

“Two worlds
can fit into me,
I can not
fit into this world”

Azerbaijan's immortal poet
İmadəddin Nəsimi



Michael Reinhard Heß



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I can not fit into this world”

bp



As Azerbaijan's long-term reliable partner, BP takes pride in supporting the country's rich cultural legacy and in helping promote it internationally. This book is BP's contribution to the 650th anniversary celebrations of one of Azerbaijan's and the world's great poetic and philosophic giants – Imadeddin Nesimi. The owner of an unconquered spirit and soul, an unprecedented versifier of human perfection and a fearless searcher for Truth, Nesimi remained astonishingly true to what love is – love that conquers everything in life and in death. The way he sought for Truth and described it in his poetry and philosophic thoughts and died for it, has remained a symbol of unshakeable human faith in what one believes to be true. With this book BP wishes to pay tribute to Azerbaijan's great thinkers and rich poetic traditions, which are a worthy part of the world's civilization.

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I can not fit into this world”

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Məscudiyə səciə oldu vahid

Məscudi-həqiqi oldu səciə

İman ilə küfr bir şey oldu

Tətu ilə acı bir meyvə oldu

The Worshipped and the Worshipper has become the One
The Truly Worshipped One has become the Worshipper

Belief and disbelief have become one and the same thing,
Sweet and bitter have become one and the same wine.

Aziq qatında küfr ilə islam birdir

Before the loving one disbelief and Islam are one and the same.

Nəsimi

All things are the place of manifestation of Man. Or: Man is the place of manifestation of all things

Fəzlollah of Astarabād

aşhadu al-lā ilāha illā F-ʿH

va-aşhadu anna Ādama həlifət Allāh

va-aşhadu anna Muḥammadan rasūl Allāh

I witness that there is no god except for *Fāh*,

I witness that Man is the locum tenens of Allah,

I witness that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah

Amir Gīyāsoddīn (fl. first half of the 15th century)

This man [Nəsimi] was a kafir and an anti-Muslim. We take refuge with Allah from his words and deeds! However, he has produced some very subtle poetry.

Sibt al-ʿAḡamī, from The treasures of gold concerning the history of Aleppo (before 1480)

... *Nəsimiyəl türrehāt u küfriyätindən* ...

... from the shenanigans and kafir rubbish à la Nəsimi ...

ʿAşık Çelebi (1520–1572)

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Michael Heß
Shanghai, June 25, 2019

1. INTRODUCTION

Many have undertaken to write about “İmadəddin Nəsimi. His life, poems, thought, religious beliefs and image as a martyr as well as many other aspects of his personality have been made the subject of countless scholarly books and articles in a host of languages. Nəsimi also inspired filmmakers, novelists, poets, and musicians.

In September 2018, Azerbaijan’s capital Baku hosted the first international Nəsimi Festival. Even more recently, on January 11, 2019, Azerbaijan’s President İlham Əliyev declared 2019 the official Nəsimi year to commemorate the 650th anniversary of Nəsimi’s traditionally assumed year of birth.

Particularly, the events mentioned in the preceding paragraph clearly show that the interest in Nəsimi is on the rise, especially in his native Azerbaijan. The increase of his popularity partly has its origin in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the recovery of Azerbaijan’s independence in 1991. These events constitute essential prerequisites for renewed and deepened approaches to Nəsimi, as well as to other important figures from Azerbaijan’s rich cultural heritage. In the constrained conditions of the Soviet era, such approaches could not always be engaged on the necessary scale. Under the more favorable present circumstances, there is hope that many of the difficulties that stood between Nəsimi and his modern readers in the past will be removed.

This present volume almost exclusively deals with “İmadəddin Nəsimi’s Turkic (or, as one may also refer to them, Azerbaijani, or Oghuz) poems. Like many other great poems from the Iranian sphere of culture, Nəsimi left behind a complete diwan or collection of poems both in his native Turkic and in the Persian language. The present publication limits itself to the Turkic part of Nəsimi’s poetry. This is a result of my training as a Tur-

cologist. Incidentally, to my knowledge, no scholar ever presented a comprehensive analysis of Näsimi's works in all two languages. In fact, such a comprehensive investigation into and perhaps the interpretation of Näsimi's complete work constitutes one of the far-off goals of Näsimi scholarship. This adds yet another challenge to those encountered by readers and scholars of Näsimi, some of which are discussed in chapter 2 below.

The main aspiration of this book is to provide a broader Western-speaking audience with an introduction to the life, work, and heritage of İmadöddin Näsimi. In this way, it is hoped that this might stimulate future research into Näsimi. Indeed, much remains to be done.

The book was written from a scratch to honor Azerbaijan's 2019 Year of Näsimi. However, it incorporates material from several previous publications.¹ All of it was reworded, checked and supplemented with recent material.

May the contents of this publication be helpful in drawing more attention to this fascinating figure of Middle Eastern history.

Berlin, May 21, 2019

¹ Cf. Heß 2001; Heß 2009; Heß 2010; Heß 2010 / 2011; Heß 2013; Heß 2015; Heß 2016; Heß 2017; Heß 2018; Heß 2018a; İmadöddin Nesimi 2012; İmadöddin Nesimi 2012a.

2. HOW TO USE THIS VOLUME

2.1. Principles of transcription, alphabetization, and pronunciation

Whenever it is clear from the context, the language source is not specifically indicated. However, an abbreviation (see the list in 2.2.) of the language source is prefixed to the word(s) in superscript, if considered necessary or useful, as in ^{Arab.}Abū Sa'īd. The abbreviations in the raised script are not part of the original words as they appear in sources or secondary literature but are only added to serve as an aid for the modern reader who is not familiar with all the different languages used throughout this book. This system is meant to help in identifying the language, to ensure precise references and rendering of the quoted forms and to avoid misunderstandings.

Quotations from foreign languages, except for most proper names and place names, are usually given in italics.

Wherever a word or name has passed into current English or can easily be identified, no special principles for transcription are applied.

2.1.1. Azerbaijani

2.1.1.1. Transcription

Modern Azerbaijani words, text passages, and names are given in the current official Latin orthography. Unless stated otherwise, all Modern Azerbaijani quotes from other alphabets (which means Arabic and Cyrillic for the purposes of this volume) are automatically converted to this system.

A different system is used for the Azerbaijani quotes from the medieval Azerbaijani texts when more precision is needed as regards to phonetical or prosodic distinctions that no longer exist in the modern language. These distinctions are expressed by means of diacritics. Table 1 below lists the letters of the Arabic script that was used for most of the medieval texts and their transcription equivalents. As can be seen, the vowels, which the medieval Arabic script rendered only incompletely, are supplemented according to the Modern Azerbaijani pronunciation. It must be

emphasized that these reconstructions do not imply a statement about what may be supposed to be the correct pronunciation used in the times of Näsimi or the copyists of the manuscripts. The more differentiated transcription system outlined here only serves as an orientation for the modern reader.

