

## 5.—Cohabitation, périphérie, diaspora

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### THE BREATH OF THE IMAM

On the Safavid Christ of Mullā Muḥsin Fayḏ-i Kāshānī (1599-1679)

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*Abstract* — This paper focuses on the handling of the figure of Jesus Christ (*'īsā, masīḥ*) in Mullā Muḥsin Fayḏ-i Kāshānī's Persian verse, in order to get a first glimpse of the poetic "Christology" of one of the most outstanding disciples of the main intellectual figure of the Safavid 1600s, the philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī, d. ca. 1636). As a matter of fact, while the relevance and nature of Christian imagery in Persian poetry have been repeatedly observed as far as "classical" pre-1500s authors are concerned, the interaction of the codified Christology of Persian literary culture with the renewed religious, political, and socio-cultural conditions of the Safavid-Mughal *koiné* remains largely unexplored. By collecting and analysing the occurrences of a basic vocabulary relating to Jesus in Fayḏ-i Kāshānī's lyrical collections, I show how a canonical set of metaphorical imagery is conceptually and aesthetically recasted in the renewed context of Persianate early modernity, at the crossroads of Sadrian philosophy, speculative Sufism, Shiite devotion and poetic innovation. In particular, I uncover a complex net of textual interactions and superimpositions between the Persian poetic phenomenology of Christ and the pivotal image of the twelfth Imām.

*Keywords* — Fayḏ-i Kāshānī; Mahdī; Jesus Christ; Safavid; Persian poetry.

During our conversations on Christianity in the *Dār al-islām*, Professor Zekiyan has constantly been drawing my attention on the methodological imperative of exposing and going beyond any enthusiastic idealisation or consolatory myth of "tolerance". At the same time, he has been passionately advocating the expediency of philologically assessing, especially for the Ottoman and Safavid context, the strong political and aesthetic-religious underpinnings of a uniquely rooted lexicon of understanding

and accommodation.<sup>1</sup> Very laterally linking to such discourses, as a humble *tuhfa-yi darwish* to Father Levon I present here the first results of a brief philological excavation in Safavid literary culture, looking for the traces of Christian imagery in the lyrical verses of an important Persian intellectual figure of the 1600s, the philosopher Mullā Muḥsin Fayẓ-i Kāshānī.<sup>2</sup> More in detail, I collect the occurrences of a basic vocabulary relating to the figure of Jesus Christ in the *dīwān* of one of the most outstanding disciples of the main intellectual figure of the Safavid 1600s, the philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī, d. ca. 1636), in order to get a glimpse of the handling of a canonical set of imagery by a key figure of the renewed context of Persianate early modernity, at the crossroads of Sadrian philosophy, speculative Sufism, Shiite devotion and poetic innovation. As a matter of fact, while the relevance and nature of Christian imagery in Persian poetry has been repeatedly observed as far as ‘classical’ pre-Timurid authors are concerned, from Niẓāmī Ganjawī to Rūmī to, especially, the ‘Byzantine’ Khāqānī Shirwanī,<sup>3</sup> the interaction of the codified Christology of Persian literary culture with the renewed religious, political, and socio-cultural conditions of the Safavid-Mughal *koiné* remains largely unexplored.<sup>4</sup> Several interrelated questions can be asked: how is the rich set of Christian lexicon and imagery used among the poets of the “modern diction” (*tāzaguyī*)? To what extent does the “style of imagination” (*ṭarz-i khiyāl*) impact on its textual accommodation? Does the poetic handling of such imagery somehow dialogue with the contemporary

