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Persian Poetry, Sufi Authority, and Ottoman Multilingualism: İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳī Bursevī's Qurʾān Commentary, the *Rūḥ al-bayān*

Abstract

This paper explores the functions of Persian poetry in Ottoman Sufi İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳī Bursevī's most well-known work, his encyclopaedic *tafsīr*, the *Rūḥ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (*The Spirit of Elucidation in Qurʾānic Interpretation*). I argue that Bursevī (Ar. Burūsāwī) uses Persian poems alongside traditional sources for Qurʾān 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 Shahab Ahmed's argument that through Rūmī's *Maṣnavī* 'the meaning of the Qurʾān is perceived and produced and illuminated by fiction, and the meaning of fiction is perceived, produced and illuminated by the Qurʾān,' by demonstrating that Bursevī extends this intertwining of fiction and the Qurʾān 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 *Rūḥ al-bayān* and Bursevi'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, Qurʾānic exegesis, multilingualism.

In the preface to his voluminous, trilingual Qurʾān commentary, the *Rūḥ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, Ottoman Sufi author İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳī Bursevī (Ar. Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī Burūsāwī) (1063–1137/1653–1725) describes the process of writing the work as rooted in his collection of *tafāsīr* '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 (*maʿārif*). 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 (*ṣālihāt al-aʿmāl wa'l-khālaṣāt al-athār*),' a

1 Burūsawī 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 Bursevī's *tafsīr* is his use of Persian poetry. In writing about the *Rūḥ al-bayān* in his autobiographical notes, Bursevī highlights that he prepared it in an 'original fashion' whereby he mixed Sufi terms (*kalimāt al-taṣawwuf*) with Persian poems where useful (*mazajtu al-taqrīr bi'l-abyāt al-fārisiya ḥasabamā sāʿduha al-maḥall*).[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 *tafsīr* as well as, potentially, the fluctuating views on the propriety of some elements of Bursevī's hermeneutics.[4]

In this paper, I argue that Bursevī's use of Persian poems in his multilingual *tafsīr* 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 *tafsīr* 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 *tafsīr* – as the consummate proof to the influential patrons that he sought for his worthiness of their support.

1. Introducing İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳī Bursevī (1063–1137/1653–1725)

With over a hundred works to his name, İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳī 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 *Rūḥ 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 sharḥ. 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 sharḥ 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 Bursevī's life we learn from his autobiographical notes penned across several treatises, particularly the *Tamām al-fayḍ 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 Namlı, and numerous doctoral dissertations and master's theses in Turkish, Bursevī is yet to receive systematic study in a Western language.[5]

Bursevī 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 ʿOṣmān Fażlī Atpazarī (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, Bursevī mentions memorizing the Qurʾān and learning calligraphy, and studying the religious sciences (*ʿulūm*), grammar (*ṣarf*), syntax (*naḥw*), 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 Fażlī – by then head of the Jilwati order – for further study at the latter's Sufi lodge in Istanbul. Bursevī describes Fażlī's teachings as approximating a madrasa curriculum in that they featured not only the Sufi texts and the study of the invisible (*bāṭin*) knowledge but also the study of the visible (*ẓāhir*) 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 Fażlī, Bursevī also learned Persian and read a number of Persian books: the Persian poet Saʿdī Shirāzī (d. 691/1292) and his masterpieces, the *Bustān* and *Gulistān*; Jāmī (d. 898/1492) and the *Bahāristān* (modelled after Saʿdī's *Bustān*); Ottoman *şeyḫülislām* Kemālpaşazāde (d. 940/1534) and his *Nigāristān* (modelled after the *Gulistān*); Rūmī's *Maṣnavī* and *Fīhi mā fīhi*, Timurid polymath and Sufi Ḥusayn Vāʿiẓ-i Kāshifī (d. 910/1504–1505) and his *tafsīr*,[9] the *Dīvān* of Ẓahīr al-Fāryābī (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 Namlı 2001. For studies on Bursevī in English, see Atanasova 2016; Cook 2019; and Elias 2022.

