

Annali di Ca'Foscari

Serie orientale

Vol. 61 Giugno 2025

e-ISSN 2385-3042



Edizioni
Ca'Foscari

e-ISSN 2385-3042

Annali di Ca' Foscari

Serie orientale

Direttore
Antonio Rigopoulos

Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Venice University Press
Fondazione Università Ca' Foscari
Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia
URL <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/riviste/annali-di-ca-foscari-serie-orientale/>

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale

Rivista annuale

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Editore Edizioni Ca' Foscari | Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia, Italia | ecf@unive.it

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Scientific certification of the Works published by Edizioni Ca' Foscari: all the essays published have received a favorable opinion from subject-matter experts under the responsibility of the Advisory Board of the journal. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with the scientific and editorial criteria of Edizioni Ca' Foscari, through an anonymous peer review process, with the exception of the essays by De Notariis and Wood, which underwent an open peer review.

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Articoli



The Symbolism of Nature in the Mamluk *Munāẓara*: A Study of Some Floral Literary Debates

Arianna Tondi

Università degli Studi di Bergamo, Italia

Abstract The literary debate is a distinctive genre of the Arabic literary tradition. Emerging in the Abbasid era, it flourished in Mamluk Egypt, when many compositions in prose and in verses have been produced, exhibiting a wide variety of animate or inanimate actants and themes. These texts have been composed for entertainment, with a didactic function, to comment on or symbolically represent aspects of the social reality. In this article, we will focus on the floral literary debate, a specific subtype of the genre that was practised from the third/ninth century. We will analyse a corpus of texts which portray speaking flowers produced from the sixth/twelfth to the ninth/fifteenth century to assess how one of the most classical and practised strands of the genre has been reconfigured between 1100 and 1400 to carry out specific performative and agentive scopes.

Keywords Literary debate. Mamluk literature. Nature. Flowers. Text. Reality.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Floral Motif in Premodern Arabic Literature. – 3 Literary Debates as Panegyric. – 4 Discourse of Flowers as Repository of Mystical and Moral Lessons. – 5 Armies of Flowers, Fruits, and Nuts as Mirror of Mamluk Conflicts? – 6 The Literary Debate as Source of Encyclopaedic Knowledge and Ego-Document. – 7 Concluding Remarks.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-02-24
Accepted 2025-05-14
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Tondi, A. (2025). "The Symbolism of Nature in the Mamluk *Munāẓara*: A Study of Some Floral Literary Debates". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 9-44.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/001

1 Introduction

The literary debate is one of the most representative genres of world literature. It was widespread from antiquity (the earliest records date back to the twenty-first century BCE) and has enjoyed great fortune throughout the Mediterranean basin, becoming very popular even in England and France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Cuddon 2013, 186-7). At the core of this kind of text there is a dialectical exchange between two or more animate or inanimate beings who claim superiority over the other, attacking the flaws and demerits of their opponents and supporting arguments of various kinds. The genre has a long history in the Arab world as well. The literary *munāẓara*,¹ rooted in the theological and juridical debates of the Umayyad and Abbasid period, is an expression of the art of rhetoric and dispute, two fields in which the Arabs have excelled since pre-Islamic times. Its origins would date back to the fourth/tenth century while the most recent examples – written largely in vernacular – were produced in the 1940s, during the late *Nahḍa*.² The content may seem secondary to the importance accorded to the stylistic aspect. The issues addressed, however, may metaphorically express a social, political, or religious struggle between the protagonists of the debate (Belhaj 2010).

The Arabic literary dispute has been analysed by several scholars. Ewald Wagner has reconstructed the genealogy of the literary debate and analysed its different forms (Wagner 1991).³ Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila has reconstructed the prototypical structure (Hämeen-Anttila 2006), while Geert Jan van Gelder, Wolfhart Heinrichs, and David Larsen have scrutinised specific themes of these compositions,

I would like to sincerely thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions, which helped me in improving the quality of my manuscript.

1 The qualification of ‘literary’ is used by scholars to distinguish between debates that have a belletristic nature thus can be considered *adab*, and scholarly debates. In this article we will use the term *munāẓara* as an umbrella term, to refer to the various types of literary contests. Although – as we will see – the texts we will analyse are mainly called *mufāḥara*, the term *munāẓara* seems to have established itself in academic circles.

2 Interestingly, in the twentieth century the literary debate was mostly practised in a specific area of the Arab world, namely the Arabian Peninsula, where it is an emblem of vernacular literature. For some of these debates, see al-Uḥayḍib 1399 (Hijri). It emerged as a genre so practised throughout the Abbasid empire, it ended up being a local textual form.

3 The entry written by Wagner for the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is based on his seminal study on the *munāẓara* (Wagner 1963).

aiming to identify the messages and subtexts inherent in them (van Gelder 1987, 2020a; Heinrichs 1991; Larsen 2020).⁴

One of the most practised strands in the struggle for precedence, within this genre of Arabic literature, is that between elements or components of the natural world. Considering the recent interest of academic scholarship in the manifold configurations of the natural world within the premodern Arab textual culture,⁵ the literary debate is a significant field of inquiry regarding the functions attributed to the natural component. In fact, many debates are distinguished by a remarkable number of contestants belonging to the plant and mineral kingdoms (flowers, fruits, nuts, minerals), which are anthropomorphised, or presented through the figure of prosopopoeia. The botanical *munāẓara* is a well-developed sub-genre of the Arabic literary debate.

This article will focus on pragmatic functions of the representation of nature in the *munāẓara* from the sixth/twelfth century onward, with particular attention to the Mamluk era (seventh/thirteenth-tenth/sixteenth centuries) and – but not exclusively – to the Egyptian territory, a geographical area where the genre flourished. In the Mamluk period, in fact, this kind of text experienced great fortune and became a document with socio-political and religious-sapiential and mystical value, occasionally with a didactic aim. Specifically, we will concentrate on a corpus of texts portraying speaking flowers to try to detect their subtexts and implied meanings. To this end, attention will be paid to the analysis of the symbolic use of this specific natural element, with the aim of identifying the multiple functions attributed to it and the differences from the previous production of the Abbasid period. These fictional texts, far from being purely descriptive performances, are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and political context in which they have been produced. The later *munāẓara* is not merely a stylistic and rhetorical exercise⁶ but, developing an aspect already present in some earlier samples, it becomes a means of indirectly narrating specific aspects of the social reality, representing the relationship between the intellectual and

4 For two recent and updated perspectives on the literary dispute, see Magliozzi 2024 and Saitta 2023. While the former focuses on the dawn of the genre, by highlighting the dialectical nature of some disputes by al-Ġāḥiẓ, the latter concentrates on the postclassical developments in Yemen.

5 See, for example, Bellino 2023 as a collector of several approaches to the study of nature.

6 In his 1991 study on the origins and developments of the Arabic dispute, John Mattock was very critical of the *munāẓara*, asserting that the genre has shown a certain invariability and has maintained a “mixture of predictability and whimsicality”. Disputes were “exercises in scholarly frivolity” (Mattock 1991, 163). Recent scholarship on Mamluk literature can help us re-consider these statements.

power, or expressing opinions on topical issues. Thus, the *munāẓara* can be interpreted as a political and social document and in certain cases becomes a hybrid form of writing, sometimes indistinguishable from the *maqāma*. According to the current state of research, the floral *munāẓara* produced after 1100 has not yet been subjected to exclusive investigation.

As we will demonstrate, these texts usually function to generate a second level of meaning.⁷ We will suggest a cross-sectional reading, taking into account the complex set of factors – textual and extra-textual – that might have contributed to define their meaning. We will try to assess their agentive function and the evolutionary path of the genre. Before starting to investigate the selected debates, we need to shed light on the treatment of the flower theme in Arabic literature, with particular reference to poetry and the most ancient floral debates known to us. Mamluk literature is characterised by a high level of intertextuality. The notion of originality also implies the reconfiguration of traditional motifs and tropes. Revisionist studies on Mamluk literature have successfully deconstructed the idea of lack of originality of this production, showing to what extent it is an aesthetic and pragmatic response to new needs which emerged in a new reality (Bauer 2005). Our inquiry follows the same path, with the aim of evaluating how the dispute between flowers has been adapted to new aesthetics and purposes after the sixth/twelfth century.

Moreover, the scrutiny of the floral *munāẓara* is a further step in the study of nature in premodern Arabic literature, the flower being an element that may help to map a segment of literary production and studying the cultural history of the Mamluk period. As highlighted by the editors of the volume *Tracés du végétal. Nouvelles Recherches sur l'Imaginaire*, the plant, usually associated with the scientific domain, also concerns the historical, geographical, literary, and artistic field. It can be approached as a trace, that is, the materialization of a presence in a space, a recognizable mark of something that no longer exists, a representation of that absence. The trace may correspond to a real presence or a symbolic one that results from the representation of a past. The trace can be understood as a sign that may be interpreted in multiple ways. The interpretative process acts in many regards, with the aim of restoring the past perception or annihilating it. It acts as well like a creation that takes into consideration the past to produce something new (Trivisani-Moreau et al. 2015). We will

7 Identifying potential references to the extra-textual reality is one of the most difficult aspects in approaching debates between inanimate entities. Unlike *maqāmāt*, these texts have not been objects of commentaries and glosses. Furthermore, we have to be careful not to read into these works and to evaluate what texts may have said or not.

explore the discourse of flowers as a trace. The symbolism⁸ of the natural component will be put in dialogue with earlier floral literary debates, the peculiarities of the context in which the texts were composed, and the increasing and multifaceted presence of flowers in several literary genres of the Mamluk period. Lastly, the topic of this article can contribute to enrich our comprehension of the status of the nonhuman, as well as strategies for mediating it, in premodern Arabic literary traditions.⁹

2 The Floral Motif in Premodern Arabic Literature

Nature encompasses many types of writing of Arabic literature, starting from pre-Islamic poetry and the Koran. Natural images described and evoked here, which reflect the environment of the Arabian Peninsula and the eschatological imagery of Paradise (Hämeen-Anttila 2016), became the basic component of the repertory from which Arab poets took inspiration and innovated in the subsequent centuries. A sub-theme of literature about nature is represented by flower depictions.¹⁰ Flowers are an element of the natural realm that is culturally defined; in Arabic literature served to convey different meanings and messages. Already found in *ġāhili* poetry, images of floral beauty and fragrance started to be pervasively evoked in the Abbasid era, when flower poetry emerged as an independent poetic genre. *Nawriyyāt* and *zahriyyāt*,¹¹ i.e. poems centred on the description of flowers, became one of the hallmarks of Abbasid poetry, influenced by contacts with ancient Persia and the urbanisation of the Arab civilisation as a result of territorial conquests. This kind of poetry flourished in the Arab East as well as in the West. Poets also incorporated flower ekphrastic descriptions in poems on the spring and gardens. The repertory of types of flowers largely increased: from wild species such as the chamomile presented in pre-Islamic poetry to a large taxonomy including garden flowers, such as varieties of rose, the narcissus, the anemone, along

8 Here we use the term symbolism to indicate reliance on objects, characters, actions, which stand for something else and have a deeper meaning beyond the apparent sense (Cuddon 2013, 697).

9 Recent scholarship has deeply investigated various aspects of the interaction between human and nonhuman in medieval literatures. See, for example, Paz 2017 and López-Farjeat 2022.

10 For an overview of the pervasiveness of the floral theme in the literatures of the Islamic world, see Schimmel 2002.

11 The two terms derive from *nawr* and *zahr*, respectively 'blossom' and 'flower'. For a detailed analysis of flower poetry in classical Arabic literature, see Schoeler 1974.

with a long list of fruits.¹² Flowers were usually described through metaphors, similes, and analogies with parts of the body, precious stones, textiles, and celestial bodies (Garulo 1993, 1046; Schoeler 2002, 400). Considered exclusively manneristic, impressionist, visual, and decorative by traditional Orientalists (Grunebaum 1945, 149-50), nature poetry has been re-evaluated in recent studies, which underscore the poets' empathy for nature, their lyrical tone, and their feelings that emerges in this production, as well as the humanisation of nature (Foulon 2005, 79). The metaphorical intent and more profound functions behind apparently descriptive passages have been brought to light (Sumi 2004).¹³ Flowers are also the protagonists of a sub-type of literary contest which gained momentum from the fourth/tenth century. Before venturing into this sub-type, we have to consider the main features of the literary dispute in general in order to provide a framework for the comprehension of the dynamics that rule our corpus of texts and to trace the developments of the genre.

The Arabic terms generally employed to designate the literary debate are *munāẓara*, *mufāhara*, and *muḥāwara*.¹⁴ In a debate, two or more tangible or intangible beings boast and vie for precedence, with the aim of being honoured for possessing the best qualities. The final judgement is normally left to the author or an arbiter who acts as an unbiased judge. In some cases, no winner is proclaimed; in other samples, the opponents are estimated equals. In his article, Wagner traces the origin of the fictional *munāẓara* in earlier forms such as *faḥr* (self-praise poems) and *naqā'id* (contest-poems). The prose debate developed from *faḍā'il* literature, based on the exaltation of the excellences of people, cities, and regions. Another ancestor is represented by some treatises by al-Ġāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) composed to praise or to blame different categories of animals or people. With the Abbasid polymath, the theme of the struggle for excellence enters the realm of *adab* and is further developed, since the subjects of the comparison are spoken through an attorney or partisan, who praises the qualities of his defendant and attacks the flaws of the opponent. In al-Ġāḥiẓ, the rational reasoning has evident theological and philosophical implications. This aspect was abandoned in the full-fledged literary debate (Wagner 1991, 566-7). The debate can

12 Alongside flower *qaṣīdas*, poets compiled anthologies entirely dedicated to flowers-and-fruits epigrams and poems.

13 Akiko Motoyoshi Sumi identifies two simultaneous operations working in the *qaṣīda*: mimetic/tangible representation and symbolic/abstract representation (Sumi 2004, 16-17).

14 The first term indicates a contest in which different viewpoints are opposed against each other. The second term, which can be translated as 'vainglory' or 'boasting match', designates the boasting about the qualities of something or someone. The third term indicates a dialogue confrontation.

be in prose, verse, or prosimetrum; the last one is the form that has known more dissemination, especially after 1100. Concerning the structure of the debate, Hämeen-Anttila has identified two models, without excluding the flexibility and versatility of the structure. In the first type we have a prologue where the narrator – usually the author – introduces the scene-setting. Then, we have a series of eulogies on oneself and invective of vituperations against the opponent (eulogy-cum-invective scheme). The opponent answers in like manner, until the last contestant. In the epilogue the judge declares the winner or simply issues a judgement. The second type occurs when there are only two participants. They attack each other in a repartee (Hämeen-Anttila 2006, 141-2). The literary debate has evolved through time, especially in the post-Abbasid period, overlapping with other genres such as the *risāla* and the *maqāma*.¹⁵ Such texts may serve different functions: displaying one's eloquence and rhetorical abilities, providing literary entertainment, provoking humour, and suggesting a second level of meaning beyond the surface one (Van Gelder 2020b).¹⁶

The floral debate has shown to be one of the most productive in the history of the genre. Scholars agree that a *zahriyya* by the Abbasid poet Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 283/896) constitutes a pre-*munāẓara*, since it stages the narcissus and the rose – two flowers associated with the refinement and the sophistication of the Abbasid culture – who are personified but do not speak themselves. The poet immediately declares his preference for the first one through a set of images that standardised over time and were associated to these flowers until the “later centuries”.¹⁷ This poem was followed by a series of responses in form of refutation, such as the *Kitāb mufāḥarat al-waḍ-ward wa-l-narġis* (Book of the Boasting-Match Between the Rose and the Narcissus) by the bookman Ibn Abī Ṭāḥir Tayfūr (d. 280/893), which has been lost (Toorawa 2005, 87-8). The opposition between the rose and the narcissus became a very well-known trope in the

15 Al-Qalqaṣandī (d. 821/1418) classified the debate as a sub-type of the *risāla*, being a prose genre characterised by brevity and flexibility and suitable to present many types of topics. With regard to the *maqāma*, some later literary debates have a fictitious *isnād* and are written in *sağʿ* (ornate prose; Hämeen-Anttila 2006, 138; 143).

16 Among the most practised types, one can find – just to cite a few – the debate of Pen and Sword – which reflects the competition between the administrative class and military power –, the debate between Spring and Autumn – focused on exposing medical contents –, the dispute of the town of Kūfa versus Baṣra – a clear reflection of ancient territorial rivalries and local interests.

17 We borrow this expression from Syrinx von Hees (2023). We find it very appropriate to indicate the post 1100 period, as an alternative to the term “postclassical”, unfitted to indicate the literary production from the post-Seljuk period onward. For a critic of the implications of the use of ‘postclassical’, see Bauer 2007.

third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries.¹⁸ Several explanations have been advanced to decipher the origin of the contrast. In general, the rose was associated with the elegant men of the Abbasid court. Moreover, according to some anecdotes, the caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 247/861) explicitly expressed his preference for the rose, a noble flower that did not suit the common people. If the rose was the emblem of the caliph, the narcissus acquired an oppositional force, that of the Persian elements that gravitate around the towering figure of the caliph. Beginning from here the image of the rose sitting on the throne and the narcissus standing at his service may have its origin. The rose-narcissus opposition could be a literary reflection of this tension (Toorawa 2005, 92). Thus, a symbolic interpretation – or at least some extra-textual references – of the competitive strife seems to exist since the dawn of the floral debate. The poet al-Ṣanawbarī (d. 334/945-6) penned the first independent *munāẓara*, a six-verse composition where the two flowers directly speak and precedence is given to the rose. As Heinrichs has shown in his study dedicated to the rose-narcissus debate, we have to wait a century for the first prose debate of this kind known to us, a conversation between some flowers by the Andalusian poet Aḥmad b. Burd al-Aṣṣār (d. 445/1053-54). It is a more complex composition where, after an introductory scene where four flowers decide to recognise the authority of the rose, each one of them pledges his loyalty to the chosen flower and then formalise their promise in an official document. The poet closes the *risāla* by dedicating it to a vizier that ruled Cordoba after the falling of the Umayyad caliphate. The anthologist Abū al-Walīd al-Ḥimyarī (d. 440/1048) composed a fictional response to this *contrat social* in which obedience to the rose is questioned and the royal right is attributed to the narcissus by employing an expedient argument which convinces the flowers of the precedent that the rose does not deserve caliphal power. This refutation is dedicated to the ruler of Seville. The two texts are not literary debates in the strict sense because the speakers do not boast for precedence, but they are built on the idea of the literary contest. By reading these texts against the political context of al-Andalus after the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate, Heinrichs suggests that they may reflect the rivalry between Cordoba and Seville as new emerging centres of power (Heinrichs 1991, 186-92). The two texts are an important step in the evolution of the debate, since the traditional opposition between flowers is invested of a new meaning, i.e. opposition between rulers and centres of power. The two *risālas* thus function as a political document.

18 Interestingly, in the same centuries – in particular from the ninth century onwards – the *altercatio* between the rose and the violet was a very widespread kind of composition, especially in medieval Latin language (Marinoni 2007).

To conclude, we want to point out another important detail discussed by Heinrichs. The scholar states that floral contests produced from the third/ninth to the ninth/fifteenth century share some aspects, notably the frequent recourse to poetic argumentation. According to the scholar, *taḥyīl* (make-believe, i.e. trying to explain real phenomenon by ascribing fantastic reasons through mock analogies or reified metaphors) as a tendency widespread in poetry has been widely used in the literary debates to corroborate one's argument for superiority (Heinrichs 1991, 182-3).¹⁹

What emerged from this overview is that a political lexicon used by the speaking contestants, with the rose as *malik* (king) and *sultān* (ruler) who claims his right to *ḥilāfa* (caliphate), hints that floral images might have been mobilised to take the side of a representative of power since the fifth/eleventh century. In addition to that, poetic argumentation based on fantastic interpretation is the privileged means by which the speaking flowers try to assert their superiority.

3 Literary Debates as Panegyric

As we have seen, in the two Andalusian *risālas* praising the aesthetic qualities of flowers is instrumental in taking an oath of allegiance to a political figure. In some successive literary debates, this function became well established. We encounter at least three full-fledged *disputatio* having an encomiastic aim. The practice of composing spring and flower verses to celebrate the unparalleled perfection of a renowned and powerful patron can be traced back to the Abbasid poet Abū Tammām (d. 231/845), who juxtaposes the fertility of the garden or the perfection of a blossom to the munificence of the praised person, the incontestable perfect one. It became a customary practice, to the extent that it has been extended to the *munāẓara*²⁰ (Hämeen-Anttila 2006, 142). Here, as we will show, the patron can be eulogised by means of different textual strategies and internal references that, in certain cases, are inspired by attributes of the praised.

The first sample is a disputation encapsulated in a longer *risāla* preserved by the man of letters 'Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 597/1201) in his multivolume anthology *Ḥarīdat al-qāṣr wa ḡarīdat al-'aṣr* (The

19 The centrality of the imaginative creation in the making of the literary contest is recognised by the scholar Gardā' al-Mārdīnī, who uses the adjective *ḥayālī* (imaginary) to denote it (2008).

20 The encomiastic function is carried out not only through the floral debate, but also through other types of contests.

Unbored Pearl of the Palace and the Register of the Age).²¹ The name of the author is not specified,²² but in introducing the epistle al-İşfahānī specifies that it is dedicated to Ġamāl al-Dīn al-Ġawād, known as al-Ġawād al-İşfahānī (d. 559/1164), a vizier of the Zangids in Mosul (Frenkel 2022).²³ Unlike the previous debates, here we have a frame story where the author/narrator introduces himself while entering a lush garden. The frame narrative will become a standard opening in successive debates. After a complex and ornate prose description of the prosperity of nature in springtime, six flowers speak in turn in relatively short passages. The argumentation follows a precise scheme, where the *qiyās al-šabah* (analogy by similarity) of a contender is deconstructed by means of the *qiyās al-‘aks* (analogy on the basis of the opposite) by the opponent.²⁴ Each contestant exalts his unique chromatism and physical constitution, sometimes drawing on the poetic repertoire of images about flowers. Then, he attacks the previous speaker by refuting the reasons of his pride. The first speaker, the narcissus (*narğis*), asserts that he deserves precedence because he is golden-coloured like a precious jewel, he is usually compared to the eyes – an important sensory organ –, and he is a pleasant companion in the drinking party. The second speaker, the chamomile (*uḡhuwān*), discredits these arguments by opposing the narcissus’ submission – represented by his servility in the drinking party and his being gathered to be put in a vase – to his own freedom, being a flower that grows in the wild. By means of a reified metaphor, the chamomile associates himself to a beautiful smiling mouth. In his turn, the violet (*banafsağ*) attacks the lavender (*ḥuzāmā*) because he lives in wild and open spaces: for this reason, he cannot be compared to human beings but to wild beasts, consequently he has no reason for boasting. The last speech is reserved to a variety of rose (*ğūrī*

²¹ al-İşfahānī 1999, 310-14. The text has been preserved by al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) as well, but without the epistle. The Egyptian encyclopaedist calls it *Risālat ba‘ḍ fuḍalā’ İşfahān* (Epistle by a Certain Erudite from İşfahān; al-Nuwayrī 2005, 11: 131-5).

²² He is presented as an erudite from İsfahan living in the same epoch of al-İşfahānī (al-İşfahānī 1999, 308).

²³ ‘Imād al-Dīn al-İşfahānī might be the author of this text. He was connected with the Zangids, like the vizier al-Ġawād al-İşfahānī. He could have written the disputation before the fall of the vizier in 558/1163, and he may have hidden his authorship afterwards for obvious reasons. The practice of cryptically indicating the name of the author was quite common. In his *Kitāb al-Zahra* (The Book of the Flower), Ibn Dāwūd al-İşbahānī (d. 297/910), for example, used to quote poetry in the same obscure way, and it is generally presumed to be Ibn Dāwūd himself (Van Gelder 2018, 27). This very plausible identification has been hinted at by the reviewer of this article.

²⁴ Recourse to analogical reasoning demonstrates to what extent the argumentative sequence of the literary debate has been influenced by the juridical debate.

al-ward),²⁵ which categorically denies the self-praise of the violet by ridiculing his short life. How can the violet claim such a right to power? The rose, on the contrary, blooms several times a year and is a simile for the beautiful body. The flower concludes his self-praise by proclaiming himself *al-Sayyid al-muntaẓar* (the eagerly awaited master; al-İşfahānī 1999, 313).²⁶ When the rose's physical presence comes to an end, his essence – in the case of the vizier his political authority – persists after his 'disappearance'.²⁷ Being an important chief, the vizier is present and mentioned even in his absence. Getting the last word, the rose is the presumed winner, so it is a reference to Ġamāl al-Dīn al-Ġawād. The splendour of the rose, the king of flowers and a paragon of beauty and perfection, is the epitome of the perfection and the glory of the praised person (Schippers 2013, 383).

The second debate we deal with in this section was composed by the literary critic and prose-writer Diyā' al-Dīn Ibn al-Aṭīr (d. 637/1239) who was active as *kātib al-inṣā'* (chancery secretary) and vizier of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's son in Damascus. He composed many epistles addressed to important personalities of his time, dealing with many topics in a literary style (Rosenthal 1986, 724). The contest is known as *Risālat al-azhār* (Epistle of Flowers)²⁸ and has the following structure: the frame story, the debate, and the dedication with the praise of al-Malik al-Aṣraf Mūsā (d. 635/1237), the Ayyubid ruler of Damascus. The fictionality of the text, where the debate between personified flowers is more dramatised than the previous one, is openly justified in the frame story by specifying that the narrator was in a dream-like state when he was involved in a unique garden experience.²⁹ Walking through a lush greenery, he decides to enter a garden, where he engages in a visual and acoustic experience with the elements inhabiting the enclosure. The narcissus opens the boasting. The first part of the debate stages six flowers and a pigeon and is clearly shaped on the *risāla* reported by al-İşfahānī. Here too,

25 From Jūr, later also known as Fīrūzābād, a Persian town famous for roses (al-Tha'ālībī 1968, 127).

26 Although *al-Sayyid al-muntaẓar* is also the epithet attributed by Shī'a to the Mahdī, we can exclude the possibility that the mention of the Mahdī may be motivated by the Shī'i faith of the dedicatee. al-Ġawād al-İşfahānī was vizier under the Zangids, who were Sunni, and came from a family in the service of the Seljuqs, also Sunni.

27 This is a reference to the rose oil or rosewater extracted from the petals of the flower. This motif is already found in Ibn Burd's *risāla* (Heinrichs 1991, 188) and will be invested with different meanings in later debates.

28 We have consulted the version reported in *Kawkab al-Rawḍa* by al-Suyūṭī (2008, 706-12).

29 Trying to give credibility to a fictional text and not being accused of spreading falsehood has been a major concern for premodern Arab authors. See, for example, Drory 1994. Resorting to standard *formulae* and other devices is very common in literary debates.

traditional images taken from floral poetry are re-employed to laud the superiority of the dedicatee. For instance, the violet claims the beauty of his colour because it is similar to the first growth of beard on the tender cheeks of the beloved. The rose reverses this simile by stating that fluff blackens the delicate rosy cheek. To dishonour and mock the violet, the rose cleverly evokes a pejorative comparison of the repertoire that compares the violet to burning sulphur.³⁰ It is indeed compared to combustion, the rose proudly affirms. The next contestant is a singing pigeon, who dispraises the flowers that took part in the dispute by stating they are nothing else than the spots of pigeons' dirt and nests. Claims and counterclaims are clearly based on strategies employed in the rhetorical dispute. In this epistle we find a variation compared to the previous debates. Abū Tammām inaugurated the practice of connecting the depiction of spring to the praise of the caliph; al-Buḥturī (d. 284/897) continued in this direction by expanding the repertory of nature for this scope, including the wind, clouds, rivers, and trees. Ibn al-Aṭīr does the same in his debate when, after the pigeon's intervention, he makes two further natural elements, a cloud full of rain and the sun, take part in the contest. The hyperbolic path is evident, since the author starts with a small, elegant garden flower and ends with the brightest celestial body. The cloud, that usually represents the munificence of the dedicatee, constructs its argument through the opposition between *ẓāhir* (the outer form) and *bāṭin* (the inner essence). While the other speakers have just pretended to have certain features, the cloud gives life to the soil thanks to its rain. As the cloud proudly says, it is the one who makes visible what is hidden in the earth, alluding to the regeneration of nature after a rainfall. In this epistle, the narrator plays an active role, since he personally takes part in the tribute to the patron. After the boasting of the last element, the narrator intervenes stating that not one of the contestants can even compete with the *mamdūḥ* (praised one), whose name is given. Then the spring, the breeze, the cloud, the sun, and the birds acknowledge their inferiority and the dedicatee's excellence. The closing scene further emphasises the eulogistic purpose of the epistle. In a choral scene, the protagonists of the debate address the narrator declaring that, like him, they deeply love the ruler, a clear oath of loyalty.

When I left the garden, the fruits of the trees, the cloud from its place, and the sun with its light professed all together: "We have seen

30 The exceptionality of this simile is explained in Harb 2020, 145.

your love for al-Malik, a love that has become unanimous (*iğmā'an*).³¹ You loved him because you saw him, we loved him because we heard about him. We swear to you by his virtues that abound in the face of the sky and among the stars".³² (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 712)

As emerged from the analysis, this seventh/thirteenth century laudatory *munāẓara* is well integrated in a consolidated tradition of *madiḥ* poetry, from which themes and images are taken and employed. We do not have a metonymic relationship between the garden and the patron; the latter is above everything. The fact that nothing claims final authority in the contest implies that the debate does not have only a descriptive function. It is a means of legitimising the ruler and exalting the perfection of his power. The struggle for precedence, here, aims at demonstrating that no singular element among the beautiful components of the garden can claim precedence in front of the greatness of the praised one.

The last debate with a laudatory purpose we deal with in this paragraph was composed by Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Mārdīnī (d. 750/1349).³³ He was a litterateur, *ḥadīṭ* (sayings of the Prophet) scholar, and Ḥanafī jurist (al-'Asqalānī 1993, 3: 84-5) in Mamluk Egypt. The contest is called *al-Ġawhar al-fard fī munāẓarat al-narġis wa-l-ward* (The Unique Jewel in the Disputation Between the Narcissus and the Rose).³⁴ The two flowers speak in turn, each producing nine speeches in a well-defined argumentative sequence. The addresser, as indicated at the beginning of the composition, is the grand Ḥanafī judge Šihāb al-Dīn b. al-Kašk. The specificity of this disputation lays in the author's choice – a scholar with a legal background – to let the discussants quote verses of the Koran to support their superiority. The argumentation is thus based not only on reified metaphors and fantastic interpretation through which the author associates flowers and their attributes to tangible objects and human feelings, but also on *iqtibās* (citation) from the Koran and the Sunna that serve to maintain a certain claim by deduction. Thus, the proofs of superiority are not exclusively of a pure literary nature. This method is inspired by the logic of legal reasoning in Islamic law, a field in which al-Mārdīnī as well as the dedicatee were

31 In Islamic jurisprudence, the term *iğmā'* indicates the consensus of the authorities over a certain issue. Used in this context, the term indicates the consensus of the flowers in recognising the superiority of the patron.

32 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the Author.

33 This debate has been shortly discussed by Heinrichs, who has focused on its narrative structure (1991, 194-5).

34 It has been transmitted, among others, by al-Suyūṭī in *Kawkab al-Rawḍa* (2008, 602-11) and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Anṣārī al-Širwānī in *Nafḥat al-yaman fīmā yazūlu bi-dikrihi al-šaġan* (1297, 136-48).

specialised. As Abdessamad Belhaj has demonstrated in his study of the different trajectories taken by the disputation in the Arab-Islamic tradition, the literary debate cannot be neatly separated from the juridical and theological debate, having inherited and adopted dialectic strategies from its antecedents (2010). Hence, the narcissus gives proof of his superiority by quoting, for instance, a part of a Koranic passage: “golden,³⁵ bright her colour, gladdening the beholders” (Koran II, 69;³⁶ al-Suyūṭī 2008, 603). In our debate, by means of a synecdoche, yellow represents the narcissus. The fact that in the Book of God this colour is given a positive connotation would imply the excellence of the narcissus. This claim is followed by another Koranic verse aimed at attacking the status of the rose: “slain were the Men of the Pit (*qutila aṣṣḥāb al-uḥḍūd*)” (Koran LXXXV, 4; al-Suyūṭī 2008, 603). The word *uḥḍūd* is cited by the narcissus as part of a paronomasia, where, however, the second term is absent but can be easily deduced from the context. The missing word is *ḥudūd* (cheeks), the most frequent simile for the rose in classical Arabic poetry. The semantic relation created between the Koranic verse and the implied word suggests a relation of similarity: annihilation is the destiny written for the rose. Later in the debate, in his *mu’āraḍa* (counter-objection) the rose destroys his respondent’s proof by means of another Koranic citation meant to give authority to the speaker’s thesis. After saying that the difference between the sun and the stars is huge, the rose quotes from the Koran: “None of us is there, but has a known station” (Koran XXXVII, 164; al-Suyūṭī 2008, 606), then he concludes that the narcissus is nothing else than one of his soldiers, i.e. a subordinate. By means of this citation, the rose implies that his rank among flowers cannot be questioned. Al-Mārdīnī honours the addresser also by employing legal terminology. The narcissus maintains that his merit over the rose is *farḍ al-‘ayn* (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 610), a legal obligation mandatory upon the individual, a merit that must be recognised. Building the debate on this method and using terms of Islamic jurisprudence is a way of esteeming the dedicatee and the subtleties of the science he represents.

Concerning the argumentations of a pure literary nature, in the debate there are interesting examples of poetic imagery at work. Resuming the image in which the rose indirectly associates himself to the sun and his opponent to the stars – implying his own primacy –, the narcissus rejects this claim by stating that if compared, fixed stars (*nuḡūm ṭawābit*) are more valuable than a moving planet/star (*al-sayyāra*; al-Suyūṭī 2008, 607), because what is permanent is better than what is transient. The star is one of the most common similes

35 *Ṣafrā’* (yellow) in the Arabic version.

36 The Koran is cited in Arthur Arberry’s translation (1955).

for the narcissus in classical Arabic poetry. In this context, however, the implicit comparison has a further purpose, that of creating a connection between the narcissus and the dedicatee, the judge Šihāb al-Dīn. Threatening his adversary, the narcissus says:

I swear by Who adorned the sky with stars, if you do not retreat,
I will throw at you *a piercing meteor*/ Šihāb al-Dīn (*šihāb ṭāqib*).³⁷
(al-Suyūṭī 2008, 607)

The *tawriya* (double entendre) alludes to the judge, whose name means the “Meteor or Shooting Star of Religion”, and creates as well a semantic association between him and the narcissus as a star. This association is confirmed in the last speech by the narcissus, where the flower asserts precedence over the rose because of “my presence in the stellar abode/in the abode of Šihāb al-Dīn”³⁸ (*al-maqarr al-šihābī*;³⁹ al-Širwānī 1297, 146).⁴⁰ Despite the apparent propensity for the narcissus, in the epilogue the author states that the only one entitled to settle the arbitration is – obviously – the exalted judge.

In the three laudatory debates we have examined, the praise of the patron results from the aesthetic value of the composition, the struggle for precedence between the beauties of a garden, and by presenting him as the esteemed judge whose integrity makes him the only one who can express the final judgement. The floral *munāẓara* has thus demonstrated to have been an alternative to the classic panegyric until the Mamluk period.

4 Discourse of Flowers as Repository of Mystical and Moral Lessons

The garden is a trope in classical Arabic poetry. Beyond being a spatial construction invested with multiple meanings, the garden is also a symbolic space where the human being can imagine and express his subjectivity. The hidden treasures of the terrestrial garden constituted a subject of reflection and meditation for many Arab poets. Nature, seen as a source of spiritual communion and a sublime being, inspired them with reflections about infinity and

³⁷ “Piercing meteor”, italicised, is the intended meaning, whereas “Šihāb al-Dīn”, underlined, is the suggested meaning. *Šihāb ṭāqib* is also a Koranic expression (Koran XXXVII, 10).

³⁸ The reference here is to the fact that the Ḥanafī judge is in the city.

³⁹ This *tawriya* can be found only in the version of the debate reported by al-Širwānī.

⁴⁰ Mattock considers the narcissus’ allusions to stars cryptic, a proof of the irrelevancy of the composition (1991, 160).

finiteness, permanence and mutability (Jayyusi 1994, 379-87). In Sufi-inspired literature, the motif of the garden with its creatures served as a repository of lessons and to capture the essence of what surrounds the human being. In the mystical work *Kaṣf al-asrār ‘an ḥikam al-ṭuyūr wa-l-azhār* (Disclosing the Secrets of the Wisdom of the Birds and the Flowers)⁴¹ by Ibn Ġānim al-Maqdisī (d. 678/1279), a verdant garden is presented as a place of retreat (*ḥalwa*) and the setting of a lengthy conversation staging several natural entities, such as flowers, animals, a cloud – just to cite some of them –, embodying human characteristics endowed with specific moral qualities. These entities epitomise different and contrasting behaviours. By observing their aspect and conduct, the author/narrator intends to provide moral lessons concerning the relationship between the human being and his Creator.

The title of the work does not include a term indicating the debate. Nevertheless, the personification of flowers through the device of the prosopopoeia, the presence of a frame story, the narrative construction, and the use of motifs that frequently recur in the floral literary debate, all indicate that the work is openly influenced by the *munāẓara*. We consider *Kaṣf al-asrār* an interesting case study in our discussion because it reveals the variety of functions attributed to the *munāẓara* in the “later centuries”, thus showing the flexibility of the genre in adapting to different scopes and delivering several types of messages. With regard to the sources that might have influenced the author, who is a preacher native of Cairo, the motif of the allegorical garden can also be found in Persian mystical poetry. In Ġalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s (d. 672/1273) poems the description of the beauty of the garden is instrumental to the adoration of God and the greatness of His creation. Through the use of allegory, the visual depiction of nature delivers hidden spiritual meanings (Sharify et al. 2021, 60).

In *Kaṣf al-asrār*, written in high ornate prose, al-Maqdisī recurs to garden imagery to convey earthly and divine meanings.⁴² Each entity is reserved a separate chapter called *iṣāra* (allusion) where it can outline its main qualities and suggest what can be learned from its personal experience. In some chapters, a certain entity answers to the speaker of the previous section, thus creating a net of cross-references. The first speaker is the East wind, followed by a series of flowers and plants, namely the rose, the myrtle (*marsīn*), the Egyptian willow (*bān*), the narcissus, the waterlily (*nīlūfar*), the

41 The work has been translated in French (al-Maqdisī 1821), English (al-Muqaddasi 1980), and Italian (al-Muqaddasi 2012). We have relied on the version edited by ‘Alā’ ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Muḥammad (1995).

42 al-Maqdisī is credited with other debates having a mystical sub-text, such as *Mufāḥarat al-layl wa-l-nahār* (The Boasting-Match of Night and Day; Larsen 2020, 200).

violet, the gillyflower (*manṭūr*), the jasmine (*yāsmīn*), the sweet basil (*rayḥān*), the chamomile, the lavender, and the anemone (*ṣaqīq*). That the author has drawn on a 'repertory' of floral species – the most common ones – acting in *munāẓarāt* is evident.

The inner and mystical dimension of the work is explained in the introductory part. What distinguishes *Kaṣf al-asrār* from the antecedent floral debates is the declared allegorical use of natural entities. In this respect, Gianluca Saitta has recently devoted a study to al-Maqdisī's use of an emblematic language to construct images of mystical significance. In his reading of this *oeuvre*, the scholar highlights that al-Maqdisī's garden is not a theophany. Through the detailed description of the nature encapsuled in the enclosure, the author means to display the pain suffered by natural entities because of their loss of the union with the Almighty and their constant attempts to recover this unique relationship. Nature is capable of expressing itself through *lisān al-ḥāl* (language of states),⁴³ a sort of mute and nonverbal language that can be understood only by those who are in spiritual communion with the Creation.⁴⁴ The product of this emblematic language is the *iṣāra*, a sort of parable (Saitta 2022, 152-5). We can understand the *lisān al-ḥāl* and the *iṣāra* in terms of signifier and signified. The profound dimension of this discourse of nature is further emphasised by al-Maqdisī in the prologue, where he says to his potential readers:

I have composed this book to explain what I have learned from animals through their symbols (*ramz*) and minerals through their signs (*ḡamz*), in addition to what flowers told me about their condition. (al-Maqdisī 1995, 44)

In rhetoric, *ramz* denotes a wide range of methods of indirect expression, a sort of cryptic and decoded message conveyed by certain images that the receiver has to interpret. In Sufi literature, *ramz* is a technical term that indicates the conveying of an elusive spiritual meaning that can be grasped only by the initiated, in such a way that it preserves the mysteries of the spiritual experience from the uninitiated (Heinrichs, Knysh 1995, 428-9).

As in the case of the literary debate, *Kaṣf al-asrār* is built upon the antithetic opposition of different characters as a way to offer the widest array of *exempla*. For the scope of our study, we will limit our

⁴³ In the genre of the *munāẓara*, the presence of the expression *lisān al-ḥāl* signals that a nonhuman entity is given voice, thus indicating the fictionality of a debate that can never take place in reality.

⁴⁴ In *Kaṣf al-asrār*, *lisān al-ḥāl* is opposed to *lisān al-qāl* and *lisān al-ḥabar*, the verbal language that does not carry inner meanings (al-Maqdisī 1995, 43).

analysis to how the device of the *iṣāra* works in the reconfiguration of the trope of the narcissus as a servant and the lavender as a wildflower underestimated by humans. We have already encountered these two tropes in the *risāla* preserved by al-Ḥṣfahānī. Now we will demonstrate how al-Maḡdisī promotes an intertextual dialogue with the antecedent debates, adapting their motifs to his Sufi background and to the scope of his work.

The association of the narcissus with a servant is very old in Arabic literature and is probably a consequence of the association of the rose with the dominant figure of the caliph. If the rose is the caliph, the narcissus is the element – maybe Persian – that gravitates around the caliph. Hence, as we have said above, the standardised image of the rose that sits and the narcissus that stands to serve (Toorawa 2005, 92). The servile attitude is also connected to the fact that since the Abbasid period the narcissus was represented as a pleasant companion in the drinking party, always ready to serve. The obsequious behaviour has been mobilised in many literary debates with the aim of denigrating the narcissus. This servility is presented in terms of sycophancy by other flowers, something to be ashamed of. In *Kaṣf al-asrār*, on the contrary, the main trait of the narcissus is interpreted as proof of obedience and humility. Here is the position of the protagonist of the fifth *iṣāra*:

I am the watchful, the witness, the nocturnal conversation partner, and the drinking companion. Indeed, the real master of the group is his servant. I teach whoever may be interested the obligations of service. I make ready for service.⁴⁵ My condition relies on firm determination. I always stand up straight. (al-Maḡdisī 1995, 57)

The flower shares the same status of the human being, suffering for its separation from God. The readiness to serve is a step on the path of the *murīd* (disciple) to reach his *murād* (the Willed one). The lavender takes the floor in the twelfth *iṣāra*. The loneliness of this flower, which blooms far from civilization and in isolated places, is presented as a merit. The company of wild beasts and isolation from humans give the lavender the opportunity to concentrate on the spiritual path, avoiding worldly distractions.

You will find me in Naḡd, far from dwellings. I am satisfied with the open land, content with the company of the juniper tree and the absinthe. [...] I am the companion who never abandons the traveller. So I gain rewards and remain sheltered from immoral people who commit sins in hideouts. I do not take part in abominable actions,

⁴⁵ Literally 'I tighten my belt' (*aṣṣiddu waṣṭī*).

and I never sit with men who drink and get drunk. (al-Maḡdisī 1995, 69-70)

The “accumulated burden of floral association”, to cite Kasia Boddy (2020, XVII), is thus reinterpreted by al-Maḡdisī. The author invests conventional motifs with new meanings, inviting the attentive reader to uncover the secrets of nature. Flowers teach us that appearances are deceptive. By giving voice to oppositional characters, the author highlights the richness of teachings that can be learned from the non-human. There is no winner; all entities have a lesson to be taught. The garden as a place of the soul is not a place of passive contemplation, but of learning.

5 **Armies of Flowers, Fruits, and Nuts as Mirror of Mamluk Conflicts?**

During the Mamluk period the genre of the literary debate was very popular and dealt with a wide range of topics. Some of them are classical, such as the boasting of the Rose and the Narcissus, Night and Day, Sword and Pen, while others are modern, in the sense that they are related to the specific context of production at the level of themes⁴⁶ and vernacular vocabulary, such as Egyptian words that date to the late Mamluk era (Geries 2002, 23-4). Most *munāẓarāt* were written as independent texts and then included in major works such as anthologies, encyclopaedias, or miscellaneous works. The debate we will propose in this paragraph is halfway between the classical debates and the new ones produced in the late Mamluk period. The text is undated and anonymous, under the title *Mufaḥarat al-ward ma’a l-nisrīn wa qitāluhu ‘alā l-mulk* (The Boasting-Match

⁴⁶ An interesting example of modern debates was represented by disputations between recreation grounds of Cairo, a corpus of debates that dispense information about several aspects of the social reality in Mamluk Cairo (al-Šištāwī 1999).

of the Rose against the Eglantine, and His Fight for Power).⁴⁷ This prosimetrum composition testifies to the difficulty of speculating about the possible references to the extra-textual dimension in some later literary debates. However, a contextual reading of our text may help identify some elements useful for a deeper comprehension of the function attributed to this competition between flowers by its author. The high dramatic tension and the abundance of descriptive details suggest that this text has been produced for entertainment, like other compositions of – presumably – the same epoch. The attempt to produce a cultural reading, however, may reveal that the composition is also, to a certain extent, inspired by some peculiarities of the political scene of the Mamluk period.

Mufāḥarat al-ward ma'a l-nisrīn is an unconventional debate, which demonstrates the vitality of the genre in the later centuries and its capability to adapt to different contexts and purposes. The focus here is not on giving evidence for one's superiority through dialectic argumentation, but on the accurate description of battle scenes where flowers and other organic elements fight. Rebellion against power seems to be the main theme of this boasting. Furthermore, we do not have the prototypical structure identified by Hāmeen-Anttila. The language register is relatively simple, if compared to the debates we have hitherto seen. The text has a *maqāma* structure, being composed of two parts: a long narrative frame and the verbal exchange.⁴⁸ The frame story is quite long and re-elaborates the theme of the separation from the beloved, typical of classical Arabic poetry; it acts like a *nasīb*, the elegiac prelude. The narrator enters a pleasant garden to forget his lovesickness. He admires different kinds of flowers, a pomegranate tree, and the agarwood. The uniqueness of the beauty of each one of them, however, reminds him of an aspect from the beloved, such as the smell, body, and hair. Nature, here, mirrors the emotions of

47 We do not know if the title has been chosen by the author or added by a copyist. To our knowledge, the debate has been transmitted only by al-Suyūṭī in *Kawkab al-Rawḍa* (2008, 696-705). We want to mention another floral text from the Mamluk period, penned by the Egyptian Ibn al-Dawādārī (d. after 736/1335) and included in his multi-volume history *Kanz al-durar wa ḡāmi' al-ḡurar* (Treasure of Pearls and the Assemblage of Choice Objects; Ibn al-Dawādārī 1960, 1: 277-370). The text is titled *al-Muḥāḍara al-rabī'iyya* (The Printemps Conversation). Although it is not a proper debate where natural elements vie for precedence, it is clearly influenced by the floral literary debate. In this long text, several flowers and fruits speak in turn and report poetry celebrating their beauty. The scope of this conversation seems to be anthological, in particular the collection of similes as found in flower and fruit poetry. Curiously enough, in this text a *tinnīn*, a strange creature of Arab mythology, takes the place of the human character we have found in the above-mentioned literary debates. This reference, which deserves further investigation, has been recommended by one of the anonymous reviewers.

48 The fictionality of the text is justified in the prologue when the narrator announces he is going to relate “the strange story and incredible facts” that happened to him (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 696).

the narrator, as in classical poetry. Unable to relieve his distress, he decides to leave the spot after seeing the rose for the second time. At this point, the second part of the text begins. The eglantine praises his fragrance and asserts he is the sultan of the garden. The rose's anger erupts because he does not accept his authority to be questioned, and the situation deteriorates. After a short exchange in which the two opponents boast about their presumed superiority, war is announced and the two arrange the fight with the support of their respective armies. The peculiarity of the contest is the detailed description of this war constructed in terms of creative imagination. In her study about the literary ability of producing a sense of wonder as a pillar of classical Arabic literature, Lara Harb explains the distinction between *taḥyīl* and *ḥayāl* (imaginary). While the first indicates the creation of an image which makes the listener believe it is true and belongs to the realm of the acceptable, the second does not claim something untrue to exist in reality; it is simply the product of imaginative faculty (Harb 2010, 50-2). The war between the two armies is presented through imaginary and unrealistic images aimed at creating a sense of wonder without requiring the reader to accept them as truth. In the following passage, the rose summons his servant, the basil, in order to get ready for the fight. Then the rose issues other similar orders and the battle scene is set.

Then, he [the rose] ordered the fruit of the drumstick tree (*šanbar*)⁴⁹ to hang the great standards⁵⁰ of the Sultan and to carry Indian swords. The sugar cane (*qaṣab*) quivered like straight lances. The ground filled with horses and David's armours. Citrons (*turunġ*) bore golden helmets, while Kabbād citrons⁵¹ equipped themselves with defensive stones. The appointed knights appeared. Flowers divided in two halves, with double-faced walnuts (*ġawz*) in the middle. The matter spread, birds twittered, the eyes of the flowers opened, and bitter oranges (*nāranġ*) hung down curtains of fire. The lemon (*laymūn*) said: "I will show you the stars in daylight!". At that point, clamour became tremendous, the companion was separated from his companion, and the brother reneged his fellow brother. Mulberries (*tūt*) drowned in their own blood, unripe dates (*rāmiḥ*) fell from the treetop and joined [the battle]; they cried out from the palm until they were split. The strong almond (*lawz*), with his grandiose chivalry and valour, came close the rose and said:

49 *Šanbar* is the short form of *ḥiyār šanbar*, the drumstick tree.

50 The word *šālīš* (and its variant *ġālīš*) indicates a standard with a horse tail at the top. In the Mamluk period, it was exposed forty days before the beginning of a battle (Dahmān 1990, 50; 96).

51 Species of lemon (Lane 1865, 2585).

“Do not be scared and terrified, the oppressor will be annihilated. Mount and go, and do not be impatient, but be determined and trust”. (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 701-2)

The main literary technique is the personification of different kinds of fruits and nuts through military images where words ascribed to the semantic field of a medieval war are employed.⁵² These images give a strong sense of action, further dramatising the description. The direct confrontation between the army of the rose and that of the eglantine takes place and the war for power reaches its climax, in a crescendo of violence where nature is both the protagonist and the setting of this unusual battle.

At that point the two armies rode and came after each other. The branches of the trees were intertwined and became one with everything. Bunches of dates (*qanā*) were running like horses, trying to get ahead of one another. [...] Fighting and stabbing were ongoing in the turmoil of the battle in the garden. (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 702)

The army guided by the eglantine surrenders to the strength of the army of the rose. The flower declares his loyalty to the sultan of the garden. Reconciliation is rendered through the description of an idyllic atmosphere that fills the garden after violent combat; harmony and peace between the various natural components is restored. After the military victory of the rose, the combatants appear before the sultan to congratulate him and officially recognise his power. The almond, the apple (*tuffāḥ*), the plum (*barqūq*), and the apricot (*mišmiš*) give the rose an account of their bloody and heroic participation in the fighting, while other fruits and flowers, asked by the rose, admit they have not taken part in the battle due to physical weakness. The plum, covered with the dust of the battlefield and his body burned by the heat, recites the following couplet to describe his state:

The fires of my ardour made me black like the slave
I confronted with my flesh and, when my commitment to you
came to an end, my kernel was visible (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 704)

52 We want to specify that we have not found such a military terminology in any other floral debate. The only exception is represented by the *Mufāḥara bayna l-tūt wa-l-mišmiš* (The Boasting-Match Between Mulberry and Apricot), where some of these military terms, in particular ‘armours’ and ‘banners’, are to be found. There are two versions of this text that are slightly different. The first is attributed to the Syrian Ḥanafī jurist and poet Taġ al-Dīn al-Šarḥadī (d. 674/1275) and it has been recently edited (al-Šafadī 2018, 108-16). The second is attributed to the Syrian historian Šams al-Dīn al-Ḍahabī (d. 748/1348) and it has been reported in *Kawkab al-Rawḍa* (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 689-95). The two military terms are reported in the two versions. This testifies the intertextual relationship between literary debates centred on elements of the vegetal realm.

The imaginative faculty of the author works through the creation of a simile (*tašbīh*) based on the comparison of the dark fruit to a human. In this post-battle testimony, the dedication of the plum to his master is demonstrated by the image of his lacerated body.

The provenance of the *Mufāḥarat al-ward ma'a l-nisrīn* is unknown, the only element that might suggest an Egyptian origin is the word *šanbar*, which use is attested to in Egypt (Lane 1865, 831). The Mamluk dating can be assumed by some lexical choices, such as the term *šālīš* indicating a standard used by Mamluk sultans, as well as by the fact that the debate reflects the evolution of the prototypical floral *munāẓara* in the later centuries and the experimentation of new aesthetics. The literary rendering of the opposition between flowers as a means to recognise a political authority goes back, as we have seen, to the Andalusian specimens. In the Mamluk era the dispute between inanimate objects – in particular edibles – claiming authority has been represented, in some cases, in terms of a real war. At least two other literary compositions from the same period corroborate this argument. The *Mufāḥarat al-ruzz wa-l-ḥabb rummān* (The Boasting Debate Between Rice and Pomegranate Seeds), which goes back to the late Mamluk period or the beginning of the Ottoman era, has been scrutinised by Ibrahim Geries. This *maqāma*-like text displays an imaginary competition between Rice and Pomegranate seeds where names of weapons used during the Mamluk period are cited. A group of various kinds of food intervenes in the conflict to make peace between the two contenders (2002, 30-1). The second work, which is not a debate in the strict sense of the word, is *Kitāb al-ḥarb al-ma'sūq bayna laḥm al-ḍa'n wa ḥawāḍir al-sūq* (The Delectable War Between Mutton and the Refreshments of the Market-Place). It stages a curious battle between King Mutton and his followers, i.e. succulent and luxurious foods, and King Honey and his fellows – vegetables, fruits, milk, cheese, i.e. poor foods – on the other side. Apart from being an important literary source of dietary habits and food culture in medieval Cairo, the general atmosphere of this literary composition clearly recalls that of the literary debates, based on personification of inanimate objects and direct confrontation between opponents (van Gelder 2000, 97-8). Some scholars have believed these wars are allegorical references to conflicts which were common among rival Mamluk leaders or to rebellions by emirs opposing the authority of the Sultan,⁵³ thus suggesting a contextual reading of the debates. Geries, for example, does not exclude that the debate between Rice and Pomegranate may be a symbolic story, a medium by which a

53 For a historical analysis of Mamluk rules of succession and factional rule, see Levanoni 1994.

writer expresses his opinions and hopes regarding the society in which he lived (2002, 35-6).

What is the aim of the imaginary capacities displayed by the author of our text? We do not have sufficient textual elements to place the boasting-match in the political and historical context of the Mamluk era, so we cannot be sure of the real intentions of the author. However, the fact that some literary debates of approximately the same period do indeed represent conflicts between edibles and flowers can hardly be accidental.⁵⁴ The narrative scheme presents the opposition to the authority followed by reconciliation and the recognition of the leadership. Beside the great emphasis on war images in the second part of our composition, we think that the closing words of the author may confirm our attempt to decipher the potential symbolism of the narrative: "This is what has been presented about the boasting and the wars of enmity" (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 705). We can deduce that the fantastic war between flowers, fruits, and nuts may be an allusion to real conflicts; it may also reflect the wish to respect the supremacy of who was in power and not to rebel against him.

The last aspect we want to shed light on is the careful choice of the author to construct the debate by making a wide variety of edibles speak alongside flowers. How can we explain this fact? In a recent study dedicated to the increasing importance of nature in Arabic literature after 1100, Syrinx von Hees notices that fruit poems acquired a remarkable presence which reached the point that independent sections on them were created in anthological collections of similes.⁵⁵ Old poems were collected and new ones composed. In order to explain an evident shift to so many kinds of everyday fruits especially in Mamluk literary production, the scholar states that this phenomenon can be understood in the context of the broadening of Mamluk literature in terms of themes, genres, and interest towards everyday life. Moreover, other causes can be ascribed to the wide popularity of encyclopaedias of natural history, where nature was accurately classified (von Hees 2023, 167-9). We think that von Hees' remarks can help us explain the choice of our anonymous author

54 However, we cannot generalise as some scholars – especially in the Arab world – have done. As we will see in the next paragraph, the six *maqāmāt* by al-Suyūṭī focused on elements of the natural realm have often been interpreted as a literary reflection of conflicts that were common in the Mamluk period. What we want to stress here is that a distinction must be made.

55 This renewed attention towards fruits as a subject of literary production can also be found in the genre of the *munāẓara*. In fact, there are some debates between fruits dated to the Mamluk period, such as the *Mufāḥara bayna l-ruṭab wa-l-a'nāb* (The Boasting-Match Between Ripe Dates and Grape), the *Mufāḥarat al-tīn wa-l-'inab* (The Boasting-Match Between Fig and Grape), and the *Mufāḥarat bayna l-mišmiš wa-l-tūt* (The Boasting-Match Between Apricot and Mulberry). They are reported in *Kawkab al-Rawḍa* (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 667-95).

to broaden the elements of the vegetal realm acting in his literary contest. It can be related to Mamluk encyclopedism and meticulous attention toward the tiniest details concerning plants. This remark brings us to the last debate object of analysis, the point of arrival of the evolution of the *munāẓara* at the end of the Mamluk period.

6 The Literary Debate as Source of Encyclopaedic Knowledge and Ego-Document

The polymorphic scholar ʿĠalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) penned at least thirty *maqāmāt* centred on various subjects and polemics that were topical at his time. These texts are not picaresque narratives but expositions of a certain topic in ornate prose. In al-Suyūṭī's time, in fact, the genre of the *maqāma* evolved and acquired new forms. Among these compositions, six are centred on elements of the plant and mineral realms, in particular fruits, vegetables, nuts, precious stones, perfumes, and flowers. Five of these *maqāmāt*⁵⁶ are constructed as a series of monologues pronounced by personified natural elements who are eager to itemise their properties and virtues. Hence, we are not dealing with real literary debates because the speakers do not attack each other and there is no judge or winner. They are descriptive, informative, and didactic texts, since they display information and notions pertaining to several domains: religious knowledge, poetry, philology, and medicine (van Gelder 2007, 314-15). The sixth text, called *Maqāmat al-rayāḥīn*⁵⁷ (The Flower *Maqāma*), is distinguished from the other ones because it stages nine flowers openly vying for precedence. A winner is proudly declared by a judge. This work testifies to what extent the *maqāma* overlapped with the literary debate in the later centuries (Hämeen-Anttila 2012, 7). Al-Suyūṭī combines antecedent materials and reinterprets traditional images to adapt them to a new communicative context. Above all, he innovates, producing a peculiar text that widely circulated in the Arab world, as demonstrated by the numerous manuscripts in which it has been copied.

The debate has a well-defined structure: the *isnād* (chain of transmitters), the narrative frame, the contest, and the final verdict. The influence of the *maqāma* is tangible in the presence of the fictitious

56 They are *al-Maqāma al-tuffāḥiyya* (The Apple *Maqāma*), *al-Maqāma al-zumurrudiyya* (The Emerald *Maqāma*), *al-Maqāma al-fustuqiyya* (The Pistachio *Maqāma*), *al-Maqāma al-yāqūṭiyya* (The Ruby *Maqāma*), *al-Maqāma al-miskiyya* (The Musk *Maqāma*). They have been edited several times; we have consulted the edition by al-Durūbī (1989).

57 This *maqāma* is known by different titles in manuscript versions. We rely on the title – and the text – reported in *Kawkab al-Rawḍa* (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 713-29). The word *rayḥān* (pl. *rayāḥīn*) originally indicated any sweet-smelling plant (Lane 1865, 1181).

isnād, where we find fantasy characters whose names are words taken from the semantic field of the garden.⁵⁸ The first transmitter, Heavy Downpour, introduces the frame story of which he is the protagonist: one day he entered a lush garden and saw flowers of incontestable beauty. The narrator explained that the flowers of the enclosures were holding an assembly to establish, by adducing cogent proofs, which flower is the most suitable for power (*mulk*). Thus, *occasio litigandi* is clearly expressed. The argumentative sequence is composed by a series of speeches from nine flowers who speak only once: rose, narcissus, jasmine, Egyptian willow, eglantine, violet, waterlily, myrtle, and sweet basil. The debate is lively, sometimes ironic. The first speaker, the acknowledged king of flowers, makes his speech boasting about his urban elegance and renowned aesthetic qualities. Successive speakers contest point for point the presumed qualities of the predecessor. Each speech has a standard structure: firstly, the invective against the merits boasted by the previous speaker, secondly, the vaunting of the speaker's distinctive features. The self-praise concerns religious, medical, and literary merits, together with traditional motifs we have already seen in anterior literary debates. Among the religious claims, a flower is proud when he is mentioned in the Koran or in the sayings of the Prophet. For example, the rose claims superiority because his name occurs in the Book of God: "And when heaven is split asunder, and turns crimson (*warda*) like red leather" (Koran LV, 37). The next speaker, the narcissus, reverses this argument by stating that redness is a scorn because, according to the Prophet, red is the colour of Satan (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 715). To assert his excellence, myrtle says he is mentioned in a *ḥadīṭ* transmitted by Ibn 'Abbās: "The first thing planted by Noah after leaving the ship was myrtle". Medical properties of a certain flower are revealed at length.⁵⁹ The literary material includes the reconfiguration of older images and poetry composed by poets of the past or contemporary of the author. The image of the narcissus standing on his leg is praised by the flower as a sign of his devotion to God, always in upright posture to contemplate and adore. The denigratory and self-glorification parts conclude with *ṣawāhid*, poetic verses that validate an argument. Thus, in each speech we find verses that demystify the previous flower⁶⁰ and verses that praise the flower in turn. Hence, each speech includes a set of informative details,

58 The introductory chain of transmitters serves the function of justifying the fictionality of the story.

59 Efficacy of plants in treatment is presented as a merit also in other literary debates, such as the debates between fruits cited in note 55. It appears to be customary in debates of the Mamluk era.

60 For example, the narcissus sarcastically closes his invective by reciting two verses by Ibn al-Rūmī that compare the rose to a mule's anus.

and inevitably calls to mind the organisation and classification of knowledge in the Mamluk encyclopaedia, in particular the selection of data in the dozens of entries dedicated to the plant kingdom. As Francesca Bellino explains in her study about the representation of the plant realm in the Mamluk encyclopaedia, entries on plants were accurately planned to provide useful botanic, agricultural, geographical, and medical notions, as well as literary selections, that show how a plant had been used, imagined, and perceived in a diachronic perspective (2016, 137-40). In the case of al-Suyūṭī, his being the best representative of encyclopaedism (Ghersetti 2017, 1) is reflected in his text; the emphasis on religious citations is due to the author's expertise in the field of Islamic sciences.

After the last speech, an impartial and incorruptible judge is called. The narrator reserves a large space to the presentation of the arbiter and his stated reputation. According to Samīr al-Durūbī, who has extensively studied this floral debate, the description of the judge, containing a complete list of the religious, linguistic, and literary disciplines he masters, is a cameo of the author, who lets himself enter the fictional world of his *maqāma* to settle the dispute (2001, 87-8).⁶¹ The judge firmly clarifies that he acts exclusively on the basis of the Sunna, that he is unlike the judge of Boasting-match between Ripe Dates and Grape, Fig and Grape, and Apricot and Mulberry,⁶² and that he does not accept bribery and those who support it. The verdict is delivered. None of the nine flowers deserves authority. The only one who merits sovereignty is henna blossom (*fāḡiya*), the flower preferred by the Prophet. It is the sole flower on which authentic traditions have been transmitted,⁶³ differently from other contestants who are mentioned in weak or forged sayings. As an expert in the traditions of the Prophet and great defender of it, al-Suyūṭī cannot but rely on the Sunna to establish who must be the legitimate ruler. At this point the esteemed judge eulogises the medical benefits of the chosen flower, highlighting its multiple uses in Prophetic medicine. The uniqueness of henna and its special link with the Prophet are honoured in the closing part of the pronouncement, where the judge reports a couplet on the luminosity of the henna blossom composed by himself. The henna is

61 In the Boasting-Match Between Fig and Grape, which was well-known by al-Suyūṭī, the scholarly background of the judge is shortly described. The fact that al-Suyūṭī accurately presents the disciplines mastered by the judge of his *maqāma* – branches of knowledge that coincide with his fields of expertise –, may confirm it is a biographical note in the composition, as well as a sign of the author's proverbial self-conceit.

62 In the mentioned debates, the judge does not declare any winner and calls for reconciliation between the opponents.

63 For example, "The lord of perfumed flowers in this world and in the hereafter is henna blossom"; "The lord of the aromatic plants of Paradise is henna" (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 727).

the only plant to which al-Suyūṭī dedicates poetic verses. At the end of the composition, the nine flowers acknowledge the sovereignty of the *fāḡiya* and his right to power.

Maqāmat al-rayāḥīn has been read by many Arab scholars as a symbolic story. In general, rivalry among flowers has been considered a way of indirectly narrating and criticising the factionalism that characterised the Mamluk period. In his 1970s study on the art of the *maqāma*, Yūsuf Nūr 'Iwaḍ asserted that al-Suyūṭī's *maqāmāt* on perfumes, flowers, fruits, vegetables, and precious stones have a deeper significance. Due to the pressure intellectuals were exposed to by Mamluk elites, they resorted to allusive narratives to disguise criticism of Mamluk rule (1979, 235). In his 1980s study, al-Durūbī concluded that the Musk *Maqāma* and the Ruby *Maqāma* are fictional renderings of the general climate of that period, marked by endemic conflicts among Mamluk emirs (1989, 68). According to the scholar, the Flower *Maqāma* epitomises this literary 'trend'. Notoriously critical of the legitimacy of Mamluk power and in uneasy relationship with the sultans of his time, al-Suyūṭī would have represented the factional strife as key to maintaining power through the conflict between the nine flowers. The debate, composed at around 904/1499 according to the scholar's analysis of some manuscript versions (al-Durūbī 2001, 41), reflects in particular conflicts between competitors that followed the death of the Sultan Qāyitbāy in 901/1496.⁶⁴ To support this argument, al-Durūbī notes the richness of political and military lexicon used in the text (2001, 99; 105-11).⁶⁵ We think the hermeneutic process of *Maqāmat al-rayāḥīn* and its fellow *maqāmāt* may have been influenced by twentieth century Egyptian historiography – especially monarchist and pan-Arabist – that downplayed the Mamluk past, associating it with tyranny, chaos, and oppression (Sung 2017, 5-6).⁶⁶ Consequently, these texts have been interpreted – maybe too easily – as references to Mamluk warmongering, without considering their specificities.

In our view, the composition should not be read only in the light of the political context of the Mamluk era, but also in relation to

⁶⁴ Al-Durūbī seems not to consider that the *maqāma* has been included by al-Suyūṭī in his work *Kawkab al-Rawḍa*. This voluminous work was concluded in 895 as indicated, for example, in a manuscript version preserved in Cambridge (Browne 1900, 182) and in the edition we have consulted (al-Suyūṭī 2008, 752). Hence before the year of composition identified by al-Durūbī. The *maqāma* would not have been written after the death of the Sultan. This would exclude the reading supported by the scholar.

⁶⁵ Ġardā' al-Mārdīnī, most probably influenced by the previous readings of the text, shares the same opinion (2008).

⁶⁶ Suffice it to think that Ġamāl al-Ġīṭānī's novel *al-Zaynī Barakāt*, that depicts the harshness of the police state of the Mamluk period relying on historical chronicles, was published in 1971.

anterior floral debates. Most of the political lexicon used by al-Suyūṭī was taken from a fixed repertory, in the sense that it had been conventionally used in previous literary debates to the point that it became a sort of stock vocabulary of the floral debates. Moreover, we lack elements to connect the actants of the text to real historical characters. We think that the implicit message inherent to the text cannot be detected by the verbal speech of the nine flowers, but mainly by the epilogue where the figure of the Prophet is celebrated by introducing his beloved flower. In other words, the part reserved to the boasting of the flowers is functional to the main scope of the *maqāma*, i.e. the praise for the Abbasid caliph. The principal function is the *madīḥ* of the figure of the caliph, not the concealed representation of Mamluk conflicts. Al-Suyūṭī resorted to the floral debate, a sub-genre traditionally invested with laudatory scopes and potential political meanings, to express between the lines his stance on the legal ruler and his disdain for sultanic power. Al-Suyūṭī considered the Abbasid caliphs the only legitimate rulers, because of their alleged kinship to the house of the Prophet. Mamluk sultans were, on the contrary, the incarnation of a worldly power that needed legitimising. In some treatises, in form of collections of *aḥādīṭ*, the scholar resorted to specific selective and ordering strategies to indirectly express political critique of the sultan and his colleagues who revered secular rulers for the sake of convenience (Mauder 2016).⁶⁷ His strict adherence to the Sunna and emulation of the Prophet's prescriptions made him side with the Abbasid caliphs, represented by the *fāḡiya*, which is a trace of the presence of the Prophet and a sign of the legitimacy of the caliphs. Thus, by exalting the authority and importance of henna blossom our author declares the prominence of religious power over temporal power. The ruler must be appointed on religious basis, al-Suyūṭī tells us. We can safely consider *Maqāmat al-rayāḥīn* a sort of ego-document, a fictional literary text where the author expresses a personal opinion and reflects about himself without being outspoken.⁶⁸ The mention of bribery is, among others, an evident autobiographical note, a clear reference to the corruption of his colleagues and their attachment to the worldly dimension that he tirelessly attacked.

The *maqāma* has been included – along with flower and fruit debates by other authors – in *Kawkab al-Rawḍa* (The Florilegium of the Island of al-Rawḍa), a literary-historical anthology al-Suyūṭī centred on the Nilotic island where he retired in the 1480s after

⁶⁷ Al-Suyūṭī experienced various problems with the ruling sultans. Among them, his refusal to pay a visit to the Sultan Qāyitbāy because he believed that men of science should not visit secular rulers. This angered the Sultan (Sartain 1975, 86-91).

⁶⁸ For a study of forms of writing of the self in the Mamluk era, see Wollina 2013.

a series of violent polemics with his colleagues. The anthological context provides further elements to close our analysis of the text.⁶⁹ In this work, al-Suyūṭī collected many materials about the history of the island and how its beauty had been celebrated by authors of different epochs. A large space is reserved to two natural elements that mark the landscape of the island: the Nile and its vegetal species. The abundance of plants is presented as a *faḍīla*, a state of excellence in which the island has been invested by divine bounty.⁷⁰ The first species presented in the section on plants is – now for obvious reasons – the *fāḡiya*, followed by dozens of flowers, fruits, and vegetables, on which the author collected poetic verses of the tradition and *munāẓarāt*, a genre in vogue in al-Suyūṭī's time. The Flower *Maqāma* is placed in this section of the anthology, immediately after *Mufaḥḥarat al-ward ma'a l-nisrīn* and *Risālat al-azhār*. The last two debates have, as we have seen, a political subtext. Al-Suyūṭī consciously interacts with these antecedents, confirming this function of the debate and adapting it to his communicative needs. Furthermore, the nine contesting flowers and henna blossom are presented separately in the plant section of *Kawkab al-Rawḍa*. The fact that they are made protagonists of the Flower *Maqāma* may be a way of valorising – by means of literary creativity – a virtue of Egypt, thus exalting a specificity that – according to the literature of *faḍā'il* – distinguished Egypt. Our *maqāma* may also hint at a territorial specificity.

To conclude, *Maqāmat al-rayāḥīn* has shown to fully reflect the literary esprit of its époque. The overlapping of literary forms of writing, the encapsulation of different spheres of knowledge, the intertextual dialogues with antecedent or contemporary debates, all confirm our thesis about the evolutionary path of this literary genre.

7 Concluding Remarks

This study has demonstrated that the literary debate was a very flexible form of writing from its inception, in terms of actants, structure, and functions. We have focused on floral *munāẓarat*, compositions that originated from Abbasid flower poems and dialectical reasoning, infused with creative imagination and regard to indicate fictionality. We have focused our attention on boasting

⁶⁹ Van Gelder has stated that the apparently pointless Debate between the Cowl and the Hood, that closes al-Suyūṭī's treatise on the superiority of the cowl, reveals its real meaning only if considered in relation to the main subject of the treatise (1991, 209-11).

⁷⁰ According to the Egyptian tradition of the *faḍā'il*, literature on the special merits of Egypt, lush vegetation is one of the many excellences that gave the country pre-eminence when compared to other reigns of the *dār al-islām*.

debates produced after the sixth/twelfth century. We have tried to detect the interpretative possibilities of a corpus of six texts with the purpose of underscoring the multiple functions assigned to this sub-type of literary debate. The floral *munāẓara* has more than one layer of meaning behind the surface or literal meaning. In it, flowers have functioned as traces carrying inner meanings that had been defined, written over, re-defined, and re-employed since the Abbasid era, when this textual form primarily served to swear allegiance to a political figure. In the Mamluk era, the scopes of the floral literary debate widened, as well as the participants in the contest. As emerged from our investigation, several dimensions contribute to the construction of natural symbolism: religious, medical, political, and geographical/territorial. The botanical-naturalistic strand of the genre was practised with the aim of praising a ruler or an eminent personality, giving moral and mystical teachings, and indirectly narrating or giving a literary rendering of current political tensions, such as the frequent power struggles that characterised this era. However, we have shown that a contextual analysis revealed that we should pay attention to carefully distinguish texts that may have a political subtext from texts that may serve other functions.

Concerning the internal construction of the debates, particular differences have not emerged, except for a certain experimentalism in the introductory and closing parts. Authors drew on a repertory of images which have been reconfigured according to their intents. In some cases, the use of a specific lexicon – such as in the case of war terms – has revealed to be useful to determine how the circumstances have affected the structuring of the text. We have noted how interest towards everyday life and the encyclopaedic organisation of knowledge affected the floral debate in the later centuries. We have demonstrated that the Mamluk floral debate dialogues with the Abbasid and at the same time innovates it. The different kinds of texts we have analysed show that this form of writing was practised at different levels of the social and intellectual scale: anonymous or obscure writers, secretaries, and learned men.

The analysis carried out in this article opens the door to the study of the influence of the floral debate on other types of literary debates, especially the study of the impact of al-Suyūṭī's *maqāma* on literary debates produced in other parts of the Islamic world. Approaching other typologies of debates composed in Egypt in the same period could be a successive step in the exploration of the functions of the genre and its popularisation. In particular, debates between recreation grounds or landmarks of Cairo, where the inanimate protagonists are anthropomorphised through floral images, could reveal many other things concerning the evolution of the literary debate.

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Abū Bakr al-Fūrakī, référence *aš'arites* inconnue du *Traité de théologie d'Averroès*

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Abstract Averroes' *kalām* treaty, the *Kitāb al-kašf 'an manāhiġ al-adilla* is one of the most controversial texts from the Andalusian philosopher. Its writing relied vastly on Aristotelian texts and opuses from the *aš'arite kalām*, of which Averroes wanted to deconstruct and refute the doctrines. Most of its references – whether they are Aristotelian or *aš'arite* are not explicitly quoted – are consistent with the medieval Islamic customs. Having published between 2005 and 2007 an analysis of the Aristotelian sources of this text, this contribution aims at studying the *aš'arite* authors critiqued by Averroes and broadly mentioned as the 'modern *aš'arites*'. The main source discovered through this textual comparison is the *Kitāb al-Niḡāmī fī usūl ad-dīn* by Abu-Bakr Al-Fūrakī, author of a *kalām* treaty of which a single copy has been conserved in Istanbul. A transcription and a translation of its most salient excerpts have been included in this contribution, in order to show the relationship between those two *kalām* treaties.

Keywords Ibn Rušd. *Kalām*. *Aš'arism*. Prophecy. Al-Andalus. Almohades.

Sommaire 1 Introduction : La question des auteurs *aš'arites* dans le *Kitāb al-Kašf 'an manāhiġ al-adilla* d'Averroès. – 2 L'*aš'arisme* en al-Andalus. – 3 Comparaison textuelle. – 3.1 La preuve a *contingentia mundi* du *kalām aš'arite*. – 3.2 Preuve de l'Unicité divine. – 3.3 La Mission prophétique.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-02-24
Accepted 2025-06-30
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Canova, B. (2025). "Abū Bakr al-Fūrakī, référence *aš'arite* inconnue du *Traité de théologie d'Averroès*". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 45-78.

1 Introduction : La question des auteurs aš'arites dans le *Kitāb al-Kašf 'an manāhiğ al-adilla d'Averroès*

Le *Kitāb al-Kašf 'an manāhiğ al-adilla fī aqā'id al-milla*¹ (al-Ġābirī 1998) connu en Occident comme *Livre du dévoilement des procédés démonstratifs des doctrines de la religion* (ci-après *Kašf*) est un traité de *kalām* rédigé par Averroès en 1198, dans le même période que les plus célèbres *Faṣl al-maqāl*, *Discours décisif* (De Libera, Geoffroy 1996) et *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (al-Ġābirī 2015) (*Destructio destructionis*). L'ambition déclarée de cette œuvre fut d'établir une théologie rationnelle fondée sur les acquis des doctrines aristotéliennes. Dans le milieu juif et chrétien, une démarche semblable a été entreprise à peu près à la même époque, mais avec une meilleure fortune, par Moïse Maïmonide dont le *Guide des égarés* (Munk 1856) rédigé en 1190 devint un des piliers de la pensée théologique juive ; puis quelques décennies après, par Thomas d'Aquin, qui en 1258 jette les bases de la scolastique latine avec sa *Summa contra gentiles* (Michon 1999). Le trait commun entre ces trois œuvres dont les influences réciproques restent encore à étudier est d'avoir voulu intégrer le système aristotélien aux contenus doctrinaux d'un monothéisme – qu'il soit juif, arabe ou chrétien – afin de dissiper les nombreux questionnements autour du divin par le biais des certitudes établies par la Raison. Cette voie s'était ouverte vers la fin du dixième siècle avec la diffusion du *corpus* aristotélien d'abord en milieu arabe et juif, puis latin. Ce corpus a offert aux penseurs du Moyen Age une systématisation considérée à l'époque comme exhaustive du « savoir humain », mais aussi des « règles de la pensée bien conduite », (al-Ġābirī 1998) pour reprendre une expression couramment utilisée par Averroès lui-même. Il n'est guère étonnant qu'un des enjeux cognitifs majeurs de l'époque, quel que soit le monothéisme d'appartenance, ait été d'intégrer les acquis du « savoir humain » légué par Aristote au « savoir divin » transmis par la Révélation.

Pour ce qui en est du *Kašf*, l'enjeu était double : à la fois consolider le *credo Tūmartien* qui fédérait les peuples de al-Andalous autour des *almohades*, comme cela a été montré par Marc Geoffroy (1999 ; 2000 ; 2005) mais aussi, de manière plus vaste, de ramener le consensus autour des questions théologiques qui exacerbaient les conflits entre factions adverses et qui divisaient la communauté des

¹ Dans cette contribution tous les passages cités de ce traité de théologie musulmane ont été traduits directement de l'original arabe, à partir de l'édition de référence utilisé par la plupart des spécialistes contemporains (al-Ġābirī 1998). La traduction directe de l'arabe a été privilégiée afin de garder le plus possible une conformité avec la terminologie adoptée pour la traduction française des ouvrages de *kalām*, établie par Daniel Gimaret au fil de quarante ans d'étude sur le sujet.

croyants sunnites. Le *Kašf* se présente comme l'aboutissement de la démarche entreprise avec le *Faṣl al-maqāl*, qui avait non seulement légitimé l'étude de la *falsafa* (la philosophie des Grecs) mais qui avait indiqué le *naẓar* (la spéculation philosophique) et le *burhan* (la pensée démonstrative), comme « instruments privilégiés » pour départager les questions théologiques les plus controversées et étayer de la sorte les fondements de la Révélation. D'une certaine manière le *Kašf* se veut la démonstration « pratique » du postulat énoncé dans le *Faṣl al-maqāl* : seule la Raison, capable de dégager le vrai, peut trancher à propos des thèmes controversés du *kalām* ou encore là où des passages du texte sacré et de la *sunna* se prêtent à différentes interprétations. Fort de cette conviction, Averroès entreprend de les examiner point par point, en contrecarrant les arguments fallacieux, les interprétations trompeuses introduites par les écoles théologiques dialectiques, notamment celle *aš'arite*, dont Averroès fut fièrement l'adversaire. Comme cela a été montré à plusieurs reprises par M. Geoffroy (1999 ; 2000 ; 2005), le *Kašf* est une sorte de contre-traité de *kalām aš'arite*, qui déconstruit le discours des maîtres de ce courant de pensée. Il serait en revanche une erreur de lui réserver un rôle d'œuvre mineure dont le destinataire aurait été le peuple (qui à l'époque n'avait aucun accès à l'écriture, et qui écoutait les sermons lors de la prière du vendredi) ou au maximum les théologiens, empêtrés dans les discours dialectiques, comme cela a été maintes fois avancé par différents spécialistes d'un Averroès très « latin », investi par un imaginaire certes séduisant mais peu crédible de « libre penseur », d'intellectuel « maudit », voire de « Philosophe des Lumières ante litteram » se pliant à la foi par convenance plutôt que par conviction. Sa position d'éminent jurisconsulte du droit musulman – il était *qadī al-quḍāt* (juge suprême), la finesse de sa pensée théologique, son immense travail d'harmonisation entre pensée aristotélicienne et doctrines islamiques, laisse peu de doutes sur son adhésion au cadre religieux et civilisationnel dans lequel il évoluait et auquel il souhaitait apporter une contribution d'envergure avec son traité de théologie. Cette contribution est restée inaboutie du fait de sa disgrâce à la cour Almohade, imputable en partie au contenu de ses écrits mais surtout aux intrigues ourdies contre lui par les *Uléma* qui arrivèrent à obtenir son expromission, même si cette dernière fut suivie par sa réhabilitation et sa réintégration à la Cour. À la différence du monde latin, dans lequel ses textes continuèrent à éveiller autant « d'inquiétudes » (Brenet 2015) que d'admiration, aucune condamnation durable de ses thèses philosophiques n'eut cours dans un islam médiéval qui se montra plutôt enclin à l'oubli qu'à la persécution de ses doctrines les plus controversées. Le culte ininterrompu voué à Avicenne du Moyen-Âge jusqu'à nos jours dans le monde musulman est l'explication la plus évidente même si la moins évoquée par les exégètes Occidentaux du fait que la pensée

islamique se montra moins réceptive que celle latine aux apports du corduan. D'une certaine manière, Averroès a « perdu la partie » qu'il avait engagé contre Avicenne (De Libera 2000) dans le monde musulman, « partie » qu'il a en revanche gagnée dans le monde latin. La postérité de son influence intellectuelle pâtit par ailleurs de la chute des Almohades au sort desquels il était foncièrement lié.

Quoi que sa démarche de fonder une théologie rationnelle de stricte obligeance aristotélicienne n'ait pas eu le résultat espéré (même si ce dernier fut moins négligeable de ce que certains spécialistes ont prétendu), cela n'enlève rien à la justesse, ni à la clarté du but que Averroès se préfixa en composant le *Kašf* : élever la réflexion autour du divin au rang de science « bien fondée » (al-Ġābirī 1998), grâce aux apports du *'ilm al-naẓar* et du *'ilm al-burhan*, les sciences spéculative et démonstrative. Le *Kašf* est bien plus proche de la *Summa contra gentiles* (de laquelle personne n'oserait remettre en question la portée philosophique) que d'un texte « destiné au peuple » – qualification sur laquelle il est inutile de s'attarder de nouveau (Canova 2007), tout comme on ne s'attarderait pas sur qui définirait un texte de pédagogie comme « destiné aux enfants » – ou encore du « pamphlet » *almohadiste* à l'intention de dialecticiens dépourvus de capacités spéculatives, auquel certains lecteurs peu avertis de Marc Geoffroy ont essayé de le réduire, en trahissant à la fois la pensée du philosophe et celle de l'orientaliste qui a donné une lecture bien plus nuancée de cette démarche au fil de l'annotation du texte (Geoffroy 2000).

Tout comme cela a été le cas pour les sources aristotéliennes sur lesquelles ont porté nos communications précédentes (Canova 2006 ; 2007), celles du *kalām* sont imbriquées les unes dans les autres, sans que leurs auteurs et leurs œuvres ne soient nécessairement cités explicitement. Dans certains cas ils sont repérables uniquement en examinant la « séquence de reprise » de leurs propos lors de la réfutation des thèses attribuées de manière indifférenciée à leur école de pensée. Averroès n'indique pas le titre des textes auxquels se réfère, car ils étaient facilement reconnaissables par les savants contemporains, en revanche ces textes sont très peu connus,² voire inconnus de nos jours. Il est donc primordial de déterminer les auteurs auxquels Averroès faisait référence, en contestant les doctrines de cette école. On n'a pas une connaissance exhaustive des ouvrages de *kalām* qui circulaient à l'époque almohade dans le territoire de l'al-Andalus, en particulier ceux de *kalām aš'arite*, qui nous intéresse ici.

2 Une étude comparative des textes menée sur les 57 microfilms des manuscrits *aš'arites* des archives de Daniel Gimaret, initialement légués au EPHE, ont été transférés à l'IRHT, en 2005. Le catalogage du fond réalisé par Barbara Canova, est disponible sous forme de fiches auprès de l'Institut de Recherche d'Histoire des Textes.

Par sa position géographique, la péninsule ibérique s'est trouvée en marge du territoire du *dār al-islām* au Moyen-Âge. Pour cette raison, ses contacts avec la production intellectuelle de l'islam oriental ne furent pas réguliers.

Pour comprendre à quelle version de l'*aš'arisme* Averroès adressait ses critiques en composant le *Kašf*, il est nécessaire d'abord de déterminer en quoi consistait l'*aš'arisme* andalou ; quels étaient les ouvrages les plus répandus, les courants dominants. Il faut tâcher de reconstituer le cadre global des sources qui interviennent dans le traité, pour rendre au *Kašf* sa lisibilité, car il s'agit d'un texte polémique qui réfute des doctrines considérées comme notoires par Averroès. Les textes *aš'arites* critiqués au fil du *Kašf* sont cités de façon précise mais elliptique, ce qui nous laisse présupposer que ses destinataires sont accoutumés à la lecture d'ouvrages de *kalām* et n'ont besoin que de quelques phrases pour se repérer dans un système dogmatique partagé avec l'auteur. De ce fait, s'il veut saisir dans son intégralité la démarche polémique d'Averroès, le lecteur contemporain est obligé d'essayer de déterminer l'ensemble des textes dont l'auteur disposait.

2 L'*aš'arisme* en al-Andalus

Pour ce qui en est de l'école *aš'arite*, Averroès, comme d'autres auteurs contemporains, la découpe en deux phases : « l'*aš'arisme* ancien » et « l'*aš'arisme* moderne », sans donner de détails précis, ni de définition de ces deux courants. Si les critiques adressées à l'*aš'arisme* « moderne »³ visent clairement deux maîtres de ce courant, al-Ġuwaynī et al-Ġazālī,⁴ dont Averroès cite les noms et occasionnellement les œuvres, les textes dont les titres sont explicitement nommés ne sont pas les seuls pris en considération dans ce traité. Il est question de la *Risala Niẓamiyya* (Al-Kawtharī 1948) d'al-Ġuwaynī, dont Averroès cite le titre et l'auteur, à deux reprises (al-Ġābirī 1998, 111-15) ou encore des *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* (Beġu 2000), des *Ġawāhir al-Qurān* (al-Ġazālī 1933), du *Miškāt al-anwār* (al-Ġazālī 1924), d'*Al-munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (al-Marraq 1984) et du *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*,⁵ œuvres d'al-Ġazālī dont Averroès énumère les

³ C'est ce courant, auquel est rattaché al-Ġazālī, qui est le plus attaqué par Averroès. Il est ainsi qualifié dans le *Kašf*, ainsi que dans le *Muqaddima* d'Ibn Ḥaldūn (Cheddadi 2002, 1 : 903).

⁴ Il faut remarquer que Averroès semble compter sans hésitation al-Ġuwaynī parmi les auteurs « modernes » tandis que Ibn Ḥaldūn, dans la *Muqaddima*, semble faire commencer le courant « moderne » avec al-Ġazālī (Cheddadi 2002, 1 : 903).

⁵ Ces œuvres sont énumérées dans un *excursus* véhément qui dénonce l'incohérence d'al-Ġazālī (al-Ġābirī 1998, 150-1).

titres dans un excursus polémique dirigé contre le maître iranien au milieu du traité, mais sans s'attarder ni dans leur analyse, ni leur déconstruction. Il s'agit plutôt d'une liste de titres, dont il ne semble pas trop se servir dans son traité. En revanche, deux ouvrages des mêmes auteurs, le *Kitāb al-Iršād* (Luciani 1938), d'al-Ġuwaynī et *al-Iqtisād fī-l-I'tiqād* d'al-Ġazālī (1994), dont la présence est conséquente et répandue dans tout le texte, ne sont même pas nommés. Quant à l'*aš'arisme* « classique » – où ancien –, nous sommes encore moins informés, car Averroès se contente d'exposer les principes généraux de l'*aš'arisme* antérieur à al-Ġuwaynī en regroupant au fil du discours ces auteurs sous des dénominations communes : « les *aš'arites* » ou « les premiers *aš'arites* », sans indiquer aucune source spécifique.

La réfutation de ces doctrines, présentées comme « communément répandues », constitue environ les deux tiers du *Kašf*. Nous avons donc essayé de déterminer au moyen de la confrontation textuelle et de témoignages historiographiques parallèles, les auteurs qu'Averroès était censé connaître. Nous avons cherché dans la *Muqaddima* d'Ibn Ḥaldūn (De Slane 1863, 1 : 185-230 et 2 : 451-80), auteur de peu postérieur à Averroès, qui nous donne un aperçu des auteurs de *kalām* les plus étudiés dans al-Andalus (région qu'on ne retrouve pas nommée de la sorte chez Ibn Ḥaldūn, mais qu'on peut recouper avec les régions citées d'Espagne, Maghreb et *Ifriqiya*). En parcourant la *Muqaddima* d'Ibn Ḥaldūn, nous trouvons un excellent témoin des enjeux civilisationnels de l'époque, on ne peut que remarquer les nombreuses occurrences dans lesquelles les *mutakallimūn* (terme que De Slane traduit par le mot « scolastiques ») sont cités. Ibn Ḥaldūn relate lui aussi les troubles que leurs doctrines avaient semées depuis plus d'un siècle dans ces régions. Le fait que ce sujet revienne à maintes reprises, avec beaucoup d'insistance, donne la mesure de la nuisance créée par la rupture du consensus autour des préceptes de la religion. Si Avicenne, al-Ġazālī et Averroès sont présentés comme de philosophes dignes de respect, Ibn Ḥaldūn adresse aux *mutakallimūn* les mêmes critiques qu'Averroès : avoir introduit de manière trompeuse des concepts mal maîtrisés de la philosophie dans le domaine de la religion. Visiblement le *Kašf* répondait à une vraie exigence de clarification et de recadrage doctrinaire, passant par la déconstruction des doctrines *aš'arites*. Cette confrontation croisée présente cependant une anomalie, celle des textes d'un auteur d'envergure tel qu'Ibn Fūrak. Le *Fahrassa* (Abū l-Aġfān, Al-Zāhī 1980, 85) de Ibn 'Atīyya atteste de la circulation dans la péninsule ibérique de deux textes d'Ibn Fūrak, le célèbre *Kitāb Muškil al-ḥadiṭ wa-bayāni-hi* et le *Kitāb al-imām Abī-Bakr ibn Fūrak*. Or ce dernier titre ne correspond à aucun ouvrage d'Ibn Fūrak cité par des sources orientales. Fórneas envisage que le *Kitāb al-imām Abī-Bakr ibn Fūrak* ne soit autre que le *Kitāb al-Muškil*, même si ce dernier est déjà cité quelque ligne auparavant par l'auteur des *Fahrassa*. En réalité, on

peut avancer une hypothèse bien plus pertinente. Il s'agirait d'un autre texte, le *al-Niẓāmī fī uṣūl ad-dīn* (ci-après *Niẓāmī*), à savoir une synthèse systématique des doctrines d'al-Aš'arī, augmentée des procédés propres à la *falsafa* que le *kalām aš'arite* intégrera au fur et à mesure dans sa tradition. Ce traité a été rédigé par Abū Bakr al-Fūrakī (m. 1085) le petit-fils d'Ibn Fūrak (m. 1015) et beau-fils d'al-Quṣayrī (m. 1074). De celui-ci nous ne connaissons, à l'état actuel, que cette œuvre, qui nous est parvenue par un seul manuscrit conservé à Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 2378.⁶ Ce manuscrit est présenté dans sa page de garde comme [K. li-] *ayh al-Imām al-Ustad Ibn Fūrak fī Uṣūl ad-dīn*, c'est-à-dire comme un ouvrage du grand père de al-Fūrakī. Cette confusion a été dissipée par D. Gimaret (1990, 219-28), mais sans description de cet *unicum*, ni d'hypothèses explicatives de cette erreur d'auteur dans l'intitulé de ce manuscrit. Il se peut donc que cet ouvrage ait en effet longuement circulé sous l'attribution fautive qui nous apparaît dans le manuscrit Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 2378, dont l'intitulé, par ailleurs, manifeste une ressemblance avec le titre de l'œuvre « mystérieuse » d'Ibn Fūrak, citée par Ibn 'Aṭīyya. Une confirmation de sa présence en al-Andalus nous vient du fait que, comme on le démontrera par la suite, ce texte semblerait avoir été utilisé par Averroès comme référence pour une partie considérable des propos de théologie *aš'arite* analysés et critiqués au fil du *Kitāb al-Kašf*, et notamment quand il s'agit des propos qu'Averroès attribue de façon générique aux *aš'arites*. Si le *al-Niẓāmī fī uṣūl ad-dīn* est une *summa* assez réussie des doctrines *aš'arites*, son auteur semble rester à l'ombre de son célèbre grand-père. On peut chercher une raison à la fausse attribution qui apparaît dans l'intitulé dans le fait que le K. *al-Niẓāmī* rapporte, en maintes endroits, des propos attribués⁷ à Ibn Fūrak par al-Fūrakī même. Il est possible que ce texte ait été classé, dès le départ ou par la suite, comme un recueil des pensées d'Ibn Fūrak rédigé par son petit-fils. Il se peut aussi que la personnalité controversée du petit-fils ait encouragé la transmission du contenu de cet ouvrage sous la paternité plus flatteuse d'Ibn Fūrak, auteur

6 Le manuscrit, Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 2378 compte 158 folios, il est copié avec une écriture orientale, totalement dépourvue de points diacritiques. Le colophon nous indique qu'il a été copié en 1388. Le même colophon nous renseigne aussi sur son commanditaire, le juriste *ša'afite* Šafī al-dīn Aḥmad ibn Musa. Pour des raisons de concordance du nom, du *madhab* et d'activité nous avons identifié le commanditaire avec le yéménite Safī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Mūsā, juriste *šāfi'ite* dont l'activité à Zabid en 780 est attestée par une anecdote rapportée par Al-Hazraḡī (Al-Hazraḡī 1911, 2 : 263). Le ms contient deux textes, dans les premiers 16 folios, une série de questions (*masā'il*) d'ordre théologique. Au f. 17r nous avons une nouvelle *basmala*, qu'annonce, titré en rouge, un *Discours sur les termes techniques utilisés par les experts de science des Uṣūl*. Les *Uṣūl* en question, étant les *Uṣūl al-Dīn*.

7 Dans ce cas, al-Fūrakī se distingue des autres auteurs *aš'arites*, qui rarement mentionnent les noms des maîtres ayant inspiré leurs ouvrages.

unanimement reconnu et apprécié, à différence de son petit-fils. En effet les informations biographiques que nous possédons sur l'auteur du *K. al-Niẓāmī* sont fort désobligeantes, comme l'on peut le tirer d'Ibn al-Ġawzī, al-Safadī et al-'Asqalanī qui l'ont cité dans leurs ouvrages :

Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Ayūb Abū Bakr al-Fūrakī, petit fils de Abī Bakr ibn Fūrak :⁸ il s'installa à Baġdād où il passe toute sa vie, il était expert de *kalām*, spéculation rationnelle et rhétorique. Il était gendre d'Abī al-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī,⁹ il tenait des sermons dans la [*madrasa*] *Niẓāmiyya* et à cause de lui des discordes surgirent dans le *maḡhab* (école), il était passionné par les biens mondains, il cherchait le prestige, il n'avait pas honte de s'habiller en soie [...]. À la question « pouvons donc suivre son enseignement ? » Abī Mansūr ibn Ġuwhair réplique « Son *ḥadīṭ* est encore plus farfelu que sa dague ». Réponse qui fut fort appréciée par les gens. Notre *ṣaiḥ* Abū al-Faḍīl ibn Nāṣr dit de lui : « Il était un propagateur d'innovations blâmables » ; « il cassait du charbon brûlant et il en mangeait ». Mourût le *ṣa'bān* de cette année. Il est enterré près du sépulcre d'al-Aṣa'arī.¹⁰ (Ibn al-Ġawzī s.d. XVI, 243)

Al-Safadī lui fait écho dans son *Al-wāfī bi-l-wafayat* :

Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn Dawd Ibn Abī 'Imarān Ibn 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-Raḥman Ibn 'Awuf al-Zahirī Abū Bakr al-Fūrakī petit fils de l'Imām Abī Bakr ibn Fūrak al-Samarqandī. Il s'installa à Baġdād où il vit jusqu'à sa mort. Il prononçait des sermons à la [*madrasa*] *Niẓāmiyya* et il était en rapport avec les militaires ; il était insigne dans la connaissance du *kalām*, de la science spéculative et dans la rhétorique ; il avait étudié le *kalām* d'al-Aṣ'arī sous Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Qazāz. Il épousa la fille puis née du maître Abī Qāsim al-Quṣayrī. Il était impliqué avec l'armée en raison de sa recherche de comforts matériels [...] Il mourût l'année 478 [h]. (Al-Safadī s.d. 372)

⁸ Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Al-Hasan b. Fūrak (m. 1015). Il était probablement originaire de Ispahan. Il étudie le *Kalām* à Baṣra et Baġdād et il devient avec al-Bāqillānī, dont il est contemporain, un des plus insigne théologien de la postérité immédiate d'al-Aṣ'arī. Son texte le plus connu est le *Kitāb muškil al-ḥadīṭ wa-bayānī-hi*, dans lequel il essaie de dégager le *kalām* de fautes interprétatives liées selon lui à l'anthropomorphisme ou au mu'tazilisme. Nous avons aussi un recueil de propos intitulé *Muġarrad maqālāt al-Aṣ'arī* dans lequel on a, sous la forme de questions et réponses un exposé des doctrines d'al-Aṣ'arī (Gimaret 1987). Pour un aperçu du contenu de l'ouvrage, cf. Gimaret 1985, 32, 185-218.

⁹ Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī (986-1074) originaire du Khurasan, maître soufi et auteur de la célèbre épître *al-Risala al-quṣayriyya fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*.

¹⁰ Sauf indication contraire, toutes les traductions sont de l'Auteure.

Le jugement de ces auteurs, proches par ailleurs du *maḡhab* ḥanbalite, adversaire de l'*aš'arisme*, apparaît plus mitigé chez al-'Asqalānī :

Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Fūrakī petit fils du Qādī Abī Bakr Ibn Fūrak sous l'autorité du Qādī Abī Bakr al-Ḥairī. Ibn Nāṣr dit qu'il propageait l'hérésie (innovation blâmable) ; [tandis que] Ibn Ḥayrwan dit que son *ḥadīṭ* était intègre. Ibn Nāṣr dit qu'il le considérait comme *aš'arite*. Ibn al-Sim'ānī dit qu'il était un *mutakallim* excellent et éloquent ; il étudia le *kalām* sous Ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Qazāz. Il épousa la fille puis née de al-Quṣayrī. Il était lié à l'armée et pour sa cause le désaccord surgit entre l'école Ḥanbalite et l'école *aš'arite*. Il tenait des sermons dans la *madrasa* Nizāmiyya et j'ai entendu que il s'habillait en soie et il tenait son certificat d'Abī Ṣālah al-Mawḍun. Al-Inmatī, interrogé sur lui, dit qu'il touchait des impôts illégaux des charbonniers. Il mourût le mois de ṣab'an. (al-'Asqalānī 1911, 403)

Au-delà de la réputation sulfureuse du personnage, que l'on dégage des trois sources (dont la parenté est évidente par la formulation des propos repris presque à l'identique), il nous est donné à savoir qu'al-Fūrakī était formé à la *falsafa* et était expert « de *kalām*, de spéculation rationnelle et rhétorique » et encore, quasiment de même, qu'« il était insigne dans la connaissance du *kalām*, de la science spéculative, et dans la rhétorique » et qu'il aurait été à l'origine de la (une) dispute entre les courants *aš'arite* et *ḥanbalite* « et qu'à cause de lui des discordes surgirent dans les *maḡhā'ib* (écoles) » précisée par la suite dans le *Lisān al-nizān* « pour sa cause la discorde surgit entre les *aš'arites* et les *ḥanbalites* ». Si l'endroit de sa sépulture, à côté d'al-Aš'arī même, nous laisse pressentir qu'il était apprécié au moins par ses contemporains appartenant au même *maḡhab*, son nom ne comparait néanmoins pas parmi ceux des grands maîtres de cette école. Il n'empêche qu'il a rassemblés de façon claire et ordonnée les principes fondamentaux de la dogmatique *aš'arite*. Il n'est donc pas étonnant que, disposant d'un tel ouvrage systématisé, bien structuré et ordonné, Averroès l'utilise comme trace pour détailler les discours des *mutakallimūn*, qui représentent la cible principale du *Kašf*. Ce qui ressort de l'analyse conduite jusqu'à présent sur ce traité est que presque toutes les doctrines critiquées dans le *Kašf*, sous la dénomination globale de « doctrines *aš'arites* », semblent se trouver formulées avec une ressemblance frappante dans le texte d'al-Fūrakī (Averroès reformule parfois un énoncé en le corrigeant d'un seul mot afin le rendre identique à celui qui se trouve dans le *Nizāmī*). Nous verrons par la suite comment certains problèmes interprétatifs concernant les arguments du *Kašf* sont facilement résolus dès lors que l'on dispose du *Nizāmī*, auquel Averroès répond point par point.

3 Comparaison textuelle

3.1 La preuve *a contingentia mundi* du *kalām aš'arite*

La preuve de l'existence de Dieu *a contingentia mundi* a été élaborée par le *mu'tazilite* Abū l-Ḥudayl. Cette preuve se trouve exposée dans la plupart des ouvrages de *kalām aš'arite* mais pas toujours de façon complète et systématique. Parmi les ouvrages qui sont censés avoir circulé dans al-Andalus, trois seulement énoncent et développent la démonstration de chaque théorème : *al-Iršād* d'al-Ġuwaynī, le *al-Iqtīṣād fī al-I'tiqād* d'al-Ġazālī, le *Kitāb al-Niẓāmī fī Uṣūl ad-dīn* d'al-Fūrakī. Les démonstrations, tout en ayant beaucoup de points en commun, sont formulées et exemplifiées de façon différente par chaque auteur. En général l'adventicité du monde, qui implique l'existence d'un principe adventeur, est soutenue par le biais d'une chaîne de principes, à savoir que les accidents existent, qu'ils sont adventices, que la substance n'est jamais dépourvue d'accidents et que ce qui n'est pas dépourvu d'adventice est adventice à son tour. Une fois démontré chaque principe les *aš'arites* considèrent avoir démontrée la contingence du monde.

Averroès ne peut pas accepter, en raison de son aristotélisme, que le monde ne soit pas coéternel au Moteur qui détermine son existence. Il tâche donc de réfuter la preuve *a contingentia mundi* en montrant les incohérences présentes dans les démonstrations de chacun des principes formulés par les *aš'arites*, exception faite du premier à la véridicité duquel il souscrit évidemment.

On peut résumer schématiquement les critiques qu'Averroès dirige contre les démonstrations de trois des quatre principes *aš'arites* :

1. Les *aš'arites* veulent démontrer l'adventicité des accidents en réfutant la doctrine de la latence (*kumūn*), (à savoir que les accidents existeraient depuis toujours cachés dans la substance et se révéleraient à des moments différents). Ce que les *aš'arites* arrivent à démontrer se limite au fait que les accidents dont on constate la venue à l'être sont adventices et non pas qu'ils sont des accidents par exemple dans le cas des mouvements des sphères célestes.
2. Les *aš'arites* soutiennent que la substance n'est jamais dépourvue d'accidents, mais, ce qu'ils appellent substance ce sont probablement les atomes, dont l'existence même n'est pas démontrée (et il fait suivre une longue critique de l'atomisme).
3. Les *aš'arites* soutiennent que ce qui n'est pas dépourvu de l'adventice est adventice à son tour mais n'ont uniquement raison que lorsqu'il s'agit de substances indissolublement affectées par un accident particulier, qu'on connaît comme adventice, et non pas des substances affectées par la catégorie

des adventices en général (à savoir des substances éternelles qui pourraient être affectées par des accidents adventices se succédant les uns aux autres).

Or, à la lumière des deux textes (*al-Iršād* et *al-Iqtīṣād fī al-I'tiqād*) qu'on croyait jusqu'à présent (Geoffroy 1999, 26) les référents principaux du *Kašf*, les critiques d'Averroès semblent déplacées pour les raisons suivantes :

1. al-Ġazālī, tout en citant la doctrine de la latence, ne s'attarde pas à en débattre et al-Ġuwaynī lui consacre juste un paragraphe en préférant donner un autre type de démonstration de l'adventicité des accidents, déroulée en trois étapes à savoir : que ce qui est éternel ne peut pas cesser d'exister, que les accidents ne peuvent pas subsister par eux même, qu'ils ne peuvent pas se transporter.
2. Nous ne trouvons aucun indice décisif du fait qu'ils puissent désigner spécifiquement les atomes en employant le terme « substance » dans le cadre de la preuve de l'existence de Dieu ni chez al-Ġazālī (qui semble avoir abandonné l'atomisme), ni chez al-Ġuwaynī car dans la démonstration du deuxième principe il fait aussi état de la substance selon les *mulḥida* (athées) qui considèrent la substance comme matière et les accidents comme forme (!).
3. Averroès concède à al-Ġuwaynī d'avoir discerné la faiblesse de la démonstration du dernier théorème et de l'avoir changé (et en effet nous trouvons le dernier principe ainsi formulé chez al-Ġuwaynī : il ne peut pas y avoir de choses contingentes sans commencement) en introduisant de nouveaux éléments. Averroès réfute alors en premier lieu l'argument classique et seulement après, consacre un paragraphe à part à la critique de la nouvelle méthode introduite par al-Ġuwaynī. Il nous reste donc à trouver la source de l'argument classique vers lequel Averroès dirige en premier lieu sa critique.

Nous verrons ci-après comment les démonstrations énoncées dans le *Niṣāmi* laissent la place aux réfutations d'Averroès ; mais, avant tout, voyons dans quels termes la preuve de l'existence de Dieu *aš'arite* est présentée dans le *Niṣāmi* et dans l'*Iršād* et comme ensuite elle est reprise dans le *Kašf*. Al-Fūrakī et Averroès présentent la

thèse fondamentale de la preuve de l'existence de Dieu aš'arite,¹¹ à savoir que si le monde est adventice il nécessite un principe qui en détermine la venue à l'être. Les deux textes énoncent ce principe de façon absolument identique :

Kašf, p. 103	Nizāmī, 35r
إذا فرضنا أن عالم محدث لزم ، كما يقولون ، أن يكون له ولا بد فاعل محدث	اعلم أن العالم محدث واعلم أن المحدث لا بد له من محدث
S'il on admet que le monde est adventice, comme ils disent, alors il s'en suit sans faute qu'il a un agent adventeur.	Sache que le monde est adventice et que ce qui est adventice a sans faute un adventeur.

Le aš'arites produisent ensuite quatre prémisses, qui une fois vérifiées, sont censées prouver cet argument. Averroès critique la démonstration de trois de ces quatre principes, tout en passant sous silence la démonstration de la première prémisse,¹² celle qui soutient que les accidents existent, dont la véridicité, pour un aristotélicien, ne peut faire aucun doute.

Mais voici les quatre prémisses, ou principes,¹³ présentées par al-Ġuwaynī et al-Fūrakī. Trois de ces prémisses sont rapportés par Averroès dans le *Kašf*. Nous pouvons constater que la ressemblance textuelle entre le *Kašf* et le *Nizāmī* est frappante à la fois dans la structure,¹⁴ le contenu et la formulation. Il en n'est pas de même pour ce qui concerne al-Ġuwaynī, soit au niveau du contenu, pour ce qui concerne le dernier principe, soit à niveau de la structure de l'énonciation :

11 Nous retrouvons quelque chose d'analogue chez al-Ġuwaynī, mais présentée à la fin de la preuve de l'existence de Dieu et formulé, avec quelque trace d'avicennisme pour ce qui concerne le nécessaire et le possible, d'une façon plus étendue et qui porte sur la venue à l'être dans le temps ces réflexion sur le temps et sur le nécessaire et le possible sont totalement absent du texte d'al-Fūrakī. Maintenant qu'il est prouvé que le monde est contingent et qu'il a eu un commencement, il s'ensuit que le contingent peut exister ou ne pas exister, et quel que soit le moment où il s'est produit, il aurait pu se produire à un moment antérieur ; que l'existence du contingent aurait pu être retardée de plusieurs heures au-delà de ce moment. Si donc l'existence possible se produit, au lieu d'une prolongation également possible de la non-existence, l'esprit saisit comme une chose évidente que pour se produire l'existence a eu besoin d'un principe déterminant, qui détermine sa réalisation » (Luciani 1938, 36).

12 Il est possible qu'il n'y s'attarde pas car il est bien convaincu de l'existence des accidents, en raison de son aristotélisme.

13 Il faut remarquer que la dénomination de « principes » (*uṣūl*) est caractéristique d'al-Fūrakī et al-Ġuwaynī, les autres auteurs préférant plutôt les appeler théorèmes (*da'āwī*).

14 Il faut remarquer que l'ordre avec lequel les principes sont énoncés ne correspond pas toujours.

<i>Kašf</i> , p. 103	<i>Nizāmī</i> , 26r	<i>Iršād</i> , p. 10, 12-14
فنفقون إن الطرق التي سلكوا في ذلك طريقان: أحدهما وهي الأشهر التي اعتمد عليها عالمهم تنبئني على ثلاث مقدمات هي بمنزلة الأصول لما يرومون إثباته من حدوث العالم: إحداهما أن الجواهر لا تنفك من الأعراض أي لا يخلو منها، والثانية أن الأعراض حادثة، والثالثة أن ما لا ينفك عن الحادث حادث، أعني ما لا يخلو من الحوادث هو حادث	وهذه الدلالة مبينة على أصول أربعة >منها< إثبات وجود الأعراض والثاني إثبات حدوث الأعراض والثالث إثبات استحالة خلو الجواهر من الأعراض والرابع إثبات أن ما لم يسبق الحوادث فهو محدث	حدثت الجواهر ببني على أصول منها إثبات الأعراض و منها إثبات حدوثها و منها إثبات استحالة تعري الجواهر عن الأعراض و منها إثبات استحالة حوادث لا أول لها.
Nous disons que les méthodes utilisées par le <i>mutakallimūn</i> sont au nombre de deux : la première, la plus connue, celle sur laquelle s'appuie la majorité [des <i>mutakallimūn</i>] est fondée sur trois prémisses qui sont les principes de ce que ils vont démontrer au sujet de l'adventicité du monde : la première affirme que les substances ne sont pas séparées des accidents, c'est à dire qu'elles n'en sont jamais dépourvues, la deuxième que les accidents sont adventices, la troisième soutient que tout ce qui n'est pas séparé de l'adventice est adventice, je veux dire que toute ce qui n'est jamais dépourvu d'adventice est lui aussi, adventice.	Cette preuve est fondée sur quatre principes à savoir la démonstration de l'existence des accidents, la deuxième [qui est] la démonstration de l'adventicité des accidents, la troisième [qui est] la démonstration de l'impossibilité pour la substance d'être dépourvue d'accidents et la quatrième [qui est] la démonstration du fait que ce qui n'est pas antérieur à l'adventice est lui aussi adventice.	La contingence de la substance est démontrée par des principes à savoir : la démonstration de l'existence des accidents, la démonstration de leur adventicité, l'impossibilité de dégager la substance des accidents, la démonstration de l'impossibilité pour ce qui est adventice d'être sans commencement.

Nous allons voir maintenant, dans le détail, que les réfutations d'Averroès (concernant trois des quatre principes constituant la preuve de l'existence de Dieu *aš'arite*), portent manifestement sur les démonstrations fournies par al-Fūrakī.

Nous avons vu qu'Averroès ne s'attarde pas sur le premier principe qui soutient l'existence des accidents. Il commence sa réfutation à partir du deuxième principe, celui qui stipule l'adventicité des accidents. Il s'agit de la critique à la doctrine du *kumūn* (latence) des accidents que les *aš'arites* imputaient aux *molhida* (les athées). Le résumé (al-Ġābirī 1998, 109) d'Averroès suit la critique faite par al-Fūrakī du principe de « latence » avancé par les *molhida* :

Kašf, p. 109

وأدلتهم التي يرومون بها بيان إبطال قدم الأعراض إنما هي لازمة لمن يقول بقدم ما يحسن منها حادثاً، أعني من يضع أن جميع الأعراض غير حادثة، وذلك أنهم يقولون إن الأعراض التي يظهر للحسن أنها حادثة، وإن لم يكن حادثة، فإنما أن يكون منتقلة من محلّ إلى محلّ، وإما أن تكون كامنة في المحلّ الذي ظهرت فيه قبل أن تظهر. ثم يبطلون هذين القسمين، فيظنون أنهم قد بينوا أن جميع الأعراض حادثة

La démonstration par laquelle ils veulent infirmer l'éternité des accidents sont des arguments qui ne valent que contre ceux qui affirment l'éternité des [accidents] dont on a la perception qu'ils sont adventices, c'est à dire, ceux qui considèrent que tous les accidents sont non créés, car ils [aš'arites] soutiennent que les accidents que l'on perçoit par les sens comme adventices, même s'ils ne le sont pas, sont soit transférés d'un substrat à l'autre, soit latents dans le substrat ils se manifestent avant même leur manifestation [et que comme ils ne sont ni l'un ni l'autre, ils sont forcément adventices]. Après quoi [les aš'arites] infirment ces deux hypothèses et croient, ce faisant, démontrer que tous les accidents sont adventices

Nižāmī, 27r-27v

صحة الأصل الثاني، وهو حدوث الأعراض، أنا وجدنا الجسم كان ساكناً متحركاً، فلا يخلو حال هذه الحركة من إحدى الأحوال : إما أنها كانت في الجسم في حال سكون الجسم كما هي في حال حركة الجسم على صفة واحدة، وأنها كانت كامنة في الجسم في حال سكون الجسم، ثم ظهرت في حال حركة الجسم ؛ أو كانت في غيره من الأجسام فانتقلت إلى هذا الجسم ولا كون أن يقال إنها كانت في الجسم في حال سكونه كما هي في حال حركته لأن ذلك يوجب أن تكون الجسم بها متحركاً وقد شاهدنا الجسم وما فيه حركة ولا هو متحركاً فيظل ذلك لأن بالبيان يدرك ذلك والدليل يوصحه و أيضاً فإنه لو كان

La véracité du deuxième principe, l'adventicité des accidents, [se montre dans le fait qu'] on trouve que le corps est [tantôt] en repos, [tantôt] en mouvement, et donc, de deux choses l'une à propos de ce mouvement : soit il se trouvait dans le corps alors que le corps était en repos de la seule et même manière qu'il s'y trouve alors que [le corps] est en mouvement, mais se trouvait latent dans le corps tandis que celui-ci était au repos, puis s'est manifesté lors du mouvement du corps ; soit [le mouvement] se trouvait dans un autre [corps] puis s'est transféré dans celui-ci. Or, il n'est pas possible de dire que [le mouvement] se trouve dans le corps lorsque celui-ci est au repos comme il s'y trouve lorsque [le corps] est en mouvement, car cela supposerait que le corps soit, du fait de ce [mouvement, un être] mû. Or nous voyons des corps, et des choses dans lesquelles il y a mouvement, qui ne sont pas mues. Cela [que le mouvement se trouve dans le corps en repos comme dans le corps en mouvement] est donc faux, [sa fausseté] étant attestée par le témoignage des sens (*al-'aiyyan*, la vue), et l'argumentation l'atteste aussi.

Cette fois-ci, Averroès peut à plein titre formuler sa critique, qui répond parfaitement à l'argument d'al-Fūrakī, en opposant à l'argument de la succession du mouvement et du repos dans les corps, la perpétuité du mouvement des sphères célestes dont personne n'a jamais constaté aucun passage de l'état de repos à celui de mouvement :

Mais tout ce qui apparaît avec évidence de leur propos, c'est que les accidents qui se manifestent comme adventices le sont [effectivement], non que serait adventice ce dont il n'est pas manifeste que ça l'est, ni ce sur quoi il y a doute quant à savoir si ça l'est, comme les accidents qui existent dans les corps célestes et leurs mouvements. (al-Ġābirī 1998, 105)

<i>Kašf</i> , p. 105	<i>Nizāmī</i> , 28r
إدناها [المقدمات] أن الجواهر لا تنفك من الأعراض أي لا يخلو منه	الأصل الثالث و هو استحالة خلو الجواهر من الأعراض
L'une d'elles [de ce prémisses] affirme que la substance n'est jamais [dépourvue] d'accident, c'est à dire qu'elle n'en est pas séparée.	Le troisième principe établit que la substance n'est pas séparée de accidents.

Nous trouvons la démonstration la fournie par al-Fūrakī de l'inséparabilité entre matière et accidents dans le manuscrit cité (Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 2378, f. 28r):

فنقول : إنه من المعلوم أنه يستحيل تقدير وجود جواهر هذا العالم لا مجتمعة و لا مفترقة، و لا متحركة و لا ساكنة، و لا متقاربة و لا متباعدة. فإن كانت مجتمعة، فالاجتماع عرض ؛ وإن كانت مفترقة فالافتراق عرض، وإن كانت ساكنة فالسكون عرض، وإن كانت متحركة فالحركة عرض. وليس يمكن تقدير وجودها إلا على إحدى هذه الصفات. وعلى أي صفة منها كانت، فهي عرض.

«فعلما أنه يستحيل خلو الجواهر من الأعراض، حيث لم يصح إثباتها إلا على أحد هذه الصفات

Nous disons : on sait qu'il est impossible de supposer l'existence des substances de ce monde [de manière telle qu'elles ne seraient] ni réunies, ni séparées ; ni en mouvement, ni en repos ; ni rapprochées les unes des autres ni éloignées. Or, si elles sont réunies, cette réunion est un accident ; et si elles sont séparées, cette séparation est un accident. Si elles sont en repos, leur repos est un accident, et si elles sont en mouvement, leur mouvement est un accident. Et il n'est possible de se les représenter que dans l'un de ces états, et quel que soit l'état dans lequel elles se trouvent, c'est un accident. Nous savons donc que la substance ne peut être dénuée d'accidents, puisqu'il n'est possible d'établir leur existence que [pourvue] d'un de ces états.

La réfutation d'Averroès du troisième principe prend son départ dans le constat d'une ambiguïté dans l'usage du terme substance :

La prémisse qui dit que la substance n'est pas séparable des accidents – est une prémisse correcte s'ils [les *mutakallimūn*] entendent, [par le mot substance] les corps individuels et consistants par eux même ; mais s'ils entendent par là les parties indivisibles – qu'ils appellent substance simple – on se retrouve face à des problèmes insolubles. (al-Ġābirī 1998, 105)

La réfutation d'Averroès est fondée sur l'ambiguïté dans l'usage du terme substance (*ġawhar*) chez les *aš'arites*. Car le terme substance simple (*al-ġawhar al-fard*) utilisé par al-Bāqillānī et ses contemporains devient chez les *aš'arites* de l'époque d'al-Ġuwaynī. Le terme « substance » désigne à la fois la substance, selon le sens commun, et les atomes d'après eux. Averroès ne manque pas de mettre l'accent sur cette ambiguïté pour démanteler le troisième principe *aš'arite*. Son argument peut être résumé ainsi :

- On ne peut pas fonder la démonstration de l'existence de Dieu sur une prémisse douteuse
- La prémisse des *aš'arites* est douteuse car un de ses éléments est douteux, à savoir l'existence des substances simples.
- Nous n'avons aucune démonstration valable de l'existence des atomes, car celle qui nous est fournie par les *aš'arites* est fondée sur un discours qui applique les règles de l'arithmétique à la géométrie en tenant pas en compte la différence entre quantité discrète et quantité continue.

Or cette critique peut nous sembler déplacée si l'on considère uniquement l'*Iršād* de al-Ġuwaynī et le d'al-Ġazālī, car nous n'avons pas d'indices pour croire que les deux auteurs se réfèrent aux atomes quand ils parlent de « substance » dans le cadre de la preuve de l'existence de Dieu. Au contraire, chez al-Fūrakī, nous avons davantage d'éléments pour croire qu'il en est ainsi, car les accidents affectant la substance énumérée dans le passage dont est question ci-dessus, sont exactement les accidents censés affecter les atomes dans la tradition du *kalām*, à savoir : uni et séparé ; en repos et en mouvement ; lointains et rapprochés.¹⁵ Ce sont là les accidents qu'on appelle de « localisation » à savoir ceux qui déterminent relativement à d'autres atomes la position de la substance-atome dans l'espace. Aucune substance simple, dans le *kalām* classique, n'est dépourvue de ses accidents. De toute évidence l'exemple porté par al-Fūrakī en

¹⁵ Ce dernier couple a été ajouté après, étant les deux premiers couples les originelles du *kalām* classique.

appui du « deuxième principe » nous laisse bien croire qu'en parlant de substance, il se réfère aux atomes. Dans ce cas on peut constater la pertinence de la réfutation d'Averroès, qui soutient que ce qui n'est pas séparé de l'adventice est adventice à son tour.

Dans le *Kašf* et le *Nižāmī*, la première prémisse (celle qui atteste l'existence des accidents) est identique ; les énoncés de la deuxième prémisse sont très proches dans les deux textes, sinon pour le fait que al-Fūrakī introduit une notion de temporalité :

<i>Kašf</i> , p. 105, §25	<i>Nižāmī</i> , 28v, l. 2
وما لا يتفك عن الحادث حادث	وما لم سبق الحوادث وجوده كان حادثاً
Ce qui n'est pas séparé* de l'adventice est, à son tour, adventice	Ce qui n'est pas antérieur à l'adventice, quant à son existence, est adventice
* La formulation du dernier principe varie pour ce qui concerne le choix du verbe. Averroès utilise <i>infakka</i> , être séparé, à la place de <i>sabaqa</i> , être antérieur, en se référant à une formule de la tradition mu'tazilite que l'école <i>aš'arite</i> récupère dans sa première période (McCarthy 1953, 7-11). Les auteurs de l'époque classique (al-Baḳillānī, Ibn Fūrak, al-Ġawaynī, al-Fūrakī) et les plus tardifs (al-Ġazālī, Šahrastānī) abandonnent cette formulation au profit du verbe <i>sabaqa</i> , en appuyant leurs démonstrations du théorème uniquement sur l'idée d'antériorité. Aux fins de sa réfutation, Averroès trouve un avantage à se référer à la première formule, en ignorant ostensiblement l'amélioration que l'école <i>aš'arite</i> apporte par la suite.	

C'est la formulation *aš'arite* de la troisième prémisse qui est considérée ambiguë par Averroès.

<i>Kašf</i> , 109, § 40	<i>Nižāmī</i> , 29r, ll. 2-5
وأما المقّمة الثالثة وهي القائلة إنّ ما لا يخلو عن الحوادث فهو حادث، فهي مقّمة مشتركة الاسم وذلك أنّها يمكن أن تفهم على معنيين، أحدهما: ما لا يخلو من جنس الحوادث ويخلو من أحوالها، والمعنى الثاني: ما لا يخلو من واحد منها مخصوص مشار إليه، كأنك قلت: ما لا يخلو من هذا السواد المشار إليه	كالسواد لما كان سواداً لعينه لم يجز تقدير وجوده ليس بسواد والجوهر لما قبل العرض لعينه لم يجز تقدير وجوده إلا وهو قابل
La troisième prémisse, celle qui affirme que toutes choses qui ne sont pas dépourvues d'[éléments] adventices sont-elles mêmes adventices, est une prémisse équivoque.* En effet on peut l'entendre selon deux significations différentes. Première signification : ce qui n'est pas dépourvu du genre des adventices et qui est dépourvu d'un de ses singuliers ; deuxième signification : ce qui n'est pas dépourvu d'un de ses singuliers, comme quand [par exemple] on dit : ce qui n'est pas dépourvu de cette noirceur désignée	Comme une chose noire, si elle est noire par sa propre essence, il sera impossible de la supposer existante autrement que noire, ceci est un exemple qui sert à illustrer l'argument selon lequel si un accident est réuni à une substance de toute éternité en vertu de la propre nature de cet accident il ne pourra jamais en être séparée. Or on sait que les accidentes s'unissent aux substances et ils s'en séparent
* Le terme ici employé est <i>mušarakat al-ism</i> , qui traduit l'homonyme dans les <i>Catégories</i> d'Aristote.	

3.2 Preuve de l'Unicité divine

La preuve de l'unicité de Dieu, découlant de celle de son existence, est formulée de manière analogue dans presque tous les textes de *kalām aš'arite*. Elle s'appuie sur le principe de l'empêchement réciproque (*tamānu'*), qui consiste à montrer l'absurdité de l'hypothèse selon laquelle deux divinités régissent ensemble l'univers. La structure de l'argument est la suivante : si les divinités étaient deux ou plusieurs, leurs volontés pourraient être opposées ; en ce cas, selon la doctrine *aš'arite* nous n'avons que trois possibilités :

1. ou bien la volonté de l'un et de l'autre s'élisent mutuellement
2. ou bien les deux volontés opposées s'accomplissent
3. ou bien la volonté de l'un prévaut sur celle de l'autre.

Dans les deux premiers cas nous nous serons face à un univers sans aucune détermination (le monde serait en même temps existant et inexistant), dans le troisième cas une des deux divinités se trouverait dans l'impossibilité d'exercer sa volonté ce qui est incompatible, selon les *aš'arites*, avec le statut ontologique même de la divinité.

Il est intéressant de remarquer que chaque auteur *aš'arite* reproduit ce thème avec de légères variantes terminologiques, tout en maintenant de façon substantielle l'exposition de l'argument, ce qui fait penser à une sorte de « profession de foi » bien établie, à l'intérieur de l'école *aš'arite*. Le texte d'Averroès semble suivre, en le généralisant, le *K. al-Tamhīd* d'al-Bāqillānī (McCarthy 1957, 46) pour l'énonciation du principe et le *Niẓāmī* d'al-Fūrakī pour ce qui concerne les exemples en soutien de la preuve de l'unicité divine.

