



An Analysis of Sırrı Pasha's Translation of Sharḥ al-‘Aqā'id with a Focus on the Issue of Free Will

Sırrı Paşa'nın Şerhu'l-Akâid Tercümesi'nin Cüz'î İrâde Meselesi Örneğinde Analizi

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Giridi (the Cretan) Sirri Pasha's (1844-1895) translation of *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya* by al-Taftāzāni (d.792/1390). The paper begins with contextualizing this translation by alluding to the background of Sirri Pasha and his other works. I particularly pay attention to the translator's prolegomenon which reflects his conception of *kalām*. Then the paper shows how a translation expands this classical Mātūrīdite *kalām* text for the nineteenth century Ottoman readers, by including all different opinions from other commentaries and glosses on *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id*. Collection of views in the translation enables us to compare all different positions. Sirri Pasha did not only translate the text and quoted other interpretations but put forward his own comments. Thus, I call it "commentarial translation". This study also analyzes the views on the concept of human free will, which was regarded as the main conflict between Mātūrīdī and Ash'arī schools. Sirri and his sources hold fast to the Mātūrīdī position in their discussion of the particular free will (*al-irāda al-juz'iyya*).

Keywords: Kalām, Mātūrīdī kalam, Sirri Pasha, *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id*, Translation, Free will.

Öz

Bu makalede Giritli Sırrı Paşa'nın (1844-1895) *Şerhu'l-Akâid Tercümesi* analiz edilmektedir. Makalede öncelikle Sırrı Paşa'nın entelektüel arka planı ve diğer eserlerine değinilerek tercüme tarihsel bağlamına yerleştirmeye çalışıldı. Özellikle mütercim kelâm tasavvurunu yansıtan mukaddime kısmına dikkat çekildi. Mâtürîdî kelâmına dair klasik bir metnin on dokuzuncu yüzyıl Osmanlı okuyucusu için *Şerhu'l-Akâid*'in diğer şerh ve haşiyelerindeki farklı yorumları içerecek şekilde tercümenin nasıl genişlediği gösterildi. Tercümede farklı görüşlerin bir araya toplanması, aynı mesele karşısında farklı yaklaşımların birbirleriyle karşılaştırılabilmesini sağlamaktadır. Sırrı Paşa sadece metni tercüme edip diğer yorumları nakletmekle kalmamış, kendi yorumlarını da ortaya koymuştur. Bu nedenle bu tercüme "yorumlu tercüme" olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Örnek olarak bu çalışma Mâtürîdî ve Eş'arî ekolleri arasındaki temel ihtilaflardan biri olarak görülen *irâde-i cüz'iyye* kavramı üzerine odaklanmaktadır. Sırrı Paşa ve faydalandığı kaynaklardan Cevdet Paşa bu meselede Mâtürîdî görüşü benimsemişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kelâm, Mâtürîdî kelâmı, Sırrı Paşa, *Şerhu'l-Akâid*, Tercüme, Cüz'î irâde.

Introduction*

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries after Tanzimat period there was an intensive translation activity. Many scientific and philosophical texts were translated from French and Arabic into Ottoman Turkish. This paper looks at the translation of a *kalām* text in nineteenth century. However, before getting into the topic, let me note some important studies on Ottoman Turkish translations. A number of scholars including Saliha Paker, Zehra Toska, Berrin Aksoy, Cemal Demircioğlu and Sadık Yazar have made important contributions to the field of Ottoman translation studies.¹ They have pointed out that the boundary between translation and original is not clear in the Ottoman period translations. They have also shown that there were different forms of translation practices. Hence, some of them such as Paker and Demircioğlu dealt with the concept of *terceme* (translation) as a one way of producing original work (*te'lif eser*). Since

* A previous version of this paper was presented on 29 October 2017 in Jordan at a conference entitled "Understanding Maturidi Kalam – Legacy, Present & Future Challenges". I would like to thank the editor and the reviewers for their suggestions which were very useful for revising the paper.

¹ Saliha Paker, "Telif, Tercüme ve Özgünlük Meselesi", *Metnin Halleri: Osmanlı'da Telif, Tercüme ve Şerh Eski Türk Edebiyatı Çalışmaları IX*, ed. Hatice Aynur et al. (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2014), 36-71; Sadık Yazar, "Bakir Bir Araştırma Sahası Olarak Osmanlı Tercüme Geleneği", *Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi* 60/1 (2020), 153-178; Berrin Aksoy, "Translation Activities in the Ottoman Empire", *Meta: Journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal* 50/3 (2005), 949-956.

translating had a meaning of interpreting in the Ottoman translations.² That is because, transferring (*naql*) textual products occurs through translations, adaptations, additions, or omissions. According to Toska, we should not evaluate the original text and its translation as opposed to each other.³ Their studies are mostly on the literary translations, however there is a gap in theological translations. Following their perspective, in this study I look at a case of a theological translation activity during the late Ottoman Empire.

There is an increase in translation of theological works in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Earlier translations were usually brief creedal texts beginning from the 16th century. Larger theological texts were being translated into Turkish during 18th and 19th centuries. These are the translations of *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafiyya* by Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id al-‘Adudiyya* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī, *al-Fiḥ al-akbar* by Abū Ḥanīfa, *Tawālī‘ al-Anwār* by Qādī al-Baydāwī, *‘Aqā’id* of al-Tahāwī, *Qasīdat Bad’ al-Amālī* by Sirāj al-Dīn al-Ūshī and *al-Qasīda al-Nūniyya* by Hızır Bey.⁴ As a case study, I look at the translation of *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafiyya* (The Commentary on the Creed of al-Nasafī), which is one of the most important source texts of Māturīdism. I chose the translation of Sirrī Pasha, as it is representative of a combining kind of translating.

