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TAFSIR FOR THE CRIMEAN KHAN AND OTTOMAN SULTAN: POLITICS AND RELIGION IN THE SUFI EXEGETICAL LEGACY OF IBRĀHĪM AL-QIRĪMĪ (D. 1593)

Mykhaylo Yakubovych*

Abstract: This research explores the exegetical legacy of Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī/Ībrāhim el-Kırımî (d. 1593),¹ a prominent 16th century Crimean Sufi scholar affiliated with the Halveti order and closely connected to Ottoman Sultan Murad III. Although often overlooked in the broader landscape of Islamic intellectual history, al-Qirīmī’s writings (particularly his Qur’anic commentary on the “Light Verse”, (Q. 24:35) reveal an important synthesis of Ibn ‘Arabī-inspired Sufi allegorical interpretation (*tafsīr ishārī*) and Sunni orthodoxy. Recent scholarship has corrected past attributions of his work and begun to uncover his role not only as a commentator but also as a key political actor and spiritual advisor in the Ottoman court. The article places al-Qirīmī within the historical and intellectual context of late 16th century Ottoman-Persian conflicts, demonstrating how his writings reflect the religious and political discourse of his time. By analysing his hermeneutic methodology (particularly his Halveti-based theory of the soul’s stages of ascent and descent), this article covers al-Qirīmī’s contribution to the Qur’anic exegesis outside the *medrese* system and shows the political angles of Sufi commentary in early modern Islamic empire.

Keywords: *Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, Ottoman Qur’anic exegesis, Halveti Sufism, tafsīr ishārī, Sultan Murad III, political Sufism*

INTRODUCTION

The famous German Orientalist Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), who authored a voluminous encyclopedic work, *Geschichte der Literatur von ihrem Anfang bis auf die neuesten Zeiten* (History of Literature from its Beginning to Modern Times), was aware of many significant Ottoman works of the late 16th century. In volume 3, published in 1812, he mentions someone named “Tatar Ibrahim Efendi,” who is said to be an author of

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¹ Since most of the manuscripts analysed for this article were written in Arabic, for the scholars not so much known in modern scholarship, Arabic transliteration has been used; in later Ottoman and Turkish research, al-Qirīmī mostly appears as “el-Kırımî,” “el-Ḳırımî” or “Kırımli.”

“Commentary over the famous verse of sūrah ‘The Light,’ written for the sultan Murad.”² Despite not going into other details, Eichhorn puts this author in the first place among other “Crimean writers,” emphasising his close relation to the highest political authority of the Ottoman Empire, in this case, as a Qur’anic commentator. Writing Qur’anic commentaries with dedication to the rulers was not a novelty; however, just earlier in the 16th century, a well-known scholar and later *Shaykh al-Islām* from 1545 to 1574, Muḥammad Abū al-Su‘ūd al-‘Imādī (Ebüssuūd Efendi), wrote a long mention of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in his introduction.³

If, in that case, Ebüssuūd Efendi with his commentary titled *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Guidance of the Clear Mind to the Virtues of the Noble Scripture) represented Ottoman religious bureaucracy being at the top of the educational and juridical system, the one Tatar Ibrahim Efendi has something personal in his connection to the Sultan. This enigmatic Sufi with some of his writings discovered recently (for years they were ascribed to another important figure, Aziz Mahmud Hudayi (d. 1628)), known under the full name as Ibrāhīm b. Haqq Muḥammad/Mehmet al-Qirīmī al-Dashtī or shortened as “Tatār Sheykh” (d. 1593), is considered to be a teacher of Crimean Khan Devlet Giray (d. 1577) and Ottoman Sultan Murad III (in office from 1574 to 1595). Not only were his texts written exclusively for the Sultan preserved, but one of the most important outlines the Halveti Sufi doctrine, known as *Mawāhīb al-Raḥman fī bayān Marātīb al-Akwān* (Bounties of the All-Merciful in Explaining Levels of Beings) and written between 1583 and 1590. Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī also has not been the first Sufi approaching in his work a Qur’anic verse known as *ayat al-nūr* (Q. 24:35). Before him was a long tradition of writing and interpreting this part of the Qur’an in places from Central Asia to Anatolia.⁴ What seems to be interesting in this case (which remains Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī’s solely exegetical work that is somewhat edited and published)⁵ is that, in his exegetical writings, he addresses many current historical events, generally interpreting the Qur’an in the light of the complicated political situation at the end of 16th century, especially the 12-year Ottoman-Persian war (1578–1590).

The fact of Sufi brotherhoods being engaged in political life is well-established among the scholars of the early modern history,⁶ but once again, we have a slightly different case: not only Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī was actively “advising” the Sultan on decision-making processes, up to hiring some bureaucrats for important state positions, but he also spoke on behalf of the

² Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, *Geschichte der Literatur von ihrem Anfang bis auf die neuesten Zeiten* [History of Literature from its Beginning to Modern Times] (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1810), vol. 3, 1201–202.

³ Muḥammad Abū ‘s-Su‘ūd al-‘Imādī, *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* [Guidance of the Sound Intellect to the Merits of the Noble Book], ed. Mehmet Taha Boyalık, Ahmet Aytepe, Ziyaüddin el-Kaliş, Muhammed İmād el-Nabulsî (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2021), vol. 1, 24–25.

