



Looking Through *Tahqīq* Glasses: Early Modern Imagination and the Unveiling of Nature in Mīrzā Bīdil's *The Sinai of Knowledge*

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Abstract

In this article I trace the contours of the notion of *tahqīq* in the *Ṭūr-i maʿrifat* “The Sinai of Knowledge,” a late seventeenth-century poetic exploration of natural phenomena by the most important Indo-Persian poet-philosopher of the Mughal times, Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Qādir Bīdil (ʿAzimabad, 1644 – Delhi, 1720). I collect and analyze all the textual *loci* where the term *tahqīq* occurs in Bīdil's *masnavī*, showing how “verification/realization” is a key concept to make sense of Bīdil's method of observation, via imagination, of the phenomenic unfolding of *physis*. I also explore several surprising points of contact between Bīdil's poetic conceptualization of nature and some aspects of Renaissance and post-Renaissance Italian naturalistic thought.

Keywords

tahqīq – Bīdil – nature – philosophia naturalis – *Ṭūr-i maʿrifat*

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The Truth I spontaneously embrace could never be submerged¹

TOMMASO CAMPANELLA

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Tahqīq: in the technical language of scientists, it is the ascertainment of an issue through a proof, just as scrutiny (*tadqīq*) is the ascertainment of a proof through another proof [...]; among the Sufis, it is the manifestation of Truth in the shapes of the divine names [...]; and among the reciters of the Qur'ān, it is the accurate realization of every single letter²

MUḤAMMAD 'ALĪ AL-TAHĀNAWĪ

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Introduction

In a sonnet of uncertain date, the Calabrian philosopher Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639) writes: “The world is the book in which the Eternal Intellect (*Senno Eterno*) wrote its own concepts, and the living temple/where, painting actions and the image of itself/ adorned the low and the high with living statues.”³ As Giovanni Gentile already noticed in the 1910s, the notion that the world is the book of God was not at all considered by Campanella as an original one, but its revolutionary use in a naturalistic way, directly related to new *philosophia naturalis* initiated by another Calabrian intellectual, Bernardino Telesio (1509–1588), was undoubtedly innovative.⁴ Significantly enough, the well-known sonnet is entitled *Modo di filosofare* “Way of Philosophizing,” and

1 “Verum quod sponte recepto submergi haud potuit.” Tommaso Campanella, *Philosophia, sensibus demonstrata* (Naples, 1591), frontispiece.

2 Muḥammad 'Alī al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn wa 'l-'ulūm*, 2 vols, ed. R. al-'Ajam et al. (Bayrūt, 1996), I, 392.

3 *Il mondo è il libro dove il senno eterno/scrisse i propri concetti, e vivo tempio/dove, pingendo i gesti e 'l proprio esempio/di statue vive ornò l'imo e 'l superno*. Tommaso Campanella, *Le poesie*, ed. Francesco Giancotti (Milano, 2013), 25, 13–14, 26.

4 Tommaso Campanella, *Poesie*, ed. Giovanni Gentile (Firenze, 1939), 30–31.

focuses on a clearly stated methodological exhortation to abandon the “books and the dead temples” in order to “fully realize” (*adempio*) the universe and “contemplate” God as “internal to all things.”⁵ It is tautological to say that, in the anti-Aristotelian context of the collected *Poesie filosofiche* (1621), such statements are concerned with poetry as much as they are with philosophy: in the second poem of the *Scelta*, poets are, indeed, openly accused of preferring “fake heroes” and “infamous passions,” while the “works of nature” are much more “marvelous” (*stupende*) and worthy of being described, since they lead to “discovering [every] truth” (*verità*).⁶ As heralded in the opening *proemio*, in fact, the poet-philosopher should probe “the world” and abandon the “second schools,” explained by Campanella himself as “those [schools] who learn not from God *in nature* but from the books of men” (italics are mine).⁷

The focus of this essay is a late seventeenth-century Persian poem and what it reveals about the observation of natural phenomena, poetic novelty, and the entangled dialectics of the ontological and gnoseological notion of *taḥqīq* (“verification” and “realization,” in their wide semantic spectrum, as defined by the Indian scholar al-Tahānawī in his eighteenth-century encyclopedia of technical terms quoted in the epigraph above).⁸ As such, we are not directly concerned with the re-narrative of well-known fortunes of naturalism in Renaissance and post-Renaissance Italian and European literary and philosophical culture. Nonetheless, the emblematic Italian textual episode just described – easily translatable, following Matthew Melvin-Kouchki,⁹ within the Arabo-Islamic epistemic poles of *taḥqīq* (“realization”) and *taqlīd* (“imitation”) – helps us in locating our discussion within the wider, connected perspective of what Jonardon Ganeri has described as an early modern philosophical globalization centered in the Safavid-Mughal Persosphere.¹⁰ After all, well before the writings of Gassendi and Descartes were made accessible in Persian through the mediation of François Bernier during the latter seventeenth

5 In his own comment added at the end of the poem Campanella openly expresses the necessity to “get back to the original book of Nature” (Campanella, *Le poesie*, 26).

6 Campanella, *Le poesie*, 11.

7 Campanella, *Le poesie*, 9.

8 I won’t elaborate here on the complex semiosis of the term, briefly resumed with essential bibliography by Giancarlo Casale in the introduction to the present volume. My understanding of this notion largely coincides to the one clearly articulated by İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī and the Islamicate republic of letters* (Cambridge, 2016), 96–104.

