Arabic Philology at the Seventeenth-Century Mughal Court.
Saʿd Allāh Khān's and Shāh Jahān's Enactments of the *Sharḥ al-Radī*[1]

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Abstract

Persian narrative sources provide a colorful picture of Mughal courtly life, but in order to zoom in on cultural practices one has to turn to the artefacts of cultural pursuits. This article studies one specimen of the empirical treasure trove of Arabic manuscripts in South Asia in order to approach a lacuna in Mughal scholarship: the role of Arabic at the Mughal court. In the following, I will analyze the different paratextual layers of a manuscript of the thirteenth century Arabic grammar commentary *Sharḥ al-Radī* by Radī al-Dīn al-Astarābādhī to study its reading and transmission. The manuscript version represents a written artefact, which emerged out of a series of intellectual engagements. On the one hand, these textual engagements offer a perspective on the manuscript's initial owner, Saʿd Allāh Khān (d. 1656), and his intellectual pursuits, as well as the scholarly framework in which he was brought up and worked in. On the other hand, the history of this manuscript's circulation highlights the treatment of Arabic written artefacts at Shāh Jahān's court. In an exemplary manner, the manuscript's history of circulation demonstrates how courtly elites engaged with Arabic during the seventeenth century.

Keywords: Enactment, Manuscripts, commentary, grammar, marginalia, Mughal Court, Radī al-Dīn al-Astarābādhī

Empirically speaking, Arabic constituted a significant scholarly idiom across many regions of early modern South Asia.[2] A growing community of scholars has already offered a range of different perspectives on Arabic's cultural role.[3] Muhsin al-Musawi emphasized Arabic's scholarly valency by exemplifying a range of vibrant intellectual debates conducted from Mamlūk Egypt to Central Asia.[4] Engseng Ho and Ronit Ricci put forward studies with a

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[2] See especially the survey in Zubaid M. G. Ahmad, *The Contribution of Indo-Pakistan to Arabic Literature. From Ancient Times to 1857.* Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968.
[3] See, for example, Olly Akkerman, "The Bohra Manuscript Treasury as a Sacred Site of Philology: a Study in Social Codicology." *Philological Encounters 4* (2019), pp. 182-201. Christopher Bahl, "Creating a Cultural Repertoire Based on Texts – Arabic Manuscripts and the Historical Practices of a Sufi in 17th Century Bijapur," *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 9/2-3 (2018).
[4] M.J. Al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

particular focus on the transregional reach of "Arabicised" communities, their texts, networks and literary tastes across the Indian Ocean.[5] In a similar vein, Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have unearthed Arabic narrative texts from Mecca and letters from archives in Lisbon which reflect on the transoceanic reach of this language.[6] Deborah Schlein recently studied Arabic and Persian medicinal manuscripts to revisit the scholarly vibrancy and transregional dimension of these learned traditions through to the colonial period.[7] What is missing though, is an assessment of Arabic philology across early modern North India. Especially for the context of the Mughal court, an engagement with Arabic still largely remains a desideratum.[8]

The bulk of the hitherto studied narrative sources on the Mughals is in Persian and in these sources references to Arabic and its function at the court are rare. They often come in the form of appreciation for a courtier's mastery of the language, such as the famous Faiẓī, who was considered "one of the most accomplished Arabic savants of his day."[9] Nevertheless, courtly etiquette considered Arabic as part of the linguistic canon.[10] Therefore, it is necessary to look beyond the narrative sources and approach the significance of Arabic at the Mughal court from the angle of object history and material cultures, in general, and manuscript studies in particular.[11] This is the conceptual location of the following study: to shed some light on the

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[5] Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim. Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated. Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[6] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "A Handful of Swahili Coast Letters, 1500-1520." *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 52, no. 2 (2019): 255-81. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "A View from Mecca: Notes on Gujarat, the Red Sea, and the Ottomans, 1517-39/923-946H." *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2017): 268-318.

[7] Deborah Schlein, "Medicine without Borders: Tibb and the Asbab Tradition in Mughal and Colonial India", unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2019.

[8] Ahmad, *The Contribution of Indo-Pakistan*.

[9] Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 214.

[10] For example, Ibid., 78 and 117.

[11] For such a conceptual approach see for example John-Paul Ghobrial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

cultural role of Arabic, and specifically Arabic grammatical texts and philological practices, through the surviving manuscript cultures of the Mughal court.

South Asian manuscript collections offer abundant materials for this kind of research. This article starts with one manuscript to raise the issue of how to study Arabic philological practices at the seventeenth century Mughal court. The manuscript MS 4832 from the Rampur Raza Library, Rampur in Uttar Pradesh, India, contains the grammar commentary *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-maʿrūf bi-l-Raḍī*, initially written by Raḍī al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Astarābādhī (d. 686/1287 or 688/1289) in 686/1287 on the famous grammar work *al-Kāfiya fī-l-naḥw* by Ibn al-Ḥājib (d. 646/1249).[12] A short pencil-note on the fly-leaf by a certain Arshzādeh states that the manuscript had been discussed in an article by Mawlana Hafiz Nazir Ahmad of Calcutta, which was published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* in 1917.[13] This article together with references in John Seyller's work on the Mughal Imperial Library and its manuscript cultures provides basic details of the manuscript.[14] Saʿd Allāh Khān (1608-1656), courtier and vizier of the Mughal Emperor Shāh Jahān since 1645 (r. 1628-58), received the thirteenth century commentarial elaboration after its completion in 1050/1640.[15] His comments and notes abound in the margins of the manuscript. Shāh Jahān and some of his court officials later filled the title-page with their seals. Shāh Jahān himself inscribed a short notation also on the title-page stating that the manuscript entered into the collections of the Royal Library after the death of his vizier, the previous owner of the work,

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[12] Reinhard Weipert, "al-Astarābādī, Raḍī al-Dīn," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. Kate Fleet et al., accessed December 21, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_22847.

[13] al-Maʾmūn Suhrawardy and Hafiz Nazir Ahmad, "Notes on Important Arabic and Persian MSS. found in various Libraries in India," *Journal & Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, New Series* 13 (1917): 150.

[14] For this and the following see John Seyller, "The Inspection and Valuation of Manuscripts in the Imperial Mughal Library'. *Artibus Asiae* 57, 3/4 (1997): 243-349, 329.

[15] For this and the following cf. al-Astarābādhī, MS Sharḥ al-Kāfiya, MS 4832, Rampur Raza Library, Rampur. Unfortunately, it was not possible to reproduce high-resolution images of the manuscript in this article. On Saʿd Allāh Khān see Kinra, *Writing Self*, 78.

Saʿd Allāh Khān, in 1656. As later seals suggest, the manuscript continued to change hands before it found its way into the Rampur Raza collections, a place where many books of the Imperial Library ended up.[16]

Here, I will analyze the different paratextual layers of the manuscript to contextualize the reading, studying and transmission traces of the grammar work. The manuscript version represents a written artefact, which emerged out of a series of intellectual engagements with Raḍī al-Dīn's commentary. On the one hand, these textual engagements offer a perspective on Saʿd Allāh Khān's intellectual pursuits and the scholarly framework in which he was brought up and worked. They also exemplify what Arabic philology meant for a Mughal courtier. He created a personalized textbook for the study of Arabic philology. It offers a first-hand view on the significance of Arabic philology in the scholarly and courtly milieus. On the other hand, the history of this manuscript's circulation highlights the treatment of Arabic written artefacts at the seventeenth-century Mughal court. In an exemplary manner the manuscript's history of circulation demonstrates how courtly elites engaged with Arabic during the seventeenth century. In the context of a larger corpus of Arabic manuscripts, the overall paratextual profile offers insights into Arabic's transregional importance in creating shared textual corpora and learned activities.[17] Arabic philological practices constituted a crucial intellectual pursuit at Shāh Jahān's court during the seventeenth century. I will set out by locating Arabic at the

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[16] The Delhi collections in the British Library do not exclusively hold the remnants of the Mughal Imperial Library. I thank Nur Sobers-Khan and Arthur Dudney for pointing this out to me. See also W. H. Siddiqi, *Rampur Raza Library*. Rampur: Rampur Raza Library Publications, 1998, for the Mughal collections that ended up in Rampur.

[17] A notion of how manuscript notes can be read as paratexts was elaborated in Bahl, "Creating a Cultural Repertoire". Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987). For another application of these concepts see Ronit Ricci, "Thresholds of Interpretation on the Threshold of Change, Paratexts in Late 19th-century Javanese Manuscripts," *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 3 (2012), 185-210.

