

THE ROLE OF MATURIDI IN THE ISLAMIC CULTURE OF CENTRAL ASIA

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The region of Central Asia, which played an important role in history with its knowledgeable and intelligent people during the Medieval Period, has shown a great development in the field of Islamic culture. Especially Maturidi, who was the leader of Islamic belief in Central Asia, has promoted respect to other religions and beliefs of neighboring countries. The religious school developed by Maturidi, which has put forward Islamic tolerance, rational mind and culture, was the reason for millions of people to choose Islam. The Maturidi's idea that once a person has a faith, there is no difference between him and other Muslims has prevented religious splits and extremism in the society.

With acceptance of the Maturidi' school as the dominant sect in Central Asia, although the Islamic religion was dominant in all states established in the region, these states had never become 'Islamic states'. Therefore, Maturidi can be seen as the one, who has brought the 'secular' system. As a result, the society of Central Asia has never perceived the neighboring wide-spread Zoroastrians and Buddhists as ideological enemies, the states in Central Asia had never fought in the name of religion; on the contrary, the neighboring tribes and people understood that Islam was not an imposing religion and thus felt sympathetic towards Islam.

Key Words: Central Asia, Islam, Culture, Maturidi, Sect, Rational mind, Knowledge (Science)

THE ROLE OF MATURIDI IN CENTRAL ASIA ISLAM CIVILIZATION

Central Asia is a region with a rooted history. According to what is presented in ancient Greek resources, Skifs (Sak) lived in those regions in 1000s BC.¹ First civilization centers arose in centuries of VIII-VII BC in Central Asia. Zoroastrianism which was perceived as one of the biggest religions took shape in that period. Cities and city civilizations started to rise in Central Asia as of these centuries approximately. Central Asia was invaded by Iran in centuries of V-IV BC, and then Aleksander Makedonski (Alexander Dhul-Quarnayn) invaded Central Asia in Century IV. Following this invasion, Greek civilization, its culture and literature showed its effect on domestic civilization. But lifestyle, culture and literature of indigenous people may have

¹ М.М. Хайруллаев, *Маънавият Юлдузлари*, Тошкент, 2000, Introduction

affected Greek writers, because such famous writers as Kliment Aleksanderskiy, Ksenofontov, Strabo, Ptolemy, Herodot mentioned about the culture of Central Asia and legendary heroes such as Tomaris, Sparetri, Zarina, Shirak etc. in their works.

Transoxiana was composed of such regions as Sogd, Khorezm, Fergana, Ushrusana, Chogoniyan in Century I BC;² it was the exact centre of “The Big Silk Road” connecting Western and Eastern states and developed well in civil and cultural terms. The Zoroastrianism religion which started to dominate in Central Asia in that period affected the society’s life, civilization and morals, and continued to affect until Islamic religion came in Century VIII.

1. Asian Hun Empire(from Century IV BC to 48 AD)
2. Gokturk Empire (from 951 BC to 744 AD)
3. Uighur Empire (744-1209)
4. Great Seljuk Empire (1040-1157)
5. Kharzem Shah State (995-1231)
6. Timur Empire (1370-1506)
7. Karakhanid Empire(840-1212)
8. Ghaznavid State (963-1186)
9. Chagatai Khanate (1227-1370)
10. Shaybanids (1500-1598)
11. Samanids (819-1005)

dominated the region heavily.

Islam firstly entered into Transoxiana in 667 at Hakim b. Ömr el-Gıfari’s command. But he could only stay there for three years. Although he launched some expeditions after that, his dominance in Transoxiana wasn’t permanent due to the temporary and regional successes of Arabian armies.³

Central Asia was invaded by Muslim-Arabs coming from northwest in Century VIII,⁴ and Islamic religion was established in a few years instead of indigenous religions. The whole region apart from Uşrusana, was invaded under Kuteybe b. Muslim’s command (p.705) and joined to Arabic-Islamic caliphate.⁵ As a result, a huge Arabic-Islamic Empire emerged comprising the people with different languages and cultures in that

² Ahmed Emin, *Zuhrül-İslam*, Mektebetün-Nahdatul-Mısriyye, Volume-1., Cairo, 1966, p259

³ *Rehber Encyclopedia*, Türkiye Newspaper Publications, Volume-11, İstanbul, 1984, p. 287