9 Matthew Melvin-Kouchki, “*Taqlīd* vs. *taḥqīq* in the Renaissances of Western Early Modernity,” *Philological Encounters*, 3, 1–2 (2018): 193–249.

10 Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700* (Oxford, 2011), 16.

century, we know that some of Campanella's writings were circulating in the Safavid empire,¹¹ and one of his direct disciples, the Dominican father Paolo Piromalli, even authored a Persian treatise on Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity at the court of Shāh 'Abbās II (r. 1642–1666), of which a Latin version also exists.¹²

In a chapter devoted to the Catholic beliefs on the Holy Spirit (*dar bayān-i 'tiqādāt-i mā dar bāra-yi rūḥ al-quds*), Piromalli deals with the limits of knowledge and inserts an independent, relatively long discussion on natural philosophy and sciences, which has until now gone completely unnoticed by scholars. Here, following Campanella's teachings, he methodically criticizes the Aristotelian approach to nature, advocating for the necessity of direct observation and praising new discoveries. Also adumbrated into this Persian text is, among other things, Campanella's *Apologia pro Galileo* or "Defense of Galileo" (1622), from which Piromalli directly derives some passages on traditional Islamic cosmology. The latter is criticized – along with parallel Christian doctrines – when it comes to the structure of the universe, but also praised *contra* pre-modern Western assumptions with respect to the theory of the infinity of the worlds created by God, a theme coming to him, ultimately, from Giordano Bruno (1548–1600).¹³ As for our "naturalistic" perspective, it is also quite remarkable that the first Italian book (and, perhaps, the first work in any European vernacular) ever rendered directly into modern literary Persian was the *Idea del giardino del mondo* or "Idea of the garden of the world," a treatise on natural phenomena and medical physiology written in 1586 by the "physician" (*fisico*) from Ravenna, Tommaso Tomai (also the author of a famous *Meteorologia*). It was translated in the 1650s by Muḥammad Zamān while traveling

11 Alessandro Orenco has shown how the Latin grammatical writings included in Campanella's *Philosophia rationalis*, probably through the mediation of father Piromalli, were adapted in Armenian by the latter's disciple Oskan Erewanc'i – a native of New Julfa – under the title of *K'erakanut'ean kirk'* "Books of grammar": see Alessandro Orenco, "L'origine et le valeur des grammaires de Oskan Erewanc'i," *Revue des Études Armeniennes* 39 (2020): 123–142, 126 and *passim*.

12 See Dennis Half, "Paolo Piromalli," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, eds. D. Thomas and J. Chesworth, vol. 10, "Ottoman and Safavid Empires (1600–1700)," (Leiden, 2017), 582–587.

13 Paolo Piromalli, *Risāla dar bayān-i 'tiqādāt wa mazhab-i kalimatullāh-i 'sawī*, MS, Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Pers. 49, ff. 22v–35r. Compare, for instance, ff. 28v–30v with Tommaso Campanella, *Apologia pro Galileo* (Frankfurt, 1622), 8, 29, 34 and *passim*. I wish to thank my student Martino Masolo for his collaboration on Piromalli's work.

from Iran to India after he received a copy of the work from his Jesuit companions.¹⁴

Against this background, in which the Mediterranean and Indo-Persian worlds are already linked by a thick web of dialogic connections, I trace here the contours of the notion of *taḥqīq* in the *Ṭūr-i maʿrifāt* (“The Sinai of Knowledge”), a late seventeenth-century poetic exploration of natural phenomena, metaphorical modes of being, and the mirroring mind by the most important Indo-Persian poet-philosopher of the late Mughal period, Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil (‘Azīmābād 1644 – Delhi 1720). As this is a preliminary excavation, I will limit myself to collecting and briefly analyzing all the textual *loci* where the term *taḥqīq* occurs in Bīdil’s *mathnawī* (a poem in rhyming-couplets), showing how “verification/realization” is a key concept to make sense of Bīdil’s method of observation, via imagination (*khiyāl*), of the phenomenic unfolding of *physis* (*ṭabīʿat*) and its multiplicity (*kathrat*). This method, I argue, is at once poetic and philosophic,¹⁵ and is explicitly related, in both directions, to a clear idea of “imagining newness”¹⁶ – in a manner not so different from the way Campanella “imagines” the realization of truth (*verità*) as a new, concrete endeavor both in the visual language of the *impresa*¹⁷ and the metaphorical one of his *Poesie filosofiche*. In light of Giancarlo Casale’s remarks in the introductory essay to this volume, then, I look at this episode of poetic-philosophical *taḥqīq* as an occasion to explore, on the one hand, the peculiar conceptualization of a new “(poetic) style of knowing” in the later Mughal period, and,