<i>Kašf</i> , p. 125	<i>Niẓāmī</i> , 36r, 20-36v, l. 7	<i>Tamhīd</i> , p. 46
وذلك أنهم قالوا: لو كانا إثنين فأكثر لجاز أن يختلفا، وإذا اختلفا لم يخل ذلك من ثلاثة أقسام لا رابع لها: إما أن يتم مرادها جميعاً، وإما ألا يتم مراد واحد منهما، وإما أن يتم مراد أحدهما ولا يتم مراد الآخر. قالوا: ويستحيل ألا يتم مراد واحد منهما، لأنه لو كان الأمر كذلك لكان العالم لا موجوداً ولا معدوماً. ويستحيل أن يتم مرادهما معاً لأنه كان يكون العالم موجوداً معدوماً معاً. فلم يبق إلا أن يتم مراد الواحد ويبطل مراد الآخر، فالذي بطلت إرادته عاجز والعاجز ليس بآله.	التقدير و لو قدرنا وجود صانعين للعالم لا مكن تقدير و قوع الخلاف سما حتى ان أراد احدهما احيا زيد اراد الآخر اما نته فإذا قدر و لك لم يخل من يد ر انقاع مراد هما و ان لا يقع مراد هما و لا لجوز بقدر انقاع مراد هما ليس ذلك يوجب ان يتقا زيد في حاله و احده حيا وممتا و هذا المحال [...] و لا يجوز ان لا يقع مراد هما ليس ذلك يوجب ان ي [...] زيد في حاله واحده لاحيا و لا ممتا و هذا إلا يجوز فوجب ان تقع من اد أحدهما دون الآخر و وقع مراده كان عاليا و الذي لم يقع مراده معلوبا مطلوب الممهورى لا يصح ان تكون الها ظم ينق إلا ان تكون اله هو الواحد العاهو العالب فعملب انه لا يجوز ان تكون الصانع إلا واحد او يدل عل صحه ها	وليس يجوز أن يكون صانع العالم اثنين و لا أكثر من ذلك، والدليل على ذلك أن الاثنين يصح أن يختلفا ويوجد أحدهما ضد مراد الآخر، فلو اختلفا وأراد أحدهما إحياء جسم وأراد الآخر إيمائته لوجب أن يلحقهما العجز أو واحدا منهما، لأنه محال أن يتم ما يريدان جميعا لتضاد مراديهما ، فوجب أن لا يتما أو يتم مراد أحدهما ، فيلحق من لم يتم مراده العجز أو لا يتم مرادهما فيلحقهما العجز، و العجز من سمات الحدث ، و قديم الإله لا يجوز أن يكون عاجزا.
Ils disent : si [les divinités] étaient deux ou plus, elles pourraient être en désaccord et, dans ce cas, il faudrait, de trois choses l'une, sans qu'il puisse y en avoir de quatrième : ou bien la volonté des deux [divinités] s'accomplira, ou bien la volonté d'aucune, ou bien c'est la volonté de l'une mais non de l'autre qui s'accomplira. Ils poursuivent : or il est impossible que ne s'accomplisse ni la volonté de l'une ni celle de l'autre, car s'il était ainsi le monde ne serait ni existant ni non existant ; de même, il est impossible qui s'accomplisse la volonté de l'une et de l'autre, car le monde serait à la fois existant et inexistant. La seule possibilité qui reste est que s'accomplisse la volonté de l'une et que la volonté de l'autre échoue. Or celui dont la volonté échoue est impuissant, et un être impuissant ne peut pas être une divinité	Même si nous supposons l'existence de deux créateurs du monde, comment envisager l'occurrence d'un désaccord [entre eux] : si [par exemple] l'un d'eux voulait ressusciter Zayd et l'autre voulait la fin de ses jours, il ne serait pas possible de déterminer si ce qu'il veut l'un arriverait ou si ce qu'il veut n'arriverait pas. Il ne serait pas non plus possible d'estimer la probabilité du fait que ce qu'il veut n'arrive pas. De même il est impossible que Zayd se trouve au même temps en état de vie et en état de mort. [...] Ce qui se produit donc découle de la volonté d'un seul d'entre eux sans le concours de l'autre, et c'est donc la volonté d'un seul qui s'est produite. Celui dont la volonté s'accomplit prime sur celui dont la volonté ne s'est pas produite. Dieu donc est l'Unique Dieu, il n'est donc pas permis que le Créateur soit autre qu'un seul, tout cela indique la justesse de ce propos	Ce n'est pas possible que les <i>artisans</i> du monde soient deux ou plus. La preuve en est le fait que, s'ils étaient deux, ils pourraient être en désaccord et donc on trouverait que la volonté d'un serait en rivalité avec celle de l'autre. S'ils étaient en désaccord et l'un voudrait faire vivre un corps tandis que l'autre le faire périr, il est possible que les deux se trouvent dans l'impossibilité [d'accomplir l'acte souhaité] ou qu'un des deux le soit. Parce qu'il est impossible que ce qu'ils veulent tous les deux soit accompli, à cause de la contradiction de ce qu'ils veulent, il en découle nécessairement qu'ils ne l'accomplissent pas, ou que le désir l'un seul d'eux se réalise, donc celui qui n'accomplit pas ce qu'il veut sera impuissant. O bien ni l'un ni l'autre peuvent n'accomplir ce qu'ils veulent, l'impuissance des deux se produirait. Or, l'impuissance est l'une des caractéristiques d'un être contingent, de ce fait un Dieu éternel ne peut pas être impuissant.
* Traduction de l'Auteur.		

3.3 La Mission prophétique

La Loi Révélée, comme fondement de la Cité, joue un rôle de première importance dans la philosophie politique et morale d'Averroès. La loi divine est connue par l'intermédiaire des Prophètes. La nature de la mission prophétique et la manière de distinguer un prophète d'un imposteur est un thème central de la théologie musulmane.

Si dans son traité de théologie, Averroès consacre à ce sujet une longue dissertation, en tant que philosophe, il l'aborde uniquement dans le *Commentaire moyen des Parva naturalia* (Zouggar 2012, 410) en traitant de la vision dans le sommeil.

Le phénomène de la prophétie y est identifié à celui du songe véridique, duquel Averroès parle à cet endroit. En principe, c'est le perfectionnement intellectuel du philosophe qui permet de réaliser l'identification avec le logos divin. L'explication de ce point relève de la science de l'intellect. Le fait que la Vérité puisse se communiquer également à des humains non tournés vers la philosophie par le truchement d'images singulières (ce qui est le cas pour le prophète comme pour celui qui reçoit des songes véridiques) est plutôt un cas particulier, une exception. Dans le commentaire sur les *Parva naturalia* (Badawi 1954), Averroès explique néanmoins un processus noétique selon lequel il est possible que l'intellect Agent actualise dans l'imagination du rêveur des formes singulières de ce qu'il contient en lui-même de manière universelle. Dans le *Kašf*, le champ des « récepteurs du logos divin » s'élargit. Dans un passage portant sur l'attribut divin du « parlant » (*mutakallim*), à propos de la tradition prophétique Averroès écrit que « les savants sont les héritiers des prophètes » (*al-'ulamā' waraṭat al-anbiyā'*). Il affirme que la connaissance rationnelle reçue sur un mode démonstratif par le savant a la même Source – le logos divin, dirait-on en Occident – que celle qui inspire le prophète à produire des images de la vérité (ce qui est vérifié dans le fait que c'est, pour les savants, la connaissance rationnelle qui permet d'adhérer à la vérité révélée). Dans ce cas spécifique, très rare, la prophétie a une primauté sur la connaissance rationnelle, qui lui sert de vérification.

Il résume des arguments des *Mutakallimūn* (al-Ġābirī 1998, 173):

1. « Il est possible que Dieu missionne des envoyés » (§ 235-6). Cette formule dogmatique est conçue pour se démarquer à la fois du mu'tazilisme (pour lesquels cela est nécessaire) ; et des « *dahriyya* » (qui affirment que c'est impossible).

Puis pour passer de là à l'affirmation qu'un tel est prophète :

2. « la production des miracles (*mu'ǧiza*, *ḥāriqa*) est un signe (*dalīl*) que l'envoyé vient produire pour signifier qu'il est envoyé de la part de Dieu, comparable à un signe de reconnaissance » (§ 236, 2e partie).

L'un et l'autre volets de l'argument reposent sur une analogie avec le monde visible (ils relèvent du *qiyās al-šāhid 'alā al-ġā'ib*):

1. Il est possible que Dieu envoie des messagers, de la même manière qu'il est possible qu'un roi en envoie à ses sujets ;
2. Le miracle authentifie le messager de la même manière qu'un insigne royal authentifie le messager.

La critique porte sur la faiblesse initiale du passage direct entre le champ du possible au champ du factuel avéré : s'il est possible que Dieu missionne des envoyés, il n'en découle pas encore nécessairement qu'il l'ait vraiment fait ; les envoyés sur lesquels repose toute l'autorité de la Loi révélée peuvent avoir été des imposteurs, ou avoir été illusionnés.

Or les *aš'arites* donnent comme seul argument la *mu'ğiza* qui est définie de manière standard dans la littérature *aš'arite* comme un acte contraire à l'habitude (*nāqi li-l-'āda* ou *hāriq li-l-'āda*, d'où l'appellation *hāriqa*, plur. *hawāriq*) qui apparaît chez celui qui prétend (*mudda'in*) à la prophétie, dans le temps de l'obligation légale (*zaman al-taklīf*) – distingué du temps de la résurrection, *al-qiyāma* : les choses extraordinaires qui se produiront au jour dernier ne seront pas des miracles.

Il doit être accompagné du défi (*taḥaddī*) – l'acte par lequel le prophète dit : si vous ne me croyez pas, essayez d'en faire autant – et ceux qui sont défiés ne doivent pas être capables de relever le défi – les exemples sont Moïse convoquant les magiciens, ou encore les versets du Coran disant : « essayez de composer dix versets comme ceux-ci » (Coran 27, 88).

En effet, d'autres personnes (les saints, *awliyā'*) peuvent produire des actes extraordinaires qui ne sont pas des *mu'ğizāt* parce qu'ils ne sont pas accompagnés de cette revendication.

En fonction de cela, si un individu produit un acte extraordinaire (dans le sens de non conforme au cours ordinaire des choses), s'il a défié les humains d'en produire un semblable et que personne n'y a réussi, on a la certitude que ce signe est donné par Dieu comme une attestation de la véracité de celui qui affirme être un envoyé de Dieu.

Cela est résumé par Averroès dans le § 239 (al-Ġābirī 1998, 174), sous forme syllogistique :

1. « Cet individu a produit un miracle ».
2. « Toute personne qui a produit un miracle est un prophète ».

Ayant réduit la formule dogmatique à ce syllogisme, Averroès entreprend d'en montrer la faiblesse. En cette occasion Averroès traite de façon très pragmatique la question de la prophétie. Il abandonne les réflexions noétiques sur les modalités à travers lesquelles la prophétie peut se manifester dans l'âme du prophète (il nous donne un aperçu de cela dans le *Tahafūt al-tahafūt* – Bouyges

1992, 510 – et dans le Commentaires moyen des *Parva Naturalia*) pour se concentrer sur les preuves de l'existence même du prophète et des moyens que les hommes doivent employer pour conférer à un homme la qualification de prophète. En maintenant la structure argumentative qui façonne tout le texte, Averroès traite ce sujet en deux volets. D'abord il prend en examen les doctrines des aš'arites, l'école théologique qui représente la cible principale du *K. al-Kašf*. Il montre les faiblesses de leurs propos et en suite il produit ses propres arguments, pour donner une preuve positive de la véracité de l'envoi du Prophète de l'Islam. Pour mieux retracer le déroulement du discours nous allons suivre ce découpage.

Nous allons voir comment Averroès utilise principalement trois ouvrages du *kalām aš'arite*, le *K. al-Iršād* d'al-Ġuwaynī, le *Iqtīṣād fī al-'Itiqād* d'al-Ġazālī et le moins connu *an-Niẓāmī fī uṣūl ad-dīn* d'al-Fūrakī.

Dans le détail, les arguments se déroulent de la manière suivante :

Quant à l'existence de cette sorte de personnes [envoyées], certains, les *mutakallimūn*, se sont efforcés de la montrer pas le syllogisme (*qiyās*). Ils disent : il est établi que Dieu est parlant, voulant, et maître (*mālik*) de ses serviteurs. Or il se peut, dans le monde visible (*šāhid*), qu'une personne parlante, voulant et maîtrisant le sort de ses serviteurs missionne un envoyé aux serviteurs qu'il domine. Donc, nécessairement, la même chose doit se pouvoir dans le monde invisible. (al-Ġābirī 1998, 174)

Ce propos est une synthèse des affirmations d'al-Ġazālī et d'al-Fūrakī. Al-Fūrakī, affirme dans le *Niẓāmī* :

Ce qui prouve la vérité de ce que nous avons dit [qu'il est possible à Dieu de missionner des envoyés] est que nous disons que Dieu est le Souverain de [ses] sujets (*mālik al-mulk*) et qu'il est possible à un souverain de disposer de ses sujets comme il le veut. Donc, s'il veut missionner des envoyés, il le fait. (Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 2378, f. 133r, ll. 4-6)

et al-Ġazālī, dans son *Iqtīṣād fī al-'Itiqād* :

La preuve de [cette] possibilité est que du moment qu'il est montré que Dieu *ta'āla* est parlant et qu'il est capable (puissant, *qādir*), non empêché de manifester le discours intérieur en créant des expressions (*alfāz*) des sons, des signes et autres moyens de signification ; et que [d'autre part] il est montré la possibilité que [quelqu'un] missionne des envoyés. (Agah Çubukçu, Atay 1962)

Immédiatement après, Averroès ajoute :

Ils renforcent [le caractère probant de] ce lieu en infirmant [l'idée de] l'impossibilité qui, selon les Brahmanes, affecterait l'existence de prophètes missionnés par Dieu, et disent : [ce qui précède] étant le cas, il est clair qu'il s'agit d'une chose possible, dans le monde invisible comme dans le monde visible. En outre, il est clair aussi que, dans le monde visible, lorsqu'un homme se présente devant les sujets (*al-mulk*) en disant : 'Ô gens, je vous suis envoyé de la part du souverain (*mālik*)', et qu'il produit des signes [appartenant au] souverain, il est nécessaire de reconnaître que ce que prétend cet envoyé est la vérité. Or, disent-ils, ce signe, c'est [en l'occurrence] que l'envoyé produise un miracle. (al-Ġābirī 1998, 174)

Et nous trouvons de même chez al-Fūrakī :

Et ce qui prouve également la vérité de ce que nous avons dit est ce qui apparaît avec évidence au sujet de la prophétie des envoyés, et ce que Dieu – exalté soit-il – manifeste par le biais (*'alā yad*) de chacun d'entre eux en fait de miracles (*mu'ǧizāt*) qui montre sa véridicité. (Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 2378, f. 133r)

Ces arguments sont critiqués par Averroès de la manière suivante : les *aš'arites* fondent leur démonstration sur une série d'arguments fallacieux :

- Ils donnent comme preuve de l'existence du prophète le miracle, dont n'est pas prouvée ni l'existence, ni le lien avec la prophétie.
- Ils déduisent la possibilité de l'envoi du prophète d'un syllogisme du visible à l'invisible sans qu'il y ait uniformité de nature entre les deux termes du syllogisme même (c'est le cas de al-Fūrakī).
- En montrant la possibilité de l'envoi du prophète (ce qui est fait par le biais de la réfutation des brahmanes), ils ne démontrent point l'existence des prophètes. S'ils croient le faire ce puisqu'ils se méprennent sur les sens et sur les implications du terme « possible ».

On peut analyser dans le détail comme ces critiques se déroulent. Pour ce qui en est du premier point, la légitimation du signe (le miracle) qui à son tour doit légitimer la Révélation ne peut avoir lieu que :

- Par le biais de la Révélation
- Par le biais de la Raison

Or, il ne peut pas découler de la Révélation car la véridicité de cette dernière est encore à établir.

- Ne peut pas découler de la raison, car elle porte sur l'expérience.

Donc, on ne peut pas s'attendre à ce que les gens puissent reconnaître une (première) Révélation par le biais du miracle si cela ne se pas déjà produit maintes fois avant. Il faudrait par ailleurs que le miracle soit univoquement lié à la prophétie, ce qui n'est pas toujours le cas. On ne peut donc pas en avoir une preuve rationnelle car en l'absence de la prémisse « toute personne qui produit un miracle est un Envoyé » on ne peut pas tirer la conclusion voulue.

En outre, à supposer que l'on ait reconnu l'existence de l'état d'envoyé, ayant substitué la [notion de] possibilité qui équivaut à l'ignorance à celle de [possibilité de] l'existence, et que l'on ait posé que le miracle indique la sincérité de l'individu qui revendique la qualité d'envoyé, nécessairement, le caractère probant de cette indication ne s'imposera pas à celui qui considère comme possible qu'un miracle puisse être produit par quelqu'un qui n'est pas envoyé, ce qui est [précisément] le cas des *mutakallimūn*, puisqu'ils considèrent comme possible qu'il soit produit par un magicien, ou par un saint (*walī*). Quant à la condition [subsidaire] qu'ils invoquent, à cause de cela [ce qui précède] [ce qui précède], à savoir que le miracle n'indique la qualité d'envoyé que lorsqu'il est associé au fait que [celui qui le produit] prétend (*yaddaʿī*) à cette qualité. (al-Ġābirī 1998, 174)

Al-Fūrakī donne la définition de miracle (*muʿjiza*) qui sera débattue par Averroès :

acte contraire à l'habitude (*nāqidh li-l-ʿāda*) qui apparaît chez (*ʿalā yad*) celui qui prétend (*muddaʿin*) à la prophétie, dans le temps de l'obligation légale (*zaman al-taklīf*) [qui s'oppose au temps de la résurrection, *al-qiyāma* : les choses extraordinaires qui se produiront au jour dernier ne seront pas des miracles]. Il doit être accompagné de défi (*tahaddī*) [l'acte par lequel le prophète dit : si vous ne me croyez pas, essayez d'en faire autant] et ceux qui sont défiés ne doivent pas être capables de relever le défi [les exemples que l'on a l'esprit sont Moïse convoquant les magiciens, ou les versets du Coran disant : essayez de composer 10 versets comme ceux-ci. (Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 2378, f. 13r, ll. 6-7)]

[...]

Si celui qui produit un tel acte ne dit pas : je suis prophète et voici mon miracle, et donc croyez-moi dans ce que je prétends, et suivez-moi, ou bien opposez-vous, ce n'est pas un miracle (Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 2378, f. 137r, l. 8)

[...]

Exemples classiques de *mu'ğiza* ; Moïse transforme le bâton en serpent (*inqilāb al-'asā hayyatan*), retire la main blanche de son sein, fend la mer (*falq al-bahr*) ; Jésus guérit l'aveugle et le lépreux (*ibrā' al-akmah wa-l-abras*) ressuscite les morts (*ihyā' al-mawtā*). (Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 2378, f. 137r, l. 15)

La première critique qu'Averroès adresse aux *aš'arites* est qu'ils posent comme auto-évident un lien entre miracle et prophétie quand ce lien n'est pas évident du tout.

Pour toutes ces raisons, l'argument « celui qui fait de miracle est prophète » est rhétorique car finalement on ne peut pas reconnaître comme assurément existants ni le sujet (*mubtada'*) ni le prédicat (*ḥabar*) on ne peut pas juger de la véridicité de la proposition même (al-Ğābirī 1998, 174).

Cet exemple précis paraît tiré d'al-Ğazālī, *Maqāsid* (Beğu 2000, 11), l'assentiment (*tasdīq*) à une proposition comportant un sujet et un prédicat doit nécessairement être précédé de deux représentations (*tasawwur*), celle du sujet et celle du prédicat : « Tout assentiment doit nécessairement être précédé de deux représentations ». En effet, on ne peut pas imaginer que celui qui ne comprend pas « le monde » (*al-'ālam*) seul, et « adventice » (*ḥādith*) seul puisse consentir au fait que le monde est adventice ».

Pour ce qui concerne la deuxième critique, Averroès se réfère principalement à al-Fūrakī et concerne l'usage du syllogisme du visible à l'invisible qui est inapproprié en raison du fait qu'il n'y a pas d'adéquation entre les natures des deux termes du syllogisme. Nous retrouvons ce type de critique à plusieurs reprises dans le *Kaśf* et elle s'appuie sur le texte du *mahdī* Ibn Tūmart. Le *qiyās al-ğā'ib 'alā aš-šāhid*, l'analogie de l'inconnu au connu (visible), est fallacieuse parce qu'il n'y a pas de moyen terme (*ğāmī'*) entre celui-ci et celui-là, l'un étant le contraire de l'autre, puisque celui-ci est agent et celui-là ne l'est pas ; que celui-ci est éternel et celui-là est adventice, que celui-ci est tributaire et celui-ci se suffit à lui-même ; dès lors, en jugeant de l'un par analogie avec l'autre, on altère la réalité de l'un et de l'autre, car l'analogie n'est valide entre des choses similaires ou différentes, pourvu qu'il existe une similitude (*šabah*) entre elles. Or le Créateur n'a ni semblable ni similaire. Ainsi est réfutée toute pratique assimilationniste et est réfutée l'analogie de l'inconnu au connu.

Averroès pose donc son propre argument en soutien de la preuve de l'envoi du prophète en prenant le départ du constat que certains hommes ont institué des lois révélées (*šarā'i'*) sans qu'elles ne soient le fruit d'une accumulation séculaire de savoirs. Ce fait est extraordinaire et constitue en fait le « vrai » trait distinctif du prophète, car tous les hommes pour avancer dans la connaissance sont obligés de se référer à ceux qui ont vécu avant eux.

Supposons par exemple qu'il n'ait pas existé jusqu'à notre époque de science de la géométrie et de l'astronomie, et qu'un seul homme, par soi-même, prétende à connaître les dimensions des corps célestes et leurs figures, ainsi que les distances séparent les uns des autres il en serait incapable.

Ces lois qui ne sont pas le résultat d'une sagesse humaine sont l'acte propre de la prophétie, celui que fait en sorte qu'un homme puisse être reconnu comme prophète.

Ces lois ont en plus la caractéristique de savoir doser la connaissance pour afin que le peuple puisse atteindre sa félicité sans égarement.

Nous disons qu'il y a plusieurs façons de le reconnaître. La première et de savoir que les révélations (*šarā'i'*) que contient [le Coran] à propos des sciences et des actes sont des choses qui ne peuvent être acquises par l'apprentissage mais seulement par l'inspiration. La deuxième [se rapporte à] ce qu'il contient d'informations sur les choses cachées. (al-Ġābirī 1998, 174)

Averroès ne s'attarde pas au sujet du *iḥbār 'an al-ġuyūb* car il s'agit d'un concept largement acquis dans le *kalām*, comme l'explique par ailleurs Daniel Gimaret dans son texte *La doctrine d'al-Ash'ari* (Gimaret 1990, 465).

Le discours prophétique à proprement parler porte tantôt sur des choses du passé dont le prophète ne pouvait pas avoir connaissance parce qu'il n'avait pas pu les apprendre, soit sur des événements à venir, annoncés et qui se sont en effet produits comme il l'avait annoncés,¹⁶ on trouve encore une fois chez al-Fūrakī une définition proche de celle évoqué par Averroès : le propos prophétique porte « la connaissance des choses passées sans avoir lu des livres, et la prédiction des choses futures » (al-Ġābirī 1998, 174).

Averroès y a déjà fait allusion un peu plus haut, en expliquant que le Coran indique une inspiration divine parce que les prophètes « prédisent des faits qui ne se sont pas encore produits, et que ces faits arrivent dans l'être à la manière dont ils l'avaient prédite et dans le temps où ils l'avaient prédite » (180).

La raison pour laquelle il est si important pour Averroès, d'établir de manière univoque l'existence du don de la Prophétie et de savoir par quel biais on peut reconnaître un Prophète d'un imposteur est de ce fait de pouvoir créer, grâce à *'ilm al-naẓar* un lien univoque entre le miracle et le prophète, en considérant inaboutie la démonstration des *aš'arites*.

16 On trouve une énumération concise et exhaustive du caractère miraculeux du Coran, auprès des *aš'arites*, dans le texte d'al-Fūrakī (Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 2378, f. 139r).

Le long chapitre consacré dans le *Kašf* à ce propos est explicable à la fois par l'importance que ce thème avait à son époque, comme cela est attesté par Ibn Ḥaldūn, qui revient maintes fois sur le sujet, mais il a aussi une raison interne à la démarche du traité.

Averroès note que la philosophie pratique, celle politique, celle qu'il a étudiée à fond, n'arrive pas à exprimer adéquatement les enseignements indispensables à tous les êtres humains pour atteindre le bonheur, à la fois aux élites et du peuple. C'est l'universalité du message divin qui établit pour lui de primauté de la connaissance du prophète par rapport à celle du Philosophe accompli.

Selon Averroès, la Loi révélée, livre avec une précision et une clarté infiniment plus grande que ne pourraient le faire l'art politique, les techniques de bonne gouvernance, la rhétorique, la meilleure manière de conduire l'ensemble des êtres humains, quel que soit leur niveau, vers l'accomplissement de leur bonheur individuel et collectif. « C'est pourquoi on peut affirmer que ces connaissances, qui sont apportées par le prophète inspiré, sont d'autre ordre que celles acquises par l'enseignement, les art » etc. Si la pratique de la philosophie garantit la béatitude de du savant, elle ne donne pas à savoir comment répondre aux besoins des autres êtres humains, qui sont la majorité.

À différence d'Ibn Baġġa qui considérait que le philosophe devait s'abstraire du monde et mener une vie retirée afin d'atteindre la perfection du savoir jusqu'à l'*ittisāl* (la jonction avec l'intellect divin), Averroès considère, selon la plus pure tradition musulmane, que « les savants sont les héritiers des prophètes ». Or, s'ils héritent des prophètes une proximité avec l'esprit divin qui leur permet de s'approprier des intelligibles au-delà de ce qui est consenti aux autres hommes, ils héritent aussi le rôle de bien conduire le peuple sont garants de l'accomplissement des tous les êtres humains, et non pas uniquement de leur propre accomplissement. Comme ironisait le théologien jésuite Giovanni Maria Luisetto, « Dieu créa l'homme à sa propre image, au point que l'homme aussi ne crée rien qui ne soit pas à sa propre image », l'Averroès de plus en plus élitiste¹⁷ que l'on dépeint, intéressé à un univers accessible uniquement aux savants, enfermé dans la même « tour d'ivoire métaphysique » qu'Ibn Baġġa, l'Averroès qui accorde au peuple une vérité amputée de toute valeur profonde est bien plus à l'image des exégètes Occidentaux qui le décrivent de la sorte, que du cadī de Cordoue qui s'efforça de bien diriger la communauté de son époque, de contrecarrer les méfaits d'une pensée trompeuse répandue à tous les niveaux de la société et qui alimentait conflits et divisions. Dans les chroniques locales il est plus souvent cité pour ces activités que pour sa vaste production

17 Une description bien plus adaptée à la production et au profil de Ibn Baġġa.

philosophique. Des Lois capables de garder l'ensemble des hommes écartés des conduites néfastes pour les individus et pour la société, par l'adhésion libre de l'esprit (*taṣdīq*) et non pas par la violence et la contrainte sont perçues par Averroès comme le vrai acte prodigieux du prophète.

[§ 258] Le premier est que l'existence de la sorte d'hommes que l'on appelle envoyés ou prophètes est connue par soi, et que ce sont des hommes de cette sorte qui ont institué des lois (*ṣarā'i'*) pour les humains sous inspiration (*waḥiyy*) divine, non par un enseignement humain. Les seuls à nier leur existence sont ceux qui nient l'existence des [autres] choses transmises par tradition multiple (*mutawāṭira*), les *dahriyya*, reconnaissent qu'il existe certains individus qui reçoivent l'inspiration de communiquer aux humains certaines connaissances et actes bons par laquelle leur félicité sera achevée, et de leur interdire des croyances perverses et des actes mauvais. C'est en cela que consiste l'activité des prophètes.

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[...]

[§ 271] Celui qui institue les Lois doit également connaître la vaste quantité de choses dont le peuple a besoin pour sa félicité, et quelles méthodes doivent être employée pour lui [faire acquérir] ces connaissances. Or tout cela, ou la plupart de ces choses, ne peuvent être établies par l'enseignement, ni l'art ou la sagesse, comme le sait avec certitude qui s'est adonné aux sciences, et en particulier celle de l'institution des Lois, de la décision des règles [aptés à procurer le bonheur de tous]. (al-Ġābirī 1998, 179 ; 182)

Une Loi dont l'inspiration ne serait pas divine, selon Averroès, ne pourrait donc pas être formulée en des termes adéquats pour convenir dans toutes les époques à la totalité des êtres humains, non pas à une

seule partie d'entre eux. Si Averroès voit effectivement dans la figure du « philosophe au savoir parfait » l'accomplissement de l'Humain (qui devient capable d'atteindre le divin), il voit aussi la perfection du savoir divin – transmis par les prophètes – se manifester entre autres dans la capacité d'accomplir l'Humanité, dans la capacité d'atteindre l'âme de tout être humain.

[§ 272] Comme toutes ces choses se trouvent dans le Livre Sacré de la manière la plus parfaite possible, nous savons que cela procède d'une inspiration divine, et qu'il s'agit de la parole de Dieu, mise dans la bouche de son prophète. C'est pourquoi Dieu a dit, voulant éveiller l'esprit à ce fait : - Dis : « Si les hommes et les Djinns s'unissaient pour produire quelque chose de semblable à ce Coran ils ne produiraient rien qui lui rassemble » (Coran 17: 88), etc., jusqu'à la fin du verset.

[§ 273] Cette idée gagne en crédibilité, au point de devenir comme une vérité catégorique et certaine, si l'on sait que [le Prophète] – la paix et le salut de Dieu soient sur lui – était illettré, a grandi dans une nation illettrée, inculte (*'āmmiyya*), nomade, qui n'avait jamais pratiqué les sciences et à laquelle aucune science n'a été attribuée, qui ne s'était jamais adonnée à l'étude des êtres comme y étaient habitués les Grecs et d'autres nations chez lesquelles la sagesse avait été achevée pendant des périodes très longues.

[...]

[§ 275] Cette idée peut également être connue d'une autre manière, en comparant cette Loi aux autres. En effet, si l'acte des prophètes en tant qu'ils sont prophètes n'est rien d'autre que d'instituer des lois par une inspiration divine, comme cela est établi pour tous, je veux dire tous ceux qui professent qu'il y a des lois révélées grâce à l'existence de prophètes – que les bénédictions de Dieu soient sur eux – et que l'on considère ce que le Livre précieux contient de révélations utiles à la science et à la pratique, elles-mêmes utiles au bonheur, et ce que contiennent les autres livres et lois révélées, on constate sa supériorité infinie, de ce point de vue, en comparaison avec autres lois.

[§ 276] Et en somme, s'ils existent des livres, reçus dans certaines Lois Révélées qui méritent d'être considéré la parole de Dieu¹⁸ en raison de leur caractère prodigieux, de l'écart de genre qu'ils

18 Sur ce point aussi Averroès rejoint al-Fūrakī, qui affirme l'origine divine de la Torah et des Évangiles (Istanbul, Aya Sofya, 2378, 133v).

présentent avec les paroles humaines, et de leur différence [avec ces dernières] quant à ce qu'ils contiennent comme science et [prescriptions portant sur les] actes, il est clair que le livre précieux, le Coran, mérite incommensurablement davantage cette dignité.

Quant à toi, ceci t'apparaîtra fortement si tu prends connaissance de ces livres, je veux dire la Torah et les Évangiles – car certes, il est impossible qu'ils aient été altérés dans leur totalité.

Les livres sacrés juifs et chrétiens sont censés avoir fait l'objet d'une altération (*tahrif*). Il faudrait donc distinguer dans cette perspective ces livres eux-mêmes, tels qu'ils sont évoqués par le Coran, et ce que lisent effectivement les chrétiens et les juifs, à savoir des textes altérés par la suite, au fil du temps. Mais, même si altérés, ils ne peuvent l'avoir été en totalité, et il reste quelque chose de la parole divine dans ces livres. Cependant la présence divine à un moindre degré par rapport au Coran.

[...]

[§ 278] A cause du caractère unanimement [partageable] de l'enseignement du Livre Sacré, et des révélations qui s'y trouvent – je veux dire par là le fait qu'elles assurent la félicité de chacun –, cette Loi révélée est commune à tous les hommes. C'est pourquoi Dieu a dit :

-Dis : « Ô vous les hommes, Je suis en vérité envoyé vers vous tous comme le Prophète de Dieu » (Coran 8: 158) et c'est pourquoi [le Prophète] – sur lui soit la paix – a dit : « J'ai été envoyé au blanc et au noir ».

Il semble qu'il en aille en quelque sorte pour les lois révélées comme pour les aliments : de même qu'il y a des aliments qui conviennent à toutes les personnes ou à la plupart, de même pour les lois. C'est la raison pour laquelle les lois antérieures à celle-ci, qui est la nôtre, furent toujours particulières à certains peuples seulement, tandis que cette loi, qui est la nôtre, a été imposée de manière générale à tous les hommes.

[...]

[§ 280] Si, donc, tout cela est comme nous l'avons dit, il t'apparaît que la manière dont le Coran signifie la prophétie [de Muḥammad] – la paix et le salut de Dieu soient sur lui – n'est pas semblable à la manière dont la transformation du bâton en serpent (Coran 7: 107; 26: 32) signifie la prophétie de Moïse – la paix soit sur lui –, ni à la manière dont la résurrection des morts et la guérison de l'aveugle et du lépreux (Coran 3: 49 ; 5: 110) signifient la prophétie de Jésus. En effet, même si ce sont là des actes qui

ne sont produits que par des prophètes, et qui sont persuasifs pour le peuple, ils ne signifient cependant pas [la prophétie] de manière catégorique s'ils sont pris à eux seuls, car ce ne sont pas des actes [qui procèdent] de la qualité en vertu de laquelle le prophète est dit être prophète, tandis que le Coran signifie cette qualité à la manière dont la guérison signifie la médecine. Ainsi, par exemple, si deux personnes prétendent être médecins, et que la première dit : « La preuve que je suis médecin, c'est que je marche sur l'eau », tandis que la seconde disait : « La preuve que je suis médecin est que je guéris des malades », et que la première se mettait à marcher sur l'eau, la seconde à guérir des malades, nous conviendrons que [l'art de la] médecine se trouve en celui qui a guéri les malades et notre assentiment serait de l'ordre démonstratif, tandis que notre assentiment au fait que [l'art de] la médecine se trouve dans celui qui a marché sur l'eau serait de l'ordre de la persuasion, relevant de l'argument *a fortiori*.

[§ 281] Et le type d'opinion que formerait auprès des gens ce serait que celui qui est capable de marcher sur l'eau – ce qui n'est pas un acte à mesure d'homme – doit *a fortiori* être capable de guérir, ce qui est à mesure d'homme. C'est la même relation qui existe entre le miracle qui ne relève pas des actes [procédant] de la qualité [en vertu de laquelle le prophète est prophète] et la qualité même en vertu de laquelle le prophète mérite d'être [appelé] prophète, à savoir l'inspiration. C'est de cette sorte qu'est la conviction qui se produit dans l'âme : il n'est pas improbable que celui que Dieu a rendu capable d'accomplir cet acte extraordinaire, parmi tous les hommes de son temps, dise vrai, lorsqu'il prétend que Dieu l'a gratifié de l'inspiration [prophétique].

[§ 282] En somme, si l'on pose que les Envoyés [par Dieu] existent, et que les actes miraculeux (*ḥāriqa*) ne procèdent pas d'autres hommes qu'eux, le miracle (*mu'ǧiz*) est un signe (*dalīl*) afin qu'on considère le prophète véridique. Je veux dire que le miracle extérieur, qui n'est pas approprié à la qualité en vertu de laquelle le prophète est appelé prophète, obtient uniquement l'assentiment du peuple, tandis que le miracle propre au prophète [la production d'une Loi Révélée] obtient l'assentiment à la fois du peuple et des savants. (al-Ġābirī 1998, 183-5)

Pour établir que le miracle est le trait distinctif de la prophétie, il fallait auparavant reconnaître que les prophètes existent, que les miracles existent, que produire un miracle n'est pas le fait de tous, mais uniquement des prophètes, il fallait donc établir

- a. la reconnaissance de l'existence des miracles
- b. la reconnaissance de l'existence de prophètes

pour obtenir l'assentiment [*taṣdīq*] à une proposition assertorique où *a* est prédiqué de *b*, cela nécessite d'abord de reconnaître l'existence de chacun des deux termes prédiqués et du lien univoque existant entre les deux.

Le syllogisme qui prétend donc établir qu'un tel est prophète ne pourra le faire que si l'on sait précédemment qu'ils peuvent exister à la fois les prophètes et des miracles.

Or, si le miracle « extérieur à la mission prophétique » (guérir les malades, marcher sur l'eau, transformer un serpent en bâton et un bâton en serpent) est convaincant pour le peuple, mais se prête aussi à d'incessantes remises en question (véridicité des témoignages, tromperie des sens, aucune preuve objective que ces faits soient en lien avec la prophétie elle-même), le miracle interne à la mission Prophétique est convaincant pour le peuple tout comme pour les savants.

Du point de vue d'Averroès, plus encore que la connaissance de l'avenir et des réalités inatteignables par un simple être humain, le vrai miracle du prophète est la Loi Révélée, qui siècle après siècle continue à motiver ses croyants à agir pour le Bien de tous. Si aucune science, ni art humains a le pouvoir d'obtenir qu'on n'agisse pas en privilégiant son propre intérêt ou celui du groupe auquel on appartient, selon Averroès, le message prophétique – en plaçant à l'extérieur l'arbitrage suprême des agissements humains – eut comme principal bienfait le pouvoir de soustraire les individus et les peuples à la fois au chaos de l'anomie, à la loi imposée à tous par le plus fort, à la loi imposée par les plus nombreux aux minorités, à la loi imposée par les élites à la multitude.

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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.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Framing the Islamic Languages' Space: *Domestic, Nomadic, Time-Echoing*. – 3 Surfaces and Culture Earthquakes: A Reverberating Sufi Corpus.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-02-24
Accepted 2025-07-07
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Fontana, C. (2025). "Toward an Ethospoetics of the Islamic Languages. Re-Reading Multilingualism Along the Silk Road According to Alessandro Bausani – Part I". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 79-106.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/003

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 Qurʾān and seminal authors like ʿUmar Khayyām (d. 517/1124), al-Rūmī (d. 672/1273), and Muḥammad Iqbal (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.³In 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 also highlighted 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 *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* literature, the term 'house' is frequently associated with concepts such as cavern, shell, and the hereafter, among others.

as ‘ethnopoetic’ (i.e. grounded on *ethos*). This innovative ethnopoetic 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.

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), López-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).

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-Tawḥīdī (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-territorialization’, 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).

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 peripheral] 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 militants) in the Omayyad and Abbasid period (al-Tawḥīdī ed. 1965, 293; al-Jāhīz 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 Baṭṭūṭa (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 *Mahābhārata* "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'*, *ḥuffāz* 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 generative soil where Ar./Pers. *bu'd/qurb* o *qurub* (distance/proximity) or *bāṭin/zāhir* (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 Valéry (*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 Mu'tazilism (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 *Qur'ān*, *aḥādīth*, *sunna*, *sīra*, and *Nahj al-balāgha* for the Shī'i'a 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.

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 Ernst, 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 Qur’ān-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 Shi’a canonical traditions and jurisprudence – e.g. *ijmā’* (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 Ḥāfeẓ, it is *shokr-e Īzād ke miyān-e man-o-ū ṣoḥḥ oftād/ṣufiyān raqṣ - konān sāghar-e shokrāne zadand* where the terms in italics are borrowings from Arabic. Cf. Bausani 1978, 8-9.

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 Shi‘ī 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 Ismā‘ilī theology (Walker 1993), suggesting a further hyponymisation: al-Ghazālī in his *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* distinguishes two categories of *‘ilm al-bāṭin*: *‘ilm taṣqīl al-qalb* (knowledge of ways to polish the heart), which is a pedagogic discipline, and *‘ilm al-mukāshafa*, which is God-given illumination of the heart (ed. 1970, 105). Ibn al-‘Arabī 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 Qur’ān. 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 (*‘iyāfa*), gnostic cabalism (*ḥurūfiyya*) 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 Šūfis, 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-Šādiq (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 geometers’ 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-‘Arabī, al-Ghāzālī 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, Suhrawardī, and Ibn ‘Arabī*, Seyyed Husein Nasr highlights how, conversely, the ‘*aql*’ 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.

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 *sharī'a* language reached a semantic crystallisation with the Shafī'i *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 'Arabī (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 *badī'* 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 *badī'-kalām* interplay in "Toward a Redefinition of *Badī'* 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.

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/ *badī'* interaction and its relevance to Islamic languages is no mere digression. Without understanding the rise of *badī'* 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 Sa'dān, 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 *sharī'ah* 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 *badī'* issue.

29 See the first note of this paper.

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La sepoltura dei musulmani in contesto non islamico fra teoria e prassi Prima indagine sul caso campano

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Abstract This article is a response to the invitation of the Union of Italian Islamic Communities to the academic world to pay more attention to the issue of Islamic burial and cemetery spaces in Italy. It has two objectives. The first is to identify and analyse Islamic rules on burial in a non-Islamic context in order to verify their compatibility with Italian legislation. The second objective is to carry out an initial mapping of the existing Islamic cemeteries in Campania, the actual number of which is one of the data on the basis of which it will be possible to determine whether and to what extent the right of Muslims living in the area to be buried in accordance with Islamic rules is respected.

Keywords Burial. Graveyards. Fatāwā. Islamic law. Muslims in Campania.

Sommario 1 Introduzione. – 2 La giurisprudenza islamica relativa alla sepoltura in contesto non islamico. – 3 Gli spazi cimiteriali islamici in Campania: prima mappatura. – 4 Conclusioni.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-02-21
Accepted 2025-06-18
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation De Angelo, C. (2025). "La sepoltura dei musulmani in contesto non islamico fra teoria e prassi. Prima indagine sul caso campano". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61(1), 107-150.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/004

1 Introduzione

Nel mese di aprile del 2021 l'UCOII (Unione delle Comunità Islamiche in Italia)¹ ha pubblicato un breve report intitolato *La sepoltura dei defunti musulmani in Italia. Indagine svolta sulle agenzie funebri islamiche in Italia*.² L'obiettivo di questa ricerca era quello di avviare «un processo di raccolta dati, da ripetere ogni anno», che facesse «luce sull'entità del bisogno di luoghi di sepoltura per fedeli musulmani» (UCOII 2021, 2). L'indagine è stata realizzata su un campione rappresentato dalle «salme [...] di musulmani gestite da 10 agenzie funebri [islamiche]» (UCOII 2021, 1),³ tutte ubicate nel Centro-Nord della Penisola,⁴ ai referenti delle quali è stato somministrato un

1 È uno dei più importanti e rappresentativi attori islamici in Italia, insieme alla Confederazione Islamica Italiana (CII), al Centro culturale islamico d'Italia e alla COREIS (Comunità religiosa islamica) (Bombardieri 2014).

2 Ringrazio il presidente dell'UCOII, Yassine Lafram, per avermi fornito una copia del report. La produzione di quest'ultimo, così come la pubblicazione degli altri documenti dell'Unione relativi alla sepoltura – ai quali si farà riferimento nel corso di questa trattazione – ben attestano l'importanza che quest'ultima è andata assumendo negli ultimi anni, specie dopo la pandemia. In realtà la necessità di garantire ai musulmani una sepoltura in linea con le prescrizioni islamiche è stata presente nell'agenda dell'UCOII sin dagli anni Novanta del secolo scorso, da quando cioè si è costituita (1990), come del resto in quella delle altre Associazioni islamiche. Infatti, all'art. 15 della bozza di intesa che l'UCOII ha presentato nel 1992, si legge «i piani regolatori cimiteriali prevedono, su richiesta della Comunità competente per territorio, reparti speciali per la sepoltura di defunti musulmani. Alla Comunità che faccia domanda di avere un reparto proprio è data dal sindaco in concessione un'area adeguata nel cimitero» (Cilardo 2002, 314). Lo stesso testo, ma più esteso e articolato, lo si ritrova anche nell'art. 14 della bozza d'intesa predisposta dall'Associazione Musulmani Italiani del 1994: «i piani regolatori cimiteriali prevedono, su richiesta della sede periferica dell'Associazione Musulmani Italiani competente per territorio, reparti speciali per la sepoltura di defunti musulmani. Alla sede periferica che faccia domanda di avere un reparto proprio è data dal sindaco in concessione un'area adeguata nel cimitero. Le sepolture nei reparti islamici dei cimiteri comunali sono perpetue, in conformità della legge e della tradizione islamica. Nell'ambito dei reparti in questione, è assicurata la facoltà di procedere all'orazione prima dell'inumazione» (Cilardo 2002, 326-7). Infine, l'art. 23 della bozza di intesa della COREIS del 1996 recita «i piani regolatori cimiteriali prevedono, su richiesta della Comunità islamica, reparti speciali per la sepoltura di defunti musulmani. Alla Comunità che faccia domanda di avere un reparto proprio è data dal sindaco in concessione un'area adeguata nel cimitero. È garantita a tutti i musulmani la celebrazione del rito funebre e la inumazione secondo la tradizione islamica, con sepoltura perpetua. A tal fine, fermo restando gli oneri di legge a carico degli interessati, o della Comunità, le concessioni di cui all'art. 91 del D.P.R. 21 ottobre 1975, nr. 803, sono rinnovate alla scadenza di ogni novantanove anni» (Cilardo 2002, 346).

3 A p. 6 del report viene invece riportato che le agenzie funebri coinvolte sono undici, una in meno delle dodici elencate sul sito dell'Unione (<https://ucoii.org/agenzie-funebri/>).

4 Lombardia, Lazio, Veneto, Piemonte, Emilia-Romagna, Toscana e Umbria (UCOII 2021, 6).

questionario⁵ col quale si chiedeva loro di indicare, relativamente al 2019 (quindi prima della pandemia) e al 2020 (in piena pandemia), di rispondere ad alcuni quesiti riguardanti principalmente il numero dei defunti musulmani di cui si erano occupati in quei due anni e il luogo dove erano stati sepolti, cioè se in Italia (per esempio nel comune o nella provincia o nella regione di residenza) oppure nel Paese d'origine del defunto (rimpatrio della salma). I risultati hanno evidenziato che vi è stato sia un aumento complessivo delle salme che le agenzie indagate hanno gestito – nel 2020 sono state 1.219, 139 in più rispetto alle 1.080 del 2019 –, sia un aumento del numero delle salme seppellite in Italia – 463 nel 2020 rispetto alle 259 del 2019 –; è diminuita, invece, la percentuale delle salme rimpatriate, che è passata dal 76% del 2019 (821 salme su 1.080 gestite) al 62% del 2020 (756 salme su 1.219 gestite). Per quanto riguarda invece il luogo di sepoltura delle salme inumate in Italia, nel 45% dei casi il seppellimento è avvenuto nella regione di residenza del defunto, nel 18,8% dei casi nella provincia di residenza, mentre nel 34,7% nel comune di residenza (UCOII 2021, 4). Queste variazioni sono tutte imputabili verosimilmente all'avvento del COVID-19 che, oltre a provocare un aumento dei decessi nel Paese, anche fra coloro che professano l'islam,⁶ ha richiesto, per evitarne la propagazione, il blocco della circolazione interna e internazionale, impedendo, almeno per il periodo durante il quale è rimasto in vigore, il rimpatrio delle salme. L'impossibilità di operare quest'ultimo è la ragione per la quale è aumentato il numero delle sepolture dei musulmani in Italia, una scelta obbligata che, a sua volta, ha richiesto la creazione di nuovi spazi cimiteriali islamici, il cui numero, infatti, sarebbe quasi raddoppiato, passando dai 50 del mese di marzo del 2020 ai 98 dello stesso mese del 2021,⁷ un risultato al quale l'UCOII ritiene certamente di aver contribuito (UCOII 2021, 2, nr. 2), sia grazie alla redazione di un documento relativo alle indicazioni che un'area cimiteriale islamica dovrebbe avere (UCOII 2020a) e di una guida teorico-pratica concernente lo svolgimento dei riti funerari islamici in Italia (UCOII 2020b), sia in virtù del ruolo di intermediazione con le istituzioni comunali che spesso è stata chiamata a svolgere da parte di alcune comunità islamiche locali.

5 Oltre che sui questionari, l'indagine si è basata anche su alcune interviste che sono state fatte ai referenti delle agenzie funebri (UCOII 2021, 3).

6 Secondo i dati dell'Istat, nel 2020 in Italia sarebbero morti a causa del COVID-19 153 musulmani: 14 egiziani, 81 marocchini, 14 nigeriani, 17 senegalesi, 11 tunisini e 16 pakistani.

7 Un elenco non aggiornato dei cimiteri/spazi cimiteriali islamici esistenti in Italia è disponibile sul sito dell'UCOII (disponibile all'indirizzo <https://ucoii.org/cimiteri-islamici-in-italia/>). Una mappatura degli stessi, ugualmente non aggiornata, si trova anche in Omenetto 2020.

Tra le raccomandazioni che chiudono il report, l'UCOII ha incluso quella relativa alla necessità di «svolgere maggiori ricerche [...] sul numero dei decessi e sulle modalità di sepoltura» dei defunti di fede islamica in Italia, concentrando l'attenzione

sulla distribuzione territoriale dei decessi [...] per individuare [le] zone in cui la necessità [di spazi cimiteriali islamici] è più alta.

A tal fine, l'Unione ha sottolineato l'importanza della collaborazione, fra gli altri, col mondo accademico (UCOII 2021, 7). Le riflessioni che seguono costituiscono una risposta a tale invito. Tra gli obiettivi di questo articolo vi è, infatti, quello di far emergere e analizzare le criticità connesse alla sepoltura dei musulmani deceduti in Campania. Nello specifico, ho cercato di verificare se nel territorio della Regione sia stato soddisfatto o meno il diritto dei musulmani ad avere degli adeguati luoghi di sepoltura, coerenti cioè con le prescrizioni statuite a tal proposito dall'islam, un diritto che, oltre a costituire il corollario della libertà religiosa garantita dall'art. 19 della Costituzione,⁸ è

sancito e garantito [...] dal Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica nr. 285 del [10 settembre] 1990.⁹ (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri 2013, 84)

In effetti, quest'ultimo, insieme alla legge nr. 130 del 30 marzo 2001 (*Disposizioni in materia di cremazione e dispersione delle ceneri*) e al Regio Decreto nr. 1265 del 27 luglio 1934 (*Approvazione del testo unico delle leggi sanitarie*), contiene la disciplina generale in materia di trattamento delle salme e sepoltura, alla quale occorre far riferimento per tutti i defunti che appartengono alle confessioni che non hanno stipulato l'intesa con lo Stato, fra i quali rientrano anche i musulmani.¹⁰ L'art. 100, co. 1, del D.P.R del 1990 statuisce che

8 «Tutti hanno diritto di professare liberamente la propria fede religiosa in qualsiasi forma, individuale o associata, di farne propaganda e di esercitarla in privato o in pubblico il culto, purché non si tratti di riti contrari al buon costume».

9 Intitolato *Approvazione del regolamento di polizia mortuaria* e pubblicato sulla Gazzetta Ufficiale del 12 ottobre del 1990, nr. 239, S.O.

10 Infatti, alcune delle comunità religiose che hanno stipulato l'intesa con lo Stato (ex art. 8 Cost.) hanno previsto all'interno di quest'ultima una disciplina speciale relativa al trattamento delle salme e ai luoghi di sepoltura, tarata cioè sulle specifiche prescrizioni religiose che in materia sono previste dalla confessione di appartenenza; è quanto hanno fatto per esempio gli ebrei (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri 2013, 84).

i piani regolatori cimiteriali *possono*¹¹ prevedere reparti speciali e separati per la sepoltura di cadaveri di persone professanti un culto diverso da quello cattolico,

riservando in tal modo ai Comuni la competenza a decidere in merito alla creazione di spazi cimiteriali destinati ai musulmani,¹² decisioni che, come spesso è accaduto, diventano altamente politicizzate (Gianfreda 2020, 278, 280; Baldassarre 2019, 401-4).¹³ Questa discrezionalità è la ragione per la quale gli spazi cimiteriali islamici sono stati creati, all'interno dei cimiteri dei comuni dove vivono i musulmani, solo in alcuni casi e non in altri. I comuni delle province campane hanno creato questi spazi? E se li hanno creati, la loro creazione è stata tale da consentire ai musulmani di rispettare le regole prescritte dalla loro religione in materia di seppellimento? La ricerca che ho condotto costituisce un tentativo di rispondere a queste domande.

Il testo che segue è diviso in due parti.

11 Il corsivo è aggiunto. Silvia Baldassarre rileva, correttamente, che «la disposizione [...] sembrerebbe essere fraseggiata in termini di facoltà per l'amministrazione, ma così interpretata essa potrebbe essere sospettabile di incostituzionalità, dal momento che l'attuazione di un diritto scaturente da una libertà costituzionalmente garantita non può essere lasciata all'assoluta discrezionalità delle amministrazioni comunali» (Baldassarre 2019, 404).

12 Nel comune di Caldiero (VR), per esempio, è solo dal 2011, da quando cioè è entrato in vigore il Regolamento di Polizia Mortuaria emendato, che il Sindaco può «*concedere* nel Cimitero un'area adeguata alle comunità straniere professanti un culto diverso da quello cattolico che fanno domanda di avere un reparto proprio per la sepoltura delle salme dei loro connazionali (art. 25bis)», con un evidente discriminazione, tra l'altro, per i cittadini italiani non cattolici.

13 Per esempio, nel Consiglio Comunale del 23 giugno 2020 del comune di San Giuliano Milanese – durante il quale si è discussa la *Mozione ad oggetto dei cimiteri cittadini, parità di diritti di sepoltura presentata dal gruppo consiliare Movimento Cinque Stelle*, ovvero della possibilità di individuare uno spazio all'interno del cimitero comunale da destinare alla sola sepoltura dei musulmani – Fratelli d'Italia, Forza Italia e Lega si sono espressi negativamente in quanto «non può trovarsi d'accordo [...] la richiesta di individuare un campo ad uso esclusivo dei cittadini di fede musulmana in quanto contraria ai principi fondamentali della nostra Carta Costituzionale» (Comune di San Giovanni Milanese, *Consiglio Comunale del 23 giugno 2020*, 97). Ugualmente contrario si è detto il Sindaco, Margo Segala (Forza Italia): «Io credo che l'integrazione ci sia sé [sic!] tutti andiamo nello stesso cimitero, che sia civile essere seppelliti nelle stesse modalità nel rispetto delle esigenze altrui, e a San Giuliano questo era consentito» (Comune di San Giovanni Milanese, *Consiglio Comunale del 23 giugno 2020*, 98). La prima dichiarazione è giuridicamente infondata: come si è visto sopra, la possibilità di prevedere degli spazi cimiteriali per defunti professanti un culto diverso da quello cattolico è previsto dal D.P.R. nr. 285 del 1990 sulla cui costituzionalità non è stato mai sollevato alcun dubbio; ed è in applicazione di quest'ultimo, del resto, che sono stati creati gli spazi cimiteriali islamici attualmente esistenti in Italia. Le ragioni dell'opposizione alla *Mozione* diventano più chiare, invece, nelle parole del Sindaco, secondo cui l'integrazione dei musulmani passa attraverso la rinuncia da parte di questi ultimi alle regole che la loro religione prescrive in materia di sepoltura.

Nella prima ho operato l'analisi testuale di alcuni dei responsi (*fatāwā*, sing. *fatwā*),¹⁴ in arabo,¹⁵ che i giuristi musulmani, di diverso orientamento, hanno emesso per disciplinare le fattispecie connesse al *come* e al *dove* seppellire la salma del musulmano defunto in contesto non islamico. In particolare, ho analizzato i responsi emessi dalla Commissione Permanente per le Ricerche Scientifiche e l'emanazione delle *Fatāwā* dell'Arabia Saudita (in arabo al-*Lağna al-dā'ima li'l-buḥūt al-'ilmiyya wa'l-iftā'*, da ora in poi *Lağna*)¹⁶ – che per la produzione delle regole islamiche si attiene all'interpretazione letterale delle fonti primarie del diritto, cioè del Corano e della *Sunna* – e quelli emessi dal Consiglio Europeo per le *Fatāwā* e le Ricerche (in arabo al-*Mağlis al-ūrūbī li'l-iftā' wa'l-buḥūt*, da ora in poi *Mağlis*)¹⁷ – per il quale la produzione e l'applicazione di una regola non può prescindere dalla valutazione effettiva della situazione nella quale si trova il musulmano cui essa è rivolta. La scelta di analizzare la diversa giurisprudenza prodotta dalla *Lağna* e dal *Mağlis* è da ascrivere alla necessità di rappresentare, sia pur parzialmente, l'eterogeneità anche dottrinale dei musulmani in Italia. Questi ultimi, infatti, oltre che per lingua, cultura, cittadinanza, ecc., si differenziano tra di loro anche per le diverse interpretazioni dottrinali cui fanno riferimento, tra le quali, fra le altre, vi è quella salafita (Allievi 2021, 55-6), che trova una voce nella *Lağna*, e quella *wasafī*,¹⁸ che trova espressione nel *Mağlis*, il quale, per le questioni che attengono al diritto islamico, costituisce il punto di riferimento dell'UCOII, come mi hanno esplicitamente confermato sia il suo attuale presidente, Yassine Lafram, sia il suo predecessore, Izzedin Elzir, nell'ambito di un'intervista che, separatamente, mi hanno rilasciato.¹⁹ L'analisi della dottrina islamica relativa alla sepoltura del musulmano in contesto non islamico costituisce un elemento di originalità rispetto alla letteratura esistente, che, invece, a partire da fonti secondarie, si è concentrata quasi esclusivamente sull'esame delle regole relative

14 Per *fatwā* si intende la risposta al quesito posto da un credente o da un gruppo di credenti in merito alla disciplina giuridico-religiosa di una determinata fattispecie. Il soggetto che ne fa richiesta viene indicato col termine *mustaftī*; il dotto che lo rilascia, invece, è definito *muftī*. La *fatwā*, costituendo un mero parere, non ha carattere vincolante, il *mustaftī* quindi è libero di non attenervisi; quest'ultima è una delle ragioni per le quali non è possibile paragonare una *fatwā* a una sentenza.

15 Salvo diversamente indicato, tutte le traduzioni dall'arabo sono dell'Autore.

16 Su questa Commissione si veda Al-Atawneh 2010.

17 Su questo Consiglio si veda, fra gli altri, Shavit 2015; 2022.

18 Si tratta di quell'approccio che «calls for adapting religious laws to changing times and circumstances in a way that would make the lives of Muslims easier and Islam more attractive» (Shavit 2015, 18).

19 Ho intervistato entrambi via zoom, il primo il 13 novembre 2023, il secondo il 21 marzo 2024.

all'inumazione che sono state elaborate per i musulmani che vivono in contesto a maggioranza islamico (Gianfreda 2020; Fronzoni 2020, 327-38; Fronzoni 2023). Anche chi ha riconosciuto che

One area of concern for Muslims in the West is the question of death and burial, yet there seems to be little research on this matter from a [Islamic] jurisprudential perspective. [...]. This gap in research leaves many practical questions unanswered for Muslims living in Western countries, where the surrounding cultural and legal frameworks can differ significantly from those in predominantly Muslim regions (Hussain 2024, 1, 5),

e si è impegnato nell'elaborazione di uno studio, condotto su fonti primarie, finalizzato proprio a sanare tale lacuna, ha dedicato però pochissimo spazio alla questione dell'adattamento delle prescrizioni islamiche in materia di sepoltura in occidente, limitandosi di fatto a evidenziare che la giurisprudenza islamica, unanimemente, non ammette l'inumazione del musulmano in un cimitero non islamico (Hussain 2024, 3-4).

Nella seconda parte, invece, sono passato all'analisi descrittiva ovvero a verificare se e in che termini i musulmani in Campania ottemperano alle regole di cui sopra, mettendo in evidenza i fattori che eventualmente ne determinano la violazione. I contenuti di questa parte sono il risultato dell'elaborazione dei dati emersi dalle interviste non strutturate alle quali sono ricorso per interrogare alcune delle persone direttamente coinvolte col tema esaminato (imam, dirigenti dei centri islamici, operatori funerari, vertici istituzionali, credenti, ecc.).²⁰ Anche questa seconda parte presenta un elemento di originalità, nella misura in cui essa esplora una questione che, rispetto alla Regione indagata, non è stata mai oggetto di interesse. Fino a questo momento, infatti, nessuna delle ricerche pubblicate sulla presenza dei musulmani in Campania, durante l'epoca contemporanea, hanno riguardato gli spazi cimiteriali e la questione della sepoltura. In effetti, alcune di esse hanno offerto un quadro generale sull'insediamento islamico nella Regione, soffermandosi prevalentemente su Napoli;²¹ altre, invece, hanno riguardato le conversioni (Pagano 2016; Di Nuzzo 2020).

Oltre allo specifico proposito connesso a ciascuna delle parti sopra indicate, l'articolo, nel suo insieme, intende contribuire

20 Un sincero ringraziamento a tutti/e gli/le intervistati/e per la loro preziosissima collaborazione.

21 Allievi, Dassetto 1993, 91-6; Allievi 2003, 50-60; Amato, Di Mauro 2024; Boccolini 2002; Di Mauro 2023.

all'arricchimento del sapere fin qui prodotto sulle questioni relative al decesso e al seppellimento dei musulmani in Italia.²²

2 La giurisprudenza islamica relativa alla sepoltura in contesto non islamico

Nei confronti del morto, la comunità musulmana è tenuta ad assolvere quattro obblighi ovvero ottemperare alle regole funerarie (*aḥkām al-ġanā'iz*): il lavaggio della salma (*ḡusl*), l'avvolgimento di quest'ultima negli indumenti funebri (*takfīn*), l'esecuzione della preghiera funeraria (*ṣalāt al-ġanāza*) e, infine, il seppellimento (*dafn*) (Laġna 2007, 7: 208 [17531],²³ 231 [16570], 262 [18842]).²⁴ Questi oneri, ricadendo su tutta la *umma*, hanno natura collettiva (*farḍ al-kifāya*), pertanto qualora non siano soddisfatti da coloro che sono legati al defunto da una relazione parentale o amicale vi dovranno provvedere gli altri membri della comunità; quando anche uno solo di questi ultimi li ottempera, tutti gli altri ne sono esonerati (Laġna 1996, 8: 399 [3791], 417 [1496], 419 [10744]; Laġna 2007, 7: 261 [18443], 293 [16836]).

Dopo l'esecuzione della preghiera funeraria, la regola prevede che si proceda, nei limiti del possibile, al rapido²⁵ seppellimento della salma ovvero alla sua inumazione (Laġna 1996, 8: 340 [9008]), così come è prescritto dal Corano

Vi abbiamo creato dalla terra e alla terra vi riconduciamo, e poi nuovamente vi faremo uscire da lì (20, 55); Non abbiamo reso la

22 In effetti la letteratura scientifica su questo specifico tema è piuttosto scarsa (Biano 2010; Rhazzali 2015; Sacchetti 2017; 2024). A questi lavori, di taglio socio-antropologico, vanno aggiunti quegli studi, ugualmente pochi, di tipo geografico, che, analizzando gli spazi cimiteriali dedicati ai cittadini e migranti di fede non cattolica, trattano anche dei musulmani (Cristaldi, Omenetto 2018; 2020; Omenetto 2020). Infine, vi sono alcuni studi giuridici (Gianfreda 2020; Lazzarini 2020; Fronzoni 2020, 327-38; Fronzoni 2023).

23 Quello tra parentesi è il numero del responso analizzato.

24 Per la giurisprudenza islamica in materia di regole funerarie islamiche si rimanda, tra gli altri, ad al-Ġazīrī 2005, 282-304; al-Qaḥṭānī 2002; al-Ṭiyyār et. al. 2012, 1: 455-512; 9: 71-80. Le regole funerarie islamiche si fondano principalmente sulla *Sunna*, ovvero la seconda fonte del diritto islamico, la prima è il Corano. Per *Sunna* si intende l'insegnamento del profeta Muḥammad desumibile dalle narrazioni/tradizioni (*ḥadīṭ*, pl. *aḥādīṭ*) che ne riportano i fatti, i detti e i silenzi.

25 Questa rapidità, così come quella richiesta per lo svolgimento di tutti gli altri riti funebri, mira a preservare il cadavere dalla decomposizione e i vivi dal cattivo odore che da questo sprigiona. Il celere svolgimento delle *ġanāza* è richiesto, inoltre, per consentire al defunto pio (lett. appartenente alle genti del bene/*min ahl al-ḥayr*) di ottenere la prima possibile la ricompensa per le buone azioni compiute o per permettere ai vivi di liberarsi senza indugio della salma di colui che pio non lo è stato. Laġna 1996, 8: 429 (1705).

terra un ritrovamento di vivi e di morti? (77, 25-6); poi lo fa morire e lo sotterra, poi, quando vuole, lo risusciterà (80, 21-2)

e, infine, il versetto col quale Allah ha indicato a Caino cosa fare del corpo del fratello che aveva ucciso

Dio inviò un corvo che grattò la terra per mostrargli come nascondere la salma di suo fratello (5, 31).²⁶ (Abou Ramadan 2019, 223; Lavoie 2011, 94-5)

Il Mağlis spiega che il modo corretto di ricondurre il/la defunto/a alla terra sia quello di seppellirlo/a in una tomba o in una nicchia scavata al suo interno,²⁷ come si è sempre fatto dalla nascita dell'islam fino a oggi. Solo ricorrendo all'inumazione è possibile, infatti, rispettare l'inviolabilità, la sacralità e la dignità riconosciuta al corpo del morto.²⁸ Per questo motivo il Mağlis ha risposto negativamente a chi gli ha chiesto in merito alla possibilità di ricorrere alla tumulazione della

26 Salvo diversamente indicato, tutte le traduzioni del Corano sono tratte da *Il Corano* 2010.

27 La tomba è denominata in un modo diverso a seconda del posto dove, al suo interno, viene scavata la nicchia in cui sarà riposta la salma: se viene scavata lateralmente, allora la tomba prende il nome di *lahd* (questa pratica permette che la terra utilizzata per riempire la fossa non cada direttamente sulla salma, salvaguardandone l'integrità); se, invece, la nicchia viene scavata nel centro del fondo della tomba, quest'ultima prende il nome di *šaqq* (la nicchia, con all'interno la salma, verrà poi chiusa con delle pietre naturali o con una lastra prefabbricata, in tal modo si eviterà che la terra usata per riempire la fossa cada direttamente sul morto). La preoccupazione che la terra utilizzata per riempire la tomba possa danneggiare il corpo del defunto viene meno, ovviamente, quando quest'ultimo viene chiuso nella bara e poi seppellito, come accade in Italia: la terra in questo caso finisce sulla bara e non sulla salma. È interessante notare che la distinzione fra le diverse tipologie di tombe è stata operata, fra le altre, anche in una *fatwā* con la quale la Lağna ha risposto a una richiesta di chiarimenti in merito alle modalità di seppellimento proveniente dal direttore del Centro Culturale Islamico d'Italia. Lağna 1996, 8: 423-7 (1666). In generale, sulle regole del diritto islamico relative alla struttura della tomba si vedano Abou Ramadan 2019; Rāğib 1992.

28 Nell'islam il corpo dell'uomo è concepito come un bene che appartiene a Dio, che lo concede in deposito al suo servitore. Quest'ultimo, di conseguenza, non potrà disporne a suo piacimento, piuttosto si dovrà astenere dal compimento di ogni atto che possa minarne l'integrità; al momento della morte, infatti, dovrà restituirlo come lo ha ricevuto, al netto dei segni del naturale invecchiamento e degli effetti delle eventuali patologie di cui è stato affetto e il cui verificarsi non sia dipeso dal suo stile di vita. All'inviolabilità del corpo non vi è tenuto solo chi lo abita, ma anche tutti gli altri, che non dovranno arrecarvi alcun danno. L'obbligo di non violare il corpo persiste anche dopo la morte. Tale principio discende dalla tradizione profetica secondo cui «rompere le ossa del morto è come romperle a una persona viva», pertanto al corpo del vivo e del morto deve essere riservato lo stesso trattamento. Lağna 1996, 9: 120-1 (2214).

salma o alla sua cremazione, esplicitamente vietati.²⁹ A tal proposito, esso ha suggerito ai musulmani che vivono in un contesto non islamico (come è l'Italia), specie quelli che non hanno parenti della loro stessa fede, di lasciare un testamento scritto che risulti giuridicamente valido («bi-kitāba waṣiyya qānūniyya») nel quale esplicitamente indicare che, una volta morti, le loro spoglie dovranno essere gestite in ossequio alle prescrizioni islamiche (lavaggio, avvolgimento nel lenzuolo funebre, preghiera e seppellimento) (Mağlis 2020a, *fatāwā* nrr. 19-21; 2020b, *fatwā* nr. 34 e ultima *qarār*/raccomandazione; Lağna 1996, 8: 208 [17513]). Questa soluzione – ammessa dal diritto italiano (Gianfreda 2020, 221) – è quella che uno degli imam di Napoli suggerisce ai convertiti: solo così, infatti, essi potranno evitare che la loro famiglia di origine, in genere non musulmana, ne sottoponga la salma a trattamenti vietati dall'islam. Questo imam è vicino all'UCOII, e, nel corso delle diverse conversazioni che abbiamo avuto, ha dimostrato più volte di conoscere e apprezzare la giurisprudenza del Mağlis. Vicino all'UCOII è anche Ali Abu Shwaima/ʿAlī Abū Šuwayma, cittadino italiano di origine palestinese e presidente del Centro islamico di Milano e Lombardia al quale è legata la pubblicazione del «periodico mensile di studi islamici» intitolato *Il Messaggero dell'Islam*. Nel nr. 205 di quest'ultimo, uscito nel 2017, viene proposto, nella sezione documenti, un modello di testamento, redigendo il quale il credente potrà assicurarsi che gli atti di disposizione delle sue spoglie siano conformi alle prescrizioni islamiche.³⁰ Tale modello è stato redatto, infatti,

in previsione di una situazione, in cui il musulmano italiano, la famiglia del quale – legata alla tradizione religiosa dominante locale – avendo disapprovato la sua scelta religiosa – possa legalmente disporre della sua salma in modo diverso da quello islamico. (*Il testamento del musulmano* 2017, 20)

I giuristi musulmani, se da un lato sottolineano la rapidità con la quale bisogna procedere alla inumazione, dall'altro non specificano l'arco temporale, dal momento dell'accertamento della morte, entro

29 La cremazione è vietata perché riduce la salma in cenere, violandone la sacralità (Lağna 2007, 7: 208 [17513]). La tumulazione, invece, è vietata perché contraria alla prescrizione coranica che obbliga all'inumazione. Questi divieti sono stati richiamati anche dall'UCOII: «La salma dovrà obbligatoriamente essere seppellita col metodo della inumazione quindi in terra piena [...] è fatto divieto nella pratica religiosa la cremazione e la tumulazione. L'unica pratica ammessa è l'inumazione» (UCOII 2020a, 2).

30 Modelli di testamento che i musulmani usano per disporre le modalità con le quali dovranno essere trattate le loro spoglie sono abbastanza diffuse in tutti i contesti nei quali essi costituiscono una minoranza. Si veda, per esempio, quello predisposto dall'Australian National Imams Council (disponibile all'indirizzo <https://anic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Revert-Burial-Rights-Documents.pdf>).

il quale essa deve avvenire. Viceversa, alcuni studi³¹ e alcune guide ai funerali musulmani (per es.: Sultan 2013, 3, 4, 11) riportano che il seppellimento dovrebbe avvenire entro ventiquattro ore dal momento del decesso. In Italia tale tempistica contrasta con l'art. 8 del D.P.R. nr. 285 del 1990, secondo cui

nessun cadavere può essere [...] inumato [...] prima che siano trascorse ventiquattro ore dal momento del decesso [...]

e con l'art. 74 del D.P.R. nr. 396 del 2000 (*Regolamento per la revisione e la semplificazione dell'ordinamento dello stato civile*) per il quale

1. Non si può far luogo ad inumazione o tumulazione di un cadavere senza la preventiva autorizzazione dell'ufficiale dello stato civile [...].
2. L'ufficiale dello stato civile non può accordare l'autorizzazione se non sono trascorse ventiquattro ore dalla morte.

Anche in altri Paesi l'esecuzione dell'inumazione è condizionata al decorrere di un certo numero di ore dal momento della morte: in Belgio 24 ore, nei Paesi Bassi 36. In questi ultimi però è ammessa una deroga, che nella prassi è diventata la regola (Kadrouch Outmany 2016, 97; Sonneveld, Conway 2024, 63, 67, 69). L'impossibilità di seppellire il defunto prima che siano trascorse ventiquattro ore dalla sua morte è forse il motivo per cui l'UCOII, nelle indicazioni in materia cimiteriale che ha pubblicato, non ha indicato l'arco temporale specifico entro il quale deve avvenire la sepoltura, analogamente a quanto sono soliti fare i giuristi, limitandosi a prevedere una generica rapidità: «il defunto deve essere seppellito nel minor tempo possibile» (UCOII 2020a, 2). Generico è anche il riferimento temporale contenuto nel facsimile di testamento cui prima si è fatto riferimento, nel quale il *de cuius* si limita a ordinare «che senza ritardo la mia salma venga [...] inumata» (*Il testamento musulmano* 2017, 22-3).

Una volta scavata la tomba, al suo interno deve esservi calata la salma, avvolta nei soli indumenti funebri, posta sul fianco destro e col viso rivolto verso Mecca (Lağna 1996, 8: 437, [8563]); non è previsto, quindi, il ricorso all'uso della bara:³² né il Profeta né la prima generazione di musulmani vi fecero infatti ricorso (Lağna

31 Ahaddour et al. 2017, 41; Burkhalter 1998, 63-4; Faguit 2020, 16; Fibbi, Maire 2011, 11-12; Leong et al. 2016, 772; Sheikh 1998, 139; Sonneveld, Conway 2024, 66-7.

32 I giuristi concordano unanimemente («ittifāq al-fuqahā'») che, fatta eccezione per i casi di bisogno («ḥāğa»), l'uso della bara è da considerarsi riprovevole («karāha») (al-Mawsū'a al-fiqhiyya 1983, 2: 119; al-Saḥibānī 2005, 47).

2007, 7: 300 [17883]);³³ essa può essere utilizzata però prima del seppellimento, per trasportarla per esempio nel luogo dove avverrà quest'ultimo (Lağna 1996, 8: 439 [4731]). Il mancato ricorso all'uso della bara costituisce un problema per i musulmani che vivono in Italia perché contrasta con l'art. 74 del D.P.R. nr. 285 del 1990 secondo cui «ogni cadavere destinato alla inumazione deve essere chiuso in cassa di legno».³⁴

Per la verità esso confligge con la legislazione di molti Paesi non islamici e questa è la ragione per cui alcuni dei musulmani che risiedono in America, in Australia e in Germania si sono rivolti alla Lağna affinché li illuminasse sulle modalità con le quali superare tale contrapposizione. Essa ha risposto che l'uso della bara è ammesso nei casi di forza maggiore, tra i quali rientra anche quello della residenza in un Paese nel quale sia in vigore una legge che ne obbliga all'uso,³⁵ purché essa sia rivolta verso Mecca; Dio, infatti, «non [...] ha imposto pesi gravosi nella religione» (Cor. 22, 78) e

33 Oltre che dalla *Sunna*, il mancato ricorso all'uso della bara discenderebbe, tra le altre cose, anche dal consenso (*iğmā'*) – che costituisce la terza fonte del diritto islamico – e dalla necessità di distinguersi dai cristiani (al-Mawsū'a al-fiqhiyya 1983, 2: 119; Lavoie 2011, 93; al-Saḥibānī 2005, 47).

34 Malgrado l'art. 74 di cui sopra, in Italia ci sarebbe la possibilità di ottenere l'inumazione senza cassa: nella circolare esplicativa del Ministero della Sanità nr. 10 del 31 luglio 1998, emessa nelle more di una organica revisione del D.P.R. 285 del 1990, è previsto, al punto 8 (Usanze funebri in reparti speciali entro i cimiteri) che «per le professioni religiose che lo prevedano espressamente, è consentita l'inumazione del cadavere avvolto unicamente in lenzuolo di cotone», fermo restando l'uso della bara per il trasporto della salma. La circolare è stata pubblicata sulla Gazzetta Ufficiale Serie Generale nr. 192 del 19 agosto 1998, ed è disponibile al seguente URL: <https://urly.it/3-325>. La portata di questa circolare però risulta dubbia nella misura in cui, relativamente alla parte che qui rileva, piuttosto che assolvere al compito di facilitare l'interpretazione delle disposizioni previste dal D.P.R. nr. 285 del 1990, le integra, prevedendo una disposizione *ex novo*, che essa non avrebbe il potere di disporre. I dubbi in merito all'effettiva portata di questa circolare sono, forse, la ragione per la quale in alcuni casi essa è stata recepita e in altri no; per esempio, nella convenzione che il comune di Bolzano ha stipulato nel 2012 con il Comitato Islamico di Bolzano si legge, all'art. 2, che «i defunti saranno deposti sul fondo dello scavo all'interno del feretro utilizzato per il trasporto al cimitero» (il testo della Convenzione può essere letto al seguente URL: https://urly.it/3_x9j). Ancora, nel verbale della Giunta comunale di Vicenza del 14 aprile 2017, relativo alla deliberazione concernente l'individuazione dell'area cimiteriale per la sepoltura di persone di religione musulmana, si legge che «le modalità di sepoltura convenute con i referenti della comunità islamica non sono in contrasto con la normativa vigente, in quanto le spoglie mortali dovranno essere deposte in idonea cassa di legno» (il verbale può essere consultato al seguente URL: https://urly.it/3_xd2).

35 Inoltre, l'obbligo di usare la bara non costituisce un motivo valido per trasportare la salma al Paese d'origine, soprattutto se nel luogo di residenza c'è un cimitero islamico. Lağna 1996, 8: 438-9 (3913).

non imporrà a nessuno un carico pesante più di quanto ognuno possa portare (Cor. 2, 286). (Lağna 1996, 7: 393-4 [21522]; 8: 431-2 [1705], 438-9 [3913])

L'uso della bara è dato per acquisito dall'UCOII, secondo cui

la salma avvolta nel kafan [cioè nel lenzuolo funebre] viene predisposta nella bara e prontamente sigillata. (UCOII 2020b, 4)

Analogamente, nel modello di testamento proposto da *Il Messaggero dell'Islam* si legge

Dispongo [...] che la mia salma, avvolta nel sudario, sia sepolta, senza cassa, in modo che non sia separata dalla terra, a meno che la legge locale prescriva inderogabilmente che la sepoltura avvenga in bara. (*Il testamento musulmano* 2017, 23-4)

Anche Nasser Hidouri/Nāṣir Ḥidūrī - tunisino, imam del centro islamico di San Marcellino (CE) - mette in evidenza che l'uso della bara non costituisce un problema, oggetto di discussione semmai è la sua posizione, che deve essere orientata verso Mecca (intervista del 24 aprile 2023).

Al fine di evidenziare che si tratti di una tomba è utile operare, col terreno, un rialzo dell'altezza di 20 cm. La tomba può essere segnalata anche apponendovi una pietra tombale o un pezzo di legno,³⁶ sui quali però non deve esserci scritto nulla.³⁷ La necessità di indicare l'esistenza della tomba è legata all'obbligo di non calpestarla e di non costruirci sopra³⁸ (Lağna 1996, 8: 384-5 [4009], 442 [868], 443 [5175]; Lağna 2007, 7: 234 [20529], 329-30 [15679]). Una volta interrata, la

36 Si vedano le foto poste a chiusura di questo articolo.

37 Tuttavia «è usanza portare delle piante e fiori da poggiare sopra la terra ove è sepolto il morto [...] apporre delle lapidi con i riferimenti della persona defunta» (UCOII 2020a, 2).

38 L'UCOII, invece, ritiene che il rialzo non debba superare i 30 cm e conferma che «la zona di sepoltura deve essere riconoscibile così da non permettere a nessuno di camminarci o stazionarci sopra» (UCOII 2020b, 2).

salma non può essere esumata, se non in casi eccezionali³⁹ (Lağna 1996, 8: 450 [4332]). Proprio per evitare l'esumazione, la Lağna ha ritenuto lecito il versamento di una quota, mensile o annuale, con la quale alcuni musulmani immigrati in occidente partecipavano alla costituzione di un fondo che avrebbe finanziato il rimpatrio delle loro salme nel Paese d'origine; questa soluzione permetteva loro da un lato di risparmiare (ritenevano che i costi di seppellimento nei Paesi occidentali fossero particolarmente gravosi), e dall'altro di evitare che i loro resti fossero dissepelliti dopo un certo numero di anni⁴⁰ e inceneriti, come ritenevano fosse solito avvenire in alcuni Paesi occidentali (Lağna 2007, 7: 397 [17940]).⁴¹ La perpetuità dell'inumazione mal si concilia con la disciplina generale in materia di trattamento delle salme e sepoltura: infatti, in base all'art. 82 del D.P.R. nr. 285 del 1990 «le esumazioni ordinarie si eseguono dopo un decennio dalla inumazione», una disposizione che è stata pensata per recuperare lo spazio necessario per procedere a nuovi seppellimenti; i dieci anni sono calcolati dalla sepoltura della salma che ha esaurito il campo inumazioni. Decorso questo termine occorrerà procedere all'esumazione (i resti saranno deposti nell'ossuario cimiteriale, che molto spesso è misto), a meno che non si provveda all'ampliamento del

39 Quando sussista un'importante utilità pubblica (*maṣlaḥa*) da conseguire, la cui individuazione è rimessa ai dotti. Il Mağlis, per esempio, nel 2004, su richiesta di alcuni musulmani in Danimarca, ha emesso una *fatwā* con la quale ha dichiarato lecita la costruzione di un cimitero su un terreno concesso da un comune con la condizione però che, successivamente, una parte sarebbe potuta divenire oggetto di espropriazione per la costruzione di una strada o altra opera ovvero per soddisfare un'utilità pubblica, una condizione che avrebbe implicato necessariamente l'esumazione delle salme seppellite nella parte del cimitero che potenzialmente sarebbe stata espropriata (Mağlis 2019, 268). Un'analisi dei casi per i quali i giuristi classici hanno ammesso l'esumazione è stata proposta da Abou Ramadan (2019, 226-35); si veda anche Kadrouch Outmany 2016, 99-100.

40 Il timore dell'esumazione continua a essere una delle principali ragioni per le quali molti musulmani in Europa preferiscono rimpatriare la salma verso i Paesi islamici di provenienza. In realtà, alcuni studi hanno messo in evidenza che non sempre in questi ultimi viene garantita la perpetuità dell'inumazione «it must be noted that in big cities in Morocco graves are cleared out after a long amount of time» (Ahaddour et al. 2017, 55); «the religious motive, which included burial in an Islamic cemetery without having to fear the graves would be emptied, was mentioned by Muslims from various ethnic backgrounds: Moroccan, Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian, and Sudanese. Although during my own fieldwork in Morocco, I was informed that graves there are indeed cleared out after an unspecified time, most of my respondents are still under the impression that graves in Morocco are granted for an unlimited period of time. The same was true of the Turkish respondents speaking of graves granted in perpetuity in Turkey that are in fact, also cleared out, especially in the larger cities» (Kadrouch Outmany 2016, 102).

41 Il tema dell'esumazione emerge, sia pur indirettamente, dal dibattito giuridico relativo allo spostamento della salma dopo che sia stata seppellita. È interessante notare che fra i tre casi per i quali la scuola giuridica *mālikita* ritiene lecito il trasferimento della salma, e dunque la sua esumazione, vi sia il desiderio della famiglia del compianto di averne le spoglie più vicino e per visitarne la tomba (al-Ğaziri 2005, 302-3).

campo.⁴² Diversa, invece, è la situazione nel caso in cui le inumazioni siano avvenute in un'area ricevuta in concessione, a titolo oneroso, e adibita a campo di inumazione (art. 90); tale concessione non può avere però una durata superiore a 99 anni, salvo rinnovo, che è a discrezione del comune (art. 92). La concessione rende quindi residuale l'ipotesi dell'esumazione, ma non la esclude del tutto, rimanendo ancorata alla volontà del comune di rinnovarla o meno. Per scongiurare quest'ultima occorrerebbe obbligare il comune al rinnovo automatico della concessione, obbligo previsto per esempio dall'art. 16, co. 4, della L. 8 marzo 1989 nr. 101 recante *Norme per la regolazione dei rapporti tra lo Stato e l'Unione delle Comunità ebraiche italiane* (Gianfreda 2020, 247),⁴³ una disposizione che certamente le comunità musulmane potrebbero inserire nel testo di una futura intesa con lo Stato.⁴⁴ Sull'inevitabile adattamento alla normativa vigente relativa ai tempi di inumazione ed esumazione si è chiaramente espressa l'UCOII. Essa, infatti, nel prototipo di convenzione che suggerisce alle comunità musulmane di stipulare con le amministrazioni locali in materia di sepoltura, prevede, al punto 5, che

il tempo di inumazione delle salme avrà durata conforme alla normativa vigente (attualmente 10 anni, al termine dei quali si procederà alle esumazioni). (UCOII 2020a, 3)

In questo stesso punto si chiede alle amministrazioni di riservare ai musulmani un ossuario o una fossa comune nei quali depositare i resti umani esumati. Il *Messaggero dell'Islam*, invece, nel facsimile di domanda da presentare alle autorità competenti al fine di ottenere uno spazio cimiteriale, offre una soluzione che potrebbe garantire la perpetuità dell'inumazione:

trascorso il tempo necessario alla completa mineralizzazione delle salme [ossia alla loro trasformazione in ossa], c'è un metodo

42 È quanto ha deliberato, per esempio, la Giunta comunale di Bologna del 23 marzo del 2021, che, a fronte del numero di morti causato dal COVID-19, ha ampliato la sezione islamica del cimitero di Borgo Panigale (la delibera può essere consultata al seguente URL: https://urly.it/3_x8s).

43 Anche per l'ebraismo, infatti, «exhumations are only exceptionally carried out, always with the permission of the rabbi» (Iwanowska, Rucińska 2024, 79).

44 È, in effetti, quanto è stato previsto nelle bozze d'intesa che negli anni Novanta del secolo scorso furono predisposte dall'AMI e dalla COREIS, cui si è fatto riferimento precedentemente. Le difficoltà che spesso i musulmani incontrano quando devono seppellire i loro correligionari nei Paesi non islamici sono state rappresentate in un bel cortometraggio del 2017 ambientato in Svizzera e intitolato *Facing Mecca*. Il regista è Jan-Erick Mack. Il trailer e la trama sono disponibili al seguente URL: <https://urly.it/3amjc>.

‘islamico’ per recuperare spazi per altre inumazioni, senza far uscire dalla terra le spoglie mortuali residue. (2017, 19)

Non viene però spiegato in cosa consista questo metodo. Esso, forse, si riferisce all’ipotesi, avanzata da alcuni musulmani, di seppellire la salma senza bara, avvolta solo nelle lenzuola funebri:

col lenzuolo, non essendoci la cassa dopo un po’ di anni, poi, come dire, lo puoi spostare poi il tutto in modo che ci sia spazio per altri. (Ferraro 2018, 89)

Dopo aver delineato il *come* deve essere seppellita la salma, passo ora ad analizzare il *dove* deve avvenire l’inumazione. In generale, non è difficile trovare spazio per l’esecuzione di quest’ultima, visto che ogni cimitero deve destinarvi una parte della propria area (art. 58 del D.P.R. nr. 258 del 1990). La questione, però, è se i musulmani debbano essere inumati in un cimitero che sia riservato a loro per intero (cimitero islamico), o se possano esserlo in una sezione loro dedicata all’interno di un cimitero non islamico (reparto speciale in un cimitero comunale) o, infine, se possano esserlo in qualunque posto, anche in un’area qualunque di un cimitero non islamico. Su questo punto la dottrina elaborata dalla Lağna è molto più rigida di quella del Mağlis. La Lağna, concordando col Mağlis, ha dichiarato che il defunto non deve essere spostato dal luogo in cui ne è avvenuta la morte, al punto che i parenti del/della defunto/a non sono obbligati ad attenersi alle indicazioni che questi/a ha lasciato nel suo testamento in merito al luogo nel quale vuole essere seppellito/a, quando questo è diverso da quello del decesso (Lağna 2007, 7: 246 [18230], 313 [20646]).⁴⁵ Essa, inoltre, ha più volte sottolineato che la salma non può essere spostata dal luogo del decesso per essere trasportata, per esempio, nel Paese di origine del defunto (Lağna 1996, 8: 451 [8909]). L’inumazione delle spoglie nel luogo del decesso è subordinata però all’esistenza nello stesso di un cimitero islamico: dai primordi dell’islam, i musulmani, per distinguersi da coloro che professano altre confessioni o che non ne professano alcuna, devono essere seppelliti in un cimitero che sia loro esclusivamente riservato.⁴⁶ I loro resti non possono essere

45 Sul dibattito giuridico islamico relativo alle disposizioni testamentarie con le quali il/la credente provvede a specificare il cimitero all’interno del quale vuole essere seppellito/a e dello spostamento della salma dal luogo del decesso che a tal fine si necessiti, si veda al-Saḥibānī 2005, 244-51.

46 Il divieto di seppellire i musulmani fra coloro che non lo sono discenderebbe anche dalla «punishment to which the latter are subject in their graves. If Muslims were to be buried next to them they would be harmed and disturbed by their proximity to this punishment» (Ahaddour et al. 2017, 35-6). Su questo punto si veda anche Aldeeb Abu Sahlieh 2002, 57-62.

inumati nemmeno nei cimiteri non islamici all'interno dei quali siano stati individuati dei campi, circoscritti e delimitati, da destinare alla sepoltura islamica (come succede in Italia nella maggior parte dei casi): tutto ciò che si trova tra le mura perimetrali di un cimitero è parte di esso, indipendentemente dalle divisioni interne che ne vengono operate. L'assenza nel luogo del decesso di un cimitero islamico determina l'obbligo di trasferire il morto presso la località nella quale esso invece è presente, ovvero in un Paese islamico; il trasferimento verso quest'ultimo è stato prescritto anche nel caso in cui la salma (in Germania) fosse destinata a un cimitero islamico, posto accanto a quello cristiano, per la sepoltura nel quale la famiglia del defunto aveva sottoscritto un contratto ventennale, rinnovabile per altri venti anni; in caso di mancato rinnovo o comunque allo scadere di quest'ultimo, la salma sarebbe stata esumata, per fare spazio ad altre, e i resti inceneriti. Per la Laḡna, la pregnanza del divieto del seppellimento dei musulmani nei cimiteri non islamici è tale da prescrivere l'esumazione nel caso in cui esso sia avvenuto.⁴⁷ È quanto ha affermato rispondendo a un immigrato musulmano in Canada, di origine algerina, il cui padre era morto in Francia e seppellito in un cimitero cristiano; lo ha ribadito in un altro responso nel quale ha risposto a un musulmano in Francia che aveva seppellito lì il padre, in un cimitero cristiano, malgrado questi, prima di morire, gli avesse chiesto di seppellirlo in Algeria, un desiderio che, al momento della morte, il figlio non riuscì a soddisfare perché non aveva i soldi necessari (Laḡna 1996, 7: 451 [8909], 453-4 [1841], 454 [3081], 455 [5377]; Laḡna 1996, 9: 6 [10508]; Laḡna 2007, 7: 391 [15267], 391-2 [16057], 393-4 [21522], 329 [19955]). Il Maḡlis ha elaborato una dottrina meno rigida.⁴⁸ Per esso, la regola è che il musulmano venga seppellito nel cimitero islamico del luogo dove è avvenuto il decesso, anche quando disti molto da quello di residenza e/o nascita. A rafforzamento della sua tesi, esso cita una tradizione profetica (*ḥadīṭ*) dalla quale emerge il merito attribuito a colui/colei che muore in una terra lontana da quella in cui è nato/a:

Un uomo morì a Medina, dove era nato; il Profeta pregò per lui e poi disse 'oh se fosse morto in un luogo diverso da quello in cui era nato'. Gli chiesero 'perché dici questo?'. Egli rispose 'se un uomo muore in un posto diverso da quello in cui è nato, in Paradiso gli sarà riservato uno spazio pari alla distanza che intercorre fra il luogo in cui è nato e quello in cui è morto'. (Al-Nasā'ī 2015, 258, *ḥadīṭ* nr. 1832)

⁴⁷ È quanto viene prescritto anche da alcuni giuristi mālikiti (Hussain 2024, 3, 5).

⁴⁸ Ho ricostruito la dottrina del Maḡlis a partire da Maḡlis 2020a (*fatāwā* nrr. 19 e 21 e la raccomandazione nr. 10), Maḡlis 2020b (*fatwā* nr. 34) e, infine, da Maḡlis 2019, 52-3.

Inoltre, in una decisione (*qarār*), la nr. 21, emessa nel 2000, il Mağlis si è espresso negativamente in merito al trasferimento delle salme nei Paesi d'origine dei defunti, considerandolo difficoltoso e comunque inutilmente dispendioso, ribadendo il suo *favor* per il seppellimento del cadavere nel luogo del decesso. Tra un cimitero islamico e uno non islamico, la famiglia dovrà seppellire il proprio compianto sempre nel primo, anche quando questi si trovi più lontano del secondo. La regola, infatti, è che visitare i cimiteri sia funzionale al benessere del visitatore, che da essa riceverà un monito e apprenderà una lezione, come confermato nella tradizione profetica

Ti ho ordinato di non visitare le tombe, ma ora ti raccomando di farlo perché rende il tuo cuore più tenero, ti fa lacrimare gli occhi e ti ricorda l'Aldilà.

In assenza di un cimitero riservato esclusivamente ai musulmani, questi ultimi potranno essere seppelliti in un cimitero non islamico all'interno del quale sia stato loro destinato uno spazio ben specifico e delimitato.⁴⁹ In assenza anche di quest'ultimo, i musulmani potranno essere seppelliti ovunque sia possibile, anche in uno spazio comune in un cimitero non islamico.⁵⁰ A causa dei pochissimi cimiteri/spazi cimiteriali islamici esistenti sul territorio, raramente i musulmani in Italia riescono a rispettare la regola del seppellimento nel luogo

49 In questi termini si è espressa anche l'UCOII: «Tra le caratteristiche del cimitero per i musulmani c'è quella della sua specificità: un'area ben delimitata e definita che deve essere completamente dedicata alla sepoltura dei soli musulmani, così da dare la possibilità ai membri della comunità di svolgere i riti della sepoltura e identificare facilmente l'area, oltre a raccogliersi in preghiera. In altri termini è necessario munirsi di un appezzamento di terra specifica solo per i defunti di fede islamica, o in alternativa una parte definita di un cimitero già esistente con una chiara separazione che sia visibile o riconoscibile, quanto meno dagli addetti ai lavori ed è per questo che si chiede una delle tre soluzioni: area separata, un cimitero per soli musulmani; area isolata, all'interno di un cimitero esistente e isolato rispetto agli altri spazi; area recintata, all'interno di un cimitero ma con divisori visibili» (2020, 1).

50 Negli stessi termini si è pronunciata anche l'Accademia internazionale del diritto islamico, lo ha fatto in una decisione, la nr. 23 (quesito nr. 4), emessa nell'adunanza che si è tenuta a 'Ammān dall'11 al 16 ottobre del 1986, nella quale ha statuito che, in caso di necessità («*ḍarūra*») è lecito («*ḡā'iz*») seppellire un musulmano in un cimitero non islamico (Qararāt s.d., 38). Dello stesso avviso è stato anche al-Qaraḍāwī, che a lungo è stato il presidente del Mağlis, in un responso intitolato *Dafn al-muslim fī maqbarah al-naṣārā/Il seppellimento del musulmano nel cimitero dei cristiani* (2001, 83-4). Una posizione analoga è stata espressa anche dalla Dār al-iftā' di Birmingham. Nel responso del 20 agosto del 2011, intitolato *Burial in Non-Muslim Cemeteries* [sic!], essa ha statuito che «A Muslim should be buried, if is possible in a Muslim cemetery. To bury a Muslim in a non-Muslim cemetery is Makruh [cioè riprovevole], especially if there is a Muslim cemetery already there. However, if there wasn't a Muslim cemetery available, and the family had no alternative but to bury him there, then this will not be Makruh» (Questo responso può essere letto al seguente URL: <https://urly.it/3ac77>). Si veda anche Albeeb Abu Sahlieh 2002, 56.

decesso o, in alternativa, in quello di residenza.⁵¹ Essi, infatti, avvenuta la morte, devono individuare il comune più vicino nel quale vi sia un cimitero/spazio cimiteriale islamico, che spesso si trova anche a centinaia di chilometri dal luogo del decesso/residenza, sperando che accetti di accogliere la salma, una decisione non scontata, che, costituendo una deroga al dettato dell'art. 50 del D.P.R. 218, deve essere autorizzata dal sindaco. Il numero estremamente esiguo dei cimiteri/spazi cimiteriali riservati ai credenti di fede islamica è la ragione per la quale molti musulmani in Italia, ma anche negli altri Paesi europei, sia pur in misura minore, optano per il rimpatrio della salma nel Paese d'origine, affinché venga lì seppellita. Le restrizioni agli spostamenti internazionali imposte dal COVID-19 hanno reso però impossibile continuare a ricorrere a questa pratica: con la pandemia molti musulmani si sono trovati da un lato a non poter seppellire i propri compianti nel Paese di residenza, a causa dell'assenza di cimiteri/spazi cimiteriali islamici, e dall'altro a non poterne spedire le spoglie nei Paesi d'origine, a causa dei limiti alla circolazione internazionale.⁵² Il Mağlis, tenendo conto di questa situazione, ha ribadito che, in assenza di cimiteri/spazi cimiteriali islamici, i defunti possono essere seppelliti là dove è possibile, anche in un cimitero non islamico. Esso ha fondato la sua decisione sul principio per il quale Dio non impone al credente più di quanto questi sia in grado di fare e su quello secondo cui nell'aldilà il credente verrà giudicato per le azioni compiute nel corso della sua vita e non per il luogo nel quale è stato seppellito. Il principio del rispetto delle regole islamiche in materia di seppellimento proporzionatamente alle concrete possibilità emerge anche dalle parole di Nasser Hidouri:

abbiamo sepolto un ragazzo nel cimitero [non islamico] di Casal di Principe [CE], proprio al centro del cimitero, era un tunisino [...] la religione non mette in difficoltà [...] facciamo quel che è possibile fare, pensando di riuscire a ottenere per il futuro un posto, come ce l'hanno gli ebrei, i buddisti, ecc. (Intervista del 28 aprile 2023)

Che i musulmani vengano talvolta seppelliti in cimiteri/spazi cimiteriali non islamici è stato confermato anche da Massimo Abdallah Cozzolino – segretario generale della Confederazione Islamica Italiana (CII), presidente della Federazione Islamica della Campania e responsabile dell'Associazione Culturale Islamica Zayd

51 Infatti, l'art. 50 del D.P.R. nr. 285 del 1990 dispone che «nei cimiteri devono essere ricevuti [...] a) i cadaveri delle persone morte nel territorio del comune, qualunque ne fosse in vita la residenza; b) i cadaveri delle persone morte fuori dal comune, ma aventi in esso, in vita, la residenza».

52 Sulla giurisprudenza islamica europea e italiana in materia di COVID-19, si veda De Angelo 2023.

Ibn Thabit-Moschea di Napoli/al-Ġam'iyya al-ṭaqāfiyya al-islāmiyya
Zayd bin Ṭābit:

nel cimitero di Marigliano, in provincia di Napoli, è stata ricavata un'area per il seppellimento degli acattolici all'interno della quale sono stati inumati anche alcuni musulmani, però non è stato possibile rispettare tutte le regole islamiche, soprattutto quella relativa al direzionamento della salma. (Intervista realizzata via zoom il 28 novembre 2023)

Il Mağlis ha più volte invitato i musulmani a intraprendere, nei limiti del possibile, tutte le azioni necessarie per ottenere nei Paesi nei quali vivono dei cimiteri/spazi cimiteriali loro riservati, così come è accaduto per i cristiani, gli ebrei e i pagani; questo contribuirebbe a migliorare la loro condizione e a meglio preservarne l'identità. Un'agenda che vale soprattutto per le nuove generazioni, che sono nate e cresciute nei Paesi europei nei quali risiedono, di cui hanno la cittadinanza, di cui si sentono parte integrante e nei quali vogliono dunque essere seppelliti, piuttosto che nei Paesi di provenienza dei genitori o, sempre più spesso, dei nonni.⁵³

All'orientamento dottrinale prodotto dalla Lağna e dal Mağlis rispetto al *dove* seppellire i musulmani se ne può aggiungere un altro, secondo cui: nei Paesi occidentali i deceduti musulmani devono essere inumati nei cimiteri islamici; in assenza di questi ultimi, essi devono essere obbligatoriamente («wuğūb^{an}») trasferiti nei Paesi islamici, purché le autorità di questi ultimi lo permettano, chi ne dovrà sostenere le spese sia in condizione di farlo e non si tema per la decomposizione del cadavere. Se nemmeno il trasferimento verso un Paese islamico è possibile, allora il seppellimento dovrà avvenire in un'area riservata ai musulmani individuata all'interno di un cimitero non islamico; in assenza di questa specifica area, l'inumazione potrà essere effettuata per ragioni di necessità in un cimitero non islamico (dei miscredenti, «kuffār»). In quest'ultimo caso, però, la precedenza deve essere data al cimitero cristiano, seguito da quello ebraico e solo infine a tutti gli altri (Al-Mawsū'a 2014, 77-8).

53 Secondo Aldeeb Abu Sahlieh, la richiesta dei musulmani di avere un proprio cimitero o dei propri spazi cimiteriali costituisce una prova del disprezzo («mépris») che essi nutrono per la società non islamica nella quale vivono e la mancata volontà di integrarvisi (Aldeeb Abu Sahlieh 2002, 43). Viceversa, Burkhalter vede in tale richiesta «non [...] une volonté de se fondre complètement dans la société, au sens d'assimilation, mais plutôt comme le désir d'être reconnu avec son identité propre» (Burkhalter 2001, 7).

3 Gli spazi cimiteriali islamici in Campania: prima mappatura

Dopo aver descritto alcuni orientamenti dottrinali islamici in merito al seppellimento delle salme in contesto non islamico, passo ora a illustrare la realtà campana.

Dai dati Istat del 2023 emerge che in Campania risiedono 251.996⁵⁴ stranieri, 81.646 dei quali musulmani, provenienti da quarantatré Paesi formalmente islamici.⁵⁵ A questi dati vanno aggiunti quelli relativi ai cittadini italiani di fede islamica, vale a dire gli stranieri musulmani che hanno acquisito la cittadinanza italiana e i cittadini nati italiani che si sono convertiti all'islam.

Del numero di questi ultimi è difficilissimo darne conto. A tal fine potrebbe essere utile esaminare i registri con i quali le moschee/sale di preghiera/centri islamici abitualmente tengono nota di coloro che si convertono presso le loro sedi, ma che per ragioni di privacy sono spesso inaccessibili. Questa pratica mi è stata confermata, in una conversazione informale, da uno degli imam di Napoli, Amar Abdallah/‘Ammār ‘Abdallāh, presso la cui sala di preghiera, ogni settimana, si convertono, in media, due-tre persone, molte delle quali giovani, sia straniere sia italiane, residenti in città come in altre parti della Regione.⁵⁶ La dichiarazione della testimonianza di fede/*šahāda* – «attesto che non c'è Dio al di fuori di Allāh e che Muḥammad è il suo Messaggero» – che segna il ritorno all'islam (conversione) di chi la effettua, viene eseguita due volte, una in forma privata (alla quale sono presenti esclusivamente il soggetto interessato, l'imam e due testimoni), l'altra in forma pubblica (se lo vuole, il/la neo-musulmano/a ripete l'attestazione di fede dinanzi ad altri membri della comunità). Queste conversioni, oltre a essere attestate

54 Questo e tutti i dati che seguono sono dell'Istat o elaborati da me a partire da questi ultimi, salvo diversamente indicato.

55 Ai fini del presente lavoro sono considerati islamici tutti quei Paesi che hanno aderito all'Organizzazione della Cooperazione Islamica. L'elenco di tali Stati è disponibile al seguente URL: https://urly.it/3z_24. L'appartenenza a un Paese islamico non equivale necessariamente a essere musulmani (in molti Paesi islamici vi sono infatti una o più minoranze religiose; in Nigeria, per esempio, poco meno della metà della popolazione è cristiana) o musulmani praticanti (il grado e la tipologia di adesione all'islam non sono gli stessi per tutti i musulmani: vi sono quelli che prediligono la dimensione prettamente spirituale, quelli che privilegiano il rispetto del «dato normativo», ecc.; si tratta di un fattore importante perché da esso discende la richiesta, avanzata alle istituzioni, di soddisfare alcuni bisogni religiosi piuttosto che altri o nessuno).

56 Secondo questo imam, «Napoli è la città con il numero più alto di convertiti all'islam» (Acampa 2018).

formalmente dall'iscrizione nel registro di cui sopra,⁵⁷ vengono spesso documentate anche informalmente ovvero filmando i neo-musulmani nel momento in cui pronunciano la *šahāda*, filmati che in alcuni casi vengono postati sulle pagine dei *social media* dei centri islamici. L'eventuale consultazione dei registri delle conversioni fornirebbe comunque un dato parziale: non è certo, infatti, che tutti i convertiti campani siano tornati all'islam in Campania, potrebbero averlo fatto in un'altra Regione o addirittura in un altro Paese; inoltre, non è detto che le conversioni avvengano necessariamente presso la/il moschea/sala di preghiera/centro islamico, molte avvengono in semplici abitazioni private alla presenza di due testimoni.

Sono invece disponibili i dati relativi agli stranieri musulmani residenti in Campania che hanno acquisito la cittadinanza italiana: fra il 2012 e il 2022, per esempio, sono diventati cittadini italiani 2.120 albanesi, 66 egiziani, 3.722 marocchini, 568 bengalesi e 310 pakistani. Molti di questi neoitaliani possono aver mantenuto anche la cittadinanza d'origine; dal 2004, infatti, l'acquisizione della cittadinanza italiana non è più subordinata alla rinuncia di quella di origine.⁵⁸ Ai fini del censimento, tra le due cittadinanze di cui il soggetto è in possesso prevale quella italiana (Istat 2011, 6), quindi tutti coloro che hanno acquisito la cittadinanza italiana, pur mantenendo quella originaria, non verranno più computati fra gli stranieri.

Se ai musulmani stranieri aggiungiamo quelli che hanno acquisito la cittadinanza italiana si arriva alla conclusione che in Campania vi dovrebbero essere almeno 88.432 credenti di fede islamica. L'uso del condizionale è d'obbligo perché questo numero non contempla i musulmani stranieri che hanno acquisito la cittadinanza italiana prima del 2012, così come i convertiti e quelli fra gli stranieri di fede islamica che sono presenti sul territorio clandestinamente.

Dai dati Istat è possibile ricavare anche il numero dei musulmani stranieri che sono deceduti in Campania;⁵⁹ mi sono limitato a calcolarli per il periodo compreso fra il 2010 e il 2021.⁶⁰ In dodici

57 La certificazione del ritorno all'islam mi è stata confermata da Karima Angiolina Campanelli - 69 anni, di origine romana, che ha a lungo vissuto a Napoli e che ora risiede a Benevento - il cui certificato di avvenuta conversione, risalente a più di venti anni fa, è stato rilasciato dalla Comunità islamica del Sud di Napoli, i cui locali si trovavano allora al Corso Arnaldo Lucci, ma che oggi hanno sede in via Spaventa. Intervista telefonica rilasciata il giorno 1.11.2023.

58 Sulla disciplina della cittadinanza si veda il testo, elaborato dal Servizio Studi della Camera dei Deputati, disponibile al seguente URL: https://urly.it/3z_6m.

59 Per i musulmani italiani non è possibile ricavare alcun dato perché i deceduti non sono censiti in base alla confessione religiosa professata.

60 Al momento della stesura di questo lavoro, i dati relativi alla mortalità degli stranieri successivi al 2021 non risultavano ancora disponibili.

anni sono morti 462 musulmani. La provincia col maggior numero di morti di fede islamica è stata Napoli, mentre la comunità cui appartiene il prevalente numero dei deceduti è quella marocchina (196 defunti).

Le domande che mi sono posto, e dalle quali è partita la mia ricerca,⁶¹ sono queste: dove sono stati seppelliti questi morti? Il loro seppellimento è stato conforme alle regole islamiche?

I primi due piccoli spazi cimiteriali islamici di cui sono venuto a conoscenza si trovano entrambi in provincia di Salerno, vale a dire nel Comune di Eboli e in quello di Campagna, la cui costituzione è legata essenzialmente all'intraprendenza e al diretto coinvolgimento di Fatiha Chakir, mediatrice linguistico-culturale e presidentessa dell'Associazione di Promozione Sociale Il mondo a colori - Lella Fatna.⁶²

Lella Fatna (1951-2017), una musulmana di origine marocchina che aveva acquisito la cittadinanza italiana, era la madre di Fatiha ed è alla sua morte che è collegata la vicenda della costituzione dello spazio cimiteriale islamico di Eboli, nel 2017. Nel mese di ottobre di quell'anno, infatti, la donna muore per un'improvvisa e fulminante malattia, che la porterà via dai suoi amati in soli diciotto giorni. Mentre il corpo della donna giaceva presso l'obitorio dell'ospedale di Battipaglia, Fatiha si rivolge al sindaco di Eboli (che in quel momento era Massimo Cariello), il Comune nel quale risiedeva la madre e dove, per legge, quest'ultima doveva essere sepolta. Il cimitero locale non aveva uno spazio destinato ai musulmani, ma uno per agli acattolici, dove di solito vengono seppelliti gli atei e coloro che non sono cristiani.⁶³ Le condizioni in cui versa quest'area, però, non sono tali da poter accogliere la salma di Fatna: questa parte del cimitero, infatti, per la sua destinazione, dovrebbe essere priva di simboli religiosi, nei fatti però risulta piena di croci che, i parenti dei defunti, non rispettando la volontà dei loro estinti, vi hanno insediato, facendole perdere in concreto quella neutralità religiosa che invece dovrebbe connotarla. Stando così le cose, diventa necessario individuare un altro spazio, un compito per adempiere al quale Fatiha chiede la consulenza dell'imam di Santa Cecilia (frazione di Eboli). Il posto trovato è costituito da una grande aiuola, della grandezza di circa 6-7 metri, che confina con il muro esterno di una delle uscite laterali

61 La ricerca è ancora in corso, quelli che seguono quindi sono necessariamente risultati parziali, che saranno ampliati nelle future pubblicazioni.

62 Le considerazioni che seguono si fondano sulle interviste telefoniche che Fatiha Chakir mi ha rilasciato il 23 novembre del 2023 e l'11 giugno del 2024.

63 Uno spazio analogo esiste anche nel cimitero del Comune di Salerno, all'interno del quale però il corpo di Fatna non poteva essere seppellito perché non era morta lì e nemmeno vi risiedeva. L'accesso sarebbe stato subordinato a un'ordinanza sindacale derogatoria, l'emissione della quale è rimessa alla discrezionalità del Sindaco.

del cimitero e il cui suolo rientra nella proprietà cimiteriale. Fatîha propone alle autorità comunali di dismettere l'aiuola e di destinarne il terreno alla sepoltura della madre ed eventualmente, per il futuro, a quella di altri musulmani (lo spazio è tale da poter accogliere le salme di tre adulti o di diversi bambini). Le autorità comunali accettano e rilasciano velocemente, insieme alla Azienda Sanitaria Locale competente, tutti i necessari permessi per procedere, da un lato, al seppellimento della salma (Fatîha non chiede la concessione dell'area, quindi l'inumazione dovrebbe avere la durata ordinaria di dieci anni) e, dall'altro, alla repentina costruzione dei tre muri che dovevano circoscrivere il terreno del futuro spazio cimiteriale islamico (il quarto esisteva già perché era quello del cimitero), uno dei quali con l'apertura che vi avrebbe garantito un accesso indipendente [figg. 1-2]. La salma viene trasportata sul posto e una parte della comunità marocchina, guidata da alcuni imam, esegue la preghiera funeraria, cui segue il seppellimento. Contemporaneamente e speditamente vengono svolti i lavori di muratura che però, ad avanzato stato di realizzazione, vengono bloccati dai carabinieri, dopo aver verificato che la ditta incaricata dei lavori mancava dei permessi necessari per svolgerli. Quest'ultima, infatti, dovendo realizzare una costruzione sul suolo cimiteriale, doveva essere ingaggiata dal Comune che, invece, ingenuamente o per incompetenza o per mera superficialità, delegò Fatîha e la sua famiglia a farlo, creando i presupposti per il sorgere di un abuso che è costato a Fatîha una multa, debitamente pagata, ma soprattutto l'impossibilità di completare i lavori (per es. l'area delimitata non è stata pavimentata [fig. 3], non è stato possibile creare una condotta per l'acqua ecc., la tomba non è stata completata - rimanendo senza lapide e il dovuto rialzo [fig. 4] -; l'unico intervento ammesso dall'Amministrazione è stato l'inserimento di un cancello che ha reso inaccessibile l'area, rendendola così più sicura ovvero sottraendola alle rappresaglie che non sembravano potersi escludere [fig. 2]) e di procedere ad altre sepolture, specie quelle di alcuni bambini che nel frattempo sono morti e le cui spoglie sono state mandate agli spazi cimiteriali islamici di Roma, Bari, ecc.. Da allora nulla è cambiato e non lo sarà fino a quando il Consiglio comunale non si pronuncerà in merito con un'apposita delibera; la speranza è che lo faccia nel più breve tempo possibile per permettere la sepoltura di altre salme, le poche che la dimensione dell'area permette di ospitare.⁶⁴

64 L'invecchiamento della popolazione musulmana locale (composta soprattutto da marocchini, il cui numero, dal 2019 in poi, è attestato intorno alle 1.700 unità) e la conseguente morte di una parte di essa renderà inevitabile la necessità di ampliare quest'area o di individuarne un'altra.



Figura 1 Spazio cimiteriale islamico. 2024. Eboli. © Autore

Meno complicate, invece, sono state le vicende che hanno portato, nell'estate del 2020, alla nascita dello spazio cimiteriale islamico di Campagna, la cui creazione è legata alla necessità di seppellire il/la figlio/a, morto/a poco dopo la nascita, di una coppia di marocchini musulmani residenti a Quadrivio (frazione di Campagna) da molti anni. La coppia ha il desiderio di seppellire il/la neonato/a presso il cimitero locale, così da poterne visitare regolarmente la tomba, piuttosto che inviarne la salma a Roma o a Bari o addirittura in Marocco. A tal fine, chiede aiuto a Fatìha, che, come aveva fatto nel caso della madre, si rivolge al sindaco del Comune di Campagna, carica allora ricoperta da Roberto Monaco, che si mostra disponibile e la rinvia all'ingegnere Antonio Savia, con l'aiuto del quale viene individuata una piccola area da adibire alla sepoltura islamica, fino a quel momento utilizzata come ricovero di una serie di utensili. Prima di procedere ai lavori che la creazione di questo spazio necessitava, il Comune di Campagna, sapientemente, chiede e ottiene da quello di Eboli la documentazione relativa alla costruzione della sua area cimiteriale islamica: per evitare l'errore compiuto a Eboli, è esso stesso che provvede a ingaggiare la ditta che deve costruire i muri necessari a delimitare l'area dove saranno ospitate le salme dei musulmani e a crearne l'ingresso indipendente, opere che verranno realizzate senza il sorgere di alcun problema. A costruzione ultimata e previo pagamento dei relativi oneri, l'area è stata data in concessione per 99 anni, rinnovabili, e può accogliere 3-4 salme di adulti, di più qualora si dovesse trattare di bambini. L'area è accessibile da un

cancello delle cui chiavi sono in possesso i genitori del/della piccolo/a defunta, l'imam di Campagna e Fatîha.⁶⁵



Figure 2-4
Spazio cimiteriale islamico. 2024. Eboli.
© Autore

L'indisponibilità dello spazio cimiteriale di Eboli ha spinto Fatîha a suggerire alle famiglie dei defunti musulmani di rivolgersi al Comune di Avellino, dove esiste un altro spazio cimiteriale islamico campano, quello più grande, inaugurato il 15 aprile del 2020, in occasione del seppellimento di 'Abd al-'Âlî, un marocchino di fede islamica residente a Montoro (AV), morto di COVID-19. Infatti, l'Amministrazione, «con un bel gesto di civiltà e attenzione»,⁶⁶ ha messo a disposizione della

65 Anche qui la popolazione musulmana locale è composta prevalentemente da marocchini, il cui numero, dal 2019 in poi, oscilla intorno alle 200/300 persone, che naturalmente non potranno essere accolte nello spazio cimiteriale ora disponibile, del quale quindi, col tempo, occorrerà prevedere l'ampliamento.

66 Gianluca Festa, Sindaco di Avellino dal 2019 al 2024. L'ho intervistato in presenza, presso i locali del Comune, il 6 maggio 2023.

comunità musulmana un'area circoscritta del cimitero comunale che si compone di quattro prati di forma rettangolare, circondati da alcuni vialetti; l'intero perimetro di ciascuno dei prati è delimitato da una siepe che funge da divisorio rispetto a tutto il resto; ogni campo è dotato di un autonomo ingresso [figg. 5-6]. Nell'area assegnata non c'è nessun simbolo religioso; fra i quattro campi, al centro, vi è solo un monumento che il Comune ha dedicato alle vittime del terremoto del 1980 [fig. 7]. La grandezza dei campi è tale da accogliere, complessivamente, venti salme, cinque delle quali sono state già seppellite [figg. 8-10]. Si tratta di cinque uomini, tre marocchini, un ghanese e un pakistano; tutti morti fra il 2020 e il 2022 a causa del Coronavirus. Nessuno di loro era residente presso il Comune di Avellino; due risiedevano in provincia di Avellino, gli altri tre nella provincia di Salerno e Napoli.⁶⁷ Delle cinque tombe presenti solo due sono corredate da lapidi [fig. 10]; negli altri tre casi la fossa è attestata dalla presenza di un semplice pezzo di legno e dal rialzo del terreno [figg. 8-9]. Sulla lapide di Radad Abddaim (1974-2020) vi è stata apposta anche la foto, in evidente contrasto con quella parte della dottrina secondo cui le immagini degli essere umani sono vietate [fig. 10].⁶⁸ Gli ulteriori quindici posti sono disponibili per volontà del Sindaco allora in carica (Gianluca Festa) che – dopo essere stato inondato di richieste di inumazioni provenienti da tutta la Campania e non solo, come era del resto facilmente prevedibile, considerata la penuria degli spazi cimiteriali islamici, emersa in tutta la sua drammaticità durante il periodo della pandemia – ha deciso di limitare la sepoltura solo ai residenti. Questa scelta è stata funzionale al perseguimento di tre obiettivi: 1. rispettare il D.P.R. 285 del 1990, secondo cui, come si è visto prima, il cimitero è riservato essenzialmente ai residenti; 2. evitare che i posti andassero tutti esauriti, lasciando la comunità musulmana comunale, seppur «trascurabile»,⁶⁹ senza spazio; 3. impedire che l'inumazione delle salme divenisse una forma di speculazione, che le imprese funerarie, ritenendo di poter approfittare della disponibilità del cimitero di Avellino di accogliere le salme dei musulmani provenienti anche da

67 Questi dati mi sono comunicati da uno dei dipendenti della società concessionaria dei servizi cimiteriali che si occupa della gestione del cimitero avellinese. L'intervista è avvenuta in presenza, presso il cimitero di Avellino, il 16 settembre 2023.

68 Sul fondamento del divieto delle immagini nell'islam si veda Naef 2009, 642-4. Secondo Karima Angiolina Campanelli la foto sulla lapide potrebbe indicare che alcuni musulmani starebbero facendo proprie alcune pratiche cristiane. Intervista telefonica effettuata il 1° novembre 2023.

69 Gianluca Festa, intervista del 6 maggio 2023. Gli immigrati musulmani che risiedono nel Comune di Avellino – e che appartengono alle cinque comunità musulmane straniere più corpose della Campania, ovvero albanese, bengalese, marocchina, nigeriana e pakistana – sono stati 172 nel 2020, 200 nel 2021, 185 nel 2022 e 203 nel 2023.

altre località, intercettassero la forte domanda di spazi cimiteriali islamici per aumentare i propri introiti: «Hai il morto? Dallo a me perché io ho dove seppellirlo».⁷⁰



Figure 5-6 Spazio cimiteriale islamico. 2024. Avellino. © Autore

70 Gianluca Festa, intervista del 6 maggio 2023.



Figure 7-10 Spazio cimiteriale islamico. 2024. Avellino. © Autore

L'area per le sepolture islamiche non è stata data in concessione, pertanto la durata delle inumazioni è quella ordinaria, dieci anni.

L'UCOII e la CII si sono contese la paternità dello spazio cimiteriale islamico avellinese. Il 15 aprile del 2020 l'UCOII pubblicò, in diretta, sulla sua pagina Facebook il video nel quale vennero riprese sia la tomba scavata per il primo defunto da inumare sia l'area destinata alle altre sepolture dei musulmani;⁷¹ nel testo, in italiano e in arabo, che accompagnava il video si sottolineava che quello di Avellino era il primo spazio cimiteriale in Campania⁷² e, solo nel testo italiano, si esprimeva

un ringraziamento speciale alla comunità locale, a Mbarek Nasri [imam del Centro islamico di Torchiati (frazione di Montoro), dove risiedeva il defunto] e a tutte le autorità che hanno collaborato con *noi*

lasciando intendere di aver svolto un ruolo di primo piano nella vicenda. La CII, invece, ha postato un video sul suo canale youtube, in arabo e in italiano, nel quale Mbarek Nasri ringrazia Massimiliano Abdallah Cozzolino perché

ultimamente abbiamo avuto, in questa epidemia qua, un deceduto nel nostro Comune e [Cozzolino] veramente ha dato un grande aiuto, lo ringraziamo di nuovo.⁷³

Nell'intervista che mi ha rilasciato, Cozzolino, pur riconoscendo la pressione che l'UCOII ha esercitato per l'apertura dello spazio cimiteriale avellinese, ne ascrive comunque la paternità alla Confederazione, in quota alla quale sarebbe Mbarek Nasri, un'affiliazione attestata dal fatto che si tratta di uno di quegli imam che, per conto della CII, ha ottenuto il nulla osta del Dipartimento dell'Amministrazione Penitenziaria (DAP) per fornire assistenza religiosa nelle carceri.

71 Il video può essere visionato al seguente URL: <https://urly.it/3-2n1>.

72 Non viene fatto nessun riferimento a Eboli che, non potendo per il momento accogliere nessuna salma, di fatto è come se non esistesse.

73 Il video può essere visionato al seguente URL: <https://urly.it/3-2n6>. La citazione è a l'32".

Nella provincia di Avellino, precisamente a Solofra, si trova un altro spazio cimiteriale.⁷⁴ Si tratta di una piccola area, «una sorta di giardinetto»,⁷⁵ di forma triangolare [fig. 18], in grado di accogliere diverse salme [figg. 11-12], che l'Amministrazione comunale, inizialmente in via informale (non era stata cioè stipulata alcuna convenzione), ha destinato esclusivamente alla sepoltura dei credenti di fede islamica, escludendo che vi possano essere inumati altri residenti non cristiani:

loro [cioè gli amministratori] mi hanno detto e assicurato che lo spazio è riservato solo ai musulmani, non ai non cristiani, ma ai musulmani.

La preoccupazione che le future Amministrazioni potessero eventualmente disattendere questo accordo verbale è il motivo per cui il mio informante si è adoperato per intraprendere le necessarie procedure affinché esso fosse formalizzato, una formalizzazione sul cui esito egli è era molto ottimista, considerati i buoni rapporti che intrattiene con gli Amministratori locali. L'ottimismo si è rivelato fondato: il 28 giugno del 2024, la Giunta Comunale ha deliberato accogliendo la richiesta per l'individuazione di uno spazio cimiteriale islamico che il mio informante aveva presentato solo due giorni prima. Nel processo di formalizzazione dello spazio cimiteriale solofrano non è stata coinvolta nessuna associazione islamica. L'area è circondata da molte cappelle dalle quali è separata grazie ai vialetti che ne consentono l'accesso [figg. 11-12]; in futuro, tuttavia, essa verrà delimitata da alcune siepi che verranno a tal fine piantate e per le quali Mustafà Bidaa ha già ottenuto il necessario permesso, impegnandosi a sostenerne le spese. Lo spazio cimiteriale solofrano è stato inaugurato nel 2020, quando Michele Vignola, sindaco che in quel momento era al suo secondo mandato consecutivo, acconsentì al seppellimento del corpo di una donna siriana morta quell'anno (Maha Tfenkji/Mahā al-Tafankǧī).⁷⁶ Prima di quel momento le salme dei musulmani deceduti che risiedevano nella cittadina, molti dei quali

74 Le notizie relative a questo spazio le ho ricavate dall'intervista telefonica che mi è stata concessa, il 12 giugno 2024, da Mustafà Bidaa (Muṣṭafā Bid'ah), figlio di uno dei deceduti che li hanno trovato sepoltura. Sono venuto a conoscenza di tale spazio e riuscito a entrare in contatto con Bidaa grazie alla Prof.ssa Maria Ines Avino (associata di lingua e letteratura araba presso l'Università degli Studi di Napoli «L'Orientale»), alla quale esprimo il mio più sincero ringraziamento. In effetti, se è vero che gli spazi cimiteriali islamici di Eboli, Campagna e Avellino sono stati oggetto di una discreta copertura mediatica, quanto meno a livello locale, rendendo nota la loro apertura, lo stesso non può dirsi per il caso di Solofra.

75 Le citazioni riportano le parole di Mustafà Bidaa.

76 A Solofra vive il maggior numero di siriani residenti nella provincia di Avellino, ovvero 51 (al 1° gennaio 2023).

siriani, venivano espatriate (per i siriani è stato possibile fino allo scoppio della guerra,⁷⁷ iniziata nel 2011) oppure inumati al cimitero di Roma. È proprio presso quest'ultimo che, nel 2009, fu seppellito Mustafâ M. Deeb/Muṣṭafâ Muḥammad Dîb, ovvero il marito di Maha Tfenkji, la cui salma, a seguito dell'apertura dello spazio cimiteriale solofrano, è stata esumata e lì trasferita (su richiesta dei figli),⁷⁸ dove è stata seppellita accanto a quella della moglie. La parte anteriore delle lapidi riporta le loro generalità in caratteri latini. A fianco delle generalità è posizionata la foto del defunto, in evidente contrasto con quella parte della dottrina secondo cui la raffigurazione degli esseri umani è illecita. Oltre alle scritte in caratteri latini ve ne sono alcune in arabo [fig. 13].



Figura 11 Spazio cimiteriale islamico. 2024. Solofra. © Autore

77 Mustafâ Bidaa mi ha detto che la Siria, come altri Paesi arabo-islamici, copriva i costi per il rimpatrio della salma.

78 Tre, residenti rispettivamente ad Avellino, Solofra e Istanbul. Spero, per il futuro, di riuscire a mettermi in contatto con loro per farmi raccontare più dettagliatamente le circostanze connesse alla sepoltura dei loro genitori, specie la questione dell'esumazione che, come si è visto, viene ammessa solo in casi eccezionali.

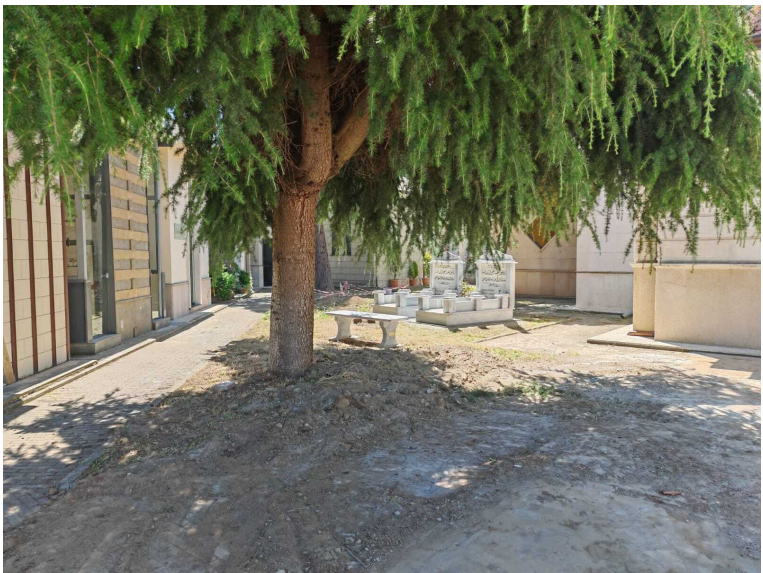


Figure 12-13 Spazio cimiteriale islamico. 2024. Solofra. © Autore

Oltre ai coniugi Dib, nello spazio cimiteriale solofrano sono state sepolte altre due persone, due uomini di origine siriana, entrambi residenti a Solofra e deceduti nel 2024.⁷⁹ Uno di essi è Khaled Bidaa/Ḥālid Bid'ah (1955-2024), il padre del mio informante. L'uomo, morto a 68 anni, risiedeva in Italia da cinquanta anni e aveva acquisito la cittadinanza italiana. Il seppellimento è avvenuto in presenza dell'imam della Comunità islamica di Napoli, Amar Abdallah. Il mio informante ci ha tenuto a sottolineare che la scelta di inumare il padre a Solofra non è legata alla difficoltà di rimpatriare la salma in Siria, quanto alla volontà di tenerla vicino, «perché noi [cioè i membri della famiglia] viviamo tutti qui». Il perimetro del punto specifico in cui Khaled è stato sepolto è momentaneamente contrassegnato da un nastro, per evitare che qualcuno lo calpesti; è stato altresì apposto un piccolo cartello con le sue generalità. Lo stesso è stato fatto per l'altro deceduto (Mohamed Ziad Rihawi/Muḥammad Ziyād Rihāwī, 1961-2024) [figg. 14-15]. Le lapidi saranno apposte non appena ne sarà ultimata la realizzazione: il mio informante ha inviato, alla ditta che ha ingaggiato per costruirle, le foto di quelle dei coniugi Dib affinché ne riproduca le fattezze e il colore, in maniera tale da conferire allo spazio cimiteriale una coerenza cromatica e stilistica. Il seppellimento e il trasporto delle salme sono stati eseguiti dalle onoranze funebri locali (Onoranze funebri Scarano), che si sono già occupate del trasporto di altri deceduti musulmani, per il quale provvedono a rimuovere dal mezzo funebre le croci di cui esso è normalmente attrezzato. Scarano si è occupato anche del manifesto funebre, caratterizzato dalla presenza della *basmala* [fig. 16]. Infine, Mustafā Bidaa mi ha informato del suo desiderio di acquistare un terreno confinante il cimitero, affinché, previa donazione al Comune, ne diventi la parte riservata esclusivamente alla sepoltura dei musulmani, alla quale possano accedere, fatta salva la preventiva e necessaria autorizzazione del Sindaco, anche i deceduti di fede islamica che risiedono nelle zone limitrofe prive degli spazi necessari per la loro inumazione [fig. 17].

