

## ALBANIAN CONTEMPORARY QUR'ANIC EXEGESES

RATIONALIST REFORMIST DOCTRINE

AS REFLECTED IN THE COMMENTARY OF HAFIZ ALI KORÇA

التفسير الألباني المعاصر – الاتجاه الإصلاحى العقلى فى تفسير الشيخ الحافظ على كورتشا



1873-1957

By

**Prof. Dr. Hajredin Hoxha**

**Prof. of Qur'anic Exegeses & Academic Consultant**

**Qatar Emiri Air Defence Training Institute**

**Doha-Qatar**

(Former Professor at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, Qatar University, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Hamad bin Khalifa University, Qatar, Community College of Qatar, Community College of Taibah University, al Madina Munawarah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Faculty of Usulud Din, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University, Brunei, Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences – International Islamic University – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia)

## Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore and analyze the main intellectual and religious trends and tendencies in the writings of Albanian *Ulema* in their dealing with *Qur'anic studies*, in the modern time, in the Balkan Peninsula in South-East Europe. In conducting this study, the researcher has utilized inductive, historical, critical, and analytical methodologies. The Albanian lands in the Balkan Peninsula were governed and ruled by the Islamic Ottoman Empire almost six centuries. Historically, Albanians were able to show to the world a very good sample of peace, unity and harmony among themselves, as a multi religious and multiethnic society in Europe. The attention and the engagement of the *Albanian Ulema* with the *Qur'anic sciences* have been tremendous since the spread of Islam in South-East Europe. Despite the tough political, economic, and religious challenges in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries they were not distracted from conducting their learning and teaching in the field of Qur'anic studies. As a result of very close contacts and relations of Albanian Uleam with different ideologies, cultures and civilizations within the Ottoman Empire mixed ethnicity and in the middle east, the researcher based on different references, was able to identify and discover *Sunni Reformist approach in dealing with Quranic Exegesis in the Commentary of Sheikh Hafiz Ali Korça*, as a case study. The results and conclusions of this study proved that Sunni Reformist approach was widely present in their writings.

**Keywords:** *Albanians, Balkans, Exegeses, Reformist, Hafiz Ali Korça*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

### Preface

Muslims of the Balkans in Europe were faced with numerous social, political, religious, and ideological problems, and Albanian scholars were among the first to suffer the consequences of these challenges. In this context, the Muslim community (*Albanians, Bosnians and Turks*) as well the Muslim scholars in Balkans were facing ideological, political, social, cultural and religious challenges. However, these tough challenges did not prevent them from their love, passion, sincerity, seriousness in learning Islam, The Qur'an, interpreting it, learning Arabic, Turkish, Persian languages for better service of Islam and Muslim society. Thus, led them to produce partial and complete Qur'anic commentaries with its translations. The first partial commentary among Albanians was published in 1929, by Sheikh Hafiz Ibrahim Dalliu, by Sheikh Hafiz Ali Korça and others<sup>1</sup>.

During the early twentieth century a number of books were written on Qur'anic exegesis. Some Albanian scholars have commented the Noble Qur'an in a scholarly way such as the commentary written by Sheikh Hafiz Ibrahim Dalliu, Sheikh Hafiz Ali Korça and others. There have also been commentaries upon specific verses and chapters of the Qur'an by other authors, such as the commentary of Sura al-Fatiha by Sheikh Haji Vehbi Agolli-Dibra, the brief and concise translation and commentary of Sheikh Qazim Hoxha etc.

The first voices of social and religious reformism were heard at the turn of the twentieth century, and especially during its first three decades, which were replete with events and developments. Meanwhile, the communist ideology had been introduced to Albanians, and the economy and the political situation greatly deteriorated before the WW II due to the ideological polarisation in Europe. All these developments in Europe created pessimism and fear about an uncertain future of Islam and Muslims. Crime was soaring, and corruption was in the increase, social injustice and spying, which made people feel rather insecure.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of atheism had already appeared in society, propagating the principles of materialism through schools, societies, organizations, etc. Albanian U'lama sacrificed everything to defend Islam and their country from Italian and Greek occupiers.<sup>3</sup> Among the U'lama who stood against the communist ideology coming from Europe is our famous scholar Sheikh Hafiz Ali Korça, who was a fearless defender of the truth. Hafiz Ali Korça published the book *Bolshevizma a çkatërrim i njerëzimit* ("Bolshevism is the destruction of mankind") in 1925. This work contains words like:

*(Bolshevizma s'pajton kurrë - Bolshevism can never agree)*  
*(Me dinin e Muhamedit - With the religion of Muhammad)*  
*(Çelët do ta kenë luftën - They shall always be at war)*  
*(Gjer ditën e Kiametit. - Until the Day of Judgement).*

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<sup>1</sup> Ismail Bardhi, *Hafiz Ibrahim Dalliu dhe egzegjeza e tij kur'anore*, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> Ali M. Basha, *Islami në Shqipëri gjatë shekujve*, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 147-148.

Hafiz Ali Korça was distinguished scholar and understood the danger of communist ideology in depth and warned people against it by clarifying the origin of the communist<sup>4</sup> ideology: “*The bitter and accursed Bolshevik tree was planted 70-80 years ago by (Karl) Marx, and then it was nourished with the water of Lenin, and we want to inform our brethren for the great animosity that Jews bear in their hearts against Muslims. In the Sura al-Mai’dah, God the Glorious says: “Verily, you will find the strongest among men in enmity to the believers the Jews and the polytheists...”* (al-Ma’ida, 83.) *All the catastrophes and hardships that have whelmed the Islamic world, from the ancient times up to the present have been instigated by the Jews and the polytheists, and many Jews converted to Islam in order to harm it and the Muslims. Abdullah ibn Saba’a spread ideas and doubts that contradicted Islam, saying: ‘Ali is God!’* (Highly elevated is He above what they ascribe to Him). *In the Battle of Siffin too, the Jews played they role in secret, and even the building of the Masjid al-dirar in Madina was supported by the Jews, in order to sow doubt and cause harm. In the past they have killed prophets and messengers of God, committing many crimes against humanity.*”<sup>5</sup>

He also warns against the Jewish danger in economy. When they failed with their plots against Christians and Muslims, they turned to economical intrigues and the formation of masonic societies, such as the *Freemasons Liberal Society*, among its principle was “*Brotherhood and Unity among all people*”.<sup>6</sup>

In order to better know the truth on this challenge and Albanian Muslims’ their resistance to it, one must go through the speeches, sermons, and scholarly articles written by the U’lama of the time. In this paper we shall deal with the personality and the commentary of Hafiz Ali Korça as well as his views on certain verses regarding important creedal, social and some other contemporary matters.

## Questions of study

This paper aims to discuss and analyse the following issues:

- 1- *Life and works of Hafiz Ali Korça.*
- 2- *His efforts against contemporary political and social anti-Islamic challenges?*
- 3- *His methodology in Qur’an Interpretation?*
- 4- *His qualifications to become a Qur’anic Exegete?*
- 5- *The impact of the reformist contemporary doctrine on his Qur’anic Interpretation.*

## Previous Studies:

I found some previous studies and articles which were partially related to my study. On the top of those studies was: Hafiz Ali Korça – Jeta dhe Vepra ( *Hafiz Ali Korça -His Life and Works*). The study was conducted by professor Ismail Ahmedi, a well-known professor of oriental studies in the university of Prishtina, Kosova. The study was published by “Logos “ publishing house in North Macedonia in 1995. The study covered his life, works, political thoughts, his poetry translations from Persian language into Albanian language, his writings and

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<sup>4</sup> See: Vernon Bogdanor, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Institutions*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 50-51; Joel Kriger, *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, Oxford University Press, 1993; Frank Bealey, *Russian Revolution*, Oxford 1999, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Hafiz Ali Korça, “Bolshevizma a çkatërrim i njerëzimit”; 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 10-11,16-21; Daut I. Hoxha, *Hafiz Ali Korça - Veprimtaria e tij në lëmin e atdhetarisë dhe arsimit-kulturës shqiptare dhe arabe-osmane-persiane*, 1995, Tiranë, pp. 5-12.

translations about Islamic Civilizations, his national and patriotic poems and some parts of Qur'an interpretations

However, regarding his Qur'anic exegeses which were published in Islamic quarterly magazines, his methodology in Qur'anic exegeses, the qualifications of the Qur'anic exegete and other many issues in the field of Qur'anic studies were not discussed in the monography of prof. Ismail Ahmedi. This study was very helpful due to its rich bibliography for which I am indebted to the professor Ismail Ahmedi, is that I have benefitted extremely from his references which were used in his monography for Sheikh Hafiz Ali Korça.

