THE METHODOLOGY OF AL-MĀṬURĪDĪ’S QUR’ANIC EXEGESIS:
Study of Ta’wīlāt Abl al-Sunnah

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Abstract

According to Islamic theology, al-Māṭurīdī is one of the three prominent Muslim theologians of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah who are called aqtāb madhhab Ahl al-Sunnah wa’l-Jamā‘ah (the leaders of Sunnite school of thought). In addition to his reputation as a theologian, al-Māṭurīdī actually was competent in various Islamic sciences. In Qur’anic exegesis, he has Ta’wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah or Ta’wīlāt al-Qurān. Unfortunately, this fact isn’t known well by Islamic researchers. This article is going to elucidate the features of his work that encompass at least seven characteristics. Al-Māṭurīdī prefers to combine the naqli (traditional) and ‘aqli (rational) sources. Consequently, it can be identified as tafsīr bi’l-izdiwāj or the exegesis that amalgamates tafsīr bi’l-ma’thūr (traditional exegesis) with tafsīr bi’l-ra’y (rational exegesis). He is not an interpreter who uses excessive grammatical analysis to interpret the Qur’anic verses. He sometimes presents many styles of qira’ah (recitation of the Qurān) without thorough explanation. He almost never uses Isrā’iliyyāt (the Judeo-Christian traditions and tales) to interpret the Qur’anic verses. He favors tawassūṭ (nonaligned and independent standpoint) when he deals with different viewpoints among theologians. He tends to follow the Hanafite school of thought in discussing the jurisprudential Qur’anic verses. He applies asbāb al-nuzūl (the causes of revelation) loosely.

Keywords: Qur’anic studies, Qur’anic Exegesis, al-Māṭurīdī, Ta’wīlāt Abl al-Sunnah.
A. Introduction

The history of Islam can be divided into three periods, the classical period (30-648 / 650-1250), the middle period (648-1215 / 1250-1800) and the modern period (since 1215 / 1800). In its history, Islam has had two golden ages, namely, the first and the second golden ages. The first golden age can be found in the classical period when the expansion and the integration of Islamic government occurred before the prophet Muḥammad (may God bless and grant him salvation) died in 11/632, and continued under the administration of Rashidūn (rightly guided) caliphs (13-35 / 634-661) and Ummayad dynasty (41-132 / 661-750). The second golden age took place in the middle period, marked by the Ottoman dynasty in Turkey (680-1342 / 1281-1923), Savafid dynasty in Iran (907-1149 / 1501-1736) and Mongol dynasty in India (932-1275 / 1526 -1858).1

During the first golden age, there were three prominent Muslim theologians of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah school of thought, i.e. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash’arī (d. 330/941) in Baṣrah, Abū Mansūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Māturīḍī (d. 333/944) in Samarqand (Transoxiana) and Abū Ja’far al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/933) in Egypt.2

Additionally, Jalāl Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Mūsā said that those three Islamic scholars were also called aqtāb madhhab Abl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ab (the leaders of Sunnite school of thought) which encompassed al-Ash’arī, al-Māturīḍī and al-Ṭahāwī, 3 although among the followers of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah, or most Muslim people generally, including Indonesian citizens, if there is a consensus of opinion, it is that their major theologians on kalaam are al-Ash’arī and al-Māturīḍī. It

1 For further explanation about the periods of Islamic history, see Harun Nasution, *Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspeknya*, vol. 1 (Jakarta: UI Press, 1978), pp. 56-89.
4 See the appendix of *Ta’wilāt Abl al-Sunnah* (Baghdad: al-Irshād, 1983), p. 693.
seems al-Ṭāḥāwī is unlucky because his name has been nearly forgotten in the study of *kālam*.

Besides his popularity in *kālam*, al-Ḥaṣārī also has many works on different subjects. In total, his works number over 24 titles. There are two titles on *tafsīr* (Qura’nic exegesis) and *tajwīd* (proper pronunciation for correct recitation of the *Qur’ān*), 4 titles on *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), 12 titles on *kālam*, 1 title on *taswīw* (sufism) and five titles on other various themes.4

Al-Ḥaṣārī’s book on Qura’nic exegesis is entitled *Ta’wilāt Abl al-Sunnah* (the Sunnite interpretations) that is widely known as *Ta’wilāt al-Qur’ān* (the Qura’nic interpretations). The book, written by this *Imām al-Mutakallimin* (leader of theologians) and Ra’īs Abl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah (mentor of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah), is found in several places, including the Turkish libraries in Istanbul, Egyptian library of Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyyah in Cairo, Syrian library of Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhirīyyah in Damascus, British Museum in London and Berlin library in Germany.5 However, comprehensive discussions of this book are rarely seen. Moreover, few Qura’nic studies mention the name of al-Ḥaṣārī as a Qura’nic exegete.

Ahmad al-Shirbāṣī, when explaining the levels of Sunnite exegetes, did not allude to al-Ḥaṣārī, but instead remarked on al-Āsh’ārī, another theologian who lived at the time of al-Ḥaṣārī. Drawing on the work of al-Fadl ibn al-Hāsib al-Tibrīshī, a Shi‘ite priest, al-Shirbāṣī gives the following explanation.


