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THE MĀTURĪDĪ TRADITION OF *TAFSĪR*: REPRESENTATIVES, RECEPTION AND DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

Philipp Bruckmayr*

Abstract: Despite increasing scholarly interest in the Māturīdī school of dialectic theology and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī's Qur'an commentary among scholars of the history of *kalam* (rational theology) and *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis), respectively, comparatively little attention has been devoted so far to the role of Qur'anic exegesis among later representatives of the school and to its relevance for the elaboration and transmission of Māturīdī thought in general. Accordingly, this article sketches the history of the Māturīdī tradition of Qur'anic exegesis. After discussing al-Māturīdī's foundational *Ta'wīlāt ahl as-Sunna* and its relevance for the formulation and dissemination of his doctrines, it turns to the *tafsīr* works of later major Māturīdī scholars, most notably Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī and Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī. It presents an overview of the history and impact of Māturīdī(-influenced) Qur'anic interpretation until the 19th century, as reflected in independent *tafsīr* works as well as in glosses and super-glosses to earlier texts of the genre, including to popular non-Māturīdī titles, such as al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* and al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-Tanzīl*. Thereby, it is shown that the field of *tafsīr* has been an important locus for the assertion, elaboration and transmission of Māturīdī thought.

Keywords: *tafsīr*, *kalām*, 'aqīda, Māturīdiyya, al-Māturīdī, al-Nasafī

INTRODUCTION

This contribution provides an overview of the history of Māturīdī Qur'anic exegesis, understood as a distinct tradition within the field of *tafsīr* that is characterised by its reflection of and/or elaboration on theological doctrines associated with the Māturīdī school of *kalām*. As is the case with the Māturīdiyya, this tradition originated in the Turkic world, more precisely in Transoxania. What is more, its development and transmission also occurred primarily in Central Asia and Ottoman lands.¹ After introducing Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī's (d. 333/944)

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¹ Key works on the history and doctrines of the school are Wilferd Madelung, "The Spread of Māturīdism and the Turks," in *Actas do IV Congresso de Estudos Arabes e Islâmicos: Coimbra-Lisboa, 1 a 8 de*

famous Qur'anic commentary, *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-sunna*, and its role in the exposition and transmission of his theological teachings, the present study focuses on the still largely understudied *tafsīr* works of later Māturīdī scholars, particularly those of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142) and Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310). Taking these foundational texts from the Māturīdiyya's home region as a starting point, it then sketches the history of Māturīdī-oriented Qur'anic exegesis until the late 19th century. Attention is paid to original Qur'anic commentaries as well as glosses and super-commentaries to earlier works of the tradition. Furthermore, it includes Ottoman commentarial literature on the most widely distributed books of the genre during the period: al-Zamakhsharī's (d. 538/1144) *al-Kashshāf* and al-Bayḍāwī's (d. 685/1286) *Anwār al-tanzīl*. Neither of these was Māturīdī in doctrinal orientation. The last section presents several case studies to demonstrate how representatives of the tradition have expounded, transmitted and further developed al-Māturīdī's teachings through their *tafsīr* writings. It is shown that the influence of al-Māturīdī and his doctrines cannot be reduced to the spheres of *kalām* and *'aqīda* (creed, i.e. texts on the articles of belief). Much to the contrary, Qur'anic commentaries have for a millennium been one of the main conduits for the exposition, confirmation, sophistication and distribution of Māturīdī teachings, and thus the cultivation of the Māturīdī school identity.

THE BEGINNING: AL-MĀTURĪDĪ'S TA'WĪLĀT AHL AL-SUNNA

The centrality of the Qur'an for al-Māturīdī's theological thought is evident from his foundational *kalām* work, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, which features almost 460 direct references to and quotations of individual Qur'anic verses.² It should therefore not come as a surprise that the majority of his key theological positions are also reflected in his extensive Qur'an commentary, *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*.³ At times, this results in a strong degree of intertextuality between the two works.⁴ As noted by Saleh, his *tafsīr* represents a notable counterpoint to al-Ṭabarī's (d.

setembro de 1968 (Brill, 1971); Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī & die Sunnitische Theologie von Samarkand* [Al-Māturīdī and the Sunnī Theology of Samarkand] (Brill, 1997); Edward Badeen, *Sunnitische Theologie in Osmanischer Zeit* [Sunnī Theology in Ottoman Times] (Ergon, 2008); Philipp Bruckmayr, "The Spread and Persistence of Māturīdī *Kalām* and Underlying Dynamics," *Iran and the Caucasus* 13, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1163/160984909X12476379007882>; Sönmez Kutlu, ed., *İmam Māturīdī ve Maturidilik* [Imam Māturīdī and the Māturīdiyya], 3rd ed. (Otto, 2012); Angelika Brodersen, *Der Unbekannte Kalām: Theologische Positionen der Frühen Māturīdīya am Beispiel der Attributenlehre* [The Unknown kalām: Theological Positions of the early Māturīdiyya as Exemplified by the Teachings on the Attributes] (LIT, 2014); Lejla Demiri, Phil Dorroll and Dale Correa, eds., *Māturīdī Theology: A Bilingual Reader* (Mohr Siebeck, 2022).

² See the index of Qur'anic verses in Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd* [The Book of Divine Unity], ed. Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi (İSAM, 2005), 635–66.

³ The best edition of the complete work, which is also used throughout this study, is edited by Ahmet Vanlioğlu et al. It is a critical edition based on several manuscripts and frequently incorporates additional material from al-Samarqandī's commentary in the footnotes. Further, it includes an index volume. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* [Interpretations of the Qur'ān], ed. A. Vanlioğlu et al., 18 vols. (Mizan Yayınevi, 2005–2011).

⁴ Manfred Götz, "Māturīdī und sein Kitāb Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān" [Māturīdī and his Kitāb Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān], *Der Islam* 41 (1965): 31.

310/923) famous contemporary commentary.⁵ While al-Ṭabarī's work is tradition-based and largely devoid of theological speculation and *kalām* terminology, al-Māturīdī's not only accords considerable space to theological discussions and concepts but also exhibits a much greater propensity towards drawing and voicing personal conclusions and, therefore, the use of reason in interpreting the sacred text.⁶ After all, he accords a major role to human reason (*'aql*) in his epistemology.⁷

Al-Māturīdī's frequent recourse to rational proofs (sg. *dalīl al-'aqlī*) and his understanding of the anthropomorphic expressions of the Qur'an as figurative, which prompted him to interpret them consistently in a metaphorical sense, are elements of his *tafsīr* that strongly reflect his theological positions. A typical example of these two approaches is his assertion that, besides revelation, the acceptance of the fact that God is not part of creation renders likening Him to creation rationally absurd (*madfū' bi-l-'aql wa-l-sam' jamī'an*).⁸ As far as the general role of reason in his epistemology is concerned, he emphasises on several occasions that, apart from revelation, the rational reflection about the world represents the second source of knowledge about God, his oneness and the purpose of creation.⁹

Of interest for an enquiry into a distinctively Māturīdī tradition of Qur'anic exegesis are those points of doctrine on which the two great Sunni schools of *kalām*, the Māturīdiyya and Ash'ariyya, diverge.¹⁰ One such question is the possibility and nature of seeing God (*ru'ya*). This point is naturally also addressed in *tafsīr*. In his discussions of Q. 6:103 and 7:143, al-Māturīdī notes the beatific vision in the afterlife is a fact. Yet, it must be understood to take

⁵ Walid A. Saleh, "Rereading Al-Ṭabarī through al-Māturīdī: New Light on the Third Century Hijrī," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2016.02>.

⁶ Ibid., 183–86, 188, 191–94, 198, 200–201; Walid A. Saleh, "Al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), Early Sunni Exegesis, and Mu'tazilism: Sura 67 and the Five Principles of Sunni Exegesis," in *Non Sola Scriptura: Essays on the Qur'an and Islam in Honour of William A. Graham*, ed. Bruce Fudge, Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, Sarah Bowen Savant and Christian R. Lange (Routledge, 2022), 168. Even though some of Saleh's conclusions have been qualified by Koç, the general view of a counterpoint is valid, not least due to the marked differences in the amount of discussions of *kalām*-related material in these two *tafsīr* works. Cf. Mehmet Akif Koç, "On the Allegedly Overstated Importance of aṭ-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) within the Sunnī Exegetical Tradition: An Answer to Walid Saleh," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 173, no. 2 (2023): 349–54, <https://doi.org/10.13173/ZDMG.173.2.343>.

⁷ Hureyre Kam, "Die Duale Epistemologie al-Māturīdīs" [Al-Māturīdī's Dual Epistemology], in *Rationalität in der Islamischen Theologie, Band I: Die klassische Periode*, ed. Maha El Kaisy-Friemuth, Reza Hajatpour and Mohammed Abdel Rahem (De Gruyter, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110588576-016>; Ulrich Rudolph, "Ratio und Überlieferung in der Erkenntnislehre al-Ash'arī's und al-Māturīdī's" [Reason and Transmission in the Epistemology of al-Ash'arī and al-Māturīdī], *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 142, no. 1 (1992).

⁸ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 1:69.

⁹ See, for instance, *ibid.*, 1:66 (on Q. 2:27), 1:110 (on Q. 2:40), 4:368-369 (on Q. 7:54).

