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Toward an Ethospoetics of the Islamic Languages
Re-Reading Multilingualism Along the Silk Road According to Alessandro Bausani – Part I

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Abstract In 1966, Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988), a key scholar of Arabic and Persian studies, introduced the influential paradigm of 'Islamic Languages', sparking both skepticism and interest to date. This article, the first of two, uses ideas from Bachelard and Deleuze-Guattari, along with historical sources, to re-read Bausani's paradigm, focusing on space and mobility along the Silk Road. It argues that shared religious and moral values, more than language itself, drive the flow of ideas in the Muslim 'domestic space'. This 'ethospoetic' lens shows how shared imagination forms in multilingual literary contexts, crossing ethnic and linguistic lines.

Keywords Multilingualism. Alessandro Bausani. Ethospoetics. Theoretical studies. Muslim domestic space. Sufism.

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1 Introduction

Studies on multilingualism in the premodern Muslim world owe much to the well-known Italian orientalist and scholar Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988). Bausani was a keen historian of religions and a fond polyglot (he studied more than thirty languages). He combined his passion for Oriental languages with the in-depth study of Islam, making him the most influential translator of the Qur'ān and seminal authors like ʿUmar Khayyām (d. 517/1124), al-Rūmī (d. 672/1273), and Muḥammad Iqbāl (d. 1938), into Italian. Besides being a glottothete – i.e. the language inventor of a secular expressive idiom called *Markuska* – during his long and successful career,[1] Bausani devoted his attention to the study of artificial sacred languages like the Bala-i-Balan (fl. fourteenth century) alongside the subcategory of partial pseudo-languages (i.e. glossolalia expressions and magic formulas) employed in both Persian and Arabic, as attested in his 1974-work, *Le lingue inventate*.

More importantly, as Bausani was an all-encompassing intellectual, an insatiable explorer of the Muslim world, and a voyageur across the fields of religion, literature, and philology, he advocated a brand-new theoretical approach to Islamic Studies as a result of interdisciplinary, translingual, and transcultural investigations. This attitude found an early argumentation in a conference paper, which dates back to 1966, where a muddled – though thought-provoking – paradigm of the 'Islamic Languages' is sketched out for further systematisation in "Le Lingue islamiche: interazioni e acculturazioni" (1981, 3-19).[2] There, Bausani argues that some languages, in their encounter with Islam:

> Have been profoundly influenced, lexically, graphically, and to a certain extent, morphologically and even phonetically by the

The two-paper research, of which this study is part, is among the outputs of the project *Islamic Languages on the Silk Road: Lexical, Semantic, and Symbolic Convergences* I carried out as a Postdoctoral Fellow at Ca' Foscari University of Venice (December 2020-January 2023). I am obliged to Professors Daniela Meneghini, Thomas Dähnhardt, Simone Sibilio, and Andrea Drocco for their supervision and thoughtful comments. The findings herein reflect my research work and solely fall under my responsibility.

1 Markuska is a language created by Bausani and his sister when he was eleven years old. The author later described its grammar in his *Le lingue inventate*, where he refers to himself under the laconic pseudonym 'E.J'. For an insight, see Gobbo 2019, 16-27.

2 The idea was originally addressed in a paper entitled "Per una letteratura comparata delle lingue islamiche", which was published with the proceedings of a conference held in Ravello on 1-6 September 1966 (Bausani 1967, 145-56). Bausani later expanded it in Bausani, Scarcia Amoretti 1981, 3-19. Veersteegh notes that elsewhere, Bausani (1975, 111-21) also provided an English definition for the Islamic languages or Muslim languages (Veersteegh 2020, 6 fn. 2). Bausani's *in utero* interest in the quality of 'Islamic' as applicable to language and literature also appears in an earlier work (1951).

> great cultural languages of the Muslim faith: Arabic and Persian. (Bausani 1981, 4)

Bausani's theoretical framework opened new perspectives on the joint reflection on space, language, and culture throughout the last forty years. This attempt raised both skepticism and vivid interest in scholarship up to date, as the 2020-volume *Le Lingue Islamiche. Forty Years Later* (Olivieri, Lancioni, Bernardini) or the contributions of Salvaggio (2024) and Zappa (2024) confirm.

In that volume, for instance, Kees Versteegh entitles his opening contribution with the provoking question "Can a Language be Islamic?" reasonably answering that

> labels such as 'Islamic/Muslim' should be applied to the speakers, rather than to their languages […] any more than a taxi [he adds] cannot become Islamic by the fact that the driver is a Muslim. (Versteegh 2020, 24)

His trenchant criticism is still tempered by the acknowledgment of Bausani's smart intuition towards that deep sense of religious-cultural relationship binding Arabic, Persian, Urdu, or Swahili speakers – among the idioms he mentions – who adopted Islam.

My point here is to explain at what level of analysis this religious and ethical *fil rouge* affected different languages and in what terms the possible definition of 'Islamic Languages' might still be useful. In particular, I explore its applicability to the region indicated by Ferdinand von Richthofen since 1877 as *die Seidenstrasse* – i.e. the Silk Road, whose imagery frequently overlaps with the fulgent memory of the ancient Hellenistic *ecumene* and the Islamic domestic *kosmos*' legacy, while also broadening its horizon to the lands of China.[3] In order to compensate for the absence of explicit chronological references in Bausani,[4] I decide to pay more attention to the formative stage of Islamic cultures' encounter, hence, to sources related to the late Abbasid era (tenth-twelfth centuries) up to the fifteenth century, where societal upheavals and new paths for spirituality (e.g. Sufism) profoundly energised cultural practices. In this sense, I pursue a theoretical discussion on these topics, whereas the Bausanian

3 The 'invention' of the Silk Road is thoughtfully discussed by Tamara Chin (2013, 194-5). Being aware that the definition is non-endogenous, I will use it as a mere geographical indication in the present paper.

4 The only turning point to which Bausani alludes is the one between pre-modern and modern Muslim societies (1981, 15-16). Although there is an implicit reference to colonialism on the last pages when he discusses linguistic hegemony (17-18), this is not discussed within the article.

paradigm's unsuitability for a proper linguistic analysis has already been highlighted in detail (Veerstegh 2020, 5-25).

In order to do this, in this first article of a two-part study, I take Bausani's terminology and premises as a starting point to explore the limits of his essentially descriptive paradigm – that he defines as *quid* (something) – and, at the same time, investigate what, in my view, is its enormous potential. My focus thereby is on what Bausani indicates as the pivots for the Islamic Languages' theory: a) the hegemonic influence of Persian and Arabic affected other languages following a 'centres-peripheries' dynamic; b) the *influsso libresco* – i.e. canonical written production's prestige – served as the main booster for the transfer of knowledge across different languages; c) the *osmosi dall'alto* – i.e. the canonised religious tradition had a primary influence also into the oral knowledge transfer and, lastly, d) the presence of Arabic and Persian in other languages is traceable as according to multiple layers of stratification. In this article, I limit the discussion to the first two issues.