"multilingual" Mughal court,[18] before analyzing the different cultural functions of the manuscript – first as Sa'd Allāh Khān's textbook and then as Shāh Jahān's intellectual artefact.

Arabic at the multilingual Mughal court

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Mughal court negotiated Persian with a variety of linguistic traditions of North India. While Chaghatay Turkish continued to be a significant medium of communication and memory under Babur – his "autobiographical" writings were initially penned in Chaghatay – it increasingly lost its appeal over the following generations of emperors, probably also due to Akbar's efforts to distance his Gurkānī dynasty's cultural horizon from Central Asia.[19] Although it might have kept its importance as a language of personal conversation, Muzaffar Alam has shown that the court consolidated Persian as the language for the official communication and royal memory.[20] Persian functioned as a unifying political idiom. Engagements with its literary and aesthetic traditions created a framework for an authoritative courtly etiquette. It shaped the court's transregional relations with a larger Persianate world. Finally, Persian also served as the medium of historical and prosopographical expression through which the court represented and conducted itself. However, new research has managed to interlace linguistic variety into the dominant Persian cultural fabric of the Mughal court. Accordingly, different languages served, at times, different purposes in Mughal courtly networks. Especially during the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries courtly networks of learning introduced other long-standing

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[18] For "multilingual" South Asia, see Orsini, F./Sheikh, S., "Introduction". F. Orsini and S. Sheikh (eds.). *After Timur Left. Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century North India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 1-44.

[19] Stephen F. Dale, "The Poetry and Autobiography of the Bâbur-nâma," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 3 (1996). Munis D. Faruqui, "The Forgotten Prince: Mirza Hakim and the Formation of the Mughal Empire in India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48, no. 4 (2005).

[20] For this and the following Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

cultural traditions of North India to the Mughals. Allison Busch has highlighted the Mughal's considerable patronage of Braj Bhasha to show that it offered a medium for an "aesthetic experience" different from Persian.[21] She has argued that Braj Bhasha, widely spoken and used among Vaishnava communities in North India, must also be considered a courtly language of the seventeenth century. It was through the circulation of Braj Bhasha poets and their texts that "Indic" literary tastes entered the Mughal court and became a cultural asset among the elites. In a different way, Sanskrit provided another medium to negotiate "cultural encounters" between Persianate, Brahman and Jain scholars, as Audrey Truschke has shown. It influenced ideas of political sovereignty and effected a large-scale translation movement from Sanskrit into Persian.[22] Thereby, royal patronage was successful in drawing various learned groups to the court.

What the studies of Braj and Sanskrit have underscored is the need to read the huge amount of Persian narrative texts together with sources in the other languages of the subcontinent and with other types of texts. The growing multilingual historiography of the Mughal court has highlighted the possibilities and limitations of each linguistic tradition for historical research. Scholarship on Persian as the undisputable *lingua franca* of the imperial elite and its trickling down into other social contexts offers many perspectives on courtly culture.[23] Nevertheless, Persian narrative sources cannot necessarily provide all the answers to research questions intending to broaden our view on the socio-cultural fabric of the court. For example, Persian biographical compendia (*tazkeras*) refer to the cultural transactions among scholarly groups in particular ways as fitting to the larger genre and representational

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[21] Allison Busch, "Hidden in Plain View: Brajbhasha Poets at the Mughal Court," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2010): 267-268 and 303-304.

[22] Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

[23] Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam.* Munis Faruqui, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504–1719* (Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Kinra, *Writing self.*

drive of the narrative texts.[24] In general, Persian chronicles provide a crucial window on the political cultures of the court, but they mainly offer a representational view of its activities and often omit the detailed processes of cultural practices.[25] Especially when it comes to Arabic textual practices, references in the available narrative texts are rather sparse and thus, the written artefacts which were produced in these transactions need to be consulted.[26]

At the same time, this focus on Persian narrative texts created a mainly Persianate view of Islamicate courtly cultures. Scholarship aggravated this through a long-held conceptual bifurcation: Arabic served the more "religious" and Persian the more "secular" domain.[27] Arabic was fundamentally "Islamic" while Persian commanded the cosmopolitan capacity to be "Islamicate".[28] This bifurcation might partly explain why the study of Arabic at the Mughal court within a vibrant Islamicate culture has drawn little attention among researchers so far. Yet, contrary to the empirical predicaments that researchers faced with Braj Bhasha,[29] for example, the Mughals' flirtations with Arabic have left a treasure trove of source materials,

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[24] For this historiographical critique in a Middle Eastern context see Konrad Hirschler, "Studying Mamluk Historiography. From Source-Criticism to the Cultural Turn", Stephan Conermann (ed.), *Ubi sumus? quo vademus? Mamluk studies, state of the art,* Goettingen: V&R Unipress, pp. 159-186. For recent studies of such aspects in a South Asian context see Jyoti Gulati Balachandran, "Exploring the Elite World in the Siyar al-Awliyāʾ, Urban Elites, Their Lineages and Social Networks", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2015, 52/3, 241-270. Sushmita Banerjee, "Conceptualising the Past of the Muslim Community in the sixteenth century, A prosopographical study of the Akhbār al-Akhyār", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2017, 54/4. 423-456.

[25] At the same time, chronicles have their own *raison d'être* and do not lend themselves to the study of cultural practices in the same way as other sources do, even when they account for "the subtleties of interpersonal communication" and courtly procedures. See Emma Flatt, *Courtly Culture in the Indo-Persian States of the Medieval Deccan, 1450-1600* (PhD Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2009).

[26] It is impossible to prove an absence but see the limited references to Arabic in Abū al-Fazl ibn Mubārak, called 'Allāmī, and Henry Beveridge, *The Akbar Nāma of Abu-l-Fazl: (History of the Reign of Akbar Including an Account of His Predecessors)* (Delhi: Rare Books, 1972).

[27] Tahera Qutbuddin, "Arabic in India. A Survey and Classification of Its Uses, Compared with Persian," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127/3 (2007).

[28] The term "Islamicate" refers to a "culture centred on a lettered tradition … shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims", which distinguishes it from "Islamic" as pertaining to the sphere of religious belief: Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974, pp. 56–60.

[29] Busch, "Hidden in Plain View", 269. She refers to the "enormous holes in the archive", both due to predilections of past scholarship and the loss of texts.

which are today housed in South Asian and European archives.[30] Arabic manuscript collections abound from the Mughal period.[31] They cover a range of texts in Islamic Law, Hadith, Quranic Exegesis, Philosophy, Sufism and Philology, to name only a few subjects.

These manuscripts need to be harnessed and integrated into an expanding field of manuscript studies, which is redefining approaches to social and cultural histories both globally and in a South Asian context.[32] While it is important to elicit Persianate representations of cultural practices, it makes sense to complement such descriptive accounts with a study of the surviving objects of cultural transactions. Studying the objects of cultural practices has proven a promising pathway to enrich and diversify our perspective on the past. Finbarr Flood has convincingly argued for an analytical framework that pays attention to the "semantic content" together with the mode of its circulation, i.e. the material objects that produced the transmission.[33] Konrad Hirschler has shown that late medieval Syrian book culture – for a long time studied mainly on the basis of narrative sources – has to be pieced together by studying bit by bit the surviving objects of its main protagonists.[34] Historical

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[30] For example Omar Khalidi, "A Guide to Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu Manuscript Libraries in India," *MELA Notes 75-76* (2002-03). Cf. Otto Loth, *A Catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts in the library of the India Office* (London: 1877).

[31] For meticulous work on some of these manuscript collections, see for example John Seyller, "Scribal Notes on Mughal Manuscript Illustrations," *Artibus Asiae* 48, 3/4 (1987): 247-277. Ibid. "Inspection and Valuation". See also some of the collections in the Rampur Raza Library. Cf. W. H. Siddiqi, *Rampur Raza Library* (Rampur: Rampur Raza Library Publications, 1998).

[32] For the notion of complementing narrative and documentary sources see Andreas Görke and Konrad Hirschler, "Introduction, Manuscript notes as documentary sources," in *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*, eds. A. Görke and K. Hirschler (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2011), 9-20. S. G. Nichols, "What is a Manuscript Culture? Technologies of the manuscript matrix," unpublished paper dating from Jan./March 2014, accessed October 28, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/6481950/What_is_a_Manuscript_Culture.
Noah Gardiner, "Forbidden knowledge? Notes on the production, transmission, and reception of the works of Aḥmad al-Būnī," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 12 (2012).
For a South Asian context see Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation." Muzaffar Alam, "Mughal Philology and Rūmī's Mathnavī," in *World philology*, ed. Sheldon Pollock et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015). Yael Rice, "Mughal Interventions in the Rampur 'Jāmiʿ al-Tavārīkh'," *Ars Orientalis* 42 (2012). Keelan Overton, "Book Culture, Royal Libraries, and Persianate Painting in Bijapur, circa 1580-1630," *Muqarnas* 33 (2016): 91-154.

