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REASON AND REVELATION IN ABU MANSUR AL MATURIDI'S THEOLOGY AND THE METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CREEDAL KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract

This article examines how reason and transmitted knowledge cooperate in Abu Mansur al-Maturidi's theology. It combines close reading of an accessible Arabic extract from Kitab al-Tawhid with a selective review of Turkish and English scholarship. The analysis distinguishes the origin of information, the justification of its credibility, and the scope of the conclusion drawn from it. The results show that perception, reports, and reflection have distinguishable functions while frequently depending on one another in actual argument. Reason participates in assessing transmission, and transmission supplies information that an individual cannot obtain by direct observation. These findings support a proposed procedure for examining creedal claims through source identification, authentication, contextual interpretation, and evaluation of inference. International examples illustrate textual scholarship, bilingual publication, philosophical reconstruction, and university teaching rather than national educational systems. The article also develops an untested teaching proposal for advanced aqida study. Its contribution is a transparent analytical framework that separates historical evidence from contemporary application; it does not claim new manuscript discoveries or measured educational outcomes.

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Keywords: Al-Maturidi; aqida; reason; revelation; testimony; rational reflection; Kitab al-Tawhid; Transoxiana; theological method.

Introduction

A theological claim becomes academically assessable when its evidence can be located and its reasoning can be reconstructed. Statements about the relationship between reason and revelation often remain too general to meet this requirement. Saying that a theologian reconciles them leaves important questions unanswered. What kind of transmitted material is involved? Which role does reason perform? Does an argument establish the reliability of a report, explain its meaning, or justify a further proposition? These operations require separate attention.

This article addresses those questions through Abu Mansur al-Maturidi's account of knowledge. Its central argument is that the relationship between reason and revelation should be examined as a set of evidential operations. A source provides information; a justification explains why the information deserves acceptance; interpretation determines its relevant meaning. A conclusion is then evaluated against those preceding operations. This sequence is the present article's analytical proposal, rather than terminology attributed to al-Maturidi.

The distinction between revelation and transmission is particularly important. Revelation denotes divine communication within the theological account. Transmission concerns how information, including information about revelation, reaches later recipients. The Arabic terms *khbar*, *akhbar*, *sam'*, and *naql* therefore require attention to context. Translating all of them simply as revelation can conceal the ordinary human reports also discussed in the primary text [1, pp. 70–72].

The research asks how the three means of knowledge operate, how reports receive epistemic authority, and how reflection coordinates evidence. A further question concerns responsible contemporary application. The study seeks to make these issues useful for advanced aqida research while maintaining a clear boundary

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between historical reconstruction and a proposed method for present scholarship. It focuses on selected epistemological passages, not the entire doctrinal system or every later interpretation of Maturidi theology.

The Samarqand setting and the scope of attribution

Al-Maturidi belongs to the intellectual history of Samarqand and Transoxiana. Özen identifies Maturid, the place associated with his nisba, as an outlying district of Samarqand [3, p. 146]. This provides a precise geographical basis for describing him as a scholar of Mawarannahr. It does not establish the uniformity of every theological position held in that region. A regional designation should identify a setting, while a doctrinal attribution must still be supported by a particular author and text.

The historical significance of this distinction extends to the term Maturidi tradition. A founder's formulations, a later scholar's explanations, and a modern reconstruction may belong to a related intellectual history without being identical. Researchers should specify whose argument they are discussing. A view found in al-Nasafi, for example, cannot automatically be quoted as al-Maturidi's own words. The relationship requires textual comparison and an account of the intervening interpretation.

Rudolph's historical study examines al-Maturidi's life, writings, and theological setting before reconstructing his teachings. Its epistemological discussion links the criticism of unexamined authority to the search for grounds that distinguish competing claims [7, pp. 231–232]. For the present inquiry, this supports reading epistemology as part of theological argument rather than treating it as a detached preliminary definition. It also encourages caution about projecting modern philosophical classifications onto early texts.

A geographic identification and a doctrinal conclusion consequently carry different evidential burdens. The former may rest on a biographical source. The latter needs a passage that actually concerns the doctrine. The article follows this

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distinction throughout. It uses the Samarqand setting to delimit historical attribution, while the results on knowledge rely principally on the inspected Arabic extract. Neither geographical pride nor a broad school label is used as a substitute for textual demonstration.