<sup>1</sup> Such an approach can be easily recognised along the whole relevant scientific production of Father Levon, who has been able to apply this epistemic filter to Venetian history (e.g. Zekiyan 1978), the Armenian genocide (e.g. Zekiyan 2001), contemporary politics (e.g. Zekiyan 1994), religious identity (e.g. Zekiyan 2003), and, of course, Irano-Armenian relations (e.g. Zekiyan 2005). In the latter perspective, Professor Zekiyan’s nuanced observations on the historically fertile results of the forced emigration of Armenians during the reign of Shāh ‘Abbās I, as well as his balanced discussion of the most authoritative research on the subject (starting with Herzog 1990), can indeed be read as a model for dealing with these subjects, including of course the Ottoman dimension (see Zekiyan 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Born in Kāshān to a family of scholars at the very end of the sixteenth century (1006 or 1007 *hijrī*), he famously married the daughter of his *ustād* Mullā Ṣadrā, who also gave him the *takhalluṣ* Fayẓ. A prolific polymath and philosophical authority (essential data and bibliography in the encyclopedic entries by Chittick 2012 and Algar 1999), his poetry is relatively little studied (a recent discussion of its stylistic features, is Yazdānpanāh and Nayyirī 2020). On his appraisal of Sufism, fundamental to understand his lyrical output, some important remarks can be found in Lewisohn 1999 and, especially, Zargar 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Minorsky’s study of Khāqānī’s “Christian” *qaṣīda* (Minorsky 1945) is still fundamental, together with Kazzāzī’s monographic work (Kazzāzī 2007). Among the vast bibliography on, and innumerable references to, the textualisation of Christ in Persian, I limit myself to mention here, besides the relevant entries in Encyclopaedia Iranica (s.v. “Christianity”), the dedicated studies by Dehqāni-Tafti 1990 and Āryān 1990.

<sup>4</sup> This is in striking contrast with the wide bibliography on Christianity in the Safavid realm (rich references can be found in Thomas and Chesworth 2017, 493-692).

novelties in philosophical thought, in a context where poetry is a powerful philosophical medium?<sup>5</sup> Against the background of Safavid official Twelver devotion, is there any specific Shiite reading of such material? What about the possible subtle interaction of the Islamic Christ of the Persian poetic ethos with the contemporary religious debates and cultural exchanges with both local and European Christians?<sup>6</sup> Taking these questions very seriously, I do not pretend to provide any articulate answers in such scanty notes of mine: the short anthology presented here is to be read as the beginning of a new inquiry inspired by the intellectual figure of Professor Zekiyan.

I focus exclusively on two lexical items: *masīḥ/masīḥā* “Christ” and *ʿīsā* “Jesus” (plus, in one single case, *rūḥullāh* “Spirit of God”, a common Arabic epithet for Jesus). *Masīḥ/masīḥā* occurs in nine separate *bayts* of Fayz-i Kāshānī’s lyrical *dīwān*.<sup>7</sup> At a first glance, the figure of the Messiah appears connected to the conventional set of related images already explored by the pre-Timurid canon. In the following couple of lines, for instance, *masīḥā*/Christ is presented as a model of asceticism and self-effacement, accompanied by his donkey (*khar*, usually alluding to the coarseness of the body as opposed to the subtlety of breath, i.e. Christ himself) and, especially, linked to height of the (fourth) sky where he ascended according to some commonly diffused Islamic traditions:

*bar farāz-i āsmān kī jāy yābad chūn masīḥā*  
*juz kaṣī k-ū dar zamīn fikr-i khar u bār-ash nabāshad*<sup>8</sup>

Who will find a place in the height of the skies like Christ  
if not those who, on the earth, do not care about their donkey and load?

*bī taʿalluq chūn masīḥā zī tu dar rūy-i zamīn*  
*tā farāz-i āsmān-i chārumīn-at jā shawad*<sup>9</sup>

Live on the earth with no ties, like the Christ,  
so that your place will be high in the fourth sky.

<sup>5</sup> Besides the ambitious comparative propositions by Meisami 2020 (especially 59-66), a philologically fertile reading of Saʿib-i Tabrīzī’s poetry as existentialist atomism reflecting the Sadrian ideas on *ḥaraka jawhariyya* (substantial motion) is Futūḥī 2021. Some observations on philosophical poetry in the Safavid context can be also found in Amir-Moezzi 2005.

