

HİLMİ DEMİR & MUZAFFER TAN

A RETURN
TO MIND
AND
WISDOM

AI-MĀTURĪDĪ



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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A Return to Mind and Wisdom: Al-Māturīdī

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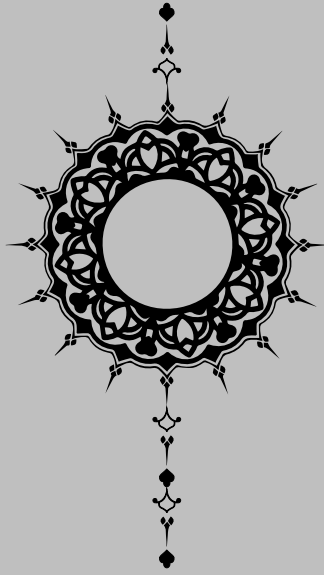
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FORWARD



In the last century, we have lost a lot of things that we have gained through hard and long struggles. Of course, we lost it not in a short period of time, as it was thought, but after a much longer melting process that spanned centuries. The most memorable of our losses were the geographies we retreated to, but perhaps the most damaging to us was losing our tradition on which culture, art and science were built. The question of “whether Islam is an obstacle to progress or not”, which started to be discussed in the last period of the Ottoman Empire, left its place to the debates on “whether terrorism stems from the Islamic tradition”. In this process, those who held that Islam is not an obstacle to development put the blame on tradition, not on Islam. Such a defense, as well as the debates on modernization and secularization, pushed us to exclude and marginalize tradition and ultimately to live a religious practice without a tradition. The lack of tradition, on the other hand, paved the way for the ideological reading of Islam and new drifts.

The ever-increasing wave of violence since the 80’s and the radicalized youth’s preference for strict and harsh forms of Islam push us to defend ourselves again. The mentality of each society is kneaded in a tradition, matures and transfers its achievements to future generations. Tradition is the necessary ground for the formation of the world of thought and contemplation. Of course, imitating this tradition as it is does not mean carrying it to the present. On the contrary, the tradition is constantly renewed and updated by its members, otherwise the tradition dies.

We believe that Islam, as the last religion sent to humanity, should have something to say to the new world. Since we are of the opinion that this can only be done by speaking and thinking within a tradition, we decided to publish a book series in order to explore the Islamic tradition and to transfer it to the younger generations in a way that is understandable in today's language. We believe that our people who will discover the tradition will build a future befitting the beautiful ages of our past, without being caught in the periodic radical winds. The circle of fire around the Islamic world and Turkey threatens not only our borders, but also our tolerant world of religious thought, which has been living in Anatolia and three continents for more than a thousand years. The way to overcome this threat and the civilization crisis that the Islamic world has entered into is to build a Turkey-based new world of thought. In order to build this world, we believe that the founding texts of our world of thought, which have guided Anatolia for a thousand years, should be explained to our people in a new and understandable language. We hope that these texts will revive the richness, scholarly tradition and intellectual thought of Islamic culture against the ideologies foreign to the Islamic tradition, which are increasingly spreading and expanding all over the world, especially in the Middle East and Asia.

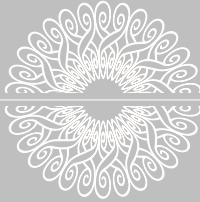
Today, there is a need for the revival and, if necessary, the reconstruction of the forgotten civilization of our country, to which the cries of help from our shattered Islam and our heartland are directed. With this necessity, we think that it is important to re-read the tradition, to understand it correctly and to transfer it to today's language for the revival and construction of our "imagination of civilization". Written by two scholars who are experts in their fields, this work is one of the outstanding examples of the effort to

transfer our tradition to the present. We would especially like to thank Mr. Cemil ecek for his encouragement and valuable intellectual contributions to the writing of this work. Last but not least, we are also grateful to Hilmi Demir and Muzaffer Tan, two distinguished scholars in their fields and the authors of this work, for bringing this valuable work to us and academia.

I hope that this work will make a modest but memorable contribution in bringing the tradition to the present. It helps us remember that we found the solution to many of our problems before.