¹⁰ Angelika Brodersen, *Zwischen Māturīdiyya und Ash'ariyya: Abū Šakūr as-Sālimī und sein Tamhīd fī Bayān at-Tauhīd* [Between Māturīdiyya and Ash'ariyya: Abū Šakūr al-Sālimī and his Tamhīd fī Bayān al-Tauhīd] (Gorgias Press, 2018); Wilferd Madelung, "Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī and Ash'ari theology" in *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth. Vol. 2. The Sultan's Turret: Studies in Persian and Turkish Culture*, ed. Carole Hillenbrand (Brill, 2000); Badeen, *Sunnitische Theologie*; Yahya Raad Haidar, "The Debates between Ash'arism and Māturīdism in Ottoman Religious Scholarship: A Historical and Biographical Study" (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2016); Lutz Berger, "Interpretations of Ash'arism and Māturīdism in Mamluk and Ottoman Times" in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016).

place without spatial perception (*idrāk*), as such a form of perception is restricted to spatially limited objects, something contradictory to God's essence.¹¹

Another key difference to the Ash'ariyya is al-Māturīdī's teaching on the Divine attributes, which revolves around three interrelated issues. First, al-Māturīdī's view that all Divine attributes, including the attributes of act (*al-ṣifāt al-fi'liyya*), which describe actions (e.g. creating, seeing and the like) and are causally linked to creation (i.e. the temporal world), are eternal and thus without beginning. The main point of this argument was, second, al-Māturīdī's affirmation of the existence of the Divine attribute of *takwīn* (existential or bringing-into-existence) as a description of God's role as creator and its relationship to the temporal world.¹² Connected to this discussion is, third, the differentiation between the eternal attribute of existential on the one hand, and the thing created (*mukawwan*), as the object of the exercise of *takwīn* in time, on the other.¹³ Expectedly, it is in his commentary to the phrase "when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, 'Be' - and it is,"¹⁴ which occurs several times in the Qur'an, that he sets out his doctrine in this regard. Accordingly, he concludes the respective discussion in relation to Q. 2:117 by saying:

This establishes that origination and existential are not temporal (*al-iḥdāth wa l-takwīn laysa bi-ḥādith*) and that God is to be described as the one bringing [something] into time (*muḥdith*) and bringing into existence (*mukawwin*) from eternity, as everything comes into being [only] at the time, he desires it to exist.¹⁵

Similarly, al-Māturīdī's theory of human agency, another key point of differentiation regarding the Ash'ariyya, is frequently reiterated or at least reflected in his *tafsīr*. This concerns specifically his conviction that man is endowed with free will (*ikhtiyār*) and human capacity (*istiṭā'a*) is of two kinds: the natural permanent capacity of causes and conditions (*istiṭā'at al-asbāb wa-l-aḥwāl*) and the capacity for specific acts (*istiṭā'at al-af'āl*), which God creates for a given act at the time of its performance.¹⁶ The aspect of free will is commonly addressed in relation to Qur'anic verses referring to God as guiding and misguiding whomever He wills. Thus, al-Māturīdī explains, for instance, regarding Q. 2:26 and 4:88, that God causes only those to go astray of whom he knows that they choose to go astray and vice-versa.¹⁷ The theory of the two forms of human capacity is clearly expounded in his commentary to "God does not burden any human being with more than he is able to bear" (Q. 2:286): "For us, this has two

¹¹ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 5:165–67, 6:47–48, 52–59. Cf. Götz, "Māturīdī und sein Kitāb Ta'wīlāt," 45–47.

¹² On al-Māturīdī's doctrine and its place among his followers in the Māturīdiyya, see Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, 313–19; Brodersen, *Der Unbekannte Kalām*, 278–314.

¹³ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 73–74; Brodersen, *Der Unbekannte Kalām*, 554–57.

¹⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all English quotations from the Qur'an are derived from Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Quran* (Dar al-Andalus, 1980).

¹⁵ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 1:220–21 (quotation from 1:221). Cf. *ibid.*, 2:320–21 (on Q. 3:59), 8:111–12 (on Q. 16:40).

¹⁶ Götz, "Māturīdī und sein Kitāb Ta'wīlāt," 52–57; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, 339–43; J. Meric Pessagno, "Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb: The View of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104, no. 1 (1984); Angelika Brodersen, "Göttliches und Menschliches Handeln im Māturīditischen Kalām" [Divine and Human Acts in Māturīdī Kalām], *Jahrbuch für Islamische Theologie und Religionspädagogik* 2 (2013).

¹⁷ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 1:65, 3:373.

aspects: the capacity of causes and conditions and the capacity of acts. Hereby the former precedes the latter, and this is [just] what this statement refers to.”¹⁸

The question of human free will and the latter Qur’anic statement are directly linked to another point of divergence between the Māturīdī and Ash’arī schools: the possibility of God obligating humans with something beyond their capacity (*al-taklīf mā lā yutāq*). Whereas al-Māturīdī and his followers deny it, the Ash’ariyya, emphasising God’s unrestricted power, regards it as theoretically possible.¹⁹ Accordingly, al-Māturīdī categorically rejects this idea in his discussion of the latter verse. What is more, he differentiates between actions for which one is incapable, and others for which one would be capable. For instance, he explains, God may command an unbeliever to believe, even though He knows that this obligation will not be complied with, based on the volition granted to the unbeliever. Whereas the obligation would be inconceivable in the case of actual incapacity, the unbeliever simply fails to comply with the obligation by their choice.²⁰

Al-Māturīdī’s definition of belief and its components constitutes another point of difference to the Ash’ariyya on several levels, which is prominently featured in *Ta’wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*. His view of assent in the heart (*taṣdīq bi-l-qalb*) as the basis of belief (*īmān*) is reflected frequently in the commentary.²¹ Likewise, the question of whether works form part of belief, and whether *īmān* can therefore increase or decrease as a result of one’s actions is addressed.²² Due to his conviction about the exclusively inner nature of belief, he rejects both possibilities. Contrastingly, he formulates – in several places throughout the work – a complex theory of increase (*tazāyud/ziyāda*), in the sense of a constant renewal of belief that may result in its eventual or temporary strengthening. For him, what is erroneously described as an increase is merely a sophistication (*tazyīn*) or improvement (*taḥsīn*) of one’s belief, as he says while commenting on Q. 14:26.²³ Relatedly al-Māturīdī also disputes the legitimacy of *istithnā’*, i.e. the practice of qualifying one’s belief by saying “I am a believer, if God wills.” He stresses this point in connection with Q. 2:136 (“Say: ‘We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us’”), asserting that: “This verse disproves the one who qualifies his belief, because the command to them is to express their belief in absolute terms (*qawlan bāttan*) without qualification (*thunyā*) or doubt.”²⁴

¹⁸ Ibid., 2:226–27 (quotation from 2:227). Cf. 6:336 (on Q. 9:42) and 7:151 (on Q. 11:20) on each form of capacity, respectively.

¹⁹ Cf. Angelika Brodersen, *Tradition und Transformation in der Māturīdīya des 6./12. Jahrhunderts. Mit einer Kritischen Edition des Kitāb al-Kifāya fī l-hidāya fī uṣūl ad-dīn des Aḥmad b. Maḥmūd b. Abī Bakr Nūr ad-Dīn aṣ-Ṣābūnī al-Ḥanafī al-Buḥārī (gest. 580/1184)* [Tradition and Transformation within the Māturīdiyya of the 6th/12th Century: With a Critical Edition of the *Kitāb al-Kifāya fī l-Hidāya fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* of Aḥmad b. Maḥmūd b. Abī Bakr Nūr al-Dīn aṣ-Ṣābūnī al-Ḥanafī al-Buḥārī (d. 580/1184)] (Brill, 2022), 88–90.

²⁰ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt*, 2:228.

²¹ Ibid., 1:38 (on Q. 2:13), 1:235–36 (on Q. 2:128), 2:269–70 (on Q. 3:19), 7:97 (on Q. 10:84).

²² On the general debate, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Īmān and Islām* (Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1965).

²³ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt*, 7:492. A more elaborate discussion of this theory is found in idem., 1:236 (on Q. 2:128), 2:480–81 (on Q. 3:173), 6:172 (on Q. 8:4).

²⁴ Ibid., 1:252. Cf. 1:18 (on Q. 1:5), 1:340 (on Q. 2:183), 2:224–25 (on Q. 2:285).

Besides the foregoing, there are countless other examples for the prominent place of al-Māturīdī's theological doctrines in his Qur'anic commentary. For the following discussion of the evolution of a distinctive tradition of Māturīdī-influenced *tafsīr* in his wake, they should be sufficient, not least due to their focus on issues that were to crystallise into lasting and partly highly emblematic points of differentiation between the Ash'arī and Māturīdī schools. What is more, the preceding discussion should have dispelled any doubts about the relevance of including *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna* into an assessment of al-Māturīdī's thought and influence as a *mutakallim* (dialectic theologian).

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE MĀTURĪDĪ TRADITION OF *TAFSĪR*: 'ALĀ' AL-DĪN AL-SAMARQANDĪ

Strictly speaking, *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna* is part of the reception history of al-Māturīdī's Qur'anic exegesis. We learn from the earliest specimen of the *tafsīr* tradition developing among his followers, 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. c. 540/1145) *Sharḥ ta'wīlāt ahl al-sunna*,²⁵ that it was not the master who committed his Qur'anic commentary to writing. Rather, the work was assembled by his foremost students on the basis of his lectures. As al-Samarqandī notes, this has rendered the work more accessible from a linguistic perspective than some of his other writings. Still, he asserts, it is a demanding book that can be fully grasped only by readers with expertise in philology, Islamic law and, notably, *kalām*.²⁶ This statement throws some light on how al-Samarqandī perceived his mission as a commentator to the work.

It is not a coincidence that a Māturīdī-influenced current of Qur'anic commentary appears at this time, i.e. the first half of the 12th century. Al-Samarqandī was a student of Fakhr al-Islām al-Bazdawī (d. 482/1089), whose major work on Ḥanafī legal theory was the first to exhibit influences of al-Māturīdī's theological thought.²⁷ What is more, his great-grandfather, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Bazdawī (d. 390/999), had studied with al-Māturīdī. He could thus even have been involved in the compilation of *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*. At least there is clear evidence he was a transmitter of the work.²⁸ The *Kitāb uṣūl al-Dīn* by Fakhr al-Islām's younger brother, Abū l-Yusr al-Bazdawī (d. 493/1099), is the first *kalām* work to identify al-Māturīdī as the pivotal figure of rational theology in Transoxania and as a counterpart to al-Ash'arī.²⁹ Al-Samarqandī's second famous teacher was Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114), who has been credited with

²⁵ On the preserved manuscript copies of the work, see Götz, "Māturīdī und sein Kitāb Ta'wīlāt," 69–70; Ikhtiyar Abdurahmanov, "Codicological Description of the Manuscripts of 'Sharḥ At-Ta'wīlāt' by Alauddin Samarkandi," *Information Horizons: American Journal of Library and Information Science* 2, no. 5 (2024).