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- 14 For a complete bibliography, see F. Calzolaio and S. Pellò, “A Persian Matteo Ricci: Muhammad Zamān’s Seventeenth-Century Translation of *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas*,” in G. Abbattista, ed., *Global Perspectives in Modern Italian Culture. Knowledge and Representation of the World in Italy from the Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century* (London, 2021), 146–159.
- 15 Examining Mullā Sadrā’s use of poetry, Sayeh Meisami has shown how the “poetic method also facilitates an imaginative understanding of the unity of the knower and the known that defies the subject-object dichotomy of Peripatetic epistemology on the grounds of the graded unity of existence.” Sayeh Meisami, “Poetry as an Essential Tool of Philosophical Inquiry and Writing in Later Islamic Philosophy: The Case of Mullā Ṣadrā,” *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 43, no. 4 (2020), 73.
- 16 Prashant Keshavmurthy has brilliantly discussed the canonization of Bīdil’s “technique of the imaginary” in relation to the “newness” of *tāzaguyī* (“modern diction”). Prashant Keshavmurthy, *Persian Authorship and Canonicity in Late Mughal Delhi: Building an Ark* (New York, 2016), especially 90–150.
- 17 It is significant that the frontispiece of the 1591 Neapolitan edition of the *Philosophia, sensibus demonstrata* shows the easily decipherable image of a monk struggling in the ocean in the direction of a floating globe, illuminated by the rays of the sun. The Latin motto surrounding it is reported in the epigraph to this essay: “The Truth I spontaneously embrace could never be submerged.”

on the other, to unearth some striking continuities with the Mediterranean intellectual sphere before the Enlightenment, in the thought-provoking chronological perspective proposed in this volume by Rajeev Kinra. Critically responding to some important recent contributions to the study of Mughal *taḥqīq*,¹⁸ I will show how Bīdil's textual "realization" of nature provides an excellent opportunity to move beyond the prevalent debates on kingship and the *ṣulḥ-i kull*: here, our discourse on early modern Persianate regimes of knowledge extends to the stylistic and philosophical, through a transregional reconfiguration of Sufi-Neoplatonic notions¹⁹ recast in the context of an "international Baroque."²⁰

Maḥmūd Futūḥī has recently used the adjective "microscopic" to characterize the poetic strategies of authors such as Sā'ib-i Tabrīzī (ca.1592–1676) and Bīdil with regard to the phenomenology of *physis* (his related use of the concept of poetic "atomism," *zarragīrā'ī* is also notable in this perspective).²¹ Bīdil's work – whose peculiar thematization of nature and its close connection to the *'ilm-i taḥqīq* (the "science of realization") was already noticed by Bausani almost seventy years ago²² – can be defined, using Futūḥī's words, as an exploration in the frenzied atomic structures of what Mullā Sadrā thought of as the

18 I think especially of Christian B. Pye, "The Sufi method behind the Mughal 'Peace with All' religions: A study of Ibn 'Arabi's 'taḥqīq' in Abu al-Fazl's preface to the Razmnāma," *Modern Asian Studies*, 56, no. 3: 902–923.

19 Some recent observations on Neoplatonism in the Mughal world, quite relevant for our concerns here, can be found in J. Gommans and S. Huseini, "Neoplatonic Kingship in the Islamic World: Akbar's Millennial History," in *Sacred Kingship in World History: Between Immanence and Transcendence*, eds. A. Moin and A. Strathern (New York, 2022), 198–202.

20 The stylistic-comparative intuitions of scholars such as Gianroberto Scarcia and Riccardo Zipoli – see their essays in G. Scarcia, ed., *Persia Barocca* (Reggio Emilia, 1983), as well as Zipoli, *Chirā sabk-i hindī dar dunyā-yi gharb sabk-i bāruk khwānda mīshawad*, Tehran, 1984) can and should be recast in the perspective of connected philology and philosophy. Going beyond the scope of late Safavid-Mughal poetics, this could provoke a reconsideration of the provincial – Italian and European – understanding of the Baroque itself. For an analogous discussion from Ottoman architectural history, see Unver Rustem, *Ottoman Baroque: The Architectural Refashioning of Ottoman Istanbul* (Princeton, 2019).

21 Maḥmūd Futūḥī Rūdma'janī, "Jūshish-i jawhar-i hastī dar sabk-i hindī (khwānish-i ṣadrāyī-yi shī'r-i Ṣā'ib-i Tabrīzī)," *Nashriya-yi zabān wa adab-i fārsī-yi dānishgāh-i Tabrīz*, 73, 242 (1399): 217–238 (219).

22 See "Note sulla natura in Bēdil," *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, n.s., 15 (1965): 215–228, but also "Note su Mirzā Bedil," *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, n.s., 6 (1954–1956): 163–199, especially pp. 179–182, on Bīdil's articulation of the "science of *taḥqīq*" and the structure of matter (*hayūlā*) in his poem *Trfān* (1712).

