

A Mystical Approach to the Qur'anic Story of Prophet 'Īsā
(Jesus) Through the Qur'anic Exegesis *Rūḥ al-bayān* by
Ismail Haqqi Bursawī (d. 1725)

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
Master of Research (Islamic Studies)**

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which, to a substantial extent, has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged. I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee for the care, loan, and reproduction of theses.

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ABSTRACT

This research is aimed at Sufi exegesis and the mystical approach to the verses on ‘Īsā/Jesus in Ismail Haqqi Bursawī’s (d. 1725) commentary of the Qur’an: *Rūḥ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Spirit of Exposition in the Exegesis of the Qur’an). Sufi *tafsīr* always impressed readers, with outstanding commentary characteristics and a lengthy existence. Since ‘Īsā is an inspirational figure for Muslims, Christians and others, Bursawī’s commentary – *ishārī* (allusive) in nature and inspired by Ibn al-‘Arabī and other great Sufi scholars – rightfully deserves scholarly scrutiny. Bursawī lived in the Ottoman Empire, where remarkable contributions to Islamic science and knowledge were made, under whom Sufi *tafsīr* bloomed. Therefore, room is dedicated to this period and its development of exegesis. The main objectives of the thesis are investigation of the *ishārī* understanding of the Qur’an in Bursawī’s *Rūḥ al-bayān*, encapsulated in commentaries on verses about ‘Īsā; the examination of the characteristics of Sufi hermeneutics in the context of interpretive trends before the emergence of *Rūḥ al-bayān*, and to analyse Bursawī’s views on the theology of prophethood, focusing on ‘Īsā’s mission. The methodology engaged textual analysis, thematic and content analysis, and comparative analysis, all needed for this study. Bursawī, despite being inherently inclined towards the Akbarian school of thought, also displayed an equal interest in the Kubrawī school. Moreover, Bursawī did not overlook the importance of traditional exegesis and frequently favoured it. This traditional exegesis not only provides a deeper insight into the esoteric intentions of the Qur’anic text but also emphasises the fundamental understanding of the text itself, which Bursawī wished to impart to his readers through his *Tafsīr*. Thus, the research suggests, based on the analysis of his *Tafsīr*, that Bursawī, although greatly influenced by Akbarian and Kubrawī schools in *Rūḥ al-bayān*, kept his interpretation of the verses about Prophet ‘Īsā mainly traditional and exoteric. Bursawī’s *tafsīr* shows his original contributions and trademark style: storytelling, the thoroughness in linguistical explanations of the Qur’anic expression as well as

the inclusiveness of all major interpretational views, and the perfectly maintaining the exegetical balance between exoteric and esoteric. The two principal implications of the study are making portions of Bursawī work available in English and the contribution to the intercultural and interfaith exchange between Muslims and Christians.

Keywords: *Tafsīr*, Bursawī, ‘Īsā/Jesus, Sufī, Ibn al-‘Arabī, *ishārī*, exegesis, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, *rūḥ kalimah*

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INTRODUCTION

Everything written about Islam concerning the Qur'an can be considered exegesis (*tafsīr*).¹ Yet, exegesis has received less attention than other Islamic disciplines and *tafsīrs*, as Qur'an commentaries, have generally been consulted rather than studied.² However, recent years have recorded increased interest in *tafsīr*, particularly the Sufi. The reason is that many are looking for a positive emotional impulse in their relationship with God or a more profound religious experience, which is often unavailable to those maintaining that the Qur'an has no meanings other than those expressed by its outer aspects of exegesis. The Sufi or mystical approach to religion and its exegesis is often recognised as “the language of truth” and, apart from being compatible with modern times and people's needs, they are what has been missing for many.³

In Islamic teaching, the Qur'an offers as much as one can embrace, depending on individual intellectual ability and spiritual state. This occurs in times and environments where there is a genuine need to discover the Qur'an's original meanings. *Tafsīr*, as a literary genre and living witness of the historical development of all other Islamic sciences with their varieties and vocations, is the most reliable source of Islamic knowledge and tradition.⁴ The primary purpose of *tafsīr* is to draw humanity to a more profound understanding of the Qur'an and make its meaning accessible. However, as much as Muslims need to understand the Qur'an to implement it in their daily lives, of no less importance is the introduction of non-Muslim readers to the message of the Qur'an as understood by Muslims.⁵ This matter seems impossible to overemphasise in a world of chronic ignorance and misunderstanding, where some believe the

¹ Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 67.

² Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink, *Tafsir and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

³ Maryam Musharraf, “A Study on the Sufi Interpretation of Qur'an and the Theory of Hermeneutic,” *Al-Bayān Journal* 11, no. 1 (2013): 33, <https://doi.org/10.11136/jqh.1311.01.03>.

⁴ Pieter Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur'an Commentaries: Crossings Between this World and the Otherworld* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 19.

⁵ Görke and Pink, *Tafsir and Islamic Intellectual History*, 361-2.

Qur'an is for burning rather than reading.⁶ According to Abdullah Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 653),⁷ knowledge does not come to anyone nor can it be acquired by those restricted to the Qur'an's outer meaning. This meaning is an indication or hint leading to proper understanding of the Qur'an and abundant knowledge.⁸ Besides this, Muslims who know the Qur'an well can expect better understanding from non-Muslims and, consequently, have more productive interfaith dialogue.

There is a need for *tafsīr* since it represents the most important driving force of Islamic religious discourse. As found in the Qur'an, *tafsīr*, with its Arabic root *f-s-r*, refers to explanation (*bayān*) and uncovering (*kashf*) through Divine assistance, making evident the understood meaning. *Tafsīr* is technically a clarification of the words of God and their purposes in the Qur'an. It has the same meaning as *sharḥ* (explanation) and *takshīf* (uncovering).⁹ Al-Zarqānī (d. 1947) defines *tafsīr* as the science in which one investigates, within human capacity, the various aspects of the Qur'an containing and indicating God's intentions.¹⁰ To approach and understand these, as al-Suyūfī (d. 1505) asserts, one needs to be familiar with a range of disciplines: circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*); knowledge of verses, Meccan and Medinan; clear and ambiguous (*muḥkam* and *mutashābih*); abrogating and abrogated (*nāsikh* and *mansūkh*); specific or general (*khāṣṣ* and *'āmm*); and so on. Being familiar with these helps acquire better understanding of the Qur'an's context.¹¹

Highlighting the importance of *tafsīr*, Walid Saleh notes:

Qur'anic commentary stands at the heart of the Islamic literature produced in any age. In it, one finds reflected the concerns of every generation of Muslim intellectuals. The role of

⁶ For more information on contemporary ignorance, see Garry Wills, *What the Qur'an Meant: And Why it Matters* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018).

⁷ A famous companion, the first to recite the Qur'an in public in Mecca and one of the first exegetes of the Qur'an.

⁸ Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya ulum al-Dīn* [Revival of Religion's Sciences] (Cairo: Lajnat Nashr al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1937-38), 8-9.

⁹ Qur'an 25:33; also see Jalal al Din Al Suyuti, *Al Itqan fi Ulum al Qur'an* [The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur'an], trans. Hamid Algar, Michael Schub and M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing Ltd, 2012), vol. IV, 192.

¹⁰ Muhammad al-Zarqani, *Manāhil al 'Irfan fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* [Sources of Education in the Sciences of the Qur'an], 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 2017), 331-3.

¹¹ Al-Suyūfī, *Al-Itqān fi 'Ulum al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, 181-99.

Qur'anic commentary as the most prominent bearer of religious thinking has only increased over the centuries.¹²

Examination and discussion of the Qur'an in the period of early commentaries and traditions were to reach and investigate its applicability in religious and social life. For this purpose, the term *ta'wīl* was used.¹³ Since the Qur'an for Muslims is a speech that is impossible to imitate (*i'jāz*) and the primary source of Islam, commenting on it is considered a necessarily responsible activity. Thus, Islamic scholars developed rigorous rules concerning interpreters of the Qur'an (*mufasssīrūn*).¹⁴ Importantly, two preliminary contentions could be made considering the heritage of exegesis of the Qur'an. First, *tafsīr*, in its hermeneutic constellation with the outer world, depending on by whom it was informed, often was the individual interpretation directed to make the Qur'an relevant to every time and situation, where a range of external influences was presented through commentary.¹⁵ Second, no exegetic school has superiority or exclusivity over Qur'anic interpretation. All vocations of *tafsīr* – traditional, philosophical, juristic, Sufi or modern, with their distinctive fashions – have contributed to the vast and splendid Islamic exegetical heritage.¹⁶

Ishārī tafsīr is credited with assuming the existence of inner and hidden meanings of Qur'anic verses, something for which not only common knowledge and experience are required but also personal and unique mystical inspiration (*ishāra*), love (*'ishq*) and eventual dissolution in God (*fanā'*). It has been well-regarded by almost all Muslim scholars. Many of them, like al-

¹² Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr: The Qur'ān Commentary of al Tha'labī (d. 427/1035)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 2, quoted in Sarah Abdel-Latif, "Mystical Qur'anic Exegesis and the Canonization of Early Sufis in Sulamī's 'Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr,'" *International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 6, no. 4 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v06i04/13-22>.

¹³ Well-learned scholars of the early period, like Sufyan ibn Uyayna (d. 814), defined *ta'wīl* as: the application of the Qur'an's text to a given situation or to come back to origins (*ta'awwala*). Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubara* [Biographies of the Great] (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1998), 497-8.

¹⁴ For more details, see Recep Dogan, *Usul al Tafsīr: The Sciences and Methodology of the Qur'an* (US: Tughra Books, 2014), 125-132; Ahmad von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an* (UK: Islamic Publications, 2009), 95-102.

¹⁵ Eisegesis is the interpretation of a text by reading into it one's ideas. Merriam-Webster, online, s.v. "Eisegesis," accessed July 23, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eisegesis>.

¹⁶ See Claude Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, C. I. Gillio, Wadad Kadi and A. Rippin (Leiden: Brill, 2002), accessed September 15, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301588461_Exegesis_of_the_Qur'an_Classical_and_Medieval.

Ghazālī (d. 1111), al-Zarkashī (d. 1392) and al-Suyūfī, openly defended it, claiming its inclusion in any decent representation of the Qur'an as a vital vehicle in the lives of Muslims throughout their long history.¹⁷ Bursawī's exegesis, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, with its commentary of verses related to 'Īsā/Jesus, influenced by Sufi views, offers an excellent pathway to understanding the nature of *ishārī tafsīr* and its lavishness. Sufi in vocation and a compendium in style and method, *Rūḥ al-bayān* presents valuable insights into esoteric and exoteric interpretations of verses about 'Īsā. How Bursawī introduced and presented the hidden meanings in the story of 'Īsā, scattered in Qur'anic verses over 14 chapters, where the importance of indication¹⁸ is brought into view and definitions made evident to those looking for more than what is apparent, amid the traditional exegetical context, is the primary task of my research, presented in chapters three and four.

Research Questions

Taking the importance highlighted as a guideline, this study critically analyses and appraises Bursawī's spiritual-theological interpretations of Prophet 'Īsā in his exegesis *Rūḥ al-bayān*. With this primary concept in mind, some sub-questions will also be explored:

1. Bearing in mind his Akbarian inclination in interpretation and Kubrawī influence, does Bursawī follow the Akbarian or Kubrawī school, or both, while conceptualising the prophethood in Islam? He is also often literal and traditional in his commentaries. To what extent does this happen and with which aspects of 'Īsā's life and mission?
2. What are Bursawī's original contributions to Sufi *tafsīr* as examined through the case study of Prophet 'Īsā, having in mind the influence of Ibn al-'Arabī and his comparison of 'Īsā to a perfect human being (*insān kāmil*)?

¹⁷ Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1984), 34.

¹⁸ Another meaning of *ishāra*.

Theoretical Framework, Methodology of the Research, and Data Collection

The theoretical framework of this research comprises three concepts – prophethood in Islamic theology, the relationship of the prophets with God in Islamic spirituality and the layers of meaning (*marātib al-ma‘āni*) present in *ishārī* (allusive) exegesis. In addition to the theological considerations of prophethood in Islam, prophets play a highly symbolic role in Islamic spirituality, where there is a special relationship between them and God. *Ishārī tafsīr* offers unique observations of the core of that relationship – love. It requires total effacement of oneself as if consumed in the beloved One.¹⁹ As a result, love for God has dominated the heart of every prophet. In their love for God, they excelled every other of His creatures and remained excellent exemplars for everyone else to emulate. This was their greatest *karāmah*, or gift from God, making them extraordinary and unique. Their worship and honour of God, faithfulness and fulfilment of their duties find their source in love for God. This love is what we inherited from them, witnessed by the purity of state where a lover keeps nothing back from their beloved in their heart.²⁰

Ishārī tafsīr comes with depth of theological and spiritual interpretation where prophethood is understood as the prophets’ journeys and those who followed them. Through this, one learns that genuine commitment and devotion begin and develop with true love. The Qur’anic view of prophethood is guidance and bringing news from the unseen (*ghayb*), a concept that relates to the past, present and future. After God’s permission, the prophets performed miracles (*mu‘jizāt*), proving the truthfulness of their summons to people. Although they lived in separate eras of history, prophets were brothers, coming from the same source and having the same, unique message for humankind. In his *tafsīr*, al-Ṭabarī relates what was narrated by Abu Huraira from Prophet Muhammad:

Prophets are fraternal brothers, and their mothers are different. Their faith is one. Of all men, I am the most rightful claimant to Jesus, son of Mary, because there was no prophet between

¹⁹ Abū l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā‘if al-Ishārāt* [Subtle Allusions], trans. Kristin Zahra Sands (Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Fons Vitae, 2017), 1:235.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:235-6.

him and me. He will be my successor in my community. He will indeed descend, and when you see him, you will recognise him...²¹

The narration notes important details: although their religious laws, as seen by al-Ṭabarī, were diverse, they all had been sent by God from the same origin, preaching identical faith. As the narration highlights, the relationship between Muhammad and ‘Īsā is particularly significant for Muslims from historical and religious perspectives. The theme of ‘Īsā’s return is particularly remarkable and will be further discussed in this work.

The third critical theoretical concept relevant to this research is layers of hidden, esoteric meaning (*marātib al-ma‘āni*) in Qur’anic exegesis. Sufi exegesis views the revelation and interpretation of these meanings as its primary task. It implies the Qur’an has several layers of hidden meaning. Sufi exegesis holds the text of the Qur’an, besides its exoteric (*ẓāhir*) meaning, is open to a multivalence of interpretations towards its hidden (*bāṭin*) meanings. The Qur’an addresses humankind individually; therefore, everyone should find their level of communication with God according to their intellectual ability and nearness to Him, as suggested by Sufis.²² Having in mind the three concepts within which this research will be conducted, the main objective will be to find out the original exoteric and esoteric observations of Bursawī in his *ishārī* commentary, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, focusing on ‘Īsā as a case study and important figure within Islamic prophethood. This will be observed through love and gratitude as driving motivations in human obedience to God and dominant feelings in the Sufi tradition.

This study is qualitative textual research exploring the exegesis *Rūḥ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*. This volume is written mainly in Arabic by the Jalwati *shaikh* and exegete Ismail Haqqi Bursawī. As the primary source of the research, I focus on his commentary on the verses about ‘Īsā. This allusive *tafsīr*, as my thematic analysis shows, views ‘Īsā through the light of Sufi

²¹ Abul Hussain Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjaj, *Sahīh Muslim*, trans. Nasiruddin al Khattab (USA: Darussalam, 2007), 7213; Al Tabari, *Jami al Bayan an Ta’wil al Qur’an* [Complete Explanation of the Exegesis of the Qur’an] (Cairo: Dar al-ma’rifah, 1954), vol. 2, 55, commentary of Ālu ‘Imrān.

²² Murshid F. A. Ali ElSenossi, “The Language of the Future: Sufi Terminology,” s.v. “*isharah*,” “*ma’ani*” “*sura*,” accessed March 25, 2020, <http://www.almirajsuficentre.org.au/qamus/>; Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur’an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 8-12.

exegetical tradition. As indicated by the content analysis, Bursawī's *tafsīr* is a compendium, gathering not only Sufi but also other interpretive traditions.

The critical appraisal provides the opportunity to reflect and evaluate Bursawī's *ishārī* observations of the verses on 'Īsā, trying to detect elements that make it similar or different to mainstream exoteric commentaries, such as al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi'*, Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr* and al-Qurtubī's *Al-Jāmi'* as well as Sufi exegeses such as al-Qushayrī's *Laṭā'if*, al-Kāshānī's *Ta'wīlāt* and Kubrawī's *Al-Ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya*. This approach will help explain, justify and tackle this interpretation after synthesising other perspectives and traditions. The investigation of the commentaries of the verses related to 'Īsā will clarify the position of *ishārī* Sufi exegesis within the broad Islamic hermeneutical heritage. I will also scrutinise the objections and critiques made by traditional circles that *Rūḥ al-bayān* has many unreliable and unauthentic narrations. *Rūḥ al-bayān* will be the primary source along with the Qur'an (Arabic original and English translation by Al-Hilali and Khan),²³ and the content analysis will be used to filter *sūras*/chapters and verses/passages of the Qur'an related to the story of 'Īsā. The version of *Rūḥ al-bayān* that will be used is the ten-volume Beirut print by Dār al-Fikr from 2008. This edition is chosen for its comprehensive introduction to the author, Sufism, Sufi *tafsīr* and its essential place in Qur'anic hermeneutics. The content of the *tafsīr*, written in classical Arabic (except for some passages written in Persian), is presented, chapter by chapter and verse by verse, containing the author's explanations, commentaries, quotations and referrals to other *tafsīrs* and sources. The print is mainly based on the 1912 manuscript kept in the Library of Toronto, Canada.

To carry out comparative analysis, apart from the traditional, Akbarian and Kubrawī exegeses, some non-exegetical sources like Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and *Futuḥāt al-makkiyyah* and Rumi's *Mathnawī* will be used. Relevant secondary classic and modern literature in English, Arabic, Turkish and Bosnian languages on Sufi *tafsīr*, Ibn al-'Arabī, Bursawī's work, Prophet 'Īsā and prophethood in Islam will also be used. Comparative analysis

²³ Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language* (Madinah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 1999).

will help define if Bursawī followed Akbarian or Kubrawi tradition, or both, to what extent, and will detect and clarify their similarities with Bursawī's original contributions. These two traditions are often difficult to distinguish. While Bursawī mainly leans towards Ibn al-'Arabī's reflections, he did not hesitate to offer his unique views and thoughts. Also, his reference to Kubrawī authorities, Kubrā (d. 1221), al-Dāya (d. 1256) and al-Simmānī (d. 1336), will give valuable insight into his views influenced by this Sufi tradition.

The data analysis will follow mixed methods: content analysis will be used to check where 'Īsā is covered as one of the *ulu al-'azm* prophets²⁴ as a scoping activity. For that purpose, relevant sections and passages from the Qur'an will be referenced. Without a specific sequence or narrative pattern, 'Īsā is mentioned in more than 90 verses scattered over 14 chapters,²⁵ providing the initial guidelines for analysing Bursawī's exegesis. The Qur'anic references to the Prophet 'Īsā are in six categories: (1) 'Īsā's mother, Maryam (Mary) and his miraculous conception (Q 19:16-22); (2) the miracles he performed as a prophet of God (Q 3:49); (3) 'Īsā's preaching to his people (Q 61:6); (4) the verses of theological implications relevant to 'Īsā and his prophetic mission, negating his Divine origin (Q 5:72-74); (5) 'Īsā's eschatological conversation with God (Q 5:116-120), and (6) 'Īsā's return, as briefly implied in the Qur'an, without precise indication (Q 43:61). Narrations at different levels of authenticity exist in *ḥadīth* literature treating the issue.²⁶

Textual analysis will be used to thoroughly examine the discussion and commentary Bursawī made on prophethood in general and 'Īsā. This method will provide the opportunity to better understand Bursawī's theological approach and understanding of prophethood in Islam, much influenced by Ibn al-'Arabī's legacies and Akbarian tradition, as well as Kubrawī's. His

²⁴ The five great prophets are Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, 'Īsā and Muhammad; see Qur'an 46:35.

²⁵ Muhammad Fuad Abdul Bāqī, *Al Mu'jam al Mofahras li Alfaz al Qur'an al Kareem* [Dictionary of Expressions in the Qur'an] (Cairo: Dar al Hadīth, 1996), 607.

²⁶ Bukhārī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, trans. M. Muhsin Khan (Maktaba Shamela, 2015), book 3, vol. 2, Descent of 'Īsā, *ḥadīth* no. 3448, 1028, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/>; also see Muslim, *Sahīh Muslim*, Descent of 'Īsā, *ḥadīth* no. 242-3, 52-3.

view on ‘Īsā’s eschatological return before the end of time is of particular interest since scholars have no unified stand on this exceptional event.

The critical appraisal will help create insight into Bursawī’s work and how Islamic theology, Sufism and Qur’anic exegetical endeavours are linked to assess Bursawī’s original contribution to Islamic theology and exegesis. Thematic analysis, a common method in qualitative research, will be used to identify, analyse and present the case of ‘Īsā in his irregular and sporadic coverage in the Qur’an through *ishārī* exegetical light within Bursawī’s *Rūḥ al-bayān*. This analysis will cover all phases of the story of ‘Īsā in the Qur’an yet emphasise its theological aspect rather than particularities from his life. The strong accent will be on ‘Īsā as God’s Word and Spirit from Him (*kalimatuhū wa rūḥun minhu*) and how Bursawī understood them.

Research Objectives

This study has three main research objectives:

1. To investigate aspects of the *ishārī* understanding of the Qur’an, encapsulated in commentaries on verses about ‘Īsā made by Bursawī in his *tafsīr*, *Rūḥ al-bayān*.
2. To examine characteristics of Sufi hermeneutics in the context of interpretive trends before the emergence of *Rūḥ al-bayān*, which played a significant role, bearing in mind its time, place and compendium style of writing.
3. To analyse Bursawī’s views on the theology of prophethood, focusing on ‘Īsā’s mission, its eschatological aspect through his return and the description of the unique relationship between prophets and God.

Brief Chapter Description

Chapter one highlights the importance of Sufi or *ishārī tafsīr* in Islamic exegetical tradition, presenting its traits and essential facts. This chapter scrutinises the hermeneutical

heritage in the context of the Ottoman period (13th to 20th century), the subject academically neglected and waiting to be explored. The case figure, Jalwati shaikh Ismail Haqqi Bursawī, represents a crucial scholar of this time and I analyse his exegesis, *Rūḥ al-bayān* – its features, style and exegetical observations. Some research on Bursawī’s work by Western authors is also scrutinised.

Chapter two presents Prophet ‘Īsā as a monumental theological figure in the Islamic faith. It investigates the Qur’anic context of his role in Islam, theological explanations, and Sufi and modern views on his mission and teachings. An inevitable topic is his eschatological role and its ground in the Qur’an, tradition and current opinions.

Chapter three deals with Bursawī’s comments and views about Prophet ‘Īsā’s miracles and extraordinary qualities from his life and mission. For this purpose, sections from *Rūḥ al-bayān* are scrutinised, their esoteric (*ishārī*) messages as well as traditional or exoteric observations, as collected and presented by the author.

Chapter four focuses on the theology of prophethood in Islam, as interpreted by Bursawī in his *tafsīr*, with the case of ‘Īsā as the primary interest. A strong contention underlying the chapter’s main topic is the relationship prophets had with God and all the eternal values making this relationship unique, including uncompromised love, commitment, guidance and gratitude. This chapter, like the one preceding, presents Sufi views, Bursawī’s understanding of the verses in question and the influence of Akbarian and Kubrawī thoughts on his work.

CHAPTER 1: SUFI EXEGESIS AND A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE OTTOMAN SUFI *TAFSĪR*, BURSAWĪ AND *RŪḤ AL-BAYĀN*

1.1 Introduction

The importance of the Qur'an in the life of Muslims inevitably imposes the significance of its proper understanding, which naturally depends on its authentic interpretation. All schools of *tafsīr*, including the Sufi, are crucial aspects of Qur'anic science (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*). Esoteric exegesis is integral to the Qur'anic commentary heritage and to a good extent remains unexplored.²⁷ This chapter scrutinises the Sufi or *ishārī tafsīr* with its deep and spiritual interpretations within a broader Islamic hermeneutical context, indicating its unique role in the field of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*. This is important since Sufi writers have insisted on esoteric exegetical tradition as well-rooted and identifiable within the Islamic tradition, deserving to be appropriately defined and catalogued.²⁸ The first two sections of this chapter offer an overview of the main traits of Sufi exegesis and insights into its historical development, the most outstanding scholars in the field and their works.

Mystics always had unusual and distinctive fashions of looking into the Qur'an, having taught of its two dimensions: exoteric and esoteric. Together these two lead to that which is inseparable – knowledge and spiritual experience. Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 988) explains that Sufis are recognised through their living by the Qur'an and traditions of Prophet Muhammad, resulting in showing noble qualities, performing righteous actions and gaining higher spiritual states.²⁹ Also, they claim to have acquired knowledge about the soul (*nafs*), its traits and propensities, and a method of eliminating its vices. They have also discovered what is difficult for others by sacrificing themselves, making every discovery a personal path.³⁰

²⁷ Esoteric deals with the inner aspects of existence and topics pertaining to the inner life of man. Exoteric refers to the external and pertains to what is seen. For more information see Marcia Wilson, *Esoteric and Exoteric*, 2011.

²⁸ Jamal J. Elias, "Sufi Tafsīr Reconsidered: Exploring the Development of a Genre," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 12 (2010): 46-50.

²⁹ Abu Nasr al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-luma' fī al-tasawwuf* [Brief Introduction on Sufism], ed. Reynold Nicholson (London: Luzac & Co, 1993), 13.

³⁰ Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 29.

This chapter is also an insight into the exegetical heritage of the Ottoman Empire and the significant impact it had on various disciplines of Islamic studies, mainly *tafsīr* and Sufi literature. Ismail Haqqī Bursawī, who is the subject of my academic scrutiny, collected exegetical works before him in *Rūḥ al-bayān* and, along with his contributions, influenced scholarly circles afterwards. Being founded on Sufi orders, the Ottoman Empire embraced Sufism like no Muslim empire previously.³¹ This relationship between Ottoman society and Sufism was reflected in students of knowledge through formal education in the *madrasas* plus culture and the public through the informal environment of mosques and Sufi lodges. *Madrasas* served the function that a university fulfils today – a place of higher learning to produce qualified professionals for the needs of the state.³² Bursawī, a versatile teacher and public figure, is directly linked to this Ottoman educational establishment as a *shaikh* and exegete teaching *tafsīr*, a key discipline in the *madrasa* curriculum. The Qur’anic verses about Prophet ‘Īsā, as interpreted and understood in *Rūḥ al-bayān*, are of particular interest in this work in chapters three and four.

1.2 Sufi *Tafsīr*: An Overview

In traditional biographical encyclopedias of exegetes (*tabaqāt al-mufasssīrīn*), Sufi exegesis has always been viewed as part of the vast *tafsīr* milieu, never as a separate literary genre. Viewing it as a distinct genre appears in modern *tafsīr* endeavours.³³ Sufi *tafsīr* has been scrutinised since the earliest times and attracted considerable interest from scholars and others. Several things should be considered to determine if it can be viewed as a separate genre. First, Sufi commentaries do not have a unique or shared structure, characteristics or concerns that distinguish them from the rest of the *tafsīr* corpus. Sufi exegetes often rely on other non-Sufi

³¹ The earliest Sufi orders mentioned in association with the formation of the Ottoman Empire are Yasawi, Mawlawī, Chishti and Baktashi. See Spencer J. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press Inc., 1998), 51-64, 67-81.

³² Halil Şimşek, “The Missing Link in the History of Quranic Commentary: The Ottoman Period and the Quranic Commentary of Ebussuud/Abū alSu’ūd al ‘Imādī (d. 1574 CE) Irshād al ‘aql al salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al Karīm” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2018), 43.

³³ Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur’an Commentaries*, 17.

tafsīr works, especially in the formative period. For instance, al-Qushayrī was influenced by al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) and al-Tha‘labī (d. 1035), so Sufi *tafsīr* often represents a successful synthesis of exoteric and esoteric commentaries or a fusion of traditional doctrines and their allegorical interpretations.³⁴ For example, Sufi exegetes often add personal mystical experiences to the widely accepted exoteric understanding of the Qur’an. Second, the word *ishārī* (allusive) does not exclusively relate to exegetical activity treating the Qur’an but to all forms of esoteric knowledge, writings and interpretations. Famous masterpieces, such as Rumi’s *Mathnawī* and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, are typical Sufi works containing interpretations of the Qur’an but with different *tafsīr* formats.³⁵ Apart from this, many Sufi works are verse-by-verse based, without covering the entire Qur’an. Moreover, understanding *ishārī* as esoteric only is not satisfactory; it is allusive, metaphorical and indicative, for Sufi commentaries are mainly suggestive and not declarative.

In mystical *tafsīr*, the exegete is not occupied with explaining the relationship between revelation and actual events; instead, they interpret words and verses in the Qur’an out of personal spiritual experience.³⁶ Third, many Sufi authors did not identify themselves as Sufis and their works as *ishārī*, which denoted respect and derogation in early stages of hermeneutic endeavours. . The term *zuhhād* (ascetics), people who tried to prove the compatibility of their attitudes and actions with those of the Messenger of Islam and the content of the Qur’an or just generally pious people, was in use.³⁷ Finally, the categories of Qur’anic verses commented on by Sufi exegetes are not exclusively esoteric since the terms *muḥkam* (self-explanatory), *mutashābih* (obscure), *ḥalāl* (permitted), *ḥarām* (forbidden), *amthāl* (examples), *awliyā’* (God’s friends) and others are widely applied in all theological, legal and other scholar

³⁴ Elias, “Sufi Tafsīr Reconsidered,” 45; Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, 8-12.

³⁵ Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 67.

³⁶ Musharraf, “A Study on the Sufi Interpretation.”

³⁷ Abdel-Latif, “Mystical Qur’anic Exegesis,” 17.

writings.³⁸ So, it is correct to conclude that Sufi *tafsīr* is integral to a shared Islamic exegetical heritage abreast with its traditional counterpart.

The main objection of the fierce critics of Sufi *tafsīr*, like Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and al-Wāhidī (d. 1075), is that this exegetical style is not in line with usual and accepted methods of exoteric exegesis; it deviates from the original and intended message of the text, finding the Qur'an's interpretation unrelated and opposed to the literal meaning. Al-Ghazālī, al-Taftazānī (d. 1390), al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī defended Sufi *tafsīr* if it conforms to the literal meaning of the Qur'an's text, viewing it as a warm expression of personal piety.³⁹ Introducing Sufi *tafsīr* brings a few points of enquiry: What makes it distinctive? What makes it mystical? What knowledge can be acquired with the Sufi approach to the Qur'an and how authentic is this trend of hermeneutics? These questions are pathways to better understanding of the subject, but they demand a more comprehensive study.

Two prominent spiritual figures from the second century after *hijra*⁴⁰ are taken as the forefathers of mystical thought in Islam: al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765); although Sunni esoteric doctrine achieved initial consolidation in the third century AH with the appearance of the *tafsīr* of al-Tustarī (d. 896), who is considered for Sufi exegesis what al-Ṭabarī is for traditional.⁴¹ As mentioned, mystics presume the Qur'an has multiple layers of hidden, inner meaning (*bāṭin*) beyond the external and obvious (*ẓāhir*). The Sufi persistence on the Qur'an's multivalent nature is related to understanding its ambiguous (*mutashābih*) verses. Based on Ibn Zubayr's (d. 728) interpretation of Q 3:7, Sufi commentators claim the clear verses (*muḥkam*) are the basic message, understandable for all humankind. At the same time, the ambiguous (*mutashābih*) can be comprehended only by some.⁴² The most frequently quoted

³⁸ Elias, "Sufi Tafsīr Reconsidered," 46.

³⁹ Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, 1-40.

⁴⁰ Migration of the Prophet Muhammad and the first Muslims from Mecca to Madina, 622 CE.

⁴¹ Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At Tustarī* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1979), 141.

⁴² Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 14-5.

proof of the existence of the Qur'an's various meanings and their interpretations is the narration by Ibn Mas'ūd from Prophet Muhammad:

The Qur'an was sent down in seven letters (*aḥruf*). Each *ḥarf* has a back (*ẓahr*) and a belly (*baṭn*). Each *ḥarf* has a border (*ḥadd*), and each border has a lookout point (*maṭla'*).⁴³

Traditionalists and mystics have their says on this narration. The focus is on the exoteric sense or knowledge available to the masses and the inner sense and understanding, or experience, hidden from many and entrusted only to the few.⁴⁴ This is the elementary way of distinguishing *tafsīr* from *ta'wīl*: the former offers the unmistakable, exoteric message, while the latter embodies the esoteric, hidden meaning. This is where *ishārī tafsīr* comes into existence and why, as Calder noticed, allusion (*ishārah*) and exegesis (*ta'wīl*) are used as synonyms.⁴⁵ This exegetical approach aims not to prove something but to give meaning to the Qur'an through spiritual experience or inspiration (*ilhām*). The mystically uninspired reader will never understand the importance of mystical interpretation based on its apparent description. Someone reaching the hidden esoteric message does not need a literal description. These inspirations oblige no one since not anyone can experience them. They are kept as personal treasures.⁴⁶ Some traditionalists see Sufi interpretations as deviated and distortive to the original meanings of the Qur'an, detecting it as eisegesis rather than exegesis. Al-Ghazālī defends esoteric interpretation in the belief that constraining meaning to what was narrated by the Messenger's companions and first generations necessarily narrows the Qur'an's potential.⁴⁷ Sufis "had a sense" for things others did not, looking for more esoteric meanings in the text, not rejecting the exoteric ones.

⁴³ Muhammad ibn Hibbān, *Sahīh ibn Hibbān* (Damascus: Dar al Maārif, 1952), narration no. 75; Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 17.

⁴⁴ Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 17.

⁴⁵ Stephen R. Burge, *The Meaning of the Word: Lexicology and Quranic Exegesis* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 13-5.

⁴⁶ Dogan, *Usul al Tafsīr*, 297; Elias, "Şufi Tafsīr Reconsidered," 51.

⁴⁷ Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 56-9.

Sufi *tafsīr* is of two types: *nazarī* (theoretical, speculative) and *ishārī* (allusive).⁴⁸ *Nazarī tafsīr* holds an already “prepared” theory about the Qur’an, practically adjusting it to (often problematic) views and ideas. Maintaining the approach of parallel exegesis, this *tafsīr* tradition found the text’s objective in dealing with events and laws in coexisting, similar symbols of the spiritual world without paying much attention to the evident nature of words and their exoteric meaning. These symbols and interpretations are even more allusive than *ta’wīl*. The sensual form in the wording of a verse is only a hint leading to the spiritual world of meanings. A reader needs to cross over through their mystic experience to understand them. This fashion created unusual interpretations of the Qur’an, fiercely criticised by traditional interpreters.⁴⁹ The most criticised theory of this exegetical method is the oneness of existence (*wahdat al-wujūd*) and its advocate Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240), considered by many a founder of this movement, also named philosophical Sufism. All disciples of his time and after following him are known as Akbarians.⁵⁰

While speculative exegesis often ignores apparent meanings of Qur’anic verses and Arabic language rules, its allusive counterpart does not deny the text’s literal (*ẓāhir*) sense. However, the allusive approach believes each verse has many levels of meaning hidden within the letters and words. Inspiration is seen as a tool to reach these hidden meanings, rather than a means of proving ideas.⁵¹ It is essential to distinguish between the *ishārī*, who never neglected the unmistakable Qur’anic message, and the *bāṭinī* school, which rejected agreed inner textual meanings and apparent practices of Islam. The *bāṭinī* school claims those who ascended to high spiritual levels ceased being obliged with their religious duties. They preferred their distorted interpretations, often contradicting widespread Islamic teachings.⁵²

⁴⁸ Muhammad Husain al-Dhahabī, *Al Tafsīr wal Mufasssirun* [Exegesis and Exegetes] (Cairo: Kitabah Wahbah, 2000), 229-40.

