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**The Husayni Brahmins and Other Poor Persian Speakers:
Standardizing Language and Devotion in Mīrzā Qatīl**

Ogni rapporto di egemonia
è necessariamente
un rapporto pedagogico.
Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderno 10*: 1331

The interrelated issues of linguistic variety (geographical as well as chronological and sociolectal), identity and standardization have been dealt with by Adriano Rossi several times, in important contributions ranging from the Achaemenid and pre-Achaemenid period (I think especially of his seminal article on linguistic variety in Achaemenid Iran – Rossi 1981 – but also of Rossi 2010) to the contemporary context (e.g. Rossi 2015). As far as the Neopersian space is concerned, Professor Rossi has acutely observed how the distinctly complex multilingual landscape of the Iranian-speaking areas – and, I would add, of the Persianate world as a whole – has contributed to obstacle the formation of a diglottic situation in its “narrow definition” (to use Ferguson’s terminology): «Quando la polarizzazione sociolinguistica tra varietà alte e basse si verifica nell’ambito del plurilinguismo, non c’è spazio sufficiente per la formazione d’una situazione diglossica» (Rossi 2007: 101). However, in a more recent paper dealing expressly with the problem of diglossia in Persian, he has aptly suggested how, contrarily to the somewhat rigid homoglottic conclusions drawn by John Perry in his study of the subject (2003, and also in Perry 2012: 82), the use of the notion of “progressive gradients” of diglossia employed by Luca Alfieri and Chiara Barbati (2010) would probably better fit the situation (Rossi 2015: 217). The underpinnings of Rossi’s argument are solidly historical: «A real knowledge of the language shows that throughout the history of Persian the relationship between the spoken and literary forms has been in constant flux, and that this has generally been noted by grammarians only after a certain delay, all this resulting in a continuously changing self-consciousness of what a norm for both spoken and literary forms

should be at any determined time» (Rossi 2015: 213). Every linguistic fact is a historical fact, Rossi seems to warn the reader, and in the conclusion to his paper he accordingly invokes the necessity to look at the social history of Persian language in the broadest and most inclusive sense possible, «to correctly outline the reciprocal relationships among the different L and H varieties in what is currently called the world of ‘Persianate culture’» (Rossi 2015: 218).

Welcoming his advice, in this small tribute to Professor Rossi I will present some hitherto neglected material and a few scattered thoughts relating to the parallel and overlapping articulations of “standard” and “non-standard” linguistic and religious identities in the late 18th-early 19th c. Persian works of Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan Qatīl, whose attempts at defining both regional and social varieties of Persian, including para-diglottic statuses, I have described and analyzed in a recent paper (Pellò 2016). A convert to Shiite Islam from a Bhandari Khatri family of secretarial traditions, Divānī Singh/Muḥammad Ḥasan Qatīl, mainly based in Lucknow during the rule of the Shiite Nawabs and also credited with a formative travel to Iran, is a key figure to understand the dynamics of the “Persian language question” in late Zand-early Qajar Iran and early colonial Persianate Hindustan.¹ As I have observed in the above mentioned study, the most relevant part of Qatīl’s work (and, probably, also the most influential) is devoted to the description of the Persian language both as a transregional medium (with the three hierarchical “varieties” of Iran, Turan and Hindustan) and as an instrument of work for the North Indian secretary-poet: in his *Shajarat al-Amānī* (1791), *Nahr al-Faṣāḥat* (1794) and *Chār Sharbat* (1802), Qatīl responds to the heated debates of the 18th c.,² establishing a definitive preeminence for an imagined “Iranian” variety but also carving a specific socio-textual space and place for the Hindustani Persophone scribe – a scribe to be educated *à la iranienne*, and at the same time able to express an

¹ Qatīl was born in Delhi in 1759 and died in Lucknow most probably in 1817-18, during the reign of Ghāzī al-Dīn Ḥaydar (1822 and 1825 have also been proposed as possible dates for his death). For further biographical information, the description of his main linguistic treatises and relevant bibliography see Pellò 2016: 205-209.