⁴ See Gerhard Böwering, “The Light Verse: Qur’anic Text and Sūfi Interpretation,” *Oriens* 36 (2001).

⁵ Davut Ağbal, “İbrahim el-Kirimi (öl. 1001/1593) ve Risale fi Tefsiri Ayeti’n Nur İsimli Eserinin Tahkik ve Tahlili” [Ibrahim al-Kirimi (d. 1001/1593) and a Critical Edition and Analysis of His Work Risāla fī Tafsīr Āyat al-Nūr], *Osmanlı Dönemi İlmî Çalışmaları* 1 (2021).

⁶ See recent study by Kameliya N. Atanasova, *Sufism and Power in the Ottoman Empire. The Writings of Ismail Hakki Bursevi (1653–1725)* (Edinburgh University Press, 2025); for the Khalwatiyah/Halveti brotherhood, see Hasan Karataş, “The Ottomanization of the Halveti Sufi Order: A Political Story Revisited,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 1, no. 1-2 (2014).

centralised power in front of an angry mob during the imperial cavalry uprising in 1593.⁷ According to Derin Terzioğlu, who discovered his authorship and studied his letters to Murad III, what enabled Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī to become a prominent political player was, on the one hand, his proximity to the Sultan as his sheikh and companion, and on the other, his reputation and track record as a sharia-abiding, Sunnitising Sufi.⁸ In the figure of Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī we may see a scholar with a large network around him, who also played a significant role for the later branches of the Halveti Sufi brotherhood:⁹ both lines of transmission recorded by his youngest contemporary Müniri-i Belgradi (d. 1617)¹⁰ and later by Ḥasan al-Qirīmī (d. ~1850)¹¹ include his name as an important figure.

If the political role of Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī (as many other Ottoman Sufis) remains evident from the research made in recent times, his intellectual background, which has been the basis and a reflection of his political views, remains largely unknown. Once again, the only one of his works somewhat edited remains the letters written to Sultan Murad III (for a long time ascribed to Hudai) and a short piece of Qur'an commentary on Q. 24:35. Still, his preserved manuscript legacy goes far beyond what is available in the edited form: a couple of other interpretations of complete surahs and selected verses of the Qur'an have been written by this scholar. In addition, one may find the numerous cases of Qur'an commentaries given to the words, expressions or passages in his other writings. This article is a first attempt to look at the works of Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī in the perspective of Islamic exegetical history, especially the balance between Sufi approaches known in modern scholarship as *tafsīr ishārī* ("allegorical interpretation") and traditional mainstream Sunni understanding of the verses. This is not only a reconstruction of his interpretative method, but a contextualisation within the existing tradition (like the legacy of great Sufi Sheikh Ibn 'Arabī) and relational historical realities.

This research also argues that Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī has a systematic approach to the Qur'anic hermeneutics in light of his Halveti-based theory of 12 stages of soul, known as stages of ascent (*'urūj*) and descent (*nuzūl*).¹² Analysing his exegetical works mostly written during last decade of activity (1580s–early 1590s) and preserved in numerous copies, the reception

⁷ Mustafa Efendi Selaniki, *Tarih-i Selânikî* [The History of Selânikî], ed. M. İpşirli (Turk Tarih Kurumu, 1999), vol. 1, 302.

⁸ Derin Terzioğlu, "Power, Patronage and Confessionalism: Ottoman Politics as seen through the Eyes of a Crimean Sufi, 1580-1593," in *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Marinos Sariyannis (Crete University Press, 2019), 183.

⁹ The Halveti Sufi order (*al-Khalwatīyya*) is one of the most influential mystical brotherhoods in the Islamic world. Founded in the 14th century by 'Umar al-Khalwatī, the order emphasises *khalwa*, or spiritual retreat, as a means of achieving inner purification and closeness to God. Its practices include disciplined silence, remembrance (*dhikr*), fasting, and continuous moral self-examination, all intended to cleanse the heart from worldly distractions. The Halveti order spread widely across Anatolia, the Balkans, the Caucasus, North Africa, and the Middle East, especially benefiting from the Ottoman patronage.

¹⁰ Müniri-i Belgrâdî, *Silsiletü'l-Mukarrabîn ve Menâkibü'l-Müttakîn* [The Lineage of the Ones Brought Near (to God) and the Virtues of the God-Fearing], Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ms. Şehid Ali Paşa 2819, f. 105b-106a.

¹¹ Hasan Efendi el-Kırımı, *Erkân-ı Tarikat Mecmû'ası* [A Compendium of the Principles of the Tarīqa], Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ms. Uşşaki Tekkesi 392, f. 12b.

¹² See, on this theory, Mykhaylo Yakubovych, "A Neglected Ottoman Sufi Treatise from 16th Century: Mawāhib al-Raḥman fī bayān Marātib al-Akwān by Ibrāhīm Al-Qirīmī," *Journal of Ottoman Studies* 45 (2015).

of his approach to Qur’anic interpretation is also evident from the later works of his students, as well as echoed in a later Halveti works. Overall, the case of Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī’s exegetical legacy may provide new insights on exegetical tradition outside the domain of the traditional *medrese* system, broadcasted by the Sufi circles to broader readership via the brotherhood’s network. Moreover, this is about roving loyalty to the Empire as the most correct version of Sunni traditionalism in times of struggle between the Sunni and Shia empires.

