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Dynamics and Periodization of Al-Qur'an Interpretation in the Ottoman Empire (1299-1923 AD)

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Abstract: The interpretation of the Qur'an during the Ottoman Empire is thought to have faced a period of stagnation, attributed to a lack of interpretive literature production. However, recent philological studies suggest a notable flourishing of Quranic interpretation during its golden age. This study aims to challenge this assumption by proposing a hypothesis that the practice of interpreting the Qur'an in the Ottoman Empire was shaped by historical conditions, political turmoil, and the intellectual capabilities of its people. It delves into the dynamics of Quranic interpretation activities, exploring chronological periods during the Ottoman era. Employing descriptive-analytical techniques within a historical context, the study conducts a literature review with primary sources, including Quranic commentary books by Ottoman interpreters, and secondary sources, such as journal articles and books on Quranic interpretation and Ottoman Empire history. The findings reveal that Quranic interpretation during the Ottoman Empire exhibited adaptability to historical changes. The observed dynamics are categorized into three periods: the interaction period, marked by the introduction of classical interpretive works; the culmination period, representing the peak of Quranic interpretation practice; and the decline period, characterized by a weakening tradition due to internal and external challenges faced by the Empire.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire; Periodisation of Interpretive tradition; Quranic Interpretation; Dynamic of Quranic Interpretation.

Abstrak: *Tradisi penafsiran al-Qur'an Turki Utsmani dianggap mengalami stagnasi, dengan alasan minimnya karya tafsir yang muncul pada masa tersebut. Akan tetapi penelitian-penelitian terbaru berbasis filologis menunjukkan adanya kemajuan tradisi tafsir al-Qur'an Turki Utsmani pada masa kejayaannya. Artikel ini turut menjawab asumsi tersebut dengan menghadirkan hipotesa bahwa tradisi tafsir Turki Utsmani merupakan hasil dari sejarah yang bersinggungan dengan gejolak politik dan daya intelektualitas masyarakatnya. Sehingga pertanyaan yang dijawab oleh artikel ini: Bagaimana dinamika tradisi tafsir Turki Utsmani dan periodisasi tradisi tafsirnya?. Jenis penelitian dalam artikel ini adalah kajian pustaka, menggunakan metode deskriptif-analitis dengan pendekatan historis. Data-data primer berupa kitab-kitab tafsir Turki Utsmani, data sekunder berupa buku atau artikel jurnal terkait dengan penafsiran dan sejarah Turki Utsmani. Hasil ditemukan, bahwa tradisi penafsiran Turki Utsmani tidak stagnan, akan tetapi dinamis sejalan dengan dinamika historis Turki Utsmani. Dinamika tersebut dapat di bagi dalam tiga periode: periode interaksi, yaitu perkenalan antara masyarakat Turki dengan karya-karya tafsir klasik; periode kulminasi, yaitu masa puncak kegemilangan tradisi penafsiran yang sejalan dengan kejayaan Turki Utsmani; dan periode deklinasi, yaitu ketika tradisi tafsir sudah mulai menurun karena permaslahan internal-eksternal kerajaan.*

Kata Kunci: *Turki Usmani; Periodesasi Tradisi Tafsir; Penafsiran al-Qur'an; Dinamika Penafsiran al-Qur'an.*

INTRODUCTION

The practice of interpreting the Quran has persisted from the time of its revelation to the present day, facilitated by the universal nature of the Quranic text (Wardani & Nadhiroh, 2020). This practice occurs when the Qur'an is employed as a source of inspiration to consistently engage in the process of interpretation and deriving meaning, rather than merely using it to justify specific opinions. Gamal al-Banna explicitly terms this pattern of interaction as a centrifugal pattern (Al-Banna, 2005). This centrifugal interaction can lead to the development of an interpretive tradition, which can subsequently be transmitted as distinct scientific disciplines through generations (Ridwan, 2017).

As an Islamic empire, the Ottoman Empire adopted various older interpretations of the Quran, evident in the literature consulted by the Turkish people during their initial encounter with Islam (Esat Özcan, 2020). Spanning South-eastern Europe to the Middle East, the empire endured for six centuries (Shaw, 1976). Throughout this period, concerted efforts were made to enhance the treasures of Quranic interpretation. Notably, these efforts included initiatives such as the propagation of tafsir-based education in madrasas, pulpits, and *tafsir halaqahs* in the presence of the sultan. Additionally, even in the administrative realm, the selection of civil servants involved assessments centred around the interpretation of Quranic verses (Burhan Baltacı, 2011).

Nevertheless, some scholars contend that Quranic interpretation during the Ottoman Empire era lacked a solid foundation. Husein al-Dzahabi's work, *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufassirun*, does not specifically address the topic of interpretation during that period. Similarly, Ignaz Golziher, in his book *Madzhab Tafsir*, overlooks the tafsir works from this specific era. İsmail Cerrahoğlu adopts a similar stance, asserting that the Quranic interpretation during that time was unproductive (Topal, 2022). Basyrul Muvid argues that the authorities' inclination to institutionalize the Asy'ariyah ideology as an official doctrine hampers the progress of interpretive activities within the Empire (Muvid, 2022).