6 See Cook 2019, 72.

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

8 See Namlı 2001, 36–7.

9 Bursevī must be referring to Kemāluddīn Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī al-Kāshifī (d. 910/1504–5), a well-known Timurid preacher and poet, who composed the *tafsīr Mawāhib-i ʿaliyya,* also known as *Tafsīr-i Ḥusaynī*. See Yousofi 2012; Burūsawī 2011, 80–1.

to be one of the three 'prophets' of Persian poetry;[10] the poetry of Kamāl Khujandī (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-manẓūm wa'l-manthūr*).'[11]

Following his initiation into the Jilwati order and his investiture experience, Bursevī 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, Fażlī summoned him to Edirne where the latter was advising Sultan Meḥmed IV (r. 1057–1098/1648–1687). He moved to Bursa as Fażlī's deputy there in the same year and began writing the *Rūḥ al-bayān*.[12]

Bursevī's involvement with Ottoman officialdom began shortly after Fażlī'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 (*vaʿẓ ve naṣīḥat*) to the Grand Vizier Elmas Meḥmed Paşa and Sultan Muṣṭafā II (r. 1106–1114/1695–1703).[13] While we don't have much detail about what specific roles Bursevī 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, Bursevī 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 vaḳʿası*) in 1115/1703, a Janissary revolt took place in the course of which the *şeyḫülislām* Feyżullāh Efendi was killed, Sultan Muṣṭafā II dethroned, and Aḥmed III (r. 1115–1143/1703–1730) installed in his

10 See de Bruijn 2012.
11 Burūsawī 2011, 80–1.
12 See Namlı 2001, 50; Cook 2019, 80–1.
13 Cook notes that the battles Bursevī likely joined in were those of Lugos (1695), Ulaș/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] Bursevī 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, Bursevī also produced a significant number of dedicatory writings to high-ranking officials, such as *Tuḥfe-i ʿAliyye* (*The Gift to ʿAlī*), written for Grand Vizier Çorlulu ʿAlī Paşa whom he advised on various matters and *Tuḥfe-i Recebiyye*, 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 Dāmād ʿAlī 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 Dāmād İbrāhīm Paşa who frequently sought his advice and with whom Bursevī appears to have kept active correspondence. He addressed other officials, such as to the Chief Bodyguard of the Sultan (*serḫāṣeki*), Ṭūbāzāde Meḥmed, in his treatise *Tuḥfe-i Ḫāṣekiyye* (*A Gift to the Haseki*) and to the Superintendent of the Imperial Gardens (*ḫāṣbaḥçeler müfettişi*), Baḥrī Ḥüseyin Efendi, the *Risāle-i Ḥüseyniyye* (*A Treatise for Hüseyin*) and the *Tuḥfe-i Baḥriyye* (*A Gift to Bahri*).[18]

These close relationships to officialdom not only provided Bursevī with the material benefits of patronage but also on occasion shielded him from other religious elites' criticism. In 1722 his patron, Dāmād İbrāhīm Paşa, received a complaint from the Mufti of Istanbul, concerning his preaching on Ibn ʿArabī's controversial notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unicity of being). Overwhelming support for Bursevī however, prevented his prosecution.[19] In 1135/1723, he moved back to Bursa where he oversaw the construction of the Muḥammediye Mosque using his own funds, and renovated his tekke in the city.[20] He died two years later, on Dhū'l-Qaʿda 9 1137/July 20, 1725, and was buried in a tomb next to the mosque he built near Tuzpazarı.[21]

I argue that Bursevī'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 (*quṭb*), whom he understood to be his mentor, Fażlī. While his claims to authority may reflect his fraught legitimacy amidst competing Jilwati 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 Bursevī's sermons on God's unity (*tawḥīd*) were taken out of context. He also notes that the controversy which centered on Bursevī'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 Bursevī'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 ʿAzīz Maḥmūd Hüdāyī and his mentor, ʿOs̱mān Fażlī Atpazarī, both of whom advised several Ottoman sultans.