[33] Finbarr Flood, *Objects of translation: Material culture and medieval "Hindu-Muslim" encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 9-10.

[34] See the introduction to Konrad Hirschler, *Book Culture in Late Medieval Syria: The Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī Library of Damascus* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

objects and especially manuscripts transmitted among learned communities provide a wealth of traces that can be used to understand the complexities of cultural practices and what they signify in a particular historical moment.

Preparing the Textbook – Saʿd Allāh Khān Making Sense of Raḍī al-Dīn

Saʿd Allāh Khān approached the world of Arabic Grammar through the study of Raḍī al-Dīn al-Astarābādhī's thirteenth-century commentary (sharḥ) on Ibn Ḥājib's famous al-Kāfiya. Al-Astarābādhī had finished the Sharḥ al-Kāfiya in the field of syntax (naḥw) in 686/1287 before treating Ibn al-Ḥājib's al-Shāfiya in the field of morphology (ṣarf) in a separate commentary, completed in 688/1289.[35] He derived the "textual witnesses" (shawāhid), which consisted mainly of poetry,[36] from a huge variety of sources.[37] Research has focused on al-Astarābādhī's innovative approach in his definition of speech.[38] At the same time, scholars have pointed out that his grammatical reasoning was not determined by an affiliation to a particular school of thought, but that he successfully integrated different branches – such as the Basra and the Kufa school, the most important schools of grammar in the early Islamic period – when it served his purpose of explaining grammatical phenomena.[39] Moreover, al-Astarābādhī's commentary was more famous in the eastern Islamic lands, such as Iraq and

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[35] Weipert, "al-Astarābādhī."

[36] Ibid.

[37] Pierre Larcher, "Note sur trois éditions du Sharh al-Kâfiya de Radî l-dîn al-Astarâbâdhî," *Arabica* 36 (1) (1989): 113.

[38] Jean-Patrick Guillaume, "Defining the Word within the Arabic Grammatical Tradition: Astarābāḏī's Predicament," in *The Word in* Arabic, ed. Giuliano Lancioni and Lidia Bettini (Leiden, Biggleswade: Martinus Nijhoff, 2011). Pierre Larcher, "What is a kalima? Astarābāḏī's Answer," in *The Word in* Arabic, ed. Giuliano Lancioni and Lidia Bettini (Leiden, Biggleswade: Martinus Nijhoff, 2011), 49-68.

[39] For this and the following see Muḥammad al-Ṭanṭāwī, *Nashaʾat al-naḥw, wa-taʾrīkh ashhur al-nuḥḥāt*. Al-Qāhira [Cairo]: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1944, pp. 245. I thank Abdallah Soufan for introducing me to the arguments of this work.

Persia, than in the west and was considered overall to be more influenced by the study of philosophy and logic that left their imprint on the study of grammar.[40]

To my knowledge, the *Sharḥ al-Raḍī*'s trajectory of reception in South Asia has not been studied yet, but this task is outside the scope of the present article. If quantity can be used as a measuring stick for popularity then, compared with other commentaries of the *al-Kāfiya* – such as Jāmī's *al-Fawāʾid al-Ḍiyāʾiyya* – al-Astarābādhī's *sharḥ* was not the most common reading material among students of Arabic.[41] So far, studies of the Mughal madrasa curriculum before the eighteenth century are rare and offer only glimpses of the educational setting based on some normative texts of the period.[42] The *Dars-i Niẓāmī*, a formalised curriculum which spread over the eighteenth century across the Mughal realm, listed the *Kāfiya* and the *Sharḥ Jāmī* for the study of Arabic grammar, but not the *Sharḥ al-Raḍī*.[43] Still, a perfunctory glance at several manuscript collections in North India and the Deccan suggests a common transmission of the *Sharḥ al-Raḍī*.[44] Manuscript collections paint a more complex picture of textual traditions in different places.[45] The choice of commentary may also lie in a geographical and cultural branching out of learned traditions. The *Kāfiya* elicited several commentarial elaborations across the Islamicate world which scribes copied to different

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[40] Ibid., 242-243.

[41] See Muzaffar Alam, "Scholar, Saint and Poet. Jāmī in the Indo-Muslim World", in Thibault d'Hubert and Alexandre Papas, eds., *Jāmī in Regional Contexts: The Reception of ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān Jāmī's Works in the Islamicate World, Ca. 9th/15th-14th/20th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 136-176.

[42] For example Syed Ali Rezavi, "The Organisation of Education in Mughal India." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 68 (2007), pp. 389–397.

[43] Francis Robinson, "Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals: Shared Knowledge and Connective Systems", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 8/2, (1997), pp. 151-184.

[44] For the collections in Rampur see Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation." For collections in the Deccan see the tables in the appendix to Christopher Bahl, *Histories of Circulation. Sharing Arabic Manuscripts across the Western Indian Ocean, 1400-1700* (PhD Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2018).

[45] For a different context see A. Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic letters, Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018).

degrees in South Asia.[46] Some scholars preferred specific texts over others and their choices

could reflect scholarly, personal or other reasons.

The service elites of the Mughal court left a large archive of biographical literature,

observations of the royal domain, chronicles and historical treatises concerned with individual

members of the dynasty and their entourage within the empire.[47] They wrote about members

of their community, colleagues, so to speak, and what they had to say about Saʿd Allāh Khān

was unanimously positive. His title, *ʿAllāmī Fakhāmī Jumlat al-Mulk* reflects a great respect for

learning and knowledge that he commanded at the court.[48] ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Lahorī's *Bādshāh-*

nāme includes an appendix listing different learned professional groups at Shāh Jahān's court,

among them doctors, poets and scholars.[49] Saʿd Allāh Khān features at the top of the list of

scholars.[50] Lahorī praises him extensively for his expertise in both the rational (*maʿqūla*) and

the transmitted (*manqūla*) sciences, the fact that he had memorised the Quran, that he

"shone with an excelling genius" (*iẓāʾat-i dhihn*), conceived his thinking and reflection well

(*iṣābat-i fikr*), exhibited a superiority in knowledge (*farṭ-i maʿlūmat*) and demonstrated an

eloquence in language (*faṣāḥat-i zabān*). Similarly, the biographical entry in the *Maʿathir al-*

Umarāʾ offers a quintessentially positive picture of a highly knowledgeable servant, who rose

up the ranks quickly due to his skills and expertise and who was considered a loyal and close

courtier of Shāh Jahān given the fact that he was transferred to the post of superintendent of

the *Dawlatkhāna-yi khāṣ* (Select Hall of Audience) early on.[51] The steep rise through the ranks

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[46] Loth, *Catalogue.*
[47] For the most recent study of this, see Kinra, *Writing Self.* See for example, Muhammad Salih Kamboh, *ʿAmal-i-Ṣāliḥ, Or, Shāh Jahān Nāmah of Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Kambo (a Complete History of the Emperor Shāh Jahān),* Ghulam Yazdani (ed.)*.* Bibliotheca Indica. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1912.
[48] Nawāb Shāh Nawāz Khān and ʿAbdul Ḥayy, *The Maāthir-ul-umarā being Biographies of the Muhammadan and Hindu Officers of the Timurid Sovereigns of India from 1500 to about 1780 A.D.,* trans. H. Beveridge and annotated by Baini Prashad, Vol. 2., (Calcutta: Asiatic Society and Calcutta Oriental Press, 1952), II/643.
[49] Lahorī, *Bādshāhnāme.*
[50] For this and the following see Ibid., 754-755.
[51] Khān and Ḥayy, *The Maāthir-ul-umarā*, 637-643.

of the *mansabdar* is also pointed out in an extensive introduction to his writings and letters (*maktūbāt*).[52] Biographical accounts from within the courtly community of servicemen are a precious source because we can assume that observers and observed shared an imperial *esprit de corps* and a common understanding of cultural refinement and social etiquette.[53]

A closer view comes from the written exchanges between the *munshī* Chandar Bhan Brahman and Saʿd Allāh Khān.[54] They corresponded extensively, and this insight makes the *munshī* a prime witness of the prime minister's scholarly background. According to him, it was especially Saʿd Allāh Khān's "managerial acumen, generous disposition and spiritual awareness" that distinguished him beyond his skills as a military commander. More specifically, he had acquired an array of administrative skills that were in high regard among the service elites. His skills in "prose composition" (*inshāʾ*) were crucial to the daily transactions of the court. The upper echelons of the Mughal court treated Saʿd Allāh Khān as a trusted confidant and able administrator when it came to running the affairs of the empire. More importantly, his expertise as an imperial servant built on years of learning in disciplines as diverse as arithmetic, theology and calligraphy but which particularly required the mastery of Arabic and Persian philology.[55] He was trained in Lahore, which was considered one of the scholarly centres of the period, and before he entered into imperial service in 1050/1640 he carried the title *Mullā*, referring to a learned man.[56]

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[52] Nazir Hasan Zaydi, "Muqaddima", Saʿd Allāh K̲h̲ān, *Maktūbāt-i Saʿd Allāh Khān.* Lāhawr: Idārah-ʾi Taḥqīqāt-i Pākistān, Dānishgāh-i Panjāb, 1968.