<sup>6</sup> A fascinating perspective, for instance, is offered by texts such as Italian missionary Paolo Piromalli’s doctrinary treatise on Christianity, penned by the Dominican in Persian in 1651, where the author clearly resorts to a whole set of lexical/conceptual *topoi* connected to both contemporary Safavid philosophy and Persian literary culture (e.g. the use of *wujūd* “Being/existence” in the opening remarks: cf. Piromalli MS, ff. 1a-3b).

<sup>7</sup> I have used Muḥammad Paymān’s edition, collecting Fayz’s *ghazals* and quatrains (Fayz-i Kāshānī 1354). On the separate work called *Shawq-i Mahdī*, which is also object of our study, see *infra*.

<sup>8</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 148.

<sup>9</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 167.

In the first line, the contrast between pneumatic lightness and the heaviness of worldly ties is clearly conjured by the complementary diads Christ/sky (*masīḥā/āsmān*) and donkey/earth (*khar/zamīn*). In the second, the exhortation to be *bī ta'alluq* “with no ties” in this world — thus, again, to imitate Christ’s asceticism — may even contain a rhetorical *talmīḥ* (allusion) to the Docetist view of the crucifixion followed in the Qur’an, where Christ is not hanged to the Cross (its four arms often representing the four elements of material creation) and is directly raised to the sky.<sup>10</sup> Be that as it may, in the following *bayt*, the evocation of the celestial abode of Jesus (*samā*) couples with another classical Perso-Islamic *topos*, i.e. Christ’s miraculous ability to revive the dead.

*kū masīḥ-ī ki murda zinda kunad*  
*khabar-ī chand az samā gūyad*<sup>11</sup>

Where is a Christ who will revive the dead,  
and bring us some news from the skies?

Similar themes are found in a few other more elaborated lines, where Fayz-i Kāshānī draws on the well-known miraculous connection between Christ and the “breath” (*nafas*) of life:

*īstādan nafas-ī nazd-e masīḥānafas-ī*  
*bih zi ṣad sāla namāz-ast ba pāyān burdan*<sup>12</sup>

To remain, for the time of a breath, close to someone who has the breath of Christ  
is preferable than performing perfect prayers for one hundred years.

*az dam-e rūḥparwar-ash yāft ḥayāt jān-i man*  
*chūn nafas-i masīḥ k-ān yāft wafāt-rā rafū*<sup>13</sup>

My soul has been revived by his spirit-nourishing breath:  
it is similar to the breath of Christ, who was able to mend death.

In the first *bayt*, the evocation of a *masīḥānafas* ([one endowed] with the breath of Christ, a compound famously used in a well-known *ghazal* by

<sup>10</sup> As far as the Safavid context is concerned, Fayz’s most illustrious contemporary Ṣā’ib-i Tabrīzī (ca. 1592-1676) connects the idea of (the absence of) *ta'alluq* to the figure of Christ in several occasions (e.g. Ṣā’ib-i Tabrīzī, 1985-95, n. 161, 330, 1837). Ṣā’ib’s *bayts* often include the trope of the “needle” (*sūzan*) that, according to some traditions, Jesus had with himself during his ascent to the highest sky and, being considered by the angels as a symbol of attachment, prevented him to complete his celestial climb. The theme might ultimately derive from an elaboration of the image of the nail of Crucifixion.

<sup>11</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 136.

<sup>12</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 315.

<sup>13</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 351.

Ḥāfiẓ<sup>14</sup>) is to be read in the context of a poem all focused on the superiority of inner growth and deep understanding as compared to the deeds and duties of exoteric religion; interestingly enough, *masīḥānafas* can be a metaphorical embodiment of the Imam, as suggested by the use, in the *bayt* immediately ensuing, by the expression *wāliullāh* “friend of God” with an identical logical meaning (“to circumambulate once the abode of a friend of God is better than collecting one hundred *ḥajjs*”) and by the fact that, as we will see, Ḥāfiẓ’s use of the expression is declaredly read somewhere else by Fayẓ-i Kāshānī as referring to the twelfth Imam. In the second line, the author invents a true *murā’āt-i nazīr* — a semantic *accumulatio* — around the “reviving breath” of Christ (gathering together the expressions *dam*, *rūḥparwar*, *ḥayāt*, *jān*, *nafas* and the contrasting *wafāt*). The following line keeps all the discussed themes together:

*chu az ḥaqq dam zanam parwāz gīram*  
*masīḥ-am ān dam in tan murgh-i ṭayn-ast*<sup>15</sup>

When my breath speaks of Truth I take flight:  
 I am Christ, then, and my body is a clay bird.