⁴⁹ Helmut Gätje, *The Quran and its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 40-1.

⁵⁰ This term does not indicate a specific Sufi group or order; rather, all those that accepted Ibn al-‘Arabī’s esoteric interpretations, especially those related to metaphysics.

⁵¹ Al-Dhahabī, *Al Tafsīr wal Mufasssirun*, 337.

⁵² Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 11; Dogan, *Usul al Tafsīr*, 299.

1.3 Sufi Exegetes and the Development of Sufi Exegesis

This section briefly examines the periods of development of Sufi exegesis since its earliest known origins, with the most significant authors and their outstanding contributions to Sufi hermeneutics. Many influential Sufi commentaries are still in unpublished manuscripts, emphasising the need for contemporary research in Sufi hermeneutics.⁵³ According to Suleyman Ateş, Sufi *tafsīr* historically went through five development periods. The formative period began with the first written Sufi *tafsīr*, commentaries on some Qur’anic verses. Their styles fit Sufis’ persistence in camouflaging their spiritual states and experiences without exposing them to the masses. The most prominent name from this period is Abū Muhammad Sahl ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Tustarī, the author of *tafsīr* of the whole Qur’an and first Sufi exegete identified as such. The classic period of systematisation was the time of Abū ‘Abdurrahmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021), who played an enormous role with his *tafsīr*. The most significant endeavours of this period are the collection and systematisation of previous works and their reorganisation. This was followed by development influenced by Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 1074) and Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybūdī (d. 1135), and general transformation of a Muslim society when Sufi exegesis as part of a broad Sufi thought was fully established. Great Sufi al-Ghazālī, as well as the author of *al-Mufradāt*, al-Isfahānī (d. 1109), are from this era. A period of esoteric exegesis influenced by Ibn al-‘Arabī and the formation of theoretical exegesis (*tafsīr nazārī*) and philosophical mysticism is what follows. *Futuḥāt makkiyyah*⁵⁴ and *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*⁵⁵ are the most reliable sources of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s exegetical and religious views, the “oneness of existence” in particular. Ibn al-‘Arabī significantly influenced Sufi thoughts and interpretive trends afterwards, including Bursawī. Finally, the Ottoman period of Sufi exegesis, which comprised many nations and vast geography, is the last of this periodisation by Ateş. A new

⁵³ Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 68.

⁵⁴ Muhyiddin Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations (Al-Futuḥat al Makkiyya)*, trans. William C. Chittick and James W. Morris (New York: Pir Press, 2005), vol. 1.

⁵⁵ Muhyiddin Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fusus al-hikam* [The Ringstones of Wisdom], ed. Abu al-A’la Afifi (Beirut: Dar al Kitab al Arabi, 1980).

interpretive style or *ḥāshiya* had emerged and became a default of *tafsīr* in the Ottoman Empire. This period is also considered the most neglected in Sufi *tafsīr*.⁵⁶

A similar periodisation, introduced by Alan Godlas, recognises four periods of Sufi exegetic tradition. The formative period, in which tenets and foundations of esoteric commentary were laid (al-Tustarī, al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī and al-Anṣarī (d. 1089)). The period of Sufi *tafsīrs* reflected in the works of al-Maybudī, al-Daylamī (d. 1193) and Ruzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 1209), when Sufi hermeneutical terminology and vocabulary were developed and standardised. The third period (mid-13th to mid-14th centuries) is the time of Sufi schools (Kubrawis and Akbarians) represented by Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā and Ibn al-'Arabī. Ibn al-'Arabī's exegetical views expressed in his writings influenced those after him: al-Qūnawī (d. 1274), al-Safadī⁵⁷ (d. 1296), al-Nisabūrī (d. 1327) and al-Kāshānī (d. 1329). The fourth period is from the 14th to 19th centuries and the most prominent Sufi exegetes of this time are Nimat Allah ibn Mahmut al-Nakhjiwānī (d. 1514), Jalwati shaikh Aziz Mahmud Hudāyī and Ismail Haqqi Bursawī (d. 1725), also a Jalwati shaikh whose *tafsīr Rūḥ al-bayān* is the most substantial and comprehensive *tafsīr* written and composed during this period of Sufi exegetical activity.⁵⁸ Andrew Rippin concludes the final period of Sufi *tafsīr* history is from the 19th century to current times, with Ibn Ajība (d. 1809), Panipati (d. 1810) and al-'Alūsī (d. 1854) as the most prolific authors.⁵⁹ Jamal Elias rightfully argues this periodisation sees Sufi *tafsīr* as a separate genre, the idea disliked by majority of scholars. Elias assumes Sufi *tafsīr* and its context should be considered an integral part of the wider *tafsīr* heritage, so the same general development periodisation should apply.⁶⁰ On the other side, as Coppens noticed in his study of five Sufi *tafsīrs*, continuity is significant evidence proving Sufi *tafsīr* a separate genre. Sufi authors relied

⁵⁶ Suleyman Ates, *Ishari Tefsir Okulu* [School of Allusive Exegesis] (Ankara: Ankara Universitesi Ilahi Fakultesi Yayinlari, 1974).

⁵⁷ Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, an author and historian from Mamluk period, a student of imam al-Shāfi

⁵⁸ Alan A. Godlas, "Sufi Qur'an Commentary: Sufi Tafsir," accessed 23/06/2021, www.uga.edu/islam/suftaf/tafsuftoc.html.

⁵⁹ Alan A. Godlas, "Sufism," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin and Jawid Mojaddedi (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2017).

⁶⁰ Elias, "Ṣufi Tafsir Reconsidered," 45-6.

on those before them, using identical and easy-to-recognise terminology while explaining verses from the Qur'an, so they agree on the same exegetical principles and signify them. This makes their *tafsīr* works unique and genealogical.⁶¹

Al-Tustarī is credited with the oldest comprehensive Sufi commentary. His *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-aẓīm* is the first autonomous Sufi exegesis of the Qur'an.⁶² It does not explain every verse or chapter. It is also evident that al-Tustarī did not write it himself – his exegesis contains his opinions and expositions of the verses in the Qur'an collected by Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Baladī (d. 1112), which is mentioned in the beginning of the *tafsīr*. “He (al-Tustarī) was asked about...and he replied...” is a frequent phrase used by al-Baladī throughout the work, where he clearly indicates al-Tustarī's authorship of the book.⁶³ In his introduction, he states the principle of his approach to exegesis as “...understanding the Book of God according to the language of the people of the truth,”⁶⁴ something widely disapproved by traditional circles. He believes an esoteric understanding of the Qur'an, along with rituals of scriptural focus (*dhikr*), leads to mystical experience, something Suhrawardī (d. 1191) and Ibn al-'Arabī also mention in their writings. Suhrawardī considers al-Tustarī a pivotal figure in the historical turn of Sufism towards philosophical mysticism.⁶⁵ Drawing a parallel between al-Tustarī's and Bursawī's writing styles, knowing Bursawī's commitment to the legacy of *al-Shaikh al-Akbar*, would be interesting. He is also one authority Bursawī refers to in his *tafsīr*.

About a century after al-Tustarī's death, al-Sulamī emerged as a leading figure in Sufi *tafsīr* literature.⁶⁶ His *tafsīr* lists all the verses without commenting on them all. His primary goal was to collect, systemise and reorganise previous works.⁶⁷ His commentary focuses on

⁶¹ Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur'an Commentaries*, 39, 68-9.

⁶² Abu Muhammad Sahl ibn Abdullah al Tustari, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī* [Great Commentaries on the Qur'ān], trans. Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler (Amman, Jordan: Fons Vitae, 2011).

⁶³ Al-Dhahabī, *Al Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, 258-9.

⁶⁴ Bowering, *Mystical Vision of Existence*, 39-40.

⁶⁵ Ali Humayun Akhtar, “Identifying Mysticism in Early Esoteric Scriptural Hermeneutics: Sahl al-Tustarī's (d.283/896) Tafsīr Reconsidered,” *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 2, no. 2 (2017): 40.

⁶⁶ See Muhammad ibn Husain al Sulamī, *Haqaiq al Tafsīr, aw, Haqa'iq al-Tafsīr* [Truths of the Exegesis] (UK: Turath for Solutions, 2013).

⁶⁷ Elias, “Sufi Tafsīr Reconsidered,” 41-55.

words rather than segments of the verses and their context. The structure of his *tafsīr*, without prominent linking elements between commentaries, clearly indicates a compilation. His intention was to compile the views of esotericists (*ahl al-ḥaqīqah*) in an independent book, as the exotericists (*ahl al-zāhir*) did in their books.⁶⁸ He places all viewpoints under a verse in his comments, quoting the exoteric interpretations before the esoteric, giving preference to the latter. His *Ziyādāt Ḥaqāiq al-tafsīr* (Reality Additions to Exegesis), along with *Ḥaqāiq* and *Ṭabaqāt al-sūfiyyah*, the oldest extant Sufi biographical collection, preserves the oral teachings and writings from the Sufi heritage between the 8th and 10th centuries.⁶⁹ His form became an important model for Sufi work through to the modern period. His compendium style is faithfully reflected in Bursawī's *Rūḥ al-bayān*.⁷⁰ Al-Sulamī's student, al-Qushayrī, wrote his *tafsīr* in response to the speculative exegeses.⁷¹ Still, his main contribution was through other Sufi writings like *Al-Risāla al-qushayriyya fī 'ilm al-tasawwuf*,⁷² in which he presents a classic formulation of Sufi doctrine. He explores the meaning of the Qur'an through four levels: 'ibārah (textual meaning), *ishārah* (allusion), *laṭā'if* (subtle meanings) and *ḥaqā'iq* (spiritual truths). The *Laṭā'if* contains al-Qushayrī's commentaries and some Sufi sayings, bearing great literal value since it concentrates on words, phrases and etymology. It is well-respected and gladly read in Sufi circles.⁷³ Just like al-Qushayrī insisted on hidden layers of meaning in the Qur'an some six centuries later, Bursawī did similar in his works and ultimately in *Rūḥ al-bayān*, sporadically referring to al-Qushayrī as one of his authorities.

Al-Ghazālī is one of the most outstanding Sufi scholars, whose *Iḥyā'* (not a *tafsīr*) treats knowledge, worship and manners.⁷⁴ He is reported to have written over 400 works, out of which

⁶⁸ Al-Dhahabī, *Al Tafsīr wal Mufasssīrūn*, 261.

⁶⁹ Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 69.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁷¹ Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Lataif al-Isharat* [Subtle Allusions], trans. Kristin Zahra Sands (UK: Amazon Digital Services, 2019); Almir Fatic, "Sufijski Tefsir Kao Metod Tumacenja Kur'ana" [Sufi Tafsīr as a Method of the Qur'an Interpretation], *Eseji o tesavvufu* [Essays on Tasawwuf], Kelamu'l-šifa', br. 45-47, year XIII, 1438/2017, 40-4.

⁷² Al-Qushayri, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism*.

⁷³ Al-Qushayri, *Lataif*, 71.

⁷⁴ Al Ghazali, *Ihya ulum al-Dīn*.

70 are still manuscripts.⁷⁵ Unlike Ibn al-‘Arabī, he wrote in an accessible and easy-to-understand manner, defending the idea of rational interpretation (*ta’wīl ‘aqlī*). He uses similitudes (*ḍarb al-mithāl*), helping humanity understand the message by considering parables.⁷⁶ Al-Ghazālī recognises a powerful connection between knowledge and love, stressing the spiritual knowledge on which love entirely depends.⁷⁷ This highlights the always-present sense of love and unity with God, common to all the prophets, often brought to the reader’s attention in Sufi *tafsīrs*, including Bursawī’s.

Al-Maybūdī’s *tafsīr* establishes the genre of Sufi *tafsīr* in Persian, proving it an effective means for esoteric interpretation of the Qur’an.⁷⁸ This *tafsīr* is the only extant esoteric *tafsīr* of this period (first half of the 12th century) between two significant Sufis: al-Qushayrī and al-Baqlī.⁷⁹ The hallmark of al-Maybūdī’s commentary is his arrangement of the Qur’anic chapters as sections, then their division into three turns (*nawbāt*). The initial part is always a Persian restatement of the Arabic original, the second section comes with exoteric commentary (in Persian and Arabic) and the final one, which makes this work unique, is esoteric interpretation (also in both languages) containing *rumūz* (signs), *ishārāt* (allegories) and *laṭā’if* (subtleties).⁸⁰ Al-Maybūdī was influenced by his mentor, Khawāja ‘Abdullah al-Anṣarī (d. 1088), the only authority to which he refers. Having influenced Sufi exegetes afterwards (including Bursawī, who wrote several passages in *Rūḥ al-bayān* in Persian), *Kashf al-asrār* is considered one of the most famous Persian *tafsīr* and always relevant.⁸¹

Among great Sufi exegetes is Ruzbihān al-Baqlī, who is reported to have experienced mystical states even as a child. His work, *Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqāiq al-Qur’ān*, contains his commentaries as well as quotations from al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī. He wrote many of his

⁷⁵ Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 72.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷⁷ Siddiqui Mona, *Christians, Muslims and Jesus* (London: Yale University Press, 2013), 209.

⁷⁸ Annabel Keeler, *The Qur’an Commentary of Rashi al-Din Maybudī* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), xxi. His *tafsīr* is called *Kashf al Asrar*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, xxii.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, xxii; Sand, *Sufi Commentaries*, 73.

⁸¹ Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 74.

distinctive comments in a spiritual state. The Jalwatis, Bursawī's Sufi order, considers spiritual states to be irreplaceable stages in the Sufi path, seeing the *khalwat*, or seclusion from the world, as preparation for mystical experiences. Alan Godlas wrote an analytical edition and English translation of al-Baqli's *tafsīr*.⁸² Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā (d. 1220) was a prominent Sufi exegetic figure in Central Asia and a founder of the Kubrawī school. His most famous followers are Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī al-Dāya and Ala' al-Dawlā al-Simnānī. Al-Kubrā describes the Sufi path as a personal journey toward God. He believes, whatever God created in the macrocosm exists within every individual on the microcosmic level. Al-Kubrā admonishes people to pray not out of fear of hell or wishing for paradise but because God is praiseworthy. The Kubrawī school is represented by a few Sufi writings and a *tafsīr* named *Baḥr al-ḥaqāiq* (The Sea of Essences) or 'Ayn al-ḥayāt (The Source of Life), also known as *Al-ta'wilāt al-najmiyya*, frequently quoted in *Rūḥ al-bayān*. It was initiated by al-Kubrā, resumed by al-Razī al-Dāya and completed by al-Simnānī. Along with the Akbarian school on one side, this commentary, on the other, represents the mainstream Sufi exegetical tradition present in Bursawī's work.⁸³

Ibn al-'Arabī,⁸⁴ known as *al-Shaikh al-Akbar* (the grand teacher), is a Sufi scholar without whom any decent discourse on Sufism and esoteric *tafsīr* is impossible. His spiritual fulfilments were evident from his childhood and his grand visions and teaching skills gained his high status. Ibn al-'Arabī wrote over 350 works, among them *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*,⁸⁵ an exposition of the deeper meaning of the wisdom of prophets within the three Abrahamic religious traditions. He wrote *Futuḥāt al-makkiyyah*,⁸⁶ inspired by his first pilgrimage, as a vast manual of common spiritual knowledge shared by the three traditions, reasoning and mystical insight. Although not originally *tafsīr*, these comprehensive writings are viewed as exegetical, with original and

⁸² Ibid., 75.

⁸³ Alexander Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 105-6.

⁸⁴ His full name is Abu Abdullah Muḥammad Muhyiddin ibn 'Ali ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Arabi al-Ḥatimī al-Ṭa'i al-Andalūsī al-Mursī al-Dimashqī.

⁸⁵ Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, *The Ringstones of Wisdom (Fusus Al-Hikam)*, trans. Caner K. Dagli (Lahore: Kazi Publications, 2004).

⁸⁶ Ibn al-Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations*, vol. 1.

faithful explanation of the oneness of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). This inseparable reality concurrently appears and is recognised in existing images. Ibn al-'Arabī shows how the perfect human being (*insān kāmil*) is reflected in this reality and how God is known to those who truly know themselves.⁸⁷ These narratives are easily recognised in Bursawī's work, which qualifies them as the main topics of the Qur'an, without which Bursawī considers dissolution in God (*fanā'*) as unachievable. Najm al-Din Rāzī al-Dāya was a disciple of Al-Kubrā and, as mentioned before, worked on his teacher's *tafsīr*. He also wrote *Mirsād al-'ibād min al-mabda' ilā al-ma'ād* (The Path of God's Servants from Beginning to the End), a comprehensive guidebook to Sufī tradition.⁸⁸ Bursawī's *tafsīr* is where the Akbarian and Kubrawī schools meet, co-exist, and complement each other. Therefore, it can be concluded that Kubrawī and Akbarian works are essential and relevant to Bursawī's *tafsīr*.

Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī was the first scholar to be influenced by Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings, intellectually and socially, as he was his student and stepson. His magnum opus are "Exposition on the Interpretation of the Core of the Qur'an" (*I'jāz al-bayān fī ta'wīl umm al-kitāb*) and *Miftāḥ al-ghayb* (The Keys of the Unseen), exegetical works that contributed to formation of the intellectual framework of Ottoman scholars in general. The former commentary is preceded by a long introduction that outlines the doctrinal foundations of al-Qūnawī's exposition, including the "five divine presences" developed from Ibn al-'Arabī's ideas.⁸⁹ The latter, along with its commentary by Molla Fanārī, serves as a milestone in understanding Akbarian thought within Ottoman scholar context.

⁸⁷ "Introduction to Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi (1165–1240 AD)," The Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society, accessed August 14, 2020, <https://ibnarabisociety.org/introduction-muhyiddin-ibn-arabi/>.

⁸⁸ Najm al-Din Razi, *Mirsād al 'Ibād* [The Path of Servants], trans. Hamid Algar (New York: Caravan Books, 1982), 537.

⁸⁹ Sadruddin Qunawi, *I'jaz al Bayan fī Ta'wil Umm al Qur'an* [The Marvellous Exposition of the Interpretation of the Qur'an], ed. Muhammad Khajawi (USA, Amazon, 2010); Jane Clark, "Toward a Biography of Sadr al Din al Qunawi," The Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, accessed January 29, 2020, <https://ibnarabisociety.org/sadr-al-din-al-qunawi-jane-clark/>.

Nizām al-Dīn al-Nisabūrī was a versatile scholar. His primary exegetical work was his *tafsīr* named *Gharāib al-Qur’ān*, a combination of traditional and Sufi commentaries.⁹⁰ As he mentions in the introduction, he mainly refers to al-Rāzī (d. 1210) and al-Zamaksharī (d. 1144) in his *tafsīr*. His *tafsīr* is like al-Kāshānī’s but less philosophical and theoretical. His primary method was to derive many issues (*as’ilah kathīrah*) from a few expressions (*alfāz qalīlah*).⁹¹ He views a mystical state as a prerequisite for *ta’wīl*, the esoteric interpretation of the Qur’an.⁹²

‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī is known as one of the earliest interpreters of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works, although he had a different stance in exegesis. Al-Kāshānī’s commentary on *Fusūs al-hikam* is famous. He also wrote *Istilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyyah*, a dictionary of Sufi technical terms. He was writing in Arabic and Persian. While Ibn al-‘Arabī prefers unveiled knowledge (*kashf*) over reason (*‘aql*), al-Kāshānī prefers the correspondence (*taṭbīq*) between verses in the Qur’an ahead of an individual’s spiritual path.⁹³ His *tafsīr*, *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, previously believed to have been authored by Ibn al-‘Arabī, which is also called *Tafsīr Ibn al-‘Arabī* and *Ta’wīlāt al-Qāshānī*, is one of the most valuable references to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings and views. It is an exegesis of all chapters of the Qur’an, but not every verse.⁹⁴ Al-Kāshānī is often quoted in *Rūḥ al-bayān*. Since Bursawī can be considered an interpreter of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s legacy in his time, the insight into Bursawī’s interpretational preferences will be of particular significance.

‘Alā’ al-Dawlā al-Simnānī was a prolific Sufi author, credited with 150 titles. He was an influential figure in Persian social and Sufi intellectual history. His commentary style of the Qur’an explains the Sufi motivation for exegesis. He introduces *wahdat al-shuhūd* (oneness of witnessing), the philosophical idea of reconciling God’s physical manifestations with the doctrinal requirements of religious law (*sharī‘a*) in Sunni Islam. In his *Maṭla’ al-nuqat*, he

⁹⁰ Nizam al-Din al-Nisaburi, *Tafsīr Gharaib al Qur’an* [Interpretation of Rarities in the Qur’an] (Beirut: Dar al Kotob al Ilmiyyah, 1996).

⁹¹ In Arabic: *istinbāt al-masa’il al-kathīrah min al-alfāz al-qalīlah*.

⁹² Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 77-8.

⁹³ James W. Morris, “Ibn Arabi and his Interpreters Part II: Influences and Interpretations,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, no. 4 (1986).

⁹⁴ ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *A Sufi Commentary on the Qur’an (Tawīlāt al-Qur’ān)*, trans. Feras Hamza (Cambridge, UK: The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought and the Islamic Texts Society, 2021), xi-xxiv.

promises the composition of a massive *tafsīr*. Yet, he ends with *Tafsīr Najm al-Qur’ān*,⁹⁵ a modest resumption of an incomplete commentary started by Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā and continued by Najm al-Dīn Rāzī al-Dāya. He presents the seven subtle substances (*latā’if*), stating multiple levels of interpretation of the Qur’an. His exegesis mentions four levels of meaning or kingdoms of existence. Through his works, al-Simnānī establishes a comprehensive Sufi vocabulary and interpretative ground for reading the Qur’an and his commentary.⁹⁶

Daud al-Qaysarī (d. 1350) lived in a turbulent transition from Seljuk’s rule to the Ottoman state. He was teaching in the first official *madrasa* established in Iznik in 1331. His mentor, al-Kāshānī, introduced him to the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī. He proved his love and respect for Ibn al-‘Arabī through his commentary of *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, also known as *Muqaddima*, which is considered a prerequisite for studying Ibn al-‘Arabī. His *Risāla fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf* is an invaluable reference to Sufism.⁹⁷

Molla Fanārī (d. 1431), the first *Shaikh al-islām* of the Ottoman Empire, is along with al-Qaysarī, credited for making Akbarian idea of the oneness of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) familiar to the wide scholar circles in the Ottoman Empire. He also vastly contributed to the intellectual life in general. Molla Fanārī was known as an active participant in intellectual endeavours of his time, serving as a judge, on one hand, and diligently writing in attempt to insemiate the understanding of God’s religion among ordinary people, on the other. His principal areas of interest were *tafsīr*, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), grammar, theology, and Sufism. It is notable that he was largely neglected by the Western academia, and one of the reasons could be found in his predominantly commentary (on other works) writings. His main work is *Misbāḥ al-uns* (The Lamp of Intimate Friendship), a commentary on Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī’s *Miftāḥ al-ghayb*. Apart from expressing his views on al-Qūnawī’s ideas through this *tafsīr*, Molla Fanārī presented the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī in it, precisely *insān kāmil*. Perfect man is a well-

⁹⁵ Jamal J. Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of ‘Ala’ Ad-Dawla As-Simnani* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 204-6.

⁹⁶ Elias, “Ṣufī Tafsīr Reconsidered,” 49-52.

⁹⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Living Sufism* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980), 145.

emphasised concept in his writings. He pointed that every human being, when generally learned, and learned about God, aware of his being unconditionally sustained by God, is potentially *insān kāmil*.⁹⁸

Abū Su‘ūd al-‘Imādī (d. 1574), the author of *Irshād*,⁹⁹ is, along with Bursawī, a leading figure of Ottoman exegetical heritage. He was the Judge of Istanbul (1533-1537) and 14th *Shaikh al-islām* (1545-1574).¹⁰⁰ Although principally influenced by Sufi thought, the Ottoman *tafsīr*, as seen in *Irshād*, strongly relies on reasoning and linguistics. The *Irshād* represents a nicely composed synthesis between tradition and logic, also notable in *Rūḥ al-bayān*. Al-‘Imādī’s *tafsīr* also provides valuable insight into variations of Qur’anic readings (*qira’āt*), their history, valuation and assessment.¹⁰¹

1.4 Tafsīr Heritage in the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire was multicultural. Its scholars came from diverse social backgrounds. Their ethnicity was only sometimes in the foreground. Abū Su‘ūd al-‘Imādī, probably the most remarkable religious figure of the Ottoman Empire, was of Turkish heritage according to some, but Kurdish origin according to others. Similarly, Bursawī was originally from Aytos, today’s Bulgaria, before moving to Bursa, where he received his moniker Bursawī and composed his exegesis *Rūḥ al-bayān*. Therefore, he is an Ottoman scholar of European heritage.¹⁰² In the Ottoman era, *tafsīr* was taught and studied in *madrasas*, mosques, *tekkes*¹⁰³ and private homes. Primary exegetical references were al-Zamakshari’s *Kashāf* and al-

⁹⁸ His full name is Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamzah al-Fanārī; see Halim Calis: “‘Ayn al-‘yān: The First prominent Qur’anic Commentary in Ottoman History”, *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, v. 7, issue 1, 2022; also Molla Fanārī and the Mişbāḥ al-Uns: The Commentator and The Perfect Man/A. Godlas, pp. 31-45; Uluslararası Molla Fenārī Sempozyumu, Uludag University, 2009, accessed online 23/09/2023.

⁹⁹ The full name of his *tafsīr* is *Irshād al-‘aql al-salim ilā mazāyā al-kitāb al-karīm*.

¹⁰⁰ İsmail Hâmi Danişmend, *Osmanlı Devlet Erkânı* [Great People of the Ottoman Empire] (Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1971), 114.

¹⁰¹ Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” iii.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰³ Sufi lodges.

Bayḍāwī's (d. 1286) *Anwār al-tanzīl*. This applies to all exegetical activities among Ottoman scholars, whether they wrote a whole commentary of the Qur'an, a commentary on its chapter(s) or a *ḥāshiyā/ta'liqa* writing.¹⁰⁴ The first *madrasa* in the new Ottoman state was established in Iznik in 1331.¹⁰⁵ The head professor in this *madrasa* was Daud al-Qaysarī, a famous student of 'Abdul Razzaq al-Kāshānī. Al-Qaysari's introduction to the commentary of Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* is critical in Sufism studies due to his style and profound understanding of Ibn al-'Arabī's teaching.¹⁰⁶ Al-Qaysarī's *Muqaddima* is considered one of the most excellent writings on Sufi thought and its tenets. Apart from the formal *madrasa* educational backdrop, there was a more prominent informal social and religious setting, Sufi daily life, through which ordinary people aspired to connect to God and meet their needs for higher levels of wisdom and spirituality. Ottoman authorities were careful not to seclude the two from each other but instead saw them as necessary facets of a holistic educational process.¹⁰⁷ This care also extended to *madrasa* education, where Sufism was studied for its theoretical merit and to assist in students' spiritual formation. The outcome is invariably linked to Sufi influence in all Islamic disciplines, including *tafsīr* in the Ottoman setting.

In his survey of 13 *tafsīr* works, Sakip Yildiz (b. 1963) concluded that three primary schools of exegesis of the Qur'an existed in the state by Sultan Bayazid II's (1481-1512) death. First, the mystic school established by Ibn al-'Arabī passed into Anatolia by his student and stepson, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī. Ibn al-'Arabī's ideas were further accepted and promoted by Muhammad Muhyidin Uftade (d. 1580), one of the most influential Sufis in the early stage of the Ottoman Empire, over Aziz Mahmud Hudāyī and Osman Fazli (d. 1690) to Bursawī. Second, the *tafsīr* school influenced by Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd ibn Umar al-Taftazānī (d. 1389)

¹⁰⁴ *Hashiya/taliqa* (super-commentary or gloss) is a note at the bottom or side of a page. It offers additional information to the *sharh* (comment), criticising or evaluating the strength of the argument presented in the text (*matn*); "Matn, Sharh, Hashiya, Taliqa, and Takmila in Islamic Intellectual History," Mâverd, February 8, 2015, accessed March 23, 2022, <http://maverd.blogspot.com/2015/02/matn-sharh-hashiya-taliqa-and-takmila.html>.

¹⁰⁵ For the history and development of the *madrasa* in the Ottoman Empire, see Ebrahim Moosa, *What is a Madrasa?* (North Carolina, US: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

¹⁰⁶ Elias, "Şufi Tafsīr Reconsidered," 49-52.

¹⁰⁷ Nasr, *Living Sufism*, 145-50.

and ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Jurjānī (d. 1413), foreigners from the eastern territories who wrote their commentaries in Persian. Third is the school of other exegetes with no specific orientation.¹⁰⁸

The Ottoman Qur’anic exegesis is understudied and mostly unknown. The Ottoman time (14th to 20th century) is arguably the most neglected period in the history of exegetical literature concerning academic research and scholarly scrutiny. Ottoman hermeneutical heritage remains a massive challenge in the West, and there are a few reasons for this. First to mention is over 600 years in which much of the *tafsīr* heritage is still in manuscript and waiting to be discovered and scholarly attended. Then the activities of Western colonial powers in the 18th and 19th centuries ignored and excluded anything related to Ottoman culture and science from the rest of the Islamic world through their Orientalism studies and creating a negative image of the Orient in the eyes of the Occident. Probably, the most latent indicator is the exclusion of prolific Ottoman *tafsīr* scholars from modern biographical literature (*tabaqāt*), although they were well-educated in traditional exegesis and Islamic sciences. The Ottoman exegetes were disregarded, but not, for example, Egyptian and Indian authors, who were pictured as representatives of modern Islamic thought and the Qur’an interpretation. This proves that modern historiography of the Qur’anic exegesis was biased, calculated and had an Orientalist direction, misrepresenting the facts.¹⁰⁹ Finally, the most likely reason is a lack of analytic and critical interest in the matter from modern scholars and researchers. Sakip Yıldız’s efforts are notable and praiseworthy for his contribution to the “Ottoman *tafsīr* movement” in 1987, where he presented in detail *tafsīr* written in the Ottoman state. He also lists 14 exegetes without more information about their *tafsīr* activities.¹¹⁰ Muhammad Abay (b. 1968) conducted the first comprehensive bio-

¹⁰⁸ Sakip Yıldız, “Osmanlı Tefsir Hareketine Toplu Bakış” [Overview of the Ottoman Tafsīr Movement], *Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 2, no. 2 (1987).

¹⁰⁹ Necmettin Gökkır, “Has Tabari’s Tafsīr, Jami’ al-Bayan Ever Been Lost? Rethinking the Historiography of Tafsīr in the Light of Ottoman Documents,” *Hemispheres* 31, no. 2 (2016): 19.

¹¹⁰ Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” 47.

bibliographical survey of Ottoman exegetes in 1992. He outlines the general traits of Ottoman *tafsīr* and its sources over the 600 years of the Ottomans.¹¹¹

Ziya Demir (d. 2006) conducted a comprehensive survey in his thesis in 1994 on *tafsīr* heritage from the early 14th to late 16th centuries. He presents ten complete *tafsīr* works from the period, 32 *hāshiyas*, five complete translated Qur'an commentaries and other valuable writings.¹¹² Mustafa Ozturk wrote his monograph in 2012, dividing Ottoman *tafsīr* heritage into classical and modern, taking the introduction of Tanzimat¹¹³ as a separator between the two periods. The author did not explain the background of his classification and stated no particular difference between them. He also made the complete list of *tafsīr* during the Ottoman period, including works on the history of the Qur'an, various genres of the science of the Qur'an and *usūl al-Qur'ān* (theory on the commentary of the Qur'an).¹¹⁴ ISAR (Istanbul Research and Education Foundation) organised an international conference on Ottoman *tafsīr*, titled *Osmanlı'da İlm-i Tefsir*, in 2018, with conference papers published in 2019. Samuel J. Ross' *The Importance of Ottoman Tafsir: A Codicological Perspective* is particularly significant. It brings attention to the importance of the Ottoman *tafsīr* heritage within a larger exegetical tradition, scrutinising the phenomena of Ottoman *tafsīr* and exegetes being neglected and held marginal in contemporary research as the reasons and challenges involved.¹¹⁵

Ottoman commentaries of the Qur'an have been little addressed in Western academia. The need for contemporary research is evident. This literature has barely been studied analytically or critically, with essentially some descriptive MA and PhD theses, mainly in

¹¹¹ Muhammad Abay, "Osmanlı Donemi Mufessirleri" [Exegetes from the Ottoman Period] (Master's diss., Bursa Uludag Üniversitesi, 1992).

¹¹² Ziya Demir, *Osmanlı Mufessirleri ve Tefsir Çalışmaları* [Ottoman Exegetes and their Exegetical Works] (Istanbul: Ensar Nesriyat, 2007).

¹¹³ Tanzimat (reorganisation) is a set of measures directed to introduce reforms in the Ottoman Empire under sultans Abdulmecid and Abdulaziz amid European influence (1839-1876).

¹¹⁴ Mustafa Ozturk, *Osmanlı Tefsir Mirası* [Ottoman Tafsir Legacy] (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2015).

¹¹⁵ Samuel J. Ross, *The Importance of Ottoman Tafsir: A Codicological Perspective* (Istanbul: 'İSĀ R Yayınları, Osmanlı'da İlm-i Tefsir, 2019), 521-37, accessed October 14, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/41523181/The_Importance_of_Ottoman_Tafsir_A_Codicological_Perspective.

Turkish and Arabic and very few in English. These works mainly focus on institutionalised *tafsīr* studies with the *madrasa* curriculum as their background.¹¹⁶

1.5 Bursawī's Brief Biography, Scholarly Views and the Jalwati Order

Ismail Haqqi Bursawī was born in 1653 in Aydos (Bulgaria). When he was three years old, his father, Mustafa Efendi, brought him to Osman Fazli, one of the “great ones” (*buyukler*) of the Jalwati order.¹¹⁷ Since then, Fazli referred to Bursawī as “our student.” At ten, he was assigned to Abdulbaqi Efendi, Fazli’s *khalīfa* (representative) in Edirne, the former Ottoman capital. He had already acquired excellent writing skills and mastered grammar, rhetoric, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and theology. When he was 20, he went to Istanbul and joined the classes of Osman Fazli and started teaching in Kul Cami, Selim I Mosque and Suleymaniye Mosque. He was a diligent and committed student. When he received permission from *shaikh* to enter seclusion (*halwet*) for three months, he also studied music and proved to be good at it. In 1675, Osman Fazli appointed him as his *khalīfa* in Uskub (Skopje), where he married. After spending six years there, he moved to Koprulu (Northern Macedonia), where he spent 14 months then moved to Strumica. The great *shaikh* invited him to be his guest in Edirne for three months, where he studied Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fusūs al-hikam*. In 1685, Osman Fazli Efendi’s *khalīfa* in Bursa, shaikh Sun‘ullah Efendi, died and Bursawī was appointed his successor. He stayed there for the rest of his life and was buried in 1725 in the vicinity of his mosque.¹¹⁸

Ottoman Turks continued cherishing the tradition of Ibn al-‘Arabī. They took over from the Seljuks, who established the first *madrasa* (Sultan Orhan Ghazi, d. 1362) in Iznik in 1331, where Daud al-Qaysarī, who was knowledgeable of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s legacy, was teaching. His

¹¹⁶ Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” 50.