² A classical study on the subject, focusing mostly on poetics, is Shafī’ī-Kadkanī 1996. Among more recent scholarship, Arthur Dudley has dealt with the philological sides of the Persian language question in 18th c. India in his detailed ph.d. dissertation (Dudley 2013) and following articles.

authoritative judgement on what Iran is or should be.³ Negotiating his own transitional biographical figure, the Shia-ruled milieu of Nawabi Lucknow and the plurilingual and multi-devotional background of late eighteenth century North India, Qatīl tends to model his hierarchized construction of standards of authority on the discursive practices of Shiite *fiqh*, and, more in general, on normative religious paradigmas (Pellò 2016: 226). In a linguistic theorization dominated by legalistic concepts such as *taqlīd* (imitation) and by the idea of linguistic *ijtihād* (the effort toward normative elaboration based on scriptural sources), usages contradicting the presupposed norm are understood as a *taṣarruf* (intervention, disposal), a complex notion which in Islamic jurisprudence indicates also the (licit or illicit) “right to dispose of a property” and which had already been commonly employed by previous philologists – for instance, to remain close to Qatīl’s time and space, Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Khān-i Ārzū (1688-1756).⁴ The very structure of the Persian sentence is understood under this species:

For the Arabs, in the verbal sentence, the verb precedes the agent, and in the opposite case they call the sentence *mubtadā va khabar* (i.e. nominal sentence), but in Persian, to put the agent before the verb in the verbal sentence is considered more eloquent (*aḫṣaḥ*) (Qatīl 1872: 12)

The basic features of Persian are seen as deviating from the “norm” posed by the socio-religious authority of Arabic. The same Arabic vs. Persian normative hierarchy is reproduced when talking of varieties within Persian itself:

In order to achieve eloquence (*faṣāḥat*) the radical *vāv* in *tu-rā* (تورا) and the radical *nūn* in *man-rā* have been eliminated, so that what remains is *tu-rā* (ترا) and *ma-rā*, but some people in Khorasan still have not abandoned *man-rā* (Qatīl 1872: 12-13)

³ Qatīl’s linguistic idea of Iran (see Pellò 2016: 228-235) responds to a complex series of socio-semiotic tensions traversing the area at the dawn of the age of nationalism: interesting insights can be found in Kia 2014.

⁴ Ārzū, for instance, discusses the liceity of *taṣarruf* by Indian poets writing in Persian in the introduction of his *Dād-i sukhan*: interestingly enough, this *taṣarruf* by authoritative writers is considered acceptable because of its being analogous to the *taṣarruf* often applied by authoritative Iranian writers to the “norm” of Arabic (Ārzū 1974: 7-9; in the same place Ārzū discusses as well the right of *taṣarruf* of Iranians over Tūrki). On Ārzū and his comparative method see Raḥīmpūr 2012, Dudney 2013 and Pellò 2004.

The linguistic practice of the «people of Khorasan» (who, for Qatīl, represent the transitional space between “Iranian” and “Turanian” Persian, respectively dominated by Isfahan and Balkh⁵) is read as a lack of acceptance of the result of the linguistic normative effort by the recognized authorities of the imagined literary hyper-*majlis* (see Pellò 2016: 224-225): consequently, they are perceived as backward speakers (they «still have not abandoned» the use of *man-rā*). In this perspective, it is not surprising that the morphological features of the varieties deemed as less authoritative are included in a section of the *Shajarat al-Amānī* devoted to identify and avoid the flaws in the *fasāḥat* of word and speech:

And then [there is] the contradiction of the linguistic paradigm (*mukhālifāt-i qiyās-i lughavī*) [...] like using *kushtānīdan* instead of *ku-shānīdan* or *gashtānīdan* instead of *gardānīdan*, as in the use of the *Kabulis* and some *Khorasanis*, and this corresponds, in Arabic, to use *aqlal* and *ajlal* instead of *aqall* and *ajall* (Qatīl 1872: 20-21)

The formation of the causative verb with the infinitive stem which Qatīl attributes to the speakers of Eastern varieties is, once again, measured on the normative example of Arabic “standards” and “deviations”, and is defined as a defiance to the linguistic *qiyās*, a concept whose preminence in the debates on the *uṣūl al-fiqh* (where it generally means “judicial reasoning by analogy”) is well known. Without going into the technicalities of the traditional Shiite critique of the validity of *qiyās* and its subsumption by *ijtihād*, I can here preliminarily say that the *qiyās-i lughavī* of Qatīl, modeled on the legal *qiyās-i shar‘ī*, shows nonetheless the characteristics of universal validity required by Shiite scholars of *fiqh*, stressing the necessity of avoiding any risk of producing divergent doctrines;⁶ in other words, it is to be understood as the base of an ubiquitous normative standard.⁷ A similar

⁵ As far as the preminence of Balkh is concerned, Qatīl still echoes the description of the Iranian linguistic context made by Ibn al-Muqaffa’ as early as the 8th century, and later on more or less preserved by the lexicographic tradition (seeazard 1971: 49).

⁶ A very clear introductory discussion on the position of *qiyās* in the Shiite context can be found in Bernard and Troupeau 2012.

