Vernacular Legalism in the Ottoman Empire: Confession, Law, and Popular Politics in the Debate over the “Religion of Abraham (*millet-i İbrāhīm*)”

Nir Shafir

Assistant Professor of History, University of California, San Diego, United States

nshafir@ucsd.edu

Abstract

In the seventeenth century, Ottoman jurists repeatedly tried to stop Muslims from stating that they “belonged to the religion of Abraham.” A century earlier, however, the expression had been a core part of the new confessional identity of the empire’s Muslims. This article explores how the phrase changed from an attestation of faith to a sign of heresy through a study of a short pamphlet by Minḳārīzāde Yaḥyā Efendi. Minḳārīzāde argued that the use of the phrase is not permissible and addressed his arguments not to learned scholars, but to the semi-educated. I argue that Minḳārīzāde’s pamphlet provides a glimpse into “vernacular legalism” in action in the Ottoman Empire, that is, how semi-educated audiences received and understood legal debates and subsequently turned law into a space of popular politics.

Keywords

millet-i İbrāhīm – religion – confessionalization – popular law – Abrahamic religions – Ottoman – vernacular – Minḳārīzāde – early modern

Can a Muslim say, “I belong to the religion of Abraham (*millet-i İbrāhīm'denim*)”? This was one of the most fiercely debated questions in the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Circa 1650, the future *şeyḫülislām* (chief jurist) Minḳārīzāde Yaḥyā Efendi (1609–1678) launched a major salvo when he argued, in two pamphlets, that the practice is not permissible.

Minkārīzāde's second pamphlet was copied and read across the empire, stoking the flames of the dispute. Yet, a hundred years earlier, the declaration "I belong to the religion of Abraham" had been a key part of a new set of catechisms that fostered a Muslim identity centered on the sharia. What does the phrase mean and what accounts for this volte-face? How did a handful of words suddenly fall on the wrong side of the law?

The debate over the "religion of Abraham (*millet-i Ibrāhīm*)" has a two-fold significance for our understanding of Ottoman society and Islamic law. First, it reflects the development of the confessionalization process in the early modern Ottoman Empire.¹ While some scholars, discussed below, regard the debate over *millet-i Ibrāhīm* as being about the place of non-Muslims in Ottoman society, I argue that the debate was internal to Ottoman Muslims and was about the everyday practices that signified their religious belief. The phrase, "I belong to the religion of Abraham," first emerged in the sixteenth century as part of a new set of catechisms designed to cultivate a specifically Sunni Muslim identity. In the seventeenth century, however, as more Ottoman subjects became Muslims, the standards of religiosity shifted and the phrase came to be interpreted as a denial of belief. Minkārīzāde, in his pamphlets, argued that the words *dīn*, *milla*, and *sharī'a*—terms that partially connote the concept of "religion" today—have equivalent meanings.² Declaring oneself part of the religion of Abraham therefore means ascribing Islam to Abraham and rejecting the sharia. A phrase that Muslims had used to build a confessional polity in one century became a mark of heresy in the next.

More important than the theological details of the debate over the "religion of Abraham" is the manner in which it was conducted and the audience to whom it was addressed. The polemics over the phrase offer a glimpse into what I argue to be a "popular" or, perhaps less pejoratively, "vernacular" legalism in the Ottoman Empire, i.e. the ways in which a semi-educated public received,

1 On "confessionalization" in an Ottoman context, see Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

2 In recent years, scholars have reexamined the category of "religion" and its genealogy, often pointing out that the concept fits poorly with commonly used Arabic analogues. See, for example, Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 176–245; Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 39–45; Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); For another point of view on the topic, see Rushain Abbasi, "Islam and the Genesis of 'Religion': A Study of Muslim Discourses on *Dīn*," *Studia Islamica* 115:1 (forthcoming 2020). The debate over *millet-i Ibrāhīm* can also be seen as one instance in which premodern Muslims argued over the social significance and conceptual boundaries of terms like *millet* and *dīn*.

produced, and propagated legal debates. Participants in the vernacular legal world not only transformed the debates by introducing simplified, schematic, and polarizing readings of Islamic law, but they also created the possibility for Islamic law to become a space of public and popular politics. Vernacular legalism thus represents a social usage of the law that lies beyond its formal functions and spaces such as judges presiding in courts, jurists issuing fatwas, professors debating in madrasas, or councils reviewing appeals in divans.³ In the case of *millet-i Ibrāhīm*, legal texts were written not to answer the question of a specific petitioner but to instigate and direct a public debate.⁴

The discourse of the vernacular legal world lacked the finesse or precision of traditional legal discussions, however. It was conducted at the level of the semi-educated, who could read, albeit sometimes with difficulty, but might, for instance, be unable to distinguish between the literal and figurative meaning of a phrase, a basic act of interpretation. This example raises an important distinction in my use of the word “vernacular” here. Vernacular legalism was vernacular *not* by virtue of its language choice, i.e. Turkish in place of Arabic, but by virtue of its partial and imperfect engagement with auxiliary sciences of language—grammar, logic, rhetoric, and disputation—that undergirded and directed legal discussions.⁵ Indeed, the sources on the *millet-i Ibrāhīm* debate are primarily in Turkish, but many other similar debates of the period were conducted in Arabic, even when the scholars involved were Turkish-speaking. Regardless of the language, we find in these vernacular legal debates a desire to engage with legal arguments, though without a full grasp of the linguistic disciplines that formally trained scholars received. This understanding of the “vernacular” draws from the art historian’s notion of the vernacular, as in “vernacular” architecture, i.e. common, everyday buildings built by

3 Paul Dresch has argued for a study of legalism (as opposed to law) which he defines as an “appeal to rules that are distinct from practice, the explicit use of generalizing concepts, and a disposition to address in such terms the conduct of human life.” He seeks to move the study of law and society away from an emphasis on power and toward classificatory regimes. While I do not subscribe here to Dresch’s overarching concept, I share an interest in using legalism to denote uses of the law outside its formal boundaries. Paul Dresch, “Introduction: Legalism, Anthropology, and History: A View from Part of Anthropology,” in *Legalism: Anthropology and History*, ed. Paul Dresch and Hannah Skoda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1, 15.

4 My understanding of a “public” draws on Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002). Vernacular legalism occupies a space between the local specificity of the “archive” and the abstracted universalism of the “library,” to use Brinkley Messick’s useful categorization of Islamic legal texts. Brinkley M. Messick, *Shari’a Scripts: A Historical Anthropology* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2018).

5 For an overview of the heightened importance of these sciences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Khaled el-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), esp. pp. 115–20.

craftsmen with little or no formal academic training. Vernacular builders might draw upon dominant ideas in architecture, but often do so with their own techniques and materials or produce examples that are not meant to be canonical and exemplary.⁶ In spite of these shortcomings, participants in vernacular legal culture constituted an important public for legal discussions.⁷ This can be seen in the second iteration of Minkārīzāde's pamphlet, which he shortened in an effort to make it accessible to those who found reading difficult and to fuel a debate that was smoldering in Ottoman society. The reception of the *millet-i Ibrāhīm* debate by the vernacular legal world helped convert an act of piety into a declaration of heresy. The vernacular definition of heresy often dispensed with the precise juristic distinctions between terms like *kufi*, *ilhād*, *bid'a*, *ghulāt*, and *zandaqa*, and almost never found its way into formal legal sources, but it remained a potent accusation.

I highlight vernacular legalism in this article to demonstrate the diverse ways in which law could take root in Muslims' daily lives. In historical studies of Islamic law, popular participation in law is often characterized as being limited to litigating affairs in a courtroom or requesting a fatwa from a mufti.⁸ In other

6 On the usage of the concept of vernacular architecture in art history, see N. W. Alcock and et al., "Vernacular Architecture," in *Grove Art Online*, 2003, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/97818844446054.article.To88875>; this notion of the vernacular is slightly at odds with the one proposed by Sheldon Pollock, according to whom the vernacular is the realm of the local or translocal in comparison to the universal and cosmopolitan. Sheldon I. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); For a discussion of the applicability of Pollock's ideas to the question of Arabic and legal discourse, see Messick, *Sharī'a Scripts*, 27–28; for a discussion of legal material in Turkish, see Sara Nur Yıldız, "A Hanafi Law Manual in the Vernacular: Devletoğlu Yūsuf Balıkesrī's Turkish Verse Adaptation of the *Hidāya-Wiqāya* Textual Tradition for the Ottoman Sultan Murad II (824/1424)," *Bulletin of SOAS* 80:2 (2017): 283–304.

7 Steven Wilf has highlighted a "vernacular legal culture" that was specific to the American colonies in the second half of the eighteenth century (and he chooses the word "vernacular" as a more palatable alternative to "popular"). In his interpretation, vernacular legal culture is constituted by popular stories and texts about crimes and criminals that led residents of the colonies to narrativize the centrality of law to early American society. While the emphasis on the legal imagination of ordinary people is appreciated, Wilf's notion of vernacular legal culture seems to be not much more than a way of highlighting the connection between the larger cultural milieu and the significance of law, and thus I find his version of vernacular legal culture too broad to be analytically productive. Moreover, the realm of vernacular legal culture is predictably limited to criminal law. Steven Robert Wilf, *Law's Imagined Republic: Popular Politics and Criminal Justice in Revolutionary America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58–66.

8 Even studies of the popular reception of law in the Ottoman Empire focus mainly on the ability of ordinary people to access legal forums like courtrooms, rather than their role in actively shaping the law. See Timothy Fitzgerald, "Reaching the Flocks: Literacy and the Mass Reception of Ottoman Law in the Sixteenth-Century Arab World," in *Law and Legality in the Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey*, ed. Kent F. Schull, M. Safa Saraçoğlu, and Zens, Robert (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 9–25.

words, most Muslims are regarded as consumers of law. The producers of law, by contrast, are specialists who subject themselves to years of study—not only of jurisprudence or *fiqh*, but also grammar, logic, rhetoric, and disputation. In this sense, vernacular legalism is an oxymoron given that *fiqh* is a highly specialized legal science that resists popularization. Yet, I argue that there are moments when ordinary Muslims engaged with the law, not as passive consumers but as active producers, however imperfectly. While the words of this vernacular legal world were (and still are) considered “vulgar,” they represent a form of popular politics that emerged from their engagement with legal debates. To put it another way, the vernacular legal world’s reception of law was also an act of the production of law and helped establish law as a space of public politics in Islamic societies.

Treating Islamic law as a popular phenomenon can, in turn, help us rewrite the history of religion in the late medieval and early modern periods. Islamic law (and forms of Islamic religiosity centered on following the sharia’s prescriptions) during this period, roughly 1200–1800, is regarded as a discourse imposed by state officials or intransigent scholars onto more popular, and supposedly more authentic, forms of religious practice, such as Sufism, saint-worship, and folk beliefs, especially in frontier areas such as Anatolia and Southeastern Europe, where the power of centralized states was minimal at first.⁹ Indeed, Muslims rulers like the Ottomans had to recruit legal scholars from outside their realms to staff positions in their new capitals, and popular resistance to the state took the form of rebellions led by Sufis and holy men, who found a ready following among both city dwellers and nomads.¹⁰ In this context, the establishment and operation of Islamic law, along with the appointment of judges and muftis, was a projection of state power.¹¹ Yet, efforts by the state to establish Islamic law also created a parallel, popular space of law. Although many scholars, both in the past and today, often dismissed such popular participation as

9 See, for example, James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

10 Ethel Wolper, *Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

11 Leslie P. Peirce, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Guy Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Hanafi School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Abdurrahman Atçıl, *Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Tijana Krstić, “State and Religion, ‘Sunnitization’ and ‘Confessionalism’ in Süleyman’s Time,” in *Szigetvar 1566—Proceedings of the Commemorative Conference on the Siege of Szigetvar and Suleyman the Magnificent’s and Miklos Zrinyi’s Death*, ed. Pál Fodor (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2019), 65–91.

the byproduct of preachers agitating the populace, the time has come to investigate vernacular legalism on its own terms.

This article seeks to initiate a conversation on vernacular legalism. I investigate one small example of the legal vernacular world in the seventeenth century—the debate over *millet-i İbrāhīm*—and I engage with vernacular voices only indirectly. Many writers in the vernacular legal world lacked the authority to become authors in their own right and their presence can be discerned only through the writings of more authoritative scholars who wished either to silence or amplify their voices. I begin by explaining the rise of the practice of declaring oneself to be “part of the religion of Abraham,” before turning to an examination of the pamphlets in which the debate over the practice took place. I then explain the emergence of vernacular legalism in the Ottoman context and analyze the arguments put forward by Minḳārīzāde and his attempt to cultivate a particular audience of the semi-educated. Finally, I focus on the popular reception of his arguments.

1 The Quranic and Ottoman Origins of Abraham's Religion

The phrase “*millet-i İbrāhīm*” has Quranic roots but it gained a new usage in the Ottoman Empire. It is taken from multiple Quranic verses, though the most commonly quoted is “say, no, [ours is] the religion (*milla*) of Abraham, the perennial believer.”¹² Abraham here is the mythic ancestor of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and early Muslim exegetes understood his *milla* to be Islam, albeit a primordial religion from which Jews and Christians had ultimately deviated.¹³ The phrase “I belong to the religion of Abraham,” or, literally, “I am [part] of the religion of Abraham (*millet-i İbrāhīm'denim*),” was incorporated into a new set of catechisms written in the Ottoman Empire starting in the sixteenth century. By declaring that they “belong to the religion of Abraham,” Ottoman Muslims reasserted their faith as early Muslims had done when they claimed the Abrahamic legacy for themselves.

12 The translation of Qur'an 2:135 is based on that of M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16; The full verse is: “Say, no, [ours is] the religion of Abraham the perennial believer... who did not worship any God but God.” The other verses in which the phrase appears are Q2:130, 3:95, 4:125, 6:161.

13 On the meaning of *milla* in the classical *tafāsīr* literature, see Jacob Olidort, “Portraying Early Islam as the *milla* of Abraham: a Look at the *tafāsīr* Evidence,” in *The Late Antique World of Early Islam: Muslims among Christians and Jews in the East Mediterranean*, ed. Robert G. Hoyland (Princeton, N.J.: The Darwin Press, 2015), 313–37.

