Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

The Composite Sufi Front vis-à-vis the Puritanical Kadızadeli Movement in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire

Erken Modern Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Püriten Kadızadeli Hareketi'ne Karşı Muhtelit Sufi Cephesi

BAHADIR YOLCU

Sabancı Üniversitesi, YL Öğrencisi.
(bahadir.yolcu@sabanciuniv.edu), ORCID: 0009-0005-2399-0494.

Geliş Tarihi: 16.03.2023. Kabul Tarihi: 05.06.2023.

“ ” Yolcu, Bahadır. “The Composite Sufi Front vis-à-vis the Puritanical Kadızadeli Movement in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire.” *Zemin*, s. 5 (2023): 160-178.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8033544.

Yolcu, Bahadır. "The Composite Sufi Front vis-à-vis the Puritanical Kadızadeli Movement in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire." *Zemin*, s. 5 (2023): 160-178.

Abstract: The seventeenth-century Ottoman society experienced a major split due to the reformist and anti-traditionalist Kadızadeli movement. Their puritanical vision germane to Islam was in direct contradiction to the more inclusive and latitudinarian religious reception of the Sufi orders. The radicalism of the Kadızadeli adherents managed to resonate in the imperial court and provoked the enforcement of several anti-Sufi measures such as the prohibition of the whirling (*semāʿ*) ritual peculiar to the Mevlevîs. The particularities of this wide-ranging movement have already been meticulously studied through the prism of historically specific socio-economic relations; however, little attention has been given to the agency and inventiveness of the Sufis in reaction to the Kadızadeli incursions. The present article aims to rectify this omission in the literature. Primarily, the lines of cleavage separating the two opposite groups were not clearly demarcated but blurred. Further, the Sufis were not thoroughly glued to one another through the presence of a well-organized, coherent, and uniform coterie. Rather, the Sufi populace was expressive of a remarkably fragmented structure due to the intra-Sufi discords. Whilst excommunicating each other, they could go so far as to develop reflexes as extremist as a Kadızadeli sympathizer. Nevertheless, the only device through which they advocated institutionalized mystical practices was their pen.
Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Kadızadeli Movement, Sufism, Illicit Innovation (*bidʿa*), sharia, Heterogeneity, Mevlevîs, *Meşnevī*.

Özet: On yedinci yüzyıl Osmanlı toplumu reformist ve gelenek-karşıtı Kadızadeli hareketi nedeniyle büyük bir bölünme yaşamıştır. Onların İslam'a ilişkin püriten vizyonu tarikatların dini daha kapsayıcı ve esnek biçimde alımlamasıyla dolaysızca çelişiyordu. Kadızadeli taraftarların köktenciliği Osmanlı sarayında yankı uyandırmayı başarmış ve Mevlevîlere özgü semâ âyininin yasaklanması gibi tasavvuf-karşıtı pek çok tedbirin uygulanmasına sebep olmuştur. Bu geniş erimli hareketin hususiyetleri, tarihsel olarak özgül sosyo-ekonomik ilişkilerin süzgecinden geçirilerek titizlikle incelenmiş ancak Kadızadeli akınlarına tepki olarak mutasavvıfların sergilediği faillik ve yaratıcılık çok az ilgiye mazhar olmuştur. Elinizdeki makale, literatürdeki bu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Her şeyden önce, iki karşıt cenahı birbirinden ayıran sınırlar açık seçik çizilmiş olmaktan ziyade belirsizdi. Dahası, mutasavvıflar iyi örgütlenmiş, tutarlı ve yeknesak bir zümrenin dolayımıyla birbirlerine sıkı sıkıya bağlı değillerdi. Bilakis, mutasavvıf kitle tasavvuf-içi ihtilaflar nedeniyle oldukça parçalı bir yapı hüviyetindeydi. Birbirlerini tekfir ederken bir Kadızadeli muhibbi gibi müfrit refleksler geliştirecek kadar ileri gidebiliyorlardı. Mamafih, müesseseleşmiş tasavvufî pratikleri müdafaa etmek için ellerindeki yegâne araç kalemleriydi.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Kadızadeli hareketi, tasavvuf, bidat, Şeriat, heterojenlik, Mevlevilik, *Meşnevī*.

The antagonism that exploded between the Kadızadelis and the Sufis in the seventeenth century is more than a historically contingent phenomenon. It seems to me extremely striking that in a historical episode in which the decline paradigm[1] finds wide coverage in numerous contemporary texts (e.g., Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli and Katib Çelebi), the tendency towards religious purification –that is, the fundamentalist current, the urge to revive the standards of the Golden Age of the prophet Muhammad, the allergy against innovations– did not only create fascination in the imperial palace but also precipitated the formation of a distinct social stratum, especially among the mercantile entrepreneurs and artisanal groups in pursuit of upward social mobility.[2] This aspect alone suffices to prove that leaning towards religious purification led predominantly by a cluster of the *sharia*-minded activists was closely interwoven with the political turbulence and socio-economic pressures that confronted the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire. Thus, the acute strife and the ideological rift between Sufi practitioners and the puritanical Kadızadeli current backed at certain time intervals by holy law-defined "orthodoxy" composed of the exoteric "learned men" (*ulama*) did not pose diametrically opposed images but encompassed a broader array of protagonists and sympathies than the "Kadızadeli vs. Sufi" dichotomy signifies.[3]

Until very recently, the religion-based conflicts of the seventeenth century have been put under investigation with a greater focus on groups representing the radical wing that intimidated the established order. In this context, the emphasis was mostly placed upon extremist, militant, and inflammatory campaigns of the Kadızadelis, who, metaphorically speaking, aspired to turn the clock

---

1 For a comprehensive analysis of the decline paradigm, see Cemal Kafadar, "The Question of Ottoman Decline," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, no. 4 (1997-1998): 30-75.