²⁶ Götz, "Māturīdī und sein Kitāb Ta'wīlāt," 30.

²⁷ Aron Zysow, "Mu'tazilism and Māturīdism in Ḥanafī Legal Theory," in *Studies in Islamic Legal Theory*, ed. Bernard G. Weiss (Brill, 2002), 238.

²⁸ Shovosil Ziyadov, "Taschkenter Handschriften über das Milieu Bucharischer Theologen in 13. und 14. Jahrhunderten" [Manuscripts from Tashkent on the Milieu of Bukharan Theologians in the 13th and 14th Centuries], *Manuscripta Orientalia* 9, no. 3 (2003).

²⁹ See, for instance, Abū l-Yusr al-Bazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn* [The Sources of Religion], ed. Hans-Peter Linss (Maktabat al-Azharīya li-t-turāth, 2003), 13–14, 76–78.

standardising and updating al-Māturīdī's doctrines. Therefore, Rudolph regards him as the "real founder of the Māturīdī school."³⁰

In his commentary, al-Samarqandī elucidates numerous statements by al-Māturīdī, which are directly related to doctrines that had meanwhile become characteristic of the school. Two examples should suffice at this point. Concerning *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*'s discussion of *takwīn* as an attribute that is eternal despite its relation to time-bound creation, he specifies it would be impossible to presume the existence of the created from eternity. Therefore, one could not say that He created the world from eternity but only that He is endowed with the attribute of bringing-into-existence from eternity, whereas He is the creator of the world only from the time onwards when it comes into being.³¹

Concerning al-Māturīdī's rejection of the *taklīf mā lā yuṭāq* in his discussion of Q. 2:286 and his abovementioned differentiation between acts that are truly impossible and others that are not, al-Samarqandī offers a clarification, which is directly linked to the Māturīdī doctrine of the two forms of human capacity:

This has two aspects in our view. The first is that obligating someone with something beyond his capacity would be devoid of any wisdom and could thus not be ascribed to God. This concerns the obligation to perform something, for which one is lacking the power (*qudra*), such as commanding the paralyzed to walk, the blind to see and the like. The second aspect is the obligation to perform something, for which one has the functioning tools (*ālāt salīma*), that is, acts of which one is capable due to their causes (*asbāb*). Regarding those characterized in this way, God proceeds continuously in the same fashion, according to which He creates the power for their performance at the moment the act is willed, so that it comes into existence [together] with the act.³²

Thus, even though al-Samarqandī speaks of *qudra* rather than *istiṭā'a*, he neatly describes the issue based on al-Māturīdī's distinction between the general capacity of causes and conditions and the capacity for specific acts.

These and other examples indicate that al-Samarqandī's *Sharḥ* represents a stringent continuation of al-Māturīdī's original work, especially as far as the elucidation of and elaboration on discussions from the field of *kalām* are concerned.³³ Strikingly, an early copy of *Sharḥ ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*, dated to 1134, is among the first proofs for the reception of the Māturīdiyya in Bukhara, and thus of the expansion of the school beyond Samarkand and its surroundings.³⁴

³⁰ Ulrich Rudolph, "Ḥanafī Theological Tradition and Māturīdism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016), 291.

³¹ Götz, "Māturīdī und sein Kitāb Ta'wīlāt," 58.

³² Quoted in al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 2:228 n. 2.

³³ For additional examples see *ibid.*, 1:65 n. 10, 1:220 n. 7; Götz, "Māturīdī und sein Kitāb Ta'wīlāt," 36–37, 58–59.

³⁴ Ashirbek Muminov, "Die Bedeutung der Handschriften aus der 'Bibliothek des Ḥwāja Muḥammad Pārsā' für die Erforschung des Hanafitischen Gelehrtenmilieus von Buḥārā" [The Relevance of the Manuscripts of the 'Library of Ḥwāja Muḥammad Pārsā' for Research on the Ḥanafī Scholarly Milieu of Bukhara], *Manuscripta Orientalia* 9, no. 3 (2003): 60.

THE EVOLUTION OF MĀTURĪDĪ-INFLUENCED QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

Another student of the al-Bazdawī family would become much more prominent than al-Samarqandī: Abū Ḥafṣ Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142). A student of Abū l-Yusr al-Bazdawī, he is best known for his *Al-'aqā'id al-Nasafīyya*, the most widespread Māturīdī doctrinal primer of all, in which he distils the school's main positions, in accordance with Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī's systematisation and reformulation, into a concise form designed for memorisation.³⁵ Perhaps due to his fame as a legal scholar and *mutakallim*, it has been largely overlooked that Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī was also a key figure in the reception and continuation of al-Māturīdī's Qur'anic exegesis.³⁶ Whereas *Al-'aqā'id al-Nasafīyya* was strongly indebted to the thought of Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, his Qur'anic commentary, *Al-taysīr fī l-Tafsīr*, is much more original and must be considered a key work of the Māturīdī tradition of *tafsīr*.

Albeit shorter than *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*, al-Nasafī's Qur'anic commentary is clearly encyclopaedic (the print edition spans 15 volumes, whereas the Istanbul edition of al-Māturīdī has 18, excluding the highly commendable index volume). In any case, the influence of the school's eponym is felt throughout the text.³⁷ Al-Māturīdī and his commentary are one of the two most frequently cited and quoted sources in the text.³⁸ Generally, the space devoted to discussions of *kalām* as well as the degree to which the latter are reflected in his comments to the Qur'anic text are considerable. What is more, Najm al-Dīn's expositions of such topics often mirror the evolution of al-Māturīdī's doctrines at the hands of Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī. Yet, *Al-taysīr* was not only up-to-date concerning developments within his school. The second most often cited work is *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, the comparably recent Qur'anic commentary of the Nishapuri Sufī scholar and Ash'arī theologian Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072).³⁹ Notwithstanding this engagement with contemporary Ash'arī thought, it is clearly al-Māturīdī and his followers who are providing the doctrinal framework for the author's interpretation and explication of issues related to the articles of faith and field of *kalām*, as the examples in the last section of this contribution will show.

Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's *Al-taysīr* also mirrors another major development of the period: the renaissance of Persian among Transoxanian scholars from the second half of the 10th century onwards.⁴⁰ In his introduction to *Al-taysīr*, which features an elaborate discussion of al-Māturīdī's distinction between *tafsīr* (explanation) and *ta'wīl* (interpretation) in *Ta'wīlāt ahl*

³⁵ Rudolph, "Ḥanafī Theological Tradition," 292; Brodersen, *Der Unbekannte Kalām*, 35.

³⁶ Walid A. Saleh, "Medieval Exegesis: The Golden Age of *Tafsīr*," in *The Oxford Handbook on Qur'anic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford University Press, 2020), 667.

³⁷ Māhir Adīb Ḥabbūsh, "Muqaddimat al-Taḥqīq" [Introduction to the Edition], in Abū Ḥafṣ al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr fī l-tafsīr*, ed. Māhir Adīb Ḥabbūsh (Dār al-Lubāb, 2019), 1:74.

³⁸ See the indices in Abū Ḥafṣ al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr fī l-tafsīr* [The Facilitator in Exegesis], ed. Māhir Adīb Ḥabbūsh (Dār al-Lubāb, 2019), 15:640–42, 15:658–61.

³⁹ See Alexander Knysh, "Sūfism and the Qur'ān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Brill, 2001–2006), 5:143–146.

⁴⁰ Travis Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'an: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 303–13.

al-Sunna,⁴¹ he provides the definition of the two critical terms in Arabic and Persian.⁴² The same strategy, undoubtedly geared towards a local readership, is employed throughout the commentary, as al-Nasafī time and again inserts short explanations or translations of key phrases in Persian.⁴³ The growing acceptance and increasing prestige of Persian as a language of scholarship and predication is, however, brought even more strongly into focus by the author's Persian Qur'an translation, known as *Tafsīr-i nasafī*. Even though he largely refrains from exegetical interventions in this work,⁴⁴ it has played an important role in the transmission of a Ḥanafī-Māturīdī influenced understanding of the Qur'an in a Persianate world that was geographically expanding in eastern and western directions.⁴⁵ This said, al-Nasafī's Māturīdī orientation shines through in the book in several instances. Thus, he emphasises in his translation of Q. 2:26, as does al-Māturīdī in his commentary to the verse, that God guides and misguides people based on their free will.⁴⁶ On the question of *ru'ya* (in connection with Q. 6:103), he explains – obviously following al-Māturīdī and in almost the same words as in his *Al-taysīr* – that perceiving God spatially would necessitate a spatial limitation of the Divine, something inconceivable due to His exalted nature.⁴⁷

Al-taysīr and *Tafsīr-i nasafī* became widely distributed works way beyond Transoxania. Their use in *madrasah* education in the Timurid, Ottoman and Mughal realms is well documented and testified to in surviving manuscript collections.⁴⁸ In Ross' lists of the "most popular *tafsīrs* in Islamic history," *Al-taysīr* ranks #34, according to the number of extant copies, and #45, according to geographical distribution. By only considering the more extensive Qur'anic commentaries (i.e. those categorised as L-XXL by Ross), to evade comparing apples with oranges, we arrive at ranks #16 and #14, respectively.⁴⁹ Comparable statistics are not available for *Tafsīr-i nasafī*. Yet, it has been noted that it was a model and

⁴¹ Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 1:3–4. Al-Māturīdī's definition of the two terms has proven highly influential and made its way into major standard works on the Qur'anic sciences. See, for instance, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Al-itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* [The Complete Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'an], ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūt (Al-Risāla, 2008), 758; Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-'irfān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* [Springs of Wisdom in the Sciences of the Qur'an], ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad Zamarlī (Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1995), 2:8.