IBRAHIM AL-QIRIMI AS A *MUFASSIR*: SOURCES RECONSIDERED

As has been mentioned, since most of the exegetical works by Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī remain unpublished, there is a strong demand to give at least a short overview of the sources available. This author’s biography is generally known up to the measure it allows to talk about the exact date of writing and other contexts.¹³ His work, *Mawāhib al-Raḥman*, also reveals numerous facts about other works written, such as the letters to Sultan Murad III. In short, Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī appears on the Ottoman historical scene after his move to Istanbul from Crimea in 1577 – where he previously had close relations with Devlet I Giray Khan (1551–1577). From his later writings, we know that he visited Istanbul previously, studying under the famous Halveti Sufi Nūreddīn-zāde (d. 1573) – in all the texts he said to be his student having *ijāzah* from him, which is, in Sufi case, a permission to transmit the Halveti doctrine. Residing in numerous Sufi places in Istanbul, finally Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī settled into Küçük Ayasofya Mosque. Most likely, he accompanied Sultan Murad III in some of the military expeditions. He died on 12 March 1593 (8 Jumādā al-Ṭānī 1001); according to the later Crimean Tatar historian Muḥammad Rizā (d. 1756), who is said to be one of his descendants, Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī was one who “comes in one hundred years, a renewer of religion (*mujaddid*).”¹⁴

In later Sufi literature, Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī became an example of almost legendary piety in dealing with the Sultan: ‘Azīz Maḥmūd al-Hudā’ī (d. 1628) reveals a story of his open criticism against the Sultan and his injustice, which lead to the ruler’s repentance.¹⁵ Another example is Ismā’īl Ḥaqqī al-Bursawī (d. 1725), who tells a story from ‘Uthmān Faḍlī (d. 1691) where Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, “a *sheikh* of sultan Murad the Third One” gives advice for those “mixing with sultan” (*man yukhālīṭ al-sulṭān*) to be holders of wonders (*ṣāḥib al-kirāma*), hidden or open, and adds that “I and guess that *sheikh* Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī has been ‘a pole of his times’ (*quṭb waqtuhu*).”¹⁶ This list later mentions apprehensions could be

¹³ His full biography is yet to be written; see general notes in Süleyman Gür, *Kırım Kitabı* [The Book of Crimea] (Büyüyen Ay Yayınları, 2022), 306–308; many lines of connections to Sultan Murad III are also discovered in Terzioğlu, “Power, Patronage and Confessionalism,” 145–50.

¹⁴ Muḥammad Riḍā, *Al-Saba’ As-Siyār fī Akhbār Mulūk Tātār* [Al-Sab’ al-Sayyār fī Akhbār Mulūk al-Tātār] (Madrasah ‘Aliyah İmbirāşūriyah, 1248/1832), s. 102.

¹⁵ Al-Hudā’ī, *Al-Wāridāt wa l-Wāq’āt al-Şūfiyah al-Hudā’īyah* [The Sufi Inspirations and Spiritual Experiences of Hudāyī], ed. Aḥmad al-Muzīdī (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2016), 170.

¹⁶ Al-Bursawī, *Tamām al-Fayḍ fī Bāb al-Rijāl* [The Fulfillment of Spiritual Effusion in the Chapter on Men], ed. Aḥmad al-Muzīdī (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2010), 298.

continued, but one may easily conclude that Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī's legacy has been circulating in Sufi networks in the following 17th century – and that is also true about his works.

The full list of the works by Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī needs a separate study,¹⁷ but I provide here the ones related to *tafsīr*. First, this is about *Risālah fī Tafsīr ayā al-nūr*, which is available as a manuscript in Süleymaniye library (Fatih 5381) and published along with Turkish translation by Davut Ağbal.¹⁸ Another two commentaries, written on the short suras *Al-Qadr* (Q. 97) and *Quraysh* (Q. 106), are inside a manuscript in the same library (Laleli collection), with the name Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī stated in the beginning.¹⁹ This manuscript also contains some texts by Ibn 'Arabī and other Sufis, by the same hand, with dates at the end of some treatises, especially “middle of Shawwāl 999” (August 1591) for Q. 106 and probably same time for Q. 97. Thus, both copies were written during the lifetime of the author – also, the author is referred to as a living authority: “*qāla ayda-n al-sheykh al- 'Arif al-Kāmil, al-sheykh Ibrāhīm Muḥammad al-Qirīmī – sallamahu Allahu Ta'ālā wa abqā'ahu...*” (“Also the Sheikh said, being the knowing and the perfect one, Sheikh Ibrāhīm Muḥammad al-Qirīmī – may Allah protect him and prolong his life...”).²⁰