As Tijana Krstić demonstrates, these catechisms were intended to correct the errant practices of Ottoman Muslims, many of whom were recent converts, and to educate them in the basics of the true faith.¹⁴ The catechisms, all of which are in Turkish, often begin with a taxonomical history lesson to help guide Muslims to their proper identity. The anonymously authored *Essence of Islam* and Lütü Paşa's (d. 1563) *Questions and Answers* posed to readers a series of hypothetical questions about their proper community. Readers are told to profess that they are descendants (*zürriyet*) of Adam, of the religion (*millet*) of Abraham, of the community (*ümmet*) of Muhammad, and followers of the doctrine (*mezheb*) of Abu Hanifa.¹⁵ The so-called *Spear Catechism* (*mızraklı ilm-i hāl*), a composite of catechisms likely compiled in the seventeenth century, starts with the following statements for the believer: "I am a descendant of Adam, I am of the religion (*millet*) of Abraham, I am of the faith (*dīn*) and community (*ümmet*) of Muhammad, the last prophet. Thanks be to God, in belief (*i'tikāt*) my doctrine is Sunnism (*mezhebim ehl-i sünnet ve'l-cemā'at*)."¹⁶ Each of these statements was a step toward a specific confessional ideal for Ottoman Muslims. The phrase "I belong to the religion of Abraham" was thus an attestation of faith, a declaration of being Muslim. Moreover, this set of attestations seems to have been a sixteenth-century Ottoman innovation: a Persian model of the question-and-answer catechism from the previous century does not include them nor mention the *millet-i İbrāhīm*.¹⁷

Other than the pamphlets in the seventeenth century, these catechisms are nearly the only concrete demonstration of the social usage of the phrase, "I belong to the religion of Abraham." The one other example I have come across

14 Tijana Krstić, "From *shahāda* to 'aqida: Conversion to Islam, Catechisation, and Sunnification in Sixteenth-century Ottoman Rumeli," in *Islamisation: comparative perspectives from history*, ed. A. C. S. Peacock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 296–313.

15 See Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, MS 3324 (f. 119b) and Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS A.F. 437 for the *Eğër sorsalar* text; and see Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Kiliç Paşa MS 378 for the Lütü Paşa version.

16 İsmail Kara, ed., *Mızraklı İlmiḥal* (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1989), 5, 11, 84; Krstić, "From *shahāda* to 'aqida." Given the lack of copies from before the eighteenth century, it is possible that the "*Spear Catechism*" was not written in the sixteenth century as is generally assumed. In later editions of the *Spear Catechism*, which became the standard catechism of the empire in the nineteenth century, the phrase, "I belong to the religion of Abraham," has been omitted. This suggests that the controversy had an impact on the content of the catechisms. İsmail Kara's edition of the *Spear Catechism* is based on the late nineteenth-century printed versions, in which the phrase is missing, but he says he consulted earlier manuscript versions, which purportedly include the phrase.

17 *Risāle-i imān*, Konya Bölge Kütüphanesi MS 165, ff. 119a–139b. The approximate copy date, Ashura (10) Muharram 898 A.H./ 1 Nov 1492, is taken from the colophon of the preceding treatise by the same scribe on f. 116b.

is in a late seventeenth-century hagiography of Demir Bâbâ, a sixteenth-century holy man working in the wilds of Deliorman, in what is now northeastern Bulgaria. There, hidden in the forests, a frontier Islam that had been slowly extinguished elsewhere in the empire continued to survive.¹⁸ In one of the many stories collected about him, Demir Bâbâ is summoned by the king of Muscovy to fight a dragon ravaging the land. When the infidel king asks him, "What is your religion (*ne milletdensün*)," he answers "I belong to Abraham's religion."¹⁹ What exactly he means by this is unclear. While he may be stating that he is a Muslim, the phrase could have had different connotations for him altogether. Regardless, the phrase "I belong to Abraham's religion" functions as a declaration of belief or identity. When the king asks Demir Bâbâ if he is referring to the Abraham who freed Nimrod, Demir Bâbâ answers in the affirmative. The answer is odd, given that Nimrod is Abraham's primary antagonist in the Qur'an and in stories about the prophets, but it suggests that there was a large and diverse popular lore about Abraham's central role in the origins of Islam.²⁰ The authors of the sixteenth-century catechisms may have drawn upon this popular devotion to Abraham when they made the declaration "I belong to the religion of Abraham" one of the foundations of Ottoman Muslim identity. These examples demonstrate that the *millet-i İbrâhîm* was not a discrete religious community, but rather a pious and frequently uttered declaration. As the seventeenth-century bibliophile Kâtib Çelebi (1609–1657) noted, "it has become a widespread and regular habit among the people to say simply 'I belong to the religion of Abraham.'"²¹ Utterance of the phrase was one of the many everyday practices that constituted lived religion in the Ottoman Empire.²²

18 On the dating of the text, see Nikolay Antov, *The Ottoman "Wild West": The Balkan Frontier in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 207–8.

19 Filiz Kılıç and Tuncay Bülbül, eds., *Demir Baba Velâyetnâmesi* (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2011), 91; Antov, *The Ottoman "Wild West,"* 233. I thank Nikolay Antov for bringing this story to my attention.

20 A popular Persian couplet that mentions Abraham as the builder of the Ka'ba is found on manuscripts and ceramics throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For a Ka'ba tile example, see the David Collection, Inv. No. 51/1979. For examples of the couplet's usage, see Sabiha Göloğlu, "Depicting the Holy: Representations of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem in the Late Ottoman Empire" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Istanbul, Koç University, 2018), 55–56. The couplet was the subject of a fatwa by Ebü's-su'üd regarding whether it is permissible to call Abraham *Ḥalîl-i Âzar*. See Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden, MS Or. 12425 f. 2a.

21 Kâtib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, trans. G. L. Lewis (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1957), 121.

22 On the recent turn to conceiving religion as constituted by "everyday" practices, see Nancy T. Ammerman, "Finding Religion in Everyday Life," *Sociology of Religion* 75:2 (2014): 189–207.

Although the phrase *millet-i Ibrāhīm* was introduced as part of an effort to cultivate a specific confessional identity in Ottoman Muslim subjects, it possessed some inherent ambiguities that made it a source of controversy. The first is the reference to Abraham/Ibrāhīm. By linking an Ottoman Islamic identity to the first prophet of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the catechisms opened the possibility of blurring the distinction between the different faiths. In the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, this shared heritage created a dilemma for the Prophet Muhammad as he sought both to align his religion with and differentiate it from the *ḥanīfiyya* or *dīn Ibrāhīm*, the general monotheism in the Arabian lands centered on the figure of Abraham.²³ The Ottoman-era debate over *millet-i Ibrāhīm* bears no connection to this early Islamic discussion regarding the *ḥanīfiyya*; the debate was not over the interpretation of the Quranic verse (“say, no, [ours is] the religion of Abraham, the perennial believer”) but over the catechismic declaration, “I belong to Abraham’s religion,” which does not include the additional description of Abraham as a *ḥanīf*. However, the Ottoman-era declaration raised questions similar to those that the Quranic verses raised for early Muslims. For Minkārīzāde, Muslims who declare that they “belong to the religion of Abraham” implicitly call into question the relation between Muhammad and Abraham and between Islam and its Abrahamic precursors. An inherent tension has always lurked in the millennia-long debate over Abraham’s legacy: recognizing familial resemblances can quickly become the impetus for a family feud.²⁴ Today, this discussion continues in the newly coined concept of “Abrahamic religions;” Abraham is no longer an object of competition but a figure through whom we envision a shared future.²⁵

The other ambiguity in the phrase *millet-i Ibrāhīm* lies in the many significations of the word *millet*. Historians of the Ottoman Empire today understand *millet* to signify a community of people connected to a specific religion, almost invariably non-Muslim. The phrase *millet-i Ibrāhīm* thus suggests to the ear of

23 Uri Rubin, “*Ḥanīfiyya* and Ka’ba: an inquiry into the Arabian, pre-Islamic background of *dīn Ibrāhīm*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990): 85–112; see also Olidort, “Portraying Early Islam as the *milla* of Abraham.”

24 Guy G. Stroumsa, “From Abraham’s Religion to the Abrahamic Religions,” *Historia Religionum* 3 (2011): 11–22.

25 Stroumsa, 20. In recent years, scholars have criticized the use of “Abrahamic religions” as an analytical concept. See Aaron W. Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jon D. Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, & Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012); Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

the modern historian a community of Jews or an interconfessional community.²⁶ Yet, in the past, *millet* signified much more than our modern notion of a religious community. As seen in the aforementioned catechisms from the early modern period, *millet* was often treated as a synonym of *dīn* (religion, faith), but it was also unclear how precisely it differed from *ītikād* (belief) or *ümmet* (community). Similarly, in modern translations of the Qur'an, *milla* is alternately rendered as "religion," "community," and "law."²⁷ Minkārīzāde would use the ambiguity inherent in the word to extend the signification of *millet* to encompass the sharia.

The ambiguous associations of those two words, *millet* and *Ibrāhīm*, have hampered the efforts of the few historians who have touched upon the Ottoman-era debate. Cengiz Şişman, for example, argues that Minkārīzāde wrote his *millet-i Ibrāhīm* treatise to preserve more tolerant classical attitudes toward non-Muslims in the face of attacks on Jews and Christians.²⁸ He

26 Part of the modern confusion over the term *millet-i Ibrāhīm* derives from our modern notion of *millet* as proto-nation, as in the so-called "*millet* system." That meaning emerged in the eighteenth century as the Ottoman government introduced an official relationship between the government and the religious leaders it appointed to represent non-Muslim communities. Benjamin Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society, Vol. 1: The Central Lands*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (London: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 69–90; Daniel Goffman, "Ottoman Millets in the Early Seventeenth Century," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 11 (1994): 135–58; Paraskevas Konortas, "From Taife to Millet: Ottoman Terms for the Ottoman Greek Orthodox Community," in *Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism*, ed. Dimitri Gondicas and Charles Issawi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 169–79; Maurits H. van den Boogert, "Millets: Past and Present," in *Religious Minorities in the Middle East: Domination, Self-Empowerment, Accommodation*, ed. Anh Nga Longva and Annie Sofie Roald (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 27–45; Antonis Hadjikyriacou, "Beyond the Millet Debate: Communal Representation in Pre-Tanzimat Cyprus," in *Halcyon Days in Crete ix: Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Marinos Sariyannis (Rethymno: Crete University Press, 2019), 71–96; One of the few Ottomanists who recognized *millet* as religion is M. O. H. Ursinus. See *EF*, s.v. Millet (Ursinus).

27 Olidort, "Portraying Early Islam as the *milla* of Abraham," 315.

28 Cengiz Şişman, "Minkārīzāde Yahya: Şeyhülislam Minkārīzāde Yahya Efendi," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographic History: Volume 10: Ottoman and Safavid Empires (1600–1700)*, ed. David Thomas and John Chesworth (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 404–10; Harun Küçük interprets the fatwa of Yenişehirli 'Abdullah Efendi, mentioned below, in a similar manner. He suggests that Sultan Ahmed III instructed the *şeyhülislam* to forbid Muslims from saying that they "belong to the *millet-i Ibrāhīm*," and instead to say that they "belong to the *millet-i Muḥammad*." The goal of the change was to create a more equal and inclusive status for non-Muslim subjects, that is, the *millet-i Ibrāhīm*. This suggestion does not make much sense. Why should Muslims, in a more equal system, not be allowed to state that they belonged to the *millet-i Ibrāhīm*, especially as we have no examples of non-Muslims referring to themselves in this manner. Bekir Harun Küçük, "Early Enlightenment in Istanbul" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, La Jolla, Calif., University of California, San Diego, 2012), 22.

suggests that Minkārīzāde wrote his treatise in response to a purportedly fundamentalist movement called the *Ḳāḏīzādelis*, discussed below. In particular, Şişman proposes that Minkārīzāde was responding to one of the *Ḳāḏīzādeli* preachers, Vānī Meḥmed Efendi (d. 1096/1685), who, alongside Minkārīzāde himself and Kara Muştafā Paşā (d. 1095/1683), oversaw the trial and conversion of the Jewish messiah claimant Sabbatai Zevi in 1666.²⁹ Şişman assumes, one, that the Ottoman-era debate over *millet-i Ibrāhīm* is connected to the aforementioned discussion of *ḥanīfs*, the followers of the pre-Islamic Arabian monotheism, and, two, that, because it uses the word *millet*, it should relate to the status of non-Muslims. This is incorrect. While the early Islamic interpretations of the term *millat Ibrāhīm* connected it to the *hanīfs*, Minkārīzāde and others' treatises on the topic do not discuss the *ḥanīfiyya* in any way. Moreover, the debate is not about the status of non-Muslims nor was Minkārīzāde trying to uphold some sort of tolerance toward non-Muslims;³⁰ Minkārīzāde's treatise mentions neither Jews nor Christians, as Şişman himself acknowledges. The

29 Minkārīzāde's role in the trial of Sabbatai Zevi is elaborated in Cengiz Şişman, *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Zevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 30–34.

30 Şişman's contention that Minkārīzāde held more tolerant views of non-Muslims follows from a compounded overinterpretation of an anecdote recounted by Paul Rycaut (d. 1700), an English diplomat living in Istanbul in the 1660s, regarding a disagreement between Minkārīzāde Yahyā and Vānī Meḥmed. The topic at hand was whether communal prayers in support of the Ottoman armies' campaigns against the Habsburgs in 1664 should be held in a city-wide assembly or in mosques. Minkārīzāde and another shaykh, basing themselves on legal precedent and tradition, argued for the former, while Vānī argued for the latter. According to Rycaut's account of the event, the controversy was about whether or not a city-wide assembly increased the efficacy of the prayer. Vānī argued that since all participants were true Muslims ("Believers"), a citywide assembly was a superfluous addition. In her article on the *Ḳāḏīzādeli* movement, Madeline Zilfi interprets this episode as part of Vānī's attack on religious syncretism (presumably, non-Muslims could participate in a citywide mass prayer) and Sufism (she assumes that Minkārīzāde's supportive shaykh was a Sufi). Şişman interprets Zilfi's comments as proof that Minkārīzāde completely opposed Vānī and the *Ḳāḏīzādelis* and therefore Minkārīzāde had a "disdain of the anti-Jewish and anti-Christian sentiments on the rise during this period" and wrote the treatise on *millet-i Ibrāhīm* to counter such beliefs. Both Zilfi and Şişman may have overinterpreted a single report by an English diplomat; While Vānī may have had a larger intention in arguing that city-wide communal prayers were not efficacious, Minkārīzāde's opposition to Vānī's position does not necessarily mean that he held more tolerant views of non-Muslims, only that, in this instance, he adhered to legal precedent and fought for the superiority of his views at court. Paul Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire from the Year 1623 to the Year 1677*, 2 vols. (London, 1680), 2:154. Madeline Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45:4 (1986), 251–69, comment on Minkārīzāde at 264–5; Şişman, "Minkarizāde Yahya," 407.

work is also not an argument against the Kādizādelis.³¹ While the Kādizādeli framework very poorly explains the religious dynamics of the seventeenth century, if one were to measure Minkārīzāde by its standards, his ideas would fall close to those of Vānī Mehmed. Moreover, the date of Minkārīzāde's treatise makes it highly unlikely that he was responding to Vānī Mehmed Efendi, who arrived in Istanbul and assumed a position of power in the court only in 1662, years after Minkārīzāde wrote his work.

Şişman's argument aside, the Kādizādeli movement remains the main framework through which scholars interpret the polemical debates of the seventeenth century, like the dispute over the religion of Abraham.³² According to this narrative, a few puritanical preachers tapped into the economic frustrations of Istanbul's denizens to further their own extremist agenda. A so-called "fundamentalist" movement emerged, in which practices like coffee drinking, tobacco smoking, and Sufi rituals were attacked as "innovations." However, the movement quickly dissipated with the dismissal of Vānī Mehmed Efendi following the failed siege of Vienna in 1683.