The decision to introduce a differentiated system based on the *Azerbaijani* (instead of the Modern Turkish or Ottoman) pronunciation follows the assumption that it reflects Näsimis Azerbaijanian origins more appropriately.²

Table 1 Transcription system for Medieval Azerbaijani

Original letter	Transcription	Original letter	Transcription
ا	ā, a, ʔ; nothing or ʔ	ص	ʃ
ب	b	ض	z
پ	p	ط	t
ت	t	ظ	z
ث	s	ع	ʕ
ج	c	غ	ġ
چ	ç	ف	f
ح	h	ق	q
خ	x	ك	g, k, ŋ or y
د	d	گ	g
ذ	z	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
ژ	j	ه	h; -
س	s	و	o, u, ū, ü; v
ش	ʃ	ی	e, i, i, i; y

² In contrast, many modern editions have used transcription systems based on Ottoman and Turkish pronunciation, e.g. Kürkçüoğlu 1985, Ayan 1990, and Vaktidolu 2009.

2.1.1.2. On the alphabetical arrangement of the Azerbaijani letters

If it is necessary to arrange Azerbaijani words according to the alphabet together with words from other languages (for instance, in the list of references), the Azerbaijani letter “Ə ə” immediately follows the letter “E e”. I. e., it is placed in the same order as in the official alphabet used in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Incidentally, the complete sequence of the letters in this alphabet is given in section 2.1.1.2. below.

In contrast, when the Azerbaijani letters “Q q” and “X x” are used in alphabetical lists with elements from other languages, they are not arranged as in the official alphabet of the Republic of Azerbaijan but placed in the same positions as in the English alphabet. In other words, the Azerbaijani letters “Q q” and “X x” are arranged immediately following “P p” and “W w”, respectively.

In the same kind of alphabetical arrangements as discussed above, letters with diacritics (as “Ç ç”) follow those without (such as “C c”).

2.1.1.3. A rough guide to Azerbaijani pronunciation

The following table contains examples from English and other common European languages that give a rough orientation of the pronunciation of Modern Azerbaijani. Note that this is only a basic approach. For more detailed and precise information, native speakers or the specialized literature should be consulted.

Table 2 Pronunciation of Azerbaijani

Letter	Approximate pronunciation	IPA symbol	Letter	Approximate pronunciation	IPA symbol
A a	a as in the French pronunciation of <i>Paris</i>	/a/	Q q	mostly g as in <i>great</i>	/ɑ/ or /ɑ/
B b	b as in <i>book</i>	/b/	L l	as l in the English words <i>love</i> or <i>like</i> ; the pronunciation is influenced by the surrounding vowels	/k/ or /l/
C c	either j as in <i>joy</i> or z as in the Italian <i>zio</i>	/dʒ/, /dz/	M m	m as in <i>make</i>	/m/
Ç ç	either ch as in <i>change</i> oder ts as in <i>tsar</i>	/tʃ/, /ts/	N n	n as in <i>nun</i>	/n/

Letter	Approximate pronunciation	IPA symbol	Letter	Approximate pronunciation	IPA symbol
D d	<i>d</i> as in <i>drop</i>	/d/	O o	mostly <i>o</i> as in <i>Lord</i> ; in some Russian loanwords in Azerbaijani it is also pronounced as the <i>a</i> in the French pronunciation of <i>Paris</i>	/o/ or /a/
E e	so-called closed <i>e</i> sound, similar to Russian <i>e</i> in <i>neft'</i>	/e/	Ö ö	sounds somewhat similar to the <i>u</i> in <i>turn</i> or the <i>i</i> in <i>bird</i>	/œ/
Ə ə	so-called open <i>e</i> sound, approximately as the <i>a</i> of <i>share</i>	/æ/	P p	<i>p</i> as in <i>pay</i>	/p/
F f	<i>f</i> as in <i>fish</i>	/f/	R r	a special kind of <i>r</i> , with no common equivalent	/r/
G g	<i>g</i> as in <i>great</i>	/g/	S s	always voiceless as in <i>seven</i>	/s/
Ĝ ĝ	approximately similar to the French <i>r</i> in <i>rouge</i>	/ʒ/	Ş ş	<i>sh</i> as in <i>shop</i>	/ʃ/
H h	an audible <i>h</i> sound, as in <i>her</i>	/h/	T t	<i>t</i> as in <i>tie</i>	/t/
X x	a <i>ch</i> sound as in <i>Loch Ness</i> , or <i>j</i> in the Spanish proper name <i>Juan</i>	/χ/	U u	similar to the <i>o</i> in <i>do</i> or the <i>oo</i> in <i>good</i> , but always pronounced short	/u/
I i	sounds similar to the <i>o</i> in <i>liquor</i>	/i/	Ü ü	as the <i>u</i> in French <i>tu</i>	/y/
İ i	clear <i>i</i> sound, as in <i>mean</i> or <i>me</i>	/i/	V v	<i>v</i> as in <i>voice</i>	/v/
J j	<i>j</i> as in the French word <i>jour</i>	/s/	Y y	<i>y</i> as in <i>you</i>	/j/
K k	<i>k</i> as in <i>can</i> or <i>cunning</i>	/k/	Z z	<i>z</i> as in <i>zoom</i>	/z/

2.1.2. Chaghatay

The Chaghatay (Turkic) language is transcribed using the conventions set out for Ottoman in Heß 2010–2011.

2.1.3. Chinese

Chinese is rendered in simplified characters plus the modern Mandarin pronunciation (using the 汉语拼音 Hànyǔ pīnyīn system).

2.1.4. Classical Arabic, Ottoman, Old Western Oghuz and Persian

Classical Arabic, Ottoman, Old Western Oghuz and Modern Persian are transcribed according to the system proposed in Heß 2010–2011. If necessary, transliterations are provided according to the system described in Heß 2009.

To simplify matters, I try to follow the current Modern Persian pronunciation, although the Classical (literary) pronunciation might have been more apt for some of the medieval terms.³

2.1.5. Kazakh

Kazakh is transcribed based on Muhamedowa 2016: xvii. However, the symbol “ğ” replaces “y” (< Kazakh F F), the Cyrillic letter “э” is represented by “yo”, and the hard sign (“’b”) by zero.

³ On the problems in establishing Modern Persian pronunciation cf. Thiesen 1982 (introductory sections).

