



# Hafiz Ali Korcha's Approach to Tafsir

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## Abstract

At the beginning of the XX century one of the people who contributed the most to Albania's religious issues was Hafiz Ali Korcha. He wrote various works in different fields, including the Tafsir science in which he clearly expressed his contemporary and progressive approach. He wrote a non-systematic interpretation of the meaning of the Qur'an, a commentary on the short suras, on the completeness of the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad, and an independent interpretation of the allegory of the Surah Yusuf. This article analyses Hafiz Ali Korcha's approach to the science of tafsir based on the main topics of tafsir methodology. The article consists of two parts. The first part provides a description of his work in the science of tafsir. The second part addresses main themes of the methodology of tafsir. The article concludes that Hafiz Ali Korcha was a very good connoisseur of methodological issues. In his work, the author followed certain principles, especially leaning towards the modernist school led by Muhammad Abduh.

**Keywords:** Tafsir, Ali Korcha, interpretive tafsir, israiliyât, modernist approach.

## Introduction

Hafiz Ali Korcha (Korça) was born in Korcha (Korçë) on April 5, 1873. At the age of 12, he became a hafiz. He completed his primary and secondary education in Korcha, while he continued his higher studies at the University of Istanbul. In addition to Albanian, he was proficient in Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and French. Hafiz Ali had important duties, such as being an advisor to the Ministry of Education, Director General of this Ministry, Chief of Fatwas at the High Council of Sharia in Albania, a teacher at the Higher Madrasah of Tirana, etc. He passed away on December 31, 1956, in Kavaya (Kavaje). He was a Muslim intellectual and thinker who excelled in several fields such as tafsir, Islamic jurisprudence, Sufism, history, literature, and poetry. He has works in all of these fields. The influence of Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina, Rumi, Omar Khayam, Saadi Shîrâzî,

Hasan Tahsin, Muhammad Abduh, etc., is clearly noticeable in his works. In addition to the works of tafsir, which are the subject of our study, some of Hafiz Ali's most important works are *Trëndaflishta e Sadiut* (Gulistan of Saadi), *Rubaijjati Hajjam* (Rubaiyat of Khayyam), *Mevludi* (Mawlid), *Historia e Shenjtë dhe Katër Halifetë* (The Holy History and the Four Caliphs), *Treqind-e-tri Fjalet të Imam Aliut* (The Three Hundred and Three Words of Imam Ali), etc. His works were collected by the editor Ismail Ahmedi and were published by the Logos Publishing House in 12 volumes.<sup>1</sup>

Currently, we have four types of works available from Hafiz Ali Korcha in the field of Tafsir. Three of them are written in prose and one in poetry. The majority of his works written in prose consist of articles on Tafsir that he published in the magazine “*Zani i Naltë*”, an academic publication of the Albanian Muslim Community from 1923 to 1939. The scholar Ismail Ahmedi has compiled these writings into a volume titled “*Commentary on Some Verses and Surahs of the Quran*”.

The work written in poetry is the story of Yusuf and Zulaikha, which despite being primarily a work with strong poetic characteristics, Hafiz Ali has actually addressed specific themes in an attractive form for the reader, without deviating from the theological contours of Islam. The poetic treatment is actually one of Hafiz Ali's strongest points, as even his main work, the *Holy History and the Four Caliphs*, of more than 600 pages, is written precisely in the form of poetry.

Since we are dealing with four different versions of the interpretation of the Quran, the basic features of its commentary are addressed in the first part, where a brief presentation of the works in question is made. However, important methodological issues are discussed in the second part of the work. We have allocated the third point to the criticisms directed at Hafiz Ali for his work in the field of Quranic commentary.

The literature we have used is mainly in Albanian language, followed by Arabic, Turkish, and English, based on the works we deemed necessary to include.

### **1. The works of Hafiz Ali of Korcha in the field of Tafsir/Quranic exegesis and the characteristics of his interpretation/Tafsir<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> For more see: Ahmedi, Hafiz Ali Korça Jeta dhe vepra., 2006.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed information see: Karaj, 2023.

1.1. A general description and literature used by him

The scholar Ismail Ahmedi has prepared the collection of the works of Hafiz Ali Korcha in 12 volumes. Volume 8 is titled “*Commentary on some verses and surah's of the Qur'an*”. The tafsir consists of 25 articles published in 230 pages. This volume includes three types of works on the interpretation of the Quran. A short part of these writings is the tafsir of Surah Al-Fatihah and an expanded translation of Surah Al-Baqarah up to verse 28, as well as the expanded translation of surahs Al-Fatihah, Al-‘Alaq, Al-Nun, Al-Muzzammil, Al-Muddaththir, Al-Taqwir and Al-Masad. Another part includes articles related to the universality of the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the third part is the tafsir of half of the short chapters of the Quran starting from Surah Al-Duhaa until the end of the Quran. Meanwhile, his poetic work is the third book in Hafiz Ali's series, published as a separate volume.