At a closer look, what seems to be essential in this paradigm is the frame of cultural space, its practices, and the wandering nature of ontologies and meanings rather than the morphological, lexical, and phonological issues mentioned by Bausani – which, as alsohighlighted by Dayeh (2022, 109), are not traceable consistently throughout *Dār al-Islām*'s idioms. Based on this observation, I list a set of premises for my study, namely sociocultural, ethical, historical, or related to the history of science, according to which Muslim speakers often employed metaphors, metonymies, and analogies to faithfully interpret and translate Islamic identity concepts. A perspective that risks upending each of the scholar's four arguments ultimately – to paradoxically prove that his intuition was great.

Drawing upon a holistic methodology that gathers Gaston Bachelard's *La Poétique de l'espace* (1957) and Deleuze-Guattari's *Mille Plateaux* (1987) with historical, lexicographical, and literary sources, I start my rereading of the Islamic Languages in the wake of Bausani's paradigm focusing on imagination and – from here – on poetics rather than on multilingualism and interlinguistic processes. My study argues that the adherence of a large number of speakers to the same code of ethical-moral values, inspired by religious beliefs, has primarily influenced the mobility of concepts rather than words through the different idioms of the Muslim 'domestic space'.[5] This led to a shared imaginative and expressive framework identified here

5 Campo (1991) employs the expression 'Muslim domestic space' but with a completely different meaning. He analyses how, in *Qurʾān* and *ḥadīth* literature, the term 'house' is frequently associated with concepts such as cavern, shell, and the hereafter, among others.

as 'ethospoetic' (i.e. grounded on *ethos*). This innovative ethospoetic perspective – conceived in contrastive terms with respect to the ethnopoetics of Jerome Rothenberg (1968), Dennis Tedlock (1983), and Dell Hymes (1981), which is grounded instead on the ethnic matrixes embedded in every cultural expression – therefore focuses on the cognitive and semantic processes that have led to the creation of common imagineries traced in multilingual literary pursuits. I stress how such processes, insensitive to ethnic differences (but also to the terms of linguistic proximity sketched by Bausani), took an eminently ethical, spiritual, and cultural familiarity as a basis. My exploration begins by introducing the methodological tools employed throughout this two-part study while also identifying the vital space for Islamic Languages. I will demonstrate how this reflection integrates the discussion of Bausani's initial focus on 'centres-peripheries' dynamics.

2 Framing the Islamic Languages' Space: *Domestic*, *Nomadic*, Time-*Echoing*

> "Quand les cimes de notre ciel se rejoindront/ Ma maison aura un toit".
> (Paul Éluard, *Dignes de vivre*, 1944, 115)

In a 2000s contribution dedicated to a renewed reading of Gilles Deleuze's (d. 1995) philosophy of space, the poet Arnaud Villani states:

> The space generally understood does not have any requirements. Space is an area in which, among other things, there is an activity, specifically a human activity, an area that, therefore, is null from the value point of view. The territorialization process changes the nature of space by inserting something that the space itself does not have, such as an economy, a language, a religion. (Villani; Sasso 2003, 84)

Drawing upon this reflection, my first concern is to start identifying the space where the Islamic Languages took form and spread and how, in turn, this might significantly contribute to expanding their own spectrum and, hence, definition.

In the one provided by Bausani, space and language areas almost match to the point that they are mutually defined. While giving this aspect as implicit, he pays attention to when an 'Islamic' linguistic dimension burgeoned in a noticeable way, thus when the superstrata influence of "Arabic, Persian-Arabic, Arabised Persian started to affect all the Asian languages" (1981, 5) as for the result of cultural

stratification.[6] Claiming a geographically grounded 'centres-peripheries' dynamic, Bausani mainly identifies unidirectional trajectories, which are expressions of the Arabic/Persian "colonizing power of penetration" over other languages (7). In his view, words migrated from the Arabic-Persian-speaking Muslim centres of cultural production to the Hindi, Turkish, Chagatai, and, more recently, Urdu ones, indicating the evolutive stages of the Islamic Languages' life. While this reflection "does not make much sense from a linguistic point of view" (Versteegh, 2020, 9),[7] it has more to do with the cultural hegemony and modes of cultural exchange within the area. More compellingly, it only marginally addresses two concepts assumed at its core: i.e, a Muslim space of ever-shifting poles for cultural production and free contact among languages; Islam itself, which, if understood in its broad "cultural and non-religious significance" (Bausani 1981, 3), carries significant weight in complicating a mere space-language mutual definition.

With respect to the possible notion of Islamic Languages, as governed by default by the centrality of faith and spirituality as an overall cultural framework, no aim could be more challenging than investigating the Muslim relational space. This undertaking necessarily invites us to explore the Silk Road's lands, valleys, and crossroads through "les géographies solennelles des limites humaines" (Éluard 1936, 42) rather than demarcated physical boundaries. Apart from ever-shifting 'centres' and 'peripheries', here, the immensity of human agency appears as inscribed in the wake of Islam through a constellation of 'language miniatures', which only occasionally calls for familiarity with a remarkably huge linguistic space. By 'language miniatures', I mean those sketches that unveil essential, ontological vitality encapsulated in words' semantics, the one which paves the way for a proper reflection on imagination and – from here – on poetics rather than on formal language inferences.[8]

In order to fulfil these premises, Gaston Bachelard's (d. 1962) topophilia seems to be the most helpful access to our subject, whereas Gilles Deleuze's (d. 1995) insights in topology and the most recent inquiries of Arkady Plotnitsky enlighten us on the broad geolinguistic

6 In the *Lingue Islamiche* essay, Bausani clearly states that the classification of Islamic Languages "is based, almost exclusively, on socio-linguistic superstrata" (Bausani 1981, 3-4). Although he mentions other areas of influence, like Africa (5), throughout the essay, he focuses on the Asian context exclusively.

7 If not referred to the wandering loanwords, which, however, in both Versteegh and Bausani's view, do not affect a language's structure so profoundly. Contradictorily, Bausani pays considerable attention to loanwords later in his essay (11).

8 The term 'miniature' is borrowed from Bachelard (1957, 148-82). If Bachelard employs it to indicate "the worlds within worlds" underpinned by imagination (171), I also apply the same principle to languages' liveliness and creativity.