Another text on *tafsīr* is in the Hasan Hüsnü Pasha collection at Süleymaniye and titled *Risālah fī Akhir Sūrah al-An'ām wa fī awā'il Sūrah al-Sajadah li-l-Sheykh Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī* (“A Treatise on the End of Surah ‘al-An'ām’ [Q. 6] and the Beginning of Surah al-Sajadah [Q. 32] by Sheykh Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī”).²¹ Located together with the writings of Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī and Ibn 'Arabī, this *mecmua* (“collection of articles”) looks like a later copy than the one that has the date 1050 (1640) at the end of the text.²² Finally, there is also a copy of a small treatise titled *Kitāb fī Asrār Ṭ[a]S[in]M[im]* (“Treatise on the Secrets of Ṭ[a]S[in]M[im]”), meaning the first verses of Q. 26 and Q. 28, preserved in the Dokuz Eylül University Library in Izmir among other short Sufi treatises.²³ Interestingly, the scribe who copied numerous other works of Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī for this volume appears as the one “in service of (*fī khidmat*) Sheykh...Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī,” named “derwish Muḥammad b. Rajab Khalīfah” with the date 15 Ramaḍan 1000 (25 June 1592).²⁴ Thus, we have someone close to the author in his lifetime copying the original (or taking dictation from him, as sometimes happened in those circles).

¹⁷ See the most complete one based on Turkish libraries in Gür, *Kırım Kitabı*, 308–10; still, some other works could be added like *Risālah Faṭḥ al-Madā'in* found in Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Ms. or. oct. 2232–7) and mentioned by Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī in his letters to Sultan Murad.

¹⁸ Ağbal, “İbrahim el-Kırımı,” s. 5-32.

¹⁹ Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, *Tafsīr Sūrah al-Qadr*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ms. Laleli 1512, ff. 34-38; Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, *Tafsīr Sūrah li-Ilāfi*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ms. Laleli 1512, ff. 32-34.

²⁰ Al-Qirīmī, *Tafsīr Sūrah al-Qadr*, f 35b.

²¹ Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, *Risālah fī Akhir Sūrah al-An'ām wa fī awā'il Sūrah al-Sajadah* [A Treatise on the Conclusion of Sūrat al-An'ām and the Opening Verses of Sūrat al-Sajdah.], Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ms. Hasan Hüsnü Pasha 763, f. 79-82.

²² *Ibid.*, f. 82a.

²³ Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, *Kitāb fī Asrār Ṭ[a]S[in]M[im]* [Treatise on the Secrets of Ṭ[a]S[in]M[im]], Ms. DEÜ Yazma Eserler Koleksiyonu, 3945, ff. 153a-158a.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 147b.

Some of the commentaries directly approaching selected verses are also available in Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī's letters to Sultan Murad (known as *Tazākīr* and falsely attributed to Hudā'ī), preserved in at least 16 copies in various Turkish libraries.²⁵ The only edited and subsequently Latinised text remains the one prepared by Mustafa Güven in the early 1990s for his MA work, though once again written from the perspective of Hudā'ī.²⁶ The arguments by Derin Terzioğlu in verifying those letters as being actually written by Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī (though his name is not mentioned in any of them) can hardly be disputed, as they mention some works he wrote for Murad III, many historical events in Crimea, similarity of doctrinal visions etc. In sum, we have at least four works in the genre of *tafsīr* written by Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, with some other commentaries preserved in the aforementioned letters (in Arabic and Ottoman). In some places he also deals with *tafsīr* tradition, for example, finding support in the opinions of other authorities in Qur'anic exegesis before him.²⁷ In his other works, Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī frequently refers to the Qur'anic verses, but mostly in a specific context, not necessarily involving textual reasoning related to the genre of *tafsīr*. The line between writing *tafsīr* on purpose and commenting over some verses in more broad contexts is not strict (especially in Sufi tradition), but the key is what the author considers to be the main hermeneutical intention – explaining the meaning of the verse or merely finding support for his thought, which also affects the text structurally. As Jamal J. Elias argues in his study of Sufi exegetics, “it remains to be seen if the pious motive plays such an important role in the composition of *tafsīr* generally and, if so, whether this has any bearing of the treatment of *tafsīr* as an epistemic, rather than simply literary, genre.”²⁸

EXEGETICAL APPROACH

This kind of epistemology is particularly evident from the contextualising techniques used by Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī in his commentaries. His theory mostly follows the legacy of the earlier Halveti brotherhood, based on the thought of Ibn 'Arabī. Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī put in the centre of his teaching a human soul (*nafs*), which passes through 12 stages of a spiritual journey. It starts from the lowest (*al-nafs al-ammārah*, “the evil-commanding soul,” a key concept that appears in Q. 53:12) to the highest (*al-nafs al-marḍiyah*, “the pleasing soul”) stages, then “hiding” in Divine unity on the seventh stage coming back in the last, 12 stage, reaching perfection and “manifesting” Divine knowledge. Apart from many highly symbolic interpretations on the way from recognition of Divine Oneness (*tawhīd*) to the Unity of Being (*wahdat al-wujūd*), Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī finds a place for developing an understanding of world history – “the universal soul” (known as *al-nafs al-kulliyah* in Arabic Neoplatonism) – that also travels through those stages, being manifested in Islamic *ummah* (community) and

²⁵ Derin Terzioğlu lists 14 of them (see Terzioğlu, “Power, Patronage and Confessionalism,” 154–55). Two more copies are found in Atatürk Kitaplığı in Istanbul, Ms. OE 242, Ms. OE 385.

²⁶ M. S. Güven, “Çeşitli yönleriyle Azîz Mahmûd Hudâî'nin mektupları” [The Letters of 'Azîz Mahmud Hudâî from Various Perspectives] (unpublished Master's diss., Marmara University, 1992).