⁷ It might be useful, as far as the linguistic weight of *qiyās* and the relevant Arabic model is concerned, to read the very classical definition of grammar (*naḥw*, lit. “path”) provided by al-Rummānī, a prominent 10th c. linguist from Baghdad: “The aim of grammar is the distinction (*tabyīn*) between what is correct (*ṣawāb*) and

logic applies to the history of the language itself, as in Qatīl's discussion on the use by Sa'dī of the verbal prefix *bi-* in the *Gulistān*, a basic text for Persian linguistic education in the Persianate world:

The reason for the inelegance of this *bā* is that it is used normally in poetry to fulfil the necessities of meter. The fact that it occurs in the *Gulistān* at the beginning of the verbs in the past tense is explained by the several interventions (*taṣarrufhā*) that the book has been subjected to: how could the respected *shaykh* do this? Sa'dī did not write *biguft* instead of *guft*, and the ugliness of *biguft* and *biraft* as compared to *guft* and *raft* are clear to all the eloquent people. (Qatīl 1874: 6-7)

Leaving aside Qatīl's misunderstanding of the nature of the prefix,⁸ what is particularly relevant here for us is that he recurs again to the notion of *taṣarruf* – in this case a philologically inappropriate one. The concept is used to explain what appears to him as a problematic deviation of an absolute authority such as Sa'dī from the *qiyās* and, thus, make sure that the linguistically foundational *Gulistān* sits well within the pre-determined norm. As a matter of fact, as I have already observed, the “standard” proposed by Qatīl tends to merge a certain “Iranian” literary tradition (identified with classical poets up to the Timurid times, and more recent masters from the *vilāyat* – i.e. Iran – such as 'Alī Ḥazīn) and what he calls *muḥāvara* and *rūzmarra*, which we can define as the everyday contemporary usage of well-educated Iranian speakers in conversation and general writing (Pellò 2016: 209-219 and *passim*).

Against this background, being eighteenth century Iran tendentially identified by Qatīl with Twelver Shiite Islam, it is not surprising that a strong attention to the standardization of the use of a Shiite religiolect – the internalized audience being fellow Indian *munshīs*, very often from the same Hindu Persian-writing social milieu as Qatīl – can be found in all his works. A clear example in this direction comes from the *Chār Sharbat*. A text marked by a special attention to the plurilingual features of the Persianate world (the last of its four main chapters is devoted to a complete grammatical description of late Eastern Tūrki), the *Chār Sharbat* contains a whole lexicographical section focusing on the *mustalahāt-i ahl-i zabān*, i.e. the “expressions of the native speakers” (Qatīl 1845: 27-36). Among the ca.

what is wrong (*khaṭā'*) in the expression, according to the way (*mazhab*) of the Arabs, by means of analogy (*qiyās*)” (al-Rummānī 1969: 38).

⁸ On the history and functions of this prefix see Lazard 1975 and McKinnon 1977.

450 lexical items described in the chapter, including everything from names of fruits, sweets and places to obscene expressions to the technolact of traditional wrestling (*kushtī, varzish*), more than forty (around one tenth of the total) are related to Twelver Shiite religious life: the entries range from complete lists of appellatives for the Imams (for instance, the ten entries *ṣāhib al-zamān, ḥujjat, ḥujjat al-qā'im, qā'im, qāyim, āl-i 'abā, ṣāhib al-'aṣr va al-zamān, ṣāhib al-amr, Muḥammad, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan*, all described as *kināya az imām-i mahdī 'alayhi 's-salām* “allusion to Imam Mahdi – peace be upon him” – Qatīl 1845: 33-34) to names of prayers and curses (e.g. the *chār zarb* “four strokes”, which Qatīl defines as *naw'-ī az sab-i khulafā-yi ṣalaṣa nazd-i irāniyān* “among the Iranians, a kind of invective against the three caliphs” – Qatīl 1845: 36) to significant identity-making texts and genres, such as the tradition of the *vāqi'a* (“[writing of] the event”, a type of *marṣiya* “elegy”) initiated by the late Safavid author Āqā Muḥammad Shaykhā Muqbil-i Iṣfahānī (d. 1744), whom the author refers to and praises in the text (Qatīl 1845: 35).⁹ Adequacy and correctness of speech corresponds to adequacy and correctness of knowledge of the modern nationalized socio-semiotics of Iranian Shiism; proper, authoritative and exclusive linguistic standards correspond to proper, authoritative and exclusive devotional standards. In other words, it can be tentatively said that the model speaker of Persian, occupying the highest position in linguistic authority is for Qatīl a well-educated Iranian Shiite, possibly from the old capital Isfahan.¹⁰

In such perspective, a useful place to observe these phenomena of linguistic-religious methodological superimpositions at work is made by the only non-linguistic and non-literary treatise by Qatīl, the doxographic *Haft tamāshā* “Seven views”.¹¹ Written later in Qatīl's life (the date provided for

⁹ A detailed contribution on the *vāqi'a* and Muqbil-i Iṣfahānī is the recent study by Mirbāqirīfard and Āṣaf 2015.