[53] John F. Richards, "Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers," in *Moral Conduct and Authority*, T*he Place of Adab in South Asian Islam,* ed. Barbara Metcalf (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1984), 255-289.

[54] For this and the following cf. Kinra, *Writing Self,* 78.

[55] See Ibid. For an in-depth study of Persian philology from a comparative perspective see Rajeev Kinra, "Cultures of Comparative Philology in the Early Modern Indo-Persian World." *Philological Encounters* 1, 1-4 (2016): 225-87. For the late Mughal period, see Arthur Dudney, *A Desire for Meaning: K̲h̲ān-i Ārzū's Philology and the Place of India in the Eighteenth-Century Persianate World* (PhD Thesis, Columbia University, New York: Proquest LLC, 2013). For introductions to Arabic philology, see J. Owens, *The foundations of grammar, An introduction to medieval Arabic grammatical theory* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1988).

[56] Zaydi, "Muqaddima", pp. 3-4.

Arabic philology constituted a scholarly tradition in its own right, but also served as a basis to explore other fields such as Quranic exegesis, Hadith and Law. Here, it is employed as a label for a range of textual genres, a rich corpus of treatises and several traditions of learning from grammar (ʿilm al-naḥw) to rhetoric (ʿilm al-balāgha) and lexicography (ʿilm al-lugha). Adam Talib recently argued that, far from a mere linguistic syllabus that furnished a systematic pathway for language acquisition, Arabic philology represented a textual method and a comprehensive approach to learning and exegesis as a whole.[57] He incorporated an auxiliary purpose into a more holistic view and defined it as "an attention to language and language practice that is based on the putatively ideal and uncorrupted form of Arabic known from the earliest recorded Arabic text."[58] He considers the Arabic language sciences as a "cognitive model" and "pillar of an Arabo-Islamic scholarly habitus" that was pursued with "eclecticism" and "encyclopaedic scope" during the Middle period (1000-1500).[59] Analogously, across the early-modern Subcontinent as well an engagement with Arabic Grammar meant dealing with a larger cultural tradition that was intricately interwoven with other Islamicate fields. Just as Persian secretarial literature transmitted a cosmopolitan worldview,[60] the study of early modern Arabic philology inculcated a worldview of Arabic Islamicate refinement. In terms of the textual materials it was transmitted through textual traditions dealing with corpora of Quran, Hadith and Poetry and evolved along a chain of commentarial elaborations.[61]

Going beyond the prosopographical works of the period, manuscript notes and reading traces are a valuable source to examine Saʿd Allāh Khān's scholarly appreciation of Arabic philology in this one manuscript version of the text, and thereby to widen our view on his

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[57] See Adam Talib, "al-Ṣafadī, His Critics, and the Drag of Philological Time," Philological Encounters 4 (2019), pp. 109-134, 115-118.
[58] Ibid.f
[59] Ibid.
[60] Cf. Dudney, A Desire for Meaning. Kinra, Writing Self.
[61] See the examples given in Al-Ṭanṭāwī, Nashaʾat al-naḥw.

cultural pursuits. Saʿd Allāh Khān manipulated his manuscript considerably in the process of studying Arabic philology. Feras Krimsti recently employed the term "engagement" to look at the transmission history of an eighteenth century travelogue and its "different actualizations", or versions, to study "different stages in [its] evolution".[62] I use the term "enactment" to relate to traces of a text's reception – how readers engaged with the text – in the framework of one manuscript version, i.e. the paratexts and marginalia, which give clues about the engagement of a reader with the text.[63] In general, marginalia throughout a manuscript constitute an "enactment" of the main text, which offers specific insights into a reader's learning process. These marginalia are the written traces that a future reader could engage with himself. Different manuscript versions can thereby constitute different enactments of the same text. Since not all readings leave traces, enactments are only partial reconstructions of reception, constituted by those marginalia which a reader purposefully applied in the margins of a manuscript.

The seventeenth-century manuscript version of the commentary tells a story of what Arabic grammar meant for Saʿd Allāh Khān and how he acquired his expertise in Arabic philology. Saʿd Allāh Khān placed *ḥawāshī* ("marginal notes") in the margins of the *matn*, the main text. New approaches to the study of book history and commentarial cultures have also paid more attention to the cultural conventions and social contexts in which commentaries were composed or unfolded their effects.[64] Building on this work, I consider Saʿd Allāh Khān's enactment, and thus each manuscript version in general, as a microcosm of knowledge

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[62] Feras Krimsti, "Arsāniyūs Shukrī al-Ḥakīm's Account of His Journey to France, the Iberian Peninsula, and Italy (1748–1757) from Travel Journal to Edition", *Philological Encounters* 4 (2019), 202-244, 206-207.

[63] For an elaboration of this see Bahl, *Histories of Circulation*, chapter 4.

[64] See Boris Liebrenz, "Preface." *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 9/2-3 (2018): 105-107. Asad Ahmed, "Post-Classical Philosophical Commentaries/Glosses: Innovation in the Margins," *Oriens* 41 (2013): 317-348. Joel Blecher, "Ḥadīth Commentary in the Presence of Students, Patrons, and Rivals, Ibn Ḥajar and *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in Mamluk Cairo," *Oriens* 41 (2013): 261-287.

transmission. Saʿd Allāh Khān's marginalia pave a personalised pathway that rendered the manuscript's *matn* intelligible to him. The manuscript accumulated traces of use in the form of intertextualities: quotes and other textual snippets, which only make sense once they are read together with the respective section of the *matn*. The written marginalia represent reading traces. Thereby the reader intended to mark and explicate sections of the text for future reference. It is not possible to reconstruct the intricacies of other oral readings or discussions of the work that Saʿd Allāh Khān might have conducted in a *majlis*, a reading or study circle. Significantly, the individual selection of textual snippets turns each manuscript version into a highly subjective studying device and thereby a representation of a reader's intellectual efforts in the engagement with the *matn*. Saʿd Allāh Khān's enactment offers a close-up view of the processes of Arabic knowledge transmission on the reception side of a manuscript's text.

Reading different notes of the manuscript together makes it clear that Saʿd Allāh Khān crafted the enactment in his own hand. To begin with, the note by the emperor Shāh Jahān on the title-page attributed the handwriting (*khaṭṭ*) to his courtier. The handwriting of the marginal notes on the title-page, in the margins throughout the manuscript and in the gloss and the colophon at the very end of the manuscript appear to be the same given the similar shapes of specific words such as *fī,* which is written with the *yā* as a characteristic tail that opens to the right instead of the left.[65] These peculiarities make it reasonable to attribute the marginalia to Saʿd Allāh Khān. Some marginalia might indeed have been inscribed later on, since the manuscript continued to circulate during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[66] For example, after the date and the final praise of Allāh, the prophet Muḥammad and his

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[65] Compare the different sections in MS 4832, Rampur.
[66] See the seals on the title-page of MS 4832, Rampur.

family, followed by the term *tamma* (completed), there appears the partially effaced seal of Muḥammad Saʿd Allāh, similar to the one on the title-page, who took possession of this manuscript in 1249/1833.

