SUNNI THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS:
A CRITICAL STUDY OF ILĀHIYYĀT IN
AL-MĀTURĪDĪ’S TA’WĪLĀT AHL AL-
SUNNAH

Aref Chaker
30 June 2020

Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation
Charles Sturt University

Mehmet Ozalp
Hakan Coruh
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP ................................................................. V

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................ VI

ABSTRACT............................................................................................... VII

INTRODUCTION......................................................................................... 1

Background .......................................................................................... 1

Significance of the Research ................................................................. 4

Research Objectives ............................................................................ 6

Research Questions and Main Argument ............................................ 6

Theoretical Framework ....................................................................... 8

Methodology ......................................................................................... 13

Research Limitations .......................................................................... 19

Chapters Outline ................................................................................. 20

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW ...................................................... 24

1.1 Introduction .................................................................................. 24

1.2 The birth of theological exegesis as a Qur’anic genre .................. 26

1.3 Sunni theological exegesis and place of Ta’wīlāt in classical and contemporary Arabic Islamic literature ........................................ 28

1.4 Sunni theological exegesis and Ta’wīlāt in Western literature ....... 44

1.5 Ta’wīlāt in literature on Islamic theology ..................................... 52

1.6 Conclusion .................................................................................... 66

CHAPTER 2: THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT AND EXISTENCE OF GOD .... 69
2.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 69

2.2 The theological context in Central Asia: The stimulus of al-Māturīdī to write on the existence of God ................................................................................................................................. 71

2.3 In search for a new paradigm in proving the existence of God .................................. 80

2.4 Examining the contributions of exegetes to the debate concerning the existence of God: .......................................................................................................................... 91

2.5 The paradigm of al-Māturīdī: a synthesis between rationalism and traditionalism ......................................................................................................................... 94

2.6 The proofs of the existence of God in Ta’wīlāt .................................................................. 98
   2.6.1 The proof of change ................................................................................................. 99
   2.6.2 The proof of the opposites ..................................................................................... 103
   2.6.3 The proof of cause .................................................................................................. 106
   2.6.4 The proof of ḥudūth (temporality and finite of the world) .................................... 109
   2.6.5 The proof of the existence of evil in the world .................................................... 109
   2.6.6 The proof of ‘ināyah (care) and taskhīr (service) ................................................ 115
   2.6.7 The proof of order and taswiyah (perfection in the world) .................................. 118
   2.6.8 The proof of invention in the creation ................................................................. 121

2.7 The proofs exclusive to Kitāb al-Tawḥīd ...................................................................... 124

2.8 Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 129

CHAPTER 3: THE TAWḤĪD OF GOD .................................................................................. 132

3.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................... 132

3.2 The role of proofs in the establishment of the doctrine of tawḥīd in Ta’wīlāt... 133

3.3 The proofs of tawḥīd in al-Māturīdī’s exegesis ............................................................ 141
   3.3.1 The Proof of anbā’ al-ghayb (the tales of the unknown) addressed to the polytheist Arabs ................................................................. 141
   3.3.2 The proof of ease and acceptance of death .......................................................... 146
   3.3.3 The proof of consistency and interconnectedness of manāfi’ (benefits): .......... 148
   3.3.4 The proof of comprehensiveness of ittisāq and tadbīr ....................................... 156
   3.3.5 The proof of continuous flow of day and night .................................................. 162
   3.3.6 The proof of design in creation ........................................................................... 167
   3.3.7 The proof of tadbīr (mutual conflict) and tamānu’ (mutual hindrance) .......... 179
3.4 The Proofs exclusive to Kitāb al-Tawḥīd ................................................................. 190

3.5 conclusion................................................................. 194

CHAPTER 4: THE NATURE OF THE NAMES AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD............ 198

4.1 Introduction.................................................................................................................. 198

4.2 The notion of al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā in Ta’wīlāt............................................................... 199

4.3 The nature of the dhāt of God....................................................................................... 218

4.4 The nature of the attributes and names of God ......................................................... 225

4.5 The relationship between names of God and his dhāt: The position of al-Māturīdī with respect to Mu‘tażilītes and the traditionalists................................................................. 233

4.6 The categorisation of the names of God and the relationship between the dhāt of God and his actions................................................................................................. 238

4.7 The attribute of takwīn ................................................................................................. 241

4.8 Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 257

CHAPTER 5: THE YAD AND ‘AYN ANTHROPOMORPHIC EXPRESSIONS.......... 261

5.1 Introduction.................................................................................................................... 261

5.2 The yad expression between the other exegetes and al-Māturīdī ....................... 263

5.2.1 The application of al-Māturīdī of his exegetical principles................................. 279

5.2.2 The consistency in al-Māturīdī’s analysis and his robust exegetical methodology in interpretation ........................................................................................................ 282

5.2.3 The creativity and liberty of al-Māturīdī in his interpretations.......................... 292

5.2.4 The yad in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd .................................................................................. 298

5.3 The ‘ayn expression .................................................................................................. 299

5.3.1 The interpretation of the plural form of ‘ayn...................................................... 301

5.3.2 The interpretation of the singular form of ‘ayn................................................. 306

5.4 Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 314

CHAPTER 6: THE ISTIWĀ’ OF GOD ........................................................................ 316

6.1 Introduction................................................................................................................. 316
6.2 Al-Māturīdī and the Sunni and Transoxianan exegetes on *istiwā’* and creation of the heavens

6.2.1 Al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the association of *istiwā’* with heavens in al-Baqarah ................................................................. 318
6.2.2 The commentaries of the other exegetes on *istiwā’* verses .......................... 325
6.2.3 Al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the association of *istiwā’* with the heavens in Chapter Fuṣṣilat ................................................................. 330
6.2.4 The commentaries of the other exegetes on the association of *istiwā’* with the heavens in chapter Fuṣṣilat ................................................................. 332

6.3 The *istiwā’* of God and the interpretation of ‘*arsh* as kingship

6.3.1 The first scenario – the seven days of creation ........................................ 333
6.3.2. The second scenario of the six days ........................................................................ 337
6.3.3 A new perspective in understanding the ‘*arsh* .............................................. 340
6.3.4 The position of the other exegetes on the meaning of *istiwā’* in association with ‘*arsh* ................................................................................. 342
6.3.5 The conceptual framework and methodology of al-Māturīdī in the interpretation of *istiwā’* in association with the ‘*arsh* ............................................. 343

6.4 The interpretation of *istiwā’* as the creation of the throne ......................... 348

6.5 The reinforcement of the transcendence of God in response to critics’ interpretations ........................................................................ 357

6.6 The notion of *tafwīḍ* in *istiwā’* ................................................................ 369

6.7 The discourse concerning *al-istiwa’* in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd ................................ 374

6.8 Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 378

CONCLUSION ..................................................................................................... 382

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................. 398

APPENDIX I .................................................................................................... 408

The Library of Congress Arabic transliteration system Error! Bookmark not defined.

Arabic vowels and diphthongs Error! Bookmark not defined.
CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP

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.

Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged. I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses.

……………………………….

Aref Chaker

Date: 21/06/2020
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere indebtedness to all those who, without their generous assistance, this work would not exist. I would like in particular to thank my chair supervisor Associate Professor Mehmet Ozalp for his expert help, insightful comments and supportive encouragement.

I am greatly indebted to my co-supervisor Associate Professor Hakan Coruh for his invaluable feedback, constructive criticism at various stages of completion of this thesis and bringing great ideas to my attention.

Finally, I cannot forget to thank my dear wife, children and extended family for their constant love, support and patience throughout the duration of this project. Without them and their creative environment, I would not have accomplished this mission.
ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates and critically analyses the theological views of al-Māturīdī vis a vis *ilāhiyyāt*¹ in his exegesis *Ta’wilāt ahl al-Sunnah*. The research undertook an analytical study of the theological verses in the original Arabic exegetical corpus of al-Māturīdī to discover a comprehensive exposition of his theological views, contributions to the genre of theological exegesis, methodology in interpreting such verses and the conceptual framework he employs in explaining them. To realise these objectives, thematic and textual analysis is carried out on the entire exegesis of al-Māturīdī. A comparative content analysis is also carried out between *ta’wilāt* and al-Māturīdī’s main theological epistle, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, to discover the similarities, differences and nuances that exist between both titles. In addition, the thesis conducted a comparative analysis of the exegetical writings of the key exegetes of al-Māturīdī’s era and region as far as the theme of *ilāhiyyāt* is concerned. These exegetes are Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767 CE), Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), Muḥammad ‘Ayyāshī (d. 932 CE), and Abū al-Layth Samarqandī (d. 983 CE). The original contribution to knowledge of this thesis is the finding that al-Māturīdī is the earliest Sunni scholar to write in the genre of Sunni theological exegesis, in his era and region. In doing so, al-Māturīdī provided a more comprehensive and Qur’anic basis for his theology. In *ta’wilāt*, al-Māturīdī set up his conceptual framework, epistemology and methodology in the interpretation of the theological verses pertinent to *ilāhiyyāt* (divinity).

Furthermore, the thesis establishes that a comprehensive understanding of al-Māturīdī’s theology cannot be achieved by the study of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* alone. The critical analysis of *ta’wilāt* is

---

¹ Al-Taftāzānī defines *ilāhiyyāt* as “the matters relevant to the *dhāt* (ipseity) of God, his *tanzīh* (absolvement) and his attributes, what is permissible to use with God and what is not permissible to use, and his actions and names.” The concept will be explained further in the introduction chapter. M. Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ Al-Taftāzānī ‘Ala Matn Al-’Aqā‘id Li Al-Shaykh Najm Al-Dīn Al-Nasaṭī* (Baghdad: Maktabat al Muthanna, 2012), 2, 57.
fundamental to any academic research that aims to discover the theology of al-Māturīdī independent of main Maturidite scholars.
INTRODUCTION

Background

Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944 CE) is one of the pivotal theologians in Islamic history. He is the founder of one of the two main schools of theology in Sunni Islam, al-Māturīdiyyah. A school that was and continues to be embraced, followed and respected by billions of Muslims across centuries in the Muslim world. It comes as no surprise that his writings parallel his calibre and are classified amongst the most fundamental literature in Islamic academia, across various disciplines, but particularly in Islamic theology.²

Despite the wide fame and reverence of al-Māturīdī, few of his titles have been preserved.³ Out of seventeen titles al-Māturīdī had written in the Islamic disciplines of ‘aqīdah (theology), uṣūl al fiqh⁴ (principles of Islamic jurisprudence) and tafsīr (Qur’anic exegesis), only two titles survived and are accepted by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars as the work of al-Māturīdī.⁵ They

---

³ Many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars’ express sadness and distress for the loss of many of his writings. The exploration of the various reasons and factors that have led to their loss continues to be the subject of discussion and research amongst the scholars until today. For further information see: Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand.
⁴ 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 Sharia 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” M. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Maḥṣūl Fī ‘Ilm Uṣūl Al-Fiqh*, 1st ed. (Riyadh: Imam ibn Saud Islamic University, 1979), 1, 94.
are, “Kitāb al-Tawḥīd” and “Taʾwīlāt ahl al-Sunnah”. The field of Islamic theology suffers the greatest loss, in this regard, since 10 of 17 of al-Māturīdī’s titles are in this discipline. Such a loss of many of his academic works deprives the reader of a clear structured and complete understanding of his theological opinions, principles and his contributions to the various Islamic disciplines.

“Taʾwīlāt ahl al-Sunnah”, which will be referred to henceforth as Taʾwīlāt, is an encyclopaedic Qur’anic exegesis al-Māturīdī wrote towards the end of the ninth and early tenth centuries. Chronologically, thereupon, the title is one of the earliest comprehensive exegetical books written in Islamic academic history. Further, it is the only title al-Māturīdī has written in the field of Qur’anic exegesis. Abū Muʿīn Nasafī (d.1115 CE), a prominent Māturīdī theologian, testifies for the distinction of the book. He describes it as “a book that no other book comes close to it in its theme and content or in its academic value…” He emphasises that al-Māturīdī resolved

---


7 The exegesis will be referred to in the dissertation in the abbreviated form “Taʾwīlāt” with the first letter capitalized. Given the need to consistently refer to the title, the abbreviation will help reduce unnecessary repetition of the full title and ease the reading of the chapters on the reader.

8 There has been multiples complete prints of Taʾwīlāt. They range between 10 volumes to 18 volumes.

9 Khalīfa argues that al-Māturīdī has two books in the field of exegesis with similar titles: Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah and Taʾwīlāt Al-Māturīdīyyah. According to him, al-Māturīdī wrote the former 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 Alāʿ al-Dīn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Samarquandī…” However, Ibrahim and Sayyid ‘Awadāyn dispute what Khalīfa argues and elucidate that the second book, Taʾwīlāt al-Māturīdīyyah, is not a compilation of al-Māturīdī’s exegesis, rather it is a commentary written by his student Alāʿ al-Dīn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Samarquandī on al-Māturīdī’s exegesis. Ceric confirms, “there seems to be unanimous agreement in the historical reports on al-Māturīdī about the authenticity of Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd and Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah”. For further information see, Khalīfa, *Kashf Al-Ẓunūn ‘an Asāmī Al-Kutub Wa Al-Funūn*, 1, 336; M. Māturidī *Taʾwīlāt Ahlu Sunnah* 1vols. (Cairo: Al Majlis Al A'la Li Shu'un Al Islamiyyah, 1994); M. Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abu Mansur Al-Māturīdī* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), 40.

in Ta’wîlât “many of the controversial misconceived thoughts and concepts.”

In a similar vein Abdul Qâdir al-Qurashî (d.1373 CE), a Ḣanafî jurist and biographer, shares Nasafî’s admiration of the title and repeats nearly the exact statement. Al-Qurashî describes Ta’wîlât as “a book that has no equal in the field of exegesis.” In fact, none of the early written exegeses, al-Qurashî claims, “comes close to it.” The testimony of the classical scholars, Nasafî and al-Qurashî, of the title echoed throughout time till the 20th century. The late Muslim scholar al-Kawtharî (d.1952 CE) describes it as “a book that has no match in the field of exegesis.”

Though the work is essentially an exegesis book, a number of scholars have indicated that it also contains the theological and jurisprudential opinions of al-Māturîdî. Al-Ghâlî states, “He studied within it, scholarly and professionally, theological, uṣūl and jurisprudential matters as well as exegesis and explanation of… the Qur’an…” The study and analysis of Ta’wîlât, therefore, is an important academic contribution to the understanding of Islam but more importantly to the comprehensive and holistic understanding of the theological views and principles of al-Māturîdî and the discovering of his contributions to the fields of Qur’anic exegesis, Sunni theological exegesis and Islamic theology.

---

11 Ibid.
12 A. Al-Qurashî, Al-Jawāhir Al-Mūdiyyah Fi Ṭabaqât Al-Ḥanafiyyah (Cairo: Hajar, 1993), 2, 130.
13 Ibid.
14 Al-Bayâdî, Ishârât Al-Marâm ‘an Ibârât Al-Imâm, 3.
15 Whilst al-Ghâlî is correct to state that al-Mâturîdî studies in Ta’wîlât uṣūl and jurisprudential matters, the theological matters are the most dominant and recurring in Ta’wîlât. The magnitude of the theological data in Ta’wîlât requires multiple theses if one wants to study them scholarly. The space, depth and level of discussion al-Mâturîdî offers for Sunni theology in his exegesis overshadows all other Islamic subjects. His insights and personal engagement with the theological topics are better crafted and point to his originality and uniqueness as a theologian. Whilst many of his jurisprudential and uṣūl comments are short, less developed and aim to quickly support the traditional Ḣanafî school without much analysis leaving the reader in need for more clarity and substance. Al-Ghâlî, Abu Mansîr Al-Mâturîdî Ḥayâtuhu Wa Arâ’uhû, 58.
Significance of the Research

Rudolph bespeaks of al-Māturīdī’s revolutionary influence in the domain of Islamic theology in the Muslim world. He sees him “… among the few Islamic theologians whose significance needs no emphasis nor special reminder. His reputation as a ground breaking mutakallim is long undisputed.” Al-Māturīdiyyah school is the only Sunni theological school that arose to prominence in Central Asia and competed with the Ash’arī theological school on the leadership of the Sunni world and became its co-equal in the theological arena to this day.

Despite his far-reaching reverence and influence across millennia, few of al-Māturīdī’s works is extant today. A datum that impacts deleteriously on the ability of one to establish a comprehensive and organic understanding of al-Māturīdī’s theology. Rudolph ratifies, "…one still feels at loss to describe his theology with precision and to explain the means by which he distinguished himself from the other representatives of his discipline."

Ta’wilāt ahl al-Sunnah is the only exegetical title al-Māturīdī wrote and the most comprehensive text he has ever produced. Kitāb al-tawḥīd, the other surviving book and the Summa Theologica of al-Māturīdī, has been analysed and politely criticized by classical Muslim scholars, such as Abū Muʿīn Nasafī, and contemporary scholars, such as Ceric and Rudolph, for its brevity, ambiguity and the difficulty of deciphering the teachings and inferred meanings of al-Māturīdī in it. The very scholars, on the other hand, praised immensely Ta’wilāt and testified for

---

16 Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand.
17 Ibid.
18 Ceric and Sharifah, Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abu Mansur Al-Māturīdī; Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand; Nasafī, Taṣṣirat Al-Adillah Fī Uṣūl Al-Dīn, 2.
the greatness of the exegesis. Rudolph affirms, “There can be no doubt that the Ta’wīlāt … is an exceptionally interesting and noteworthy Qur’an commentary.”

The drive behind such praise is the richness of Ta’wīlāt and particularly its academic potential as far as theological exegesis is concerned. Saleh, Ghalī and Rudolph unanimously consent that Ta’wīlāt is more than a conventional and traditional Qur’anic exegesis. It suffices to quote Rudolph who describes Ta’wīlāt as a text that contains, “an abundance of earlier exegetical material, and what is more interesting, also provides valuable information on many details of al-Māturīdī’s own theological positions.” Yet it remains an unexplored landmark work. It has been hardly studied and what has been published on the text is “small in scope and very general in its conclusions such that a more precise image of al-Māturīdī’s exegetical work is lacking to this day.”

Thus, the study and analysis of Ta’wīlāt is an important academic contribution to the discovery of the full theology of al-Māturīdī and the understanding and appreciation of his contributions to the development of Sunni theological exegesis. This thesis is the first research to study and critically analyse al-Māturīdī’s only exegesis in a systematic and analytic manner in English. In addition, the thesis compares and contrasts al-Māturīdī’s work, in the context of the theological verses, with the key exegetical works produced during his era and region. Furthermore, it reveals the distinctiveness of his methodology and paradigm in dealing with theological verses and anthropomorphic expressions found in the Qur’an. The thesis contrasts the theological content of Ta’wīlāt as far as ilāhiyyāt is concerned with al-Māturīdī’s doctrinal positions in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd to capture the similarities and nuances but equally develop an illuminating and expounding

---

19 Tabṣirat Al-Adillah Fī Uṣūl Al-Dīn, 2, 220-21.
20 Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 187.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
understanding of al-Māturīdī’s theology and the characteristics and development of his theological thought.

**Research Objectives**

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Conduct a critical study and investigation of the methodology of al-Māturīdī in his analysis of the theological verses in Ta’wīlāt and hence fill a gap in the study of theological exegesis in the Sunni literature.

2. Discover the comprehensive theological positions and views of al-Māturīdī in the field of *ilāhiyyāt* entailing the existence of God and his divinity, the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, the nature of God’s Self, his names, attributes, actions and the various anthropomorphic expressions.

3. Examine and analyse the contributions of al-Māturīdī 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 pertinent to *ilāhiyyāt*.

**Research Questions and Main Argument**

This study investigates al-Māturīdī’s theological opinions, teachings and his contributions, in Ta’wīlāt, to the establishment and development of Sunni theological exegesis genre. It gives a critical study of his theology and his contributions to the genre through a detailed study of the
Theological verses pertaining to *ilāhiyyāt*, the existence of God and his divinity, the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, the nature of God’s Self, his names, attributes, actions and the various anthropomorphic expressions.

The following questions are raised and investigated by this study:

1. What are the theological interpretations and views of Abū Ṭālib al-Māturīdī in *Ta’wīlāt*, as far as the existence of God and his divinity, the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, the nature of God’s Self, his names, attributes, actions and the various Qur’anic anthropomorphic expressions are concerned?

2. How does al-Māturīdī explore, understand and discuss the various fundamentals of the above doctrinal topics in light of the relevant verses and how does his commentary differ from the other key exegetes in his era and region?

3. What are the similarities, differences and nuances that exist between his exegesis, *Ta’wīlāt*, and his work in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* as far as *ilāhiyyāt* is concerned?

4. What are the contributions of al-Māturīdī to the genre of theological exegesis in Sunni literature?

The main argument of this thesis is that al-Māturīdī is the earliest Sunni scholar to write in the genre of Sunni theological exegesis, in his era and region. In doing so, al-Māturīdī provided a more comprehensive and Qur’anic basis for his theology. In *Ta’wīlāt*, al-Māturīdī set up his conceptual framework, epistemology and methodology in the interpretation of the theological verses pertinent to *ilāhiyyāt*. *Ta’wīlāt* provides an invaluable insight into al-Māturīdī’s views, arguments and discussions in the field of *ilāhiyyāt*. Furthermore, the thesis establishes that a comprehensive understanding of al-Māturīdī’s theology cannot be achieved by the study of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* alone.
The critical analysis of Ta’wilāt is fundamental to any academic research that aims to discover the theology of al-Māturīdī.

**Theoretical Framework**

The conceptual approach of this thesis revolves around two theoretical frameworks within Islamic scholarship. The first is the science of Qur’anic exegesis, *tafsīr*. Muslim exegetes consider *tafsīr* “the discipline that covers the meaning, explanation, exposition, elucidation, explication, interpretation, and commentary of the Qur’an.”

Farīd Esack, Hussein Abdūl Raof (d. 2013 CE) and ‘Abdullah Saeed state that from the early days of the discipline, Qur’anic exegesis has been associated with particular theological or political schools. Accordingly, within this broad discipline, the primary focus in this thesis centralises on Sunni theological exegesis. Conceptually, Sunni theological exegesis, as a genre, has not enjoyed an adequate academic attention to formulate a conclusive and consensual definition let alone an agreed framework. Fudge describes the general state of Sunni exegetical titles stating, “two characteristics predominate…” in most of these titles “…reports from Prophet Muhammad… and strong philological orientations.” Thus, the introduction of a clear perception for the Sunni genre did not appear until after Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210 CE) authored his renowned exegesis, “*Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (the Keys of the Unseen)”. Troudi, who

---

26 Ibid.
reviews the nature of Sunni theological exegesis through the analysis of the exegesis of al-Rāzī, defines the genre as, “Qur’anic verses that are interpreted based on theological and philosophical issues (masā’il) or simply theological and philosophical issues they raise.”27 It is, thus, a genre that discusses theological arguments and theories within the context of the Qur’an. Accordingly, this thesis discovers, documents, evaluates and critically analyses the theological arguments, maxims and views al-Māturīdī presents in his exegesis to determine if it qualifies to be considered the earliest title written in Sunni theological exegesis. The common belief amongst many exegetes and historiographers is that the development of Sunni theological exegesis did not take place until the 12th century, the era of al-Rāzī, who is regarded as the “master of Qur’anic interpretation and theological reasoning.”28 The study challenges this long held belief that al-Rāzī’s exegesis is the first title written in Sunni theological exegesis.29

Additionally, the nature of the theological topics al-Māturīdī raises, in Ta’wīlāt, their importance and relevance in Islamic theology30 will be amongst the key indicators of the value of his contribution to Sunni theological exegesis. The overwhelming established belief in the theological and exegetical scholarship that Sunni theological exegesis marks the introduction of reason31 into the theological commentary.32 Thus, the role of reason in al-Māturīdī’s theological

27 Troudi, "Qurʾānic Hermeneutics with Reference to Narratives: A Study in Classical Exegetical Traditions," 82.
29 The literatures review chapter lists and discusses the names and arguments of the Muslim and non-Muslim scholars who believe al-Rāzī’s exegesis is the first in the Sunni theological exegesis genre.
30 In his era, region and the debates of his times.
31 Hence, theological exegesis is classified under the branch of tafsīr bi al-ra’y (exegesis by opinion).
commentary will be another key indicator in identifying his position in the evolution of the genre of Sunni theological exegesis.

The second theoretical framework applied in this thesis is the general academic approach to ilāhiyyāt in Islamic theology. Islamic theology consists of three main categories: ilāhiyyāt, nubuwwāt (prophethood) and samʿiyyāt (transmitted beliefs including eschatology). This thesis focuses on the ilāhiyyāt which covers the concept of God in Islamic theology.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE), in many of his titles, theological and non-theological, lays out the basic framework for ilāhiyyāt, in systematic theology, and its scope. He argues that ilāhiyyāt focuses on God’s existence, eternity, oneness and essential attributes. Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 1355 CE) concurs with al-Ghazālī that “ithbāt al-Ṣāniʾ (affirming the existence of the fashioner or creator)” is al-maqsad al-awwal (the first objective) in ilāhiyyāt. Masʿūd Taftāzānī further confirms that, “the knowledge about the existence of wājib al-wujūd (the one whose existence is necessary [a reference to God]) is the asās (foundations) of ilāhiyyāt…” Hence, the study begins with analysing al-Māturīdī ‘s commentary vis a vis the existence of God.

The association of tawḥīd with ilāhiyyāt commences before the advent of Islam, according to Shahrastānī (d. 1158 CE). He coins the association of ilāhiyyāt as a concept, by Pythagoras, in reference to tawḥīd when he was describing the nature of God. Shahrastānī reports the words of

---

36 Iḥyāʾ Ulūm Al-Dīn 1, 22; Al-Munqīdah Mina Al-Dalāl, 139-43; Ghazālī, Faḍāʾiḥ Al-Bāṭiniyyah, 38.
37 A. Al-Ījī, Kitāb Al-Muwaqif Fī Ilm Al-Kālām (Beirut: Dar Al Jil, 1997), 3, 11.
38 Taftāzānī, Sharḥ Al-Taftāzānīʾ ʿAla Matn Al-ʿAqāʾid Li Al-Shaykh Najm Al-Dīn Al-Nasafī, 1, 41.
Pythagoras, “the creator is one who is not similar to the other ones. He does not enter under count and he cannot be fully encompassed by the intellect or by the soul”\textsuperscript{39} The discussion of \textit{tawḥīd} in Islamic theology, nonetheless, stems from \textit{tawḥīd} being the core tenet of Islam. Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767 CE) spoke about \textit{tawḥīd} in \textit{al-Fiqh al-Akbar} and linked to the discussion of the nature of God.\textsuperscript{40} Muḥammad Baqillānī (d. 1013 CE) explicated further, “…it is to testify that the presence of God, as one, is established and that he is unique in his existence, worthy of worship alone and there is nothing like unto him…”\textsuperscript{41} Al-Juwaynī dedicates an entire chapter for it, in his title “\textit{al-Shāmilīfī Uṣūl al-Dīn} (the comprehensive in the foundations of religion)”, entitled, ‘\textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd}’, in which he rationally argues the oneness of God and extends to discuss the attributes of God and denying anthropomorphism in the form of God.\textsuperscript{42} Similarly, al-Bājūrī (d. 1860 CE) linked it to the nature of God whose \textit{dhāt}\textsuperscript{43} (ipseity) is unlike the \textit{dhāt} of others and he has \textit{sifāt} (attributes).\textsuperscript{44}

Taftāzānī stresses that amongst the tenets of \textit{ilāhiyyāt} is “the matters relevant to the \textit{dhāt}\textsuperscript{45} of God, his \textit{tanzīh} (absolvement) and his attributes, what is permissible to use with God and what is not permissible to use, and his actions and names.”\textsuperscript{46} Similarly, al-Ījī considers it part of \textit{ilāhiyyāt} and delays the discussion of the names and attributes of God to the last category. He states, “and with it we terminate the discussion of \textit{ilāhiyyāt}.”\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{39} Mohamed. Shahrastānī, \textit{Al-Mīlāl Wa Al-Nīḥal} (Beirut: Dar al Fikr, 1997), 2, 132.
\textsuperscript{40} Al-Bayāḍī, \textit{Ishārāt Al-Marām ‘an Ibārāt Al-Imām}, 89.
\textsuperscript{41} A. Baqillānī, \textit{Al-Inṣāf Fīmā Yajib I’tiqāduh} (Cairo: Maktabah Azhariyah, 2000), 23.
\textsuperscript{42} A. Al-Juwaynī, \textit{Al-Shāmilī Fi Uṣūl Al-Dīn} (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al Ilmiyyah, 2000), 168-84.
\textsuperscript{43} The discussion of the appropriate translation for the term will take place in Chapter five. For the sake of simplicity, ipseity will be used until then.
\textsuperscript{44} I. Al-Bājūrī, \textit{Sharḥ Jawharat Al-Tawḥīd} (Dimascus1971), 21.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Dhāt} as a term refers to God’s Self. In chapter 4, there is a comprehensive discussion of the term and its use in theology and how it should be translated.
\textsuperscript{46} Taftāzānī, \textit{Sharḥ Al-Taftāzānī ‘Ala Matn Al-`Agā’id Li Al-Shaykh Najm Al-Dīn Al-Nasafī}, 2, 57.
\textsuperscript{47} Al-Ījī, \textit{Kitāb Al-Mawāqif Fi ‘Ilm Al-Kalām}, 3, 302.
Hence, this thesis is conceptually framed on the key themes in ilāhiyyāt, God’s existence, eternity, oneness and the nature of God’s dhāt, names and attributes, and follows the classical framework in content and in order of importance while catering to the theological content al-Māturīdī presents in his exegesis. Āḥmad al-Ghāmidī, a contemporary theologian, commits to a similar theological framework when studying the creed of al-Bayhaqī (d. 944 CE), a Shafī‘ī scholar, in the tenet of ilāhiyyāt, through al-Bayhaqī’s various titles.⁴⁸ Al-Ghāmidī commences by assessing al-Bayhaqī’s methodology in proving the existence of God, God’s oneness and progresses to discussing the names of God and his attributes including anthropomorphism.

Al-Māturīdī’s commentary in Ta’wīlāt comprises all matters of classical and contemporary themes of theology including the key themes of ilāhiyyāt. Al-Māturīdī’s commentary in Ta’wīlāt, nonetheless, does not structure the themes in the classical framework to which Muslim theologians usually adhere. The two main reasons for the difference are the nature of the title and the aim of al-Māturīdī. Ta’wīlāt is an exegesis and not a theological epistle. It, therefore, adheres to the classical system of suwar (chapters) order in the Qur’an.⁴⁹ Such treatment of theological topics may have made it difficult for the reader to determine his theological positions but it offered an important genre to Qur’anic exegesis – Sunni theological exegesis. Furthermore, the audience for whom al-Māturīdī caters in Ta’wīlāt includes the general readership, in Samarqand and elsewhere, who may not be interested or fully competent in systematic theology and abstract theological writing. As it will be evident in chapters 2 to 6, al-Māturīdī wanted his arguments to be reader-friendly to ordinary Muslims. Hence, his commentary is rich with theological and dialectical information but al-Māturīdī does not permit it to dominate or overwhelm the exegetical nature of the title.

⁴⁹ It begins with surah al-Fiṭrah and ends with surah al-Nās.
Prophethood and eschatology, where al-Māturīdī makes significant original contributions, or other pertinent theological topics are beyond the scope of this thesis as it would have come at the expense of an adequate and in-depth critical analysis of al-Māturīdī’s theological commentary in *ilāhiyyāt*. The strategy is to cover the chief areas comprehensively and permit the opportunity for future research.

**Methodology**

This research studies and analyse classical Islamic texts through a modern critical lens. Hence, its methodology demands a combination of traditional Islamic approach and modern critical methods and tools to accomplish it successfully. The research employed a qualitative textual analysis method in examining al-Māturīdī’s exegesis, his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and all the titles of the key exegetes that are relevant to al-Māturīdī’s era and region.\(^{50}\)

The research undertook a thematic–analytical study of the theological verses in the original Arabic exegesis corpus of al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt*, to discover his theological views, contributions to the theological exegesis genre, methodology in interpreting such verses and the paradigm he employs in explaining them. This also proves essential to the process of discerning the characteristics of his style and may require resorting, in some instances, to heuristic procedures.

To realise the above objectives, textual analysis is carried out on the entire exegesis of al-Māturīdī from beginning to end and chapter by chapter. His theological writings, however, are spread throughout his exegesis without a thematic structure, following the nature of the chapters

\(^{50}\) Aḥmad al-Ghāmidī implements a similar methodology when studying the creed of al-Bayhaqī in the tenet of *ilāhiyyāt*, through al-Bayhaqī’s various titles.
in the Qur’an, which address multiple themes predominantly. Content analysis is applied to deconstruct al-Māturīdī’s main theological arguments, while thematic analysis is used to reconstruct al-Māturīdī’s arguments within the theological framework of the research. For example, to compile his main arguments on the proofs of tawḥīd (unity of God), the thesis deconstructs his arguments for God’s tawḥīd, which is sporadic throughout his exegesis, and thematically reconstructs them in a single chapter. The Integrity of al-Māturīdī arguments is preserved as the deconstruction focuses on extracting all the theological views and concepts al-Māturīdī expresses and discusses and then thematically link them together in respective chapters.

Ta’wīlāt, the only extant exegetical work of al-Māturīdī, constitutes the primary source upon which the thesis is constructed. In principle, all the chronological and extant prints of Ta’wīlāt have been consulted and applied, as much as possible, in the thesis, including the incomplete editions.\textsuperscript{51} However, the fundamental edition the researcher relies on in his critical analysis and examination of Ta’wīlāt is that of Bekir Topaloglu (d. 2016 CE) published in 2005. Topaloglu edited this print of Ta’wīlāt and corrected most of the editorial mistakes the previous editions suffered and has been recommended by prominent academics in the field.

In addition, the thesis conducts a comparative analysis of the exegetical writings of the key exegeses of al-Māturīdī’s era and region as far as ilāhiyyāt is concerned. Rudolph considers a number of regional exegeses essential to evaluating accurately the theological significance of Ta’wīlāt. They are the exegeses of Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān (d. 753 CE), Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 775 CE), Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka‘bī (d. 931 CE), Muhammad ‘Ayyāshī (d. 932 CE) and Abū al-Layth

\textsuperscript{51} The incomplete editions are: 1- the print edited by Ibrahim and Sayyid ‘Awadayn published under the sponsorship of the High Committee of Islamic Affairs in the Ministry of Islamic Endowment in Egypt in 1971 and 2- the later, incomplete, version in 1983, by the same editors, published by the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs in Iraq. The first complete edition and print of Ta’wīlāt, undertaken by Fātimah al-Khaymī, in 2004 has also been consulted and cited in the thesis, where it is seen fit.
Samarqandī (d. 983 CE). However, the exegeses of Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān and Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka‘bī are not extant today.⁵² Hence, they have not been incorporated in the thesis.

The incorporated exegetes are Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767 CE), Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), Muḥammad ‘Ayyāshī (d. 932 CE), and Abū al-Layth Samarqandī (d. 983 CE). Ṭabarī’s exegesis was included in the critical comparison due to his prominence in the Sunni exegetical academia, being a contemporary of al-Māturīdī and a promoter of interesting theological views that numerous contemporary Arabic scholars, such as Jābir Amīr and ʻIbrāhīm ‘Awaḍ, assert that it represents the traditional Sunni creed.⁵³ Additionally, contemporary English academics such as Walid Saleh emphasize that it is instrumental to reread the works of Ṭabarī and al-Māturīdī in the context of one another and that such critical comparison will revolutionalise the field.⁵⁴ The selected titles represent the earliest proper exegetical titles in Sunni literature present today.⁵⁵

Even though, Samarqandī appeared post al-Māturīdī’s era his exegesis was included as he comes from the same school and region of al-Māturīdī. Samarqandī’s exegesis gives an indication of the status of Sunni theological exegesis shortly after al-Māturīdī’s time and thus offers to discover the value of al-Māturīdī’s contributions to the genre. ‘Ayyāshī’s exegesis is included in the thesis, although he is of the Shi‘ite tradition, as prominent European academics such as Rudolph list it as one of the significant exegesis in Transoxiana in al-Māturīdī’s lifetime.⁵⁶ Even though, it is arguable that the selected exegeses may not represent all the exegetical literature of

⁵² Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 188.
⁵⁶ Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 188.
the era and region of al-Māturīdī, they are the only ones extant in circulation today. The authors may not be classified as peers of al-Māturīdī on the theological level but on the exegetical level they are amongst the prominent scholars of the era and region of al-Māturīdī. Thus, they will help one visualise the overall state of the theological exegesis genre and examine how advanced al-Māturīdī’s commentary was on the level of his era and region. On the other hand, the exegesis of Muḥammad al-Sulamī (d. 1022) and the exegesis of Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 897 CE) were excluded from the comparison as their works have been reviewed and were found to contain no theological content. Thus, they cannot be compared with Ta’wīlāt theologically.57 The irrelevance of the titles to theological exegesis is not surprising as they belong to the genre of Ṣufī exegesis.58

The findings of the assessment is compared and contrasted with al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the same verses resulting in a scholarly assessment that determines the distinctiveness of his efforts, the nuances of his work, his paradigm of interpretation and the value of his contributions to the genre.

A similar comparative analysis is undertaken between Ta’wīlāt and al-Māturīdī’s theological epistle, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, on the content and methodological level to discover the similarities, differences and nuances that exist between both titles. This comparison is useful in ascertaining which work was produced first and given that Ta’wīlāt is far larger the expectation is al-Māturīdī would cover more ground in his exegesis and therefore enable to discover his theology more comprehensively.

57 These titles are very brief. Each one of them consists of a single volume. Their brevity eased the process of reviewing their content and assessing the theological component in them.
In relation to categorisation, selection and analysis of the verses, the study took a thematic approach. After examining the entire Taʾwīlāt as guided by the theoretical framework, the selection of the verses is based on two criteria: (1) their relativity to the field of īlāhiyyāt; (2) the level of controversy, interest and study associated with the verses.

All the main citations from the Arabic primary sources are documented in the study in two forms, a transliteration followed with an English translation. The step was taken to guarantee the authenticity, clarity and accuracy of all the citations and help the reader engage better with Taʾwīlāt. The transliteration system followed is the Library IJMES Arabic romanization system included below.  

The IJMES Arabic transliteration system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Arabic Character</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Arabic Character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>hamzah</td>
<td>GH</td>
<td>غ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ā</td>
<td>ا</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>ف</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>ب</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>ق</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>ت</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>ك</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH</td>
<td>ث</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>ل</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>ج</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>م</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>ح</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>ن</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

59 The transliteration system has been included as an appendix because it is 10 pages long and there are relevant aspects of it to the thesis on different pages.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KH</td>
<td>خ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>د</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DH</td>
<td>ذ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>ر</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>ز</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>س</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH</td>
<td>ش</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ِ</td>
<td>ص</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ؤ</td>
<td>ض</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ء</td>
<td>ظ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'</td>
<td>ع</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Short Opener**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>و</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ù</td>
<td>Ù</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>ي</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ī</td>
<td>ي</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Long Opener**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ā</td>
<td>Ā</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Maddah**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ā’</td>
<td>Ā’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Alif Maqsourah**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Short Closer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ū</td>
<td>ū</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Long Closer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ی</td>
<td>ی</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Short Breaker**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Long Breaker**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ī</td>
<td>ī</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Doubling the letter**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ﺅ</td>
<td>ﺅ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Shaddah َّ**

**Arabic vowels and diphthongs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic vowels and diphthongs</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fat-Ḥaḥ َّ</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ا</td>
<td>ā</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Limitations

This research concentrates on discovering al-Māturīdī’s theology through his own work, studying how he understood, interpreted and analysed the theological verses and how he influenced Sunni theological exegesis. It investigates all the commentaries al-Māturīdī wrote on the tenet of ilāhiyyāt. It does not include other tenets of Islamic theology such as nubuwwāt (matters pertaining to Prophethood) or samʿiyyāt (transmitted beliefs such as the notions of Paradise and Hell and the events of the Hereafter including eschatology).⁶₀

In addition, the research only compares and contrasts the commentaries of al-Māturīdī with that of the key exegetes of his era and region. The selection of the exegetes adheres the following criteria: (1) the availability of their exegetical titles today, (2) the relevance and importance of their work to the accurate study of al-Māturīdī’s theology in Taʿwīlāt (3) the prominence and weight of the scholar and his exegesis and their influence on the discipline of

---

Qur’anic exegesis. Thus, the study does not examine all the commentaries written by all Sunni exegetes on the theological verses up to modern era.

**Chapters Outline**

The thesis is organised in six chapters, excluding the introduction and conclusion. Given the foundation of the dissertation revolves around the discovery and critical analysis of the theological views and contributions of al-Māturīdī to Sunni theological exegesis in *ilāhiyyāt*, each chapter has been dedicated to cover a specific aspect of the subject.

Chapter 1 examines, the literature in the nature and state of the academic studies that engage the genus of Sunni theological exegesis, *in toto*, and whether it has been recognized as an independent genre in the domain of Qur’anic exegesis or not. The aim of such an examination is to prospect for gaps in the study of Sunni theological exegesis, as a genre, and then in Ta’wīlāt in particular from an exegetical perspective. The second objective of the chapter is to investigate whether Ta’wīlāt has been studied academically with the aim of discovering the theology of al-Māturīdī, in it, in the academe world, specifically as far as *ilāhiyyāt* is concerned. The reviews undertaken identify numerous substantial gaps in knowledge that exist in Muslim and non-Muslim literature in the study of the theology of al-Māturīdī through Ta’wīlāt, as far as *ilāhiyyāt* is concerned, the study of Sunni theological exegesis as a genre and the study of the contributions of al-Māturīdī to the genre and the pivotal role his exegesis plays in the development or rather the establishment of Sunni theological exegesis.

Chapter 2 provides a critical analysis of the theological commentary of al-Māturīdī in Ta’wīlāt in the sphere of the existence of God. The first part of the chapter, studies and analyses
succinctly the influence of the region on the motivation of al-Māturīdī to study and prove the existence of God. The second part transitions to study the paradigm al-Māturīdī devises to prove the existence of God. The third part, unearthed, critically analyses and explains the proofs al-Māturīdī postulates to prove the existence of God. The findings are analytically compared and contrasted with *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and the key exegeses of the era and region to highlight the contributions of Ta’wīlāt to al-Māturīdī’s theology, in *ilāhiyyāt*, and his contributions to Sunni theological exegesis.

Chapter 3 focuses on a systematic and exhaustive analysis of the views of al-Māturīdī on the doctrine of *tawḥīd* and his contributions to this area of theology. The chapter assesses al-Māturīdī’s commentary to extract his theology on the conception of *tawḥīd* in Ta’wīlāt. It identifies, categorises and investigates the proofs al-Māturīdī postulates to ascertain the legitimacy of the notion of *tawḥīd*. It sheds the light on the nuances and similarities between his two extant titles and identifies al-Māturīdī’s uniqueness in Ta’wīlāt. A thorough and critical examination and comparison of the exegeses of the most prominent exegetes of al-Māturīdī’s time and region is conducted to achieve the same outcome and discover al-Māturīdī’s contributions to Sunni theological exegesis.

Chapter 4 addresses the question of “who is God”, in al-Māturīdī’s understanding, what are his attributes? and how do God’s attributes relate to his self? It examines al-Māturīdī’s perception of the notion of the *asmā’ al-ḥusnā* (the beautiful and perfect names of God) in Ta’wīlāt. A more profound dimension of the topic is al-Māturīdī’s theology on the nature of God, the nature of God’s names and attributes and the relationship of God’s Self with his names and attributes. The unique attribute of *takwīn* is then analysed and critiqued given that it is al-
Māturīdī’s unique work, completely original and chartered to him, and is the mother attribute, in his opinion, that governs all the *ṣifāt al-*af’āl (the attributes of the actions of God).

Chapter 5 delves into al-Māturīdī’s doctrine concerning the anthropomorphic expressions in the Qur’an. It examines the thought-provoking proposition of al-Māturīdī, discovered in the analysis of chapter four, about whether he views or classifies the anthropomorphic expressions, in the Qur’an, as similes rather than divine inherent attributes. The chapter focuses on the expressions that fall under the category of anthropomorphism in the form of God. Namely, the *yad* and the ‘*ayn* expressions in the Qur’an. The commitment to these specific expressions is driven by the fact that they symbolise the most controversial and most graphical expressions that advocate a physical image of God and are sufficient in identifying and capturing al-Māturīdī’s approach to all anthropomorphic expressions pertinent to the form of God.

Chapter 6 studies the theological position of al-Māturīdī on *istiwā* in his exegesis as it symbolises anthropomorphism in action. It investigates al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the verses that ascribe the notion to God, to discover his interpretations and doctrine. Additionally, the chapter assesses al-Māturīdī’s conceptual framework and methodology in explaining *istiwā*, if any, to verify if it is different or consistent with the methodology, he adopts in his analysis of the expressions relevant to anthropomorphism in form- *yad* and ‘*ayn*. It contrasts his writing on *istiwā* in Ta’wilāt with his writing on the subject in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* to develop a comprehensive appreciation and understanding of his theological position on the subject and discover the nuances that exist between both texts. It compares his commentary with the other

---

61 The two terms *yad* and the ‘*ayn* have not been translated as hand and eye respectively as this translation is not consensual amongst all Sunni theologians and their meanings, in reference to God, will be discussed in chapter five.

62 As noted in the previous note. There is no consensual meaning or definition for *istiwā* amongst Sunni theologians. The discussion of the various meanings, in reference to God, will take place in chapter six.
selected exegetes to appraise his contributions to the establishment and development of Sunni theological exegesis.
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Qur’anic exegesis is one of the most pivotal fields in the Islamic scholarship. It underlies a central role to all Islamic disciplines. Ali al-Wāḥidī (d. 1075 CE) classifies Qur’anic exegesis as “the mother of all the Shari’a disciplines and the compendium of all the religious rulings.”  

Al-Rāghib Al-Iṣfahānī (d.1108 CE) concurs with al-Wāḥidī and describes Qur’anic exegesis as “the most honorable knowledge a human may learn.”

The reverence Muslim scholars had for Qur’anic exegesis, particularly in the Sunni world, does not come as a surprise since the subject matter of the field is to understand the final revealed sacred text, according to Muslim belief. Ibn ʿAṭiyyah (d. 1146 CE) articulates this belief as his main motive for composing a title in Qur’anic exegesis. All the maʿārif (sciences) deduce their maxims from the Qur’an and its exegesis, he stresses. Therefore, scholars, and general Muslims akin, turn primarily to the Qur’an as the undisputed truth and trusted source of knowledge, guidance and understanding of the physical and metaphysical world alike.

The belief in the divine origin and undisputed authority of the Qur’an triggered a significant evolution in the field of Qur’anic exegesis. Muslim scholars, from all walks of

---

64 A. Al-Hamadānī, Tanzīh Al Qur’ān ‘an Al Matāmi’ (Beirut: Dar Al Nahda), 7.
65 In his work Ilm Kitāb Allah (Knowledge of the Book of God), Ibn ʿAṭiyyah stresses that the entire shari’a is constructed upon Qur’anic exegesis. For further information see: A. Ibn ʿAṭiyyah al-Andalusī, Al-Muharrar Al-Wajīz Fī Tafsīr Al-Kitāb Al-ʿAzīz, 2nd ed., 6 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al ‘Ilmiyyah, 2007), 1, 34.
66 Ibid.
67 The praise of the Muslim scholars of the field of Qur’anic exegesis and their emphasis on its focality in Islamic sciences should not be misunderstood to mean that tafsīr replaces the fields of theology and fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence). General Muslims usually consult the literature of these fields directly when seeking verdicts. Rather, it underscores the centrality of Qur’anic exegesis in determining the relevant primary proofs upon which these verdicts and views are constructed and the process of validating these proofs conceptually.
academia, began to seek from the Qur’an the proofs, teachings and tenets upon which they founded their relative Islamic disciplines. This interest changed the face of Qur’anic exegesis forever. It progressed the study of the Qur’an beyond the brief and timid lexical and philological explanations of its verses prevalent in the early days of Islam. It induced, as Gilliot and Qaṭṭān, amongst others, advise, new genres of exegesis unfamiliar to the predecessors such as jurisprudential exegesis, linguistic exegesis, mystical exegesis and theological exegesis. Theological exegesis came into being as a genre that seeks the principles of the Islamic Creed from the Qur’an and studies the verses related to the Islamic doctrine, which is at the heart of the undertaken thesis.

This chapter seeks to accomplish two objectives fundamental to this thesis. The first is to assess and critically analyse the research, if any, undertaken on al-Māturīdī’s exegetical title, “Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah” and whether it is acknowledged as an influential theological exegesis in the Sunni mainstream. For this purpose, the chapter examines, as a preliminary step, the nature and state of the academic studies that engage the genus of Sunni theological exegesis, in toto, and whether it has been recognized as an independent genre or not. The aim of such an examination is to prospect for gaps, if any, in the study of Sunni theological exegesis in general, as a genre, and then in Ta’wīlāt, in particular, from an exegetical perspective.

The second objective of the chapter is to investigate whether Ta’wīlāt has influenced the scholarly perception about the theology of al-Māturīdī in the academe world, specifically ilāhiyyāt. For this end, another review is conducted to assess whether the theological views al-
Māturīdī articulates in Ta’wīlāt, or his contributions therein, have been studied, or not, since the discovery of al-Māturīdī as a theologian, in the western academia. Such an analysis helps identify aspects, nuances and areas of research unexplored vis a vis the theological dimension of Ta’wīlāt whether by classical or contemporary literature.

1.2 The birth of theological exegesis as a Qur’anic genre

One cannot claim that the emergence of theological exegesis was the result of mere academic interest or progressive, and objective, accumulation of knowledge alone. Rather it occurred in the aftermath of the fitnah\(^\text{70}\) (major political conflict) that unfolded immediately after the assassination of ‘Uthmān Ibn ‘Affān\(^\text{71}\) (d. 656 CE) and the political polarizing wars that ravaged the Muslim world for years to follow. These events caused a great division in the fabric of the early Muslim nation on the political, social but more importantly on the religious level as well. Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921 CE), Hussein Abdūl Raof (2013) and Fazlur Raḥmān Malik, among others, maintain that the divisions (such as Shī‘ite, Zaydite, Khārijite, and Mu’tazilite) materialized, after this defining fitnah event, cannot be classified simply as sects or groups\(^\text{72}\). On the contrary, they are independent Islamic schools that sought to be separate and parallel to what would become the mainstream Sunni school on all levels. As a result, they developed their own

\(^{70}\) The First fitnah (35/656-40/661) started after the assassination of the third caliph ’Uthmān in the year 35 AH/656 CE and ended in 40 AH/661 CE after the murder of the fourth caliph Ali. Stalemate at the Battle of Ṣiffīn and inconclusive arbitration between ’Ali and Mu’āwiyyah resulted in the formation of many sects in Islam. (Ullah, Al-Kashaf: Al-Zamakhshari’š Mu’tazilite exegesis of the Qur’an, 2013, p. 98)

\(^{71}\) ‘Uthmān Ibn ‘Affān is the third rightly guided Caliph in Islamic history. In virtue, he is one of the leading figures of the companions and highly respected amongst the Muslims. He has major contributions to Islamic sciences. One of them is the second compilation of the Qur’an. (Al-Ṣallābī, The Biography of ’Uthmān ibn ’Affān, 2005)

\(^{72}\) Abdul Raof, Schools of Qur’anic Exegesis: Genesis and Development; Goldziher, The History of Islamic Schools in Qur’anic Exegesis; F. Raḥmān, Islamic Methodology in History (Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965).
understanding and principles for the various Islamic disciplines particularly theology, *fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence) and Qur’anic exegesis.

In relation to their influence on Qur’anic Exegesis, Abdūl Raof states, “Similarly theological cleavages among mainstream and non-mainstream Islam have encroached upon Qur’anic Exegesis.” Abdullah Saeed endorses the same view and further elucidates, “While we cannot speak about Sunni, Shi’i or Khārijī *tafsīr* in the first/seventh century, we can certainly use those terms in the third/ninth century.” He adds, “Since then, all three groups continued to produce *tafsīr* works that project their legal, theological and religio-political views.” In point of fact, Abdūl Raof believes the impact of the political situation on Qur’anic exegesis to be greater than on any other Islamic discipline. He asserts, “Muslim Exegetes have been working in politically pressurized and hostile environment. The political status quo has impinged upon exegesis more than any other discipline in Islamic Studies.”

Thence, from all these factors, Sunni Exegesis, Shi’ite Exegesis and Mu’tazilite Exegesis were produced and became a fixed reality in Islamic scholarship. Each camp endeavoured to use the Qur’an as a vehicle to prove the legitimacy of their views. These efforts influenced immensely the birth and development of theological exegesis as a genre. Philippe

---

73 The technical definition of the word *fiqh* is “The knowledge of Shari’ah rulings that relates to the practical aspects (of a *mukallaf*) and derived from its detailed evidences.” (Hamid and Ginena, Foundations of Shariah Governance of Islamic Banks 2015), p.8
76 Ibid.
78 The Shi’ite or, in Arabic, Shi’ah is a term applied to the largest minority in the Muslim world who believe that, after the death of the Prophet, the Imamate (the 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. ("Shi’a," n.d.)
80 As well as other types of exegesis.
Gilliot asserts this inference and highlights the role of the Mu‘tazilites in the birth of the genre of theological exegesis. He states, “While here is not the place to discuss the early beginnings of dialectical theology in Islam, it can be said to have been consolidated by the Mu‘tazilites, even if they did not actually initiate it.”

The best strategy to discredit their adversaries and refute their opinions and teachings was, and continues to be, postulating that they do not correspond to the teachings of the Qur’an.

Consequently, literature written in the genre of Islamic theological exegesis cannot be treated as homogenous. Undisputedly, there is Sunni theological exegesis, a Shi‘ite theological exegesis, a Mu‘tazilite one and so forth. The focus of this study is on Sunni theological exegesis, its evolution and study in Muslim and non-Muslim literature.

1.3 Sunni theological exegesis and place of Ta’wīlāt in classical and contemporary Arabic Islamic literature

The study of the historiography and development of Sunni theological exegesis has been neglected in the Arab Muslim academia and, to lesser extent, in western academia. Strangely, some Muslim scholars who rose to prominence in the current and past century for writing in the history and evolution of Qur’anic exegesis, in Sunni main stream, do not seem to place theological exegesis in a category of its own let alone mention it in their works.

Mannā‘ Qaṭṭān (d. 1999 CE), whose title in the sciences of the Qur’an earned him a great popularity in the Arab and Muslim world, is a good illustration of this observation. Qaṭṭān does

---

81 Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval," 12.
82 The reverence of the Qur’an, as the primary source of guidance in Islam and the undisputed authority amongst the Muslims, urged all the schools to strive to justify and substantiate their teachings and principles by its verses. For further information see: Dhahābī, Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufassirūn.
83 Their names and titles will appear and be discussed shortly.
not discuss or even enlist theological exegesis as a genre of Qur’anic exegesis. He divides the
types of exegesis into three main types, 1- *al-tafsīr bil ma’thūr* (exegesis by narration), 2- *al-
tafsīr bil ra’y* (rational exegesis) and 3- *al-tafsīr al-mu’āṣir* (contemporary exegesis).

Theological exegesis, thence, would fall under the category of *al-tafsīr bil ra’y*, since Qaṭṭān
listed al-Rāzī’s exegesis, which is theological, under this category. The fact remains though that
Qaṭṭān does not even mention it as a sub-category.

The categorisation of Qaṭṭān, however, has not been endorsed by fellow Muslim scholars.
Walid Saleh (d. 1986 CE), for instance, argues that this thematic presentation is “decidedly
Sunni of the Salafi type” and of no analytical value. Al-Bughā & Mistū, two contemporary
Muslim scholars, agree with Saleh. They categorise the works in exegesis into four types rather
than three. They endorse the first two categories Qaṭṭān lists, namely, *al-tafsīr bil ma’thūr*
(exegesis by narration) and *al-tafsīr bil ra’y* (rational exegesis). However, they add two distinct
types, 1- *Al-Tafsīr al-Bātinī* (esoteric exegesis) and 2- *Al-Tafsīr al-Ishārī* (mystical exegesis).

Unlike Qaṭṭān, they provide a clear definition of each category, albeit they do not list theological
exegesis as an independent category. Nūruddīn ‘Itr, a contemporary prolific Muslim scholar,
follows the methodology of al-Bughā & Mistū and accepts the categories they listed. However,
he adds to it another category *al-tafsīr al-fiqhī* (Jurisprudential exegesis). He, like the others,
makes no clear reference to theological exegesis as a genre.

Some may argue these scholars did not list theological exegesis, as a genre, for their titles
are not comprehensive. They did not intend to list all the types of exegeses extant in Qur’anic
literature. This justification, however, is not satisfactory for two reasons. Firstly, despite the

---

85 Qaṭṭān, 370.
88 Itr, *‘Ulūm Al-Qur’an Al-Karīm*, 74.
claim of brevity, these scholars listed tens of exegetical titles of various degrees of importance. They included titles that belong to theological exegesis such as *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* authored by al-Rāzī. Secondly, they listed genres of less, or at least equal, significance to theological exegesis such as *al-tafsīr al-bātinī* (esoteric exegesis) and *al-tafsīr al-ishārī* (mystical exegesis). These scholars seem unaware, or perhaps heedless of the existence of the theological genre in the first place.

The clear negligence of theological exegesis, evident in the work of some Muslim scholars, does not constitute the norm for all academic literature concerning the various types of Qur’anic exegesis. Notable Muslim and non-Muslim scholars discussed theological exegesis and treated it as an independent genre. Dhahabī (d.1977 CE) is one such scholar. In his book *al-Tafsīr wal Mufassīrūn* (Exegesis and the Exegetes), Dhahabī employs a rather extensive approach in his review of Qur’anic exegesis literature, including theological exegesis. In his investigation of theological exegesis titles, Dhahabī does not delimit his scope to Sunni literature. He, rather, expands it to include exegetical literature from other theological camps, Muʿtazilites, Shiʿites and Kharijites. It is indeed a noteworthy effort from a Sunni scholar and most definitely an untraditional step. Despite the inclusive and wide-ranging approach of Dhahabī, the critical analysis he provides for the exegetical works of all camps lacks content and depth. He describes the titles rather than analyse their content and highlight their originalities and their nuances. Saleh concurs with this critical remark. He goes beyond it to classify Dhahabī’s title as “…more a catalogue and survey of works than a well thought out historical conception of the genres of tafsīr…”

---

89 The Sunni, Muʿtazilites, Shiʿites and Kharijites camps.
Consequently, in the sphere of theological exegesis, Dhahabī does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of these exegetical titles. His inquest into the theological exegesis books, at a macro level, does not contribute anything substantial to the knowledge about the evolution of the genre, its stages or the challenges it encountered. Equally, on the micro level, Dhahabī seems to rush in his investigation of each title. He focuses on including a large number of titles rather than allow himself the time and space to adequately critique each title satisfactorily. Unfortunately, his review does not constitute a scholarly study of the methodologies of the various authors in their exegeses.

Despite the voluminous nature of Dhahabī’s study, he does not discuss Ta’wīlāt or at the very least note its existence. Incongruously, he remarks Abū Ḫasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 936. CE), a contemporary theologian of al-Māturīdī, as a Sunni exegete. He reports that al-Ashʿarī wrote a Sunni theological exegesis named “al-Mukhtazan (the filled with treasures book)”.\(^92\) He even relates Ibn ‘Asākir’s commendation of al-Ashʿarī’s exegesis\(^93\) but fails to remark anything about the effort of al-Māturīdī in Sunni theological exegesis. Dhahabī completed his dissertation in 1976; four years after the first partial edition of Ta’wīlāt became available in print. It is indeed an oversight on his part, most likely, instigated by the lack of attention in the Muslim, and possibly Non-Muslim, intelligentsia to al-Māturīdī as a theologian in the first place – an issue this chapter discusses systematically in a dedicated section.\(^94\)

---

\(^92\) Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufassirūn*, 1, 150.

\(^93\) Dhahabī relates that Ibn ‘Asākir’ said, “he (al-Ashʿarī) did not leave a verse an innovator has misused except he refuted it and turned into a proof for the creed of the people of the truth”. For further information see: ibid.

\(^94\) The exegesis of al-Rāzī, A renowned Muslim scholar from the Ashʿarī school, (d. 1209 CE) is the only Sunni title Dhahabī reviews in his thesis. Dhahabī criticizes the exegesis of al-Rāzī with two main points. The first is the contention that al-Rāzī does not effectively rebuke the theology of the Muʿtazilites in his exegesis, which makes the Sunni views seem fragile and precarious. The criticism of Dhahabī is an unquestionable evidence of the role assigned to the genre of theological exegesis. As has been indicated in the previous section that theological emerged to support the doctrine of each school and undermine the doctrine of its opponents. The second criticism is Dhahabī’s assertion that al-Rāzī’s exegesis is excessive with the discussion of kalām related subjects to the extent
Muḥammad al-Zarqānī (d.1948 CE) is another late Muslim scholar who wrote on theological exegesis. In his title *Manāhil al-‘irfān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* (the sources of knowledge in the sciences of the Qur’an) he dedicates a section to discuss the various types of Qur’anic exegesis. In this section, al-Zarqānī discusses theological exegesis as an independent category. He distinguishes between the titles written by mainstream Sunni exegetes and those written by Shi‘ites, Mu‘tazilites and Ismā‘ilites. Al-Zarqānī dedicates separate but brief headings for each theological orientation. It is useful to draw a comparison between the approaches of Dhahabī and al-Zarqānī, whilst reviewing the writing of the latter on theological exegesis. The initial points of commonality between them is their classification of theological exegesis as an independent genre and the inclusion of the work of other currents in their listed titles.

They differ, nonetheless, when it comes to the degree of analysis and scope. In terms of scope, Dhahabī reviews more titles, from each camp, than al-Zarqānī. In terms of analysis, al-Zarqānī is very brief when compared to Dhahabī. He does not even attempt to analyse the methodologies or the characteristics of the *tafsīr* books of the other camps. Al-Zarqānī seems to take a defensive stance rather than an analytical one. He directs his attention mainly to two non-Sunni schools, the Shi‘ite and Mu‘tazilite, with stronger emphasis on the latter. He selects

---

that al-Rāzī’s exegesis, in the view of Dhahabī, should be more appropriately rendered a “*mawsū‘ah fī ‘ilm al-kalām* (an encyclopedia in the science of dialectics)” than a Qur’anic exegesis. According to Dhahabī, this quality diminished the value of the title from an exegetical standpoint. For further information see: ibid, 1, 293-94.

95 A title written in the science of *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* (the Qur’anic sciences) for which he gained prominence.

96 He is the first Sunni scholar, as far as the review has demonstrated, to introduce they types of *tafsīr* as a section into *ulūm al-Qur’ān* (the Qur’anic sciences) literature.

97 The term he uses to refer to theological exegesis is “*tafsīr ahl al- kalām*” (the exegesis of the scholars of dialectics).


99 He calls them *fīrāq* (sects). For further information see: Ibid, 2, 61, 65, 66.

100 Unlike other scholars such as Qaṭṭān, al-Bugha and ‘Itr.

101 Al-Zarqānī suffices with the mention of one, as he did with the Shi‘ite exegesis, and sometime he lists two titles of each camp. For further information see: Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil Al-‘Irjāfī Fī ‘Ulūm Al-Qur’ān*, 2, 59.
particular theological verses from each title and critiques the approach of the authors strongly. Through his selective examples, al-Zarqānī demonstrates how, from his perspective, the other schools manipulate the meanings of the verses to help propagate their doctrine. He then rebuts their commentaries respectively. The impression one gathers from al-Zarqānī’s writing is that his main aim is not to analyse objectively and comprehensively these titles. Rather he seeks to rebuke them and uphold his own theological school, the Sunni school. Hence, al-Zarqānī places special emphasis on Sunni theological exegesis and chiefly al-Rāzī’s exegesis.102

Unsurprisingly, al-Zarqānī concurs with Dhahabī, once more, in dropping the exegesis of al-Māturīdī from the list of Sunni theological exegesis. The further one enquires into Arabic exegetical literature the more it becomes perceptible, or rather undeniable, the complete absence of the image of al-Māturīdī as an exegete and the absence of Ta’wīlāt as a Sunni exegesis let alone a theological exegesis.

Ahmad al-Sharbāṣī (d. 1980 CE) who provides a detailed chronological account of all Qur’anic exegetical titles, including the non-Sunni titles, does not note al-Māturīdī’s exegesis.103 Ironically when he enumerates the exegeses of the year 400 Hijri, he records the name of al-Ash’arī, who emerged as a prominent Sunni theologian104, tens of years after al-Māturīdī and whose exegesis is missing until today, but does not register the name of al-Māturīdī.105 Shams al-dīn al-Dāwūdī (d. 1538 CE) wrote a two volume alphabetical index of the names of all Muslim

102 He praises al-Rāzī immensely for valiantly defending ahl al-Sunnah (the Sunni school) and rebutting the misconceptions of the others, mainly the Mu’tazilites, using their rational methods. Al-Zarqānī’s commentary on the exegesis of al-Rāzī is dominated by praise to the point that he does not criticize it at all – a clear divergence from the approach of Dhahabī. For further information see: ibid, 2, 60.
103 Ahmad Al-Sharbāṣī, Qiṣṣat Al-Tafsīr (Beirut: Dar al Jil, 1978).
104 Prior to this Abū al-Ḥasan was a Mu’tazilite.
105 Al-Sharbāṣī, Qiṣṣat Al-Tafsīr 90.
exegetes yet he does not enter the name of al-Māturīdī\textsuperscript{106} in his exegetical registry.\textsuperscript{107} A similar attitude is witnessed by Jalāl al-dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505 CE) in his title.\textsuperscript{108}

Indeed, the absence of Ta’wīlāt from the writing of these scholars credits the urgency for conducting research on Ta’wīlāt from an exegetical perspective to investigate the paradigm and methodology of al-Māturīdī in the interpretation of theological verses. The review of the Islamic scholarly literature, at least so far, exposes the complete disregard, or to say the least, the absence of any scholarly study into Sunni theological exegesis as a genre. Ironically, as evident earlier, Dhahabī and al-Zarqānī wrote more, as little as it may be, about the theological exegeses of the other schools, Mu‘tazilites and Shi‘ites, than their own. They have accepted theological exegesis as a genre of Qur’anic exegesis but did not attempt to study the development of this genre or appraise the Sunni exegeses authored in it such as Ta’wīlāt.

The unavailability of Ta’wīlāt in print may, to a degree, acquit the past, and some classical, scholars from neglecting its study or mention. The same excuse, however, does not pardon recent studies. Unfortunately, contemporary research, in Qur’anic exegesis, does not break the cycle encountered in old and classical Arabic literature. A case in point is the book Muḥammad al-Maghrāwī published in 2000.\textsuperscript{109} The title of the book inspires one that it will conduct an objective comparison whereby the author presents and analyses the methodologies and the interpretations of the various theological schools, those who advocate ta‘wīl and those who oppose it. The examination of the book, however, proves otherwise. The author could not resist the urge to defend his personal doctrine. The entire study is a campaign against those who

\textsuperscript{106} Or the name of his exegesis Ta’wīlāt in his book.
\textsuperscript{107} M. Al-Dāwūdī, Ṭabaqāt Al-Mufassirīn, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al 'Ilmiyyah, 1983).
\textsuperscript{108} J. Al-Suyūṭī, Ṭabaqāt Al-Mufassirīn (Kuwait: Dar Al Nawadir, 2010).
\textsuperscript{109} The book is titled “Al-Mufassirrūn bayna al-Ta‘wīl wal iḥbāt fī Ayāt As Šifā‘ī” (the exegetes between affirming and interpreting the verses of the divine attributes).
uphold the ṭāghūt al-kalām al-madhīmūn\textsuperscript{110} (the idol of scorned Islamic dialectics) and the ṭāghūt al-majāz\textsuperscript{111} (the idol of metaphor).\textsuperscript{112} Right from the outset, there is an aggressive rebutting mentality that directs and drives the author in his research. Al-Maghārī sets the neo-salafist\textsuperscript{113} creed as the absolute paradigm to determine what is acceptable and what is not hermeneutically. He reprimands the exegeses of all the preceding Muslim scholars who wrote in the genre and did not endorse the traditional creed. He corrects, in his opinion, the mistakes of many of the classical Sunni exegetes in their interpretation of the divine attributes.\textsuperscript{114} He categorises the commentaries of the exegetes on the verses as either in accordance or in violation of the creed of the salaf.\textsuperscript{115} The analytic depth is completely absent from Al-Maghārī’s research. Hardly any effort is exerted in understanding and assessing scholarly the methodology of the exegetes in handling the verses on the attributes of God. Thus, the study contributes little to the appreciation of the development of theological exegesis or its Sunni sub-category. Despite the publication of the book \textit{ab initio} the new millennia, when a complete edition of Ta’wīlāt was available, the author does not discuss Ta’wīlāt or name it in his thesis. Ta’wīlāt is at the very core of the subject of the research yet the author overlooks it in favour of the Ash’arī school.\textsuperscript{116}

It is rather strange to see a contemporary publication addressing the theme of theological exegesis heedless of the significance of Ta’wīlāt when a 1984 thesis about the state of Qur’anic

\textsuperscript{110} M. Al-Maghārī, \textit{Al-Mufassirūn Bayna Al-Ta’wil Wal Ithbāt Fi Ayāt Al-Sīfāt} (Beirut: Resalah Publishers, 2000), 3.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{112} The term ṭāghūt in Islam symbolises polytheism and tyranny.

\textsuperscript{113} Neo-Salafism or Wahhabism is “an inspired by neo-Hanbalite school of Ibn Taymiyyah (XIVth century), representing a traditional current that is distinguished by its literal reading of Islam and its rigorist and puritanical appearance” A. Sfeir, \textit{Dictionnaire Mondial De L’islamisme} (Paris: Plon, 2002), 479.

\textsuperscript{114} Al-Maghārī, \textit{Al-Mufassirūn Bayna Al-Ta’wil Wal Ithbāt Fi Ayāt Al-Sīfāt}.

\textsuperscript{115} Salaf is an Arabic Islamic term that refers to the prominent Muslim scholars that lived in the first three Islamic centuries. for further information see, Sfeir, \textit{Dictionnaire Mondial De L’islamisme}.

\textsuperscript{116} Al-Maghārī, \textit{Al-Mufassirūn Bayna Al-Ta’wil Wal Ithbāt Fi Ayāt Al-Sīfāt}. 
exegesis confirms it. Muḥammad al-Jaʿfar, in his thesis, confirms the influence of al-Māturīḍī’s school, along with the Ashʿarī school, on the field of exegesis. He states, “the dialectic Islamic schools that have influenced the development and progress of the Islamic intellect are three: Ahl al-Sunnah, the Muʿtazilites and the Shiʿites…the dialectic form of the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah is represented by al-Māturīḍīyyah and al-Ashʿarīyyah.” Al-Jaʿfar praises al-Māturīḍī and al-Ashʿarī and stresses the significance of their contributions to the field of theology and exegesis. Al-Jaʿfar remarks Taʿwīlāt, al-Māturīḍī’s exegesis, as one of the influential works in the domain of theology along with Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. Peculiarly though when al-Jaʿfar begins discussing the topic in detail, he does not cite, not in the least, Taʿwīlāt. All the examples, of Sunni influence on the development of Qur’anic exegesis, he quotes are obtained from al-Rāzī’s exegesis, Shahristānī’s titles (d. 1153 CE). Needless to say, al-Jaʿfar resorts to Ashʿarī sources exclusively. It is puzzling to see his commendation of the influence of al-Māturīḍī and his title on the entire field yet witness him overlook it.

The overlooking may be justified by the tendency one witnesses in some later classical and contemporary Muslim scholars, even Non-Muslims to project the Ashʿarī and Māturīḍī theology schools as one. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 1370 CE), in the eight/fourteenth century, aided immensely in building this image. It came as a product of the Mamluk regime, as Madelung contends, that sanctioned the “conformist Sunnite solidarity against the infidels,

---

117 The title of his study is “Athar al-Taṭawwur al-Fikrī fil Tafsīr Fi al-ʾAṣr al-ʿAbbāsī” (the impact of the intellectual development on the field of exegesis during the Abbasid Reign).
119 Ibid.
120 He is a faithful follower of the Ashʿarī school and Ghazālī’s works (d.1111 CE).
121 The non-Muslim’s perspective or perspectives will be assessed later in the chapter.
122 The Ashʿarī is an early theological orientation of Islam, Sunni in particular, founded by Imam Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī in the 10th Century and second most dominant theology school in the Muslim world (“Ashʿaris - LookLex Encyclopaedia,” n.d.).
123 Al-jaʿfar, Athar Al-Taṭawwur Al-Fikrī Fi Al-Tafsīr Fi Al-ʾAṣr Al-ʿAbbāsī.
against Shiism, Mu’tazilism, and falsafa (philosophy).”

The differences between both schools were waived as mostly lāfẓī (terminological) and minor. It is possible that in such a spirit al-Ja’far assumed his discussion of the Ashʿarī school’s influence on Qur’an exegesis indirectly includes al-Māturīdī.

Regardless, such an assumption is hardly adequate. One cannot simply overlook the contributions of a foundational exegete, and a theologian, such as al-Māturīdī from the academic narrative on such grounds. Al-Ashʿarī and al-Māturīdī founded their own theological school separately and independently from one another. They emerged in different geographical, cultural, intellectual and political circumstances. Despite their common denominators, they possess different points of views on many issues in the Islamic doctrine and a number of titles were authored to highlight and explain these differences. Al-Māturīdī wrote in the field of theological exegesis long before the renowned al-Ashʿarī and before al-Rāzī, whom al-Jaʿfar refers to heavily. Al-Ashʿarī’s exegesis is missing and the work of al-Rāzī did not appear until the thirteenth century.

The disregard of Taʾwīlāt and Sunni theological exegesis, as a genre, persisted in the new millennia in the works of contemporary Muslim and Arabic academics. In 2008, Ṣalāḥ al-Khālidī wrote a book that examines the methodologies of the Muslim exegetes. According to al-Khālidī, the aim of the book is to educate Muslim academics about the methodologies of the Muslim

---

125 Ibid.
exegetes.\textsuperscript{127} Al-Khālidī does not clarify the academic gap he intends to fill or how his book differs from the Dhahabī’s title. The assessment of al-Khālidī’s title reveals that it is an abridged version of Dhahabī’s book. In the treatise, al-Khālidī does not hide his bias against rational exegesis. He openly declares \textit{al-tafsīr al-atharī} (narrative and traditional exegesis) the best type of exegesis and commends the exegetes who adhered to it.\textsuperscript{128} Al-Khālidī’s writing lacks objectivity, critical analysis and comprehensiveness. Frequently, it appears as a personal assault against the adversaries of the traditional school, particularly the Muʿtazilites.\textsuperscript{129} Al-Māturīdī is graced with neither acclaim nor criticism. Ta’wīlāt is virtually non-existent as far as al-Khālidī is concerned.

In 2009, Fāṭimah Mārdīnī\textsuperscript{130} published a book with the same title as the monograph of Dhahabī.\textsuperscript{131} She acknowledged the work of Dhahabī and declared the objective of her book to complement his work and improve on it.\textsuperscript{132} However, her book falls short of her promise. She enlists the same titles Dhahabī reviewed in all the genres of Qur’anic exegesis and her analysis is briefer and less analytical. The new component in Mārdīnī’s work is the inclusion of a new category of Qur’anic exegesis, \textit{al-tafsīr al-muʿāṣir} (contemporary exegesis). She discusses under it thematic exegesis and the grammatical analysis of the Qur’an amongst other exegetical issues.\textsuperscript{133} Al-Māturīdī and his Ta’wīlāt are not discussed.

\textsuperscript{127} S. Al-Khālidī, \textit{Ta’rif Al-Dārisīn Bi Manāhij Al-Mufassirīn}, 3rd ed. (Dimascus: Dar Al Qalam, 2008), 6.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, 302. He lists all non-Sunnī exegeses, Shi’ites, Muʿtazilites, Kharijites, Sufi and Ismāʿīlites, under the heading “\textit{al-ittijāḥāt al-munḥarifah fī al-tafsīr} (the flawed currents in tafsīr)”. For further information see: ibid, 501.
\textsuperscript{129} For further information see: ibid, 504-05.
\textsuperscript{130} She has been teaching the subject of Qur’anic exegesis for many years in Syria. For further information see: F. Mārdīnī, \textit{Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufassirīn} (Dimascus: Bayt Al hikma, 2009), 4.
\textsuperscript{131} The title of the book is “\textit{Al-Tafsīr wa Al-Mufassirīn} (Qur’anic exegesis and the exegetes)”
\textsuperscript{132} Mārdīnī, \textit{Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufassirīn}, 7.
\textsuperscript{133} Under this category, she reviews rather fleetingly – a similarity she shares with Dhahabī – many titles written by contemporary exegetes such as Jamāil al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914 CE), Muhammad ibn ‘Āshūr (d. 1973), Muhammad Sha’rāwī and Muhammad al-Ṣābūnī. For further information see: ibid, 142-69.
In 2010, Ibrahim ‘Awaḍ wrote a book investigating exegetical titles from Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE) period to Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966 CE) period. The title suggests the author studied all exegeses written between the ninth century and the twentieth century but ‘Awaḍ studies only eight titles. He does not enlist al-Māturīdī’s exegesis, despite being a contemporary of Ṭabarī, or even indicate coming across it. ‘Awaḍ investigates in his book Shi’ite exegesis, and a Mu‘tazilite exegesis, a commendable gesture, but did not extend this courtesy to any Sunni theological exegesis. An important feature that distinguishes ‘Awaḍ’s work from the previous studies is his objectivity. His commentary on al-Ṭabrasī (d. 1154 CE) and Zamakhsharī (d. 1144 CE) titles is balanced and is not a relentless attack. The omission of ‘Awaḍ of al-Māturīdī does not seem deliberate or theological driven, unlike Ḥussayn below. ‘Awaḍ seems genuinely unaware of Ta’wilāt’s existence.

In 2011, Ḥussayn S’āid Ḥussayn wrote an academic article to review the Sunni exegetes who caused major changes in the field of Qur’anic exegesis. Ḥussayn eliminates deliberately any Sunni exegete affiliated with a known theological school, without providing any justification. Yet he nominates Ṭabarī to be one of the reforming exegetes, despite his known theological views found in his exegesis. Ḥussayn altogether eliminates al-Māturīdī’s exegesis and al-Rāzī’s exegesis.

134 The book is titled, “Mina al-Ṭabarī ilā Sayyid Qutb: Dirāsāt fi Manāhij al-Tafsīr wa madhāhibih (from Tabari to Sayyid Qutb: Studies into the methodologies of Qur’anic exegesis and its schools).”
135 He investigates “Majma’ al-Bayān (the compendium of clarity)” by Faḍl ibn Ḥassan al-Ṭabrasī (d. 1154 CE).
136 He investigates “Al-Kashshāf” by Māḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144 CE).
137 Even al-Rāzī’s exegesis is excluded by ‘Awaḍ. ‘Awaḍ, Mina Al-Ṭabarī Ilā Sayyid Qutb: Dirāsāt Fi Manāhij Al-Tafsīr Wa Madhāhibih, 5.
138 Ibid, 121, 47.
139 The article is titled “Al-Mujaddidūn fi Tafsīr Kitāb Allah (the reformists in the interpretation of the book of God)”.
140 S.H. Ḥussayn, "Al-Mujaddidūn Fi Tafsīr Kitāb Allah," (Suisse Univerity), under "2018." http://k-tb.com/book/Quraan05456-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AF%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87. 467.
141 Ibid, 478.
In 2014, Ziyād al-Jirjāwī and Abdūl Fattāḥ al-Hamṣ wrote a joint article about the evolution of Qur’anic exegesis, its development and its paradigms. They emphasised the lack of academic studies and conferences in this area of research and their intention was to break the virginity of it in modern times.\(^{142}\) Despite the briefness of their article, they list many titles, including theological ones, but they do not analyse any of them. The article lacks the critical element and hardly fills any gap. Rather it is, underwhelmingly, a repetition of information previous scholars have already offered. Al-Māturīdī’s exegesis, as it has become the norm, is not mentioned.

The literature review so far has investigated numerous theses and articles written in the last two centuries in the field of Qur’anic exegesis and none of them underlines the importance of the exegesis of al-Māturīdī or even remarks its existence. The same proves to be true for theological research as well.

The omission, disregard and unawareness of the existence of al Māturīdī’s Ta’wīlāt let alone studying or analyzing, or at least acknowledging its influence on theological exegesis, or its mere existence as a Sunni exegesis, are all common affectations in most, if not all, of the Arabic Islamic literature- contemporary and classical. One confidently concludes that Ta’wīlāt, despite being in print since the seventies, is an undiscovered Sunni theological exegesis.

It is perplexing to see it untouched in any exegetical, and nearly theological, research to the extent that one questions whether it simply did not merit noteworthiness and was inconsequential. On the contrary, evidence\(^ {143}\) affirms that both al Māturīdī and his title received

---

\(^{142}\) Z Al-Jirjāwī and A Al-Hamṣ, “Dirāsah Ta’ṣīliyyah Li Nash’at Al-Tafsīr Wa Taṭawwurih Wa Maṣādirih Wa Anmāṭitih,” in The first Academic conference of the Qur’an and Islamic Studies College in Al-Quds University (Abu Dis2014), 4.

\(^{143}\) Numerous statements about the significance of Ta’wīlāt, such as al-Qurashī, Nasafī and Rudolph, have been included in the introduction chapter in the significance of the research section.
the adoration of all those who read them. They assert it is a significant and seminal work that must be investigated. Saleh confirms the exegesis of Māturīdī is “a fundamental early work that will revolutionalise how we understand the development of the genre…”

He further elaborates on the significance of Ta’wīlāt, “One cursory glance at this work is sufficient to make us realise that, when fully investigated, it will radically change the way we perceive the development of early Qur’anic commentaries.”

While one cannot provide a conclusive response for this mystification, the negligence of al-Māturīdī’s exegesis, given the scarcity of information, the analysis of his period proposes few causative factors. The first is his geographical location. Central Asia was far from the center of the Caliphate, Baghdad. Baghdad, at the time, was the political capital and the academic Makkah of the Muslim world. As a result, many of the historians, bibliographers and scholars did not pay adequate attention to the academic developments that took place elsewhere. In addition, the remoteness of Samarqand, when contrasted with the convenience of Baghdad being in the heart of the Middle East, made it unpractical for foreign students to travel Samarqand to learn. Central Asia was seen as the cultural and intellectual backwater of the Muslim world. Undoubtedly, this would have limited the spread of al-Māturīdī’s teachings to other parts in the Muslim world and restricted his influence to his region. Wilfred Madelung, Philipp Bruckmayr and Rudolph confirm indirectly the significance of this inferred cause, on the ignorance and negligence about al-Māturīdī’s exegesis, when they affirm the interrelatedness of the spread of

146 The city of al Māturīdī and his suburb Māturīd.
the teachings of al-Māturīdī school, from Central Asia to the Mediterranean the heartlands of Islam, with the rise of Turkish dynasties to power.148

By the same token, they confirm that the lack of political support to al-Māturīdī and his school, during his lifetime, contributed to his absenteeism in the theological and exegetical circles. The Ash'arī school enjoyed complete political immunity and promotion by three major Muslim dynasties, the Seljuq149, the Ayyubid150 and the Mamluk151. These dynasties played a pivotal in the spread the teachings of the school throughout the medieval era. Similarly, the Mu'tazilites, albeit for a shorter period, their teachings were enforced by the Abbasid caliphs, al-Ma'mūn (d. 833 CE) and al-Mu'taṣim (d. 842 CE). In addition, the role of the Mamluk and more importantly the Ottomans came later and the emergence of Sunnite solidarity, discussed earlier, robbed al-Māturīdī from having his distinctive image.152

Additionally, the strong allegiance within the schools of Islamic Jurisprudence decreased interest in al-Māturīdī’s teachings and titles. The teachings of al-Māturīdī were adopted by the Ḥanafī School alone. Meanwhile, the Ash‘arī teachings were embraced by two prominent schools, the Mālikī School and the Shāfi‘ī school and a significant number of Ḥanbalī scholars. In the competitive environment that dominated amongst the various schools, this would have

---


152 Yahya. Haidar, "The Debates between Ash‘arism and Maturidism in Ottoman Religious Scholarship: A Historical and Bibliographical Study" (the Australian National University, 2016), 14-16.
discouraged scholars or at least caused them to favor the scholars of their own schools over those who belonged to other schools.\textsuperscript{153} Haidar endorses this inference as he views the confinement of Māturīdīsm to Ḥanafī circles in Transoxiana an understandable justification for the obscurity of al-Māturīdī in an Ashʿarī dominated environment.\textsuperscript{154}

The obscurity of al-Māturīdī continued into contemporary times but for new reasons. Most of the studies undertaken in the genesis of Qur’anic exegesis, its genres and sub-genres and the methodologies of the Muslim exegetes, consciously or unconsciously, focalize around the work of Dhahabī. They use his very title, imitate his framework, copy his methodology and even draw the same conclusions. The texts are filled with repetitive information that does not offer any new valuable insight into the development of the field or its genres, which reflects a lack of serious research. The critical analysis is hardly discernible. It is overpowered by the defensive tenor and at times subjective attacks. The genealogical nature of the tradition, as Saleh rightly points,\textsuperscript{155} caused most studies to rely on the classical inherited work without spending much effort to regenerate research into the genres of Qur’anic exegesis or at least update it. Thus, despite entering the new millennia, research about Sunni theological exegesis remains in the past and al-Māturīdī and his exegesis continue to be the prisoners of the perception of the classical period- unnoticed.

The literature on theological exegesis in the Muslim and Arabic academia remains embryonic. Studies are mostly descriptive, repetitive and defensive rather than analytical or critical. Most of the writers discuss the widely endorsed titles that has been noted by classical

\textsuperscript{154} Haidar, "The Debates between Ashʿarism and Maturidism in Ottoman Religious Scholarship: A Historical and Bibliographical Study," 35.
scholars. No effort has been put towards analysing the characteristics or the methodologies of the exegesis whether from the Sunni school or the other parallel schools.

As far as the study of Ta’wīlāt, in Arabic Islamic tradition, whether as a Sunni theological exegesis or as an exegesis in its own right, is non-existent. No academic work has been produced on it besides a very brief commentary by the annotator of the Resalah publication of the book. Similarly, no work has been produced discussing the contributions of al-Māturīdī to theological exegesis or his theological views contained in Ta’wīlāt. Thus, a serious gap exists in the study of Sunni theological exegesis in the Arab and Muslim literature, specifically in reference to the exegesis of al-Māturīdī.

1.4 Sunni theological exegesis and Ta’wīlāt in Western literature

The discipline of Qur’anic exegesis has been a dynamic and important field of study in the European and English academia. Alford T. Welch divides the Qur’an studies’ research into three areas: “(1) exegesis, or the study of the text itself, (2) the history of its interpretation, and (3) the roles of the Qur’an in Muslim life and thought (in ritual, theology, etc.).” Whilst the categorisation Welch postulates is astute, there are areas of studies that he did not signify such as the contributions of the exegetes to the Qur’anic exegesis and its genres, the critical analysis of the methodologies the exegetes employ in their interpretations and the study of the paradigms that direct their thought process and writing.

156 This is in reference to the commentary of Khaymī who published the first complete publication of al Māturīdī exegesis. For further information see: M. Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1st ed., 5 vols. (Beirut: Resalah Publishers, 2004).
Thus, the approach of the English and European writers, or as some researchers describe it “the western writers”, to Qur’anic exegesis cannot be described as homogenous. They have differed greatly, with Arab and Muslim scholars, and amongst themselves, about many notions in the field. The vigorous debate continues until today in relation to nearly every aspect of Qur’anic exegesis from the origin of the key term “tafsir” to the authenticity and originality of the narrative type of exegesis to the authorship of the Qur’an and to many other aspects in exegesis. Notwithstanding the above, there is no confusion or disagreement amongst Western scholars, Muslims and Non-Muslims, about the legitimacy of categorizing theological exegesis as a genre of Qur’anic exegesis in its own right.

