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Islamic Solidarity and Transnational Advocacy: The Case of Mehmet Akif Ersoy and Iran

Abstract

Cultural and historical similarities play a crucial role in fostering interactions between nations, while overlooking these commonalities can exacerbate perceived differences. Iran and Turkey share deep religious, linguistic, and literary traditions, which have historically influenced intellectual exchanges between the two nations. Mehmet Akif Ersoy, a prominent Turkish poet and thinker, exemplified this connection through his admiration for Iranian literature, particularly the works of Saadi Shirazi, and his deep concern for Iran's political struggles. During the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911), Mehmet Akif and Cemal Kuntay co-authored the poem "Acem Şahı" as a response to the bombardment of the Iranian National Council in 1908. This poem, published in *Sebilürreşad*, reflected Ersoy's Islamist perspective, emphasizing resistance against autocracy. Recognizing his support, the Qajar government considered awarding him a Badge of Merit and Virtue. This paper examines Mehmet Akif's perception of Iran and his advocacy for its people. It explores his biography and ideological approach, followed by an analysis of Iran's response, particularly through two Ottoman documents on the proposed award. The findings suggest Ersoy's commitment to the Ummah primarily motivated his defense of the Iranian Constitutional movement, positioning him as a transnational intellectual figure in the Muslim world.

Keywords: Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Iranian Constitutional Revolution, Ottoman Empire, Iran-Turkey Relations, Islamic Solidarity

İslamî Muavenet ve Ulusötesi Savunuculuk: Mehmet Akif Ersoy ve İran Örneği

Öz

Kültürel ve tarihî benzerlikler, milletler arasındaki etkileşimi güçlendiren önemli unsurlardır. Bu ortak noktaların göz ardı edilmesi aradaki farklılıkları derinleştirebilir. İran ve Türkiye, köklü dinî, dilsel ve edebî gelenekleri paylaşmakta ve bu ortak miras tarih boyunca iki ülke arasındaki entelektüel etkileşimleri şekillendirmektedir. Türk edebiyatının önde gelen isimlerinden Mehmet Akif Ersoy, İran edebiyatına -özellikle Sâdî-i Şîrâzî'nin eserlerine- duyduğu hayranlık ve İran'ın siyasi mücadelesine olan derin ilgisiyle bu bağı somutlaştıran önemli bir kişiliktir. İran Meşrutiyet Devrimi (1905-1911) sırasında, Mehmet Akif ve M. Cemal Kuntay, 1908 yılında İran Millî Meclisi'nin Muhammed Ali Şah Kaçar tarafından bombalanmasına tepki olarak Acem Şahı adlı şiiri kaleme almışlardır. *Sebilürreşad* Dergisi'nde yayımlanan bu şiir, Ersoy'un güçlü İslamcı perspektifini yansıtarak istibdadı karşı direnişini vurgulamıştır. Mehmet Akif'in bu desteğinin farkında olan Meşrutî Kaçar yönetimi, ona Liyakat ve Fazilet Nişanı takdim etmeyi düşünmüştür. Bu makale, Mehmet Akif Ersoy'un İran'a dair algısını ve İran halkına yönelik savunuculuğunu incelemektedir. İlk olarak Ersoy'un biyografisi ve ideolojik yaklaşımı ele alınmakta, ardından İran'ın bu desteğe verdiği yanıt, özellikle önerilen nişana dair Osmanlı belgeleri üzerinden analizler yapılmaktadır. Ersoy'un İran Meşrutiyet hareketine verdiği desteğin temelinde ümmet kavramına olan bağlılığının yattığını ve onun Müslüman dünyasında ulusötesi bir entelektüel figür olarak konumlandığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mehmet Akif Ersoy, İran Meşrutiyet Devrimi, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, İran-Türkiye İlişkileri, İslami Dayanışma

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1. Introduction

The subsequent revolutions in Europe, particularly the French Revolution, fueled the rise of nationalism and republicanism across the continent. This ethno-based nationalism incited unrest among both non-Muslim and, later, Muslim minorities within the Ottoman Empire. Despite implementing reforms under pressure from various factions, the empire found itself in a precarious economic and political state. Global rivalries and internal weaknesses further compounded its challenges. Even the foreign policy of Abdul Hamid II, which sought to maintain a balance of power, ultimately failed to halt the empire's decline. The Ottoman Empire eventually collapsed with the advent of World War I.