²⁷ Ibid., 413.

²⁸ Jamal J. Elias, “Sūfî Tafsîr Reconsidered: Exploring the Development of a Genre,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 12 (2010): 52.

khalīfah (Caliph). Moreover, various stages of those manifestations represent territorial development of the Ottoman Empire, starting from Crimea (whether this is historically true or not) and ending with the promised conquest of Persia – which sounded extremely important in the times of the Ottoman-Safavid war of 1578–1590, echoed in constant references to “infidel tribe of kızılbaş,” as Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī refers to the Sefevī supporters from South Caucasus, called this way for their special headwear (*kızılbaş* literally means “those one with a red head”).²⁹ Not only supporting Murad III as the God-installed defender of true Sunni faith has been in the mind of Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī: he supported the pro-Ottoman party in Crimea during the conflict between Saadet II Giray and Islam II Giray in 1584,³⁰ then commented over many events in various parts of the Empire from Rumelia to Egypt, even “revealing his dream” about the capture of Vienna³¹ and urging the Sultan not to make any peace with Muscovy and “Franks” (meaning the Habsburg power).³² In some way, Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī followed same political perspective as before – being in Crimea, he also advised Devlet Giray Khan to confront Muscovy as much as possible in order to save control over the lands located north to the Caucasus.³³

How is this approach, based on metaphysical pretexts with obvious political implications, reflected in Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī’s exegetical writings?

The commentary over Q. 24:35 (“Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth...”) ³⁴ is interesting for understanding his exegetical method. In the beginning, Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī talks about hierarchy in the order of being: God is the only true being (designated by the idea of light), and all the next sentences (“there is a niche, and in it a lamp, the lamp inside a glass, a glass like a glittering star...”) are mainly interpreted as various “worlds” connected to each other “in time.” “A blessed olive tree” becomes a hint (*tanbīh*) that all the worlds originate from the “presence of the Essence” (*ḥaḍrat al-dhāt*).³⁵ Between other Sufī concepts, one may also see that this tree (*shajarah*) is also “a great part” (*ḥuḍ kathīr*) of *al-ḥaqīqah al-nabawwiyah al-aḥmadiyah al-mahmūdiyyah* (“the Ahmadi and Mahmudi prophetic reality,” a well-known Sufī concept). Interestingly, at this place a gloss on the margin (designated as one *min-hu*, i.e. from the author) converts this already classical Sufī metaphysics into legal thinking, also related to the figure of the Prophet:

²⁹ See, for example, one of his dreams “predicting” the fall of Tabriz to the hands of Ottomans in 1585: Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, *Risāle fī Ḥakki Kızılbaş* [Treatise on the Truth of the Kızılbaş], Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Ms. Hasan Hüsnü Paşa 763, ff. 132-133. See on the term *kızılbaş*: Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, “Qızılbaş ‘Heresy’ and Rebellion in Ottoman Anatolia During the Sixteenth Century,” *Anatolia Moderna/Yeni Anadolu* 7 (1997).

³⁰ Mykhaylo Yakubovych, *Filosofska dumka Krymskogo Hanstva* [Philosophical Thought of the Crimean Khanate.] (Komora, 2016), 398–99.

³¹ Güven, *Çeşitli Yönleriyle*, 88.

³² *Ibid.*, 96.

³³ Abdullah Soysal, “Kırım’da Yetişen Büyükler (Kırımlı İbrahim Efendi)” [The Great Figures Raised in Crimea (İbrahim Efendi of Crimea)], *Emel Dergi* (1964): 21.

³⁴ If not stated otherwise, all the quotations are taken from M. A. S. Abdel Haleem’s translation (Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁵ Ağbal, “İbrahim el-Kırımı,” 18–19.

know, that a mark of the gnosis (*'irfān*) is the absence of Shar'iah violation, and this is the example of the Prophet, may God bless and greets him, since he was the most knowing of all the people...who does not observe that, his claims are false, and he should be punished to death by sultan if proved.³⁶

This gloss obviously fits into the self-design of the Halveti order as the main promoter of the Sunnitisation of the Empire in the East, especially in time of the war with the Sefevids.³⁷ In another gloss later in the manuscript, “God guides whoever He will to his Light” from the same verse, he says it means the “total greatness” (*ta'zīm 'amma*) of the Islamic *ummah* compared to other communities (*umām*).³⁸ Finally, in the text of the commentary, Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī refers to another verse (Q. 53:9-11) describing the Prophet's meeting with the angel Gabriel: “he was two bow-lengths away or even closer—and revealed to God's servant what He revealed.[The Prophet's] own heart did not distort what he saw.” For him, once again, this is a hint to the “prophetic right,” praise of the knowledgeable believers and blame of arrogant unbelievers.³⁹