In Fayẓ’s *irfānī* reading, the famous miracle of Christ making birds of clay and insufflating life in them, mentioned in Qur’an 5, 110 and originating in the apocryphal Gospels (cf. the 2nd c. *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*),<sup>16</sup> becomes, similarly to the above seen cases of Jesus and the donkey, an image of the relation between the subtle nature of life/breath and the roughness of the body. Here, however, the transformative action of the word of Truth (which is made of breath, *dam*) changes the status of the body itself, against the background of a philosophical *ghazal* devoted by Fayẓ to a revelatory exploration of the epiphanic nature of the microcosm: as he says in the third line of the poem, “the two worlds (*du ‘ālam*) find their place in me:/don’t think that my existence (*wujūd*) is [just] this one”.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ḥāfiẓ 1983-4, n. 235; the *ghazal* containing this expression will be the object of re-elaboration in another work attributed to Fayẓ-i Kāshānī, the *Shawq-i Mahdī*, as we shall observe further on.

<sup>15</sup> Fayẓ-i Kāshānī 1975, 66.

<sup>16</sup> On this miracle, see Robinson 1989.

<sup>17</sup> The philosophical implications of the classical poetic cohesion between Christ and the spirit/breath are not negligible: the conventional trope recasted by Fayẓ as a hint at a transformative idea of Man as a pneumatic microcosm should be read against the background of a wider Persianate context marked by a thick net of relevant speculations on the nature of breath, from medicine to Sufism (which connects Iran and South Asia as early as the 14th c., as shown by Ernst 2011; see also, on the medical implications, Speziale 2018, 114-8; some seminal observations on Ibn ‘Arabī’s views on breath can be found in a long footnote by Corbin 1958, fn. 23, pt. 1, ch. 1).

Christ becomes, thus, part of a metaphorical map of the macrocosmic self reflected in the mirror of a transfigured body, against the background of a declared Shiite reading: not only, for instance, the heart is the “meaning (*maʿnā*) of the supreme Throne (*ʿarsh-i barīn*) and the eyes are a “talisman (*ṭilism*) constructed on the soul (*jān*)”, but the substance of the observer himself — the speaking subject, the mirror or shell (*ṣadaf*) of the Absolute — is made of the “love of the *ahl al-bayt*” (*sirisht az mihr-i ahl-i bayt dāram*). It is worth noticing here that, in Fayz’s poetical world, Jesus is evoked two times with the well-known epithet *rūḥullāh* “Spirit of God” (on the basis of *Qurʾān* 4,171). In one case, in the context of another *ghazal* devoted to Man (*insān*) as the microcosm, the perfectly human figure of Christ is only very indirectly foreshadowed by the relevant image of the soul/life (*jān*) and the spirit (*rūḥ*) itself:

*chu insān buwad rūḥ-i āfarīnīsh*  
*zi rūḥullāh durr-i jān āfarīdand*<sup>18</sup>

Since Man is the spirit of Creation  
 they created the pearl of the soul with the Spirit of God.

Somewhere else, in a complex anthropogonic poem, the epithet summons the Qurʾanic image of the infant declaring himself Prophet in his mother lap (19,30-33) and the complementary theme of Mary’s silence (19,26):

*gar ba nuṭq āyīm pīsh az waqt chūn rūḥullāh-īm*  
*w-ar khamush bāshīm hangām-i sukhan chūn maryam-īm*<sup>19</sup>

If we speak ahead of time we are like Jesus  
 and if we remain silent when it’s time to speak, we are like Mary.