The creed was written by Najm al-Dīn Omar al-Nasafī al-Samarqandī (d. 537/1142), a twelfth century Māturīdī theologian and a Hanafī jurist. al-Nasafī’s *Aqā’id* was so essential that it was also translated by the Orientalists in the eighteenth century. In 1788 its translation to French was published, in 1792 to German, in 1903 to English. Nasafī’s text was among the Ottoman madrasa curricula and it was very suitable for memorization. It was titled as *al-‘Aqā’id*, which means the creed of Islam. It was studied and taught in advanced level madrasas with its most prevalent commentary, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id*, was authored by al-Taftāzānī (d.793/1390), who was an Ash‘arī scholar. This commentary was one of the highly esteemed books among the Ottoman ulama. Throughout centuries many glosses were written upon it until modern times.

The Ottoman Turkish translation of the *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id* is made by Selim Sirrī Pasha Girīdī (the Cretan) (1844-1895). Sirrī Pasha consulted the major glosses of this commentary including that of glosses of al-Khayālī (d. 875/1470[?]), Isām al-Dīn Isfarāyīnī (d. 945/1538), Ramazan Efendi (d. 979/1571), Siyālkūtī (d. 1067/1657) and Kefevī (d. 1168/1754). Sirrī Pasha also benefited from contemporary writings such as Ahmed Cevdet Pasha’s (d. 1895) translation of Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddima*.⁵ It appears that during the nineteenth century there was an increasing interest

² Cemal Demircioğlu, “Osmanlı Çeviri Tarihi Araştırmaları Açısından ‘Terceme’ ve ‘Çeviri’ Kavramlarını Yeniden Düşünmek”, *Journal of Turkish Studies (Türklük Bilgisi Araştırmaları)* 33/1 (2009), 159-177; Saliha Paker, “On the poetic practices of ‘a singularly uninventive people’ and the anxiety of imitation”, *Tradition, Tension and Translation in Turkey*, ed. Ş. Tahir Gürçağlar et al. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2015), 27-52.

³ Zehra Toska, “Evaluative Approaches to Translated Ottoman Turkish Literature in Future Research”, *Translations: (Re)shaping of Literature and Culture*, ed. Saliha Paker (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi, 2002), 58-76.

⁴ See Serbestzade Ahmed Hamdi, *İlm-i Kelamdan Akāid-i Adudiyye Şerhi Celal Tercümesi* (Trabzon: Serasi Matbaası, 1311 [1893]); Müstakimzâde Süleyman Sâdeddin, *Fıkh-ı Ekber Tercümesi* (İstanbul: İkdām Matbaası, 1314 [1896]); Hafız Refi, *Kaside-i Emālī Tercümesi* (İstanbul: Mahmud Bey Matbaası, 1302 [1884]); İsmâil Müfîd Efendi, *Kaside-i Nûniyye Şerh ve Tercüme-i Manzûmesi* (İstanbul: Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, H. Hüsnü Paşa, 892.7); Üsküp Kadısı Mustafa Sıdkı, *Tavālī‘ Tercümesi* (İstanbul: Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Giresun, 160).

⁵ Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Tercüme-i Mukaddime-i İbn Haldûn* (İstanbul: Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2015).

toward these kinds of translations outside madrasa circles, as the number of educated people was rising thanks to the newly established schools and colleges.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed many changes when this commentary was translated. Many scholars such as Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905) in Egypt attempted to revitalize *kalām* thought. It seems that Sirrî Pasha did not aim to change the traditional views, but he intervenes and stresses on certain problems, which illustrate how an Ottoman scholar received and transmitted the classical *kalām* thought in this reform period. There was an emphasis on Hanafî-Māturîdî tradition in the late Ottoman history. Māturîdî thought, especially the idea of human free will and power to act, drew interest from the larger Sunnî tradition in the modern *kalām* thought. Also, Sirrî Pasha's writing may have been influenced by his political environment where the non-Muslim groups began challenging or rising against Ottoman rule as they were receiving protection and support from European nationalism. Subsequently, this led to many religious conflicts and wars in Ottoman territory. Thus, all these intellectual, social, and political changes were making their way into Sirrî Pasha's writings in general and his comments in this translation in particular.

1. Sirrî Pasha: An Ottoman Scholar-Bureaucrat

Selim Sirrî Pasha was an Ottoman bureaucrat, a poet, and also a scholar of *tafsîr* and *kalām*. He was born in the town of Heraklion (Kandiye) in the island of Crete in 1844. We should recall that the Cretan Revolt took place in between 1866-69 against Ottoman rule. Therefore, it is likely that Sirrî himself grew amidst tensions between Muslims and Christians living on the island. After completing his primary education in Crete, Sirrî served as a clerk (*kâtip*) in various Ottoman provinces. In 1872 he was appointed to the chief secretary (*mektupçu*) of Tuna province. He was a successful statesman. At the end of his career, he became the governor of Baghdād and Diyarbakir. Sirrî Pasha died in 1895 in Istanbul where he was receiving treatment for a heart disease.⁶