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network where topophilia acts (Plotnitsky 2009).[9] Investigating how language's imaginary processes and resulting realisations give voice to the most profound movement of the consciousness, *La Poétique de l'espace* (1957)[10] of Bachelard provides the means to observe language as the dynamic, undetermined voice of consciousness climbing from the cave of Muslim devotion to finally mould the outside world. More rivetingly, according to Bachelard's view, outside space appears as "seized upon by the imagination" (36); hence, it cannot remain a neutral subject to the measures and estimates of the philologist, historian, or geographer. Eloquently, the definition of *Dār al-Islām* offers clues to a domestic configuration of this area that has not been lived as a physical space but according to a shared sense of life and emotion binding a heterogeneous – though externally cohesive – religious community, as Calasso-Lancioni (2017), Hodgson (1975, 59), Löpez-Morillas (2011), and Zadeh (2012) depict it.[11] They convincingly attest to the Muslim community's ability to look at the same primary religious sources from various perspectives and idioms, ranging from the Iberian Peninsula to Bukhara, often bypassing political hierarchies.

In my view, the first step in the realisation of the Islamic Languages' space is to focus on three crucial premises briefly: 1) to clarify the term of applicability of the domestic space notion to the Islamic ethos-grounded collective spatial dimension as an alternative to Bausani's 'centres-peripheries' conceptualisation; 2) to draw upon Deleuze's reasoning, his addressing the fluid, continuous processes of human 'territorialisation', 'deterritorialisation', and 'nomadism' which, in turn, redefine the nature of the space discussed here; 3) to argue the relevance of the space-time relationship beyond Bakhtin's chronotope while reflecting on Bausani's paradigm (Bakhtin 2020, 85).

(1) Let us first address the social and religious terms that could define the *kosmos* as an intimate, domestic space where consciousness stirs up from *de profundis* and acts at both individual and collective levels. As William Goyen (d. 1983) affirms in his novel *The House of Breath* (1950), the place where people are born, grow, and move around "is unknown until they call it with love, and call it home, and put roots there and love others" (40). Michael Sells (2016, 88) reminds us how a central feature of classical Islamic culture was the ability to foster "the interpermeability and interfusion of discursive and cultural worlds such as each one is reflected within

9 In his paper, Plotnitsky suggests a possible 'third' option of social topology within this article, combining individual, collective, and general reflections on space.

10 As the present study is in English, hereafter, I will directly quote from the book's English translation (1994).

11 For further insights, refer to Calasso's earlier contribution (2010, 271-96).

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the other". This extraordinary openness to embracing a plethora of heritages and languages, alongside the Arabian ethos and idiom, may extend beyond the confines of a Muslim universe, as described by geographers. Sells' review and encapsulation of the unsayable shows how vast a universe grows in Sufi flashes, and how tiny it becomes when compressed in the reach-out for the divine. We can detect this not only in "one of history's greatest philological endeavours" (Idel, McGinn 2016, 90), but also in the emotional philological path collecting a myriad of individual life acts inspired by the same values and hermeneutics regardless of the *ethnos*, as also found in Shahab (2016). Bausani himself also points out this aspect:

> Even if not clearly stated, the importance of an educated cultural superstratum, hence a non-ethnic unity among the Islamic Languages, is undoubtedly present in Muslim peoples' consciousness – at least as a potential. (1981, 3-4)

Looking at the same issue upside down, the narrowed, if not irrelevant, place reserved to a geographical, physical notion of the 'stranger' within the classical Muslim tradition, as studied by Rosenthal, confronts us with the peculiar dynamics of the vast Muslim space as those of a domestic one (1997, 35-6) – a context where, indeed, *ethnos* plays a liminal role. Here, the prevailing sense of familiarity with a composite *ethos* encrypted and engraved in a unique, ethical, behavioural, and emotional code enables every Muslim from *el-Andalus* to Delhi to see themselves in this mirror, conceiving strangeness as an existential and spiritual status that frees the human from bondage. "No land is my home. My homeland is God", recites al-Tawḥidī (d. 414/1023) in his *al-Ishārāt al-Ilāhiyya* (ed. 1950, 78). The *gharīb* (Ar./Per.) 'stranger', therefore, acquires a moving ontological status through its alternative, plain or metaphorical, definitions like *ibn al-ṣabīl* (Ar.) 'son of the road' (Ibn al-Athīr ed. 1991, 263), *ibn al-arḍ* (Ar.) 'son of the earth' (66), *ibn al-qastal* (Ar.) 'son of the dust' (278), *bīgāneh* (Per.) 'alien' (al-Sharīshī ed. 1992, 1: 69) or *faqīr/darwīsh* (Ar./Per.) 'the poor one' – i.e. the wandering pious in Sufi tradition (Dehkhoda 1958). In all cases, each fixed criterion is only contextually defined. Hence, a distinguishing facet here is the fluctuating social marginality rather than spatial foreignness. In other words, the Muslim domestic space is for the *umma* dweller, the real place to be and live, regardless of physical boundaries or the cultural authoritativeness of the region he/she comes from.

(2) As far as the more general concept of space to be discussed in this section, Deleuze's inquiries in topology in *Mille Plateaux* (1987), and more specifically, the chapter "Nomadologie", equip this reading with additional tools. Applying his rhizome diagram theory to the

perception of the space (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 660-1),[12] we can see how a horizontal, non-hierarchical look at the multiplicities usually gathered under the label of a cultural 'whole' reveals that these do not coincide with 'the whole' itself, nor do they strictly adhere to a linguistic/cultural prestige dynamic as found in Bausani (1981, 6-7). Deleuze affirms:

> An intensity, for instance, is not composed of addable quantities: a temperature is not the sum of two smaller temperatures, a velocity is not the sum of two smaller velocities [...] discrete topological elements are perceived *continuous spaces* as parallel to the great figure they compose. (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 661)

Applying this reading to *Dār al-Islām*, it seems evident that linguistic, ritual, and broadly cultural multiplicities, even if tied under the same ethical and religious marker, do not dissolve in Islam until their disappearance. Conversely, they contribute to renewing its image, as Deleuze would say, "deforming it continuously [but without tears, seams, or folds] through acts of territorialization" (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 103). Alongside cultural 'territorialization', what acquires significance here are also the processes of 'de-territorializ*ation*', hence in the wake of Peirce, those that transform 'indexes' into 'symbols' and, later, 'icons'.[13] In other words, the Islamic ethos could be imagined as an elastic mesh or biological entity where Arab, Persian, Indian, Turkish, or Chinese knots or cells continuously get either a bit closer or a bit distant according to the continuous 'deformations' they undergo to their vital space. Still, the substrata of symbolic familiarities Silk Road's peoples shared before the advent of Islam, under its influence, and even after, do not allow abrupt movements – i.e. historical ruptures or overturns – to tear the big picture or break a chain of those meaningful acts of nomadism "tattooing [that portion of] earth" (Lambert 2005, 226-7) known as the Silk Road.