During this period of decline, four intellectual movements emerged, each proposing a different path for the empire's survival and reform: Ottomanism, Islamism, Turkism, and Westernism. Ottomanism emphasized the unity of the empire's diverse population, transcending national, ethnic, and religious identities, and advocated for equal rights for all Ottoman subjects. Key figures in this movement included İbrahim Şinasi (1826–1871) and Namık Kemal (1840–1888). Islamism, centered on the unifying principles of Islam, sought to unite Muslims and establish a powerful Islamic empire. This ideology found a platform in the journal *Sırat-ı Müstakim* (later renamed *Sebilürreşad*), with Mehmet Akif Ersoy (1873–1936) as a prominent thinker associated with the movement.

Conversely, Turkism emphasized Turkish identity and gained prominence as Ottomanism and Islamism waned. Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924) was a leading figure in this movement. Finally, the Westernist intellectual movement, whose platform was the journal *Servet-i Fünun*, argued that the empire's revival and salvation lay in the adoption of Western ideals. Among the prominent thinkers and leaders of this ideology were Abdullah Cevdet (1869–1932) and Tevfik Fikret (1870–1915).

Mehmet Akif Ersoy was a key figure in the Islamist intellectual movement within the Ottoman Empire, prioritizing the concept of the *ummah* (global Muslim community) over nationalism. His Islamic ideology and pan-Islamic perspective fostered a sympathetic and fraternal view of Iran during the Qajar period. Mehmet Akif Ersoy regarded Iran as an integral part of the *ummah* and a fellow Islamic nation. His knowledge of Iranian history and culture, coupled with his devotion to Islamic unity, led him to reference Iran and Iranian poets in his works.

Furthermore, during the bombardment of the Iranian Parliament (*Meclis*) by Mohammad Ali Shah, Mehmet Akif Ersoy demonstrated his support for the Iranian people and the Constitutional Revolution by reporting on events in Iran for Ottoman readers through *Sebilürreşad*. His admiration for Iranian culture even led the Qajar state to consider awarding him a Badge of Merit and Virtue.

This study contends that Mehmet Akif Ersoy regarded Iran as more than just a neighboring nation; he saw it as an integral part of the Islamic world. Despite Iran's Jafari Shia Muslim identity, Mehmet Akif Ersoy championed its political struggles and esteemed its literary traditions. Through his poetry, journalism, and intellectual discourse, he sought to reinforce Islamic unity and bridge the cultural and ideological divide between the Ottoman and Iranian peoples. The paper begins by outlining Ersoy's life and contributions, followed by a detailed analysis of his engagement with Iran through poetry, translation, and references to Persian literature, then discusses Iran's awarding of a badge to him.

2. Literature

There are very few studies in Iran and Turkey regarding the relationship between Mehmet Akif Ersoy and Iran. In Turkey, for the first time, Mortaza Firuzi presented a paper titled "*Two Documents from the Ottoman Archives Regarding the Awarding of an Iranian State Badge to Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Ashraf Adib, and Muhammad Hamdi*" during the *The Turkish National Anthem and Mehmet Akif Ersoy in the 100th Anniversary with its Universal Dimensions* international conference in Ankara, Turkey, in 2021 (Firuzi, 2022: 215-228). This presentation focuses on translating and analyzing the Ottoman documents as well as the reasons for the award, which were not mentioned in the documents. Firuzi also reviewed the research conducted in Iran until 2021. Firuzi believes that the reason for granting this badge was Mehmet Akif Ersoy's support for the Iranian people during the bombardment of the Iranian Parliament and the period of the Minor Autocracy, as reflected in his writings in *Sebilürreşad*, his magazine.

In Iran, apart from journalistic writings, there has been one translation, one academic article, two books, and a master's thesis on Mehmet Akif Ersoy. The first article was a translation titled "*Acem Şahı*", published in *Ettelaat* magazine. In this article, Mohammad Hossein Amir Ardoosh translated the poem *Acem Şahı*, which refers to Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar (Amir Ardoosh, 2008: 57-58). The second academic study on this subject was conducted by Ataollah Hasni under the title "*Three Ottoman Poets*" (Hasni, 2008: 53-72). In this article, Hasni provides a broad exploration of Mehmet Akif Ersoy and his writings related to Iran including *Acem Şahı*.