Bursevī's *Rūḥ al-bayān* 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, *tafsīr* 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, Bursevī's erudition, encyclopaedic knowledge, and multilingualism on display in the *tafsīr* 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 *Rūḥ al-bayān* and Bursevī's Multilingualism

Largely considered to be his magnum opus, the ten volume Qurʾān commentary is one of Bursevī'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 *tafsīr* into Urdu may be interpreted as evidence to the commentary's continued popularity among Muslim readers. None of the printed editions of the *Rūḥ al-bayān* to date contain Bursevī's marginal notes in Ottoman Turkish available in the autograph, thus rendering an important source of information inaccessible to researchers.[23]

The *Rūḥ al-bayān* 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 Sakıb Yıldız's 1972 Ph.D. dissertation in French, sections of it have been recently translated into English in two volumes of a *tafsīr* 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 Bursevī's autograph of the *tafsīr*, including examples of the marginal notes, Bursevi, *Rūḥ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, İnebey Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Genel 13, 90 ff., ff. 82–83. The most recent edition of the work, in Turkish, Bursevī 2012–2020 also excludes important marginalia. Also see Cook 2019. Little is known about the reception of Bursevī's *tafsīr* – 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 *Rūḥ al-bayān* in these *tafsīr* primer volumes is significant as it situates this popular Ottoman Qurʾān commentary among its Arabic and Persian peers.[26]

Bursevī 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 ʿOṣmān Fażlī and the head of his order.[28]

As mentioned earlier, Bursevī 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 Qurʾān commentaries and texts widely used in Ottoman madrasa education at the time – such as the *tafsīr*s of Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), Bayżāvī (d. 685/1286), and key texts from the school of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) – with poems by many of the same Persian authors that he mentions reading as a Sufi novice: Rūmī, Ḥāfiẓ, Saʿdī. He also incorporates the teachings of multiple Jilwati shaykhs from his order as well as his own interpretations of Qurʾānic verses derived from sermons he gave as a preacher.

In the *Rūḥ al-bayān*, Bursevī interprets the Qurʾān 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 *taʿūdh* and the *basmala* phrases, 'I seek protection in God from Satan the accursed' (*aʿūdhu 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 (*ḥikma*) for it [viz., the *taʿūdh*] 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 Qurʾān or rather, enter in a dialogue (*munājāt*) with the Beloved, needs to purify the tongue because he has tarnished himself with idle talk (*fuḍūl al-kalām*)

26 Bauer et al. 2022. Excerpts from the *Rūḥ al-bayān* thus appear alongside those of early, classical, and modern exegetes as well as Shiʿi 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), Şeyḫzāde (d. 950/1543) and Üftāde (d. 988/1580), one of the founding figures of the Jilwati order. The volumes do not include Bursevī's marginalia in Ottoman Turkish.

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

28 Bursevī'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 *taʿūdh*. The folk of knowledge (*maʿrifa*) [viz. Sufis] have said: This word is the vehicle for those who come near (*mutaqarribīn*), 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-Naḥl): '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 Qurʾān and that it reflects the common consideration of seeking the protection of the gnostic reality (*al-ḥaqīqa al-ʿarifiyya*), another reference to Sufis.[31] He then cites a hadith and another Qurʾānic verse – also standard methods of *tafsīr* – to explain the occasion of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) of the verse in question. The hadith and the aya (Q 96:1) thus both link the *taʿūdh* 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' (*aʿūdhu*). Specifically, he cites synonyms for the verb in Arabic but also provides their Persian translations (e.g., 'take refuge' (*altajāʾ*, and *panāh mikhāham*), 'resist temptation' (*istiʿaṣama* and *nigāh dāsht mikhāham*), etc.). Next he engages in brief morphological analysis of the Arabic term whereby he explains the two *maṣdar*s 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-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* – a work considered to be simultaneously 'philosophical and *bi'l-raʾy*' 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' (*aʿūdhu*).