Since Sirrî Pasha had a good grasp of Arabic and Persian, he translated from both languages into Turkish. Firstly, he composed commentarial translation of *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʾid* of al-Taftāzānî and then published its summary entitled *Naḳdū'l-kelām fî ʿaḳāʾidi'l-İslām* in 1884. In this field he also wrote on the views about seeing God in paradise, titled *Rü'yetü'l-Bârî hakkında risâle* (Treatise on the Beatific Vision of Creator). His book *ʿĀrāu'l-Milel* (Views of the Nations) is a compilation about the history of theological sects. Also, in his treatise titled *Rûh Risâlesi*, Sirrî describes the ideas of the Muslim thinkers on the spirit. Another book he penned is entitled *Nûru'l-Hüdâ li-men İstehdâ* (the light of guidance for the one who seeks the guidance), which was published in Diyarbakir. It is about the falsifying Christian belief in trinity and proving alteration (*tahrîf*) of the Bible. Besides, Sirrî wrote an exegesis of several chapters of the Quran and his main source was Fakr al-Din al-Râzî's *Tafsîr al-Kabîr*. The most important tafsir book he authored was *Aḥsenü'l-Ḳaşaş* (The Best of

⁶ Cemal Kurnaz, "Sirrî Paşa", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2009), 37/127-128.

Tales), an exegesis of the surah Yūsuf.⁷ In his tafsīr works he uses mostly method of rational interpretation (*dirāya*) rather than transmitting traditions (*riwāya*).⁸

Ottoman ulama usually studied and composed texts in the commentary/gloss (*sharḥ /hāshiya*) style. Among the commentaries that were highly esteemed in the Ottoman Empire we can mention the *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id* of al-Taftāzānī, which was written in 1367. It was taught in the madrasas and glossed upon by many scholars until modern times.⁹ The glosses also were received well. Among them the gloss of Ahmed b. Musa (d. 1481), known as Khayālī, gained notoriety and became a madrasa textbook in its own right. Sirrī Pasha undertook translation of *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id* while working in the Vilayet of the Danube (Tuna). Initial parts of the translation were published in 1875 (1292 AH) in Ruse (Ruşçuk), the capital of Danube. The last part was published in Trabzon in 1884, because the printing press was closed in Ruse. This translation of Sirrī Pasha includes glosses from Khayālī and other prominent glossators of *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id*. Collection of views in the translation enables us to compare all different positions on various theological issues. For such an example, we will look at the section on free will. However, first we will provide an overview of Sirrī’s reason for translation and his method and then look at the prolegomenon which is his own composition.

2. Sirrī’s Reason for Translation and His Method

Ottoman translators usually added an introduction and a conclusion to the source text. In these additional sections, we can find the reason for composing (*sebeb-i te’lif*) a text. Sirrī Pasha adds his purpose of translation in his foreword (*temhîd*) by stating that the Arabic text is difficult for the majority to benefit from. Besides, it is worth to translate a recognized work rather than floundering to write an original work.¹⁰ However, it seems that he did something more than translating, he compiled from many sources and constructed a new text. His lengthy introduction is his own composition, and four volumes of translation is around 800 pages. Thus, his main reason for translating a theological text is the audience who are the new intellectual elite and not necessarily proficient in Arabic.

Sirrī states his method of translation in the beginning. He wanted to translate the text word-by-word, but he was obliged to summarize some discussions. As is well-known, there are two main methods of translation: word for word and sense for sense. Sirrī summarizes some discussions marking them in the headlines of the subject that it is a summary (*telhîş*). Sirrī also notes other sources he used in order to discern them from the main text under translation.¹¹ This act of summarizing is also a rewriting of the text. It is actually a kind of commenting and glossing. In fact, his writing style is similar to other glosses. Sirrī adds his own views under the title headings such as 'for the translator' (*li'l-mütercim*), additional note (*lâhiqa*), benefit (*fâ’ide*), answer (*cevâb*).

⁷ Kurnaz, "Sırrı Paşa", 37/128; Bursalı Mehmed Tahir, *Osmanlı Müellifleri*, ed. Fikri Yavuz - İsmail Özen (İstanbul: Meral Yayınevi, 1972), 2/368-369.

⁸ Ekrem Gülşen, "19. Yüzyılda Bir Osmanlı Valisi: Giritli Sırrı Paşa ve Tefsir Anlayışı", *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 12/22 (2010), 186.

⁹ Sırrı Paşa, "Mukaddime", *Şerh-i Akâid Tercümesi* (Ruscuk: Tuna Vilayet-i Celilesi Matbaası, 1875), 4.

¹⁰ Sırrı, "Mukaddime", 3.

¹¹ Sırrı, "Mukaddime", 4-5.

He also puts down a compact conclusion (*netīce*) after bringing together different interpretations. He sometimes expresses his views in the footnotes, where at other times he gives definitions of basic concepts related to the topic under discussion.