2 Mustafa Naima, *Tarih-i Naima* (Istanbul, 1282 [1865-1866]), 6:232-34, 240. "The Kadızadeli movement resembled a tree; one branch was the imperial guard (*bostancı, baltacı*) and its roots were the whole of the market people (*âmme-yi ehl-i suka*)." Marinos Sariyannis, "The Kadızadeli Movement as a Social and Political Phenomenon: The Rise of a 'Mercantile Ethic'?" in *Political Initiatives 'from the Bottom up' in the Ottoman Empire, Halcyon Days in Crete VII, 9-11 Jan. 2009*, ed. A. Anastasopoulos (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2012), 273.

3 Madeline Zilfi, "The Kadızadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45, no. 4 (October 1986): 252.

back. At the opposite pole of the spectrum, the Sufi side was in some very large brushstrokes portrayed as a mystical cadre, who was exposed to violent onslaughts, who were labeled as responsible for the wide-ranging degeneration, and who were therefore forced to play the role of the oppressed. Nevertheless, the fact that the Sufis were not a homogeneous faction and the Kadızadelis did not target the entire Sufi institution was simply overlooked. Moreover, it cannot be ignored that some Sufi figures could develop aggressive propensities at least as much as the Kadızadelis and did not hesitate to openly declare some sharp and anti-conformist individuals as heretics despite being under the same umbrella of Sufism, and harshly quarreled among themselves on certain controversial issues. It does not seem probable to penetrate the religious aura of the seventeenth century without examining the front opened by the Sufis, the answers that they developed against the arguments of the Kadızadelis, the political ventures in which they were involved, and the divisions among themselves. Specific to this paper, I will be striving to throw the spotlight on the reflexes of the Sufis as a highly heterogeneous social party.

The Main Contours of the Kadızadeli Movement

Kadızade Mehmed (d. 1635), eponym of the movement, first began to pursue his intellectual and spiritual odyssey under the guidance of the Halvetî sheikh Ömer Efendi (d. 1624) in Istanbul, but then despite an initial affinity, his sober and rationalist temperament and religious proclivity appeared to be incompatible with the esoteric Sufi path.[4] He opted for the preacher path as a professional occupation and soon evolved into an ardent opponent of Sufism ornate with pantheism, syncretism, and emotive religiosity. Influenced by the celebrated fundamentalist theologian Birgivî (d. 1573), an adherent of the school of Ibn Taymiyya as opposed to the legal Ottoman Islam represented by the school of Fahr-i Râzî,[5] he embarked upon the dissemination of a fundamentalist ethos from

---

4 Katib Çelebi, *Fezleke-i Tarih* (Istanbul, 1286 [1870]), 2:64.

5 Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Yeniçağlar Anadolusunda İslam'ın Ayak İzleri: Osmanlı Dönemi, Makaleler-Araştırmalar* (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınları, 2011), 178. The anxiety of deviating from the true essence of religion is a common denominator for Ibn Taymiyya and Birgivî. Just like his intellectual ancestor, Birgivî too deemed music and *semāʿ* (the whirling ritual of the Mevlevî order) to be heretical deviations from the *sharia* and the rightful path of the blessed predecessors. See M. Hulusi Lekesiz, "XVI. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Düzenindeki Değişimin Tasfiyeci (Püritanist) Bir Eleştirisi: Birgivî

the pulpit of Hagia Sophia by means of a large arsenal of rhetorical weapons and of the gift of persuasion. Driven by zeal and marshaling fiery discursive strategies, he was capable enough to form a vibrant community around himself and to raise a collective consciousness against any type of corrupt and deceptive practices.[6] The primary conceptual tool that he inherited from Birgivî was the Quranic principle "enjoining right and forbidding wrong," which provided a theoretical and legitimate groundwork to judge and denounce Sufi practices such as the vocal invocation of divine names (*zikr-i cehrī*), musical audition accompanied by rhythmic movement (*devrān*) and whirling (*semāʿ*), and the teachings of Ibn Arabî alongside the permissibility of the consumption of coffee, tobacco, and opium.[7] The term innovation (*bidʿa*) was another functional device to rid pious society of metastases that contaminated the social organism, thereby jeopardizing eternal salvation. The followers of Kadızade Mehmed largely conserved the main pillars of his doctrine and even turned the initiative into an activist and authoritative faction replete with prohibitions, censors, and vandalisms. The chief suspects from which heretical innovations flowed were apparently the Sufi orders. "If the Sufis were not tamed, the Kadızadelis argued, the entire community would be plunged into unbelief."[8] However, the overall Sufi institution composed of manifold derivatives was not categorically disapproved. Particularly targeted Sufi organizations were Bektâşî, Halvetî, and Mevlevî

Mehmed Efendi ve Fikirleri," (PhD diss. Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Ankara, 1997), 113. However, as a cautionary remark, let me here insert a revisionist vein in the available historiography, which offers a strong dose of skepticism in stressing this "ready-made" intellectual genealogy. Derin Terzioğlu argues that the Kadızadelis were deeply entrenched in the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition and the attempt by the canonical literature to associate them with Taymiyyan ideas should be put under critical scrutiny. Without negating the legitimate critique raised by Terzioğlu, I rather opt to align with the conventional historiography. For further elaboration, please consult the following: Derin Terzioğlu, "Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Siyāsa al-Sharʿiyya*, and the Early Modern Ottomans," in *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire: c. 1450–c. 1750*, eds. Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 102.

6 "He was expert at silencing an opponent. He resuscitated the ancient objection to dancing and gyrating, and won the enmity of the entire Khalwati and Mevlevî orders." Katib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, trans. G. L. Lewis (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), 136.