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 *Ḥāshiya al-Kashshāf*.[34] This is followed by a couplet from Rūmī's *Maṣnavī*, '*dar taṣavvur zāt-i ū ra gānj kū, tā dar āyad dar taṣavvur miṣl-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 ʿArabī 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 *taʿūdh* 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-kabīr* 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 ʿAbbās (d. 68/686–688), widely considered the 'father of Qurʾānic exegesis,' who reports that devil previously known as ʿAzāzīl or Nāʾil became named 'Satan' after God cursed him. Bursevī then cites *Rawḍ al-akhyār*, a commentary on Zamakhsharī's *Rabīʿa al-Abrār* by Ottoman author Muḥyiddīn Muḥammed b. Ḳāsım Amāsī (d. 940/1533) – also known as İbn Ḫaṭīb Ḳāsım – 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 Zamakhsharī's manuscript being misplaced by the jinn. He follows this with another Qurʾānic 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 Fātiḥa 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 ʿUmar (d. 23/644), Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 114/732), early Baghdadi Sufi Kharrāz (d. 277/890), Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), the Sufi and occultist Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 622/1225), the *Taʾwīlāt al-Najmiyya*, Rūmī, Ḥāfiẓ, Ibn ʿArabī, Sufi and first Ottoman madrasa instructor Dāvūd Ḳayṣerī (d. 751/1350), Molla Fenārī (d. 834/1431), amidst other Qurʾānic verses and prophetic hadith.

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

35 Rūmī 2004, 11.

36 See Vaglieri 2012. I have not found much information about İbn Ḫaṭīb, 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 Amāsī, Muḥammad ibn Qāsim, 1459 or 1460–1533 or 1534. *Rawḍ al-akhyār al-muntakhab min Rabīʿ 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 Bursevī cites in his *tafsīr* of Sura al-Fātiḥa, we notice that the most cited author is Saʿdī (five times), followed by the text the *Taʾwīlāt al-Najmiyya* (four times), Rūmī, Mollā Fenārī, and Nasafī (d. 537/1142) (the *Taysīr*) (each three times), and Ṣadreddīn Ḳonevī (two times). Commentators Muqātil (d. 150/767), Ibn ʿAṭā (d. 309/922), Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), Bayżāvī (d. 685/1286), Ḳayṣerī (d. 751/1350), Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), Ebūssuʿūd (d. 982/1574), follow at being mentioned once each. Bursevī also utilizes numerous hadith and sayings of the Prophet, as well as Qurʾānic verses.

This breakdown largely reflects citations in other suras and verses (depending on length), whereby Persian poetry and *tafsīr*s by Sufis dominate, in addition to early and classical *tafsīr*s (e.g., Muqātil, Zamakhsharī), Bursevī's mentions of his shaykh, ʿOs̱mān Fażlī, or other Jilwati Sufi (e.g. Üftāde, Hüdāyī, etc.) and his own interpretations. Amidst the Persian poets Bursevī cites, the most frequently cited ones are Rūmī, Saʿdī, and Ḥāfiẓ, followed by Bursevī's incorporation of Persian literary sources in his *tafsīr* is in and of itself not surprising. Scholars have noted the special relationship between Rūmī's *Maṯnavī* and the Qurʾān particularly in Persian and Ottoman literature. As Aslıhan Gürbüzel argues in her recent monograph, 'early modern Persianate reading cultures highly revered the *Mesnevī* [...]' and Rūmī often referred to himself as the 'prophet' of his time and to the *Maṯnavī* as the 'second Qurʾān,' or as 'revelation' (*vaḥy*). According to Mevlevi teachings, the *Maṯnavī* could shed light on the 'inner meaning of the Quran.'[38] This treatment of the *Maṯnavī* was based on a broader understanding of revelation as not limited to the Qurʾān 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 *Maṯnavī* stood out as a sacred text.[39]

What may well have enabled this framing of the *Maṯnavī* were the over 4,500 direct citations of Qurʾānic verses that appear in the work – a feature that the late Shahab Ahmed argued renders the work 'effectively, a Qurʾānic exegesis by other means.' According to Ahmed, 'Rūmī dis-locates the text of the Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān – and fiction.[40]