In some footnotes Sirri Pasha poses a presumed question (*suâl-i muḳadder*) to the author. For example, according to Taftāzānī's commentary, Nasafī reminds that it is suitable to begin the book with the topic of knowledge, which is an introductory subject of kalām books. Sirri points out that this comment was an answer to a presumed question which was raised as to why the author did not start the text with the most important aim of kalam, i.e., the existence of Creator and His unity, but rather preferred beginning with the problem of created beings (*muḥdathāt*), i.e., the world (*kā'ināt*) and its states [substances (*a'yān*) and accidents (*a'rāz*)]. Reminding these issues leads to knowing the essence and attributes of the Creator. Here Sirri Pasha adds that philosophers discuss natural body in physics since it is a part of the world too. But their vision is different from theologians because they study natural body regarding whether it is moved or unmoved. However, theologians study it in so far it indicates existence and attributes of the Creator.¹²

Sirri occasionally explains the topic in a dialogue style. For example, in the subject of universals and particulars, he writes a dialogue between a philosopher and a pupil (*shākird*) discussing if Allah knows the particulars (*juz'iyāt*)¹³ and then another dialogue between a virtuous person (*fāzil*) and a theologian on the same topic.¹⁴ This method of dialogue makes it easier to learn and understand the theological problems. From these translation strategies, it can be said that Sirri Pasha did not only translate the text and quoted other interpretations but put forward his own comments which makes it a mix of literal and free translation. This shows how the translator intervenes in the text and it can also be seen as an interpretation activity. Thus, I call it "commentarial translation".

3. The Sources of Sirri's Prolegomenon (*Muḳaddime*)

Sirri composed a lengthy introduction for the translation. Although this is Sirri's own composition, it does quote many passages from other classical books such as *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* of Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjānī (d. 1413), *Muḳaddima* of Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), and *Kashf al-Zunūn* of Kātib Chelebi (d. 1657). Relying on these sources, the introduction provides, in a way, a history of thought. It begins with the emergence of the divergences (*ikhtilāfāt*), after the Prophet Muhammad died, between his companions. This section is mostly based on the appendix of *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* of al-Jurjānī, which is another famous book taught in the madrasas. Sirri instead introduces his translation with this exposition of kalām's historical background.

In the appendix of *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, al-Jurjānī reports from al-Āmidī saying that when the Prophet died all Muslims were in one creed and one way except hypocrites. He mentions divergence among the Muslims in five issues: first, whether the Prophet was conscious in deathbed when he wanted a paper; second, whether Usama should be the commander of an army as the Prophet ordered; third, whether the Prophet was really dead or still alive; fourth, where to bury him, and

¹² Sirri, *Şerh-i Akāid Tercümesi* (Ruscuk: Tuna Vilayet-i Celilesi Matbaası, 1875), 1/9.

¹³ Sirri, *Şerh-i Akāid Tercümesi*, 1/310-314.

¹⁴ Sirri, *Şerh-i Akāid Tercümesi*, 1/314-316.

finally who would be the caliph.¹⁵ Then, the misguided seven big sects are elaborately explained with their subgroups. The main sects are respectively Mu'tazila, Shi'a, Khawārij, Murji'ah, Najjāriyya, Jabriyya, and Mushabbiha. The eighth group is the one which will be saved (*Nājiyya*) in the hereafter. The main source for this section is *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif, Muqaddima* of Ibn Khaldun together with its translation by Cevdet Pasha (d. 1895) and occasionally Gelenbevî's (d. 1791) gloss on *Jalāl*. Besides classical books, Sırrî quotes from a contemporary Ottoman scholar Nüzhet Efendi's (d. 1889) treatise called *Kırmızı Bayrak* (Red Flag) while he is explaining where the name of Qarmatians derived from and the origins of Hasan Sabbah.¹⁶

After Islamic sects Sırrî goes on to enumerate philosophical groups (*mezāhib-i felāsife*) and other religions. This topic is lacking in *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*. Therefore, Sırrî uses other trustworthy sources. These are mostly taken from Cevdet Pasha's translation of the *Muqaddima*'s sixth chapter, Molla Lutfi's *Gloss*, Nev'î Efendi's (d. 1599) *Netāyicü'l-Fünūn*,¹⁷ a book on the classification of sciences, Kâtib Chelebi's two books, i.e., *Kashf al-Zunūn* and *Jihan-numa (Cihānnumâ)*, Ali Suāvî's *Târih-i Efkâr*, which is a series of articles that Suāvî wrote in his newspaper *Ulūm Gazetesi* (1869-1870), and *Shamsiyya*, a logic handbook by al-Qazwîni al-Kâtibî (d. 1276), and its commentaries.

Sırrî's discussion of various religions includes Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity. He gives a relatively longer space to Christianity by summarizing *Tuḥfetü'l-erîb fî'r-red 'alâ ehli's-şalîb* of Abdullah al-Tarjumān (d. 1429) who was a convert from Spain. Sırrî introduces four gospels namely Matta, Luka, Markos, and Yuhanna, and talks about twelve apostles of Jesus.¹⁸ Quoting Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima* at length, Sırrî elucidates the history of Christianity further by focusing on the Nestorians.¹⁹ At the end, Sırrî Pasha directs the reader who wants to learn details of Christianity by referring to *Izhār al-ḥaqq* written in 1861 by Raḥmat Allāh al-Hindî al-Kayrānawî (d. 1891), an Indian scholar. It is a refutation of trinity. He points out that "studying this book is a necessity for Muslims" (*ehl-i İslām için mütâlaası vâcib*).²⁰ It is unusual to encounter so much information about Christianity in a *kalām* book. However, as I have suggested, this could be related to the environment in which Sırrî Pasha grew and served as an Ottoman statesman, i.e., Crete and Balkans, which were witnessing rise of nationalism that was tied to religious difference. In a way, Sırrî's translation embodies the impact of nationalist movements on a theology book.