Another study which was partially related to my study was the work of Albanian famous writer Ibrahim Daut Hoxha, entitled: Hafiz Ali Korça - Veprimtaria e tij në lëmin e atdhetarisë dhe arsimit-kulturës shqiptare dhe arabe-osmane-persiane (*Hafiz Ali Korça – His activity and contribution in the field of Albanian and Arab-Ottoman-Persian patriotism and education-culture*), published in Tirana, Albania in 1995.

### **Methodology of study:**

In conducting this study, the researcher has utilized inductive, historical, critical, and analytical methodologies

### **The problematic of study:**

Contemporary modern Islamic Sunni scholars among Albanians are to be divided into many groups or categories. Scholars who embrace the Salafī view of understanding Islam, scholars with Maturidi and Ash'ari view, Scholars with Sufi view etc. However, this study is going to prove that among Albanians were scholars who embraced the reformist contemporary view about Islam, and our respected great Mufasir and scholar Hafiz Ali Korca is the leading pioneer of this reformist contemporary Islamic school.

Let us not forget that the influence of the reformist school on Albanian thinkers was significant. A glance at the writings published in Albanian journals of the time, including those of the High Council of Islamic Affairs will show that they revolve around issues which were prevalent at the time: *the need for religion and piety, the relationship between Islam and the West, the challenges of modernism, the new arguments of religion on theism, woman's emancipation, employment and position, human rights, secularism, religious tolerance, solidarity among followers of the same religion, the problem of ideologies like communism, socialism, capitalism* etc.<sup>7</sup> and let's remember that this school,

“...was established in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries A.H. (after Hijra), in Egypt by two professors: Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani (1254-1315 AH) and Muhammad Abduhu

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<sup>7</sup> See the: *Kultura Islame* , ( Islamic Culture ) an Islamic Journal published by High Council of Islamic Affairs in Albania, no. 3-4 (November-December 1941), “*Islami është gjallë*” (Islam is live) written by the Albanian orientalist Vexhi Buharaja, who wrote on the Arab encyclopedist Muhammad Farid Wajdi, editor of the al-Azhar Journal. He also wrote the article “*Fuqia e Islamit në botë*”, (The Power of Islam in the World), pp. 96-99. See issues 17-19 (1941); where the names of the great reformist thinkers Jamal al-Din Afghani, Farid Wajdi, Muhammad Abduhu are given. See also issue 10 (1944), pp. 272-6; issue 20 (April-May 1942) “*Feja, kultura dhe shkenca*” (Religion, Culture, Science) pp. 226-9; issue 1-2 (1946), where in a long commentary on verse “... and do not invoke any god beside Allah. There is no god but He. All will perish but He. To Him belongs the command. And to Him shall all of you return” al Qasas:88, the author expounds on concepts of modern physics, evolution, etc.

(1266-1323 AH). The emergence of this school came during the weakness of the Ottoman Empire, and in a state of ignorance and backwardness of the Muslim Ummah. This is at a time when the West (the Christian world) was progressing spectacularly in materialism. The position of this school was to try to adapt to the reconciliation of that incoming civilization while maintaining Islamic affiliation. It is as Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Al-Dhahabi - may God have mercy on him - (d. 1397 AH) says: this school gave human mind wide freedom similar to that of Mu'tazila fraction in some of its teachings and beliefs, and deviated some of the words of the Qur'an from meanings that were not typical of the Arabs at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, and challenged the authenticated hadith sometimes with weakness and sometimes with fabrication, although they are authentic hadiths. The similarities between the oldest to criticize this school and accuse it:

1- Sheikh Muhammad 'Alish al-Maliki (d. 1299), who was a contemporary of al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh and warned against them and their method, 2- Mustafa Sabri, the last sheikh of the Ottoman Empire, he likened al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduhu to Luther Protestant, and Muhammad Abduhu was considered the first to introduce Freemasonry in Al-Azhar, who encouraged his student Qasim Amin to promote al Sufur (liberality of women and their nudity) and write his books on women, 3- Dr. Mohammed Hussein Al-Dhahabi who wrote a lot about them, 4- Mufassir Sayyid Qutb where he criticizes the school's approach to interpretation, 5- Prof. Dr. Fahd bin Abdul Rahman Al-Roumi in his doctoral thesis entitled 'The Modern School Curriculum in Interpretation'. In contrast to these, we find those who exaggerate in praise of this school, especially its early pioneers like Dr. Mohsen Abdel Hamid, Mohamed Emara and others<sup>8</sup>.

In this study we will be dealing with a leading figure of the Albanian reformist school, as manifested in his sermons, speeches, articles, books and exegetic works, namely Sheikh Hafiz Ali Korça. His whole commentary is no longer extant, only a part of it has survived; other works have been burned during the communist regime in Albania.

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<sup>8</sup> For more details see an article titled: Manhaj al Madrasah al Aqliyah ( al Hadithah) wa taqwimuha fi al Islah al Muasir, at : [www.alukah.net](http://www.alukah.net), See also: : Shafik bin Abdullah Shukair; *Mauqif al Madrasati al Aqliyati al Hadithati min el Hadithi an Nabawiyyi al Sharif -Dirasatun Tatbikiyatun ala Tafsir al Manar*, pg: 19-30

## SECTION ONE:

### ON THE AUTHOR OF THIS COMMENTARY

#### 1. Name and birthplace

Sheikh Hafiz Ali Iljaz Kadiu, better known as Hafiz Ali Korça, a surname he acquired from his town of birth, was born in 1873,<sup>9</sup> other sources say 1870,<sup>10</sup> in Korça, South-Eastern Albania. He hailed from a family of religious intellectuals who revered scholars and knowledge, and he was destined to continue the footsteps of his predecessors in science and knowledge.

Hafiz Ali Korça lived at a time of general national awakening among Albanians. He was one of the figures who produced literary studies in Albanian, Persian, Turkish, and Arabic while in migration. He called for the creation of an Islamic and national awareness, the re-acquisition of the lost rights, and for religious freedom besides political freedom and independence from the colonialists.<sup>11</sup>

Orthodox Greece considered Korça a centre for the spread of missionaries and colonialist attacks against Islamic culture in Albania. There were 126 Greek missionary schools in this town, as well as in Berat. It was God's will that this Muslim scholar be born in this town, and thwart their plots.<sup>12</sup>

#### 2. Education

Hafiz Ali Korça received his first learning during these political and religious developments. He memorized the Qur'an at the age of twelve. He completed his early education in his hometown, and his university studies in Istanbul, where he studied Islamic sciences, Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish and French.<sup>13</sup> He was greatly influenced by the scholarly ambience of Istanbul and the different thinkers living and writing there.<sup>14</sup>

#### 3. Family and descendants

Hafiz Ali Korça's family lived in the town of Shijak (Albania). He had five sons and two daughters. His elder son Majd al-Din and second son Bahr al-Din died in their youth in an accident, whereas his third son Ilias, who had graduated from the Madrasa of Tirana, was sentenced to 25 years in prison during the Enver Hoxha regime. He was released in 1968, after serving for 15 years, and he died in 1975. He was the true heir of Hafiz Ali Korça's knowledge, but it was God's will

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<sup>9</sup> Ismail Ahmed, *Hafiz Ali Korça-Jeta dhe Vepra*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> See: *Hafiz Ali Korça-Veprimtaria e tij në lëmin e Atdhetarisë dhe Arsim-kulturës arabe-osmane-persiane* by the contemporary historian Ibrahim Daut Hoxha.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 6-7; Ibrahim Daut Hoxha, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-15.

<sup>12</sup> Ismail Ahmed, *Hafiz Ali Korça-Jeta dhe Vepra*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> See: Shefik Osmani, *Panteoni iranian dhe iranologët shqiptarë*, pp. 272-6.

<sup>14</sup> Ismail Ahmed, "*Hafiz Ali Korça-Jeta dhe Vepra*"; 16-17; Ibrahim Daut Hoxha, "*Veprimtaria e tij në lëmin e atdhetarisë dhe arsim-kulturës*"; 11-17.