2.1.6. Russian

Russian is transcribed according to the DIN 1460 transliteration system.⁴

2.2. List of abbreviations

A. H.	<i>Anno Hegirae</i> , in the year ... of the Muslim lunar calendar (beginning in A. D. 622)
arab.	Arabic language
az.	Azerbaijani language
çığ.	Chaghatay language
d.	died
germ.	German (language)
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
mpers.	Modern Persian language
MS	manuscript
oaz.	Old Azerbaijanian (Oghuz / Western Oghuz) language
osm.	Ottoman (language)
owo.	Old Western Oghuz (language)
Q	Quran
russ.	Russian (language)
ttü.	Turkish language of Turkey

2.3. List of symbols

*	The asterisk denotes reconstructed or hypothetical forms.
<	evolved from
>	evolving into
//	The space between the slashes marks phonemes.

⁴ See Wernke / Kunkel-Razum / Scholze-Stubenrecht 2009: 139.

3. PROBLEM AREAS

Ahead of treating some aspects of ²²Näsimi's times, life and his work in the main chapters (4.-6.), the present chapter (3.) looks at some fundamental obstacles that are encountered by anyone who becomes interested in Näsimi.

Some of these difficulties, such as the absence of reliable historico-critical editions of Näsimi's Turkic diwan, are the result of insufficient research. Others can, at least in theory, largely be overcome by consulting the secondary literature. Essentially, it is the combination of all these problems which makes the study of Näsimi's work such a difficult endeavor.

3.1. The need for new text editions

Probably the most urgent thing to do concerning İmadoddin Näsimi Turkic-language works is to create new historical-critical editions that satisfy the needs of modern scholarly work. To this day, not a single edition of Näsimi's Turkic poems (and possibly other works as well) has been created that would successfully meet the criteria of a modern historical-critical methodology. The only project that ever tried to apply such standards to the whole of Näsimi's Turkic diwan is the three-volume Soviet edition directed by Cahangir Qəhrəmanov.⁵ It is true that Qəhrəmanov used a number of manuscripts and collated them using up to date scholarly methodology. However, this great achievement of Soviet Azerbaijani scholarship has two serious drawbacks. Firstly, due to the overall political restraints of the Cold War era, Qəhrəmanov and his colleagues were not able to use enough of the most important and oldest manuscripts of Näsimi's Turkic works. In particular, they did not have access to the many priceless Näsimi manuscripts that are kept in Turkey.⁶ Secondly, and this not only constitutes a disadvantage but an irreparable defect, Qəhrəmanov violated one of the sacred principles of all philological work. This is the principle which prohibits scholars from altering the texts they investigate. In violation

⁵ Qəhrəmanov 1973.

⁶ For information on some Näsimi manuscripts kept in Baku and Istanbul cf. Heß 2009: 921f. Still more manuscripts are found in the catalogues form a variety of countries listed in Heß 2009: 916-921.

of this fundamental imperative, Qəhrəmanov introduced many "changes" (*dəyişiklik*) to the text of his Nəsimi edition. These modifications were motivated by often rather vague categories, including "information about Hurufism" or "comparative linguistic data from other Turkic languages". What is more, in practically all cases, the "changes" were applied without marking them in the transcribed text, which leaves the reader unable to distinguish the original versions of the manuscripts from the editor's opinion. For instance, the Qəhrəmanov edition unitizes forms of the first person singular personal pronoun by writing them according to their Modern Standard Azerbaijani form (*mən*), independent of whether the manuscripts actually show forms with initial *b-* or *m-*. In sum, Qəhrəmanov's edition is practically useless as any scientific analysis.⁷ Other editions of Nəsimi's diwan either consider only single or tardive manuscripts,⁸ are partial⁹ or do not use up to date critical-historical methodology.¹⁰

The most important task that stands before future generations of scholars is, therefore, to establish a critical edition, at least of his Turkic poems. Such an edition would have to take into consideration the most ancient manuscripts from Turkey, both from Istanbul and from smaller libraries in the provinces, and from other countries. There are probably too many excellent old manuscripts of Nəsimi's diwan for them all to be united in a single edition. However, even the combination of a dozen or so of the most ancient and promising manuscripts into a new critical-historical edition will be a huge step forward for research into Nəsimi. Needless to say that the establishment of such an edition will profit from the unlikely progress in the field of computer technology that continues to be made across the world. The possibilities of digital publishing might be specially used to create an edition that combines facsimilia, transcriptions, commentaries and translations into a host of important languages, such as English, Azerbaijani, and Russian.

In the process of the creation of such a new edition, the genealogy of Nəsimi manuscripts will probably be understood in a better way. In all likelihood, the various stages of publishing activity and the critical scholarly research will be necessary until a more or less final version of such a manuscript pedigree can be arrived at. As research continues, both the established texts themselves and our picture of the genealogical relationship between the manuscript will have to be revised and

refined a number of times, with both being checked against each other during the investigative process.

At this point, it has to be mentioned that all previous rumors about an alleged autograph (or autographs) of ¹¹Nəsimi's Turkic poems have never been substantiated. The Ottoman lexicographer ¹²Bursali Mehmed TəhİR (1861–1925) claimed that such an autograph was kept at the ¹³Cennətzadə Library of the Anatolian town of Erzurum. The Turkish scholar and editor Kemāl Edib Kürkçüoğlu (1902–1977) stated that in March 1960 the expert in Ottoman literature, Prof. Dr. ¹⁴Abdülkadir Karahan (1913–2000), contacted him and told him that he had seen that autograph in the Bodleian Library in London.¹⁵ Kürkçüoğlu went on to state that he, later on, was able to look at the manuscript personally. However, according to him, it cannot be regarded as ¹⁶Nəsimi's autograph because its orthographic characteristics showed that it was written at the end of the 15th or beginning of the 16th century.¹³

The above described rather sobering state of the art in publishing Nəsimi's Turkic diwan must of course not lead to the postponement of any serious scholarly treatment until more reliable editions will be available than today. Such a rigid philosophical approach would lead to the silencing of all discussions about Nəsimi's poems, which is, of course, both impossible and unwanted. Nəsimi is of such great importance to the history of Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani language, literature and culture that he simply cannot be ignored. Research into Nəsimi will have to continue even before publishing project(s) of his Turkic diwan will (hopefully) be realized. Some of the results of this research will probably have to be modified, and in certain cases perhaps to be revised, in light of the new historico-critical editions. Nevertheless, they can contribute to the deepening of our understanding of the great poet.

3.2. The scarceness of information about Nəsimi

Another problem is that very little is known about Nəsimi's life. This is not unusual for medieval figures, and for medieval Oriental poets. As to Nəsimi, not only are many aspects of his life unknown or disputed, there is practically no information also about the sequence and circumstances in which he composed his poems. This,

⁷ See the discussion of the edition in Heß 2009: 86–88, from which the quotes were taken.