ḥaraka jawhariyya, i.e. the “constant flux” of substance.²³ Against this background, the *Ṭūr-i maʿrifat* (“The Sinai of Knowledge”), a poetic project completely devoted to the description of the natural and meteorological phenomena observed by Bīdil in the late 1680s in the hills of Bairat (now Viratnagar) in the northern Aravallis, is no doubt the most explicitly naturalistic of his works. Written a few years after the Persian translation of Tomai’s *Idea del giardino del mondo* and, to continue with the Italian mirrorings, Alessandro Marchetti’s rendering of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* in Tuscan hendecasyllables (ca. 1668), the twenty-eight chapters of the *Ṭūr-i maʿrifat* focus on the description of a long series of specific phenomena, from the bubble to the spark, from the rainbow to the stone, from the drop to the cloud, etc.²⁴

Suggestively, the poem opens, so to say, in the name of *taḥqīq*. The first mention of the term appears at the very beginning of the text, in the introductory verse announcing a methodological manifesto:

āghāz-i bayān-i sayr-i bayrāt
taḥqīq-i sawād-i qudratāyāt

[This is] the beginning of the elucidation of Bairat’s exploration,
the *taḥqīq* of a land where the signs of potency (*qudrat*) appear²⁵

The poem thus declares itself to be a reflective “realization” of the landscape of Bairat, through its exploration (*sayr*, a term also commonly used to define the thorough “study” of a text) and its consequent poetic elucidation (*bayān*, echoing the “clear expression” taught by God to Man in Qur’ān 55:4, and at the same time the rhetorical tradition of *ilm al-bayān*, or the “science of figurative

23 Scarcia observed that “the sensibility which underlies the philosophical thought of the so-called school of Isfahan has filtered into the Persian academy, and influenced, in a mediated way, its aesthetic paths.” Gianroberto Scarcia, “Il contagio della fantasia,” in R. Zipoli and G. Scarcia, eds., *Il canzoniere dell’alba*, (Milano, 1997), 87–95, 94.

24 Classical views on the poem can be found in ‘Abdul Ghanī “Mirzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil kī mathnawī Ṭūr-i maʿrifat”, *Makhzan*, 4, no. 2 (1950): 3–13, Id., *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil* (Lahore, 1960), 194–205 and Alessandro Bausani, “Note sulla natura,” 220–228. Two recent studies are Stefano Pellò, “Two Passing Clouds: The Rainy Season of Mirzā Bīdil and Amānat Rāy’s Persian Version of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.20,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 24 (2020): 408–418 and Id. “Atmosfere indo-persiane: cumulonembi, bolle e *avatāra* monsonici in Mirzā Mirzā‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil e nella sua scuola,” in *Come la freccia di Ārash. Il lungo viaggio della narrazione in Iran: forme e motivi dalle origini all’età contemporanea*, ed. N. Norozi (Bologna, 2021), 291–311. The work has been translated into Italian by Riccardo Zipoli: Mirzā ‘Abdolqāder Bīdel, *Il Sinai della conoscenza* (Venezia, 2018).

25 Mirzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, 4 vols., ed. Kh. Khalili (Kabul, 1962–1965), v. 3, 1.

expression”). The “land” (*sawād*) mentioned in the second hemistich is also a “scripture” – playing on a very common *ihām* “double entendre,” which is here reinforced by “signs” (*āyāt*, an obvious allusion to the verses of the *Qur’ān*). Hence, as in the above-quoted line by Campanella, Nature is a book to be read and understood. However, the central theme in Bidil’s line is not so much the ubiquitous image of the “book of nature” but the isomorphic nature of text, language, imagination, and phenomena, according to his Akbarian semiotic theory.²⁶ In other words, if the phenomonic world is the unfolding of the names of God, *taḥqīq* means here to textualize it truthfully. Such premises are deepened further a few lines later:

zi Ṭūr-i ma’rifat ma’nāsarāy-am
ba chandīn kūh mīnāzad sadā-y-am
zi gulgash-t-i ḥaqīqat tarzabān-am
ba ṣad minqār mībālad bayān-am

I am the singer of the meanings of the Sinai of science:
 my voice is a proud echo between several mountains.
 My tongue is fresh, because of the rose-garden of the Real (*ḥaqīqat*):
 my expression boasts of having hundreds of beaks.²⁷

The “mountains” named here are the mountains of Bairat, a visible index of the Qur’anic *Ṭūr*, usually identified with biblical Sinai, the place of God’s manifestation, while “knowledge” (but also “science,” *ma’rifat*), invoked already in the poem’s title, is identical to the natural landscape (thus, the mountains’ natural landscape is identical to knowledge). The poet’s aim is to sing the mountains’ “meaning” (*ma’nā*), which is echoed and accompanied by innumerable other “singers”: the voice of the birds is the soundstage of the landscape itself and their songs are identical with Bidil’s voice, which is in turn echoed by (and, as we shall see, blended in with) the mountains. While plenty of obvious allusions to the Persian hypertext can be traced here, from ‘Aṭṭār’s *Mantiq al-ṭayr* (“The Language of the Birds”) to Shabistarī’s *Gulshan-i rāz* (“The Rose-garden of Mystery”) to Sanā’ī’s *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa* (“The Garden of Truth”), the newness of Bidil’s investigation in Bairat’s “Rose-garden of Truth” (*Gulgash-t-i*

26 Quite interesting for our concerns here are the striking parallels with Giordano Bruno’s ideas on imagination and *phantasia*: see for instance Robert Klein, “L’imagination comme vêtement de l’âme chez Marsile Ficino et Giordano Bruno,” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 61, 1 (1956): 18–36, and Nicoletta Tirinnanzi, *Umbra naturae: l’immaginazione da Ficino a Bruno* (Rome, 2000), 243–292.

27 Bidil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 1.

ḥaqīqat) remains clear: his tongue is “fresh” (*tar*) because he is interested in the verification and the elucidation (again, *bayān*) of an actual *jardin plane-taire* – to borrow an expression of the French botanist Gilles Clément – where the Reality of Being (*ḥaqīqa*) unfolds like a flower.