5 See the preface of *Ta’wilāt Abl al-Sunnah* written by Muḥāmmad Mustafīd al-Raḥmān, pp. 3-4.

The assertion that al-As‘ārī is an exegete is also followed by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhāḥabī in his al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn (the exegesis and exegetes). He declared that the name of al-As‘ārī’s Qura’nic exegesis was al-Mukhtazīn (the treasure storage).7

However, Ṣubḥī Sa‘līḥ, in Mahābīth fī Ulūm al-Qur‘ān, did not include al-Māturīdī’s name as an interpreter. The Qura’nic interpretations and their interpreters from Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah, according to him, are Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb, written by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta‘wīl, written by Nāṣir al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh al-Bayḍawī (d. 685/1286), Irsāhad al-Aql al-Salīm ilā Mazāyā al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm, written by Abū al-Su‘ūd al-‘Imādī (d. 982/1574), Madārik al-Tanzīl wa Ḥaqā‘iq al-Ta‘wīl, written by Abū al-Barakāt al-Nāṣafi (d. 710/1310), and Lubāb al-Ta‘wīl fī Ma‘ānī al-Tanzīl, written by ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Khāzin (d. 741/1341).8 A similar attitude is shared by Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) in Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn9 and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-

Although al-Māturīdī was not well known as an exegete, there were some writers who acknowledged him. Among of them were Muḥammad ibn Abī al-Qurashi (d. 775/1373) in Tabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyyah,11 Ḥāji Khalīfah (d. 1067/1654) in Kashf al-Zunūn,12 and Ṣadīq ibn Ḥusayn al-Qafūjī (d. 1307/1889) in Abjad al-‘Ulūm.13

B. Biography of al-Māturīdī

His name was Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd Abū Maṣūr al-Māturīdī.14 He was born in Māturīd or Māturīt, a district of Samarqand.15 His noble lineage is connected to Abū Ayyūb Khalīd ibn Zayd ibn Kulayb al-Anṣārī (d. 52/672), a companion of the prophet Muhammad, from the clan of Khazraj in Medina, when Muḥammad stopped by his house in the course of the Hegira (migration) journey from Mecca to Medina. Al-Māturīdī’s date of birth is still in dispute among historians, although there is a consensus that al-Māturīdī died in 333/944 and was buried in Samarqand.16

To make a supposition about al-Māturīdī’s birth, we can relate it to the years when his teachers died. For instance, the death of Ṣuṣayr ibn Yaḥyā al-Balkhī (d. 268/881) and Muḥammad ibn Muqāṭīl al-Rāzī (d. 248/862). After that, we can presume that al-Māturīdī most probably was born before 248/862. Therefore, if he was ten years old when he graduated from his elementary school and then directly studied with Muḥammad ibn Muqāṭīl al-Rāzī, he presumably was born in 238/852. If this presumption is true, it can be concluded that he lived to be almost

14 Al-Qurashi, Tabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyyah, vol. 1, p. 130.
92 years old. In addition, he was born in the reign of al-Mutawakkil (232-247 / 846-861) and was nine years old when al-Mutawakkil was assassinated in 248/862.\(^\text{17}\)

Therefore, al-Māturīdī was born twenty-two years before the birth of al-Ashʿarī (d. 330/941), who was born in 260/873,\(^\text{18}\) although other information says that he was born in 270/883.\(^\text{19}\) If the former option (260/873) is chosen, it can be said that al-Ashʿarī began to support Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaʿah in 300/912, because he left his teacher, Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Jubbāī (d. 303/915), and rejected the Muʿtazilah when he was 40 years old.\(^\text{20}\) On the other hand, al-Māturīdī advocated Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah before 300/912.

Historians do not give details about how he got his education. It is told that he studied Islamic sciences, taking supervision from four Islamic scholars in the academic tradition of Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767). They were Abū Bakr Ahmad al-Juzjānī, Abu Naṣr Ahmad al-ʿIyāḍī, Muḥammad ibn Muqāṭil al-Rāzī (d. 248/802) and Nuṣayr ibn Yahyā al-Balkhī (d. 268/881).

Therefore, it is unmistakable to conclude that a Ḥanafite education was taken by al-Māturīdī. His teachers were scholars who made a great contribution to spreading the Ḥanafite school of thought in two territories governed by the authority of the Sāmānīte dynasty, namely, Transoxiana and Khurāsān. For this reason, it is understandable that al-Māturīdī leans towards the Ḥanafite, which at that time was the most prominent trend in society. Furthermore, he almost never travelled outside Transoxiana and Khurāsān to study. He learnt from Abu Naṣr Aḥmad al-ʿIyāḍī in Samarqand, as well as from Abū Bakr Ahmad al-Juzjānī, Nuṣayr ibn Yahyā al-Balkhī and Muḥammad ibn Muqāṭil al-Rāzī in Khurāsān. Consequently, this refutes the assumption that al-Māturīdī has been influenced by al-Ashʿarī in constructing his theological

\(^{17}\) ʿAlī, ʿAqidat al-İslâm, p. 265.

\(^{18}\) Müsâ, Nashʿat al-Ashʿarîyyah, p. 165.