Differently from the isolated case of *rūḥullāh*, Fayz’s poetic treatment of the term *ʿisā* — the most common name to refer to Jesus in his corpus — shows no noteworthy difference as compared to that of *masīḥ/masīḥā* and can be quickly recapitulated. The “miracle” of Jesus is used as a hyperbolic term of comparison to describe the power of the glance of the beloved and linked to the idea of the resurrection of the lover-poet:

*dar har nigah-i hazār fitna*  
*īn muʿjiza-yi kudām ʿisā-st*<sup>20</sup>

A thousand upheavals in every glance:  
 this is the miracle of which Jesus?

<sup>18</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 135.

<sup>19</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 247.

<sup>20</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 67.

*bar mazār-am gar guzār ārad zi sar gīram ḥayāt  
yā rabb ān 'īsānafas gar bar mazār-am bigzarad*<sup>21</sup>

If he passes by my tomb I will be revived:  
o Lord, if that one with the breath of Jesus passes by my tomb!

As already observed and expected, the donkey accompanies Jesus as the body (and worldly ties) accompanies the essence of breath/life, contrasting the latter's celestial tendencies; in the third, interesting case, however, *'īsā*/Jesus rides the donkey of the body not as a detached ascetic or an ascending soul but as the cosmic energy of *'ishq*/love blessing it with life and meaning:

*tan khar-ast u 'alaf hamīkhwāhad  
jān chu 'īsā khudāy-rā jūyān*<sup>22</sup>

The body is a donkey and needs its hay,  
the soul, like Jesus, only looks for God.

*tā chand ūftīm dar ayn u gil chu khar  
chūn 'īsā az zamīn ba sūy-i āsmān rawīm*<sup>23</sup>

How long will we continue to fall in pain and dust like a donkey?  
Like Jesus, let's go from this earth to the sky.

*'īsā-yi 'ishq ar nabuvad bar sar-am  
kay rawad in lāshakhar-i lang-i man*<sup>24</sup>

If the Jesus of love was not in my head  
how could this broken donkey walk?

The above discussed, canonical link between *'īsā*/Jesus and the sky is dealt with by Fayz as an independent theme in another couple of lines:

*chu 'īsā jāy-i ū dar āsmān-ast  
ki dar rūy-i zamīn jā'-ī nadārad*<sup>25</sup>

Just like Jesus, his place is in the sky:  
there's no place for him on this earth.

*yā bi-ḥabli 'llāh āwīzīm dast-i i'tiṣām  
hamchūn 'īsā bar farāz-i āsmān jawlān kunīm*<sup>26</sup>

or we hold faithfully to the rope of God  
and like Jesus we'll fluctuate in the height of the skies

<sup>21</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 101.

<sup>22</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 337.

<sup>23</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 298.

<sup>24</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 308.

<sup>25</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 180.

<sup>26</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1975, 268.

The “rope of God” is a direct quotation from the *Qur’ān* (3,103), and the whole first emistich is a Persian interpretation of the verse where it appears: in fact, the suggested image of Christ swinging in the sky while holding the divine rope is to be read in the context of a *ghazal* where, in a series of verses built on alternative situations (or...or...or...), several characters of the prophetic history appear (namely, Abraham, Ismael, Noah, Muḥammad and Moses), prelude to the meeting of the poetic *persona* of the Lover with the Beloved (*jānān*). The same Qur’anic “rope of God” is explicitly identified with the “love for the *ahl al-bayt*” in another *ghazal* (*bi-ḥabli ’llāh-i mihr-i ahl-i bayt-ast i’tiṣām-i mā*): the awaited Beloved, i.e. the *insān-i kāmīl* as a hypostasis of God’s beauty,<sup>27</sup> clearly alludes here, as suggested above while dealing with another textual locus, to the idea of the future *parousia* of the Imam.