Hereupon, I explain my choice to define my subject of study as ethospoetics of Islamic Languages or, better, Islamic ethospoetics. Bausani's point of view partially resonates with the ethnopoetic

12 The name 'rhizome' refers to vegetable radicles, such as those of the weed, which originate in a single point and then unfold in multiple directions. Metaphors aside, a rhizomatic thought possesses the character of "granting an open circulation between concepts, favouring differentiated paths and unprecedented connections" (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "Rhizome", later reprised and included in *Mille Plateaux* 1980).

13 To expand upon Charles Sanders Peirce's definition for 'index', 'icon', and 'symbol', see, respectively, the paragraphs "Of Reasoning in General", "Divisions of Triadic Relations", and "Syllabus" in Hartshorne, Weiss, and Burks who edited *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (1997, 2: 286, 247, 275).

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manifesto signed by Jerome Rothenberg and Dennis Tedlock, among others, in the late 1960s. While following different investigation paths, Bausani and ethnopoetics scholars equally advocated for a proper revaluation of 'peripheral' or marginalised linguistic and literary performances, as well as the importance of cultural experience in lieu of a hardcore philological approach. However, Bausani mentions ethnicity as a term mostly inherited by his coeval cultural jargon – and thus imbued with ideological stances – but, in his view, devoid of proper cultural significance (1981, 3-4, 9, 16, 18). Conversely, being Tedlock eager to upend a colonialist perspective in approaching the so-called 'indigenous cultures'' literature(s), he identifies ethnicity as encapsulated by default into every cultural data, running the risk of confirming the point of view he instead aims to dismantle:

> Ethnopoetics does not merely contrast the poetics of 'ethnics' with just plain poetics, but implies that any poetics is always an ethnopoetics. Our main interest will indeed be the poetries of people who are ethnically distant from ourselves, but it is precisely by the effort to reach into distances that we bring our own ethnicity, and the poetics that goes with it, into fuller consciousness. (Tedlock 2011)

Reflecting on the profound implications of cultural fragmentation within the "Medieval, grammatic, and anti-ethnic Muslim wholeness" (Bausani 1981, 17), Bausani's paper ends with a thought-provoking quote from Sutan Takdir Alisjabhana (d. 1994), who expressed aversion towards self-referential ethnopoetic inquiries and their "disdain of linguistic universals" (18). While this attitude prompts a crucial evaluation of the cultural specificities of the Muslim World and its marginalised peripheries, Bausani's position may lead us into a potential contradiction similar to the one Tedlock's ethnopoetics faced. With this, I mean underscoring the risk of "misrepresenting and even patronizing primitive [or peripherical] cultures" (Quick 1999, 100), thereby strengthening their ties with the bias of the Western ethnographer – or, in our case, an Arabic-Persian suprematist colonizing narrative.

An overview of a concept like 'being virtuous' (Ar. *futuwwā*/Per. *javānmardī*), as exhaustively provided by Mohsen Zakeri and Lloyd Ridgeon, might enlighten us about this risk. Both the pre-Islamic Arabic and Persian meanings of those terms broadly refer to a sense of youth and moral refinements as an individual virtue, which certainly, with the advent of the Qur'ān, "started to be infused with a partially new content" (Zakeri 1995, 21), being therefore elevated to the range of an associational type of "ethical system dominated by altruism, magnanimity, and liberality" (Ridgeon 2011, 13). However,

the process of evolution did not stop there. These terms continued to be shaped by the ever-changing socio-political and intellectual landscapes within the vast Islamic domestic space. This continuous transformation led to a confluence between similar concepts in different contexts, distancing the concept from the Arabic-Persian original semantic dimension. In this sense, *futuwwā*/*javānmardī* meanings stretched to overlap with *'ayyār*'s one (urban militians) in the Omayyad and Abbasid period (al-Tawḥīdī ed. 1965, 293; al-Jāḥiẓ ed. 1947, 1: 168-9), from there, to straightforward robbers or Robin-Hood type heroes (al-Tawḥīdī ed. 1939-44, 3: 160-1), to later become expression of a switch from a *chevalerie militaire* to a *chevalerie spirituelle* (Corbin 1971, 311-56) with Suhrawardī (d. 586/1191) and the spread of Sufism (Piemontese 1967, 557-63). From the twelfth century, the absorption by the Sufis of the concept of *futuwwā*/*javānmardī*, a testament to the spiritual depth of these concepts, led, in turn, to its assimilation by groups commonly associated with them, like the artisan and trade guilds. Furthermore, in Anatolia, during the thirteenth century of the Great Seljuqs' regency, the influence of the indigenously early Turkish element *aqi* – i.e. 'courageous, virtuous, and loyal' but referred to political authority (Bayram 1991, 3-5), brought those terms to indicate a military force under the caliphal appanage as well. So *futuwwā*/*javānmardī* spread along the Silk Road (and not only there) as a semantically composite rose of ever-declined meanings following metaphorical or metonymic paths, where the thief and the saint, the loyal companion and the rebel – not sparing the "killer", as found in Ibn Baṭṭuṭa (ed. 1954, 383) – shape a legendary archetype of masculinity. This, in turn, enriched Arabic and Persian imaginaries with new suggestions – and, incidentally, questions Bausani's concept of mainly unidirectional trajectories of influence that, alone, could never justify such a rich and complex semantic development.

(3) Reaching now to the space-time issue, the previous example showed us how "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one concrete whole", according to Bakhtin's chronotope (2020, 84). A continuative perception of time acts as a catalyst for errant ontologies across a vast space, which becomes intimate if read through those similarities and contiguities, metaphors, and metonymies that have slowly shaped multifaceted ideas like 'stranger' or 'being virtuous', as shown. At the beginning of this paragraph, I have pointed out Bausani's emphasis on pursuing a cumulative reading of linguistic stratifications (i.e. sociolinguistic superstrata) – rather than the transformative nature of the cultural processes that led to these results. While space-language areas are at least mutually defined in his paradigm, the notion of 'time' – the "fourth spatial dimension" in Bakhtin's terms (2020, 85) – is hinted at just in relation to the Persian and Arabic historical periods of significant influence.