⁴² Al-Nasafī, *At-Taysīr*, 1:10.

⁴³ Zadeh, *Vernacular Qur'an*, 281–82.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁴⁵ Bert G. Fragner, *Die Persophonie: Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens* [Persophonía: Regionality, Identity and Language Contact in Asian History] (Das Arabische Buch, 1999); Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway, eds., *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order* (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2012).

⁴⁶ Abū Ḥafṣ al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr-i Nasafī* [Nasafī's Exegesis], ed. 'Azīzallāh Juwaynī (Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Farhang-i Irān, 1974), 1:10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:199. Cf. Al-Nasafī, *At-Taysīr*, 6:172.

⁴⁸ Ḥabbūsh, "Muqaddimat at-Taḥqīq," 141–42; Shahab Ahmed and Nenad Filipovic, "The Sultan's Syllabus: A Curriculum for the Ottoman Imperial *Medreses* prescribed in a *Fermān* of Qānūnī I Süleymān, dated 973 (1565)," *Studia Islamica* 98/99 (2004): 199; Zadeh, *Vernacular Qur'an*, 282–83, 564.

⁴⁹ Samuel J. Ross, "What were the Most Popular *Tafsīrs* in Islamic History? Part 1: An Assessment of the Manuscript Record and the State of *Tafsīr* Studies," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 25, no. 3 (2023): 23, 28, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2023.0555>.

source for numerous later Persian Qur'an translations and commentaries, most importantly Ḥusayn Wā'iz Kāshifī's (d. 910/1504) widely distributed and influential *Mawāhib-i 'aliyya*.⁵⁰

Interestingly, it has been a matter of debate whether Kāshifī was of Sunnī or Shi'ī persuasion.⁵¹ As far as the field of Sunnī doctrine and the reception of *kalām*-saturated *tafsīr* is concerned, he was clearly leaning towards the Māturīdiyya. Thus, in his unfinished Persian Qur'an commentary, *Jawāhir al-tafsīr*, he paraphrases most of al-Māturīdī's introductory differentiation between *ta'wīl* and *tafsīr*.⁵² Besides describing the Transoxanian luminary as the "imam of guidance" (*imām al-hudā*), he quotes/cites *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna* several times, including on the nature of Divine speech, a topic occupying a prominent place in *kalām*.⁵³ Contrastingly, al-Ash'arī is mentioned only once, notably in relation to his former association with the Mu'tazila.⁵⁴

MĀTURĪDĪ-INFLUENCED QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS IN THE POST-AL-ZAMAKHSHARĪ PERIOD

Returning to our chronological survey, we may assume that other Māturīdī-influenced *tafsīrs* were written by scholars from Transoxania and surrounding areas after the period of al-Samarqandī and Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī. For instance, al-Samarqandī's student and son-in-law 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Kāsānī (d. 587/1191), who also studied with Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, has left a work titled *Ta'wīlāt al-qur'ān*, which I have not been able to access so far. In any case, al-Kāsānī featured among those Transoxanian scholars who propelled the dissemination of the Māturīdiyya into new regions, due to their westward migration during the establishment of Turkic dynasties in Iran, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levante. Settling first in Konya then in Aleppo, he thus also represents the accompanying geographic expansion of the Māturīdī tradition of Qur'anic exegesis.⁵⁵ A similar case is Bayān al-Ḥaqq al-Nīsābūrī al-Ghaznawī (fl. around 553/1158), who was of Māturīdī orientation and likewise settled in Syria.⁵⁶ He wrote on *kalām* and authored several works of *tafsīr*, of which only his *Bāhir al-burhān fī ma'ānī mushkilāt al-Qur'ān* is preserved.⁵⁷ Yet, issues of *kalām* are not prominent in the book and Māturīdī doctrines and approaches are almost entirely restricted to discussions of the ambiguous anthropomorphic verses (*al-mutashābihāt/āyāt al-ṣifāt*). Thus, he stresses the

⁵⁰ Cf. Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan, *The Holy Qur'an in South Asia: A Bio-Bibliographic Study of Translations of the Holy Qur'an in 23 South Asian Languages* (Bibi Akhtar Prakāšanī, 2001), 173, 236–37, 333–34; Kristin Zahra Sands, "On the Popularity of Husayn Wa'iz-i Kashifi's *Mawāhib-i 'aliyya*: A Persian Commentary on the Qur'an," *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 4 (2003).

⁵¹ Sands, "On the Popularity," 479–483.

⁵² Ḥusayn Wā'iz Kāshifī, *Jawāhir al-Tafsīr* [Jewels of Exegesis], ed. Jawād 'Abbāsī (Markaz-i Nashr-i Mīrāth-i Maktūb, 2000), 223–224. Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 1:3–4.

⁵³ Kāshifī, *Jawāhir*, 161, 642, 728, 830.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 811.

⁵⁵ Madelung, "Spread of Māturīdism," 154.

⁵⁶ Su'ād bt. Ṣāliḥ Bā Biqī, editorial introduction to *Bāhir al-burhān fī ma'ānī mushkilāt al-Qur'ān: Muqaddimat taḥqīq kitāb Bāhir al-burhān - al-dirāsa* [The Splendid Proof Concerning the Meanings of the Difficulties Passages of the Qur'an: Editorial Introduction to the Book "Bāhir al-burhān" – The Study], by Maḥmūd b. Abī l-Ḥasan al-Nīsābūrī, ed. Su'ād bt. Ṣāliḥ Bā Biqī (Jāmi'at Umm al-Qurā, 1997), 87–89.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 98–101.

general necessity of figurative interpretation in such cases in connection with Q. 1:7 and then again with Q. 3:7, where he cites the interpretation of God's "rising above" (*istiwā'*) – not in literal spatial terms but as a reference to his power (*qudra*) and possession of authority (*istilā'*) – as an example.⁵⁸ Just like al-Māturīdī in his *Ta'wīlāt*, he also describes the notion of the Divine rising towards/above heaven (*istawā ilā l-samā'*) in Q. 2:26 as "taking possession" (*istawalā*) of heaven.⁵⁹

At the same time, the overall genre of *tafsīr* began to undergo major transformations that would change the shape of the field for centuries to come. At the beginning of this development stood Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's Mu'tazilī contemporary from neighbouring Khwarazm, Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) and his influential Qur'anic commentary *Al-kashshāf*. Despite its not overly prominent but still perceptible Mu'tazilī elements, this concise and philologically focused work was the archetype of a new style of *tafsīr* writing, well-suited for usage in the *madrāsah* context, and would dominate the field for a long time.⁶⁰ It was only superseded in the 15th century in the face of the increasing prominence of Naṣr al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī's (d. 685/1286) *Anwār al-tanzīl*. Notably, the latter was closely modelled on *Al-kashshāf*, albeit purging it of most Mu'tazilī views and traces and aligning it with Ash'arī doctrine instead.⁶¹

Expectedly, the strong appeal of *Al-kashshāf* did not go unnoticed by later Māturīdī authors. Analogous to al-Bayḍāwī's Ash'arī response to al-Zamakhsharī's work, his contemporary Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī (gest. 710/1310), the foremost Transoxanian Māturīdī *mutakallim* and Ḥanafī legal scholar of his day, penned the first Māturīdī-oriented *tafsīr* in the format and style of *Al-kashshāf*.⁶² Due its approach, his *Madārik al-Tanzīl* accords much less space for questions of *kalām* and *'aqīda* than the encyclopaedic commentaries of al-Māturīdī and Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī. Still, the correction and substitution of Mu'tazilī positions in al-Zamakhsharī's template represent an important aspect of Abū l-Barakāt's exegetical efforts. Consequently, his doctrinal convictions shine through time and again, as will be shown below. As far as interpretations of legal and doctrinal import are concerned, *Madārik al-Tanzīl* may well be considered a Ḥanafī-Māturīdī response to the Shāfi'ī-Ash'arī calibrated *Anwār al-Tanzīl*.

Although never reaching the prominence of al-Bayḍāwī's work, *Madārik al-Tanzīl* still gained wide currency. It was employed in Timurid, Ottoman and Mughal *madrāsah* education

⁵⁸ Maḥmūd b. Abī l-Ḥasan al-Nīsābūrī, *Bāhir al-burhān fī ma'ānī mushkilāt al-Qur'ān* [The Splendid Proof Concerning the Meanings of the Difficult Passages of the Qur'an], ed. Su'ād bt. Šāliḥ Bā Biqī (Jāmi'at Umm al-Qurā, 1997-1999), 1:13–14, 277–78. Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 5:370–78 (on Q. 7:54), 7:381 (on Q. 67:2).

⁵⁹ Al-Nīsābūrī, *Bāhir al-burhān*, 1:55–57; al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 1:68–70.

⁶⁰ Andrew J. Lane, *A Traditional Mu'tazilite Qur'ān Commentary. The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144)* (Brill, 2006); Walid A. Saleh, "The Gloss as Intellectual History: The *Hāshiyahs* on *al-Kashshāf*," *Oriens* 41, no. 3-4 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1163/18778372-13413402>; Kifayat Ullah, *Al-Kashshāf: Al-Zamakhshari's (d. 538/1144) Mutazilite Exegesis of the Quran* (De Gruyter, 2017).