Hayrullah BAŐER

Anadolu Education Culture and Science Foundation
Chairman of the Board



INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

Religion has two dimensions. The first and essential dimension is the field of faith: It includes the questions such as “who is a Muslim, what is the faith, how do I talk about God, how do I explain the relationships between God, man and the universe?” These are questions concerning fundamental Islamic beliefs and doctrines necessary for a Muslim to believe in. Therefore, they refer to what Muslim scholars call “*uṣūl* (fundamentals)”. Religion is built on these fundamentals. The second is the practical dimension of religion. It includes our prayers, the rules we follow in daily life, marriage, family, eating and drinking, as well as state-society relations, taxes, trade, war, etc. As matters of secondary importance, they are referred to as “*furūʿ* (branches of religion)” by Muslim scholars. In Islamic thought, the science that deals with the first dimension is called the science of *Kalām*, while the science that deals with the second is called the science of *Fiqh*. The former in the Sunnism has been represented by such schools of thought, in other words *madhhab*, as Ashʿarism and Māturīdism, especially after the fourth century, the former by Ḥanafism, Malikism, Shafiism and Ḥanbalism.

If Muslims are asked which faith they follow today, they will answer with either Sunnism or Shiʿism, with the former being more common than the latter. People are much more likely to say Sunnism than Shiʿism. When self-professed Sunnis are then asked what Sunnism is, very few will know about its sub-branches. The historical roles played by *madhhabs* have almost disappeared with the modernization of Islam. Unfortunately, Māturīdism, which we deal with here, is one of the schools of thought whose influence is rapidly decreasing in the Islamic world today.

In *Madhhabs*, we are referring to schools of thought. In this respect, they are not static, dull structures, and when considered in this manner, time is capable of erasing and destroying them. The madhhabs are epistemic communities created by the Muslim scholars (ulama) for the purpose of producing, testing and distributing religious knowledge. Even though madhhabs are named after their founders, they are not structures based on the charisma of a leader, nor should we confuse them with modern religious communities. The task of madhhab is to produce a systematic thought process of understanding, interpreting, and implementing religion. It is necessary to keep in mind that the four Sunnite schools of thought that have survived until this very day are capable of solving and answering outstanding problems as well as withstanding time; essentially this is how they survive.

Māturīdism, which we deal with in this study is the name of the theological school based on the views of famous theological scholar Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) who was born in Samarqand. The views of Māturīdism are based on the views of Abū Ḥanīfa, the founder of the first Islamic school of law. Māturīdism has often been overshadowed by Ḥanafism, and sometimes, the term “Ḥanafīte creed” has been preferred instead of Māturīdism. Therefore, while every Māturīdī Muslim is Ḥanafīte, not every Ḥanafīte Muslim is necessarily Māturīdites (though most are). Māturīdites are found across Central Asia, the Middle East, India, Afghanistan, Anatolia and the Balkans. It is also known as the madhhab of the Turks.

A *madhhab* (p. madhāhib) is a school of thought where individual views become a doctrine and are referenced by later ones. Legal and theological madhhabs in Islamic thought are the frames of reference required for systematic thinking, continuity and elimination of uncertainty rather than being political. Two types of madhhab have emerged in the history of Islam. The first

is *al-madhāhib al-‘amaliyya* (schools of law) that regulate the practices of Muslims. These are also called *al-madhāhib al-fiqhiyya* (juristic schools). Fiqh actually has a broad meaning, including legal practices. It refers to an area that regulates how Muslims worship, how they trade, and behave in private and public spheres. Therefore, these schools have emerged to answer our practical problems such as how to fast, how to give alms, how to get married, how to pay taxes.

Legal Schools has been established and spread as a civil reality in order to ensure legal security. Thus, it has been possible to ensure legal unity by giving the same verdict on the same events in all regions. Thus, large masses of people have taken a certain mujtahid imam as their basis and started to see his madhhab as the law and realized stability and justice in society. Ḥanafism, Mālīkism, Shāfi‘ism and Ḥanbalism are four mainstream Sunnite madhhabs that have survived to the present day.

The second type of madhhabs are called theological or creedal madhhabs. They are the madhhabs that determine the fundamental Islamic beliefs of Muslims. While the legal madhhabs deal with practical issues, they are more concerned with theoretical-creedal issues. They have contributed to the formation of metaphysical thoughts of Muslims by addressing issues in theory such as what is faith, who is a Muslim, what is the situation of a sinner Muslim, why our good and bad actions are described as good or bad. Likewise, there are two theological schools in the Sunnite mainstream: Ash‘arism and Mātūrīdism.

Abū Ḥanīfa is the founder of the first school of law (*fiqh*) known as “Ḥanafism”. Fiqh is a branch of science that regulates the practices of Muslims known as “mu‘āmalāt”. Today, we mostly use fiqh for the attempts to seek answers to the questions such as “how to pray”, “how to give zakat”, “what breaks the fast” etc. How-

ever, in history, *fiqh* has a wide range of regulation that includes the field called law today. Many individual and public regulations such as how to collect taxes, what are the rules of shopping in the bazaar, how the courts are held in disputes, how the state operates the land were made through *fiqh*. Abū Ḥanīfa, who was born in Kufa in 80/699 and died in Baghdad in 150/767, is considered one of the first founders of this discipline. In fact, he is the person who theorized the issue of “how to make law” in Muslim societies. Thus, he paved the way for the formation of a written culture and a legal society in the Islamic world.