The assertion of stagnation made by several scholars, as mentioned earlier, has been challenged by other researchers. Esma Topal (Topal, 2022) and Burhan Baltacı (Burhan Baltacı, 2011) are among those who oppose this assumption. They both contend that gauging progress in Quranic interpretation should not solely rely on widespread independent interpretive efforts. Instead, the advancement of interpretation should be evaluated in the context of its contribution to societal development. Additionally, Norah Abdul Aziz conducted research on 170 commentators (*mufassir*) who lived between the 7th and 14th centuries Hijriyah. Her writings emphasize that, besides comprehensive interpretive works, the growth of interpretation should take into account both minor and major interpretations (Al-Ali, 2022).

Other research has also been carried out by Achmad Yafik Mursyid who examined Elmalili Hamdi Yazir's work, *Tafsir Hak Dini Kur'an Dili* (Mursyid, 2020). Mursyid asserted that Elmalili did not display any inclination towards Turkification and modernization. Instead of aligning with the government's push for Turkification, Elmalili chose to enhance the general public's understanding of basic Islamic knowledge through interpretations. According to this study, the Turkish secular government intervened in the interpretation process post the Turkish revolution. However, Susan Gunasti, in her research, argues that Elmalili's interpretation effectively preserves the traditional lineage of Ottoman Empire interpretation, ensuring its continuation to the present generation (Gunasti, 2019). Gunasti's research on Elmalili's work is grounded in the assumption that interpretation does not emerge in isolation but is rather influenced by political and sociocultural factors within a specific society.

Servet Demirbaş delves into a more comprehensive examination of the epistemology underlying Elmalili's ideas in his interpretation. According to his research, Elmalili's interpretation reflects a classical style deeply rooted in the legacy of classical Islamic thought passed down through traditional Turkish madrasas (Demirbaş, 2021). The study's findings suggest that the tradition of Turkish tafsir was shaped by socio-cultural characteristics intricately linked to the classical learning culture of madrasas. The influence of classical Islamic thought on Turkish interpretation is further supported by the results of Kursoni's research. His investigation focused on Isma'il Haqi's book *Ruh al-Bayan*, and Haqi's background as a disciple of a Sufi contributed to the evident Sufi style in the work (Kusroni, 2019).

Drawing from the aforementioned research, it can be deduced that the practice of Quranic interpretation during the Ottoman era underwent periods of both culmination and decline. A comprehensive examination of the available Quranic commentaries from the Ottoman Empire era allows for an exploration of the dynamics involved in the interpretive process and the societal influences shaping it. This approach aids in establishing the chronological development of interpretation. The argument presented in this article asserts that the exegetical tradition in Ottoman Turkish is the result of a historical convergence of political turmoil and the intellectual capabilities of its people. Consequently, the primary focus of inquiry revolves around the dynamics of Quranic interpretation during the Ottoman Empire and the periodization of this interpretive tradition within that historical context.

METHOD

This study employs a written data-based library research using descriptive-analytical methods with a historical approach. The data is acquired through documentation techniques, focusing on sources related to Turkish interpretation and the history of the Ottoman Empire. Primary data includes Turkish interpretive works penned by Turkish commentators during the Ottoman era, while secondary data comprises books and journals relevant to the tafsir tradition and Ottoman Empire history. The historical examination of the Ottoman Empire specifically addresses aspects significant in the formation of tafsir traditions. The presentation of data is descriptive, complemented by interpretive works from that period. The analysed data is utilized to examine the influence of political dynamics on interpretive traditions.

The interpretive works of the Ottoman Empire are systematically presented, spanning from the pre-Ottoman era to the period just before the Empire's dissolution. The analysis of the data follows a deductive approach, focusing on the most widely acknowledged interpretive works during the Ottoman Empire's most dynamic historical period. This methodology is employed to determine the periodization of the exegetical tradition in the Turkish Empire and the approaches adopted by its interpreters.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Historical Dynamics of Ottoman Empire and Its Interaction with the Tradition of Qur'anic Interpretation

The Ottoman Empire originated as a nomadic group (Shaw, 1976) inhabiting the Mongol region and certain northern areas of China (Bosworth, 1980). This group is commonly referred to as Oghuz (Al-Azizi, n.d.) although some sources use the term Ghuzz (Shaw, 1976). The Oghuz people embraced Islam in the 9th century AD and progressively adopted it more widely in the 10th century AD. Their nomadic lifestyle persisted until the 13th century AD (Hasan, 1989). This means that for approximately 300 years after embracing Islam, the Oghuz

people did not establish their own system of government. However, during their introduction to Islam, the Oghuz people began studying Arabic books of tafsir (Quranic interpretation). These books included tafsir by Abū Mansūr Muhammad al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) *Te'wīlāt al-Sunnah*, Abū al-Lays al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) *Tafsīru Abū al-Lays al-Samarqandī*, Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144) *al-Kashshāf 'an hakā'ik al-tanzīl*, Abū al-Barakāt al-Nafṣī (d. 710 /1310), and *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta 'wīl*, the magnum opus of 'Abdullah bin 'Umar al-Baidawi (d. 1292 AD) (Esat Özcan, 2020).