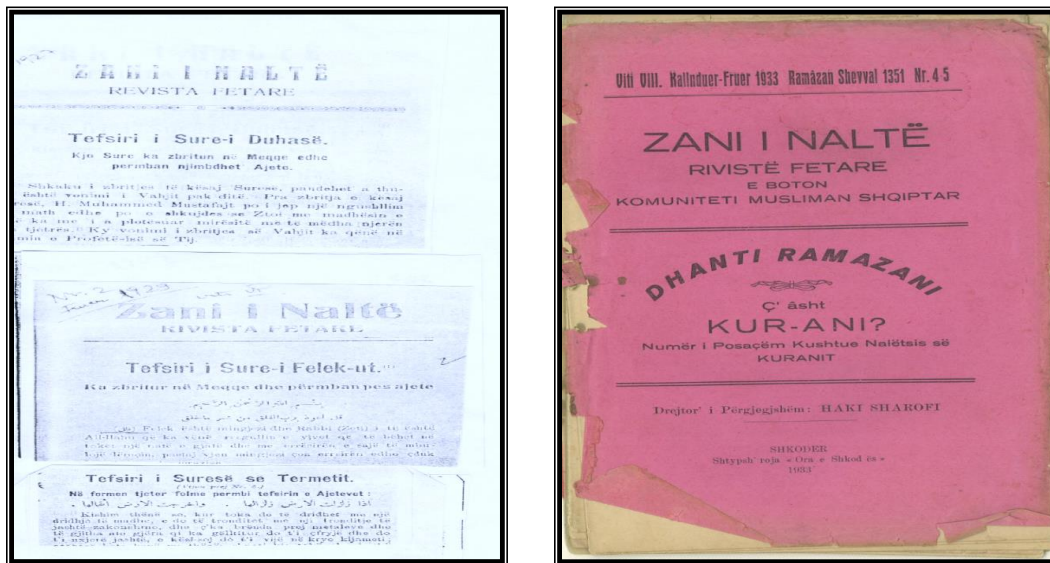
for him to die too young. The fourth son, Salah al-Din graduated from the Military Academy in Italy and worked as an officer instructor in the Albania Royal Court. The fifth son, Ala al-Din, also graduated from the Military Academy of Rome, and he returned to Albania upon his father's call to serve his homeland and teach the military skills to his people. He died in 1982. One of the daughters of Hafiz Ali lives in Tirana, and the other lives in Durrës.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Academic and religious positions

1. He was officially invited for the crowning ceremony of Prince Wied as the King of Albanians, in 1914. Hafiz Ali read the welcome address in French.
2. In 1916 he was appointed Head of Education of several bigger towns.
3. From 1918-1924 he was Head of the Islamic Supreme Council in Albania.
4. From 1924-1949 he taught Arabic, Quranic Exegesis (Tafsir), Logics, and other subjects at the madrasa of Tirana.
5. From 1924-1938 he worked on the Qur'an commentary for the Zani i Naltë Journal, and was considered as the only Albanian exegete (Mufassir) of the period.
6. From 1949-1959 he was deported to Kavaja, where he continued to teach secretly.
7. He worked as an adviser to the Minister of Education.<sup>16</sup>

#### 6. His death

Shaykh Hafiz Ali Korça became ill in the town of Kavaja, where he was deported, and died on December 31, 1956. His funeral rites and prayer were led by his student and future head of the Islamic Community of Albania, the late Haxhi Hafiz Sabri Koçi.<sup>17</sup>



**Albanian Islamic Journal- Albanian Muslim Community**

(Courtesy of <http://zanimalte.al/zani-i-nalte-1923-1939/>)

<sup>15</sup> Ismail Ahmedi, *Hafiz Ali Korça - Jeta dhe vepra*, pp. 51-53.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 41, 42, 43, 44, 49, 56, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Ismail Ahmedi, op. cit., pp. 5-51.



## SECTION TWO:

### HAFIZ ALI KORÇA'S IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL REFORM

As we have explained earlier, sheikh Hafiz Ali Korça, was a leading religious as well national figure. His works and legacy can be seen widely covering almost all fields of knowledge, in political, philosophical, patriotic and national concerns/areas. In the following points we stated some of his works in different fields.

#### 1. WORKS OF A POLITICAL NATURE:

1. **“Bolshevizma a Ç’katërimi i Njerëzimit”**<sup>18</sup>( Bolshevism- Destruction of mankind)
2. **“Shtatë** <sup>19</sup> **ëndrrat e Shqipërisë”** (Seven dreams of Albania )
3. **“Filosofi e vjetër”**; (Classical Philosophy )
4. **“Filosofi mbi besimet myslimane”**, ( Philosophy of Muslim Believes)
5. **“Logjika”**. (Logic)

#### 2. HIS ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOLS TEXTBOOKS

1. **Alfabeti Shqip** -Albanian alphabet,
2. **Alfabeti Arabisht** - Arabic alphabet,
3. **Gramatika-Sintaksa Shqip-Arabisht-** Grammar&Syntax Albanian-Arabic Text book.
4. **Ilmi Bejan-Retorika**; ( Rethorics )
5. **Myslimanija**; (The Religion of Islam)
6. **Mevludi** <sup>20</sup> **a jetë e pastër e Pejgamberit**; (Birth and Life of Prophet Muhammed)
7. **Treqind**<sup>21</sup> **e tri fjalët e Imam Aliut**; ( 301 Words of al Imam Ali)
8. **Gjylistani-Trendafilishta e Saadiut**; <sup>22</sup> Julistan’s Garden – Persian writer Al Sa’di )
9. **Rubajati-Katrorët e Umer Hajjamit**; (Quadruplets of Persian writer Omar al Khayyam)
10. **Jusufi me Zelihanë-a Ahsenul-Kasas**;(Yusuf and Zeliha, Best Qur’anic Stories)
11. **Historia e shenjte dhe të katër Halifetë**.(Our Sacred History and Four Khalifs)

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<sup>18</sup> Printed by Mbrothësia Publishers; March 1925, Shkodër, Albania.

<sup>19</sup> This *diwan* in poetry and prose was political in nature, and was published in 1924. It contains dreams Hafiz Ali Korça had seen and written down. He mentions the dangers threatening Albania from out: Russian, Italian, and Greek colonialism, and immoral leaders and politicians from within. He distributed it privately and when the government found out about it, they dismissed him from his position as the Head of the Supreme Council of the Shari’iah, but he continued to teach logics and Arabic at the madrasa until 1949, Published by the state printing house, Tirana: 1944.

<sup>20</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> printing, November 1919, Nikaj, Shkodër, Albania.

<sup>21</sup> Korça Publishers, Korçë, 1910.

<sup>22</sup> Mbrothësia, “Kristo P. Luarasi”; Tiranë 1917, Albania.

### 3- DAILY , WEEKLY ARTICLES IN INTERNATIONAL NEWS PAPERS

During our research we came across of some daily and weekly newspapers in Turkey, Egypt, Iran etc. in which Hafiz Ali Korça's writing were published:

- **al-Sabah;** الصباح
- **Aksham;** أفشام
- **Siratun Mustaqim;** صراط مستقيم
- **Bayan al-Haqq;** بيان الحق
- **Aksu Sada-Anatol Seneleri;** عكس صدا – أناضول سنلري
- **Hal-laj;** newspaper in Iran published his articles in Persian.
- **al-Sijase;** السياسة newspaper in Egypt published his articles in Arabic.<sup>23</sup>

By this writings Hafiz Ali's articles gained the sympathy of Shaykh al-Islam, who fully supported the continuation of his writings.<sup>24</sup>

The Hafiz also corresponded with the Rector of al-Az'har University, Shaykh Mustafa Maraghi. In a letter from 1939, Shaykh Maraghi wrote: *“Respected and honoured Professor Ali, Assalamu alaikum wa rahmat Allah! After these cordial greetings I would like to inform you that I read your last letter, which was written from the heart of a believing man...”*<sup>25</sup>

Hafiz Ali also corresponded with King Faruq of Egypt and the King of Hyderabad, Osman Nizami, both of whom he informed that: *“Albanians have ended up like orphans, without any help from anybody, the best and most fertile lands had been allotted to the neighbouring Greece and Yugoslavia, whereas the poor Albanians have been left with hills and unfertile rocks.”*<sup>26</sup>



### SECTION THREE:

<sup>23</sup> Hafiz Ali Korça, *Shtatë ëndrrat e Shqipërisë*, pp. 22, 27, 31, 41, 48, 55, 61.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77.

<sup>26</sup> Ismail Ahmedi, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-49; Hafiz Ali Korça, *Shtatë ëndrrat e Shqipërisë*, pp. 75-77.

**HIS COMMENTARY: “KUR’ANI <sup>27</sup> I MADHNUESHËM E THEBI I TIJ “ -  
THE EXALTED QURAN AND ITS MEANING” <sup>28</sup>**

**1. THE MAIN FEATURES OF HAFIZ ALI KORÇA’S COMMENTARY**

After careful reading and deep analysis to his approach in his Qur’anic commentary we realized the following characteristics:

- He opposed all forms of immorality and warned against the soul that incites to evil, and he enjoined the believers to rely on moral values.

- He warned against the danger from the Jewish plots in economy, politics, and morality, and their intentions to dominate the world.

- He analysed values that were peculiar to Islam, arguing that the message of Islam saved the Arabs and mankind from the darkness of ignorance, and from Roman as well as Persian colonialism.

- He focused on Qur’anic values as opposed to imported Western values.