¹⁰ Notably enough, this model seems indeed personified by the figure described in *tazkira* literature as Qatīl's master, Mīrzā Muḥammad Bāqir Shahīd Iṣfahānī (e.g. Muṣḥafī 1934: 46). On the centrality of the notion of “capital city” in Qatīl's socio-linguistic theory see Pellò 2016: 233-235.

¹¹ A very sketchy description of the contents of the seven chapters of the *Haft tamāshā* can be found in Anūsha 2001: III, 2032-2034. A detailed discussion of the extant manuscripts of the *Haft tamāshā* is Rafūgarān 2016. The text has been translated in Urdu in the 1960s by Muhammad 'Umar, who provides useful information

the beginning of the composition is 1226, corresponding to 1811 – Qatīl 1875: 4), this work is devoted to a detailed description of the religious situation in Northern India during the eighteenth century and was composed at the behest of some Iranian notables (Qatīl 1875: 3-4), somehow embodying the linguistic-doctrinal standard authority I have just mentioned. Being the work of a philologist, grammarian and language teacher, it is not surprising that the *Haft tamāshā* contains several references to the “correct” pronunciation of devotional terminology, especially when it comes to the Sanskritic field.¹² However, this linguistic attention, scattered over the whole book and including descriptions of the nature of languages,¹³ is not of course to be read solely as a professional quirk. As a matter of fact, the normative model discussed above seems here to be applied as a general framework to understand social hierarchies and power relations, and ultimately to establish a common, homogeneous validity for the national, linguistic and religious canons proposed by Qatīl. Among the several examples provided by the text, a particularly representative case is made by the pages Qatīl devotes to the so-called “Husayni Brahmins”, a group of philo-Shiite Hindus, a version of whose story famously appears in Premchand’s *Karbala* (1920).¹⁴ The passage, which is significantly found in the chapter devoted to the “explanation of the beliefs of the groups of Hindus who are outside their own *sharī‘at*” (*sharḥ-i firaq-i hinduvān-i ki az sharī‘at-i kh‘ad bīrūn-and*) (Qatīl 1875: 6) goes as follows:

in his introduction (Qatīl 1968). A few annotations on the historical figure of Qatīl as a *munshī* can be found in Alam and Subrahmanyam 2012: 423-426.

¹² It is Qatīl himself to announce his methodology in the introduction: «Since the people of Iran (*ahl-i vilāyat*) are not familiar with the Hindi terminology (*alfāz-i hindī*), the face of every such expression has been adorned with the explanation of the single letters (*hurūf*) and vocalizations (*ḥarakāt*)» (Qatīl 1875: 5).

¹³ Especially noteworthy is Qatīl discussion of Sanskrit, «an ancient language in which the Vedas (*bed*) of the Hindus are written», belonging to «no specific city or village», and its comparison to Arabic (Qatīl 1875: 10-11).

¹⁴ Some observations on this little-understood socio-textual case can be found in Hyder (2006: 174-180). Notably enough, the Husayni Brahmins appear as well in another well-known Hindi literary work, the 1966 novel by Rahi Masoom Raza *Adha Gaon* (“A Village Divided”). Some information on the Husayni-Dutt Brahmins can be found in Abū Ṭālib (1984). According to the description based on the colonial censuses of 1883 and 1892, «they say that they were originally Bhāt Brahmins» and they were connected to the Siyālkoṭ district (Rose 1911: 141-142).

A group of Brahmins claim: «We are Husayni Brahmins (*barahmanāni ḥusaynī*). We don't ask the Hindus for alms, and we accept what the Muslims give us. This is how we live». This is also because the Muslims, being pleased, give them something, even if sometimes the Hindus are better than the Muslims who were the friends of the despicable Yazīd (Qatīl 1875: 39).