In the 13th century AD, the Oghuz people began the process of settling in permanent residences in Central Asia, although this endeavour was cut short by the invasion of the Mongol Empire. Seeking refuge, the Oghuz people turned to their fellow Turkoman, the Seljuk Turks (Hasan, 1989). Pledging allegiance, the Oghuz people aligned themselves with the Seljuk Empire under the rule of Sultan Alauddin II (Syalabi, 1992). Between 1290-1300 AD, the Seljuk Empire faced devastation from Mongol attacks, leading to the death of Sultan Alauddin II. Earlier, the Oghuz people had acquired a parcel of land in the Anatolia region from the Sultan of the Seljuk, exchanging it for their military support against the Byzantines. Following the decline of the Seljuk Empire and the weakening of the Mongol Empire, Utsman declared the establishment of an Islamic dynasty and declared himself as Padisyah Al-Utsman. Eventually, in 1300 AD, his dynasty became known as the Ottoman Empire (Kia, 2011).

Before the formation of the empire, the Ottoman Empire lacked their own Islamic educational system. To deepen their understanding of Islam, Turkish people consistently pursued Islamic knowledge in madrasas affiliated with the Seljuk monarchy (Ihsanoglu, 2004). These educational institutions featured a curriculum that emphasized both traditional Islamic teachings and interpretations grounded in Sufism (Shaw, 1976). Following the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, a madrasa was established thirty years later. This institution adopted the educational system of the preceding dynasty and was overseen by Dāwūd Qayserī (d. 751/1350), appointed during the rule of Sultan Orhan Gazi. To achieve a harmonious integration of esoteric and exoteric knowledge, the Sultan strategically positioned dervish huts and madrassas in close proximity. Additionally, the Sultan carefully selected the most suitable type of ulama to serve as their leaders (Topal, 2022). As a result, in regions previously under Ottoman Empire administration, madrasas and mosques would be constructed in close proximity to each other (Ihsanoglu, 2004).

According to Esma Topal (Topal, 2022), the Ottoman Empire's expansion strategy involved the establishment of madrasas, which served to intertwine religious elements with political objectives. This implies that, to strengthen the Empire's control over its newly acquired territory, educational and religious institutions were built to propagate the ideology embraced by the empire. This aligns with Karen Barkey's perspective, asserting that the Sultan utilizes the presence of Islamic institutions such as madrasas and mosques as tools to solidify their political authority. Furthermore, it underscores that Islam is not merely a religious matter but an integral part of the government system (Barkey, 2014). Consequently, the government system accommodates Islamic law according to the Hanafi school of thought. Colin Imber observes that the Empire is intentionally and officially working to control the acceptable range of opinions within each madhhab and restrict the authority of madhhab followers to engage in ijtihad beyond the established principles of the Hanafi madhhab (Imber, 2016). Thus, it can be inferred that madrasas, serving as institutions for Islamic education, and mosques, serving as centres of community engagement, play a crucial role in realizing the Empire's function in managing divergences among madhabs.

From the establishment of the Ottoman Empire until the mid-1400s AD, the Sultans consistently pursued a policy of territorial expansion and consolidation. During the reigns of Uthman and Orkhan from 1300 to 1359 AD, the Ottoman Empire extended its control over Eastern Europe, Asia, various Arab nations, and key cities such as Azmir (Smyrna), Thawasyanli, Uskandar, Ankara, and Gallipoli (Al-Azizi, n.d.). Murad I further expanded the empire's influence to include Adrianople and several northern regions of Greece (Muvid, 2022). However, challenges arose during Bayazid I's rule, particularly in terms of expansion and political stability. The pivotal moment came with the defeat against Tamerlane at the Battle of Ankara in 1402 AD, leading to the capture and subsequent demise of both Bayazid I and his son a year later (Shaw, 1976). After their deaths, a power struggle unfolded among Sultan Bayazid's family members, persisting for several years until Muhammad I (1403–1421 AD) ultimately resolved it. Muhammad I's reign marked a period of stability for the Ottoman Empire, during which efforts were directed towards internal improvements and the establishment of foundations for security. This effort was sustained by his successor, Sultan Murad II (1421–1451 AD), until it reached its peak during the rule of Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih (Muhammad II) from 1451 to 1484 AD. Under Murad II's guidance, the Ottoman Empire gained momentum in its advancement. Sultan Muhammad II achieved a significant feat by defeating the Byzantine army and seizing Constantinople in 1453 AD (Nasution, 1985). After the conquest of Constantinople, a pivotal stronghold of the Byzantine Empire, the Ottomans believed they had enhanced opportunities to expand their influence across the European continent.