\(^{20}\) Müsâ, Nashʿat al-Ashʿarîyyah, p. 168.
thoughts, notwithstanding the resemblances between them.21

The followers of al-Māturīdī conferred on him many special titles to show their admiration. Some of his titles are ʿImām al-Hudā (the leader of guidance), Qudwat Abl al-Sunnah wa al-Iḥtīdā (the model of those who follow the tradition and guidance), Raʾīʾ Alāʾ al-Sunnah wa al-Ṣamaʿ (the upholder of Sunnite banners), Qāliʾ Aḏāʾīl al-Fitnah wa al-Biḍāʾ (the destroyer of deviant defamation and heresy), ʿImām al-Mutakallimīn (the leader of theologians) and Muṣḥīḥ ʿAqāʾid al-Muslimīn (the corrector of Muslims’ beliefs).22 Those honorary degrees indicate the high academic position reached by al-Māturīdī. However, there are some writers who call al-Māturīdī The Second Great “Father” of Sunnite Theology23 or The Second Great Theologian of the Sunnite24 because he is ranked below al-ʿAshʿarī.

C. Al-Māturīdī’s Qura’nic Exegesis

After examining al-Māturīdī’s Qura’nic exegesis, it can be said that his exegesis has several characteristics or features. Here are the details.

First, there is the combination of ʿnaqli (traditional) and ʿaqīli (rational) sources. The ʿnaqli source consists of the Qurʾān, the traditions conveyed by the prophet or his companions, whereas the ʿaqīli source stems from his thoughts (ijtiḥād). According to this fact, it is acceptable to say that al-Māturīdī’s Qura’nic exegesis can be called tafsīr bi al-izdiwāğ or the exegesis that amalgamates tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr (traditional exegesis) with tafsīr bi al-raʾy (rational exegesis). This labeling is based on the categories of exegesis given by Abdul Djalal25 whose classification is more comprehensive than the classification given by other writers, such

24 Ibid., p. 207.
25 Abdul Djalal, Urgensi Tafsir Mandhû’i Pada Masa Kini (Jakarta: Kalam Mulia, 1990), pp. 64-8.
as al-Zarqa’ni,²⁶ Amīr ‘Abd al-‘Aţīz,²⁷ and M. Quraish Shihab.²⁸

Here is the example of his commentary with the assistance of Qura’nic verses themselves.

[master of the day of judgment; QS. 1:4].

The words “yawm al-dīn” in this verse mean the day of reckoning and repayment for all our deeds or the judgment day. In this regard, its meaning resembles the spirit of QS. 37:53 and QS. 24:25.

[When we die and become dust and bones, shall we indeed receive rewards and punishments?; QS. 37:53].²⁹

The same thing is done by al-Māṭūrīdī when he interprets the verse:

[On that day Allah will pay them back (all) their just dues; QS. 24:25].²⁹

The same thing is done by al-Māṭūrīdī when he interprets the verse:

²⁶ He classifies Qura’nic exegesis into mahmūd (praiseworthy) and madhmu>m (blameworthy). See al-Zarqa’ni, Manābil al-’Irfa>n, vol. 2, pp. 33-34.
²⁸ Besides classifying Qura’nic exegesis into tafsīr bi al-ma’thu>r and tafsīr bi al-ra’y, he also quotes ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Farmawi’s categorization that classifies Qura’nic exegesis into tabdīl (analytical), ījmāl (general), muqārin (comparative) and mawdū’i (thematic). See M. Quraish Shihab, Membunikan Al-Qur’an (Bandung: Mizan, 1999), pp. 83-86.
And remember We said: Enter this town, and eat of the plenty therein as ye wish; but enter the gate with humility, in posture and in words, and We shall forgive you your faults and increase (the portion of) those who do good; QS. 2:58.

Al-Māturīdī says that the meaning of addition or increase in the word sanā'īd is “al-tawfiq bi'l-ihṣān min ba'd (the success granted by Allah to perform goodness on the next day). This interpretation corresponds with the verse:

So he who gives (in charity) and fears (Allah), and (in all sincerity) testifies to the best, We will indeed make smooth for him the path to bliss; QS. 92:5-7.

Besides getting assistance from the Qura’nic verses, al-Māturīdī was also assisted by the prophet tradition. The main feature noticed by everyone who reads Ta’wilāt Abl al-Sunnab is that al-Māturīdī never mentions the transmission line of tradition (sanad) when he quotes the tradition. Al-Māturīdī usually uses specific terms such as mā ruwiya ‘an al-nabiyy (the tradition that transmitted from the prophet), mā ruwiya ‘an rasūl Allāh (the tradition that transmitted from the messenger of Allah), kaqawlih salla Allāh ‘alayh wa sallam (for instance, the saying of Muhammad PBUH), li mā ruwiya fi al-khabar (like as transmitted in the tradition), mā jāa ‘an rasūl Allāh (the tradition that comes from the messenger of Allah), dafīlah qawluh sallā Allāh ‘alayh wa sallam (its argument is the saying of Muhammad PBUH), wa fī ba’d al-akbbār (and in some traditions), mā jāa fī al-khabar (the argument that stated in the tradition) and dhukir fī al-khabar (said in the tradition).

Therefore, it is understandable if there are many questions about the reasons why al-Māturīdī does not mention any ascription of transmission line (sanad) in his commentary, although he surely knows that sanad is one of the important elements that should not be abandoned.