⁶¹ Walid A. Saleh, "The Qur'an Commentary of al-Bayḍāwī: A History of *Anwār al-tanzīl*," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 23, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2021.0451>.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 76; Angelika Brodersen, "Abū l-Barakāt an-Nasafī," in *Handbook of Qur'anic Hermeneutics. Vol. 3: Qur'anic Hermeneutics from the 13th to the 19th Century*, ed. Georges Tamer (De Gruyter, 2025).

and its use is even documented in the Mālikī-Ash‘arī/Shāfi‘ī-Ash‘arī dominated regions of West Africa and Southeast Asia as well as among Ibadi scholars in Oman.⁶³ In Ross’ list of the historically most popular *tafsīrs*, it appears as #21 (number of extant copies), and #16 (geographic distribution), respectively.⁶⁴ The 20th century Azhari scholar al-Zurqānī lists *Madārik al-Tanzīl* among the nine most important works of *tafsīr bi-l-ra’y* (i.e. commentary based on independent opinion), a formulation that commonly implies a greater responsiveness to issues and approaches of *kalām*, such as the figurative interpretation of the ambiguous verses.⁶⁵ It has thus undeniably contributed to the spread and reception of Māturīdī-influenced Qur’anic exegesis. In contrast to Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī’s *Al-taysīr*, *Madārik al-Tanzīl* has also drawn glosses from the 15th century onwards, mostly by South Asian authors.⁶⁶ The last and most expansive of these was composed in India by ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Ilahābādī al-Hindī (d. 1333/1915).⁶⁷

This development was part of the larger trend in scholarship of engaging Islamic intellectual tradition increasingly through the medium of commentaries and glosses to earlier works.⁶⁸ In the field of *tafsīr*, this mainly concerned *Al-Kashshāf* and *Anwār al-Tanzīl* as base texts.⁶⁹ Accordingly, in the wake of Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī, also the Māturīdī tradition of Qur’anic commentary expressed itself primarily through glosses on these two works and, to a lesser extent, on his *Madārik al-Tanzīl*. One of the exceptions to this trend is *Rūḥ al-Bayān*, the *tafsīr* of the Ottoman scholar Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī al-Bursawī (d. 1137/1725).⁷⁰ Heralded as the first

⁶³ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Qāyīnī an-Nasafī, *Naṣā’ih-i Shāhrukhī* [The Admonitions for Shāhrukh], Cod. A.F. 112, Austrian National Library Vienna, n.d., fol. 4a; Cevat İzgi, *Osmanlı Medreselerinde İlim: 1. Riyazî İlimler* [The Sciences in Ottoman Madrasas: 1. Mathematical Sciences] (İz Yayıncılık, 1997), 167; Philipp Bruckmayr, “Past and Present Aspects of Māturīdism in South and Southeast Asia,” in *Uluğ Bir Çınar İmām Māturīdī Uluslararası Sempozyum Tebliğler Kitabı*, ed. Ahmet Kartal (Ofis Yayın Matbaacılık, 2014), 125; Andrea Brigaglia, “*Tafsīr* and the Intellectual Tradition of Islam in West Africa: The Nigerian Case,” in *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, ed. Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink (Oxford University Press, 2014), 399; A. C. S. Peacock, *Arabic Literary Culture in Southeast Asia in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Brill, 2024), 415; Valerie J. Hoffman and Sulaiman bin Ali bin Ameir Al-Shueili, “Ibādī *Tafsīr* Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford University Press, 2020), 735.

⁶⁴ Ross, “Most Popular *Tafsīrs*,” 21, 26.

⁶⁵ Al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-‘irfān*, 2:56.

⁶⁶ Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur: Zweiter Supplementband* [The History of Arabic Literature: Second Supplement Volume] (Brill, 1938), 267; ‘Abd al-Ḥayy b. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ḥasanī, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir wa-bahjat al-masāmi‘ wa-l-nawāzīr* [The Promenade of Thoughts and the Delight for the Ears and Eyes] (Idārah Tālīfāt-i Ashrafiyya, 1991–1993), 4:37–38, 5:203, 6:64; ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Ḥabashī, *Jāmi‘ al-shurūḥ wa-l-ḥawāshī* [The Compendium of Commentaries and Glosses] (Dār al-Minhāj, 2017), 2:175–76.

⁶⁷ ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Hindī al-Ḥanafī, *Al-iklīl ‘alā madārik at-tanzīl wa-ḥaqqā’iq at-ta’wīl li-l-imām an-Nasafī* [The Crown on “The Grasp of Revelation and the Truths of Interpretation” of Imam al-Nasafī], ed. Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Bayraqdār (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2012).

⁶⁸ Cf. Asad Q. Ahmed and Margaret Larkin, “The *Hāshiya* and Islamic Intellectual History,” *Oriens* 41, no. 3-4 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1163/18778372-13413401>; Ahmed El Shamsy, “The *Hāshiya* in Islamic Law: A Sketch of the Shāfi‘ī Literature,” *Oriens* 41, no. 3-4 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1163/18778372-13413404>; Walid A. Saleh, “Marginalia and Peripheries: A Tunisian Historian and the History of Qur’anic Exegesis,” *Numen* 58, no. 2-3 (2011): 305–309, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852711X562326>.

⁶⁹ Cf. Saleh, “The Gloss”; id., “Qur’an Commentary of al-Baydāwī.”

⁷⁰ On the author and his work, see Feras Hamza, Sajjad Rizvi and Farhana Mayer, eds., *An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries. Vol. 1: On the Nature of the Divine* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 45–46.

“complete Sufi Ottoman Qur’an commentary,”⁷¹ and noted for its indebtedness to Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) in this regard, the work exhibits a clear Māturīdī imprint. *Ta’wīlāt ahl al-Sunna* and, particularly, *Al-taysīr* served al-Bursawī as sources.⁷² Selected examples for his affirmation of Māturīdī doctrine are given below.

The last milestone in the history of independent Māturīdī-influenced *tafsīrs* is the influential *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī* of the Baghdadi scholar Abū l-Thana’ al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854). The author and his work are highly complex and therefore defy simple categorisation. Al-Ālūsī was a Neo-Ḥanafī, whose father had reportedly switched from the locally prevailing Shāfi‘iyya to the Ḥanafī school. What is more, he was living and working at the threshold between the traditional *madhhab*-based scholarly culture and its approaches to Qur’anic exegesis on one side, and the emerging Salafīyya movement, with its more hadith-centred hermeneutics and its critical distance to theological speculation and the methods of the *mutakallimūn*, on the other.⁷³ At same time, his *tafsīr* represents a high point in the systematic engagement with Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought in the field of Qur’anic commentary outside the narrower segment of decidedly Sufi *tafsīrs*.⁷⁴ This critical juncture in Islamic intellectual history is also reflected in his work. Over the 15 years it took him to complete the encyclopaedic *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī*, we notice a decrease in his support for or adoption of positions associated with the dialectic theologians.⁷⁵

Yet, especially in the earlier volumes of the work, Māturīdī influence and at times even explicit expressions of belonging are encountered. The introduction quotes passages from al-Māturīdī’s discussion on the differences between *tafsīr* and *ta’wīl*.⁷⁶ The Divine attribute of *takwīn* is traced to “our masters, the Māturīdiyya” and al-Māturīdī is referred to as “our imam.”⁷⁷ In a digression on the question of belief and compulsion, in connection with Q. 16:16, he affirms that *īmān* exclusively consists of assent in the heart, and explains that human sins, such as illegal sexual intercourse, are not performed due to Divine compulsion but by free choice (*ikhtiyār*).⁷⁸ In relation to Q. 27:10, he demonstrates that the dominant Ḥanafī position on the infallibility (*iṣma*) of prophets, which – contrary to the Ash‘arī view – even includes deliberate minor sins, can be traced to al-Māturīdī, who asserted that this neither implies the absence of trials and temptation during the prophet’s lifetime nor of his free will.⁷⁹

⁷¹ Susan Gunasti, “Political Patronage and the Writing of Qur’ān Commentaries among the Ottoman Turks,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 24, no. 3 (2013): 354, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/ett024>.

⁷² See, for instance, Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī al-Bursawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān* [The Spirit of Elucidation] (Al-Maṭba‘a al-‘Āmira, 1839), 1:33–34, 304, 431.

⁷³ Basheer M. Nafi, “Abu al-Thana’ al-Alusi: An Alim, Ottoman Mufti, and Exegete of the Qur’an,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743802003033>.

⁷⁴ Tareq Moqbel, “The Reception of Ibn ‘Arabī in Sunnī *Tafsīr*: Akbarian Discourse in al-‘Ālūsī’s *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī*,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 174, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.13173/ZDMG.174.2.341>.

⁷⁵ Nafi, “Abu al-Thana’ al-Alusi,” 482–88.

⁷⁶ Abū l-Thana’ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī fī tafsīr al-qur‘ān* [The Spirit of the Meanings in the Exegesis of the Qur’an], ed. ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Bārī ‘Aṭīyya (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1994–1996), 1:6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:64, 77.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 7:473.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 10:160–61. For assertions of the Māturīdī position on minor sins against the Ash‘arī view, see Yaḥyā b. ‘Alī Naw‘ī, “Risāla fī l-farq bayna madhhab al-Ashā‘ira wa-l-Māturīdiyya” [Epistle on the Difference

Its middle position between traditional (particularly Ḥanafī-Māturīdī) Qur'anic exegesis and reform approaches, and its critical reception and integration of Ibn 'Arabī's thought, facilitated *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī*'s positive appraisal in different scholarly milieus. For instance, it was a major source for the Urdu *Bayān al-Qur'ān* of Ashraf 'Alī Thānwī (also Thānawī, d. 1362/1943), one of the main figures of the Indian Deobandi movement, which strives for a reform of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī heritage from within the tradition (as opposed to the wholesale rejection demonstrated by the Salafiyya movement).⁸⁰

THE PERPETUATION AND REAPPRAISAL OF DOCTRINAL TEACHINGS IN MĀTURĪDĪ QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

In the following I will provide some examples of how representatives of the Māturīdī-influenced tradition of *tafsīr* have delineated, further developed and transmitted al-Māturīdī's doctrinal teachings in their Qur'anic commentaries. The focus is on Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's *Al-Taysīr* and Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī's *Madārik al-tanzīl*, the most important independent works of Qur'anic exegesis by Māturīdī authors of the formative period. In addition, several later commentaries and *tafsīr* glosses are included, to the exclusion of al-Samarqandī's *Sharḥ al-Ta'wīlāt*, which is naturally dependent on al-Māturīdī's work. Thematically, it follows the structure set out in the foregoing overview over the *kalām*-related content in al-Māturīdī's *Ta'wīlāt* (and thus on Māturīdī/Ash'arī differences), yet without touching on all the doctrinal aspects presented there.