What is less clear, is whether Saʿd Allāh Khān copied the entire *matn* himself. The scribal colophon at the very end of the manuscript states the completion of the aforementioned gloss in the handwriting of a certain al-Muftaqir Ṭīb.[67] This could be read as a self-effacing formula, literally meaning "the one in need of goodness/the seeker of goodness," which could have related to Saʿd Allāh Khān at a point when he did not yet hold his title as a courtier. Such anonymizing formulae were a commonplace in Arabic Islamicate manuscript cultures.[68] Similar to the more frequently appearing formula *al-faqīr al-ḥaqīr* ("the beggar, the poor"), they expressed a very personal longing for humility, which, according to Chandar Bhan Brahman's previously mentioned descriptions, stood in high regard among members of the Mughal court as well. Importantly, the date 1050/1640, as stated in this scribal colophon, appears in Saʿd Allāh Khān's seal on the title-page, which reads "Saʿd Allāh Khān servant of Shāh Jahān, 1050" (*Saʿd Allāh Khān murīd ḥaḍrat Shāh Jahān, 1050*).[69] One can presume Saʿd Allāh Khān's penmanship of the *matn*, but it does not exclude the possibility that another scribe prepared the *matn* for Saʿd Allāh, who then filled the manuscript with marginalia. As mentioned previously, the date of the seal, 1050/1640, matches his entrance into imperial service. It indicates that Saʿd Allāh Khān might have studied this grammar commentary in the early stages of his imperial service at the Mughal court.

The marginalia reveal the library of books that Saʿd Allāh Khān used to read the *Sharḥ al-Raḍī* and create his manuscript enactment. Explanations offered by other authorities in the

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[67] Cf. MS 4832, Rampur, fol. 441r. Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation" gives "Ṭabīb" instead of "Ṭīb" in this case.
[68] For an overview of technical terms see Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts. A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).
[69] This seal is not mentioned in Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 329. See also MS 4832, Rampur, fol. 441r.

field of Arabic lexicography corroborated passages of the *matn*. The first set of folios and the last folios contain references to the same works, mainly from the field of Arabic lexicography. Many marginalia are quotes from al-Fīrūzābādī's *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* and al-Jawharī's *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*.[70] The *Qāmūs* is a famous fourteenth/fifteenth-century dictionary that remained popular across the Arabic-using communities of the globe over the early modern period. The *Ṣiḥāḥ* is an even older eleventh-century lexicon with continued fame amongst poets due to the reverse arrangement of the roots of Arabic words, which facilitated the search for rhyming letters. Apart from these two central works, Saʿd Allāh Khān also used the *Tāj al-maṣādir* by Jaʿfarak Bayhaqī (d. 544/1150),[71] and the *Shāfiya*, Ibn al-Ḥājib's other prominent and widely circulated commentary on Arabic morphology (*ṣarf*).

Saʿd Allāh Khān studied the text through a "lexicographical lens". This means that he first and foremost intended to understand the linguistic and semantic levels of the commentary to acquire a fundamental understanding of Arabic grammar. For example, on folio 2v Saʿd Allāh Khān added a quote from a *ḥāshiya* (a gloss) of a work entitled *Maṭāliʿ*, a commentary in the field of logic,[72] which defined "the signpost as the standing sign for the knowing of the path/way" (*al-nuṣbatu hiya al-ʿalāmatu al-manṣūbatu li-maʿrifati al-ṭarīq*).[73] This marginal note refers to the term *al-nuṣba* ("signpost") in the section *wa-ḥtaraza bi-qawlihi lafẓun ʿan naḥwin al-khaṭṭu wa-l-ʿaqdu wa-l-nuṣbatu wa-l-ishāratu* ("articulation in accordance with grammar is the writing, the tying together, the signposting and the

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[70] For this and the following see J. A. Haywood, "Ḳāmūs. Arabic Lexicography," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, eds. P. Bearman et al., accessed December 21, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0434.

[71] D. N. MacKenzie, "Ḳāmūs. Persian Lexicography," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, eds. P. Bearman et al., accessed December 21, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0434.

[72] I thank Abdallah Soufan for pointing this out to me.

[73] MS 4832, Rampur, fol. 2v.

النصبة هي العلامة المنصوبة لمعرفة الطريق.

instruction").[74] It is part of al-Astarabādhī's longer elaboration and explanation of a fundamental teaching of Arabic grammar which stands at the beginning of this section: "The word is an utterance assigned to give a singular meaning" (*al-kalima lafẓun wuḍiʿa li-maʿnan mufradin)*.[75] Here, Saʿd Allāh Khān was mainly interested in understanding the arguments and teachings put forward in the commentary.

At the same time, he also explains some sections of the *matn* without quoting a specific authority but by simply adding the common abbreviation for the phrase *qaddasa Allāh sirrahu* ("May God sanctify his spirit").[76] An abundance of such marginalia appear throughout the manuscript. They are not further specified with a reference to a particular work or commentary. Instead the term *Sayyid* or a simple *sīn* (possibly abbreviation) are placed underneath these marginal notes.[77] In some cases, he also used this framework of marking marginalia to add short sections of the *matn* which he had previously forgotten to include.[78] It seems plausible that these marginalia were taken from works by scholar Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī (816/1414), who composed important commentaries in the field of Arabic, among them a commentary on the rhetoric commentary *al-Muṭawwal* by al-Taftazānī.[79] Both scholars dominated curricula of learning across early modern Islamicate cultures,[80] and their texts also circulated widely in South Asia.[81] This then suggests that a *sharḥ* on one of the most

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[74] Ibid.

واحترز بقوله لفظ عن نحو الخط والعقد والنصبة والإشارة.

[75] Ibid., fol. 1v.

الكلمة لفظ وضع لمعنىً مفرد.

[76] Cf. Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts*. I thank Konrad Hirschler for discussing these translations with me.
[77] See for example MS 4832, Rampur, fol. 2r.
[78] Ibid.
[79] A. S. Tritton, "al-Djurdjānī", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 17 February 2020. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2123. First published online: 2012.
[80] Robinson, *Shared Knowledge*.
[81] See Loth, *Catalogue*.

famous and widely circulated commentaries in Arabic rhetoric served as an important studying device to engage with Arabic grammar.

Sa'd Allāh Khān also employed Persian marginalia to make sense of the text. In several cases, Sa'd Allāh Khān marked Persian marginalia with the term *muhadhdhib*,[82] which refers to a person, who corrected or revised a manuscript copy. Presumably, he also used Persian when sections of the Arabic *matn* remained unintelligible to him. Given the prevalence of Persian across networks of the Mughal court, as argued by Muzaffar Alam, this does not come as a surprise. Here, it indicates that Persian served as a complementary language in learned pursuits.

Apart from the lexicographical lens of his studies, Sa'd Allāh Khān also had a strong interest in morphological aspects of the Arabic language. He used the margins of his manuscript to engage with discussions in philology. The upper left-hand margin on folio 2r, which refers to the term *ḥurūf al-mu'jam* ("letters of the alphabet") contains a longer quote from the previously mentioned dictionary *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*:[83]

العجم النقط بالسواد مثل التاء عليه نقطتان يقال اعجمت الحرف والتعجيم مثله ولا يقال عجمت

ومنه حروف المعجم وهي الحروف المقطعة التي يختص اكثره بالنقط من بين سائر حروف الأمم ومعناه

حروف الخط المعجم كما يقول مسجد الجامع وصلوة الأولى أي مسجد اليوم الجامع وصلوة الساعة

الأولى وناس يجعلون المعجم بمعنى الأعجام مصدراً مثل المخرج والمدخل أي من شأن هذه الحروف

إن تعجم، صحاح.

It discusses the term *al-'ajam* by distinguishing between the first, the second and the fourth form of the root 'ayn-jīm-mīm (*'ajama*). The paragraph goes through the different morphological forms of the root and states their semantics. For example, the quote starts with

[82] See for example MS 4832, Rampur, fol. 1v and 2v.
[83] For this and the following MS 4832, Rampur, fol. 2r.

the definition of *al-ʿajam*: "the placing of the diacritical marks, for example, two dots on the *tāʾ*, thus we say: *aʿjamtu al-ḥarfa*, and *al-taʿjīm* is the same, [but] one does not say *ʿajamtu*." The paragraph goes on to explain that there are the letters of the alphabet (*ḥurūf al-muʿjam*) and the ones with diacritical marks make up most of them. The section then explains how the term for letters of the alphabet, *ḥurūf al-muʿjam* (lit. "letters that have been disambiguated"), which was initially called *ḥurūf al-khaṭṭ al-muʿjam* (lit. letters of the writing/script which are disambiguated"), came to be used as such, i.e., how the complex of two elements of a genitive construction with a passive participle added as an adjective came to be reduced to the first element of the genitive construction with the adjective passive participle taking the place of the second. The author of the *Ṣiḥāḥ* explains this by referring to two other cases where this happened, e.g. *masjid al-jāmiʿ* instead of *masjid al-yawm al-jāmiʿ* ("Friday mosque instead of the mosque of the day of Friday").