Two books have been published about Mehmet Akif Ersoy. The first, titled *Mehmet Akif Ersoy: Biography and Selected Works*, was translated from English into Persian by Kazem Rajavi Izad in 1969 (Tarlan, 1969). In the book, the authors review Mehmet Akif Ersoy's biography and some of his works. The second book, *Ey Cemaat, Uyanın (O People, Wake Up)*, is a collection of selected poems along with an overview of Mehmet Akif Ersoy's life and thoughts, written by Masoud Sadr Mohammadi in both Persian and Azerbaijani Turkish (Ersoy, 2021). In this book, Sadr Mohammadi translates several well-known poems of Mehmet Akif Ersoy into Azerbaijani Turkic. Additionally, as an introduction, he provides a Persian translation of the entry on Mehmet Akif Ersoy from *The Diyanet Encyclopedia of Islam (Türkiye Diyanet Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam)*.

A master's thesis on Mehmet Akif Ersoy was also written by Diyadin Azarak, titled "*The Life and Poems of Mehmet Akif Ersoy and Their Comparison with the Life and Poetry of Malek o-Sho'arā Bahar*", at the University of Tehran in 2012 (Azarak, 2012). In this thesis, Azarak examines the poetry collections (*Divans*) of Mohammad-Taqi Bahar and Mehmet Akif Ersoy, analyzing the common themes between the two poets. The study compares their perspectives on religion, ethics, patriotism, and their views on the East and the West.

3. The Life and Legacy of Mehmet Akif Ersoy

Mehmet Akif Ersoy is regarded as a conservative Islamist intellectual of the late Ottoman and early Republican period in Turkey. He was born in Istanbul in 1873. His father, Tahir Efendi, was of Albanian descent, while his mother, Sharifa Khanum, was of Bukharan origin. After completing his primary and secondary education, he enrolled in the *Mekteb-i Mülkiye-i Baytariyye* (Veterinary School) in 1888, following the passing of his father and the necessity of entering the workforce. After graduating, he worked as a veterinarian until 1913, during which

he traveled extensively across the Ottoman Empire—including Anatolia, Rumelia, and Syria—gaining firsthand insight into the hardships faced by the people (Tarlán, 1969: 11; Özer, 2020).

Following the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era (1908), Mehmet Akif Ersoy played a significant role in *Sırat-ı Müstakim* (later renamed *Sebilürreşad*), one of the most influential intellectual and scientific journals of the time. He contributed editorials and used the journal as a platform to disseminate his ideas. During this period, he also taught Ottoman literature at *Dârülfünûn* (the Imperial University of Istanbul) and Arabic literature at the *Şehzadebaşı Club* of the Committee of Union and Progress (Özçelik, 2009: 38).

Amid the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), he sought to foster national unity and support the army by delivering sermons at major mosques such as Fatih, Beyazıt, and Süleymaniye. However, his criticism of the nationalist and anti-religious tendencies of certain members of the Committee of Union and Progress, as well as the government's opposition to his religious views, led him to withdraw from his academic activities at *Dârülfünûn* in Istanbul (Okay & Düzdağ, 2003: 433).

During World War I (1914–1915), Mehmet Akif Ersoy undertook two missions assigned by *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa* (the Special Organization). As part of these assignments, he traveled to Berlin and Najd. His trip to Berlin aimed to unite Muslims against the Allied forces. Meanwhile, his journey to Najd sought to secure the support of Arab tribes in response to the revolt led by Sharif Hussein (Tarlán, 1969: 13-14; Öztürkçü, 2016: 1-192).

Following the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I and the imposition of harsh terms in the Armistice of Mudros, along with the Greek occupation of parts of Anatolia, the Turkish National War of Independence began. Mehmet Akif Ersoy joined the independence movement in Ankara, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and was elected as the representative of Burdur in June 1920. He actively encouraged the people to join the national resistance, oppose the Treaty of Sèvres, and resist Western colonial forces (Okay & Düzdağ, 2003: 434).