79 Essi non quindi rientrano nel numero dei defunti calcolato per il periodo 2010-21.



Figure 14-15
Spazio cimiteriale islamico. 2024.
Solofra. © Autore



Figura 16
Necrologio di Khaled Bidaa.
© Onoranze funebri Scarano

È venuto a mancare

Khaled Bidaa

Ne danno il triste annuncio la moglie **Sawsan**,
i figli **Moustafa e Willy**, le figlie **Rachele, Siria, Sara, Soraia e Sedra**,
i fratelli, la nuora, i generi, i cognati, le cognate,
i nipoti ed i familiari tutti.

La sepoltura avrà luogo domani **Martedì 26 Marzo**
alle ore **11,00** presso il **Cimitero di Solofra**.

Si dispensa dalle visite a casa.

Solofra, 25 Marzo 2024

Onoranze Funebri
SCARANO
Seppellire con la massima cura e con la massima dignità



Figura 17 Spazio cimiteriale islamico. 2024. Solofra. © Autore

Non mi risulta, almeno per ora, l’esistenza di ulteriori spazi cimiteriali. A Napoli, la città col maggior numero di residenti di fede islamica, dalla fine degli anni Ottanta del secolo scorso i musulmani sistematicamente hanno avanzato al sindaco di turno un’istanza per ottenere un cimitero/spazio cimiteriale a loro riservato. La prima richiesta risale al 10 maggio del 1989,⁸⁰ quando Amar Abdallah, allora rappresentante della sezione napoletana dell’Unione degli Studenti Musulmani (al-Ittihād al-Ṭullāb al-Muslimīn fī Īṭālia), firmò una domanda, rivolta al

80 Di questa prima richiesta ne dà notizia anche Allievi (1993, 92).

Sindaco Lezzi, nella quale, in ragione del numero dei musulmani ormai residenti in città e delle specificità islamiche in materia funeraria (obbligo dell'inumazione, perpetuità di quest'ultima,⁸¹ direzionamento della salma/barra, ecc.), chiedeva la concessione di un'area cimiteriale; l'individuazione di un'area cimiteriale, e la conseguente possibilità di seppellire in loco i musulmani, avrebbe consentito di ovviare al problema dell'oneroso rimpatrio delle salme, il cui costo si aggirava intorno ai 5 milioni di lire.⁸² L'ultima richiesta risale, invece, al mese di settembre del 2011, durante il governo De Magistris, rivolta all'Assessore all'immigrazione Sergio D'Angelo.⁸³ Nel corso del duplice mandato di quest'ultimo il risultato al quale si è arrivati è stata l'individuazione di un'area da poter adibire a cimitero islamico, quella di via S. Maria del Pianto, a ridosso del cimitero ebraico, e lo sgombero della stessa; dopo di che la situazione si è arenata, sembra per ragioni economiche. Dalle diverse interviste che ho realizzato è emerso, infatti, che le varie associazioni islamiche non siano in grado di sostenere gli ingenti costi al pagamento dei quali il Comune ha subordinato la concessione dell'area in comodato d'uso. La mancata gratuità di quest'ultimo pare dipenda dal disavanzo economico in cui versava il Comune, che però è in fase di risanamento. Questo scenario sta inducendo i musulmani a trovare una alternativa, ovvero due diverse soluzioni, entrambe allo stato puramente embrionale. La prima, di cui mi hanno riferito Amar Abdallah, Abū Amīr⁸⁴ e Nasser Hidouri, consisterebbe nell'optare per la scelta, impossibile da realizzare, di creare un cimitero *ex novo* nel territorio del casertano, in un Comune che non è stato ancora individuato;⁸⁵ la seconda invece, di cui mi ha parlato Massimo Abdallah Cozzolino, consiste nel realizzare

81 La richiesta su questo punto viene mitigata in quelle successive: per esempio, in un documento del 1995 si legge che trascorsi cinquanta anni dall'inumazione, il terreno potrà essere utilizzato per nuovi interramenti; successivamente, in un altro documento non datato, gli anni passano a quaranta. Ringrazio Amar Abdallah per avermi permesso di consultare questi documenti.

82 Il riferimento alla questione del rimpatrio delle salme è contenuto nel documento del 13 maggio 1991, nel quale Amar Abdallah dichiara che presso il Secondo Policlinico (Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria - Federico II) ogni mese vi erano almeno tre defunti di fede islamica.

83 Nessuna richiesta invece è stata avanzata all'attuale Amministrazione, guidata dal sindaco Manfredi, come mi è stato confermato dalla vicesindaca, Laura Lieto, e dall'assessore alle politiche sociali, Luca Trapanese.

84 È l'imam della moschea della pace, sita in via Torino (Napoli).

85 L'impossibilità deriva dalla circostanza che le confessioni religiose «ai sensi della normativa civilistica vigente [...] possono essere concessionarie di aree, reparti speciali destinati alla sepoltura dei propri fedeli, ma mai istituire cimiteri privati»; infatti, «le innovazioni introdotte nell'ordinamento italiano a partire dal testo unico in materia sanitaria del 1934 e soprattutto con i successivi regolamenti di polizia mortuaria [...] il vigente nr. 285 del 1990, [...] hanno riguardato [...] l'impossibilità di edificare nuovi cimiteri [...] al di fuori dei cimiteri comunali» (Gianfreda 2020, 262, 270).

l'estensione di un cimitero già esistente nella provincia di Napoli, potenzialmente nel Comune di Sant'Antimo.

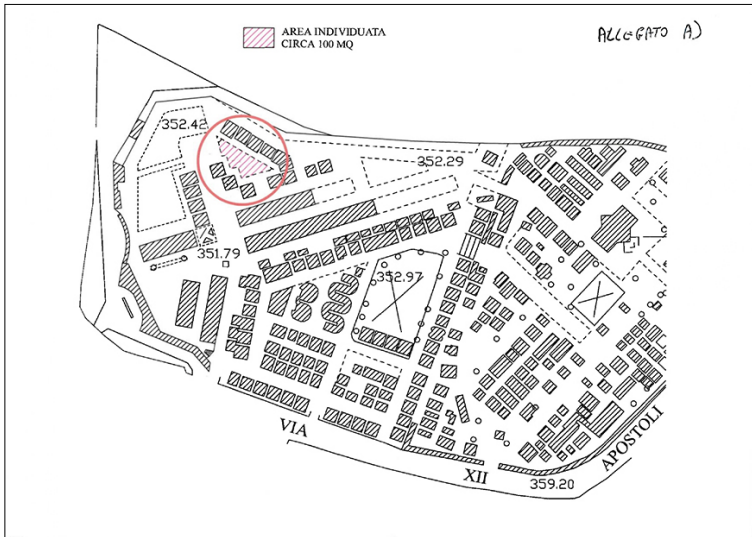


Figura 18 Planimetria del Cimitero di Solofra, 2024. Solofra.
© Allegato A della Delibera di Giunta n. 104 del 28-6-2004 della Città di Solofra (<https://urly.it/31bh2y>)

4 Conclusioni

Dal 2010 al 2021 in Campania sono morti 462 musulmani. Dalle ricerche che ho condotto è emerso che solo 9⁸⁶ di essi hanno trovato sepoltura negli unici quattro spazi cimiteriali islamici esistenti nella Regione, nei quali sono stati seppelliti nel rispetto della legislazione nazionale e locale vigente (uso della bara, decorso delle ventiquattro ore dal decesso, ecc.) e di alcune delle prescrizioni islamiche (separazione dai non musulmani, orientamento verso Mecca, ecc.). Dove sono tutti gli altri? Pochi, come si è visto, sono stati seppelliti negli spazi comuni dei cimiteri comunali o nelle aree di questi ultimi riservati agli acattolici; diversi hanno trovato sepoltura nei cimiteri islamici di Roma e Bari, ma la salma della stragrande maggioranza dei defunti è stata rimpatriata, suffragando i risultati di altri studi (Biano 2010; Rhazzali 2015; Sacchetti 2024). A confermarmelo

86 In realtà sono undici, ma due non possono essere conteggiati perché morti nel 2024 e quindi non rientrano nei dati ricavati dall'Istat che, al momento della stesura di questo lavoro, erano fermi al 2021.

sono state tutte le persone che ho intervistato, incluso Alessandro Trombetta, uno dei titolari della Funeral Home, l'agenzia di pompe funebri napoletana che costituisce un punto di riferimento per la gestione delle salme dei musulmani che vivono in Campania e non solo.⁸⁷ Lo è diventato perché, come ha evidenziato Cozzolino, ha intercettato le esigenze della comunità musulmana legate non solo al trasporto delle salme, ma anche relativamente agli spazi e ai mezzi che sono necessari per lo svolgimento dei riti funerari.⁸⁸ presso i locali della sua agenzia possono essere svolti, infatti, il lavaggio della salma, l'avvolgimento della stessa negli indumenti funebri e anche la preghiera funeraria, il tutto eseguito secondo le regole islamiche, con dignità e decoro, un risultato che, nella maggior parte dei casi, non può essere garantito dagli spazi rappresentati, per esempio, dagli obitori degli ospedali. Trombetta mi ha riferito che, in linea di massima, il rimpatrio delle salme avviene in sette giorni lavorativi; molto dipende però dalla cadenza settimanale dei voli per i Paesi verso i quali le spoglie sono dirette. In alcuni casi il corpo dei defunti non ha come destinazione il Paese d'origine, ma quello dove si trovano i parenti, che vogliono seppellirlo in un luogo a loro vicino; questa pratica sembra ricorrere, per esempio, fra gli afgani, il rimpatrio degli estinti dei quali è spesso diretto in Germania, come è successo, per esempio per alcune delle vittime del naufragio di Cutro. In alcuni casi, il rimpatrio della salma è finanziato dai soldi raccolti fra i credenti delle sale di preghiera che, generosamente, li donano a tal fine. In altri casi, poi, è il governo del Paese di origine a coprire tutte le spese del rimpatrio, come avviene nel caso dei tunisini, che però in Campania sono pochi. Infine, molti dei miei interlocutori mi

87 L'intervista si è svolta in presenza, presso la sede dell'agenzia funebre, il 28 aprile 2023.

88 I riti funerari non vengono svolti dai dipendenti dell'agenzia, ma dai/dalle musulmane, a seconda del sesso di appartenenza del defunto, che a tal fine vengono incaricati, quasi sempre a titolo gratuito, dalla famiglia o dagli imam dei vari centri islamici. Karima Angiolina Campanelli, per esempio, mi ha raccontato che poco dopo il suo ritorno all'islam fu inviata, a titolo gratuito, all'ospedale di Avellino per compiere il lavaggio e il *takfīn* di una giovane siriana lì deceduta (la regola, infatti, prescrive che chi compie il *gusl* e il *takfīn* deve essere dello stesso sesso della salma. Sui soggetti che, in contesto non islamico, eseguono i riti funebri, si veda Venhorst et al. 2013). Si trattava, verosimilmente, di Banan, una ventunenne che risiedeva a Solofra, morta nel 2005 per un'infezione post-parto. L'evento è stato riportato dalla stampa locale, in particolare in un articolo di Alfonso Raimo intitolato *Hola muore a 21 anni dopo il parto*. Non è chiaro il motivo per cui sia stato cambiato il nome della giovane sfortunata. Sono grato alla Prof. ssa Maria Ines Avino per avermi fornito una copia di questo articolo (purtroppo manca il nome della testata). La ragione per la quale i riti funerari devono essere eseguiti dai/dalle musulmani/e discende dalla loro natura, dalla circostanza cioè di costituire «a form of worship» (Hussain 2024, 3). Che questi riti debbano essere compiuti solo dai musulmani è esplicitamente previsto nel modello di testamento predisposto da *Il Messaggero dell'Islam*: «tutto questo [cioè i riti funerari] avrà da essere eseguito dai Musulmani» (2017, 23).

hanno riferito che, fino a qualche tempo fa, era prassi, soprattutto fra i marocchini, stipulare, nel Paese di origine, un'assicurazione finalizzata proprio a coprire i costi del rimpatrio della salma. La desuetudine di questa pratica, almeno secondo Nasser Hidouri, è da imputare probabilmente alla circostanza che spesso le banche e le società assicurative con le quali venivano stipulate le polizze sempre di più fossero solite allungare di proposito i tempi del rimpatrio della salma, adducendo lungaggini burocratiche, nella consapevolezza che le famiglie, sia la parte residente in Italia sia quella che si trovava in Marocco, desiderose di far ritornare la salma il prima possibile, non avrebbero aspettato, e si sarebbero rivolti ad altri per il trasporto del corpo, perdendo quindi i soldi versati per l'assicurazione.

Se è vero che il rimpatrio delle salme è indotto dall'assenza di cimiteri/spazi cimiteriali islamici è anche vero però, come ha chiaramente affermato Amar Abdallah, che molti musulmani che vivono in Campania, tra i quali la percentuale di quelli che appartengono alla prima generazione è ancora alta, vogliono essere seppelliti nel Paese d'origine, al quale evidentemente sono ancora legati, un legame che li induce a ignorare le indicazioni di senso opposto che sono state elaborate dai dotti, per i quali, come si è visto, il seppellimento deve avvenire nel luogo del decesso.⁸⁹ Questo sentimento di appartenenza, però, è destinato a venir meno tra coloro che fanno parte della seconda generazione, e ancor di più della terza, quelle nate e cresciute in Italia, che vorranno essere seppelliti nel loro Paese, l'Italia appunto, nel rispetto delle regole della religione di appartenenza, come è garantito dalla libertà religiosa riconosciuta dalla Costituzione italiana.

89 Lo stesso comportamento è stato riscontrato anche nella ricerca condotta fra i musulmani di Alessandria (Biano 2010).

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A Village on the Outskirts of the Ottoman Empire: Archaeological Research at Tell Zeyd

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Abstract This paper presents the most recent results from the research programme *Zeyd Archaeological Project*; launched in 2022, this project aims at exploring economy and society in the hinterland of the historical province of Mosul in the long Islamic period focusing on a highly representative site of the area, Tell Zeyd. Three seasons of archaeological research at the site have made it possible to put together a rich assemblage of data that illustrates settlement patterns and production at the village in the Ottoman period. This paper focuses on the evidence that emerged from the 2024 excavations, and, more specifically, on the occupation phases that can be ascribed to the Early Ottoman period (Period E), datable to around the sixteenth century.

Keywords Ottoman archaeology. Ottoman rural settlement. Ottoman pottery production. Ottoman economy. Ottoman history.

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Peer review

Submitted 2025-03-24
Accepted 2025-04-30
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Tonghini, C.; Boschini, J.; Palalidis, S.; Bangsborg Thuesen, M. (2025). "A Village on the Outskirts of the Ottoman Empire: Archaeological Research at Tell Zeyd". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 151-190.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/005

1 Zeyd Archaeological Project

Tell Zeyd is a site on the high eastern plains of the River Tigris, in the autonomous Kurdistan Region in northern Iraq [fig. 1].

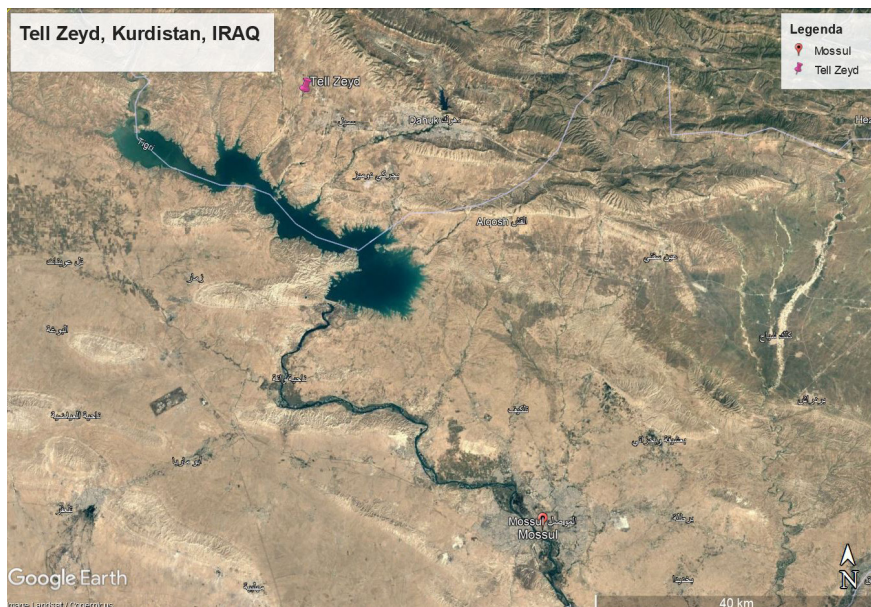


Figure 1 General map of northern Iraq, with the location of Tell Zeyd and Mosul. Google Earth.

The site comprises a tell and a lower mound, with a wadi flowing through its eastern outskirts; it is now surrounded by cultivated fields [fig. 2] and the closest settlement is the modern village of Marani, 2.3 km to the North, though two farms are located nearby.

The site was surveyed in the framework of the ‘Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project’ (LoNAP: Morandi Bonacossi, Iamoni 2015), and surface finds provided evidence of continuous occupation from the Late Chalcolithic until the Late Ottoman period (Morandi Bonacossi, Iamoni 2015; Morandi Bonacossi, Tonghini forthcoming). No structural remains are visible today, with the exception of those of a watermill between the wadi and the lower part of the site [fig. 3]; this structure is currently being studied to establish its chronology. The remains of another watermill are preserved on the opposite side of the wadi.



Figure 2 Tell Zeyd: general view, with the excavation area A.1; from the North-West. © ZAP



Figure 3 The watermill during excavations; from the East. © ZAP

Tell Zeyd is located in an area that played a primary role in agricultural production over several centuries. As to the Islamic period, the written texts state that the Umayyad Caliphs, with the establishment of the district of Mosul, were already making major

investments in the agriculture of the area at the end of the seventh century (Robinson 2000, 36-40 and 77-86), thus resuming its role as the 'granary of the empire' that characterised various phases of its long history. This role became even more crucial at the time of the Abbasid Caliphs, with the urban development of Iraq and the growth of its population.¹ The various waves of invasion from the East that affected these territories between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries may have resulted in a period of settlement decline and disruption of agricultural production (Ashtor 1976). In fact, texts mention various activities carried out by the Ottoman power in the sixteenth century to regenerate agricultural productivity, such as the reorganisation of land ownership and the restoration of abandoned watermills.² Despite its significance for the understanding of settlement patterns, agricultural economy and material culture of the long Islamic period, this area has been overlooked by archaeological research. Only in recent decades, thanks to several multi-period surveys, has its potential for understanding the complex history of northern Iraq emerged (Kopanias, MacGuinnis 2016). In the context of one of these multi-period regional studies, the 'Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project' (LoNAP), a specific research programme was established in 2016 to investigate the agricultural hinterland of Mosul in the long Islamic period. After a first phase of analysis of settlement, landscape and material culture based on the evidence gathered by LoNAP (Morandi Bonacossi, Tonghini forthcoming), and a specific study focused on watermills,³ research strategy led to the selection of a representative site to be further explored in-depth as an observatory on the rural world of the Mosul area in the long Islamic period.

In consideration of its location, its continuous occupation pattern and its role in the agricultural production of the area, as testified by the presence of a watermill, Tell Zeyd seemed to constitute the ideal sample.

Three field seasons of excavations have been carried out so far. Stratigraphic excavation has made it possible to gather a rich documentation that sheds light on occupation modes, crops and farming, local production activities, and material culture. Evidence explored so far can be associated with the Ottoman period, and can be ascribed to a period between the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The area selected for the excavation is located at the margins of the village, where surface finds suggested that production activities

1 Robinson 2000; Heidemann 2011; Kennedy 2011; Tonghini 2022.

2 Khoury 1997; Tonghini, Usta 2021; Usta, Tonghini 2023; Usta forthcoming.

3 Tonghini, Usta 2021; Usta, Tonghini 2023; Tonghini 2022.

may have taken place [fig. 4; see part 2]. Indeed, evidence for the production of clay pipes for smoking had already come to light in the first year of excavation, consisting especially in wasters and row material (Tonghini et al. 2022). Together with the consumption of coffee, the practice of smoking, since its introduction at the end of the sixteenth century, constituted a true social revolution that deeply modified habits, practices and the economy. Remains of clay pipes are often found on the surface of sites in the Kurdistan region and throughout the territories of the Ottoman empire. However, the cycle of manufacturing and distribution of clay pipes, as well as the specific chronology of the various types, is still poorly understood, especially in this area. Data from well-stratified archaeological contexts are indeed scarce. The finds from Tell Zeyd are providing evidence of the types of pipes in use in the region, organised in a chronological sequence thanks to stratigraphy and data on the manufacturing process.⁴

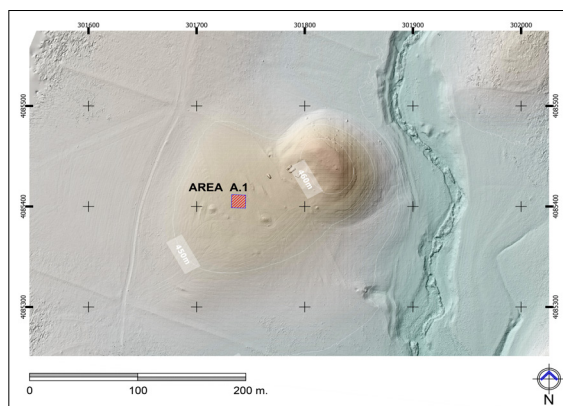


Figure 4
DSM of the site,
with location of Area 1
excavation; UAV
and topographic survey
and data processing
by Turin Polytechnic
(Lingua et al. 2023),
up-dated E. Reali. © ZAP

Study of the pottery is leading to the establishment of a typology, organised chronologically thanks to stratigraphy; for the first time, it will be possible not only to achieve a better understanding of the pottery in use in the Late Islamic period, i.e. the period that corresponds to the Ottoman rule of the area, but also to isolate three major phases within it: Early Ottoman (around the sixteenth

4 A first overview of the finds is offered in Tonghini et al. 2022. J. Boschini is currently studying the whole assemblage of clay pipes retrieved at Tell Zeyd for his PhD thesis at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Continuation of the excavations at Tell Zeyd will hopefully provide further data in the future, with the exploration of those areas where geo-magnetic surveying has identified traces of firing activity. The geomagnetic survey of Tell Zeyd was carried out by R. Deiana (University of Padua), together with M. Censini, and M. Pavoni (University of Padua) in 2024.

century), Middle Ottoman (seventeenth-eighteenth centuries) and Late Ottoman (nineteenth-early twentieth centuries).⁵ An overview of the pottery of the Early Ottoman period is offered below.

Ongoing analysis of the archaeobotanical remains is shedding light on the floral environment, crops and the agricultural economy.⁶ This study is a major component of the project, as a fundamental research question specifically aims to use material evidence to address the well-known theory of the Early Islamic 'Green Revolution' (Decker 2009; Watson 1981; 1983).

Ongoing analysis of the archaeo-zoological remains is illustrating the faunal environment and making it possible to identify farming strategies and diet practices.⁷

Historical research is also being carried out to supplement the archaeological data. This takes the written sources into account, but also uses oral interviews to shed light on the most recent periods.⁸ So far, the documentation collected specifically concerns the Ottoman period. Although data is extremely limited, the picture that emerges from the texts is that of a marginal area, thinly populated and frequented by nomadic tribes (Usta forthcoming); in this respect, the picture derived from archaeology is much richer and more complex (Part 2 below; Tonghini et al. 2022; Tonghini et al. forthcoming).

Since 2023, anthropological research is also being conducted to document traditional agricultural practices and production processes, and to gain a better understanding of the composition of today's society and its tribal heritage in the area.⁹

As to the toponym, a *TilZeyt* that may correspond to the site under study appears in the *tahrir defters* of Diyarbekir of H 937/1530-31 (Usta forthcoming); it is not possible at present to establish if this name derives from an Arabic toponym (i.e. the tell of Zeyd, for example) or if it represents the corruption of an ancient toponym that

5 A first overview of the pottery in use in the area in the Late and Middle Ottoman periods can be found in Tonghini et al. forthcoming.

6 R. Dal Martello (Ca' Foscari University of Venice) studied the archaeobotanical remains from the 2023 season, see Dal Martello in Tonghini et al. forthcoming. The remains from the 2022 season have been analysed by M. Jaquet for her MA thesis (2023-24), under the supervision of C. Pagnoux (CNRS, Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle) and C. Douché (University of Oxford): *Étude carpologique du site de Tell Zeyd*. A publication is currently in preparation. Archaeobotanical studies of the Tell Zeyd finds will continue thanks to cooperation that is being established between these institutions.

7 C. Minniti and Y. Naime, Sapienza University of Rome, are conducting the study of the faunal remains. A first publication on the 2022 and 2023 finds is currently in preparation.

8 O. Usta (University of Çanakkale) is working on the Ottoman sources; S. Siviero (Ca' Foscari University of Venice) on the texts in Arabic.

9 This research is being carried out by F. Vacchiano (Ca' Foscari University of Venice), in cooperation with the University of Dohuk, Department of Sociology.

goes back to the long pre-Islamic history of the site. It is hoped that the ongoing research on the pre-Ottoman written texts will provide further information in the future.

The present paper illustrates the results so far achieved in relation to the sequence of occupation of the site, with a focus on the evidence that pertains to the phases ascribed to Period E, corresponding to the Early Ottoman period, around the sixteenth century. The paper also presents the pottery from Period E and its contribution to the definition of pottery production in the Ottoman period, previously very poorly represented in the archaeological record and in publications.

Cristina Tonghini

2 The Occupation Sequence in Area 1¹⁰

This chapter presents an overview of the occupation sequence on the basis of the stratigraphic excavation of Area 1 at Tell Zeyd. The evidence concerning Periods A-D, already discussed in a previous paper (Tonghini et al. 2023; Tonghini et al. forthcoming), is summarised here and supplemented with new data that emerged from the 2024 excavations.¹¹ The evidence concerning Periods E and F, identified in the 2024 season, is presented together with a first interpretation.

A general chronological framework for the various Periods is also provided here. This is based on the relative sequence, on the dating of specific finds from available publications, such as clay smoking pipes and glazed wares, and on data from the study of written sources, integrated with information derived from oral interviews (Usta forthcoming).

Area 1 is located to the West of the tell, and measures 13 × 13 m [fig. 4]. The stratigraphic analysis and the interpretation of the evidence follow common archaeological practice: the stratigraphic units identified in the excavation are organized into a Harris diagram and subsequently grouped into individual activities or groups of activities; these are then organised into Phases and ascribed to

10 Periods A-D are discussed by J. Boschini, E-F by S. Palalidis. Excavation, stratigraphic analysis and interpretation is the joint work of both authors.

11 Two members of the Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage of Dohuk worked jointly with the Italian team at the excavation of the site: Tahsin Ahmad and Walat Ayub. The excavation was carried out with the help of 12 workers from the neighbouring villages: Sliman Habib, Saud Antar, Hawar Ahmad, Muhammad Ahmad, Zakariya Mohammad, Ayyub Mohammad, Omar Jama', Serbist Nazar, Husin Antar, Farman Hido, Abdallah Mohammad, Jiwar Ahmad; Sharhan Antar served as site guard for the duration of the field operations.

Periods (Carandini 1981). SUs are numbered in the course of the excavation and do not follow a specific order, while Phases are numbered in ascending order from the most recent to the earliest. Periods are indicated with the letters of the alphabet in a progressive sequence starting from the most recent period identified, and they will be renamed or numbered on completion of the excavation.

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2.1 Period A: Contemporary Agricultural Activity

Area 1 is located in an area that is today used for the cultivation of vegetables and cereals; Period A features a layer of ploughed soil approximately 15 cm deep that covers a compact layer with plough marks.

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2.2 Period B: Late Ottoman Village B (Twentieth Century)

The structural evidence of Period B consists of fragments of wall foundation composed of small and medium-sized stones; these remains have been extensively damaged by contemporary agricultural activities. In addition to the walls, which are mainly concentrated in the north-western and eastern areas, four bases of *tannurs* pertaining to Type 2¹² came to light in the western part, together with a platform composed of rubble and clay which may also have been used for installing *tannurs*. The disturbance caused by modern agricultural activities has critically affected this evidence; however, the presence of ovens and of the platform may be interpreted in relation to a domestic courtyard context.

Study of the Ottoman written texts and interviews carried out in the area make it possible to relate the abandonment of the village to the Simel massacre of 1933; this may therefore constitute the *terminus ante quem* for Period B (Tonghini et al. forthcoming).

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12 For a description of the types of *tannurs* identified at Tell Zeyd, see Tonghini et al. forthcoming.

2.3 Period C: Late Ottoman Village C (Nineteenth Century)

Several structural remains have been ascribed to Period C, a period when the village seems to have flourished. The corner of a building with a series of ten *tannurs* was brought to light near the eastern edge of the excavated area [fig. 5];¹³ this building has been interpreted as a bakery with a high production rate, which may have been used by the entire village. Six more *tannurs* came to light at the centre of Area 1, their features suggesting that they may have been used for cooking food. A further Type 1 *tannur* emerged in the north-west corner of Area 1; this was surrounded by stone and *tannur* fragments, very likely to provide insulation. This structure was stratigraphically connected to an earthen floor extending towards the north-west. This context has been interpreted as part of a workshop producing clay pipes for smoking because of the presence of raw material fragments and numerous pipes, including unfinished and faulty specimens (Tonghini et al. 2023).

Study of the archaeobotanical remains from this Period has provided significant data. Evidence for the cultivation of barley and wheat was identified, as well as for other species with economic value, such as tobacco, cotton and numerous fruit species.

All these data, integrated with those emerging from the study of the historical sources (Usta forthcoming), make it possible to interpret Period C as a time of intense production activity in the village. In consideration of the stratigraphy (i.e. it pre-dates Period B of the early twentieth century) and of the presence of specific types of clay pipes and pottery, a nineteenth century dating has been proposed for Period C.

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13 Eight of these belong to Type 1 as defined at Tell Zeyd, and two to Type 2: Palalidis in Tonghini et al. forthcoming.



Figure 5 Group of *tannurs* interpreted as a bakery in Period C. © ZAP

2.4 Period D: Settlement Contraction/Abandonment and Nomadic Occupation (Eighteenth-Seventeenth Century)

A total of twelve phases have been ascribed to Period D; of these, six phases can be interpreted as abandonment contexts (Phases 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15) which alternate with six phases of site frequentation (Phases 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16). The phases of abandonment are characterised by the absence of structural archaeological evidence; a strong element for this interpretation is provided by the archaeobotanical remains, which consist of wild flora specimens only, indicating the absence of agricultural activities and of stable human occupation (Tonghini et al. forthcoming).

As to the phases of occupation or frequentation of the site in Period D, they are characterised by the large number of pits and by poorly preserved and very fragmented wall remains. Most of the pits show similar features: a diameter of between 1 m-1.90 m

and a depth varying between 20-60 cm, a filling with a cinerous-sandy matrix rich in plant remains, few finds of ceramics and other materials, and the presence at the bottom of a whitish layer formed by plant remains. These characteristics led to the identification of these archaeological features as pits for the storage of goods by the nomadic populations that frequented the site. An exception to this is P16 (SU 1141), composed of layers of black combusted plant remains alternating with layers of red clay and sand and containing ceramic and bone fragments. This pit type can thus be interpreted as a waste pit used by the inhabitants, as is the case at other sites in the vicinity (Conti, Fiorina 1997).

In the most recent Phase 6, three pits (P1ZD22 - SU 149; P3ZD22 - SU 151; P1 - SU 1084) and a fragment of a small stone wall foundation (SU 133) came to light.

Lower in the sequence, in Phase 8, seven pits were found (P2ZD22 - SU 143; P2 - SU 1090; P3 - SU 1094; P4 - SU 1091; P5 - SU 1093; P6 - 1096; P7 - SU 1099); it is in this phase that the waste pit mentioned above (P16 - SU 1141) came to light. The remains of another poorly preserved wall foundation in stone were also found (SU 1105).

In Phase 10 a series of ten pits was identified (P4ZD22 - SU 154; P5ZD22 - SU 156; P6ZD22 - SU 158; P7ZD22 - SU 160; P8 - SU 1117; P9 - SU 1116; P10 - SU 1119; P11 - SUs 1120, 1121, 1125, 1126; P12 - SU 1124; P13 - 1131), scattered throughout Area 1. Four fragments of wall foundation also came to light (SU 1106; SU 1107; SU 1110; SU 1129), together with a Type 1 *tannur* oven for baking bread (T17 - SU 1101). The higher concentration of structural remains, especially if compared to the later Phases 6 and 8, may indicate that frequentation of the site was more regular and extended over time in Phase 10 than in the others, and the possibility of the presence of a settled community at this time cannot be ruled out.

Proceeding downwards to Phase 12, three pits (P14 - SU 1134; P15 - SU 1136; P18 - SUs 1148, 1150) and two very damaged wall fragments (SUs 161, 162) were identified in the western part of Area 1.

Seventeen pits (P17 - SU 1143; P19 - SU 1140; P20 - SU 1152; P21 - SU 1154; P22 - SU 1157; P23 - SU 1159; P24 - SU 1161; P25 - SU 1163; P26 - SU 1165; P27 - SU 1167; P28 - SU 1169; P29 - SU 1176; P30 - SU 1177; P31 - SU 1179; P32 - SU 1181; P33 - SU 1183; P34 - SU 1187) came to light in Phase 14 [fig. 6], constituting the highest concentration identified so far in a phase in Area 1. The large number of pits and the absence of structures in this phase, suggests a more frequent but less stable phase of occupation of the area. The earliest phase of Period D, Phase 16, presents only three pits (P35 - SU 1193; P36 - SU 1195; P37 - SU 1198) and four badly preserved wall fragments (SUs 1103, 1109, 1170, 1171). Wall SU 1103 is preserved to a height of three courses and is built in two parallel lines of stones. It is located

at the eastern border of Area 1, but, like the rest of the wall evidence from this period, it is poorly preserved. Probably the village did not disappear completely in this phase but underwent a contraction.

The stratigraphic interpretation of period D is extremely complex due to the numerous pits that disrupt the sequence, and to the extremely deteriorated state of the few wall fragments that were identified. However, the picture that emerges from the evidence summarised above depicts a situation of regular frequentation of the site by nomadic communities. Study of the archaeobotanical remains from Period D revealed the presence of abundant vegetable waste, probably used to feed herds, and animal dung (Dal Martello in Tonghini et al. forthcoming). In this period, animal husbandry rather than agriculture very likely prevailed among the communities frequenting or occupying Tell Zeyd. These data match those provided by the study of the written sources that describe a long phase of intense regional instability, with the abandonment of sedentary occupation in favour of nomadism (Usta forthcoming). Although the existence of a much-reduced stable population cannot entirely be ruled out, most of the evidence can be interpreted in relation to a seasonal frequentation, with temporary structures and the creation of storage pits. Tell Zeyd was very likely transformed into a nomadic transhumance stopping point in Period D. As to absolute date, this is based on the relative sequence, and on the chronology of some clay pipes and specific glazed wares (Tonghini et al. forthcoming).

Jacopo Boschini

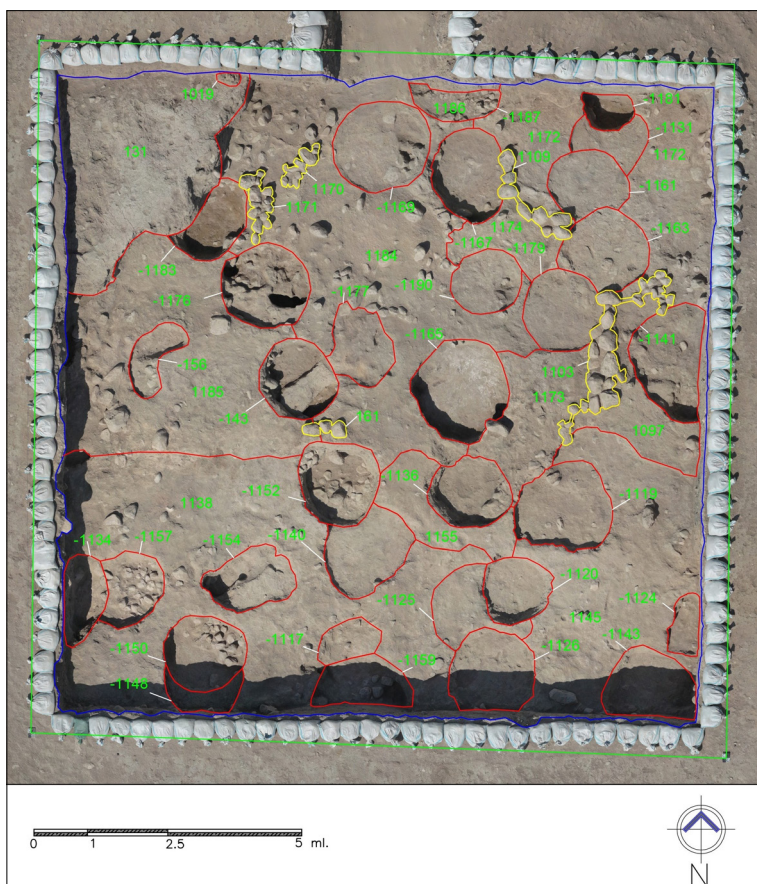


Figure 6 Orthomosaic of Area 1 at Tell Zeyd documenting Period D, Phase 14 (16/09/2024). © ZAP

2.5 Period E: Early Ottoman Occupation (Sixteenth Century)

A phase of abandonment (Phase 17) separates the predominant nomadic activities of Period D from a series of production structures and installations in Phases 18-21 that can be interpreted in terms of a sedentary occupation of the site, designated as Period E. Stratigraphy and contextual finds, especially pottery and clay pipes (Part 3 below), suggest that this period should be ascribed to the sixteenth century, and that it can therefore be interpreted as the earliest Ottoman village of Tell Zeyd.

A large trapezoidal structure (S1) has been partially uncovered along the northern border of the excavation, oriented north-northeast-south-southwest and extending beyond the northern edge

of the excavation area [fig. 7]. The southern wall, which has been fully excavated, measures 4 m in length; the longer of the two orthogonal walls exceeds 2 m in length, but they both extend beyond the northern edge of the excavation site. A wall consisting of a foundation in stone (SU 1188) and a superstructure in pisé (SU 1200) appears on the eastern side of structure S1; the portion in pisé is preserved to a height of 30 cm, and it is coated with a 2 cm-thick layer of reddish plaster on both the internal and external surfaces; the foundation is composed of one course of a double-faced wall made of unworked stone measuring 20-40 cm. Collapsed and weathered remains of the pisé walls have been documented inside (SU 1199) and outside (SU 1208) the structure S1.



Figure 7 Trapezoidal structure (S1) by the northern border of the excavation. © ZAP

Artefacts recovered from the interior of this building include a small quantity of iron slag, iron nails and tacks, and fragments of ceramic vessels with a thick layer of bitumen that can be interpreted either as an unusually heavy coating or production-related residues. These finds suggest that the structure was used primarily for manufacturing activities rather than for domestic purposes.

To clarify the stratigraphy of the archaeological deposit, a 6 × 6 m square trench was opened in the south-eastern sector of Area 1 [fig. 8].

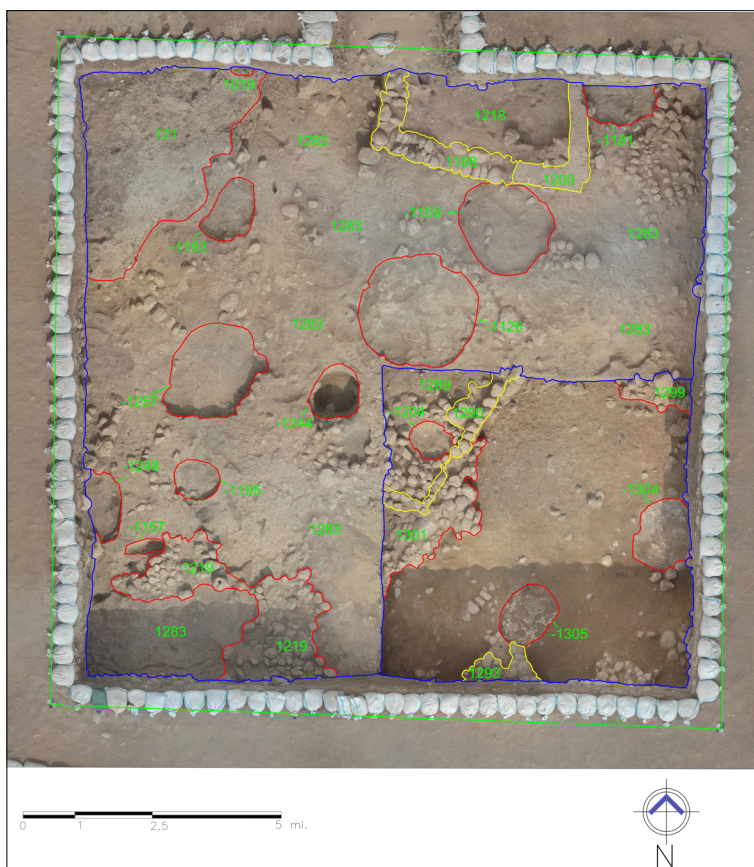


Figure 8 Orthomosaic of Area 1 at Tell Zeyd documenting Period E and sounding trench opened in the south-eastern sector documenting Period F (17/10/2024). © ZAP

A second rectangular structure (S2) was partially uncovered in the centre of Area 1. Only one corner, formed by two single-face stone foundation walls (SU 1290), has so far been brought to light and fully excavated within this smaller trench; the rest of this structure will be investigated during the next field season. Structure S2 is oriented northeast-southwest, with the longer wall measuring 3 m and the shorter wall approximately 1 m.

A large clay furnace (T19 - SU 1203) came to light in the southern corner of structure S2 [fig. 9]. This oven was 70 cm in diameter at the base, narrowing to 60 cm at the top, and 70 cm high. This installation displayed structural features that suggest it may have functioned as a furnace or bloomery (Tylecote 1992, 48-9). Its thick walls, ranging from 12 to 21 cm, were externally coated with small stones, very

likely to improve insulation. Four holes, 8-10 cm in diameter, were identified in the southern, western, and north-western walls of the oven. However, their irregularity leaves it unclear whether they served as tuyere holes for bellowing or were created by animals. No openings for cleaning, fuelling, or ventilation were identified at the base of the oven; it should be noted, however, that a significant portion of the eastern wall had been destroyed by a storage pit (P15 - SU 1136) dug after the village was abandoned. The contents of the oven included ashes, other residues from combustion, and a thick layer of burnt animal bones at the bottom; no slag or other artefacts were found to indicate a specific type of production.



Figure 9 Large clay oven or furnace (T19) inside structure S2. © ZAP

Due to their value, blooms are rarely recovered, and iron slag is generally removed from the bloomery during the cleaning process.¹⁴ However, the presence of slag, and possibly some blooms, is well-documented at Tell Zeyd across all layers attributed to Period E, suggesting that iron smelting activities were conducted at the site.

A series of ten ovens were installed in the central and northern sectors of Area 1, near the two structures S1 and S2 (T18 - SU 1190; T20 - SU 1206; T21 - SU 1212; T22 - SU 1223; T24 - SU 1233; T25 - SU 1254; T26 - SU 1263; T27 - SU 1266; T28 - SU 1269). Many of these

14 Voroshilov, Voroshilova 2023, 94-105; Burja, Batič, Pavlovič 2024, 3920.

ovens were constructed on the partially razed remains of earlier installations.

Eight of the ovens (T20, T22, T23, T24, T25, T26, T27, and T28) were thin-walled (1.5-3 cm thick), larger in size (50-65 cm in diameter, 40 cm in height), and correspond to the Type 1 *tannurs* identified in the later Phases 2 and 4 (Tonghini et al. forthcoming). In contrast, two ovens (T18 and T21) were thick-walled (6-8 cm thick) and smaller in size (40-45 cm in diameter, 25-30 cm in height). These represent a distinct typology not previously attested at Tell Zeyd and were possibly used for cooking food.

The effect of pastoral nomadic groups excavating seasonal storage pits during several phases also disturbed the layers of the Period E village. A total of 18 empty storage pits, often characterized by a white organic layer at the bottom, came to light within these phases throughout the entire excavation area (P38 - SU 1215; P39 - SU 1217; P40 - SU 1221; P41 - SU 1226; P42 - SU 1231; P43 - SU 1242; P44 - SU 1244; P45 - SU 1246; P46 - SU 1248; P47 - SU 1252; P48 - SU 1257; P49 - SU 1259; P50 - SU 1261; P51 - SU 1272; P52 - SU 1275; P53 - SU 1277; P54 - SU 1279; P55 - SU 1285).

The excavation of these pits, combined with the removal of stones from abandoned structures, caused significant damage to several architectural features. This includes the southern and eastern walls of the northern structure S1 (SUs 1188 and 1200), the central section of the middle structure (SU 1290) and the eastern wall of the furnace (T19 - SU 1203).

Pit 56, by the southern excavation border, in the south-eastern sector of Area 1 (SU 1295), seems to represent a different type; in fact, besides the white organic layer at the bottom, as found in the other pits, it contained a rich assemblage of large, fragmented vessels and 48 iron tacks; it may therefore be interpreted as a garbage pit.

The evidence from Period E can be interpreted as indicating both domestic and industrial activities. Food production appears to have played a central role in this period, as shown by the concentration of *tannurs* and cooking installations around the two structures S1 and S2. Numerous basalt quern-stone fragments, used for grinding grain, also came to light and give support to this interpretation. Moreover, several fragments of small table legs were recovered from Period E [fig. 10a]; these small tables are made of a kind of coarse stucco composition, characterised by coarse sand inclusions, and were used for rolling out bread during the process of preparation; they are well represented in the folklore museums of the area, in Dohuk and al-Qosh.

Evidence of production related to metallurgy also came to light. Together with quantities of metal slag [fig. 10b], several stone pestles and mortars were found. In consideration of their size (30-40 cm), they seem more suitable for metallurgical activities rather than

food processing. Indeed, one of the initial steps in ore preparation involves crushing and grinding the raw material to reduce it to smaller particles, so as to facilitate the separation of metal before smelting.¹⁵ While the interpretation of oven T19 as a furnace or bloomery remains uncertain due to the lack of clear production traces in its contents and the ambiguous nature of some structural features, the abundance of iron slag from this period strongly indicates that metallurgical activities were conducted at the site, in installations yet to be identified.

A total of 164 short iron tacks, characterized by domed heads and short nails, were recovered [fig. 10c]. In some cases, these tacks were found in clusters within pit contents. Their presence could suggest local production of these items or, at the very least, indicate the widespread use of artefacts requiring leather or textiles to be fixed to a frame with tacks. Unfortunately, no primary depositions of the iron tacks were documented at Tell Zeyd, making it impossible to determine the shape or nature of the perishable objects to which they were once attached.

Finally, several pottery fragments from Period E had a thick layer of bitumen on their internal surface [fig. 10d]. Bitumen, which has been extracted and traded in the region since prehistory, was commonly used as an adhesive, building mortar, waterproof coating for vessels, and as a sealant.¹⁶ As some fragments from large vessels show traces of fire, and in consideration of the amount of bitumen, the possibility that these may have been used for melting bitumen into liquid form or for producing bitumen mastic must be taken into consideration (Schwartz, Hollander 2000, 85-8).

Stefano Palalidis

15 Haaland 2004, 4-9; Jemkur 2004, 41; Fluzin 2004, 66; Thiele 2010, 100-1.

16 Connan 1999, 34-8; Connan, Van de Velde 2010, 2-3; Breu et al. 2019.

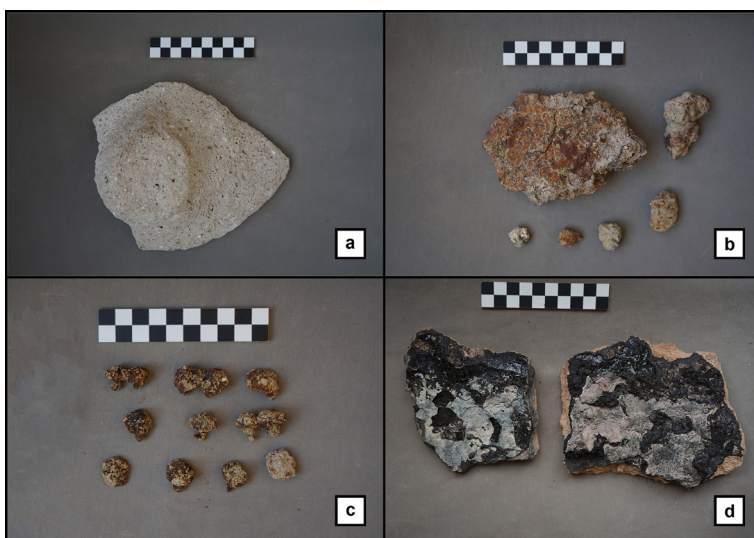


Figure 10 Selected finds from the 2024 excavations at Tell Zeyd: a) leg fragment of small stucco table for rolling out bread (SU 1300); b) iron slags (SU 1300); c) iron tacks (SU 1296); d) potsherds showing a thick layer of bitumen on their internal surface (SU 1188). © ZAP

2.6 Period F: Pre-Ottoman period (Fifteenth c. and Earlier)

The final phase excavated during the 2024 excavation campaign (Phase 22) consists of several layers of accumulation (SUs 1291, 1294, 1297, 1300, and 1301), two short wall fragments (SUs 1298 and 1306), and two additional storage pits (P57 - SU 1304; P58 - SU 1305), all predating Period E. These layers seem to indicate a period of abandonment that only the continuation of the excavations will make it possible to define.

Stefano Palalidis

3 The Pottery

3.1 Introduction

Archaeological research into the long Islamic period in the region is impeded by the paucity of reliable research tools, such as a regional chrono-typology of reference for pottery production. This stems in part from the scarcity of excavations carried out so far into Islamic period deposits in Iraqi Kurdistan; the numerous survey projects that have been carried out in this region in the last decade have attracted attention to this problem, and have tried to establish a preliminary framework for pottery production in order to date settlement in broad terms.¹⁷ Some periods, such as the Early Islamic, are better known than others in terms of pottery indicators, while diagnostics for the long Ottoman period remain more difficult to establish. Therefore, the definition of a chrono-typology for the pottery of the entire Islamic period is among the aims of the ZAP project.

Thanks to stratigraphy, the pottery finds from Tell Zeyd can be anchored to a relative sequence; however, the difficulty of identifying residual pottery in the excavated contexts remains, especially at a site continuously occupied since the Late Chalcolithic such as Tell Zeyd. Quantity evaluation can help to isolate residual types, but rarity is not necessarily an indicator of chronology, as it may be associated with imported fine wares. Moreover, only on completion of the excavation of the entire occupation sequence of the Islamic period, with a full evaluation of the entire assemblage, will a definitive picture emerge. So far, some steps forward have been made in relation to the Late and Middle Ottoman period (Period C, D: Tonghini et al. forthcoming); this paper presents an overview of the pottery from Period E that contextual data make it possible to ascribe to the Early Ottoman period.¹⁸

The pottery finds from Tell Zeyd are organised into four major groups: Glazed Wares, Buff Wares, Kitchen Wares, and Hand-made Wares. Within these major groups, wares are defined according to fabric, macroscopically analysed through a magnifying lens, and

17 Ahmad 2021; Nováček 2008; Nováček et al. 2016; Nováček 2022; Tonghini, Vezzoli 2020; Morandi Bonacossi, Tonghini forthcoming.

18 The chrono-typology for Tell Zeyd is being built on a basic framework created by the present writer and V. Vezzoli within the Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project (Tonghini, Vezzoli 2020); new types and chronological data are being added as the finds from Tell Zeyd continue to be studied, season after season, under the supervision of C. Tonghini. The study of the pottery from the 2024 season was carried out by C. Tonghini and M. Thuesen, assisted by three students from the Ca' Foscari University of Venice (L. Gobbo, G. Brandoni, L. Zebochin).

surface treatment, and, subsequently, on the basis of form and function.

Cristina Tonghini

3.2 The Glazed Wares of Period E

Glazed wares appear in limited quantities in the various phases of Period E: 148 fragments were identified, constituting a percentage between 1.1 and 2.1 % if we consider the whole of the pottery assemblage, between 2.6 and 6.3 % if we exclude unidentified and pre-Islamic residual pottery [fig. 11].

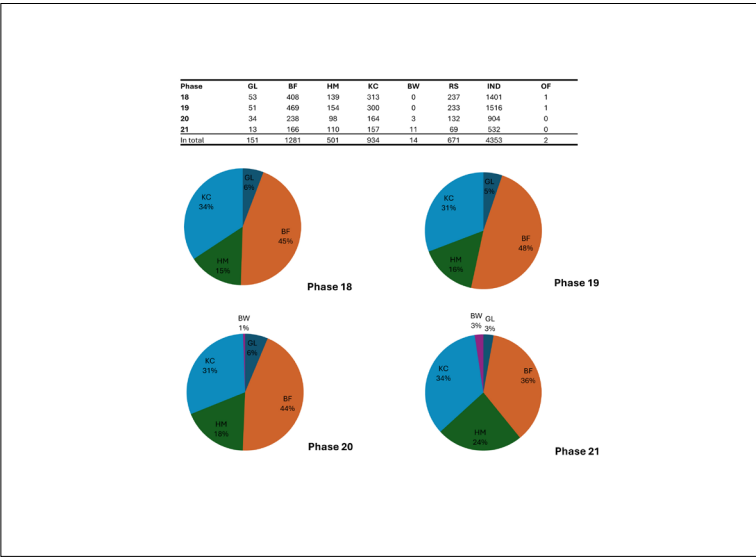


Figure 11 Quantitative tables and graphics showing the total amount of sherds and the distribution by phase of the main groups: GL (glazed wares), BF (buff wares), HM (hand-made wares), KC (kitchen wares), BW (black wares), RS (residual pottery), IND (undetermined pottery), OF (over-fired pottery). © ZAP

This percentage, moreover, does not precisely represent the glazed wares in use in Period E only, as some residual Middle Islamic sherds may have been included in the account. Only on completion of the excavation, with the establishment of the entire pottery sequence for the Islamic period, will a better understanding of the characteristics of the various groups make a more precise distinction possible.

A good example of this difficulty is represented by **Ware 21**, characterised by a light buff body and a monochrome turquoise/light blue glaze. So-called *Turquoise-glazed* ware constitutes a vast group

that was produced in different varieties in the Islamic period; an Early Islamic Turquoise-glazed variety is now relatively well known,¹⁹ while the features of a Middle Islamic variety in this region have yet to be clearly determined (Vezzoli, LoNAP forthcoming a). Moreover, there is also evidence of Turquoise-glazed varieties in the Late Islamic period: some are well defined, such as Tell Zeyd Ware 39, found in Period D (Tonghini et al. forthcoming); others require further research. In the present state of our knowledge, therefore, we have preferred to group all sherds with a buff body and a monochrome turquoise/light blue glaze in a large category, Ware 21. In Period D, Ware 21 occurs rarely, and this may indicate that it is residual, i.e. it constitutes a pottery group of the Middle Islamic period. Only a variety of it, Ware 21B, may be regarded as an Early Ottoman type in consideration of its occurrence in Period E: it constitutes 5.9 % of the glazed pottery assemblage in Phase 18, and 15.6 % in Phase 19. It has a light buff body with frequent fine and medium-size inclusions, especially lime, and it is covered by a light-blue glaze, fairly decayed in most cases; all sherds belong to closed forms [figs 12, 13d]. It is extremely difficult to find comparanda for this ware in publications unless they include colour photos. A similarity has been noted with two specimens from Baalbek that belong to closed forms; in the publication they are attributed to the thirteenth century, but they are part of a large unstratified assemblage that is dated between the ninth and the sixteenth century (Daiber 2006, Pl. 15j).

19 For an overview of the various Early Islamic types and their distribution see Hardy Guilbert et al. 2004, 84-6. Kennet 2004, 35-7. Müller-Wiener 2017, 48-9. Petřík et al. 2020, 22. Rougelle 2005. Tonghini, LoNAP forthcoming.

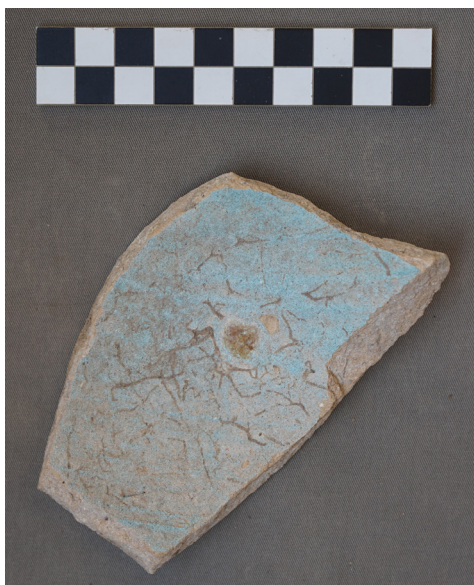


Figure 12
ZD.1208.1, Ware 21B. © ZAP

A similar difficulty is encountered with the *Green-glazed ware*. This constitutes the majority of the glazed pottery assemblage in all phases of Period E. Differences within this group relate to fabric, the presence/absence of slip, the colour and the quality of the glaze, and the general care in the manufacturing process; several fragments present a badly fired glaze, with irregular, blistered surfaces and other faults. Thus, fragments that do not present specific features other than a green glaze are grouped under **Ware 101**; this constitutes the widest of the glazed group, with occurrences varying from 33.3% to 66.7 % of the total assemblage of glazed wares. A variety characterised by a sandy, pinkish or buff body with abundant calcareous grit has been classified as **Ware 43**; it is only associated with closed forms, and a thin slip can appear on the exterior [**fig. 13 a-c, e-f**]. Ware 43 appears in significant quantity in Period E: its percentage varies between 11.8 % and 33.3 % of the glazed pottery assemblage. These figures seem to support the identification of Ware 43 as a group in use in Period E.

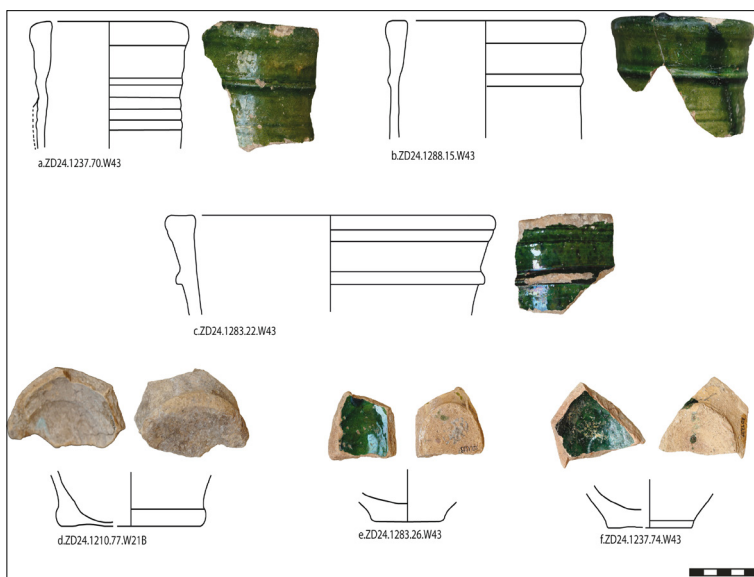


Figure 13 Glazed Wares 21B and 43. © ZAP

Equally in need of further research is **Ware 19**. It features a pinkish body with few inclusions; it is covered by a white slip and a green or mustard yellow monochrome glaze; an incised decoration may also occur. These sherds may, in many cases, be interpreted as residual from the Middle Islamic period, especially those with an incised decoration. However, the occurrence of a ware with similar features in the Ottoman period cannot be ruled out. This may be the case of a large dish fragment that is covered by a deep-green glaze of good quality but speckled [ZD.1210.74: **fig. 14**]; its fabric is characterised by abundant grit, quite unlike most of the other W19 specimens. It is a unique occurrence, and no specific ware has yet been associated with it, but it may represent an Ottoman variety.



Figure 14
ZD.1210.74, Ware 19. © ZAP

Fine glazed table wares have also been found; two can be associated with types that are well known in the specialist literature, while others require further research. Two fragments with a siliceous body and a black and blue underglaze-painted decoration can be interpreted as the product of the Damascus workshop manufacturing stone-paste vessels in the Iznik style, and ascribed to the sixteenth century [fig. 15].²⁰ Two others (not ill.), have a very hard siliceous body and a underglaze-painted decoration in blue; their characteristics are comparable with those of the Early Iznik production (late fifteenth-sixteenth centuries), but their size makes it impossible to be more conclusive at this point. This is also the case of a sherd with an earthenware fabric and a blue underglaze-painted decoration (not ill.)

These fine wares, certainly unexpected in a rural settlement such as Tell Zeyd, thus provide some chronological indications for Period E.

Three other fragments with a siliceous body and under-glazed painted decoration occur in Period E; they can be dated to the Middle Islamic period, and can thus be regarded as residual in Period E.

Cristina Tonghini

20 I wish to express my gratitude to Véronique François, CNRS-Université de Provence, Aix-en-Provence, for the identification of these two sherds. For a discussion of this group, and an assemblage from Damascus, see François 2008, 'Imitations damascènes des céramiques d'Iznik'.



Figure 15 Glazed Ware: Iznik style Damascus ware. © ZAP

3.3 The Buff Ware of Period E

Wheel-thrown buff ware constitutes the most dominant group among the pottery from Period E with a total of 1,281 collected sherds. Their percentage ranges from 15.6 to 17.2% of all excavated sherds, or 36.3 to 48.2% when pre-Islamic residual material and unidentified sherds are excluded [fig. 11].

Ware 40 is the most prominent type, accounting for up to 41.6 % of buff ware found during Period E. It is characterised by a light yellow or green-coloured fabric with coarse calcium inclusions and carbonate burnouts, which are particularly visible on the interior surfaces. The main form associated with this ware consists of long-necked jars with an externally thickened rim and one/two wide handles attached to the lower part of the neck and the upper part of the body [fig. 17]. Both flat bases and ring bases occur among this type (Tonghini et al. forthcoming, fig. 10). The final finishing of the external surface appears irregular, while the neck has sometimes been incised with a tool, creating up to six single lines running horizontally around the neck. Roulette decoration has also been observed on fragments deriving from the neck and the upper part of the body. These sherds were classified according to their roulette motifs, which could be distinguished as zig-zag patterns (Ware 40D1) and spirals (Ware 40D2) [fig. 16]. This type of surface treatment has also been documented at 'Ana (Northedge et al. 1988, 113 fig. 51:8) and within the Late Ottoman assemblage from Kharabeh Village (Simpson, Watkins, 184 fig. 62:14).

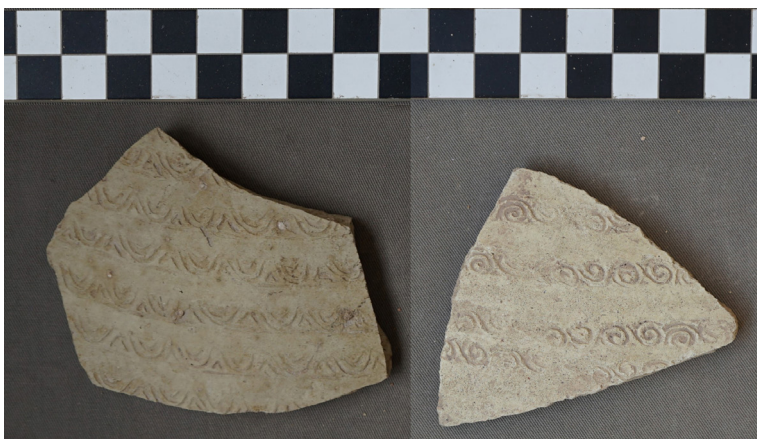


Figure 16 Decoration W40D1 (ZD.1300.90) and W40D2 (ZD.1283.39). © ZAP

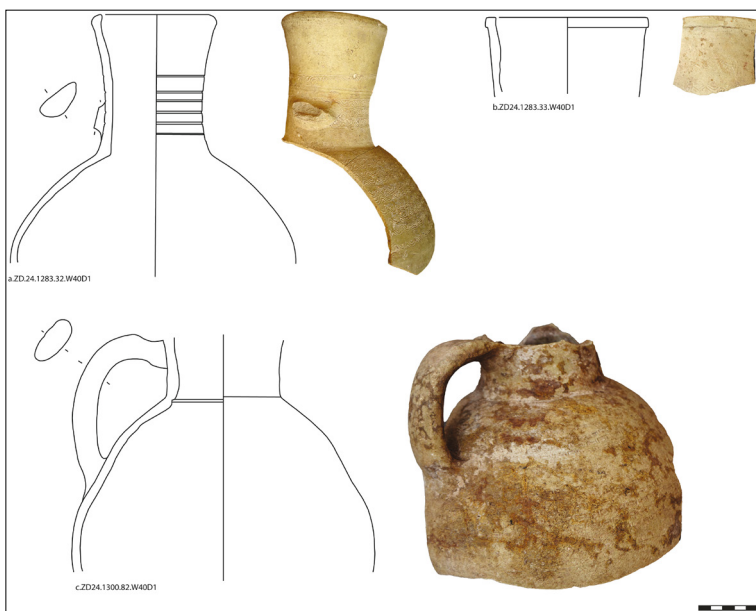


Figure 17 Buff Ware: Ware 40D1. © ZAP

A version of Ware 40 with lighter surfaces and pink-coloured fabric has been identified and categorised as Ware 41; it features roulette decoration with the same motifs that appear in Ware 40. Notably, the zig-zig pattern remains the most common design in both wares. Ware 41 only appears in small quantities throughout Period E, ranging

between 1.2 and 7.14% of all buff ware. Apart from a potential difference in firing strategies, this group also seems to be different as regards forms, as sherds from more thin-walled and smaller vessels were recognised as belonging to this ware. Unfortunately, the lack of diagnostic sherds obstructs the further reconstruction of vessel shapes within this group, which will hopefully be expedited by future studies.

The further construction of a typology for buff ware is faced with difficulties concerning dating due to the lack of stratified references. When lacking diagnostic features, as in the case of Ware 40 body fragments, these sherds were therefore classified as Ware 100. This represents buff and light-coloured sherds considered non-residual, but which could not be placed with certainty in one of the established ware types. Ranging between 44.5 and 68.9% of all sherds assigned to buff wares in Period E, this constitutes a significant portion of the excavated assemblage. However, it is expected that this group will be reappraised at a later stage of our research. The same applies to Ware 103, which has a similar type of fabric to W100, but is defined by its lighter and more pinkish surface. The highest proportion of sherds assigned to this group was found within Phase 18, where they amount to 12.8% of sherds of buff ware. Their proportion remains relatively low in other phases (between 3.2 and 6.8%).

Mette Bangsberg Thuesen

3.4 The Kitchen Ware of Period E

Kitchen ware is defined as vessels that appear to have been specifically designed for the thermal processing of food. They are primarily recognised by their prominent mineral temper and the presence of fire damage. A total of 934 excavated sherds were classified within this group, representing 10.3 to 13.7% of the Period E assemblage, or 30.6 to 34.4% when pre-Islamic and unidentified pottery are excluded [fig. 11]. For dating, we have mainly relied on proportional frequencies among the different ware types, which, interestingly, exhibit a distinct pattern compared to the pottery from the preceding Periods C and D (Tonghini et al. forthcoming). During Period E, Ware 37 emerges as the predominant type of kitchen ware. This group is characterised by its compact fabric that features prominent mineral inclusions of elongated and rounded shapes. Items are formed using the coiling technique and the ware is easily recognisable due to its highly burnished surfaces, inside and out. This ware appears to have been produced with only one shape in mind: a globular jar with a short, flared neck and a simple rim, with two wide handles attached to the rim and the shoulders of the vessel. These are often decorated with an impressed thumb mark on the lower part of the

handle [fig. 18a-b]. This mark is potentially diagnostic of Period E, as it is only rarely recorded on handle fragments of Ware 37 found in later periods. Rim diameters range from 12 to 26 cm, with a general tendency towards larger orifices. Burnished cooking ware with the same distinctive form was found within the Late Ottoman assemblage from Hatara Saghir (Simpson 1997, 128-9, fig. 5.3-4). Additionally, this type of ware was also recognised as a chronological marker for the Middle and Late Islamic periods in the LoNAP survey (Tonghini et al. forthcoming; Tonghini, Vezzoli 2020). Its longevity is now further documented within the stratified sequence from Tell Zeyd. From constituting 11% of all excavated Kitchen Ware in Period C to 28% in Period D, Ware 37 accounts for 31.9 to 59.8% of sherds assigned to this ware category in Period E. It can therefore be seen as a constant within the household repertoires, although the current data suggest a primary use phase within the Early Ottoman period. Throughout Period E, Ware 37 is only outnumbered by sherds assigned to Ware 102, which consists of non-residual sherds that need to be evaluated at a later stage. This group accounts for between 31.7 and 52.9% of all Period E sherds.

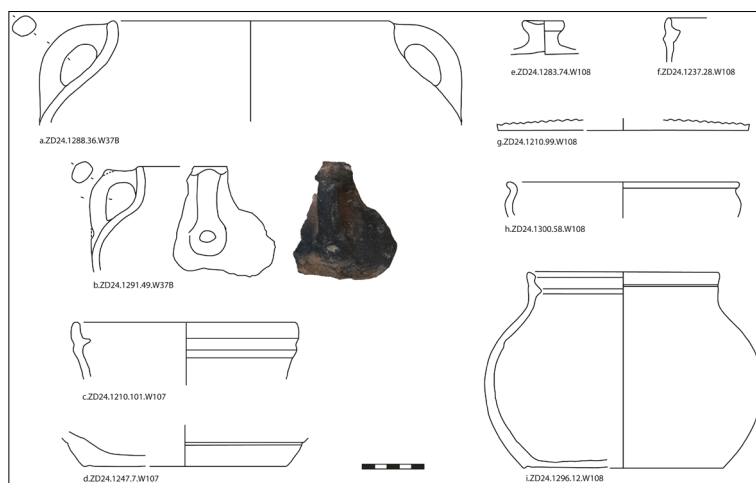


Figure 18 Kitchen Wares. © ZAP

Another notable observation involves the near absence of Ware 35 (see Vezzoli in Tonghini et al. forthcoming), which comprises only 0.7 and 1.3% in Phases 18 and 19, respectively. In comparison to the above-lying layers, where this ware constituted 40% of the fragments associated with kitchen ware ascribed to period D, the significantly lower quantity of sherds suggests that these are intrusive. Ware 35 can therefore be considered diagnostic of Period D.

During the recent field campaign, three new types of kitchen ware were defined: Wares 45, 107, and 108. Ware 45 has only been recognised within the lowest layers so far reached in Area 1 (Phases 19-22). This type represents a group of handmade vessels of primarily closed forms, whose fabric is defined by organic temper with a few mineral inclusions of natural shape. The colour of the vessel surfaces can be characterised as buff to light brown, while the core is black or dark grey, providing a sandwich-like section. The firing is, however, not consistent and may depend on which part of the vessel is being observed. Both the exterior and interior surfaces are regularly smoothed, while a few rim sherds are decorated with a brown-painted line. Both open and closed forms are represented within this ware [fig. 19e-g]. Three complete profiles were recovered from context 1296 (Phase 21), all of which were wide-mouthed jars with a vertical or knob-like handle attached to the mid-body. All of these are characterised by thick vessel walls, a simple rim, and flattened bases. Two-handled jars of smaller sizes were also recognised among this group, including a long-necked jug with a simple, slightly everted rim. The other jar strongly resembles the handled pots of Ware 37, including the impressed thumb mark on the lower part of the handle. This indicates familiarity with this design and may point to contemporary production.

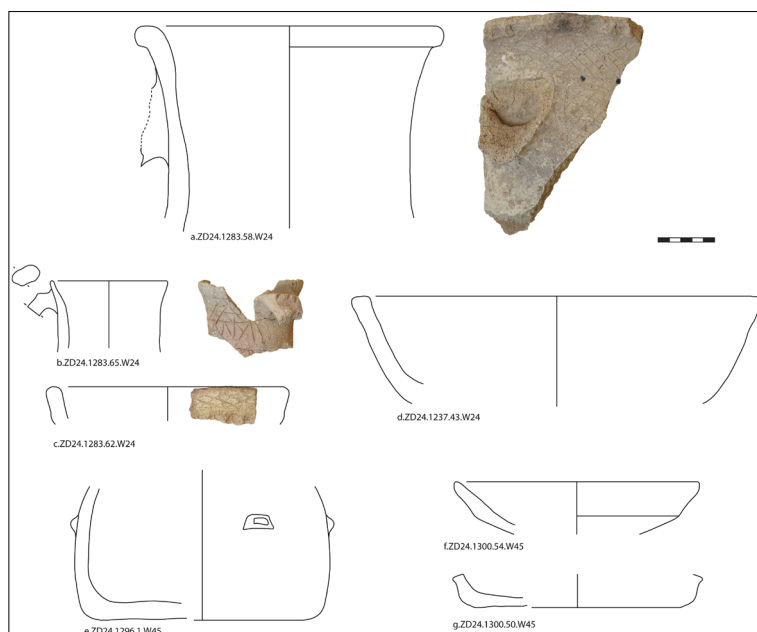


Figure 19 Handmade Wares. © ZAP

Ware 107 represents another fabric group, consisting of thick-walled vessels with an orange-coloured exterior. The coarse fabric features an abundance of elongated or angular mineral inclusions of multiple colours. The interior surface tends to be blackened or overfired. The exterior surface is smoothed and carved decoration was observed on one body sherd in the form of a single wavy line framed by two horizontal lines that appear to have run around the vessel. At this point of the research, Ware 107 has only been found in very small quantities within phases 18 and 19 (0.96 to 2 % of kitchen ware). Some inferences regarding shape can be made from two sherds that seem to derive from closed vessels. This includes the rim sherd of a necked jar with an inner ledge rim (diam. 17 cm), probably designed to hold a lid, and the fragment of a ring base which features an incised line on the lower part of the exterior body [fig. 18c-d]. Whether this ware group represents a residual type belonging to earlier settlement phases remains open for now, but future study seasons will hopefully clarify the matter.

Finally, sherds of Ware 108 are defined by their pinkish orange-coloured fabric with prominent mineral grit temper, consisting of sub-angular or sub-rounded inclusions of grey, dark red, brown and buff colours. This ware is similar to fabric group 107 but differs in that it always has an orange-coloured body. Another distinguishing feature is its surface treatment, as the external surface of this ware's base is smoothed. One complete profile is present among this group, a short-necked jar with an inward folded rim and an inner ledge rim. The diameter of the rim measures 15 cm and its ring base 16 cm [fig. 18i]. Other rim fragments within this ware type feature the same inner ledge rim, but tend to have a more upright-oriented or simple rim, with diameters ranging between 11-16 cm. This group also includes carinated bowls with outward folded rims and lids [fig. 18e-h]. So far, no *comparanda* have been found in the available literature, and notably, both Ware 107 and Ware 108 are absent from the Hatara Saghir assemblage (Simpson 1997).

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3.5 The Handmade Ware of Period E

Handmade ware covers a significant portion of the Early Ottoman pottery repertoire at Tell Zeyd, a tendency which has also been recognised at other Islamic sites and during the LoNAP survey.²¹ The findings of this season show a steady increase in the proportion of

²¹ Novacek et al. 2008, 281; Simpson 1997, 113; Vezzoli, LoNAP forthcoming.

handmade sherds among those so far excavated, rising from 5.2 to 11.5% (N=567). In comparison, they constituted less than 5% of all collected sherds during Periods C and D (Tonghini et al. forthcoming), and when omitting residual and unidentified sherds they account for 15.3 to 24.1% of the Period E assemblage [fig. 11].

The most common type of handmade ware is Ware 24, which occurs in pale yellow, pale olive, light brown and pink hues. It has a very coarse fabric defined by negative traces of vegetal temper and a high frequency of large red, grey, and white inclusions. These vessels were not made on a wheel and a great variety of forms are represented within this group, indicating its utilisation in different kinds of domestic practices [fig. 19a-d]. However, they mostly appear as thick-walled, open forms. Several sherds of this group feature applied decoration or bluntly incised patterns, mostly of crosshatch or geometric motifs that seem to be located on the upper parts of vessels and on the necks of jars. A new observation this season was the evidence of glaze or glass drop decoration, which seems to be primarily associated with large two-handled jars with a straight neck and thickened, everted folded rim [fig. 19a]. Strong parallels can be found among handmade pottery from Hatara Saghir, which share similar forms and the same type of incised decoration (Simpson 1997, 124-5). However, this type of coarse handmade ware has also been excavated from Middle Islamic contexts at sites in Iraqi Kurdistan, such as Kona Makhmur (Nováček et al. 2016, 91) and Kani Shaie (Ahmad 2021, 201-2, Pl. 16-21), which is why within the LoNAP, this ware was considered a chronological marker of both Middle and Late Islamic pottery traditions (Vezzoli, LoNAP forthcoming).

A significant new addition to our typology is Ware 105, which can be characterised as bitumen-covered burnt ware. This ware contains visible residues of bitumen, which covers the interior surface like a thick coating [fig. 10d]. Other distinctive features include a light red or orange-coloured fabric with highly frequent organic temper. The vessels were made with the coiling technique and carved decoration in the form of straight lines and dots was observed within this group. The type of deposition and the location of residues within the vessel suggest a connection to bitumen production (Breu et al. 2019, 569; Schwartz, Hollander 2000). Unfortunately, only body sherds are associated with this ware, which makes it difficult to make inferences about their original forms. However, the rather thick walls indicate that these fragments derive from large vessels. This points towards production beyond the household level, thereby further attesting to the function of Area A as an industrial site, which can now add bitumen production to its repertoire. Ware 105 constitutes 2.9 to 9.1% of all handmade ware, increasing in proportion from Phase 19 to Phase 21.

The remaining sherds of handmade ware were assigned to Ware 110, which once again represents a generic group that requires

further evaluation. This group constitutes between 1 and 10 % of all handmade ware in Period E. Likewise, we assigned to Ware 106 the pithoi fragments that could not be conclusively dated to the Ottoman settlement phases. However, their low frequency (0.9 %) seems to suggest residual material or potential import.

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3.6 Chronological Assessment

The stratigraphic sequence makes it possible to establish that Period E is earlier than Period D. Period D was associated with a seventeenth-eighteenth century horizon in consideration of the presence of a number of clay pipes for smoking that fit this span of time (Tonghini et al. forthcoming).

Although most of the pottery assemblage of Period E consists of wares that are little represented in publications, a chronological assessment of it can be offered at this stage by combining various data.

First, it should be noted that virtually no clay pipes occur in Period E; the very few, small fragments that were found have been interpreted as intrusive in consideration of their size and frequency, and of the stratigraphic complexity of the archaeological deposit featuring a large number of pits.

A strong element for dating is offered by two of the glazed fine ware fragments that have been associated with a well-known production from Damascus imitating the Iznik style and regarded as sixteenth century products.

In support of this dating, we can also consider the pottery from the earlier Phase 22: this phase has been ascribed to Period F, the excavation of which will only be completed in the next field season; the pottery analysed so far seems to describe a Middle Islamic pottery horizon (tenth-fifteenth c.). A few Middle Islamic sherds do also occur in Period E, where they have been interpreted as residual in consideration of the contextual presence of later types.

As to the assemblage of unglazed wares, a chronological assessment cannot be based on *comparanda*, given how infrequently these appear in publications. However, some chronological indications may derive from the analysis of contextual data. It should be noted that the assemblage of unglazed pottery features both differences and similarities with the assemblage from the later Period D (Tonghini et al. forthcoming): differences may confirm that we are dealing with a different chronological horizon, similarities may suggest a relative chronological proximity. The Buff Wares group is dominated by Ware 40; this ware also appears in the later Period D, but in a completely

different percentage; continuous features include the fabric – and thus very likely the source of raw materials and manufacturing procedures – and the decorative repertoire. However, further research is necessary, the acquisition of a larger repertoire of forms from both periods being a pre-requisite for reliable comparison. Kitchen Wares constitute a group that shows a striking continuity in terms of fabric and forms, as is the case with Ware 37, but it also includes types specific to Period E, such as Wares 45, 107 and 108. In particular, Wares 107 and 108 show fabric and forms that are distinctively different from the predominant Ware 35 of Period C and D. As to the Hand-made Wares group, its occurrence in Period E is much more significant than in Period D, and this difference may thus bear chronological indications.

We can conclude thus that the assemblage of unglazed wares describes a horizon that pre-dates Period D and that shows both differences and similarities: different wares occur together with similar wares but in a different proportion. This difference may be interpreted in relation to chronology, and it fits an association with a period earlier than Period D that other elements (glazed fine wares, absence of clay pipes) enable it to be identified as the sixteenth century.

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4 Conclusions

The research currently in progress at the site of Tell Zeyd is shedding light on the history of this settlement, its society and economy, and this makes it possible to understand poorly documented phases in the long history of the rural hinterland of Mosul.

The excavation of the archaeological deposit at Tell Zeyd led to the acquisition – for the first time in the region – of material evidence pertaining to the Ottoman period, from the sixteenth century until the early decades of the twentieth century, spread over four main Periods (B-E).

The earliest of these Periods, Period E, is ascribed to the sixteenth century. The archaeological evidence shows that at this time the site was occupied by a settled community, very likely mainly devoted to agriculture but also involved in metalwork production and in the processing of bitumen; in-depth studies are currently in progress to improve definition of these activities. The study of the pottery finds for the first time provides an assemblage of reference for this span of time, anchored to an absolute chronology thanks to the relative sequence and to specific fine wares. The evidence points to a lively community, with the skills needed to carry out metalwork production and other manufacturing activities and well connected with a

regional distribution network. In fact, the pottery assemblage is rich and diversified, and a good percentage of it seems to be the product of commercial workshops rather than domestic manufacturing. The presence of fine wares that are generally found in urban contexts confirms this picture. The analysis of production residues in progress will make it possible to reach a better understanding of which specific production activities were carried out at the village, and to clarify if they aimed at the self-sufficiency of the village, for instance producing the tools for local agricultural work, or if they were also meant for a wider horizon.

The evidence for Period D indicates that the site was frequented by a nomad population; at this time the traces of a settled population become extremely thin. Stratigraphic and contextual data suggest a seventeenth-eighteenth centuries date for Period D. The complex stratigraphy of this Period makes it possible to identify the features of the nomadic presence, such as a large number of pits; these pits differ from those commonly used for waste disposal: they are not very deep, and they contain ash, vegetable residues and few ceramic finds; archaeo-botanical residues in the fill consist of vegetable waste, animal dung and wild plants. Conversely, there is very little evidence to reflect the presence of a settled community, such as some structural remains. The evidence for Period D at Tell Zeyd seems to match the picture provided in the written texts, which testifies to the rise of nomadism in the region (Khoury 1997; Usta forthcoming). The evidence from archaeology makes it possible to confirm this picture and to enrich it with data derived from the study of faunal and floral remains; for the first time in the region data on wild flora has come to light, and it is now possible to identify species connected to farming. Study of the pottery has made it possible to isolate the types that were used in this period; besides common ware, it is interesting to note that table ware included glazed vessels that are normally found in urban contexts, confirming that either the nomadic or the settled population of Tell Zeyd in this period was connected with major distribution markets.

The evidence for Period C identifies a settled community devoted to agriculture and other production activities, and can be associated with the nineteenth century. Archeo-botanical analysis has identified the crops of the area, and archaeo-zoology analysis illustrates domesticated and wild species. Evidence of a bakery installation making bread for the market has come to light, together with evidence pertaining to the manufacture of clay pipes for smoking (Tonghini et al. 2023). Historical sources refer to a period of economic development in the region, and archaeology adds significant elements to this chapter.

As to the evidence for Period B, this is much disturbed by the contemporary activities of Period A. Archaeological evidence seems

to illustrate domestic contexts, and historical research suggests that this recent phase was associated with the presence of Christian communities (Tonghini et al. forthcoming; Usta forthcoming).

The archaeological evidence has also demonstrated that Area 1 constituted a marginal area for the settlement of Periods C, D and E, the location of production activities involving the use of fire and the space at the margin where nomads would settle. It is only in Period B that Area 1 was chosen for sparse, domestic occupation.

The evidence briefly described above illustrates the history of Tell Zeyd in the Ottoman period and provides data on its material culture, society and economy. These data also make a major contribution to the general history of the area, confirming certain trends, such as the rise of nomadism, but providing elements that give depth and colour to the general picture reflected in the written sources: archaeology identifies specific crops being cultivated and specific animal species being bred, adding to our understanding of agriculture and farming, and diet practices. Unexpected production activities carried out by a rural community in the various periods have also been identified, conveying an image of a diversified society and lively economy. Finally, the evidence offers a glance at the repertoire of objects employed for daily life, such as the pottery in use in the household.

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Reviving Ara the Handsome Exploring the Protohistoric, Uartian, Orontid, and Medieval Armenian Heritage of Aralesk/ Kalecik in Van, Turkey

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Abstract This article examines the archaeological site of Aralesk/Kalecik, in the Van plain (eastern Turkey), traditionally linked to Queen Semiramis. Excavated in the 1940s by an American mission, the site poses interpretative challenges. It was likely a fortified outpost controlling the northern access to the Uartian capital and shows signs of occupation during the Orontid/Achaemenid periods. The article also considers nearby evidence from protohistoric and historic phases, stressing the need for further investigation and protection of the site's endangered remains.

Keywords Uartu. Early Bronze Age. Fortress. Inscriptions. Van Fortress.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Aralesk/Kalecik: Topographic Variants and Connections with Mythology. – 3 History of Studies. – 4 The Uartian Inscriptions (CTU A 2-1 and A 8-41). – 5 The American Archaeological Excavations in 1938-39. – 6 The Archaeological Evidence. – 7 The Fortress on the Rock-Spur and the Surrounding Areas. – 8 The Rock-Cut Chamber. – 9 The Middle Iron Age/Uartian Period Cemetery of Kalecik. – 10 The Stone Circles and Stelae Area. – 11 The Armenian Chapel, Church and Cemetery. – 12 The Chronology of the Site and the Problem of the Painted Pottery. – 13 Conclusions.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-02-11
Accepted 2025-05-05
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Dan, R. (2025). "Reviving Ara the Handsome. Exploring the Protohistoric, Uartian, Orontid, and Medieval Armenian Heritage of Aralesk/Kalecik in Van, Turkey". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 191-236.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/006

1 Introduction

One of the most intriguing sites in the Van plain is the small fortress of Aralesk/Kalecik, built on an imposing rocky promontory approximately 4.6 km north of the Van rock [fig. 1]. The village of Aralesk/Kalecik and its promontory are inextricably linked to Armenian mythological tradition and the legend of Semiramis, the legendary queen whose actions are symbolically connected to Urartian antiquities, particularly the founding of Van. The site also holds significance for the pioneering period of investigations into the archaeology of the Bia/Urartu state. It was explored during two seasons by an American expedition just before the outbreak of World War II. However, much of the documentation produced during this mission has been lost or mixed with records from contemporary excavations at the Van rock and the site of Tilkitepe, leading to considerable confusion in interpreting the occupation phases of these sites. Aralesk/Kalecik was particularly important during the Urartian period as it guarded the northern approach to the capital [fig. 2]¹ and formed part of a systematic fortification project securing all access routes to the city, constructed between the second half of the ninth century and the early eighth century BCE² [fig. 3]. The site, however, appears to have been occupied as early as the Protohistoric Period, during the Early Bronze Age, and later during the period when the Armenian Highland became part of the Achaemenid Empire under the local Orontid dynasty, and during several stages of the Middle Age. The data used to reconstruct the site's occupation chronology remain largely uncertain and are critically discussed in this text. Both the site and, more broadly, the entire Van plain are under constant threat from the relentless expansion of the modern city. Continuous construction has already destroyed or endangered much of this extraordinary area and its archaeological remains. The Aralesk/Kalecik promontory and the archaeological mound at its base are themselves threatened by new building projects.

I would first like to express my gratitude to Prof. Mirjo Salvini for the opportunity to visit the site of Aralesk/Kalecik alongside him, one of the many sites we explored together, and for the invaluable discussions on Urartian studies, both in the field and within the rooms of the Anatolian section of ICEVO-CNR. I would also like to extend my thanks to my friends and colleagues Bülent Genç and Kenan Işık, with whom I had the chance to engage in extensive conversations about Urartian sites in the Van region. Special thanks are also due to Onofrio Gasparro for his valuable suggestions on the dating of Armenian Khatchkars. All images reproduced in this contribution were created by the author, except where otherwise indicated. The images of the various sites were taken in 2008 and 2009.

1 Lehmann-Haupt 1931, 622-3; Burney 1957, 40; Çilingiroğlu 1994, 52.

2 On this ring of fortifications, see Dan 2014 and Dan 2025. For the Urartian control of the Van plain, including the fortress of Aralesk/Kalecik, see Dan, Salaris 2022.

Today, virtually nothing remains of the ancient mudbrick village visible in archival images [fig. 4]. A modern cemetery lies just a few dozen metres west of the site, surrounded by newly constructed residential complexes. Furthermore, other medieval remains are progressively disappearing, such as a recently destroyed Armenian medieval cemetery. This contribution represents the first systematic publication entirely devoted to the site of Aralesk/Kalecik and the initial attempt to contextualise it within the archaeological landscape of its immediate surroundings, including several burial areas and a puzzling zone marked by the presence of hundreds of small stone stelae. Additionally, historical and chronological considerations will be made regarding these significant findings. In addition to archival material, this study is based on a series of visits conducted by the author to the various sites discussed, carried out over the three-year period between 2008 and 2010.

2 Aralesk/Kalecik: Topographic Variants and Connections with Mythology

We do not know the ancient name of the fortress of Aralesk/Kalecik, as historical sources provide no information on this matter, nor is it possible to hypothesise an association with a toponym not directly connected to the site. The name *Aralesk*, along with its variants *Araleszk*, *Lesk*, *Lezk* and *Avalessk*, is associated with aspects of ancient mythology, which will be discussed shortly. The Turkish-derived name *Kalecik* (literally 'small castle') and its phonetic variations found in the literature (*Kaladjyk*, *Kaladjug*, *Kalehjic*, *Kalatchik*, *Kalachik*, *Kaléjik*, *Kaledshick*) underscore the defensive or fortified character of the site, aligning with its strategic significance across various historical periods.³ These variations reflect linguistic adaptations influenced by Ottoman and modern Turkish usage, layering over earlier nomenclatures. The name *Aralesk* appears to be deeply connected to Armenian mythology. Indeed, the site is considered to be the place where, according to folk etymological legend, Semiramis is said to have revived her lover Ara from death by licking his wounds

3 Mordtmann 1872, 488-90 (*Kaledshik*); Sayce 1882, 454-60 (*Kalachik*, *Kaléjik*); Sayce 1888, 6; Sayce 1893, 14, 22; Belck 1893, 78 (*Kaladschik*); Sandalgian 1900, 250-1 (*Kalatchik*); Maspero 1900, 105 (*Kalajik*); Lynch 1901, ii.38, 112 (*Kalajik*); Marr 1915, 1731 (*Laza*, *Lēzoy*, *Lesk*, *Kaladjuk*); Lehmann-Haupt 1928-35, 22, pl. XLII (*Aralesk*, *Kaladjyk*); Meščaninov 1931-32, 263-6 (*Lesk*, *Kaladjug*); Piotrovskij 1959, 51, 105 (*Kaladjik*, *Araleszk*); Melikišvili 1960, 122-3, 272 (*Lesk*); König 1955-57, 2, 17 (*Aralesk*, *Lesk*, *Kaladjyk*); Harutyunyan 2001, 17-18, 205 (*Lesk*); Salvini 2008, 107, Salvini 2018, 41-4, CTU A 2-1 (*Aralesk*, *Lesk*, *Kalecik*).

(Thomson 2006, I.15).⁴ The name Aralesk is interpreted through folk etymology as being composed of *Ara* and a derivative of *lezel* which mean 'to lick' (Lehmann-Haupt 1926, 5*). The term *Arlez*, or Armenian *aralez*, *aralezk'* or *yaralez*, refers to a supernatural creature, with uncertain etymology. The *Arlez* were believed to have brought the dead Ara back to life by licking his body. The fifth-century writer Eznik Kolbac'i described the *Arlez* as a type of dog, and Movsēs Xorenac'i recorded a legend where a dog saved a prince Sanatruk and his nurse in a snowstorm. In the tenth century, T'ovma Arcruni mentioned a village where the legend of Ara's resurrection by the *Arlez* was recited. Some scholars suggest the legend may originate from Assyria, where the god Marduk, associated with resurrection, was also known as 'lord of the dogs'. The *Arlez* may also be linked to ancient Asianic legends, particularly that of Attis (Ara), and viewed as a Zoroastrian spirit-dog associated with funeral rites. Even in Christian times, Armenians revered dogs, and some continued to worship dogs during religious observances, as noted by Armenian and Byzantine writers (Russell 1986, 412).⁵ The only mention of the place where Ara's attempted resurrection occurred is found in the text of T'ovma Arcruni, where it is stated that the village was called *Lezu*, which would literally mean 'tongue'. The issue, however, lies in the historian's description, which places the village on the opposite bank relative to the current location of Aralesk/Kalecik. Furthermore, the discrepancies do not end there: according to T'ovma Arcruni, Ara was healed in that location, whereas Movsēs Xorenac'i recounts that Semiramis was unable to resurrect him (Thomson 2006, I.15). In any case, as with other places described by Moses of Chorene, it is interesting to underline how there seems to have been a direct association between locations from Armenian mythology, particularly those connected to Semiramis, and places of the ancient Urartian state (Belck, Lehmann 1895, 605-6). The attribution of these works to Semiramis is consistent with a literary *topos*, widespread since the Hellenistic period throughout Greece,⁶ which portrays her as the archetypal queen-builder. Semiramis, a legendary figure of great power and ingenuity, was celebrated for her architectural feats in numerous ancient stories. The works attributed to her were admired in many regions of Asia, reflecting her prestige and reputation as a symbol of power and skill. This literary *topos* helped shape the image of Semiramis as a central figure in ancient mythology and history, whose name became associated with remarkable architectural

⁴ On the cult of Ara the Handsome, see the seminal work by Kapantsyan (1945).

⁵ See Aiello's detailed study (1978) on the Armenian deities known as *Arlez*. On this topic, see also Areshian 2006, 292.

⁶ Diod. Sic. 2.96-102; Str. 11.14.8; 12.3.37; 16.1.2; Plin. HN 6.31.

and civil achievements. This association suggests that mythical and historical landscapes may have overlapped, with mythological narratives intertwining with real-world locations that held political, cultural, and military significance during the Urartian period. The connection between Semiramis and Urartian sites like Aralesk/Kalecik could reflect the enduring influence of Urartian monuments and their symbolism in later Armenian traditions, reinforcing the continuity of cultural and mythological ideas through successive eras.

3 History of Studies

The site of Aralesk/Kalecik was among the first to be visited as part of the journey that marked the beginning of archaeological research in the field of Urartology. An inscription from the site (Inscription XXXVI = CTU A 2-1) called Kalatchik was seen and copied by Friedrich Eduard Schulz during the summer of 1827 [fig. 3A-C]. It was inscribed on a column base that had been repurposed as an altar stone in a recently constructed church within the village. Regarding this, Schulz provides the following intriguing details:

Sur les rochers au nord de la ville je n'ai trouvé aucune trace d'un monument antique. Un roc bien escarpé, isolé et de forme pyramidale, tout près du village arménien de Kalatchik, qui porte aujourd'hui sur son sommet une petite église, est regardé dans le pays comme un endroit consacré, dans la plus haute antiquité, au culte des divinités. Il y avait là, dit la tradition, un temple et une idole fort célèbres, que le christianisme a fait disparaître jusqu'à la moindre trace. Tout près de ce rocher on m'a indiqué un endroit où l'on a trouvé, il y a quelques années, sous la terre, une grande pierre que l'on a transportée dans l'église nouvellement construite du village, où l'on s'en sert de pierre d'autel. C'est un grès rougeâtre, rond et travaillé comme une pierre à moulin. Il a un diamètre de deux pieds et demi sur six pouces de hauteur. Sa partie supérieure et celle d'en bas sont unies et sans inscriptions, mais sur le bord elle est entourée d'un double rang de caractères cunéiformes, gâtés en plusieurs endroits par des croix que l'on y a gravées il n'y a pas encore longtemps. Les deux lignes de cette inscription, comme celles de la pierre ronde de Schouschanz, sont séparées l'une de l'autre par un vide de dix-huit lignes. (Schulz 1840, 320-1)⁷

The rock of Aralesk/Kalecik is mentioned by Lynch, who, however,

⁷ On this inscription, see also Saint-Martin 1828, 187-8.

was probably unaware of the existence of the site (Lynch 1901, 112). The territories around the site discussed in this contribution were, however, defined as follows:

On the other hand, the alluvial plain which is confined by Mount Varag upon the east, and which may be said to extend from a headland near the village of Kalajik on the north to the high ground just north of Artemid upon the south, affords a considerable area of rich soil, capable under irrigation of producing the choicest fruits of the earth. (Lynch 1901, 38)

Many years later, in 1938-39, the site called in that occasion Kalehjic, was excavated by an American mission led by the Lake couple, Kirsopp and Silva, as part of a broader exploration program in the Van region. This program also included excavations at the Van Fortress and Tilkitepe, but these initiatives were interrupted by the outbreak of World War II.⁸ These excavations will be discussed in more detail in a specific section of this text. Subsequently, the site was visited between mid-June and mid-August 1956 by Charles A. Burney during his pioneering survey around Lake Van. The site is briefly described as follows:

This small stronghold overlooked the approach to Van from the north, along the shore of the lake. It stands on an impregnable pinnacle, overhanging on two sides. On the S.W. side a small ravine allows a fairly easy ascent, but the defenders blocked this path with a masonry revetment wall. (Burney 1957, 45)

The site (No. 201), unlike others, was not drawn, and only three ceramic fragments were collected from the surface. These fragments were analysed in the volume by H.F. Russell, which is based on the ceramic materials collected by Burney (Russell 1980, 50-1, 127). In 1964, near the village, traces of a Urartian cemetery were discovered during the construction of the road connecting Van with Ağrı (Öğün, Bilgiç 1973, 14). This was later discovered to be a vast burial area known as Altintepe, excavated by V. Sevin between 1997 and 1999. However, it will not be analysed in this text, as it is more closely related

⁸ Lake, Lake 1939; Lake 1940; Pfeiffer 1940; Otto 1941-44, 87-95; Korfmann 1977; 1982.

to the capital than to the site of Aralesk/Kalecik.⁹ In 1972-73, Veli Sevin explored a series of rock-cut tombs, which he later published in 1986. One of these tombs was located near Aralesk/Kalecik. It was a rock-cut tomb, which Sevin believed to date to the Urartian period, identified within a rocky complex approximately 500 m from the fortress. This burial was considered the first rock-cut chamber in the Van plain, following those already known in Van fortress (Sevin 1986, 336-9, figs 21-4). Later, the site was included in the *Topographische Karte von Urartu*, a volume that compiled known Urartian sites up to that point in the form of a gazetteer. The site, listed as number 5 among the Urartian sites in Turkey, was described as: “Burganlage mit Treppentunnel und Inschrift des Išpuini (9. Jahrh. V. Chr.) und Argišti I (Anfang 8. Jahrh. V. Chr.), Nekropole” (Kleiss, Hauptmann 1976, 10). Near the fortress lies an important necropolis, commonly referred to as Kalecik. Since at least 1998, it had become a target for illegal excavations. Scientific investigations of the site were first conducted between 2003 and 2004 by the Archaeology Department of Van Yüzüncü Yıl University. These preliminary studies provided sufficient data to justify formal excavation efforts. Consequently, in 2004, archaeological excavations commenced under the joint direction of the Van Museum Directorate and the university's archaeology department, with scientific coordination by Rafet Çavuşoğlu. The excavations, which continued until 2007, identified a total of 25 underground chamber tombs. Among these, 24 had been looted by illegal excavators, and one remained unopened (Çavuşoğlu, Biber 2012).¹⁰ This necropolis is discussed in detail in a dedicated section of this text. In more recent years, the site has been revisited by Aynur Özfirat as part of an extensive survey program covering the

9 During the construction of the road from Ağrı to Van, several tombs were destroyed around 8 km before Van and 2 km south of Kalecik in 1965 (in 1964 according to Ögün, Bilgiç 1973, 14, and in 1965 according to Ögün 1978, 672). Shortly afterward, emergency excavations were carried out in an area where a series of burials had been looted by inhabitants of the nearby village. Of the three typically Urartian urn burials identified, only one was intact, containing burnt bone remains and a bronze ring inside the vessel. These cremation burials were compared to tombs excavated by Petrov in 1914 near Iğdır. At a distance of 1 m, an inhumation burial was also found, consisting of a skeleton buried in a pit and covered with a layer of gravel 0.08-0.10 m thick. A 0.25 m thick layer of sand covered the body, with a large stone measuring 1.50 m placed on top. At the head of the skeleton, two plain bowls and a footed bowl were recovered. Inside one of these bowls was a necklace, a large glass bead, and typical Urartian bronze pins (Ögün, Bilgiç 1973, 14; Ögün 1978, 672-3; Sevin 2012, 125). Several years later, it was understood that these tombs were part of a vast necropolis known as Altintepe, where excavations documented numerous tombs, nearly all of which were damaged. A total of 38 tombs were investigated and documented, including 33 rock-cut chamber tombs, two inhumations, and three urn cremations (Sevin, Özfirat 2001, 179-83; Sevin 2012, 107-34).

10 For this site, see the specific paragraph within this same text.

Van region and its surrounding areas. The site was catalogued with the code O70/9. These surveys identified the presence of pottery from the Middle Bronze Age, as well as from the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age pottery, and Late Iron Ages.¹¹ As part of the epigraphic research conducted by CNR-ICEVO under the direction of Prof. Mirjo Salvini, the author of this contribution had the opportunity to visit the site of Kalecik multiple times over the three-year period from 2008 to 2010. During these visits, photographic material and measurements were collected, as presented in this text, covering the fortress, the necropolis, and the area of the small stelae. The site was visited in 2017 as part of a research project focused on the study of road routes during the Urartian period (Gokce, Genc, Kacmaz Levent 2019, 328-9, 332, fig. 1).

4 The Urartian Inscriptions (CTU A 2-1 and A 8-41)

Two inscriptions originate from the site of Aralesk/Kalecik [fig. 5]. The first is a column base with a brief inscription of King Išpuini, son of Sarduri (CTU A 2-1), which is integral to the beginnings of Urartian studies, having been first seen in 1827 by Friedrich Eduard Schulz (Schulz XXXVI) [fig. 5A-C]. Schulz provided information on the original discovery and the inscription's finding. In fact, it seems that the stone was found several years before 1827, buried not far from the rock of Aralesk/Kalecik, and was later transported to the newly built church in the village, where it was used as an altar stone. It has been described as a reddish sandstone, round and shaped like a millstone, with a diameter of two and a half feet and a height of six inches (approximately 76 cm in diameter and 15 cm in height). Its upper and lower parts are smooth and without inscriptions, but along its edge, it is surrounded by a double row of cuneiform characters, damaged in several places by crosses carved after the discovery (Schulz 1840, 320-1). The information reported by Schulz was subsequently referenced in numerous studies on Urartian inscriptions that followed.¹² At an unspecified time, likely in connection with the destruction of the church where the stone was kept, the inscription was lost, and its fate remains unknown. However, Lehmann-Haupt was able to see it in the early twentieth century and made a cast of

¹¹ Özfiat 2009a, 347, 349, 354, 359; Özfiat 2009b, 215, 217, 226; 2022, 561, figs 1, 11f.

¹² On this inscription, see Mordtmann 1872, 488-90, Inscr. 2; Sayce 1882, 454-60 Inscr. no. 3; Sayce 1888, 6; Sayce 1893, 14, 22; Sandalgian 1900, 250-1, Inscr. no. 53-53*; Lehmann-Haupt 1928-35, 22, pl. XLII, CICH 10; Melikišvili 1960, 122-3 UKN 17; König 1955-57, 2, HchI 5a; Harutyunyan 2001, 17-8 KUKN 19; Salvini 2008, 107, CTU A 2-1; Salvini 2018, 41-4, CTU A 2-1.

it, which he published in his corpus [fig. 5D] (Lehmann-Haupt 1928-35, pl. XLII). The short inscription repeats the same text twice on two overlapping lines:

(1) ^miš-pu-ú-i-ni-iš ^msa₅-duri(BAD)-ḫi-ni-še bur-ga-na-ni ši-di-ši-tú-ni ḫal-di-ni-ni uš-gi-ni ^miš-pu-ú-i-ni-iš mdsar₅-duri(BAD)-ḫi-ni-še É i-ni ši-di-ši-tú-ni i-nu-^rki' [ba]-^rdu'-si-ni [ú-i] gi-e-i ši-da-^rŠE?'

(1) Išpuini, son of Sarduri, built a *burganani*. Through the help(?) of the god Ḫaldi, Išpuini, son of Sarduri, built this building. [No] thing had been built to this [per]fection (before).

(2) ^miš-pu-ú-i-ni-iš ^msa₅-duri(BAD)-ḫi-ni-še bur-ga-na-ni ši-di-ši-tú-ni ḫal-di-ni-ni uš-gi-ni ^miš-pu-ú-i-ni-iš mdsar₅-duri(BAD)-ḫi-ni-še É i-ni ši-di-ši-tú-ni i-nu-ki ba-du-si-ni be-^rdi' ú-i 'gi'-e-i ši-da-ŠE?

(2) Išpuini, son of Sarduri, built a *burganani*. Through the help (?) of the god Ḫaldi, Išpuini, son of Sarduri, built this building. Nothing had been built to this perfection (before). (Author's transl.)

The text refers to the construction of a structure called *burganani*, a term yet to be fully interpreted, which was likely situated at the foot of the Kalecik fortress, according to the information provided by Schulz. The interpretation of the term *burganani* has been debated for over a century. Sandalgian suggested that the term signifies a 'high place' (*lieu-élevé*), possibly denoting a site of sacred or religious nature (Sandalgian 1900, 251); in his 1938 study, Adontz analyses the term *burganani* found in the Urartian inscription of Aralesk/Kalecik and identifies it as meaning "fortress-tower" or "palace". The author highlights the striking coincidence between the Urartian term *burgana* and the Armenian *burgn* (gen. *burgn*), already attested as the translation of *pyrgos* in Classical Armenian biblical texts. According to Adontz, this linguistic correspondence suggests not only a direct contact between the Urartian and Armenian languages, but also a possible Asiatic origin of the term, which may have spread into the Greek (*pyrgos*) and Italic (*burgus*) worlds – possibly even through Etruscan mediation (Adontz 1939, 465). Melikishvili and Harutyunyan, on the other hand, interpreted *burganani* as possibly referring to a fortress (*krepost'* крепость) (Melikishvili 1960, 123; Harutyunyan 2001, 17). According to König, the term *burganani* possibly referred to a grazing district or pasture area (*Weidebezirk*) or a sheepfold or livestock pen (*Hürde*) (König 1955-57, 179). According to Balkan, *burganani* referred to an area where animals destined for sacrifice were gathered, or an enclosure for the temple courtyard and the defence of the temple complex (Balkan 1960, 110-12). Yakubovich suggests an etymological comparison with Classical Armenian *brgn*

meaning ‘fortress’ (Yakubovich 2016, 148). Salvini, in his recent corpus, opts to leave the term *burganani* untranslated. The term is attested exclusively during the reign of Iṣpuini (CTU A 2-1; A 2-9A-B), the so-called co-regency between Iṣpuini and Minua (CTU A 3-1; A 3-11), and the reign of Minua alone (CTU A 5-28; A 5-29; A 5-30; A 5-31). The term *burganani* appears in diverse contexts. In some instances, it precedes the planting of trees (CTU A 3-1), while in others, it is linked to the creation of gardens and orchards (CTU A 5-28, A 5-29, A 5-30). Balkan’s hypothesis remains valid: until an excavated structure is found with an *in situ* inscription explicitly referring to its foundation, assigning a definitive meaning to the term will remain impossible (Balkan 1960, 112). The second inscription (CTU A 8-46) is carved on a stone slab that was believed to be lost for a long time but is actually preserved at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, where is currently stored [fig. 5E-F]. The uncertainty regarding the location of the inscription stems from the information provided by Marr, the first to publish the epigraph, which was later referenced by various scholars. Marr stated that the inscription was cut from the original rock without damaging the text and was transported from Van to Tbilisi by A.A. Florensky. However, according to König, the inscription was not taken to the museum, as it is absent from Tsereteli’s Tbilisi catalogue.¹³ However, Marr also informs us that the slab, considered part of an altar, was later documented by the artist G. Kelchevsky, and a negative print was made for the Caucasian Museum (Marr 1915, 1732). This confirms that before being transported to Moscow, the inscription indeed passed through Georgia. The inscription is said to have been discovered in a small niche in the western wall of the Aralesk/Kalecik site (Marr 1915, 1732; König 1955-57, 17). It remains unclear whether the inscription was carved into a niche in the stone, where the inscription was created, or if the inscription was placed within a stone block embedded in the western fortification wall of the fortress [fig. 10]. After Marr’s initial publication, the inscription has been revisited by many scholars.¹⁴ The inscription, which is rectangular in shape, measures approximately 20 cm in height and 30 cm in width, with a thickness of about 5 cm (Salvini 2008, 367; 2018, 236). However, it is important to note that these are likely approximate measurements due to the carving of the original stone to facilitate its transportation. The area with the inscription measures 12 cm in height and 25.5 cm in width.¹⁵ As correctly pointed out by

13 Marr 1915, 1731-2; Meščaninov 1931-32, 264; König 1955-57, 17.

14 On this inscription, see Meščaninov 1931-32, 263-6; Lehmann-Haupt 1928-35, 128, CICH 114A; König 1955-57, 17, HchI 94; Melikišvili 1960, 172, UKN 153; Harutyunyan 2001, 205, KUKN 183; Salvini 2008, 367; Salvini 2018, 236, CTU A 8-41.

15 Marr 1915, 1732; König 1955-57, 17; Salvini 2008, 367; Salvini 2018, 236.

Meščaninov, it is impossible to determine which Argišti is referred to in this inscription, due to the absence of the patronymic (Meščaninov 1931-32, 264). However, it has almost always been attributed to Argišti (I), son of Minua.¹⁶ According to Salvini, the paleographic aspects, such as the form of the sign -ni, would suggest a dating before the reign of Sarduri (II), son of Argišti, thus attributing it to Argišti (I), son of Minua (Salvini 2018, 236). The brief inscription, which contains some terms that remain untranslatable (*úḫini* and *šua*) and lacks a verb, though it is likely complete, reads as follows:

1 ṁar-gi-iš-ti-še 2 a-li-e 3 i-ni ú-ḫi-ni 4 NA₄.šú-a-i-e

Argišti says: this *uḫini* of *šua*

The significance of this inscription lies primarily in its evidence of construction activities at the site still occurring in the first half of the eighth century BCE.

5 The American Archaeological Excavations in 1938-39

As previously mentioned, the only controlled excavations ever conducted at the site were carried out by the American expedition in 1938-39, under the direction of Kirsopp and Silva Lake.¹⁷ To better understand the site and its chronology, it is necessary to summarise in this section the most significant findings of these investigations.¹⁸ The excavations at Kalecik were undertaken in an effort to identify a site that could be compared with the discoveries at Van Fortress and Tilkitepe, with the aim of establishing a chronological sequence

¹⁶ For example, see König 1955-57, 17; Harutyunyan 2001, 205.

¹⁷ Regarding these excavations, in addition to the literature that will be cited in this paragraph, see Dan 2023, 86, which refers to the issue of the sinking of the *Athenia* during World War II, which led to the loss of much of the documentation from these American excavations.

¹⁸ It is important to note that the materials from the excavations at Van Fortress, Tilkitepe, and Kalecik are believed to have been mixed. In this regard, Korfmann wrote that “it should be noted that the Tilkitepe material is marked with Greek excavation inventory numbers (in letter form), the Kalecik material apparently with Hebrew, and the Van material with Roman ones” (Korfmann 1977, 181; Korfmann 1982, 37, 220). Despite this, some materials remain impossible to separate (Korfmann 1982, 87.8).

for the materials recovered.¹⁹ The site was chosen because the surface was rich in fragments of typically Urartian highly polished red ceramics, as well as other types described as “plain” and “painted buff” (Korfmann 1977, 186-7; Korfmann 1982, 197). In 1938, a trench was initially opened running east-west, measuring 5 m in length and reaching a depth of 8 m on the western side of the rock spur (Lake 1940, 189). At a certain depth, the archaeologists reached Urartian archaeological levels, beneath which they identified a thin layer containing ceramics described as *pre-Urartian* (including *highly glazed black* and *incised grey sherds*). Below this, they encountered a sterile clay and pebble level, interpreted as virgin soil.²⁰ During this campaign, the presence of a cave and a stepped tunnel at the site was also noted.²¹ The archaeologists identified two levels of Urartian ceramics: a later level characterised by *highly burnished red ware* and an earlier one where this ceramic type was mixed with *painted buff ware*, a pattern they had also observed in some levels at Van Fortress (Korfmann 1977, 192; 1982, 198). We will return to this painted pottery later in this text. In 1939, it was decided to continue the work at the trench from 1938, initially by widening it, before attempting to dig deeper into what was initially defined as virgin soil, which, after an additional depth of about 3 m, turned out to indeed be virgin soil. The widening yielded results consistent with those of the previous year. The conclusion of the work on the eastern slope was that there was a fortress-citadel, but no settlement to the west of the rock spur (Korfmann 1977, 192-4; 1982, 199-200). In any case, it is worth noting the discovery of a hearth where a large cooking pot was found resting on a bed of ashes, and beside it, a fragment of a plate, an obsidian knife, and a large number of animal bones. The pottery associated with the hearth has been described

19 Among the reasons for the Kalecik excavations was the verification of data obtained from the excavation conducted by the American mission on the southern side of the Van Rock. Here, 5 m of debris and materials were identified, related to the destruction of the city of Van during the events of World War I. In the subsequent 2 m, levels with highly burnished red pottery, typically Urartian, were identified, but no building remains were found. At approximately 8 m in depth, sandy virgin soil was encountered (Korfmann 1977, 185-6). These pieces of information are very interesting, although limited. On one hand, they seem to suggest that the medieval settlement might rest directly on Urartian layers, while on the other, the constraints imposed by the small size of the trench prevent excluding the possibility that the ancient settlement of the Urartian capital lies directly beneath the medieval city of Van.

20 The letters from Lake are inconsistent with each other. At the end of the 1938 campaign, it was clearly stated that the depth reached led to the decision to stop the work, despite not having reached the bedrock, with the plan to move the trench the following year (Korfmann 1977, 187-8). However, in the letters at the beginning of the 1939 expedition, it is clearly stated that a level was reached that could have been virgin soil (Korfmann 1977, 192; 1982, 198).

21 Lake 1940, 189; Korfmann 1977, 187-9, 192; 1982, 198.

as plant or grit-tempered, handmade, usually brown or black, with a well-burnished slip (Korfmann 1982, 198). In connection with this hearth, two skeletons were found, one of an adult, probably female, and a child, seemingly crushed by the collapse of a stone wall. A fragment of an obsidian knife buried in the forehead of the mother suggests that it was probably driven into the skull by the fall of the wall. Deeper in the trench, the remains of a stone foundation of a dwelling were found (Korfmann 1982, 199), which was later extensively exposed. Here, two earthen floors were found, spaced about 45 cm (18 inches) apart, with a number of less well-laid floors in the middle. The dwelling was initially dated to the Chalcolithic based on ceramic materials (Korfmann 1982, 200), but it was later determined to belong to the Early Bronze Age (Kura-Araxes culture). In the final part of the second and last excavation season, the work focused on the excavation of the stepped rock-cut tunnel that started at the summit of the site. Initially, it was correctly interpreted as a cistern, but later reinterpreted as an entrance to the citadel. However, at the end of the excavation, once the virgin rock was reached and debris and ceramics were removed, it was reinterpreted once again as a cistern. Two ventilation windows for light entry were identified, which were used to dispose of excavation materials and accelerate processes. At the end of the excavation, it was concluded that, given the presence of modern materials in the terminal section of the tunnel, it had been in use until just a few years before, likely until World War I, when many of the buildings at the top of the rock were destroyed (Korfmann 1977, 198-200; 1982, 201-2). Regarding the results of these excavations and the ongoing issues concerning the chronology produced by the excavations at the site, refer to the specific paragraph on the chronology of the site in this same text.

Summary of the Stratigraphy of Kalecik

1. From 1 to 7 m deep, modern materials were mixed with ancient ones.
2. At a depth of 7 to 8 m, primarily red burnished ceramics were found alongside kitchenware.
3. At 8 m, painted yellow-brown pottery became almost as abundant as the fine red ceramics.
4. Below 8 m, at unspecified depths, layers from the Early Bronze Age were uncovered.

6 The Archaeological Evidence

The term Kalecik refers to a series of archaeological features located near the village known as Aralesk/Kalecik. All these features, which are clearly interconnected across various periods, are presented in the following paragraphs of this text. They include the rocky outcrop and surrounding areas excavated by the American mission, which hosted the Urartian fortification and other structures, as well as the origin of the two inscriptions previously discussed. Additionally, near the outcrop, a rock-cut chamber, a couple of Iron Age cemeteries, and a puzzling area marked by rows of small stelae have been discovered. The medieval archaeological features, particularly the two Armenian churches and the cemetery, are addressed in a dedicated section. All these highly significant archaeological findings are constantly threatened by uncontrolled construction activities, illegal excavations, and the intentional destruction of archaeological evidence, particularly those from the medieval period. Unfortunately, the area of the Kalecik site was selected for the construction of new housing following the devastating earthquake in the Van region in 2011. The table below provides the names, key characteristics, and chronologies of the sites discussed in the text. These will be further discussed in a specific section later. The coordinates of the various areas were collected by the author during surveys conducted in the region between 2008 and 2010.

Table 1 Archaeological Sites in the Aralesk/Kalecik Area

Site name	Site type	Chronology	Coordinates	State of conservation
Aralesk/ Kalecik	Fort	MIA/Urartu, MA	38°32'45.56"N 43°20'15.68"E	Damaged by new constructions, vandalism
Aralesk/ Kalecik	Settlement	EBA, MIA/ Urartu, MA	38°32'44.51"N 43°20'13.79"E	Damaged by soil removal, illegal excavations and new constructions
Aralesk/ Kalecik	Village	MA	38°32'44.51"N 43°20'13.79"E	Completely destroyed
Surb Amenap'rkich'	Chapel	MA	38°32'45.28"N 43°20'15.98"E	Completely destroyed
Surb Mariam Astvatsatsin	Church	MA	38°32'44.64"N 43°20'17.19"E	Completely destroyed
Kalecik	Rock-cut tomb	MIA/Urartu?	?	Unknown

Site name	Site type	Chronology	Coordinates	State of conservation
Kalecik	Cemetery	MIA/Urartu	38°33'21.11"N 43°20'55.54"E	Partly damaged by new constructions, illegal excavations
Kalecik	Cemetery	MA	38°32'40.77"N 43°20'33.07"E	Completely destroyed by mechanical machines
Kalecik	Stone Circle-I	Protohistoric?	38°33'24.54"N 43°20'56.72"E	Damaged by agricultural fields and illegal excavations
Kalecik	Stone Circle-II	Protohistoric?	38°33'20.39"N 43°21'4.95"E	Damaged by agricultural fields and illegal excavations
Kalecik	Stone Circle-III	Protohistoric?	38°33'19.61"N 43°21'5.10"E	Damaged by agricultural fields and illegal excavations
Kalecik	Stone Circle-IV	Protohistoric?	38°33'19.30"N 43°21'6.47"E	Damaged by agricultural fields and illegal excavations
Kalecik	Stelae area	Protohistoric?	38°33'20.13"N 43°21'7.71"E	Damaged by agricultural fields and illegal excavations



Figure 1 Satellite image showing the archaeological sites mentioned in the text (satellite base from Google Earth 2024)



Figure 2 View of the capital of Urartu, the Van-Tuspa fortress, seen from the summit of the Aralesk/Kalecik rock in 2008. Photo by the Author

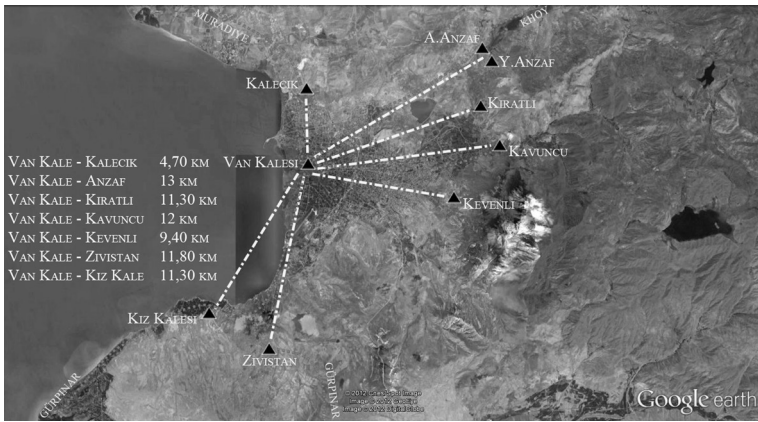


Figure 3 Reconstruction of the ring of fortifications that protected the capital of Urartu, with the aerial distances between it and the eight fortresses that protected it. Photo by the Author



Figure 4 Period image depicting the Aralesk/Kalecik rock from the southwest. Note the chapel, now vanished, on the top of the spur (image available at <https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-van/kaza-of-van/local-characteristics/popular-medicine.html>)

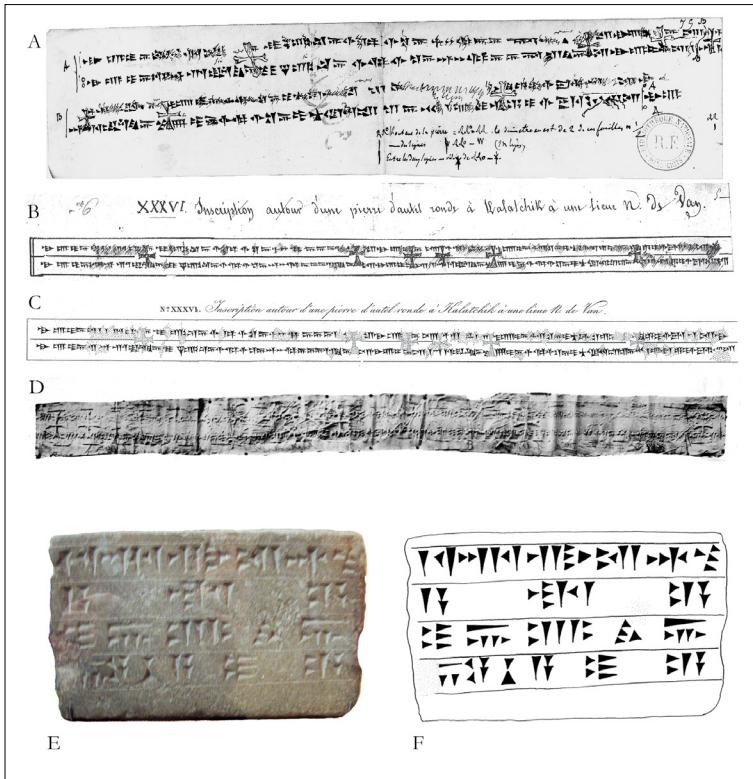


Figure 5 Urartian inscriptions from the Aralesk/Kalecik site. A-D) Base of the column of King Išpuini, son of Sarduri (CTU A 2-1) (A-C are the copies made by Schulz and taken from Salvini 2018, 41-3; D is the cast made by Lehmann-Haupt, from Lehmann-Haupt 1928-35, pl. XLII). E-F) Inscription of Argišti (I), son of Minua (CTU A 8-41) (E, photo courtesy of Mirjo Salvini of the inscription at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow; F, copy by Mirjo Salvini modified by Salvini 2008, 248)

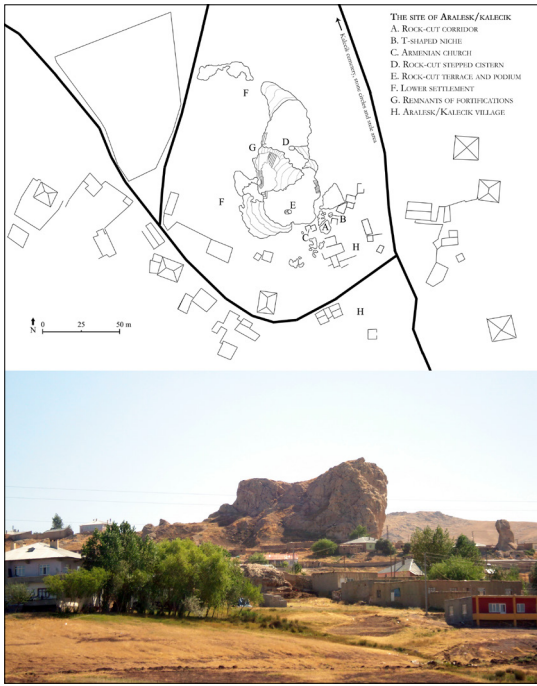


Figure 6
Top, schematic plan of the
Aralesk/Kalecik site with
key features indicated
(adapted after Dan 2010,
fig. 2). Bottom, view of the
Aralesk/Kalecik rock from
the northeast

7 The Fortress on the Rock-Spur and the Surrounding Areas

The small fortress of Kalecik is situated on a prominent rocky promontory²² overlooking the modern village below, approximately 4.6 km north of ̐uşpa in a straight line [figs 4, 6-7]. The promontory is located about 4.5 km west of Ak Köprü (Sinclair 1987, 189) and roughly 800 m north of the D975 Van-Ağrı road. The spur, approximately 25-30 m high, features a single access point on the northwest side, facing the lake.²³ The rocky spur hosting the remains of the fortress measures approximately 90 m along the north-south axis and 60 m along the east-west axis.²⁴ The destruction of many of the site's

22 Coordinates: 38°32'45.63"N 43°20'15.90"E; Elevation: 1750 m. a.s.l. The rocky promontory is located near the modern villages of Kalecik and Iskeleköy (Harta Genel Müdürlüğü 1:200,000, Van Sheet 86).

23 For the investigations conducted by the author of this contribution at the site between 2008 and 2009, see Dan 2010, 49-50, fig. 2.