Rather than seeing the polemical debates as emerging from a paroxysm of fundamentalism, it is more helpful to situate them in the process of "confessionalization" and "Sunnitization" that Tijana Krstic and Derin Terzioğlu have recently elaborated.³³ Confessionalization in the Ottoman context entailed a long-term alignment of the empire's identity with a specifically Sunni and Hanafi Islam. The confessional identity of Ottoman subjects had been of minor concern to Ottoman rulers before the fifteenth century. Even seemingly basic beliefs like the superiority of the Prophet Muhammad over the other prophets, or that the five canonical prayers were obligatory, could not be taken for granted; there are reports that in late fourteenth-century and early fifteenth-century Bursa, some Ottoman Muslims regarded Jesus as the most superior Prophet.³⁴ In the words of Cemal Kafadar, there reigned a

31 Şişman bases his claim that the debate over the "religion of Abraham" is tied to the Kādizādelis on a reference to Madeline Zilfi's article on the movement. Zilfi, in turn, bases her connection of the two events on the fact that Kâtib Çelebi includes the controversy in his book about the debates of the period, *The Balance of Truth (Mizānu'l-ḥaqq)*. However, not every debate in *The Balance of Truth* should be read as part of the Kādizādeli agenda. Kâtib Çelebi lists public and popular debates that he felt were ignited by the participation of the uneducated. Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis," 255; Kâtib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 108–23.

32 Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis;" Madeline Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600–1800)* (Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988).

33 Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam*; Derin Terzioğlu, "How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization: A Historiographical Discussion," *Turcica* 44 (2012–2013): 301–38.

34 Baki Tezcan, "Ottoman Mevali as 'Lords of the Law,'" *Journal of Islamic Studies* 2:3 (September 2009): 384–85.

“metadoxy” in the early Ottoman Empire, a state of confessional ambiguity in which neither orthodoxy nor heterodoxy was fully articulated.³⁵ There were initial attempts at confessional boundary-making within the empire in the fifteenth century, but the process did not begin in earnest until the sixteenth century when it was triggered by imperial competition with the Safavids and their Kızılbaş followers in the east and Catholic rulers in the west. The catechisms that incorporated the phrase “*millet-i Ibrāhīm*” were only one part of a series of changes that included organizing neighborhoods around the disciplinary watch of mosques, educating Muslims in the basic legal requirements of Islam, and the introduction of new ideas about heresy.³⁶ The framework of confessionalization has proven to be particularly fruitful for scholars studying the Ottoman Empire because it allows them to treat religion in general, and Sunnism in particular, as an evolving entity. This point may appear self-evident but it makes a needed intervention in earlier scholarship, like that on the Kāḏizādeli movement, which treats religion as a set of fixed “orthodox” Islamic beliefs that are either adopted or set aside.

The polemical debates over *millet-i Ibrāhīm* were one manifestation of the confessionalization process in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as more and more of the empire’s Muslim population introduced daily prescribed Islamic actions into their lives. Tijana Krstić explains this process in regard to the Süleymanic period: “authors [of catechisms] explicitly circumscribed the field of piety for Ottoman Muslims by erecting ever more numerous signposts beyond which the domain of infidelity began, while at the same time promoting *fikih* and its practitioners as the ultimate arbiters of the boundaries of belief.”³⁷ Standards of piety shifted as Ottoman subjects became familiar with the requirements and proofs of the sharia. Daily actions that had once been acceptable, like declaring that one belonged to the religion of Abraham, were suddenly subject to greater scrutiny and became the object of popular debate.

2 Minkārīzāde’s Pamphlets

Minkārīzāde’s two pamphlets on *millet-i Ibrāhīm* are our chief sources on the controversy over the phrase and therefore we have to delve into the

35 On metadoxy, see Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 76.

36 See the essays in Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu, eds., *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450–c. 1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

37 Krstić, “State and Religion,” 84.

Minḳārīzāde's motivation for writing them.³⁸ Both of his pamphlets are written in Turkish: the first pamphlet is about fifteen to twenty folios and the second, an abridgement of the first, is about two or three folios, depending on the copyist. It is this second, shorter pamphlet that made its way across the empire and prompted a number of responses.

Minḳārīzāde Yahyā Efendi was the son of the eponymous Minḳārī Ömer Efendi (*minḳārī* likely refers to an aquiline or hook nose), a provincial scholar who became a successful professor in the capital and was eventually appointed the chief judge of Mecca, where he died when Minḳārīzāde was fifteen years old.³⁹ The son drew upon his father's scholarly connections to study Qur'an recitation as a child with the famous Sufi shaykh Hüdā'ī Maḥmūd Efendi (d. 1628), and after quickly completing a madrasa education, studied with his *eniştes* (the husbands of his aunts, a special role of mentor and protector in Turkish culture)—Veli Efendi and *şeyḫülislām* 'Abdurrahīm Efendi (d. 1656).⁴⁰ Minḳārīzāde went on to teach at several madrasas until he was appointed to higher imperial positions, taking up the chief judgeship of Mecca in 1649; in 1652 he was appointed as chief judge of Egypt, where he established close contacts with Arab scholars and continued to hold teaching sessions at local madrasas and the governor's court.⁴¹ Like many officials in high positions, he held this post intermittently, being appointed and dismissed three times. In 1658, he was briefly appointed chief examiner of the *'ulemā* for a few months before becoming chief judge of Istanbul. In 1662, he became Rumeli *kazasker*, and a few months later he reached the top of the pyramid when he became *şeyḫülislām*, a position he held for eleven years, achieving a level of power and influence that few *şeyḫülislāms* ever attained. At the height of his career,

38 For this article I examined some forty copies of this treatise in manuscript libraries around the world (though many more exist and are not cataloged properly). I also acquired reproductions of early copies from the following libraries: İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi MS T5917; Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Arab 292 ff. 99a-101a; UCLA Young Research Library Special Collections, Collection 896, Box 109, MS 740; İstanbul Araştırma Enstitüsü, Şevket Rado MS 232 ff. 132b-136b; Gazi Husrev-Begova Biblioteka, MS R702 ff. 198b-204b; Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin Efendi MS 1064 ff. 166-168; Princeton University Library, Garrett MS. 400L. The long version of the pamphlet can be found in Nuruosmaniye Kütüphanesi, MS 4952 ff. 25b-54a and in Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Yazma Bağışlar MS 1438 ff. 103-116.

39 Nev'izāde Atâyî, *Hadâ'iku'l-hakâ'ik fî tekmileti's-şakâ'ik: Nev'izāde Atâyî'nin Şakâ'ik zeyli*, ed. Suat Donuk and Derya Örs, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2017), 1709-10.

40 Şeyhî Mehmed Efendi, *Vekâyi'u'l-fuzalâ: Şeyhî'nin Şakâ'ik zeyli*, ed. Ramazan Ekinci and Derya Örs, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2018), 1128-29.

41 Şeyhî Mehmed Efendi, 2:1129; Muḥammad Amīn b. Faḍl Allāh al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī a'yān al-qarn al-ḥādī 'ashar*, vol. 4 (Cairo, 1284), 477-78.

however, something afflicted his right hand, rendering him unable to write and continue working, and he was dismissed in 1673.⁴² His many writings, most of which were likely completed in the 1650s, included a tertiary commentary on al-Bayḍawī's (d. 1286) interpretation of the Qur'an and a work of disputation theory (*adab al-baḥth*) written as a tertiary commentary on Mīr Abī'l-Faṭḥ's (d. 1568) commentary on *al-Adab al-Aḍuḍiyya*. His popular pamphlet on *millet-i Ibrāhīm* was also penned in this period, though his biographers fail to mention it, possibly due to the fact that it was aimed not at scholars but at the general public.

Minkārīzāde's second pamphlet was the most popular work on the *millet-i Ibrāhīm* controversy in the Ottoman period; today, however, students of Ottoman history who might have heard of the "religion of Abraham" are more familiar with Kātib Çelebi's description of the controversy from *The Balance of Truth*. Kātib Çelebi's genius lies in his capacity to compile and collect, not in original thought: his chapter on *millet-i Ibrāhīm* is almost completely comprised of anonymized quotations from Minkārīzāde's longer treatise. Unlike the other scholars to whom he refers by name in his book, Kātib Çelebi anonymizes his extended quotations from Minkārīzāde, referring to him only as a "learned scholar (*fāzil*)."⁴³ It is not clear why Kātib Çelebi, who was so eager to highlight the sagacity of his friends and the stupidity of his enemies, does not mention Minkārīzāde by name. Perhaps it is because he regarded Minkārīzāde to be an opportunist like his own former teacher, Kāḍizāde Meḥmed. The eponymous "founder" of the Kāḍizādeli movement was an incendiary with a sharp mind who courted controversy for personal gain, according to Kātib Çelebi.⁴⁴ The rest of Kātib Çelebi's treatise contains a disparaging summary of a certain unknown shaykh's (referred to as *seyḥ-i mücib* or the respondent shaykh⁴⁵) defense of declaring oneself part of the religion of Abraham and Kātib Çelebi's summation that while the masses are ultimately wrong, it is futile to try to stop them.

42 Modern scholars have interpreted this illness as a stroke, though the sources are ambiguous on the matter.

43 One reason why Kātib Çelebi's copying activities were not readily recognized was that the translator, Lewis, decided to render "*fāzil*," or "scholar," as a proper name and not as a descriptor. He also found Kātib Çelebi's treatment of the topic tedious. Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 12, 110.

44 Kātib Çelebi, *Mizānū'l-ḥaḳḳ fi ihtiyārī'l-aḥaḳḳ* (Kostantiniye: Matba'a-i Ebu'l-Ẓiyā, 1306), 132; Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 137.

45 The translator of Kātib Çelebi's work, Lewis, read *mücib* as the name of the shaykh (as he did with the descriptor *fāzil* above), but *Mücib* as a name is rare and nearly always found in compounds with a name of God, not by itself. It likely refers to a respondent in this case. I thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

In *The Balance of Truth*, Kâtib Çelebi includes the *millet-i Ibrâhîm* controversy as one of twenty-one debates over proper Muslim practice—such as the permissibility of worshipping at the tombs of saints or smoking tobacco—that smoldered in the empire during the seventeenth century. Of course, there were more than twenty-one debates and most were fought in what I call “pamphlets”: short and cheap treatises that brought legal debates and proofs to a vernacular and popular audience.⁴⁶ Pamphlets provided readers with a *ḥadīth* or two, some quotes from a major legal scholar like al-Bayḍawī, and perhaps some counterarguments to deploy against anyone who disagreed. They gave access to legal argumentation to those who lacked the intellectual or financial capacity to navigate large legal manuals. Most are written in a straightforward and accessible Arabic or, on a rare occasion, in Turkish, as in the case of Minkārîzâde’s pamphlet. In other words, the vernacularity of the pamphlets resides not only in their choice of language, but also in opening legal argumentation to a popular audience, as will be discussed below.

Most of the topics discussed by Kâtib Çelebi have left behind a long trail of pamphlets, evidence of the vigorous and contentious debates they inspired. The *millet-i Ibrâhîm* debate is anomalous in that it is dominated by single pamphlet by Minkārîzâde; it is difficult to find treatises other than his and what exists almost always refers back to his treatise. The controversy over the phrase “I belong to the religion of Abraham” appears to have started in the early seventeenth century. Writing in 1656, Kâtib Çelebi points out that over eighty treatises recently had been written on *millet-i Ibrâhîm*, nearly none of which has survived today.⁴⁷ By contrast, what remains besides Minkārîzâde’s pamphlets and Kâtib Çelebi’s summary are a few direct responses to Minkārîzâde’s claims, of which only two are extant. Kâtib Çelebi also mentions that the government tried to ban usage of the phrase (*ṭaraf-ı saltanatdan men’ olunsa*), yet traces of this attempt are difficult to find.⁴⁸ He may be referring to a fatwa that supposedly was penned by *şeyhülislâm* Mehmed Bahâî Efendi (r. 1649–1651,

46 What I call “pamphlets” are referred to as *risāla* / *rasā’il* (pl.) in Arabic and *risāle* / *resā’il* or *risāleler* (pl.) in Turkish, literally, a treatise. However, a *risāla* can refer to a text that ranges from hundreds of folios to a few folios. I use the word “pamphlet” to differentiate the short, ephemeral treatises that were the main medium for these seventeenth-century polemical debates from a generic *risāla*. See my forthcoming monograph, *Pamphleteering Islam*, for more information.

47 Kâtib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 121. There are two copies of an anonymous treatise in Arabic that do not respond to Minkārîzâde’s piece and that may therefore predate his treatise. See Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin MS 1064, ff. 204a–205b; Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Mihrişah Sultan MS 220, ff. 368a–369b.

48 Kâtib Çelebi, *Mizânü’l-ḥaḳḳ fi ihtiyār-i’l-aḥaḳḳ*, 114.

1652–1654), of which I have found only a single copy, scribbled at the end of Minkārīzāde's treatise: "When Zeyd asks 'Amr the Muslim, 'Which *millet* do you belong to?' how must 'Amr respond?" The *şeyhülislām* answers that "it is sufficient to say that "I follow (*üzereyim*) the *dīn* of the Prophet Muhammad."⁴⁹ In this legal opinion, the *şeyhülislām* provides a valid answer but evades the larger question looming in the background, that is, whether or not it is permissible to say "I belong to the religion (*millet*) of Abraham." Instead, he falls back on the formula that Muslims should state that they follow the religion (*dīn*) of Muhammad.

Despite the fact that Kātib Çelebi alluded to the existence of over eighty pamphlets on the topic of *millet-i İbrāhīm*, the number of extant copies of Minkārīzāde's second, shorter pamphlet radically exceeds that of all other texts on the topic in the manuscript record. This numerical domination can be partially explained by the fact that Minkārīzāde crafted it to circulate and be read by a large public. We can tell that he wanted to use pamphlets to instigate a more popular class of readers to action because he tried twice to get it right. He most likely completed his pamphlets between 1652 and 1655, when he was moving back and forth between Cairo and Istanbul during his appointments as chief judge of Egypt. The timing is significant because it demonstrates that he was not yet a *şeyhülislām*, with the power of the state behind him, when he wrote the treatise. Instead, he was between jobs, perhaps trying to find a way of cultivating power outside of formal positions. Circa 1652, he wrote the longer pamphlet, the one from which Kātib Çelebi copied heavily.⁵⁰ Unlike his other writings, which are nearly all in Arabic, he chose to write in Turkish, presumably to reach a specific audience of Turcophone Ottoman Muslims whose Arabic was shaky. Apparently, this work failed to reach its intended audience. He therefore composed a second, shorter version by removing "ancillary arguments (*şī'ab*)" so that "reading (*muṭāla'a*) it would not tire its readers;"⁵¹ fifteen

49 İstanbul Araştırma Enstitüsü, Şevket Rado MS 232 f. 136b

50 The earliest dated copy of the longer pamphlet that I have found is from ca. 1 Feb 1665 (middle of Rajab 1075). It was copied from the author's "second copy" and from another copy that was collated against the author's original, Nuruosmaniye Kütüphanesi MS 4952 ff. 25b–54a. The earliest version of the shorter pamphlet is from July 4, 1656 (12 Ramazan 1066) in İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserleri Kütüphanesi, MS T5917. In his *Balance of Truth*, written in 1656, Kātib Çelebi uses the longer pamphlet but does not mention the shorter one. This suggests that Minkārīzāde's longer pamphlet had been circulating since ca. 1652 and that the shorter one was written in 1656, or a year or two earlier.