As I will show below, a close reading of Bursevī's use of Persian poems in his *tafsīr* confirms Ahmed's and Gürbüzel's findings about the importance of the *Maṯnavī* 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 *taḍmīn* is worth exploring further. Bursevī'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. İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı Bursevī, Rūḥ al-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qurʾān, *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 Qurʾān, but it also tells us something new: that Bursevī extends this treatment to a broader Persian literary canon beyond Rūmī and the *Maṯnavī* – 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 Qurʾānic verses due to its believed talismanic, or protective powers, Bursevī references three Persian poets, Ḥāfiẓ, 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 (*fayḍ*), the oneness of God (*waḥda*), and the divine throne (*ʿarsh*). 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. Ḥāfiẓ 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 (*fayḍ ilāhī*). Sometimes translated as divine 'overflowing,' or a 'blessing' or 'grace,' *fayḍ* is a key Sufi term, particularly in Ibn ʿArabī'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 Qurʾānic verses that demonstrates the connections in meaning between *Allāh* (God), *lillāh* (to god), *lahu* (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 Muḥammed 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 ʿAlāeddīn Ḫalvetī (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 Şeyḫ 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-fayḍ al-tajallī*) in Ibn ʿArabī's thought. As Chittick points out, self-disclosure (*tajallī*) is so central to Ibn ʿArabī's teachings that he was called one of the Companions of Self-Disclosure (*aṣḥāb al-tajallī*). See Chittick 1998, 52. Also see Ibn al-ʿArabi 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 Üftade, 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 ʿAlāeddīn Ḫalvetī, see Karataş 2011, 91–7.

46 Burūsawī 2003, 403.

47 *ibid*. For Şeyḫ 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 ʿajība*) 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-fayḍ min Allāh taʿāla*).

Bursevī then introduces the poem by merely stating 'Ḥāfiẓ said' (*qāla al-Ḥāfiẓ*):

> *Fayż-i rūḥ al-quds ar bāz madad farmāyad*
> *Dīgarān ham bi-kunand āncha masīḥā 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 Bursevī'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 Ḥāfiẓ. It is obvious that in the above case, Bursevī is not using the term *fayḍ* only in a generalized fashion to mean divine grace or blessing but imbues it with a more specific meaning, signalled by Ḥāfiẓ's verse dealing with the emanation of the Holy Spirit. The notion of *fayḍ* - which William Chittick terms 'effusion' – is a key Sufi term that Ibn ʿArabī defines as a method of gaining knowledge beyond the domain of reason.[50] *Fayḍ al-rūḥ* is particularly important to Bursevī 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 Ḥāfiẓ's verse here, confirming Ahmed's argument about the intertwining of fiction and revelation – as the verse highlights important Sufi notion that Bursevī sees embedded in the Qurʾānic text, the intertextuality in Ḥāfiẓ's verse allows the revelatory text of the Qurʾān (in its reference to Jesus) to elucidate the poetic text. The Persian poem transcends language boundaries because the technical term – *fayḍ* (Pers. *fayż*) – remains the same in Bursevī's commentary in Arabic, and the couplet in Persian. At the same time, the Ottoman Jilwati Sufi teaching is bolstered by the Persian verse by bestowing the authority of someone as prominent as Ḥāfiẓ onto Üftāde and consequently, to Bursevī himself. The verse, teaching, and

48 Ḥāfiẓ, *Ghazals*, 143.9.
49 Burūsawī 2003, 403. My translation.
50 See Fitzroy 2020, 43 on the divine 'manifestation-emanation' (*al-fayḍ al-tajallī*) in Ibn ʿArabī's thought. Also see Ibn al-ʿArabi 2004, xxiii–xxiv and 4–5. As Chittick points out, self-disclosure (*tajallī*) is so central to Ibn ʿArabī's teachings that he was called one of the Companions of Self-Disclosure (*aṣḥāb al-tajallī*). See Chittick 1998, 52.
51 Burūsawī 2011, 77.

Qurʾānic 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 ʿArabī, whose writings Bursevī mentions reading from cover to cover.[52]

3.2. Jāmī and God's Oneness (waḥda)

As Bursevī continues his *tafsīr* of the throne verse after citing Ḥāfiẓ, we come across another Sufi term that he elucidates through the use of Persian poetry: *waḥda* (*vaḥdat*) (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 (*tasbiḥ*) and mentions how that gave him special powers.[54] Next, he explains that there are three levels of divine unicity (*tawḥīd*), the highest of which is the statement 'there is no God but me' (*lā illāha illā anā*) because it is at the stage (*maqām*) of absolute extinction of the self (*al-fanāʾ al-kullī*).