On March 12, 1921, he participated in a committee convened to select the national anthem of Turkey, and his poem, *İstiklâl Marşı* (*Independence March*), was unanimously chosen by the Turkish Grand National Assembly. He donated the cash prize awarded for the anthem to charity (Okay M., 2001: 355-356).

With the official establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the Turkish Grand National Assembly held elections for its second term. However, Mehmet Akif Ersoy was not permitted to participate. In October 1923, at the invitation of Abbas Halim Pasha, he traveled to Egypt, where he remained from late 1925 onward (Okay & Düzdağ, 2003: 434).

Mehmet Akif Ersoy spent a decade in Egypt, teaching Turkish language and literature at the Faculty of Arts of Cairo University. After eleven years abroad, he returned to Istanbul while suffering from illness and passed away on December 27, 1936 (İz, 2012).

Mehmet Akif Ersoy's works are categorized into two main genres: poetry and prose. His poetic works include a seven-volume *divan* (collection of poems). His prose works consist of interpretations, sermons, translations, and articles published in the journals *Sırat-ı Müstakim* and *Sebilürreşad* (Okay & Düzdağ, 2003: 437-439).

Among his lesser-known works is a translation of Imam Ali's letter to Malik Ashtar Nakha'i, which has received limited scholarly attention. The translation was originally from Arabic, written by Abdulaziz Çaviş and Akif, and later translated into Ottoman Turkish in *Sebilürreşad*. Later, this

translation was published in Turkey under the title *Hız. Ali Diyor Ki... (Thus Spoke Imam Ali...)* (Hız. Ali Diyor Ki..., 2022).

4. Iran in the Works of Mehmet Akif Ersoy

Mehmet Akif Ersoy's travels, political engagements, and literary activities deeply shaped his admiration for Iranian culture. Having extensively studied Persian literature, he frequently referenced Persian poets and incorporated their moral, philosophical, and religious themes into his own writings. His perspective on Iran can be examined from two angles: religious and cultural. Religiously, he was a staunch advocate of Islamism and a strong proponent of *umma* (the global Muslim community) unity. However, his vision of unity did not align with the idealistic notion of establishing a single Islamic state under one flag. Instead, he sought the liberation of Muslims from the oppression of both internal rulers and colonial forces (Okay M, 2017: 68–69). This perspective led him to view Iran not merely as a neighboring country but as an integral part of the *umma*—and, more broadly, as part of his own homeland. His outlook is clearly reflected in his works and in those of his colleagues in the journal *Sebilürreşad*.

During the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911), Ersoy co-authored the poem *Acem Şahı* with Mehmet Cemal Kuntay (1885–1956). This poem, published in *Sebilürreşad*, not only served as a literary condemnation of Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar's autocratic rule but also resonated deeply with Ottoman and Iranian intellectuals. In the Ottoman Empire, it reached a wide audience, while in Iran, its themes of tyranny and resistance aligned with the concerns of constitutionalists and reformists. The following section examines the impact of *Acem Şahı* in both contexts, highlighting Ersoy's influence in shaping public discourse on Iran's political struggles.

The poem consists of two sections, both of which begin with verses from Saadi Shirazi. The first part opens with: "*For a man, the entire land... is not worth shedding a drop of blood,*" while the second part begins with: "*It is a mistake for leadership to be in the hands of those... whose hands are turned away from God.*" (Mehmet Akif Ersoy, 2016: 70–74).

In *Acem Şahı*, Mehmet Akif Ersoy and Kuntay strongly denounce Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar, particularly condemning the trampling of Sayyids (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) by Russian Cossacks. They liken this atrocity to an event that would bring joy to the soul of Yazid ibn Muawiyah, underscoring the poem's deep religious and political critique.

The translation of *Acem Şahı* is as follows:

"The Shah of Ajam (Iran)"

*"Power in the hands of the unworthy is but a dreadful snare,
From their tyranny, all seek refuge in God's care."*

—Saadi

*Bu müdhiş velvelen İrân'ı dâim inletir sanma
([O King], do not think that this terrible commotion will make Iran lament forever)*

*"Muzaffersin!" diyen sesler bütün hâindir, aldanma
(All the voices saying "You are victorious!" are treacherous, do not be deceived)*

*Zafer-yâb olduğun kimdir? Düşün bir kerre millet mi?
(Who is it that you are victorious over? Think for a moment, is it the nation?)*

Adâlet isteyen bir kavmi vurmak gâlibiyet mi?
(Is it victory to strike a people demanding justice?)