In this sense, Bausani's 'archaeological' endeavours in recognising historical and linguistic 'centres' and 'peripheries', instead of accepting their transient nature and spatial relativity are similar to the cartographer's. Cities, towns, and villages indicated in his map are represented through small points; the roads linking them resemble straight lines. Still, despite the author's premises on "influsso libresco" and "osmosi dall'alto", a map like this does fully account for the myriad of invisible paths through which wandering cultural practices move within this area (i.e. the methods of conversation, discussion, compilation, speaking, and writing), which are certainly mentioned but not investigated,[14] making both the contemporary lexicographer and the historian uncomfortable.

Even with a hint of naïveté, if looking at one single textual source or even dictionary, we are ultimately forced to acknowledge the eternal now in which words live, their boldness to incarnate or resist power. In the most fortunate cases, we can roughly attest to when a term starts to be used, how different languages had encountered at a few signs' crossroads, or follow the intricate threads of the etymologies. However, dictionaries are not 'dwelled' by specific dates, nor by kingdoms' alternations, their splendours, or declines. They are the dwellings of meanings, actions, and, quite often, people. Thus, what justifies words' presence in lexicographic records is their continuative use, at least for an extended period, so that they appear – in Bachelard terms – like the "fixations" (1994, 6) or photograms of which every personal memory, but also every collective linguistic one, is made.

As a necessary caveat, when I mention 'words' here, I namely refer to what sustains *logos*' continuity and liveliness, hence the ontologies underpinning these 'photograms', how they grow and transform under the 'tran-subjectivity' of language meaningfulness and work through *agencement* – i.e. 'concatenation' – as we saw in both 'stranger' and 'being virtuous' examples.[15] Within the frame,

14 In Bausani's essay, the expressions *influsso libresco* and *osmosi dall'alto* are used complementarily. They respectively refer to written transmission and indirect oral transmission; however, the processes by which these occur are not expanded upon. Moreover, oral transmission is scarcely addressed, if at all. For example, Bausani primarily accounts for the written tradition's influence (i.e. the one concerned with the *influsso libresco*), frequently mentioning it but taking for granted the methods of introducing Arabic and Persian corpora in the Muslim area. When discussing *osmosi dall'alto* – the phenomenon where illiterate social strata were influenced by written culture almost by osmosis – he notes that stories from the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābharata* "were profoundly enjoyed by the illiterate people" (12), yet he does not explain how these texts reached the Malay environment. As for oral transmission, he states: "There are lexemes that derive from oral contact, it is undeniable, but they are relatively scant" (1981, 13).

15 'Tran-subjectivity' is a term introduced by Bachelard (1957, 19). The term *agencement* is borrowed from Deleuze's arguably expanded vision, although Bachelard does not appear in the text (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 691). For the continuity of thought between the authors, cf. Marzocca 1989, 161.

of Islamic Languages' chameleon-like semantics has no chance of survival far from the efforts of *ulamā'*, *fuqahā'*, *udabā'*, *ḥuffāẓ* administrators, bureaucrats, traders, travellers, scholars, wandering pious figures, artists, and calligraphers whose works enable us to re-depict the maps of historical and geographical references with unrestrained freedom.

The vision described so far might look *a*-historical in principle, if not for an inner sentiment of the time that governs it, stressing the anthropocentric perspective at the basis of ethospoetics inquiries applied to the Islamic Languages' domestic space. While holding the strands of Bachelard, Deleuze, and Bausani's approaches to the spatial dimension, I argue that topophilia, topology, and cartography are all valuable means to understand how ethospoetics works as a germinative soil where Ar./Pers. *buʿd*/*qurb* o *qurub* (distance/proximity) or *bāṭin*/*ẓāhir* (inward/outward) acquires different meanings according to a philosophy of space. If Bachelard defines the 'imaginative mind' and the 'observing mind' as following different paths, respectively of 'immersion' – i.e. focusing on the invisible nucleus overcoming the surface – and 'emersion' – i.e. gazing at the core that dynamises the surface shape (1994, 157-8) – Deleuze qualitative equivalence between 'extension' and 'intension' or 'profundity' encourages us to look for the Islamic Languages ontologies through both ascending and descending movements (1995, 296-7), not neglecting the continuous, telluric effect of the historical continuum on the language surface. When having a closer look at it, the paradox faced by the present investigation is soon unveiled: while talking about the Islamic domestic space, we are actually talking about 'time' disguised as 'space'.

3 Surfaces and Culture Earthquakes: A Reverberating Sufi Corpus

> Ce qu'il y a de plus profond en l'homme, c'est la peau.
> Paul Valery (*L'idée fixe*, 1933, 42)

I do not intend to neglect a conventional historical perspective within this framework; simply, in my view, it fails to be a secure pivot. It acts better as a two-fold guideline, enabling us to define how profound cultural shocks are simultaneously the strongest and most detectable of a series continuously affecting the surface. There is no doubt that Muslim domestic space's boundless expansion has been triggered by specific cultural dynamics, among which the theological and language revisions also quoted by Adam Mez and Bausani, respectively, in *Die Renaissance des Islams* (1922, 32-8) and *I Persiani* (1962, 83-92). The eight-ninth centuries blooming of Muslim

languages' normativisation, namely Arabic and New Persian, and, later on, the fall of Baghdad in 1258 opened multiple parallax views on cultural earthquakes, which are readable between the lines of major events occurring up to the fifteenth century and question "the neat identification of political and cultural poles" as al-Musawi recalls (2015, 6). The reflection on these phenomena is essential in order to discuss Bausani's stress on the *influsso libresco* (namely, the second main argument of his paradigm, 1981, 6).[16] I am about to show how this influence is just a more tangible seismic shift when compared to the profound, empathetic cultural revolutions from below, such as the one that emerged with the significant impact of Sufism.

Among the seismic shocks involving the Muslim cultural world, al Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) polemical theological activity had contributed to the new politically oriented discourse on faith that started early on and got even more controversial during the caliph al-Mutawwakil's (d. 247/861) times, with "Sufism included, and rationalist philosophy excluded" (Hourani 1976, 71; cf. Goldziher 1981, 105). Due to an obvious chronological estimate, we should admit that the glorious rationalist parenthesis of Muʿtazilism (fl. eighth-tenth centuries) – that still exercises a relentless attraction to scholars and has a prominent place in our studies – arguably participated to a lesser degree than thus far we have thought in hastening the whirling spirals of the Islamic ethos to the farthest eastern lands where the Silk Road starts. As observed by Nicholson (2001, 53), from the thirteenth century, with the arrival of Mongols, India, western China, and then Anatolia became the destination of a massive cultural and professional migration of scholars, pious figures, and traders – mostly Persians from Khorasan – who followed the strands of a more empathetic than rationalist religious discourse. In the second part of this study, I will discuss how this empathetic discourse actually integrates rationalism and logic, but in a very original way.