24 75 × 15 m according to Russell (1980, 127), who was probably referring only to the upper part.

remains dates back to the First World War (Korfmann 1977, 200) and the systematic demolition carried out by the village inhabitants. There is no trace of the deep trench excavated by American archaeologists to the west of the cliff. From the ruins of a possible small Armenian church [fig. 6C], on the southern slopes of the rocky spur, the remains of a rock-cut corridor [fig. 6A] have emerged, which closely resembles those found in the fortresses of Minua at Lower Anzaf, Upper Anzaf, and Kavuncu. This must have been the ancient access to the fortress. Immediately after this corridor, in almost perfect alignment, there is a characteristic T-shaped niche [figs 6B, 8], likely intended to contain urns, similar to those found in large quantities at Van Castle and other sites in Van region.²⁵ The horizontal arm of the niche is 1.92 m long, with a total height of 1.75 m from the ground, and the vertical arm has a width of 0.40 m. The depth of the niche is approximately 0.50 m. Its lower section is oval and carved directly into the bedrock.²⁶ From here, the road runs along the eastern and northern sides of the small rock, leading to its summit; indeed, the western side, the least naturally protected, bears significant traces of rock-cut steps and terraces, and it is here that the actual entrance to the fortress must have been [figs 6G, 9]. This coincides with the presence of the two section of wall still visible [figs 6G, 10]. One is about 1 m long, with three/four layers of stones placed on foundations cut into the rock, allowing us to observe the significant original depth of the wall. Another small section, built between two rocky ridges, is preserved with two courses of stones, but until 1973 it was well-preserved with at least four superimposed courses, as shown in photographs taken by Rudolf Neumann and stored in the archives of the D.A.I. On the western side of the spur, an artificial terrace is visible, closely resembling many found on the summit of Țușpa and at several other Urartian sites. It measures approximately 6 by 3 m. Rather than a cultic terrace, such structures should be considered partially rock-cut and partially masonry-built spaces, whose exact function remains to be determined. Furthermore, the systematic destruction over the years of the structures preserved on the summit of the rock by the inhabitants of the village below has exposed all the characteristic Urartian stepped foundations. At the foot of the rocky spur, there are piles of construction blocks that once belonged to the walls. To the right of the entrance, a rock-cut terrace is partially preserved, though heavily eroded by weathering agents. It measures 11.30 m in length, with a maximum preserved width of 2.80 m; the height of the back wall is about 3 m. The summit of the spur has an approximately

25 On these T-shaped niches in Urartian culture, see Dan forthcoming.

26 On the T-shaped niche of Kalecik, see Dan 2010, 49; Gokce, Genc, Kacmaz Levent 2019, 329, fig. 1.

oval shape, narrowing in the central section along the east-west axis, with a sloping surface descending from south to north. No discernible traces of structures are preserved, but evidence of stonework is visible throughout. At the centre, at the narrowest point of the spur, is located the entrance of a rock-cut stepped tunnel [figs 6D, 11]. This is the only structure visible on the summit of the rock, archaeologically investigated in the 1930s by Kirsopp and Silva Lake (Korfmann 1977, 198, 200). This tunnel has a depth of 19 m and an opening diameter of 2.80×2.55 m (Dan 2010, 50; 2020, 176). It was not possible to visit the interior of the structure due to the erosion of the rock-cut steps, but a previously unidentified window was noted on the eastern side of the rock, which illuminates the deep tunnel. This was also a characteristic feature of Urartian architecture, found in the rock-cut stepped tunnels of Toprakkale and Delibaba.²⁷ At a height of 3.60 m from the water level, a drainage channel has been carved into the rock in the eastern direction. The channel measures 1.30×1.20 m. At the end of the fifteenth step of the tunnel, the interior is 1.70×1.75 m. This section is arched, with a width of 80 cm. The arch was likely needed due to a rock fissure. After the tenth step, there is a levelling on the right side for 15 steps. The drainage channel is 2.5 m long, with a base width of 20-15 cm, a top width of 70 cm, and a depth of 70 cm. The cistern's floor measures 4.10×3.00 m. After 3 m of steps, 8 rows of steps lead to a section 2.60 m long, 50 cm deep, and 15-20 cm wide, consisting of 15 steps. The total number of steps is 40 (Gokce, Genc, Kacmaz Levent 2019, 328-9). This is a well/cistern designed for water supply in case of a siege, likely intended for collecting rainwater. Given that the opening of the well is located at the top of the rocky spur, nearly 20 m high, even more, it is highly unlikely that it could have reached an aquifer (Dan 2010, 50). On the summit of the rock [fig. 12], in the southern terrace overlooking the capital, there is a rock-cut podium accessible via three steps [figs 2, 6E, 13]. In some historical photographs, remnants of ancient walls – possibly Urartian and medieval – are still visible, along with the Armenian chapel that once stood at the summit [fig. 4]. According to the legends, the chapel is said to have been built on the site of a pagan temple, of which no remains are preserved. Of the medieval and late medieval village, characterised by mudbrick houses, virtually nothing remains today, whereas between 2008 and 2010 some ruins were still visible. Traces of a settlement have been identified beneath the ruined village; however, the archaeological investigations were limited. Of all the fortresses built to defend the capital, this is the only one that

27 On the rock-cut stepped tunnels (known in literature with the German terms of *Felstrepptunnel*), with reference to previous literature, see Koroğlu, Danişmaz 2018; Dan 2020.

exclusively exhibits military and territorial control characteristics. It was established as a territorial control station (Belli 1989, 66). It was therefore established as a territorial control station along the route that ran along the eastern shore of Lake Van, connecting the capital with the Muradiye area at the northeastern end of the lake. The entire area is constantly threatened by the construction of new buildings, the removal of archaeological soil on the western side of the site, and the presence of an expanding modern cemetery on the northwestern side of the site.



Figure 7
Top, view of the Aralesk/Kalecik
rock from the south. Bottom,
view from the north, with
the area where the American
mission excavated.
Photo by the Author

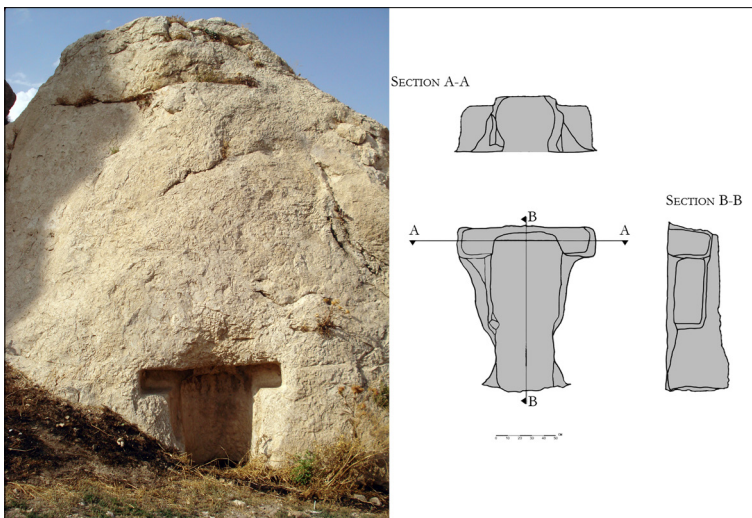


Figure 8 Photo and drawing of the T-shaped niche at the southern part of the Aralesk/Kalecik rock. Photo by the Author



Figure 9 View of some rock-cut foundation terraces on the western side of the rock. Photo by the Author

Figure 10
Remains of Urartian
megalithic walls on the
western side of the rock
corresponding to the
possible access to the
fortress. The inscription
of Argišti I (CTU A 8-41)
may have come from here.
Photo by the Author



Figure 11 Two views of the stepped rock tunnel access at the central part of the summit of the rock.
In the right photo, note the opening to the exterior of the rock for air circulation
and light entry. Photo by the Author



Figure 12 Two views of the summit of the Aralesk/Kalecik rock. Top, view from the north to the south. Bottom, view from the south to the north. Photo by the Author



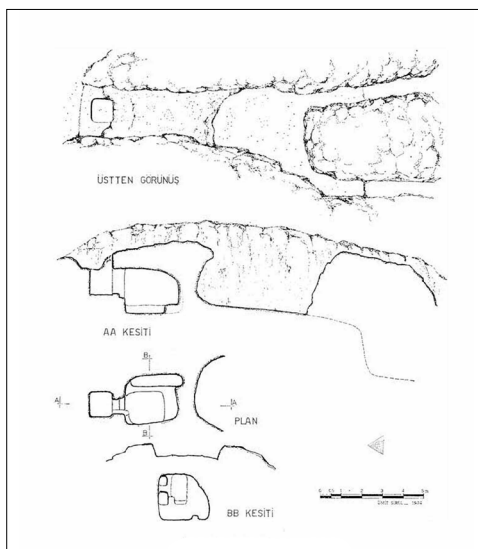
Figure 13 The rock podium on the southern summit of the Aralesk/Kalecik rock. Top, general view, bottom, close-up of the medieval Armenian crosses engraved on the podium, which was likely incorporated into the vanished medieval chapel. Photo by the Author

8 The Rock-Cut Chamber

Between 1972 and 1973, Veli Sevin explored a series of tombs, some of which were rock-cut, in the Van region, which had unfortunately been looted and partially destroyed by illegal excavations. Despite the diverse morphologies of these tombs and the absence of grave goods, the complex of these tombs offered valuable insights. One rock-cut chamber was discovered 500 m northeast of the Aralesk/Kalecik Fortress [fig. 14]. The tomb was created by carving into a soft tuff layer within a natural limestone fissure, approximately 2.25 m wide, which had been filled with softer tuff material. Its north-facing entrance (1.10 × 1.25 m) takes the form of a shaft approximately 1.30 m deep. From there, the door (1.10 × 0.60 m) is accessed, leading into the burial chamber, which is reached via two steps. The chamber itself measures roughly 2.50 × 2.25 m, with a flat ceiling that slopes downward to the south, reaching a maximum height of 2.10 m. Although heavily damaged by looters, the tomb's features were still discernible. To the immediate right of the entrance are two niches carved one above the other, although their forms have been significantly eroded due to the softness of the tuff. In front of the eastern and southern walls of the chamber is a bench measuring 0.70-0.75 m in width and 0.35 m in height. In the eastern bench, a trough measuring 2.40 × 0.50 m and 0.30 m deep was carved in a north-south orientation. Sevin noted similarities between this burial and the tombs at the Inner Castle of Van and Kayalıdere, while also recognising unique features in the tomb at Aralesk/Kalecik. Although this did not lead him to consider the tomb as belonging to a princely figure, as seen in the aforementioned comparison tombs, it nonetheless led him to conclude that it was the tomb of an important individual. Sevin concluded his presentation of the tomb with a chronological proposal based on the presence of niches and carved troughs inside the niches, similar to those found in the tombs at Van Castle (the western chamber of the İç-Kale tomb) and Kayalıdere (Tomb A, Room 3). According to Sevin, the use of these rock-cut features would have ceased with the mausoleum of Arğiști (I) at Van Fortress, the only tomb among those mentioned that could be dated thanks to the presence of the king's annals on its façade. This mausoleum, known as the Great Hırhır, was believed to be the last burial where these rock-cut features were found, features that are also present in the tomb at Aralesk/Kalecik. Sevin thus concluded his analysis by dating the tomb to a period prior to the eighth century BCE, and specifically before the reign of Arğiști (I), the son of Minua (Sevin 1986, 336-9). The dating of the rock-cut tomb to the Uartian period has also been reaffirmed by other scholars, who have confirmed the association of the site with this historical period based on supposedly common stylistic and morphological elements of

the funerary structures (Çevik 2000, 9-10). Despite Sevin's proposal, caution must be exercised when dating these rock-cut chamber tombs unless there are definitive diagnostic elements, which, in the specific case of this tomb, do not appear to be present. The burial could belong to the Middle Iron Age, but it might also be earlier or later.

Figure 14
Plan and sections of the rock
chamber near Aralesk/Kalecik
(from Sevin 1986, fig. 21)



9 The Middle Iron Age/Urartian Period Cemetery of Kalecik

In addition to the rock-cut chamber discussed in the previous paragraph, there is another funerary archaeological context that appears to be directly connected to the site of Aralesk/Kalecik. It is located 1.4 km northwest of the Aralesk/Kalecik rock spur. This is a necropolis known in the literature as Kalecik [fig. 15]. The necropolis, located in a flat area between two hills known as Sığır Hill on the west (1881 m. a.s.l.) and Şahbağı Hill (1968 m. a.s.l.) became known starting in 1998, when it became a target for illegal excavations, and was subsequently excavated between 2004 and 2007 under the scientific direction of Rafet Çavuşoğlu. During the excavations a total of 25 underground chamber tombs were identified.²⁸ Of these, 24 had

²⁸ On the results of these excavations, see Çavuşoğlu, Biber 2005a; Çavuşoğlu, Biber 2005b; Çavuşoğlu, Biber 2006; Biber 2006; Çavuşoğlu, Biber 2007; 2008; Çavuşoğlu, Biber, Başar 2008; Çavuşoğlu, Biber 2012; Çavuşoğlu 2015.

been looted by illegal excavators, and one remained unopened. This one unfortunately consisted only of an entrance dromos without a burial chamber, and was clearly left unfinished. The excavations were carried out progressively, with 9 tombs investigated in 2004, 6 in 2005, 8 in 2006, and 2 in 2007. The tombs in this area were opened in a soft limestone layer 1 m under the ground surface, and were similar to the close cemetery of Altıntepe. The burial chambers, which are also deeper than the well-type dromos, are accessed by ascending a few steps. The entrance to the chamber tomb is also blocked with flat stone slabs. The dimensions of the Kalecik tombs vary from 4.50 × 2.40 m to 1.80 × 2.90 m. The presence of niches for cremation urns on the side walls was characteristic of the larger tombs. Smaller burial chambers do not have niches. The burial chambers generally have a rectangular or square plan with rounded corners, and some are equipped with benches. The height of the burial chambers is not very high, not exceeding 1.30 m. Giving the architectural plans of the tombs, along with ceramic and metal artefacts recovered, was suggested that the necropolis was in use from the ninth century BCE until the end of the Urartian Kingdom (Çavuşoğlu, Biber 2008, 192-3; Çavuşoğlu, Biber, Başar 2008, 276). Particularly interesting was the discovery of typical Urartian lamps, which clearly were not part of the grave goods but were used in ancient times during the reopening of tombs at the time of new burials, as in nearly all cases the tombs were multiple burials. As for the materials, both ceramic and metallic, with red polished pottery clearly of Urartian production, as well as metals where short curved blades and swords with typical Urartian characteristics are distinguished,²⁹ it is difficult to provide an exact dating for these tombs and their materials without referring to a general Urartian period.

29 See especially the pottery and the metal objects in Çavuşoğlu, Biber 2012, figs 11, 13.

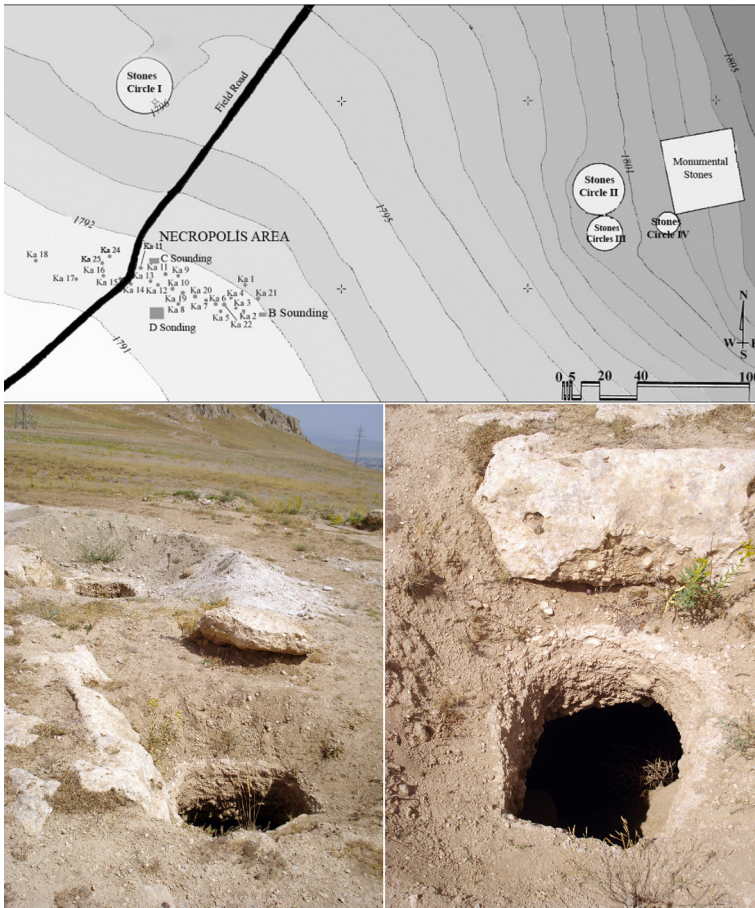


Figure 15 The Kalecik necropolis. Top, plan of the structures (from Çavuşoğlu, Biber 2012, fig. 1). Bottom, two images of the burial entrances in 2009

10 The Stone Circles and Stelae Area

Relatively close to the necropolis, there are other archaeological remains that are both intriguing and problematic in terms of their functional and chronological contextualisation. In the easternmost part of the necropolis, there are three separate stone circles with diameters of 13 m, 18 m, and 30 m, as well as an area where standing stones form an enigmatic monument. This group of stone circles is directly associated with the stelae area and is situated approximately 160 m northeast of the MIA/Urartu cemetery. A fourth stone circle, located 200 m west of the standing stones is found on flat land about

90 m north of the MIA/Urartu cemetery. The standing stones of the stelae area are arranged in a 39 × 40.5-metre area, with each stone carved from regional limestone and varying in height between 1.00 and 1.30 m [fig. 16]. The stones are set in a regular East-West alignment, spaced approximately 0.50 m apart. Originally, the standing stones were arranged in 45 rows, each containing 55 stones, suggesting a total of 2,475 stones. However, the number has significantly decreased due to illegal excavations. The stone circles adjacent to the southwest corner of the standing stones include one with a 13-metre diameter, and another pair of stone circles on an artificial hill about 20 m to the west, with diameters of 30 m and 18 m. Between the stone circles and the standing stones, there is a canal running in a north-south direction. The purpose and function of the standing stones and stone circles remain uncertain. It has been proposed that their precise arrangement may indicate a connection to astronomical observations. Supporting this hypothesis is the existence of similar stone rows and circles in other parts of the Near East and Europe, and the stone circles located between Lake Aral and the Caspian Sea, both believed to represent sacred or ritual sites. These structures often functioned as astronomical observatories, potentially linked to the measurement of time, lunar cycles, or solar rituals. No architectural remains were discovered around the stones and circles to suggest the area was a settlement. This absence has led to the hypothesis that the site was primarily dedicated to cult ceremonies rather than daily activities. Consequently, it has been suggested that the individuals buried in the nearby necropolis may have had roles associated with the religious or ceremonial functions of the complex, possibly overseeing its operation or maintenance (Çavuşoğlu, Biber 2012, 333, 335, 337). While the interpretative proposals are intriguing, it must be acknowledged that, given the current state of our knowledge, it is not only challenging to determine the function of these structures but also to establish their chronological framework. There is no definitive evidence to associate these features with the nearby Urartian-period necropolis. An alternative hypothesis could suggest that these structures might be linked to the Protohistoric phases of the nearby Kalecik fortress, specifically to the Early Bronze Age. In this regard, a compelling comparison can be drawn between the large circular stone structures (so-called 'ring plateaus') identified in the Ashotsk Valley near Hartashen (province of Shirak, Armenia) and the stone enclosures at Kalecik, near Lake Van in modern-day Turkey. The Hartashen monuments - some of which are associated with kurgans - have yielded material evidence suggesting a construction phase in the Early Bronze Age (twenty-eighth to twenty-seventh centuries BCE), particularly linked to the Kura-Araxes culture (Schunke, Yeganyan, Khachatryan 2011). This chronology supports the view that the stelae at Kalecik may predate the Urartian period and correspond

instead to an earlier phase of occupation in the Early Bronze Age. The morphological and spatial similarities between the two sites, including their positioning between natural ridges and their large, ring-shaped ground plans, reinforce the hypothesis of a broader and older cultural continuum across the Armenian Highlands. Unfortunately, this entire archaeological area is under significant threat from the relentless urban expansion of the city of Van. Part of the necropolis has already been destroyed to make way for new residential buildings, and it is highly likely that the site will be completely obliterated in the coming years.



Figure 16 View of the stelae area in 2009. Photo by the Author

11 The Armenian Chapel, Church and Cemetery

Very little information is available about the Armenian village that once stood on the rock outcrop of Aralesk, which was almost entirely destroyed during the events of the First World War. In the 1850s, the village had 76 households (501 inhabitants), and by 1914, it had grown to 130-80 Armenian families engaged in agriculture and fruit farming (Hakobyan, Melik-Bakhshyan, Barseghyan 1988, 566). Apparently, on the rock outcrop and in the village below, there were two churches. One chapel dedicated to Armenian pilgrims was located at the summit of the rocky spur, known as Surb Amenap'rkich' (Savior of

All),³⁰ apparently, built on the site of an ancient pagan temple, which, according to tradition, was connected to the myth of Semiramis and Ara.³¹ As already introduced, the legend has it that Queen Semiramis of Assyria placed the body of King Ara the Handsome, slain in battle, in this temple so that the mythical creatures called Aralezs could lick his wounds and bring him back to life. According to tradition, the pagan temple was later destroyed by Apostle Thaddeus, who built the chapel of the Savior of All in its place (Hakobyan, Melik-Bakhshyan, Barseghyan 1988, 566). In an old photograph, likely from the late 1800s or early 1900s, the chapel can still be seen at the summit of the rock outcrop [fig. 4]. Another church was located at the foot of the rock on its southern side, corresponding to the area where the Urartian rock-cut access corridor to the site, described earlier in this text, has resurfaced. This church was likely named Surb Mariam Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God, Saint Mary) (Dan et al. 2023, 108). This last church was the one described by Schulz as the place where the base of the column with the inscription of Išpuini (CTU A 2-1), discovered underground nearby, was transported and used as an altar stone. The church is completely destroyed, and possibly the inscription with it, although copies made by Schulz and the cast made by Lehmann-Haupt have survived.³² Approximately 250 m east of the fortress, an Armenian necropolis rich in Khachkars with remarkable decorations has been identified [fig. 17]. Among the tombs, several Urartian construction blocks originating from the fortress have been found; one of these stones features five axial holes (Dan 2010, 50). This is the same cemetery briefly mentioned by Marr (Marr 1915, 1732). The khachkars observed,³³ based on their decorative features, would likely date to the fourteenth-fifteenth century AD. They belong to the group identified by Thierry as khachkars carved on roughly shaped schist stones (Thierry 1989, 119), a category characterised by limited distribution, predominantly confined to the areas within the historical

30 The day of Surb Amenap'rkich' vow was Red Sunday, celebrated two weeks after Easter. Many visitors from Van and surrounding villages flocked to the village on this occasion. Especially smartly dressed young men and women participated in this visit to find their life partners. Thus, the holiday became an occasion for the search for a groom and a bride (Sherents 1902, 69). For ethnographic information on the village of Aralesk/Kalecik, see Srvandztyants' (1874). For historical images of the village, see Lisitsian 1958.

31 Schulz 1840, 320-1; AA.VV. 1878, 180; Marr 1915, 1732; Hakobyan, Melik-Bakhshyan, Barseghyan 1988, 566-7.

32 Refer to the paragraph on inscriptions in this same text.

33 For an introduction to the Armenian khachkars, see Petrosyan 2007.

region of Vaspurakan.³⁴ What distinguishes these khachkars from more traditional forms is the absence of preliminary preparation of the support. Unlike conventional practices, which involved carving and squaring the base of the stele, in these cases, the crosses and their intricate and detailed decorations were engraved directly onto the flat surface of the stone block, utilising its natural morphology and the relative 'softness' of the material. Unfortunately, nothing remains of the beautiful khachkar photographed by R. Naumann, which was still present on the site in 1973.³⁵ This elaborate khachkar, with an Armenian inscription at the base, should date back to the fourteenth century AD. Regrettably, the cemetery was completely destroyed in 2021 through the use of bulldozers, as reported by several media.³⁶ Many of the crosses, likely carved by pilgrims at the foot of the upper terrace of the rocky outcrop that hosted the pagan sanctuary and the chapel, appear to be part of a clear process of Christianization of ancient monuments. In this context, the several crosses carved on the base of the column of Išpuini can be interpreted, as they fortunately did not obscure the full understanding of the inscription (Mordtmann 1872, 488).³⁷ These crosses were likely carved in the first half of the nineteenth century, if the information reported by Schulz is correct (Schulz 1840, 320-1). Two large crosses are carved on the upper terrace and were evidently connected to the now completely vanished chapel. Crosses are visible everywhere, also at the foot of the site, although many have been destroyed today. At a short distance from the village, there is another rocky hill called *Adamantsqar* (Adam's Stone) (Hakobyan, Melik-Bakhshyan, Barseghyan 1988, 567).

34 Establishing a precise range for this category of khachkars proves to be challenging, primarily due to the significant loss of Armenian cultural heritage, including khachkars, in the western area corresponding to present-day Turkish territory. This difficulty is further compounded by the absence of a systematic study dedicated to the stone crosses in the region, which further limits the ability to clearly define the geographical distribution and specific characteristics of these artefacts.

35 Image numbers: D-DAI-IST-KB 4533 and D-DAI-IST-KB 4534.

36 See, for example the article "Van: Armenian Cemetery Bulldozed, Tombstones and Bones Smashed" available at <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Van:-Armenian-cemetery-bulldozed,-tombstones-and-bones-smashed-53901.html>.

37 For the processes of Christianization of Urartian epigraphic monuments, see Dan et al. 2023.



Figure 17 Two khachkars still in situ in 2009 in the now-destroyed Armenian cemetery. Photo by the Author

12 The Chronology of the Site and the Problem of the Painted Pottery

The definition of the chronological phases of occupation for the sites discussed in this text will be addressed in this paragraph. The most complex situation concerns the prehistoric and Urartian occupation of the Aralesk/Kalecik site, but other evidence, except for the Kalecik necropolis, also presents challenges in establishing precise periods of occupation. Despite destruction and vandalism, the Aralesk/Kalecik rock formation shows clear signs of occupation dating back to the Urartian period, particularly in the distinctive rock-cut foundations, the T-shaped niche, and the corridor located immediately at the southeastern base of the rock, as well as the few remaining wall sections on the western side. The stepped rock-cut tunnel, already discussed in the text, should also be considered a Urartian feature of the site. All these findings are reinforced by the discovery of inscriptions, previously mentioned in this text, found in this location or its immediate vicinity. The medieval and late medieval occupation of the rock is evidenced both by period photographs, the accounts of travellers and explorers, and the presence of hundreds of crosses carved into the rock. Practically no pottery or soil remains on the rock to help clarify its occupation, which is naturally closely connected to that of the underlying mound. The mound, which is constantly threatened by soil removal and illegal excavations, is the

area where the American mission excavated and where A. Özfirat likely collected ceramics during her survey of the area. The materials collected by the Americans are the most complex to analyse because, as is well known, they were mixed.³⁸

The cataloguing system of ceramic artefacts used at the three sites of Kalecik, Tilkitepe, and Van Fortress, which involved codes in three different languages, cannot be considered a completely reliable criterion. Indeed, the person in charge of the excavations Immanuel Ben-Dor, who likely also assigned the ceramic artefacts Hebrew inventory numbers, did not work at the site during the entire 1939 campaign (Korfmann 1982, 199). Therefore, it is possible that a different system of labelling the materials was later used. In any case, from the controversial data produced by the excavation carried out on the west side at the foot of the rock, it was determined that the site had an occupation phase during the Early Bronze Age, more specifically within the Kura-Araxes cultural horizon, as suggested by some ceramic evidence from the site.³⁹ This layer, attributed to the beginning of prehistory, was interpreted by Lake as a prehistoric layer, dating back to the Chalcolithic. The situation becomes even more complex when considering the Urartian layers. As previously introduced in this text, the American mission identified two levels of red-polished pottery, with the lower, older layer showing a mixture of red-polished pottery and painted productions. The issue of these painted productions is particularly interesting and problematic. Usually, painted pottery – specifically the so-called Triangle Ware or Festoon Ware – is considered a marker of the post-Urartian phases, or more precisely, of the Orontid elite in Achaemenid period.⁴⁰ Today, unlike at the end of the 1930s, we also know that red-polished ceramic productions continued into the post-Urartian period. However, it remains unclear whether these productions should be specifically attributed only to the immediate post-Urartian or pre-Achaemenid phase, usually labelled as ‘Median’, or if they continued to overlap with painted productions from the Orontid/Achaemenid period. Furthermore, we are now aware of the existence of painted

38 For the possible materials from Kalecik, see Korfmann 1982, 87.8, 119.5-6, 121.7, 127.1-7, pls 25-8.

39 The majority of the finds shown in figs 25-8 in Korfmann 1982 most likely originate from the excavations at Kalecik, as evidenced by their assignment of Hebrew inventory numbers. Among the ceramic finds, the handle depicted in fig. 27.4 is particularly striking from a typological perspective, as it belongs to the group of the so-called ‘Nakhichevan handles’, a highly distinctive form of the Early Bronze Age (EBA) (Korfmann 1982, 186).

40 For a brief discussion on this issue related specifically to the sites excavated by the Americans at Van, see Korfmann 1977, 192 and footnote 50. On the Triangle Ware, see Khatchadourian 2018 and Dan, Cesaretti 2021.

Uartian pottery from the seventh century BCE, which imitates contemporary Phrygian productions. These cultural exchanges, still largely unexplored, are beginning to be illuminated. In this context, one should consider the painted vessels from Karmir-blur in Armenia and the Phrygian metal belts found at Toprakkale.⁴¹ In light of these data and considering the reliability of the information provided by the Lakes, several possible scenarios can be proposed to justify this stratigraphic sequence. The first scenario suggests that the uppermost layer containing the red-polished pottery could be a late or, more likely, immediately post-Uartian layer, where the production of red-polished ceramics continued. This layer could be dated to the second half of the seventh century BCE and into the sixth century BCE. The lower layer, on the other hand, would correspond to the first half of the seventh century BCE, where the coexistence of Uartian red-polished pottery and contemporary local painted productions of Phrygian inspiration, which we could classify as 'Uartian-Phrygian style pottery', would be evident. Especially in fragmentary form, the painted Phrygian-like productions and those from the post-Uartian Orontid/Achaemenid periods could be easily confused. Of great importance are some of the details reported by the Lakes, which also involve the chronology of the Toprakkale site:

"The difficulty of the painted buff ware is this: it must be roughly contemporary with the Uartian red ware, not only because we have found the same potter's mark on both, yet it does not always occur with Uartian red ware. Last year on 'B', the trial trench on the south side of the Kale, we found the level where Uartian red ware was common, but not a single sherd of painted buff turned up. On Van Kale, and at Kalecik, in unstratified areas on the hillsides, both types are common, but at least at Kalecik, it seemed more probable that the painted buff was slightly earlier than the Uartian red. This is confirmed by the fact that previous investigators have stated that at Toprak Kale they found only Uartian red, no painted buff. This statement, however, must be accepted with some reservations, in view of the fact that in walking over the hillside at Toprak Kale, this summer, we have picked up several sherds of painted buff. Finally, as I said above, two sherds of painted buff turned up in the lowest level yet reached in 'D'. Unfortunately one was lost by a workman before it reached the pottery room and could not be carefully studied, and the other is of a type somewhat unlike anything we have had before. If, however, we can get rid of enough water to dig down another metre at 'D' that should tell the story" (Korfmann 1977, 198).

Toprakkale, as is well known, is a site with debated chronology. There is discussion over whether it was founded in the eight or

41 On this topic, see Bonfanti, Dan 2021 and Bonfanti, Cesaretti, Dan 2024.

seventh century BCE, but the scientific community is unanimous in considering it a site exclusively occupied during the Urartian period. Unfortunately, the ceramic materials from the site are mostly unpublished, but we are aware of the presence of Urartian red-polished pottery, as this is the site where this type of pottery was first recognised (Toprakkale Ware). The discovery of Painted Buff Ware on the hill of the site might indicate an additional phase of occupation, previously unknown, or suggest other possibilities, as we will explore further. This introduces the second chronological hypothesis for Kalecik, which was suggested by the Lakes: that the upper layer, containing only red pottery, was entirely Urartian and thus could be placed in the third quarter of the ninth century BCE, the time of the fortress's foundation, continuing into the seventh century BCE. Consequently, the lower stratum of Aralesk/Kalecik could be associated with the Early Iron Age, where it appears that both red pottery and some painted pottery production already coexisted, even though these are rare.⁴² The information provided by Lake regarding the discovery of painted pottery on the hill of Toprakkale suggests three possible scenarios. The first, in agreement with the idea that Toprakkale was only occupied during the Urartian period, is that the painted pottery fragments belong to the Urartian-Phrygian Style, which would also align with the discovery of Phrygian-imported belts identified at the site. The other two options concern the possibility that the site was inhabited either during the Early Iron Age or during the Orontid/Achaemenid period, opening up an entirely unexplored chapter of the site's history. All of these hypotheses can only be tested with new archaeological investigations at both Kalecik and Toprakkale, given the confusion surrounding the materials from these sites, Tilkitepe and Van Fortress, which has already been mentioned earlier. The vast online archive of the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut* (DAI) holds several photos of materials stored at the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara, inventoried under the name "Grabung Lake 39", some of which are attributed to Kalecik. Among these, there are some examples of fragments or complete vessels of Triangle Ware and Festoon Ware⁴³ that are labelled as possibly coming from Kalecik. The case of a fragment of Triangle Ware⁴⁴ labelled as possibly originating from Kalecik is emblematic, as the original inventory code is marked with Greek letters, a circumstance that should indicate it originates from Tilkitepe. The problem is that

42 On this, see Özfırat 2018, 166, fig. 4.

43 See the almost complete vessel decorated with the Festoon motif, confidently attributed to Kalecik, although its original inventory number is unknown (Arachne ID, 1167840).

44 Arachne ID, 2004404.

we do not know whether the materials from Kalecik were labelled with Hebrew letters until the end of the 1939 campaign, due to the circumstances previously discussed. In addition to the information derived from the American excavations, it should be noted that Russell, based on three fragments drawn by Burney, only recognised ceramics of the type he called JJ, which correspond to “gritty cream slipped ware”, identified as Urartian pottery through comparisons with Toprakkale, which is apparently a single-phase site, and Norşuntepe. MM was described as “miscellaneous first millennium wares and cooking pot (Russell 1980, 50-1). The inability to verify these data is further complicated by the preliminary information provided by A. Özfiat. The scholar, commenting on ceramic materials she collected at the site, which have not been published, reported the first identification of painted pottery at Kalecik, attributing it to the Middle Bronze Age. Specifically, she referred to monochrome painted pottery, red-brown burnished ware. Additionally, she mentioned the identification of ceramics that could be generically attributed to the Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, and Late Iron Age, but without specific elements related directly to the Kalecik site that would allow for the verification of these details (Özfiat 2009a, 347, 349, 354, 359; Özfiat 2009b, 215, 217, 226). The absence of images or drawings makes it difficult to contextualise most of the data discussed so far. Given the information currently available, it is possible to reconstruct the following hypothetical chronology for Aralesk/Kalecik:

Phases	Archaeological evidence
I – Early Bronze Age	Archaeological evidence
II – Middle Bronze Age	Pottery
III – Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age	Pottery?
IV – Middle Iron Age/Urartu	Pottery, Architecture and Inscriptions
V – Late Iron Age/Orontid/Achaemenid	Pottery?
VI – Middle Age	Pottery, Architecture and Inscriptions

As previously discussed, the nearby Kalecik necropolis provides data on the tomb architectures and the few materials inside, which point to a confirmed dating to the Middle Iron Age/Urartian period. The situation is different regarding the stelae area and the large stone circles, which appear to be a Protohistoric site that do not seem to have any relation to the Urartian presence in the area. However, the rock-cut chamber located 500 m northeast of the rock can be attributed to a general Iron Age context.

13 Conclusions

The analysis of the Aralesk/Kalecik site, located in the Van plain of modern eastern Turkey, has revealed several significant aspects crucial for understanding its history and its place within the broader archaeological and historical context of the region. The site, associated with the Armenian mythological figure of Queen Semiramis, has been the subject of pioneering studies since the late 1940s, when an American mission-initiated excavation. However, the results of these early investigations remain a topic of debate due to challenges in evaluating the findings and the need to refine the site's chronology. The archaeological evidence discovered at Aralesk/Kalecik suggests a possible continuous occupation from the protohistoric period to later historical phases. The evidence indicates that the site was inhabited during the Early Bronze Age, associated with the Kura-Araxes cultural horizon, when the area at the foot of the rock appears to have been occupied by a settlement. The archaeological evidence suggests that the peculiar features found to the north and northeast of the site, such as four stone circles and an area characterised by rows of hundreds of small stelae, may also date to the Early Bronze Age. Sparse ceramic evidence seems to be associated with occupation levels that can be placed between the Middle Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age. The evaluation of the Iron Age occupation phases is closely linked to the investigations carried out by the American mission. This paper has outlined all the potential reconstructions of these phases, particularly focusing on the presence of painted pottery associated with what is thought to be Urartian pottery. Resolving these issues is directly related to the initiation of a new season of excavations at the site. The Urartian occupation of the rocky promontory and, more broadly, of the site is evident during the Urartian period, with numerous epigraphic and archaeological data attesting to the site's occupation beginning in the second half of the ninth century BCE. King Išpuini, the son of Lutipri, chose this location as part of an ambitious project to fortify all access points to the capital city of Դիսի, a project that was later continued by his son Minua. The prolonged Urartian occupation is further attested by an inscription from the first half of the eighth century BCE, commissioned by Arghišti, son of Minua. It is likely that the site remained in use until the late seventh century BCE. The necropolis of Kalecik, located to the north of the rocky promontory, also appears to date to the chronological horizon between the late ninth and seventh centuries BCE. Assessing the possible presence of occupation layers from the Orontid/Achaemenid period is challenging. At present, there is no documentation of the nature or characteristics of the painted pottery excavated by the American mission. If future investigations confirm post-Urartian

occupation, it would be of significant importance, as it would make Aralesk/Kalecik the only site within the Urartian fortification system around the capital that remained continuously in use during the Orontid/Achaemenid periods. All other fortresses in this system, such as Lower and Upper Anzaf, Kıratlı, Kavuncu, Kevenli, Zivistan, and Kız Kalesi, appear to have been destroyed and abandoned. The site also shows significant medieval and late medieval occupation levels, though much of this evidence has been lost over time. The need for further archaeological investigation is clear, not only to clarify the site's chronology but also to protect its remains from the ongoing threats of systematic destruction. The site is facing considerable damage and erosion, which jeopardises its preservation and limits the potential for new discoveries. Immediate action is required to protect and conserve the archaeological evidence that still exists, as it may provide crucial insights into the history of the region and the dynamics of its ancient societies. In conclusion, the Aralesk/Kalecik site is an essential resource for understanding the history and archaeology of the van region. However, its preservation and further study are critical to unlocking its full historical significance. The future of the site depends on continued research, conservation efforts, and international collaboration to ensure its protection from further deterioration. Through such efforts, we may gain a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural and historical developments in the region, particularly in relation to the Urartian and Achaemenid influence.

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Accenni di marzialità nelle fonti buddhiste in lingua pāli: riflessioni sulla base di alcuni elementi storico-artistici dal Gandhāra

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Abstract This article will discuss some early references to the martial arts as they appear in the Pāli canon from a historical perspective. At first, a passage involving fighting shows occurring during festivals will be analysed, highlighting the early Buddhist attitude connected with its ascetic background. Then, a possible shift in attitude that occurred during the reign of Aśoka (III century BCE) will be discussed, and some evidence from Gandhāran Buddhism will be introduced, highlighting a developed stage in which Buddhism has integrated into society, negotiating values and coming to terms with foreign elements, such as symposia, bacchanals and martial arts. Eventually, a Pāli account which includes a sympotic party and an early reference to martial arts practiced within an Indian Buddhist monastery will be discussed.

Keywords Theravāda Buddhism. Pāli Canon. Gandhāra. Indo-Greek. Martial Arts. Wrestling. Pugilism.

Sommario 1 Introduzione. – 2 Per una storia delle arti marziali o per le arti marziali nella storia? – 3 Nota sulle fonti letterarie buddhiste in lingua pāli. – 4 Il primo contatto è stato un *light-contact*. – 5 Le arti marziali entrano nei monasteri in India: realtà o immaginazione? – 6 Conclusioni.



Peer review

Submitted 2024-03-07
Accepted 2025-04-14
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation De Notariis, B. (2025). "Accenni di marzialità nelle fonti buddhiste in lingua pāli: riflessioni sulla base di alcuni elementi storico-artistici dal Gandhāra". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 237-274.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/007

1 Introduzione

Assurte a icone della cultura popolare, vi sono certe figure afferenti all'ambito marziale la cui sola menzione è evocatrice di capacità combattive eccezionali e stupefacenti. Queste figure, da realtà locali quali erano, grazie soprattutto ai nuovi media e alle moderne fonti di comunicazione che ne hanno permesso una capillare diffusione, vivono ormai nell'immaginario globale, facendo sognare grandi e piccini, e abitano un reame dell'immaginario in cui storia, leggenda e mito si fondono. Mi riferisco ai monaci *shàolín* 少林 cinesi, ma anche a personaggi evocativi come i *samurai* 侍 e i *ninja* 忍者 giapponesi.¹ Al di là dell'alone mitologico che circonda queste figure, vi è una realtà storica, a volte anche non facile da dipanare, che fa emergere un interessante connubio, ossia quello tra le arti marziali e il buddhismo.

La classe guerriera dei *samurai* instaurò una sorta di simbiosi con il buddhismo *zen* 禪 già a partire dal XIII secolo (King 2000, 30-8). Ciò non implicò solamente un interessamento da parte del ceto combattente della società nei confronti di pratiche più spirituali, ma comportò anche un coinvolgimento delle cariche religiose verso questioni più marziali. Un esempio tra tutti ci è fornito dal monaco *zen*, afferente alla scuola Rinzaï, Takuan Sôhō (1573-1645), il quale scrisse opere indirizzate a maestri di spada in cui la filosofia *zen* e l'arte della scherma si intrecciano in un, per certi versi paradossale, connubio.³ Per quanto riguarda invece l'arte dei *ninja*, a oggi

Questo articolo è scaturito dal progetto MALIWI (Making Libation of Wine from Golden Cups: Social, Ritual, and Ceremonial Use of Wine in the Gandharan Area, from the Achaemenids to the Kushans) diretto dalla Prof.ssa Claudia Antonetti, a cui sono grato per la attenta lettura del presente scritto. Un ulteriore ringraziamento va a Luca M. Olivieri, Omar Coloru, Elisa Iori e Marco Enrico, coi quali ho avuto negli ultimi anni molte occasioni di discutere dei temi trattati. Sono infine grato ai revisori per i loro consigli, i quali mi hanno portato a rivedere alcune posizioni iniziali e a rielaborare, spero in meglio, alcune sezioni. Tutte le traduzioni dalle lingue indiane, quando non diversamente specificato, sono a cura dell'Autore.

1 Si veda Bowman 2021, 100-5, il quale ci descrive di come la figura del *samurai* si sia affermata nella cultura popolare durante gli anni Settanta, mentre i *ninja* e i monaci *shàolín* hanno fatto il loro ingresso nell'immaginario collettivo a partire dagli anni Ottanta.

2 Versione nipponica del cinese *chán* 禪, che a sua volta vuole rendere foneticamente termini indiani indicanti l'“assorbimento meditativo” quali *jhāna* in pāli e *dhyaṇa* in sanscrito.

3 A questo proposito, si veda la traduzione italiana di Aldo Tollini del *Taiaki* 太阿記 (Trattato della spada Taia) di Takuan Sôhō (Tollini 2009, 377-92). Sempre Tollini ci ha fornito una traduzione italiana dell'*Ittôsai sensei kenpôsho* 一刀齋先生剣法書 (Trattato della spada del maestro Ittôsai), un testo in cui emerge chiaramente uno stretto legame tra la classe guerriera nipponica e i dettami del buddhismo *zen* di scuola Rinzaï (Tollini 2020).

nota ai più come *ninjutsu* 忍術,⁴ più si va indietro nel tempo più le informazioni sono nebuloze e incerte, benché sembrerebbe esserci stato un rapporto simbiotico con l'ambito religioso fin dai primordi,⁵ in particolare con alcune correnti del buddhismo esoterico come lo *shugendō* 修験道 (Zoughari 2016, 43). In questi casi si potrebbe anche parlare in termini di adozione, da parte di queste figure guerriere, di una sorta di 'tecnologia spirituale', in quanto sembrerebbe proprio verificarsi, tramite lo sviluppo spirituale, un potenziamento delle capacità combattive. Il praticante sembra così riuscire a trascendere la mera maestria tecnica tramite la pratica spirituale, la quale si configura, in alcuni contesti, addirittura come condizione necessaria per la corretta esecuzione del gesto marziale.⁶

Ancora più significativo, infine, è il caso dei monaci *shàolín*, giacché, contrariamente agli esempi sopracitati, non erano guerrieri interessati a pratiche spirituali, bensì individui appartenenti a un ordine monastico e, contemporaneamente, dediti alle arti marziali. Su basi epigrafiche è possibile rintracciare un coinvolgimento militare di questi monaci già a partire dal VII secolo d.C., benché lo sviluppo di uno stile propriamente '*shàolín*' sia storicamente ascrivibile solo a epoche successive (Shahar 2000; 2008, 9-52). La coesistenza di una duplice carica di 'monaco' e 'combattente' all'interno di un singolo individuo pone un 'apparente' problema. Qui il termine 'apparente' è usato nella sua doppia accezione antitetica, sfruttando la sua enantiosemia. È 'apparente' nel senso di 'evidente' o 'lampante', ma al contempo è 'apparente' inteso come 'finto' o 'fittizio'. Alcune fonti classiche del buddhismo indiano hanno una posizione decisamente pacifista e anti-violenta, giacché il 'non-uccidere' (*pāṇātipāta*) è posto come primo precetto sia per i laici che, soprattutto, per i monaci, precludendo così a prescindere (almeno in teoria) la partecipazione

4 I termini *ninja* e *ninjutsu*, usati correntemente, si affermano in Giappone a partire dal XVII secolo. Per un'interessante panoramica su denominazioni alternative o più antiche di *ninja*, si veda Zoughari 2016, 195-204.

5 «Malgrado le molte leggende che attribuiscono la creazione del ninjutsu ad antiche divinità mitologiche, l'arte probabilmente si è formata tra il X e il XIV secolo. Di fatto, il ninjutsu è il frutto di un'integrazione tra fonti religiose e tecniche guerriere che ha dato vita a un approccio puramente giapponese all'utilizzo della natura, delle leggi cosmiche (meteorologia, astronomia, divinazione, e così via), della psicologia e della fisiologia umane allo scopo di influire in modo permanente sulla storia e assicurarsi la sopravvivenza fisica e spirituale» (Zoughari 2016, 41).

6 Ciò si può evincere da alcuni passi dell'*Ittōsai sensei kenpōsho*, così come notato in De Notariis 2021, 313. Riflessioni su pratiche ascetiche e meditative del buddhismo indiano intese come tecniche endogene volte ad apportare delle modifiche al sistema biofisico umano sono espresse da Sarbacker (2020, specialmente p. 68).

a qualsivoglia conflitto bellico.⁷ In questo caso, è *evidente* come il coinvolgimento buddhista in attività legate alla guerra sia un problema. Tuttavia, il dato empirico stesso dell'esistenza di monaci-guerrieri ci pone di fronte all'ineludibile conclusione che la storia non si ferma di fronte a *fittizi* problemi di carattere teoretico, così come le tradizioni stesse non rimangono paralizzate dai loro stessi dettami, ma anzi reagiscono alle contingenze. A questo proposito, non si può non menzionare il lavoro di Stephen Jenkins ([2010] 2011; 2016; 2017), il quale ci descrive le modalità attraverso cui alcune narrative buddhiste sono state in grado di rinegoziare l'approccio di questa tradizione ai conflitti bellici attraverso il concetto di 'violenza compassionevole' (*compassionate violence*). Il problema teoretico, pertanto, sussiste solo per chi se lo pone, giacché il fatto storico non chiede il permesso d'esistere.

Cionondimeno problematizzare una questione ci permette di guardarla più da vicino, di osservarne le sfaccettature e di porci delle domande, principi d'azione che ci mobilitano verso la ricerca di una risposta. Ecco che, allora, il paradosso e l'apparente contraddizione sono un'opportunità per storicizzare anche alcuni aspetti considerati marginali rispetto alle problematiche del filone storiografico principale. Si pensi, per esempio, al divieto buddhista valido sia per i monaci che per i laici di bere sostanze inebrianti e la paradossale situazione che ci ha presentato Harry Falk (2009) in cui i monaci buddhisti nel Gandhāra (un'area a nord-ovest rispetto all'India, tra l'odierno Pakistan e l'Afghanistan) erano coinvolti nella

7 Il Buddha stesso ha rinunciato a uccidere le creature viventi (*pāṇātipātāṃ pahāya*; D, I, 3) e il commentario è abbastanza chiaro sul significato del termine *pāṇātipāta*: «È detto: 'ammazzare le creature (*pāṇa-vadha*), abbattere le creature (*pāṇa-ghāta*)'. In questo contesto l'uccisione delle creature (*pāṇātipāto*) è l'uccisione (*atipāto*) di una creatura (*pāṇassa*)» (*tattha pāṇassa atipāto pāṇātipāto. pāṇavado pāṇaghāto ti vuttaṃ hoti*; Sv, I, 69). Il filosofo buddhista Vasubandhu suggerisce l'esistenza di una responsabilità collettiva anche per la sola partecipazione a una guerra, giacché la colpevolezza del singolo è estesa al gruppo intero: «Quando c'è un esercito ecc. [e] l'azione è compiuta da uno solo, [comunque] tutti sono come l'assassino» (*senādiṣvekaḥāryatvāt sarve kartṛvadanvitāḥ*; Abhidh-k 4.72). Su queste questioni etiche si vedano anche Schmithausen 1999, 45-52; Keown 2005, 69-83 e Shahar 2008, 20-2.

produzione – e forse consumo – di vino.⁸ Ciò ha esortato una rilettura di fonti oramai classiche nello studio del buddhismo, consentendo di problematizzare la presenza di uva e vino anche nella letteratura in lingua pāli.⁹ Similmente, il porci il problema dell'esistenza di monaci-guerrieri ci pone nella condizione di poter riguardare con occhi nuovi le nostre vecchie fonti ed ecco che allora, proprio sotto il nostro sguardo nuovo, resoconti composti con certe finalità improvvisamente possono parlaci di marzialità, descrivendoci visioni di quei primi contatti tra il buddhismo indiano e l'ambito del combattimento nell'India antica.

8 Come evidenziato da Moscatelli e Filigenzi (2024, 226 nota 21), non tutti gli studiosi sono concordi nell'accettare le teorie di Falk, un'opinione contraria è, per esempio, quella di Tanabe (2015), così come alcune interpretazioni epigrafiche su cui Falk basò le sue argomentazioni sono state recentemente discusse da Baums (2024, 286-8). Tuttavia, sempre Moscatelli e Filigenzi (2024, 226 nota 21) ci ricordano di come nel *Vinaya* della scuola Mūlasarvāstivāda, un codice monastico redatto nel nord-ovest rispetto all'India (quindi in area gandhārica, vedi *infra*), vi sia un resoconto che ci descrive delle monache buddhiste che prendono parte alla produzione di alcolici (Falk 2010, 101). D'altronde il consumo di bevande inebrianti era concesso ai buddhisti a scopi medici (tema ampiamente discusso in De Notariis 2023), tra i quali, possiamo sospettare, rientravano anche casistiche non particolarmente gravi, le quali permisero l'assunzione di alcolici anche per motivi tutto sommato comuni. Si consideri, per esempio, il fatto che ai monaci della regione di Jibin 罽賓 (un'area a nord-ovest che comprendeva il Kashmir, il Gandhāra o addirittura Kāpiśī) era concesso bere piccole quantità di bevande alcoliche per contrastare il freddo (Enomoto 1994, 364-5). Infatti, siccome è attestato e concesso che i buddhisti consumassero alcolici, siamo legittimati a interrogarci su dove e come se li procurassero. D'altronde non mancano evidenze letterarie per la produzione di succhi analcolici a base di frutti o altri prodotti vegetali da parte dei buddhisti e la differenza tra la bevanda alcolica e quella analcolica era spesso solo dovuta alla mancanza di fermentazione di quest'ultima (De Notariis, Enrico 2024, 154-9). La liminalità tra bevanda alcolica e non-alcolica potrebbe essere stata un fattore effettivamente sfruttato dai buddhisti per aggirare i divieti monastici e concedersi delle bevande altrimenti proibite (McHugh 2024, 13). Ciò detto, non dovrebbe risultare particolarmente problematica l'interpretazione avanzata da Falk, la quale anzi risponderebbe al quesito sulla provenienza degli alcolici usati dai buddhisti a scopi medici e sarebbe, inoltre, supportata da una meno incerta produzione buddhista di bevande analcoliche.

9 A questo proposito, si veda De Notariis 2023.

2 Per una storia delle arti marziali o per le arti marziali nella storia?

There is not 'one' discourse of martial arts,
just as there is neither *one practice* (or field
of practice) nor *one cultural* or *one academic*
discourse of it or them.
Despite its familiarity, there is in fact no one single
or simple 'thing' behind the term.
The term is at best shorthand for a cluster
of associatively or connotatively related practices.
(Bowman 2021, 135)

Innanzitutto, è bene qui precisare che accolgo il suggerimento di Paul Bowman (2017) rispetto all'evitare definizioni troppo precise e circoscritte per il lemma 'arte/i marziale/i'. Infatti, il lemma stesso è intrinsecamente portatore di una copresenza di significati, laddove il termine 'arte', come giustamente rilevato da Marcello Ghilardi (2020, 9), può rimandare al termine latino *ars*, indicante una specifica capacità tecnica (in questo caso: *ars bellica*), ma può anche essere inteso come un'espressione artistica di forme 'belle', come nelle 'belle arti'. Scrive, inoltre, Ghilardi:

Nell'espressione 'arte marziale' la differenza di accento che si conferisce all'aggettivo (arte *marziale*) oppure al sostantivo (arte marziale) modifica a sua volta il tipo di attenzione o interpretazione che se ne dà. Nel primo caso [...] si porta in primo piano il carattere combattivo e non solo agonistico della disciplina: essa è 'marziale' in quanto connessa alla lotta, allo scontro, al confronto effettivo tra individui [...]. Nel secondo caso l'accento viene invece posto sulla dimensione artistica e (ri)creativa, al punto da accostarla implicitamente alle cosiddette 'belle arti' per il suo valore estetico o formativo. (2020, 12-13)

Pertanto, benché si potrebbe potenzialmente concepire il lemma 'arte/i marziale/i' secondo un uso corrente moderno che vi vede uno 'stile di combattimento' formalmente codificato con tecniche precise, usate al punto quasi da diventare un'arte, mi tratterò qui dall'adottare esclusivamente una tale designazione (benché essa non sia comunque esclusa) prediligendo invece la presa in considerazione di una più ampia varietà di 'attività marziali', le quali comprendono anche: combattimenti ludici, risse, incontri di lotta o pugilato, pratiche guerriere, ecc.

Inoltre, prima di entrare nel vivo dell'analisi ci si potrebbe concedere una doverosa digressione sulle implicazioni e le modalità di studiare le 'arti marziali'. Un approccio immediato e non particolarmente problematico consiste nel porre la marzialità come caso di studio all'interno di qualche disciplina già consolidata,

usando metodologie oramai comprovate nel tempo e accettate dalla comunità di studiosi che ne fa parte. Nel nostro caso (ed è proprio quello che accadrà) significa problematizzare la marzialità all'interno degli studi sul buddhismo tramite un approccio storico. Tuttavia, vi è anche la possibilità di un'emancipazione dello studio delle arti marziali rispetto ai campi d'indagine più ordinari e il suo stabilirsi come disciplina indipendente.¹⁰ Ciò implica che oltre a indagare le *arti marziali nella storia* vi è la concreta possibilità di scrivere una vera e propria *storia delle arti marziali*. La differenza tra le due locuzioni risiede nello slittamento dei termini che le compongono, il quale si riflette in una diversa articolazione delle priorità. Di comune, invece, le due locuzioni non hanno solo le 'arti marziali' – fatto che già di per sé è notevole –¹¹ ma soprattutto la 'storia'. Qualsiasi cosa, un istante dopo che viene in essere, ha già una storia, poiché ha già un passato. Io qui affermo l'ovvio perché dell'ovvio, ovviamente, nessuno mai se ne cura. Ciò che concerne le arti marziali, come qualsiasi altro fenomeno culturale antropico, ha un contesto storico, ha origine in un determinato punto nel tempo (a volte anche difficile da individuare con precisione) e si avvicenda in un divenire storico. La dimensione storica è, infatti, insita in tutto ciò che rientra nell'ambito delle arti marziali e il suo studio si è dimostrato utile per capire il presente e demistificare narrative faziose, perlopiù costruite per soddisfare finalità ideologiche (Bowman 2016; Lorge 2016; Wile 2020). Pertanto, il presente studio avrà una doppia vocazione: in senso classico sarà uno studio esplorativo su alcuni elementi legati alla marzialità in fonti letterarie buddhiste, ma cionondimeno è volto a contribuire a quell'orientamento emergente che vede le 'arti marziali' come oggetto e campo di studi indipendente. L'approccio storico fungerà da *trait d'union* tra i diversi approcci, giacché una storia delle arti marziali non può svincolarsi dal ruolo che le arti marziali hanno avuto nella storia.

10 Riflessioni su questa eventualità sono state espresse, si vedano per esempio Bowman 2015; 2017; 2018 e De Notariis 2021, 319-22.

11 In Cina, per esempio, scrivere a riguardo delle cosiddette 'arti del combattimento' non sembrava essere un'attività considerata adatta a un letterato, motivo per cui abbiamo pochissime disquisizioni estese sull'argomento prima del XX secolo. Questa situazione, secondo Lorge (2016, 907), è paragonabile alla carenza di trattazioni all'interno degli studi accademici in epoca moderna, suggerendo così l'esistenza di una sorta di pregiudizio di fondo verso la tematica in questione.

3 Nota sulle fonti letterarie buddhiste in lingua pāli

Per lo studio del buddhismo antico disponiamo di fonti materiali (archeologiche, epigrafiche, iconografiche) e fonti letterarie, le prime databili in maniera più sicura delle seconde, benché le seconde spesso risultino essere più descrittive e ricche di dettagli delle prime (Wynne 2005, 39-42). Varie testimonianze letterarie in svariate lingue sono espressione dei plurimi tentativi di tramandare la dottrina buddhista da parte delle molteplici scuole o tradizioni, ognuna delle quali passibile delle proprie idiosincrasie dottrinali. Tra le varie tradizioni testuali in lingue indiane, l'unica che è giunta fino a noi nella sua interezza, e non in maniera frammentaria, è quella della tradizione Theravāda,¹² che rivendica una connessione con la prima recitazione comunitaria (*saṅgīti*) avvenuta dopo la morte del Buddha, un evento che possibilmente determinò una prima collezione di testi concordati, quindi definibili 'canonici' (Skilling 2022, 221).¹³ La scuola Theravāda ha tramandato in una lingua medio-indoaria chiamata 'pāli' un *corpus* testuale formato da quella letteratura considerata canonica, che consta di tutti quei testi raccolti all'interno dei *Tre canestri* (*tipiṭaka*), ossia: *Il canestro dei discorsi* (*sutta-piṭaka*), *Il canestro della disciplina* (*vinaya-piṭaka*) e *Il canestro relativo alla dottrina* (*abhidhamma-piṭaka*). Questa letteratura è stratificata e solitamente abbastanza difficile da datare con certezza. Il I secolo a.C. è considerato il periodo in cui i testi furono messi per iscritto in Sri Lanka, evento concomitante a una certa chiusura in termini dottrinali (Anālayo 2012). Tuttavia, si può considerare il fatto che già nel III secolo a.C. durante il regno del re Aśoka (momento in cui il buddhismo arrivò in Sri Lanka) esisteva già una collezione di testi, benché probabilmente al tempo trasmessi solo oralmente.¹⁴ Tuttavia, il grado di aderenza tra questi testi antichi e la letteratura effettivamente pervenutaci – e quindi in merito alla possibilità stessa di fungere da fonte attendibile per lo studio del buddhismo antico – è un argomento che ha visto gli studiosi prendere posizioni

12 Le osservazioni di Norman ([1984] 1992, 39-40) che suggeriscono cautela nell'attribuzione di aggettivi quali 'intatto' e 'completo' al canone pāli non devono farci desistere dal considerare il suo valore di 'collezione organica'.

13 Altre scuole, di contro, lamentano una rottura con questo primo tentativo di sistematizzazione testuale, implicitamente riconoscendo una discontinuità con la tradizione più antica (Skilling 2022, 221).

14 Il re Aśoka, infatti, nel cosiddetto editto di Bairāt chiaramente menziona i titoli di componimenti letterari buddhisti (cf. Hultsch 1925, 172-4), per i quali gli studiosi hanno tentato identificazioni con testi in pāli giunti fino a noi (cf. Olivelle 2023, 115-24 e Tieken 2023, 302).

anche abbastanza divergenti l'un dall'altro.¹⁵ Quindi, nonostante i testi canonici ed esegetici in pāli fungeranno da filo conduttore per la seguente trattazione, cionondimeno la loro testimonianza verrà corroborata da altre fonti, in modo tale da iscrivere la testimonianza in un più articolato quadro storico.

4 Il primo contatto è stato un *light-contact*

La nostra storia è marginale, giacché parte dalla periferia. La tradizione buddhista nasce come uno dei tanti movimenti ascetici dell'India antica che si interfacciò col problema del *saṃsāra*, ossia quel ciclo di nascita, morte e rinascita, senza inizio e senza fine (S, II, 181-2), regolato dal principio retributivo del *kamma*,¹⁶ è percepito come intrinsecamente doloroso (S, II, 179-80). Il problema del 'dolore' (pāli: *dukkha*) è centrale nella speculazione buddhista, tant'è che si potrebbe descrivere il buddhismo come un sistema articolato volto ad affrontare il problema dell'esistenza del dolore. La tradizione stessa si è espressa in questi termini, quasi a indicare che questo fosse il suo unico interesse: «O monaci, in passato e ora, io insegno solo [l'esistenza del] dolore e la cessazione del dolore». ¹⁷ Se questo è, quindi, il tema centrale da cui si mosse il buddhismo e che soggiace, dunque, alla sua produzione letteraria, non sorprenderà allora che riferimenti alle 'arti marziali', in senso lato, andranno cercati ai margini, ai confini, nelle periferie dei racconti.

Pertanto, è quindi particolarmente emblematico un resoconto agiografico sulla vita del Buddha, pervenutoci all'interno dell'*Ariyapariyesana-sutta* (Il discorso della nobile cerca; M, 26), in cui si implica che il suo risveglio avvenne ai margini di un insediamento militare:

15 A titolo esemplificativo, c'è chi come Gregory Schopen ([1985] 1997, 23-4) ha tentato di affermare che anche il materiale canonico in lingua pāli da noi posseduto non può fornirci notizie certe antecedenti al V secolo d.C., epoca in cui furono redatti gli attuali commentari pāli. Questa posizione è stata contestata da Alexander Wynne (2005), il quale difende l'utilizzo del canone pāli come fonte storiografica per lo studio del buddhismo attivo in un'epoca ben più antica di quella avanzata da Schopen.

16 In sanscrito *karman*, da una radice *√kr-* che indica il 'fare' o l' 'azione', giacché ogni atto si porta seco un frutto che in un futuro giungerà a maturazione e necessiterà di essere fruito. Il buddhismo opera una risignificazione di questo concetto, attribuendo preminenza all'intenzione che precede l'azione, piuttosto che all'atto stesso (cf. Gethin 1998, 120; Gombrich [2009] 2012, 78).

17 *pubbe cāhaṃ bhikkhave etarahi ca dukkhaṃ c'eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ* (M, I, 140). Il commentario a questo testo canonico indica chiaramente che con questa frase si intendono le quattro nobili verità (*catusaccam eva paññāpemi ti attho*; Ps, II, 118), ossia: l'esistenza del dolore (*dukkha*), la sua origine (*dukkha-samudaya*), la possibilità che esso cessi (*dukkha-nirodha*) e il percorso che conduce alla sua effettiva cessazione (*dukkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭipadā*).

*so kho ahaṃ bhikkhave kimkusalagavesī anuttaraṃ santivarapadaṃ
pariyesamāno Magadhesu anupubbena cārikaṃ caramāno yena
Uruvelā senānigamo tad avasariṃ. tatth' addasaṃ ramaṇīyaṃ
bhūmibhāgaṃ pāsādikaṃ ca vanasaṇḍaṃ nadiṃ ca sandantiṃ
setakaṃ sūpatitthaṃ ramaṇīyaṃ, samantā ca gocaragāmaṃ. tassa
mayhaṃ bhikkhave etad ahosi: ramaṇīyo vata bho bhūmibhāgo
pāsādiko ca vanasaṇḍo, nadī ca sandati setakā sūpatitthā
ramaṇīyā, samantā ca gocaragāmo; alaṃ vat' idaṃ kulaputtassa
padhānatthikassa padhānāyā ti. so kho ahaṃ bhikkhave tatth'
eva nisīdiṃ: alaṃ idaṃ padhānāyā ti. so kho ahaṃ bhikkhave
attanā jātidhammo samāno jātidhamme ādīnavaṃ veditvā ajātaṃ
anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ pariyesamāno ajātaṃ
anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ ajjhagamaṃ. (M, I, 166-7)*

Proprio io, o monaci, alla ricerca di qualcosa di buono, cercando l'insuperabile stato della perfetta quiete, vagabondando per la questua nel Magadha, nel corso del tempo, raggiunsi Uruvelā, un insediamento militare (*senānigama*).¹⁸ Là vidi un'incantevole porzione di terra, un amabile boschetto, un limpido fiume che scorre con incantevoli sponde e un intero villaggio per la questua. Io, o monaci, pensai questo: «Incantevole, invero, la porzione di terra, amabile il boschetto, limpido il fiume che scorre con incantevoli sponde e vi è un intero villaggio per la questua. Questo, invero, è adeguato allo sforzo per un figlio di buona famiglia che ha come scopo lo sforzarsi». Io, o monaci, proprio lì mi sedetti [pensando:] «Questo [posto] è adeguato allo sforzo». Io, o monaci, essendo per mio conto soggetto alla nascita, avendo compreso il pericolo dell'essere soggetto alla nascita, cercando il non-nato, l'insuperabile, il pacificato dai legami, il *nibbāna*, ottenni il non-nato, l'insuperabile, il pacificato dai legami, il *nibbāna*.

Questo passo è emblematico per almeno un paio di questioni. Come ha recentemente discusso Oskar von Hinüber (2023, 45-9), i primi buddhisti si muovevano per villaggi e insediamenti temporanei, non per grandi città, dato che queste ultime ebbero uno sviluppo parallelo e non antecedente a quello del buddhismo (48). Inoltre, la formulazione secondo cui Uruvelā sarebbe un insediamento militare (*senānigama*) sembrerebbe essere stata emendata da tradizioni successive e, tra le motivazioni avanzate, vi è il sospetto di un atto di censura, in considerazione del fatto che un campo militare potesse essere percepito come luogo inadeguato per ospitare il risveglio del

¹⁸ In questo frangente, ho seguito l'interpretazione di von Hinüber (2023, 46) per *yena Uruvelā senānigamo*.

Buddha.¹⁹ Tuttavia, per come invece si presenta il testo, il buddhismo si pone ai margini del campo militare, ma lì allora il margine diviene il centro, durante quell'evento solenne e significativo che è il risveglio del Buddha.

Se è vero che un movimento ascetico itinerante si colloca alle periferie del mondo sociale, è anche vero che la società nel suo insieme funge da contorno per quella che potrebbe essere una comunità ascetica. Due mondi in contatto e interconnessi, ma ognuno col suo centro, ponendo l'altro ai confini ed è proprio ai confini del mondo buddhista, ai margini della liceità, che possiamo scorgere testimonianze di quella che era la cultura marziale dell'India antica così come sublimata all'interno di rappresentazioni e spettacoli.²⁰

*yathā vā pan' eke bhonto samaṇa-brāhmaṇā saddhā-deyyāni
bhojanāni bhuñjitvā te evarūpaṃ visūka-dassanaṃ anuyuttā
viharanti – seyyathidaṃ naccaṃ gītaṃ vādiṭṭaṃ pekkhaṃ akkhānaṃ
pāṇissaraṃ vetālaṃ kumbhathūṇaṃ sobhanagaraṃ caṇḍālaṃ
vaṃsaṃ dhopaṇaṃ hatthi-yuddhaṃ assa-yuddhaṃ mahisa-
yuddhaṃ usabha-yuddhaṃ aja-yuddhaṃ meṇḍaka-yuddhaṃ
kukkuṭa-yuddhaṃ vaṭṭaka-yuddhaṃ daṇḍa-yuddhaṃ muṭṭhi-
yuddhaṃ nibbuddhaṃ uyyodhikaṃ balaggaṃ senā-byūhaṃ anika-
dassanaṃ – iti vā iti evarūpā visūka-dassanā paṭivirato samaṇo
Gotamo ti. iti vā hi bhikkhave puthujjano Tathāgatassa vaṇṇaṃ
vadamāno vadeyya. (D, I, 6)*

19 «[A]n army camp might have been considered as an unsuitable place for Enlightenment» (von Hinüber 2023, 46-7). A sostegno di questa lettura si può considerare il fatto che tra le offese monastiche che richiedono espiazione chiamate *pācittiya*, ce ne sono tre consecutive ossia la numero 48, 49 e 50 (Vin, IV, 103-7) che trattano delle interazioni tra monaci ed esercito (cf. Horner [1945] 2008, 18, 21).

20 Come suggerito da Del Toso (2020, 60-1), in quella che sembra essere una strategia di progressiva ritualizzazione della violenza operata dalla cultura indiana, già a partire dalla letteratura vedica dei *Brāhmaṇa* si opererà per una soluzione più 'teatrale', una in cui l'uccisione sacrificale è rappresentata e non compiuta realmente (si veda anche De Notariis 2021, 314-15). Per una recente panoramica di come il rituale vedico sia passato dalla violenza a modalità progressivamente sempre meno violente, si veda Thite 2024. Similmente, possiamo considerare la spettacolarizzazione della lotta e dei combattimenti come parte dello stesso processo di 'civiltizzazione', il quale si esplicita appunto o rappresentando la violenza in forma simbolica o limitandola spazialmente e temporalmente. Vi è da notare che forme residuali di un più antico atteggiamento violento delle genti indoarie sopravvivono nel buddhismo sotto forma di partecipazioni monastiche a discussioni e dibattiti, in quanto vere e proprie forme di competizione, e di espressioni formulaiche come la ben nota minaccia della 'rottura della testa' usata retoricamente ma di chiaro retaggio violento (a questo proposito si veda Neri, Pontillo 2024).

E quando alcuni rispettabili asceti e brahmani, avendo consumato le cibarie date per fede, partecipano alla visione di spettacoli (*visūka-dassana*) di tal fatta, quali: la danza, il canto, la musica, le esibizioni, le recitazioni, la musica prodotta manualmente, i cembali, le percussioni, gli spettacoli della città di Sobha, i rampanti giochi acrobatici ad opera di fuoricasta,²¹ il combattimento di elefanti, cavalli, bufali, tori, capre, arieti, galli, quaglie, ²² il combattimento coi bastoni (*daṇḍa-yuddha*),

21 La locuzione *caṇḍālāṃ vaṃsaṃ dhopanaṃ* è certamente di difficile interpretazione. Secondo il PED (s.v. «vaṃsa») il passo è corrotto. L'evidenza in Ja, IV, 390 sembrerebbe suggerire la lettura dei tre termini come un singolo composto (*caṇḍāla-vaṃsa-dhopanaṃ*). Il DOP (s.v. «caṇḍāla») sembra supportare la lettura di questi tre termini come parte di un singolo composto con un significato quale 'acrobatic feat' (prodezza acrobatica), benché in prima istanza non sia affatto chiaro come il termine *dhopana/dhovana* 'lavaggio' (cf. PED, s.v. «dhovana») possa contribuire a determinare un tale significato. Una 'prodezza acrobatica' è chiaramente intesa in S, V, 168 (cf. Spk, III, 226), in un passo che testimonia l'esistenza di un significativo *caṇḍāla-vaṃsaṃ* privo però di *dhopana*. L'esegesi al passo del *Dighanikāya* commenta tutti e tre i termini (Sv, I, 84-5), implicando l'esistenza di tre attività diverse: una per ogni termine. Per dirimere la questione, si potrebbe considerare che il PED (s.v. «dhovana») indica come equivalente in sanscrito *dhāvana*, il quale può avere come significato, oltre che il 'lavaggio', anche una sorta di 'corsa' ('running', cf. SED, s.v. «dhāvana», da una radice *√dhāv-*). In pāli abbiamo lo stesso significato attestato per *dhāvana* e per il verbo *dhāvati*, quest'ultimo occorre in maniera significativa in Vin, II, 10, in un contesto festivo, col significato di 'scorrazzare' (il passo in questione verrà tradotto e contestualizzato nel capitolo seguente). Se, pertanto, consideriamo il significato di 'gioco acrobatico' per *caṇḍāla-vaṃsa*, allora quel *dhopana/dhovana* sarà meglio interpretato come *dhāvana*, col significato di 'correre/scorrazzare', suggerendoci così una scena dinamica, in cui vari artisti si muovevano in maniera vivace, correndo qua e là, ed eseguendo le loro prodezze acrobatiche. La presenza di virtuosismi ginnici ed esibizioni di giocoleria è significativa alla luce delle successive evidenze sulla presenza di incontri di combattimento. Infatti, l'associazione tra spettacoli di combattimento e giochi acrobatici è presente già a Creta in età minoica nel secondo millennio a.C., così come in Cina durante il periodo della dinastia Han orientale (25-220 d.C.) (Christopoulos 2010, 19-22). Inoltre anche nel *Milindapañha* troviamo i lottatori/wrestler (*malla*), fianco a fianco a giocolieri e acrobati, all'interno di una lista di gruppi umani che agiscono come una gilda, ossia tramandano le conoscenze solo ai membri interni al gruppo (Mil, 191).

22 «'Combattimento di elefanti ecc.' [indica che] non è appropriato per un monaco combattere con elefanti ecc., ma anche farli combattere e assistere al combattimento» (*hatthi-yuddhādisu, bhikkhuno n' eva hatthi-ādīhi saddhiṃ yujjhituṃ na te yujjhāpetuṃ na yujjhante daṭṭhuṃ vaṭṭati*; Sv, I, 85). Per quanto riguarda il 'combattimento con gli animali', si consideri Christopoulos 2010, in cui si discute delle evidenze della cosiddetta 'lotta coi tori', attestate dalla Grecia alla Cina.

il combattimento coi pugni (*muṭṭhi-yuddha*),²³ la lotta libera (*nibbuddha*),²⁴ la rappresentazione di scontri (*uyyodhika*),²⁵ l'esibizione di forza[militare] (*balagga*),²⁶ lo spiegamento di truppe (*senā-vyūha*),²⁷ l'esibizione dell'esercito (*aṇika-dassana*).²⁸ L'asceta Gotama si astiene dalla visione di spettacoli di tal fatta. In questo modo, o monaci, la persona comune (*puthujjana*) loderebbe il Tathāgata.

In questo resoconto è riportato che l'astensione dalla visione di spettacoli (*visūka-dassana*) è cosa lodevole. Gli spettacoli sono di vario genere, ma al fine della presente trattazione sono di particolare interesse le parate militari (possibilmente un'occasione per dar sfoggio di potere da parte del regnante), i combattimenti con e tra

23 Il termine pāli *muṭṭhi* equivale al sanscrito *muṣṭi* e indica letteralmente una 'mano serrata', ossia un pugno (cf. SED, s.v. «muṣṭi»). Appare anche in composti che indicano una quantità, come per esempio in *taṇḍula-muṭṭhi* (un pugno o una manciata di riso).

24 «La 'lotta libera' è il combattimento tra lottatori/wrestler» (*nibbuddhan ti malla-yuddham*; Sv, I, 85), il termine *malla-yuddha* è usato ancor oggi come designazione arcaica per il wrestling indiano praticato correntemente (cf. Alter 1992, 1). Troviamo nel *Milindapañha* un chiaro riferimento alla modalità di lotta, la quale implica proiezioni e atterramenti: «[Come] il lottatore che, grazie alla sua superiorità in potenza, velocemente proietta il lottatore avversario» (*mallo atibalavatāya paṭimallaṃ khippaṃ ukkhipati*; Mil, 273) e anche «[Come] il lottatore che, avendo velocemente proiettato l'avversario, lo fa cadere sulla schiena» (*yo mallo khippaṃ paṭimallaṃ ukkhipitvā uttānakaṃ pāṭeti*; Mil, 293).

25 «'Rappresentazione di scontri' indica laddove si vede uno scontro» (*uyyodhikan ti yattha sampahāro dissati*; Sv, I, 85 = Vin, IV, 107).

26 «'Esibizione di forza [militare]' è il conteggio delle forze [militari]» (*balaggaṇ ti bala-gaṇana-tṭhānaṃ*; Sv, I, 85). Il termine *balagga* è glossato anche nel *Vinaya*: «'Esibizione di forza [militare]' indica una tale quantità di elefanti, una tale quantità di cavalli, una tale quantità di carri, una tale quantità di fanteria» (*balaggaṃ nāma ettakā hatthi ettakā assā ettakā rathā ettakā pattī*; Vin, IV, 107).

27 «'Spiegamento di truppe' [indica] lo stabilirsi della truppa, [indica] l'accamparsi della truppa insieme allo spiegamento di carri ecc.» (*senā-vyūhan ti senā niveso, sakaṭa-vyūhādi-vasena senāya nivesanaṃ*; Sv, I, 85). Il *Vinaya* sembra implicare che il termine indichi l'atto di 'disporre' le varie componenti dell'esercito: «'Spiegamento di truppe', ossia: che qui ci siano gli elefanti, che qui ci siano i cavalli, che qui ci siano i carri, che qui ci siano le truppe di fanteria» (*senāvyūhaṃ nāma ito hatthi hontu ito assā hontu ito rathā hontu ito pattikā hontu*; Vin, IV, 107).

28 «'Esibizione dell'esercito' è l'esibizione dell'esercito definito a partire da questo modo: 'L'esercito di elefanti col più basso [numero] ha tre elefanti, ecc.'» (*aṇika-dassanan ti tayo hatthiṃ pacchimaṃ hatthāṇikaṃ ti ādinā nayena vuttassa aṇikassa dassaṇaṃ*; Sv, I, 85). Il *Vinaya* contiene una versione estesa di questa glossa: «L'esercito è l'esercito degli elefanti, dei cavalli, dei carri, della fanteria. L'esercito di elefanti col più basso [numero] ha tre elefanti, l'esercito dei cavalli col più basso [numero] ha tre cavalli, L'esercito di carri col più basso [numero] ha tre carri, L'esercito di fanteria col più basso [numero] ha quattro uomini, frecce alla mano, come fanti» (*aṇikaṃ nāma hatthāṇikaṃ, assāṇikaṃ, rathāṇikaṃ, pattāṇikaṃ. tayo hatthi pacchimaṃ hatthāṇikaṃ, tayo assā pacchimaṃ assāṇikaṃ, tayo rathā pacchimaṃ rathāṇikaṃ, cattāro purisā sarahatthā pattī pacchimaṃ pattāṇikaṃ*; Vin, IV, 107-8).

varie specie di animali e le competizioni di arti marziali. Tra queste ultime paiono distinguersi, approssimativamente, combattimenti con armi bianche quali bastoni o mazze (*daṇḍa*), combattimenti a mani serrate (*muṭṭhi*) che potrebbero suggerire incontri di pugilato e, infine, lotta libera o wrestling (*nibbuddha*). Che queste forme di intrattenimento marziale effettivamente avessero luogo in India ce ne dà testimonianza anche Strabone nel quindicesimo libro della *Gheographiká* (15.1.66), ove riporta che «presso alcune popolazioni le ragazze da marito vengono date in premio a chi vince una gara di pugilato» (Biffi 2005, 101). Strabone si basa sui resoconti dei cosiddetti ‘Storici di Alessandro’, in teoria testimoni della spedizione di Alessandro Magno che nel IV secolo a.C. si spinse fino all’India settentrionale. Similmente, la grammatica di Pāṇini testimonia l’esistenza di incontri di combattimento parimenti databili al IV secolo a.C. (Agrawala 1953, 158), permettendoci così di sostenere con maggior sicurezza la veridicità della testimonianza buddhista per l’epoca in questione.

Tornando ora più nello specifico al nostro resoconto buddhista, ci si potrebbe interrogare sulle ragioni che indurrebbero una persona comune a lodare il Buddha per la sua astensione da tali spettacoli e, come conseguenza logica, chiederci perché sarebbe da biasimare se vi partecipasse. A questo proposito, possiamo considerare il divieto per i monaci di partecipare ai festival montani (*giragga-samajja*), in cui, appunto, vi sono spettacoli di danze, canti e musiche (Vin, II, 107-8). A precedere la promulgazione del divieto a partecipare a questi festival all’interno della narrazione, vi è il giudizio morale espresso dalle persone (*manussā*), il quale presenta chiari parallelismi col sopracitato giudizio della persona comune (*puthujjana*):

manussā ujjhāyanti khīyanti vipācenti: kathaṃ hi nāma samaṇā Sakyaputtiyā naccam pi gītam pi vāditam pi dassanāya āgacchissantī seyyathāpi gihi kāmabhogino ’ti. (Vin, II, 107-8)

Le persone danno in escandescenze, si arrabbiano, si infastidiscono: «Come, invero, gli asceti appartenenti al figlio degli Sakya verranno a vedere danze, canti e musiche proprio come i laici capifamiglia che si godono i piaceri sensuali?»

Da queste evidenze, sembrerebbe palesarsi una certa attenzione dei primi buddhisti per quanto concerne il giudizio dei laici. Il buddhismo, infatti, emerge da quello che è il contesto ascetico indiano in cui l’individuo, chiamato in pāli *samaṇa* e in sanscrito

śramaṇa, si sforza attraverso esercizi ascetici anche estenuanti,²⁹ distaccandosi dal mondo e dalla vita ordinaria. Evidentemente, i buddhisti per essere considerati veri '*samaṇa*' dovevano soddisfare certe aspettative sociali dettate dal ruolo nonostante vivessero in un mondo in cui stavano cambiando gli equilibri degli assetti sociali a causa di un secondo periodo di urbanizzazione.³⁰ Infatti, vediamo che già durante il regno del re Aśoka (metà del III secolo a.C) vi è una riqualificazione del festival chiamato *samājo* (equivalente del sopracitato *samajja*),³¹ il quale, da evento immorale, viene normato e adeguato a degli standard etico-religiosi:

(C) *na cha samājo katavyo* (D) *bahukaṃ hi dosaṃ samājamhi pasati Devānaṃpriyo Priyadasi rājā* (E) *asti pi tu ekachā samājā sādhumatā Devānaṃpriyasa Priyadasino rāño*. (Hultzsich 1925, 1)

(C) E non è da organizzarsi nessun festival (*samājo*). (D) Giacché il re Piyadassi caro agli dèi vede molta corruzione nei festival. (E) Benché ci siano invero alcuni festival considerati lodevoli dal re Piyadassi caro agli dèi.

Che alcune forme di festività fossero considerate positivamente sembrerebbe essere confermato anche dall'editto IV su roccia promulgato da Aśoka. In tale editto il sovrano lamenta di come in passato fu promossa proprio l'uccisione degli animali e la violenza verso le creature viventi, in un clima generale in cui era imperante la mancanza di rispetto verso i parenti, gli asceti e i brahmani. Il vanto di Aśoka consta proprio nell'aver convertito alcune attività sociali riconducendole all'interno della propria egida etico-religiosa:

(B) *ta aja Devānaṃpriyasa Priyadasino rāño dhamma-charaṇena [bhe]rī-ghoso aho dhamma-ghoso vimāna-darsaṇā cha hasti-da[sa] ṇā cha agi-kh[a]ṃdhāni cha [a]ñāni cha divyāni rūpāni dasayitpā janam*. (Hultzsich 1925, 6)

Ora, grazie alla condotta conforme al *dhamma* del re Piyadassi caro agli dèi, il suono dei tamburi diviene suono del *dhamma*, vengono mostrati al popolo esibizioni di carri/palazzi celesti (*vimāna*), esibizioni di elefanti, masse di fuoco e forme divine.

²⁹ *Śramaṇa* deriva da una radice *śram-* che letteralmente significa 'sforzarsi', cf. SED, s.v. «śram».

³⁰ Cf. Gombrich [2009] 2012, 47-8; Iori 2023, 186-7. Anche la letteratura buddhista si sviluppò in parallelo a quello che fu lo sviluppo urbano del tempo, si veda von Hinüber 2023, 48.

³¹ Cf. Falk 2006, 57.

Il termine *dhamma* lasciato intradotto può essere genericamente interpretato, nel contesto degli editti, come una sorta di norma etico-religiosa, giacché se in alcuni casi sembra prescrivere un comportamento etico, in altre circostanze chiaramente promette una ricompensa soteriologica, ossia l'ottenimento del cielo.³² Il passo sopracitato è ritenuto descrivere degli spettacoli conformi al *dhamma*, quindi di carattere etico-religioso, in un'atmosfera che pare festiva.³³ Aśoka è stato un grande, se non il più grande, patrono del buddhismo in India e pertanto non è peregrino supporre che la sua riconversione morale di alcuni festival indiani³⁴ comportò un maggior coinvolgimento dei buddhisti in tali eventi, giacché il suo *dhamma*, benché non esattamente conforme, non contravviene ai dettami buddhisti. Questo fatto potrebbe aver mitigato gli effetti che ebbero le aspettative dei laici verso la categoria degli asceti, le quali causarono un'iniziale promulgazione dei divieti di partecipazione ai festival in cui avevano luogo attività ritenute non consone.³⁵ Anzi, se queste festività divennero conformi, effettivamente, alla norma etico-religiosa del *dhamma*, il buddhismo potrebbe aver giocato un ruolo da protagonista e non solo da mero spettatore, ruolo che lo obbligò ad abbandonare la veste dello schivo asceta in favore di un progressivo inserimento in società. Tale processo di integrazione può inquadrarsi in ciò che è stato definito come una forma di 'addomesticazione' (*domestication*), intesa come una graduale costituzione e consolidamento di relazioni con la

32 Molteplici sono i riferimenti negli editti di Aśoka, finanche a includere esposizioni quali quella nell'editto IX su roccia, in cui l'ottenimento del cielo si presenta come il *summum bonum*: «Da ciò si può ottenere il cielo, (L) e cos'è più opportuno fare rispetto all'ottenere il cielo?» (*iti iminā sak[a] svagaṃ ārādhetu iti (L) ki cha iminā katavyataraṃ yathā svagāradhī*: Hultzsch 1925, 16). Si veda anche Patrick Olivelle (2012, 173; 2023, 257-65), che evidenzia l'esistenza di alcune similitudini tra il *dhamma* di Aśoka e il concetto moderno di 'civil religion'.

33 «The sound of a drum invariably precedes either a battle, a public announcement, or the exhibition of a scene to the people. But since Aśoka entered on his career of righteousness it has ceased to be a summons to fight but invites people to come and witness certain spectacles; and as those spectacles are of such a character as to generate and develop righteousness, the drum has become the proclaimer of righteousness» (Bhandarkar 1913, 25).

34 Similmente, l'editto IX su roccia riporta che le cerimonie augurali chiamate *maṅgala* solitamente sono di poco conto, ma quando sono conformi al *dhamma* (viz. *dhamma-maṅgala*) portano molti frutti meritori (cf. Hultzsch 1925, 16-17). Da notare che il termine *maṅgala* in pāli indica una 'lieta festività' (cf. PED, s.v. «maṅgala»), la quale parimenti ha subito nelle fonti Theravāda un processo di risignificazione per conformarsi ai principi buddhisti (e.g. Sn, 258-69, 359-75; cf. Olivelle 2023, 237).

35 Un caso può essere quello della danza, così come discusso da Antonella S. Comba (2019), la quale suggerisce che non sia un'attività intrinsecamente negativa, ma viene trattata come tale a causa delle aspettative laiche verso la categoria degli asceti.

società laica,³⁶ fatto che di per sé, perlomeno in alcuni ambiti, potrebbe aver favorito il crollo di quelle rigide distinzioni che ci potremmo aspettare tra un asceta e un laico.³⁷ Una definitiva rottura con una modalità di vita austera a favore di una più ampliata partecipazione sociale sembrerebbe il quadro rappresentato nel codice legislativo monastico della scuola Mūlasārvāstivāda:

the Buddhist monk in Early North India, and in this monastic code [viz. in the *Vinaya*], did not look like the caricature found in modern scholarly sources [...]. The monk that we will see in this code is a construction foreman, an art promoter, a banker, an entrepreneur, sometimes a shyster, and sometimes a saint – he should at least prove to be of some interest. (Schopen [2000] 2004, 20)

E anche:

we find monks who eat fine meals in the home of prominent laymen; monks who are concerned not about meditation but with property, with marking and maintaining control or possession of property, and who have and acknowledge personal property. (26)

Vi è da notare che contrariamente al *Vinaya* in pāli del Theravāda, il quale è il prodotto di una tradizione che si distaccò dal nord dell'India per arrivare in Sri Lanka al tempo di Aśoka, il *Vinaya* del Mūlasārvāstivāda è il prodotto di una scuola sviluppatasi nel nord-ovest dell'India (collocandosi così in area gandhārica) e contiene molte informazioni databili intorno al I-II sec. d.C. (Schopen [2000] 2004, 20).³⁸ Questo intervallo cronologico è concomitante alla costruzione del monastero di Saidu Sharif (metà del I secolo d.C., cf. Olivieri 2022, 72) nel Gandhāra e quindi coincide con l'attestata sedentarizzazione e annessione del buddhismo all'interno del tessuto urbano di quell'area.

Se ciò che è attestato in Gandhāra è stato un punto di arrivo di un lungo processo,³⁹ la riconversione morale delle manifestazioni

36 «At a minimum, I urge that domestication of the sangha occurs whenever certain relations are established between the sangha and laity, whenever the sangha participates with the laity in institutions» (Strenski 1983, 464-5).

37 Tali distinzioni sembrano effettivamente essere venute meno in alcune occasioni, cf. De Notariis 2024, 37 e riferimenti in nota 63.

38 Come evidenzia Kieffer-Pülz (2014, 52-3 e nota 45), per una chiusura definitiva di questa raccolta bisogna però considerare come data il IV-V secolo d.C., giacché sono attestate interpolazioni che rimandano a un periodo successivo rispetto a quello indicato da Schopen.

39 «Buddhism enters Swat physically and monumentally through the construction of a Dharmarājika stūpa (mid- to late third century BCE) [...] However, Buddhism had to go through a long negotiation with local religious traditions and society before becoming established in the form we know today» (Iori 2023, 198-9).

pubbliche operata da Aśoka potrebbe essere stato un primo passo significativo verso l'abbattimento di quei confini tra monaci e laici, rimuovendo lo stigma dell'immoralità e dell'empietà che gli eventi di aggregazione sociale si portavano seco. Attenuatosi così il giudizio di condanna morale verso la partecipazione a degli eventi pubblici di carattere ludico, rimaneva solo la promozione del *dhamma*, che era precisamente il fulcro della predicazione del Buddha (*dhammaṃ deseti*; e.g. D, I, 62). Pertanto, dato che pare quanto mai irragionevole supporre che a dei festival regali non partecipasse proprio il gruppo religioso prediletto dal sovrano, le riforme di Aśoka potrebbero aver avuto come risultato un primo coinvolgimento buddhista all'interno dell'organizzazione e dello svolgimento dei festival.⁴⁰ Questo avvicinamento al mondo secolare dovuto all'inclusione all'interno di quell'istanza sociale con elementi ludico-ricreativi che è la festa pubblica potrebbe aver determinato una prima condivisione degli spazi con altre tipologie di attività, come appunto le arti marziali in oggetto, promuovendo uno scambio di saperi e inaugurando la possibilità di un'influenza reciproca.⁴¹

5 Le arti marziali entrano nei monasteri in India: realtà o immaginazione?

[T]here is little if any evidence of Buddhist monks
actively engaging in martial arts
in the manner of some Indian ascetics or of their
Buddhist brothers in East Asia.
(Gethin 2007, 65)

Se, come abbiamo visto, i primi contatti tra buddhismo e marzialità sono avvenuti in zone di confine, intese come aree periferiche rispetto a un centro di interesse, è anche vero che nel caso dei monaci *shòlín* vi è stata una piena integrazione della periferia con il centro. Tra questi due estremi cristallizzati possiamo ipotizzare l'esistenza di

⁴⁰ Benché non eccessivamente discusso in letteratura, il buddhismo a dispetto del suo iniziale atteggiamento austero, non diniegò completamente l'attività sociale della festa o dei festival, ma anzi probabilmente trovò una sua modalità di partecipazione, la quale sarebbe sicuramente un valevole oggetto di studio per il futuro. Per i riferimenti ai festival e alla relativa partecipazione monastica, il *Vinaya* del Mūlasārvāstivāda sembra essere una delle fonti principali, a questo proposito si veda Pagel 2007, 371-2 nota 3.

⁴¹ Evidenze più tarde di questo fenomeno si hanno, per esempio, all'interno della *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*, un testo datato nel periodo dell'Impero di Vijayanagara (1336-1646), che descrive il festival *Navarātri* e ci mostra come coesistessero all'interno dello stesso spazio attività acrobatiche, sport tra cui quelli di combattimento, varie attività ricreative, spettacoli di magia e anche, significativamente, pratiche ascetiche. A questo proposito si veda Suebsantiwongse 2023, in cui la condivisione degli spazi è vista come promotrice di una condivisione dei saperi.

una o più situazioni dal carattere fluido e dinamico, in cui è stato possibile rinegoziare tradizioni, abitudini e valori. Uno di questi casi si potrebbe localizzare nel già citato Gandhāra, frontiera a nord-ovest dell'India, un crocevia di culture e culla di una società cosmopolita, in cui indiani e greci coesistettero (Baums 2018; De Notariis 2024, 29-32). Un ambiente multiculturale è più plausibile che favorisca l'insorgere di sincretismi e forse, proprio per il fatto di trovarsi straniero in terra straniera, il buddhismo nel Gandhāra si è dimostrato venir meno all'immagine austera che di se stesso ci presenta tramite la letteratura indiana in lingua pāli, in special modo nel già sopracitato caso delle bevande inebrianti. Le arti marziali nel Gandhāra ci presentano una situazione analoga a quella del rapporto buddhista con gli alcolici (banditi eticamente, ma integrati gandhāricamente), consentendoci di ipotizzare una più generale apertura al mondo laico in quelle contrade, la quale ha assunto le forme dell'assimilazione e della partecipazione. La cultura materiale, sotto forma di ritrovamenti archeologici e di iconografie, ci racconta una storia di integrazione del buddhismo con la società del posto, finanche all'inserimento e alla partecipazione nel processo produttivo delle bevande inebrianti.⁴²

Per quanto riguarda la marzialità, vi sono ritrovamenti archeologici di pesi usati per l'allenamento dei lottatori (Bernard, Jullien 1982; Di Castro 2003; 2007; Ghosh 2023, 65-72) che ci testimoniano un certo grado di sviluppo delle pratiche legate al combattimento [fig. 1], anche in rapporto a una dimensione religiosa. Ciò è suggerito da evidenze circostanziali ed epigrafiche, come il caso del peso a forma di lastra di pietra recante un rilievo che raffigura una scena di lotta e proveniente dallo scavo di un'area sacra buddhista. Su di esso è anche inciso il nome dell'atleta/donatore (*Minamdrasa*, lett.: 'di Menandro'). Per tutte queste ragioni, gli studiosi hanno ipotizzato una funzione votiva,⁴³ così come la funzione di *ex voto* è stata avanzata per altri pesi d'allenamento (Giuliano 2003, 87; 2010,

42 Oltre al già sopracitato contributo di Falk (2009), si segnala anche la miscellanea curata da Claudia Antonetti, Marco Enrico e il sottoscritto dal titolo *Wine Cultures: Gandhāra and Beyond*, in cui sono presenti numerosi contributi che affrontano questa tematica da prospettive diverse.

43 Bernard, Jullien 1982, 36; Coloru 2009, 262; Galli 2011, 292; Ghosh 2019, 56. Per una discussione più ampia che riguardi le iconografie marziali in rapporto alla religiosità buddhista, si veda Galli 2011, 292-6, il quale in un caso specifico afferma: «This important relief indicates that sporting performances took place which could be watched by a refined public and that these may have occurred during festivals and religious celebrations in the sacred area» (Galli 2011, 295).

67; 2021, 81).⁴⁴ Inoltre la presenza di spettacoli di lotta nell'ambito di festival organizzati in occasione dell'inaugurazione di uno stūpa buddhista è attestata nell'*Avadānaśataka* (AŚ, I, 387.7-12). Tale testo ci descrive addirittura il lottatore vincitore nell'atto di elogiare le buone qualità del Buddha, auspicandosi di poterle ottenere a sua volta (Pagel 2007, 388-9). In questo caso, la testimonianza letteraria sembrerebbe corroborare l'interpretazione del materiale gandhārico (Olivieri 2022, 131), suggerendoci l'esistenza di una connessione ben più plausibile tra gli incontri di combattimento e l'ambito delle festività e delle celebrazioni religiose.



Figura 1 Manubrio votivo o peso d'allenamento gandhārico per i lottatori con decorazioni floreali. IV-V sec. d.C. (?). Scisto grigio. Pakistan (?). MNAO inv. 18959. Photo after Di Castro 2003, 259, Courtesy of East and West

Ecco che allora questa situazione non è forse tanto diversa rispetto a quella indiana prospettata nel capitolo precedente, in cui i festival fungevano da occasione per l'organizzazione e la fruizione di incontri di combattimento in veste di spettacoli, se non per un notevole particolare. I testi pāli ci descrivono la partecipazione monastica a questi spettacoli come azione deprecabile, mentre l'iconografia gandhārica ci mostra un accostamento esplicito del buddhismo con le arti marziali,⁴⁵ in modalità comparativamente simili agli accostamenti

44 Per questi ultimi, scrive Giuliano «Questi pesi, che avevano verosimilmente la funzione di ex voto, potrebbero essere connessi a gruppi di lottatori professionisti e atleti, la cui divinità protettrice – Krishna, Balarama o l'omologo Eracle – era caratterizzata dalle virtù eroiche. Il culto di tali divinità, assorbito nell'ambito della religiosità buddhista, aveva forse una piccola parte all'interno delle aree sacre degli *stupa*» (2021, 81). Ben nota è infatti l'assimilazione di Eracle con la figura buddhista di Vajrapāṇi, per una recente trattazione si rimanda a Galinsky 2020.

45 Si veda, per esempio, Ingholt 1957, 55 figg. 27-30; Taddei 1965; Galli 2011, 294 fig. 2.

tra buddhismo e baccanali -⁴⁶ i quali prevedono aspetti legati alla sessualità e al consumo di alcolici altamente normati - e che quindi potrebbero suggerirci una sorta di assimilazione, come quella avvenuta per questi ultimi.

Infine, vi è un ulteriore elemento da tenere in considerazione: le raffigurazioni marziali nel Gandhāra rappresentano Siddhārtha intento ad allenarsi nel tiro con l'arco e partecipe di incontri di lotta [figg. 2-3]⁴⁷ all'interno del cosiddetto 'Ciclo delle Competizioni' (Giuliano 2003; 2021), una serie di competizioni agonistiche che vedono il futuro Buddha come protagonista. Non è tanto la cosa in sé che desta stupore, giacché è verosimile che il Buddha, appartenendo alla classe dei guerrieri (pāli: *khattiya*; sanscrito: *kṣatriya*), abbia ricevuto un'educazione formale nell'*ars bellica*, quanto il fatto che tale aspetto della sua educazione sia enfatizzato proprio nel Gandhāra.⁴⁸

A corroborare il quadro finora delineato, vi è il fatto che Lucas Christopoulos ha, addirittura, avanzato l'ipotesi che la marzialità sviluppatasi in zone asiatiche sotto l'influenza greca abbia avuto un ascendente, proprio tramite il buddhismo, sulla marzialità cinese, spodestando il primato delle discipline autoctone.⁴⁹

46 Mi riferisco qui agli esempi discussi da Filigenzi (2019) con le annesse implicazioni derivanti. Per una più recente disamina di alcune di queste tematiche, si veda Moscatelli, Filigenzi 2024.

47 In particolare, nella fig. 3 Siddhārtha è rappresentato dal lottatore volto di schiena, il quale presenta spalle possenti e riccioli voluminosi, due dei 'segni' (pāli: *lakkhana*; sanscrito: *lakṣaṇa*) che caratterizzano un Buddha secondo la tradizione, in aggiunta a un'aureola che adorna il capo (Olivieri 2022, 180).

48 Vi è il caso emblematico di un'iconografia gandhārica raffigurante il giovane Siddhārtha nell'atto di partecipare a una gara di tiro alla fune, ipoteticamente una delle prove che dovette affrontare per la conquista della moglie, ma di cui non vi è menzione nelle fonti (Giuliano 2021, 74-6). Infatti, è legittimo ipotizzare che l'enfasi sulle capacità marziali del futuro Buddha che ritroviamo nell'arte del Gandhāra sia dovuta proprio a un peculiare *ethos* gandhārico, in parte frutto dell'influenza esercitata dai greci: «Nel Gandhara, come in altri contesti, la storia segue talora dei percorsi suoi propri, discostandosi dall'esposizione letteraria degli eventi, attingendo da un lato alla tradizione orale e a versioni locali della leggenda, dall'altro colorando il racconto con elementi presi in prestito dall'osservazione della realtà circostante e dei costumi del luogo» (76-8).

49 «L'art du poing chinois est apparu à l'origine, comme une tradition gymnique et martiale hellénistique véhiculée principalement au travers du bouddhisme et des visiteurs venus d'Asie centrale et des Indes, puis peu à peu mêlée aux exercices de santé du Daoyin et du passé guerrier chinois. Cette fusion donnera naissance à la fois à un art de combat, à un exercice de santé et de longévité et à un art de démonstration connu plus tard sous le nom d'art du poing (*quanshu* 拳术) ou d'art guerrier (*wushu* 武术), réunissant ainsi trois aspects primordiaux des gymnastiques antiques» (Christopoulos 2005, 46). Si vedano anche Christopoulos 2010; 2013.



Figura 2 Siddhārtha si allena nella lotta e nel tiro con l'arco. Metà I sec. d.C.-metà del III sec. d.C. Indian Museum (Kolkata, West Bengal, India). Foto di John C. Huntington. © John C. and Susan L. Huntington Photographic Archive of Buddhist and Asian Art



Figura 3 Segmento di fregio curvilineo con scena di lotta in cui sembra essere coinvolto anche Siddhārtha. Seconda metà I-II sec. d.C. Scisto verde. Da Saidur Sharif I. MNAOr inv. 4178, MAI S 800 (dep. ISIAO). © ISMEO/Ca' Foscari Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan. Photo after Olivieri 2022, 178

Alla luce di quanto riportato, potrebbe essere significativo constatare il fatto che le arti marziali, così come i baccanali o gli eventi simposiali, sono almeno una volta entrate all'interno di un monastero

buddhista in India per essere praticate dai monaci secondo le fonti letterarie in pāli.⁵⁰

tena kho pana samayena Assajipunabbasukā nāma Kiṭāgirismiṃ āvāsikā honti alajjino pāpabhikkhū. te evarūpaṃ anācāraṃ ācaranti: mālāvacchaṃ ropenti pi ropāpenti pi siñcanti pi siñcāpenti pi ocinanti pi ocināpenti pi ganthenti pi ganthāpenti pi ekatovaṇṭikamālaṃ karonti pi kārāpenti pi [...] te kulitthīnaṃ kuladhītānaṃ kulakumārīnaṃ kulasuṇhānaṃ kuladāsīnaṃ ekatovaṇṭikamālaṃ haranti pi harāpenti pi [...] te kulitthīhi kuladhītāhi kulakumārīhi kulasuṇhāhi kuladāsīhi saddhiṃ ekabhājane pi bhuñjanti ekathālake pi pivanti ekāsane pi nisīdanti ekamañce pi tuvaṭṭenti [...] vikāle pi bhuñjanti majjam pi pivanti mālāgandhavilepanam pi dhārenti naccanti pi gāyanti pi vādenti pi lāsenti pi [...] aṭṭhapade pi kīlanti [...]. (Vin, II, 9-10)⁵¹

A quel tempo, dei monaci spudorati e cattivi, seguaci di Assaji e Punabbasu, risiedono a Kiṭāgiri. Essi indulgono in nefandezze di tal fatta: coltivano e fanno coltivare le piante [da fiore] per le ghirlande, le annaffiano e le fanno annaffiare, le raccolgono e le fanno raccogliere, le intrecciano e le fanno intrecciare, producono e fanno produrre una ghirlanda con lo stelo su un lato [...] Questi [monaci] portano e fanno portare la ghirlanda con lo stelo su un lato a donne gentilizie, a figlie gentilizie, a signorine gentilizie, a nuore gentilizie, a serve gentilizie [...] Questi [monaci] mangiano in un'unica scodella assieme a donne gentilizie... bevono dalla stessa coppa, siedono sullo stesso seggio, condividono lo stesso letto [...] essi mangiano nel tempo inopportuno, bevono sostanze inebrianti, indossano ghirlande, profumi e cosmetici, danzano, cantano, suonano strumenti musicali, si divertono [...] giocano su un tabellone da gioco di otto file di otto caselle (*aṭṭhapade pi kīlanti*)...⁵² [il racconto continua con una lunga lista di attività ludiche].

La scena che il testo ci prospetta potrebbe quasi essere definita simpotica, anzi sicuramente lo sarebbe se il resoconto fosse tratto da una fonte greca.⁵³ Siamo di fronte a una festa privata ed elitaria, in cui si consumano cibarie e si bevono sostanze inebrianti (*majja*),

50 Questo resoconto del *Vinaya* è discusso anche da Ali (1998, 177), McHugh (2021, 215-16) e De Notariis (2024, 32-8).

51 Il resoconto appare anche in Vin, III, 179-ff. e abbreviato in Vin, II, 142. Vi sono anche versioni di questo racconto nei *Vinaya* tradotti in cinese (Heirman, Chiu 2023, 310 nota 51).

52 Per tradurre *aṭṭhapada* ho adottato l'interpretazione di Bock-Raming 1999, 43.

53 Sul possibile trasferimento culturale del simposio greco in India, si consideri Zysk 2021 e De Notariis 2024.

i partecipanti, oltre ai monaci stessi, sono tutte donne e il racconto chiaramente allude a situazioni di intimità, per via della condivisione di seggi, letti e vivande.⁵⁴ Infine, vi sono attività ricreative di vario genere, musiche, canti e danze, in aggiunta a una lista di attività ludiche, le quali includono giochi da tavolo, di ruolo, ma anche tipologie di spettacoli. Tra questi ultimi ritroviamo il pugilato e la lotta libera o wrestling, a cui i nostri monaci prendono parte, divenendo così partecipi di un'evidentemente diffusa pratica di spettacolarizzazione dell'ambito militare e delle pratiche di combattimento, qui però significativamente localizzata all'interno di un monastero buddhista in India:

hatthismim pi sikkhanti assasmim pi sikkhanti rathasmim pi sikkhanti dhanusmim pi sikkhanti tharusmim pi sikkhanti hatthissa pi purato dhāvanti assassa pi purato dhāvanti rathassa pi purato dhāvanti dhāvanti pi ādhāvanti pi usseḷenti pi apphoṭenti pi nibbujjhanti pi muṭṭhīhi pi yujjhanti raṅgamajjham pi saṅghāṭiṃ pattharivā naccakiṃ evaṃ vadanti idha bhagini naccassū ti; nalāṭikam pi denti vividham pi anācāraṃ ācaranti. (Vin, II, 10)

[I monaci] si allenano nell'utilizzo dell'elefante, nell'equitazione, nell'utilizzo del carro, nel tiro con l'arco, nella scherma, scorrazzavano di fronte all'elefante, al cavallo, al carro, scorrazzavano avanti e indietro, fischiavano, schioccavano le dita, lottavano, combattevano coi pugni e, avendo disteso la veste come se fosse un palco, dicono a una danzatrice: «Sorella, danza qui!», marciano la fronte⁵⁵ e indulgono in molteplici nefandezze.

Il racconto ci informa che questi monaci si addestrano in attività militari tipiche dell'esercito indiano, quest'ultimo è solitamente chiamato *caturaṅga*, poiché è composto da quattro (*catur*) parti o membra (*aṅga*), ossia: elefanti, cavalli, carri e fanteria (cf. SED, s.v. «caturaṅga»).⁵⁶ Elemento sicuramente interessante è il fatto che queste attività marziali occorrono in una lista di attività ricreative. Se infatti alcune attività potrebbero rientrare nell'ambito dello

54 Vi è infine da notare la presenza delle ghirlande, che, benché siano generalmente associate ai contesti festivi, possono anche essere indice di un invito alla condivisione dell'intimità. A questo proposito si rimanda alla trattazione di Silk (2007).

55 Horner traduce la locuzione *nalāṭikam pi denti* come «they applauded» ([1952] 2001, 15), senza chiarire la fonte di una tale interpretazione (il recente DOP, s.v. «nalāṭika», non fornisce nessuna informazione utile per desumere una tale lettura). Pertanto siccome il termine *nalāṭika* ha un parallelo nel termine sanscrito *lalāṭikā* (cf. PED, s.v. «nalāṭika»), ho basato la mia traduzione sulla definizione fornita nel SED (s.v. «lalāṭikā»): «a mark made with sandal or ashes on the forehead».

56 Le prime tre membra le ritroviamo menzionate esplicitamente, mentre la 'fanteria' la inferiamo dall'addestramento nel tiro con l'arco e nella scherma.

spettacolo e dell'esibizione, altre invece sembrano rientrare proprio nel dominio dell'allenamento, veicolato dal verbo pāli *sikkhati*, il quale indica propriamente l'atto di 'imparare qualcosa', di 'esercitarsi' o di 'allenarsi' (PED, s.v. «sikkhati»). Chiaramente è difficile determinare con certezza se questo resoconto rappresenti un fatto reale o sia solo espressione dell'immaginario buddhista nell'atto di promulgare una norma di disciplina monastica, giacché le norme contenute nel *Vinaya* vengono solitamente introdotte da una narrazione volta a giustificarne la promulgazione.⁵⁷ In genere nel caso paradigmatico qualcuno compie qualcosa che si rivela avere delle ricadute negative sulla comunità monastica e quando il Buddha ne viene a conoscenza si esprime sulla questione, emanando obblighi e divieti. Come nel diritto consuetudinario, la norma è espressa come conseguenza di un accadimento, rendendo la narrativa che fa da preludio praticamente fondamentale ai fini della sentenza regolamentatrice. È verosimile che alcune di queste norme siano state dettate da esigenze reali ed emanate in un momento in cui una concreta situazione di vita ha, effettivamente, fatto emergere un problema. Ciò implicherebbe che la situazione, nel suo insieme, possa essere riflessa nella narrazione, con un variabile grado di aderenza alla realtà, attraverso resoconti che alla lettura possano sembrare perlomeno plausibili. Altre narrative, invece, sfidano il nostro senso del plausibile, ma qui è bene considerare l'aggettivo 'nostro', poiché il fatto che una narrativa sia inverosimile per noi non vuol dire che lo fosse per le genti dell'India antica o che comunque l'episodio in questione non possa ad ogni modo essere portatore di un qualche significato simbolico.⁵⁸

Se pensiamo all'atto stesso del normare, dobbiamo considerare il fatto che vi è la necessità di regolamentare solo ciò che *realmente* è praticato o ciò che può esserlo almeno *potenzialmente*. Non vi è motivo di vietare qualcosa che è al di là di qualunque orizzonte di pensiero,

57 Sul problema della storicità delle cornici narrative del *Vinaya*, si veda Clarke 2009, 35-9. Di particolare interesse vi è il fatto che un'eventuale mancanza di storicità del resoconto non inficerebbe, necessariamente, un suo possibile utilizzo nell'ambito della ricerca, giacché le informazioni in esso contenute possono avere una loro rilevanza se opportunamente contestualizzate: «What is of importance here is not the historicity of the event, but the value that the monastic traditions themselves attached to and invested in it. Such stories must be, at least in part, credible or plausible, which, of course, is not to suggest that these narratives are not in any way exaggerated or delivered with – and perhaps even for – comic effect» (Clarke 2009, 36).

58 Una storia che sfida il nostro senso del razionale è, per esempio, il racconto che riferisce le modalità attraverso cui il divieto di bere bevande intossicanti è venuto in essere (Vin, IV, 108-10), ove si narra di come un monaco di nome Sāgata affronti in duello una creatura ofidica dotata di poteri psichici. Il resoconto, seppur fantastico, ha chiaramente un forte valore simbolico se si considera la credenza folclorica in divinità serpentiformi diffusa nel nord dell'India e anche in Gandhāra (Filigenzi 2019, 77-80; Moscatelli, Filigenzi 2024, 227-9), giacché rappresenterebbe il buddhismo che trionfa nei confronti di un culto locale.

non si può normare ciò che è inconcepibile, giacché mancherebbe la materia prima del ragionamento: il concetto.⁵⁹ Ciò detto, se non si volesse accettare la possibilità che il sopracitato resoconto possa in minima parte rappresentare un evento realmente accaduto,⁶⁰ cionondimeno dobbiamo accettare che esso rientrò nel reame della plausibilità, fatto che ci porta ad avanzare alcune considerazioni.

Affinché l'evento rientri nell'ambito del possibile, si deve supporre che i monaci avessero le possibilità fattuali e materiali per organizzare un evento di tale portata, in termini di strutture, risorse e potere. Pertanto, siamo ben lontani dalla figura del povero asceta mendico ed errabondo, ma piuttosto siamo di fronte a una ben organizzata struttura ecclesiastica in grado di rapportarsi con le élite,⁶¹ la quale quindi è entrata in contatto coi costumi mondani ed è creduta potenzialmente in grado di replicarli. Dunque, nonostante il testo legislativo condanni formalmente tali atti promuovendo una moderatezza e una sobrietà di vita tipica degli asceti, ciononostante ci presenta una fronda del buddhismo che si è imborghesita, che ha pienamente integrato usi e costumi dell'alta società laica attraverso un'attiva partecipazione.⁶² Tutto ciò potrebbe sembrare frutto di una mera illazione, una sorta di esagerazione storica, se non fosse che le testimonianze dal Gandhāra ci presentano un quadro buddhista ben lungi da quella morigeratezza ascetica ostentata nelle fonti pāli, ma anzi ci suggeriscono un connubio tra buddhismo, baccanali e arti marziali avvenuto proprio in quella regione. Forse, si potrebbe addirittura speculare, fu una necessità che il buddhismo ebbe in quelle contrade per andare incontro all'*ethos* di un popolo in parte greco e in parte indiano,⁶³ una modalità di interazione con la società civile volta ad accattivarsi le simpatie e quindi, di rimando, il supporto laico. Curiosamente, infatti, anche nella narrazione del *Vinaya* in pāli i laici di Kiṭāgiri sembrano apprezzare quei monaci abietti:

59 Ciò ricorda i paradossi che si presentano nello studio del misticismo: come possiamo conoscere un colore che non abbiamo mai visto o il sapore di un alimento che non abbiamo mai assaggiato?

60 Chiaramente la lista di attività ludico-ricreative che viene proposta ci fornisce, possibilmente, una gamma di possibilità e non un'istantanea dell'evento.

61 Per quanto riguarda la visita di donne altolocate nei monasteri buddhisti, si considerino anche le evidenze di Schopen (2006, 495), il quale sottolinea come queste tipologie di visite all'interno della tradizione Mūlasārvāstivāda siano descritte come una 'pratica usuale' (*dharmaṭā*).

62 McHugh (2021, 237) menziona una commedia satirica in cui si ironizza sulla supposta vita austera dei monaci buddhisti a fronte di un manifesto lusso.

63 Sia le attività di carattere simpatico che quelle legate al mondo del combattimento sono occupazioni spiccatamente greche, che rientrano all'interno delle varie modalità di trascorrere il tempo libero. Per una panoramica si veda Ghosh 2019. Una diffusione attiva delle pratiche di combattimento greche in Asia è discussa da Christopoulos (2013).

amhākaṃ pana ayyā Assajipunabbasukā saṇhā sakhilā sukhasambhāsā mihitapubbaṅgamā ehisvāgataṇḍino abbhākuṭṭikā uttānamukhā pubbabhāsino, tesaṃ kho nāma piṇḍo dātabbo. (Vin, II, 11)

I nostri nobili maestri (ayya) seguaci di Assaji e Punabbasu sono educati, amichevoli, di piacevole conversazione, ridenti, accoglienti, cordiali, genuini, cortesi nell'eloquio, la questua andrebbe data proprio a loro!⁶⁴

L'opinione delle genti con cui questi monaci interagivano è in netta opposizione con la percezione che ne ebbe l'ortodossia monastica, la quale di contro vi vedeva individui potenzialmente violenti e pericolosi:

kathaṃ mayaṃ bhante Assajipunabbasukānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ Kiṭṭāgirimā pabbājaniyakammaṃ karoma, caṇḍā te bhikkhū pharusā ti. tena hi tumhe, sārīputtā, bahukehi bhikkhūhi saddhiṃ gacchathā ti. (Vin, II, 12)

[Sāriputta e Moggallāna:] «Come possiamo noi, Signore, eseguire un atto di scomunica da Kiṭṭāgiri per i monaci seguaci di Assaji e Punabbasu? Questi monaci sono aggressivi e brutali». [Il Buddha:] «Allora, Sāriputta [e Moggallāna], voi andate insieme a molti monaci».

Si potrebbe sospettare che sia proprio la pratica marziale a rendere questi monaci facinorosi potenzialmente pericolosi e, pertanto, il Buddha raccomanda a Sāriputta e Moggallāna di recarsi da loro con una scorta di monaci. *En passant*, possiamo notare che anche i cosiddetti monaci ortodossi non hanno un atteggiamento particolarmente remissivo, ma anzi quasi squadristico.

Volendo ora riassumere il quadro fin qui delineato, non possiamo chiaramente determinare con certezza se il resoconto del *Vinaya* in pāli sia da intendersi come un resoconto di fatti realmente o parzialmente accaduti o piuttosto come un espediente narrativo. In questo secondo caso, cionondimeno, il resoconto avrebbe la caratteristica della plausibilità, fatto ancor più significativo se lo rapportiamo al materiale pervenuto dal Gandhāra, il quale ci presenta un connubio, seppur in forme diverse, del buddhismo con i baccanali e le arti marziali. Ecco che allora l'immaginario dei testi pāli potrebbe essere volto a mettere in guardia dai pericoli dell'imborghesimento una comunità di monaci sempre più benestante e interrelata con la società, mostrandoci un atteggiamento conservativo del Theravāda verso quelle attività invece integrate nel Gandhāra. Indipendentemente dall'accettazione

⁶⁴ Alcuni di questi aggettivi sono attribuiti al Buddha in D, I, 116.

o dal ripudio dei simposi e delle arti marziali da parte del buddhismo, siamo costretti ad ammetterne la presenza, la quale trova riscontro nella realtà materiale e vive riflessa nell'immaginario. Il resoconto in pāli, inoltre, sembra tradire un certo apprezzamento dei laici per questi monaci abietti, fatto sicuramente notevole che potrebbe rivelare una sorta di realtà storica proprio perché giocherebbe a sfavore dei redattori del racconto, mentre è proprio sull'onda del maggior apprezzamento e del tentativo di inserirsi in società che il buddhismo ha integrato elementi mondani della società laica nel Gandhāra.

Infine, nonostante l'*impasse* ermeneutico concernente la realtà storica, possiamo comunque trarre un dato reale dal resoconto. Dal punto di vista concettuale, infatti, è comunque significativo il fatto che degli allenamenti in discipline legate alla guerra occorranza in una lista di pratiche ludiche non solo in veste di spettacoli, ma anche come vere e proprie attività fisiche svolte a scopo ricreativo. Tutto ciò potrebbe indicare una consuetudine antica non dissimile dalla situazione contemporanea in cui alcune persone scelgono di andare a praticare le arti marziali come attività di svago nel tempo libero.

6 Conclusioni

Modern Buddhology recognises that many aspects of the Saṅgha's communal life are only partially documented, if at all. In order to gain a glimpse of those 'hidden' features, we have learned to read 'between the lines' and to turn increasingly to archaeological and historical sources, sometimes with spectacular results.
(Pagel 2007, 369)

La *Storia* è composta da molteplici *storie*, piccoli tasselli che disposti all'interno di un quadro più grande ci forniscono un'immagine complessa e articolata, di senso compiuto, benché con i suoi chiaroscuri e con i suoi paradossi, ma d'altronde paradossale è la vita stessa dell'uomo: materia cosciente che si interroga su se stessa.

Questa è stata una piccola storia, incentrata sul ruolo delle arti marziali all'interno del buddhismo antico, e si spera possa fungere non solo da tassello per una storia più ampia delle arti marziali, ma anche per una miglior comprensione di quel quadro cangiante e polimorfo che è il buddhismo. Possiamo dire che il rapporto del buddhismo con la marzialità è stato altalenante, presentando escursioni anche abbastanza importanti, passando da una presa di distanza a situazioni di convivenza e prossimità, giungendo finanche a forme di partecipazione attiva, sopravvissute nei secoli, prosperanti tutt'oggi e vivide nel nostro immaginario, come nel caso dei monaci *shàolín*.

Per questa storia siamo partiti dai margini, dalle periferie, da una situazione in cui il buddhismo guardava alla marzialità da una certa distanza. Tuttavia, si è argomentato, a partire dalla metà del III secolo a.C. con Aśoka si è aperta la possibilità di contatti più ravvicinati con quelle attività marziali che abitavano i contesti festivi. Un evento del genere è da configurarsi all'interno di quel processo di 'addomesticazione' che ha portato il buddhismo a interessare relazioni sempre più frequenti e articolate con la comunità laica e di cui vediamo una fase particolarmente evoluta di questo sviluppo nel Gandhāra. Proprio nel Gandhāra il buddhismo ci mostra degli adattamenti considerevoli, tra cui spicca un coinvolgimento nell'economia cittadina che lo porta finanche alla gestione della produzione di bevande inebrianti. Inoltre, in quella che sembra essere un'inesauribile spinta adattiva, il buddhismo associa se stesso a festività di carattere dionisiaco, con raffigurazioni erotiche e rappresentazioni di baccanali e, non da ultimo, con le arti marziali. In considerazione di ciò, non appare così fuori luogo il resoconto del *Vinaya* in pāli in cui dei monaci ritenuti abietti organizzano un vero e proprio simposio, con musiche, danze, cibo, alcol, situazioni di intimità e attività ludico-ricreative. Tra queste ultime, appaiono attività legate all'ambito militare, allenamenti in discipline marziali e veri e propri incontri di combattimento. L'esempio del buddhismo nel Gandhāra ci permette di leggere sotto un'altra luce la narrativa, giacché non ci appare più così irrealista e inverosimile, acquisendo sempre più un carattere di verosimiglianza. Chiaramente un verdetto netto sulla storicità o meno del resoconto va al di là delle nostre possibilità valutative, ma cionondimeno ci consente di ragionare su questioni storiche e inferire informazioni. Il resoconto, infatti, ci presenta un buddhismo pienamente civilizzato, partecipe della vita cittadina, e ci avverte dei potenziali pericoli dell'imborghesimento, qui inteso come un allontanamento dal mondo rurale concomitante a una certa ricercatezza di benessere materiale, in uno spirito da *viveur*. Per quanto riguarda le discipline da combattimento è stata avanzata una suggestione importante in relazione alla *storia delle arti marziali*, ossia la possibilità che delle arti marziali fossero praticate nell'India antica come attività di svago. Questo resoconto del *Vinaya* è forse il riferimento più antico alla possibilità di un ingresso delle arti marziali

nei monasteri buddhisti,⁶⁵ fatto rilevante non solo in riferimento agli sviluppi che si ebbero nel Gandhāra e, successivamente, in Cina, ma anche per quanto riguarda gli sparuti riferimenti di connessioni esistenti tra le arti marziali indiane e il buddhismo.⁶⁶ Ecco che allora si potrebbe quasi avanzare un'ulteriore linea interpretativa che vede il Gandhāra, terra di confine per l'India, come il centro di un irraggiamento di influenze. È fatto oramai attestato che il Gandhāra abbia avuto un ruolo centrale, nella trasmissione della letteratura buddhista in Cina (Neelis 2011, 42-7, 229-56), ma ha anche avuto un ascendente, generalmente molto meno discusso, sulla letteratura pāli, come nel caso del *Milindapañha*⁶⁷ o delle influenze sulla geografia sacra in alcuni *Jātaka* (Deeg 2022). Nell'ottica di comunità interconnesse, in cui gli scambi non sono unilaterali, ma vicendevoli, possiamo aspettarci riflessi o echi di quel buddhismo gandhārico, sviluppatosi in una civiltà cosmopolita, in cui elementi simpotici e discipline del

65 Più antico, benché non l'unico. Si consideri, ad esempio, un'evidenza presente all'interno della letteratura esegetica: «Allora vi erano cinquecento [individui] che consumavano le rimanenze dei pasti, i quali vivevano proprio all'interno del monastero, dipendendo dai monaci. Essi, dopo aver mangiato le rimanenze del pasto dei monaci, il quale era composto da deliziose pietanze, si addormentarono. Svegliatisi, si recarono alla sponda del fiume, chiassosi e scalpitanti si divertirono, combattendo alla maniera dei Malla; sia dentro che fuori dal monastero si comportano solo che in malo modo» (*tadā pana pañcasatamattā vighāsādā bhikkhū nissāya antovihāre yeva vasanti, te bhikkhūnaṃ bhuttāvasesāni pañitabhojanāni bhuñjitvā niddāyitvā utthāya naditiraṃ gantvā nadantā vaggantā mallayuddhaṃ yujjhantā kīlanti, antovihāre pi bahivihāre pi anācāraṃ eva karontā caranti*; Dh-p, II, 154). Anche in questo caso il fatto di allenarsi nelle arti marziali all'interno di un monastero è descritto come un atto deprecabile, sebbene, a questo punto, saremmo legittimati a chiederci donde viene tutta questa preoccupazione. La stessa storia appare con alcune significative modifiche nel *Vālodakajātaka* (I *jātaka* de 'L'acqua [dei resti] del setaccio'; Ja 183), in cui i protagonisti dell'episodio sono cinquecento ignobili servitori di altrettanti cinquecento virtuosi laici buddhisti, i quali, similmente, dopo aver consumato le rimanenze del pasto, si recano al fiume e combattono tra di loro (Ja, II, 96). Vi è da notare che in entrambi gli episodi i protagonisti non sono guerrieri di professione, ma sembrerebbe qui implicita una pratica delle arti marziali a scopo ricreativo.

66 Sulla base di una versione della storia di Bodhidharma, patriarca del buddhismo *chán* 禪 (= *zen* 禪) e fondatore della tradizione marziale degli *shāolín*, secondo cui egli era un monaco buddhista proveniente dal sud dell'India (Faure 1986: 188), vi è una credenza attestata tra i praticanti dell'arte marziale indiana conosciuta come *kalarippayattu* che vede Bodhidharma come un esperto della suddetta arte, sostenendo quindi che il *kalarippayattu* sia antenato dello *shāolín* (McDonald 2007, 147). Allo stesso tempo c'è chi crede che il *kalarippayattu* incorporò tecniche di difesa elaborate in ambito medico e buddhista (Zarrilli 1998, 268 nota 119) e chi segnala i centri buddhisti tra i principali siti per l'apprendimento delle arti marziali in Kerala (Karasinski-Sroka 2021, 2-3). Un'influenza dell'India meridionale, in particolare dravidica, sullo *shāolín* è stata avanzata da Varghese (2003), la cui accuratezza accademica lascia però a desiderare.

67 Il *Milindapañha* (Le domande di Milinda) è un testo che riporta dei dialoghi filosofici tra un monaco buddhista di nome Nāgasena e il re indo-greco Milinda (altresi noto come Menandro), originariamente composto in gāndhārī, un medio-indoario attestato nel Gandhāra (De Notariis 2022, 118 nota 17). Thomas W. Rhys Davids, uno dei pionieri dello studio del buddhismo in Europa e fondatore della Pali Text Society affermò: «I venture to think that the 'Questions of Milinda' is undoubtedly the master-piece of Indian prose» (1890, XLVIII).

combattimento sono riuscite ad accattivarsi le simpatie buddhiste. La lettura delle fonti letterarie può avvenire, pertanto, in un modo *paṭiloma*, ossia ‘contropelo’, contrastando, provocatoriamente, il resoconto e provocando attriti al regolare scorrere della narrazione tramite l’ineludibile pettine della storia, in modo tale che emergano questioni nodose, che si sollevi almeno un pelo di incertezza su quel mondo a noi molto lontano che è l’India antica.