⁸ An example is Paşayev 1987. The manuscript Paşayev used for his edition was copied in 1269 A. H. (A. D. 1852 / 1853; see Heß 2009: 91.

⁹ For instance, Kürkçüoğlu 1985.

¹⁰ For instance, Kürkçüoğlu 1985; Ayan 1990; Ayan 2002; Vaktidolu 2009. – Cf. also Heß 2009: 922–924, where some more editions are mentioned.

¹¹ Quoted in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XXVII. On ¹²Bursali Mehmed TəhİR, see p. 174.

¹² Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XXVII.

¹³ Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XXVII. – On the question of the autograph cf. also the discussion in Heß 2009: 81f.

of course, limits our ability to interpret them. What would be necessary, among other things, would be a systematic collection of the source material relevant to the life of Näsimi, in the ideal case in the respective original languages and with philological and historical annotations, similar to what 吳玉貴 Wú Yù Guì (*1956) has done for Chinese sources on the history of the Second Turkic Kaganate.¹⁴

The present volume tries to give a short summary of some of the facts that modern scholarship believes to have established about *Näsimi, as well as the open questions that remain.

3.3. The nature of Näsimi's poetry

Näsimi wrote in a highly elaborate prosodic system called *ruz* in Azerbaijani. *Ruz* has its origins in the Arabic and Persian literary traditions. It is based on the distinction between short and long syllables. Even in the Arabic and Persian traditions themselves, *ruz* is so complicated that only a few experts ever mastered it.¹⁵ What is more interesting is that *ruz* is not particularly well adapted the kind of Oghuz Turkic dialects Näsimi used for his poems, which in principle do not distinguish between short and long vowels. Even for specialists, a full understanding of all the metrical, rhetoric and other principles of *ruz* is very demanding. Fortunately, it is possible to find literature both on Azerbaijani *ruz*¹⁶ and on the way Näsimi used it in his poems.¹⁷

In addition to the difficulties presented by the formal structure of the poems, Näsimi's poetry is characterized by its richness in possible meanings. Of course, this is a feature Näsimi's works share with many other medieval poets, and perhaps with all good poets. However, Näsimi's poems are particularly demanding, because he belonged to a religious movement that had its own way of coding meanings. Obviously, much of the things Näsimi alludes to in his verses was designed for an esoteric public.

The list of difficulties that stand between the modern reader and Näsimi could be prolonged and enhanced in detail. However, the essential problems discussed above

are enough to show that there is still a long way to go until we will be able to appreciate and understand the works of this poet fully – even if, as in the present book, attention is focused on the Turkic poems.

¹⁴ 吳玉貴 Wú Yù Guì 2009.

¹⁵ On the Arabic and Persian origins of *ruz* in general cf. Meredith-Owens 1979; Thiesen 1982; Allahverdiev 1992.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Cəfər 1958; Quluzadə 1965; Cəfər 1977. Some important information is also given in Safarova 2006.

¹⁷ For instance, Dəzafar 1973.

4. LOOKING AT THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1. Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus – a region of transit

The South Caucasus region has always been an area of intense intercultural contact and a geopolitical bone of contention. The reasons for this are in part geographical and geostrategic. The area is situated on one of the major transit routes between East and Central Asia and the West.

The name “Azerbaijan” itself already betrays this diverse and often contested cultural and political history. Its ultimate sources seem to lie in such Middle Persian forms as *Ādurbādagān*.¹⁸ These have, essentially through Arabic and Modern Persian intermediaries, eventually given the modern Azerbaijani form *Azərbaycan*.¹⁹ The Middle Persian term *Ādurbādagān* is believed to have been synonymous with the Ancient Greek term Ἀτροπατηνὴ (*Atropatēnē*), which is a shortened form of Μηδία Ἀτροπατηνὴ (*Mēdia Atropatēnē*). Ἀτροπατηνὴ / Μηδία Ἀτροπατηνὴ is usually explained to be “the Atropatean Media” or “the Media belonging to Atropates”,²⁰ with Media being the second most important province of Iran in the times of the Persian Wars.²¹ The geographical designation contains the proper name Ἀτροπάτης (*Atropatēs*), which belongs to a historical figure. The spelling Ἀτροπάτης is an Ancient Greek transcription of an eventually Iranian name. Ἀτροπάτης commanded the troops of the Medes in the battle between the Persians and Alexander the Great at Gaugamela (331 B. C.).²² However, after the death of the last Achaemenid king Darius III. in 330, Ἀτροπάτης submitted to Alexander, who conferred on him the

¹⁸ Yarshater 1983: 762.

¹⁹ On the origin of the toponym see also Balci 2015: 139. In contrast, the direct derivation of the modern Azerbaijani designation *Azərbaycan* (and its counterparts in other modern languages) from the Ancient Greek Ἀτροπατηνὴ instead of Middle Persian forms such as *Ādurbādagān*, as proposed, for instance, in Sumbatzade 1990: 37, is phonetically not convincing. For the approximate geographical extension of Μηδία Ἀτροπατηνὴ in the classical Greek sources cf. Gemoll 1988: 138, s.v. *Ἀτροπατηνὴ*.

²⁰ Yarshater 1983: 762.

²¹ Duchesne-Guillemin 1979a: Col. 1128. – For the approximate geographical extension of Μηδία in the classical Greek sources cf. Gemoll 1988: 502, s.v. *Μηδία*.

²² Duchesne-Guillemin 1979.

northwestern part of Media that thenceforward bore his name.²³ As can be seen, the earliest history of Azerbaijan is marked by the direct and intense – although not always peaceful – contact between the Greek and Persian empires. The early *Adurbādagān*/ (Μηδία) Ἀτροπατηνή was influenced by both dominating cultures of the time. Influence from the outside remained a characteristic of later epochs of Azerbaijanian history.²⁴

4.2. Azerbaijan and its surroundings in the Mongol era

The Mongol invasions of the 13th century changed the course of the history of Eurasia in a dramatic and frequently catastrophic way. There is no place here to discuss the causes and effects of this great turning point in detail. Suffice it to say that the Mongol conquests not only changed the political landscape in a profound and lasting way, but also the mindset of whole cultures, including China, Russia, and many Islamicate countries. Even today, the reminiscence of the destructive Mongol hordes is again and again evoked across the countries once devastated by them.²⁵

From the middle of the 11th century onward, Iran including Azerbaijan had *de facto* been controlled by the Oghuz Turkic Seljuqs, although the fiction of rule by the Abbasid caliphs was still upheld. The Seljuqs had made the cities of *ḥḥḥḥ*-Rcy(y)