In her discussion about the development of the Qur’anic exegesis in the early second/eighth century, Kifayat Ullah states that the broad categories of Qur’anic exegesis that “can be distinguished: paraphrastic, narrative, legal, linguistic, philosophical, mystical, and theological.” However, when listing the sub-categories of theological exegesis, Ullah limits

---

159 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” H. Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5. It is the researcher’s view that the reference should be either between Arabic and English literature or between Muslim and Non-Muslim literature. The researcher adopted the former in this thesis.


them to four sub-categories: 1-Shi‘ite, 2-Zaydite\textsuperscript{163}, Khārijite\textsuperscript{164} and Mu‘tazilites.\textsuperscript{165} Inexplicably, Ullah does not enlist Sunni theological exegesis as a sub-category. She neither discusses it, \textit{in toto}, nor does she dissect any of its titles anywhere in her research, save the mention of the name of al-Rāzī vis a vis the meanings of the Qur’an once or twice.

While all those who composed in the historiography of Qur’anic exegesis, in English, recognised theological exegesis, little has been noted or written about Sunni theological exegesis – a serious gap in English academia indeed. The first comprehensive analysis of a Sunni theological title took place recently, in 2014 with Tariq Jaffer. In his book, Jaffer expresses his surprise of the minimal attention al-Rāzī’s title, and by extension the sub-genre, received from western scholarship given the acknowledgement they expressed of its richness and influence.\textsuperscript{166}

Even, the monograph of Michel Lagarde on the Qur’an commentary of al-Rāzī in 2008, the first academic, though incomprehensive, study on al-Rāzī’s exegesis in western scholarship, focused strictly on the Qur’an’s beauty therein and did not study it as a Sunni theological title.\textsuperscript{167} Jaffer, thus, assents to the conclusion of the researcher that Sunni theological exegesis, to the surprise of all, has not been studied adequately in western scholarship. The disquisition into the causes behind the paucity divulges a bigger impediment.

\textsuperscript{163} Zaydite is a Shi‘a Muslim school of thought named after Zayd ibn ‘Ālī, the grandson of Husayn ibn ‘Ālī. They are the oldest branch of the Shia and the largest group amongst the Shia before the Safavid Dynasty in the sixteenth century and currently the second largest group, are the closest to the Sunnis. They are particularly prevalent in Yemen. (”Zaidiyah - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia,” n.d.)

\textsuperscript{164} Kharijites were a movement during the early years of Islam. This movement has no followers today. (”Kharijite - Simple English Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia,” n.d.)

\textsuperscript{165} Later in her dissertation, Ullah annexes to her list a fifth entry, the Ismā‘īlīte exegesis. For further information see: Ullah, \textit{Al-Kashaf: Al-Zamakhshari’s Mu‘tazilite Exegesis of the Qur’an}.

\textsuperscript{166} Jaffer, \textit{Razi : Master of Quranic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning}, 6-7.

Most of the western scholarly Studies available today, as Saleh deprecates, “are devoted to the earliest phase of the Qur’anic exegetical tradition, the pre-Ṭabarī phase.” Many titles are yet to be edited and published in the post-Ṭabarī period and Saleh emphasizes the presence of epochal works of exegesis “still untouched. Works whose assessment would not only fill gaps in our knowledge of the history of this genre but also likely to modify what we think of the cultural significance of exegesis.” Conveniently, Saleh does not find a better example to demonstrate his assertion than Ta’wilāt. He states, “Let me give a stark example … the commentary of Abū Mansur al-Māturīdī…has been published in 10 volumes yet…scholars continue to discuss the history of exegesis as if this work did not exist.”

Saleh is not the first to draw attention to the importance of Ta’wilāt as a Sunni theological exegesis. Gilliot, Troudi, and Rudolph before him acknowledge its value and its potential contributions to Qur’anic exegesis and to Islamic theology and to Islamic disciplines at large. Troudi states, in this regard, “Many exegetical works began to represent their authors’ doctrinal choices and reject Mu’tazilī interpretations. One of them has much of the Māturīdī exegetical material preserved by… al-Māturīdī… in his major Qur’anic exegesis… Ta’wilāt ahl al-Sunnah.” Thence, it is appropriate to theorise that Ta’wilāt is the first comprehensive extant Sunni attempt to inoculate Sunnism in the face of its antagonists.

As far as exegetical studies are concerned, the first attempt to utilise Ta’wilāt, in the western academia, was in 1982. It took place after Ibrahim and al-Sayyid ‘Awaḍayn published

---

168 Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabari (d. 923 CE)
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid, 1646.
the first volume of Ta’wilāt in 1971. Galli wrote a short article titled “Some aspects of al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the Qur'an”. As the title suggests, the article does not have a set analytical course. It functions as a quick overview of the main components of the first volume of Ta’wilāt. Galli commences with al-Māturīdī’s conception on tafsīr and ta’wil. He follows it with listing the main sources from which al-Māturīdī seeks his interpretation of the verses. They are: 1- the Qur’an, 2- the traditions of the prophet and 3- “the interpretation given to the Qur’an by previous commentators.” The sources Galli listed are typically evident in the overwhelming majority of Sunni exegeses. Thus, it appears the aim of Galli, in the list he outlined, was to paint Ta’wilāt with the conformative image of most traditional Sunni exegeses rather than provide a profound analysis of the title to discover al-Māturīdī’s originality. Galli’s interest in his analysis, of Ta’wilāt, is thus exegetical rather than theological. This inference is further ascertained by the subsequent section in Galli’s article, in which he comments on the attitude of al-Māturīdī towards the use of Israelites reports in the explanation of Qur’anic stories. He praises al-Māturīdī for omitting them from his work. Even though, Galli describes Ta’wilāt as “a mine of information” for al-Māturīdī’s theological views and dedicates a section for al-Māturīdī’s theological doctrines, Galli does not delve into any of them. He suffices with listing some of the main theological topics al-Māturīdī covers in the first volume of Ta’wilāt. Galli follows the list of topics with another list of the main sects al-Māturīdī refutes in his exegesis. He

174 The publication of a complete copy of Ta’wilāt ahl al-Sunnah would have to wait until the beginning of the twenty first century as will be seen shortly.
175 with which al-Māturīdī opened his exegesis.
177 Ibid, 9.
178 Ibid, 17.
179 Such as the doctrine of tanzīh (transcendence of God), the creation of God of man’s actions, the theory of kasb (acquisition) and the confirmation of attribute of takwīn. The doctrine of tanzīh and the attribute of takwīn will be covered from chapter 4 onwards in this thesis. As for the doctrine of acquisition and the creation of the human acts it falls outside the scope of the thesis and it will a rich subject for future studies.
dedicates two pages only for all these theological elements. His article, therefore, does not offer any substantial analysis of al-Māturīdī’s theology or even his exegetical methodology.\footnote{Such a result is expected though since Galli had only one volume of Ta’wilāt at hand. Even if he attempted to undergo such an analysis, it would have been uncomprehensive because the majority of Ta’wilāt, at this stage, remained a manuscript.} It seems the partial publication of Ta’wilāt instigated a limited research activity on the exegetical level. However, it did not create a momentum. After Galli’s article, no study was undertaken on Ta’wilāt exegetically, or even theologically, until the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

In 2004, Fatimah Khaymī published a complete edition of Ta’wilāt, in an attempt to place the exegesis on the academic scene again.\footnote{Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah.} Interestingly in the same year, Gilliot uses Ta’wilāt in the context of questioning the authorship of the Qur’an through his analysis of the meaning of the word \textit{kawthar} in chapter al-Kawthar.\footnote{Claude. Gilliot, “Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur’an” (paper presented at the Towards a new reading of the Qur’an, Notre Dame (Indiana), United States, 2005-04-02 2005).} It is possible that Fatimah’s publication drew attention to Ta’wilāt again. Gilliot claimed that al-Māturīdī “was very embarrassed by this word but shows insight when he rejects the interpretation of majority (of exegetes).”\footnote{Ibid, 98.} Despite the erroneous of the inference of Gilliot,\footnote{The commentary of al-Māturīdī on chapter al-Kawthar does not express embarrassment at all. Rather, al-Māturīdī analyses all the reported interpretation of the word \textit{kawthar} and states his rational preference. For further information see: M. Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 18 volumes vols. (İstanbul: Dar Al Mizān, 2007), 18, 627. He retracts his statement about the embarrassment of al-Māturīdī of the chapter though he insisted that this verse puzzled al-Māturīdī and put him in a predicament. For further information see: Claude. Gilliot, “Māturīdī’s Treatment of Early Exegetical Traditions and Related Topics” (paper presented at the Büyük Türk Bilgini İmâm Māturīdī ve Māturīdilik : Milletlerarasi tarsısmali ilmi toplanti, Istanbul, 2012 2009), 589.} this statement is the first critical analysis of Ta’wilāt in the new millennia albeit it is very brief. In 2009, Gilliot revisits the topic and presents a better outline of the commentary of al-Māturīdī on the very chapter.\footnote{He retracts his statement about the embarrassment of al-Māturīdī of the chapter though he insisted that this verse puzzled al-Māturīdī and put him in a predicament. For further information see: Claude. Gilliot, “Māturīdī’s Treatment of Early Exegetical Traditions and Related Topics” (paper presented at the Büyük Türk Bilgini İmâm Māturīdī ve Māturīdilik : Milletlerarasi tarsısmali ilmi toplanti, Istanbul, 2012 2009), 589.}

In the same year, Aḥmad Rofiq, finally, writes an article about the methodology of al-Māturīdī in Ta’wilāt. Hence, an exegetical study. Rofiq expresses his surprise of the scarcity of comprehensive discussions on the book despite its availability throughout the Muslim world,
specifically in the domain of Qur’anic studies. He dedicates a section of his article for the biography of al-Māturīdī and follows with an analysis of his exegetical methodology.

Rofiq does not clarify that his article would focus only on a single chapter from the Qur’an, chapter al-Baqarah, but it does. The review of all the examples cited, in Rofiq’s article, confirm this observation. In fact, his analysis stops at the first two juz’ (parts) of the chapter only. The only verse Rofiq uses, beyond the first two juz’, is verse 255 of chapter al-Baqarah. This peculiar, and limited, approach of Rofiq raised the curiosity over which edition of Ta’wīlāt Rofiq analyses. Surprisingly, Rofiq’s edition of choice, in his 2009 article, was the incomplete, one volume, publication of Ta’wīlāt edited in Baghdad in 1983. Rofiq did not use the complete edition published by al-Khaymī in 2004 or the critical edition published by Bekir Topaloglu in 2005. Thus, Rofiq’s article lacks the necessary exhaustiveness and accuracy not to mention some of the imprecisions evident in the conclusions arrived at by Rofiq.

At the same time, the article does not enjoy many anticipated original contributions. For instance, one of his findings is that “al-Māturīdī can be categorized as a cautious exegete who seldom uses isrā’īliyyāt (the Judeo-Christian traditions and tales).” Whilst this statement is correct, it is not original. In his 80’s article, Galli states the same position on al-Māturīdī’s use

---

187 The Qur’an contains 114 chapters of variable lengths.
188 Specifically, it ends at verses 252 of chapter al-Baqarah.
190 Despite, as Rofiq states in his own words, the availability of multiple editions of the Ta’wilāt, which are complete, he did not use any of them.
192 This edition will be discussed in the subsequent section.
193 A relevant instance, of the imprecisions, is Rofiq’s claim al-Māturīdī does not use grammatical analysis in his interpretation of the verses. A claim that would be dispelled in the course of this study, particularly in the context of the analysis of the anthropomorphic expression in chapter five and chapter six.
of the Israelite tales. Thus, al-Māturīdī’s methodology, from a mere exegetical facet, has not been explored comprehensively until today. The same applies to the theological facet of Ta’wīlāt.

The 2014 monograph by Jaffer does not prove different either. He sheds no new light into al-Māturīdī’s exegesis, his methodology or his exegetical or theological views. This position was unanticipated given Jaffer’s surprise of the lack of studies into theological exegesis and classical titles. Jaffer refers to al-Māturīdī seldom, less than a handful times, in his book and briefly refers to his theological views. The drive to establish al-Rāzī as “the first Sunni theologian to develop a methodology that unified ‘aql and naqī” may have overshadowed the importance of examining al-Māturīdī’s contributions and views. The undertaken thesis will trigger a re-examination of this particular finding of Jaffer.

Since then, there has not been any exegetical studies into Ta’wīlāt. In 2016, Saleh attempts to reread and reassess the status and value of the exegesis of Ṭabarī through comparing his interpretation of few verses with that of al-Māturīdī. The article offers noteworthy analysis but lacks comprehensiveness in reference to al-Māturīdī’s views. This is expected since the primary focus of the paper is to shed new perspectives on the exegesis of Ṭabarī and not al-Māturīdī.

On an exegetical level, therefore, western research, into Qur’anic exegesis, remains mostly confined to the early exegetical works before Ṭabarī’s exegesis. There is a unanimous agreement on the existence and independence of theological exegesis as a genre but there has not been substantial or comprehensive research into its genesis and development. Most studies focus

---

196 It is likely Rofiq was not aware of Galli’s article because it is antiquated.
197 Jaffer, Razi : Master of Quranic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning, 1.
on the history and development of exegesis.\textsuperscript{198} Some attention has been given to a few titles pertinent to theological exegesis, but they predominantly belong to the non-Sunni camps.\textsuperscript{199}

In the same vein, there has not been any substantial research in Ta’wīlāt on the exegetical level, in reference to its methodology and/or contributions to Sunni theological exegesis. The publication of Ta’wīlāt at different time intervals sparked temporary interest into the title but has not led to a substantial and systematic study. A significant gap this thesis aims at fulfilling on the level of the contributions of al-Māturīdī to Sunni theological exegesis.

1.5 Ta’wīlāt in Literature on Islamic Theology

The lack of academic studies into Ta’wīlāt on the exegetical level raised the curiosity to investigate whether the title, owing to its theological content, may have been engaged in pure dialectical studies on al-Māturīdī’s theology. Hence, the purpose of this section is to assess the influence of Ta’wīlāt on theological studies vis a vis al-Māturīdī. On account of the scarcity of research concerning al-Māturīdī’s theology in Arabic and Islamic tradition, it was not viable to dedicate a separate section for it, as was the case with the exegetical review. Thus, the current review is inexorably preponderated with English and western literature. The discussion of the very few Arabic relevant studies have been incorporated into the chronological review and analysis of all academic titles apposite to al-Māturīdī’s theology.

\textsuperscript{198} Such as “The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim” by Herbert Berg and “Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis: Genesis and Development” by Hussein Abdul-Raof.

\textsuperscript{199} For instance, “scripture and exegesis in early Imami Shiism” by Meir Bar-Asher, “Al-Kashaf: Al-Zamakhshari’s Mu’tazilite exegesis of the Qur’an” by Kifayat Ullah and “Qur’anic Hermeneutics with Reference to Narratives: A Study in Classical Exegetical Traditions” by Khaled Troudi. There has been very little engagement with Sunni theological exegesis.
To understand the state of research on Ta’wīlāt, on a mere theological level, or the lack thereof, in the western and Arabic academia one must grasp the stages through which the study of al-Māturīdī as a theologian, as a whole, has passed.

From the beginning, it has not been easy for researchers, modern or classical, to discover the theological views of al-Māturīdī through his own writings. The titles of al-Māturīdī have not been readily available as they have become in the last few years. Rather they were procured gradually, through a prolonged or delayed discovery of manuscripts and partial publications and editing, and then re-editing, of his books over the span of the past two centuries. To the Arabic intelligentsia, the causing factors outlined in the exegetical section were additional factors that had a dramatic effect on the absence of al-Māturīdī from research.

The course of events, both historical and academic, caused the history of research about al-Māturīdī, his teachings, his theological contributions and his works and even his school in the western academia, to be non-linear.

The first interest, one encounters, in al-Māturīdī commenced in the 19th century with the works of Wilhelm Spitta (d. 1883 CE), who consulted al-Rawḍah al-Bahiyyah written by Ḥasan Abū ‘Adhabah200 (d. 1758 CE) concerning the thirteen known points of disagreement between al-Ashʿarī and al-Māturīdī.201 Spitta professed both theologians shared the same teachings, and differed from each other only in subsidiary doctrinal points. Therefore, al-Māturīdī at this stage was regarded, to particular extent, one of the affiliates of the Ashʿarī school.

---

An image that Spiro’s research (d. 1904 CE) casted doubt upon when he discovered that the disagreements between both scholars, al-Ashʿarī and al-Māturīdī, date back as far as the eighth/fourteenth century, after Spiro accessed the work of al-Subkī on the *khilāf* (disagreement) between these two theologians. ²⁰²

Despite its inaccuracy, the suggestion that Ashʿarī and al-Māturīdī formed nearly identical *kalām* schools in Sunni Islam accorded more authority. It carried out to the twentieth century with Horten ²⁰³ (d. 1945 CE), Klein ²⁰⁴ and Tritton (d. 1973 CE). ²⁰⁵ The idea was, more or less, considered proven to the extent that Goldziher (d. 1910 CE) pronounced: “It is not worth addressing the small differences between these closely related doctrinal views in more detail.” ²⁰⁶

This image of al-Māturīdī diminished any interest of research about him and the attention was directed towards the prominent Ashʿarī school. ²⁰⁷ Consequently, even when it became known that two of al-Māturīdī’s significant texts were extant in manuscript form, ²⁰⁸ they were left unexamined. As Rudolph puts it, “the impression…of al-Māturīdī was completely dominated by … the concept of a “second al-Ashʿarī from the East.” ²⁰⁹

---


²⁰³ Max. Horten, *Die Philosophischen Systeme Der Spekulativen Theologen Im Islam, Nach Originalquellen Dargestellt* (Bonn: F. Cohen, 1912), 531.


²⁰⁶ As cited in Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 13. A similar quote from Goldziher is cited in J. R. Halverson, *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam: The Muslim Brotherhood, Ashʿarism, and Political Sunnism* (2014), 14. Halverson cites Goldziher saying “there are no essential differences between the two schools.” The researcher used the citation of Rudolph because of his fluency in German which makes it likely that his citation of Goldziher is more accurate.

²⁰⁷ Haidar, ”The Debates between Ashʿarism and Maturidism in Ottoman Religious Scholarship: A Historical and Bibliographical Study,” 23.

²⁰⁸ The two titles are: *Ta‘wilāt ahl al-Sunnah* and *kitāb al-tawḥīd*. Several manuscripts of the former were available in Europe and the Muslim world. For further information see: Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 13.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.
Research about al-Māturīdī remained dormant until the 1950s and ’60s. Schacht (d. 1953 CE) resuscitated interest in al-Māturīdī when he drew attention to the importance of comparing the theological views of al-Māturīdī, not with the Ashʿarī school as it has been the case since the 19th century, but with the teachings of a Ḥanafī school that emerged in the third/ninth century.

This marked a major shift in the study of the conceptualization of al-Māturīdī. Al-Tancī (d. 1955 CE) paved the path in this direction when he unearthed the reference of Abū Muʿīn Nasafī (d. 1115 CE), in Tabṣirat al-Adillah, to the Samarqand theological school and its roots in the school of Abū Hanīfā. The significance of studying al-Māturīdī became invaluable. His emergence as the founder of an independent theological school in the Sunni mainstream dismantled the long-held monopoly of Ashʿarism over the representation of the theology of Sunni Islam. Madelung demonstrated in his publication “The Spread of Māturīdīsm and the Turks” that the influence of al-Māturīdī’s theology was universal in the Muslim world. He clarified how the efforts of the Turks liberated the teachings of al-Māturīdī from the confines of Transoxiana and carried it to the central territories of Islam and the entire Muslim world.

At the same, the work of Madelung justified the absence of any interest into al-Māturīdī in the Arabic and Islamic circles. A pivotal factor one could not afford to overlook is the reluctance of the Eastern Hanafites to endorse the theological teachings of al-Māturīdī as their own. Rudolph and Spannaus have written very comprehensive and informative papers on this subject, it suffices to refer to them.

Even though, the aforementioned series of events woke interest in studying al-Māturīdī it could not be undertaken fully. His titles were not available in print. Some authors such as

---

210 As cited in ibid.
211 Rudolph, Hanafi Theological Tradition and Maturidism; Spannaus Nathan, Theology in Central Asia (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016).
Schacht and Gotz (d. 1965 CE) consulted some of the manuscripts of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and *Ta’wīlāt* to familiarise themselves with his works. There lies the first access to the *Ta’wīlāt*. Gotz gave an account about the Istanbul manuscripts of *Ta’wīlāt*. He translated the introduction and spoke about the al-Māturīdī’s definition of *ta’wil*. He briefly spoke about the issue of *qadar* (Divine Predestination) and human responsibility and dedicated the rest of his article to listing and describing the complete, incomplete manuscripts of *Ta’wīlāt* and the commentary on it that exist in Istanbul.\(^{212}\) These efforts, praiseworthy as they may, hardly amount to the form of studies. The aim of these scholars was, as Rudolph puts it, “to inform themselves firsthand about the theological views of Māturīdī”\(^{213}\) and pave the way to editing and publishing these titles, as Schacht openly declared in his article.\(^{214}\) The publishing did not actualise though and both titles remained out of print until 1970. In this date, the first edition of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* by Kholeif saw the light and a year later, in 1971, the two brothers Ibrahim and al-Sayyid ‘Awādayn published the first volume of *Ta’wīlāt*.\(^{215}\)

The activism in editing and publishing al-Māturīdī’s texts was paralleled with an intensification in the investigation of his theological views in the western but not in the Arabic world. An extensive research was undertaken by various academics, post the publication, but it centered overwhelmingly on *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. These studies did not address the whole epistle rather targeted specific theological topics therein.

In contrast, *Ta’wīlāt* received little to no attention on the theological arena.\(^{216}\) No study was undertaken on *Ta’wīlāt* theologically, in the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) century. It is accurate to state that


\(^{215}\) The publication of a complete copy of *Ta’wilāt* Ahl al-Sunnah would have to wait until the beginning of the twenty first century as will be seen shortly.

\(^{216}\) The exegetical effort such that of Galli have been discussed in the previous section.
the great emphasis *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* received came on the expense of Taʾwīlāt. Even when the topic demanded investigating the content of Taʾwīlāt, many researchers did not oblige. For instance, in 1994, Sarah Stroumsa wrote an article that re-examines the theological sources, in particular the Muslim ones, about Ibn al-Rāwandī. Particularly, his title, “*Kitāb al-Zumurrud* (the blinding emerald).” Stroumsa analyses *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* since al-Māturīdī refers, briefly, to Ibn al-Rāwandī in it once. Yet she does not use Taʾwīlāt, despite al-Māturīdī discussing the views of ibn al-Rāwandī four times in it—twice in chapter al-Baqarah and once in chapter Ghāfir and chapter al-Munāfiqūn. Stroumsa had access to the ‘Awaḍayn edition of Taʾwīlāt, as she lists it in the biography of the article, and could have benefited from al-Māturīdī’s commentary on chapter al-Baqarah yet she elected not to use it.

Another stark example is the paper Binyamin Abrahamov wrote in 1995. The paper investigates, supposedly, the stance of all the Islamic theological schools from anthropomorphism in the Qur’an. Yet, Abrahamov does not cite Taʾwīlāt at all or even consult it. As one investigates the various theological research on al-Māturīdī, the same trend prevails, Norman Calder in 1994 investigates al-Māturīdī’s writing about the Barāhima in *Kitāb al-

---


218 Al-Māturīdī discusses ibn al-Rāwandī’s opinion on what constitutes a theological proof in his commentary on verse three in chapter al-Baqarah at the beginning of his exegesis. He mentions Ibn al-Rāwandī’s opinion in chapter al-Baqarah a second time when discussing how a prophet gains the highest rank of closeness to God. For further information see: Al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, 1, 373.

219 In chapter Ghāfir, al-Māturīdī reports the position of Ibn al-Rāwandī about the punishment of the grave and in chapter al-Munāfiqūn, al-Māturīdī provides the definition of Ibn al-Rāwandī of the term *fiqh*, in a theological context. For further information see: ibid, 1, 547. ibid, 9, 10; ibid, 10, 21.

220 Instead Stroumsa limited Taʾwīlāt to being a biographical source and said for “detailed description of further information about the confrontation of Muhammad with the Jews” read Taʾwīlāt. For further information see: Stroumsa, "The Blinding Emerald: Ibn Al-RāWandī’S KitāB Al-Zumurrud," 168.

221 The title of the article is “The "Bi-lā Kayfa" Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology”.

Tawḥīd but overlooks his commentary about them in Taʿwīlāt. In 1974, Frank wrote a paper to review the position of al-Māturīdī from the notion of ṭabāʿī (natures). He based it solely, as he stated, on the writing of al-Māturīdī in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. Likewise Montgomery Watt writes his exposition on the differences between al-Māturīdī and al-Ashʿarī relying on Kitāb al-Tawḥīd only. The same conclusion holds true in the case of Gimaret who analysed the various doctrinal positions of the various Muslim theological schools of the creation of the human acts, including that of al-Māturīdī, in an article he published in 1980. Even J Meric Pessagno who published three theological articles in 1984, two of which are at the heart of the theology of al-Māturīdī, overlooked the theological contributions of al-Māturīdī in Taʿwīlāt. In the second article, Pessagno examined the thinking of al-Māturīdī on the question of evil and its existence, pertinent to theodicy. Whilst in the former, he sought to discover al-Māturīdī’s concept of al-kasb (acquisition) and the freedom of the human agency. In both articles, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd was the only authoritative reference to al-Māturīdī’s theology.

It seems that the partial publication of Taʿwīlāt in the seventies sparked a feeble interest in studying it. Nonetheless, this interest was eclipsed by two factors. The publication of Kitāb al-Tawḥīd a year before, which was celebrated by many academics as the magnum opus of al-

---

223 The paragraph began with the nineties papers because it illustrated the point made earlier about the unused of Taʿwīlāt even when the subject of the research demanded it.


227 Namely they are “Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb the View of Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī” and “The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought”.

228 The third article is titled “the reconstruction of Muhammad ibn Shabīb’s teachings”. For further information see: J. Meric Pessagno, “The Reconstruction of the Thought of Mu&#X1e25;Ammad Ibn Shab&#X12b;B,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 104, no. 3 (1984).


231 The elimination of Taʿwīlāt from the third article Pessagno wrote cannot be faulted because al-Māturīdī did not mention Muhammad ibn Shabīb therein unlike ibn al-Rāwandī.
Māturīdī’s theology. Second, the general image of Sunni exegesis, at the time, as traditional and narrative exegeses. The general image would have lowered the interest in seeking any guidance on al-Māturīdī’s theology through his exegesis.

In the nineties, the status quo, of disregarding the theological component of Ta’wīlāt prevailed. Despite the important publication of Mustafa Ceric’s dissertation in 1995 whereby he concentrated on highlighting some, not all, of the genuine contributions of al-Māturīdī to Islamic theology. Ceric verified the authenticity of Ta’wīlāt back to al-Māturīdī, stressed its exegetical value but did not speak of its theological significance unlike Galli and Gotz.

Ceric’s dissertation was ensued by another groundbreaking monography by Rudolph Ulrich in 1997 about the role of al-Māturīdī in developing Sunni theology in Samarqand. Rudolph undertakes in it an opulent study of the theology of al-Māturīdī. He assesses the state of Sunni theology in Central Asia before al-Māturīdī and speaks at length about his biography and the structure of Kitāb al-Tawḥīd and some of al-Māturīdī’s theological views expressed there. Rudolph attests that the study of theological opinions and contributions of al-Māturīdī is not complete without the full analysis of Ta’wīlāt. He describes it as “the only work of al-Māturīdī’s to be graced with an extensive commentary” and “…provides valuable information on many details of al-Māturīdī’s own theological positions.” He asseverates, “…but as of yet its theological content has not been published or studied.”

---

232 The exegeses of many contemporaries of al-Māturīdī, such as ‘Ayyāshī, Tabari and Samarqandī, were perceived as narrative.
234 It is likely Ceric did not read Ta’wīlāt comprehensively, if at all, since the focus of his study was on kitāb.
235 Being in German, the study did not become accessible in English until 2015.
236 Rudolph discusses the views of al-Māturīdī in the context of the Hanafite theology in the region.
238 Ibid, 187.
239 Ibid, 184.
At the beginning of the new millennium, Bekir Topaloglu regenerated interest in studying al-Māturīdī’s theology when he published a Turkish translation of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* in 2002 and followed it with a new edition of the Arabic text, in collaboration with Muhammed Aruçi, in 2003. As a result, Salim Daccache published in 2008 a revised version of his 1988 doctoral dissertation about the rational and historical context of the creation of the world in al-Māturīdī’s theology. The revision was written in French and then translated into Arabic. However, Daccache does not incorporate the theology views of al-Māturīdī in Ta’wīlāt in his revised thesis.

Bekir Topaloglu, in collaboration with several editors, under his supervision, worked on producing a critical and more accurate edition of Ta’wīlāt, which he published, a year later, in 2005. Notwithstanding the significance of Topaloglu’s accomplishment, the academic zeal in investigating Ta’wīlāt remained below what was expected. In 2009, Robert G. Morrison wrote an article that discusses astrology in early *tafsīr*. Morrison strictly cited al-Māturīdī in it, several times, via *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and Rudolph’s German study. Ta’wīlāt was not factored in the study.

In 2010, Halverson wrote a book about the influence of politics on theology and creed in Sunni Islam. The only personal writing of al-Māturīdī Halverson analysed for this purpose was *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. In 2012, Marwā Kharmah wrote a research paper that discusses the theological methodology of al-Māturīdī between *naql* (tradition) and *‘aql* (reason). The objective of Kharmah, as stated in her paper, was “to clarify the academic methodology al-Māturīdī employs

---

240 In the Sorbonne University.
241 The researcher employs primarily this edition in his critical analysis of the commentary of al-Māturīdī and consults the other editions, for the sake of comparison, if the need arises.
when establishing the religious doctrines.” However, she dedicates one, out of four sections in her short article, for this purpose. The other three address the al-Māturīdī’s biography, which has been repeatedly discussed in numerous researches, the role of reason in Islamic thought and a rebuttal of some the researchers who criticised al-Māturīdī.

From the outset, Kharmah advises that the inductive approach of her research would pivot overwhelmingly on Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. She overlooks Ta’wilāt, theologically, in her paper. Consequently, the lack of comprehensiveness, analytical precision undermines her paper and her findings. For example, Kharmah claims al-Māturīdī utilises ‘aql (reason) to prove the existence of God but uses naql (tradition) only to prove tawḥīd (monotheism). Her conclusions may be indicative of the view of al-Māturīdī in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd but does not reflect his view in Ta’wilāt and will be falsified later in the thesis.

Some recent studies have attempted to explore Ta’wilāt in a theological context. However, it gave the exegesis a secondary role in the analysis of the theological positions of al-Māturīdī and reserved the primary role to Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. Angelika Brodersen has undertaken such a task. Her most recent works about al-Māturīdī and his theological school are two papers. The first is published in 2014 and the second is published in 2018.

245 Ibid.
246 In addition, brevity is another main criticism of the article. Merely seven pages, out of twenty-nine pages, are reserved to overview the use of ‘aql (reason) in the entire theology of al-Māturīdī. It is cumbersome, if not impossible, to investigate thoroughly the methodology of al-Māturīdī in such a space. In addition, the article is dominated by the defense of al-Māturīdī forbidding that he may have any commonalities with the Mu’tazilite camp. Kharman, “Bayn Al-‘Aql Wa Al-Naql Manhaj Al-Imām Abi Maṣūr Al-Māturīdī Al-‘Aqādī,” 91.
247 This point is discussed at length in chapter four, of this study, which discusses the conception of tawḥīd in Ta’wilāt and contrasts it with kitāb al-tawḥīd.
In the 2014 paper, Broderson writes about the freedom in the human acts versus divine determination. She analyses “the doctrines and the methods” of al-Māturīdī on the subject in an attempt to determine if human freedom and divine determination can be classified as essential correlates rather than opposites. Brodersen analyses the exegetical commentary of al-Māturīdī on some of the verses, pertinent to the subject. Her aim though is not to discover the theological position of al-Māturīdī in Ta’wilāt on the matter. Rather, it is to showcase how he uses tradition, epistemologically, to establish his “middle ground” doctrine. Therefore, Brodersen does not analyse all the verses relevant to the topic. She fixates her analysis, of al-Māturīdī’s commentary, on verses he already cited in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. Resultantly, Brodersen does not see Ta’wilāt as a legitimate source for al-Māturīdī’s theology. She openly criticises his commentary stating “his exegesis in Ta’wilāt seems somewhat lacking. He does not commit to the one interpretation that supports his rational argument.” She concludes, “therefore his exegesis can more accurately be classified into the traditional Tafsīr.” Brodersen, accordingly, commits to Kitāb al-Tawḥīd to discover the doctrinal arguments of al-Māturīdī and complements it with a review of the works of the followers of his school.

Broderson’s classification of Ta’wilāt as “a traditional tafsīr” lacks both accuracy and exhaustiveness. To pass such a verdict on the entire exegesis, one should dedicate a complete study for this end, which she has not undertaken. In addition, her treatise focuses on a singular

---

251 A long-standing theological dispute amongst Muslim theologians.
253 The purview of Broderson, thus, is far from the ilāhiyyāt theme, the scope of this study. Yet her paper is of interest, to this disquisition, because she consults the exegesis of al-Māturīdī therein.
254 Or “the holy scripture”, as she describes it. Brodersen, "Divine and Human Acts in Maturidi Kalam," 358.
255 The doctrine of al-Māturīdī confirms human freedom as a pre-condition of man’s responsibility and reconciles it with Divine almightiness of God who remains the creator of all acts. For further information see: ibid, 359.
256 The topic of the capacities of the human to act and the creation of his action by God.
258 This is how Brodersen transliterates the word tafsīr in the article.
theological topic and fails to examine al-Māturīdī’s exegetical commentary on all verses of relevance. Thus, expectedly, the cogency of her position concerning Ta’wilāt diminishes, even within the scope of the topic of human freedom and divine predestination.

The position of Brodersen concerning Ta’wilāt, in her 2014 paper, it seems, impacted her future writing on the theology of al-Māturīdī. In her 2018 article about the divine will in the conception of al-Māturīdī she did not cite Ta’wilāt at all. Despite her “preoccupation with Māturīdite theology”, Brodersen does not attempt to entertain the possibility that al-Māturīdī has discussed the notion of divine will or the topic of whether God accepts evil in his exegesis. In her analysis, she relies on the works of “al-Māturīdī’s followers” to obtain the Qur’anic proofs and rational arguments on the subject.

Thus, Brodersen, in her most recent research, does not investigate the subject of ilāhiyyāt, in Ta’wilāt or Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. Her research concentrates on the human freedom, the creation of the human acts and the divine will of God and her primary sources are Kitāb al-Tawḥīd and the literature of “al-Māturīdī’s followers”. Brodersen sidelines Ta’wilāt because she classifies it as a traditional tafsīr – a position this dissertation disagrees with and challenges.

Another recently published dissertation about al-Māturīdī’s theology is the monograph Yahya Raad Haidar wrote in 2016. The dissertation sheds light on the “chief theological

---

260 The human freedom and divine predestination and their interrelatedness.
261 Since, Brodersen’s treatment of this topic falls outside the scope of this monograph, as stated earlier, it is not possible for the researcher to provide an alternative position to hers. This should be taken in a future research concerning the theology of al-Māturīdī in Ta’wilāt on of the relationship between human freedom and divine predestination. A topic that qualifies as a good future research.
263 Ibid., 239.
264 It is titled “The debates between Ash’arism and Māturīdīsm in ottoman religious scholarship: a historical and bibliographical study.”
concepts over which the Māturīdī and Ashʿarī schools differed." As the title suggests, the concern in Haidar’s work is the Māturīdiyyah as a school and not strictly its founder, al-Māturīdī. A further ascertaining proof of this inference is the period Haidar selects for his study, “the Ottoman period”, which is far from the period of al-Māturīdī. The circumstances of the two periods are very dissimilar. Haidar articulates clearly his aim of the thesis. It is to highlight the differences between the Ashʿarī and the Māturīdī schools during this particular period. However, Haidar does not cover all the differences. Rather he elects specific theological topics to demonstrate these differences.

The concern of Haidar, thus, is not to discover the theology of al-Māturīdī, as a theologian. He is not concerned with studying al-Māturīdī’s exegesis whether in general or in relation to the area of ilāhiyyāt. In contrast, Haidar does not treat the works of al-Māturīdī as his pivotal primary source to determine al-Māturīdī’s theological views. As one reads throughout the analysis of Haidar of all the theological sections it becomes apparent the central view to him is that of the theologians of the Māturīdī school. Al-Māturīdī, the founder, does not play a direct active role in the discourse of Haidar’s thesis except in the early chapters.

Nonetheless, Haidar favours Kitāb al-Tawḥīd over of Ta’wīlāt in his research. The mention of Ta’wīlāt, other than being limited, is merely biographical and historical. He lists it as one of the titles of al-Māturīdī when he speaks about the biography of al-Māturīdī. Haidar

---

266 Ibid.
267 Namely, he discusses the knowledge of God, the role of wisdom in God’s action and the relationship between the acts of God and his predestination and the acts of Man. For further information see: ibid, 69.
268 Similarly, he does not assess the nature of al-Māturīdī’s exegesis to determine if it is a theological exegesis or a traditional one and does not shed the light on the commonalities, or nuances, that exist between both kitāb al-tawḥīd and Ta’wīlāt.
269 To Haidar, al-Māturīdī’s titles are one of many sources he accesses to establish the stance of the school and the nature of the debate between Ash’arism and Māturīdism.
270 He mentions Ta’wīlāt in his thesis four times only.
mentions it a second time when he enumerates the number of times al-Rāzī referred to al-Māturīdī in the former’s exegesis. Haidar cites Ta’wîlāt one last time when quoting various Muslim historiographers and Ḥanafī scholars who emphasize the status of al-Māturīdī, as a theologian, through his main academic contributions.

Yet ironically, Haidar does not incorporate any of the theological opinions al-Māturīdī expresses in Ta’wîlāt, on any of the topics Haidar discusses, in his thesis. For instance, in relation to the epistemological question of whether reason alone necessitates knowledge of God, al-Māturīdī makes unique remarks on the matter in Ta’wîlāt. Yet Haidar does not raise them at all and confines his analysis of al-Māturīdī’s position on the subject to Kitāb al-Tawḥīd.

In summary, the interest in al-Māturīdī rose only after the publication of his two extant titles, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd and Ta’wîlāt, which complete publication did not realise until the 21st century. The fame of the Kitāb as the magnum opus of al-Māturīdī theology eclipsed the academic awareness of the theological significance of Ta’wîlāt. The theological merit of Ta’wîlāt has been underscored by reputable scholars recently but still did not translate into incorporating Ta’wîlāt into theological studies about al-Māturīdī. There has been a feeble interest in researching Ta’wîlāt every time a new edition of the title emerges but this interest focuses predominately on few exegetical elements of Ta’wîlāt and remains utterly inadequate, to say the least. The absence of a comprehensive analysis of the theological content in Ta’wîlāt will inevitably lead to inaccurate conclusions about his theology, as evident with Brodersen and

---

271 Haidar, “The Debates between Ash’arism and Maturidism in Ottoman Religious Scholarship: A Historical and Bibliographical Study,” 49; ibid, 125.
272 such as Ṭāshkubrī Zādah and Bayyāḍī.
274 The remarks of al-Māturīdī are analysed in chapter three and chapter four of this thesis.
Kharmah. Ta’wīlāt demands an exclusive study in its own right, which is the objective of this dissertation in the domain of ilāhiyyāt.

1.6 Conclusion

In Arabic Islamic literature, theological exegesis is recognised as an independent genre of Qur’anic exegesis by many Sunni scholars. In saying that, the genre, as a field of research, remains nascent in the Muslim and Arabic academia despite its existence as a phenomenon since the early centuries of Islam. The sparse literature written about it is descriptive, repetitive, indexical and brief. It lacks the critical component and is driven by a subjective and defensive tenor. No critical studies are undertaken into the characteristics or the methodologies of the titles of the genre. The genesis of the entire genre remains obscure till this day.

Likewise, research into Sunni theological exegesis, sub-genre, undergoes the same symptoms but suffers further alienation and negligence. The only exegesis that captured some attention is al-Rāzī’s title but no substantive studies has gone into its contribution Sunni theological exegesis. There is a serious academic gap in the study of the genre, the sub-genre and all pertinent titles.

Notwithstanding the above, Ta’wīlāt sustains the greatest share of negligence and alienation in Arabic Islamic tradition. As a Sunni theological exegesis title or even as an ordinary Sunni exegesis, Ta’wīlāt is virtually inexistent. On the exegetical level, no studies have been undertaken on al-Māturīdī or his title at all. The contributions of al-Māturīdī to Sunni theological exegesis and Qur’anic exegesis remain unexplored. A gap this study fills substantially in the sector of ilāhiyyāt.
In western literature, theological exegesis is recognised as a genre unanimously. Sunni theological exegesis, however, does not enjoy the same status. It is not even listed as one of its main types. The Mu’tazilites and Shi’ites’ theological exegesis is the one mostly underlined in exegetical studies about the genre. There are in-depth studies in some of their titles but no adequate study has been undertaken on Sunni theological exegesis with the exception of the work of Jaffer on al-Râzî’s exegesis. Thus, the same gaps persist in academic research concerning Sunni theological exegesis in western literature.

Similar is the fate of Ta’wilât and its author, al-Mâturîdî. They are briefly mentioned, with emphasis on their standing but there has not been any substantial research into them, on the exegetical level, whether in methodology or contributions to Sunni theological exegesis. The publication of Ta’wilât prompted a transitory occupation into the book but it never led to an extensive and methodical study of it.

On a theological level, in Arabic and western academe, Ta’wilât remains until today unexplored. The focus remains on Kitâb al-tawhîd to identify al-Mâturîdî’s theological views despite the consensus amongst all academics, Muslims and non-Muslims, on the importance and value of Ta’wilât.

Thus, this study aims to divulge many academic gaps, some already listed above. It seeks to break the academic silence on the theological significance of Ta’wilât. It systematically and comprehensively investigates the doctrinal positions of al-Mâturîdî in the domain of ilâhiyyât. It critically analyses his exegetical commentary to discover his conceptions on the existence of God, the doctrine of tawhîd and the nature of God. The perspective of al-Mâturîdî vis a vis the nature of God is determined through the critical analysis of his discussion of the notion of the names and attributes of God and his position from anthropomorphism in the Qur’an.
Another gap, the review shone the light on, is the lack of a comparative analysis of the theology of al-Māturīdī in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* in tandem with Ta’wīlāt. The study aims at filling this gap within the scope of the research in the following chapters.
CHAPTER 2: THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT AND EXISTENCE OF GOD

2.1 Introduction

The review undertaken in the previous chapter identified the existence of substantial academic gaps in the study of the theology of al-Māturīdī through Taʾwīlāt. It established the urgency of a proper understanding and evaluation of al-Māturīdī’s contributions to Sunni theology and Sunni theological exegesis. The existence of the Divine is at the heart of all theological discourse.

Indeed, the concept is not avant-garde to human intellect. The existence of a divine source behind existence has always been of interest to the humans. “Does God exist?” One would argue is one of the most debated questions in human history and is duly one of the most complex and pivotal notions to human thought. Throughout the different ages, humans studied this notion, considered it and proposed various proofs and arguments to support the existence of God. Al-Māturīdī continues this intellectual legacy and partakes zealously in the discourse about God’s existence in his exegesis. He expands on the conception of the existence of the Divine and the role of the human belief in it as he presents his proofs and establishes his views.

This chapter prefaces the critical analysis of al-Māturīdī’s commentary, in Taʾwīlāt, on God’s existence with a succinct examination of the influence of the rich tapestry of cultural and religious diversity, in his region, on his zeal to explore the topic as a Sunni exegete. It assesses the impact of the social and intellectual conditions in Central Asia on the formation of al-Māturīdī’s credence and arguments, in this area of theology.

The traditional Sunni theologians “were content with a theological knowledge rooted in
scripture…these traditionalists sought the ground of their belief in a non-rational sphere.”

Rudolph asserts this phenomenon and elaborates that the traditionalists emphasized “the
dependence of the human being on revelation” in discovering and learning about God. They
were “quite skeptical” towards the role of reason in theology. Thus, as Shihadeh states, “the
epistemological view that rational proof is needed to recognise the existence of God was not held
universally.” It was uncommon to explore the subject from an unadulterated rational
perspective, on the traditional Sunni theological platform, before al-Māturīdī. Al-Māturīdī is not
the first Muslim theologian to formulate rational proofs of the existence of God. The polymath
Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī (d. 873 CE) rightly claims the first place on the Muslim falsafa
(philosophical) platform, with his renowned contributions to the cosmological argument.
Similarly, the Mu‘tazilites, particularly Muḥammad Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 840 CE), As
Van Ess emphasizes, take credit for being the first Muslim school to raise it. Al-Māturīdī,
however, is the first Sunni exegete, from a traditional school, the chapter argues, to introduce it
in Sunni theological exegesis. This contention necessitates a comparative investigation of the
commentaries of contemporary and prominent Sunni, and/or regional, exegetes on pertinent
theological verses in the Qur’ān.

---

276 Cafer S. Yaran, Islamic Thought on the Existence of God: Contributions and Contrasts with Contemporary
277 Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 265.
278 Ibid.
282 Even on the theological level, Rudolph recognises the efforts of al-Māturīdī in proving the existence of God
through confirming the contingency of the world. He states, “It was common for the mutakallim to claim [the
existence of God] …al-Māturīdī nevertheless makes the effort to secure it intellectually and prove it painstakingly.”
For further information see: Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 233.
283 The chronological presentation of the pertinent verses, starting with the first chapter of the Qur’ān and
proceeding to the one that follows, is abandoned partially in the chapter because, in this instance, it disrupts
the clarity of the presentation of al-Māturīdī’s arguments on the topic and does not serve a coherent role.
The chapter consists of three main parts. The first part studies and analyses the influence of the region on al-Māturīdī’s motivation to study and prove the existence of God. This part forced, per se, its presence in the chapter due to the influential evidence discovered during the research. It clarifies why al-Māturīdī had a strong interest in this theological theme. The second part transitions to the study of the paradigm al-Māturīdī devises to prove God’s existence. The study then proceeds to, the third part, the discovery and critical analysis of the proofs al-Māturīdī postulates, in his exegesis, to prove the existence of God while it contrasts it with Kitāb al-Tawḥīd.

### 2.2 The theological context in Central Asia: The stimulus of al-Māturīdī to write on the existence of God

Al-Māturīdī lived in the city of Samarqand far from Baghdad, the Makkah of theological discourse during the Abbasid era. In turn, al-Māturīdī was far from the vehement interactions associated with the theological debates that unfolded in Baghdad.\textsuperscript{284} The geographical aloofness leads one to wonder of the reasons that had driven al-Māturīdī to engage a complex theological topic such as proving the existence of God rationally. At a closer look, it becomes apparent that al-Māturīdī’s environment was not really as far intellectually from the theological fervour and disputes as his geographical location may deceptively suggest. To the contrary, the very nature of al-Māturīdī’s environment, filled with people of various faiths and colourful ideologies, constituted the drive for such discussions.

As indicated earlier, the traditional Sunni scholars, up until the 10th century, did not

\textsuperscript{284} Rudolph, \textit{Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand}, 25-30.
attempt to prove God’s existence via ‘aql.285 According to Yaran and Fakhry, the introduction of “a proof of the existence of God”286 was not seen “necessary at all.”287 They relied on scripture completely and benefited from the nature of the Arabian society, which, even before the advent of Islam, did not deny or dispute the existence of God except for a small minority. The primary dispute the Arabs had with Islam was the Abrahamic notion of monotheism that did not tolerate any deity besides God.288 Despite such an approach being untraditional, al-Māturīdī partook in the debate in his exegesis and is amongst the first Sunni exegetes, if not the pioneer of this notion in Sunni theological exegesis, to raise it, discuss it and infer diverse proofs proving God’s existence. The investigation of al-Māturīdī’s writing about the existence of God in Ta’wīlāt unearths the influence of the cultural and intellectual circumstances of his period and region on his discussion of the topic.

Al-Māturīdī in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd discusses the beliefs of al-Summaniyyah sect. He defines it as a materialistic sect that denied the existence of God, and afterlife, and believed the existence of the world to be the result of the interaction of the physical particles in nature, traditionally referred to in Islamic theology as jawāhir and a’rāḍ.289 Historians, geographers and heresiographers confirm the presence, if not the dominance, of al-Summaniyyah in central Asia in the pre-Islamic period.290 Ibn Al-Nadīm quotes from an ancient historical record important


287 Islamic Thought on the Existence of God : Contributions and Contrasts with Contemporary Western Philosophy of Religion, 11; Fakhry, A Short Introduction to Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism, 135.


289 M. Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 2001), 152.

historical facts about the region of Khurasan. He confirms that al-Summaniyah and the teachings of their prophet Budasef\(^{291}\) dominated the entire Transoxiana region and beyond, prior to the advent of Islam.\(^{292}\) Al-Bayrūnī likewise confirms their dominance in Persia, Iraq and Khurasan\(^{293}\) and al-Mas‘ūdī drew many cultural similarities between them and the Polytheist Arabs, which points to the existence of al-Summaniyah in the region and highlights the study of the Muslim academics of their communities.\(^{294}\)

Rudolph, conversely, dismisses the existence of al-Summaniyah in central Asia and Samarqand during al-Māturīdī’s lifetime. He assumes the reference al-Māturīdī makes to al-Summaniyah in his Kitāb was a participation “in a general form of argumentation against certain notorious opponents, which was ubiquitous in Islam kalām”\(^{295}\) in line of the traditional trend of the theological works in the region.\(^{296}\) The accuracy of Rudolph’s claim however remains to be tested. Al-Ḥakīm al-Samarqandī (d. 956 CE), whom Rudolph assures to be the most traditional theologian of the region and whose work has been endorsed by the Samanid state and all traditional Ḥanafī jurists of the region, does not make any reference to al-Summaniyah in his work.\(^{297}\) The absence of the mention of al-Summaniyah in al-Samarqandī’s work casts doubt on the accuracy of Rudolph’s inference that the discussion of


\(\text{\footnotesize No biographical information has been found on the life of prophet Budasef whom Ibn Al-Nadīm names. It is likely, however, that this term is a reference to Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. There are Persian literary traces that point to presence of the Buddhist culture in ancient Iran after then tenth century. For further information see: M. Vaziri, Buddhism in Iran : An Anthropological Approach to Traces and Influences (United States of America: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 43.}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize Ibni Al-Nadīm, Al-Fihrist, 484.}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize Bayrūnī, Tahqīqi Ma Lil Hind Min Maqūlah Maqūlah Fi Al ‘Aqlī Aw Marthūlah, 16-68.}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize A. Al-Masʿūdī, Murūj Al-Dhahab Wa Ma’aḍīn Al-Jawhar, 5 vols. (Beirut: Al Maktabah Al ‘Asriyah, 2005), 1, 161.}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 150.}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize Ibid.}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize Ibid.}\)
their belief by al-Māturīdī is just a traditional trend. The inaccuracy of Rudolph’s claim is further strengthened by supplementary historical records that confirm the dominance of al-Summaniyyah in the region beyond the river from the early days of Jahm Ibn Ṣafwān.298 Al-Māturīdī, in the course of his discussion of al-Summaniyyah’s beliefs, tries to dissuade the reader from debating their followers and considers it foolish and fruitless since they do not accept any part or type of evidence except what relates to the physical world.299 The zealous effort of al-Māturīdī to deter Muslims from debating al-Summaniyyah’s followers is indicative of their presence in the region and that debates were taken place with them. Otherwise, the warning of al-Māturīdī would be redundant and irrelevant. Al-Māturīdī notes, in addition, the debates that took place between al-Summaniyyah and a prominent Mu’tazilite scholar, Al-Nazzām, and warns against it. Notably, al-Māturīdī refers to them in various parts of his exegesis and rigorously counters their arguments and set of beliefs whenever the opportunity and the context permit.300 The presence of segments of this sect in the region would have contributed to al-Māturīdī’s motivation to discuss and attempt to prove the existence of God using new rational arguments and proofs beyond the traditional ones.

This motivation is triggered by other non-Muslims sects as well. Mānism is another Gnostic sect that thrived in central Asia and would have influenced the theological discourse of al-Māturīdī. Manists believed their prophet Mānī (d. 272 CE) combined the wisdom of Christ, Buddha and Zoroaster.301 According to Muslim historians, Mānists were instrumental in a

300 Al-Māturīdī refers to them as the Summaniyyah and the Dahriyyah interchangeably. Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 4, 12; ibid, 4, 65.
number of political rebellions orchestrated in the eastern region of the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{302} They exasperated the Abbasid Kings to the extent that al-Mahdī (d. 786 CE) dedicated a special division to pursue them.\textsuperscript{303} \textit{Al-Zanādīqāh} (the heretics), was the title the Abbasids bestowed upon them.\textsuperscript{304} This very title al-Māturīdī employs in his discussions with them and about them in \textit{Ta’wīlāt}.\textsuperscript{305} Instructed by the Abbasid caliphs, some of the Samanid rulers promised to end the Mānists, or \textit{al-Zanādīqāh}, but the emperor of China cautioned the Samanid kings against such an action. He threatened to do the same to the Muslims in China, according to Ibn Al-Nadīm.\textsuperscript{306} The political positions of the Chinese emperor deterred the Samanids from taking any military action against them and consequently granted them the liberty the Christians enjoyed in the region.\textsuperscript{307} Nonetheless, the protection status granted to the Mānists announced the beginning of an intellectual struggle against them as Ibn Al-Nadīm confirms. He asserts Mānists caused theological tribulations in the region and the Muslim scholars refuted them.\textsuperscript{308} Hence, al-Māturīdī addresses them in more than one place in \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd} and in various parts in \textit{Ta’wīlāt}.\textsuperscript{309} The multiple references al-Māturīdī makes to the Mānists confirms not only their presence in the region but the engagement of al-Māturīdī with them and their prospective influence on his exploration of new proofs to assert God’s existence in his theological and exegetical titles.

In his exegetical title, moreover, al-Māturīdī frequently addresses another non-Muslim sect, al-Thanawiyyah (the dualists). In fact, he discusses them more than any other non-Muslim

\textsuperscript{303} Ibn Al-Nadīm, \textit{Al-Fihrist}, 472.
\textsuperscript{304} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{305} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 1, 485.
\textsuperscript{306} Ibn Al-Nadīm, \textit{Al-Fihrist}, 472-73.
\textsuperscript{307} Ibid, 472.
\textsuperscript{308} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{309} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd}, 89-92; \textit{Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 1, 485.
group with 27 citations in Ta`wīlāt. Their belief in the eternity of the light and darkness and the eternity of matter attracted the attention of al-Māturīdī and catalysed him to discuss God as the only creative source. Al-Thanawiyyah, shared the same belief as al-Summaniyyah, or al-Dahriyyah as al-Māturīdī refers to them, particularly in the eternity of matter and the notion of impossibility of *ex nihilo* creation. Consequently, they believed in the eternity of the world and negated the existence of God. They claimed the existence of creatures happened haphazardly and at random and there is no creator or designer. The dualistic Persian ideology influenced al-Māturīdī’s writings about the existence of God. Interestingly, al-Māturīdī discusses them heavily in Ta`wīlāt as he discusses them in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* if not more.

Notwithstanding the stimulus of the aforementioned faith traditions, the influence of the Greek philosophy was the most revolutionary and substantial. Long before the Muslim theologians, and Christian and Jewish theologians, the Greek philosophers studied the existence of God and his nature. Plato saw God as an intelligent and transcendent spirit and the highest being. He is the first cause and a rational, purposive, and beneficent agency, the demiurge. According to Plato, God fashioned a universe that exhibits his magnificent artwork. Similarly, Aristotle perceived God as the unmoved first mover. He is pure form, wholly immaterial and unchanging as he, God, cannot become more perfect, immutable and eternal. Plotinus (d. 270

---

310 Ta`wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 8, 701.
313 Ibid.
315 Therefore, God is the apex of being and knowledge. For further information see: Myrna Gabbe, "Aristotle on the Starting-Point of Motion in the Soul," *Phronesis* 57, no. 4 (2012): 358.
C.E), in a similar sense, discussed “the One”, referring to God, who is “the indefinable”\textsuperscript{316}. The source of all things is not all things; and yet it is all things in a transcendental sense.”\textsuperscript{317} In the hands of its forefathers, the Greek philosophy debated the nature of God. It offered multiple proofs of God’s existence or the Supreme Being. The proof of movement, the urgency of the first mover and the proof of the beginning, as God is the first cause, are all instances of the ancient philosophy’s contributions to the discussion.

These discussions represented a completely new and enthralling paradigm in the study of God and theology, foreign to the traditional theological circles in the Muslim world. The quest of the Muslim kings for personal Glory, their keenness on establishing their trademark and the policy of freedom of religion and open debate, particularly to the Christians and Jews, turned the churches and synagogues into libraries of the Syriac manuscripts and boomed the translation of the ancient wisdom.\textsuperscript{318} Consequently, the philosophical literature, terminology and concepts found its way in the Muslim world and forced upon the Muslim theologians a new reality they never faced before and neither did their predecessors. A milestone of this magnitude, inevitably, influenced al-Māturīdī and motivated him to discuss the existence of God and seek new proofs of it. Al-Māturīdī engages the change and adapts with the spread of the Greek thought in the Muslim society. The study of Taʾwīlāt establishes that al-Māturīdī studied and discussed the concepts of the Greek philosophers, or as he calls them al-Falāsifah (the philosophers), about God. In some instances, he endorses their views and in other instances, al-Māturīdī not only critiques them but also refutes them. The discussion of al-Falāsifah’s (philosophers) thoughts in

\textsuperscript{316} Paul Kalligas, Elizabeth Key Fowden, and Nicolas Pilavachi, The "Enneads" of Plotinus a Commentary, Volume 1 (Princeton University Press, 2014), 663.
\textsuperscript{318} A.S. Nashshār, Manāhij Al-Baḥth ʿinda Mufakkirī Al- İslām Wa-Naqd Al-Muslimīn (Beirut: Dār al-fikr al-'Arabī, 1947), 463.
Ta’wīlāt is greater than it in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. The influence of the Greek philosophers will be elaborated thoroughly in the discussion of the proofs of God’s existence al-Māturīdī postulates.

In addition to the influence of non-Muslim faiths and ideologies, the existence of multiple theological schools and movements in the Muslim world may have triggered al-Māturīdī to discuss the divinity and the existence of God. The Muʿtazilites established their own definition of monotheism\textsuperscript{319} and al-Qarāmīṭah sect redefined the notion of God altogether.\textsuperscript{320} It is not a coincidence for al-Māturīdī to discuss and refute the views of al-Qarāmīṭah, in his writings, right after responding to the materialists. This is evident in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd and in Ta’wīlāt where al-Māturīdī expands in his discussion of their beliefs particularly in relation to the notion of God.\textsuperscript{321}

The discussion of the existence of God in al-Māturīdī’s exegesis was influenced as well by the needs of his co-religionists. Being in a remote area far from the attention of the Muslim scholarship, who tended to focus on the Middle East region alone, caused al-Māturīdī to feel the urgency of establishing the existence and divinity of God for his populace. It must be kept in mind that this region was experiencing continuous mass conversion to Islam along centuries.\textsuperscript{322} Theological interactions were thus a constant in the region and still resided, at least culturally, in the minds and psyche of the inhabitants of this region soupçons of the previous ideologies and faiths their grandfathers embraced. Hence, the need for a comprehensive explanation and a discussion of all theological challenges posed by other ideologies was greater in Samarqand than in the Middle East.

As established in chapter one, there was no substantial theology titles for the Sunnis of

\textsuperscript{321} Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, 4, 195.
Samarqand to consider or consult to understand their belief in God and prove it on all levels. Even the work of al-Ḥakīm, rendered by Rudolph the most influential and fundamental theological title in the region, was fairly limited. It consisted of short segments that prompted the Muslims to believe in the Islamic doctrine but did not explain it to them, nor prove it or defend its truthfulness and legitimacy. It is a point of consensus amongst Muslim scholars, such as Abū Naṣr Farābī (d. 950 CE) and Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE), that it is the duty of Muslim scholars to teach people and explain to them their creed particularly under such circumstances.³²³ Al-Māturīdī, thus, attempts to address the knowledge gap and cater for the needs of the Muslim community starting with the proofs of the existence of God.³²⁴

In the view of the researcher, the influence of the religious ideologies of his region had a substantial role in motivating al-Māturīdī to tackle theological topics from an unconventional and rational perspective. It drove him to innovate new proofs and methodology in the study of God’s existence and Islamic theology altogether. The following section discusses the framework within which al-Māturīdī implements his methodology and introduces his proofs of God’s existence in Ta’wīlāt.

³²³ M. Fārābī, Iḥṣā’ Al-ʻulūm (Beirut: Dar wa Maktabat Al Hilal, 1996), 70; Al-Ghazālī, Al-Munqidh Mina Al-Ḍalāl, 6–7.
³²⁴ In addition to filling the knowledge gap, such a thorough approach to theology is concurrent with the creed the Qur’an emboldens. The Qur’an does not accept the practice of blind following and cultural inheritance in theology without proper conviction. Verse 170 of chapter al-Baqarah is an unequivocal evidence. The verse states, “And when it is said to them, the disbelieving Arabs, “Follow what Allah has revealed,” they say, “Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing.” Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they guided?” Many similar verses challenge, those who blindly follow their forefathers without contemplation, understanding and critical reflection over their inherited beliefs and practices. In his exegesis, al-Māturīdī embraces the teachings of such verses. He comments on Verse 170 cited above, “they were sufahā’ (fools) and people of taqlīd (blind following). They said they will blind follow their fathers.” For further information see: Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 621. Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 1.
2.3 In search for a new paradigm in proving the existence of God

The notion of proving the existence of God is one of the topics that manifests the vertical split between the traditionalists and the rationalists as well as other theological movements in the Islamic landscape. Four distinct approaches occupied the discourse about the topic. The rationalists classified this conception as a rational task and insisted on the use of reason singularly in proving the existence of God. The traditionalists, on the other hand, disagreed fiercely and argued it is a matter of faith independent from reason. The sacred text and narrative sources, from their perspective, suffice the Muslim’s intellectual needs, to learn of the existence of the divine, and qualify as an acceptable and legitimate proof.325 Other than the traditional and rational schools, the Ismā’īlites and Sufis emerged with a completely different approach each proposing a distinct paradigm. The Ismā’īlites promulgated that the proof of God’s existence lies in the existence and presence of the Imam of the time.326 For he is the equal of God, in his divine attributes, in the terrestrial realm.327 The Sufis, on the other hand, sought the spiritual elevation path and argued that recognising God, learning about him and proving his existence takes place through *ilhām* (inspiration) and experiencing the presence of God.328 The influence of the Ismā’īlites and Sufis was marginal in the scholarly arena, particularly the former, when compared with the rational and traditional camps who dominated the theological discourse. Hence, the paradigm of al-Māturīdī, in proving the existence of God, is analysed in light of these two camps.

---

The Mu‘tazilites were the defenders of the rational school. They asserted that the God’s existence can only be established through rational thinking and contemplation. They emphasised that all scriptures are irrelevant in this sense since the legitimacy of scripture depends in the first place on the existence of God. Thus, according to them, the first duty of an accountable person, particularly a Muslim, is to prove the existence of God through rational reasoning.\(^{329}\) Shihadeh concurs, “Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā‘ī (d. 933 CE)…went so far as to argue that the primary duty of each person is to rid oneself of traditional, uncritical belief by doubting God’s existence, before attempting to prove it.”\(^{330}\) The jurist Abdūl Jabbār (d. 1025 CE) elaborates, "If one asks (you) 'what is the first duty God demands from me?' then say ', to think and contemplate in order to discover God. For knowing God happens not unthinkingly or innately nor by virtue of the physical senses."\(^{331}\) The motive behind the Mu‘tazilites’ firm stance on this opinion is the impossibility of proving God’s existence through other avenues. If one were to suggest that the proof of God’s existence is intuitive, necessary by nature or easily perceived by the physical senses then there would be no dispute amongst all ‘uqalā’ (sane humans) on God’s existence. It would have become clear and given in the minds and hearts of all sane humans, exactly like day and night, and it would have been undeniable in the psyche of every individual.\(^{332}\) The reality, however, says otherwise. The very presence of atheists and materialists, irrespective of their number across the ages, testifies of the contrary. Hence, the sacred scripture, human instinct and physical senses do not qualify to be legitimate proofs of God’s existence, only human’s reason and deduction. Some Mu‘tazilites exaggerated in relying on ‘aql (reason) in proving God’s existence, to the extent of declaring the person who does not employ it with blasphemy. Abū


\(^{331}\) Abdul Jabbār, *Kitāb Sharḥ Al-Uṣūl Al-Khamsah*.

\(^{332}\) Ibid, 49.
Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 933 CE) stresses, "The one that does not know God by proof is a disbeliever. Knowledge is the opposite of ignorance and ignorance about God is blasphemy."333

On the other hand, the traditionalists, who represented the overwhelming majority in the Sunni academia at the time, insisted on the opposite view. To know God and prove his existence one must go through the sacred scripture.334 They contended that reason has no role to play because belief in God’s existence is a matter of faith.335 As a result, the traditionalists contested the very study of the nature and reality of God altogether as, in their view, it violates the boundaries Prophet Muḥammad has drawn for the Muslims when he said, "contemplate over the creation of God and do not contemplate his nature because you will perish."336 Additionally, the traditionalists saw the use of reason a burden rather than a blessing. It requires a certain level of intelligence uncommon in all people and this was a further ground for opposition. It is futile to trouble the whole humanity with such an unbearable task, rational reasoning, forcing on them a great toil with little result, when the proof is readily available in the infallible sacred texts.337

One of the chief difficulties that inhibits one from embracing the traditional standpoint is that it is not logically feasible. To prove God’s existence through scripture alone is similar to attempting to prove the premise based on the conclusion. The belief in scripture is dependent on one’s willingness to believe in God. The authority of the scripture and its infallibility as an

334 The sacred scripture to the Muslims is the Qur’an and the Sunnah. For further information see: Shihadeh, "The Existence of God," 198.
336 J. Suyūṭī, Al-Fath Al-Kabīr: Fī Damm Al-Ziyādah Ilā Al-Jāmi’ Al-Ṣagḥār (Beirut: Dar Al Fikr, 2003); Sulaymān ibn Ahmad Ṭabarānī, Al-Mu’jam Al-Awsat (Cairo: Dār al-Haramayn, 1999), 6, 250; Al-Bayhaqī, Al-Jāmi’ Li Shu’ab Al-Īmān, 1, 260; Al-Asbahānī, Kitāb Al-‘azamah, 1, 210.
337 Amīr, Manhaj Al-Salaf Wa Al-Mutakallimīn Fī Muwafaqāt Al-‘Aql L Al-Naqīl Wa Athar Al-Manhajayn Fī Al-‘Aqīdah, 87.
unquestionable source of guidance and knowledge depends primarily on proving that it is revealed by God. It is difficult to expect people to believe in God without offering a persuasive argument. Such an expectation seems to be a given and it makes one wonder of the reasons that compelled the traditionalists to be so cynical and animus towards the use of 'aql. It is not farfetched to claim that traditionalists may not have fully opposed the rational model had it not being promoted solely by the Mu‘tazilites and the falāsifah (Muslim philosophers). The long conflict the Mu‘tazilites had with the Sunni scholarship, particularly their position on the creation of Qur’an, the exercise of political power to coerce all scholars to embrace their religious views and the challenging approach to tradition, may have hindered many traditional scholars from accepting anything that comes from them. The position of the traditionalists from the teachings and the views of the falāsifah suffered an analogous fate. The idea of Muslim scholars learning their theology and defending it through the works of ancient philosophers was not an easy matter for the traditionalists to digest. The ancient philosophers were seen as disbelievers who did not accept or receive the word of God. It did not seem acceptable to receive theological guidance from those who were seen as less privileged than the Muslims who were honoured with divine revelation. Hence, the exclusion of reason in learning and proving God’s existence dominated the Sunni arena up until al-Māturīdī.

Al-Māturīdī, although a well renowned Sunni scholar endorsed by the Sunni community, does not seem to adhere to the traditional position in this aspect of theology. The study of Ta’wīlāt reveals that al-Māturīdī is one of the first Sunni exegetes to open the debate on key paradigm issues and discuss it thoroughly. Al-Māturīdī believes that human reason has the

---

338 Many Muslim scholars declared them as disbelievers and did not even accept classifying them as misguided or wrong.
339 The birth of al-Māturīdī school, and later the Ash’arī school, is a great testimony of the resentment of the Sunni scholarship to the Mu‘tazilites and Muslim philosophers.
capability to learn about God and prove his existence. He infers this supposition from his study of copious verses in the Qur’an.\textsuperscript{340} In all these verses, al-Māturīdī explains that God demands from humans to contemplate and study his creation in order to benefit from them in finding the inescapable truth about God’s existence.

In his commentary on verses 17 - 19 of chapter al-Ghāshiyah, al-Māturīdī argues that the verses induce one to apply reason to discover the existence of the divine. He explains that the interrogative phrase verse 17 uses, ”why don’t they contemplate over the creation of the camels?”, could have two interpretations. The first interpretation is “‘alā al-amr (it is a command)”\textsuperscript{341} from God and therefore should be understood in the imperative form ”falyanzurū (they must contemplate).”\textsuperscript{342} The second interpretation is that it could be a response to a question the disbelievers of Makkah posed before the revelation of the verse. Al-Māturīdī favours the former and further explains that the command does not aim at calling the inhabitants of Makkah to study the biological features of the camel and become well versed in its anatomy.\textsuperscript{343} Rather it is a command to contemplate how the creation of such creatures, the camels, comes from a creator who possesses capabilities beyond theirs and hence proves God’s existence.\textsuperscript{344} Contemplation over the creation of God is, therefore, compulsory for it necessitates the existence of God. Al- Māturīdī’s conclusion is in congruence with his comments, on the same topic, in \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd} where al-Māturīdī elucidates that God conceals his existence behind his creation because studying the creation would inexorably lead one to the creator who gave it a

\textsuperscript{340} Such as verse 101 of chapter Yūnus, verse 53 of chapter Fuṣṣilat, verses 17 – 19 of chapter al-Ghāshiyah, verse 164 of chapter al-Baqarah as well as verse 21 of chapter al-Dhāriyyāt.
\textsuperscript{341} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 17, 182.
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{343} Such a task is not even feasible in this period as they were not capable of doing so.
\textsuperscript{344} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}. 

Al-Māturīdī explicates further the importance of reason in studying and proving God’s existence in his commentary on verse 75 chapter al-An‘ām. In the verse, Prophet Ibrahim is described as “… mina al-mūqinīn (from those of complete conviction).” Al-Māturīdī analyses the nature of īqān (full conviction) and how it promotes the use of reason. He states, ”(to have) īqān (full conviction) bil shay’ (in a notion or a thing), means to have knowledge of this notion firmly after proving (its existence) rationally via the means of contemplation, study and reflection.” Al-Māturīdī stresses that such a quality and title cannot be attributed to God, “lā yūṣaf Allah bil yaqīn (God cannot described to possess full conviction)” for it necessitates that God’s knowledge was acquired after deduction and reasoning. His statement is crucial to the discussion at hand as it indicates that the path of complete and firm conviction, in the view of al-Māturīdī, is through rational reasoning. It strengthens further the deduction al-Māturīdī expresses in chapter al-Ghāshiyah about the importance of ‘aql in learning about God. Al-Māturīdī’s characterization of īqān as a product of contemplation and reason renders it an essential and inherent human experience.

Al-Māturīdī’s position prompts a compelling inquiry of whether the īqān of the prophets and messengers is a product of a similar human experience. According to al-Māturīdī, it is. He proposes the prophets and messengers reach īqān in God’s existence after they undergo the deduction and reasoning stage before receiving the divine message. Al-Māturīdī forms this beginning.

---

345 Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 136.
346 Ta‘wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 108.
347 Ibid, 5, 110.
348 Ibid.
349 Ibid.
350 Therefore, in al-Māturīdī’s view, the prophets and messengers before prophethood believe in the existence of God fully from the early days of their life. They reach full conviction in God through contemplating the universe and all creatures therein.
opinion through his analysis of verse 75 Chapter al-An‘ām. In verse 75, God addresses Prophet Muḥammad with the phrase "wa kadhālika nurī Ibrāhīm (and likewise we show Ibrahim) …".\(^{351}\) God informs Prophet Muḥammad that as he learnt about God through signs and proofs, until he reached full conviction, so did Prophet Ibrahim. Al-Māturīdī clearly states after that "ṭarīq al-ma‘rifah (the path to knowledge) about God is through istidlāl (deduction and reasoning)."\(^{352}\) The rational analysis of “what God created as proofs” is the medium to prove his existence. It cannot be achieved “mina al-sam‘ wa al-hiss (from Scripture and physical senses) even though Scripture and the narratives confirm what rational deduction establishes."\(^{353}\)

Al-Māturīdī supports the above argument further when he elucidates on of the proofs God showed to Ibrahim that lead to his conviction. After listing the various interpretations of the meaning of the phrase "nurī Ibrāhīm malakūt al-samāwāt wa al-‘ard (show Ibrahim the realm of the heavens and the earth)"\(^{354}\), al-Māturīdī interprets the nurī phrase to refer to baṣar qalbhī (the rational vision through Ibrahim’s heart and mind).\(^{355}\) Interestingly, al-Māturīdī does not criticise, but equally does not endorse, the conventional interpretation of the phrase that all other Sunni exegetes, preceding and contemporary, propagated. The conventional interpretation of the verse stipulates that Ibrahim sighted physically and miraculously the metaphysical world in all its intricacies, with the permission of God.

The view of al-Māturīdī begs to differ and is unheard of in Sunni exegesis.\(^ {356}\) To al-

\(^{351}\) “And likewise, did We show Abraham the realm of the heavens and the earth that he would be among the certain [in faith]”
\(^{352}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 111.
\(^{353}\) Ibid.
\(^{354}\) Verse 75 in Chapter Al An‘ām, "And likewise did We show Abraham the realm of the heavens and the earth that he would be among the certain [in faith]"
\(^{355}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 111.
\(^{356}\) This will be verified in the sequential section designated to the comparison of his commentary with the most prominent Sunni exegetes of his region and time.
Māturīdī the vision God granted to Ibrahim was the ability to see “via heeding the signs and exploring the various proofs that manifest to the humans upon al-ta’ammulī khalq Allah bi al-fikr (upon contemplating the creation of God through intellectual reasoning).”\(^{357}\) Al-Māturīdī leaves no room for ambiguity. Istidlāl (rational reasoning), he argues, is what God granted Ibrahim in this vision to use as “hujaj yastadil bihā (strong proofs)”\(^{358}\) in his exchanges with his people. The strength of the rational vision lies in the fact that it is accessible to all humans as opposed to the miraculous vision of the celestial realm, which if it were true, would have been exclusive to Ibrahim, in the view of al-Māturīdī.\(^{359}\)

In the sense of a debate thus, al-Māturīdī views verses 75 to 77 in chapter al-An‘ām. They speak of a munāẓarah (debate) that took place between Prophet Ibrahim and his people, who worshiped statues and stars, al-Māturīdī proclaims. Ṭabarī does not agree with al-Māturīdī at all. The former interprets these verses in the context of nazar (Ibrahim attempting to discover his belief in God) as it has been transmitted by a number of exegetes such as al-Ḥasan.\(^{360}\) Al-Māturīdī refuses such an interpretation since it may necessitate the state of ignorance and disbelief on a prophet.\(^{361}\)

In fact, al-Māturīdī considers rational reasoning the only method to establish and prove God’s existence. In his commentary on verses 90-92 Chapter Yūnus,\(^{362}\) al-Māturīdī states, “al-īmān billah lā yakūn illā bi al-istidlāl (belief in God cannot be established except by rational reasoning).”\(^{363}\) God is beyond al-ḥiss (the senses) and al-mushāhadah (physical observation) and

\(^{357}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 111.

\(^{358}\) Ibid.

\(^{359}\) Ibid.


\(^{361}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 115.

\(^{362}\) The Verses discuss the denunciation of the belief of Pharaoh as he offered it in the final moment of death.

\(^{363}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 7, 104.
learning about him is feasible through *istidlāl* (rational reasoning).\(^{364}\) Al-Māturīdī does not see such a claim, the superiority of rational reasoning in proving God, unacceptable as many notions in the created realms, which none disputes their existence, can only be perceived and understood through *istidlāl* (rational reasoning). He cites the shade and the intellect as two examples on the basis that they cannot be weighed, felt or held physically yet all humans believe in their existence.\(^{365}\) Al-Māturīdī argues that creatures are one of two types: 1- tangible creatures one can observe closely and their physical nature can be perused and examined and 2- intangible creatures one can only learn about their existence through their actions and impact in the physical world such as intellect, the soul and sight.\(^{366}\) Al-Māturīdī then provides his conclusion, “… if some of the creation of God is beyond our physical senses then surely the creator who magnificently created and innovated such creatures is worthy of such status… he can only be known through the impact of his actions…”\(^{367}\) Thus, in the view of al-Māturīdī, the existence of God can only be known through rational reasoning. Indeed, a new position in the Sunni traditional exegesis literature.

Al-Māturīdī, strikingly, does not discuss the role of scripture in proving the existence of God.\(^{368}\) Similarly, al-Māturīdī does not mention or emphasize the spiritual method in discovering or proving the existence of God. *Ilhām* (inspiration) and *kashf* (unveiling) Maturis not endorsed anywhere in Ta’wīlāt in such a context. The same holds true in his *tawḥīd* epistle. Openly, some of al-Māturīdī’s followers mirror this view and articulate it. Abū Ḥafṣ Nasafī (d. 1142 CE) states, "*Ilhām* (inspiration) is not an acceptable method to prove and learn about the existence of

\(^{364}\) Ibid, 9, 311; ibid, 9, 497.
\(^{365}\) Ibid, 10, 30.
\(^{366}\) Ibid, 10, 704.
\(^{367}\) Ibid.
\(^{368}\) Except once in chapter Al-An’ām, which has been mentioned earlier.
God…” It follows then al-Māturīdī does not accept the epistemological status Sufis grant to kāshf (unveiling) in discovering God. His unnacceptance is a clear distinction to later prominent Ashʿarī scholars, such as Ghazālī, who not only accepted and legitimised kāshf but deemed it the best method to learn about God.

Al-Māturīdī’s unnacceptance of ilḥām and kāshf does not mean he discredits one’s personal experience in establishing God’s existence. In verse 27 chapter al-Baqarah, al-Māturīdī draws the attention to a noteworthy analysis of the word ‘āhd (covenant), which God has taken from all children of Adam, according to the Qur’an, and its role in believing in God. To al-Māturīdī, the covenants of God are of two types: 1 – ‘āhd khilqah, (the natural covenant) and 2 – ‘āhd risālah, (the message covenant). Al-Māturīdī views the natural covenant as a feeling that compels a person to look into his own creation and contemplate to discover his creator. The words of al-Māturīdī should not be misconstrued to mean he believes that knowledge about God happens by default through the natural covenant. He is, rather, pointing to the fact that natural intuition coupled with reason lead to belief in the existence of God.

---

369 Abdallah. Nasafi, Matn Al-Aqā’id (Kazan1890), 46; Taftāzānī, Sharḥ Al-Taftāzānī ‘Ala Matn Al-‘Aqā’id Li Al-Shaykh Najm Al-Dīn Al-Nasafi, 808.
370 Kāshf is the experience of receiving a personal or individualistic divine inspiration after the purification of the soul through acts of worship and spiritual struggles. It uncovers the veils of the heart in order to allow divine truths to flow into it. For further information see: Fethullah Gülen and Ali Unal, Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism: Emerald Hills of the Heart (Rutherford, N.J.: Fountain, 2004), 108; Shahida Bilqies, “Understanding the Concept of Islamic Sufism,” Journal of Education & Social Policy 1, no. 1 (2014): 61.
371 Nowhere in his exegesis, al-Māturīdī raises it or discusses it let alone promote it.
373 The verse reads, “Who break the ‘āhd (covenant) of Allah after contracting it and sever that which Allah has ordered to be joined and cause corruption on earth. It is those who are the losers”.
374 The natural covenant within every person that confirms the existence of God. Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 408.
375 The verbal covenant a believer makes when they accept the message of the prophets and messengers. Ibid.
376 Hence, it necessitates the use of reason.
377 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 408.
The natural disposition to believe in God and its relationship with reason is explicated further by al-Māturīdī in verse 172 chapter al-Aʿrāf.\textsuperscript{378} The verse reports a covenant God took from all humans, in the realm of spirits\textsuperscript{379} in which they vowed to believe in God.\textsuperscript{380} Al-Māturīdī lists briefly the traditional interpretations of the ‘ahd (covenant) but then offers a different perspective. He defines ‘ahd as “mā a’lamahum mā minhu ansha’ahum wa qallabahum min ḥāl ilā ḥāl (what God taught the humans about the substance of their creation\textsuperscript{381} and how their creation passes from one stage to the next).”\textsuperscript{382} This knowledge points the human to the tadbīr (management) of God of the affairs of the humans.\textsuperscript{383} Thus, al-Māturīdī suggests that a rational interpretation of the notion of ‘ahd is a strong possibility that cannot be ignored. He states, “hādhā al-ta’wīl aḥaq mina al-awwal (this, rational, interpretation is more worthy of consideration than the first, traditional one).”\textsuperscript{384} Consequently, the covenant of the humans the verse speaks of, according to al-Māturīdī, is nutq ḥāl (testimony of the observed reality) and not qawl lisān (a verbal articulation).\textsuperscript{385} Al-khilqah (the creation) and al-fiṭrah (the human natural disposition), according to al-Māturīdī, do not replace the necessity of the rational method to prove the existence of God rather they stimulate it.\textsuperscript{386} They create the urgency in one to think about life and existence, question reality behind the universe and search for answers. The rational

\textsuperscript{378} This is the main Qur’anic verse that informs one about the covenant between God and all children of Adam.
\textsuperscript{379} Thus, before the existence of the bodies and the terrestrial world.
\textsuperscript{380} The verse reads, “And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins- their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we have testified.” [This] - lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, “Indeed, we were of this unaware.”
\textsuperscript{381} al-Māturīdī refers here to the knowledge of the humans about their reproduction cycle, from cohabitation to pregnancy and the various embryonic stages.
\textsuperscript{382} Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 6, 105.
\textsuperscript{383} Al-Māturīdī is pointing the to the proof of tadbīr, which will be studied at length in the section of the proofs of the existence of God.
\textsuperscript{384} Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 6, 106.
\textsuperscript{385} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{386} Ibid.
contemplation comes as a natural response to the impulse the human soul instigates by the ‘ahd (covenant).

This unprecedented analysis with which al-Māturīdī enriches Sunnī theological exegesis, one finds glimpses of it in Descartes, father of modern philosophy, literature. Remarkably, Descartes expresses a similar analysis. He states “When I say that I am so instructed by nature, I merely mean a certain spontaneous inclination which impels me to believe in this connection, and not a natural light which makes me recognize that it is true.”387 Al-Māturīdī approves the role of human intuition in inferring God’s existence but not its ability to prove God’s existence without reason.

2.4 Examining the contributions of exegetes to the debate concerning the existence of God:

An exhaustive examination, similar to the one undertaken on al-Māturīdī’s exegesis, of the prominent Sunni and regional exegeses brings to light interesting insights. Ṭabarī, for instance, does not comment in the least, let alone discuss or explain, the methods of proving the existence of God. Rational reasoning as a concept is reticently present in his exegesis and used strictly in the context of explaining jurisprudential rulings highlighted in some the verses.388 Ṭabarī stresses the importance of contemplating the verses of God to appreciate His bounties and transmits reports, from earlier exegetes, to this meaning. However, he does not take the discussion further.

387 René Descartes et al., Meditations on First Philosophy : With Selections from the Objections and Replies : A Latin-English Edition (2013), 14; René Descartes, Deena Weinberg, and René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy ([Place of publication not identified]: BN Pub., 2007), 23.
388 Verse 185 of chapter al-Baqarah.
and does not link it to proving God’s existence through reason. Ṭabarī adopts the view that Ibrahim’s vision was a physical miracle from God. He focuses fully on reporting the various reports that describe what Ibrahim sighted from the celestial realm. Thus, he adheres faithfully and exclusively to the traditional interpretation of the verses. Ṭabarī does not provide any further commentary on the nature of yaqīn (certainty) and its relevance to rational reasoning or the role of ‘aql in proving God’s existence or the possibility of new interpretations for the verses.

Unlike al-Māturīdī as well, Samarqandī does not discuss istidlāl (rational reasoning) at all in his exegesis. Even in the context of the verses al-Māturīdī uses to prove his view on the essentiality of ‘aql and istidlāl, Samarqandī centralises his efforts predominantly on explaining the philological meaning of the key words in those verses and does not go beyond. In the context of verses 75-77 chapter al-An‘ām and the vision of Ibrahim, Samarqandī follows, scrupulously, in the steps of Ṭabarī and restricts himself to commentating on the narrative sources alone. He does not analyse the implications of these narrations or the various possible meanings surrounding the text.

Similarly, Muqātil’s commentary consists of very brief lexical explanation of the key words in the verses. It is void of any analytical commentary and of any discussion of rational reasoning. In chapter al-An‘ām, Muqātil’s commentary is dominated by relating the same reports, Samarqandī, Ṭabarī and other Sunni exegetes transmitted, about the miraculous vision of

---

390 Whether in relation to theology or jurisprudence
Ibrahim had of the terrestrial and celestial worlds. Muqātil presents the same approach in his analysis of the subsequent verses where he reports the story of the cave found in most of the Sunni exegeses.

‘Ayyāshī’’s exegesis is a Shia title. Although the focus of the thesis is on Sunni exegeses, an exception is made for ‘Ayyāshī’’s title since it was written in the region of al-Māturīdī and in close proximity to his era. Rudolph speaks of its importance in evaluating the context and the theological contributions of al-Māturīdī. In the context of the analysis at hand, ‘Ayyāshī limits his contributions to listing narrative reports from the Imams about the miraculous nature of Ibrahim’s vision and the discussion Ibrahim had, with his people, about the worship of the planets. Rational reasoning is not discussed at all in reference to theological studies or proving the existence of God. It is noteworthy that ‘Ayyāshī supports the same interpretations as the traditional Sunni exegetes albeit the source of his quoted reports are the Imams (the heirs of the prophet), according to his dogma. Thus, al-Māturīdī’’s commentary is new and unconventional in the context of Sunni exegetical literature and in the context of his region, across the various Muslim denominations. No preceding or contemporary exegete raised, let alone analyse and expound on, the theological issue of the existence of God, the paradigm to study it as a notion, or the application of rational reasoning in the process. Al-Māturīdī’’s commentary remains unparalleled in depth, content and style.

---

393 The story of the cave reports that Ibrahim’s mother hid him in the cave to protect him from the king who wanted to execute all the male babies born on this day because of a vision he had about his kingdom crumbling down on the hands of a young boy. For further information see: ʻṬabarī, Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fi Taʿwīl Āy Al-Qur’an, 11, 480; Ibn Sulaymān, Taṣfīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 1, 570.