During Sultan Salim I's rule (1512–1520 AD), the Ottoman Empire refrained from expanding its territories in Europe and strategically redirected its military focus towards Egypt (under the Mamluk dynasty), Persia, and Syria. The policies initiated by Sultan Salim I were continued by Sultan Sulaiman al-Qanuni (1520–1566) AD. Rather than extending territorial control to the east or west, Sultan Sulaiman opted for expansion in the surrounding regions of Turkey, including Tunisia, Iraq, Yemen, Budapest, Belgrade, and Rhodes Island. Consequently, during Sultan Sulaiman al-Qanuni's era, the Ottoman Empire encompassed diverse territories, spanning Asia Minor, Armenia, Iraq, Syria, Hijaz, and Yemen in Asia; Egypt, Libya, Tunis, and al-Jazair in Africa; as well as Hungary, Romania, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Albania in Europe (Nasution, 1985). The Ottoman Empire's constitution, known as al-Qanun, was instituted during Sultan Sulaiman I's reign and later came to be named al-Qanuni (Al-Azizi, n.d.).

The pinnacle of Quranic interpretation coincided with the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire (Gunasti, 2019). The establishment of madrasas in various regions has proven to be fruitful, contributing to positive outcomes. These institutions provide religious education, science-based curricula, and training in public service administration, cultivating specialists in diverse fields, particularly in Islamic law (Ihsanoglu, 2004). The examinations conducted for potential government officials, up to the civil service selection, are rooted in Quranic interpretations (Burhan Baltacı, 2011). Moreover, the collaboration between rulers and ulama, as evident in the intense learning activities within the Palace, played a crucial role in advancing the tradition of Quranic interpretation. This collaboration is highlighted by the substantial educational activities within the palace, where beyzâds (aristocrats' sons), shahzâds (sultans' descendants), and their students received instruction in the study of translated tafsir books or tafsir in Turkish (Esat Özcan, 2020). The tradition of studying tafsir endured until the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Notably, a learning practice known as *Huzur* lessons, conducted in the presence of the sultans, persisted and evolved over time. These

sessions involved in-depth discussions of religious knowledge and spanned 160 years without interruption at Topkapı Palace. Typically held once or twice a week during the month of Ramadan, these high-quality tafsir lectures focused on a chosen verse or surah from the Qur'an, with scholars deliberating on the exegesis in the presence of the sultan (Burhan Baltacı, 2011). Additionally, regular tafsir classes, catering to a broader audience, were conducted throughout the year at the Palace.

Commencing in the midst of Sulaiman the Magnificent's rule until the end of the 16th century, there was a gradual diminishing of territory, initiated by the loss of Tunisia due to Austrian attacks (Shaw, 1976). During this period, the fundamental structures of Ottoman governance and society experienced a gradual destabilization, leading to a decline in the Empire's authority. This trend persisted until territories were surrendered, and the influence of European imperialism expanded.

This condition persisted until the nineteenth century, earning the empire the designation of the "sick man of Europe." The successors of Sulaiman the Magnificent lacked the requisite competence to maintain the grandeur he had achieved. The situation was exacerbated by widespread corruption and bribery within the royal system. Concurrently, external events beyond the control of the sultan and even the most capable ministers unfolded outside the Empire. These events encompassed the increasing influence of European countries in various domains, including politics, economics, military, and culture. This marked a stark contrast to the conditions the empire had experienced for two centuries following Muhammad Al-Fatih's significant triumph. Europe did not fully comprehend the decline of the Ottoman Empire until the 17th century. In this period, the Sultans had a chance to recognise and tackle the consequences of this decline. Nevertheless, this circumstance caused people to cultivate an unfounded sense of security, impeding their motivation for advancement (Shaw, 1976).

Shaw (Shaw, 1976) delineated the period of Ottoman decline into two distinct phases. The initial phase, known as the century of decentralization, commenced under the rule of Salim II and extended until 1683 AD, notable for the Ottoman army's unsuccessful siege of Vienna. During this period, the Ottoman Empire became embroiled in a prolonged conflict that depleted its resources for military purposes, resulting in reduced funding for other sectors. The second stage unfolded in the 18th century, characterized as a century of decline marked by internal turmoil and the loss of significant regions within the empire. The defeat at Vienna, the relinquishment of crucial territories in Hungary and Transylvania, the influx of war refugees, and Venetian attacks in the western Balkans contributed to significant internal issues. This scenario set the stage for internal disintegration.

Certain Ottoman individuals started acknowledging the possibility of reform by studying the strategies employed by Europe in establishing their dominance and incorporating the most successful European tactics into the Ottoman system. Under the rule of Salim III, a decision was made to centralize and modernize. Consequently, a reform movement emerged during his era that integrated both traditional and modern elements, ultimately contributing to the development of modernization in the nineteenth century (Shaw, 1976). This laid the groundwork for the reformative movement known as Tanzimat (Firdaus, 2002).

