

MATURIDISM AND ASH'ARISM AS FOUNDATIONAL TRADITIONS OF
AHL AL-SUNNA WA'L-JAMA'AH

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Abstract: *This article examines Maturidism and Ash'arism as classical Sunni theological traditions, demonstrating that these schools are not later sectarian innovations but systematic articulations of the original creed of Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'ah. Through historical, textual, and methodological analysis, the study refutes contemporary claims that these schools represent later additions to Islam. It further clarifies common misconceptions surrounding the concept of bid'ah by distinguishing between doctrinal innovation and necessary methodological tools developed to preserve Islamic teachings. The findings show that Maturidi and Ash'ari methodologies provided essential intellectual frameworks that safeguarded orthodoxy against philosophical distortions and ensured the continuity of authentic belief.*

Keywords: *Maturidism; Ash'arism; Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'ah; Sunni theology; kalām; creed; intellectual history; sanad; bid'ah; orthodoxy.*

Main Article. According to the consensus of authoritative scholars of the Islamic world, the creed of Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'ah has been transmitted through the schools of Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 333/944) and Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 324/936) [1].

However, certain contemporary groups contend that if these imams lived in later centuries, then earlier Muslims must have had no creed or that these schools introduced new doctrines – a claim that lacks academic foundation.

This study demonstrates, through historical and rational analysis, that these theological traditions are not new sects but systematic articulations of the pure creed inherited from the prophetic era.

1. The Nature of Attribution: Not “Creation,” but “Systematization”

The terms Maturidism and Ash'arism do not imply doctrinal innovation. Rather, they represent methodological schools that explain and defend Islamic creed [2].

These imams compiled dispersed theological principles found within the Qur'an and Sunnah, structuring them into coherent chapters and supporting them with logical and textual evidence [3].

Like jurists such as Imam Abu Hanifa and Imam al-Shafi'i, they did not invent new laws but clarified inherited teachings.

2. Scholarly Chains and Intellectual Lineage

Maturidism and Ash'arism are grounded in authentic scholarly chains (isnads) that trace back to the Companions and ultimately the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) [5].

The Maturidi Chain:

Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi learned through teachers Abu Nasr al-Iyazi and Abu Bakr al-Juzjani, who were connected to the students of Imam Abu Hanifa: Imam

Muhammad al-Shaybani and Qadi Abu Yusuf [6]. Abu Hanifa in turn studied under the Tabi'in, who were students of Companions such as Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and Ali ibn Abi Talib [7].

The Ash'ari Chain:

Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari based his methodology on the scholarly heritage of Imam al-Shafi'i, Imam Malik, and the hadith scholars of Hijaz [8].

3. Clarifying the Misconception of Innovation (Bid'ah)

Critics often confuse methodological development with doctrinal innovation. The evolution of scholarly tools to preserve and articulate Islamic teachings does not constitute religious innovation [9].

A) Hadith Terminology:

Terms such as sahih, hasan, and da'if were not used during the Prophet's lifetime [10].

Scholars like Imam Malik, Imam al-Bukhari, and Imam Muslim developed them to preserve authenticity.

If methodological development were bid'ah, one would have to accuse these great scholars of innovation – an untenable conclusion [11].

B) Qur'anic Preservation:

Early Qur'anic manuscripts lacked diacritical marks. These were later added to prevent mispronunciation among non-Arab Muslims and to preserve the Qur'an accurately [12].

CONCLUSION

Imam al-Maturidi and Imam al-Ash'ari served as protectors of Sunni orthodoxy, strengthening transmitted texts with rational arguments, defending the creed from philosophical distortions, and ensuring unity within the Muslim community [13]. Their traditions remain foundational pillars of Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'ah and central components of Sunni intellectual heritage.

Expanded Academic Additions When examined within the broader landscape of Islamic intellectual history, Maturidism and Ash'arism emerge not only as preservers of classical creed but as architects of a refined rational-theological tradition.

Their works achieved a critical harmony between revelation (naql) and reason ('aql), a balance essential in addressing philosophical challenges of their time [14].

Both schools engaged rigorously with questions of divine attributes, metaphysics, human free will, and epistemology – always defending orthodoxy rather than departing from it [15].

Their influence extended across legal theory, Qur'anic exegesis, and ethics. By the 10th century CE, the two schools had become dominant theological orientations across regions including Transoxiana, Persia, Andalusia, Anatolia, and the Indian subcontinent [16].

Despite geographical variations, both schools upheld core Sunni principles such as monotheism, prophethood, divine revelation, and communal consensus (ijma') [17].

Institutions including al-Azhar and al-Qarawiyyin continue to rely on their frameworks, which remain central in addressing modern challenges posed by literalism and hyper-rationalism [18].

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