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Persian Poetry, Sufi Authority, and Ottoman Multilingualism: İsmā‘il Ḥakkī Bursevī’s Qur’ān Commentary, the *Rūh al-bayān*

Abstract

This paper explores the functions of Persian poetry in Ottoman Sufi İsmā‘il Ḥakkī Bursevī’s most well-known work, his encyclopaedic *tafsīr*, the *Rūh al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (*The Spirit of Elucidation in Qur’ānic Interpretation*). I argue that Bursevī (Ar. Burūsāwi) uses Persian poems alongside traditional sources for Qur’ān exegesis and teachings in his own order to ‘translate’ complex Sufi concepts to a broad audience of interested in both Persian literature and Sufism, and by doing so, bolsters his own religious authority in his order and beyond. I build on Shabab Ahmed’s argument that through Rūmī’s *Masnāvi* ‘the meaning of the Qur’ān is perceived and produced and illuminated by fiction, and the meaning of fiction is perceived, produced and illuminated by the Qur’ān,’ by demonstrating that Bursevī extends this intertwining of fiction and the Qur’ān to a recognizably Sufi, Persian literary corpus which highlights his multilingualism and erudition and positions him and his order within an established canon. This paper has four parts. In part one, I briefly sketch Bursevī’s life and education. In part two, I introduce his *tafsīr*, the *Rūh al-bayān* and Bursevī’s method of interpretation. In part three, I analyse examples of his use of Persian poetry in the commentary. In part four, I assess these findings with a view of Bursevī’s authority construction and questions about his audience.

Keywords: Persian poetry, Sufism, early-modern Ottoman literature, Qur’ānic exegesis, multilingualism.

In the preface to his voluminous, trilingual Qur’ān commentary, the *Rūh al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Ottoman Sufi author İsmā‘il Ḥakkī Bursevī (Ar. Ismā‘il Ḥaqqī Burūsāwi) (1063–1137/1653–1725) describes the process of writing the work as rooted in his collection of *tafsīr* ‘scattered to the four winds’ some of which he gathered as a youth, and some later in life. He states that his goal in writing the commentary was to summarize what had been lost, or slipped out, from these earlier writings. Bursevī stresses that he cited sources verbatim and added to them what came to him from by way of perception, or gnosis (*ma‘ārif*). He then ‘arranged these subtleties into a string of pearls, which I counted on my fingertip, one after another, until the last noble pearl.¹ Importantly, he asks God to render the voluminous commentary ‘one of the good works and the essence of the tradition (*ṣālibāt al-a‘māl wa’l-khālaṣāt al-athār*),’ a

1 Burūsāwi 2003, 5.

clear indication that he saw himself as building on existing canon by contributing an important perspective and expanding on others' interpretations.²

One of the most unique aspects of Bursevi's *tafsir* is his use of Persian poetry. In writing about the *Rūh al-bayān* in his autobiographical notes, Bursevi highlights that he prepared it in an 'original fashion' whereby he mixed Sufi terms (*kalimat al-taṣawwuf*) with Persian poems where useful (*mazajtu al-taqrir bi'l-abyāt al-fārisiyā hasabamā sāduba al-mahall*).³ Those same poems have been edited out in at least one twentieth-century edition of the commentary and misspelled in another, published nearly a hundred years later, reflecting both the ongoing practical challenges of editing a multi-volume multilingual *tafsir* as well as, potentially, the fluctuating views on the propriety of some elements of Bursevi's hermeneutics.⁴

In this paper, I argue that Bursevi's use of Persian poems in his multilingual *tafsir* is key to better understanding both his intended audiences and the mechanics of his own authority construction in its specific cultural and political setting. Specifically, through frequent Persian poetry citations, which he intertwines with classical methods of hermeneutics and previously unwritten teachings from shaykhs in his own Sufi order, the Jilwatiyya (Tr. Celvetiyye), he 'translates' complex Sufi concepts in his *tafsir* to an audience interested in Sufism and well-versed in classical Persian poetry. In the process of doing so, he positions himself as an outstandingly erudite polyglot writing in the three imperial languages in the Ottoman Empire (Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, and Persian), and his *tafsir* – as the consummate proof to the influential patrons that he sought for his worthiness of their support.

1. Introducing İsmā'il Hakkī Bursevī (1063–1137/1653–1725)

With over a hundred works to his name, İsmā'il Hakkī Bursevī ranks as one of the most prolific Ottoman authors of all time. He is widely considered to be the founder of a branch of the Jilwati Sufi order, and is known to have advised several high-ranking Ottoman officials – factors which provide important political context for better understanding the *Rūh al-bayān* and particularly its Persian elements.

2 In using the term 'expansion,' I refer to Kelly Tuttle's argument that, '[I]nstead of thinking of the source-text in terms of primacy, we should think of the commentary as a unifying exercise that expands the matn at the same time as it was expanded by the sharh. That is to say, the source-text, in its excessively fragmentary state, becomes more than the actual words on the page. It becomes a cultural and literary heritage. The sharh then becomes the expansion of that heritage in front of the reader, unfolded.' See Tuttle 2013, 5.

3 Burūsawī 2011, 108.

4 For instance, the 1912 edition of the work published in Istanbul omits entire sections of the commentary, while the 2003 one, published in Beirut has erroneous spelling of the Persian poems in it. See Burūsawī 1330–1339 [1911–1920] and Burūsawī 2003, respectively. Yet other editions purposefully exclude his citations of non-canonical hadith. See Burūsawī 1988–89. For an analysis of these absences see Cook 2019, 95–7.

Most of what we know about Bursevi's life we learn from his autobiographical notes penned across several treatises, particularly the *Tamām al-fayd fī bāb al-rijāl* [*The Perfection of Divine Manifestation in Man*] and the *Kitāb al-silsila al-Jilwatiyya* [*The Book of the Jilwati Order's Silsila*]. While there is an extensive biography of him in Turkish written by Ali Namli, and numerous doctoral dissertations and master's theses in Turkish, Bursevi is yet to receive systematic study in a Western language.⁵

Bursevi was born in 1063/1653 in the Black Sea town of Aydos (present day Aytos, Bulgaria) in a scholarly family. His parents had emigrated there following a major fire in Istanbul in 1061/1651 that consumed their home and possessions. He mentions an auspicious meeting at the age of three, when he met 'Oşmān Fażlı Atpazari (1041–1102/1632–1691), a Sufi shaykh and future head of the Jilwati order, one of the few Sufi orders indigenous to the Ottoman Empire.⁶

When describing his education, for which he used a generous inheritance bequeathed to him by his late mother, Bursevi mentions memorizing the Qur'ān and learning calligraphy, and studying the religious sciences (*‘ulūm*), grammar (*ṣarf*), syntax (*nāḥw*), and 'what is satisfactory and sufficient to the mind from the first to the last.' Importantly, he writes about studying Turkish and Arabic side by side, which could account for the significant amount of works he wrote in Arabic (by some estimates, up to forty percent).⁷

At the age of twenty, he joined his mentor Fażlı – by then head of the Jilwati order – for further study at the latter's Sufi lodge in Istanbul. Bursevi describes Fażlı's teachings as approximating a madrasa curriculum in that they featured not only the Sufi texts and the study of the invisible (*bātin*) knowledge but also the study of the visible (*zāhir*) knowledge, erasing earlier held distinctions that bifurcated the pursuit of knowledge along these two paths. For instance, he reports studying jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalām*), alongside Persian poetry.⁸