7 Madeline Zilfi, *Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulama in the Post-classical Age: 1600–1800* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988), 136.

8 Zilfi, "Discordant Revivalism," 254.

orders and the well-orchestrated campaign managed to evoke ill sentiments like suspicion and hostility amongst the crowds against these orders.[9] The accomplishments of the Kadızadeli propagandists were to a great extent derived from their expertise in exploiting the turbulent atmosphere, decadence, and social and economic affairs that had been taken off the rails in the seventeenth-century Ottoman society.[10] In other words, they pointed fingers at "innovator" Sufis as scapegoats for the general downtrend and did not mind conducting quixotic attacks on non-existent enemies. Hence, the Sufi orders had to bear the brunt of offensive rhetorical attacks and outright physical violence.

The escalation of the latent "center-periphery" tension was perhaps another driving force that turned the Kadızadeli activism into an overambitious crusade dedicated to metamorphosing the entire socio-cultural texture being at variance with the primordial convictions of the overarching Islamic creed. In the classical era, the ruling class and official madrasah ulama gathered around the palace were mostly members of the *Mevleviyye*, *Halvetiyye,* or *Zeyniyye* orders.[11] The imperial identification with the Sufi orders was for the benefit of both flanks. Through the social and economic privileges offered to these orders that established extensive networks of relations scattered all over the Ottoman geography, the central administrative mechanism was able to preserve and consolidate its authority over the broad masses. Therefore, the Sufi orders became a crucial element of the imperial *modus operandi*. Well-trained and cultured dervishes of the Sufi orders of urban origin such as *Halvetiyye* and *Mevleviyye* were in return provided with the opportunity to climb to the upper steps in the social hierarchy, especially by the grant of high positions (e.g., the most lucrative judgeships, professorships, or being preachers in the prominent mosques of Istanbul) among the ulama cadres. Further, the intimate relations that the sultans fostered with various Sufi orders even authorized the leaders of these orders to direct the appointments

---

9 Marc David Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 8.

10 Necati Öztürk, "Islamic Orthodoxy among the Ottomans in the Seventeenth Century with Special Reference to the Qadizadeh Movement," (PhD diss. University of Edinburgh, 1981), 14.

11 Halil İnalcık, *Devlet-i 'Aliyye: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Üzerine Araştırmalar 2* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2014), 230.

for important bureaucratic, military, and judicial offices. Their words were considered to be distinguished reference letters.[12] This adequately exemplifies the esteemed social status and political weight of the Sufis intertwined with the palace. The Kadızadeli partisans, on the other hand, were bereft of the patronage opportunities provided by being in constant and warm contact with the central government, the social privileges key for building a glittering career, and the economic prosperity enabling resilience to grave crises. "Kadızadelis were usually not Ottomans in the limited sense of the word, trained in the imperial schools of the capital, but often of provincial origin, and received their initial training in the provinces."[13] It is no coincidence that they hurled the stone of criticism at the "fortunate" groups such as the high-ranking ulama and the Sufi orders, which constituted the central core of the religious establishment. An ode to Murad IV (r. 1623-1640) written by Kadızade Mehmed, which states that the growing anger and wailing caused by the tumultuous climate of the seventeenth century in the provinces posed a threat to the Ottoman reign, is particularly noteworthy.[14] In this regard, their fervent speeches from the pulpits were intended to resonate with the disadvantaged (and often uneducated) groups who were ready to embrace strict regulations of religion and to vilify the allegedly upper classes. As Zilfi rightfully argued, "their place on the ill-paid periphery of the Ottoman religious establishment sharpened the movement's anti-elitist edge."[15] Concisely, socio-economic reasons as well as religious motives made up the backbone of the assaults launched against the Sufis.

The contemporary eyewitness Katib Çelebi (d. 1657) did not hesitate to draw attention to the very fact that both conflicting parties possessed extremist motives and impulses that posed a threat to the harmonious functioning of the social order. To him, those who have cultivated themselves intellectually and have enriched their cultural capital do not take part in one side or the other in this futile contro-

---

12 For a letter of recommendation by the Halvetî Sheikh Aziz Mahmud Hüdâyî on appointments for certain offices, see Türkan Alvan, *Sultan Murad-ı Sâlis'in Dünyası* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2021), 225-26.

13 Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 74

14 "*Hâb-ı gafletten uyan ey Âl-i Osmân bilmiş ol / Gider elden aç gözün taht-ı Süleymân bilmiş ol / Sen sürûr ile safâlar sürmedesin her gûşede / Taşralarda doldu cümle âh u efgân bilmiş ol*." Ali Fuat Bilkan, *Fakihler ve Sofuların Kavgası* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2016), 67.

15 Zilfi, "Discordant Revivalism," 265.

versy. "This is a profitless quarrel, born of fanaticism. We are all members of the community of Muhammad, brothers in faith. We have no warrant from Sivasi, no diploma from Kadızade."[16] As the title of his book *The Balance of Truth* clearly indicates, Katib Çelebi was prone to attain balance and *phronesis* in the Aristotelian sense. He had written his seminal work to reveal the precise nature of a number of issues that were the subject of fierce debates during his time together with a comparative methodology and a strict insistence on the path of reason. It would not be highly exaggerated to postulate that his work carried out a particular mission to prevent speculative disputes that pitted Muslims against each other and struck a blow to the habit of symbiotic existence developed over the centuries. He laid heavy stress upon the liability of being intellectually equipped and polymath so as to refrain from polarization arising mostly from ignorance or ideological blindness. Toleration and accommodation towards innovations, customs, or even superstitions that had been adopted and practiced all along the stream of time by people sharing the same confessional boundaries were of immense significance for Katib Çelebi. He was confident in expressing that the urge to uproot them would deconstruct social stability and generate devastating repercussions entailing an unbridgeable gulf in society. He often cautioned that these customs and conventions should not be suppressed even by force of a sword, even if they are contrary to *sharia*; as a matter of fact, many efforts have been wasted on this path. "Once an innovation has taken root and become established in a community, it is the height of stupidity and ignorance to invoke the principle of 'enjoining right and forbidding wrong.'"[17] As can be inferred, it was not absolutely imperative to materialize an ultimate orthodoxy through *sharia*; rather, Katib Çelebi was vehemently critical of any type of puritan argument, which consider all innovations illicit, illegitimate, and heretical and came up with a nuanced analysis of innovations, customs, and conventions, which were the integral components of society. That is why he advised the imams and preachers who lead society to always be soft-hearted, to call for public decency without dramatizing small issues: "Let your sermons contain no remarks that go against the customs and conventions of the citizens, for that causes dissension and insurrection."[18]