394 Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 188.
2.5 The paradigm of al-Māturīdī: a synthesis between rationalism and traditionalism

The commentary of al-Māturīdī establishes that he believes rational reasoning to be fundamental in proving the existence of God and learning about Him. It is intriguing to see that al-Māturīdī considers the interrogative form in verse 17 chapter al-Ghāshiyah to be a command rather than a recommendation. Such an interpretation places him closer to the class of the rationalists, particularly the Muʿtazilite school. Al-Māturīdī parallels with the Muʿtazilite school on the importance of the role of ʿaql in proving God’s existence. He deems it necessary to preach and persuade people. His analysis of the verses concerning the vision of Ibrahim, in chapter al-Anʿām, leads one to believe the vision to be rational as opposed to miraculous and sensational, an untraditional position, because it equips Ibrahim with the rational proofs necessary, to argue the existence and unity of God, to his people who attributed divinity to cosmic objects. In the same vein, al-Māturīdī considers rational reasoning indispensable in the development of the conviction of the prophets and messengers in God. All these positions are not only innovative and untraditional, in Sunni theological exegesis, but they also draw al-Māturīdī closer to the rational camp.

Nonetheless, al-Māturīdī, surprisingly, agrees with the contention of the traditionalists in some of their objections to the rational approach. He acknowledges the difficulty of the rational path to discover God. Al-Māturīdī states, “Undoubtedly the multiple affairs and thoughts the human mind has to process would confuse it and affect the accuracy of its conclusions.” He explains further, “The griefs, emotions, pain and many matters occupy the mind and may hinder

---

395 Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 182-83; Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 7, 18.
it from reaching the truth and the evidence (of God’s existence) in every minor and major creature. Likewise, is the effect of desires, ambitions and personal wishes.”

Al-Māturīdī, thus, represents a realistic and a synthetic understanding of the role of ‘aql and the effect of life on one’s inability to see clearly and learn about God. He considers the totality of the human being influential on his belief choices and perception of the world. This consideration separates him from the Mu‘tazilites who see the human’s choices a result of mere rational analysis. Al-Māturīdī stands in the middle between the traditionalists and the rationalists without agreeing wholeheartedly and explicitly with either. One can see that he evaluates and considers the views of both sides in their own merit but then determines his own view on the matter. It is this aspect that sets him apart from both camps.

One of the issues that manifests the difference between the traditionalists and rationalists on the role of ‘aql, in proving the existence of God, is the issue of punishment for disbelief applied against ‘āqil (a person with complete sanity). The rationalists, as detailed earlier, regarded ‘aql sufficient to prove God’s existence and accordingly regarded the fair minded or sensible person who chooses to disbelieve in God, even before receiving the teachings of a divine message, deserving of punishment. Au contraire, the traditionalists asserted that a person does not deserve punishment unless they disbelieve after receiving the teachings of a divine message. The synthetic mindset of al-Māturīdī manifests once more in this instance. The theological position he holds harmonises between the contentions of the rationalists against naqīl and the contentions of the traditionalists against ‘aql. Al-Māturīdī separates between the notion of accountability and guilt and the notion of ‘udhr (excuse and pardon). He firmly agrees with the rationalists, “lahu al-ilāh qabla an yab’atha ilayhim al-rasūl limā rakkaba fīhim mina al-

396 Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 182-83; Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 7, 18.
‘uqūl al-salīmah (God has the right to inflict people with punishment for disbelieving in him even before sending a messenger to them because he provided them with sound intellect).”

Al-Māturīdī, however, insists people will not be punished, in the religious sense, until they receive divine guidance. Why? one might ask. Al-Māturīdī eagerly clarifies that God elected not to punish them until “ba’dā qat‘i al-‘udhr (all possible excuses are exhausted).” In chapter al-Isrā’, al-Māturīdī provides more insight, “Allah bi faḍlihi arāda an yadfa‘a al-shubaha ‘anhum wa yaqṭa‘a ‘anhum ‘udhrahum birasāl yub‘athu ilayhim (God, from his benevolence, decided to clear all misconceptions for the humans and leave them no excuse for disbelieving by sending a messenger to them)” in addition to the faculty of reason they enjoy. Brilliantly, al-Māturīdī satisfies the contentions of both camps. He acknowledges the importance of reason whilst upholding the authority of naql.

Before elaborating on how al-Māturīdī supports this unprecedented view, an interesting matter should be pointed. Nasafī articulates clearly the view of al-Māturīdī in relation to the accountability aspect. In a response to a question posed to Nasafī about a man who did not learn or hear about any scripture or revelation from God yet possesses complete sanity and normal intelligence. Is such a person accountable for believing in God? Nasafī states “yes.” What Nasafī overlooks though is the position of al-Māturīdī on the notion of ‘udhr (excuse), which he elaborates in Ta‘wīlāt. Nasafī’s statement prompts an inquiry on how well the followers of al-Māturīdī have investigated Ta‘wīlāt from a theological perspective, an area for further research.

---

397 Ta‘wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 430.
398 Either directly, from a prophet or messenger, or indirectly, through the scholars and the preachers. Ibid, 8, 240.
399 in chapter al-A‘rāf verse 94
400 Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 430.
401 Ibid, 8, 241.
403 Ibid, 6.
outside the scope of the thesis at hand.

In return to how al-Māturīdī ascertains his view, which is thought provoking from both an exegetical and theological point of view, it is through the Qur’an. Verse 15 chapter al-Isrā’ constitutes al-Māturīdī’s main proof.\textsuperscript{404} Whilst some of the Mu’tazilites, according to al-Ījī, reinterpret the word rasūl (messenger) in al-Isrā’ verse\textsuperscript{405} to mean ‘aql, to disprove the traditional view and legitimise their view,\textsuperscript{406} al-Māturīdī does not. He interprets rasūl based on its undisputed philological meaning, which all traditional Sunni exegetes have endorsed, “an official messenger from God.”\textsuperscript{407} The verse is yet another example of the role of exegesis in theology, and vice versa, and the significance of theological exegesis. Al-Māturīdī, nonetheless, infers from the very verse, without breaching the lexical elasticity of the rasūl word, the proof to support his point of view. He argues that even though an intelligent person who disbelieves in God’s existence deserves punishment for disbelief, after discovering God via reason, he will not be punished because the verse states “wa mā kunnā mu’adhhibīna (We do not inflict punishment) ...”\textsuperscript{408} until after a messenger is sent. Thus, people are pardoned temporarily until such a point despite being accountable. God delays the punishment of such individuals, out of mercy and compassion, until a prophet conveys the divine message to them.\textsuperscript{409} This unprecedented inference in Sunni theological exegesis sheds the light on the scholarship of al-Māturīdī in theological exegesis and theology. It clearly proves, along with the previously established points the independence of al-Māturīdī from both camps and his effort to establish a

\textsuperscript{404} The verse reads, “And We do not inflict punishment until we have sent a Rasūl, (Messenger)”.  
\textsuperscript{405} It is verse 15 in chapter Al-Isrā’.  
\textsuperscript{406} Al-Ījī, Kitāb Al-Mawāqif Fi ‘Ilm Al-Kalām, 3, 155; M. Ibn Rushd, Manāhij Al-Adillah Fī ‘Aqā’id Al-Millah (Cairo: Al Maktakah al Azhariyah, 2010), 11.  
\textsuperscript{407} Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 8, 240.  
\textsuperscript{408} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{409} Ibid.
new school of thought that harmonises the relationship between *naql* and ‘*aql*.

Unlike the Muʿtazilites, al-Māturīdī does not rely on mere logic to verify the supremacy and essentiality of rational reasoning. Rather he infers the evidence of his opinion from the Qur’an itself and from the practice of the prophets, particularly, Ibrahim, as outlined in the Qur’an. The ability of al-Māturīdī to prove his opinion through the Qur’an is echoed in the words of Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn Rushd (d. 1198 CE), a polymath of the twelfth century, who confirms the view of al-Māturīdī that the Qur’an advocates the importance of ‘*aql*, despite the unawareness of the traditionalists of this Qur’anic fact.\(^{410}\)

Having established the religious context of al-Māturīdī’s time and his methodology in using proofs, the discussion can now move to examining and extracting the proofs al-Māturīdī uses in Ta’wīlāt to prove the existence of God, which are erected upon the synthesized Qur’anic rational paradigm al-Māturīdī formulated therein.

### 2.6 The proofs of the existence of God in Taʾwīlāt

In the previous sections, the discussion focused on al-Māturīdī’s approach to the concept of proving the existence of God and the paradigm upon which he constructs his proofs of the notion. This section represents the succeeding natural and logical step, to discover the actual proofs al-Māturīdī postulates for God’s existence and to examine them critically against the commentaries of the other exegetes and his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.

The proofs al-Māturīdī offers vary innovatively between customary proofs, borrowed or influenced, by other schools or ideologies as well as new unprecedented proofs he introduces.

---

2.6.1 The proof of change

Al-Māturīdī asserts that the constant changes in the universe testify to the existence of God.\footnote{Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 514; Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 12.} He states, “Constant change takes place in everything except God. For the constant changes and development is a mark of the finite beings.”\footnote{Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 514.} So if God were to change, he would be a finite being and not God. The Qur’an speaks about the notion of change, as a natural phenomenon, in many verses such as verse 190 Chapter al-‘Imrān. Some may argue that Abū Ḥanīfa is the first Sunni scholar, as far as theological treatises show, to raise the notion of change and hint to its relationship to God’s existence.\footnote{Al-Bayāḍī, Ishārāt Al-Marām ‘an Ibārāt Al-Imām, 67.} Abū Ḥanīfa remarks, “It is impossible for ‘aqīl to believe that…the change (one sees) in the world and its affairs… takes place without a maker and protector that protects it from imbalance.”\footnote{Ibid.} Although Abū Ḥanīfa does not infer God is unchanging, he proposes the existence of God through the existence of change and maintenance of the world. If one continues reading the commentary of Abū Ḥanīfa, however, a different perspective develops. Abū Ḥanīfa provides an example to illustrate the above remark. He states, “such as the sudden existence of a massive building in a land which was empty before.”\footnote{Ibid, 68.} This example clarifies that Abū Ḥanīfa is discussing the argument of design and creation and not the proof of change al-Māturīdī forwards. It is likely al-Māturīdī, in general, benefited from the works of Abū Ḥanīfa, since he studied all his works, as al-Bayāḍī confirms.\footnote{Ibid, 19.} As far as the proof of change is concerned, however, al-Māturīdī does not. He arrives to this proof through the aptitude, he
enjoys in Qur’anic interpretation, evident in the study of the paradigm al-Māturīdī frames in the previous section.

Al-Māturīdī’s persistent explanation of the proof of change in Ta’wīlāt lends credence to the above inference. In his commentary on verse 164 chapter al-‘Imrān, al-Māturīdī reinforces the same concept. He explicates, “This is a sign of the world's finite attribute, because it keeps changing and alternating from one state to another. The constant state of beginning and end and recurring change are evidence of the weakness of these notions and that it has an originator.”

In his exegesis of verses 4 and 5 chapter al-A‘lā, al-Māturīdī explains why God employs such a proof. He clarifies, “…the process of proving the existence of the maker is easier for people to comprehend when the reference is made to such phenomena.” Al-Māturīdī, thus, favours the proofs that are accessible to people from all walks of life due to their ease on the public. He further explains, “…one can discover …the maker via the things that change constantly and is easy for people to observe.” Once more, al-Māturīdī’s care for the average person manifests itself. It seems that his concern, in Ta’wīlāt, is both academic and advocative at the same time. His quest to prove the existence of God satisfies all readership, the academic and the common.

In Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, al-Māturīdī expresses a similar meaning though in a different phrasing. He enunciates that every existing being is subject to change and “change and perish necessitate finite and death.” The human moves from infancy to adulthood and from beauty to decay, the universe fluctuates from coldness to heat and from darkness to light. Al-Māturīdī uses the undisputed phenomenon of change in the universe to construct a theological argument.

---

417 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 465.
418 Ibid, 17, 167.
419 Ibid, 17, 168.
420 Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 12.
421 Ibid.
The world is ever changing, everything that changes is finite, and thus the world is finite. Once he proves the finite nature of the world then he necessitates the existence of God.

Al-Ash‘arī uses what may appear, at first, a resemblant argument. He states, “the human moves from one stage to another, a fertilized egg, to a blood clot then a foetus ... and so on until they reach perfection.” The human did not change himself certainly. Therefore, an eternal and all-powerful being initiated the changes that took place in the human. Other than the fact that al-Māturīdī precedes al-Ash‘arī in the use of the proof of change, on the assumption that al-Ash‘arī is referring to the proof of change in the first place, there are importance differences between the statements and arguments of each scholar. However, before delving in this subject matter, it is important to shed the light on an important characteristic in al-Māturīdī’s proof. The underlying element behind the interest of al-Māturīdī in the proof of change in the universe is its visibility and discernibility to the average mind. It is a proof every human can observe, investigate and at the same time very difficult to dispute. This is not the first instance al-Māturīdī uses a proof of such nature. In his interpretation of the vision of Ibrahim earlier, he classified the vision as rational, rather than miraculous or physical, because this would make Ibrahim’s vision a proof accessible to all the humans. Al-Māturīdī takes the debate with this proof beyond sheer logical arguments, which are theoretical in nature, to equip the reader with a tangible evidence.

In return, to the comparison between al-Māturīdī and al-Ash‘arī, the evidence the former employs is different than that of al-Ash‘arī. Al-Māturīdī observes the phenomenon of change in the entire world and uses it as a platform to prove God’s existence whilst al-Ash‘arī focuses

---

424 Including all the creatures that exist within it.
primarily on the human development, which is a reference to the design and development argument in a very specific context- the human. The magnitude of al-Māturīdī’s proof is greater and more persuasive for it directs the attention to the permanence and consistency of change in the entire universe, which makes it stronger logically. Al-Asḥārī’s statement is similar to Abū Ḥanīfa’s remarks, quoted earlier. It focuses on the gradual development phenomenon evident in the world. Al-Māturīdī, on the other hand, links the discussion of the phenomenon of change to the difference between the nature of God and the nature of the creatures, the nature of the finite and the nature of the infinite. He seems to construct stronger rational proofs than al-Asḥārī, who was tutored from a very early age on the hands of the Mu’tazilites.\(^{425}\)

Change, as a proof of God’s existence, has not been raised by the other exegetes. Samarqandī and Ṭabarī mention the notion of change, in their titles, but do not link it to God’s existence. The latter mentions the notion in the context of Islamic eschatology in reference to the radical changes that will take place in the heavens before the hereafter. He does so during his attempt to reconcile between the various verses that discuss the change in the heavens during resurrection.\(^{426}\) Ṭabarī uses it as well in reference to the relationship between the divine decree and the preserved tablet.\(^{427}\) Samarqandī raises the notion of change completely outside the theological topic at hand. He speaks of it in relation to the throne of Balqīṣ\(^{428}\) (Queen of Sheba). Muqātil reiterates the verses that discuss the natural phenomenon of change as they are referring

---

\(^{425}\) Al-Bayyāḍī points that the followers of al-Māturīdī developed the proof of change further after his demise and utilised it more logically to prove the finite world and the existence of God. For further information see: Al-Bayyāḍī, \emph{Ishārāt Al-Marām ‘an Ibārāt Al-Imām}, 93.

\(^{426}\) Ṭabarī, \emph{Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’ān}, 24, 323.

\(^{427}\) Ibid, 24, 324.

\(^{428}\) The reference to the throne of Balqīṣ, the Queen of Sheba whom Prophet Sulaymān marries, is found in chapter of Al-Naml from verse 20 onwards.
to the power of God and does not go any further whilst ‘Ayyāshī drops it completely. Al-Māturīdī is the first Sunni exegete to infer the proof of change as a proof of God’s existence from the Qur’an and formulates it into a logical argument.

### 2.6.2 The proof of the opposites

The world, according to al-Māturīdī, consists of opposite elements, coldness and heat, light and darkness, land and sea, etc. The various opposing elements are, nonetheless, in equilibrium. They work in complete harmony according to particular percentages and specified proportions. If any of them goes out of the set balance, the universe will lose its functionality and possibly its existence. In his commentary on the 2nd verse of al-Fātīha al-Māturīdī states, “… the consistency of the measurements (of all elements), the unification of the opposites, the interdependence of one another… despite their conflicting nature… is clear evidence that it is not possible that all this have taken place except from someone all knowledgeable, all-powerful and caring for all the universe.” Al-Māturīdī infers the above astute points from the expression “Rabb al-‘ālamīn (The Lord of the worlds)” in the verse. If God describes himself as the Lord of all that exists, then he is the God of the opposites and they should point to his existence. Al-Māturīdī reiterates the same point, briefly though, in verse 36 chapter al-‘Imrān. He explicates, “God - the Almighty – clarifies (in this verse) that he constructed it (the universe) on the basis of unifying the opposites so it may be known that he exists …”

The proof of the opposites appears in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd as well, though al-Māturīdī’s discussion of the proof there is much more exhaustive than

---

430 Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 12.
431 Ibid, 2, 293.
in Ta‘wīlāt. Al-Māturīdī states, “mobility and immobility…fusion and dispersal, increase and decrease, are all opposing notions. The human intellect cannot accept that they may coexist, out of their own accord…”⁴³² He explains further, “Such opposing elements naturally fight one another, which will lead to fragmentation, destruction and non-existence.”⁴³³ Thus, there must exists a force that subjugates all these elements to order and harmony through its will and forces them to coexist.⁴³⁴ If left to its nature, these elements will attempt to dominate one another. This is the entropy as explained in the second law of thermodynamics but expressed in rational way. In this proof, al-Māturīdī refutes the opinion of the materialists who believe that primordial matter or hūlē/hyle works independently and mechanically without the need for or the interference of a dominant managing will- God.⁴³⁵ Hence, al-Māturīdī achieves two goals within this proof. He evinces the existence of God and refutes the materialists’ view, in a single argument.

This argument reinforces an earlier deduction, about the scholarship of al-Māturīdī in the non-Muslim ideologies common in his region and neighbouring lands, particularly, Indian and Greek philosophy. More importantly though, in this proof, the influence of the Mu‘tazilites’ ideology on al-Māturīdī shines. He borrowed the proof of the opposites from their literature. Abū Ali al-Khayyāṭ (d. 835 CE) states, on the authority of Ibrahim Al-Nazzām (d. 835 CE), “I found heat the opposite of cold and I found that the opposites do not exist in one place out of their own will.”⁴³⁶ This is verbatim what al-Māturīdī wrote. Al-Khayyāṭ then continues, “…Thus, I knew

⁴³² Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 13; ibid, 117.
⁴³³ Ibid, 143.
⁴³⁴ Ibid, 13.
that there must be a force that combined them and subdued them against their nature...Whoever can be subdued is weak. Weakness is a sign of their finite nature."  

Once more a reiteration of what al-Māturīdī argues. Al-Khayyāṭ then concludes, “Thus, it was given a beginning by the one who can give a beginning to all and was innovated by a powerful innovator.” These citations prove beyond doubt the influence of al-Naẓẓām on al-Māturīdī, at least in this aspect of theology, and Rudolph concurs. It proves that al-Māturīdī had no issue in learning and benefiting from the Muʿtazilites if it served a noble purpose, proving the existence of God, and the logic was precise. All the same, the use of al-Māturīdī of some of the Muʿtazilites concepts and proofs does not suggest complete acceptance of their teachings, as it will appear in later chapters. Al-Māturīdī fiercely disputes many of their theological views, in other areas, but endorses their arguments if they satisfy his line of thought.

The argument of the opposites, as a natural phenomenon, has not been mentioned by any other Sunni or regional exegetes. Even on the word level, the level of mentioning the utterance itself “opposite” in their exegeses, its presence is limited in Ṭabarī and Samarqandī titles and completely absent from the writings of Muqātil and ‘Ayyāshī. Al-Māturīdī, thus, is not only the first Sunni exegete to bring awareness of the natural phenomenon, amongst the contemporary and preceding exegetes, but also the first to list and explain the proof of the opposites as a proof of the existence of God.

---

437 Ibid.
438 Ibid.
440 Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʿwil Āy Al-Qurʾan, 18, 83; Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Baḥr Al-ʿUlūm, 1, 37.
2.6.3 The proof of cause

Another manifestation of the influence of other orientations on al-Māturīdī’s theological mindset is evident in the proof of cause, which he highlights, in Ta’wīlāt, as a proof of God’s existence. This proof is widely circulated amongst the kalām scholars. As Ṣabrī points, the cosmological concept is a primary one in the mindset of all humans, has been hardly disputed and is accepted in the ancient Greek philosophy. According to Nagasawa, the first clear enunciation of the cosmological argument is in the last dialogue found in Plato’s (d. 348 BCE) Laws. Christian and Muslim theologians adopted it later and the Muslims developed the kalām cosmological argument particularly on the hands of the polymath al-Kindī (d. 873 CE). Al-Māturīdī advocates that all that exists must have a Ṣāni’ (maker), who is the primary cause for their existence. In Ta’wīlāt, he states, “…whoever denies the existence of al-Ṣāni’ (the maker) we must first address with them the finite of the world and the need of the world for a creator…” Thus according to al-Māturīdī, there is a symbiotic relationship between God’s existence and the existence of the world. As Rudolph emphasizes, in his analysis of Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, al-Māturīdī does not suffice himself with borrowing the idea of the first cause from the earlier scholars but enlarges on it a different argument. The world points to the necessity of God as the cause and maker of the universe. Al-Māturīdī refers to the proof of the cause, or the cosmological argument, in verse 26 chapter al-Jinn when discussing the types of knowledge God made accessible to humans. He asserts, “…God permitted people to learn through contemplation of his

444 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 155.
creation, without the need for revelation, the existence of al-Ṣāni' (the maker)…"\(^{446}\) A clear reference to the fact that the existence of the world, unquestionably, necessitates the existence of God. Al-Māturīdī proclaims that the aforementioned fact is discernible to any observer who contemplates the universe and that such a conclusion is inevitable, unless one suffers a mental impairment or consciously opts not to pursue the issue.\(^{447}\) Thus far in his discussion of the proof of the cause, al-Māturīdī elects to formulate maxims that govern this argument rather than cite practical examples, like in the previous proofs. The only example al-Māturīdī cites, in Ta’wilāt, is in verse 7 chapter al-Dhāriyāt - The rain. Al-Māturīdī states, “...since it (rain) is subjected for the service (of the creatures) then it must have a subjugator…”\(^{448}\) referring to the existence of God as the cause behind the rain.

In Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, al-Māturīdī uses the proof of cause to prove God’s existence\(^{449}\) albeit with a different approach and style. Conversely, in the Kitāb, al-Māturīdī cites plenty of simple examples to ascertain the cause argument seeking the aid of analogy. Al-Māturīdī posits, “indeed we do not know a book without a writer, a separation without a separator, a mobility or immobility without an instigator… indeed the world, in its greatness, cannot come together or mobilise except by an external source (a maker).”\(^{450}\) He reinforces the same conception elsewhere in the Kitāb and expands it further. He says, “writing points to the existence of a writer…construction, weaving…and all ṣinā’āt (crafts) follow the same rule. Hence, by analogy it is incumbent to believe in the existence of al-Ṣāni’ (the maker) of the world …”\(^{451}\) Despite the difference in the style of discussion, between Ta’wilāt and Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, al-Māturīdī applies

---

\(^{446}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 16, 186.
\(^{447}\) Ibid, 16, 140.
\(^{448}\) Ibid, 14, 130.
\(^{449}\) Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 241.
\(^{450}\) Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 15.
\(^{451}\) Ibid, 29.
a consistent terminology in both titles and maintains the reference to *al-Ṣāni’* (the maker) as the cause of the existence of the world.

The investigation of the presence of the proof of cause in the works of later prominent theologians imparts a noteworthy remark. Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013 CE) and al-Bayyāḍī borrowed the exact style and identical terms al-Māturīdī utilises in his works. Abū Bakr states, “the writing necessitates a writer and…. the construction necessitates a builder and we do not doubt the ignorance of one who informs us that writing can be without a writer ... Thus, the world necessitates (the existence of) *al-Ṣāni’* (the maker).”452 Al-Bayyāḍī follows suit. He cites the same examples to negate the primordial matter and establish the existence of an all-wise creator.453 The common approach and terminology later theologians share with al-Māturīdī could indicate they all borrowed it from him directly, through his works, or indirectly, through his followers. Equally, it could suggest they, al-Māturīdī and the others, all took from the same source- al-Kindī. The second proposition, however, becomes implausible after a deep analysis of al-Māturīdī’s writing. The strongest evidence against the second proposition is that the discussion of al-Māturīdī of the cosmological argument does not reflect the meticulous articulation of it by al-Kindī.454 Equally, it is difficult to determine whether al-Māturīdī accessed the work of al-Kindī directly and borrowed the proof of cause from him or he accessed it via other sources. The commonality and popularity of the argument makes it difficult to triangulate the direct source. In Ta’wīlāt, regardless, al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the causality principle appears well defined and clearly articulated. However, it is sporadic because he brings it up only when the theme of the verses permit.

452 A. Al-Baqillani, *Kitāb Al-Tamhīd* (Beirut: Maktabah Sharqiyyah, 1957), 44.
Despite the popularity of the cosmological argument, the other Sunni and regional exegetes do not raise it in their commentary at all. The reference to “al-Ṣāni’ (the maker)” indeed appears once in Ṭabarī’s exegesis.\(^{455}\) Nonetheless, it is not cited in the context of proving God’s existence rather it relates to seeing God in the hereafter.\(^{456}\) Samarqandī refers to “al-Ṣāni’ (the maker)” once as well but in reference to the challenge God puts to the non-Muslims to produce a book equal to the Qur’an.\(^{457}\) Muqāṭil and ‘Ayyāshī do not refer to it at all.

Al-Māturīdī is the only Sunni and Transoxianan exegete to discuss and explain the proof of cause or the cosmological argument in his exegesis. A proof influenced by Greek philosophy, the falāsifa (Muslim philosophers) and the Mu‘tazilites’ literature yet al-Māturīdī endorses it and advocates it in Ta‘wīlāt and in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. The identity of al-Māturīdī as an independent exegete and more importantly as the father of Sunni theological exegesis grows stronger.

2.6.4 The proof of ḥudūth (temporality and finitude of the world)

In his exegesis, al-Māturīdī introduces the proof of ḥudūth when he discusses the limitation of the human minds and perceptions in verse 54 chapter al-A‘rāf. He argues, “…the perceptions (of the creatures) are limited. Hence their inability to comprehend fully the aims behind matters. This is the direct result of the limitedness and finite nature of the world and all therein…”\(^{458}\) Al-Māturīdī, thus, postulates that the world is finite. In a similar tone, in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, al-Māturīdī establishes the finite of the world, “the world is known to consist of parts and pieces. It is established that most of these pieces are finite…”\(^{459}\)

---

\(^{455}\) It appears in verse 103 chapter al-An‘ām.

\(^{456}\) Ṭabarī, Jāmi‘ Al-Bayān Fī Ta‘wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 12, 18.

\(^{457}\) Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 1, 34.

\(^{458}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 379.

\(^{459}\) Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 12; ibid, 19.
Although in both titles al-Māturīdī’s conclusion is the same, the types of proof he forwards, in each one, to arrive at his conclusion, are different. In Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, al-Māturīdī supports the argument of ḥudūth with logical proofs. He states, “…the entire world is finite because a finite and infinite cannot both be parts of the same object…” In Taʿwīlāt, on the other hand, al-Māturīdī refers to the miracles God granted to his messengers, Moses in this instance, as one of the proofs of the finite of the world. He states. “God shows (the people of Israel) who disbelieved some of his great miracles … God mentioned these miracles of his divine messages and prophets as proofs of the ḥudūth of the world from nothing…” His commentary in Taʿwīlāt constitutes the first time, in the context of the study of the existence of God, al-Māturīdī departs from rational reasoning to revelation. The drive behind the citation is not clear and he does not elaborate. Al-Māturīdī attempts to claim the world is finite for the messengers informed us of this fact and proved their truthfulness through their multiple miracles but offers no more. Al-Māturīdī’s departure from ‘aql to naql, however, does not last long. Later in Taʿwīlāt, al-Māturīdī returns to empirical proofs and uses the notion of the quotidian termination of day and night, as proof of the ḥudūth of the world. He elucidates, “…in it (the continuous end of the day and night) is proof of the ḥudūth of the world… its end… indicates that from the outset it was unable to make itself and that it has an originator…” There are two underlying principles in al-Māturīdī’s statement. The first is that if substantial parts of the world, such as the day and the night, are finite then essentially the world is finite because the finite and infinite cannot coexist in one entity. The second is that if substantial parts of the world cannot stop their end therefore, someone causes their end and that is God. The second point al-Māturīdī implies is of less

---

460 Ibid, 12.
461 Al-Māturīdī, Taʿwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 140.
462 Ibid, 1, 299.
importance to the discussion of the proof of hudūth (temporality and finite of the world). It is more relevant to the proof of cause but worthy of mention nonetheless. Interestingly, al-Māturīdī implies these principles in his above commentary and does not state them plainly as he does in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. There is an element of vagueness in his exegetical writing when contrasted with that of Kitāb al-Tawḥīd.463

The vagueness in al-Māturīdī’s commentary is not limited to the above verse. It appears once more in al-Māturīdī’s commentary on verses 7 and 8 chapter al-Dukhān. Therein, al-Māturīdī speaks of the proof of hudūth yet again does not articulate it openly. He commences by explaining why the verses chose to establish first the lordship of God over the heavens and the earths before referring to God’s lordship over Pharaoh, the Egyptians and their ancestors.464 Al-Māturīdī justifies, “… he (Pharaoh) did not witness the beginning (of the heavens and the earths) and will not witness their end… (Moses) needed to refer Pharaoh to an event the latter has witnessed (his personal birth and the creation of his race)…”465 The above statement centralises around the hudūth proof. It is vague at first sight though as al-Māturīdī does not elaborate adequately on the connection between the order of the verses, in chapter al-Dukhān, and the hudūth proof. The connection is as follows. God placed verse 7 first because it presents a legitimate proof of the lordship of God of the heavens and the earth. However, it is a proof that Pharaoh could deny since he did not witness the beginning of their creation. Hence, God

463 Some scholars such as Ceric criticised the fluency of al-Māturīdī’s writing in Arabic and described his writing in Arabic as, “awkward, obscure and hard to follow.” Ceric attributes the vagueness to the fact that Arabic was al-Māturīdī’s second, or third, language. He states, “…which is most probably due to the fact that he thought in Turkish or Persian but wrote in Arabic…” The analysis of al-Māturīdī’s writing in Taʾwilāt demonstrates that he had a good command of the Arabic language. For instance, chapter five and six will reveal how al-Māturīdī uses pure use grammatical arguments to support his exegetical interpretation of some anthropomorphic expressions. It seems that his writing style of choice is the main contributive factor to the vague and obscurity in his works.Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abu Mansur Al-Māturīdī* 21-22.

464 The verses read, “The Lord of the heavens and the earth and that between them, if you would be certain. There is no deity except Him; He gives life and causes death. [He is] your Lord and the Lord of your first forefathers”

strengthens his argument with a complementary proof in verse 8. A proof Pharaoh cannot deny for he witnessed it, which is the beginning and end of his ancestors and by extension the human race. Once Pharaoh confesses that this substantial part of the terrestrial world is finite, which is an observable truth, then by necessity the entire world is finite because finite and infinite cannot exist in one entity. In Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, al-Māturīdī clearly details this principle but in Taʾwīlāt, he points to it meanderingly and expects the readers to deduce it on their own. Is the vagueness deliberate?

The above question opens the door for a number of suppositions. One of them is al-Māturīdī intended Kitāb al-Tawḥīd to be the main reference for mere dialectical arguments whilst he intended for Taʾwīlāt to be the reference for the Qur’anic evidence upon which he establishes his dialectical arguments. It is similarly possible that al-Māturīdī expects the reader to study both titles to construct a complete insight of his theological views and arguments, the rational and the revelational.

The hudūth proof, like previous proofs, is not exclusive to al-Māturīdī. Al-Kindī is the first Muslim scholar to refer to it. The latter inherited it from Aristotle who supported it with a mathematical proof.466 Al-Kindī, later Ash’arī theologians, such as Shahrastānī and Baghdādī, and even some late Māturīdī scholars, such as Ibn Al-Humām (d. 1457 CE), all used the mathematical proof of Aristotle when constructing the argument.467 Al-Māturīdī, conversely, does not. He does not allude to it, at all, in any of his titles. Al-Māturīdī’s abstinence from the employment of a mathematical proof represents the second instance, in which al-Māturīdī uses a

466 Ibn Rushd, Manāhibī Al-Adillah Fī ’Aqāʾid Al-Millah, 21.
proof al-Kindī stated but does not copy his style and evidence orthodoxly. It is reasonable to claim that al-Māturīdī, read, or at least, benefited from al-Kindī’s work but was more selective in what he utilises from it. Rudolph arrives to the same conclusion, in his analysis of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. He agrees that most likely al-Māturīdī statements have been influenced by al-Kindī and the scholars who benefited from his work such as al-Nazẓām but does not expand on the subject or analyses the proof in Ta’wilāt.\footnote{Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 240.} Al-Māturīdī may have borrowed some of the concepts from al-Kindī but seems to insist on constructing his own evidence and style. Rudolph testifies of this inference, “al-Māturīdī…shows his personal imprint. He does not suffice with sifting through the opinions of his predecessors but alters them in accordance with the context of his own theology.”\footnote{Ibid, 239.} The evidence and style of al-Māturīdī, in Ta’wilāt, are both rational and Qur’anic. They indicate his liberal tendency and his keenness on founding a new school, a new paradigm and a new methodology in the Sunni exegetical arena.

The proof of *hudūth* is not evident in the works of the other Sunni and regional exegetes. Surprisingly, Ṭabarī does not raise it at all, in reference to God’s existence, despite his engagement in theological discussions in reference to some of the attributes of God.\footnote{These discussions will be examined, explained and critiqued thoroughly in chapters five and six of the thesis.} The notion that the world is finite, or some parts of it are, appears few times in Ṭabarī’s work but never in a theological context. The other exegetes had no mention of it on any level. As the study progresses, al-Māturīdī continues to be the only Sunni and Transoxianan exegete to impar and discuss the proofs of the existence of God in his exegesis.

\footnote{Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 240.}
2.6.5 The proof of the existence of evil in the world

The proof of the existence of evil in the world stands as an exclusive proof to al-Māturīdī, which he uses to establish God’s existence. In verse 185 chapter al-‘Imrān, al-Māturīdī argues, “If the world was created by itself or was created according to its own wishes it would have chosen for itself the best of states and qualities...”471 In other words, al-Māturīdī is suggesting that the world would not have allowed evil to exist in it if it had a choice- an interesting observation on al-Māturīdī’s part. He continues, “However, wujūd shurūr (the presence of evil) and qabā’iḥ (ugliness) indicates a’la kawnihi bi ghayrihi (that it was created by a separate entity) ...”472 The argument al-Māturīdī forwards in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd is nearly identical, "if this world existed by itself then it would have chosen for itself ... the most perfect of qualities. This would negate the existence of evil or anything bad in the world. Since they do exist then God exists."473 Al-Māturīdī is the first theologian to use such a proof to verify God’s existence. Rudolph does not discuss the proof of evil in his analysis of the proofs of the existence of God in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. It is not clear whether he overlooked it or did not consider it a separate argument. Al-Māturīdī’s statements, in Ta’wilāt and in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, clearly indicates that he legitmised it as an indepent proof of the existence of God. Usually philosophers and theologians tend to use beauty and righteousness as vehicles to prove God’s existence, as it is the case with Plato and the proof of purpose. Al-Māturīdī, however, chooses a different path. He believes that evil, ugliness and incompleteness are undeniable parts of the world yet are abhorred and rejected by all. No consciousness freely chooses for itself such qualities. Therefore, someone chose it and placed it in the world- it is God.474

471 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 501.
472 Ibid, 2, 501.
473 Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 17.
474 Ibid, 110.
The proof of evil ascertains the independence, scholarship and brilliance of al-Māturīdī. It cements the point observed in the previous sections about al-Māturīdī’s interest in his own liberal approach in the study of Islamic theology and theological exegesis. It manifests his uniqueness and importance in the Sunni Islamic theological movement and the rational aptitude he possesses not to mention the astute critical analysis and intellectual depth he enjoys. In the sphere of the existence of God, al-Māturīdī appears as the father of theological exegesis in the Sunni world in the field of *ilāhiyyāt*.475

The question of whether the other exegetes commented on this proof is redundant since the proof itself was not in circulation in the theological narrative before al-Māturīdī. Nonetheless, the investigation of its presence in their exegetical work does not prove fruitful. None of the other exegetes raises it at all except in reference to the presence of evil in the world, which is unrelated to the current subject matter.

2.6.6 The proof of *‘ināyah* (care) and *taskhīr* (service)

The proof of *‘ināyah* (care) and *taskhīr* (service) can be classified per excellence as a Qur’anic proof. The reason for classifying it as such is its frequent appearance in the Qur’an, the extensive focus it enjoys in it and the copious examples the Qur’an provides of it, which are of various styles and expressions. Everything in the world indicates the care of God of the humans particularly, the Qur’an asserts. They can adapt to the various conditions, states and situations. Their adaptedness ability could not have happened at random. The more one investigates the

475 In addition, the level of consistency in the types of proofs and language that appear in Ta’wilāt and *kitāb al-tawḥīd* confirms further al-Māturīdī’s authorship of both titles.
realm of creation the clearer this fact becomes. For all creatures are at the service of the human race.

This Qur’anic proof had the share of the lion in Ta’wīlāt. Al-Māturīdī weaves this proof from copious Qur’anic verses that speak about the divine care of the human and the placement of all the creatures at his service. In verses 5-8 chapter al-Naḥl, al-Māturīdī states, “…He (God) stated that he created for us (the animals) to carry us from one country to another. It ensures our survival and meets our needs…”\(^{476}\) Likewise, in verse 37 chapter Yāsīn al-Māturīdī describes the alteration of the day and night as “…a sign of the ulūhiyyah (Godship) of God…he (God) knew what would benefit them (the creatures) and their needs…”\(^{477}\) In verse 12 chapter al-Naḥl, al-Māturīdī asserts that the benefits of these creatures to humans is beyond their will, choice or control. He states, “…God created these things and placed in them benefits to creation. Those benefits will apply to the creation whether they will it or not… whether they love it or not and whether they hate it or not…” In other words, the care and service of these creatures to the humans is beyond their will, the creatures and the humans alike – it is a divine command. Similar examples are cited in verse 70 chapter al-Isrā’, verse 20 chapter Luqmān and verse 27 chapter al-Sajdah.

Similarly, in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, the proof of ‘ināyah (care) and taskhīr (service) is hard to miss. Al-Māturīdī states, "Indeed God created the humans in the best form. He put at their service everything that exists on the face of the earth as well as the heavens."\(^{479}\) Every being has a specific purpose to fulfil. In the cycle of life, at the end, all benefits are channelled to support

\(^{476}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 8, 83.
\(^{477}\) Ibid, 12, 75.
\(^{478}\) The will of the other creatures and the will of the humans.
\(^{479}\) Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 178.
human life and this could not have happened be at random or coincidentally.\textsuperscript{480} The frequency of the proof in Ta’wīlāt, however, exceeds its presence in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd.

Qāsim\textsuperscript{481} commends al-Māturīdī for being the first Sunni scholar to apply this proof to the argument of the existence of God. He argues, “We would not be fair to Māturīdī if we do not point to his use of this proof which is the strongest of proofs for it reconciled between ‘aql and naql.”\textsuperscript{482} Thus, according to Qāsim, al-Māturīdī is the first traditional Sunni scholar to reconcile between rational argumentation and a sacred revealed source, in this area. Later philosophers and Muslim theologians wrote about this proof – chief amongst them is Ibn Rushd. He classifies it with the proof of invention as the best of proofs to establish God’s existence. Ibn Rushd criticises other dialectical scholars for engaging and expanding in their literature on proofs that are doubtful in nature and do not lead the ordinary person to proper and firm belief.\textsuperscript{483} The ordinary person, thus, remains in the conscious of al-Māturīdī during his writing in Ta’wīlāt it has been recurrently evident.\textsuperscript{484}

Muqātil in his commentary on verse 13 chapter al-Nāḥl points very briefly that these creatures are a sign of the oneness of God because of their magnificent creation. He does not explain, though, how or why they point to monotheism and does not connect it to the God’s existence. Muqātil also fails to comment on the notion of care and service to humans and its relation to God.\textsuperscript{485} Conversely, Ṭabarī highlights how these verses are “from the bounties of God

\textsuperscript{480} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{481} In his introduction of Ibn Rushd’s book Manāḥij al-Adillah.
\textsuperscript{482} Ibn Rushd, Manāḥij Al-Adillah Fī ‘Aqā’id Al-Millah, 21.
\textsuperscript{483} Ibid, 134.
\textsuperscript{484} The importance of the proof al-Māturīdī explores is further signified today in light of the advancement of sciences across all disciplines, which points to the level of care and accuracy one observes in all the aspects of the existing world.
\textsuperscript{485} Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 2, 461.
upon humans…for their livelihood.” Nonetheless, he does not expand the discussion to prove God’s existence through them. Similarly, Samarqandī is briefer than Ṭabarī in commenting on the verses and does not point to the existence of God. The same proves to be true in the context of other verses that discuss the same theme such as verses 35-38 chapter Yāsīn. Al-Māturīdī is not the only Sunni theologian to reconcile between this proof and rational argumentation, as Qāsim indicated earlier, but he is also the first Sunni exegete to explain this proof and infer it from the Qur’an in his exegesis.

2.6.7 The proof of order and *taswiyah* (perfection in the world)

Al-Māturīdī refers to this proof with numerous titles in his works. He calls it the proof of “ittisāq”, the proof of “itqān”, and the proof of *taswiyah* (perfection). The last two titles al-Māturīdī uses frequently in Ta’wilāt. The outward and inwards aspects of the universe indicate a faultless construction, marvellous perfection and unparalleled accuracy. The proof of *taswiyah* (perfection) is frequently cited in the Qur’an and al-Māturīdī treats it as an important theological proof. Al-Māturīdī argues that perfection is clear evidence of the presence of God, “…the perfection in creation is an indication of the presence of God…” Al-Māturīdī complements this proof by highlighting an observational truth. He states, “…the action of the creation is sometimes perfect, as they intend, and sometimes otherwise…” Thus, he stresses the presence

---

486 Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 17, 178.
487 Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 2, 267.
489 Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 112.
490 Ibid, 142.
491 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 17, 501.
492 Ibid.
of consistent and systematic perfection in creatures, which is a non-existent ability in any being in the entire world and has not been rightly claimed by anyone, as an indication of the thumbprint of an external force. This external force brought the universe into existence – it is God.

Al-Māturīdī points to the *taswiyah* proof in a number of verses of the Qur’an. In verse 3 chapter al-Mulk,493 he refers to it by negating the presence of flaws and imperfections in the world, “The absence of flaws and incongruity…is an affirmation of God’s existence.”494 Similarly, in verse 2 chapter al-Furqān he confirms, “And he created everything and determined its measure as a sign of his oneness and Godship…”495 Then in verse 49 chapter al-Qamar he emphasizes that order and *taswiyah* are proofs that God is the creator, “Everything We created is in *qadar* (precisely measured)…to prove he is the creator.”496 Al-Māturīdī uses this proof to refute the proponents of randomness and the opinion that the universe is the product of an unconscious blind power, as the materialists postulate. He cites, in addition to the above, verses from chapter al-Raḥmān497 and chapter Yāsīn.498

In a similar vein, al-Māturīdī speaks about the proof of order and *taswiyah* in many places in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. He refers to it with multiple terms, highlighted earlier, such as "*ittisāq* (coordination)"499, "*itqān* (perfection)"500 and “*al sunan al-wāḥidah* (the universal laws).”501 As far as al-Māturīdī is concerned, this proof is palpable in the universe. He provides several

493 The verse reads, “Who created the seven heavens one upon another. You will see no incongruity in the Merciful One's creation. Turn your vision again, can you see any flaw?”
495 Ibid, 10, 219.
496 Ibid, 14, 248.
497 Verse 5.
498 Verses 38-40.
500 Ibid, 142.
examples of it such as the accuracy of the calculation of time based on the alteration of the day and the night during the various seasons.\textsuperscript{502}

Al-Māturīdī contends some materialists argued against the \textit{taswiyah} proof by claiming the wisdom and purpose behind the creation of many creatures is not known to us. He responds by saying that human intellect is, at many times, incapable of understanding other humans’ wisdom behind some of their actions. How could it then be able to comprehend the divine wisdom behind all existing creatures?\textsuperscript{503}

The recurring of verses that address the manifestation of perfection in the creation of God prompted al-Māturīdī to value it and cultivate a proof out of it. A very visible trend in al-Māturīdī’s writings is his insistence on the application of verses and examples obtained from the Qur’an over any other external sources, unless unavoidable, in explaining his points. The Qur’anic focus is a strong characteristic in the rational proofs al-Māturīdī forwards, in \textit{Ta’wīlāt}. This approach enables al-Māturīdī to stretch his rational thought as far as he can while it grounds him within the boundary of the Qur’an. He extracts from every verse the relevant points that accredit his proof, as he does with chapter al-Mulk for instance. He travels through the Qur’an developing his views and exploring the Qur’anic narrative in discovering God. Additionally, al-Māturīdī develops logical maxims that solidify his argument, as he does when he postulates, “the perfection in creation is an indication the existence of God.”\textsuperscript{504} Al-Māturīdī then supports them with logical proofs from the Qur’an such as the absence of perfection in the actions of the creatures. All these characteristics are featured in his commentary and discussion of the \textit{taswiyah} proof.

\textsuperscript{502} Ibid, 22.  
\textsuperscript{503} Ibid, 113.  
\textsuperscript{504} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 17, 501.
Ṭabarī and Samarqandī, in their commentaries on verse 49 chapter al-Qamar indeed agree with the interpretation al-Māturīdī selects.\textsuperscript{505} They do so after listing the conventional opinions that interpret \textit{qadar} as divine decree and punishment of Arab polytheists. Nevertheless, they fail to deduce any theological points from the verse let alone an argument to establish God’s existence.\textsuperscript{506} Similarly, Muqātil and ‘Ayyāshī refer only to the traditional opinions mentioned above without any mention of the interpretation al-Māturīdī promotes or any theological inference.\textsuperscript{507} No theological inference, likewise, is found in Ṭabarī, Samarqandī’s, ‘Ayyāshī’s or Muqātil’s commentaries on verse 2 chapter al-Furqān.\textsuperscript{508} None of the exegetes attempts to develop a theological argument to prove God’s existence using the \textit{taswiyah} proof.\textsuperscript{509} Al-Māturīdī is the only Sunni exegete to introduce this proof in Sunni theological exegesis and develop it into a rational argument.

2.6.8 The proof of invention in the creation

The proof of invention or as al-Māturīdī titles it, “\textit{burhān al-istidlāl bil Khalq} (the proof of learning about God’s existence through creation)”\textsuperscript{510} is quintessentially a Qur’anic proof. The Qur’an is filled with verses that demand one to contemplate over the magnificent creations of God and how they were fashioned. Many verses use recurring phrases urging the humans to contemplate and use their intellect in studying the world, "verily indeed there are verses for those who have intellect", "verily indeed there are verses for those who think", and “do you not possess

\textsuperscript{505} Al-Māturīdī interprets the utterance \textit{qadar} in al-Qamar verse as all creatures are created precisely measured, as indicated earlier in the section.

\textsuperscript{506} Ṭabarī, \textit{Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an}, 22, 605; Samarqandī, \textit{Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm}, 3, 377.

\textsuperscript{507} Ibn Sulaymān \textit{Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān}, 4, 184.


\textsuperscript{510} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd}, 21.
intellect?” The last phrase was repeated more than thirteen times in the Qur’an and the reference to ‘aql appears more than fifty times. Al-Māturīdī observes the call of the phrases and capitalises on this proof in his quest to attest God’s existence. In verse 53 chapter Fuṣṣilat, al-Māturīdī commences his argument. He lists the commonly transmitted interpretations of the verse particularly the expression “āyātinā”. The transmitted reports interpret āyātinā as either, the promised punishment of the enemies of Islam, the promised victories of Prophet Muḥammad, or the continuous appearance of the sun, moon and stars in the heavens. Thereupon, al-Māturīdī delivers his own interpretation of the phrase. He states, “The signs…of God’s divinity and existence…” Al-Māturīdī shifts the context of the verse far from all conventional interpretation towards God’s existence. He ensues his interpretation with listing a number of examples that testify to his proof. One of them is “…the rise of the heavens despite its size, thickness and density without a visible support, a holding chain or a pillar from below.” Ṭabarī lists the same transmitted reports al-Māturīdī included in Ta’wīlāt. Conversely however, Ṭabarī favours the first, traditional interpretation, he lists- the promised punishment of the enemies of Islam. Ṭabarī argues that the third opinion, the appearance of the sun, moon and stars, is farfetched. He does not attempt to signal that there is any implication in the verse to God’s existence. The interpretation Ṭabarī favours and his argument, in support of his choice, exhibits the intellectual gap between al-Māturīdī and Ṭabarī. Al-Māturīdī understands the phrase

---

511 The verse reads, “Soon shall We show them Our Signs on the horizons and in their own beings until it becomes clear to them that it is the Truth.”
512 The interpretation of āyātinā as promised punishment to the enemies of Islam or promised victories to Prophet Muhammad applies in the future as the chapter is revealed in the Makkī period. They are promises from Allah that the prophet will triumph against his enemies in the future.
513 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 13, 156; Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 21, 492.
514 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 13, 157.
515 Ibid, 9, 99.
516 Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 21, 493.
“Soon shall We show them …” on the intellectual and positive level\(^{517}\) while Ṭabarī understands it on the threatening level, “God promised his prophet that he will show these polytheists signs in the future and it is impossible that he threatened to show them what they already saw (the sun and the moon and the stars)…”\(^{518}\), Ṭabarī argues.

Samarqandī walks in the footsteps of Ṭabarī, adding the future miracles of the prophet, such as the miracle of the split of the moon, as another possible interpretation. Muqātil and ‘Ayyāshī are briefer than both and interpret ayātinā to be the future punishment.\(^{519}\)

In verse 73 chapter al-Hajj al-Māturīdī deduces a suitable maxim, “…God has proven his divinity and Godship through the creatures he created…”\(^{520}\) None of the exegetes who commented on the verse addressed it as a theological proof or inferred any principle from it.\(^{521}\) Al-Māturīdī further explains his proof of God’s invention in verse 26 al-Baqarah, “…if all creatures cooperated with one another to create what is similar, (in its physical properties), to mosquitoes and flies, and collaborated to compile the necessary limbs, (of the insect), such as the mouth, the nose… they would not have been able to do so…”\(^{522}\) Al-Māturīdī addresses the invention in creation in his tawḥīd epistle as well. He elaborates, “… the seasons of winter and summer…the proportions of the heavens and the earth, the orbits of the sun, the moon and the stars, the provisions and sustenance of creatures... All this runs according to one maslak (system or archetype) …”\(^{523}\)

\(^{517}\) Al-Māturīdī interprets the phrase as a promise from God that as the humans’ understanding of the universe and science advances and improves, they will see more clearly, intellectually, the miracles and the proofs of God’s existence.

\(^{518}\) Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 21, 493.

\(^{519}\) Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 3, 748; Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 3, 233.

\(^{520}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 9, 410

\(^{521}\) Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 18, 685; Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 2, 470; Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 3, 139.

\(^{522}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 406.

\(^{523}\) Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 21.
Later theologians and thinkers, subject to their cultures and environments, agreed with al-Māturīdī on the legitimacy of the proof of invention. Ibn Rushd, for instances, raises it and considers it a legitimate and well-grounded proof. He reprimands the kalām scholars for marginalising it in favour of the proof of jawāhir and aʿrāḍ (the essential and accidental properties).\footnote{Ibn Rushd, \textit{Manāhij Al-Adillah Fī `Aqā'īd Al-Millah}, 194; Muhammad ‘Atif Iraqi, \textit{Al-Nazʿa Al-`Aqliyyah Fi Falsafat Ibn Rushd} (Cairo: Dar Al Ma'arif, 1993), 230.} Before departing from this point, it is important to remark that the proof of jawāhir and aʿrāḍ was not used at all in Taʿwīlāt. In \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd}, however, it is boldly present.\footnote{Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd}, 141-42.} The likely cause for its absence from Taʿwīlāt is its dialectical anatomy.

Al-Māturīdī, thus, responds to the call of the Qurʾan and derives a proof that requires reason and contemplation. He is the only Sunni and Transoxianan exegete to infer the invention proof from the Qurʾan, enriching Sunni theological exegesis. It is yet another proof to which al-Māturīdī can claim an academic patent. In light of modern science, the proof al-Māturīdī highlights gains significance. All the empirical studies undertaken points to the complexities of all creations from the atom to the neuron star. He represents the early seed for the argument of intelligent design.\footnote{E.V. Rope Kojonen, "Intelligent Design: A Theological and Philosophical Analysis" (University of Helsinki, 2014), 15.}

### 2.7 The proofs exclusive to \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd}

The comparison of the proofs al-Māturīdī developed, for the existence of God, in Taʿwīlāt with his writing in \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd} reveals the presence of proofs in the latter al-Māturīdī does not furnish in Taʿwīlāt. They are, 1- the proof of ḥarakah (movement), 2- the proof of jawāhir and...
aʿrāḍ (the essential and accidental properties) and 3- the proof of the animate and inanimate beings. These proofs are discussed and analysed below to provide a comprehensive understanding of the theological views of al-Māturīdī vis a vis the existence of God but more importantly to learn of the reasons that may have stopped al-Māturīdī from listing them in Taʾwīlāt.

Al-Māturīdī raises the proof of ḥarakah (movement) during his discussion of the temporality of all creatures and objects, "... Everybody is either in a state of movement or stillness. It cannot be a place for both at the same time. Thus, a body is sometimes moving and sometimes still and anybody that possesses such a nature is finite."\(^{527}\) Al-Māturīdī’s statement establishes that every creature in nature is either moving or stationary. Since every creature alternate between both, states, then it is a given that this alteration is caused by a force acting on it. According to al-Māturīdī, anything subject to such laws is finite.

The proof of movement was first adduced by Aristotle.\(^{528}\) Al-Farābī endorsed Aristotle’s proof fully and stressed that a moving force causes every movement and nothing moves without a mover. The proof must eventually lead to the unmoved mover otherwise it will cause an *ad infinitum*.\(^{529}\) Al-Farābī, however, developed the argument further to refer to the oneness of God in Islam and not just the originator.\(^{530}\) It seems that al-Māturīdī adopts the opinion of al-Farābī in his *Kitāb* but does not in Taʾwīlāt. The decision of al-Māturīdī not to discuss such a widely accepted proof in Taʾwīlāt proposes a number of theories especially when this proof has been promoted by many Muslim theologians such as al-Naẓẓām,\(^{531}\) from the Muʿtazilites, al-

---

\(^{527}\) Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd*, 12.  
\(^{530}\) Ibid, 262.  
Ash’arī and Shahrastānī as well as Ibn al-Humām among many others. The omission does not appear accidental, rather, it is likely purposive. It could be that al-Māturīdī did not find a Qur’anic evidence to back this proof and as a result omitted it.

Equally, al-Māturīdī may have considered it inappropriate to Ta’wīlāt due to its exegetical nature that revolves solely around the Qur’an. He may have found that the in-depth discussion of such proofs will push the work towards a philosophical approach. Alike, al-Māturīdī may have abandoned this proof in Ta’wīlāt purely out of consideration of the general readership since this type proof requires more of an expert mind, well versed with logic and the technical jargon of kalām. One must not approbate one possibility over the other for the treatment of al-Māturīdī of the existence of God topic in Ta’wīlāt begs the possibility of all these propositions being correct. Furthermore, these reasons could equally apply to the next two proofs.

The proof of jawāhir (essences or substances) and a’rāḍ (accidents) is another proof al-Māturīdī lists exclusively in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. According to al-Māturīdī, the world consists of jawāhir and a’rāḍ. The jawāhir consist of indivisible particles. All these particles are finite because they change regularly depending on the a’rāḍ, accidental properties, that take place in them. If the jawāhir and a’rāḍ are finite then the world is also finite. Al-Māturīdī bases this view on a principle he posits, “What is always associated with a finite being is inevitably finite itself.” Ibrahim al-Sayyār (d. 845 CE), a prominent Mu’tazilite scholar, promoted this proof to

---

533 Baghdādī, Uṣūl Al-Dīn, 40.
536 Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 141-42.
537 Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 10, 121.
538 Ibid.
prove the finite nature of the world but did not raise the indivisible aspect of particles. It is possible al-Māturīdī borrowed this principle from the Mu‘tazilites, given his incessant contact with them. However, this likelihood is farfetched given that the proof of jawāhir and a‘rāḍ and the concept of standard atomism was widespread amongst Muslim theologians and philosophers and continued to be a well-regarded theological proof by many kalām scholars after al-Māturīdī. Ash‘arī, who appeared on the scene few decades after, uses the notion of jawāhir and a‘rāḍ, as Shahrastānī explains, and so does Baghdādī, Ghazālī and al-Ṣābūnī, a Māturīdī follower.

Al-Māturīdī expresses this opinion in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd but not in Ta‘wilāt. He does quote the terms jawāhir and a‘rāḍ as technical terms, in Ta‘wilāt, to describe the notion of bodies, essences and accidents in the terrestrial realm tens of times. However, al-Māturīdī never raises them as a proof of God’s existence. The absence of this proof from Ta‘wilāt despite the use of its key technical terms, jawāhir and a‘rāḍ, strengthens the first two proposed explanations suggested earlier. Al-Māturīdī does not find a Qur’anic backing for the jawāhir and a‘rāḍ

540 He said that if jawāhir are eternal then they exist together, separately or they exist together partially or they exist separate partially. In all scenarios, they either exist together, fully or partially, then one must ask them who joined them together or they are separate from one another, fully or partially and then the same questions arises of ask who separated them. The answer in all cases is God unified them and separated them. For further information see, Shahrastānī, Kitāb Nihāyat Al-Iqdām Fī ‘Ilm Al-Kalām, 11.
541 Baghdādī, Uṣūl Al-Dīn, 35.
543 The followers of al-Māturīdī copied the proof from him as is without any further modifications. Hence, it remained nearly in the exact form even when used two centuries later. Nūr al-Dīn Al-Ṣābūnī states. “The world is made of two fundamental parts, the essences and the accidents. The essences exist independently and do not need to be hosted by another. Whilst the accidents cannot exist independently and need to latch or associate to a substance always” for further information see: A. Ṣābūnī, Kitāb Al-Bidāyah Min Al-Kifāyah Fī Al-Hidāyah Fī Uṣūl Al-Dīn (Alexandria: Dar al-Ma‘arif, 1969), 19-20.
544 Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 141-42; Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 8, 5.
545 Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 613; ibid, 2, 348.
546 Ibid, 1, 389; ibid, 7, 101.
argument and as a result does not list it as a proof. Equally, he may have disapproved of its discussion in an exegetical work given its philosophical nature.

The above characteristics are apparent in the third, and last proof, al-Māturīdī proposes in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, the proof of the animate and inanimate beings. Al-Māturīdī categorises the world into living creatures and dead ones. He states, “None from the livings can rightly claim they are eternal for if they do so then all people will know they are undeniably lying” particularly those who witnessed their birth or beginning. Thus, all animate beings are finite and by extension, the inanimate beings are finite, since they are under the control, power and use of the former. Al-Māturīdī proposes two logical arguments. First, none of the animate beings claimed eternity, anything that does not claim eternity is finite, all animate beings are thus finite. The second argument depends on the conclusion of the first. Since all animate beings are finite and all inanimate beings are controlled by all animate beings. It follows then that all inanimate beings are finite.

Despite the wordiness, and the confusion, of this argument, al-Māturīdī is attempting to prove the universe is finite by proving that its inhabitants and the objects therein are finite. Al-Māturīdī seems to feel compelled to provide various rational proofs to substantiate the temporality of the world in the absence of a concrete and detailed scientific knowledge. He strengthens this proof by arguing that all animate beings are incapable of being self-sufficient because they have a need for inanimate objects, such as food for instance, to survive.

This proof seems to be unique to al-Māturīdī as the researcher has not been able to cite it elsewhere. In Ta’wīlāt, al-Māturīdī discusses the concept of death in verse 185 chapter al-‘Imrān

547 Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, 11.
548 Ibid.
549 Ibid.
and clarifies the relationship between the living and the dead. He illuminates, “...all living beings cannot control (death) and indeed this is the case of the dead for they are under the supervision and the control of the livings.” However, he does not extend the discussion to be a proof for God’s existence. The lack of motivation behind extending the argument could be, as suggested earlier, the lack of evidence that supports it in the Qur’an.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter discusses al-Māturīdī's perspective on the existence and nature of the Divine through his exegetical work. It assesses his views and contributions on the subject in light of the relevant theological and exegetical literature. Al-Māturīdī evidences his uniqueness in the field of theological exegesis on two levels, the theological and the exegetical. On the theological level, al-Māturīdī is the first Sunni scholar to lead the debate about the existence of God in the mainstream traditional Sunni academia via his Ta’wīlāt. He constructs a new and clear paradigm for this purpose based on rational argumentation, which is unprecedented in the mainstream Sunni theological narrative. In his paradigm, al-Māturīdī endorses, albeit partially and conditionally, the views of the traditional school, the rational school, particularly, the Muʿtazilites, and Muslim and non-Muslim philosophers. Al-Māturīdī is analytical and critical of the views of all camps. Through critical analysis, he articulates his independent views and arguments for the existence of God. He legitimises the use of rational argument in proving God’s existence and considers it the strongest if not the only accepted and scholarly approach. Al-Māturīdī proves that rational argumentation appeases God as God advocates for it in the Qur’an.

550 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 501.
Furthermore, according to al-Māturīdī, God decrees for all his prophets and messengers to experience it before receiving revelation and being granted the status of ultimate conviction. At the same time, al-Māturīdī asserts that receiving scriptural guidance is paramount. In doing so, he acknowledges some of the contentions of the traditional school. Al-Māturīdī argues that a person is only punishable for disbelief after denying the scriptural messages despite their ability to discover God through their own reason. al-Māturīdī’s position on this matter has been overlooked by Nasafi, who does not elaborate on the notion of ‘udhr (excuse), which al-Māturīdī explains in Ta’wīlāt. Nasafi’s omission prompts an inquiry on how well the followers of al-Māturīdī have investigated Ta’wīlāt from a theological perspective.

In addition, al-Māturīdī delivers many arguments and proofs that establish the existence of God. On one hand, some of al-Māturīdī’s arguments were influenced, if not borrowed, from the Mu’tazilites and philosophers before him. Al-Māturīdī, nonetheless, constructs them in his own style and evidence and does not endorse them wholly. On the other hand, al-Māturīdī presents new rational arguments that were his brainchild pressing his own trademark such as the proof of the existence of evil, the proof of change and the proof of ‘ināyah (care) and taskhīr (service). He devises his new arguments through his personal contemplation and study of the Qur’an and the universe and all therein.

On the exegetical level, al-Māturīdī formulates a Qur’anic based rational argumentation to prove God’s existence. He connects Qur’anic exegesis to dialectical theology, in this aspect of theology, and proves that rational reasoning is revelational in essence. He provides Qur’anic evidence for all the proofs he endorses be them from the rational or traditional school. He does the same for all the proofs he originates. Al-Māturīdī extracts theological arguments from verses most of the preceding, contemporary and regional, exegetes overlooked. He discusses topics
unexplored by any other Sunni exegete before him or during his era and region. Al-Māturīdī proves the inseparability of rational thought from scripture in the Qur’an, as far as proving God’s existence is concerned. At the same time, he does not attempt to force rational proofs on the verses. The above observation is clearly seen in his omissions of particular rational proofs from Ta’wīlāt. Namely, the proof of harakah (movement), the proof of jawāhir and a’rāḍ (the essential and accidental properties) and the proof of the animate and inanimate beings. Al-Māturīdī’s aim is not to bend the interpretation of the verses to suit the well circulated rational theological proofs rather it is to discover the rational proofs the verses willingly articulate or implicate. Hence, the above prevalent philosophical proofs that kalām scholars discuss in their writings and al-Māturīdī advocates in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd are completely eliminated from Ta’wīlāt.

In the next chapter, the discussion will progress to the most orbital and distinctive notion in Islamic theology – tawḥīd (Islamic monotheism) and all topics related to it. As in this chapter, the aim is to discover the contributions, if any, of al-Māturīdī, to analyse them and to compare and contrast his exegetical commentary with the exegetical work of other prominent exegetes, as well as his Kitāb, and examine the consistency of al-Māturīdī in his exegetical analysis.
CHAPTER 3: THE TAWḤĪD OF GOD

3.1 Introduction

The investigation of al-Māturīdī’s commentary in Ta’wīlāt vis a vis the existence of God in the previous chapter, established his pivotal contributions to the development of Sunni theological exegesis, on the content and methodological level, and afforded a better insight into his theological views. The second fundamental theological topic to īlāhiyyāt, from an Islamic perspective, is tawḥīd. Rudolph describes tawḥīd as “the very core of the Islamic faith.” Even a perfunctory appraisal of the theological verses in the Qur’an manifests a copious of verses advocating for one and unique God.

This chapter, thus, assesses the commentary of al-Māturīdī on such verses to extract his theology on the conception of tawḥīd in Ta’wīlāt. It undertakes a systematic and exhaustive analysis of al-Māturīdī’s positions on tawḥīd to highlight his contributions to Sunni theological exegesis. It commences with al-Māturīdī’s stance on the necessity of proofs to legitimate the doctrine of tawḥīd, his categorisation of the apposite proofs and his understanding of their nature.

The theological commentary of al-Māturīdī on tawḥīd in Ta’wīlāt is contrasted with his discussion of the topic in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, with the aim of shedding the light on the nuances and similarities between both works and identifying al-Māturīdī’s uniqueness in Ta’wīlāt. The same is undertaken on the exegetical level, with a thorough and critical examination and comparison of the exegeses of the most prominent Sunni exegetes of al-Māturīdī’s time and region, ‘Ayyāshī, Ṭabarī and Samarqandī. It aims to discover his contributions to Sunni theological exegesis and al-Māturīdī’s station amongst his peers.

551 Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 269.
3.2 The role of proofs in the establishment of the doctrine of *tawḥīd* in

**Ta’wilāt**

In al-Māturīdī’s view, the establishment of proofs that attest for the legitimacy of the doctrine of *tawḥīd* is an obligation and not just an academic curiosity. The debate between Prophet Ibrahim and king Nimrud, related in chapter al-Baqarah, plays a central role in determining al-Māturīdī’s perspective on the propagation of *tawḥīd*.552 Al-Māturīdī infers from the very verse that it is the duty of every *mu’min* (Muslim believer) to call all non-Muslims to the *waḥdāniyyah* (oneness) of God with proofs.

Equally, al-Māturīdī stresses that it is important for all Muslims to study *tawḥīd* and its proofs before propagating it for Ibrahim did so with king Nimrud.553 Al-Māturīdī states, “*umrnā bi du’ā’ al-kafarāh* (we have all being commanded (by God) to invite all disbelievers to the *waḥdāniyyah* of God).”554 This is an indirect invitation for Muslims to study *tawḥīd* and not simply inherit it. Otherwise, they will not be able to propagate it. Sequentially, al-Māturīdī deliberates that *tawḥīd* must be proven to people before they can be expected to accept it. He states, “If we call them (non-Muslims) to it (*tawḥīd*) they will demand proofs to attest to (our truthfulness) and to clarify (our position).”555 The onus of providing a proof, in al-Māturīdī’s opinion, is part of the religious duty of *al-anbiyā’ bi ajma’ihim* (all the messengers and prophets of God) to substantiate the *tawḥīd* message.556

---

552 Verse 258 of Chapter Al-Baqarah.
554 Ibid.
555 Ibid.
556 Ibid.
Al-Māturīdī stipulates numerous important theological points from al-Baqarah verse. Belief, to him, must be constructed on knowledge and corroborated with proof. It should be learnt, therefore, and cannot simply be inherited or imitated blindly without conviction. This outlook applies to Muslims and non-Muslims alike and in al-Māturīdī’s view, the journey of belief is similar for all people regardless of their faith.\(^{557}\) Secondly, Muslims are not permitted, or able, to propagate \textit{tawḥīd}, to others, if they have not learnt it properly with proofs and are convinced by it.

Another important theological point al-Māturīdī deduces is that the proofs of \textit{tawḥīd} are part of the duties of the prophets and messengers. This deduction stipulates that proofs of \textit{tawḥīd} should be available in divine scripture. Significantly, this observation implies al-Māturīdī believes that the Qur’an contains all requisite proofs for an individual to embrace \textit{tawḥīd} and correspondingly Muslims should utilise the Qur’an in their theological discourse. Al-Māturīdī’s deduction, by extension, highlights the legitimacy and importance of theological exegesis as a genre and justifies his motive in discussing \textit{tawḥīd} in Ta’wīlāt – to unearth the Qur’anic proofs to ascertain the dogma of \textit{tawḥīd}.

The deductions of al-Māturīdī seem peculiar when juxtaposed with the writings of the Sunni exegetes of his epoch and region. Ṭabarī and Muqātil do not comment at all on the necessity of proofs for belief in \textit{tawḥīd} to say the least. They do not even see a relevance between the verse and \textit{tawḥīd}. They focus on the narrative exegetical reports transmitted from earlier exegeses, which centred on the details of the debate, between Prophet Ibrahim and King Nimrud. Ṭabarī and Muqātil do not infer any lessons from the verse let alone deduce theological

\(^{557}\) The acquisition process of learning and embracing the doctrine of \textit{tawḥīd} should not differ from one individual to the other.
orientated principles. They maintain this trend in their commentaries on all the creedal debates the Qur’ān reports.

Samarqandī, walks in the footsteps of Ṭabarī and Muqātil, though to a lesser extent. He records the same historical information they provided. However, exclusively, Samarqandī defends the debate technique Ibrahim applied when he manoeuvred around the argument of Nimrud that he can give life and death and puts forth a totally new point, “bring the Sun from west if you can”. Samarqandī asserts vehemently the acceptability of such a practise in debate but displays no interest at all in inferring theological principles from the verse or mentioning the duty of proving *tawḥīd* before embracing it. This is not limited to Samarqandī’s commentary on this verse but rather in all instances of Qur’ānic debates. Similarly, ʿAyyāshī does not deduce any general, or specific, theological benefits from the Qur’ānic debates relating to *tawḥīd*. Remarkably, ʿAyyāshī transmits the same narrative exegetical reports the Sunni exegetes transmitted albeit from Shi’a sources and chains of narrations. Al-Ḥārīdī, thus, is the first Sunni and Transoxianan exegete to argue for the obligation of proofs for the propagation of *tawḥīd*.

Al-Ḥārīdī corroborates his untraditional views further in other instances in Taʾwīlāt. He refers to the encounter that took place between Prophet Muḥammad and the Najran Christians, from Yemen, who visited him in Madinah, an event Sīrah literature reports and confirms. After courteously hosting their bishop, Abū al-Ḥārīth, and their tribal leader al-ʿĀqib, Prophet Muḥammad received revelation to appeal to the Christian delegate to not associate any creature as deity with God, including ʿĪsā (Jesus), and a friendly debate ensued. When the Christian delegation insisted on the divinity of ʿĪsā and rejected the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, as understood by

---

Muslims, the Qur’an commanded Prophet Muḥammad, to challenge them to invoke God, sincerely, to curse whoever knows the truth yet denies it. Al-Māturīdī argues that this incident evinces tawfīr al-ḥujjah (the necessity of supplying proofs) for tawḥīd when addressing non-Muslims. For the open challenge with the Najran Christians only took place after sufficient proofs have been forwarded and explained to them, the various viewpoints were mutually presented and debated, and all misconceptions have been clarified.

No other, Sunni or regional, exegete infers or discusses the importance of the proofs for the doctrine of tawḥīd in their commentary on these verses. Ṭabarī, Samarqandī and Muqātil concentrate on detailing the narrative reports pertinent to the event. They do not speak of any theological lessons. ‘Ayyāshī, the prominent Shi’a exegete from Samarqand, uses the verses to emphasise the status of the progeny of Fatima and Ali and their closeness to Prophet Muḥammad and their right to leadership but does not relate the verses to tawḥīd or the compulsion of its proofs.

In verse 61 al-‘Imrān, al-Māturīdī forwards yet a new proof to support his understanding – the political decisions of Prophet Muḥammad. Al-Māturīdī cites the timing of the war and peace decisions in the life of Prophet Muḥammad and the Muslims and then argues that the

559 Verses 50 to 61 from chapter Al-‘Imrān.
561 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilât Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 318.
562 A practise consistent with what they did in their commentaries on the debate between Ibrahim and king Nimrud.
563 ‘Ayyāshī uses the verse to legitimise the right of the progeny of Fatima and Ali to political leadership because of the mubahahah event that took place when the verse was revealed. When Prophet Muḥammad was commanded by God to challenge the Najran delegation he brought out his daughter Fatima, his two grand children, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn and his son in law Ali to stand next to the Prophet when he invokes God to curse whoever is hiding the truth. The event signifies the closeness of Fatima, Ali, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn and his son in law Ali to stand next to the Prophet when he invokes God to curse whoever is hiding the truth. For further information see: Mohammadjavad Najafi and Seyyed Mohammadtaqi i Musavi Keramati, "Contemporary Commentators’ Views on the Verse of Mubahala," Sientific Journal Commentary Studies 6, no. 21 (2015); Muhammad Reza’i and Mahdi Bozorgi, "A Study of the Verse of Mubahalah,” Journal of Shi’a Islamic Studies 2 (2009).
564 Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’ān, 6, 473; Ibn Sulaymān Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 1, 237; Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 1, 219; ‘Ayyāshī, Tafsīr Al-‘Ayyāshī, 1, 237.
decision of war, against the chiefs of Makkah, only took place after proofs were well articulated, thoroughly discussed and full aggression and systematic persecution were practised against the Muslims on the hands of the chiefs of Makkah for years.\textsuperscript{565} Not to mention the exile of the Prophet and the Muslims and the coercion of Muslims to abandon their faith or face execution.\textsuperscript{566} All these historical events, the commands of God in the Qur’an, and the decisions of Prophet Muḥammad as well as the theological debates, reported in the Qur’an, betoken the fundamentalism of proofs in the establishment of \textit{tawḥīd}, in al-Māṭurīdī’s view.

Remarkably, a view \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd}, the \textit{summa theologica} of al-Māṭurīdī, does not raise despite discussing thoroughly the proofs and the miracles of the prophets and messengers in an independent section.\textsuperscript{567} Consequently, it is only plausible that al-Māṭurīdī inferred this view through his study and analysis of the Qur’an. This opens the possibility of Ta’wīlāt being authored after \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd} otherwise al-Māṭurīdī would have noted this significant finding in his theology epistle. This point will be investigated further in the course of this study.

Therefore, al-Māṭurīdī is the first Sunni exegete to introduce this theological topic in Sunni exegesis and the first to argue that the provision of proofs is imperative upon the messengers for the valid propagation and embracement of \textit{tawḥīd}. Al-Māṭurīdī presents diverse and strong proofs to support his view mostly inferred from Qur’anic verses and the events that surrounded their revelation. He does not bend the verses to suit his theological views rather he extracts them promptly and contentedly from the relevant verses. Al-Māṭurīdī offers a new insight that surpasses his discussion of the subject in his famous title, \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd}. With this

\textsuperscript{565} Al-Māṭurīdī, \textit{Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 2, 318.  
\textsuperscript{566} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{567} The section is titled \textit{muḥdith al-‘ālam wāḥid} (the creator of the world is one). For further information see: Al-Māṭurīdī, \textit{Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd}, 20.
opinion, al-Māturīdī sets up the scene, in Sunni exegesis, for the academic study of *tawḥīd* as a theological subject and not just an inherited imitated belief.

The standpoint of al-Māeturīdī on *tawḥīd* has an additional significance. It bespeaks that he does not consider belief in *tawḥīd* to be an instinctive compulsion in the *fiṭrah* (natural disposition) of the human rather he sees it as an instinctive compulsion to think and discover God through human’s reasoning. Such a view stands against the traditional school that insists on the instinctiveness of belief in God’s existence, as discussed in the previous chapter. Ḥarbī, a traditional contemporary theologian, insists that belief and knowledge in God’s existence and the doctrine of *tawḥīd* are one. Hence, the traditional argument in both subjects is that they are indispensable by instinct. None of the humans ever questioned this fact, Ḥarbī adds. To him, this understanding is “the most established knowledge, the most proven scientific fact and the mother of all principles.” Ḥarbī contends that this has always been the position of the traditional Sunni school. Ḥarbī relies heavily on ibn Taymiyyah and his argument in this respect. Ibn Taymiyyah justifies the instinctiveness of the belief in God’s existence and *tawḥīd*, amongst humans, on their need for a God, “…who creates them…protects them…sustains them…and fulfils their inner urge to worship…” Ibn Taymiyyah then concludes, “So if these matters are requisites for all souls without which they cannot survive…then the embracement of the belief in a creator is inescapable and imperative…” Before going further, it is noteworthy to bear in mind that ibn Taymiyyah is not engaging in this colloquy just for the sake of proving the

---

568 See the previous chapter “the existence of God”.
570 Ibid, 204.
571 Ibid.
572 Ibid, 205.
574 Ibid.
instinctive belief in tawḥīd in the human conscious. He has another equally or more important
goal, to deny the legitimacy of the proofs the rational school employ and the very need for their
arguments, in the first place, to evince anything that relates to God. Similarly, Ḥarbī raises the
whole discussion in the context of reprimanding al-Māturīḍī for accepting and using the proofs
of the Muʿtazilites and the Jahmiyyah in proving the existence and tawḥīd of God.⁵⁷⁵

The underpinning aim of ibn Taymiyyah and Ḥarbī leads the discussion to a focal point,
the employment of rational proofs in support of tawḥīd. Does al-Māturīḍī legitimise the use of
rational argumentation in proving tawḥīd? Before delving into this discussion, the consistency of
al-Māturīḍī in his study of theology should not go unnoticed. In the previous chapter, al-Māturīḍī
does not concur with the traditional view that belief in God’s existence is indispensable through
fitrah (human instinct) and outlines the grounds for his opinion. The study of his commentary on
the doctrine of tawḥīd reveals that he holds the same view – a proof of consistency in al-
Māturīḍī’s conceptual or thought framework.

A careful analysis of al-Māturīḍī’s commentary on tawḥīd answers the above question
positively. Indeed, he argues that the doctrine of tawḥīd is nothing but a normal rational
conclusion the human intellect demands. He considers it as part of the maʿrūf (the good actions)
that human intellect accepts and praises. Al-Māturīḍī highlights this understanding twice in his
exegesis. The first is in verse 27 chapter al-Baqarah⁵⁷⁶ and the second is in verse 67 chapter al-
Tawbah.⁵⁷⁷ In both occasions, al-Māturīḍī reiterates the same statement, “…and they forbid
people from doing the maʿrūf, which the minds accept and praise and that is tawḥīd in one

⁵⁷⁵ Ḥarbī, Al-Maturidiyyah Dirasatan Wa-Taqwiman, 191.
⁵⁷⁶ The verse enumerates some of the traits of the munāfiqīn (male hypocrites in faith), particularly spreading ḥifūd (corruption) in earth. For further information see: Al-Māturīḍī, Taʿwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 408.
⁵⁷⁷ A verse that outlines the actions of the munāfiqīn and munāfiqāt (male and female hypocrites in faith)
God.” The repetition demonstrates the resolve of this understanding in al-Māturīdī’s mind. *Tawḥīd* is rationally commended and therefore necessary. What may have led al-Māturīdī to draw a correlation between *maʿrūf* and reasoning through proofs is the objective role of reason. How else would people agree on what is good especially when there is disagreement amongst them. Only rational proofs could subside disputes and contentions.

In verse 71 chapter al-Tawbah, al-Māturīdī overtly confirms the rational necessity of *tawḥīd*, implied in the previous verses. He explicates, “and they enjoin the maʿrūf the minds deem obligatory and that is the belief in the *tawḥīd* of God.” Al-Māturīdī not only legitimises the use of rational arguments to prove *tawḥīd* but deems them a necessary obligation and an inescapable conclusion.

Muqātil differs with al-Māturīdī on the interpretation of *maʿrūf* in the aforementioned verses. He considers *maʿrūf* to be the belief in Muḥammad as a prophet, “and they forbid people from the *maʿrūf*, which is belief in Muḥammad.”  Ṭabarī widens the scope to disbelieving in God, the messenger and Islam. He explains, “They forbid people from believing in God and his messenger and what he brought to them from God.” Samarqandī concurs with Ṭabarī whilst ‘Ayyāshī does not comment on the verse at all. None of the contemporaries of al-Māturīdī, or preceding exegetes, suggests a link between *ʿaql* and *tawḥīd* let alone contemplate the notion that reason obligates *tawḥīd*. This interpretation complements the originality of al-Māturīdī’s thought and his contributions to Sunni theological exegesis specifically in the scope of *tawḥīd*.

---

579 Ibid, 6, 408.
Al-Māturīdī’s approach to the notion of proving *tawḥīd* is an illustration of an unconventional scholarly trend in Sunni exegesis. A new theological and exegetical path al-Māturīdī is paving, already highlighted in chapter two. It is the path that reconciles and synthesises *ʿaql* and *naql* and does not see any conflict between them. Al-Māturīdī discovers the rational argumentations within the verses and digs up overlooked theological teachings from the Qur’an. A practise both the traditional and rational Sunni schools did not or perhaps could not identify. Thus, al-Māturīdī’s approach, in theological exegesis, could not be labelled as orthodoxly traditional or orthodoxly rational. It is both and neither concurrently. The following analysis of his proofs of *tawḥīd* further strengthens this conclusion.

3.3 The proofs of *tawḥīd* in al-Māturīdī’s exegesis

Unlike *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, al-Māturīdī does not list the proofs of *tawḥīd* in *Taʾwīlāt* in a designated chapter or in a systematic categorisation. Conversely, he elicits them and studies them in the context of the verses as he deems relevant to the subject. A systematic study of his commentary unveils the following proofs.

3.3.1 The Proof of *anbāʿ al-ghayb* (the tales of the unknown) addressed to the polytheist Arabs

Al-Māturīdī presents the proof of *anbāʿ al-ghayb* (the tales of the unknown) in a very specific context. He postulates that some chapters of the Qur’an exclusively address *ahl al-kitāb* (the people of scripture) whilst other chapters exclusively address *ahl al-shirk* (the Arab polytheists). He states, “Most of the verses in chapter of al-Māʾidah were revealed to address *ahl al-kitāb* (the
people of scripture) …and chapter al-An‘ām was revealed to address ahl al-shirk (the Arab polytheists).”

Al-Māturīdī introduces the anbā’ al-ghayb proof as part of the exclusive address to ahl al-shirk that calls them to the doctrine of tawḥīd.584 He clarifies this claim at the beginning of his commentary on chapter al-An‘ām, “chapter al-An‘ām is miraculous as it was revealed to debate the people of polytheism (the Arabs) and affirm tawḥīd and divinity of God…”

Accordingly, in verses 76 to 79 of al-An‘ām, al-Māturīdī presents anbā’ al-ghayb as the main proof of tawḥīd addressed to the Arabs’ polytheists. At first, the main theme in the verses appears far from al-Māturīdī’s reference as it relates the tale of Ibrahim with the Chaldeans who used to worship the sun, the moon and other planets. However, al-Māturīdī asserts that this story is a proof of the truthfulness of Prophet Muḥammad who grew up in Makkah where none tutored him in these tales.586 Al-Māturīdī confirms that Prophet Muḥammad did not emigrate from his Arab tribe or his region, did not engage with the people of the previous scriptures and above all was illiterate.587 God, thus, taught him such stories to be proofs of tawḥīd and renunciation of idol worshiping, al-Māturīdī concludes. The exclusiveness of these proofs to the Makkah society, in al-Māturīdī’s opinion, rests in the fact that they alone can testify for its truthfulness. The people of Makkah knew the nature of their society, their level of education and the intricate details of Prophet Muḥammad’s life. They knew of his illiteracy, as it was prevalent amongst them, and that such religious knowledge was not accessible to them.

However, this is not only the cause for such a proof to be exclusive to the Makkah circles, al-Māturīdī elaborates. He stresses this, particular, historical tale would win the hearts of...

583 Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 4, 201.
584 Ibid.
586 Ibid, 5, 124.
587 Ibid.
the inhabitants of Makkah because they prided themselves as faithful adherents to the legacy of their forefathers. They all consent and vaunt about being the descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham.\textsuperscript{588} Hence, they must accept the message of \textit{tawhīd} for it is the legacy of their ancestor Ibrahim- an advocate of \textit{tawhīd}.\textsuperscript{589}

The proposition that there are chapters exclusive to a specific audience\textsuperscript{590} to propagate \textit{tawhīd} does not appear anywhere in \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd}. In the \textit{Kitāb}, al-Māturīdī does not differentiate between the theological proofs addressed to the Arabs’ polytheists or others. As a result, the proof of \textit{anbāʿ al-ghayb} does not appear in the \textit{Kitāb}. Its absence strengthens the possibility of al-Māturīdī authoring \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd} before Ta’wīlāt. Otherwise, he would have included, or at least referred, to this type of proof in it. The possibility gains further strength since al-Māturīdī mentions the debate of Abraham with the Chaldeans twice in \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd} but not as a proof of \textit{tawhīd}. Al-Māturīdī cites it as part of a series of proofs that confirm \textit{ruʿyat al-Rabb} (seeing God on the Day of Judgment).\textsuperscript{591} Al-Māturīdī cites it again in the course of his debate with ‘Abdullah al-Ka‘bī (d. 931 CE) about \textit{ṣifāt al-afʿāl} (the attributes of actions).\textsuperscript{592} Al-Māturīdī never uses it as a proof of \textit{tawhīd}, which reinforces the above chronological possibility. It is not conceivable to argue that al-Māturīdī does not mention the \textit{anbāʿ al-ghayb} proof in \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd} as it is \textit{samʿī} (narrative) proof for al-Māturīdī; he does not mention the \textit{samʿī} proofs, as part of his theoretical framework, in both titles. The possibility of Ta’wīlāt being authored or finalised after \textit{Kitāb}, thus, gains more weight.

\textsuperscript{588} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{589} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{590} Such as the exclusiveness of chapter al-Anʿām to \textit{ahl al-shirk} (Arabs ’polytheists).
\textsuperscript{591} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd}, 78.
\textsuperscript{592} Ibid, 53.
The examination of the other exegetes’ commentaries confirms the exclusiveness of *anbāʿ al-ghayb* proof to al-Māturīdī. The exegetes do not differentiate between chapters addressed to the Arabs’ polytheists and chapters addressed to others. This view is new in Sunni exegesis and unique to Ta’wilāt. Furthermore, Ṭabarî, Muqātil, Samarqandī and ‘Ayyāshī do not see any of the verses, al-Māturīdī cites, as proofs of *tawḥīd*. They suffice with transmitting the traditional reports about the debate between Ibrahim and the Chaldeans. Al-Māturīdī, thus, stands unprecedented in Sunni exegesis in his claim of the exclusiveness of the address in chapter al-An‘ām to the Arab polytheists and the use of its verses as a proof of *tawḥīd*.

Notwithstanding the originality of al-Māturīdī in extracting from the Qur’an a new proof of *tawḥīd*, his claim of exclusive proofs can be challenged. The cost of such a claim is the temporality of some of the *tawḥīd* proofs al-Māturīdī proposes. The *anbāʿ al-ghayb* proof is obsolete today since all the Arabs of Makkah have either demised or entered Islam and the polytheists of other cultures cannot verify the truthfulness of such a proof.

Furthermore, the claim of the exclusivity of this proof to the Arab polytheists can be falsified for such historical proofs have two facets. One facet relates to the nature of the society of Prophet Muḥammad and his personality, which al-Māturīdī focuses on, but the other facet relates to the accuracy of the information reported in the verse. The accuracy of the information could only be verified through Judeo-Christian sources and hence the proof is beneficial to them as well. The Arabs, as per the Qur’an’s testimony, have consulted the Jews of Madinah in

593 The proof of *anbāʿ al-ghayb*.
594 The Arabs may feel that such proofs relate to them because they know well the nature of their society and the character and life of Prophet Muhammad and can confirm that he did not acquire this information from any human source.
595 The people of scripture are familiar with the details of such tales from their own texts and can verify its truthfulness and details.
relation to some of the historical reports the Qur’an communicates to validate them. The Arabs even demanded the assistance of the Jews of Madinah to challenge the claim of prophet Muḥammad to divine revelation and the Jews obliged as it is evident in the cause of revelation of chapter al-Kahf.\(^{596}\) The claim of exclusivity, thus, may stand vigorous in some aspects such as the sentiments of the Arabs towards tawḥīd, since Ibrahim believed in tawḥīd and their lineage bond them to him. This does not qualify, however, limiting the proof and the verses to them.