During his studies in Aydos, Edirne, and Istanbul, where he joined Fażlı, Bursevi also learned Persian and read a number of Persian books: the Persian poet Sa‘di Shirāzī (d. 691/1292) and his masterpieces, the *Bustān* and *Gulistān*; Jāmī (d. 898/1492) and the *Bahāristān* (modelled after Sa‘di's *Bustān*); Ottoman *ṣeyhülislām* Kemālpaşaçāde (d. 940/1534) and his *Nigāristān* (modelled after the *Gulistān*); Rūmī's *Maṣnavī* and *Fibī mā fibī*, Timurid polymath and Sufi Husayn Vā‘iz-i Kāshīfī (d. 910/1504–1505) and his *tafsīr*,⁹ the *Divān* of Zāhir al-Fārīyābī (d. 552/1201), a Persian poet, who contributed to the development of the ghazal; Awḥad al-Dīn al-Anvarī (d. between 585–587/1189–1191) an astrologer and court poet in the Seljuk court, proclaimed by Jāmī

5 See Namli 2001. For studies on Bursevi in English, see Atanasova 2016; Cook 2019; and Elias 2022.

6 See Cook 2019, 72.

7 See Namli 2001, 36–7; Yıldız 1975, 106.

8 See Namli 2001, 36–7.

9 Bursevi must be referring to Kemāluddin Husayn b. 'Ali al-Kāshīfī (d. 910/1504–5), a well-known Timurid preacher and poet, who composed the *tafsīr Mawāhib-i 'aliyya*, also known as *Tafsīr-i Husaynī*. See Yousofi 2012; Burūsawi 2011, 80–1.

to be one of the three ‘prophets’ of Persian poetry,¹⁰ the poetry of Kamāl Khujandi (d. 803/1401), a Persian poet and Sufi who lived in Tabriz at the time of the Mongol invasion and enjoyed the patronage of Timur’s son, Mirānshāh, and a contemporary of Hāfiẓ; and ‘others in both verse and prose (*min al-manzūm wa’l-manthūr*).’¹¹

Following his initiation into the Jilwati order and his investiture experience, Bursevi spent a decade on the Balkans as a preacher and the attendant of Sufi lodges in Skopje (Üsküp), Veles (Köprülü), and Strumitsa (Ustrumca) where he sometimes received a warm welcome and at other times incurred the wrath of local religious elites for his criticism of what he saw as their errant ways and corruption. In 1096/1685, Fażlı summoned him to Edirne where the latter was advising Sultan Mehmed IV (r. 1057–1098/1648–1687). He moved to Bursa as Fażlı’s deputy there in the same year and began writing the *Rūḥ al-bayān*.¹²

Bursevi’s involvement with Ottoman officialdom began shortly after Fażlı’s death in 1102/1691 – an indication of his sustained efforts at gaining recognition as his mentor’s successor and the head of the Jilwati order which he claims across numerous of his treatises. Thus, in the year between 1107/1695 and 1108/1696, he was summoned to take part in the Austrian campaigns to boost the morale of the troops and to provide advice and guidance (*va’z ve nasihat*) to the Grand Vizier Elmas Mehmed Paşa and Sultan Muṣṭafā II (r. 1106–1114/1695–1703).¹³ While we don’t have much detail about what specific roles Bursevi fulfilled on these campaigns, we learn from his own writings that he had to leave the battlefield due to his injuries which took between five and ten years to heal.¹⁴

He spent the next two decades of his life as an itinerant scholar. He went on the Hajj twice, in 1112/1700 and 1122/1710. On the second of those journeys, which he undertook about five years after having completed the *Rūḥ al-bayān*, he spent a couple of months in Cairo teaching at al-Azhar University where he issued certificates of study (*ijāzāt*) to several individuals – an indication of the popularity he enjoyed among the Cairene scholars.¹⁵

At home, Bursevi witnessed political and religious turmoil. In 1112/1700 a Sufi was murdered in the Grand Mosque (Ulu Camii) in Bursa over his prayers on the Night of Power (*laylat al-qadr*). During the Edirne Event (*Edirne vakası*) in 1115/1703, a Janissary revolt took place in the course of which the *seyhülislām* Feyzullāh Efendi was killed, Sultan Muṣṭafā II dethroned, and Ahmed III (r. 1115–1143/1703–1730) installed in his

10 See de Brujin 2012.

11 Burūsawī 2011, 80–1.

12 See Namlı 2001, 50; Cook 2019, 80–1.

13 Cook notes that the battles Bursevi likely joined in were those of Lugos (1695), Ulas/Banat and Cenei (1696) and the siege of Azov (1696–1697) and that he must have returned home before the Ottoman defeat at Zenta in 1697 and the subsequent Treaty of Karlowitz (1698–99). See Cook 2019, 86. See also Namlı 2001, 73.

14 Namlı 2001, 73.

15 *ibid.*, 87–8.

place.¹⁶ Bursevî expresses vocal criticism of actors in both of these events, which may indicate his more active social role and political aspirations.

During this time period, Bursevî also produced a significant number of dedicatory writings to high-ranking officials, such as *Tuhfe-i 'Aliyye* (*The Gift to 'Ali*), written for Grand Vizier Çorlulu 'Ali Paşa whom he advised on various matters and *Tuhfe-i Recebîyye*, for Receb Paşa the Governor of Damascus whom he befriended during his residence in Damascus between 1129/1717 and 1132/1720. Even when far from Istanbul, he seems to have maintained close contact with Ottoman officials. For instance, in 1127/1715, he sent a letter to Dâmâd 'Ali Paşa, the Grand Vizier, congratulating him on his success in his expedition against the Venetians, which reversed the latter's victory of 1110/1699.¹⁷ While in Üsküdar in 1132–1135/1720–1723, he received a residence from the Grand Vizier Dâmâd İbrâhim Paşa who frequently sought his advice and with whom Bursevî appears to have kept active correspondence. He addressed other officials, such as to the Chief Bodyguard of the Sultan (*serhâseki*), Tübâzâde Mehmed, in his treatise *Tuhfe-i Hâsekîyye* (*A Gift to the Haseki*) and to the Superintendent of the Imperial Gardens (*bâşbâhçeler müfettişi*), Bahri Hüseyin Efendi, the *Risâle-i Hüseyiniyye* (*A Treatise for Hüseyin*) and the *Tuhfe-i Bahriyye* (*A Gift to Bahri*).¹⁸

These close relationships to officialdom not only provided Bursevî with the material benefits of patronage but also on occasion shielded him from other religious elites' criticism. In 1722 his patron, Dâmâd İbrâhim Paşa, received a complaint from the Mufti of Istanbul, concerning his preaching on Ibn 'Arabi's controversial notion of *wahdat al-wujûd* (unity of being). Overwhelming support for Bursevî however, prevented his prosecution.¹⁹ In 1135/1723, he moved back to Bursa where he oversaw the construction of the Muhammediye Mosque using his own funds, and renovated his tekke in the city.²⁰ He died two years later, on Dhû'l-Qâda 9 1137/July 20, 1725, and was buried in a tomb next to the mosque he built near Tuzpazari.²¹

I argue that Bursevî's close ties to the Ottoman court, particularly in the last three decades of his life, had a two-way relationship to his impressive literary output. Throughout his writings, he claims to be one of the most influential Sufis of his time, and successor to the spiritual axis (*qutb*), whom he understood to be his mentor, Fâzîli. While his claims to authority may reflect his fraught legitimacy amidst competing Jîlwati branches and their respective shaykhs, his success at securing the patronage of high-ranking officials appears to have landed him in the ranks of some of the most

16 Namlı 2001, 83.

17 *ibid.*, 91.