---

16 Katib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 133.

17 Katib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 89.

18 Katib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 148.

The Sufi Community: Idiosyncratic Typologies

From the completion of the institutionalization process onwards, that is, being organized into various orders (*ṭarīqas*), the Sufi lodges functioned as "the fine arts academies."[19] They were cultural production centers where aesthetic engagements such as poetry, composition, music, and calligraphy were cultivated and flourished under the same roof. Especially the Mevlevîs made a substantial contribution in terms of cultural refinement and accumulation through their incentives to teach the Persian language and literature and to compose Persian and Turkish mystic poetry.[20] Therefore, the Mevlevîs were conceived to be the representatives of the cultural elite in the realm of "popular religion," which incorporated diverse traditions, customs, and beliefs, quite contrary to the pristine form of Islam that the *sharia*-minded puritans were keen to revive.

The Mevlevîs came first among those who suffered the wrath of the anti-Sufi trends triggered by the Kadızadeli movement. In addition to *devr*, *raḳṣ*, and *semāʿ* rituals declared as heretical,[21] their close contact with Persian, which was not only a linguistic medium but also the stenography for a philosophical-mystical canon and its hermeneutics, was another legitimate reason to put them under harsh criticism. Persian, to which the Mevlevîs attributed a sacred value because it was the *Meṣnevī*'s language, was labeled as the language of hell by the seventeenth-century puritans. However, it is best to keep in mind that Persian literacy was still an integral component of the literate Ottoman identity, hence a prime instrument for upward social mobility. Kadızade Mehmed himself had read the *Meṣnevī* and quoted couplets.[22] The entirety of Persian in fact was not condemned but it could rather be appreciated as a fertile source of literature only through the lens of textual formalism, which fitted better the normative authority that

---

19 Mustafa Kara, *Din, Hayat, Sanat Açısından Tekkeler ve Zaviyeler* (İstanbul: Dergâh, 2019), 50.

20 John Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 238.

21 For a passage from the treatise of Üstüvanî including the condemnation of these illicit "innovative" practices ("*Devr ve raks ve teganni itmek haramdır.*"), see Mustafa Kara, *Metinlerle Osmanlılarda Tasavvuf ve Tarikatlar* (İstanbul: Dergâh, 2021), 178-80.

22 Baki Tezcan, "The Portrait of the Preacher as a Young Man: Two Autobiographical Letters by Kadızade Mehmed from the Early Seventeenth Century," in *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete IX – A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 9-11 January 2015*, ed. Marinos Sariyannis (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2019), 187-249.

the puritanical currents sought to establish. In other words, Persian had to be stripped of its sacred value along with all philosophical-mystical tenets, notions, and teachings that it encompassed. As Aslıhan Gürbüzel rightfully states, it was a topic of contention "between different reading communities of Persian mystical-ethical poetry."[23]

The prolific and eminent Mevlevî sheikh İsmail Rusûhî Ankaravî (d. 1631) was a passionate intellectual figure at the heart of the bitter debates, intervening in grave charges intended to undermine the deep-rooted traditions of the Sufi institution. His *Commentary on Forty Prophetic Sayings* was a qualified rebuttal of the two ill-defined judgments against the Mevlevî variant of Islam: its so-called alarming predilection towards embracing and disseminating illicit innovations and the extreme gravity of Persian in ceremonies and teachings. In opposition to the allegations that deemed Persian to be the language of hell, Ankaravî "reproduced standard arguments in favor of the status of Persian as a truly Islamic language, such as a compilation of narratives about the prophet's speaking Persian."[24] He lashed out at those, who stated that the *Meṣnevī* contradicts *sharia*, and then discredited their narrow and rigid interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence. According to his view, the *Meṣnevī*, formulated in the language not of *sharia* but of *hikma* (conventional or philosophical wisdom, the central notion in Sühreverdi's (d. 1191) illuminationist [*işrāḳī*] theory),[25] "did go beyond sharia, but this did not make the book un-Islamic or blasphemous"[26] because Rûmî's book was the disclosure (*alethia*, Ancient Greek: ἀλήθεια) of the non-verbal, unintelligible, and esoteric truths that God assigned to the prophet. Ankaravî produced also plenty of apologetic treatises justifying *semāʿ* and its close-knit association with the basic dogmas of Islamic doctrine and praxis, which epitomized how vehemently he upheld Sufi rituals as being an authentic and indispensable constituent of the centuries-old Islamic tradition.[27] The best-known treatise that was

---

23 Aslıhan Gürbüzel, "Bilingual Heaven: Was There a Distinct Persianate Islam in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire," *Philological Encounters*, no. 6 (2021): 219.

24 Gürbüzel, "Bilingual Heaven," 223.

25 For an introductory observation of how the term *hikma* was perceived by the Sufis, see Mustafa Kara, "Hikmet: Tasavvuf," *TDVIA* (İstanbul: TDV, 1998), 17:518-19.