⁴ *Türkler (Encyclopedia)*, volume -I, Yeni Türkiye Publications, Ankara, 2002, p. 388

⁵ *The ENCYCLOPAEDIA of Islam*, (new edition), vol.5, Leiden, 1979, p. 208; Meydan Larousse, *Büyük Lügat ve Ansiklopedi*, Meydan Publishing, volume-8, İstanbul, 1978, p. 467

wide geography lying from Atlantic Ocean to Tian-Shan, from Caucasia to the Indian Ocean at the end of Century VIII. It wasn't easy for Arabs to conquer Central Asia, for sure.⁶ Together with invasion movements, they also made a relentless struggle against indigenous old civilization, religions, native alphabet and scientists. With the establishment of Islamic religion in the region, old scripts used by indigenous people such as Khwarezmian, Sogd and Turkish scripts disappeared, and language protectives and nationalists were punished.⁷

The then mayor of Khorasan Nasr bin Seyyar succeeded in familiarizing the society with Islam and dominance of Muslims due to the successful politics he applied. Although some masters objected to Nasr as the fast Islamization of the region bothered their interests, rebellions couldn't be successful as Nasr endeared himself to the society with the politics he applied.⁸

Towards the end of Century VIII, the whole Central Asia came to heel against Arabic Caliphate and Islamic religion became the dominant religion. Arabs named this valley between Amu Darya (Ceyhun) and Syr Darya (Seyhan) as "Transoxiana".⁹

Transoxiana (the Arabic-rooted word, Mâverâünnehir) which is an Arabic definition means across the river, the other side and it means "the country across the river" with a broader definition.¹⁰ It is also a special geographical phrase given to lands which can be invaded by Muslim-Arab conquerors across the Ceyhun river (Amu Darya-Oxus, Oghuz or Öxus)¹¹ especially in Central Asia, in the lands of Turkistan. This region is called "Transaxiona" in Greek-Latin language which bears the same meaning with Transoxiana (the land across Oxus or Oghuz)¹². This phrase is called "Transoxiana" in all western languages.¹³ Transoxiana phrase (Mâverâünnehir, the Arabic rooted form) became popular in Middle Ages, used by Arab and Iranian writers and it is also a name adopted by Turks-living on these lands- as of the beginning of Century XX.

⁶ Шовосил Зиёдов, *ал-Мотуридий Хаёти ва Мероси*, Абдулла Кодирий Номидаги халк мероси нашриёти, Тошкент, 2000, p. 8

⁷ Хайруллаев, *Маънавият Юлдузлари*, Introduction

⁸ *Rehber Encyclopedia*, p.287

⁹ Although Transoxiana saying reminds of Central Asia, it involves Uzbekistan, east part of Karakalpakstan, Tajikistan, south part of Kyrgyzstan, Kyzl Kum desert and some parts of Kazakhstan when the borders in historical artifacts are taken into account. This region is an area of 660 000 km², and 40 million people live there with a majority of Turks.

¹⁰ Yusuf Ziya Kavakçı, *XI.-XII. Asırlarda Karahanlılar Devrinde Mâverâünnehir İslam Hukukçuları*, Atatürk University Publications, Sevinç Press, Ankara, 1976, p.4

¹¹ Philip K. Hitti, *History of The Arabs*, 10 edition, Macmillan education, London, 1970, p. 209

¹² Abdulmun'im Macid, *et-Tarih-us-Siyasi li'd-devleti'l-Arabiyye*, Mektebetü'l-Encla'l-Misriyye, volume-2., Cairo, 1982, p.208

¹³ Büyük Lugat ve Ansiklopedi, *Meydan Larousse*, Meydan Publications, İstanbul, 1978, volume-8, p.467

Transoxiana was generally inhabited by Iranian and Turkish people since the dawn of the history.¹⁴ And Transoxiana was known as a “Turkish city” through the history.¹⁵ It is also a fact that Transoxiana became an international trade route connecting China and Internal Asia to the Central Asia and India. Therefore, Central Asia became one of the most active and most lively regions of the old world continents of both Turkish and Islamic worlds in economic, social, political and religious aspects from the Middle Ages to a very recent period.¹⁶

An inclination of belief emerged in Transoxiana in which there was no political pressure on religion and which was far from the religious ideological atmosphere in the 10th century (Hijri 4). Famous scholar Mâturidi who initiated this inclination adopted and developed the ideas of some previous scholars.