Sırrî Pasha was not merely translating the main text and quoting others to explicate the text. He intervenes where he does not agree with the author. For instance, he criticizes Cevdet Pasha's account of the ancient Greek philosophy. Sırrî asserts that Cevdet seems to merge the philosophies of Anaxagoras and Anaximenes under the name of Anaxagoras.²¹ Another example is about the meaning of sophist, which Sırrî defines as owner of the wisdom, but then notes that it accrued a negative meaning later on. However, in *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* sophist (*sūfastâ*) is explained

¹⁵ Sırrî, "Mukaddime", 5-10.

¹⁶ Sırrî, "Mukaddime", 26, 31.

¹⁷ Sırrî, "Mukaddime", 59. He mistakenly writes Nev'îzâde.

¹⁸ Sırrî, "Mukaddime", 69.

¹⁹ Sırrî, "Mukaddime", 80-86.

²⁰ Sırrî, "Mukaddime", 86.

²¹ Sırrî, "Mukaddime", 58.

with two terms, i.e., *sūfa* means knowledge and *sata* means error. Sirri Pasha considers this definition to be wrong.²²

There are even more sources that are consulted in the main part of the book which is a translation of *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id*. Sirri resorts almost to all the glosses (*hāshiya*) on this book such as those of Khayālī, Ramazan Efendi, Isam, Siyālkūtī, Kefevī, Mufti of Vidin (Mustafa Hamdi Efendi), and *Taliqāt* of Sheikh Khālīd (d.1255/1839). Sirri Pasha also refers to *al-Mutawwal* of al-Taftazānī, and a gloss known as *Torun* by grandson of al-Taftazānī (d. 906/1500), *Rumūzul-Hikem* (1871) by Abdurrahman Sami Pasha (d. 1881) and *Miftah al-Funūn* by Pasquale Gallupi (d. 1846), a logic book which was translated to Turkish in 1861.²³ He uses *Tefsīr-i Mevākib*, a Qur'an exegesis translated from Persian to Turkish by İsmâil Ferruh Efendi (d. 1840). All in all, Sirri's translation is a very rich text that has some striking aspects such as changing the structure of a *kalām* book and introducing new subjects. He also uses texts that were just published at the time, showing that Sirri was an avid reader and paid attention to contemporary publications in explaining a centuries old text. The translation reflects influence of contemporary politics and religious conflicts.

4. Cevdet Pasha's Criticism of Sirri's Prolegomenon

In the foreword of his translation Sirri Pasha requests to be excused for any mistakes in his translation because he was busy with official duties while he was translating and commenting on *Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id*. Sirri believes that his text is not completely devoid of mistakes (*mündericâtının sehv ü hatadan beraetine itimadım yok*), thus, he says that he is open to corrections and improvements of the master scholars.²⁴ Of course this is a traditional utterance that shows his modesty rather than being pompous about his work. After composing his prolegomena, Sirri Pasha sends it to Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, one of the leading scholars and statesman of his time, for whom Sirri has so much respect. He is from Lovech (*Lofça*), a town in the province of Tuna in 1822. He was serving as the Minister of Education in 1875, when he got Sirri's prolegomenon.²⁵

Ahmed Cevdet Pasha thoroughly reads the prolegomenon and writes a brief review in which he makes some revisions. Sirri reproduces this letter at the end of introductory (*mukaddime*) volume of the book. In the letter Cevdet Pasha warns Sirri about structure and style of his writing. Cevdet criticizes that Sirri listed the Ash'ariyya under the Jabriyya as a moderate compulsionism (*cebriyye mütevassıta*) which is a version of fatalism in page 45. Since the Jabriyya was mentioned as the opposite side of the saved sect (*firaḳ-ı nâciye*), so in this classification Ash'ariyya would fall within the heretic groups (*firaḳ-ı dâlle*). The Jabrites believe that all actions are determined by God and they deny the free will. However, in page 47, the Ash'ariyya was included in the saved sect. Thus, according to Cevdet this amounts to a contradiction. Then Cevdet suggests that Sirri should have adequately explained only the Jabriyya among the heretic groups, so that one would not assume the Ash'arites to be among them.²⁶ Although, Cevdet proposes some other corrections in the text,

²² Sirri, "Mukaddime", 67-68.

²³ Sirri, *Şerh-i Akâid Tercümesi*, 1/109.

²⁴ Sirri, "Mukaddime", 5. Çerkeşizâde Mehmed Tevfik (d. 1901) wrote a treatise as a critique of Sirri Pasha's translation in order to show his errors and flaws.

²⁵ Yusuf Halaçoğlu - Mehmet Âkif Aydın, "Cevdet Paşa", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Erişim 21 Aralık 2022).