26 Gürbüzel, "Bilingual Heaven," 230.

27 Eliza Tasbihi, "Sufis versus Exoteric Ulama in Seventeenth-century Ottoman Turkey: The Debate on 'Pharaoh's Faith' in the Mevlevî and Akbarian Sufi Traditions," in *Sufis and Their Op-*

devised to defend the Mevlevî *semāʿ* is the *Risāletü'l-hüccetü's-semāʿ*. It is mostly linked to another significant work of Ankaravî, the *Minhācü'l-fuḳarā*, which provides a complete synopsis of his tutoring for the Sufi novice.[28] Yet, what brought Ankaravî considerable fame and dignity was his detailed commentary on the *Meṣnevī* entitled *Majmūʿat al-Laṭā'if ve Maṭmūrat al-Maʿārif* through the spectacles of Ibn Arabî. Ankaravî applied Ibn Arabî's doctrine of the unity of being (*vaḥdet-i vücūd*) based on the presupposition that the visible world, that is the empirical plane of experience, is essentially composed of phenomenological manifestations through which the Absolute reveals itself,[29] to the *Meṣnevī*'s divine-love-oriented formula. He picked a manuscript of the *Meṣnevī* dated back to 1411, to which scant credence is attributed by today's scholars because of its dubious authenticity and of its inclusion of the problematic Book Seven.[30] The author of Book Seven indirectly charges Ibn Arabî (d. 1240) with disbelief because of his declaration that the spirit of Pharaoh was purged by virtue of the affirmation of divine unity at the point of death. However, Ankaravî proposes an esoteric method of reading in conjunction with some Persian literary conventions like "submerged or implicit metaphor" to furnish incontrovertible proof that there is no friction or controversy between the thought of Ibn Arabî, of which he is very fond, and the poetry of Mevlânâ Celâleddin-i Rûmî (d. 1273), the founding leader of the Sufi order to which he is affiliated.[31] As Eliza Tasbihi appropriately pointed out, Ankaravî's mastery of Arabic and Persian in particular, and his vast knowledge in disciplines such as philosophy, theology, exegeses, and jurisprudence, incorporated him into the Ottoman intelligentsia

---

ponents in the Persianate World, eds. Reza Tabandeh and Leonard Lewisohn (Irvine: Jordan Center for Persian Studies, 2020), 186.

28 Alberto F. Ambrosio, "Ismāʿīl Rusūhī Ankaravī: An Early Mevlevi intervention into the emerging Kadızadeli-Sufi conflict," in *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200-1800*, eds. John Curry and Erik Ohlander (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 187.

29 For an in-depth analysis of *vaḥdet-i vücūd*, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1994), 66-97.

30 Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı criticizes Ankaravî for being alien to Mevlânâ's literary style and philosophy and for being under the enormous influence of the Akbarian school. Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı, *Mevlânâ'dan Sonra Mevlevîlik* (İstanbul: İnkılap, 2018), 141.

31 Tasbihi, "Sufis versus Exoteric Ulama," 192-93.

representing high culture, thereby lending him the facility to get involved in the sultan's network of patronage.[32] Besides, being appointed to the Galata Mevlevî lodge located on the European side of the Ottoman capital as the head (*pōst-nişīn*) at the time when "the Istanbul-based Mevlevî shaykhs formed a common front against the activities of puritanical groups"[33] made the impact of his words even more potent.

Another notorious individual figure was the Halvetî sheikh Niyâzî-i Mısrî (d. 1694), who had to endure the animosity of the Kadızadeli propagandists the most as an outspoken dissident on the margin. Despite being a moderate Sufi master reconciling both the exoteric and esoteric facets of Islam, he eventually became embroiled in the stormy polemics when the third and last wave of the Kadızadeli reform campaign was deployed through the Hanafî jurist Vânî Efendi's (d. 1685) overwhelming influence over the grand vizierate of Köprülüzâde Fazıl Ahmed Paşa (d. 1676) and Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Paşa (d. 1683). Instead of bending to the imperial prohibitions and pressures, Mısrî continued without hesitation his mission to guide his disciples by conducting Sufi rituals allegedly anti-sharia and to deliver ardent sermons about the corruption of official administrators, the baseless bigotry of the exoteric ulama, and the injustices rampant in the Ottoman territories. For this reason, he was repeatedly harassed by the Kadızadeli "zealots," therefore became progressively marginalized and was ultimately exiled first to Rhodes and then to Lemnos, where he died in 1694. Being subject to both political and religious persecution never generated a softening in Mısrî's pretty sharp tongue. On the contrary, by making much more provocative speeches, he thoroughly triggered the sheer ferocity of his opponents. Along with the archenemy Vânî Efendi and his political patrons, who were jointly responsible for Mısrî's banishment, the imperial family bore the brunt of the Halvetî sheikh's impeachments. He went so far as to suggest that the ruling Ottoman dynasty must be replaced with the Crimean khans.[34] His voice did not echo with a sedate tone in denigrating the house of Osman: "They

---

32 Eliza Tasbihi, "The Mevlevī Sufi Shaykh Ismāʿīl Rusūkhī Anqarawī (d. 1631) and his Commentary on Rūmī's *Mathnawī*" *Mawlana Rumi Review*, no. 6 (2015): 179.

33 Ambrosio, "Ismāʿīl Rusūhī Ankaravī," 187.

34 Derin Terzioğlu, "Sufi and Dissident in the Ottoman Empire: Niyāzī-i Mışrī" (PhD diss. Harvard University, Cambridge, 1999), 346.