At this point in his *tafsīr*, he cites the commentary (*Ḥāşiye*) by Ottoman commentator Şeyḫzāde (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 Şeyḫzāde'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 [ʿOṣmān Fażlī] whom he describes as 'the spirit in my body,' (*rūḥī fī jasadī*). 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 ʿOṣmān 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 Qurʾanic 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 Qurʾān scholar Şeyḫzāde (d. 950/1543) and his commentary on Bayżāvī'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 (*jamᶜ wa aḥadiyya*). 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 wāḥidiyya*). Both of these phrases, according to Bursevī, refer to spiritual stations (*martaba*) during which the seeker witnesses the true oneness of God (*tawhīd ḥaqīqī ḥaqqānī*).[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, Bursevī here uses a number of different words derived from the same Arabic root *w-ḥ-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 Jāmī that specifically deal with the term *waḥda* (Pers. *vaḥdat*), divine oneness or, unicity:

Garcha lā dāsht tīragī-yi ᶜadam
Dārad illā furūgh-i nūr-i qadam
Garcha lā būd kān kufr-u jaḥūd
Hast illā kalīd-i ganj-i shuhūd

Chūn kunad lā basāṭ-i kathrat ṭayy
Dahad illā za-jām-i vaḥdat may
Ān rahānad za-naqsh-i bīsh-u kam-at
v-īn rasānad ba-vaḥdat-i qadam-at

Tā nasāzī ḥijāb-i kathrat dūr
Nadahad āftāb-i vaḥdat nūr
Dāᵓim ān āftāb tābān-ast
Az ḥijāb-i tū az tū panhān-ast

Gar bīrūn āᵓī az ḥijāb-i tūᵓī
Murtafaᶜ gardad az miyāna dūᵓī
Dar zamīn-i zamān-u kawn-i makān
Hama ū bīnī 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 jamᶜ*) are Sufi technical terms and stages on the Sufi path as outlined in Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism. See Qushayri 2007, 87.
58 Burūsawī 2003, 404.
59 See Jāmī, *Silsilat al-ẕahab*. 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]

Bursevī 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 ʿArabī'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 *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the oneness of Existence. Bursevī'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 ʿArabi' especially in the context of his discussion of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.[61] In other words, Bursevī'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 Bursevī 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 (ʿarsh wa-kursī)

At a later point in his *tafsīr* of the throne verse, Bursevī cites Rūmī's *Maṯnavī* while interpreting the reference to God's throne and footstool (*ʿarsh 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, Bursevī cites the well-known early Qurʾān commentator Muqatīl b. Sulaymān on the footstool, which is carried by four angels.[62]

At this point, he cites the Sufi *tafsīr* work attributed to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā and Rāzī, the *Taʾwīlāt al-Najmiyya* on the importance to not interpret what is said in the Qurʾān and hadith only with an eye to their words' meanings but also to their forms (*bi'l maʿānī wa-lā bi-ṣūratiha*) highlighting the binary between meaning and form that is typical in Sufi writing informed by Neoplatonism, such as Ibn ʿArabī's.[63] The quotation stresses that God created everything in the world of form (*ʿālam al-ṣūra*) with its equivalent in the realm of meaning (*ʿālam al-maʿnā*) – the afterlife (*al-ākhira*) – and everything that has equivalent in the realm of form, has an equivalent in the realm of the Real (*ʿālam al-ḥaqq*) 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 (*ʿālam al-insān*). The equal of the throne in the world of man, is his heart – the locus of the settling of the Spirit (*rūḥ*). The equivalent of the footstool is thus the innermost heart (*sirr*) 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 *Taʾwīlāt*, Bursevī cites Rūmī's *Maṯnavī*:

Guft paygambar ki ḥaqq farmūda ast
Man na-gunjam hīch dar bālā-u past
Dar zamīn-u āsamān-u ʿarsh nīz
Man na-gunjam īn yaqīn dān ay ʿazīz
Dar dil-i muʾmin bi-gunjam ay ʿajab
Gar marā jūʾī dar ān dil-hā ṭalab
Khwud buzurgī ʿarsh bāshad bas madīd
Layk ṣūrat kī-st chūn maʿnā rasīd [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 Burūsawī 2003, 409. Note that Hamza et al. 2010 have found that this part of the *tafsīr* is distinct from Muqātil's actual commentary.