51 Minkārīzāde refers to the act of reading with the term "*muṭāla'a*," which, alongside *naẓar*, is one of the common words used to refer to reading at the time. Significantly, the use of *muṭāla'a* conveys the fact that pamphlet was intended to be read alone and visually, rather than recited to a group.

to twenty folios were reduced to two or three.⁵² As we shall see below, this second attempt at writing a pamphlet proved to be a success. Not only were many more copies made—I have come across only two or so copies of the longer pamphlet compared to around a hundred copies of the shorter one—but Minkārīzāde was able to tap into a popular audience, one that had difficulty reading but still wanted to participate in these debates. Minkārīzāde's second pamphlet on *millet-i İbrāhīm* proved to be so popular that it overshadowed all other pamphlets and set the terms of the debate.

3 Vernacular Legalism

Who were these enthusiastic, but easily exhausted, readers of Minkārīzāde? They likely belonged to a group known as *ümmis*, a semi-educated population, linguistically grounded in Turkish but perhaps aspiring to read and write in Arabic.⁵³ *Ümmi* is often translated as “illiterate,” but this rendering overlooks other significations of the word. In the Qur'an, *ummī* “appears as the counter-image of those who claim exclusivity or superiority by virtue of their possessing Scripture and scribal knowledge,” and it refers to anyone “whose scriptural knowledge is limited.”⁵⁴ In the late medieval and early modern periods (1200–1800), the term continued to hold the same connotations, except that it referred not to a lack of scriptural knowledge but to a lack of knowledge derived from education.⁵⁵ *Ümmis* possessed only a partial education or even eschewed the conceits of education out of modesty, as did the many Sufis and poets in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who added the term *ümme* to

52 Minkārīzāde, *Risāle-i millet-i İbrāhīm*, Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin MS 1064 f. 166b.

53 On *ümme* readers, see Derin Terzioğlu, “Where İlm-i Hal Meets Catechism: Islamic Manuals of Religious Instruction in the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Confessionalization,” *Past & Present* 220 (2013): 79–115, at 90–91; and S. Aslıhan Gürbüz, “Teachers of the Public, Advisors to the Sultan: Preachers and the Rise of a Political Public Sphere in Early Modern Istanbul (1600–1675),” Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2016, 180–89.

54 Islam Dayeh, “Prophecy and Writing in the Qur'an, or Why Muhammad Was Not a Scribe,” in *The Qur'an's Reformation of Judaism and Christianity: Return to the Origins*, ed. Holger M. Zellentin (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 55.

55 Emine Gürsoy-Naskali, “Yunus Emre ve edebiyat tarihçileri,” in *Yunus Emre sempozyumu: Bildiriler* (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1992); John Curry, *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire: The Rise of the Halveti Order, 1350–1650* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 127–28; Dana Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2013), 43.

their names. It also could signify a person who could read but not write, or who could read Turkish but not Arabic. These men probably saw themselves as more educated than ordinary people (*‘avāmm*), albeit not at the level of the learned elite (*hāvaşş*). Despite these limitations, they remained an audience that could be cultivated in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

Some *ümmis* likely resembled the anonymous shaykh whom Kâtib Çelebi thoroughly disparaged in his essay on *millet-i İbrâhîm*:

This respondent wrote a treatise in Arabic, weak in matter and composition, beginning with a few roughly-drafted lines purporting to be addressed to the Sheykh al-Islam. I have thought it desirable to omit them, as they are a mass of immoderate confutations and inventions. After that, the treatise is a jejune compilation of Koranic verses and traditions relating to religion and faith, the superficial meaning being given every time. From these he ostensibly draws conclusions and with tremendous foolhardiness shows no respect or regard for the words of commentators or theologians, not understanding what any given scholar’s argument is or on what it is based, or whether it is refutable.⁵⁶

Kâtib Çelebi’s invective highlights the characteristics of “bad” readers and writers. First, their inability to differentiate between literal and figurative meanings (*zâhirî üzere ma’nâlar vërüb*) reflects a lack of knowledge of rhetoric, *balâgha*. Likewise, something “weak in matter and composition (*za’f-i te’lif ü terkib*),” i.e. that it is poorly written, suggests a deficiency on the part of the writer in both rhetoric and grammar, *naḥw*. The inability to understand an argument and “whether it is refutable (*red ve men’ kabûl eder mi bilmiyüb*)” reveals an ignorance of the rules of disputation, *adab al-baḥth*, and logic, *manṭiq*. Finally, the refusal or inability to refer to authorities on the topic (*ehl-i tefsîr ve ‘ülemâ-i uşûl sözlerine i’tibâr ve iltifât eylemiyüb*) makes it clear that these *ümmis* were unable to engage in scholarly debates.⁵⁷ The anonymous shaykh was a proponent of Muslims’ declaring their belonging to the *millet-i İbrâhîm*, but the criticism held true for both proponents and opponents of the practice.

Vernacular legalism encouraged, or at least tolerated, the forms of reading described above. Due to their lack of mastery of the auxiliary sciences of language, *ümmis* preferred literal over non-literal interpretations and often failed

⁵⁶ Translation taken from Lewis, *The Balance of Truth*, 117; Kâtib Çelebi, *Mizânü’l-ḥaḳḳ fi ihtiyârî’l-aḥaḳḳ*, 108–9.

⁵⁷ Kâtib Çelebi, *Mizânü’l-ḥaḳḳ fi ihtiyârî’l-aḥaḳḳ*, 108–9.

to respond to arguments with valid proofs. Again, what made these readers “vernacular” was not their choice of language necessarily, but the methods with which they approached texts. The choice of language did not translate directly to a broader or more restricted audience. Many historians presume that a text written in Arabic would have had a smaller audience in the Ottoman Empire, but many vernacular writers and readers, like the anonymous shaykh above, seemed to have preferred Arabic, even if their command of the language was weak. Choosing to write in Turkish, as Minḳārīzāde did, might broaden the potential audience of a text, but it also potentially changed its interpretation. Few, if any, works on rhetoric, disputation, logic, and even grammar existed in Turkish and so Turcophone readers without training in these linguistic sciences lacked the interpretive precision associated with legal scholarship and debate.⁵⁸ Vernacular readers worked with legal texts not as scholars evaluating the formal validity of the arguments, but as debaters eager to take arguments and counterarguments to the street, mosque, and coffeehouse. It was precisely this middling audience that Minḳārīzāde attempted to tap.

While vernacular legalism may have emerged in other Islamic societies, developments in the Ottoman Empire made it especially salient there. First, the confession-building policies of the sixteenth century encouraged Ottoman Muslims to practice Islam according to the standards of sharia and to measure their religiosity accordingly, thereby promoting a popular desire for legal knowledge.⁵⁹ Moreover, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Ottoman government had attempted to monopolize the legal field, taking what had been a largely decentralized community of jurists and instituting a state-appointed hierarchy.⁶⁰ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Ottoman state took a more prominent role in defining and regulating the rulings of jurists and judges.⁶¹ These processes were always partial and contested, but the expanded role of the Ottoman state in law was palpable. Scholars and jurists without official sanction were left on the margins, both supplementing and competing

58 On one of the few rhetoric manuals in Turkish, see Gürbüz, “Teachers of the Public,” 202–209.

59 Tijana Krstić, “‘You Must Know Your Faith in Detail’: On the Redefinition of the Role of Knowledge and Boundaries of Belief in Ottoman Catechisms (*‘ilm-i ḥāls*),” in *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450 - 1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

60 Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law*; On this literature, see Krstić, “State and Religion,” 77–78; Of course, the increased role of government did not mean that the jurists simply mirrored the government’s positions, as Atçil reminds us. Abdurrahman Atçil, “The Safavid Threat and Juristic Authority in the Ottoman Empire during the 16th Century,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 2 (May 2017): 295–314.

61 Samy Ayoub, “‘The Sulṭān Says’: State Authority in the Late Ḥanafī Tradition,” *Islamic Law and Society* 23:3 (2016): 239–78.

with the official state legal positions. Over the course of the seventeenth century, a vibrant and varied world of popular muftis emerged, operating with only partial regard to their imperial betters, and, on occasion, the state was forced to address them. At one end of the spectrum were learned legal scholars in Arab cities like Khayr al-Dīn al-Ramlī (d. 1671) and ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731), who issued fatwas for followers across the empire without the official sanction of the government. At the other end, was a variety of semi-educated and largely anonymous authors who issued their legal opinions across Anatolia and the Balkans. On certain occasions, this popular legal world could seize control of a debate. For example, at the same time that Minḡārīzāde was writing his pamphlets on *millet-i Ibrāhīm*, Abu’l-Wafā al-‘Urḡī (d. 1660), the Shāfi‘ī mufti of Aleppo, complained about these popular elements in the debate over the permissibility of smoking tobacco:

When the Sultan permitted smoking in 1060 [1650]... no one with imperial authority in jurisprudence (*idhna malakiyya fi’l-furū‘ wa’l-uşūl*) would say that smoking, which is widespread in our times, is forbidden, but neither would they deem it permissible. [This situation] energized a group to declare it forbidden, out of ignorance and stubbornness, and their talk has produced nothing except acrimony and quarreling.⁶²

According to ‘Urḡī, the government’s legal system had created a thorny dilemma for itself. State jurists, i.e. those “with imperial authority in jurisprudence,” were expected to rule on the permissibility of tobacco, but the sultan’s decree prevented them from doing so, and in the ensuing vacuum, a populist or vernacular legal world stepped in to issue its own legal opinions.

The debate over *millet-i Ibrāhīm* followed a trajectory similar to that of tobacco. As mentioned, the government had attempted to ban Muslims from declaring themselves “part of the religion of Abraham,” but it is telling that so far we have little evidence of this earlier attempt. The lack of evidence might be a sign that the government failed to enact its legal position or to truly engage with the *ümmis*. Minḡārīzāde, who was not yet a *şeyḡülislām*, may have seen the lack of action by the government as an opportunity to direct the conversation through the vernacular legal sphere—first in a pamphlet of fifteen folios and, when that failed, in a shorter, more digestible version. In the end, he was successful. His abridged work, whether in Kātīb Çelebi’s collection or

62 Abu’l-Wafā b. ‘Umar al-‘Urḡī, *Risāla fi ḥukm isti’māl al-dukhān*, Library of Congress, MS Mansuri 4.790, f. 1a

in its own pamphlet form, was immensely popular, reproduced in pamphlets, miscellanies, margins, and notebooks hundreds of times over until it reached readers from the streets to the palace.⁶³

Most formally trained scholars, however, did not regard Minkārīzāde's efforts in a positive light and, like al-ʿUrdī, took a disparaging view of the vernacular legal world. Kātib Çelebi advocated that people should be allowed to say, "I belong to the religion of Abraham," given that if one tried to change their opinion, "No one would pay any attention anyway; it would irritate the people and provoke them to contention, to no purpose."⁶⁴ As demonstrated throughout *The Balance of Truth*, Kātib Çelebi felt that these debates would not have occurred if the common people—whom he sometimes called "āmmē" and occasionally "cumhūr," that is, the "masses" or the "public"—had not stuck their noses into the fray in the first place.⁶⁵ So while Kātib Çelebi's laissez-faire recommendation to give the common people the freedom to say what they wish might seem gracious and tolerant to the modern reader, it also smacks of elitist condescension, a rejection of their presence at the table. Not surprisingly, the writings of these "popular" proponents and opponents of *millet-i İbrāhīm* have not survived, and, if they have, are often anonymously or pseudonymously written. They lacked the authority, and therefore the authorship, to ensure that their writings would spread across the empire and be preserved for posterity. Instead, we access them through the comments of their detractors, like Kātib Çelebi, and through works specifically crafted for them, like Minkārīzāde's pamphlet.

63 For the palace copy, see UCLA Young Research Library Special Collections, Collection 896, Box 109, MS 740. The manuscript was copied in the *hāne-i seferli*, a building originally built in the early seventeenth century to prepare for military campaigns. By the end of the century, however, it had become a book production center. Unlike other examples, this pamphlet is written in perfect Ottoman *naskh* calligraphy and is heavily illuminated, though it is not the most accurate copy in relation to the original.

64 Translation adapted from Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 121; Kātib Çelebi, *Mizānū'l-ḥaḳḳ fi ihtiyārī'l-aḥaḳḳ*, 114–15.

65 While translating *cumhūr* as "public" might seem like an anachronism, by the seventeenth century, the meaning of the word had started to shift from "the masses," to "republic" or some representation of popular will. See Marinos Sariyannis, "Ottoman Ideas on Monarchy before the Tanzimat Reforms: Toward a Conceptual History of Ottoman Political Notions," *Turcica* 47 (2016): 33–72; Wael Abu-Uksa, "The Construction of the Concepts 'Democracy' and 'Republic' in Arabic in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean, 1798–1878," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 80:2 (2019): 249–70; For Kātib Çelebi's use of *cumhūr* see Kātib Çelebi, *Mizānū'l-ḥaḳḳ fi ihtiyārī'l-aḥaḳḳ*, 47, 59, 106.

4 Minkārīzāde's Argument

Minkārīzāde's main aim was to convince Muslims who had become accustomed to asserting their identity by declaring they "belonged to the religion of Abraham" to abandon the practice. It was a fight over an everyday practice, but to make his case he turned toward theology. The problem, however, was that the Qur'an repeatedly tells Muslims to follow "*millat Ibrāhīm*," and never once uses the phrase *millat Muḥammad* or *millat al-Islām*. Minkārīzāde knew that the educated (*ḥavāṣṣ*) understood these Quranic quotations as signifying that while Islam has Abrahamic antecedents, its law (*ṣerīʿat*) and religion (*millet*) are wholly its own, i.e. that *millet-i Ibrāhīm* is Islam. However, he believed that ordinary people tend to be literalists (*zāhīrbīn*) who interpret everything superficially and subvert the very purpose of the catechisms. For this reason, he set out to ban usage of the phrase "I belong to the religion of Abraham" in its literal, superficial meaning, that is, to stop people from stating that they were part of a separate religion of Abraham. To make his argument stick he had to, one, expand the meaning of the word *millet*, and, two, make sure that his argument would be adopted by more than a few legal scholars.

Minkārīzāde opens his pamphlet with the contention that "to practice (*ʿamel*) [the religion] in accordance with the law (*ṣerīʿat*) and religion (*millet*) of a preceding prophet means to follow our Prophet's law and religion. It does not mean to follow the law and religion of that preceding prophet."⁶⁶ To clarify his words, he makes an analogy to inheritance: once a piece of property is bequeathed to an heir, it loses all connection with the original owner. Islam bears a similar relation to the Prophet Abraham. Once Muhammad emerges as a prophet of God, he inherits the religion, that is, the *millet*, from Abraham.⁶⁷ This initial argument leads him to his main contention that the phrase is not permissible "because the literal meaning of saying 'I belong to the religion of Abraham' indicates that the religion is still that of the Prophet Abraham and that the practice [of the religion] should occur according to that of the Prophet Abraham."⁶⁸ If this were true, "then the Prophet Muhammad would not be God's messenger, he would be an earlier prophet's messenger and [the Prophet Muhammad] would have to be an intermediary between Abraham and his

66 Minkārīzāde Yahyā Efendi, *Risāle-i millet-i Ibrāhīm*, Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin MS 1064, f. 166b. All references below to the text refer to this manuscript.