On a different note, the inclusion of al-Māturīdī of the samʿīyyāt (narrative) proofs as accepted legitimate academic proofs of tawḥīd marks an important distinction from the proofs he forwards in his discussion of God’s existence in chapter two. There, al-Māturīdī deliberately opts not to use any narrative proofs. One of the conceivable reasons for the distinct approach is the nature of the topics- tawḥīd and God’s existence. In the latter, al-Māturīdī has to prove that God exists to an audience who do not believe in God or the Qur’an. Hence, he invests heavily in rational arguments. Whilst in the former, al-Māturīdī addresses an audience who believes in God’s existence but question the legitimacy of the doctrine of tawḥīd, unique to Prophet Muḥammad’s message. Hence, any proof of the validity of Prophet Muḥammad’s message is inevitably a proof of the validity of tawḥīd. Hence, the use of narrative proofs.

\(^{596}\) The chapter’s very name and main theme relate to the story of the fityah al-kahf who are described in biblical sources as the seven sleepers. The Jews of Madinah provided information about the seven sleepers to the Arab polytheists of Makkah, when they travelled to them, along with other questions, to help them challenge the claim of Muhamad to Prophethood and see if he is truthful. Resultantly, chapter al-Kahf was revealed. For further information see: I. Ibn Kathīr, Al-Bidāyah Wa Al-Nihāyah, 2nd edition ed., 22 vols. (Damascus: Dar Ibn Kathir, 2010), 3, 53.
3.3.2 The proof of ease and acceptance of death

Al-Māturīdī’s employment of the samʿīyyāt (narrative) proofs stops with the above proof. All the arguments that ensue become overwhelmingly observational and rational. One such proof is the phenomenon of death. Al-Māturīdī, strangely, sees in death a proof of tawḥīd. He argues, in verse 185 chapter al-‘Imrān, “The fact that every heart (of every creature) accepts the phenomenon of death and is in peace with it… is a proof that the affairs (of all creatures) are to one God.” Al-Māturīdī elaborates that if death was not a fateful end destined by God every creature, particularly the ḥukamāʾ (wise and intelligent humans), would exert the effort in eliminating it from their life. Yet they all accept the notion of death even though it does not possess a jawhar and ‘aql does not necessitate it – death is merely the absence of life. Ḥubb al-hayāt (the love of life) is universal amongst all creatures. They enjoy it and, if they were given autonomous choice, would certainly prefer it over death. The acceptance of death, therefore, as a natural end, to all forms of life, stems from the fact that it is beyond the capacity or the choice of the creatures. It is determined by God who is wāḥid, the only one. This proof testifies of al-Māturīdī’s analytical aptitude. He does not only see God in beauty and creation but also in death and evil and seeks to legitimise tawḥīd through all the aspects of the world. The proof, additionally, asserts that al-Māturīdī does not intend to write a conventional exegesis but a theological one that advocates his personal imprint and theological views to the Muslim world. In spite of the acute analysis of al-Māturīdī, one may contend that death could indicate the presence of multiple Gods and not necessarily one. Al-Māturīdī seems to have considered such an objection and readily refutes it. He argues that this possibility is not plausible for the presence

597 Al-Māturīdī, Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 501.
598 In this instance, it means a physical embodiment.
599 Al-Māturīdī, Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 501.
600 Ibid.
of multiple Gods negates the inevitability of death. When one God may decide the death of one person another God may deny it. Inevitably, this would lead to irtiyāb (confusion and chaos) in the world of the living.\(^{601}\) Death is, consequently, a proof of tawḥīd al–Māturīdī articulates in his exegesis.

Conversely, Muqātil and Ṭabarī, in their exegeses, stress that the aim of al-‘Imrān verse is to warn those who disbelieve in Prophet Muhamad from their inevitable death and their return to God who will hold them accountable.\(^{602}\) They do not relate the verse to tawḥīd or any theological discussion. Similarly, Samarqandī advises that the aim of al-‘Imrān verse is to prove the universality of death and that the inhabitants of the heavens and the inhabitants of earth will taste death.\(^{603}\) Samarqandī does not suggest any correlation between death and tawḥīd. Likewise, ‘Ayyāshī does not infer from al-‘Imrān verse any theological benefit pertinent to tawḥīd. Nonetheless, he interprets the verse as a proof of the Raj‘ah (return or resurrection of the Imam) doctrine.\(^{604}\) Thus, the use of death as a proof of tawḥīd is unprecedented in Qur‘anic exegesis. It appears for the first time in al-Māturīdī’s exegesis.

Surprisingly and despite its rational nature, the proof of death does not appear in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd.\(^{605}\) Hence, Rudolph does not list it amongst al-Māturīdī’s proofs of tawḥīd. The nonappearance of death proof in the Kitāb reinforces the researcher’s claim that Ta’wilāt have been written, or finalised, after Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. Al-Māturīdī arrived at such a proof during his exegetical study of the Qur‘an.

---

\(^{601}\) Ibid.
\(^{602}\) Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 1, 320; Ṭabarī, Jāmi‘ Al-Bayān Fī Ta‘wīl Āy Al-Qur‘an, 7, 452.
\(^{603}\) Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 1, 271.
\(^{604}\) According to Abū Ja‘far, as Ayyāshī relates in his exegesis, the verse proves that every Imam murdered by the sword, before the completion of his reign period, will return to life to “taste death”, in other words experience a natural death. For further information see: ‘Ayyāshī, Tafsīr Al-‘Ayyāshī, 2, 118.
\(^{605}\) whether in the chapter designated to the study of the doctrine of tawḥīd or elsewhere in the title.
3.3.3 The proof of consistency and interconnectedness of manāfi’ (benefits):

Al-Māturīdī transitions from the proof of death to the proof of manāfi’ (benefits) to establish tawḥīd. The proof meets the discerning eye recurrently in Ta’wīlāt. The first instance is in verse 22 chapter al-Baqarah. Al-Māturīdī states, “he made all of this to us then, from his care, he made the manāfi’ (benefits) of the heavens connected to the manāfi’ of earth despite the massive distance between them…in order for it to be known that the munshi’ (the creator) of the heavens is the very one that created earth.”\textsuperscript{606} Al-Māturīdī’s argument, thus, is given the interconnectedness of the manāfi’ (benefits) of the heavens to the earth the creator of both must be one. Al-Māturīdī backs this proof with a rational reasoning, “…for if the creator of one (the heavens) was different than the other (the earth) there would have been no meaning of connecting the manāfi’ of the heavens to the earth particularly given the distance between them.”\textsuperscript{607} Al-Māturīdī demonstrates why, in his view, polytheism is not realistic or rational. He elucidates that if the creator of the heavens was different or independent from the creator of the earth then it is not rational for the former to share the heavens’ resources with the creatures of the latter for two reasons. The First is the realm of the heavens does not benefit anything from earth, as far as al-Māturīdī observes. The Second is the large distance between them inhibits any earthly benefit from reaching the heavens’ world. Al-Māturīdī builds his argument on the concept of reciprocal interest or benefit observed in the earth life amongst humans and in the flora and fauna realms. In all these realms, creatures help one another for mutual benefits but the astronomical gap, ironically, between the terrestrial and celestial world, al-Māturīdī claims,

\textsuperscript{606} Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 58.
\textsuperscript{607} Ibid.
makes the assumption of common interest flawed and illogical. Their benefits, therefore, are
interconnected for another purpose “…Their (the benefits of the heavens and the earth) origin is
one (God). He has no partners and he has no equal.”

When al-Māturīdī’s commentary is contrasted with the titles of contemporary and
preceding exegetes, important differences become apparent. Muqātil, in his commentary on the
same verse, provides a brief lexical explanation of the words without any further elucidations
whilst ’Ayyāshī does not comment at all. Ṭabarī resonates the same lexical meanings Muqātil
cites but, in addition, lists their chains of transmissions, a typical practice on his part. Ṭabarī
briefly comments on them “…and Our Lord reminds his servants of his bounties upon them to be
conscious of his favours upon them…” No theological deductions are afforded by any of the
exegetes. Samarqandī, conversely, breaks the trend. He speaks about the proofs of tawḥīd in the
verse but not the manāfi’ proof or the notion of dependence. Samarqandī highlights the notion of
istiqāmah (uprightness and permanence), which will be discussed later in this chapter under a
more relevant heading. The manāfi’ proof, thus, seems the brainchild of al-Māturīdī’s
exegesis.

Al-Māturīdī revisits the manāfi’ proof in verse 164 chapter al-Baqarah. He lists some of
the natural phenomena that verify the dependence of the earth’s inhabitants on the heavens’
benefits,” …for instance, one cannot learn…. the ripeness of grapes and fruits except by the sun
and the moon. He (God) made the revival of earth and the growth of what is in it…the result of
rain.” Thus, he asserts that the survival of all species on earth depends on the heavens’ benefits

---

608 Ibid.
609 Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 1, 365.
610 It will be discussed under the proof of ittisāq and tadbīr.
611 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 302.
even in reaping the fruits of the earth. He elucidates, “...For the creatures cannot benefit from the
manāfi’ (benefits) of one (the heavens or the earth) except if it is interconnected to the manāfi’ of
the other.”\textsuperscript{612}

Al-Māturīdī follows this conclusion with a hypothetical scenario: what would happen if
the benefits of the heavens were cut off from earth? He responds, “This would have led to the
destruction of the provisions of the creatures (of earth). In its destruction lies their very end and
corruption.”\textsuperscript{613} At this apposite moment, al-Māturīdī connects the above conclusion to his proof,
“the connection of one (earth) to the other (heavens) and its dependence on it (proves) their
creator is one.”\textsuperscript{614} Al-Māturīdī, however, does not explain why and how the connection of the
benefits ascertains tawḥīd. He, perhaps, expects the reader to engage the argument and discover
the final deduction. The creation of the earth, and the creatures therein, without supplying them
with provisions and expecting them to depend entirely on the heavens’ benefits, which is
supposedly created by a different deity, manifests ignorance and weakness on the part of the
creator of earth. Thus, he is not God and it follows that the munshi’ of both realms is one.

Unexpectedly, the other Sunni exegetes agree with al-Māturīdī that verse 164 in al-
Baqarah is one of the chief verses in the topic of tawḥīd. Muqātil and Ṭabarī report various
narrations about the cause of the revelation of the verse, which revolves mainly around the
demand of the mushrikīn (Arab polytheists) of a proof of tawḥīd from the prophet.\textsuperscript{615} Strangely,
onetheless, neither of them discusses how the verse establishes tawḥīd. Ṭabarī briefly remarks,
“and the correct opinion ... is that God drew the attention of his servants to the proof of his

\textsuperscript{612} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{613} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{614} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{615} Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’ān, 3, 267; Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 1, 153.
Nothing further is added by him and therefore no theological analysis is undertaken. ‘Ayyāshī, the only prominent Shi’a exegete from al-Māturīdī’s region whose work is extant, offers complete silence on verse 164 as well. Samarqandī, however, does. He concurs with Muqātil and Ṭabarī on the importance of the verse and confirms, “…and it has been reported that this verse contains the foundations of tawḥīd…” Unlike the previous exegetes, though, Samarqandī endeavours to explain how the verse relates to tawḥīd. He links it to verse 22 chapter al-Anbiyā’ and the proof of tamānuʾ (the mutual hindrance argument) and how if there were multiple deities the earth will be corrupt, which will be examined in a separate section. Samarqandī, hence, neither infers the manāfiʿ proof from al-Baqarah verse nor attempts to deduce a new theological proof, unlike al-Māturīdī. Samarqandī, nonetheless, engages the topic of tawḥīd albeit at a much briefer and less profound scale than al-Māturīdī. Despite the geographical proximity, it is unlikely Samarqandī read and benefited from al-Māturīdī’s exegesis. Two indicators strengthen this deduction. First, Samarqandī does not point to the manāfiʿ proof at all anywhere in his exegesis and second he uses a different terminology than al-Māturīdī. A sufficient example, of the difference in terminology between both exegetes, is the term al-munshiʿ. Samarqandī does not use it at all in the context of tawḥīd. In spite of the above, the possibility cannot be ruled out. Samarqandī may have read Taʾwīlāt but opted not to quote it since he favoured being a traditionalist over being exploratory.

Returning to the manāfiʿ proof, al-Māturīdī highlights the role of the sun and moon again, in verse 4 chapter Yusuf, in reference to food and plantations, “…the sun and the moon were

---

616 Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwil Āy Al-Qurʾān, 3, 267.
617 Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-ʿUlūm, 1, 110.
618 Ibid.
619 The frequency of the appearance of the term al-munshiʿ in al-Māturīdī’s exegesis will be clarified in the end of the following paragraphs.
620 The verse speaks mainly of the dream of Prophet Yusuf of the sun, the moon and 11 planets.
interpreted as his (Yusuf’s) parents because from the sun and moon comes the fertility of all food on earth and the ripeness of fruits and all the manāfi’ the humans need." Al-Māturīdī is referring to another manifestation of the sun and the moon’s role on the existence of life on earth, the phenomena of natural seasons and the tide movement. Al-Māturīdī continues to display the habit of seizing all theological implications obtainable from any given verse. He has underscored the dependence of the earth on the heavens’ benefits and their connection in numerous verses.

Al-Māturīdī does not stop at the dependence of earth on the heavens in proving tawhīd. He extends the argument further to the interdependence amongst creatures and various elements of life on earth. In verse 53 chapter Fuṣṣilat, al-Māturīdī explores the dimension of interdependence amongst humans as part of the manāfi’ proof. In verse 53, God speaks of his āyāt (verses and signs), which he will show to the disbelievers in the āfāq, usually translated as horizons. Al-Māturīdī interprets āyāt, in the verse, as “proofs” that establish the divinity and wahdāniyyah of God and then interprets āfāq as the various countries and cities. Thereupon, he forwards his argument, “as for the (proofs God spoke about) in the āfāq they are (in fact) the manāfi’ (the benefits) of the far countries and remote villages and how they are connected to personal benefits and the benefits of the near countries.” Al-Māturīdī adds a new dimension to his argument, the transactions of the humans from the far corners of the globe with each other. He observes that despite the distances, the cultures, the races, the languages and the mindsets that separate the humans, they still need one another. Their interests intersect on the level of

---

621 Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 7, 270.
622 The four seasons are a by-product of the orbit of the earth around the sun.
623 The tide movement depends chiefly on gravity of the moon and its proximity to earth.
625 Ibid.
countries, cities and races. If each race or country were created by a different deity then they would have been self-sufficient and would not depend on the assistance of the creatures of another deity since God is perfect and omnipotent. Al-Māturīdī argues that this unifying system of interconnected interests is set to prove God is one. In verse 41 chapter Yāsīn, al-Māturīdī asserts the above deduction and points to the distance factor once more. He states, “(in the verse) a proof of waḥdāniyyah (oneness) of God …by connecting the edges of the earth, despite the distance between them, to one another in the manāfi‘ of the humans and their needs.” Al-Māturīdī argues God placed such causes and impulses in the humans and taught them the means and knowledge to interact and connect with each other to gain their manāfi‘ and fulfil their needs. Everything is interconnected with an unbroken chain of dependencies to show that the entire universe is the product of one God.

None of the other exegetes, not even remotely, points to such an analysis or interpretation, whether in the Yāsīn verse or previously cited verses. Muqātil and ‘Ayyāshī do not comment at all whilst Ṭabarī and Samarqandī list the various narrative reports that provided the lexical meaning of the key words in the Yāsīn verse- “al-fulk” and “al-mashḥūn”. Al-fulk was unanimously interpreted as the ark of Prophet Noah and al-mashḥūn was interpreted as, the full, heavy or the carried ark. All exegetes concurred the theme of the verse is to remind the Arab polytheists of the bounty of God upon them in saving Prophet Noah, and the believers with him,

---

626 Al-Māturīdī deduces from the very verse additional proofs of tawḥīd but they will be analysed and critiqued soon in a separate section.
627 The verse reads, “And a Sign for them is that we bore their race (through the Flood) in the loaded Ark.”
628 He pointed to the distance factor before in his discussion of the connection between the benefits of the heavens and earth in chapter al-Baqarah and chapter Yusuf.
629 Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘īlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 13, 157.
630 Ibid.
from the major flood. Samarqandī opts to describe *al-fulk* as, “a sign to the disbelievers, in Makkah, to learn about the *waḥdāniyyah* of God who carried their ancestors …in the ark of Noah” but does not explain how or why. Samarqandī proceeds casually to the subsequent verse without any further elaboration on his statement.

The analysis of al-Māturīdī’s commentary on verses 41 and 42 chapter Yāsīn manifests his skilfulness in relating the verses to *tawḥīd* and the proof of *manāfi’*. Al-Māturīdī argues that “*al-fulk*” could have two interpretations. The traditional one is the ark of Noah and the new interpretation is the skill of constructing ships. He, unexpectedly, favours the latter. Al-Māturīdī does not state the conclusion overtly perhaps because he deems it self-explanatory. God taught the humans to build ships to connect with one another for they are dependent on one another in their benefits. Their inter-dependence is a proof of *tawḥīd*. Even in the event that some exegetes may insist on the traditional interpretation of “*al-fulk*”, in verse 41, and oppose al-Māturīdī’s deviation from it, al-Māturīdī’s deduction still stands for according to him, verse 42 chapter Yāsīn would still refer to the skill of building ships. The verse would read, “and we have created for them the like of it (the other ships) so they may ride it.” Ergo, all possible interpretations of the verses reinforce the *manāfi’* proof, in its various dimensions.

The *manāfi’* proof is the inventive work of al-Māturīdī but it is not exclusive to Ta’wilāt. It appears in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and al-Māturīdī uses it as part of his arguments’ arsenal in establishing *tawḥīd*. He states, “…the connection between the *manāfi’* proves that (polytheism)
is false." Interestingly though, al-Māturīdī refers to it only once and does not elaborate much. The massive difference, in frequency and content, between the al-Māturīdī’s discussion of the manāfī’proof in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd in comparison to Ta’wīlāt may be attributed to the fact that Ta’wīlāt offers a better medium for the expansion and study of the proof due its Qur'ānic nature. Shihadeh, in his review of the proofs of the existence of God in al-Rāzī’s works, reveals that al-Rāzī uses the concept of manāfī⁶³⁶ to prove God’s existence in his theological works and in his exegesis.⁶³⁷ Shihadeh, nonetheless, does not compare al-Rāzī’s application of the concept to al-Māturīdī’s use of it, in Ta’wīlāt or in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. In fact, al-Māturīdī does not appear at all in Shihadeh’s work.

The thorough explanation al-Māturīdī provides in the afore-analysed verses and other verses, such as verse 18 chapter al-Mu’mīnūn, verses 60 and 87 chapter al-Naml, verses 13 and 64 chapter Ghāfir and verse 11 chapter Fuṣṣilat as well as verse 6 chapter al-Naba’, testify for the significance of this proof to al-Māturīdī in establishing tawḥīd. Additionally, the frequency of al-Māturīdī’s reference to the manāfī’ proof serves as a strong indication of his deliberate effort to contribute to Sunni theological exegesis as a genre and to bring to light the theological components of the Qur’an. The undertaken examination of the other prominent Sunni exegesis literature, preceding and contemporary, so far, demonstrates that he is the first Sunni exegete to commence this path.

Al-Māturīdī does not only display consistency in concepts but also in terminology. In all the above verses, al-Māturīdī speaks of the one munshi’ (creator) in the context of the manāfī’

---

⁶³⁵ Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 167.
⁶³⁶ Al-Rāzī’s use of the concept of manāfī’ does not equate the proof of manāfī’ al-Māturīdī developed to prove the tawḥīd of God.
proof, as well as other proofs that will be covered in relevant sections. The exegetes of all the examined titles, in the context of tawḥīd, do not display such a consistency in content or terminology.

### 3.3.4 The proof of comprehensiveness of ittisāq and tadbīr

Likewise, consistency manifests in al-Māturīdī’s writing about the proof of ittisāq and tadbīr. The notion of ittisāq, which refers to the uniformity, harmony and continuity in the flow and sustenance of the affairs and needs of the universe, is one al-Māturīdī uses frequently as an observational and rational proof to substantiate the doctrine of tawḥīd. He discusses the notion of ittisāq in the universe in Ta’wīlāt twelve times when in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd he raises it four times only. Out of the four citations in the Kitāb, only once al-Māturīdī commentates on it as a proof of tawḥīd, in the chapter he designates for the topic. There, al-Māturīdī observes the activities that take place in the world and then states, “what is mentioned of the ittisāq of the entire world despite the distinct and conflicting essences therein …proves that such harmony …is not possible except through a mudabbir (manager) … whose tadbīr (decision and action) is not shared or disputed…”638

On the other hand, in Ta’wīlāt, al-Māturīdī opines ittisāq, as a proof of tawḥīd, in ten out of the twelve citations. The frequency of his employment of ittisāq, as a proof, in Ta’wīlāt is much higher than it in the Kitāb. The proof of ittisāq consistently appears in Ta’wīlāt, from the opening chapters and throughout it.639 In verse 164 chapter al-Baqarah, al-Māturīdī highlights ittisāq in combination with itqān (perfection) and ihkām al-ṣun‘ah (meticulousness in the making

---

638 Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 123.
639 Including the last chapter.
or creation).\textsuperscript{640} The verse adduces numerous natural phenomena as āyāt (signs) of God. The main ones are, the creation of the heavens and earth, the alternation of the night and the day, the maritime systems and navigations across the seas, the sustenance and movement cycles of the animals on the planet and their survival, and the system that determines the direction and movement of the winds and the clouds. Al-Māturīdī concludes that ittisāq (flow, harmony and cooperation), itqān (perfection) and īḥkām al-ṣun‘ah (meticulousness in the making), in all these phenomena are “proofs that your God is one…These things urge you to confess to his wahdāniyyah (oneness).”\textsuperscript{641}

In verses 96 and 97 chapter al-An‘ām, however, al-Māturīdī separates ittisāq from itqān and īḥkām al-ṣun‘ah and presents it as the binary pair of tadbīr. The verses corroborate the hand of God in the universe by calling to the study of some of the mechanical aspects of the celestial creatures, the sun, the moon and the stars, such as their orbits and calculations- sciences, which are coined today as Helioseismology, Selenography and astronomy. Al-Māturīdī explicates, “…these verses serve as reminders of the tadbīr …of God as we mentioned that all matters are governed by a consistent and unifying ittisāq.”\textsuperscript{642} The flow and consistency in all aspects of the existence and movements of these three creatures is a sign of God’s oneness. A sign that all other investigated exegeses fail to discuss. They focus solely on the lexical explanation of the key words in the verses and the transmission of narrative reports pertinent to it. Al-Māturīdī, therefore, is the sole discusser of the theological implications of the verses.

Al-Māturīdī then imagines a debate scenario, in which he is asked, “what is the proof that establishes your claim (of the oneness of God)?” He answers, “The exhibition of ittisāq

\textsuperscript{640} Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 301.
\textsuperscript{641} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{642} Ibid, 5, 153.
(uniformity and continuity) in al-tadbīr (the management) of everything … denotes that it is the work of one."\textsuperscript{643} Therefore, al-Māturīdī sees a symbiotic relationship between ittisāq and tadbīr in the management of the world. Their collective materialisation in everything in the world proves the oneness of God. He overtly asserts this surmise in verse 68 chapter Yūnus, “…and these verses contain a proof of tadbīr and knowledge because, as we stated, their ittisāq runs according to one set system and path."\textsuperscript{644} A surmise no other exegete makes. The discussion of tadbīr or ittisāq does not appear in their commentaries on the verse.

In verse 60 chapter al-Naml, al-Māturīdī reiterates the association of ittisāq and tadbīr in the context of the creation of the heavens and earth and the bounties of rain and plantations, “God informs us about the ittisāq and tadbīr of all the affairs … to prove the munshi’ and mudabbir is one.”\textsuperscript{645} In this statement, nonetheless, al-Māturīdī does more than just assure the mutuality of ittisāq and tadbīr. He delivers the conclusion of his proof, “the munshi’ (the creator) and mudabbir (the manager of the universe) is one.”\textsuperscript{646} This conclusion elaborates further on al-Māturīdī’s éclat over other Sunni or Transoxianan exegetes because he is the first to propose it. The other prominent exegetes restricted their commentaries to the brief philological explanation of the main words in the verse and the transmission of the reports of the preceding scholars.

This conclusion, al-Māturīdī echoes again in his verse 1 chapter al-Layl, the last citation of ittisāq, “…and its ittisāq, as mentioned earlier, and its continuity on the same consistency and system indicates the munshi’ is the mudabbir. He is one and this creation did not happen randomly but with due measurement…”\textsuperscript{647} The conclusion of al-Māturīdī and his insistence on

\textsuperscript{643} Ibid, 5, 83.
\textsuperscript{644} Ibid, 7, 85.
\textsuperscript{645} Ibid, 10, 399.
\textsuperscript{646} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{647} Ibid, 17, 230.
describing God with two distinct titles, the *munshi’* (the creator) and *mudabbir* (the manager) is not haphazard. Al-Māturīdī attempts to prove both roles to God through various proofs. He uses the *manāfī’* proof dominantly to ascertain God’s role as the *munshi’* (the creator), even though it feeds into his role as a *mudabbir* (the manager). Al-Māturīdī’s consistent terminology therein, in describing God as the *munshi’*, is a clear evidence of it. He uses the proof of *ittisāq* and *tadbīr*, on the other hand, to prove God’s role as the *mudabbir* (the manager).

Al-Māturīdī’s separation between the two roles, in Ta’wīlāt, and his effort to prove them independently may be the result of the influence of his region and the non-Muslim ideologies al-Māturīdī encountered. In *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, one cites the possible cause for al-Māturīdī’s approach.648 There, Al-Māturīdī relates the various beliefs of the sects and philosophical schools in his region, about God and the world. Amongst them are “*ahl al-ṭabā’i*’ (the people of the elements of nature)”649 who, based on their observation of the world, deduced that “*(the world) evolves from one state to the other by substances, nourishments. Its (the world) affairs is the result of the interaction and development of the various elements with each other.*”650 It seems they accept God created the initial elements of nature but do not believe that God administers their development and interactions in the natural world. Consequently, al-Māturīdī in his proofs of *tawḥīd* refutes this conception and caters for all orientations and thoughts whether they believe in God’s existence or the natural affairs of the world or the eternity of God and the universe. The proof of *ittisāq* and *tadbīr* is a proof that establishes *tawḥīd* of God not only as the creator but also as the *mudabbir* (administrator or manager) of the affairs of the world.

---

648 This is cited in the chapter titled “*ikhtilāf firaq al-‘ālam*” (the various worldviews of the religious sects of the world).
650 Ibid.
The notion of *ittisāq*, as a proof of *tawḥīd*, does not appear anywhere in any of the exegesis titles the study examines. It does not appear as a theological term nor as a theological concept, in Ṭabarī, ‘Ayyāshī or Muqātil’s work. A breakthrough though, is evident in Samarqandi’s exegesis who refers to the concept of *ittisāq* under a different title- *istiqāmah*.651

Samarqandi states briefly, “*Istiqāmah* (in creation), points to *tawḥīd*.“652 *Istiqāmah* in Arabic means to walk on a straight path, to follow an upright methodology and to reside in a permanent place.653 Samarqandi refers to the reliability and consistency in the cycle of creation as it becomes clear from his commentary, “the *istiqāmah* of the night and the day and the winter and summer and the harvest time. For everything takes place in its set time… The creation points to one God. ”654 The *istiqāmah* Samarqandi describes is, conceptually, the *ittisāq* that al-Māturīdī signifies. Unlike al-Māturīdī though, who consistently flags the presence of *ittisāq* at every relevant verse, Samarqandi commentates on *istiqāmah* once in his exegesis. If anything, his practise attests that Samarqandi did not study it exhaustively in the Qur’an, as al-Māturīdī did. Otherwise, he would have expanded on it and referred to it in some, if not all the, relevant verses.

The comparison of al-Māturīdī’s commentary with his counterparts solidifies his deliberate resolve to study and prove Islamic theology through the Qur’an in Ta’wīlāt. It confirms that he intends for Ta’wīlāt to be different and to originate the Sunni theological exegesis genre. Whilst, the prominent exegetes of his time and region, and even those who

---

651 This is the theological deduction Samarqandi infers from verse 22 of chapter al-Baqarah, which was referred to you earlier in the proof of manāfi’ section.
preceded him in the Sunni traditional school, continued to produce conventional exegetical titles with little to no theological commentary.

This deduction gains more strength and credibility when comparing and contrasting the occurrence and discussion of *tadbīr*, as a concept, across all the aforementioned titles. Nowhere in his title does Ṭabarī use *tadbīr* as a proof of *tawḥīd*. ‘Ayyāshī and Muqātil are no different. Samarqandī cites it twice in the context of *tawḥīd*, once in verse 22 with the notion of *istiqāmah*, which has already being discussed, and the second in the context of the proof of *tamānu’*, which will be discussed separately. Al-Māturīdī, thus, is the only Sunni exegete of his time and region to study *tadbīr* and *ittisāq* from a theological perspective and prove *tawḥīd* through them.

Indeed, the notion of *tadbīr* as proof of *tawḥīd*, is not the brainchild of al-Māturīdī. It was known before the advent of Islam and employed as a part of the cosmological or teleological argument for the existence of God.⁶⁵⁵ Paul wrote about it in this sense in his epistle to the Romans, as Rudolph mentions.⁶⁵⁶ It is, additionally, evident in this capacity in some titles of the ninth century such as *Kitāb al-Dalāʾil wa al-ʿiʿtibār ʿalā al-khalq wa al-tadbīr* (the Book of Indications and Contemplation on Creation and Guidance) by Jāḥiz. (d. 868 CE). According to Van Ess, al-Muḥāsibī⁶⁵⁸ precedes al-Māturīdī in using *tadbīr* as a proof of *tawḥīd*.⁶⁵⁹ It is difficult to examine the accuracy of the claim of Van Ess as al-Muḥāsibī’s title is not in print, in Arabic or English. This chronological review of the use of *tadbīr* as a theological proof substantiates that it did not originate with al-Māturīdī. However, at the same time, it substantiates

---

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.
⁶⁵⁸ in his title *Kitāb al-ʿAzamah* (the book on the Greatness of God).
that al-Māturīdī’s exegesis is the first Sunni exegesis to study the notion of tadbīr thoroughly via the interpretation of the Qur’anic verses.

The originality of al-Māturīdī’s work is not only in his introduction of tadbīr as a proof of tawḥīd in Sunni exegesis but, equally, in modifying it from the traditional form and adding al-ittisāq as a cornerstone part of it. In verse 3 chapter al-Mulk, al-Māturīdī divulges the essentiality of ittisāq to the tadbīr argument, “…for if you see flaws then you will then think that the mudabbir is multiple…” Al-Māturīdī, therefore, does not believe that the mere existence of tadbīr (management) in the various realms of the universe is a proof of tawḥīd. Rather, it is the undeniable observance of ittisāq in the tadbīr that establishes it.

### 3.3.5 The proof of continuous flow of day and night

Another proof of tawḥīd al-Māturīdī delivers in Ta’wīlāt is the phenomenon of day and night. He states, “The ikhtilāf (variation) of the night and day indicates their Creator is one.” Ikhtilāf, in this instance, refers to the relentless cycle of day and night. Al-Māturīdī provides the grounds for this proof, “For if the creators (of day and night) were two, then if one (the first) bestows the night then the other (the second) may interdict the day. And if the other (the first) bestows the day then the other (the second) may interdict the night.”

Al-Māturīdī reinforces this proof by returning to the manāfiʿ argument but from a specific perspective, the polarity between day and night. He elucidates, “And the second (ground

---

660 Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 15, 291.
661 Al-Māturīdī uses the term ikhtilāf here in its Qur’anic technical sense and not its apparent Arabic denotational sense, which is to be different and distinct.
662 Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 302.
663 Ibid.
for the day and night to be a proof of *tawḥīd*) is that he placed in them benefits and interconnected them to each other despite being opposites of one another.”664 This qualifies them to be an independent proof of God since each of them is an *ayah*, proof, in its own right that points to *waḥdāniyyah*, oneness, of God. Al-Māturīdī states, “They are *āyatān mukhtalifatān* (two distinct signs and proofs), which are also *mutaḍāttān* (opposites)… and they are *āyatān* (two proofs and signs) that indicate the *waḥdāniyyah* of God.”665 Al-Māturīdī raises the connection between day and night despite their natural polarity again in verse 189 chapter al-‘Imrān666 and reiterates the same meaning in verse 190 of the same chapter. Therein, al-Māturīdī explains what he means by *taḍād* (polarity) between them, “one is light when the other is dark … and the naked eye sees no similarity between them.”667

Al-Māturīdī’s approach to the interpretation of the verses and unearthing its theological facet is disparate from his counterparts, to say the least. Muqātil and ‘Ayyāshī do not interpret any of al-‘Imrān verses. Ṭabarī does but to him the verses are a response to a statement made by some Non-Muslims against God, which verse 181 of chapter Al-‘Imrān sheds light on, “God has heard the saying of those who said: ’Allah is poor, and we are rich.’ We shall record what they have said…”668 Thus, according to Ṭabarī, God calls people, in verses 189 and 190, to contemplate and take heed, “from what I created for you in the heavens and the earth … and how I made the night and the day interchange one after the other.”669 To Ṭabarī, the verses are not revealed to prove *tawḥīd* rather to realise that “whoever described me (God) to be poor and he is

---

664 Ibid.
665 Ibid, 8, 237.
666 Ibid, 2, 509.
667 Ibid, 2, 510.
668 Verse 181 of chapter Al-‘Imrān.
rich is a forger and a liar.” Samarqandī does not make any theological inferences from the verses. Samarqandī ignores the context of al-‘Imrān verses completely and interprets them in the light of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (a cause of revelation) he transmits. “The people of Makkah asked the messenger of God to bring forth a proof (of his divine message)” Samarqandī reports. Hence, the verses were revealed. Samarqandī explains, “They are great creation of God…and they are sufficient heeding signs to the people of intellect.” Samarqandī indirectly communicates that the purpose of the revelation of the verses is theological, to prove the divinity of the message of Prophet Mohamed but does not explain how the alteration of the day and night proves or even relates to *tawḥīd*.

Thus, al-Māturīdī is the only Sunni exegete to postulate that the opposing nature of the day and night warrants *tawḥīd* since it serves as a vivid example of how the world consists of many mutually opposing phenomena yet they are all ordained in harmony with one another. Rudolph relates in his categorisation of the arguments of *tawḥīd* that al-Māturīdī discusses this concept in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. A closer analysis at the *Kitāb*, however, bids two important remarks. The first is al-Māturīdī does not speak of the proof of day and night in his *Kitāb* at all. The second is that al-Māturīdī’s mention of the opposites notion there is, rather, secondarily raised, in his discussion of the *manāfi’* (benefits) proof.

In contrast, in Ta’wilāt, al-Māturīdī focuses primarily on highlighting the day and night proof in numerous places. It is evident in his commentary on verse 164 chapter al-Baqarah, verse 86 chapter al-Naml, Verse 5 chapter al-Zumar, verse 37 chapter Yāsīn and verse 73 chapter al-

---

670 For the creator of the heavens and earth cannot be described as *faqīr* (poor). For further information see: ibid, 7, 474.
672 Ibid.
Qaṣaṣ. In verse 164 chapter al-Baqarah, al-Māturīdī discusses the benefits of the alteration of day and night and cites verse 73 of chapter al-Qaṣaṣ. He states, “And from his Mercy that he has made the night and the day for you. So that you may have rest (in the night) and seek your Lord's bounty (in the day).”\(^{674}\) Al-Māturīdī, then, concludes, “Thus the connection of the benefits of one another despite their contrast (with one another) proves that their creator is one.”\(^{675}\) The highlight in this instance is not merely the connection of some benefits between different creatures rather it is the organisation of the benefits of the mutual opposites, day and night, and how it allows humans to benefit from this cycle. Whoever created humans is the one who administers the cycle of night and day. In verse 73 chapter al-Qaṣaṣ, verse 86 chapter al-Naml, verse 5 chapter al-Zumar and verse 37 chapter Yāsīn al-Māturīdī restates the proof of the day and night repeatedly arguing the same concepts at different lengths.\(^{676}\)

Once more, Muqātil and ‘Ayyāshī do not comment on al-Qaṣaṣ verse at all. Unlike, the previous verses, Samarqandī retreats from making any theological deductions from al-Qaṣaṣ verse. He limits his commentary to the general meaning of the verse reiterating that the day and night are from the bounties and mercy of God upon the humans to rest and seek their provisions.\(^{677}\) Similarly, Ṭabarī provides the lexical meaning of the key words but adds, “the alteration of the day and night is a mercy from God… to know that worship does not befit except the one who bestows (his bounties) upon you.”\(^{678}\) Thus, Ṭabarī highlights that the provider of bounties is the one worthy of worship. A notable theological deduction but does not qualify the day and night to be a separate proof of *tawḥīd*. In verse 86 chapter al-Naml, nonetheless, Ṭabarī

---

\(^{674}\) Al-Māturīdī, *Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, 1, 301.

\(^{675}\) Ibid.

\(^{676}\) Ibid.

\(^{677}\) Samarqandī, *Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm*, 2, 617.

classifies them as “ḥujjah (proof) for tawḥīd” but does not explain how. Likewise, Samarqandī describes them as “…signs for those who believe in tawḥīd of God” but does not elaborate on their connection to tawḥīd. ‘Ayyāshī and Muqāṭīl do not comment on al-Naml verse at all.

The latter does, nonetheless, on Verse 5 chapter al-Zumar. He explains that God, “yusallīṭ (permits) each one of them (day and night) to eat away from the other.” Samarqandī, repeats the same interpretation, “each of them decreases from the other” and Ṭabarī is not far from them “this (the day) covers that (the night) and vice versa.” None of them associates the verse with tawḥīd or elucidates on the comments they make on the previous verse of how day and night are a sign or a proof of tawḥīd. The same pattern is evident in their commentaries on verse 37 chapter Yāsīn.

In addition to the differences in the discussion and formulation of the phenomenon of day and night as a proof of tawḥīd between al-Māturīdī and the aforementioned exegetes, consistency manifests as a strong characteristic in al-Māturīdī’s writing. In every single verse al-Māturīdī deems useful or relevant to the day and night proof, he comments, presents his argument and discusses it. This is confirmation of al-Māturīdī’s determination and his deliberate effort to distinguish Ta’wilāt from the conventional exegeses of his time and to be the first Sunni exegete to open the gate for the genre of Sunni theological exegesis.

---

680 Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulam, 2, 594.
681 Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqāṭīl Ibn Sulaymān, 4, 238.
682 Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulam, 3, 177.
683 Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayan Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’ān, 2, 253.
684 Further evidence of al-Māturīdī’s deliberate effort to produce a theological exegesis is the domination phenomenon, with which he strengthens the day and night argument, as a proof of tawḥīd. In verse 164 chapter al-Baqarah al-Māturīdī states, “each of them, I mean the night and the day, gets overpowered when the other comes. Hence, there is a muḥdith (a creator from nothing) and he is one.” The overriding of the night to the day or vice versa in al-Māturīdī’s commentary has two facets. The first facet indicates the absence of an intrinsic
3.3.6 The proof of design in creation

The theological discussion of *tawḥīd* persists in Ta’wīlāt and al-Māturīdī sees in the fashioning of the creatures a proof of the oneness of God. An observing look at Ta’wīlāt results in abundant verses al-Māturīdī cites to confirm the creation proof. Unlike the previous proofs, al-Māturīdī does not construct the creation proof from the study of a single creature or notion or phenomenon. Rather, he explores congruently all generic and specific verses that speak of creation, as a whole, and deduces from them arguments to establish his proof.

On the macro level, al-Māturīdī speaks of the creation proof in verse 7 chapter al-Mā’idah. In al-Mā’idah verse, God reminds people of his bounties upon them and the *mithāq* (covenant) of God to which they committed. Al-Māturīdī interprets the *mithāq* to be the *mithāq* al-khilqah (the covenant of creation). He states, “The khilqah (natural composition) of every creature testifies of the waḥdāniyyah (oneness) of God.” In verse 32 chapter al-A’rāf, al-Māturīdī asserts that his *ta’wil* (interpretation) of *mithāq* is the most correct and that the context of the verse favours it more than the conventional interpretation the other exegetes forwarded, which will be discussed shortly. Everything in the life of the humans from the

---

685 All the previous proofs focused on a specific creatures and notions such as death, day and night, the connection of the benefits of the heavens and the earth.
687 Ibid, 5, 331.
beginning of their existence including their development, from the creation of the world around
them and until the end of life is a *mithāq* (covenant) that proves that “…there is no *rabb* (Lord)
for the humans except God.”688 Al-Māturīdī confesses that the full appreciation and explanation
of this statement as it duly deserves “…is beyond the scope of the creatures to absorb … their
minds cannot discover how and where it even began.”689

Al-Māturīdī acknowledges the presence of other interpretations of *mithāq* and lists them
briefly including the reports that God took a pledge of belief from the souls of all children of
Adam before their physical birth. However, he expresses concern about whether it is wise to
propagate such reports to the “‘awām wa ahl al- ḍa ‘f (the general public and the weak-
minded).”690 This account exhibits al-Māturīdī’s critique of the traditional Sunni exegetical
reports. He analyses and evaluates their fitness to his readership and region. This serves as
supplementary proof of the postulation put in chapter two that al-Māturīdī was not a mere
traditional follower in the Sunni academia. Al-Māturīdī is conscious of the needs of his region
and its orientations and is the founder of a critical movement in Sunni exegesis that does not just
propagate blindly tradition literature but firstly analyses it, evaluates it and seeks to advance the
exegetical movement beyond just reporting.

When contrasting the interpretation of *mithāq*, al-Māturīdī presents, which he uses as part
of his creation argument, with the other studied exegeses, one learns that his interpretation is
unheard of in Sunni or Shi’a exegetical literature. ʿAyyāshī records multiple narrations from Abū
ʿAbdullah (d. 680 CE) and Abū Jaʿfar (d. 733 CE), prominent scholars and imams from the
progeny of Prophet Muḥammad, that interpret *mithāq* as a verbal covenant all the children of

688 Ibid.
689 Ibid.
690 Ibid, 5, 330.
Adam pledged to God, whilst they were in the realm of the souls.\textsuperscript{691} In one of the reports, however, `Ayyāshī records additional segments, not found in the reports the Sunni exegetes transmit, “…and Muḥammad the messenger of Allah is your messenger and Ali is the prince (leader) of the believers…”\textsuperscript{692} Besides the theological and political note, that the caliphate of Ali is ordained from God from eternity, `Ayyāshī does not make any further deductions from the verse whether in relation to \textit{tawḥīd} or any other theological topic.\textsuperscript{693} Muqātil offers a similar brief contextual explanation of the verse. God took the \textit{mithāq} (covenant) of all the children of Adam to believe in him.\textsuperscript{694} Muqātil does not provide any theological explanation or inferences. Ṭabarī represents the Sunni counterpart of `Ayyāshī.\textsuperscript{695} He records numerous transmitted narrations from multiple Sunni scholars that interpret the \textit{mithāq} in a similar sense to the previous exegetes.\textsuperscript{696} He does not offer any other interpretation or deduce any theological benefit or even discuss the transmitted reports. Samarqandī does not divert from the trend of the aforementioned exegetes in the interpretation of the \textit{mithāq}. He, nonetheless, unlike the others, attempts to defend the authenticity and plausibility of the traditional reports against those who opposed them and denied their soundness.

Samarqandī’s defence of the traditional reports raises a compelling question of whether he is referring to al-Māturīdī’s criticism of the reports. It is difficult to assume otherwise given

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{691} All the children of Adam testified their belief in the existence of God before the physical creation of their bodies. For further information see: Ayyāshī 2, 40-43
\item\textsuperscript{692} Ayyāshī 2, 43
\item\textsuperscript{693} The political influence on the theological and exegetical narrative is quite clear in this instance. The majority of reports transmitted from the Sunni or Shi’a sources do not mention this addition that is very political in its nature and does not intrinsically has any theological value. Furthermore, chapter al-A’raf was revealed in Makkah before the migration of Prophet Muhammad to Madinah according to the all the exegetes. Thus, it was revealed before the Muslims formed a mosque or a community let alone having the indulgence of discussing their political leadership after the demise of Prophet Muhammad.
\item\textsuperscript{694} Ibn Sulaymān, \textit{Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān}, 2, 72.
\item\textsuperscript{695} He transmits all the traditional reports pertinent to this verse in Sunni exegesis literature.
\item\textsuperscript{696} A spoken covenant given to God by the children of Adam that they believe in him alone. For further information see: Ṭabarī, \textit{Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an}, 13, 223-28.
\end{itemize}
the close proximity in which they lived and the fact they belonged to the same Ḥanafī School. Samarqandī’s stance reflects the Sunni ambience in al-Māturīdī’s region, which accepts and follows the traditional views whether in theology or exegesis.\textsuperscript{697} It displays the distinction of al-Māturīdī from his counterparts. At the same time, it offers a justification for why al-Māturīdī’s theological work, according to Rudolph, did not receive the commendation one would expect.\textsuperscript{698} Thus, al-Māturīdī is the first Sunni exegete to give a new interpretation of the mīthāq, to challenge the traditional Sunni and Shi’a reports and to consider it evidence or part of the proof of design and magnificence in creation that substantiates the doctrine of tawḥīd. Before departing from the examination of al-Māturīdī’s commentary of the mīthāq verse, it should be noted that in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd al-Māturīdī does not list mīthāq al-khilqah (the covenant of creation) as part of the proof of creation. In fact, the creation argument as a proof of tawḥīd is non-existent there. The manāfi’ proof and the ittisāq and tadbīr proof dominate Kitāb al-Tawḥīd along with the proof of tamānu’, which will be covered in its own section.

Al-Māturīdī continues to assert the importance and presence of the creation proof in the Qur’an. In verse 185 chapter al-A’rāf, he revisits this proof.\textsuperscript{699} Al-Māturīdī suggests that the purpose of the creation of the heavens and the earth and all creatures is to direct the humans to tawḥīd. He states, “The contemplation in the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and all that God created is to prove the wahdāniyyah (oneness) of God and his rubūbiyyah (Lordship).”\textsuperscript{700} The objective is not to study creatures at their apparent appearances, as he explains in verse 189 chapter Al-‘Imrān, but to delve in their inner qualities to lead one to the knowledge of the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{697} Rudolph, \textit{Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand}, 100.
\textsuperscript{698} Ibid, 101.
\textsuperscript{699} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 6, 128.
\textsuperscript{700} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Al-Māturīdī states, “It is to obligate contemplation … to lead one to knowledge of who created … thus it is obligatory to prove tawḥīd by contemplation because they are all proofs of that.” The entire creation, thus, bears the hallmark of God’s power and oneness.

Al-Māturīdī reinforces this point in verse 16 chapter al-Ra’d. God challenges the Polytheists with a question “…have the partners, they have set up with God, created anything like His creation so as to make the matter of creation doubtful for them?” Al-Māturīdī proclaims, “If, as some claim, someone else created then the creation could not and would not point to any God. How could that be (acceptable) when the purpose of creation is to know the creator?”

Al-Māturīdī constructs this argument on the premise that the purpose of creation is to point to the creator. A premise he points to in the verses quoted earlier and he establishes when listing the various arguments that prove God’s existence in the previous chapter. If more than one God created the world and none of them has distinguished his creation from the others, it becomes impossible to identify them. In fact, “…it would not have been possible to know even the number of Gods…” because of the similarities in creation. The polytheists cannot, therefore, even claim that a set number of Gods must be worshipped for it could be more or less since it is difficult to discern to whom different creatures belong. Thus, the similarities between the creatures point to tawḥīd and the nature of creation inevitably points to tawḥīd as it simultaneously points to God’s existence. Al-Māturīdī’s inference of this rational argument

---

701 Ibid, 2, 508.
702 Ibid, 2, 510.
703 Ibid, 7, 407.
704 Ibid.
through al-Ra’d verse is admirable. It ascertains the ineluctability of *tawḥīd* through the creation proof.

Even though, the creation proof is not present in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, the notion of indefinite or ambiguous number of deities does. Al-Māturīdī expands on it further but does not link it to the creation proof rather to the human experience of the notion of *al-wāḥid* (the one), a *sam’ī* (narrative) proof, that will be discussed later.\(^{705}\)

Similarly, other exegetes do not infer any theological arguments from al-Ra’d verse. ‘Ayyāshī does not comment on the verse at all and Muqātil repeats the words of the verse nearly verbatim. He comments, “have they confused the creation of the statues with the creation of God? The statues cannot create anything so how could they worship what cannot create.”\(^{706}\) Ṭabarī and Samarqandī report that the verse is a parable God gave to the polytheists to realise the fallacy of their deities. They reverberated Muqātil’s commentary, “God says (to disbelievers)… has the creation of your statues, whom you have taken as deities, being confused with the creation of God?”\(^{707}\) They do not construct an argument from it for *tawḥīd* and do not attempt to extract or analyse the theological implications therein.

Al-Māturīdī complements his theological analysis, in support of the creation proof, of the verses that describe creation on a macro level with a similar rigorous analysis of the verses that describe the notion of creation on a micro level. One of these verses, is verse 53 chapter Fuṣṣilat.\(^{708}\) The verse calls humans to ponder over two things – the *āyāt* (proofs and signs) of

---

\(^{705}\) The proof of *al-wāḥid* (the one) is a proof al-Māturīdī employs exclusively in the *kitāb*. It will be examined thoroughly in the section dedicated to the exclusive proofs of *tawḥīd* in the *kitāb*.


\(^{708}\) The verse reads, “We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.”
God in the āfāq (typically translated as horizons), and the āyāt of God in wa fī anfusikom (typically translated as in yourselves). Al-Māturīdī, however, does not follow the typical interpretation of the Fuṣṣilat verse. He advocates an alternative construal for the two commands. Al-Māturīdī interprets the first phrase “our āyāt in the āfāq” to mean “raf’ al-samā’ (the elevation of the heavens) despite its thickness, density and vastness without an apparent mean and the suspension of it from the top without a chain or a pillar from the bottom.” Thus, he considers the phrase specific to the marvel creation of the cosmos. Al-Māeturīdī considers it a sign of the legitimacy of tawḥīd that God placed deliberately for the humans to contemplate. Likewise, Al-Māeturīdī interprets the second phrase “our āyāt...wa fī anfusikom (in yourselves)” to refer to the development cycle of the human embryos. He elucidates, “wa fī anfusikom (in yourselves) points to how the humans metamorphose in the wombs from a fertilised cell to a blood clot to an embryo…to prove that this is the work of one God.” Al-Māeturīdī does not explain though how the creation of the heavens and the embryonic development of humans substantiate tawḥīd. It seems he deems it self-explanatory. The connection between these two phenomena and wahdāniyyah of God is finesse in creation. Finesse cannot come from multiple Gods with multiple wills. Hence Al-Māeturīdī sees in the creation of the heavens and humans a proof of tawḥīd. The study of other verses Al-Māeturīdī employs to establish the creation argument confirms the researcher’s analysis. However, before expanding on this point, which will be extensive, it is important to investigate if the other Sunni and Transoxianan exegetes agree with Al-Māeturīdī’s views.

---

709 Al-Māeturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 13, 157.
710 Ibid.
Ayyāshī opts not to comment on the Fussilat verse at all. On the other hand, Muqātil, Ṭabarī and Samarqandī comment on the verse but remain committed to the transmitted traditional interpretations only. Muqātil interprets the āyāt to be the punishment of God that descended on the previous nations, such as the people of Thamūd and the people of Lot, and interprets the āfāq to be the land that stretches from Yemen to the Levant, in which these nations lived. As for the phrase āyāt fi anfusikom, Muqātil interprets it as God’s punishment that descended during the battle of Badr and the defeat of the Arab polytheists during it.

Ṭabarī does not concur with Muqātil on the above interpretations. He lists different transmitted reports that present various interpretations of the Fussilat verse. Some of these reports interpret the āyāt in the āfāq to be the emergence of Prophet Muḥammad in the world whilst other reports claim the phrase foretells the triumphs of Prophet Muḥammad in his future battles against all enemies in general. As for the phrase fi anfusikom, Ṭabarī interprets it to mean the triumph of Prophet Muḥammad against the polytheists of Makkah, specifically, and his conquest of Makkah. Interestingly, Ṭabarī opposes al-Māturīdī’s interpretation categorically. He considers it ghayr ma ‘qūl (not rationally possible) to interpret the āyāt as the heavens and the stars because, to Ṭabarī, the purpose of the verse is to threaten the Arab polytheists and promise them, in a cautionary tone, to see what they have not seen before the advent of Prophet Muḥammad.

Samarqandī lists all the reports Muqātil and Ṭabarī recorded in their exegeses. He seems to incline to a different interpretation. The āyāt in the āfāq could refer to the miracle of the split

---

711 Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 3, 748.
712 Ibid.
714 Ibid.
715 Ibid, 21, 494.
of the moon in Makkah, in Samarqandī’s opinion. He bases it on a report of *aszāb al-nuzūl* (a cause of revelation) al-Ḍāḥīkī (d. 725 CE) transmitted that backs up this interpretation.⁷¹⁶

Al-Māturīdī’s interpretations of the Fuṣṣilat verse and linking it to *tawḥīd* proves, thus, to be peerless amongst his colleagues. Towards the end of his commentary though, Samarqandī provides an interesting comment. He states that some of the *muta’akhkhirīn* (contemporary and recent century scholars) interpret the *āyāt* in the *āfāq* to mean the signs God placed in the world that point to his *waḥdāniyyah* but he neither elaborates further nor does he name about whom he is speaking. This is most likely a reference to al-Māturīdī since Samarqandī hails from the same region as al-Māturīdī, belongs to the same school as him not to mention that al-Māturīdī is the only exegete that established a link between the verse and *tawḥīd*. The comment of Samarqandī is direct proof of his conscious choice to follow the traditional exegetical path and not endorse the genre al-Māturīdī is aiming to establish- Sunni theological exegesis. At the same time, Samarqandī’s comment may indicate that at his time, the views of al-Māturīdī, exegetical and theological, were not widely endorsed by all scholars of the region.

A noteworthy point that should be articulated, before returning to the investigation of the creation proof in al-Māturīdī’s commentary, is that the Fuṣṣilat verse and the creation proof do not appear in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Al-Māturīdī does not utilise the verse or the proof to evince *tawḥīd* there.

In return to the investigation of how al-Māturīdī relates the Fuṣṣilat verse to the creation proof and corroborates the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, finesse in creation seems to be the key link

---

between them. The study of verse 26 chapter al-Baqarah, strengthens this assumption. In al-Baqarah verse, al-Māturīdī’s investigates the creation of a very distinct and overlooked creature-the insects. The verse begins with a statement about the mosquito, “God is not ashamed to cite the similitude of a mosquito or of something even more insignificant than this”. Al-Māturīdī considers this verse a proof of tawḥīd for “…the miracle of waḥdāniyyah (the oneness) of God… in the creation of what is miniscule and infinitesimal, in body and size, is more appreciable than in the creation of large and massive creatures.” Al-Māturīdī considers the intricate design of such creatures a sign of one God. He justifies this conclusion stating, “…because all creatures, even if they combine their efforts, cannot fashion a creature, like mosquitoes and flies, and fit them with the needed (limbs)… mouth … hand… anus but they might (possibly) be able to do so in the large creatures.” Thus, God granted such creatures, insects, a mention in the Qur’an, contrary to how the kings of earth habitually speak about such creatures with contempt and disgust, to emphasise their miraculous and sophisticated nature as a proof of God’s oneness.

The above inference is the brainchild of al-Māturīdī, no other exegete endorses it or beats him to it. The commentary of all the other, investigated, exegetes is overwhelmingly transmissive. Ţabarî lists three possible interpretations. The first is a report of asbāb al-nuzūl (cause of revelation) for the verse. It states that after the hypocrites listened to the previous parables in verses 17, the lit fire, and verse 19, the rain, in chapter al-Baqarah they said, “God is

---

717 The verse reads, “Indeed, Allah is not timid to present an example - that of a mosquito or what is smaller than it. Those who have believed know that it is the truth from their Lord. But as for those who disbelieve, they say, “What did Allah intend by this as an example?” He misleads many thereby and guides many thereby. And He misleads not except the defiantly disobedient.”

718 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 64.

719 Ibid, 1, 65.

720 Ibid, 1, 64.

721 The first is from famous exegetes amongst the companions of the prophet, Ibn Abbas (d. 687 CE) and Ibn Mas‘ūd (d. 653 CE). The second is an interpretation from a later exegete Qatādah ibn Di‘āma (d. 735 CE) and the third is an interpretation from another known exegete al-Rabī’ Ibn Anas (d. 758 CE).
higher and loftier than giving such parables.” The second states a similar cause of revelation but with different verses, different parables and interlocutors. The disbelievers said, after they heard the Qur’an give parables of the fly, in verse 73 of chapter al-Ḥajj, and the spider, in verse 41 of chapter al-’Ankabūt, and objected “what does God want from this?” Consequently, al-Baqarah verse was revealed. The third explains that the parable assimilates the state of the humans, particularly non-Muslims, to the mosquito. Once, they have their fill from life and desires God will take them. Ībād favours the first opinion as it is suitable to the context of the verse. Evidently, none of the reports, Ībād lists, infers a proof of tawḥīd from the verse and he does not either. Samarqandī relates the second and third reports Ībād explains but does not favour any of them. Ībād opt not to comment on the verse and Muqātil simply repeats the wording of the verse. None of the exegetes attempts to deduce any theological benefit from al-Baqarah verse pertinent to tawḥīd or any other theological topic. Ta’wilāt is the only Sunni exegesis, and the only title of al-Māturīdī, that considers sophistication, magnificence and finesse in creation a proof of tawḥīd.

At first sight, the theological argument al-Māturīdī wove from his reflection and contemplation over the creation verses may not seem as solid as he aspires in attesting the belief of tawḥīd. One may argue that the collaboration of efforts amongst humans, or other creatures of will, as evident in the physical world, may lead to perfection and finesse. How could finesse and intricate design then point to tawḥīd? The response lies in the key differences between the nature of God and the nature of creatures. As praiseworthy as it may seem, collaboration is indicative of the creatures’ inability, individually, to complete or perfect a task. A quality that cannot exist in a

722 Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 1, 399.
723 Ibid, 1, 400.
724 Samarqandī, Taṣfīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 1, 36.
725 Ibn Sulaymān, Taṣfīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 1, 95.
deity as it contradicts Godship, omnipotence and perfection. Thus, the above analogy cannot apply to God.

Thus, sophistication, magnificence and finesse in the creation of God is symbiotic with tawḥīd in al-Māturīdī’s eyes. He persists in emphasising and confecting evidence of it as he progresses in Ta’wilāt. In chapter al-Rūm verse 30,726 chapter Qāf verse 6 and chapter al-Mulk verses 3 and 4, God speaks of the notion of perfection and its opposite tafāwut (incongruity) in the creation of the heavens. He challenges humans to find faults in the heavens. Al-Māturīdī considers such verses a proof of the wahdāniyyah (oneness) of God. It complements the finesse and sophistication in design of creation argument, he proposes. According to al-Māturīdī, the presence of multiple creators would cause inconsistency in creation as each will create in his own fashion and each will run his creation according to his will. The result would be incongruity and incompatibility between the creatures that belong to different deities. Since no incongruity exists in creatures then in turn no polytheism exists in creation. Hence, tawḥīd prevails. A rational argument, al-Māturīdī, formulates built on a qur’anic evidence and an observational truth. It would be interesting if any other exegete infers it or at least endorses it.

None of them does. ‘Ayyāshī has no commentary on the verses and Muqātil confines his efforts to explaining the meaning of a single word “tafāwut” which he interprets as ’ayb (flaw).727 Ṭabarī is not very different from Muqātil. He comments briefly on the various recitations of the word tafāwut and interprets it to mean ṣudū’ (cracks) in the heavens.728

---

726 In al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the following phrase in verse 30 chapter al-Rūm, “and adhere to the true nature on which Allah has created the world. The mould fashioned by Allah cannot be altered”, al-Māturīdī explains why the mould, fashioned by God, cannot be altered. It is because it contains a proof of the wahdāniyyah of God as God states (in chapter al-Mulk’s verse) ‘You will see no incongruity in the Merciful One's creation’…the absence of incongruity is a proof of his wahdāniyyah.” For further information see: Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 11, 187.
728 Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 23, 506.
Samarqandī mirrors the style of Ṭabarī in the explanation of the verse but adds that tafāwut could mean *ikhtilāf* (differences) as well. None of the exegetes examine the verse theologically or attempt to extract from it a proof to support the doctrine of *tawḥīd*.

### 3.3.7 The proof of *tadāfu‘* (mutual conflict) and *tamānu‘* (mutual hindrance)

The title of the section may seem unconventional. Traditionally, Sunni theologians speak of the proof of *tamānu‘*, as opposed to *tadāfu‘* and *tamānu‘*, which translates to mutual hindrance or impediment, as Rudolph suggests, as a proof of *tawḥīd*. However, the title of the section intends to represent the proof from the lens of al-Māturīdī, how he studies and presents it in Ta‘wīlāt.

In his discussion of this proof, al-Māturīdī overwhelmingly speaks of two notions and not one, *tamānu‘* (mutual hindrance) and *tadāfu‘* (inevitable clashing). He uses them in conjunction with each other more than five times in Ta‘wīlāt. Interestingly, al-Māturīdī does not use *tadāfu‘* in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* in the discussion of *tawḥīd*.

In his discussion of the concept of *tamānu‘*, in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, al-Māturīdī quotes four verses from four different chapters- al-Ra‘d, al-İsrā‘, al-Anbiyā‘ and al-Mu‘minūn. In Ta‘wīlāt, however, al-Māturīdī discusses the proof of *tadāfu‘* and *tamānu‘* in three of them only. The fourth verse, verse 16 chapter al-Ra‘d, al-Māturīdī uses it, in Ta‘wīlāt, rightly if one might add, for a different proof. Thus, from the outset, al-Māturīdī’s discussion of the proof of *tadāfu‘* and *tamānu‘* in Ta‘wīlāt seems more clearly thought as far as relevance and terminology is

---

731 How he uses them will be discussed shortly.
732 The proof of creation.
concerned. It is likely al-Māturīdī revised his use of verse 16, after he wrote the *Kitāb*, and as a result excluded the verse, from the *tamānuʿ* argument, in his exegesis. This avers the likelihood of Taʿwīlāt being written or completed after the *Kitāb*.

Consequently, in Taʿwīlāt, the discussion of the *tamānuʿ* argument commences with verse 42 chapter al-Isrāʾ.733 God states, “(O Muḥammad), tell them that if there had been other deities beside God, as they assert, they would surely *ibtaghaw* (have tried to find) *sabīlā* (a way or path) to *dhī al-ʿArsh* (the Owner of the Throne).” The keywords in the verse are three: 1- *ibtaghaw*, commonly means to seek, 2- *sabīlā*, generally means a way or path or a mean or method and 3- *dhī al-ʿArsh*, lexically it means the Owner of the Throne but all the Sunni exegetes, investigated, declare it a reference to God.

Notably, al-Māturīdī commences by listing the various exegetical commentaries on al-Isrāʾ verse, theological and lexical, before he expresses his personal interpretation. He reviews the theologically relevant commentaries and analyses them. This practise from al-Māturīdī is notable as this is the first time, he transmits the theological commentaries of other Sunni exegetes. The main drive for the change is that al-Isrāʾ verse is the first instance where Sunni exegetes provide a theologically orientated commentary. Al-Māturīdī does not name these exegetes, however, the analysis of the other prominent Sunni exegeses reveals their identity. They are Ibn Abbas (d. 687 CE), Qatādah (d. 735 CE) and Muqātil, whose reports are found in Ṭabarī’s Samarqandī’s and Muqātil’s exegeses. A review of them in these respective titles is in order.

---

733 Al-Māturīdī cites al-Isrāʾ verse on two occasions in his exegesis. One in verse 106 of chapter Yusuf and the second one is in its own chapter, al-Isrāʾ. However, only in one of them, al-Māturīdī pertains it to *tawḥīd*, which is in the body of chapter al-Isrāʾ.
Muqātil interprets *ibtaghaw* and *sabilā* to mean “…they (the other deities) would have sought a mean to dominate him (God) and overpower him as it is the practice of the kings of the earth with one another…”734 He does not go any further in his commentary. Thus, Muqātil does not establish or spell out the link between the verse and the *tamānuʿ* argument, as a proof of *tawḥīd*, even though the context of the verse makes it obvious that God is referring to it.735 Al-Māturīdī transmits the interpretation of Muqātil faithfully. He neither expands nor comments on it, which indicate that al-Māturīdī does not favour it but does not reject either. For if al-Māturīdī did, he would have criticised it as he does with the interpretations of the other Sunni traditional scholars found in Samarqandī’s and Ṭabarī’s exegeses.

Ṭabarī takes an opposite path to Muqātil’s in his interpretation of the keywords in al-Isrāʾ verse. Ṭabarī considers the verse a command from God to Prophet Muḥammad instructing him to tell the polytheists “… if it is as you say that there are other deities with God, which is incorrect, then those deities would have sought *al-qurbah* (to be favoured), *al-zulfah*, (to be close) and *al-martabah* (to be of high rank) with *dhī al-ʿArsh* (God).”736 The position Ṭabarī adopts represents the Sunni traditional opinion for he transmits these reports from various *tabiʿīn* exegetes particularly Qatādah. Whilst ʿAyyāshī, the only prominent Shia exegete from the region of al-Māturīdī, does not comment on the verse at all, Samarqandī adopts the traditional Sunni interpretation and in turn Ṭabarī’s position. He relates a narration from Ibn Abbas that states, “say (Muḥammad) to the people of Makkah if there were other deities with him (God)…they would have sought a path to him and to be like him.”737 He follows it with the explanation of

735 The presence of multiple deities necessitates an inevitable clash between them. Since a clash does not exist then multiple deities do not exist.
736 Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʿwīl Āy Al-Qurʿān*, 17, 454.
Qatādah, “…they would have recognised the high status of dhī al-‘Arsh (God) and tried to be close to him…” Al-Māturīdī transmits these interpretations faithfully, as he does with Muqātil, but criticises them fiercely. He states, “…it is not likely that God will make such a statement about the asnām (statues) as if they are real deities when they are made of wood.” Al-Māturīdī opposes this interpretation for firstly these statues are inanimate pieces of wood of no significance and secondly they are taken besides God as false deities so why would he address them in such a capacity? Al-Māturīdī continues in his refutation, “…God describes them (the asnām), in other verses, as they cannot hear, cannot reason, cannot see…cannot create even flies…” So why would he treat them as deities here? Al-Māturīdī’s refutation of this traditional interpretation is constructed on two fundamental sources ‘aql (reason) and naql (other Qur’anic verses). Reason refuses the treatment of a piece of wood as a respectful deity worthy of address particularly one taken besides God. Similarly, al-Māturīdī’s review of all the verses that discuss the asnām (statues), naql sources, concludes that God highlights their unworthiness of being treated or addressed as conscious creatures let alone deities. Thus, the traditional interpretation conflicts with the main Qur’anic narrative of the asnām, in al-Māturīdī’s opinion. The only exception al-Māturīdī makes is that if the address in the verses was to angels, whom some people worshiped as false deities. Al-Māturīdī makes such an exception as God describes the angels, in the Qur’an, as servants of God who seek his pleasure and seek closeness to him. In such an instance only, the traditional interpretation would make sense to al-Māturīdī.

Al-Māturīdī demonstrates not only a critical mind but a tactful one as well. He uses the very tradition, the Qur’an’s address about statues and angels, to refute the traditional exegetical

738 Ibid.
739 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 8, 281.
740 Ibid.
741 Ibid.
interpretations from prominent sources such as Ibn Abbas and Qatādah. Unlike, other exegetes al-Māturīdī appraises the transmitted traditional interpretations. He assesses their credibility and does not accept them just because they came from early scholars. He critiques them and, if need be, challenges them tactfully through tradition itself as well as reason. These traditional exegetical interpretations, nonetheless, afford one an invaluable insight into the status of the discussion of the proofs of tawḥīd in Sunni exegesis. It was completely absent and as this study progresses from one topic in ilāhiyyāt to the other the importance of the contributions of al-Māturīdī to Islamic theology and Sunni theological exegesis appear instrumental.

With this objective in mind, al-Māturīdī shifts from transmitting and refuting the traditional interpretations on al-Isrā’ verse to proposing his own theological arguments and interpretation. Firstly, he argues that had there been other deities that truly have a share with God in the world and its affairs, “…they would have stopped him from executing his command in everything…” but since, “…no other (so called deity) has done so… there is no other deity besides God.” Secondly, al-Māturīdī argues that God proved the fallacy of the polytheists’ belief by explaining to them that if there were deities other than him “…they would had have advanced proofs of their rubūbiyyah (Lordship) and ulūhiyyah (divinity) by creating creatures, as God … showed his rubūbiyyah and ulūhiyyah by the creatures he created.” Al-Māturīdī, then, ratiocinates. Since no other deity has proven or proclaimed “inshā’a shay’ (to create anything)” then there is no deity except God. Al-Māturīdī considers the absence of proofs

742 Ibid.
743 Ibid, 8, 282.
744 Ibid.
745 Ibid, 8, 281.
from the other deities to compete with God and to aver their existence and their creation is, by its very nature, a proof of his oneness.

The thoroughness al-Māturīdī demonstrates in the analysis of al-Isrā’ verse, strangely, does not transcend to the other relevant chapters.\textsuperscript{746} A contributing factor could be the lack of need for it since the proof is self-explanatory in these verses. The Qur’an states the proof in verse 22 chapter al-Anbiyā’, “Had there been other deities besides God in the heavens and the earth, both (the heavens and the earth) lafasadatā, would have gone corrupt (out of order).” Al-Māturīdī discusses the verse on six different occasions in Ta’wīlāt, four of them are in chapter al-Anbiyā’, verses 17, 22, 30 and 31. The other two are in verse 91 chapter al-Mu’minūn and verse 61 chapter al-Naml. Al-Māturīdī interprets lafasadatā in chapter al-Anbiyā’ to mean “…they would not have existed in the first place because it is the habit of the kings when one constructs something the other seeks to destroy it…”\textsuperscript{747} Thus “…they (heavens and the earth) would have been non-existent if there were multiple Gods.”\textsuperscript{748} Al-Māturīdī asserts the above reasoning repeatedly every time he quotes this verse without adding any new argument. A minor difference in terminology, though, appears in verse 61 chapter al-Naml. Al-Māturīdī uses the terms ‘tamānu’ and taghālub (attempt to win against by power) there instead of tadāfu’, in the context of the clash of multiple deities. In addition, al-Māturīdī recommends such a proof to be particularly used in the debates with thanawiyyah (dualists) and Magi as they associate partners with God.\textsuperscript{749}

\textsuperscript{746} Chapter al-Ra’d, al-Anbiyā’, chapter al-Naml and al-Mu’minūn
\textsuperscript{747} Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 9, 269.
\textsuperscript{748} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{749} Ibid, 12, 81.
As far as the commentary of the other exegetes, on al-Anbiyā’ verse, is concerned, Muqātil does not depart far from his usual method of commentary. He merely reiterates the words of the verse, “If there were in them (the heavens and the earth) many deities beside God both of them would have been destroyed.” Similarly, Ṭabarī restates the same meaning in his own words, “if other deities, worthy of worship, existed in the heavens and the earth besides God, the creator of all things,…the inhabitants in the heavens and the earth would have been corrupt.” Samarqandī follows suit and as mentioned earlier, in the section of the proof of ittisāq and tadbīr, connects the istiqāmah in the affairs of the world to this verse arguing if there were two distinct deities everything would have been corrupt. He repeats the same meaning in another two instances in his exegesis. ‘Ayyāshī does not comment at all on the verse as the extant copy of his exegesis stops at chapter al-Kahf.

For the same reason, ‘Ayyāshī does not comment on verse 91 chapter al-Mu’minūn, the third and last key verse of the proof of tamānu’ and tadāfu’. In general, the commentary of all examined exegeses on al-Mu’minūn verse does not differ greatly from it on the verses in chapter al-Anbiyā’. Muqātil does not comment at all and Samarqandī repeats the analogy of al-Māturīdī on the habit of the kings of the earth and does not go further.

Conversely, al-Māturīdī and Ṭabarī offer further insights on the verse each in his own style and approach. Ṭabarī, for the first time, provides his understanding of the reasoning behind the tamānu’ argument. He paraphrases the scenario of the verse, about the possibility of the existence of two deities, and then explains, “…they would have tried to dominate one another

750 Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 3, 74.
751 Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’ān, 18, 425.
752 Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 2, 423.
753 Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 3, 164; Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 2, 488.
and the strong would have triumphed over the weak. For the strong does not accept being dominated by the weak and the weak is not fit to be God…”

This is the only time he refers to the verse in his exegesis.

Al-Māturīdī, on the other hand, does. He cites the verse four times in Ta’wīlāt. The first time in conjunction with verse 22 chapter al-Anbiyā’, discussed earlier. The second and third are in the context of the same chapter, chapter al-Mu’mūnūn, with verses 14 and 91 with the main analysis being on the latter. Al-Māturīdī scrutinizes each phrase in the verse and opens with a commentary on the notion of a walad (child) of God. The verse reads, “God has no offspring (child or children) and there is no other deity as a partner with Him…” Al-Māturīdī elucidates, “If God had a child it would have been a God itself. For the child, evidently, is from the same species as the father and it cannot be from a different species or a different nature.”

He then clarifies the connection between the notion of the walad (child) of God and the second part of the verse. “…if the child is a deity (as well), as we explained before, then every deity (the father and the child) would have become an independent ruler over its creation.” Thus, God cannot have a child because the notion of a child conflicts with the autonomy of God and his sovereignty and leads to the conclusion of the verse, “…they would have tried to override one another…” Hence, the proof of tamānu’. The fourth instance is in verse 3 chapter al-Mulk. Al-Māturīdī states, “…if you see futūr (flaws) and shuqūq (cracks) it means you see tadāfu’ (clashes) and tamānu’ (mutual hindrance) in the world.” Why? Al-Māturīdī answers, because, as verse 91 chapter al-Mu’mūnūn argues, every deity would seek to be the independent ruler over its creation. As a

---

754 Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fi Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 18, 425.
755 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 10, 57.
756 Ibid.
757 Ibid, 15, 291.
result, “… each deity will take his creation and the fuṭūr (flaws) and shuqūq appear.”758 In addition, “… tadāfu’ (clashes) and tamānu‘ (mutual hindrance) happen when there are multiple Gods because what one constructs the other will destroy.”759 Furthermore, “…the creation of each is distinct from the other.”760 It would necessitate, as well, the presence of differences and incongruity in the universe.

Al-Māturīdī seems determined to progress Sunni exegesis beyond the conventional style. He does not stop at pointing to the theological argument, which is self-evident in the verse, but goes further to explain how it relates to the other parts of the verse, which Ṭabarī, the only other exegete to comment on the verse, does not.761 Al-Māturīdī connects it to other verses in the Qur’an, as well, to solidify further the belief in tawḥīd, which no other exegetes attempts to do. He clarifies the logic and the argument behind it and how it necessitates tawḥīd. A clear effort to interrelate theology to exegesis or rather unearth the significance of the Qur’anic theology not only in propagating tawḥīd but in proving it.

Al-Māturīdī draws the attention to the importance of Qur’anic theology in the evolution of Sunni theology. His persistent highlight of all theological elements in the verses verifies his determination in commencing a new movement in Sunni exegesis. A movement that does not accept but examines the traditional exegeses. It critiques and when necessary opposes the traditional stances. It corrects what it deems inaccurate and seeks to contribute its own interpretations. A movement that enriches Sunni exegesis by discovering new insights the

758 Ibid.
759 Ibid.
760 Ibid.
761 Ṭabarī expressed his admiration of the powerful and succinct ḥujjah, the proof, God provides in the verse but did comment on the notion of walad (child) of God in the verse and why God mentioned it in the same context as the proof of tamānu‘.
predecessors missed or overlooked. It does not, as other Sunni exegetes have demonstrated, accept and simply echo what others have written. The genre of Sunni theological exegesis emerges from such a movement and so far, in the scope of tawḥīd and existence of God, al-Māturīdī delivers it into existence.

Verse 185 chapter al-‘Imrān affirms the above conclusion. In al-‘Imrān verse, which is not one of the main verses of the proof of tamānu’, al-Māturīdī supplements his argument by signifying the incompatibility of polytheism with the nature of God. In all the previous verses, al-Māturīdī addresses the scenario of clash between multiple deities but in this verse, he discusses the scenario of ḭiṣṭāḥ (compromise or agreement) between deities. He states, “The existence points to tawḥīd …even in the scenario of ḥiṣṭāḥ (between deities).”762 Why? “Because it (ḥiṣṭāḥ) indicates ‘ajz (weakness) and jahl (ignorance).”763 According to al-Māturīdī, a God will not compromise indefinitely to another God unless he is weaker or less knowledgeable. Al-Māturīdī does no elucidate on the logic behind his conclusion perhaps since he believes it self-explanatory. Only one of two possibilities emerge from a compromise. Either one of the Gods knows that the other is more knowledgeable and hence he accepts to compromise to him, which denotes jahl (ignorance) in the compromising deity. Or he knows that the other is not more knowledgeable but stronger. Hence, he submits to him, which signifies ‘ajz (weakness) in the compromising deity. Al-Māturīdī ratiocinates, “…the weak and ignorant cannot be a God.”764 Tawḥīd is the only logical form of theism. None of the other exegetes discuss tawḥīd let alone any of the aspects of the tamānu’ argument in this verse. Al-Māturīdī’s commentary, thus, is unprecedented.

---

762 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 502.
763 Ibid.
764 Ibid.
As stated, in the beginning of this section, al-Māturīdī does not use the term *tadāfu‘* in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. The concept of the *tamānu‘* argument, nonetheless, is evident there and he advances it as a proof of *tawḥīd* under the category of *dalālat al-aql* (rational proofs). Al-Māturīdī argues that if there were more than one God, the world would not exist except in theory. As Rudolph explains it, “one will prevent the self-realization of the other.” This resembles his interpretation of *lafasadata* in verse 22 chapter al-Anbiyā’, deliberated earlier. Al-Māturīdī uses the same term, “…*wafī dhālika fasād al-rubūbiyyah* (this nullifies the concept of God’s Lordship).” Al-Māturīdī mirrors in his *Kitāb* the same views he argues and proves in Ta‘wilāt albeit the terminological and presentation differs. Indeed, the *tamānu‘* argument, as Rudolph states, is not developed by al-Māturīdī. Rudolph suggests that it is a form of the cosmological or teleological proof developed by the Stoics and Church Fathers. His citation, and reference to Richard Heinzmann, however, does not support the suggestion. It states that the Church Fathers “held it to be possible in principle to infer the existence of a God from the signs present in this world.” It is rather a generic observational remark rather than a specific reference to the *tamānu‘* argument, which al-Māturīdī categorises, as Rudolph confirms, a rational argument. It is likely that al-Māturīdī borrowed the *tamānu‘* argument from the Qur’an where it is strongly and directly present. The only exception is the *sirr* (the secret scenario). Al-Māturīdī presents it in the *Kitāb* only. He asks, “Could each God do an action

---

765 Rudolph refers to them as the indicators of intellect. However, proof is a better rendering for the word *dalālah* lexically and contextually since al-Māturīdī is using them as independent arguments to prove *tawḥīd*. For further information see: Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, 269.

766 Ibid, 271.


771 Rudolph points to the strong presence of the *tamānu‘* argument in the Qur’an. For further information see: Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 271-72.
secretly without the other God or Gods knowing?” If the answer is yes then they are both ignorant and if the answer is no then they are both weak and if only one of them can then the other does not qualify to be a God. This essentially falls under the ignorance and weakness concept that al-Māturīdī spoke of in Ta’wīlāt. It represents a clearer illustration of it. Perhaps al-Māturīdī excluded this illustration from Ta’wīlāt as he could not find a Qur’anic verse that establishes it or it is difficult to give a definite answer to this question. So far, al-Māturīdī has demonstrated spontaneousness and naturalness in his commentary. He studies a given verse, analyses it, and infers from it all that his mind permits him to infer. The overall consistency in the nature of the arguments al-Māturīdī presents to support the proof of tamānu’ expressed in both titles confirms that the authorship in both of them belongs to the same writer, al-Māturīdī.

3.4 The Proofs exclusive to Kitāb al-Tawḥīd

Despite the elaborate theological commentary al-Māturīdī expounds in Ta’wīlāt, to prove the doctrine of tawḥīd, one yet encounters in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd theological proofs that are non-existent in Ta’wīlāt. Some of these proofs pertain to the sam‘ (transmission) category while others pertain to the ‘aql (reason) and ḥiss (physical reality) category. In total, al-Māturīdī discusses in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd three arguments that he eliminates from Ta’wīlāt.

The sam‘ī argument al-Māturīdī presents emphasises that all humans, even the proponents of polytheism, consent that the notion of al-wāḥid (the One) represents al-ibtidā’ (the beginning) of all things. Every creature and notion begins with one and then enumerates. In addition, all humans use the notion of al-wāḥid (the One) to express al-’azama (majesty), al-
Thus the uniqueness of the notion of \textit{al-wāḥid} (the one) and what it denotes is a universal truth amongst humans.\footnote{Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd}, 19.} Anything beyond this notion does not express any of the above qualities. It merely communicates a numerical digit.\footnote{Rudolph describes the argumentation of al-Māturīdī in the prominent role of the One in human understanding as a distinguished and uncommon argument in the classical \textit{kalām} theology. For further information see: Rudolph, \textit{Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand}, 273.} Even though al-Māturīdī does not elucidate further on this proof, as ambiguity has proven to be a constant trait in his writing, whether in Taʾwīlāt or \textit{Kitāb}, what he intends to accomplish, through this argument, is to appeal to the human sense and their universal consensus on the uniqueness of the concept of \textit{al-wāḥid}. Humans reserve the one status to the best, unparallel and most unique amongst them. Therefore, it defies logic and consensual sense to apply or even accept the notion of multiplicity to God, the most perfect and omnipotent being, when amongst humans such notion is only indicative of count. Al-Māturīdī is arguing that the association of the notion of multiplicity with deities diminishes the values of majesty, dominion, high rank and excellence of the deities and robs them from the quality of perfection, which nullifies Godship. Hence, \textit{tawḥīd} is the only doctrine for a powerful and perfect God.

Rudolph suggests that al-Māturīdī borrowed the concept of the oneness of God from Neoplatonic philosophy. He explains that it is evident in the writing of Plotinus (d. 270 CE), which has been translated into Arabic and the distinction between absolute and relative oneness was discussed by Proclus (d. 485 CE), whose work accessible in the Islamic world.\footnote{Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd}, 19.} Rudolph theorises that al-Māturīdī may have borrowed the concept from Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, a student of al-Kindī, or somehom from the Ismaʿīlites who absorbed some concepts from Neoplatonic philosophy in their creed.\footnote{Rudolph, \textit{Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand}, 276.} The former seems to be a stronger possibility since al-Kindīʾ’s influence on some
of the proofs al-Māturīdī postulates for the existence of God has been evinced in the analysis of chapter two. Another supporting evidence is the opinion of Jospeh Van Ess who names al-Kindī as the most likely source upon whom the Mu'tazilites relied in developing their definition of the oneness of God as the unique without equal.777 A third possibility Rudolph and Van Ess do not mention is the Qur’an. In chapter al-Ikhlāṣ verse 1, God describes himself as the *ahad* (the unique one) but this is not sufficient to credit this possibility for al-Māturīdī did not use *al-wāḥid* (the one) in the context of chapter al-Ikhlāṣ or elsewhere in the Qur’an in his exegesis. In return to the first two prospects, Rudolph confesses that it is no longer possible to ascertain how al-Māturīdī came to know of such concepts as access to al-Balkhi’s work is no longer available.778 Regardless of how al-Māturīdī borrowed the basic concept of *al-wāḥid* from Neoplatonism, he developed it in a manner that fits within Islamic theology and formulated from it a unique proof to ascertain *tawḥīd*.

From the concept of *al-wāḥid* (the one), al-Māturīdī transitions to a purely rational argument. His second argument, partially, benefits from the principal premise in the *samʿī* proof.779 Al-Māturīdī maintains that if the notion of multiplicity is applied to deities then, logically, one must accept the possibility of an infinite number of deities. For it is possible, upon such basis, that every single creature is created by a different deity.780 The number of creatures, thus, becomes innumerable, as there is always something being created in the universe. It follows that the number of deities is thus countless, which is not only farfetched but also unrealistic. It triggers multiple complications. The least of them is the inability of the humans to know who

779 The principal premise in the previous proof is that all humans consent that any digit used after *al-wāḥid* (the one) aims at expressing countability and not singularity. For further information see: Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd*, 19.
780 Ibid.
created who and what, to identify these indefinite number of deities and recognise who is worthy of worship and to whom they are accountable. Hence, the belief in a single omnipotent, perfect and all-knowing God, *tawḥīd*, is the only feasible, realistic and logical doctrine. Another complication the notion of multiple deities generates is to reach consensus on the number of Gods. Any number given can be disputed and rightly challenged. Anyone can ask why is it not more? or why is not less? Only *al-wāhid* (the one) who represents the beginning of all creatures and outside the order of count is unarguable and unchallengeable by reason.

Al-Māturīdī persists with the rational arguments. The third, and final, rational proof he discusses, exclusively in his *Kitāb*, is the unification of the opposite *jawāhir* (essences) and *ṭabāʾiʿ* (natures) in a single individual. Al-Māturīdī claims that no creature can be labelled as either of absolute good or pure or beneficial essence or of absolute evil or impure or harmful essence. The ever presence of such conflicting essences within all creatures shows that the proclamation of distinct separate Gods, one for goodness, purity and benevolence and another for evil, impurity and harm is more theoretical than realistic as purely evil creatures or purely good creatures are fictional and do not exist in the physical world. Similarly, on the level of *ṭabāʾiʿ* (natures), the *ajsām* (bodies) of all creatures are composed from different natures which possess conflicting and opposing characteristics within them. If the various natures are created by different deities they would grow apart and would corrupt all bodies. Nevertheless, they are amalgamated in a felicitous manner, which shows they are directed by a single God who possesses complete power and *ḥikma* (wisdom).

---

782 Ibid.
783 Ibid.
Despite their métier, al-Māturīdī does not address any of these abovementioned arguments in Ta’wīlāt. A conceivable reason for their omission is their nature. The first argument is obtained from the analysis of the experiences of humans across all faiths and it cannot be drawn from the verses. Similarly, the second argument is dialectical per excellence. It, therefore, does not suit the exegetical nature of Ta’wīlāt and at the same has not been addressed by the Qur’an. Al-Māturīdī maintains the exegetical integrity of Ta’wīlāt by ensuring that the theological and dialectical content does not rob the text from its exegetical form and does not turn into a dialectical text. This is a practice for which al-Rāzī was reprimanded harshly by Dhahabī, and other exegetes, for he compromises this quality in his exegesis written in the 13th century. Thus, al-Māturīdī, centuries before al-Rāzī, is already aware of the complexity of this trap and avoids such practise. As for the third argument al-Māturīdī proposes, it is observational. However, it fits under the proof of ittisāq and tadbīr, the proof of tamānu’ and tadāfu’ and partially the proof of day and light. All three proofs, al-Māturīdī expands on them generously in Ta’wīlāt, which could have warranted a disinterest in the mention of this proof there.