Regarding the literature used by Hafiz Ali in his works of tafsir, he has not expressed anything substantial, except for the names of some authors such as Afghani, Abduh, Rida, Razi, etc. However, in his book “*Historia e Shenjtë*” (The Holy History), he has cited the following works: *Tafsir Kebir (Menâr)*, *Tarih-i Taberi*, *Tarih Ravdatu'l Ahbab*, *Tarih Ravdatu's Safa*, *Tarihu'l Islam*, *Miradu'l Iber*, *Buhari*, *Muslim*, *Tarih-i Din-i Islam*, *Tarih Enbija*, *Tarihi Asri Saadet*, *Kisas-i Enbija*, and so on. Since the *Historia e Shenjtë* is a historical work, the literature mentioned mainly consists of works in the field of history. These works seem to be references even in his tafsir works because the history of Islam is an integral part of Hafiz Ali's work, including Fahrudin Razi's tafsir in this case. (Korça, *Historia e Shenjtë*, 2006)

1.2. The Expanded Translation of the Comprehensive Quran and its Essence

This is part of Ali Korcha's extensive work titled “*The Comprehensive Quran and its Essence*”. We only have access to the portion published in the “Ora e Shkodrës” printing press in 1926. It is a booklet of 15 pages, including the commentary of Surah Al-Fatihah and an expanded translation of the first 28 verses of Surah Al-Baqarah. (Ahmedi, Hafiz Ali Korça Jeta dhe vepra, 2006)

Hafiz Ali, follows a systematic approach in his tafsir of Surah Al-Fatihah. He begins by providing basic information such as the origin of the surah, its various names, and the number of its verses. He then proceeds to interpret the surah, following the sequence of its verses without omitting any of them.

One distinctive feature of the author is that he occasionally stops at various issues and treats them in more detail. For example, he stops at the issue of the use of plural in verses 4-6 of Surah Fatihah, also addressing the societal aspect expressed in it. (Piku, 2020) In this way, his stoppages and thematic treatments are realized in a disproportionate form. Hafiz Ali uses different subtitles depending on the context, such as “*Thelbi shkencor*” (scientific basics) / (fennî), where he includes scientific approaches in his commentary, or “*Thelbi tasavufit*” (Sufi basics)” (Korça, Tefsiri i sure-i Fatihasë, 2015) where he provides mystical interpretations.

After making a relatively long tafsir of Surah Al-Fatihah, the author continues with Surah Al-Baqarah, now shortening the interpretation. Despite using terms and words in Arabic, as is customary in religious sciences, it is noted that he has tried to write as much as possible in Albanian by also translating the terms. (Ahmedi, KORÇA, Hafiz Ali, 2002)

It is noticeable the use of footnotes, where the author has provided different explanations on specific topics. Therefore, we are dealing with an expanded translation of the Quran, and not a full-fledged commentary like in the case of Surah Al-Fatihah. In this way, he continued until verse 28 of Surah Al-Baqarah. There are no other writings of Hafiz Ali in the form of an expanded translation.

### 1.3. Commentary on the prophecy of Muhammad (PBUH)

The verification of the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and its universality always receives the attention of Hafiz Ali's writings. The author has dedicated 16 articles to this issue, starting from a single verse, which is *قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا ...*

Hafiz Ali interpreted the forementioned ayah in this way stating all the concepts that prove the prophethood of the prophet Muhammad (pbuh):

*“My beloved Muhammad, to those people who have sound minds and pure hearts and are truly called humans, say this: "O humans! O you who count yourselves as individuals, know for certain that I am the messenger of God for all of you, to proclaim the true religion of God, the same religion that all the Prophets have had. However, over the centuries it has deviated from its path and has become filled with falsehoods, therefore, today I am clarifying and purifying it from all deceptive tales. I am sent by the Almighty, the true God, and the sovereignty of the higher and lower worlds rests solely in His hands. No one can interfere with His sovereignty and rule. Besides Him, there is no other God to whom worship is due. He is the Creator of all creation; He gives sustenance, and He takes it away. If this is the case, then believe in God and also in Muhammad, who is His messenger. Believe in that Muhammed who is illiterate and never went to school and is the most knowledgeable person in the entire world. He has received*

*teachings directly from God Himself. Muhammad believes in God, in the Quran, and in all the Holy books of God. Therefore, act as Muhammad has acted, so that you may find everlasting salvation and happiness.*" (Al-A'raf, 7:158)