[the Ottomans] are past the point of 'reform' [*ıslah olmakdan kalkmışdur*], they are like a spoiled egg [*cılk olmuş yumurta*]; there is nothing auspicious left in them. The throne of the Tatar is preferable."[35] Such bold allegations were followed by his self-appointed prophetic-messianic vision. Through the "prophetic revelation" (*vaḥy*) informed to him and the numerological interpretation of the Holy Book (*cifr*), he declared that Hasan and Hüseyin, the grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad, possessed the mark of prophethood.[36] In this declaration to which the narrative of the return of Christ is immanent, Mısrî capitalized on the much-celebrated hagiology of Ibn Arabî drawing a distinction between legislative (*nubuwwa*) and non-legislative prophecy (*walaya*). The uncanonical preaching about the Hasanayn, which at first glance contradicts the fundamental tenet of the mainstream Sunni tradition that Muhammad was "the seal of the prophets," is obviously associated with the narratives of political apocalypse. Mısrî "read present circumstances as a 'likeness' (*mathal*) of eschatological events."[37] That is why his return to Bursa in 1693 was embellished with a "savior" vibe. What is more, the diary of the Halvetî sheikh palpably mirrors his enigmatic mental state and uncompromising, anti-conformist identity. The traces of traumatic experiences originating from the banishment seem to have diffused to every part of the diary. "The most commonly represented emotions in the diary are all of a negative nature –fear, distrust, anxiety, and anger."[38] The maltreatments that he was compelled to resist must have induced a pathological psychology and led him to abuse the language of *shath*, seemingly irreligious statements generally raised during a mystical ecstasy. What is intensely curious in the case of Niyâzî-i Mısrî is the fact that he was not judged as a heretic in spite of his extremist utterances. According to Derin Terzioğlu, it was because "the line… between 'right belief' and 'heresy' was not set in stone."[39] In other words, the overall

---

35 Terzioğlu, "Sufi and Dissident," 350.

36 Terzioğlu, "Sufi and Dissident," 435.

37 Samuela Pagani, "Timeless Typologies and New Individualities, 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi, Niyâzî-i Mısrî and the Sufi Theory of Sainthood in the Early Modern Ottoman World," in *Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology*, eds. Lejla Demiri and Samuela Pagani (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 175.

38 Derin Terzioğlu, "Man in the Image of God in the Image of the Times: Sufi Self-Narratives and the Diary of Niyāzī-i Mıṣrī (1618-94)," *Studia Islamica*, no. 94 (2002): 153.

39 Terzioğlu, "Sufi and Dissident," 501.

religio-political picture was far more complex. Mısrî even had sympathizers in the imperial palace, who sought to put an end to his banishment. Further, he was and still is viewed as a part of the circle of the Sunna. Indeed, when his *Divan* (the collection of poetries) is examined, it can be observed that he never intended to transcend the path of the Sunna but was enthusiastic to share what he acquired during his mystical journey as a receiver of divine unveiling.[40]

The last Sufi master worth mentioning in the context of the Kadızadeli-Sufi dispute is the Kâdirî-Nakşî Sheikh 'Abd al-Ghanî al-Nabulusî (d. 1731). Although Nabulusî, who spent his entire life in relatively sheltered Damascus, stepped into neither Istanbul, the religious core of the Empire, nor the Anatolian lands, he did not remain a mere spectator of the misfortunes of his Sufi colleagues in this geography but wrote various treatises in defense of them. The most renowned treatise among them is *al-'Uqūd al-Lulu'iyya fi Ṭarīq al-Sāda al-Mawlawiyya* in which the Damascene Sheikh upheld for the legitimacy of the Mevlevî ritual *semā'* and the use of musical instruments during the invocation (*zikr*). In his view, blasphemous (*ḥarām*) recitations or practices are never committed under the enchanting influence of music in Mevlevî assemblies; instead, for these dervishes, who are truly devoted to the faith of the "Book and Sunna," music is only a means of refreshing their hearts and encouraging their spiritual journey.[41] Only those who are *ārif-i billah* (that is, those who know Allah through divine revelation and introspection) can grasp the state of awe and ecstasy that arise from ceremonies like *semā'*.[42] Furthermore, Nabulusî was as straightforward as Niyâzî-i Mısrî in protesting the ill-advised religious policies of his time. He even penned a booklet justifying the legality of tobacco.[43] The fact that he expounded the debate over the Hasanayn by siding with Mısrî, who had developed an orientation towards *melāmet* (voluntary exposure to disapproval by a mystic reminiscent of a transparent mirror) just like himself, was clearly indicative of a gesture of solidarity. Perhaps the most eye-catching work of Nabulusî is his

---

40 See Kenan Erdoğan, ed., *Niyâzî-i Mısrî Divanı* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1998).

41 Abdülganî en-Nablusî, *Mevlevîlik Müdafaası*, trans. M. Zahid Tığlıoğlu (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2019), 67.

42 Abdülganî en-Nablusî, *Mevlevîlik Müdafaası*, 80-86.

43 See Abdülganî en-Nablusî, *Tütün Risalesi*, trans. M. Emin Efe and Ahmet Şenharputlu (İstanbul: Dergâh, 2021).

commentary on Birgivî's well-known and most-copied *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*. "He meant his commentary… to deflect incorrect uses and establish right ones, and so 'save' the powerful text… from those who would mis-interpret and mis-apply it for their own noxious ends."[44] Nabulusî had envisioned a dramatically distinct social and cultural world from that of those who stuck to Birgivî's so-called purifying vision. For instance, he rejected *O tempora! O Mores!* topos and the degenerative perception of time (the more time gets away from the Golden Age (*'aṣr-ı sa'ādet*) the more deceptive innovations leading to moral corruption disperse). It would be profoundly misleading to essentialize a particular section of the time tunnel. For the Damascene Sheikh, the continuous presence of friends of God (*awliyā' Allah*) abolishes the imagined superiority of the distant past over the present while preserving the prodigious memory of the pious ancestors.[45] More precisely, the contemporary religious aura bears its own validity. Last but not least, Nabulusî did not neglect to make cautionary remarks about "ignorant ones" or "fanatics" who introduced themselves as the genuine protectors of Islam. Whoever makes such a statement and accuses others of being deviant is guilty of spoiling religion.