Nasîbin yok mudur bir parça olsun âdemiyetten?
(Do you have no share, even a small portion, of humanity)

Nasıl aldirmiyorsun yükselen feryâda milletten?
(How do you not heed the rising cry from the nation?)

Emîn ol bunca mazlûmun yüreklerden kopan âhı,
(Be certain, the sighs rising from the hearts of so many oppressed people)

Tependen indirir elbette bir gün lâ'netu'llâh!
(Will surely bring down the curse of God upon your head one day!)

Sığınmış olduğun şevket-sarây-ı zulmü pek muhkem
(The palace of tyranny, in which you have taken refuge, so strong)

Hayal etmektesin... Lâkin ne bârûlar, ne müstahkem
(You are imagining it... But neither gunpowder nor fortifications)

Penâh-ı bî-amanlar , heybet-i Kakhâr-ı Mutlak'lâ
(Can provide refuge to the merciless, before the might of the Absolute Subduer (God))

O, birçok memleket vîran edip yaptırdığın eyvan
(That palace you built, after laying waste to many lands)

Harâb olmaz mı? Kabristana dönmüşken bütün İran?
(Will it not be destroyed? When all of Iran has been turned into a graveyard?)

Evet, İrân'ı kabristana döndürdün, helâk ettin
(Yes, you turned Iran into a graveyard, you destroyed it)

Kefen yaptın girîbân-ı ümîdi çâk çâk ettin!
(You made a shroud, you tore to shreds the collar of hope!)

"Bütün dünyâ için bir damla kan çoktur" diyorlar, sen
(They say "One drop of blood is too much for the whole world," yet you)

Şu ma'sûm ümmetin seller akıttın hûn-i pâkinden!
(You caused rivers to flow from the pure blood of this innocent community!)

Yüzünden perde-i temkîn-i artık kaldırıp attın:
(You have now lifted and thrown away the veil of restraint from your face:)

Ne mâhiyyet, nasıl fitrattasın, dünyâyâ anlattın!
(You have shown the world what kind of being, what kind of nature you have!)

Livâü'l-hamd-i hürriyet iken İslâm için gâyet
(While the banner of praise of freedom was the ultimate goal for Islam)

Nedir pâmâl-i istibdâdın olmak öyle bir râyet
(How could such a banner be trampled by tyranny?)

Kazak celbeyleyip tâ Rusya'dan, sâdâtı çiğnettin;

(You brought Cossacks from as far as Russia and made them trample the descendants of the Prophet;)

*Yezîd'in ruhu şâd olsun... Emînim çünkü şâd ettin!
(May the soul of Yazid be joyful... I am sure you have made it so!)*

*Şehâmet gösterip binlerce beytullâhı bastırdın;
(Displaying your "bravery," you raided thousands of houses of God;)*

*Şecâat arz edip birçok ricâlullâhı astırdın!
(Exhibiting your "courage," you had many men of God hanged!)*

*Ne Allah'tan hayâ ettin, ne Peygamber'den âr ettin:
(You neither felt shame before God, nor were you ashamed before the Prophet:)*

*Devirdin kâ'be-i ulyâ-yı dîni, hâk-sâr ettin!
(You overturned the exalted Kaaba of religion, you reduced it to dust!)*

*Hamâset-perverân-ı kavmi tuttun bir bir öldürdün,
(You seized and killed one by one the heroes of the nation,)*

*Umûmen Şark'ı ağlattın, umûmen Garb'ı güldürdün...
(You made the East weep in general, you made the West laugh in general...)*

*Hayır, hiçbir gülen yok, sızlıyor Garb'ın da vicdanı,
(No, no one is laughing, the conscience of the West also aches,)*

*Görüp ecsâd-ı mazlûmîne meşher hâk-i İrân'ı!
(Seeing the martyred bodies displayed on the soil of Iran!)*

*O Sa'dî'ler, o Hâfız'lar, o Firdevsî, o Râzî'ler,
(Those Sa'dis, those Hafizes, those Firdawsis, those Razis,)*