It is known that racional meditation about religious faiths in the history of Islam started with Middle East-centered Mu'tazila madhhap. Following the first intellectual movement at the end of Hijri Century I and at the beginning of Century II, Mu'tazila madhhap was born as a school of meditation.

İmam Mâturidi (d. 333/944) developed the school of belief in the region of Central Asia and systematized the Islamic belief by taking into account the socio-psychological condition of the region. İmam Mâturidi explained and developed his principles and ideas he put forward regarding the Islamic doctrines. Moreover, Mâturidi accepted that mind is a necessary basis for the religion to be understood in addition to verses and traditions concerning the field of Islamic doctrine. In Maturidi, mind is at service of Quran, it is a factor which confirms, explains and completes it.

Some researchers see Maturidi as the continuation of Hanafi madhhap. In fact, although Mâturidi madhhap benefited from Ebu Hanefi, it is a different school of belief due to the method it uses. Scholars belonging to this kalam school since İmam Mâturidi developed kalam method, and wrote many works in order to criticize such parties as Mu'tazila, Shia which exist out of Sunni Islam and also Ismailism, Druze, Zaidiyyah etc. arising from it.¹⁷ However, due to the fact that Mâturidi emerged in a closed basin like Transoxiana, and it spread in a region far from the science centers of that period such as Basra and Baghdad, it couldn't maintain a geographical distribution as much as other madhhaps of belief. The reasons why Mâturidi spread mostly in Transoxiana and generally among Turks can be stated as below:

¹⁴ *Türk Encyclopedia* M.E.B., Ankara, 1976, volume-XXIII, p.333

¹⁵ Махмуд Кашгарий, *Дивану Лугатум-Турк*, перевод К. Бекетаев-Е. Ибаатов, Алма-Ата, 1993, p. 9

¹⁶ Zekeriyâ Kitarçı, *Sosyal, Siyasi ve Dini Yönleri ile İslami Fetihler Sırasında Aşağı Türkistan*, Diyanet Journal, Volume XVII, no-5, September-October 1978, p.276

¹⁷ See Also.: Gülçehra Sadıkova, *Mâturidilik ve Türkler*, Osh State University Faculty of Theology, Osh, 1998., p.31(unpublished undergraduate thesis)

- 1) Mâturidi madhhap supports that Turks have the same rights with Muslims and Arabs;
- 2) Mâturidi suggests that all Muslims are equal in terms of belief;
- 3) They don't include actions in faith;
- 4) They stipulate that the religion should be internalized from the heart and willingly;
- 5) They support the idea that the people living in countries with monotheism to which a hymn message didn't come can reach to salvation and ascend to heaven;
- 6) They oppose the usage of God notion as a tool for political aims;
- 7) They attach great importance to mind and interpretation about the understanding of the religion;
- 8) The fact that Mâturidi was Turkish and took into account the political and social structure of the region.¹⁸

Mâturidi's school of belief is more concrete, more technical and more philosophic in terms of both the used method and discussed subjects compared to other schools of beliefs. Mâturidi has different opinions of his own in some matters compared to other schools of belief. These opinions-in short-are as below:

1. Even if religious notification doesn't exist, human can find The God with mind;
2. Good and bad; beautiful and ugly can be found with mind, The God commands something as it is beautiful, prohibits as it is ugly;
3. Human beings have a will in themselves. Human beings make choice with their will, and The God creates that act according to the human's choice;
4. The God does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear;
5. The God's actions absolutely have a reason and wisdom. But human may not know this reason and wisdom all the time.¹⁹

One of the characteristics of Mâturidi school of kalam is that it connects theoretical and theological aim with practical and moral aim. This condition which we see as a characteristic of Mâturidi system roots from the Islam itself.