The direct influence of al-Māturīdī's thought on later works in the field is well reflected in relation to the question of human reason as a source of knowledge. In his interpretation of Q. 2:40, for instance, Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī directly quotes the master's respective elaborations on the verse, to the inclusion of his programmatic statement that the signs of creation would clearly indicate the world has not been brought into being without a reason.⁸¹ An illustrative case of intertextual reception history in connection with this topic is provided by Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī al-Bursawī in his comments to Q. 2:7 ("God has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes is a veil"). In contrast to al-Māturīdī, who is mute on such aspects, Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's *Al-taysīr* contains a longer discussion on sense perception and the role of the heart.⁸² He also invokes Q. 50:37 ("In this, behold, there is indeed a reminder for everyone whose heart

between the Ash'arī and Māturīdī Schools], in *Sunnitische Theologie in Osmanischer Zeit*, ed. Edward Badeen (Ergon, 2008), 29; Kamāl al-Dīn al-Bayāḍī, *Ishārāt al-marām min 'ibārāt al-imām Abī Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān* [The Desired Signs from the Statements of the Imam Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān], ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mizyadī (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2007), 39.

⁸⁰ Kamran Bashir, *The Qur'an in South Asia: Hermeneutics, Qur'an Projects, and Imaginings of Islamic Tradition in British India* (Routledge, 2022), 130. In his list of sources, Thānwī also mentions al-Nasafī's *Madārik al-tanzīl*. Ashraf 'Alī Thānwī, *Tafsīr bayān al-qur'ān* [The Exegesis of the Elucidation of the Qur'an] (Maktaba Raḥmaniyya, 2011), 1:8. On the conflicting evaluation of the South Asia Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition among Deobandi and Salafis, see Philipp Bruckmayr, "Salafī Challenge and Māturīdī Response: Contemporary Disputes over the Legitimacy of Māturīdī *Kalām*," *Welt des Islams* 60, no. 2-3 (2020).

⁸¹ Al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr*, 2:38; al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 1:110.

⁸² Al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr*, 1:288–90. Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 1:34–35.

is wide-awake”), a choice that was most likely inspired by al-Māturīdī. In his *Ta`wīlāt*, he interprets the “heart” in this verse as human reason, which, as he continues, man uses through speculation (*naẓar*) as one of the three sources of knowledge, besides the senses and transmission (*khābar*).⁸³ Six hundred years later (and 800 after al-Māturīdī), al-Bursawī builds a discussion around his quotation of the respective passage in *Al-taysīr*.⁸⁴

Concerning the beatific vision in the Māturīdī understanding of seeing without spatial perception, we have already noted that Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, following al-Māturīdī’s treatment of Q. 6:103, briefly asserts this interpretation at the same place in his Persian Qur’an translation and in his *tafsīr*.⁸⁵ It is therefore perhaps not coincidental that Kamāl al-Dīn al-Bayādī (d. 1098/1687), the author of the most influential work on Māturīdī/Ash‘arī differences from the Ottoman period, does not refer to any *kalām* works as his main references on the topic in his introductory enumeration of the major points of divergence, but to *Ta`wīlāt ahl al-Sunna* und *Al-taysīr*.⁸⁶ Of interest is also Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī’s take on the subject in his *Madārik al-tanzīl*, which, as will be remembered, served partly as a response to al-Zamakhsharī’s Mu‘tazilī positions in *Al-Kashshāf*. Abū l-Barakāt’s discussion of the issue is a bit more extensive than Najm al-Dīn’s and framed in clear contradistinction to the Mu‘tazilī view, which, by focusing on the literal meaning (“No human vision can encompass Him”), rejects the beatific vision altogether. Indeed, the author begins his discussion by stating: “The Mu‘tazilīs hold on to this verse. Yet, this is baseless, as what it negates is the encompassing and not the seeing.”⁸⁷

Al-Māturīdī again engaged with the topic extensively in relation to Q. 7:143.⁸⁸ Not much of his highly dialectic argumentation remains in the works of later commentators. Rather, it seems they were mainly interested in using the occasion just to confirm meanwhile firmly established doctrines contradict the Mu‘tazilī position. Concerning the passage “he said: ‘O my Sustainer! Show [Thyself] unto me,’” Najm al-Dīn and Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī assert in almost identical words, that “this is the proof of the Sunnīs (*ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā‘a*) for the possibility of seeing God.”⁸⁹

Regarding the interpretation of the Qur’anic description of the process of creation as *kun fa-yakūn*, and the doctrinal debates prompted by it, Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī leaves aside al-Māturīdī’s distinction between creating (*takwīn*) and the thing created (*mukawwan*) at its first appearance (Q. 2:117). He does not even mention the Divine attribute of *takwīn*. Yet, he quotes a preceding point from the master’s discussion: his explanation that the word *kun*, as part of

⁸³ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta`wīlāt*, 14:118.

⁸⁴ Al-Bursawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, 1:33-34.

⁸⁵ Al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr-i Nasafī*, 1:199; al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr*, 6:172. Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Ta`wīlāt*, 5:167-69.

⁸⁶ Al-Bayādī, *Ishārāt al-marām*, 38.

⁸⁷ ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr al-Nasafī: Madārik al-tanzīl wa-ḥaqā‘iq al-ta`wīl* [Al-Nasafī’s Exegesis: The Grasp of Revelation and the Truths of Interpretation], ed. Marwān Muḥammad al-Sha‘ār (Dār al-nafā‘is, 2009), 2:40.

⁸⁸ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta`wīlāt*, 6:47-48, 52-59.

⁸⁹ Al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr*, 6:504; al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-tanzīl*, 2:109-10.

eternal Divine speech, whose character differs fundamentally from the Arabic language and its phonetics, must not be conceived as a word consisting of the two letters *kāf* and *nūn*.⁹⁰

Later commentators commonly reconnect the verse with the concept of *takwīn*. Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī uses the term but does not denote it explicitly as an eternal Divine attribute at this point.⁹¹ Instead, he elaborates on its practical implications by explaining the relationship between God's (pre-)eternal knowledge about the existence of a thing and His command for the said thing to come into being at the designated time, in what seems to be an unacknowledged recourse to al-Samarqandī's *Sharḥ ta'wīlāt ahl al-sunna*.⁹² In Muḥyī al-Dīn Shaykhzādah's (d. 951/1544) gloss on al-Bayḍāwī, which is, due to its confident inclusion of extensive doctrinal and philosophical discussions, regarded as a turning point in Ottoman *tafsīr* literature,⁹³ we also find an encompassing treatment of the issue with direct reference to al-Māturīdī.⁹⁴ Contrastingly, a brief straight-forward definition of *takwīn* as an eternal Divine attribute (*ṣifa azaliyya*) is provided in al-Bursawī's delineation of the doctrine of the Sunnis (*ahl al-sunna*) in connection with this verse.⁹⁵

With respect to al-Māturīdī's comments on Q. 2:26, where he affirms human free will and explains that God wills guidance or misguidance based on his foreknowledge of man's choices, we find a clear line of transmission in *Al-taysīr*. Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī opens his discussion with a direct quotation from *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna* before offering scriptural and rational proofs against the Mu'tazilī position that God wills guidance for everybody.⁹⁶ Still centuries later, affirmations of the Māturīdī position on the matter would rely on its delineation in these two *tafsīrs*. For instance, the Indian luminary Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791) refers readers to these two works for the correct doctrine on human volition in his monumental commentary to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*.⁹⁷

Similarly, al-Māturīdī's teaching of the two forms of human capacity pervades the *tafsīr* tradition emerging in his wake. In *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*, it is primarily Q. 2:286, 9:42 and 11:20 that serve as starting points for his expositions.⁹⁸ Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī takes up the issue only in relation to the two latter verses. While al-Māturīdī designed his explanations mainly as a response to Mu'tazilī theories of human capacity,⁹⁹ his successor focuses on the explication and transmission of established school doctrine. Relying on a slightly modified

⁹⁰ Al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr*, 2:420–21. Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 1:220.

⁹¹ Al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-tanzīl*, 1:121.

⁹² Ibid. Cf. al-Samarqandī, *Sharḥ Ta'wīlāt*, quoted in al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 1:220 n. 7.

⁹³ Mykhaylo Yakubovych, "Ottoman Qur'anic Studies: Case of *Tafsīr* Glosses," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 73, no. 1 (2020): 50, <https://doi.org/10.24425/ro.2020.134044>.

⁹⁴ Muḥyī al-Dīn Shaykhzādah, *Ḥāshiyat Muḥyī al-Dīn Shaykhzādah 'alā tafsīr al-qāḍī al-Bayḍāwī* [Muḥyī al-Dīn Shaykhzādah's Gloss to the Exegesis of the Qadi al-Bayḍāwī], ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir Shāhīn (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), 2:254–58.

⁹⁵ Al-Bursawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, 1:145.

⁹⁶ Al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr*, 2:20; al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 1:65.

⁹⁷ Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Iḥāf al-sadāt al-muttaqīn bi-sharḥ Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* [The Gift of the Pious Nobles through the Commentary on "The Revival of the Religious Sciences"] (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1994), 2:173.

⁹⁸ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 2:226–27, 6:366, 7:151.