(near present-day Teheran, 1049) and Isfahan (1051) their residences.²⁶ By the middle of the 11th century, the Greater Seljuqs of Iran (as they are often referred to) ran into a profound crisis. One of the reasons for this was the decline of the class of *ḥḥḥḥ*-*dehkāns* in the eastern parts of Iran from around 1147 onward. The *ḥḥḥḥ*-*dehkāns* were a class of relatively small landowners, who traditionally had served as intermediaries between the central government and the local populace. Gradually, the *ḥḥḥḥ*-*dehkāns* disappeared, and the vacuum they left behind was filled by warlords as well as religious groups, some of which were of mystical (Sufi) character. In fact, the situation prevailing from the middle of the 12th century onward was not unlike that two centuries later, in the times of *ḥḥḥḥ*-Nāsīmī.²⁷ Finally, in 1194, the Greater Seljuq state fell prey to the Ḥvārezmians.²⁸

The first wave of Mongols reached Azerbaijan in the winter of 1220–1221.²⁹ They quickly overcame resistance by the local Muslim Atabek (*ḥḥḥḥ*-Atabōylār)/ Ildengizid (*ḥḥḥḥ*-Eldānzōlār) state.³⁰ However, they had no intention of settling yet and they moved on to the north by 1222, where they took and plundered the important city of *ḥḥḥḥ*-Şamaxı.³¹ This marked the beginning of a period of turmoil and instability. In 1225, *ḥḥḥḥ*-Gālāl ad-Dīn, theoretically heir to the Ḥvārezmian state, which no longer existed after its destruction by the Mongols, came to Azerbaijan and established himself as a ruler temporarily, before passing on to Anatolia (where he was defeated and killed by the Rüm Seljuqs in 1231).³² The pace of Mongol advance was temporarily lowered by the death of the charismatic leader Gengiz Khan in 1227.³³

In 1231, the second massive series of invasions of Azerbaijan by the Mongol armies started.³⁴ After nearly another decade of bloodshed, the Mongol rule over Azerbaijan and the rest of Iran was established. Azerbaijan first became part of

²³ Duchesne-Guillemin 1979.

²⁴ In much of the present book, the term “Azerbaijan” is used in the sense of “territory that more or less corresponds to present-day Azerbaijan (be it the Republic of Azerbaijan or so-called South Azerbaijan, i.e., the predominantly Azerbaijani-speaking regions of Iran)”. This convention is introduced in order to help modern readers’ orientation and does of course not claim to establish any direct relationship between the medieval and modern applications of the term. A similar use of the toponym “Azerbaijan” has been established in the specialized literature for a long time. Cf. Mahmudov et al. 2011: 21, where two meanings of “Azerbaijan” (*Azərbaycan*) are used even within one and the same sentence: “In the 13th and 14th century, Azerbaijan was the central province of the Ilkhanid and Jalairid states, and as to its administrative-territorial division, it comprised four main provinces: Azerbaijan, Arran, Shirvan and Mughan.” (*XIII-XIV əsrlərdə Azərbaycan Hülakətləri və Cəlairilər dövlətlərinin mərkəzi vilayəti olmaqla, inzibati-şəxsi bölgüsü baxımından əsas 4 əyalət – Azərbaycan, Arran, Şirvan və Muğan əyalətlərinə ayrılırdı*). Here, “Azerbaijan” (*Azərbaycan*) is at first used as a vague geographical term (probably meant to be roughly corresponding to the territories of present-day Southern Azerbaijan and the Republic of Azerbaijan) and then as the name of a historical province at the time of the Ilkhanid and Jalairid states.

²⁵ On the impact of the Mongol invasions cf. Róna-Tas 1991: 29f.

²⁶ Zinkeisen 1840: 29; Kreiser / Neumann 2005: 35. – On the early history of the Seljuqs and their conquest of Iran see also Zinkeisen 1840: 28; Vryonis 1971: 82f.; Kononov 1978: 256; Matuz 1985: 14, 21; Cahen 1987: 347; Guzew 1990: 57; Róna-Tas 1991: 39f.; Menges 1995: 27; Yıldız 2000: 9; Bünyadov 2007: 5.

²⁷ See below chapter 4.5.

²⁸ Róna-Tas 1991: 40. – On the Ḥvārezmian state, see also below p. 28.

²⁹ Golden 1996: 62. Cf. Valiyev / Şirinov 2016: 18; Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 332.

³⁰ Golden 1996: 62f. On the previous history of the Ildengizid state, cf. Golden 1996: 60–62. For maps of the extension of the Ildengizid state on the eve of the Mongols’ arrival and the course of the Mongol campaigns, see Mahmudov et al. 2011: 19f.

³¹ Here I follow Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 335; Golden 1996: 63; and Valiyev / Şirinov 2016: 18.

³² Golden 1996: 63; Kreiser / Neumann 2005: 45; Valiyev / Şirinov 2016: 18.

³³ Matuz 1985: 28.

³⁴ Valiyev / Şirinov 2016: 18.

the Mongol Great Khanate (1239–1256) and then of the Ilkhanid state (³⁵Elxanilər dövləti or ³⁶Hülakular dövləti, 1256–1335 or 1357), which became one of the four great subdivisions of the Mongol empire.³⁵ The first capital of the Ilkhanid state was ³⁶Marağa, which was followed by Tabriz.³⁶

When the Mongols conquered Iran, their ruling class did not adhere to any of the Abrahamic religions. As for Islam, they frequently were openly hostile to it. For instance, they conquered and destroyed Baghdad (1258), including much of its cultural riches. However, the Ilkhanid Mongol ruler Ghazan (in power 1295–1304) had converted to Islam before his ascension. Under his rule, Iran quickly became re-Islamized.³⁷ Whereas Buddhism had been an accepted religion in Iran before that date, it now began to be actively suppressed and persecuted.³⁸ The year 1295, therefore, marks a watershed in the history of Iran and that of Azerbaijan. We will see how this turning point influenced the life and works of ³⁹Nəsimi.

Shortly after the turn of the century, the Ilkhanid rule began to decline. In 1314, several vassals of the Ilkhanids, including the eponymous Ottoman ruler 'Osmān, disobeyed.³⁹ After the death of the Ilkhanid khan ⁴⁰Abū Sa'īd (ruled 1316 or 1317–1335), a process of political fragmentation began.⁴⁰ Soon after, small independent principalities began to (re)appear on Azerbaijanian and Iranian soil.⁴¹

Towards the middle of the 14th century, Mongol rule was in decline in the other subdivisions of the empire, too. For instance, the Central Asian part, named after Gengiz Khan's son Chaghatay (the so-called Ulus of Chaghatay), disintegrated in 1348.⁴²

³⁵ Dates are from Golden 1996: 63. In a similar way, Minorsky 1964 [1958]: 249 uses the year "1256" for the beginning of Mongol rule over Iran. Mahmudov et al. 2011: 20 give the year "1258" for Azerbaijan's integration into the Ilkhanid state. Cf. Akiner 1986: 106; Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 348; Valiyev / Şirinov 2016: 18.