- He expounded on the virtues, qualities, and manners of the Prophet Muhamed (*peace and blessings of God be upon him*) in dealing with people, especially the orphans, arguing that the Prophet Muhammad (*peace and blessings of God be upon him*) represented the peak of humanism and democracy. He argued that the Rightly Guided Caliphs were democratic, albeit not in the modern sense of the word, and that the Prophet (*peace and blessings of God be upon him*) was not a parasite who lived off others, as is the case with modern leaders. All people, be they princes or beggars, were equal in his eyes.

- He strongly affirms the peaceful spread of Islam as opposed to Christianity. Had Islam not been tolerant, Christianity would have disappeared from the areas where Islam spread, and had it used violence to convert people, there would be no Christians or Jews left in those parts of the world.

- He supported the idea of the universalisation and internationalization of the Islamic call<sup>29</sup> and its preservation in this world.

- He underlined the rational and spiritual capacity of Islam to face the challenges of modernity.

- He explained that there are no holy persons (or kings) in Islam and that holiness belongs only to God, and that no soul shall bear the burden of another.

- He called for reforms in the method of teaching religion, focusing on the intellectual heritage, the improvement of Arabic, the study of linguistics and stylistics from such traditional masters like Zamakhshari, Ibn Hajib, etc., and the scholarly writings of Fakhr al-Din Razi, Ibn Sina, Jalal al-Din Suyuti, Imam al-Ghazzali etc. He was against the imitation of Western methods

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<sup>27</sup> Printing House “Ora e Shkodrës”; Shkodër 1926.

<sup>28</sup> This is an incomplete treatise too. The only extant copy is that from the National Library in Tirana and we will rely on it as well as the scattered commentaries of different verses in other books to understand his reformist views.

<sup>29</sup> On Islam’s universality see: el-Qardawi, *Shumul al-Islam fi dou’i sharh mufassal lil-Usul al-ishrin lil-Imam al-Shahid Hasan al-Banna*, Cairo, Maktaba al-Wahba, 2nd ed., 1995, pp. 35-120.

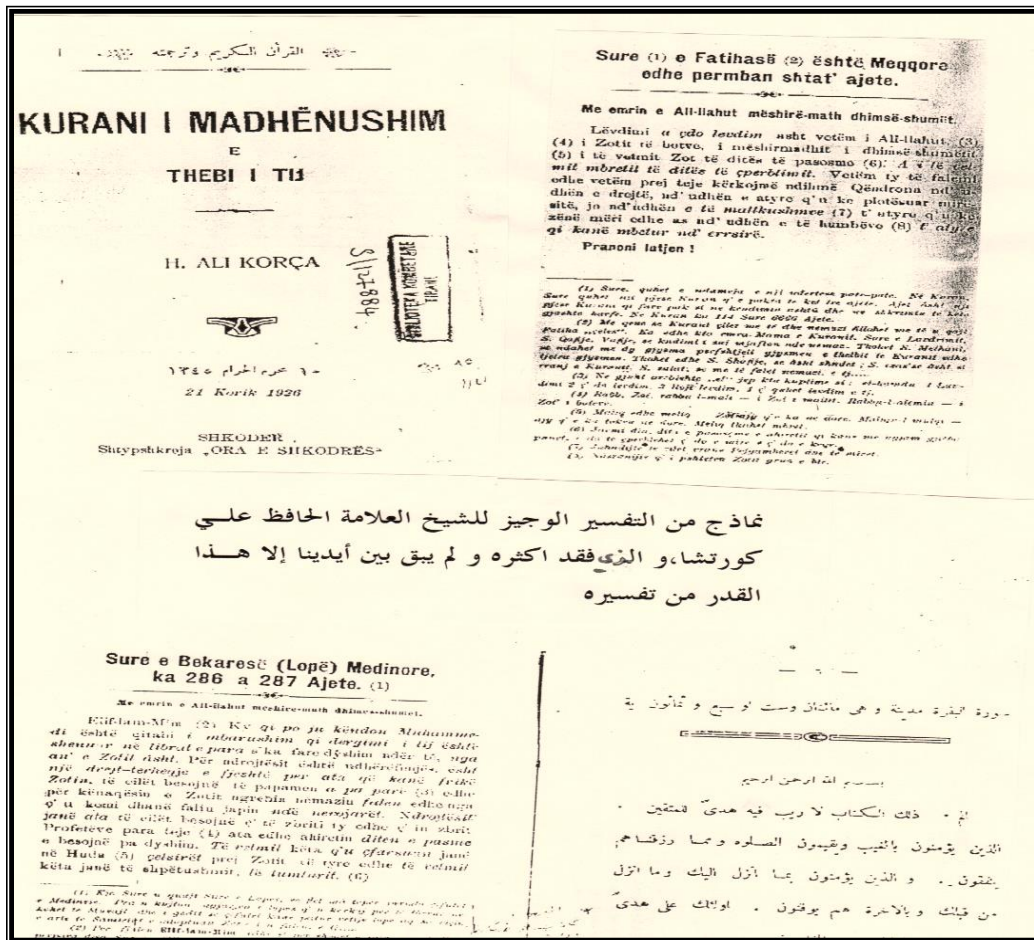
in the education reform, but rather dreamed of basing the latter on the Abbasid models in Baghdad and the Umayyad models from Andalusia, combined with modern disciplines;<sup>30</sup>

- He argued for the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, the Prophethood of Muhammad, (*peace and blessings of God be upon him*) and the universality of the message of Islam;

- He called for the spread of religious schools, because they played a very important role in the life of the ummah.

- He fought against idolatry and the idea of intercession of idols in prayer, be they alive or dead;<sup>31</sup>

- He opposed non-Islamic customs, superstitions and innovation, calling people to rely on the Noble Qur'an and the Prophetic *Sunnah*.



The First pages of his Qur'anic Exegeses

<sup>30</sup> Dhahabi, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 408-420. Compare with Muhammad Abduh's method.

<sup>31</sup> *Zani i Naltë*, Nr. 3, March 1929, pp. 796-7, 799-800; Nr. 9, Qershor 1924, p. 270; Nr. 8, May, 1924, pp. 238-46.

## 2. HAFIZ ALI KORÇA'S EXEGESIS: HIS METHOD AND REFERENCES

In his introduction to the brief commentary, Hafiz Ali Korça points out that he has written at length on the exegesis of the Book of God, and that he relied on many well-known works on the subject, but that unfortunately the financial circumstances did not allow for the publication of this voluminous commentary, which forced him to postpone it.

Despite the difficult financial situation, he had decided to publish the summarized version, in order to make it accessible to a wider audience. Unfortunately, the copy we possess is missing most of the pages. Some researchers say that Hafiz Ali's voluminous commentary was about 2000 (two thousand) pages long.<sup>32</sup> The incomplete summarized version starts with Chapter al-Fatiha and ends with verse 38 of Chapter al-Baqarah. We therefore had to gather the comments on different verses scattered in his writings in Islamic journals especially the well-known journal (*Zani i Naltë* - High Voice) in order to have a general view of his ideas on exegesis.

Before turning to Hafiz Ali's method in exegesis, we must mention the sources in which he relied in the writing of his commentary as well as other works. He has relied on a considerable number of works, due to his knowledge of many Oriental and European languages, which greatly benefitted him in his work.

1. The following is a list of works on which Hafiz Ali relied in his writings:

- Literature on the Prophetic Sunnah; the biography of the Prophet and his Companions; exegesis works, starting from the commentary of Fakhr al-Din Razi, Rashid Rida's al-Manar; books on history, especially the History of al-Tabari; Arabic literature, namely grammar and rhetoric; Islamic and Western philosophy; general literature in different languages; Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Albanian literature; modern works on geography, astronomy, and biology; jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence; Qur'anic sciences; Islamic history; apologetics; world politics; Western orientalist literature, etc., which confirms his great learning.

2. From our research on his writings in exegesis, we concluded that his method of studying the Books of God consists of the following points:

- He points out Meccan and Medinite verses, and their numbers.
- He elaborates on different terms and foreign terms in Albanian.
- Translates the chapter names and explains the reasons for their titles.
- He provides grammar analysis, e.g. the function of *al* in the verse:

﴿ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴾ [ الفاتحة: 2 ] ; “*al-Hamdulil-lahi Rab-bil-Alamin*”;

- He often briefly refers to the readings (*qira'at*) of the Qur'an.
- He points out the opinion of the commentators on the symbolical letters at the beginning of certain chapters, but rather briefly;<sup>33</sup>
- He elaborates on different communities living in the Arabic Peninsula: Jews, Christians, idolaters of stones and stars, materialists etc;<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ramiz Zekaj, *Zhvillimi i Kulturës Islame*, pp. 317-19; Ismail Bardhi, *Hafiz Ibrahim Dalliu*, p. 67; Shefik Osmani, *op. cit.*, pp. 272-6.

<sup>33</sup> In the footnotes to the summarized commentary, the author says that he compiled a special book on these letters, which confirms his great interest on the field of exegesis. Unfortunately, this book is no longer extant.