Materials and methods

The study uses qualitative textual analysis and a purposive review of selected scholarship. The principal primary material is a scanned Arabic extract from Kitab al-Tawhid hosted in the University of Notre Dame's Madrasa Discourses materials [1]. Its title page names Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi as editors. The inspected extract contains printed pages 69–76, preceded by the title page. Those printed numbers, rather than the PDF image count, identify the passages cited here. The extract does not display complete publication metadata, so its reference does not supply an inferred edition year.

The primary reading covers the discussion of knowledge, sensory apprehension, reports, reflection, and objections to these means. Arabic wording was examined in the page images. The article provides explanatory English paraphrases rather than reproducing a modern copyrighted translation. It does not claim collation of manuscripts, inspection of the complete Arabic book, or a new critical edition.

Secondary material includes Esen's epistemological study, Demir's account of reason and human nature, TDV reference articles, selected pages of Rudolph's monograph, and Harvey's publicly available introduction [2–8, 12]. Publisher descriptions and institutional materials supply evidence about international publication and teaching practices [9–10, 13]. Saygi's published abstract is used for the limited comparative question it explicitly discusses [11]. Each source is used according to the material actually available, rather than treated as fully read merely because its bibliographic record was located.

The unit of analysis is an argument or evidential operation. Passages were grouped by the information they discuss and by the work assigned to reflection.

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The interpretation then considered whether the conclusion concerns historical transmission, conceptual consistency, or theological meaning. No questionnaires, statistical analysis, or classroom experiment formed part of the research. The results are interpretive findings and clearly identified proposals.

Evidence classification and analytical controls

The analysis separates three levels of statement. A textual finding describes what an inspected passage says. A scholarly interpretation reports a named researcher's explanation. A contemporary proposal specifies an analytical or teaching practice developed in this article. This separation allows a reader to disagree with the proposal without assuming that the primary text has been rejected. It also prevents a recommendation from being presented as an established historical practice.

The following matrix records how the materials enter the argument. It is a source map, not a ranking of theological authority. Differences in access determine how specific a claim may be.

Table 1. Sources and the permissible scope of their use

Material	Evidence inspected	Use in this article
Kitab al-Tawhid extract [1]	Arabic title and pp. 69–76	Close reading with printed page references
Esen and Demir [2, 6]	Article text or substantive scholarly account	Named interpretations, kept distinct from primary wording
Rudolph and Harvey [7–8]	Selected pages and public introduction	Historical and constructive approaches within the inspected scope
Reader and institutions [9–10, 13]	Publisher contents and teaching or publication pages	Documented examples of access and teaching, not national outcomes
Saygi [11]	Published bibliographic record and abstract	A bounded comparison involving al-Nasafi and Aquinas

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A recurring control concerns pagination. The primary extract and Rudolph's references to an earlier edition employ different numbers. They cannot be exchanged without checking the relevant edition. Another control concerns inference: an institution's use of a reading establishes that the reading is included, but not that students' understanding has improved. These controls govern the international discussion and the proposed educational applications.

Results

Sensory apprehension and the conditions of evidence

The primary passage names sensory apprehension, reports, and reflection as ways of reaching knowledge of things [1, p. 69]. Its discussion of sensory apprehension treats direct experience as a basis that a verbal denial cannot simply remove. The argument addresses the difficulty of consistently denying what one encounters while still speaking and acting within the same experienced world [1, p. 70]. This provides a starting point for studying how the account distinguishes knowledge from an unsupported personal impression.

The text also recognises circumstances in which apprehension is impeded. Its later discussion mentions sensory weakness, distance, smallness of an object, and the condition of sleep [1, p. 75]. These qualifications matter. The reliability of perception is not expressed as a claim that every appearance, under every circumstance, must be accepted without assessment. Conditions affecting access to the object have to be considered.

For methodological purposes, two propositions should therefore remain distinct. One concerns whether perception can convey knowledge. The other concerns whether a particular act of perception supplies adequate evidence in a specified case. Rejecting the first because some observations fail is an overgeneralisation; accepting every observation because perception is a source of knowledge is another. The passage supports investigating the conditions of a specific apprehension rather than abandoning perception as a category.

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The contemporary implication proposed here concerns theological research that draws on observed examples. An illustration can explain a concept, but its evidential force depends on the claim it is meant to support. Observing change in a familiar object and drawing a universal metaphysical conclusion are different steps. The latter needs an explicit premise connecting the observation to the conclusion. Identifying that connecting premise makes the reasoning available for examination and avoids allowing an illustrative example to perform more argumentative work than it can justify.