Bidil is very clear in underscoring how his *taḥqīq* of natural phenomena is first of all a practice of acute observation, marked by a vocal departure from inherited knowledge. A particular stress is put on the key notion of the “gaze” (*nigāh*), closely related to one of the most decisive icons of Bidil’s poetic, the mirror (*ā’īna*). In an intimistic passage, depicting himself as a talisman made of the four elements, the author laments the prevalence of the stationary and frozen element of earth (*khāk*) to the detriment of fire (*nār*), the element connected to activity, learning, and transformation. At the end of such considerations, *taḥqīq* appears as directly connected, namely, to both fire and the gaze:

kasān-ī rā ki bar taḥqīq rāh-ast
nafās chūn sham‘ mawqūf-i nigāh-ast

The breath of those people whose path follows *taḥqīq*
 is dependent upon their gaze, like the candle.²⁸

Elsewhere in Bidil’s *oeuvre*, from his *mathnawī Ṭilism-i Ḥayrat* (“The Talisman of Astonishment”) to his autobiographic *Chahār ‘Unşur* (“The Four Elements”), the material microcosm is a key anthropologic theme, and also recalls, to be sure, prestigious precursors in the “new diction” such as Sā’ib-i Tabrīzī.²⁹ Here, however, the four elements are employed to make sense of *taḥqīq* as a decisive mode of existence: the sense of the ephemeral occasion of phenomenic “life” (embodied by the “breath”/*nafās*) depends on the capacity of observing reality while illuminating it, like the burning candle. *Taḥqīq*, the realization of the substantial structure of reality (*ḥaqīqa*), can only take place in the observing, and inquiring, eye:

chi khaffāshī-st ay mahrūm-i jāwīd
ke az chashm-i tu panhān mānd khurshīd
dil-at ā’īna wa ‘ālam nadīdan

28 Bidil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 2.

29 There are a few monographs in Persian relating to the subject: one on Bidil and his autobiography (Asadullāh Ḥabīb, *Bidil wa chahār ‘unşur*, [Kabul, 1988]) and two on Sā’ib-i Tabrīzī (Zahrā Ḥasanī, *Kārburd-i chahār ‘unşur wa mażmūnsāzī az ān dar dīwān-i Şā’ib-i Tabrīzī*, [Tihārān, 2013] and Ilhām Musawī, *Anāşir-i arba’a (āb, khāk, ātash wa āb) dar dīwān-i Şā’ib-i Tabrīzī*, [Tihārān, 2017]).

*nigāh-at bāda wa ghaflat kashīdan [...]
hamīn chashm-ī ki shāyān-i tajallī-st
chu gardad basta zindān-i tajallī-st*

What a bat you are, oh you, deprived in eternity:
Even the sun remains hidden in front of your eyes.
Your heart is a mirror, and you don't see the world.
Your gaze is like wine, and you are just unaware.
The same eye, which is the proper place of manifestation,
if it remains closed, becomes the prison of manifestation.³⁰

Ordinary language, or, better, the reading of the world through the filter of acquired semiotic schemes, is what prevents the observer from actually seeing it. In the *Chahār Unşur*, Bīdil insists on this notion, saying that the concept of “spring” (*bahār*) – an inherited label of a pre-codified reality – baffles him, while he looks for the perceptual “realization” (*taḥqīq*) of “color” and “perfume.”³¹ *Taḥqīq* is realized in the open “eye,” internalized as the “mirror” of the heart, while the “ear” becomes the place for *taqlīd*: Bīdil insists repeatedly on the defectiveness of the “ear” (*gūsh*) and “listening” (*shinīdan*), said to be the ultimate reason for “blindness”:

*dar īnjā zarra khurshīdāshiyān-ast
sarāb āghush-i baḥr-i bīkarān-ast
hamānā kurī-ast ay hūshdushman
ki dīdanhā-t gum shud dar shinīdan*

Here, a particle has its nest in the sun
and the mirage embraces an endless ocean.
This is blindness, oh enemy of intellect:
listening too much, you lost your acts of seeing.³²

Following a philosophically pregnant stylistic practice of the “new diction,” the plural suffix *-hā* is added to the infinitive form *dīdan* “to see” in order to mark distance from essentializing attitudes.³³ In this perspective, the innumerable,

³⁰ Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 2.

³¹ Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 4, 157.

³² Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 4.

³³ In this respect Gianroberto Scarcia speaks, quite aptly, of a contrast between the “unyielding plurality” of “actions, the *energeins*” and “the singular fixity of the *ergons*, or static virtues.” Scarcia, “Il contagio,” 95.