¹¹⁷ This Sufi order was established by Muhamad Jelveti Pir Uftade (d. 1580) and organised by Aziz Mahmud Hudayi (d. 1628). It is also called the Hudayi order. Other derived orders are Hashimi and Fanai. For more details, see Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders*, 78.

¹¹⁸ Ali Namli, “Ismail Hakki Bursevi: Celveti seyhi, mufessir, sair,” *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, c. XXIII (Istanbul: Turkiye Diyanet Vakfi, 2001), 102; Ryan Christopher, trans., “Ismail Hakki Bursevi,” Chisholme Institute, accessed November 3, 2019, <https://www.chisholme.org/resources/overview/ismail-hakki-bursevi-extended-version.html>.

commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* showed his mastery of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s intellectual legacy and Sufi tenets. The commitment to *al-Shaikh al-Akbar*’s teachings continued after al-Qaysarī over Muhammad Uftade and Osman Fazli to Bursawī.

Bursawī believed Islam could be profoundly understood only when taken from exoteric sources (*zahiri kaynaklari*), the revelation and tradition, and esoteric sources (*batini kaynaklari*), Divine inspiration and knowledge of heart (*ilhām, kashf, ‘ilm ladunnī*). Motivation is achieved through good deeds (*amal sālih*) and a continuous consciousness of God (*taqwā*), preventing people from doing wrong. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s influence is also recognised in Bursawī’s understanding of God’s beautiful names. He believed that one needs to remember and pronounce them since they are the foundation for everything in this world. They are readable and apparent everywhere around us. The highest level of belief is the realisation that there is nothing in existence but God (*lā mawjūda illa Allāh*), which is the essence of His oneness (*tawḥīd*). After reaching this stage, it follows the realisation that the existence of everything is only an illusion (*khayāl*) and true life is only in the hereafter.¹¹⁹ The author of *Rūḥ al-bayān* also distinguished the three levels of *tawhid*. *Lā ilāha illa huwa* – there is no god but Him – anyone looking for God must accept that everything existing is His gift, witnessing Him. *Lā ilāha illā anta* – there is no god but You – the level on which an individual recognises and feels Him in everything and realises their dependence on Him, still feeling their existence. Finally, *lā ilāha illā ana*¹²⁰ – there is no god but Me – the completeness of *tawḥīd* or one’s annihilation in God’s existence, who is the only truth (*al-Ḥaqq*).¹²¹ Bursawī insisted on studying the life and manners of Prophet Muhammad since God sent all the prophets before him to foretell his emergence and prepare humankind for his arrival. He is the crown of creation since he was

¹¹⁹ Y. Ş. Yavuz and C. Kardaş, “‘Ismail Hakki Bursevi’: Itikadi Gorusleri,” *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, c. XXIII (Istanbul: Turkiye Diyanet Vakfi, 2001), 108-9.

¹²⁰ All these three syntagms are derived from the Qur’an. See Qur’an 59:23, 21:87, 20:14.

¹²¹ The Sufi term *al Fana’ fi tawhid* (disappearance in God’s oneness) denominates a true experience of God’s oneness, the experience of those sincere in their faith, those who disappear in His existence, the topic present in al-Ghazalī’s and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings. Also, all three phrases are texts from the Qur’an, taken from different contexts. See William Harmless, *Mystics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

given the completeness and perfection of God's word (*jawāmi' al-kalim*). Besides this, he is the best manifestation (*maẓhar*) of God's names and attributes.¹²²

According to Bursawī, Ibrahim Zahid Gilani (d. 1300) was the first individual from whom the Jalwati (*Celvetiyye*) order originated. He was the first to practice *halwat* (seclusion) and *jalwat* (emergence). The latter was superior to the former, the state in which the mystic comes out enriched by Divine attributes after the seclusion. This experience helps the being disappear and mingle with God's being. Therefore, *halwat* is an adequate and necessary preparation for *jalwat*. Aziz Mahmud Hudāyī (d. 1628) is credited with making the Jalwati principles clear and accessible, putting them in writing, as well as playing a significant role in spreading the order's influence. Before, Muhammad Muhyidin Uftade formulated its principles and distinguished them from those of the Halwati and Bayrami orders.¹²³ Although there are a few biographies of Bursawī, his institutional role in the Jalwati order is still to be assessed. It is widely accepted among scholars of Ottoman Sufism that Bursawī and his teacher Osman Fazli are founders of the Haqqi (*Haqqiyye*) order, a suborder of the Jalwati order. However, this fact has not received sufficient scholarly attention.¹²⁴

Bursawī's treatise on the Jalwatis, *Silsilename Celvetiye*, details his perception of the order. Briefly, the Jalwati order recognises three types of mystic "travellers" (*sālik*): novices who need to contemplate: *lā ma'būda illa Allāh* (only God is to be worshipped); mid-level mystics who need to reach out for the meaning of *lā maqṣūda illa Allāh* (nothing is wished for but God); and those of the high-level whose mission is contemplation on *la maḥbūba illa Allāh* (nobody is to be loved but God).¹²⁵ Their focus on *jalwat* over *halwat* shows a strong relationship between this order (*ṭarīqa*) and the Naqshibandi. Jalwatis share some teachings with them and their genealogies cross in Haji Bayram Wali (d. 1430), the founder of the

¹²² Yavuz and Kardas, "İsmail Hakkı Bursevî," 109.

¹²³ Baskıcı Gonca, "A Life between Piety and Politics: Aziz Mahmud Hudayi (1543-1628)" (Master's diss., Bilkent University, 2000), 40-5.

¹²⁴ Kameliya Atanasova, "The Sufi as the Axis of the World: Representations of Religious Authority in the Works of Ismail Hakkı Bursevî (1653-1725)" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2016), 15.

¹²⁵ Selvi Dilaver, *Who Can be a Shaikh*, trans. Abdulaziz Rizvic (Sarajevo: UG Samarkand, 2008), 53.

Bayrami order. Bursawī, a prominent figure in the history of the Jalwati order, defined it as a crescent, a little visible moon at the time of Gilani. The Jalwati *ṭarīqa* took its “full moon” at the time of Uftade, while a complete moon was achieved during Aziz Hudāyī.¹²⁶ Bursawī was a prolific writer. His principal works include *Rūḥ al-bayān*, an original esoteric interpretation of the Qur’an; *Rūḥ al-Mathnawī*, a commentary on the introductory part of Jalāluddīn Rumi’s *Mathnawī*; *Faraḥ al-rūḥ*, an essay on Yazidjoghlu Meḥmed’s *Muḥammadiyya*; *Sharḥ Pand Aṭṭar*, a translation with grammatical notes and analysis of Farid al-Din Aṭṭar’s *Pand nama*; *Silsila Tariqat Jalwatiyya*, a treatise on the order with biographies of leading *shaikhs* including his own; *Diwan* followed by *Maqālat*; *Kanz Makhfi*, detailed presentation of his approach to pantheistic *tasawwuf*; *Tuḥfa Khaliliyya*, a collection of moral admonitions; *Mi’rajīyya*, a poem of Prophet Muhammad’s ascent to Heaven; and *Kitāb al-natīja*, his last work, written in 1724.¹²⁷

1.6 Research on Bursawī and *Rūḥ al-bayān* by Muslim and Western Authors

Rūḥ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān (Spirit of Exposition in the Exegesis of the Qur’an) is Bursawī’s capital work and the commentary for which he is mainly remembered. He was working on it for 23 years after a suggestion from his teacher, Osman Fazli, and it is generally considered one of the most significant Sufi *tafsīr*. The main motive behind writing his *tafsīr* was fulfilling the sacred obligation of commanding what is good and preventing evil, as a warning and guidance for readers. Bursawī aspired for the book to be his intercessor on the day when no wealth nor sons will avail.¹²⁸ He outlined the principles (*uṣūl*) that drove him in composing his exegesis: following the Book of God (*tamassuk bi kitāb Allāh*); standing behind the tradition (*al-iqtidā’ bi sunna*); eating what is permissible (*akl al-ḥalāl*); preventing

¹²⁶ Ahmed Munji and Semih Ceyhan, “Ibn ‘Arabi’s Influence on Ottoman Sufism in Üftade’s Views,” *Walisongo Penelitian Jurnal Sosial Keagamaan* 16, no. 2 (2018): 274.

¹²⁷ Kut, Günay Alpay, “Ismail Ḥaḳḳī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. Peri Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, C. Edmund Bosworth, Emeri van Donzel and Wolfhart P. Heinrichs (Brill, 2012), accessed February 5, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3655.

¹²⁸ Ismail Haqqī Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān fī Tafsīr al Qur’an* [Spirit of Expression in the Exegesis of the Qur’an] (Beirut: Dar al Fikr, 2008), vol. V1, 3-13.

disturbance (*kaff al-adhā*); avoiding wrongdoings (*ijtināb al-āthām*); repentance (*tawbah*); and fulfilling the rights of others (*adā' al-ḥuqūq*).¹²⁹

The base of *Rūḥ al-bayān* was Bursawī's public sermons, which he began delivering in 1685, eventually putting them in writing and concluding his *tafsīr* some 20 years later.¹³⁰ In his *tafsīr*, Bursawī heavily relies on Ibn al-‘Arabī's intellectual legacies, not neglecting other authorities, like al-Tustarī, al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī, al-Kāshānī, al-Ghazalī and others. He also cites Persian poetry from Musharrif al-Sa‘dī (d. 1293), Jalāluddīn Rūmi, al-Hāfiz al-Shirāzī (d. 1390), and ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 1492).¹³¹ He borrowed Kubrawī's inspiration, frequently quoting *Al-ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya*, from Najm al-Dīn al-Kubra and his followers, Najm al-Dīn Rāzī al-Dāya and ‘Alā al-Dawlā al-Simnānī. The truth is, apart from some minor differences, Akbarians and Kubrawīs share an almost identical spiritual framework and approach to Sufism and *tafsīr*, which is easily noted in *Rūḥ al-bayān*.¹³² One of the aims of this study is to draw attention to this substantial similarity, apart from above mentioned differences. Among Bursawī's sources are also wise sayings (*ḥikam*) of Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1309) of *Shādhilī tariqa* in Egypt and Northern Africa. This fact depicts international traits of Bursawī's exegesis, where Sufi ideas travelled freely in the late period of the Ottoman Empire.¹³³ *Rūḥ al-bayān* is an exemplary *tafsīr*, presenting the two characteristics of the Ottoman exegetical tradition: syncretism (*tawfīq*), the combination of two or more exegetical traditions, each contributing to a more profound and comprehensive understanding of the text of the Qur’an; and *taṭbīq*¹³⁴ (correspondence). It implies that a Sufi commentator presents a *bāṭin* (esoteric) meaning, which holds the purpose and goal of its author's exegesis, and a *ẓāhir* (exoteric) one, which is obvious but not the primary purpose of the commentary.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Şimşek, “The Missing Link,” 332.

¹³¹ Knysh, *Sufism*, 101-5.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The term was introduced by Abd al-Razzaq al-Qāshānī, a Sufi exegete. Although he was not the first to use it, he is credited with its scientific introduction to the exegesis of the Qur’an.

Bursawī was also known as a *ḥadīth* specialist and the most prominent writing in this field is his commentary on the 40 *ḥadīth* of Imam Nawawī, *Sharḥ al-arba ‘īna ḥadīthan*. Besides this, *Risāla fī iṣtilāḥi ahl al-ḥadīth* (Treatise on the Traditional Terminology) is noteworthy. Overall, Bursawī authored, according to Sakip Yildiz, 127 works in Ottoman Turkish and Arabic, although this information cannot be confirmed.¹³⁵ Bursawī’s autobiography is valuable writing, covered in 17 chapters titled *Tamām al-fayz* (An Ultimate Wealth), completed in 1691. Written in Arabic, its first seven chapters present Sufī topics and tenets, the genealogy of the Jalwatī order and the main issues of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s intellectual legacy. Then Bursawī wrote about his master, Osman Fazli, the Jalwatī *shaikh*, his knowledge, merits, details from their mutual conversations and his affiliation. He only wrote about himself in chapters 16 and 17, dedicating much more space to his *shaikh* in his biography, which is a rare and unique example of respect and loyalty.¹³⁶

Rūḥ al-bayān was first published in 1866 and a few more times afterwards. In 1998, Muhammad Ali Ṣābūnī (d. 2021) in Damascus made a summarised version, *Tanwīr al-azhān min tafsīr Rūḥ al-bayān*, where he edited the original work and deleted many weak (*da‘īf*) or unauthentic (*mawḍū‘*) narrations. Some criticise this alteration, suggesting the narrations in question should be indicated and kept, which would have been more efficient and appropriate for this project. In Pakistan, the Urdu translation of Bursawī’s commentary was published in 2013 by Mufti Faiz Ahmed Owaisi. The complete Turkish translation was courtesy of Prof. Dr. Hasan Kamil Yılmaz in 2016 and Imam Ömer Faruk Hilmi and Osman Şen in 2017. Recep

¹³⁵ Namlı, “İsmail Hakkı Bursevî,” 104. Haqqī’s writings are interested in and dedicated to Ottoman officials in which he, using his authority as a Jalwati shaikh and person of knowledge, reminds the Ottoman ruling hierarchy of Sufī and Islamic values, while warning them of negative consequences if his advice is not heeded or neglected. These writings are generally known as *r’īsā la* and *tuhfe* (epistles and dedicatory writings) and bear personalised titles, depending on to whom they are dedicated (*tuhfe aliya*, *r’īsā la husayniyye*, etc.). The common traits for all of them are *nasihat* (advice) and political connotation (*siyasetname*), treating political issues, responsibilities of the hierarchy before God and people. Apart from this, he clearly stresses the importance of the role of *qutb* (the axis) in wider society, not hesitating to openly claim this honourable title for himself. Also see Atanasova, “The Sufi as the Axis of the World,” 44-7.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 62-3.

Tutar translated selected chapters and passages from Bursawī's *tafsīr* (*Ruhul Beyan'dan secme surelesi*) in 2018. An English translation of *Rūḥ al-bayān* still needs to be done.

Some considerable research has been conducted on Bursawī's works and *tafsīr* from Western academic circles. Jamal J. Elias provides a brief overview of Bursawī's *tafsīr*, comparing it to al-Sulamī's *Ḥaqāiq* due to its compendium style. As he noticed, *Rūḥ al-bayān* is a full-scale commentary of the Qur'an, including the author's views combined with those of his predecessors, predominantly Ibn al-'Arabī, al-Ghazālī and al-Qushayrī. His *tafsīr* attempts to put all known and accepted *tafsīr* methods together. In his efforts, he interpreted the whole Qur'an, chapter by chapter, verse by verse and sometimes word by word, citing his sources. He clearly expressed in his commentary the idea that *waḥdat al-wujūd* is the central message of the Qur'an, and without it, one cannot achieve *fanā' fī Allāh* (dissolution in God). His *tafsīr* is often referred to as a canonical source of Sufi views.¹³⁷ Gunay Alpay Kut points out that Bursawī was one of the most prolific Ottoman scholars, and interestingly, the autographed copies of most of his works are kept in his library in Bursa. His writing style is comparatively simple Turkish, avoiding many of his contemporaries' fancy and complicated styles.¹³⁸

In 2013, the international symposium on Bursawī and *Rūḥ al-bayān* was held in Bursa, where some of the most eminent Western experts in *tafsīr* presented their papers. Among them was Prof. Dr. Andrew Rippin with his paper "*Rūḥ al-Bayān* and the Scholarly Genealogy of Quranic Exegesis"; Prof. Dr. Denis Gril presented "From Ibn al-'Arabi to Ismail Haqqi, According to the *Rūḥ al-Bayān*"; Prof. Dr. Laila Khalifa presented "*Tafsīru Rūḥ al-Bayān li Ismail Haqqi al-Brusewī bayna jam'ihī li tafāsīr'al-sābiqa wa tamhidihī li tafāsiri'al-lāhika*" (Bursawī's *tafsīr* as a compendium for previous *tafsīrs* and a role-model for later *tafsīrs*); Dr. Jamal E. Elias presented "Bursalı Ismail Hakkı as Commentator: An Examination on the *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Bayān* and the Rūḥ al-Mathnawī"; and Prof. Dr. Masataka Takeshita presented "Ismail Haqqi Bursawī's Commentary on the Light Verse in his *Rūḥ al-Bayān*: An Analysis of its

¹³⁷ Elias, "Şufi Tafsīr Reconsidered," 46-7, 54.

¹³⁸ Kut, "Ismail Hakkı."

Sources and its Place among Sufi Commentaries.”¹³⁹ Unfortunately, none of these works was accessible when this research was written.

In her dissertation, Kameliya Atanasova explores Bursawī’s Islamic rhetorical approach to asserting his religious authority as a Sufi master. Through analysis of his dedicatory treatises (*tuhfa*) to Ottoman officials, she examines how he used the terms *shaikh* (master), *ṭarīqa* (order) and *quṭb* (celestial axis) to argue his superiority over other Ottoman scholars. Focusing on him as the axis, Atanasova scrutinises the broad social roles he reserved for Sufis as keepers of Islamic laws and tradition within the Ottoman state as their legitimate historical reality.¹⁴⁰ Alexander Knysh highlights Bursawī’s endless admiration for Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teaching. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s cosmological psychology is the starting platform for Bursawī’s understanding and thoughts on the cosmos, prophethood and human destiny in this life and the hereafter. God is the only Real One (*al-Ḥaqq*) and everything else in the universe is imagination (*khayāl*) or the creation of His imaginative faculty. His attributes and names are concepts through which humans accomplish their potential. The perfect human being (*insan kāmil*) is someone who comprises all the attributes and names, and he is entitled to be known as a vicegerent (*khalīfa*). God, the Real, is unknown and unknowable. He has two halves (*shaṭr*): one is unreachable, mysterious and with no company. The other half is His manifestation through events and entities in the universe, God’s eternal self-imagination (*khayāl*). Knysh emphasises that all these ideas are more than obviously Akbarians.¹⁴¹

Discussing the advancement of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ideas in the field of Sufi *tafsīr* after him, Coppens reminds that there is no single in-depth study of *Rūḥ al-bayān* and Bursawī’s work in Western academia. Praising him as a prolific author, Coppens mentions Bursawī’s great interest in Persian literature, reflected in his commentary of Rumi’s *Mathnawī* and passages in his *tafsīr* written in Persian. Bursawī’s commentary of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* is also a precious

¹³⁹ Ismail Hakki Bursewi Uluslararası Sempozyumu – II [International Symposium on Ismail Haqqi Bursawī – II], Bursa, Turkey, November 1-3, 2013.

¹⁴⁰ Atanasova, “The Sufi as the Axis of the World,” vi-vii.

¹⁴¹ Knysh, *Sufism*, 101-5.

source of *ishārī* ideas.¹⁴² His *tafsīr* is an eclectic compendium, not strictly divided between traditional and Sufi, deriving its commentaries from broad and diverse sources. This is especially notable when reaching hidden, esoteric meanings of some verses where Bursawī did not hesitate to refer to non-*tafsīr ishārī* sources. He regularly refers to Ibn al-‘Arabī in his *tafsīr*, showing he mastered the intellectual legacy of his spiritual teacher, but surprisingly, he did not do it all the time. For example, his commentary on the verse “...and My mercy comprises everything...”¹⁴³ shows that Bursawī followed the traditional and exoteric description rather than Ibn al-‘Arabī’s. Therefore, Coppens suggests a scholarly investigation of his commentary of *Fusūs* to trace Bursawī’s sporadic disagreements with Ibn al-‘Arabī.¹⁴⁴

This section presented Sufi *tafsīr* as a literary genre within a wider exegetical heritage, as seen by Muslim and Western scholars, although having a sense for the argument that Sufi *tafsīr* could be regarded as a separate genre. It also considered the history of the science of *tafsīr* and interpretive activities in the Ottoman Empire, introducing us to *Rūḥ al-bayān*, its main characteristics and the method used by Ismail Haqqi Bursawī. It shows that *ishārī tafsīr*, driven by Sufi allusion or indication, and with its notable and unique traits, remains a genuine treasure and valuable source of information on the Qur’an and its meanings, harboured in the Ottoman hermeneutical heritage.

1.7 Conclusion (Gap in Knowledge)

The Ottoman *tafsīr* heritage, in its varieties, presents a genuine treasure and is vastly neglected and waiting for scholarly affirmation. Bursawī’s exegesis *Rūḥ al-bayān*, with its compendium style and historical context, collected hermeneutical heritage that influenced the interpretational trends that would come afterwards. Its value is in the inclusiveness of the collective features of *ishārī* and traditional *tafsīr*. Prophet ‘Īsā has been an endless source of

¹⁴² Pieter Coppens, “Sufi Qur’an Commentaries, Genealogy and Originality: Universal Mercy as a Case Study,” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 7, no. 1/2 (2018).

¹⁴³ Qur’an 7:156.

¹⁴⁴ Coppens, “Sufi Qur’an Commentaries,” 116-7.

inspiration for Sufis. Ibn al-‘Arabī saw his perfect human being as having much in common with ‘Īsā amid his miraculous birth and uncompromised obedience and submission to God. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s affiliation with ‘Īsā was strong and unique. As he explained, ‘Īsā was his first teacher and way into Sufism. This “first love” made him believe and hope he would be a witness to the day of ‘Īsā’s return and perhaps was the motive to live his final years in Damascus, the place of ‘Īsā’s *nuzūl*.¹⁴⁵ Ibn al-‘Arabī believed every individual took their faith and knowledge from a particular prophet. Sufis took it, according to him, from prophets ‘Īsā and Muhammad. Therefore, they are ‘Īsāwīs (people of ‘Īsā) and Muhammadānīs (people of Muhammad). William Chittick wrote briefly on this assertion:

...in other words, to attain true knowledge, one must know and act in accordance with a paradigm of human perfection embodied in a prophet. No one comes to know things as they are without these divinely appointed intermediaries.¹⁴⁶

Since Ibn al-‘Arabī had a profound influence on Ottoman Sufi tradition and Bursawī in particular, the realistic expectation is that this special connection with ‘Īsā is also reflected in Bursawī’s *tafsīr*. The Sufi concept of love as the path to achieving God’s proximity ultimately fits Jesus’ human perfection as the fulfilment of that love. Like all other prophets, ‘Īsā is the motivation for accomplishing the most productive potential within us all. The richness of mystical interpretation of the Qur’anic messages, focusing on ‘Īsā and love, attracts scholarly attention. All the prophets were spiritual travellers and the allusive nature of Bursawī’s *tafsīr* offers precisely what people need from ‘Īsā’s story – insight into the spiritual understanding of the Word and Spirit from Him.

The literature review shows the presence of some dignitary research done on Bursawī and *Rūḥ al-bayān*. Still, these can only be considered pioneering attempts to make Bursawī and his work more accessible to contemporary readers of the Ottoman exegetical works. The immediate demand becomes even more evident, considering the gaps in knowledge as focal points:

¹⁴⁵ Jaume Flaquer, “The Akbarian Jesus – The Paradigm of a Pilgrim in God,” The Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society, accessed June 30, 2020, <https://ibnarabisociety.org/the-akbarian-jesus-jaume-flaquer/>.

¹⁴⁶ William Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2005), 14.

1. A significant contribution would be having at least some passages from *Rūḥ al-bayān* translated into English. This research aims to reduce this gap by having passages from *Rūḥ al-bayān* referring to Prophet ‘Īsā translated into English, summarised and discussed within the scope of this work.
2. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s influence on Bursawī’s exegesis is also assumed and documented. Unlike other Sufi authors who were influenced by *al-Shaikh al-Akbar*, he seems to stand by a literalist approach when it comes to ‘Īsā’s story in the Qur’an and his eschatological return (*nuzūl*) in particular, although not always. Therefore, there is an impression that the extent of Bursawī’s exegetical loyalty to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s legacy is also worth academic scrutiny.
3. Traditional circles object that Bursawī used many unreliable traditional sources, not only in the verses about ‘Īsā but broadly in his *tafsīr*. This is another field of academic interest: the traditional sources and narrations the exegete quoted in his work or their impact on exoteric description and esoteric interpretation of the verses where Prophet ‘Īsā was of primary concern.
4. Love is the essence of the relationship between God and His devoted servants. Prophet ‘Īsā, called by Rumi the *Spirit of Love*, is appropriate for following up on this Divine phenomenon. What is the influence of Divine love and how is it related to human life? Some answers are expected to be found in Bursawī’s related interpretation.

CHAPTER 2: ‘ĪSĀ IN ISLAMIC SCHOLARLY TRADITION AND SUFISM

2.1 Introduction

Viewing Prophet ‘Īsā in the context of Islamic prophethood, a crucially important concept covered in the Qur’an, is the aim of this chapter. Prophethood is supported by more than half the Qur’an’s content, covering prophets and their significant roles in the history of humanity.¹⁴⁷ The Qur’an teaches that humankind was created to worship God according to the guidance in His revelation (*wahy*).¹⁴⁸ Humans exist to learn about their Creator, abide by His laws, enjoy His Divine mercy and enter Paradise. Prophethood, a necessary mediation for humanity, is a bridge between the Creator and creations through the demonstration and application of His message. It was communicated through the prophets, exceptional individuals who emerged at certain times of history to fulfil the tasks prescribed by God. The Qur’anic story about Prophet ‘Īsā is outstanding and mysterious, indicating that Divine revelation (*wahy*) is all-present and appears in various forms and times. The Qur’an places ‘Īsā, son of Maryam, directly in context with the emergence of the final Divine word and the seal of prophethood, Prophet Muhammad, attributing him like no other prophet in the Book.¹⁴⁹ This makes the story of ‘Īsā an exceptional subject in Sufi *tafsīr*. This chapter points to the surprising reality of the shortage of research on the coverage of ‘Īsā in *tafsīr* and Sufi literature, particularly *ishārī tafsīr*.

2.2 ‘Īsā (Jesus) and Maryam (Mary) in the Qur’an; the Etymology of Names

‘Īsā is one of the 25 prophets mentioned by name in the Qur’an.¹⁵⁰ The Qur’anic expressions for a prophet are *rasūl* (pl. *rusul*), an individual with a given revelation or Divine law to be conveyed to people, and *nabī* (pl. *anbiyā’*), a herald sent by God to bring news from

¹⁴⁷ The most frequently mentioned prophet in the Qur’an is Mūsā/Moses, with about one-third of verses dedicated to him. See chapters al-Baqarah (2), al-A’raf (7) and al-Shuarā’ (26).

¹⁴⁸ Qur’an 51:56.

¹⁴⁹ Qur’an 61:6.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Īsā is mentioned by name 25 times in the Qur’an and as *al-masīh* (the anointed one) 11 times, while 93 Qur’anic verses refer to ‘Īsā/Jesus directly or indirectly; see the entries on “‘Īsā, Masīh” in Abdul Bāqī, *Al Mu’jam al Mofahras*; Imran Erfani, *A to Z Ready Reference of the Quran* (Delhi: Goodword Books, 2014).

Him, relying on and calling to the law of the prophet(s) preceding him. So every *rasūl* is a *nabī*, while not every *nabī* is a *rasūl*.¹⁵¹ Jesus is mentioned 25 times in 93 verses over 14 chapters and is considered one of the *ulu al-‘azm* prophets.¹⁵² Having had assigned as *rasūl* and *nabī* in the Qur’an,¹⁵³ ‘Īsā is also named ‘Īsā, the son of Maryam and *al-masīh*.¹⁵⁴ The expressions *kalimatuhu* (His Word) and *rūḥun minhu* (Spirit from Him), used exclusively in the Qur’an for him, will be discussed in section 2.4. ‘Īsā is likely of Hebrew or Aramaic origin from the names Yasu’ and Yashu’.¹⁵⁵ In *Mufradāt*, ‘Īsā is a foreign personal noun; when adapted to Arabic, it means a black-white camel (*a’yas*), also the verb *āsa* (to inseminate the camel).¹⁵⁶ *Al-masīh* is from the Arabic root m-s-ḥ, meaning anointed one, a name reserved for ‘Īsā, and as the Qur’an indicated, given to him even before his birth, unlike in Christianity where he acquired this title later in his worldly life..¹⁵⁷ As for some of his attributes or unique titles (some proclaimed personally by him), they are *min al-muqarrabīn* (among those close to God);¹⁵⁸ *wajīh* (worthy of esteem);¹⁵⁹ *mubārak* (blessed one);¹⁶⁰ *qawl al-ḥaqq* (speech of truth);¹⁶¹ and ‘*abd Allāh* (servant of God).¹⁶² All these are used with Divine precision, corresponding to the context of the Qur’anic narration, delivering a powerful and clarifying message about this prophet.

Maryam is a highly respected individual, holding the highest standard of purity, and her character is openly defended in the Qur’an against Jewish accusations.¹⁶³ She is the only female

¹⁵¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū’ al-fatāwā* [Collection of Fatwas], 10/290, accessed February 23, 2022, <https://almosleh.com/ar/ar/657>.

¹⁵² Abdul Bāqī, *Al Mu’jam al Mofahras*, 607. *Ulul ‘azm* are the five greatest prophets mentioned by name in the Qur’an whose missions were crucial: Nūh, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, ‘Īsā and Muhammad. See Qur’an 46:35.

¹⁵³ Qur’an 4:171, 19:30.

¹⁵⁴ Maurice Gloton, *Jesus Son of Mary in the Quran and According to the Teachings of Ibn Arabi* (Fons Vitae, 2016), 68-69.

¹⁵⁵ Arthur Jeffrey, Gerhard Böwering and Jane McAuliffe, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran* (Woods Press, 2008), 220.

¹⁵⁶ Raghīb al-Isfahani, *Mufradat alfāz al-Qur’ān* [Dictionary of Qur’anic Expressions] (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 2020), 477.

¹⁵⁷ Qur’an 3:45; M. Syed Waqas, *Christ or not Christ, the Christology of the Qur’an (Making of Jesus in the Qur’an)* (Bab al Ilm, 2015), 26.

¹⁵⁸ Qur’an 3:45.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Qur’an 19:31.

¹⁶¹ Qur’an 19:34.

¹⁶² Qur’an 19:31.

¹⁶³ Qur’an 4:156.

mentioned in the Qur'an (34 times in 31 verses) and the 19th chapter (*sūra*) is named after her.¹⁶⁴ Generally, the Qur'an does not speak about people in a historical or biographic manner; instead, it conveys ethical and theological messages drawn from their lives. 'Īsā and his mother are no exception. Everywhere in the Qur'an, 'Īsā is identified as the son of Maryam, which is a constant reminder of his human nature. They are both dignified and honoured by an etiquette of the sign or miracle,¹⁶⁵ regularly reserved in the Qur'an for the phenomena people are invited to ponder and research to discover the absolute truth behind them. The verse Q 23:50 takes the man out of the regular cycle of looking for material explanations for the events around him, guiding him to a higher cause. Everything about 'Īsā and his mother is a miracle, and the Qur'an repeats that miracles are our reality and happen with God's permission. Significant room is dedicated to Maryam in *Alu 'Imran*, when her mother, the wife of 'Imran, was supplicating for her unborn child, hoping to be male and intending to dedicate him to service in a temple. To her surprise, she gave birth to a girl, naming her Maryam,¹⁶⁶ and asked God for her protection and her offspring. Prophet Zakariyyā then took care of her and witnessed unusual events surrounding Maryam.¹⁶⁷

The birth of Maryam and her childhood spent in service in the temple can be considered the beginning of the miraculous story of her son 'Īsā, witnessed in angels' address to Maryam, where "His Word," the news about her unborn son, *al-masīh*, worth of esteem (*wajīh*) takes the central position. In surprise, Maryam politely questions her Lord's unusual commandment. When reassured by Jibrīl and glad tidings about her son and his unique mission, she relied on her Lord and put her trust in Him.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Generally, suras were named by Prophet Muhammad and his companions, who used effort and independent interpretation (*ijtihad*) to do this.

¹⁶⁵ Qur'an 23:50.

¹⁶⁶ Maryam is the Aramaic version of the Biblical name Miriam, the sister of Prophet Moses. The etymology indicates the meaning *merit* (love, beloved) the ancient Egyptian language. Patrick Hanks, Flavia Hodges and Kate Hardcastle, *A Dictionary of First Names* (Oxford University Press, 2006); al Isfahani, *Mufradat*, 607.

¹⁶⁷ Qur'an 3:33-7.

¹⁶⁸ Qur'an 3:47.

‘Īsā’s childhood is scarcely mentioned in the Qur’an. The only references are to an account of his birth next to a date palm and to a miracle where he spoke in the cradle.¹⁶⁹ Fakhruddin al-Rāzī (d. 1209) describes this segment as one of the most extraordinary events in human history. Such context is considerably different to the context in the Gospels.¹⁷⁰ It is understood that the primary goal of little Jesus’ talking, an unfamiliar moment for Christian readers of the Qur’an, is a clarification of his nature and mission and a defence of his mother against accusations.¹⁷¹ The annunciation and nativity, as presented in the Qur’an,¹⁷² made Ibn al-‘Arabī, who considered himself a spiritual student of ‘Īsā, claim that ‘Īsā was a perfect being in his simple humanity, created from an ideal mother and a perfectly harmonious angel.¹⁷³ Maryam is also highly regarded in *ḥadīth*. Abu Mūsā al-Ash‘arī narrated:

Many men attained perfection, but not many women, apart from Āsiya, the wife of Pharaoh; and Maryam, the daughter of ‘Imrān. The superiority of Aisha over other women is like the superiority of *tharīd*¹⁷⁴ over all other foods.¹⁷⁵

All three women lived in different periods of human history, so individually they were the best women in their times. The hinted perfection (*kamāl*) is the high status in devotion to God, the eminence categorically stated and persistently highlighted in the story of Maryam:

And when the angels said: O Maryam, Verily, Allah has chosen you, purified you, and chosen you above the women of the mankind.¹⁷⁶

Apart from this, Ibn Kathīr mentions in his commentary of *sūra* al-Taḥrīm (The Prohibition) the narration about the Prophet’s “eschatological marriage” with Āsiya (Pharaoh’s wife), Maryam and Kulthūm (Mūsā’s sister) in Paradise, related by al-Ṭabarānī in his *al-Mu‘jam al-kabīr*. He also indicated the problem of its authenticity.¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁹ Qur’an 19:16-34.

¹⁷⁰ Rāzī Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr (Maḥāṣin al-ghayb)* [The Great Exegesis, The Keys of the Unseen], (Dar al Fikr, 2018).

¹⁷¹ Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims* (New York, St Martin’s Press, 2017), 122-4.

¹⁷² Qur’an 19:17-21.

¹⁷³ Gloton, *Jesus Son of Mary*, 71.

¹⁷⁴ A traditional Arab dish made from pieces of bread in a vegetable or meat broth.

¹⁷⁵ Muslim, *Sahīh Muslim, ḥadīth* 2431, 700.

¹⁷⁶ Qur’an 3:42.

¹⁷⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’an al-‘azīm* [Interpretation of the Great Qur’an] (Cairo: Dar al Hadīth, 1993), vol. 4, 390-1.