²⁶ Sirri, "Mukaddime", 321.

looking at his articulation of the free will shows how he saw the position of Ash'arites among different groups. Cevdet elucidates his ideas in the following way:

If it were desired to explain the two-fold division of Jabriyya, it would be suitable to explain within the issue of debates between the Māturīdism and the Ash'arism. Hence the topic of free will and destiny is a very large and hazardous field. On one side of this is the Jabriyya, and on the other side the Mu'tazila, they sometimes got out of the way and went astray. The saved sect, which is Followers of the Sunni tradition (*Ehl-i Sünnnet ve'l-Cemâat*), became moderate between these two sides by demonstrating the particular (human) free will (*irâde-i cüz'îyye*) and thus saved from being in danger. But they also differ (among themselves) in interpreting this human free will and are divided into two: The Ash'arism and the Māturīdism. The Ash'arism were objected to because their inference and style of explanation eventually [concerning human free will] leads to compulsion, and from this perspective the position of the Māturīdism was seen more suitable to the reasoning. Yet among them the Hanafites who at most incline and rely on the side of reason, of course in this topic inclined to the Māturīdī position. However, the difference between the Ash'arism and the Māturīdism does not reach to the level of accusing each other with heresy; and both of them essentially hold the same position, thus, the saved sect consists of them.²⁷

Here Cevdet emphasizes the rationality of Māturīdism in addition to its commonality with Ash'arism against heretical groups. The pages, where Cevdet accuses Sirrī of being contradictory, are in fact, Sirrī's summarized translations mostly from *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, which in turn quoted al-Āmidī. On page 45 of Sirrī's prolegomenon, the compulsion (*cebr*) is described as attributing the human actions to Allah. Then the Jabrites (*Cebriyye*), which is among the heretic groups, is divided into two: the first is the moderate (*mütevassıta*) and the second is the pure (*hālisa*) Jabrites. The moderate one is between compulsion and submission (*tevfiż*), and attributes an effective acquisition (*kesb*) to the human. These are Ash'arites (*Eş'ariyye*), Najjārites (*Neccāriyye*), and Dīrārites (*Dirāriyye*). The pure Jabrites are the Jahmites (*Cehmiyye*), which belongs to Jahm b. Safwān and his companions. They do not give any power, whether acquisitive or effective, to the human. The human is like an inanimate body whose all actions are necessary.²⁸

On page 47 Sirrī discusses the saved sect. The idea of saved sect is based on the seventy-three-sect hadith.²⁹ The prophet said that "the saved sect is the one to which I and my companions belong". The scholars understood this hadith in different ways. Sirrī continues quoting from *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* of al-Jurjānī and writes that the Ash'arites, the predecessors of Atharīs (*selef-i muḥaddisîn*) and other Sunnis (*ehl-i Sünnnet ve'l-Cemaat*) all are the saved sect. Māturīdites were not mentioned here.³⁰ Then, Sirrī quotes Ahmed Cevdet's translation of *Muqaddima* in classifying the saved sect into two groups: the Ash'arism and the Māturīdism. Even though they have differences in minor issues (*mesāil*) of theology, they agree upon the method of creed.³¹

Sirrī Pasha did take Cevdet Pasha's criticism seriously as evidenced by his later work that paid attention to the letter. In his *Ārāü'l-Milel*, which was published in 1886, Sirrī narrates the same

²⁷ Sirrī, "Mukaddime", 321.

²⁸ Sirrī, "Mukaddime", 45-46; cf. Seyyid Şerif Cürçânî, *Şerhu'l-Mevâkıf*, trans. Ömer Türker (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2015), 806.

²⁹ "My community will divide into seventy-three sects." Sirrī, "Mukaddime", 47.

³⁰ Sirrī, "Mukaddime", 47; cf. Cürçânî, *Şerhu'l-Mevâkıf*, 3/810.

³¹ Sirrī, "Mukaddime", 49; cf. Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Mukaddime Osmanlı Tercümesi* (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2008), 3/71.

information, except that this time he follows Cevdet Pasha's suggestion. Amongst the heretic sects, he mentions only the pure Jabriyya excluding the moderate Jabriyya altogether.³² As for the saved sect, he quotes only the two division of Ahl al-Sunnah (*ehl-i Sünnet*) from Cevdet Pasha.³³ In other words, he excludes the Atharism, instead names Māturīdism (*Māturīdiyya*).

5. Ash'arī and Māturīdī Divergence on the Free Will

Following the classification of Ahl al-Sunnah, Sirri Pasha gives an account of the birth of these two groups and again quotes from Cevdet Pasha about the relationship between Ash'arism and Māturīdism. Cevdet's approach is remarkable to illustrate how Ottoman translators adjusted the theological texts to their own Māturīdī context: "When Ash'arism is mentioned in the opposite of Māturīdism, by this the followers of Imam Ash'arī are intended, but sometimes, if it is mentioned in the opposite of heretics (*ehl-i bid'at*), then Ash'arism refers to Sunnis (*ehl-i Sünnet*) in general. In this way, Ash'arism encompasses Māturīdism. Therefore, Māturīdism becomes a sub-group under Ash'arism."³⁴ Even though they agree on the basic beliefs of Islam, they have a few diverging views on some questions of *kalām*. Nevertheless, it is possible to reconcile them.³⁵

According to Cevdet Pasha the main controversy is the problem of human's particular free will (*irāde-i cüz'iyye*). There are two extreme sides regarding this problem. While the Jabrites absolutely deny the human free will and believe that all movements of humans are determined by God, the Mutazilites claim that humans are free in all their actions because they are responsible for what they do in this world, and gain rewards in the hereafter. They state that human is the creator of his actions, so the creator becomes multiple. On the other hand, according to the Jabrites, the divine duties are in vain. Also, it is apparent that there is a difference between climbing up the stairs and falling from them. Ahl al-Sunnah takes a middle position between these two extremities. They believe that the Necessary Existence (*Vâcibü'l-Vücûd*) is the Creator of all things, but humans have a particular free will in their voluntary actions.³⁶

The major debated issue is that whether the free will is created or not. The particular free will means to choose the action or abandon it. The Ash'arites say that it is created, but the Māturīdites say that it is not created. In this sense, according to the Ash'arites everything happens since Allah already knows them. As for the Māturīdites, the knowledge follows what is known (*'ilim ma'lûma tâbi'dir*), therefore God eternally knows the future since it is going to happen.³⁷ It means that God has pre-eternal knowledge, but this does not restrain humans' free actions. In the chapter on the attributes of God, quoting Siyalkûtî who presents a division of knowledge: (1) active knowledge

³² Sirri-i Giridî, *Ârâü'l-milel* (İstanbul: Şirket-i Mürettibiye Matbaası, 1886), 187-188.