3.5 conclusion

The systematic and comprehensive analysis of Ta’wīlāt has yielded key findings in al-Māturīdī’s contribution to Sunni theological exegesis and his theology. In Sunni exegesis, al-Māturīdī is the first exegete to discuss at length the various aspects of the conception of tawḥīd. His primary concern is to establish tawḥīd with a diverse set of proofs and arguments constructed on a solid foundation. One of the fundamental elements al-Māturīdī highlights in Ta’wīlāt is the necessity of proofs for the sound propagation and correct belief in tawḥīd. He is the first Sunni exegete to

784 Dhahabī, Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufassirūn.
argue for the obligation of proofs for the propagation and belief in *tawḥīd*. Al-Māturīdī reinforces the validity of the above argument with an array of evidence from numerous Qur’anic verses and Prophet Muḥammad’s biography.

The propagation of al-Māturīdī of the necessity of proofs bespeaks that he does not consider belief in *tawḥīd* to be an instinctive compulsion. This position is in congruence with the views al-Māturīdī advocates, in chapter two, *vis a vis* the existence of God – an indication of consistency in his thought framework in Ta’wīlāt. In the same breath, al-Māturīdī legitimises the use of rational argumentation in proving *tawḥīd*. Furthermore, he classifies it as a necessary, natural and rational conclusion human intellect is bound to concede.

Nevertheless, the proofs al-Māturīdī proposes to ascertain the doctrine of *tawḥīd* are not only rational. They vary between rational, textual and observational. They illustrate a new unequalled academic trademark al-Māturīdī engineers in Sunni exegesis. It reconciles ‘*aql* and *naql* and sees not any conflict between them.

The only *sam ‘ī* (textual) proof al-Māturīdī presents is *anbā’ al-ghayb* (the tales of the past events and nations). He classifies it as an exclusive proof to the Arab polytheists, but the claim of exclusivity could be challenged. Conversely, al-Māturīdī cites numerous rational and observational proofs. Amongst them is the proof of the acceptance of death. The argumentation of death as a proof of *tawḥīd* is original to Ta’wilāt. It does not appear in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* at all and is not cited by any other Sunni or Transoxianan exegesis. The proof of *manāfi’* (the interconnectedness of benefits of the heavens and the earth) is another observational and rational proof al-Māturīdī refers to frequently in Ta’wilāt. Similar to the proof of death, the *manāfi’* proof is the brainchild of al-Māturīdī. The frequency of al-Māturīdī’s reference to the *manāfi’* proof in
in Ta’wīlāt serves as a strong indication of his deliberate effort to contribute to Sunni theological exegesis as a genre and bring to light the theological components of the Qur’an.

The proof of ittisāq and tadbīr represents a strong rational proof al-Māturīdī raises recurrently to ascertain tawḥīd. Al-Māturīdī proclaims that the symbiotic relationship between ittisāq and tadbīr proves the oneness of God. The originality of al-Māturīdī’s work is not only in his introduction of tadbīr as a proof of tawḥīd to Sunni exegesis. But equally in modifying it from the traditional form and complementing with ittisāq, as a crucial component in it. In al-Māturīdī’s view, the presence of tadbīr alone in the universe does not prove tawḥīd. The surmise al-Māturīdī asserts has not been paralleled by any other exegete.

Al-Māturīdī strives to provide additional proofs of tawḥīd. The proof of the continuous flow of day and night is another unexampled rational proof he suggests. Al-Māturīdī employs it to counter the argument of dual Gods. The proof of design in creation comes as another illustration of the objective of al-Māturīdī to be the founder of Sunni theological exegesis. It is a rational proof, in which he observes all the verses that discuss creation, as a notion, and creatures, general or specific to prove tawḥīd. Al-Māturīdī asserts that the absence of a trademark for different deities in creation necessitates that the creator is one. None of the prominent exegetes, predecessors or contemporaries, arise or even allude to the presence of the proof of creation in Ta’wīlāt. The last proof of tawḥīd al-Māturīdī advances, in Ta’wīlāt, is the proof of tadāfu’ and tamānu’. Al-Māturīdī considers the absence of evidence of other deities competing with God, inhibiting him from executing his will in the world, averring their existence and distinguishing their creation from his all argue in favour of the doctrine of tawḥīd.

The elaborate theological explanations al-Māturīdī puts forth in Ta’wīlāt are not paralleled by any other exegete. All other exegetes do not depart far from their usual method of
mere transmission of the traditional reports and brief lexical explanations. The resolve and fervour al-Māturīdī demonstrates to assert the doctrine of *tawḥīd* is not extant in other Sunni or Transoxianan exegesis. He seeks to progress Sunni exegesis beyond orthodox imitation towards an analytical exegesis that appreciates the theology of the Qur’an.

Despite al-Māturīdī’s elaborate theological commentary in *Ta’wīlāt*, he does not incorporate in it all his proofs of *tawḥīd*. Al-Māturīdī reserves few proofs to *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. They are: 1- *al-wāḥid* (the one) notion in the human experience, 2- the infinity of deities’ proof and 3- the opposing *jawāhir* (essences) and *ṭabāʾiʿ* (elements) proof. These proofs could have been excluded from *Ta’wīlāt* for various reasons. The most plausible ones are the dialectical nature of these proofs and the lack of Qur’anic underpinning for them.

Upon the completion of an extensive assessment and analysis of al-Māturīdī’s theology in *Ta’wīlāt* and his contributions to Sunni theological exegesis in the sphere of proving God’s existence and *tawḥīd*, the next chapter transitions to another focal, ponderous and controversial topic in *ilāhiyyāt* - the nature of God, his names and attributes.
CHAPTER 4: THE NATURE OF THE NAMES AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

4.1 Introduction

The critical analysis of al-Māturīdī’s commentary on God’s existence and *tawḥīd*, in Ta’wīlāt, established his foundational contributions to Sunni theological exegesis and provided an invaluable insight into his theology vis a vis *ilāhiyyāt*. Nonetheless, the field of *ilāhiyyāt* extends beyond these two notions, as nuclear as they may be. It seeks to understand the nature of God, his names and attributes and the nature of relationship of the attributes with Godself. Ta’wīlāt offers inestimable divination into al-Māturīdī’s theology in these notions of Islamic theology.

This chapter explores these very notions and commences with examining al-Māturīdī’s perception of the notion of *al-asmā’ al-husnā* (the beautiful and perfect names) of God the Qur’an introduces. It progresses to more profound dimensions and examines al-Māturīdī’s theology on the nature of God, the nature of God’s names and attributes and then how al-Māturīdī harmonises the relationship of God’s Self with his names and attributes.

The interplay between the above three key elements is further assessed and critiqued in the course of the analysis of al-Māturīdī’s discussion of the unique *takwīn* attribute. The *takwīn* attribute is singled out for examination, over the other attributes, for three reasons. It has been developed by al-Māturīdī unshared by any other Sunni theological school. Hence, this attribute’s content is completely original and chartered to al-Māturīdī. It is the mother attribute, in al-
Māturīdī’s opinion, that governs all the ṣifāt al-afʿāl (the attributes of the actions of God). The investigation of it, thus, is not the investigation of a single attribute rather a complete category. Lastly, the study of the takwīn attribute would enable the thesis to produce a consistent and comprehensive assessment of all the fundamental categories of the attributes of God. Chapter two covered al-ṣifah al-nafsiyyah (the fundamental attribute of God) of al-wujūd, (God’s existence). Chapter three, investigated the most fundamental attribute of al-ṣifāt al-salbiyyah (the negative attributes), al-waḥdāniyyah (the oneness of God), through the analysis of the tawḥīd doctrine. The current chapter assesses ṣifāt al-afʿāl (the attributes of the actions of God) through the analysis of the takwīn attribute in addition to touching on some aspects of ṣifāt al-maʿānī (the abstract attributes), such as ‘ilm (God’s knowledge) and qudrah (God’s omnipotence).  

4.2 The notion of al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā in Taʾwīlāt

The Qur’an proposes the notion of al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā (the beautiful and perfect names of God) four times in four separate chapters, al-Aʿrāf, al-Isrāʾ, Ṭāha and al-Ḥashr. These chapters are revealed at different time intervals. Three of them are categorised traditionally as Makkī and the fourth is Madanī. The Qur’anic context, thus, underscores the significance of al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā notion as it evokes it several times and at different stages of the Qur’an’s revelation. These four verses, thus, provide the best starting ground for the study of al-Māturīdī’s doctrine on al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā and for comparing his theological opinions with that of the other Sunni and Transoxianan exegetes.

785 In addition, the subsequent chapter will focus on the anthropomorphic expressions, which entails al-ṣifāt al-khabariyyah, the attributes that one may only learn through the khabar (narrative sources), which have become controversial because of their anthropomorphic implications.
Muqātil manifests his awareness of the concept of *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* (the beautiful and perfect names of God) in verse 180 chapter al-‘A’rāf, the first of the four key verses. Muqātil, however, does not define or explain the notion of *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* or his views on it. Instead he lists some of the names of God, mainly the ones God mentions in verse 24 chapter al-Ḥashr. In addition, Muqātil relates a cause for the revelation of the verse. He states, “whilst a man invoked Allah and invoked al-Raḥmān. A polytheist man heard him and objected, ‘does not Mohamed and his followers claim to worship one God? Why is this man invoking two?’” Consequently the verse was revealed. Muqātil proceeds to clarify the *ilḥād* in the names of God that the verse cautions against is the practice of giving the names, limitary to God, to false deities such as al-Lāt and al-‘Uzzā. Muqātil’s primary focus is, thus, on setting the milieu for the verse’s revelation. He does not offer any exegetical explanation of the main concepts in the verse or even the lexical definitions of the key terms therein let alone a theological examination of the notion of *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*.

Ṭabarī’s approach, in chapter al-‘A’rāf, is very similar to that of Muqātil. Initially, he gives an example of what the names are by listing two, al-‘Azīz (the dignified and the powerful) and al-Jabbār (the restorer and the all-compelling). Ṭabarī confirms, through the aid of a

---

786 The verse reads, “And to Allah belong *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* (the beautiful and perfect names of God), so invoke Him by them. And leave [the company of] those who practice *ilḥād* concerning His names. They will be recompensed for what they have been doing.

787 The analysis began with a review of the other exegetes before al-Māturīdī’s commentary because of the length and versatility of his commentary on the names of God, in this verse, in comparison to their very brief commentary. This would enable the reader to follow al-Māturīdī analysis uninterruptedly and eases the comprehension of the topic.

788 The polytheist person who objected was Abū Jahl.


790 These are some of the names the Arab polytheists gave to the stone statues and trees they worshiped before the advent of Islam. For further information see: I. Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidayah Wa Al-Nihayah*, 2nd edition ed., 22 vols. (Damascuc: Dar Ibn Kathir, 2010), 2, 231.


792 Through a report on the authority of Ibn Abbas.
prophetic tradition\textsuperscript{793} that God has 99 names and asserts that “all his names are \textit{hasan} (good and beautiful).”\textsuperscript{794} Heretofore, \(^{795}\text{Ṭabarī’s} \) commentary, similar to that of Muqātil, is narrative and brief. It lacks analytical substance and does not raise any theological topics.

\(^{793}\text{The ġadīth is related by Abū Hurairah. For further information see: M. Bukhāri, \textit{Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhāri}, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir, 2001), 3, 198.}\)

\(^{794}\text{Ṭabarī, \textit{Jāmi' Al-Bayān Fī Ta‘wil Āy Al-Qur‘an}, 13, 281.}\)

\(^{795}\text{The second phrase in the verse reads, “And leave [the company of] those who practice \textit{ilḥād} concerning His names. They will be recompensed for what they have been doing.”}\)

\(^{796}\text{Ṭabarī, \textit{Jāmi' Al-Bayān Fī Ta‘wil Āy Al-Qur‘an}, 13, 283-84.}\)

\(^{797}\text{Ibid, 13, 282.}\)

\(^{798}\text{Ibid, 13, 281-83.}\)

\(^{799}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{800}\text{Ibid.}\)
revelation Muqātil reported and ensues it with the prophetic tradition Ṭabarī related about the number of the names of God.\textsuperscript{801} He does not delve into the theological implications of the verse nor does he attempt to thoroughly explain them. Similar to Ṭabarī, he interprets ḻḥād, in al-A‘rāf verse, as the distortion of some of God’s names and using them for the false statues and idols the Arab polytheists worshipped.\textsuperscript{802}

In al-A‘rāf verse, al-Māturīdī commences his examination of the notion of \textit{al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā}, alike the aforementioned exegetes. From the outset, however, his approach stands dissimilar to theirs. Al-Māturīdī leads by addressing the denial of the Mu’tazilites of the very notion of \textit{al-asmā’}. He states, “It is possible that they (Mu’tazilites) assumed that the affirmation of multiple \textit{asmā’} (names to God) obligates the affirmation of multiple \textit{dhāts} (multiple Gods).”\textsuperscript{803} The theological discussion is at the forefront of al-Māturīdī’s commentary. He acknowledges the concerns of the Mu’tazilites, which exhibits fairness on al-Māturīdī’s part in reading the opinions of the opponents. He, nonetheless, considers the verse a robust proof against them as it confirms the notion of multiple names to God and demands people to use them. Al-Māturīdī concludes, “So he (God) informed (us) that the affirmation of multiple names does not necessitate the affirmation of multiple \textit{dhāts} (multiple Gods).”\textsuperscript{804} In al-Māturīdī’s opinion, the verse should alleviate the concerns of the Mu’tazilite since it is a clear statement from God about the nature of God and his names.

Curiously, the first proof al-Māturīdī proposes in the matter is a \textit{sam‘ī} (narrative) proof, al-A‘rāf verse itself, taken directly from the wording of the verse. He corroborates his

\textsuperscript{801} Samarqandi, \textit{Tafsīr Al-Samarqandi Bahr Al-‘Ulūm}, 1, 568.
\textsuperscript{802} Ibid, 1, 569.
\textsuperscript{803} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 6, 121.
\textsuperscript{804} Ibid.
understanding of the verse with yet another sam‘ī proof he obtains from the prophetic traditions. It is a sabab nuzūl (a cause of revelation) for the verse, about a Muslim who invoked God during his prayer by multiple names and said, “O’ Allah, O’ Raḥmān, O’ Raḥīm.” Three names were used to invoke one God. It is the same cause of revelation Muqātil, Ṭabarī and Samarqandī recorded. Yet none of them wielded or saw in it a theological proof in the face of the Mu‘tazilites’ argument. Whilst Ṭabarī trammels the scope of the verse to the Arab polytheists, al-Māturīdī harnesses it as a theological proof for his contemporary scholarly controversies.

Despite the above, al-Māturīdī seems to recognise that the citation of the verse and the cause of revelation may not satisfy all dissent. Accordingly, he instantly follows the narrative proofs with a rational one underpinned by real life experiences. He explicates, “It is possible for one Shay’, thing, to have various names and this would not obligate (logically) the belief in the existence of multiple things or to break it to multiple parts.” In this statement, al-Māturīdī, skilfully, shifts the burden of proof to his opponents. His argument is that if life experience indicates that an entity or an object may be called by multiple names without compelling one to believe in multiple entities, then this should be the default position and any new suggestion needs to yield enabling evidence.

Al-Māturīdī continues his theological explanation and cites the notion of harakah (movement) as a case in point. He expounds, “...the (notion of) harakah is called (by multiple titles) a harakah (movement) a ‘araḍ (an accidental property), a Shay’ (a thing) and a khālq (a creature).” All these names point to one notion- harakah. It can be described as a physical

805 Ibid, 6, 122.
806 Ibid, 6, 121.
807 Ibid.
movement, a ‘araḍ, as it does not exist on its own, a thing and a creature because God created it.
All these descriptions, according to al-Māturīdī, do not lead one to believe in the existence of multiple entities called harakah nor do they necessitate the fragmentation of it.\textsuperscript{808} Al-Māturīdī reasons analogically, “and this is how it is in all ashyā’ (things).”\textsuperscript{809}

Al-Māturīdī, thus, coalesces the narrative proofs with the rational ones to assuage the fears of the Mu‘tazilites whose drive for the objection is the safekeeping of the authority of tawḥīd and whose trust in rational proofs, as higher proofs, is more dominant. Concomitantly, he underscores the legitimateness of his belief in ta ‘addud al-asmā’ (the plurality of the names of God). Al-Māturīdī’s commentary on al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā reveals yet another salient fact. It is the first encounter of al-Māturīdī using a prophetic tradition to strengthen a theological view. He does not formulate an argument on it directly rather he combines it with his primary proof, the wording of al-A‘rāf verse. This may indicate that prophetic traditions play a secondary role in al-Māturīdī’s methodology as far as theology is concerned.

After appeasing the chief concern of the Mu‘tazilites camp about the incompatibility of the names of God with tawḥīd, and clearly devising the foundations of the legitimacy of his theological position, al-Māturīdī delves into some of the constituents of the belief in the names of God that the verse addresses forthrightly. He emphasizes the centrality of the notion of ḥusnā (beauty and perfection) in the names of God and stresses that it is fundamental to proper belief in God’s names. He states, “and it is possible that they, (Arab polytheists) described God with descriptions “lā yahsunu an yūṣafa bih (not appropriate to describe him by it).”\textsuperscript{810} Consequently,
God revealed the verse to respond to them. As beforehand, al-Māturīdī illustrates his point with examples. He cites examples of titles and descriptions that God cannot be called by such as “O’ creator of pigs, O’ creator of the impurities, O’ God of monkeys and the like.” These descriptions cannot be ascribed to God even though he created them, because they are not ḥusnā. Thus, al-Māturīdī does not consider logic the sole criteria in determining a name of God. A name does not qualify unless it is, positive, beautiful and perfect.

Al-Māturīdī does not stop at adumbrating what cannot be a name of God but imparts, as well, guidelines from which divine names may be elicited. Before continuing with the subject at hand, the methodology of al-Māturīdī and his meticulousness in detailing how a name qualifies to be ascribed to God is amongst the indicia of al-Māturīdī’s purposive strategy to subsume theological analysis as an essential part of Sunni exegetical literature and inspire the genre of Sunni theological exegesis. In return to the topic, al-Māturīdī lists some of the reservoirs for the names of God, 1- “… Names proven amongst all creatures that he (God) is called by them and he provided to the people such as yā Hādī (O’ Guider) and yā Murshid (O’ advisor to the Right Path)”812, 2- Names based on “ what he (God) gave them from blessings and bounties (such as) yā Karīm (O’ generous), yā Jawad (O’ most generous) and yā Laṭīf (O’ gentle in his decree)”813, 3- Names deduced from the manifestation of the ulūhiyyah (Godship) and rubūbiyyah (Lordship) of God in the souls of his creatures such as “Yā Khāliq (O’ Creator), Yā Rāziq (O’ Sustainer) Yā Rahmān (O’ Most Merciful).”814 Thus, al-Māturīdī approves as asmā’ ḥusnā, to God, the names that have become iconic of God amongst people. This may include

811 Ibid.
812 Ibid.
813 Ibid.
814 Ibid.
God’s names from other divine scriptures, in addition to the Quran and Sunnah, names derived from God’s bounties and blessings upon people, names that express his divine nature and sovereignty and names derived from his attributes rather than his actions, for they need to mirror his infinity and eternity.

Al-Māturīdī systematically progresses from the discussion of the criteria that determines the divine names, to addressing the concept of exclusiveness in the names of God. He interprets ilḥād in al-asmā of God, the second phrase in al-‘Arāf verse, to mean the practise of naming other deities with names that are God’s right alone, “and they have been called mulḥidīn 815 because they gave others (deities) his names or because they shared his names with others.” 816 This inference is not exclusive to al-Māturīdī as the other Sunni exegetes 817 have affirmed the right of exclusiveness of the perfect divine names to God. Unlike al-Māturīdī though, it is the only theological comment they made.

Their Shi’a counterpart, ‘Ayyāshī, was no different. 818 His commentary on verse 180 al-Aʿrāf, is the only commentary, in which he explores al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā. Nonetheless, ‘Ayyāshī’s approach to the topic is very diametric from his Sunni counterparts. He reports two interesting reports on the subject and interprets the verse, peculiarly, in light of these reports. The first is from ‘Alī al-Riḍā (d. 818 CE), one of the twelve Shi’a imams, in which he says, “When a calamity befalls you, seek aid in us from God. This is the interpretation of the verse, ‘and to God belongs al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā (the beautiful and perfect names) so invoke him with it.” 819 In this

---

815 Mulḥidīn is the plural form of the name mulḥid, which is a description of the person that performs ilḥād.
816 Al-Māturīdī, Taʿwilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 6, 121.
817 Muqātil, Tabari and Samarqandī.
818 ‘Ayyāshī is the single Shi’a exegete from the region of al-Māturīdī whose work is extant today.
819 ‘Ayyāshī, Tafsīr Al-ʿAyyāshī, 2, 42.
narration, ‘Ayyāshī alludes to an association between *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* and the twelve Imams. The second narration surpasses the insinuation of a connection between the Imams and *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* to an overt confirmation of it. It asserts they are one. ‘Ayyāshī reports Al-Ḥussein (d. 680 CE), the grandson of Prophet Muḥammad, says, “we are, I swear by God, *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* (the beautiful names of God). None’s (invocation) will be accepted without our knowledge.”

The unification between the names of God and the twelve Imams in Shi’a theology, which ‘Ayyāshī’s commentary avows, falls outside the scope of this thesis and thereby will not be analysed. This is the singular account of ‘Ayyāshī commenting on *al-asmā’* in his entire exegesis. Pursuantly, it is apposite to conclude that ‘Ayyāshī does not study or discuss the notion of *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* in his exegesis theologically save for transmitting some Shi’a traditional reports.

The approach of the Sunni exegetes, in their commentary on verse 111 chapter al-Isrā’, does not differ much from that of ‘Ayyāshī. Muqātil, for instance, does not engage in any theological discussion of the names of God therein. His commentary consists of a single phrase, "it (*al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*) means the names of God (listed) in the end of chapter al-Ḥashr and the entire Qur’an." One may deduce, thus, that Muqātil believes that the names of God can only be obtained from the Qur’an. It is difficult to read any further into his commentary as he

---

820 Ibid.
821 Nonetheless, it is ground for further research into the classical Shi’a exegeses and their theological views on the nature of the relationship between God and the twelve Imams.
822 As far as the level of commentary on the theological components of the verses.
823 The second of the four verses that address the notion of *al-asmā al-ḥusnā*.
reiterates the same phrase when exegeting verse 8 chapter Ṭāha\(^{825}\) and when commenting on verse 24 chapter al-Ḥashr without offering any further insight.\(^{826}\)

The same conclusion is drawn from the analysis of Ṭabarī’s commentary on verse 110 chapter al- Ḥisr. He restates the same cause of revelation he recorded in chapter al-Ａ‘rāf,\(^{827}\) about an Arab polytheist enquiring if Muslims worship more than one God after he heard a Muslim man call God by multiple names. The only alteration here is that Ṭabarī identifies the Muslim man to be Prophet Mohamed.\(^{828}\) Ṭabarī even transmits the same prophetic tradition, he related in chapter al-Ａ‘rāf, about the ninety names of God but he appends one phrase to it, “*kulluhunna al-Qur’an* (they (the names) are all in the Qur’an).”\(^{829}\) Thus, Ṭabarī believes that all names of God should be taken only from the Qur’an but, like Muqātil, does not expand any further on the issue. The same edict Ṭabarī expresses in verse 24 chapter al-Ḥashr, "and they (*al-asmā’ al-husnā*) are these names that he called himself by and mentioned them in these two verses."\(^{830}\) Even in the very verse that lists the divine names, Ṭabarī does not offer any additional information or argumentation or analysis of God’s names. The same is evident in his interpretation of verse 8 chapter Ṭāha. The above findings reinforce the absence of any intention amongst these exegetes to address the theological facets of these verses let alone lead the path in the establishment of Sunni theological exegesis.

---

\(^{825}\) This is the third of the four key verses. Muqātil states in it, “The ones (meaning the beautiful names of God) at the end of chapter al-Ḥashr.” For further information see: ibid, 3, 22.

\(^{826}\) This is the fourth and last key verse. Muqātil states in it, “To him belongs the beautiful names meaning... The names which he mentioned in this chapter (chapter al-Ḥashr).” For further information see: ibid, 4, 286.

\(^{827}\) The same cause of revelation all Sunni exegetes noted, including al-Ｍāturīdī.


\(^{829}\) Ibid.

\(^{830}\) Ibid, 23, 305.
Samarqandī’s commentary confirms the above conclusion. He walks in the footsteps of Ṭabarī and Muqātil. In al-İsrā’ verse 110, Samarqandī reprises the very phrase he articulated in chapter al-A’rāf, "to him belongs the most high attributes."\textsuperscript{831} He does not comment on verse 8 chapter Ṭāha either and repeats, one last time, the above quoted phrase in verses 24 and 25 chapter al-Ḥashr. The only divergence from Ṭabarī and Muqātil is that Samarqandī provides very minor lexical explanations of each name the verses enumerate.\textsuperscript{832} Therefore, all commentaries on the relevant verses are void of theological commentary.

Contrarily, al-Māturīdī exhibits determination on the theological analysis of all relevant verses. In verse 110 al-İsrā’, al-Māturīdī continues his analysis of \textit{al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā} and the maturation of his theological argument. The verse encourages people to invoke upon God using his beautiful and perfect names chiefly his two names, Allah and al-Raḥmān. The verse’s emphasis on these two names, particularly al-Raḥmān, motivates al-Māturīdī to revisit the cause of revelation he, and all the other exegetes, noted in chapter al-A’rāf and to assay it further to acquaint himself better with the circumstances that surrounded the verse’s revelation and the debate pertinent to it. Al-Māturīdī discovers that amongst the motives for the objection of the Arab Polytheists of the supplication of the Prophet is their unfamiliarity with the name al-Raḥmān. He states, “because the Arabs did not know prophets or \textit{kutub munazzalah mina al-samā’} (divinely revealed books), before Islam, and did not believe in them. They did not know the name al-Raḥmān, did not use it…and the same applies to the rest of the names.”\textsuperscript{833} Indirectly, in al-İsrā’ verse, al-Māturīdī implies that God’s names may only be acquired through the prophets and the divine books. In other words, through narrative sources. He confirms this

\textsuperscript{831} Samarqandī, \textit{Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm}, 2, 333.
\textsuperscript{832} Ibd, 3, 432.
\textsuperscript{833} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 8, 378.
inference further as he resumes his investigation of the objection of the polytheist Arabs, “limā lā sabīl ilā ma ‘rifati dhālika (for it is not possible to know the multiple names of God), except through the tongues of the messengers and prophets, or through the divinely revealed scripture.”\textsuperscript{834} Al-Māturīdī’s choice of phrase limā lā sabīl ilā ma ‘rifati dhālika (for it is not possible to know about the multiple names of God) enfeebles the role of reason in discovering the names of God.

Therewithal, al-Māturīdī underlines the importance of relating each name of God to one of his divine attributes. He enunciates “they (the Arab polytheists) denied the name al-Rahmān since they did not know that it is derived from the attribute of rahmah (mercy).”\textsuperscript{835} Specifically, al-Māturīdī is contending that had the Arab polytheists known that al-Raḥmān was derived from the rahmah attribute they would have accepted it.\textsuperscript{836} How could he have known their intention or stance? Al-Māturīdī avers, “since they did not object to al-Raḥīm as a name which they knew is derived from rahmah.”\textsuperscript{837}

Al-Māturīdī, therefore, skilfully dissects the circumstances of the revelation of the verse to elicit theological evidence for his arguments. This very statement of al-Māturīdī is very significant for it is not intended for doctrinal use only but equally for polemical one. It comprises a counter argument to Abū Bakr Al-ʿAṣamm (d. 816 CE), a renowned Muʿtazilite scholar who argued that God selected al-Raḥmān as a proper noun, along with Allah, “because they were not taken from any attribute.”\textsuperscript{838} Al-Māturīdī relates the statement of Abū Bakr and rebuts it in verse

---

\textsuperscript{834} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{835} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{836} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{837} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{838} Ibid.
110 chapter al-Isrā’. Evidently, the debate with the Mu'tazilites constantly galvanizes al-Māturīdī to educe new theological verifications for his beliefs. A further confirmation of the influence of the theological climate in his region on his works.

In light of the above, al-Māturīdī persists in examining the cause of revelation and maintains that, “the Arabs did not deny that a thing could have two names or more. They knew that having various and many names does not necessitate different entities, nor does it demand believing in multiple ones.”839 The purpose of this statement is to deny the Mu‘tazilites any foothold in the objection of the Arab polytheists to the invocation of God by multiple names. Al-Māturīdī asserts that the objection of the polytheists was driven by their unfamiliarity with the meaning of al-Raḥmān rather than believing that logically a thing or an entity could not have more than one name. The supporting evidence of al-Māturīdī, in this regard, is their acceptance of the name al-Raḥīm, which they used interchangeably with the name Allah to refer to God and they did not think it constitutes two different deities.840

Hitherto, one question remains unanswered, “why does al-Māturīdī deem the perception of the Arab polytheists of the multiple names of God significant to his theological debate with the Mu'tazilites?” For two reasons, the Arab polytheists cannot be accused of being subjective or sympathetic towards al-Māturīdī’s view since they are non-Muslims. The second one, more importantly though, the perception of the Arab polytheists represents the Arabic native speaker’s perception. Al-Māturīdī states, “for they know (in their language and culture) that an object or an entity may have two names or more.”841 Al-Māturīdī, intriguingly, classifies the linguistic

839 Ibid.
840 Al-Māturīdī adds another motive behind their objection. It is al-ta ‘annut wa al-‘inād (intransigence and stubbornness). He claims, “they denied to God… out of ta ‘annut wa ‘inād (intransigence and stubbornness),” ibid.
841 Ibid.
argument as evidentiary as the rational and the narrative one. Hence, al-Māturīdī quotes al-Zajjāj (d. 922 CE), earlier when proving that the divine names must relate to an attribute, to confirm that al-Raḥmān as a name is derived from the attribute *al-rahmān* (mercy).  

Upon being satisfied with his argument on the legitimacy of the plurality in the names of God, al-Māturīdī progresses to reaffirm another foundational principle he established earlier about *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*, “as we have mentioned earlier, everything ḥasan (beautiful and good) is attributed to him (God) and everything unpleasant and flawed may not be attributed to him nor may he be named by it.”  

Anew, al-Māturīdī cites, as an auxiliary proof, a prophetic tradition, which is a supplication Muslims use in their five daily prayers. He quotes from it the part most relevant to his argument, “All salutations are offered to God, prayers and ṭayyibāt (all that is good and beautiful) ...”  

The reference in the supplication is the word ṭayyibāt, which means good and beautiful. Al-Māturīdī then advises, “Thus, to him (God) is attributed everything that is ṭayyib (good) and everything that is ḥasan (beautiful).” Sedulously, al-Māturīdī employs ḥadīth traditions as a contributory component of his theological disquisition of the names and attributes of God. This is a new development in his methodology, which contrasts with all his previous commentaries on God’s existence and the notion of tawḥīd. Albeit al-Māturīdī does not overtly express his disapproval of the use of prophetic traditions in these topics an in-depth analysis of his writing on both subjects divulges his uninterest, to say the least, in its contribution to the previously mentioned topics.

---

842 Ibid.
843 Ibid.
844 Ibid.
845 Ṭayyibāt is one of the plural forms of ṭayyib.
The topic of *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* surfaces again in chapter Ṭāha verse 8. Even though al-Māturīdī does not engage the subject there, in the same intensity and thoroughness he does in the previous chapters, he contributes further significant theological analysis. Al-Māturīdī imparts, for the second time one might add, a statement from Abū Bakr Al-Aṣamm, relevant to *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*. Al-Māturīdī relates, “Abū Bakr Al-Aṣamm said, ‘whoever establishes *tawḥīd* of God in his names is rewarded with *al-ḥusnā*, which is Jannah (Paradise).’” Abū Bakr’s call to establish *tawḥīd* in the names of God is in truth a call to deny the notion of multiple names to God, for the Mu’tazilites affirm that belief in multiple names impels belief in multiple infinite deities, which leads to polytheism and negates *tawḥīd*. Abū Bakr, subtly, changed the grammatical classification of *ḥusnā*, in the Ṭāha verse, from being a description of God’s names to a noun that typifies Jannah (Paradise). This is a clever tactic by Abū Bakr for *husnā* has been applied in the Qur’an multiple times to mean paradise. However, not in this instance for multiple reasons. The foremost one is the opening phrase in the Ṭāha verse. It reads, “and to God belongs the…” which directly expresses that what succeeds in the verse belongs to God and not to the people. It cannot mean paradise because the meaning will become incoherent and the verse will read “and to God belongs the names the paradise.”

Not to mention that grammatically *asmā’*, in the Ṭāha verse, is a *man’īt*, a noun being described, and *al-ḥusnā* is a *na’t*, an attributive adjective to the *man’īt*. Thus, *al-ḥusnā*, is an adjective of the *asmā’* and not an independent noun. Hence, it is in the definite form because *al-

---

847 The third of the four key verses that address *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*, as indicated earlier in the chapter.
848 Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, 9, 182.
asmā is in the definite form as per the Arabic grammatical rule of thumb that the na’īt has to agree with the man’ūt in definiteness and indefiniteness all the time.\footnote{The rule of thumb in Arabic grammar is that the na’t has to agree with the man’ūt in definiteness and indefiniteness. For further information see: Ibn Hishām. Al-Anṣārī, Mughnī Al-Labīb ‘an Kutub Al-A’ārīb (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2016), 855; Sharḥ Qaṭr Al-Nadā Wa Ball Al-Ṣadā (Beirut: Dar al-Khayr, 1990), 285.}

Notwithstanding the above, al-Māturīdī does not respond to Abū Bakr’s untraditional interpretation in the context of chapter Ṭāha. Rather, he refers the reader to his responses elsewhere, “and we have mentioned (the topic) earlier (in what proceeded).”\footnote{Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 9, 182.} Bekir Topaloğlu, the editor of the Ta’wīlāt, assumed al-Māturīdī intended to refer the reader to his writing about the topic of paradise, being described as ḥusnā, earlier in the Qur’an and his response to Abū Bakr there. As a result, in the footnote, he puts a reference to verse 26 chapter Yūnus. The assumption of Topaloğlu is incorrect for al-Māturīdī does not discuss or respond to Abū Bakr at all in chapter Yūnus. Al-Māturīdī’s intended reference is to his refutation of the Mu’tazilites’ doctrine in the previous verses in chapters al-A‘rāf and al-İsrā’. Abū Bakr’s aim is not to prove that ḥusnā could mean Paradise. Rather he deliberately tries to evade the normative meaning of the verse that God has multiple names since it stands against his doctrine. Al-Māturīdī does not reiterate his whole argument in chapter Ṭāha as it is not customary in his writing style to repeat a previous argument without a new or an improved insight.

Another significant finding in al-Māturīdī’s commentary in chapter Ṭāha, is that the statement of Abū Bakr he relates is not found in the recently published exegesis of Abū Bakr.\footnote{A. Al-Ąṣamm, Tafsīr Abu Bakr Al-Ąṣamm (Beirut: Dar Al Kutub Al ‘Ilmiyyah, 2007).} Accordingly, the value of Ta’wīlāt aggrandizes not only as the first Sunni theological exegesis
but also as an authority for undocumented exegetical and theological views from other Muslim orientations and currents.

The exegetical and theological views of al-Māturīdī in chapter al-Ḥashr take a different turn. He does not debate the Muʿtazilites or raises the issue of the multiple divine names and multiple deities. In chapter al-Ḥashr, al-Māturīdī focalizes on the examination of the relationship between the asmāʾ (divine names) and the ṣifāt (the divine attributes). In verse 24, he claims that the conjunction between the asmāʾ and the ṣifāt is symbiotic. Accordingly, al-Māturīdī interprets al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā in the verse as the attributes of God. He states, “to him belongs al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā, which means the esteemed ṣifāt (divine attributes).” Al-Māturīdī proceeds to elaborate on what constitutes an attribute of God. He states that the term ṣifah, in Arabic, “could refer to an actual ṣifah (an inherent attribute) or to a tashbīh (a simile).” Only the former qualifies to be an attribute of God for it corresponds to a ḥaqīqah (an existent reality). This principle of al-Māturīdī instigates an examination into the various descriptions of God found in the Qurʾan, and in the prophetic traditions, particularly the ones that contain anthropomorphic expressions. Are they all ṣifāt of God or are they different forms of simile? This will be investigated in the subsequent chapters, chapters five and six.

As clarified earlier none of the other exegetes undertook any theological discussion in their commentary on al-Ḥashr verse. The consideration of al-Māturīdī of this possibility focuses the light on a panorama of issues. Firstly, the importance of the linguistic analysis in understanding the names and attributes of God. Al-Māturīdī has already evinced its influence in

---

852 Al-Māturīdī suffices himself with his descant on the subject in the verses in chapter al-ʾAʾrāf and chapter al-Isrāʾ.
853 Al-Māturīdī, Taʾwilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 15, 99.
854 Ibid.
855 Ibid.
his investigation of the cause of revelation of al-Isrā’ verse. Secondly, his structural examination of the theological topic. al-Māturīdī’s approach is not ad hoc. He studies carefully all facets of the topic to ensure that his interpretation is overarching, accurate and legitimate theologically. The analysis of al-Māturīdī’s interpretation of the anthropomorphic expressions, in subsequent chapters,\textsuperscript{856} will permit further insight into the matter.

The methodology of al-Māturīdī remains consistent throughout his commentary on \textit{al-asmā’ al-husnā}. He presents a concept and then provides an example to clarify it. Unquestionably, his modality eases the understanding of the concepts on his readership. It is closer to the educational model than it is to the polemical mode \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd} vividly exhibits. Nonetheless, this educational method is not present in al-Māturīdī’s writing on the topics of the existence of God and \textit{tawḥīd}. The cause for the change in method could be al-Māturīdī’s attempt to better his writing style or, which is more likely, a response to the nature of the topic. Al-Māturīdī anticipates that the current points of discussion demand examples to clarify them. \textit{Al-asmā’ al-husnā} is indeed a theological and conceptual topic, be that as it may, it has a practical facet as well as it forms part of the supplications and prayers of all Muslims. It closely affects people’s interlocutions and relations with God since these names are part of their everyday language and worship. Hence, al-Māturīdī is prudent to the nuances of the topic and cites examples to facilitate to the reader a complete comprehension and application of the topic. The contrast, resultingly, between al-Māturīdī and the other exegetes does not stop only at bringing up the theological dimension, a significant dimension, in the Qur’anic discourse. It also manifests in his attempt to study and write about each topic with adequate, suitable and adaptive methodology.

\textsuperscript{856} Chapter five and chapter six.
In return to the topic at hand, the claim of the right of divine proprietary on the names of God may prove intractable because many of God’s names are commonly used in Arabic. Al-Mālik (the possessor or owner), quoted above by al-Māturīdī, is a primary illustration of it. People use this word in reference to one another on a regular basis. How could the Arabic speaker distinguish God’s names from the names of the humans? Al-Māturīdī introduces the notion of *iṭlāq* (absoluteness) of the name to rectify the issue. He demarcates between both uses by the application of *idāfah* (the genitive construction in the nouns), as well, on the name when used for humans. Al-Māturīdī states, “It (the name) cannot be used for humans except if it is adjunct to another thing or object. The absolute form can only be applied to God.”⁸⁵⁷ For example, the name al-Mālik (possessor and owner) may be used to describe God when put in the absolute form, al-Mālik (the possessor or the owner of all). However, when describing a human, the name must be adjunct to an object or a trait such as *mālik al-hādiqah* (the owner of the garden) or *mālik al-jamāl* (the possessor of beauty). Al-Māturīdī remains faithful to his writing method of revising his ideas and developing them as he progresses from one chapter to the other.

In *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, al-Māturīdī does not analyse or even mention *al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā* as a concept. It may come as a surprise but neither the term(s) nor the concepts are raised there. Indeed, al-Māturīdī discusses, at length, various notions, precepts and strands that relate to the names and the attributes of God, which will be addressed in dedicated chapters⁸⁵⁸ but *al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā* is not amongst them. The most likely reason for the absence of *al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā* from the *Kitāb* is that it is a Qur’anic topic par excellence. This observation solidifies, if not confirms,

---

⁸⁵⁸ Chapters five and six.
the aforementioned verdict forwarded in the previous chapters that al-Māturīdī wrote Ta‘wīlāt later contrary to what Rudolph suggested.

4.3 The nature of the dhāt of God

In al-Māturīdī’s discussion of the asmā’ of God, and at times his attributes, in Ta‘wīlāt, he rigorously underscores a specific characteristic of the divine names. He underscores this characteristic whether he is explaining a specific ism (name) or delineating the notion of names, as a whole. This characteristic is al-dhātiyyah, being related to the dhāt of God (God’s self).\textsuperscript{859} Al-Māturīdī describes all divine names respectively as asmā’ dhātiyyah (dhātī names) and every divine name as either ism dhātī (dhātī name) or bi dhāt Allah (in the dhāt of God). He insists on quantifying all the names of God with this description. Al-Māturīdī’s persistent underscoring of this characteristic compels one to enquire of the purpose and motivation behind his persistence. To answer this enquiry, it is necessary first to understand the denotation and connotation of the term dhāt in al-Māturīdī’s terminology.

In Arabic, the term dhāt is a very abstract and generic term. It is so abstract that all theologians, even from conflicting schools, concur on its use to describe God. Hence, it is difficult to find an equivalent word for it in English. The most accurate translation of the term dhāt would be ‘God’s self’. This translation carries the same generic and abstract sense the Arabic term enjoys. Some may wonder if the phrase ‘the essence of God’ could be a satisfactory translation for the dhāt of God. In al-Māturīdī’s writing, the phrase most certainly could not because the term ‘essence’ refers to the substance from which an entity is composed. Such a

\textsuperscript{859} The definition of the term and the best translation of it will be explained thoroughly in the subsequent paragraphs.
description is not only unacceptable, as it becomes evident in al-Māturīdī’s analysis that, it borders on blasphemy as it assimilates God to creation by suggesting that he came into existence from a specific substance. Thus, Rudolph’s use of “essence” as an equivalent term to dhāt is inaccurate, to say the least. The same could be said in reference to Thomson Gale in his writing about God’s attributes in the Islamic doctrine in his Encyclopaedia of religion. The ambiguity of the Arabic term is what makes it the term of choice, and the phrase ‘Self of God’ satisfies this ambiguity to an acceptable degree.

The importance of ambiguity when talking about God’s self, in al-Māturīdī’s mindset, manifests itself when he attempts to explain how people may relate or understand the dhāt of God, in verses 49 and 50 chapter Ṭāha. The verses relate a dialogue between prophets Moses and Aaron and the Pharaoh of Egypt. Pharaoh enquires, "So who is the Lord of you two, O Moses?" Moses responds, "Our Lord is He who gave each thing its form and then guided [it]" and the dialogue, between both parties, continues with the purpose of introducing Allah to the Pharaoh. Al-Māturīdī analyses carefully the dialogue reported in the verses and emphasises the theologically significant moments. He states, “He (Pharaoh) asked them (Moses and Aaron) from what (substance) their God is made. Moses answered by pointing to his (God’s) imprints in creation.” Indeed, Moses did not provide a direct answer. He diverted the Pharaoh’s attention to the magnificence in God’s creation. Al-Māturīdī justifies Moses’s evasion of the question by pointing to the inappropriateness of the question. It seeks to learn “from what is God made and how is God formed.” Al-Māturīdī ratiocinates, “This proves that God cannot be defined or

860 Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samargand, 280.
862 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 9, 203.
863 Ibid.
known through māhiyyah (quiddity) or kayfiyyah (modality). There is no māhiyyah or kayfiyyah (applicable to him)." Al-Māturīdī continues to elaborate further the basis for the above opinion, “For these are from the attributes of creation and God is exalted above being described with the attributes of creation.” Thus, al-Māturīdī infers from the verse, a narrative proof, and the action of Prophet Moses a ground-breaking point in the human perception of the dhāt of God.

Such analysis was far ahead of al-Māturīdī’s time in Sunni exegesis. The same cannot be said about the commentary of the other exegetes. ‘Ayyāshī does not comment on the verses at all whilst Muqātil does limitedly linking the verse to how God guides creatures to their provision and food sources. Ṭabarî follows suit but adds, to Muqātil’s commentary, the fact that God provides for each species sexual partners and guides them to the appropriate reproduction method. Typically, Samarqandī reiterates Ṭabarî’s interpretation. Thus, none of the exegetes attempts to infer any theological guidance about the dhāt of God from the verse let alone connect it to the discourse about the self of God.

Conversely, al-Māturīdī persists with the subject and stresses that even if the humans insist on defining God, through such avenue, they would surely fail for “one cannot imagine for God a kayfiyyah (howness or a modality). It will not cross anyone’s mind if he has a quiddity. It is not possible to reach the truth (in this regard) through contemplation and study. The ‘aql does not have the capability to grasp this notion.” Thus, the dhāt of God cannot be defined for it is beyond and above all forms of life and existence that the humans know and understand. Al-
Māturīdī’s statement confirms that he does not consider ‘aql capable of fully comprehending the notion on its own. This underscores that al-Māturīdī does not negate the use of naql in theological discourse and that his endorsement of reason is not absolute either as some of his opponents proclaim. He seems to employ each of them where applicable.

Accordingly, al-Māturīdī reverts to using rational justification to persuade further his readership on the above point- the incapability of reason to define the dhāt of God. It would have been sufficient for al-Māturīdī to refer the reader to verse 50 chapter Țāha or verse 11 chapter al-Shūrā, “there is nothing like unto him”. Al-Māturīdī, nonetheless, does not. He opts to offer a rational and digestible example that all in his era could relate to and appreciate. The example is their ignorance of the secrets of creation in the world around them and their ignorance of their own composition. Al-Māturīdī analogises, “For he (the human) is a creature that has not been able to understand, by reason alone, his essence. He cannot comprehend why he was composed in such a manner nor can he invigorate his self by his own capability.”

Accordingly, the humans are not equipped with the intellectual capability that would enable them to learn or comprehend fully the dhāt of God. Al-Māturīdī’s argument is indeed appealing for it caters for people from different schools- rational or traditional. If one cannot understand his essence despite the fact that it is physically observable then one would not be able to identify the nature of the infinite creator, who is not physically observable.

Al-Māturīdī continues with the rational proofs and recalls the notion of tadbīr to further fortify his view. He states, “He (the human) is a creation that depends on the tadbīr (of

\[870\] Ibid.
\[871\] The proof of tadbīr, divine maintenance and governance of the universe and all therein, has been listed as one of the proofs of God’s existence in chapter two.
God) and is subject to the *taqdīr* (decree of God).”  

872 Al-Māturīdī extrapolates from *tadbīr* that if the humans do not have the capacity to ensure the sustenance of their own species and equally inadequate to resist the decree of God. They could not possess the rational dexterity to grasp the *dhāt* of God. He concludes, “The nature of *rubūbiyyah* of God is more deserving (of humans’) imagination and speculation since they are incapable of contemplating it and (their) intellects will be exhausted and terminated before comprehending it.”  

873

The utterance ‘*dhāt Allah*’ (the *dhāt* of God) appears in Muqātil exegesis in chapters al-Baqarah, al-Imran, al-‘Ankabūt and al-Zumar.  

874 However, his interpretation of the term differs depending on the context of the verse. In al-Baqarah, al-‘Imrān and al-‘Ankabūt, Muqātil interprets the utterance as sacrifice and endurance for the sake of God. He states, “Then he (God) explained to the believers that they must face calamities and hardshipfi *dhāt Allah* (for the sake of God).”  

875 Whereas in al-Zumar, he states that it describes the *dhikr* (the remembrance) of God.  

876

Ṭabarī uses the exact term twenty-four times in his exegesis. He uses them all in the same sense Muqātil uses them in al-Baqarah, al-Imran and al-‘Ankabūt, cited earlier, the endurance of sacrifice for the sake of God.  

877 Identically, Samarqandī uses the utterance ‘*dhāt Allah*’ (the *dhāt*

---

873 Ibid, 2, 344.  
875 Ibid, 1, 304.  
876 Ibid, 3, 372.  
877 Ibid, 3, 681.  
878 Ibid, 1, 182.  
879 Ibid, 3, 684.  
of God) in the same sense, endurance for the sake of God, in the chapters, al-Imran\textsuperscript{881}, al-
‘Ankabūt\textsuperscript{882}, Luqmān\textsuperscript{883} and al-Ṣāffāt\textsuperscript{884} whilst ‘Ayyāshī does not use the term at all.

None of the exegetes uses the term \textit{dhāt} or any of its derivatives, in relation to God, anywhere in their exegetical works except the instances noted above. In addition, none of them confer about the nature of the \textit{dhāt} of God or the perception of the humans of it in the verses pertinent to the names and attributes of God or elsewhere in their exegeses. Thereby, it could be proposed that al-Māturīdī is the only Sunni and Transoxianan exegete to link the analysis of the \textit{dhāt} of God to his exegetical commentary.

The absence of any commentary on the matter from the other exegetes credits such conclusion. Particularly, in the case of Muqātil who is the founder of a theological school named after him, al-Muqātiliyyah, whom many theologians such as Ash‘arī, al-Muṭahhar al-Maqdisī (d. 966 CE), Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī (d. 1178 CE), al-Ījī (d. 1355 CE) and al-Kawtharī (d. 1952 CE) reprimanded for delving into the \textit{dhāt} of God.\textsuperscript{885} Al-Maqdisī went further to state, “Al-Muqātiliyyah are the followers of Muqātil who claimed that God is a \textit{jism} like all bodies from flesh and blood and his height is 7 hand spans.”\textsuperscript{886} Ash‘arī concurs with al-Maqdisī. He lists the school of Muqātil amongst the schools that practice \textit{tashbīh} of God and confirms that they believed that God is a \textit{jism} but he claimed that they proposed “nothing resembles him (God) and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{881} Samarqandī, \textit{Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm}, 1, 253.
  \item \textsuperscript{882} Ibid, 2, 624.
  \item \textsuperscript{883} Ibid, 3, 26.
  \item \textsuperscript{884} Ibid, 3, 145.
  \item \textsuperscript{885} Al-Ījī, \textit{Kitāb Al-Mawāqif Fi ‘Ilm Al-Kalām}, 273.
\end{itemize}
he does not resemble anything.” 887 Despite the infamy of Muqātil in making tashbīh of God, as Muḥammad al-Kawtharī stresses 888, his exegesis is void of any reference to the nature of the dhāt of God or his description. How can the two seemingly opposing facts be reconciled? They can be reconciled by realizing that Muqātil wrote his title as a traditional Sunni exegesis and not as theological exegesis. The fact of the matter remains that al-Māturīdī is the first Sunni exegete to introduce this theological topic in Sunni exegesis and provide an explanation.

The study of the dhāt of God does not seem to occupy a substantial space in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd either. The term appears often albeit it is not the central theme of the discourse. Mostly, al-Māturīdī uses it in his explanation of several names of God, the legitimacy of the assertion of the notion of names to God and the affirmation of divine attributes. The insight al-Māturīdī offers in Ta’wīlāt about the comprehension of the dhāt of God is unparalleled in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. Perhaps the ascendancy of the polemical debate sidelined the study of this topic in the Kitāb whereas in Ta’wīlāt, as al-Māturīdī was studying the theological dimensions of the verses, he had the pleasure of focusing on this aspect of theology.

4.4 The nature of the attributes and names of God

Al-Māturīdī extends the preceding perception, the inability of the human’s intellect to fully grasp the *dhāt* of God, to the divine attributes. He cites the attribute of *takwīn* as an example to illustrate his view. He states, “Upon this is (the understanding of) the *takwīn* of God of things.” Al-Māturīdī then further explains, “(your knowledge of) the command of *takwīn* should not give (you) the illusion that the (human) perceptions are capable of comprehending it (*takwīn*) fully or that intellects are capable of reaching it.” The command of *takwīn*, which will be discussed later, is above and distinct from all types of commands humans can know or apply for it points to the *mutaʾālī ʿan ṣīfāt al-khalq* (the one who is above the attributes of creation) whose majesty is established beyond their directions and instructions. This bids the question, ‘why inform people about the divine attributes if they cannot fully grasp them? Al-Māturīdī elucidates that the aim of informing the creation of these attributes of God is “*littaqrībi mina al-afhām dūna tahqīq al-mafhūm* (to draw closer to the understanding of the humans these attributes so they can relate to God without aiming to establish full realisation of them).” In al-Māturīdī’s view, an integral role of the attributes is not to depict God thoroughly but to permit people to relate to him and love him.

Al-Māturīdī appreciates that the Mu’tazilites may capitalise on such statements to deny the notion of divine attributes altogether. Hence, he denies them the opportunity by launching an attack against such a proposal and exhibiting the incompatibility of such thoughts with the teachings of the Qur’an. The pre-emptive strike of al-Māturīdī appears in the end of verse 100

---

890 Ibid.
891 Ibid.
892 Ibid.
chapter al-An‘ām—God says, “Exalted is He and high above what they describe.” Al-Māturīdī commences his argument, “in his (God’s) statement is the confutation of the claim of the Mu‘tazilites that the ṣifāt (attributes) of God are merely wasf al-wāṣifīn (the description of the describers).” The phrase means that the descriptions of God are expressions people use to describe God and do not represent a verification of God for such attributes. Al-Māturīdī responds, “If (the attributes of God) were nothing but wasf al-wāṣif (a description from a describer) then there would be no point of reprimanding some of the describers or praising others.” Briefly, he counters their argument against the existence of the notions of the divine attributes. Al-Māturīdī is implying that if the notion of attributes did not exist and did not matter to God then he would not have reprimanded those who described him with false descriptions and he would not have praised those who described him with accurate descriptions. Once more, al-Māturīdī’s argument fuses between ‘aql and naql. Al-An‘ām verse represents the narrative proof as it exalts God above being described with traits that do not befit his divinity. Al-Māturīdī, skilfully however, derives from the verse a logical proof. If God condemns being described falsely then it follows that he cares about how he is perceived and described. Thus, he must have ṣifāt, which are perfect, and he would like them to be known, cherished and praised. Thus, the notion of divine attributes is real and is not just wasf al-wāṣifīn (the description of the describers), as the Mu‘tazilites claim.

In Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, al-Māturīdī expresses the same position but supports it with a different argument, “and the one (Mu‘tazilites) who states that God has no ṣifah (attribute) in reality and it is only wasf al-wāṣif (description from a describer)… then why does he describe

893 Ibid, 5, 163.
894 Ibid.
God with the attribute of 'ilm and qudrah (knowledge and full of ability)?\(^{895}\) The argument al-Māturīdī puts forth is much simpler than that in Ta’wīlāt. He challenges the inconsistency of the Mu’tazilites in denying the notion of attribute to God yet affirming to him the attributes of 'ilm (full knowledge) and qudrah (omnipotence) and also calling him with names based on it “‘ālim, khāliq and qādir.”\(^{896}\) Notwithstanding the value of al-Māturīdī’s above, the Qur’anic argument he presents may be simple but it is more effective than the one in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd as it does not depend on the response of the opponent or his justification. It is complete and precise in itself not to mention being supported by a narrative source- the Qur’an. Yet al-Māturīdī chose not to use it in his Kitāb. This could indicate that he did not develop the argument until after he finished the Kitāb, which suggests that his exegesis came later.

Returning to the topic of the nature of the divine names and attributes, al-Māturīdī extends to the names of God the same conception he applies to the attributes of God, the taqrīb (approximation) concept. He states, “And upon this understanding is the comprehension of the names ‘Allah’, ‘al-Raḥmān’ and all the names that the creatures know (for God). It is to taqrībi mina al-afhām (to make them partially explicable to the humans). The aim is not tahqīq al-ḥurūf, it is not to say these very letters are uttered, or tarkīb al-kalam, to claim this is how speech is composed, or ta’līf al-‘ibārah, to indicate that this is how expressions are formed (by God).\(^{897}\) In verse 56 chapter al-Nisā’, al-Māturīdī reiterates the same position in his commentary on the name al-‘Azīz. Commonly, al-‘Azīz is understood and translated as the mighty or the defater. One of the recognized lexical meanings of this utterance, nonetheless, is the thing that is rare to

\(^{895}\) Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 50.
\(^{896}\) Ibid.
\(^{897}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 263.
encounter or the thing that is difficult to achieve.\(^{898}\) Al-Māturīdī capitalises on this philological facet of the name and states, “and he (God) is ‘Azīz for he is beyond the perceptions (of creation) to possess knowledge of him and their imaginations could not perceive him fully.”\(^{899}\) An identical statement al-Māturīdī reinstates when explaining the name al-Aḥād and the name al-Ṣamad. He asserts, “He is the one whom the tongue is mute, the expressions are short, imaginations are incapable and the perceptions are overwhelmed from engulfing him fully.”\(^{900}\) In chapter al-Ikhlāṣ, Al-Māturīdī delivers his key formula about the full appreciation of the names of God, “Therefore all the names given to God are not to \text{taḥqīq al-ḥurūf} (to establish all the aspects of the meanings related to the letters used to name an entity).”\(^{901}\) Rather the main objective behind them is to aid the human mind to understand and describe God in an abstract sense,\(^{902}\) to cater for the theological necessity of distinguishing God from other false deities\(^{903}\) and to reveal the manifestations of his identity to all creation.\(^{904}\)

The scenario encountered with the \text{dhāt} of God repeats itself with the names and attributes of God when reviewing the titles of the other exegetes. They ignore the mention of these topics completely in their commentary and provide no theological substance in their titles. The various lexical interpretations of the name al-‘Azīz, al-Māturīdī lists, are completely overlooked by the other exegetes. Ṭabarī asserts, “God is ‘Azīz (powerful) in his vengeance from


\(^{899}\) Al-Mātüridī, \text{Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 3, 286.

\(^{900}\) Ibid, 17, 377.

\(^{901}\) Ibid, 17, 374.

\(^{902}\) Ibid.

\(^{903}\) Ibid, 17, 377.

\(^{904}\) Ibid, 17, 378.
those who torture his creation.”\textsuperscript{905} He reinstates the same meaning when writing about the Jews, according to him, who crucified Jesus in verse 158 chapter al-Nisā\textsuperscript{906}. Muqāṭil does not travel far from Ṭabarī. In the context of the same verse, he also interprets al-‘Azīz as the powerful God who protected Jesus from his enemies.\textsuperscript{907} Samarqandī relates their interpretations verbatim in his exegesis.\textsuperscript{908}

The same remark persists when investigating the exegetes’ commentary on the name al-Aḥād. None of the them delves into the nature of the attributes and the names of God and the capacity of the human intellect to perceive them. They simply relate the traditional reports. It is not that al-Māturīdī ignores the traditional interpretations. He indeed lists them but does not stop at the point of transmission. His personal mission, it appears, is to discover the theological facets of the verses and the names of God.\textsuperscript{909}

As the analysis of the theological commentary of al-Māturīdī proceeds from one topic to another it grows difficult to label him as a traditional Ḥanafī scholar. Al-Māturīdī does not seem capable of mere transmission and reporting, like Samarqandī, of what others state or formulate. He seems to have an internal urge to revise, to assess, to critique, to refine and to develop his personal views on the subject matter according to his principles and his methodology. He may agree with theological positions endorsed before him but only when he is persuaded of their correctness. The appeal of gifting new knowledge to the Islamic academia is evident strongly in his commentary and it contributes greatly to his unique exegetical positions in Ta’wilāt.

\textsuperscript{905} Ṭabarī, \textit{Jāmi‘ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an}, 8, 488.

\textsuperscript{906} He states, when commenting on the name al-‘Azīz “God will seek revenge from his enemies.” For further information see: ibid, 9, 378.

\textsuperscript{907} Ibn Sulaymān, \textit{Tafsīr Muqāṭil Ibn Sulaymān}, 1, 421.

\textsuperscript{908} Samarqandī, \textit{Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm}, 1, 355-58.

\textsuperscript{909} He uses the name al-‘Azīz as well to point that God’s attributes are from his dhāt and not from an external entity of power. For further information see: Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 9, 296.
In the cross analysis of Ta’wīlāt with *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, the same theological formulas perpetuate. In his explanation of the name al-Aḥad and al-Wāḥid, al-Māturīdī uses word for word the same statement he uses in Ta’wīlāt. God “is the one whom the tongue is mute, the expressions are short, imaginations are incapable, and the perceptions are overwhelmed from engulfing him fully.”910 Al-Māturīdī further stresses in the *Kitāb*911, “The names by which we call him are expressions intended to ease on the humans’ perceptions the understanding of God not that they are his actual names.”912 It is highly tenable that al-Māturīdī copied these statements into his exegesis when the theme arose. Thus, al-Māturīdī’s position in Ta’wīlāt and *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* on the nature of the names and attributes of God is one.

In the above deliberation, al-Māturīdī brings to the surface the transcendence–immanence paradox. If God is transcendent, beyond space and time, how could he be understood or related to by humans who are bound by space, time and sensory perceptions? In al-Māturīdī’s view, the role of the names and attributes is to be the conceptual instruments that aid resolve this complication. They permit the humans to feel the presence of God, to appreciate his influence on all creation, to understand the relationship between the infinite and the finite without rendering God unreachable. Nonetheless, covering the gap cannot come at the expense of the absolute transcendence of God and His immanence. This should be upheld at all times and cannot be compromised for it will lead to tendencies to anthropomorphise God into worldly images or make Him part of the universe. In the context of western literature, absolute transcendence seems to be the most appropriate term to describe the transcendence al-Māturīdī advocates and defends.

---

910 *Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd*, 43.
911 Specifically, in the section titled, *mas’alat al-wasfu li Allah wa al-tasmiyah lā yūjibān al-tashbīh* (the issue of ascribing a description to God and a name does not necessitate *tashbīh*).
It contrasts the concept of transcendent anthropomorphism, which Wesley Williams, Ignaz Goldziher and Sherman Jackson state was prevalent amongst some Muslim theologians such as Muqātil.913 Williams and Jackson do not discuss al-Māturīdī’s position on the transcendence of God in Ta’wīlāt or Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. The former, however, argues that incorporeal transcendence, in general, is a Hellenistic concept rather than an Islamic one.914 Williams builds this deduction on another theory he upholds, which views Islam as a continuation of Judaism, Christianity and the ancient near east society. If, thus, incorporeal transcendence is not evident in Judaism and Christianity then it cannot be palpable in Islam.915 Williams’s view may be further influenced by Goldziher’s opinion who insists that traditional Islam preached crude anthropomorphism.916 Goldziher’s opinion cannot be accepted as a fact because western scholars do not agree on the place of anthropomorphism in the history of Islamic thought.917 Additionally, other western scholars such as Ritter disagree with Goldziher completely and confirm that Muslim scholars abhored the concept of anthropomorphism.918 Williams and Livant Holtzman assert that Muslim theologians of all eras and persuasions unanimously confirm God’s transcendence and condemn anthropomorphism.919 The absolute transcendence of God is asserted in the Qur’an in numerous chapters such as al-Ikhlāṣ and al-Shūrā and therefore it is

915 Williams’s argument on Islam being a continuity of previous Semitic religions in the conception of God and the comparison he conducts between Islam and Judaism and Christianity requires a separate study, in which an extensive analysis and deliberation of his views is assessed and evaluated.
incorrect to classify it as a purely Hellenistic concept borrowed as it is. At the same time, the late development of the dialectical discussion on divine transcendence,\textsuperscript{920} in Islamic theology, makes it conceivable, that Muslim scholars, through the Mu'tazilites, benefited from Hellenistic literature in the development of the Islamic polemical position on God's transcendence. al-Māturīdī's commentary in Ta’wīlāt does not present any hint of a direct influence. It focuses entirely on the assertion of God's absolute transcendence.

Consequently, al-Māturīdī remains prudent in Ta’wīlāt from letting the reader depart with the misapprehension that they know everything about God. Hence, he insists that the names inform us about God but do not depict him.

Al-Māturīdī asserts that this understanding falls under the correct knowledge of the *tawḥīd* of God. From the necessities of *tawḥīd* is to have *ma‘rifah* (knowledge) of God, but it must remain within the parameter of *subḥāniyyah* (the glorification of God) ‘*an ma‘ānī jāmī‘ al-‘arūfin* (beyond the semantics and conceptions of all known entities).\textsuperscript{921}


\textsuperscript{921} Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, 2, 263.
4.5 The relationship between names of God and his *dhāt*: The position of al-Māturīdī with respect to Muʿtazilites and the traditionalists

In the preceding section, the emphasis of al-Māturīdī on the association of the names and attributes with the *dhāt* of God and describing them as *dhātiyyah* (*dhāt* related) was duly underscored but not analysed. This section looks closely at the nature of the relationship between the *dhāt* of God and his names and attributes.

One of the key expressions al-Māturīdī uses when articulating the relationship of the names and attributes with the *dhāt* of God is the phrase *bi dhātihi*. For instance, when describing the knowledge of God, al-Māturīdī uses the phrase ‘ālim *bi dhātihi*\(^\text{923}\) (he has full knowledge by his *dhāt*). This locution of al-Māturīdī stands out on two grounds. The first is the frequency of its use. Al-Māturīdī uses this pronouncement 142 times in Taʿwīlāt. Certainly, such consistent recurrence cannot be discounted. The second ground is the actual wording of the phrase, *bi dhātihi*. It assimilates the expressions the Muʿtazilites apply when they deny the presence of the attributes to God and claim that the only existent entity is the *dhāt*. Shahrastānī, whilst explaining the difference between the statements of Abū al-Hudhayl (d. 841 CE) in describing the attributes of God and the rest of the Muʿtazilites, quotes an interesting phrase the Muʿtazilites propagate. He states, “and the difference between the statement of the speaker (the majority of the Muʿtazilites), ‘ālim *bi dhātihi lā bi ‘ilm* (he knows by his *dhāt* and not by knowledge) and the statement of the speaker (Abū al-Hudhayl) is …”\(^\text{924}\) The similarity between the wording of the two phrases is striking.

\(^{922}\) Hundreds of times, al-Māturīdī reminds the reader that all the attributes and names are *dhātiyyah* (related to the *dhāt* of God).
\(^{923}\) Al-Māturīdī, Taʿwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 86.
\(^{924}\) Shahrastānī, Al-Milal Wa Al-Niḥal, 1, 50.
Shahrastānī then confirms, “those who proclaim that God is ‘ālim bi dhātihi lā bi ‘ilm (he knows by his dhāt and not by knowledge) have denied the attributes (to God).”\(^\text{925}\) The semantic similarities between al-Māturīdī’s statement and the Mu’tazilites’ statement could easily cause one to misconstruingly deduce that al-Māturīdī is a covert Mu’tazilite or at least a sympathiser. The analysis of al-Māturīdī’s commentary, nonetheless, indicates that such a deduction is far from reality and al-Māturīdī’s choice of words serves a discrete purpose.

Al-Māturīdī reveals this purpose in verse 45 chapter al-Nūr,\(^\text{927}\) a verse that sheds the light on the creation of the different species from water or fluid. Al-Māturīdī clarifies, “It is done through the tadbīr of the one who is ‘ālim bi dhātihi (has full knowledge by his dhāt) not by ‘ilm mustafād (a knowledge he acquired from someone).”\(^\text{928}\) Al-Māturīdī uses this phrase because he aims at stressing that the names and attributes of God are inherent and intrinsic to God’s self. He articulates this position in clearer words when explaining the name al-Ḥayy in verse 255 chapter al-Baqarah. He states, “He is alive by his dhāt and not by a life that is different from him like the creation. They are alive by a life that is different than them.”\(^\text{929}\) Al-Māturīdī stresses the same concept when explaining the other names of God, he comes across in the verses. None of the other exegetes engaged the subject at all, which makes al-Māturīdī the only Sunni and Transoxianan exegete to explore the subject in his exegesis.

In Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, the term bi dhātihi appears 39 times in relation to the dhāt of God and his names and attributes. The attributes of ‘ilm (knowledge) and qudrah (power) seem to be

---

\(^{925}\) Ibid.

\(^{926}\) In addition to the opinion al-Māturīdī clearly asserts, in the previous section, about the names being a necessity to relate to God and not intended for themselves could be misconstrued to be a similarity.

\(^{927}\) The verse reads, “Allah has created every [living] creature from water. And of them are those that move on their bellies, and of them are those that move on two legs, and of them are those that walk on four…”

\(^{928}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 10, 185.

\(^{929}\) Ibid, 2, 152.
the most frequent attributes with which al-Māturīdī highlights the relationship with the *dhāt*. He states, “God knows by his *dhāt* and he is capable by his *dhāt* and everyone else other than him they are (knowledgeable and capable) through others.”

In addition, al-Māturīdī highlights it, to a lesser extent though, in relation to the *hikmah* (wisdom) of God, the *ghinā* (independence and self-sufficiency) of God, and the *karam* (the generosity) of God.

The homogeneity between al-Māturīdī’s writing on this subject in the *Kitāb* and Ta’wīlāt is conspicuous to the observing eye. Consistently, al-Māturīdī refers in Ta’wīlāt to the same names and attributes he refers to in *Kitāb*, albeit in Ta’wīlāt he expands to other names and attributes. Notwithstanding the above, in Ta’wīlāt, al-Māturīdī elaborates more on the issue, which suggests that he wrote it at a later stage. The focus of al-Māturīdī on particular attributes in the *Kitāb* and the exclusion of others is most likely driven by the polemical nature of the title. Hence, he highlights the essential attributes of God such as knowledge, power, freedom, wisdom and generosity. The attributes deemed necessary to God, rationally, if he were to create, perfect and rule. Despite these minor differences, between the *Kitāb* and Ta’wīlāt, the position of al-Māturīdī from the relationship between the *dhāt* of God and all his attributes is one. He believes that all the attributes relate directly to the *dhāt* and come from it.

The position of al-Māturīdī from the relationship between the *dhāt* and attributes prompts another significant enquiry about the independence of one from the other or the differentiation between them. Could the *dhāt* be distinct from the divine attribute? Should they be perceived as two different entities or one? Al-Māturīdī opens the door on this topic very briefly in verse 255

---

930 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd*, 48; ibid, 277.
931 Ibid, 216; ibid, 219.
932 Ibid, 177; ibid, 219.
933 Ibid, 112.
chapter al-Baqarah in the course of his discussion of one of the essential attributes of God, the attribute of ḥayāt (life). He clarifies that the ḥayāt (life) of God is “lā bi ḥayāt hiya ghayruh (his attribute of life is not other than his dhāt).”\(^9\) Thus, al-Māturīdī does not see the attributes independent from the dhāt. In chapter al-A‘lā verse 1, al-Māturīdī formulates the above opinion in an overarching principle. He states, “ṣifātuhu laysat bi aghyār li al-dhāt wa hiya lā tufāriq al-dhāt (his attributes are not independent entities from the dhāt and they do not separate from the dhāt).”\(^9\) It seems that the aim of al-Māturīdī is to shut the door on the counter argument of ta ‘addud al-qudamā’ (multiple infinite beings).\(^9\) Some may argue that the position may put him in the ranks of the Mu‘tazilites or close to them on the spectrum. In chapter al-Isrā’ verse 86, al-Māturīdī dispels this possibility and elucidates further his position on the relationship between the dhāt and the attributes of God. He asserts, “Ṣifatuhu lā huwa walā ghayruh (his attributes are not him and are not other than him either).”\(^9\) In other words, the attributes do not constitute the dhāt of God but at the same time they are not independent from his dhāt – the generic Sunni view on attributes of God. Al-Māturīdī does not expand any further on this paradoxical issue and does not seem enthusiastic to deliberate on it further.

Before analysing further the brevity of al-Māturīdī, it is essential to review the commentaries of other exegetes on the subject. None of the Sunni or Transoxianan exegetes addresses the relationship between the dhāt and the attributes of God in any degree. Not even Ṭabarī who uses a nearly identical phrase, to that of al-Māturīdī, in his exegesis, “lā hiya huwa

\(^9\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 152.
\(^9\) Ibid, 17, 166.
\(^9\) If one was to suggest that the attributes of God are separate entities and independent from the dhāt of God and eternal then this would necessitate the existence of multiple eternal beings and nullify tawḥīd.
\(^9\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 8, 351.
walā ghayruhu (it is not it and it is not different than it).”\textsuperscript{938} Ṭabarī’s use of this phrase, however, is utterly different. Ṭabarī uses the phrase in the context of discussing if the notion of the khalq (creation) of the heavens and earth should be understood as a description of them or if it is a reference to the heavens and earth. Thus, al-Māturīdī is the only Sunni and Transoxianan exegete to introduce such a significant theological topic in his exegesis.

In Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, al-Māturīdī raises the issue of the independence of the attributes from that dhāt of God. He affirms the same statement as in Taʾwīlāt, “The sifāt (attributes) are not him (God) and are not other than him.”\textsuperscript{939} Al-Māturīdī elaborates that this statement represents ‘qawl ahl al-ithbāt’ (the position of the people of affirmation).\textsuperscript{940} However, he does not pursue the subject any further.

It seems rather strange that al-Māturīdī does not engage this aspect of the relationship between the dhāt and the attributes any further. He addresses this subject shyly, in a limited context and with no rigor. In comparison with his persistence in ensuring the clarity of the meaning of the phrase bi dhātihi and its role in the attributes, al-Māturīdī seems reluctant to approach the association of the attributes with the dhāt. He partakes in the discussion on a need basis only. Upon examining the three instances where al-Māturīdī cites this principle\textsuperscript{941}, whether in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd or Taʾwīlāt, the following conclusion prevails. In chapter al-Isrā’, al-Māturīdī quotes the principle in response to the Ḥashawīyyah who claim that the actual printed copies of the Qur’an are the word of God. In chapter al-Aʿlā, he cites it, partially, when explaining why God is worthy of praise alone. In Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, al-Māturīdī quotes it when responding to the

\textsuperscript{938} Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwīl Āy Al-Qur’an, 3, 272.
\textsuperscript{939} Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 55.
\textsuperscript{940} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{941} The attributes of God are not his dhāt and are not independent from it.
Muʿtazilite theologian, al-Kaʿbī. Thus, au contraire to his robust and proactive methodology, al-Māturīdī, in this particular issue, seems to be a follower of the traditional stance. Perhaps the complexity of the issue and its sensitivity have forced him to abandon his habit of deep analysis and to accept the statement as it is. Al-Māturīdī’s reluctance in delineating the interdependence between the *dhāt* and the divine attributes in Taʾwīlāt cannot be discounted on the basis that the topic is polemical or dialectical. Al-Māturīdī exhibits the same reluctance in writing about this issue in the *Kitāb*.

### 4.6 The categorisation of the names of God and the relationship between the *dhāt* of God and his actions

Al-Māturīdī has another use for the word *dhātī* in Taʾwīlāt. He uses it to label one of the two categories of the divine names. According to him, the names of God are of two types: 1- *ism dhātī* (the *dhāt* based names) and 2- *ism fiʿlī* (the actions of God based names).

The technical definition of the *ism dhātī* is “*al-makhṣūṣ bihī Allah* (the name made exclusive to God) which none else could be called by it.” An example of the *dhātī* names is al-Raḥmān. In contrast, the technical definition of the *ism fiʿlī* is, “the divine name one is permitted to call others (creatures) by it.” An example of the *fiʿlī* names is al-Raḥīm. In chapter al-Aʿlā, verse 1, al-Māturīdī reaffirms the existence of the *dhātī* names. He states, “al-

---

942 Wolfson states that the first dated formula for the relationship between the *dhāt* and the attributes of God belongs to Sulaymāb ibn Jarīr al-Zaydī (d. unknown) who said, “God’s knowledge is neither God nor other than God”. The same belief was held by the Ashʿarīs and Ibn Kullāb (d. 854 CE). For further information see, Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 207.

943 Interestingly, Rudolph does not raise this issue either in his appraisal of the theology of al-Māturīdī in in the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.

944 Al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, 1, 16.

945 Ibid.
asmāʾ al-dhātīyyah are: Allah, whom there is no God but him, al-Raḥmān and what is similar to them from the names (of God).”

Al-Māturīdī’s categorisation of the divine names into dhāt based and fiʾl based names stimulates legitimate and important questions about whether al-Māturīdī distinguishes between the dhāt of God (God’s self) and his fiʾl (God’s actions), about the relationship of God’s actions with his dhāt and how al-Māturīdī reconciles between this relationship with the attribute of takwīn.

Al-Māturīdī responds swiftly, “It should be noted that the fiʾl (action) is an attribute of the dhāt of God. It cannot be attributed to other than his dhāt for it will imply that God needs others (to do his actions).”

Al-Māturīdī advances in explaining his point of view. He stresses that the suggestion that the fiʾl (action) of God is not an attribute of his dhāt would necessitate the praise of God’s actions to be directed to other than him. This violates the fundamental principle which stipulates that God, “bi nafsihi mustahiqun likul madḥ wa hamd (God deserves and is worthy of thanks and praise in his self).” Thus the categorisation of the names into dhāt based and fiʾl based by al-

---

946 Oddly though, al-Māturīdī does not mention the fiʾlī names in chapter al-Aʾlā. Rather he introduces al-asmāʾ al-ṣifātiyyah (the attribute-based names), a type of names he did not list earlier. However, when al-Māturīdī begins to provide examples of al-asmāʾ al-ṣifātiyyah it becomes clear they are synonymous with the fiʾlī names. The examples al-Māturīdī cites of them are, Ālim (all-knowing), Hakīm (all-wise) and Rahim.

947 Ibid, 17, 166.

948 Ibid.

Thus the categorisation of the names into dhāt based and fiʾl based by al-
Māturīdī is not ideologically driven to separate the actions and the attributes of God from his *dhāt*.\(^{949}\) It, conversely, stresses their connection to God’s self in al-Māturīdī’s mindset.

The concept of categorising the names of God into two types is not unique to al-Māturīdī. In his exegesis, Ṭabarī reports the statement of ‘Aṭā’, a traditional exegetes, (d. 732 CE) that al-Raḥmān “is from the names of God that none of his creatures is permitted to use as a name.”\(^{950}\) Ṭabarī endorses the opinion of ‘Aṭā’ and states, “and to God belongs names he prohibited on his creation to call themselves by it…such as Allah, al-Raḥmān and al-Khāliq.”\(^{951}\) But he adds further, “and there are names that he permitted them to call each other with such as al-Raḥīm, al-Samī’, al-Baṣīr and al-Karīm.”\(^{952}\) Thus, Ṭabarī concurs with al-Māturīdī on the technical categorisation of the names into two types\(^{953}\) but does not label them as Māturīdī does into *dhātī* or *fi’lī* names.

What is unique to al-Māturīdī, additionally, is the justification of this categorisation and his defence of it. He clearly explains that he is following the logic of the Qur’an but Ṭabarī does not.\(^{954}\) In addition, al-Māturīdī elucidates his theological position of the relationship between the *dhāt* of God and his *fi’l* (action) and presents a rational argument to support. Neither Ṭabarī, who

---

\(^{949}\) The drive behind such a categorisation, in al-Māturīdī’s mindset, is that it corresponds to the Qur’anic categorisation of the names. God says,” (O’ Muhammad) say (to them) invoke Allah or invoke al-Rahman…” the association of al-Rahman with Allah led al-Māturīdī to believe that it is a, “*dhātī* and not *fi’lī* name”. on that basis it seems co-associated the name al-Rahman with the name Allah and made them names that points particularly to the *dhāt* of God and classify the rest as either *fi’lī*, or *ṣifāt*-based, names. al-Māturīdī displays keenness on following the categorisation of the Qur’ān in his work. For further information see, ibid, 1, 361.

\(^{950}\) Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’ān*, 1, 86.

\(^{951}\) Ibid, 1, 87.

\(^{952}\) Ibid.

\(^{953}\) Those the human can use and those they cannot.

\(^{954}\) Please see footnote 156.
spoke about the categorisation of the names nor any other exegete\textsuperscript{955} attempt to discuss or point to this relationship.

\textbf{4.7 The attribute of takwīn}

The discussion of the \textit{fi’l} (action) of God and its relationship with the \textit{dhāt} of God leads the analysis to the attribute of \textit{takwīn}, the mother attribute of all the actions of God.\textsuperscript{956} Al-Māturīdī discusses the \textit{takwīn} attribute in various instances in \textit{Ta’wīlāt}. The first instance is verse 117 chapter al-Baqarah. The verse reads, “He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth: when He decrees a thing, He merely says, ‘\textit{Kun fa yakūn} (be and it will be).’” \textit{Kun}, the imperative form of the verb ‘to be’ in Arabic, is the point al-Māturīdī finds most suitable to open up the discussion about the \textit{takwīn} attribute.

Al-Māturīdī argues that \textit{kun} does not represent the literal uttered word of God rather it is the most succinct expression to communicate the command of God, “\textit{laysa huwa qawlu Allah} (it is not a statement from God)…it is \textit{awjaz al-kalām} (the shortest form of speech)… there is nothing lesser than this two-letter word to convey the meaning.”\textsuperscript{957} From the outset, al-Māturīdī’s interpretation of \textit{kun}, in al-Baqarah verse, stands different to the interpretation of all the exegetes of his region particularly his Sunni counterparts. Whilst ‘Ayyāshī, the only Shi’a contemporary exegete of al-Māturīdī’s region and period, does not comment on the verse at all,

\textsuperscript{955} The remaining exegetes did not address the categorisation topic in their exegeses at all and equally did not address the nature of the relationship between the \textit{dhāt} of God and his names and attributes.

\textsuperscript{956} Despite the importance of the \textit{takwīn} attribute, Rudolph does not dedicate for it an independent space in his book. He studies it succcinctly in chapter 8 under the heading “God’s attributes”. He seems to be more interested in al-Māturīdī’s approach to discussing all divine attributes, including \textit{takwīn}, in \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd} but not necessarily how al-Māturīdī formulates the \textit{takwīn} attribute on its own. Rudolph, \textit{Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand}, 278.

\textsuperscript{957} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 1, 220.
Muqātil does. He briefly explains that *kun* was actually a command uttered by God. Muqātil states, “He does not need to repeat his *qawl* (statement) like the creatures do.”⁹⁵⁸ At the same time, he qualifies the verse to relate to the creation of Jesus. Muqātil does not engage in the discussion any further and certainly does not mention anything concerning the *takwīn* attribute. Samarqandī supports Muqātil’s commentary wholeheartedly. He states, “It means when God wills to create a creature. He just says, ‘*kun fa yakūn*’ (be and it will be). It is said that the verse was revealed in relation to the delegation of Najrān.”⁹⁵⁹ Thus, Samarqandī concurs with Muqātil’s interpretation of *kun* and his qualification of the verse to Jesus’s creation because he, Samarqandī, confirms that it addresses the delegation of Najrān⁹⁶⁰. Samarqandī expands further though and cites an objection he encountered against this interpretation of *kun*. He commences with a proposed question, “And if it is asked…is the *kun* command addressed to a *mawjūd* (existent) or to a *ma’dūm* (a non-existent being)?”⁹⁶¹ The aim of the question is to discredit the traditional interpretation of *kun*, regardless of the response. So Samarqandī continues, “…if it is addressed to a *ma’dūm* (a non-existent being) then how could it be addressed to it (something that doesn’t exist)? …and if it is addressed to a *mawjūd* (existent) being…how could it be asked to exist?”⁹⁶² Samarqandī provides two possible responses to the above scenarios. The first is that all things exist in the knowledge of God and therefore God is addressing what exists in his knowledge and not what exists in the physical realm. The second explanation is that *kun* is not a spoken statement from God. Rather it is an allegoric expression that refers to his creation of

---

⁹⁶⁰ The delegation of Najrān is a Christian delegation from Yemen that met with Prophet Muhammad after his migration in Madinah. They debated with him over numerous theological topics the chief of it was the creation of Jesus and his Prophethood. This has been explained and referenced in the previous chapter See the section the proof of *anbā’ al-ghayb* in chapter three.
⁹⁶² Ibid.
Samarqandī does not comment any further and does not raise the topic of *takwīn* as an attribute of God, or any other attribute for that matter, despite being a prominent traditional theologian in the Ḥanafī school.

There are two important remarks that need to be addressed before moving to Ṭabarī’s interpretation of *kun*. Samarqandī does not clearly state, which of the two responses he supports. This is particularly significant when the second explanation negates the interpretation of *kun* he endorses at the beginning of his commentary. Secondly, the latter proposed explanation Samarqandī provides, *kun* not being a spoken statement from God but a figurative expression that refers to his creation, has been promoted by a number of Muʿtazilite theologians such as, al-Jubbāʿī (d. 303 CE), al-Balkhī (d. 329 CE) and al-Rummānī (d. 384 CE). The lack of commentary from Samarqandī, on the proposed responses he lists, could have various causes. It may represent his inability to respond decisively to an opposing opinion. It may indicate, additionally, indecisiveness on what to endorse or it could simply point to a lack of interest in entering the theological debate pertinent to the interpretation of *kun*.

In contrast, Ṭabarī plunges into the discussion and, with all might, defends the traditional interpretation of *kun*. He categorically rejects all proposed scenarios, including the ones Samarqandī suggests, and unwaveringly confirms that *kun* is a statement from God. He asserts, “The command of God to a thing, when he wills its *takwīn* and existence, is to say

---

963 Ibid.
965 Ṭabarī is aware of the challenging objections Samarqandī presents in his exegesis. Tabari lists them at the beginning of his commentary. How can God give a command to an entity that does not exist? And if it does exist, what is the point of such a command being given to an already existing entity? Tabari lists all the responses Samarqandī presents, and more, but still insists on his view. For further information see: Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʿwil Āy Al-Qur`ān*, 2, 542.
"kun," Nonetheless, unlike Samarqandī, formulates a tactic to manoeuvre around the challenging questions. He sets a timeline, which, in his opinion, refutes the above objection. It explains the correlation between "kun", as a speech from God, and the thing to be created as a result of it. Ṭabarī argues, “The existence of (the thing) that God wants its takwīn and existence (to take place) does not precede his (God’s) irādah (his will) and does not happen after it.”

Hence, they happen simultaneously for, as Ṭabarī explains, “it is not acceptable that a thing is commanded to exist except when it is actually existent and (likewise) it cannot exist without God’s command and irādah for it to do so.” It could be argued though that Ṭabarī’s explanation does not really resolve the objection rather it clouds the issue further. The cycle of creation of all beings is not the same. Some creatures come into existence spontaneously and others gradually. It would be burdensome, if not impossible, to harmonise between the simultaneousness of God’s word with the creation of things and their respective creation cycle. This interpretation would lead to the word of God being stretched and contracted based on the nature of the cycle of the creation of things. Furthermore, how would the statement of God be classified then? Is it qadīmah (eternal) or ḥadīthah (finite)?

Regardless, Ṭabarī does not respond to such questions. Instead, he maintains his course. The analysis of his commentaries, on al-Baqarah verse, discloses the grounds for his firmness on interpreting "kun" as an uttered command from God. Firstly, Ṭabarī does not see a justification for ta’wīl in this instance. He explains, “It is not permissible to divert from the ṣāhir (literal interpretation) to the bātīn (inferred interpretation) without a proof.” The bātīn interpretation Ṭabarī refuses to acknowledge is to interpret "kun" as a figurative expression that points to the will

---

966 Ibid, 2, 547.
967 Ibid.
968 Ibid.
969 Ibid.
and action of God, something Samarqandī silently tolerates, and not God’s actual spoken word.\footnote{Ibid, 2, 546.} Secondly, Ṭabarī argues that such an interpretation does not consist with ṣawāb al-lughah (the correct linguistic use of the word in the Arabic language). In his opinion, the phrase would sound outlandish to the native speakers, when interpreted in such a fashion. Thirdly, the syntax of the verse points to simultaneousness between the word of God and the existence of the thing because the verb yaqūlu, he (God) says, is conjunct on the verb, yakūnu, he (the thing) exists. Thus, “God cannot give a command to a thing to exist except if it does exist and likewise a thing cannot exist except when God commands it to exist.”\footnote{Ibid, 2, 549.}

Despite the thorough response of Ṭabarī in the rejection of the ta’wil of kun, he does not comment or raise the topic of attribute of takwīn as one of the attributes of God though he is familiar with the term, takwīn, and utilises it, in such capacity, in his commentary, as noted earlier.