Introducing the subject of his analysis, Qatīl is quick both to favourably position himself and his social background (Hindus can be better than certain Muslims) and to make sure that he diminishes the behaviour of the Husayni Brahmins (the claim that they only ask Muslims for alms is, more than everything else, an attempt to obtain their favour). In particular, the “mistake” made by the Brahmins appears here to be the fact that they don't specify the kind of Muslim they refer to, while the “deep reading” of the philologist Qatīl is shown to work as an Occam razor to distinguish and punctualize. The core foundational story of the social group is narrated immediately after:

They claim that when the party of Yazīd went to Damascus bearing the heads of the martyrs, one night they stopped over in the house of a Brahmin. In the middle of the night, when everyone was asleep, a throne (*takht*) came down from the sky, and because of its blessing the house turned full of light. A man, of a luminous beauty and all dressed in white, came down from that throne, picked up the head from the floor and kissed the blessed face of the Imam of jinns and of humans, wailing with tears, and so did other three people. Then, another throne descended from the air: four women were on it. One of them took the blessed head, kissed it and cried. When the morning arrived, the two thrones went back to the sky. The woman who owned the house witnessed to the event and became restless and informed her husband. When the man heard the story, he took the blessed head from the floor and hid it in a secret place. The bearers of the heads prepared to depart and could not find the blessed head. They became nervous and started questioning the Brahmin: notwithstanding his swears, they became aggressive, and he brought to them the cut head of his son. They did not believe that this was the head of that noble. The poor man brought them the head of his second son, but they refused that too. He cut the head of his eighteen sons, but they rejected all of them. At the end, they killed the poor man, and managed to bring to Damascus the blessed head (Qatīl 1875: 39-40).

The pious story of the descent of heavenly figures – Qatīl’s audience would no doubt recognize the members of the extended *ahl al-bayt* behind the unnamed characters sitting on the thrones – and the sacrifice of the poor Brahmin’s sons at the hands of the cruel Omayyads sits well within the ethos and the narrative protocols of ‘Alid martyrology. However, the implacable author’s comments are very clear in dismissing it:

This is the story told by the Husayni Brahmins, but the other Hindus and the Brahmins themselves consider it risible. Nonetheless, it is surprising that some simple-minded Twelver Shiites (*iṣnā ‘ashariyān-i sādālawḥ*) consider them as part of their noble heritage and firmly believe in the service of the Husayni Brahmins, and strive to nobilitate them even more than the ‘*ulamā* of religion, by saying that they are much better than us, and even better than our ‘*ulamā*, because their ancestor sacrificed his eighteen sons to the lord of the martyrs – peace be upon him – and when they say it they wet their sleeves with tears (Qatīl 1875: 40).

The respect and consideration seemingly shown by local Indian Shiites to the Husayni Brahmins is explained as due to a lack of doctrinal knowledge (philo-Brahmin Shiites are significantly brushed off as illiterate simpletons, with a term, *sādālawḥ*, literally meaning “tabula rasa”), even putting at risk the authority of the learned ‘*ulamā*. To firmly establish his point, in the conclusion to his observations on the Husayni Brahmins, Qatīl finally recurs to the linguistic argument:

Regarding the Husayni Brahmins, a strange story came to my mind. When Nawab ‘Imād al-Mulk, the minister of Hindustan, passed away in Kalpi, and the present writer was there after his death, a Hindu came in the house of government in the company of Mīr Naṣr Allāh the son-in-law of the Nawab [...]. He said: “I am a Husayni Brahmin, residing in noble Karbalā”. I enquired about his name and he said “Nūr Muḥammad Panḍe”, which means “Mullā Nūr Muḥammad”, since *panḍe*, with the Persian *bā*, the *alif*, the nasalized *nūn*, the heavy *dāl* without dots, and the *yā-yi majhūl*, is a Hindi term referring to the *mullā* of the Hindus, and although it is an appellative reserved to the educated Brahmins, now every Brahmin adds the term *panḍe* to his name and uses it as an appellation. I asked him “*Ayna mawladak?*” [“Where is your hometown?”, in Arabic] He smiled and said “In our Karbalā nobody understands Persian! The language, there, is *Arwī!*” – i.e. Arabic [...] I asked “*Zan-i habīb [va] dukhtar-at-rā kujā guzashta āmada-ī?*” [“Where have you left your dear wife and daughter, coming here?”, in Persian]. He smiled and said “This is Arabic!”, but he

actually said again *Arwī*. Finally it became clear that he was from the Kharkars of Bundelkhand. I gave him something and let him go. (Qatīl 1875: 40-41)