18 *ibid.*, 103–5.

19 Ali Namlı's analysis of this incident points that Bursevî's sermons on God's unity (*tawhîd*) were taken out of context. He also notes that the controversy which centered on Bursevî's sermons in Üsküdar led earlier biographers to speculate about him being sent into exile to Tekirdağ, a possibility which Namlı dismisses on the basis of Bursevî's own memoirs of this time period. Namlı 2001, 106–8.

20 Namlı 2001, 111.

21 *ibid.*, 103.

politically active shaykhs in his order, such as 'Aziz Mahmûd Hüdâyi and his mentor, 'Osmân Fażlı Atpazârî, both of whom advised several Ottoman sultans.

Bursevi's *Rûb al-bayân* is an important stage of his authority construction and may have played a key role in his recognition by Ottoman bureaucrats. Due to their complex nature and requisite knowledge, *tafsîr* works in the premodern period could and often did function as the path for emerging Muslim scholars to gain reputation before an audience of their peers as well as patrons.²² As I will demonstrate below, Bursevi's erudition, encyclopaedic knowledge, and multilingualism on display in the *tafsîr* can be viewed as an ongoing showcase of the kind of qualities that a prominent Ottoman Sufi was expected to possess in order to secure the high-level of recognition and patronage necessary in the competitive urban networks of the early modern Ottoman Empire and their vibrant Persianate literary culture.

2. The *Rûb al-bayân* and Bursevi's Multilingualism

Largely considered to be his magnum opus, the ten volume Qur'ân commentary is one of Bursevi's most well-known works. The commentary has been the subject of numerous master's theses and doctoral dissertations in Turkey and has been translated into modern Turkish. Editions of the work have been published in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Pakistan from the nineteenth century through to the early 2000s. The most recent translation of the *tafsîr* into Urdu may be interpreted as evidence to the commentary's continued popularity among Muslim readers. None of the printed editions of the *Rûb al-bayân* to date contain Bursevi's marginal notes in Ottoman Turkish available in the autograph, thus rendering an important source of information inaccessible to researchers.²³

The *Rûb al-bayân* has only recently begun to attract scholarly attention.²⁴ Perhaps as a consequence, it is yet to be fully translated into a Western language. Outside of Sakib Yıldız's 1972 Ph.D. dissertation in French, sections of it have been recently translated into English in two volumes of a *tafsîr* primer edited by Feras Hamza, Sajjad Rizvi, and Farhana Mayer and Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza, respectively.²⁵ The

22 I thank Walid Saleh for this suggestion.

23 See Figure 1 for Bursevi's autograph of the *tafsîr*, including examples of the marginal notes, Bursevi, *Rûb al-bayân fi tafsîr al-Qur'ân*, İnebey Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Genel 13, 90 ff., ff. 82–83. The most recent edition of the work, in Turkish, Bursevi 2012–2020 also excludes important marginalia. Also see Cook 2019. Little is known about the reception of Bursevi's *tafsîr* – an important question which merits further manuscript study but which unfortunately exceeds the scope of the present work. At least several of the manuscript copies of the work available in Turkish libraries are still pending digitization.

24 See Cook 2019; Elias 2022; Şahin 2021; Topyay 2022.

25 See Bauer et al. 2022; Hamza et al. 2010.

inclusion of the *Rūh al-bayān* in these *tafsīr* primer volumes is significant as it situates this popular Ottoman Qur'ān commentary among its Arabic and Persian peers.²⁶

Bursevi completed the work over the course of 21 years, between 1095/1684 and 1117/1705. In the preface to the commentary, he explains that he began writing it as a preacher in the Great Mosque in Bursa. He appears to have been tasked with writing the commentary as a specific requirement of his position which, in addition to preaching, included instruction in *tafsīr*.²⁷ He completed the work as a Jilwati Sufi shaykh and importantly, as the self-proclaimed successor to 'Osmān Fażlī and the head of his order.²⁸

As mentioned earlier, Bursevi himself stresses the 'originality' of his exegetical method of 'mixing' Sufi terms with Persian poems. Upon close examination, one finds that the work intertwines classical Qur'ān commentaries and texts widely used in Ottoman madrasa education at the time – such as the *tafsīrs* of Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144), Bayżāvī (d. 685/1286), and key texts from the school of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) – with poems by many of the same Persian authors that he mentions reading as a Sufi novice: Rūmī, Ḥāfiẓ, Sa'di. He also incorporates the teachings of multiple Jilwati shaykhs from his order as well as his own interpretations of Qur'ānic verses derived from sermons he gave as a preacher.

In the *Rūh al-bayān*, Bursevi interprets the Qur'ān line by line, and often even word by word – a characteristic of classical *tafsīr*.²⁹ Typically, he begins his interpretation with introductory remarks about the significance of a word, phrase, or the entire sura, which he follows with a combination of linguistic analysis, occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), direct quotations from other authoritative sources and poetry, as well as his own interpretations. For instance, he begins the *tafsīr* with an interpretation of the *ta'ādh* and the *basmala* phrases, 'I seek protection in God from Satan the accursed' (*ta'ādhū billāh min al-shaytān al-rajīm*), and 'in the name of God the Most Gracious the Most Merciful,' (*bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*), respectively:

The underlying reason (*bikma*) for it [viz., the *ta'ādh*] is to ask for permission [to enter] and knock on the door because whoever comes to the door of the King of kings does not enter except with His permission. Likewise, whoever wants to read the Qur'ān or rather, enter in a dialogue (*munājāt*) with the Beloved, needs to purify the tongue because he has tarnished himself with idle talk (*fūdūl al-kalām*)

26 Bauer et al. 2022. Excerpts from the *Rūh al-bayān* thus appear alongside those of early, classical, and modern exegetes as well as Shi'i commentators. The editors of the volume on several occasions highlight how Bursevi's *tafsīr* is distinctively Ottoman. For example, they point to citations of Mollā Fenārī (d. 834/1431), Şeyhzāde (d. 950/1543) and Üftāde (d. 988/1580), one of the founding figures of the Jilwati order. The volumes do not include Bursevi's marginalia in Ottoman Turkish.

27 Cook 2019, 82. Also see Namli 2001, 179–80.

28 Bursevi's consistent claims to being of the most important Sufis in his order and beyond appear to not gone entirely uncontested and may well reflect institutional anxieties over leadership in the Jilwatiyya. See Atanasova 2016, 17–21.

29 See Rippin 2012.

and falsehood (*bahtān*) and he purifies himself through the *ta‘ūdh*. The folk of knowledge (*ma‘rifā*) [viz. Sufis] have said: This word is the vehicle for those who come near (*mutaqarribin*), and the safeguard of the fearful, and the reprimand for the evildoers, and the return of the lost ones, and the joy of the loving ones and it is as the Lord of the two worlds said in the sura of the Bee (al-Nahl): ‘When thou recitest the Koran, seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan’.³⁰

Bursevī follows this introductory note by clarifying that the phrase is the accepted saying if one wishes to recite or read the Qur‘ān and that it reflects the common consideration of seeking the protection of the gnostic reality (*al-haqīqa al-‘arifiyya*), another reference to Sufis.³¹ He then cites a hadith and another Qur‘ānic verse – also standard methods of *tafsīr* – to explain the occasion of revelation (*ashbāh al-nuzūl*) of the verse in question. The hadith and the aya (Q 96:1) thus both link the *ta‘ūdh* and the *basmala* to Muhammad’s first encounter with the angel Gabriel.