During that time, according to (Herawati, 2022), Ottoman society exhibited three distinct patterns of thought. The traditionalists, constituting a faction that preserved and upheld the principles of fiqh and existing schools of thought, asserted that while fiqh was established, the madhhab (school of thought) needed rejuvenation and adaptation to suit the

societal context. Furthermore, the modernists advocated for the adaptation and evolution of fiqh to align with the socio-cultural milieu. Finally, there was a group that contended the existing fiqh was insufficient in addressing the new challenges arising in a diverse society.

After the Tanzimat period, there was a notable shift in the policies, governmental structure, and law enforcement orientation of the Ottoman Empire. The empire had to adapt to the changing global landscape as the centre of world civilization shifted towards Europe. The reformist faction acknowledged Europe's progress and used it as a model for advancement in the contemporary era. The restructuring of the Ottoman Empire was so profound that the ultimate decision-making authority shifted from the Sultan to the Sublime Porte (Findley, n.d.). The Sublime Porte took on responsibilities for handling extraterritorial and citizenship disputes in negotiations with England. The significant transformation in the governance structure of the Ottoman Empire, once closely intertwined with Islam, is reflected in Fuad Pasha's statement that "Islam, historically, within its context, has been a catalyst for remarkable advancement. Today, Islam is viewed as an antiquated timepiece in need of adjustment" (Findley, n.d.).

Over time, classical traditions began to be neglected. During the shift from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey, authorities sought to replace the legacy of the Ottoman Empire with modernity. This endeavour extended to reinterpreting the Quran which previously held strong connections to the Sufistic tradition. Mursyid's examination of Elmalili Hamdi Yazir's work, "Tafsir Hak Dini Kur'an Dili," revealed that the author resisted the influences of Turkification and modernization (Mursyid, 2020). Despite being specifically requested by Mustafa Kemal at that time to write a tafsir in alignment with Turkish secular preferences, Elmalili opted to enhance the public's understanding of classical Islamic knowledge through interpretation, rather than conforming to the rulers' expectations of Turkification (Wilson, 2009)

The interpretive traditions in Ottoman Empire from the 9th to the 20th century AD and their works of interpretation.

This part aims to delve into the Turkish tradition of Quranic interpretation by showcasing different tafsir works authored by eminent scholars. The scope will span from the early stages of the Oghuz people's engagement with Islam to the decline of the Ottoman Empire, encompassing the period from the 9th to the 20th century AD. The content will be periodically presented in alignment with the historical dynamics of the Ottoman Empire, as discussed earlier. Recognizing the significance of the pre-Ottoman period or the time when the Oghuz people first encountered Islam is crucial, as their early Quranic interpretation works exerted a substantial influence on subsequent interpretive works, particularly in terms of the adopted approach.

In the early 10th century, Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi (853-944 AD) gained recognition for his Ta'wilat ahl al-Sunnah. Some Turkish scholars, including Tahir Uluç, consider him a Turkish commentator due to his birth in Samarkand, a region predominantly inhabited by people of Turkish descent (Uluç, 2017). Additionally, Mesut Kaya pointed out that Abu Mansur represented legal, intellectual, and theological traditions closely tied to the Turkic people of the region (Kaya, 2019). Abu Mansur utilized various methods and approaches, such as the *ta'wil* method and the *'Ilm al-Kalam* approach, in interpreting the Quran. For instance, he suggested that Surah al-Qiyamah [75]:23 could serve as an argument in the context of *ru'yatullah*, along with explaining other perspectives using the *ta'wil* method. The Samarkand exegetical tradition not only influenced Abu Mansur but also gave rise to another scholar,

Naṣr ibn Muḥammad Abū al-Layth al-Samarkandi (944-983 AD), renowned for works like Bahr al-'Ulum, al-Nawazil, and the Sufism genre book Tanbih al-Ghafillin (Nuwaihidl, 1988). Scholars, such as Susan Gunasti (Gunasti, 2019) and Nurit Tsafrir (Tsafrir, 2021), have specifically delved into Abu Layth's school of thought and theological inclinations. Susan noted that many of Abu Layth's works had been translated by the Ottomans.

Another Turkish scholar with Sufi inclinations was Shadruddin al-Qununi (1210-1275) (Al-Ali, 2020). He shared a close spiritual bond with Ibn 'Arabi, who acted as his mentor or mursyid (Nuwaihidl, 1988). Al-Qununi also authored *Tafsir al-Basmalah* (Al-Ali, 2020) and I'jaz al-Bayan fii Tafsir Umm al-Qur'an. His work on interpreting *al-Fatihah* is categorized as al-*ta'wil* rather than *al-tafsir*, leading to significant debate between the two classifications (Al-Qununi, 2000). The al-ta'wil approach is commonly employed, particularly by Sufis, as a means of understanding the Quran (HS, M. A., 2020). In this context, al-Qununi delves into various aspects of Sufism, including his elucidation of the term *al-'Ilm al-dzauqy* (Al-Qununi, 2000).