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30 Ibid., p. 150.
31 Ibid., pp. 8, 9, 226, 322, 385, 417, 479, 526, and 634.
in checking the reliability of tradition. Moreover, according to al-Dhahabî, the discarding of sanad, the customary practice among exegetes, has a negative effect on al-wad’ (falsifying tradition) in interpretation and creates many amalgamations between saḥîḥ (reliable tradition) and mawdū’ (counterfeit tradition). Furthermore, it also makes Isra‘îlyât (the Judeo-Christian traditions and tales) spread out widely.32

Perhaps the question above cannot be answered exactly, except by al-Mâturîdî himself. However, it is tolerable if we make a presumption on his motivation. Presumably al-Mâturîdî intends to abandon the sanad because he does not intend to lead the attention of his commentary readers to be focused on the insignificant things and then not remember the most significant ones. Besides, al-Mâturîdî surely has known that there were many Islamic scholars who had not only paid attention to the traditions of the prophet but also collected and written them in specific books, such as Abû ‘Abd Allâh Muḥammad al-Bukhârî (d. 256/869) and Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjâj al-Nîsâbûrî (d. 261/874), whose residence, namely, Bukhârâ and Nishapur, by coincidence is not far from Samarqand, the birthplace of al-Mâturîdî.

Here is an example of his commentary based on the tradition of the prophet.

[Divorced women shall wait concerning themselves for three monthly periods; QS.2:228].

The words “thalâthab qurû’” above, according to al-Mâturîdî’s interpretation, are similar to thalâthab ḥayd (three periods of menstruation). Even though it also can be interpreted as thalâthab athâr (three periods of cleanness), but the appropriate meaning is thalâthab ḥayd because this meaning is the same as mentioned in the tradition that the prophet Muhammad PBUH said, “The waiting period for a slave widow is two periods of menstruation”. Two periods of menstruation in that tradition are a part of the waiting period for a free widow. Hence, the proper

interpretation for this verse is three periods of menstruation.\textsuperscript{33}

He also supports his commentary with the tradition when he explains the following verse:

\begin{align*}
\text{الَّذِيْنَ قُلُوكُمُ بِهِ مُرَتَّانَ فَإِمَائِسُوكُمُ مَعًَرُوفٌ أَوْ تُسْرِيْحَ بِإِحْسَانِ}
\end{align*}

\[A \text{ divorce is only permissible twice; after that, the parties should either hold together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness; QS. 2:229}].

According to his point of view, the words “\textit{tasrīh bi-ihbān}” (separate with kindness) in that verse can be interpreted with “\textit{ataf\'{l}iqah thālithah}” (the third divorce) based on the saying of prophet Muḥammad: \textit{huwa al-ataf\'{l}iqah al-thālithah} (it is the third divorce).\textsuperscript{34}

In addition to the tradition, al-Māturīdī also refers to the statements of the prophet’s companions. One of those companions, whose statements were frequently quoted by al-Māturīdī, is ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687). For example, when al-Māturīdī interprets the following verse.

\begin{align*}
\text{الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَزِّبَ الْعَلَمَيْنِ}
\end{align*}

\[Praise \text{ be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds; QS. 1:2}].

The words \textit{al-hamd lī-Allāh} (praise be to Allah) cannot be only interpreted as Allah praising Himself to show His right of admiration in front of all His creatures, but also can be interpreted that Allah orders, “\textit{Say: Praise be to Allah!”} Because the word \textit{al-hamd} is attributed to Allah, it contains implicitly the obligation for us to express gratitude to Allah, the Almighty. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās says that \textit{al-hamd lī Allāh} means \textit{al-shukr lī Allāh bi mā ʂa\text{"{a}}t i\text{"{a}} hālqīb} (all gratitudes are to Allah for His

\textsuperscript{33} Al-Māturīdī, \textit{Taw\‘īlāt Abl al-Sunnah}, 493. Al- Jaṣṣāṣ mentions this tradition with two transmission lines, i.e. both from Ḥāshibah and Ibn ʿUmar. See Abū Bakr Abīl Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ, \textit{Aḥkām al-Qurān}, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1993), pp. 499-500.

bestowal to His creatures). Besides, the command to express gratitude can be found in the tradition that talks about how the prophet expressed his gratitude by doing the prayer thoroughly until the soles of his feet became puffy. Therefore, those who submit and obey Allah’s orders are akin to those who express gratitude to Allah.35

The other companions and followers whose viewpoints and outlooks are also alluded to by al-Māturīdī are Abu Bakr (d. 13/634),36 ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/643),37 ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (d. 35/655),38 ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib (d. 40/660),39 ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd (d. 32/652),40 Abū Muṣā al-Ash‘a[rī (d. 44/664),41 ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar (d. 73/692),42 Ubayy ibn Ka‘b (d. 31/651),43 ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73/692),44 Abū Hurayrah (d. 59/678),45 Ḥasan ibn ‘Ali (d. 50/670),46 Āishah binti Abī Bakr (d. 58/677),47 Ḥafṣah binti ‘Umar (d. 45/665),48 Anas ibn Mālik (d. 93/711),49 al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728),50 Qatādah ibn Di‘āmah (d. 117/735)51 and so on.