Pertanto, confrontare le evidenze di quello che è stato effettivamente un buddhismo vissuto in relazione a un componimento letterario che può essere frutto dell’immaginario, ma cionondimeno ispirato da elementi reali,⁶⁸ ci pone di fronte a una dimensione terza, terra di mezzo tra l’eterica, evanescente e fioca storicità di una narrazione in contrapposizione al peso stringente della materialità, come può essere un vaso per la distillazione⁶⁹ [fig. 4] o un peso per l’allenamento [fig. 1] che ci portano a dire: *è vero, qualcuno li usò!*



Figura 4 Distillatore: condensatore dal tempio BN, Barikot. Metà III sec. d.C. Foto di Elisa Iori.
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68 Cf. McHugh 2021, 76-7, 111-13, per quanto riguarda l'utilizzo dell'immaginario nello studio degli aspetti sociali legati al consumo di bevande alcoliche nell'India antica.

69 Sulle origini della distillazione, McHugh (2020) ha recentemente sostenuto una datazione più tarda rispetto a quella finora mantenuta, benché si segnali che la questione sia ancora aperta e sicuramente necessita di un'ulteriore analisi. In ogni caso, quel genere di vasellame era legato alla produzione di alcolici (cf. Coloru, Iori, Olivieri 2024, 202-7).

Fra gli estremi ci sono sempre delle sfumature, sprazzi di tonalità di non chiaro inquadramento cromatico, gradazioni più o meno accentuate del plausibile e anche tasselli di storia che si aggirano nell'immaginario, poiché anch'esso è, per molti versi, storicamente determinato, giacché non possiamo immaginare, per definizione, l'inimmaginabile.

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I testi pāli utilizzati sono tratti dalle edizioni della Pali Text Society (PTS)

Abhidh-k	<i>Abhidharmakośa</i> (Pradhan 1967)
Aś	<i>Avadānaśataka</i> (Speyer 1906-09)
D	<i>Dīghanikāya</i> (PTS)
Dhp-a	<i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i> (PTS)
DOP	Dictionary of Pāli (Cone 2010)
Ja	<i>Jātaka</i> (PTS)
M	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i> (PTS)
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i> (PTS)
PED	Pali-English Dictionary (Rhys Davids, Stede [1921-25] 2015)
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i> (<i>Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>) (PTS)
S	<i>Samyuttanikāya</i> (PTS)
SED	Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Monier-Williams 1899)
Sn	<i>Suttanipāta</i> (PTS)
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i> (<i>Samyuttanikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>) (PTS)
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i> (<i>Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>) (PTS)
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i> (PTS)

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The Linguistic Heritage of the Bangladeshi ‘New Communities’ of Venice (Italy) Between Italian and Bangla and Beyond

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Abstract This paper presents the initial findings of a sociolinguistic study conducted using ethnographic methods on the Bangladeshi community of Venice (Italy). Observations and interviews were carried out with migrants of different generations, genders, educational backgrounds and jobs concerning the Heritage Language field, with both Italian as a second language and Bangla. Following the journey of the diaspora, the social and linguistic composition of the community will be detailed, as well as beliefs and practices concerning language and its role as heritage, with particular attention given to women's conditions and opportunities.

Keywords Bangladesh. Immigration. Sociolinguistics. Heritage Language. Bangladeshi women.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical background. – 2.1 The Faro Convention and International Legislation: Where is Language? – 2.2 National and Local Legislation on Languages. – 2.3 The Heritage Speaker between L2 and Heritage Language. – 3 Context: Bangladeshi Migration. – 3.1 The Bangladeshi Presence in Venice. – 4 Research Questions and Methodology. – 5 Data. – 5.1 The Italian Learning Process: Challenges and Necessities. – 5.2 Women's Challenges. – 5.3 Bangla as an HL. – 5.4 Other Languages of the Repertoire: English. – 6 Discussion. – 6.1 The Italian Learning Process: Challenges and Necessities. – 6.2 Women's Challenges. – 6.3 Bangla, ‘the Language of the Heart’. – 6.4 ‘... But Also Trilingual’: Other Languages of the Repertoire. – 7 Conclusions.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-02-18
Accepted 2025-05-09
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Ferro, G. (2025). “The Linguistic Heritage of the Bangladeshi ‘New Communities’ of Venice (Italy). Between Italian and Bangla and Beyond”. *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 275-298.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/008

1 Introduction

Bangladeshi people are the second largest community in the Municipality of Venice, and Bangla is one of the first languages of the city, after Italian and with Chinese, Russian/Ukrainian, and so on. The demand for Italian courses by all nationalities, especially by Bangladeshis, is growing as steadily as the diversity of communities. In this research, Bangladeshi migrants of this area, of different social statuses, generations and genders were interviewed on their linguistic practices, difficulties in learning/using Italian as a second language, and about their mother tongue - Bangla - to understand how the multilingual Heritage of the community is developing.

Moreover, Bangla is an important Heritage for Bangladeshi people since Bangladesh was created on linguistic basis. After Western Pakistan forced Eastern Pakistan (present Bangladesh) on using Urdu, on the 21 February 1952 some students of Dhaka who gathered to demonstrate against this imposition and for the recognition of Bangla as an equally important language were killed. Globally on this date the UNESCO International Mother Language Day is observed every year.

In this paper, the first section will be devoted to the basis of this NRRP project, the Faro Convention, that will be linked to Heritage Languages. The research questions and methodology will be then delineated. In the second section the constitution and composition of the Venetian and then of the Bangladeshi-Venetian community will be presented, as well as its history, coming to the third section which will present the initial data on linguistic practices, challenges and opportunities related to the process of Italian learning alongside a first insight on the attitudes towards Bangla. A specific part will be devoted to women, a particularly vulnerable group of this community, as they are usually the target of many legislations and "anxiety about [...] effects and imagined failures of migration and multiculturalism [...] opaque backdrop to the agency of male migrants" (Alexander, Chatterji, Jalais 2015, 134). Taking notes of the point of view of every and each part of the community will give us a wider perspective on our understanding of Heritage.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 The Faro Convention and International Legislation: Where is Language?

The Faro Convention “promotes a wider understanding of heritage and its relationship to communities and society”.¹ It encourages protecting Heritage as a priority element of a goal of “cultural diversity” and respect for “different interpretations” on Heritage, as in art. 5(e). Member States commit themselves to develop Cultural Heritage as a resource to facilitate peaceful coexistence and to integrate all these methods into lifelong learning. In general, language is not considered as a part of Cultural Heritage to be protected, the latter being defined as “practices, representations and expressions, knowledge and skills [...] that communities, groups and in some cases individuals, recognise as part of their cultural heritage” (*UNESCO Convention for the Safeguard of Intangible Cultural Heritage* of 2003; Smeets 2004, 156). In many Proclamations and other international instruments² neither is the role of language central (it is only a “vehicle” of Intangible Cultural Heritage) nor is the legislation clear or mandatory, leaving the ultimate choice to Member States (Smeets 2004). In this matter, there is a “longstanding resistance of States to any external interference in national cultural policies and the codification of protection for intangible heritage, especially languages, at the international level” and in general a “sensitive matter linked to State-building and national identity” (Vrdoljak 2014, 139).

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, adopted in 1992 and effective in 1998, has the aim of protecting and promoting historical regional and minority languages in Europe. It specifically states that it can only be applied to historical languages

1 See the website of the Council of Europe Office in Venice to access the text of the Faro Convention, available at the following link: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice/faro-convention>. The Faro Convention is a “framework convention” which defines issues at stake, general objectives and possible fields of intervention for member States to progress. Each State Party can decide on the most convenient means to implement the Convention according to its legal or institutional frameworks, practices and specific experience. The Convention was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 13 October 2005, and opened for signature to member States in Faro (Portugal) on 27 October of the same year. It entered into force on 1 June 2011. To date, 24 member States of the Council of Europe have ratified the Convention and 4 have signed it. It was ratified by Italy on the 23 September 2020.

2 *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* of 1966, art. 27 and *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* of 1992, art. 4.3, both of the UN; *Proclamation of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* of UNESCO, 2001-5.

used by the nationals of the States Parties, excluding both dialects and the languages of the recent migration.³ Italy has not ratified this Charter.

2.2 National and Local Legislation on Languages

For what concerns Italy more specifically, the UNESCO portal states that there are some linguistic minorities, among those there are 12 Historical Linguistic Minorities, safeguarded by the Law no. 482/1999 *Norme in materia di tutela delle minoranze linguistiche storiche* (Regulations concerning the safeguard of historical linguistic minorities).⁴ The safeguarded linguistic communities are Albanian, Catalan, Germanic, Greek, Slovenian and Croatian, those speaking French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan and Sardinian. Moreover, the Central Institute for Intangible Heritage of the MIBACT (Ministry of Culture) has the aim of safeguarding the Cultural Heritage sustaining the diverse fields linked to the different collective identities of the various groups in the territory. According to both these legal instruments, the languages of migrants are not covered by the legislation.

On the local level, namely in Veneto, according to the Regional Law no. 9 of 13 April 2007, the region supports the safeguard and the valorisation of the Venetian linguistic heritage, specifying that:

Le specifiche parlate storicamente utilizzate nel territorio veneto e nei luoghi in cui esse sono state mantenute da comunità che hanno conservato in modo rilevante la medesima matrice costituiscono il veneto o lingua veneta.⁵

In addition, the above-mentioned Law no. 482/1999 is active in the region too, protecting Ladin, Cimbrian (a Germanic language) and Friulian and activating annually initiatives concerning linguistic

³ See the website of the Council of Europe to access the text of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages at the following link: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/about-the-charter>.

⁴ To read the Italian Law no. 482/1999 regarding the Regulations concerning the safeguard of historical linguistic minorities access the following link: <https://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/99482l.htm>.

⁵ "The specific parlances historically used in the Venetian territory and in the places where these have been maintained by communities that have conserved significantly the same origin constitute Venetian or Venetian language". See the Veneto region website to read the full text of the Regional Law no. 9 of 13 April 2007, available at the following link: <https://bur.regione.veneto.it/BurVServices/pubblica/DetailLegge.aspx?id=196722>. All the translations in this paper are made by the Author.

minorities.⁶ In the Venetian legislation the languages of migrant communities are not covered either.

For migrants, certainly their mother tongue is vital as well as the language of the majority, through which they can access the Cultural Heritage as well as a relationship with the hosting society. Nowadays Bangladeshi's mother tongue is also a distinctive and omnipresent element of the community of Venice and the city itself, since the number of Bangladeshi activities and employers is growing more and more. The decision to safeguard and consider as Cultural Heritage only certain kinds of languages, as endangered languages (see Turin 2014) or traditional and historical languages, is linked to an "authorised heritage discourse", a hegemonic and institutionalised control on what can be Cultural Heritage, validated by expert knowledge (Smith 2006, 11). In this sense, only the authority has the role to protect or legislate on certain languages, not considering both ethnic and linguistic minorities and specific vulnerabilities, as well as the menaces from linguistic imperialism, globalisation and the growth of nationalism (Smeets 2004, 160; Bernini 2014, 165).

For what concerns the learning of Italian as a second language, there is no mandatory course to attend once entering Italy, apart from specific courses for unaccompanied minors, asylum seekers and international protection holders in the SAI project (Integrated Reception System).⁷ It is compulsory, though, for foreign citizens who have been legally living in Italy for more than 5 years and intend to apply for a long-term EC permit (art. 9 of the Consolidated Immigration Law) to take and pass the Italian language knowledge test (minimum A2 level of the CEFR, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), or to have a certificate of knowledge from the institutional certifying bodies, with different exemptions.⁸ In addition, the B1 test (CEFR) is mandatory to access different training courses and, according to the law 1/12/2018 no. 132, to obtain the Italian citizenship.

6 See the website of the Veneto region to read the regulations concerning linguistic minorities, available at the following link: <https://www.regione.veneto.it/web/relazioni-internazionali/minoranze-linguistiche>.

7 See the SAI (Integrated Reception System) project website and understand the aims of the project accessing the following link: <https://www.retesai.it/attivita-e-servizi/accoglienza-integrata/>.

8 See the website of the Italian Minister of Interior to read the regulations of Italian as a second language tests to obtain permanent residence permits at the following link: <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/temi/immigrazione-e-asilo/modalita-dingresso/test-conoscenza-lingua-italiana>.

2.3 The Heritage Speaker between L2 and Heritage Language

For Bangladeshis living in Italy, then, both Italian and Bangla are central, the first to obtain papers or access work, the second as a Heritage Language (HL). The term Heritage Speaker (HS) is linked to the concept of HL, born in Canada, a multilingual land of both indigenous and colonisation languages, where in the 1970s the Ontario Heritage Languages programme was developed, financing a school system that would teach the HL for 2.5 hours (Aalberse, Backus, Muysken 2019, 2). The actions of the Canadian federal government then continued along these lines and, since 2006, the Heritage Ministry has implemented language policies in favour of English, French and indigenous minorities, while also giving support to other HLs – the dozens of minority languages of migrant communities (Eaton, Turin 2022, 794). The Canadian government's definition of HL is:

A mother tongue that is neither an official language, nor an indigenous [i.e. Aboriginal] language. (Aalberse, Backus, Muysken 2019, 2)

The term 'heritage' always refers to the transmission from generation to generation of patterns, beliefs and ways of living, and despite continuity with the past, the 'inheritance' is present (Aalberse, Backus, Muysken 2019, 3). HLs thus:

1. are/were originally spoken in a different place from where they are currently spoken;
2. were brought to their present location through the migration and settlement of their speakers;
3. the term itself does not refer to political or national alliances, but to historical origins, not being a threat to the integrity of the nation state;
4. no reference is made to current speaking skills, making even an identity connection with the HL of the cultural community of origin possible;⁹
5. being languages transplanted to a place where they are not dominant, the ideal of competence, authenticity and richness of expression is usually found in the country of origin (Eaton, Turin 2022, 795).

⁹ In the literature, the erosion, or attrition, of the mother tongue is often emphasised as one of the primary characteristics of HLs, especially by second generations. Lacking the necessary linguistic input, lexicon, morpho-syntactic structures and variety of registers are gradually lost: representing HL as a deficient and deficient linguistic system may, however, be counterproductive and does not consider HS in whom identity construction is central (Nagy, Celata 2022, 226).

There are different kinds of HSs: he/she may be a person whose exposure to the mother tongue (L1) is interrupted (by voluntary immigration, deportation, adoption) in conjunction with an intensive exposure to a non-mother tongue (L2). For children of immigrants, the language of the parents is often learnt at home as the minority L1, while the L2 is learnt outside the home and is the language of the majority. There are many cases and, as the community grows in generations, there tends to be a language shift, the L2 of the parents becoming the L1 of the children, who will have the parents' mother tongue as HL, until the generation when the HL is acquired in fragments and restricted to a few registers, while the language of the majority becomes these generations' mother tongue (Nagy, Celata 2022, 225). In this paper, these kinds of HSs will be analysed, taking into account the exposure to L2 and the process of learning Italian/Bangla as well as the practices and uses of L1.

3 Context: Bangladeshi Migration

Venice's migrant population accounts for about 15% of the total resident population, 39,025 immigrants present out of a total of 253,174 residents in 2022, with a higher figure compared to the Italian territory, where the total presence of foreigners accounts for 6.4% of the total number of residents. The Bangladeshi presence is the most numerous in the municipality of Venice, with 8,269 presences (5,328 men and 2,941 women),¹⁰ around 20% of the total foreign resident population.

Bangladesh was born out of independence from Pakistan in 1971 on linguistic basis. In addition to the official language, Bangla, 36 other languages are spoken.¹¹ The country faces a high poverty rate and periodic flooding caused by climate change, with water covering 8% of the territory: international migration is therefore a survival strategy for many Bangladeshis (Siddiqui 2004). Bangladesh is one of the largest migrant countries, with an estimate of 7 millions abroad by 2021.¹² Through national and international laws, Bangladeshis have always moved where they could find opportunities, in UK (the London community is one of the largest today), and in other anglophone or European countries. They entered Italy "pulled by the attraction of

10 ISTAT 2023. Data extracted on 9 January 2024 at 10:45 UTC (GMT) from I.Stat.

11 See the Ethnologue website to read more information about the languages spoken in Bangladesh, available at the following link: <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/BD/>.

12 See the the United Nation agency for migration website, namely the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), to read a report regarding Bangladeshi migrants, available at the following link: <https://bangladesh.iom.int/news/world-grows-281-million-migrants-bangladesh-6th-largest-migrant-sending-country>.

periodic amnesties for irregular migrants to legalize their status" (King, Della Puppa 2021, 408), a "permanent (or at least renewable) residence in Europe" (Knights 1996, 109). In the 1990s Bangladeshi presence started growing slowly, but with the Martelli Law (1990) a first wave of Bangladeshi migrants began, with family/parental migration, work migration and through "travel agents" who recruited Bangladeshi migrants (Knights 1996, 109). In that period, migrants were predominantly from Shariatpur, Noakhali, Komilla and Dhaka and they resided in Rome (Mantovan 2007, 286-7). Once regularised, Bangladeshi migrants began internal migration especially to the Northeast (Morad, Gombac 2018, 40). Through family reunifications and trafficking, between 2002 and 2022 the presences increased sixfold, with 150,000 regularly present,¹³ mainly concentrated in Rome and in the Veneto region (King, Della Puppa 2021, 408).

3.1 The Bangladeshi Presence in Venice

Veneto is the second Italian region for residences of foreign citizens (2002-12) with about 450,000 presences. The Bangladeshi migration to Venice from the 1990s saw men seeking work, single or married, as first migrants. They now can reach Venice: i) through internal migration; ii) with a work visa, through the *decreto flussi* (flows decree);¹⁴ iii) as asylum seekers and iv) through family reunification, once settled properly with residence permits and appropriate housing.¹⁵ According to the figures given in section 2.1 (p. 6), 65% of migrants are men and 35% women: in 20 years, the female presence has risen from 14% to 35%, a sign of an increase in long-term residents and mature migration.

13 Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy Report *The Bangladeshi community in Italy 2022*.

14 The legislative decree known as the *decreto flussi* sets "the maximum number (so-called quotas) of foreign citizens from non-EU countries who may enter Italy from abroad each year to work is defined in the so-called flows decree. The decree provides for separate entry quotas for seasonal workers, self-employed workers and non-seasonal employed workers. Quotas are also set for converting residence permits issued for study reasons into work or for converting residence permits issued for seasonal work into non-seasonal employment" (see the Italian Minister of Work and Social Politics website to read the full regulations of the flow decree, available at the following link: <https://integrazioneimmigranti.gov.it/it-it/Ricerca-news/Dettaglio-news/id/2213/Che-cose-il-Decreto-Flussi-Cosa-si-intende-per-quote-di-ingresso>).

15 The legislation for family reunification requires residence permits of a certain duration, housing eligibility and a minimum income. Moreover, not all family members can be reunited: mainly wife and children under 18 (see the Italian Minister of the Interior website to read the regulations regarding family reunification, available at the following link: <https://prefettura.interno.gov.it/it/prefetture/trapani/ricongiungimento-familiare>).

As of 2010, the main areas of birth among Bangladeshi immigrants in Venice were the districts of Shariatpur, Dhaka and Kishoreganj. The presence in the municipality of Venice is concentrated in the centre of Mestre and the mainland (64%), 32% are in Marghera and Chirignago and 4% in Venice. The minors are 23.7% of the total: in 2018, in three schools in the municipality (two in Mestre and one in Marghera) Bangladeshi children were more than 50% and among the 890 requests for mediation in schools (2019-20), 60% (531) were for Bangla (Bonesso 2020).

Unlike other areas of Veneto where industry in the narrow sense has created the greatest attraction, migrants from Venice and Mestre are employed in the area's most profitable activities: catering (dishwashers, kitchen helpers, cooks), tourism-related activities (housekeepers, waiters/waitresses in hotels and B&Bs, receptionists, porter service), entrepreneurship and shipbuilding in Marghera. In fact, Fincantieri was one of the first attractions in the Venetian municipality, where around 3,000 Bangladeshis by 2021 were employed in the "mansioni più pesanti e dequalificate" (heaviest and most de-skilled jobs) (Mantovan 2007, 288).

In 2021, there were about 250 businesses run by Bangladeshi in the historic centre alone, often low-priced industrial souvenir shops in the most tourist areas. In Mestre, one mainly finds grocery shops with typical South Asian products, government office for tax assistance and information that deal with documents and bureaucracy mainly for compatriots, money transfers and other services (sometimes all in the same shop). These activities are mainly concentrated in the areas where Bangladeshi people live (many do not have a driving licence or a car), in the streets adjacent to the train station, in the centre of Mestre, and in the main market, expanding the choices to Bangladeshi fruits and vegetables.

The salary of the Bangladeshi workers must be enough to support themselves and their family here in Italy, paying very high rents that are often increased for foreigners, especially around Mestre centre, which is why it is common for a Bangladeshi family to be forced to live in one room, sharing a house with other families. The money earned is often used to send a livelihood to the family in the country of origin, to relatives of the extended family, and in the case of wealthier families to do charitable work for the poorest in the village, as this Bangladeshi interviewee states:

Quel periodo là mia famiglia economicamente era ottimo quel periodo perché avevamo lavorato tutti in Germania in Svizzera

[...] Là abbiamo aiutato sempre i poveri da quando arrivato in Europa [...] della zona.¹⁶

4 Research Questions and Methodology

This paper will answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic composition of Venice and of the Bangladeshi community?
2. What are the practices and ideas regarding Italian and Bangla?
3. What is the point of view of women and which peculiar difficulties are they facing?

A qualitative method was used in a sociolinguistic research study with ethnographic method, with informal and formal meetings, interviews, chats with participants and field observations of Bangladeshis living, working and/or studying in the municipality of Venice, thus including Mestre and Marghera. Approximately from May 2023 to September 2024, 20 semi-structured interviews were carried out and recorded in Mestre and Marghera with 15 participants (some participants were interviewed more than once) with migratory background from Bangladesh of different ages, genders and generations recruiting interviewees through the snowball method, mainly through key informants. In addition, informal conversations with several people of different ages and genders were carried on. In conjunction with the work in the field, visits to schools and places of interest, and meetings with informants, a field diary was written, with the issues discussed with the people, impressions, observations.

The semi-structured interview is constructed on the two main topics of interest, subdivided into a first introductory part of questions to frame the personal and migrant situation of the interviewee and a second part concerning more specifically the languages of the repertoire, their use and importance (for parents, if they wish to teach Bangla to their children) and the means through which they learned Italian. At the beginning, the specific themes of the research study were about the process of learning Italian and the maintenance of Bangla as a Heritage Language. While going on with interviews, precisely through a semi-structured method, it came out that other issues were important within the research study and were entangled

16 "That time there my family economically was very good that time because we had all worked in Germany in Switzerland [...] There we have always helped the poor since I came to Europe [...] in the area (Interviewee no. 1, Italian, man, over 50 years old, in Italy for more than 20 years)".

to the main topics, since many people had a really limited knowledge of Italian or were struggling to learn it:

- Which difficulties are you facing to learn Italian?
- How do you think it is a necessity to learn Italian?
- Which problems have you faced/Which events happened because you did not know Italian?

The interviews were carried out either in Italian (where possible), in English, Bangla, Hindi or a mixture of these languages. In each excerpt, the interviewee is given a number (in chronological order), then the language of the interview is indicated, along with gender, age, generation or years of presence in Italy. To preserve the linguistic characteristics of the interviewees, the interviews were transcribed faithfully to the spoken word, preserving any grammatical errors.

5 Data

Different issues/theme were identified coding the transcribed interviews and four main themes/issues were selected for a wider analysis in this specific paper:

1. The Italian learning process: challenges and necessities
2. The specific difficulties of women
3. Bangla as an HL
4. Other languages of the repertoire: English

5.1 The Italian Learning Process: Challenges and Necessities

1. Actually, right now, I'm not only studying. I'm working plus studying. And I have to take the load that tomorrow I have to go work. And I don't have enough time to do this study. [...] In the starting, it was very hard for me. I was very tired at that moment. I couldn't concentrate. Because if you're going to learn something new, you have to be concentrated. (Interviewee no. 3, English, young man, newly-arrived)
2. So, they only know Bangladeshi. So, they only communicate with Bangladeshi people. [...] Venice has lots of Bangladeshis. So, it's not hard to only communicate with Bangladeshi and survive there. (Interviewee no. 3, English, young man, newly-arrived)
3. Let's say I'm going to stay in Italy 10 years. In between 10 years, I can be sick. Very horrible way. And what about... it's a workplace. No one is going to give me his available time. I have to take care of myself. (Interviewee no. 3, English, young man, newly-arrived)

4. For the survival. It's very necessary. (Interviewee no. 3, English, young man, newly-arrived)
5. Ti racconto la vita di un bengalese. Il bengalese viene in Italia. Lavora a Fincantieri, lavora nella ristorazione, quindi ha... Va là, ritorna, non ha nessun contatto con lo stato italiano, con le persone italiane. (Interviewee no. 4, Italian, man, second generation)¹⁷
6. Quando lui era cinque mesi io ho lasciato il divano perché lui sempre come così dormire [...] Anche lui è caduto, anche è arrivato il sangue nel naso, subito ho chiamato ambulanza e ho andato in ospedale, non chiamano mio marito perché mio marito lavorava. (Interviewee no. 5, Italian, woman and mother of 2, in Italy for more than 5 years)¹⁸
7. Noi sempre sempre lanciamo una notizia che novo arrivi donne omini devono imparare lingua italiana, donne loro devono andare dei medico allora devono parlare da soli, devono andare iscola dai bambini, devono parlare con l'insegnante con- am- amici della iscola dai g- con gli altri genitori allora se tu hai qualche problemi con tua figlio con tua figlia con altri figli se tu non riesci parlare non riesci spiegare quale probleme che hanno questi figli che litigano [...] se tu no sai niente lingua italiana come fai collegare con i altri genitori come fai spiegare ehm- altri genitori quale problemi che avete tra le bambini? (Interviewee no. 1, Italian, man, over 50 years old, in Italy for more than 20 years)¹⁹
8. Tre-quattro cose noi sempre insegniamo per primo a loro quelli novo arrivi quelli che vengono qui per imparare lingua italiana, quella abbiamo visto che senza lingua italiana diffiscile integrarsi qui questo paese. (Interviewee no. 1, Italian, man, over 50 years old, in Italy for more than 20 years)²⁰

17 "I'll tell you how the life of a Bengali is. The Bengali comes to Italy. He works in Fincantieri, he works in catering, so he... He goes there, he comes back, he has no contact with the Italian State, with Italian people".

18 "When he was five months I left him on the couch because he always sleeps like this [...] he also fell, also came blood in the nose, immediately I called the ambulance and I went to the hospital, I didn't call my husband because he was working".

19 "We always send a news that new arrivals women men they must learn Italian language, they have to go to the doctor so they have to speak alone, they have to go to the school of the children, they have to speak with teacher with friends of the school with other parents so if you have some problems with you daughter with your son they fight [...] if you know nothing of Italian language how can you connect with other parents how can you explain ehm- other parents what problem there is between children?".

20 "Three-four things we always teach them first those new arrivals who come here to learn Italian, that we have seen that without the Italian language it is difficult to integrate here in this country".

9. Nell'altro paese dell'Europa quando tu entri un paese prima di tutto tu devi imparare quella lingua là no? obbligo no? in Italia non è obbligo. (Interviewee no. 1, Italian, man, over 50 years old, in Italy for more than 20 years)²¹
10. Io ho a che fare sempre con adulti e quindi il fatto è che loro si sono proprio impostati all'idea che una volta che hai smesso di studiare è difficile riprendere. (Interviewee no. 10, Italian, young mother of newborn, second generation)²²
11. [...] partono dal presupposto che l'italiano è impossibile. Non difficile, è impossibile. (Interviewee no. 10, Italian, young mother of newborn, second generation)²³
12. Perché poi dice, intanto mi serve il documento, ora che ho il documento ho tempo di imparare, però dopo il tempo non arriva... (Interviewee no. 10, Italian, young mother of newborn, second generation)²⁴

5.2 Women's challenges

1. In Bangladesh anche la famiglia di musulmani loro pensa che donne non lavora fuori di casa e uomo sì [...] mia famiglia un po' mentalità un po' di differente, mia mentalità un po' differente di altri perché non è che è una donna, non è che è una femmina io devo migliorare la mia vita perché io voglio la mia vita migliore. (interviewee no. 2, Italian, young woman, in Italy for less than 5 years)²⁵
2. Bangladeshi donne non è forte come italiani [...] tante persone mia *sanskṛti* dice no no va bene che una donna va un altro paese sola sola e questa non è una cultura di mia- in Bangladesh non funziona bene. (Interviewee no. 2, Italian, young woman, in Italy for less than 5 years)²⁶

21 "In the other countr[ies] of Europe when you enter a country first of all you have to learn that language yes? [it is] mandatory yes? In Italy it is not mandatory".

22 "I always deal with adults so the fact is that they've convinced themselves that once you've stopped studying it's hard to restart".

23 "They presume that Italian is impossible. Not difficult, impossible".

24 "Because then they say, now I need the paper, once I have the paper I have time to learn, but then the time never comes...".

25 "In Bangladesh even the family of Muslims they think women don't work outside the house and man does [...] my family a little bit different mentality, my mentality a little bit different than others because it's not that she is a woman, it's not that she is a female I have to improve my life because I want my life better".

26 "Bangladeshi women is not as strong as Italians [...] so many people my *sanskṛti* (culture) say no no it is good that a woman goes another country alone alone and this is not a culture of my- in Bangladesh it does not work well".

3. Devo imparare prima italiano dopo cerco lavoro. (Interviewee no. 2, Italian, young woman, in Italy for less than 5 years)²⁷
4. Perché il loro ruolo fondamentale è la gestione totale della casa, della famiglia che è veramente un impegno grandissimo che a volte sembra, almeno io lo vedo in questo modo, più dell'uomo che lavora fuori. Quindi anche loro si trovano in una situazione molto... dicono sono stanca, non ce la faccio. Poi magari tendono a dire guarda io non so la lingua, come faccio ad aiutarti? Quindi anche loro si trovano in una brutta situazione. Quindi non posso dare la colpa a loro. (Interviewee no. 6, Italian, young mother of 2, second generation)²⁸
5. Ho imparato ita- l'italiano tanti anni dopo, tanti anni dopo perché ehm-- erano non è così davvero, adesso ci sono tanti posti perché da- di imparare e perché non ho conosciuto tante scuole, tante persone [...] perché adesso ci sono tanti bengalesi [...] per quello ho imparato piano piano [...] perché non c'è internet anche. (Interviewee no. 7, Italian, mother of 2 and Italian teacher, in Italy for almost 20 years)²⁹
6. Ecco perché ora ho voglia di studiare qua, perché quando sono venuta qua [2006] è nato mio filio e poi un'altra filia quindi no? Bisogno tanto tempo come una mamma, adesso sento un po' libera. (Interviewee no. 7, Italian, mother of 2 and Italian teacher, in Italy for almost 20 years)³⁰
7. Here you need language for everything such as going to the doctor, my child is little, if she needs to see a doctor my husband has to take time off but he can't take time off all the time. (Interviewee no. 8, Bangla and Hindi, recently arrived mother of 2)³¹
8. This month I have an appointment to the doctor on the 23rd how can I explain the problem if I don't know the language, so I have to take him [with me] because he knows Italian [...]

27 "I have to learn Italian first, then I look for a job".

28 "Because their fundamental role is the total management of the house, of the family that is really a great task that sometimes it seems, at least I see it this way, much more than the man who works outside. So they also find themselves in such a situation... they say I'm tired, I can't. Then they might say look, I don't know the language, how can I help you? So they also find themselves in a bad situations. So I can't blame them".

29 "I learned Italian so many years later, so many years later because uhm-- they were not like that really, now there are so many places because it gives-- to learn and because I did not know so many schools, so many people [...] because now there are so many Bengalis [...] that's why I learned slowly [...] because there is no internet also".

30 "That's why I feel like studying here now, because when I came here [2006] my son was born and then another daughter so no? I need so much time as a mother, now I feel a bit free"

31 The excerpts 7, 8 and 9 were translated from Bangla by a collaborator of the project.

whenever I go to whichever office, when they ask questions, I don't understand anything, so I can't answer, if I knew the language [...] I've had many problems when I went to the hospital here. I'm very good in my language but I don't speak Italian, I've suffered a lot because I couldn't explain my pain and my problems. (Interviewee no. 8, Bangla and Hindi, recently arrived mother of 2)

9. Soon after I arrived in Italy, I signed up for a [Provincial Adult Education Centre] language learning course, but I didn't finish it. I was out of school for a long time because my son was sick most of the time and I couldn't even take the exams so I couldn't complete the course. For those of us who are mothers of young children in Italy, I wish that if the Italian government had taken steps to allow us to learn the language with our children, I think many mothers would have learned the language. (Interviewee no. 8, Bangla and Hindi, recently arrived mother of 2)

5.3 Bangla as an HL

1. Ho visto un po' di familia che bambini che nato qui che no parlava bene le regole no? E allora poi mi è venuto mente che guarda ce questi bambini non parlano bene la lingua se hanno con i genitori i-in Bangladesh loro non riescono parlare con loro parenti, loro cugini, loro nonni no-non riescono a parlare perché loro dimenticato bangla, oppure loro non sanno bangla per questo mi è venuto mente che una rilasione con i parenti si chiudeno se loro non imparano questi bengoli quale lingua madre, lingua madre [...] se loro no parlano questa lingua perdono tutto. (Interviewee no. 1, Italian, man, over 50 years old, in Italy for more than 20 years)³²
2. Devono conservare la mia lingua perché è l'unica lingua al mondo che ha dov- è- è stata ottenuto in seguito a una s- come dire [massacro] quindi l'uni- l'unico popolo che ha lottato per avere la sua lingua madrelingua quindi hanno il sacro s- dovere di continuare a mantenere questa lingua in casa sua [...] quello che mi- mi fa sentire un po' inferiore è che noi non sappiamo la nostra lingua, non sappiamo la

32 "I saw some family that children born here that didn't speak the rules well no? And then it came to my mind that these children don't speak the language well if they speak with their parents in Bangladesh they can't speak with their relatives, their cousins, their grandparents can't speak because they forgot Bangla, or they don't know Bangla that's why it came to my mind that a relationship with relatives is shut down if they don't learn this language, the mother tongue [...] if they don't speak this language they lose everything".

- grammatica. (Interviewee no. 9, Italian, young man, second generation)³³
3. Molto importante perché loro sono stati otto ore in classe sempre parlano italiano non c'è problema niente io non ho paura con l'italiano perché loro sempre va fuori a parlare italiano anche a scuola italiana bangla no, bangla solo con mio marito. (Interviewee no. 5, Italian, woman and mother of 2, in Italy for more than 5 years)³⁴
 4. Io l'ho imparata un po' a voce dai miei genitori. Che comunque fino alla mia adolescenza non riuscivo a esprimerla bene, perché, cioè li mescolavo un po'. Non riuscivo a dire delle parole dirette. Quindi ho sempre mescolato, perché non riuscivo a formare una frase corretta in modo giusto. È stato sempre un po' difficile. Infatti parlavamo sempre quasi in italiano. Tranne con mio papà e mia mamma, ma i miei fratelli, io... (Interviewee no. 6, Italian, young mother of 2, second generation)³⁵
 5. Però gli insegno anche il bengalese, un po', quello che so io, diciamo. Perché secondo me se riesco a introdurre anche quel poco che so io, è molto interessante la cosa. (Interviewee no. 6, Italian, young mother of 2, second generation)³⁶
 6. Io sto cercando di...è difficile per me lasciare l'italiano ma mi sto impost... cioè mi impongo di parlare in italiano... parlare in bengalese. (Interviewee no. 10, Italian, young mother of newborn, second generation)³⁷
 7. Cioè in senso io ancora adesso se mi dici di parlare in italiano la parlo meglio del bangla. (Interviewee no. 10, Italian, young mother of newborn, second generation)³⁸

33 "They have to preserve my language because it is the only language in the world that had to- it was obtained as a result of a s- how to say [massacre] so the only- the only people that fought to have their native language so they have the sacred s- duty to continue to keep this language at home [...] what makes me feel a little bit inferior is that we don't know our language, we don't know the grammar".

34 "[It is] very important because they have been in class eight hours they always speak Italian there's no problem I'm not scared with Italian because they always go out and talk in Italian also in Italian school Bangla no, Bangla only with my husband"

35 "I've learnt it verbally a little through my parents. Anyways, until my adolescence I couldn't express it well, because, well I mixed them a little. I couldn't say direct words. So I've always mixed, because I couldn't assemble a correct sentence in the right way. It's always been a little difficult. In fact we would almost always speak in Italian. Except for my dad and my mum, but my brothers, me..."

36 "But I will teach them Bengali as well, a little, the things I know, let's say. Because in my opinion, if I can introduce even the little that I know, it's very interesting".

37 "I'm trying to... it's difficult for me to leave Italian but I'm convinc- like I'm forcing myself to speak Italian... speak in Bengali".

38 "Like I mean I now if you tell me to speak Italian I speak it better than Bangla".

8. I miei hanno sempre parlato in bengalese, cioè loro parlano italiano ma con noi in famiglia no. Quando eravamo più piccoli, ed è una cosa comune in tutte le famiglie, parlare in bengalese con mamma e papà e parlare in italiano tra i fratelli. (Interviewee no. 10, Italian, young mother of newborn, second generation)³⁹
9. Poi mia mamma ad una certa ci ha imposto: "Parlate in bengalese che imparate entrambi". E quindi abbiamo imparato. Adesso parliamo un misto. Un misto italiano. (Interviewee no. 10, Italian, young mother of newborn, second generation)⁴⁰
10. E invece con lei io ci tengo che impari, cioè in senso comunque ci tengo che tutta la cultura resti, però ovviamente l'italiano arriverà da sé. (Interviewee no. 10, Italian, young mother of newborn, second generation)⁴¹
11. Stiamo parlando bangla perché sappiamo che a scuola imparerà l'italiano [...] devono sapere almeno leggere e scrivere, leggere i nomi dei prodotti, gli indirizzi, parlare con i nonni. (Interviewee no. 11, Italian, woman in her 30s, in Italy for more than 10 years)⁴²

5.4 Other Languages of the Repertoire: English

1. Perché così non sono bilingue, ma anche trilingue. Poi ci saranno altre lingue che si aggiungeranno. (Interviewee no. 6, Italian, young mother of 2, second generation)⁴³
2. [...] e con Alexa di farle sentire cose in inglese [...] Cioè sono troppo abituata all'italiano però vorrei imputarmi io sul bengalese e sull'inglese. L'italiano lo impara. (Interviewee no. 10, Italian, young mother of newborn, second generation)⁴⁴

39 "My parents have always spoken in Bengali, like, they speak Italian but with us within the family they wouldn't. When we were younger, and it is something common in every family, to speak in Bengali with mom and dad and to speak in Italian among siblings".

40 "Then my mum at a certain point forced us: 'Speak in Bengali so you'll both learn'. So we've learnt. Now we speak a mixture. A mixture of Italian".

41 "Instead with her I care that she learns, like I mean in any case I care that all the culture remains, but obviously the Italian will come by itself".

42 "We're speaking in Bangla because we know that at school [he] will learn Italian [...] they at least have to know how to read and write, read the names of the products, the addresses, speak with the grandparents".

43 "Because then they won't be bilingual, but also trilingual. Then there will be other languages that will be added".

44 "[...] and with Alexa to make her hear things in English [...] Like I'm too used to Italian but I'd like to focus on Bengali and English. [Of course] she will learn Italian".

3. Un po' di persone, sì 3-400 persone, che andato in Inghilterra. (Interviewee no. 1, Italian, man, over 50 years old, in Italy for more than 20 years)⁴⁵

6 Discussion

6.1 The Italian Learning Process: Challenges and Necessities

Being one of the poorest countries in the world, many Bangladeshis migrates to earn money for them and for their families, both in Italy and abroad. The continuous number of arrivals, especially through the *decreto flussi*, poses several challenges both to migrants who do not know the Italian language and to those that deal with a first literacy in Italian. For many men, it is really difficult to learn Italian since their work duties condition their opportunities and their energies to learn Italian (excerpt no. 1 § 4.1). Apart from the material opportunities, like time, to learn a language, motivation plays a crucial role in language learning (Dörnyei 1998, 117). Work and the improvement of their status and conditions are the primary goals of the Bangladeshis, and at the same time the attitude towards the Italian learning process is negative, resulting in a low interest/intrinsic motive of learning Italian (excerpts nos 5, 10-11 § 4.1; Dörnyei 1998, 128). In addition to the focus on work, the vast community of Venice lowers the interest and the necessity of learning Italian (excerpt no. 2 § 4.1).

At the same time, there are many reasons and motivations to learn Italian, starting from emergencies, in the hospitals or in other situations where there is the need to speak Italian since no one speaks Bangla, nor English. Many interviewees pointed that there is the need to learn at least the basics of Italian for this reason (excerpts nos 3, 5 § 4.1). In front of this challenges and needs, different interviewees think that the most important thing once entering Italy should be language, to learn all the basics for survival in the host society, and that a course should be mandatory, as it is in other European countries such as Germany (excerpts nos 7-9 § 4.1).

In this sense, the work of associations and institutions is essential to make possible a first, basic communication in Italian and to teach how to deal with the problems of migration in a foreign country. In many of these classes, preA1-B1 Italian language courses are held, for women and men of different nationalities (even if in many areas the majority is Bangladeshi), but also specifically for women, minors

45 "A few people, yes 3-400 people, who went to England".

and particularly vulnerable learners (such as during pregnancy, etc.). These courses are mainly held by governmental school, private associations or are funded by different institutions. The goal of one of the associations that were interviewed is to decrease the distance between Italians and Bangladeshi immigrants through language and to foster inclusion, so that over time Bangladeshis in Mestre and Venice can do more skilled and qualified jobs, entering the Venetian social fabric (excerpts nos 7-8 § 4.1). It also emerged that the lack of knowledge of Italian by one partner has consequences on the work schedule of the other partner, who needs to take time off work (excerpts nos 7, § 4.1).

6.2 Women's Challenges

In addition to the arrivals to *decreto flussi*, and to the problem faced by men concerning duties, responsibilities and work schedules, the presence of Bangladeshi people is considerably growing thanks to family reunification, particularly of women. In December 2022 a Bangladeshi woman was beaten for wearing the *niqāb*, a veil that covers a woman's entire body.⁴⁶ In addition to the difficulties of migrating in a different country, Bangladeshi women are a particularly vulnerable group for being women, muslim and migrant at the same time.

The excerpts nos 1 and 2 (§ 4.2) give an idea of what social expectations are there for women. This leads to a strong division between public and private, male and female, home/family and work: the *pardā* (literally 'curtain') is the practice that – especially in the Indian Subcontinent and Islamic countries – prevents the man from seeing the woman, thus drawing a 'curtain' both physical (*hijāb*, physical segregation of the genders) and metaphorical, but which plays an equally important role in intensifying the spatial division and disparity between the genders, limiting women's personal, work and social activities, relegating them to the domestic sphere (see Lata, Walters, Roitman 2021). The institution of marriage – in most cases arranged – leads to viripatrilocality, i.e. the bride's residence in her husband's family, on which the woman depends, also economically. Once emigrated, often through family reunification, the gender gap continues, with the woman being dependent on her husband in every sphere of the public sphere, also for language (excerpt no. 7 § 4.2).

One of the numbers that stands out the most in the figures of Bangladeshi presence is the male-female ratio of the Bangladeshi

⁴⁶ See the article from the online newspaper *Today* to read the full news, available at the following link: <https://www.today.it/cronaca/ragazza-picchiata-velo-niqab-mestre.html>.

presence: 5,328 men versus 2,941 women (see § 2.1). Coming to Italy through family reunification means coming several years after their husbands, who already know some basics of Italian language, since men often work with Italians or, regardless, are more present in Venetian social life. They are able to learn the language more quickly because of a greater linguistic input, albeit at a basic level and limited to work, bureaucratic and children's schooling needs. Once arrived in Italy, many Bangladeshi women get pregnant or they have to take charge of domestic work, childcare, cooking, housework, without the joint family's support they used to have in the native country (excerpts nos 4-6 § 4.2).

There are few women engaged in work, they remain more isolated and Italian language input is reduced, often zero, given also the possibility of access to services (such as groceries) managed by compatriots. Even if many women are starting working, also with small jobs that they can do within the house, in the cleaning sector or in the healthcare, but surely the opportunities they have to learn Italian and to speak with Italians are fewer than for Bangladeshi men, creating a particular situation of vulnerability and marginalization (Tonioli 2022, 269-70). In some cases, women start working or studying when their children become more independent, even after many years after coming to Italy (excerpt no. 5 § 4.2).

These practices can create particular difficulties for women when they emigrate to a foreign country whose language and culture they neither speak nor know, thus they do not have the tools to create their own living space outside the home and to settle in, nor can they be autonomous at pivotal moments such as pregnancy, during which there may be emergencies or particular difficulties that cannot always be mediated through the husband (excerpts nos 7-8 § 4.2)

Associations in the area, CPIAs (Provincial Centres for Education of Adults) and municipal initiatives are committed to creating courses specifically for women to teach not only Italian but also health elements related to the sexual sphere and to the reproductive system, to help them deal with problems related to pregnancy, motherhood, hygiene, postpartum issues and the schooling of their children. The reasons set out above, however, make self-determination, including linguistic self-determination, difficult, especially when there is no continuous support network that can cover all women, even the most vulnerable, but only courses linked to municipal and European funds.⁴⁷ In this

47 A teacher refers to several FAMI (Fondo Asilo Migrazione e Integrazione) projects, which are used to create specific language courses for women. One of these, V.O.C.I. of 2021, can be found on the website of the municipality of Venice. See the website of the Venetian municipality to read more about the language courses funded by FAMI at the following link: <https://www.comune.venezia.it/it/content/convegno-finale-2021-progetto-fami-voci>.

sense, one must bear in mind the material difficulties related to the possibility of having linguistic input suitable for learning Italian that migrant women may have, as well as the time they have to devote to housework (excerpts nos 4, 9 § 4.2).

Nonetheless, not for all women the situation is the same, but this often depends on family status, immediate needs and, of course, circumstances. As for the excerpts nos 1 and 3 (§ 4.2), learning Italian was for this interviewee a way to be able to enter the Italian social fabric more easily, as well as to increase her working possibilities.

6.3 **Bangla, ‘the Language of the Heart’**

An Italian teacher, during an informal conversation, stated that Bangladeshis only speak and hear the “language of the heart”, that is Bangla, their mother tongue and also the HL. There are many opportunities to speak Bangla, since the community is one of the biggest in Italy. On the other hand, while the community keeps growing, many children are born in Italy and attend Italian school, with a greater Italian input than their parents, they are starting losing their competence in Bangla (Nagy, Celata 2022, 225). Having seen this problem, many schools in Mestre were founded to teach Bangla in a scholastic way to the children of Bangladeshis born in Italy, who have an identity bond to the language and who can communicate with their relatives in Bangladesh or in other countries (excerpt no. 1 § 4.3). Many parents state that keeping Bangla alive is vital for their children (excerpts nos 3, 5-6, 10-11 § 4.3), but also the second generation recognises its importance (excerpt no. 2 § 4.3).

If, for what concerns the first generation, the opportunities to speak and hear Italian are scarce, in the second generation there is a shift, beginning right from childhood with the experience with the siblings, and the input and the competences in the HL diminish (excerpts nos 4, 6-9 § 4.3), also creating new varieties mixing Bangla with Italian (excerpt no. 9 § 4.3). Nonetheless, they recognise the importance of handing down the heritage to their children, the third generation (excerpt no. 10 § 4.3).

6.4 **‘... But Also Trilingual’: Other Languages of the Repertoire**

Another issue to highlight that influences language practices is that in several cases Italy is seen as a “transit” country to reach the most desirable destination, the UK (excerpt no. 3 § 4.4). This is called onward migration (Della Puppa 2021, 36). The English attraction certainly relates to the desire to join the old Bangladeshi community

in London, which is seen as subject to less racism than the Italian one, but also to the state aid:

Bedi qui Italia che sono immigrati che bibeba da 20 anni 30 anni che vive qui dopo prende scittadinanza se ne va via? perché? [...] perché in Italia non c'è una social service non c'è.⁴⁸ (Interviewee no. 1, Italian, man, over 50 years old, in Italy for more than 20 years)

The view of the United Kingdom (or other European countries) as richer in possibilities and aid therefore prompts emigration again, along with the possibility of investing in the children's future (Della Puppa, Morad 2019, 481). The inability to educate and socialise their children in English is a problem for Bangladeshis, who would be more oriented towards a "globalised and cosmopolitan dimension" (Della Puppa, Morad 2019, 481). Such is the importance given to English that Italian (and linguistic input in Italian) is often neglected: many of the participants in Tonioli's study (2022, 278-9) in fact considered English to be the key to their children's future, influencing ideologies and linguistic behaviour within the Bangladeshi family and also losing out on access to Italian cultural heritage and exchange processes. On the other hand, many interviewees highlighted the importance of having a wider linguistic repertoire, while not neglecting the education of Bangla and Italian (excerpts nos 1-2 § 4.4). When (and if) migrating to the UK, then, the linguistic repertoire, the dominance and in general the linguistic heritage might change again, as well as the context, the motivation and other factors, as can be seen in Goglia's studies (2021; 2023).

7 Conclusions

In this first insight on the features Bangladeshi community of Venice, it was portrayed how diversified the composition of this same community is, with differences according to gender, social status (and opportunities) and generation. Many Bangladeshi people realise the importance of learning Italian, surely for emergencies but also to enter in the social and work fabric of the country. On one hand, men are facing the challenges of having many responsibilities and work duties and they must subtract their energy from the study of Italian language to work and earn as much money as possible for their family. On the other hand for women the opportunities to learn

48 "See here Italy who are immigrants who lived for 20 years 30 years living here after they take citizenship they leave? why? [...] because in Italy there is no social service there is not".

Italian are scarce: their burden is more invisible than men's but still it conditions their possibilities to learn Italian and speak in Italian with people. Surely Italian is a necessity for them 'for survival' (excerpt no. 4 § 4.1) but the many difficulties and challenges they face make them vulnerable learners.

For what concerns Bangla, there is a positive attitude towards HL for first generations as well as for second and third generations, creating a transnational bond (with relatives, etc.). Creating a wider repertoire and shaping also the linguistic landscape of Venice, English is the language that covers all the communities and sometimes it makes possible to communicate without using Italian.

In this landscape, the diversity of the city should be taken as a positive feature that creates, according to the Faro Convention, the possibility to understand the more widely Heritage, both of the hosting country and of the migrants in the territory. All the languages in the municipality should be considered important for the different communities, as Bangla is for Bangladeshis, giving it space within the municipality as part of the Heritage, while working on the motivation to learn Italian, creating the conditions to increase the opportunities and integrating specific policies for multilingualism and the protection of minority languages in the current legislation.

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From Organics to Ceramics? Exploring Organic Skeuomorphism in the Later Neolithic in Northern China

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Abstract Skeuomorphism in Chinese ceramics is a widespread phenomenon with examples known from the early Shang dynasty (sixteenth c. BC) through to modern times, and with metal, lacquer, jade and glass vessels all serving as models for the ceramics they inspired. With Neolithic pottery in China, however, the presence of skeuomorphic design is more difficult to assess. Nonetheless many Neolithic ceramics from northern China seem to embody influences from materials as various as basketwork, birch bark, leather and horn. This suggests that extensive skeuomorphism may once have operated at a much earlier stage in China's ceramic history than the Bronze Age – namely the Neolithic period.

Keywords Skeuomorphism. China. Neolithic. Birch-bark. Basketry. Leather. Horn.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Skeuomorphism in Chinese Neolithic Ceramics. – 2.1 Basketwork. – 2.2 Birch Bark. – 2.3 Leather. – 2.4 Vessels Made from Horn. – 2.5 Erlitou and Early Shang Bronzes. – 3 Conclusion.



Peer review

Submitted 2024-12-20
Accepted 2025-06-18
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Wood, N. (2025). "From Organics to Ceramics? Exploring Organic Skeuomorphism in the Later Neolithic in Northern China". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 299-318.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/009

Integrating the organic and inorganic components of a site, and deploying an augmented idea of the kind of material culture being produced, allows for broader interpretive possibilities.
(Hurcombe 2014, 161)

1 Introduction¹

In the long and varied history of Chinese ceramics the principle of skeuomorphism has been an important and enduring theme. The shapes of metal vessels in particular have been copied in clay for more than three thousand years with cast bronze serving as the preferred models in the Bronze Age (sixteenth to the fourth c. BC) and beaten silver and gold vessels in the Tang and Song dynasties (seventh to thirteenth c. AD) (Medley 1972; Rawson 1989; Vainker 1991, 109). In the late eleventh c. AD some glazed imperial Ru ware bottles were made in the shapes of imported Islamic glass, while black-glazed and russet-glazed cups and cup-stands were made by the Ding ware potters of northern Hebei province that closely resembled the forms and the colours of contemporary lacquer wares. Similar correspondences can be traced through the post-Neolithic history of Chinese ceramics while, in some cases, particularly with China's more prestigious wares such as Guan ware, skeuomorphic design seems to have been the rule rather than the exception. In the case of Guan ware influences from hammered silver, archaic cast bronze, lacquer, jade, and imported glass, are all evident in the fine imperial celadon wares made at Lin'an (now Hangzhou City) in the later Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) (Scott 1989, 40-4).

But how should we take account of any influences on Chinese ceramics from vessels made from organic materials that have not survived through gradual decay over the millennia, and are therefore missing from the archaeological record? This is particularly true of vessels made from materials such as horn, wood, bark, basketwork and leather, all included by Linda Hurcome in 'The missing majority', that is the once abundant, but now long-lost, organic artefacts of the Neolithic world (Hurcome 2014). Northern China, in particular, has a rich and varied history of ceramic production that, from the Bronze Age onwards, shows abundant evidence for skeuomorphism in its ceramic design. It therefore seems reasonable to test the skeuomorphic principle with surviving Neolithic ceramics from this same region, but in this case against the background of a lost material

¹ Acknowledgements: sincere thanks to Dr Peter Hommel, University of Liverpool, for useful discussions on this subject, and for some valuable references, images, and suggested edits to the text.

culture that may have made extensive use of containers and vessels made from organic materials. There is also an added interest, when dealing with this part of China, that the Neolithic north gave way to the early Bronze Age – a change epitomised by China's first cast ritual vessels of the early sixteenth c. BC and excavated from sites such as Yanshi in Henan province (Deydier 2018). These early bronzes present their own challenges with regard to form and ornament, with contemporary vessels made from perishable organic materials perhaps also playing some part in their unusual designs.

2 Skeuomorphism in Chinese Neolithic Ceramics

2.1 Basketwork

Some very early pottery vessels that seem to show signs of skeuomorphism may have used baskets as their models (Hommel 2013, 667). Examples are known from the Russian Far East and made by hunter-gatherers at the end of the last Ice Age, c. 11,000 to 5000 BC. Some are thought to have been moulded inside actual baskets, as basketwork impressions survive on their surfaces (Zhushchikhovska 1997, 160-2). From China itself, is a U-shaped vessel from a Hongshan culture site that seems to have been made in a typical basket-ware form [fig. 1]. The vessel dates from c. 4500-3000 BC and was excavated near to Chifeng in Inner Mongolia. Its outside surface has a basket-like texture, while its rim is formed in a typical basketwork style [figs 1-2].



Figure 1 Hongshan culture vessel from Xintai, near Chifeng. Mid-fifth to the fourth millennium BC. H. 25.8 cm. Reproduced from Institute of Archaeology, CASS, 1993, 110



Figure 2 Picking basket, China, made from wicker and wood. Modern. H. 30 cm, W. 32 cm. Image courtesy of Couleurlocale

2.2 Birch Bark

Also from the Chifeng region, but in this case from the somewhat earlier Zhaobaogou culture (c. 4900 to 4700 BC), is another pottery vessel that might be suspected as deriving from a basket-work form. This example has an oblong base and a round top, which are characteristics of many basketwork designs [figs 2-3]. However, another interpretation is that this piece might be following a birch bark original – birch bark being a very ancient and versatile material for vessel-making (Hommel 2013, 667; Nelson 2002; Orsini et al. 2015). Containers made from birch bark exploit the principle that large vertical sheets can be unpeeled from birch trees by using high and low ring-cuts with one vertical cut to connect them. Birch bark has the nature of a thin natural plywood that can be heated, steamed or soaked in hot water to make it flexible. Large and long-lasting vessels can be made from this material through a type of ‘bark origami’ (Fletcher et al. 2018; Yarish et al. 2009). Birch bark is naturally waterproof and rot-resistant, and may also be used to hold liquids [fig. 4] (Ward et al. 1996). As the bark cools and dries it becomes tough and rigid as its resins harden. Birch bark tar, made from the dry distillation of the bark itself, is also a very ancient and useful adhesive that is strong, flexible and waterproof, and considered superior to pine or spruce pitch (Koller et al. 2001).

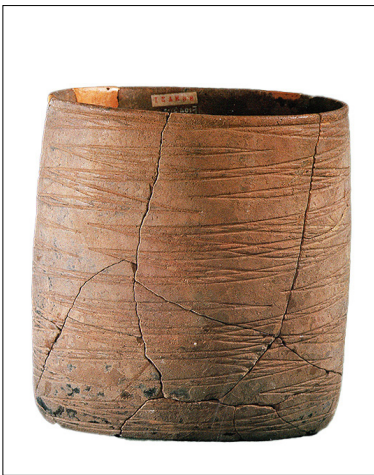


Figure 3 Pottery vessel with an oblong base and a circular top. Zhaobaogou culture near Chifeng, Inner Mongolia. C. 4900-4700 BC. H. 20.5 cm. Reproduced from Institute of Archaeology, CASS, 1993, 106



Figure 4 Birch bark water bucket with oval top and a wooden handle, 'Niatush', Japan. Ainu, Yezo, Volcano Bay Hokkaido. Pre-1900 H. 32 cm, W. 16 cm. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

2.3 Leather

When considering leather prototypes for Chinese ceramic vessels, it is possible to begin on firmer ground and at much later dates than the Neolithic, with numerous potential examples of glazed northern ceramics from the late sixth to the twelfth centuries AD. For these vessels at least, the influences of leather prototypes on ceramic form and detail are widely accepted and discussed, with modern survivals of similar leather forms used for comparison (Department of Archaeology Peking University (ed) 1992, 258-9). Leather working in northern China, particularly among its pastoralist peoples would have been widespread with its products traded within more settled societies. An advantage of these later leather-inspired ceramics, from the perspective of the present review, is that they allow familiarity to develop with the forms and details of typical leather vessels that have been translated by potters into the very different medium of clay [figs 5-6].



Figure 5 Xing whiteware flask, Tang Dynasty (618-907AD). Exhibited in Beijing in 2013. Photo, courtesy of Kang Baoqiang, Palace Museum, Beijing



Figure 6 Olive-green glazed flask and cover. Liao Dynasty (907-1125) H. 30.5 cm. © Christie's / Bridgeman Images

2.3.1 Neolithic Leather Working

For Neolithic skin-workers de-fleshing, de-hairing and scraping would have been essential first stages, but they would then have been faced with two problems common to the practice. The first is the tendency for the skins to stiffen, shrink and harden as they dry, while the second is the risk of rapid decay, particularly when the

skins become wet. Thus, structural preservation of the material and restoration of its original flexibility have been prime concerns for the multitude of skin-working techniques that have developed through the millennia.

With regard to preservation, skins have been traditionally cured by exposing them to wood- or grass-smoke and/or by lengthy immersion in liquors made from tannin-rich organic materials, especially infusions of tree bark. Flexibility can be restored by rubbing fat-rich materials such as animal brains, fish oil, egg-yolks, or fish-eggs into the skins, and this process can also render them waterproof. Countless variations on these principles can be traced through early material cultures, with climate, local fauna and flora, and the intended uses for the processed skins, all serving as factors in determining the specific techniques adopted (Kemper 2020; Hurcome 2014, 80-1).

Once the skins are prepared, they can then be made into three dimensional objects in an economical and effective way, usually by cutting the leather sheets to a pattern and stitching the edges with tough and fine cord, root-fibre or sinew. This process usually leaves raised welts where the various sections have been joined [fig. 7]. Handles (when needed) can be made by folding the leather to increase its thickness or by plaiting or twisting leather strips to make more substantial sections. Handles can also be made as continuations of the major parts of the vessels, as with the leather prototype for the Xing ware flask in fig. 5. The advantages of leather over ceramic, once the difficulties of making the vessels have been mastered, is that the objects can be light, 'unbreakable' and long-lasting, making ideal waterproof containers for liquids such as water or wine.



Figure 7
Modern leather purse. H. 22 cm, W. 19 cm.
English, Bristol, 2000.
Photo by the Author

2.3.2 Shandong Neolithic Ewers

There are few objects in Neolithic China's rich and complex ceramic history more striking in form than some ewers of the later Shandong Longshan culture, c. 2500-2000 BC [figs 8-9]. These were made in what is now Shandong province. They have been excavated at sites such as Dawenkou, Ti'an and at Yanguanzhuang near to Weifang City in central Shandong (Druc et al. 2021, 2). They are sometimes described as 'bird like' because of their large and exaggerated 'beaks' and tall legs.

They are all trilobate, with some showing udder-like fullness while others are simply stubby feet attached to the main bodies of the ewers. They tend to be relatively large (up to 40 cm tall), and have been described as 'ritual vessels', and were perhaps once used for serving wine (McGovern et al. 2004, 17593; McGovern et al. 2005, 266). They are often made from pale-firing kaolinitic clays rather than from the reddish- or grey-firing loessic materials that are more abundant in Shandong province. Alternatively these darker clays could be covered with pale clay-slips to give an overall white impression (Druc et al. 2021,7). Later examples show signs that they were constructed from multiple sections that had been thrown on the fast potter's wheel [figs 8-9].



Figure 8 Neolithic Shandong Longshan Culture *gui*. Excavated at Lingchengzhen, Rizhao County, Shandong. C. 2500-2000 BC. H. 36.8 cm. W. 20.4 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Peking University. Photo by the Author



Figure 9 Neolithic Shandong Longshan culture *gui*. C. 2500-2000 BC. From Yanguanzhuang, Weifeng Municipality, Shandong. H. 31.7 cm. W. 19.8 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Peking University. Photo by the Author

2.3.3 Possible Sources For the Ewers' Forms

It seems feasible that these very complex Shandong ceramic ewers were copying vessels that were originally made by the cutting and joining some type of sheet material, with riveted bronze cautiously proposed by Watson in 1973, although with appropriate caveats (Watson 1973, 58-9). However, rawhide or leather may be more likely candidates as references to these materials seem evident in their applied 'welts', in the twisted 'ropes' of their handles, and in the 'nail-heads' that appear where strengthening details may have been applied to the original vessels. Even so, a problem with this hypothesis is that it pre-supposes the presence of sophisticated skin-working traditions in the Middle Dawenkou and Longshan cultures, for which little evidence seems to have survived. Although leatherworking has been proposed for two important Neolithic sites in north China - namely the large Middle Neolithic village of Jiangzhai in Shaanxi province and at fourth millennium BC sites near Chifeng in Inner Mongolia (Xishuiquan and Baiyinchanghan) - Dawenkou leather working remains a less examined subject (Peterson et al. 2010, 5757; Peterson, Shelach 2012, 284). Nonetheless, some hints for skin-working within the Dawenkou culture may come from ceramic drums found in Shandong province that Lawergren suggests were originally topped with skin (Lawergren 2006, 110-11). With regard to the animal skins available to the Dawenkou people, domesticated pig remains have been found at nineteen Dawenkou sites dating from c. 4100-2600 BC. while Kwang-chih Chang mentions that pig, cattle and sheep remains have been recovered from later Dawenkou sites in Shandong (Jin 2009, 121-2; Chang et al. 2005, 96).

2.4 Vessels Made from Horn

In one respect horn-working presents an easier option for vessel making than leather in that horn-workers are already in possession of hollow forms that can be modified or merged to make larger vessels. This may have some relevance to some dramatic ewers excavated from the Dadianzi site of the Lower Xiajiadian culture in Auohan banner in Inner Mongolia and dated to c. 2000-1000 BC [fig. 10] (Institute of Archaeology, CASS 1993, 124).



Figure 10
Late Neolithic Xiajiadian culture ewer from tomb 612. Dadianzi. C. 2000-1000 BC. H. 27.2 cm Reproduced from Institute of Archaeology, CASS 1993, 32

2.4.1 Working Animal Horn

Animal horn becomes plastic when heated and sections can be fused together when soft (often above 300°C). Horn can also be glued effectively when cold. The Dadianzi ewers appear as if the originals may have been made from separate horn elements that were merged at their edges and then tightly bound with a suitable material, perhaps rawhide [fig. 10]. Superficially the Dadianzi ewers from Inner Mongolia share many features with the Shandong vessels, but closer study of their details suggests an imitation of horn – rather than hide-working. The difference extends to the handles, which are flat, rather than appearing like twisted rope or leather. Other features that may be evoking horn originals are the vessels' burnished surfaces and their lightly scratched 'scrimshaw' style of ornament. A further interesting aspect of the Xiajiadian culture ewers from Tomb 612 at Dadianzi is that they were found together with a lacquered wooden cup – a rare organic survival from China's Neolithic past.

A few hundred miles to the west of Shandong, on the great central plain, traversed by the Yellow River are important sites from the Erlitou period, such as Erlitou itself (Yanshi), Luo Damiao, and Dong Gangou near to Luoyang (Deydier 2018, 10). It is from these sites that some of north China's earliest cast bronze vessels have been excavated (Han et al. 1954). The later Longshan ceramic vessels from the region are varied in form and function but, from the standpoint of the present discussion seem to owe more to horn than to hide in their essential designs and details [fig. 11]. More specifically, the use of Water Buffalo horn might be suspected, perhaps from the distinctive short-horned north Chinese species (*Bubalus mephistopheles*), which is now extinct [fig. 12] (Yang et al. 2008). It may also be significant that many of these drinking or pouring vessels have rims that rise opposite to their handles. This can suggest the shape taken by a buffalo's horn where it meets the animal's skull, a feature that may have been exploited as pouring-lips on some horn-made originals [fig. 11].



Figure 11 Two grey pottery tripod ewers. Erlitou period. Sackler Museum, Peking University.
Photos by the Author



Figure 12
Bubalus mephistopheles skull
from the Tianluoshan site,
displayed at the museum
at Hemudu. Image from
Wikimedia Commons,
courtesy of Mx Granger

2.4.2 Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age Ceramics from Erlitou Sites

In the history of horn-made vessels the simplest and most ancient shape is the unmodified curved animal horn, with its earliest known representation seen in the Upper Palaeolithic ‘Venus of Laussel’ (c. 23,000 BC), a *bas-relief* figure discovered within a cave in the Dordogne department of France (Duhard 1991). In China itself an exact horn skeuomorph in ceramic, and from the Dawenkou culture, is displayed in the Jinan Museum in Shandong [fig. 13].

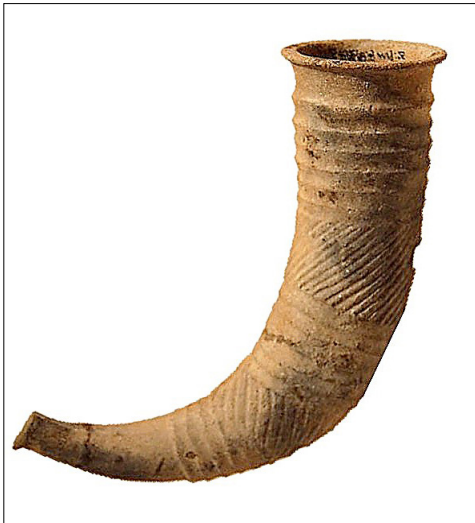


Figure 13
Ceramic horn from
the Dawenkou culture, Juxian,
Shandong. Perhaps an
end-blast trumpet Jinan
Museum, Shandong. Image
courtesy of Peter Hommel

2.4.3 The *Gu* Form

A later important horn-form that appears in many cultures worldwide is the beaker with a flat base. This latter style may also be suspected in some vessels from Erlitou sites, although in this case the shapes could be interpreted as combinations of two horn-made beakers, with one inverted to make a tall hollow foot [figs 14-15]. This feature, combined with the banded detail where hollow foot and cup may have been joined, is often seen in later cast-bronze versions of the same footed-beaker form [fig. 16].



Figure 14 Pottery *gu* (wine vessel) Erlitou period. Excavated at Yanshi, Henan Province. C. 2100-1600 BC. H. 17.7 cm. Reproduced from Institute of Archaeology, CASS 1993, 124

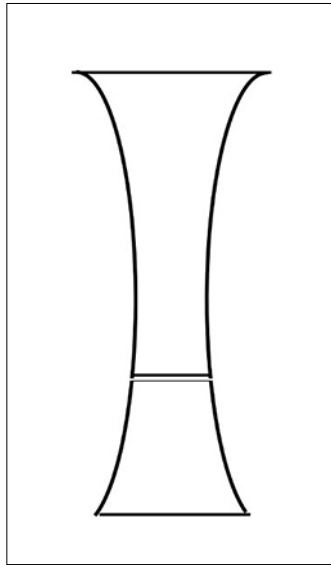


Figure 15 A *gu* form can be made from horn by joining two beaker-shapes and binding the join. Image by the Author



Figure 16
Bronze *gu*, later Shang dynasty. C. 1150-1050 BC.
H. 32 cm. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

2.4.4 The Rhino Horn Cup

But perhaps the most iconic of all horn-based forms in China's material culture must be the Rhino horn cup, and these have considerable antiquity in China. As Jeannie Thomas Parker notes:

Literary evidence confirms the fact). that by the Eastern Zhou Dynasty at the latest, the Chinese were using wine cups made out of rhinoceros horn. (Parker 2013, 103)

Lander and Brunson also note:

Bones identified as rhinoceros or Sumatran rhinoceros were identified at Early and Middle Neolithic Dadiwan (Gansu), Middle Neolithic Guantaoyuan and Zijing (Shaanxi), Middle Neolithic Xiawanggang (Henan), Bronze Age Erlitou (Henan), and Bronze Age Anyang (Henan). (Lander, Bronson 2018, 301)

Rhinoceros horn is a densely compacted keratinous composite that grows as a solid mass over a fleshy bump on the nasal bone of the animal. As a result it forms a natural cup that can be easily finished by cutting and cleaning [fig. 17]. The odd geometry of the top of the *jue* cup seems to echo the way that the horn grows from the animal's nasal bone [fig. 20]. Late Neolithic pottery cups in *jue* form also have the characteristic 'sawn-off' flat base of the rhino-horn cup [fig. 18]. There is a sense too that the horn prototype (if it existed) may have been deformed pyroplastically (i.e. pinched after heating) to give a pouring lip, a feature that is also evident in Erlitou ceramics and bronzes [figs 18-19].



Figure 17

Plain rhino horn cup, China.
Sixteenth c. AD or earlier. H. 8.9
cm, L. 16.5 cm. Museum of East
Asian Art, Bath. Heritage Images

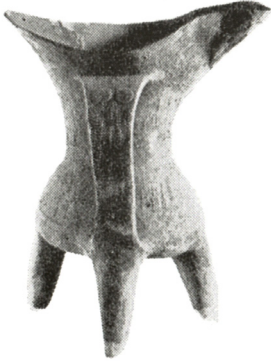


Figure 18 Pottery *jue*, from the third
stratum at Erlitou. Sixteenth c. BC. H. 13 cm.
Reproduced from Kaogu (1965), 5, pl. 4:9)



Figure 19 Bronze *jue* (wine cup). Early Shang Dynasty,
Erligang period, fifteenth to fourteenth c. BC. H. 14.6 cm,
W. 13.5 cm. Also bronze *gu*, early Shang dynasty, Erligang
period. Fifteenth to fourteenth c. BC. H. 16.8 cm.

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Figure 20 Sumatran rhinos (the smallest member of the rhino family) were abundant in north China until later in the Shang dynasty. <https://www.worldwildlife.org/photos/sumatran-rhino-new-hero-image>

2.5 Erlitou and Early Shang Bronzes

The Erlitou culture and period are often regarded as one and the same as the Xia dynasty, the first of three early Bronze Age dynasties in traditional Chinese chronology – namely Xia, Shang and Zhou. Xia territory was conquered by the Shang, probably in the sixteenth c. BC and the region that is now Henan province and its environs became an advanced and powerful state that came to dominate northern China for some five hundred years. Bronze ritual vessels were developed from those pioneered by the late Erlitou culture and these became a focus for Shang religious practice when used for ritual drinking and feasting. These same ritual bronzes were also buried in elite tombs for use in the afterlife (Rawson 2023, 77).

The *jue*, *jia* and *gu* forms were initially three of the more important cast bronze vessel-types and were probably used for the warming, serving, and drinking of wine. As proposed above, it seems possible that both the *gu* and *jue* forms may originally have been made from horn, so it could be cautiously proposed that ritual vessels made from horn may have once held an equal, or perhaps superior, status to ceramics in the Erlitou culture, before they were displaced by bronze vessels of similar design.

3 Conclusion

The main theme for this review is that the widespread skeuomorphism that is evident in Chinese ceramics from China's Bronze Age to the present day may not have started in the mid second millennium BC but may also have been a feature of Chinese ceramics made during the Neolithic period. However, the prime difficulty in extending the skeuomorphic principle into this earlier timeframe is that most non-ceramic models for form and ornament would have been organic, and now lost through gradual decay over the millennia. For evidence of skeuomorphic design in Neolithic northern China we need to look instead at the ceramics' forms and details for clues to possible organic prototypes.

In the light of this approach, many of the earlier north Chinese Neolithic vessels suggest that woven baskets or folded bark containers may have served as sources for imitation. By contrast, the extraordinary 'bird-shaped' ewers of Shandong province seem to be invoking vessels that may once have been made by the folding and joining of some kind of sheet-material. The most likely candidate in this case seems to have been cured animal skin rather than bark or beaten metal, but this particular perspective does involve some large assumptions regarding animal-skin working in north China in the later Neolithic. Other Neolithic ceramic traditions of north China provide strong hints for the presence of horn-made vessels as prototypes. In this case the skills involved in creating any horn originals would have been the cutting, joining and pyro-plastic distortion of existing animal horn.

There is also a possibility that horn may once have served as an élite material in some later Neolithic cultures in northern China, and some evidence for this may be found in the forms of some of China's earliest cast bronzes. These are the celebrated ritual vessels of the Erlitou or Xia culture, excavated from sites such as Yanshi in present-day Henan province. These early bronze vessels show complex and eclectic shapes that have long puzzled historians of Chinese culture. However, when worked-horn ritual vessels are considered as possible prototypes for these designs then their forms may become more understandable. Of course, while pursuing this line of reasoning one has to bear in mind the well-known art-historical trap of finding a parallel and then considering it an influence, although, conversely, it may also be remiss to ignore potentially significant associations (Wood 2013, 48).

A further implication of the 'organics to ceramics' hypothesis is that our general sense of the northern Chinese Neolithic period as an 'age of ceramics' may be a rather partial view. With so many organic containers suspected as models for ceramic production a much richer and more varied range of Neolithic vessels may once have existed. And, from what we know of their modern equivalents,

many of these organic containers would have been lighter, stronger and altogether more practical than the Neolithic ceramics that they may have inspired.

Other aspects of this subject that might bear further study, should some of these proposals be accepted, include the question of why the potters of northern China felt the need to copy vessels made from other materials so faithfully, and in such careful detail, and how these often very complicated forms were successfully translated into clay? These problems have more to do with anthropology and applied ceramic technology, respectively, so are rather beyond the scope of this brief survey, although they are still of considerable interest (Blitz 2015). There are also larger questions regarding Neolithic ceramics within the rest of China, as this discussion has been confined to the Neolithic north and northeast [fig. 21]. With regard to the larger Neolithic world, cultures as far apart as East Africa and the southeast regions of the United States can also show convincing evidence for skeuomorphism in their Neolithic ceramic vessels (Blitz 2015; Grillo et al. 2022). However, as discussed above, the Neolithic ceramics and early bronze vessels from northern China seem to provide an unusually rich field for study, particularly when considering the complex evolution of three-dimensional design within China's larger cultural history.



Figure 21 Neolithic ceramics discussed in the essay. Figure prepared by the Author

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L'archeobotanica in Cina Storia della disciplina e prospettive future

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Abstract This study traces the development of archaeobotany in the context of Chinese Archaeology, with a particular focus on the analysis of macro-botanical remains from the early twentieth century to today. Although plant remains have been reported since the beginning of modern archaeological research in the country, the discipline became widespread and institutionalised only after the 2009 promulgation of the updated *Field Archaeology Work Protocol*, which mandated the collection of archaeobotanical remains in all archaeological excavations. This article outlines the main phases of development of the discipline – from initial chance discoveries to its institutionalization and subsequent internationalisation – and explores the reasons for its continued growth.

Keywords Archaeobotany. Plant domestication. China. Neolithic. Archaeology. Agriculture. Rice. Millet.

Sommario 1 Introduzione. – 2 L'inizio dell'archeologia moderna in Cina e la ricerca delle origini della civiltà e dell'agricoltura cinese: 1911-86. – 2.1 Il contesto storico della nascita dell'archeologia moderna in Cina. – 2.2 Ritrovamenti 'accidentali' di macro-resti da siti archeologici e le prime teorie sull'origine dell'agricoltura in Cina. – 3 La nascita della flottazione e l'inizio formale della paleocarpologia in Cina: 1986-2009. – 3.1 Il metodo di raccolta dei macro-resti: la flottazione. – 3.2 Lo sviluppo delle scienze archeologiche in Cina e l'inizio formale della ricerca archeobotanica. – 4 L'archeobotanica cinese entra nel XXI secolo. – 4.1 Istituzionalizzazione e crescita della pratica archeobotanica. – 4.2 Nuovi temi e metodologie di ricerca archeobotanica. – 5 Conclusione.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-03-12
Accepted 2025-04-22
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Dal Martello, R. (2025). "L'archeobotanica in Cina. Storia della disciplina e prospettive future". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 319-356.

1 Introduzione

L'archeobotanica studia le relazioni tra i gruppi umani e l'ambiente in cui esse vivono tramite l'analisi di reperti vegetali provenienti da siti archeologici. I reperti vegetali possono essere suddivisi in due grandi categorie: i macro- e i micro-resti. I macro-resti includono semi e frutti,¹ quali cariossidi di cereali, noccioli e altri semi e frammenti di frutta, noci e gusci, frammenti di legno (in genere carbonizzato),² e altri generici frammenti di piante (Fuller, Lucas 2015). Sono considerati macro-resti anche quei frammenti di cibo, ad esempio pane o altri composti, i quali hanno recentemente assunto maggiore prominenza nella ricerca archeologica, grazie allo sviluppo di nuove metodologie di identificazione degli 'ingredienti'.³ Questo tipo di resti si preserva nella maggioranza dei casi per carbonizzazione, tramite contatto diretto con il fuoco (combustione). Altri processi di fossilizzazione possono avvenire in presenza di determinate condizioni climatico-ambientali, ad esempio ambienti secchi o desertici (conservazione per essiccazione/disseccamento), ambienti freddi (congelamento) e ambienti umidi (tramite la sommersione dei resti) permettono la conservazione non soltanto di semi, ma anche di foglie e fiori. Infine, uno speciale processo di conservazione è la mineralizzazione, la quale avviene a seguito del contatto del materiale organico con il calcio fosfato ($\text{Ca}_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$), ad esempio nelle latrine o nelle fogne, essendo esso presente nell'urina. I micro-resti includono i fitoliti,⁴ il polline e le spore (il cui studio si indica con il termine palinologia; Moore et al. 1991). Inizialmente, sia in Cina che all'estero, le indagini

Studio condotto nell'ambito del Progetto *CHANGES - Cultural Heritage Active Innovation for Sustainable Society* - finanziato dall'Unione Europea - Next-GenerationEU - PIANO NAZIONALE DI RIPRESA E RESILIENZA (PNRR) - MISSIONE 4 COMPONENTE 2, INVESTIMENTO N. PE000000020 - CUP N. H53C22000850006. I punti di vista e le opinioni espresse sono tuttavia solo quelli dell'Autrice e non riflettono necessariamente quelli dell'Unione europea o della Commissione europea. Né l'Unione Europea né la Commissione Europea possono essere ritenute responsabili per essi.

1 Talvolta lo studio dei semi (antichi) è indicato in italiano con il termine di 'paleocarpologia' o di 'carpologia', dal greco παλαιός (pàleo) 'antico', καρπός (karpós) 'frutto' e λόγος (-lògos) 'discorso' (studio).

2 Lo studio dei frammenti di legno carbonizzato, indicati in letteratura con il termine carboni, è noto come 'antracologia', dal greco ἀνθραξ -ακος (anthrax -akis) 'carbone' e λόγος (-lògos) 'discorso' (studio). In cinese si utilizzano i termini *mutanxue* 木炭学 (studio dei carboni) o *mutan fenxi* 木炭分析 (analisi dei carboni).

3 Si vedano ad esempio González Carretero et al. 2017; Arranz-Otaegui et al. 2018.

4 Corpi silicei prodotti dalle piante durante il loro ciclo vitale a seguito della deposizione nel tessuto vegetale di silice presente nel terreno. I fitoliti assumono morfologie che permettono l'identificazione della tipologia di pianta dalla quale provengono, ed essendo composti inorganici di silice biogenica, si conservano una volta rilasciati nel suolo dopo la decomposizione della materia organica che li conteneva (si veda Castelletti 1990; Piperno 2006).

archeobotaniche si concentrarono principalmente sulle piante ad uso alimentare, con lo scopo di ricostruire i sistemi agricoli passati e il loro sviluppo nel tempo (si veda ad esempio Helbaek 1971; Renfrew, 1973). Oggi invece si può affermare che l'archeobotanica si prefigge l'obiettivo di ricostruire la molteplicità delle relazioni tra l'umanità e il suo ambiente naturale nel senso più ampio della ricerca, ponendo attenzione anche alla ricostruzione del clima e della vegetazione e dell'impatto antropico su di essi. Altri importanti temi di ricerca includono la domesticazione delle piante, l'organizzazione sociale nella gestione e nella produzione delle risorse alimentari o floristiche, eventuali differenze sociali o di genere nell'accesso a tali risorse, la ricostruzione della dieta e l'indagine delle identità culinarie. Queste tematiche sono indagate sia dal punto di vista dei cambiamenti biologici nelle piante, sia nell'evoluzione di nuove strutture sociali, culturali ed economiche e delle innovazioni tecnologiche legate alla loro gestione, produzione ed utilizzo.

In Cina, reperti vegetali erano stati rinvenuti già durante i primi scavi archeologici nel paese (Huanghe 1959; Hubeisheng, Wang 1964; Ho 1969), ma le prime vere indagini che si possono definire archeobotaniche iniziarono verso la fine del secolo scorso, a seguito della pubblicazione di articoli che introdussero la metodologia di ricerca archeobotanica.⁵ Mentre l'inizio formale dell'archeobotanica in Cina viene convenzionalmente fatto risalire alla pubblicazione di questi articoli, fu soltanto dopo il 2000 che questa disciplina divenne una materia di studio e di ricerca a sé attraverso l'istituzione di laboratori archeobotanici nelle maggiori università cinesi e di corsi d'insegnamento di archeobotanica nei programmi di laurea in archeologia (Zhao 2005a). Questo articolo delinea lo sviluppo dell'archeobotanica in Cina, in particolar modo dello studio dei macroresti, attraverso l'analisi delle principali scoperte, dei cambiamenti nelle tematiche di ricerca e del processo di istituzionalizzazione della disciplina, fino alla sua recente internazionalizzazione. Per una trattazione dell'evoluzione dell'archeobotanica inclusiva dello sviluppo dello studio dei fitoliti, carboni e polline all'interno dell'archeologia cinese si veda in lingua inglese Dal Martello et al. (forthcoming).⁶

5 Huang 1982, 1986; Xiong 1989; Zhao 1992.

6 Per ulteriori approfondimenti si vedano in lingua cinese per i carboni Wang 2011; per i fitoliti Zhang, Zhang, Hua. 2002; Zhang et al. 2004; Wen et al. 2018; per il polline Zhou 2002; Zhang 2005.

2 L'inizio dell'archeologia moderna in Cina e la ricerca delle origini della civiltà e dell'agricoltura cinese: 1911-86

2.1 Il contesto storico della nascita dell'archeologia moderna in Cina

L'inizio dell'archeologia moderna in Cina viene convenzionalmente fatto risalire ai primi decenni del XX secolo. Successivamente alla caduta della dinastia Qing (1911), ma specialmente dopo la fine della Prima Guerra Mondiale (1915-1918), numerosi studiosi cinesi ritornarono in patria dopo periodi di studi all'estero e introdussero le moderne tecniche scientifiche di scavo e indagine archeologica ivi apprese. In particolar modo, si iniziò a scavare seguendo i principi stratigrafici, differenziandosi in questo dalle precedenti esplorazioni e ricerche archeologiche effettuate specialmente nella regione del nordovest della Cina (Meyer, Brysac 2009). Nel 1916 e nel 1928 furono istituiti rispettivamente il Servizio Geologico Cinese (*Dizhi Diaochasuo* 地址調查所), sotto la guida di Ding Wenjiang⁷ (丁文江 1887-1936), e l'Accademia Sinica (*Zhongyan Yanjiuyuan* 中央研究院), diretta da Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培 1868-1940). Il primo era incaricato delle indagini preistoriche, mentre l'Accademia Sinica si occupava dei periodi storici. La loro fondazione costituì il primo passo verso l'istituzionalizzazione della ricerca archeologica in Cina.⁸ Particolarmente importante fu la scoperta nel 1921 del sito archeologico di Yangshao 仰韶, a Mianchi, nello Henan, da parte di Johan Gunnar Andersson (1874-1960), direttore del Servizio Geologico Svedese e collaboratore con quello cinese da poco istituito. Lo scavo del sito di Yangshao è considerato il primo vero e proprio scavo scientifico di un sito preistorico in Cina. A seguito del ritrovamento di ceramica rossa dipinta di nero a Yangshao, Andersson teorizzò che questa cultura – e più in generale la civiltà cinese, poiché i resti di Yangshao erano i più antichi mai rinvenuti fino a quel momento – si originò a seguito di una diffusione da Occidente. Questa teoria si basava sulla presunta somiglianza tra i motivi decorativi Yangshao con quelli rinvenuti ad esempio nei siti della Cultura Anau, nell'odierno Turkmenistan, o della Cultura

⁷ In questo articolo gli studiosi cinesi sono indicati come consuetudine cinese indicando prima il cognome e a seguire il nome proprio.

⁸ Per una trattazione approfondita dello sviluppo dell'archeologia in Cina si veda in lingua inglese Liu 2017; Chang 1977; Falkenhausen 1995; Tong 1995; in lingua italiana Visconti 2016.

Trypillia (o Tripolje), nell'odierna Ucraina (An 1979).⁹ Questo ebbe due effetti significativi sulle direzioni che la ricerca archeologica condotta in Cina assunse da quel momento in poi: Andersson focalizzò il suo lavoro nella regione nordoccidentale del paese, nel tentativo di tracciare la rotta di diffusione da lui teorizzata;¹⁰ gran parte degli archeologi cinesi, invece, si concentrarono nella valle del Fiume Giallo (*Huanghe* 黄河), considerata tradizionalmente la culla della civiltà cinese (Chang 1964; Falkenhausen 1993; Xu 1999). Gli archeologi cinesi speravano, così facendo, di individuare evidenze in grado di dimostrare un'origine indipendente della civiltà cinese. Questo segnò i successivi decenni della ricerca archeologica, ponendo le basi per una grande attività di ricerca nella Pianura Centrale (*Zhongyuan* 中原), a discapito delle aree ad essa periferiche.

La fondazione della Repubblica Popolare Cinese nel 1949 portò ad ulteriori cambiamenti nella ricerca archeologica, sia dal punto di vista istituzionale che ideologico. Nel 1949 furono istituiti il Ministero della Cultura (*Wenhuabu* 文化部), a capo dell'Ufficio (o Agenzia) dei Beni Culturali (*Guojia Wenwuju* 國家文物局), dal quale ancora oggi dipendono tutte le Soprintendenze e gli Istituti Provinciali¹¹ di Ricerca dei Beni Culturali e di Archeologia (*Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiusuo* 文物考古研究所).¹² Essi sono, a loro volta, responsabili della gestione delle squadre di scavo locali e forniscono le autorizzazioni necessarie per condurre qualsiasi progetto d'indagine sul campo nel territorio di loro competenza. Nel 1950 fu fondato l'Istituto di Archeologia (*Kaogu Yanjiusuo* 考古研究所) dell'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze (*Zhongguo Kexueyuan* 中國科學院), dal 1977 diventata Accademia Cinese delle

9 All'epoca il diffusionismo (eurocentrico) era la teoria prevalente tra gli archeologi, questa prevedeva un'origine univoca, ben collocata nel tempo e nello spazio, delle innovazioni tecnologiche, le quali si trasmettevano successivamente nelle regioni adiacenti. Per una disamina delle teorie diffusioniste riguardanti l'origine della civiltà cinese si veda Puett 1998; per una panoramica recente sulla Cultura Anau si veda Kircho 2020; sulla Cultura Trypillia si vedano Müller, Rassmann, Videiko 2016; Shatilo 2021.

10 Andersson 1923a, 1923b; 1925; 1929; 1934; Fiskesjö, Chen 2004.

11 La Repubblica Popolare Cinese è suddivisa in ventidue province (*sheng* 省) e cinque regioni autonome (*zizhiqu* 自治区; Tibet, Xinjiang, Ningxia, Mongolia Interna e Guangxi) assimilabili grossomodo alle regioni italiane, alle quali si aggiungono le municipalità di Pechino, Shanghai, Tianjing e Chongqing. In questo articolo si fa riferimento alle province e alle regioni autonome con il nome proprio senza il termine indicante il livello amministrativo di appartenenza. In ognuna di queste regioni si trovano Istituti di Ricerca dei Beni Culturali e di Archeologia, talvolta più di uno (ad esempio nel Sichuan vi sono sia un Istituto Provinciale del Sichuan, sia un Istituto di Chengdu, la capitale; Flad, Chen 2013, 51). Sull'istituzione e il ruolo degli Istituti Provinciali di Ricerca si veda Falkenhausen 1995.

12 Dagli anni Novanta in poi, gli istituti di ricerca provinciali acquisirono maggior autonomia nella gestione degli scavi nella regione di loro competenza anche grazie alla necessità di coordinare gli scavi di emergenza obbligatori durante qualsiasi opera edilizia e infrastrutturale in Cina (si veda Falkenhausen 1995; Visconti 2016, 131, 163-4).

Scienze Sociali (*Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan* 中国社会科学院).¹³ Nel 1952 fu istituito il primo corso di laurea in archeologia presso il Dipartimento di Storia dell'Università di Pechino (*Beijing Daxue* 北京大學). Nel 1957 fu fondato l'Istituto di Paleontologia dei Vertebrati e di Paleoantropologia (*Gujichui Dongwu yu Gurenlei Yanjiusuo* 古脊椎動物與古人類研究所) sotto la direzione generale dell'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze Sociali. Nel 1965 fu istituito il primo laboratorio per la datazione al radiocarbonio,¹⁴ anch'esso presso l'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze Sociali, al quale seguì la fondazione di altri laboratori per la datazione al radiocarbonio presso altri istituti dell'Accademia.¹⁵ Queste istituzioni hanno avuto, e hanno tuttora, un ruolo di primo piano nello sviluppo delle scienze archeologiche in Cina, fungendo spesso da apripista per metodologie e progetti innovativi (si veda ad esempio Liu et al. 2024).

Dal punto di vista ideologico, tra gli anni 1950-90, l'approccio interpretativo maggioritario dei resti archeologici fu quello cosiddetto marxista e in particolar modo l'evoluzionismo storico (Zhang 2013). Secondo il modello proposto, la società umana attraversa in maniera pressoché lineare (1) lo stadio primitivo, caratterizzato da tribù nomadi dedite alla caccia e alla raccolta di piante selvatiche, che evolvono in popolazioni stanziali praticanti l'agricoltura, (2) lo schiavismo, (3) il feudalesimo, fino a raggiungere il moderno (4) capitalismo e (5) comunismo.¹⁶ Questo paradigma evolutivo della società era stato descritto abbinato per la prima volta a dati archeologici nel 1930 all'interno del libro *Zhongguo Gudai Shehui Yanjiu* 中國古代社會研究 (Ricerche sulla Società Cinese Antica) di Guo Moruo (郭沫若 1892-1978), presidente dell'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze tra il 1950-78.¹⁷ Il paradigma marxista fu particolarmente rilevante per le indagini archeobotaniche in quanto prevedeva una divisione netta tra popolazioni preistoriche pre-agricole e agricole; inoltre, prevedeva un'evoluzione lineare e soprattutto necessaria

13 L'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze Sociali sostituì l'Accademia Sinica, dal 1949 spostatasi a Taiwan.

14 Per una breve introduzione al metodo di datazione al radiocarbonio, il suo sviluppo ed utilizzo in archeologia si veda Kern 2020.

15 Per una trattazione approfondita dello sviluppo delle tecniche di datazione al radiocarbonio in Cina, si vedano Chen 2023; Zhou, Chen 2016. Dal 1972 l'Istituto di Archeologia dell'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze Sociali pubblica ogni anno una raccolta di tutte le datazioni effettuate nell'anno precedente all'interno della rivista *Kaogu* 考古 'Archeologia'; si vedano ad esempio il primo volume, *Zhongguo Kexueyuan* 1972 e il più recente, *Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan* 2024.

16 A riguardo si vedano Chang 1977; 1999; Cheng 1965; Liu, Chen 2012; Yang 1999.

17 Nel 1952 Guo pubblicò *Nulizhi Shidai* 奴隸制時代 (L'Età Schiavistica) (Guo 1952), nel quale aggiornò con nuovi dati la pubblicazione del 1930 (Guo 1930) e si concentrò in particolar modo sui resti archeologici della dinastia Shang, interpretata nell'ambito del modello delineato dall'evoluzionismo storico come una società di tipo schiavistico.

verso l'agricoltura e la sedentarietà come base assoluta della civiltà umana.

2.2 Ritrovamenti 'accidentali' di macro-resti da siti archeologici e le prime teorie sull'origine dell'agricoltura in Cina

Fino alla fine degli anni Settanta del secolo scorso, il ritrovamento di macro-resti fu per lo più accidentale, quando tali resti erano in quantità elevata o di dimensioni tali da poter essere individuati ad occhio nudo durante le operazioni di scavo (Liu et al. 2008, 8). I reperti vegetali venivano poi affidati ad agronomi o botanici per la loro identificazione. In questo periodo i più importanti ritrovamenti di piante antiche includono:

- Semi di panico (indicati con *su 粟*, termine con cui si indica la specie *Setaria italica*)¹⁸ e presunti semi di cavolo (*baicai* 白菜 o *jiecai* 芥菜, probabilmente semi appartenenti al genere *Brassica*) da due vasi rinvenuti in una fossa durante lo scavo del 1954 del già citato villaggio neolitico di Banpo, nello Shaanxi (Zhao 1983).
- Frammenti di glume, chicchi di riso (*dao 稻*, indicante la specie *Oryza sativa*) e ghiande rinvenuti in grandi quantità in fosse di stoccaggio durante lo scavo del sito di Hemudu 河姆渡, nel Zhejiang, negli anni 1973-74 (An 1979; You 1976).
- Grani di presunto panico durante lo scavo del 1976-78 di Cishan 磁山, nello Hebei. Secondo il rapporto di scavo, i chicchi di panico furono rinvenuti in oltre 80 fosse situate tra i 0,3-2 m di profondità. In queste fosse vi erano cumuli di piccoli semi rotondi decomposti che si dissolsero in polvere non appena furono esposti all'aria (Sun, Liu, Chen 1981; An 1979, 37). Oltre ai semi di panico, furono rinvenuti resti di noci, nocciole, e resti di frutta del bagolaro (*Celtis* sp.).
- Chicchi di riso durante lo scavo del 1972 del villaggio Neolitico di Baiyangcun 白羊村, nello Yunnan (Yunnansheng 1981).

Oltre ai ritrovamenti diretti di semi, lo studio delle loro impronte su frammenti di ceramica fu impiegato in diverse occasioni per attestare la possibile presenza di piante nei siti archeologici. Un esempio famoso è il presunto riso identificato tramite le impronte su

¹⁸ La *Setaria italica*, conosciuta come panico in italiano, è un cereale a cariosside piccola della famiglia delle Poaceae, sottofamiglia Panicoideae, comunemente assimilato ad altre specie della stessa sottofamiglia indicate come 'migli' (*millet* in inglese). Nei testi antichi cinesi panico viene indicato con il termine di *ji 稷*.

frammenti di ceramica provenienti dal villaggio Neolitico Yangshao di Xiawanggang 下王岗, nello Henan (An 1979, 41; Henansheng 1999). Scoperte come quelle elencate erano praticamente sempre interpretate come evidenza diretta della coltivazione locale delle specie rinvenute, e, secondo il paradigma evolutivo marxista, indice di una società primitiva di tipo stanziale praticante l'agricoltura. Questo veniva stabilito senza prendere in considerazione il contesto archeologico di ritrovamento e le condizioni climatico-ambientali del periodo di occupazione del sito, dalle quali dipendeva l'effettiva possibilità di coltivazione delle piante rinvenute. Questi ritrovamenti furono centrali nel teorizzare un'origine locale dell'agricoltura in Cina. Questa tematica si inserì all'interno di quel filone di ricerca volto a dimostrare l'origine autoctona della civiltà cinese, la quale doveva basarsi su un sistema agricolo proprio e ben sviluppato. Si teorizzò quindi che il panico ed il miglio (il cereale *Panicum miliaceum*, indicato in cinese con il termine *shu* 黍)¹⁹ fossero stati domesticati nel nord della Cina, presumibilmente dalle popolazioni Yangshao nella valle del Fiume Giallo, e il riso a sud (An 1979; Yan 1982a, 1982b), in una visione 'duale' dell'origine dell'agricoltura che coniugava le recenti scoperte archeologiche con quanto precedentemente teorizzato a partire dai testi scritti.²⁰ Il panico, il miglio ed il riso [fig. 1] erano infatti tre delle 'cinque' piante tradizionalmente ritenute costituenti il sistema agricolo della civiltà cinese, secondo la teoria degli *wugu* 五穀/五谷 'cinque cereali' (Bray 1984, 432; Wan 1962; Song 2002). Tra gli *wugu* si annoverano anche legumi *shu* 菽, presumibilmente soia - *Glycine max*, oggi indicata in cinese come *dadou* 大豆 [fig. 3]; frumento/grano tenero - *Triticum aestivum*, indicato in cinese con il termine *xiaomai* 小麥/小麦 (ad oggi l'unica tra le varie specie di grano domestiche documentata in siti archeologici cinesi antichi) e/o orzo - *Hordeum vulgare*, oggi indicato in cinese con *damai* 大麥/大麦, ma grano ed orzo sono anche congiuntamente indicati con il termine *mai* 麥 [fig. 2].²¹ Talvolta, al posto del riso tra gli *wugu* viene inclusa la cannabis, o canapa (*ma* 麻, fig. 3; Bray 1984, 432). Secondo

19 Oltre al già citato panico, un altro cereale a cariosside piccola delle Panicoideae originario della Cina è il *Panicum miliaceum*, solitamente indicato in italiano con il termine di 'miglio'. In questo articolo si utilizza panico per indicare la specie *Setaria italica*, e il termine miglio per indicare la specie *Panicum miliaceum*; si adotta la dicitura panico/miglio per indicare entrambi (nell'accezione generica di *millet* in inglese).

20 Sull'orientamento storiografico dell'archeologia cinese si veda Falkenhausen 1993. Per una sintesi delle teorie sull'origine dell'agricoltura in Cina derivanti dai testi antichi si vedano Ho 1969, 1975; Bray 1984.

21 I termini *lai* 來 e *mai* 麥 sono entrambi documentati nelle ossa oracolari per indicare un tipo di cereale; mentre *lai* viene inteso come indicante il grano, gli studiosi non sono concordi nello stabilire se il termine *mai* indichi anch'esso soltanto il grano o, similmente al suo utilizzo attuale, indichi congiuntamente sia grano sia orzo (si veda Liu et al. 2017, 11, tab. 2).



Figura 1 A. Piante di riso (*Oryza sativa*) in coltivazione, Novara, Italia, settembre 2024. Foto di L. Dal Martello, pubblicata con permesso; B. Semi di riso archeologico carbonizzati provenienti dal sito di Baiyangcun, Yunnan (2650-2050 a.C.); C. Semi archeologici carbonizzati di miglio (sinistra, visti frontalmente) e panico (destra, visti frontalmente) provenienti dal sito di Baiyangcun, Yunnan (2650-2050 a.C.); D. Piante di miglio (*Panicum miliaceum*, sinistra) e panico (*Setaria italica*, destra), Giardino Botanico di Jena, Germania, settembre 2022. Foto dell'Autrice



Figura 2 A. Piante di grano tenero (*Triticum aestivum*) in coltivazione, Vicenza, Italia, giugno 2022; B. Seme archeologico carbonizzato di grano tenero (visto frontalmente a sinistra, posteriormente a destra) proveniente dal sito di Haimenkou, Yunnan (1650-400 a.C.); C. Seme archeologico carbonizzato di orzo (visto frontalmente a sinistra, posteriormente a destra), proveniente dal sito di Dayingzhuang, Yunnan (750-390 a.C.); D. Piante di orzo (*Hordeum vulgare*) in coltivazione, Vicenza, Italia, settembre 2022.
Foto dell'Autrice

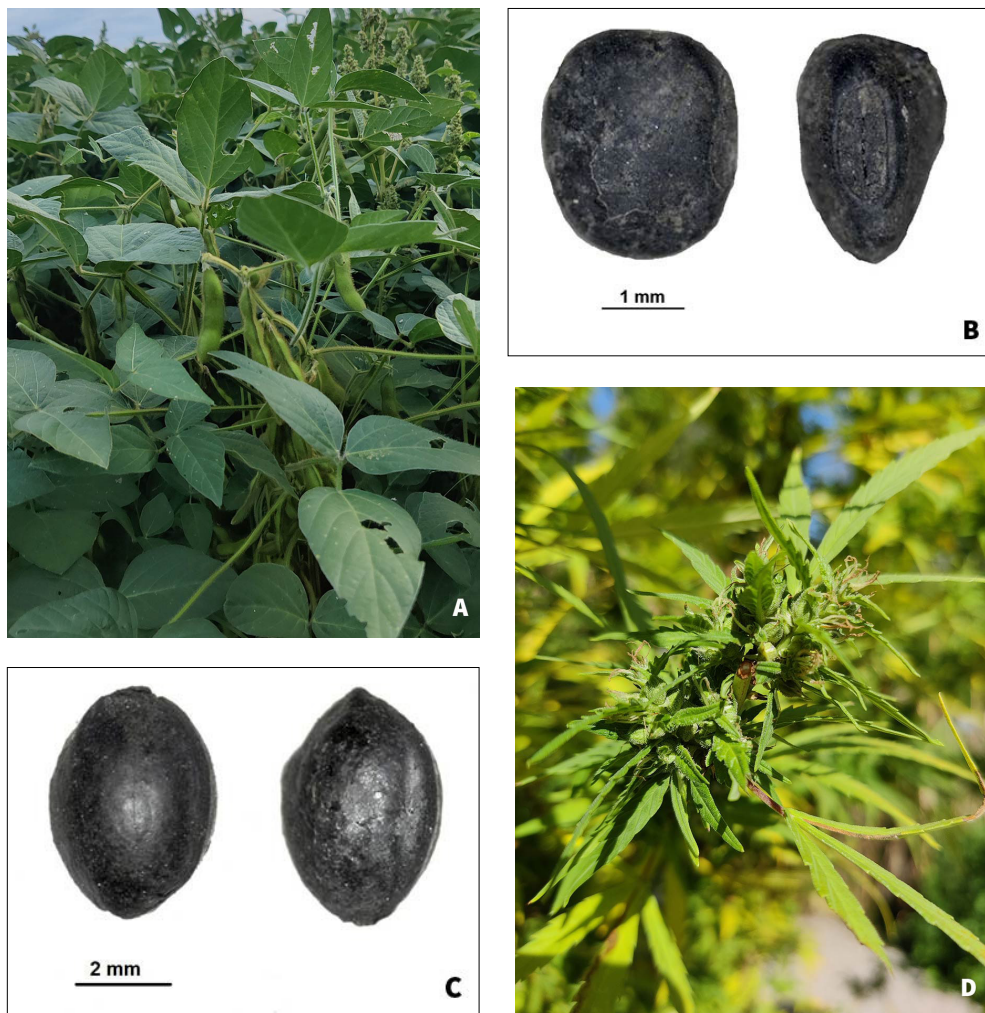


Figura 3 A. Piante di soia (*Glycine max*) in coltivazione, Padova, Italia, settembre 2024; B. Seme archeologico di soia (visto lateralmente a sinistra, e superiormente a destra) proveniente dal sito di Baiyangcun, Yunnan (2650-2050 a.C.); C. Semi archeologici di cannabis dal sito di Haimenkou, Yunnan (1650-400 a.C.); D. Infiorescenza di pianta di cannabis (*Cannabis sativa*), Giardino Botanico di Jena, Germania, settembre 2022. Foto dell'Autrice, foto D modificata da Dal Martello et al. 2024, fig. 2

queste prime teorie, le zone originarie di coltivazione del panico/miglio e del riso si dividevano seguendo la catena dei monti Qinling e il fiume Huai (Yan 2000; Zhao 2011). Riguardo alla zona precisa di origine del riso, esistevano teorie non del tutto concordi. Alcuni studiosi proposero che il riso fu domesticato nel basso corso del Fiume Azzurro (*Changjiang* 长江, chiamato anche Yangtze o Yangzi in inglese), come attestato dai ritrovamenti a Hemudu. Altri studiosi proposero invece un centro di origine nella regione dello Yunnan, nel profondo sudovest della Cina. Questa teoria si basava sul principio *vaviloviano* secondo il quale i centri di origine delle specie domestiche andavano individuati nei moderni centri di diversità (selvatica) di tali specie (Vavilov 1926). Numerose popolazioni di riso selvatico erano state documentate nel sud della Cina (nello Yunnan, Guangxi e Guangdong) durante le ricognizioni del Servizio Geologico Cinese all'inizio del XX secolo (Chang 1976; Wang 1977; Li 1981).²² Nella bassa valle del Fiume Azzurro, invece, non vi era alcuna traccia di riso selvatico; inoltre, il ritrovamento di riso antico a Baiyangcun nel 1972 forniva ulteriore supporto a questa teoria.

Al tempo, il riso di Baiyangcun fu molto discusso all'interno del filone di ricerca noto come *farming/language dispersal hypothesis* 'la teoria della dispersione dei primi agricoltori e delle famiglie linguistiche' (si vedano Renfrew 1994; Bellwood, Renfrew 2002; Bellwood 2011), il quale associa la dispersione delle principali famiglie linguistiche allo sviluppo dell'agricoltura. Secondo questa teoria, il surplus di cibo che si accumula grazie all'agricoltura causa un aumento demografico; l'aumento della popolazione provoca uno squilibrio nelle risorse disponibili, e una parte del gruppo migra nelle zone adiacenti alla ricerca di nuove terre coltivabili, diffondendo quindi l'agricoltura e la lingua parlata. La teoria della dispersione dell'agricoltura e delle famiglie linguistiche postula quindi che ricostruendo la regione nativa delle famiglie linguistiche si può individuare l'origine di alcune specie domestiche. Secondo gli studiosi di linguistica comparata, il riso fu originariamente domesticato tra popolazioni parlanti il proto-Austroasiatico,²³ sulla base dell'elevata diversità di vocaboli indicanti riso o attività relative alla sua coltivazione in confronto

22 Nonostante sia generalmente vero che l'archeologia cinese si focalizzò in prevalenza nella Pianura Centrale e lungo la valle del Fiume Giallo, durante gli anni tra la fondazione della Repubblica Cinese (1911) e la fondazione della Repubblica Popolare Cinese (1949) la situazione di grave incertezza politica e sociale causò un rallentamento delle ricerche archeologiche ad eccezione dello Yunnan e altre zone periferiche, che, proprio grazie alla loro posizione 'remota', permisero alle ricerche di proseguire in relativa sicurezza.

23 Le lingue austroasiatiche oggi sono per lo più diffuse tra l'India nordorientale, lo Yunnan, e i paesi del Sud-Est Asiatico continentale fino all'odierna Malesia; la loro distribuzione territoriale è altamente frammentaria.

alle altre famiglie linguistiche in Asia. La presenza di riso selvatico ed il ritrovamento di riso antico in siti neolitici dello Yunnan furono considerati evidenze a supporto di un centro di origine delle lingue austroasiatiche proprio nello Yunnan, le cui popolazioni neolitiche erano indicate come responsabili della domesticazione del riso e della sua dispersione sia lungo il Fiume Azzurro sia nel Sud-Est Asiatico continentale.²⁴

Oggi si può affermare che questa teoria è stata pienamente confutata grazie al generale aumento delle indagini archeobotaniche in tutta la Cina e nei paesi del Sud-Est Asiatico, ma soprattutto grazie alla datazione diretta dei macro-resti, tra cui anche semi di riso da Baiyangcun ottenuti tramite flottazione durante gli scavi del 2013 (Dal Martello et al. 2018; Dal Martello 2022; fig. 1). Questo ha permesso di stabilire che i resti di riso archeologico fino ad oggi rinvenuti al di fuori della media e bassa valle del Fiume Azzurro risalgono ad epoche successive, talvolta di diversi millenni più tarde, rispetto a quelli provenienti dal medio e basso corso del Fiume Azzurro. Oggi gli studiosi sono pressoché concordi nell'individuare quest'ultima come la zona di origine del riso domestico. Inoltre, la ricerca archeobotanica degli ultimi decenni ha confutato la veridicità universale dell'assunto vaviloviano dei centri di origine negli odierni centri di diversità selvatica delle specie botaniche, in quanto non sempre le moderne popolazioni selvatiche riflettono la loro reale distribuzione in antichità, specialmente in regioni oggi altamente urbanizzate dove la vegetazione originaria è completamente scomparsa, come il medio e basso corso del Fiume Azzurro (Fuller 2011).

3 La nascita della flottazione e l'inizio formale della paleocarpologia in Cina: 1986-2009

3.1 Il metodo di raccolta dei macro-resti: la flottazione

Il metodo più comunemente impiegato per il recupero dei macro-resti vegetali durante lo scavo archeologico è la flottazione, conosciuta in cinese come *zhiwu kaogu fuxuan* 植物考古浮选. Questa metodologia fu inventata negli anni Cinquanta da H.C. Cutler durante le indagini dei siti di Tularosa Cave e Higgins Flat pueblo in New Mexico (Stati Uniti; Browman 1999), il quale persuase S. Streuver ad utilizzarla durante lo scavo archeologico del sito di Apple Creek, nella bassa valle del Fiume Illinois negli Stati Uniti (Streuver 1968). Successivamente, la

24 Per una trattazione approfondita di tale teoria si vedano ad esempio Bellwood 1995; Higham 1996a; 1996b; 2004; Benedict 1999; Sagart 2008; Van Driem 2012.

flottazione fu impiegata durante gli scavi di Ali Kosh nella pianura di Deh Luran, in Iran (Helbaek 1969), e prese piede specialmente negli scavi di siti preistorici del Mediterraneo e dell'Asia sudoccidentale. La flottazione è un metodo di raccolta dei resti botanici relativamente semplice ed economico; sono necessari un contenitore (come un comune secchio), un setaccio dalla griglia fine e dell'acqua. Le linee guida dell'English Heritage raccomandano l'uso di setacci con una griglia di almeno 0,25-0,3 mm (Campbell, Moffett, Straker 2011). In Cina, le *Tianye Kaogu Gongzuo Guicheng* 田野考古工作规程 (Regole per l'Archeologia sul Campo), un compendio di linee guida nazionali per lo scavo e la documentazione e conservazione dei reperti archeologici edito dall'Agenzia dei Beni Culturali, prevedono l'utilizzo di setacci provvisti di una trama compresa tra 0,2-0,5 mm (Guojia 2009). Nella maggior parte degli scavi archeologici in Cina vengono utilizzati setacci di 0,355 mm, di più facile reperimento. L'utilizzo di setacci dalla trama così fine permette la raccolta anche dei resti più piccoli, i quali andrebbero altrimenti perduti. Questi includono i chicchi del panico o di altre piante che producono semi talvolta dalla grandezza inferiore ad 1 mm. La terra scavata viene versata lentamente in un contenitore riempito precedentemente di acqua; una volta depositata sul fondo la si muove con delicatezza per far emergere ed affiorare i resti organici, i quali galleggiano in virtù della loro inferiore densità e peso rispetto al sedimento. Ciò che galleggia viene versato in un setaccio a maglia fine. In seguito, i resti organici vengono raccolti facendoli confluire in sacchetti appositi, i quali vanno obbligatoriamente messi all'ombra ad asciugare, per evitare la rottura accidentale dei resti carbonizzati durante la loro asciugatura per azione del sole (Pearsall 2015).²⁵ Una volta asciutti, i campioni archeobotanici così raccolti vengono analizzati in laboratorio tramite l'utilizzo di un microscopio binoculare. Tutti i resti vegetali vengono estratti e identificati confrontandoli con le flore locali ed infine contati. La flottazione compensa la naturale tendenza umana ad estrarre i resti più grandi, al tempo stesso aumenta esponenzialmente la quantità di resti raccolti, proprio in virtù della possibilità di raccogliere anche quei resti non visibili ad occhio nudo (come sottolineato da Streuver 1968, 353). Esplicativo a riguardo fu il commento da parte degli archeologi di Ali Kosh dopo il primo utilizzo della flottazione:

plant remains were scarce at Ali Kosh. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The mound is filled with seeds from top to bottom;

25 Oltre al metodo qui descritto, Streuver descrisse anche la flottazione chimica, la quale usava composti chimici per dividere ulteriormente il materiale organico raccolto. Questa metodologia oggi è entrata in disuso.

all that was “scarce” in 1961 was our ability to find them, and when we added the “flotation” technique in 1963 we recovered a stratified series of samples totaling 40,000 seeds. (Hole et al. 1969, 24)²⁶

Un processo di flottazione meccanicizzato, indicato con il termine di flottazione meccanicizzata (conosciuto in inglese come *machine flotation*), fu sviluppato negli anni successivi, incorporando l'uso di alcuni serbatoi e pompe per l'acqua (Limp 1974; **fig. 4** destra) per distinguerlo dal precedente, generalmente indicato con il termine di flottazione manuale (in inglese *bucket flotation*; **fig. 4** sinistra). La flottazione meccanicizzata permette di flottare una quantità maggiore di sedimenti in minor tempo. Uno speciale tipo di macchina da flottazione fu quella sviluppata tra gli anni Sessanta e Settanta dal gruppo di ricerca di Eric S. Higgs (1908-1976), fondatore della Scuola di Paleo-economia presso l'Università di Cambridge, in Inghilterra, ed utilizzata durante lo *Shell Mound Archaeological Project* (Watson 1976), per questo motivo conosciuta come *SMAP-type flotation machine*. Il gruppo di ricerca capitanato da Higgs contribuì alla diffusione della flottazione negli scavi archeologici in Europa e nel bacino Mediterraneo.²⁷ Fu proprio questa macchina ad essere la prima impiegata dagli anni Novanta in poi in Cina, e il prototipo delle moderne macchine per la flottazione, oggi utilizzate pressoché in tutto il mondo.



Figura 4 Sinistra: flottazione manuale a Baiyangcun, Yunnan, 2013; foto di Min Rui, Istituto Provinciale dei Beni Culturali e di Archeologia dello Yunnan, pubblicata con permesso. Destra: flottazione meccanicizzata a Shuang'an con una macchina da flottazione del tipo SMAP, Shaanxi, 2013. Foto dell'Autrice

26 «I resti vegetali ad Ali Kosh erano scarsi. Niente di più lontano dalla verità. Il tumulo è pieno di semi da cima a fondo; ad essere ‘scarsa’ nel 1961 era la nostra capacità di trovarli, e quando nel 1963 aggiungemmo la tecnica della ‘flottazione’, recuperammo una serie stratificata di campioni per un totale di 40.000 semi» (trad. dell'Autrice).

27 Tra i primi risultati derivanti dall'utilizzo della flottazione si vedano ad esempio Higgs 1972; Stewart, Robertson 1973; Renfrew 1973; Jarman, Legge, Charles 1972; French 1971.

3.2 Lo sviluppo delle scienze archeologiche in Cina e l'inizio formale della ricerca archeobotanica

Gli anni Ottanta del secolo scorso furono un decennio di grande sviluppo per la ricerca archeologica in Cina. Nel 1982 l'Ufficio dei Beni Culturali promulgò la *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Wenwu Baohufa* 中华人民共和国文物保护法 (Legge sulla Protezione dei Beni Culturali della Repubblica Popolare Cinese) aggiornata l'ultima volta nel 2017 e mutuata da precedenti norme promulgate nel primo decennio dopo la fondazione della Repubblica Popolare Cinese. Nel 1984 fu pubblicata la prima edizione delle già citate *Regole per l'Archeologia sul Campo* (si veda Wenwuju 1984). Nella loro prima edizione le Regole ponevano molta attenzione sulla cultura materiale e le strutture dei siti. Al tempo le scienze archeologiche erano estremamente giovani, non soltanto in Cina. Nel decennio successivo alla pubblicazione delle Regole gli studiosi cinesi iniziarono a promuovere l'utilizzo delle cosiddette scienze archeologiche all'interno della ricerca archeologica. Ne conseguì un gran numero di traduzioni in cinese di pubblicazioni straniere, le quali servirono ad introdurre i concetti e le metodologie di tali scienze. Per quanto concerne la ricerca archeobotanica, rappresentativa di questo impeto è la fondazione di due riviste specializzate nella pubblicazione di studi sulle pratiche agricole dal punto di vista storico-archeologico, la *Nongye Kaogu* 农业考古 (Archeologia Agricola) e la *Gujin Nongye* 古今农业 (Agricoltura Antica e Moderna), fondate rispettivamente nel 1981 e nel 1988 e tuttora attive. Fu in queste riviste che vennero pubblicati dal 1982 i primi articoli d'introduzione della metodologia archeobotanica (Huang 1982, 1986; Xiong 1989), i quali segnano convenzionalmente l'inizio della ricerca archeobotanica in Cina. Al 1986 risale il primo studio con flottazione noto effettuato in Cina, da parte di Gary Crawford, professore di archeobotanica all'Università di Toronto (Canada) al tempo attivo in Giappone e Corea del Sud (si veda ad esempio Crawford, Hurley, Yoshizaki 1976; Crawford 1983). Crawford flottò una piccola parte di un deposito proveniente da una casa nel sito di Baijinbao 白金宝, nello Helongjiang, e vi trovò tre semi di miglio della specie *Panicum miliaceum* (Crawford 2016, 1072).²⁸ La prima indagine archeobotanica effettuata da uno studioso cinese risale al 1992, quando Wu Yaoli 吴耀利, al tempo archeologo e successivamente direttore del Dipartimento di Preistoria dell'Istituto di Archeologia dell'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze Sociali, flottò e ottenne dei campioni archeobotanici durante lo scavo del sito Neolitico di Lilou 李楼, nello Henan (Wu 1994; Wu, Chen 1993, 1994a,; 1994b). Wu costruì tre setacci quadrati di circa 40 cm di lunghezza

28 Si veda anche Jia 2005, 1: 161, 2: 81, figg. 7-3.

e 6-7 cm di altezza e li dotò di maglia di rispettivamente 2 mm, 1 mm, e 1,5 mm. Come notato dagli archeologi ad Ali Kosh, anche Wu notò che grazie alla flottazione si riuscivano ad ottenere resti che non venivano precedentemente rinvenuti, ad esempio carboni, piccoli semi, glumelle e chicchi di riso carbonizzato (Wu 1994, 365).

Estremamente rilevante per lo sviluppo della paleocarpologia in Cina e da alcuni considerato il padre dell'archeobotanica cinese fu infine Zhao Zhijun 赵志军, direttore del Laboratorio di Archeobotanica dell'Istituto di Archeologia dell'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze Sociali dal 1999 ad oggi. Nel 1991 si era tenuto a Nanchang, nello Jiangxi, il primo convegno internazionale sull' 'archeologia agricola'. Zhao, al tempo dottorando presso l'università del Missouri, Columbia, negli Stati Uniti, non potendo partecipare in presenza pubblicò il suo intervento sotto forma di articolo (Zhao 1992), nel quale coniò il termine con cui oggi si indica l'archeobotanica in Cina: *zhiwu kaoguxue* 植物考古学 (archeologia botanica/vegetale), sostituendo il precedente *nongye kaogu* 农业考古 (archeologia agricola).

Dagli anni Novanta, diversi archeologi iniziarono ad interessarsi ai macro-resti e quindi a introdurre la flottazione durante gli scavi archeologici ai quali partecipavano (si vedano ad esempio Kong, Zhu 1998; Kong, Liu, He 1999). Tra gli studiosi che promossero la conoscenza e la diffusione della pratica della flottazione vi furono il già citato Zhao Zhijun, il quale condusse i primi studi archeobotanici in regioni cosiddette 'periferiche', tra cui a Mopandi 磨盘地 nello Yunnan; Lajia 喇家 nel Qinghai; Xinglonggou 兴隆沟 nello Helongjiang.²⁹ Un altro importante contributo alla diffusione dell'archeobotanica fu dato dall'archeologa Leng Jian 冷健, la quale imparò la metodologia di flottazione da G. Crawford e la impiegò in diversi siti scavati durante l'*Early Shang Civilization Project* (Progetto sulla Civiltà Shang Antica),³⁰ guidato da K.C. Chang (Chang Kwang-chih/Zhang Guangzhi 張光直 1931-2001), professore di archeologia cinese all'Università di Harvard, negli Stati Uniti (Murowchick 1997; Murowchick, Cohen 2001). Il conseguente aumento di ritrovamenti di resti vegetali a seguito dell'introduzione della flottazione accrebbe l'interesse accademico per l'archeobotanica, e questo ampliò ulteriormente il suo utilizzo negli scavi. Questa, però, rimase un'attività piuttosto marginale fino ai tardi anni 2000. Non vi erano ancora norme o raccomandazioni nazionali regolanti il recupero e lo studio dei

29 Zhao 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Zhao, He 2006.

30 L'Early Shang Civilization Project fu un progetto di collaborazione internazionale inizialmente guidato dal Peabody Museum all'Università di Harvard (Cambridge, Stati Uniti) e l'Istituto di Archeologia dell'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze Sociali. Questo progetto iniziò grazie ad una legge del 1991 che consentiva nuovamente agli stranieri di partecipare ad attività di ricerca e scavo archeologico sul campo, attività vietate agli stranieri dal 1950.

resti botanici, e soprattutto non vi era nessun corso di formazione a riguardo. In questi primi decenni di sviluppo dell'archeobotanica, la pratica della flottazione e lo studio dei macro-resti dipese in larga parte dall'interesse individuale dei singoli archeologi. Non sorprendentemente, gli studiosi che più si interessarono al recupero dei resti vegetali furono gli archeologi preistorici, i quali erano fortemente interessati al tema dell'origine dell'agricoltura. Questa era vista come un aspetto indissolubile dell'inizio della vita sedentaria. La sedentarietà e la produzione della ceramica erano considerati aspetti caratterizzanti l'inizio del periodo Neolitico.³¹ In questo senso i maggiori temi di ricerca continuarono ad essere l'individuazione dei centri di origine del riso e del panico/miglio, e la connessione tra l'inizio dell'agricoltura e l'inizio della civiltà cinese (Zhao 2005a; 2005b). Per questo motivo, fino almeno alla fine degli anni Dieci del 2000, la maggior parte degli studi archeobotanici avvennero durante lo scavo di siti preistorici, o si concentrarono particolarmente sulla documentazione archeologica dei cinque cereali (i già citati *wugu* delle fonti storiografiche). Le pubblicazioni derivanti da questi studi consistono per lo più in elenchi di piante identificate, interpretate come evidenza diretta della loro coltivazione locale, senza considerazioni di tipo quantitativo o qualitativo, o confronto con dati paleoclimatici e paleoambientali. In questi decenni, in linea con le teorie di domesticazione prevalenti anche in altre parti del mondo, come ad esempio l'Asia sudoccidentale, si pensava che vi fosse una zona circoscritta e univoca nella quale le piante furono domesticate per poi diffondersi nelle zone adiacenti.³² Fu proprio l'ampliamento dell'applicazione dell'archeobotanica nei decenni successivi che contribuì allo sviluppo di una visione multicentrica (o a mosaico) dell'origine dell'agricoltura, anche in Cina.

31 Questo cambiò a seguito del ritrovamento di resti di ceramica nella Cina meridionale, ad esempio nei siti di Xianrendong 仙人洞, Yuchanyan 玉蟾岩 e Zengpiyan 甌皮岩 (Wu et al. 2012; Boaretto et al. 2009; Yuan 2002; 2013), identificati come siti di raccoglitori e cacciatori per l'assenza di evidenze certe di sedentarietà e coltivazione delle piante. Alcuni studiosi ipotizzano che la ceramica si sviluppò per cuocere i semi di riso selvatico, per la presenza di fitoliti di riso su alcuni frammenti di ceramica rinvenuti nei siti sopra elencati (i.e. Higham, Lu 1998; Liu 2008). Altri studiosi hanno sollevato dubbi sull'affidabilità dell'identificazione e la provenienza di tali resti e hanno invece ipotizzato che la ceramica servisse per cuocere, e in special modo bollire, le piante selvatiche locali, come ad esempio noci e ghiande che necessitano di essere messe in ammollo allo scopo di ridurre le tossine naturalmente presenti in esse e diventare digeribili per gli esseri umani (Lu 1999, 124; Pearson 2005; Fuller, Castillo 2016).

32 Questa teoria è nota in inglese come *mono-centric domestication* in contrasto con la *multi-centric domestication*. Per una disamina delle due teorie si vedano Fuller, Willcox, Allaby 2011a; 2011b; Allaby et al. 2017; 2022.

4 L'archeobotanica cinese entra nel XXI secolo

4.1 Istituzionalizzazione e crescita della pratica archeobotanica

Dalla fine degli anni 2000 si è assistito ad un notevole (ed ininterrotto) aumento delle pubblicazioni di studi archeobotanici in Cina [fig. 5]. Questo deriva dalla combinazione di diversi fattori. Il primo fu l'apertura di laboratori specializzati nell'analisi dei resti archeobotanici. Zhao Zhijun nel 1999 fondò il primo Laboratorio di Archeobotanica presso il Centro per le Scienze Archeologiche (*Keji Kaogu Zhongxin* 科技考古中心) dell'Istituto di Archeologia dell'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze Sociali. Zhao fu anche responsabile della popolarizzazione della flottazione meccanizzata, facendo dimostrazioni e addestrando archeologi, ad esempio durante il programma di addestramento dell'Università di Pechino condotto nel 2003 a Tonglin, nello Shandong. Jin Guiyun 靳桂云, professoressa di archeologia all'Istituto per il Patrimonio Culturale presso l'Università dello Shandong (*Shandong Daxue* 山东大学), nel 2006 fondò il Laboratorio per l'Ambiente Quaternario e l'Archeologia (dal 2016 parte del Laboratorio di Ricerca Internazionale Congiunta per l'Archeologia Ambientale e Sociale, *Huanjing yu Shehui Kaogu Guoji Hezuo Lianhe Shiyanshi* 环境与社会考古国际合作联合实验室). Un contributo alla fondazione del laboratorio fu dato dalla permanenza all'Università dello Shandong nei primi anni 2000 di Crawford in veste di Liqing Fellow nelle Scienze Sociali. Jin all'Università dello Shandong incluse nello stesso laboratorio strumenti per l'indagine sia dei macro- che dei micro-resti (in particolar modo i fitoliti; Jin, Wang 2006). Nel 2008 venne fondato il Laboratorio di Archeobotanica presso la Scuola di Archeologia e Museologia dell'Università di Pechino (*Beijing Daxue Kaogu Wenbo Xueyuan* 北京大学考古文博学院) diretto da Qin Ling 秦岭, professoressa di archeologia Neolitica. La realizzazione di tale laboratorio avvenne anche grazie ai proficui scambi accademici instaurati tra l'Università di Pechino e l'University College London (UCL) di Londra attraverso il Centro Internazionale per il Patrimonio Culturale e l'Archeologia Cinese (*International Centre for Chinese Heritage and Archaeology* - ICCHA) con doppia sede alla Scuola di Archeologia e Museologia dell'Università di Pechino e all'Istituto di Archeologia di UCL.³³ Questi scambi permisero a Qin di trascorrere un soggiorno di studio presso UCL per apprendere i metodi d'indagine archeobotanica, e a Dorian Q Fuller, professore di

33 ICCHA è tuttora attivo nella promozione della cultura cinese e nello sviluppo di collaborazione scientifica internazionale tramite programmi di scambio tra ricercatori, organizzazione di cicli di conferenze e progetti di ricerca congiunti.

archeobotanica a UCL, di trascorrere un intero semestre all'Università di Pechino, durante il quale insegnò un corso di archeobotanica e aiutò a strutturare il laboratorio. Entrambi i laboratori all'Università dello Shandong e all'Università di Pechino hanno oggi tra le più ampie collezioni di piante moderne, colloquialmente chiamate collezioni di riferimento, essenziali per l'identificazione dei resti archeobotanici (Dorian Q Fuller, com. pers., settembre 2024). Contemporaneamente all'istituzione dei laboratori, l'archeobotanica venne inserita come corso a sé stante nei corsi di laurea di archeologia delle maggiori università cinesi e vennero pubblicati manuali di archeobotanica in lingua cinese (Liu, Jin, Kong 2008; Zhao 2010), contribuendo a diffondere la conoscenza delle metodologie e iniziando a formare una generazione di archeobotanici.