Although Bausani did not explicitly account for pious figures, traders, and copyists as cultural actors (13), nor the *elemento popolaresco* – i.e. the 'emersion' of folk echoes in canonised written tradition – as relevant to the Islamic Languages discourse (10), it seems reasonable to say that the Sufi language has been more influential than any other in the profound Islamisation of the Silk Road area. In this paragraph, I suggest looking more closely at a few issues in particular. First, how and in response to which historical and cultural overturns did Sufi idiolect move at ease across the Islamic

16 Bausani is obscure about this point. In his essays, here and there, he roughly refers to the most authoritative religious sources like the *Qurʾān*, *aḥādīth*, *sunna*, *sīra*, and *Nahj al-balāgha* for the Shiīʿa tradition, yet he never defines a corpus or a specific period of reference. As with reference to the third pivot of his paradigm, i.e. "osmosi dall'alto d'origine colta" (1981, 6, 9, 12) I will address in the second part of my study.

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Languages, working at both the superficial and profound language levels, much better than the written canonised corpora accounted in Bausani.[17] Second, I discuss the ethos-poetics-related factors that should lead us to consider the Sufi corpus as the most suitable for this investigation. Conclusively, I will address Sufis' mobility in the following article, as their 'nomadism' played a crucial role in revising theoretical rhetorical frameworks across the Silk Road's traditions. In my view, these insights not only question the *influsso libresco*, as already stated above, but also corroborate upending the idea that an Arabic-Persian influence over other languages followed unilateral trajectories as claimed by the Italian scholar (1981, 8-9).

It is true that traders, professional writers, craftsmen, bureaucrats, and many other actors travelling across *die Seidenstrasse*'s recently defined space contributed to building different languages' crossroads as patchworks rather than geographies and chronologies. Upon looking back, one is drawn to notice a spontaneous combination of aesthetic criteria, professional idiolects, and commercial terminology in the wake of Islam.[18] Sufis incorporated, however, all the material world into the spiritual *logos* through errant, interlinguistic double-entendres and metaphors that provide us with a rich corpus that reflects positively on Islamic Languages' ontologies. Some pivotal Sufi conceptualisations like *ḥaqq*/*ḥaqīqa* – i.e. 'reflection on truth' or *baqā'*/*fanā'* – i.e. 'abiding/annihilation', for instance, could arguably be conceived as polysemic living entities grown under the wing of a Sufi' experience. Sufism engaged with different cultures' meditation practices more than expected. In their poetic journeys along the path, Sufis recover so much of the physical and seeming real, which has been the domain of a long poetic tradition. To the unfamiliar reader, their poetic excursions sound pretty sensual, worldly, and even secular. Their deep or esoteric meaning is achieved via this buttressing of the spiritual with the material or densely physical.

17 The bibliography on the "logocentric elevation of orality over writtenness" (Timm 1992, 302-3) in the Sufi knowledge transfer, practices, and accounts is huge. Timm's edited volume, including Ersnt, Narayanan, and Hoffman's contributions, also addresses the troublesome transition of Sufi corpora to the written form. In his seminal work, Ernst (2011) argues that Western scholars' alienation from the oral aspects of transmission and their tendency to prioritise writtenness have exaggerated the degree of literality according to which premodern Muslim religious training and knowledge transfer actually occurred (55 and *passim*). Regarding the problematic notion of authorship in Sufi accounts, see also Frishkopf 2003.

18 It is curious that Bausani solely stresses the *influsso libresco* as maritime trades' strong influence in the spontaneous spread of Islam did not go unnoticed in his previous inquiries (Bausani 1969, 487-520). More recent scholarly works address this issue, although authors often fail to quote the Italian scholar's earlier records (cf. Steinmann 1987, 68-74 and Lawler 2014, 1440-5).

They also dig deep into the religious, or even orthodox, side of Islam, but the outcome is different from surface meanings.

Regarding surface/profundity, Bausani also addresses the degree of profundity in linguistic contacts within his essay, but oddly limits it to loanwords. He states:

> Loans, obviously, are *deeper* if they reach what Graur calls 'the bottom of the language' – *casa* [home], for instance, belongs to the bottom of the language in Italian, but the word *batràcide* [adj., related to *bàtrace* (frog, toad)] does not. (Bausani 1981, 11)

According to this vision, one should expect Bausani to analyse the concepts embedded in words and, in turn, the loanwords related to foundational epistemological categories. Also, taking into account his stress on the Qurʾān-related sources' prestige, one could also await the analysis of religious terms highly recurring in the Silk Road's Islamic Languages – notably Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Chagatai – mostly tied to Sunni and Shiʿa canonical traditions and jurisprudence – e.g. *ijmāʿ* (consensus or agreement of the Islamic community on a point of Islamic law).[19] Surprisingly, in his essay, we found just a mention of Italian-Persian borrowing in use during the 1980s and a verse from Ḥāfeẓ (d. 792/1390) filled with Arabic loans – commonly used in Persian at the poet's time – that do not prove the relevance of the label 'Islamic' as applied to the Italian-Persian case, neither a more profound connection beyond mere multilingualism in Ḥāfeẓ's (12).[20] This lack of a deeper connection in Bausani's analysis is disappointing, as it was not loanwords but semantics or Islamic ethos-related concepts that might justify the canvas of interlinguistic influences.

The antithetic pair *bāṭin/ẓāhir* is helpful to this understanding. Bernd Radtke (*EIr*) and Paul E. Walker (*EI*) explain that these terms underwent a multilayered semantic enrichment as a binomial. This semantic endowment was initially referred to the literal meanings of 'inner' and 'outer' to include soon 'inward/outward' in the metaphysical understanding of early mystics like Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d.

19 As I attested in a preliminary phase of my study (52 lexemes collected), most terms from Sunni and Shi'a canonical traditions are maintained across Islamic Languages such as Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu only with some minimal, usually phonetic or morphological, variations.

20 The Italian-Persian borrowing mentioned refers to the daily use of *panj mīl* [*līr*] (five-thousands liras) where liras is implicit and *mīl* is a partially integrated loan from the Italian *mille*. Bausani recognises this loan with exclusive reference to *hazār līr* and not to all the cases where *hazār* is in use. As for the verse of Ḥāfez, it is *shokr-e Īzād ke miyān-e man-o-ū ṣolḥ oftād/ṣufiyān raqṣ - konān sāghar-e shokrāne zadand* where the terms in italics are borrowings from Arabic. Cf. Bausani 1978, 8-9.