³⁶ Cf. Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 334.

³⁷ Cf. Minorsky 1964 [1958]: 249; Golden 1996: 65.

³⁸ Spuler 1979.

³⁹ Cf. Beldiceanu 1989: 28.

⁴⁰ Golden 1996: 65f. Cf. Valiyev / Şirinov 2016: 23. On the decline of Ilkhanid power cf. also Beldiceanu 1989: 28.

⁴¹ Cf. p. 33 in the chapter about the Shirvanshans below. – For instance, Abū Sa'īd's ruling dates are given as 1317–1335 by Fleet 2009: xv, and as 1316–1335 by Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 335, 345, 348.

⁴² Arziev 2006: 55; Memtimin 2016: 82; 84.

4.3. Post-Genghizid Azerbaijan and its environment

As Mongol power waned, local dynasties asserted themselves in the Ilkhanid lands. These local dynasties in part resumed political traditions that had existed before the Mongol invasions of the 13th century.⁴³ The result of this process was the further fragmentation and destabilization of the whole region.⁴⁴ A number of smaller and larger independent principalities, federations and city-states took the place of the once unified Ilkhanid realm.

It is impossible to narrate the complicated political events of this period in full detail here. The selection of events presented both illustrates important overall developments and some characteristic local events that are in some way helpful in understanding Nasimi and his time. As a consequence of this choice, some of the more insignificant local principalities are therefore not treated separately. This applies, for instance, to the city of ⁴⁵Marağa, which was governed by its own independent ruler at the turn from the 14th to the 15th century.⁴⁵

4.3.1. The Jalairids

The Jalairids (⁴⁶Cəlairilər) quickly became one of the most influential local powers in post-Genghizid Iran and Azerbaijan. The dynasty was founded by ⁴⁷Şayh Uways in 1356.⁴⁶ Two years later, he defeated the Chobanids in a pitched battle.⁴⁷ The Chobanids were one of the Mongol families who had filled the power vacuum left behind by the Ilkhanids.⁴⁸

By 1359, ⁴⁸Şayh Uways had managed to conquer large parts of today's northern and southern Azerbaijan including Tabriz, which he turned into the capital of his

⁴³ As an introduction to the post-Genghizid history of the Caucasus region, see, apart from the literature mentioned in the below subchapters, Pfeiffer / Quinn / Tucker 2006.

⁴⁴ Cf. Halm 1988: 98.

⁴⁵ See Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 334. – In addition to the example of ⁴⁶Marağa cf. the episode around ⁴⁷Səlim narrated below on p. 40.

⁴⁶ For a general introduction to the Jalairids, see Smith Jr. 1965.

⁴⁷ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 329. Cf. Golden 1996: 66.

⁴⁸ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 329.

new state.⁴⁹ In its most prosperous times, the Jalairid state comprised large portions of Iran and Iraq, Georgia and present-day Armenia.⁵⁰

^{arab}Şayḫ Uways ruled until his death in 1374, when he bequeathed the throne to his son ^{arab}Sultān Ḥusayn.⁵¹ Under his rule, the Jalairid state lived through a grave crisis when the local ruler of Shiraz, ^{arab}Şāh Şuġā', routed a Jalairid army and temporarily occupied its capital (1376).⁵² However, ^{arab}Sultān Ḥusayn was able to reconquer Tabriz soon after.⁵³ In 1378, a revolt in Baghdad, which was then under Jalairid control, broke out, but ^{arab}Sultān Ḥusayn managed to quell it.⁵⁴ In 1381, ^{arab}Şāh Şuġā' marched on Tabriz again but had to give up on the way to it.⁵⁵

In 1382, it was ^{arab}Sultān Ḥusayn's own brother ^{arab}Sultān Aḥmad's turn to revolt. He occupied the capital, killed his brother and assumed power.⁵⁶

The Jalairids lost their capital to Tamerlane in 1385 and were able to reclaim it only in early 1388 after Tamerlane had to leave Iran to face a threat posed by Toxtamiş in Central Asia.⁵⁷ ^{arab}Sultān Aḥmad himself arrived in Tabriz in the spring of that year.⁵⁸ However, the renewed Jalairid rule over the metropolis did not last long again. An anti-Jalairid pretender by the name of ^{arab}Dövlətyar, who had remained in the city, invited ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu military to help.⁵⁹ The call was promptly answered, and on May 24, the ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu drove the Jalairids out of the city again.⁶⁰ In ^{arab}Dür-Ḥiġġa A. H. 790 (December 1388), The ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu chief ^{arab}Qara Məhəmməd himself arrived in Tabriz.⁶¹

After 1399, ^{arab}Sultān Aḥmad had to flee from Tamerlane to Egypt but was able to return to his country after the Central Asian dominator died in 1405.⁶²

In 1410, ^{arab}Sultān Aḥmad was defeated and executed in an open battle against

the ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu ruler ^{arab}Qara Yusif.⁶³ This was the end of the Jalairid dynasty and state.⁶⁴

4.3.2. The Shirvanshahs

^{arab}Şirvan is the name of territory and state between the ^{arab}Kür river and the Caspian Sea, with the cities ^{arab}Dərbənd and the capital ^{arab}Şamaxı as its important centers. It comprised the Absheron Peninsula and Baku, which was a small and rather insignificant town in the Middle Ages.⁶⁵

Towards the end of the 9th century A. D., when the whole region still belonged to the Abbasid Caliphate, the region of ^{arab}Şirvan began to loosen its dependence on Baghdad. As a consequence of their continued struggle for independence, the rulers of ^{arab}Şirvan gave themselves the title of Shirvanshahs (^{arab}Şirvanşahlar), i. e., "Kings of ^{arab}Şirvan".

The territory managed to maintain its independence after the first wave of Mongol attacks in the 1220s when the region was temporarily ruled by the former ruler of ^{arab}Hvārezm, ^{arab}Ġalāl ad-Dīn.⁶⁶ though, soon after, the Shirvanshahs became vassals of the Mongols.⁶⁷

Profiting from the weakening and gradual disintegration of the Ilkhanid state about a century after this, the Shirvanshahs reasserted their independence in 1338.⁶⁸ They quickly became one of the main political actors south of the Caucasus and therefore immediate rivals of the Jalairids. In 1364, the Shirvanshah ^{arab}Kavus (ruled 1345–1372) tried twice in vain to conquer the Jalairid capital Tabriz.⁶⁹ ^{arab}Şayḫ Uways responded to the aggression by launching a military campaign against

⁴⁹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 329.