Nel 2009, fu pubblicata un'edizione riveduta e ampliata delle *Tianye Kaogu Gongzuo Guicheng* 田野考古工作规程 (Regole per l'Archeologia sul Campo) (Guojia 2009). Nella nuova edizione, tuttora in uso, venne posta particolare enfasi nel fornire agli archeologi delle procedure standardizzate da seguire durante lo scavo archeologico, con l'obiettivo di unificare tutte le fasi dello scavo archeologico a livello nazionale, dalla pianificazione pre-scavo alla catalogazione post-scavo. In esse venne normato il recupero dei resti organici durante gli scavi archeologici, tra cui anche quelli archeobotanici (Guojia 2009, 21-5). Le nuove linee guida raccomandano la flottazione di almeno 20 L di terra (con incrementi di 5 L) per ogni unità stratigrafica o contesto archeologico, e l'uso di setacci di maglia non più grande di 0,2-0,5 mm. Nelle *Regole* vengono inoltre fornite schede precompilate indicanti le informazioni da documentare durante la flottazione e le seguenti fasi di analisi dei campioni, facilitando enormemente il lavoro degli specialisti e degli operai addestrati e soprattutto tentando di unificare le analisi effettuate da studiosi diversi in province diverse. In occasione della pubblicazione della nuova edizione delle *Regole per l'Archeologia sul Campo*, nel giugno 2009 l'Università di Pechino tenne un grande corso di addestramento al quale parteciparono 627 archeologi provenienti da quasi tutti gli istituti di ricerca archeologica provinciali (Flad, Chen 2013). Da allora l'Università di Pechino ogni anno organizza corsi di aggiornamento per gli archeologi provenienti dagli istituti provinciali durante la scuola di scavo per gli studenti iscritti ai corsi di archeologia dell'università.

La pubblicazione della nuova edizione delle *Regole per l'Archeologia sul Campo* fu un momento chiave non soltanto per la standardizzazione e l'unificazione delle pratiche di scavo archeologico a livello nazionale, ma anche per l'introduzione della metodologia archeobotanica su larga scala e l'istituzionalizzazione della stessa. Da allora gli studi archeobotanici iniziarono ad essere condotti da specialisti, i quali potevano formarsi proprio in virtù dell'istituzione di laboratori come quelli all'Università dello Shandong e all'Università di Pechino. La

formazione di tali figure è alimentata dalla necessità di raccogliere campioni archeobotanici come ordinato dalle nuove norme del 2009. Nonostante l'applicazione di tali norme non sia ancora attuata in modo uniforme, è innegabile che la loro introduzione abbia promosso in maniera drastica l'ampiamiento delle indagini archeobotaniche, come si evince dal progressivo (ed ininterrotto) incremento dei report archeobotanici pubblicati dal 2009 ad oggi indicizzati su CNKI (Chinese Network Knowledge Index) [fig. 5]. A titolo esemplificativo, nel 2022 sono stati indicizzati 60 pubblicazioni relative a studi archeobotanici, ovvero un numero di gran lunga superiore rispetto a quanto rilevato anteriormente al 2010 (quando si contavano appena un paio di studi l'anno). È importante specificare che questo numero riflette solo le pubblicazioni in lingua cinese e quindi non rispecchia la totalità delle pubblicazioni derivanti da studi su siti cinesi, sicuramente superiori a quelle indicizzate in CNKI, poiché sempre più studiosi cinesi pubblicano in lingua inglese, un dato che si può in parte evincere da Scopus e World of Science [fig. 5].

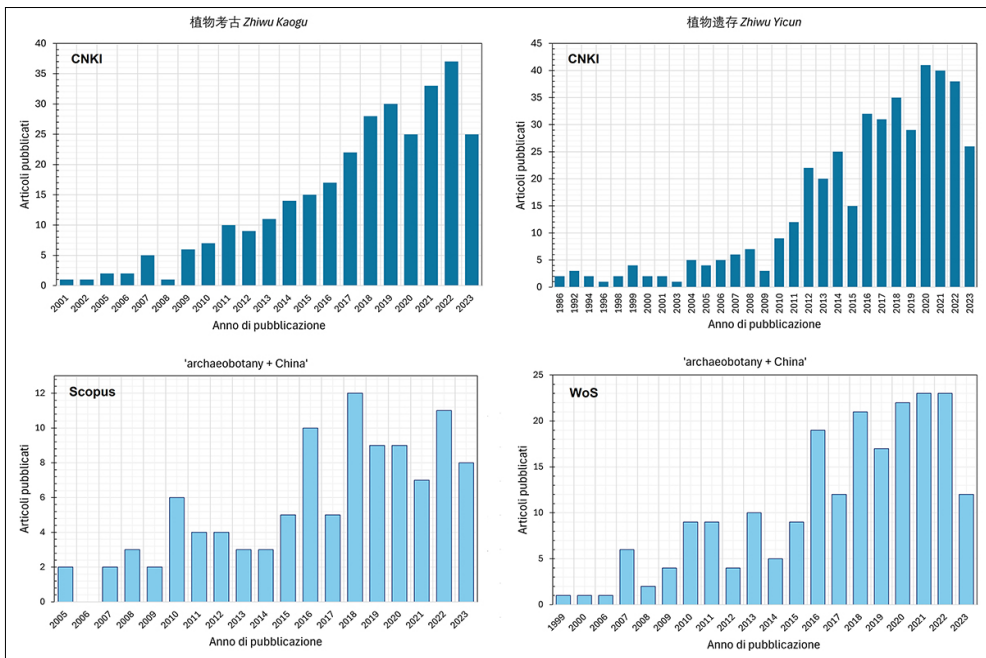


Figura 5 Illustrazione grafica delle tendenze di ricorrenza dei termini *zhiwu kaogu* 植物考古 (archeobotanica) e *zhiwu yicun* 植物遗存 (resti archeobotanici) nelle pubblicazioni accademiche (articoli, tesi di laurea magistrale e dottorato) in lingua cinese indicizzati in CNKI (Chinese Network Knowledge Index; CNKI 2024); e dei termini 'archaeobotany + China' in articoli in lingua inglese indicizzati su Scopus (2024) e World of Science (WoS 2024)

A seguito della crescita delineata sopra, si assistette alla necessità di creare uno spazio nazionale per la presentazione e la diffusione dei nuovi dati accumulati grazie alle ricerche archeobotaniche. Questo si concretizzò con l'organizzazione del primo convegno specialistico, tenutosi nel 2012, ospitato dall'Istituto di Archeologia dell'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze Sociali sotto la guida di Zhao Zhijun, intitolato *Zhongguo Zhiwukaogu Xueshu Jiaoliu Yantaohui* 中国植物考古学术交流研讨会 (Seminario e scambio accademico sull'archeobotanica cinese).³⁴ Da allora il convegno avviene con cadenza quasi annuale. Nel 2014, durante il simposio sull'origine della domesticazione del riso e la sua diffusione (*Daozuo Nongye Qiyuan yu Chuanbo Xueshu Yantaohui* 稻作农业起源与传播学术研讨会), tenutosi a Yuyao, nel Zhejiang, fu istituito un Comitato Nazionale per l'Archeobotanica Cinese all'interno della Società Archeologica Cinese (*Zhiwukaogu Zhuanye Weiyuanhui* 植物考古专业委员会).³⁵ In aggiunta al congresso nazionale, vengono organizzati con sempre maggior frequenza simposi specifici regionali o tematici, tra cui si possono elencare a titolo esemplificativo:

- *Dao de Zhiwu Kaoguxue—Qianyan yu Fansi Xueshu Shalong Huiyi* 稻的植物考古学——前沿与反思学术沙龙会议 (Workshop Internazionale: Frontiere dell'Archeobotanica del Riso),³⁶ tenutosi all'Università di Pechino nell'agosto 2016.
- *Qingzang Gaoyuan ji Zhoubian Diqu Zhiwukaogu Faxian he Yanjiu Guoji Xueshu Yantaohui* 青藏高原及周边地区植物考古发现和研究的国际学术研讨会 (Simposio sulle scoperte e la ricerca archeobotanica dell'altopiano del Qinghai-Tibet e delle Aree Circostanti), tenutosi a Xi'an nel dicembre 2019.³⁷
- *Jiangnan Gudai Zhiwu yu Shehui: Zhiwukaogu Guoji Xueshu Duihua* 江南古代植物与社会: 植物考古国际学术对话 (Simposio Internazionale sull'Archeobotanica: Piante e Società Antiche a Sud del Fiume Azzurro), tenutosi a Hangzhou nel novembre 2022.³⁸

34 Si veda l'annuncio della notizia dal sito dell'Istituto di Archeologia dell'Accademia Cinese delle Scienze Sociali: http://kaogu.cssn.cn/zwb/xsdt/xsdt_3347/xshy/201207/t20120713_3924234.shtml.

35 Si veda l'annuncio della notizia dal sito dell'Istituto Provinciale di Ricerca dei Beni Culturali e dell'Archeologia del Zhejiang, e dal sito dell'Istituto di Archeologia dell'Accademia delle Scienze Sociali: <http://www.soaa.zju.edu.cn/wkkg/2011/0922/c44601a1935130/page.htm>; http://kaogu.cssn.cn/zwb/xshdx/sjzkgkxshdxztd/kgxhgzhfzyt/201606/t20160603_3937625.shtml.

36 Si veda il programma del workshop dal sito di UCL: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/chinese-heritage-archaeology/international-workshop-programme-current-frontiers-archaeobotany-rice>.

37 Si veda il resoconto pubblicato nel sito della Northwest University: <https://culture.nwu.edu.cn/info/1018/1311.htm>.

38 Si veda il programma del simposio pubblicato nel sito dell'Università del Zhejiang: <http://www.soaa.zju.edu.cn/2022/1125/c34190a2690957/page.htm>.

Degno di nota è il commento fatto da Zhao Zhijun in occasione del *Simposio Internazionale sull'Archeobotanica* ad Hangzhou nel novembre 2022 riguardo alla crescita nel numero degli specialisti in archeobotanica nelle istituzioni cinesi, dove, secondo le stime più recenti, vi sono oggi oltre 70 archeobotanici tra università, istituti provinciali e musei in tutta la Cina, in confronto a meno di una decina di specialisti prima del 2010 (Dal Martello et al. forthcoming).

4.2 Nuovi temi e metodologie di ricerca archeobotanica

Negli ultimi anni contemporaneamente all'espansione generale della pratica delle indagini archeobotaniche è avvenuto un ampliamento dei temi di ricerca indagati, ma in special modo le metodologie di ricerca si sono notevolmente diversificate. L'origine dell'agricoltura continua ad essere un tema centrale per l'archeobotanica in Cina. Per quanto riguarda il riso è diventata prassi l'analisi morfologica delle basi delle spighe del riso come parametro per discriminare il riso domestico da quello selvatico.³⁹ Grazie a questo approccio si sta definendo ulteriormente sia la cronologia sia la geografia della domesticazione del riso. L'analisi morfometrica⁴⁰ dei semi è diventata pratica comune degli studi archeobotanici, molti nuovi report includono un'appendice con le misurazioni dei semi appartenenti alle specie più importanti rinvenute nel sito oggetto della pubblicazione. La misurazione dei semi è diventata particolarmente rilevante per tracciare la domesticazione di alcune specie, come il miglio o la soia, per le quali i semi sono pressoché gli unici resti preservati archeologicamente, e quindi manca la possibilità di distinguere le piante domestiche da quelle selvatiche sulla base della morfologia delle spighe o dei baccelli.⁴¹ In questo modo si è superata la visione per la quale il ritrovamento di una specie equivaleva alla coltivazione in loco, e gli studiosi ora uniscono analisi contestuali, morfologiche, morfometriche, quantitative, e soprattutto dati paleoclimatici per la ricostruzione del ruolo delle piante rinvenute nell'economia del sito indagato. A questo riguardo, diversi studi hanno iniziato a porre attenzione alle specifiche dinamiche di coltivazione delle specie. Due studi interessanti sono stati l'indagine dell'ecologia delle coltivazioni del riso con lo scopo di determinare la storia evolutiva delle diverse

39 Per studi sulla zona del basso corso del Fiume Azzurro, si vedano ad esempio Zheng, Sun, Chen 2007; Fuller, Harvey, Qin unpublished; 2007; Fuller et al. 2009; Fuller et al. 2011a.

40 La misurazione lineare della lunghezza, larghezza e spessore del seme.

41 Per l'utilizzo di questa metodologia per indagare la domesticazione del miglio si veda Stevens et al. 2020, della soia si vedano Lee et al. 2011; Fuller et al. 2014.

varietà di riso oggi esistenti, e lo sviluppo delle stagionalità di coltivazione dell'orzo e del grano. Riguardo all'ecologia del riso coltivato, un contributo fondamentale in questo senso è stato quello apportato dallo studio dei fitoliti, grazie ai quali si sono stabiliti dei parametri per determinare l'apporto idrico ricevuto dalla pianta in antichità e quindi se le coltivazioni fossero a secco, intermedie, o in terrazzamenti permanentemente sommersi.⁴² In parte collegato a questo tema è anche il tentativo di ricostruire l'impatto ambientale che le diverse tipologie di coltivazione ebbero sull'ambiente (Fuller, Weisskopf 2011; Fuller et al. 2011b). L'orzo (*Hordeum vulgare*) ed il frumento (*Triticum* spp.), entrambi originari dell'Asia sudoccidentale e domesticati come coltivazioni invernali, data la scarsità di acqua nel periodo estivo nella loro regione nativa, oggi esistono in varietà invernali e primaverili. Il quesito rispetto a quando e dove si svilupparono le varietà primaverili non è ancora stato del tutto risolto, ma recentemente è stato ipotizzato che queste varietà si svilupparono in concomitanza alla loro dispersione sull'altipiano del Tibet, un'ipotesi avvalorata da descrizioni in fonti storiografiche cinesi databili al I millennio a.C., le quali specificano la coltivazione di queste due specie in periodi dell'anno diversi a seconda della regione geografica (Liu et al. 2017). Se nei primi decenni della ricerca archeobotanica il focus sia stato quasi soltanto sulle principali specie tradizionalmente considerate alla base dei primi sistemi agricoli (gli *wugu*), recentemente diversi studi hanno indagato altre specie, tra cui il grano saraceno (*Fagopyrum esculentum*, *qiaomai* 荞麦),⁴³ il farinello comune (*Chenopodium album*, *li* 藜),⁴⁴ il pesco (*Prunus persica*, *tao* 桃; Zheng, Crawford, Chen 2014; Dal Martello et al. 2023) e la canapa (*Cannabis* sp.).⁴⁵ Questo sta dimostrando quanto queste specie fossero tutt'altro che secondarie già nei primi sistemi agricoli nel paese. L'attenzione verso specie diverse dai principali cereali e legumi permetterà di capire appieno la specifica diversità regionale e la potenzialità delle risorse locali per la sussistenza economica sia passata che futura.

Un altro sviluppo significativo è lo studio del DNA sia antico che moderno per comprendere esattamente i geni coinvolti nei cambiamenti avvenuti durante il processo di domesticazione,⁴⁶ e più in generale, l'applicazione delle ultime tecniche di analisi su isotopi

⁴² Si vedano Fuller et al. 2011b; Weisskopf et al. 2015; Weisskopf 2017; Wu et al. 2024.

⁴³ Hunt, Shang, Jones 2017; Hyslop, d'Alpoim-Guedes 2021; Wei 2019; Krzyzanska et al. 2021; Tang et al. 2021.

⁴⁴ Yang et al. 2009; Gao 2021; Xue et al. 2022; Song, Zhou, Lu 2022.

⁴⁵ Dal Martello et al. 2024; Liu et al. 2022; Long et al. 2019; Sun 2016.

⁴⁶ Molti studi si stanno concentrando sul DNA antico del riso, si vedano ad esempio Ishikawa, Castillo, Fuller 2020; Ishikawa et al. 2010; 2017; 2022; Ishikawa 2024.

stabili e marcatori genetici, sia su ossa umane e animali, che su resti botanici.⁴⁷ Ad esempio, la misurazione degli isotopi viene utilizzata per determinare l'apporto idrico alle colture, e più in generale le condizioni paleoclimatiche durante l'occupazione dei siti (Fiorentino et al. 2015; Li et al. 2022). Queste tecniche sono impiegate con sempre maggior frequenza per stabilire la composizione ed eventuali differenze di dieta (ad esempio tra generi o tra strati sociali diversi; tra umani e animali) attraverso la determinazione dei rapporti isotopici relativi alle piante C_3 - C_4 del carbonio del collagene osseo umano o animale.⁴⁸ Infine, negli ultimi anni si è iniziato a porre attenzione a resti organici 'amorfi' talvolta rinvenuti nei campioni archeobotanici, i quali sono interpretati come resti di cibo cucinato.⁴⁹ Questo sta creando un forte approccio multidisciplinare alla ricerca archeobotanica, grazie al quale si stanno esplorando in maniera molto più ampia la molteplicità delle interazioni tra i gruppi umani e l'ambiente circostante, superando lo studio puramente in prospettiva agricola delle piante.

Infine, missioni archeologiche cinesi hanno iniziato a dirigere progetti di scavo al di fuori dei moderni confini cinesi, una novità assoluta rispetto ai decenni precedenti, nei quali l'interesse accademico degli studiosi cinesi era per lo più rivolto all'interno dei confini nazionali. Nell'ambito di questi progetti internazionali, la componente d'indagine ambientale è significativa. Ad esempio, l'archeobotanico Zhou Xinying 周新郢 (impiegato presso l'Istituto di Paleontologia dei Vertebrati e di Paleoantropologia) guida studi ambientali derivanti da materiale proveniente da scavi in Uzbekistan (Chen et al. 2020; Zhou unpublished). Il professor Ma Jian 马健 della Northwest University (Xibei Daxue 西北大学), in collaborazione con la Termez State University (Uzbekistan), conduce progetti di scavo nel paese, i quali prevedono l'analisi degli aspetti ambientali dei siti studiati (Marcella Festa, com. pers., gennaio 2025). Infine, presso la Northwest University, nel 2021 è stato istituito il *Belt and Road*

47 Si vedano a titolo esemplificativo Patalano et al. 2015; Ren et al. 2017; Yang et al. 2022; Zhang et al. 2024

48 Le piante sono classificate in C_3 o C_4 a seconda del diverso numero di atomi di carbonio prodotti durante la fotosintesi. Tra i cereali, il riso, il frumento e l'orzo sono piante C_3 , mentre il panico/miglio, il sorgo e il mais sono piante C_4 . Per un approfondimento sull'applicazione di questa metodologia per ricostruire la dieta in contesti archeologici si veda Lightfoot, Liu, Jones 2018; per una sintesi di recenti studi di questo tipo in Cina si vedano Liu et al. 2021; Liu, Reid 2020.

49 Un importante contributo nello sviluppo di una metodologia per l'analisi e l'identificazione degli ingredienti contenuti in questo tipo di resti è stato dato dalla ricercatrice Lara González Carretero (González Carretero et al. 2017) a partire dall'analisi di materiale proveniente dall'Anatolia e l'Asia sudoccidentale. Questa nuova metodologia sta venendo impiegato con successo per lo studio di materiale analogo proveniente dalla Cina (Kan unpublished).

Joint Laboratory on China — Central Asia Human and Environment Research, Zhongguo— Zhongya Renlei yu Huanjing “Yidai Yilu” Lianhe Shiyanshi 中国— 中亚人类与环境“一带一路”联合实验室 (Laboratorio Congiunto ‘una Cintura una Via’ Cina - Asia Centrale per la Ricerca Uomo-Ambiente), il cui scopo è indagare le interazioni tra uomo e ambiente nella regione dell'Asia Centrale attraverso studi archeologici, in particolar modo concentrandosi sull'esplorare le grandi rotte di connessione e scambio tra la Cina e l'Asia Centrale, nominalmente conosciute come Vie della Seta.

5 Conclusione

L'archeobotanica è una scienza archeologica relativamente giovane nel panorama accademico cinese, ma nei pochi decenni trascorsi dall'inizio della sua pratica ha già apportato un contributo significativo nella comprensione della società cinese antica. Questo si è concretizzato non soltanto nella ricostruzione delle dinamiche e dei luoghi di origine dell'agricoltura nel paese, ma anche nella comprensione preliminare della dieta delle popolazioni passate e del loro rapporto con il territorio in cui vivevano. Le piante soddisfano alcuni dei bisogni umani primari, come il nutrirsi e il riscaldarsi, e forniscono materia prima per il vestiario e le costruzioni. Questi sono tutti aspetti fondativi della civiltà umana. Comprendere l'uso delle risorse floristiche in passato è quindi fondamentale per comprendere appieno lo sviluppo della civiltà umana così come la conosciamo oggi. Gli enormi progressi registrati negli ultimi dieci anni nella ricerca archeobotanica in Cina sono ancora in parte limitati dalla carenza di ampie collezioni di riferimento moderne, ad alta specificità regionale. Al momento della stesura di questo articolo le collezioni moderne note sono quella ospitate all'Università dello Shandong e all'Università di Pechino, ma altre università stanno iniziando a costruirne di proprie (Dorian Q Fuller, com. pers., ottobre 2024). Queste forniranno un supporto fondamentale, specialmente nell'identificazione di quei resti non appartenenti alle principali specie di cereali e legumi, molti dei quali rimangono ancora non identificati. Ciò consentirà di comprendere appieno come le popolazioni passate si siano sostenute e/o abbiano utilizzato piante locali, magari diverse da quelle che utilizziamo noi oggi, specialmente in regioni come lo Yunnan caratterizzate da un'enorme biodiversità floristica, dove la potenzialità di utilizzo di specie locali è molto alta e dove, ancora oggi, vi è un ampio impiego di piante spontanee nella cucina. L'interdisciplinarietà nella ricerca archeobotanica sarà senza dubbio l'aspetto che maggiormente crescerà nel prossimo futuro, e ci permetterà di capire appieno la moltitudine di strategie con cui le persone interagivano con l'ambiente circostante e lo modificavano sin dalla più remota antichità.

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Xiong Shili in Conversation: Transcultural Epistolary Exchange on the *Daodejing*

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Abstract The present paper examines a letter that the Chinese philosopher Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885-1968) sent to the Italian journalist Luciano Magrini in 1936, with the purpose of elucidating the main purports of the *Daodejing* 道德經 (The Classic of the Way and Virtue). This letter will be studied from two different perspectives, thus achieving a twofold aim: on the one hand, as a witness to the relationship between these two intellectual personalities; on the other, as a valuable source for philosophical speculation. For this reason, the first part of the article will adopt a historical perspective, aiming at reconstructing the context and background of this epistolary exchange, while the second will engage philosophically with the content of the letter, clarifying Xiong's interpretation of Daoist philosophy and relating it to his personal philosophical system.

Keywords Xiong Shili. Luciano Magrini. Chinese philosophy. Twentieth century. Cosmology. Daodejing.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Letter and its Context. – 2.1 The Sender and the Receiver. – 2.2 Italian Reception and Translation History of the DDJ. – 3 The Letter and its Content. – 3. Xiong Shili and the DDJ: Stanza 1, Verses 1-2. – 3.2 Xiong Shili and the DDJ: Stanza 1, Verses 3-4. – 3.3 Xiong Shili and the DDJ: Stanza 47. – 4 Concluding Remarks.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-03-15
Accepted 2025-05-05
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Pietrasanta, L.A. (2025). "Xiong Shili in Conversation: Transcultural Epistolary Exchange on the *Daodejing*". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 357-384.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/011

1 Introduction

In 1936, the Chinese philosopher Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885-1968) sent a letter to the Italian journalist Luciano Magrini (1885-1957). This epistolary exchange, edited and published in *Shili Yuyao* 十力語要 (Dialogues of Xiong Shili) (Xiong 2007a), is valuable for two reasons that I will explore in the present contribution. On the one hand, the letter allows us to reconstruct the cultural and historical background of this international exchange and understand some of the dynamics behind the reception of knowledge about China in Italy; on the other, it is an important testimony of Xiong Shili's interpretation of the *Daodejing* 道德經 (The Classic of the Way and Virtue) and of his engagement in a transcultural philosophical dialogue. The article will be accordingly divided into two parts: the first one will be focused on the context that the letter, as a historical document, gives us access to; the second one will delve into the content of the letter, this time taken as a vehicle and a receptacle of philosophical speculation. In particular, I will closely examine Xiong's remarks on cosmological and epistemological theories, taking as respective starting points his commentary to stanzas 1 and 47 of the *Daodejing*.

2 The Letter and its Context

2.1 The Sender and the Receiver

The Chinese philosopher Xiong Shili wrote the letter published as *Da Magelini* 答馬格里尼 (In response to Magrini)¹ in 1936. At this time, Xiong, who was born in 1885, had finished his training both in Confucianism and Buddhism, and had already been hired as lecturer at Peking University by the will of Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940). His *opus magnum*, the *Xin Weishi lun* 新唯識論 (Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness, henceforth XWSL), was published in 1932. The author himself described it as the "crystallization of Oriental philosophy" (Lin 2014, 361), in so far as it represented a synthesis of Confucian and Buddhist philosophy. Besides his affiliation to a specific tradition, the main argument of Xiong's philosophy is that, metaphysically speaking, the absolute or unconditioned principle does not stand independently beyond things or phenomena, which

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable insights and suggestions. Any remaining inaccuracy or error is entirely mine.

1 This letter, albeit never thoroughly examined, is briefly mentioned in Guo Qiyong 1996, 242 and Bresciani 2009, 158.

in turn constitute the relative, the conditioned. This is expressed by Xiong by means of the formula *tiyong bu er* 體用不二 (non-duality of substance and function). Xiong will continue to strenuously prove this point almost until his death, which occurred in 1968 in Shanghai. Today, he is retrospectively identified as the founder of New Confucianism, along with other intellectuals of his generation (Makeham 2003).

Luciano Magrini, the recipient of Xiong's missive, is a lesser-known figure, but we do have one comprehensive study of his life and work by Lorenzo Marco Capisani (2019). His interest in the study of Magrini is connected to the line of research on the Sino-Italian political and diplomatic relationships during the second half of the twentieth century. The analysis of the relationship between Magrini and Xiong Shili – which will be the core of the first section of this article – is largely based on Capisani's study of Magrini's biography, as well as on the direct testimony left by Magrini in the form of books and articles.

Born in Trieste in 1885, after a politically turbulent youth, Luciano Magrini worked as a news correspondent for several Italian newspapers, covering the years of World War I. After the war, in the 1920s, he continued his activity as a reporter and journalist and was sent to Asia twice: between 1923 and 1924, and later in 1926. An interesting account of these travels is included in Magrini's book *La Cina d'Oggi* (China Today) published in 1925 (Magrini 1925).

During these trips, Magrini became acquainted with Chinese society. He engaged with political matters but was also interested in local cultural and academic circles. It is likely that this is how, either directly or indirectly, his first contacts with Xiong Shili came about. The knowledge and connections Magrini gained during these years proved invaluable in the 1950s, when he began to plan an institute to foster cultural and philosophical dialogue between Italy and China. His dream came true on 9 September 1954, with the founding of the Istituto Culturale Italo-Cinese (Italian-Chinese Cultural Institute, henceforth: Institute or ICIC) in Milan. In its early years, the Institute focused on enlisting prominent figures from the Milanese intellectual circles and clearly defining its mission and objectives. This foundational work was crucial to its survival, particularly given the emergence of a competing study centre in Rome in 1953, the *Centro Studi per le Relazioni Economiche e Culturali con la Cina* (Center for Studies on Economic and Cultural Relations with China, henceforth: CsChina).

Magrini faced the challenge of clearly and narrowly defining the scope of his Institute's activities to ensure that it complemented, rather than overlapping with, the work of CsChina. This focus, combined with Magrini's personal interests, steered the Institute toward cultural and intellectual pursuits, leaving political, diplomatic,

and economic matters to the centre based in Rome. The latter, among other activities, brought together members of the Italian Communist Party, who were primarily interested in political engagement with the PRC. As Capisani shows, Magrini “distanced himself from the ideological affinity that tied Italian Communists to the PRC cause” and “treated the issue of diplomatic normalization as separate from the study of Chinese civilization” (2019, 567-8).

The ICIC’s primary activity was the biannual publication of the series *Quaderni di Civiltà Cinese* (Notebooks on Chinese Civilization). This collection of pamphlets featured articles on Chinese history and culture, contributed by members and collaborators of the Institute, most of whom were intellectuals active in academic circles. Regular contributors included Magrini himself, Gerardo Dino Fraccari (1909-1999), a high school philosophy teacher and freelance lecturer at the State University of Milan; Rosanna Pilone (1931-2006), a sinologist and expert in Chinese art and philosophy; and Maria Attardo Magrini, the founder’s daughter, who oversaw the section on Chinese poetry. Particularly notable were the Institute’s strict translation guidelines. According to these, “each work had to be translated collaboratively by a Chinese scholar and a European scholar”, so as to ensure both an “accurate interpretation of Chinese thought” and a “polished, distinguished Italian linguistic presentation” (Capisani 2019, 580).

In its later years, the Institute expanded its philosophical contributions. Alongside Fraccari, it featured Paolo Beonio-Brocchieri, known as the “intellectual-mediator” (Colombo 1993) for his comparative studies of Eastern and Western civilizations. Beonio-Brocchieri also served as a bridge between the Institute’s members and the Milanese philosophical community of the time. After his collaboration with the Institute, he contributed to Mario Dal Pra’s *Storia della Filosofia* (History of Philosophy), editing the second volume, *La filosofia cinese e dell’Asia orientale* (Chinese and East Asian Philosophy), which includes mentions of Xiong Shili (Beonio-Brocchieri 1977, 269).

Among the Institute’s many interests and activities, its extensive focus on the study of the *Daodejing* (henceforth: DDJ) stands out. As mentioned, the letter that Luciano Magrini received from Xiong Shili in 1936 was precisely a detailed commentary to the Daoist classic. From the letter’s opening lines – and from the title of its edited version, *In Reply to Magrini* – it is evident that the letter sent by the Chinese philosopher was part of an ongoing exchange. Xiong begins his reply by addressing the questions and points raised by his interlocutor’s earlier correspondence:

In the letter you sent me, four were the issues: first, you asked my interpretation of Laozi’s philosophy; second, you asked how and

which aspects were influenced by Daoism in China; third, you inquired about the teachings of Chinese contemporary Daoism; fourth, you asked about the number of devotees and temples of modern Daoism. (Xiong 2007a, 125) ²

Xiong's reply spans 24 pages. The bulk of the letter is devoted to addressing the first question about Daoist philosophy and sets aside issues related to contemporary Chinese society. After a brief introduction discussing the status of Chinese philosophy and its differences from the Western canon (a topic that will be addressed in the second part of this contribution), Xiong delves into an investigation of the philosophy of the DDJ. He selects 10 stanzas (numbers 1, 4, 6, 14, 15, 16, 21, 25, 47, 48) and provides detailed commentary on each. While I will explore the content of this commentary in the next section, my focus here will be on the reception of this commentary in Italy, thanks to Luciano Magrini's efforts and commitment.

2.2 Italian Reception and Translation History of the DDJ

Magrini's interest in Daoism is evident from the earliest issues of the *Notebooks*. In the first issue, he authored a historical-philosophical essay on the figure of Laozi, titled *Lao-tse* (Magrini 1955a). In the second issue, he wrote the article *Luci e riflessi del Tao* (Lights and Reflections of the Tao) (Magrini 1955b), which explored the influence of Daoist principles on Chinese culture and philosophy. His commitment to studying Daoism culminated in the second issue, which featured the first (out of three) part of the publication of the Institute-sponsored translation of the DDJ, a project initiated at Magrini's suggestion. The translation was carried out by the aforementioned journalist and sinologist Rosanna Pilone. Pilone worked in a synoptic perspective, consulting both the Chinese critical edition of the DDJ edited by Jiang Xichang 蒋锡昌 (also transliterated as Chiang Hsi-chang) and the English translation by Wu Jingxiang 吴经熊 (also as Chin Hsing Wu).

Pilone prefaced her translation with a brief *Introduzione al Tao-te-king* (Introduction to the Tao-Te-King), in which she acknowledged the Italian translators who preceded her in tackling this "enigmatic text" (Pilone 1955, 139): Guglielmo Evans (1922), Julius Evola (1924),

² Jié lái wèn, lüè yǒu sì shì: yī, wèn wú duìyú Lǎozǐ zhéxué zhī jiěshì. Èr, wèn Dàojiào zài Zhōngguó suǒ yǐngxiǎng yú gè fāngmiàn zhě rúhé. Sān, wèn Zhōngguó xiàndài Dàojiào zhī jiàoyì. Sì, wèn xiàndài Dàojiào zhī xìntú duōguǎ yǔ sīyǔ duōguǎ 接來問, 略有四事: 一、問吾對於老子哲學之解釋。二、問道教在中國所影響於各方面者如何。三、問中國現代道教之教義。四、問現代道教之信徒多寡與寺宇多寡。Unless otherwise specified, the translations of the cited passages are by the Author.

Alberto Castellani (1927), Xiao Shiyi (1941), and Baldo Peroni (1949). In this *Introduction*, she also touches upon the story of Xiong Shili's manuscript, claiming that:

I have kept the comments to a minimum, avoiding those of ancient Chinese commentators and European translators. From an unpublished, extensive manuscript, written in English, by the greatest Chinese philosopher of the last century, Shi-li-hsiung (or Hsiung-hsi-ling as referenced by Siao-Sci-yi, who consulted the same manuscript sent by the philosopher to Luciano Magrini), I have translated ten chapters that the reader will find reproduced in the respective notes. (Pilone 1955, 142)³

This passage introduces two relevant elements for our analysis. Firstly, Pilone's notes confirm that the "extensive manuscript" she is referring to is precisely the letter that Xiong Shili (transliterated as "Shi-li-hsiung" or "Hsiung-hsi-ling") sent to Magrini in 1936. However, Pilone appears to have misunderstood a key detail. She suggests that the manuscript was written in English, but this is contradicted by Xiong himself at the end of the letter, when he states: "I was asked to reply in English, but being unable to write in English, I drafted it in Chinese and entrusted Mr. Qian Xuexi [錢學熙] to translate it for me" (Xiong 2007a, 149).⁴ This misunderstanding also affects Pilone's presentation of Xiong's commentary. In the footnotes to her own translation, she referenced what she believed to be Xiong's "translation" of the text. In reality, Xiong quoted the original text in Chinese, then providing his own commentary, leaving the actual translation of both the DDJ verses and his own commentary to Qian Xuexi.⁵

Secondly, Pilone's introduction presented Xiao Shiyi 萧师毅 (also transliterated as Siao-Sci-yi or Hsiao Shih-yi) as a key figure in the dissemination of Xiong's ideas. As a matter of fact, Magrini did not restrict circulation of Xiong's manuscript to members of the Institute but shared it with Xiao Shiyi, also known in Europe by the name of Paul. Paul (or Paolo) Xiao Shiyi (1911-1986) was a Taiwanese philosopher who moved to Europe in the late 1930s to continue

3 "Ho limitato i commenti al minimo, evitando quelli degli antichi commentatori cinesi e dei traduttori europei. Da un inedito, ampio manoscritto, steso in lingua inglese, del più grande filosofo cinese dell'ultimo secolo, Shi-li-hsiung (o Hsiung-hsi-ling come lo chiama Siao-sci-yi che ha consultato lo stesso manoscritto inviato dal filosofo a Luciano Magrini) ho tradotto dieci capitoli che il lettore troverà riprodotti nelle rispettive note".

4 *Lì bùnéng wéi Yīngwén, tè yì Zhōngwén xiědìng, ér shǔ Qián Xuéxī jūn wéi wú yìyì.* 力不能為英文，特以中文寫定，而屬錢學熙君為吾移譯 (Xiong 2007a, 149).

5 Qian Xuexi (1906-1978) was professor of English language and literature and followed Xiong to Sichuan during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

his studies between Milan and Freiburg. While in Milan, at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Xiao completed his translation of the DDJ, which was published in 1941 by the Laterza publishing house. Xiao's relative fame is tied not only to this translation – whose publication was facilitated by the renown philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) – but also to an episode involving the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). As Xiao recounted in a surviving testimony, he travelled to Freiburg in 1942 to attend Heidegger's seminars, where he presented the German philosopher with his freshly published translation of the *Laozi*. After this first encounter, on the initiative of Heidegger, the two started a collaborative translation of DDJ into German, delving into 8 stanzas of the Chinese classic.⁶

In the introduction to his widely recognised translation, Xiao acknowledges the pivotal roles of Xiong Shili's commentary and Magrini's mediation:

The fervour for philosophical and literary exploration in the vast field of Chinese literature was shared by an Italian, Prof. Luciano Magrini, who visited China twice, earning significant prestige within Chinese cultural circles for his expertise and insight. [...] Luciano Magrini collaborated with the greatest philosopher of modern China, Hsiung Hsi-ling, of the National University of Peking, conducting an in-depth study of the *Tao-te-king*. [...] My approach to translating the *Tao-te-king* was greatly facilitated by Luciano Magrini, who generously made his research findings available to me and allowed me to consult a valuable manuscript sent to him by Hsiung Hsi-ling, containing a brilliant interpretation of the Tao. (Xiao 1941, 16-17)⁷

Xiao's translation of the *Laozi* gives considerable weight to Xiong Shili's commentary. His comments are translated and incorporated by Xiao in the footnotes to all ten stanzas considered by Xiong. Among these, Xiao emphasised the originality of Xiong's interpretation of the first and forty-seventh stanzas – these will be examined in detail in the next section of this article.

6 More on this encounter in Parkes 1987 and Francescato 2022.

7 “Al fervore delle ricerche filosofiche e letterarie nel vasto campo della letteratura cinese ha partecipato anche un italiano, il prof. Luciano Magrini, che visitò due volte la Cina acquistando per la sua competenza e comprensione un particolare prestigio nel campo culturale cinese. [...] Luciano Magrini intraprese in collaborazione con il più grande filosofo della Cina moderna, Hsiung Hsi-ling, della National University of Peking un accurato studio sul *Tao-te-king*. [...] Accingendomi alla traduzione del *Tao-te-king*, questa mi fu facilitata dall'assistenza di Luciano Magrini, che mise liberamente a mia disposizione i risultati dei suoi studi e mi rese possibile consultare un prezioso manoscritto a lui inviato da Hsiung Hsi-ling nel quale quest'ultimo dà una geniale interpretazione del significato del Tao”.

In sum, Xiong's commentary of the DDJ generated two threads of reception of the *Laozi* in Italy. Turning now to the next section of this article, I will show that the letter is a relevant piece of philosophical speculation, as well as a rare testimony of Xiong Shili's interpretation and account of the philosophical purport of the DDJ.

3 The Letter and its Content

As noted above, Xiong's letter is a response to Magrini's questions about Daoist philosophy and the meaning of the *Laozi*. In order to explain his own understanding of the DDJ, Xiong articulates his response as a commentary to the text itself,⁸ starting from the first stanza which, in his words, is "the most important and the one that has always been most commented on by Chinese scholars" (Xiong 2007a, 129).⁹ It is at this point that Xiong puts forward – as claimed by Xiao Shiyi – his "brilliant interpretation of the meaning of the Dao" (Xiao 1941, 17).

3.1 Xiong Shili and the DDJ: Stanza 1, Verses 1-2

After addressing the paradoxical nature of the question concerning the Dao – which remains inherently indefinable and unnameable –¹⁰ Xiong proceeds to expound upon the structure of Daoist cosmology, focusing on the relationship between the Dao (道) and the 'ten thousand things' (alternatively referred to as *wanwu* 萬物 or *wanyou* 萬有). He interprets this relationship in terms of two interconnected aspects: the Dao as the unique, eternal, unconditioned and absolute principle, and the ten thousand things as the differentiated, conditioned

8 Xiong comments on the so-called Wang Bi's 王弼 (226-49) edition of the *Laozi*, the version preserved in print alongside Wang Bi's commentary. However, as Wagner (2003) has shown, Wang Bi's interpretation was almost certainly based on a version of the text different from the one that later became associated with his commentary and now carries his name.

9 *Lǎozǐ shǒu zhāng zuì wéi zhòngyào, Zhōngguó cónglái xuézhě wèi zhī zhùshì bù xià shù bǎi jiā* 老子首章最為重要，中國從來學者為之注釋不下數百家 (Xiong 2007a, 129).

10 The reference is at the well-known opening stanza of the DDJ. For the sake of clarity, the following is the first part of the stanza in both Chinese and English, in the translation by Ryden (2008, 5): *Dào kě dào, fēi cháng dào* | *Míng kě míng, fēi cháng míng* | *Wú míng tiāndì zhī shǐ* | *Yǒu míng wàn wù zhī mǔ* | *Gù cháng wú yù yǐ guān qí miào* | *Cháng yǒu yù yǐ guān qí jiǎo* 道可道非常道 | 名可名非常名 | 無名天地之始 | 有名萬物之母 | 故常無欲以觀其妙 | 常有欲以觀其徼 (Of ways you may speak, but not the Perennial Way; | By names you may name, but not the Perennial Name. | The nameless is the inception of the myriad things; | The named is the mother of the myriad things. | Therefore, be ever without yearning so as to observe her obscurity; | Be ever full of yearning so as to observe what she longs for).

and relative multiplicity of experienced entities. Xiong's account of the cosmology of the DDJ is modelled on the core metaphysical assumption of his own metaphysical system, emphatically rendered through the expression *tiyong bu er* 體用不二, which translates as 'the non-duality of substance and function', that is the non-duality of the unconditioned principle and its conditioned phenomenal manifestations. Transferring this to the specific context of the letter, Xiong argues for the 'non-duality' (*bu er* 不二) of the Dao and the ten thousand entities.

Xiong's main focus is demonstrating that the Dao is the foundational principle underlying all manifestations, and nonetheless it cannot be understood as existing separately from or beyond those phenomena. Instead of transcending them, the Dao is inherently identified with them, following the principle of 'non-duality' – or 'non-separability', as Ng Yu-Kwan prefers to put it (2003). In this view, things are the expression of the Dao itself. Here are two meaningful extracts from the letter, where Xiong clearly discusses this point:

The term 'Dao' at the beginning of the verse refers to what was previously referred to as 'true principle', which here indicates the fundamental substance (*shiti*) of the cosmos. However, in Western philosophy, [the concept of] 'substance' is discussed as if it were separate from the phenomenal realm, suggesting that behind phenomena lies an essence, which is called substance (*shiti*). In contrast, Chinese philosophy does not adopt such a perspective. For instance, the Dao of Laozi certainly is not posited as something separate and detached from the phenomenal realm. Rather, it is asserted that all entities within the phenomenal realm are manifestations of the Dao. Put simply, all things take the Dao as their underlying substance (Xiong 2007a, 130)¹¹

To clarify with an analogy: just as all forms of ice have water as their substance, and there is no separate essence of ice apart from water, so too does water not exist as something apart from ice. [Similarly,] all phenomena take the Dao as their substance, and the Dao, in turn, does not exist independently of the myriad phenomena. [...] If one were to claim that the Dao exists entirely beyond and

11 Jùshǒu 'Dào' zì, jí qián suǒwèi zhēnlǐ yě, cǐ mù yǔzhòu shítǐ. Dàn Xīyáng zhéxué tán shítǐ sì yǔ xiànxàng jiè fēnlí, jí jì xiànxàng zhī bèihòu yǒu qí běnzhi, suǒ wéi shítǐ. Èr Zhōngguó zhéxué shàng zé wú chí cǐ děng jiànjiě zhě, jí rú Lǎozǐ suǒwèi Dào, jú búshì chāotuō xiànxàng jiè zhīwài ér bié yǒu wù, nǎi wéi xiànxàng jiè zhōng yīqiè wànyǒu jiē Dào zhī xiǎnxiàn. Yì yán zhī, yīqiè wànyǒu jiē yǐ Dào wéi shítǐ 句首“道”字，即前所謂真理也，此目宇宙實體。但西洋哲學談實體似與現象界分離，即計現象之背後有其本質，說為實體。而中國哲學上則無持此等見解者，即如老子所謂道，決不是超脫現象界之外而別有物，乃謂現象界中一切萬有皆道之顯現。易言之，一切萬有皆以道為實體。

separate from all phenomena, then the Dao would become a mere void, and how could it then be called the fundamental substance of the universe? Laozi's follower Zhuang Zhou once expressed this idea brilliantly, saying, "The Dao is in the piss and shit",¹² illustrating that the Dao is not independent, separate from the myriad things. (130)¹³

At the core of Xiong's commentary is what we could define as a sense of immanence of the Dao (*ti*) within the phenomenal realm of experienced entities (*yong*), a relationship he illustrates by means of a metaphor. A piece of ice exists only because of the water that constitutes it. The relationship between ice (form) and water (essence) is reciprocal: ice cannot exist independently of water that constitutes it, just as water cannot exist as a 'thing in itself', that is it cannot be manifested without a specific form. The particular piece of ice is inseparable from the specific portion of water that forms its essence and 'fills' it. Likewise, the water, at that moment, 'exists' precisely as that particular piece of ice. In this metaphor, the ice stands for the ten thousand things (*wanwu* or *wanyou*), which are the constantly differentiated phenomena – what Xiong usually refers to as *yong* (function), the visible and tangible aspects of reality that we encounter and engage with. Water, on the other hand, symbolises the Dao, the unifying principle and essence that gives substance to all things (Xiong's *ti* or *shiti*).¹⁴ He explicitly characterises the relationship between these two factors by positing the phenomenal multiplicity as the manifestation or appearance of the Dao, and the Dao itself as the 'substance' or 'reality'¹⁵ (*shiti*) of phenomena. The

12 Translation by Burton Watson (2013). To be precise, the Zhuangzi reads *shini* 屎溺 instead of *shiniao* 屎尿.

13 *Qiáng yǐ yù míng, rú yíqiè bīng xiàng jiē yǐ shuǐ wéi tǐ, fēi lí shuǐ ér bié yǒu bīng xiàng zhī zìtǐ. Jì bīng yǐ shuǐ wéi tǐ, zé shuǐ gù fēi lí bīng ér bié yǒu wù. Yíqiè wànxiàng, yì Dào wéi tǐ, zé Dào gù fēi lí yíqiè wàn yǒu ér bié yǒu wù. [...] Ruò wèi Dào guǒ chāoyuè yú yíqiè wàn yǒu zhī wài zhě, zé Dào yì wánkōng, ér hé dé míng wéi yǔzhòu shí yé? Lǎozǐ zhī hòuxué Zhuāng Zhōu céng yǒu miàoyǔ yún "Dào zài shìniào", kě jiàn Dào bù lí yíqiè wàn yǒu ér dú zài yì 強以喻明，如一切冰相皆以水為體，非離水而別有冰相之自體。既冰以水為體，則水固非離冰而別有物。一切萬象，以道為體，則道固非離一切萬有而別有物。[...] 若謂道果超越於一切萬有之外者，則道亦頑空，而何得名為宇宙實體耶？老子之後學莊周曾有妙語云“道在屎尿”，可見道不離一切萬有而獨在也。*

14 I treat *ti* and *shiti* as synonyms and render both as 'substance' (or, more rarely, as 'reality', when adopting Makeham's translation), since Xiong explicitly equates the two in the majority of his writings. Makeham (2015, xxiv) notes that Xiong, both in the vernacular edition of the XWSL and in his *Fojia mingxiang tongshi* 佛家名相通釋 (Complete Explanation of Buddhist Terms), not only equates *ti* and *shiti*, but also extends this equivalence to other terms, such as *benti* 本體, *zhenli* 真理 (see also footnote 34) and *shixiang* 實相. I, therefore, take it that here Xiong is referring to one and the same concept, albeit expressed through different terms.

15 This second term is used by Makeham to translate *ti* 體 and *shiti* 實體 (2015; 2023).

Dao, therefore, is affirmed as a unique and absolute principle, yet it is not conceived as heterogeneous and separate from the realm of experience, multiplicity and relativity. Instead, this Dao-principle is realised precisely through its integration with and participation in the multiplicity of phenomena.

If this interpretation is correct, Xiong is thus refuting those metaphysical conceptions that are based on the idea of transcendence, *de facto* advocating for a position of immanence, which he also tracks, as this letter suggests, within the *Laozi*: the Dao does not exceed and stand independently beyond the things (*wanwu*) through which it is manifest. Xiong seems thus to align the philosophy of the *Laozi* to his personal metaphysical position which, borrowing from Makeham's terminology, can be defined as a 'monism': "opposed to ontological dualism and pluralism, he was an ontological monist" (Makeham 2017, 502).

This monistic perspective, which Xiong Shili derives from and ascribes to the DDJ and the broader Chinese philosophical tradition, is presented, here in the letter, as fundamentally opposed to Western philosophy. According to his analysis, Western philosophy is characterised by the presupposition of a realm 'beyond', that is: it is primarily concerned with the concept of 'substance' (*shiti*) as something existing beyond or separately from phenomena (*xianxiang* 現象). He refers to this as the 'separation' (*fenli* 分離) or 'transcendence' (*chaoyue* 超越) of substance (*ti* or *shiti*) from the realm of experienced phenomena (*yong*). In contrast, Chinese philosophy – especially as articulated in the metaphysical framework of the DDJ – understands substance, or the Dao, as inherently connected to the phenomenal realm, which serves as its direct manifestation. Xiong emphasises this fundamental distinction at the outset of the letter, where he argues that:

The distinctive characteristic of the Chinese is the absence of religious thought, as can be evidenced from the ancient Book of Odes (*Shijing*). [...] In the *Shijing*, there is no concept of divine worship. (Although terms such as 'Heaven' (*tian*) and 'Sovereign' (*di*) occasionally appear outside the 'two *nans*', what is referred to as *tian* is the principle of the self-so, while *di* represents the flow of great transformation, akin to a guiding authority at most. These terms do not refer to a deity with will and personality existing beyond the myriad things). Thus, the notions of *tian* and *di* in the *Shijing* cannot be interpreted in the same way as terms like 'Heavenly Sovereign' (*tiandi*) in Christian scriptures. This

[distinction] illustrates the unique character of the Chinese. (Xiong 2007a, 125-6)¹⁶

Xiong's interpretation of the DDJ seems thus shaped by this fundamental conviction: that the notion of transcendence is essentially alien to the Chinese tradition, already from the time of the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Odes). This insistence on what we have defined as the 'immanentistic' nature of Chinese philosophy can be linked to the desire of freeing the Chinese tradition from any links to the concept of 'religion'. As a matter of fact, Xiong Shili clearly bonds 'transcendence' to 'religion', as his critique of Buddhist thought also attests elsewhere: "the basis of Buddhist teachings is, after all, religion. These masters were compelled to posit a spirit-cum-*ātman* in altered form so not to lose the traditional spirit [of Buddhism as a religion]" (Makeham 2023, 116). By reading the whole Chinese tradition as free from transcendence, Xiong can then argue it to be exclusively a-religious. As shown, this happens in spark opposition to other systems, namely Western and Buddhist traditions: although by means of different concepts and ontological models, both Western philosophy and Buddhist thought, according to Xiong, share the same metaphysical assumption, which marks their fundamental difference from the Chinese model.

Before going back to the commentary and moving to verses 3 and 4 of *Laozi* 1, one final observation.

In order to reach a more thorough understanding of the general view that Xiong is presenting in the letter, it is important to stress the context in which it is situated. Starting from the second half of the nineteenth century, and all throughout the 1930s, the Chinese empire (before) and the Chinese nation-state (later) underwent a period of massive modernisation-qua-westernisation. At the heart of this process lay, first and foremost, the concept of 'science' as a distinctive Western enterprise. However, the introduction of science – and its application to various fields including the military, economic, politic, public and educational – brought about a whole new way of conceiving the very same notions of field and category, what Hui (2011, 58) calls "a paradigm shift". One of these new categories was precisely that

16 Zhōngguó mínzú zhī tèxìng jí wéi wú zōngjiào sīxiǎng, cǐ kě yú Zhōngguó yuǎngǔ zhī "Shījīng" ér zhèng zhī. [...] "Shījīng" zhōng jué wú shéndào sīxiǎng (suī èr Nán yìwài yì jiān yǒu Tiāndì děng míngcí, rán suǒ yún Tiān zhě, jí wèi zìrán zhī lǐ; suǒ yún Dì zhě, wèi dà huà liúxíng, ruò yǒu zhǔzāi éryǐ. Fēi wèi qí chāoyuè wànyǒu zhī wài ér wéi yǒu yìzhì yǒu réngé zhī shén yě. Gù 'Shījīng' zhōng zhī Tiān yǔ Dì, bùnéng yǔ Jīngjiào jīngdiǎn zhōng zhī Tiāndì děng cí tóng yī jiěshì) jí cǐ kě jiàn Zhōnghuá mínzú zhī tèxìng 中國民族之特性即為無宗教思想，此可於中國遠古之《詩經》而證之。[...]《詩經》中絕無神道思想(雖二南以外亦間有天帝等名詞，然所云天者，即謂自然之理；所云帝者，謂大化流行，若有主宰而已。非謂其超越萬有之外而為有意志有人格之神也。故《詩經》中之天與帝，不能與景教經典中之天帝等詞同一解釋)即此可見中華民族之特性。

of 'religion' (*zongjiao* 宗教, a rendering imported from Japan)¹⁷ that, along with those of 'philosophy', 'superstition' and 'science', was part of the transcendental scheme of concepts and categories that shaped modernity, both in China and elsewhere.¹⁸ This framework was not just a neutral sum of concepts: it came also as a system of values and enforced hierarchies of the very categories it was bringing along. Within this scale, science, as the hallmark of a modern, progressed and secular society, was undoubtedly more favoured than practices and doctrines associated with the realm of religion. This context likely played a role in shaping Xiong's persuasion of the non-religious character of Chinese philosophy and culture; although one might question to what extent that was a persuasion and to what, instead, it was a clever way of presenting Chinese philosophy, so that it would be taken more seriously, with religion being the mark of non-scientificity.¹⁹ As a matter of fact, Xiong, in the letter, explicitly states that "Europeans, when discussing Chinese philosophy, often conflate it with religion", to the point that universities around the world "exclude it from curricula of the course in Philosophy, or take it as a mere subsidiary of theology" (Xiong 2007a, 125).²⁰ Xiong sees this treatment as based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of Chinese philosophy, which actually is, in his view, a "non-religious form of thought" (*wuzongjiao sixiang* 無宗教思想).

Xiong's reading of the Chinese tradition as completely a-religious – despite being a stretched interpretation – is grounded in his view of the different historical processes that interested the West and China, and that, in his time, brought about the latter's subordination to the former. This idea will be better examined in the next section, with regards to *Laozi* 47. For now, it is important

17 It is important to highlight that, although the equation of the term *zongjiao* (Jap: *shūkyō*) with the European concept of 'religion' was primarily a Japanese undertaking, the compounds *zongjiao* and *jiaozong* 教宗, as well as the individual characters, were originally Chinese. In fact, they were already used by the Buddhist master Zongmi 宗密 (780-841) to distinguish different strands of Buddhism. The process of resemanticisation of these terms is thoroughly documented by Barrett and Tarocco (2012).

18 As Tarocco states for the specific case of 'religion', already from the nineteenth century, the Chinese language experienced a significant lexical expansion, absorbing a wide range of terminology connected to Western knowledge and thought (2008, 49). The impact that Japanese lexicon had on this reconfiguration of the Chinese language is analysed by Masini (1993).

19 With specific regard to Xiong's XWSL, Major (2023) offers an interesting analysis of the discursive tools and argumentative strategies employed by the author to navigate his peculiar position at the challenging crossroads between modernity and advocacy for tradition.

20 *Wú wèn Ōurén yán jí Zhōngguó zhéxué, zhé yǔ zōngjiào bìng wéi yī tán. Gè guó dàxué yú zhéxué kěmù zhōng bìng bù liè rù Zhōngguó zhéxué, huò zé yú shénxué zhōng fù jí zhī* 吾問歐人言及中國哲學，輒與宗教並為一談。各國大學於哲學科目中並不列入中國哲學，或則於神學中附及之 (Xiong 2007a, 125).

to highlight that Xiong Shili's emphasis on the non-religiosity of the Chinese tradition can be linked both to his philosophy of history and to the socio-historical context he was experiencing, which, as shown, relegated 'religion' to a subaltern position.

3.2 Xiong Shili and the DDJ: Stanza 1, Verses 3-4

Xiong Shili concludes his discussion of Daoist cosmology by referencing the third and fourth verses of the first stanza of the DDJ, which he interprets as an explanation of "the functional manifestation (*fa yong* 發用) of the Dao" (Xiong 2007a, 131). The reference is here to the third and fourth verses of the stanza, according to which the nameless (*wuming* 無名) is the origin of heaven and earth (*tiandi* 天地), while the named (*youming* 有名) is the Mother (*mu* 母) of the myriad things (*wanwu* 萬物). The aim of Xiong's commentary to these verses of the *Laozi* is to clarify the relationship between these two poles (namely, the nameless and the named) and their connection to the Dao. His main argument is that the *wuming-youming* binary structure – which he equates to the relationship between *wu* (無, non-being) and *you* (有, being)²¹ – is not to be read as an equivalent of the relationship between the principle, Dao, and the 'ten thousand things' (*wanwu*). This is because the Dao and the *wanwu* follow the *ti-yong* metaphysical pattern, while the *wu(ming)-you(ming)* structure, introduced in verses 3 and 4, concerns only the generative process of the 'ten thousand things' (the *yong*).

With this general framework in mind, Xiong reads the 'nameless' and the 'named' (as well as 'non-being' and 'being') mentioned in the *Laozi* as another way of denoting what he respectively calls 'spirit' (*jingshen* 精神) and 'form' (*xingben* 形本) – this latter being closer to

21 Xiong explicitly equates *wuming* with *wu* and *youming* with *you* (2007a, 131): "*Wúmíng*" yī cí, qí yìyì réng shì yī "wú" zì. [...] "*Yǒumíng*" yī cí, qí yìyì réng shì yī "yǒu" zì "無名"一詞, 其意義仍是一"無"字. [...] "有名"一詞, 其意義仍是一"有"字. (The term 'nameless' retains the same meaning as 'non-being'. The term 'named' retains the same meaning as 'being').

the concept of ‘matter’.²² The spirit, he explains, is not only called non-being (*wu*); it is also nameless (*wuming*) because of its amorphous nature: “that which is without form cannot be named; the spirit is without form and is therefore called ‘nameless’” (Xiong 2007a, 131).²³ Following the same logic, that which is with form “is different from that which is without form; therefore, it is called ‘being’ (*you*). For it is given a name out of ‘being’ (*you*), it is called ‘named’ (*youming*)” (Xiong 2007a, 131).²⁴

By linking the Laozian concepts of *wuming* and *youming* to *jingshen* and *xingben*, Xiong is able to: (1) describe their operation and interaction in terms consistent with his own philosophical framework; and (2), more importantly, clarify that these represent two tendencies (*shi* 勢) active at the level of *yong*, thereby avoiding the risk of equating *wuming* with *ti* (or Dao). Let us briefly explore these two points.

Xiong engages with this cosmological model from his earlier texts and until one of his latest works, the *Tiyong lun* 體用論 (Treatise on Reality and Function, henceforth: TYL) published in 1958. The core idea is that the dynamic interplay of these two opposing tendencies allow for the cosmos’ perpetual transformations to occur and be manifest. These principles are expressed by means of different terms both in the letter and elsewhere. For example, while in the letter Xiong employs the aforementioned *wu-you*, *wuming-youming*, and *jingshen-xingben*, in his XWSL and his TYL he resorts to “expansion (*pi* 闢)-contraction (*xi* 翕)”, “*Qian* (乾)-*Kun* (坤)” – both derived from the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) – and “the pure and spirit like (*jingshen* 精神)-matter and energy (*zhili* 質力)”.²⁵ These different terms, I believe, all refer to the same binary concept. In each case, the first element of the pair designates the tendency responsible for the formation of ‘spiritual’ or ‘mental’ (*xin* 心) entities, defined precisely by their lack

22 I render it as ‘form’ since Xiong often uses the abbreviated term *xing* (形) for *xingben*, treating them as synonyms. However, it should be noted that he explicitly states that, when talking about ‘form’, he is referring to “the subtle and incipient beginning of form”, “its very first condensation” at its “most subtle state”. The beginning of form – that here should be intended as closer to the concept of matter, which can be interested by the phenomenon of condensation – is thus the point of origin (the Mother) of the myriad things. He even draws an analogy between *xingben* and atoms (*yuanzi* 原子) and electrons (*dianzi* 電子) in order to highlight that “it differs from already formed things”, as it is the incipient state of matter. Xiong appears to borrow the term *xingben* from the *Zhi Bei You* 知北遊 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, where, due to its closeness to the concept of matter, Watson translates it as “the body”, while rendering *wuxing* 無形 as “formlessness” in the same passage (Watson 2013, 180).

23 *Wúxíng zhě bù kě míng, jīngshén wúxíng, gù wèi zhī wúmíng* 無形者不可名，精神無形，故謂之無名 (Xiong 2007a, 131).

24 *Yì wúxíng gù, yīng fù shuō yǒu, yuán yǒu qǐ míng, gù yún “yǒumíng”* 異無形故，應復說有，緣有起名，故云“有名” (Xiong 2007a, 131).

25 The translation of this last pair is by Makeham (2023, xxviii).

of visible and tangible form. The second, by contrast, denotes the tendency responsible for the formation of ‘material’ (*se* 色) entities, which possess tangible form and arise through condensation (*ning* 凝).²⁶

As a matter of fact, this binary structure, which lays at the basis of the constant transformation of the cosmos, is frequently juxtaposed to another similar structure employed by the author in his philosophy: the *ti-yong* pair. If read through this lens, *ti* and *yong* appear as merely one of the various ways and terms through which Xiong conveys this concept of complementary dynamism of elements or principles. However, I argue that the *ti-yong* pair – although still binarily configured – is fundamentally different from the abovementioned structure.²⁷ If this is true, then these two should not be juxtaposed and treated as different forms of the same concept. In other words, the *ti* is not equal to ‘spirit’, ‘expansion’, ‘non-being’ or the ‘nameless’; the *yong* is not equal to ‘body’, ‘form’, ‘contraction’, ‘being’ or the ‘named’. Especially with regards to the couple *wu-you*, Xiong explicitly states that “spirit (*jingshen*) is equivalent to non-being (*wu*) and therefore [belongs to] the *yong* of the Dao”, while “*ti* indicates the fundamental substance (*shiti*) which is equivalent to the Dao” (Xiong 2007a, 132).²⁸

Moreover, as mentioned at the outset of this paragraph, Xiong unmistakably states that by addressing the relationship between ‘named’ and ‘nameless’, ‘being’ and ‘non-being’ the original text is actually explaining the “functional manifestation of Dao”. Therefore, the interplay of *wu* and *you*, and of all the equivalent couples, happens at the level of *yong*:

Therefore, one must know that the functional manifestation of the Dao, on one side, appears as spirit (*jingshen*), that is what is referred to as the silent, formless, and nameless. On the other side, from this spirit emerges a re-action, that condenses into tangible forms. [...] Although speaking from the point of view of their origin,

26 It is important to note that when Xiong discusses the interplay between these two tendencies, he appears to draw on the Buddhist notion of ‘conventional truth’ by positing the existence of material and mental phenomena – or *dharmas* (法 法) – only provisionally (*jia* 假). Both their distinct existence and their dualistic characterisation are by-products of our linguistic and cognitive practices. Rather, they should be understood as non-abiding epiphenomena of the ceaseless transformation of the *ti*, generated through contraction and expansion – or any other equivalent pair of terms (Makeham 2015, xlvii-xlix).

27 This is asserted also by Makeham (2023, xxxi), who states that “the constantly turning over”, another name for Reality, “is *ti*, and *xi* and *pi* are *yong*”.

28 *Shén jí wú, nǎi Dào zhī yòng. Tǐ zhě shí tǐ, jí Dào shì yě* 神即無，乃道之用。體者實體，即道是也 (Xiong 2007a, 132).

it can also be said that form and spirit are both manifestations of the Dao. (Xiong 2007a, 131-2)²⁹

We can, thus, reasonably argue that the *ti-yong* pair has only one other equivalent – at least within the text of the letter – which is the relationship between the Dao and the ten thousand things. On the contrary, the relationship between spirit and form has been proved to be expressible through many other terminological forms. The *ti-yong* structure, then, appears to encompass the other type of structure, rather than being its equivalent. If this is correct, Xiong Shili's philosophy seems to allow for analysis on two distinct levels: a cosmological level and an ontological-metaphysical one.

As shown by John Makeham, Xiong Shili himself clarifies this point by stating that “ontology (*bentilun* 本體論), also called metaphysics” is the field that “investigates the Reality of the cosmos (*yuzhou shiti* 宇宙實體)”; while cosmology (*yuzhou lun* 宇宙論) is the field that “explains the cosmos’ myriad images (the phenomenal world)” (2023, xxii). Following this distinction, cosmology – which inquires about entities and phenomena as constantly changing and as subject to laws of space and time (*yuzhou* 宇宙, precisely) – is centred on the dynamic interplay of two different but complementary tendencies: spirit and form, being and non-being, expansion and contraction, and so on. Ontology, on the other hand, addresses the conditions of possibility of the very realm examined by cosmology, as much as its question is about the nature of that *shiti* that enables the realm of *yong* to appear and be manifested.

This two-level distinction, I argue, is eminently at play in the letter, and largely shapes Xiong's reception and interpretation of the DDJ. While the general layout we have described is more or less consistent throughout his works, Xiong's decision of including the *wu(ming)*-*you(ming)* pair within the realm of cosmology – and not that of ontology or metaphysics – is somewhat peculiar, although perfectly coherent with his metaphysical assumptions. He stresses this choice by arguing against Wang Bi's³⁰ commentary to the DDJ:

None of the commentators of the Laozi throughout history has provided a thorough explanation of the meaning of being (*you*) and non-being (*wu*). Even Fusi's profound understanding goes only as far as skimming the surface, by saying “all beings originate from

29 *Gù zhī Dào zhī fāyòng, yī fāng bì fāxiàn wéi jīngshén, suǒwèi jìmò wúxíng ér wèi zhī wúmíng zhě shì yě; yī fāng yòu yóu jīngshén ér fāxiàn yī zhǒng fǎn zuòyòng, jí níng chéng xíngběn. [...] Sui tuīyuán ér yán, yì kě shuō xíng yǔ shén tóng wéi Dào zhī fāxiàn* 故知道之發用，一方必發現為精神，所謂寂寞無形而謂之無名者是也；一方又由精神而發現一種反作用，即凝成形本。[...] 雖推原而言，亦可說形與神同為道之發現。

30 Xiong addresses him by his courtesy name Fusi 輔嗣.

non-being". In the end, it is unclear on what basis he speaks about non-being. This until Tang times, when Lu Xisheng's generation [of scholars] interpreted non-being as *ti* and being as *yong*. This view, albeit coming closer to the truth, still lacks accuracy and truthfulness. (Xiong 2007a, 131)³¹

Xiong seems to be shifting Wang Bi's claim about being and non-being to the cosmological level, instead of the ontological one. This is the only solution in order to avoid the identification of Dao (and, thus, of *ti*) with non-being or nothingness.³² This is typical of Xiong's metaphysical programme and it is one of the main mistakes he ascribes to Buddhism.

This criticism of the postulation of a quiescent, empty or void *ti* – behind the phenomenal realm of the *yong* – is very much present in Xiong's works. Although he is well aware of the aporetic nature of an absolute reality which cannot be properly and directly defined, he still argues for a 'positively' present *ti*. In other words, it can be formally addressed only in negative terms – due to the intrinsic limitations of language –, but its positive nature has to be assumed and, eventually, reached by means of intuition. Xiong explicitly states this in his XWSL, when he talks about a *ti* "which is not empty", and "which is able to be profoundly realised by means of proper attentiveness" (Makeham 2015, 126). This will be the point of rupture with Buddhism (especially Madhyamaka),³³ in so far as, according to Xiong, it fails to establish a correct interpretation of the nature of *ti*.

31 Cónglái zhù Lǎozǐ zhě, yú yǒuwú yì dōu wú quèjiě, suī yǐ Fǔ Sì zhī hēzhì, yì zhǐ fúyóu qí cí yuē: "Fán yǒu jiē shǐ yú wú." Zhōng bù míng yī hé ér yán wú. Zhì Táng Lù Xīshēng bēi, huò yǐ wú wéi tǐ, yǐ yǒu wéi yòng, qí shuō jìn shì ér yóu qiàn jīngshēn 從來注《老子》者，於有無義都無確解，雖以輔嗣之壑智，亦只浮游其詞曰：“凡有皆始於無”。終不明何而言無。至唐陸希聲輩，或以無為體，以有為用，其說近是而猶欠精審。

32 As a side note, Feng Youlan, in his *History of Chinese Philosophy* published between 1931 and 1934, comments on this passage from *Laozi* 1 with a similar concern regarding *wu* and *you*: "Shìwù kě míng yuē yǒu; Dào fēi shìwù, zhǐ kě wéi wéi wú. Rán Dào néng shēng tiāndì wànwù, gù yòu kě chēng wéi yǒu. Gù Dào jiān yǒu wú ér yán; wú yán qí tǐ, yǒu yán qí yòng" 事物可名曰有；道非事物，只可謂為無。然道能生天地萬物，故又可稱為有。故道兼有無而言；無言其體，有言其用。(Things can be named 'you'; the Dao is not a thing and thus can only be named 'wu'. However, the Dao generates heaven, earth and the myriad things. Thus, it can also be named 'you'. Hence the Dao encompasses both *you* and *wu*: *wu* expresses its essence (*ti*), and *you* its function (*yong*)) (Feng 1961, 220).

33 Along with Yogācāra (*youzong* 有宗, Existence School), Madhyamaka (*kongzong* 空宗, Emptiness School) is one of the two main branches (*pai* 派) of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Xiong (2007b, 18-19) describes it as mainly interested in discussing emptiness (*kong* 空), by means of arguments in *via negativa* (*zhequan* 遮詮), with the aim of discarding any form of attachment to phenomena (*zhixiang* 執相) and conceptual elaborations (*xilun* 戲論). He eminently associates this school with the figure of Nāgārjuna (*Longshu* 龍樹) and his *Zhongguan lun* 中觀論 (Treatise on the Middle Way), as well as with the *Da boreboluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經 (Perfection of Wisdom Sutra) and the *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論 (Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom).

Therefore, there appears to be a link between the philosopher's critical remarks to Buddhist interpretations of reality or substance (*ti*) and the distance he marks from Wang Bi's commentary on the nature of *wu* in the DDJ. As a matter of fact, in the letter he also makes explicit that the 'wu' mentioned in the DDJ and in its commentaries, "is named *wu* only because it has no form; it is not [to be intended as denoting] emptiness" (Xiong 2007a, 131).³⁴ This way, Xiong manages to define *wu* (and *wuming*) as something that, albeit without form, is still, precisely, 'something', is still positively present. And this resonates well with Xiong's notion of spirit (*jingshen*), as well as expansion (*pi*), which he then proceeds to equate *wu* to.

3.3 Xiong Shili and the DDJ: Stanza 47

Laozi 47 can roughly be considered as discussing ways and means to gain knowledge (*zhi* 知). As argued by Andreini (2018), this stanza has been read from different perspectives, giving rise to various and diverse interpretations both by ancient commentators and contemporary scholars. Xiong Shili traces in the Laozian verses the assessment of two different ways of gaining knowledge: one oriented outwards, the other inwards.

The first typology is expressed in the DDJ by means of two metaphors: "going out the door" (*chu hu* 出戶) and "peeping through the window" (*kui you* 窺牖).³⁵ The former, according to Xiong, expresses the meaning of being directed "outward" (*wai* 外), which as far as knowledge is concerned, is equal to "establishing the existence of external objects and applying the techniques of observation and measurement" (Xiong 2007a, 140).³⁶ While "peeping through the window" is the action that allows one to see just "a splinter of light", which applied to knowledge refers to the analytical method: in order to "achieve a comprehensive understanding" of a phenomenon, this approach fragmentarily "delves into parts" of it. By building on the images found in the text, Xiong describes this first type of *zhi* as obtained through the "objective method" (*keguan fangfa* 客觀方法): the reference here is at the empirical study of things, which entails

34 *Yǐ wúxíng gù, míng wú, fēi kōngwú zhī wú yě* 以無形故，名無，非空無之無也 (Xiong 2007a, 131). In a further parallel, Feng Youlan also notices that *wu* "is not equivalent to 'null' or zero. The Dao is the general principle by which heaven, earth and the myriad things arise, how can it be equivalent to the nothingness of zero" (*Fēi jí shì líng. Dào jí tiāndì wànwù suǒyǐ shēng zhī zǒng yuánlǐ, qǐ kě wèi wéi dēngyú líng zhī "wú"* 非即是零。道及天地萬物所以生之總原理，豈可謂為等於零之「無」。) (Feng 1961, 221).

35 Translation by Ryden 2008, 99.

36 *Chū hù míng wài, jí shèdìng wàijiè shìwù, ér xíng zhìcè zhī shù* 出戶名外，即設定外界事物，而行質測之術 (Xiong 2007a, 140).

the presupposition of the effective and external existence of such ‘things’ – that can, thus, be determined, measured and acted upon – as well as their calculability. This method is also defined as “analytical” (*jingxi* 精析), in so far as it enables things to be sectioned into analysable parts (*xiwu* 析物), leaving synthesis as a result following this ‘analytical moment’. As anticipated, this modality – expressed by means of the aforementioned metaphors – is linked with the concept of ‘outward’ or ‘external’: things can be analytically measured only because they are thought as isolated, abstracted and external ‘objects’, receptive to the agency of a ‘subject’.

However, as Xiong points out, there is one other type or modality of knowledge, which does not presuppose the subject-object division and which is antithetically defined with the metaphors of “not going out the door” (*bu chu hu* 不出戶):

Now, saying “go not out the door, know all under Heaven” means that there is no need to seek externally, nor to rely on objective methods, to comprehend (*zhi*) the great origin of the world. (This *zhi* is not the same as the *zhi* in *zhishi* [knowledge]; rather, it refers to *zizheng* [to directly experience]. While “the great origin of the world” refers to the Dao (Xiong 2007a, 140)³⁷

Xiong plays on the ambiguity of the term *zhi* 知, generally translated as ‘knowledge’ or ‘to know’, to show that it encompasses two different modalities of approaching things. On the one hand, what has been defined as the “analytical” and “objective” approach (conveyed by the metaphor of “going out the door”) is the first sense of *zhi* as *zhishi* 知識. On the other, *zhi* can also attest for knowledge that comes from direct experience, intuition, awareness. Xiong expresses this second faculty with various terms, such as *zizheng* 自證,³⁸ *mingjue* 明覺,³⁹ *tiyan* 體驗⁴⁰ and *zhengzhi* 證知. These two different faculties, that Xiong here sees

37 *Jīn yuē* “bù chū hù, zhī tiānxià”, shì bù dài wài qiú, jí bù yóu kèguān fāngfǎ ér zì zhī tiānxià zhī dàběn yě (cǐ zhī fēi shì zhīshì zhī zhī, nǎi zìzhèng zhī wèi. Tiānxià zhī dàběn, jí wèi Dào) 今曰「不出戶，知天下」，是不待外求，即不由客觀方法而自知天下之大本也(此知非是知識之知，乃自證之謂。天下之大本，即謂道)。

38 Not to be mistaken for *zizhengfen* 自證分, the third of four aspects of cognition in Yogācāra Buddhism, that Xiong frequently mentions in XWSL and *Fojia mingxiang tongshi* 佛家名相通釋 (Complete Explanation of Buddhist Terms).

39 Translatable as ‘numinous awareness’, *mingjue* is defined by Xiong as the faculty to reach and realise the ultimate reality (Xiong 2007a, 144).

40 As argued by Stanchina (2025, 140), the verbal meaning of *ti* as in *tiyan* or *tihui* 體會 (to directly experience) is “metaphorically bounded to the corporeal sphere (*shenti* 身體) and means to embody, to make something present through your flesh and bones”. For example, the compound *tiwu* 體無 (verb and object) “does not mean contemplating *wu* as an exterior object, but becoming it through the act of *wu-ing*, so to realize the verbalization of the noun in your practical activity”.

as implicitly pointed at in Laozi's words, are traceable back to a pair of concepts he frequently employs in his XWSL: *zhi* 智 (wisdom) and *hui* 慧 (discernment). While wisdom "does not rely on sensory experience, nor on logical inference", discernment aims to "distinguish things" and "pertains to the physical world". As a matter of fact, in order to further clarify its meaning, Xiong Shili resorts to the *Laozi*, arguing that "the *zhi* 智 that Laozi rejected is called 'knowledge' (*zhishi* 知識), what I term *hui* 慧" (Makeham 2015, 25).

Now that the terminology is laid clear, Xiong puts forward one final point. These two faculties, being different in their method, are also different in their object. In his XWSL, Xiong already stressed that "discernment (*hui*) pertains to the physical world" and "its application is limited", while only wisdom (*zhi*) "can be used to perceive Reality (*ti*)" (Makeham 2015, 26). In the letter, he remarks upon this, asking "how could it ever be that [Reality] can be investigated by means of the same techniques applied for analysing external objects", given that it is "absolute", "silent" and "without dimension and form" – with 'external objects' being precisely the opposite:

Being accustomed to discriminating and analysing things, and make it into systematic knowledge, this is termed 'science'. Hence, [taking the] efficacy of science and applying it to the [study of] Dao is definitely inappropriate. Why is it so? Because with regards to science, one has to work externally; [...] as for the Dao, one has to work internally. (Xiong 2007a, 141)⁴¹

Again, the idea of an outward-oriented *vis-à-vis* an inward-oriented knowledge, which Xiong draws from the metaphors employed in the *Laozi*. At this point, it is clear that, albeit not as a whole, the objective and analytical approach (also referred to as 'discernment') is rejected when it comes to the investigation of the Dao. This conclusion is perfectly coherent with his commentary to *Laozi* 1: the Dao cannot be conceived as 'something', which means that it cannot be treated in the same way as any other 'thing' or object of knowledge. Unlike other objects, *shiti*, being the absolute (*juedui* 絕對), is not determinable, nameable and knowable by means of differentiation, discernment and judgment. For these reasons, Xiong resorts to the figure of an inward-oriented investigation, so as to step back from a perspective that sees the absolute substance as an 'object' laying externally, ready to be grasped by a knowing 'subject'.

41 *Xí yú biànxī shìwù, ér chéngwéi yǒu tǒngxì zhī zhīshì, shì wèi zhī xué. Gù yǐ wéi xué zhī gōng ér wéi Dào, bì wú dāng yé. Hé zé? Wéi xué bì yònggōng yú wài, [...] wéi Dào bì yònggōng yú nèi* 習於辨析事物，而成為有統系之知識，是謂之學。故以為學之功而為道，必無當也。何則？為學必用功於外，[...] 為道必用功於內。

Finally, Xiong adds one last layer to this interpretation of *Laozi* 47. The metaphors found in the original text, as shown, are read as revealing the implications of the phenomenon of *zhi*, which encompasses both the analytical and the experiential approaches. Xiong goes one step further: remodelling the text onto his own historical context, he interprets these two different approaches as representing, respectively, the cores of Western and Chinese philosophies:

The method of Western philosophy is the analysis of things. [...] In short, [Western metaphysicians] take the principle to be a ‘thing’ existing in another realm and they infer it relying only on their knowledge. In this sense, [they] regard the principle as being analysable in terms of quantity, quality, relations and so on. [...] Chinese philosophy has a peculiar spirit that pays fundamental attention to the experiential method. With the experiential method, any type of the so-called differentiations, such as inside/outside, subject/object, identity/difference, are unattainable. [...] The principle is ultimately without direction and without form. Hence, it can’t be inferred by means of knowledge. (Xiong 2007a, 126)⁴²

In light of this passage, it is clear that, when Xiong denies the applicability of the analytical method to the study of the Dao, he is not doing so neutrally. He is actually putting forward a critique towards the analytical approach, typical of Western philosophy, to metaphysical matters, contextually reserving a privileged position to Chinese philosophy, the only capable of ‘knowing’ the Dao.

While this understanding was not limited to Xiong, his reasoning still has some originality. First of all, the essentialist view that sees these two traditions in direct opposition stems coherently from Xiong’s commentary to *Laozi* 1, where he clearly differentiated Western cosmology from the Chinese one. The Western idea of a principle that is transcendent, external and creative matches its objective, analytical and ‘outward-oriented’ method of philosophical inquiry. Whereas Chinese cosmology, expressing the idea of a principle that is nowhere else but within ‘this world’ or within ‘this mind’, echoes the

42 *Xíyáng zhéxué zhī fāngfǎ yóu shì xī wù zhī fāngfǎ*. [...] Yàozhī, dōu bǎ zhēnlǐ dāngzuò wàijiè cúnzài de wùshì, píngzhe zìjǐ de zhīshì qù tuīqióng tā, suǒyǐ bǎ zhēnlǐ kànzuò yǒu shùliàng, xìngzhì, guānxì dēngděng kě xī. [...] Zhōngguó zhéxué yǒu yī tèbié jīngshén, gēnběn zhùzhòng tīrèn zhī fāngfǎ. Suǒwèi nèiwài, wú wǒ, yì yī, zhōngzhōng chābiéxiàng dōu bùkě dé. [...] Zhēnlǐ bǐjīng wú fāngsuǒ, wú xíngtǐ, suǒyǐ bùnéng yòng zhīshì qù tuīduó 西洋哲學之方法猶是析物的方法。[...] 要之，都把真理當作外界存在的物事，憑著自己的知識去推窮他，所以把真理看作有數量、性質、關係等等可析。[...] 中國哲學有一特別精神，根本注重體認的方法。所謂內外、物我、一異，種種差別相都不可得。[...] 真理畢竟無方所，無形體，所以不能用知識去推度。

image of an ‘inward-oriented’ investigation. This shows coherence between cosmological and epistemological conclusions.

Finally, it appears that Xiong’s exposition of these structural differences is based on this general assumption: although the metaphysical, cosmological and epistemological aspects, being different manifestations of the core assumption of a system, are all entangled and mutually defined, and they are all contributing factors to historical development, metaphysics has a privileged position in determining everything else. This is eminently evident in the way he discusses the historical development of the two traditions he is considering. In his comment to *Laozi* 47, he seems to present two traditions that are different both in terms of philosophical inclination and historical trajectory without explicitly linking these two parameters. However, at the outset of the letter, Xiong underlines that it is precisely the fact that Chinese philosophy envisions the principle as attainable through experience that “made it difficult for science to be developed [in that context]” (Xiong 2007a, 127).⁴³ The Chinese philosophical approach, having as its main focus a metaphysical principle that is not an ‘object’ that can be grasped, defined and calculated, was never a driving force for the development of the scientific outlook that, instead, was the hallmark of Western philosophy and civilisation. Western metaphysics, precisely because it envisioned a metaphysical principle that is outside and independent from the world, and which can be “discriminated in terms of quantity and quality” (127), has been the propulsive force for the development of logic and science.

Aside from the historiographical accuracy of Xiong’s judgment, his reflection is relevant in so far as it gives us a hint of his philosophy of history, a theme certainly worth of further investigation. The reasons behind China’s backwardness with respect to the West and Japan represented the *vexata quaestio* of Xiong’s time: the scientific and technological development in China was not sufficient to stand its ground to the West, resulting in the Chinese ‘century of humiliation’. In light of this, it is not only a matter of chance that Xiong addresses this problem precisely in a letter to a European. On the contrary, this is a precious testimony of Xiong’s interpretation of the link between cosmology and historical development, and the extent to which the former influences and determines the latter. His reflection resonates with Yuk Hui’s (2016, 19) understanding of “technics” as being “always a cosmotechnics”: different cosmologies bring about different technologies, and, thus, different historical trajectories.

43 *Cǐ děng zhéxué [...] yǐ bù zhòng xī wù zhī fāngfǎ gù, jí bù yì fāzhǎn kēxué* 此等哲學 [...] 以不重析物的方法故, 即不易發展科學 (Xiong 2007a, 127).

It is interesting to point out that in China, from the end of the nineteenth century, this problem was expressed by means of the *ti-yong* structure – the same employed by Xiong in his metaphysics. The question was about the extent to which it was possible to adopt Western learning, the *yong*, while still preserving a Chinese core, the *ti*. As argued by Xiong in this letter, China and the West, being different in their *ti* (cosmology), also differ in their *yong* (their historical and technological development).⁴⁴ Cosmology is then a deciding factor in so far as it determines the way in which one perceives and approaches beings and things, both at individual and collective level. This is probably one of the reasons behind Xiong Shili's interest in metaphysics and cosmology, making his engagement in these fields all but neutral and ahistorical.

4 Concluding Remarks

As stated at the outset of this article, the present study aimed at achieving two distinct purposes. On the one hand, shedding light on this letter, as a testimony of a fragment of intercultural history. As shown, this epistolary exchange accounted for an ongoing relationship between Chinese and Italian intellectuals of the twentieth century. Luciano Magrini sponsored much of the research done on Chinese culture and philosophy in Italy at the time and, thanks to his expertise and his acquaintances, the manuscript that he received from Xiong circulated widely, even to the point of reaching, by means of Xiao Shiyi's work, Martin Heidegger.

On the other, this letter is an interesting and rich repository of philosophical speculation as well as a rare example of Xiong Shili's comprehensive engagement with Daoist philosophy. To this regard, it is relevant to highlight that his vision will be completely revised 22 years later, in his TYL, where he blames Laozi and Zhuangzi

⁴⁴ As argued by Alitto (1979, 6), the *zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong* 中學為體，西學為用 (Chinese learning for fundamental principles; Western learning for practical application) formula, employed by the “cautious Chinese reformers”, was based on the “theoretical distinction between principles and practical applications”. Considering Xiong's *tiyong bu er* philosophical assumption, it would be logical to conclude that such a reformist position is incompatible with his system. However, in his XWSL, Xiong only disapproves of the use of discernment (which in the letter is associated to Western learning) “to solve metaphysical problems”, while if it is “used only in the universe that constitutes our every-day lives—that is, within the world of physical principles—that of course it cannot be deemed inappropriate” (Makeham 2015, 26).

for (1) treating the Dao (the *ti*) as a transcendent principle,⁴⁵ (2) explaining this principle in terms of nothingness and pure stillness and (3) giving rise to weak and passive political and moral theories (Makeham 2023, 6-7). While entailing a complete retraction of the content of the letter, this later development of Xiong's interpretation of Daoist philosophy is worth of further investigation, although it lies beyond the scope of this article.

Leaving aside this later overturning, Xiong's commentary to the DDJ, although structured in a quite traditional fashion, still conveys a modern outlook as far as historical background and philosophical speculation are concerned. As this letter suggests, Xiong's hermeneutical approach to ancient texts is close to what Huang Chun-chieh (2005, 288-9) defines a "intersubjective" or "experiential" reading of the classics,⁴⁶ vis-à-vis an "objective" and "philological" one. While this latter works by means of textual annotations and takes the original meaning of the text as something that can be objectively reconstructed, the presupposition of the first approach is that the classics, albeit bearers of a trans-historical truth (or *dao*), can be fully comprehended only when instantiated in the concrete historical and personal experience of the interpreter. This approach is defined "inter-subjective" in so far as the *dao* of the text "is not something that exists objectively, independent of the interpreter", and, as argued by Ng On-cho (2005), it revokes the Gadamerian positive revaluation of tradition and 'prejudice' as the wealth of experience that makes the very act of comprehension possible. Read through this lens, Xiong's interpretation of the *Laozi* is not to be regarded as an anachronistic reading of an ancient text, but as the only way of properly 'instantiating' its *dao*.

45 Interestingly enough, this conclusion is close to Wang Fuzhi's 王夫之 (1619-1692) evaluation of the DDJ, a thinker that strongly influenced and shaped Xiong's philosophical ideas. As shown by Black (1989, 67), in fact, according to Wang, "If the ordinary world (characterized by diversity) came from a non-ordinary source (transcending diversity), then that source would be something existing in its own right apart from the ordinary. Such was the fault he found in the Taoism of the *Lao-tzu*".

46 It is interesting to point out that Huang explicitly relates Ma Yifu 馬一浮 (1883-1967), friend of Xiong an author of a preface to the XWSL, to the first hermeneutical method (Huang 2005, 288).

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Mapping Referents in Chinese and Italian: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Anaphora, Deixis, and Other Referential Relations

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Abstract This paper provides an overview of different types of referential expressions, including *deixis* and *anaphora*, and explores the various linguistic forms used to encode these relationships in Chinese and Italian – two languages that exhibit distinct reference-tracking systems: the former largely inference-based, the latter primarily morpho-syntactic. To this end, the study examines empirical data from both large and small corpora, spanning a range of genres and text types. The contrastive analysis includes both qualitative and quantitative observations, highlighting similarities and differences, and revealing novel or previously understudied patterns. The results have implications not only from a typological perspective but also for applied fields such as natural language processing and second/foreign language acquisition.

Keywords Referential relationships. Anaphora. Deixis. Corpus study. Chinese. Italian.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Laying the Background: Review of the Literature. – 2.1 Reference, Deixis, and Anaphora. – 2.2 Typological variation. – 3 The Study: Objectives, Methodology, and Data. – 4 The Analysis: Referential Mapping and Forms. – 4.1 Exophora. – 4.2 Anaphora. – 5 Conclusions.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-04-23
Accepted 2025-06-30
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Morbiato, A. (2025). "Mapping Referents in Chinese and Italian: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Anaphora, Deixis, and Other Referential Relations". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 385-424.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/012

1 Introduction

Referential relationships are a fundamental yet complex component of linguistic organisation.¹ They are crucial for ensuring textual coherence and cohesion, as they form the backbone of a text. For discourse to be intelligible, reference and cohesion are essential – particularly for tracking participants accurately across sequences of clauses. This means that in a text describing situations involving the same participants or entities, these must be referred to in ways that allow readers or listeners to identify them as either the same as or distinct from those mentioned earlier (Foley, Van Valin 1984, 1). Crucially, languages achieve this through different, often more or less overt, means. In other words, the mechanisms for encoding reference and maintaining cohesion vary cross-linguistically, ranging from morphosyntactic markers to pragmatic inference. This makes referential relationships and reference tracking among the most intricate areas of linguistic inquiry. Their complexity stems not only from the remarkable variation observed across languages but also from the inherently multifaceted nature of reference itself, which intersects with semantics, semiotics, syntax, and pragmatics. Over the past few decades, linguistic research has increasingly focused on reference and anaphora, with efforts aimed at explaining anaphoric phenomena within various syntactic theories and at exploring the significant cross-linguistic variation in reference-tracking mechanisms across typologically distant language families (cf. next section). However, substantial gaps remain – especially in the systematic classification of referential phenomena and in cross-linguistic, corpus-informed comparisons involving Chinese and Romance languages.

This paper aims to provide an overall sketch of the various types of referential relationships, outlining both primary categories and subtypes, and to examine how these are realised in Chinese in comparison with Italian and English. This work builds on the scheme of referential relationships outlined by Korzen (2023), and investigates its applicability to account for the forms and phenomena observed in the research corpus. The analysis is based on natural linguistic data, including large-scale, generalised corpora such as the PKU CCL corpus (Peking University) and the BCC corpus (Beijing

¹ Simplified Chinese characters and the Pinyin romanisation system have been used throughout the article. The glosses follow the general guidelines of the Leipzig Glossing Rules. Additional glosses include: BA = ‘Chinese 把 *bǎ* patient marker’; BEI = ‘Chinese 被 *bèi* marker’; COS = ‘change of state’; EXP = ‘experiential aspect marker’; SFP = ‘sentence final particle’; SP = ‘structural particle’. List of abbreviations: C. = Chinese; E. = English; I. = Italian. In this paper, the term ‘Chinese’ refers to *Pǔtōnghuà*, the standard language of the PRC.

Language and Culture University). Additionally, specific cases are examined where significant differences emerge among the languages under investigation. To this end, the analysis is conducted on small, self-compiled corpora tailored to each case study, consisting of texts in genres where these specific referential relationships are particularly prominent. When necessary, native Chinese speakers were also consulted. This is a preliminary study and does not aim for exhaustiveness, but rather seeks to lay the groundwork for a practical taxonomy of referential relationships in Chinese and beyond, while encouraging further comparative research – particularly through larger corpus-based studies.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the background and a brief review of key studies in the literature on referential phenomena, though a detailed discussion of terms like anaphora and deixis falls outside the scope of this work. Section 3 outlines the study's objectives and framework and describes the data and corpora used. Section 4 presents the analysis and discusses the main findings. Section 5 concludes with a summary of the results and their implications.

2 Laying the Background: Review of the Literature

Referential relationships, reference tracking, and anaphora constitute particularly complex linguistic phenomena. This complexity is closely tied to the remarkable variation across languages in how referential relationships are encoded, as well as the inherently intricate nature of reference itself. In Chomsky's words,

There are certain phenomena, like anaphora, which have just been extremely good probes; they've raised questions that have to be answered, and there are other things that also do, but I haven't seen many. [...] It seems to me to make good sense to work intensively in those subareas where sharp questions seem to arise that can be answered in ways that have an explanatory character. (Chomsky 1982, 83)

Since Chomsky's observation, research on anaphora and reference has grown into a substantial and multifaceted area of linguistic investigation. Scholars have pursued two main lines of inquiry: on the one hand, explaining coreference and anaphoric phenomena within various syntactic frameworks; on the other, investigating the cross-linguistic diversity of reference-tracking mechanisms across typologically distant language families – work that has led to the development of typologies of reference-tracking systems. This has resulted in a diverse and heterogeneous body of literature, rooted in

different theoretical frameworks, which in turn has contributed to terminological confusion. Terms like reference, deixis, and anaphora are not easy to define, given the vast literature on these matters that spans multiple fields and disciplines, including semiotics, philosophy, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, natural language processing, and psycholinguistics – cf. the related entries in reference books such as Horn and Ward (2004) and Mey (2009). Hence, no unified consensus exists on how key notions such as *anaphora* and *deixis* should be defined (Cornish 2010; Huang 2000a; Levinson 1983), nor on how a taxonomy of referential relationships should be structured. The next sections will attempt to provide a brief sketch of this complex landscape.

2.1 Reference, Deixis, and Anaphora

Reference is a fundamental concept in linguistics that deals with how language users identify and point to entities in the world or in discourse. It encompasses the ways in which words, phrases, and expressions link to people, objects, events, and abstract concepts, allowing for meaningful communication. The scholarship on the concept of reference itself is highly complex and multifaceted, as it intersects various disciplines, from philosophy and psycholinguistics to semiotics and linguistics. Given this breadth, a comprehensive account lies far beyond the scope of the present paper. However, borrowing Sidnell and Enfield's words,

if human cognition is fundamentally intentional in the sense of being about or directed towards something, reference is a form of shared intentionality in which the cognitive focus of two or more persons is aligned and jointly focused [...] reference involves directing the attention of some other person to something, [which] may or may not be present in the immediate context of interaction. (Sidnell, Enfield 2017, 217)

In the latter part of their sentence, some scholars locate the distinction between deixis and exophoric reference on one hand, and anaphora and endophoric reference on the other – an issue that the following paragraphs will attempt to explore. However, there remains limited consensus in the literature regarding the precise definitions of these terms (see Green 2009 for discussion).

In traditional linguistics, deixis (from Ancient Greek: δεικτικός, lit. 'display, demonstration, or reference') is generally understood to be the linguistic encoding of references pointing to the spatiotemporal context of the utterance (Stapleton 2017). Typical examples include terms such as *I*, *here*, *now*, and *this* – Bühler's so-called 'pure deictic

terms'. These terms are heavily context-dependent and represent a kind of cognitive centre of orientation for the speaker. More in general, deixis refers to the phenomenon wherein understanding the meaning of certain words and phrases in an utterance requires contextual information (Stapleton 2017). In other words, it concerns the ways in which languages encode or grammaticalise features of the context of utterance or speech event (Levinson 1983). For instance, saying "this one" while pointing to a book anchors the reference to the speaker's location, indicating relative proximity (see Levinson 1983; 2006) for a more detailed overview of the concept of deixis). Following Fillmore, Levinson (1983, 65) conveniently distinguishes between the interpretation of deictic forms through either gestural or symbolic usage. Gestural deixis requires direct sensory monitoring of the speech event, often involving a selecting gesture, as in *This one's genuine, but this one is a fake*. Symbolic deixis, on the other hand, relies on contextual knowledge, such as spatial or participant parameters, to be understood, as in *This city is really beautiful*. The complexity of this notion is nonetheless suggested by the vastness of the literature on the matter, which reveals diverse interpretations.²

The term anaphora (from Ancient Greek: ἀναφορά, 'carrying back upstream'), in modern linguistics, has received various definitions, as well (Huang 2015). Generally, it refers to a relation between two or more linguistic expressions, where the interpretation of one (the anaphor or anaphoric expression) is determined by the interpretation of the other (the antecedent), as in (1) (Huang 2000a; 2015). This conception of anaphora is generally accepted by linguists both within formal and functional approaches, including several pragmaticians (cf. Cornish 2010), and lies at the basis of psycholinguistic experiments on anaphor interpretation as well as computational approaches to automatic anaphora resolution (see, e.g. Mitkov 2022). In the Chomskyan generative tradition, the term is instead used to distinguish between different types of NPs: an NP with the features [+anaphoric, -pronominal], such as a reflexive, is an anaphor, while an NP with the features [-anaphoric, +pronominal], like the pronoun *tā* 'he' in (2), is pronominal. Hence, the focus is more on the notion of coreference, with anaphors defined as inherently bindable expressions, in accordance with the Binding Theory. Often, the term anaphora is presented in a dichotomy (as e.g. Halliday, Hasan 1976; Korzen 2023), referring to expressions whose antecedent appears earlier in the discourse, in contrast to *cataphora*, where the antecedent appears later, as in (3). In this sense, both anaphora and cataphora can be subsumed under the term *endophora*, which refers to the relation where the anaphoric or cataphoric expression and its

² See e.g. Green 2009; Levinson 1983; Sidnell, Enfield 2017; Verschueren 2009.

antecedent are within the same text or conversation. In contrast, the term exophora refers to cases where the antecedent of a deictic or indexical expression lies outside the text or conversation, as in (4) (cf. also **fig. 1**).

(1) (examples from Huang 2015) 小明₁說₁/自己₁困了。

<i>Xiǎo</i>	<i>Míng₁</i>	<i>shuō</i>	<i>ø₁/zìjǐ₁</i>	<i>kùn-le</i>
Xiao	Ming	say	3SG/SELF	sleepy-PFV/COS

‘Xiǎo Míng said that he was sleepy’.

(2) 小明₁喜歡他₂。

<i>Xiǎo</i>	<i>Míng₁</i>	<i>xǐhuan</i>	<i>tā₂</i>
Xiao	Ming	like	3M.SG

‘Xiǎo Míng likes him’.

(3) *ø₁* 越說, 小明, 越高兴。

<i>ø₁</i>	<i>yuè</i>	<i>shuō</i>	<i>Xiǎo</i>	<i>Míng₁</i>	<i>yuè</i>	<i>gāoxìng</i>
	more	say	Xiao	Ming	more	happy

‘The more he talks, the happier Xiǎo Míng becomes’.

(4) [Referent in the physical environment and with selecting gesture]

他不是校长。

<i>tā</i>	<i>bù</i>	<i>shì</i>	<i>xiàozhǎng</i>
3SG	NEG	be	principal

‘He’s not the principal’.

In some other approaches (Cornish 2010; 2014), deixis and anaphora are conceived differently. The former serves to orient the addressee’s attention toward a new discourse entity, while the latter occurs when an anaphoric form – together with the clause in which it appears – signals the continuation of a previously established focus of attention. This is seen within discourse, understood as a hierarchically structured and dynamically evolving sequence of communicative acts aimed at achieving a specific goal, and shaped by the context in which it unfolds. In other words, anaphoric references maintain the discourse focus on an entity, situation, or proposition already introduced, thereby ensuring topic continuity. Deictic references, by contrast, signal topic shifts – that is, they redirect the addressee’s or reader’s attention to a new, discourse-initial entity, situation, or proposition. This approach aligns – albeit with differences in terminology – with observations found in several studies on the matter, e.g. topic continuity (Givón 1983), discourse topics and activation costs (Chafe 1994), pragmatic accounts of discourse anaphora (Huang 2000b), and accessibility theory (Ariel

2009), among others. These scholars focus more on activation states and processing costs, as well as topic continuity, rather than directly addressing the specific mechanisms of anaphoric relationships themselves. While these theories emphasise the cognitive processes involved in tracking referents, they provide valuable insights into how the accessibility of antecedents and the continuity of discourse topics influence anaphoric form choice and interpretation. For example, Huang (2000b) outlines the following distributional pattern of anaphora in conversation: (i) Establishment of reference tends to be achieved through the use of an elaborated form, notably a lexical NP. (ii) Shift of reference tends to be achieved through the use of an elaborated form, notably a lexical NP. (iii) Maintenance of reference tends to be achieved through the use of an attenuated form, notably a pronoun or a zero anaphor. Certainly, as Green (2009, 181) observes, “pragmatic approaches have in general attempted to blur the line between deixis and anaphora”, contributing to terminological confusion and controversies. This can be seen, for example, in sentence (4) above, where Huang’s analysis does not fully clarify whether the pronoun *tā* ‘he’ is deictic or anaphoric. Nonetheless, as Green (2009, 181) continues, “the tendency to see one element (deixis) as essentially exophoric and the other (anaphora) as intralinguistic remains”. This study aligns with this tendency.

2.2 Typological Variation

Another major factor that makes anaphoric phenomena difficult to account for within linguistic formalisms and theories is the cross-linguistic diversity reference tracking exhibits. Languages, and language families, vary significantly in their mechanisms for signalling and tracking anaphoric relationships. In some, morpho-syntactic structures play a prominent role in disambiguation, whereas in others, resolution relies heavily on inferential processes informed by context, shared knowledge, and world understanding. This has motivated scholars to develop typologies of reference-tracking systems, identifying gender, switch-reference systems, switch-function, and inference-based reference tracking systems (Comrie 1989; Foley, Van Valin 1984). These systems reflect a spectrum of linguistic strategies, with gender systems relying primarily on lexical and morphological cues, switch-reference and switch-function systems being predominantly grammatical, while inference systems being largely pragmatic and inference-based. A later typology outlined by Huang (2000) differentiates only between two types: syntactic and pragmatic, to which Italian and Chinese belong, respectively. A preliminary comparison between Chinese and Italian is offered by Huang (2016). Italian marks gender and

number on nouns, including common nouns, and exhibits rich verbal morphology signalling number and person, which is absent in Chinese.

(5) (Huang 2016)

I. *cammin-o* ‘walk-1SG’, *cammin-i* ‘walk-2SG’, *cammin-a* ‘walk-3SG’, *cammin-iamo* ‘walk-1PL’, *cammin-ate*, ‘walk-2PL’, *cammin-ano* ‘walk-3PL’

C. 走 *zǒu* ‘walk’

This morphological marking plays a crucial role in referential tracking by establishing agreement between nouns, pronouns, and verbs. This enables several important functions. First, finite verbs agree in number and person with the subject, which facilitates the retrieval of omitted (dropped) pronominal subjects in unmarked, non-contrastive sentences (5I). These subjects can thus be systematically recovered through verbal inflection. Second, agreement allows for flexible word order – even highly ambiguous permutations such as OVS – without necessitating changes to verbal diathesis, such as active-passive alternations. Despite these variations, the syntactic and semantic roles of noun phrases can still be recovered, as illustrated in (6B) (note that English does not permit such word order without significant rephrasing in translation):

(6)

A.	Dove	<i>sono</i>	<i>fini-ti</i>	<i>gli</i>	<i>spaghe-tt-i?</i>
	where	be.PRS.3PL	end-PTCP.3PL.M	the.M.PL	spaghetti-M.PL
	‘Where did the spaghetti go?’				
B.	<i>Li</i>	<i>ha</i>	<i>mangia-ti</i>	Alberto.	
	3PL.M.ACC	have.PRS.3SG	eat-PTCP.3PL.M	Alberto(M.SG)	
	O	V		S	
	‘Alberto ate them’.				

More broadly, agreement facilitates the interpretation of referents across sentences. In certain constructions – particularly those involving past participles – object agreement in gender and number is also available, as seen in ***Li ha mangiati*** in (6B) and ***Non li avrebbe infastiditi*** in (7d) below:

- (7) (Gombrich, *Breve storia del mondo*; cf. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/anafora_\(Enciclopedia-dell'Italiano\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/anafora_(Enciclopedia-dell'Italiano)/))
- (a) Si chiam-ava(3SG) Rodolfo d'Asburgo(M.SG),
 (b) e i(M.PL) princip-i(i(M.PL) tedesc-hi(M.PL) lo(3M.SG) avevano(3PL) elett-o(M.SG) re nel 1273 nella speranza che,
 (c) essendo ø un(M.SG) cavalier-e(M.SG) pover-o(M.SG) e sconosciut-o(3M.SG),
 (d) ø non li(3PL) avrebbe(3SG) infastidit-i(PL) troppo.
 (e) Ma ø non avevano(3PL) fatto i conti con la sua(SG) abilità e la sua(SG) giustizia.
 'His name was Rudolf of Habsburg, and the German princes had elected him king in 1273 in the hope that, being a poor and unknown knight, he would not bother them too much. But they had not reckoned with his ability and his justice'.

A very different picture emerges with Chinese, which notoriously lacks gender or number marking on nouns or verbal morphology. Rather, Chinese, along with many other East and Southeast Asian languages, relies on an inference-based reference-tracking system, where disambiguation is mainly achieved through pragmatics and world knowledge (Huang 1994; 2000a; 2015). These systems are characterised by the extensive use of zero anaphora, which can appear in various syntactic positions (8) and is capable of recalling antecedents across adjacent sentences, even in the presence of intervening referents (cf. Tao, Healy 1996 and Xu 2015 for examples). When more referents are present, both salience and reference play crucial roles in antecedent retrieval (Huang 1994; Xu 2015). Huang argues this is evident in (9), where the control verb *shuofu* 'persuade' can prefer either agent/subject or patient/object control depending on context and real-world knowledge. In (9a), *shuofu* typically expresses a request for action, favouring patient/object control, but in (9b), inference/real-world knowledge overrides other constraints, as it is more likely that a surgeon will operate on a patient, not the other way around.

(8) (Huang 2016, 30)

A: 老师₁有没有表扬过小明₂?

B: Ø₁表扬过Ø₂。

A:	<i>lǎoshī₁</i>	<i>yǒu</i>	<i>méi</i>	<i>yǒu</i>	<i>biǎoyáng-guò</i>	<i>Xiǎomíng₂?</i>
	teacher	have	NEG	have	praise-EXP	Xiaoming

B: Ø₁ *biǎoyáng-guò* Ø₂

B: Ø praise-EXP Ø

A: 'Has the teacher₁ ever praised Xiaoming?' B: '(She₁) has praised (him)'.

(9) (Huang 2016, 31)

a. 病人₁说服医生₂明天给他₁开刀。

bìngrén₁ shuōfú yīshēng₂ Ø₂ míngtiān gěi tā₁ kāidāo
patient persuade doctor tomorrow for 3sg operate

‘The patient₁ persuaded the surgeon₂ that (he₂) will operate on him₁ tomorrow’.

b. 医生₁说服病人₂明天给他₂开刀。

yīshēng₁ shuōfú bìngrén₂ Ø₁ míngtiān gěi tā₂ kāidāo
doctor persuade patient tomorrow for 3sg operate

‘The surgeon₁ persuades the patient₂ that (he₁) will operate on him₂ tomorrow’.

These peculiarities have attracted considerable attention from linguists regarding how Chinese, unlike English, uses fewer overt markers while still allowing for accurate disambiguation, as well as on the mechanisms and reasons behind the licensing of zero anaphora.³ This is why the majority of existing studies on Chinese focused on the linguistic forms and mechanisms employed to encode anaphora as well as the challenges of incorporating these phenomena into various syntactic frameworks (cf. Huang 1994; 2000a; 2015, among others). Huang (1994), for example, aimed to demonstrate the inadequacy of a purely syntactic approach to explaining Chinese anaphora. Through an in-depth analysis of phenomena such as long-distance reflexivisation, zero anaphora, and discourse anaphora, he developed a pragmatic theory of anaphora grounded in the neo-Gricean framework of conversational implicatures. His later cross-linguistic study (2000) explored various formalisms, both syntactic and semantic, including Optimality Theory (OT) and, to a lesser extent, Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar (GPSG) and Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG). Despite this broader scope, his work maintained its primary focus on the role of pragmatics in licensing and disambiguating anaphora.

Despite the increasingly extensive body of literature – of which the above sections provide only a brief outline – many aspects of referential relationships remain underexplored. Few corpus-informed studies have examined in detail the differences in the linguistic forms that encode various types of referential relationships across two (or more) typologically diverse languages. In particular, few corpus-informed studies have examined in detail how different linguistic forms encode various types of referential relationships across two (or more) typologically diverse languages. In the case of Chinese, while considerable attention has been devoted to anaphora – especially zero anaphora – most existing work has concentrated on mechanisms

³ Huang 1984; Li, Thompson 1979; Pu, Pu 2014; Sun 2020; Tao, Healy 1996; 2005; Tu 2010.

for choosing among anaphoric forms, the cognitive processes underlying antecedent retrieval, and the challenges of accounting for certain phenomena (such as zero anaphora and long-distance reflexivisation) within formal syntactic frameworks, as e.g. zero anaphora and long-distance reflexivisation (Huang 1994; 2000a). Conversely, to my knowledge, few studies have attempted to develop a systematic taxonomy of the different types of relationships and corresponding forms through which reference and anaphora are realised. Furthermore, with some exceptions primarily focused on English, little research has explored the function-form mappings of anaphoric phenomena in Chinese in a comparative perspective. Lastly, considerable confusion persists in the literature on Chinese regarding the boundaries between anaphora, deixis, and other related categories. Yet these concepts are essential – not only for theoretical linguistic analysis but also from an applied perspective. For instance, they are central to current research in natural language processing (see Morbiato 2024 for an overview), and they remain largely overlooked in language pedagogy despite their clear relevance for communicative competence.

3 The Study: Objectives, Methodology, and Data

Given the background outlined so far, this study aims to explore how different types of referential relationships are expressed in Chinese, in comparison with Italian and, where relevant, English. Specifically, it proposes an overall scheme of referential relationships based on Korzen (2023), outlining both major categories and subcategories. Korzen sketches a taxonomy of referential relationships – what he describes as a text’s referential skeleton – based on Italian, illustrating various types of anaphoric, cataphoric, and exophoric reference, with particular attention to the relatively underexplored phenomenon of so-called *unfaithful anaphors*. His work is adopted as a baseline here, as it offers one of the most detailed analyses and taxonomies of Italian data, thus enabling a more nuanced comparison with Chinese. The present study aims to assess the applicability of Korzen’s taxonomy to Chinese data in comparison with Italian, and, where relevant, English. It also seeks to identify any new patterns or forms of reference that emerge from the corpus analysis. To this end, examples that closely resemble those discussed in Korzen (2023) were identified in the corpora to ensure greater comparability. This allows for a more controlled evaluation of whether the same referential categories and distinctions hold across languages, or whether language-specific patterns emerge in the Chinese and Italian data.

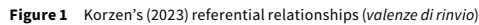
This study is broadly situated within the field of cross-cultural pragmatics (House, Kádár 2021). As Alcón and Safont Jordà (2008,

193) note, pragmatic competence requires “knowledge of those rules and conventions underlying appropriate language use in particular communicative situations and on the part of members of specific speech communities”. While similarities in the use of anaphoric forms are attested crosslinguistically, languages do not necessarily employ the same set of referring expressions to encode a given relationship. Even when forms appear superficially similar, they may differ in terms of coding principles such as informativity, rigidity, and attenuation (Ariel 2009, 3). This approach builds on contrastive pragmatic research – namely, the systematic comparison of language use across comparable texts or corpora – and employs ancillary methods that precede or follow contrastive analysis, serving as pilot studies to identify relevant features for comparison. It relies on several key criteria: the use of corpora, the application of both qualitative and quantitative methods, the inclusion of variation or multiple languages to ensure comparability, and the consideration of different data types – both naturally occurring and elicited. For the present study, a variety of linguistic data were gathered from both large-scale, generalised corpora and small, self-compiled corpora. Data collection utilised two primary large-scale corpora: the PKU CCL Corpus, Peking University, and the BCC Corpus, Beijing Language and Culture University. In addition, the study also consists of three case studies on self-compiled corpora consisting of texts from specific genres, including news reports on car accidents, procedural texts such as recipes, and political discourse. These genres were selected because they specifically exhibit the target phenomena, as will be explained in each dedicated section. As preliminary steps, native Chinese speakers were also consulted to provide translations for specific examples from the literature and judgments regarding the naturalness or acceptability of various referential forms in particular contexts. The scope of the data collected reflects the exploratory nature of this study, which is based on preliminary qualitative and quantitative observations. Accordingly, the study does not aim for representativeness or exhaustiveness. Instead, it seeks to offer initial insights that may guide and inspire further comparative research – particularly through larger, corpus-based investigations focusing on specific genres.

4 The Analysis: Referential Mapping and Forms

The sections that follow explore the mapping of referential relationships and the different forms they display in the analysed dataset. Figure 1 illustrates Korzen’s (2023, 107) scheme of referential relationships: exophoric reference points to an element outside the text or discourse itself, which could consist of an element

context exophoric



As previously mentioned, exophora is broadly intended as a type of reference in which a linguistic expression points to an entity or information external to the text or conversation, yet mutually accessible to both the speaker and the listener. Korzen's scheme of exophoric relationships predicts two broad types of identification, individual and categorial identification, with possible subcategorisations as illustrated in figure 2 and in subsections below [fig. 2]. Typically, the entity being exophorically referred to is present in the context of the discourse (*deixis*), which makes it cognitively salient for both interlocutors (Chafe 1976). In other cases, it points to an entity which is identifiable by both interlocutors in that accessible / present in the knowledge they share (*common knowledge*), although it is not available in the immediate context – cf. Prince's definition (1981) of "New Unused". Another case is *generic* reference, which points to a category of things that is mentally identifiable by the hearer (for an overview of the notions of accessibility, identifiability, and shared knowledge, I refer the reader to the seminal works by Chafe (1976), Prince (1981), Lambrecht (1994), *inter alia*.

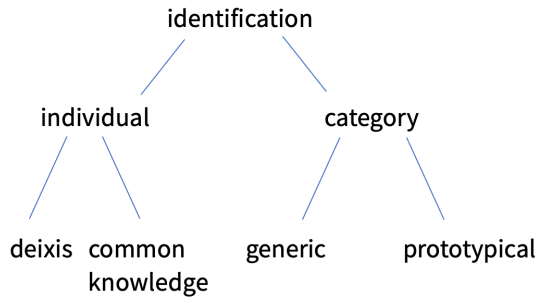


Figure 2 Exophoric reference (Korzen 2023, 108)

The following sections are devoted to identifying these subtypes and the forms they can be encoded with across the three languages, as well as exploring any additional patterns.

4.1.1 Deictic Reference

In deictic reference, individual entities (either animate or inanimate) are identifiable because they are present in the context of the discourse. Korzen's deictic reference broadly corresponds to what Levinson (2006) calls gestural usage, which necessarily involves understanding the context and the spatial-temporal positioning of the interlocutors. Deictic reference can be encoded through various linguistic means across all languages. Here are some Chinese examples drawn from corpora that are very similar to the Italian sentences discussed by Korzen (2023), to ease the comparison:

(10) C. 瞧你的狗, 咬我的新鞋! (BCC)

qiáo	nǐ	de	gǒu	yǎo	wǒ	de	xīn	xié
look.at	2SG	SP	dog	bite	1SG	SP	new	shoe

I. Guarda, il tuo cane sta morsicando le mie scarpe nuove!

E. Look, your dog is biting my new shoes!

(11) C. 瞧瞧那个。它太美妙了 (BCC)

qiáo-qiáo	nà	ge	Ø	tài	měimào	le
look.at-look.at	that	CFL	Ø	too	beautiful	SFP

I. Guarda quello. Ø (È) davvero bello!

E. Look at that. It's wonderful!

(12) C. 那只猫很漂亮 (BCC)

<i>nà</i>	<i>zhǐ</i>	<i>māo</i>	<i>hěn</i>	<i>piàoliang</i>
that	CLF	cat	very	beautiful

I. Molto bello quel gatto.

E. That cat is beautiful.

(13) C. 你瞧我。 (CCL)

<i>nǐ</i>	<i>qiáo</i>	<i>wǒ</i>
2SG	look.at	1SG

E. Look at me!

I. a. Guarda me!

b. Guardami!

(14) C. 你要吗? (BCC)

<i>nǐ</i>	<i>yào</i>	$\emptyset$	<i>ma</i>
2SG	want	$\emptyset$	Q

I. Ne vuoi?

E. Do you want some?

(15) C. 好漂亮! (BCC)

$\emptyset$	<i>hǎo</i>	<i>piàoliang</i>
	very	beautiful

I. $\emptyset$ Molto bello!

E. $\emptyset$ So beautiful!

All three languages make use of full NPs determined by demonstratives, possessive pronouns, articles/number-classifier constructions,⁴ demonstrative headless NPs/pro forms (including pronouns), and zero forms. A first difference can be seen in possessive modifiers, which in Italian are determined by the article – absent in both Chinese and English (10). Moreover, English differs from Italian and Chinese in that pronominal subjects cannot be omitted across sentences (11E), whereas such omission is permissible in both Chinese and Italian (11C-11I), although for different reasons (see Section 4.2.1). Another substantial difference lies in the distinction between weak and strong pronouns in Italian – a feature that is absent in both English and Chinese. Weak pronouns include, for example, accusative-case

⁴ A well-known difference between the three languages concerns the article versus classifier system. Italian and English exhibit an article system, a feature not shared by Chinese, which instead exhibits a demonstrative/numeral plus classifier (CLF) noun modification.

suffixes such as -mi, -ti, -lo, and partitive pronouns like *ne*. The weak pronoun in (13Ia) conveys unmarked deictic reference, while the strong pronoun in (13Ib) feels marked, often carrying additional emphasis, such as contrast – (13Ib) means ‘look at me, not at someone else’. Lastly, partitivity is conveyed differently in the three languages: in (14), Chinese employs a zero, while Italian and English use pronouns, the former the clitic *ne*, the latter the pronoun *some*.

Korzen notes that deixis can also be *indirect* (or *associative*), i.e. refer to entities that are not directly perceivable but are linked to present and visible referents or contexts. Typical examples include signs or labels. For instance, in the following examples, the underlined phrases indicate any potential entities within the temporal and spatial context of the utterance. These may be specific (as in (16), where the dog owner can identify the specific dog) or nonspecific (as in (17), referring to any wild birds which visitors reading the sign might encounter). Indirect or associative deixis is characterised by limited linguistic realisations. According to Korzen (2023), Italian only allows noun phrases with a definite article (which includes contracted prepositions).⁵ In fact, plural bare nouns are also allowed (18). Chinese, conversely, employs bare nouns or nouns modified by descriptive adjectives (16-17C), while English allows all the above means:

(16) C. 当心恶犬 (CCL)

<i>dāngxīn</i>	<i>è-quǎn</i>
beware	vicious-dog

I. Attenti al cane!

E. Watch out for the dog!

(17) C. 不要喂饲野鸟 (BCC)

<i>bùyào</i>	<i>wèisì</i>	<i>yě-niǎo</i>
NEG.IMP	feed	wild-bird

I. Non dare da mangiare agli uccelli selvatici.

E. Don't feed wild birds.

⁵ In Italian, contracted prepositions, known as *preposizioni articolate*, occur when a preposition combines with the definite article to form a single contracted word. For example, *in + il = nel* ‘in the’, *di + il = del* ‘of the’, and *a + il = al* ‘to the’. This phenomenon is, in Italian, obligatory, standing in contrast to English, where prepositions and articles remain distinct, though some instances of contraction may appear in casual speech, such as informal reductions (e.g. *to the* becoming *ta*).

(18) (source: <https://hinterland.camp/it/>)

Silenzio	notturmo	da-lle	22.00	non	d-are	da	mangi-are
silence	night.time	from-the	10 p.m.	NEG	give-INF	to	eat-INF
a	<u>can-i</u>	e	<u>uccelli.</u>				
to	dog-PL	and	bird-PL				

‘Nighttime silence from 10 p.m.; do not feed dogs or birds’.

4.1.2 Common Knowledge-Driven Identification

Common knowledge-driven identification occurs when a noun phrase points to a referent that is neither directly nor indirectly present in the context but is nonetheless identifiable for both interlocutors, as it is unique within a specific referential universe and cognitively salient to both of them (Levinson 2006 refers to this as symbolic usage). The referential universe may vary in scope/breadth and may consist of a shared context between the interlocutors (e.g. a specific family, city, job context or environment). In this case, while Chinese employs bare noun phrases, English and Italian typically rely on the definite article, although bare nouns may also occur in specific cases (21).

(19) C. 我看见了太阳! (BCC)

wǒ	kàn-jiàn-le	tàiyáng
1SG	see-RES-PVF	sun

I. Ho visto il sole!

E. I saw the sun!

(20) C. 我今天见到校长了。 (Source: book 暗之匙)

wǒ	jīntiān	jiàn-dào	xiào-zhǎng	le
1SG	today	see-RES	school-principal	PVF/COS

I. Oggi ho visto il preside.

E. Today I saw the school principal.

(21) C. 我真想立刻见到妈妈 (BCC)

wǒ	zhēn	xiǎng	lìkè	jiàn-dào	māma
1SG	really	want	immediately	see-RES	mother

E. I so want to see mom right away.

I. Voglio vedere mamma/la mamma subito.

One last case, not covered in Korzen’s outline, involves indefinites introducing previously unmentioned referents into discourse; in this case, the referent may be either specific (i.e. identifiable by the speaker only) or not (unidentifiable for both). These are generally encoded as indefinite noun phrases (with indefinite articles/adjectives

in Italian and English and with the numeral *yī* ‘one’ + CLF or else as postverbal bare NPs in Chinese, although see Morbiato 2020 for a quantitative and qualitative corpus-based account of sentence-initial indefinites (so-called 无定NP主语句 *wúding NP zhǔyǔ jù*) in Chinese).

(22) C.在窗边他看见了一个鸟笼养着一只金丝雀 (BCC)

<i>zài</i>	<i>chuāng-biān</i>	<i>tā</i>	<i>kàn-jiàn-le</i>	<i>yī</i>	<i>ge</i>	<i>niǎolóng</i>
at	window-side	3SG	see-RES-PFV	one	CLF	birdcage
<i>yǎng-zhe</i>	<i>yī</i>	<i>zhī</i>	<i>jīnsiquè</i>			
raise-PROG	one	CLF	canary			

E. At the window he saw a cage with a canary.

I. Alla finestra vide una gabbia con un canarino.

In Chinese, a key difference between indefinite noun phrases and (proper) names/bare NPs lies in the importance of the entities they introduce as potential discourse topics. Xu’s (2010) study on narrative Chinese discourse shows that 53.8% of entities introduced by names or bare noun phrases are never mentioned again, compared to only 4.8% for those introduced by indefinite noun phrases. Entities introduced by indefinite noun phrases are referred to far more frequently later in the text, with an average of 15.8 mentions, rising to 22.4 for those introduced by existential-presentative constructions, such as *cóngqián*, *yǒu* ‘long ago, there was’ in (23). These findings suggest that indefinite noun phrases, particularly in existential-presentative constructions, play a crucial role in introducing major discourse topics in Chinese. Overt pronouns, such as *tā* ‘he’ in (23b), along with zero pronouns, demonstrative expressions, and bare noun phrases referring to entities already introduced into discourse seem then to perform more the function of topic maintenance and reference tracking (anaphora), which we will examine in greater in detail in Section 4.2.

(23) (Xu 2015) (a) 从前, 有个勤劳的铁匠, (b) 他有个儿子, (c) 快满二十岁了...

(a)	<i>cóngqián</i>	<i>yǒu</i>		<i>ge</i>	<i>qínláo</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>tiějiàng</i>
	long.ago	there.be		CLF	hard.work	SP	blacksmith
(b)	<i>tā</i>	<i>yǒu</i>	<i>ge</i>	<i>érzi</i>			
	3SG	have	CLF	son _i			
(c)	<i>Ø_i</i>	<i>kuài</i>	<i>mǎn</i>	<i>èrshí</i>	<i>sui</i>	<i>le</i>	
	<i>Ø_i</i>	soon	reach	twenty	year.old	cos	

‘Long ago, there was a hardworking blacksmith. He had a son who was nearly twenty’.

4.1.3 Case Study 1: Exophoric Coreference in Political News Reports

Korzen (2023, 109) observes that, in Italian, a further exophoric phenomenon is also attested, which he calls exophoric coreference. Here, the same referent is pointed to exophorically by two distinct noun phrases with lexically different heads. In the example below, the two noun phrases *il Presidente della Repubblica* and *il Capo dello Stato* refer to the same specific referent. In Korzen's view, they each identify the referent exophorically and independently of one another: the latter would, in other words, not constitute an anaphoric form.

(24) (Korzen 2023, 109)

Oggi il Presidente della Repubblica Sergio Mattarella terrà il suo tradizionale discorso di fine anno, il primo dell'era Giorgia Meloni. Il Capo dello Stato parlerà...

'Today, the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, will deliver his traditional end-of-year speech, the first of the Giorgia Meloni era. The Head of State will speak...'.

In Italian, such occurrences are common in journalistic genres and narrative texts, where synonymic substitution is employed to avoid repetition. This raises the question of whether similar strategies are found in Chinese. According to the native speakers consulted in the present study, this strategy does not appear to be available: once a referent is introduced, it is typically recalled using lighter noun phrases, such as bare noun phrases with proper nouns or pronouns (thus falling into the category of coreferential anaphora, Section 4.2). This is their translation for (24):

(24') 今天, 意大利共和国总统塞尔焦·马塔雷拉将发表他一年一度的年终讲话, 这将是乔尔吉娅·梅洛尼执政以来的首次讲话。马塔雷拉总统将会谈到.....

<i>jīntiān</i>	<i>Yìdàlì Gònghéguó</i>	<i>zǒngtǒng</i>	<i>Sàirǚqiáo Mǎtǎlélǎ</i>	<i>jiāng</i>
today	Italy Republic	president	Sergio Mattarella	fut
<i>fābiǎo</i>	<i>tā</i>	<i>yì-nián-yí-dù</i>	<i>de</i>	
deliver	3SG	one-year-one-time	SP	
<i>niánzhōng jiǎohuà</i>	<i>zhè</i>	<i>jiāng</i>	<i>shì</i>	
year-end speech	this	fut	be	
<i>Qiáo'ěrjǐyà Méiluóní</i>	<i>zhízhèng</i>	<i>yǐlái</i>	<i>de</i>	
Giorgia Meloni	govern	since	SP	
<i>shǒucì jiǎohuà</i>	<i>Mǎtǎlélǎ</i>	<i>zǒngtǒng</i>	<i>jiāng huì</i>	<i>tándào</i>
first speech	Mattarella	president	fut	talk.about

Sentence (25), from a news article, similarly displays a heavy noun phrase *Zhōngguó guójiā zhǔxí Xí Jìnpíng* 'President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping' which is later referenced by repeating only the proper noun, *Xí Jìnpíng*:

(25) (source: <https://www.zaobao.com.sg/>)

中国国家主席习近平星期三(12月18日)下午抵达澳门, [...]。 (one sentence follows)

这是习近平担任国家主席任内第三度访问澳门...