¹⁸ See Also: Sönmez Kutlu, *Türk Kavminin Tarih Boyunca Benimsediği İslam Mezhepleri ve Kırgızistandaki Dini Durum (Makalesi)*, OŞ, 1998, p. 1

¹⁹ Ahmet Saim Kılavuz, *Anahatlarıyla İslam Akaidi ve Kelama Giriş*, Ensar Neşriyat, İstanbul, 1997, p. 303

Mâturidi kalam system became an effective kalam system both in the age when its founder lived and in next generations.²⁰ Islamic belief which constitutes the basis for Islamic order of life and its considerations were assaulted by opponents in every era. Parties of belief which cause divergence among Muslims are psychological and cultural appearances of opponents. Mâturidi school of kalam is a kalam school which can always answer these assaults and succeeds in associating mind with Quran.²¹

Islam entering into Transoxiana, and culture and civilization created by it and also doctrine of belief developed by Mâturidi found a suitable place in those fertile soils.²² Due to the efficient studies of Mâturidi himself and representatives of Mâturidi madhhap coming after Mâturidi, such commercial cities as Samarkand and Bukhara became glamorous centers of Islamic world and Islamic science. In fact, these cities came to a position to be able to compete with the famous and classical science-culture surroundings of Islam such as Baghdad, Basra and Kufa being in Mesopotamia which is another civilization center. In some periods, Transoxiana region is seen to leave Mesopotamia behind which is another cradle of Islamic civilization in terms of the development and uprising of Islamic culture and civilization. The best example of this development is that although the main and basic centers of classical Islamic sciences such as TAFSIR, HADITH, FIQH being the only reference point of Muslims after the Quran, and hadithes which wholly presents the life of prophets best are told and related with Mecca, Medina and Damascus; many significant hadithes, tafsirs and fiqhs in this field were written by Islamic scholars such as Buhari, Tirmizi, Muslim and Nesefi who grew up in Transoxiana and gained an internationally proper fame.

It is possible to see that Islamic culture and civilization developed and rose with a stunning manner in Transoxiana in those periods due to the scientists of Mâturidi and school of Mâturidi.

Islamic culture made a great progress together with the commercial and economic development which was carried out with Iran and Khorasan in the region of Transoxiana. Actually, the first rise of Transoxiana which became a glamorous civilization area of Islam world with topographical enlargements of big cities in the region, religion, madhhap, struggles among populaces, guilds, religious orders, local concepts of culture coincides with the period in which Mâturidi lived.²³ Looked at in general, Transoxiana became a glamorous

²⁰ Today, more than half of the Sunni muslims in the world (approximately 53%) are Hanafi in Islamic law; most of Hanafis have adopted Mâturidi belief madhhap. Mâturidi maddhap spread in Turkey, The Balkans, Central Asia, China, India, Pakistan and Eritrea. Turkish citizens are generally Mâturidi in belief and Hanafi in Islamic law.

²¹ Ebu Hafs Ömer Nesefi, *İslam İnancının Temelleri Akaid*, prepared by. Seyyid Ahsen, 4th edition, Otağ Publication and Press, İstanbul, 1975, p. 22; Kemal Işık, *Mâturidi'nin Kelam Sisteminde İman, Allah ve Peygamberlik Anlayışı*, Fütüvvet Publications, Ankara, 1980, p. 135

²² The same article, p. 277

²³ Хайруллаев, *Маънавият Юлдузлари*, p.11

civilization area of Islam world in the period of Samanids (819-1005), and Mâturidi also lived in that same period.

The high population of Transoxiana in that period, their generosity, hospitality, perfectness of roads and gates, high numbers of charities like foundation, society's courage, their inclination and ability for science, prosperity of the region, soil productivity, abundance of crops, fruit etc. products and domestic animals are depicted at great length by Muslim geographers.²⁴ For example, El-Makdisi states the outstanding significance of people who grew up in Transoxiana region as: "This region is the most esteemed and valuable among other regions. Many noble personalities and scholars grew up in these regions. These regions are the source of goodness, the cradle of science and the strongest basis and high castle of Islam. Rulers and armies of these regions are the best among other rulers and armies. Scholars who grew up in these places are respected and appreciated as much as rulers".²⁵

Transoxiana region became the hometown of many scholars and world conquerors such as İbn Sina (d.1037), Muhammed Tarhan Özluk Farabi (d. 339/950), Harezmi (d.850), Fergani (d.865) Uluğbek (d.1449), Biruni (d.1048), Ali Kuşçu (d.1471), Nevai (d.1501), Timur (d.1405), Buhari (d.870), Serahsi (d.899), Tirmizi (d.892), Merginani (d.1197), Oşi (d.1041), Neseîî (d.1114), Semerkandi (d Century X), Mâturidi (d.333/944), Zamahşari (d.1149) etc. who showed their effects not only on Islam world but also on Europe and world civilization. These personalities and our other ancestors made significant contribution to world civilization in the fields of philosophy, law, mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, metaphysics etc., and some of these scholars became leaders of "Beyt ül-Hikme" Baghdad which is the first academy of the known recent history. These significant scholars disseminated science and knowledge, and model morals of Islam from this region to the whole world. They also grew many Islam scholars with these characteristics. These scholars and many others and philosophers who grew up in Transoxiana became leaders for the movements of science, idea and rationalist thought of the whole Islamic world and world science civilization for long ages.