The majority of explanations in these articles consist of assessments by Western intellectuals<sup>3</sup> towards Islam and Muslims in general, but specifically towards Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Hafiz Hafiz Ali has published the articles with a common title, which is "The verse that describes the general prophethood of H. Muhammad (pbuh)", stating further ("*Dyk e pshtetur mbi dokumentta rë nji shumicë ylemash europjan*") "*Based on documents of a majority of European intellectuals*". (Korça, Ajeti qe kallxon profetsine e pergjithshme të Muhammedit a.s (II), 2015) the essence of Hafiz Ali's logic regarding the interpretation of this verse lies in the object to whom the words "*O mankind*" and the concept of "*jami'an*" are addressed. Muhammad (pbuh) was sent as a prophet for all beings, as well as for believers and non-believers, so the verse is addressed to "all mankind together". This means that anyone who knows him, if they have not damaged their human qualities, will accept the fact that Muhammad (pbuh) had high qualities. Thus, in his writings, he lists the qualities that have deeply influenced Western thinkers, such as the spirit of freedom, respect, and protection of the rights of followers of other beliefs (Korça, Ajeti qe kallxon profetsine e pergjithshme të Muhammedit a.s (I), 2015), to the point where many of them were employed by Muslim leaders (Korça, Ajeti që kallzon profetsin e përgjithshme të H. Muhamedit duke u mbështetur te një shumicë dijetarësh europianë, 2015) and those who have accepted Islam have done so without coercion from anyone, but with complete freedom and personal preference.

Here, too, Ali Korcha has added specific subtitles, such as an original version titled "Kijâs Mantikî" (*sylogism*), where he makes deductions in the form of rational conclusions. (Korça, Profetësia e përgjithshme e H. Muhammedit (a.s.), 2015)

#### 1.4. The commentary of the short surahs

Hafiz Ali's most systematic commentary is on the short surahs of the Quran. He has dealt with the commentary of the surahs Al-Ma'un, Al-Nasr, Al-Qadr, Al-Takâthur, Al-Humazah, Al-'Alaq, Al-Zilzâl, Al-Duhaa, Al-Kâfirun, Al-Falaq and Al-Nâs.

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<sup>3</sup> Among the mentioned names are: Thomas W. Arnold, Sir Hanri Lejard, Bos-Vert Esmit, Isak Tejlor, Karlaçli, Sir William Moyer, Orko Hart, etc. But "Historia e përhapjes së Islamit" të Thomas W. Arnold it is the work to which he referred more.

Usually, he starts with the basic information about the surah, such as whether it is from Mecca or Medina and the number of verses. If there are different transmissions regarding its origin, he briefly mentions them.<sup>4</sup> If he deems it necessary, he discusses the main concept of the surah at the beginning.<sup>5</sup>

Immediately after these introductory information's, the author mentions (sebebi nuzul) the reason for the revelation of the surah or the historical context in which it was revealed. (Korça, Tefsiri i surei Maunit, 2015) So, he continues with the interpretation of each verse without skipping any of them. At the end of the interpretation of some surahs, Ali Korcha has titled it “*summary*,” where he mentions conclusions drawn from the interpretation he has done. There are cases where his interpretation of a surah has extended to more than one writing.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.5. Poetic interpretation about Surah Yusuf

The work “*Yusuf and Zulaikha*” consists of 3100 verses divided into 38 parts, each with a title and published in a volume of 125 pages. Initially, this work was part of Hafiz Ali's main work entitled “*The Holy History*” (Korça, Jusufi me Zelihanë, 2005), but they were published separately.

*Yusuf and Zulaikha, the most beautiful of the events* in poetic form, is thought to be a work inspired by Firdawsī<sup>7</sup> or Molla Jami<sup>8</sup>. (Ahmedi, Hafiz Ali Korça Jeta dhe vepra, 2006) The common feature of these authors is that they follow the version of the Quran and the interpretation of the scholars of tafsir. Hafiz Ali writes in the form of poetry because he wants to attract the attention of young people with beautifully written and high-quality Albanian language. The aim was to teach the young generation the pure faith. Meanwhile, he claims that through poetry he expresses himself very clearly, as if it were a tafsir. (Korça, Historia e Shenjtë, 2006)

The main themes of this work are the same as those included in the Quran, among which are high morality, human dignity, patience, invitation to accept monotheistic faith, and the triumph of

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<sup>4</sup> For ex., for Surah Al-Fatihah, it is stated that it is Meccan, but that it is transmitted that it was also revealed in Medina. (Korça, Tefsiri i sure-i Fatihasë, 2015)

<sup>5</sup> For ex., in Surah Falaq, he first deals with what *falaq* is, in Surah al Humazah, he explains what the term *humazah* is. (Korça, Tefsiri i sure-i Felekt, 2015; Tefsiri i sure-i Humezesë, 2015)

<sup>6</sup> For ex., the tafsir of the first five verses of Surah Al-'Alaq is covered in five writings.