*Gazâlî'ler, o Kutbüddîn, o Sa'düddîn, o Kâdî'ler
(Those Ghazalis, that Qutb al-Din, that Sa'd al-Din, those Qadis)*

*Yetiştirmiş; o Örfî'nin, o birçok şems-i irfânın
([That Iran] brought forth; from the light of that Urfi, of those many suns of wisdom)*

*Ziyâsından tenevvür eylemiş; iklîmi dünyânın,
(The climes of the world have been illuminated;)*

*Bugün makhûr-i nâdânîsidir bir firka haydûdun!
(Today, it is subjugated by the ignorance of a band of brigands!)*

*Nedir pinhân olan esrârı bilmem, bunda Ma'bûd'un
(I do not know what hidden secrets lie in this, of God)*

*Hayır, Ma'bûd'a ircâında yoktur bunların ma'nâ:
(No, in referring these matters to God, there is no meaning in this:)*

*Yataklık eylemez cânîye -hâşâ- bir zaman Mevlâ
(The Lord - may it never be so - will never be an accomplice to a criminal)*

*Şehâmet-perverâ, Şâhâ! Zaman, bî-dâdı kaldırmaz;
(O promoter of bravery, O King! Time does not tolerate injustice;)*

*Hatâ etmekteşin şâyed diyorsan "Kimse aldırılmaz."
(You are making a mistake if you say, "No one cares.")*

*Bu istibdâda artık bir nihâyet ver ki: İstikbâl
(Put an end to this tyranny now, for the future)*

*Karanlık derler amma işte pek meydanda: İzmihlâl !
(They say is dark, but it is quite evident: Destruction!)*

(Mehmet Akif Ersoy, 2016: 73-74).

Another example of Mehmet Akif Ersoy's deep concern for Iran can be found in his warnings against the disintegration of the Islamic world, including Iran, in the second book of *Safahat*, titled *Süleymaniye Kürsüsünde* (*At the Süleymaniye Pulpit*). In this poem, Mehmet Akif Ersoy condemns the discord among Muslims, urging them to awaken to the dire state of the Islamic world and to distance themselves from ethnic divisions and other factors of disunity. He explicitly refers to the partition of Iran with the verse:

"İşte Fas, işte Tunus, işte Cezayir, gitti...

"İşte İran'ı taksim ediyorlar şimdi"

(Here is Morocco, here is Tunisia, and now Algeria is gone... Now look, they [the Europeans] are dividing Iran [among themselves])

This line highlights his concern that the global powers of the time were attempting to divide Iran (Mehmet Akif Ersoy, 2016: 168).

During those years, the influence of colonialist powers in the Islamic world had intensified. Morocco (1906), Tunisia (1881), and Algeria (1830) had fallen under French control, while Iran came under British influence in 1906 (Işık, 2012: 56-57). Continuing in the same poem, Ersoy criticizes the lack of awareness and response among Muslims at a time when Iran was being partitioned between Britain and Russia. He expresses this sentiment with the verse:

"Arzı oynattı yerinden yıkılırken İran

Belki bir kıl öpürmedi sizden, bu ne kan!"

(The earth shook when Iran fell...

Perhaps not even a hair of yours was touched, what blood is this!)

Through these lines, he severely criticizes Muslims for their inaction and indifference (Mehmet Akif Ersoy, 2016: 169).

In the poem "*Vâiz Kürsüde*" (*From the Preacher's Pulpit*) in the fourth volume of *Safahat*, Mehmet Akif Ersoy laments the dominance of Crusader influence in the Islamic world, including Iran, through the following verses:

"Tunus'ta, Fas'ta, Cezâyir'de, Çin'de, İran'da,

Cava'yla, hitta-i Hindî'de, belki Afgan'da,

Sibirya, Hıyve, Buhârâ, Kırım muhîtinde,

Yaşarken ehl-i salîbin nüfûzu altında:"

(In Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, China, Iran...

In Java, India, perhaps in Afghanistan...)

*In the lands of Siberia, Khiva, Bukhara, Crimea...
They live under the influence of the Crusaders.)*

(Mehmet Akif Ersoy, 2016: 258).