2.3 Mission of ‘Īsā

Having placed ‘Īsā in the Qur’anic context of prophethood (*risālah*) and bearing in mind that all prophets, apart from their universal prophetic missions, had precise tasks, in the course with specific historical circumstances and demands of their times, this section will independently peruse ‘Īsā’s mission. The prophets completely obeyed God, having impeccable morals and always being truthful. The Qur’anic verse “And certainly, We sent to every nation a Messenger: ‘Worship God and avoid false gods...’”¹⁷⁸ can be taken as an introduction to the main tasks of prophethood: clarification of God’s truth (*ḥaqq*) and rejection of all falsehood assigned to Him (*bāṭil*) by people; teaching the true nature and purpose of life; demonstration of how God should be worshipped (*ibāda*); conveying the definition of righteous deeds (*ṣālihāt*) and immoral conduct (*sayyi’āt*); description of Paradise (*jannah*) as a reward for obedience and warning or punishment for disobedience (*nār*); and explanations of commonly unknown and misunderstood matters such as the soul, angels, afterlife and fate. All prophets possessed six essential characteristics: truthfulness, sincerity, adequacy in delivering God’s commands, intelligence, infallibility and complete mental and physical sufficiency.¹⁷⁹

The Qur’an makes a clear connection between ‘Īsā and the message of Islam relevant to all prophets before him:

Say: We believe in God, in what is revealed to us and Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes. We believe in the Tora revealed to Moses, in the Gospel revealed to Jesus, and what is sent to the prophets of their Lord; we do not divide any of them, and to God, we surrender.¹⁸⁰

The Qur’an clearly states that ‘Īsā came to confirm the message of the Torah revealed to Moses before him (*muṣaddiq limā bayna yadayhi min al-tawrāh*). By upholding the announcements of the Torah, ‘Īsā confirmed all the news of the prophets before Moses.¹⁸¹ His

¹⁷⁸ Qur’an 16:36.

¹⁷⁹ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), vol. V1, 185-6. For more on the prophethood in Islam, see Jamal Badawi, *Muhammad’s Prophethood: An Analytical View* (Riyadh, KSA: World Assembly of Muslim Youth, 1995); Syed Muhammad Naquib al Attas, “The Worldview of Islam: An Outline,” in *Islam and the Challenge of Modernity: Historical and Contemporary Contexts*, ed. Sharifah Shifa Al-Attas (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996).

¹⁸⁰ Qur’an 2:136.

¹⁸¹ Qur’an 5:46.

mission was a continuation of the delivered revelation and prophetic tradition established before him but forgotten, embodied in the *Injīl* (Gospels), which was a guidance, light and warning for the pious.¹⁸²

The distinct task of ‘Īsā’s mission was to remove some of the harsh laws temporarily imposed on the Jews due to their prior sinful deeds. The emergence of ‘Īsā was a time of God’s mercy and for these restrictions to be lifted.¹⁸³ While all the prophets continuously stressed the importance of monotheism (*tawhīd*) and human submission to their Creator (‘*ibada*’), ‘Īsā was the only one who stated it while he was a baby in the crib: “I am the servant of God!”¹⁸⁴ He received the Word before he was born because he was the Word. This becomes even more important, remembering what Christians will later proclaim about Jesus’ Divine nature. “Be aware of God and follow me”¹⁸⁵ is what ‘Īsā commanded his followers, emphasising the priority of legitimate application of faith. Also, many Jewish sects existed during his time, substantially differing in their religious views, like the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Herodians, Zealots and others. Therefore, ‘Īsā’s mission was also to clarify some points of dispute among them¹⁸⁶ and upholding the Mosaic law, the primary task of ‘Īsā’s mission.

Considering the events after him, the historical context and closure of prophethood with the appearance of Prophet Muhammad, according to the Qur’an, ‘Īsā is closest to the final prophet, having allusively announced his coming.¹⁸⁷ This connection seems even more critical and highlighted regarding his eschatological role or his descent (*nuzūl ‘Īsā*), which will be addressed in more detail in section 3.4.¹⁸⁸ The Qur’an also puts a strong accent on ‘Īsā’s miracles or rather their origins (*bayyināt* – clear evidence, *bi idhni rabbī* – with my Lord’s permission): his miraculous birth, his conversation with the Jews while in the cradle;¹⁸⁹

¹⁸² Ibid., Qur’an 57:27.

¹⁸³ Qur’an 3:50.

¹⁸⁴ Qur’an 19:30.

¹⁸⁵ Qur’an 3:50.

¹⁸⁶ Qur’an 43:63.

¹⁸⁷ See Qur’an 61:6.

¹⁸⁸ Zeki Saritoprak, *Islam’s Jesus* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2015), 3.

¹⁸⁹ See Qur’an 19:30.

breathing life into a clay bird;¹⁹⁰ curing a man blind from birth and the leper;¹⁹¹ raising the dead; and the descent of a prepared table on request by his pupils (*al-ḥawāriyyūn*).¹⁹²

The Qur'an repeatedly reminds readers that all these were performed by God's permission only and did not make Jesus divine.¹⁹³ Some room is given to the event with the table spread with food (*al-mā'ida*) demanded by his people to satisfy their hearts rather than to fill their bellies, followed by 'Īsā's supplication and immediate response from God by sending the food, reminding them that this will be a subject of great punishment if they still disbelieve after the miracle took place before their eyes. The continuation of the verses from *sura al-Mā'ida* to its end, in which the eschatological dialogue between God and 'Īsā is taking place, is the clarification and summary of his life and mission in this world.¹⁹⁴ All he was doing was obeying God's commandment, reminding people of their Lord and witnessing over them while on earth until he was taken up. Neither he nor his mother ever called on people to worship anyone besides God. God is glorified and taken witness by 'Īsā in this dialogue, and readers witness as if this unusual event is taking place right before them. The final judgement belongs to God only; He is the Only One to either punish or forgive His servants on the day when the truth will be fruitful to the truthful.

The Qur'an announces that 'Īsā was also strengthened and assisted by the *Rūḥ al-qudus* (angel Jibrīl, also *Rūḥ al-amīn*) all through his life from his birth and up to his rescue from the murder plot, the same as Prophet Muhammad was helped after him.¹⁹⁵ This support is unique and was available to His other servants, not only prophets. Both *Saḥīḥs* (Bukharī and Muslim) report Muhammad's praising words to Ḥassan ibn Thābit for his poetry as a response to verbal

¹⁹⁰ See Qur'an 3:43.

¹⁹¹ See Qur'an 5:110.

¹⁹² See Qur'an 5:114.

¹⁹³ See Qur'an 5:110.

¹⁹⁴ See Qur'an 5:114-20.

¹⁹⁵ The Islamic understanding of *Rūḥ al-Qudus* is the angel Gabriel (Jibrīl), the angel of Revelation (*wahy*). See Hikmat Bashir, *Al Tafsir al-masbūr* [Preserved Exegesis] (Kuala Lumpur: Dar al Maathir, 1999), 1/192-3). This term appears four times in the Qur'an, three times concerning 'Īsā and once to Muhammad. See 2:87, 2:253, 5:110, 16:102.

attacks by polytheists in Mecca: “O Allah, support him with *Rūḥ al-qudus!*”¹⁹⁶ From these statements, the bond between the Holy Spirit (*Jibrīl*) and ‘Īsā emerges as an attribute or God’s privilege to ‘Īsā, the aid to his mission and protection of his and his mother’s integrity against people’s malice.

2.4 ‘Īsā, His Word (*kalimatuhū*) and Spirit from Him (*rūḥun minhu*)

The Qur’an refers to ‘Īsā as “His Word He delivered to Maryam and a Spirit from Him”,¹⁹⁷ alluding to his miraculous, fatherless conception. Therefore, ‘Īsā, a human being, is a direct outcome of God’s creative word: Be! (*kun*), just like Adam was long before him in the event of creation, probably even more miraculous than ‘Īsā’s.¹⁹⁸ One verse explicitly states this is the truth from the Lord and invokes Prophet Muhammad and all believers not to doubt. The Qur’an rebukes those who doubt him as a prophet and a direct intervention of His divine creative might, naming ‘Īsā a statement of truth.¹⁹⁹ The traditional interpretation of the two expressions mainly gravitates around Ibn Kathīr’s explanation that the Word is the same word God sent Jibrīl (Gabriel) to Maryam and Spirit is the *naḥkha*, the blowing breath through Maryam’s lap into her womb where ‘Īsā was conceived.²⁰⁰ This commentary maintains literal meanings, depicting God’s commandments to Jibrīl.

Al-Rāzī, the master of the unification of reason and tradition, in his *tafsīr Maḥāṭib al-ghayb*, considers “Word” and “Spirit” to be metaphorical and he did not try to explain them by their outward meanings, which some may interpret as his inclination towards Jesus’ divine nature. But, as Ibn al-‘Arabī explains, all human beings, with their birth, life paths and destinies, come from God and return to Him. This is their link with the Divine nature and the existence of His eternal and perfect Word is never wholly exhausted in their lives, as the Qur’an says:

¹⁹⁶ Bukhārī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, vol. 4, *hadīth* no. 3212; Muslim, *Sahīh Muslim*, vol. 4, *hadīth* no. 2485.

¹⁹⁷ Qur’an 4:171.

¹⁹⁸ Qur’an 19:35, 3:59.

¹⁹⁹ Qur’an 3:59-60, 19:24.

²⁰⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al Qur’an al-azīm*, 558.

Say: Though the sea became ink for the words of my Lord, verily the sea would be used up before the words of my Lord were exhausted...²⁰¹

Al-Alūsī gives a good summary of the main views of the leading exegetes on possible meanings of ‘Īsā being God’s word: he is the fulfilment of God’s creation through the word; ‘Īsā is the prophet by God’s Word; he is the Word since he speaks on behalf of God; and he is the Word in his person or embodiment of good news from God. He adds further nuance that ‘Īsā as the Word of God is a manifestation of His attribute of *kalām* (divine speech).²⁰² Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), an author, poet and modern exeget, holds a cautious and reserved stand on the interpretation of *kalima* and *rūh*, believing their true meanings belong to the unseen, unwitnessed and cannot be adequately reached due to our limited capacities. Therefore, it should not be an object of useless, time-wasting speculations.²⁰³

Sufi *tafsīrs*, committed to their search for deeper meanings, go further than traditional comments on *kalimatuhu* and *rūḥun minhu*. For Bursawī, the word *rūh* is interpreted as something that Jibrīl was coming to the prophets with, which revived the hearts of humans. *Al-Qudus* is a perfect purity, something not affected by immoral actions.²⁰⁴ Sufis maintain that everything existing has a created spirit and its form. The relation between the spirit (*rūḥ*) and form (*ṣūrah*) is one of the meanings and the Word. The Divine Spirit preceded the created spirit and this is *rūḥ al-qudus*. Man has a body (form), spirit (meaning and consciousness) and essential and primordial aspect denoted by the Holy Spirit. Man’s *rūḥ* is his constant and immediate connection with the Creator, the Source and a reminder of the origin and destination.²⁰⁵

In his introduction to the *Muslim Jesus*, Tarif Khalidi, discussing the Word and Spirit, poses the question that occupies the minds of many: are the two an exclusive honour to ‘Īsā or

²⁰¹ Gloton, *Jesus Son of Mary*, 156-7.

²⁰² Al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma’āni fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-aīm wa sab’al-mathānī* [The Spirit of Meanings in the Exegesis of the Qur’an and the Seven Repeated Verses] (Beirut: Al-Resalah, 2010), vol. 6, 413-4.

²⁰³ Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al Qur’an* [In the Shade of the Qur’an], trans. Adil Salahi (The Islamic Foundation, 2007), accessed January 30, 2020, vol. 3, 343, <https://www.kalamullah.com/shade-of-the-quran.html>.

²⁰⁴ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2884-5.

²⁰⁵ ElSenossi. “The Language of the Future.”

just a phrase or expression that can be related to any other prophet? In other words, if ‘Īsā is given special status by God, to what extent is it and why? Apart from stating that ‘Īsā is a rather controversial prophet like no other, he highlights the detail overlooked by many: the word “cleansing” or “clearing” used in verse: When God said, addressing His last Jewish prophet: “O ‘Īsā, I will take you and raise you to Myself and *clear (clean)* you of those who disbelieve...”²⁰⁶

Khalidi believes this moment defines the unique nature of ‘Īsā’s mission: he is the only prophet made distant by God from the perverted beliefs of his people and he plays an active role in this delicate and responsible process in worldly life and the hereafter. ‘Īsā also categorically denies his responsibility for their distorted beliefs in the eschatological dialogue brought in *sūra* al-Mā’ida.²⁰⁷

The *rūḥ* (Spirit) is used 21 times in the Qur’an, always as singular with a spectrum of similar meanings corresponding to different contexts and their realities.²⁰⁸ Jesus is described as *rūḥun minhu* (the spirit from Him), not as *rūḥuhu* (His Spirit), where the role of Gabriel (Jibrīl), the angel of Revelation, is highlighted. The Qur’an reminds, inviting human reasoning, that the same narrative and conclusion applying to Adam and his creation applies to ‘Īsā and his birth.²⁰⁹ Referring to al-Rāzī’s comments on these verses and his explanation of the connection between the Spirit and the miracle of reviving the dead, two options are presented: either ‘Īsā could, with God’s permission, breathe life into a dead thing since he was created similarly or God created life in lifeless objects as soon as ‘Īsā breathed into them. The author of *Mafātīḥ* prefers the latter without rejecting the former.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Qur’an 3:55.

²⁰⁷ Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3-6.

²⁰⁸ See Qur’an 2:87, 16:2, 78:38.

²⁰⁹ Gloton, *Jesus Son of Mary*, 167.

²¹⁰ Ayoub, *The Qur’an and its Interpreters*, 145.

2.5 Crucifixion and ‘Īsā’s Return (*nuzūl*)

The Qur’an maintains that ‘Īsā was neither killed nor crucified – this was made to appear to people.²¹¹ This statement is directed against all those who claim otherwise. The two verses in question are also known as denial and confirmation verses – they deny that ‘Īsā was killed by those who wanted to cause him harm, concurrently confirming that he was taken up to God. How exactly he was raised (*wa rāfi ‘uka ilayya* – I will raise you²¹²), where and when, the Qur’an does not explicitly answer. No matter how this took place, it was an extraordinary event.²¹³ The most prominent exegetical view of these two verses is the “substitution theory” – someone was made to look like ‘Īsā and crucified instead. However, this statement cannot be found in the Qur’an.²¹⁴ There is only one traditional narration, recorded by al-Nasā’ī (d. 915)²¹⁵ and reported by Ibn ‘Abbās:

When God wanted to take up ‘Īsā to Heaven, he came out in front of his companions, and they were in a house, twelve men. His head looked like water was dripping from it. ‘Īsā asked them: Who is ready to take my look and be killed in my place – he will be my companion in Paradise? The youngest among them stood up and said: I will do it! ‘Īsā told him to sit down. Then he repeated his question, and again, the young man replied: I will do it! ‘Īsā told him to sit down again. When ‘Īsā repeated it for the third time, and when the same young man spoke, ‘Īsā said: It is you! He was made to look like ‘Īsā, and ‘Īsā was raised to heaven through the opening of the roof of the house. The Jews arranged the raid, arresting the young man because of his look like ‘Īsā. They killed him and crucified him. Afterwards, people were divided into three groups: those claiming God the Almighty was among them; for the time He wanted to be, and He went to Heaven. These are Jacobites. The other group claimed that the Son of God was among us for the time God wanted him to be then He raised him to Him. These are Nestorians. The last group claimed: The servant of God and His prophet was among us for the time God wanted him to be. These are Muslims. The first two disbelieved and stood up against Muslims, killing them all. Islam was lost until God sent Prophet Muhammad, then He revealed: Then a group of the children of Israel believed, and a group of them disbelieved (both groups in the

²¹¹ Qur’an 4:157-8.

²¹² Qur’an 3:55.

²¹³ Mathias A. H. Zahniser, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 60.

²¹⁴ Waqas, *Christ or not Christ*, 20.

²¹⁵ Abu Abd al Raḥman Aḥmad ibn Shu‘ayb ibn Ali ibn Sinan al-Nasā’ī was Persian, a remarkable collector of *hadīth* and the author of *Al-Sunan*, one of the six canonical *hadīth* collections.

time of ‘Īsā); So We gave power to those who believed against their enemies, and they became victorious.²¹⁶

Al-Ṭabarī includes in his *tafsīr* a few interpretations of *Innī mutawaffika*, preferring *I will take/receive you over I will cause you to die*, bearing in mind the eschatological role of ‘Īsā, as described in *hadīth*.²¹⁷ Ibn Kathīr and al-Suyūṭī prefer *I put you to sleep*, providing in their *tafsīrs* evidence through other Qur’anic verses.²¹⁸ Some other exegetes maintain *mutawaffika* to be as *death applied to you only*. Since the Qur’an mentions this death would occur after the second coming²¹⁹ amid the rest of the events, Jesus is understood to be alive. Upon his second coming, he will initiate and apply various social reforms, rectifying established but incorrect beliefs about God and himself.²²⁰ Briefly, Muslims believe, as guided by the Qur’an, that God would not allow malicious people to harm and execute His prophet ‘Īsā – He mysteriously saved him. He raised and took him to Him, where he enjoys the Creator’s mercy, awaiting his time to return to earth and complete his mission. In all these, ‘Īsā does not become divine and never ceases to be a human in his nature, chosen by God, the sign (*‘ilm*) of the Hour.²²¹

Sufī exegetes, as usual, go further. They claim, by reaching human perfection, ‘Īsā completely disappeared in his Lord (*fanā*). His rise is the move to a higher level of existence.

Ruzbihān al-Baqlī explains:

Just watch the essence of things. When the body becomes a spirit, there is no need for its outer form independent of the dust. What disadvantage and trial can befall it? Do you not know that when ‘Īsā ascended, he got separated from everything worldly? When someone in love is taken up, and when love comes back to its origins, it colours him with its colours and lets him disappear in the presence of the Loved. Like this, he is raised to higher heavenly levels, with

²¹⁶ Al-Nasāī, *Al-Sunan al-kubra* (Damascus: Al Risala al-alamiyya, 2016), book 6, *hadīth* no. 489, 510.

²¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī Muhammad ibn Jarīr, *Al-Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, (Cairo: Centre for Arabic and Islamic Studies, 2001), book 5, 450. Around 100 narrations are ascribed to the Messenger concerning ‘Īsā’s descent as the sign of the Day of Judgement. Some are authentic, but many are not. Also, see Zahniser, *The Mission and Death of Jesus*, 34-6.

²¹⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’an al-‘azīm*, 1:575.

²¹⁹ Qur’an 4:159.

²²⁰ Abu Hayyan Muhammad b. Yusuf al-Andalūsī, *Tafsīr al-Bahr al-Muhīt* [Great Exegesis] (Beirut: Dar Ehia al-Tourath al-Arabi, 1983), 2:473.

²²¹ Gloton, *Jesus Son of Mary*, 148; Qur’an 43:61.

angelic wings, up to the ‘*Illiyūn*,²²² like Khidr, Ilyasa‘ and ‘Īsā, who complemented their human traits with godly attributes, and their essence became esoteric.²²³

In al-Baqlī’s words, love dominates as the unifying agent between the Lord and His servant, a paved path to a higher existence. ‘Īsā’s departure and separation from everything worldly was the only way to achieve the *fanā*’ and completeness of love for God. The Qur’an does not directly mention the return or descent of ‘Īsā; rather, it is a hint contained in two verses: “He is the Sign of the Hour...” and “...there is not one of the People of the Book who will not believe in him before he dies...”²²⁴ They can be taken as allusion to ‘Īsā’s second coming but not clear evidence. Therefore, al-Taftazani, a Persian Sufī exegete, saw the return of ‘Īsā as a symbol and not a factual event.²²⁵ Some modernists, such as ‘Abduh (d. 1905), Riḍā (d. 1935) as well as “modern” traditionalist Nursi (d. 1960), are not convinced about the idea of ‘Īsā’s bodily return. They see the *ḥadīth* concerning it as the influence of Christian theology. ‘Abduh sees it as a return of compassion and harmony. It is a triumph of spirituality over the profane and materialistic set-up and dominance. Riḍā explains that the return of ‘Īsā is a return to the Qur’an’s laws and Prophet Muhammad’s tradition. Nursī understands it as the comeback of the “spiritual person” and renewal of Islam and Muslim-Christian dialogue worldwide.²²⁶ Also, as modernists claim, ‘Īsā’s name *al-masīh* does not allude to his return and has no eschatological connotation in the Qur’an.²²⁷

2.6 Tradition (*Ḥadīth*) on ‘Īsā

The Qur’an clearly states ‘Īsā’s message to his people is to worship God and not associate partners with Him.²²⁸ It does not directly mention his eschatological return – this can be

²²² Qur’an 83:18-20.

²²³ Ruzbihan al-Baqlī, *Abhar al-’āshiqīn* [Jasmine of Lovers] (Tehran/Paris: Iranian Library 8, 1958), 156.

²²⁴ Qur’an 43:61, 4:159.

²²⁵ Sad al-Din Masud ibn Umar ibn Abd Allah Al-Taftazani, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Sad al-Din al-Taftazani on the Creed of Najm al-Din al-Nasafī*, trans. Earl Edgar Elder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), xx.

²²⁶ Rashid Riḍā, *Tafsir al-manār* [The Lighthouse Exegesis] (Cairo: Al Hay’at al Misriyya al ‘ammah lil Kitāb, 1990), 3:261; Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*, 182-6.

²²⁷ Qur’an 3:45.

²²⁸ Qur’an 5:72.

understood from the context in Q 43:57-61. As understood by mainstream Muslims (*ahl sunna*), these verses indicate the return of ‘Īsā: he is not dead, he was taken up and his death will occur sometime in the future, just before the Day of Judgement. More precisely, in the context of *hadīth*, ‘Īsā will return as a sign of the Day of Judgement, God’s mercy, the bearer of truth and justice, and marking the victory over the Antichrist (Dajjāl). More than 100 narrations from Prophet Muhammad exist concerning the return of ‘Īsā. Some of them (around 30) are reliable and can be found in the collections of authentic narrations (*sahīhs*), while the rest are considered weak (*ḍa‘īf*) or even fabricated (*mawḍū‘*).²²⁹ Mainly, the accent of these narratives is on establishing belief and social justice, the two most anticipated solutions related to ‘Īsā’s return to earth. According to some narrations, ‘Īsā will return to fulfil his mission of establishing peace and goodness and eradicating all evil and corruption embodied by Dajjāl. ‘Īsā will descend from heaven in the last days accompanied by two angels. They will battle Dajjāl and the people who embraced and followed his evil. ‘Īsā will be victorious, kill Dajjāl and defeat his followers. Furthermore, all those who embraced the evil of Dajjāl shall perish even when touched by ‘Īsā’s breath.²³⁰ After the final battle, ‘Īsā will bring peace to earth, all battles shall cease and the world will know an age of peace. Safety will rule, so the sheep will lie in the wolf’s shadow without fear. The rule of ‘Īsā will be with justice and everyone will head to him to embrace Islam’s true religion.²³¹ Narrations are abundant in allusions and indications, and their literal expressions have limitless and deep-meaning interpretations. Traditional scholars, such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Nawawī and Ibn Taymiyya, understand them literally and interpret them accordingly.²³² They leave little room for lengthy interpretations, and according to them, what needs to be understood and taken as a message is clear and straightforward: ‘Īsā will come back

²²⁹ Shawkānī collected these narrations in his *Kitāb Tawdīh Tawātur mā jāe fī al-Mahdī al-muntazir wa al-Dajjāl al-Masīh* [The Book of Explanation of the Truth News about Expected Mahdī and Antichrist]. According to some, this book has been lost. I could not find a copy of it.

²³⁰ Bukharī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, book 92, *hadīth* no. 81; Bukharī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Book 97, *hadīth* no. 99; Muslim, *Sahīh Muslim*, book 20, *hadīth* no. 54.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Al-Ṭabarī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 5:451.

when God decides, before the Day of Judgement as its immediate sign and herald. He will follow the last prophet, Muhammad, since his religious law is only credible and binding until the end of time. ‘Īsā will join the army of Mahdī in his battle of truth against the one-eyed liar Dajjāl and his followers. He will manage to kill him in Palestine and explain the truth about himself, just as alluded to in *sūra* al-Mā’ida. He will spend 40 years on earth, and some, among them Bursawī, say he will marry, die and be buried next to the final prophet.²³³ In an attempt to clarify the exclusivity of ‘Īsā’s return or to rationalise it, the vast majority of Islamic scholars, traditional and modern, offer some concise points: his return will prove wrong the claim according to which he was killed; ‘Īsā needs to come back to complete his worldly life and be buried like all other human beings created from clay; he wished to be of the nation of Muhammad, having supplicated to be of them – God accepted his request; by his return, all false beliefs about him will be identified and exposed; and finally Prophet Muhammad claimed ‘Īsā, by indicating the non-existence of a prophet between him and ‘Īsā. The son of Maryam is exclusively honoured since he announced the final prophet’s emergence and called on people to believe in and follow him.²³⁴

The mysterious content of the narration raised a debate between Sunnī and Shī’a Muslims in the context of ‘Īsā’s return and leadership in the final days. It is narrated by Abu Huraira:

What do you think, when the Son of Maryam comes down among you, and your leader is (already) with you... (*imāmukum minkum*)²³⁵

and:

²³³ Abu Dawūd, *Sunan abu Dawood* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiya, 2009), Book of Battles, *hadīth* no. 4321; Tirmidhī, *Jāmi’ at-Tirmidhi* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiya, 2010), Book of Tribulations (*fitan*), *hadīth* no. 2244.

²³⁴ For more details, see Al-Ṭabari, *Al-Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’an al-‘azīm*; Ibn Kathīr, “Signs Before the Day of Judgement, The,” Sunnah Online, trans. Huda Khattab, accessed November 15, 2022, <https://sunnahonline.com/library/paradise-hell-and-the-hereafter/262-signs-before-the-day-of-judgement-the>; Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani, “The Expected Mahdi (‘a) and His Government of Justice,” in *A Bundle of Flowers from Garden of Traditions of Prophet & Ahlul Bayt*, ed. Celeste Smith, trans. Sayyid Abbas Sadr-‘ameli, (Imam Ali Foundation, 1997), <https://www.al-islam.org/bundle-flowers-garden-traditions-prophet-ahlul-bayt/expected-mahdi-and-his-government-justice>; Mehmed Karahodzic, *‘Īsā u Knjigama Sufija* [Jesus in the Books of Sufis] (Sarajevo: Mehmed Karahodzic, 2004).

²³⁵ Bukhārī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Book of Narration about the Prophets, *hadīth* no. 3449.

...and he instates the leader among you... (*fa ammakum minkum*)²³⁶

Sunnīs are categorical that both expressions intend the Qur'an and Prophet's tradition (*sunnah*), while Shīas take these narrations as solid evidence in justification for their leadership (*imāmat*) theory and imams as absolute leaders after Prophet Muhammad until the end of time. Going into details of this debate is not intended here – the narration is of concern because it deals with the return of 'Īsā, as indicated in other traditional sources.

Generally speaking, there are three perceptions of 'Īsā's eschatological role in Islam: disapproving approach by some modernists in which the narrations dealing with it are seen as fabricated and as a result of Christian influence on Islam; the literal or traditional approach by those accepting them with no questioning; and the interpretative or in-between view. Only reliable narrations are acceptable, but they need to be adequately scrutinised and interpreted, and not taken literally since Prophet Muhammad often spoke allegorically, using figurative speech in his statements. His sayings dealing with 'Īsā's descent on earth are considered that kind of speech.²³⁷

2.7 'Īsā and Jesus as Spiritual Exemplars in Classical Sufi Literature

'Īsā receives comprehensive treatment in Sufi books since their literature sees him as a symbol of perfect human purity and “a true Sufi.” Sufis read and understand the Qur'an, believing it to be the Word of God of the highest level, so they accept 'Īsā to be His timeless and placeless Word. Sufi literature is often neglected since it treats texts with deeper meanings and higher levels of recognition and acceptance. It has always been mysterious to the public through resaying and storytelling. Therefore, some Sufi interpretations of 'Īsā, especially those related to him as the Spirit from Him (*rūḥun minhu*), are presented as Christian-like. Sufis do not seem to be bothered by these accusations.²³⁸ Sufis refer to Jesus mainly through his Qur'anic portrait. Even when this is different, the citations serve the purpose of subordination and

²³⁶ Muslim, *Sahīh Muslim*, Book of Faith, *hadīth* no. 223.

²³⁷ Saritoprak, *Islam's Jesus*, 158.

²³⁸ Karahodzic, *'Īsā u knjigama Sufija*, 5.

conformation of the Qur'anic account of 'Īsā.²³⁹ They have always admired Jesus and see him as a perfect Sufi master and someone to whom Divine mysteries were revealed. Jesus is reported to have said:

It is to those worthy of my mysteries that I tell my mysteries. My place is in the world's middle, and I appeared to people in the flesh. I found all of them intoxicated- I found none of them thirsty. My soul became afflicted for the son of men because they are blind in their hearts and cannot see. They came empty to the world, and empty they were about to leave. Whoever has come to understand the world has found it only dead flesh, and whoever has found dead flesh is superior to the world. Whoever fits in the world and becomes rich- let him renounce it. Become a traveller.²⁴⁰

As the Spirit from Him, Jesus is pure compassion, the Divine attribute that Sufis seek to manifest in their spirits. In Sufi literature, there is an accented portrayal of Jesus as detached from the temporary world and close to God (*zuhd* and *qurb*). Thus, his wise sayings are frequently quoted in Sufi circles and taken as an inspirational guideline, such as:

None of you can come to true belief until he no longer cares to be praised for his worship of God Almighty and no longer cares to partake of the goods of this world.²⁴¹

It may not be immediately apparent, but the core theme in the narrative about 'Īsā in Sufi literature is how to acquire Divine love and nearness, the eternal goal of Islamic mysticism.²⁴²

A Sufi said:

There is no benefit in a tree with no fruit, or an oyster with no pearl, in bees with no honey, in a musk bag with no musk, in a husk with no seeds, in a body with no mind, in mind with no heart, in a heart with no love, and in love with no nearness to the beloved. The value of the husks is in the seeds within them, and the value of men is in the hearts within them. The value of servants is in their masters, and the glory of the lovers is in their beloveds.²⁴³

The Sufi tradition records Jesus' encounter with three mobs of people whose physical states were fragile and their appearances drained. Although they all looked the same, the reasons

²³⁹ Milad Milani, "Representations of Jesus in Islamic Mysticism: Defining the 'Sufi Jesus,'" *Literature and Aesthetics* 21, no. 2 (2011).

²⁴⁰ Gospel of Thomas, saying 28.

²⁴¹ Abu Talib al-Makkī, *Qut al-qulub* [Nourishment for Hearts] (Beirut: Dar al Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1997), 1:256; al-Ghazālī, *Ihya*, 4:370.

²⁴² Milani, "Representations of Jesus."

²⁴³ Aisha al-Ba'unīyyah, *The Principles of Sufism*, translated by Emil Homerin (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 75.

behind their appearances were different. Jesus questioned the cause of their states and the first group responded that fear of hellfire was the cause of their condition. Jesus explained that safety, as God promised, would be a reward for fears in due time. The second group was told that their longing for the Garden and His mercy would attract His giving what is wished for, as God has promised. The accent is on Jesus' reply to the third group, who was honoured by God's proximity and the privilege of His love purely because of their love for Him and Jesus. This is how they became "those brought near" (*muqarrabūn*).²⁴⁴ Therefore, Sufis took their mysticism as the path to their perfection of Islam, how true love will be found and experienced in its primordial source and form. Its roots were derived from the lifestyle and behaviour of the prophets and their companions.

Traditionally, Sufis are occupied with esoteric and hidden meanings of the Qur'an. The connection between Ibn al-'Arabī's *insān kāmil*, as the highest type of human being and someone who reached the highest place in the eyes of God, and 'Īsā, who with his modest garment and complete obedience to God was "a Sufi of his time," seems to be important. Ibn al-'Arabī's perfect human being, developed by him and used by Sufis, reflects his idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (oneness of existence) or the ontological union with Divine Being, which can be achieved through the highest piety and devotion. All beings are reflections of the Divine Being, depending on their spiritual elevation and realisation of God's names and attributes. God created the universe to reflect His perfection and He wants to be known. The only human being who achieved complete perfection was Prophet Muhammad. Other prophets and nobles achieved it according to their proximity to God. Jesus, as a human person, is among, , the few prophets Sufis refer to as the *perfect human being*. His breath's healing and reviving power makes him a uniquely outstanding individual sent by God, seeing him as the "sacred breath," the same breath of Jibrīl from which 'Īsā was conceived. The Qur'anic *rūḥ al-quḍus*, the sacred

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 73-4.

spirit or breath, never implied the acceptance of Christian thoughts and beliefs about the Holy Spirit; instead, it was used to promote Islamic doctrine.²⁴⁵

Although the Qur'an and *hadīth* do not directly mention him, the *insān kāmil* is realistic and personal, not abstract and fictional, conversely existing in his higher or lower stages and levels. The realisation of spiritual qualities is what one needs to strive for. Humans do not just look to fulfil their material and physical needs only – they also seek to meet their moral and spiritual needs. By achieving this, they become learned, astute and benevolent. These and many other virtues are what Islam wants to develop in human beings – reflections of God's attributes and beautiful names. Therefore, the *perfect human being* is one who has already actualised them in themselves, lives them and lives with them.²⁴⁶

Ibn al-'Arabī was proud of his “special relationship” with 'Īsā, claiming him as his first master and having regular spiritual encounters with him. 'Īsā was his spiritual teacher who taught him about Being. This is important to consider when reading his chapter on 'Īsā in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. During their meetings, as claimed by Ibn al-'Arabī, 'Īsā called Ibn al-'Arabī beloved and ordered him to perform asceticism (*zuhd*) and self-denial (*tajrīd*) on his way to becoming a spiritual elite.²⁴⁷ In *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, he says the *Rūh al-amīn*, Jibrīl the trustworthy, appeared to Maryam as a complete man, a messenger sent to bestow on her a pure son; he blew into her and 'Īsā was conceived. So, Jibril was the carrier of God's creative word to Maryam, just like messengers carried words from God to their people. 'Īsā was created from the physical waters of Maryam and abstract waters of Jibrīl.²⁴⁸ Originating from a “spiritual male,” a man-looking angel, he is a perfect union of the human image and angelic spirit.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Saleha Idris, “Insan Kamil: Theological and Psychological Perspectives,” *Asian Journal of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities* 5, no. 2 (2017).

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabī, *Futūḥāt al-Makkīya* [The Meccan Revelations], ed. Osman Yahia (Paris: Al Hay'at al Misriyya al 'ammah lil Kitab, 1985), vol. 12, 122, <https://archive.org/details/al-futuhāt-al-makīyya-ibn-arabi-edition-osman-yahia>.

²⁴⁸ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fusus*, vol. 1, 128-9.

²⁴⁹ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, vol. 11, 439.