<sup>7</sup> Firdawsī, pseudonym of Abū al-Qasem Manşūr, (born c. 935, near Tūs, Iran-died c. 1020-26, Tūs), Persian poet, author of the *Shāh-nāme* (“Book of Kings”), the Persian national epic. (Boyle, no date; Kanar, 1996)

<sup>8</sup> He is Nūruddīn Abdurrahmān b. Nizāmuddīn Ahmed b. Muhammad al-Jāmī (v. 898/1492), Iranian scholar and poet from the Nakshibendi sect, author of the work Heft Evreng, which consists of 7 poems, including Yasuf u Zulaikha. (Okumuş, 1993)

righteousness despite the vicissitudes of life. Hafiz Ali's poetry is simple and the thought flows clearly and penetratingly to the reader. (Ahmedi, Hafiz Ali Korça Jeta dhe vepra, 2006) It can be said that the entire Surah Yusuf is found in this poem, as well as some added fragments or characters borrowed from Eastern poetic creations, which are all in function of explaining the Quranic message.<sup>9</sup>

## **2. The methodological approach of Hafiz Ali**

Having the freedom to write in the form of articles, Hafiz Ali was not conditioned by a standard format in his tafsir works. For this reason, in his work we find different formats of studies. To address this issue, the topic is divided into two titles where in the first one we find the types of tafsir and in the second one the sciences of the Quran, which are more prominent in his work.

### **2.1. Schools of tafsir**

#### **2.1.1. Interpretive tafsir mainly based on rationality**

Hafiz Ali's method of tafsir is interpretive (*diraya*) and less traditional (*riwaya*). Hafiz Ali appears to be influenced by the modernist rationalist school of thought represented by Afgani, Abduh, and Rida. (Korça, Ç'duhet feja, 2015) As is known, in this trend, the commentator does not engage in extensive linguistic and hadith analyses but draws from the past what is necessary to give the verse the necessary meaning in the current context. (Al-Dhahabî, 1398 (hijri)) According to them, traditional commentaries filled with lengthy grammatical analyses, juristic dispositions and classical fatwas, polemics among schools of thought, theological problems, etc., are more of a hindrance to understanding the Quran's true message than a help. (Öztürk, 2004) His theological product was a reformist, progressive attempt in Islamic culture and theology. (Bardhi, 2019)

The rational argumentation is one of the strongest features of Ali Korcha. He constantly uses this form of argumentation. For example, he has constructed the argument for the prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh) through rational reasoning. The fact is that even Westerners appreciate that he

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<sup>9</sup> For example, a fact that is not mentioned in the Quran, but according to Ali Korcha, after many hardships, Zulaikha, a character who ultimately turns out to be positive, marries Joseph (peace be upon him) with the blessing of God. After this marriage, Zulaikha, through the prophet, finds true love, which is divine love, and dedicates her whole life to worshipping God with commitment and devotion. (Korça, Jusufi me Zelihanë, 2005)

was *ummi* (illiterate), but his path is now being recognized through science the great success in educating a people so far from humanity and enemy of faith (Korça, Tefsiri përmbi ajetin që na kallzon profetsin e përgjithshme të H. Muhammedit (I), 2015), the rapid and widespread expansion of Islam (Korça, Tefsir përmbi ajetin që na kallzon profetsin e përgjithshme të H. Muhammedit (II), 2015), the non-apostasy of Muslims despite torture, etc.

Furthermore, Hafiz Ali also has passages where he constructs rational arguments on the classical structure of the science of logic.<sup>10</sup> Using this method, but without expressing it in the classical scheme, he has shown how Islam is a religion of naturalness and rationality. According to him, the logical conclusion of this truth is that whoever wishes to be guided must necessarily follow Muhammad (pbuh). (Korça, Ajeti që na kallzon profetësinë e përgjithshme të H. Muhammed Mustafajt (a.s.) pas dokumentavet t'Ylemave European, 2015)

#### 2.1.2. Traditional Tafsir (riwaya)

In terms of the traditional method, we mostly find tafsir of verses or concepts through other verses. This is also the most similar approach to the contemporary school of *Menâr* that he follows. (Al-Dhahabî, 1398 (hijri))

However, the hadiths are few, as well as the words of the companions. In this aspect, Hafiz Ali has a great similarity with the *Menâr* school. Even Rashid Rida, who is known for his neo-Salafi approach and values accurate transmissions, has included them very little in his interpretation work. (Öztürk, 2004)

Moreover, Hafiz Ali Korcha agrees with the opinion of Abduh in the case of magic, who rejects the possibility that magic could have been performed on the Prophet (peace be upon him). The transmission in question, although it is considered indisputable by the traditionalist school, it is actually *hadith ahad*. Hafiz Korcha opts for a rational interpretation of the issue, stating that if there is a potential possibility for a prophet to be affected by magic, then he has the attribute of *'ismah* (infallibility). This is because the act of performing magic indicates that he could be