5. Mehmet Akif Ersoy's Appreciation of Iranian Literature

From a cultural and literary standpoint, Mehmet Akif Ersoy was deeply familiar with Iranian culture and literature. He was proficient in Persian and Azerbaijani Turkic literature and frequently referenced classical Persian poets such as Saadi Shirazi, Hafez Shirazi, Ferdowsi, Attar Neishapouri, Urfi Shirazi, and Fakhr al-Din Razi. Among poets of Azerbaijani Turkic literature, he particularly admired Fuzuli.

In addition to his literary references, Mehmet Akif Ersoy played an active role in introducing Persian literature to Ottoman Turkish audiences. He published classical Persian works in Ottoman Turkish under the title *Bada'i al-Acem* in the journal *Servet-i Fünun* from 1898 onwards (İz, 2012).

Among Iranian poets, he had a particular devotion to Saadi Shirazi. In his view, *Bustan* was an exemplary literary text that served humanity (Tarlan, 1348: 34). Mehmet Akif Ersoy referred to Saadi as "*the perfect example of the Eastern spirit*" and expressed his admiration for Saadi's storytelling technique:

"Saadi's stories make me think for hours. After reading Dumas's introduction [referring to Alexandre Dumas], I discovered the secret of Saadi's unique artistry. That is, to convey profound wisdom, there is no need for lengthy narratives."

His admiration for Saadi extended beyond literary appreciation—he even published a poem titled "*Saadi*" and several selections from Saadi's works in *Resimli Gazete (Illustrated Newspaper)* (Tarlan, 1348: 33; Mehmet Akif Ersoy, 2016: 526-528, 553).

6. The Bestowing of the Iranian State Order to Mehmet Akif Ersoy

Mehmet Akif Ersoy's support for the people of Iran, as well as his interest in Iranian culture and literature, prompted the Iranian embassy during the Qajar era to write a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Istanbul on February 25, 1923. A draft followed on February 27, 1923, informing the Ottoman government about the awarding of the *Order of Merit and Virtue* to Mehmet Akif Ersoy and his colleagues from the *Sebilürreşad* magazine—namely, Eşref Edip Fergane and Mehmet Hamdi Yazır. These documents are preserved in the Ottoman Prime Ministry Archive (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*, BOA), specifically in the Istanbul Representative of the Foreign Ministry (*Hariciye Nezareti İstanbul Murahhaslığı*, HR.İM), under reference numbers 67/92-1 and 67/92-2.

The documents themselves do not specify the reason for awarding the *Order of Merit and Virtue*. However, Morteza Firuzi, through an analysis of the historical context, attributes the primary reason for this recognition to Mehmet Akif Ersoy and his colleagues' support for the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (For an examination of the documents and their translations, see Morteza Firuzi's article in *Mehmet Akif Ersoy ve İstiklal Marşı*, 2021: 104, 106).

5. Conclusion

Mehmet Akif Ersoy was one of the most influential writers, translators, and thinkers of the late Ottoman period and early modern Turkey. A leading figure in the intellectual democratic Islamist movement during the Empire's most challenging times, he wrote with the aim of preserving and revitalizing the Islamic state, as well as realizing the lofty ideals of Islam and humanity within the Ottoman Empire and the broader Islamic world.

With his deep-rooted Islamic thought and commitment to Ummahism, Ersoy regarded the entire Islamic world as his homeland. Free from material attachments and selfish inclinations, he placed patriotism, humanity, and Islam at the core of his writings. Among the Islamic nations he held in high regard was Iran. Mehmet Akif Ersoy possessed extensive knowledge of Iranian literature and culture and maintained a strong affinity for its people, considering them an integral part of the Islamic world despite their Shiite majority.

During the Ottoman Empire's decline, Mehmet Akif Ersoy actively supported Iran, composing poems such as *Acem Şahı* and using *Sebilürreşad*, a magazine he contributed to, as a platform to inform the Ottoman public about Iranian affairs. Through his writings in this publication, he consistently emphasized the bonds of brotherhood and friendship between the two nations. His advocacy extended beyond poetry-he defended Iran's territorial integrity in *Süleymaniye Kürsüsü* and *Vaiz Kürsüsü*, voicing concerns about Western influence in the country. Mehmet Akif Ersoy's unwavering support for Iran and his vision of Islamic unity ultimately led the Qajar government to consider awarding him the Order of Merit and Virtue in recognition of his contributions.

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