Reports and the assessment of transmission

The discussion of reports begins with information that people ordinarily obtain from others, including their names and ancestry [1, p. 70]. This argument situates testimony within everyday knowledge before treating reports associated with messengers. Its force lies in showing that a rejection of reporting as such would undermine familiar forms of identification and practical life. The theological account does not start from the assumption that all information must be personally observed.

The extract then distinguishes reports whose status provides assurance from reports that do not reach that level. Its treatment of transmitted prophetic reports recognises the fallibility of individual transmitters and asks how the report nevertheless acquires credibility [1, pp. 71–72]. It also considers a report below the relevant level of assurance, the circumstances of its transmitters, and its relationship to established evidence. The passage connects assessment with the practical question of acting on or leaving a report.

This finding should not be compressed into a universal ruling on every later debate about solitary hadith and creedal doctrine. The selected passage has to be interpreted within its own wording. A complete reconstruction of subsequent school positions would require additional texts, distinctions, and historical

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evidence. Esen's treatment of reporting helps identify the epistemological question, but it remains a named secondary reading [2, pp. 47–48].

The methodological result is that transmission and justification are related but distinguishable. A chain of communication explains how information arrived; a credibility assessment explains why it warrants acceptance. In contemporary academic writing, the equivalent practical requirement is to identify a source precisely and show why it supports the claim. A quotation repeated across several websites may originate in one unverified attribution. Counting repetitions does not resolve that problem. The researcher must investigate provenance rather than infer independent confirmation from visible frequency alone.

Reflection and the problem of self defeating denial

The section on reflection gives reasons for using thought in relation to sensory knowledge and reports [1, pp. 72–73]. Reflection distinguishes claims, evaluates their implications, and helps assess evidential signs. The primary text also points out that an attempt to reject reflection relies on reflection to formulate and support the rejection. The objection consequently uses the very operation whose legitimacy it contests. The argument concerns the coherence of the denial rather than a guarantee that every particular inference is sound.

That distinction is central to the present interpretation. Establishing the need for reasoning does not establish the truth of each conclusion offered in its name. A person can use a necessary cognitive capacity badly. The researcher must therefore examine the premises, the inferential connection, and the relevant alternatives. A valid general defence of reflection cannot replace the assessment of a specific argument.

The extract further relates reflection to recognising the implications of things and to evaluating what is beneficial or harmful. Its discussion of human nature acknowledges that natural inclination and intellectual assessment may agree or diverge [1, pp. 73–74]. Demir's account of reason and human nature similarly

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emphasises impediments that may affect human judgment [6]. This supports distinguishing a capacity from the emotional or practical conditions under which it is exercised.

For contemporary *aqida* scholarship, the result is a requirement to make inferential steps visible. A researcher should state what an argument assumes, what it concludes, and why the conclusion follows. Where a premise is accepted within a theological community but disputed outside it, that status should be acknowledged. Such disclosure does not remove commitment to the premise. It explains where the disagreement lies and prevents a reader from being asked to accept an argument whose essential assumption has remained hidden.

Coordination between the means of knowledge

The primary account places reflection within the assessment of both perception and reporting [1, pp. 72–76]. Its sources of knowledge are therefore distinguishable without being isolated. A report supplies information about an event; reflection assesses whether the conditions support accepting it. Perception supplies encountered particulars; reflection evaluates what they imply. The present analysis identifies coordination of functions as the clearest way to describe this relationship.

Rudolph also observes that al-Maturidi often supports theological views through more than one epistemic route [7, pp. 231–233]. This does not justify counting repeated versions of the same premise as independent proof. The contemporary reconstruction must ask whether the routes add distinct information or simply restate a conclusion already assumed.