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<sup>10</sup> For Ex.: "The claim: Every verse of the Quran is a miracle in itself, as the meanings contained within the verses of the Quran are endless. Minor premise: Because the Quran encompasses all types of knowledge. Major premise: Every knowledge is endless in terms of its depth and breadth. Conclusion: Since the Quran encompasses all knowledge, it necessarily has no end." (Korça, Profetësia e përgjithshme e H. Muhammedit (a.s.), 2015)



controlled by other powers, which undermines his credibility.<sup>11</sup> This approach has been taken for the first time in history by the Mu'tazilites (Al-Razî, 1420 (hijri)) and later by Abduh.<sup>12</sup>

The Sunni school of thought had a moderate approach, accepting the fact that magic was done to the Prophet (pbuh), but that it lasted for a very short time, as Jibreel (as) helped the Prophet (pbuh) to escape from the magic by showing him the place where the knots were tied.<sup>13</sup> Even Al-Dhahabi follows this version, saying that the magic done to the Prophet (pbuh) was in the form of a physical illness in the Prophet's (pbuh) body, not in his mind, so it does not harm his attribute of being free from sin. (Kaçkın, 2017) Abduh also argues against the acceptance of hadiths with the principle that matters of theology cannot be based solely on *ahad* category hadiths. He may reject a hadith despite its transmission by Bukhari and Muslim if it is *ahad*, or he may accept a truly doubtful *ahad hadith*. (Al-Dhahabî, 1398 (hijri)) However, Ali Korcha seems to be an isolated case. A closer look at his work suggests that he is an exception. It cannot be proven that Hafiz Korcha had a tendency to reject the category of *ahad hadiths*. This is possible because even Kadi Iyad does not accept the fact that the Prophet (pbuh) was bewitched (Kaçkın, 2017), but he does not reach this conclusion because of the rejection of *ahad* transmissions.

### 2.1.3. Modernist rationalist or reformist approach

The authors consideration for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is maximum. The figure of the Prophet (peace be upon him) is unparalleled and indisputable. In his commentary on Surah Al-Duhaa, when he discusses the interruption of revelation, Hafiz Ali explains this phenomenon as the need of the Prophet's body for a short rest, since the first contact with Allah's light overwhelmed and exhausted him. This is the wisdom behind this interruption and nothing else. (Korça, Tefsiri i sure-i Duhasë, 2015) Later, in the same surah, the author compares the prophets Ulul Azm, whom he believes to be six in number, including Adam (peace be upon him). Mentioning the difficulties faced by other prophets, in contrast to the simplicity of Muhammad's

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<sup>11</sup> Prof. Dr. Hajredin Hoxha addresses the issue extensively. He highlights the criticism that this approach has received from Al-Dhahabi in his work "*Et-Tefsîr ue 'l-mufessirûn*" and considers it as a devaluation of the Sahihs, which is a Western and enemy-of-faith perspective. (Hoxha, 2008) Apart from the fact that traditionalists strongly support this transmission, Hoxha's criticism of Hafiz Ali is severe, primarily because Hafiz Ali did not have a standard way of rejecting hadiths, even if they were *ahad*.

<sup>12</sup> Actually, Abduh denies the existence of magic in its traditional form and aligns himself with the Mu'tazilites on this matter. He believes that what is called magic is actually based on real elements, such as rumors or false accusations in cases of marital discord caused by magic. (Al-Dhahabî, 1398 (hijri))

<sup>13</sup> For a more comprehensive analysis regarding the transmissions of magical events see: Cook, 2000; Kaçkın, 2017.

(pbuh) task and the great success he achieved, distinguishes clearly the difference between Muhammad (pbuh) and other prophets. (Korça, Ajeti qe kallxon profetsine e pergjithshme të Muhammedit a.s (I), 2015) As mentioned earlier, based on the immaculacy of the Prophet (pbuh), he denies that magic was performed on him, as this would damage his high status as a prophet.<sup>14</sup>

Other similarities of Hafiz Ali with reformist Mufassir include his request for theologians to also acquire scientific knowledge in addition to religious knowledge, his categorical rejection of blind imitation, and his focus on national issues rather than being overly concerned with the decline of the Ottoman Empire. (Hoxha, 2008)

#### 2.1.4. Tafsir ishârî

Hafiz Ali gave a wide space to Sufism at certain moments, and the traditional approach to analyzing verses seems to be an aspect from which he does not easily let go. The influence of Fakhruddin Razi (Hoxha, 2008) should be acknowledged in this case. In the treatment of Surah Al-Fatihah, Hafiz Ali also mentions the mystical approach with the title *“the essence of Tasawwuf”* *“Thelbi tasavvufit”* (in a Sufi way). Here, the author presents the opinion that Allah is everywhere, but since His light is strong, it catches our eyes and the fog of our souls is so thick that it hinders us from seeing Allah. (Korça, Tefsiri i sure-i Fatihasë, 2015)