Next in his commentary, he provides a brief linguistic discussion of the term ‘I seek refuge’ (*a‘ūdhu*). Specifically, he cites synonyms for the verb in Arabic but also provides their Persian translations (e.g., ‘take refuge’ (*altajād*), and *panāh mikhāham*), ‘resist temptation’ (*isti‘āsama* and *nigāb dāshat mikhāham*), etc.). Next he engages in brief morphological analysis of the Arabic term whereby he explains the two *masdars* and compares them to other words in Arabic that have similarities in grammar. He follows this with an anonymous statement relating to different phrases with the verb in Arabic shedding light on the grammar he explains in context.³² Through these translations, Bursevī both showcases his multilingualism and engages readers who would benefit from such detailed linguistic explanations and examples. He then cites an excerpt from the *tafsīr* of Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* – a work considered to be simultaneously ‘philosophical and *bi‘l-ra‘y*’ and in this way transcending multiple categories of exegesis.³³ The excerpt deals with the covenant between God and the worshipper which grants the latter refuge – another reference to the word that Bursevī interprets, ‘I seek refuge’ (*a‘ūdhu*).

At this point, Bursevī moves on to the next phrase, ‘*billāh*’ which he introduces by pointing out that the teaching of the folk of the realities (i.e. Sufis) is embedded in it. The rest of the discussion revolves around the impossibility of accessing the divine essence – here Bursevī intertwines his own statements with excerpts from Taftāzānī’s *Hāshiya al-Kashshāf*.³⁴ This is followed by a couplet from Rūmī’s *Masnavī*, ‘*dar taṣavvur zāt-i ū ra gānj kū, tā dar āyad dar taṣavvur misl-i ū*’ which can be translated as ‘How

30 Burūsawī 2003, 5. Also see Arberry 1955, Q 16:98.

31 See Arnaldez 2012.

32 Burūsawī 2003, 5–6.

33 Anawati argues that ‘al-Rāzī put into this all his knowledge both of philosophy and of religion.’ See Anawati 2012. For discussion on *tafsīr* types and their histories, see Görke and Pink 2014 and Saleh 2004.

34 I have not found reliable information about this work. It does not appear to be one of Taftāzānī’s better known writings.

can His essence ever be perceived, For things comparable to be conceived!'³⁵ Drawing on the theosophy of Ibn 'Arabī about the divine essence, Bursevī then explains that there are three types of words of protection linked to God's essence, actions, and attributes, respectively. He follows with a prophetic hadith and another excerpt from Rāzī's *tafsīr* on the various types of evil, and concludes that the *ta'ādh* phrase can bestow protection from all of them.

In what may seem like a digression at a first glance, he writes about how all knowledge is contained in the Arabic letter 'bā' which he interjects with another excerpt from *al-Tafsīr al-kabir* on the goal of all knowledge being the believer's arrival at his lord, and 'bā' being the glue in 'billāh' that links believer and God. He suggests that he will refer to the 'secrets of bā' at a later point and moves on to his interpretation of the next word in the phrase, 'from Satan' (*min al-shayṭān*). In explaining the word Satan (*shayṭān*) Bursevī first refers to Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/686–688), widely considered the 'father of Qur'ānic exegesis,' who reports that devil previously known as 'Azāzil or Nā'il became named 'Satan' after God cursed him. Bursevī then cites *Rawd al-akhyār*, a commentary on Zamakhshari's *Rabi'a al-Abrār* by Ottoman author Muhyiddin Muhammed b. Kāsim Amāsi (d. 940/1533) – also known as İbn Hātīb Kāsim – on the differences between devils, the jinn, and angels with regards to their ability to have offspring and die. At this point, he states that no one but a small group of philosophers denies the existence of the jinn and cites an incident related by Ghazālī about Zamakhshari's manuscript being misplaced by the jinn. He follows this with another Qur'ānic verse (34:14) and discusses the jinn's bodies relative to other spiritual beings such as angels. He cites Mollā Fenārī's *tafsīr* on the Fātiḥā identifying Satan with Iblis and cites another verse (6:112).³⁶

In the rest of his *tafsīr* of the phrase, Bursevī cites a dazzling number of sources: the caliph 'Umar (d. 23/644), Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 114/732), early Baghādādī Sufi Kharrāz (d. 277/890), Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), the Sufi and occultist Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 622/1225), the *Ta'wīlāt al-Najmīyya*, Rūmī, Hāfiẓ, Ibn 'Arabī, Sufi and first Ottoman madrasa instructor Dāvūd Kāyserī (d. 751/1350), Molla Fenārī (d. 834/1431), amidst other Qur'ānic verses and prophetic hadith.

Amidst this array of sources, Persian poetry holds a central place. For example, Cook, whose study on Bursevī's humanism and anti-humanism is extensively based on the *Rūh al-bayān*, argues that amidst this array of Sufi and non-Sufi sources, Sufi *tafsīrs*, theological treatises, and poetry collections, especially Persian poetry, in addi-

35 Rūmī 2004, 11.

36 See Vagliieri 2012. I have not found much information about İbn Hātīb, but there are at least three extant manuscripts of the work in question, two at the Rare book library at Ankara University (Mss 36312 and Mss 36317 (see URL: https://yazmalar-divinity.ankara.edu.tr/yazmalar/36312_14-1269424.pdf and https://yazmalar-divinity.ankara.edu.tr/yazmalar/36712_14-1269824.pdf) and one at Harvard University Library (see Amāsi, Muhammed ibn Qāsim, 1459 or 1460–1533 or 1534. *Rawd al-akhyār al-muntakhab min Rabi' al-abrār*: manuscript, 1576. MS Arab SM206. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. URL: <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.hough:2255981?n=11>).

tion to Jilwati Sufi teachings, ‘predominate’.³⁷ My cursory findings confirm Cook’s. If we examine the breakdown of sources Bursevi cites in his *tafsir* of Sura al-Fatiha, we notice that the most cited author is Sa‘di (five times), followed by the text the *Ta‘wilat al-Najmiyya* (four times), Rūmī, Mollā Fenārī, and Nasafī (d. 537/1142) (the *Taysir*) (each three times), and Şadreddin Konevī (two times). Commentators Muqātil (d. 150/767), Ibn ‘Atā (d. 309/922), Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), Bayzāvī (d. 685/1286), Kāyserī (d. 751/1350), Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), Ebūssu‘ūd (d. 982/1574), follow at being mentioned once each. Bursevi also utilizes numerous hadith and sayings of the Prophet, as well as Qur’ānic verses.