To the contrary of Ṭabarī, the complete focus of al-Māturīdī is on affirming the existence of the attribute of takwīn via al-Baqarah verse. He does not concern himself at all with the above discussion that Ṭabarī and, to a lesser extent, Samarqandī immerse. A practice that may appear peculiar at first but a close analysis of al-Māturīdī’s opinion clarifies the reason for his uninterest in Ṭabarī’s defence and justifications. First, al-Māturīdī does not support the traditional opinion and accordingly does not feel the obligation to defend it. Second, the root cause of the difference of opinion is not kun per say rather it is how a believer should understand the attribute of kalām (speech) of God and relate it to the physical world, which al-Māturīdī discusses in a more appropriate medium – the verses that mention the kalām (speech) of God.
Third, the theme of the verse, in al-Māturīdī ’s view is the issue of takwīn and power of God. Hence, al-Māturīdī ’s sole focus remains on proving takwīn as an attribute of God.

In al-Māturīdī ’s view, “the verse refutes the claim that advocates that ‘khalq al-shay’ (the creation of a thing) huwa dhālika al-shay’ nafsuḥ (is the same as the very thing itself).” Al-Māturīdī clarifies how. He explains that God distinguishes between three things, the verb, the doer of the action and the object of the action. He states, “He (God) says, ‘wa idhā qaḍā amran (when he decrees an order)’. He mentions qaḍā (to decree) and mentions amran (a command) and mentions kun fa yakūn (be and it will be) separately.” Al-Māturīdī argues that the use of separate words with different meanings is indicative of the fact that the command of God is different from the creatures that come into existence as a result of it. He concludes, “If the takwīn (the action of bringing into existence) and the mukawwan (the existent creatures) were one, he (God) would not need to use the word kun, when talking about takwīn.” Thus, the role of kun in al-Baqarah verse is to point to the takwīn attribute and the conclusion is “…it (takwīn) is ghayruhu (separate from the mukawwan).” Al-Māturīdī proceeds from the linguistic argument, that every utterance points to a separate entity, to prove the separation between takwīn and mukawwan to a logical one. He constructs his argument methodically and takes all scenarios into consideration. Takwīn could either be finite or infinite. If it is finite then there are two further possible scenarios. “immā an yahdutha binafsih (either it gave itself existence by itself)…aw bi iḥdāthi ākhar (or something other than it caused it to exist).” If the first possibility is to be accepted then “lajāza dhālika kulli shay’ (this would be acceptable in everything).” Al-

---

972 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 220.
973 Ibid.
974 Ibid.
975 Ibid.
976 Ibid.
977 Ibid.
978 Ibid.
Māturīdī implies in this phrase that if it were acceptable to assume that things can give existence to themselves without an external force then the whole creation and attributes of God discourse will be pointless as there will be no need for a God to exist logically.

Even if the second possibility is to be accepted then this would lead to “mā lā nihāyah (infinite regress).”\(^{979}\) Then al-Māturīdī delivers the conclusion, “wa dhālika fāsid (this is all false) thabata anna al-takwīn…laysa biḥādith (this establishes that takwīn is not finite).”\(^{980}\) As it is the case with the first possibility, al-Māturīdī does not finish his thought or link his conclusion to the original point. Perhaps al-Māturīdī considers the relationship self-explanatory. Al-Māturīdī implies that since takwīn is infinite, as he has proven, it must different from the mukawwan (the thing brought into existence) for the latter is ḥādith (finite) by consensus of all observers.

Subsequently, al-Māturīdī transitions to speak about the nature of the takwīn attribute and its relation to God. He states, “and God is described fī al-azal (eternally) to be muḥdith (to create the finite beings) and mukawwin (to bring things into existence).”\(^{981}\) Thus, takwīn is an eternal attribute of God, according to al-Māturīdī.\(^{982}\)

A paradoxical issue would be to explain how takwīn, as an eternal attribute, relates to the physical world and the gradual cycle of creation. Rudolph raises this matter in his analysis of Kitāb al-Tawḥīd indirectly. He states, “God is described with…the act of creation eternally… even if created things have not existed eternally… he is always the creator of things, which will

\(^{979}\) Ibid.
\(^{980}\) Ibid.
\(^{981}\) Ibid, 1, 221. Rudolphs arrives to the same conclusion in his analysis of takwīn in the context of Kitāb al-Tawḥīd.
\(^{982}\) Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 286.

In his commentary on al-Baqarah verse, al-Māturīdī supports his personal opinion with two arguments, a linguistic and exegetical one and a logical one. Therefore, one may conclude that al-Māturīdī endeavours to establish the attribute of takwīn and understand its nature through the narrative sources and reason jointly. This practice contributes to al-Māturīdī’s vision of synthesising ‘aql with naql. He harmonises between both sources to outline a thorough understanding of the attribute of takwīn and to legitimise his views in the traditional and rational camps.
one day exist.” However, Rudolph does not explain how al-Māturīdī resolves the conundrum. In Ta’wilāt, al-Māturīdī responds to the above question, although partially, and addressed the paradox in separate places. In chapter al-‘Imrān verse 19, he describes the impact of the takwīn attribute on creation as everlasting. He states, “‘kun is an expression that points to the takwīn attribute which causes (all) creation to come into existence (continuously in succession) forever and ever.” Al-Māturīdī reprises this point of view again in verse 44 chapter Qāf, “the existence of all things takes place by the eternal takwīn attribute. It was expressed by the word kun (in the Qur’an) to make it comprehensible to the people.” Then in verse 117 al-Baqarah, al-Māturīdī harmonises between the eternality of takwīn and its effect on the creation and the gradualness of the existence of all creation. He explains that the time of the existence of everything has already been set eternally and its existence manifests in its specified time, “everything will be at the time, in which he willed for it to exist.” Thus, takwīn is eternal but the manifestation of it in the physical world is gradual. According to al-Māturīdī, thus, there is no complication between the eternal nature of the attribute and the temporality of creation.

In light of the above, al-Māturīdī objects to the traditional interpretation of kun as a verbal command uttered by God. In verse 19 of Al-‘Imrān, he leaves no room for any ambiguity about his view, “kun is an expression that point to the takwīn attribute... Fi al-ḥaqīqah (in reality) there is no kāf or nūn (no uttered word).”

Al-Māturīdī persistently exerts all efforts to ensure that kun is not understood as a qawl (a verbal statement) from God. Even in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, al-Māturīdī states that kun is “amr al-

---

983 Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 287.
984 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 2, 266.
985 Ibid, 14, 124.
986 Ibid, 1, 221.
987 Ibid, 2, 266.
*takwīn* (the command of bringing into existence)."\(^{988}\) The persistence of al-Māturīdī, in opposing the traditional interpretation, cannot be coincidental. It is likely driven by scholarly motives. In verse 44 chapter Qāf, one of the motives manifests. Al-Māturīdī’s concern is that the traditional interpretation invalidates the eternal nature of *takwīn*. He justifies, “The *takwīn* (the cause of the existence) of *al-mukawwanāt* (the existent beings) cannot be described as a word. The beginning of creation, its resurrection, the gathering (of all creatures) and everything that exists *yastawī* (is equal and the same).”\(^{989}\) In other words, they have all being eternally commanded to exist and the suggestion that God speaks *kun* as a verbal command for every creature nullifies the eternality of *takwīn* as far as al-Māturīdī is concerned. Thus, it is likely that al-Māturīdī’s understanding of *takwīn* and its nature influenced his interpretation of *kun*. The statement of al-Māturīdī serves another relevant purpose. It rebuts the renouncement of Ṭabarī of *ta’wil* who claimed there is no ground for it. Certainly, the contradiction of the traditional interpretation with an eternal attribute is legitimate ground for the application of *ta’wil*, at least according in al-Māturīdī mindset.

Persistently, al-Māturīdī returns to the topic of separation between *takwīn* and *mukawwan*, in verse 19 of al-‘Imrān. He reconfirms that “it (*takwīn*) isfī *al-ḥaqīqah* (in reality) different from *al-khalq* (creation).”\(^{990}\) Additionally, al-Māturīdī offers a new argument to credit it. He explains, “God informed us that *khalq* (creation) takes place because of it (*takwīn*) and every entity that becomes the effect of another entity is, as commonly known, distinct from it.”\(^{991}\) Al-Māturīdī’s new argument has two facets, one is observational and the other is logical. The observational facet is that it is common knowledge amongst humans that the entity that causes

\(^{989}\) Ṭa’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 14, 124.
\(^{990}\) Ibid, 2, 266.
\(^{991}\) Ibid, 2, 266.
another to exist is different from it. The logical facet is that the cause and the effect cannot be one. They have to be different. Otherwise, one would not yield the other since it is itself. Thus, al-Māturīdī seeks to enhance his arguments as he proceeds in investigating the topic throughout the Qur’an. He does not suffice himself with a single commentary on the topic, at a given verse, rather he continuously attempts to offer new knowledge and further assessment.

The investigative persistence of al-Māturīdī is not evident in Samarqandī’s commentary on verse 19 chapter of al-‘Imrān. He does not comment on verse 19 but indeed he does on verse 47 of the same chapter. Samarqandī’s commentary is brief though and offers no theological insight. It specifically focuses on the miraculous creation of Jesus without a father. Samarqandī does not bring up the takwīn attribute at all or record any discussion of it. Upon reviewing all the verses pertinent to the subject of takwīn and kun, in Samarqandī’s exegesis, the following pattern emerges. Samarqandī consistently interprets kun to be a spoken word from God and does not go any further. He never acknowledges the existence of the takwīn attribute let alone study it.

The absence of any theological commentary from Samarqandī on the takwīn attribute is rather peculiar given the close proximity between him and al-Māturīdī in time and region. Two possible explanations may justify, what could be interpreted as, a deliberate circumvention of the subject by Samarqandī. Possibly, he does not see his exegesis the right place of discussion, which reinforces the leading of al-Māturīdī in founding the genre of Sunni theological exegesis. Equally, Samarqandī may not have agreed with the views of al-Māturīdī and opted not to join the discourse.

---

993 Ibid, 1, 459; ibid, 2, 374; ibid, 3, 213.
994 Let alone their affiliation with the same theological and jurisprudential school of Abū Ḥanīfa.
The introduction of the *takwīn* attribute is the brainchild of al-Māturīdī and stands independent from all Sunni theological schools before him or after him including his own school, the Ḥanafī school.\textsuperscript{995} In fact, in al-Rawḍah title, Abū ‘Adhabah (d. 1758 CE) states, “and there is nothing in the writing of Abū Ḥanīfa or his early students and scholars of his school that explicitly supports it (*takwīn*). In contrast, some of the words of Abū Ḥanīfa implies that he supports the Ashʿarī view.”\textsuperscript{996} Abū ‘Adhabah explicitly states that the *takwīn* attribute was not supported by the Ḥanafī school until after the advent of al-Māturīdī. The lack of traditional support for *takwīn* may have contributed to Samarqandī’s reluctance of discussing it.

Notwithstanding the above, the first possibility is the most probable. Samarqandī’s attitude in general has demonstrated, so far, his uninterest in opening any theological discussions in his exegesis except in rare occasions.

Au contraire, al-Māturīdī does not miss any occasion to reopen the topic of the *takwīn* attribute. In verse 40 chapter al-Naḥl, al-Māturīdī returns to the linguistic argument albeit from a different approach. Firstly, after he restates the same view about the nature of *kun* and the separation between *takwīn* and the *mukawwan*, he adds, “and he (God) pointed to it (*mukawwan*).  

---

\textsuperscript{995} Some may argue that al-Ḥakīm Samarqandī mentioned that God is eternally a creator, and this could be an indication the Ḥanafīs were developing the *takwīn* creed independently from al-Māturīdī. Such an argument cannot be substantiated because firstly al-Ḥakīm was a contemporary of al-Māturīdī and “the old and prevalent view envisions al-Ḥakīm as al-Māturīdī’s student.”, according to Rudolph. Even if one considers Ritter’s and Madelung’s position that the *sawād* was written a century after the time of al-Ḥakīm, the precedence of al-Māturīdī in the discussion of *takwīn* remains the strongest and more accurate position. F. Al-ʿOmar, “The Doctrines of the Maturidite School with Special Reference to as Sawād Al Aʿazam of Al Hakīm as Samarqandī” (Arts, The university of Edinburgh, 1974), 12, 29, 69; Rudolph, Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand, 102-05; Goldziher, The History of Islamic Schools in Qur’anic Exegesis, 295; A. S. Tritton, “An Early Work from the School of Al-Māturīdī,” The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, no. 3/4 (1966): 96; Montgomery. Watt, Islamic Philosophy and Theology, second edition ed. (Edinburgh: University Press, 1985), 243; Madelung, Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam, 118f; Josef van Ess, “Theology and Society in the Second and Third Century of the Hijra. Vol. 1. A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam,” (2016); Josef van Ess and Gwendolfini Goldbloom, Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra. Volume 2: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam (Brill, 2017), 2, 565.

\textsuperscript{996} Abi ’Adhabah, Al-Rawḍah Al-Bahiyyah Fima Bayna Al-ʿAshā’irah Wa Al-Māturīdiyyah, 39.
with \textit{al-shay’} (the thing)."\textsuperscript{997} The aim of this description is to further emphasize the distinction between the attribute of \textit{takwīn} and the \textit{mukawwan} because God refers to them in distinct terms proving they are two separate entities.

Secondly, al-Māturīdī infers that the role of the phrase, \textit{innamā qawlunā li shay’in,} (verily our command or statement to a thing to come into existence) in the verse is metaphoric. It is to accentuate the dissimilarity between \textit{takwīn} and \textit{mukawwan}. He states, “He (God) \textit{kannā ‘anhu} (metaphorically implied the separation between them) \textit{bi wuqū’ī al-qawli ‘alayhi} (by making \textit{mukawwan} the object upon which the command falls).”\textsuperscript{998} Hence, “it is established that \textit{takwīn} is other than the \textit{mukawwan}.”\textsuperscript{999} Al-Māturīdī relentlessly seeks further proofs to establish his argument from verse to verse. In this instance, he infers it from the choice of words and the role of the phrase in al-Naḥl verse. Hence, al-Māturīdī is producing a \textit{sam‘ī} (narrative) proof.

Nevertheless, al-Māturīdī ensues the narrative proof with a rational one. He adduces it in chapter al-Naḥl after relisting the logical argument he presented earlier in al-Baqarah verse 117. Al-Māturīdī advances that it is acceptable, rationally, to give someone a title or name based on the actions they perform. He cites as an example the name, \textit{kāsib}, which means the one who performs a particular action or the one who profits from a particular transaction.\textsuperscript{1000} He explains that the person who undertakes the action of \textit{kasb} (gaining or doing a particular action) may be called a \textit{kāsib}. Based on this logic, al-Māturīdī states, “if the actions of God were the actual creatures then it should be appropriate to call him (by their characteristics and descriptions).”\textsuperscript{1001} Thus, there should be no objection to calling God “…\textit{māyyitan} (dead), \textit{mutahārrikan} (mobile),

\textsuperscript{997} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 8, 111.
\textsuperscript{998} Ibid, 8, 112.
\textsuperscript{999} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1000} I. Al-Jawhari, \textit{Al-Sīḥāh Tāj Al-Lughah Wa Sīḥāh Al-ʿArabiyyah}, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al ‘Ilm Lil Malayin, 1990), 1, 212; Fayruz Abādi, \textit{Al-Qāmūs Al-Muhīṭ}, 1, 238; Ibn Manẓūr, \textit{Lisān Al ‘Arab}, 1, 716.
\textsuperscript{1001} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 8, 111.
sākinan (stationary), khabīthan (impure), tayyiban (pure), ṣaghīran, (small) et cetera.”

All these characteristics belong to his creatures and if one accepts that the actions of God are in fact his actions then there should be no protestation to calling him by their characteristics which are his actions. Al-Māturīdī capitalises on this conclusion to disqualify the claim that takwīn and mukawwan are the same. All Muslims, from all schools and orientations, would object to calling God with the above names and descriptions, dead, impure etc, because they conflict with a universal maxim that stipulates that God can only be described by al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā (the most perfect and beautiful of names of God) and “…is deemed above such descriptions” and thereupon the above view is false.

Al-Māturīdī does not stop at demonstrating the incompatibility, and therefore by necessity the falseness, of the other view with the universal maxims that govern the belief in the names and attributes of God. He proceeds to persuade the reader that his conjecture is the most valid one. He proposes that the separation between the takwīn attribute and the mukawwan (created beings) would facilitate the affirmation of the names that God ascribed to himself such as “Mumītan (the bringer of death), Muḥyiyan (the donor of life)…Jāmiʾan (the gatherer), Mufarriqan (the separator between creation)” without falling in the above complication for it does not ascribe to him the characteristics of these notions and creatures that do not befit his majesty.

In fact, the presence of these very names, in al-Māturīdī’s assessment, is evidence that that “(God’s) fiʿl (action) is different from the mafʿūl, (the outcome or receiver of his action).” Al-Māturīdī does not explain how but it can be deduced from the “separate words”

1002 Ibid, 8, 111-12.
1003 Ibid.
1004 Ibid.
1005 Ibid.
argument he forwarded in the previous verses. If God called himself the Mumīt (the bringer of death) he cannot be called the mayyit (the dead) because these two names oppose each other. If He called Himself the Jāmi’ (the gatherer) He cannot be called the majmū’ (the gathered). An entity cannot be dead and then cause death to others and similarly cannot gather everything and then itself be what is gathered. Hence, the takwīn attribute exists and is distinct from the mukawwan and the fi ’l is different from the maf’ūl.

The analysis of al-Māturīdī’s reasoning for the existence of the takwīn attribute manifests conspicuous findings. Al-Māturīdī does not oppose the other view for the sake of academic competitiveness. He perceives it as paradoxical to the universal maxims of the names and attributes of God. In addition, he aims at preventing a misconception that may result of such a view.\textsuperscript{1006} Al-Māturīdī believes that denying the attribute of takwīn undermines the position of the entire Sunni academia as šīfātiyyah (affirmers of the attribute to God) for the traditional position that Abū Ḥanīfa and the Ash‘arī school advocated is not ‘apodictic’\textsuperscript{1007} and would collapse under strong rational scrutiny similar to the one al-Māturīdī advanced.\textsuperscript{1008} A differentia that sets him apart from the other exegetes of his era and region.

Even Ṭabarī who engages in a stimulating discussion about kun in chapter al-Baqarah retracts from any further discussion on the topic elsewhere in his exegesis. In chapter al ‘Īmrān,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1006} It causes a contradiction between the perfect names God ascribed to himself and the condition of al-ḥusnā and the names that the denial of the takwīn attribute would dictate by means of reason.
\textsuperscript{1007} The researcher uses this term in the same sense as the word waterproof is used.
\textsuperscript{1008} Equally important is the visibility of the vision of al-Māturīdī, as the Sunni synthesiser between reason and the scared text, in his reasoning. Al-Māturīdī aims at being the progenitor of a new brand of Sunni theologians. One that harmonises between ‘aql and naqīl. The first part of the first argument al-Māturīdī puts is logical, an entity is to be named by its characteristics, but the second part is unapologetically traditional and narrative, God may only be named by the most perfect of titles, since the Qur’an, Sunnah and ājma’ (scholarly consensus) stipulate such a practice. The same pattern emerges in the second argument. The first part of the second argument is to accept the names God ascribed to himself but the second part is logical, one cannot be the thing and its opposite at the same time, i.e. the bringer of death and the dead. Al-Māturīdī weaves ‘aql with naqīl to formulate his conceptions about the attribute of takwīn specifically and the names and attributes of God Generally.
\end{flushright}
chapter al-An‘ām, chapter al-Naḥl, chapter Yāsīn, and all the other relevant verses, Ṭabarī maintains his original position that *kun* is a spoken command from God. He does not formulate any new argument or provide any new proofs to complement his interpretation. The *takwīn* attribute does not appear anywhere in his exegesis albeit the term itself, *takwīn*, is frequently cited in it. Ṭabarī uses *takwīn*, as a term, 9 times in his exegesis referring to God bringing creatures into existence but never proceeds to affirm the existence of the attribute. His frequent use of *takwīn* in the context of *kun* indicates that the technical sense of the term was coined at the time. Hence, one may deduce that Ṭabarī deliberately does not engage the theological discussion as, most likely, he does not deem it appropriate. Hitherto, al-Māturīdī is the only Sunni exegete to introduce a methodological theological discussion of the *takwīn* attribute in his exegesis.

Al-Māturīdī’s theological discussion of the *takwīn* attribute in *Ta’wilāt* resembles greatly his discussion of it in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. The main drive behind the deliberation in both titles appears the same, a response to those who deny the existence of the *takwīn* attribute. The similitude extends to the style of writing and nature of the arguments forwarded, either to legitimise al-Māturīdī’s view or to falsify the opposing one. An important deduction from the likeness is that it is a further confirmation, through the content, style and methodology, that the author of both titles is one, al-Māturīdī.

Al-Māturīdī employs in the *Kitāb* logical arguments parallel to that in *Ta’wilāt*. He proposes the cause and effect proof. To al-Māturīdī, affirming the existence of creation and denying the existence of the *takwīn* attribute is like affirming the existence of the effect yet denying the existence of the cause. Equally, al-Māturīdī raises the incompatibility argument. Denying the existence of the *takwīn* attribute necessitates the description of God with” *fasād*

---

1010 Ibid.
(corruption), *sharr* (evil), *al-qubḥ* (hideousness) and *al-sū’* (malice).” Qualities evident in creation and the one who believes that the action of creation is one with creation has no escape from affirming them to God, which is false.

Notwithstanding the sameness between the discussion in both titles, few differences arise. First, all the arguments of al-Māturīdī in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* are entirely rational. He has no citation of any the relevant verses. He does not incorporate in the *Kitāb* any of the lexical arguments evident in *Ta’wilāt*. The absence of Qur’anic lexical agumens in the *Kitāb* reinforces the propositions, advanced in chapter two and three, of the *Kitāb* being authored before *Ta’wilāt* and that the *Kitāb* centralises on the dialectical discourse when *Ta’wilāt* focuses on the narrative and synthetic proofs through the Qur’an itself. Second, al-Māturīdī seems more aggressive in his debate in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. In his objection to the opposing view, al-Māturīdī assimilates those who deny the existence of the *takwīn* attribute to the ones who believe that creatures exist through the *tabāiʿ* (natural particles). In fact, he argues that the latter’s argument is more logical for they at least confirm the existence of creation *bi ghayrihi* (via a separate entity). In the same vein, when al-Māturīdī challenges them with the incompatibility argument. He states, “to describe God with such qualities or to give him such names is *kufr* (blasphemous).” Al-Māturīdī does not utter such labels in *Ta’wilāt*. Third, in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* al-Māturīdī defends better the eternalness of the *takwīn* attribute and refutes claims of its unsuitability with the finite nature of creatures. He analogizes the *takwīn* attribute to the attribute of *qudrah* (power) and ‘*ilm* (knowledge). If the eternality of the knowledge of God and his power does not conflict with the

---

1011 Ibid.
1012 Otherwise why would he not include the Qur’anic arguments that strengthen his point of view?!
1013 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd*.
1014 Ibid.
1015 The qualities listed earlier, fasād, corruption, sharr, evil, *al-qubḥ*, hideousness, and *al-sū’*, malice.”
temporality of creation, the attribute of *takwīn* should not. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, al-Māturīdī was more immersed in refuting the opposing arguments when in Taʾwīlāt he combines studying the relevant verses and inferring from them sound proofs of *takwīn* along with disqualifying the opposing party in an exegetical milieu.

### 4.8 Conclusion

The critical analysis of al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the verses pertinent to the names and attributes of God unearths significant differences and key findings.

One of the key findings in the chapter is al-Māturīdī’s introduction of the notion of *al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā* (the perfect and beautiful names of God) in a theological light. Interestingly, al-Māturīdī does not make any reference to in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* but thoroughly studies it in Taʾwīlāt on the theological level - an important difference between both titles. This key finding is exclusive to al-Māturīdī’s exegesis when compared with his Sunni and Transoxianan peers. Al-Māturīdī utilises the notion of *al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā* as a platform to commence a theological debate with the Muʿtazilites vis a vis the existence of the names of God. Al-Māturīdī not only affirms their existence but equally proves the Islamic and rational legitimacy of their plurality. He supports this belief, primarily, with numerous Qurʾanic proofs, simultaneously, underpins it with complementary rational proofs, to assuage the dissent of the Muʿtazilites, and concludes his argument with a linguistic one, in chapter al-Isrāʾ. No other exegete uses *al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā* theologically or opens any form of debate let alone provide such a rich theological, rational and lexical analysis.
Furthermore, al-Māturīdī underlies the foundational role of *al-ḥusnā* (beauty and perfection) component in the formulation of the names of God. He stresses that a name cannot be ascribed to God unless it denotes the values of beauty and perfection to him. In addition, al-Māturīdī succinctly develops a methodology for the derivation of the names of God. He, importantly, argues in favour of the existence of the eternal attributes of God and rejects the Mu‘tazilites’ position on it and describing it as *waṣf al-wāṣifīn* (empty descriptions of God). He stresses the existence of a symbiotic relationship between the names and the attributes, where each divine name must relate, at least, to one attribute. These theological positions of al-Māturīdī are not extant in any other theological title and are his brainchild in Ta‘wīlāt.

Al-Māturīdī’s deliberation on the *dhāt* of God is another significant finding in the analysis. Al-Māturīdī ratiocinates that God cannot be defined or known through *māhiyyah* (quiddity) or *kayfiyyah* (modality). They do not apply to him. The subjugation of God to such laws causes one to assimilate God to his creation and if applied they yield no accurate depiction of God’s nature, names or attributes. According to al-Māturīdī, the names and attributes God lists in the Qur’an are not there to grant humans a full comprehension or description of God rather it is *taqrīb al-fahm* (to draw him closer to the human’s intellect). Al-Māturīdī uses rational and traditional proofs to establish this view.

Al-Māturīdī retracts to the traditional camp when it comes to describing the relationship between the *dhāt* of God and his attributes. He affirms the attributes are not the *dhāt* of God yet are not independent or separate from it. Al-Māturīdī abandons his explorative style in this area and approaches it briefly and cautiously. He does not offer any original insight or contributions to the debate.
Conversely, al-Māturīdī returns to his proactive style in the sphere of discussing God’s actions. He stresses that they are from His attributes. They cannot be attributed to other than the dhāt of God because such an attribution necessitates that God needs others to undertake actions. The insistence of al-Māturīdī on the classification of God’s actions as attributes is driven by his belief in the existence of the attribute of takwīn, the mother attribute of all divine actions. Al-Māturīdī opens the debate about the takwīn attribute in the verses that report the divine command- kun fa yakūn. In the context of this command, Ṭabarī debuts his traditional theological position and interpretation of the command as an uttered verbal statement from God. Al-Māturīdī opposes categorically the traditional interpretation. To him, kun is not a verbal statement God utters rather he uses it for it is awjaz al-kalām (the shortest form of speech) to denote his command. Al-Māturīdī’s focus, however, remains on the establishment of the existence of the takwīn attribute. According to him, the role of kun in the verses is to point to the takwīn attribute. Al-Māturīdī discredits the claim that the action of creation is the same as the created. He constructs multiple traditional, mainly Qur’anic, linguistic and rational arguments dispelling this theological position confirming the existence of the takwīn attribute. Al-Māturīdī sees the belief in the takwīn attribute a necessity to the correct belief in the perfect and beautiful names of God, to the correct demonstration of the relationship of God’s actions to the physical realm and the integrity of the šifātiyyah Sunni school.

With the establishment of a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the theology of al-Māturīdī, and his significant contributions to Sunni theological exegesis, as far as the nature of God, his names, attributes and actions, as well the attribute of takwīn, are concerned. The next two chapters focus on the most controversial facet of the attributes of God- the anthropomorphic expressions. Chapter five addresses the expressions of yad and ʾayn exclusively. A critical
analysis is undertaken of each expression to develop an extensive and accurate perception of al-Māturīdī’s creed in the anthropomorphic expressions pertinent to the form of God, including whether al-Māturīdī regards them as eternal divine attributes.
CHAPTER 5: THE YAD AND ‘AYN
ANTHROPOMORPHIC EXPRESSIONS

5.1 Introduction

The study has, thus far, produced a thorough and clear examination of al-Māturīdī’s creed, in ilāhiyyāt, through Ta’wilāt.\textsuperscript{1017} The previous chapters critically analysed his commentary vis a vis God’s existence, tawḥīd, the nature of God’s Self, his names, attributes and actions, including the takwīn attribute, and the interplay between them. On the theological level, the chapters delivered an unprecedented all-inclusive perception of al-Māturīdī’s theology in all these fields and detailed the nuances and parallels between Ta’wilāt and Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. On the exegetical level, the chapters demonstrated strongly the headship of al-Māturīdī in finding the Sunni theological exegesis genre and verified al-Māturīdī’s originality in his conceptual framework, methodology and exegetical tools.

The understanding of anthropomorphism,\textsuperscript{1018} nonetheless, remains unexplored. It is orbital in developing an accurate and comprehensive understanding of al-Māturīdī’s theology concerning the attributes of God and successively God’s nature. In the previous chapter, al-Māturīdī forwarded that sifah may relate to similes and does not ineludibly point to God’s inherent attributes. This chapter examines this thought-provoking proposition and assesses whether al-Māturīdī classifies the Qur’anic anthropomorphic expressions as similes rather than

\textsuperscript{1017} The previous chapters critically analyse his commentary \textit{vis a vis} the existence of God, the doctrine of tawḥīd, the nature of God, his names, attributes and actions, as well the attribute of takwīn.

\textsuperscript{1018} Williams confirms that the number of studies that treat anthropomorphism, in general, in Islam is handful. His statement resolves the absence of any study on anthropomorphism in Ta’wilāt. For further information see: Williams, "A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam," 29.
divine inherent attributes. The chapter focuses specifically on anthropomorphism in the form of God.\textsuperscript{1019} Namely, the \textit{yad} and \textit{‘ayn} expressions.\textsuperscript{1020} The commitment to these specific anthropomorphic expressions is driven by the fact that they symbolise the most controversial and most graphical expressions that depict a physical image of God. Van Ess and Holtzman testify that Muslim scholars loathed the association of physical image with God.\textsuperscript{1021} The former confirms that the \textit{yad} and \textit{‘ayn} have been interpreted in that sense by some theologians such as Hishām al-Jawāliqī (d. unknown) and others.\textsuperscript{1022} Therefore, these two expressions are sufficient in identifying and understanding al-Māturīdī’s approach to all anthropomorphic expressions pertinent to the form of God.\textsuperscript{1023}

In unison, the chapter investigates al-Māturīdī’s contributions to the discourse about anthropomorphism in Sunni theological exegesis and assesses whether al-Māturīdī’s commentary can be classified as new contributions to the genre. Consecutively, it contrasts al-Māturīdī’s study of the \textit{yad} and \textit{‘ayn} expressions in Ta’wīlāt to it in \textit{Kitāb al-Tawḥīd} to cultivate a complete understanding of al-Māturīdī’s theology on anthropomorphism in the form of God.

\textsuperscript{1019} Löhr Gebhard et al., "Anthropomorphism," in \textit{Religion Past and Present} (Brill).
\textsuperscript{1020} An extensive explanation of the meanings of these two expressions lexically, culturally and Islamically will be presented in the subsequent section. The researcher deliberately does not define or translate the two utterances, in the introduction, with their common lexical meanings because the study does not look at them as standalone utterances but as expressions annexed to God. This helps keep the reader free from any presumptions of their meanings in the context of describing God.
\textsuperscript{1022} According to Van Ess, Hishām al-Jawāliqī believed God to have a single eye. For further information see: Van Ess and Goldbloom, "Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra. Volume 4 : A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam," 444.
\textsuperscript{1023} The notion of \textit{istiwā‘} will be attended to in a separate chapter since it belongs to the category of anthropomorphism in the activities of God.
5.2 The *yad* expression between the other exegetes and al-Māturīdī

The discussion of the *yad* expression occupies a substantial area, as it will be evident, of the theological discourse about the anthropomorphism in the form of God. The arch contributor to the interest in the meaning of *yad* originates from its lexical denotation. In spite of *yad*’s multiple meanings in Arabic,\(^{1024}\) ‘hand’, the physical limb, is the most circulated one. It is, thus, amongst the expressions that may insinuate to God a physical form. As such, as Van Ess elucidates, it falls under the category of anthropomorphism in the form of God.\(^{1025}\)

In the Qur’an, the utterance *yad*, when associated with God, appears in various morphological forms. An observation that may seem insignificant at first, but it indeed plays a major role in the vehement debate about the interpretations of *yad* amongst the exegetes and theologians alike.\(^{1026}\) The term occurs in the singular form, *yad*, seven times in the Qur’an. It recurs in the dual nominative form, *yadāh*, once and in the dual genitive form, *yadāy* and *yadayya*, five times. Lastly, it appears in the plural form, *aydīna*, once. Statistically, *yad*, in association with God, emerges in fourteen different verses across twelve different chapters. Some of these chapters belong to the Makkī category whereas others belong to the Madanī one, according to the traditional categorisation of the chapters. Hence, the context, in which the *yad* expression occurs, differs from one verse to the other. Notably, none of these verses holds *yad* as an attribute of God in its direct theme. The mention of *yad*, in these verses, remains rather secondary to another main message each verse conveys.\(^{1027}\)

---

\(^{1024}\) All the lexical meanings of *yad* in Arabic will be discussed shortly.
\(^{1025}\) Gebhard et al., "Anthropomorphism."
\(^{1026}\) The importance of the morphological forms of *yad* will be realised once the analysis of the relevant verses commences and the opinions of the various exegetes are assessed.
\(^{1027}\) This holds true to the verses that belong to the Makkī and the ones that belong to the Madanī category.
In principle, all the Sunni exegetes address the *yad* expression when associated with God. Albeit they do not comment on all of its related verses. Strangely, verse 73 chapter al-‘Imrān, the first citation of *yad* in association with God in the Qur’an, is ignored by all the exegetes including al-Māturīdī. The only exception is Samarqandī. Hence, the analysis begins from his commentary. It is important to be familiar with the context of the verse first. The verse reads, “…Say, "Indeed, [all] bounty is *bi yaddi Allah* (in the *yad* of God) - He grants it to whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Wise.”1028

Initially, Samarqandī’s commentary gives the impression that he interprets, the singular form of, *yad*, in the verse - *bi yaddi Allah*. He states, “*bi yaddi Allah ay bi tawfiq Allah* (by the *yad* of God means by good fortune from God).”1029 As one analyses the rest of his commentary, however, this impression subsides. It is not clear whether Samarqandī is interpreting the *yad* as a standalone utterance or he is interpreting the entire phrase as such. The subsequent statement on his part causes the confusion. Samarqandī states, “Prophethood can only be granted by the fortune of God.”1030 He does not elaborate any further on the meaning of *yad* and seems satisfied with these two statements. Samarqandī’s commentary leads to more questions than answers. It appears that he is avoiding making the distinction between the two.

With the aim of finding clarity, Samarqandī’s commentary on verse 64 chapter al-Mā’idah is assessed. Therein *yad*, in association with God, appears twice. One in the singular

---


1030 Ibid.
form, *yad Allah* (the *yad* of God), and the second in the dual form, *yadāh mabsuṭatān* (his two *yad* are wide opened).¹⁰³¹ The verse represents God’s response to a statement made by some of the Jews,¹⁰³² which accuses God of stinginess. Samarqandī states, “God said, ‘*bal yadāh mabsuṭatān*’ ya ‘*nī rizquhu wāsi’ bāsiṭun ‘alā khalqih* (it means his provision, is enormous and all-encompassing of his creation). He spends as he pleases.”¹⁰³³ Once more, Samarqandī employs the same style of expression. He interprets the *yad* utterance with a generic phrase, “his provision is enormous and all-encompassing of his creation.” The phrase may indicate that Samarqandī interprets *yad* as *rizq* (provision) but the lack of any follow up details causes one to question whether this interpretation should be classified as a theological opinion or a mere exegetical contextual interpretation. It is too vague to identify whether the drive for Samarqandī’s interpretation is doctrinal, as he feels that there is ground for *ta’wīl*, or exegetical, triggered by the connotational meaning of the phrase. Samarqandī does not comment further on al-Mā’idah verse, and the response to the above question, thus, is adjourned until the examination of the subsequent pertinent verses is conducted. Furthermore, the brevity in Samarqandī’s commentary makes it difficult to discern whether he has a specific conceptual framework and a set methodology he follows or not. What can be discerned, nevertheless, is that Samarqandī does not rely on transmitted reports in his commentary, thus far, since he does not relate any narrations from other exegetes.

Unlike verse 73 chapter al-‘Imrān, all exegetes were eager to comment on verse 64 chapter al-Mā’idah. Even ‘Ayyāshī, the Transoxianan Shia exegete, who seldomly comments on

¹⁰³¹ 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…”
¹⁰³² During the time of Prophet Muḥammad.
¹⁰³³ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm*, 1, 404.
verses of theological nature commented on al-Māʿidah verse. Contrary to Samarqandī, ‘Ayyāshī reports two important narrations. The first is from Yaʾqūb ibn Shuʿayb (d. 800 CE), one of the transmitters from al-Hussayn.1034 Yaʾqūb asked al-Ḥussayn about the cause of the revelation of al-Māʿidah verse. Al-Ḥussain elucidated that the verse responds to a statement made by some of the Jewish chiefs who described God as having his yad tied to his neck. Al-Ḥussayn enacted or illustrated their statement and “wa qāl biyadihi ilā ʿunuqih (he pointed his hand to his neck).”1035

The second report is from Abū Ḥasan al-Khurasānī (d. unknown) in which Hisham Ibn al-Mashriqī (d. unknown), one of al-Khurasānī’s disciples, asked him about the meaning of the expression yadāh mabsūṭatān in al-Māʿidah verse. “afalahu yadān hākadhā (Does God have hands like these)?”1036 and pointed to his own hands. Abū Ḥasan responded, “law kāna hākadhā kāna makhlūqan (If he had then he would be a creature).”1037 Even though ‘Ayyāshī does not expand on the topic, all the narrations he reports seek one objective. They reprimand and object against any expression that insinuates any resemblance of God to his creatures. Hence, the objection to the Jewish figures’ statement.1038

These reports express ‘Ayyāshī’s clear theological position against anthropomorphism. Thus, for the first time, ‘Ayyāshī makes a theological position in his exegesis unlike Samarqandī who, until now, does not raise this aspect at all in his commentary. Even though ‘Ayyāshī establishes his theological position, he does not actually explain what yad means and therefore from an exegetical perspective his commentary is lacking.

Muqātil follows in the path of ‘Ayyāshī and lists various reports about the cause of revelation. He goes a step further, than ‘Ayyāshī, and reveals the names of the Jewish figures

1034 Al-Ḥussayn Ibn Ali is the grandson of Prophet Muhammad
1035 ‘Ayyāshī, Tafsīr Al-ʿAyyāshī, 1, 351.
1036 Ibid.
1037 Ibid.
1038 For they described God as having a hand tied to his neck. For further information see: ibid.
responsible for the statement.\textsuperscript{1039} Muqātil reiterates a cause of revelation similar to that of ‘Ayyāshī. Muqātil’s report, nonetheless, is less graphical. He transmits that they\textsuperscript{1040} said, “God has held His hand away from us and does not spend any bounties upon us. He is not generous.”\textsuperscript{1041} Muqātil does not interpret or even comment on the meaning of yad, either in the singular or in the dual form, theologically or exegetically. He assures that rizq (provision) of God is generous and proceeds to the next verse.\textsuperscript{1042} Thus, Muqātil departs from ‘Ayyāshī in terms of clarifying his theological position of the topic.

The lack of theological content evident in the works of the above exegetes\textsuperscript{1043} is contrasted with a thorough commentary in the exegeses of al-Māturīdī and Ṭabarī. The latter transmits the same cause of revelation Muqātil and ‘Ayyāshī report. He interprets the phrase yadi Allah, the singular form of yad, as “the khayr of Allah…wa ‘atā’uh (the goodness of God… and his bestowed bounties).”\textsuperscript{1044} He stresses that this interpretation is God’s choice, “wa innamā waṣafa ta ‘ālā dhikruhu al-yad…wal ma ‘nā al-‘atā’ (Verily God described himself with the yad when the meaning is ‘atā’ (bestowment and charity)).”\textsuperscript{1045} Ṭabarī justifies God’s choice of expression by saying, “li’anna ‘atā’ al-nās wa badhl ma’rūfihim al-ghālib bi aydīhim (for the provision of people and most of their acts of goodness is usually carried out by their hands).”\textsuperscript{1046} Thus, it has become customary for people to describe the generosity of one another with such expressions.\textsuperscript{1047}

\textsuperscript{1039} They are Ibn Ṣūrya, Finḥāṣ and ‘Āzir Ibn Abī ‘Āzir. For further information see: Ibn Sulaymān, \textit{Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān}, 1, 490.
\textsuperscript{1040} The Jewish figures from Madinah city.
\textsuperscript{1041} Ibn Sulaymān, \textit{Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān}, 1, 490.
\textsuperscript{1042} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1043} ‘Ayyāshī, Muqātil and Samarqandī.
\textsuperscript{1044} Ṭabarī, \textit{Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an}, 10, 450.
\textsuperscript{1045} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1046} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1047} Ibid.
Furthermore, Ṭabarî supports his interpretation with a narration from Ibn Abbas, in which the latter clarifies, “…they [the Jews of Madinah] did not mean an actual hand…rather they meant that he [God] is tight-fisted and holds back from spending…”\textsuperscript{1048} In the same vein, Ṭabarî lists multiple narrations from other renowned great exegetes such as Qatādah (d. 736 CE), al-Suddī (d. 744 CE) and al-Ḍaḥḥāk Ibn Muzāḥim (d. 718 CE), that confirm the above interpretation.

To such a degree, it may be safe to conclude that Ṭabarî considers the expressions the Arabs utilise, in their conversations, literature and poetry, amongst the main legitimate mechanisms in determining the meanings of the vague Qur’anic utterances. He states, “\textit{wa mithlu dhālika min kalām al-‘arabī ash‘ārihā wa amthālihā akthar min an yuḥṣā} (and the examples [of such use] in the poetry and proverbs of the Arabs is beyond count).”\textsuperscript{1049} Unpredictably, Ṭabarî does not apply the above criterion when he interprets the dual form of \textit{yad}, \textit{yadāh}, in the consecutive phrase in the very verse.\textsuperscript{1050}

Ṭabarî lists four main interpretations to the dual form of \textit{yad} in al-Mā`idah verse that \textit{ahl al-Jadal} (the theologians) proposed. It may mean: (1) \textit{ni’amuhu} (God’s bounties), (2) al-quwwah (God’s power); (3) mulkuh (God’s possession); and (4) \textit{yad} (God’s hand) although it is not a \textit{jārihah ka jawārih banī Adam} (a limb like the limbs of humans).\textsuperscript{1051} Fleetingly, he presents the arguments of the first three viewpoints and devotes a single phrase for each viewpoint. \textit{Au contraire}, Ṭabarî thoroughly unpacks the argument of the fourth viewpoint. This viewpoint asserts that \textit{yadāh} is an inherent attribute of God and it means God has an actual hand but is not a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1048} Ibid, 10, 451.
\item \textsuperscript{1049} Ibid, 10, 450.
\item \textsuperscript{1050} Verse 64 of chapter al-Mā`idah.
\item \textsuperscript{1051} Ṭabarî, \textit{Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an}, 10, 453.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
limb like the humans’ limbs. Ṭabarī dedicates four complete pages to explain and credit this interpretation.

This, rightly so, leads to the belief that Ṭabarī implicitly endorses this interpretation. As Ṭabarī outlines the supporting evidence for the fourth viewpoint, he opens up with the following statement, “if the meaning of yad is bounty or power or possession then there is nothing special about God creating Adam [in his own hands] because all his creatures are created by God’s power.” According to Ṭabarī, the interpretation of yad in any of the above meanings nullifies the ma’nah (distinctive meaning) that separates Adam from sā’ir al-khalq (the rest of creation). Since the distinction of Adam must be established, in Ṭabarī’s view, then the other interpretations are false and yad of God is a description of his two hands but unlike the hands of the humans. He seems to endorse, what Williams labels as, transcendent anthropomorphism albeit tacitly. Ṭabarī leans towards affirming that yad, in his view, means God’s hand, in the Qur’an, but not overtly.

On that account, Ṭabarī’s strategy in establishing the rightfulness of his interpretation is to prove the interpretations of the others as false. In such a spirit, he returns to the singular form of yad, in the beginning of al-Mā’idah verse, yad Allah, and claims that if it meant bounty or power then God would not have replied to it in the dual form, yadāh mabsūṭatān. Rather, God would have replied to it in the singular form “yadu Allah mabsūṭah.” It cannot be

---

1052 Ibid.
1053 Ibid.
1055 Of course, a hand unlike the hands of the creatures.
1056 Such a strategy is not necessarily valid. Later in the discussion, the soundness of this strategy will be scrutinised.
1057 He returns to the beginning of the verse where God relates the statement of some of the Jewish figures of Madinah where they spoke about the yad of God, in the singular form.
1058 Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʿwil Āy Al-Qur’ān, 10, 453.
claimed that the dual form of \textit{yad} expresses \textit{al-ni’am al-kathīrah} (numerous bounties) for in \v{T}abarī’s view, Arabs do not use the \textit{muthannā} (dual form) to express plurality. The \textit{muthannā} denotes “‘\textit{an iṯnayni bi a’yānihimā dūn al-jamī’} (it points to two specific and countable entities and not a plural).”\textsuperscript{1059} \v{T}abarī concludes, “This indicates the \textit{khaṭa’} (wrongfulness) of the opinion that says that the meaning of \textit{yad}, in this instance, is \textit{ni’mah} (bounty).”\textsuperscript{1060} And in accordance with his logic, “[it establishes] the \\textit{sīḥah} (the correctness) of the opinion that says \textit{yad Allah} is a \textit{sīfah} (an attribute of God).”\textsuperscript{1061} Finally, \v{T}abarī cements this view by claiming that the above argument \textit{taẓāharat al-akhbār ‘an rasūlis‘} (the numerous reports from the messenger of God) have established it and it is the ‘\textit{ulamā’}’s (the prominent scholars) and \textit{ahl al-ta’wīl}’s (the exegetes) view.\textsuperscript{1062} The concluding point, \v{T}abarī remarks, aims at rising the credibility of his interpretation and giving it an ambience of prominence since it is the inherited view of the predecessors.

Even though \v{T}abarī insists that his endorsed interpretation is supported by numerous prophetic traditions, he does not cite a single prophetic tradition to ascertain his claim. Similarly, \v{T}abarī neither quotes any report from the \textit{ulamā’} (scholars), whom he claimed they endorse this interpretation, nor lists the names of the exegetes who rally behind it. The absence of reports, citations and at the very least some of the names of the scholars, whom \v{T}abarī claimed, uphold this view is very peculiar. The trademark of \v{T}abarī’s exegesis is its abundant narrative content. Yet he does not transmit a single report that interprets \textit{yad} as a hand of God. \v{T}abarī lists plenty

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1059} \textit{Ibid}, 10, 454.
\textsuperscript{1060} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{1061} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{1062} \textit{Ibid}.
\end{flushright}
of traditional reports that endorse his interpretations of other segments in the verse, yet not a single one in relation to this particular interpretation of *yad*. The absence of supporting citations opens the doors to questioning the accuracy of Ṭabarī’s claim.

The strategy Ṭabarī applies in confirming the validity of his interpretation leaves a lot to be desired. It does not build an intrinsic argument to establish his interpretation rather it aims at discrediting the rest. It succeeds in refuting one of the four interpretations, the *ni’mah* (bounty) one, but does not respond to the rest. In Arabic, *yad* has multiple independent meanings. It may refer to: (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. To rule out one meaning, of the ten, does not suffice to establish another.

Furthermore, Ṭabarī concludes in his argument that both forms of *yad*, the singular and the dual, mean the hand of God. This contradicts the report of Ibn Abbas Ṭabarī personally relates at the beginning of his commentary, in which Ibn Abbas states, “…they (the Jews) did not mean an actual tied hand. Rather they mean he is tight-fisted.” Ibn Abbas’s narration indicates that *yad* should be interpreted as a part of the phrase and not as an independent utterance. It constitutes a traditional report that negates the generalisation in Ṭabarī’s interpretation of the phrase- *yad* of God.

---

1063 For instance, Tabari transmits multiple reports from Qatādah and other exegetes that explain the second part in the verse but does not transmit any report from any scholar to back his interpretation of the *yad* in the first part of the verse. For further information see: ibid, 10, 457.
1064 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.
1066 Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta‘wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 10, 452.
Even the axiom of the ‘correct Arabic use’, upon which Ṭabarī denounces the interpretation of *yad* as bounties falls apart when the suggested meaning for *yad* is ‘َاَٰثَا’ (donation and bestowment). In the course of his commentary on al-Mā’idah verse, Ṭabarī quotes verses from al-A’šā’s poetry, in which he praised the generosity of a man saying, “*yadāka yadā majdin* (your two hands are hands of glory) ...” Al-A’šā (d. 625 CE), used the dual form of *yad* to express the generosity and ‘َاَٰثَا’ (donation and bestowment) of the man. Not to mention that Ṭabarī does not back this Arabic axiom with any endorsement from any prominent authority in the Arabic language.

Despite the above conceivable objections to the opinion Ṭabarī endorses, he seems adamant on propagating it. His commentary on al-Mā’idah verse constitutes the only account, in which he discusses thoroughly the interpretation of *yad* and the affirmation of the attribute of hand to God. Ṭabarī does not revisit the topic, modify his interpretation or seek to improve it in any of the subsequent verses, in which the *yad* expression occurs. Thus, this interpretation epitomizes the most probable or perhaps the only correct interpretation of *yad*, when associated with God, in Ṭabarī’s exegesis. At the same time, it bespeaks of the insignificant role the Qur’anic context plays in Ṭabarī’s framework when determining the meaning of *yad*.

Conversely to Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī studies the *yad* expression, analytically and thoroughly, in numerous Qur’anic chapters in Ta’wilāt. While there are some repetitive elements in his work, al-Māturīdī’s interpretation of the utterance variegates depending on the verse subject to study.

---

1067 Ṭabarī argues, as cited, earlier in the section, that the use of the dual form of *yad* makes the interpretation of *yad* as bounties unacceptable linguistically.


1069 Customarily, the anthropomorphic expressions in the Qur’an, such as *yad*, are discussed by theologians and exegesis under the notion of *muḥkam* (clear) and *mutashābih* (unclear) verses. In Ta’wilāt, remarkably, al-Māturīdī
In the context of verse 64 chapter al-Mā`idah, various similarities and nuances emerge when comparing al-Māturīdī’s commentary to that of Ṭabarî. Firstly, al-Māturīdī commences, his commentary, by relating traditional reports about the meaning of the singular form of *yad*. He transmits the same report of Ibn Abbas Ṭabarî cited above. Al-Māturīdī, however, lists additional reports, that Ṭabarî overlooks, that suggest a different meaning of *yad*. For Instance, al-Hasan al-Baṣrī’s report that confirms the Jewish figures used the phrase *yadullah maghlūlah* (the hand of God is tied) to say that God cannot punish them. This makes more sense than claiming God is short-handed in generosity. Correspondingly, al-Ḥasan interpreted the phrase *yadāh mabsūṭatān* (his two *yad* are widely stretched) as he has the full ability to “*yaghfir liman yashā`’ wa yu`adhīb man yashā`* (he forgives whomever he wants and punishes whomever he wants)." As a result, the duality in the *yad* expression could be a reference to the “*al-maghfīrah wa al-ta’dhīb* (the forgiveness and punishment).”

It is likely that al-Māturīdī notes al-Ḥasan’s report as it legitimises the non-literal rendering of the *yad* expression. A position that al-Māturīdī upholds and advocates. The evidence of this inference lies in the second opinion al-Māturīdī transmits, which stresses that the phrase *yadullah maghlūlah* (the *yad* of God is tied) is “*kināyah `an al-bukhl wa waṣfun bihī lā ḥaqīqat al-ghul* (is a metaphor that expresses stinginess. It does not denote being actually chained).”

---

1070 Ibid, 4, 266.
1071 Ibid.
1072 Ibid.
1073 Ibid, 4, 267.
Accordingly, al-Māturīdī does not list various interpretations for the dual form of *yad* and does not resort to indirect implications as Ṭabarī does. He clearly states his personal opinion about the meaning of the phrase *yadāh mabsūṭatān*. It has a single meaning, as far as he is concerned, and it is “*ni’amahu* (bounties of God)”\(^{1074}\) This is one of the key nuances that separates Ṭabarī from al-Māturīdī in al-Mā’idah verse. Al-Māturīdī does not only uphold the interpretation Ṭabarī unequivocally opposes but also regards it as the default and only meaning of *yad* in the verse. Consequently, al-Māturīdī does not focus on establishing the correctness of his interpretation as he considers it a given in this context. What aids al-Māturīdī in this approach is that “*ni’amahu* (bounties of God)” is one of the fundamental lexical meanings of *yad*, as explained earlier.\(^{1075}\) Instead, al-Māturīdī directs his focus on persuading the reader that the literal meaning of *yad*, hand, cannot apply when it is associated with God.

Al-Māturīdī emphasizes, “*thumma lā yuḥtamal an yufhama min iḍāfat al-yad ilā Allah mā yufham mina al-khalq* (it is not conceivable for the meaning of *yad*, when associated with God, to be the same as when it is associated with the creation).”\(^{1076}\) The first impression that rushes to one’s mind is that al-Māturīdī’s aim is to falsify the fundamental proof Ṭabarī, and his proponents, have employed to nullify the interpretation of *yad* as bounties. In reality, the aim al-Māturīdī pursues goes beyond the refutation of Ṭabarī. In order to grasp this discernment, it is crucial first to examine the evidence al-Māturīdī forwards to support this premise. He states, “It is evident [in the Qur’an] *iḍāfat al-yad ilā* (the association of the *yad* with entities and notions) *lā* 

---

1074 Ibid.

1075 Van Ess reports that the Mu’tazilites and Jahmites interpreted *yad* as the bounties and grace of God. He does not mention al-Māturīdī’s exegetical interpretation or theological position on the meaning of *yad*. In principle, Van Ess agrees with the interpretation of *yad* as bounties and considers suitable to the context of the verses. For further information see: Van Ess and Goldbloom, "Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra. Volume 4 : A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam," 445.

yuhtamalu an yakūna lahu yad (that is impossible for them to possess a hand).” Al-Māturīdī’s logic is forthright. If the Qur’an, not only accepts but, have employed the dual form of yad in a metaphorical sense, when associated with created entities and notions, then there are no grounds to oppose the interpretation of yad, when associated with God, in such a sense. It is not acceptable to insist on the literal rendering of yad, as hand, particularly, when such an interpretation leads to anthropomorphism.

Al-Māturīdī cites multiple verses as proof for his argument. The first is verse 42 chapter Fuṣṣilat. The verse reads, “Falsehood cannot come to it bayna yadayhi (between its two hands [meaning before him]) or min khalfihi (or behind it). (It is) sent down by the All-Wise, Worthy of All praise.” The verse describes the immunity of the Qur’ān to falsehood. Falsehood can never find a way to its verses. Al-Māturīdī states, “lā yufhamu mina al-Qur’an al-yad kamā yufhamu mina al-khalq (None understands from the association of yad with the Qur’an a physical hand as one would when it is associated with creatures).” Indeed, all the exegetes consent the meaning of bayna yadayhi, in the context of Fuṣṣilat verse, is ‘before it’ or ‘in front of it’. Even though, its apparent meaning is “between his two hands”, none ever interpreted it as such. The question al-Māturīdī is implying is, why should the anthropomorphic interpretation of yad be the default assumption with God? Ṭabarī’s commentary provides no answer. Additionally, the expressions, ‘before it’, ‘in front of it’ and ‘behind it’, do not serve as spatial directions. All exegetes understood them as phrases that express the impossibility of falsehood penetrating the Qur’ān.

1077 Ibid.
1078 Ibid, 3, 551.
1079 Such expressions are not governed by logic either. Otherwise, it would have been necessary to add “from above” and “from under” as well to express complete immunity. Rather they are determined by the nature and style of expressions in a given language.
Al-Māturīdī’s analysis of the Fuṣṣilat verse, in the context of his commentary on chapter al-Mā’idah, and his expansion on its theological implications is unprecedented in Sunni Qur’anic exegesis. It illustrates al-Māturīdī’s keenness on extracting the theological intricacies in all the verses, which, in turn, credits the proposition that he intended to institute the genre of Sunni theological exegesis. Consequently, al-Māturīdī persistently cites more Qur’anic examples where *yad* is used in the dual and plural forms to express meanings other than hand. He quotes verse 10 chapter al-Ḥajj, “…That is because of *qaddamat yadāk* (what your two hands have sent forth) …”, verse 30 chapter al-Shūrā, “…and whatever of misfortune befalls you, it is because of *mā kasabat aydīkum* (what your hands have earned)…” and verse 1 chapter al-Ḥujurāt, which will be discussed in its own right later in the section.

In the first two instances, al-Māturīdī stresses that the utterances *yadāk*, the dual form of *yad*, and *aydīkum*, the plural form of *yad*, “do not denote the commonly known meaning-hand.” Rather, they point to the actions of a person. *Yad* is used for “*limā bilyadi yuqaddim wa yu’ṭī wa yaksab* (it is the instrument with which one offers, provides and earns).”

On the methodological level, three fundamental differences arise between Ṭabarī and al-Māturīdī. Firstly, al-Māturīdī focuses on verses that relate directly to the dispute subject. All the verses he quotes use *yad* in the dual form when Ṭabarī does not at all. Secondly, al-Māturīdī gives precedence to the Qur’anic use of the terms and expressions over the general Arabic use. As demonstrated above, al-Māturīdī does not waste his breath on arguing whether lexically the *muthannā* (dual form) expresses plurality or not. Indeed, al-Māturīdī indirectly proves that the *muthannā* (dual form) may be used to express multiple notions, as it is the case in verse 10

---

1080 Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, 4, 266.
1081 Ibid.
chapter al-Ḥajj and verse 30 chapter al-Shūrā above, but this is not his primary concern. His aim, and the heart of the matter to him, is to grasp how God uses the *yad* expression in the Qur’an and what he means by it.

This leads to the third difference between both exegetes, which is the contribution to the genre of Sunni theological exegesis. Whilst al-Māturīdī focuses on the exegetical aspect in the interpretation process, studying every relevant verse, Ṭabarī focuses solely on the theological topic. Ṭabarī’s focus on the theological topic is positive but does not serve the genre of theological exegesis. He utilises the verses as the ground where he opens the theological discourse but ignores the most important element in the exegetical interpretation, the contribution of the verses, at hand, to the theological debate. Ṭabarī’s approach inhibits a comprehensive understanding of the Qur’anic argument on the topic of the *yad*. He does not consider the nuances that all the verses may contain and likewise ignores the insight with which the various verses may enrich the debate. Accordingly, Ṭabarī raises the issue of *yad* once in his exegesis as his aim is not driven by an interest in the theological implications of the verses rather it is driven by his sense of duty to briefly comment on a controversial theological topic virally discussed in the academic circles at the time. On the other hand, al-Māturīdī interprets the utterance in the context of every verse individually, discusses the theological elements directly, states his opinion openly and supports it with pertinent Qur’anic evidence.1082

On a separate note, despite being in an exegetical milieu, the theological arguments al-Māturīdī presents in Ta’wilāt are original and valuable. Nevertheless, they were completely

---

1082 The consistency of al-Māturīdī in the application of the above methodology in his commentary on the other verses relevant to the attribute of *yad* will be assessed further in this chapter. It will help determine his commitment to the development of the new genre and his adherence to his methodology.
ignored by prominent western theologians such as Van Ess and even Wilfred Madelung whom Jeffrey Halverson distinguishes as “one of the few modern scholars of Maturidite theology.”

All Muslims and non-Muslims academics centralised their writing and research on Kitāb al-Tawḥīd and no genuine effort has been put towards studying al-Māturīdī’s theological views in Taʾwīlāt. Whilst Rudolph was not different, he clearly confesses that “Taʾwīlāt has hardly being studied till now.”

Upon concluding the critical analysis of al-Māturīdī’s argument in chapter al-Māʾidah, it is apposite to return to his aim behind the whole argument. His aim is to formulate an exegetical and theological principle that governs the interpretation of yad as an anthropomorphic expression wherever it may be in the Qur’an. The principle he suggests is “the annexation of the utterance yad to God cannot be interpreted (as hand or limb) the same as when it is annexed to creatures.” Indeed al-Māturīdī, a prominent dialectical theologian, uses the Qur’anic verses, a samʿī proof, considerably, in his formulation of this interpretation principle. He sees the Qur’an an underpinning in his framework of determining the meaning(s) of yad and formulating a principle for it. The formulation of such an exegetical and theological principle is an innovative step that no other exegete had attempted, recommended or discussed in their exegeses. In the subsequent sections, of this chapter, the study examines al-Māturīdī’s application of this principle in other pertinent verses, such as verse 57 of chapter al-Aʿrāf.

---


5.2.1 Al-Māturīdī’s application of his exegetical principles

Al-Māturīdī sees in verse 57 chapter al-A’rāf another excellent proof that reinforces the principle he formulates in chapter al-Mā’idah about the exegesis of yad. The verse reads, “It is He [God] who sends the wind bayna yadāy raḥmatiḥ (between the two hands of his mercy) …” Instantly, al-Māturīdī immerses into a theological analysis of the verse, “bayna yadāy raḥmatiḥ is dalālah (an indication) that one should not interpret the yadāyn as the jāriḥatayn (two limbs [hands]) as one would when associated with the creatures.” He efficiently explains why not, “for none understands the yad (when associated) with al-maṭar (rain) as the jāriḥah (a limb [hand]). For [it is a consensual fact] that rain does not have limbs.” Likewise God does not have a jāriḥah and the yad should not be interpreted it as such. Al-Māturīdī wants to dispel the assumption that whenever yad is heard in the Qur’an then it must be a hand. He does so by highlighting many of the instances where all people accept yad as a metaphoric expression rather than a lexical reference.

In his closing sentence on al-A’rāf verse, al-Māeturīdī voices a strong personal stance against those who affirm the attribute of hand to God. He adjudges, “wa man fahima dhālika fa innamā yafham li fasādin fī ‘aqīdatih (whoever forms such an understanding it is the result of a corruption in their creed.”

In the context of al-A’rāf, none of the other exegetes analyse the creedal facets of the verse. The comprehensiveness of Al-Māturīdī is unparalleled in their exegeses. Muqātil does not delve into any theological analysis. He interprets the phrase bayna yadāy raḥmatiḥ, which

---

1086 Ibid, 5, 389.
1087 Ibid.
1088 Ibid.
1089 Ibid.
literally means between the two hands of his mercy, as “the clouds that travel in front of the wind.”\footnote{Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 2, 42.} More precisely, he interprets the term ‘bayna yadāy’ as quddām (in front of) and rahmatih as (the clouds). Likewise, Ṭabarī interprets bayna yadāy as Muqātil. He reiterates, “it is quddām rahmatih wa amāmahā (before his mercy and in front of it).”\footnote{Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’ān, 12, 492.} Distinctively howbeit, Ṭabarī justifies the ground for such an interpretation. He elucidates, “and the Arabs use such a statement to describe anything that takes place quddām (before) another thing or amāmahū (in front of it).”\footnote{Ibid.} The addition that ensues, from Ṭabarī, proves most riveting. He states, “[such a statement] they [Arabs] use…fī akhbārihim ‘an banī Adam (in their reports about the humans). They used it so often to the extent that they began to use itfī ghayri banī Adam (in their reports about everything else).”\footnote{Ibid.} Ṭabarī inadvertently validates the principle al-Māturīdī excogitates in al-Mā`īdah verse and provides an Arabic lexical basis for it. Thus, it is acceptable in Arabic to see the dual form of yad used in other than its apparent sense, a hand, with concrete and intelligent entities. It may be used in a non-literal sense, thus, with creatures that possess physical hands, such as humans, and creatures that do not. Ṭabarī ends his commentary with the previous remark, “wa mā lā yad lah (and in describing what does not have a physical hand).”\footnote{Ibid.} Despite that Ṭabarī does not change his view about the meaning of yad, when associated with God. He does not derive or, possibly, does not detect in al-A`rāf verse any theological messages. As for Samarqandī, he restates the same interpretation as the previous exegetes, “bayna yadāy rahmatih means quddām al-maṭar (before the rain).”\footnote{Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 1, 522.} He does not offer any further insight.
It is ironic to see Ṭabarī ascertaining unconsciously the fundament of the interpretation, of al-Māturīdī, he vehemently opposed. It attests to the analytical eye of al-Māturīdī and inspires more confidence in the soundness of his interpretation and the accuracy of his claims and reports. It begs a question to Ṭabarī. If the dual form of yad is used in Arabic to express other meanings than an actual hand, then what is the justification for his insistence on limiting its interpretation to that meaning when yad is associated with God?

On a theological level, it begs another question, should one understand the nature of God through the anthropomorphic expressions that occur in certain verses? Or should one understand the anthropomorphic expressions in light of the nature of God the Qur’an advocates? It seems that al-Māturīdī’s leans towards the latter. His commentary on the previous verses evinces that he determines the meaning of the anthropomorphic expressions through the nature of God that tradition and intellect stipulate. Al-Māturīdī corroborates the legitimacy of his course by various proofs. In this instance, he does so with solid evidence from the Qur’anic choice of words and style of expression that hand is not the default meaning of yad always. This Qur’anic evidence is coupled with the seal of Arabic soundness, which Ṭabarī, unconsciously, stamps. Another evidence is the agreement of all the aforementioned exegetes on al-Māturīdī’s interpretation of the phrase “bayna yaday”, in al Aʿrāf verse. It adds another layer of evidence, to the above since it is a form of ījmāʾ sukūtī (tacit consensus) amongst the investigated exegetes. If they agree that the interpretation is correct then they agree that the basis for inferring it is correct. Thus, al-Māturīdī’s paradigm is set.

At the same time, in al-Māturīdī’s closing statement on al Aʿrāf verse, when he speaks about the fasād (corruption) in the belief of the other, he answers the second question, posed
above, and classifies the interpretation of yad, when associated with God, as a hand, a symptom of the other attempting to discover God through the vice versa method, through the anthropomorphic expressions. Al-Māturīdī’s opposition to this method is fierce. His commentary on chapter al-Mā’idah and now al-A‘rāf demonstrates his persistent interest in disproving their approach. The persistence of al-Māturīdī demonstrates, on a methodological level, his consistency in his writing. This consistency will be further tested in the analysis of his commentary on the yad related verse in chapter Ṣād.

5.2.2 The consistency in al-Māturīdī’s analysis and his robust exegetical methodology in interpretation

The insistence on the figurative interpretation of yad appears again in al-Māturīdī’s commentary on verse 75 chapter Ṣād. However, the meaning forwarded this time is very different. Al-Māturīdī’s offers a new insight into his approach to the interpretation of yad, when associated with God, and potentially all the anthropomorphic expressions, which will be investigated in subsequent sections.

Al-Māturīdī does not standardise ni‘am (bounties) as the default meaning of yad and then apply it to all verses where God uses the yad expression. Rather, he treats each verse individually based on its context, characteristics and utterances. Verse 75 in chapter Ṣād exhibits a perfect illustration of this approach. Ironically, it is the very verse upon which Ṭabarī denied

---

1096 Unless the context demands it as it is the case with verse 48 chapter al-Furqān, which is identical to verse 57 of al A‘rāf.
that *yad* could mean a bounty. This makes the analysis of al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the verse, expectedly, more gripping.

The verse reads: “He (God) said: “O Iblīs (Satan)! What prevents you from prostrating yourself to one (Adam) whom I have created *bi yadayya* (with both my *yad*) …” The dual form of *yad, yadayya*, appears in the verse in the context of the creation of Adam. Al-Māturīdī proposes multiple interpretations for the phrase. None of them is bounties but indeed they are all figurative. The first interpretation, he opens with, is *taʿẓīm* (elevation). Al-Māturīdī argues the intent of the use of *yadayya* here is *taʿẓīm Adam* (to express the greatness of Adam [as the first human]). Al-Māturīdī, Taʿwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 12, 280.

Thus, the expression stresses a connotative meaning rather than a semantic...
one. *Yad* here has no meaning as an utterance.\(^{1100}\) It is part of a phrase that communicates that God dignified the creation of Adam and distinguished it.\(^{1101}\)

Al-Māturīdī constitutes this new interpretation on an exegetical principle he formulates. Al-Māturīdī inferred this principle on the basis of a pattern he identifies through his observation of many Qur’ānic verses, where various specific creatures are associated with God. He states, “…and as we have mentioned multiple times earlier, *takḥṣīṣ* *idāfat al-shay’* *al-wāḥid* *li* *Allah* (when one specific creature is annexed to God) *yakhirūj makhrāj* *ta’zīm* *dhālika* *al-wāḥid* *(it emphasises the distinction and status of this creature) …”\(^{1102}\) Indeed, in many chapters, before


\(^{1101}\) Interestingly, al-Māturīdī does not use the verse as an opportunity to speak about the image of Adam, which has been discussed extensively by Van Ess as an anthropomorphic expression in his title. Van Ess suggests that the phrase about the image of Adam was borrowed from Judeo-Christian sources and became a ḥadīth report later. Al-Māturīdī demonstrates commitment to writing about anthropomorphism in the Qur’an but not in Prophetic tradition. For further information on the views of Van Ess on anthropomorphism see: Van Ess and Goldbloom, “Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra. Volume 4 : A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam,” 421.

\(^{1102}\) Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, 17, 268.
and after chapter Ṣād, al-Māturīdī points to this phenomenon. For instance, chapter Hūd and chapter al-Shams where God speaks about nāqatu Allah (the she-camel of God) sent to Prophet Salih and chapter al-Jinn, in which God speaks about the masājid li Allah (the mosques belong to God). Even though all the animals, places and constructions belong to God, he would select a particular human, animal or place and annex them to his name, in the Qur’an, to signalise the status of these creatures and place them above others. Thus, the phrase bi yadayya falls in this category.

Al-Māturīdī’s commentary portrays consistency in his application of his methodology in multiple facets. The most significant one is the paramountcy of the Qur’anic style of expression and its choice of words over any other style of expression or choice of words in the Arabic language. Al-Māturīdī seeks his interpretations of the anthropomorphic expressions through the Qur’an itself before any other source. However, why would a dialectic of the status of al-Māturīdī abandon rational reasoning and focus primarily on a traditional proof? The choice of al-Māturīdī is, likely, driven by multiple reasons. First and foremost, al-Māturīdī is a scholar of the Sunni mainstream and closely, as well as proudly, affiliated with the traditional school of Abū Ḥanīfah. Therefore, tradition instinctively takes primacy. The second reason, which is alike momentous, is the undisputed eloquence of the Qur’an. The belief in the supremacy of the articulateness of the Qur’an is a vox populi amongst all Muslims whether scholars or laymen, exegetes or theologians. Whilst scholars dispute amongst each other over which meaning is more eloquent than another in Arabic in general, in principle, they all submit to the eloquence of the Qur’an and the disputes concerning it are minimal, in the Sunni arena. From a tactical

1103 Chapter Hūd verse 73, 4, 478 and chapter al-Shams verse 13, 10, 544
1104 Chapter al-Jinn verse 17
perspective, the use of traditional proofs is more advantageous to al-Māturīdī as it could appeal to the traditional current. The third significant reason is that such proofs explain a vague Qur’anic phrase by a clear Qur’anic verse. The Muslim exegetes, traditionally as it is indicated in the works of Qaṭṭān, Mistū and others, consider this to be the best method to interpret the Qur’an.1105 Thus, al-Māturīdī’s adoption of such a method could yield the “literal” opposition into accepting his interpretations since they are the product of the most accepted exegetical method across all Muslim scholars. The fourth reason for al-Māturīdī’s choice is that, rationally, this method has the potential to being more correct than any other interpretation. Surely, none can claim to know the meaning God intends to convey in these expressions. However, when one attempts to interpret the word of God in accordance to his, God’s, style of expression then it is more prospective to be correct. This would satisfy the rational movement as well since it is more logical to interpret one’s utterances based on one’s general style of writing.

The second facet of al-Māturīdī’s consistent methodology is his formulation of exegetical and theological maxims to govern the understanding of anthropomorphic and vague verses constructed on his careful analysis of the Qur’an. The first instance of this is in chapter al-Mā’idah with the use of the dual form of yad to denote the meaning of bounties. Al-Māturīdī is not only consistent in devising such maxims but also consistent in applying them. The interpretation of the annexation of a creature to God as ta’zīm does not stop with Adam. He applies it faithfully with his interpretation of the she-camel and the masājid (mosques) in other chapters.

1105 Qaṭṭān, Mabāhith Fī ‘Ulūm Al-Qur’an, 358; M. Dhahabi, Al Tafsīr Wal Mufassiroon, vol. 2 (Cairo1976 ), 1, 228.
Notwithstanding the preeminence of the above interpretations, al-Māturīdī explores other possibilities and motives and lists them when he sees fit. Accordingly, he points to another possibility for the use of yadayya in the Ṣād verse. He explicates “aw an yakūn dhikru dhālika linfasihī wa idāfatihi ilayh mina al-yad (it is possible that God mentioned the yad (utterance) and he annexed to himself in the context of the creation of Adam) to cater for the human’s understanding based on the reality they know.”\textsuperscript{1106} Al-Māturīdī is arguing that humans cannot imagine such actions, being carried out, without the use of hands. Hence, God uses expressions that accommodate to the humans’ perception. Al-Māturīdī clarifies, “…lima bil yad yakūnīft al-shahid law ihtamal kawn dhālika mina al-khalq ([to describe the actions in a manner that corresponds to how it would be done in the shāhid (in the observed world) had it been done by them) …”\textsuperscript{1107}

Other than the fact that such an interpretation is unprecedented in Sunni exegesis, al-Māturīdī proves, through it, that his theological commentary is not done for the sake of casual commentary on a verse that he happened to come across. To the contrary, al-Māturīdī deliberately studies the verse, and utterances therein delicately, elicits all possible theological interpretations and presents them. He is committed, as the study has established up to this point, to finding a new genre in Sunni exegesis, a theological exegesis. Al-Māturīdī originates it on a unique paradigm that explores, analyses and critiques rather than simply transmit from earlier sources.

Accordingly, the critiquing component in al-Māturīdī’s exegesis does not discriminate between one movement or another. He commences his critique with the partisans of the literal

\textsuperscript{1106} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah}, 12, 281.

\textsuperscript{1107} Ibid.
translation of *yad* as hand, as he does previously in al-A‘rāf. He affirms that such an interpretation is indicative of a *fasād* (corruption) in their belief and ignorance of the transcendence of God ‘*an ma’nā al-ghayr* (above the qualities of the creatures). Otherwise, such a meaning would not have crossed their mind.\(^{1108}\) Al-Māturīdī reiterates the point he remarked in chapter al-A‘rāf that the nature of God, in his view, influences the interpretation of the anthropomorphic expressions and not the reverse. Then, al-Māturīdī extends his critiquing to target the theological views of a current he has not addressed before— the rational current. In al-Māturīdī’s opinion, the rationalists failed in interpreting the *yad* expression properly. He highlights the weakness of their views, “…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…”\(^{1109}\) Then he rebuts their views and assures the supremacy of his interpretation, “…however all these interpretations are marginal when compared to the fact that the utterance of *yad* has been used in the Qur’ān with what cannot possibly have a hand or a limb, and a single specific meaning …”\(^{1110}\) referring to his commentary on verse 57 chapter al-A‘rāf.

Al-Māturīdī cannot be described, thus, as an orthodox rationalist who would favour any rational interpretation over any traditional one. His critiquing and analysis do not discriminate between opinions or movements. The commitment of al-Māturīdī is to what he deems sound. The sound approach to explaining the anthropomorph expressions is not by conjuring any rational interpretation without a Qur’anic backing. It needs to satisfy both tradition and reason and appease the concerns of the challengers in order for al-Māturīdī to accredit it. Al-Māturīdī

\(^{1108}\) Ibid.
\(^{1109}\) Ibid, 12, 280.
\(^{1110}\) Ibid.
envisages the key to such a perfect interpretation is the synthesis between ‘aql and naql. He attempts to achieve that integration in his interpretation and fuses both currents into one. Al-Māturīdī aspires to be the father of the synthetical school between naql and ‘aql in the Sunni arena in addition to his intention to find the genre of Sunni theological exegesis.

Such aspirations do not seem to cross the minds of most of the Transoxianan and Sunni exegetes of al-Māturīdī’s period and region. ‘Ayyāshī and Muqātil do not comment on chapter Ṣād’s verse at all. Ṭabarī interprets yadayya as the two hands of God, not a surprise. He states, “God informs us that he created Adam with his two hands.”¹¹¹¹ He does not qualify the meaning of the hands and, as stated earlier, does not return to the theological discussion he advocates in chapter al-Mā’idah. Likely, for he feels that he exhausted the subject there sufficiently.

Samarqandī, on the other hand, engages the theological topic in his commentary for the first time in this study. He adumbrates the opinions he deems central to the discussion and they are three. The first opinion suggests that “we believe in the verse”¹¹¹² but does not attempt to interpret it since “we do not know its tafsīr (exegetical meaning).”¹¹¹³ The second opinion calls for “its tafsīr as God said [it].”¹¹¹⁴ This opinion is similar to Ṭabarī. They interpret yad as hands but with qualification. Samarqandī relates that they say, “It is a hand that is not like the hands (of creation).”¹¹¹⁵ The third opinion is where Samarqandī’s inclination appears. Unlike the previous views, Samarqandī lays out the argument of this point of view generously. He reports that they refuse the interpretation of yad as hand as it does not conform to their criterion.¹¹¹⁶

¹¹¹¹ Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 21, 239.
¹¹¹³ Ibid.
¹¹¹⁴ Ibid.
¹¹¹⁵ Ibid.
¹¹¹⁶ Ibid.
is, “we interpret it [the yad] with what befits the attributes of God.”\textsuperscript{1117} Thus, this view concurs with al-Māturīdī on the basis of interpretation. Resultingly, yad, to them, means “his khalq (creation), his qudrah (omnipotence or capability), his quwwah (power) and his irādah (will).”\textsuperscript{1118}

Samarqandī portrays his awareness that the third interpretation, which he endorses, is not objection free. He focuses particularly on the main contention used against it, which that it renders the takhṣīṣ (distinction) in the use of the yad in the creation of Adam obsolescent. Thereby, Samarqandī counters it instantly, “And if someone says God created other things with his omnipotence, power and will and what is the benefit of takhṣīṣ (distinction) in this instance? It could be replied to them that yad has been used to describe other creation.”\textsuperscript{1119}

In simpler terms, Samarqandī does not accept that there is takhṣīṣ (distinction) for Adam in the first place in this verse. He argues that God has used the yad utterance to describe the creation of other beings and therefore no distinction exist. He cites verse 71-chapter Yāsīn, which speaks about the creation of cattle, as evidence.\textsuperscript{1120} Simply, Samarqandī annuls the takhṣīṣ argument altogether by proving that, in his opinion, it does not exist. He affirms, therefore, that yad means “bi quwwatī (my [God’s] power).”\textsuperscript{1121} In the context of the creation of Adam it could refer to” … the power or the knowledge [of God]”\textsuperscript{1122} or “the power of omnipotence [of God].”\textsuperscript{1123}

\textsuperscript{1117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1120} The verse reads, “Have they not seen that We have created for them bi aydīna [of what Our hands/power have worked] cattle, so they have become their masters?”
\textsuperscript{1121} Samarqandī, \textit{Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al- ʿUlūm}, 3, 174.
\textsuperscript{1122} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1123} Ibid.
Samarqandī supports his interpretation with a noteworthy ḥadīth tradition from the companion ‘Abdullah Ibn Mas‘ūd (d.650 CE), a prominent traditional exegete, who asserts that every verse, in the Qur’an, has a ẓahr (apparent meaning) and a bāṭn (indirect meaning). Samarqandī is seeking a traditional backing for his opinion by citing this ḥadīth tradition. He is affirming that having multiple meanings for a single utterance that extend beyond the conventional meaning is not only acceptable but part of the expression mechanism in the Qur’an intended by God.

The inescapable question is, does Samarqandī actively ignore al-Māturīdī’s point of view or is he simply unaware of it? It is factual to state that whoever reads Samarqandī’s exegesis will not deduce that the two men have ever met despite living in the same region, era and being affiliates of the same school. Al-Māturīdī’s opinion is not easy to stand behind as it opposes all sides. Particularly if one’s aim is to be traditional, which, apart from this case, is what Samarqandī has endeavoured to remain, as the study revealed multiple times in all previous chapters.

Not to mention that al-Māturīdī’s opinion addresses better the contentions of the literalists and the traditionalists. al-Māturīdī’s interpretation proves a rational and Qur’anic explanation for takḥṣīṣ of the creation of Adam and responds well to the dual form argument Ṭabarī and his affiliates used against any form of ta’wīl. Amongst the qualities that distinguish al-Māturīdī, in Ta’wīlāt, from the other exegetes is his independence and the creativity he exhibits in his theological arguments. His creativity shines in his methodology and analysis.

---

1124 Ibid.
whilst his independence grants him the liberty to explore interpretations and explanations beyond the normative conventional ones provided by traditionalists and rationalists.

5.2.3 The creativity and liberty of al-Māturīdī in his interpretations

In line with the above, al-Māturīdī persists in his exploration of the meanings of *yad* in verse 10 chapter al-Fath. The verse reads, “Verily, those who give pledge to you (Muḥammad) they are giving pledge to Allah. The *yad* of Allah is over their hands…” Al-Māturīdī relates six possible interpretations for the *yad* of God. It could be (1) *jazā’ al-mubāya‘ah* (a reward from God for the pledge), (2) *jazā’ al-wafā’* (a generous reward if they fulfil their pledge with the Prophet), (3) *yurūdu bihā rasūllah* (it refers to Prophet Muḥammad), (4) *yad rasūlilah* (the hand of Prophet Muḥammad), (5) *tawfiq Allah* (the aid of God) and (6) *al-naṣr* (the victory of God to His messenger).1125

Some of the interpretations al-Māturīdī lists above are unique to him whereas some of them have been advised by other exegetes. For instance, *al-wafā’* (fulfilment) is common between him, Muqātil and Samarqandī.1126 Whilst *al-naṣr* (the victory from God) and *al-thawāb* (the reward), al-Māturīdī shares with Samarqandī alone.1127 Ṭabarī is the only exegete to give supremacy to the interpretation of *yad Allah* as “*yad Allah fawqa aydīhim ‘inda al-bay’ah* (the hand of God is above their hands at the time of the pledge).”1128 To him, this is the primary meaning but he includes the *quwwah* (power) of God as a possible secondary meaning. Ṭabarī

---

1127 *Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm*, 3, 314.
does not explain at all how the hand of God could be the above hands of the pledgers. He does not even qualify it or clarify that an anthropomorphic understanding is impossible. He states it as it is and proceeds to the next segment of the verse.

To the contrary, none of the interpretations al-Māturīdī propounds classify yad as a hand of God or even any other divine attribute. The same stance is reflected in Samarqandī’s exegesis albeit in a more a timid fashion. Despite Samarqandī returning to his habit of not commenting on the verses at all, he quotes al-Zajjāj (d. 923 CE), an Arabic authority, who interpreted the yadu Allah expression as “al-wafā’ ... al-thawāb ... al-minnah ’alayhim (fulfilment of promise by God, reward and bounty).”[1129] Samarqandī does not comment on the interpretations of al-Zajjāj negatively, which suggests that he concurs with al-Zajjāj and tacitly agrees with al-Māturīdī.

Al-Māturīdī, on the other hand, explains the grounds for each interpretation he offers personally. To him yadu Allah expression could be jazā’ al-mubāya’ah (a reward from God for the pledge) for when the companions gave the pledge to the prophet “kānāt lahum ’indahu yad (they had done him a favour).”[1130] As a result, God “yajzīhim biwafā’ tīlka al-mubāya’ah (God will reward them for the fulfilment of the pledge).”[1131] Al-Māturīdī carries out this method with all the interpretations.

Most of al-Māturīdī’s interpretations of yad, in al-Fatḥ verse, can be categorised as an action of God- such as al-wafā’ (fulfilment of promise), al-naṣr (the victory of God) and tawfīq (the aid of God), or as jazā’ (reward) from him. The other interpretations he offers for the verse centralise on the person of Prophet Muḥammad or his hand. These interpretations are unique to

---

[1131] Ibid.
al-Māturīdī. He advances them as feasible interpretations of yad since the Prophet is the representative of God in the pledge ceremony and the Prophet’s actual hand “bi al-basṭ wa al-mubāya ‘ah (was stretched in the pledging) fawqa aydīhim (above the hands of the companions).”\textsuperscript{1132} Al-Māturīdī rationalises this interpretation with another persuasive point, which is to teach the companions that they have no “yad ‘inda rasullilah (favour upon the messenger of God)”\textsuperscript{1133} personally; rather they entered into a pledge with God.\textsuperscript{1134} Hence, God describes the hand of the Prophet as yadu Allah.

Despite the ingenuity of al-Māturīdī in his commentary on al-Fatḥ verse and the rationalisations of his interpretations, they all seem more exegetical than theological as he does not raise any theological points through them. Still, they reflect his conceptual framework and his methodology silently. They represent his uncompromising approach on the yad being interpreted as a limb or limb-like. At the same time, they highlight his employment of the context of the verses and the circumstances and events, in which they are revealed as well as the objective behind their revelation.

This dynamic methodology permits al-Māturīdī to revisit issues he addressed prior and to exert further efforts in discerning new evidence from the verses to reinforce his earlier interpretations. Verse 1 chapter al-Ḥujurāt, serves as a verification of this praxis. The verse reads, “O You who believe! Do not put (yourselves) forward bayna yaday Allah and his Messenger…” Al-Māturīdī opens his commentary on al-Ḥujurāt verse by listing the various transmitted proposed causes of revelation. The same practice is undertaken by the rest of the

\textsuperscript{1132} Ibid.  \textsuperscript{1133} Ibid.  \textsuperscript{1134} Ibid.
exegetes save ‘Ayyāshī, who has no commentary on the chapter. The reports, of all the exegetes, vary greatly in terms of the nature of the events that caused the revelation of the verse and the people involved in it. Essentially though, the verse advises Muslims to not rush in setting rulings or practices or recommendations on any issues before Prophet Muḥammad addresses these issues.