<sup>34</sup> *Kur'ani i Madhëruar e thelbi i Tij*, pp. 3-13.

- He provides the reason/s for the revelation of different verses<sup>35</sup>.
- He relies on the biography of the Prophet a.s.(*Alayhis Salam*) and of his Companions in order to clarify the meaning of a particular verse.
- He inclines towards the scientific commentary, as can be clearly seen in his exegesis of Chapter al-Zalzalah, where he deals with different laws of physics regarding the destruction of the earth before the Day of Resurrection, volcanos, the shooting stars, the collapse of the heavens, and other eschatological events. In our view, the influence of scientific exegesis and his relying on the commentary of Fakhr al-Din Razi was so great, that he went as far as to write that there are animals and human beings in the other planets, based on the verse:

﴿ وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَثَّ فِيهِمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ جَمْعِهِمْ إِذَا يَشَاءُ قَدِيرٌ ﴾ [الشورى: 29]

“*And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and whatever moving creatures He has dispersed in them both. And He is All-Potent over their assembling whenever He wills*”( *Al Shura 29*)

- He often transmits the words of al Imam al Fakhur Razi without mentioning number of the page and volume<sup>36</sup>.
- He often elaborates on Sufi notions and terms, as in the commentary of Chapter al-Duha, in which he states that during the first encounter with Gabriel a.s., the Prophet a.s. was immersed in the Ocean of God’s Light, and he was overwhelmed by the waves of this Ocean, from the Light of God the Glorious.<sup>37</sup>
- He often makes digressions from the subject; and then returns to the latter.
- At times he illustrates his arguments with his own poetry<sup>38</sup>.
- When pointing out Islamic values, he refers to the pre-Islamic period for comparison.
- Hafiz Ali Korça used beautiful poetical expressions throughout his commentary, reflecting his great poetical skills which had shown since his childhood days. He composed poetry on all Islamic disciplines, and he used terms with sublime meanings to illustrate his ideas<sup>39</sup>.
- He quoted words of wisdom from Western thinkers, philosophers, and historians, and elaborated on their positive impressions on the greatness of the message of Islam, and the lofty personality of the Prophet a.s., who exerted himself in the full realization of human potentials and divine goals.
- Hafiz Ali Korça responds to the doubts and allegations of hostile missionaries and orientalists, and criticizes Christian missionary methods in Africa, China, and India;<sup>40</sup>
- He provides a brief introduction before the commentary of each Chapter, e.g. in Surah al-Qadr, Surah al-Takathur, etc, and then elaborates on it;<sup>41</sup>
- In Hafiz Ali’s view, the numbers mentioned in different verses, such as ‘1000 months’ in Chapter al-Qadr do not mean specific numbers, but are used to convey the notion of great quantity, as is common in Arabic;<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> *Zani i Naltë*, Nr. 6, 1927, (162-167).

<sup>37</sup> *Zani i Naltë*, Nr. 8, mars, 1927, (227-228).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 233.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 236.

<sup>40</sup> *Zani i Naltë*, Nr. 1, nëntor, 1927, 383-388 dhe Nr. 3, prill, 1924, (203-217).

<sup>41</sup> *Zani i Naltë*, Nr. 7, prill, 1924, (195-201).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*. p.236

- He quotes from the commentaries of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Rashid Rida, and others, without mentioning their names;<sup>43</sup>

- He points out the different lessons and admonitions of Qur'anic verses and strongly criticizes the rich who prefer a life of luxury, priding themselves with their wealth and children, and not contributing socially or religiously to their environment, e.g. by building schools, or helping the poor marry, etc. He often calls upon them for an appropriate investment of their wealth and means;<sup>44</sup>

- Sometimes he ends his commentary on a verse with a summary, and at times he bases his argument on Hadith.

- He completely rejects the *israiliyyat* and we must point out that we have not come across any in his commentary. This is a characteristic of the reformist rationalist school which had a profound influence on him.<sup>45</sup>

- He relied on contemporary scientific discoveries, e.g. when speaking about the harms of alcohol and smoking, and for the benefits of fasting on health, he argued by referring to medical reports<sup>46</sup>.

- He avoided repetitions when elaborating on the meanings and of verses. he pointed out the rhetorical peculiarities of the Qur'an, in order to differentiate between its addressing the Prophet, and the Muslims;<sup>47</sup>

- He used stylistic expressions inspired by the Qur'an, such as "*The shining of the sun of religion is approaching*" or "*From the ocean of divine love*" etc.<sup>48</sup>

- He elaborates on Divine destiny (*qadar*), pointing out the error of Albanian customs, superstitions and misconceptions on different aspects of life<sup>49</sup>.

- He defended the Sunni doctrine with full conviction, calling for relying on the Noble Qur'an and the Sunnah. He also called for the translation of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Hadith into Albanian.<sup>50</sup>

As we have seen, these are the most important milestones of his method and references of his Qur'anic commentary. We may conclude on this point, that such method is completely accepted, and in general this method is the same method of other Muslim exegetes in the science of Tafsir, bearing in mind their different religious, doctrinal and cultural backgrounds.

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<sup>43</sup> *Zani i Naltë*, Nr. 6, 1926, (163-167).

<sup>44</sup> See his commentary on Chapter al-Takathur, in *Zani i Naltë*, nr. 9, Qershor 1924, pp. 261-5.

<sup>45</sup> See his commentary on the verse of fasting, in *Zani i Naltë*, nr. 6, Mars, 1924, p. 174.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164. On the different kinds of accounts in the Qur'an, see: Abd al-Hamid Muhammad Nada Ja'rana, *al-Mad'hal il al-tafsir*, Maktabat al-Wahba, Caijro, 1st. ed., 1996, 405-24; Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *al-Tahbir fi 'ilm al-tafsir*, ed. Fat'hi Abd al-Qadir Farid, Darul-Manar, Cairo 1986, pp. 235-242.

<sup>48</sup> *Zani i Naltë*, nr. 6, 1924, p. 174.

<sup>49</sup> *Zani i Naltë*, nr. 2, Shkurt 1929, p. 776; nr. 3 Mars, 1929, p. 799.

<sup>50</sup> *Zani i Naltë*, nr. 3, Mars 1929, p. 800.

### 3. THE IMPACT OF THE REFORMIST RATIONALIST SCHOOL ON HAFIZ ALI'S THOUGHT

One of the greatest arguments pointing out to his belonging to the reformist rationalist school was his attitude towards the incident of the *sihr* (black magic) on the Prophet a.s. which has been related in hadiths which are regarded as authentic.<sup>51</sup>

In his commentary of Surah al-Falaq Hafiz Ali Korça writes:

“It has been related that Labid ibn al-A’asam, the Jew from Medina, performed sihr (black magic) against the Prophet in a well, and that the Prophet had hallucinations as if he did some things which in reality he did not, and as if he spoke certain things which in reality he did not, until God the Almighty informed him for the place of the magic ... and other claims. I say that these claims are absolutely false, because the prophets are not affected by magic, and therefore how can sihr affect the Prophet a.s.? Whoever claims this in fact only confirms the claim of the idolators who used to say:

﴿إِنْ تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا مَسْحُورًا﴾ [الإسراء: 47]

“You follow none but a bewitched man” (al-Isra, 47) and

﴿وَقَالَ الظَّالِمُونَ إِنْ تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا مَسْحُورًا﴾ [الفرقان: 8]

“And the wrongdoers say: You follow none but a man bewitched” (al-Furqan, 8).

Furthermore Hafiz Ali Korça writes:

“The term “bewitched” (مَسْحُورًا) refers to a man who cannot differentiate between things and who has delusions of having performed actions which he or she has not performed in reality, or a person who believes he or she has been inspired with something, but in reality that is not the case. Those who claim this (event as true) do not know the reality of prophethood, and shamelessly attribute these ridiculous allegations to the Prophet of God, believing that the Jew Labid ibn al-A’sam performed sihr on him. They have forgotten the Qur’an truth that the Prophet is protected and preserved. We are obligated to believe in what we must believe, and to reject what we must reject.

When rumours of the sihr spread, the Prophet a.s. himself denied these allegations, by saying: “I cannot be bewitched.” In any case, if there are such reports from the Prophet of God, they are single narrations (رواية الآحاد) which bear no weight whatsoever. We must believe that the Prophet a.s. is protected, pure and purified from any such thing that has been said against him. They can speak whatever they want, but we are obligated to believe what the Qur’an orders us to believe. If such shallow minded accusations that the Prophet a.s. was bewitched were true, he would have informed his ummah on something which he has not been ordered or inspired by God. Sihr indeed exists,<sup>52</sup> but it cannot affect a person who is protected by God the Glorious, whom He looks after and protects. We as Muslims believe in only what the Qur’an teaches us to believe, and not in what the idolaters believe. It is true that sihr exists, but it cannot be interpreted in the way of those who

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<sup>51</sup> This hadith is transmitted by Imam al-Bukhari in his *Sahih*, Chapter of al-Sihr, no. 5430, vol. 5, p. 2174; and Imam Muslim, in his *Sahih*, Chapter of Sihr, no. 2189, vol. 4, p. 1719.