³³ Sirri, *Ârâü'l-milel*, 192-193.

³⁴ Sirri, "Mukaddime", 50. For the differing positions between two schools on the doctrine of acquisition and free choice see Yahya Raad Haidar, *The Debates Between Ash'arism and Māturīdism in Ottoman Religious Scholarship: A Historical and Bibliographical Study* (Canberra: The Australian National University, PhD Thesis, 2016), 76.

³⁵ For an extensive account of controversial topics between Ash'arism and Māturīdism see Mehmet Kalaycı, "Mātūrīdī-Hanefī Aidiyetin Osmanlı'daki İzdüşümleri", *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 20/2 (2016), 9-72.

³⁶ Sirri, "Mukaddime", 50.

³⁷ Sirri, "Mukaddime", 51.

(*fiilî*) which comes before what is known (*malûm*) and (2) passive (*infiâlî*) knowledge which comes after what is known.³⁸

Cevdet Pasha states that the truest view is that of the Mâturîdites. The discussion is put as follows:

If particular free will (*irâde-i cüz'îyye*) is created, then humans are obligated in using their powers, so this leads to determinism (*cebr*), which makes the divine orders futile (*abes*). However, it is possible to compromise between two views by saying “the stimulation (*şevk*) and desire (*arzu*), which are the causes (*esbâb*) of *irâde-i cüz'îyye*, are created”. If the Ash‘arites contest it by saying that if the *irâde-i cüz'îyye* were not created by Allah, then the human would create it, so it leads to the Mu‘tazilite view. Also, if the human is not a creator, and it is impossible to have the created without a creator, so it requires that Allah is not the creator of everything as Mu‘tazila argue. It is answered as follows: The Creator of everything is Allah, but the particular free will (*irâde-i cüz'îyye*) is not a thing (*şey*). Since a thing means an existent matter (*emr-i mevcûd*), but particular will is not temporal and rather is a state (*hâl*) that emerges in a human suddenly in one moment, it is like conceptual entities (*umûr-i i‘tibârîyye*), hence it is not an existent which needs a creator and directed at active creation. If one were to say that it is unlikely to accept particular free will as a conceptual entity regarding that it is the source of voluntary actions and focal point of happiness in two worlds, it would be responded that there are two meanings of conceptual entity (*emr-i i‘tibârî*): the first is not existing in itself but being mere imagination, the second is existing in itself, but not being qualified with the existence in a time in the outside world. Here what we say is that the human free will is a conceptual entity and has a meaning in the latter sense not in the former sense.³⁹

In this passage, Cevdet Pasha, as a follower of al-Mâturîdî, argues that human's limited free will is a conceptual entity (“*irâde-i cüz'îyye emr-i i‘tibârîdir*”) noting that it is not a mere imaginative thing rather it is the kind of perspectival state that exists in itself but not in the external temporal world. Considering that Sirrî extensively quoted Cevdet’s discussion of particular will without any objections, we may surmise that he endorses his position.

6. Creation of Actions

Sirrî’s translation of the chapter on the human actions is noteworthy both for showcasing his style of translation and his position on the issue of particular will. Typically, Sirrî translates passages from the main text and the commentary and intersperses the commentary with additional material from other glosses on the *Sharḥ al-‘Aqâ'id*. He also uses footnotes to either explain an issue further or again quote relevant passages from other theological or religious books. In the section on creation of actions and the following related topics, besides the original text, Sirrî consults works of Ramazan Efendi, Akkirmânî (d. 1760), Ibn Abî Sharîf (d. 1500), Khayâlî, Siyalkûtî, ‘Isâm, and *Tefsîr-i Mevâkib*. This *tafsîr* is particularly referenced to provide exegesis of the quoted verses from the Qur’an.

With regard to human actions, in the text of Nasafî it is stated that God creates all human actions pertaining to belief and disbelief, obedience and disobedience. Taftâzânî provides some arguments for this position such as that creating actions would require their detailed knowledge

³⁸ Sirrî, *Şerh-i Akâid Tercümesi*, 2/65.