Saʿd Allāh Khān's manuscript copy shows that he expanded his inquiries into morphology and Arabic orthography. He added a longer text section after the compositional colophon, which stated Raḍī al-Dīn's completion of the text in 686/1287.[84] This text section runs over four folios and precedes the scribal colophon which states that the copy was completed in 1050/1640.[85] It is not marked explicitly with a specific author but the phrase *kāna al-muṣannif dhakara* (sic) ("the author remarked") probably refers to Ibn al-Ḥājib. The note is a short *ḥāshiya* ("gloss") which summarized some technicalities in Arabic orthography starting out with the silent hāʾ (*wa-li-tadhakkur aḥkām al-hāʾ al-sakt*). The gloss builds up to an extensive list of different cases and their orthographic details. Within the overall fabric of

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the manuscript it probably fulfilled the function of an appendix, complementing the study of Arabic syntax with aspects of Arabic orthography.

Saʿd Allāh Khān primarily concentrated his efforts on acquiring a linguistic understanding of the commentary rather than engaging in doctrinal or religious debates which the text could have sparked given Raḍī al-Dīn's engagement with a range of textual sources.[86] This does not mean, however, that he shied away from engaging with the intellectual substance of the text. Rather, he focused on comprehending and processing the arguments of Raḍī al-Dīn's commentary, which offered him a well-trodden pathway through the complex and intricate paths of Arabic philological reasoning.

The title-page offers another hint of how Saʿd Allāh Khān crafted this manuscript enactment. He inserted a crucial note in this prominent place. Its position on the title-page, arguably the most visible part of the manuscript and, as a paratextual element, the "threshold" that prefigured the approach of a reader to this text,[87] suggests that it presents an important clue of how he envisioned his manuscript version. The note recounts the famous anecdote of the origins of Arabic grammar (*naḥw*) as a central discipline according to the prominent figure Abū l-Aswad al-Duʾalī (d. 69/688-9). Abū l-Aswad was a poet among the early Muslim community and is credited with inaugurating the science of grammar *(waḍaʿa l-ʿarabiyya wa-rasama l-naḥw)*.[88] This "origin narrative" of Arabic Grammar circulated widely in different versions and across many textual genres and seminal works, but especially in the biographical literature of al-Balādhurī, al-Dhahabī, Ibn Khallikān, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī and al-

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[86] I thank Abdallah Soufan for pointing this out to me.
[87] See Genette, *Seuil*.
[88] For this and the following cf. Monique Bernards, "Abū l-Aswad al-Duʾalī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, eds. Kate Fleet et al., accessed December 21, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24161.

Suyūṭī.[89] Saʿd Allāh Khān in turn derived his version from al-Samʿānī's *Ansāb* and it reads as follows:

في معرفة النحو وعلم الإعراب وقيل إنما سمى هذه العلم بهذا الاسم لأن العرب

اختلط بالعجم وولدهم الأولاد من الأعجميات فسد لسانهم وصاروا يلحنون في الكلام قال

علي رضي الله عنه لأبي الأسود الدؤلي قد فسد لسان المولدين فأجمع في علم الإعراب شيئاً

وكان العرب قبل ذلك لا يحتجون إلى ذلك لطبعهم وأخذتهم الأدب واللسان من معدنه فلما

كثر أولاد السبايا احتاجوا إلى تعلم الإعراب فجمع أبو الأسود الدؤلي شيئاً في الإعراب ثم

قال لطلابها ومتعلمها أنح نحوه فسمى هذا النوع من العلم النحو، أنساب سمعاني

[…] On the knowledge of grammar and the science of inflexion (*iʿrāb*) ["the terminal syntax"]. It is said that this science was given this name because the Arabs mingled with the non-Arabs (Persians) and their offspring, the offspring of the non-Arabs (muwalladūn), corrupted their language [of the Arabs] and they began to make errors in their speech. ʿAlī, may God be blessed with him, said to Abū l-Aswad al-Duʾalī: "The language of the offspring (muwalladūn) has been corrupted. Compose something in the science of inflection!" The Arabs did not need this beforehand due to their natural disposition [to Arabic] and because they took their Literature and Language from its pure source. When the *muwalladūn* increased, they needed instruction in the science of inflection. Abū l-Aswad al-Duʾalī composed [rules] relating to inflections and then he said to the students and the seekers of knowledge: "Follow his example!" And so this science was called *al-naḥw*. [From the] Ansāb of al-Samʿānī.[90]

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[89] Ibid.
[90] MS 4832, Rampur, fol. 1r.

In other words, it is the growing interaction of Arabs and non-Arabs in the early Islamic period and the latter's difficulties with the Arabic language that creates the necessity to gather everything related to the "science of inflection" (ʿilm al-iʿrāb). Those who were not "naturally disposed" to Arabic, i.e. non-Arabs, required a systematic approach and education.

Saʿd Allāh Khān's inscription of this "origin narrative" in such a prominent place as the title-page calibrates the cultural significance of his enactment. It helps to explain what the copy of the *Sharḥ al-Raḍī* and its perusal might have meant for him. To begin with one has to consider Saʿd Allāh Khān's own cultural background. He himself presumably did not grow up in an Arabic-speaking environment. His service in the highest echelons of the imperial Mughal elite predisposed him to the cosmopolitan Persianate idiom. Though he was already well-trained in Arabic at the point of studying the *Sharḥ al-Raḍī*, the marginalia have also shown that he read the text through the Persian language when needed. But while Persian might have been the dominant idiom of the court, the "origin narrative" on the title-page reads like a "purpose note" for Saʿd Allāh Khān's copy of the commentary in its entirety: One was supposed to study Arabic according to the precepts that the earliest generations of scholars laid out in their texts. And Saʿd Allāh Khān studied Arabic philology in a systematic and authoritative way to reach a level of proficiency intended to equal that of the earliest generations.

For Saʿd Allāh Khān MS 4832 of the *Sharḥ al-Raḍī* was a scholarly tool to explore the Arabic philological tradition. It represented his choice among many different options of commentaries. Further research might unearth other Arabic grammar commentaries that he studied. Presumably, Saʿd Allāh Khān considered the text to be widely acclaimed and an acknowledged commentary that guided him through a central text of Arabic grammar, not disregarding other texts of the period. Two other versions of the same commentary copied in

the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively also survive in the Rampur Raza Library.[91]

As far as courtly collections are concerned, the *Sharḥ al-Raḍī* did not represent an unusual commentary. At least six manuscript versions of the text survive from libraries of the Deccan, two in the Royal Library of Bijapur, three in the Salar Jung Museum and one in the Asafiya library collections, all copied during the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries.[92] An analysis of these manuscripts is beyond the scope of this article, but what a perfunctory survey suggests is that some come with their own sets of marginalia and paratexts, while some lack any kind of marginal engagement with the *matn*. These are then different enactments of the same text.

Apart from the question of why this particular text, another interesting angle is to ask what this specific text meant for a member of the Mughal courtly elite. The S*harḥ al-Raḍī* shaped Saʿd Allāh Khān's view of the Arabic language. Inscribing this "origin narrative" on the title-page underscored the personal character of his textbook through which he intended to follow the approach of earlier generations. Here, Brinkley Messick's distinction between "contingent" and "cosmopolitan" texts can be employed to delineate at least two different significances that Saʿd Allāh Khān attached to his manuscript.[93] On the one hand, his choice of books from which he quoted the marginalia, such as the common Arabic dictionaries, and the reference to the "origin narrative" underscore that he participated in a cosmopolitan and transregionally shared Arabic philological culture. His case exemplifies the ways in which the

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[91] See MS 4831 and MS 4833. See the details in Abusad Islahi and Muhammad Irfan Nadwi, *Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts, Volume IX* (ʿilm al-imlāʾ, al-lughat, al-amthāl wa al-ḥikam, ʿilm al-ṣarf wa al-naḥw), Rampur: Rampur Raza Library, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, 2015.

[92] Cf. MS IO B 17, 18, British Library; MS Naḥw 56, 57, 59 Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad; MS Naḥw 6, Andhra Pradesh Oriental Manuscript Library (APOML), Hyderabad. See the tables in Bahl, "Histories of Circulation".