67 Minkārīzāde bases this initial argument on some key works of Hanafī *uṣūl al-dīn*, mostly by earlier commentators of classical Hanafī works, like Faḥr al-Islām al-Pazdawī (d. 1100) and Akmal al-Dīn al-Bābartī (d. 1384/5)

68 *Risāle-i millet-i Ibrāhīm*, f. 167a.

community.”⁶⁹ In other words, the Prophet Muhammad would be a messenger of Abraham, not of God.

Minkārīzāde then responds to potential objections, the main one being that it is permissible to say “I belong to the religion of Abraham” because *millet* pertains only to the principles of religion (*uṣūl-i dīn*) and on these all the prophets of God are in agreement.⁷⁰ *Uṣūl-i dīn* here means those things that must be believed, in other words, dogma or creed: the unity of God, prophethood, the day of judgment, and so on.⁷¹ Since all of God’s prophets concurred on these basic beliefs, declaring that one belongs to Abraham’s religion could have no negative connotations. Minkārīzāde, though, argues that *millet* applies not only to the foundational principles of religion but also to *furūʿ*, the “branches” of practice and jurisprudence, such as prayer, fasting, alms-giving, pilgrimage, and jihad.⁷² In other words, to say that one belongs to Abraham’s religion is to reject the sharia and Islam. This is why Minkārīzāde repeatedly suggests that saying one belongs to a previous prophet’s *millet* means following that prophet’s sharia as well.⁷³ Only by interpreting *millet* as encompassing law and jurisprudence can Minkārīzāde provide an argument for banning the declaration, “I belong to the religion of Abraham.”

To make this argument, Minkārīzāde must support a larger claim about the relationship between belief and practice in religion by equating the concepts of *millet*, *dīn*, and *ṣerīʿat*. As Jacob Olidort notes in his study of early Muslim exegetes’ understanding of *milla*, the word reveals a “tension... [as to] how to define the relationship between beliefs and the practices that signify allegiance to them.”⁷⁴ His observation applies also to the Ottoman-era debate on the subject. Earlier commentators cited by Minkārīzāde, such as Birgīvī Meḥmed (d. 1573) and al-Bayḍawī, generally agree that *dīn* and *millet* are synonyms and connected to matters of belief (*ʾitīkāḍ*).⁷⁵ Minkārīzāde, however, argues that *millet* goes beyond belief and incorporates the sharia, that is, the daily practices

69 *Risāle-i millet-i Ibrāhīm*, f. 167a.

70 *Risāle-i millet-i Ibrāhīm*, f. 167b.

71 As Gimaret notes, *uṣūl al-dīn* is essentially a synonym of *ʿilm al-kalām*. See *Et*, s.v. *Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Gimaret).

72 It is unclear exactly what Minkārīzāde is referring to when he says “*furūʿ*.” Is it *furūʿ-i dīn* or *furūʿ-i fīkh*? In either case, the intended meaning is the practice of Islam according to its legal prescriptions.

73 *Risāle-i millet-i Ibrāhīm*, f. 167a.

74 Olidort, “Portraying Early Islam as the *milla* of Abraham,” 318.

75 “...In the *Fiqh akbar* ‘religion (*dīn*) is a noun that relates to (*wāqīʿ alā*) faith (*īmān*) and Islam and all the commandments of the law (*ṣerayīʿ*).” Translation taken from Nuruosmaniye Library, MS 4952, f. 47b. See also, Kâtib Chelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 115–16. The same statement is made in Kara, *Mızraklı İlmihal*, 73. Anonymous, *İlm-i ḥāl*, Bibliothèque Nationale de Tunis, MS 2520, p. 2; Classical lexicographers had differing opinions on the

that constitute Islam. Claiming a different *millet*, like that of Abraham, means advocating for a different sharia, which implies a disregard for the Islamic ritual obligations and an alternative way of being Muslim.⁷⁶ Professing to be a part of the *millet-i Ibrāhīm*, a central element of faith a century earlier, had suddenly become unacceptable. By reinterpreting the meaning of *millet*, Minḳārīzade proposes a different vision of religion, and his critics highlight this particular claim as indefensible and incorrect.

Minḳārīzade's other writings suggest that his reinterpretation of *millet* was part of a larger project of redefining the standards of Muslim belief. When he became *şeyḫülislām* in 1662, he advocated for a more expansive definition of heresy. In a written debate with Khayr al-Dīn al-Ramlī, an influential but independent scholar in Palestine, he put forward his case. His argument mirrors the overall point of his treatise on *millet-i Ibrāhīm*—everyday actions and words can mark one as an apostate or infidel, contrary to the established tradition that one must make an explicit and intentional declaration of apostasy.⁷⁷ Al-Ramlī responds that it is “prohibited to anathematize (*takfir*) a Muslim for a rarely said word or even a single word.”⁷⁸ “*Millet-i Ibrāhīm*” was one such word that that now arose suspicions of heresy.

What did the proponents of *millet-i Ibrāhīm* make of Minḳārīzade's arguments? The few responses that survive all reject his attempt to tighten the

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meaning of the word *milla*. One late thirteenth-century Maghrebi lexicographer, Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1311), defines *milla* as sharia and *dīn*. Olidort, “Portraying Early Islam as the *milla* of Abraham,” 317.

76 While there is no evidence that anyone attempted to formulate a separate sharia for the *millet-i Ibrāhīm*, some scholars did address the question of whether there could be alternative sharias. A scholar named Muḥammad b. Abi Bakr al-Ḥiṣārī wrote a treatise in response to a patron who read the famous prayer manual *Dalā'il al-khayrat* and wondered whether the Qur'an attests to the existence of other sharias, specifically those of *milla* *Ibrāhīm*. *Dalā'il al-khayrat* does not seem to make any mention of *milla* *Ibrāhīm*, however, and al-Ḥiṣārī's pamphlet appears to have been written without reference or relation to Minḳārīzade's work. Milli Kütüphane, MS A938, ff. 84a-85b.

77 On this expanded notion of heresy, see Krstić, “State and Religion,” 83; Ramlī's response echoes his words in his other works. See Guy Burak, “Faith, Law and Empire in the Ottoman ‘age of Confessionalization’ (Fifteenth - Seventeenth Centuries): The Case of ‘Renewal of Faith,’” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 28.1 (2013): 7–8, 11–13.

78 Ramlī, *Untitled Treatise on Heresy*, Hekimoğlu MS 322, f. 303a; Reşid Efendi MS 1215, f. 192ab.

المراد . . . يمنع التكفير في كلمة تقع من المسلم نادرا او كلمة واحدة او ما في حكمها لا ما وقع لبعض الملاحدة المارقين من الدين مروق السهم من الرمية من تصنيف كتاب او كتب مقتضية هدم عن الدين ومخالفة سائر المسلمين ودعواه في ذلك الحق اليقين فانه لا يجوز تأويله ولا حمله على ما ذكرنا بل يجب الكفار قايله في الرد عليه تنفيرا من بدعته وضلالته فان التأويل في مثل ذلك لا يكون الا في كلام المعصوم

circle of Islam. Most of these responses took the form of short and simple rejoinders by unknown or anonymized figures, e.g. a certain Ḥasan Efendi, or İzmîrî Ḥāfiẓ Efendi or İsmā'îl Efendi, one of the *ulema* of Bursa. Their responses seem to have been written after Minkārîzâde had become *şeyhülislām* in 1662 and was in a stronger position to impose his views and punish dissenters. These responses first and foremost oppose expanding the notion of *millet* beyond the fundamental beliefs of religion. Quoting the Central Asian scholar Ḥusāmeddīn Aḥsiketî (d. 1247), these anonymized writers insist that *millet* means *dīn*, and not *şerī'at*.⁷⁹ A certain Ḥasan Efendi states that “the term *millet* is mostly used in principles of faith. It is not used in practical law (*furūda*) and it does not have the meaning of sharia.”⁸⁰ The critics of Minkārîzâde state that anyone who declares that he belongs to the religion of Abraham is actually saying that he belongs to the religion of Muhammad. All the prophets belong to the same *millet* and by saying they are part of Abraham's *millet*, they are only demonstrating their appreciation of Abraham.⁸¹ One commentator says that the Quranic command to “say [I belong to] the religion of Abraham” was a way for the nascent Muslim community to appeal to Jews and Christians by respecting their forefathers, whereas others say it was a rebuke of these groups.⁸² In the longest and most critical response, an anonymous shaykh dismisses as ludicrous Minkārîzâde's claim that those who declare they belong to Abraham's religion actually believe that Islam is literally Abraham's religion or that Abraham is somehow superior to the Prophet Muhammad.⁸³ A respondent with less civility, identified only as Ni'matullah, cuts to the chase: who is Minkārîzâde to declare those who say they are part of Abraham's religion to be heretics?⁸⁴ The tone may be harsh, but the debate went to the core of what it meant to be a Muslim.

79 Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin MS 1064, ff. 169a, 170a; Manisa Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS 4478 ff. 180a, 182b. On Aḥsiketî see Mehmet Boynukalın, “Hanefî Usûl Muhtasarlarının Gelişimi: (11) Hüsameddin El-Aḥsiketî'nin El-Müntehab'ı ve Hanefî Usûlündeki Yeri,” *Kocaeli İlahiyat Dergisi* 1, no. 2 (Aralık 2017): 21–42.

80 Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin MS 1064, ff. 168b; Manisa Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS 4478 ff. 180a. The eighteenth-century Indian scholar al-Ṭahānawî (fl. 1745) seems to echo some of the critiques of these seventeenth-century scholars, insisting that *milla* refers only to the fundamentals (*uṣûl*) of a legal system, not the positive laws (*furû*). Olidort, “Portraying Early Islam as the *milla* of Abraham,” 317–18.

81 Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin MS 1064, ff. 168b; Manisa Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS 4478 ff. 180a.

82 Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin MS 1064, ff. 169ab, 170b; Manisa Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS 4478 ff. 180ab, 181b, 183ab.

83 Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin MS 1064, ff. 170b; Manisa Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS 4478 ff. 184a.

84 Text: “*kayfa yukfir mu'taqidahu*,” Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Aşir Efendi MS 427 f. 49b.

5 Minḳārīzāde Cultivates a Public

Lay people (*‘avāmm*) in the Ottoman period were expected to recite the basic precepts of the faith and follow its core practices. When the influential *şeyhülislām* Ebü’s-su’üd Efendi (1490–1574) reportedly was asked what the *dīn* and *millet* of Islam are, he responded that it is sufficient for ordinary people to believe in the unity of God, the prophethood of Muhammad, and the validity of the sharia. However, “it is not necessary for them to have a close grasp of the concepts or details of legal rulings.”⁸⁵ Yet, as a consequence of the confession-building policies of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, ordinary Muslims were increasingly taking part in larger legal and theological discussions.⁸⁶ Kâtib Çelebi saw this intrusion of commoners into public discussions as the very cause of the polemics of the period and his solution was to chide them for participating and to dismiss their words. He goes so far as to distort Minḳārīzāde’s treatise by inserting his own comments against commoners into his summary of it.⁸⁷ This is all to be expected and reflects the traditional hierarchy of revelation, in which only the more educated elite (*ḥavāṣṣ*) are free to explore multiple notions of being Muslim.⁸⁸ For Minḳārīzāde, however, addressing an audience of ordinary Muslims—those readers who tired

85 Mehmet Ertuğrul Düzdağ, ed., *Şeyhülislām Ebussuud Efendi Fetvaları Işığında 16. Asır Türk Hayatı* (Istanbul: Enderun Kitapevi, 1972), 176; this fatwa is not included in the critical edition of Ebü’s-su’üd’s fatwas and was probably a later addition. Ebussuüd, *Marûzât*, ed. Pehlul Düzenli (Istanbul: Klasik, 2013); however, the same expression appears in Kara, *Mızraklı İlmihal*, 73.

86 The participation of ordinary Muslims in these discussions is most clearly demonstrated in Terzioğlu, “İlm-i Hal,” Krstić, “From *shahāda* to *‘aqida*,” on the push for ordinary believers to be well-versed in the details of Islam in the Ottoman period, see Krstić, “You Must Know Your Faith in Detail.”

87 For example, although Kâtib Çelebi usually faithfully copied Minḳārīzāde’s pamphlet, he inserted the phrase “Nevertheless this is not the way ordinary people (*cumhūr*) see it” following Minḳārīzāde’s description of Birgivi’s position on the difference between *millet*, *dīn*, and *sharī‘a*. Kâtib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 116; Kâtib Çelebi, *Mizānül-ḥaḳḳ fi ihtiyārī’l-aḥaḳḳ*, 106. For Minḳārīzāde’s statement, see the extended treatise in Nuruosmaniye Kütüphanesi MS 4952 f. 46b.

88 *Ḥavāṣṣ* is a flexible social category referring to the elite. Traditionally a political distinction, the *ḥavāṣṣ* consisted of the ruler and those around him, the ruling elite, whereas the *‘avāmm* comprised the rest, that is, those who paid taxes. At the same time, *ḥavāṣṣ* and *‘avāmm* also functioned as categories of moral and intellectual distinction, broadly overlapping with their respective political counterparts. One of the normative values separating the *ḥavāṣṣ* from the *‘avāmm* was education. What non-elites or the *‘avāmm* lacked was not education per se, but the very capacity to be educated. For this reason, I refer to *ḥavāṣṣ* as “the educated elite” in this article. On the topic, see Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 368–77. See also my forthcoming monograph, *Pamphleteering Islam*.

easily—and involving them in (some of) the details of his argument was the key to successfully propagating his particular understanding of *millet*.

At first sight, it seems that Minḳārīzāde, due to an internal contradiction in his argument, is interested in upholding the distinction between ordinary people and the educated elite in his treatise. As mentioned, Minḳārīzāde argues that the literal or *ẓāhirī* meaning of the phrase “I belong to Abraham’s religion” is that Islam is not the religion of the Prophet Muhammad but of Abraham, and therefore it is not permissible to utter it. However, the Qur’an specifically tells Muslims to declare that they are part of *millat Ibrāhīm* (but never mentions *millat Muḥammad* or *millat al-Islām*), and, thanks to the catechisms of the sixteenth century, many Ottoman Muslims did so. Moreover, in one *ḥadīth*, the prophet Muhammad awakens one morning and says, “We arise into the state of Islam (*aṣbaḥnā ‘alā fiṭrat Islām*)... and into the *dīn* of our Prophet Muhammad and the *milla* of our forefather Abraham...”⁸⁹ To resolve this contradiction, Minḳārīzāde divides his response into one set of instructions for the educated elite and another for ordinary people. The educated elite understand that the phrase was not meant to be taken literally and can therefore say it. Ordinary people, however, were literalists (*ẓāhirbīn*), who, if they overheard the educated elite saying the phrase, would misinterpret it and utter it without the proper belief. He therefore argues that the educated elite should only say the phrase privately, in the company of other educated people, and not where it may be overheard and misinterpreted.⁹⁰ Moreover, when saying it, the educated elite were to add the proviso (*ḳarīne*) that the religion, i.e. Islam, was originally the prophet Abraham’s and became the Prophet Muhammad’s upon his revelation. In other words, *millet-i Ibrāhīm* is the religion of Muhammad.⁹¹ Not adding this proviso indicates that the speaker believes in the phrase’s literal and superficial (*ẓāhirī*) meaning, i.e. that he or she does not believe in Islam.