Apparently, at the time when the scale and intensity of the puritanical Kadızadeli onslaughts were immensely enlarged, the Sufi masters produced a vast number of punctilious works vindicating the time-honored Sufi rites by employing their advanced intellectual faculties. In his article, while opposing the myth of the "triumph of fanaticism," which signifies the decline in rational sciences allegedly caused by the Kadızadeli movement, El-Rouayheb underlined that the number of Sufi works particularly relying upon Ibn Arabî's theories had considerably increased in the course of the seventeenth century.[46] There is nothing to surprise us in this factual information since the philosophical heritage of Ibn Arabî served as a fruitful source in presenting counter-arguments against the

---

44 Jonathan Parkes Allen, "Reading Mehmed Birgivî with 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, Contested Interpretations of Birgivî's *al-Tarīqa al-Muhammadiyya* in the 17th-18th-Century Ottoman Empire" in *Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology*, eds. Lejla Demiri and Samuela Pagani (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 157.

45 Allen, "Reading Mehmed Birgivî," 160.

46 Khaled El-Rouayheb, "The Myth of 'the Triumph of Fanaticism' in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire," *Die Welt des Islams*, no. 48 (2008): 198-200.

reform-minded religious authorities. The sole weapon of the Sufi masters, who were evidently not passive or sluggish ascetics, was their pens. They challenged detractors of the Sufi practices in the theoretical field, but never mobilized as an activist organization chasing down retaliation. To be perfectly honest, it would not be quite possible even if they searched for such a concerted mobilization. The Sufi community did not consist of protagonists who resembled the brethren of a harmonious orchestra. Albeit responding to the invectives of the Kadızadeli adherents was a common denominator, they did not function as a monolithic block. The Sufi community was split into fragments due to the intra-Sufi discords. For instance, the Halvetî sheikh Ömer Efendi had publicly charged İdris-i Muhtefî (d. 1615), the leader of the Bayrâmî-Melâmî order known, defined, and guaranteed by the state apparatus, with heresy and atheism (*ilḥād ve zendeḳa*).[47] Niyâzî-i Mısrî did not eschew brutally impeaching the Hamzavîs (also known as the Melâmî branch of the Bayramîs) by professing that "I could be anything, an ignoramus, a sinner, a mischief-maker, an imbecile, a donkey, a dog, a cat, or a pig, but God forbid that I should be a Hamzavî."[48] On the other hand, two prominent Halvetî sheikhs Alâaddin Karabaş Veli (d. 1685) and Mehmed Nazmi Efendi (d. 1701) prudently kept a distance from Niyâzî-i Mısrî because of his suspicious account about the Hasanayn.[49] The heaviest censure was raised by İsmail Hakkı Bursevî (d. 1725), the esteemed commentator of some verses of Ibn Arabî's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikem* (*Şerḥ-i Ebyāt-ı Fuṣūṣ*) and the author of a grand commentary on the Quran in which he syncretized both theological and Sufi exegesis. Bursevî denounced both Niyâzî-i Mısrî and his Halvetî fellow and adversary Karabaş Veli as heretics, whose execution was permitted.[50] Lastly, Ankaravî because of his atypical commentary on the *Meşnevī* and his intimate association with the palace had encountered hostilities by Mevlevî counterparts. Briefly put, the Sufis were far from drawing a uniform and cordial group image; they could become as radicalized as the Kadızadelis in excommunicating each other while debating over certain religious controversies.

---

47 Sariyannis, "The Kadızadeli Movement," 280.

48 Sariyannis, "The Kadızadeli Movement," 280.

49 Terzioğlu, "Sufi and Dissident," 452-53.

50 Pagani, "Timeless Typologies," 192.

Conclusion

The Kadızadeli-Sufi conflict, which emerged in the turbulent atmosphere of the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire, where religion and politics were intertwined, presents a picture too complex to be reduced to binary oppositions. This conflict, which conjures up the image of a polarization ostensibly provoked by religious disagreements, was not devoid of socio-economic and political dimensions. The reform-minded Kadızadelis stuck in the periphery, which was most shaken by the seventeenth-century crises, had desiderated to benefit from the blessings of the center encircled by their Sufi foes. However, it was never converted into a bottom-up revolutionary operation. The imperial palace was the locus of the interplay of both forces. As the Kadızadeli reformists reinforced their dominance over the state apparatus, the pressure especially on the Halvetîs and Mevlevîs intensified. The Sufis in return opened up a front by producing theoretical works involving well-substantiated arguments. Yet, the Sufis, who demonstrated a highly fragmented communal identity due to the struggles within themselves, proved also to be as radical as their chief rivals when necessary. Although they were members of the orders in which the culture of obedience (*bī'at*) was instilled, they exhibited non-conformist individualities on the profane sphere as if to attest that they did not belong solely to the realm of the spiritual. The Kadızadeli-Sufi fission was in fact a symptom of the polyphonic and dynamic spirit of Islamic thought and praxis in the seventeenth century. The Sufis by their intellectual reflexes and inventive reactions colored this versatile reality.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Abdülganî en-Nablusî. *Mevlevîlik Müdafaası*. Translated by M. Zahid Tığlıoğlu. İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2019.

_____. *Tütün Risalesi*. Translated by M. Emin Efe and Ahmet Şenharputlu. İstanbul: Dergâh, 2021.

Katib Çelebi. *The Balance of Truth*. Translated by G. Lewis. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957.