Converting the legacy of Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics into the support Sunna-oriented interpretation can be found in Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī's exegesis of surah al-Qadr (Q. 97). It starts from the quotation taken from the words of al-Qāshānī (d. 1330), one of the most famous of Ibn 'Arabī's commentators, saying the night of Decree (*Laylatu l-Qadr*) is special for the spiritual traveller (*sālik*) to know his capacity (*qadri-hi*) in obtaining Divine knowledge.⁴⁰ Similar text, in slightly different wording, is available from the published version of al-Qāshānī's commentary, for a long time ascribed to Ibn 'Arabī, even in the 1317/1899 Cairo edition;⁴¹ the real attribution shows a great level of Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī's acknowledgement with Sufi writings for stating correct authorship. Once again, Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī explains the virtue of this night by reference to another verse on the Prophet encountering the angel Gabriel – “His sight never wavered, nor was it too bold” (Q. 53:17) – saying: “after him, there will be a trustees (*umanā'*) on the way of the law, the path, and the knowledge (*al-sharī'ah, al-tarīqah and al-ma'rīfah*).”⁴² Those “trustees” attain the “Garden of Restfulness” (*sidrat al-muntahā*), taking their guidance to the *ummah* “by the means of the law and Sunnah,” but this can be only one such person during a time.⁴³ It becomes evident that speaking about the post-Prophetic time, he could mean only a person leading the community, with such descriptions, a Sunni *khalīf*: “and over those trustees there is only one *al-imām*, who is the manifestation of the Oneness.”⁴⁴ The picture of this harmony between the reality (*al-ḥaqīqah*) and its reflection is confirmed at the end of this short treatise: diversity of

³⁶ Ibid., 18.

³⁷ See, for example, Nabil Al-Tikriti, “Contrarian Voice: Şehzāde Korkud's (d. 919/1513). Writings on Kalām and the Early Articulation of Ottoman Sunnism,” in *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450-c. 1750*, ed. Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu (Brill, 2021).

³⁸ Ağbal, “İbrahim el-Kırımı,” 21.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Al-Qirīmī, *Tafsīr Sūrah al-Qadr*, f. 35a.

⁴¹ See Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, *Tafsīr al-Sheykh al-Akbar* (Al-Maṭba' al-Yamaniya, 1899), vol. 2, 202.

⁴² Al-Qirīmī, *Tafsīr Sūrah al-Qadr*, f. 39a.

⁴³ Ibid., 36a-36b.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 37a.

“spirits” and “intellects” in the lower level of being manifests in knowledgeable human beings from prophets to the scholars of *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* and spiritual travellers, “which will not cease to achieve knowledge in both East and West until the Day of Judgment.”⁴⁵ Finally, “those who has power over them appear, for the sake of command, order and statecraft (*al-ḍabt, al-taṣarruf wa al-siyāsah*), meaning rulers of Islam and sultans of faith...”⁴⁶ In his other text mentioned above (*Kitāb fī Asrār Ṭ[a]S[in]M[im]*), Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī writes about the perfect human who is a God-given mercy to His servants and becomes *khalīfah fī taṣarruf mulku Llahi... wa huwa al-wāsiṭ bayna Allahi wa khalqī Allahi* (“Caliph in order of the Divine power...and he is the middle between God and creature of God”).⁴⁷ As one may see, all these interpretations are mostly based on reading the Qur’an through the story of Q. 53 (Prophet Muhammad’s encounter with Gabriel), taken as the ideal projection for human beings in their quest for ultimate perfection – with political authority as the foremost of them, though described in highly theological terms.

That line of reading continues in other short commentaries by Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī. In his *tafsīr* of Q. 106 (‘Quraysh’), he gives special attention to the verse “So let them worship the Lord of this House” (Q. 106:3): “if they are bestowed for living before His House and serving it though being idol-worshippers at this time, so what do you think about virtue of its Muslim inhabitants and servants, who are the pure monotheists?”⁴⁸ Knowing how symbolically significant the Ottoman control of Makkah (from 1517 onwards) was for Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī,⁴⁹ this looks like a hint to the current political powers. This short *tafsīr* ends with a quotation from Muḥī’ al-Dīn al-Baghawī’s (d. 1122) commentary, known as *Ma’ālim al-Tanzīl*, which was popular in the Ottoman Empire, describing the mainstream Sunni reading of the text.⁵⁰

If in his short commentaries Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī has been mostly silent on the main part of Halveti doctrine (seven stages of soul, known as *al-aṭwār al-saba’h*), in the commentary for Q. 6 and Q. 32 he reveals this idea in total. Unsurprisingly, this is the verse “It is God who created the heavens and the earth and everything between them in six Days. Then He established Himself on the Throne” (Q. 32:4), where he points to this idea as reflected in the Qur’an. In this search for perfection of the soul, he mentions another verse, this time from Q. 15:99 (“Worship your Lord until what is certain comes to you”), where the term *al-yaqīn* is used. Usually interpreted as a “death in which everyone is sure” (*al-mawt al-muqīn bihi*), as al-Baghawī writes,⁵¹ for Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī this is a Sufi epistemological metaphor, meaning annihilation (*al-fanā’*) in God and revival of the human being in a more perfect sense. This is also purification from “false imaginations” (*khiyālāt al-fāsīdah*) like the errors

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Al-Qirīmī, *Kitāb fī Asrār Ṭ[a]S[in]M[im]*, f. 158.

⁴⁸ Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, *Tafsīr Sūrah Quraysh*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, f. 33b.

⁴⁹ Yakubovych, “A Neglected Ottoman Sufi Treatise from 16th Century,” 153.