In the commentary of verse 19 of Surah Al-Baqarah **أَوْ كَصَيْبٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَاتٌ وَرَعْدٌ وَبَرْقٌ يَجْعَلُونَ أَصْلِحَهُمْ فِي ءَاذَانِهِمْ مِنَ الصُّوَءِ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ** ***“Or ‘those caught in’ a rainstorm from the sky with darkness, thunder, and lightning. They press their fingers into their ears at the sound of every thunder-clap for fear of death. And Allah encompasses the disbelievers ‘by His might’.”***

(Al-Baqarah, 2:19) he expresses that “hard rain implies faith and the Quran, darkness and thunder imply serious deeds, such as prayer, fasting, jihad against unbelievers, leaving old religions and positions of this world, which is very difficult for them. When they hear such matters of the afterlife that resemble a thunderstorm and a roar, the unbelievers put their fingers in their ears so as not to hear them.” (Korça, Komentimi i disa ajeteve dhe sureve të Kuranit, 2006)

#### 2.1.5. Tafsir ‘ilmî (fennî)

Another very important element of Hafiz Ali in his tafsir is the argumentation with scientific facts. He has acted this way wherever he had the opportunity. In fact, in Surah Al-Fatihah, he has given

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<sup>14</sup> See the subtitle “Traditional tafsir (riwaya)” in this article.

this element a separate title by titling it “*The scientific essence (fenni)*”. In this case, he has made the scientific interpretation based on the concept of “Lord of the worlds”. Adding to that the verse **“*And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and all living beings He dispersed throughout both. And He is Most Capable of bringing all together whenever He wills.*”** (Al-Shûrâ, 42:29) He claims that the term “living beings” includes creatures found in other celestial bodies as well as on earth. (Korça, Tefsiri i sure-i Fatihasë, 2015)

In the study of Surah Al-Zilzâl, the author expresses that without knowing the science of geology, the Quran cannot be properly understood. He has discussed Al-Zilzâl in two articles, where in the first he explains the historical part of the creation of planets (Ahmedi, Hafiz Ali Korça Jeta dhe vepra, 2006) and geological issues related to earthquakes (Korça, Tefsiri i sure-i Zilzalit Sureja e Termetit, 2015)

#### 2.1.6. Tafsir ijtîmâî

The sociological interpretation<sup>15</sup> constitutes the essence of the *Menâr school of tafsir*. Hafiz Ali also does not avoid this. This feature is clearly evident in the tafsir of Surah Al-Fatihah. (Piku, 2020) The author stops at the issue of the use of plural in verses 4-6 of Surah Al-Fatihah and argues that things have blessings when done collectively. When done individually, there are no blessings. Hafiz Aliu also relates this to the hadith where the Prophet (peace be upon him) advises Muslims to pray for each other because this is an accepted prayer. Thus, if each one prays for his brother, the prayer of all is accepted. At the same time, if a believer prays for everyone, he has included himself. (Korça, Tefsiri i sure-i Fatihasë, 2015)

In the commentary on verse 4 of Surah Al-Falaq, Hafiz Ali has also accepted the version of Muhammad Abduh, describing “neffaththat” as “those who deal with words of slander and strive to break the bonds of friendship, brotherhood, and love.” (Korça, Tefsiri i sure-i Felekut, 2015) He has taken this interpretation from Muhammad Abduh (1992) as well as Rashîd Ridâ and

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<sup>15</sup> Regarding the naming of this particular school of tafsir (Quranic exegesis), there are various discussions. The term “sociological tafsir” seems more appropriate as it primarily addresses societal issues and problematic aspects of society. Since the field of sociology describes, analyzes, and explores the causes of social situations, it serves an identifying function. On the other hand, the mentioned school of tafsir is normative and aims to improve society. (Doğru, 2022)

Mustafa Meragi (Dođru, 2022). But the traditional approach is “*witches casting spells by blowing onto knots*”.