_____. *Fezleke-i Tarih*. vol. 2. İstanbul, 1286 [1870].

Mustafa Naima. *Tarih-i Naima*. vol. 6. İstanbul, 1282 [1865-66].

Niyazî-i Mısrî. *Niyâzî-i Mısrî Divanı*. Prepared by Kenan Erdoğan. Ankara: Akçağ, 1998.

_____. *Niyazî-i Mısrî'nin Hatıraları*. Prepared by Halil Çeçen. İstanbul: Dergâh, 2006.

Secondary Sources

Allen, Jonathan Parkes. "Reading Mehmed Birgivî with 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, Contested Interpretations of Birgivî's *al-Tarīqa al-Muhammadiyya* in the 17th-18th-Century Ottoman Empire." In *Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology*, edited by Lejla Demiri and Samuela Pagani, 153-170. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019.

Alvan, Türkan. *Sultan Murad-ı Sâlis'in Dünyası*. İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2021.

Ambrosio, Alberto F. *Dervişler*. Translated by Buğra Poyraz. İstanbul: Kabalcı, 2012.

_____. "Ismā'īl Rusūhī Ankaravī: An Early Mevlevi intervention into the emerging Kadızadeli Sufi conflict." In *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200-1800*, edited by John Curry and Erik Ohlander, 183-197. Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011.

Baer, Marc David. *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Bilkan, Ali Fuat. *Fakihler ve Sofuların Kavgası: 17. Yüzyılda Kadızadeliler ve Sivasiler*. İstanbul: İletişim, 2016.

El-Rouayheb, Khaled. "The Myth of 'the Triumph of Fanaticism' in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire." *Die Welt des Islams* 48, (2008): 196-221.

Gölpınarlı, Abdülbâki. *Mevlânâ'dan Sonra Mevlevilik*. İstanbul: İnkılap, 2018.

Gürbüzel, Aslıhan. "Bilingual Heaven: Was there a Distinct Persianate Islam in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire?" *Philological Encounters* 6, (2021): 214-241.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things*. Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1994.

İnalcık, Halil. *Devlet-i 'Aliyye, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Üzerine Araştırmalar 2*. İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2014.

Kafadar, Cemal. "The Question of Ottoman Decline." *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4, (1997-1998): 30-75.

Kara, Mustafa. *Din, Hayat, Sanat Açısından Tekkeler ve Zaviyeler*. İstanbul: Dergâh, 2019.

_____. "Hikmet: Tasavvuf." *TDVIA*. vol. 17. İstanbul: TDV, 1998.

_____. *Metinlerle Osmanlılarda Tasavvuf ve Tarikatlar*. İstanbul: Dergâh, 2021.

Lekesiz, Mustafa Hulusi. "XVI. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Düzenindeki Değişimin Tasfiyeci (Püritanist) Bir Eleştirisi: Birgivî Mehmed Efendi ve Fikirleri." PhD diss. Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Ankara, 1997.

Ocak, Ahmet Yaşar. *Yeniçağlar Anadolu'sunda İslam'ın Ayak İzleri: Osmanlı Dönemi, Makaleler Araştırmalar*. İstanbul: Kitap Yayınları, 2011.

Öztürk, Necati. "Islamic Orthodoxy among the Ottomans in the Seventeenth Century with Special Reference to the Qadizadeh Movement." PhD diss. University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 1981.

Pagani, Samuela. "Timeless Typologies and New Individualities, 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi, Niyâzî-i Mısrî and the Sufi Theory of Sainthood in the Early Modern

Ottoman World." In *Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology*, edited by Lejla Demiri and Samuela Pagani, 171-194. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019.

Sariyannis, Marinos. "The Kadızadeli Movement as a Social and Political Phenomenon: The Rise of a 'Mercantile Ethic'?" In *Political Initiatives 'from the Bottom up' in the Ottoman Empire, Halcyon Days in Crete VII, 9-11 Jan. 2009*, edited by A. Anastasopoulos, 263-289. Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2012.

Tasbihi, Eliza. "Sufis Versus Exoteric Ulama in Seventeenth-century Ottoman Turkey: The Debate on 'Pharaoh's Faith' in the Mevlevī and Akbarian Sufi Traditions." In *Sufis and Their Opponents in the Persianate World,* edited by Reza Tabandeh and Leonard Lewisohn, 167-203. Irvine: Jordan Center for Persian Studies, 2020.

_____. "The Mevlevī Sufi Shaykh Ismāʿīl Rusūkhī Anqarawī (d. 1631) and his Commentary on Rūmī's *Mathnawī*," *Mawlana Rumi Review*, no. 6 (2015): 163-182.

Terzioğlu, Derin. "Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Siyāsa al-Sharʿiyya*, and the Early Modern Ottoman." In *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450-c. 1750*, edited by Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu, 101-154. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

_____. "Man in the Image of God in the Image of the Times: Sufi Self Narratives and the Diary of Niyāzī-i Mışrī (1618-94)," *Studia Islamica*, no. 94 (2002): 139-165.

_____. "Sufi and Dissident in the Ottoman Empire: Niyāzī-i Mışrī." PhD diss. Harvard University, Cambridge, 1999.

Tezcan, Baki. "The Portrait of the Preacher as a Young Man: Two Autobiographical Letters by Kadızade Mehmed from the Early Seventeenth Century." In *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete IX – A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 9-11 January 2015*, edited by Marinos Sariyannis, 187-249. Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2019.

Trimingham, John Spencer. *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Zilfi, Madeline. *Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulama in the Post-classical Age: 1600-1800.* Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988.

_____. "The Kadızadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45, no. 4 (October 1986): 251-169.