instable opportunities of seeing (perhaps better, reflecting) the reflection of a particle of dust dancing in the light or, paradoxically, even the illusion of water in a mirage, become instruments for achieving, in the observer, the *taḥqīq* of Being, but only on the condition that pre-codified narratives do not interfere. The necessity of getting rid of the screening of “fables,” which are openly accused, later on in the same paragraph, of “scratching the ear of the heart (*gūsh-i dil*)” and “forbidding the gaze from seeing the manifestation (*jilwa*),” is elaborated in several lines, where textual items classically related to the revelation of Truth, such as the mirror of Alexander and the fire of Sinai, become – as objects of *taqlid* – paradoxical obstacles to revelation itself. Thus, instead of struggling to imagine the rock of Bisotun (the scene of the ill-fated romance of Farhād and Shīrīn), says Bīdil, it is better to contemplate every brick (made of the dust of infinite lovers and beloveds) which is here in front of us, as if it were a “place of pilgrimage” (*ziyāratgāh*).³⁴ Or, in another line:

agar hūsh āshnā-yi dars-i maʿnī-st
jahān yak nuskha-yi majnūn u laylī-st

If your intellect understands the lesson of meaning,
the world is a text of innumerable Laylās and Majnūns³⁵

The fractal dimensions of the phenomenic world, its luxuriant metamorphical shapes, are the locus for observing the iconic love story of Layla and Majnun, just like every other “fable” from the past. Laylā and Majnūn, like Farhād and Shīrīn, the mirror of Alexander, the fire of Sinai, the rock of Bisotun, and so on, are embodied in the natural landscape and in its most simple elements, starting from the inorganic level. Thus, in the *Tūr-e maʿrifat*, the perturbed contours of the dark monsoon cloud, allusively conjuring the classical Indic motif of Kṛṣṇa as the black nimbus (*megha*) as well as Ibn ʿArabī’s image of the all-encompassing, primordial ‘*amā*’ (cloud),³⁶ can be investigated as a “melancholic smoke brought to the sky by the long hair of Majnūn’s head.”³⁷ The author’s research on metaphors shows, in this perspective, its weight as a fact of philosophy as well as of history and geography: looking at this as a method,

34 Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 4.

35 Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 4.

36 In Chittick’s words, the ‘*amā*’ is “identical with Nondelimited Imagination considered as the very substance within which all things in the cosmos take shape [...]. The cloud – like all clouds – undergoes constant transformation in the outward form, though its substance remains the same” (William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, New York, 1989, 126–127).

37 Pellò, “Atmosfera indo-persiane,” 297–298.

Bidil's imaginative *taḥqīq* can find Majnun in the monsoon atmosphere of Bairat as well as in the devotional vaishnava climate of Vrindavana, seen as the “valley of Majnun” in a famous passage of the *Chahār Unsur*.³⁸

The close proximity of nature, the observability of its phenomena by an implied observer, is what makes it a privileged object for a de-idealizing *taḥqīq*. Bidil repeatedly insists on the dialectic poles of closeness and distance, and the relative directionality (forward/backward) of the observer's movement: not differently from the ear (*gūsh*), he says, the backward-looking (*dar qafā*) eye does not know (*nashnākht*) anything other than tales, and is not able to see the “meadows” (*chaman*) lying just before it; consequently, the intellect (*hūsh*) prefers “illusions” (*wahm*) instead of “science” (*maʿrifat*).³⁹ The process of de-idealization of reality/*ḥaqīqat*, now reflected in the polished mirror of the observer's gaze, and its actualization beyond the semiotic nets of pre-codified labels and essentializing background voices, calls for a renovated look at the immersive dimension of adjacency:

ba dūrān gar rasīdanhā-st mushkil
zi nazdīkān nabāyad būd ghāfil
agar taḥqīq-i maʿnī nuskhaārā-st
ba har jā chashm wā gardad tamāshā-st
kunūn dar kūh-i bayrāt āb u rang-ī-st
ki har sang-ash ba dil burdan farang-ī-st

If reaching those things which are faraway is difficult,
 you don't need to ignore those things which are near.
 If the *taḥqīq* of meaning embellishes the book,
 there is a vision to contemplate everywhere your eye is open.
 Now in the mountain of Bairat there are such waters and colors
 that every stone is a Frankish beauty, stealing your heart.⁴⁰

The “location of *taḥqīq*” is, here, clearly expressed: the historical, identified, perceptual present of Bairat's natural scenery. Bidil is interested, to modulate an expression used by Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam with reference to Bidil's close acquaintance Anand Rām Mukhlis, in a textual “discovery

38 Bidil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 4, 148.

39 Bidil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 5.

40 Bidil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 5.

of the familiar” of Northern Indian landscapes.⁴¹ In the very same years, in Delhi, Afzal al-Din Sarkhush famously expressed a comparable approach to the Mughal connected present in the introduction of his *Tazkira Kalimāt al-Shu‘arā* (“Biographies of the Words of the Poets”): Differently from all the others who came before him, he says, his book will only deal with the poets of his own times, from the reign of Shah Jahan onwards, because there is no good in reporting (*naql*, a term closely connected to *taqlīd*) what comes from the past and is already known.⁴² From this perspective, the transformation of the stones of Bairat into “Frankish beauties,” a clear allusion to the diffusion of European painting in the Mughal-Safavid world, should be read as a textual surfacing of the empirical present in which Bīdil’s poetic *taḥqīq* is declaredly located: not only is the observed, present reality of Bairat’s nature the object of Bīdil’s *taḥqīq*, but also the analogical referents are to be searched for in the same live temporality. After all, in the well-known story of Bīdil’s own portrait narrated in the autobiographical *Chahār Unsur*, the author explicitly hails the transition from the “past” centers of fabulous pictorial art (Greece and China, according to Persian literary conventions) to the closer, experienced ones of Farang (Europe) and Hindustan. It is in this perspective that the “real” Anup Chhatr, one of the emperor Aurangzeb’s portraitists and a personal acquaintance of Bīdil, takes the place of the “mythological” Mani and Bihzad.⁴³ Bīdil’s reflections on the preeminence of the present as the laboratory of his *taḥqīq* continue as follows:

ma raw jāy-i digar jāy-i tu īnjā-st
tamāshā-yi tapishhā-yi tu īnjā-st
ba ‘ayshābād-i īn mahfil rasīdan
may-i taḥqīq-i jām-ash nāchashīdan
zi ahl-i i‘tibār-i hūsh dūr-ast
agar hūsh-ī-st taftīsh-ī żarūr-ast