[93] He developed the relational terms "cosmopolitan" and "contingent" for his conceptual distinction between the "Library" and the "Archive", which hold widely available books and locally crafted documents respectively. His discussion is based on Sheldon Pollock's conceptualisation of the terms "cosmopolitan" and "vernacular". Cf. Brinkley Messick, *Sharīʿa Scripts: An Historical Anthropology.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 20-30. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men. Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley [et al.]: University of California Press, 2006), 10-29. For another application of these terms in the context of a "localised" corpus of "cosmopolitan" works of *hadīth* in fifteenth century Damascus, see Hirschler, *Book Culture*, 166-168.

Mughal court shared the pursuit of Arabic philology and its book cultures with other regions in which these same texts were read and studied.[94] In sum, this builds on Ricci's argument about the transregional quality of Arabic scholarship and the fact that readers could easily relate to a larger cosmopolitan Arabic Islamicate culture.[95]

Yet, Saʿd Allāh Khān followed this pathway through the highly individualized reading and quoting of other scholarly authorities. Thus, on the other hand, his choice of marginalia personalized his manuscript copy and therefore turned his enactment into a local and individualized, i.e. "contingent," manuscript version of a widely circulated, i.e. "cosmopolitan," text. What made the manuscript version contingent and thereby "his" was a selective recompilation of textual snippets that affirmed his cosmopolitan outlook in the pursuit of Arabic philology. As suggested above, such an enactment could differ considerably from other enactments of the same texts, because other readers approached the text in different ways, for example through a specific set of auxiliary readings or by concentrating on other passages of the *matn*. While Saʿd Allāh Khān's choice of text was not unique, the enactment of his manuscript was. It is an expression of his personal path through the field of Arabic philology which survives in the form of inscribed marginalia.

In the Royal Library – Shāh Jahān's Collection of the Enactment

After Saʿd Allāh Khān's death, the manuscript MS 4832 circulated among many members of the Mughal court, during Shāh Jahān's reign and after. Shāh Jahān's characteristic notation states the inclusion of the manuscript into the collections of the Royal Library. Notes by servants, courtiers and librarians document the "inspection" of the manuscript.[96] According

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[94] See also Robinson, "Shared Knowledge".
[95] Ricci, *Islam Translated*, 4, 13-17.
[96] Here and in the following see Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation", 329, 248 and 254.

to John Seyller's meticulous study, the inscription of inspection and valuation notes on Mughal manuscripts registered the systematic handling of manuscripts at the Mughal court, their reception through courtly protagonists, their circulation within the palace and their storage in the Imperial Library. Collectively the notes documented interested parties, i.e. the sultan, courtiers and other members of the court. Simultaneously, a bibliophilia was expressed in a particular way: the material value, provenance and safeguarding by various generations of librarians.

What else were these notes meant to do in an elite courtly setting? Apart from denoting a complex system of handling manuscripts, in specific contexts these notes can also express a scholarly appreciation for the created enactment of a text. The documentary character that we read into these notes speaks for the smooth running of transactions. But behind these notes are people who interacted in a range of different capacities. A human component was certainly one of them. Long times of service, personal loyalties and intimate friendships drove cultural practices and engagements at the court.[97]

Saʿd Allāh Khān was a highly respected prime minister under Shāh Jahān, cherished as a colleague and a loyal serviceman.[98] In the composition *Chahār Chaman*, Chandar Bhan reported on an encomium that circulated at the court after Saʿd Allāh Khān's death in 1656 on Shāh Jahān's request. Subtle language praised Saʿd Allāh Khān's superior attributes, especially with regard to learning, knowledge and scholarly pursuits:[99] For example, in Kinra's translation, he was considered "singular among the erudite men of the world (*yagāna-yi dānishwarān-i jahān*), the model for wise men of the times (*qidwa-yi khiradmandān-i zamān*) [and] the textbook for scholars of the age (*dastūr al-ʿamal-i dānāyān-i rozgār*)" among other

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[97] For the study of "patterns of habitual and ritual behaviour in the daily interactions between members of the court" see Flatt, *Courtly Culture*, 15-16 and 40-50.
[98] For this and the following cf. Kinra, *Writing Self,* 78.
[99] Ibid., 80.

attributes.[100] As Kinra emphasized, such rhetorical hyperbole communicated carefully calibrated appreciation at the court through a shared idiom. It highlights that Shāh Jahān had been very close to his courtier and used this encomium to express his loss of a great serviceman at the court.

Shāh Jahān did not only receive a copy of an Arabic grammar commentary, but an enactment of one of his most trusted and accomplished courtiers. The emperor's Persian note, which covers the top-half of the title-page, reads as follows:

"In the name of Allāh, the most gracious and the most merciful, this book is the commentary of Raḍī with marginalia in the handwriting of Saʿd Allāh Khān, the deceased and buried. In its greatness it entered the library of the court. Written by Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad Ṣāḥib-i Qirān Shāh Jahān Bādshāh."[101]

The transfer signified Shāh Jahān's engagement with the manuscript as an intellectual artefact. First of all, the note makes clear that Shāh Jahān saw this manuscript himself and documented its inclusion into the Royal Library with his own hand. This was not an uncommon practice for Shāh Jahān.[102] The *Chahār Chamān* documents recurring occasions of book enactments which took place in the *ghusl-khāna*, a "salon" that served the staging of the court's cultural ambitions.[103] Here, "celebrated books in Arabic and Persian, often in the author's handwriting were brought in from the Royal Library and displayed for the hair-splitting and discerning critical gaze of the Emperor of Form and Content, the King of Kings of Aesthetic Appreciation, along with miscellaneous albums of art and calligraphy in a variety of

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[100] Ibid., 80.
[101] Cf. MS 4832, Title-page. Cf. Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 329 for a slightly different translation on which I build. He translated *ḥāshiye-ān* as "decorated borders". I read "marginalia" since the margins are filled with longer comments and not decorated in any other artistic way.
[102] This might have been part of an occasion as described in Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 245-246.
[103] Kinra, *Writing Self,* 117.

scripts […]."[104] Secondly, apart from categorizing the text of the manuscript within the discipline of grammar (*naḥw*), Shāh Jahān also noted the abundance of marginalia (*ḥāshiya*, pl. *ḥawāshī*). While it is not clear to what extent he engaged with them, the statement underscores that he was aware of Saʿd Allāh Khān's textual engagement with the manuscript. Thirdly, the reference to the "deceased and buried" Saʿd Allāh Khān reads as an acknowledgement of loss. Shāh Jahān received this manuscript after the death of his trusted vizier and servant and not as a gift or courtly offering during the vizier's lifetime, a ritual commonly practiced for example at the court of Bijapur in the Deccan.[105] Finally, the reference to Saʿd Allāh Khān's handwriting not only identifies the scribe of the manuscript for future readers. It also expresses a scholarly appreciation of Saʿd Allāh Khān's engagement with the text. This becomes clear when comparing it to the subtleties of formulae by the other courtiers who left their mark on the same title-page. The notations and seals of Shāh Jahān's other servants come with a formula of humility and thereby indicate a hierarchical relationship of the official with his master Shāh Jahān.[106] However, Saʿd Allāh Khān is mentioned without any association of rank. Shāh Jahān ascribed the manuscript to him because it mattered to the emperor that this was Saʿd Allāh Khān's product of learning.

The details and placement of the royal scribal notation hold the key to understanding Shāh Jahān's personal investment in this manuscript: Shāh Jahān did not approach Arabic philology through the same process of studying. He collected the manuscript as a completed study enactment of his courtier, a commentary with an apparatus of marginalia that guided the next reader though the text in the ways that Saʿd Allāh Khān had done previously. The extent of Shāh Jahān's reading or studying of the grammar commentary is impossible to

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[104] Quoted through Ibid., 117.
[105] Overton, "Book Culture", 113-117.
[106] See the translations in Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 329.

assess. As far as the manuscript shows, he did not apply any other marginalia. He only inscribed his note on the title-page. Visually, the notation towers over everything else and dominates the layout of the folio. This is the extent of his own pursuit in Arabic philology: he is a collector of scholarly enactments which were significant because of the learned efforts that a trusted courtier had put into them.[107]

The Imperial Library collected multiple versions of *Sharḥ al-Raḍī* and of other texts.[108] Building on the previous argument of Saʿd Allāh Khān's enactment, I suggest reading the multiplicity of the text as a selection of different scholarly enactments that offered different pathways of study for future readers. Each manuscript version mattered individually, not only because of the main text it contained, but also because of the specific set of marginal engagements and the scholarly enactment that they thereby created.