⁵⁰ Al-Qirīmī, *Tafsīr Sūrah Quraysh*, f. 34a-b. According to the Turkish manuscripts database (yek.gov.tr), Süleymanie library alone holds more than 190 copies of this highly influential commentary.

⁵¹ Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abdallah al-Nimr et al. (Dar Ṭaybah, 1411/1990), vol. 4, 392.

of *al-rāfiḍa wa sār al-mulāḥidah min al-mutaṣawwifa*.⁵² This sentence could be translated as “Shias [usually meant by derogatory *al-rāfiḍa*, in this case probably Sefevids] and other heretics from the ones ascribed to Sufism.” Once again, in the next lines he talks about one leader (*al-imām*) and some “trustees” (*umanāʾ*) who guard “the gate of the way” (*abwāb al-tarīqah*). Finally, *al-sunnah wa l-sharīʾah* “are likeness of ship flowing by the sea of the nature, encircled by the seven stages.”⁵³ Once again, as all other short writings on the Qurʾan, Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī makes an intentional conclusion about the Sunni positionality of his Sufi interpretation.

More research is needed to analyse the Qurʾanic interpretations provided in Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī’s letters to Sultan Murad III, but even a first look gives the same picture as his short *tafsīrs*. In one of the long letters written in Arabic (while the writings are mostly in Ottoman), he comments over Q. 3:200, i.e. “You who believe, be steadfast, more steadfast than others; be ready; always be mindful of God, so that you may prosper,” and other verses related to *jihād*.⁵⁴ One may see here a long apology of how powerful *khalīfatū Allah* should be, and not only from military, but also spiritual perspectives: “he should possess God-given morals and described by the God-given attributes and names, observing the rights of the names, attributes and divine essence, as well as, plurality of being by the laws of *sharīʾah* and Sunnah.”⁵⁵ Being fully engaged in the Sufi adoration of dream interpretation, in one of his letters Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī refers to verses from surah *al-Faṭḥ* (The Victory, Q. 48), saying he had a dream reciting it when he personally witnessed the city of Pécs being surrounded “by the warriors of Islam (*asker-i Islam*).”⁵⁶ It is unclear whether his presence was real or imagined, since most probably he talks about the Ottoman conquest of Pécs from the Habsburgs in 1543; in the same letter, quoting other verses from this surah, he also shares his prediction with the Sultan of the future war with Leh (meaning Poland).

Before going into the concluding remarks on Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī’s approach to *tafsīr*, it should be generally noted that his exegetical legacy has not been neglected for the later representatives of the Ottoman Sufi circles. Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī’s chain of transmission (*silsilah*) is known, since it is recorded in some late Ottoman sources. An early 19th century Sufi known as Ḥasan Qirīmī in his work *Erkân-ı Tarikat* (The Pillars of Tariqah)⁵⁷ lists his *silsilah* starting from early Halveti scholars, also mentioning Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, naming his student as Abu Bakr Walī Efendi and Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī’s son, ‘Afīf al-Dīn Efendi.⁵⁸ He subsequently mentions Abu Bakr Efendi al-Qirīmī as his teacher, who studied under his father.⁵⁹ This Abu Bakr Walī would be a completely neglected figure, if not for the unique

⁵² Al-Qirīmī, *Risālah fī Akhir Sūrah al-Anʾām wa fī awāʾil Surah al-Sajadah*, 81b.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Güven, Çeşitli Yönleriyle, 73.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 88.

⁵⁷ El-Kırımî, *Erkân-ı Tarikat Mecmûʾası*, f. 12a.

⁵⁸ Ibid., f. 13a-b.

⁵⁹ Afifüddin Abdullah b. İbrâhim el-Kırımî, *Âdâbü’s-Sülûk* [Ethics of the Way], ms. Milli Kütüphane Ankara, A 8581, f. 3b.

manuscript available from the State Library in Berlin.⁶⁰ The author names himself as “Abu Bakr b. Rasūl al-Qirīmī,” saying he was given permission to transmit Sufi knowledge (*al-mujāz ‘an*) from Ibrāhīm b. Ḥaqq Muḥammad al-Qirīmī.⁶¹ According to the publication details, this work titled *al-Risālah al-Haqīqiyah* (the Epistle on the Truth) was written in 1021 (1612) in Kefeh/Caffa (now Feodosia in Crimea).⁶² In that work, mostly dedicated to the same outline of Halveti doctrine as did Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī before his student, Abu Bakr b. Rasūl al-Qirīmī addresses some surahs of the Qur’an with the mostly symbolic sense given to the surah al-Qadr.⁶³ First, he notes the change of pronouns in that surah, since first God describes His essence (“We sent it down”), then talks about the angels (“On that night the angels and the Spirit descend again”) and, finally, the night (“[there is] peace that night until the break of dawn”).