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110/728), where *al-bāṭin* means "the man's inner self, the complex of emotions which stir his soul" (Radtke *EIr*). While during the same period, the pair developed in the Kufian Shiʿī environment to indicate the 'eternal', so the inner nature, and the 'terrestrial' – privileging the first (i.e. the highest form of knowledge) at the expense of the second – from the tenth century onwards many Sufis arguably treasured the 'esoteric/exoteric' understanding that those terms acquired in Ismāʿilī theology (Walker 1993), suggesting a further hyponymisation: al-Ghazālī in his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* distinguishes two categories of *ʿilm al-bāṭin*: *ʿilm taṣqīl al-qalb* (knowledge of ways to polish the heart), which is a pedagogic discipline, and *ʿilm al-mukāshafa*, which is God-given illumination of the heart (ed. 1970, 105). Ibn al-ʿArabī draws a similar distinction (cf. Sell 1988, 121-49). These two (additional) meanings of *bāṭin*/*ẓāhir* were not always clearly differentiated. So many misunderstandings and misrepresentations arose, especially when the lexemes started to indicate the allegorical and literal interpretation of the Qurʾān. The situation became more complicated when the derived term from *bāṭin* – i.e. *Bāṭiniyya*, began to be used as a diminishing, pejorative designation applied by Sunnī orthodoxy to theological or even political enemies (Walker 1993, 127).[21] The terms' interpretations within the Indian or Turkish environments have been investigated by Dähnhardt (2018, 449-60) and Virani (2010, 197-221). I will no longer dwell on what scholarship has already explored in depth. Still, this case suggests that terms featured by such a semantic wealth could hardly be conceived as Arabic loanwords simply migrated to Persian, Hindi, or Turkish. They express the composite, slow magma of ontologies that only *bāṭin*/*ẓāhir*'s continuative use across the heterogeneous practices of Islam across time and space made possible.

Based on the previous example, we can agree with Sells that Sufi idiolect interiorises the Islamic ethos to the point "that no register was left away" (2016, 105). Therefore, the Qur'anic, poetic, Gnostic, hermetic, and theological linguistic worlds are merged in a sort of mythopo(i)etic tension (cf. Van Gelder 1983). This use does not spare alchemy, astrology, numerology (*jabr*), cledonism (*ʿiyāfa*), gnostic cabalism (*ḥurufiyya*) as they are found in every local tradition encountered by Sufi Islam.[22] In Deleuzian terms, one can argue that Sufi idiolect acts both on the stylistic surface and semantic profundity

21 As found in Walker (*EI*), "typically, for Sunnīs, the term might be used against the philosophers (*al-falāsifa*) or the Ṣūfīs, both of whom were accused of elevating the figurative interpretation of the holy writ over its literal meaning, which they thus tended to ignore. Political reasons were often entangled".

22 A broad reflection related to written signs and al-Ḥurūfiyya movement is found in Schimmel 1990, 68. Regarding pseudo-magical rituals and their use among Sufis, see Coulon 2015, 179-248. With reference to divination practices, see Fahd 1966.

of the communicative dimension, shuffling the cards of Muslim references with substrata beliefs and rituals as in the example of *wajd*/*wujūd* conceived as both the ecstatic practice and the ultimate sense of mystical research (Renard 2005, 80).[23]

As anticipated, I now explain why a Sufi corpus is the most suitable for an Islamic ethospoetic investigation. The main feature of the ponderous and renewed Sufi cosmology – which finds its ultimate realisation in an idiolect that seems to be 'Islamic' *par excellence* – is the ability to solve contradictions, logical squabbles, sophistries, and opposite tensions into an appeased sense of unity. In metaphysical terms, all this translates into the seeker's search for God. This concept was already well consolidated in the Hinduist and Buddhist areas, and its long-reaching influence is traced back to modern times by Böwering (1992, 77-89), Idel-McGinn (2016, 22), and Dähnhardt (2012, 323-60). The search for unity is manifested in language at both formal and epistemological levels. Regarding the formal one, Sufi idiolect reshapes "the divisions between subject and object, self and other, reflexive and nonreflexive, upon which language is based" (Sells 2016, 87) with extreme nonchalance. As for the epistemological level, Sufis' acquisition of *kalāmī* speculative thought as a layer of their multileveled linguistic domain allowed them to integrate the realm of logic into the one of empathy. As the anthropologist Favret-Saada recalls, emotional and visceral religious discourse, "is the only one that can guarantee life course and human creativity when rationality helps less" (1977, 27): thus, in the most chaotic or troublesome contexts of war, displacement, or political upturns. While Bausani's interest in upheavals may be less, it is precisely during these circumstances that the Islamic Languages had the opportunity to construct that common imaginary, which, in turn, defines them.

In a passage of the *Poétique*, Bachelard states: "Isn't the exterior an old intimacy in the shadow of memory?" (1994, 230). Seemingly, at the ontological level, what guarantees the protagonism of emotions in the Sufi language's recognition of local and global traditions is the ability to reunite the external, spatial dimension of the world and the inner, primeval one. *Mutatis mutandis*, if early *fuqarā'* like Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 80/765) suggested looking at the first *kalima* as their sole reference, they implicitly enabled their non-Arab followers to do the same and draw from the Persian and Hindi fertile soils all those atavistic elements that could therefore find a place in this Islamic stretched label. The connection, for instance, between *dil* (Per.) and

23 Cf. also Deleuze 1995, 297-8. Curiously, in the wake of nineteenth-century geometricians' work, even Deleuze mentions the possibility of working on letter shapes and resulting symbols. Cf. Plotnitsky 2009, 122.

qalb (Ar.) – i.e. 'heart' in relation to Hindi and Old Hindi *dil* – i.e. 'heart/mind', both understood as the seat of human reasoning by Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Ghāzalī or Suhrawardī,[24] goes beyond Gutas' (1998) pivotal study about Greek philosophy's influence on Arabic thought, broadening the eastern horizons of the ethospoetics and its wandering semantics.[25] Moreno's (1949, 59-66) and later Dähnhardt's (2002) inquiries with respect to Hinduism inferences in Sufis' cosmology and practices are extremely compelling in this sense.