As an embodiment of love and human perfection, ‘Īsā illustrates the final and most elevated transformation of the human soul towards *fanā’* and *baqā* (annihilation and subsistence). This is how the “Sufi Jesus” came to life, often used as a perfect agent to overcome differences and open dialogue between Islam and Christianity. This “missionary role” of Jesus is another reason why he is so frequently present in modern Sufi literature. Sufis realised that what some take as a source of dispute and differences could be the starting point of dialogue and unity. Based on the many references to Jesus in the Qur’an and traditions of Islam (*ḥadīth*), it is suggested that Islamic teaching offers Christians a lot upon which they can build effective dialogue with Muslims in modern times.²⁵⁰

The Sufi view of Jesus goes with the mainstream Islamic view, although, for those who need to become more familiar, it may look closer to Christian dogma since they cannot see a clear line between the two. Rumi’s *Mathnawī* brings Islam’s ‘Īsā for a moment, then suddenly, with no explanation, Christianity’s Jesus appears and takes over. They successfully co-exist, complementing and approving each other in a distinctive way where Rumi, not as a philosopher or poet but as a lover of God, finds in ‘Īsā the perfect version of a human and helper for humanity. He helps them to understand their higher selves by becoming familiar with their lower selves, learning from the opposites (story of ‘Īsā and his donkey).²⁵¹ His Word and Spirit from Him, and how they are understood within Christian theology, according to Ibn al-‘Arabī, make him the most resembling God’s creature to another God’s perfect word – the Qur’an – both being unique creative manifestations in their circumstances.²⁵² Ibn al-‘Arabī, who devoted so much of his writing within *Fusūs* and *Futuhāt* to ‘Īsā or Jesus, brings to attention an interesting observation about his mother, Maryam: a mother naturally had to precede her son. But the reason for the mother’s existence is what comes afterwards – her miraculous son, the

²⁵⁰ Elliot Miller, “Sufis: The Mystical Muslims,” Christian Research Institute, June 9, 2009, accessed August 23, 2022, <https://www.equip.org/articles/sufis-the-mystical-muslims>.

²⁵¹ John Baldock, *The Essence of Rumi* (London: Arcturus Publishing Ltd, 2006), 117-21.

²⁵² Zachary Markwith, “Jesus and Christic Sanctity in Ibn ‘Arabi and Early Islamic Spirituality,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* 57 (2015): 88-93.

secret. Therefore, Maryam is the elucidation, so 'Īsā is the mother (reason) and Maryam is the son (consequence) since God had created a mother for the son to exist. Anyone who wants to know 'Īsā needs to acknowledge Maryam first.²⁵³

As for 'Īsā's miracles, as Sufis maintain, they are manifestations of God's power through 'Īsā, His Word and Spirit. As a *perfect human being* in his capacity, he is in the middle of the human imaginative and creative process, directly connected to the Creator. He was not crucified or killed but raised to heaven and will return to participate in our human life more entirely than he did in his first sojourn on earth. Upon arrival, he will lustrate the world and destroy Dajjāl; he will remove roadblocks between people and have a family. He will die and be buried next to Prophet Muhammad, as they will be revived together.²⁵⁴

2.8 'Īsā (Jesus) in Modern Islamic Literature

'Īsā's mission, especially its eschatological episode, as pictured in Islamic tradition and exegetical sources, is mainly neglected in modern literature. Works treating the subject in English are scarce. For many Muslims, the return of 'Īsā represents the end of time and nearness of judgement, and the impression is that the event is much speculated but unexplored. Available traditional sources principally present the establishment of justice and peace through a decent and honourable world order, social equality, tolerance and global satisfaction as the primary purpose of 'Īsā's return. This section explores what Western and Muslim authors have written on Prophet 'Īsā within the past two decades. It seems the discussion on 'Īsā never ends and the narrative about him is inseparable from the Muslim-Christian context; his mission with its historical and eschatological episodes is redefined and its horizons rediscovered for Muslims and Christians. There are theological differences between Islam's 'Īsā and Christianity's Jesus, but the similarities the two faiths share are far more worthy of scholarly attention.

²⁵³ Ibid., 90.

²⁵⁴ Bursawi, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, vol. 2, 956-7.

Tarif Khalidi collected sayings attributed to Jesus by Muslim scholars in a project attractively named *The Muslim Jesus*, a perception in which Jesus is highly regarded but not believed to be divine.²⁵⁵ His collection is a valuable compendium of tradition on ‘Īsā and Jesus, becoming Muslim Jesus. The book is an excellent source of information about Islam and Christianity and an effective tool for establishing profound grounds for mutual understanding. This is significant, specifically for Christians, for their knowledge that the non-acceptance of Jesus’ divinity in Islam does not mean Muslims denounce his prophethood and special status. Many Christians are unfamiliar with the Qur’anic picture of Jesus, and this book – promoting the Muslim Jesus through sayings and stories about the second last prophet on earth, named by the author “Muslim Gospel” – takes this original Qur’anic picture as a starting point in this literal effort. It is a story about the love between Islam and Jesus or an unprecedented note of how one religion embraced the central figure of another, claiming him to be their own or everything seems to be that way.

Tradition (*ḥadīth*) in the canonical collections deals mainly with Jesus at the end of the world and the time of his eschatological return, where he plays a crucial role in tandem with Mahdi. This somehow makes him “an awaiting figure,” surreal and distant, with no immediate impact and applicability to Muslims’ daily life. What draws one’s attention and offers a more imminent and direct insight into “everyday Jesus” are works in which he, with his sayings and admonitions, kept living since his “first” time, effectively bridging the gap until his return. This is Jesus of popular piety, a living moral force and figure of devotion and love for God. The Muslim Gospel originated in Arabic Islamic literature, the literal effort of premodern times, is where one finds this Jesus and other prophets like Moses, David and Solomon. While the Qur’an gives the purely theological and doctrinal context of Jesus’ appearance and mission, in Muslim Gospel, we find a complementary expansion of his Qur’anic account, daily Jesus and a prophetic role model. Its material has been scattered among the books of Islamic scholars of

²⁵⁵ Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*.

various schools of thought worldwide for over 1,000 years (8th to 18th centuries).²⁵⁶ These sayings reflect Jesus' life devoted to God, worship and love for Him. The author does not exclude the possibility of fabrication, but the figure of Jesus remains above religious environments, welcoming everyone to love and claim him.²⁵⁷

A. H. Mathias Zahniser wrote an insightful book, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, that could be taken as a manual on common elements in the two religions.²⁵⁸ He begins by saying that Muslims and Christians pray to the same God, sharing Jesus and other essential views. It is a book with a different approach to Muslim–Christian dialogue. While it is common for such discussion to take mutually agreed topics as a starting point, this nicely presented work takes the most debated point – Jesus' mission and death – as the starting ground. The author helps to view the other side's doctrines through their sacred texts and offers an objective re-examination of their sources. The value of this work is the honest approach to the facts on both sides. The often-overlooked fact is that Gospel narratives and the Qur'anic text support each other in presenting things or their mutual interpretations. One of the most illustrative examples is the substitution of 'Īsā and his rescue, cited in the Qur'an: "...but so it was made to appear to them,"²⁵⁹ supported by the Gospels and their texts about the end of Jesus' worldly mission. The author highlights the nine moments proving the point and calls on common sense when a reader is about to make their conclusions.

The book offers essential principles for dialogue: honesty and impartiality by uprooting double standards related to historical origins, scriptures and laws.²⁶⁰ This classification gives both sides equal space and opportunity to examine and be examined in their creeds and statements. Zahniser's book is focused on the objective presentation of the mutual facts on 'Īsā or Jesus from Islamic and Christian perspectives, agreements and disagreements.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 3-6.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Zahniser, *The Mission and Death of Jesus*.

²⁵⁹ Qur'an 4:157.

²⁶⁰ Zahniser, *The Mission and Death of Jesus*, 3-14.

Unfortunately, it offers no account of ‘Īsā’s return and eschatological role. The content offers valuable preparation for “what comes next” in ‘Īsā’s mission, as alluded to by the Qur’an and directed by Islamic tradition. ‘Īsā’s return and eschatological role are dealt with in details through “the beginning” of all the three great religions in *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus*, the book that offers a different and compelling approach.

Mona Siddiqui asserts that, while Christians emphasise the full realisation of Judaism through Christianity, Muslims believe Judaism and Christianity can be restored to their original ideas through the Qur’an.²⁶¹ Prophet Muhammad’s mission and the Qur’an clarify the tasks and books of Moses and Jesus. In this sense, Jesus’ role is crucial. Regardless of how significant and unique one sees him, the theological focus is on the revelation he received, his mission and prophecy rather than his personality and life. The Islamic concept of revelation reminds humankind of the oneness of God (*tawhīd*), the idea that is to be maintained unconditionally within Islam. This reminder was always present since the first prophet and the word revealed to him down to the times of the final prophet and his word. Revelation is thus God’s communication with humankind through concrete events, reigniting awareness of Him, about themselves and the reality around them. Islam sees prophecy as the most incredible honour for which a human being can be elected. It is not a result of a personal effort and endeavour but purely the result of Divine election.²⁶² Prophecy interprets God’s word and finds its way to people’s hearts. Prophets are God’s witnesses before people that the message was delivered to whom it was intended and nothing else can be claimed on the day of judgement.

‘Īsā reinstated the Mosaic law (*muṣaddiq*), but he is also a prophet of love and forgiveness, two necessary premises people need from God, whose laws they transgress so often out of forgetfulness and rebellion. In mercy from God, Islam finds the most comprehensive and capturing definition of love. ‘Īsā is the embodiment of this love. Muslims believe ‘Īsā will come back since God took him until He decides to return him to earth sometime before the end. No

²⁶¹ Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus* (London: Yale University Press, 2013).

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 12-34.

part of his life story indicates he is divine before worldly departure or after it. He remains the messenger of God and a sign of remarkable eschatological events awaiting to take place.²⁶³ By offering a comprehensive introduction to the Islamic concepts of revelation and prophethood, followed by the presentation of the relation between law and love, where the law is seen as something formal and ritual-related, Siddiqui reminds that love is personal, inner, emotional and the only way of achieving the true spirituality and genuine morality. Many are examples where Jesus helped uphold the law in people's lives by calling for forgiveness of their sins.²⁶⁴ Guided by al-Ghazalī, the author stresses that love of God is more than obedience, but whoever loves God must be obedient to Him. True love cannot exist without spiritual knowledge. On the other side, God's love for man comes through trials and examination. Siddiqui often shifts between 'Īsā and Jesus in her analysis of critical mutual topics, making her work an attractive read. In her presentation of the concepts of revelation, prophethood and love in *Christians, Muslims and Jesus*, the Sufi influence on Siddiqui is apparent. She never refers (at least openly) to Bursawī, so further examination of her concepts, as dealt with in *Rūḥ al-bayān* in verses about 'Īsā, can serve as an excellent addendum to her work.

Zeki Saritoprak was inspired by the events of 11 September 2001 when he wrote *Islam's Jesus*, the book on Jesus and his role in Islamic tradition intended for non-Muslims and Westerners.²⁶⁵ He rightfully states that not many people in the West know the Qur'anic Jesus nor do they properly understand how Muslims see him. His mother's status is also vastly unknown and misinterpreted. Without seeing these as they are viewed and presented in the Qur'an, anyone from a non-Islamic background would be deprived of an objective picture of such an important theme in Islamic faith and tradition. His work highlights the rich Islamic theological engagement with Jesus, an important figure in Islamic theology. The book poses questions that draw the attention of many and offers answers through the main themes of

²⁶³ Ibid., 223, 232.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 193-210.

²⁶⁵ Saritoprak, *Islam's Jesus*.

Islamic theology: divinity, prophethood and eschatology.²⁶⁶ ‘Īsā is a dominant theme of the Islamic eschatological concept and his “come back” before the end of time is particularly important and challenging.

One theological question drew the author’s attention: how can someone come down from heaven to earth? In this book, he attempts to find the answer this ancient dilemma. He is modern and loyal to traditional Islamic teaching. ‘Īsā’s reappearance is expected and, no matter how it will happen, the focus is not on his personality but on our attention and joining forces to bring peace and prosperity to earth.²⁶⁷ Thus, Muslims are encouraged not only to wait for Jesus to return and the last events to begin but to prepare themselves for this development of making the world a better place, taking the task of restoring faith and a good environment into their hands. In other words, it is our share of ‘Īsā’s descent to prepare the ground for his return and positively impact this world.

Saritoprak dedicates a chapter of his book to different interpretative approaches to Jesus’ eschatological role, including Sufi. The authorities he includes are Ibn al-‘Arabī, Rūmī, al-Sha’rānī and Bursawī. He is surprised by Bursawī’s literal approach to some issues, like Jesus’ marriage at the time of his return, whereas he “expected” the author of *Rūḥ al-bayān* to be more mystic and use symbolic interpretation. His fascination increases, bearing in mind ‘Īsā’s celibacy on earth the first time and the narrations of his eschatological marriage are not sound and reliable.²⁶⁸ This forms a good initiation for further examination of Bursawī’s interpretative content in his *tafsīr*. This is more important when it is known that Bursawī’s departures from the esoteric in favour of exoteric interpretation on some crucial matters are more than sporadic. The author believes his book will help shed light on Jesus as a prominent eschatological figure from the perspective of Islamic theology, where he holds a significant stand.

²⁶⁶ Saritoprak, *Islam’s Jesus*, xi.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 157-61.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 133.

Mustafa Akyol's *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims* is a well-researched analysis of how Jewish beliefs and practices became Christian.²⁶⁹ Akyol pays attention to Paul's tremendous role in forming contemporary Christian theology and, consequently, the transition from Jewish Christianity to Pauline Christianity or a phenomenon of how quickly the former became heresy in the eyes of the latter. Paul's role is monumental, as someone who never saw or heard Jesus but presented Christian Jesus to the world and paved the way for establishing the most significant religion in the world. The true motive behind Paul's work is also what Akyol tries to address and without going too far in the debate, he keeps in mind the Islamic perspective when looking for possible answers. Like Saritoprak, Akyol notes the Qur'an is a reminder and guidance to humankind, occupied with moral and spiritual instructions rather than 'Īsā's story. Placing Jesus and his story in the proper theological context and perspective is the primary concern of the Qur'an.²⁷⁰ This is what people need to know about Jesus or 'Īsā. Akyol rightfully notices that Muslims vastly underestimate and neglect Jesus as a role model in everyday living and building a better environment and relationships with other communities. The Muslim world is in apparent crisis and needs new ideas and visions based on traditional Islamic teaching and what the prophets preached and taught, among them Jesus as the most resembling individual to Prophet Muhammad. Referring to the Qur'an and tradition (*sunnah*) remains and inevitably leads to prosperity, but Muslims need to develop their sense of current times and needs, finding the spot for themselves. Jesus or 'Īsā can teach Muslims and effectively guide them in two critical matters frequently debated in Muslim circles today: *khilāfa* and *sharī'a*. The first is the kingdom of God, the community guided by Him in which His law, *sharī'a*, will be honoured without blind literalism, driven by love and understanding, where wrongdoers will be judged not against their immorality but by the mercy of the Merciful. *Khilāfa* and *sharī'a* need to be first established in people individually then collectively.

²⁶⁹ Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*.

²⁷⁰ Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*, 152.

Also, Akyol deals with answers to some critical dilemmas: Was ‘Īsā a prophet like all others? In a moment, he reminds that ‘Īsā is the only prophet mentioned in the Qur’an without a lapse, for which he was condemned. Because of this, he is a “faultless son of Mary” and “blessed wherever he was.”²⁷¹ Tradition relates a narration that ‘Īsā is the only human being saved from Satan’s pinch while he was born.²⁷² Not even Prophet Muhammad was given such a privilege. Does Jesus’ miraculous birth make him special? What does it mean that he was raised to God? In answering these, Akyol is brave enough to approach the Son of God, the Spirit and His Word differently, urging readers not to omit important hints hidden in the Qur’an. Are they the allusive expressions taken literally from the text in the Gospels and is there room for their allusive interpretation? ‘Īsā is *His Word* and is this merely God’s creative word of “be-and-it-is” or the presentation of a higher sense where ‘Īsā is a perfect human being who, by receiving the original Word and committing to it, became one? I am curious to explore how Bursawī understood these dilemmas and his interpretative solutions for them or how traditional and mystic in his commentaries have met. One more essential point is brought to attention in *The Islamic Jesus*: the place of Islamic Christology abreast the authentic Christianity, where the restoration of original Christianity is openly discussed. Nothing new: the urges for it existed even in the 16th century and its protagonists were executed. The matter is gaining importance nowadays, where Islam is viewed as the only perspective path for reviving the original Christian beliefs and values.²⁷³ By noting this, Akyol shares his ideas with Mona Siddiqui. The argument places Muhammad beside Jesus, where Jesus stands to Moses (*muṣaddiq*), as indicated by the Qur’an.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Qur’an 19:31.

²⁷² Bukhārī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, book 54, *hadīth* no. 506.

²⁷³ Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*, 174-5.

²⁷⁴ Qur’an 5:48, 61:6.

2.9 Conclusion

‘Īsā or Jesus has been a constant theme and inspiration. His extraordinary conception, life, teachings, signs or miracles, miraculous departure (as seen by Muslims) from this world, and his eschatological return to the earth naturally dominate the narrative about him. His Word and the Spirit from Him are valid subjects for academic scrutiny by Muslims and others, where the complexity of their meanings will be impartially explored.²⁷⁵ Moreover, the substitution theory, related to ‘Īsā’s death or departure and his return, remains mainly unchallenged in traditional *tafsīr*, increasing the need for scrutiny and further quests. It is a fact that Jesus in Islam, particularly as seen in Sufism, has been barely treated in books written in English and his eschatological return is almost wholly neglected. Analysis of Bursawī’s commentaries on verses about ‘Īsā in *Rūḥ al-bayān*, with its combined exoteric and esoteric insights, will shed some light on the subject in the coming two chapters.

²⁷⁵ For more information on the linguistic aspects of the nouns “word” (*kalima*) and “spirit” (*rūḥ*), see Gloton, *Jesus Son of Mary*, 152-8.

CHAPTER 3: BURSAWĪ'S COMMENTARY ON THE VERSES ABOUT 'ĪSĀ'S MIRACLES AND EXTRAORDINARY QUALITIES

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on 'Īsā and his role within Islamic prophethood as seen in scholarly tradition and Sufism. This chapter and next closely examine Bursawī's interpretation of the Qur'anic verses about 'Īsā in *Rūḥ al-bayān*. This chapter focuses on miraculous details from Prophet 'Īsā's life, focusing on three categories of verses from my categorisation in the introduction: 'Īsā's mother Maryam; the miracles surrounding his birth and his prophetic performance; and his return or descent. The passages related to his prophetic mission and its theological implications, or the remaining three categories of verses, will be covered in chapter four. For analytic purposes, the corresponding verses from *sūras* Ālu 'Imrān, al-Mā'ida, Maryam and al-Zukhruf plus Bursawī's related interpretations are scrutinised. The events are analysed in chronological order and as presented by the Qur'an.

This chapter looks for an answer to what exegetical style Bursawī follows in his *tafsīr* and who he refers to most in his interpretations when commenting on verses dedicated to 'Īsā's miracles and extraordinary situations in his life. Also, this chapter attempts to detect his hermeneutical originality in *Rūḥ al-bayān* through the contributions he made, and Ibn al-'Arabī's and Sufi as well as traditional scholars and exegetes' influence on him. Of particular interest is the presence of the narrative about the perfect human being (*insān kāmil*), so dominant in Ibn al-'Arabī's writings, and how Bursawī is, if at all, committed to this Akbarian legacy in *Rūḥ al-bayān*. The main argument is that Bursawī maintains a focus on linguistic explanations, attempting to create the nearness of the Qur'anic context of the story of Prophet 'Īsā to the readers of his *tafsīr*, predominantly remaining traditional with a combined Akbarian-Kubrawī touch.

3.2 Maryam (Mary) and ‘Īsā’s Birth

The Qur’an has acknowledged Maryam like no other woman and shown high regard for her piety and chastity, referring to her and her son as “the sign” (*āyah*).²⁷⁶ Her name appears in the Qur’an more than her son’s.²⁷⁷ Maryam was honoured by a conversation with the angels, provision from God and a baby son talking from the cradle in her defence. She is also the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur’an. After praising the wife of Pharaoh and setting an example for believers, the Qur’an praises Maryam’s belief in God’s words, His Scriptures and her obedience to God.²⁷⁸ Prophet Muhammad praises her as an exceptional woman and leader in Paradise.²⁷⁹ Chronologically, the earliest sequence related to Maryam in the Qur’an is when her pregnant mother, wife of ‘Imrān, supplicated:

O my Lord, I have vowed to You what is in my womb to be dedicated for Your service, so accept this from me. Verily, You are the all-Hearer, the All-Knowing.²⁸⁰

Bursawī has a preaching and storytelling style in his *tafsīr*, offering engaging, not always authentic, details and constantly catching the reader’s attention. Concerning verse 7:35, he notes that Maryam’s father was ‘Imrān ibn Māthān and her mother was Hannah bint Fāqūdhā. He also mentions that Prophet Zakariyyā²⁸¹ married ‘Īshā, Maryam’s sister, making ‘Īsā and Yahyā²⁸² (John) cousins.²⁸³ Bursawī does not mention the source of this information – it is presumed he relied on *isrāiliyyāt*,²⁸⁴ a common practice in all *tafsīr* genres.²⁸⁵ Keeping on

²⁷⁶ Qur’an 23:50.

²⁷⁷ Abdul Bāqī, *Al-Mu’jam al-mofahras*, 762.

²⁷⁸ Qur’an 66:12.

²⁷⁹ Muslim, *Sahīh Muslim*, *hadīth* no. 2431, 700.

²⁸⁰ Qur’an 3:35. This verse, like the rest of the *sūra*, is from the Medinan period, while *sūra* Maryam (which is from the Meccan period) mentions Maryam before, but not at this early stage of her life.

²⁸¹ Prophet Zakariyyā’s account in the Qur’an starts from his elderly age, with no information on his childhood and youth. Tradition says he was a carpenter and lived a modest life, full of gratitude to God. See Ibn Kathīr, *Stories of the Prophets*, trans. Rashad Ahmad Azami (Darussalam, 2003), 628-44.

²⁸² Yahyā was the son of Zakariyyā, whose glad tidings were foretold to his father (Q 19:7). Yahyā was commanded to hold steadfastly to the Book and given wisdom while still a child (Q 19:12).

²⁸³ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, vol. 2, 606-7.

²⁸⁴ Biblical material, or the oral tradition (narratives and fables) of the People of the Book, used to support Islamic tradition. For more information see Muhammad H. al-Dhahabī, *Al-isrāiliyyāt fī al-tafsīr wa al-hadīth* [Biblical Material in Tafsīr and Hadīth] (Dar al-Iman, 1985).

²⁸⁵ Traditional *tafsīrs* are much more cautious and reserved when using biblical materials than Sufis, especially Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Taymiyya, while al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī incorporate them more often in their *tafsīrs*. See Norman Calder, “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” in *Approaches to the Quran*, ed. Gerald Hawting (London: Routledge, 1993).

Maryam's origins, committed to his storytelling style, Bursawī records that Hannah did not have children and was already old. One day, while in the shade of a tree, she spotted a bird feeding her young. She wished to become a mother and made a vow that if this happened, out of gratitude, she would dedicate the child to the Sacred Temple (*bayt al-maqdis*). She conceived Maryam and her husband, 'Imrān, soon passed away. Her words "...what is in my womb" when made the vow (*nadhr*) indicates she was still in early pregnancy since she did not name it a child. The word *muḥarrar* means freed from all other works and dedicated to service in the Sacred Temple and worship to God. Bursawī highlights that this dedication excluded even marriage. Every prophet in the Jewish line had someone of their progeny dedicated to service in the Temple, and they always were male and never female. Hannah dedicated what was in her womb either because she believed it was a boy or hoped that dedicating her child to the temple would influence the child's gender to be granted as a boy.²⁸⁶ With these passages, Bursawī demonstrates his methodology – bringing in narrations from previous sources, engaging in storytelling to make the verse relevant to readers and engaging in linguistic analysis in critical aspects of the verse he is analysing (in this case, the dedication of a female child to temple run by men). These aspects give a didactic and pedagogical nature to his *tafsīr*, which was his declared intention.

Concerning verse 3:44, Bursawī mentions how Zakariyyā acquired guardianship over Maryam after the incident with pen selection on the Jordan river, after her father died and her mother took her to the rabbis in the temple, looking for her protection. He repeatedly omits his sources, but this narration, with closely similar versions, can also be found in traditional and other *tafsīrs*.²⁸⁷ He also reminds that Zakariyyā's care of Maryam turned out to be a part of the fulfilment of God's acceptance of her mother's supplication.

²⁸⁶ Bursawi, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 607.

²⁸⁷ See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'azīm*, vol. 1, 342-3.

Every time he entered *al-miḥrāb* (room) to visit her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: O Maryam! From where have you got this? She said: This is from God. Verily God provides sustenance to whom He wills, without limit.²⁸⁸

Since Maryam's room (*al-miḥrāb*) is a place of miracle, Bursawī dedicates some space to explain it linguistically, referring to a historical context. He defines *al-miḥrāb* as either a room built upstairs for Maryam, the most honourable sitting spot at the front of the Temple or simply the name for a temple at the time.²⁸⁹ Bursawī mentions that Zakariyyā was constantly entering *al-miḥrāb* by himself, and on his way out, as a precaution, he would lock seven doors behind. Every time, he found with Maryam some food unusual for that season, as it was from Paradise. His questioning Maryam was out of his astonishment by this unique situation. Maryam was still a young girl and did not understand the question nor could she answer it comprehensively. She spoke simply as a child: *This is from God* – like her baby son in the cradle later. In the context of this verse (3:37), Bursawī discusses the concept of *karāmah*:²⁹⁰

...this verse is proof of the existence of *karāmāt* for God's friends and elite (*awliyā'*). Anyone denying it should know that *karāmah* is the foundation and initial step of the prophethood.²⁹¹

He considers it crucial, so he consistently reminds of spiritual gifts (*karāmāt*) in his interpretations of Prophet 'Īsā. Common in Sufi literature, this segment is at the core of the narrative about God's chosen individuals. In Maryam's unique case, employing the mother-son relationship, Bursawī explains the place and role of *karāmāt* within the context of prophethood. The miracle of a chaste and virgin mother equals the miracle of her son, a fatherless prophet. Al-Kāshānī's interpretation of the provision found at Maryam goes even further with *ishārī*

²⁸⁸ Qur'an 3:37.

²⁸⁹ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 610.

²⁹⁰ According to the *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, the word *karāmah* (pl. *karāmāt*) means nobility, honour, prestige, esteem and miracle. The miracle is at the centre of Sufi sense of *karāmah*, a wonder performed by a chosen individual, or a spiritual gift given by God. Hans Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary: The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Beirut: 3rd ed. Maktabat Lubnan, 1960), 822. According to Oxford Reference, *karāmah* is grace. Refers to charismatic gifts or the capacity to perform miracles, as evidenced by the temporary suspension of the natural order through divine intervention. Signifies a state of sanctity and confirms validity of the saint (*walī*) in Sufi circles, encouraging veneration of holy men. Sign of God's favor. Manifestation of possession of barakah (God's blessing). "Karamah," Oxford Reference, accessed February 14, 2023, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100030241>.

²⁹¹ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 610.

sense alluding to a possibility of spiritual provision: gnoses (*ma'rifah*), spiritual realities (*ḥaqāiq*) and *hikmah* (knowledge and wisdom) bestowed on her, not only food.²⁹² Showing the inseparable tie between the prophets and spiritual gifts, Bursawī reminds of the narration according to which Prophet Muhammad was hungry during drought and his daughter Fāṭima brought him a few pieces of modest food, which touched him. Upon his request to get it again, she uncovered the plate and found abundant food, which stunned the Prophet's daughter, who knew it was a miracle and exclaimed:

‘This is from God! Verily He provides to whom He wills, with no limit.’ The Prophet commended her: ‘Praise be to God Who made you like the most honoured lady of the Children of Israel!’²⁹³

Explaining it further, Bursawī includes al-Tustarī's proposal that the greatest *karāmah* takes place on a personal level: to eliminate some of our despised characteristics and put our personalities under control.²⁹⁴ By referring to al-Tustarī, Bursawī highlights the importance of correct reasoning. The everyday presence of God's gifts and miracles is best reflected in one's power over desire and accurate perception of surrounding things. Misunderstanding them and their origins impedes one's comprehension of faith and life in general.²⁹⁵

The following section from *sūra* Maryam describes her encounter with Jibrīl, the most significant moment in the story on 'Īsā – the incident of his conception:

And mention in the Book Maryam when she withdrew in seclusion from her family to a place facing east. She placed a screen from them, then We sent to her Our *Rūḥ* (spirit), and he appeared to her as a man in all respects. She said: Verily! If you do fear God, I seek refuge with the Most Gracious from you. He said: I am only a messenger from your Lord to announce to you the gift of a righteous son. She said: How can I have a son when no man has touched me, nor am I unchaste? He said: So it will be, your Lord said: That is easy for Me: and to

²⁹² Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān (Tafsīr al-Kāshānī)* [Esoteric Meanings of the Qur'ān], trans. Feras Hamza, (Cambridge, UK, The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought and the Islamic Texts Society, 2021), vol. 1, 139.

²⁹³ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 610. Bursawī did not mention the reference for this narration. I could not find it in the referent *hadīth* literature.

²⁹⁴ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 610.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

appoint him as a sign to mankind and a mercy from Us, and it is a matter already decreed by God.²⁹⁶

Bursawī notes that Maryam (*ābidah*, she-servant) is mentioned by her first name, which is not coincidental. He recalls that kings and the noble did not say, out of respect, their wives' names in public, but their family names only, while servant women were called by their first names. Bursawī continues in his critique and says when Christians made up things about Maryam and her son, God accented her first name to highlight her servanthood and sincere worship. Also, this served as a reminder for Arabs about their bad manners when discussing their servant women.²⁹⁷ Bursawī brings to attention, like Imam Suhaylī (d. 1185)²⁹⁸ before him, that God spoke to Maryam through His angels as He spoke to the prophets:

And when the angels said: 'O Maryam, submit yourself with obedience to your Lord, prostrate yourself, and bow down with those who bow down.'²⁹⁹

The Qur'an's reference to the angels refers to Jibrīl and the plural is used out of respect for him as their leader.³⁰⁰ Bursawī finds it essential to stress that the angelic conversation with Maryam is not considered revelation (*wahy*) since:

...We sent not before you any but men onto whom We revealed...³⁰¹

Most scholars agree that no woman was a prophet, and since Bursawī says nothing more about this, one can assume he agrees with this view. On the other side, scholars like Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064)³⁰² believe that Maryam, Ishaq's mother, Sarah and Mūsā's mother were prophets and this direct angelic communication proves it.³⁰³ Jibrīl communicated orally with Maryam and this is a gesture of genuine honour to the friends of God (*karāmāt al-awliyā'*).³⁰⁴ Reminding of Maryam's *karāmāt* and the levels of God's communication with His selected servants, Bursawī

²⁹⁶ Qur'an 19:16-21.

²⁹⁷ Bursawi, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2880-1.

²⁹⁸ Abu al-Qāsim al-Suhaylī, an Islamic scholar of Andalus, wrote on grammar and Islamic law and is famous for his commentary on Ibn Hishām's *Sīrah* (Book of Biographies).

²⁹⁹ Qur'an 3:43.

³⁰⁰ Bursawi, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2881.

³⁰¹ Qur'an 12:109.

³⁰² Ibn Hazm was a great Muslim scholar of Cordoba, a proponent of the *Zahiri* (literal) school, a historian, philosopher, jurist and theologian.

³⁰³ Ibn Kathīr, *Qasas al-Anbiyā'* [Tales of the Prophets] (Damascus: Dar al Fayha, 2016), 651.

³⁰⁴ Bursawi, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2881.

notes that Maryam was purified from disbelief and sins, despised deeds and repulsive habits. She never experienced a man’s touch, menstruation or post-natal bleeding and God saved her from the accusations made by the Jews and purified her by her son’s talk from the cradle. Notably, she was selected twice, above all other women in the world, since she was given a son without a man, which did not happen to any woman before her, and made her and ‘Īsā a sign.³⁰⁵ Bursawī finds the connection between verses wherever possible and tends to explain the juridical content if any:

O, Maryam! Submit yourself with obedience to your Lord, prostrate yourself, and bow down with those who bow down.³⁰⁶

Bursawī notices that Maryam was commanded to observe the prayer in congregation, not by herself, with the notion of the prayer’s essential elements (*arkān*): *qunūt* (long-standing), *sujūd* (prostration) and *rukū‘* (bowing). Interestingly, the mention of prostration came before bowing. Bursawī asserts this was either the way they prayed back then or to highlight the importance and uniqueness of humbleness in prostration.³⁰⁷

The Qur’an refers to Maryam and her son together as “a sign”:

And We made the son of Maryam and his mother a sign, and We gave them refuge on high ground, a place of rest, security, and flowing streams.³⁰⁸

In this context, Bursawī reports from Mujāhid (d. 722)³⁰⁹ that Maryam said:

When I was alone with ‘Īsā, we talked to each other. When I talked to someone else, I could hear him glorify God in my womb.³¹⁰

Back to verses 15:15-6, where Bursawī, combining lexical meanings and circumstances through his storytelling style, also gives valuable insights from previous authorities. When interpreting a place facing east, Bursawī regards the explanation of al-Hassan al-Basrī, who thought it to be the eastern side of Zakariyyā’s house. Maryam used to stay at her aunt’s house

³⁰⁵ Ibid., vol. 2, 614.

³⁰⁶ Qur’an 3:43.

³⁰⁷ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 614

³⁰⁸ Qur’an 23:50.

³⁰⁹ Mujahid ibn Jabr, one of the foremost Islamic scholars from the generation of followers, was accredited with the first written *tafsīr*.

³¹⁰ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 616-7; I could not find the narration in the referent *hadīth* literature.

when she was menstruating. Otherwise, she lived in the *masjid*. She was going to take a bath and, since it was winter, she came to the house's sunny spot on the eastern side. She placed a screen (*hijāb*) and Bursawī includes al-Kāshifī's (d. 1504)³¹¹ definition of *hijāb* as anything that restricts the viewer's view (Pers. *parda*), the usual way of maintaining privacy. When she had finished and dressed, Bursawī kept explaining that the angel came to her as a bright young man with black hair. This man was Jibrīl, immaterial and spiritual, called *rūḥ* because of his grace and unique role in delivering the revelation to the prophets or this is how God named him out of love and attachment.³¹²

Being grounded in logic and science, connecting his thoughts with real life, Bursawī explained that Jibrīl looked like a handsome man because of the young woman, Maryam. It was vital for him to be well-built (*sawiyyan*) so his words catch Maryam's attention and she would accept what he said. Had he appeared in his original, angelic form, Maryam would have probably run away, and she would not have heard his words. Had he appeared in his immaterial form, 'Īsā would have been immaterial.³¹³ Bursawī further defines *rūḥ* and the Kubrawi interpretation in *Al-Ta'wilāt al-najmiyya*. His seemingly favourite source appeals to him most, where the light (*nūr*) of the Divine spoken word is closely related to *rūḥ*. In the *Ta'wilāt*, *rūḥ* is the light of God's word – Be! (*kun*). This light is called *rūḥ* because God revives dead hearts with it: "Is he who was dead and We gave him life..."³¹⁴ Amid the similarity and complexity in their meanings, sporadically, *rūḥ* (soul) and *nūr* (light) are juxtaposed and used as substitutes: "...And thus We have sent to you *rūḥ* of Our Command."³¹⁵ So God sent Maryam the light of His Word *kun* and this word (*kalimah*) appeared as a man (*bashar*), just like the light of *tawḥīd*

³¹¹ Husain Waiz al-Kāshifī was a Persian poet, exegete and Sufi scholar from the Timurid era. He was the author of *Jawāhir al-tafsīr* (Gems of Exegesis), claimed by Sunni and Shia congregations.

³¹² Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2881.

³¹³ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2881-2.