This breakdown largely reflects citations in other suras and verses (depending on length), whereby Persian poetry and *tafsirs* by Sufis dominate, in addition to early and classical *tafsirs* (e.g., Muqātil, Zamakhshari), Bursevi’s mentions of his shaykh, ‘Oşmān Fażlī, or other Jilwati Sufi (e.g. Üftāde, Hüdāyī, etc.) and his own interpretations. Amidst the Persian poets Bursevi cites, the most frequently cited ones are Rūmī, Sa‘di, and Hāfiẓ, followed by Bursevi’s incorporation of Persian literary sources in his *tafsir* is in and of itself not surprising. Scholars have noted the special relationship between Rūmī’s *Masnavī* and the Qur’ān particularly in Persian and Ottoman literature. As Aslıhan Gürbüzel argues in her recent monograph, ‘early modern Persianate reading cultures highly revered the *Mesnevi* [...]’ and Rūmī often referred to himself as the ‘prophet’ of his time and to the *Masnavī* as the ‘second Qur’ān,’ or as ‘revelation’ (*valḥy*). According to Mevlevi teachings, the *Masnavī* could shed light on the ‘inner meaning of the Quran’.³⁸ This treatment of the *Masnavī* was based on a broader understanding of revelation as not limited to the Qur’ān but as infinite and ongoing – and one to which Sufis in particular had exclusive access. While Persian literary canon was broadly discussed and debated in early modern Ottoman learned circles, amongst Mevlevis, the *Masnavī* stood out as a sacred text.³⁹

What may well have enabled this framing of the *Masnavī* were the over 4,500 direct citations of Qur’ānic verses that appear in the work – a feature that the late Shahab Ahmed argued renders the work ‘effectively, a Qur’ānic exegesis by other means.’ According to Ahmed, ‘Rūmī dis-locates the text of the Qur’ān by plucking out of it short passages, individual verses or phrases; he then re-locates these passages, verses and phrases into the vast and rich tapestry of the stories of his own weaving.’ The result is the mutual embeddedness and transposition of revelation – the Qur’ān – and fiction.⁴⁰

As I will show below, a close reading of Bursevi’s use of Persian poems in his *tafsir* confirms Ahmed’s and Gürbüzel’s findings about the importance of the *Masnavī* as

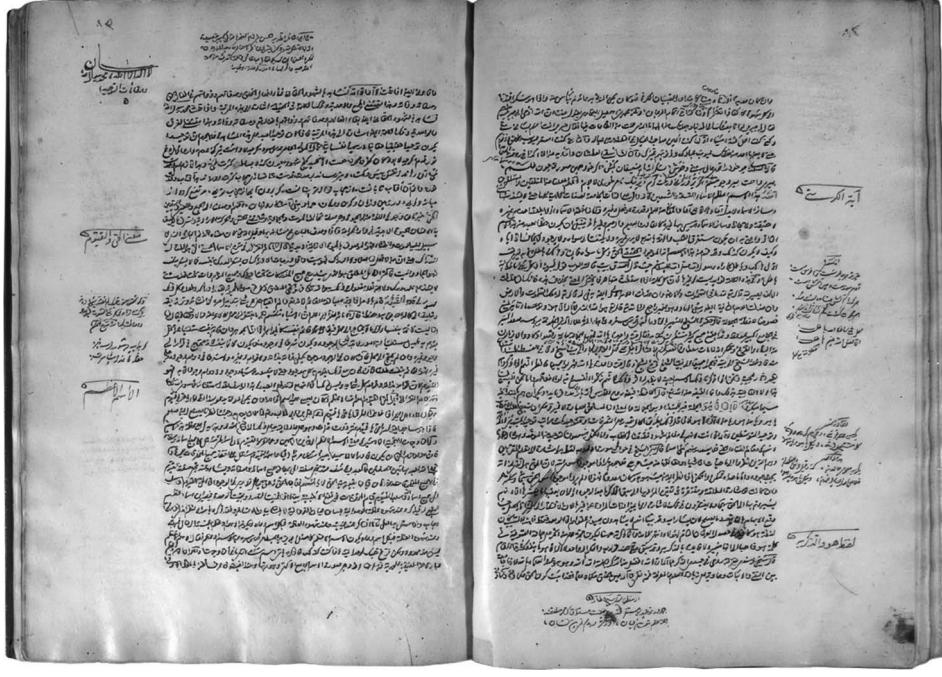
37 Cook 2019, 97.

38 Gürbüzel 2023, 143–4.

39 Gürbüzel 2023, 160.

40 Ahmed 2016, 307–8. The question as to how closely this use of Rūmī resembles the medieval Arabic literary practice of *tađmin* is worth exploring further. Bursevi’s use of the poems that he cites to interpret scripture positions them as somewhat uniquely authoritative above other types of literature, as I discuss here.

Figure 1. *İsmā‘il Hakkı Bursevī*, *Rūh al-bayān fi tafsir al-Qur’ān*, *İnebey Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi*, Genel 13, 90 ff., ff. 82–83



a sacred text and in particular, as one that has been used to shed light on the Qur’ān, but it also tells us something new: that Bursevī extends this treatment to a broader Persian literary canon beyond Rūmī and the *Maṣnavī* – a canon which he gives a particularly Sufi significance.

3. Teaching Sufism through Persian Poetry?

For example, in his exegesis of the throne verse (Q 2:255), one of the most frequently cited Qur’ānic verses due to its believed talismanic, or protective powers, Bursevī references three Persian poets, Hāfiẓ, Jāmī, and Rūmī. As I will demonstrate below, the poems he cites in his hermeneutics are linked to his discussions of three respective Sufi notions – divine emanation (*fayd*), the oneness of God (*wahda*), and the divine throne (*arsh*). The throne verse can be translated as follows:

God there is no god but He, the Living, the Everlasting. Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep; to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Who is there that shall intercede with Him save by His leave? He knows what lies before them and what is after them, and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge save

such as He wills. His Throne comprises the heavens and earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious.⁴¹

3.1. *Hāfiż and Divine Emanation*

One of the Sufi concepts that Bursevī explains in the context of his commentary on the throne verse is that of divine emanation or effusion (*fayd ilāhi*). Sometimes translated as divine ‘overflowing,’ or a ‘blessing’ or ‘grace,’ *fayd* is a key Sufi term, particularly in Ibn ‘Arabī’s theosophy where it is usually synonymous with *tajallī*, divine self-disclosure or ‘theophany’.⁴²

Bursevī’s discussion of the term appears in the context of his commentary on the divine name God (‘Allāh’) with which the throne verse begins and its special powers. He begins his *tafsīr* of the word by stating that the name is ‘the most exalted of the ninety nine names because it proves the [divine] essence that includes all the divine attributes.⁴³ He further argues that there are benefits in the specific word (Allāh) that are absent from other words and provides a brief grammatical discussion intertwined with Qur’ānic verses that demonstrates the connections in meaning between *Allāh* (God), *lillāh* (to god), *lāhu* (to him belongs), and the letter *hā* (referring to *huwa* (He)) – a sign of how unique the Arabic word *Allāh* is.⁴⁴

Next, he mentions a story by Muhammed Üftāde (d. 988/1580) – one of the founding figures of the Jilwati order – that illustrates the special powers of the divine name. In the first out of two examples, Üftāde describes an incident during which Molla ‘Alāeddin Ḥalvetī (d. 866–867/1462–1463), one of the first Halveti shaykhs in the Ottoman lands, came to Bursa.⁴⁵ When he went up to the pulpit in the Great Mosque, he uttered ‘yā Allāh,’ just once and the large congregation that had gathered to hear him broke into dance and tears and nearly did not recover from sadness and fear.⁴⁶ In the second example that Üftāde narrates, when the sultan of the age died, a group of people conspired to murder the vizier. The latter came to seek shelter in the home of Şeyh Vefā (d. 896/1491) in Istanbul who took him in. When the group stormed the shaykh’s house, he came out and just said ‘yā Allāh’ once and they fled.⁴⁷ Bursevī

41 Arberry 1955, Q 2:255.

42 See Morrisey 2020, 43 on the divine ‘manifestation-emanation’ (*al-fayd al-tajallī*) in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought. As Chittick points out, self-disclosure (*tajallī*) is so central to Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings that he was called one of the Companions of Self-Disclosure (*ashāb al-tajallī*). See Chittick 1998, 52. Also see Ibn al-‘Arabī 2004, xxiii–xxiv; 4–5.