No one, perhaps not even Minḳārīzāde himself, was convinced by his proposed solution. An anonymous critic of Minḳārīzāde lambasts him for his seeming hypocrisy: Minḳārīzāde first states that it is not permissible to say “I belong to the religion of Abraham” and then reverses course. Which one is it, the critic wonders?⁹² Kātib Çelebi thought it was cruel to tell ordinary people, who slavishly obey custom, that they are not allowed to say

89 *Risāle-i millet-i Ibrāhīm*, f. 168a.

90 *Risāle-i millet-i Ibrāhīm*, f. 168a.

91 *Risāle-i millet-i Ibrāhīm*, f. 168a.

92 Anonymous response to Minḳārīzāde’s pamphlet, Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, Veliyüddin MS 1064, f. 171a; Manisa Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi MS 4478 f. 184b.

the phrase while telling the educated elite that it is permitted. “It would mean imposition of hardship to declare ‘No, these words are wrong. The educated elite, who know their origin, may use them, but the common people must not.’ No one would pay any attention anyway; [banning the phrase] would mean irritating the people and provoking them to contention, to no purpose.”⁹³ Even Minḳārīzāde finds his required proviso, which is intended to explain and elucidate the phrase’s non-literal meaning, pointless because not everyone is able to tell if the speaker uttering it did so with or without belief in its literal meaning. The ambivalence toward his own solution derives from his determination that “in sum, every word is understood according to its literal meaning (*hāsil-ı kelām her söz zāhirine māhmūldır*).”⁹⁴ In other words, everything will eventually be reduced to its literal, base meaning, especially in a world in which it is nearly impossible to separate the educated elite from ordinary people. Given that “it is not permissible for us to say any word whose literal meaning we are not allowed to believe,” it is best to stop uttering the statement entirely, he argued.⁹⁵ In some ways, Minḳārīzāde is implicitly calling for the elimination of different expectations for ordinary people and educated elites and judging everyone by the same standard of behavior.

Despite the fact that Minḳārīzāde suggests that the educated elite could say the phrase while the ordinary people were to abstain, it seems that his intention was to stop usage of the phrase entirely. Indeed, Minḳārīzāde was not trying to lecture the educated elite: he specifically wrote the pamphlet for a reader who had difficulty reading. Educated scholars like Kâtib Çelebi already knew the phrase’s non-literal interpretation and did not need Minḳārīzāde to elucidate it for them. For this reason, Minḳārīzāde sought to incite to action a different group of readers, those who possessed some capacity to read his pamphlet but did not consider themselves part of the educated elite and who would conclude that uttering “I belong to the religion of Abraham” was unacceptable.

Why does Minḳārīzāde address the vernacular legal world to make this argument? To answer this question, it would be necessary to undertake a comprehensive study of his work before and after he became *şeyhülislām*. To date, no such study exists. However, another one of Minḳārīzāde’s writings sheds light on his interest in addressing the public. As he was writing his pamphlets on *millet-i İbrāhīm*, he also issued a fatwa calling for the execution of a scholar

93 Adapted from the translation of Kâtib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, 121; Kâtib Çelebi, *Mizān-ı'l-ḥaqq fi ihtiyār-ı'l-aḥaqq*, 114–15.

94 *Risāle-i millet-i İbrāhīm*, f. 168b.

95 *Risāle-i millet-i İbrāhīm*, f. 168b.

known as Kürd Molla on charges of heresy.⁹⁶ Kürd Molla had written a commentary critical of the aforementioned Birgivî Mehmed's *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*, and while many others had criticized Birgivî without being punished, two points sealed Kürd Molla's fate, in Minkārīzāde's view. Among the various heresies propagated by Kürd Molla, the most serious was that he openly claimed that exotericists (*ahl al-zāhir*) look at the externality of actions—that is, whether an act conforms to the law—whereas esotericists (*ahl al-bāṭin*) look at the internality of actions—that is, the intention behind the act—and each approach to Islam is acceptable and can coexist.⁹⁷ Echoing the aforementioned view that practice and belief are intimately related, Minkārīzāde finds Kürd Molla's views unacceptable. Minkārīzāde's recommendation that Kürd Molla be put to death, without the possibility of repentance, however, stems not from Kürd Molla's theological views, but from the fact that he had spent years "liberally lecturing and composing books... with the sole purpose of arousing within the weak and feeble the delusion of these misguided errors."⁹⁸ Minkārīzāde's call for Kürd Molla's execution demonstrates the importance he attached to addressing ordinary people. Kürd Molla was a rival not only in terms of approaches to Islam but also in his ability to reach the public, and therefore he needed to be silenced.

6 Vernacular Receptions

To this point, I have dealt with the vernacular legal world only indirectly. As few statements by vernacular legal writers are extant, I have been forced to reconstruct their views from the words of elite scholars who cultivated or criticized them. Yet, the vernacular legal world did not just passively receive ideas but rather transformed them, turning Minkārīzāde's arguments into an active call to declare as heretics any partisans of Abraham's religion.

In the eyes of his critics, Minkārīzāde's attempt to reach the vernacular legal world had been too successful. One man, the aforementioned Ni'matullah, wrote in mediocre Arabic (he was most likely a semi-educated *ümme*; much of Kâtib Çelebi's earlier critique of the anonymous shaykh could apply to

96 The story of Kürd Molla and Tatar Imām is one of the more famous examples of Kāḏizādeli fanaticism that Zilfi highlights from the chronicle of Naima. Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety*, 145–46; Naima Mustafa Efendi, *Tāriḥ-i Na'imā (Ravzatü'l-Hüseyn fî Hulâsati Ahbârî'l-Hâfikayn)*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli, 4 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2007), 1434–36.

97 "A copy .... decrying ... Muḥammad al-Kurdî," Köprülü Library, Ahmedpaşa MS 152, ff. 78a.

98 "A copy .... decrying ... Muḥammad al-Kurdî," Köprülü Library, Ahmedpaşa MS 152, ff. 77a–79a.

Ni‘matullah’s writings) that there had appeared a “great plague (*āfa*)” in “this Sunni community (*sunna*) of ours,” a sanctimonious group of people who were unhappy at the respect ordinary people showed to the holy forefathers (*salaf*). A thinly veiled description of Minkārīzāde follows:

They told the converts (*muhtadīn*) and confused the common people to reject the *millat Ibrāhīm* in opposition to the Qur’an and the Sunna. They went astray and led others astray. Among them was a man who composed two pamphlets [i.e. Minkārīzāde], one small and one big, though his small one was big in terms of inciting the common people against the educated elite and the holy forefathers from the time of the Prophet Muhammad until today. They declared as a heretic anyone who said, “we belong to the religion of Abraham,” regardless of who he was.⁹⁹

Ni‘matullah’s words convey the intense emotions that the debate over *millat-i Ibrāhīm* elicited among Muslims at the time. Ni‘matullah sees the rejection of the phrase “*millat-i Ibrāhīm*” as an attack on the very tradition (*sunna*) of Islam itself and upon its holy forefathers, the *salaf*.¹⁰⁰ He recounts how these new partisans of the faith repeated many of Minkārīzāde’s arguments, such as the comparison between prophecy and inheritance or that the phrase “I belong to the religion of Abraham” implies that Muhammad is the prophet of Abraham and not of God. Most importantly, his comments show that these partisans expanded Minkārīzāde’s argument against using *millat-i Ibrāhīm* to make the phrase a clear marker of heresy. Minkārīzāde never explicitly stated that saying, “I belong to the religion of Abraham” was a sign of heresy, but the reception of Minkārīzāde’s pamphlet in the legal vernacular world made it so. What Ni‘matullah describes is not the learned debates of jurists over subtle distinctions between types of heresy, but a popular form of public politics.

Ni‘matullah’s comments also demonstrate how successful Minkārīzāde was in reaching a new group of readers with his second pamphlet. Ni‘matullah mentions that recent converts (*muhtadīn*) and ordinary people (*‘awāmm*) have been carried away by Minkārīzāde’s words to attack the educated elite (*khawāṣṣ*). Ni‘matullah complains that the ordinary people “consult their

99 Ni‘matullah’s response, Süleymaniye Library, Esad Efendi MS 356o, ff. 88b-89a; Asir Efendi MS 427 ff. 49ab.

100 Ni‘matullah’s response, Süleymaniye Library, Esad Efendi MS 356o, ff. 88b-89a; Asir Efendi MS 427 ff. 49a.

pamphlet at their convenience to embellish their speech with lies and fill it with irrelevant proofs... and the outcome of their pamphlet is a tripling of the words of one of them, [words] that say that to enter Abraham's religion is to exit Muhammad's religion and become an infidel."¹⁰¹ Kâtib Çelebi would have been horrified, his fears of public disorder due to popular participation had been realized. Minkârîzâde, on the other hand, likely would have been happy that he could rally people to his cause.

Ni'matullah's words also demonstrate the speed with which the topic of *millet-i İbrâhîm* had entered the realm of polemics. As proof of this, one reader of Ni'matullah's short response found his views idiotic and jotted down in the margins a number of long rejoinders in which he accuses Ni'matullah of slander, being childish, and arguing incomprehensibly.¹⁰² The longest of this reader's comments, however, is in response to Ni'matullah's allusions to Minkârîzâde. Among a variety of insults, he writes, "How many faults and excesses are in his [Ni'matullah's] writings. Only beasts and animals make sounds like these, and you would waste your time trying to correct them." As the commentator continues to cast aspersions, he remarks that,

it is no wonder that he [Ni'matullah] is one of the Sufis of our time who has ruined the beliefs of the faithful, especially in Constantinople, so that they stubbornly resist these matters of religion and yet, nonetheless, they claim to be saints, as if they've lost all reason and thought! I wish I knew what was the point of all this depravity?¹⁰³

This reader's reference to Sufis is intriguing. The issue of *millet-i İbrâhîm*, of course, had little to do with Sufism, at least not directly. However, Minkârîzâde's comments represented a step in a new direction regarding the relationship between sharia and Islam, a direction that was less favorable to forms of Islam, such as Sufism, that drew legitimacy and inspiration from sources beyond the sharia. Not surprisingly, whether Minkârîzâde intended to or not, his pamphlet had transformed the question of *millet-i İbrâhîm* from a minor theological issue into a litmus test of one's positions in broader societal conflicts.

101 Ni'matullah's response, Süleymaniye Library, Esad Efendi MS 3560, ff. 89a; Asir Efendi MS 427 ff. 49b: "ونتيجته رسالتهم ثلاثة اثلثة اقاول احدها"

102 Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Esad Efendi MS 3560, f. 88b-89a (margins).

103 Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Esad Efendi MS 3560, f. 89a (margins).

7 Conclusion

In the 1720s, a fatwa on the question of *millet-i İbrāhīm* was made the very first entry in *şeyhülislām* Yenişehirli ‘Abdullah Efendi’s (d. 1743) compilation of legal rulings. The fatwa decreed that when Muslims are asked, “what is your religion (*millet*)?” they are to answer “I belong to the religion of Muhammad,” not “I belong to the religion of Abraham.”¹⁰⁴ It had been over seven decades since Minḳārīzāde had written his two pamphlets and his view that Muslims should not say that they belong to Abraham’s religion had become part of an imperial collection of legal rulings. Now, Muhammad too, not just Abraham, had a *millet* and this was the proper *millet* for Muslims. The fatwa also indicates that many Ottoman Muslims continued to declare that they belonged to Abraham’s religion. The debate was still current and judging by the copy dates of Minḳārīzāde’s treatise, it would remain relevant for another century.

The fight over *millet-i İbrāhīm* demonstrates how a declaration of faith could become a sign of heresy in little over a century. As is hopefully clear by now, the debate was never about the status of the other Abrahamic religions, that is, Judaism and Christianity, in the Middle East. It was instead a fight over the practices that defined Islamic belief in the Ottoman Empire. At first, encouraging Ottoman Muslims—many of whom were recent converts or subscribed to forms of Islam that sought authority from beyond the sharia—to declare they belonged to Abraham’s religion served as a means to reinforce a notion of Islam based on the sharia. In the seventeenth century, however, when the confessional identity of the empire as a Sunni Muslim polity was more secure, the phrase became a victim of its own success and was targeted by a movement to constrict the definition of Islamic religiosity even further. Minḳārīzāde Yahyā, a future *şeyhülislām*, argued that saying “I belong to Abraham’s religion” entails a rejection of Muhammad’s prophethood and, more importantly, the sharia. To make this argument, Minḳārīzāde

¹⁰⁴ The fatwa in question is listed under a special rubric regarding belief. The collection and arrangement of fatwas in imperial collections was done by the clerks of the office of the *şeyhülislām*, so it is difficult to ascribe the choice solely to the *şeyhülislām* himself. “Question: When Zeyd the Muslim is asked, ‘What religion [*millet*] are you?’ which of the following must he say: ‘I belong to the religion of Muhammad...’ or ‘I belong to the religion of Abraham...?’ Answer: He must say, ‘I belong to the religion of Muhammad.’” Yenişehirli ‘Abdullah Efendi, *Behcetü’l-Fetâvâ*, ed. Süleyman Kaya et al. (Istanbul: Klasik, 2011), 25.

expanded the definition of the word *millet* to include both the foundations of basic belief and daily religious practice according to the law.

More significantly, the debate over *millet-i İbrāhīm* sheds light on the workings of vernacular legalism in the Ottoman Empire. I have adumbrated the existence of a space of legal debate and discussion that resided below the formal world of jurists, judges, and professors. The semi-educated readers and writers who participated in vernacular legalism approached law in a simple fashion, focusing less on formal arguments and interpretations and more on using law as a space of public and polemical debate. Scholars today have generally overlooked legal vernacularism because its texts tend to be vulgar and its participants marginal. Often, we can only access the vernacular legal world through the words of its critics or those elite scholars that wished to make use of it. Minḳārīzāde was one of the latter. He tried and succeeded in addressing this vernacular legal world. In his second pamphlet on *millet-i İbrāhīm*, he shortened his initial, little known pamphlet to two or three folios, and it was quickly copied and read across the empire. As his arguments circulated in the vernacular legal world, they were actively transformed. Minḳārīzāde simply stated that it is not permissible for a Muslim to declare that he belongs to the religion of Abraham, yet readers of his pamphlet went further and declared that anyone who stated, “I belong to the religion of Abraham,” was a heretic. In other words, the reception of his arguments in the vernacular legal world turned the issue into a stark marker of whether or not one was part of the Muslim community. The continued vigor of the debate over the course of the eighteenth century suggests that the vernacular legal world continued to thrive in the Ottoman Empire as a space for popular politics for decades to come.

