
Colin P. Mitchell
In this article, Shahzad Bashir provides an insightful historiographical reexamination of the practice of cannibalism during the reign of the first Safavid ruler, Shāh Esmā‘īl (r. 1501-1524). The first section of this article reviews the major chronicles and how they chose to report the celebrated incidents of Qizilbāsh anthropophagy. Bashir is quick to identify that this alleged cannibalism was sporadic and rare, and certainly cannot stand as consistent proof of “ritualistic” religious behavior among the Turkmen amirs. The well-known episode of one Morād Beg Jahānšāhūlī being cooked and eaten after Ḥoseyn Kiyā’s unsuccessful rebellion in 1504 is not consistently represented by 16th century Safavid sources: Ḥabīb al-sīyar and Ḥasan Beg Rumālī (Aḥsan al-tavārīḫ) do not mention any cannibalism, while later accounts like Eskandar Beg Monšī appear to be copied directly from Qazvīnī’s earlier Lobb al-tavārīḥ (ca. 1555). The second episode – the partial consumption of Moḥammad Shibānī Khān’s corpse on the battlefield outside of Marv in 1510 – likewise appears to have numerous historiographical gaps and contradictions in the sources. For Bashir, these isolated acts of cannibalism are better understood as symbolic displays of submission and loyalty by the Qizilbāsh rank-and-file towards their Safavid shah, and as such cannot be categorized as part of a larger ritual belief system inherited from the Steppe traditions. The significance of this early anthropophagy is made even further complicated by the fact that Šāh ‘Abbās the Great was reputed to have kept a group of cannibals (chīqāqīyān) who would cook and eat criminals and dissenters. On this basis, Bashir divides cannibalism into two types – secular and religious – with the former being associated with the despotic stylings of
‘Abbās and the latter identified with the pietistic devotion felt by Qizilbash for Esmā‘īl as both muršid and shah.

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Thèmes : 4.2.1. Safavides et Qâjârs

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