The three prominent scholars mentioned above may represent the tafsir tradition that emerged during that period, focusing on various *Ilm al-Kalam* topics. At this introductory phase, the tafsir tradition was primarily shaped by the Sufistic approach. Alongside these three types of tafsir, numerous non-Turkish interpretive works gained widespread circulation in society in the period leading up to and during the early years of the establishment of the kingdom, particularly around 1299-1300 AD. One such influential work was Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl, by 'Abdullah bin 'Umar al-Baidawi (died 1292 AD). This tafsir later became part of the official curriculum in Ottoman Empire madrasas in the 16th century AD (Gunasti, 2019). Additionally, there are other commentaries like Mafatih al-Ghaib by Fakhruddin Al-Razi; Al-Taysir fi Al-Tafsir and al-Akmal wa al-Athwal by Najm al-Din al-Nasafi, which will be discussed in next sections.

The establishment of the Ottoman Empire in 1299-1300 AD facilitated the propagation of Sufi-style tafsir writings in various regions, especially in territories annexed by the Ottoman Empire through the construction of religious and educational institutions such as mosques and madrasas. The teachings of *Ulum al-Qur'an* and tafsir annotations became fundamental knowledge for interpreting the Quran and were disseminated to students (Al-Ali, 2020). Among the works on ulumul Quran taught were *Ma'ani al-Fadz al-Qur'an* by Ibn Dammur (died 1329 AH) (Al-Zarkali, 2002) and *Khasyiah 'ala al-Kassyaf li Al-Zamakhsyari* by Akmal al-Din Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Babarti (1314-1383 AD)(Nuwaihidl, 1988). In these madrasas, tafsir topics were taught alongside religious and other advanced scientific subjects. Preferred tafsir subjects included *Anwâr al-tanzîl, al-Kashshâf 'an hakâ'iki't-tanzîl*, and *Tafsir Jalâlayn*. The instruction of tafsir was conducted in Turkish, contributing significantly to the translation and interpretation of the Quran into the Turkish language (Esat Özcan, 2020).

In subsequent years, the practice of annotative interpretation proved to be highly successful. These works are extensively taught in educational institutions and mosques, and the pulpits of mosques often feature teachings on Quranic oral interpretation. This tradition gave rise to Muslim scholars, commonly referred to as *mufasir* at that time, who engaged regularly in tafsir studies, even if they did not author a specific tafsir book (Burhan Baltacı, 2011). By the 15th century AD, after the widespread dissemination of the oral interpretation tradition, Haci Pasha, one of the three Grand Viziers of the Ottoman Empire during the Orkhan Gazi period, produced his remarkable work, *Majma' al-Anwar fi Jami' al-Asrar* (Al-Zarkali, 2002). Although there are differing opinions about the year of his death, researchers generally agree that he passed away either in 1417 AD or 1424 AD. Aydar's research on Haci

Pasha revealed that, despite being more renowned as a doctor, he wrote a book of tafsir (Aydar, 2021). According to Aydar, *Majma' al-Anwar* introduced a fresh perspective amid the Sufistic dominance of its time. Haci Pasha was significantly influenced by the interpretive ideas of Fakhruddin Al-Razi and Najm al-Din al-Nasafi. During this period, the Sufi tafsir tradition continued to prevail, with comprehensive tafsir works such as Tafsir al-Qur'an by Ibn Qadli Muhammad bin Hamzah (died 1420 AD), Syihabuddin al-Siwasiy (died 1456 AD) with his tafsir 'Uyun al-Tafsir li al-Fudlala' al-Samasir, alongside other annotated books of tafsir (Al-Ali, 2020).

In the 16th and 17th centuries AD, spanning the leadership from Salim I to Sulaiman al-Qanuni, the Ottoman Empire witnessed substantial progress in the field of tafsir. Norah Ali acknowledged that this period saw the highest number of *mufasirs* in the history of Ottoman Turkey (Al-Ali, 2020). Despite these advancements, the evolution of the tafsir tradition appears to follow a similar pattern to earlier periods, with Sufistic perspectives still exerting a predominant influence on most tafsir traditions. An influential figure during this era was 'Ali bin Abdillah al-Badlisi, a Sufi renowned for his tafsir titled *Jami' al-Tanzil wa al-Ta'wil fii al-Tafsir.* Naim Doner pointed out that the uniqueness of his interpretation lies in its perspective. Although rooted in Sufism, the interpretation incorporates *riwayah* and *dirayah* methodologies. The author underscores various perspectives, including Sufism, philosophy, 'Ilm al-Kalam, Fiqh, and linguistics (Döner, 2018).

In this century, the tafsir tradition has seen enrichment through extensive works of *tafsir* and *sharah* literature. Islamic studies began to be conducted in numerous mosques during this period, and one of the most renowned scholars in this field was Isma'il Hakki Bursevi (1127 AH/1715 AD) (Esat Özcan, 2020). His work, titled *Ruh al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, commonly known as *Tafsir Hakki*, was published in four volumes (Al-Ali, 2020). Ismail Hakki is recognized as the most prolific scholar in the Ottoman history, having authored 128 books (Güngör, 2020).