He lived in a time very close to the Prophet and his companions. Therefore, he received his knowledge about how to interpret and implement Islam from the very first, original sources. All of the other madhhab imams were born long after Abū Ḥanīfa. For example, the founder of Ḥanbalism, on which many Salafists base themselves, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal was born in Baghdad in 164/780, about 14 years after Abū Ḥanīfa’s death.

Another feature of Abū Ḥanīfa is that he is the founder of the school that advocates contemplation and *ijtihad* in Islam, known as *Ahl al-Ra’y*. Having focused on how to understand and interpret the basic texts of Islam, he based contemplation and rational interpretation in the explanation of the Islamic faith. When those who opposed reasoning on religious issues asked him, “Is not enough for you what is enough for the Companions of the Prophet?”, he replied, “Yes, if I were in their place, what was possible for them would have been possible for me.”

He rationally interpreted religious texts to solve the problems faced by the expanding and growing Islamic society after the death of the Prophet. He paved the way for the establishment of a school of law, which would encompass the changing conditions and the legal regulations needed by the expanding

states, and a Kalām school, which would later be named with his name. Imam al-Māturīdī, a famous scholar from Samarqand, established a school of Kalām known as Māturīdism based on the works written by Abū Ḥanīfa in the field of faith.

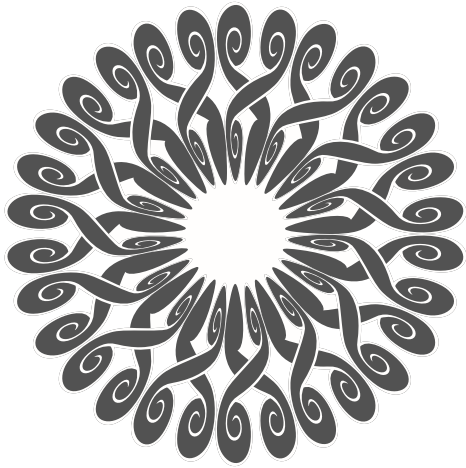
Known as a jurist, Abū Ḥanīfa is also one of the founding figures of the belief system known as Ahl al-Sunnah. Abū Ḥanīfa carried out important scientific activities with a student group of about forty people in Kufa. While some of them took various positions in the state, especially as a judge, while their teacher Abū Ḥanīfa was still alive, some of them were engaged in education and training activities. Especially those who were appointed as judges (qadis) in different cities had a say in the religious and legal fields under the Abbasid rule. Ḥanafītes made up the majority of the qadis in Iraq. Most students of Abū Ḥanīfa taught in Iraq, the center of Islamic culture, and its surroundings. Through his disciples and followers, Abū Ḥanīfa's views were widely spread and reached large masses of people. Abū Yūsuf, who was among the prominent students of Abū Ḥanīfa, played an important role in the spread and development of Ḥanafism. During the reign of Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (786-809 A.D.), Ḥanafite judges were appointed to important city centers, and through the activities of these qadis, Ḥanafism spread throughout the country. Thus, Ḥanafism gained a social base, especially in Khorasan and Transoxiana regions. Khorasan and Transoxiana, where the Ḥanafism flourished and took root, were located at the intersection of Persian, Indian, and Chinese civilizations. For this reason, especially Transoxiana has become a region where different cultures and civilizations meet, and where different religions and beliefs coexist. In addition to these geographical and cultural characteristics of Khorasan and Transoxiana, the fact that deeds (*amal*) are not seen as a part of faith in the Ḥanafism played a role in the interest and acceptance of

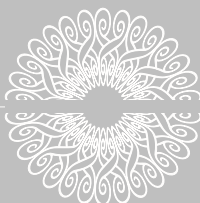
this madhhab by the people, who have recently converted to Islam and have have a pre-Islamic tradition.

The Islamic society, which rapidly expanded in the geographical area, also started to encounter many different philosophical and cultural beliefs. Internal and external threats and problems required Muslims to find a middle way within themselves. This process made it necessary for some of the ulama to write works in the field of belief and creed and to engage in the science of Kalām. However, there has been no consensus on these principles since the first century of higrāh. First of all, Ahl al-Ra’y school, represented by Abū Ḥanīfa has shown the ability to solve the basic legal problems of society. Later, while the moderate Sunnite thought centered around Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī emerged in Baghdad, Central Asia witnessed the birth of more rational Māturīdism.