⁵⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 334.

⁵¹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 329. Cf. Golden 1996: 66.

⁵² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 329.

⁵³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 329.

⁵⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 329.

⁵⁵ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 329.

⁵⁶ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 329.

⁵⁷ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360. On the events around Tamerlane see chapter 4.3.3. below.

⁵⁸ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360.

⁵⁹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360.

⁶⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360.

⁶¹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360.

⁶² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 332. On Tamerlane's death, cf. p. 37 below.

⁶³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 332, 364. On the ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu and this particular battle, see chapter 4.3.5. below.

⁶⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 329f.

⁶⁵ According to Minorsky 1978: 521, the name ^{arab}Şirvān (>^{arab}Şirvan) in the sense of the territory north of the Kür river came into use only in the 15th-16th century while before that it had been called ^{arab}Şarvān. For the territorial borders of ^{arab}Şarvān~^{arab}Şirvān in the historical period looked at in the present volume, cf. Mahmudov et al. 2011: 17, 18, 19, 20, 23.

⁶⁶ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333.

⁶⁷ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333.

⁶⁸ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333.

⁶⁹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333.

⁷⁰Şirvan in 1367. This resulted in a three-month occupation of the coastal kingdom.⁷⁰ ⁷¹asab Sayh Uways imprisoned ⁷²Kavus for those three months, but later set him free.⁷¹ This can probably be interpreted as an act of pragmatism: it was wise not to humiliate an enemy whom he was not able to vanquish totally.

After ⁷³Kavus's death, his son ⁷⁴Huşang (1372–1382) took power. He was succeeded by ⁷⁵İbrahim I. (1382–1417).⁷²

When Tamerlane conquered the southern parts of Azerbaijan in 1385 and 1386, the Shirvanshahs managed to survive by submitting themselves to him.⁷³ In order to demonstrate his willingness to cooperate, ⁷⁴İbrahim I. went to meet Tamerlane in person in Karabakh and offered the Central Asian invader sumptuous presents.⁷⁴ In exchange, Tamerlane recognized ⁷⁵İbrahim I. as ruler of the Shirvan kingdom.⁷⁵ Later on, ⁷⁶İbrahim I. managed to include the ruler of ⁷⁷Şaki, ⁷⁸Seyid Əhməd, in his alliance with Tamerlane.⁷⁶

This coalition survived until Tamerlane's sudden death in 1405. Their cooperation was seen, for instance, when ⁷⁹İbrahim I. fought on the side of the Central Asian ruler in the Battle of Ankara (1402).⁷⁷

After Tamerlane's death, ⁸⁰İbrahim I. occupied the city of Tabriz for a short while but had to give it up when the joint forces of the ⁸¹Qaraqoyunlu ⁸²Qara Məhəmməd and the Jalairid ⁸³Sultān Aḥmad approached in June 1406.⁷⁸

In 1410, ⁸⁴İbrahim had his son ⁸⁵Kəyümərs fight alongside the Jalairids against the ⁸⁶Qaraqoyunlu. ⁸⁷Kəyümərs put himself personally at the head of a Shirvanese army that camped near Tabriz. To his misfortune, he failed to take notice of the victory of the ⁸⁸Qaraqoyunlu ⁸⁹Qara Yusif over his ally ⁹⁰Sultān Aḥmad in the (second) battle in a place near Tabriz called ⁹¹Şənbə-Qazan (August 30, 1410).⁷⁹ He was surprised by ⁹²Qaraqoyunlu units and taken prisoner. ⁹³Qara Yusif later ordered him to be freed. ⁹⁴Kəyümərs was able to return to Shirvan. Notwithstanding this, the whole episode had a bad ending for him, because his father ordered him to

be executed out of his suspicion that he and ⁹⁵Qara Yusif might have been engaged in a conspiracy against himself.⁸⁰

In 1411 or 1412, a decisive battle between the ⁹⁶Qaraqoyunlu and the Shirvanshah took place, possibly near the river ⁹⁷Kür.⁸¹ The Georgian king Constantine II. and the ruler of ⁹⁸Şaki fought on ⁹⁹İbrahim's side.⁸² The battle ended in yet another of ¹⁰⁰Qara Yusif's many victories. The Shirvanshah and his seven sons were taken as prisoners, and the Georgian king and 300 of his notables were captured and then executed.⁸³ ¹⁰¹İbrahim was later freed after having paid a stately sum. From April 1413 until his death in 1417, he ruled Shirvan as a vassal of the ¹⁰²Qaraqoyunlu.⁸⁴

¹⁰³İbrahim's successor ¹⁰⁴Xəlilullah I. (1417–1462) renounced ¹⁰⁵Qaraqoyunlu suzerainty. Soon after his accession, he concluded an alliance with Tamerlane's son ¹⁰⁶Şəhrəz Şāhroḥ to secure his position.⁸⁵

4.3.3. Tamerlane and the Timurids

A century and a half after Gengiz Khan had set half of the world on fire, another mighty leader of horsemen spread his power across Eurasia: Tamerlane (1336–1405), whose name is also given in alternative forms such as Timur, ¹⁰⁷Teymur, etc.

Originating in Central Asia, Tamerlane began to conquer large parts of Central Asia around 1370.⁸⁶ Until approximately 1375, Tamerlane concentrated his military efforts on the southeastern portion of the erstwhile Chaghatay Ulus. The territories he invaded comprised parts of present-day southern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and China's新疆Xinjiāng region.⁸⁷

Soon after, though, the world conqueror-to-be turned his attention to the west. At the onset of the 1380s, Tamerlane and his army reached the former Ilkhanid territories.⁸⁸ Their further advance to the west, into the Iranian heartland, was

⁷⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333, 335.

⁷¹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333.

⁷² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333. Cf. Hüdüd al-'Ālam 1993: 405; Mahmudov 2004–2005, vol. 2, 116–126, s. v. *Qarabağ*, here p. 118.

⁷³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333.

⁷⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333. Cf. Akiner 1986: 106; Golden 1996: 66.

⁷⁵ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333.

⁷⁶ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 334.

⁷⁷ Balci 2015: 139.

⁷⁸ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 362.

⁷⁹ On this battle, see p. 43 below.

⁸⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 364.

⁸¹ Both the date and the exact place of the battle are a matter of dispute, cf. Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 365.

⁸² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 365.

⁸³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 365.

⁸⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 365.

⁸⁵ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 365. On the outcome of this alliance, cf. chapter 4.3.5.

⁸⁶ Aubin 2017.

⁸⁷ Memtimin 2016: 82f.