Do not go anywhere else, your place is here.
 The place to observe your palpitations is here.
 Reaching the joyful setting of this assembly
 and not tasting the wine of *taḥqīq* from its cup

41 Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Discovering the Familiar: Notes on the Travel-Account of Anand Ram Mukhlis, 1745,” *South Asia Research* 16, no. 2 (1996): 131–154.

42 Muḥammad Afzal Sarkhush, *Kalimāt al-shu‘arā*, ed .M. H. Maḥwī Lakhnawī (Madras, 1951).

43 Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 4, 282.

is foreign to those who value intellect:
if intellect is there, inquiry (*taftīsh*) is necessary.⁴⁴

This is a quite precise description of what scholars have often identified, albeit somewhat vaguely, as one of Bīdil's main conceptual motifs, the "occasion" (*furṣat*) represented by the phenomenological existence of the observer. The structural connection between this *furṣat*, which is read by Bausani as a "creative instant" (*attimo creativo*),⁴⁵ and *taḥqīq* is here clearly theorized: the "realization" of existence through the observation of external realities corresponds to the occasion of perceiving, at the same time and with no essential contrast, the internal microcosm (the "palpitations" of the living being) where this "realization" is reflected. The discovery of *physis*, i.e. the unfolding of the substance (*ḥaqīqat, jawhar*) of Being (*wujūd*), is dependent upon the implied presence of intellect (*hūsh*, but also "conscience," a meaning clearly shown, for instance, in the canonical expression *bīhūsh* "senseless") from which *taftīsh* ("inquiry") descends. The latter term, a *maṣdar* of the Arabic root *f-t-sh* (expressing the idea of "examining, verifying") in the causative form, is of course semantically overlapping with, and formally parallel to, *taḥqīq*.

Taḥqīq is directly mentioned four other times in the text, invariably connected to conceptual icons and metaphorical events linked to the sphere of sight, epiphany/revelation, and observation: 1) the "mirror of *taḥqīq*" (*āyina-yi taḥqīq*) shows the nature of the echo in the mountains: a scream, says Bīdil, can work as an "experiment" (*imtihān*);⁴⁶ 2) "roughness" (*durushtī*) means "not opening the eyebrows" and thus being "the enemy of *taḥqīq*," when exploring the stony imagery of the "mountains" (*kuhistān*);⁴⁷ 3) the "road of *taḥqīq*" (*jādai-yi taḥqīq*) brings, following the inductive hint of perfume, to the apparition of a bush of jasmine "in the eye" (*dar dīda*), against a background of fiery images conjuring the "bush of fire" on mount Sinai;⁴⁸ 4) "careful consideration" (*ta'am-mul*) is likened to the "spectacles of the *taḥqīq* of entities" (*'aynak-i taḥqīq-i ashyā*): the realization of the Real in the eye of the researcher needs steadfast observation – through *taḥqīqī* glasses – making possible the research on the "innumerable manifestations" (*ṣad jilwa*), and their presentification⁴⁹ to the

44 Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 17.

45 Bausani, "Note sulla natura," 218.

46 Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 23.

47 Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 24.

48 Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 44.

49 I think here of Husserl's use of the term *Vergegenwärtigung*: cf. Mark P. Drost, "The primacy of perception in Husserl's theory of imagining," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50, no. 3 (1990): 569–582.

observer (“if there is careful observation [*ta’ammul*], the manifestation is ours” says Bīdil).⁵⁰

This last passage quickly brings us to the conclusion of this essay, an introductory exploration that will hopefully be the starting point for a more in-depth study. The key methodological notion of *ta’ammul* is mentioned in the same section of the poem as the above passage (a meditative *ishārat* or “indication”) as many as five times in seven lines, and the centrality of *taḥqīq* is reinforced by the contextual use of the closely connected *taḥaqquq* (the existential “realization,” says Bīdil, that opened his eyes on the “secrets of water and earth” [*ramz-e āb u khāk*] i.e., the phenomenic world of matter). Describing his resulting discoveries, Bīdil writes that thanks to this reflective observation of nature, it became certain (*yaqīn*) to him that “in every drop (*qatra*) there is a life (*jān*), and that “a world (*jahān*) is hidden in every fistful of earth (*kaf-i khāk*).”⁵¹ To evoke the conceptual world of another Italian thinker of the “nova filosofia,” the Neapolitan Giordano Bruno, Bīdil’s imaginative *taḥqīq* appears to be a tool to investigate the infinite *vicissitudo* (alternation, mutation) of matter, or, alternatively, to realize the *explicatio* (“unfolding”)⁵² of the *natura naturans*, at both the macroscopic and microscopic level.⁵³ Openly contrasted to *taqlīd* in a *ghazal*, where it is defined as an “euphoria” (*nash’a*) unknowable to imitation,⁵⁴ *taḥqīq* is at the same time a Ka’ba (i.e., the ultimate goal) – the expression *Ka’ba-yi taḥqīq* (the Ka’ba of *taḥqīq*) in fact appears repeatedly in

50 Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 18.