<sup>52</sup> Thus, Hafiz Ali Korça confirms the existence of sihr, but denies the possibility of it affecting the Prophet a.s.. In his commentary of the verse “..And from the evil of those who practice witchcraft when they blow in the knots” (Falaq, 4), he says that it refers to those who blow (in the knots). Upon comparing these words with those of Muhammad Abduh, I noticed that they are identical, which confirms their common idea and method. See Abduh’s *Tafsir juz’i amma*, pp. 181-192, quoted by Dhahabi in his *al-Tafsir wa al-mufasssirun*, vol. 2, pp. 420-1.



have strayed. Sihr means deviating something from the truth, and people use it in order to deceive through words and gestures, making one believe that the illusion is true. The Noble Qur'an says:

﴿فَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ وَعَصِيَّتُهُمْ يُخَلِّلُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ سِحْرِهِمْ أَتَّهَا تَسْعَى﴾ [ طه:66 ]

“ Then behold! their ropes and their sticks, by their magic, appeared to him as though they moved fast” , ( Taha:66), it does not say: “It appeared to him as if the ropes and sticks moved by their magic”, and we say in Albanian: “So and so took my mind away by throwing dust in my eyes” - to refer to a ruse or intrigue. The Prophet a.s. has said:(وإن من البيان لسحراً) (In words, too, there is ruse).<sup>53</sup> In modern politics, diplomats use this ruse in public discourse, through numerous conferences and pompous, empty sentences and long texts, full of unfulfilled promises. This is how they use their speech during elections, and in times of war.

The second argument that this narration is fabricated is the fact that Sura al-Falaq was revealed in Mecca, whereas Labid ibn al-A'sam was from Medina. Therefore, how can one accept this claim?!

Be as it may, this is an absurd fabrication which is unacceptable by sound minded people, and we do not believe in it.”<sup>55</sup>

This is a clear and transparent attitude of the Hafiz Ali Korca towards this narration. He analysed from a logical and religious point of view the impossibility of such a thing having happened to the Prophet Muhammad (a.s.) This was his opinion and his method:

However, there is another opinion on this issue. Before criticizing his opinion, it is worth quoting the words of prof. Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabi on this matter:

“This hadith, which is rejected by the Imam (Abduh) has been related by al-Bukhari and other authors of reliable books and has no bearing on the authenticity of prophethood. The sihr which seized the Prophet regarded the sickening of his body without affecting his mind, and it has been said that Labid ibn El-A'sami's sihr against the Prophet may have been something pertaining to the blowing of knots by women, after which he imagined that he approached one of his wives without being able to do anything, whereas the sihr rejected by the Prophet regards the madman, and no doubt that such a person cannot become a prophet. In this sense he was accused (by the polythesists) who said:

﴿وَقَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِي نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الذِّكْرُ إِنَّكَ لَمَجْنُونٌ﴾ [ الحجر:6 ]

“O you to whom the Dhikr has been sent down! Verily, you are a madman!”<sup>56</sup>

Regarding the hadith related by al-Bukhari and other authentic books, even though the Imam (Abduh) and his think alike do not differentiate between Bukhari's narrations and others, and according to them it is not a sin to reject a narration found in al-Bukhari, which can be a single narration that cannot be accepted with certainty, in our opinion (Dhahabis' opinion) this attitude destroys a good part of the Sunnah which is an explication and a guide to the Qur'an.”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Tirmidhi related this hadith in his *Sunan*, no. 2028, vol. 4, p. 376.

<sup>54</sup> The descent of the last two chapters (*al Falaq and al Nas* ) is a disputable issue. Some scholars, like Imam ibn Kathir, vol. 7/701, al Suyuti, vol.1/47, etc, point out that the last two Suras are Medinite, whereas according to Ibn Shihab Zuhri in *Tanzil al-Qur'an* (vol. 1, p. 24), and Imam al Bagawi, vol.4/723, and Imam Ibn Atiyah, vol.15/607, chapter al-Falaq according to some narrations was revealed in Mecca, and according to other narrations it was revealed in Madina. Thus, there are two differing opinions on this issue.

<sup>55</sup> *Zani i Naltë*, Nr. 2, Shkurt 1929, pp. 777-9.

<sup>56</sup> al-Hijr, 6.

<sup>57</sup> al-Dhahabi, *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirun*, vol. 2, p. 421-2.

According to Dhahabi, the authentic *Sunnah* does not contradict the Qur'an, but it "explicates or reinforces the Qur'an... No authentic hadith contradicts the Qur'an, and if such a thing happens, either the hadith is authentic but unclear, or it is clear but not authentic, and the latter cannot be accepted. And if it is clear, it must be explained in conformity with the Qur'an, since the Qur'an comes first, and the secondary cannot contradict that which has priority".<sup>58</sup>

There is another important issue here, namely that the rejection of authentic hadith is similar to the acceptance of fabricated hadith, and this creates a bad impression on the ummah, the scholars and the imams who were the best of their generations. The rejection of authentic hadith amounts to abandoning the faith...<sup>59</sup> In his chapter on the Sunnah in his book *al-Muwafaqat*, Imam Shatibi writes:

"In its true meaning, the Sunnah is based on the Qur'an, it clarifies its meaning, explicates its topics and facilitates its understanding."<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, one must not reject the clear and authentic Sunnah, which can not in any way contradict any pillar of faith or a source of the Shari'ah. Our respected scholar sheikh Hafiz Ali should have been more careful and not judge these narrations as unauthentic or single reports. It is possible according to the majority of the scholars that the body of prophet Muhammed (*peace be upon him*) to be affected by the magic, but not his mind. Shaikh Hafiz Ali in this issue was holding the opinion of the Mu'tazilites, who rejected completely the idea of affecting the body of prophet Muhammed (*peace be upon him*).

The discrediting of the two Sahihs (*al Bukhari and Muslim*) is a characteristic of the pro-Western Muslims, of the Orientalists, and the opponents of Islam both in the past and in the present. Exaggeration in the interpretation of the texts, especially the prophetic sayings, among the leaders of the reformist rationalist school and the Mu'tazilite ideas in these matters, is one of the most negative aspects and gravest errors against the second source of the Shari'ah, namely the pure prophetic Sunnah. This manner of interpretation must be annulled and replaced by a better one, namely a return to the method of the pious ancestors (*salaf al-salih*) and the Muslim scholars, in actions, words and beliefs, if we truly seek success and happiness.

No one dares to touch the authority of the two Sahihs by Imam Bukhari and Muslim, because the whole *ummah* is unanimous about their authenticity, otherwise they shall be discredited with the mark of Mu'tazilism all their life, and they shall be also responsible for those who follow them until the Day of Judgement.

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<sup>58</sup> Yusuf al-Qardawi, *al-Marja' iyyah al-ulya fil-islam lil-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah, Dawabit wa Mehadhiyr fil-fahmi wa al-tafsir*, Cairo: Maktab Wahba, p. 99.

<sup>59</sup> al-Qardawi, *al-Mad'hal li dirasat al-Sunnah al-nabawiyya*, Cairo, 3rd ed., 1992, p. 103.

<sup>60</sup> Abu Is'haq al-Shatibi, *al-Muwafaqat fi al-Shari'ah al-islamiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 396.

## 5. HAFIZ ALI KORÇA'S ATTITUDE TO THE ISRA'ILIAI

Among the important issues which are related to our study and more specifically Hafiz Ali Korça's reformist religious doctrine, is the question of the narrations from Jews and Christians, which are known as Isra'iliat in the Shari'ah and especially in Quranic exegesis. As it is known, according to the followers of the reformist school, one of the principal or necessary disciplines for the commentary of the Noble Qur'an is the categorial rejection of the Isra'iliat ( biblical narrations, narrations from the Jewish and Christian sources, and the exclusive relying on the Book(Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah.<sup>61</sup>

In his analysis of the atheist, communist, or secularist thought of Albanian intellectual elites, Hafiz Ali Korça draws the Muslim reader's attention by saying that there are some Muslim clerics, speakers and preachers of Islam who had no idea what they were speaking about in their sermons, speeches, or lectures. He tells the story about a preacher (*khatib*) who had mounted the pulpit and starting shouting in a loud voice while speaking about Isra'iliat superstitions on the creation of Adam, the formation of the rivers in Paradise and other stories that have nothing to do with our religion.