The autobiographical anecdote serves multiple purposes. At the general methodological level, Qatīl underlines once more the reliability of his philological doxography by showing that first-hand accounts retain a preeminent role among his sources: he proves his theory by comparing it to experimental situations, in this case the meeting with the Brahmin, following analogous schemes already operated in his linguistic treatises.¹⁵ More specifically, within the narrative context, Qatīl takes the opportunity to insert a comparative explanation of Sanskritic terminology, providing a grapho-phonological analysis of the term *paṇḍe* (< *paṇḍita*). Both features are common all around the book and hundreds of comparable examples can be found: Qatīl's philology of the devotional technolects of 18th c. Northern India is perhaps the most constant trait of the *Haft tamāshā*, relating it to his linguistic works while institutionalising the philological analysis of Indic devotional lexicon so commonly found in various 18th c. works of poets and literati, first of all the inclusive *tazkira* genre.¹⁶ For what concerns us here, however, the most relevant passage is probably Qatīl's short dialogue with Nūr Muḥammad Paṇḍe. Boasting of his polyglottal skills, Qatīl ridicules the Brahmin by addressing him first in Arabic, thus "exposing" his interlocutor's and all Husayni Brahmins' false pretension of being "native of Karbalā" (the main trait of the Husayni Brahmin self-representation, as Qatīl himself pointed out at the beginning of his discourse), and then in Persian, to mock the philological confusion perceived in the use of the glottonym *Arwī*, indeed referring to a complex set of linguistic contexts and practices,¹⁷ but which Qatīl reduces to a case of malapropism.

Several comparable examples can be found all along the text of the *Haft tamāshā*. At the beginning of the treatise, for instance, while describing the ten *avatāras* of Vishnu, Qatīl takes up a discussion on Kalki, the last, "apocalyptic" *parousia* of the supreme deity, whom he calls with the appel-

¹⁵ I think, for instance, of the "real life" letter specimens provided in the *Nahr al-faṣāḥat*, textualizing different regional and social subjectivities (Qatīl 1874: 42-69).

¹⁶ Some examples of the textual strategies adopted by *tazkira* writers to disseminate cultural-specific knowledge among the Persian transregional literary community can be found in Pellò 2014: 37-42.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Shu'ayb 'Ālim 1993, especially pp. 84-126.

lative Nehkalank (*nehkalang*).¹⁸ According to Qatīl, «some ignorant Muslims» (*musalmānān-i abha*) who are «unaware of the book of their own doctrine» (*ba kitāb-i mazhab-i kh^vad nā-āshnā*) identify Nehkalank with Dajjāl, the “deceiver” opponent of Jesus of Islamic eschatology: this belief is deemed by the author as «absolutely wrong», first of all on the usual philological basis.¹⁹ Immediately after, he dismisses in equally strong terms a parallel view held by «foolish Hindus who do not know the most elementary ways of their own doctrine [...] – be them cursed in eternity» who believe that the apocalyptic figure will restore the dominance of Hindus over Muslims (Qatīl 1875: 24). While commenting the dangers residing in this kind of views, and in order to firmly establish his condemnation, Qatīl narrates a first-hand account, where, as in the case of the Husayni Brahmins, the philological-linguistic argument plays a strategic argumentative role. Here, the author declares to have seen (*dīdam*) a «fanatic» (*khaylī muta‘aṣṣib*) *mullā* from Feyzabad who considered Hindus «totally impure» (*najīs-i mahẓ*), telling an enquiring naive Hindu boy that the Shiites (the *mullā* is credited with using the derogatory term *rāfizi*) are the descendants of the child of the cooking maid of Imam Ḥusayn’s family, who was spared by the party of Yazīd and escaped in Iran. The child, whose name was Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, would eventually become the emperor of Iran and introduce «innovations» (*iḥdāṣ*) in religion. Iranians, the *mullā* says in the text, are the descendants of that servant boy, and call him Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (Qatīl 1875: 24-25). While creating a feeling of empathy between his own social background and his Iranian dedicatees (the *mullā* equally hates Hindus, Shiites and Iranians), Qatīl exposes the «damned» (*mal‘ūn*) *mullā*’s insinuations as completely baseless (*ghalaṭ-i mahẓ*) primarily by underscoring how, in that credulous context made of «orphans and sons of elementary school *mullās*», the linguistic-political notions of “Iranian” and “Turanian” (*lafz-i irānī va tūrānī*) – which he deals with at length in his philological treatise

¹⁸ The appellative, with some variants (e.g. *Nikalank*), is diffused among various traditions of north-western India, including the Ismaili (see Khan 1997).

¹⁹ Qatīl provides a detailed description of the name of the mythical toponym of Śambhala (*sanbhal*; the future place of birth of Kalki/Nehkalang according to tradition) and underscores the absurdity of relating it to Dajjāl («and what has Sanbhal to do with Dajjāl? *Sanbhal kujā va dajjāl kujā*» – Qatīl 1875: 24), also probably alluding to the connection often made between the Islamic eschatological “deceiver” and the river Tigris (*Dajla* in Arabic).

tises – are wrongly superimposed to the doctrinal concepts of Shiite and Sunni Islam (Qatīl 1875: 25).