43 Burūsawī 2003, 403. For an English translation, see Hamza et al. 2010 and Bauer et al. 2022. Note that the editors’ notes on Bursevī are on occasion factually incorrect as for example, when they claim he was a disciple of Üftāde, who had died more than seventy years before Bursevī was born. See Hamza et al. 2010, 225 n 354.

44 Burūsawī 2003, 403.

45 For more information on ‘Alāeddin Ḥalvetī, see Karataş 2011, 91–7.

46 Burūsawī 2003, 403.

47 *ibid.* For Şeyh Vefā, see Curry 2010, 69–70.

concludes this section lamenting the absence of such miraculous events in his time as he writes:

Note that if they mention ‘Allāh,’ miraculous effects (*āthār ‘ajiba*) appear and if we mention that very name, no such effect appears. This is because they were pure in heart and improved their character. This is not the case for us nor is there the ability [for it]. And verily, the emanation only comes from God Almighty (*wa-innamā l-fayd min Allāh ta‘ala*).

Bursevi then introduces the poem by merely stating ‘Hāfiẓ said’ (*qāla al-Hāfiẓ*):

*Fayż-i rūb al-quds ar bāz madad farmāyad
Digarān ham bi-kunand āncha masīhā mī-kard*⁴⁸

Translation:

Aided by the Holy Spirit’s emanation,
Others, too, can do what the Messiah did.⁴⁹

At a first glance, the Persian verse has little to do with the rest of Bursevi’s commentary on ‘Allāh.’ Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that he uses the couplet to shed light on or illustrate the concept of divine emanation which he references immediately before quoting Hāfiẓ. It is obvious that in the above case, Bursevi is not using the term *fayd* only in a generalized fashion to mean divine grace or blessing but imbues it with a more specific meaning, signalled by Hāfiẓ’s verse dealing with the emanation of the Holy Spirit. The notion of *fayd* - which William Chittick terms ‘effusion’ - is a key Sufi term that Ibn ‘Arabī defines as a method of gaining knowledge beyond the domain of reason.⁵⁰ *Fayd al-rūb* is particularly important to Bursevi who in another place writes of it as the process of ensoulment of the embryo – a process mirroring the creation of Jesus.⁵¹

He provides no commentary to Hāfiẓ’s verse here, confirming Ahmed’s argument about the intertwining of fiction and revelation – as the verse highlights important Sufi notion that Bursevi sees embedded in the Qur’ānic text, the intertextuality in Hāfiẓ’s verse allows the revelatory text of the Qur’ān (in its reference to Jesus) to elucidate the poetic text. The Persian poem transcends language boundaries because the technical term – *fayd* (Pers. *fayż*) – remains the same in Bursevi’s commentary in Arabic, and the couplet in Persian. At the same time, the Ottoman Jīlwātī Sufi teaching is bolstered by the Persian verse by bestowing the authority of someone as prominent as Hāfiẓ onto Üftāde and consequently, to Bursevi himself. The verse, teaching, and

48 Hāfiẓ, *Ghazals*, 143.9.

49 Burūsawī 2003, 403. My translation.

50 See Fitzroy 2020, 43 on the divine ‘manifestation-emanation’ (*al-fayd al-tajallī*) in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought. Also see Ibn al-‘Arabī 2004, xxiii–xxiv and 4–5. As Chittick points out, self-disclosure (*tajallī*) is so central to Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings that he was called one of the Companions of Self-Disclosure (*ashāb al-tajallī*). See Chittick 1998, 52.

51 Burūsawī 2011, 77.

Qur'ānic main text create a matrix of transregional, multilingual, continuous knowledge that is based in Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish sources of authority. The three layers of meaning here are also an opportunity for Bursevī to showcase not only his trilingual skill but also highlight his connections to these sources of authority: earlier Jilwati shaykhs, Persian poets, and Ibn 'Arabi, whose writings Bursevī mentions reading from cover to cover.⁵²

3.2. *Jāmī and God's Oneness (wahda)*

As Bursevī continues his *tafsīr* of the throne verse after citing Hāfiẓ, we come across another Sufi term that he elucidates through the use of Persian poetry: *wahda* (*wahdat*) (divine oneness or unicity). The poetic verses – this time by Jāmī (d. 898/1492) – appear in the context of his interpretation of the next phrase in the throne verse, 'there is no god but Him' *lā ilāha illā huwa*.

Bursevī begins by stating that the phrase is the predicate for the subject, linking back to the previous word in the verse. He then states that 'he is glory (*jalāla*) and the meaning [of the phrase] is that only He and no other is worthy of worship.⁵³ The significance of the phrase is highlighted as Bursevī writes that it was a part of the Supreme Axis's prayer (*tasbih*) and mentions how that gave him special powers.⁵⁴ Next, he explains that there are three levels of divine unicity (*tawhīd*), the highest of which is the statement 'there is no God but me' (*lā ilāha illā anā*) because it is at the stage (*maqām*) of absolute extinction of the self (*al-faṇā' al-kullī*).

At this point in his *tafsīr*, he cites the commentary (*Hāsiye*) by Ottoman commentator Şeyhzāde (d. 950/1543) on Sura *al-Ikhlāṣ* that lends support to his argument and more generally, to the claims of some Sufis to be at a stage where they perceive only the existence (*wujūd*) of God and nothing else.⁵⁵ Bursevī concludes this section by informing his readers that he cites Şeyhzāde's words only as proof for the importance of 'He' as a name for God and against the opponents of Sufis who claim it is only a pronoun.⁵⁶

Next, Bursevī refers to the teachings of his shaykh ['Oṣmān Fażlī] whom he describes as 'the spirit in my body,' (*rūḥi fi jasādī*). According to him, the phrase *lā ilāha illā llāh* is more exalted than simply '*Allah*' or '*huwa*' because it combines both

52 Bursevī mentions reading the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*The Ringstones of wisdom*) with his mentor 'Oṣmān Fażlī in Edirne, and also lists a commentary of the work that he himself authored which was stolen by bandits on his way back from the Hajj.

53 Burūsawī 2003, 403.

54 It is not clear who Bursevī identifies as the Pole of Poles. The *dhikr* that he mentions went on like so: 'ya huwa, ya man huwa huwa, ya man lā ilāha illā huwa.' Burūsawī 2003, 403. The editors of *An Anthology of Qur'ānic Commentaries* identify him as Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband but I have not found sources that corroborate that.

55 With the term 'ibn al-shaykh' Bursevī must be referring to Ottoman Qur'ān scholar Şeyhzāde (d. 950/1543) and his commentary on Bayżāvi's *tafsīr*. See Baş 2010.