⁹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 2:226–27, 6:366.

terminology, he takes a basic knowledge of Mu‘tazilī positions for granted. Thus, he notes to Q. 9:42 (“they will swear by God, ‘Had we been able to do so, we would certainly have set out with you!’”):

This concerns the capacity of the functioning tools and facilitating causes (*istiṭā‘at salāmat al-ālāt wa-tahayyu‘ al-asbāb*) [i.e. al-Māturīdī’s *istiṭā‘at al-asbāb wa-l-aḥwāl* or capacity of causes and conditions], which precedes the act, whereas the capacity through which the act is [actually] performed, only [comes into existence] in our view together with the act. This has no relation to the Qadariyya [i.e. the Mu‘tazila, as proponents of unrestricted human agency and the consequent existence of full capacity before the act], as we say that what is meant [here] is [only] the capacity of [basic] causes (*asbāb*).¹⁰⁰

Just like the school’s eponym, he finds an example for the form of capacity only created with and for the specific act in Q. 11:20 (“having lost the ability to hear and having failed to see”), saying “this verse points to the capacity which is the [real] cause for the act (*‘illat al-fi‘l*).¹⁰¹

Abū l-Barakāt does not engage the concept of the two forms of capacity in his *Madārik al-Tanzīl* in connection with any of the three mentioned verses.¹⁰² Contrastingly, the Ottoman glossator Shaykhzādah picks up the topic in his discussion of Q. 2:286 (“God does not burden any human being with more than he is able to bear”), again in contradistinction to the Mu‘tazila. Thus, after affirming the rejection of *taklīf bi-mā lā yuṭāq* shared with the Mu‘tazila, he specifies:

They say, the capacity (*istiṭā‘a*) precedes the act, but we say, it does not exist, except together with the act. The difference between us and them lies in the actual power (*ḥaqīqat al-quḍra*), through which an act comes into being and without which it could not come into existence, whereas there is no disagreement concerning the capacity of causes and conditions (*istiṭā‘at al-asbāb wa-l-aḥwāl*) that precedes the act. It is this [latter] capacity on which the [divine] statement (*khiṭāb*) is based and not on the actual power, given its non-existence at the time of the statement.¹⁰³

This concise and straightforward description of a centuries-old debate is a summary and paraphrase of al-Māturīdī’s comments on this part of the verse.¹⁰⁴ What is more, the Ottoman scholar supports it with a reference to Q. 3:97 (“pilgrimage...is a duty owed to God by all people who are able to undertake it”) and an accompanying exegetical hadith, both taken

¹⁰⁰ Al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr*, 7:356.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 8:180. Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Ta‘wīlāt*, 7:151.

¹⁰² Yet he does rely on Q. 11:20 in this regard in his main *kalām* work. Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī, *Sharḥ al-‘Umda fī ‘aqīdat ahl as-sunna wa-l-jamā‘a al-musammā bi-l-i‘timād fī l-i‘tiqād* [The Commentary on the Summation of the Creed of the People of the Sunna and the Community Known as “The Validation of the Articles of Belief”], ed. ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh Ismā‘īl (Maktabat al-Azhariyya li-l-Turāth, 2014), 280.

¹⁰³ Shaykhzādah, *Ḥāshiyat Muḥyī al-Dīn Shaykhzādah*, 2:695.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta‘wīlāt*, 2:226–27.

directly from *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-sunna*.¹⁰⁵ Shaykhzādah's intervention showcases the cumulative character of the Māturīdī tradition of *tafsīr* across temporal and geographic borders.

Al-Māturīdī's rejection of *taklīf bi-mā lā yuṭāq* in relation to Q. 2:286 is not reproduced in Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's *Al-taysīr*.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless it is affirmed in the late 17th/early 18th century exegesis of the verse by al-Bursawī, who incidentally supports his view with reference to other sections of Najm al-Dīn's *tafsīr*.¹⁰⁷ Contrastingly, the link between Q. 2:286 and the impossibility of *taklīf bi-mā lā yuṭāq* was again established by Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī in *Madārik al-tanzīl*, yet without the distinction between actually and only apparently impossible acts. Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī, who refers his readers to al-Samarqandī's *Sharḥ ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*, merely specifies that what is meant is exclusively that for which man has the power, as an obligation could only apply to acts of which one is capable.¹⁰⁸ Once again, the mere transmission of the school doctrine is privileged over any further theological reflections.¹⁰⁹

This dynamic is strengthened and broadened in 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Hindī's gloss to *Madārik al-tanzīl*, where he draws a clear line to the Ash'arī school. In this respect, he asserts that Abū l-Barakāt had intended to say that the Sunnīs (*ahl al-sunna*) hold the *taklīf bi-mā lā yuṭāq* to be rationally impossible, whereas it is conceivable for the Ash'arīs. What is more, al-Hindī connects the question to Ḥanafī legal theory, the eventually dominant strand of which has similarly been strongly impacted by Māturīdī thought: "The scholars of legal theory often refer to this [i.e. the rejection of *taklīf bi-mā lā yuṭāq*] regarding questions concerning the proof that the [divine] command depends on the capability to perform [a given act]."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Shaykhzādah, *Hāshiyat Muḥyī al-Dīn Shaykhzādah*, 2:695; al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 2:227. See also the discussion of the topic in Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's comments on Q. 11:20, where he apparently draws on the same hadith. Al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr*, 7:356.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 3:441-442. See above regarding the discussion in al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 2:228.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Bursawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, 1:303-304.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-tanzīl*, 1:218.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Nasafī subsequently expands the scope of the debate in comparison to his predecessors by inserting a long quotation from al-Zamakhsharī's *Al-kashshāf*. Whereas the view of the impossibility of *taklīf bi-mā lā yuṭāq* is shared by al-Zamakhsharī, al-Nasafī highlights differences to the Mu'tazilī position regarding the interpretation of a following segment of the verse in the quote. In this respect, he notes the statement ("O our Sustainer! Take us not to task if we forget or unwittingly do wrong!") points to the possibility of God taking a believer to task for forgetfulness and unintentional wrongs. He contrasts this with the Mu'tazilī denial of this possibility, which rests on their view of the exclusively rational basis of good and evil. Al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-tanzīl*, 1:218-219; Abū l-Qāsim Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl* [The Exegesis of the Revealer of the Truths Concerning the Difficulties in the Revelation], ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām Shāhīn (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2015), 327-28. Although this issue was already addressed by al-Māturīdī (*Ta'wīlāt*, 2:230-31), the choice to frame it based on al-Zamakhsharī highlights the ongoing development of the field. The same approach was then also taken by the early Ottoman glossator to al-Bayḍawī, Ibn al-Tamjīd (d. 880/1476). Muṣṭafā Ibn al-Tamjīd, "Hāshiyat Ibn al-Tamjīd," in 'Iṣām al-Dīn Ismā'īl al-Qūnawī, *Hāshiyat al-Qūnawī 'alā Tafsīr al-Imām al-Bayḍawī*, ed. 'Abdallāh Maḥmūd Muḥammad 'Umar (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001), 5:505-506.

¹¹⁰ Al-Hindī, *Al-iklīl*, 2:320. On the Māturīdī influence on Ḥanafī legal theory, see Zysow, "Mu'tazilism and Māturīdism"; Dale J. Correa, "Taking a Theological Turn in Legal Theory: Regional Priority and Theology in Transoxanian Ḥanafī Thought," in *Locating the Sharī'a*, ed. Sohaira Z.M. Siddiqui (Brill, 2019); Philipp Bruckmayr, "At the Intersection of *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* and *Kalām*: The Commentary Tradition on Ṣadr al-Sharī'a al-Thānī's *al-Muqaddimāt al-Arba'*," *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 14 (2023); Hisashi Obuchi, "'Alā' al-Dīn al-Samarqandī's Non-Realist Approach to Good (*Hasan*) and Bad (*Qabīḥ*): Moral Ontology

Subsequently he includes another part of the verse (“in his favour shall be whatever good he acquires, and against him whatever evil he acquires”) into the discussion to relate it to the Māturīdī affirmation of human free will (*ikhtiyār*). He does this with reference to the definitive Māturīdī response to the late Ash‘arī position of *jabr mutawassit* (relative compulsion), as influentially championed by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 609/1206), which was formulated by Ṣadr al-Sharī‘a al-Thānī al-Bukhārī (d. 747/1346). According to Ṣadr al-Sharī‘a al-Thānī’s complex 14th century sophistication of al-Māturīdī’s theory of human volition, as briefly explained by the Indian glossator, it is the exercise of human free will (*ikhtiyār*) and not God’s decree that serves as the *murajjih* (preponderator) by which a given (hitherto only theoretically possible) act comes into existence, as opposed to a contrasting act or inaction.¹¹¹ Yet, the late al-Hindī was not the first representative of the tradition to link this point to Ḥanafī-Māturīdī/Shāfi‘ī-Ash‘arī differences in legal theory. This approach is already found in the super-commentary to al-Bayḍāwī by the Egyptian Ḥanafī-Māturīdī scholar Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī (d. 1069/1569).¹¹²

As a final example, we will now have a look at how al-Māturīdī’s use of Q. 2:136 (“Say: ‘We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us’”) and Q. 2:285 (“they all believe in God, and His angels, and His revelations, and His apostles”) to reject the verbal qualification of one’s status as a believer (*istithnā*), has played out in later *tafsīrs* of the tradition.¹¹³ Concerning the latter verse, Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī emphasises that it is “an indicator for the invalidity of qualification” (*dalīl ‘alā buḥlān al-istithnā*).¹¹⁴ Of course, this wording presupposes readers know what type of qualification is meant. Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī would later use almost the same words, albeit specifying that what is meant is qualification in the sphere of belief. This he immediately connects with another doctrine highlighted by al-Māturīdī in his comments on the verse, namely that it proves that the grave sinner does not lose his belief on account of his actions.¹¹⁵ Notably, Abū l-Barakāt finds another textual proof against *istithnā*’ in Q. 8:4, where it had been neither invoked in *Ta’wīlāt ahl al-sunna* nor in *Al-taysīr*.¹¹⁶ What is more, he likewise invokes this as a proof text against the practice in his main *kalām* work, *Al-i‘timād*.¹¹⁷

With al-Khafājī’s gloss to al-Bayḍāwī at the latest, the topic becomes explicitly framed as a point of dispute between the Māturīdiyya and Shāfi‘iyya-Ash‘ariyya within *tafsīr* works. For his discussion of the issue and affirmation of the Māturīdī position, he relies on Abū l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī’s *kalām* writings and characterises it as “the question [of the state of belief]

in Sixth/Twelfth-Century Māturīdī Theology and Legal Theory,” *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 8 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-20240008>.