In the late Ottoman period, spanning the 18th to 20th centuries AD, the invention of printing technology had a significant impact (Al-Ali, 2020). Ulya Fikriati's research on the evolution of the tafsir tradition in Egypt highlighted that the progress in tafsir madrasa learning techniques in Egypt corresponded to advancements in information technology (Fikriyati, 2020). The similar thing happens in this era, where Ottoman authorities adopts printing technology to mass-produce the Quran and its interpretations, aiming to enhance accessibility (Azak, 2018). However, the reality does not align with this effort, as the number of tafsir books during this period is actually decreasing. A significant challenge is the limited presence of Muslim intellectuals. Political and economic upheavals exacerbated poverty and education challenges, particularly in rural areas. Despite these difficulties, the practice of interpreting the Quran persisted in urban areas, and *Huzur* lectures continued to be conducted at the Palace (Burhan Baltacı, 2011). The situation is further complicated by the polarization of Turkish society into three ideological groups: traditionalist, reformist, and modernist. Dissatisfaction with traditional religious practices in addressing state matters, intensified by European dominance, led people to distance themselves from the classical Turkish Islamic tradition.

The disillusionment of the population with classical Islamic traditions led them to explore alternative ideologies such as atheism and materialism, with the hope of restoring Turkey's former grandeur. The emergence of atheism and materialism in society is rooted in disillusionment with the Islamic religion and stands in opposition to Sufi mysticism. Akhmad Rizqon specifically addresses the resistance of Turkish Muslims to this phenomenon,

primarily through a modernist interpretation known as *Tafsir Risale-i Nur* by Said Nursi (Akhmad Rizqon Khamami, 2023). The Nurcu movement surfaced during the later stages of the Turkish Sultanate and the early Turkish Republic, utilizing *Risale-i Nur* as an ideological tool to revive Islam among the Turkish people and counteract secular influences in modern society.

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir is one of the Turkish scholars who played a significant role in rejuvenating Turkey's classical interpretation through his work, *Tafsir Hak Dini Kur'an Dili* (Wilson, 2009). In the midst of the Turkish revolution, a period when traditional Islamic values faced challenges, Elmalili strategically chose to bide his time before expressing these ideas. Elmalili openly identified as a religious person when invited by the Turkish president to join the administration. Mustafa Kemal tasked him with writing a commentary on the Quran, emphasizing Turkification. However, he used this directive as an opportunity to reintroduce traditional ideas from the Ottoman Turkish madrasa education system (Mursyid, 2020).

Periodization of the Ottoman Tafsir Tradition

Philip K. Hitti proposes that examining the history of the Ottoman Empire during its zenith is advantageous not just politically but also in terms of religious thought (Hitti, 1970). According to Hitti's perspective, analysing the dynamics of the Ottoman Empire's interpretive tradition can reveal its patterns and periods. Therefore, the practice of Quranic interpretation during the Ottoman Empire can be divided into three periods: the Interaction phase (5-8 AH/9-14 AD), the Culmination period (8-12 H/14-18 AD), and the Declination period (12-14 H/18-20 AD).

The initial phase of the Interaction period began when the Turkish people started acquiring knowledge about Islam in the 5th/9th century AD. From the 8th to the 14th century AD, the practice of interpretation was primarily characterized by the production of interpretations based on surahs. Subsequently, these interpretations were integrated into the curriculum of madrasas. This is evidenced by the discovery of ancient artifacts containing interpretations of Surah al-Fatihah in Turkish, purportedly written in the 6th/10th century AD (Esat Özcan, 2020). Following the establishment of the Ottoman Empire in 699 AH/1300 AD, Quranic interpretation began to be used as educational material in madrasas.

During the period of interaction, Turkish society was exposed to significant Arabic interpretive works. Notable examples include *Ma'ālim al-Tanzil* by al-Baghawī; *al-Kashshā*f by Zamakhsharī; *Mafātīhu al-Ghayb* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and *Anwāru al-Tanzil* by al-Bayḍāwī (Topal, 2022). This interaction had a profound impact on the interpretive tradition of Turkish ulama, placing a strong emphasis on annotative interpretations and incorporating some minor interpretations in the evolution of the field. Norah Abdulaziz (Al-Ali, 2020) identified key figures who significantly contributed to the interpretive tradition during this era. Examples include Shadr al-Din Muhammad bin Ishaq al-Qanuni (673 H/1275 AD) with his work *I'jaz al-Bayan fi Kasyf ba'dli Asrari Umm al-Qur'an*; 'Ala' al-Din 'Ali bin Isma'il bin Yusuf al-Qununi (729 H/1329 AD), who authored *Nur al-Misra fi tafsir surah al-Isra'*; Syaraf al-Din Daud bin Mahmud bin Muhammad al-Qayshari (751 H/1350 AD) with his book *Ta'wilat Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*; and Akmal al-Din Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Babarti, known for his annotations *Khasyiah 'ala al-Kasysyaf li al-Zamakhsyari* and *Khasyiah 'ala tafsir al-Baidlawi* (786 H/1384 AD).