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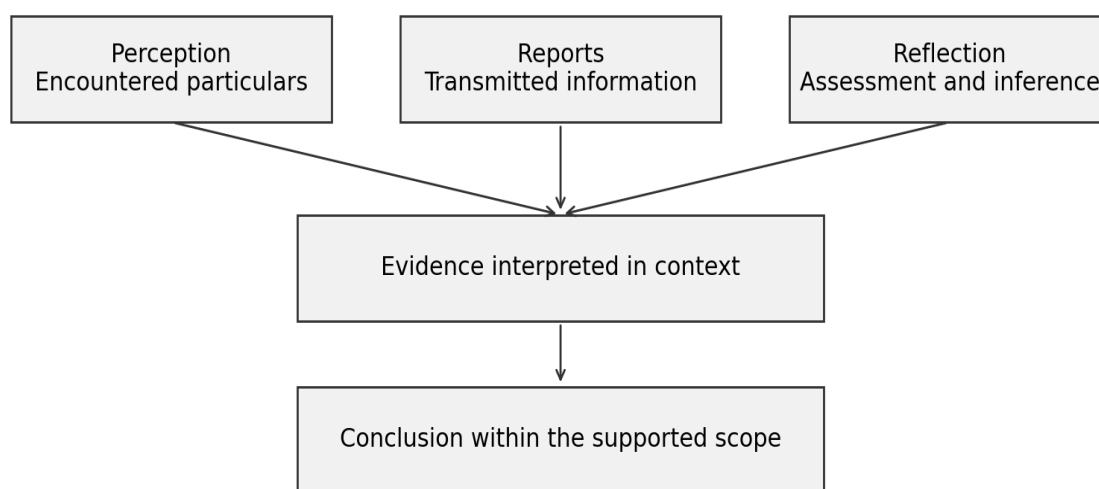


Figure 1. Author's analytical reconstruction of evidential coordination. The diagram is not reproduced from al-Maturidi and does not depict a historical classroom method.

The arrows represent analytical relations, not a rule that every conclusion requires all three sources. Some questions concern events known through reporting; others involve conceptual implications. The appropriate combination depends on the object of inquiry. The framework consequently directs attention to the kind of question before deciding which evidence is relevant.

Revelation and the responsibility of interpretation

A transmitted religious text presents at least two questions to a researcher: whether the text has been identified correctly and how its meaning should be understood. Authentication addresses the first question. Linguistic and contextual interpretation address the second. Treating them as one operation can produce a misleading result, because a genuine passage may still be read incorrectly. Conversely, an attractive interpretation cannot establish the authenticity of the words on which it rests.

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The discussion of al-Maturidi's Quranic commentary in the TDV reference article connects transmitted material, language, and rational inference [12]. It also describes interpretive caution rather than an unrestricted claim to determine every intended meaning conclusively. This material is used here through the reference article; the complete Ta'wilat al-Quran was not directly inspected. The conclusion is therefore limited to the interpretive features documented by that account.

The methodological proposal developed from these distinctions is to keep the wording, the proposed meaning, and the doctrinal conclusion separately visible. A researcher first records the relevant sentence and surrounding argument. The researcher then explains the terms used, identifies plausible readings, and states why a particular reading is preferred. Only after that should the further theological conclusion be specified. This sequence allows disagreement about interpretation without confusing it with a denial of the text's authority.

Translation adds another layer. An English equivalent may illuminate one use of an Arabic term while narrowing another. In this article, reflection explains nazar where the passage concerns the exercise of thought; reports explains akhbar where transmitted information is under examination. These choices are contextual working equivalents. An adequate argument must remain accountable to the Arabic wording. A future bilingual study could test the choices against additional passages and compare the conceptual consequences of alternative translations.

Discussion

International scholarship and documented practice

International engagement with Maturidi theology takes several forms. The following examples concern identifiable publications or educational materials, rather than claims about entire countries. Each example answers a different practical question about access, explanation, or use of the tradition.

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Table 2. Selected international examples and their research relevance

Example	Documented practice	Relevance and boundary
Turkish scholarship [2, 6]	Focused studies of knowledge and human nature	Provides named interpretations; does not demonstrate national curriculum outcomes
Germany based publisher [9]	2022 bilingual reader with Arabic selections and annotated English translations	Enables comparison of text and translation; individual chapters were not fully inspected here
United Kingdom [8, 13]	Constructive philosophical study and announcement of an edited English translation	Shows work on conceptual engagement and access; the announced translation was not used as a read primary text
University of Notre Dame, USA [10]	Course material on al-Maturidi with questions about reason and circularity	Documents a teaching resource; supplies no measured learning results

The bilingual reader edited by Demiri, Dorroll, and Correa organises material from the founder and later writers across epistemology and other theological topics [9]. Its documented design offers a useful model of making translations accountable to Arabic selections. Notre Dame's material instead foregrounds questions that invite students to examine the argument [10].

Harvey's introduction explicitly distinguishes his constructive project from merely repeating earlier conclusions [8, pp. 5–7]. This is relevant because contemporary application requires a stated purpose. A historical description asks what a text meant in its setting; constructive theology asks what a position can contribute to present inquiry. The questions may inform one another, but the resulting claims should not be conflated.