For Abu Bakr b. Rasūl al-Qirīmī, those are the three levels where Divine Oneness manifests: first is “internal,” the hidden one; second is “external,” the open one; and third is ultimately complete where the internal joins the external. At first glance, his further discussions mostly contain traditional intellectual constructions with references to al-Qadr also as Divine predestination of human destiny, which results from the idea of omnipotence,⁶⁴ while he apparently turns on explicit political thinking. People are free to do some of their deeds independently, even if they “got delegation (*ḥaydūdah*) from God like the great viziers [serving] from the family of ‘Uthmān.”⁶⁵ God “delegates” his power to his servants, allowing them to do some deeds, similar to the way a sultan asks his viziers to act on his behalf. It is not entirely clear whether this is a standard parable with a popular explanation for the freedom of will doctrine, or a kind of political hint like his teacher has been usually talking about. It looks like the idea of *khilāfa*, be it in purely spiritual or a political centre has been central for many of the next centuries for the next Halveti tradition: the aforementioned son of Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī, ‘Afīf al-Dīn Efendi made this topic a key issue just after the explanation of *tawhīd* in his treatise titled *Ādābū’s-Sūlūk* (The Ethics of the Way).⁶⁶ In other Sufi brotherhoods like Jilwati, this place has also been a point developed into the hierarchy of *aqṭāb*, i.e. celestial axes.⁶⁷ It is important to add, in later Sufi sources, Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī has been designated as “*al-sheikh al-quṭb*” (“The Teacher, the Axis”), as in the case of collection of the Sufi treatises dated by 1103/1692 where the opinion on Sufi ritual dance (*dawrān*) is extracted from his *Mawāhib* and provided as a small *risālah* by an unknown copyist.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Abu Bakr b. Rasūl al-Qirīmī, *Al-Risālah al-Haqīqiyah* [The Treatise on Truth], Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. Petermann II 441.

⁶¹ Ibid., f. 1a.

⁶² Ibid., f. 30b.

⁶³ Ibid., 11a-15b.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 13a-14b.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 14b.

⁶⁶ El-Kirimī, *Ādābū’s-Sūlūk*, f. 14a-15b.

⁶⁷ Atanasova, *Sufism and Power in the Ottoman Empire*, 107–15.

⁶⁸ Al-Qirīmī, *Min Madārij Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī*, Ms. Universitätsbibliothek Basel, M VI 53, ff. 252a-253a.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī belonged to a generation of Sufis who left great legacy, being fully incorporated into the scholarly network of their times and recording their approach in a large number of works, long and short, in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish. His political ties to the Crimean Khan and Ottoman Sultan played not only a significant role in the development of Halveti Sufi order in Anatolia and beyond, but also give insights onto Qur’anic hermeneutics. Being placed outside the domain of the classical Ottoman *medrese* tradition (which has been predominantly based on glossing over al-Bayḍāwī and al-Zamakhsharī’s *tafsīrs*),⁶⁹ Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī’s readings of the Qur’an remain contextualised within the mainstream Sunni tradition. One may not see any challenging interpretations *per se*, as there are references to the scholarly tradition of Qur’anic exegesis like commentary by al-Baghawī are mentioned.

From his Sufi perspective over the short surahs, Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī opted for the Halveti imagination of the spiritual travel, where the soul (*nafs*) passes through 12 stages of acknowledgment with the Unity of the World. Purely spiritual interpretations still have their political conclusions: in the same way as one finds that the true reality is the One and this reality is God alone, the spiritual traveller comes to the idea of the unity of Muslim leadership, as actual manifestation of the Divine regency (*khilāfa*). In almost all his commentaries over the surahs and verses analysed (Q. 24:35, 97, 6:160-165/32:1-10, 106), Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī uses a similar hermeneutical pattern: he starts with the argumentation of the Sufi doctrine, and finally comes to the significance of the Ottoman leadership and protection of “true” Sunni doctrine by a group of people he usually describes as “*umanā*” (“trustees”), obviously meaning high-ranked Sufi scholars gathered around the Sultan. In some places, he contextualises his ideas with reflections over current events like referring to the Ottoman-Safevid war of 1578–1590, but also with many mystical projections, as they appear in his other writings in the form of dreams, frequently associated with the personality of Sultan Murad III. It generally looks like Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī’s writings became a close point of relations between the Sufi spiritual tradition and the political leadership of the Ottoman Empire – as many later biographies and single comments in works mention his relationship with the Ottoman Sultan as a “teacher” or “guide” (*sheikh*) as a great personal story of this important figure.

Coming back to Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī’s approach to Qur’anic exegesis, one may hardly call it free from traditional frames: external (*ẓāhir*) and internal (*bāṭin*) layers of the Qur’an were approached in purpose-built meaningful unity, based on the principle of analogy. Some material processes like acquisition of the lands by the Ottoman Empire were nothing more than a manifestation of the process of spiritual perfection passed by the universal soul towards the final acknowledgement of Divine Unity. Despite being denoted as *tafsīr* in early manuscripts and later catalogues, this generally makes all Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī’s writings on surahs depend on his other works, as they were most likely designed for the close circle of his

⁶⁹ See Mykhaylo Yakubovych, “Ottoman Qur’anic Studies: Case of Tafsīr Glosses,” *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 71 (2020).

students, with Murad III among them. There are still many questions concerning the further reception of Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī's contributions to Sufi doctrine, since almost all his written works remain manuscripts, with some attributed to other scholars for a long time, like what happened with his letters to Sultan Murad III. Still, even this preliminary research over Ibrāhīm al-Qirīmī's writings in *tafsīrs* shows an illustrative framework where profound Qur'anic exegesis meets highly symbolic political discourse – moreover, with deep influence from the author's life.

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