<i>Zhōngguó</i>	<i>guójiā</i>	<i>zhǔxí</i>	<i>Xíjìnpíng</i>			
China	state	chairman	Xi.Jinping			
<i>xīngqīsān</i>	<i>(12 yuè</i>	<i>18 rì)</i>	<i>xiàwǔ</i>	<i>dǐdá</i>	<i>Àomén</i>	
Wednesday	(Dec.	18th)	PM	arrive	Macao	
<i>zhè</i>	<i>shì</i>	<i>Xíjìnpíng</i>	<i>dānrèn</i>	<i>guójiā</i>	<i>zhǔxí-rèn</i>	<i>nèi</i>
this	be	Xi.Jinping	serve.as	state	chair-person	in
<i>dìsān</i>	<i>dù</i>	<i>fǎngwèn</i>	<i>Àomén</i>			
third	time	visit	Macao			

'Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Macau on Wednesday afternoon (December 18) [...]. This is Xi Jinping's third visit to Macau during his presidency...'

However, one may wonder whether such cases might emerge if a larger body of texts is considered. Is this phenomenon also attested in Chinese newspapers? To what extent do Chinese and Italian differ in coreference encoding? These questions have been addressed through a corpus study conducted on political news reports, covering diplomatic travels by the presidents of China and Italy, consisting in 60 texts, 30 for each language.

In 100% Italian texts, repetition avoidance was achieved, in addition to proforms and faithful anaphors - i.e. NPs with the same head nouns (cf. Section 5.2.1), through a number of synonyms, such as *il Presidente Mattarella* - *il Capo dello Stato* (cf. Section 5.2.2), as in (26):

(26)

Il giorno successivo, sabato 9 novembre, il Presidente Mattarella ha incontrato il Primo Ministro, Li Qiang, e il Presidente dell'Assemblea Nazionale del Popolo, Zhao Leji. Al termine dei colloqui, il Capo dello Stato ha poi deposto una corona al Monumento degli Eroi del Popolo in Piazza Tiananmen...

'The following day, Saturday, November 9, President Mattarella met with Prime Minister Li Qiang and the Chairman of the National People's Congress, Zhao Leji. At the end of the talks, the Head of State laid a wreath at the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square'.

On the contrary, no such instances were found in Chinese, which only employed proforms and faithful anaphors - i.e. NPs with the same head nouns, as e.g. *Yìdàlì Gònghéguó Zǒngtǒng Sà'ěrjiā · Mǎtǎlélā* (*Sergio Mattarella*) 'The President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella' and *Mǎtǎlélā Zǒngtǒng* 'President Mattarella' in (27), or *Guójiā Zhǔxí Xí Jìnpíng* and *Xí Jìnpíng* in (28). Full NP repetitions were also observed.

(27) 意大利共和国总统塞尔焦·马塔雷拉(Sergio Mattarella)于今天即11月12日结束了对中华人民共和国的国事访问。在意大利与中华人民共和国建交55周年前夕,此次访问证实了意大利进一步深化双边关系的意愿。

Yìdàlì Gònghéguó Zǒngtǒng Sàirǐjǐo · Mǎtǎlélǎ (Sergio Mattarella) yú jīntiān jí 11 yuè 12 rì jiéshù le duì Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó de guóshì fǎngwèn. Zài Yìdàlì yǔ Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó jiànjiāo 55 zhōunián qiányè, cǐ cì fǎngwèn zhèngshíle Yìdàlì jìnyībù shēnhuà shuāngbiān guānxì de yìyuàn.

11月8日星期五,中华人民共和国主席习近平在人民大会堂为马塔雷拉总统举行了欢迎仪式,并进行了双边会谈。

11 yuè 8 rì xīngqīwǔ, Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó Zhǔxí Xí Jìnpíng zài Rénmín Dàhuìtáng wèi Mǎtǎlélǎ Zǒngtǒng jǔxíng le huānyíng yíshì, bìng jìnxíng le shuāngbiān huìtán.

‘The President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, concluded his state visit to the People’s Republic of China on November 12. This visit, taking place on the eve of the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Italy and the People’s Republic of China, reaffirmed Italy’s commitment to further deepening bilateral relations. On Friday, November 8, President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China hosted a welcome ceremony for President Mattarella at the Great Hall of the People and held bilateral talks’.

(28) 2024年11月8日下午,国家主席习近平在北京人民大会堂同来华进行国事访问的意大利总统马塔雷拉举行会谈。

2024 nián 11 yuè 8 rì xiàwǔ, Guójiā Zhǔxí Xí Jìnpíng zài Běijīng Rénmín Dàhuìtáng tóng lái Huá jìnxíng guóshì fǎngwèn de Yìdàlì Zǒngtǒng Mǎtǎlélǎ jǔxíng huìtán.

习近平指出, 今年是中意建立全面战略伙伴关系20周年。

Xí Jìnpíng zhǐchū, jīnnián shì Zhōng-Yì jiànli quánmiàn zhànlüè huǒbàn guānxì 20 zhōunián.

‘On the afternoon of Nov. 8, 2024, President Xi Jinping held talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing with Italian President Mattarella, who is in China for a state visit. Xi noted that this year marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Italy’.

4.1.4 Categorical Identification and Generic Reference

In Korzen’s outline [fig. 2], the second major type of exophoric reference is categorical identification, more commonly referred to in linguistic literature as generic reference. Korzen further refines this category by distinguishing between generic and prototype reference. In the case of generic reference, the noun phrase denotes an entire category rather than an individual referent, presenting a description or evaluation as universally applicable to all members or subsets of that category (29-30). Alternatively, in prototype reference, the noun phrase points to a representative member of the category, serving as a generalised example of that class (31):

(29) C. 坐汽车比火车贵八九倍 (source <https://www.sohu.com/>)

zuò	qìchē	bǐ	huǒchē	guì	bā-jiǔ	bèi
sit	car	compare	train	expensive	8-9	time

I. Usare l'auto costa da otto a nove volte di più che prendere il treno.

E. Driving a car is eight to nine times more expensive than taking a train.

(30) C. 老虎是猫科动物 (source <https://www.sohu.com/>)

lǎohǔ	shì	māokē	dòngwù
tiger	be	feline	animal

I. La tigre è un felino.

E. The tiger is a feline.

(31) C. 我已经买车了 (BCC)

wǒ	yǐjīng	mǎi	chē	le
1SG	already	buy	car	PFV/COS

E. I've already bought a car.

I. Ho già comprato la macchina

While the above examples involve bare NPs in Chinese and definite-article-marked NPs in Italian, as noted by Korzen, data show that indefinite NPs may also carry generic reference in all three languages:

(32) C. 一个年轻人应当有志气。 (Lu, Pan 2009, Morbiato 2018)

yí	ge	niánqīng-rén	yīngdāng	yǒu	zhìqì
one	CLF	young-man	should	have	ambition

I. Un ragazzo giovane dovrebbe avere un po' di ambizione.

E. A young man should be ambitious.

(33) C. 咱生个孩子吧。 (CCL)

zán	shēng	ge	háizǐ	ba
1PL	be.born	CLF	child	SFP

I. Facciamo un bambino.

E. Let's have a baby.

4.2 Anaphora

With regard to anaphora, Korzen (2023) proposes a scheme with a threefold division: coreferential, associative, and resumptive anaphors [fig. 3]. Coreferential anaphora (identity) involves an anaphor that refers back to a noun phrase (NP) in the preceding context, with both the anaphor and the antecedent pointing to the same entity. For example, in the sentence John was tired. He went to bed, he is a

coreferential anaphor referring to *John*. While coreferential anaphora is the most straightforward and widely studied form of reference, associative and resumptive anaphora are often more complex, as they involve more nuanced relationships and therefore merit closer attention. Associative anaphora, also known as partial coreference or bridging, refers to something that is contextually or logically connected to the antecedent, as in *We checked the picnic supplies. The beer was warm*. This type of anaphora relies on shared knowledge, derived either from the immediate discourse or from the broader context. Resumptive anaphora, finally, involves the use of an anaphor to refer back to an entire clause, sentence, or a portion of it – often to emphasise or elaborate on previously mentioned information. For instance, in *The car broke down. It happened in the middle of the highway*, the word *it* is a resumptive anaphor referring not just to *the car*, but to the entire event of the car breaking down.

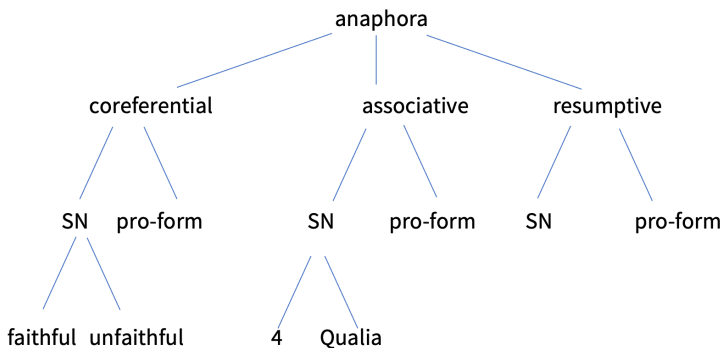


Figure 3 Anaphoric relationships (slightly adapted from Korzen 2023, 110)

4.2.1 Coreferential Anaphora

Coreferential anaphors are expressions that refer back to a specific antecedent previously introduced in the discourse. As in deictic reference, both definite noun phrases (34a-b) and pro-forms (34c) can be used. When a full noun phrase is used, Korzen (2023) distinguishes between faithful anaphora, where the head of the NP is lexically identical to the antecedent (34a), and unfaithful anaphora, where the head differs lexically, often being a hypernym, as e.g. *car* and *vehicle* in (34b).

(34) (Korzen 2023, 110)

- Ho visto un'automobile. non conosco. (a) *L'automobile* era di una marca che
(b) *Il veicolo* era di una marca che non
conosco.
(c) Non l'avevo mai vista prima.
'I saw a car. (a) *The car* was of a brand I don't know.
(b) [...] *The vehicle* was of a brand I don't
know
(c) I had not seen it before'.

A few observations on Korzen's example are, however, in order. As he states, it is a well-known fact that the anaphoric strength of a noun phrase exceeds that of a pronoun. In other words, strong anaphoric devices, such as full noun phrases, serve to either introduce entirely new referents into the discourse or to reintroduce previously mentioned, cognitively active referents after a significant absence or when other intervening referents have been introduced. Conversely, weaker means (e.g. pronouns or zero anaphors) are typically used to encode informationally given or highly accessible items.⁶ This, however, implies that (34a) and (b) above would be appropriate, for instance, only in a context where another utterance intervenes between the two, such as (34a') below. Furthermore, sentence (b) sounds quite unnatural in a conversation context as that imagined by Korzen. A term like *il veicolo* would be more appropriate in contexts such as news reports or official documents (e.g. police reports on car accidents).

(34a') Ho visto un'automobile nel cortile ieri sera. C'erano anche un motorino e una bici. *L'automobile* era di una marca che non conosco.

'I saw a car in the courtyard last night. There was also a scooter and a bicycle. The car was of a brand I don't know'.

Proforms may also include zero anaphora (dropped pronouns). However, a noteworthy point concerns the licensing conditions for zero anaphora in these three languages. With rare exceptions, English allows coreferential subject omission only in adjacent clauses and never across sentence boundaries and does not permit zero anaphora in object position (exceptions include, for example, recipe texts and certain other genre-specific text types). Italian, as said earlier, allows the omission of all pronominal subjects (pro-drop), as the subject can be inferred from verb inflection agreement. However, pronominal

⁶ Ariel 2009; Chafe 1994; Givón 1983; Huang 2000b.

objects must be overt, at the very least encoded by a clitic. Finally, Chinese permits the omission of both verbal arguments, even across different clauses (see Morbiato 2024, 127).

(35) E. **He** dressed up, $\emptyset_j$ went down the stairs_k, $\emptyset_j$ walked out **the front door**_i. Then **he** closed **it**_j behind him.

I.	$\emptyset_j$	Si	vest-ì,	$\emptyset_j$	scese	le	scale _k
		REFL	dress.up-PST.3SG		go.down-PST.3SG	the	stairs
e	$\emptyset_j$	usc-ì	da-lla	porta d'		ingresso _i	
and		exit-PST.3SG	from-the	door of		front	
Poi	$\emptyset_j$	la _i	chiu-se	a-lle sue	spalle.		
Then		3SG.F close-PST.3SG	at-the his	shoulder			

C. 他穿好衣服, 走下楼梯, 走出前门。然后就顺手把门关上了。

tā _j	<i>chuān-hǎo</i>	<i>yīfú</i> ,	$\emptyset_j$	<i>zǒu-xià</i>	<i>lóutī</i> _k
3SG	dress-RES	cloth		walk-down	stairs
$\emptyset_j$	<i>zǒu-chū</i>	qián-mén _i		<i>ránhòu</i>	
	walk-exit	front-door		afterwards	
$\emptyset_j$	<i>jiù</i>	<i>shùnrshǒu</i>	<i>bǎ</i>	mén _i	<i>guān-shàng-le</i>
	then	smoothly	BA	door	close-up-PFV/COS

4.2.2 Unfaithful Anaphora

According to Korzen, unfaithful coreferential anaphors are noun phrases whose heads differ lexically from their antecedents, often taking the form of hypernyms or synonyms (34b). These anaphors serve two main functions. The first is stylistic, aimed at avoiding repetition – a common preference in certain genres such as journalistic writing, where Italian in particular tends to discourage reiteration. This use contributes to lexical variation within the text, a phenomenon especially prominent in Italian. Lexical variation, however, generally reduces anaphoric strength compared to lexical identity. As a result, demonstratives – e.g. *quel* in (36), which explicitly anchor the anaphor to its antecedent within the same co-text, occur more frequently in unfaithful than in faithful anaphora (Korzen 2023, 114):

(36) Non si vuole con ciò pretendere che gli Stati Uniti cambino il proprio sistema, anche se sono molte e autorevoli le voci che si sono levate in quel paese [→ gli Stati Uniti] a chiedere l'adozione di una legislazione in questa materia.

'This does not intend to claim that the United States should change its system, even though many authoritative voices have risen in that country [→ the United States] to call for the adoption of legislation on this matter'.

The second function of unfaithful anaphora relates to information structure: such anaphors introduce new information about the antecedent, adding descriptions, evaluations, or other details. For instance, in journalistic style, an unfaithful anaphor may broaden or reframe the antecedent to convey new content. This practice is found in both English and Italian, where such expressions enrich the discourse by layering additional meaning onto the initial referent.

(37) Tra i due litiganti, prova ad inserirsi il terzo incomodo: Cameron. *Il leader britannico* ha incontrato sia Putin che Obama, ed ora vuole giocarsi le sue carte.
'The US-Russia duel. [...] Between the two quarrellers, Cameron, a third nuisance, tries to join in. *The British leader* met both with Putin and Obama and now wants to play his cards'.

Korzen's comparison of Italian and Danish reveals a significantly higher frequency of variation across different linguistic levels in Italian, including in coreferential anaphora. This variation is shaped not only by language-specific and cultural norms but also by text type: it is more frequent in "creative" genres (e.g. narratives, descriptions, arguments) than in technical, legal, or regulatory texts, where semantic precision is paramount.

Is unfaithful anaphora also available in Chinese? According to native informants, who were asked to translate the examples discussed so far, it is not. Below is a translation provided for (34):

(34'') 昨晚我在院子里看到了一辆汽车,

(a) 是我不认识的品牌。

(b) 那辆汽车是我不认识的品牌。

zuó-wǎn	wǒ	zài	yuànzǐ-lǐ	kàn-dào-le	yī	liàng	qìchē
yesterday-night	1SG	be.at	yard-in	see-RES-PFV	one	CLF	car

(a)	shì	wǒ	bù	rènshí	de	pǐnpái
	be	1SG	NEG	know	SP	brand

(b)	nà	liàng	qìchē	shì	wǒ	bù	rènshí	de	pǐnpái
	that	CLF	car	be	1SG	NEG	know	SP	brand

'I saw a car in the yard last night. That car/it was a brand I didn't know'.

With regard to (24), a faithful anaphora, i.e. the repetition of the NP head *Mattarella*, is felt to be the best option. As for (34), native speakers also reject the unfaithful anaphora option, claiming that only types (a) and (c) are acceptable – i.e. either faithful coreferential anaphora or proform – while the use of synonyms does not seem justified (34''). Nevertheless, a dedicated case study based on corpora will examine this type of anaphoric form in more detail (see Section 4.2.3).

Crucially, Chinese exhibits a particularly interesting pattern resembling unfaithful anaphors, but not found in the other two

languages. It involves a proform, typically a pronoun, preceded by modifiers, usually adjectives or relative clauses. Just like unfaithful anaphors, this structure serves to provide additional information (either objective or subjective, such as the speaker's opinion or stance) about a referent already introduced in the discourse, which is now referred to via a pronominal proform.

(38) 为什么没有人帮帮可怜_的他们? (BCC)

wèishénme	méi	yǒu	rén	bāng-bāng	kělián	de	tāmen
why	NEG	have	person	help-help	pitiable	SP	they

'Why doesn't anyone help 'the pitiable them'?''

(39) 李衍秀今年才开始“改行”种植棉花。37岁的他一直兼任永安村实业公司总经理。(BCC)

Lǐ	Yǎnxiù	jīnnián	cái	“gǎiháng”			
Li	Yanxiu	this.year	only	“switch.profession”			
zhòng	miánhuā	37 suì	de	tā	yīzhí		
plant	cotton	37 year.old	SP	1SG	always		
jiānrèn	Yǒng'ān	cūn	shíyè	gōngsī	de	zǒng	jīnglǐ
hold	Yong'an	village	industry	company	SP	general	jīnglǐ

'Li Yanxiu only this year, 'changed his profession' to cotton farming. 'The 37 yo he'/ Since he was 37 years old, he has been the part-time general manager of the Yongan Village Industrial Company'.

Translation into English and Italian of these sentences is not straightforward, as a similar pattern is entirely absent. This pattern does not fully fall into the category of unfaithful referential anaphors as defined by Korzen, since the head is not a different noun but rather a pronoun. Nonetheless, as said, it exhibits the functions of unfaithful anaphors, namely referring back to a highly accessible referent and adding information about that previously introduced referent. It certainly deserves further attention in corpus-based studies to explore its communicative functions and possible structural tendencies.

4.2.3 Case Study 2: Unfaithful Anaphors in Web News

The issue of unfaithful anaphora in Chinese calls for further investigation. To this end, a case study was conducted on a sample corpus comprising texts on two distinct topics: web news on political trips and general news reports, collecting 60 texts, 30 for each language. The quantitative analysis is compelling and shows that 100% of Italian texts involved repetition avoidance, whereas Chinese texts used either proforms or faithful anaphora, with very few exceptions. Below are some examples where anaphoric forms are highlighted:

(40) Un ordigno ha colpito ieri in tarda serata un'automobile in via Manzoni, a Latina. Il veicolo appartiene a un insegnante.

'An explosive device struck a car late last night on Via Manzoni in Latina. The vehicle belongs to a teacher'.

(41) Scontro alla rotonda tra un camion e un'automobile: grave il passeggero del veicolo.

'Collision at the roundabout between a truck and a car: the passenger of the vehicle is in serious condition'.

(42) In condizioni critiche, il venditore di un'auto su cui lo stesso stava viaggiando lungo via Slovenia. Alla guida, il potenziale acquirente del veicolo, sul sedile di fianco, il proprietario del mezzo. La trattativa, con test incluso, ha preso la piega peggiore alle 17.30, quando l'automobile ha svoltato per immettersi nella rotonda attigua.

'In critical condition, the seller of a car in which he was traveling along Via Slovenia. Driving was the potential buyer of the vehicle, while the owner sat in the passenger seat. The negotiation, including a test drive, took a turn for the worse at 5:30 PM when the car turned to enter the adjacent roundabout'.

In Italian, within this genre, avoiding repetition feels almost obligatory. Notably, in example (42), four different nouns – *auto*, *veicolo*, *mezzo*, and *automobile* – are used to refer to the same entity within a very brief passage consisting of just three sentences. In Chinese, on the contrary, all instances are NPs headed by the word *chē* 'car', with few exceptions where the noun is *chēliàng* 'vehicle', as can be seen below in (43) and (44).

(43) 最近,温州龙港的黄先生向“浙里帮”反映,8月31日一早,他停放在家楼下的轿车发生了一起“离奇”的车祸,而车辆后续的赔偿问题迟迟得不到解决。

<i>zuìjìn</i>	<i>Wēnzhōu</i>	<i>Lónggǎng</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>Huáng</i>	<i>xiānshēng</i>
recently	Wenzhou	Longgang	SP	Huang	Mr.
<i>xiàng</i>	<i>“Zhèlǐ Bāng”</i>		<i>fǎnyìng</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>yuè</i>
towards	“Zheli Bang”		report	8	month
<i>yī-zǎo</i>	<i>tā</i>	<i>tíngfàng</i>	<i>zài</i>	<i>jiā</i>	<i>lóuxià</i>
one-early	3SG	park	at	home	downstairs
<i>de</i>	<i>jiàochē</i>	<i>fāshēng-le</i>	<i>yī</i>	<i>qǐ</i>	<i>“líqí”</i>
SP	car	happen-PFV	one	CLF	“bizarre”
<i>de</i>	<i>chēhuò</i>	<i>ér</i>	<i>chēliàng</i>	<i>hòuxù</i>	<i>de</i>
SP	accident	but	vehicle	subsequent	SP
<i>péicháng</i>	<i>wèntí</i>	<i>chíchí</i>	<i>dé</i>	<i>bùdào</i>	<i>jiějué</i> .
compensation	issue	long.time	get	NEG	resolve

'Recently, Mr. Huang from Longgang, Wenzhou, reported to *Zheli Bang* that on the morning of August 31, his sedan, which was parked downstairs at his home, was involved in a 'bizarre' accident. However, the issue of subsequent compensation for the vehicle has yet to be resolved'.

(44) 通过现场的公共视频可以看到, 撞向黄先生车的是一辆“蔚来”电动汽车, 车辆在拐弯后, 突然加速向着路边冲去。

<i>tōngguò</i>	<i>xiànchǎng</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>gōnggòng</i>	<i>shìpín</i>
through	scene	SP	public	video
<i>kěyǐ</i>	<i>kāndào</i>	<i>zhuàng</i>	<i>xiàng</i>	<i>Huáng</i>
can	see	crash	towards	Huang
<i>xiānshēng</i>	<i>chē</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>shì</i>	<i>yī</i>
Mr.	car	SP	be	one
<i>liàng</i>	<i>“Wèilái”</i>	<i>diàndòng</i>	<i>qìchē</i>	<i>chēliàng</i>
CLF	“NIO”	electric	car	vehicle
<i>zài</i>	<i>guǎiwān</i>	<i>hòu</i>	<i>tūrán</i>	<i>jiāsù</i>
at	turn	after	suddenly	accelerate
<i>xiàngzhe</i>	<i>lùbiān</i>	<i>chōng</i>	<i>qù</i>	
towards	roadside	rush	go	

‘Footage from a public surveillance camera at the scene shows that the vehicle that crashed into Mr. Huang’s car was a NIO electric car. After making a turn, the vehicle suddenly accelerated and veered toward the roadside’.

Based on the corpus examined, Chinese and Italian exhibit contrasting tendencies with respect to faithful versus unfaithful anaphora. In sum, Italian tends to favor unfaithful anaphoric expressions, frequently employing a wide range of synonyms, hypernyms, or semantically related expressions. This flexibility allows for variation in reference while maintaining discourse cohesion. Chinese, by contrast, shows a marked preference for faithful anaphora, where the anaphoric element closely mirrors its antecedent – often through repetition of the lexical head alone – thereby reinforcing cohesion through lexical continuity. These cross-linguistic tendencies reflect distinct discourse strategies and underscore the influence of language-specific constraints on referential coherence.

4.2.4 Associative Anaphora

Associative anaphora (Korzen 2023; Hawkins 1978; Löbner 1998) refers to entities that are associated with, but not identical to, their antecedents. This phenomenon – also known as bridging⁷ plays a crucial role in discourse comprehension. Clark (1977) argues that bridging relies on background assumptions or inference, often involving implicatures. An entity introduced into a discourse – the anaphor – stands in a particular relation to some previously mentioned discourse entity, as in *I looked into the room. **The ceiling** was very high*. This relation is not explicitly stated by linguistic means. Yet it is an essential part of the discourse content because necessary for successfully interpreting a discourse (Irmer 2011, 223). The relationship can take various semantic forms, as illustrated below with examples from the cooking domain. Bridging also presents a significant challenge in natural language processing (NLP), as parsers and computational tools often struggle to establish these associative links (Fang, Baldwin, Verspoor 2022). Bridging cross-reference anaphora is most commonly encoded using definite NPs (Huang 2000a). However, other forms are also possible, including numerals, quantifiers, measure words, and indefinite adjectives or pronouns (highlighted in bold below):

- (45) Lisa opened **the picnic basket**. **The sandwiches** were perfectly crafted. (Setting-element)
- (46) Cut **the lemon** and take **the seeds** out. (Whole-part/necessary parts)
- (47) Slice **the bread** into **pieces**. (Partitive)
- (48) Add all **dry ingredients**, except **yeast**. (Set-membership)
- (49) Add all **fruits**, except **strawberries**. (Hypernym-hyponym)
- (50) Bake for 15 minutes, then turn **the oven** off and let it cook. (Necessary role/tool)
- (51) Remove sinew and membrane from the chicken breast, chop, or mince very finely to almost a paste. Mix with ½ **a tablespoon of the corn flour**, milk [...] With one chopstick pick up **a little of the chicken mixture** and drop that in the stock, go on until **all the chicken** is used up and you have **lots of chicken bits/balls** pea size. (Fang et al. 2022)

One way to formally account for this “associability” is through the four qualia roles introduced in Pustejovsky’s Generative Lexicon (1995, 67, 85). Pustejovsky conceptualises qualia structure as an inherent semantic property of lexemes, consisting of four roles: the formal role (e.g. attributes like shape, size, position, and colour), the constitutive role (e.g. elements such as material, weight, components, and content), the agentive role (e.g. the entities or factors involved

⁷ Asher, Lascarides 1998; Bos, Buitelaar, Mineur 1995; Clark 1977; Huang 2000a.

in the creation of the object), and the telic role (e.g. the object's purpose or function). These semantic roles offer a framework for understanding associative anaphora (Korzen 2023). For example, after introducing a car, one can easily refer to associated entities such as its parts (wheels, doors), properties (colour, size), individuals involved with it (e.g. a mechanic), or its purpose (e.g. a trip).

4.2.5 Case Study 3: Partial Coreference in Culinary Texts

Morbiato (2024) conducted a corpus analysis of evolving anaphors in culinary texts to compare the use of different anaphoric forms (e.g. full NPs over pronouns or zero forms) in Chinese, English, and Italian, based on the corpus also analysed in Morbiato, Cani 2024. The data consists of recipe texts drawn from user-generated blogs, describing similar recipes, i.e. the preparation of pumpkin bread rolls, in English, Chinese, and Italian. Partial coreference can be observed in both languages, although with different means. Here are some text excerpts:

(52) (I.14a)

Mett-ete	in	una	ciotola	il	
put-IMP.2PL	in	a	bowl	the	
quantitativo	di	polpa	di	zucca	(120gr),
quantity	of	pulp	of	pumpkin	
(b)	la	Pasta	(a	pezzetti),	lo
		Madre			
	the	sourdough	in	pieces	the
zucchero	e	<u>parte</u>	d-ell'	<u>acqua</u>	
sugar	and	part	of-the	water	

'Place 120 grams of pumpkin puree, the sourdough cut into pieces, sugar, and a portion of the water (e.g. 100 grams) in the bowl. Mix everything thoroughly to achieve a creamy texture'.

(I.15a)

Aggiung-ete	la	farina	e	gradualmente	
add-IMP.2PL	the	flour	and	gradually	
inseri-te	la	restante	acqua	(b)	può
insert-IMP.2PL	the	remaining	water		might
darsi	che	non	serva	tutt-a	
be	that	NEG	need	all-F.SG	

'Add the flour and gradually incorporate the remaining water; you might not need all of it'.

(I.17a)

Pirl-ate	un	po'	l'	impasto
spin-IMP.2PL	a	bit	the	dough

a	formare	un-a	bell-a	palla	lisci-a
to	form	a-F	nice-F	ball.F	smooth-F
(b)	ole-ate	Ø	leggermente	e	
	oil-IMP.2PL	Ø	slightly	and	
mett-ete-la	in	una	ciotola		
put-IMP.2PL-F.3SG	in	a	bowl		
'Give the dough a gentle spin to form a nice, smooth ball. Lightly coat with oil, place in a bowl'.					

(l.18b)

stend-ete	con	il	mattarello	l'
spread-IMP.2PL	with	the	rolling.pin	the
impasto	sgonfiando-lo	bene	ma	delicatamente,
dough	deflating-3M.SG	well	but	gently
'Take the dough out of the fridge and allow it to come to room temperature. Roll out the dough with a rolling pin, gently deflating it, and stretch it until it reaches around 5 mm in height'.				

In Italian, both measure words and expressions (e.g. *un dito d'acqua* 'a finger of water', *parte dell'acqua* 'part of the water') and clitic partitive pronouns occur, as e.g. 'ne', followed by the quantity *120gr.* 'use 120 g (of it)'. Hypernyms and collective nouns/expressions are used as well, such as *tutto* 'everything in (40) (14c) to denote all the aforementioned ingredients.

(53) (C.9) (a)	南瓜泥 _g	用南瓜	去皮切块	Ø	蒸熟	(b)	然后	Ø	入榨汁机	Ø	榨成汁
	nánguā	ní _g	yòng		nánguā	qù	pí				
	pumpkin	puree _g	TOP	use	pumpkin	remove	skin				
	qiē	kuài	Ø		zhēng-shú	ránhòu	Ø				
	cut	pieces	Ø		steam-cook	then	Ø				
	rù	zhàzhījī	Ø		zhà-chéng	zhī					
	insert	juicer	Ø		press-become	juice					

'For the pumpkin puree, peel the pumpkin, cut into pieces and steam, then put in the juicer and juice'.

(C.10) 然后除黄油外所有材料放入厨师机内。

ránhòu	chú	huángyóu	wài	suǒyǒu	cáiliào _m
then	except	butter	out	all	ingredient
fàng-rù	chúshījī	nèi			
put-insert	mixer	in			

'Place all the ingredients in the mixer, excluding the butter'.

(C.15) 然后Ø整理成面团,入不锈钢碗里。

ránhòu	Ø	zhěnglǐ-chéng	miàntuán	rù	bùxiù
then	Ø	arrange-become	dough	insert	stainless
gāng	wǎn	lǐ			

steel bowl in

'Next, knead the mixture until it forms a dough and place it in a stainless-steel bowl'.

In Chinese, similarly, whole-part relationships are present, as e.g. *nánguā* 'pumpkin' and *pí* 'skin', as well as quantifiers *suǒyǒu cáiliào* 'all ingredients'. Similar considerations hold for English (see Morbiato 2024).

However, in this type of texts a different kind of reference is strikingly observable, and namely expressions that refer to an entity while also indicating a change in its properties or attributes over time. These are, in the literature, referred to as evolving anaphors (Asher 2000; Korzen 2009; Oguz et al. 2022) and are common in procedural texts, as e.g. recipes, where they typically refer to an ingredient or component of a recipe that has undergone some transformation.

Evolving anaphors are observable both the Italian and Chinese corpus, with similar referential mechanisms. For Italian, one instance is (I.15)-(18), where the referent undergoes several changes of states, while being referred to in an array of different ways, e.g. with the same NP (e.g. *l'impasto*, 'the dough' in (17a) and (18.b)), clitic pronouns, zero anaphors (I.17b), or different NPs (e.g. *un composto cremoso* in (I.14) *una bella palla liscia* 'a nice, smooth ball' in (I.17). In Chinese, evolving anaphors abound and are mainly encoded through zeroes, and can be observed in the many passages in example (53) above. Morbiato (2024), along with Korzen (2009) extensively examined this phenomenon, which will therefore not be further discussed here. However, it seems necessary to incorporate this type of anaphoric relationship into the overall framework outlined above, distinguishing it from bridging or associative anaphora. This distinction is further justified by the fact that such a relationship is not easily accounted for within the Qualia Structure theory discussed above, as it involves the evolution of an entity over time, potentially reaching ontological thresholds. For instance, this can include transformations in physical state, such as a solid turning into a liquid, as exemplified in (42), in *Ø rù zhàzhījī Ø zhà-chéng zhī* 'Put in the juicer and juice (lit. to become juice)'.

4.2.6 Resumptive Anaphors

Resumptive anaphors encapsulate not just a noun phrase but an entire preceding clause, sentence, or a substantial portion thereof, thereby foregrounding the topical content of the discourse. In other words, this type of anaphora does not establish reference to a discrete nominal expression but instead targets a broader propositional or discursive segment – typically to emphasise, reiterate, or evaluate a

previously stated idea. Consequently, the antecedent is interpreted as a third-order entity, which demands a particularly “strong” anaphoric form (Korzen 2023). According to Korzen, in Italian (and similarly in English), when the anaphor is pronominal, it is most often a demonstrative pronoun; when it takes the form of a noun phrase, it is typically a demonstrative-modified NP.

(54) (Korzen 2019, 80)

Nel cortile del nostro Parlamento è in corso – forse ancora – un’indegna manifestazione [...]. Penso, quindi, che questo problema vada segnalato [...].

‘In the forecourt of our Parliament a shameful demonstration is – probably still – in progress [...]. I therefore think that this problem should be reported [...].’

(55) (Korzen 2014, 258)

Evidentemente, la questione dell’immigrazione è il fatto principale dietro il quale si nascondono poi tutte le cause di razzismo e di xenofobia, ed è su questo che deve rivolgersi tutta l’attenzione dei governi europei.

‘Clearly, the issue of immigration is the main thing behind which all the causes of racism and xenophobia are hidden, and it is to this that all the attention of European governments must be directed’.

The Chinese forms encoding this type of anaphoric relationship are not dissimilar. Like Italian and English, Chinese also uses demonstratives. Native speakers suggest that the possible translations of (54) and (55) above can be as follows, demonstrating a series of resumptive means that are similar, such as *zhè.ge wèntí* ‘this problem’ in (56) and *zhè zhèng-shì... zhòngdiǎn* ‘this is the key point’ in (57).

(56) 在议会的前院,可能仍在进行一场令人羞耻的示威活动[...]。因此,我认为这个问题应该被报道[...]。

<i>zài</i>	<i>yìhuì</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>qiányuàn</i>	<i>kěnéng</i>	<i>réng</i>
at	forecourt	sp	before	maybe	still
<i>zài</i>	<i>jìnxíng</i>	<i>yī</i>	<i>chǎng</i>	<i>lìng</i>	<i>rén</i>
be.at	hold	one	CLF	lead	people
<i>xiūchǐ</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>shìwēi huódòng</i>	<i>yīncǐ</i>	<i>wǒ</i>	<i>rènwéi</i>
shame	SP	demonstra-tion	therefore	1SG	think
<i>zhè</i>	<i>ge</i>	<i>wèntí</i>	<i>yīnggāi</i>	<i>bèi</i>	<i>bàodào</i>
this	CLF	problem	should	BEI	report

(57) 显然,移民问题是隐藏种族主义和仇外心理根源的核心问题,这正是欧洲各国政府必须全力关注的重点。

<i>xiǎnrán</i>	<i>yímín</i>	<i>wèntí</i>	<i>shì</i>	<i>yǐncáng</i>
obviously	immigration	problem	be	conceal
<i>zhǒngzú.zhǔyì</i>	<i>hé</i>	<i>chóuwài</i>	<i>xīnlǐ</i>	<i>gēnyuán</i>

racism	and	xenophobia	psychol.	root
<i>de</i>	<i>héxīn</i>	<i>wèntí</i>	<i>zhè</i>	<i>zhèng-shì</i>
SP	core	problem	this	right-be
<i>Ōuzhōu</i>	<i>gè-guó</i>	<i>zhèngfǔ</i>	<i>bìxū</i>	<i>quánlì</i>
Europe	each-country	government	must	full-effort
<i>guānzhù</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>zhòngdiǎn</i>		
focus	SP	key.point		

5 Conclusions

This paper offered an overview of the different types of referential relationships, with a particular focus on exophora and anaphora, and detailed the linguistic forms used to encode these relationships in Chinese as compared to Italian and English. Korzen's (2023) work on referential relationships in Italian served as a valuable baseline, allowing the identification of a range of interesting similarities and differences with Chinese and English, although with some remarks and additions as detailed below.

The corpus data showed encoding strategies in the three languages, both with similarities and with some nuanced differences as outlined in the various sections. With regard to exophoric forms, all languages exhibited full noun phrases with demonstratives or possessives, headless demonstrative NPs, pronouns, and zero forms. Despite these similarities, some differences emerged, including the cooccurrence of articles and possessives in Italian, absent in English and Chinese; argument omission is allowed in Italian and Chinese, though for distinct reasons and with different licensing conditions; and different means to express partitivity (with proforms in Italian/English vs. zeroes in Chinese). Finally, Italian distinguishes between weak and strong pronouns – a contrast absent in the other two languages. With regard to generic reference, data show that in addition to bare NPs in Chinese and definite-article-marked NPs in Italian/English, indefinite NPs may also carry generic reference in all three languages.

With regard to anaphora, similar encoding strategies are found, although differences exist in the distribution and licensing conditions of pronouns versus zero forms, with substantial variation across the three languages. Substantial differences, crucially, emerged in the use of synonyms/hypernyms and hyponyms in coreference, both exophoric and anaphoric. Notably, exophoric coreference and unfaithful anaphora, both involving synonyms, are attested in Italian as strategies to avoid repetition and provide additional information. However, these phenomena were not (or only extremely marginally) observed in Chinese, which tends to favour NP repetition, faithful

anaphora, or the use of proforms. This holds across the various text types and genres examined in the case studies' corpus analysis. In particular, unfaithful anaphora (i.e. an NP with a lexically different head, as in "The US president" / "the leader") is not used in Chinese and is only marginally observable. Crucially, however, a distinct pattern emerged that fulfills a similar function, involving a pronoun modified by adjectives or relative clauses. Though the head is pronominal rather than nominal, its communicative function parallels that of unfaithful anaphora: it serves to provide additional (objective or subjective) information about a previously mentioned referent and has a similar information structure. This pattern, while structurally distinct yet functionally akin to unfaithful anaphora, warrants further corpus-based investigation – both to determine its frequency and distribution across genres and registers, and to gain deeper insight into its communicative and discourse-functional roles in comparison to unfaithful anaphora in other languages.

(58) 为什么没有人帮帮可怜^的他们? (BCC)

wèishénme	méi	yǒu	rén	bāng-bāng	kělián	de	tāmen
why	neg	have	person	help-help	pitiable	SP	they

'Why doesn't anyone help 'the pitiable them'?'

Regarding Korzen's framework of referential relationships, it was found to be generally useful, but a few important cases deserve further elaboration. First, specific reference – being identifiable to the speaker but not to the interlocutor – was not included, despite its key role in introducing new discourse referents through indefinite NPs. Moreover, it seems necessary to incorporate evolving anaphora – i.e. anaphoric expressions referring to entities whose properties change over time – into the overall mapping of referential relationships, distinguishing it from bridging or associative anaphora. This distinction is further justified by the difficulty of accounting for such relationships within existing frameworks like the Qualia Structure theory [fig. 4].

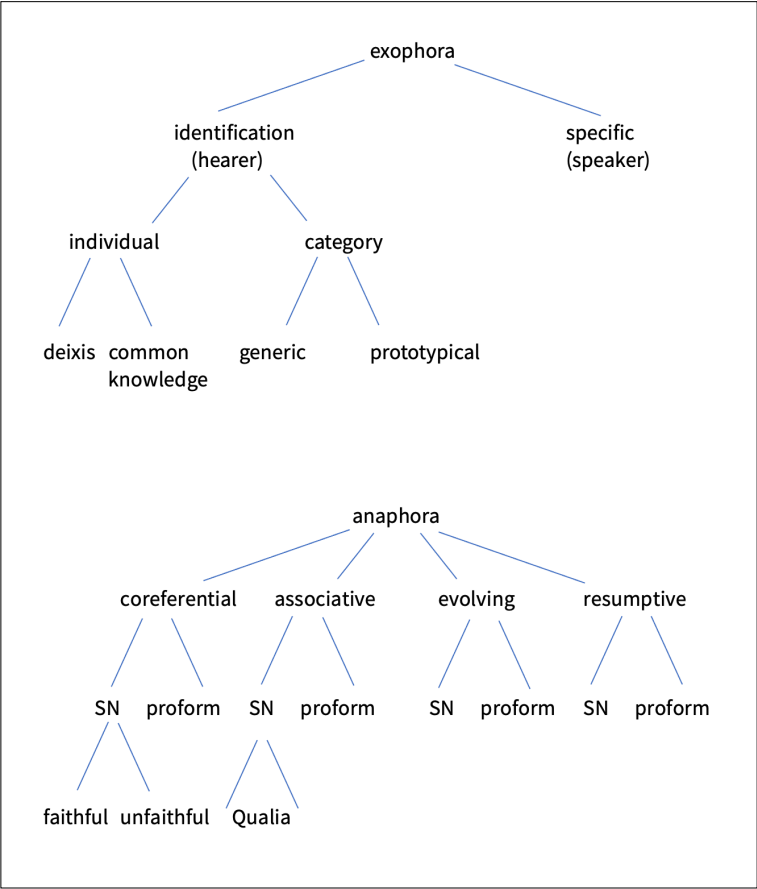


Figure 4 Mapping of exophoric and anaphoric relationships

Overall, the corpus-based comparison proved highly informative, particularly through the construction of comparable datasets within specific genres, which enabled more controlled and meaningful cross-linguistic contrasts. Based on preliminary qualitative and quantitative observations from relatively small corpora, the study does not aim for full representativeness. Nonetheless, it provides valuable initial insights that highlight the potential of corpus-driven research. These findings emphasise the central role of such approaches in revealing both universal tendencies and language-specific strategies in referential practices, and they may serve as a springboard for more extensive future research – especially through larger, genre-specific corpus investigations. It is hoped that this work will help pave the way for such developments.

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Optative *namu* and its Variant *namo* in Old Japanese Sources

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Abstract The prevailing view that *namo* represents an older form of the optative suffix *namu* emerged in the early twentieth century and has since achieved widespread acceptance, becoming nearly unquestioned in modern commentaries and dictionaries. However, such a view rests on tenuous foundations. This paper reexamines several contested attestations in Old Japanese sources as well as long-standing semantic theories that continue to shape scholarly discourse. The findings indicate that *namo* cannot be easily regarded as an antecedent of *namu*, a conclusion with theoretical implications for its etymology that will also be explored.

Keywords Old Japanese. History of grammar. *Namu*. Optative modality. Man'yōshū.

Summary 1 *Namu* or *na-mu*? – 2 Optative *namu* in Old Japanese Sources. – 3 Semantic Analysis of Old Japanese Optative *namu*. – 4 The Variant *namo*. – 4.1 The Reading of 南畝. – 5 The Form *nimo*. – 6 Theories on the Etymology of *namu*. – 7 Conclusions.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-03-04
Accepted 2025-06-30
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Pasa, G. (2025). "Optative *namu* and its Variant *namo* in Old Japanese Sources". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 425-460.

1 *Namu* or *na-mu*?

The homophony between optative *namu*,¹ bound *namu*, and conjectural *na-mu* is one of the most confusing grammatical aspects for learners of classical Japanese.² In particular, optative *namu* and conjectural *na-mu* are difficult to distinguish after *ichidan* and *nidan* verbs, since the *mizenkei* and *ren'yōkei* forms are identical for these conjugations. Their similarity is not only troubling beginners or desultory readers of classical texts, however. Japanese speakers of the Kamakura period seem to have been confused regarding their use too, as documented by two passages of the *Uji shūi monogatari* 宇治拾遺物語 (A Collection of Tales from Uji), both of which, from a grammatical point of view, are idiosyncratic.

- (1) *Sono ie ni ayumi yorite, "Inaka yori noboru fito no yuki tomaru beki tokoro mo saurawanu wo, koyoi bakari yadosase tamawanan ya" to ieba.* (Gosho-bon *Uji shūi monogatari* 4.5)³

He approached that house saying, "Since there is no other place where someone coming from the countryside may stay, pray let me just lodge here tonight".⁴

However, optative *namu* is generally never connected to bound *ya*. Here, the *ren'yōkei* would be appropriate (Negoro 1962), since conjectural *na-mu* + *ya* express request. One might add to Negoro's observation an inverse example, in which conjectural *na-mu* appears in a context where optative *namu* would be expected.

- (2) *Ikitaraba yangotonaku narinu beki mono nareba, "Ikade naku mo narinan".* (Gosho-bon *Uji shūi monogatari* 10.9)

Since, if he (=Mosuke) had lived, he would certainly become a high-ranking official, there were people even thinking: "If only he could somehow disappear!".

The expected form in this context would be *naranan* as the relevant proposition appears to represent a form of desire rather than a 'confident supposition', which is how conjectural *na-mu* would be interpreted. The interpretation of *nan* as a volitive here seems hardly plausible due to the intransitivity of the verb, which is likely

1 The invariant suffix *namu* is referred to as either optative or desiderative in Western grammars. Here, it is defined as optative, as this term more precisely conveys that the realisation of the desired outcome lies outside the speaker's will or agency.

2 The combination of perfective *nu* with conjectural-volitive *mu* serves many functions beyond mere conjecture but will, for convenience, be labeled as 'conjectural *na-mu*', similar to its designation as *suiryō no namu* in Japanese.

3 All quoted passages are transcribed phonologically, with phonetic adjustments to approximate the pronunciation of each period.

4 All translations are by the Author.

the reason why Kobayashi-Masuko (1996) emended the text into *naranan*. In addition, bound *mo* is generally employed in optative *namu* sentences (Koike 2023), while its use with conjectural *na-mu* is unconventional. On the other hand, *ikade* frequently occurs with conjectural *mu* (Yu 1997) but is not generally found with how optative *namu*, which suggests that the author struggled to tell the two constructs apart both in their connection and in the syntactical structure of the sentence they were originally employed in.⁵ These examples prove that optative *namu* had already declined in early Kamakura.

To the aforementioned categories of learners, casual readers, and medieval Japanese speakers, one could introduce an additional group of people confused by the morphological identity of optative *namu* and conjectural *na-mu*: scholars. In fact, even modern grammarians and exegetes of classic Japanese texts struggle in some particularly ambiguous instances, where the context does not readily allow for the exclusion of one of the two forms. As a result, the body of sentences containing optative *namu* varies depending on whose interpretation one is relying on. This applies to both Old Japanese and Heian-period Japanese texts. Other factors, such as differing interpretations of a corrupted text, may also have a minor impact on the resulting corpus. Hence, the first essential step is to review these problematic instances to consolidate a stable dataset of attestations. Since this article focuses on the origins of optative *namu*, only Old Japanese texts will be here considered.

2 Optative *namu* in Old Japanese Sources

One notable example of ambiguity arising from the identical morphology of *ichidan* and *nidan* verbs in their *mizenkei* and *ren'yōkei* forms appears in the third poem of the *Kojiki* 古事記 (Record of Ancient Matters).⁶

- (3) *Awoyama ni pi, ga kakuraba nubatama no₂ yo₁ pa idenamu* [伊伝那牟] *asapi, no₂ wemi, sakaye ki, te [...] i pa nasamu wo.* (*Kojiki* I; 3)

⁵ An alternative approach is to posit a shift in the meaning of optative *namu*, as outlined in Satō 1974.

⁶ Also counted as fourth, as in Takeda 1956; Tsuchihashi 1957; Sasaki 2010 etc. or labeled 3b, as in Sakata 2015. The preceding text is also a poem by Lady Nunakawa, though it ends with *ko₂to₂ no₂ katarigo₂to₂ mo ko₂ wo ba* ‘thus I voiced the happenings’, a formula employed at the end of a few *Kojiki* poems. Here and below the numbering follows Yamaguchi, Kōnoshi 1997 for the *Kojiki*.

This poem is Lady Nunakawa's response to the courtship of the god Yachihoko no Kami, who in the episode had recited the preceding poem outside her abode hoping to be allowed entry. After alluding to her consent to the god's advances, the poem continues with the quoted passage, in which Lady Nunakawa promises herself for the following night. The quoted passage is cited in the entry for the optative *namu* in the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* as the earliest documented example found in the sources. In addition, *idenamu* is interpreted as an optative by Aiso (1939; 1962), Tsuchihashi (1957), Kurano (1958), Ogiwara and Kōnosu (1973), and Nishimiya (1979) among others, all of whom identify Yachihoko no Kami as the subject of the sentence. However, it is difficult to imagine what Lady Nunakawa might be asking Yachihoko no Kami to 'go out of' if *idu* is interpreted literally, nor does it seem plausible to construe the phrase as an invitation for a further visit after dusk, since the following paragraph explicitly states that the god did not enter her room that night.⁷ The absence of honorifics is also telling. The conjectural interpretation, e.g. seen in Takeda (1956), Yamaguchi (1980) and Yamaguchi and Kōnosu (1997) is contextually viable, yielding a meaning as follows.

When the sun hides behind the green mountains, the night shall draw near, dark as the seed of an iris. [...] Only then shall you rest (beside me).

The primary critique of this approach lies in the fact that the phrase **yo₁ idu* 'the night comes out' is not commonly attested in Old or Heian-period Japanese, leading some scholars to view skeptically the possibility of *yo₁* serving as the subject of the verb *idu*. Todani (1961) attempted to address this by identifying *yo₁go₂mori* as an analogous example in which the night is conceptualised as a physical entity, concluding that such construct is indeed plausible. However, his interpretation of *namu* as an optative – 'If only the night would draw' – is questionable, since *namu* typically conveys a counterfactual desire whereas the night drawing is an unavoidable event.⁸ On the other hand, Sakata (2015) proposed an implied *tuki₂* (moon) as the subject of the verb paired with a conjectural interpretation of *namu*. Ōta (1922; 1926), Kurano (1976), Fukunaga (1988) and Nishioka's

⁷ *Kare so₂no₂ yo₁ pa apazu site akuru pi₁ no₂ yo₁ ni mi₁-api siki*; 故其夜者不合而明日夜爲御合也 (Therefore, they did not meet that night, but they met on the night of the next day) (*Kojiki* I).

⁸ When optative *namu* marks an event that will certainly occur, like the drawing of night, the counterfactuality is typically conveyed through adverbs such as *paya*, as seen in *ko₂yo₁pi₁ pa paya mo...* *ake₂namu* 今夜者早毛明者將開 (May tonight end as swiftly as possible) in *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves) 12.2962 (see (9) below). However, there is no trace of such an adverb in the poem under discussion.

(1997), among others, more traditional interpretation of *idenamu* as a volitive with Lady Nunakawa set as subject – originally advanced by Keichū 契沖 in the *Kōganshō* 厚顔抄 (Brazen Notes) and later developed by Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 in the *Kojikiden* 古事記伝 (Commentaries on the *Kojiki*) – is also problematic, as the resulting meaning of ‘I’ll be coming out at night’ appears contradictory to the setting in which the two characters are expected to meet indoors. Even so, it cannot be ruled out that Nunakawa intended to meet the deity outdoors, as she might have been hindered from doing so indoors by the presence of her parents, a theme recurrent in other contexts.⁹ Ultimately, both the conjectural and volitive readings are more convincing than the optative in this case.

Another problematic passage including the form *namu* in the *Kojiki* is found in a poem belonging to the annals of the legendary emperor Keikō 景行.

- (4) *Aratama no₂ to₂si ga ki₁pureba aratama no₂tuki₂ pa ki₁pe₂ yuku ube na ube na ki₁mi₁ matigata ni wa ga ke₁seru osupi₁ no₂ suso₁ ni tuki₂ tatanamu* [多多那牟] *yo₂*. (*Kojiki* II; 28)

Unlike the previous case, the only apparent interpretation of *tatanamu* from a morphological standpoint is as an optative. Still, it is difficult to see how such meaning would fit within the context of this poem. Like the previous case, this poem is presented in the narrative as being recited by a lady – Lady Miyazu – in response to the preceding composition delivered by the male counterpart, Yamato Takeru. Upon reaching Owari, Takeru is warmly welcomed by Lady Miyazu with a lavish banquet, during which he recites his poem after noticing that her dress is stained with menstrual blood.¹⁰ From this context, it seems that *tatanamu yo₂* should be in some way responding to the ending *tatinike₁ri* of Takeru’s poem, but it is unclear how an optative construct may achieve this. The presence of the interjection *ube (na)* (indeed) is also a hurdle to an optative interpretation, as this expression occurs elsewhere with conjectural *mu* but never with optative *namu*. For this reason, most commentators, beginning with Keichū and Norinaga, have emended the text into *tatinamu*, though this should be left as a last resort since *tatanamu* appears consistently in all manuscripts. Many interpretations that do not involve altering

9 E.g. in *Man’yōshū* 13.3312, as pointed out by Norinaga: *okuto₂ko₂ ni papa pa inetari to do₂ko₂ ni titi pa inetari okizataba papa sirinu besi idete yukaba titi sirinu besi* 奥床仁母者睡有外床丹父者寐有起立者母可知出行者父可知 (My mother sleeps in the inner bed, my father in the outer. Should I rise, my mother will know; should I leave, my father will know).

10 *Na ga ke₁seru osupi₁ no₂ suso₁ ni tuki₂ tatinike₁ri* (The moon has risen on the hem of the vest that you’re wearing!) (*Kojiki* II; 27).

the text have been attempted: Aiso (1939; 1962) mentions that the peculiar form might be either due to the sound change *tati*→*tata*, or the insertion of *na* in *tatamu*; Yūkichi (1956) proposes that it reflects an older form equivalent to *tatinamu*; Tsuchihashi (1957) postulates an elision of *ri* from the form *tatarinamu*, which in turn would be the reduction of *tatiarinamu*; Kinoshita (1972; 1974), believing that *namu* is the dialectal variant of *ramu* also attested in the *Man'yōshū*, speculates that *tatanamu* might be an erroneous transcription of *tatunamu*; Kasuga (1992) advocates for the sound change *tati*→*tata*, first proposed by Aiso, pointing out that it might be caused by vowel harmony, which is more common in Eastern Japanese; Gotō (1967) claims that an optative interpretation of *namu* is viable, but his reasoning failed to persuade later scholars, and the view was not adopted in subsequent commentaries. Other attempts have been made but the resulting theories appear even less likely. It is hard to judge whether any of these speculations is more plausible than positing a textual corruption. While the construct *mizenkei* + *namu* is only attested as an optative elsewhere, an additional morphologically plausible interpretation, though speculative, is that *na* is a conjugated form of the negative auxiliary *zu*. According to this interpretation, seen in Yamaguchi and Kōnoshi (1997), *tatanamu* would constitute the predicate of a negative rhetorical question, yielding a meaning as follows.

Since the new year arrived, new moons have waxed and waned.
Ah, indeed, indeed, how can the moon not rise upon the hem of my
vest, while so desperately waiting for you?

The obvious criticism of this view is that the sentence lacks an interrogative pronoun or bound particle (Sasaki 2010). However, interrogative pronouns or bound particles are not strictly necessary for forming a rhetorical question. Textual corruption or a vowel shift might be the other best candidates.

A third problematic use of *namu* is found in the first poem of the *Hitachi no kuni fudoki* 常陸国風土記 (Records of the Hitachi Province).

- (5) *Ko₂titate₁ba wo-Batuse-yama no₂ ipaki₂ ni mo wite ko₂moranamu* [許母郎奈牟]
na ko₁pi₂ so₂ wagi₁mo. (*Hitachi no kuni fudoki* 1)

Here, the problem with *ko₂moranamu*, which morphologically can only be construed as an optative, is that the context seems to require that both the author of the poem and the counterpart participate in the action of the verb. What appears to be the response to this poem, found in *Man'yōshū* 16.3806, includes the wording *tomo ni* (together), further solidifying this read, while *ko₂moranamu* implies that only the counterpart *wagi₁mo* ‘my beloved lady’ would perform

the action. Further investigation reveals that the form *ko₂moranamu* is the result of a later interpolation, specifically the addition of *na* 奈 during the textual revision conducted by Nishino Nobuaki 西野宣明, a Mito scholar who produced the proofread version currently used as source book in most modern editions. The three primary manuscripts of the *Hitachi no kuni fudoki* – the *Kan-bon* 菅本, *Takeda-bon* 武田本, and *Matsushita-bon* 松下本 – uniformly present the form *ko₂moramu*, allowing the following translation of the poem.

Since the rumors (of our love) cause us such distress, let us seek
refuge in the rocky fortress of Small Hatsuse mountain. Do not
pine, my beloved.

In conclusion, the above poem should not be considered an example of optative *namu*, as the addition of *na* was conducted by Nishino probably to correct a hypometric verse. Although the anomalous use of *namu* was pointed out more than one century ago by Saitō Mokichi 斎藤茂吉 (1917) and was later discussed by Kinoshita (1972; 1974), mainstream commentaries like Akimoto (1958) and Uegaki (1997) continued to employ Nishino's text.

Next, a few debated instances in the *Man'yōshū* will be discussed. In addition to the exegetical and textual issues of previous texts, the *Man'yōshū* introduces an additional layer of complexity, as the text is typically not rendered phonetically, leading to ambiguity regarding the correct reading of the text. For example, Yamaguchi (1980) doubts whether 夜長有 in 7.1072 should be read *yo₁ru nagaku are*, rather than the more conventional *yo₁ nagakaranamu* (or *yo₁ nagaku aranamu*).

- (6) *Asu no₂ yo₁pi₁ teramu tukuyo₁ pa katayo₂ri ni ko₂yo₁pi₁ ni yo₂rite yo₁ nagakaranamu*
[夜長有]. (*Man'yōshū* 07.1072)¹¹

If only the moonlit night of tomorrow could draw near and unite with tonight so
that the night might be longer!

Yamaguchi's observation is grounded in the fact that elsewhere *namu* is consistently represented in the notation, either through phonographs or the logograph 將. Both the imperative form and the optative *namu* are sufficiently appropriate for the context in this instance, making it difficult to determine the correct reading from a semantic standpoint. Traditionally *nagakaranamu* has been favored as it is found in *jiten* 次点 manuscripts,¹² but the presence of verses as *ko₂yo₁pi₁ no₂ nagasa ipoyo₁ tugi₂ko₂so₂* 'May the length of tonight

¹¹ Unless otherwise specified, the *kun* reading for the *Man'yōshū* is drawn from Kojima, Kinoshita, Tōno 1994-96.

¹² Manuscripts predating the collation of Sengaku 仙覚 in the Kamakura era.

be that of five hundred nights!' in 6.985, featuring benefactive imperative *ko₂so₂* in an extremely similar context, certainly favors Yamaguchi's view. I would exclude this instance from the corpus of attestations.

To a larger extent, the conventional readings of 7.1254 and 11.2829 have also been debated.

- (7) *Opobune ni kadi si mo aranamu* [有奈牟] *ki₁mi₁ nasi ni kaduki₁ seme₂ya mo nami₁ tatazu to₂mo*. (*Man'yōshū* 07.1254)

In this poem 有奈牟 has generally been read *aranamu*, although the enigmatic nature of the composition complicates any definitive judgment. It remains unclear what the author – portrayed, at least within the poetic fiction, as a diver from Lake Biwa – intended to convey through this composition, which serves as a response to the preceding poem (07.1253). Interpretations differ regarding both the gender of the (fictional) author and the overall meaning of the composition, though they generally converge on interpreting *namu* as optative. Once again, Yamaguchi (1980) observes that an optative interpretation would be anomalous in this context, as the resulting meaning of 'If only ships had oars!' conflicts with the fact that ships indeed have oars. This makes the use of *namu*, an expression of counterfactual desire, inappropriate in this situation. His view is that here the correct reading is *arinamu*, leading to an interpretation along the lines of 'As ships (obviously) have oars, I would (obviously) not dive without you'. Nevertheless, interpreting *kadi* as a metaphor for a serious commitment, as seen in Kojima, Kinoshita and Tōno (1995) etc., seems more straightforward, especially when considered alongside 'diving' as a metaphor for physical intimacy, and by extension, adultery, as seen in Watase (1985). This would yield approximately the following meaning:

If only this ship had oars! How could I possibly dive without you, even when the surface lies still? (If you were truly committed, how could I ever betray you? Even if the chance arose.)

I would therefore consider the above as an attestation of optative *namu*.

Regarding 11.2829, a conjectural interpretation is presented by Tsuchiya (1951), later adopted by the *Man'yōshū taisei* (Treasure of the *Man'yōshū* 1953) and backed by Tsunochi (1979). The mainstream reading is as follows.

- (8) *Ko₂ro₂mo si mo opoku aranamu* [多在南] *to₂ri kape₂te ki₁reba ya ki₁mi₁ ga omo wasuretaru*. (*Man'yōshū* 11.2829)¹³

Tsuchiya here reads *arinamu*, resulting in the first two verses roughly meaning ‘You should naturally have many clothes (but only one lover)’. The issue with the interpretation of this poem, which Tsuchiya’s reading does not help to solve, is that while the author appears to criticise the counterpart for having numerous lovers, metaphorically compared to garments in the second half of the composition, the first two verses instead express a desire for the very multiplicity of those garments. As a consequence, *ko₂ro₂mo* must be interpreted as referring simply to garments in the first part and metaphorically to lovers only in the second part for the poem to remain coherent.

If only you had many garments (instead than lovers)! For, by changing them again and again you have forgotten my face.

Probably to avoid this mismatch, many early commentators, e.g. Keichū in the *Man'yō Daishōki* 万葉代匠記 (Apprentice of the *Man'yōshū*), set the first-person as the subject in the first two verses, thereby resolving the mismatch by interpreting *ko₂ro₂mo* as a metaphor for ‘lovers’ throughout the poem.

If only I had many garments (as you do)! For, (as) by changing them again and again you have forgotten my face (I might forget yours).

Whether this is a more natural interpretation is debatable, but it does avoid the mismatch. Another possible way to resolve said mismatch is to retain the first-person subject in the latter part. This would require interpreting *namu* as an expression of counterfactual past, an unusual – but not entirely implausible – usage, as will be seen below.

If only I had many garments (=lovers)! So that, by changing them again and again, I might have forgotten your face.

As to Tsuchiya’s reading, while it appears fitting for the first two verses – despite Inaoka (1998) calling it as ‘inappropriate’ without further elaboration and Omodaka (1961) also dismissing it – it still requires the aforementioned double interpretation of *ko₂ro₂mo*. Aside from that, Tsuchiya’s reading could be viable, were it not for the fact that *si mo... namu* should be interpreted in the same manner as the

13 The reading of 多 is debated, with *amata* and *sapa ni* indicated as possible readings, but none of these would affect the following discussion.

previously discussed 07.1254 (7), owing to their structural similarity.¹⁴ Conclusively, 11.2829 (8) should be accepted as an attestation of optative *namu*.

In addition to the instances discussed above, Yoshida (1967) contends that, contrary to the interpretations found in most commentaries, *namu* found in poems 7.1402, 10.2317, 12.2962, and 13.3346 reflects conjectural usage. These poems share a common structure, featuring the repetition of a verb followed first by the conjunctive particle ...*ba* and then by ...*namu*, and are thus grouped and discussed together by Yoshida:¹⁵ more concretely, the specific wording are *ko₂to₂ sakeba ...sakenamu* in 7.1402 and 14.3346, *ko₂to₂ puraba ...pur?namu* in 10.2317 (10) and *ake₂ba...ake₂namu* in 12.2962 (9). Unfortunately, in 10.2317 (10), where the conjugation of *puru* would reveal whether *namu* is attached to the *mizenkei* or *ren'yōkei* base, the conjugated form is not recorded phonetically. At the time of Yoshida's work, the only case among these four generally interpreted as a conjectural use was precisely that in 10.2317 (10), where 將落 was read *purinamu* (see Takeda 1956; Omodaka 1962). Yoshida's attempt aims to extend this conjectural interpretation to the other three cases.

Yoshida's argument is certainly viable for 7.1402 and 13.3346, where the phrase *ko₂to₂ sakeba ...sakenamu* can be interpreted either as an optative 'If he/she really has/(had) to leave... I wish he/she would leave/(had left) (in such and such manner)' or conjectural 'If you/he/she really have/has to leave... you/he/she should leave (in such and such manner)', without causing major contextual conflicts. However, 12.2962 seems to possess the clear tint of unattainable desire typical of optative *namu*.

- (9) *Siro₁tape₂ no₂ so₁de karete nuru nubatama no₂ ko₂yo₁pi₁ pa paya mo ake₂ba ake₂namu* [明者將開]. (*Man'yōshū* 12.2962)

If this pitch-dark night, where our white mulberry sleeves lie far apart, truly must come to an end, may it end as swiftly as possible!

This poem conveys the author's desire for the night spent apart from a lover to come to a swift end. As Yoshida himself admits, it is difficult to see how conjectural *na-mu* may fit the context here, especially considering the presence of bound *mo*, which, as previously noted, typically occurs with optative *namu*. Through this usage, one can

¹⁴ In this context, *si mo* seemingly conveys an exclusion of other options, resembling bound *ko₂so₂*.

¹⁵ Yoshida adds to these four instances also the structure found in poem 16.3788, although in that case ...*ba...namu* appears with different verbs: ...*kadukaba mi₁du pa karenamu*. This poem will be discussed more in detail in section 3.

infer that the structure ...*ba...namu* incorporates the optative *namu*, which in turn can be applied to the above discussed 7.1402 and 13.3346. Further evidence of the optative nature of *namu* in the structure ...*ba...namu* can be found in later literature, such as *sakurabana tiraba tiranamu* 'If cherry blossoms really must fall, let them fall!' from *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 (Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems) 1.74, among other examples.

As for *namu* in 10.2317 (10), previously interpreted as a conjectural, an optative read is now seen in commentaries such as Kojima, Kinoshita, Tōno 1995.

- (10) *Ko₂to₂ puraba so,de sape nurete to₂poru beku puranamu* [将落] *yuki, no₂ so,ra ni ke₂ni tutu*. (*Man'yōshū* 10.2317)

If it must fall, let it fall until my sleeves are soaked through! Oh, snow that melts while still in the sky!

The main reason why the reading *purinamu* was formerly preferred is that it allows the first part of the poem to be interpreted as a subordinate clause modifying the noun *yuki* – 'Oh snow that, if it must fall, should fall until my sleeves are soaked through' – thus preventing an awkward break in the sentence at the middle of the fourth verse, which is unavoidable if *namu* is interpreted as an invariant suffix.¹⁶ Even so, accepting an unusual break in the sentence appears to be a better compromise, once it is established that ...*ba...namu* typically occurs with the optative, as demonstrated above, and given that the optative fits the context exceptionally well here.

Finally, tracing further back in time, Miyajima (1932) questions certain conventional readings, such as those of 3.335, 8.1655, and 16.3886.

- (11) *A ga yuki, pa pi,sa ni pa arazi ime₂ no₂ wada se ni pa narazute puti ni ariko₂so₂* [有毛]. (*Man'yōshū* 3.335)

My journey shall not last long. Meander of Dreams, do not grow shallow; do remain a pool profound!

Ōtomo no Tabito 大友旅人 composed this poem as he departed for his post as governor of Dazaifu. The present prevailing reading *ariko₂so₂* assumes textual corruption, with 毛 emended into 乞, read

16 Optative *namu* is generally categorised as a 'final particle' – *shūjōshi* 終助詞 – in Japanese historical linguistics, although the fact that it connects only to a specific conjugated form of inflectable words makes it more akin to an auxiliary suffix rather than a 'final particle' as intended within the grammar of modern Japanese. Optative *namu* more closely resembles modern Japanese 'invariant auxiliary suffixes' – *fuhenka jodōshi* 不変化助動詞 –, i.e. -*ō* and -*yō*.

ko₂so₂. No manuscript, however, records 乞. The only textual variant is 淵有如 found in the *Ruiju Koshū* 類聚古集 (Classified Collection of Ancient Rhymes), a manuscript from the Insei period in which poems are organised by theme. The conventional reading thus rests on the assumption that 毛 is an error, with 如 *goto* thought to be a wrong, inverse assumption from an earlier *kana* source recording *koso*, at least according to Omodaka (1958). Alternative readings, such as *aramu mo* (Takeda 1949), were proposed, though they are less fitting in the context compared to the benefactive imperative *ko₂so₂*. One of these alternative readings is *aranamo*, proposed by Miyajima in the attempt to respect the received text. The reading *aranamo*, however, has two major flaws: first, *na* is never omitted by the notation elsewhere, unless *namu* is written logographically; secondly, the resulting counterfactual desire would conflict with the interpretation of the toponym as indeed referring to a deep pool, as suggested by a verse in *Kaifūsō* 懷風藻 (Fond Recollections of Poetry) 80.

Similarly, Miyajima's reading of 腊賞毛 in 16.3886 as *ki,tapi₁payasanamo* is questionable, again due to the absence of *na* in the notation. His comparison with *mawosi payasane* from the previous poem (16.3885) offers no additional support for this reading, since *ne* functions as an imperative there, while *namu* does not generally function as an imperative. The conventional reading of *ki,tapi₁payasu mo* 'Turn me into dried meat!' ¹⁷ is certainly more reliable.

Finally, Miyajima reads 跡可曰毛 as *to ipanamo* in 8.1655. While the proper reading of this string is debated, there is no doubt that his proposal is not a promising candidate. Conclusively, Miyajima's pioneering attempts to identify additional uses of the form *namo* should be interpreted in the context of the newly established reading of 南畝 in 1.18 as *namo* by Yamada (1928) and Kōnosu (1930) but, due to the issues outlined above, were not adopted by later commentaries.

After the above consideration, we are left with nineteen certain attestations of optative *namu* in Old Japanese sources, along with two instances of the variant *namo*, all of which appear in the *Man'yōshū*. An additional attestation – *Man'yōshū* 1.18, read either *namo* or *namu* – will be treated below. ¹⁸

¹⁷ This poem is a playful piece written from the perspective of a crab.

¹⁸ The other sources reviewed are the poems contained in the *Kojiki*, *Nihonshoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan), *Hitachi no kuni fudoki*, *Kakyōhyōshiki* 歌経標式 (The Canon of Poetic Composition) and *Shoku nihongi* 続日本紀 (Continued Chronicles of Japan) along with the *Bussokusekika* 仏足石歌 (Buddha's Footprint Stone Poems). The main survey was conducted using Tsuchihashi-Konishi (1957) for the poems in the *Kojiki*, *Nihonshoki*, *Hitachi no kuni fudoki*, *Shoku nihongi*, and for the *Bussokusekika*; Kojima-Kinoshita-Tōno (1994-96) for the *Man'yōshū*; the *Corpus of Historical Japanese* (CHJ) for the *senmyō* of the *Shoku nihongi*; and Okimori (1993) for the *Kakyōhyōshiki*.

3 Semantic Analysis of Old Japanese Optative *namu*

The consensus holds that the desire expressed by *namu* has two defining characteristics: the agent must be different from the speaker – most often limited to the third person –, and the desire must be counterfactual, meaning that the desired action or state must be regarded as an impossible outcome. These characteristics distinctly differentiate *namu* from other optative expressions, such as Old Japanese optative *ne*, which conveyed desire directed toward the second person, thus closely resembling an imperative. Historically, this distinction was not always recognised. For example, Fujitani Nariakira 富士谷成章, in his *Ayuhishō* あゆひ抄, clearly states that although optative *namu* was often defined *negai no nan* ‘optative *namu*’, it did not convey desire but rather functioned as an imperative, comparable to the spoken *-te kure yo*. From then, it became clear that *namu* must be understood in connection with the above delineated two characteristics. In particular, the latter of these two has been the focus of studies such as Gotō (1967), Kinoshita (1974) and Yamaguchi (1980).

Gotō and Kinoshita both agree that the meaning of *namu* is rooted in the counterfactual nature of the desire expressed, which was already well established by then. However, while Gotō confines himself to defining the resulting semantics without attempting a reevaluation of the prevailing view, Kinoshita takes a more nuanced approach by distinguishing between two types of counterfactuality: *hangezai* ‘counterfactual present’ and *hankako* ‘counterfactual past’. The former is defined as the expression of a present (or future) state different from the one expected, whereas the latter indicates the expression of a state that differs from the current one as a result of the occurrence (or not occurrence) of a past event. For instance, a concrete example of ‘counterfactual present (desire)’ would be ‘If only it stopped raining!’ while facing heavy rain; meanwhile uttering ‘If only it had stopped raining!’ while facing a flood would constitute an example of ‘counterfactual past (desire)’. Kinoshita proceeds to argue that, while in the more familiar Heian-period Japanese *namu* expressed counterfactual present as conventionally thought, in Old Japanese its main function was that of counterfactual past. This hypothesis is based mainly on poem 16.3788, already mentioned above.

- (12) *Mi,mi,nasi no₂ ike₂ si urame,si wagi,moko₁ ga ki,tutu kadukaba mi,du pa karenamu* [潜者水波将瀬]. (*Man'yōshū* 16.3788)

How hateful is the pond of Miminashi! If only its waters had dried up when my beloved came and dove in!

This poem is part of a triad based on the tale of Lady Kazura. According to the preface, Lady Kazura was courted by three men

but, unwilling to settle for any of them and unable to make them desist, resolved to end her life by throwing herself into a pond. This tale resurfaces in the *Yamato Monogatari* 大和物語 with a modified narrative: Lady Kazura falls in love with the emperor, who, however, fails to summon her promptly after their first encounter, driving her to despair and resulting in the same tragic outcome as in the earlier version. Beyond the narrative differences, the version in the *Yamato Monogatari* features a significant grammatical variation, as *namu* is replaced by the auxiliary *masi*, resulting in the phrase ...*kadukaba midu zo finamasi*. The use of *masi* in the *Yamato Monogatari* is significant as it contrasts with the string 将洵 from the *Man'yōshū*, which cannot be read as *karemasi* because *masi* is never rendered logographically, at least according to mainstream readings. Kinoshita contends that this shift signals a transition in the expression of counterfactual past from *namu* to *masi*. Based on this reasoning, most instances of *namu* in the *Man'yōshū* are then by him re-interpreted as reflecting a counterfactual past, with only a few exceptions,¹⁹ which he suggests are later examples that no longer retain the original meaning of counterfactual past. From the Heian period onward, with some rare cases where both readings are plausible, *namu* predominantly expresses counterfactual present. Kinoshita concludes that the semantics of *namu* gradually shifted from counterfactual past to counterfactual present sometime between Old Japanese and Heian Japanese, with a handful of early cases already showing in the *Man'yōshū*. Kinoshita's theory, although insightful, presents several weak links. Just to mention one, counterfactual past in the *Man'yōshū* is typically expressed precisely through *masi* (*wo*), as it is in Heian Japanese. For example, the next poem in the triad (16.3789), which in the tale's fiction appears to belong to Lady Kazura's second wooer, uses *masi wo* to express counterfactual past.²⁰ Thus, if Kinoshita's hypothesis held true, counterfactual past would be expressed by both *masi* and *namu*, with the former also attested with third-person subjects.²¹

Yamaguchi (1980) challenges Kinoshita's interpretation by suggesting that in the first poem of the Lady Kazura triad (12), the two characters 潜者 should be read as *kadukeba* rather than *kadukaba*, thus leading to an interpretation of *karenamu* as an expression of counterfactual present. Although the counterfactual past seems to fit

19 Specifically, 7.1212, 12.3138, and 20.4437, where *namu* unquestionably refers to an event that has yet to occur.

20 *Man'yōshū* 16.3789: ...*ke:pu yuku to₂ ware ni tuge:seba kape:ri ki:masi wo* (If only you had told me that today you would go (to die), I would have come back (to stop you)!).

21 See *Man'yōshū* 2.91: ...*Yamato naru Oposima no₂ ne ni ipe₂ mo aramasi wo* (If only the house (of my beloved) was on top of the Mount Ōshima in Yamato!).

the context best, Yamaguchi's reading could be plausible if the phrase is taken as a kind of timeless statement: 'If only the pond's waters would dry up as my beloved dives'. After addressing this particularly problematic poem, Yamaguchi applies the counterfactual present interpretation to all remaining instances of *namu*, also denying any future nuance in the action or state conveyed by the marked verb.

Yamaguchi's interpretations of *namu* sentences are overall plausible; however, limiting the semantic range of *namu* exclusively to the present tense is somewhat arbitrary. Both past and present interpretations are viable in most cases, with the specific temporality determined by other elements within the sentence, such as temporal adverbs. Consequently, in the absence of clear indicators like temporal adverbs or contextual clues, judging whether a statement conveys counterfactual past, present or future becomes technically impossible. For instance, let us consider the following poem.

- (13) *Wagi, moko₁ pa kusiro₂ ni aranamu* [有奈武] *pi?darite no₂ wa ga oku no₂ te ni maki, te inamasi wo.* (*Man'yōshū* 9.1766)

If only my beloved lady were a bracelet! If so, I would don her round the top of my left wrist and carry her away!

Here, Yamaguchi interprets *aranamu* as an expression of counterfactual present, whereas Kinoshita as counterfactual past (in which case a more fitting translation of the latter part would be 'I would have donned... and carried...'). Both interpretations are equally viable since there are no temporal adverbs or contextual clues to determine a precise temporality. I would argue that *namu* as a grammatical structure does not offer data on the temporality of the verb, but rather simply expresses 'atemporal' counterfactual desire. The expression is then concretely employed predominantly in present contexts, but occasionally also appears in past contexts, as in the above discussed 16.3788 (12) or, according to my interpretation, 11.2829 (8).

Likewise, the temporality of *masi* is not inherent to *masi* itself but rather emerges from its interaction with other elements of the sentence. Whether in optative contexts or not, *masi* generally appears in structures with two temporal clauses (e.g. 'if A happens, then B happens', 'if A had happened, B would have happened' etc.). In contrast, *namu* typically operates within sentences involving only a single temporal term. This leads *namu* to appear predominantly in present or future-oriented contexts, while counterfactual past, which generally requires two temporal terms, is mainly the domain of *masi*. In conclusion, I would argue that neither *namu* nor *masi* possess intrinsic temporality. Their association with verbs conveying present/future actions or states in the case of *namu*, and past/present actions or states for *masi*, arises from the syntactic structure of the

propositions in which they occur. This concept might be extended to other expressions of the same sort, e.g. *nu ka*, which Kinoshita considers as antithetic to *namu* in that it relates to present/future actions. Although largely ignored, likely because his argument is again based on subjective interpretations, the differentiation he established left some influence, which persists even in recent years (see Kuroda 2017; Moriwaki 2021). Nevertheless, since *namu* is here viewed as devoid of a temporal quality, positing an antithesis with *nu ka* becomes unnecessary.

4 The Variant *namo*

Concerning the relation between *namu* and its variant *namo*, it is clear from the number of attestations that in Old Japanese the main form was *namu*. The following are the only three generally accepted attestations of the form *namo*.

- (14) *Mi₁wayama wo sika mo kakusu ka kumo dani mo ko₂ko₂ro₂ aranamo* [有南畝]
kakusapu besi ya. (Man'yōshū 1.18)

Must Mount Miwa really be hidden thus? Oh, I wish at least clouds had a heart!
Ought they truly conceal it so?

- (15) *Kami₁ tu Ke₂no₁ Wodo₁ no₂ Tado₂ri ga kapadi ni mo ko₁ra pa apanamo* [安波奈毛]
pi₁to₂ri no₂mi₂ site. (Man'yōshū 14.3405)

How I long for my beloved to meet me on the path to the Tadori river in Wodo of
Kamitsukeno! Just her, all alone!

- (16) *Kami₁ tu Ke₂no₁ Wono₁ no₂ Tado₂ri ga apadi ni mo sena pa apanamo* [安波奈母]
mi₁ru pi₁to₂ nasi ni. (Man'yōshū 14.3405)

How I long for my man to meet me on the path to the Tadori river in Wono of
Kamitsukeno! Without anyone seeing us!

The first poem is part of a dyad that includes a long poem and its envoy, of which it constitutes the latter.²² According to the preface shared with the preceding *chōka*, the poem was composed by Nukata no Ōkimi 額田王 upon her descent into the Ōmi province, where Emperor Tenji 天智 had relocated the capital in 667. Conversely, the left annotation of the poem attributes authorship to Emperor Tenji himself, suggesting that he may have composed it during an imperial visit to Yamato shortly after the relocation. While most

²² 'Envoy' is the English term commonly employed to translate the word *hanka* 反歌, which refers to a *tanka* 短歌 (short poem) that is attached to a *chōka* 長歌 (long poem) of which it summarises the content.

scholars accept Nukata no Ōkimi as the author, opinions on the matter remain divided, with some, most notably Omodaka (1957), arguing in favor of Tenji's authorship. Furthermore, the classification of the present composition (1.18) and the following (1.19) as *hanka*, despite their clear departure from merely summarising the content of the preceding *chōka* (1.17), complicates the assessment of their composition context. Some scholars argue that the *hanka* label is a later addition that does not accurately reflect the author's original intent (Kimura 2007; Inaoka 1993). In any case, as far as 1.17 and 1.18 are concerned, the dyad represents an expression of the author's nostalgia for the land of Yamato, their homeland and former abode before the relocation of the capital.

As for the remaining two poems, the final composition (16) is not treated by the compiler as a separate work but rather as a variant of the preceding one (15). This appears to be incorrect, as the respective use of *koira* 'my beloved (woman)' and *sena* 'my beloved (man)' suggests that the authors, at least within the fictional context, were respectively a male and a female, meaning that the two poems must have originally been distinct compositions. These poems lack both preface and left annotation, leaving contextual information unavailable. However, their placement in the 14th book and the phonographic notation clearly indicate that they belong to the *azuma no uta* 東歌 (eastern poem) corpus. More specifically, the toponym within the text suggests that the authors, whether fictional or not, were from the Kamitsukeno province, later known as Kōzuke and corresponding roughly to present-day Gunma Prefecture.

These three poems contain the only attestations of optative *namo* found in Old Japanese sources, with no occurrences found in later texts either. The prevailing view on the relationship between this rare form and the more common one is that *namo* represents an older form, which by the time of the earliest sources had already transformed into *namu* through an *o*→*u* vowel shift. Yamada (1913) is seemingly the earliest grammarian of the modern era to suggest, albeit without confidence,²³ that *namo* represents the older form. That is instead given as granted in subsequent technical studies, notably those by Miyajima (1932), Hamada (1948), Tabe (1953), Hayashi (1953), Negoro (1959), Gotō (1967) as well as by Yamauchi (1967) and Moriwaki (2021), who explicitly note that *namo* is broadly regarded as the earlier form. Major dictionaries, such as the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* and *Jidai-betsu kokugo daijiten*, also reference this

23 Although Yamada, in his 1913 grammar, cautions that discerning between the two sounds /u/ and /o/ is difficult due to the interchangeability of certain phonographs, the assertion that *namo* is older follows inevitably from the etymology he proposes, which views the optative *namu* as the manifestation of the bound particle in final position. In his 1928 commentary, Yamada demonstrates significantly greater confidence.

perspective in the entries for the respective terms. The derivation of *namu* from the form *namo* is thus upheld as the mainstream view, albeit with varying degrees of confidence, and it has been so for around a century.

A key reason why this view is widely held is that the earliest attested form of the morphologically identical bound particle *namu* is, indeed, *namo*. As a bound particle, *namo* appears frequently in the *senmyō* 宣命 (edicts) of the *Shoku nihongi*, where it is recorded in phonographic writing nearly one hundred times. Bound *namo* is also attested in the *Man'yōshū* itself, although in only one instance (14.3447). The parallel between the two particles, bound and final, tacitly implies that the same vowel change must have occurred in both cases. Nevertheless, several factors complicate interpreting optative *namu* as a straightforward derivation from *namo*.

- Firstly, drawing parallels between the bound particle and the final particle *namu* is questionable. Regardless of their etymologies, the two particles are unlikely to share a common origin. The proposed etymology linking the two words as cognates, suggested by Yamada (1913) and supported by Tabe (1953) has multiple shortcomings, which will be discussed below, and has never gained much acceptance. Consequently, the presence of a vowel shift in the bound particle does not necessarily indicate that the same shift occurred for the final particle as well, as their respective structural components, if any exist, would presumably differ.
- Secondly, since the bound form *namu* first appears in the *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* 日本三代実録 (Veritable Records of Three Reigns of Japan) – the last of the *Rikkokushi* 六国史 (Six National Histories), completed in the first year of the Engi era (901) – it can be assumed that the bound particle underwent the vowel shift in the early Heian period. In particular, the first appearance of the form *namu* is found in a *senmyō* from the year 875, although *namo* remains the predominant form until the end of the text.²⁴ This suggests that the vowel shift in the bound particle occurred in the second half of the ninth century, though it is possible that it took place earlier in spoken language. As Yamaguchi (1980) notes, this assumption is further supported by the observation that other words underwent the same vowel change during this period, such as *nemo₂ko₂ro₂* evolving into *nemugoro/nengoro* and *akato₂ki₁* transforming

24 One earlier example appears in a *senmyō* from the year 868 contained in the *Ruiju Kokushi* 類聚国史 (Categorised National History of Japan), a history ordered thematically and traditionally attributed to Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真, said to have been completed in 892. However, the *Nihon Sandai Jitsuroku* reports the same *senmyō* with the spelling *namo*.

into *akatuki*, among many others. Consequently, if the optative *namu* experienced the same vowel shift, it would be expected to have occurred during the early Heian period rather than at any earlier stage. This applies specifically to the vowel shift from *o*₂ to *u*.²⁵ As to the vowel alternation between *o*₁ and *u*, as seen in forms like *sino*₁*bu* and *sinubu*, or *yo*₁/*yo*₁*ri* and *yu*/*yuri*, which was already present in the Old Japanese stage, the direction of the change remains uncertain. The notation of several words oscillates between *o*₁ and *u*, creating the impression that these sounds represent synchronic variants rather than being the result of a diachronic shift. Yamaguchi concludes that if *mo* belongs to the *kō* 甲 series, it is just as plausible that *namo* is a derivative of *namu* as the reverse.

- Finally and most importantly, the latter two attestations in 14.3405 (15)(16) of the form *namo* belong, as mentioned, to the corpus of the eastern poems. In Eastern Old Japanese poetry, the sound /u/ often shifts to /o/, as seen in forms like *araparo*₁ ‘to appear’ (14.3414) and *hararo*₁ ‘to be overgrown (by trees)’ (14.3546) which, in the case of auxiliaries *mu* and *ramu*, results in their respective representation as *mo* and *namo*, e.g. in *wataramo* ‘let us cross’ (14.4355) and *ko*₁*pu namo* ‘be (probably) yearning’ (14.3476) as well as in various other instances. This suggests that the *u*→*o* shift in the two eastern poems is a diatopic, rather than diachronic, variation. The standard *namu* is also found once in an eastern poem (14.3463), but so are the standard *mu* and *ramu*. Naturally, it is more logical to attribute the occurrence of a phenomenon to a well-documented cause in the sources as the *u*→*o* shift in Eastern Old Japanese, rather than to the speculative existence of the older form *namo*.

Given these considerations, one might question whether *namo* truly existed in Western Old Japanese to begin with.

4.1 The Reading of 南畝

The doubt above presented is particularly reasonable given that the text of the unique attestation of *namo* in Western Japanese in 1.18 (14) is notably idiosyncratic. The text from the *Kan'ei* 寛永 manuscript, which is commonly used as sourcebook, is as follows.

25 Yamaguchi also notes that if *mo* belonged to the *otsu* 乙 series, an etymological composition of *na* + *mo* would be more plausible than a single morpheme structure, as the combination CaCo2 is uncommon due to the constraints imposed by the Arisaka-Ikegami law.

(17) 三輪山乎然毛隠賀雲谷裳情有南畝可苦佐布倍思哉 (*Man'yōshū* 1.18)

The notation employs the two characters 南畝, suggesting a phonographic rendering. However, while 南 is a commonly used phonogram, 畝 is never employed as a phonogram in the *Man'yōshū* or in other Old Japanese sources, making the combination highly unusual.

As to textual variants, the above mentioned *Ruiju koshū* – the oldest extant manuscript that contains most poems of the first volume and dating to before the year 1120 – records instead the notation 南武, which reflects a more conventional use of phonograms. This notation also appears as a variant in the collated text of the *Nishihonganji* 西本願寺 manuscript from the mid-Kamakura period, as well as in later manuscripts belonging to its lineage. On the other hand, the collated *Genryaku* 元暦 manuscript – dated 1184 and chronologically second to record the first volume – reads 南畝, which is also the notation found in the *Kishū* 紀州 manuscript, the first ten books of which were copied in the late Kamakura period but do not belong to the *Genryaku* lineage. Finally, the lineage of *Reizei* 冷泉 and *Hirose* 廣瀬 manuscripts, respectively hailing from late Muromachi and Edo period but unrelated to both the *Kishū* and *Genryaku* manuscripts, also agree with the notation 南畝. In short, the manuscript evidence suggests that 畝 may indeed be the original character, as it appears across manuscripts of different lineages. The character 武, instead, could be the result of a copying error (or intentional interpolation)²⁶ that first appeared in the *Ruiju Koshū*, which Sengaku may have then consulted during his textual revision, later transmitted in the *Nishihonganji* manuscript. As to the use of phonograms, although it is indeed the case that 武 frequently serves as a phonogram for *mu*, it is also true that the character 南 is generally employed alone to transcribe both the optative *namu* and conjectural *na-mu*, since this character ended with a bilabial nasal in Middle Chinese. In fact, optative *namu* and conjectural *na-mu* are transcribed by this sole character respectively 6 and 23 times, while *mu* after 南 is found transcribed only once in an eastern poem, specifically as 南牟 in 14.3390. In other words, the character 南 is rarely used as a *ryakuongana* 略音仮名 – phonograms that ignore the final consonants of the Chinese pronunciation – but is commonly used as *nigōkana* 二合仮名, phonograms that represent two morae with a single character. Adding a standalone phonogram to express *mu* would thus be rather unusual and resemble more the usage of this character found in the

²⁶ The latter is the view put forth by Omodoka (1957), who suggests that the editor of the *Ruiju Koshū* may have occasionally replaced characters unfamiliar to the Heian reader with familiar ones, e.g. 激→灑 in 8.1418.

phonographic eastern poems rather than that of the logographic-mixed style of the present composition. In conclusion, both 南畝 and 南武 are idiosyncratic in terms of character transcription, though in different ways.

Nowadays, most commentaries accept 南畝 as the correct text, but the agreement on its actual reading is not likewise universal. On the contrary, the conventional reading was *namu* until the beginning of the last century. Yamada (1913, 1928) appears to be the first to advocate for the reading *namo*, challenging earlier scholars by arguing that, since the *go* 呉 reading of 畝 is *mo*, the two characters should be read together as *namo*. From today's perspective, Yamada's argument might initially seem lacking, since modern *kanji* dictionaries list *mu* alongside *mo* as a *go* reading.²⁷ However, the character 畝 in both the Song rhyme dictionaries *Guangyun* 廣韻 (Expanded Rhymes, completed in 1008) and *Jiyun* 集韻 (Collected Rhymes, 1037) is listed in the 厚 rhyme, which includes 母, read *mo* across all Old Japanese sources when employed as a phonogram. The natural conclusion is that 畝 should be read *mo* as its homophone 母. Japanese early dictionaries such as the *Tenrei banshō meigi* 篆隸万象名義 (The Meaning of Characters in Seal and Clerical Script, around 830) and the *Shinsen jikyō* 新撰字鏡 (Newly Compiled Mirror of Characters, around 900) provide the same information, recording 走, belonging to the 厚 rhyme, as final for 畝. Possibly for these reasons, most commentaries followed Yamada (1928) in reading the string in question as *namo*.

Takeda (1956), on the other hand, drew a comparison with the unique example 来二計謀 *kinikemu* in 4.509, in which 謀 is read as *mu* despite frequently representing *mo* in the *Nihonshoki*. This comparison subtly suggests that 畝 may have followed a similar pattern, i.e. might have been read as *mu* in the *Man'yōshū* and only later have come to represent the phoneme *mo*, which led Takeda to conclude that *namu* is the correct reading in this context. Nevertheless, Takeda's view was not adopted by later commentaries, likely because 謀 belonging to the 尤 rhyme in the *Guangyun* – thereby differing from 畝 – posits a serious challenge to this perspective. It is clear that 謀²⁸ shifted to the 侯 rhyme, distinguished from 厚 only by tone, sometime during the Tang period. This shift is evidenced by their reassignment to the 侯 rhyme in the *Jiyun*, which contrasts with

27 E.g. the *Gakken kanwa daijiten*, which is a dictionary that pays particular attention to phonetics, including the reconstructed Chinese pronunciations from various periods.

28 Even more significantly so the character 牟, homophone of 謀 and frequently used as a phonogram for the sound *mu* in both the *Kojiki* and *Man'yōshū*.

its earlier placement in the 尤 rhyme in the *Guangyun*.²⁹ In contrast, the character 畝 belonged to the 厚 rhyme from the origin. Even so, Takeda's comparison is still insightful because both 計謀 and 南畝 are meaningful lexical compounds in Sinitic, which suggest that the choice of these characters must have been partially based on their semantics, though the meaning they convey appears unrelated to the content of the poem itself. In particular, the compound 南畝 (field facing south)³⁰ appears several times in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry), the *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han), the *Wenxuan* 文選 (Literary Selections) and other Chinese classics, which raises the possibility that the author might have employed it for a purpose other than phonographic transcription. The term is also present in the later *Shoku nihongi*, demonstrating that it was to some extent in use in Japan. This observation is important insofar as it explains why an uncommon character such as 畝 was used instead of the sole phonogram 南 or a more conventional combination of phonograms.

Similarly to Takeda, Ōno T. (1962; 1977) supported the reading *namu*, particularly aiming his criticism at Takagi, Gomi and Ōno (1957), whose commentary (the so-called old *Taikei*) was highly influential at the time and played a significant role in establishing the reading *namo*. Ōno T. addressed the issue of the Chinese reading by noting that characters belonging to the 厚 rhyme could be used to transcribe both Japanese /o/ and /u/ sounds. He argues that 母 is an exception due to its high frequency of use, which usually leads to the stabilisation of a single reading. Similarly to Takeda, Ōno T. tries to corroborate his statement by comparing the use of 畝 with that of 謀 but avoids the mentioned problem by stating that 謀 (and 牟) originally did not belong to the 尤 rhyme, as might be concluded by their position in the *Guangyun*, but rather to the 侯 rhyme. This would suggest that characters in the 侯 rhyme were also read with vowel /u/ in Old Japanese, leading to the conclusion that characters in the 厚 rhyme, such as 畝, could have shared the same pronunciation. This statement is based on evidence found in a fragment of the *Qieyun*³¹ 切韻 (Cut Rhymes) – a rhyme dictionary of the Sui era of which only edited fragments remain – where the *fanqie*³² of 謀 is found as 莫侯.

29 The *Jiyun* was compiled in 1037, approximately three decades after the *Guangyun*, and is said to reflect a more modern standard of pronunciation.

30 In ancient times, lands facing south were generally chosen for agriculture due to their better exposure to the sun. As a result, the term 'south field' also came to signify a luxuriant field, or more broadly, to be used as a eulogistic term for fertile land.

31 Ōno T. specifically refers to the third fragment of the *Tang xie Qieyun* 唐寫切韻, an edited version of the *Qieyun* hailing from the early Tang. The fragment is generally referred to as *Qiesan* 切三 and is now preserved at the British Library.

32 *Fanqie* 反切 is a traditional Chinese method for representing pronunciation, where two characters are used to indicate the initial and final sounds of a given character.

Ōno T.'s observation can be complemented by the following data.

- In the *Qiesan* fragment, 謀 is listed under the 尤 rhyme, despite its *fanqie* suggesting that it should rhyme with 侯.
- In Wang Renxu's 王仁昫 *Kanmiu buque qieyun* 刊謬補缺切韻 (Revised and Expanded Rhyme Dictionary) – an edited and enlarged version of the *Qieyun* from the early eighth century and conserved in its complete form – 謀 location and *fanqie* agrees with the *Guangyun*.
- In the glosses of Lu Deming's 陸德明 *Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文 (Textual Explanations of Classics) – a collection of annotated pre-Qin classics likely dating to the late sixth century – the *fanqie* of 謀 is found as 莫浮 and 亡侯 but also as 莫侯.
- The *Tenrei banshō meigi* – based on the Chinese dictionary *Yupian* 玉篇 (Jade Chapters) completed in 543 – records the *fanqie* 莫侯.

This data shows contradicting information on the final of 謀 (and 牟) from sources of the same period or even from the same source. While Ōno T. emphasises that the reading *mu* of 謀 derives from the 侯 rhyme, it remains unclear to the author how he addressed the data from the *Guangyun* and similar sources. The opposite view, for example held by Ōta (2023), is that 謀 belonged to the 尤 rhyme in the *Qieyun* but had already shifted to the 侯 rhyme prior to the *Yupian*. The *Qieyun* and *Guangyun* would thus be retaining either an earlier or a diatopic standard. From this perspective, one might infer that the *mu* reading of 謀 and 牟 derives from the 尤 rhyme, antithetically to Ōno T.'s claim but similarly to how the *go* reading of 求 or 留 is respectively *ku* and *ru*.

Ultimately, resolving the issue of the pronunciation of 畝 by examining the pronunciation of 謀, as Ōno T. proposed, is challenging due to the unclear phonetic history of this and other /m/-initial characters that in the *Guangyun* belong to the 尤 rhyme. However, Ōno T.'s assertion that characters of the 厚 rhyme were also read with vowel /u/ can be supported from an alternative perspective. For example, the 侯 rhyme – differing from the 厚 and 侯 rhymes only in the tone – includes the character 豆, which is extensively used as a phonogram for the sound *du* in Old Japanese sources. Another example is 頭, which belongs to the 侯 rhyme and is read *du* in the *Man'yōshū* and *Nihonshoki*, as well as preserving the *go* reading *zu*. Additionally, 斗 belonging to the 侯 rhyme is read /tu/ in poem 43 of *Kojiki*, although being read *to*₁ elsewhere.³³ Given these examples, even in the case the sound *mu* of 謀 and 牟 originated from the 尤

33 Concretely, 美志麻遲斗岐 *mi-i-sima ni tuki*₁ in *Kojiki* II; 43. This, however, could be attributed to the o-i-u fluctuations mentioned earlier.

rhyme – which to the author seems most likely – it is still reasonable to assume that 畝 could be read *mu* in Old Japanese, similarly to how characters of the 侯 and 候 rhymes are occasionally read with the /u/ vowel.

5 The Form *nimo*

As discussed above, the form *namo* cannot be easily considered attested in Western Old Japanese. However, the morphologically similar form *nimo* appears twice in the *Man'yōshū* and thus merits consideration.

- (18) Ware no₂mi₂ si ki₁ke₁ba sabusi mo poto₂to₂gi₁su Nibu no₂ yamabe₁ ni iyuki,
nakanimo [鳴尔毛]. (*Man'yōshū* 19.4178)

Oh, how lonely it is to hear it alone – Cuckoo, fly to Mount Nibu and cry there too!

- (19) Ki₂ no₁ kuni ni yamazu kayo₁pamu tuma no₂ mori tuma yo₂siko₂sene tuma to₂ ipi
nagara (tuma tamapanimo [賜尔毛]). (*Man'yōshū* 9.1679)

Let us journey again and again to the land of Ki! O Shrine of Lovers – fetch me a lover! For it is borne in your very name.

In the latter example (19), the bracketed text is recorded as a textual variant. In both examples, the text is relatively stable: although minor variations occur, they do not compromise its overall integrity. Some commentaries accept the received text, while others emend it – identifying 尔 (also written 尔), read *ni*, as a scribal error for 奈 *na*. However, the recurrence of the spelling 爾毛 lends support to the possibility that the form *nimo* may have genuinely existed. The suffix *ni* is also attested following the *mizenkei* form in 5.801 (*nari wo simasani* ‘do your work!’), where it is thought to carry a meaning equivalent to the desiderative-imperative suffix *ne*. Nevertheless, the theoretically corresponding form *nemo* is virtually unattested; only a single potential instance is found in 14.3432, though the passage in which it appears is obscure and may reflect a different lexeme altogether.

Another difficulty lies in the semantic interpretation of *nimo* in the cited poems. That is because, while in 5.801 *ni* appears to parallel the function of *ne*, in 19.4178 (18) *nimo* seems instead to express counterfactual desire, in line with the function of *namu*. Indeed, (*poto₂to₂gi₁su*) *nakanamu* is found in 8.1509 and 20.4437, and similar expressions appear elsewhere in the *Man'yōshū* and later sources. This poses a problem because, as mentioned above, *ne* and *namu* differ significantly in both meaning and usage, although they share the feature of expressing a desire for the realisation of an action or state not carried out by the speaker.

The text in 9.1679 (19) is even more perplexing. If the textual variant is paraphrasing *yo₂siko₂sene* ‘fetch me ...!’, then *nimo* would semantically align with the desiderative-imperative *ne*. On the other hand, a counterfactual interpretation along the line of *namu* (‘if only you would fetch me a lover!’) is also plausible, though the form **tamapanamu* is unattested in Old Japanese. Additionally, it is also problematic to view *nimo* merely as a chronologically prior form as some have proposed, as neither of its two occurrences appears particularly early; quite the contrary, 19.4178 (18) is dated to 750, belonging to the latest stage of the *Man’yōshū*.

In short, while the construction *nimo* is clearly related to the other Old Japanese *n-* desideratives, its connection with the speculative form *namo* in Western Old Japanese remains uncertain. Nonetheless, it does show that the bound particle *mo* may occur in constructions that bear semantic equivalence to *namu*.

6 Theories on the Etymology of *namu*

It goes without saying that identifying one form as older has significant implications for the possible etymologies of optative *namu*. Numerous etymological theories emerged in the first half of the last century, but waning interest in speculative theories appears to have long brought that momentum to a halt. Most of the theories advanced reflect the then-recent belief that, among the two forms, *namo* represents an older form. Yet, the above considerations, highlighting the weaknesses underlying this premise, further undermine the already questioned validity of these theories. According to some of the proposed ones, *namu* could be analysed as:

- The optative particle *na*, in turn originating from the *mizenkei* form of the negative auxiliary *zu*, combined with the bound particle *mo* (Miyajima 1932)
- The final use of the bound particle *namo* (Yamada 1913; 1936)
- The *mizenkei* form of the negative auxiliary *zu* combined with the conjectural auxiliary *mu* (Hamada 1948)
- The result of a vowel shift from *nimo* where *ni* is the *ren’yōkei* form of the negative auxiliary *zu* and *mo* is the bound particle (Hamada 1948)
- The result of a vowel shift from *nemo* where *ne* is the optative particle and *mo* is the bound particle (Hamada 1948)
- The optative particle *na* combined with the intentional auxiliary *mu* (Tokuda 1936, 206; Okuzato 1943, 210)

Of these, only *iii* and *vi* predicts *namu* as the original form.

Etymology *i* was first proposed by Miyajima and later adopted by some scholars, such as Gotō (1967), as well as by certain dictionaries,

including the *Iwanami kogo jiten*, which references this etymology. An obvious critique of this theory is that the morphological binding of *mo* to the *mizenkei* form is highly idiosyncratic; moreover, it fails to address the semantic gap between the first-person optative *na* and *namu*. Neither Miyajima nor Gotō offered any rationale for how the addition of an exclamatory particle would alter the perceived performer of the action.

Etymology *ii*, briefly mentioned above, was first proposed by Yamada and later backed by Tabé (1953), but presents even greater challenges: while bound *pa*, *mo*, *so₂(/zo₂)* and *ko₂so₂* all have their final uses, none can connect to a specific form of inflectable words,³⁴ nor generate a nuance even remotely related to that of the optative *namu*, not to mention that it implies that bound *namo* underwent the same vowel shift in different eras depending on the position within the sentence.

The following three potential etymologies were first presented by Hamada (1948), who ultimately chooses to support the latter, though the rationale for this preference remains somewhat unclear. Among these, theories *iv* and *v* assume that *namo* is the older form, with the former positing the sound change *i*→*a* and the latter *e*→*a* to align with the attested form. Aside from the tentative speculations on the vowel shift, the lack of semantic equivalence between the optatives *ne/ni* and *namu* presents an additional challenge to the theories, as it leaves unexplained how the addition of the exclamative particle *mo* can transform an imperative into a prominently third-person expression.

Etymology *vi* was proposed independently by Tokuda (1936, 206) and Okuzato (1943, 210), and later further developed by Yoshida (1966; 1967). Following Tokuda, Yoshida argues that the morphemes *na*, *ni*, *nu*, and *ne* are the surviving inflected forms of an optative suffix that followed the *yodan* conjugation. Okayama (1977) criticised this theory, identifying several critical issues with the etymology: the absence of an attested *shūshikei* form, the lack of such forms in adnominal position, and the difficulty of explaining the semantic differences among at least *na*, *ni*, *nu ka*, and *namu* based on this assumption. Although absent from Japanese scholarship after Yoshida, this theory has resurfaced in recent Western grammars, such as in Vovin (2020, 599, 602) and Kupchik (2023, 345), neither of which, however, address Okayama's criticisms. Even setting aside the morphological issues with this assumption – such as why intentional *mu* can follow what is generally considered a final suffix,

34 Tabé argues that the *mizenkei* was originally noun-like, allowing bound particles to connect to it. However, it is not found connected to other bound particles aside *pa*. Moreover, as with etymology *i*, the theory does not explain why the addition of *mo* would affect the meaning of the expression, given that Tabé also considered optative *na* to be a final use of the bound particle *na*.

or why it follows *na* despite negative suffix *zu* preceding it in the form *na-na* – this view fails to account for how the peculiar meaning of *namu*, as outlined above, could arise from the combination of the desiderative *na* and intentional *mu*.

Etymology *iii* stands out as the most straightforward approach to explain the formation of the term *namu* from a morphological standpoint. By refraining from positing *namo* as the original form, one can account for the absence of reliable attestations and eliminate the need to assume vowel shifts and morphologically ‘ungrammatical’ constructs. Structurally it would result in the morphologically familiar construct negative auxiliary *zu* + conjectural auxiliary *mu*, thus equating the morphology of *zaramu*. The existence of the dialectal auxiliary *napu*, believed to be a combination of the *mizenkei* conjugated form of *zu* and the reiterative *pu*, demonstrates the theoretical feasibility of such a construct. This approach thus leaves semantics as the only issue to be addressed. Even so, solving this issue is not an easy task.

From a semantic perspective, the possibility that *na* may be an inflected form of *zu* is entirely plausible, especially considering that the construct *nu ka*, widely recognised as morphologically including the negative suffix *zu*, has equal semantic value to *namu*.

- (20) *Oto₂ no₂ sukunaki, mi₁ti ni apanu kamo [相奴鴨] sukunaki, yo₂ mi₁ti ni apasaba iro₂ge₁seru suge₁kasa wogasa waga unage₁ru tama no₂ nana tu wo to₂rikape₂ mo mawosamu mono₂ wo sukunaki, yo₂ mi₁ti ni apanu kamo [相奴鴨]. (Man'yōshū 16.3875)*

Oh, how I yearn for him to meet me upon the silent road! Silent! Is the road where, if only he would meet me, I could ask him to barter that tiny sedge hat of his, tinged with color, for the seven strings of jewels I have strung round my neck. Oh, how I yearn for him to meet me upon that silent road!

- (21) *Mato₂poku no₂ no₁ ni mo apanamu [安波奈牟] ko₂ko₂ro₂ naku sato₁ no₂ mi₂naka ni ape₁ru sena kamo. (Man'yōshū 14.3463)*

If only he could meet me on a field far away! My lover, who meets me so indiscreetly in the heart of the town!

For instance, in the two poems above, *apanu ka* and *apanamu* seem to convey equivalent meanings, both expressing a longing for a secret meeting with the beloved. One more example.

- (22) *Iso₁ no₂ Kami₁ Puru no₂ Mi₁ko₂to₂ pa tawayame₂ no₂ mato₁pi₁ ni yo₂rite uma-zi-mono₂ napa to₂rituke sisi-zi-mono₂ yumi₁ya kakumi₁te opoki₁mi₁ no₂ mi₁ko₂to₂ kasiko₁mi₁ amazakaru pi₁nape₂ ni makaru puru-ko₂ro₂mo Matutiyama yo₁ri kape₁ri ko₂nu kamo [還来奴香聞]. (Man'yōshū 6.1019)*

Oh you, Isonokami no Furu, who enticed by a gentle lady, were yoked as a horse and encircled by hunters' bows and arrows as a deer, you who are now forced to leave to the uncouth regions far from the Heavens by his lordship's awesome

decree! May you go only as far as Mount Matsuchi on your path and then return straight back!

- (23) *To₂si mo pe₂zu kape₂ri ko₂namu* [来嘗] *to₂ asakage₂ ni matu ramu imo si omokage₂ ni mi₁yu.* (Man'yōshū 12.3138)³⁵

I glimpsed, in a vision, my beloved lady waiting in the morning light and thinking, 'If only he would return before the year is out!'

The first poem recounts the exile of a courtier named Isonokami no Otomaro 石上乙麻呂, who was banished to Tosa by Emperor Shōmu 聖武 following an illicit affair with Lady Kume no Wakame 久米若売. The author – possibly a retainer, family member, or even Otomaro himself writing in the third person – expresses a longing for Otomaro's swift return from the exile, hyperbolically hoping that he might turn back as soon as Mount Matsuchi, which lies along the route to Tosa, is reached. Similarly, in the second poem the author expresses a similar longing, this time through the thoughts of a lady awaiting his return.³⁶ When comparing the analogous contexts in these two poems, it is difficult to see how *ko₂nu ka* and *ko₂namu* may carry distinct nuances. A final example.

- (24) *Mono₂no₂pu no₂ lpase no₂ mori no₂ poto₂to₂gi₁su ima mo nakanu ka* [鳴奴香] *yama no₂ to₂kage₁ ni.* (Man'yōshū 8.1470)

If only the cuckoo of the sacred lpase wood would cry now, in the eternal shade of the mountain!

- (25) *Poto₂to₂gi₁su napo mo nakanamu* [奈賀那牟] *moto₂ tu pi₁to₂ kake₂tutu moto₂na a wo ne si naku mo.* (Man'yōshū 20.4437)

If only the cuckoo would still cry, as I long for my beloved of old! Alas! Yet it is only me who keeps crying.

Again, the forms *nakanu ka* and *nakanamu* here occur in analogous contexts and seemingly convey the same nuance of counterfactual desire. Clearly, *nu ka* and *namu* bear a striking semantic resemblance, on top of their morphological similarity. Positing a morphological

35 The Old *Taikei* (Takagi, Gomi, Ōno 1959) reads *ki₁namu* here. This instance was not addressed in section 2 because the consensus overwhelmingly favors *ko₂namu*. The New *Taikei* (Satake et al. 2000) emended into *ko₂namu*.

36 Earlier, I dismissed the thesis upheld by some scholars (Kinoshita 1974; Moriwaki 2021) arguing that *nu ka* and *namu* differ in temporality, noting that this interpretation largely hinges on the reading of poem 16.3788 (12). The latter of these two poems provides yet another example where a counterfactual present/future interpretation of *namu* better fits the context, so much so that Kinoshita admitted this example (23) to be an exception.

connection – specifically the presence of a conjugated form of the negative suffix *zu* – is therefore a most natural solution.

Yamaguchi (1980) supported etymology *iii* but also pointed out that the absence of an interrogative adverb co-occurring with *namu* constitutes an issue to the theory, given that *ka* in *nu ka* is always omitted in the presence of an interrogative pronoun, as below.

- (26) *Asipi₁ki₂ no₂ yama mo tikaki₁ wo poto₂to₂gi₁su tuki₂ tatu made ni nani ka ki₁nakanu*
[奈仁加吉奈可奴]. (*Man'yōshū* 17.3983)

Why does the cuckoo not come calling before the moon has risen, though the steep mountain lies so near?

From this phenomenon one might anticipate **namu ka* as the original form, with *ka* subsequently omitted. If that is the case, the absence of an interrogative adverb is certainly suspicious, considering that final *ka* is never omitted in the absence of an interrogative adverb, at least as far as the construct *nu ka* is concerned. One might wonder whether a negative rhetorical sentence can form without an interrogative pronoun at all. Since according to this etymology *namu* would have equal structure to *zaramu*, it might prove useful to see if and how *zaramu* forms negative rhetorical sentences.

The construct *zaramu* is attested in the *Man'yōshū* in a fair number, mostly expressing negative conjecture. However, *zaramu* appears to approach an optative nuance when paired with bound *ya* to form a rhetorical question.

- (27) *Ki₁rime₂yama yuki₁ kapu mi₁ti no₂ asagasumi₁ pono₂ka ni dani ya imo ni apazaramu* [妹尔不相牟]. (*Man'yōshū* 12.3037)

Will I not meet my beloved lady, not even as faintly as the morning mist that cloaks the winding paths of Mount Kirime?

A negative conjectural interpretation is technically viable here, but it is not difficult to see how in this context an optative nuance emerges from the presence of the minimal particle *dani* combined with the rhetorical negative question formed by bound *ya* + *zaramu*, since the content of the conjecture – not meeting one's beloved – is undesirable. Similarly, an optative nuance seemingly arises also in the presence of the maximal particle *sape₂*.

- (28) *Tukuyo₁ yo₂mi₁ kado₂ ni idetati asiura site yuku to₂ki₁ sape₂ ya imo ni apazaramu* [妹二不相有]. (*Man'yōshū* 12.3006)

Even as I step out for a walking divination, drawn by the beauty of the moonlit night, will I not be able to meet my beloved?

Although optative expressions are generally said to co-occur with minimal particles – in particular bound *mo* – the predicate can hardly

be interpreted as a simple negative conjecture in this poem. Like the previous example, the rhetorical question formed by *ya... zaramu* indirectly conveys an optative nuance. Furthermore, the optative nuance of these instances reflects a counterfactual desire, similar to *namu*, since a rhetorical question negates its content by definition. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether the optative nuance emerges also in the absence of both minimal and maximal particles.

- (29) *Tama no₂ wo no₂ utusigo₂ko₂ro₂ ya to₂situki₂ no₂ yuki₁ kaparu made imo ni apazu aramu* [妹尔不逢将有]. (*Man'yōshū* 11.2792)

Will my sanity, the lifeline of my soul, endure, if I do not meet my beloved lady before months and years slip past?

For example, while this whole poem indirectly expresses a desire to meet the lover, it should be noted that *ya... apazaramu* (or *ya... apazu aramu*), though structured as a rhetorical question, can be here interpreted as a mere conjecture, rhetorically negating the possibility of meeting the beloved lady. In other words, the rhetorical question – reducible to ‘will I retain my sanity?’ – while implying a negative response, does not necessarily have to be interpreted as conveying a wishful meaning akin to ‘If only I could retain my sanity!’, as instead was the case in the presence of a minimal or maximal particle. However, it is also true that while the readings *apazaramu* or *apazu aramu* seem to be considered equivalent, they do differ in that in the latter the verb *ari* is a free morpheme, which could be affecting the possible interpretations of this particular case.

Conclusively, it appears that in the *Man'yōshū*, an optative meaning similar to that of *namu* is produced by *zaramu* under specific conditions: the presence of a minimal (or possibly maximal) particle and a rhetorical predicate bound by *ya*. While *namu* sentences often include the minimal particle *mo*, there are no instances of optative *namu* bound with *ya*. This means that if *namu* originates from a negative rhetorical question it must have lost the bound particle only at a later stage. The absence of conjectural attestations of *namu* in Old Japanese sources, where negative conjecture is consistently conveyed by *zaramu*, implies that if such a usage ever existed, it had already disappeared by the time of the earliest records. Still, if the above-presented interpretation of *Kojiki*'s poem 28 (4) by Yamaguchi-Kōnishi (1997) is accepted, it is worth noting that the form *tatanamu* would constitute a non-optative instance of *namu*, thereby equating *zaramu* in its negative conjectural meaning.

One additional problem of theory *iii* is the semantic limitation of *namu*, which exclusively permits third-person subjects. This limitation is shared with the negative suffix construct *nu ka*, but not with *ya... zaramu*, as can be seen from the uses in 12.3037 (27) and 12.3006 (28) provided above. In modern Japanese, optative structures

including the negative suffix do have a similar limitation, but the first person is admitted on the condition that the verb carries a nuance of potentiality. This does not seem to be the case for *namu* and *nu ka*. One explanation might be that, while these forms could originally be used with a first-person subject when the verb conveyed potentiality, they solidified in the more frequent third-person context, perhaps also due to the relative paucity of potential *yu* and *rayu* in poetry.³⁷

7 Conclusions

In this article, I analysed the ambiguous and debated instances of optative *namu* in Old Japanese texts, examined its semantic range, and reconsidered the widely accepted view that it derives from the older form *namo*. I also reevaluated the proposed etymologies, offering a deeper analysis of one of them (etymology *iii*). The conclusions drawn from the analysis are as follows.

- Only nineteen certain attestations of *namu* and two attestations of *namo* are found in Old Japanese texts. To these I would add one more attestation of *namu*, bringing the total to twenty, based on my reading of 南畝 in *Man'yōshū* 1.18 as *namu*.
- Optative *namu* does not have intrinsic temporality but is mainly used to express counterfactual present. There is no semantical distinction based on the temporality between *namu* and *nu ka*.
- The character 畝 in *Man'yōshū* 1.18 is not merely functioning as a phonogram because (a) *namu* was typically conveyed by the sole character 南; (b) the author had access to a range of more common phonograms for the sound *mo* or *mu*; (c) 南畝 is a meaningful compound in Sinitic. Consequently, it cannot be considered strong evidence for a hypothetical reading, as the primary purpose of its use is logographic rather than phonetic.
- Regarding the character 畝 in *Man'yōshū* 1.18, the reading *mu* is more plausible than *mo* because (a) the reading *mu* should be regarded as standard because *namo* appears exclusively in eastern poems, meaning *mo* warrants support only if backed by compelling phonetic evidence; (b) *mu* cannot be excluded as a plausible option among the potential Sino-Japanese readings because in Middle Chinese 畝 shared its final with characters which in Japanese were read with vowel /u/, such as 豆 and 頭.
- Among the proposed etymological theories, the one positing *namu* as the original form appears to be the most plausible, as

37 As for the verb *apu* in *ya... apazaramu*, this verb classically had inherent potentiality, as it carried the nuance of 'meeting by chance or opportunity', rather than 'intentionally meeting' as is mostly the case in modern Japanese.

it avoids speculative assumptions about morphology and aligns with the observation that negative rhetorical questions can yield optative nuances under specific conditions. The required conditions, observed through the comparison with *zaramu* are (a) the presence of a minimal (or possibly also maximal) particle; (b) the presence of bound *ya*, rather than of an interrogative pronoun. Nevertheless, two significant questions remain: (i) whether a negative rhetorical question can form in the absence of bound *ya*, and whether such absence can occur frequently enough to develop into a standardised expression; (ii) whether constraints of the poetic form or a process of semantic narrowing sufficiently explain the absence of first-person subjects in *namu* (and *nu ka*) phrases.

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Ancient Roman Antiquity in the Italian Landscape and the Reception of Roman History in Modern Japan (1868-1912)

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Abstract Diplomatic and cultural exchanges between Japan and the Kingdom of Italy began as soon as Japan opened its borders. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were particularly fruitful for fostering cultural ties, culminating in the growth of ancient Roman history and archaeology as academic disciplines in Japan. This article examines unpublished and little-known sources, including diaries of Japanese travellers and Meiji-era (1868-1912) writings on ancient Rome. It focuses on Japanese travellers' impressions of Roman monuments and ruins in Italy and explores how these experiences contributed to the dissemination of ancient Roman studies in Japan.

Keywords Ancient Roman Archaeology. Ancient Roman History. Meiji Period. Japanese travellers. Reception of Classical Antiquity.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Encounter with Roman History and Archaeology in the Late Edo Period. – 3 The Growing Interest in Roman Antiquity During the Meiji Period. – 4 Admiration for Ancient Roman Stone Culture and the Image of Rome. – 5 The Influence of Artists and Academic Scholars' Visits to Archaeological Sites in Italy. – 6 Conclusions.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-03-11
Accepted 2025-05-05
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Fukuyama, Y.; Pilutti Namer, M. (2025). "Ancient Roman Antiquity in the Italian Landscape and the Reception of Roman History in Modern Japan (1868-1912)". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 461-484.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/014

1 Introduction

The archaeological sites of the Kingdom of Italy were among the most prominent destinations for travellers during the era of the Grand Tour. In the eighteenth century, young men from upper-class British families travelled across the Continent to complete their education through practical experience, with Italy as their final destination. For those seeking to trace the history of ancient Rome and experience its glorious past, the remains of Antiquity served as vital clues for imagining the ancient Roman world. This was equally true for Japanese travellers. The opening of Japan's borders in 1854 made international travel possible, and from the beginning of the Meiji period (1868-1912), Japanese bureaucrats and aristocrats began visiting Europe and America as part of efforts to modernise and westernise their homeland.

Despite Japan's isolationist policy during the Edo period, interest in ancient Rome began to emerge in the nineteenth century. However, a deeper engagement with the subject developed with the dissemination of Western knowledge among Japanese intellectuals during the late Edo and early Meiji periods. These intellectuals began reading English works such as Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and Hans Christian Andersen's *The Improvisatore*, which fostered an interest in the remains of ancient Rome in Italy. Such well-known books reinforced the image of Ancient Rome as a decayed yet once-great civilisation for Japanese readers, which in turn fostered their desire to visit archaeological sites. Although the Ministry of Education introduced universal history into the school curriculum in 1872, visual knowledge of ancient Greece and Rome remained quite limited at the time. Unlike European tourists, Japan's long period of isolation left its travellers relatively unfamiliar with Classical Antiquity, leading them to approach Italy's ancient sites with fresh perspectives and expectations distinct from those of Europeans.

With the opening of Japan's borders and the possibility of international travel, how were Japanese intellectuals during the Meiji period impressed by Roman archaeological sites in Italy? What did they hope to learn through their visits? The study of how Ancient Rome was received in Japan is a relatively recent scholarly

endeavour.¹ To uncover the origins of Japanese interest in ancient Rome and the role of archaeological sites in Italy in shaping the image of the Roman city within Japanese society, this paper analyses the travel diaries of Japanese travellers alongside books and articles on ancient Rome from the late Edo and Meiji periods.

2 The Encounter with Roman History and Archaeology in the Late Edo Period

Japan's isolation policy, implemented from the late sixteenth century, significantly limited knowledge of European history within the country until the late eighteenth century. However, the arrival of foreign embassies – such as the Russian mission in 1792 and the United States delegation in 1853 – prompted Japanese scholars to recognise the importance of understanding world history in order to contextualise these encounters and their broader implications. In 1801, a Rangakusha (蘭学者, a person who studies Western science, primarily through Dutch sources) named Yamamura Saisuke 山村才助 published the first book about world history *Seiyō Zakki* 西洋雜記 (Notes on European History) (Sukeno 1978, 15). In the preface of this book, the author noted that it was primarily composed using 32 European books, 41 Chinese books, and 52 Japanese texts on Dutch studies available in Japan at the time. The book includes episodes from Roman history, such as the foundation myth of Romulus and Remus, Julius Caesar's military campaigns, and Constantine's relocation of the capital to Constantinople (Yamamura 1801, 48-51). The information in this book was passed down to later Japanese works on world history, though its content remained quite limited.

Our collaborative research and the publication of this article were made possible through Waseda Institute of Advanced Study's visiting scholar program AY2024 and the JSPS Kakenhi grant number 24K00054 (International Joint Research on "The Reception of Western Classics in Japan: From the Early Modern Period to the Age of Globalization").

The Authors would like to express their gratitude to the Murakawa family for allowing them to consult their archive, to Prof. Ralf Behrwald (University of Bayreuth) for his comments, and to Profs Paolo Calvetti and Silvia Vesco (Ca' Foscari University of Venice) for their interest in their research. They also wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and constructive feedback, which helped to improve the clarity and quality of this article.

This study results from the close collaboration between the two authors. With regard to the concerns of Italian Academia, Yuko Fukuyama is responsible for Sections 2 through 5, while Myriam Pilutti Namer is responsible for Sections 1 and 6. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by Yuko Fukuyama.

1 Cardi and Kondo's forthcoming 2026 publication will be the first comprehensive book dedicated to the reception of Classical Antiquity in Japan..

Despite this, one notable *Uki-e* 浮絵 (perspective print) depicting Roman antiquity exists. Attributed in the 1770s-1780s to Utagawa Toyoharu 歌川豊春, a prominent *Uki-e* artist of the time and founder of the Utagawa school, the print portrays a landscape featuring the Colosseum, the statue of Marcus Aurelius, the Arch of Titus, Trajan's Column, and various other ancient Roman objects [fig. 1].² The title of the print, *Oranda Furansukano garan no zu* 阿蘭陀フランスカノ伽藍之図, translates to "Franciscan monastery in Holland". During the late Edo period, only Dutch merchants were permitted to stay in Japan, confined to the small island of Dejima. They served as a fragile link connecting Japanese intellectuals with Western knowledge. This political context in Japan led to the misunderstanding of Roman landscapes as Dutch ones. The model for this *Uki-e* print is a capriccio landscape from William Austin's 1756 work, which drew inspiration from Giovanni Paolo Pannini.³ It was part of a series of four engravings titled *Ruins of Ancient Rome*, none of which are direct copies of Pannini's originals. Austin appears to have combined Pannini-like Roman ruins with his own imagination in an engraving that was subsequently brought to Japan by a Dutch merchant. Toyoharu also produced a series of Dutch landscapes, including a depiction of Venice based on Antonio Visentini's engraving after Canaletto (Okano 1973, 16-17; Ōsawa 1994, 88-9).⁴ *Uki-e* was a highly popular art form during the late eighteenth century, and foreign landscapes must have captivated Japanese viewers. As a result, though referred to as Dutch landscapes, images of the *Foro Romano* were seen as exotic Western scenes and were widely shared with the public in the city of Edo.

More detailed knowledge of Ancient Rome was finally introduced in 1853, when Mitsukuri Genpo 箕作阮甫 published *Kyokusei Shiei* 極西史影 (Historical Descriptions of Europe), a work based on Johannes Bosscha's book on universal history (Mitsukuri 1853).⁵ Rangakusha including Mitsukuri, worked to gather information about Western societies for the Japanese government, which needed to prepare for negotiations with foreign powers in the mid-nineteenth century.

² Kobe City Museum. Comparable *Uki-e* paintings, exhibiting minor variations in colour, can also be found in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, inv. 11.16000), and the Machida City Museum of Graphic Art.

³ William Austin, *Ruins of Ancient Rome*. 1756. London, Robert Sayer. Available at https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1949-1008-175; Oka 2010, 182-3; Hiraizumi 2018, 113.

⁴ Kiyoharu utilised a printing of "Prospectus ab Sede S. Crucis ad P.P. Discalceatos" from A. Visentini, *Urbis Venetiarum Prospectus Celebriores*. Venice: Joannem Baptistam Pasquali, 1742-54. A fragment of Visentini's printing likely arrived in Japan through the activities of Dutch merchants.

⁵ He utilised Bosscha, J. (1838). *Schets der Algemeene Geschiedenis en van die des Vaderlands*. Breda: Broese.

Mitsukuri's Roman history begins with the Etruscans and provides detailed accounts of key events, such as the struggle between the patricians and plebeians, Augustus's establishment of the imperial system, the eruption of Vesuvius, and the fate of Pompeii and Herculaneum, including their excavation in 1756. The work also covers episodes from the reigns of Roman emperors. Although these books were handwritten and copied, the information was shared among Japanese intellectuals, marking the first appearance of details about archaeological sites in Italy.

Japan's isolationist policy during the late Edo period limited access to information about Roman antiquity. While fragmentary knowledge was conveyed through *Uki-e* paintings, these were primarily imagined landscapes and did not engage with or accurately reflect the archaeological remains of ancient Rome.