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Faith and the limits of comparative reconstruction

The relationship between evidence and religious assent raises a further issue. An argument may be judged sound while a person's response to it involves dispositions and commitments that cannot be described solely by listing premises. Conversely, commitment does not remove the scholarly obligation to explain the reasons offered for a claim. The present article proposes keeping the logical assessment of an argument distinct from a full account of the person who accepts it.

Saygı's study compares al-Nasafi and Thomas Aquinas on intellect, assent, and free will. Its published abstract identifies a tension concerning whether conclusive evidence leaves room for voluntary assent and considers a dual understanding of assent in al-Nasafi [11]. This supplies a carefully bounded comparative question. It does not establish that al-Maturidi and Aquinas held the same theory, nor that the later al-Nasafi can simply replace the founder as the subject of this article. For a future comparison, a shared question should precede any claim of similarity. The researcher would identify the relevant texts, define what each author means by assent, and reconstruct the role of evidence within each argument. Differences in doctrinal setting should then be retained. The value of the comparison would lie in clarifying a problem, not in collecting parallel expressions that happen to use similar English vocabulary.

This discipline also applies within Islamic theology. A school designation does not settle whether authors agree about the status of a particular premise or the function of an argument. The current findings support comparison at the level of identifiable operations: using a report, assessing its credibility, interpreting its wording, and evaluating a conclusion. Claims about a thinker's entire epistemology require a wider textual base. The proposal thus narrows the immediate comparison while creating a clearer basis on which further research can expand it.

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Applications to advanced aqida study

The findings suggest a teaching exercise in which students reconstruct one theological argument from a short text. The exercise should use a passage of manageable length, a stable edition reference, and sufficient surrounding context. Students would identify the claim, locate the supporting evidence, and state the inferential connection in their own words. This is a proposed application of the analysis, not an account of an intervention already implemented at the author's institution.

An initial task can distinguish a bibliographic record from the text it identifies. Students receive a reference and locate the actual passage. They record printed pagination and note any difference from digital page numbering. A second task asks them to identify what the passage explicitly says and what a modern commentator adds. A third requires them to state the strongest question that remains unresolved by the supplied evidence. Together these tasks can make the limits of an interpretation visible without turning the exercise into a test of personal religious commitment.

Feedback should focus on observable scholarly work. A teacher can assess whether the source was located, whether the paraphrase preserves the relevant qualification, and whether the conclusion follows from the stated premises. Agreement with a preferred conclusion alone does not reveal whether the student understood the argument. Likewise, a citation count does not establish that the cited material supports the claim. Evaluation therefore needs direct attention to the relation between evidence and explanation.

The educational proposal would require testing before claims of effectiveness are justified. A pilot could compare written reconstructions before and after guided practice, using an explicit rubric and more than one assessor. The outcomes would concern source accuracy and argument reconstruction, not an assumed change in belief. No such pilot is reported here. Its design is a research direction

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arising from the conceptual findings, and any future publication should provide the actual participants, procedures, ethical arrangements, and evidence.

Limitations and conclusion

The analysis has a limited textual base. Direct primary reading is restricted to the accessible extract of Kitab al-Tawhid. The discussion of Quranic interpretation relies on a reference article, while the international review includes publisher descriptions and institutional materials whose evidential purpose differs from that of a theological text. The corpus does not establish later doctrinal developments, teaching effectiveness, or national educational patterns.

An additional limitation concerns the transition from exposition to proposal. The source assessment procedure offered in this article is a contemporary reconstruction. Although it is informed by the primary account of knowledge, its sequence and educational uses belong to this study. Further research should test it against additional passages, especially cases where a doctrinal argument combines transmission, linguistic interpretation, and rational premises. A complete edition comparison could also clarify textual variations that the supplied extract alone cannot resolve.

Conclusion

The inspected passages show that perception, reports, and reflection perform distinguishable but connected roles. Reporting conveys information beyond an individual's direct experience. Reflection evaluates its credibility and implications, while perception contributes encountered particulars under conditions that can assist or impede apprehension. The rejection of a source of knowledge and the criticism of a particular use of it are consequently different matters.

The article's main contribution is to organise the study of creedal claims around identifiable evidential operations. A claim must be located, its source assessed,

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its wording interpreted, and its conclusion examined within the scope supported by the evidence. International examples show ways to provide access and frame inquiry, but do not supply results of national educational experiments. For advanced aqida research, this approach makes attribution and reasoning open to verification.

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