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Minḳārīzāde Yahyā Efendi's treatise on *Millet-i İbrāhīm* – Transcription and Translation¹

Critical Edition

Source Texts:

- A: Beyazıt Devlet Kutuphanesi, Veliyüddin MS 1064
 B: UCLA Special Collections, Collection 896, Box 109 MS 749
 C: İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserleri Kütüphanesi MS T5917
 D: Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Arab 292

A 166b / B 1b / C 1a / D 99a

Bismillāhi'r-raḥmāni'r-raḥīm. El-ḥamdu lillāhi 'alā milleti'l-islām, milleti Muḥammedin 'aleyhi's-şalātü ve's-selām. Emmā ba'd:² Bu 'abd-i³ fakīr Minḳārīzāde aşlaḥa'llāhu subḥānahu ve te'ālā⁴ me'ādehu ḥalā beyne'l-enām *millat İbrāhīm* 'aleyhi's-selām ḥuşuşında dā'ir olan su'āl⁵ cevābında 'azīzü'l-menāl niçe vecih takrīr ve bir⁶ risāle-i bedī'a taḥrīr édüb, lākın keşiretü's-şi'ab olmağıle muṭāla'asında te'ab çekilmesin dēyü ihtişār olunub ḳadr-i ḥācet{e} ihtişār⁷ olındı.

Aşḥāb-i başā'ire ḥafī ve erbāb-i zāmā'ire muḥtefi⁸ olmaya ki kütüb-i uşulda ḳarār vērilen üzre mezḥeb ve ḳavl-i muḥtār budur ki: Muḳaddem gelen nebiniñ şerī'ati ve milleti ile 'amel bizim nebīmüziñ şerī'ati ve milleti olmağ⁹ üzerinedir. Yoḥsa muḳaddem [C 1b] gelen nebiniñ şerī'ati ve millet olmağ üzerine¹⁰ degildir. Aña binā'en ki¹¹ muḳaddem gelen nebiniñ şerī'ati ve milleti bizim nebimize 'alā ṭarīḳi'l-irş intikāl eylemişdir.¹² Nitekim *اورثنا الكتاب الذين اصطفينا من عبادنا* āyet-i kerīmesi delālet eder.

1 I would like to sincerely thank Robert Dankoff for helping me resolve a number of ambiguities in the text and refine the critical edition. All mistakes are my own.

2 Emmā ba'd: missing in B.

3 Missing in A.

4 subḥānahu ve te'ālā: Missing in A.

5 A: su'ālñ

6 B: bu; missing in D.

7 A: ihtişār.

8 D: maḥfi.

9 Missing in B.

10 B: üzredir.

11 Missing in AD.

12 B: etmişdir.

‘Alā ʿarīki’l-‘irş olunca ma‘na-yi ‘irşî taḥkīk içün mīrās mūrīşden [B 2b] vārīşe intikāl étdikde vārīşe muzāf olub ve anuñ milki olub mūrīşe muzāf olmayub ve anuñ milki olmayub¹³ ve bi’l-cümle ba‘de’l-intikāl vārīşe maḥşûş olub mūrīşñ ‘alākası kalmaduğı gibi muḥaddemden bizim nebīmize şerī‘at ve millet daḥi intikāl étdikde böyledir.

Bu kelāmımız¹⁴ *Keşf-i Pezdevī*’den ve *Takrīr*’den ve *Tavdīh*’den me’hūzdır. Kezālīka *Keşf* ve *Takrīr*’de zıkr olunmuşdır ki Allāh te‘āla’niñ واذ اخذ الله ميثاق النبيين لما اتيكم من كتاب وحكمة ثم جاءكم رسول مصدق لما معكم لتؤمنن به [C 2a] kavli-şerifinde [B 3a] nebiyyīn¹⁵ üzerine taşdıke mişāk¹⁶ aḥz eylemesi enbiyā ‘aleyhimü’s-selāmiñ Ḥazret-i Muḥammed ‘aleyhi’s-selām’a ittibā’ları vācib [A 167a] olmada Ḥazret-i Muḥammed ‘aleyhi’s-selāmiñ ümmeti menzilesinde olmalarına delildir.¹⁷

[D 99b] Böyle olunca muḥaddem gelen enbiyāniñ şerāyi¹⁸ ve mileli ile ‘amel anlarıñ şerāyi¹⁹ ve mileli²⁰ olmaḥ üzerine olsa anlar Ḥazret-i Muḥammed ‘aleyhi’s-selām’a tābi’ler ve ümmeti²² menzilesinde iken Ḥazret-i Muḥammed ‘aleyhi’s-selām anlara²³ tābi’ ve anlarıñ ümmeti menzilesinde²⁴ olmaḥ lāzim gelür. Ve *Menār* şerhinde İmām Nesefi yazdığına göre ‘amel muḥaddem gelen nebīniñ şerī‘ati [B 3b] ve milleti olmaḥ üzerine olsa Ḥazret-i Muḥammed ‘aleyhi’s-selām Allāh te‘āla’nıñ resūli olmayub muḥaddem gelen nebīniñ resūli olub anuñ ile anuñ²⁵ ümmeti beyninde vāsiṭa²⁶ olmaḥ lāzim gelür.²⁷

[C-2b] İmdi hālā²⁸ dā’ir²⁹ olan su‘āl ki³⁰ ümmet-i Muḥammed ‘aleyhi’s-selām’dan bir kimesne millet-i İbrāhīm’denim demek cā’iz midir dērler. Bu takrīrden anuñ cevābi³¹ ma’lūm oldı ki cā’iz degildir. Zīrā millet-i

13 A: olmaz.

14 B: kelāmımızı.

15 D: tebyīn.

16 A: mişāka; B: mişāki.

17 D: delil budur.

18 A: şerāyi’i.

19 A: şerāyi’i.

20 ile ‘amel anlarıñ şerāyi’ ve mileli: missing in D.

21 Missing in A.

22 B: ümmet.

23 C: anlar.

24 iken Ḥazret-i Muḥammed ‘aleyhi’s-selām anlara tābi’ ve anlarıñ ümmeti menzilesinde: missing in B.

25 A: ve anuñ. Bir de.

26 C: vasita-yi.

27 Authorial comment in C, D: Heb (C: murād) tabi’iyet māddesine göre (D: demekdir) lāzim gelür ḡaflet olunmaya.

28 Missing in A.

29 D: dā’ire.

30 Missing in D.

31 C: cevāb.

İbrâhîm'denim dâmeniñ zâhiri buña delâlet eder ki millet hâlâ Hazret-i İbrâhîm'in olub millet ile 'amel Hazret-i İbrâhîm'in³² olmağ üzerine ola.³³ Bunda³⁴ ise vâkı'a muhâlif olduğundan [B 4a] mâ'adâ niçe maḥzûr³⁵ vardır,³⁶ nitekim bir miqdârı³⁷ taḳrîr olundu. Ve şâhib-i *Kesf* ve şâhib-i³⁸ *Taḳrîr* bu şerî'at hâlâ Hazret-i İbrâhîm milleti olmağ mümteni' oldı dâyu taṣrîḥ daḥi eylemişlerdir.³⁹ Nitekim dâmişlerdir ki egerçe kim ملة ابراهيم âyeti ve وفاتبعوا ملة ابراهيم âyeti ile bu şerî'at millet-i İbrâhîm olduğ şâbit oldı,⁴⁰ [C-3a] lakin جعلنا منكم شرعة ومنهاجا لكل âyetine binâ'en ve şerâyi'-i mâziyede aşı [aşl-ı?] ḥuşuş olmağ binâ'en bu şerî'at hâlâ Hazret-i⁴¹ İbrâhîm milleti⁴² olmağ mümteni' oldı.

Öyle olıcağ [B 4b] İbrâhîm⁴³ milleti⁴⁴ olmağ ne ma'nâyedir? Ol ma'nâyedir⁴⁵ ki [C 3b] ibtidâ' Hazret-i İbrâhîm'in idi,⁴⁶ haḳḳ olduğ hâlde bâkî ḳalub⁴⁷ bizim nebimiziniñ⁴⁸ oldı, Hazret-i⁴⁹ İbrâhîm'e izâfetden ḳaldı, māl-ı mevrûş gibi ki⁵⁰ hâlâ vârişe muzâf olub [A 167b] [D 100a] mûrişe⁵¹ muzâf olmaz dâmişler.⁵²

32 olub millet ile 'amel Hazret-i İbrâhîm'in: missing in A.

33 A: oluna.

34 D: Bundan.

35 B: maḥzûrlar; D: maḥzûra.

36 A: vardır ki.

37 AD: miqdâr.

38 ve şâhib-i: missing in D.

39 A: taṣrîḥ etmişlerdir.

40 Authorial comment in C: [ise] bizim şerî'atimiz Hazret-i [C 3b] İbrâhîm milleti olmağ ekşer furû'da muvâfâkata binâ'endir. Nitekim ان اولی الناس بابراهيم للذين اتبعوه وهذا النبي âyeti tefsirinde Kâdî Beyzavî'niñ Hazret-i Muḥammad 'aleyhi's-selâmıñ ve mu'mininiñ Hazret-i İbrâhîm 'aleyhi's-selâma ḳarîni 'alâ ṭarîkı'l-aşâla Hazret-i Nebî 'aleyhi's-selâm ve mu'minin için meşrû'a olan aḥkâmıñ ekşerinde Hazret-i İbrâhîm 'aleyhi's-selâma muvâfakat ṭarîkıyle ḳurba ḥaml eylemesi delâlat eder. Uşul-i dinîñ cümlesinde muvâfakat ise beyâna muḥtâc degildir, zîrâ cemî'i enbiyânıñ mileli usul-i dîne göre muḥâlîfe degildir, nitekim işâret olunur.

41 Missing in A.

42 Missing in B.

43 Missing in BD; A has here: 'aleyhi's-selâm.

44 C has here an undecipherable word: نسنحه

45 Ol ma'nâyedir: missing in A.

46 A: idügi.

47 D: olub.

48 A: peygamberimiziñ.

49 Missing in D.

50 Missing in C.

51 B: mevrûşa.

52 BD: dâmişlerdir.

Bu takrîrât-dan ma'lûm oldıki Hâzret-i İbrâhîm milletindenim dênılmaz.⁵³ Eger millet 'akâ'ide mûte'allık⁵⁴ olan eşyâya maḥşûşadır,⁵⁵ öyle olıcaḳ millet-i İbrâhîm'denim dêmek câ'izdir, enbiyâ 'aleyhimü's-selâm 'akâ'ide mûte'allık⁵⁶ olan eşyâda muhtalif olmadıklarına binâ'en [B 5a] dênilürse, dênilür ki taḥkîk budur ki maḥşûşa⁵⁷ degildir belki furû'a şâmilemdir, vechi⁵⁸ 'ala't-tafşîl⁵⁹ [C 4a] risâlemizde beyân olunmuşdır. Ve Birgili Meḥmed⁶⁰ Efendi merḥûmuñ⁶¹ dîn ve⁶² millet Hâzret-i Muḥammed 'aleyhi's-selâm'ın Haḳḳ te'âlâ'dan i'tikâda mûte'allık getürdüğü şeylerdir dëdigüniñ aşlı daḫi beyân⁶³ olunmuşdır. [C 4b] Farâzan maḥşûşa olsa bile yine⁶⁴ millet hâlâ Hâzret-i⁶⁵ Muḥammed⁶⁶ 'aleyhi's-selâmiñdir, yoḫsa Hâzret-i İbrâhîm 'aleyhi's-selâm'ın⁶⁷ degildir. Ve ol millete ittibâ' ve anuñla 'amel Hâzret-i Muḥammed'ın⁶⁸ milleti olmaḳ üzredir, yoḫsa Hâzret-i İbrâhîm'ın milleti olmaḳ üzre degildir. [B 5b] Zîrâ yukarudaki deliller ve maḥzûrlar uşûl-i dîn ve furû'a⁶⁹ 'umûm şüretine maḥşûş degildir,⁷⁰ uşûl-i dîne ḫuşûş şüretinde cârilerdir. Böyle olıcaḳ millet-i İbrâhîm'denim dêmek nice câ'iz olur ki zâhiri⁷¹ millet hâlâ Hâzret-i İbrâhîm'ın olub millete ittibâ' ve anuñla 'amel Hâzret-i İbrâhîm milleti olmaḳ üzerine olmağa delâlet eder.

Eger çünki⁷² Hâzret-i Muḥammed 'aleyhi's-selâm *ان اتبع ملة ابراهيم* âyeti muḳtażâsınca Hâzret-i İbrâhîm 'aleyhi's-selâm milletine ittibâ' ile emr olundu ve *فاتبعوا ملة ابراهيم* âyeti [C 5a] muḳtażâsınca muḫâtabûn Hâzret-i İbrâhîm⁷³ milletine ittibâ' ile emr olundılar, "Millet-i İbrâhîm'denüz" dêmek câ'iz olmaḳ

53 AB: dênilemez.

54 B: mûte'allıḳa.

55 A: maḥşûş olursa; C: maḥşûşa derse; D: maḥşûşdur; F 4478: maḥşûşa ise.

56 B: mûte'allıḳa.

57 A: maḥşûş.

58 D: ve cemî'.

59 Authorial comment in C.

60 Missing in AB.

61 A: raḫime'llâhu 'aleyh.

62 Missing in D.

63 B: zıkr.

64 D: gine.

65 Missing in AB.

66 D: İbrâhîm (crossed out).

67 A: Yoḫsa İbrâhîm'ın.

68 C: Muḥammed 'aleyhi's-şalât ve'l-selâm'ın.

69 B: uşûl ve dîn-i furû'a.

70 A: degildir ve; B: degillerdir; C: degillerdir degillerdir.

71 D: zâhir.

72 A: Egerçe kim.

73 C adds: 'aleyhi's-selâm.

görünür dênilürse cevâb budur ki yukarıda zıkr olunan delillere ve maḥzûrlara binâ'en dêmek câ'iz degildir. [D 100b] Âyeteynde⁷⁴ ise millet-i İbrâhîm'e ittîbâ' ile emrden murâd aşlında [A 168a] millet-i İbrâhîm olan millet-i⁷⁵ İslâm'a ittîbâ' ile emrdir. Nitekim şâḥib-i *Keşf* ve şâḥib-i *Takrîr* kelâmından⁷⁶ böylece müstefâddır ve⁷⁷ فَاتَّبِعُوا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ âyetinde Kâdî Beyzâvî ve Ebû's-su'ûd Efendi böylece tefsîr eylemişlerdir. Ve Hâzret-i Muḥammed 'aleyhi's-selâm şabâḥa dâḥil olduḡda

اصحنا على فطرة الاسلام وكلمة (ب6) الإخلاص وعلى دين نبينا محمد
صلى الله عليه وسلم وملة ايينا اراهيم صلى الله عليه وسلم خنيقا مسلما وما انا
من المشركين⁷⁸

déyu zıkr édûb ümmetine ta'lîm kaşd eylemeleri daḥi şimdi millet-i Muḥammed [C 5b] olub millet-i İbrâhîm olmayub ancak aşlında millet-i İbrâhîm olub⁷⁹ millete ittîbâ' ve anuñ ile 'amel Hâzret-i Muḥammed milleti olmaḡ üzerine olub⁸⁰ Hâzret-i İbrâhîm milleti olmamaḡ üzerine olmaḡ⁸¹ mülâḥazasıyladır. Ve risâlemizde daḥi niçe ṭuruḡ beyân olunmuşdur. Eger bu mülâḥaza i'tibâriyle millet-i İbrâhîm'deniz dêmek câ'izdir⁸² dênilürse dênilür ki 'avâm⁸³ zâhirbîndir⁸⁴ bu mülâḥazayı bilmezler, zâhirine göre ise [B 7a] câ'iz olmaduḡı muḡarrer oldu.