No doubt, Hafiz Ali Korça was hurt by this naive behaviour, and in his encyclopaedia "Historia e shenjtë.." ( The sacred History) he writes that it would have sufficed for a cleric like that to have elementary knowledge of geology on the layers of the earth and the creation of the rivers not to relate such absurd stories in his sermon. In this book the Hafiz calls for a distancing from such Judaeo-Christian tales, because they have destroyed the religion of Muslims.<sup>62</sup>

## 6. HAFIZ ALI KORÇA'S IJTIHADI AND REFORMIST RATIONAL THOUGHT

Hafiz Ali Korça's effort in preparing his methodological treatise on Islamic faith consists in adding to the five pillars of faith as related in the hadith of Gabriel, namely: testifying that there is no god but God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God; prayers; zakat; fasting in the Month of Ramadan; and the Pilgrimage (*al Hajj*) according to capacity<sup>63</sup>, a sixth pillar, namely the exertion (*jihad-Holy war*) in the path of God.

It seems that during his study of the political, social, and religious circumstances, and seeing the bitter reality of his time, the Hafiz tried hard to instil the love of the homeland, and the sacrifice in its defence, into the hearts of his fellow Albanians. This is a sensitive issue which needs further elaboration.

The idea that the five pillars of faith must be complemented by *jihad* as a sixth one needs a further study. The truth is that one must not add or subtract anything to what the scholars of the ummah were unanimous, but on the other hand the scholars must engage in *ijtihad*<sup>64</sup> in every time

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<sup>61</sup> On Abduh's method in exegesis, see: Dhahabi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 410-11; Fahd ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Rumi, *Manhaj al-Madrasa al-'aqliyya al-islahiyya fi al-tafsir*, p. 100-130.

<sup>62</sup> Hafiz Ali Korça, *Historia e shenjtë dhe të katër Halifetë*, pp. 28-29,

<sup>63</sup> Related by Imam Muslim in his Sahih, no. 7, vol. 1, p. 37.

<sup>64</sup> *Al Ijtihad*, means, making an independent or comparative opinion or judgement on the religious, social, cultural case in the absence of explicit Qur'anic or prophetic texts, by comparison or analogy to the similar cases in Qur'an and Sunnah. A person who performs this action is called (*al Mujtahid*). Ijtihad can be done individually as well as collectively through institutions, based on certain strict qualifications and criteria. Not every person can perform or exercise this high duty. Ijtihad is not accepted upon agreed Islamic issues by scholars or upon unchangeable Islamic principles or obligations like the pillars of Islam, pillars of Iman(Faith) etc., (*Dr.H.Hoxha*)

and place. The scholars must also follow the changes in the social and religious life and they must find alternatives or medicine from the Islamic pharmacy<sup>65</sup> for the treatment of the ills of the ummah, in order to face the challenges of time. The gate of *ijtihad* is open until the Day of Judgement.

We believe that the circumstances of the time influenced Hafiz Ali's soul and mind, and after noticing that, exhausted and tired of everything, people had started distancing themselves from this obligation, he called for the return of this obligation and for its attachment to the five known pillars of faith. However, these circumstances do not justify Hafiz Ali Korça's *ijtihad* in this case, because he introduced something which the Prophet a.s. and his companions did not, despite their sufferings, persecutions, and difficult religious, political, and economical circumstances. Hafiz Ali Korça's *ijtihad* and opinion must be understood and interpreted as personal believe or thought, or *jihad* of the pen (knowledge), *jihad* against one's passions, and with one's wealth, but not *jihad* as a warfare, because this is what the Islamic principles from the Qur'an and the Sunnah dictate. It is not permissible to add something on the five pillars of Islam, for our descendants may thus add or annul principles of faith or of the Shari'ah according to the needs and challenges of the time. Jihad is a special topic that the Qur'an and the Sunah have dealt with in detail according to the conditions and circumstances, in every time and place. And God knows better the intentions of Hafiz Ali Korça.<sup>66</sup>

#### **IV: QUALIFICATIONS OF HAFIZ ALI KORÇA AS AN EXEGETE AND COMMON POINTS BETWEEN HIS IDEAS AND THE REFORMIST SCHOOL**

##### **1. THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE EXEGETE**

And finally, we would like to address the following important question: "Did this Albanian contemporary scholar possesses the qualifications of the exegete of the Book of God, and if yes, what was their level?"

After studying the thoughts and method of this religious scholar, we saw that he possessed the necessary wealth of knowledge to have the capacity and ability to comment upon the Book of God, and this knowledge was marked by the following dimensions:

- Memorisation, reading and tajwid of the Book of God, (*being Hafiz of the Qur'an*) which as we mentioned earlier was a very spread phenomenon among Albanians in the past;
- His extensive and deep knowledge of Arabic, namely its grammar, rhetoric, style, and prosody, because he was also a professor of literature;
- His knowledge of the Sunnah, and the Hadith;
- His extensive knowledge of the Qur'anic sciences, such as: the *Meccan verses*, *Medinite verses*, the *reasons of the revelation*, the *nasikh*, *mansukh*, *mutlaq*, *mukayyad*, *a'am*, and *khass* verses, the *rhetoric styles of the Qur'an*, the order of revelation, the *muhkam* and the *mutashabih* verses, etc.;

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<sup>65</sup> The pertinent expression "medicine from the Islamic pharmacy" was used by Dr. Yusuph al-Qardawi during his Friday sermon in the International Islamic University of Malaysia, during his visit in 1998.

<sup>66</sup> *Myslimania*, pp. 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 17.

- His lofty morals and excellent manners did not permit him to use a trivial language or unethical vocabulary, except when criticizing the Jews and the Christians for their intrigues throughout human history up to the present<sup>67</sup> .

All this great multidisciplinary learning that this outstanding Islamic scholar possessed enabled him to occupy himself with the exegesis of the Noble Qur'an, and to understand the Book of God correctly, directly, and we believe that he fulfilled this mission successfully. This is a gift which God grants to whomever He wills; He Alone is Possessor of the Most Beautiful Names!

## 2. COMMON POINTS BETWEEN HAFIZ ALI KORÇA'S IDEAS AND THE PRINCIPLES OF THE REFORMIST SCHOOL

Here I would like to summarize the meeting compared points between some of Hafiz Ali Korça's ideas with the principles of the reformist school,

- His call for the improvement and reform of the teaching and educational methods in general and the religious methods in particular, which coincided with the call of the reformist school for reforms in the teaching methods at al Az'har in early 50s and 60s of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries;<sup>68</sup>

- The teaching of natural sciences in addition to the religious subjects and the opening of special faculties for this purpose;

- The improvement of the methods for teaching Arabic, preferring the French method in learning languages; bearing on mind that Paris/France, Sorbonne university in particular was a preferred place for the scholars of al Az'har to be sent for their cultural integration, training and learning French language. However, Hafiz Ali Korca in this point was against this idea,<sup>69</sup>

- Inviting the clergy to acquire scientific knowledge, just like the followers of the classical and modern reformism did, namely Imam al-Ghazzali, Imam al-Junayd, Ibn Sina, Imam Muhammad Abduh, Jamal al-Din Afghani, etc.;

- The categorical rejection of Isra'iliat and his continuous warning for caution in this matter;

- The categorical rejection of blind imitation (*al taqlid al A'ma*); calling for *al Ijtihad*.

- His view on the sihr (*black magic*) incident of the Prophet and unacceptance of the hadith which is considered authentic (*sahih*);<sup>70</sup>

- His focus on national and international political issues;

- His concern about the massacres, killings, and ill-treatment of Muslims during the rule of Mahatma Gandhi, his focus on the activities of Ahmad Abu Kalam (Sir Ahmad Khan);

- His lack of grief for the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and not looking out for means to save it from destruction. This attitude was prevalent among the leaders of the reformist school in the

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<sup>67</sup> Compare these qualifications with those of Muhammad Abduh, as related by Muhammad Abd al-Adhim Zarkani, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 62-64.

<sup>68</sup> See: Al Rumi, Fahd Abdurahman; *Manhaju al Madrasati al Islahiyati al Aqliyati fi al Tafsir*, vol.1, pg: 128-131

<sup>69</sup> See: Muhammed Reshid Rida, *Tarikh el Ustadh el Imam Shaykh Muhammad Abduh*, 1<sup>st</sup> edit., Matba'atu el Menar, 1931, pg: 39-40

<sup>70</sup> See: Shafik bin Abdullah Shukair; *Mauqif al Madrasati al Aqliyati al Hadithati min el Hadithi an Nabawiyyi al Sharif -Dirasatun Tatbikiyatun ala Tafsir al Manar*, pg: 48-49

Az'har University, some of whom even declared the priority of the Arab caliphate! We seek shelter in God from this idea, which is a result of racial and nationalist fanaticism<sup>71</sup>.