Interestingly the various causes of revelation influenced the interpretation of all the exegetes of the yad expression. Muqātil interprets the expression bayna yaday Allah as “lā ta’jalū bi amrin walā bi fī līn (do not rush in deciding a matter or taking an action) until the messenger of God commands you to do so.”\textsuperscript{1135} Ṭabarī and Samarqandī follow suit. They list the same proposed causes of revelation and their interpretation is verbatim what Muqātil advised. Ṭabarī states, “lā ta’jalū bi qaḍā’i amrin (do not rush in finalising a matter) …until you seek the permission of God’s messenger”\textsuperscript{1136} and Samarqandī states, “lā ta’jalū bi qatlin walā amrin (do not rush in deciding a matter or taking a military action) until God’s messenger commands you to do so.”\textsuperscript{1137}

Al-Māturīdī is no different. He reinforces the same interpretation, “lā tuqaddimū amran walā qawla walā fi’lan walā hukman walā nahyan (do not rush in deciding a matter or making a statement or taking an action or passing a ruling or a prohibition) before God and his messenger decide.”\textsuperscript{1138} However, al-Māturīdī capitalises on the consensus of the aforementioned exegetes on the figurative interpretation of the phrase bayna yaday Allah.\textsuperscript{1139} He calls out the

\textsuperscript{1135} Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 1, 459.
\textsuperscript{1136} Ṭabarī, Jāmi‘ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wīl Āy Al-Qur‘an, 22, 272.
\textsuperscript{1137} Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 3, 322.
\textsuperscript{1138} Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 14, 56.
\textsuperscript{1139} They all interpreted it as hastening to an action before the prophet does it or recommends it.
discrepancy of the exegetes, evidently Ṭabarī, and theologians who insist on interpreting, yaday, the dual form of yad, as “hand”, when speaking about the creation of Adam, in verse 75-chapter Ṣād. Yet they interpret it as “speaking or acting before the permission of the messenger” in al-Ḥujurāt verse. He excoriates them, “Thumma lam yafhamū mimmā thukira ...al-jawārih walā al-ʿadadfi al-yad kamā fahimū min dhālika al-khalq (none of them understood from (yaday in al-Ḥujurāt) the limbs nor the plurality of hands as they usually do when associated with creation.”1140 Al-Māturīdī then objects, “famā bālahum yafhamūna dhālika min qawlihi (so why then do they understand such a meaning from God’s statement, ‘ I created bi yaday’ (in chapter Ṣād).”1141 The grievance of al-Māturīdī focuses on the dual form of yad for it is the form the literalists cite recurrently to legitimise their controversial interpretation. They argue that the dual form in Arabic can only express the notion of limb, as Ṭabarī explicated in his commentary on chapter al-Māʿidah. Al-Māturīdī disproves this claim by adverting to al-Ḥujurāt verse as another example of the use of the dual form to refer to meanings other than a physical limb. Ironically, Ṭabarī confirms that the figurative use of the dual form of yad is not only legitimate but common in Arabic. He states, “It is reported that the Arabs would say ‘fulānun yuqaddim bayna yaday imāmih’ bi ma ‘nā ya’jal bi al-amri (such and such rushes in finalising matters before his leader).”1142 The dual form is used to describe the actions of humans and it does not refer to the physical limbs.

In addition to al-Māturīdī’s point about the inconsistency in interpretation, there are two factors that impact the determination of the meaning of yaday in al-Ḥujurāt verse- the influence of the context, of the verse, and the cause of the revelation. These factors caused the exegetes to

1140 Al-Māturīdī, Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 14, 56.
1141 Ibid.
1142 Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān Fī Taʾwil Āy Al-Qur’an, 22, 272.
fade the literal interpretation in favour of the figurative one. Why then such an application is overturned in chapter Ṣād? Wouldn’t the transcendence of God qualify as legitimate, if not compelling, grounds for such an alteration? The only Sunni exegete who responds to the above questions is al-Māturīdī. He affirms that the transcendence of God qualifies to hold up the figurative meaning.

Thus, the superiority of the figurative meaning in al-Māturīdī’s paradigm manifests once more. He seizes the context of the verse in chapter al-Ḥujurāt to revisit verse 75 of Ṣād and proposes a new possible figurative meaning for yaday there. He states, “bal yajibu an yafhamū min qawlihi (rather they (the exegetes) should understand from God’s statement)”\(^{1143}\) in verse 75 chapter Ṣād about the creation of Adam, “khalaqtu bi yaday (I created him bi yaday)” means “khalaqtuhu ‘alā ‘ilm minnī bimā yakūn minhu min khilāf aw ma’šiyah. Lam akhlūqhu ‘an jahlin bimā yakūn minhu (I created him with full knowledge of (Adam’s future) sins. I did not create him unaware of what he would commit.”\(^{1144}\)

As it has become customary, al-Māturīdī’s interpretation seems outlandish at first. Upon analysis though, it becomes clear that the new interpretation he puts forth takes in consideration the context and the circumstances during which the statement was made. The creation of Adam was surrounded by some displeasure from the angels, because of his future sins and mistakes, and the demurral of Satan. Consequently, according to al-Māturīdī, God intended to assert that he created Adam with full knowledge, that he will err and sin, and to assert his command to the angels and Satan to prostrate to Adam despite his future disobedience. This interpretation is

\(^{1143}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 14, 57.
\(^{1144}\) Ibid.
novel in Sunni exegesis and unique to al-Māturīdī. It takes into consideration the context and the events the verse is reporting, an important instrument in his methodology.

Another methodological characteristic the above interpretation exhibits, is al-Māturīdī’s continuous study and revision of his arguments and opinions as he progresses from one verse to the other. He reconstructs his discussion and supplements it in light of the new understanding he develops. The verse in chapter al-Ḥujurāt alerted al-Māturīdī to the influence of the circumstances surrounding the verse on the meaning therein. Resultantly, he conjures the new proposed meaning for *yad* in verse 75 chapter Ṣād.

### 5.2.4 The *yad* in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*

Conversely, there is no discussion of the meanings of *yad* in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. The absence of a strong Qur’anic footprint in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* could be a contributing factor for al-Māturīdī not discussing the attribute of *yad* therein but cannot be the sole justification for it. Al-Māturīdī, as it has been established in chapter four, dedicates an ample space for the study of the names and attributes of God and the notions related to them in the *Kitāb*. Yet he does not raise in it the debate concerning the meaning of *yad*, when associated with God, at all. The polemical nature of al-Māturīdī’s discourse in the *Kitāb* alone warrants, at least, the mention of the *yad*, which as the study exhibits is highly controversial.¹¹⁴⁵

¹¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Van Ess does not dedicate an ample analysis to the *yad* and ‘*ayn* expressions in the Qur’an. Indeed, he holds a substantial and critical comparison between the Jewish and Christians’ analysis of anthropomorphic expressions but does not dedicate the same strength or depth to the analysis of the verses pertinent to *yad* and ‘*ayn*. For further information see: Van Ess and Goldbloom, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra. Volume 4 : A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam,* 442.
The time factor could be at play here. It is possible that the debate, in the region of al-Māturīdī, about the *yad*, was not intense when he wrote the *Kitāb* as it was when he wrote *Ta’wīlāt*. What might strengthen this deduction is that Samarqandī, who hails from the same city as al-Māturīdī, hardly had any theological commentary in his exegesis at all until the discussion about the meaning of *yad* and the various interpretations pertinent to it came up. Furthermore, the above deduction conforms to the pattern that has been detected, since the study began, where copious pointers confirm that Ta’wīlāt came later in al-Māturīdī’s life and not *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, contrary to Rudolph’s opinion. In spite of all the above, the dedication and passion al-Māturīdī depicts, consciously and unconsciously, in both titles makes it incomprehensible for him to just skip such an important topic in his theological treatise.

On a separate note, the absence of any analysis on the meaning of *yad* in the *Kitāb* confirms the significance of this undertaken study even on a mere theological level. It proves beyond doubt that a comprehensive understanding of al-Māturīdī’s theology cannot be realised by studying one of his title alone. It is only a cross-analysis of both titles that would yield such an important outcome. The subsequent section continues in the comprehensive and methodical analysis of al-Māturīdī’s theology on anthropomorphic expressions through examining his commentary on the ‘*ayn* expression in Ta’wīlāt.

### 5.3 The ‘*ayn* expression

The ‘*ayn* is amongst the anthropomorphic expressions that raised, and continues to raise, a lot of controversy among Muslim theologians. Philologically, the ‘*ayn* utterance belongs to *al-mushtarak al-lafzī* category. Zabīdī and Ibn Manẓūr define *al-mushtarak al-lafzī* as, “the single utterance(s) that indicates, at least, two or more semantic meanings different but equally
acceptable by the scholars of the language.”\textsuperscript{1146} Thus, intrinsically, \textit{'ayn} has multiple unrelated meanings, such as: water spring, sun, money, spy, best of thing and protection.\textsuperscript{1147}

The most commonly known and utilised meaning of \textit{'ayn} though is “eye”, the organ of sight. And indeed, it is this very meaning that caused the controversy amongst the Muslim theologians for it insinuates anthropomorphism in God’s form. The question of concern is not whether God sees or not. The attribute of \textit{baṣar} (sight) is established to God independently and is beyond dispute amongst all Sunni theologians regardless of their sectarian affiliations. The controversy thrives on whether God sees with the instrument of an eye, or eyes, or not. What is the unspoken meaning when one asserts that God sees with an eye that is not like the eyes of the creatures?

The analysis of the meaning(s) of \textit{'ayn} commences with investigating all the verses in which the utterance appears in reference to God. In total, there are five different verses situated in five different chapters that mention \textit{'ayn} in association with God. Interestingly, all these chapters belong to the Makkī category unlike the case with the \textit{yad} expression.\textsuperscript{1148} Some may propose, as a possible explanation, for the concentration of \textit{'ayn} in the Makkī chapters the fact that this period was characterised with the establishment of the Islamic doctrine. However, the analysis points to a different justification, which is not theological as much as it is historical. The themes in all the \textit{'ayn} related verses narrate events from the lives of the past messengers and their \textit{umam} (nations). More specifically, they all address the lives of some of the \textit{ulū al-‘azm} (the most prominent and steadfast) messengers of God: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. Ironically, this leads to an important observation that marks a common

\textsuperscript{1147} Fayrūz Abādī, \textit{Al-Qāmūs Al-Muḥīṭ}, 6, 2170.
\textsuperscript{1148} None of the \textit{‘ayn} verses, or chapters, belong to the Madanī category.
denominator, this time, between the ‘ayn verses and the yad related ones. All the verses, in which both expressions appear, do not address the description of God or his attributes.

The context in three out of the five verses of ‘ayn focuses on the construction of the Ark of Prophet Noah. The fourth verse relates to the dialogue unfolded between Prophet Moses and God at Mount Sinai and the last verse is an admonition to Prophet Muḥammad. All the instances of ‘ayn are in the genitive case. The plural form, bi ‘aynīna, is the dominant one in all the verses apart from verse 39 of chapter Ṭāha, which has the singular form, ‘alā ‘aynī. All these expressions are respectively examined in this chapter.

5.3.1 The interpretation of the plural form of ‘ayn

Chapter Ḥūd is the first chapter in which the ‘ayn expression manifests. The verse informs about the first command from God to Prophet Noah to build the Ark. The verse reads, “And construct the Ark bi ‘aynīna and with our inspiration…” The plural form of ‘ayn, bi ‘aynīna, is used in the verse. Muqātil comments on the verse briefly and states, “and work on it [the ark] bi ‘ilminā meaning bi ‘ilminā (with our knowledge- the knowledge of God) and our revelation kamā na’muruk (as we command you).”\(^\text{1149}\) Thus, Muqātil makes it clear in all respects that ‘ayn, in this verse, refers to the knowledge of God revealed to Prophet Noah enabling him to carry out the command of constructing an Ark. Remarkably, according to Van Ess, the Mu‘tazilites interpret the term ‘aynīna as knoweldge as well. This agreement may indicate that Muqātil’s anthropomophism was not as extreme as it was portrayed. Van Ess, however, does not report al-Māturīdī’s exegetical interpretation of the term, in this context, nor al-Māturīdī’s theological

---

\(^{1149}\) Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 2, 281.
position on the ‘ayn expression. He does not even name the Mu'tazilite scholars who forwarded this interpretation.\textsuperscript{1150} As it is has become customary of Muqātil, he does not delve into any theological discussion. His commentary, nonetheless, confirms that he does not classify bi ‘a ‘yuninā as an attribute of God, in this verse at least.

Interestingly, Ṭabarī manages to interpret the expression bi ‘a ‘yuninā without providing an adequate explanation of its meaning. He simply states, “It means bi ‘aynī Allah (by the ‘ayn of God).”\textsuperscript{1151} He basically explains the plural form of ‘ayn by the singular form of the utterance and says no more. He follows his vague commentary, if it could be described as such, with five reports he transmits from earlier Sunni exegetes. Two from ‘Abdullah Ibn Abbas (d. 687 CE), the other two from Mujāhid Ibn Jabr (d. 722 CE), the main student of ‘Abdullah Ibn Abbas and the fifth from Qatādah ibn Di‘āmah Jabr (d. 735 CE). The reports are all very brief and focus on the revelation aspect of the verse. Essentially, they all report a one-word explanation, “kamā na ‘muruk (as we command you).”\textsuperscript{1152} None out of the three explains bi ‘a ‘yuninā or discusses the theological facet of the verse. Perhaps, they did not see the urgency for such a discussion or possibly they did not see in the expression a theological statement.

In one of the narrations from Ibn Abbas, though, some explanation is offered. He states, “It is because he [Noah] did not know how to build an Ark and God revealed to him to build it like the shape of the chest of the bird.”\textsuperscript{1153} This explanation may constitute a traditional basis for the interpretation of Muqātil in chapter Hūd.

\textsuperscript{1151} Ṭabarī, Jāmi‘ Al-Bayān Fī Ta‘wil Āy Al-Qur‘ān, 15, 308.
\textsuperscript{1152} Ibid, 15, 308-09.
\textsuperscript{1153} Ibid, 15, 308.
Samarqandī does not offer a personal interpretation on the Hūd verse either,\textsuperscript{1154} but unlike Ṭabarī, he transmits Muqātil’s interpretation as “bi ta’liminā wa amrinā (as per our instructions and command).”\textsuperscript{1155} Additionally, Samarqandī transmits a report from Muḥammad ibn al-Sāʿib al-Kalbī (d. 819 CE), which Ṭabarī does not transmit as well, who interpreted bi ʿaʿyuninā as “bi manzarin minnā (under our sight).”\textsuperscript{1156} Both interpretations do not categorise ʿayn as an independent attribute of God. Al-Kalbī interprets it as an expression about the sight of God and Muqātil interprets it as an expression about the taʾlīm of God, his teachings and knowledge to Prophet Noah.

Al-Māturīdī does not undervalue the above interpretations in his commentary. He acquaints the reader with the traditional opinions and lists al-Kalbī’s interpretation as one of them. He states, “Some of the scholars of exegesis said that it (bi ʿaʿyuninā) means bi amrinā wa wahyinā (our command and our revelation) and other (exegetes) said it means bi manzrin minnā (under our sight).”\textsuperscript{1157} However, al-Māturīdī opts for his own exegetical view. He states, “walakin ʿindanā yaḥtamilu wajhayn (however in our opinion it (bi ʿaʿyuninā) could have two possible meanings.”\textsuperscript{1158} The first interpretation is unique to al-Māturīdī, “bi ḥifzinā wa riʿayatinā (under our [God’s] preservation and guard).”\textsuperscript{1159} The second one however, he concurs with Muqātil’s interpretation. He suggests, “bi taʾlīm Allah to him (by God’s teaching to Noah).”\textsuperscript{1160}

Unlike Muqātil though, al-Māturīdī justifies the grounds for his second interpretation. He

\textsuperscript{1154} Verse 37 of chapter Hūd.
\textsuperscript{1155} Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-ʿUlūm, 2, 148.
\textsuperscript{1156} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1157} Al-Māturīdī, Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 7, 170.
\textsuperscript{1158} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1159} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1160} Ibid.
expounds, “for if it were not for the ta’lim of God Noah would not have learnt what a ship is and what is carpentry and would not have known how to make a ship and how to carpenter it.”

Even from a mere exegetical angle, al-Māturīdī’s commentary catches the eye. Unlike all the other exegetes of his era and region, he portrays keenness on contributing his personal reflections on the verses. He adequately explains his opinion and the basis of his reasoning. In the same vein, al-Māturīdī clarifies the ambiguity evident in the traditional reports from Ibn Abbas, Mujāhid and Qatādah, which Ṭabarī recorded in his exegesis but did not expand on them. Conversely, al-Māturīdī summarises the traditional opinions and elucidates that they interpreted bi ‘a ‘yuninā as “bi amrinā wa wahyinā (our command and our revelation).” According to al-Māturīdī, even the traditional Sunni exegetes do not interpret ‘ayn as an eye- the organ of sight. This could be the reason for the ambiguity in Ṭabarī’s commentary on their reports. He may have disapproved of such an interpretation and evaded commenting on their reports at all.

On a methodical level, al-Māturīdī does not digress from the modus operandi he applies in his analysis of the yad expression. He underpins the first possibility he proposes for the utterance bi ‘a ‘yuninā on the idiomatic use in the Arabic language. He argues, “…yuqāl (the Arabs say) ‘aynu Allah ‘alayk (the ‘ayn of God on you) means ḥifzu ‘alayk (the protection of God guards you).” Even though, al-Māturīdī does not name the Arabic authority upon whom he relies. The use of ‘ayn in such a sense is indisputable with tens of references from Arabic poetry and prose. Al-Māturīdī ensues the common idiomatic use proof with a rational

1161 Ibid.
1162 Ibid, 7, 171.
1163 Ibid.
argument. He suggests that God uses ‘āyn to refer to protection and guarding since “fī al-shāhid (in the human experience in the terrestrial world)” protection cannot take place without maintaining visual surveillance over the protected, which demands the use of the eyes. Hence, the use of ‘āyn in a figurative sense.1166

The interest of al-Māturīdī in the interpretation of ‘āyn though is not only exegetical but equally theological. He does not just want to explain what bi ‘a ‘yuninā means but more importantly he wants to ensure that none would understand it in an anthropocentric sense or interpret it in a meaning that conduces to tashbīh. Consequently, al Māturīdī reaffirms the impossibility of interpreting ‘āyn as an eye. He emphasises, “Indeed ََlā yufhamu (it cannot be understood) from bi ‘a ‘yuninā nafs al-‘āyn (the actual known eye organ).”1167 At this point, al-Māturīdī adduces verse 51 chapter al-Anfāl and verse 30 chapter al-Shūrā, where God uses the yad utterance to point to one’s action. He states, “‘alā mā lā yufhamu (as it cannot be understood [from the use of the yad]) min qawlihi (in God’s statement) …qaddamat aydīkum (the actions you [your hands] offered) and kasabat aydīkum (the actions you [your hands] earned).”1168 Al-Māturīdī uses, as a proof of the impossibility of ‘āyn being interpreted as an eye, the very verses he used in his interpretation of yad in verse 64 chapter al-Mā‘īdah.1169 As follows, al-Māturīdī intends to ensure that an anthropomorphic interpretation of ‘āyn, when associated with God, does not have any grounds. Since his aim is the same in both instances, he applies the same Qur’anic proof.

1165 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 7, 170.  
1166 Ibid.  
1167 Ibid.  
1168 Ibid.  
1169 He used these verses previously to aver that yad should not and could not be interpreted as a physical hand, when associated with God. For further information see: ibid, 4, 266.
On a methodological level, al-Māturīdī manifests consistency in adhering to the same apparatus. The same conclusion could be drawn on the epistemological level. Al-Māturīdī considers the Arabic language and its idiomatic uses a valid source of knowledge and interpretation. He fortifies it with a rational argument that benefits from the human experience and then analogises it on the Qur’anic style and choice of expression, which, to him, is the pinnacle of eloquence and most superior reference to interpreting the Qur’anic expression. The choice of verses al-Māturīdī cites, for the above purpose, are clear and agreed upon amongst Transoxianan and Sunni exegetes. So far, al-Māturīdī harmonises all these sources of knowledge and weaves them to support his interpretations and arguments. This entire approach is sui generis in Sunni exegetical literature of his era and region. Thus, it proves that he is the founder of the genre of Sunni theological exegesis, in ilāhiyyāt, and is the leading figure in synthetic theology in the Sunni exegetical landscape.

5.3.2 The interpretation of the singular form of ‘ayn

In chapter Ṭāḥa verse 39, God narrates the interlocution that took place between him and Prophet Moses, reminding the latter of the bounties of God upon him since his childhood, specifically the protection of Moses when he was an infant from Pharaoh. There the second use of ‘ayn appears. God says, “and I imbued you with love from me, in order that you may be brought up ‘alā ‘aynī (under my ‘ayn).” Muqātil interprets ‘alā ‘aynī in a sentence rather than a specific synonym as he usually does. He states, “…when he (Moses) was thrown in the chest and then in the river, when he was found and when he was fed all this took place under the ‘ayn of God…”¹¹⁷⁰ The interpretation of Muqātil of ‘ayn is ambiguous. Does he mean the knowledge of God, as per his earlier commentary in chapter Hūd, or does he mean the sight of God? or does he mean the organ

¹¹⁷⁰ Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 3, 27.
of sight? Whilst his interpretation does not enjoy the level clarity necessary, particularly in a theological context related to the nature of God, there are reports from traditional exegetes that aid in clarifying Muqātil’s commentary. However, Muqātil does not list these reports, rather Ṭabarī does. These reports interpret ‘ayn as ghidhā’ (nourishment). Ṭabarī states, “and some of them (the exegetes) said ma’nāh li tughadhdhā wa turabbā (it means so you will be nourished and brought up) alā mahabbatī wa irādatī (under my love and will).” Ṭabarī lists Qatādah, Ibn Zayd (d. 754 CE) and Abdūl Razzāq (d. 826 CE) as three authorities from whom this interpretation comes. After relating reports from Ibn Jurayj and Abū Nuhayk or Nahīk (d. unknown), who do not accept the above interpretation and insist that “ma’nā dhālika wa anta bi aynī fi ahwāli kullihā (you are under my ‘ayn in all your states),” Ṭabarī delivers his verdict and favours the first meaning. He decides, “fa awlā al-ta’wīlayn bihi (the most correct of the two explanations is) … wa litughadhadhā alā ‘aynī (to be fed and nourished) bi mar’ā minnī wa mahabbah wa irādah (under my love and will).” Samarqandī follows suit. He clusters three meanings in one phrase, “alā manzar minnī wa bi ‘ilmī wa irādatī (under my sight, love and will).” The focus of all exegetes remained philological and lexical with no theological commentary from any of them in the Ṭāha verse. The power of the context of the verse seems to influence their interpretations. There seems, albeit silent, a consensus amongst them that ‘ayn in this verse does not attribute an eye to God.

The above conclusion is a common denominator between al-Māturīdī and the aforementioned exegetes. His approach, however, to the interpretation of ‘ayn in chapter Ṭāha is

1171 Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’ān, 18, 304.
1172 Ibid.
1173 Ibid.
1174 Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 2, 395.
different to theirs. It is identical with the approach he pursues in chapter Hūd. He lists, before all else, the main opinions he deems worthy of consideration. He states, “some of them (the exegetes) said that it means tughadhūhā ‘alā ḥifẓī (to be nourished under my protection) and others said li turabbā…‘alā ‘ilmī (to be brought up under my knowledge).“\(^\text{1175}\) Al-Māturīdī does not list all extant interpretations on the verse unconditionally. Hence, the narrations of Abū Nuhayk or Nahīk and Abū Imrān al-Jūnī (d. 745 CE), amongst others, who interpreted the phrase “li tuṣnna’a ‘alā ‘aynī” to mean “to be fashioned under my ‘āyn” without any qualifications are not included in his commentary. This underlines another major difference between al-Māturīdī and the early exegetes. He does not simply relate all the interpretations, as it was customary amongst Sunni exegetes. Rather he assesses, filters and critiques the opinions before including them although he does not always explicitly indicate as such.

Out of the two interpretations al-Māturīdī lists, he accepts the interpretation of Qatādah and therefore the expression ‘alā ‘aynī is interpreted as the ghidhā’, nourishment under God’s supervision. He confirms, “wa al-awwal ashbah (and the first one is most likely to be correct).”\(^\text{1176}\) His commentary, however, does not stop at preferring one interpretation over the other. Al-Māturīdī quotes Abū ‘Awsajah (d. unknown), an Arabic linguist, who lists different and independent meanings for ‘ayn. Amongst them is knowledge, wealth, the truth, the burnt skin and the predecessor.\(^\text{1177}\) Even though, al-Māturīdī does not comment on the list of Abū ‘Awsajah, the motive behind such unprecedented quotation seems to establish that the expression ‘alā ‘aynī in the verse is open to multiple interpretations and more than one could be true. Ergo, his wording in favouring one opinion over the other was not conclusive. Hence, al-Māturīdī

\(^{1175}\) Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 9, 196.
\(^{1176}\) Ibid.
\(^{1177}\) Ibid.
describes the opinion he preferred as said, “ashbah (most likely to be correct)”\textsuperscript{1178} but not the conclusive one. This tacitly reinforces a notable inference that al-Māturīdī does not proclaim overtly but seems to advocate softly. It is that ‘ayn is not an inherent attribute of God. It is an expression that may point to several meanings as its lexical nature permits, since it is a mushtarak lafẓi, but also has a figurative sense as the current verse illustrates.

Al-Māturīdī’s keenness on highlighting the theological facet of the verses urges him to confirm that ‘ayn, in Ṭāha verse, does not have an anthropomorphic meaning. He forbids that a creature-like understanding is permitted or warranted at all. He states, “ma lā yufham mina al-khalq (the ‘ayn is to be understood differently to how it is interpreted in the context of creation).”\textsuperscript{1179} Of course, the concern of al-Māturīdī is the use of the expression as an excuse to make tashbīh, assimilate God to creatures, and claim that God has an eye or eyes. He cites the context of the verse as a proof for his stance, specifically verse 40 of the same chapter. He states, “and the verse ‘iṣṭa’na’tuka li nafsī means I made you sincere for me… and none understood from nafsī the dhāt of God so how can ‘lituṣna’ ‘alā ‘ayni’ (be interpreted) in such a sense.”\textsuperscript{1180} This very statement confirms the conclusion drawn earlier about al-Māturīdī’s view of the ‘ayn. He does not see it as a new attribute of God. It is nothing more than an expression used to convey a meaning exactly as nafsī, in the context of this verse, is an expression used to convey a meaning.

The other exegetes, who commented on verse 40 chapter Ṭāha, may or may not agree with al-Māturīdī’s implication about the ‘ayn but they surely endorse, unknowingly, the fact that

\textsuperscript{1178} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1179} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1180} Ibid.
nafsī does not refer to the dhāt of God. Muqātil states, as an explanation of the verse, “and I chose you as a messenger from me...” Similarly, Ṭabarī explains it as, “I bestowed upon you Moses all these bounties...as I selected you as a messenger of my scripture to convey it on my behalf and to uphold my commands and prohibitions.” Ṭabarī does not comment on the verse but Samarqandī does and reiterates a position nearly identical to that of Muqātil and Ṭabarī. He comments, “I chose you for the message and prophethood and to establish the proof [of my existence and message and law].” Yet none of these exegetes arrives to the conclusion al-Māturīdī drew. None of them even attempts to investigate its theological elements or to use it to ensure that 'ayn is not interpreted anthropomorphically. A completely unique contribution from al-Māturīdī to theological exegesis.

On a methodological level, the argument of al-Māturīdī is brilliant for it combines three strong elements into one argument. Besides the facts that al-Māturīdī forwards new proofs to support his argument, three elements manifest in his statement. Firstly, al-Māturīdī proposes a Qur‘anic argument that traditionalists cannot deny its solidity. He uses the clear Qur‘anic verses not only to explain the Ṭāha, ‘ayn, verse but more importantly to deny the validity of any interpretation that may open the door to ascribing to God a physical limb, an eye, in this instance. Secondly, He confirms that the influence of the context of the expression overrides its lexical sense, which makes it impossible to interpret ‘ayn as an eye in here. These two elements validate a principle al-Māturīdī aims at establishing, which is the Qur‘anic style of expression is the first resource that should be consulted when determining the meaning of the ambiguous expressions in a theological context and it comes before the general Arabic use. A principle al-Māturīdī

1181 Ibn Sulaymān, Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, 3, 28
1182 Ṭabarī, Jāmi‘ Al-Bayān Fī Ta‘wīl Āy Al-Qur‘ān, 18, 312.
1183 Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 2, 400.'au
worked hard to establish in his commentary on the yad related verses in the previous section. The third element al-Māturīdī puts to use in this argument is the consensus of the Sunni exegetes on not interpreting and understanding nafsī as the dhāt of God. He simply analogises one expression on another where both are used to describe a notion that relates to God. Al-Māturīdī is consistent in the application of his method for he adheres to the same course in the analysis and exegeting of the previous verses of ʿayn and all the yad related verses.

This proves the same on the conceptual level. In the context of the yad expression, al-Māturīdī argues that the study of such ambiguous expressions should be built on the concrete knowledge of the transcendence of God. Similarly, he vocalises the same maxim in his commentary on ʿayn in chapter Ṭāha. He states, “and none would consider such an interpretation [of ʿayn] exceptī wahm man iʿtaqada al-tashbīh wa lam yaʿrif rabbah (in the mind of a person who believes in tashbīh and does not know God).”\textsuperscript{1184} To al-Māturīdī the core of the dispute is that there is an underlying element of tashbīh in the doctrine of the proponents of such an approach, the apparent and literal approach, or a profound element of ignorance of the notion of God in Islam. He concludes, “law ʿarafa rabbahu ḥaqqa maʿ rifatihi lakān lā yataṣawwvar tashbīh al-khalq bihī (if he truly knew his God, he would not have imagined that it is permitted to assimilate the creatures to God or to assimilate God to his creatures).”\textsuperscript{1185} Such a practice is from the traits of the blasphemous.\textsuperscript{1186}

Albeit al-Māturīdī’s theological commentary terminates in chapter Ṭāha, the deliberation of his methodology remains vivid in verse 27 chapter al-Muʿminūn and verse 48 chapter al-Ṭūr.

\textsuperscript{1184} Al-Māturīdī, Taʿwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 9, 196.
\textsuperscript{1185} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1186} Ibid.
In the former, he revisits the same event chapter Hūd addresses, which is the command of God given to Noah to construct the ark. The verse reads, “So We inspired to him [Noah], construct the ship bi ‘a ‘yuninā and our inspiration.” The latter addresses Prophet Muhamad demanding that he remains patience in the face of the calamities of his mission. The verse reads, “And be patient, [O Muḥammad], for the decision of your Lord. for indeed, you are bi a’yuninā…” On the verse of chapter al-Mu’minūn, al-Māturīdī proposes that the cause of the statement is that Noah thought his enemies will hinder him from building the Ark. Correspondingly God comforted him with this verse and informed him that “nanṣuruka ‘alayhim bi ḥaythu lā yamlıkūna man’aka ‘an ittikhādhīhā (we will let you triumph over them and they will not be able to stop you from building the Ark).” Al-naṣr (triumph), thus, is his interpretation of ‘ayn of God in chapter al-Mu’minūn. This interpretation, besides being unparalleled in Sunni exegesis, avoids any anthropomorphic implications and is devoted to the influence of the context of the verse and the circumstances of the event the verse addresses. Thus, al-Māturīdī remains faithful to both his conceptual approach and his paradigm of interpretation. The same is discerned from his commentary on chapter al-Ṭūr verse 48 where he interprets ‘ayn as “wa’d al-naṣr wa al-ma’ūnah (the promise of God to Prophet Muḥammad of triumph and aid).”

Al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the ‘ayn expressions in the Qur’an, when associated with God, is, thus, an avantgarde analysis and study of the theological facet of the pertinent verses and is not a general observation of their meanings. This is yet another distinct characteristic of his exegesis that separates it from all other assessed Sunni and Transoxianan exegeses. It

1187 Ibid, 10, 25.
1188 Ibid.
1189 Ibid, 14, 185.
substantiates the hypothesis the thesis theorised that al-Māturīdī intended for Ta’wilāt to be the first Sunni theological exegesis and not a conventional narrative and traditional exegesis.

Notwithstanding the aim of al-Māturīdī inferred above, the significance of his commentary on the ‘āyn related verses surpasses the Sunni exegesis domain. It gifts an equally important contribution to Sunni theology. They are the sole extant personal commentary of al-Māturīdī on the ‘āyn controversy. Kitāb al-tawḥīd is completely void of any commentary from al-Māturīdī on the ‘āyn expression and the discourse about it being interpreted as an attribute of God.

In addition, his commentary represents a complete shift in the approach of al-Māturīdī to the subject of the names and attributes on the macro level. Whilst his approach in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd is predominantly rational and polemical. His approach in Ta’wilāt is definitely more Qur’anic but more important synthetical between reason and tradition. Even in terms of clarity and cohesion, in the context of the yad and ‘āyn verses, al-Māturīdī lays out his thoughts and criticism in a more digestible fashion for the reader.

In conclusion, the analysis of al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the ‘āyn verses confirm that he does not classify ‘āyn as a new or distinct attribute of God. In all the verses, where the expression appears al-Māturīdī interprets ‘āyn as: (1) the care and nourishment of God, (2) the protection of God; (3) the instructions and teachings of God; (4) the victory of God; and (5) the aid of God. All these interpretations point to the actions of God. they are manifestations of his attributes of ‘ilm (knowledge), quwwah (power), and rahmah (mercy). The same conclusion was drawn with the yad expression. This indicates that al-Māturīdī’s perception of all anthropomorphic expressions is that they are idiomatic expressions God uses to convey a phrasal
or idiomatic meaning. They should, consequently, be comprehended in light of the contextual theme of their verses and should not be treated as single lexical words of independent meanings.

None amongst the investigated exegetes evinces any interest in addressing the theological elements in the ‘ayn verses despite their importance and serious implications. Al-Māturīdī, conversely, capitalises on all opportunities to lucidly establish his position. As a result, al-Māturīdī is the only exegete to set up a framework and implement it. He is the only one to present new interpretations and support them with an argument. He is the only exegete to adhere to his methodology in all his exegetical study of the ‘ayn verses.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the yad and ‘ayn related verses proves essential to the comprehension of his theology on anthropomorphism in the form of God and the evaluation of his contribution to Sunni theological exegesis.

Al-Māturīdī does not give yad, when annexed to God, a set meaning that he applies to all relevant verses. He gives consideration to the context, the cause of revelation, the objective and the circumstances that surround the revelation of a verse. As a result, he interprets yad to mean: (1) bounties; (2) distinction and status 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.

The examination of al-Māturīdī’s interpretation of the yad, in its various morphological forms, discloses another significant finding in his theology. He does not classify yad as an
inherent attribute-ṣifah. It is rather a tashbīḥ ṣifah, a simile expression, used to describe mainly the actions of God. This is consistent with a statement al-Māturīdī made on the conceptual level in chapter 4 when he differentiated between the various definitions of the word of ṣifah and how it can relate to either an inherent attribute of God or function merely as a tashbīḥ, (a simile) apparatus.
CHAPTER 6: THE ISTIWĀ’ OF GOD

6.1 Introduction

The istiwā’ of God is a key topic of debate in Islamic theology, not only for istiwā’ is one of the main anthropomorphic expressions the Muslim theologians address but also since it introduces a new dimension to the debate about the names and attributes of God. In the previous chapter, al-Māturīdī resisted the interpretation of yad as a ‘hand of God’ and ‘ayn as an ‘eye of God’ chiefly for they suggest a physical image of God and any physical image attributed to God assimilates him to his creatures and therefore must be renounced. Whilst yad and ‘ayn essentially relate to the nature of God and have no relevance or interaction with God’s creation, the notion of istiwā’ represents a direct interaction with some of God’s notable creatures, predominantly the ‘arsh and limitedly the heavens. Hence, istiwā’ is more of an action than an attribute. Eventhough, Holtzman does not discuss istiwā’, or al-Māturīdī’s view on it, in her writing about anthropomorphism, she does list istiwā’ as one of the actions the Qur’an ascribes to God.

1190 The meaning of the ‘arsh will be addressed thoroughly later in the chapter in the context of the verses that associate it with istiwā’ of God. Lexically, ‘arsh is commonly used in Arabic to refer to the throne of the king where he sits and rules. For further information see: Jawhari, Al-Sihâh Tâj Al-Lughah Wa Sihâh Al-’Arabiyyah, 3, 1009.

1191 Al-Māturīdī’s theological views on istiwā’, in the context of Kitâb al-Tawhîd or Ta’wilât, are completely absent from the works of Livnat Holtzman and Miriam Ovadia. Even in the context of the chapter, in which they studied the divine aboveness, they do not discuss al-Māturīdī’s views or even acknowledge them. The main contributor for the exclusion of al-Māturīdī from Holtzman and Ovadia’s work is that he does not fit in their scope of research. They focus on the development of ḥadīth-based argumentations in Islamic theology. An area, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, to which al-Māturīdī does not contribute. The theological views of the entire Māturīdiyyah school, in fact, does not appear in Holtzman’s and Ovadia’s works. Holtzman does recognise the presence of the Māturīdiyyah school in central Asia but does not cite them in her works. It could be argued that the dominance of the Ḥanbalī school in Holtzman’s works may be a factor. The main conflicts of the Ḥanbalīs, across centuries, were with the Ash’arī and Mu’tazilite schools. Hence, they feature in her work strongly. For further information see: Livnat Holtzman and Miriam Ovadia, "On Divine Aboveuseness (Al-Fawqîyya): The Development of Rationalized Ḥadîth-Based Argumentations in Islamic Theology,” (2018); Livnat Holtzman, "Islamic Theology,” in De Gruyter Handbook of Medieval Studies, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 59; Holtzman, "The Bedouin Who Asked Questions: The Later Ḥanbalites and the Revival of the Myth of Abū Rażîn Al-’uqaylî.”

1192 The assumption that the Qur’an ascribes istiwā’ to God is not accepted completely by al-Māturīdī. The chapter will list and discuss the various interpretations al-Māturīdī postulates to istiwā’.

1193 Holtzman, "Anthropomorphism,” 47.
This chapter investigates the theological position of al-Māturīdī on *istiwā’* and verses related to it in *Ta’wīlāt* to unravel his views on the matter. In the same vein, the chapter assesses al-Māturīdī’s conceptual framework and methodology in explaining *istiwā’* to verify if it is consistent with the methodology he adopts when analysing the *yad* and ‘*ayn* expressions. The chapter, additionally, compares al-Māturīdī’s commentary with that of the most prominent Sunni and Transoxianan exegetes to assess his scholarly contributions to Sunni theological exegesis as far as the topic of the anthropomorphism in action is concerned. Finally, it contrasts his writing on *istiwā’* in *Ta’wīlāt* with *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* to develop a comprehensive appreciation and understanding of his theological position on the subject and to discover the nuances that exist between both texts.

### 6.2 Al-Māturīdī and the Sunni and Transoxianan exegetes on *istiwā’* and creation of the heavens

The notion of *istiwā’* in the Qur’ān, whether as a lexical utterance, an action or an attribute is not affiliated with God alone, rather, it is used to describe the actions and traits of humans, angels, plants and even objects.\(^\text{1194}\) This usage should be noted to prevent the treatment of *istiwā’* as an unknown or uncommon notion that the Qur’ān preserves purposefully to describe God alone. *Au contraire, istiwā’* is a notion that appears often in the Qur’ān and it denotes various meanings and describes various actions associated with multiple entities.

\(^\text{1194}\) For further information read the following verses. Verse 14 of chapter al-Qaṣaṣ, verse 29 of chapter al-Fatḥ and verse 6 of chapter al-Najm.
In association with God, the word *istiwa'*\textsuperscript{1195} appears throughout the Qur’an in one morphological form – past tense. Hence, the verb *istawā* (he performed *istiwa’*) is the only form encountered in the Qur’an in association with God. The verb is utilised in nine verses located in nine separate chapters.\textsuperscript{1196} Some of these chapters belong to the Makkī category whereas others the Madanī category. One of the possible contributing factors to *istiwa’*’s appearance, in both categories, is because the Qur’an associates it with the main stages of creation of all the realms, that define the cosmos, and how the creation began. A subject the Qur’ān highlights in many chapters and in this context the *istiwa’* of God appears.

### 6.2.1 Al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the association of *istiwa’* with heavens in al-Baqarah

All the verses covering the *istiwa’* of God raise it post the completion of the entire creation. The only exceptions are verse 29 chapter al-Baqarah and verse 11 chapter Fuṣṣilat. They pinpoint *istiwā’* taking place after beginning the creation of the earthly world and before completing the creation of the heavens.

Al-Māturīdī, as well as other exegetes, commence their discussion of the meaning of *istiwā’* in verse 29 chapter al-Baqarah by relating the other exegetes’ opinions. He lists three

---

\textsuperscript{1195} The notion of *istiwā’* should not be equated with the notion of *al-fawqiyyah* (aboveness of God). The latter is rather more specific and connected to ḥadīth reports rather than the Qur’an. Holtzman and Ovadia assert this fact and state, “It was the Ḥadīth, rather than the Qur’an that best served the proponents of the concept of God’s aboveness.” Hence, the ḥadīth reports constituted the main narrative of the ultra-traditionalists on *al-fawqiyyah*. They, as Holtzman and Ovadia advise, compiled as many ḥadīth reports as possible as textual evidence for affirming the aboveness of God and did not rely on the Qur’an since the notion of *istiwā’* does not offer the decisiveness they aspire to affirm divine aboveness and directionality to God. The various possible interpretations of *istiwā’*, from all the exegetes, will be investigated and analysed in the subsequent sections of the chapter. For further information see: Holtzman and Ovadia, "On Divine Aboveness (Al-Fawqiyya): The Development of Rationalized Ḥadīth- Based Argumentations in Islamic Theology," 229-33, 63.

\textsuperscript{1196} These verses will be outlined and critically analysed in the consecutive sections of the chapter.
opinions, 1) *istiwā* of *al-dukhān*, 2) *tamma* and 3) *istawlā*. An early yet important observation is that al-Māturīdī remains faithful to the same layout he used in his commentary on the ‘*ayn* and *yad* verses, which is to put first others’ opinions on the topic and delay his analysis and conclusions to the end, an approach not observed in his study of the topics of God’s existence and *tawḥīd* covered in previous chapters. The prompt for a new organisational rendition in this case is the presence of multiple opinions on the subject.

The first meaning al-Māturīdī refers to is *istawlā al-dukhān*. He states, “one of the possible meanings of *istiwā*’ here is *istawlā al-dukhān* (the smoke performed *istiwā*).” Al-Māturīdī is the first exegete, as far as extant literature demonstrates, to list this meaning as a possible interpretation of *istiwā*’ in the context of the heavens. He does not name the source for this opinion nor does he elaborate on what is meant by it. Al-Māturīdī’s statement is ambiguous at first for al-Baqarah verse speaks about God’s creation of the heavens and there is no mention of smoke. However, al-Māturīdī refers the reader to verse 11 chapter Fuṣṣilat, the only other verse that speaks about *istiwā*’ in the context of the creation of the heavens. He argues that the meaning of *istiwā*’ in chapter al-Baqarah is “…similar to what He (God) states (in verse 11 chapter Fuṣṣilat) ‘then He made *istiwā*’ to the heaven when it was smoke like’…” This meaning is particularly important with modern cosmology as formation of stars and planets involves dust clouds within the nebulae and their formation requires force.

---

1197 The meaning of each interpretation will be laid out in the subsequent paragraphs.
1198 Chapter 3 and chapter 4.
1199 This interpretation, thus, does not ascribe the action of *istiwā*’ to God. It suggests that the doer is the smoke of the heavens.
1200 Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, 1, 68.
1201 Ibid.
The second possible meaning al-Māturīdī tabulates for istiwa‘ is tamma, which means “to complete” or “to complete to perfection.” He supports this interpretation by referring to verse 14 chapter al-Qaṣṣaṣ. The verse reads, “balagha ashuddahu wa istawā (he reached his full strength and became perfect).” In chapter al-Qaṣṣaṣ, the verb istawā’\(^{1202}\) is used to describe how God blessed Moses by letting him reach the state of perfection in body and mind. In this opinion, al-Māturīdī aims at interpreting the istiwa‘ of God to the heavens by exploring the meanings of the verb istawā in other Qur’anic verses such as chapter al-Qaṣṣaṣ. Thus, al-Māturīdī seeks to elicit the meaning of istiwa‘ through the various uses of the term in the Qur’an unlike other exegetes this study examines.\(^{1203}\)

The third possible interpretation of istiwa‘ al-Māturīdī mentions is istawlā (to govern, dominate and have complete control).\(^{1204}\) He makes no mention of the interpretations that some of the early exegetes reported such as istaqarra (to settle and rest) or irtafa‘a (to rise above).\(^{1205}\) This could well be because al-Baqarah verse does not speak about the notion of ‘arsh as all other verses do. Even if this presumption, for argument’s sake, is accepted, it would justify dropping istaqarra (to settle and rest) but not irtafa‘a, the interpretation Ṭabarī zealously defends as will be seen shortly. Thus, al-Māturīdī’s omission of these interpretations is not due to the context of al-Baqarah verse, rather it is the product of al-Māturīdī’s deliberate filtering of the interpretations. Even when al-Māturīdī decides to relate the exegetical opinions of other scholars, he does not simply list all the transmitted interpretations. He includes only the opinions he deems

\(^{1202}\) The verb here is used in the past tense. In other words, it is used in the same morphological form that God uses when associating istiwa‘ with himself, whether in the context of the creation of the heavens or in the context of the ‘arsh.

\(^{1203}\) The opinions and interpretations of the Sunni and Transoxianan exegetes will be outlined and analysed in the next sub-section.

\(^{1204}\) Ibn Manẓūr, \textit{Lisān Al ’Arab}, 14, 414.

\(^{1205}\) Ṭabarī, \textit{Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an}, 1, 429.
acceptable, or at least tolerable. Al-Māturīdī, therefore, from the outset, shows the critical analysis approach he commits to in his interpretation of *istikār* of God.

On a conceptual level, the interpretations listed by al-Māturīdī exhibit his resolve against *tashbīh* (assimilation of God to his creation). All the interpretations he proposes are far from *tashbīh*. Conversely, all the interpretations he overlooks legitimate, remotely some may argue, the possibility of anthropomorphic interpretations of *istikār*.

In addition, the brevity of al-Māturīdī in his commentary on the opinions, he lists, indicates that they are not at the centre of his attention. His primary focus is not explaining or discussing them, rather, in chapter al-Baqarah, al-Māturīdī’s focus is on laying out his modus operandi in the face of *al-mushabbihah* – a current al-Māturīdī overtly addresses and wishes to ensure that he is distinguished from them. Hence, he affirms, “Al-aṣl ‘indanā (our fundamental principle)” in dealing with the verses that “allati ẓannat al-mushabbihah anna fihā taḥqīq wasf Allah bimā yastaḥqīq kathīr mina al-khalq al-wasf bihī ‘alā al-tashābuh (al-mushabbihah thought it establishes to God many descriptions that belong only to creation and assimilate God to creation...).” This leading statement from al-Māturīdī leaves no doubt the commentary that will follow is not purely exegetical but in fact, theological in an exegetical milieu, intended not only to counter the *mushabbihah*’s mindset but also to establish al-Māturīdī’s stance and approach to exegeting anthropomorphic expressions. Accordingly, al-Māturīdī informs the reader of the two governing maxims that define and influence his

---

1206 It is a title given to those who assimilate God to his creation and interpret anthropomorphic expressions literally. For further information see: "Al-Mushabbiha," in Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936), Encyclopaedia of Islam (Brill).
1207 Al-Māturīdī, Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 1, 68-69.
1208 Ibid, 1, 68.
interpretation. The first maxim is, “naṣifuhu bimā jā’a bihī al-tanzīl (we describe God with what has been mentioned in the Qur’an).” The second is “we attest that he (God) lā yushbihu ‘alā mā dhukira mina al-fī ’l fīhi bi ghayrih (is not similar in the actions (that the Qur’an ascribe to him) to those of others.” The first maxim unquestionably declares the traditional roots of al-Māturīdī. He relies on the Qur’an in learning and understanding God’s attributes. The second maxim, similarly, seeks its legitimacy from the Qur’anic belief “anna Allah laysa kamithlihi shay’ (that there is nothing similar unto God)” derived from chapter al-Shūrā verse 11. This way of opening by outlining interpretative maxims marks a distinction for al-Māturīdī does not do so when analysing the yad and ‘ayn verses. One possibility is that the controversy that surrounded istiwa’ of God was more far-reaching than the rest. It could also be because this verse came earlier in the Qur’an than other relevant verses.

Notwithstanding the above, tradition does not obliterate the legitimacy of ‘aql (reason) in al-Māturīdī’s epistemology. He stresses the legitimacy of reason when he asserts that the notion of tashbīh, which his second principle denounces, has no place in the Islamic doctrine. He states, “madfū’ bi al-‘aql wa al-sam’ jamī’an (it is dispelled completely by reason and tradition).” The above statement not only confirms the importance of reason to al-Māturīdī but it also highlights the vision he seeks – a synthesis between reason and tradition.

In line with his synthetic vision, al-Māturīdī ensues his Qur’anic proofs with the rational ones. He emphasizes, “…lam yajuz an yuqaddar al-ṣāni’ ‘inda al-wasf bi al-fī ’l kaghayrihi (it is not permitted for the creator, when speaking of his actions, to be assimilated to others) …lima

---

1209 Ibid, 1, 69.
1210 Ibid.
1211 Ibid.
1212 Ibid.
yaṣīr bi dhālika aḥad al-khalāʾiq (because this would render him as one of the creatures).”\textsuperscript{1213}

One of al-Māturīdī’s concerns in the notion of tashbīḥ is that it violates the sanctity of God who must transcend above his creatures.

Al-Māturīdī does not suffice with the above argument but even contends that the presumption of similarity does not only violate the notion of Godship but is rationally impossible. He states, “lā yajūz an yakūna lahu mithl fīsh’āy (it is not permitted or possible for God to have an equal or a parallel in anything).”\textsuperscript{1214} The reason for such an absolute conclusion is “idh lā yūjad ḥadathu fī aw qidam dhalika al-shay’ mina al-wajh alladhi ashbaha Allah (because there are no finite qualities in God as there are no infinite qualities in what others may falsely think is similar to him)…”\textsuperscript{1215} This is a rational argument par excellence. Al-Māturīdī’s logic is as follows. If God is infinite and his creatures are finite then it is impossible for them to be similar in any fashion for these two qualities are inherently contradictory of one another. A finite entity cannot be partially infinite, and the infinite cannot be partially finite.

After formalizing his conceptual framework and governing maxims, al-Māturīdī proposes a universal method to interpret the anthropomorphic expressions. He infers this method from his analysis of particular verses in the Qur’an, associated with God. He advises that “tamām al-bayān (the complete comprehension)”\textsuperscript{1216} of some Qur’anic expressions can only be achieved if “tukhuriya al-kalām makhraj al-ikhtiṣār (if some of the words are omitted and the verse is abbreviated).”\textsuperscript{1217} Al-Māturīdī’s comment is difficult to grasp without an example. In simpler

\textsuperscript{1213} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1214} Ibid, 1, 70.
\textsuperscript{1215} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1216} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1217} Ibid.
terms, he underlines that a literal word by word explanation in some verses is wrong because some utterances are there to serve an allegoric or rhetorical role rather than a purely lexical one. He provides multiple examples to clarify his point. One such example is verse 24 chapter al-Mā’idah. The verse reads “…Go you and your Lord and fight you two…” It is a quote from the argument that takes place between some Israelites and Prophet Moses when he commands them to enter Palestine and confront its indigenous inhabitants. Some of the Israelites refused to fight and objected with the above statement. Al-Māturīdī comments on the composition of the verse and says, “…For example, his (God’s) statement…means go (with the power) of your God…as it is known that he (Moses) fights by (the power of) his Lord and this is how it should be understood…” A literal understanding would necessitate that God and Moses go together physically and fight the Palestinians, which according to al-Māturīdī, a meaning no exegete proposes. He ensures that all exegetes consent that the conjunction “wa (and)” is not used in its primary sense; rather it is used as a marker to express the phrase “by the power of (God).”

Another example al-Māturīdī cites is verse 22 chapter al-Fajr, “And your Lord has come and the angels, rank upon rank.” Al-Māturīdī argues the meaning here is “jā’a rabbuka bi al-malak (your Lord has brought down the angels rank upon rank).” This interpretation is inferred from the multiple verses that stipulate that angels do not ascend or descend without God’s command. One of these verses is verse 8 chapter al-Ḥijr, “We do not send down the angels except with truth.” Repeatedly, al-Māturīdī resorts to Qur’anic evidence that cannot be disputed, in his view, to substantiate his methods and interpretations. It is possible to perceive this as al-Māturīdī’s way of giving his views a Qur’anic cover but the context of his commentary

1218 Ibid.
1219 Ibid.
does not suggest so. His writing seems to be mirroring his thought process as he analyses the verses and endeavours to comprehend their meanings in light of the Qur’an.

### 6.2.2 The commentaries of the other exegetes on istiwā’ verses

Despite the fact that Muqātil touches on istiwā’ in his exegesis, quite limitedly, verse 29 of al-Baqarah does not capture his interest. He overlooks istiwā’ there completely similar to ‘Ayyāshī who does not offer a single comment on the notion of istiwā’ anywhere in his exegesis. Muqātil simply repeats the words of the verse without any explanation, “istawā ilā al-samā’ fa bada’a bi khalaqa al-arḍ (God performed istiwā’ to the heavens and began creating them and created the earth).” It is possible that Muqātil does not engage the subject since the verse, in chapter al-Baqarah, does not associate the istiwā’ of God with the ‘arsh, as most of the verses do, and does not tie it with the completion of the creation of the cosmos. This omission, nonetheless, does not falter the willingness of the other exegetes to comment on the notion of istiwā in chapter al-Baqarah.

Ṭabarī is amongst the exegetes who delve into the issue directly. He begins his commentary with the opinion that interprets istiwā’, in al-Baqarah verse, as aqbalā (to come forward or towards). He states, “Some of them (exegetes) said that istiwā ilā al-samā’ aqbalā ‘alayhā (he performed istiwā’ to the heavens means he came forward towards it).”

---

1220 It is convenient to open the discussion with Muqātil for two reasons. One, it follows the chronological order and second it is easier to lay out the analysis of the commentaries of the various exegetes and the investigation of their works.
1221 Thus, there is no commentary from any Shi’ite exegete from al-Māturīdi’s region on the istiwā’ of God.
1223 It will be defined subsequently when the verse that address are analysed.
proponents of this interpretation, whom Ṭabarī does not name, backed their explanation by quoting Arabic poetry that cites the use of *istiwā’* in such a sense. Ṭabarī, however, does not accept this interpretation. He questions the relevance of the cited poetry to the interpretation above and faults it. He contends, “and this explanation of the poetry is *khaṭa’* (wrong).”1225 To him the poetry uses *istiwā’* to mean *istiqāmah*, to be straight up on the path or to sit up.1226 Ṭabarī then relates a second interpretation that ascribes the action of *istiwā’* to the heavens instead of God, “and some of them said *istawat al-samā’* bihī (the heavens made *istiwā’* because of God).”1227 He does not elaborate any further on what this interpretation means or who said it, rather he identifies a third view that interprets *istiwā’* as ‘*amada lahā* (he directed his attention to it)1228 and a fourth one *al-‘uluw* (to rise).1229

The fourth view is where Ṭabarī begins to offer further explanation. Firstly, he defines *al-‘uluw* and states, “*al-‘uluw huwa al-irtifā’* (it is to rise up).”1230 At this point, Ṭabarī delivers his verdict and openly endorses this interpretation, “*wa awlā al-ma’ ānī* (the most correct interpretation) ‘*alā ‘alayhina wa irtafa’a* (God went on top of them [the heavens] and rose). He managed them with his omnipotence and created them seven heavens.”1231 One of the subtle indicators that foreshadows Ṭabarī’s favouritism of this interpretation, other than his open endorsement, is that he provides a chain of transmission. He names al-Rabi’ ibn Anas (d. 757 CE) as the authority from whom he learnt it and relates a report, in which al-Rabi’ says, “*irtafa’a ilā al-samā’* (God rose to the heavens).”1232 It seems that Ṭabarī wanted to give the impression

---

1225 Ibid.
1226 Ibid.
1227 Ibid, 1, 429.
1228 Ibid.
1229 Ibid.
1230 Ibid.
1231 Ibid, 1, 430.
1232 Ibid, 1, 429.
that this is the only interpretation that has the predecessors’ endorsement. As will become clear when Samarqandi’s commentary is examined, however, this interpretation does not represent the single transmitted stance from the early scholars on the topic of *istiwā’* of God.

Whilst Ṭabarī confirms that this interpretation caused a controversy amongst scholars and that some of them argued against it, denying that God has risen to the heavens and explaining that what rose is the *dukhān* (smoke like matter), from which the heavens were created, he remained faithful to it. He ridicules those who deny this interpretation *haraban* (out of fear and to escape) the implication that God *kāna taḥtahā* (was below the heavens) and then rose upon them. Ṭabarī contends that other interpretations such as *aqbala* (he came towards) are not any better. They could be challenged on the same grounds for they could imply that God was “*mudbiran ‘an al-samā’* (turned his back, or was away, from the heavens)” and then he *aqbala* (moved towards them). He stresses that he can refute any interpretation on such grounds and insists on the one he adopted.

In the same commentary, in which Ṭabarī attacks other interpretations, he confirms that *istiwā’* has multiple meanings in the Arabic language. He states, “*istiwā’ fi kalām al- ‘Arab munṣarīf ilā wujūh* (istiwā’ in the language of Arabs could have multiple meanings).” He proceeds to list the main meanings. It could indicate, 1) the end of one’s youth and strength, 2) *istaqāma* (being upright or for things to go well for a person after being difficult), 3) *aqbala* (to head towards something), 4) *istawlā* (to possess, to conquer or to dominate), and 5) *al-‘uluw wa

---
1233 Ibid.
1234 Ibid, 1, 430.
1235 Ibid.
1236 Ibid.
1237 Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fi Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an*, 1, 430.
al-irtifā’ (to be high and to rise above something such as a throne). If such meanings are accepted in Arabic language then why does Ṭabarî classify them as “mustankar (denounced)” and “taʼwil bil-majhūl (an exegesis based on ignorance)”? He does not offer any explanation.

The major concern in Ṭabarî’s commentary though is not just the unjustified denouncement. It is the poor establishment of the validity of his interpretation which he labels as “the most correct of all”. He may have succeeded limitedly in faulting other interpretations, which is his right as an academic and a critic, but felt short, if not miscarried, the opportunity to prove methodically why his interpretation should be endorsed. It is a missed opportunity since Ṭabarî does not comment on istiwā’ again in his exegesis. He repeats a single phrase in his commentary on verse 5 chapter Ṭāha to reassure that istiwā’ means irtifā’ and ʻuluw (to rise and be above) and refers the reader to his commentary on chapter al-Baqarah.

Samarqandī’s approach to al-Baqarah verse is briefer than Ṭabarî. He does not seem interested in the debate at all. He advises that “al-nās (the scholars)” in relation to istiwā’ are divided into three parties. The first is the traditional scholars, whose aphorism is “naqra’uha wa nu’minu bih ʻāwalā nufassiruhāh (we read it, we believe in it but we do not interpret it).” The second is the mushabbiḥah (assimilators) who advocate the dictum, “naqra’uha wa nufassiruhāh ʻalā ma yaḥtamiluḥu dhāhir al-lughah (we read it and we interpret it according to the apparent meaning in the language).” The third is the proponent of taʼwīl who provided

1238 Ibid.
1239 Ibid.
1240 Ibid, 18, 270.
1241 Al-nās is usually translated as people but in the context of the discussion, Samarqandī is using it to refer to the Muslim scholars and the various schools who engaged in the discourse about istiwā’.
1242 Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 1, 39.
1243 Ibid.
1244 Ibid.
two possible interpretations of *istiwā’*. “ṣa’ada amruh ilā al-samā’” (the command of God ascended to the heavens)” and “*aqbala ilā khalq al-samā’* (he focused on the creation of the heavens).” Samarqandī does not endorse any of the three opinions he enumerates. He does not explain them nor justify why their proponents proclaimed them. His commentary, nevertheless, undermines Ṭabarī’s claim that the *irtifā’* interpretation represents the predecessors’ stance as Samarqandī confirms their position was to simply to believe in it without interpreting it.

In consideration of the above, the commentary of al-Māturīdī surpasses the exegetical commentaries of the other exegetes on multiple levels. From the outset, al-Māturīdī portrays a genuine interest in studying the theological aspects of *istiwā’*, at least in chapter al-Baqarah. whilst others save Ṭabarī and, to a lesser extent Samarqandī, overlooked it completely. Al-Māturīdī presents his conceptual framework, specifies his epistemology in the study of *istiwā’* and formulates the axioms necessary to the correct understanding of the notion in the Qur’an. All necessary steps to delve in a methodical and academic interpretation of the verses at hand. The zeal of al-Māturīdī in setting his conceptual framework and methodology in interpreting the anthropomorphic expressions distracted him from explaining what *istiwā’* means, in the context of al-Baqarah verse, when associated with heavens. He compensates for that when he revisits the topic in chapter Fuṣṣilat verse 11.

---

1245 Ibid.
6.2.3 Al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the association of *istiwā’* with the heavens in Chapter Fuṣṣilat

In chapter Fuṣṣilat verse 11, al-Māturīdī proposes that *istiwā’* to the heavens could be attributed to God as an action, alternatively could also be attributed to some of his creatures. He commences with the latter and accordingly interprets the verb *istawā* as *tamma* (to become complete and perfect). Al-Māturīdī does not lock the action to one creature rather suggests that it may be ascribed to one of two phenomena. The first is *al-manāfi’* (bounties and provisions), “*istawat al-manāfi’ wa al-aqwāt allatī qaddarahā fī al-ard* (the benefits and provisions that God decreed for the earth have become complete).” The reference here is to the proof of *manāfi’* used to establish *tawḥīd* as discussed in chapter three. There are benefits and provisions creatures on earth need and they are linked to the heavens. For instance, the heat of the sun, the clouds and the rain. Al-Māturīdī proposes that *istiwā’* could point to the completion and perfection of cosmic systems that deliver these benefits, “*mā lawlā al-samā’ lam yastawī manāfi’ al-ard* (without which the benefits of the earth would not have been complete).”

Al-Māturīdī ensues this possibility with an unprecedented suggestion that the interpretation could be directed to *al-hawā’ wa al-jaw* (the atmosphere and the air), “*thumma istawā al-hawā’ wa al-jaw alladhi bayna al-samā’ wa al-ard* (the air and the atmosphere between the earth and the heaven completed its rise to the heavens).” He argues that the heaven was *multaziqah bi al-ard* (attached to the earth) with no atmosphere between them. God, then, created the atmosphere in the middle and it, atmosphere, rose to a separate space above earth acting as a buffer. Both interpretations are original to al-Māturīdī and represent a genuine

---

1247 Ibid.
1248 Ibid.
effort to provide new understanding and not just transmission of what has already been reported as is the case with other exegeses. Al-Māturīdī incorporates the theme of the gradual creation of the heavens and the earth into the explanations he renders.

The theme of the heavens remains central in the interpretation of al-Māturīdī, even when he attends to the second scenario when the action of *istiwā’* being attributed to God. As before, al-Māturīdī lists two possible interpretations. The first is “*istawā’ amruh wa mulkuh* (‘the command of God and his kingship’ reached its climax with the creation of the heavens).”\(^{1249}\) The second is “*istawā’ al-maṣṣūd bi khalq al-ard wa ahlahā wa mā fīhā bi khalq al-samā’* (the objective behind the creation of earth, its inhabitants and everything in it has been completed when God completed the creation of the heavens).”\(^{1250}\) In both instances, the notion of *itmām* and *itqān* (completion and perfection), which relates to the *tamma* interpretation above, remains pivotal albeit it takes nuanced form. Perhaps one of the reasons for the *tamma* interpretation remaining essential is because al-Māturīdī does not really ascribe *istiwā’* to God directly in the context of the heavens. Indeed, he lists these two interpretations, under the category of *ṣarf al-istiwā’ ilā Allah* (to associate *istiwā’* with God) but in reality, he affiliates *istiwā’* with the actions of God and not his *dhāt*. It is the command of God that gets implemented fully. Al-Māturīdī does not state that God implements his command fully rather it is the objective of God that gets fulfilled. Crucially, in al-Māturīdī’s view *istiwā’* in the context of the heavens is not a God related attribute, neither it is an action God takes directly. It is rather a manifestation of the effect of God’s command and his objective to complete his creation. Al-Māturīdī does not take

\(^{1249}\) Ibid.

\(^{1250}\) Ibid.
the discourse any further in chapter Fuṣṣilat. It is clear though that he wants to ensure no interpretation intimates a movement or a change in the dhāt of God.

With the above objective in mind, al-Māturīdī does not openly favour one interpretation over the other. Though he seems to prefer the first two he lists, the manāfī’ (benefits) of the earth and the atmosphere. He accepts all possibilities of istiwdā’ as long as they fall within the framework, he formulates in chapter al-Baqarah showing openness on his part without forcing any interpretation.

6.2.4 The commentaries of the other exegetes on the association of istiwdā’ with the heavens in chapter Fuṣṣilat

The other exegeses do not report the interpretations al-Māturīdī lists, on Fuṣṣilat verse, and do not provide any personal interpretations. ‘Ayyāshī does not comment at all and Muqātil resorts to the ambiguity of repeating the same words the verse uses without any explanation or clarification. The same applies to Ṭabarī who, in a very short phrase, refers to his commentary on chapter al-Baqarah, where he fiercely insists on the absolute correctness of irtifā’ ‘interpretation. Even Samarqandī, the only exception out of all the assessed exegetes to interpret istiwdā’ as the command of God, does not speak about the tamām (completion) of God’s command. Rather he says, “sa’ad amruhu ilā al-samā’ (God’s command has risen to the heavens) wa huwa qawluhu kun (and it is his command ‘be’).”1251 Samarqandī appears desperate to reconcile between the two different interpretations, irtifā’ (rising) and amr (command). Even though his statement could be easily misconstrued to insinuate that God is below the heavens, suggesting a place and

1251 Samarqandī, _Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm_, 3, 220.
transition to God, he intends to say that the kun command after it finished from the creation of the earth it progressed to the creation of the heavens. His second suggested interpretation confirms this, “’amada ilā khalq al-samā’ (God focused or intended to create the heavens),”1252 but more importantly so does his interpretation of istiwa’ everywhere else in the Qur’an, when associated with the ‘arsh.

6.3 The istiwa’ of God and the interpretation of ‘arsh as kingship

6.3.1 The first scenario – the seven days of creation

The first verse to speak of istiwa’ and ‘arsh is verse 54 chapter al-‘araf, “indeed Your Lord is Allah who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then he istawā on the ‘arsh... He created the sun the moon and the stars (all) governed by laws under his command ...” Al-Māturīdī does not interpret istiwa’ directly or independently. He approaches the notion through the context of the verse, as he did in his interpretation of al-Baqarah verse.1253 Al-Māturīdī instructs that the creation of the cosmos in the six days could either point to the “khalq usūl al-ashyā’ (the essence of the species and the plants)”1254, from which other creatures could multiply and flourish later or it could refer to the “khalq kulliyat kulli shay’ (the creation of all things).”1255 At this stage, al-Māturīdī begins to construct his argument, “in kāna ‘alā al-awwal (if the first interpretation is adopted) fahuwa sittah mina al-sab’ah allatī ‘alayhā madār al-

1252 Ibid.
1253 In his discussion of the concept of istiwa’, Van Ess seems to rely heavily on the Prophetic traditions rather than the Qur’anic verse. He cites the Qur’an at the beginning but swiftly progresses to narrations about istiwa’ that interpret it as sitting on the throne. The narrations Van Ess uses are deemed by the majority of Muslim scholars as forgeries. For further information see: Van Ess and Goldbloom, “Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra. Volume 4 : A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam,” 448.
1254 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 369.
1255 Ibid.
mudad wa al-azminah (then this is a reference to six of the seven days of creation that specify the trajectory of durations and times).”¹²⁵⁶ Al-Māturīdī is suggesting that if the reference to the creation in six days is to the creation of the essences from which all creatures multiplied and developed gradually then there must be a seventh day because God, in the verse, “lām yadhkurī dhālik a mumtahanan (did not speak of an accountable creature- the humans).”¹²⁵⁷ The mumtahan is a term al-Māturīdī coins to refer to the humans primarily. The possibility of the existence of a seventh day is original and indeed an interesting possibility. At face value though, it has no relevance to the discourse about the istiwā’ of God. However, al-Māturīdī finds a connection, “fayushbih an yakūn waqt kawn al-mumtaḥanīn yawm al-sābi’ wa bihim tamma zuhūr al-mulk (it is likely then that the creation of the humans happened on the seventh day and it is only then the kingship of God manifested fully).”¹²⁵⁸ Thus, istiwā’ of God, in al-A’rāf verse, refers to the complete manifestation of the kingship of God and therefore, “-‘arsh huwa al-mulk (the -‘arsh means the kingship of God).”¹²⁵⁹

This interpretation is unprecedented in Sunni and Transoxianan exegesis. It exhibits the analytical aptitude of al-Māturīdī as an exegete and as a theologian. The argument he articulates, here, is built on a rational assumption: If God does not include humans within the six days of creation then it is possible that the six-days do not exhaust all of creation. Thus, there must be a seventh day in order for the most important of creatures, the humans, to come into existence and on the seventh day the istiwā’ (the full manifestation of God’s kinship) took place. This interpretation not only represents a completely new outlook into the meaning of istiwā’ and

¹²⁵⁶ Ibid.
¹²⁵⁷ Ibid.
¹²⁵⁸ Ibid.
¹²⁵⁹ Ibid.
‘arsh, but it also breaks from the notion of limiting creation to six days. Naturally this deserves closer scrutiny.

Al-Māturīdī anticipates such a scrutiny and provides the premises for such an outré interpretation. He justifies it with the following points. In the terrestrial world, humans are the only creatures of high intellect. He states, “lam yakūn qabla dhālika man lahu al-tamyīz (before the humans there were no creatures with the ability to discern) wa ma ‘ rifat al-mulk wa al-sultān (and to contemplate and appreciate the notions of kingship and sovereignty).”1260 In addition, humans, in al-Māturīdī’s view, are the sole creatures to recognise the value of the praiseworthy traits and actions. Such traits and actions point to one’s loftiness, esteem and status and by extension point to God – the most praiseworthy and all-perfect being.1261 Similarly, humans are the sole creatures to recognise the opposite of these traits and actions.1262 Thus, the first premise is that the humans are the only terrestrial creatures who would appreciate the magnificence of God’s kingship through their capability of discerning good from evil and ugly from beautiful.1263 Hence, the creation of humans must be on the seventh day when istiwā’ (the kingship of God) manifested fully.

The second premise al-Māturīdī puts forward is that God created the world for the humans. Since “wa minman ju’il al-‘ālam lahum wahun al-qāṣd min warā’ al-inshā’ (the world was made for them (the humans) and they are the purpose for its creation),”1264 the reference of the istiwā’ on the ‘arsh then is a reference to the creation of the humans whose existence

1260 Ibid.
1261 Ibid.
1262 Evil, wickedness, treachery, weakness, laziness etc.
1263 For God distinguished them with ‘uqūl (high reason) and gifted them tamyīz (discernment).
1264 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 4, 443.
completed the manifestation of God’s kingship. Al-Māturīdī supports his second premise with the argument that humans have superiority over other creatures, An argument that is empirically correct. Thus the creation of the humans represents tamām al-mulk (the completion of kingship) and bulūghuhu al-nihāyah (reaching its climax). They depict zuhūr tamām al-mulk (the indicator of the completion and perfection of the kingship of God).

Al-Māturīdī goes further and offers a third premise for the validity of the interpretation of istiwā’ on the ‘arsh as completion of kingship. This time he takes it from the composition of the verse at hand. He argues that al-A‘rāf verse first mentions the creation of the heavens and the earth then associates them with the istiwā’ on the ‘arsh because it is only logical to speak of the highness, loftiness and perfection of God, in status and esteem, after pointing to his creation of the kingdom. He states, “wa lidhālika atā ba ‘da dhālika al-khabar (for this it (istiwā’) was mentioned after this factt).” In simpler terms, al-Māturīdī is saying that God sets a consecutive order in the verse. He informed the reader first about the creation of his kingdom, the earth and the heavens, and then spoke about the creation of the objective of this kingdom, the humans, which itself serves as a pointer to the completion and perfection of God’s kingship. This proves the rubūbiyyah (lordship) of God over all creatures to those who seek it and contemplate it.

1265 An argument that is empirically correct.
1266 Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 370.
1267 Ibid.
1268 Ibid.
1269 Ibid.
1270 Ibid.
6.3.2. The second scenario of the six days

As impressive as the argument of al-Māturīdī may appear, it is outlandish in Sunni exegesis because it presumes the presence of a seventh day of creation. This fact alone may lead to discrediting his opinion or simply ignoring it. Al-Māturīdī prepares for such a scenario and therefore supplies a second interpretation for istiwā’ – one that conforms to the conventional view about the six days of creation and at the same time accommodates his argument. Al-Māturīdī states that if the second interpretation, creation within six days, is adopted then “yakūn muntahā tadbīr hadhā al-‘ālam ilā dhālika sittat ayyām (the end of the management of that world will be the end of the six days).”

Al-Māturīdī, now, endorses the narration of Mujāhid (d. 722 CE), a traditional Sunni exegete. Mujāhid postulated that “each day of God amounts to 1000 of the earth days.” Consequently, al-Māturīdī computes the age of the world to be 6000 years “‘alā al-qadr alladhi qadarahu Allah (according to the measure that God decreed).”

Al-Māturīdī sees this age as jā’iz (possible). He does not seem to be fully convinced of this line of thought, but he accommodates it, as it is traditional, and builds his second main interpretation upon it. According to this calculation, the age of the world will be six days and inescapably yawm al-Qiyāmah (the day of resurrection) will be the seventh day. On this day, according to al-Māturīdī, istiwā’ will take place because, “yuqirru kullu muntaḥan lahu bi

---

1271 Ibid.
1272 Ibid.
1273 One of the main students of Ibn Abbas.
1274 Tabarī, Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fī Ta’wil Āy Al-Qur’an, 12, 482. This is also in line of verse 47 of chapter al-Ḥajj.
1275 This approximation is not concrete as it is based on a personal interpretation and estimation rather than a clear direct statement from the Qur’an or the traditions of Prophet Muḥammad. Thus, it does not reflect accurately the age of earth or human life or the Islamic perspective on it. It seems to be borrowed from biblical sources since the Qur’an and Sunnah do not usually delve in providing specific dates to the beginning or end of the world. For further information see: D. O. V. Ginzburg, "The Age of the Earth from Judaic Traditional Literature," Earth Sciences History 3, no. 2 (1984).
1276 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 371.
al-mulk wa al-jalāl (every accountable creature, human, will testify to God’s kingship and majesty).” ¹²⁷⁷

Al-Māturīdī, in the second scenario, shifts the timeline of istiwā’ from the beginning of the creation to the resurrection in afterlife. An unpredicted leap and unprecedented proposition in Sunni exegesis. His creative genius stems from his association of other Qur’anic allusions of a day and extrapolation that there must be a seventh day. His interpretation of the notion of istiwā’ and ‘arsh now takes place within the context of the verses that focus on the majesty of God and his sovereignty on the day of judgment. Verses such as 16 of chapter Ghāfir, “The Day whereon they will (all) come forth. Not a single thing concerning them is hidden from God. ‘Whose is the absolute dominion, sovereignty and kingdom that Day?’ That of Allah, the One the Irresistible” and verse 19 chapter al-Infitār, “The command, that Day, will be (wholly) with Allah”. The complete manifestation of the kingship of God over creation has a new marker, it is the confession of all creatures of God ‘s majesty, particularly the humans.

This marker may come with some theological reservations. One may rightly ask; would not this diminish the kingship of God since he is awaiting the recognition of his creatures? Once again, al-Māturīdī is prepared for such a question. He clarifies that the kingship of God is infinitely perfect with or without recognition. However, the significance of the testimony of the mumtaḥan (the humans) is because of “ittifāq al-qawl ‘an ṭarīq al-ıkhtiyār (the consensus of all humans on this statement, or fact, wilfully and freely).” ¹²⁷⁸ He means to say the testimony of the humans is significant, on the day of Judgement, for they make it out of free choice, since they are the only creature with reason and free choice.

¹²⁷⁷ Ibid.
¹²⁷⁸ Ibid.
Nonetheless, this is not the only marker or indicator of the manifestation of God’s *mulk* (kingship or sovereignty) on the day of judgment. Al-Māturīdī speaks of two. He states, “yakhruju ʿalā wajhayn (*istiwā‘*) in the second scenario, could have two possible interpretations.”

The first was mentioned earlier but the second is “al-ʿuqūbah wa al-mathūbah (the reward and punishment)”

which will unfold on al-yaʾwm al-sābiʾ (the seventh day). This represents the other *maqṣūd* (purpose) behind the creation of the world. It is an indication of *tamām al-zuhūr* (the complete manifestation of God’s kingship). Al-Māturīdī sees the establishment of God’s judgment over all creatures is a manifestation of the complete *istiwā‘* of God in his sovereignty and kingship. This is also an unprecedented perception of *istiwā‘* in Sunni exegesis.

A close assessment of the second scenario al-Māturīdī offers is of utmost importance. It points to multiple important truths. The first is al-Māturīdī’s interpretation of *istiwā‘* and *ʿarsh* in the second scenario is not different from the first. At the core, it remains to be the complete manifestation of the kingship of God. What changes is the markers of this manifestation. In the first scenario, it is the creation of the *mumtaḥan* but in the second it is either the wilful admission of the *mumtaḥan* or secondarily the establishment of God’s justice. Al-Māturīdī skilfully manages to arrive at the same conclusion through two different paths. In the second scenario, he devises an analytical process that incorporates one of the traditional perceptions of the six days but still supports his interpretation of *istiwā‘* and the existence of the seventh day. He achieves a remarkable synthesis between *ʿaql* and *naql* not only through the aforementioned harmonisation but also through the new markers – testimony of humans and establishment of justice. He offers

---

1279 Ibid.
1280 Ibid.
1281 Ibid.
these through an important and significant Qur’anic theme, the relationship between the kingship and sovereignty of God and the day of Judgment.

In addition, al-Māturīdī adheres to the rules of Arabic grammar in his interpretation. Particularly, the common understanding of *thumma*\(^{1282}\), which is used in the verse, as a conjunction that communicates an order and a delay or succession between what is before and what comes after it. The verse reads, “indeed Your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six days *thumma* (then) he *istawā* on the ‘*arsh*.” Al-Māturīdī’s commentary does not only exhibit new theological interpretation of *istiwā* and ‘*arsh*, it also exhibits a critical analysis and a methodical process of theological exegesis unmatched by any other Sunni and Transoxianan exegete of his time.

6.3.3 A new perspective in understanding the ‘*arsh*

This brings the discussion to another focal point – the notion of ‘*arsh*. Indeed, the previous commentary signposts the keenness of al-Māturīdī to remain faithful to the Qur’anic themes. However, his interpretation of the ‘*arsh*, as kingship, does not fully conform to the context of the Qur’an. There are verses that clearly indicate that the ‘*arsh* of God has a physical mass and is carried by angels. Verse 7 chapter Ghāfir and verse 17 chapter al-Ḥāqqah definitely point to this understanding.\(^{1283}\) Al-Māturīdī anticipates that he will be questioned about these verses and poses the following hypothetical question, “If someone asks *limā qīla yaḥmilūna al-*‘arsh* (why

---

\(^{1282}\) It is usually translated in English as ‘then’.

\(^{1283}\) Van Ess in his presentation and critiquing of how the various Muslim denominations and theological protagonists interpreted the word ‘*arsh* does not cite anything from or about al-Māturīdī from Ta’wilāt or *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. His analysis extends to reporting accusations against the Ash’arīs but not al-Māturīdī. For further information see: Van Ess and Goldbloom, "Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra. Volume 4: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam," 455-58.
did God say that they (angels) carry the ‘arsh)?” the response is “laysa anna al-murāda min hadhā al-‘arsh al-awwal (these verses are not speaking about the ‘arsh that is mentioned first).” Al-Māturīdī means to say that these verses are not talking about the ‘arsh mentioned in chapter al-A‘rāf and similar verses. The ‘arsh, in such verses, is the “mulk alladhī zahara tamāmuwa wa ‘ulūwuh (kingship which perfection and highness has been established and complete)”

Al-Māturīdī clearly suggests the word ‘arsh, when associated with God, has multiple meanings in the Qur’an and it cannot be treated the same. If the contexts of verse 7 in Ghāfir and verse 17 in al-Ḥāqqah indicate a corporeal ‘arsh then this cannot be forced upon verse 54 chapter al-A‘rāf and its like. Al-Māturīdī exhibits a complete dedication to the influence of the context of a verse on the meaning of its text and that one meaning should not be imposed in all instances a particular text appears in the Qur’an. Hence, the meaning of ‘arsh, when associated with God, in the Qur’an could be multiple. Such a methodology enables al-Māturīdī to achieve multiple aims. On one hand, he remains consistent to his methodology of exegesis and maintains his interpretation of istiwā and ‘arsh. On the other hand, he accommodates for the transmitted reports that describe the existence of a carried ‘arsh as “a throne created from light.”

---

1284 Al-Māturīdī, Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 371.
1285 Ibid.
1286 in Chapter al-A‘rāf and similar verses
1287 Al-Māturīdī, Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 371.
1288 Ibid, 4, 444.
6.3.4 The position of the other exegetes on the meaning of *istiwā’* in association with ‘arsh

The thoroughness al-Māturīdī displayed in his commentary on the *istiwā’* in chapter al-A’rāf is matched with little to no commentary from the remaining Sunni or Transoxianan exegetes. Ṭabarī suffices himself with the phrase, “we spoke about *istiwā’* and the difference of opinion about it before and there is no need to repeat it.” This phrase speaks volumes about the approach of Ṭabarī to theological exegesis. His approach is “one size fits all” and the meaning of an utterance in one verse is the same in all verses. He does not consider the merits, the context, the characteristics and the nuances of every verse. Likewise, he does not seem interested in contemplating the theological facets of each verse independently. Perhaps because Ṭabarī does not see exegesis the correct milieu for such discourse. Thus, in the context of *istiwā’*, at least, Ṭabarī does not believe in theological exegesis as a genre. The above points constitute what separates the title of Ṭabarī from al-Māturīdī ‘s Ta’wilāt whom all evidence confirm not only his interest in theological exegesis but his deliberate steps to found this genre in Sunni and Transoxianan exegesis.

The same holds true with other exegetes. ‘Ayyāshī and Muqāṭil do not comment on the meaning of *istiwā’* at all. Samarqandī lists the same opinions he listed before. *Istiwā’* could mean “*istawlā* (he dominated)”, “*ṣa’ada amruhu ilā al-samā’* (the command of God has risen to the heaven) and “*al-‘uluw wa al-intifā’* (highness and rising).” Samarqandī insists though that *istiwā’* is from the “*mutashābih alladhī lā ya’lam ta’wīlahu illā Allah* (unclear Qur’anic notions

---

1290 The meaning of this phrase has been explained during the commentary on chapter al-Baqarah.
1291 Samarqandī, *Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm*, 1, 521.
that none knows their meaning except God).”

Al-Māturīdī is not only unsurpassed in his original interpretations of *istiwā’* but also is unequalled in his comprehensiveness.

### 6.3.5 The conceptual framework and methodology of al-Māturīdī in the interpretation of *istiwā’* in association with the ‘*arsh*’

The comprehensiveness of al-Māturīdī and his objective of writing a Sunni theological exegesis drove him to explain why the notion of ‘*arsh*, as a throne, cannot be associated with *istiwā’*. It is because “ahl al-tashbīh (the proponents of *tashbīh*)” \(^{1293}\) understood from it a *makān* (a place) to God. \(^{1294}\) To suggest or even imply that God has a place, in the mindset of al-Māturīdī, would negate his divinity because “*kullu mansūb ilā makān min jihat al-tamkīn fīh wa al-qarār mansūb ilā isti’ānah wa hājatin minhu ilayhi jalla Allha ‘an dhālika* (the association of any entity with a place where it is fixed and rests implies its need to it).” \(^{1295}\) If God seeks aid from someone or has a need then he is not all-powerful and omnipotent, hence, he is not a God.

The concern of al-Māturīdī is not about whether God has any similarities to his creation rather it is that such an interpretation annuls the very existence of God as the creator and sustainer of all beings. Al-Māturīdī takes the discourse further and assesses and explains all the blasphemous aspects that would result from such a belief. First, it abolishes the doctrine of *tawḥīd* because this throne may be “*mithlahu aw a’ẓam minhu* (equivalent or bigger than God).” \(^{1296}\) Consequently, this would render the ‘*arsh* ‘*lahu ‘adīlan* (equal to God)” \(^{1297}\), which

---

1292 Ibid, 1, 520.
1293 Another term that refers to the *mushabbihah*.
1295 Ibid.
1296 Ibid.
1297 Ibid.
negates the oneness of God. Secondly, it degrades God to having the traits of the creatures, which annuls his eternity. The notion of being in a place is “athan al-ḥadath wa amārat al-kawn ba‘ da an lam yakun (from the qualities of being finite and the proofs of being a creation brought into existence after being nothing).”\(^{1298}\) The eternality of God necessitates he existed before the presence of a \textit{makān} (space), which itself is created. Therefore, it is impossible to ascribe God to space and time and by extension it is impossible for \textit{istiwā’} and ‘\textit{arsh}’ to be interpreted as a corporeal entity.

Just as Al-Māturīdī provides abundant arguments, mainly rational, that disqualify such an interpretation of \textit{istiwā’} and ‘\textit{arsh}, none of the other exegetes, including Ṭabarī, addresses the theological concerns or challenges for the interpretation of \textit{istiwā’} and ‘\textit{arsh} as the corporeal throne. This practise does not come as a surprise since none of them shows interest in an analytic studying \textit{istiwā’} of God in the Qur’an.

Al-Māturīdī progresses, in his commentary on \textit{istiwā’}, from detailing the impossibility of the ‘\textit{arsh} being throne to formulating exegetical and theological maxims to help the scholars navigate their way around such anthropomorphic expressions. This is clear evidence of the fastidious methodology al-Māturīdī applies in studying this branch of theology. He does not aim to explain only what the notion means but also to educate the ignorant, to rebut the opponent, to clarify the misconceptions to the confused and to set a framework that becomes a model for later scholars to adhere to and apply in the case of such anthropomorphic expressions. This validates the hypothesis of the thesis that the study of \textit{istiwā, yad} and ‘\textit{ayn} verses suffice to discover the theological stance of al-Māturīdī from all anthropomorphic expressions in the Qur’an.

\(^{1298}\) Ibid.
Al-Māturīdī mentions two fundamental principles to interpret *istiwā’*, and similar anthropomorphic expressions. The first one is the *iḍāfah* (the annexation) principle. He states, “*kullu shay’in yuḍāf ilā Allah aw yuḍāf Allah ilayhi* (anything that is annexed to God or God is annexed to it)...*fahuwa ‘alā al-ṭīm* (the aim of it is glorification of that thing or entity).”\(^{1299}\)

Thus, the annexation of the ‘*arsh* to God in chapter Ghāfir is not to suggest that God has a throne to rest on rather it is to indicate the importance of the ‘*arsh* as one of the great creations of God. Al-Māturīdī does not openly state the preceding statement but he implies it as it has done in verse 75 chapter Ṣād in relation to the annexation of the *yad* to God and the creation of Adam, in chapter five. The same applies in relation to annexation of the ‘*arsh* to the *istiwā’* of God. It should not be interpreted in “*al-ma’nā al-makrūh* (the disliked sense)”\(^{1300}\), which denotes a place of rest to God. Particularly when *istiwā’* has a variety of correct and acceptable meanings. Al-Māturīdī lists four meanings of *istiwā’* identical to what Samarqandī lists in the context of the current verse. Al-Māturīdī may favour a specific interpretation over the other. However, the above statement indicates that he is willing to accept any interpretation that is valid lexically and conforms to the maxims he formulated.

The *iḍāfah* (the annexation) principle is not a new maxim. Al-Māturīdī introduced it in his commentary on the *yad* verses. Particularly in the context of the verses that speak about the creation of Adam by the *yad* of God in verse 75 chapter Ṣād. Despite the fact that this is not a new principle, it signifies the commitment of al-Māturīdī to his methodology and his consistency in the application of the maxims and principles he sets. Furthermore, this also reinforces the proposition of this study that the investigation of these expressions and verses provides enough

\(^{1299}\) Ibid, 5, 373.

\(^{1300}\) Ibid.
evidence to discover al-Māturīdī’s theology in anthropomorphism as a whole for he applies the same maxims across different anthropomorphic expressions throughout the Qur’an.

The second maxim al-Māturīdī lists is more subtle and completely new. He contends that words take different meanings and have different aims depending on the nature of the entity to which or to whom they are annexed. He states, “al-iḍāfāt ilā al-ashyā’ yafṭariq al-maqsūd bihā (the annexation (of the same notion) to (different) entities serve different aims).”  