Even though languages, religions and civilizations in Transoxiana struggled with each other throughout the history, this region didn't lose its freedom after all and reflected the dominant characteristic of Turks.²⁶

One of the most important things to pay attention is the issue of separating Faith from Actions which was developed and heavily dealt by Mâturidi school of belief. According to this, even if a person embraced and believed in Islamic religion but didn't carry out the religious actions, s/he was regarded as Muslim. Many

²⁴ *İslam Encyclopedia*, M.E.B., İstanbul, 1988, volume-7, p.498-499

²⁵ Şemseddin Makdisi (d. 744/1343), *Ahsenü't-Tekâsim*, nşr. İntitüt Für Geschichte der ar, Frankfurt, 1992, p. 393

²⁶ Zekeriya Kıtıpçı, *Sosyal, Siyasi ve Dini Yönleri ile İslami Fetihler Sırasında Aşağı Türkistan*, p.278

tribes in the region got accustomed to Islamic religion due to this view, and believing became easier for them as they reached to a conclusion that it wasn't obligatory to carry out the actions right after believing. Thanks to this view again, none of the states established in Central Asia from Mâturidi until today were called "Islamic State" or "Sharia State". Although Islamic religion was dominant in the states established in the region, sharia wasn't in the forefront in constitution or acts of state. In short, Mâturidi belief madhhap seems to have taken into account the old beliefs, religions, customs which were dominant in the region, and developed "secular" system of those times. Thus, the states established in Central Asia didn't become the direct ideological target of religious members belonging to Zoroastrianism, Buddhism etc., states didn't fight for religion; in contrast, tribes and people in neighborhood started to adopt Islam by thinking that Islamic religion wasn't imposing.

Education and science didn't die despite all kinds of wars, domestic conflicts and invasions which occurred in Central Asia throughout the history. Governments always supported scientists. However, it is also a fact that Transoxiana- actually Central Asia- couldn't reach the unity, couldn't become the one state and it only stayed just a geographical phrase despite all these development.

Central Asia was shared and managed by three big khanates like Khanate of Bukhara, Khanate of Khiva and Khanate of Kokand in Centuries of XVII-XVIII. Civil wars and conflicts between khanates became a golden opportunity for Tsardom of Russia who wanted to conquer Transoxiana. Russians began to enter into the region gradually since Century XVIII.²⁷

As is known, socialism ideology of Russians spread quickly as of the beginning of Century XX following the disintegration of khanates in the region of Transoxiana. On the other hand, although national intellectuals tried to enlighten the society with the movements of "ceditçilik (Arabic rooted word)-renaissance", they were slandered as traitor of society and they were charged with heavy punishments.

Towards the first quarter of Century XX, Central Asia region was allocated to Socialist Republics and came under the Russian administration completely. In accordance with the regime, all religious and intellectual scholars were fired, killed or declared as traitor of society. Such cities as Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, Fergana, Khiva, Najaf etc. which were made a diamond of the east with the civilization and architecture by people of Central Asia after embracing Islam were ruined and millions of works- Quran and hadithes in the first place- in these cities were collected and burnt. Not only that the regime also ordered the delivery of religious, national and historical books in the hands of society to the government. These collected precious works were also destroyed. Most of the religious scholars who didn't hand in the book were either exiled to

²⁷ Rusya'nın Orta Asya'ya Tecavüzü, Tashkent, 1998, p.12

Siberia, or slaughtered. It didn't finish with the destruction of Islamic work, three hundred sixty mosques and small ones in Bukhara were destroyed.²⁸ In short, a community of society who were unaware of their history, religion and language were tried to be revealed by force. Following a 70-year communist regime, Central Asia republics gained their independence at the beginning of 1990s.

²⁸ *Энциклопедия Средней Азии*, изд. Восток, Ташкент, 1996, р.276