56 Burūsawī 2003, 404.

negation and affirmation leading to an increase in knowledge as the phrase leads the one who utters it to union and unicity (*jam' wa ahadiyya*). He parallels this to the next part of the *shahāda*, the phrase ‘Muhammad is the Messenger of God’ which he links to another pair of Sufi technical terms – separation and singularity (*farq wa wāhidīyya*). Both of these phrases, according to Bursevi, refer to spiritual stations (*martaba*) during which the seeker witnesses the true oneness of God (*tawhid ḥaqīqi ḥaqqāni*).⁵⁷ He stresses that God’s true divine oneness is oneness witnessed by the Sufi, and not one perceived simply through the mental faculty.⁵⁸ As we can see, Bursevi here uses a number of different words derived from the same Arabic root *w-b-d*, to describe the complex Sufi idea of God being distinct and wholly different from humans and the possibility for a kind of union with Him during their lifetime. He concludes the discussion with verses by Jāmi that specifically deal with the term *wahda* (Pers. *vahdat*), divine oneness or, unicity:

Garcha lā dāsht tiragi-yi 'adam
Dārad illā furūgh-i nūr-i qadam
Garcha lā būd kān kufr-u jahūd
Hast illā kalid-i ganj-i shubūd

Chūn kunad lā basāt-i kathrat ṭayy
Dahad illā za-jām-i vaḥdat may
Ān rahānad za-naqsh-i bish-u kam-at
v-in rasānad ba-vahdat-i qadam-at

Tā nasāzī hijāb-i kathrat dūr
Nadahad āftāb-i vaḥdat nūr
Dā'im ān āftāb tābān-ast
Az hijāb-i tū az tū panhān-ast

Gar birūn ā'i az hijāb-i tū'i
Murtafa' gardad az miyāna dū'i
Dar zamin-i zamān-u kawn-i makān
*Hama ū binī āshkār-u nihān*⁵⁹

Translation:

While ‘no’ has the darkness of non-existence
 ‘Except’ has the splendour of eternity
 While ‘no’ is a place of unbelief and denial
 ‘Except’ is the key to the treasure-chest of witnessing

57 Separation and union (*farq wa jam'*) are Sufi technical terms and stages on the Sufi path as outlined in Qushayri’s Epistle on Sufism. See Qushayri 2007, 87.

58 Burūsawi 2003, 404.

59 See Jāmi, *Silsilat al-zahab*. I thank the anonymous reviewer for identifying this source for the poem above.

As ‘no’ digs up the ground of multiplicity
 ‘Except’ pours wine from the cup of oneness
 The former sets you free from images of gain and loss,
 The latter delivers you to the oneness of eternity

If you don’t throw away the veil of multiplicity
 The sun of oneness won’t bathe you in its light
 That sun – while always shining –
 Is hidden from you by the veil of your self

If you come out from the veil of your self
 The duality will disappear in the space in the middle
 In the space of time and the being of place
 All is He, see, hidden and revealed.⁶⁰

Bursevi does not provide any interpretation of Jāmī’s poem. What we see throughout the poem, however, is consistent reliance on the oneness-multiplicity pair – a central pillar to Ibn ‘Arabi’s cosmology based on the notion that divine manifestation in the human world takes place through the divine names and thus reflects both the multiplicity of His attributes and His simultaneous oneness, or unicity, an idea often referred to as *wahdat al-wujūd*, the oneness of Existence. Bursevi’s choice of Jāmī in particular appears to confirm the Sufi significance of his poem above. As Sajjad Rizvi argues, Jāmī was a ‘preeminent poet-theologian of the school of Ibn ‘Arabi’ especially in the context of his discussion of *wahdat al-wujūd*.⁶¹ In other words, Bursevi’s use of Jāmī to explain a key concept in Akbarian philosophy and Sufism lends authority to his own exegesis.

I argue that Jāmī’s poem here serves as an illustration and perhaps demonstration or proof for the complex Sufi idea of God’s simultaneous oneness and multiplicity of manifestations. Furthermore, the poem marks the end of a section before Bursevi moves on to the next part of his commentary on the throne verse. Its placement and lack of interpretation highlight its significance as a feature of the *tafsīr* that rather than needing explanation itself, explains the scriptural text.

3.3. Rūmī and the Divine Throne and Footstool (*‘arsh wa-kursī*)

At a later point in his *tafsīr* of the throne verse, Bursevi cites Rūmī’s *Masnavī* while interpreting the reference to God’s throne and footstool (*‘arsh wa-kursī*). He begins by clarifying that the throne is a metaphor and that there is no actual physical seat on which God is sitting. Instead, God uses this term to explain His Essence and Attributes to humanity in such a way that people would be able to understand these concepts. Following this, he discusses the superiority of the throne over the footstool, stressing that the throne surrounds everything and might be considered the eighth celestial

60 Burūsawī 2003, 404. My translation. For another translation, see Hamza et al. 2010, 230.

61 See Rizvi 2006, 59.

sphere (of the constellations). Next, Bursevî cites the well-known early Qur'ân commentator Muqâtil b. Sulaymân on the footstool, which is carried by four angels.⁶²

At this point, he cites the Sufi *tafsîr* work attributed to Najm al-Dîn Kubrâ and Râzî, the *Tâ'wilât al-Najmiyya* on the importance to not interpret what is said in the Qur'ân and hadith only with an eye to their words' meanings but also to their forms (*bi'l ma'âni wa-lâ bi-ṣûratihâ*) highlighting the binary between meaning and form that is typical in Sufi writing informed by Neoplatonism, such as Ibn 'Arabî's.⁶³ The quotation stresses that God created everything in the world of form (*ālam al-ṣûra*) with its equivalent in the realm of meaning (*ālam al-mâ'nâ*) – the afterlife (*al-ākhîra*) – and everything that has equivalent in the realm of form, has an equivalent in the realm of the Real (*ālam al-haqq*) which is the unseen. Furthermore, God has not created anything in the realm of the Real without an equivalent and example in the realm of man (*ālam al-insân*). The equal of the throne in the world of man, is his heart – the locus of the settling of the Spirit (*rûh*). The equivalent of the footstool is thus the innermost heart (*sîr*) of man. The segment concludes that though the throne is what God rests on, it is also said to be like a ring between the heavens and the earth by virtue of the expanse of the heart of the believer. Immediately after the quotation from the *Tâ'wilât*, Bursevî cites Rûmî's *Masnavî*:

*Gust paygambar ki ḥaqqa farmûda ast
Man na-γunjam hîch dar bâlâ-u past
Dar zamin-u āsamân-u 'arsh nîz
Man na-γunjam in yaqîn dâñ ay 'azîz
Dar dil-i mu'min bi-γunjam ay 'ajab
Gar marâjû'i dar ân dil-hâ ṭalab
Khwud buzurgî 'arsh bâshad bas madîd
Layk ṣûrat ki-st chûn ma'nâ rasîd*⁶⁴

Translation:

The Prophet said that the Real [viz., God] said,
I am not contained in the high and low
I am not contained in the earth or heavens or the [divine] throne
Know this, oh dear!
I am contained in the heart of the believer, oh wonder!
If you want to find me, seek those hearts.
The greatness of the throne will suffice
What is form when meaning has arrived?⁶⁵

62 Burûsawî 2003, 409. Note that Hamza et al. 2010 have found that this part of the *tafsîr* is distinct from Muqâtil's actual commentary.

63 See Chittick 1998, xxxiii. On the attribution of the *tafsîr*, see Ballanfat 2003; Ballanfat 2004.

64 Rûmî, *Masnavî*, Book 1.2654–2655; 2657–2658.

65 Another possible translation is, 'Who is form when meaning has arrived?'. I thank Jamal Elias for his help in translating this line.