Al-Māturīdī recognises the complexity of his statement and thus cites illustrations to elaborate it. One of the examples he cites are the following Arabic sentences, “jā’a al-ḥaqq (the truth has come)” and “jā’a fulān (such and such has come)”1303. Importantly, al-Māturīdī does not content with these linguistic examples only. He cites Qur’anic ones as well. One of them is the phrase “aṣḥāb al-nār (usually translated as the people of Hell)”, a phrase used in the Qur’an several times. God uses this phrase in verse 30 chapter al-Muddathir to refer to some angels as “aṣḥāb al-nār (usually translated as the people of Hell).” Then he uses the same phrase to describe the fasaqah (the shameless blasphemers), “aṣḥāb al-nār”, in verse 39 chapter al-Baqarah. Al-Māturīdī asserts that the aim from both uses is not “al-jam’ fī al-ma’nā (to communicate the same meaning in both expressions).” What is painfully problematic with al-Māturīdī’s commentary is that he stops at the above sentence and does not explain further. This recurring practice makes it difficult to comprehend all his views and arguments.

1301 I did not include the literal quote of al-Māturīdī because it is vague and difficult to grasp without a substantial explanation.
1302 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 373.
1303 Ibid.
1304 Ibid.
1305 Al-Māturīdī does not specify a verse because there are multiple verses that use this phrase such as the verse cited above.
1306 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 4, 451.
The purpose of both examples is to establish that in the Arabic language it is given for an entity to determine the meaning of the noun or the verb associated with it and not the opposite. It is a point of consensus that the verb “jā’a (to come)” when associated with haqq (the truth), an abstract concept, does not mean the physical movement of the haqq from one place to the other. Hence, the phrase “jā’a al-haqq (the truth has come)”, that al-Māturīdī cites, is commonly interpreted as the truth has prevailed, triumphed or has been established. On the other hand, the verb “jā’a (to come)” when associated with a person is understood as physical movement from point A to point B. Hence, the phrase “jā’a fulān (such and such has come)” is overwhelmingly understood as such and such travelled from one place to another. Be it as it may, al-Māturīdī’s maxim stipulates that the same practise should be followed when nouns and verbs are associated with God. The same applies in the case of the Qur’anic phrase “aṣḥāb al-nār”. In chapter al-Muddathir, when associated with the angels, all exegetes interpret it as “the guardians of Hell.” However, in verse 39 chapter al-Baqarah where it is used to describe the blasphemers it is interpreted, by all exegetes, as “aṣḥāb al-nār (the people of Hell).”

The citation of al-Māturīdī of this Qur’anic example is very tactful. It not only serves as an emphatic example of the soundness of his maxim, it also proactively counters critics who may object to al-Māturīdī’s maxim claiming it may have basis in Arabic but it does not in the case of the Qur’an. The example of “aṣḥāb al-nār” confirms that al-Māturīdī’s opinion is endorsed and approved by the Arabic language and the Qur’an. His logic of is not only persuasive but compelling.1307

---

1307 If creatures can influence the meaning of utterances and expressions that are associated with them to befit their nature then God and his unparalleled nature stipulates the same application if not more.
The level of discourse al-Māturīdī demonstrates, in his exegesis, on the topic of istiwā’ is unrivalled by any other exegete. In fact, it surpasses his commentary on the subject in the previous chapter where he focuses primarily on presenting his conceptual framework. Al-Māturīdī enjoys the engagement of the topic at every verse he encounters and expands on it, if the context permits. His interaction with the topic sparks new thoughts in his mind which he does not hesitate to articulate.

6.4 The interpretation of istiwā’ as the creation of the throne

In such an ambience al-Māturīdī carries on with his study of istiwā’ in chapter al-A‘rāf. He persists in his analysis of istiwā’ in the verse and notes two new and important remarks. The first is that al-Māturīdī reconsiders the interpreting of istiwā’ in light of a narration he reports from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, in which the latter says, “istiwa ‘alayhi amruhu wa ṣun ‘uhu (God’s command on it has been set and he fashioned the ‘arsh). Lam yakhtalif ‘layhi ṣun ‘u al-‘arsh (it was not difficult for him to fashion the ‘arsh).”\footnote{Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 374.} Accordingly, al-Māturīdī proposes the verb istawā is synonymous with the verb khalaqa (he created). He explains that istawā is ikhbār ‘an fi ‘lihi (a report about God’s action) andfī al-taqhīq (in reality) it points to God’s creation of the ‘arsh “‘alā ikhitlāf al-makhrajfī al-qaww (using a different term to describe it).”\footnote{Ibid, 4, 452.}

Al-Māturīdī supports this possibility with another Qur’anic observation he noticed. He expounds that God uses different terms and verbs in the Qur’an, which lexically seem different, to describe God’s act of creation. He states, “nahwa an dhakara narratan (for instance he uses
sometimes) *abda ‘a* (the term he innovates) …”\(^{1310}\) to describe his act of creation. Al-Māturīdī lists seven verbs that God uses in the Qur’an and all of them ultimately point to his act of creation.\(^{1311}\) Al-Māturīdī acknowledges that they are not completely synonymous with the verb create but they do point to it. Another example is “*faṭara* (to bring into being)” and “*ansha’a* (to originate or to fashion).”\(^{1312}\) Al-Māturīdī is pointing that the Qur’an contains a notion similar to the notion of collocation, in modern linguistics, where certain verbs are associated with certain entities. For example, the Qur’an uses the verb *nafakh*, literally means to blow, when speaking about ensoulment. It does not use this verb when speaking about the creation of the heavens or the earth, even though in both instances, the aim is to point to the act of creation by God. In a similar sense, al-Māturīdī proposes that the phrase *istawā al-‘arsh “yajib an yuqābal dhālika bi khalāqa* (should be interpreted as he created the ‘*arsh*).”\(^{1313}\)

As he expounds the new interpretation, al-Māturīdī returns to the incompatibility of the notion of *makān* (space) not only within the Islamic doctrine but also within the Qur’anic grammar. He contends that the interpretation of *istiwā’* on the ‘*arsh* as *istaqarra* (he sat or rested on the throne) does not fit with the grammatical form of the verse. The conjunction *thumma* if translated as “then” it would imply that God moves from one state to another. After he finishes from one creation he moves physically towards the other.\(^{1314}\) This means that “*fi al-waqt alladhī yasīr ilā al-‘arsh sā’ran ilā al-tharā* (at the time He wants to create the throne He would be on earth).”\(^{1315}\) Al-Māturīdī concludes “*wa dhālika tanāquḍun fāsid* (and this a fallacious

---

\(^{1310}\) Ibid.

\(^{1311}\) Ibid, 4, 453.

\(^{1312}\) Ibid, 5, 374.

\(^{1313}\) Ibid, 5, 375.

\(^{1314}\) Ibid, 5, 374.

\(^{1315}\) Ibid.
contradiction.)”1316 If God moves as he creates then “yakīnu abadan ghayra mustawin ‘alayhi (he will never rest on the throne) ḥattā yafragha min khalqi jamī’ mā yakūn abadan (until he finishes creating everything destined to exist ever).”1317 Thus, the very grammatical structure of the verse that the mushabbihah would use to support the interpretation of istiwā’ as istiqrār (resting) nullifies their interpretation, according to al-Māturīdī. The rendering of istiwā’ in such a sense is thus false and so is the translation of thumma as a conjunction that expresses consecutive physical movement of God.

Al-Māturīdī opens the window on a grammatical misconception that his opponents may exploit to derail his new interpretation. It is the role of the preposition ‘alā (on or above) in the verse. Commonly in Arabic grammar, ‘alā, as a preposition, points to something above, not necessarily attached, something or on top of something else. The interpretation of al-Māturīdī of the verb istawā, in the verse, as “created” does not fit with the role of ‘alā as preposition. It would render the meaning of the verse as “God created above the ‘arsh”, which is problematic as it makes al-Māturīdī’s interpretation incomprehensible.

The only instance when the verb istawā can become a phrasal verb that means ‘to create’ is when it is combined with the preposition ilā, which usually means ‘to’ or ‘into’. Al-Māturīdī is well aware of the nuance and elaborates that the preposition ‘alā, in the verse, is not used in its commonly known sense. It actually means ilā, the preposition. He states, “istawā ‘alā al-‘arsh ay ilā al-‘arshfī khalqihi wa raf’ih wa itmāmih (the phrase ‘he made istiwā’ on the ‘arsh’ means he made istiwā’ to the ‘arsh and created it and raised it and perfected it).”1318 It is very convenient

---

1316 Ibid.
1317 Ibid, 5, 373.
1318 Ibid, 5, 372.
for al-Māturīdī to claim the preposition ‘alā means ilā since it suits his agenda. Many English
speakers, and even Arabic speakers, who are not experts in the field of Arabic grammar would
classify the statement of al-Māturīdī as a brazen attempt of tempering with the meaning of the
verse. However, al-Māturīdī clarifies that his statement is a grammatical fact and not a
manoeuvre to defend the legitimacy of his interpretation. He elucidates, “wa dalīl iḥtimāl ‘alā’
ḥālika anna ‘alā’ min ḥurūf al-khafḍ (the proof that ‘alā could mean (ilā) is that it is from the
prepositions of khafḍ).”1319 And it is known in Arabic that “yūḍa’ ba’ḍ mawḍi’ ba’ḍ (it is
permissible to use some prepositions in the place of other prepositions).”1320 In simpler terms, the
prepositions of khafḍ, according to al-Māturīdī, in Arabic could be used interchangeably and
thus ‘alā could be used instead of ilā and communicate the same meaning as the latter. Al-
Māturīdī names four instances in the Qur’an where the preposition ‘alā is used to communicate
the meaning of another preposition including ilā. Verse 2 chapter al-Muṭafifīn, verse 30 chapter
al-An‘ām, verse 19 chapter al-Qiyāmah and verse 9 chapter al-Naḥl. These citations are more
tactful because they establish that such a use is acceptable within the Qur’an. In addition to the
Qur’anic evidence, al-Māturīdī is correct about the permissibility of prepositions being used
interchangeably. Prominent grammarians such as ‘Uthmān ibn Jinnī (d. 1002 CE), ‘Abdullah ibn
Qutaybah (d. 889 CE), Abdūl Malik al-Thaʿālibī (d.1038 CE), amongst others, confirm this
grammatical phenomenon. They wrote chapters about the subject in their works. Indeed, it may
not be a consensual topic amongst all Arab grammarians, as is the case with many syntactic
topics, but it is a respected view by the grammatical school of Kūfah.1321

1319 The prepositions of khafḍ are prepositions in Arabic that render the nouns that follow them in the genitive
case. Ibid.
1320 Ibid.
Al-ʿArabiyah (United Arab Emirates: Dar Hamalil, 2017), 395; A. Ibn Qutaybah, Kitab Adab Al-Kātib (Beirut: Dar
Sadır, 1990), 506.
Al-Māturīdī’s use of complex Arabic grammar rules is an evidence of his accomplished knowledge of Arabic grammar. This is the first instance where he resorts to advanced Arabic grammar to reinforce his view. However, his citation of other Qur’anic verses is consistent with his methodology of prioritising the Qur’anic style above any other style and relying on the common use of linguistic tools in the Qur’an to express meanings.

The consistency of al-Māturīdī is not limited to his methodology. He exhibits it in his conceptual framework as well. Not only on the level of the anthropomorphic expressions but across all theological topics. He endeavours to ensure that his interpretation or interpretations of istiwā’ conform to his entire theological system. For instance, the new interpretations of istiwā’ he proposes, whether the completion of kingship its manifestation or the creation of the throne, are compatible with his belief in the existence of the attribute of takwīn. In chapter al-A‘rāf, al-Māturīdī reminds his critics that God “khāliqan bi dhātihi (creates by his dhāt).” Istiwā’ is one of the actions of God and all the actions of God fall under the attribute of takwīn, a dhāt attribute. Thus, he concludes that it is impossible for istiwā’ to insinuate a place or a change in state because “kullu ma’nā…awjāb taghayyuran aw zawālan ... aw nahw dhālika fa Allah yajullu ‘anhu (any meaning… that necessitates a change or a transfer in state… or anything similar to that cannot be attributed to God).” Such a change is a change in the dhāt of God, which nullifies his infinity and this is “amārat al-ḥadath (an indication of temporality).” Al-Māturīdī reiterates an assertion in his commentary on the yad and the ‘ayn verses. He reminds that the problem with his critics is not just their interpretation as much as it is their conceptual

1323 Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 375.
1324 Ibid.
framework and perspective of God. Their flaw lies in their “jahluhu bihī wa taqdirihi billadhī ‘alayhi amru nafsih (ignorance of God and analogising God to themselves).”\textsuperscript{1325} Al-Māturīdī, in Ta’wilāt, is engaging a full profound theological critical analysis that no exegete of his time, region or Sunni school engaged.

In this spirit, al-Māturīdī engages the Mu‘tazilite school in his analysis of istiwā’. Surprisingly, he reports the exegesis of one of his arch adversaries, on the verse, Abū Bakr al-Asamm, the prominent Mu‘tazilite scholar. Abū Bakr, being a Mu‘tazilite, evades tashbīḥ and argues that the verse contains “al-taqdīm wa al-ta’khīr (a transposition of sentences in the verse).”\textsuperscript{1326} Hence, the verse should read, according to him, “Your Lord is God who made istiwā’ on the ‘arsh thumma (then or and) he created the heavens and the earth…”\textsuperscript{1327} Consequently, this would avoid the suggestion that God moved from one destination to the other, or changed in state, completely. Interestingly, no other exegesis reported this view from Abū Bakr al-Asamm, not even the most recent compilation of the exegetical reports of Abū Bakr al-Asamm.\textsuperscript{1328}

Al-Māturīdī cites al-Asamm’s interpretation because it reinforces his interpretation of istawā as khalaq (created). The creation of the ‘arsh, as commonly known amongst all schools, took place before the creation of the heavens. If istawā is interpreted as he created then the notion of al-taqdīm wa al-ta’khīr (the transposition between sentences) is in order. Al-taqdīm wa al-ta’khīr’s notion is known in Arabic and in the Qur’an. Suyūṭī and before him Zarkashī discuss

\textsuperscript{1325} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1326} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1327} Ibid, 5, 372.
\textsuperscript{1328} Al-Asamm, Tafsīr Abu Bakr Al-Asamm.
it and even categorise it in their titles about the sciences of the Qur’an. Therefore, it is not a manoeuvre to distort the meaning but a known concept in Arabic and in the Qur’anic style.

Al-Māturīdī, nonetheless, does not suffice himself with this fact, he validates his view of the presence of al-taqdīm wa al-ta’khīr in the Qur’an by citing his own example, verse 1 chapter al-Nisā’. He states, “kaqawlihi (like when God says) huwa alladhī khalaqakum min nafsin wāḥida thumma ja’ala minhā zawjahā (he created you all from a single soul (Adam) then he created from it its partner (Eve).” As usual, al-Māturīdī expects the reader to do the honour of understanding the rest of the argument independently. It is impossible to believe that all humans were created before Eve because this is false on all levels, physically, logically and physiologically as well as traditionally. Hence it is impossible for thumma to mean “then” and there must be a transposition in the order of the sentences in the verse. Thus, al-Māturīdī proves that al-taqdīm wa al-ta’khīr is evident in the Qur’an.

Al-Māturīdī’s example does more than just prove the legitimacy of al-taqdīm wa al-ta’khīr, in the Qur’an, and the acceptability of using thumma as “and”. It exhibits his magnificent aptitude to find a perfect example that prove to his critics that his interpretation cannot be disputed. He chose verse 1 chapter al-Nisā’ because it parallels the verse of istiwā’ in chapter al-A‘rāf on the choice of verbs and the sentence order. The two sentences in chapter al-Nisā’ are separated with thumma, as it is the case in the verse of istiwā’. The creation of Eve is referred to by the verb ja’ala, which usually means to make or to decide, but in chapter al-Nisā’ it means to create. Likewise, the verb istawā, which usually has multiple meanings, as elaborated before, but

---

1330 Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 5, 372.
in al-A’rāf verse it means to create. The creation of Eve took place after Adam and before the rest of the humans and that is an agreed upon fact amongst all Muslims. Similarly, the creation of the ‘arsh before the heavens and the earth’s creation is an agreed upon fact amongst all scholars. Therefore, as al-taqdīm wa al-ta’khīr is a must in al-Nisā’ verse it follows that it is a must in al-A’rāf verse and a possible interpretation of istiwā’ there is the creation of the ‘arsh, as far as al-Māturīdī is concerned.

Hitherto, the pursuit of accuracy and clarity is an interest al-Māturīdī maintains in all his interpretations, as demonstrated multiple times above, to leave the sceptic no reason to doubt him. His continuous use of Qur’anic examples reinforces his arguments with a Qur’anic framework and is evidence of his belief in the superiority of traditional proofs and their power of persuasion on all Muslims from all currents. A belief al-Māturīdī has demonstrated in his analysis of the yad and the ‘ayn anthropomorphic expressions albeit in istiwā’ it is more lucid.

What is not lucid though is why would al-Māturīdī cite Abū Bakr al-Āṣamm particularly, a famous Mu’tazilite, on al-taqdīm wa al-ta’khīr and the use of thumma as “and”? The first assumption is usually because Abū Bakr is the only exegete to state it. In this case, this is not correct. Other Sunni exegetes referred to al-taqdīm wa al-ta’khīr. Namely, Samarqandī and Muqātil. Samarqandī emerged after al-Māturīdī but Muqātil wrote his exegesis before al-Māturīdī. In fact, he is the earliest exegete to speak of al-taqdīm wa al-ta’khīr, albeit timidly. Muqātil mentions it in the context of istiwā’ as well. In his commentary on chapter al-Ra’id verse 2, he states, “fīhā taqdīm (the verse contains transposition of sentences).”1331 He continues to say that God made istiwā’ “qabl khalqihimā (before he created the heavens and the earth).”1332 It

1332 Ibid.
should be noted though that despite his acceptance of transposition of sentences, Muqātil does not interpret *istiwā’* at all. Most likely, al-Māturīdī cites Abū Bakr instead of Muqātil because the latter has been notoriously classified, as Sirry states, an extreme anthropomorphist in Arabic and in western literature. The notoriety of Muqātil as an extreme *mushabbih*, though, may not be bodily visible, in this instance, in the context of *istiwā’*, but this does not release him from being a regular anthropic morphist as Sirry rightly points. The assault in all of al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the verses of *istiwā’*, heretofore, has been against *al-mushabbihah’s* interpretations and the implications of their interpretations.

It is safe to conclude that al-Māturīdī is not an advocate of a mother of all interpretation of *istiwā’*. He is open and clear about the fact that all commentary on the subject is deductive and theoretical. He states, “yalzam taslīm al-*murād* limā ‘indahu idh lam yubayyinhu lanā (it is incumbent to submit to whatever God intended of this expression because he did not clarify it to us).” This expresses al-Māturīdī’s willingness and openness to accept multiple interpretations of *istiwā’* as long as it establishes the transcendence of God and consistent with the Qur’an’s internal coherence.

---

1335 "Muqātil B. Sulaymān and Anthropomorphism," 57.
1336 Al-Māturīdī, *Ta`wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, 5, 373.
6.5 The reinforcement of the transcendence of God in response to critics’ interpretations

In verse 2 chapter al-Ra’d, al-Māturīdī reasserts his position that God is transcendent in His ḍhāt, ṣifāt (attributes) and actions. He tries to standardise this concept across anything associated with God, including istiwā’. He states, “None understands from qawlihi (God’s statement) samī’ (all-hearing), baṣīr (all-seeing), ‘alīm (all-knowing), mudabbir (governor) …al-makān (that he is in a place)” even though in one’s experience such descriptions “yufham minhu al-makān idha ʿudīfa ilā al-khalq (can imply a place when it is associated with the creatures).” Al-Māturīdī does not explain how these descriptions imply a place and does not provide the experience upon which he built this premise. However, he may be pointing to the fact that every creature known to humans – through human experience and observation – and possesses such traits do occupy a place. Hence, such traits would trigger the thought of place in their minds when it is attributed to God.

In actuality though, such a thought does not take place in the minds of people because they recognize that God is beyond this world and beyond the perceptions that they built based on their experiences in this world. Thus, the logic of al-Māturīdī is the following: If the above descriptions and actions, such as seeing, hearing and managing the world, do not trigger an association with a place in one’s mind when attributed to God then so should be the case with istiwā’ when it is attributed to God. Particularly when istiwā’ as an utterance has multiple meanings that leave no room for such an assumption.

---

1337 Ibid, 7, 381.
1338 Ibid.
1339 Ibid.
One of these meanings that al-Māturīdī focuses on in chapter al-Ra’d is istawlā (to dominate or to govern). He states, “istawā amruh lam yufham minhu al-makān bal fuhima minhu nafādh al-amr wa al-sultān (the phrase ‘his command has made istiwā’” does not imply a place rather it implies the fulfilment of one’s command, sovereignty and will).”\textsuperscript{1340} Therefore, al-Māturīdī restresses that the mother of all principles in the domain of names and attributes is the verse from chapter al-Shūrā that dictates “laysa kamithlihi shay’ (there is nothing like unto him).”

The keenness of al-Māturīdī to reinforce or restate the principle(s) he formulated earlier is matched by his continuous thrive to devise new arguments to support his creedal views in Ta’wilāt. In chapter al-Ra’d, al-Māturīdī delivers a new argument. He analyses the notion of shabah (similarity) itself and its manifestation in the world. He argues that God cannot be similar to his creation in anyway because the khalq (what is created), in our world and experience, “la yushbihu ba’duhum ba’dan min jamī’ al-jihāt (are not similar to each other in all aspects).”\textsuperscript{1341} Overwhelmingly, the point of similarity between two creatures centralises around their general features, character or actions. Despite the many differences that exist between them a single common trait or description would deem them similar. When God informs us that laysa kamithlihi shay’ (there is nothing like unto him) he is in fact informing people clearly that “nafā ‘anhu al-jihāt allati yaqa’ bihā al-tashābuh wa al-tamāthul (he denies the existence of the very aspects that could hint to any similarity or any equal to him.”\textsuperscript{1342} The conclusion is “fahuwa yukhālif al-khalq min jamī’ al-wujūh (thus, he is different than his creatures in all aspects).”\textsuperscript{1343}

\textsuperscript{1340} Ibid, 7, 382.
\textsuperscript{1341} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1342} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1343} Ibid.
Al-Māturīdī demonstrates his tactful ability to merge pleasantly between 'aql and naql, in the above argument. He capitalises on this real-life observation, which, in essence, is empirical and therefore undeniable for people of all faiths and cultures, to discredit the claim of resemblance to God. He then contextualises the analysis of verse 11 chapter al-Shūrā, “…there is nothing like unto him (God)” in light of this observation to yield an accurate understanding of the extent of negation in the verse. Ergo, al-Māturīdī concludes that since all the similarities between all the creatures are partial and minimal 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. As a result, al-Māturīdī confutes the association of the notion of makān (place) with istiwā’ because this could only apply in the case of creatures and not the creator.

Hitherto, al-Māturīdī has not deviated at all from the methodology and conceptual framework he has set from the first verse that speaks of istiwā’. His proposed interpretations conform to them fully. He continues to strengthen the inevitability of the validity of his perspective about the attributes of God and the anthropomorphic expressions. The effervescent analysis encountered in al-Māturīdī’s exegesis is not matched in the exegeses of the Sunni and Transoxianan exegetes. There is little to no commentary by all of them on the al-Ra’d verse. A confirmation of the gap that exists between his objective behind his exegesis and theirs. The aim of al-Māturīdī is to write a theological exegesis while the others focused on a more conventional exegesis.

Al-Māturīdī’s commentary indicates that his writing of Ta’wīlāt is methodical. He begins from chapter al-Fātiḥah and progresses from one chapter to another. Every verse he encounters
represents to him an opportunity to restudy his theological views through its words. Verse 5 chapter Ṭāha proves no different. Al-Māturīdī makes additional contributions to the discussion he began in chapter al-Ra’d about the transcendence of God and the impossibility of the ‘arsh to be a throne where God sits or rests. He does so by producing an additional argument that ascertain the implausibility of the association of makān with God.

He commences by considering all eventualities that the notion of makān would necessitate. He states, “al-qawlu bi al-kawn ‘alā al-‘arsh wa huwa mawdī’ bi dhātihi (the statement that confirms that God is on the ‘arsh, as a space, in itself)”\(^{1344}\) gives rise strictly to the following possibilities “iḥāta dhi al-ka bi istiwā’ aw mujāwazu he ‘anhu wa iḥātahu (God is enclosed within it or he fits in it perfectly or he is bigger than it and surrounds it).”\(^{1345}\)

Al-Māturīdī raises three inescapable scenarios associated with makān that the proponents of this opinion must consider and resolve. He then begins to illustrate how they contradict the notion of Godship and by extension are impossible to coexist with God. The first scenario is the iḥāta eventuality. According to which, God is enclosed in the throne. He states, “fa’īn kān al-awwal fahuwa idhan maḥdūd muḥāṭun bihī manqūṣun ‘an al-khalq (if it is the first then God is bounded (in terms of space), surrounded by his creation and is smaller than it).”\(^{1346}\) The boundness of God in the dimension of space certainly opens the door wide opened to a God “yuḥīt bihī al-awqāt (being bound by the dimension of time).”\(^{1347}\) Al-Māturīdī, as usual, does not explain why the boundness to one dimension must obligate the boundness to the other. However, this could be the case because the dimension of space does not and cannot exist without or

\(^{1344}\) Ibid, 9, 177.
\(^{1345}\) Ibid.
\(^{1346}\) Ibid.
\(^{1347}\) Ibid.
outside the dimension of time. If the notion of makān (space) in human experience necessitates time and the latter necessitates having a beginning and an end then God becomes finite. Further, if one logically accepts the first, boundness to space, as a possibility then he cannot deny logically the latter, boundness to time, as a possibility. The acceptance of such a possibility would necessitate that it is possible for God to be finite. The mere acceptance of such a possibility of the finiteness of God contradicts the notion of unwavering belief in the perfection of God. For if it is possible that God is finite then it is possible that God is not perfect and the belief in such a possibility in Islam is sacrilegious. The outcome would then be, according to al-Māturīdī, “fayaṣır mutanāhiyan bidhāthi muqassiran ‘an khalqihi (God becomes finite in his dhāt and smaller than his creation).”\textsuperscript{1348} Such a belief is repudiated by all Muslim scholars\textsuperscript{1349} and is considered blasphemous by the consensus of the Muslim community.

The second scenario is al-istiwā’ eventuality. According to which, God is equal to the throne in size and fits in it perfectly. He states, “wa‘in kāna ‘alā al-wajh al-thānī (based on the second scenario) falaw zīda fī al-khalq lantaqaṣa ayḍan (if the size of the throne increases then the size of God decreases).”\textsuperscript{1350} Al-Māturīdī succinctly points to the influence of the circumstances of creation on the dhāt of God in such eventuality. If God is surrounded perfectly by the throne then any change in the throne would necessitate a change in the dhāt of God. An increase in the size of the throne would diminish the size of God. This does not only lead to a limitation of God but more importantly it suggests the dhāt of God is mahāl lilḥawādith, a

\textsuperscript{1348} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1350} Al-Māturīdī, Ta‘īlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 9, 177.
medium for finite actions to take place, which in turn makes God finite. Hence, al-Māturīdī concludes, “wa fīhi māfī al-awwal (and this leads to the same conclusion as the first).”\textsuperscript{1351}

The third and final scenario is al-mujāwazah ‘anhu eventuality. According to which, the throne is smaller than God. Al-Māturīdī states, “walaw kāna ‘alā al-wajh al-thālith fahuwa al-amr al-makrūh (and if it is the third scenario then it is a verboten belief) al-dāl ‘alā al-ḥājah wa ‘alā al-taqsīr (because it points to need, delinquency and dereliction).”\textsuperscript{1352} For it implies the inability of God to create what befits him.\textsuperscript{1353} In the least, it portrays God as a derelict being unbothered to create what He needs. Thus, the third scenario is not better than the previous two. It conflicts with the main attributes of God as all-powerful, all-knowing and it conflicts with his perfect sovereignty.

In chapter al-Ra’d and here, in chapter Ţaha, al-Māturīdī appears before the reader in the voice and style he embodies in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. It is his dry dialectical voice, which immerses in a polemic discourse with his opponents using mere rational proofs. It seems that the subject of the discussion in the verses stimulated the polemic capacity within al-Māturīdī. It instigated in his mind a storm of rational thoughts and ideas that disqualify the opponents’ opinion. As a result, he carries on with the dialectic approach and clarifies that the third scenario adds another complication. It ascribes to God the qualities of dhī abʿād (creatures composed of various limbs and parts), which is problematic, to say the least, in the Islamic doctrine. Not to mention that it would necessitate some parts of God would fit in the throne and other parts do not, which is a disturbing image even if it were for a human let alone a God.\textsuperscript{1354} Thus, any interpretation that

\textsuperscript{1351} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{1352} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{1353} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{1354} Ibid.
implies *makān* is unfounded in Islamic theology, according to al-Māturīdī. *Istiwā’* is not *istiqrār* (resting or sitting) and the *‘arsh*, in this verse, is not the throne. The elaborate explanation al-Māturīdī offers in his exegetical commentary on the verses from chapter al-Ra’d and Ṭaha highlights the originality of his theological postulation on the subject. It eliminates the possibility of the Karrāmiyyah influencing his theological views. Van Ess presents their view on the topic of *istiwā’* and *‘arsh*, “… The early Karrāmiyyah found the compromise solution that he (God) was confined from beneath only (in the *‘arsh*), but was infinite in all other directions.” Their position stands utterly against al-Māturīdī’s denunciation of the notion of *makān* to God.  

It may be argued that their anthropomorphic interpretations may have provoked al-Māturīdī to respond to them. Rudolph’s analysis of their role in Central Asia, during al-Māturīdī’s era, undermines this possibility. He lists them amongst the opponents that could not have played a great role in the theology of al-Māturīdī.  

The analysis of Ta’wilāt confirms Rudolph’s conclusion, as far as anthropomorphism is concerned. Al-Māturīdī does not refer to the Karrāmiyyah at all in the context of *istiwā’* or ther other investigated anthropomorphic expressions. They are non-existent in his entire deliberation on the topic of *ilāhiyyāt* in Ta’wilāt and the same holds true in the context of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Al-Māturīdī refers to the Karrāmiyyah three times in Ta’wilāt and all instances relate to the definition of Īmān (faith), a subject far from *ilāhiyyāt* and anthropomorphism.  

In return to the analysis of the nature of al-Māturīdī’s exegetical writing, the presence of such a systematised pure theological discourse in al-Māturīdī’s exegesis corroborates further that Ta’wilāt is intended to be a theological exegesis.

---


Could *istiwā’* be interpreted as *irtifā’*, rising, as Ṭabarī insisted? It seems that al-Māturīdī contemplated this interpretation as a possibility but then disregarded it. He states, “*falaysfī al-irtifā’ ilā mā ya’lū min al-makān lil-julūs sharaf walā ‘uluw walā wasf bi al-‘azamah wa al-kibriyā’* (there is no honour in rising or sitting in a high place nor is there a denotation of status, greatness and pride).” The theme of the verse and its context comes at play in al-Māturīdī’s analysis. The verse that precedes the mention of *istiwā’* describes God as the creator of the heavens and the earth. As indeed the verse that succeeds it. It describes the perfect dominion of God and his infinite ability. Thus, they denote *al-‘azamah wa al-kibriyā’* (the greatness and exaltation of God). In al-Māturīdī’s opinion, standing on the roof or living in a mountain does not warrant eminence to a person over his peers and consequently the *irtifā’* interpretation is not a viable one.

On a methodological level, al-Māturīdī remains meticulous in his application of the intra-context of the verse, and the context of its surrounding verses, in vetting what is an acceptable interpretation and what is not. It is constantly evident in his commentary on all the anthropomorphic expressions investigated, which indicates a deliberate and well thought approach to the subject contrary to the other exegetes whose commentary are repetitive, limited and unanalytic.

The consideration of *ta’zīm* (glorification) is important for al-Māturīdī and leads him to a new angle in his exegetical commentary, one that he does not address earlier. Al-Māturīdī

---

1358 Ibn Kullāb seems to agree with Ṭabarī to a particular extent. He understood *istiwā’* to mean simply ‘on high’ without denoting a specific location to God. For further information see: Van Ess and Goldbloom, “Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra. Volume 4: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam,” 219, 457.

1359 Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, 9, 177.
accentuates that, in his view, any interpretation that does not reinforce taʿẓīm (the glorification) of God is incorrect. Resultantly, the objective of speaking about istiwāʾ in the Qurʾān is, “…ʿalā taʿẓīmihi (to glorify God)…” For this purpose, the ‘arsh is associated with God because it is “aʿẓam al-khalqi wa ajalluh (the greatest of all creations and the most revered of them).” It testifies to the greatness of God and expresses his complete domination over all creation. Al-Māturīdī forwards a logical argument here. For the one “man lahu mulk dhālika (who possesses dominion over the greatest of creation) famā dūnahu aḥaqqu bihī (possesses dominion over whatever is lesser than the ‘arsh by extension).”

In this point, one witnesses the return of al-Māturīdī to his Qurʾanic style. He quotes multiple verses to substantiate the above claim. These numerous citations not only support the rational deduction he puts forward, but more importantly they prove that this deduction is Qurʾanically acceptable. One of the verses al-Māturīdī quotes, to serve this purpose, is the ending of verse 3 chapter al-Māʾīda. It reads, “this day those who disbelieve have despaired of [defeating] your religion; so, fear them not, but fear Me. This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed my favour upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion.” The verse may appear generic about the completion of the Islamic mission and perfection of Islam. In reality, however, the expert in the discipline of asbāb al-nuzūl (the occasions of revelation) knows that this verse speaks of a specific event in the life of Prophet Muḥammad when he safely returned to Makkah after being exiled from it for 10 years and marks the acceptance of Islam in Makkah. Al-Māturīdī does not overtly state how the verse validates his argument. In spite of

---

1360 Ibid, 9, 178.
1361 Ibid.
1362 Ibid.
1363 Ibid.
that, a careful analysis, coupled with strong foothold in the biography of Prophet Muḥammad, reveals his logical reasoning. He is pointing to the fact that at that point of time, when the verse was revealed, Islam was not yet accepted as the official religion of the entire Arabian Peninsula and the governance of Prophet Muḥammad was strictly limited to Madinah and Makkah. Despite that, God describes or rather declares the event as the completion of the mission of the prophet in the spread of Islam. Why? This is because Makkah, in the sight of the Arabs, is umm al-Qurā (the mother of all settlements). It is the city of God and whoever, thus, rules it rules the entire Arabian Peninsula. Hence, this event is described as the completion of the mission of Islam.

Al-Māturīdī cites this verse for this very reason. It mirrors the same logic he sees in the mention of istiwā’ with the ‘arsh. He concludes “fa mithluhu amr al-‘arsh (the same logic applies in the mention of the ‘arsh).” \(^{1364}\) In other words, al-Māturīdī is asserting that if God has istiwā’ (dominion) over the ‘arsh then he has dominion over all creation because ‘arsh is the greatest of creation exactly as God considered the conquest of Prophet Muḥammad over Makkah as a conquest over the entire Arabian Peninsula. Thereupon, al-Māturīdī delivers an argument that satisfies both intellect and tradition. His persona as the synthesizer between ‘aql and naql emerges once more and confirms that this synthesis is one of the fundamental components of his paradigm.

Another aptitude in the persona of al-Māturīdī that manifests in the course of the above argument is his ability to morph the argument of his opponents to the benefit of his own. He contends that even on the presumption that istiwā’ may mean irtifā’ (rising above the ‘arsh) it will still negate the notion of makān to God as it “‘alā al-man ‘i bi wasf al-makān (negates the
attrition of a space to God).”

Al-Māturīdī follows his contention with supporting evidence, “idh huwa a’lā al-amkinah ‘inda al-khalq (for the ‘arsh is the highest place in the perception of the creatures) and the minds cannot comprehend what is beyond it.”

He concludes, “fa ashāra ilayhi liyu ‘lam ‘uluwwuhu ‘an al-amkinah wa ta ‘ ālīh ‘an al-ḥājah (Thus, God mentioned it so it would be known that he is above the notion of space and above any type of need).”

Skilfully, al-Māturīdī verifies his principal objective, which is to deny any similarities between God and his creation, through the argument of his antagonists.

Al-Māturīdī does not construct his conclusion on this observation alone but reinforces with Qur’anic attestation. He cites verse 7 chapter al-Mujādilah, which speaks of the practise of najwā (a secret conversation) amongst people. The verse reads, “…There is no najwā (a secret conversation) amongst three but he is the fourth of them, nor are there five but he is the sixth of them.”

Al-Māturīdī elaborates, “wal-najwā laysa min naw ‘ ma yudāf ilā al-makān walakin yudāf ilā al-asrār (the reference to the najwā is not a reference to a place but a reference to shared secrets).”

He maintains that when God states, in the al-Mujādilah verse, that he is the fourth of the three and the fifth of the four and “no less than that and no more except that he is with them...” is not referring to his physical presence spatially with them. Rather he is confirming his knowledge of the asrār (secrets) of all people whether they are few or many, likewise is the reference to the ‘arsh, in chapter Ṭāha, he argues. It is not a reference to a makān for God but alternatively a reference to his superiority above all places.

---

1365 Ibid.
1366 Ibid.
1367 Ibid.
1368 Ibid.
Al-Māturīdī’s citation of the al-Mujādilah verse does not satiate his eagerness to prove his argument beyond doubt. He stresses that the interpretation of the verse of *istiwā’* should be in line with verse 84 chapter al-Zukhruf where God speaks about his *ulūhiyyah* (Godship), “And it is Allah who is [the only] deity in the heaven, and on the earth [the only] deity.” Al-Māturīdī, as usually, stops at citing the verse without illuminating on the reference or the connection between it and *istiwā’.* He means to say that the description of God as “fī al-samā’ (in the heaven)” and “fī al-ard (in the earth)” in chapter al-Zukhruf is not a reference to his spatial enclosure in either of them but a confirmation that it is God who governs all affairs irrespective of place and time.

By the same logic, the reference to the *istiwā’* of the ‘*arsh* is an indication that he is above the notion of *makān.* Al-Māturīdī whether through his personal arguments or through his analysis of the opinions of his opponents establishes the transcendence of God above *tashbīh* and above place in all possibilities.

Upon contrasting the analysis of al-Māturīdī on the verse of *istiwā’* in chapter Ṭāḥa and that of his counterparts, it becomes undeniable the magnitude of the scholarly gap that exists between his exegesis and theirs. Whilst ‘Ayyāshī and Ṭabarī do not comment at all on the Ṭāḥa verse, Muqātil and Samarqandī are persistent in repeating the same brief commentary they wrote in the previous verses. No exegete besides al-Māturīdī develops an argument for the opinion he endorses. Similarly, no exegete besides al-Māturīdī presents a counter argument to dissuade one from embracing the interpretations they oppose. There is simply no interest at all, in these exegetes, in studying the topic theologically or even exegetically. As a result, there is no evidence of a set conceptual framework or a methodology in studying the *istiwā’* of God in their exegeses. This in itself is a strong evidence that they had no interest or simply did not even contemplate the idea of writing in the genre of theological exegesis. Thus, al-Māturīdī is the first
Sunni exegete to establish this genre in Sunni exegesis. He is the first to approach the subject methodically with a set conceptual framework and to attempt to highlight the Qur’anic evidence in every single verse individually and uniquely.

6.6 The notion of tafwīḍ¹³⁶⁹ in istiwā’

In view of the above methodology, al Māturīdī progresses to verse 4 chapter al-Sajdah. There, he reassesses his commentary and his views on the subject and makes original contribution to knowledge. He states, “lakinna nadhkuru ḥarfan lam nadhkuru hu fīmā taqaddam (Here we mention a point that we did not mention earlier) wa ka’annahu aṣwab wa aqrab ilā al-ḥaqq (which might be more correct and closer to the truth).”¹³⁷⁰ Au contraire to the other exegetes, al-Māturīdī is not static or rigid in his views or commentary. He consistently reconsiders what every verse conveys and consequently, reassesses his stance accordingly. This shows that al-Māturīdī does not enforce his personal views on the verses rather seeks to develop them taking into account what the Qur’an teaches about God. Consequently, a new portrayal of al-Māturīdī emerges, one that is different to his image in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. He is not just a hardcore rationalist or polemic but also a traditionalist who holds in high esteem the Qur’an and aims to develop his theological system according to its guidance.

Thus, al-Māturīdī states, “dhālika ḥarf wa kalām lam yaj ‘ al Allahfi al-‘uqul wa al-afḥām sabīl al-dark lahu wa al-ma’rifah (this is a topic and an utterance that God, the most high,

¹³⁷⁰ Al-Māturīdī, Ta’wilāt Ahl Al-Sunnah, 11, 265.
did not permit the minds and intellects to comprehend completely).“

Al-Māturīdī’s statement is very significant. It confirms that he does not believe that any interpretation that exegetes or theologians provided or will provide about the *istiwā’* of God could be declared as conclusive. Al-Māturīdī arrives at this point in light of verse 59 chapter al-Furqān. The verse speaks about the *istiwā’* of God on the *’arsh* and about the creation of the heavens and earth in six days but it is the ending phrase of the verse that al-Māturīdī focuses on “*fas’al bihi khabīrā* (ask (about God) the one who is well acquainted with him).”

To al-Māturīdī the command “ask a well-acquainted one” is addressed to Prophet Muḥammad and he is encouraged to ask an expert about God. It can either refer to Gabriel, the arch angel, who transmits to the prophet God’s revelation, or to God directly, invoking him to guide Prophet Muḥammad to the truth of the matter. The phrase makes al-Māturīdī question the ability of the humans to grasp the notion on their own. He proposes, “*walaw kāna dhālika al-ḥarf mimmā li ‘uqūl al-bashar wa afhāmihim sabīl al-wuṣūl ilā ma ‘ rifatihi wa darkihi* (if the human intellects possessed the intellectual capability to learn this notion and comprehend it)”

God would not have instructed his messenger to ask a *khabīr* (a well-informed expert). ‘*Aql rasūl rab al-’ālamīn* (the intellect of the messenger of the Lord of the worlds), according to al-Māturīdī, represents the pinnacle of human intellect in the field of theology. If he is recommended to seek aid in this matter, then none would ever have the ability to describe or explain *istiwā’* without divine guidance.

The statement of al-Māturīdī reconfirms what has been established earlier about his belief in the integral role of reason in theology in general and in the domain of the divine names and

---

[^1371]: Ibid.
[^1372]: Ibid.
attributes in particular, which includes the discourse about the anthropomorphic expressions. The directive from chapter al-Furqān caused an important shift in al-Māturīdī’s perception of *istiwā*. It led him to state, “*lakin bil sam’ mina Allah* (it (*istiwā*) could only be comprehended through a revealed report from God).”\(^{1373}\) This makes *istiwā* an exception to the rule.

Indeed, it is not an exception to discover that the other exegetes overlooked completely the point al-Māturīdī remarked in chapter al-Furqān and chapter al-Sajdah. There was neither a new nor a repeated commentary by any of them on the topic of *istiwā*. What was surprising nonetheless, is that none of them agreed with al-Māturīdī that the command to ask a khabīr (expert) refers to God or *istiwā*. Samarqandī considers it a generic statement that means “*mā akhbartuk bihī min shay’in fahuwa kamā akhbartuk* (whatever I informed you about is in reality accurate exactly as I informed you).”\(^{1374}\) He has taken this statement verbatim from Ṭabarī who reports it from Ibn Jurayj (d. 767 CE) who closed the statement with the phrase “for I am the khabīr (expert).”\(^{1375}\)

From a mere exegetical perspective, the interpretation of al-Māturīdī of the “expert” phrase in the verse seems more on point with the principles of Qur’anic exegesis than that of Ṭabarī or Samarqandī. The phrase “ask about him an expert” came straight after God’s name al-Raḥmān (The most Merciful) and after God spoke about *istiwā*. The rule of *aqrab madhkūr* (the nearest mentioned) stipulates that a pronoun should be connected to the nearest noun. Accordingly, the pronoun “bihī (about him)” should be referring to God and the command thus

---

\(^{1373}\) Ibid.

\(^{1374}\) Samarqandī, *Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-’Ulūm*, 2, 543.

should be to enquire about God and *istiwā’* because they are the nearest noun and the nearest phrase.

This phrase presented an opportunity for al-Māturīdī to discuss *tafwīd*. An opportunity that he indeed seizes. Al-Māturīdī does not mention *tafwīd* by name but his statement entails it. After he declares that *istiwā’* can only be understood accurately through *sam‘* (revelation), al-Māturīdī remarks, “*walam yudhkar ‘an al-rasūl annahu fassar dhālika* (and it has not been reported that the Messenger (Muḥammad) explained *istiwā’*) *aw qāl fihi aw sa’alahu aḥadun ‘anh* (or stated anything concerning it or was asked about it).”1376 As brief as the statement of al-Māturīdī may appear, it contains three specifies pieces of information that legitimate *tafwīd*. It confirms that in the course of teaching the Qur’an Prophet Muḥammad never explained *istiwā’*.1377 It asserts that even in his Ḥaḍīth traditions, he never brought it up. And thirdly, it avows that none of the companions enquired about it during the lifetime of the Prophet.

Succinctly, al-Māturīdī lists the three main channels through which Muslims may have received prophetic guidance on *istiwā’*. The absence of any information through any of these channels validates *tafwīd* as an option in *istiwā’*. Al-Māturīdī seems to limit the application of *tafwīd* to *istiwā’* as he does not expand his commentary any further.

Al-Māturīdī, thus, preserves the right of the exegetes, whether predecessors or successors, not to delve into a detailed, or any, explanation of *istiwā’* in the Qur’an. Al-Māturīdī could not be accused of being monolithic as he recognises and respects the possibility of more than one valid opinion. He advocates that the truth does not necessarily have to be in one autocratic position, which is a testimony of his academic objectivity.

1377 Al-Māturīdī does not open up the discussion on the prophet traditions that ascribe to God fingers.
At the same time, al-Māturīdī’s position testifies of his respect to the legacy of the salaf (early predecessors) for he indirectly confirms that they opted not to delve in the subject. Samarqandī confirms that tafwīḍ is unquestionably the traditional position on the matter. He reports the statements of Yazīd ibn Hārūn (d. 821 CE) and Mālik Ibn Anas (d. 795 CE), both are Ḥadīth scholars from the class of tābi ‘î al-tābi ‘în (the third generation after the prophet), who refused to delve into istiwā’ and considered “ta’wīluhu al-īmān bihī (its interpretation is to believe in it without interpreting it)”\(^\text{1378}\) as Yazīd advised. Samarqandī ascertain the above position by proclaiming that the interpreting of istiwā’ according to the “ẓāhir al-lughah (according to the apparent linguistic meaning)”\(^\text{1379}\) is “qawl al-mushabbihah (is the stance and practice of the assimilators).”\(^\text{1380}\) It is surprising to see Ṭabarī who zealously claims to defend the traditional position opt not only to advocate a different position but ignore the mention of the predecessors’ practice of tafwīḍ completely in his commentary. It is notable to see al-Māturīdī, a theological exponent and an ambassador of synthetic theology, recognises the tafwīḍ position after all his previous commentary. This bespeaks his objectivity and intellectual integrity.

From a methodological perspective, al-Māturīdī’s commentary on istiwā’ in Chapter al-Furqān and Chapter al-Sajdah reveals important findings. These two chapters sequentially come after chapter Ṭāha in the order of the Qur’an. The new contribution of al-Māturīdī confirms that his study of istiwā’ in the Qur’an is chronological. He begins from chapter al-Baqarah and proceeds unswervingly to the next chapter and comments on the subject every time it surfaces. It signposts that al-Māturīdī engages the topic actively throughout Ta’wīlāt and does not simply unload his theological presuppositions on the subject at the first appearance of istiwā’ in the

\(^{1378}\) Samarqandī, Tafsīr Al-Samarqandī Bahr Al-‘Ulūm, 1, 39.
\(^{1379}\) Ibid.
\(^{1380}\) Ibid.
Qur’an, which other exegetes did, predominantly Ṭabarī. This seemingly small detail testifies of a great difference in the methodology and vision of al-Māturīdī in Ta’wilāt in comparison to his counterparts. If his aim was to simply state his theological view on the topic, he would have done what Ṭabarī did. He would simply articulate his thoughts in chapter al-Baqarah and never return to it. Al-Māturīdī’s objective is to explore and discover what the Qur’an says about *istiwā’*. This separates his work from that of all the other exegetes as the first complete Qur’anic study of *istiwā’* in Sunni exegesis. The same observation applies in the case of his commentary on the *yad* and *‘ayn* verses and Ta’wilāt is indeed the first Sunni theological exegesis.

6.7 The discourse concerning al-*istiwā’* in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*

Contrasting al-Māturīdī’s commentary on *istiwā’* in Ta’wilāt with the chapter he dedicates to the subject in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* unearths very important discoveries. A striking discovery is the similarities in the language of writing and the choice of technical terms that exist in both titles, which confirms, once more, that both texts are written by the same author.

Despite these similarities, the categorisation of the information in both texts is distinct. In the *Kitāb*, the coverage of the subject is completely thematic. All relevant information is compiled under one heading “*al-‘arsh*” and then explained systematically. Conversely in Ta’wilāt the views of al-Māturīdī are exploratory and sporadic. Indeed, this makes it difficult, for the reader, to comprehend easily his views and arguments. However, it is understandable since it reaffirms that he did not write Ta’wilāt to be a dialectic treatise but a theological exegesis. Thus, the nature of the text demands for the content to appear in different verses and follow the context of the verses and the chapters.
The analysis of the content in both titles manifests another important difference between the Kitāb and Ta’wīlāt. In the latter, al-Māturīdī dedicates more space to rebutting the interpretations that insinuate that God is enclosed or associated with a makān. In Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, on the other hand, al-Māturīdī holistically investigates all proposed opinions about the meaning of istiwa’ and ‘arsh. He addresses first the suggestion that God is in a makān. He progresses to counter the argument that proposes that God isfī kulli makān (in all places) and then explains the argument that advocates naft al-wasf bil makān (the denial of the notion of makān) altogether and believes that God is beyond such a thought.1381 The nature of the argument of al-Māturīdī in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd is highly polemical. This is not to suggest that Ta’wīlāt contains no polemical arguments or even to deny that the Kitāb is free of a calm tone. Indeed, the content in both titles is very similar, which once more, confirms that the author of both works is one. The Kitāb however, tends to be more challenging to the opponents when Ta’wīlāt delivers more of calm explanation of the topic. It follows, therefore, that the rational arguments in the Kitāb is more visible.

One of the obvious reasons for this high visibility is that al-Māturīdī targets the Mu’tazilites directly in the Kitāb whereas in Ta’wīlāt the audience is all Muslim scholars. Specifically, al-Māturīdī targets al-Ka‘bī1382 (d. 931 CE) and addresses him on many occasions by name in the Kitāb. The rivalry between al-Māturīdī and al-Ka‘bī that Rudolph expands on could have contributed to the harshness and dialectic tone in the Kitāb.1383

---

1381 Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 68.
1382 A prominent mu’tazilite scholar who founded his own school al-Ka’biyyah. He belonged to the Baghdad chapter in the Mu’tazilite order but differed from them on few theological issues. For further information see, Ibn Ṭāhir. Baghdādī, Al-Farq Bayna Al-Firaq Wa Bayān Al-Firqat Al-Nājiyah Minhum, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar Al Afaq Al Jadida, 1977), 169.
1383 Al-Māturīdī, Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd, 74.
Why doest al-Māturīdī hold back from rebutting Ka‘bī’s arguments in Ta’wīlāt? Al-Māturīdī has demonstrated a deliberate effort to minimise the presence of polemic debate in his exegesis, which of course reaffirms that he wants Ta’wīlāt to be an exegesis and not a dialectic title. Secondly, the nature of the verses does not demand it. All the verses that speak of istiwā’ speak of the ‘arsh mostly, and heavens occasionally. The likelihood of misunderstanding the reference in the verses to mean that God is in all places in knowledge is naught. On the other hand, the likelihood of misinterpreting the ‘arsh, in the context of istiwā’, to mean a makān is much greater.

However, the visible polemical nature of al-Māturīdī’s writing in his theological epistle does not stop at refuting al-Ka‘bī’s argument. He also addresses issues the proponents of interpreting the ‘arsh as a throne use to validate their view. For instance, the practice of “raf‘ al-ayādī (raising the hands up towards the heavens when invoking God)”1384 as proof that God is above the heavens, and the ‘arsh, and by extension God is in a place. Al-Māturīdī responds with an analogical reasoning: if “raf‘ al-ābṣār (raising one’s eyes)” towards the heavens is indicative of God being up in the heavens then placing one’s forehead on the ground should be proof that God is “asfāl al-arḍ (below the earth)” or that he is in Makkah when one goes to perform Hajj. Al-Māturīdī proclaims that such commands are not for the purpose of pinpointing or even determining God’s location. Rather, they are “‘alā al-ībadah (for the purpose of worship).”1385 God “lahu an yata ‘abbad ‘ibādahu bima shā’ (has the authority to demand his servants to worship him in any forms he likes).”1386 Thus, these are acts of worship God requested that we perform them in this particular way. In addition, the heaven is the direction from which people

1384 Ibid, 76.
1385 Ibid.
1386 Ibid.
witnessed the “mahbaṭ al-wahī (the descending of revelation)”\textsuperscript{1387}, which makes it an appropriate direction for supplication. It is also the direction from which “uṣūl barakāt al-dunyā (the main bounties and blessings of life in this world)”\textsuperscript{1388} descend inferring rain and sunlight.

Al-Māturīdī extends the use of the polemic tenor in the Kitāb from undermining the view of the proponents of makān to reinforcing his own view. In the event that the ‘arsh or the heavens are destroyed or cease to exist where would God be? And how would one describe istiwā’? Al-Māturīdī proclaims that the correct belief is the one that accounts for such a situation and guarantees to God a permanent state that cannot be influenced by “irtifā’ al-amkinah aw baqā’ uhā (the perishing of places or its existence).”\textsuperscript{1389} The intiqāl al-ahwāl (change from one state to another) is suggestive of iḥtimāl of fanā’ (the possibility of perishability) and one cannot rule this possibility when associating God with a perishable place or notion.\textsuperscript{1390}

Such polemic rich arguments are not evident in Ta’wīlāt. They are relevant to the overall subject but the nature of the verses does not invoke them. Most of the arguments al-Māturīdī deliberates in Ta’wīlāt are in harmony with the context of the verses. A confirmation of al-Māturīdī’s intention for this title to be a Sunni theological exegesis and not dialectic epistle. It also contributes to the proposition that Ta’wīlāt was written post the Kitāb. Another proof of the above supposition is the verbatim citation of passages from Kitāb al-Tawḥīd in Ta’wīlāt. The extent of it is unforeseen, unanticipated and perspicuous. The chapter of al-‘arsh in the Kitāb shares more than half of its content with the commentary of al-Māturīdī on the subject of istiwā’ in Ta’wīlāt. Literally, complete pages from the Kitāb are copied into Ta’wīlāt. They centralize in

\textsuperscript{1387} Ibid, 77.
\textsuperscript{1388} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1389} Ibid, 69.
\textsuperscript{1390} Ibid.
chapter Ṭāha, and to a lesser extent in chapter al-Aʿrāf, where the bulk of al-Māturīdī’s explanation is found.

One may argue that the percipient citation could be proof of the opposite. However, this cannot be correct for the following reasons. Al-Māturīdī’s commentary on istiwā’ in Taʿwīlāt, particularly in chapter al-Aʿrāf, is far more sophisticated. He develops it further and reinforces it with multiple proofs and arguments. He expands it to consider new interpretations such as istiwā’ could mean creation. Something he has not done in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. Writing Taʿwīlāt after the Kitāb enabled al-Māturīdī to refine his thoughts further. Secondly, the content in chapter al-Raʿd about the reinforcement of the transcendence of God is not extant in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. Thirdly, and perhaps the most important dissimilarity or proof, the absence of the acceptance of tafwīd in the interpretation of istiwā’ from the Kitāb coupled with its appearance in Taʿwīlāt towards the end of the commentary of al-Māturīdī on the topic, namely in chapter al-Sajdah, substantiate that Taʿwīlāt was written after Kitāb al-Tawḥīd.

6.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, al-Māturīdī’s exegesis of the istiwā’ verses proves to be the most comprehensive of all the anthropomorphic expressions related commentary. He interprets istiwā’ when associated with God to various word level meanings: (1) al-qāṣd (to direct or focus one’s attention, actions or will towards something or someone); (2) al-tamām (to complete and to perfect); (3) al-istīlā’ (to have complete dominion and control); and (4) al-khalq (to create). In the context of the heavens, al-Māturīdī sets his modus operandi in the interpretation of istiwā’ and does not associate it closely with God as an attribute or an action. He attributes istiwā’ to the
cosmic dust, the atmosphere and the air between the heavens and the earth and the manāfi’ (benefits) of the heavens. The interpretations al-Māturīdī recommends exhibit his resolve against tashbīh. In al-Māturīdī’s view, tashbīh does not only violate the sanctity of God who must transcend his creation but it is rationally impossible for it negates the notion of Godship and the eternality of God. All these interpretations are original to al-Māturīdī and represent a genuine effort to provide a new understanding of istiwā’ and to establish the Sunni theological exegesis genre.

In the context of the ‘arsh, al-Māturīdī implements the same methodology but his interpretations of istiwā’ acclimate to the context of the verses. Al-Māturīdī interprets istiwā’ as the manifestation or the completion of the mulk (kingship) of God. The ‘arsh, thus, is an allegoric reference the kingship of God and not a corporeal entity. Al-Māturīdī, additionally, introduces the notion of the markers or indicators of the zuhūr (manifestation) of the kingship of God in his interpretation of istiwā’. He offers an original doctrinal position on the notion of the six days of creation. Al-Māturīdī lists three possible indicators of this completion and manifestation: (1) The creation of al-mumtaḥānūn (the humans) at the beginning of creation, (2) the admission of al-mumtaḥānūn of God’s kinship on the day of Judgment and (3) the notion of ‘uqūbah and mathūbah (reward and punishment) as a symbol of the absolute justice of God and his sovereignty. He supports these unprecedented interpretations with rational and textual proofs from the relevant verses. Al-Māturīdī asserts that ‘arsh, when associated with God, in the Qur’an does not have one conclusive meaning. In the context of the verses of istiwā’, ‘arsh refers to the kingship of God. Elsewhere, however, it refers to a throne that symbolises the glorification of God. All these positions are unequalled in Sunni exegesis.
In saying that, al-Māturīdī does not believe that any interpretation of *istiwā’,* including his own, represents the inherent single correct meaning of the notion that all exegetes must advocate. He openly validates the practice of *tafwīḍ* in *istiwā’* and arrives to the conclusion that reason alone is not able to exclusively understand the concept of *istiwā’,* and by extension the ‘*arsh,* and traditions has not provided a conclusive explanation of it. The conclusion of al-Māturīdī though does not discourage him from exploring all the possible interpretations of *istiwā’* he can elicit from the verses. He progresses in constructing the basis of his interpretations and exerts all efforts in developing them. This being the case, he stands strongly against the anthropomorphistic interpretation of *istiwā’,* in the context of the ‘*arsh.* He designates a substantial part of his commentary to debunking such an opinion. He appeals to all types of proofs for this purpose, narrative and rational. He predominantly synthesizes and seeks to apply ‘*aql* with *naql* in his argument, when suitable, which is a trademark in his exegesis and one of his significant contributions to Sunni theological exegesis. He prioritises the use of evidence from within the Qur’ān, in the form of verses and exegetical opinions, upon which he constructs his rational arguments.

Al-Māturīdī is orthodoxly consistent in his adherence to the methodology he devised in his commentary on the expressions, *yad* and *‘ayn* expressions. Yet in *istiwā’,* he develops it further by refining the previous maxims he composed such as the maxim of *idāfah* (annexation) and introducing new exegetical maxims such as the influence of the entities on the meaning of the utterances used to describe them. Al-Māturīdī is methodical in his critical analysis of the verses. He begins from chapter al-Fātiḥah and progresses to the next chapter. Every verse he encounters represents to him an opportunity to restudy his theological views and reinforce or refine them. Al-Māturīdī displays a high level of flexibility, objectivity and scholarship 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.

Amongst the significant discoveries in this chapter are the similarities in the language of writing and the choice of technical terms that exist between Ta’wīlāt and *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, which confirm that both texts are written by the same author. At the same time, the assessment of the content manifests important difference between both titles. Verbatim quotation of passages from *Kitāb* in Ta’wīlāt as well as the absence of the acceptance of *tafwīḍ* in the interpretation of *istiwā’* from the *Kitāb* substantiate further that Ta’wīlāt was written after *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.

Al-Māturīdī is the first Sunni exegete to establish the genre of theological exegesis in Sunni exegesis as far as anthropomorphism in God’s actions is concerned. He is the first to approach the subject methodically with a set conceptual framework and a methodology and to attempt to highlight the Qur’anic evidence in every single verse individually and distinctively.
CONCLUSION

The main objectives of the thesis were to investigate the theology of al-Māturīdī, in ilāhiyyāt, through his unexplored and most comprehensive work, Taʿwīlāt, and to unearth and evaluate his contributions to Sunni theological exegesis. The absence of any substantial research into Taʿwīlāt, on the exegetical and theological level, both in Arabic and western academia, as well as the lack of a comparative analysis of al-Māturīdī’s theology in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd in tandem with Taʿwīlāt were the primary focus of the thesis. The thesis critically analysed al-Māturīdī’s commentary in Taʿwīlāt to discover his conceptions on the existence of God, the doctrine of tawḥīd and the nature of God, names and attributes of God and al-Māturīdī’s position on the various forms of anthropomorphism.

Chapter 2 showed that al-Māturīdī evidences his uniqueness in Sunni theological exegesis on two levels, the theological and the exegetical. On the theological level, al-Māturīdī is the first Sunni traditional scholar to lead the debate about the existence of God in the mainstream traditional Sunni academia. He constructs a new and clear paradigm for this purpose based on rational argumentations unprecedented in Sunni traditional narrative. In his paradigm, al-Māturīdī endorses, albeit partially and conditionally, the views of the traditional school, the rational school – particularly the Muʿtazilites – and Muslim and non-Muslim philosophers. Al-Māturīdī is analytical and critical of the views of all camps. He critically articulates his independent views and arguments. In Taʿwīlāt, al-Māturīdī legitimises the use of rational arguments in proving the existence of God and considers it the strongest, if not the only accepted approach. He proves that rational argumentation appeases God since God advocates for it in the
Qur’an. According to al-Māturīdī, God decrees for all his prophets and messengers to discover him through reason before granting them revelation and the status of ultimate conviction. At the same time, al-Māturīdī asserts that receiving scriptural guidance is paramount to the completion of one’s faith. In doing so, he acknowledges contentions of the traditional school. Al-Māturīdī argues that a person is punishable for disbelief only after denying the scriptural messages despite their ability to discover God through their independent reason. Al-Māturīdī’s position on this matter has been overlooked by Abū Muʿīn Nasafī, who does not elaborate on the notion of ‘udhr (excuse) al-Māturīdī explains in Ta’wīlāt.

Al-Māturīdī delivers eight arguments for the existence of God in Ta’wīlāt. Some of al-Māturīdī’s proofs were influenced, if not borrowed, from the Muʿtazilites and philosophers before him, such as the proof of opposites and the proof of cause. Al-Māturīdī, nonetheless, constructs them in his own style and evidence and does not endorse them uncritically. At the same time, he formulates new rational arguments that were his creation pressing his own trademark such as the proof of the existence of evil, the proof of change and the proof of ‘ināyah (care) and taskhīr (service). He devises his new arguments through personal contemplation and study of the Qur’an and the universe.

On the exegetical level, al-Māturīdī formulates a Qur’anic based rational argumentation to prove God’s existence. He connects Qur’anic exegesis to dialectical theology and argues that rational reasoning is revelational in essence. Significantly, al-Māturīdī is consistent in providing Qur’anic evidence for all the proofs, he endorses or originates, be them rational or traditional. He extracts theological arguments from verses most his contemporary and regional exegetes
overlooked; and discusses topics unexplored by any other Sunni exegete. Al-Māturīdī proves the inseparability of reason from scripture in the Qur’an.

Most importantly, al-Māturīdī does not force rational proofs upon the verses. This is clearly evident in his omission of purely rational proofs he advocates in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Al-Māturīdī’s aim is not to bend the verses to suit the well-circulated rational proofs, rather, it is to discover the rational proofs inherently conveyed or inferred in the Qur’an. Hence, the prevalent philosophical proofs *kalām* scholars discuss in their writings, particularly the proof of *jawāhir* and *aʿrāḍ*, were completely excluded from Taʾwīlāt.

Similarly, al-Māturīdī is the first Sunni exegete to discuss the conception of *tawḥīd*, at length, in Taʾwīlāt. The analysis, in chapter three, reveals that al-Māturīdī’s primary concern is to establish the *tawḥīd* doctrine with a diverse set of proofs and arguments to ensure a solid foundation. One of the fundamental elements al-Māturīdī highlights in Taʾwīlāt is the necessity of proofs for both the propagation and correct belief in *tawḥīd*. He is the first Sunni exegete to argue for such an obligation. Al-Māturīdī essentially constructs and reinforces his opinion with an array of evidence from numerous Qur’anic verses and from Prophet Muḥammad’s biography.

Al-Māturīdī’s discussion of the necessity of proofs bespeaks that he does not consider belief in *tawḥīd* to be an instinctive impulse in the human nature. A view that stands against the traditional Sunni school that insists on the instinctiveness of belief in the existence of God and *tawḥīd*. In the same breath, al-Māturīdī legitimises the use of rational argumentation in proving *tawḥīd*. He strongly classifies *tawḥīd* as a natural necessity and a rational conclusion human intellect is bound to concede. A unique position that separates him from all Sunni exegetes, who not only did not form an opinion on the matter but did not even discuss *tawḥīd* in their exegeses.
The proofs, nevertheless, al-Māturīdī proposes to ascertain *tawḥīd* do not belong solely to a single category. They are rational, textual and observational. They illustrate a new unconventional academic trademark in Sunni exegesis for the tenth century. A new unequalled theological and exegetical path engineered by al-Māturīdī reconciling ‘*aql* and *naql* without seeing an essential conflict between the two.

The main *samʿī* (textual) proof al-Māturīdī presents is *anbāʿ al-ghayb* (the tales of the past events and nations). He classifies it as an exclusive proof to the Arabs of Makkah, a unique yet challengeable position. In addition to this textual proof, al-Māturīdī cites rational and observational evidences to ascertain *tawḥīd*. Amongst them is the proof of the acceptance of death. The argumentation of death, as a proof of *tawḥīd*, is original to Taʾwilāt. It does not appear in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and is not cited in any other Sunni or regional exegesis.

The proof of *manāfiʿ* (the interconnectedness of benefits of the heavens and the earth) is another observational and rational proof al-Māturīdī presents frequently in Taʾwilāt. The *manāfiʿ* proof is the brainchild of al-Māturīdī long before other Muslim theologians discussed it. The frequency of al-Māturīdī’s reference to the *manāfiʿ* proof serves as a strong indication of his deliberate effort to contribute to Sunni theological exegesis as a genre and to bring to light the theological components of the Qur’an.

The proof of *ittisāq* and *taḍbīr* represents another strong rational proof al-Māturīdī raises recurrently in Taʾwilāt. The originality of al-Māturīdī’s work is not only in his introduction of *taḍbīr* as a proof of *tawḥīd*, to Sunni exegesis, but equally in modifying *taḍbīr* from the traditional form and complementing it with *al-ittisāq*, as a crucial part to it. In al-Māturīdī’s view the presence of governance in the universe alone does not prove *tawḥīd*. The surmise al-
Māturīdī asserts has not been paralleled by any other contemporary or predecessor exegete. Al-Māturīdī strives to provide additional unexampled proofs to ascertain the doctrine of *tawḥīd* such as the proof of the continuous flow of day and night, which he employs to counter the argument of dual gods, the proof of design in creation and the proof of *tadāfu‘* and *tamānu‘*. These proofs illustrate the objective of al-Māturīdī to be the founder of Sunni theological exegesis.

The elaborate theological explanations al-Māturīdī puts forth in Ta‘wīlāt are not paralleled by any other exegete. All other exegetes do not depart far from their usual method of mere transmission of the traditional exegetes’ commentaries and brief lexical explanations. The resolve and fervour al-Māturīdī demonstrates, in Ta‘wīlāt, to assert the doctrine of *tawḥīd* is not extant in other Sunni and Transoxianan exegesis up to and including his era. He seeks to progress Sunni exegesis beyond rigid imitation towards an analytical exegesis that focuses on the theology of the Qur‘an in the sphere of *tawḥīd*.

Despite the elaborate theological commentary of al-Māturīdī, he does not incorporate in Ta‘wīlāt all his proofs of *tawḥīd*. In *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, one encounters the proofs al-Māturīdī omitted. It seems likely that these proofs have been excluded from Ta‘wīlāt as they are pure rational arguments and there is no Qur‘anic underpinning for them.

The critical analysis of al-Māturīdī’s commentary on the verses addressing the names and attributes of God, in Chapter 4, revealed key findings and unearthed significant differences with other exegetes. On the theological level, al-Māturīdī’s introduction of the notion of al-*əslmā‘ al-ḥusnā* (the perfect and beautiful names of God) in a theological light is a key finding in the chapter. Whilst al-Māturīdī does not make any reference to al-*əslmā‘ al-ḥusnā* in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* he studies it thoroughly in Ta‘wīlāt – an important difference between both titles. Al-
Māturīdī utilises *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*’s notion as a platform to commence a theological debate with the Muʿtazilites concerning the affirmation of the divine names to God. Al-Māturīdī affirms the divine names and proves the Islamic and rational legitimacy of their plurality. He primarily underpins this belief with numerous Qur’anic evidence supported with rational proofs and concludes his argument with a linguistic proof. No other exegete uses *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* theologically or opens any form of debate about it let alone provide such a rich theological, rational and lexical analysis.

Significantly, al-Māturīdī underlies the foundational role of *al-ḥusnā* (beauty and perfection) component in the formulation of the names of God. He stresses a name cannot be ascribed to God unless it denotes the values of beauty and perfection. In addition, he develops a succinct methodology for the derivation of the names of God. He affirms the Sunni position of the existence of the eternal attributes of God and rejects the Muʿtazilites’ position against it and their description of it as *wasf al-wāṣifīn* (descriptions of the describer). Al-Māturīdī, however, stresses the existence of a symbiotic relationship between the names and the attributes of God, where each name must relate, at least, to one inherent attribute. Such theological positions of al-Māturīdī are not extant in any other exegetical title and are unique to Taʿwīlāt.

Al-Māturīdī’s deliberation on the *dhāt* of God is another significant finding in chapter 4. He ratiocinates that God cannot be defined or known through *māhiyyah* (quiddity) or *kayfiyyah* (modality). The subjugation of God to such concepts causes one to assimilate God to his creation and does not yield an accurate depiction of God’s nature, names or attributes. According to al-Māturīdī, the names and attributes God lists in the Qur’an are not there to grant humans a full
comprehension or description of God rather it is *taqřīb al-fahm* (to draw closer to the human’s intellect). Al-Māturīdī uses rational and traditional proofs to legitimise this position.

Al-Māturīdī retracts to the traditional camp, nonetheless, when it comes to describing the relationship between the *dhāt* of God and his attributes. He affirms the attributes are not the *dhāt* of God yet are not independent or separate from it. Al-Māturīdī abandons his explorative style in this area and approaches it briefly and cautiously. He does not offer any original insight or contributions to the debate.

Conversely, al-Māturīdī returns to his bold and forthright style in the sphere of the actions of God. He stresses that God’s actions are from his attributes. They cannot be attributed to other than the *dhāt* of God for such an attribution necessitates that God needs others to undertake actions. The insistence of al-Māturīdī on the classification of the actions of God as attributes is driven by his belief in the existence of the *takwīn* attribute, the mother attribute of all divine actions. Al-Māturīdī opens the debate about the *takwīn* attribute in the verses that report the divine command *kun fa yakūn*. In the context of this command, Ṭabarī debuts his traditional theological position and interprets the command as an uttered verbal statement from God. Al-Māturīdī opposes categorically the traditional interpretation. To him, *kun* is not a verbal statement from God. God uses it since it is *awjaz al-kalām* (the shortest form of speech) to denote swiftness of his command. According to al-Māturīdī, the role of *kun* is to point to the *takwīn* attribute.

Al-Māturīdī refutes the claim that the creative action of God is the same as the created. He constructs multiple traditional, mainly Qur’anic, linguistic and rational arguments dispelling this theological position confirming the existence of the *takwīn* attribute. Al-Māturīdī sees the
belief in the takwīn attribute a necessity for the correct belief in the perfect and beautiful names of God, to the correct demonstration of the relationship of God’s actions with the corporeal existence and the integrity of the ṣifātiyyah Sunni school.

Chapter 5 analyses critically al-Māturīdī’s views on anthropomorphism in God’s form of through the study of his commentary on the yad and ‘ayn related verses. It presents an invaluable insight into his theology on anthropomorphism in the form of God and contribution to Sunni theological exegesis. The chief finding of Chapter 5 is that al-Māturīdī classifies the anthropomorphic expressions to be lexical expressions that God uses to convey a phrasal or idiomatic meaning. They should, consequently, be comprehended in light of the contextual theme of their verses and should not be treated as an expression with single independent meaning applying everywhere in the Qur’an. They are not inherent attributes of God. In this sense, al-Māturīdī does not see these expressions as descriptions of God’s dhāt.

Consequently, al-Māturīdī does not give yad, when associated with God, a set meaning that applies to all relevant verses. Al-Māturīdī interprets yad to mean: (1) bounties; (2) distinction and status 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 dictated by the context of the verses involved. The examination of al-Māturīdī’s interpretation of the yad, in its various morphological forms, discloses another important finding in his theology – he does not classify yad as an inherent attribute, ṣifah. It is rather a tashbīh ṣifah, a simile expression, used to mainly describe the actions of God.

The same holds true to the ‘ayn verses. Al-Māturīdī does not classify the ‘ayn expression as a new or distinct attribute of God. In all the verses, where ‘ayn appears, in association with
God, al-Māturīdī interprets it as: (1) the care and nourishment of God; (2) the protection of God; (3) the instructions and teachings of God; (4) the victory of God; and (5) the aid of God. All these interpretations point to the actions of God. They are manifestations of his attributes of ‘ilm (knowledge), quwwah (power) and raḥmah (mercy). ‘Ayn, thus, is not an independent divine attribute.

These interpretations indicate that al-Māturīdī’s perception of all the anthropomorphic expressions, in the form of God, in the Qur’an to be idiomatic expressions God uses them to convey a phrasal or idiomatic meaning. They should, consequently, be comprehended and interpreted in light of the contextual theme of their verses and should not be treated as single lexical words of independent meanings.

In the sphere of methodology, al-Māturīdī emerges as the first Sunni exegete to follow a clear methodology in his study of the yad and ‘ayn utterances in the Qur’an. He is extremely consistent in his application of the maxims and instruments he believes serves best for an accurate interpretation of the Qur’anic expressions. More importantly, al-Māturīdī formulates exegetical principles inferred from the style of expression the Qur’ān uses. He then constantly implements these principles in his critical analysis of the anthropomorphic expressions. Al-Māturīdī emphasises the context of verses in his interpretation process and is always conscious of it in his consideration of the various meanings. One of the most distinct elements in his methodology is the employment of reason in the process of determining the meanings of the anthropomorphic expressions, which is a first in the Sunni exegetical community.

Notwithstanding the importance of the above, al-Māturīdī’s unexampled methodology imparts his trademark as a synthesiser between tradition and reason and a founder of his own
school. He criticises the rational and traditional interpretations of *yad* and *‘ayn* alike and asserts the accuracy of his proprietary interpretations. The methodology of al-Māturīdī is unique amongst all investigated exegetes. Contrary to other exegetes, al-Māturīdī is zealous and systematic in his engagement of the theological topics in *Ta’wilāt*. Other exegetes’ engagement is *ad hoc* rather than methodical. They comment once briefly on the *yad* utterances and proceed to another topic whilst al-Māturīdī studies every related verse and expression separately. He develops guiding principles, elucidates his views thoroughly, critiques other opinions and persistently seeks further interpretations with every relevant verse he encounters. This methodology gives immense flexibility, freedom and richness to al-Māturīdī and his exegesis and more importantly, respects the Qur’an and its nuances of meaning.

Surprisingly, the thoroughness one encounters in the engagement of al-Māturīdī of *yad* and *‘ayn* expressions in *Ta’wilāt* is not mirrored in *Kitāb al-Tawīl*. Al-Māturīdī does not address these anthropomorphic expressions in his theological epistle at all. This advances the significance of his theological contributions in *Ta’wilāt* and its pivotal role in a comprehensive understanding of al-Māturīdī’s theology on anthropomorphism in the form of God.

The same applies to al-Māturīdī’s understanding of anthropomorphism in the actions of God. His commentary on the *istiwā’* verses proves to be the most comprehensive of all anthropomorphic expressions. Al-Māturīdī interprets *istiwā’* when associated with God to various word level meanings: (1) *al-qāṣd* (to direct or focus one’s attention, actions or will towards something or someone); (2) *al-tamām* (to complete and to perfect); (3) *al-istilā’* (to have complete dominion and control); and (4) *al-khalq* (to create).
In the context of the heavens, al-Māturīdī sets his modus operandi for the interpretation of \(\textit{istiwā’}\). He does not associate it with God as an attribute or an action. Al-Māturīdī ascribes \(\textit{istiwā’}\), as an action, to the cosmic dust, the atmosphere and the air between the heavens and the earth and the \(\textit{manāfi’}\) (benefits) of the heavens. The interpretations al-Māturīdī recommends exhibit his resolve against \(\textit{tashbīh}\). In al-Māturīdī’s view, \(\textit{tashbīh}\) does not only violate the sanctity of God, who must transcend his creation, but is rationally impossible for it negates the notion of Godship and the eternality of God. All these interpretations are original to al-Māturīdī and represent a genuine effort to provide a new understanding of \(\textit{istiwā’}\) and establish the Sunni theological exegesis genre.

In the context of the \(\textit{‘arsh}\), al-Māturīdī implements the same methodology but his interpretations of \(\textit{istiwā’}\) acclimate to the context of the verses. He interprets \(\textit{istiwā’}\) as the manifestation or the completion of the \(\textit{mulk}\) (kingship) of God. The \(\textit{‘arsh}\), thus, is an allegoric reference to the kingship of God and not a corporeal entity. Al-Māturīdī, additionally, introduces the notion of the markers or indicators of the \(\textit{ẓuhūr}\) (manifestation) of the \(\textit{mulk}\) (kingship) of God in his interpretation of \(\textit{istiwā’}\). He offers an original doctrinal position on the notion of the six days of creation. Al-Māturīdī lists three possible indicators of this completion and manifestation: (1) The creation of \(\textit{al-mumtaḥanūn}\) (the humans) at the beginning of creation, (2) the admission of \(\textit{al-mumtaḥanūn}\) of God’s kinship on the day of Judgment and (3) the notion of \(\textit{‘uqūbah}\) and mathūbah (reward and punishment) as a symbol of the absolute justice of God and his sovereignty. He supports these unprecedented interpretations with rational and contextual proofs from the relevant verses. Al-Māturīdī asserts that \(\textit{‘arsh}\), when associated with God, in the Qur’an does not have one conclusive meaning. In the context of the verses of \(\textit{istiwā’}\), \(\textit{‘arsh}\) refers to the
kingship of God. Elsewhere, however, when associated with God, it refers to a throne that
symbolises the glorification of God. All these positions are unequalled in Sunni exegesis.

Despite the above, al-Māturīdī does not believe that any interpretation of *istiwā’*,
including his own, represents the inherent single correct meaning of the notion that all exegetes
must advocate. He openly validates the practice of *tafwīḍ* in *istiwā’* and arrives to the conclusion
that reason alone is not able to exclusively understand the concept of *istiwā’*, and by extension
the ‘*arsh*. At the same time, he confesses that tradition has not provided a conclusive explanation
of it. The conclusion of al-Māturīdī does not discourage him though from exploring all the
possible interpretations of *istiwā’* he can elicit from the verses. He progresses in constructing the
basis of his interpretations and exerts all efforts in developing them.

Even with the fact al-Māturīdī overtly preaches that he is not autocratic in his
commentary, he stands strongly against the anthropomorphic interpretations of *istiwā’*. He
designates a substantial part of his commentary to debunking it. Al-Māturīdī applies all types of
proofs for this purpose, narrative and rational. Al-Māturīdī’s opposition to anthropomorphic
interpretations stems from the lack of persuasive evidence that may credit them and their
contradiction to the fundamentals of reason and tradition.

Al-Māturīdī employs rational and traditional proofs in the formulation of his perceptions
and arguments vis a vis *istiwā’*. Additionally, he relies consistently on the versatile lexicon of
Arabic and its complex grammatical rules. A tactic al-Māturīdī did not apply in his interpretation
of the *yad* and ‘*ayn*. He predominantly synthesizes and seeks to apply ‘*aql* with *naql* in his
argument, when suitable. Nonetheless, al-Māturīdī prioritises constructing the rational arguments
he uses to support his exegetical interpretations upon Qur’anic verses and consensual
interpretations. A trademark in his exegesis and a significant contribution to Sunni theological exegesis.

In *istiwā’*, he develops his methodology, established when dealing with *yad* and ‘*ayn*, further by refining the previous maxims he composed such as the maxim of *iḍāfah* (annexation) and introducing new exegetical maxims such as the influence of the entities on the meaning of the utterances used to describe them. Al-Māturīdī is methodical in his critical analysis of the verses. Every verse al-Māturīdī encounters represents an opportunity to restudy his theological views and reinforce or revise them. He displays a high level of objectivity and scholarship in his study and maintains high proficiency in his analysis of the verses and his review of the opinions and evidence of other exegetes.

Amongst the significant discoveries of the thesis is the striking similarities, in the language of writing and the choice of technical terms, that exist between Ta’wīlāt and *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. It confirms both texts were written by the same author. The assessment of the content, on the other hand, manifests a key important difference—The absence of *tafwīḍ* in the interpretation of *istiwā’* from *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. The absence of the acceptance of tafwīḍ in the interpretation of *istiwā’* from the *Kitāb*, coupled with its appearance in Ta’wīlāt, substantiate further that Ta’wīlāt was written after *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. The research in Ta’wīlāt has revealed a more comprehensive theology of al-Māturīdī in the purview of *ilāhiyyāt*. It has shown that al-Māturīdī has written a systematic and well-defined theology in his exegesis. Al-Māturīdī lists proofs, forms arguments, discusses and debates – sometimes at length – the theological and exegetical positions of the others, whether traditionalists or rationalists. In doing so, al-Māturīdī establishes a firm foundation of his theology with the Qur’an or rather, brings out the theology of
the Qur’an which becomes his theology. The research has demonstrated al-Māturīdī to be the first Sunni exegete to accomplish such a significant task in the tenth century and his Central Asia region. In turn, this thesis abrogates fully the long-held belief, in Muslim and non-Muslim scholarship, that al-Rāzī is the founder of Sunni theological exegesis. Al-Māturīdī may be described, thus, as the father of the Sunni theological exegesis genre.

The study critically analysed al-Māturīdī’s approach to the theological verses and demonstrated his adherence to a set conceptual framework and a methodology he applies in every single verse individually and consistently. Al-Māturīdī is the earliest and first Sunni exegete to propagate the necessity of the use of ‘aql in the interpretation of the Qur’an and the understanding of its doctrines. Even though the role of ‘aql in his epistemology is not absolute, it shares the authority of exegetical interpretation on par with naql. The distinction of al-Māturīdī lies not only in his insistence on the role of ‘aql in theological exegesis but more importantly in his ability to synthesize ‘aql and naql in his arguments and substantiate that they complement and do not contradict each other in the interpretation of the Qur’an and the formation of theology. The synthetical role of al-Māturīdī is far more visible in Ta’wīlāt than in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. The polemical nature of the latter inhibits this facet of al-Māturīdī’s scholarly identity to emerge whilst in Ta’wīlāt it is boldly visible. Furthermore, the study highlights how al-Māturīdī believed and advocated that the Qur’an constructs rational arguments in the establishment of theology and does not object to the application of reason where appropriate.

The study has revealed the massive gap between al-Māturīdī’s approach to theology in Sunni exegesis and the approach of the most significant exegetes of his era and region. Even Ṭabarī who was more elaborate, than the rest of the exegetes, in his theological commentary falls
far behind al-Māturīdī. Nonetheless, al-Māturīdī’s exegesis has not been overwhelmed by polemical arguments, unlike al-Rāzī’s exegesis, and retained its exegetical purity.

The study has revealed through the comparative analysis of Ta’wīlāt with Kitāb al-Tawḥīd that the former was likely written first and there are many elements in al-Māturīdī’s theology the Kitāb simply does not mention. It seems al-Māturīdī intended for the Kitāb to be his polemical title and for Ta’wīlāt to provide insight into his systematic theology. Hence, the arguments in Ta’wīlāt are more refined and enjoy a calmer tenor. It is the Ta’wīlāt that should be primarily studied to comprehensively establish al-Māturīdī’s theology.

The study has demonstrated that al-Māturīdī cannot be classified as a traditional ḥanafī theologian or exegete. The analysis of his exegesis puts him in a separate class. He is neither a traditionalist or a rationalist rather a pioneer of a new school that sought to harmonise between these two currents and attempt to remedy the flaws that exist in their respective paradigms, as much as his region and era permitted him to do so, without losing his identity as a Sunni scholar. Al-Māturīdī may have commenced his path as a traditional ḥanafī scholar but by the time he completed his Ta’wīlāt he metamorphosed as an independent Sunni scholar in his own right, the father of Sunni theological exegesis and the formulator of the Sunni synthetic school in Islamic theology.

**Directions for further research:**
This thesis investigated and critically analysed the theological views of al-Māturīdī vis a vis īlāhiyyāt in his exegesis Ta’wīlāt ahl al-Sunnah. The research undertook an analytical study of the theological verses in Ta’wīlāt to achieve a comprehensive exposition of al-Māturīdī’s
theological views, contributions to the genre of theological exegesis, methodology in interpreting such verses and the conceptual framework he employs in explaining them.

In spite of its in-depth analysis and important findings, the thesis did not study all the theological views of al-Māturīdī in his exegesis. The abundance of theological knowledge Ta’wīlāt offers deems it crucial for further studies to be undertaken on al-Māturīdī’s theology in the title. Thus, It would invaluable to extend the study of al-Māturīdī’s theology to the other tenets in the Islamic creed such as nubuwwāt (matters pertaining to Prophethood) or samʿīyyāt (transmitted beliefs such as the notions of Paradise and Hell and the events of the Hereafter including eschatology). It would be equally illuminating to investigate al-Māturīdī’s views on the notion of Divine Decree and its relationship to human will through Taʾwīlāt and the nuances that may arise when compared to Kitāb al-Tawḥīd.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Al-Jirjāwī, Z, and A Al-Hamṣ. "Dirāsah Ta’ṣīliyyah Li Nash’at Al-Tafsīr Wa Taṭawwurih Wa Maṣādirih Wa Anmāṭith." In The first Academic conference of the Qur’an and Islamic Studies College in Al-Quds University. Abu Dis, 2014.


Goldziher, I. The History of Islamic Schools in Qur’anic Exegesis. Translated by A.H. Abdul Qadir. Cairo: Matba’at Al Uloom, 1944.


%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AF%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86-
%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1-
%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87.


Spitta, Wilhelm. "Zur Geschichte Abul-Hasan Al-Asari's." [In Text in German and Arabic.]. (1876).