Later scribal notations by servants and dated seals of courtiers on the title-page of MS 4832 document a sustained and repeated interest in the manuscript itself. On the surface, such inspection notes cumulatively mark the practice of counting and checking the manuscripts of the Royal Mughal Library.[109] For example, by comparing two manuscript versions of the same text in the Royal Mughal Library, the institutionalized procedure becomes clear. Some of the inspection notes refer to the same occasion. A servant of Shāh Jahān, Iʿtimād Khān, inspected Saʿd Allāh Khān's seventeenth-century copy of the *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya of Raḍī* in the year 1063/1653, the same year in which he inspected another, a fifteenth-century

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[107] The question can be raised whether this was both a material (*milk*) and a scholarly (*ijāza*) appropriation. With regard to frameworks of transmission in Arabic Islamicate texts there is often a distinction between the legal ownership of a manuscript and its scholarly appropriation which also transferred the right to transmit the text further. I thank Konrad Hirschler for pointing this out to me.
[108] Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation."
[109] Ibid.

copy of the *Radī Sharḥ al-Kāfiya*.[110] Later on in the year 1068/1657 (the 31st regnal year) the courtier and royal librarian ʿInāyat Khān inspected both manuscripts as well.[111] Inspections by the same servants of several manuscripts at the same time reflect on this more formal courtly and bibliophile practice. They took stock of the collections. Given the fact that ʿInāyat Khān held the office of Royal Librarian for some time these notations are not surprising.[112]

Additionally, notes by "servants" (here used as a honorific title of humility by courtiers and scholars), which appear more randomly on the manuscript's title-page, could also suggest a practice of engaging with the contents of the respective manuscript.[113] On the title-page of MS 4832 a certain Ḥakīm Ṣāliḥ stamped his seal in the year 1053/1643.[114] His courtly identity and position cannot be corroborated at this point in time. The epithet *ḥakīm*, meaning "wise, sage," commonly referred to a scholar, and often to a physician, and thus also members of the court who had distinguished themselves in acquiring knowledge and mastering the sciences, and presumably had access to the collection of the Royal Library.[115]

The case of Fāżil Khān can substantiate this thesis further. In 1059/1649, he placed his seal on the title-page of MS 4832 as well.[116] His full name was probably Fāżil Khān Mullā ʿAlāʾ al-Mulk Tūnī, from the region of Tūn in southern Khurāsān in Persia, from where he migrated to the subcontinent in the seventh year of Shāh Jahān's reign, in 1635.[117] In the *Maʿathir al-*

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[110] For details of the fifteenth century copy, see the list of studied manuscripts in Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 334. For the details of the other version, see the title-page of MS 4832, Rampur, and again Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 329.

[111] Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 329. For details of his service as the royal librarian of the Mughal Library, see Stephan Conermann, *Historiographie als Sinnstiftung. Indo-persische Geschichtsschreibung während der Mogulzeit (932-1118/1516-1707)* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2002), 323ff.

[112] Cf. Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 252.

[113] Ibid., 329. Seyller lists them merely as seals.

[114] Ibid., 329.

[115] Compare with the examples Ḥakīm Ḥādhiq and Ḥakīm Humām in Nawāb Shāh Nawāz Khān and ʿAbdul Ḥayy, *The Maāthir-ul-umarā being Biographies of the Muhammadan and Hindu Officers of the Timurid Sovereigns of India from 1500 to about 1780 A.D.,* trans. H. Beveridge and annotated Baini Prashad, Vol. 1. (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1979), 604-607.

[116] Dates as given in Seyller, "Inspection and Valuation," 329.

[117] For this and the following cf. Khān, *Maʿathir al-Umaraʾ*, I/550-553.

Umarāʾ his expertise in the sciences, especially in mathematics and astronomy, are lauded. He received his title Fāẓil Khān in the 23ʳᵈ year of Shāh Jahān's reign, i.e. in 1059/1649, which matches with the details of the seal. Since the biographical entry does not refer to any duties in the Royal Library, we could also consider another significance of the seal beyond a formal inspection. His reception of a formal title marks an occasion which granted him access to the books of the Royal Library as a servant of Shāh Jahān. His seal then presumably stated a sort of engagement with Saʿd Allāh Khān's manuscript version of *Sharḥ al-Raḍī*. This needed to be documented according to courtly etiquette. However, it does not mean that Fāẓil Khān's engagement ended with a formal inspection. He might also have used the manuscript for his own inquiries once he received a title and rose up in the courtly hierarchy. The extent of his engagement or his specific interest in the text, however, cannot be traced based on the surviving manuscript notes. This again highlights the representational character of marginalia in a scholarly enactment.

In sum, before and after the reception of the manuscript by the emperor Shāh Jahān, who transferred the manuscript into the Royal Library, such enactments continued to serve the courtly community in the pursuit of Arabic philology. Mughal courtiers might have used the manuscripts in the Imperial Library as works of reference or for their own studies. These user seals appear less systematically then the inspection notes coming from royal librarians. They also do not coincide with a dynastic handover of power. Instead they could well represent occasions or moments when members of the court made use of Saʿd Allāh Khān's manuscript version to showcase their interest in Arabic grammar, inquire about a specific philological issue or re-read how a previous vizier had perused Raḍī al-Dīn's commentary.

Conclusion – Arabic fragments at Shāh Jahān's Court

Saʿd Allāh Khān's manuscript version is only a small fragment of Arabic intellectual culture that survives from early modern South Asia. Opening its folios allows us to locate Arabic as a crucial element of the Mughal court. A focus on philological practices expands the study of Arabic beyond its alleged mainly religious purposes in seventeenth-century North India. The study of the surviving artefacts traces cultural practices, its protagonists and what it could have meant for them. Saʿd Allāh Khān shaped the manuscript as his own studying device. He explored a cosmopolitan Arabic philological tradition in a localised and personalised fashion. Shāh Jahān preserved it as a valuable scholarly enactment of one of his most loyal courtiers.

The social and intellectual differentiation in the use of manuscript notes signals different cultural interests in the text. Saʿd Allāh Khān read the commentary in a learned fashion. A lexicographical lens guided his pursuit. Engaging with Arabic syntax was his central concern when he created his manuscript enactment of the text. Recently, Pollock has defined a common denominator for *World Philology* as "making sense of texts" over time and space.[118] Saʿd Allāh Khān made an effort to do just that. He inscribed his own story of knowledge acquisition into the marginalia of the manuscript. Yet, Shāh Jahān consulted the book once Saʿd Allāh Khān's story was complete. He appreciated how Saʿd Allāh Khān had engaged with the text. The scholarly enactment was not necessarily only about who owned the text but also about how the previous owner had read the text.

The Mughal court emerges as an active site of Arabic philological practice during the seventeenth century. The two different members of the court encountered Arabic philology along different lines. Both shaped the continued transmission of philological knowledge in

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[118] Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction". S. Pollock [et al.] (eds.). *World philology*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015, pp. 1-24, 1.

their own ways. A courtier and learned figure such as Saʿd Allāh Khān perpetuated philological knowledge through his studying and reading enactments. The ensuing manuscript versions presumably continued to serve in the instruction of other members of the court. Courtly patronage and royal interests guaranteed the preservation and storage of these valuable tools. At the same time, they represented scholarly enactments that continued to symbolize strong bonds of service in a courtly context. More research is necessary to assess the wider impact of Arabic philology across learned networks of the Mughal court, the multitude of practices, literary tastes and how they interacted with other linguistic traditions and processes of knowledge formation, inside and outside of the courtly realm.

What this study has indicated, however, is the process of a cosmopolitan "professionalization" paired with a local "consolidation" of philological knowledge.[119] Saʿd Allāh Khān practiced Arabic grammar because he had a vested interest in Arabic philology. His Arabic philological practice built on the availability of a transregional corpus of texts in lexicography, grammar and other disciplines. Learned figures across Arabophile sociabilities in the Subcontinent and the Middle East made use of these works. At the same time, his manuscript enactment consolidated the Mughal court as a space where Arabic philological knowledge became available locally and in "contingent" ways. It was the arduous, manual and individualized work of scribes, be they courtiers or others, that built the Arabic manuscript collections. However, these manuscripts were never just plain books to be read, but personalised intellectual artefacts. Manuscript enactments shaped the study of Arabic philology through their highly contingent stories of knowledge transmission at the seventeenth century Mughal court.

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[119] I thank Arthur Dudney for suggesting these two terms to me.

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