In another passage, immediately preceding the above seen pages on the Husayni Brahmins, Qatīl discusses the denomination of the lineages and the political centres of the Rajput, explaining the correct pronunciation of names of clans and cities such as *Raṭhaur*, *Kachwaha*, *Amber*, *Jodhpur*, etc., with the usual grapho-phonological descriptive analysis (Qatīl 1875: 38-39). After having mentioned (and philologically analysed the name of) the Rajput ruler Jay Singh Sawai (1688-1743), he adds that «some books of cronichles (*kutub-i tavārikh*) written by Muslims claim that the aforesaid Raja belongs to the lineage of Anushirwān the Just (*Anūshīrvān-i ‘ādil*)» (Qatīl 1875: 39). The idea that Jay Singh could be put in relation with Sasanian emperor Khosrow I Anushirwān, one of the most symbolic figures of Iranian kingship, is rebuked with decision by Qatīl, according to whom «this is absolutely and without doubt detached from reality» (Qatīl 1875: 39). In the same paragraph, Qatīl consequently criticizes the opinion held by certain «noble Sayyids who have not read a book» (*sādāt-i kirām-i kitāb-nādīda*), who claim that they have a relation of foster-brotherhood (*hamshī-razādagī*) with the Rajput of Udaipur through Shahrbanū (one of the wives of Imam Ḥusayn, traditionally regarded as the daughter of the Sasanian emperor Yazdegerd III and the mother of the fourth Imam ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Abidīn) or Laylā (another wife of Ḥusayn, the mother of ‘Alī Akbar). This kind of genealogies, pure falseness (*bī-ḥaqīqatī*), underlines Qatīl, are vindicated by the Rajput themselves, who consider them a «precious capital in this world and the other» because of the «excellent glory of Anushirvan the Just and the honour of Islam (*‘uluvv-i shān-i anūshīrvān-i ‘ādil va shawkat-i islām*)» (Qatīl 1875: 39). But the Rajput cannot claim any relation to, or any right to have a say on, Iran or (Shiite) Islam in particular because, as the Husayni Brahmins (to whom Qatīl openly compares them) or the mullā from Feyzabad, they have no adequate linguistic knowledge and authority: Qatīl insists, in the *Haft tamāshā*, on the fact that the Rajput, differently from the highly praised well-educated scribal groups of Kayastha and Khatri, are not literate in Persian and this is among the main reasons excluding them from true prestige and credibility. Particularly noteworthy, in this perspective, and declaredly paralleling Qatīl’s socio-religious views to the “social philology” proposed in the *Shajarat al-Amānī* and the *Nahr al-faṣāḥat*, is the fact that in the *Haft tamāshā* the linguistic inadequacy of the Rajputs corresponds to their belonging to agricultural non-urban environments,

making them inferior to the urban and Persian-educated Kayasthas and Khattris, mainly working in bureaucratic positions. In Qatīl's words:

The nobility (*sharāfat*) of the Khattris and the Kayasthas [...] out-classes (*mīcharbad*) that of the Bais and of the Rajput, since the Rajput are not literate in Persian (*savād-i fārsī nadārand*) and their language and clothes are different from the language and the clothes of those living in the capital, i.e. Shāhjahānābād, or comparable places. (Qatīl 1875: 85)

The “ridiculous” Husayni Brahmins, the “ignorant” Muslims and Hindus identifying Kalki with Dajjāl, the “fanatic” *mullā* from Feyzabad, the “rural” Rajputs, with their beliefs and self-representations, are all outside the standards – modeled on ideas of centralized authority, hierarchized literacy, geographical centres, peripheries and borders – constructed by Qatīl in his linguistic treatises and applied to the description of North Indian society in the *Haft tamāshā*. Their transitional identities and views appear, in the socio-philological perspective of the author, as illicit *taṣarrufāt* not fitting with the tendentially purified, hegemonical ideas of Iran and Hindustan proposed in his writings, and their doctrinal “ignorance” is read through the same hermeneutical framework applied to their linguistic inadequacy as far as Persian is concerned. While some aspects of this situation might of course remind of similar phenomena in very different historical contexts, e.g., to remain within the territories of the *Shī'a*, the accusations commonly moved to *ghulāt* “extremists” such as Mughīra ibn Sa'd (d. 736) for their ill-formed Arabic,²⁰ as inadmissible as their religious views, here the attention to the correspondence between the space of speech and socio-religious appurtenances and stratifications acquires the traits of a method. It is Qatīl himself that hints to it in a revealing passage of the *Haft tamāshā*. Introducing the chapter on the «beliefs of the Hindus who do not follow the *sharī'at* (*hinduvān-i ghayr-i mutasharri'*)», Qatīl tells the ideal Iranian reader that, as far as the “correct” beliefs of the “orthodox” *smārtas* (*samartgān*) are concerned, they are perfectly in line with the basic tenets of Islam (*aṣl-i islām*), including image worship, which they understand as «loving the owner of the image in the image». However, Qatīl specifies, «this is the belief of the *khavāṣṣ* (notables) and not of the *'avāmm*