When al-Māturīdī interprets the Qur’ān, he often mentions various viewpoints, sometimes over ten viewpoints,52 regardless of whether their

35 Ibid., pp. 7-9;

36 Ibid., p. 450.
37 Ibid., p. 213.
38 Ibid., pp. 488-9.
39 Ibid., p. 412.
40 Ibid., pp. 155 and 398.
41 Ibid., p. 439.
42 Ibid., p. 245.
43 Ibid., p. 374.
44 Ibid., p. 404.
46 Ibid., p. 563.
48 Ibid., p. 302.
49 Ibid., p. 370.
50 Ibid., pp. 79-80.
51 Ibid., pp. 99-100.
52 See his commentary on the meaning of [لاّ ہے] in QS. 2: 1. Ibid., pp. 33-36.
opinions are similar or dissimilar to his opinion. Presumably, this attitude stems from his standpoint that the meanings of the terms *tafsîr* and *ta'wil* are not the same. *Tafsîr*, he argues, is the effort to define the meaning of Qur'anic verses precisely, whereas *ta'wil* is only the effort to pick out one of many alternative meanings without defining exactly which one is the truest meaning. Relying on this sharp differentiation, we can understand why al-Mâturîdî deliberately entitles his work *Ta’wilât Abl al-Sunnah* or *Ta’wilât al-Qur’a’n*, not *Tafsîr Ahl al-Sunnah* or *Tafsîr al-Qur’a’n*.53

Consequently, as said by al-Mâturîdî, every word in the Qur’ân has many probable meanings whose truth are tentative and uncertain because no one knows the truest meaning of the Quranic verses, except Allah, the Omniscient. Therefore, al-Mâturîdî often closes his quotations with the following statements: *wa bi Allâh al-tawfiq* (and the assistance is from Allah), *wa Allâh musta’ân* (and Allah is the only One whose help is sought), *wa là quwwah illâ bi Allâh* (and there is no power, except from Allah), *wa Allâh a’lam* (and Allah is the Omniscient), *wa Allâh a’lam bi mā arâd* (and Allah is the Omniscient on its meaning), *wa bi Allâh al-muwaffiq wa al-‘ismah* (and both the assistance and protection are from Allah), *wa Allâh al-muwaffiq* (and Allah is the helper) and *wa bi Allâh al-‘ismah* (and the protection is from Allah).54

Al-Mâturîdî is usually critical towards dissimilar opinions and views. Sometimes he follows the truest view, but sometimes he rejects the most false view, depending on his best analysis.

Besides basing his interpretations on the Qur’ân, the traditions and the sayings of companions and followers, al-Mâturîdî also bases his interpretations on his own thoughts (*ijtibâd*). For example, there is his commentary on the meaning of “al-ḥâyy al-qayyûm” in the following verse.

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Allah! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal; QS. 2:255].
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53 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
54 Ibid., pp. 9, 11, 13, 26, 36, 85, 91, and 113.
The word “al-ḥayy” means that Allah is the Living. He will never die, He is different from His creations who cannot avoid death. The person who really lives (FULAH ḥayy) is the one who has both glory and esteem. In this sense, the earth of Allah is called ḥayyah because it is not static, but always dynamic, fertile and productive. It yields bountiful crops and harvests, hence it has a high position and rank in the sight of all creatures. Therefore, Allah is worthy of His title “al-ḥayy” because of his great honor.

Whereas, Allah was called al-qayyu>m (the Self-subsisting and the Everlasting) because He will never forget or overlook anything and there is nothing that can free itself from the stare of Allah. In this respect, it is similar to the Arabic sentence “FULAH qa’im ‘ala marr ḥayn” which means somebody who always stares at another person in all of his matters.55

Second, al-Mātūrīḍī is not an interpreter who uses excessive grammatical analysis to interpret the Qura’nic verses. His linguistic scrutiny is not disproportionate because it corresponds to the necessity required to utilize grammatical analysis without excessiveness. Besides, he also almost never bases his argumentation on the poems that are usually used in grammatical analysis. Perhaps, the main purpose of his attitude is to prove to the readers that such grammatical exegesis is acceptable for interpreting the Qura’nic verses. The following verses are examples.

[And behold, We said to the angels: “Bow down to Adam!” and they bowed down, not so Iblis. he refused and was haughty, he was of those who reject faith; QS. 2:34].

The composition “fa-sajadū illā iblīs” which is not arranged with istithnā’ (the exception) from mustathnā minh (the word that is used as the source of exception) is tolerable from a syntactical viewpoint. This is similar to the sentence “The citizens of Kufa enter this house except the man from Medina”. Consequently, God’s command to bow down

55 Ibid., pp. 587-8.
to Adam is not only aimed for all angels and but also for Iblis, the Satan.\(^{56}\)

\[
\text{وَمَثَالُ الْجَنَّةِ مَكْفَرٌ وَمَثَالُ الْجَحِيمَ يَنْعُقُ بِهَا لَا يَنْبِعُ إِلَّا دُعَاءً}
\]

[The parable of those who reject faith is as if one were to shout like a goat-herd, to things that listen to nothing but calls and cries; deaf, dumb, and blind, they are void of wisdom; QS. 2:171].

Al-Māturīdī says that the word \textit{yan’iq} has two meanings, i.e. [1] \textit{yashū’t} (to call) and [2] \textit{yun’aq} (to be called) because the active form (\textit{fa’il}) in this verse means the passive form (\textit{mafi’ul}). This grammatical case is similar to the meaning of \textit{‘ayshah rādiyyah} or \textit{‘ayshah mardīyyah} which means pleasant life.\(^{57}\)

\[
\text{وَلَقَدْ عَلَمَّ الْجَنَّةِ أَعْتَدَدَا مَيْنَكُمْ فِي الْأَسْبَابِ فَعِلْنَا لَهُمْ كُوْنَا}
\]

[And well ye knew those amongst you who transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath; We said to them: “Be ye apes, and rejected.” QS. 2:65].