As a matter of fact, a clearly stated identification of the Beloved with the twelfth Imam is the conceptual fulcrum around which an entire poetical work attributed to Fayḏ-i Kāshānī, entitled *Shawq-i Mahdī* “Love of the Mahdī”, programmatically revolves. A personal reading of Hafiz’s *ghazals* as lyrical celebrations of the hidden Imam, a perfect object of praise (*mamdūh*), love (*ma’shūq*) and devotion (*ma’būd*), the book is a collection of 150 *ghazals* explicitly revisiting the *diwan* of the master of Shiraz, through the technique of the *jawāb* and a constant use of quotations of whole *bayts* and interpolations of emistichs (*taẓmīn*).<sup>28</sup> In such perspective of recastings and resemanticizations — the author himself describes in the introduction how he found in Ḥāfiz’s *ghazals* an adequate form to express the meaning of his passion for the Imam<sup>29</sup> — the treatment of the image of Christ in the *Shawq-i Mahdī* gives us a precious key for a contextualised understanding of this poetic figure in Fayḏ and among his immediate Safavid audience.<sup>30</sup> In the third of the three original *qaṣīdas*

<sup>27</sup> As suggested by Shigeru Kamada, who refers especially to Fayḏ-i Kāshānī’s short work *al-Kalimāt al-maknūna* (The Hidden Words), the philosopher-poet understands the notion of the Perfect Man “in the framework of the self-manifestation of the Absolute” (Kamada 2005, 457-60).

<sup>28</sup> Thus, for instance, the famous line with which Ḥāfiz’s *dīwān* usually opens is read by Fayḏ as *alā yā ayyuhā ’l-mahdī mudāma ’l-waṣli nāwilhā/ki dar dawrān-i hijrān-at basī uftād mushkilhā* “Come now, o Mahdī, dispense the cup of the eternal union:/several difficulties we met, during your prolonged absence” (Fayḏ-i Kāshānī 1993, 103).

<sup>29</sup> “I thought to myself to collect some scattered poetic ideas resulting from my reflections, and to mix them, through quotations and interpolations, with those virgin pearls [i.e. Ḥāfiz’s verses], so that the first could obtain beauty (*zaynat*) from the latter in terms of form (*min ḥaythi ’l-ṣūra*), and the latter could obtain dignity (*rutbat*) from the first in terms of meaning (*min ḥaythi ’l-ma’nā*)” (Fayḏ-i Kāshānī 1993, 102).

<sup>30</sup> Such processes of re-reading should be understood against the background of a progressive shift, in Fayḏ’s times, from a relative tolerance for a loose Sufi sensibility (with its



included in the collection, devoted to the “announcement of the *parousia* (*zuhūr*) of the Mahdī”, the image of Christ accompanies, with other sacred characters, the figure of the Imam as a probative forerunner (for his enduring life) and a metaphorical sign (with his canonical life-endowing breath) of his prodigious deeds:

*ghaybat-i chandīn nabī burhān-i ikhfā-yi way-ast*  
*‘umr-i khiẓr u nūḥ u ‘īsā ḥujjat-i ibqā-yi ū-st*<sup>31</sup>

The disappearance of several prophets is the evidence of his concealment, and the life of Khiẓr, Noah and Jesus is the proof of his permanence.

[...]

*bā ‘aṣā u sang-i mūsā u dam-i ‘īsā buwad*  
*chashmahā az sang barārad chūb-i azhdarhā-yi ū*<sup>32</sup>

He has the stick and the stone of Moses and the breath of Jesus:  
 with his dragon-like stick he will make water gush out from the stone.