İmdi 'avâm bunu dêmek câ'iz degildir, ammâ ḥavâş⁸⁵ zâhirbîn degillerdir,⁸⁶ bu mülâḥazayı bilürler, anlara bu mülâḥaza ile dêmek⁸⁷ câ'izdir, lâkin⁸⁸ dëyen kimesne zâhirinden müstefâd olanı i'tikâd ṭarîḳiyle dëmiyûb bu mülâḥazayı i'tikâd⁸⁹ ṭarîḳiyle dëdigine⁹⁰ ḡarîne gerekdir ki⁹¹ istimâ' edenler ol ṭarîḡ ile dëmiyûb bu ṭarîḡ ile dëdigini bileler, zirâ zâhiri üzerine câ'iz degildir.

74 BD: Âyetinde.

75 Missing in D.

76 C: kelâmında.

77 B: ki ve.

78 A has ملة ايينا اراهيم صلى الله عليه وسلم instead of ملة ايينا اراهيم صلى الله عليه وسلم. B omits ملة ايينا اراهيم صلى الله عليه وسلم. C: ملة ايينا اراهيم صلى الله عليه وسلم.

79 Missing in C.

80 B: üzerinedir.

81 A: olmamaḡ üzerine olmaḡ; B: olmaḡ üzerine olmamaḡ; C: üzerine olmamaḡ.

82 A: dëmekdir.

83 C: 'avâmd.

84 B: zâhirîndir.

85 oldi. İmdi 'avâm bunu dêmek câ'iz degildir, amma ḥavâş: missing in D.

86 AD: zâhirbîndir; B: zâhirîn degillerdir.

87 B: another word, crossed out.

88 A: velâkin.

89 B: i'tibâr

90 D: -dir lâkin.

91 Missing in AB.

[C 6a] Ve⁹² bunu bu üslûb üzerine havâş yine havâş yanında söyleyüb ‘avâm yanında söylememek gerekir, zîrâ eşitmek ile⁹³ zâhirinden [B 7b] müstefâd olanı i’tikâd tarîkı ile dèye giderler,⁹⁴ karîne ise herkese göre⁹⁵ fâ’ide vèrmez ki andan [D 101a] ne i’tikâd ile dènilür ve⁹⁶ ne i’tikâd ile⁹⁷ dènilmemegi⁹⁸ bileler. [A 168b] Hâşıl-ı kelâm her söz zâhirine maḥmûldır.

İmdi şol söz ki anuñ zâhirinden⁹⁹ müstefâd olanı i’tikâd bize cā’iz olmaya, ol¹⁰⁰ sözi söylemek bize¹⁰¹ cā’iz degildir, i’tikâd cā’iz¹⁰² olur bir hâle ḳomâduḳca. Bu ḳaldı ki Hâzret-i Muḥammad¹⁰³ ‘aleyhi’s-selâmıñ¹⁰⁴ eyledügi şabâḥ zıkrını¹⁰⁵ ne keyfiyyet ile eylemek gerekir, ya¹⁰⁶ icmâlen Hâzret¹⁰⁷ ‘aleyhi’s-selâm ne vech ile ḳaşd étدی ise ben daḥı ol [B 8a] vechle ḳaşd éderim dèmek gerekir, zâhirinden müstefâd olanı¹⁰⁸ ḳaşd etmemek¹⁰⁹ gerekir, yaḥûd hâlâ millet-i Muḥammed olub aşlında millet-i İbrâḥîm olan millet üzerine şabâḥa dâḥıl oldum [C 6b] dèyu ḳaşd¹¹⁰ gerekir. Va’llâhu¹¹¹ te’âlâ a’lem, bu miḳdâr muḡnidir,¹¹² tafşıl-i müşbi¹¹³ murâd éden risâle-i muṭavvelimize mürâca’at eylesün.¹¹⁴

Translation

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise be to God [and] to the Religion of Islam, the Religion of Muhammad. To proceed: In order to

-
- 92 Missing in B.
 93 B: işid[m]ekle; D: eşidmekle.
 94 dèye giderler: B dèye; D dèdigidir dèrler.
 95 Missing in B.
 96 dènilür ve: BC dènilüb, D dènilür.
 97 Missing in D.
 98 A: dènilmez.
 99 maḥmûldır. İmdi şol söz ki anuñ zâhirinden: missing in C.
 100 söz zâhirine maḥmûldır. İmdi şol söz ki anuñ zâhirinden müstefâd olanı i’tikâd bize cā’iz olmaya ol: missing in D.
 101 A: bize söylemek.
 102 Missing in A.
 103 Missing in BD.
 104 A: ‘aleyhi’s-selâm.
 105 D: zıkrin.
 106 A: ki.
 107 A: Hâzret-i Muḥammed.
 108 D: olanıñ.
 109 B: eylememek.
 110 B: ḳaşd étmek.
 111 A: Allâhu.
 112 BC: muḳni’dir.
 113 Missing in A; C: müşîr.
 114 Instead of the last sentence D has: Va’llâhu a’lem.

respond to the questions current among the people concerning the *Religion of Abraham* (*millat Ibrāhīm*), this humble servant, Minḳārīzāde, wrote about several items that are rarely discussed (*‘azīzū’l-menāl nīçe vech*) and composed an eloquent treatise on the subject. However, since [the treatise] has many ancillary arguments (*şī‘ab*), it was summarized and shortened as necessary so that reading it would not be too tiring.

It should be clear to those with insight and understanding that the chosen doctrine established by books of creed (*uṣūl*) is that to practice (*‘amel*) an earlier prophet’s law and religion means to practice according to our Prophet’s law and religion; it does not mean to practice according to that earlier prophet’s law and religion. Therefore, the earlier prophet’s law and religion have been transferred to our Prophet through inheritance (*irs*), as demonstrated in the noble verse, “We gave the Scripture as inheritance to Our chosen servants” (Q35:32).

Let us analyze the meaning of “inheritance” since this is [a case] of transfer by inheritance. When a legacy is transferred from the legator to the legatee it belongs to the legatee and becomes his property; it no longer belongs to the legator and is not his property. In sum, just as a legacy after transmission belongs solely to the legatee and no longer has a connection to the legator, so law and religion (*şerī‘at ve millet*) were transferred from the earlier prophets to our Prophet.

These words of ours are taken from the *Keşf* of Pezdevī,¹¹⁵ from the *Taqrīr*,¹¹⁶ and from the *Tavdīh*.¹¹⁷ The *Keşf* and the *Taqrīr* mention that God almighty said, “God took a pledge from the prophets, saying, “If, after I have bestowed Scripture and wisdom upon you, a messenger comes confirming what you have been given, you must believe in him and support him” (Q3:81).¹¹⁸ According to this noble verse, the pledge he took from the prophets is proof that they would follow the Prophet Muhammad and have a place in the Prophet Muhammad’s community.

Given the [arguments] above, if practicing (*‘amel*) the earlier prophets’ laws and religions meant following their laws and religions, then, just as these [earlier prophets] are followers of the Prophet Muhammad and part of his community, the Prophet Muhammad would be [these prophets’] follower and

115 This is *Kaṣṣfu’l-asrār* by ‘Abdulazīz al-Bukhārī (d. 1330), a commentary on the Hanafi *uṣūl al-fiqh* book by Fakhru’l-Islām al-Pazdawī.

116 Akmal al-Dīn al-Bābartī’s (d. 1384) commentary on al-Pazdawī, called *al-Taqrīr fī sharḥ al-uṣūl al-Pazdawī*.

117 This text is likely the *al-Tawdīh fī ḥall ghawāmiḍ al-tanḳīḥ* by Ṣadr al-Sharī‘a ‘Ubayd Allah b. Mas‘ūd (d. 1346).

118 Translation of Q3:81 taken from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Qur’an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 40.

part of their community. According to Imam Neseфі in his commentary on the *Menār*, if to practice [religion] meant following an earlier prophet's law and religion, then the Prophet Muhammad wouldn't be God's messenger, but an earlier prophet's messenger, and [the Prophet Muhammad] would have to be an intermediary between him and his community.¹¹⁹

Now, as for the current question, they ask whether or not it is permissible for someone from Muhammad's community to say, "I belong to the religion of Abraham." As demonstrated [above], it is clear that the answer is that it is not permissible. Because the literal meaning of the statement "I belong to the religion of Abraham" indicates that the religion (*millet*) [i.e. Islam] still belongs to the Prophet Abraham and that the practice of the religion should occur according to that of the Prophet Abraham. If this were true, besides being contrary to the fact of the matter, there would be many other objections, a number of which have already been demonstrated. The author of the *Kesf* and the author of the *Takrūr* have also explained that it is impossible for our law (*bu şeriat*) to still be the Prophet Abraham's religion. Indeed, they say that although the verses "the religion of your father, Abraham" (Q22:78) and "Follow the religion of Abraham" (Q3:95) establish that our law is the religion of Abraham,¹²⁰ nevertheless, based on the verse "We have assigned a law and a path to each of you" (Q5:48) and based on the fact that [these verses] apply only for laws of the past, it is impossible that our law is still the Prophet Abraham's religion.

If this is the case, then what does it mean to belong to Abraham's religion? It means that initially it [the *millet*/religion] was that of Prophet Abraham and it remained so as long as it stayed true. Then [the religion] became that of our Prophet and it no longer belonged to the Prophet Abraham. It is like they say of a bequest, that it now belongs to the legatee and no longer belongs to the legator.

From what has been demonstrated above, it is clear that one cannot say, "I belong to the religion of Abraham." If it is claimed that religion (*millet*) is

119 Authorial comment in C, D: Don't overlook the fact that this would be necessary according to the meaning of the term "following" [an earlier prophet's law and religion].

120 Authorial comment in C: The fact that our law (*şeriat*) is that of the Prophet Abraham's religion (*millet*) is based upon the agreement of most [of the sources] on religious practice. Thus, in his commentary on the verse, "And the people who are closest to Abraham are those who truly follow his ways, this Prophet, and [true] believers" (Q3:68), Kādi Beyzavī affirms that the Prophet Muhammad and his believers are closely connected by lineage to the Prophet Abraham and his believers and attributes this close connection to the agreement of most of the Prophet Muhammad's legal rulings with those of the Prophet Abraham. As for the agreement regarding the principles of religion, it is not necessary to explain this because none of the prophets' religions contradict one another according to the principles of religion.

limited to matters of creed, given that the prophets do not disagree on matters of creed, and it is therefore permissible to say “I belong to the religion of Abraham,” then the response is that the reality is that it [i.e. *millet*] is not limited [to matters of creed] but also applies to law (*furū*). This point is explained in detail in our treatise, which also expounds on the late Birgili Mehmed Efendi’s statement that *dīn* and *millet* are things that the Prophet Muhammad brought from God Almighty concerning creed. Even if it [i.e. *millet*] were limited [to matters of creed], the religion now is that of the Prophet Muhammad, it is not that of the Prophet Abraham; and following and practicing that religion means belonging to the Prophet Muhammad’s religion, it does not mean belonging to the Prophet Abraham’s religion. The reason is that the above proofs and objections are not limited to the principles of religion (*uṣūl-i dīn*) and to law (*furū*) generally (*‘umūm şüretine*); rather they cover the principles of religion specifically (*husus şüretine*).¹²¹ This being so, how can it be permissible to say “I belong to the religion of Abraham?” Taken literally, [this statement] attests that the religion (*millet*) [i.e. Islam] is still the Prophet Abraham’s and that it should be followed and practiced according to [the precepts] of the Prophet Abraham’s religion.

If it is claimed that it seems permissible to say “We belong to the religion of Abraham,” because both the Prophet Muhammad in the verse “Follow the religion of Abraham” (Q16:123) and those addressed in the verse “So follow the religion of Abraham” (Q3:95) were commanded to follow the religion of the Prophet Abraham, we respond that based on the aforementioned proofs and objections it is not permissible. As for these two verses, what is actually meant by the command to follow the religion of Abraham is to follow the religion of Islam, which is the religion of Abraham, The authors of the *Keşf* and the *Taḫrīr* understood it like this and Kāḏi Beyzavī and Ebū’s-su’ūd Efendi also interpreted the verse “So follow the religion of Abraham” in this way.

When the Prophet Muhammed would awake in the morning he would say, “We awake into the state of Islam, the word of pure faith, and into the religion of our Prophet Muhammad and the religion of our forefather Abraham, who was of true faith and a Muslim and was not one of the polytheists.”¹²² He said this [supplication] with the intention of teaching the community that now it [i.e. the religion/Islam] is Muhammad’s religion and not Abraham’s religion. Although we must consider that it originally was the religion of

¹²¹ In this sentence, “general” and “specific” appear to be terms taken from logic.

¹²² I have translated the hadith according its main renditions, which have the last clause as “ما أنا من المشركين” instead of the alternative rendition, “ما كان من المشركين” found in Minkārīzāde’s text.

Abraham, practicing and following it [now] means belonging to the Prophet Muhammad's religion, not the Prophet Abraham's religion. Various aspects of this are discussed in our [longer] treatise. If it is claimed that it is permissible to say "We belong to the religion of Abraham," based on the above consideration (*mülâhaza*), the response is that ordinary people (*ʿavām*) are literalists, that they do not understand this consideration, and that [the statement] has been ruled impermissible according to its literal meaning.

Now, it is not permissible for ordinary people to say this [statement, "we belong to the religion of Abraham"]. The educated elite (*ḥavāṣ*), however, are not literalists; they understand the above consideration and, keeping it in mind, they are allowed to say it. But when they do so they must never say it with any belief in its literal meaning. Rather they must add the proviso (*ḵarīne*) that they say it with belief in this consideration, so that those who hear it know that it is not said in that way [i.e., in its literal meaning] but in this way [i.e., with the proviso], as it is not permissible [to say it] according to its literal meaning. Still, the educated elite should say [the statement] only in the presence of other educated elites and not in the presence of ordinary people, because, when they hear it, they will think that it is spoken with belief in its literal meaning. That said, the proviso can't help everyone know whether or not the statement was said with belief. In sum, every statement is understood according to its literal meaning.

Now, it is not permissible for us to say any word whose literal meaning we are not allowed to believe, unless it is phrased in such a way that it is permissible to believe. It remains to be determined the situation regarding the Prophet Muhammad's morning supplication. Either one must say in general that one intends the statement in whatever way or manner the Prophet Muhammad intended it, but one must not intend its literal meaning; or one must intend by it: "I awake into the religion that was the religion of Abraham and is now the religion of Muhammad." God knows best and this must suffice. Those who wish additional evidence and details may consult my extended treatise.