³¹⁴ Qur'an 6:122; Alā'uddawlah al-Simnānī Najmuddin al-Kubrā, *Al Ta'wilāt al-najmiyya fī Tafsīr al Ishārī al Sūfī* [Najmi Interpretations in Sufi Allusive Exegesis] (Lebanon: Dar al-kutub al-ilmiyyah, 2009), vol. 4, 165.

³¹⁵ Qur'an 42:52.

appeared in letters: *Lā ilāha illa Allah*. When the Word appeared as a man, Maryam refused it, for she did not recognise it, seeking refuge in God.³¹⁶

Bursawī also notices the significance of the way Maryam invokes her Lord: she seeks refuge in God by invoking His name *al-Raḥmān* as ultimate protection and to attract His mercy amid the situation that befell her. By invoking God’s unique name of compassion, she reminds the stranger of His ever-presence. Bursawī’s interpretation is entirely in line with what Ibn al-’Arabī calls “the Breath of the All-merciful” (*nafkha al-raḥmān*) as an imminent manifest of God’s creative ability by speech or Word. His breath articulates His speech; by His speech, the universe had been created. The evident result of this Divine creative ability through His speech that came in His breath, embodied in the Word, is the creation of ‘Īsā.³¹⁷ Bursawī agrees with Ibn al-’Arabī, who stressed the importance of awareness of God (*taqwā*) in those who listen to advice and fear Him, not fearing people or rulers.³¹⁸ He also embraces what Kubrawīs had to say about this, referring to their remark in *Al-Ta’wilāt al-najmiyya* about Maryam’s words:

If you believe and fear God, you know about the Merciful and do not get close to me since I sought refuge in Him. If you are miserable and nasty (*shaqiyy*), you do not know about Him, and I seek protection from you anyway.³¹⁹

Bursawī asserts that Maryam goes on with the conversation, astonished and still confused, not to question God’s power, but to query the unusual situation, asking for more details from the unique guest:

How can I have a son when no man has touched me (*lam yamsasnī bashar*), nor am I unchaste (*baghiyyan*)?³²⁰

He clarifies that *mass* is a word for a permissible encounter between husband and wife, not fornication. Maryam mentions “a man,” confirming she clearly stated there was no way she could give birth to a child. Bursawī adds, supporting his view with Ibn al-’Arabī’s, that *baghiyy*,

³¹⁶ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2882; Najmuddin al-Kubrā, *Al-Ta’wilāt al-najmiyya*, vol. 4, 165.

³¹⁷ Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi*, 58.

³¹⁸ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2882.

³¹⁹ Ibid.; Najmuddin al-Kubrā, *Al-Ta’wilāt al-najmiyya*, vol. 4, 165.

³²⁰ Qur’an 19:20.

as a masculine term, means male and female, and in this case, a sinful woman looking for men. Maryam said it to deny any relationship with a man: for wedlock – no man ever touched her and for the prohibited relationship – she was not the *baghiyy*! Therefore, if there was no cause for the birth, there was no way for a child to be born.³²¹

In *Ta'wilāt*, an additional detail is brought to attention:

I am *muharrarah* (dedicated to the service in the Temple), and I cannot be married.³²²

Bursawī repeatedly combines Akbarian and Kubrawī sources, either by citing them directly or referring to the main idea in his own words, letting them complement each other. An exclusive connection is made between God's word of creation and His mercy since Maryam sought refuge in God, taking His mercy as a token. A reminder of this connection is hinted at in God's address through Jibrīl to Maryam:

He said: 'So it will be, your Lord said: That is easy for Me: and to appoint him as a sign to mankind and a mercy from Us, and it is a matter already decreed by God.'³²³

According to this verse, Bursawī believes that God's mercy precedes His guidance, which is the ground of His creation and starting point of God's communication with His servants.' Īsā is proof taken by people witnessing the Creator's might. When servants ask God for guidance, He guides them with His mercy:

He admits whom He wills to His mercy...³²⁴

In his narrative about mercy, Bursawī adds that, when God makes someone enter His mercy, He makes him of the people of the Garden and this mercy becomes what describes His servant:

And We have sent you not but as a mercy for humanity. A matter already decreed by God!³²⁵

³²¹ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2882.

³²² Ibid.; Al Kubra, *Ta'wilāt al-najmiyya*, vol. 4, 166.

³²³ Qur'an 19:21.

³²⁴ Qur'an 42:8; Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2882.

³²⁵ Qur'an 21:107.

This is how God passes things in His primordial knowledge, Bursawī assumes, and how He makes them happen in their due times and no otherwise is possible. So, there is no use in exercising sadness (over hardship), and this is the exact meaning of His words:

Who is familiar with the secret of God related to destiny (*qadar*) – his calamities become easy for him.³²⁶

After explaining that God’s mercy and His guidance are closely related, Bursawī points out the relationship between Divine knowledge and wisdom and human destiny, as hinted in the statement above. He is assured that God’s knowledge (through His command) precedes things, as God’s wisdom. According to His primordial wisdom, God created ‘Īsā, as described previously, while he was in eternity (*azal*). Therefore, all events and circumstances related to ‘Īsā are part of this wisdom. He who understands the secret of this *maqām* (stage) will find solutions for all his hardships. Bursawī indicates that everything unfolding in outer existence is the seed of God’s primordial wisdom, in line with different propensities, in different situations. One who finds something good should be thankful to God and one who finds something else should blame none but themselves.³²⁷ He alludes that one is not always able to understand God’s wisdom and His mercy, just like Maryam, but attention and piety help one understand God’s signs and miracles. It is a beautiful realisation of discovering a gift bestowed by the Merciful in which one tastes the sweetness of His wisdom after experiencing the bitterness of trial. Maryam was on a great trial, but she sent her concerns to the One whose wisdom is above everything and whose mercy leaves no one deprived. True servants are adorned with patience and contentment with God’s decree, followed by gratitude. The joy of recognising the best course paved by God for us is unique. When the veil is removed and the wisdom revealed, the moment of understanding God’s sign can be a while ahead, probably years or a lifetime, but it

³²⁶ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2883; Bursawī quotes no source for this narration. Al-Razī also mentions it in his *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (The Keys of the Unseen) in his comment of the 23rd verse of sura Al-Hadīd. See *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (v. 29, 239), accessed April 21, 2022, <https://ia802607.us.archive.org/6/items/FPtrazitrazi/trazi29.pdf>.

³²⁷ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2883.

is always within reach. It stands as a core of *karāmah*, given to God's close friends (*awliyā'*), so much highlighted in Bursawī's *tafsīr* and Sufī literature in general.

So she conceived him and withdrew with him to a distant place. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date palm. She said: Would that I had died before this and had been forgotten and out of sight! So she conceived him...³²⁸

Bursawī agrees with al-Kāshānī that Jibrīl's reassurance to Maryam was the crucial moment for her to be ready to conceive 'Īsā and al-Kāshānī seems to agree with the traditional view about this expressed by Ibn 'Abbās.³²⁹ *Rūḥ* did not need an opening to enter; it was like in the case of Adam's body, while he was granted a soul: *rūḥ* entered through the head, then came down to the eyes, mouth and rest of the organs.³³⁰ These frequent parallels and comparisons made by Bursawī are always appealing and attractive. He explains that 'Īsā had a physical, spiritual and nature of oneness, a combination of these. His physical appearance comes from Maryam's water, while his spiritual nature and its effects, like reviving the dead and creating a bird from clay, are from Jibrīl's blow. 'Īsā's unified nature (*aḥadiyyah*) was realised when the angel appeared to Maryam as a well-built young man and the water came down to her womb out of the pleasure she felt while looking at him. 'Īsā was brought forth from this water and the blow was Jibrīl's response to her satisfaction. Therefore, he is (bodily) from his mother's water only, which opposes naturalists' claim that a child cannot be conceived only from one parent.³³¹ Bursawī's inclusion of Ibn 'Abbās' opinion and my comparison of this interpretation with Ibn Kathīr's traditional exegesis from his great *tafsīr* shows Bursawī's inclination towards traditional understanding in this case.³³² He does not hesitate to be conventional or formal, referring to scientific facts in his justification of the Qur'an. Being committed to explaining the correct and comprehensive meaning of the Qur'an, Bursawī refers

³²⁸ Qur'an 19:22-3.

³²⁹ Al Kubrā, Simnānī, *Ta'wīlāt*, vol. 2, 4-6.

³³⁰ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2884.

³³¹ Ibid., vol. 5, 2886.

³³² See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm*, vol. 3, 112-3.

to *makānan qasiyyan* as a distant place, away from her family, supporting it with the narration of Anas (d. 709),³³³ who narrated from the Messenger in the tradition known as the *isrā' hadīth*:

Jibrīl told me: 'Dismount and pray!' I prayed. He asked me: 'Do you know where you prayed? You prayed at *Bayt Laḥm* (Bethlehem), where 'Īsā, son of Maryam, was born.'³³⁴

Bursawī's frequent source, Abu Su'ūd's *Al-Irshād*,³³⁵ defines *Bayt Laḥm* as the furthest house in the town. Ibn Kathīr's view (d. 1373) is almost identical to Bursawī's and he only offers a few additional details, like stating that, when Maryam felt that birth was approaching, she went out in the middle of the night from Zakariyyā's house to *Bayt al-maqdis*, hoping to be unnoticed.³³⁶ The Qur'an depicts Maryam's despair in her words: Would I have died before this and had been forgotten and out of sight!³³⁷

Bursawī agrees with the authors of *Al-Jalālayn*,³³⁸ who believe *before this* refers either to the day in which all this took place or the command by which it all happened. Maryam said it although she understood what had happened between her and Jibrīl beforehand, not because she was discontent with God's commandment but because she was embarrassed by what people would say. Bursawī recognises in this a common practice of the noble when they go through hardship and trials: Omar³³⁹ once grabbed a handful of dust and said: "I wish I am dust and nothing else!"³⁴⁰

Bilāl³⁴¹ is reported to have said something similar, Bursawī advises. This is an example of the preaching digressions in *Rūḥ al-bayān*, fitting nicely, enhanced with familiar and dear examples. Bursawī uses them for counselling (*wa'z*) and in line with the didactic nature of his

³³³ Anas ibn Mālik is a famous companion of the Messenger.

³³⁴ Al-Nasāī, *Sunan an-Nasāī*, book 5, *hadīth* no. 451.

³³⁵ *Irshād al-'aql al-salīm ila mazāyā al-kitāb al-karīm* [The Right Guidance to the Virtues of the Noble Book], the *tafsīr* of Abū Su'ūd al-'Imādī. He was arguably the greatest Ottoman exegete, *Shaikh al-islām* and supreme judge at the time of Sulaiman the Magnificent and Salim II (1545-1574).

³³⁶ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al-Bayān*, vol. 5, 2886; Ibn Kathīr, *Qasas al-anbiyā'*, 662.

³³⁷ Qur'an 19:23.

³³⁸ *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* is a famous *tafsīr* by the two Jalāl al-Dīns, al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) and his teacher al-Mahallī (d. 1460). See Jalaluddin al-Mahallī and Jalaluddin Al Suyuti, *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* [Exegesis of the Two Jalāls] (Damascus: Dar al-Ma'jun li al-Turath, 2000), 306.

³³⁹ Omar ibn al-Khattāb was a close friend of the Messenger and the second *khalīfa*.

³⁴⁰ Recorded by Ibn al-Mubārak. See Abdullah ibn Mubarak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd wa al-raqāiq* [The Book on Asceticism and Softening the Hearts], ed. Ahmad Farid (Cairo: Dar al-Mi'raj, 1995), vol. 1, 79.

³⁴¹ Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ was the companion and first *muadhdhin* in Islam.

tafsīr. For comparison, he notes that, according to *Al-ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya*, before this in the verse above refers to Maryam's pregnancy, not the day when 'Īsā was born, since she must have thought: "Because of my pregnancy and my child, God will make many enter the hellfire – some for accusing me of adultery, and some for considering my son to be divine."³⁴² Although this fictitious statement seems to reprimand the Jews and Christians for their beliefs, it reflects Bursawī's *ishārī* counselling style present throughout *Rūḥ al-bayān*. It demonstrates Bursawī's determination to use every opportunity in passing admonishing messages to readers, reminding them of eternal truth; in this case, taking Maryam as a role model.

In her despair and fear, he also reminds that Maryam wished she was forgotten and unaccounted for, not remembered by anyone. To highlight her state, the Qur'an uses the adjective *mansiyyan* in its exaggerated form (*mubālagah*), Bursawī further explains.³⁴³ This combination of exegetical comments from different sources, traditional and mystical, makes *Rūḥ al-bayān* an exegetical equilibrium. Also, offering slightly different linguistical options in *Rūḥ al-bayān* helps to better understand the meaning and circumstances hinted at but not explained by the Qur'an. As a piece of advice and counselling (*naṣīḥah and wa'z*), like Ibn al-'Arabī before him, Bursawī sees in Maryam's encounter with Jibrīl a point for contemplation: Jibrīl waited for her to become content and delighted for the moment of 'Īsā's conception so that he is born delighted and free of stress.³⁴⁴

3.3 The Miracles 'Īsā Performed as God's Prophet

According to the Islamic definition, a miracle is an extraordinary act or occurrence, opposing the laws of nature and through the direct intervention of God. The miracle is not magic (*siḥr*), which has an appearance in the form of something other than its natural form. In other words, the miracle is the reality with its essence, while magic is an illusion with no connection to the real world. A miracle (*mu'jizah*), which is mainly presented and executed publicly (Mūsā

³⁴² Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2887; Najmuddin al-Kubrā, *Al Ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya*, vol. 4, 167.

³⁴³ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2887.

³⁴⁴ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2884-5.

and Pharaoh; ‘Īsā and his people), is not a spiritual gift (*karāmah*), usually given secretly to the chosen and pious (like Maryam) who were not prophets and were mainly the only ones who took the benefit of this extraordinary matter. *Mu‘jizah* is God’s immediate intervention, aiming at helping the cause of His prophets and proving the truth of their mission in front of other people.³⁴⁵

Al-bayyināt, the expression commonly used in the Qur’an for prophetic miracles, also known as *al-mu‘jizāt*, the outstanding acts prophets performed with God’s permission to prove to people the truthfulness of their missions and this concept is repeated 52 times in the Qur’an. Al-Kāshānī gives the expression esoteric connotation in his comment on Q 57:26, interpreting it as gnostic teachings (*al-ma‘ārif*) and wisdom (*al-ḥukm*) assigned to the prophets.³⁴⁶ *Al-bayyināt* refers to ‘Īsā in four verses and a few more indirectly when referring to prophets in general.³⁴⁷ The Qur’an mentions seven distinctive miracles of Prophet ‘Īsā: (1) miraculous birth (Q 15:21-3); (2) talking in the cradle (Q 15:30-3); (3) breathing life into clay birds (Q 3:49); (4) healing the blind and the leper (Q 3:49); (5) reviving the dead (Q 3:49); (6) knowing some hidden things (Q 3:49); and (7) descent of a table spread (Q 15:112-5). *Al-bayyinah* means clear proof, indisputable evidence or a document serving as evidence. English translators of the Qur’an maintain this meaning through their works and *the clear sign*.³⁴⁸

And We gave ‘Īsā, the son of Maryam, clear signs and supported him with *Rūḥ al-Qudus*...³⁴⁹

Bursawī explains these as reviving the dead, healing the blind and leper, informing people about their hidden and invisible things, and *Injīl* (Gospels). *Rūḥ al-Qudus*, according to him, is a sacred and pure soul of ‘Īsā, described as holy (*qudus*), being *karāmah* from God since He is

³⁴⁵ See Qur’an 7:117-123, 20:65-70. Also see Jalaluddīn al-Dawani, *Sharḥ ul-Jalal ‘ala al-‘Aqā’id il-‘Aḍudiyyah* (Jalāl’s Commentary on the supporting beliefs) 2:276.

³⁴⁶ Al-Kāshānī, *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, vol. 2, 405.

³⁴⁷ Abdul Bāqī, *Al Mu’jam al Mofahras*, 175-6.

³⁴⁸ Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 88; also see Muhammad Taqī-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur’an in the English Language* (Madinah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur’an, Madinah, 1999), 17, 57.

³⁴⁹ Qur’an 2:87, 2:253.

al-Quddūs (the Most Sacred). Also, *Rūḥ al-quḍus* is the angel Jibrīl who is pure since he has never sinned. He is named *rūḥ* because he came to the prophets with life and revival for the hearts. The support mentioned in the above verse means ‘Īsā was protected from wrongdoings from the first moment in this life until his mature age: Satan could not approach him when he was born and God took him up when the Jews decided to kill him.³⁵⁰ This is how Bursawī saw this portion of the verse in its first appearance in *sūra* al-Baqara.³⁵¹ It clarifies the *bayyināt* and summarises ‘Īsā’s relationship with the angel Jibrīl. When it appears again in the same *sūra*, Bursawī repeats his comment more concisely.³⁵² In his commentary, he highlights the role of *karāmah* within his definition of *bayyinah*.

Directly referring to the clear proofs ‘Īsā came with, Bursawī explains the *al-hikmah*, prophetic wisdom and what it entails. His approach to the matter seems traditional and literal, based on his sources and the reflection in his interpretation and conclusion. The relevant text from the Qur’an is:

And when ‘Īsā came with clear proofs, he said: I have come to you with *al-hikmah* (wisdom) to clarify some of the points in which you differ. Therefore, fear God and obey me.³⁵³

Bursawī includes the *Injīl* and its laws as one of the meanings of clear proofs. *Al-ḥikmah*, or wisdom, as usually translated from Arabic, according to Bursawī, refers again to *Injīl* and its laws revealed to ‘Īsā for public instruction.³⁵⁴ This verse addresses religion-related matters and people’s differences; worldly affairs were never a concern of prophetic mission, just like Prophet Muhammad said: “You know better your worldly affairs.”³⁵⁵

As for the differences in religious matters, Bursawī accepts Ibn Abbas’ explanation that the word “some” in verse means “all,” an assumption confirmed in ‘*Ayn al-ma‘ānī*.³⁵⁶ Pointing to priorities was an essential task for all prophets since people ask meaningless questions.

³⁵⁰ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 1, 202. Bursawī does not give the source for this information.

³⁵¹ Qur’an 2:253.

³⁵² Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 1, 456.

³⁵³ Qur’an 43:63.

³⁵⁴ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 8, 4888.

³⁵⁵ Muslim, *Sahīh Muslim*, book 43, *hadīth* no. 186.

³⁵⁶ This *tafsīr* was written by Ibn Tayfūr Abū Abdullah al-Ghaznawī (d. 1165).

Therefore, ‘Īsā intended to explain issues of genuine concern since doing this is an act of wisdom.³⁵⁷

The miracles (not all of them) ‘Īsā performed are noted in two accounts in the Qur’an:

And will make him a messenger to the Children of Israel: I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I design for you out of clay, a figure like that of a bird, and breath into it, and it becomes a bird by God’s leave, and I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I bring the dead to life by God’s leave. And I inform you of what you eat and store in your houses. Indeed, therein is a sign for you- if you believe.³⁵⁸

...and when you made out of the clay a figure like that of a bird, by My Permission, and you breathed into it, and became a bird by My Permission, and you healed those born blind, and the lepers by My Permission, and when you brought forth the dead by My Permission...³⁵⁹

Both verses indicate the same miracles, in identical order, except for informing people about their food, which is mentioned only in the first account. Both verses accent God’s permission for miracles to be performed by his prophet. In his comment, focusing on people’s reaction, Bursawī wrote that, in their rejection of his call and miracles, some Jews claimed ‘Īsā came only to a particular group of people (taking this as an excuse for not accepting him). He also notes that witnessing miracles was not enough for them to believe him. ‘Īsā only shaped and did not create a bird since a servant cannot be a Creator; he could not bring into existence or make out of nothing. ‘Īsā repeatedly stresses God’s permission since the revival comes from Him, the Creator of death and life.³⁶⁰

Bursawī digresses here and tells a story about when ‘Īsā announced his prophethood and showed his miracles people asked him to create a bat. He took a handful of clay, shaped it, breathed into it and it started flying. Bursawī cites Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 737),³⁶¹ who said it was flying while people were watching it – as soon as it disappeared before their eyes, it fell dead. This distinguishes God’s creation from the “creations” of his creatures. In his exposition

³⁵⁷ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 8, 4888.

³⁵⁸ Qur’an 3:49.

³⁵⁹ Qur’an 5:110.

³⁶⁰ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 619.

³⁶¹ Wahb ibn Munabbih, a famous traditionalist from the generation of followers (*tābiūn*), is often narrated many *israiliyyāt*.

on why people asked for a bat, Bursawī assumes it was since the bat is a unique and unusual creature: it has no feathers but flies; it is born like a mammal, not a bird; it has an udder from which comes out milk; it cannot see clearly in daylight or at night, etc.³⁶²

Storytelling departures like this are almost expected in *Rūḥ al-bayān* and readers become used to them. Committed to linguistic explanations, Bursawī clarifies that *al-akmah* is a person born blind and *al-abraṣ* is a leper or person with whiteness in their skin, a condition that cannot be cured, which is widely known. He notices that Arabs were afraid of this condition. The two were singled out in a verse purposely to highlight ‘Īsā’s successful cure since doctors could not do anything, even though they were proficient.³⁶³ He also mentioned Galen’s³⁶⁴ response when they asked him about blindness, leprosy and ‘Īsā:

...and if ‘Īsā revived the dead, he was a prophet and not a doctor.³⁶⁵

Bursawī narrates that people came to ‘Īsā with a person born blind and a leper. He wiped them with his hand, and after supplication, the blind could see, and the leper was healed. Some believed and some rejected it, claiming it was magic.³⁶⁶ Without advising his sources, he also narrates that ‘Īsā revived 50,000 people in a single day. He revived four dead on request, among them a man called ‘Āzīr, ‘Īsā’s close friend. ‘Īsā reportedly supplicated:

O God, the Lord of the Seven Heavens and Seven Earths! You sent me to the Children of Israel to call them to Your faith and advise them that I revive the dead.

So, ‘Īsā revived ‘Āzīr, who stood up from his grave. He lived afterwards and had children.³⁶⁷ ‘Īsā was also able to tell people what they stored in their houses, what they had eaten and what they would eat after. People were telling their children not to play with “the magician” and hid their children from ‘Īsā. Bursawī narrates:

³⁶² Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 620. The authenticity of the narration is not apparent.

³⁶³ Ibid., vol. 2, 619.

³⁶⁴ Aelius Galenus or Galen (d. 216) was a Greek physician, surgeon and philosopher in ancient Rome.

³⁶⁵ I could not find this citation elsewhere. For more information on Galen’s views on religion and Christianity, see Gary Ferngren, “Galen and the Christians of Rome,” *History of Medicine* 2, no. 3 (2015).

³⁶⁶ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 620.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. The authenticity could not be checked and verified.

Once he came, looking for them, they would not let them play with him. ‘Īsā asked: ‘Who is in the house?’ They responded: ‘Pigs.’ ‘May they be as you say,’ he replied, and they found pigs instead of their children.³⁶⁸

This notably refers to the time of ‘Īsā’s childhood, a broadly unknown period since neither the Qur’an nor *ḥadīth* say anything about it. In his comment on *al-bayyināt*, Bursawī is devotedly exoteric and traditional, like Ibn Kathīr in his *tafsīr*, for example.³⁶⁹ Al-Kāshānī, on the other side, being committed to Akbarian *ishārī* esoterism, comments on the portion of the verse related to the food and ‘Īsā’s knowledge about it, going for much deeper and more significant meanings where apparent words are used to indicate hidden messages:

...And I will inform you too of what things you partake in your pursuit of lusts and pleasures, and what you treasure up in your houses, the houses of your unseens in the way of motives and intentions.³⁷⁰

Early childhood is the time of ‘Īsā’s first great miracle, the speech from the cradle in which he summarised his mission and essential duties, defending the chastity of his mother, fulfilling the glad tidings angels foretold to Maryam. The Qur’an relates this situation:

Then she pointed to him. They said: How can we talk to the one who is a child in the cradle? He said: Verily, I am a slave of God; he has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet. And he has made me blessed wheresoever I will be and has enjoined on me prayer, and *zakāt*, as long as I live. And dutiful to my mother, and made me not arrogant, wretched. And peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive. Such is ‘Īsā, son of Maryam. A statement of truth about which they dispute.³⁷¹

Bursawī asserts that Maryam drew their attention to little ‘Īsā in the cradle, taking him as her only proof. She vowed not to communicate with anyone (finding it the safest way to protect her privacy and innocence). Her people disapproved of her gesture, viewing it as ridiculous. Maryam kept silent, knowing the upcoming miracle – baby ‘Īsā’s clear statement – was what they needed to hear, not from her but directly from her son. Bursawī sees these words as important since they were the first speech in reply to Christian claims of ‘Īsā’s divinity. This is

³⁶⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, 621.

³⁶⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’an al-‘azīm*, vol. 1, 345.

³⁷⁰ Al-Kāshānī, *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, 142.

³⁷¹ Qur’an 19:29-34.

also a denial of their claims about God and his mother's accusations since God would not have chosen a sinful woman to be mother to someone dignified like him.³⁷² Bursawī pays attention to explaining expressions linguistically, finding them crucial in understanding the intended meaning properly. Along with his style, this feature in *Rūḥ al-bayān* has become his exegetical signature.

Some scholars believe, Bursawī informs us, God revealed *Injīl* to 'Īsā and made him a prophet while he was a child since he had the intellectual ability of a grown man, while he maintains that God sent 'Īsā revelation after he had turned 30. As for *zakāt* (prescribed alms) in the verse, Bursawī clarifies that its obligation relates to the rich of his nation, not him personally. When God addresses a prophet, the intended meaning of the revealed message applies to their followers.³⁷³ Bursawī, as it can be noted, uses his comment to clarify some juristic (*fiqhī*) rulings, as well – another common practice in his *tafsīr* and *tafsīr* literature generally. Based on the context of other similar instances, it can be concluded that he followed Ḥanafī legal tradition (*madhhab*) when doing this. *Al-Ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya* adds a mystical note to 'Īsā's words "as long as I live..." that appealed to Bursawī:

As long as he lives, one needs to keep secret, worship God and purify himself.³⁷⁴

Bursawī gives advice that observing one's duties comes under worship. This is, Sufis claim, achieved through purification for beginners or sole gratitude for those who are advanced in their religion. In both cases, the task remains after maturity and for life. If one's state has changed due to mental illness or something else, the person is excused.³⁷⁵ Apart from noting rulings on *taklīf* (duties), Bursawī did not clarify what exactly keeping the secret means – it could be presumed it is related to being trustworthy. 'Īsā reminded listeners in his speech that God made him pleasant to his mother, being benevolent and gentle, signifying Maryam's unique status and general duty of being nice to parents, especially a mother. He invokes peace

³⁷² Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2891-2.

³⁷³ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2892.

³⁷⁴ Najmuddin al-Kubrā, *Al-Ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya*, vol. 4, 170.

³⁷⁵ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2892.

and blessings on himself on the day he was born without a father and protected from Satan's touch on the day when he dies – seeking refuge from death's severity and events that follow inevitably afterwards, and on the day when he shall be revived. He seeks God's protection from the horror of the Day of Judgement and torment of the grave. He asked Him to be granted His peace and goodness in these three critical situations, like Yaḥyā, his cousin, supplicated before him.³⁷⁶

Bursawī then comments:

The definite article (*al*) on the word *salām* (peace) indicates the fulfilment of the promise, although it can have a general meaning and be an allusion to the curse on those who were his enemies. The assertion of peace for himself is an allusion to the condemnation of those opposing him, like in verse: And peace will be upon him who follows the guidance,³⁷⁷ which implies that God's wrath befalls those who deny the advice and turn their backs.³⁷⁸

This is another example of combined interpretation, linguistical exposition within traditional exegesis – one verse by another, offering insight and a path for better understanding of a hinted and broader meaning. Making a powerful and conclusive proclamation, the Qur'an points out:

Such is 'Īsā, son of Maryam. A statement of truth, about which they dispute...³⁷⁹

Bursawī sees in this brief Qur'anic statement the necessary and expected conclusion by the One who created and sent 'Īsā: a clear and concise denial of all false news about him, primarily the claim that he was God's son.³⁸⁰ He logically analyses the Qur'anic presentation of 'Īsā, clarifying that he was a prophet sent by God and the truth about him can only be one. In Bursawī's view, the following verse, 15:35, explains and highlights this fact by negating what does not befit God – begetting a son, as Christians believe. Bursawī indicates the verse insists on God's creative word *kun* (be!), the word the Creator uses while He creates and the word He used when He created Prophet 'Īsā without a father and Prophet Adam without any

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Qur'an 20:47.

³⁷⁸ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2892.

³⁷⁹ Qur'an 19:34.

³⁸⁰ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 5, 2895.

parents.³⁸¹ As can be seen in the lines above, Bursawi seems to follow classical Islamic theology regarding rejection of the Trinity, as presented and taught in Christian theology. In doing this, he is completely traditional, without esoteric notes or metaphoric hints.

3.4 Return of ‘Īsā (*Nuzūl ‘Īsā*)

The return or descent of Prophet ‘Īsā before the end of time is relevant in Islamic eschatological theology. It denotes a significant occasion from the perspective of timing, and with ‘Īsā’s eschatological conversation with God, serves as Islamic clarification of ‘Īsā’s case amid the Jewish and Christian contexts. Bursawī, in his fashion, interprets this unusual event, involving other authorities’ views and making some compelling notions of his own. While there are numerous *hadīth* narrations of various levels of authenticity addressing the matter, only one verse in the Qur’an can be taken as a reference to this much-discussed event:

And he shall be a known sign for the Hour. Therefore, have no doubt concerning it.³⁸²

Bursawī sees in ‘Īsā’s return a great sign of the end of time. When he emerges again, it will be known that the Hour is almost there.³⁸³ ‘Īsā is named as *‘ilm* (knowledge) and Bursawī presumes this is because of the knowledge required about events related to him and because he will be the herald of the Hour.³⁸⁴ As disbelievers deny his unusual birth and revival of the dead as his miracles, they also deny his return. Shedding light on the topic, Bursawī refers to the *hadīth*:

‘Īsā will descend at the place of the sacred land (Shām) called Afīq. He will be wearing two pieces of red-dyed clothing. His hair will be anointed, and in his hand will be a spear by which he will kill Antichrist (*Dajjāl*). He will come to *Bayt al-maqdis* while people are in the morning prayer.³⁸⁵

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Qur’an 43:61.

³⁸³ Bursawi, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, vol. 8, 4886.

³⁸⁴ Ibid

³⁸⁵ The narration is quoted in al-Qurtubī’s *tafsīr*, where the author noted al-Tha‘labī, al-Zamakhsharī and others relating it from Abū Huraira. See al-Qurtubī, *Tafsīr*, accessed February 13, 2022, vol. 16, 97, www.islamweb.net.

Another version, also quoted by Bursawī, brings some more details according to which Imam³⁸⁶ will be late and ‘Īsā will prompt him to the front and pray behind him, according to the law of Prophet Muhammad. “Then he will kill the pig, break the cross...and abolish the head tax (*jizyah*).”³⁸⁷ This implies that *jizyah* will be repealed from non-Muslims since only Islam will be accepted as a religion. Bursawī backs this view with al-Nawawī’s (d. 1277),³⁸⁸ who understood it similarly. He also believes that killing the pig and breaking the cross probably have no literal meaning but imply the end of worshipping anyone else but God on earth.³⁸⁹ Bursawī seems to pay attention to the well-known narrations treating the final events. He does not deny them whatsoever but understands that they bear allusive meaning. Based on his comments, he appears to understand them allegorically and as indications of deeper connotation and context. For further explanation of the event and more details on the topic, Bursawī quotes the *ḥadīth* from Muslim’s *Saḥīḥ*:

While *Dajjāl* is on earth, God will send al-Masīḥ, son of Maryam, and he will wear two pieces of red-dyed clothing. He will place his hands on the wings of two angels; whenever he lowers his head, droplets fall, and whenever he raises his head, precious stones that look like pearls fall. The fragrance of his breath will kill any disbeliever it reaches and reach out for as far as the eye can see. Then he will be looking for *Dajjāl* until he finds him at the gate of Ludd. There he will kill him.³⁹⁰

Al-Qāmūs,³⁹¹ which Bursawī consults for linguistic clarification, explains that the place Ludd is a village in Palestine.³⁹² He also acknowledges the argument brought in *Sharḥ al-*

³⁸⁶ This refers to Imam al-Mahdī (The Guided), an eschatological figure and descendant of Prophet Muhammad, who will appear before the end of this world concurrently with Prophet ‘Īsā. See Abu Dawūd, *Sunan abu Dawood*, ch. 36, *ḥadīth* no. 4271; Tirmidhī, *Jami’ al-Tirmidhi* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiya, 2010), vol. 2, 86.

³⁸⁷ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 8, 4886. Also see the narration recorded by Ibn al-‘Arabī in his tafsīr. Muhyiddin ibn al-‘Arabī, *Tafsīr al Qur’ān* [The Exegesis of the Qur’an], accessed June 27, 2022, vol. 2, 219, <https://archive.org/details/Tafsiribnarabi>.

³⁸⁸ Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, or Imam Nawawī, was a prolific Islamic scholar and author of many monumental works in different fields of Islamic science. See Fachrizal A. Halim, “al- Nawawī, Muḥyī al-Dīn,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam Online (English)*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Devin J. Stewart (Brill, 2023), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_40625.

³⁸⁹ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 8, 4886.

³⁹⁰ Muslim, *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, book 54, *ḥadīth* no. 134.

³⁹¹ *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* is a comprehensive Arabic dictionary by Al-Fairuzābādī (d. 1414).

³⁹² Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 8, 4886.

‘*aqāid*,³⁹³ by al-Taftazānī, according to which it is more appropriate to say that ‘Īsā will lead people in prayer and al-Mahdī will pray behind him since ‘Īsā is higher in merits than him and his leadership in prayer (*imāmah*) is more rightful than al-Mahdī’s. ‘Īsā is a prophet (*nabiyy*) and al-Mahdī is a guardian (*waliyy*), and the latter cannot be equal in honour to the former. Bursawī disagrees with al-Taftazānī, arguing that ‘Īsā is not coming back as a prophet since the time of his prophethood has passed and there is no prophet after Muhammad. ‘Īsā will descend and follow Muhammad’s religious law since he will reappear as one from this community (*ummah*). Out of divine respect for Muhammad’s community, al-Mahdī will be made *imām* and ‘Īsā will follow him since, by following al-Mahdī, he fulfils his obligation of the following prophet, Muhammad.

Furthermore, Bursawī points out that ‘Īsā prayed behind Prophet Muhammad on the night of ascent (*mi‘rāj*) in *Masjid al-Aqsā* with other prophets. Therefore, he concludes that ‘Īsā must pray behind Prophet Muhammad’s successor in worldly matters (*khalīfa*), whose comprehensive perfection (*al-jam‘iyyah al-kamāliyyah*) will be evident to everyone.³⁹⁴ The discussion is also a reminder about the concepts of *wilāyah* (sovereignty), *imāmah* (leadership), *khilāfah* (successorship) and *nubuwwah* (prophethood) and their respective ranks, often noted in Sufi literature.³⁹⁵

Considering the preceding four verses and the one that follows, verse 43:61 seems to perfectly fit in the context of the narrative about ‘Īsā. It identifies him as *‘ilm li sā‘ah* (a known sign of the last hour) and Bursawī, along with most exegetes (among them Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn al-‘Arabī, al-Kashānī and Kubrawīs) is on this course. The circumstance of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*), as Bursawī and others mention, is the conversation about ‘Īsā that Prophet Muhammad had with some unfriendly people from Quraish, led by ‘Abdullah ibn al-

³⁹³ *Sharh ‘aqāid al-nasafīyyah* is al-Taftazānī’s (d.1390) commentary on Al-Nasafī’s treatise on Islamic creed.