51 Bīdil, *Kulliyāt*, v. 3, 17–18.

52 On the revelatory – as for Bīdil – nature of *explicatio* in Bruno see Salvatore Carannante, *Unigenita natura. Dio e universo in Giordano Bruno* (Roma, 2018), 62–66.

53 According to Nicoletta Tirinnanzi, Bruno is relatively little interested in the abstract infinity of the divine principle, highlighting, on the contrary “the inexhaustible action with which the divine principle establishes and shapes the totality of beings” (Nicoletta Tirinnanzi, *Nota ai testi [Lampas triginta statuarum]*, in M. Ciliberto et. al, eds., *Giordano Bruno, Opere Magiche* (Milano, 2000), LXXV–CXVIII, XCIX). Tirinnanzi’s words can easily be applied to the Bīdilian attitudes discussed here.

54 Mirzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil, *Kulliyāt-i Bīdil*, 3 vols., eds. A. Bihdārband and P. Dākānī (Tihārān, 1997), v. 1, 468.

his *dīwān*⁵⁵ – and the road (*jāda*) leading to it.⁵⁶ As we have seen, the author clearly describes his *taḥqīq* as a path to look at nature with new “spectacles” (*ʿaynak*), embodying the “newness” of the poetic imaginative style of his times. *Taḥqīq* is, indeed, as much a stylistic fact as it is a philosophical notion, with no contrast between the two. I suggest that we understand this notion, in Bidil’s textual *praxis*, as the epistemic definition of the above mentioned “microscopic” approach to *physis* ascribed by Futūḥī to early modern Persian poetics. *Taḥqīq* should be considered, in other words (and as Bidil ultimately declares), as one of the key concepts to understand the novelty of *tāzagūyī* or “modern diction”: a conceptual procedure which finds its rhetorical textualization in the ubiquitous figure of the *tamthīl*, “analogy” or “similitude,” more accurately described as an analogical *mise en scene* placing the observer in the mirror of the observed natural phenomenon, and vice-versa.

Masterfully analyzing the role of imagination as the only tool for unveiling the infinite *vicissitudo* of life-matter (*vita-materia*) in Giordano Bruno, Nicoletta Tirinnanzi writes, among several other illuminating passages, that “[...] the tension pushing phantasy to forge ever-changing shapes is, in itself, a reflection of the universal life. In this perspective, *phantasia* can emulate the work of nature, molding new images of the universe, bound to collide with old beliefs and to germinate as new insights, transforming the ‘face’ of civilizations.”⁵⁷

Texts such as the *Ṭūr-i maʿrifat*, and Bidil’s *phantasia naturalis* as a whole, provide a compelling opportunity to demonstrate a truly connected Eurasian perspective on the early modern Persosphere, one that extends well beyond the specific scope of *physis* and literary imagination. Just as it does for Tommaso Campanella and the other revolutionary Italian thinkers of the Renaissance, the ability to re-imagine nature and the immediacy of meteorology

55 E.g., Bidil, *Kulliyāt-i Bidil*, v. 2, 488, 790, 862. The image is not at all new in the Persian hypertext and appears already in classical Sufi writings such as a poem often attributed to Sanāʿī of Ghazna (d. 1131), entitled *Ṭarīq al-taḥqīq* “The path of *taḥqīq*” (Bo Utas, *Ṭarīq Ut-taḥqīq: A Sufi Mathnavi Ascribed to Ḥakīm Sanāʿī of Ghazna and Probably Composed by Aḥmad B. Al-Ḥasan B. Muḥammad An-Naxčavānī*, [London, 1978], 10), ‘Aṭṭār’s memorial of saints (Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-awliyā*, ed. M. Istiʿlāmī, [Tehran], 492) and Jāmī’s *ghazals* (‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Dīwān-i kāmīl-i Jāmī*, ed. H. Razī, [Tehran, 1962], 651). As shown by Binbaş, who mentions its use in a letter addressed by the Bahmanid minister Maḥmūd Gāwān to the Timurid intellectual Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī (d. 1454), the diffusion of this conceptual metaphor is not limited to the strictly poetic dimension and points to a widespread sensibility for this particular ontology of knowledge (cf. Binbaş, *The Islamicate Republic of Letters*, 96).

56 E. g. Bidil, *Kulliyāt-i Bidil*, v. 2, 750.

57 Tirinnanzi, *Umbra naturae*, 292.

represents, for Bīdil, the necessary starting point to re-investigate the reality of the world and the inherited rhetoric-linguistic structures veiling it. Starting anew from the perceptual solidity of the meteorological present of the northern Aravallis, the master of Patna, from the philosophically cosmopolitan observation point of late seventeenth-century Mughal India, wears the spectacles of his imaginative *taḥqīq*, using them to unveil a whole set of “new worlds” and microscopic utopias, from bubbles to blossoms.