Like in the earlier examples, Bursevi provides no commentary on the Persian verses. Rather, the reference to the divine throne in Rūmī's poem concludes a section of the *tafsir* through an apt illustration, while also conveying a complex Sufi technical term in a lyrical fashion. What is different in this case is that Bursevi offers no interpretation of the passage of the *Ta'wilāt* preceding the *Masnawi* verses either. This may suggest that to him, the two texts are seamlessly linked in both referencing the divine throne but also the complex dynamic between form and meaning as understood by Sufis. In other words, Rūmī's verses provide the interpretation of the Kubravi *tafsir* for the readers of the *Rūh al-bayān*.

4. Discussion: Persian Poetry as a Vehicle for Authority Building

How does Bursevi's exegesis of the Throne verse compares to that of other commentators? A brief look at some of the most important pre-modern commentators shows that they all stress the nobility of the verse and the merits of its recitation, i.e. its liturgical use and discuss at length the relationship and difference between God's Throne (*arsh*) vs Footstool (*kursī*).⁶⁶ The jinn are much less discussed in other *tafsīrs*, making Bursevi's interpretation, distinctive in its extensive and concrete discussion of the verse's talismanic power against the jinn, devils, sorcerers, and its power to erase bad deeds. Whether this emphasis on talismanic power is a feature significant to the *Rūh al-bayān* more broadly is a question that merits further research.

As I have shown above, in the *Rūh al-bayān*, Bursevi's use of Persian poetry confirms Ahmed and Gürbüzel's arguments about the hermeneutical significance of the *Masnawi* and its status as a sacred text and even as ongoing revelation. Specifically, in his *tafsir*, Bursevi cites several well-known Persian poets in addition to Rūmī, thus extending the idea of Rūmī's *Masnawi* as a 'second Qur'ān' to a Persian literary canon that also includes Sa'di, Hāfiẓ, Jāmī, among others. I argue that Bursevi's interpretative method – which blends Persian poetry with classical sources for Qur'ānic interpretation (many of which were originally written in Arabic) with Ottoman sources (both written and unwritten, such as references to teachings in his own order) indicates that, in the *Rūh al-bayān*, classical Persian poetry functions as a specific hermeneutical and pedagogical tool. To be precise, Bursevi utilizes Persian poems to not only engage in an exegesis of the Qur'ān 'by other means,' but to specifically explain complex Sufi technical terms.

In fact, a close reading of the *tafsir* confirms the importance of Bursevi's own framing of his work as mixing Sufi words with Persian poems as it highlights the synergy between the two in the *Rūh al-bayān*. As I showed in my close reading of excerpts from Bursevi's *tafsir* of the throne verse, he picks specific verses in Persian that illustrate the complex Sufi ideas that he reads in the Qur'ānic base text. These Sufi ideas – as I have demonstrated here – are often grounded in Ibn 'Arabi's cosmology which we know

66 See Hamza et al. 2010, 127–63.

was quite popular in Jilwati thought and teaching.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the Persian verses that Bursevi embeds in the *tafsir* are, as the examples above show, not tangentially related to the topics discussed but often contain the exact same key word or words that he seeks to explain in the *tafsir*, suggesting that to Bursevi, the poetry and the prose that he cites are both of Sufi importance and all part and parcel of the same matrix of knowledge.

It is important to differentiate Bursevi's method of interpretation and its cultural context in the early modern Ottoman empire from the content and context of the classical Persian authors that he cites so frequently. While there is ample evidence for the direct relevance of Sufi ideas to Rūmī and Jāmī's poetry, the relationship between the two is less clear for some of the other authors Bursevi incorporates into his *tafsir*. For instance, as Domenico Ingenito argues, the question whether to designate Sa‘di and his poetry as Sufi is debated. While we know that he spent a considerable amount of time in Sufi lodges and that his poetry addressed both Sufis and kings, his work departs from scholastic Sufism in important ways.⁶⁸ Furthermore, as Dominic Parviz Brookshaw demonstrates, Hāfiż's poems openly criticize corrupt and materialistic Sufis as well as ascetics, evidence which Brookshaw argues indicates that 'Hafiz and his contemporaries wrote with a variety of contexts in mind and that their sophisticated audiences were capable of understanding a given poem on many levels'.⁶⁹ In the context of the *Rūh al-bayān*, what is significant is the strong resonance that we see between the classical Persian poetry and the Sufi notions espoused – a resonance which is not ready-made but which Bursevi, the commentator, creates through his particular method of exegesis.

The significance of this linking of Sufi notions with Persian poems and the base text of the Qur'ān is multifocal. By connecting the base text of the Qur'ān with the texts of the Persian poems, as well as Ottoman *tafsirs* and teachings from his own order, Bursevi is vesting significant interpretative authority in all of these sources. But Bursevi's hermeneutical method also raises important questions about his intended audiences and the politics of his multilingualism and erudition, as performed in the *Rūh al-bayān*. The seventeenth and eighteenth century in the Ottoman Empire saw a significant transformation of both the political and public spheres, where a new political class of officials enabled the rise of grandee households (salons) in which Sufis played a central role as teachers and advisers and elaborated a brand of Islam that was definitively anti-puritanical and centered on Persianate learning.⁷⁰

Bursevi began writing his *tafsir* in 1096/1685, a few years before his mentor's death, and continued on to complete it in 1117/1705 by which point he appears to have been

67 While support for Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy is of course possible outside a Sufi framework, based on Bursevi's work and particularly his autobiographical notes suggest that Akbarian thought was an indelible part of Jilwati training, teaching, mystical experiences, and literary output. See for instance, Burūsawi 2011, 7–84.

68 See Ingenito 2021, 221.

69 See Brookshaw 2019, 12. Also see Lewisohn 2015.

70 See Gürbüz 2023, 160.

a recognized Sufi shaykh with a significant number of powerful patrons, based on his own writings. We can thus consider the *Rūh al-bayān* as an archive of Bursevi's authority construction before an audience of potential patrons as well as, in all likelihood, fellow career Sufis as well as disciples, at the very time when he would have sought to establish himself on the public scene as 'Osmān Fażlī's successor and the head of the Jilwati order.⁷¹ In other words, I argue that Bursevi's multilingualism and particularly, his use of Persian poetry in his *tafsir* to explain otherwise complex Sufi ideas can be seen as the stage for his own politics of advancement and recognition from audiences who were particularly interested in classical Persian literature as well as Sufi ideas. Bursevi's potential audiences of fellow Sufis and powerful patrons are not mutually exclusive, particularly as the ranks of Sufi orders were increasingly populated by Ottoman bureaucrats in the 18th and 19th centuries. His demonstrated ability to, as I have argued, 'translate' complex Sufi notions – especially those of Ibn 'Arabī's cosmology – more understandable through the use of Persian poetry may have rendered him an important layer of linguistic and epistemic authority in light of what appears to have been a contested leadership of his order, the Jilwatiyya.⁷²

Was Bursevi successful in gaining the recognition he may have sought from his potential patrons? Given the number of dedicatory treatises he composed for high-ranking Ottoman officials in the 1120s/1710s and 1130s/1720s up to his death, I would say he must have enjoyed at least some relative success. If so, the *Rūh al-bayān* offers us a window into the making of one of the most prolific Ottoman authors of all time.

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71 Elias observes in his analysis of Bursevi's *tafsir* of Sura al-Fātiḥa that given its internal references, the text assumes a certain level of familiarity with Sufi thought. See Elias 2022, 248.

72 See Atanasova 2016, 17–21.

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