- Reforming traditional Islamic judicial courts, issues related to judges; salaries, appointments, retirements, their uniforms etc.
- Reconciliation and rapprochement between major religions, (*al Ta'lif wa al Takribu bayna el Adyan al Samawiyati*) - Judaism, Christianity, Islam-
- Reconstructing, Islamic Religious Thoughts, by correcting wrong meanings and understanding of some religious texts (qur'anic and prophetic texts) which indicate negative meanings for Muslim Umma, their awakening, their progress, their strength, rejecting categorically the idea of pessimism and backwardness from the minds and hearts of Muslims which were related to understanding of al Qada' and al Qadar, fate and destiny.

Finally, we may conclude that, the similarity between the ideas and believes of Hfz. Ali Korca and the ideas and principles of three major pioneers of contemporary reformist school in tafsir and hadith were similar to large extent, both of them focused on; reviving islamic educational, social, judicial and political current systems of that time, and the Almighty Allah knows the best.

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<sup>71</sup> See: *Mauqif al Madrasati al Aqliyati al Hadithati min el Hadithi an Nabawiyyi al Sharif -Dirasatun Tatbikiyatun ala Tafsir al Manar*, pg: 19-30

### 3. AN EXAMPLE OF THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS REFORMIST HORIZON IN HAFIZ ALI KORÇA'S THOUGHT

This truth can be seen in the special care he took to defend the principles of Islam in Albania and in his skill in defending himself from his opponents' intrigues. These characteristics come out clearly in an open letter he wrote to his fellow scholars and clerics in Albania, passages from which we quote below:

*"Gentlemen, scholars, and clerics, if you wish to gain the respect of your own people as your predecessors did, you should train your children with the same weapon which your predecessors had, namely knowledge and learning, because this is our heritage which we must pass on to our children ... The people can no longer hear fabrications, Isra'iliat, and worthless talk. It is a shame upon us to pride ourselves with our ancestors when we are naked and possess nothing. What use has our country from those who study abroad?!"*

*Brothers and gentleman, scholars and clerics!*

*If you have love and yearning for Muhammad a.s. do not sleep, but think about the future generations and beware of the following points:*

*1. Do not let the youth at the hands of the Christian missionaries and those who want to convert them to Christianity;*

*2. Teach your male and female children to read and memorize the Qur'an;*

*3. Send every child above thirteen to a religious school;*

*4. Every cleric must have at least one child in a religious school, who shall inherit his knowledge;*

*5. Every Muslim must sacrifice all he or she has for the improvement of religious education, in order that religious schools achieve the required level;*

*6. Muslim scholars and clerics must travel to towns and villages to encourage people offer their support and help in this project;*

*7. The school budget must be strengthened, and we must provide specialized professors and clerics for every subject;*

*8. If this does not take place, the concern of the scholars and the clerics for the ummah shall be lost, which would be the main reason for the decline and the destruction of Islam. These are our ills and this is the way of curing them at the present. At the time of the Abbasids, the scholars spoke six or seven languages, how many languages does each of us speak today?*

*These are sources to which we referred. Send your thirteen-year-old children to study with us, and I guarantee you that they in three years they shall speak Arabic, Persian, and French, besides learning on sciences and arts. We shall try not to disgrace ourselves before the Prophet on the Day of Judgement, and if you do not help us in this, you shall be responsible before God on that day.*

*How should we arm and train our children?*

*Besides the mother tongue and Arabic, everyone must learn an important foreign language and must arm themselves with the weapon of knowledge according to the needs of the present and the future. Otherwise, we shall perish in all aspects."<sup>72</sup>*

*May God have mercy upon Hafiz Ali Korça!*

*How great is the need of the ummah for such advice nowadays.*

*There is no power nor strength save with God, the Mighty and Sublime!*

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<sup>72</sup> Zani i Naltë, nr. 8, Maj, 1924, pp. 238-46.

#### 4. SOME METHODOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS SLIPS OF HAFIZ ALI KORÇA

We shall conclude our journey with this great scholar (*may God have mercy upon his soul!*), by mentioning some of his methodological and topical slips:

- In many cases he did not mention the volume/page wherefrom he quotes;
- The secondary details on the references (year of publishing, editions, place) he used are missing, only titles are given;
- A limited reference to authentic Prophetic hadith in different arguments from his writings;
- His rejection of the authenticity of the *sifr* incident which has been related in the Sahih of Bukhari and Muslim, thereby downplaying the most authentic books after the Noble Qur'an, on whose authenticity the whole ummah is unanimous. This is the greatest methodological slip of Hafiz Ali Korça;
- The author does not mention the number of the verses he comments upon;
- In most cases he neglects the Arabic text of the verse, by giving only the translation and commentary in Albanian; whereas the norm in such cases is to offer the Arabic original of the verse;
- In many cases, a clear difference between the translation and the commentary is not made, thus making it difficult for the lay reader to discern whether he is reading a particular verse or its commentary.<sup>73</sup>

These were some most important methodological and thematical slips in this commentary which I was able to identify. However, the above-mentioned slips do not belittle his huge and distinguished scientific, religious, historical and national contributions, writings and awareness for Islam and Albanian Muslims in Balkans. May the Almighty God shower His mercy upon him, Amin.

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<sup>73</sup> Ismail Ahmedi, *Hafiz Ali Korça-Jea dhe Vepra*, pp. 209-221.



## CONCLUSIONS AND THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Praise be to God, who helped us to reach the end of this study, with following important remarks and conclusions.

The history of Albanian Muslims is a distorted and fabricated history. The dark, hidden hand of communist countries like former Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Greece, former Yugoslavia helped in the compilation of its texts. The primary goal of this communist historiography was fighting and distorting Islam and the Muslims which was demonstrated by the late Ottoman Islamic Empire. This study revealed the opposite of what has been stated in these sources. It was a great blessing from God for the majority of Christian Albanians (Catholics & Orthodox) to accept Islam willingly, because it saved them from the abyss of disbelief, idolatry, atheism, destruction, national identity assimilation and extinction into the light of faith, vigilance, guidance and stability.

The other important issue is the peaceful spread of Islam in this area, and not through violence or “the sword”, as the official Albanian historiography has claimed for so long in modern time even in post - communist era after the fall of Communist regime in 1990. People embraced the new faith voluntarily, and this calls for an objective rewriting and reproducing all historical textbooks of the interaction of Islam with Albanian history.

Albanian Muslims showed a great interest in religious matters, which can be seen in several phenomena such as their interest in learning the Hifz (memorization) of the Qur’an, interpreting it and teaching it to their children, their interest in building mosques, in sending their children to study in Islamic countries etc. With the passing of time, their intellectual level rose to the extent that they started analysing some major religious and social issues, such as the emancipation of Albanian Muslim woman, the adoption of the Latin alphabet, etc.

This study confirms the efforts and works of great figures of learning in Albania, and their great resistance against the secular and communist challenges it the first half of the twentieth century.

The study also revealed the existence of some doctrinal tendencies in the study of the Qur’an among Albanian scholars. I came to learn about the most important ideological and religious doctrine which have appeared in the writings of Albanian scholars in Qur’anic studies, especially in exegesis, and as a result of this situation both in their lands and in the Arab world, there appeared a reformist social doctrine, whose leader was Hafiz Ali Korça. The study confirmed that he was under the great influence of the ideas of some leading figures of the rationalist reformist school, such as Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, etc. I confirmed his inclination to this strand of thought based on his view on sihr (black magic) as related in the hadith from al-Bukhari, which he rejects the whole story of Sihr as disagreeing with reason and revelation. I clarified the baselessness of this claim.

This study confirmed the love of Albanian scholars for the Noble Qur’an, their appreciation and relying therein during the most difficult periods of their history such as secularism, communism, atheism, dictatorship, imprisonments, torture, etc. They also had great interest in studying, analysing, and learning the Noble Qur’an by heart from their earliest contacts with Islam.

Among other important results is the fact that institutional work for restoring the original form of Islam in the minds and souls of Albanians must increase, because this study pointed out

the great hatred towards Islam among Albanian thinkers, due to the still-persisting communist influences and distortions of religious truths, seeking to drive people away from religion. I also recommend the researchers to study and investigate on more such scholars, because they played other numerous roles besides the ones I studied. The await for the objective researchers to remove the dust from their works, and to speak up about their scientific and patriotic activities.

These were some of the scientific results which I reached during this study. I believe strongly that this study was based on my individual effort within my intellectual limits to give some selected examples from Albanian scholars of the modern period, and clarify their views on some important Qur'anic issues, and their capacities to implement the Qur'anic texts in their intellectual life. This study is the only one of its kind in the Balkans among Albanians, dealing with the historical, political, intellectual, religious and exegetical aspect from an Islamic point of view.

In the end, I pray to God the Almighty that I have offered the Islamic library and the Albanian readers and my fellow Muslim brothers in the world a valuable scientific work. If I was right, it is from God, and if I was wrong it is from myself and the devil (far he be from us!).

My last prayer is: **“Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds!”**

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