Al-Māturīdī explains that although the word \textit{kha’si’} (despised) means \textit{ṣaghir} (trifle), \textit{dbālil} (humble) and \textit{ba’tid} (distant), its meanings actually refer to the same connotation, i.e. despicable or contemptible.\(^{58}\)

Third, al-Māturīdī sometimes presents many styles of \textit{qira’ah} (recitation of the Qur’an) at a glance and without thorough explanation. He also does not assess the category of each \textit{qira’ah}. Besides, he rarely mentions the people who are considered as the sources of \textit{qira’ah}. Among of them are ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd (d. 32/652), ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbaṣ (d. 68/687), Ubayy ibn Ka’b (d. 31/651), al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) and Muqāṭil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767). Here is an example of his interpretation.

\(^{56}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 101.
\(^{57}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 320.
\(^{58}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 164.
The word “fūm” in the verse above can be understood as “ithām” (garlic) because ‘Abd Allāh ibn Masʿūd reads “wa jūmiḥā” with “wa thūmiḥā”. Besides, it also can be interpreted as “burr” (wheat).59 We can read another example of al-Māturīdī's commentary of the following verses.

[Fāḏalqa‘a לנה רצלאק חמרוג לנה כמא תֶּבֶת אלرأִסִּין מִן בֵּכְלֵיהֶן וְקָרְבָּיהֶן

[So beseech thy Lord for us to produce for us of what the earth groweth its potherbs, and cucumbers, its garlic, lentils and onions; QS. 2:61].

Al-Māturīdī says that ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Masʿūd recite “fa in ʿamanī bi-mithl mā ʿamanṭum bib” with “fa in ʿamanī biʿl-ladū ʿamanṭum bib”. Hence, it is acceptable if the verse laytha kamithlib shay’ (QS. 42:11) is recited as laytha mitthlib shay’ because the letter “ka” is regarded as zaʾidab (additional letter).60


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[Mankind was one single nation, and Allah sent messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed; QS. 2:213].

Al-Māturīdī explains that the word liyākhum in this verse can also be recited as litahkum, hence Muḥammad will be the person who judges between people in their matters. But if we recite it with liyākhum, it is more appropriate with the verse:

[And before this, was the Book of Moses as a guide and a mercy; and this Book confirms (it) in the Arabic tongue; to admonish the unjust, and as glad tidings to those who do right; QS. 46:12].

Fourth, al-Māturīdī can be categorized as a cautious exegete who seldom uses isrā’iliyyāt (the Judeo-Christian traditions and tales) to interpret the Qura’nic verses. When he deals with the verses that contain the ancient and old stories, such as the stories of messengers, he occasionally mentions those stories based on several sources, but at the end of his quotations he often declares his hesitation about the truth of them. Hence, he does not believe in their accuracy because of their uncertainties.

Moreover, al-Māturīdī always says that the desire to know those stories in more detail is an exaggerated viewpoint and unusable attitude that should not be adopted by the interpreter. In his opinion, the appearance of such sketchy stories in the Qur’ān actually can become evidence to show clearly that the words of God given to Muḥammad are truthfully the revelation of Allah. Indeed, Muḥammad definitely could not know anything about all of these stories mentioned in the Old Testament and the Gospel, if he did not receive true guidance and revelation from Allah.

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Ibid., p. 441. Al-Ṭabarī doesn’t mention this recitation, but he mentions another recitation, i.e. “ji mā ikhtalafu fīh” is recited by Ibn Mas‘ūd with “ji mā ikhtalafu ‘anh”. See al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi’ al-Bayān, vol. 2, 349.
The following verses elucidate and support al-Māturīdī’s point of view. Al-Māturīdī confirms his attitude towards isra‘iliyya by interpreting the verse:

وَقُلُواْ يَتَّقَاذُمُ أَنْتُمْ أَنْ تَرْجُوُنَّ شَجَرَةً يَكُونُ فِي هَاذَا الْقَيْرَةِ فَكِتَابُكُمْ مِنْ أَنْطَامٍ

[We said: “O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the garden; and eat of the bountiful things therein as (where and when) ye will; but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression.” QS. 2:35].

According to al-Māturīdī, the real meaning and essence of jannah (garden) and shajarah (tree) are unknown and we do not have to know them precisely. A similar attitude is also seen when al-Māturīdī explains the verse:

فَقُلْنَا أَضْرِبُوهُ بِصُعْبَةٍ ۖ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبْحَيِ اللهُ الْمَوْتَى وَيُرِيَكُمُ الْعَلَىَّ مِثْلَهُ

[So We said: “Strike the (body) with a piece of the (beifer).” Thus Allah bringeth the dead to life and showeth you His signs; perchance ye may understand; QS. 2:73].

After talking about several commentaries that interpret the meaning of “ba‘diha” (a piece of it) to be the right thigh, al-Māturīdī utters what is obviously the truth, that those interpretations cannot be validated exactly. The factual information that should be taken is only from the Qura’nic verse above, although it seems to be very pithy and asserted in brief.

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62 According to the number of isra‘iliyya tales that mentioned in the exegesis, there are two groups of exeges, namely, [1] the exeges who mention isra‘iliyya a lot, such as Muḥammad ibn Jaʿrīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), and [2] the exeges who almost never mention Isra‘iliyya, such as al-Ḥāfiz Iṣmāʿīl ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372). See Abd al-Wahhāb Fāyd, Manhaj Ibn ʿAṭiyah fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-ʿĀmmah li-Shuʿūn al-Maṭābi’ al-Amīriyyah, 1973), p. 181.