²⁰ On the question of the ungrammatical use of Arabic by the *ghālī* gnostic Mughīra, probably a *mawlā* (non-Arab “freedman”), see Tucker 1975: 33-34. I am grateful to Marco Salati for this reference.

(commoners). Such is the true nature of image worship, but the ‘*avāmm* of this people do consider the idols as God». After having described the phonology and etymological meaning of *narāyan nirankār* or the “formless God”, he concludes that learned Hindus, when confronted with the convictions of the ‘*avāmm*, «laugh and make fun of them, since the behaviours of the ‘*avāmm* of every community is despicable (*mazmūm*)» (Qatīl 1875: 35). The observations find a few strikingly precise parallels in Qatīl’s preceding linguistic treatises: in a particularly articulate passage which I have already dealt with, for instance, the Indian Persianist, while talking of the hierarchically inferior variety of Persian used in Hindustan (*fārsī-yi hindūstān*), writes that the common people of India (‘*avāmm-i hind*), «who do not have a clue of Persian», use some expressions which are the cause of mockery among the native speakers (Pellò 2016: 19).

In Qatīl’s religious diglossia theory, following a cosmopolitan, high, urban devotional practice (the standard cult) works just like being able to make use of an authoritative, centralized, urban idiom (the standard language). The language and doctrinal tenets of the Twelver Shiite Iranian *khavāṣṣ* (overlapping with figures of authority such as the ‘*ulamā*), unified under a single hermeneutical species, represents the model of this socio-linguistic pole standardized as hegemonical, and paralleled, in India, by the language and doctrinal tenets of literate urban classes well-educated in Persian (not by chance, in Qatīl’s treatise, Kayasthas and Khattris are among the champions of the “Hindus who follow the *sharī‘at*”, with his fellow Panjabi Khattris at the highest level exactly because of their superior literacy in Persian²¹). To use the terminology of Qatīl socio-linguistics, they are the «owners of the language» (Qatīl 1874: 42) and of the correspondent “model” socio-religious behaviours.²² On the other side, just like Turanians and Indians were not the “owners” of Persian and had not the right of *taṣarruf* over it, the vernacular, local, rural socio-linguistic actors described above, whose “ignorance” of language and religion is a homogeneous logi-

²¹ «The Khattris of Panjab are all employed in bureaucracy, in the army or in the administration of *parganas*. As compared to the [Khattris] of Purab, very few – if any – of them are devoted to commerce and vile occupations. The Khattris of Panjab are more noble than those from Purab, and, as a matter of fact, among the latter one finds much less people who are literate in Persian (*dar pūrābiyān ṣāhib-i savād-i fārsī ham khaylī kamtar ba ham rasand*) (Qatīl 1875: 84).

²² A discussion on the “ownership” of (Persian) language can be found in Pellò 2016: 223-228.

cal continuum, represent the non-standard pole: significantly, they are all declaredly located by Qatīl outside the religious-linguistic *sharīʿat*. The transitional beliefs and genealogies of Husayni Brahmins, Rajputs, and all the other “poor speakers of Persian”, in Qatīl’s para-diglottic perspectives, are just another declination of the *fārsī-yi ṭabīʿī* “natural Persian” used by Indians, which he severely criticizes in the *Nahr al-faṣāḥat* (Pellò 2016: 19): a danger for the guardianship of authority, flagged in the text by the contrast between the Shiite *‘ulamās* and the Husayni Brahmins. Positioning himself as a representant of linguistic/devotional orthodoxy on behalf of the orthodox “owners of the language”, and excluding the others as “L varieties”, Qatīl standardizes, as a matter of fact, first of all the voice of his own transitional social figure and that of his fellow Khatri Persophone scribes: over the background of the rapidly growing dominance of the British in Hindustan, and with the final boundarization of Qajar Iran, the vindication and preservation of a space of hegemony is, for the linguist of the Nawabs, an arduous philological issue.

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