³⁹ Sirrî, "Mukaddime", 51. cf. Sirrî, *Ârâü'l-mîlel*, 195; Ahmed Cevdet Pasa, *Mukaddime*, 3/72.

which humans lack, and that the Qur'an includes verses that show God as the creator of every thing. Although the discussion does not directly mention the differences between Ash'arīs and Maturidīs in this part, there are allusions to the Maturidite position as Sirrī combines the commentary with Akkirmânî's explanation in a few instances, in one of which Akkirmânî's statement that knowledge follows upon the known is inserted into the commentary.⁴⁰ Sirrī also quotes from Akkirmânî's treatise on the free will at times.⁴¹

Mehmed Akkirmânî's treatise on the particular will was one of several treatises written during the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire.⁴² In this treatise eight different positions are counted on this subject. According to Akkirmânî, al-Mâturidî held the most consistent view. Al-Mâturidî argues that Allah creates everything, however he rejects the view that human free will is created, since it does not have an external existence, and is a relative thing. According to him, particular free will is a state (*hāl*), hence, it is neither an existent nor it is created. The human action happens with Allah's power from the aspect of creating and with the human's power from the aspect of acquisition. Akkirmânî states that there are four stages before an action: conception (*taşavvur*), stimulation (*şevk*), volition/will (*irāde*), and movement of bodily organs (*tahrîk-i āza*). In the fifth stage God creates (*halk*) the action per His custom. Even if all the four come together, Allah does not have to create the action. Akkirmânî notes that the will (*irāde*) and the stimulation (*şevk*) are different concepts. Allah creates the stimulation, but not the will.⁴³ Based on this idea, Cevdet Pasha, in his above discussed views tried to mediate the two sides and solve the conflict by asserting that just before the will phase, the stimulation can be created, as it is the cause of the will.

Another indication of Sirrī's allusion to the Maturidî view is in the first footnote to this topic. In that footnote, Sirrī explains that the topic is not limited to human actions but rather applicable to all kind of creatures. He notes that even though the evidence on this issue is brought up in regard to the actions of responsible adults (*mukallaḥ*), once they are established it is possible for the intellect to judge others based on them. After this general note, he proceeds to explain the issue noting that this topic contains *Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī's* (d. 418/1027) views, despite the fact that he asserted that both powers, that is God and human's power (*kudret*) are together efficient in bringing about adults' (*mukallaḥīn*) actions he did not fear from stating that two wills are efficient on one action. However, he does not say that humans are creators of their actions because the word 'creation' has the meaning of determining, God the sublime gives existence (*icād*), and through his power, without being diminished, determines as well. However, humans

⁴⁰ Sirrī, *Şerh-i Akāid Tercümesi*, 2/191.

⁴¹ Sirrī, *Şerh-i Akāid Tercümesi*, 2/192.

⁴² For a few other treatises and their analysis see Philip Dorroll, "Mâturidî Theology in the Ottoman Empire: Debating Human Choice and Divine Power", *Osmanlı'da İlm-i Kelâm: Âlimler, Eserler, Meseleler*, ed. O. Demir et al. (İstanbul: İSAR Yayınları, 2016), 219-238; Murat Karacan, "XVIII. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Âlimi Hâdimî'nin İnsan Fiillerine Dair Bir Risalesi - Tercüme ve Tahlil-", *Osmanlı'da İlm-i Kelâm: Âlimler, Eserler, Meseleler*, ed. O. Demir et al. (İstanbul: İSAR Yayınları, 2016), 239-265. For an overview of the topic see Hatice K. Arpağuş, "Mâtürîdîlik ve Osmanlı'da İrāde-i Cüz'iyeye Yorumu," *Osmanlı Düşüncesi: Kaynakları ve Tartışma Konuları*, ed. Fuat Aydın et al. (İstanbul: Mahya Yayıncılık, 2019), 243-262.

⁴³ Şamil Öcal, "Osmanlı Kelamcıları Eş'arî miydi? -Muhammed Akkirmânî'nin İnsan Hürriyeti Anlayışı-." *Dini Araştırmalar* 2/5 (1999), 246-247.

cannot determine the action as it is.⁴⁴ The point being made here is that even though al-Isfarāyīnī held on to the view that both humans and God have a role in the occurrence of an action, this did not necessitate asserting that humans are creators of their actions. Instead, he still was considered among those who say that God is the sole creator of actions. Perhaps Sirrī is suggesting that the Maturidī position does not lead to plurality of creators even though they defend that partial free will is not created.

Conclusion

Sirrī Pasha's translation of *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā'id* of Taftāzānī is not a literal (word-for-word) translation. As we have seen on the issue of partial free will, it engages contemporary as well as traditional Māturidī views. By bringing together previous glosses on the distinguished commentary of Taftāzānī on one of the most prominent creed texts in Islam, Sirrī was able to compare previous authors' views and discuss their opinions in an inter-textual and dialogical vein. Furthermore, being translated in a time of fast reforms, Sirrī's translation provided us with an understanding of Maturidī thought in the Ottoman modernization period. Through translation Sirrī transferred a classical madrasa book in field of kalam to the 19th century literate audience. We do not know its influence on the readers and how they received it, but it is clear that there was a need for translating this kalam text.

From the analysis of his prolegomenon, we can see that Sirrī follows the traditional expositions by heavily relying on such sources. For instance, we have seen that Sirrī adapted a topic that was treated at the end of *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* of Jurjānī and put it in the introduction of his translation. Sirrī also engages with some contemporary Ottoman scholars such as Cevdet Pasha, whose translation of the last chapter of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima* was quoted a few times. Apparently, he cared enough about Cevdet's views on his prolegomenon and thus published a letter from him at the end of that part. The main issue that concerns both of these late Ottoman scholars is the place of Māturidī thought in the Sunni community. They not only point out that Māturidīs together with Ash'ari's are the two mainstream Sunni theological schools. However, they also prefer Māturidī views over some Ash'ari positions such as in the case of free will.

⁴⁴ Sirrī, *Şerh-i Akāid Tercümesi*, 2/182-183, 62-64.

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