The culminating phase, spanning from 9 H/15 AD to 12 H/18 AD, represents the pinnacle of success in the interpretive tradition. This significant period commenced with the revitalization of the Ottoman Empire's interpretive tradition through the translation of

interpretive works. Among these, the translation of Abu Laits al-Samarkandi's work stands out as one of the most commonly translated into Turkish (Esat Özcan, 2020). Ahmad Da'i, who died in 1421 AD, is most known for translating the Al-Quran. He is believed to have lived during the reigns of Yıldırım Beyazıd and Murad II. Another noteworthy translation during this time is that of the book *al-Tibyân fi Tafsîr al-Qur'ân* by Hîdîr bin Abdurrahman al-Azdî, who died in 1301 AD. However, there is contention, with some arguing that Ayıntâbî Muhammad (Mehmet) b. Hamzah, who passed away in 1699 AD, translated this work into Turkish under the title *Terceme-i Tibyân Tafsîri* (Esat Özcan, 2020).

According to Norah Abdulaziz (Al-Ali, 2020), the period from the 9th to the 12th century witnessed a revival of Quranic interpretation in the Ottoman Empire, marked by extensive exegetical studies and writing *syarah*. Interpretive activities within mosques gained momentum during this era, with Isma'il Hakki Bursevi (d. 1715 AD) leading religious teaching activities (Esat Özcan, 2020). Bursevi's notable work, titled *Ruh al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, widely known as Tafsir Hakki, was published in four volumes (Al-Ali, 2020). In the early 9th/15th century AD, Haci Pasha (died 1417 AD) produced a comprehensive tafsir named *Majma' al-Anwar fi Jami' al-Asrar*. A prominent work from the 10th AH/16th century AD was authored by Ni'matullah bin Mahmud al-Nakhjawani (died 1514 AD) titled *al-Fawaih al-Ilahiyyah wa al-Fawatih al-Ghaibiyyah al-Mudlihah li al-Kalam al-Qur'aniyyah wa al-Hikam al-Furqaniyyah*, presented in two volumes with a Sufi perspective. Moreover, numerous interpretations emerged during this century. Norah reported the participation of 145 interpreters in the culmination phase, with the majority of their interpretive works exhibiting a Sufistic character (Al-Ali, 2020).

The period of decline, spanning from 12 to 14 AH (18 to 20 AD), represented the peak of the Ottoman Empire's diminishing influence. According to Norah, a noteworthy characteristic of these centuries was the increasing scarcity of interpretive works written in Turkish. Additionally, the output of exegetes and tafsir dwindled during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, occurring between the 14th and 20th centuries AD. Norah identified thirteen commentators who emerged in the final three centuries of the Ottoman Empire, yet she found only two works in Turkish. One of these was authored by Sulaiman Mustaqim (died in 1788), providing an interpretation of *Surah Al-Fatihah*. Muhammad Sirri Pasha, who passed away in 1895 AD, subsequently produced a Turkish translation of several verses (Al-Ali, 2020). However, from the end of the sultanate to the early republic, tafsir works like *Tafsir Risale-i Nur* by Said Nursi and *Tafsir Hak Dini Kur'an Dili* by Elmalili Hamdi Yazir emerged as forms of resistance against secularization.

CONCLUSION

An assumption of the perceived stagnation in the Ottoman tafsir tradition, as inferred from the quantity of comprehensive tafsir books produced, must be contextualised within its historical framework. Considering the political and scientific realities of the time, it is evident that the Ottoman Turkish exegetical tradition was dynamic rather than stagnant. This indicates that there were various changes in interpretation patterns that adapted to contemporary conditions and attempted to address ongoing issues. While the idea of stagnation in the tafsir tradition during the later period of the caliphate was likely accurate, it did not occur spontaneously. Quranic interpretation operations in the Ottoman Empire were hindered by internal and external factors, resulting in a diminished view of the classical Islamic heritage and its principles. The initiatives of the Turkish secular government played a role in reducing the impact of the traditional Ottoman Islamic heritage.

These dynamics can be categorized into three distinct periods: The interaction period, denoting the engagement between the state and interpretive works, marked the inception of the Ottoman Empire. This era saw the emergence of translations of classical Arabic commentaries and the initiation of exegesis based on surahs. The culmination period, illustrated by Turkish-language interpretive works such as Ismail Hakki's *Ruh al-Bayan*, was characterized by a commitment to preserving the legacy of the preceding era in the tradition of interpretation. The period of declination coincided with the weakening of the Ottoman Empire's power and the challenges posed by post-*Tanzimat* modernist reforms. Notably, during the transition from the sultanate to the republic, tafsir works began to develop as a form of resistance against secularization.

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