According to a tradition attributed to the sixth Imam, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, the Mahdī will appear carrying some specific symbolic objects such as the banner of Muḥammad, the ring of Solomon and the stone and stick of Moses:<sup>33</sup> in the latter case the reference is to *Qur‘ān* 2,60, where Moses hits a stone in the desert with his stick and twelve sources of water gush from it. More importantly for us, the *dam-i ‘īsā* (breath, but also word — the pneumatic *logos* — of Jesus) alludes clearly to the role of the Imam as the *qā‘im*, the “resurrector” at the end of time. Against the obvious backdrop of a long-standing overlapping of several Western Asian ideas on the eschatological “return” (*raj‘a*, in Shiite terminology) of a Saviour,<sup>34</sup> and the well-known initial Islamic identification of the Mahdi with Jesus, it is worth remembering here that, according to several traditions, Jesus will indeed accompany the Imam in his final battle against the forces of evil.<sup>35</sup>

ambiguous figure of the “Beloved”) to a more rigid focus on the all-embracing authority of the hidden Imam (see the discussion in Rizvi 2007, 85-6, later resumed by Zargar 2014, 243).

<sup>31</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1993, 173.

<sup>32</sup> Fayz-i Kāshānī 1993, 173.

<sup>33</sup> In the Safavid context, the tradition is reported, for instance, in the *Biḥār al-anwār*: (Majlisī 1983, 52, 351).

<sup>34</sup> It is worth remembering here, for instance, that in the same Safavid context in which Fayz is writing, the Zoroastrian *saoshyant* is openly and directly identified with the twelfth Imam, for instance, by Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkiwarī (also known as Sharīf Lāhījī, d. after 1677), in his *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* (Ashkiwarī 1999, 359). See also Terrier 2016, 649, for French translation and commentary

<sup>35</sup> On the interactions between the idea of Jesus and that of the *Qā‘im* see Reynolds 2001, especially 74-82.

This idea, only adumbrated in the above seen lines, is clearly inserted in a couple of *bayts* creatively responding to Ḥāfiẓ's *ghazals* in the *Shawq-i Mahdī*:

*guftam masīḥ bahr-i chi āyad zi āsmān*  
*guftā ki iqtidā ba imām-i zamān kunand*<sup>36</sup>

I asked “Why is Christ coming from the sky?”  
 He said “They follow the example of the *Imām-i zamān*”

*biyā biyā ki ḥuẓūr-i tu murda zinda kunad*  
*zi āsmān ba zamīn āwarad masīḥā-rā*<sup>37</sup>

Come, come: your presence gives life to the dead,  
 and brings Christ from the sky to the earth.

A direct metaphorical identification of the figure of Jesus with that of the Imam can be traced somewhere else, in a line where the “table of reunion” (*khwān-i waṣl*), taking the place of the “hope of reunion” (*ummīd-i waṣl*) of Ḥāfiẓ's text, alludes to the miracle of the descent of the “table spread with food” (*al-mā'ida*) attributed to Christ in *Qur'ān* 5,114-115. Fayẓ is drawing here on a cluster of canonical *topoi* already elaborated, in particular, in Khāqānī's complex poetic Christology:

*murdīm az firāq-i tu ay 'īsā-yi zamān*  
*āyā zi khwān-i waṣl-i tu mā-rā naṣīb hast*<sup>38</sup>

We died in your absence, o Jesus of the time:  
 is there a prize for us, at the table of our reunion?

In Khāqānī's poems, the “table” is openly linked to the “apostles” (*ḥawāriyān*) and the breaking of the bread during the Last Supper, at least in one case.<sup>39</sup> The reference to the “separation” (*firāq*) from the Imam — the “Jesus of the time” — (i.e. his *ghayba*), may here encourage the reader familiar with the *vita Christi* to link the idea of the “table” with this evangelical episode, prelude to the separation from Christ; at the same time, however, the joy of the “reunion” (*waṣl*) with the Mahdī during his redeeming return (*raj'a*) directly conjures the reminiscence of the joyous “tables” of Cana or the multiplication of the bread. It is worth observing, passingly, that the word *khwān* is also used to indicate the sky — to which

<sup>36</sup> Fayẓ-i Kāshānī 1993, 128; the *ghazal* is a *jawāb* to Ḥāfiẓ 1983-4, n. 193.