#### 2.1.7. Tafsir meudu‘î (thematic)

It is difficult to talk about a comprehensive thematic tafsir in the work of Hafiz Ali, but it happens that he approaches the verse thematically. (Ahmedi, Hafiz Ali Korça Jeta dhe vepra, 2006) The tafsir of Surah Al-‘Alaq is a model of thematic tafsir in Hafiz Ali’s work. Since this surah is the symbol of knowledge in Islam, the author beyond the classical tafsir has also focused on the issue of the formation of a Muslim. According to him, historically, Muslims have been the cradle of knowledge and civilization. Therefore, a Muslim should be well-read and cultured in this aspect. Thus, he has given the title of “*The Muslim Culture according to the Order of the Holy Quran*” to the tafsir of Surah Al-‘Alaq. After giving the meaning of the first five verses, the author lists the elements of Muslim culture of knowledge. First and foremost, he mentions the oneness of God as the essential element of Muslim culture. He then goes on to address in order moral culture, scientific culture<sup>16</sup>, leadership culture<sup>17</sup>, Quranic culture of reading and studying<sup>18</sup> and the military culture. In this way, the author has extensively discussed how the commandment “Read!” has been realized throughout history in Islamic countries. He concludes this topic with five articles.

#### 2.1.8. Poetry

Hafiz Ali is a full-fledged poet. In the introduction of his masterpiece “The Holy History and the Four Caliphs,” he describes that his poetry is not just rhyme at the end of the line, but it includes all the necessary components for a professional poetry. (Korça, Historia e Shenjtë, 2006)

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<sup>16</sup> The point that the author aims to emphasize is the scientific education of believers. To support this, they mention various scientific truths that demonstrate the magnificence of God, linking them to Quranic verses. Furthermore, they highlight the historical importance that Muslims have placed on science. In their tafsir (Quranic exegesis) of Surah Zilzal (The Earthquake), which deals with a phenomenon related to the Earth, he emphasize the significance of geology. The introduction of the tafsir of this surah serves as a true lesson in geology. (See: Korça, Tefsiri i sure-i Zilzalit Sureja e Termetit, 2015)

<sup>17</sup> To illustrate this point, the author mentions some of the great Muslim leaders, such as Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) and Walîd ibn Abdul-Malik. (Korça, Tefsir Përmbi Kulturën Muslimane, 2015)

<sup>18</sup> Here, the author praises the Quran, which begins with the command “Read!” He highlights the examples of well-known Muslim women who excelled in various fields of knowledge such as mathematics, poetry, art, philology, and more. By showcasing the achievements and education of these women, the author aims to refute the criticisms made by Westerners. (Korça, Tefsir Përmbi Kulturën Muslimane, 2015); Tefsir i sure-i Alek-it a Kultura Kuranore, 2015)

Undoubtedly, in terms of poetic interpretation, we find a comprehensive treatment of the verses of Surah Yusuf. Despite the fact that the author goes beyond the narrative of the Quran by adding elements from Persian literature, he has treated the entire Surah Yusuf in poetic form.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.2. The sciences of the Quran

Despite the fact that in rare cases, Hafiz Ali has also included other topics of methodology such as grammatical analysis, kiraat, makharij, etc., but what stands out are as follows.

### 2.2.1. Israiliyât

In the “*Menâr*” school of thought, Israeli tales are considered unnecessary narratives. In fact, according to them, Israeli tales are the main obstacle to understanding the Quran. (Öztürk, 2004) Hafiz Ali openly expresses his opposition to Israeli tales. “I have moved away from fairy tales; I have only shown the truths. According to the essence of the Quran, revealed from the Throne of Rahman.” “The believer who takes it in his hands, by the notes I have written, understands it so well, as if studying Tafsir.” “I threw away what Torah say, because that caused enough trouble” (Korça, *Historia e Shenjtë*, 2006) According to Hafiz Korcha, one should stay away from Hebrew-Christian narratives, because they have destroyed the faith of Muslims. (Hoxha, 2008)

Despite his strong stance against israiliyât, Hafiz Ali extensively treated the story of Yusuf and Zulaikha. Starting from the names of some characters or places, Hafiz Ali has incorporated elements from israiliyât, mixed with literary creation<sup>20</sup>, the truth of which is impossible to be verified. The author is deeply influenced by Firdawsi. The latter wrote a lyrical epic, using elements found in the Torah, Gospel, and Quran. (Ahmedi, *Hafiz Ali Korça Jeta dhe vepra*, 2006)

### 2.2.2. Mekkî-Medenî (Meccan – Medinan)

According to the fundamental data of the surahs, Hafiz Ali usually mentions the Meccan or Medinan origin of the surahs. If there are different transmissions about their origin, he briefly mentions them. For example, for Surah Al-Fatihah, he says that it is Meccan but is also transmitted to have been revealed in Medina. (Korça, *Komentimi i disa ajeteve dhe sureve të Kuranit*, 2006) However, this is just an element that the author has mentioned as a necessary standard. It is not noticed that the origin of the surahs has any significant effect on his tafsir.

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<sup>19</sup> For more details please see the treatise titled: “Poetic commentary on Surah Yusuf” in this article.

<sup>20</sup> See the treatise titled: “Poetic commentary on Surah Yusuf” in this article.