63 Ibid., p. 104.

64 Ibid., p. 170.
Fifth, in relation to the study in his Ta'wilat Abl al-Sunnah and Kitāb Tawḥīd, it can be concluded that al-Māturīdī is not just a theologian, but also an exegete who prefers tawassut (nonaligned and independent standpoint) in dealing with many different viewpoints among theologians. Hence, this neutral attitude categorizes the Māturīdītes as a moderate Abl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah school of thought. Although this position looks like the Ash’arites, another group of Abl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah, in fact there are several minor differences between the Māturīdītes and the Ash’arites that do not belong to the main theological problems.65

For instance, the Mu’tazilites believe that Allah does not have any attributes such as ‘ilm (knowledge), qudrah (power), sam’ (listen), baṣar (seeing), ḥayāb (life), baqa’ (eternity) and irādah (wish). On the contrary, the Ḥashwites believe that Allah really has those attributes as well as His creatures. On the other hand, the Ash’arites believe that Allah has those attributes, but His attributes differ from those of His creatures.66 Like the Ash’arites, al-Māturīdī conveys his point of view that Allah surely has the attributes which are not similar to the attributes of His creatures because Allah has declared that nothing is like Him (Laytha ka mithlih shay’).67

The Ḥashwites say that Allah will be seen on the resurrection day just as we see His mankind. The Mu’tazilites and the Jahmites have faith in the impossibility of seeing Allah on the judgment day. Then al-Māturīdī and the Ash’arites state that we will see Allah on the judgment day, but we do not know exactly the real nature of how we will see Allah. Al-Māturīdī argues that Allah must have forbidden Moses and his adherents when they proposed to see Allah, or Muḥammad must have prohibited his companions when they asked about ru’yah (seeing) Allah.68

Both are examples of his moderate standpoint toward the distinctions of theological views. Probably, whoever wants to know more details about his views should read his Kitāb al-Tawḥīd which specifically

65 See the preface of Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, pp. 11-3.
68 Ibid., pp. 145-6; Ibn ʿAsākīr, Tabyīn, p. 150; and Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, pp. 77-9.
explains a lot about many theological problems. In addition to his work, we also can read two comprehensive dissertations, ‘Aqīdat al-Islām wa al-Imām al-Māturīdī (the Belief of Islam and al-Imām al-Māturīdī) by Ayyūb ‘Alī and Imām Abl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah: Abū Maṣūr al-Māturīdī wa Āra’ūb al-Kalāmiyyah (the Leader of Abl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah: al-Imām al-Māturīdī and his theological views) by al-Maghribī.

Sixth, al-Māturīdī tends to follow the Hanafite school of thought in dealing with the jurisprudential Qura’nic verses. This tendency is apparent when his legal views are compared with the views of Hanafite followers, such as Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981). This comparison shows that there are many similarities between their jurisprudential thoughts, despite the fact that Abkām al-Qur’ān has a broader scope than Tāwīlat Abl al-Sunnah in discussing the jurisprudential problems. Perhaps al-Māturīdī’s inclination relates to his academic training in the tradition of Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767), as depicted previously.

By basing arguments on fairly similar sources, al-Māturīdī and the Hanafite scholars assert the following claims. The words “bismillah al-raḥmān al-raḥīm” are regarded as a Qura’nic verse, but they are not part of al-Fāṭiḥah,69 and so, performing prayer without the recitation of al-Fāṭiḥah does not break the prayer and the prayer is still legitimate.70 The sorcerer who refuses to apologize for his sins is classified an infidel and can be killed because he is considered an apostate from Islam.71 Performing sa’ī (running between the hills of al-Ṣa’āfah and al-Marwah) and ṭawaf (circumambulation of the Ka’bah seven times) is an obligation for pilgrims, although they are not essential principles of pilgrimage. Therefore, it must be changed with dam (fine) if it is not done.72 Performing ‘umrah (pilgrimage to Mecca that is not during the pilgrimage season by omitting some of the ritual, e.g. the visit to the fields of Arafah) is favorable (ṣunnah).73 Performing ihram (consecration for use in the pilgrimage) before the months of pilgrimage come is allowable,

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but it is unfavorable \textit{(makrūh)}.  

**Seventh**, al-Māturīdī has an independent and brave standpoint when he interprets the Qur'ānic verses. This standpoint is that he applies \textit{asbāb al-nuzūl} (the causes of revelation) loosely and slackly. Hence, he utilizes the situations and phenomena surrounding revelation, including the context and factual circumstances in which each verse was revealed, proportionately and does not ignore them. He takes into account the principle “\textit{al-‘īrab bi ‘umūm al-lafẓ lā bi khusūs al-sabab}” (the focused concern is the general statement and not the specific cause). The following verses are examples.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Wa’adhā tllaqīm al-isā‘, qabla‘n ajla‘n, fllā tu‘azzulohnā ‘an yinkhhā}
\textit{ar‘ū jihān, 'īdā tarrās‘u·n bīthum} bāl‘al‘wuf}
\end{quote}

\textit{[When ye divorce women, and they fulfil the term of their (‘iddah), do not prevent them from marrying their (former) husbands, if they mutually agree on equitable terms; QS. 2: 232].}