³⁹⁴ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al-Bayān*, vol. 8, 4885-7.

³⁹⁵ For more details, see Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Sharī‘ah: A Study of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī’s Effort to Reform Sufism* (UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1986), 83-94.

Ziba'rā al-Sahmī (d. 636), who will have later become a Muslim.³⁹⁶ The Qur'an classifies their intention as argumentative and them as quarrelsome. The statement is a reminder of 'Īsā's prophethood and him as a good example made by God. On the other hand, for the sake of argument, Bursawī advises that al-Ḥassan al-Baṣrī assumed the verse relates to the Qur'an, not 'Īsā, since the Qur'an is a notice on the judgement day and information about its signs. Therefore, he asserts, the verse alludes to the Qur'an.³⁹⁷ Bursawī scrutinises the verse preceding the one with *'ilm* of the Hour ('Īsā or the Qur'an).

And if it were Our Will, We would have made angels replace you on the earth.³⁹⁸

He comments on it in an entirely *ishārī* way and attention is on the space he dedicates to *insān kāmil* in his interpretation. Bursawī reminds that Ḥawwā', the first woman on earth, was created from Adam and 'Īsā without a father, both through God's creative ability. He could have made the angels live on earth as they live in heaven, live with people and inherit from them as their children do. The verse alludes, as Bursawī assumes, that if obedient to God, man will be granted the manners of the angels, so he will be God's deputy (*khalīfa*) on earth on his way to embrace God's manners, essential for the assignment. Even if the angels cannot be born from humans literally (*zāhiran*), this can happen intrinsically (*bāṭinan*) in one of two manners: through pious human breaths (*anfās*), their sincere and genuine remembrance of God (*dhikr*) and good-intended deeds (*ṣāliḥāt*).³⁹⁹ For this context, Bursawī mentions the narration of Rifā'ah ibn Rāfi':

We prayed with the Messenger, and while he was raising his head from *rukū'*, saying: *sami'a Allāh liman ḥamidah* (may God hear those praising Him), a man behind him said: *Rabbanā laka al-ḥamd ḥamdan kathīran ṭayyiban mubārakan fīh* (to You is the praise, our Lord, in abundance, wonderfully and with blessings). The Messenger concluded prayer and asked: 'Who said it a little while ago?' The man affirmed, and the Messenger said: 'I saw over thirty angels racing each other to write it first!'⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 8, 4882; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'azīm*, vol. 4, 133-4.

³⁹⁷ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 8, 4887.

³⁹⁸ Qur'an 43:60.

³⁹⁹ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 8, 4885.

⁴⁰⁰ Bukhārī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, book 10, *hadīth* no. 191.

Bursawī believes the secret is the number of letters in words (33) – every letter has its *rūḥ*, protecting it and maintaining its image and pronunciation. Most likely, he alludes to the significance of 33 repetitions of *dhikr* after prayer. Second, the perfect human being (*insān kāmil*) has spiritual children. They have manners like the angels, even more exceptional since the human propensity or readiness to see things (*isti'dād*) is more vital than angelic. The spiritual children will keep succeeding their spiritual fathers until the final time, just like the genes are transmitted from fathers to their sons until the end of this world. This is a pictorial continuation or succession. As the world of physical visions remains and lasts, the spiritual world exists similarly, Bursawī concludes.⁴⁰¹

3.5 Conclusion

Bursawī is aware of his scholarly environment's theological doctrine and traditional framework. He never ignores these guidelines in his exegesis, sporadically adding a touch of esoteric taste to his interpretation of the text. In this view, Bursawī resembles his predecessor, Abu Su'ūd al-'Imādī, probably the most significant religious and exegetical authority in the Ottoman Empire, the author of *Irshād*, regularly quoted and referred to in *Rūḥ al-bayān*. Along with his appealing and attractive interpretations, presented through his storytelling and admonishing pieces, Bursawī pays much attention to a linguistical explanation of the Qur'anic expressions where he feels readers might need them to adequately receive the intended meaning. He refers to the relevant authorities (such as al-Isfahānī and al-Kāshifī) and within his exposition, almost regularly includes historical context embellished with his likeable preaching style. This is a notable trait of *Rūḥ al-bayān* and Bursawī's exegetical originality.

Bearing in mind my questions from the introduction about Bursawī's exegetical affiliation in his *tafsīr*, it can be argued that, after examining his comments related to Maryam, 'Īsā's miracles and eschatological return, Bursawī is primarily Akbarian and Kubrawī, in

⁴⁰¹ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 8, 4884-5.

addition to maintaining a traditional exegetical line. Although a great admirer of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his legacy, Bursawī heavily relies on *Al-Ta’wīlāt al-najmiyya*, the primary source of Kubrawī exegetical tradition, successfully maintaining the Sufī Akbarian-Kubrawī balance throughout his *tafsīr*. This also could indicate that by Bursawī’s time, the two schools had become one monumental exegetical tradition.⁴⁰²

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s disputed *insān kāmil*, along with *waḥdat al-wujūd*, is well-accepted by Bursawī, although he does not relate *insān kāmil* to Prophet ‘Īsā in his *tafsīr* as much as we may expect. This reference is relatively scarce and barely adequate. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s application of the perfect human being to ‘Īsā is clear in his works. However, apart from his comment on Q 43:60 where he brought to attention the “spiritual children” (*al-awlād al-ma’nawiyya*) of *insān kāmil*, in the context of the world of meanings and spirit (*‘ālam al-ma’nā*), Bursawī, although greatly influenced by Ibn al-‘Arabī, surprisingly, hints at no more comparisons between *insān kāmil* and Prophet ‘Īsā. In this case, departing from *al-Shaikh al-Akbar*’s legacy could be explained by the assumption that Bursawī had different concerns in his comments about ‘Īsā. He possibly did not want to show his strong affiliation with Ibn al-‘Arabī, trying to keep a fair exoteric-esoteric balance in commenting on the verses about Prophet ‘Īsā. He instead focuses on counselling and advice as the primary goals of his exegesis, as indicated in his introduction and prioritised in Sufī tradition. Bursawī’s priority is demonstrated through his preaching and storytelling style, an excellent tool for delivering admonishing messages in line with the didactic and pedagogical nature of his *tafsīr*. *Wa’z* and *naṣīḥa*, as shared in Sufī tradition, are among the main aims of such *tafsīrs*, as indicated by Bursawī in the introduction of his work. Furthermore, it always remains the possibility that Bursawī quietly did not agree with all of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s explanations; therefore, did not include them in his interpretation of verses about ‘Īsā. A fair proportion of the Qur’an is counsel and advice, covering themes such as renunciation of this world, belief, the advent of death and final judgement. Apart from these,

⁴⁰² Knysh, *Sufism*, 103.

through his admonishing, focusing on 'Īsā's story as a guideline, Bursawī tries to emphasise the eternal themes of love, guidance and gratitude as the fundamental premises upon which the relationship between God and His prophets stands. This assumption will be considered through Bursawī's observations on 'Īsā's prophethood and mission in the last chapter.

CHAPTER 4: BURSAWĪ'S COMMENTARY ON THE VERSES ABOUT 'ĪSĀ'S PROPHETHOOD AND MISSION

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 scrutinised the miracles and extraordinary qualities related to Prophet 'Īsā as covered in the Qur'an and interpreted in *Rūḥ al-bayān*. It dealt with the miracles 'Īsā performed as a prophet witnessed by people and miracles that took place even before he was born (*rūḥ* and *kalimah*). Furthermore, some of 'Īsā's miracles and eschatological events will occur, according to tradition and a hint in the Qur'an, after he returns (*nuzūl*) to earth. The main aim of this final chapter is to analyse Bursawī's spiritual-theological interpretations of 'Īsā's mission and his perception and conceptualisation of prophethood in Islam. His interpretations are compared with Akbarian, Kubrawī and traditional sources. Bursawī made this work easier by frequently referring to them in his *tafsīr*. This methodology allows for identification of Bursawī's references to their works, their influence on him and his original exegetical contribution. 'Īsā's preaching to his people, the Qur'anic description of his mission and the eschatological conversation he will have with God, as told by the Qur'an, are the remaining subjects from the main categorisation of the verses covering Prophet 'Īsā through chapters Ālu 'Imrān, al-Nisā', al-Mā'ida, al-Hadīd and al-Şaff. These three segments carry the Qur'anic clarification of 'Īsā's mission and an insight into the Islamic theological implications related to this prophet. This is even more important when the central role 'Īsā/Jesus holds in Christianity and his paradigmatic appearance in this religion is considered.

On the other hand, his part of confirmation (*taşdīq*) in relation to Mūsā's book, *Tawrāt*, makes his status, from the Qur'anic perspective, essential and unique in Judaism as well. This chapter argues that Bursawī maintains, like in his comments on the verses from the previous chapter, traditional lines, deepened with combined Akbarian and Kubrawī inputs. He pays due attention to remaining on the traditional Islamic course grounded in the Qur'an, taking Prophet

‘Īsā and his unique case as a paradigm in faith and manners. Besides his usual exegetical style, Bursawī remains descriptive, attention-catching, inspirational and admonishing.

4.2 ‘Īsā’s Preaching to the Children of Israel

Like prophets before him, ‘Īsā summoned people to believe in One God and obey Him. He also proclaimed the confirmation and revision (*taṣdīq*) of Mosaic law.⁴⁰³ It is crucial to understand ‘Īsā’s mission by becoming familiar with the original message he conveyed to his people, the Children of Israel, from a Qur’anic perspective, particularly given people’s tendency to worship ‘Īsā and his mother in later times. This section focuses on related verses from Ālu ‘Imrān, al-Mā’ida and al-Ṣaff, and relevant comments by Bursawī. The Qur’an clearly defines ‘Īsā’s mission through his statement:

Indeed, they have disbelieved those who say: ‘God is the Messiah, son of Maryam.’ But the Messiah said: ‘O Children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.’ Verily, whoever sets up partners in worship with God, then God has forbidden Paradise to him, and the Fire will be his abode.⁴⁰⁴

Bursawī usually presents the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and this case is no exception. He notes this passage, with the fundamental postulate of faith – not associating a partner to the only God, as indicated by Prophet ‘Īsā – was revealed to Prophet Muhammad about the incident with the Christians from Najrān, Jacobites (*al-ya‘qūbiyyah*) who paid a visit to Madina and claimed God had incarnated in ‘Īsā and they two were one. Other *tafsīrs* also agree this incident is a reason for this revelation.⁴⁰⁵ ‘Īsā’s proclamation is straightforward and warns about the consequences of ascribing a partner to God.⁴⁰⁶ ‘Īsā summons the children of Israel to monotheism (*tawḥīd*), the uncompromised premise of faith, and he clearly states it to his people. The following Qur’anic passage further defines ‘Īsā’s mission and its contextual role in the times between prophets Mūsā and Muhammad:

⁴⁰³ Qur’an 5:46; 61:6.

⁴⁰⁴ Qur’an 5:72.

⁴⁰⁵ See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*, vol. 2, 77; Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Rāzī*, vol. 12, 63.

⁴⁰⁶ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 1067.

And when ‘Īsā, son of Maryam, said: O Children of Israel! I am the Messenger of God onto you, confirming the *Tawrāt*, which came before me, and giving glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Aḥmad. But when he came to them with clear proofs, they said: This is plain magic.⁴⁰⁷

Bursawī notices that ‘Īsā addresses his people as “Children of Israel” – purposely to highlight his attachment to them and make their hearts inclined towards his summons. His referral to the *Tawrāt* is his strongest argument, reminding them that their connection with Mūsā’s book was crucial for their religious and worldly matters.⁴⁰⁸ Bursawī does not overlook minor but meaningful details in the Qur’anic text. Noting the above gentle and thoughtful address of ‘Īsā to his people is an excellent example of *ishārī* input, or Sufi exegesis, going one step further in interpretation and consideration of the deeper meaning of the Qur’anic message. It also highlights the pedagogical trait of *Rūḥ al-bayān*. The glad tidings had a message of continuity of *irsāl* (sending the prophets), and according to Bursawī, this is the primary narrative of this verse. These glad tidings about the final prophet are also about the last book, the *Qur’an*: a summons to them to accept it as a book of the future, as they had taken Mūsā’s *Tawrāt* in the past. ‘Īsā reminds people about the first great book, referred to by the prophets, and the last, most honoured prophet, foretold by them all.⁴⁰⁹ Bursawī focuses on the importance of prophethood as the medium of the message of the Islamic faith and tradition. ‘Īsā is part of God’s plan to keep humankind guided and he was a bearer of the light that had existed before him and continued over him to the conclusion of prophethood. Bursawī continues, complementing the exposition with a narration:

Companions said: ‘O Messenger of God, tell us something about yourself!’ He said: ‘I am the fulfilment of Ibrāhīm’s supplication and the glad tidings foretold by ‘Īsā. My mother saw a dream when she was pregnant with me: a light came out of her and enlightened the palaces of Bosra in Shām.’⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁷ Qur’an 61:6.

⁴⁰⁸ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 9, 5629-30.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., vol. 9, 5630.

⁴¹⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*, vol. 1, 175; Albānī, *Silsilah al-ahādīth al-sahīhah* [Collection of Authentic Narrations] (Riyadh: Maktaba al-maārif, 1995), *hadīth* no. 1545.

Bursawī holds that every prophet told his people about Muhammad, but ‘Īsā is singled out since he immediately preceded the last prophet. The glad tidings about the final prophet are good news for all the times, before and after ‘Īsā. Praising the Muslim community (*ummah*) of Prophet Muhammad in *Rūḥ al-bayān*, Bursawī notes ‘Īsā’s dialogue with his students, who asked their prophet, like the companions of Prophet Muhammad will do later:

Hawāriyyūn asked ‘Īsā: ‘O *Rūḥ* from God, is there a community after us?’ He replied: ‘Yes, one of Muhammad, wise men, scholars, the noble, the pious – they will understand as the prophets did. They will be satisfied with a little (provision) from God, and God will be pleased with a little (action) from them.’⁴¹¹

This question was expected from them since ‘Īsā introduced them to the prophet who would appear after them and they even were told his name. Giving space to the name *Aḥmad*, Bursawī includes Ibn al-‘Arabī’s remark from his book *Talqīḥ al-adhhān*⁴¹² in relation to the origin of his name, in which he describes Prophet Muhammad as “the bearer of the flag of gratitude (*ḥamd*).” He also suggests a more detailed exposition of al-Isfahānī,⁴¹³ who believed the name *Ahmad* indicates his gratitude and entails his name *maḥmūd* (praised), who showed appreciation throughout his whole life. *Aḥmad* is in focus in his original comparative form since ‘Īsā used it to show that Prophet Muhammad will be even more grateful than him (*aḥmadu minhu*) and any other prophet before him.⁴¹⁴ The initial *alif* of the word indicates the utmost gratitude, which could be interpreted as either all the prophets were thankful to God and Muhammad was the most grateful among them or all the prophets are *maḥmūdūn* (the praised) with outstanding qualities. He is the most prominent with all virtues and merits together.⁴¹⁵

The significant part of ‘Īsā’s conversations with the Children of Israel is his dialogue with *al-ḥawāriyyūn*, his pupils and committed helpers. The linguistic meaning of the word is “those

⁴¹¹ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 9, 5629-30. The narration is not found in the referent literature.

⁴¹² Full name of the book is *Talqīḥ al-adhhān wa miḥṭāḥ ma’rifat al-insān* [Enrichment of Minds and Opening for Human Knowledge]. The manuscript can be found at Millet Genel Kutuphanesi, Eski Kayit (Old registration) No. 365 in Istanbul.

⁴¹³ Al-Raghib al-Isfahānī (d. 1109) is the author of *Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān*, the famous dictionary of Qur’anic terms.

⁴¹⁴ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 9, 5630; Isfahānī, *Mufradāt alfāz al-Qur’ān* [Vocabulary of the Expressions of the Qur’an], (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 2020), 213.

⁴¹⁵ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 9, 5629-30.

bleaching their clothes,” while semantics directs to helpers and disciples.⁴¹⁶ *Al-ḥawāriyyūn* accepted and acknowledged the truth, embraced ‘Īsā’s legacy and authority, standing behind the validity of his scripture – *Injīl*. The Qur’an refers to this dialogue in four of its verses. ‘Īsā addresses his people, initiating the conversation in a decisive moment of his mission:

Then when ‘Īsā came to know of their disbelief, he said: ‘Who will be my helpers in God’s Cause?’ *Al-Ḥawāriyyūn* said: ‘We are the helpers of God; we believe in God and bear witness that we are Muslims.’⁴¹⁷

Bursawī assumes this was when ‘Īsā knew for a fact they disbelieved, when they wanted to kill him when witnessing God’s signs only increased their perseverance in denial. He asked them, wanting to tell apart those keen to support him from those disbelieving: “Who are my helpers in establishing the faith?” He explains that *al-ḥawāriyyūn* is a plural of *al-ḥawārī*, a sincere and distinctive friend. They were 12 people from various walks of life – all named *al-ḥawāriyyūn* since they helped, sincerely loved and obeyed ‘Īsā.⁴¹⁸ The Qur’an says: “If you help God, He will help you...”⁴¹⁹ When they said: “We believe in God...” Bursawī is assured this recommencing statement explains what was meant previously: believing in God attracts His help. They asked ‘Īsā to witness then and later about the Day of Judgment when other prophets will testify for their followers. Having said this, they declared happiness in the Hereafter to be their most desired goal.⁴²⁰ This is a latent example of a combined exoteric-esoteric interpretation in *Rūḥ al-bayān*, where each observation keeps its distinctiveness, tributing each other. Similar content is found in *sūra* al-Ṣaff (the Row), the announcement and further explanation of the events that will have taken place among ‘Īsā’s followers in the times after him:

⁴¹⁶ Cosmic Prince, “the Hawariyun,” *The Islamic Adventurer*, February 21, 2009, accessed November 15, 2021, <http://islamicglobalhistory.blogspot.com/2009/02/hawariyun.html>; Isfahānī, *Mufradāt*, 219.

⁴¹⁷ Qur’an 3:52.

⁴¹⁸ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 622-3.

⁴¹⁹ Qur’an 47:7.

⁴²⁰ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 622.

Then a group of the Children of Israel believed, and a group disbelieved. So We gave power to those who believed against their enemies, and they became victorious.⁴²¹

It is also worthwhile noting what Bursawī wrote about *al-ḥawāriyyūn* in his comments for *sūra* al-Ṣaff, in addition to his interpretation of the verse above:

The Messenger said on the Battle of Trench: ‘Who will bring me some news (about our enemies)?’ Zubair said that he would do it. The Messenger praised him: ‘Every prophet had a helper (*ḥawārī*) – mine is Zubair.’⁴²²

According to some, this indicates that *al-ḥawāriyyūn* does not relate to ‘Īsā’s helpers only but to all sincere friends, Bursawī reflects. He cites Ma’mar ibn Rāshid (d. 770),⁴²³ who mentions that Prophet Muhammad had *ḥawāriyyūn* who helped him the best they could, 70 individuals who pledged allegiance on Aqaba.⁴²⁴ Comparing the two Qur’anic expressions related to small groups and their respective contexts in the Qur’an, Bursawī pictures the approximate number of ‘Īsā’s followers, taking *tā’ifah* to be a small group of people, smaller than *firqah*: “...of every troop (*firqah*) of them, a party (*tā’ifah*) only should go forth...”⁴²⁵ So, a small group believed in what ‘Īsā preached and they obeyed him, helping the faith. The other group did not believe and stood up against him. Believers became victorious after ‘Īsā ascended. Disbelievers are classified as enemies because of their antagonism toward believers. Bursawī mentions the narration according to which after ‘Īsā was gone, people split into those claiming he was God and ascended, those saying he was His son and He took him up, and those saying he was a prophet of God and He took him. They all had followers and fought one another. Disbelievers stood up against believers until God sent Muhammad.⁴²⁶ Based on this, God will have revealed later in the Qur’an:

⁴²¹ Qur’an 61:14.

⁴²² Zubair ibn Awwām was the nephew of the Messenger (son of his aunt, Safiyya bint Abdil Muttalib). Tirmidhī, *Jāmi’ at-Tirmidhi*, book 46, *hadīth* no. 3744.

⁴²³ Ma’mar ibn Rāshid was a respected scholar of *hadīth* from Basra, from the generation of followers, and a student of al-Hassan al-Basrī. See Sean W. Anthony, “Ma’mar b. Rāshid,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Devin J. Stewart (Brill, 2023), accessed November 25, 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_36131.

⁴²⁴ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 9, 5644.

⁴²⁵ Qur’an 9:122.

⁴²⁶ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 9, 5645.

So We gave power to those who believed against their enemies, and they became victorious.⁴²⁷

Verse 5:112 focuses on the conversation *Ḥawāriyyūn* had with ‘Īsā, asking him for a miracle:

When *Ḥawāriyyūn* said: ‘O’Īsā, son of Maryam! Can your Lord send down to us a table spread from heaven?’ ‘Īsā said: ‘Fear God if you are indeed believers.’⁴²⁸

Bursawī explains, maintaining a didactic nature of his *tafsīr*, that the way they asked ‘Īsā for the table spread showed this conversation took place before they acquainted God properly. They showed a lack of manners and respect by addressing ‘Īsā by his name and not by “messenger” or “*rūḥ*” from God. They also lacked manners by asking: “Can your Lord...” – questioning and doubting God’s all might. They also proved the lowness of concerns by demanding ‘Īsā to intercede in God for the table spread with food – something profane and temporary – not wishing for an eternal benefit in faith. Had they asked for an everlasting gift in faith, they would have gotten the table spread along with it anyway. Lastly, Bursawī accentuates that they wanted to satisfy their hearts by witnessing a miracle, adding the experience to their belief and reasoning. God responded to their quest and sent them what they had asked for. Some believe the table (*al-mā’ida*) came down on Sunday, so Christians took it as their special day.⁴²⁹

Bursawī engaging his Sufi preaching skills in tandem with *wa’z* (advice), employing the *ishārī* sense, advises that some Sufis recognise in the table spread the essence of knowledge (*ḥaqāiq al-ma’ārif*), which is nourishment for souls (*ghadhā’ al-arwāḥ*), just like it is food nourishment for bodies (*ghadhā’ al-budun*). They asked for something they were not ready for, so, Bursawī explains, ‘Īsā gave them the advice to rely on their piety (*taqwā*) until they attain the required knowledge and be prepared for answers.⁴³⁰ This narrative points out knowledge, offering another passage of appealing exhort (*naṣīḥa*), highlighting the manners. Improving manners and acquiring knowledge are commonly dominant features in Sufi literature. It is a

⁴²⁷ Qur’an 61:14.

⁴²⁸ Qur’an 5:112.

⁴²⁹ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 1112-4.

⁴³⁰ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 1115.

journey that begins with love, an incentive that moves things and sacrifices this love involves, making trials more bearable and goals achievable.⁴³¹ In his comment of 57:27, Bursawī holds that the Qur’anic description of ‘Īsā’s followers as a party whose hearts were ordained with clemency and mercy (*ra’fatun wa raḥmah*) primarily relates to *al-ḥawāriyyūn*, who were driven by these virtues when dealing with each other and other people. *Injīl* instructed them to forgive people and avoid reprisal for disturbances they sustained from others. It was suggested they patiently offer their left cheek if the right one was slapped or if someone took away their robe to give him their shirt too. They were not supposed to retaliate for crimes, even those resulting in the loss of lives.⁴³² They followed divine commandments and obeyed God’s will, taking love and mercy as their guides in conduct.

‘Īsā was given love by God and passed it onto his disciples, teaching them to avoid even the slightest possible confrontation with others, as instructed by his book. God’s love is to be shared with other people and ultimately used to help them experience God in their lives. ‘Īsā demonstrated to his followers that humility is a true quality of love since it comes from knowledge. It opposes arrogance, which originates in ignorance.⁴³³ In other words, who knows God, loves Him, and God is not loved only by those who do not know Him. What is mastered in Bursawī’s comment related to this passage is that one of the tasks of ‘Īsā’s mission was to convey God’s love and enable His servants to return it to Him after they perceive Him and achieve His closeness through this love. Love and clemency were common attributes of his disciples and how others knew them at a time when people were commonly cruel. In this view, they much resemble the companions (*aḥāba*) of Prophet Muhammad, Bursawī points out.⁴³⁴ Love for God is a reflection of His love for His creation, as could be noted from al-Qushayrī’s

⁴³¹ Al-Ba’uniyyah, *The Principles of Sufism*, 87.

⁴³² Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 9, 5501.

⁴³³ Al-Ba’uniyyah, *The Principles of Sufism*, 61.

⁴³⁴ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 9, 5501.

commentary of the verse, O you who believe, those of you who turn away from their religion, God will replace them with folk whom He loves and who love Him,⁴³⁵ where he wrote,

...if He had not loved them, then, certainly, they could never have loved Him, and that had He not spoken of love, how, then, could clay ever have had the courage to mention love?⁴³⁶

Bursawī successfully presents a few important counts in this section that could be reflected on: the importance of connection in revelation and prophethood between prophets ‘Īsā and Muhammad; ‘Īsā’s unique manners when summoning and teaching the Children of Israel and his prophetic care for them; the love as a core of his mission: God’s love for the prophet and his people and on the other side, their love for their Creator; the reflection of love and mercy among themselves originated in the book of *Injīl* Prophet ‘Īsā directly received from God; and the knowledge about God as the principal propensity for universal love and a relationship with God.

4.3 ‘Īsā’s Mission, Divinity, and Death

‘Īsā had his followers and those who opposed him. Some followers believed in his divinity, while some opposers announced they had killed him – both claims are categorically denied by the Qur’an. Therefore, the imperative notion amid the narrative about ‘Īsā’ is a brief investigation into the Qur’anic statements on different, contrasting views and beliefs about him held by the Jews and Christians. In this section, verses from *sūras* Ālu ‘Imrān, al-Nisā’, al-Mā’ida and al-Zukhruf, along with Bursawī’s comments, are scrutinised.

In the following verse, the Qur’an underlines ‘Īsā’s prophetic context and his connection with previous prophets, as well as the great book of *Injīl* and its relation to Mūsā’s *Tawrāt*:

And in their footsteps, We sent ‘Īsā, son of Maryam, confirming the *Tawrāt* that had come before him, and We gave him the *Injīl*, in which was guidance and light and confirmation of the *Tawrāt* that had come before it, a guidance and an admonition for the pious.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁵ Qur’an 5:54.

⁴³⁶ Al-Qushayrī, *Lataif*, 1:431-33.

⁴³⁷ Qur’an 5: 46.

Bursawī clarifies that the *qafā ‘alā atharin* (to follow) means to come shortly after someone, follow his steps or rhyme with something. He points out the *Injīl* is like *Tawrāt* – guidance and light, its repetition (*takrīr*) and additional regulation (*ziyādat al-taqrīr*). The advice and warning for the pious are highlighted since the *Injīl* comprises the message from previous revelations.⁴³⁸ The verse explains the central role of ‘Īsā abreast Mūsā and other prophets before and the link between *Injīl*, the confirmer (*muṣaddiq*) and *Tawrāt*, a forgotten law. It additionally defines the context and character of *Injīl* as then-current guidance and a reference to God, revealed to the prophet who summoned people like other prophets. Bursawī mainly interprets the verse literally, offering some linguistic hints he found worth noting. More specifically and directed to the People of the Book, the attention in 4:171 is on the concepts of *rūḥ* and *kalimah*, crucial in ‘Īsā’s case, featuring his human nature and Islamic prophetic mission. The verse also issues a precise warning to those oblivious of his message.

O people of the Scripture! Do not exceed the limits in your religion, nor say of God aught but the truth. The Messiah, ‘Īsā, son of Maryam, was a Messenger of God and His Word, which He bestowed on Maryam and a spirit (*rūḥ*) from Him; so believe in God and His Messengers. Say not: ‘Three!’ Cease! (it is) better for you. For God is (the only) One God, Glory be to Him (Far Exalted is He) above having a son.⁴³⁹

Bursawī believes this is primarily intended for Christians, warning them not to overstep the boundaries of faith by elevating the case of ‘Īsā to the divine level. No exaggeration in belief and orientation (*madhhab*) is commended, Bursawī points out. He also reminds that many people of the Muslim community (*ummah*) exaggerate their views, like some Shī‘a about ‘Ālī ibn Abī Ṭālib; Mu‘tazila about *tanzīh* (incomparability)⁴⁴⁰ denying some of God’s attributes. On the other hand, Mushabbiha⁴⁴¹ went to the opposite extremism by describing God with some

⁴³⁸ Bursawi, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 1038.

⁴³⁹ Qur’an 4:171.

⁴⁴⁰ Mu‘tazila tend to eliminate and deny all anthropomorphic elements that could be associated with God, such as God’s hand, face, etc. *Tanzīh*, which could be translated as “a departure from something” stands opposite *tashbīh*, which means “nearness” or “accessibility.”

⁴⁴¹ *Al-mushabbiha*, or *al-mujassima*, were protagonists of anthropomorphism. See Gibril Fouad Haddad, “The Hashwiyya, Mujassima, and Mushabbiha,” *As-Sunnah Foundation of America*, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://sunnah.org/2008/07/18/hashwiyya-mujassima-mushabbiha>.

human qualities.⁴⁴² Al-Kāshānī's comment on this verse in his *Ta'wīlāt* draws attention and, unlike Bursawī, he believes God addresses the Jews and Christians:

...as for the Jews, it is their absorption in the exoteric and the denial of the esoteric aspects of things and their demotion of Jesus from the rank of prophethood and the station of the possession of the attributes of lordliness. As for the Christians, it is their absorption in the esoteric aspects and their denial of the exoteric as well as the elevation of Jesus to the station of divinity; and do not say about God except the truth by combining the exoteric and esoteric aspects as well as the union and the differentiation, as is the case with the Muḥammadan affirmation of Oneness.⁴⁴³

Al-Kāshānī's interpretation of 'Īsā as the Word is in line with what was previously mentioned by Akbarians of Jesus as His Word, a disengaged and free soul, a word of the words of God, one of His spiritual realities, a spirit from among many spirits.⁴⁴⁴ Bursawī's following note could be taken as a further exposition and additional input on the nature of *rūḥ* and the relation between God and his prophet 'Īsā found partially in his earlier comments. Briefly, he maintains that 'Īsā is *rūḥ*, a soul from God, like everyone else, but in his case, He added His *rūḥ* to 'Īsā's self (*nafs*) out of respect for him. Some interpret the *rūḥ* as Jibrīl's breath he blew into Maryam's lap that reached her womb, so she became pregnant. The breath is named *rūḥ* because it was a little wind coming out of the Spirit, then God added the breath of Jibrīl to 'Īsā, so he is *rūḥ* from him.⁴⁴⁵ Bursawī also refers to what Ubayy ibn Ka'b narrates:

When God brought forth souls from the loin of Adam, He took the covenant from them and returned them all to his backbone, retaining 'Īsā's soul for the creation time. He sent it to Maryam and made it enter through her mouth.⁴⁴⁶

As for the exact moment of his birth, Bursawī points out that it is believed by some that 'Īsā was born at the same time when the blow took place, while some believe it was after the time of pregnancy, eight months, and this version prevails in Islamic scholars.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴² Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 956-8.

⁴⁴³ Al-Kāshānī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, 206.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 958.

⁴⁴⁶ The narration is also found in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, with the same narrator and slightly different wording, in his comment on Qur'an 7:172. Al-Ṭabarī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 9, 418.

⁴⁴⁷ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 958.

Putting the *rūḥ* in the context with the rest of God's creation, *Al-Ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya* notes the advantage of *rūḥ* over other things is that it was created like 'Īsā by the explicit command of *kun*, with no intermediation whatsoever. Therefore, 'Īsā is named after *rū* amid their common origins.⁴⁴⁸ Bursawī elaborates and makes polemical comments against Christian teaching of the Trinity, reminding that Christians believe in God's three hypostases: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are expected to give up on this theory if they cannot develop something more dignified. God is one, free of numbers and multiple entities. The Christian view implies He can be compared and subjected to transience and dying. He brings a simple example – having children and its purpose of propagation and protection from extinction. Logically, Bursawī explains that the angels and people in Paradise do not need to have children; why would God, who is like no one else? Having children is improper for Him since He is eternal and beyond comparison and similarity.⁴⁴⁹ After presenting combined Akbarian and Kubrawī exegesis on *kalimah* and *rūḥ*, by employing pure logic, Bursawī openly appeals to sound reasoning as the main criteria in accepting the Qur'anic definition of 'Īsā's nature against Christian claims. He stresses that the Qur'an issues a severe warning to those who keep saying what is incorrect and improper about God and Prophet 'Īsā. The Qur'an explicitly states it is apostasy to state 'Īsā's divinity and his participation in the Trinity:

Indeed, disbelievers are those who say: God is the third of the three...And if they cease not from what they say, a painful torment will befall the disbelievers among them.⁴⁵⁰

Bursawī highlights the Qur'anic question: Will they not turn in repentance to God and ask His forgiveness?⁴⁵¹ It is astonishment, pointing at their reality, which is far from the truth, rather than a question: do they not want to stop saying it? They must repent, disclaiming all misleading statements about God (*tanzīh*).⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.; Najmuddin al-Kubrā, *Al-Ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya*, vol. 2, 238.

⁴⁴⁹ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 960.

⁴⁵⁰ Qur'an 5:73.

⁴⁵¹ Qur'an 5:74.

⁴⁵² Bursawī, *Rūḥ al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 1067-8.

He also criticises the Jews' belief that Prophet 'Īsā, whom they do not take as a prophet, was crucified after worldly departure and killed. Bursawī is straightforward in his support of the Qur'anic statement, dismissing this contention. Moreover, he reminds that the Qur'an reprimands the Jews for ignoring the message of 'Īsā, as they were oblivious to the statements of prophets before him, even having killed some of them (Q 5:70). The Qur'anic text is succinct in the matter, challenging the Jews openly:

And because of their disbelief and uttering against Maryam a grave false charge. And because of their saying: 'We killed Messiah 'Īsā, son of Maryam, the Messenger of God – but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but the resemblance of 'Īsā was put over another man, and those who differ therein are full of doubts. They do not know – they follow nothing but conjecture. For indeed, they killed him not. But God raised him unto Himself, and God is ever All-Powerful, All-Wise. And there is none of the people of the Scripture but must believe in him before his death. And on the Day of Resurrection, he will be a witness against them.'⁴⁵³

Bursawī's comments suggest their disbelief is directed at 'Īsā's prophethood and the false charges are accusations against Maryam for adultery. They call 'Īsā "the Messenger of God," mocking him. They were antagonistic and plotted to kill him. Bursawī narrates that a group of Jews insulted 'Īsā and his mother, accusing them of dealing with magic.⁴⁵⁴ When he heard this, 'Īsā invoked:

O God, my Lord, I am from Your *Rūḥ*, I am the Word You created, I am not here out of my will. Curse those who insulted my mother and me!⁴⁵⁵

Keeping with his storytelling fashion, Bursawī narrates that God accepted his request and transformed the thugs into monkeys and pigs. When their leader saw what had happened, he got scared for himself. He gathered the Jews and they planned to kill 'Īsā. God sent the angel Jibrīl to advise him of being soon raised to heaven.⁴⁵⁶ Bursawī, like all other exegetes, maintains that the Qur'an is explicit that 'Īsā was neither killed nor crucified, but the matter appeared like that since someone who looked like 'Īsā was punished instead (substitution theory). In the

⁴⁵³ Qur'an 4:156-159.