### 2.2.3. Asbâb al-Nuzûl

Asbâb al-Nuzûl (the reason of the revelation) holds a significant place in Hafiz Ali's work. He mentions the event after which the verse was revealed according to classical transmissions. Sometimes he does not mention a specific event, but rather describes the context at the time it was revealed. This is one of Hafiz Ali's strongest points and it seems that he places great importance on it.

For example, regarding the revelation of Surah al-Ma'un, Hafiz Ali expresses himself as follows: "At that time when Muhammad Mustafa (peace be upon him) declared his prophethood, there were some hanifs around Mecca who said that they were followers of the religion of Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and that they were no more than twenty-five people. Whenever a verse was revealed about the things that would happen in the afterlife, they said, 'since we believe in Allah, the books that the prophets have brought, and the last day that we believe in, that we are angels who execute all the commands of Allah and worship Him. Without a doubt, we will have a higher and more distinguished rank than others, because we are pure and clean. Those who oppose us are not good people.' These contemporaries of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and others like them may have spoken in this way, but they did not act accordingly at all. They were far away from truth and justice. The aristocrats used the weak people they had in their grasp and treated them like animals, torturing and killing them mercilessly. If they saw a noble person dying from hunger or thirst, they did not even offer a piece of bread or a sip of water. With all these dark deeds, they thought that their opponents, that is, the Muslims, were outside the path of truth and were destined for eternal damnation. In general, the opponents were stronger than the Muslims, for example, Abu Jahl, Walid, and other powerful people would insult and ridicule the poor and weak people even more when they spoke. To refute the false claims of these people, Allah (may He be glorified) asked the Prophet and all of his ummah with the first verse of the Quran: ***O my distinguished Prophet Muhammad! Can you recognize that deceiver who will mislead (on the Day of Judgment) on the special day of judgment?***" (Korça, Komentimi i disa ajeteve dhe sureve të Kuranit, 2006)

### **3. Criticism of his tafsir**

The first scholars to explore the scientific aspect of Hafiz Ali Korcha's Tafsir were Ismail Ahmedi and Prof. Dr. Hajredin Hoxha. The latter one conducted a detailed analysis of the issues related to Hafiz Ali's Tafsir in his doctoral thesis, which has been translated into Albanian under the title *Tafsir and Albanian Mufasssirs in Contemporary Times*. At the end of their respective analyses, both authors also expressed their critiques. We have quoted the three most important critiques.

1 – He didn't distinguish between the translation and interpretation of the verses, but immediately moved to interpretation, making it difficult for the reader to distinguish between translation and commentary.

2 – Missing of the original Arabic texts within the commented surahs' (Ahmedi, Hafiz Ali Korça Jeta dhe vepra, 2006)

3 – Limited use of hadiths in argumentation. (Hoxha, 2008)

All three of these criticisms are valid and easily distinguishable. The fact remains that the first two criticisms are more objective than the last one. This is because Hafiz Ali does not strictly adhere to specific criteria in his work. This freedom is given to him by the fact that he does not create a thorough systematic commentary, but rather writes in the form of articles and draws attention to the topics that he considers important. This shows that there are no methodological shortcomings, but rather stems from his freedom in writing articles.

This is also demonstrated by the fact that in the expanded translation of the early verses of Surah Al-Baqarah, Hafiz Ali used a specific methodology and adhered to it correctly.

The criticism about the limited use of hadith is not necessarily a requirement in the making of tafsir. It seems more like a reactive criticism of a traditional author towards a representative of a reformist school.

## **Conclusions**

Hafiz Ali Korcha is a very strong figure in Islamic theology in Albania and throughout his life he played a very important role in the religious literature in Albanian language. Among other things, one of the most important fields he worked on is tafsir (exegesis). From his activity in the field of tafsir, we can see that instead of writing a systematic work of tafsir, Hafiz Ali took on the task of treating certain topics through tafsir that he considered important for Albanian Muslims of the time.

Considering the circumstances that the Albanian state was going through in search of independence, and the religious awakening that was primarily influenced by the separation from the Ottoman Empire, Hafiz Ali Korcha offered his intellectual contribution to all Muslim believers. The main themes of his work in the field of tafsir have been around the national identity of Albanian Muslims, the clarification of the Quran in the Albanian language, the explanation of the Quran through poetry, highlighting the values that Islam conveys, the importance of studying exact sciences and culture in general, the contribution of Muslims in the development of various sciences before their development in the West, the truth of the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him), the preservation of faith and religion despite the separation from the Ottoman Empire, and so on.

It can be observed that Hafiz Ali Korcha is a scholar who is both traditional and contemporary. He has a clear understanding of traditional concepts in the field of tafsir, but he also blends them with the new sciences developed in the West and argues that by knowing the exact sciences, we will better understand the Quran. He does not treat these ideas as fantasies of the time or cliché sayings, but in a very well-argued and convincing manner.



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