However, these scholars also provide evidence of how Sufis' penchant for fostering syncretism at times also resulted in clumsy attempts to mix and match, for instance, Muslim and Hinduist concepts and cosmologies combining just at the surface level. While tracing this tendency since the late-thirteenth/mid-fourteenth centuries, Moreno uses a vivid metaphor to describe the approach of the Indian mystic Dārā Shikōh (d. 1069/1659), mentioned as 'pupil' of al-Birūnī (d. 440/1048):

> Instead of moving from the depths of the two masses of water [Islam and Hinduism] that he wants to bring together, he sits on the isthmus that separates them, amusing himself by sending splashes from one side to the other with his hands. (1949, 63)

Sufi mysticism covers the body of the Silk Road as skin. And like skin that, while completely protecting every part of this body, at times does not hide – instead tells us something about – the work of all the other organs inside, sometimes it shows traces of mere superficial changes. Within the interlinguistic dimension, Sufism's two-folded function paves the way to what interests us most: so, not only the plethora of substrata analogies in the syncretism of concepts across different languages; but also the ontological differences disguised as sameness, accomplished through metaphor. Such is the case of the pair *bāṭin*/*ẓāhir*, as seen, or even of *ṣidq* (i.e. 'sincerity', which is also a Sufi station). I suggest looking at these "youthful poetic acts" (Bachelard 1994, 19) or metaphors "we live by", as Lakoff suggests (1980; cf. Kövecses 2020), as that body part the Sufi skin leaves uncovered, the eyes, so as to look at a parterre of emotions, conceptualisation, and ideas that cannot be 'seen' otherwise.

It will not be a hazard to state that ethospoetics works through conceptual metaphors. Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory

24 Among the significant number of sources, in his *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, and Ibn ʿArabi*, Seyyed Husein Nasr highlights how, conversely, the *ʿaql* of Greek matrixes indicated the mere rationality (1964, 34, 65, 138). See also Glünz 1991, 53-68; Rustom 2010, 69-79; Skellie 2010, 14-35. Cf. Gutas 1998, 120.

25 Cf. Papas 2019, 207-22 and Shea 2018, 25-40.

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primarily concerns well-established metaphoric associations between concepts. In Lakoff's view, metaphors are not the result of language sophistication but a natural way to think and feel the world (1980, 31-8).[26] Looking for a counterpart according to an endogenous view, this position is not that far from al-Jurjānī's (d. 471/1078) thought when he inscribes rhetorical processes within the framework of *balāgha* as "the science of the effective discourse" or the human ability to envision life (al-Jurjānī ed. 1991, 323). When we talk about eloquence or *balāgha* the concepts of language 'naturalness' and 'artificiality' (more properly in Arabic, *takalluf*) might arguably been involved, but it is a mischievous perspective. Actually, *balāgha*, besides being a powerful guidance for both literati and critics, concerns the degree of logic and aesthetic normativisation that, at a certain point, starts to be applied to natural language expressions (Fontana 2025, 57-87).

Bausani insists on the primary role of the canonised written tradition in the Islamisation of the furthest lands and languages of the Silk Road. Still, this process seems instead grounded on both spontaneous innovations in language use and their exposure to subsequent normativisation.

Naturalness or spontaneity acts better in contexts where normativisation turns a blind eye. And if *sharīʿa* language reached a semantic crystallisation with the Shafiʿi *madhab* (fl. ninth century) after two centuries of harsh theological debates and different interpretations between the Medinese, Iraqi, and Syrian schools, Sufi scholars alternatively assumed both orthodox and heterodox demeanours across the transitional phase, which runs from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries.[27] Here, figures like Anṣarī of Herat (d. 481/1088), al-Ghazālī, Ruzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1209), Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), and Suhrawardī (d. 586/1191) constantly negotiated between normativisation's gravity and language creativity's lightness, reaching the peaks of poetic fruitfulness where the Islamic *ethos* grows strong and evolves.

Normativisation, however, is a natural process in languages. And the Sufi medium was affected by it, too. I suggest reading the Sufism's encounter with the *badīʿ* observed by Homerin in his *Filled with a Burning Desire: Ibn al-Farid-Poet, Mystic, and Saint* (1987, 81-3) as a litmus of Susanne Stetkevych's arguments on *badīʿ-kalām* interplay in "Toward a Redefinition of *Badīʿ* Poetry" (1981, 1-29), and in

26 It should be noted that cognitive linguistics' conceptualisation of metaphor also encompasses similes and metonymies built on different ontological switching (analogy or contiguity between the tropical subject and the real reference). Here, just with explicit reference to this approach, I employ metaphors and similes interchangeably.

27 Gerhard Böwering suggests a four-phase developmental schema of periods: 9th-11th *formative*, 11th-13th *transitional*, 13th-mid-14th *doctrinal*, 15th-18th featured by Sufism spread across the Ottoman Empire (1989, 255-70). Cf. Renard 2005, 83.

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comparison with Daniela Meneghini's definition of Persian *bayān* (*EI3* 2015). In these interventions, as in the event itself, *balāgha* stands out as pivotal.[28] This Sufi/ *badīʿ* interaction and its relevance to Islamic languages is no mere digression. Without understanding the rise of *badīʿ* in relation to the dominating statist discourse, we may fail to understand the sense of insecurity and trepidation that the privileged elite felt at the spread of Sufism. In his *Nights* with the vizier Ibn Saʿdān, Abū Ḥayyān laid emphasis on this sense (al-Musawi 2015, 35). This sense of trepidation should lead us to explore the notions and roles of *al-balāgha* in Islamic languages during specific historical times that have witnessed radical changes. That issue has been the subject of the second part of my study, alongside the issues of language canonisation according to religious sources and the substrata survival (namely the third and fourth points of Bausani's paradigm), which I will read in the light of the Italian scholar's familiarity with artificial or invented languages the Islamic ones are not.[29]

To conclude, I suggest the smokescreen created by Bausani's stress on the *influsso libresco* left his Islamic Language paradigm enigmatic, not because it is fallacious but because it is arguably affected by an inherent vice concerning Bausani's controversial experience with the narrow philological environment of his time, which was characterised by a hardcore philological approach and a scowling resistance to interdisciplinary investigations. Within the interlinguistic dimension, both oral and written traditions, folk and aristocratic people's customs, and peripatetic information were the means through which Islam spread like wildfire as a religiously inspired culture *cum spirito mundi*: thus, an intricate embroidery where also the canons for experiencing *dīn* (religious sphere) and *dunya* (secular sphere), hence, respectively, the *sharīʿah* and *adab* have continuously nourished each other. Both sacred and secular domains justify the Islamic languages' cultural and semantic cohesiveness as the result of a creatively diversified approach to the real and imaginative space-time interaction in the Silk Road area. The intertwining between these domains makes the cognitive and semantic processes traced in multilingual expressions the most exciting backdoor to embrace the secret of an Islamic common ethos. So far, how shall we define it? Maybe as something – a *quid* in Bausani's terms – that does not tell "almost the same thing" (Eco 2003) but a multi-shaded thing through a number of different idioms.

28 Although Homerin dissertation has been later revised as a book (i.e. Homerin, E. *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn al-Fāriḍ, His Verse, and His Shrine*. New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001), this recent version does not show reference to the *badīʿ* issue.

29 See the first note of this paper.

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