<sup>37</sup> Fayẓ-i Kāshānī 1993, 105; the *ghazal* is a *jawāb* to Ḥāfiẓ 1983-4, n. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Fayẓ-i Kāshānī 1993, 115; the *ghazal* is a *jawāb* to Ḥāfiẓ 1983-4, n. 64.

<sup>39</sup> Khāqānī 1959, 787.

Christ is closely related in Persian conventions as we have repeatedly seen — thus adding a further layer to the complex texture of this line.

In two cases in the *Shawq-i Mahdī*, Fayḏ-i Kāshānī directly quotes Ḥāfiḏ's poetic treatment of the image of Christ, with no changes whatsoever. Both verses play on the idea of the vivifying nature of Jesus' breath:

*az rawānbakhshī-yi 'īsā nazanam pīsh-i tu dam  
z-ān ki dar rūḥafzāyī chu lab-at māhir nīst*<sup>40</sup>

With you, I don't breathe a single word of the life-endowing nature of Jesus because he is not as skilled as your lips are in heightening the spirit.

*muzhda ay dil ki masīḥānafas-ī mīyāyad  
ki zi anfās-i khwush-ash būy-i kasī mīyāyad*<sup>41</sup>

A good novel, my heart: one with the breath of Christ is coming, and from his sweet breaths the perfume of someone is coming.

It is the context, here, to provide Ḥāfiḏ's *bayts* with a completely new meaning; rewriting becomes a form of implicit commentary on the text, where Ḥāfiḏ's beloved and Fayḏ's Imam perfectly coincide *a priori*, with evident implications as far as the seventeenth c. Iranian reception of the poet of Shiraz is concerned. Lastly, in other two cases focusing on the life-giving breath of Christ, Ḥāfiḏ's imagery is creatively re-elaborated by Fayḏ:

*az zuhūr-i barakāt-ash na man-am khurram u bas  
'īsā injā ba ummīd-i nafas-ī mīyāyad*<sup>42</sup>

I am not the only one to be delighted by his blessed manifestation: even Jesus is coming, hoping for one breath.

*anfās-i 'īsā az nafas-at būd shamma-ī  
ta'mīr-i 'umr-i nūḥ tu-rā būd āyat-ī*<sup>43</sup>

The breaths of Jesus were just a faint aroma of your breath: the prolongation of Noah's life was a sign of your advent.

In the first of the two couplets, while the reference to Jesus is only slightly modified,<sup>44</sup> the substitution of Ḥāfiḏ's treatment of Khizr's water of life as the nectar of the beloved lips with the prophetic idea of Noah's long-lasting life intensifies the devotional, messianic tone of the text. In

<sup>40</sup> Fayḏ-i Kāshānī 1993, 114; the author directly quotes here Ḥāfiḏ 1984, n. 71.

<sup>41</sup> Fayḏ-i Kāshānī 1993, 128; the author directly quotes here Ḥāfiḏ 1984, n. 235.

<sup>42</sup> Fayḏ-i Kāshānī 1993, 128; the *ghazal* is a *jawāb* to Ḥāfiḏ 1984, n. 235.

<sup>43</sup> Fayḏ-i Kāshānī 1993; the *ghazal* is a *jawāb* to Ḥāfiḏ 1984, n. 428.

<sup>44</sup> Fayḏ's insistence on the "breath", *nafas*, takes here the place of the more erotic Ḥāfiḏian *lab* "lips".

the second *bayt*, coming from the same *ghazal* whose *maṭlaʿ* is the second of the just seen lines directly quoted from Ḥāfiẓ (*muzhda ay dil...*), Fayẓ leaves untouched the logical-semantic structure of the original but substitutes Ḥāfiẓ's reference to Moses and the fire of Sinai<sup>45</sup> with a resumption of the breath theme. This points, once again, to the perceived efficacy of Christic tropes in thinking of the Imam as a saviour, somehow revealed by a text such as the *Shawq-i Mahdī*: from such considerations, implying a thoroughly study of reception, we should start for any further analysis of Jesus figure in Safavid literary culture.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. for instance *Qur'ān* 20,10-48.

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