Figure 1 Attrib. Utagawa Toyoharu 歌川豊春, *Oranda Furansukano garan no zu* 阿蘭陀フランスカノ伽藍之図 (Franciscan monastery in Holland). 1770s-1880s. Kobe city Museum. Permission granted by the Kobe City Museum. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder

3 The Growing Interest in Roman Antiquity During the Meiji Period

In 1868, the Meiji Restoration marked the beginning of Japan's modernisation and westernisation. The scholarship on Roman history developed during the late Edo period was passed down to scholars working for the Ministry of Education, who actively engaged in translation efforts and the creation of school textbooks. In 1872, when the Ministry established official guidelines for school curricula, universal history was introduced as a subject from the fourth year of upper elementary school (for 12-year-olds), with Greek and Roman history included as part of the curriculum (Okazaki 2016, 22). One of the assigned textbooks, *Roma Shiryaku* 羅馬史略 (Handbook of Roman History) published in 1874, introduced the basic history of Rome, beginning with geographical information and the foundation of the city [fig. 2]. It then covered key events such as the fall of Tarquinius Superbus, the establishment of the Republican system, the expansion of Roman territory, the arrival of Hannibal, the Punic Wars, Sulla, the First Triumvirate, the Second Triumvirate, Augustus and the establishment of the Imperial system, the reigns of both virtuous and tyrannical emperors, and the rule of Constantine (Ôtsuki 1874, 47-57). These textbooks were used as reading materials in the classroom, and the Ministry of Education's efforts gradually succeeded in imparting basic knowledge of Roman history to many young Japanese students.



Figure 2
Assassination of Caesar in Ôtsuki 1874,
105. National Diet Library Digital
Collection

Alongside the introduction of a westernised education system, the firsthand experience of visiting Roman archaeological sites also began. The first significant account came from the Iwakura Mission 岩倉使節団, which embarked on a three-year journey to the United States and Europe in 1873 to negotiate the unequal treaties with foreign countries. The members of the Mission visited Pompeii and Herculaneum, providing the first Japanese travel diary about archaeological sites in Italy. One of the participants, Kume Kunitake 久米邦武, published *Beiō Kairan Jikki* 米欧回覧実記 (The Accounts of Iwakura Mission's Observation Journey in the United States and Europe) in 1878, based on his travel diary. In the sections of the book covering Italy, Kume focused particularly on the remains of Ancient Rome, as evidenced by the frequent etchings of archaeological landscapes (Fujisawa 2013, 128). In his draft for *Beiō Kairan Jikki*, Kume Kunitake also recorded the text of a Latin inscription from a bronze tablet and a hieroglyphic inscription he encountered during his visit to the Naples Archaeological Museum.⁶ Although the texts of the ancient inscriptions did not appear in the published edition of *Beiō Kairan Jikki*, Kume Kunitake's interest in Antiquity is evident. His impressions of Roman archaeological remains, as described in the book, seem to have been influenced by Gibbon's work. The Mission visited sites such as the Foro Romano, the Palatine Hill, the Colosseum, the Baths of Caracalla, Pompeii, and Herculaneum, which were depicted as testaments to past prosperity and its subsequent decline. When Kume visited Rome, he wrote that the ancient remains of the city evoked the perished glory of its past.

ローマの町並みはその多くが不規則、狭隘で、清掃が行き届いておらず、ほこりが目に入る。建物は大きい古いものが多く、壮麗でない。周辺部に行くと雑草が茂り家は汚くて路もがたがたである。そんななかのところどころ2000年前の遺跡があり、あるいは地中から掘り出した遺物などもあって、滅び去ったものに対する感慨が湧く。(Kume 2008, 323)

The cityscape of Rome is often irregular and narrow. The cleaning is not thorough, which leaves dust swirling into my eyes. While many of the buildings tend to be large and old, they lack grandeur. In the outskirts of the city, overgrown weeds dominate the scenery, houses appear unkempt, and the roads are bumpy. Amidst this setting, remnants of ancient ruins from 2,000 years ago can occasionally be found, along with artefacts unearthed

⁶ Fujisawa, Fujisawa 2011, 60; 65 fn. 8. Fujisawa and Fujisawa noted that the Latin text *P[O]ST Q[UI]NQ[UE]NIUM POP[ULI] V[ER]I* was from the bronze tablet of *Tabula Bembina* (inv. 2636), CIL I², 583. 1.66).

from beneath the ground, evoking a profound sense of reflection on the transience of past world.

He repeatedly compares Italy with northern countries (the United Kingdom, Germany, and France), asserting that the centre of prosperity in Europe shifted from south to north, and he regards Italy as a decayed nation (Kume 2008, 317-19). At that time, the capital of Italy had recently been moved from Florence to Rome, and urbanisation projects for the new capital were only just beginning. This situation may have led the Japanese delegates to perceive Italy as a fallen country.

By the late nineteenth century, Japanese intellectuals were already familiar with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In 1889, Takada Sanae 高田早苗, a politician and the chief editor of *Yomiuri Shinbun*, recommended in his book *Biji-gaku* 美辞学 (Study of Rhetoric) that Gibbon's work had served as an excellent guide for statesmen (Takada 1889, 35). The Japanese translation of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was first published in 1918; however, many young intellectuals at the time read the English edition and shared the image of decline associated with the Roman Empire (Sakamoto 1918). Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石's bestselling novel, *Wagahai wa Neko dearu* 吾輩は猫である (I Am a Cat), includes an episode in which a Japanese student studies the works of Gibbon, Mommsen, and Smith to learn about the ancient Romans' practice of vomiting, particularly in relation to their bathing activities after luxurious dinners (Natsume 1905, 76).⁷ Natsume graduated from the University of Tokyo in 1893, and after five years of study in London, he began teaching at his alma mater. He published *Wagahai wa Neko dearu* in 1905, which indicates that by this time, the name of Gibbon was already familiar to Japanese students.

4 **Admiration for Ancient Roman Stone Culture and the Image of Rome**

Another characteristic of *Beiō Kairan Jikki* can be seen in Kume's descriptions of archaeological sites. His writing was generally straightforward, but at times, he offered original insights, particularly regarding aspects of ancient Roman life, such as the supply of water, the remains of domestic tools in Pompeii, and the social function of the baths in Rome. He also paid particular attention to building materials, using them to highlight the appearance of Italian buildings and monuments (Kume 2008, 334-77). When Natsume arrived in

⁷ For *Wagahai wa Neko dearu* and ancient Greek and Roman material, see Townshend 2024.

Naples in 1900, marking his first step into Europe, he wrote in his diary that he was greatly surprised to see the stone-paved streets, as the entirely stone-built buildings and streets were completely new to him (Natsume 1919, 13-14). Given this background, it is not surprising that Japanese travellers focused on the stone materials at archaeological sites and their long-lasting durability.

As Tanigawa pointed out in the exhibition catalogue *Ruins in Art History*, the concept of ‘ruins’ was not present in Japanese thought before the westernisation of the Meiji period (Tanigawa 2018, 13). Traditionally, Japanese architecture was primarily constructed with wood, with stone used only for foundations. When such buildings were abandoned or destroyed, only the stone basements remained, making it rare to encounter collapsed walls or partially fallen ceilings as seen in archaeological sites in Italy. Especially from the seventeenth century, Europeans developed a fascination with ancient ruins, but this concept was entirely new to the Japanese.

Asano Nagakoto 浅野長勲, a Japanese ambassador in Italy, visited Pompeii in October 1882. His travel diary rarely includes personal comments; however, when discussing the public baths in Pompeii, he noted both the similarities and differences between ancient Roman and Japanese architecture.

浴湯店あり。往昔は吾か邦俗の如く数人浴せしものにて石造の浴器廣さ凡そ二三坪あり。今の如く格別に浴室を設けず衣服を脱し置く所は浴室の側に石にて区域をなし吾か邦浴湯店の衣服棚に稍や類す只木石の異なるのみ。(Asano 1884, 104-5)

There is a public bathhouse. In the past, similar to our country, multiple people would bathe together, and the stone-made bathing tubs were approximately 2 to 3 tsubo in size. Unlike today, there were no individual bathrooms; instead, a changing area was located adjacent to the bathing room and the clothing shelves were made of stone. These changing areas were quite similar to the Japanese bathhouses, and the clothing shelves differs only in the material – being made of either stone or wood.

He also focused on the difference between stone and wood structures and expressed particular interest in the baths, a common custom shared by ancient Rome and Japan, which was rarely found in modern European countries.

In 1887, Tani Kanjō (谷干城), the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, also visited Pompeii and left with a similar impression. Tani wrote that he was amazed at how the remains of the city preserved the daily lives of its people, despite having lived 1,700 years ago. He began his account of his experience in Pompeii by describing the building materials, noting that most of the

architecture was constructed with stone, roofing tiles, cement, and marble pillars. He also compared the stucco-covered Pompeian houses with the plastered walls of Japan. Additionally, he remarked that the lavishness of the hot baths must have corrupted the morals of the Romans (Tani 1976, 634).⁸ When he visited Rome, Tani marveled at the enormous ancient baths once again and confessed that they must have been a paradise for visitors. In addition, he took note of the building materials and methods used at the Foro Romano, explaining that the bricks were covered with marble (638).⁹

Interestingly, the published edition of *Beiō Kairan Jikki* included etchings of the visited sites. As noted in the introduction, these images were added to provide a visual representation of the civilised countries to the Japanese people (Kume 1878a, 25-6; Kume Museum of Art 2006, 17). In the Italian section of *Beiō Kairan Jikki*, images of archaeological sites dominated the portrayal of the Italian landscape. Even sites that the travellers were unable to visit were included to showcase the archaeological heritage of Italy. For instance, when they passed through Verona, Kume expressed his regret at not being able to see the famous Arena, but its image was nonetheless included alongside his account (Kume 2008, 286) [fig. 3]. Such images must have impressed Japanese readers, as the ancient stone-built structures, which had stood for centuries, were a novel element for them.

The admiration for the image of ruins with stone-built structures in Italy spread through the visual images in other published books. When Aoki Tsunesaburō 青木恒三郎 published a series of illustrated books on world-famous sites between 1885 and 1890 in seven volumes, he dedicated many pages to depicting the story and remains of Pompeii (Aoki 1886, 76-84) [fig. 4]. This series became popular among the Japanese, making images of Italian archaeological sites widely accessible in Japan.

⁸ The visits of members of the Japanese Imperial Family and officials in the late nineteenth century were also documented in Italian records. Cf. Ascione 1997, 210-11.

⁹ He also left numerous comments on the baths in Pompeii.

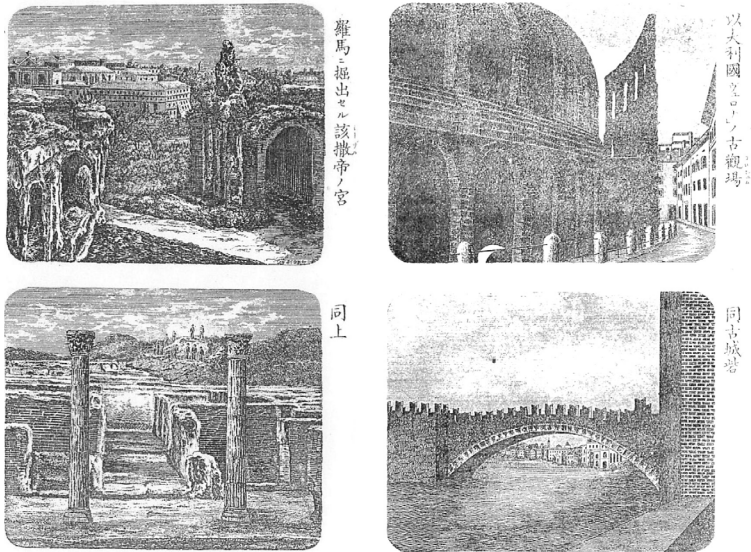


Figure 3 The illustrations in *Beio Kairan Jikki*. Upper right: The Arena of Verona; lower right: The Wall of Verona (Kume 1878b, 282). Upper left: Imperial Palaces in Rome; lower left: Imperial Palaces in Rome (Kume 1878b, 356). Waseda University Library

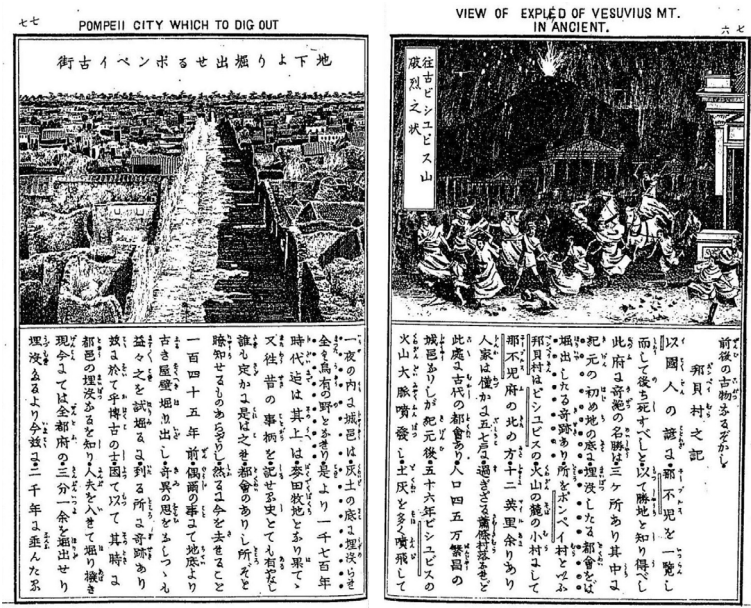


Figure 4 The illustrations of Pompeii. Aoki (1886, 76-7). National Diet Library Digital Collection

On the other hand, the fascination with the fate of Pompeii can be seen in the publication of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* in Japan. The first translation was published as early as 1879. To provide the historical context of Pompeii and the Roman world for readers, the translator included introductory notes on Rome, Pompeii, Isis, Venus, and Thessaly, with the explanation that most readers were already familiar with these topics (Niwa 1879, 1-4). These books contain numerous illustrations, but all of them depict ancient Roman scenes in a manner that resembles modern European settings (**fig. 5**). Although the accurate depiction of ancient Roman imagery would have to wait a few more years, the success of this translation undoubtedly contributed to the spread of basic knowledge about Roman antiquity and sparked an increasing curiosity about it.



Figure 5 The eruption of Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompei (Bulwer-Lytton 1878, 76-7).
National Diet Library Digital Collection

5 The Influence of Artists and Academic Scholars' Visits to Archaeological Sites in Italy

With the growing interest in Roman antiquity, Japanese specialists began to visit archaeological sites in Italy. During the Meiji period, the Japanese authorities regarded Italy as a country of great artistic heritage. When the government selected *Oyatoi Gaikokujin* (foreign experts) to introduce Western knowledge and technology, three

Italians were specifically chosen in the field of arts: Edoardo Chiossone for banknote printing, Antonio Fontanesi for oil painting, and Vincenzo Ragusa for sculpture. Fontanesi was invited to teach at the newly established *Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō* 工部美術学校 (Technical Art School) in 1876.¹⁰ As Hiraizumi noted, Fontanesi introduced the concept of “ruin” to Japan through his work (Hiraizumi 2018, 113). During his tenure teaching Japanese students from 1876 to 1878, Fontanesi used his own drawings, which depicted the remains of a Roman aqueduct and desolate ancient ruins. These drawings were then copied by his students as part of their exercises (Shōtō Museum 2018, 60-1). He brought photographs of European masterpieces, etchings, plaster casts of famous Greek and Roman sculptures, and other materials to his classes. These were used to educate Japanese students about European paintings and artistic heritage (Matsuoka 1942, 30).

Fontanesi taught in Japan for only two years, but during that time, he introduced the imagery of Italian artworks and a glimpse of Italian landscapes to his students. As mentioned earlier, the Italian landscape, particularly with its ancient Roman ruins, was a novel concept for the Japanese, who were accustomed to wooden buildings. This was equally unfamiliar to Japanese artists. One of Fontanesi’s pupils, Matsuoka Hisashi, decided to pursue further study in Western-style painting and chose to go to Rome. From 1880, he studied under the Italian painter Cesare Maccari, and from 1881 to 1887, he attended the Regio Istituto di Belle Arti in Rome (Aoki et al. 2002, 16-27). His main area of interest was portraiture, but he also left us a painting depicting the landscape of Rome with an archaeological monument, the Arch of Constantine [fig. 6]. As an art student, he was granted permission for free access to the archaeological sites in Rome in 1881, and it is likely that he painted such impressive landscape during his productive years of study (Aoki et al. 2002, 15-16). He brought his artworks back with him when he returned to Japan, and three similar paintings are preserved to this day.¹¹

10 For the details of *Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō* and Italy, see Kawakami 2011.

11 Okayama prefectural Museum of Art (see http://jmaps.ne.jp/okayamakenbi/det.html?data_id=2408); Tokyo National Museum (inv. A-11238) (see https://colbase.nich.go.jp/collection_items/tnm/A-11238?locale=ja); The University Art Museum, Tokyo University of the Arts (see https://jmaps.ne.jp/geidai/det.html?data_id=4327).



Figure 6 Matsuoka Hisashi 松岡壽, *Triumphal Arch* 凱旋門. C. 1882. Okayama Prefectural Museum of Art. Permission granted by Okayama Prefectural Museum of Art. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder

In addition to Western-art painters, Japanese-art painters also began to show an interest in Roman Antiquity. With the introduction of Western art in Japan, Japanese-art painters sought to study Western techniques to expand their expressive capabilities and create more refined works of art (Takashina 2008, 79-80). Takeuchi Seihō (竹内栖鳳) visited Rome in 1900 and created one of his notable artworks, *The Landscapes of Rome*. This painting portrays the Claudian Aqueduct and the Temple of Minerva Medica, combining elements of Western architecture with Japanese artistic techniques.¹² Takeuchi Seihō also left a comment about his impression of the Roman archaeological remains.

余が羅馬に入りパラチ(パラティーノ)の近傍を遙したる時は実に人間栄枯盛衰の感に打たれて形象物体こそ異れ一篇の唐詩に対するの感ありたり。若し技能ある人が写せば必ず面白きものを得んと固く居じたりなり。(Hiraizumi, 2018, 114)

When I visited Rome and walked through the area of Palatine, I was struck by the vicissitudes of human fortune. All the objects

12 Takeuchi Seihō, *The landscapes of Rome*. Available at <https://bunka.nii.ac.jp/heritages/detail/250675>.

seemed like a Chinese poem. If a young, talented artist were to depict this landscape, I am certain it would become a great work.

Another Japanese-art painter, Yoshida Hiroshi (吉田博), travelled abroad twice, first from 1899 to 1901, and again from 1903 to 1906.¹³ After his return, Yoshida published his travel memoir in 1907, which encompasses both of his trips abroad. In his memoir, Yoshida recommends visiting the archaeological site.

廢趾(レイン)に向かって足を向ける人は、大抵羅馬公場(ローマンフォーラム)を見落とす者はあるまい。(Yoshida 1907, 232)

Anyone who appreciates ruins will not miss the Foro Romano.

As these words suggest, he focuses not on the ancient buildings themselves, but on the ruined landscape. Not only did he visit the Foro Romano, Palatine Hill, and the Baths of Caracalla, where he noted the fragmented marbles and fallen pillars, but he also walked along the Appian Way, sketching the landscape with its iconic pine trees and the remains of destroyed Roman aqueducts (Yoshida 1907, 232-5). As mentioned earlier, Japanese wooden buildings were fragile and unable to withstand the passage of time, making the stone-built remains of ancient Rome particularly captivating for Japanese-art painters. These artists were drawn to the enduring nature of the Roman ruins, which offered a powerful medium through which to express the pathos of impermanence and the passage of time.

Alongside artists, young Japanese scholars in the humanities began to travel abroad to gain in-depth academic knowledge during the same period. In 1902, the Ministry of Education selected three historians to study in Europe, marking a significant opportunity for Japanese historians. This was a noteworthy development, as most of the governmental scholarships up to that point had been awarded to scholars in fields such as science, politics, and jurisprudence.¹⁴ One of the historians selected for this opportunity was Murakawa Kengo 村川堅固, who was tasked with studying ancient history due to the lack of a professor in this field at the University of Tokyo's history department. Murakawa departed from Yokohama in January 1903 for a travel period of three years and five months. According to his registration records at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich,

13 National Institute for Cultural Heritage, "Yoshida Hiroshi" in *Nihon Bijutsu Nenkan*, Shōwa 22-26 edition, 142-3. Available at <https://www.tobunken.go.jp/materials/bukko/8879.html>.

14 Several journal articles in 1902 celebrate the first selection of historians for the governmental scholarships for study abroad. *Chūō Kouron* 中央公論 17-12 (1902), 61; *Rekishi Chiri* 歴史地理 4-9 (1902), 102-3.

Murakawa attended several courses during his time there. These included three Greek and Roman history courses taught by Robert von Pöhlmann, five archaeology courses led by Adolf Furtwängler, a church history course by Alois Knöpfler, and a history seminar led by Kurt Riezler during the summer semester of 1903 and the winter semester of 1903-04.¹⁵ Although his future position was intended to be that of a professor of ancient history, Murakawa enrolled in more archaeology courses than history ones. Armed with the archaeological knowledge he acquired in Munich, he visited Italy on his return to Japan, from November 1905 to March 1906. During this journey, Murakawa meticulously recorded daily events and expenses in small notebooks. His Italian travel diary survives only partially, beginning with his departure from Rome and ending when he boarded a passenger ship at Brindisi. However, it includes the names of the places he visited and his impressions of them. Drawing on the knowledge he had previously acquired, he compares various sites, such as the Certosa di San Martino in Naples with the Certosa di Pavia, the Basilica of Pompeii with the Basilica Julia in Rome, and the Serapeum in Pozzuoli with the Forum in Ostia, making comparisons based on the materials used and the architectural plans.¹⁶

In his travel diary, Murakawa expresses admiration for the striking landscape of the Ciani River, with its abundant papyrus plants, and the grandeur of the Latomia dei Cappuccini. However, he does not focus as much on the archaeological sites themselves. This is likely due to his previous visits to Roman archaeological sites and his methodical approach to observation, which prevented him from viewing these locations with the typical tourist's sense of awe and wonder.¹⁷ As a specialist in Greek and Roman history, Murakawa stayed in Pompeii for four days, from February 27, 1906, and visited the archaeological sites from morning until closing time. In his diary, he mostly recorded the names of the places he visited, occasionally adding more detailed information. Like many other Japanese travellers of the time, he showed a particular interest in the building materials used at the sites.

其次にバシリカの趾あり。これは前者に比し、よく保存され居れども、建築材料は凝灰岩を主として、円柱の如き、ピラーの如き、煉瓦石を中心として、凝灰岩にて包みたるものなれば、其壮麗に於てはローマのバシリカ・

15 Murakawa family's Private Archive. Königl. Bayer. Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität. Zeugnis zum Abgange von der Universität.

16 Murakawa family's Private Archive. Travel Diary, February 23, 1906 (Certosa di San Martino and Pavia); February 27, 1906 (Basilica of Pompeii and Rome); February 25, 1906 (*Serapium* and *Forum* in Ostia).

17 Murakawa family's Private Archive. Travel Diary March 7, 1906 (Ciani river); March 8, 1906 (Latomia).

ジュリア等に比すべくもあらず。(Murakawa family's Private Archive. Travel Diary February 27, 1906 (Pompeii))

Next, there are the remains of a basilica. Compared to the previous structure, this one is relatively well-preserved. However, the primary construction material is tuff, and elements such as columns and pillars consist of brick cores encased in tuff. As a result, its grandeur cannot be compared to that of Roman structures like the Basilica Julia.

左折すれば既に有名なるポセイドンの社及其南にある所謂「バジリカ」明に認めらる。社は皆荒草の間に岐立し、純然たるドーリック式にして、材料は小孔の縦貫せる石灰石にして、時代を歴て、今は茶褐色を呈し居れり。(Murakawa family's Private Archive. Travel Diary March 3, 1906 (Paestum))

As I turn left, I can distinctly make out the renowned Temple of Poseidon and the so-called "Basilica" to its south. The temples rise amidst overgrown grass, constructed in the Doric style clearly. Their material, limestone perforated with small vertical holes, has weathered over time and its colour turned to a deep, earthy brown.

Although Murakawa had specifically studied archaeology in Germany, his frequent references to the variety of stones at the archaeological sites reflect a shared interest with other Japanese travellers. This focus on materials further emphasises the Japanese fascination with the stone culture of ancient Rome and its enduring presence in the Italian landscape.

During and after his travels, Murakawa published several short articles based on his travel diary. His enthusiasm for photography at the archaeological sites is mentioned numerous times in the diary. The photographs he took and purchased in Italy were frequently featured in his later pedagogical articles, contributing significantly to the dissemination of authentic images of Roman archaeological remains. These images played an important role in shaping the understanding of ancient Rome for Japanese teachers and students who were tasked with studying world history.

Murakawa's later article on the city of Rome, published in the pedagogical journal *Kyōiku Gahō* 教育画報 (Illustrated Journal for Education), offers a personal reflection on the archaeological remains in Rome.

こんな古い時から今日まで—たとえ其の間に非常な栄枯盛衰があり、建設と破壊とが度々繰り返されたとはいえ—(中略)首府としての命脈を保持して来たのであるから、此都に史蹟の豊富であることは当然である。いわんや我が国の古都の如く、其営造物が木造でなく、煉瓦や大理石を始め、

各種の石を以て作られて居るため、千歳の星霜にも腐朽の憂がなく、たとえ崩壊して土中に埋もれても、之を発掘すれば、昔ながらの建築材料が續々現われて来る(中略)。何気なく市中を散歩して居ても、全然現代風を離れた千年二千年前の古建築の一部や、古城壁の残りなどに往きあたって(中略)そぞろに懷古の情をそそり立つるのである。(Murakawa 1915, 171-2)

From antiquity to the present - despite numerous cycles of prosperity and decline, and the repeated construction and destruction - [...] this city has consistently sustained its role as a capital. It is therefore unsurprising that it abounds in historical landmarks. Unlike Japanese ancient cities, where structures were primarily wooden, the edifices in Rome have been built using durable materials such as brick, marble, and various types of stone. These materials, impervious to the ravages of time even over millennia, ensure the preservation of architectural remnants. Even when structures collapse and are buried, excavation reveals a wealth of original building materials. [...] A casual stroll through the city may lead one to encounter fragments of ancient edifices or remnants of old walls, their origins stretching back one or two thousand years. Such encounters, distinct from anything modern, [...] naturally evoke a profound sense of nostalgia and reverence for the past.

He compared the stone-made Roman archaeological remains with the wooden architecture of Japan, noting that the ruins of Antiquity, standing amidst the modern city, prompted him to reflect on the passage of history. Murakawa's admiration for Italian archaeological ruins was conveyed to young Japanese readers through such pedagogical articles, contributing to the dissemination of authentic information and imagery of Ancient Rome, alongside his academic activities.



Figure 7 Murakawa's photographs during his travel in 1906. At left: the *Foro Romano*; at right: the Appian Way. Private Collection. Courtesy of Murakawa Natsuko This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder

6 Conclusions

Japanese travellers frequently compared the wooden culture of Japan with the stone-built culture of Ancient Rome. The remains of ancient Roman architecture set within the modern landscape were a novel element for Japanese travellers, ranging from government officials to historians. They also perceived parallels between ancient Rome and Japan, particularly in their shared cultural emphasis on bathing. In the late nineteenth century, certain Victorian intellectuals and artists began to associate Japan with Greece, and British travellers to Japan recorded observations of similarities not only in clothing but also in everyday lifestyle practices in their travelogues (Ono 2003, 36-40). The classical image attributed to Japanese art contributed to the rise of Japonisme in Europe; however, this “classical” image was at times conflated with that of Greek art. There is no clear evidence that such European perspectives were shared within Japan. In 1915, the Japanese painters Fujita Tsuguharu (藤田嗣治) and Kawashima Riichirō (川島理一郎), residing in Paris, partook in a playful re-enactment of ancient Greek-style living in Reignac. However, their inspiration stemmed from Raymond Duncan’s performances of Greek dance rather than any direct admiration for ancient Greece (Murakami 2013, 32; 42).¹⁸ In this context – within a nation still undergoing Westernisation – the discovery of perceived similarities between Japan and ancient Rome must have made a striking impression on Japanese travellers. With the increasing interest in Roman archaeological sites, the study of archaeology in Japan also gained traction. One such example of this was a book intended for children, which contributed to broadening awareness and understanding of ancient Rome and its archaeological remains. Indeed, in 1907, *Otoghi Ryokou Sekai Meguri* お伽旅行世界めぐり (Fairy Travel All Around the World), tells the story of a young Japanese boy named Tarō who embarks on a journey around the world. For the Italy chapter, Pompei serves as his first destination. The book describes the city of Pompei as one that was buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. The focus of Tarō’s curiosity in the narrative lies primarily in the process of archaeological excavation, rather than in the specific details of the site itself (Fukuda 1907, 14-16). When Tarō asked, “It was a surprise that someone noticed this ancient subterranean city and excavated it”, an Italian man responded by explaining the history of Pompei’s rediscovery and excavation. The Italian man shared the following details: people had been aware of

¹⁸ Their Greek-inspired lifestyle was recorded in Kawashima’s diary. Kawashima Riichirō, *Illustrated Diary*, 26 June, 1915. Tochigi Prefectural Museum. Tochigi Digital Museum “SHUGYOKU”. Available at <https://www.digitalmuseum.pref.tochigi.lg.jp/museweb/detail?cls=collect3b&pkey=%E6%96%87%E8%B3%87-000646>.

the buried city's existence as early as around 1700. An archaeologist began the excavations in 1867, and with the help of 80 workers, he succeeded in uncovering most of the city by 1870. However, fieldwork activities continued, as evidenced by the ongoing work at the site. The name of the archaeologist in 1867 was written as *Fuhioruha* フヒオルハー, but it is likely referring to Giuseppe Fiorelli, who is credited with the major early excavations of Pompeii.¹⁹ The efforts of Italian archaeologists were highlighted in this book as having significant value for international scholarship, and the excavations at Pompeii were regarded as an important and fascinating subject that Japanese children in the early twentieth century should be familiar with.

In later years, many Japanese tourists visited Rome, with some exploring the House of the esteemed archaeologist Giacomo Boni on the Palatine Hill (Fukuyama, Pilutti Namer 2018). Such interest in ancient Roman history and archaeology was gradually nurtured through the efforts of the individuals discussed in this article, whose contributions have, until now, never been presented in a comprehensive overview. Travel to Europe during the Meiji period remained a privileged experience for the Japanese. Artists and scholars visited historical sites with specific intentions, often aiming to study them to enrich their academic research or artistic practice. However, Italian archaeological ruins also attracted aristocratic politicians such as Asano and Tani. Their interest in antiquity, despite not being rooted in academic pursuits, testifies to a broader cultural curiosity. The impressions they recorded in published works contributed to increasing interest in Ancient Rome within Japan. Their works not only fostered cross-cultural appreciation but also laid the groundwork for academic and cultural exchanges between Japan and Italy, promoting knowledge of Italy's archaeological heritage in Japan and underscoring the lasting significance of these early connections.

19 The name begins with 'F' and given the period of activity, this Italian archaeologist appears to be Giuseppe Fiorelli.

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An SVG-Based Approach for the Development of a Kanji Auto Assessment System

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Abstract This paper proposes a vector-graphic approach to designing a kanji assessment system for enhancing instructional practices in Japanese language education. The study details the prototype of an experimental web application, built on a vector-graphics dataset, which captures kanji strokes in real time and compares learner-produced characters against reference models to generate efficacy scores. It also showcases the pedagogical versatility of animated stroke guidance for reinforcing correct writing procedures. Advantages (including potential Chinese support) and limitations are discussed considering practical benefits and appropriate use contexts.

Keywords Automatic handwritten recognition. Digital Humanities. E-learning. Japanese language. Stroke-order recognition.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Identifying a Model. – 3 Leveraging SVG for Kanji Representation. – 4 Prototype Design and Development Using KanjiVG and JavaScript. – 4.1 Architectural Design and Technology Stack. – 4.2 User Interface and Interaction Design. – 4.3 Integration of KanjiVG Data. – 5 Technological Limits of the Actual Prototype. – 5.1 Overreliance of Shape Distance Metrics as Primary Evaluation Method. – 6 Scope and Practical Limitations of the Present Approach for Kanji Auto-Assessment. – 6.1 Practical Limitations in Classroom Settings. – 6.2 Challenges with Input Devices. – 6.3 Scalability Concerns for Large Classes. – 6.4 Suitability for Formal Examinations. – 6.5 Alternative Approaches: Image Processing Techniques. – 7 Conclusion.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-03-24
Accepted 2025-04-30
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Mantelli, A. (2025). "An SVG-Based Approach for the Development of a Kanji Auto Assessment System". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 485-508.

1 Introduction

Kanji¹ teaching is a fundamental aspect of Japanese education, commencing in elementary school, where students are systematically introduced to both reading and writing kanji. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) underscores the importance of properly writing kanji as an indispensable skill. It also emphasises the importance of maintaining a consistent instructional approach that adheres to standard forms and precise stroke order, recognizing these elements as the foundation of effective kanji education (MEXT 2016).

Kanji teaching outside Japan may differ from traditional approaches in Japan. Writing instruction is often less emphasised than reading, as evidenced by Riekkinen's analysis of Japanese textbooks, which found that "the exercises in intermediate level books are often presented in an authentic context; however, the majority focus on kanji recognition rather than kanji reproduction" (Riekkinen, Linder 2015). Similar conclusions may be inferred by examining the results of a survey (Kubota 2017, 20) which states that L2 students studying in Japan were more frequently engaged in writing kanji activities and assessments, such as writing on the blackboard. The students' comments also suggest that more time is dedicated to kanji instruction in Japanese contexts than at universities abroad. Back in their country, students tend to learn kanji more independently and primarily focusing on character comprehension for reading, rather than on mastering the detailed stroke order required for writing (Kubota 2017, 6).

Nevertheless, despite the potentially structured nature of the kanji curriculum, students often struggle to maintain accuracy and consistency in their handwriting, with factors such as confidence, proficiency level, and home environment influencing their self-assessments. They may overestimate their ability in writing, rely on reading skills as a basis for judging their proficiency, or misjudge their understanding of radicals and compound kanji words (Aiko 2018, 9-17). These findings suggest that the current methods of feedback, largely reliant on occasional quizzes, self-monitoring, and teacher correction, may not always help students accurately recognise their weaknesses (Aiko 2018, 20). Conventional methods of instruction and assessment heavily depend on human evaluators, which can result in inconsistencies and limit scalability, because as the number of students increases, maintaining uniform standards and providing timely and individualised feedback becomes more

1 Kanji are logographic characters derived from Chinese, used in the Japanese writing system alongside Hiragana and Katakana.

challenging. Automated systems offer a potential solution to this issue as they can provide consistent, scalable, and immediate feedback on kanji writing. This likely explains why companies in Japan over the past decades,² have developed various tools for kanji input and recognition, laying the groundwork for efficient and reliable kanji assessment tools.

Specifically, the foundation for automatic assessment systems can be traced back to early efforts in handwriting recognition and natural language processing research in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, the Rand Tablets (Nakagawa, 2024, 4), was the first digital graphic low-cost input device developed by the RAND Corporation. Around the same time, the Project Essay Grade (PEG) system was developed as a device able to auto evaluating essays and create an automating scoring system (Zhang 2021).

A firsthand encounter with a kanji evaluation system took place in 2007 with *Tadashii Kanji Kakitori-kun* 正しい漢字書き取りくん (Kakitori Kun the Correct Kanji Writer) on the Nintendo DS back in 2007 (Nintendo 2007).³ Despite the limited precision of the stylus, the system was already remarkably effective. In Japan, such technologies have predominantly been developed by companies rather than academic institutions. Recent commercial examples of kanji scoring systems, such as ‘Saiten Navi’ by Education Soft (Education soft 2023) and ‘Digital Kanji Plus’ by Neos (Neos 2022), indicate ongoing progress in this field. Collaborative efforts between universities and industry have also emerged: for instance, Masaki Nakagawa, emeritus professor at the Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology and a pioneer in this field, has worked extensively with various corporations such as i-Labo, which provides kanji recognition SDKs⁴ and software for Windows and Linux.⁵

Most of these products are stand-alone software rather than web-based applications, limiting their use to individual users, mainly elementary school children. The i-Labo SDK, even if online, while offering integration options for custom applications, is limited

² Toshiba introduced the JW-10 word processor for the Japanese language in 1978, based on a 1967 proposal by Toshihiko Kurihara (Doi 2015).

³ Although Its release on the Nintendo 3DS might imply a primarily recreational tool, the software was in fact designed with clear pedagogical objective as it provided structured, immediate feedback on stroke order, character form, and writing accuracy. Indeed, one of the Nintendo DS’s selling points has always been its non-game applications. In this context, several reports describe its use in Japanese schools, such as those by Sloan (2008) and Charlton (2009).

⁴ Acronym of Software Development Kit. SDK is a set of tools to build application for specific types of purposes or platforms.

⁵ Information gathered from the Nakagawa Laboratory section of the TUAT University site (Nakagawa 2024b).

to approximately 1,000 characters, and the parameters used for evaluation are not modifiable. Furthermore, these software solutions are not freely available; the SDKs come with initial and annual fees, which can be burdensome for universities that might have funding constraints.

Among researchers, notable is the work of Prof. Ido at Gifu Kyoritsu University, who developed a sophisticated system for the automatic scoring of handwritten kanji. As Ido (2015; 2019; 2020; 2022) describes, the system evaluates kanji based on multiple parameters, such as stroke correspondence, length, and intersection angles, using advanced metrics like the order-distance technique. However, the system's proprietary nature (it offered a limited password protected demo) means that its source code has not been released for public use (Ido 2024, 12).

Research conducted by non-Japanese scholars on the development of such systems is considerably less common compared to research originating in Japan. A notable example is the work of Taele, Koh, and Hammond from the University of Texas on a Writing-Based Intelligent Tutoring System (2020). Their research emphasises the importance of providing high-quality reference models to which students' drawings can be compared for effective evaluation.

Given the proprietary nature of existing systems described above, a central motivation for this study was to identify open-source, freely accessible tools for kanji assessment. Such solutions are particularly valuable because they can be extended with additional functionalities. In the context of kanji assessment for example, implementing a database to collect students' error would be highly beneficial, as it would offer insights into prevalent error patterns and raise important pedagogical considerations. Unfortunately, open-source options are scarce. An alternative therefore is to develop systems from scratch that integrate, wherever is possible, open-source technologies along with database capabilities. This approach would also enable seamless integration with existing departmental software. For instance, the department of Asian and North African Studies of Ca Foscari University of Venice has already developed a web application designed to support kanji study and provide downloadable printable exercise sheets, yet it lacks kanji evaluation features (Mantelli 2021). In this context, standalone software, with their inherent limitations, are not suitable for meeting these objectives.

However, developing such a system from scratch poses significant challenges, particularly in resource-constrained environments. This study therefore investigates the viability of assembling a functional kanji assessment platform by strategically integrating publicly available digital tools and datasets. In this context, SVG shapes of kanji are of particular interest, as they offer a promising foundation for creating a scalable and adaptable web-based assessment system.

2 Identifying a Model

As mentioned in the introduction, relying on a robust model to compare students' kanji writing is particularly important for developing an effective assessment system. Previous studies have approached this challenge in various ways. For example, Taele, Koh and Ammond (2020) collected writing data from an expert, specifically a Japanese foreign language instructor, who provided character writing data for 448 characters used in their interface. This data served as templates for assessing students' performance in writing. The data were gathered through a special application and stored in JSON⁶ format.

Ido (2019) defined a model where path data represented by Bézier curves⁷ and scoring information are embedded within XML⁸ files, structured to accommodate character-specific and assessment-specific data.

This study's methodology diverges from conventional approaches by adopting KanjiVG, a widely recognised, community-driven, open-source repository of vector-based kanji glyphs, as its foundational comparison framework. KanjiVG streamlines the development process by providing over 12,000 characters equipped with stroke-order and stroke-path metadata, thereby eliminating the need for manual data collection. Its interoperability is ensured by a Creative Commons license that facilitates redistribution and integration, while its proven adoption in platforms like Jisho, Kanji Alive, and Duolingo underscores its alignment with existing digital ecosystems. These attributes guarantee typographic precision and establish KanjiVG as a scalable, community-driven solution to custom glyph generation methods.

The advantages of vector graphics in kanji related projects are fundamental because unlike raster graphics formats such as JPG⁹ or PNG,¹⁰ which represents images as arrays of pixels with associated RGB¹¹ color values but lack relational logic, vector graphics describe images using geometric shapes (Eisenberg 2020, 22). In the case of

⁶ Acronym of JavaScript Object Notation, a data Interchange format to share data between applications.

⁷ Parametric curves that are defined by a set of control points.

⁸ Acronym of Extensible Markup Language (XML), a markup language and file format for storing, transmitting, and reconstructing data.

⁹ Acronym of Joint Photographic Experts Group, a digital file format commonly used for photos and other complex images.

¹⁰ Acronym of Portable Network Graphics, a raster-graphics file format that supports lossless data compression.

¹¹ Acronym of Red Green Blue, an additive color model in which the red, green, and blue primary colors of light are added together in various ways to reproduce a broad array of colors.

KanjiVG, kanji shapes are distributed in the Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG) format. As SVG images are defined by spatial coordinates of vertices and paths, they enable an exact mathematical representation of the kanji characters, allowing a correct foundation for creating comparison models. In contrast, raster images are subject to compression and prioritise the overall image rather than the details. Moreover, since SVGs consist of instructions for creating shapes rather than fixed pixel information, they can be scaled infinitely without any loss of quality. This scalability ensures that kanji characters are rendered accurately at various sizes, accommodating different screen resolutions and devices, which is important for a web-based assessment system accessible on multiple platforms.

Another significant advantage of SVG images is their typically smaller file sizes compared to raster images. By storing mathematical instructions instead of pixel data, SVG files are more compact, resulting in faster loading times, an important consideration for enhancing user experience in web applications. Additionally, SVG elements can be easily manipulated using web technologies such as CSS¹² and JavaScript.¹³

SVG shapes are described in XML format and enriched with attributes that define the basic form and the coordinates. An SVG image comprises elements like <circle>, <line>, and <path>, each representing different shapes [fig. 1].

```
<svg width="200" height="200">
  <!-- Group of shapes -->
  <g fill="none" stroke="black" stroke-width="2">
    <!-- Circle -->
    <circle cx="100" cy="100" r="50" />
    <!-- Line -->
    <line x1="50" y1="50" x2="150" y2="150" />
    <!-- Path -->
    <path d="M 60 160 L 100 120 L 140 160 Z" />
  </g>
</svg>
```

Figure 1
Sample of a SVG
shape

12 Acronym of Cascading Style Sheets, is a style sheet language used for specifying the presentation and styling of a document written in a markup language such as HTML.

13 Programming language natively present in modern web browsers, enabling the implementation of complex features on web pages and allowing elements to be dynamically modified on the fly without requiring a full page reload.

In this example, the `<path>` element uses commands such as M (MoveTo), L (LineTo), and Z (ClosePath) to draw shapes. These commands correspond to movements that can represent kanji strokes. As can be seen in Figure 1, the SVG representation is purely textual, defined by path commands that trace the shape of each kanji stroke. This textual format allows for precise manipulation, scalability, essential attributes for automated shape analysis and stroke pattern recognition.

3 Leveraging SVG for Kanji Representation

The KanjiVG dataset not only includes the geometric shapes of kanji characters but also embeds metadata such as stroke order, radicals, and stroke vertices. Each kanji character in the KanjiVG repository is organised using a hierarchical structure defined by XML tags, primarily `<g>` (group) and `<path>` elements. Each group is enriched with attributes that specify details such as the kanji element (`kvg:element`), position (`kvg:position`), and radical (`kvg:radical`). This structured format encapsulates various aspects of kanji characters, facilitating efficient analysis and manipulation for diverse applications [fig. 2].

```
<svg xmlns="http://www.w3.org/2000/svg" width="109" height="109" viewBox="0 0 109 109">
  <g id="kvg:StrokePaths_05bb6" style="fill:none;stroke:#000000;stroke-width:3;stroke-linecap:round;stroke-linejoin:round;">
    <g id="kvg:05bb6" kvg:element="家">
      <g id="kvg:05bb6-g1" kvg:element="宀" kvg:position="top" kvg:radical="general">
        <path id="kvg:05bb6-s1" kvg:type="a" d="M52.44,11c0.97,0.97,1.69,2.25,1.69,3.68c0,3.42-0.08,4.99-0.08,8.1"/>
      <g id="kvg:05bb6-g2" kvg:element="冫" kvg:position="middle">
        <path id="kvg:05bb6-s2" kvg:type="l" d="M27.09,23.28c0,3.73-2.77,13.98-4.03,16.47"/>
        <path id="kvg:05bb6-s3" kvg:type="b" d="M27.99,27.18c41.88,25.72,75.21,5,79.81,21.2c12.19-0.52,1.14,7.87-0.34,8.63"/>
      </g>
    </g>
    <g id="kvg:05bb6-g3" kvg:element="豕" kvg:position="bottom">
      <path id="kvg:05bb6-s4" kvg:type="l" d="M32.76,40.23c1.38,0.4,3.92,0.57,5.29,0.4c8.08-1,19.7-3.38,25.59-3.84c2.29-0.18,3.41-0.04,4.83-0.11"/>
      <path id="kvg:05bb6-s5" kvg:type="l" d="M51.26,41.5c0.18,1.1-0.06,2.08-0.72,2.94c47.84,48.63,38.92,55.58,26.5,60.5"/>
      <path id="kvg:05bb6-s6" kvg:type="l" d="M48.07,48.96c8.31,7.92,14.18,25.04,6.92,43.51c-2.42,6.16-8.12,0.9-9.3,0.05"/>
      <path id="kvg:05bb6-s7" kvg:type="l" d="M49,56c0.17,1.16-0.14,2.17-0.92,3.04c-2.78,3.84-10.78,9.86-22.33,14.21"/>
      <path id="kvg:05bb6-s8" kvg:type="l" d="M52.5,65.5c0.21,1.3-0.06,2.45-0.84,3.44c-3.27,5.04-13.97,13.61-29.91,19.56"/>
      <path id="kvg:05bb6-s9" kvg:type="l" d="M76.8,45.3c0.14,1.12-0.2,2.09-1.02,2.91c-2.55,3.35-9.29,8.72-18.05,12.19"/>
      <path id="kvg:05bb6-s10" kvg:type="l" d="M58.79,62.82c3.72,2.92,18.27,15.42,25.25,20.69c2.49,1.88,4.18,3.12,7.08,3.87"/>
    </g>
  </g>
</svg>
```

Figure 2 Sample of the kanji 家 (house) from the KanjiVG dataset

As can be observed in figure 2, each individual stroke of a kanji is defined by a `<path>` element with a `d` attribute which contains the path data. The path data uses commands like M (move to), L (line to), C (cubic Bézier curve), and Z (close path) to define the exact shape and trajectory of the stroke. The `<g>` tags group these strokes and structural components, allowing for a clear representation of

the kanji's composition. By utilizing these attributes and path data, the KanjiVG dataset provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and manipulating kanji shapes.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a key distinction between SVG and raster images is the ability to access and modify each component of an SVG image, as well as its coordinate data thanks to its XML-based structure. In the context of web design, this capability is primarily enabled by JavaScript, a programming language embedded by default in web browsers. JavaScript facilitates real-time manipulation of the HTML/XML Document Object Model (DOM), allowing for dynamic modifications of the SVG elements. For instance, it is possible to access each part of the SVG and retrieve important kanji information such as the total number of strokes (by counting the `<path>` nodes) or the direction of each stroke by analyzing the content of the `d` attribute and calculating the starting and ending points of the node.

Given the numerous advantages of SVG, I have developed a kanji assessment prototype in the form of a web application utilizing KanjiVG and JavaScript. The development of this prototype illustrates the practical applicability of SVG technology and open-source datasets in educational technology aiming to create a functional tool for assisting learners in improving their kanji writing skills.

4 Prototype Design and Development Using KanjiVG and JavaScript

This section explores the practical aspects of designing and developing a kanji assessment prototype. By leveraging the KanjiVG dataset and JavaScript technologies within a web application framework, the prototype seeks to deliver an interactive and accessible tool for evaluating students' kanji writing skills. The discussion encompasses the architectural design, implementation of core functionalities such as stroke recognition and validation, user interface considerations, and the integration of KanjiVG data with the aim to offer perspectives to encourage future research in this field.

4.1 Architectural Design and Technology Stack

Web applications have several advantages over desktop applications (Bhagwan 2021, 12), among others, they can be accessed from any device with a modern browser, eliminating the need for users to install specialised software and aligning with the goal of providing an educational tool that is available to students across various environments.

To facilitate real-time interaction and dynamic content manipulation, the prototype employs JavaScript through the Nuxt.js (<https://nuxt.com/>) framework, which is built on the Vue.js (<https://vuejs.org/>) technology.

While an in-depth discussion of the architectural advantages of Vue.js and Nuxt.js over standard JavaScript is beyond the scope of this work, it is essential to note that the framework allow the creation of modules each with its particular function, such as drawing the kanji, examining the drawn shape, and compare drawn shape over the given model. Furthermore, it facilitates the future implementation of features like database connections. The modular architecture of Nuxt.js thus ensures that the application is easily scalable to accommodate increased complexity.

4.2 User Interface and Interaction Design

The prototype's user interface provides a digital canvas where students can draw kanji characters using a mouse, stylus, or touch input on devices such as tablets and touchscreen computers. The application adapts to different screen sizes and input methods, ensuring a consistent experience across devices using an approach to design called responsive.¹⁴ The interface captures the students' handwriting data in real time, enabling real-time analysis and feedback. At the present moment, the interface presents only the necessary elements for the drawing: a) a square divided in four quadrants by 2 dashed lines, b) buttons for restarting and for undoing the last step, and 3) a button to finish and receive the score.

It is possible to select a different kanji from a list using the menu on the right. Since the software is still a prototype, all operational reports can be debugged by clicking on the debug selector. It is also possible to display the kanji model on the background for practice purpose. The top-left side of the quadrant displays the current input coordinates, also used for debugging purpose [fig. 3].

¹⁴ The term, coined by Ethan Marcotte (2011), refers to design techniques that enable interface elements to automatically adapt to the size and format of the window or screen.

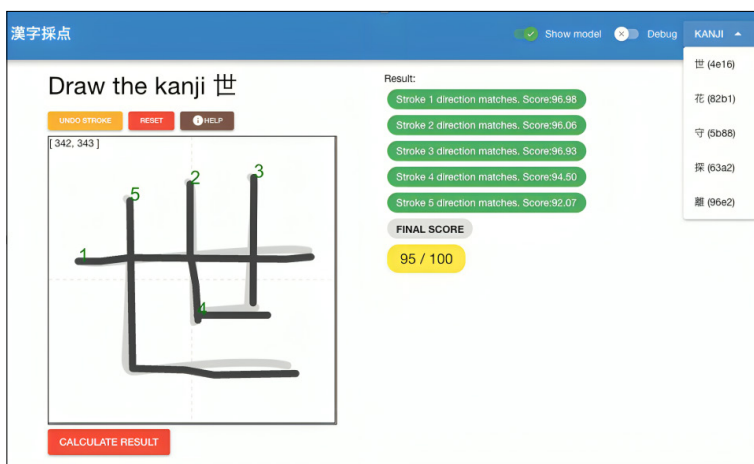


Figure 3 Kanji Evaluation prototype with result

Each time the student draws a stroke the stroke number is displayed above it. By pressing the [Calculate Result] button, the final score is calculated. The system also checks for any incorrect stroke directions or discrepancies in the number of strokes as seen in figure 4.

The inclusion of visual indicators and interactive elements aims to engage students actively in the learning process. By providing real-time feedback and an accessible interface, the prototype should encourage students to practice kanji writing more frequently and with greater attention to detail as the ability to receive immediate evaluation fosters a more responsive learning environment, where students can iteratively improve their skills through practice and correction. Studies on motivation and design demonstrate a connection between inner motivation and user engagement (Deci, Ryan 2000, 73; Deterding 2012, 17). In particular, features such as targeted feedback loops can stimulate intrinsic motivation, as learners perceive their efforts translating directly into noticeable improvements (Malone, Lepper 1987).

The system's function to display the kanji model in the background serves as a reference for students, aiding in the reinforcement of correct stroke order and structure. This optional feature can be particularly beneficial for beginners' learners who are still familiarizing themselves with kanji characters [fig. 4].

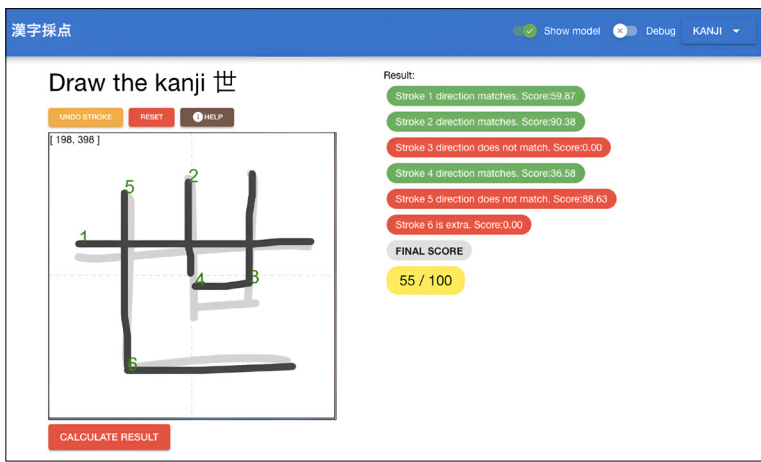


Figure 4 Handling Missing or Extra Strokes: The system detects discrepancies in the number of strokes. Missing strokes are flagged, and extra strokes are identified, contributing to the overall assessment

4.3 Integration of KanjiVG Data

The KanjiVG dataset serves as the foundation for the prototype’s kanji models. Each kanji character is represented as an SVG file containing detailed information about its strokes, including order, direction, and path data. Integrating this data into the application involves parsing the SVG files and extracting relevant information for comparison with the student’s input. By analyzing the SVG structure, the system determines the total number of strokes, their sequence, and their geometric properties. Since the SVG stroke data is defined in local coordinates, it is necessary to convert these into absolute pixel coordinates that correspond to the user’s drawing canvas. This ensures accurate alignment between the model and the student’s input.

4.3.1 Implementation of Core Functionalities

The core functionalities of the prototype revolve around capturing the student’s handwriting input and comparing it to the reference kanji model to evaluate correctness in terms of stroke order, direction, and structure. This process involves several computational steps:

1. Definition of a common coordinate system
To compare the student’s strokes with the model accurately, both datasets (the student’s and the model’s) are transformed into a common coordinate system. This involves calculating

the bounding box (Abramov 2021)¹⁵ for both the student's input and the model kanji. The top-left corner of each bounding box is shifted to the origin (0,0) of the coordinate system. This translation centers both the student's strokes and the model, eliminating positional discrepancies and ensuring that the comparison focuses on the shape and structure rather than position.

2. Data Capture and Preprocessing

As the student draws each stroke, the application records a sequence of points representing the stroke's trajectory. These points are captured in real time, storing the spatial coordinates (x and y) of each point. This continuous recording ensures that the geometric characteristics of the strokes are preserved for successive analysis.

3. Normalisation Through Sampling

The raw input data may vary significantly between users due to differences in drawing speed, scale, and starting position. To facilitate a fair comparison, the input data is normalised by sampling a consistent number of points for each stroke. This sampling reduces the dataset to a manageable size while preserving the essential characteristics of each stroke, ensuring uniform representation across all inputs.

4. Scaling with Affine Transformation

An affine transformation is applied to scale the student's strokes to match the size of the model kanji. This process adjusts for differences in scale, ensuring that size variations do not affect the assessment. The scaling factors are calculated based on the dimensions of the bounding boxes, maintaining the proportionality of the strokes and focusing the evaluation on the shape and structure rather than the size.

5. Stroke Direction Analysis

To determine the direction of each stroke, the system analyses the initial segment of the stroke. Typically, the first 20 points are sampled to capture the initial movement, providing a reliable indication of the stroke's starting direction. The angle of the initial segment is calculated using trigonometric functions, resulting in a direction vector for the stroke. This angle is then compared to the corresponding stroke in the model. The system allows for a predefined tolerance (e.g. ± 20 degrees) when comparing stroke directions. If the student's stroke direction falls within this acceptable range, it is

15 A geometric rectangle that serving as a point of reference for object detection, encloses or surrounds an object or a group of objects in a digital image.

considered correct, accommodating minor deviations that are natural in handwriting.

6. Euclidean Distance Calculation

After normalisation and sampling, the student's strokes are aligned with the corresponding strokes in the model based on stroke order. For each pair of corresponding strokes, the Euclidean distance between each point in the student's stroke and the corresponding point in the model stroke is calculated. This calculation provides a quantitative measure of the similarity between the strokes. Smaller distances indicate a closer match, reflecting higher accuracy in the student's writing.

7. Score Calculation

Once the Euclidean distances have been computed for each pair of corresponding strokes, the system converts these distances into a score on a scale from 0 to 100, reflecting the student's adherence to the model stroke. If extra strokes are detected or if any stroke is drawn in the wrong direction, that stroke is assigned a score of 0. The final score is determined by taking the average of all individual stroke scores.

4.3.2 Advantages of Standardised Datasets for Kanji Assessment and Extensibility

Standardised datasets, such as KanjiVG, provide significant advantages in developing kanji learning tools, such as the integration with compatible existing libraries. It is the case of Dmak¹⁶ a JavaScript library developed by Matthieu Bilbille that enables kanji stroke order animation. This library uses the same SVG data provided by KanjiVG, allowing students to view the correct sequence and formation of kanji strokes in real time. It also offers configurable options for animation speed and stroke colours, making it adaptable to various learning needs.

This functionality is particularly beneficial from a language-learning perspective, as it provides immediate visual feedback and reinforces proper writing techniques. When a student encounters difficulty with a particular character, accessing the Stroke Animation can clarify uncertainties and enhance retention through visual demonstration [fig. 5]. In the developed prototype, this functionality can be triggered by pressing the [help] button, providing learners with the animation of the kanji in question.

16 Acronym of Draw Me A Kanji (the website is available at <https://mbilbille.github.io/dmak/>).

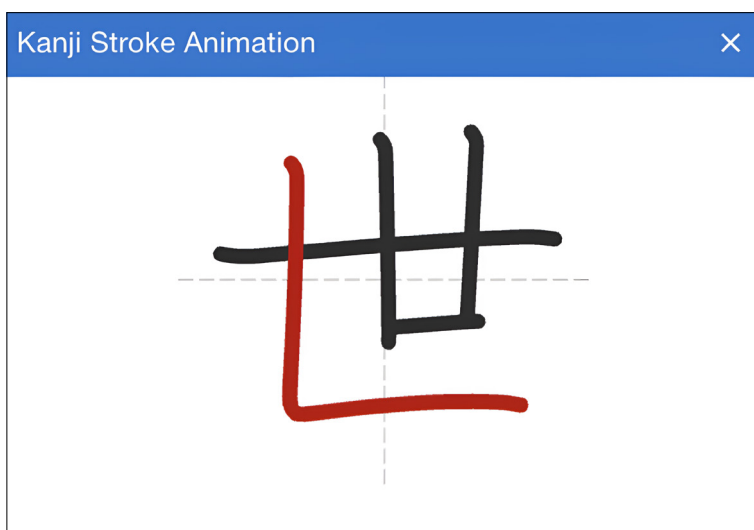


Figure 5 Kanji Stroke Animation functionality developed with the DMAK library

The inclusion of Dmak aligns with pedagogical strategies that emphasise multimodal learning (Bouchey, Castek, Thygeson 2021, 36). By catering to visual and kinesthetic learners, the prototype fosters a more engaging and effective educational experience. As previously mentioned, Dmak's complete support of KanjiVG facilitates seamless integration, reducing development complexity and allowing for the efficient incorporation of advanced features without extensive code modifications.

The KanjiVG data format is also compatible with character datasets for other languages, such as Chinese. Consequently, developing a character assessment tool that leverages this standardised framework yields considerable advantages by expanding its applicability beyond Japanese. For instance, an existing project called HanziVG (Groß 2018) provides SVG representations of Chinese characters (Hanzi), offering detailed stroke order and path data compatible with the KanjiVG dataset structure.

Although stroke order and character structure may differ considerably between Japanese and Chinese scripts, using SVG with the same data schema such as the organisation of the hierarchical data structure in `<g>` (groups), enables the prototype to adapt these distinctions seamlessly without the need to write new code to manage the different datasets.

Furthermore, `kvg:-prefixed` attributes (e.g. `kvg:element`, `kvg:radical`, `kvg:original`, `kvg:position`) [fig. 2] offer important character information that can be provided to the learners if needed.

In particular, details about the kanji radical (kvg:radical) and its semantic origin (kvg:original) can be highly beneficial.

In other words, it is possible to lay the basis for the creation of a multi-language writing assessment system that accommodate the unique conventions and nuances inherent each set. In this way, a prototype initially designed for kanji writing assessment can evolve into a more general solution, meeting the diverse needs of learners studying multiple East Asian languages that utilise logographic scripts.

Incorporating Dmak and HanziVG into the prototype exemplifies the advantages of utilizing established resources to enhance functionality and user experience. The integration of Stroke Animations through Dmak enriches the learning process by providing dynamic, interactive content that reinforces proper kanji writing techniques. Extending support to Chinese characters via HanziVG showcases the prototype's flexibility and potential for adaptation to various writing systems. These enhancements not only improve the efficacy of the assessment system but also align with broader educational objectives of supporting diverse learner needs.

5 Technological Limits of the Actual Prototype

While the prototype exhibits considerable potential as an interactive and accurate kanji assessment system, it currently faces several technological limitations that must be addressed to enhance its overall effectiveness. Addressing these constraints is important not only to establish a robust framework for future iterations but also to ensure the system's accuracy in evaluating kanji writing, particularly through the integration of multi-modal assessment metrics (e.g. stroke-order fidelity, stroke-direction precision, and shape similarity algorithms). The following sections outline these limitations and propose actionable solutions where feasible.

5.1 Overreliance of Shape Distance Metrics as Primary Evaluation Method

The current evaluation approach relies predominantly on computing the Euclidean distance between corresponding points of a student's input and a reference kanji model, following normalisation and scaling. While this method effectively captures general shape accuracy, it omits several critical facets of kanji writing. In particular, the system does not assess stroke connectivity (gaps or overlaps between adjacent strokes), the terminal stroke angle of each stroke, and temporal parameters such as execution speed or pause intervals.

In kanji writing, certain strokes are designed to connect seamlessly, and failing to evaluate this aspect can lead to incomplete assessment. Although a lack of connection currently results in a reduced score due to imperfect adherence to the model, this disconnection should be recognised as a more severe error. By assigning a significantly lower score to disconnected strokes, the system could better reflect the structural integrity of the character and identify errors that compromise its fundamental composition. Another important factor involves the endpoints of strokes, which may terminate in a sharp flick (*hane* はね) or taper outward (*harai* はらい). In the current implementation, any deviation from the model's endpoint is penalised only as a minor discrepancy. Ido (2019) recommends the use of measurement vectors to evaluate the relationships between strokes, specifically by gauging how two points, such as a stroke's endpoint and its brush-out trajectory, align with predefined criteria. Incorporating a similar method into the prototype could yield a more nuanced and precise evaluation of students' written kanji.

This type of aspects enters in a more general assessment criteria which guidelines are detailed by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan. The perfect adherence to these criteria involves a notable challenge. A solution proposed by Ido (2015, 133) is the implementation of an *Aggressive DP Matching* (ADPM) technique for substroke correspondence and an order coordinate system for stroke alignment. The ADPM technique allows precise measurement of deviations in stroke placement and geometry though if its implementation may be complex and time-consuming.

Another aspect not yet addressed in the present prototype is stroke speed and temporal data. The speed at which a student writes a stroke can provide valuable insights into their confidence and familiarity with the character. While input devices may affect the writing speed, a single student employing the same device could rewrite a kanji more rapidly over time, thus highlighting improvement in writing fluency. Storing these timing data in a database and making them available to the educator would provide an overall indication of each student's progress. A practical implementation might involve starting a timer when the student begins writing and recording the input-down and input-up events of each stroke, then saving these metrics alongside stroke path data in the database. The interface could subsequently present these metrics, along with the overall score to highlight progress over multiple sections.

5.1.1 Complex Kanji Assessment

Assessing complex kanji characters poses another challenge. As the number of strokes and the intricacy of their configurations increase,

the current computational methods may not scale effectively. Tolerance thresholds and algorithms might require refinement to handle advanced characters accurately. For instance, difficulties arise in accurately determining stroke direction when dealing with very short shapes, resulting in both false errors and false positives. To solve this problem, more complex character should be tested and the stroke direction analysis mechanism should be improved by for example, dynamically changing the threshold angle according with the length of the stroke.

5.1.2 Improvement of the Interface and of the Functionalities

The user interface could also be enhanced to promote a more engaging learning experience. As the prototype is still in the early development phases, features such detailed feedback, interactive tutorials, and customizable settings have not been implemented, potentially limiting usability. An intuitive, user-centred interface would support learner engagement and strengthen educational outcomes. Additionally, establishing a database of common errors and providing targeted feedback would enable learners to identify and correct habitual mistakes, while providing educators with valuable insights into how best to support them, thereby improving overall learning effectiveness.

As the system evolves, optimizing performance will become increasingly important. Efficient algorithms must be developed to handle complex kanji without substantial performance degradation. Managing larger data loads, supporting multiple languages, and accommodating broader user bases necessitate careful scalability considerations. Such technical optimisations will be fundamental to maintaining the system's relevance and effectiveness over time.

6 Scope and Practical Limitations of the Present Approach for Kanji Auto-Assessment

While the developed prototype shows significant potential as an educational tool for kanji learning, it is important to critically evaluate its real-world applicability, particularly within classroom settings and formal examinations. This discussion explores the limitations inherent in implementing the auto-assessment system in educational environments, considering factors such as hardware requirements, user experience with input devices, scalability for large classes, and alternative assessment methodologies.

6.1 Practical Limitations in Classroom Settings

A primary challenge in deploying the prototype within a classroom context is the need to provide each student with compatible hardware. The system relies on digital input devices capable of accurately capturing handwriting data, which raises concerns regarding accessibility and cost. Equipping a classroom of, for instance, fifty students with individual computers or tablets represents a substantial logistical and financial undertaking. While the system offers innovative potential for kanji assessment, its classroom implementation requires strategic resource allocation, particularly in institutions with limited budgets. Successful integration depends on scalable technical infrastructure and pedagogical alignment to ensure the technology enhances, rather than interrupts, instructional workflows. Potential challenges such as intermittent connectivity or device compatibility issues can be mitigated through pre-emptive testing and contingency planning. Furthermore, dedicating initial training sessions to familiarise students with the interface would help maintain focus on core learning outcomes while minimizing operational friction.

6.2 Challenges with Input Devices

The effectiveness of the auto-assessment system is intrinsically linked to the input devices employed by students. During testing phases, various devices were evaluated, including standard computer mice, entry-level Wacom drawing tablets, and iPads equipped with styluses. Each device presents unique trade-offs that impact usability and accuracy.

The use of a computer mouse, while commonplace and familiar to most students, is suboptimal for handwriting tasks. Its inherent lack of precision and the unnatural motion required can hinder the accurate rendering of kanji strokes, thereby affecting the reliability of the assessment. Students may find it challenging to produce the intricate shapes and lines characteristic of kanji, which can cause frustration and disengagement.

Wacom-like drawing tablets offer greater precision and are specifically designed for digital handwriting. In the trial, an entry-level Wacom tablet was selected for classroom use due to its affordability. However, these tablets lack an integrated display, creating a spatial disjunction between the tablet's surface and the computer screen. Users must adapt to this mismatch, which introduces a hand-eye coordination challenge during operation. The writing experience thus becomes less intuitive, potentially undermining assessment accuracy. Calibration efforts improved performance in standalone

desktop applications but not in the browser-based web application. Achieving minimal device proficiency ultimately required several hours. As Barracosa (2021) notes, mastering such tablets demands training in spatial coordination skills, with adaptation times varying significantly across learners and device quality; in some cases, proficiency may take several days.

Apple iPads-like devices with styluses provide a more natural and intuitive interface, closely mimicking the traditional pen-and-paper experience. The direct interaction with the screen allows for more accurate stroke production and a smoother user experience. Nonetheless, the high cost associated with these devices presents a significant barrier to widespread adoption. Supplying each student with an iPad and stylus is often impractical, particularly in public education systems operating under financial constraints. In addition, studies indicate that any chosen tablet requires some degree of a learning curve (Milanovic 2006; Oviatt, Arthur, Cohen 2006), although trials suggest that this adjustment period is longer for non-display tablets such as non-display-based Wacom models. Oviatt, Arthur and Cohen (2006) also highlight persistent student reluctance to abandon paper, alongside higher error rates and longer task completion times on digital devices. Nonetheless, outcomes can vary considerably depending on both device type and individual student performance levels.

6.3 Scalability Concerns for Large Classes

Implementing the auto-assessment system in large classes amplifies the previously mentioned challenges. Managing and supporting the technology infrastructure required for numerous students places additional strain on institutional resources. The logistical complexities of distributing, maintaining, and troubleshooting a multitude of devices can detract from the primary educational mission.

Moreover, ensuring consistent performance and user experience across all devices is a non-trivial endeavour. Variability in hardware capabilities and student proficiency with technology can introduce discrepancies in assessment outcomes. These inconsistencies risk compromising evaluation fairness and accuracy, thereby calling into question the system's reliability and validity.

6.4 Suitability for Formal Examinations

Given these considerations, the current approach is best suited for self-learning contexts, while its viability in formal examination

contexts remains constrained. Compared to traditional assessments, in which students write kanji characters by hand on paper, this approach can accurately capture the number of strokes and their direction, parameters that are difficult to evaluate in handwritten submissions. From this perspective, it is beneficial for practice purposes.

However, the logistical challenges of equipping examination environments with appropriate technology are substantial. The risk of technical failures during high-stakes assessments introduces substantial reliability concerns. Consequently, relying on the prototype for formal evaluations may not be practical or advisable.

6.5 Alternative Approaches: Image Processing Techniques

If handwritten exams are preferred to avoid the logistical and financial challenges associated with providing digital input devices, alternative methodologies that align more closely with traditional examination practices warrant consideration. One such approach involves leveraging image processing techniques to analyse handwritten kanji captured through digital imaging, thereby allowing educators to evaluate scanned or photographed submissions.

While this method preserves the authenticity of the conventional pen-and-paper experience and may eliminate the need for specialised hardware, its implementation is far from trivial. Tools like OpenCV (<https://opencv.org/>) and other computer vision libraries can facilitate image analysis, yet accurately interpreting handwritten kanji remains a complex task. Variations in handwriting styles, ink density, lighting conditions, and image resolution can all influence the reliability of image-based assessments. Ensuring that the system can consistently identify kanji, distinguish similar shapes, and evaluate character quality requires careful calibration and robust algorithmic design.

Moreover, integrating machine learning models capable of handling these nuances involves substantial development effort. Collecting and annotating training data, refining models to handle diverse handwriting samples, and maintaining acceptable levels of accuracy and speed are nontrivial challenges. Although advancements in computer vision and machine learning continue to expand the possibilities, educators and developers must recognise the significant technical hurdles and resource investments these solutions entail.

7 Conclusion

This study introduces a novel open-source approach to kanji auto-assessment, leveraging KanjiVG's vector data to prioritise accessibility and adaptability – a departure from proprietary or hardware-dependent systems. While challenges in formal examination contexts (e.g. device variability, training time) warrant further refinement, the prototype's innovative reuse of standardised glyphs offers immediate value as a low-cost, device-flexible tool for self-directed learning, particularly in resource-constrained settings. However, factors such as hardware requirements, usability issues related to digital input devices, and the logistical complexities of equipping numerous students can limit the feasibility of widespread classroom integration. Nonetheless, these constraints do not diminish the prototype's strengths in other learning contexts.

In particular, the system shows promise as a self-learning tool, where students can practice kanji on a variety of devices, even those with less precise input methods such as a standard mouse. For instance, although the mouse may not perfectly replicate pen-and-paper writing, it can still help learners focus on the correct stroke order and overall character shape. This focus can reinforce fundamentals and encourage regular, low-pressure practice outside the formal classroom setting.

Additionally, the modular architecture, built on open SVG data and extensible via libraries like Dmak, provides a scaffold for community-driven enhancements – from multilingual support (e.g. Chinese Hanzi) to advanced feedback mechanisms. Educators can already deploy it for targeted exercises, while its open-source foundation ensures future integrations (e.g. machine learning) require minimal structural overhaul.

Critically, the perceived 'limitations' reflect deliberate trade-offs to serve underrepresented educational needs: its simplicity makes it viable for casual learners, remote education, and institutions prioritizing affordability over commercial solutions. Rather than competing with high-stakes assessment tools, it fills a gap in everyday skill reinforcement.

Ultimately, balancing technological innovation with the realities of educational environments is likely the most critical factor. By supporting diverse input methods and prioritizing ease of use, the system can continue to evolve as a practical and sustainable resource that fosters robust kanji-writing skills and meets a variety of learner needs, even if it, at this stage, remains better suited to self-directed study than to formal testing.

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Recensioni



‘Amr ibn Mattā al-Ṭīrhānī *Il libro della torre*

Sebastiano Siviero

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Recensione di ‘Amr ibn Mattā al-Ṭīrhānī (2023-24). *Il libro della torre* (*Kitāb al-miḡdal*). 3 voll. Introduzione, testo critico arabo, traduzione italiana e indici delle sezioni I, II, III e IV di G. Gianazza; prefazione di H. Teule. Bologna: Edizioni del Gruppo di Ricerca Arabo-Cristiana, 1686 pp. Patrimonio Culturale Arabo Cristiano 29, 31, 32.

Il libro della torre (*Kitāb al-miḡdal*) è un'enciclopedia religiosa arabo-cristiana curata in questa nuova edizione critica in tre volumi dal P. Gianmaria Gianazza, Dottore in Lingua e cultura araba. L'opera, divisa in un totale di sette sezioni e 30 capitoli, vede qui pubblicate le quattro sezioni iniziali grazie al lavoro critico di Gianazza che promette anche di curare e pubblicare le restanti parti nella stessa collana. In questi tre volumi, dopo una prima esposizione della fede, si delinea il profilo allegorico della Torre menzionata nel titolo, la perfetta e solida costruzione che espone e sorregge la religione cristiana, nella sua espressione nestoriana (siro-orientale) professata dall'autore, ‘Amr ibn Mattā al-Ṭīrhānī (sec. XI). Questa edizione critica contiene un'introduzione, il testo arabo ricostruito con apparato critico, traduzione italiana e gli indici delle sezioni I, II, III e IV. Gianazza, già traduttore de *I libri dei misteri* di Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā al-Mawṣilī (sec. XIII-XIV) (Gianazza 2017, 984) e curatore de *I fondamenti della religione* di ‘Abdīšō’ bar Berīkā (sec. XIII-XIV) (Gianazza 2018, 498), con l'introduzione nel primo volume di questa edizione critica del *Libro della torre* sostiene la sua posizione circa la cronologia e l'autorialità dell'opera che qui trova pubblicazione con, per la prima volta in assoluto, una traduzione in lingua italiana. Il



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

Submitted 2025-01-08

Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Siviero, S. (2025). Review of *Il libro della torre*, by ‘Amr ibn Mattā al-Ṭīrhānī. *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 511-516.

testo in questione, infatti, fino ad ora attribuito a Mārī ibn Sulaymān (XII sec.) da Giuseppe Simone Assemani (1719, 742) e da Georg Graf (1944, 705), viene invece considerato da Gianazza come uno scritto dell'XI secolo attribuibile a 'Amr ibn Mattā al-Ṭīrhānī, un autore nestoriano.

La tesi del curatore è argomentata attraverso la menzione dell'esistenza di ben sette copie manoscritte dell'opera (tre manoscritti della BNF, tre manoscritti della Biblioteca Vaticana e un manoscritto dalla cattedrale caldea di Mardin) che nei colofoni dei copisti attribuiscono il testo direttamente a 'Amr ibn Mattā al-Ṭīrhānī. A riprova di questa antica attribuzione dei manoscritti, Gianazza cita anche l'attribuzione diretta del *Libro della torre* a 'Amr ibn Mattā al-Ṭīrhānī in un'altra opera enciclopedica arabo-cristiana, ovvero nel *Miṣbāḥ al-ḡulmah fī 'idāḥ al-ḥidmah*, scritto dal copto Ibn Kabar nel XIV secolo. La presente edizione non si colloca nel panorama degli studi arabo-cristiani soltanto come alacre lavoro filologico in grado di restituire un'opera del medioevo arabo-cristiano al pubblico contemporaneo occidentale, ma presenta, dunque, una vera e propria tesi che cambia radicalmente l'identità del testo stesso e del suo autore. Gli importanti contributi costituiti da questa edizione critica e dalla valida argomentazione di Gianazza circa l'origine dell'opera saranno senz'altro un punto di partenza di massima considerazione per gli studiosi che in futuro vorranno cimentarsi nello studio del *Libro della torre*, confermando o contestando l'identità e l'epoca dell'autore.

Il primo volume, oltre all'edizione critica delle prime due sezioni, presenta un'introduzione succinta solo sul vero e proprio contenuto del *Libro della torre*, così privando, purtroppo, il lettore di informazioni di contesto storico, politico, religioso e sociale: queste ultime potrebbero facilitare la comprensione del contenuto da parte dei lettori che non lo conoscono approfonditamente. Il curatore, nella sezione introduttiva, delinea il percorso filologico di ricostruzione del testo a partire dai manoscritti e fornisce una chiara tabella che specifica il peso e il ruolo di ogni manoscritto nella costruzione della presente edizione critica. Il merito e il contributo prezioso di Gianazza stanno proprio qui: nel lavoro di ricostruzione critica dell'opera e nella sua pubblicazione che è contributo significativo alla conoscenza della letteratura religiosa arabo-cristiana dell'età media, esibendo in particolare la pregnanza di un genere letterario come quello delle enciclopedie religiose che dimostra la spinta pervasiva e onnicomprensiva della cultura cristiana nel mondo arabo-cristiano dell'XI secolo. Il *Libro della torre* arricchisce la nostra conoscenza della teologia della Chiesa d'Oriente, del ruolo della filosofia nella discussione teologica, delle commistioni tra apologetica ed enciclopedismo visibili in questo genere letterario che cercava di contenere e presentare ordinatamente la fede cristiana e la sua

teologia, citando verità, dogmi, elementi di fede, prassi e ritualità religiosa, le sacre scritture e i valori della comunità cristiana della Chiesa d'Oriente e, infine, il rapporto della 'Torre' con la tradizione siro-orientale nella sua espressione siriana e araba attraverso la scelta di argomenti e di fonti, dirette ed indirette. Il contenuto di quest'opera, infatti, è una finestra verso il discorso teologico degli arabi cristiani che viene qui presentato in maniera sistematica. Questioni dal sapore squisitamente teologico come il carattere trinitario di Dio e la definizione di Cristo sono unite a elementi più vicini alla filosofia quando si discute della sostanza e degli attributi divini. Istituzioni religiose come il battesimo e i libri sacri vengono presentati e discussi, fornendo così al lettore degli importanti elementi per tracciare una storia culturale di questa comunità del Medio Oriente medievale.

L'edizione di Gianazza è ben curata e rispettosa della filologia. Tuttavia, alcune scelte appaiono suscettibili di attenzione e possibile miglioramento. L'apparato critico del testo arabo trascritto e quello della traduzione italiana necessiterebbero forse di maggiore chiarezza. Nel momento in cui il testo arabo ricostruito presenta in nota la concordanza di cinque manoscritti relativi ad una variante scartata dal curatore, una spiegazione della scelta compiuta aiuterebbe il lettore a comprendere l'importanza che il curatore attribuisce ad alcune versioni sopra ad altre. Ad esempio, a p. 320 del I volume, alla nota [^] leggiamo che cinque manoscritti omettono la preposizione إلى. L'omissione di tale particella altera il senso complessivo del discorso, cambiando il soggetto della frase. La scelta di prediligere l'introduzione di إلى avrebbe meritato, a mio parere, un commento in nota per meglio spiegare al lettore il percorso che ha portato a questa definizione di senso. Su questa scorta, evidenziare il rapporto che intercorre tra i diversi manoscritti concordanti, con uno *stemma codicum* anche puramente orientativo, gioverebbe alla comprensione della dimensione storica e filologica delle discordanze e delle concordanze testuali.

L'apparato di note della traduzione italiana risulta particolarmente scarso. Le scelte traduttologiche non risultano pertanto evidenti e la comprensione della lettura stessa del testo, per quanto la traduzione sia dedicata a degli specialisti, beneficerebbe di un apparato di note didascaliche per chiarire i punti più complessi. Gianazza è sempre puntuale nel presentare i riferimenti biblici del testo. Tuttavia, una notazione ulteriore gioverebbe al lettore per mostrare i collegamenti presenti con la letteratura patristica e con quella filosofica. Laddove, inoltre, possano essere presenti elementi di teologia dibattuti nella stessa epoca di scrittura anche dalle altre comunità religiose del Medio Oriente, sarebbe interessante mettere a disposizione del lettore un apparato di note che faccia riflettere sulle dinamiche interreligiose in un contesto storico nel quale le comunità cristiane

si trovavano coinvolte in dibattiti apologetici, così da poter anche ponderare quanto il discorso dell'autore fosse rivolto ad un uditorio non solo cristiano. Infine, la scelta dell'editore di numerare le note per pagina e non seguendo una lista completa per volume o per capitolo appare inusuale. Una numerazione per sezione o volume con indice alla fine del volume renderebbe più facile la consultazione dell'apparato critico. Ciononostante, appare del tutto comprensibile la scelta del curatore che rispecchia le difficoltà tecnologiche quando si tratta di editare testi in lingue non occidentali, o che hanno alfabeti e sistemi di scrittura diversi.

Per ciò che riguarda l'indicizzazione dell'edizione, una menzione d'onore va fatta ai diversi indici che rendono agevole la sua consultazione tematica. L'indice delle citazioni bibliche, l'indice delle citazioni coraniche e, infine, l'indice dei nomi di persona, luogo e di voci rilevanti, risultano degli strumenti particolarmente adatti per navigare all'interno di un'opera dal carattere enciclopedico che privilegia lo sguardo religioso comparatista utile per confrontare le comunanze e le differenze tra le diverse confessioni cristiane e le altre religioni abramitiche.

Caratteristica notevole di quest'opera, infine, che sembra distinguerla, come scritto nella precisa prefazione di Herman Teule, professore emerito presso la Radboud University e la KU di Leuven, da opere arabo-cristiane simili - ad esempio il già citato *I libri dei misteri* o il *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn* del patriarca nestoriano Elia II, entrambe le opere già curate da Gianazza (2005, 570) - è costituita dai diversi punti del testo dedicati all'ecumenismo e al confronto con altri cristiani, in maniera particolare, i melchiti e i giacobiti, e con altre religioni: gli ebrei e, soprattutto, i musulmani. Il testo arabo originale, che utilizza la tipica prosa rimata arabo-musulmana del *saḡ'*, dialoga con la religione a cui sottostanno i nestoriani dell'età d'oro del califfato abbaside, l'Islam. Questa enciclopedia religiosa, (così suole definire questo genere letterario dei cristiani orientali) si presenta, pertanto, come opera culturale di definizione identitaria ma anche di confronto e rappresentazione a direzione esterna di una comunità religiosa minoritaria. Lo stile del testo vuole sancire una vicinanza culturale ed esprime, allo stesso tempo, il rispetto e l'adeguamento nei confronti degli stilemi culturali dominanti con un intento di valorizzazione della propria comunità. Per questo carattere ecumenico, il testo in questione è notevole e appare ancor più degno di un'edizione completa che lo faccia conoscere al pubblico odierno. Gianazza, dopo aver già curato ed edito in due volumi la cronaca patriarcale contenuta nel *libro della torre* ('Amr ibn Mattā al-Ṭīrhānī 2022), con questi primi tre volumi si pone dunque sulla giusta strada per restituire completamente al presente questo importante patrimonio della storia e della letteratura del cristianesimo orientale. Questa edizione rappresenterà senz'altro un nuovo tassello nella

comprensione della storia della Chiesa d'Oriente e della vita culturale e letteraria tra gli arabi cristiani che vissero nell'età d'oro del Califfato islamico, per nulla alieni alla temperie culturale dell'epoca, ma anzi attori importanti nella costruzione della cultura araba premoderna.

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Decolonising Environmental Humanities Through Indigenous and Local Perspectives

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Review of Biswas, D.; Ryan, J.C. (eds) (2024). *Environmental Humanities in India*. Singapore: Springer, 234 pp.

For decades, the study of environment and human-ecology relationships has been dominated by Western epistemological frames and the lens of colonial modernity. Environmental degradation has been viewed as mired in a cause-effect relationship with human industrial action wherein both, the former and the latter, are subject to an understanding based on perspectives derived from a Western context. In the edited volume, Biswas and Ryan attempt to debunk and dethrone this Western-colonial framework in understanding the environmental concerns in erstwhile colonies. In this sense, the collection of essays is an essential contribution towards the decolonisation of the field of environmental humanities and uncovers the precolonial sensibilities rooted in the cultural milieu of indigenous societies. They foreground indigenous ways of knowing and understanding through engagement with literary traditions, music, and anthropological case studies, sidestepping the challenge of postcolonialism's "theoretical entanglement with the modernity/coloniality power structure" (Alfaisal 2011, 24). The essays bring together a wide range of methodological approaches to draw out the integration between human - non-human relationships in indigenous articulations of nature.



Submitted 2025-02-03
Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Gupta, D. (2025). "Decolonising Environmental Humanities through Indigenous and Local Perspectives". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 517-522.

The volume is thematically organised into four sections. Each section brings out a crucial cultural, literary, or philosophical aspect of the environmental consciousness in wide-ranging socio-cultural contexts in India, lending the volume an expansive breadth and, at the same time, a systematic flow. The first theme brings out indigenous and tribal perspectives on environmentalism and spirituality, with a special emphasis on the tribes of the north-eastern part of India. In drawing attention to indigenous and local traditions, the theme is a vital step towards the emergence of decolonial environmental humanities as a promising intellectual field. Strong critiques of anthropocentrism emerge in the second theme that is centred around the theoretical and philosophical aspects of environmental studies. It stands in alignment with Chakrabarty's (2021) assertion that "the connected stories of the evolution of this planet, its climate, and its life cannot be told from any anthropocentric perspective" (151-2). However, while the theme promises to take the readers into the theoretical backdrop relevant to education, law and ethics, the chapters do not mention education at all. Despite the gap, the theme contributes and conforms to the larger conceptual framework of the volume. In contrast to the second theme, the four chapters in the third section constitute an organic harmony with the section's title and the overall theme of the book. The section lends a methodological and conceptual depth to the volume and renders it relevant for scholars from diverse fields, such as literature, anthropology, sociology and environment, to name a few, adding substance to the promise of the editors for a multidisciplinary approach towards environmental studies. They analyse different genres of literary formulations to reflect upon the complex, unfolding human - non-human relationships in the Anthropocene. Towards the end, the final section is the culmination of the volume with an exploration of myths, legends, and music to lend an important cultural dimension to the study of environment and sustainability. The section explores newer analytical methods and fields to approach environmental issues with and opens possibilities for transdisciplinary research. The neat and systematic organisation of the volume weaves the diverse range of essays together and takes the readers along the various themes seamlessly.

In the introduction, Biswas outlines the major trends in the global scholarship on environmental humanities, eventually shifting his focus to India. He raises pertinent concerns about the colonial association of conquest over nature with development and its reminiscence in postcolonial thought. He further questions the postcolonial perspectives for "negating the possibilities of connecting to a past that homes the eco-cultural sensibility in pre-colonial societies" (4). To challenge this, he conceptually weaves the collection of essays into two strands; one focuses on the human-nature relationships in

pre-colonial societies, and the other focuses on the interplay between colonialism, western theories, and modernity in environmental humanities. He uses the ideas of sustainability, morality, and spirituality propounded by Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi to criticise Western notions of development in favour of a localised approach that blends Western theoretical discourses with the environmental sensibilities of indigenous communities. His essay weaves the diverse works in this publication into a cohesive collection of methodological and theoretical propositions stemming from the Indian cultural context.

The focus of the volume on indigenous/tribal epistemologies, cultural practices, and traditions initiates a much-needed discussion and encourages further research on human-animal-spirit-nature relationships rooted in local consciousness. Beggiora's essay lays emphasis on the environmental consciousness in the cosmologies of native cultures using a case study from central India. His work is of particular importance for students of anthropology, philosophy and environmental education to understand the intricate relationship between indigenous thought and the concept of sustainability. In arguing in favour of Indian theoretical roots for the concepts of sustainability, emancipation, equality, human rights, and environmental protection in tribal cultures and Hindu literary traditions, he places indigenous cosmologies and native traditions at the centre of global debates on environmental theorisation. Pathak and Brahma analyse performative and festive practices of Garo and Bodo tribes in north-eastern India to unravel the human-nature relationships rooted in local indigenous cultures. Their work is an immensely important contribution in framing indigenous cultural performances as the embodiments of decolonial struggles and ecologies of care. Bhattacharjee's chapter on Khasis of Meghalaya, and their traditions of nature worship and sacred groves moves further in destabilising colonial and postcolonial intrusions into forest lands in favour of the intimate interrelationships between humans and nature in indigenous practices. By stressing on the significance of indigenous/tribal cultures to challenge the colonial and postcolonial notions on human-environment relationships, the authors help the readers perceive ecologies from a decolonial lens.

In addition to tribal cultures, an emphasis on Hindu literary traditions to decolonise philosophical and policy-based understanding of human engagement with nature forms the core of two essays in the volume. Sharma and Biswas' chapter delves on sacred and ancient Hindu religious texts, such as Vedas, Puranas and epics, to draw the human - non-human integration in Indian philosophical traditions and religious practices. They argue that Hindu scriptures and traditions do not posit self and other in binary opposition; rather, all life emanates from the same source. According to them, such ideas could help the

humankind create a sustainable way of life in the Anthropocene. In another chapter, Parasain unpacks the philosophical underpinnings of environmental law and policy. Focusing on the fundamental right to life, he adopts a critical stance on the anthropocentrism inherent in the Indian Constitution and its classification of the environment as property. He relies on the spirit of Dharmic tradition, derived from the Dharmashastras, to guide the legal system towards fresh and dynamic perspectives on the meaning of life. However, while treating Hindu religious texts as authoritative, he overlooks the elements of social inequalities and hierarchies embedded in these texts, namely, those of caste and gender. His arguments would be stronger if he had analysed the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution in juxtaposition with an equally critical reading of the Hindu texts. While the two chapters are important contributions towards decolonising the field of environmental humanities, a chapter on literary contributions from other religious traditions in the subcontinent, such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, or Islam would have made the volume more encompassing and substantive.

Interestingly, several essays in the volume present an analysis of various literary productions written in different genres which work to centre the readers' attention on the ways in which the literary works negotiate with and even raise questions of conservation, ecological balance, and environmental politics. De analyses two novels to offer a decolonial bioregional perspective of how the indigenous community of Kodavas in the Western Ghats of India interacted with multiple species from the precolonial to postcolonial times. Apart from her ingenious insights into the multispecies conviviality, her bioregional conceptions of "living-in-place" and "reinhabitation" (131) are important contributions to decolonise environmental humanities. Moreover, there are three chapters that present strong critiques of ecologically devastating industrialisation and urbanisation through literary analyses. They critically examine literary works to bring out the politico-ecological struggles and mythic mobilisations (Venugopal and Rangarajan), mourning and hope (Sarker), and resistance strategies, and ecotopian possibilities (Mukherjee) embedded in their narratives.

In three essays, Amitav Ghosh's novels are interpreted for their epistemological contributions to ecological understanding and imagination. Roy uses myths and legends in Amitav Ghosh's work to offer an ecocritical perspective into the Anthropocene. In another essay, Samkariya analyses Ghosh's retelling of a popular folk parable to reflect on non-Western ontologies, agency of non-humans, and environmental consciousness. The chapter by Mondal elaborates and expands on the term secular by philosophising it as closely related to human relationality with non-humans and the environment and the responses to the world. In a dense and convoluted series of arguments,

he draws the term 'derangement' from the works of Amitav Ghosh to redefine secularism and analyse the crisis of ecological consciousness.

The last chapter of the volume by Sharma, Chaubey and Singh is a methodological and a theoretical innovation in the field as the authors view environmental catastrophe utilising the lens of popular music. They present a detailed analysis of the lyrics of a popular song and its cinematography to understand music and environment together in these efforts of raising public awareness on issues of sustainability. They open avenues to analyse music for fresh insights into the "more-than-human world" (231) and propose ecomusicology as a means for public pedagogy.

The volume is a valuable contribution to the field of environmental humanities as it decentres Western colonial perspectives in favour of indigenous epistemologies and roots ecological consciousness in locally situated frameworks. While treading the path towards epistemic decolonisation, the contributing authors move towards equalising the multitude of epistemic perspectives that have hitherto been disregarded. They do not slip into the slope of cultural and epistemic relativism that could threaten to pose challenges for the project of decolonising knowledge itself (Mitova 2021). In doing so, they open possibilities for decolonial research in varied fields, such as environmental education. In educational spaces, decolonial narratives provide an impetus to learner centred education as they displace the Western perspective of liberal individualism in favour of indigenous approaches to conceptualise childhood and knowledge (Thornton et al. 2019). Therefore, the collection of essays is an important step towards decolonising the field of environmental humanities and unlocks gateways into new methodologies and multidisciplinary research.

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Marco Fumian

Leggere la Cina, capire il mondo. Narrazioni dominanti e discorso critico in un'era di competizione

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Recensione di Fumian, M. (a cura di) (2025). *Leggere la Cina, capire il mondo. Narrazioni dominanti e discorso critico in un'era di competizione*. Milano: Mimesis Edizioni, 347 pp.

In questo presente polarizzante e bellicista, trovare delle coordinate per studiare, insegnare, e raccontare criticamente la Repubblica Popolare Cinese sottraendosi dai ranghi del 'noi e loro'¹ è impresa complessa. Eppure, il futuro prossimo promette di rendere il compito della sinologia e delle scienze e degli scienziati sociali impegnati nello studio della RPC ancor più arduo. Se fino a qualche tempo fa, ci si lamentava a buon diritto di una narrazione *mainstream* della Cina drogata dal rinnovato 'scontro di civiltà' à la Rampini,² oggi si deve fare i conti con le *Nuove Indicazioni 2025 per la Scuola dell'infanzia*

1 Su questa contrapposizione tra noi e la Cina si veda il contributo dello storico Guido Samarani (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia) «Noi e la Cina: né filocinesi né anticinesi» pubblicato nella rassegna *Sinologi nella Nuova Era*, disponibile online sul sito di Sinosfere al seguente link <https://sinosfere.com/category/sinologi-nella-nuova-era/>.

2 L'ultimo libro di questo indomito saggista d'assalto (nel vero senso della parola) alla ricerca di verità scomode si intitola *Grazie Occidente: tutto il bene che abbiamo fatto*. Ne riporto una frase della sovracopertina per far capire l'aria che tira. «Tutto il bene che abbiamo fatto, a noi stessi e agli altri, è il supremo tabù di questa epoca. Nelle scuole non si insegna più la storia vera del progresso, che è nato a casa nostra [...]. Invece nelle piazze e nella cultura contemporanea siamo sotto un processo permanente. È ora di ribellarsi, in nome della verità. Cinesi o indiani, brasiliani o africani, il mondo è popolato da miliardi di persone che devono la nostra esistenza... a noi».



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

Submitted 2025-05-23

Published 2025-07-31

Open access

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Citation Di Conzo, D. (2025). Review of *Leggere la Cina, Capire il Mondo: Narrazioni dominanti e discorso critico in un'era di competizione*, by Fumian, M. *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 61, 523-536.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2025/01/018

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e *Primo ciclo di istruzione*. Queste si aprono con l'apodittico «Solo l'Occidente conosce la Storia». Tra le levate di scudi contro questa bieca strumentalizzazione della nota frase di Marc Bloch,³ è qui necessario citare quella dell'Associazione Italiana Studi Cinesi (AISC). Preoccupata e sorpresa da tale circolare, l'AISC propone tre sintetiche riflessioni,⁴ nelle quali definisce questo approccio allo studio della storia «una provocazione che alimenta la polarizzazione di identità culturali contrapposte [...] isolando artificiosamente narrazioni nazionali, funzionali a una contrapposizione identitaria». Si sottolinea, inoltre, che la circoscrizione dello studio dell'Asia orientale alla sola Cina comunista evoca «di fatto solo l'immagine di quel Paese come parte del blocco nemico dell'Occidente» tralasciando «la storia millenaria delle relazioni tra Europa e Cina». Se da novizio socio dell'AISC non posso che far mie queste riflessioni, credo sia necessario porre questa ristretta e *negativa* narrazione della Cina nell'attuale e più ampio disciplinamento della libertà d'insegnamento e d'opinione. L'attacco al sapere critico e all'autonomia universitaria nel suo complesso va infatti ben oltre il perimetro della Grande Muraglia. Dai tagli minacciati da Trump agli atenei rei di promuovere proteste illegali e insegnamenti contro l'interesse statunitense, alla Germania di Scholz (socialdem!) dove il Professor Hage è stato licenziato dalla Max Planck Society per aver definito sui social Israele come un progetto sionista,⁵ arrivando al 'commissario' Galli Della Loggia che, tra le altre, vorrebbe

3 Tra i principali innovatori della storiografia contemporanea, insieme al gruppo della rivista *Annales*, Marc Bloch, francese di origini ebraiche, morì da partigiano, giustiziato dalla Gestapo Nazista a Lione il 16 giugno del 1944. In relazione alla strumentalizzazione di Bloch e al concetto di 'Occidente', mi permetto di segnalare il contributo di un grande storico come A. Portelli «Alle Ardeatine: ovvero di cosa parliamo dicendo Occidente», disponibile all'indirizzo <https://ilmanifesto.it/socrate-alle-ardeatine-ovvero-di-cosa-parliamo-dicendo-occidente>.

4 1) «La Cina conosce la Storia» 2) «Perché usare la categoria di 'Occidente'?», 3) «Estrapolare citazioni di Marc Bloch per affermare un nuovo concetto di storia è arbitrario e fuorviante». Il testo completo è disponibile online presso il sito dell'Associazione <https://aisc-org.it/lettera-aperta-sulle-nuove-indicazioni-della-scuola/>.

5 Per una rassegna più dettagliata delle fonti, si veda l'intervento della Professoressa Donatella Della Porta nella giornata *Il Futuro dell'Università in Italia* del 18 marzo 2025. Intervento integrale disponibile su YouTube al seguente link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4b35debqCo&t=2332s>.

reintrodurre la nomina governativa dei rettori,⁶ quell'Occidente' unico custode della storia, della democrazia, e dei diritti civili sta rapidamente restringendo quelle stesse libertà che ci renderebbero intrinsecamente migliori di un non ben definito 'Oriente'.

Questo lungo preambolo sembrerebbe mal sposarsi con la recensione di un saggio sulla Cina contemporanea. Tuttavia, *Leggere la Cina, Capire il Mondo: narrazioni dominanti e discorso critico in un'era di competizione*, volume collettaneo curato da Marco Fumian,⁷ credo rappresenti un prezioso antidoto all'avvelenato dibattito pubblico sulla Cina. Una risposta metodologica alle crescenti difficoltà e alle sfide strutturali che la sinologia, ma il sapere critico in generale, si trovano davanti. A partire da un ciclo di seminari patrocinati dalla già citata AISC,⁸ e riprendendo le fila di un proficuo dibattito sulla maggiore centralità e responsabilità dei *Sinologi nella Nuova Era* lanciato dal sito Sinosfere,⁹ il testo vuol proporre la costruzione di una «sinologia critica». Questa mira ad unire il «rigoroso specialismo accademico» con la necessità

di uscire dai compartimenti stagni di quest'ultimo per indagare in modo aperto e critico la compartecipazione della Cina alle trasformazioni in atto nel mondo di oggi, integrando quindi lo studio della Cina nel novero dei saperi pubblici condivisi che coinvolgono noi e i nostri lettori come cittadini di una comunità democratica. (25-6)

Tale ambizioso, quanto necessario, obiettivo viene realizzato chiedendo ad autorevoli sinologhe e sinologi di declinare da diverse angolazioni la relazione competitiva tra la Cina e gli Stati Uniti, condividere esperienze e metodologie di ricerca, saldando efficacemente un'analisi di ampio respiro su questo dualismo

6 Galli Della Loggia è stato messo a capo dalla Ministra Bernini del gruppo di studio incaricato di redigere la Riforma dell'Università e del reclutamento. In un suo recente articolo parla del processo di nomina dei rettori chiedendosi se «non è forse giunto il momento, mi chiedo, di rivedere qualcosa di tutta questa materia, magari restituendo un po' di competenze al tanto vilipeso potere centrale di una volta?». Ah, quei bei tempi di una volta (pre-costituzionali) quando i rettori li nominava il governo fascista o regio previo giuramento. Galli Della Loggia, E. (2024). «I poteri delle nostre università». *Corriere della Sera*, 10 aprile. Per una critica più adeguata si veda T. Montanari, T. (2025). *Libera Università*. Einaudi.

7 Professore Associato di Lingua e Letteratura Cinese presso l'Università degli Studi di Napoli «L'Orientale».

8 Il ciclo di seminari *Gli studi cinesi e il discorso pubblico sulla Cina oggi* è stato organizzato dall'AISC con il sostegno dell'Università degli Studi di Napoli «L'Orientale». Alcune delle lezioni sono disponibili online sul sito dell'AISC al seguente link <https://aisc-org.it/ciclo-di-seminari-sulla-cina-contemporanea/>.

9 La rassegna *Sinologi nella Nuova Era* è disponibile online sul sito di Sinosfere al seguente link <https://sinosfere.com/category/sinologi-nella-nuova-era/>.

internazionale con riflessioni e studi sulla sfera nazionale della RPC.

Una suddivisione artificiale del volume che aiuti il lettore ad approcciarsi a un testo che, nella sua vocazione divulgativa e pubblica non risparmia certamente complessità e profondità d'analisi, credo possa essere la seguente. I primi sei saggi si dipanano attraverso un gioco di specchi in cui Cina e Stati Uniti, con le loro rispettive propagande, narrazioni ed élite si guardano, contendendosi i 'sogni', la Storia, lo sviluppo economico, e, credo aspetto meno noto, anche il primato democratico. Sin dal primo saggio a firma del curatore, «Fra democrazia e autocrazia: leggere la propaganda sulla Cina in un'epoca di competizione» (31-68), la democrazia con le sue conflittuali interpretazioni diviene il *trait d'union* della prima metà del volume.

Fumian ci presenta le forme e i contenuti di questo rinnovato scontro dialettico nei primi anni Venti. Da un lato, attraverso il Summit per la Democrazia del 2021, l'amministrazione Biden riconfigura dal punto di vista narrativo la competizione strategica con la Cina, declinandola come una difesa della democrazia che respinga l'avanzata degli autoritarismi. Dall'altro, Pechino, come avviene in questi giorni con i dazi, ha immediatamente risposto al colpo con la pubblicazione di due documenti ufficiali: «Lo stato della democrazia americana» e «La democrazia cinese». Cosa sia la democrazia, che forme abbia e quali debba assumere, come vedremo nel dettaglio attraverso i prossimi saggi, è ritornato un primario terreno di scontro tra il paese paradigma del capitalismo contemporaneo e l'enigmatico 'Socialismo con caratteristiche cinesi' nato come una «dittatura democratica». ¹⁰ Torneremo a parlare di democrazia, ma non prima di aver discusso quella che dovrebbe essere una sua nemesi, la propaganda.

Nella «Propaganda verso l'estero della Repubblica Popolare» (69-94), Sapiro offre una puntuale ricostruzione storica della comunicazione politica di Pechino. Si evidenzia come sia le ricerche sostenute da enti con un'agenda «filoatlantica» sia quelle mosse da una «filocinese» pecchino di un presentismo astorico. Questo non permette di comprendere sia come «tutti i canali e le forme di comunicazione di Pechino siano controllate dal PCC» quanto che l'Italia non abbia mai rappresentato «un destinatario privilegiato della propaganda verso l'estero». Non rintracciando nessun eccezionalismo o particolarismo italiano, si pone enfasi sul fatto che «la posta in gioco è sempre stata la volontà della Cina di rivestire un ruolo di rilievo prima, e di leader

10 «Nella sua opera *Sulla Nuova Democrazia*, Mao parlava di 'dittatura democratica'', un'espressione che metteva insieme due concetti essenzialmente antitetici secondo il pensiero occidentale, ma che per i comunisti cinesi stavano a significare 'democrazia per molti, dittatura per pochi'; in altre parole, a essere soggetta alla dittatura, e quindi alla repressione, era una percentuale ridotta del popolo, quella dei suoi avversari» (Miranda a p. 117).

poi, nel sistema internazionale» (70). L'autrice propone quindi un filo rosso che dalla diffusione del Maoismo in Italia come alternativa politica alla contrapposizione tra i due blocchi bipolari giunge fino alla Cina come 'opportunità economica' in cambio dell'accettazione dei suoi principi politici. Se nel merito, la transizione del partito-stato da Mao a Deng e alle generazioni di leader successive può anche aver stravolto il contenuto della proiezione della Cina come «alternativa», nel metodo l'autrice sottolinea

come molte delle narrazioni sulla Cina che ormai fanno parte del sentire comune abbiano avuto origine a Pechino, e siano state convogliate da mass media cinesi che sono parte integrante dell'apparato di propaganda. (71)

In qualche modo specchio del saggio di Sapio, segue quello di Lanza,¹¹ che gode della posizione 'privilegiata' di chi conduce studi storici sulla Cina moderna nell'accademia statunitense da oltre vent'anni. Il suo saggio «*What does 'China' mean?* la doxa americana e la 'nuova guerra fredda'?» (95-114), si interroga sull'evoluzione della prospettiva americana sulla Cina. In principio, l'autore ricostruisce come la politica estera americana abbia vissuto a partire dal secondo dopoguerra un «perverso consenso su questioni militari e diplomatiche che esula da qualsiasi appartenenza politica». Questa uniformità dell'establishment nel proiettare gli interessi degli US verso l'esterno ha preso il nome di 'the blob', «una congerie di think tank, fondazioni, e settori dell'amministrazione federale» che privilegia

interventi militari a soluzioni diplomatiche; considera le tensioni e gli scontri internazionali come questioni di vitale importanza per la sicurezza nazionale piuttosto che come normali rivalità fra stati; professa come dogma incrollabile la necessità di mantenere una superiorità militare assoluta a livello globale; e, viste queste premesse, il blob ovviamente è votato alla conservazione e all'espansione di quello che Eisenhower chiamò 'the military-industrial complex'. (95-6)

Secondo l'autore, l'Asia e la Cina hanno svolto un ruolo centrale sia nella formazione quanto nella crisi di questo «consenso». Infatti, il saggio si conclude legando l'evoluzione di questo sentiero unico della

11 Questo saggio è stato in parte già pubblicato dalla rivista *gli asini* con il titolo «Il blob in crisi? Trump, la Cina e la Nuova Guerra Fredda». Disponibile all'indirizzo <https://gliasinirivista.org/il-blob-in-crisi-trump-la-cina-e-la-nuova-guerra-fredda/>.

politica estera statunitense a due convincenti spiegazioni sul perché questa «infelice e pericolosa» etichetta di «Nuova Guerra Fredda» sia emersa.

Da un lato,

Dipingere la Cina come un nemico esistenziale permette di mantenere in vita il blob, in modo da impedire che le divisioni interne (ormai esasperate) si riflettano all'esterno e soprattutto che danneggino il mantenimento del military-industrial complex. (112)

Dall'altro, definire

la Cina come un nemico, un'alternativa al sistema democratico-capitalista è un modo evidente per evitare di riconoscere come la Cina non sia un'anomalia nel sistema capitalistico globale, ma ne sia invece parte integrante, come attore cruciale. Riconoscere che la Cina non è 'altro' significherebbe anche riconoscere pienamente e finalmente che il sistema capitalistico in cui viviamo non è naturalmente orientato verso la democrazia e i diritti umani. (112)

Queste narrazioni e propagande a confronto lasciano spazio alla «democrazia 'con caratteristiche cinesi': le varie elaborazioni fino alla 'nuova era' di Xi Jinping» di Miranda (1115-38). In continuità con il contributo di Fumian, la sinologa della Sapienza Università di Roma ripercorre «l'importazione del concetto di democrazia» sin dal suo approdo sulle coste cinesi alla fine del XIX secolo. Focalizzandosi sulle sue rielaborazioni da parte del PCC, il cui apice nella stagione insurrezionale fu rappresentato dall'opera di Mao 'Sulla Nuova Democrazia' (1940), il saggio ne descrive l'evoluzione in relazione ai momenti topici della storia della RPC. Se il 4 giugno del 1989 ha sicuramente rappresentato uno spartiacque nella storia contemporanea cinese che non poteva non travolgere il concetto stesso di democrazia, Miranda espone come

il dibattito sulla democrazia abbia invece continuato a svilupparsi ampiamente anche nel corso degli anni '90 e Duemila, sebbene in maniera diversa dal periodo precedente e in modo decisamente più controllato e incanalato entro gli stretti argini definiti dal Partito. (120)

Questo studio granulare permette sia di sottolineare come la decostruzione della presunzione universale della democrazia occidentale abbia soddisfatto i «bisogni della propaganda interna e internazionale» sia di comprendere come «la democrazia onniprocedurale» (*quan guocheng renmin minzhu* 全过程人民民主)

avanzata oggi da Xi non nasca dal nulla. Questa costante riflessione e critica della ‘democrazia occidentale’ da parte dei politologi vicini al Partito ha quindi costituito il retroterra teorico per l’elaborazione di un «modello autoctono» rappresentato da questa inedita democrazia *made by Xi*. Una democrazia la cui qualità non sia da valutare sulla formalità dei procedimenti elettorali «ma alla luce della capacità di governo di migliorare la vita socio-economica della popolazione» (127). Una «democrazia dei risultati» (128), una «democrazia che funziona» (133) volta a «migliorare la sua posizione a livello mondiale» (135-6), accrescendo «il suo potere discorsivo» (136) (*huayuquan* 话语权). Se tale formulazione risponde perfettamente a bisogni di propaganda sia interna sia esterna, potenzialmente efficace, per quanto concerne quest’ultima, nel coagulare il diffuso sentimento antioccidentale, l’autrice conclude che «tale enfasi sulla performance» (137) è foriera di pericoli.

l’attuale frenata della crescita economica potrebbe mettere in discussione il patto esistente tra il governo e i cittadini, i quali sono stati sinora disposti a rinunciare a molti diritti in cambio della promessa di un progressivo e costante miglioramento del proprio tenore di vita. Il rallentamento strutturale dell’economia, [...], potrebbe innescare i presupposti per una sorta di crisi di legittimità, inattesa per l’attuale leadership al potere. (137)

Una figura incastonata tra la propaganda e l’appena descritta esigenza del partito-stato di rilanciarsi come modello altro, concorrente e migliore di quello occidentale, è quella del protagonista del saggio di Brusadelli, «Lo specchio americano di Wang Huning: il disincanto della democrazia e la guerra dei sogni» (139-66). Membro del Comitato Centrale Permanente del PCC dal XIX Congresso (2017), Wang può vantare «una continuità della sua influenza sull’intera leadership post-denghista» (142). Da Jiang a Xi, gli ultimi 30 anni della politologia ufficiale del Partito hanno visto spesso la regia dell’attuale Presidente della Conferenza Politica Consultiva del Popolo Cinese.

Se il mondo sta vivendo una ‘nuova Guerra Fredda’ tra Stati Uniti e Cina – non necessariamente come realtà storica, ma sicuramente come cornice discorsiva – allora le elaborazioni di Wang Huning, prodotte alla fine degli anni Ottanta alla fine della ‘prima’ Guerra Fredda e poi tradotte in politiche nel ventunesimo secolo, all’alba di un presunto secondo confronto bipolare tra Pechino e Washington, acquisiscono una rilevanza ancora più accentuata. (143)

Infatti, il suo libro *America contro America* del 1991, avanzando la differenza tra un «America ideale» ed una «reale» che riconduce il

«sogno americano» a fenomeno «contingente» e non «globale» (147) costituisce un riconoscibile retroterra teorico sia per la già discussa critica ad una democrazia formale e procedurale sia per l'emersione di un sogno altro, quello cinese, quello di Xi. In sintesi, Brusadelli non solo ci spiega come il pensiero di Wang sia imprescindibile per decifrare la strategia discorsiva odierna del PCC ma fornisce elementi per comprendere come «'Democrazia', 'sovranità', o 'diritti', siano diventanti «il campo immateriale su cui si svolge una competizione intellettuale per una egemonia parallela a quella geopolitica» (162).

L'ultimo saggio di questa sezione 'democratica' è a firma di Gabusi, politologo internazionalista con alle spalle lunghi studi sull'*'Importazione del Capitalismo'*¹² nella RPC. «La fortuna del capitalismo e il vantaggio delle democrazie: perché è sbagliato parlare di 'Modello Cina'» (167-88) sfida sin dal titolo uno dei *leitmotiv* più diffusi circa l'alterità intrinseca del modello di sviluppo politico-economico della RPC. Senza eccessive perifrasi, e coerente con i suoi studi passati, l'autore afferma

che non esiste un vero e proprio 'modello Cina' poiché l'esperienza della RPC degli ultimi quarantacinque anni si colloca a pieno titolo all'interno del paradigma dello stato sviluppatista in Asia Orientale. (167)

Ripercorrendo i tratti comuni, «nazionalismo economico, istituzioni solide e organizzazione corporativa delle relazioni tra stato e società» (169) degli stati sviluppatisti asiatici, quali Giappone, Corea del Sud, e Taiwan, non manca di evidenziare le discontinuità del caso cinese. La «natura marxista-leninista del sistema politico cinese» (171), con la perdurante centralità delle imprese di stato, e le dimensioni continentali che hanno comportato «una maggiore rilevanza delle amministrazioni locali rispetto al governo centrale» (172) non rappresentano a suo avviso elementi sufficienti per suffragare l'eccezionalità del 'modello Cina' tanto cara a Pechino. Partendo da una critica al 'The China Model' di Bell, passando per una rassegna del fortunato 'Capitalism Alone' di Milanovic, anche Gabusi usa un gioco di specchi per descrivere il modello di sviluppo cinese guardando alla «presunta crisi delle democrazie» e alle «camaleontiche» doti del capitalismo che ne fanno la sua fortuna. Non nega che le democrazie siano in crisi, soffrendo queste di una evidente «legittimità da output», ma inchiodando la RPC alle sue contraddizioni 'socialiste' più esplicite, quali l'assenza di democrazia sindacale e diritto di sciopero, riafferma il «vantaggio delle democrazie». Questo «risiede

12 Gabusi, G. (2013). *L'importazione del Capitalismo: il ruolo delle istituzioni nello sviluppo economico cinese*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero.

nell'alternanza al potere di personale politico diverso: nessun errore, nessuna incompetenza è per sempre» (188). Di converso,

Il vero merito del PCC non è stato sostenere un sistema in grado di selezionare leader competenti, ma introdurre nell'impianto istituzionale del marxismo-leninismo gli incentivi propri del capitalismo, che una volta innestati nell'economia ne hanno garantito la crescita. (187)

Tuttavia, il monopolio del potere del PCC come priorità ultima comporta una continua messa alla prova «dell'agibilità politica del proprio operato» costringendolo ciclicamente «a reprimere l'informazione e il dibattito intellettuale, ricorrendo anche a coercizione e violenza» (187).

I successivi due capitoli possono essere inquadrati come un ponte tra la competizione USA-Cina con la sua guerra di narrazioni e gioco di specchi ed una conclusiva sezione 'metodologica'. Dalla relazione tra il 'soft power' e teoria e pratica della traduzione (Pesaro, 189-220), al rinnovato controllo del PCC sulla diaspora d'oltremare (Brigadoi Cologna, 221-48).

Pesaro, parte dal mettere in guardia su come

passione e interesse tanto per la letteratura quanto per la traduzione non devono far perdere di vista quale sia il potenziale impatto che il sistema delle traduzioni come piattaforma di negoziazione tra diversi soft power produce a livello culturale, collettivo e individuale, ma soprattutto politico (189)

Ripercorre la densa storia della traduzione del cinese e del suo discorso sottolineando come questi siano stati «profondamente influenzati dalla relazione conflittuale tra il 'Regno del Mezzo', come si definisce la Cina, e il cosiddetto 'occidente'» (194). Dapprima, l'autrice espone nel dettaglio il contemporaneo 'storytelling di Xi'. Una compenetrazione tra politica del 'soft power' e traduzione di cui riscontra tre aspetti centrali. Il riscatto del mondo artistico-letterario cinese dopo «un secolo di rapporti conflittuali e di inferiorità con il mondo occidentale» (192). Una maggiore attenzione alla divulgazione dei «contenuti piuttosto che alle forme artistiche» (192). Infine, una rinsaldata centralità del PCC «a esercitare il suo opportuno ruolo guida nella produzione culturale del paese» (192). L'autorevole traduttrice e sinologa conclude che le sfide attuali sono «antiche dinamiche dei processi traduttivi [...] entrate in una nuova fase con l'ingresso di Xi nella scena politica cinese» (219). Una maggiore visibilità culturale a livello internazionale che si mescola «con un discorso più ideologico di soft power» riassumibile in tre tendenze. Un'«ansia interculturale del mondo intellettuale e accademico», una

«volontà politica di esercitare un soft power culturale più incisivo che accompagni l'ascesa politica ed economica della Cina»; ed infine la ricerca di «nuove strategie di mercato del mondo editoriale cinese» che siano in grado di coniugare la profittabilità del settore con «gli ideali politici del nuovo rinascimento cinese» (219).

Brigadoi Bologna ci parla delle politiche verso la diaspora cinese nella Repubblica Popolare. Riperkorrendo la peculiare storia migratoria dei cosiddetti 'cinesi d'oltremare', l'autore sottolinea come il loro ruolo nella realizzazione del progetto politico del moderno stato cinese non rappresenti un carattere innovativo della guida comunista stabilita nel 1949 ma affondi le sue radici nella tarda storia imperiale quanto nella più recente Repubblica di Cina. Gli odierni 40 milioni appartenenti alla diaspora, nonostante abbiano «genealogie, storie famigliari, esperienze migratorie e biografie personali [...] difficilmente riassumibili in una descrizione univoca e monocorde della 'cinesità'» (222), condividono certamente «l'intensificazione del controllo sociale e ideologico» (245), che il sociologo e sinologo esplora specificatamente nel caso italiano. Passando in rassegna la riorganizzazione delle istituzioni preposte alla governance della diaspora avvenuta nel 2018, che ha restituito centralità al 'Fronte Unito', e i conseguenti studi, spesso «affiliati con enti o progetti sostenuti da lobby politiche conservatrici statunitensi» (240), si pone l'enfasi su come anche il tema della diaspora sia entrato a pieno titolo nello scontro tra propagande contrapposte. Dai «timori sull'influenza politica cinese in Europa e in Italia» (235), fino all'ormai celeberrimo memorandum stralciato sulla 'Nuova Via della Seta' (BRI), «la prospettiva di una Cina ormai dichiaratamente considerata 'avversario strategico' [...] permea l'intero rapporto e ne sostiene la chiamata a una più efficace e coesa risposta europea» (241-2). Allo stesso tempo soggetti e vettori della comunicazione politica di Pechino quanto dei suoi 'avversarsi', i membri della diaspora sperimentano sulle proprie vite un altro campo di battaglia, forse il più subdolo, di questo confronto. Geneticamente portatori di un'identità e del conseguente interesse per il «ringiovanimento della nazione cinese» sono quindi bilateralmente

soggetti di una politica identitaria tutta incentrata su di una 'cinesità' priva di declinazioni, impernata su ideali di discendenza genealogica e sull'immaginario di un atavico richiamo del sangue. (247)

Di riflesso, aggiungo io, condividono lo stigma e la xenofobia dell'Italia di oggi, «uno dei paesi europei più restio a rendere più facili le procedure di naturalizzazione dei propri 'nuovi italiani'» (247). Conclude l'autore,

Se questo orientamento cambiasse, probabilmente crescerebbe anche la distanza percepita tra le retoriche dell'appartenenza delle politiche della diaspora e le vicissitudini reali delle persone che, giorno dopo giorno, con le loro scelte e aspirazioni arricchiscono ulteriormente il caleidoscopio dell'identità sinoitaliana. (247)

Infine, come si diceva, gli ultimi tre saggi potrebbero risultare maggiormente specialistici avendo come loro nucleo la metodologia con il quale guardare all'interno del vasto universo cinese. Partendo dalle narrazioni contrapposte e polarizzanti sull'odierno ruolo della Cina nell'Africa, focalizzandosi in particolare sul tema dei lavoratori transnazionali cinesi nel continente, la professoressa Ceccagno, restituisce opportunamente visibilità ad un recente dibattito sulle crescenti difficoltà nel condurre attività di ricerca sulla Cina, quello promosso dalla rivista *Orizzonte Cina* e dalla ToChina Summer School dell'Università degli Studi di Torino dal titolo *Doing Research in and on Contemporary China: Old Challenges in the New Era*.¹³ Se la domanda è di quali «strumenti possono dotarsi le studiose di Cina e di Cina globale per navigare l'attuale 'ecologia di produzione di conoscenza'?» (256), la risposta secondo l'autrice risiede nell'interdisciplinarietà come metodo¹⁴ e «antidoto all'uniformazione acritica e al posizionamento binario» (268).

Segue il contributo di Gullotta che offre la sua «Danza etnografica nella Cina post-pandemica», estratto del suo ultimo libro sempre

13 Alcune riflessioni scritte del dibattito sono disponibili sulla rivista *Orizzonte Cina*, 15(1), 2024, gratuitamente consultabile al seguente link <https://www.twai.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/OC-15.1.pdf>. La ToChina Summer School e la rivista *Orizzonte Cina* sono organizzate e promosse dal Torino World Affair Institute (T.WAI).

14 Su simili note si conclude l'intervento di Gaia Perini, professoressa di Letteratura Cinese presso l'Alma Mater - Università di Bologna, all'interno della già citata rassegna *Sinologi nella nuova era*. Consigliandone la lettura ne riporto un estratto: «a noi che osserviamo questo gigantesco gioco da fuori, sentendoci minuscoli di fronte alla portata dei processi, non posso che augurare alleanze interne fra i vari rami della disciplina e sodalizi intellettuali 'ibridi', al di fuori della nostra area. [...] soggettivamente, sento che è ora di spaziare, contaminarsi, deragliare dai binari consueti; non so se e quanto sia condiviso questo bisogno. Spero lo sia, perché la Cina è senza dubbio al centro di un'evoluzione globale che riguarda niente meno che l'umanità tutta e tale processo rischia di restare solo parzialmente intelligibile finché lo si guarda dal pertugio dei nostri saperi frammentati. Andrebbero uniti i puntini delle singole ricerche. Non solo per comprendere meglio la Cina, ma anche, magari, per provare a capire dove sono i freni di questo treno in corsa» (Perini, P. «Giovanni Arrighi a Pechino, Elon Musk a Shanghai. Alla ricerca di una sinologia 'ibrida'» disponibile online al seguente link <https://sinosfere.com/2021/02/28/gaia-perini-giovanni-arrighi-a-pechino-elon-musk-a-shanghai-alla-ricerca-di-una-sinologia-ibrida/>).

edito da Mimesis.¹⁵ Un saggio che pone al centro limiti e potenzialità della ricerca sul campo nella Cina di Xi, esplorando i rapporti di potere e le molteplici forme di autorità che non si esauriscono nel ruolo pervasivo del partito-stato. Se infatti «il controllo totale è impossibile, il partito-stato sembra accontentarsi di voler dare l'idea, a creare l'idea che ci sia un potere in grado di controllare» (282). L'autoritarismo, quindi, non solo come ubiquità del partito-stato, ma come forma di controllo che autonomamente si impone quando il ricercatore è immerso in un paradigma securitario.

Chiude questa 'sezione metodologica', la traduzione per mano del curatore del testo di Sinan Chu, che parafrasando la campagna Maoista 'che cento fiori sboccino'¹⁶ discute e riassume «il dibattito sulla politica etnica della Cina tra il 2004 e il 2015» (301-28). Criticando la semplicistica, e mi permetto di aggiungere spesso 'orientalista', visione monolitica dell'autoritarismo del partito-stato, l'autore evidenzia come la «svolta assimilazionista» intrapresa da Xi unita ad «un'evidente stretta negli spazi di discussione pubblica a livello nazionale» (326) fosse stata anticipata da una vivace e vasto dibattito sulla natura multietnica del paese e sulle politiche gestionali di tale eterogeneità. Non negando, quindi, le difficoltà odierne nello sviluppo di pensiero critico e contestazione, Chu conclude enfatizzando un aspetto centrale e spesso tralasciato.

l'agency degli attori sociali cinesi, intellettuali e cittadini comuni, rimane un elemento importante nei processi di decisione politica», sottolineando come «A dispetto della sua politica autoritaria resiliente, e dei sofisticati strumenti di repressione a sua disposizione, il Partito-Stato non opera con il consenso automatico della popolazione. (326)

Chiude questo volume poliedrico, un'intervista a tre noti giornalisti* impegnati nella comunicazione sulla Cina: Alessandra Colarizi, Simone Pieranni e Lorenzo Lamperti. La selezione non è casuale avendo questi l'indubbio merito ad aver contribuito ad un parziale quanto fondamentale miglioramento dell'informazione sulla Repubblica Popolare. Tutti e tre condividono l'esperienza presente

15 Gullotta, D. (2024). *Dentro la Cina: quattro studi sull'Ascesa Cinese*. Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis Edizioni. Recensito per i siti Sbilanciamoci e Sinosfere dal medesimo Autore di questa recensione. <https://sbilanciamoci.info/uno-sguardo-dentro-la-cina-anzi-quattro/>.

16 Campagna lanciata da Mao Zedong nel 1956 per «far sbocciare cento fiori, far contendere cento scuole di pensiero» come invito alla libertà di discussione e di confronto sui progressi e sui problemi dei primi anni di governo comunista in Cina. Le critiche furono molto più severe ed estese di quanto la dirigenza si aspettasse. Tale iniziativa si concluse nel 1957 e seguito dalla 'Campagna anti-destra'.

o passata presso il sito d'informazione 'China Files', collettivo di giornalisti specializzati in affari asiatici. Sito che è divenuto un riferimento e che credo, come me, gli autori e le autrici di questo volume consiglino a studenti e studentesse spesso disorientati sul dove ricercare un'informazione 'sana' e indipendente sulla Cina e l'Asia. Fumian li interroga sulla crisi complessiva dell'informazione sugli esteri sia nella sua natura 'finanziaria' sia di 'contenuti', giungendo chiaramente a sollecitarli sul 'caso cinese'. Ci spiegano limiti e funzionamento delle redazioni estere odierne, la subalternità ai media anglofoni che deriva dalla miscela tra la crisi della profittabilità dell'editoria giornalistica e la visione manichea della RPC, già largamente discussa in questo volume.

In conclusione di questa lunga, ma spero esaustiva, presentazione, se come propriamente affermato da Savina¹⁷ nella sua recensione del medesimo testo, questo rappresenta «un punto di arrivo metodologico di grande rilievo» reso possibile dalla partecipazione di «autorevoli sinologi», mi permetto retoricamente di aggiungere che esso non può che essere un punto di partenza. Come si è tentato di mettere in risalto all'inizio del contributo, le difficoltà che si incontrano nello studio contemporaneo della Cina rappresentano un'esasperazione e condensazione delle molteplici difficoltà legate allo sviluppo di un complessivo sapere critico, pubblico e accessibile. La «sinologia critica» sapientemente delineata in 'Leggere la Cina: capire il mondo' deve essere un tassello di un progetto più ampio per il rilancio di una conoscenza autonoma che scavalchi le mura di quel perimetro che gli esecutivi vogliono restringere.

17 Pubblicata sul sito di China Files e sul già citato Sinosfere. Disponibile all'indirizzo <https://www.china-files.com/leggere-la-cina-capire-il-mondo/>. Tonio Savina è Assegnista di ricerca presso l'Università degli Studi di Siena, Dipartimento di filologia e critica delle letterature moderne.

Rivista annuale

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