Talking about the sentence “\textit{fa la ta’dulūbunn an yankihā azwājabunn}” (do not prevent them from marrying their former husbands), al-Māturīdī says that this verse explicitly explains to us to not disallow divorced women from marrying both their former husbands and new husbands, regardless of the fact that its revelation was specifically related to the sister of Ma‘qil ibn al-Muzanī who had been divorced by her husband. After her \textit{iddah} (legally prescribed period of waiting during which a woman may not remarry after being widowed or divorced) had ended, her former husband wanted to marry her again, but her family prohibited this. Hence, this verse was finally revealed.\textsuperscript{75}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 514. This occurrence is mentioned in the prophet traditions such as by al-Bukhārī:
\end{flushright}
This verse is similar to the verses:
(exemplification or likening) and the proper doors. Besides, this verse can be interpreted as devotion, submission, obedience to Allah and by entering houses through doing their activities fruitlessly. Therefore, righteousness is by performing the back doors because they do not want to be unsuccessful again after accomplishing

But some say that Arabs customarily prefer to enter their houses through the back.

Al-Māturīdī states that Arabs usually went home after accomplishing ihram (consecration for use in the pilgrimage) and did not enter their houses through the appropriate doors, but from the back. But some say that Arabs customarily prefer to enter their houses through the back doors because they do not want to be unsuccessful again after doing their activities fruitlessly. Therefore, righteousness is by performing devotion, submission, obedience to Allah and by entering houses through the proper doors. Besides, this verse can be interpreted as tamthīl (exemplification or likening) and ramz (allegory), not by its literal meaning. This verse is similar to the verses:

[It is no virtue if ye enter your houses from the back; it is virtue if ye fear Allah. Enter houses through the proper doors; and fear Allah, that ye may prosper; QS. 2:189].

[And when there came to them a messenger from Allah, confirming what was with them, a party of the people of the Book threw away the Book of Allah behind their backs. As if (it had been something) they did not know; QS. 2:101].

[And remember Allah took a covenant from the people of the Book, to make it

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known and clear to mankind, and not to hide it; but they threw it away behind their backs, and purchased with it some miserable gain! and vile was the bargain they made! QS. 3:187].

The meaning of nabadha (to throw) in these verses can be understood without using its literal meaning because its actual meaning is that the people of the Book disregarded and paid no attention to the Book of Allah. Hence, real piety is not obtained by disobeying the teachings of Muḥammad, but by following his teachings.⁷⁶

D. Concluding Remarks

In accordance with the elucidation above, we can conclude that there are seven obvious characteristics or features of Ta’wūlāt Abī al-Sunnah, which was written by al-Māturīḍī, who lived around the time of Muḥammad ibn Jaʿīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), a famous Muslim historian and exegete.

These characteristics are the following. [1] Al-Māturīḍī brings together naqīlī (traditional) and ’aqlī (rational) sources. The naqīlī sources consist of the Qur’ān and the tradition conveyed by the prophet or his companions, whereas the ’aqlī source stems from his thoughts. Thus, it is justifiable to say that al-Māturīḍī’s Qur’ānic exegesis can be called tafsīr bi al-izdīwāj or the exegesis that amalgamates tafsīr bi al-ma’thūr (traditional exegesis) with tafsīr bi al-ra’y (rational exegesis). [2] Al-Māturīḍī is not an interpreter who uses excessive grammatical analysis to interpret the Qur’ānic verses. His linguistic scrutiny is not disproportionate because it corresponds to the necessity required to utilize grammatical analysis without excessiveness. [3] Al-Māturīḍī sometimes presents many styles of qirā’ah (recitation of the Qur’ān) at a glance and without thorough explanation. He also does not assess the category of each qirā’ah. Besides, he rarely mentions the people who are considered as the sources of qirā’ah. [4] Al-Māturīḍī can be categorized as a cautious exegete who seldom uses isrāʾīliyyāt (the Judeo-Christian traditions and tales) to interpret the Qur’ānic verses. [5] Al-Māturīḍī is not just a theologian, but also an exegete who prefers tawassut (nonaligned and independent standpoint) in dealing with the many different viewpoints among

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 388-9.
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theologians. [6] Al-Māturiḍī tends to follow the Ḥanafite school of thought when he deals with the jurisprudential Qur’anic verses. This tendency appears most clearly when his legal views are compared with the views of Hanafite followers, such as Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ. [7] Al-Māturiḍī has an independent and brave standpoint when he interprets the Qur’anic verses. That standpoint is that he applies asbāb al-nuzūl (the causes of revelation) loosely and slackly. Hence, he utilizes the context and factual circumstances in which each verse was revealed.

At last, those seven characteristics undoubtedly can demonstrate the competency and proficiency of al-Māturiḍī in Qur’anic exegesis. Therefore, after discussing this reasonable fact, it is right to conclude that al-Māturiḍī is not only a foremost theologian, but also a skillful and dexterous exegete. In line with this assessment, it will be wise for us to suggest to all writers on Qur’anic interpretation to acknowledge al-Māturiḍī’s expertise and to cite his considerable methodology in their works, especially when they explain the early Sunnite exegetes. Besides, it will be more useful, perhaps, if we can broaden our study on the reliability of traditions that are mentioned in Ta’wīlāt Aḥl al-Sunnah.
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