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

64 Rūmī, *Masnavī*, 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, Bursevī provides no commentary on the Persian verses. Rather, the reference to the divine throne in Rūmī's poem concludes a section of the *tafsīr* through an apt illustration, while also conveying a complex Sufi technical term in a lyrical fashion. What is different in this case is that Bursevī offers no interpretation of the passage of the *Taʾwilāt* preceding the *Maṯnavī* 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 *tafsīr* for the readers of the *Rūḥ al-bayān*.

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

How does Bursevī'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 (*ʿarsh*) vs Footstool (*kursī*).[66] The jinn are much less discussed in other *tafsīr*s, making Bursevī'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 *Rūḥ al-bayān* more broadly is a question that merits further research.

As I have shown above, in the *Rūḥ al-bayān*, Bursevī's use of Persian poetry confirms Ahmed and Gürbüzel's arguments about the hermeneutical significance of the *Maṯnavī* and its status as a sacred text and even as ongoing revelation. Specifically, in his *tafsīr*, Bursevī cites several well-known Persian poets in addition to Rūmī, thus extending the idea of Rūmī's *Maṯnavī* as a 'second Qurʾān' to a Persian literary canon that also includes Saʿdī, Ḥāfiẓ, Jāmī, among others. I argue that Bursevī's interpretative method – which blends Persian poetry with classical sources for Qurʾānic 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 *Rūḥ al-bayān*, classical Persian poetry functions as a specific hermeneutical and pedagogical tool. To be precise, Bursevī utilizes Persian poems to not only engage in an exegesis of the Qurʾān 'by other means,' but to specifically explain complex Sufi technical terms.

In fact, a close reading of the *tafsīr* confirms the importance of Bursevī's own framing of his work as mixing Sufi words with Persian poems as it highlights the synergy between the two in the *Rūḥ al-bayān*. As I showed in my close reading of excerpts from Bursevī's *tafsīr* of the throne verse, he picks specific verses in Persian that illustrate the complex Sufi ideas that he reads in the Qurʾānic base text. These Sufi ideas – as I have demonstrated here – are often grounded in Ibn ʿArabī'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 Bursevī embeds in the *tafsīr* 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 *tafsīr*, suggesting that to Bursevī, 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 Bursevī'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 Bursevī incorporates into his *tafsīr*. For instance, as Domenico Ingenito argues, the question whether to designate Saʿdī 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, Ḥāfiẓ'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 *Rūḥ 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 Bursevī, 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 Qurʾān is multifocal. By connecting the base text of the Qurʾān with the texts of the Persian poems, as well as Ottoman *tafsīr*s and teachings from his own order, Bursevī is vesting significant interpretative authority in all of these sources. But Bursevī's hermeneutical method also raises important questions about his intended audiences and the politics of his multilingualism and erudition, as performed in the *Rūḥ 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]

Bursevī began writing his *tafsīr* 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 ʿArabī's philosophy is of course possible outside a Sufi framework, based on Bursevī'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, Burūsawī 2011, 7–84.

68 See Ingenito 2021, 221.

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

70 See Gürbüzel 2023, 160.

a recognized Sufi shaykh with a significant number of powerful patrons, based on his own writings. We can thus consider the *Rūḥ al-bayān* as an archive of Bursevī'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 ʿOṣmān Fażlī's successor and the head of the Jilwati order.[71] In other words, I argue that Bursevī's multilingualism and particularly, his use of Persian poetry in his *tafsīr* 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. Bursevī'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 ʿArabī'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 Bursevī 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 *Rūḥ 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 Bursevī's *tafsīr* 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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