Māturīdism succeeded in developing a more sophisticated theological thought by furthering the ideas brought by Abū Ḥanīfa in the field of faith. The most original aspect of Māturīdism is that it places reasoning and contemplation at the center of religious thought. It pays special attention to the rational justification of faith, rather than reducing belief to a faith-only surrender. In this respect, Abū Ḥanīfa placed evidence and mental verification based on religious knowledge. He stated that inspiration is not a source of religious knowledge, and therefore things like dreams and inspiration cannot be evidence in religion. Al-Māturīdī’s opposition to *takfirism* (the practise of excommunicating other Muslims), his assertion based on religious scriptures that a person who commits a major sin will not stray from religion, and his claim that shirk does not cover deeds and is a kind of creed are still some of his thoughts that should be taken into account today. It is also noteworthy that he argues that man is free in his actions and choices.

Another important issue is that of “*ḥusn* and *qubḥ*”, that is, the good-evil debate, which is known as the discussion of values in Islamic thought. This debate is a matter of whether our moral actions have a moral value in and of themselves, independent of God’s declaration, and if they do, whether this can be known through reason. For al-Māturīdī, there are good and evil qualities in our actions before God. For this reason, the Samarqand school of Māturīdism argues that people would be responsible to believe in the existence and oneness of God even if the revelation did not come. As can be seen, Māturīdism suggests a more reasonable religiosity against the takfirist movements that have begun to spread in the Islamic world and esoteric beliefs that exclude reasoning. This approach makes a more rational theology possible for Muslim societies. Therefore, the discovery of Māturīdism also means the rediscovery of reason and wisdom for Muslim societies. The most important aspect of Māturīdism is that it trusts the human mind to understand the truth, to find the truth and to live a moral life. Al-Māturīdī sees revelation not as a reality outside and contrary to reason, but as a reality confirming reason. He states that by abandoning reason and thinking, human beings will suffer a greater loss both religiously and worldly. According to him, the wisdom of God is his creating everything in a meaningful unity. Pluralism in the universe is a sign of God’s existence and power. Knowing Imam al-Māturīdī and his ideas, who will shed light on the problems that Muslims are experiencing today with all these approaches, is important to have accurate and healthy information about Islam. This work, as a brief introduction to Imam al-Māturīdī and Māturīdism, aims to contribute in this sense. We would like to thank Hayrullah Başer, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Anadolu Education Culture and Science Foundation, for all his contributions to the publication of the work.





CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF AL-MĀTURĪDĪ

HIS WORKS

HIS TEACHERS

HIS STUDENTS



CONSIDERING BOTH THE LANGUAGE AND STYLISTIC FEATURES FOUND IN HIS WORKS, COUPLED ALONGSIDE SAMARQAND AND ITS SURROUNDING REGION BEING OF TURKIC MAJORITY, IT CAN BE SAID THAT AL-MĀTURĪDĪ IS OF TURKIC ORIGIN.

AL-MĀTURĪDĪ WORK'S TRANSFORMED THE VIEWS OF ABŪ ḤANĪFA INTO A KALĀM SYSTEM. THE POLITICAL CLIMATE HE WITNESSED HAD A PROFOUND IMPACT ON THIS TRANSFORMATION.

BY PUTTING AN END TO THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THE INTELLECT AND TRANSMISSION, AL-MĀTURĪDĪ SYNTHESIZED INTELLECT AND TRANSMISSION AGAINST MU'TAZILA.

AL-MĀTURĪDĪ ACCEPTED REVELATION AND REASON TO BE THE SOURCE OF RELIGION.

A RETURN
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The views of Imam al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), the founder of one of the theological schools of Islamic thought, continue to live among Muslims for centuries. Māturīdism, which emerged as a continuation of the views of Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), the founder of Ḥanafism, the first legal school, found a response in the lands where Ḥanafism spread.

Known for emphasizing reason and wisdom, Imam al-Māturīdī advocated a non-exclusive understanding of faith in Islamic thought. In his philosophy of nature, he emphasized the wisdom of God. He made a fairly rational defense of religion against gnostic beliefs while placing justice at the center of religion. The views of Imam al-Māturīdī, which has been forgotten in the last centuries, have begun to be remembered again against radical Salafist interpretations. When the readers read Imam al-Māturīdī's views, they will better understand why Radical Salafists and ISIS harshly criticize Māturīdism. Therefore, the authors have not neglected to include a special chapter in the book on this issue.