⁴⁵⁴ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 945.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid. The authenticity of this narration and supplication could not be confirmed.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., vol. 2, 945.

passages above, *Rūḥ al-bayān* shows and compares diametric theological positions on the nature and mission of Jesus in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The narrative's focus is 'Īsā's human nature against the Divine as presented by Christianity and the theological implications of the Trinity against the Islamic unconditional oneness of God (*tawḥīd*). As for Bursawī's comments on the Spirit and Word (*rūḥ* and *kalimah*), from verses 4:171, 19:17 (see chapter three) and 3:45-6, later in the text, so relevant for Christian religious tradition – they clearly show some commonalities with Christian concepts and can be taken as a bridging agent between the two theologies. This is a common trait in Sufi *tafsīrs* and Bursawī maintains the Sufi legacy of 'Īsā's "missionary role" in Muslim-Christian dialogue, as mentioned in section 2.7.

Bursawī also notes uncommon beliefs of some Christians who maintain that Jesus was crucified but did not feel the pain – a divine being felt it through perception and awareness, not as physical infliction. As for what happened after he was taken up, Bursawī refers to Al-Ḥassan al-Baṣrī's explanation that God took up 'Īsā to heaven, the place of honour and dignity (*karāmah*), where the angels are and where God's wisdom and justice govern things.⁴⁵⁷ God took 'Īsā to Himself from this world, where his slaves would have (wrongly) judged him. Verse 4:100 explains that "...And whoever leaves his home as an emigrant unto God and His Messenger...his reward is on God."⁴⁵⁸ Therefore, Bursawī advises, 'Īsā's ascent could be compared to the migration (*hijra*) to Madina, the place where God is worshipped rightfully. Also, God wanted him to be accompanied by the angels, where they could benefit from his blessed status, just like they had the opportunity to enjoy the blessing of Adam, the father of humanity, when they learned the names of things and other matters. 'Īsā is like Adam, as compared in the Qur'an,⁴⁵⁹ but since he did not come to this world out of bodily desire (*shahwah*), he did not leave it in affliction and suffering through natural death (*maniyyah*) – he came along through God's might (*qudrah*) and departed by His honour and glory (*'izzah*).⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., vol. 2, 946.

⁴⁵⁸ Qur'an 4:100.

⁴⁵⁹ Qur'an 3:59.

⁴⁶⁰ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 946.

Bursawī combines traditional exegesis (commenting on one verse by another) with *ishārī* input, ending with an attractive explanation. The similarities are notable between esoteric exegesis presented in *Rūḥ al-bayān* and Christian views concerning ‘Īsā’s ascension and his return, as can be noted in Bursawī’s narrative on *rūḥ* and *kalimah*. These theological concepts are common and shared between the two religions; the differences are extraneous.

Bursawī continues in *ishārī* style, narrating that God raised ‘Īsā, covered him with feathers and dressed him with light. He freed him from the need to eat and drink and made him fly with the angels around His throne. He was human and angelic at the same time.⁴⁶¹ In his reference to Q 3:45-6, Bursawī sheds light on the critical connection between ‘Īsā and the Word, accenting the Word and its meanings:

When the angels said: O Maryam! Verily God gives you the glad tidings of a Word from Him, his name will be the Messiah ‘Īsā, the son of Maryam, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter, and will be one of those who are near to God. He will speak to people in the cradle and manhood, and he will be of the righteous.⁴⁶²

Bursawī underlines that ‘Īsā is called a Word since the truth embodied in the Word is the purpose of his emergence – the consequence being named after its reason – the word *Be!* According to Bursawī, this is ‘Īsā’s most important name and attribute, while *al-Masīḥ* (Hebrew *Mashīḥā*, “the anointed one”) is only his honorary title, like *Ṣiddīq*, *Fārūq*, etc. When addressing Maryam directly, the angels did not say: “son of yours” but “son of Maryam.” Bursawī assumes this highlights Maryam’s exalted status, as ‘Īsā’s only parent, annulling the possibility of him having a father to be identified thereby.⁴⁶³ Bursawī finds it essential to explain the connection between ‘Īsā, the Word from God and his words intended for people, by which he summoned them to God. He stresses there is no difference in ‘Īsā’s speech to his people, as a baby or adult, since in both cases, he would speak with no fault (*min ghayr tafāwut*) and as a prophet. This is, without a doubt, one of his greatest miracles (*a’zām al-mu’jizāt*). He continues, noticing that

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Qur’an 3:45-46.

⁴⁶³ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 616-7.

adulthood (*al-kahl*) is a period of life when a person is over 30 and before the 40s – when they are mature but not old.⁴⁶⁴

As shown above, the author of *Rūḥ al-bayān* generally prefers esoteric, allusive commentary in his *tafsīr*. Still, the exoteric input, a literal interpretation, is never ignored, leaving it to the reader to decide on his preference. For this purpose, different sources are referred to and it is evident that Bursawī is well-lettered with them all. From the perspective of the exoteric view, Bursawī seems to be attracted to Ibn Munabbih’s view, which briefly summarises the traditional view on this topic and is confirmed throughout Bursawī’s comments:

‘Īsā was sent as a prophet when he turned thirty, and God took him up when he was thirty-three years old, so his prophethood was for three years. God postponed his return to make him one of the signs of the day of judgement and a seal of the general sovereignty (*wilāyah ‘āmmah*) since there would be no guardian (*waliyy*) after him. God will conclude with him Muhammadian circle – he will be sent as a *nabiyy* who will follow the law of Muhammad, followed even by the Jews and Christians. This is a renewal of prophethood before the end of time. ‘Īsā will marry and have children; he will be the seal of the selected elite (*awliyā’*) and inheritors (*wāriṭhūn*) from the perspective of sovereignty (*wilāyah*).⁴⁶⁵

Like all other Sufi *tafsīrs*, the layers of hidden meaning (*marātib al-ma’nā*), lead to by the allusion (*ishāra*) and imagination (*khayāl*) supported by the knowledge given by God (*‘ilm ladunī*), are viewed as the primary purpose of the interpretive endeavour.⁴⁶⁶ A piece of this intention can be noticed in Bursawī’s commentary on ‘Īsā’s soul:

All souls, from the first intellect are in a special row before God, without anyone’s intercession, while those behind are there thanks to the first intellect, as the Prophet Muhammad said: ‘I am the father of souls, and I am from the light of God and believers are from my light.’⁴⁶⁷

He indicates that ‘Īsā is the soul and intellect closest to the soul and intellect of Prophet Muhammad. For this reason, ‘Īsā participated in the bodily ascent (*al-mi’rāj al-jismānī*) to

⁴⁶⁴ Some also interpret *al-kahl* as a period from the late 30s to early 50s and take this verse as another proof of Prophet ‘Īsā’s return. Since he was taken up in his early 30s, he will be the age hinted in verse only when he comes for the second time.

⁴⁶⁵ Bursawi, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 947.

⁴⁶⁶ Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 3.

⁴⁶⁷ Bursawi, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 947. This narration is labelled as specious and its content is rebuked by traditional authorities, like Bukhārī, al-Nasaī, Imam al-Jawzī, Imam al-Dhahabī and others.

heaven, being timely closest to the seal of prophethood. ‘Īsā’s soul manifests the greatest name and abundant Divine presence in the stage of union (*maqām al-jam‘*) without mediacy. It is the manifestation of the comprehensive divine name (*al-ism al-jām‘ al-ilāhī*), the inheritor of the sovereignty (*wilāyah*) and closeness to God (*awliyyah*) and the final messenger directly. *Sharḥ al-fuṣūṣ*⁴⁶⁸ also shared these views, Bursawī reminds.⁴⁶⁹ The experience of union (*al-jam‘*) is a common topic in Sufi literature. *Al-fanā‘* and *al-baqā‘* (annihilation and subsistence) are two sides of the same involvement.⁴⁷⁰ The former implicates the negation of everything personal and worldly, while the latter is the union with God, assimilation into His divine Will. This union usually has two levels: the incomplete union with God, still involving the presence of the self, the stage of union (*maqām al-jam‘*), noted by Bursawī, and the absolute union (*jam‘ al-jam‘*), the highest level, with God and His presence in someone’s life. The narrative is present in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works and terminology, as well as in al-Ghazālī’s, who called it *al-ittihād* (unity) and *al-tawḥīd* (the affirmation of unity).⁴⁷¹ Bursawī’s exegesis above reflects Akbarian influence. He takes Maryam as a model of someone close to God (*waliyy*), being concurrently wrongly accused by some and overstated in respect by others. They are both wrong, he maintains, and it is expected that disrespect of the elite of God attracts misery while exaggerating their praising ends in adversity, Bursawī points out. This is the view of great people, and it is supported in *Al-Ta‘wīlāt al-najmiyyah* as well, he reminds.⁴⁷² Notably, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Akbarian legacy strongly influences Bursawī, so he often does not refer to him, taking Ibn al-‘Arabī’s views as his default thought. At the same time, *Al-ta‘wīlāt al-najmiyya*, the capital work of the Kubrawī school, is his most quoted source. This gives his *tafsīr* a unique taste of esoteric balance between the two approaches.

⁴⁶⁸ *Sharḥ fuṣūs al-hikam* is a commentary on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s famous work by Daud al-Qaysari.

⁴⁶⁹ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 947.

⁴⁷⁰ Ansari, *Sufism and Sharī‘ah*, 31-7.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.; Abul Ela Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥid Din Ibnul Arabi* (Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1964); Muhammad Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Imam Ghazzali* (Aligarh, 1962).

⁴⁷² Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 947; Najmuddin al-Kubrā, *Al Ta‘wīlāt al-najmiyya*, vol. 2, 226-7.

‘Īsā will be, according to the Qur’an, accepted as a prophet by all groups and individuals before the day of final judgement, and everyone will fully comprehend his status and the purpose of his mission:

And there is none of the people of the Scripture but must believe in him before his death.⁴⁷³

Bursawī sees the matter brought to attention in this verse as crucial. According to him, all the Jews and Christians will believe in ‘Īsā before they die. He argues that every Jew and Christian will be asked and reminded before their death of the truth about ‘Īsā and their incorrect beliefs or disbeliefs, but this will be of no use since the time of God’s commandment concerning ‘Īsā and response to it will have been gone by then. Bursawī also underlines the agreement among Islamic scholars on this topic, referring to Ibn ‘Abbās when he was asked about this issue. His response was that everyone, with no exception, would be questioned about their beliefs about ‘Īsā before dying, regardless of his destiny and way of dying.⁴⁷⁴ The correct belief about ‘Īsā and all other prophets, amid strange creeds introduced by some people, is a crucial segment in Islamic theology upon which depends the correctness of one’s faith and fate in this life and the Hereafter. Bursawī duly understands this, stresses it in his comment above and leaves no room for the dilemma. Adding to the discussion, he finds it necessary to note that some interpreted the text so they took the moment of ‘Īsā’s death as the crucial moment highlighted in the verse, understanding that all the people of the Scripture who will be present when ‘Īsā comes down from heaven will believe in him before he naturally dies, in this world, after his second appearance, which is a logical meaning and cannot be rejected as such.⁴⁷⁵

4.4 Eschatological Conversation with God

The conversation between God and ‘Īsā, as covered in Q 5:116-9, takes place in the Hereafter, at an unknown time. Its content and a few defining details lead to the conclusion that it occurs after ‘Īsā’s mission is completed and before the final day. This dialogue sheds light on

⁴⁷³ Qur’an 4:159.

⁴⁷⁴ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 948.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

the nature of ‘Īsā’s mission from the Qur’anic perspective and clarifies all the misunderstandings and misconceptions about him. God is instinctively expected to be ‘Īsā’s collocutor in this incident and the one asking questions in this unique conversation since it is an enquiry into the origins of the claims about God, ‘Īsā and his mother, rather than an enquiry about what was claimed. The readers of the Qur’an have an impression that this dialogue is essential for everyone claiming ‘Īsā, regardless of their religious context, and its importance could be the reason why this clarifying dialogue is highlighted and singled out in the Qur’an from the rest of the events of the Day of Judgement. Bursawī appropriately addresses the phenomenon in *Rūḥ al-bayān*. Although the time and location are mysterious, this fact becomes irrelevant to the reader amid all the focus on the conversation’s explanatory message. Thus, despite all the mystery around it, this dialogue is a well-anticipated eschatological event.

And when God says: ‘O ‘Īsā, son of Maryam! To men, did you say: “Worship me and my mother as two gods besides God?”’ He will say: ‘Glory be to You! It was not for me to say what I had no right to say. Had I said such a thing, You would indeed have known it. You know what is in me though I do not know what is in Yours, indeed, You, only You, are the All-Knower of all that is hidden and unseen.’⁴⁷⁶

Bursawī explains that God would say this to ‘Īsā in the Hereafter, reprimanding disbelievers and confirming before witnesses the natural right to be worshipped as the only God. He will ask ‘Īsā whether he proclaimed himself and his mother to be worshipped besides God since some worshipped them without denying God’s divinity.⁴⁷⁷ This ask is not about ‘Īsā’s denial but a rebuke for wrongdoers. Bursawī clarifies that this dialogue is not about establishing what was said and who said it. It is a fact that some people took ‘Īsā and his mother as their gods besides God, and the purpose of God’s ask is the clarification to people whether this was ‘Īsā’s instruction or whether people did it on their own.⁴⁷⁸ A similar context, taken as

⁴⁷⁶ Qur’an 5:116.

⁴⁷⁷ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 1118.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

a further explanatory remark, which did not escape Bursawī's attention, is also found in the Qur'an:

He will say: Was it you who misled these My slaves, or did they stray from the right path?⁴⁷⁹

Bursawī views that, with this conversation, God wants to clear 'Īsā from the accountability of misguiding people or He sent 'Īsā to guide them, not to mislead them in their faith – they were misguided by someone else. *Al-ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya* maintains the focus on the same argument, elaborating that assertion after the question can be supported by negation as well as by affirmation: “Am I not your Lord?”⁴⁸⁰ meaning I am certainly your Lord, and: “Is there any god with God?”⁴⁸¹ meaning there is no god apart from real God. Therefore, the purpose of God's question to 'Īsā is clarification and statement. He did not instruct people to worship him and his mother beside God, but they did it out of ignorance and exaggerated glorification.⁴⁸² This is the objective of the conversation and the expected conclusion behind it. The statement reprimands wrongdoers, highlighting the importance of the issue. As a supportive remark, Bursawī quotes Prophet Muhammad's words:

Do not praise me the way Christians praise 'Īsā, son of Maryam.⁴⁸³

He also refers to Abu Rawq⁴⁸⁴ in his search for an even more comprehensive and observing explanation, noting the conversation with 'Īsā is with his people since God's way of dealing (*sunna*) is that He will not talk to disbelievers that day, despising them. He will not even look at them – He will speak to 'Īsā instead.⁴⁸⁵ Lastly, Bursawī, in *ishārī* style, brings imaginary words from 'Īsā to God:

...I cannot say anything unless you make it happen and create it with Your word: *Kun* (Be!)
Anything I would say or do- You would certainly have known it! Since You do not know it- I did not do it. Your decree of necessity: absence of obligation cancels what is obligated.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁷⁹ Qur'an 25:18; Bursawi, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 1117.

⁴⁸⁰ Qur'an 7:172.

⁴⁸¹ Qur'an 27:60.

⁴⁸² Najmuddin al-Kubrā, *Al-Ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya*, vol. 2, 324.

⁴⁸³ Bukhārī, *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, book 60, *hadīth* no. 115.

⁴⁸⁴ 'Atiyya ibn al-Hārith Abū Rawq al-Hamdānī (d. ?) was an Islamic scholar from Kufa, tradition specialist, exegete (author of *tafsīr*) and historian.

⁴⁸⁵ Bursawi, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 1117-8.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 1118.

He justifies his digression by taking ‘Īsā as the collocutor who mentions the knowledge God hid from everyone else (*mā fī nafsika*) and *mā fī nafsī*, the wisdom hidden inside every human being, known as an inscribed image. Unlike the knowledge of God, which is accurate, adequate and uninterrupted by brief reflections or illustrations (*ṣuwar*), human knowledge is inaccurate, inadequate and interrupted. All these shortcomings make it inappropriate for acceptance as such since it is only an anticipated knowledge or apparent meaning of something.⁴⁸⁷ Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theory of *tajallī* (self-revelation) influences Bursawī’s insight into the two kinds of knowledge. He also highlights *kun* as the all-present driving and creative force within God’s communication with His servants. Ibn al-‘Arabī taught that part of the Creator’s creation is His determination or tenacity in the objects in the outer world. They are objects of His complete knowledge since He is the one who created them. On the other hand, they are His infinite reflection, created forms of a particular time. Hence, God is the absolute Knower and the known.⁴⁸⁸ Keeping count of the eschatological dialogue in question and referring to the verse:

I never told them anything except what You did command me to say: ‘Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.’ And I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst them, but when You took me up, You were the Watcher over them, and You are a Witness to all things. If You punish them- they are Your slaves, and if You forgive them- verily You, only You, are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.⁴⁸⁹

Bursawī notices that ‘Īsā’s response is direct and promptly negative to what was mentioned beforehand by taking God’s imperative (what You command me to say) as his proof and the only criterion in his prophetic mission. God’s commandment of worship, Bursawī underlines, focuses on good manners (*ḥusn al-adab*) and all that comes with worshipping the only God, the highlighted portion of ‘Īsā’s response. ‘Īsā quotes God’s exact words he had received from Him before (Worship God, my Lord, and your Lord)⁴⁹⁰ as if he passes them on

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Al-Ba’uniyyah, *Sufism and Shari’ah*, 102-6.

⁴⁸⁹ Qur’an 5:117-8.

⁴⁹⁰ Bursawī, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 1118.

to people for the second time to ensure everyone is aware of them. Dedicated to his admonishing style and general Sufi intention to advance people's manners, Bursawī sees *ḥusn al-adab* (praiseworthy manners) as one of the priorities and ultimate goals of God's revelation to humankind. His witnessing for them, 'Īsā sees, according to Bursawī, in his care or watching over them (*murāqabah*) in matters of faith and disbelief, in their response to God's commandments and preventing their disunity and disagreement.⁴⁹¹ The last segment seems particularly important, bearing in mind events and schisms after 'Īsā, and Bursawī rightfully underlines this. Therefore, after being taken up, as if 'Īsā entrusted God with watching over his people since he obeyed the divine commandment and temporarily disappeared from this world. Thus, God is a witness (*shahīd*) and watcher (*al-raqīb*) over them.⁴⁹² Bursawī continues with a retold version of 'Īsā's response to God and he is primarily exoteric, not going into exegetical depths of esoterism, as was probably expected. Comparison with Ibn Kathīr's interpretation and other traditional sources makes this statement more convincing.⁴⁹³ The Qur'anic text goes further:

God will say: This is a Day on which the truthful will profit from their truth: theirs are Gardens under which rivers flow – they shall abide therein forever. God is pleased with them, and they are with Him. That is a great success.⁴⁹⁴

That day, Bursawī asserts, God will affirm 'Īsā and his truthfulness based on his response and reference to God's commandments from before. God will also announce and praise believers with him. It will be announced publicly that the truth is on their side like it was once, but only assumably in worldly life (*dunyā*). Wrongdoers will confess that day their offence of inappropriate belief about 'Īsā, but this will not be of any help to them. Bursawī finds it essential to remind that truthfulness is reflected in three entities: faith (*tawḥīd*), obeying the law (*sharī'ah*) and rulings related to religious practice (*aḥkām*). The truthful are prophets who

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'azīm*, vol. 2, 112-6.

⁴⁹⁴ Qur'an 5:119.

always spoke the truth and their followers who accepted it. The context indicates and Bursawī believes that this dialogue will take place on the Day of Judgement, and God will say these words after ‘Īsā’s candid and comprehensive response to Him.⁴⁹⁵

Bursawī is determined, comfortable and pleased to comment in his advisory style on the verses from *sūra* al-Mā’ida covering the eschatological conversation between God and Prophet ‘Īsā. For this purpose, he does not hesitate to “engage” ‘Īsā in imaginary and *ishārī* explanations offered to God, not wandering off from the exoteric definitions. He does it attractively, as always. In his polemics, he unconditionally protects Islamic *tawhīd* and ‘Īsā’s prophetic status described by the Qur’an. By doing this, he maintains the Sufi legacy of being open and welcoming to anyone claiming and loving Prophet ‘Īsā.

4.5 Conclusion

Bursawī’s sources in *Rūḥ al-bayān* are often not quoted and some are not considered reliable, attracting fierce critique by traditional scholarly circles. Like other exegetes, he extensively uses *isrāīliyyāt* in his comments. His *tafsīr* is a compendium of various interpretive traditions and an invaluable source of reports on faith, prophets, ethics, history and life. As outlined in his introduction, Bursawī cites and collects opinions of earlier Sufi scholars. The main argument of this chapter is that in his comments about ‘Īsā’s prophethood and mission, he is Akbarian and Kubrawī, while maintaining a traditional orientation in his interpretations of Islamic prophethood and its theological implications – after studying the case of Prophet ‘Īsā through his work. To this view, his interpretational balance is outstanding: Bursawī is experienced as Akbarian by default with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ideas present in his comments, so much so that he does not refer to him directly – Ibn al-‘Arabī’s views and expressions are “infused” in his exegesis.⁴⁹⁶ This does not mean he periodically does not depart from the ideas and legacy of *al-Shaikh al-Akbar* in his comments, as can be seen in his (lack of) narrative about *insān*

⁴⁹⁵ Bursawi, *Rūḥ al Bayān*, vol. 2, 1119.

⁴⁹⁶ Ates, *Ishari Tefsir Okulu*, 242-4.

kāmil and his comparison to Prophet ‘Īsā from the previous chapter. This chapter indirectly highlights a few examples of these “disagreements.”

Furthermore, Bursawī often refers to al-Kāshānī’s *Ta’wīlāt*, a landmark of Akbarian exegesis, which is still today mistakenly attributed by many to Ibn al-‘Arabī. On the other hand, his frequent reference to *Al-Ta’wīlāt al-najmiyya*, the most prominent Kubrawī *tafsīr* and one of the primary sources of their inspiration, brings an outstanding balance to Bursawī’s Akbarian-Kubrawī presentation in *Rūḥ al-bayān*. In both cases, he uses the sources by directly quoting their authors or supporting his views with their writings. He let the two corpora tribute each other in his work and his frequent fusion of the two sources in his interpretations show their similarities. Bursawī, who was under a strong influence by Ibn al-‘Arabī’s legacy and his commentaries on the verses about ‘Īsā in which he frequently quotes Kubrawī’s *al-Ta’wīlāt al-najmiyya*, show a phenomenon on which no major study has been done in the past and something that begins to attract academic scrutiny just recently: Ibn al-‘Arabī’s influence on Kubrawīs, their adoption of his ideas and their efforts in the dissemination of his legacy. Recent steps of Seyyed Shahabeddin Mesbahi in this field are notable and praiseworthy.⁴⁹⁷

Bursawī uses his comments about ‘Īsā to properly address and explain Sufī terms, like *karāmat*, *awliyā’*, *ḥaqīqa*, *wilāyah*, *walāyah* and *khilāfa*. Referring to previous exegetes and authorities (al-Tustarī, al-Sulamī, Ibn al-‘Arabī, al-Qūnawī, al-Qushayrī and al-Kāshānī) in his interpretations, he offers profound insights into the Sufī understanding of some essential exegetical subjects. Also, when the verse had juridical weight, the author spared no room to analyse it and offer clarification. Quite often, going a step further, he provides more profound thought, giving the audience a chance to ponder over and achieve more of the nearness to God, fulfilling the didactic goals of his work.

Bursawī’s *tafsīr* demonstrates the explanatory balance throughout its text: one between the exoteric description and the esoteric interpretation, known as *tatbīq*, something the Ottoman

⁴⁹⁷ See Seyyed Shahabeddin Mesbahi, *Ibn al-‘Arabī and Kubrawīs* (Fons Vitae, 2019).

tafsīr takes pride in and is brilliantly demonstrated by *Rūḥ al-bayān* in comments about Prophet ‘Īsā. Aiming to present traditional views on prophethood, Bursawī refers to Ibn Munabbih, al-Wāḥidī, al-Suyūṭī, al-Nawawī and others as well. Interpreting the relevant verses, Bursawī is originally exoteric and seemingly determined to reflect clear Islamic, Qur’an-based theological implications related to ‘Īsā and prophethood in Islam. His digressions are storytelling journeys, widely typical for him, taking ‘Īsā as an exemplar of submission to God, an embodiment of gratitude and authentic proof of His guidance. Interestingly, Bursawī often omits to present his comments, and after referring to Akbarian and Kubrawī authorities, as part of his esoteric endeavour, almost in a teasing manner, leaves the reader to choose if they want a traditional *tafsīr* with Sufī addition or the Sufī *tafsīr* no different to traditional. This methodology makes *Rūḥ al-bayān* outstanding. Worth noting is that Bursawī is equally dedicated to his storytelling digressions and esoteric interpretation in his comments on verses about ‘Īsā’s prophetic mission like he is in comments on ‘Īsā’s miracles. Saving no space, he sheds light on the Islamic concept of *rūḥ* and *kalimah*, so crucial in ‘Īsā’s case, so the impression is that he cares profoundly that readers of his *tafsīr* are familiar with these concepts and grasp them thoroughly.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Recent times have recorded increased interest in Islamic exegetical literature and all genres of *tafsīr* due to their significant role in Islamic intellectual tradition and history. The primary purpose of exegesis (*tafsīr*) in Islamic scholarly tradition is to prepare the ground by presenting the exposition and enabling readers to profoundly understand God's word. For Muslims, this means the appropriate application of Revelation in daily life, and for non-Muslims, the introduction to the message of the Qur'an as understood by Muslims. Sufi allusive exegesis (*ishārī tafsīr*) is credited with adding a mystical, esoteric touch from a personal experience in the search for inner or hidden meanings along with a widespread exoteric interpretation of the Qur'anic text. This genre of *tafsīr*, like all others, went through historical phases of development and, by reviewing its current state through available literature and sources, it can be concluded that it has so much more to offer than what has been academically scrutinised.

The Ottoman Empire (13th to 20th centuries) was the global force for centuries and had a significant impact on various Islamic sciences: in a formal, scholarly fashion and informally, through practising Sufism in everyday life by ordinary people. Sufi exegesis experienced its maturity in this period, precisely in its second half, with Abū Su'ūd al-'Imādī and Ismail Haqqi Bursawī as the most significant and prolific Ottoman exegetes. Bursawī, of the Jalwati (Celveti) Sufi order, was a versatile and unique Islamic scholar who contributed to the science of *tafsīr* and Islamic studies in general. His *Rūḥ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Spirit of Exposition in the Exegesis of the Qur'an) is one of the most comprehensive esoteric exegeses of the Qur'an, successfully comprising existing interpretational traditions (*tawfīq*) as well as exoteric-esoteric balance (*taḥbīq*) in its commentaries. Bursawī explored and referred to various sources while composing his exegesis, ending up with a magnificent exegetical compendium and interpretational treasure. He extensively referred to previous Sufi exegetes, like al-Tustarī, al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī, Al-Kāshānī, al-Ghazālī, Ibn al-'Arabī and al-Qūnawī, as well as other

traditional scholars such as Ibn Munabbih, al-Wāḥidī, al-Nawawī and al-Suyūfī, keeping the promise from the introduction of his work to present Sufī and traditional interpretations. Moreover, Persian poets Sa‘dī, Rūmī (d. 1273) and Jāmī are frequently quoted and referred to in *Rūḥ al-bayān*. Two of the most cited and influential works in Bursawī’s commentary are Ibn al-‘Arabī’s, the great Sufī scholar and author, embodied in the Akbarian school of thought, and Kubrawī school, mainly sourced from *Al-ta’wīlāt al-najmiyya*. This *tafsīr* remains principally unexplored, at least for English-speaking readers, waiting for due affirmation in academic circles.

‘Īsā’s compelling portrayal in the Qur’an and Bursawī’s comprehensive exegetical approach, with his storytelling style, were crucial in selecting the topic for this thesis, with Bursawī’s conceptualisation of prophethood in Islam; traditional/Sufī or exoteric/esoteric balance; Akbarian/Kubrawī ratio in his *tafsīr*; Ibn al-‘Arabī’s influence on the author (particularly *insān kāmil* concept); and Bursawī’s original contributions in mind, as our primary concerns or research questions. This study examined Bursawī’s commentaries in *Rūḥ al-bayān* on ‘Īsā’s mother Maryam; his miracles and prophetic performance; his return or descent (chapter three); and spiritual-theological interpretations of ‘Īsā’s mission and his perception and conceptualisation of the prophethood in Islam (chapter four). Consequently, I have concluded Bursawī is, although Akbarian by default, equally Kubrawī. He does not neglect and often preferred a traditional exegetical legacy, which presents, beside esoteric intentions, a primary understanding of the Qur’anic text and what Bursawī wanted the readers of his *tafsīr* to remember.

When it comes to his interpretive presentation of prophethood, the impression is that Bursawī’s primary concern is clarification of the role of all prophets in Islam, the concept and purpose, principles and objectives by which their prophetic missions were governed. This is crucial to be understood in the context of ‘Īsā or Jesus, whose monumental appearance in Islam and Christianity takes an important place in the eyes of their followers. Bursawī keeps an

unconditional Islamic perception of God's oneness (*tawḥīd*) and rebukes Christian beliefs of Jesus' divine origin and his participation in the Trinity. Yet, being a dedicated Sufi and recognising one in 'Īsā, honouring God's Word and Spirit from Him, he takes Prophet 'Īsā as the most important commonality between Christianity and Islam mentioned in the Qur'an. This is because Sufis have always admired Jesus and his path and saw him as a Sufi teacher sent by God through His Word and an embodiment of His mercy. Taken as a paradigm of love and human perfection, 'Īsā illustrates the most elevated form of the human soul towards *fanā'* and *baqā'* (annihilation and subsistence). Therefore, he can be seen as "Sufi Jesus" or an agent in overcoming differences between Islam and Christianity.

Ibn al-'Arabī's influence on Bursawī and his work is beyond this discussion. Ibn al-'Arabī claimed 'Īsā as his first master and someone who showed him the way to God. This is important to consider when discussing al-Shaikh al-Akbar's influence on Bursawī's commentaries on 'Īsā. Of particular significance is the legacy of the perfect human being (*insān kāmil*), bearing in mind how much room in his writings Ibn al-'Arabī dedicated to this theory, along with the oneness of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and God's names and attributes (*asmā' wa ṣifāt*). The only person who achieved the quality of *insān kāmil* was Prophet Muhammad, while other prophets and the elite reached it according to their nearness to God. Jesus is among the few prophets Sufis refer to as the perfect human being. Surprisingly, Bursawī barely referred to *insān kāmil* in his comment about Prophet 'Īsā, which could be seen as an exegetical departure from Ibn al-'Arabī's legacy in this case. This is even more surprising, remembering the frequent presence of *insān kāmil* in the rest of Bursawī's *tafsīr*. But these interpretational disagreements with *al-Shaikh al-Akbar* are sporadically present in *Rūḥ al-bayān*, concerning other verses and topics in the Qur'an, which could be a strong invitation for further studies. It seems Bursawī prioritised his comments about 'Īsā, embellished with his likeable storytelling style, counselling and advice (*wa'z wa naṣīhat*) as his main goal and the most important benefits of the Qur'anic story about this prophet. It would not be inappropriate to conclude that he did not want to openly

show his Akbarian affiliation to the public since he found his preaching style, rooted in tradition, as more suitable for ordinary people.

As for Bursawī's original contributions in his *tafsīr*, apart from his storytelling digressions, his thoroughness in linguistical explanations of the Qur'anic expressions, less known to the broader readers' corpus, as well as his inclusiveness of almost all available interpretational views, while he perfectly maintained the exegetical balance between exoteric and esoteric, offering to the reader to choose their preference – all can be considered Bursawī's original contributions and outstanding traits in *Rūḥ al-bayān*. While engaging his storytelling method, serving the didactic nature of his exegesis, Bursawī did not hesitate to quote narrations (*ḥadīth*) without explaining their originality or authenticity, citing weak, even fabricated ones. Traditional experts of past and present criticised him for this. What could be argued regarding this is that he did not see it essential to refer to their sources in his *tafsīr* since they commonly circulated among scholars back then and were considered authentic. The possibility that Bursawī was unaware of the status of these narrations, or he knew they were unauthentic but still used them, is hardly tenable.

This research and its findings are significant for three main reasons:

1. They make some of Bursawī's original exegetical endeavours accessible in English.
2. They offer an insight into allusive (*ishārī*) interpretation of the Qur'anic verses about 'Īsā in *Rūḥ al-bayān*, at the same time comparing it with other sources of traditional and Sufi background.
3. They provide some valuable material for further studies in exegetical research related to the Ottoman period.

Bursawī's combined exoteric/esoteric interpretation of 'Īsā in the Qur'an, within the broader Islamic hermeneutical context, and the ground this interpretation provides for interfaith dialogue with Christian tradition, in which this prophet occupies a unique position, presents the relevance of this work. For Muslims and Christians, 'Īsā or Jesus is a role model and perfect

human purity, praised and loved by God and guided by Him. Both traditions, in their ways, believe in his eschatological role, which will be accomplished after he returns to earth before the end of time. It is a fact that many Christians are not familiar with the Qur'anic picture of Jesus, particularly with the one viewed by Sufis, so this effort in presenting Bursawī's share of exegetical work related to this prophet can have an important clarifying implication.

Bursawī is generally unexplored as an author of *tafsīr* among English-speaking audiences. *Rūḥ al-bayān* has been translated into Turkish and Urdu, and a massive work of translating it into English is an academic necessity still waiting realisation. This was the primary limitation of this research and the methodology outlined in the introduction. Furthermore, while there are a few exceptions, relatively brief descriptions of Bursawī's work in his *tafsīr* in the English language, there is no research of this type and with similar concerns, as far as I could establish. The praiseworthy efforts of Merve Tabur in her master's thesis⁴⁹⁸ and Kameliya Atanasova in her PhD dissertation⁴⁹⁹ are more concerned with Bursawī's leading role in the Jalwatī Sufi order, his religious authority engaged in politics and his concerns for the moral decay of the society, rather than as an author of *tafsīr*. Halil Şimşek made a good analysis of Abu Su'ūd's *tafsīr*, *Irshād*, in his PhD dissertation.⁵⁰⁰ The work focused on arguably the most outstanding Islamic scholar in the Ottoman Empire and his work, and not with Bursawī. Therefore, this study fills the gap to some extent with its content and approach, dealing with Bursawī's exegetical efforts in *Rūḥ al-bayān*, dedicated to a particular thematic unit.

Recommendations for future research may include studies focusing on analysis of Bursawī's disagreements or departures from Ibn al-'Arabī's views through different themes covered in *Rūḥ al-bayān*; Bursawī's interpretation of verses about five great prophets (*ul al-'azm*) as covered in the Qur'an; selection of topics from his *tafsīr* where Bursawī is dominantly esoteric and those where he prefers to remain exoteric in his commentaries; and storytelling as

⁴⁹⁸ Merve Tabur, "Ismail Hakki Bursevi and the Politics of Balance (Ismail Hakki Bursevi ve Itidal Siyaseti)" (Master's diss., Bogazici University, 2011).

⁴⁹⁹ Atanasova, "The Sufi as the Axis of the World."

⁵⁰⁰ Şimşek, "The Missing Link."

a tool of counselling in Islamic tradition. These are only a few of many selections for which this work can be a modest initiation.

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