¹¹¹ Al-Hindī, *Al-iklīl*, 2:320-321. On Ṣadr al-Sharī‘a’s theory and refutation of al-Rāzī, see Bruckmayr, “At the Intersection,” 21–29.

¹¹² Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī, *Hāshiyat al-Shihāb al-musammāt ‘ināyat al-qāḍī wa-kiḥāyat al-rāḍī ‘alā Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī* [The Gloss of al-Shihāb Called “The Grace of the Judge and the Comforting Sufficiency regarding the Exegesis of al-Bayḍāwī] (Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 1:275–76.

¹¹³ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt*, 1:152, 2:224–25.

¹¹⁴ Al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr*, 3:441.

¹¹⁵ Al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-tanzīl*, 1:218. Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt*, 2:225.

¹¹⁶ Al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-tanzīl*, 2:135–36. Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt*, 6:173; al-Nasafī, *Al-taysīr*, 7:128–29.

¹¹⁷ Al-Nasafī, *Sharḥ al-‘Umda*, 382.

at the point of death (or at the final judgement)” (*mas’ala al-muwāfāt*).¹¹⁸ Accordingly, al-Hindī, the glossator to Abū l-Barakāt’s *Madārik al-tanzīl*, also defines it as the famous *mas’ala al-muwāfāt* debate, on which he elaborates with reference to al-Khafājī and unspecified commentators to *Al-kashshāf*. Thus, the cumulative character of the Māturīdī tradition of *tafsīr* once again comes into focus. Yet, the late Indian commentator opts for a conciliatory approach and stresses that “there is no doubt about the state of the existence of belief in general, so that the dispute has been settled and it was shown that it was only a matter of [different] terminology (*yatabayyanu annahu lafẓī*).”¹¹⁹

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Several conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing. As was already shown by Götz in the 1960s, the number of *kalām*-related interpretations and comments in al-Māturīdī’s *tafsīr* is truly substantial. Scientific engagement with these parts of the work is thus imperative for an encompassing understanding of his contribution to and influence in the field of rational theology. In any case, his followers in later centuries were fully cognisant of this aspect of *Ta’wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*. They not only used the work as a source and reference in delineating and defending their doctrines. What is more, some of the major representatives of the Māturīdiyya wrote independent *tafsīrs* or (super-)commentaries to earlier works, which – to varying degrees but still consistently – reflected, transmitted and reappraised the school’s doctrines. Therefore, we may justifiably speak of a Māturīdī(-influenced) tradition of *tafsīr* that stretched across roughly a millennium and from Transoxania via Iran and Iraq into India, Anatolia, Syria and Egypt, and which was reinvigorated in the Ottoman context.

The early works of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī and Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī were still strongly geared towards elucidating, standardising and strengthening Māturīdī teachings, because they were composed at the time at which the Māturīdiyya finally concretised into and began to spread as a distinct school of *kalām* with clear doctrinal and methodological contours. In Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī’s day, the process of standardisation was largely completed, and the school had established a presence throughout the Ḥanafī sphere from Anatolia, Syria and Egypt to South Asia. In addition, the field of *tafsīr* had been transformed considerably by the ambivalent rise to unmatched prominence of al-Zamakhsharī’s *Al-kashshāf*. Even though the *kalām/’aqīda*-related content in his *Madārik al-Tanzīl* is conspicuously lesser than in the Qur’anic commentaries of al-Māturīdī and Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, the work still represents an important development in the Māturīdī *tafsīr* tradition. This is due to its appropriation of the format and style of *Al-kashshāf*, combined with the implicit or explicit refutation of its Mu’tazilī elements along Māturīdī lines. What is more, here we first encounter the contours of an overarching Ḥanafī-Māturīdī system, which increasingly collectively encompasses doctrine, legal theory and Qur’anic exegesis.

¹¹⁸ Al-Khafājī, *Hāshiyat al-Shihāb*, 2:135.

¹¹⁹ Al-Hindī, *Al-iklīl*, 3:535–36 (quotation from 536).

This process reached its apogee in the Ottoman context. Many of the *tafsīr* glosses composed in the Ottoman empire from the 16th century onwards show that Ḥanafī-Māturīdī scholars of the period were not willing to leave the field of Qurʾanic exegesis – and thus the de-Muʿtazilisation of *Al-kashshāf* in the form of al-Bayḍāwī and the glosses to these two works – exclusively to the Ashʿarīs.¹²⁰ Much to the contrary, they pursued the project of creating a coherent synthesis of Ḥanafī legal theory and Māturīdī doctrine further, *inter alia* through the medium of *tafsīr*. As is evident from the contemporary literary genre on Māturīdī/Ashʿarī divergences, this had meanwhile also acquired a character of identity politics. Particularly the most influential text of the genre, al-Bayāḍī’s *Ishārāt al-marām*,¹²¹ testifies to the lasting relevance of the Qurʾanic commentaries of al-Māturīdī and Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī for *kalām* works, as both are frequently invoked and quoted.

As far as the Ottoman *tafsīr* glosses of Māturīdī persuasion are concerned, it should be noted that some became highly influential and widely distributed. Al-Khafājī’s *ḥāshiyā* ranks #9 (extant copies) and #22 (geographic distribution) on Ross’ list of the most popular *tafsīrs* in Islamic history, and Shaykhzādah at #5 and #19, respectively. If we again focus exclusively on the larger books of the genre, we end up with the former occupying #5 and #7, whereas the latter comes in first in extant copies and as #4 in geographic distribution.¹²² It should be noted that many other popular Qurʾan commentaries listed by Ross and authored by scholars with a Ḥanafī background, which are most likely of relevance for an enquiry into the Māturīdī-influenced tradition of *tafsīr*, have been excluded from this preliminary study. This not only includes Timurid, Ottoman and Mughal-era glosses but also independent works of the genre, such as Abū l-Suʿūd Efendī’s (982/1574) *Irshād al-ʿaql al-Salīm* and the *tafsīr* of Ibn Kamāl Bāshā (d. 940/1534).

In any case, the cumulative character of the Māturīdī tradition of *tafsīr* and the development of its internal dynamics just described are well-reflected in the most recent of the works surveyed here: *Al-iklīl ʿalā Madārik al-Tanzīl*, the gloss written at the turn of the 20th century by the South Asian scholar ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Hindī. Using as his point of departure Q. 7:28 (“Say: ‘Behold, never does God enjoin deeds of abomination’”) and Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī’s brief comment that everything commanded by God is necessarily good and that this topic is connected to the categorisations and debates of legal theory, the author delivers the longest digression of his entire seven-volume work. Thus, he sketches over almost 50 pages of the print edition all major entanglements between Māturīdī *kalām* and Ḥanafī *uṣūl al-fiqh* and their demarcation from Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī counter-positions. This includes the questions of the rational recognition of good (*ḥusn*) and bad (*qubḥ*) and whether certain acts could be defined as intrinsically good or bad even without revelation. In addition, it features all the other debates that came to be connected with the issue of Divine command, such as

¹²⁰ Besides the examples provided above, see Arnold Yasin Mol, “Divine Respite in the Ottoman Tafsīr Tradition: Reconciling Exegetical Approaches to Q.11:117,” in *Osmanlı’da İlimler Dizisi: Osmanlı’da İlm-i Tefsir*, ed. M.T. Boyalık and H. Abacı (İSAR, 2019), 543–45, 575–83.

¹²¹ On the relevance of the work in 20th century re-assertions of Ḥanafī-Māturīdī identity, see Bruckmayr, “Salafī Challenge and Māturīdī Response,” 299, 318–19.

¹²² Ross, “Most Popular *Tafsīrs*,” 20, 26.

human agency, the creation of human acts, free will, and the obligation to perform something beyond one's capacity.¹²³

A millennium earlier, al-Māturīdī had only briefly touched on the relationship between Divine command and free will in his comments on the same verse in *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-sunna*, without mentioning any of the other related topics.¹²⁴ Perhaps he would have been surprised to see how the distinct tradition of *tafsīr*, which had grown out of his *kalām*-saturated Qur'anic exegesis, developed over a thousand years of constant engagement. Finally, the element of identity politics associated with the Māturīdī *tafsīr* tradition in the Turkic world has not ceased to operate until today. Thus, the recent Turkish translation of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's *Al-taysīr fī l-tafsīr* includes a preface by the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (b. 1954) just as the 2022 partial Uzbek translation features one by Uzbekistan's president Shavkat Mirziyoyev (b. 1957).¹²⁵

¹²³ Al-Hindī, *Al-iklāl*, 3:299–46.

¹²⁴ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 5:323–24.

¹²⁵ Necmüddīn Ömer en-Nesefī, *Et-Taysīr fī 't-Tefsīr: Ömer Nesefī Tefsiri 1. Cilt* [The Facilitator in Exegesis: 'Umar al-Nasafī's Exegesis Volume 1], ed. Muhammed Coşkun (Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2019), [i-ii]; Jamoliddin Karimov, "Study of the Heritage of Imam Maturidi at the Imam Maturidi International Scientific Research Center: Analysis and Prospective Plans," *EPRA International Journal of Research and Development* 9, no. 6 (2024): 625–27. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this Uzbek translation and its preface.

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