⁸⁸ For a survey of Tamerlane's campaigns in Iran, see Roemer 1986.

facilitated by the growing state of fragmentation and instability that characterized the region after the collapse of its centralized Ilkhanid government half a century before. In 1381, Tamerlane was able to conclude an alliance with the Sarbadarids, a local dynasty based in the east Iranian town of Sabzevar, who had assumed power in 1336.⁸⁹

Potentially, of direct importance to the understanding of İmādoddin Nāsīmī was Tamerlane's conquest of ^{میران}Astarābād or ^{میران}Esterābād ("City of Stars"), a town on the Caspian Sea coast, in 1383.⁹⁰ ^{میران}Astarābād was the hometown of ^{میران}Fāzillōh, Nāsīmī's spiritual leader and teacher. Seeing his native city overrun by a foreign invader probably left some impact on ^{میران}Fāzillōh and therefore, indirectly, on Nāsīmī.

In 1385, Tamerlane took Iran's strategically important cultural hub Tabriz for the first time.⁹¹ He briefly lost it to ^{تختامش}Toxtamış that same year before being able to reclaim it in the spring of 1386.⁹²

In contrast, the Muẓaffarids still resisted Tamerlane. ^{میران}Zaynol-Ābidin, who had succeeded ^{میران}Šāh Šoġā' in 1384, refused to support Tamerlane with his troops.⁹³ In order to break this resistance, Tamerlane directly led the bulk of his army to the Muẓaffarid stronghold Isfahan in 1387.⁹⁴ A delegation of Islamic scholars from the city (^{میران}olamā) contacted the beleaguers. Their negotiations led to a deal. According to its stipulations, the inhabitants would pay an important sum of money and hand over the city without resistance. However, the people of Isfahan did not honor their pledge. They massacred Tamerlane's money collectors and their military escort. Therefore, Tamerlane took the city by force. He took revenge by killing an alleged number of 70,000 inhabitants.⁹⁵ This was a major catastrophe in the city's history, and it took decades before it gradually began to recover from it.⁹⁶

At this point of time, the threat posed to Tamerlane by ^{تختامش}Toxtamış was still there. When the Golden Horde Khan launched a new military campaign, this time against

Tamerlane's important cities Samarkand and Bukhara in 1387, the Central Asian ruler had to rush to these places in order to defend the heartland of his empire.⁹⁷

In order to maintain control over Iran in his absence, Tamerlane left behind his son ^{میران}Mirān Šāh (1366–1408) as a vice-regent.⁹⁸ ^{میران}Mirān Šāh, in turn, employed a number of local governors to implement this task.⁹⁹ Soon intense power struggles between these subordinate governors led to a new phase of instability.¹⁰⁰ Between 1387 and 1392 alone, the city of Tabriz changed its possessors 14 times in a total number of 17 large-scale attacks that were carried out against it.¹⁰¹

Only Tamerlane's return to Azerbaijan in person in 1392 was able to put an end to this spell of chaos.¹⁰² The mighty invader performed various campaigns inside Iran and around the Caucasus, in which he took, among other things, the ^{قارا}Qaraqoyunlu capital Van. He then launched a successful attack on ^{تختامش}Toxtamış from ^{دربند}Dərbānd, which belonged to the territory of his ally, the Shirvanshah ^{ابراهیم}Ābrahīm I.¹⁰³ After completing this campaign, Tamerlane returned to Central Asia in the same year.¹⁰⁴

Tamerlane's rule over Iran, including Azerbaijan, ended with his death on February 18, 1405.¹⁰⁵ Some places, including the town of Tabriz, were lost by his successors, but what remained was governed for some time by one of ^{میران}Mirān Šāh's sons.¹⁰⁶

Timurid rule over Azerbaijan finally ended in 1408 when the Timurid ^{ابو}Abū Bakr was decisively defeated by the ^{قارا}Qaraqoyunlu ruler ^{قارا}Qara Yusif.¹⁰⁷

⁸⁹ Bashir 2005: 12, 35. Cf. Smith, Jr. 1970; Melville 1997.

⁹⁰ Bashir 2005: 35.

⁹¹ Bashir 2005: 35.

⁹² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 330. – On ^{تختامش}Toxtamış, see chapter 4.3.4. below.

⁹³ Lambton 1990: 102. – On ^{میران}Šāh Šoġā' and the Muẓaffarid dynasty, see chapter 4.3.9. below.

⁹⁴ Lambton 1990: 102.

⁹⁵ Lambton 1990: 102.

⁹⁶ Lambton 1990: 102.

⁹⁷ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 330f.

⁹⁸ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331.

⁹⁹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331 gives the following names: ^{محمود}Mahammad Davati and ^{قارا}Qara Bostam (joint governors of Tabriz), ^{عزیز}Ēzī İrañşah (Soltaniyeh), ^{شاه}Šāh Əli (^{مراغه}Maraġa), ^{حاج}Hacı Əhməd (^{پیشک}Pejški or ^{پیشکین}Pejškin).

¹⁰⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331.

¹⁰¹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331.

¹⁰² Cf. Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331.

¹⁰³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333, 361.

¹⁰⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331.

¹⁰⁵ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 332.

¹⁰⁶ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 332 give the name of this son as ^{میرزا}Mirzā Omār.

¹⁰⁷ Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23. On the ^{قارا}Qaraqoyunlu and ^{قارا}Qara Yusif see below p. 38ff.

4.3.4. The Golden Horde and Toxtamış

At the end of the 14th century, much of modern Russia and Ukraine were part of the Golden Horde. This was a Mongol successor state, just like the Ilkhanid had been.

In 1357 or 1358, the Golden Horde Khan ⁹⁹⁹Ganibeg invaded Azerbaijan.¹⁰⁸ His move was caused by a crisis in his own territory, which was linked to a terrible plague epidemic. ⁹⁹⁹Ganibeg was also attracted by the political chaos and instability in the former Ilkhanid lands.

The Golden Horde ruler ¹⁰⁰⁰Toxtamış (ca. 1377–1407) also had an eye on the territories to his south.¹⁰⁹ When Tamerlane had to return to the Central Asian heartlands of his empire to solve a number of problems in 1385, ¹⁰⁰⁰Toxtamış took the opportunity and made a large-scale incursion into Iran.¹¹⁰ Leading a force estimated at 90,000 fighters, he took Tabriz and the still important city of Marağa.¹¹¹ After completing this campaign, ¹⁰⁰⁰Toxtamış' forces gathered in Karabakh, from where they returned to the Golden Horde.¹¹² ¹⁰⁰⁰Toxtamış and his fighters brought about terrible damage on the population and plundered on a large scale, in particular during their eight-day occupation of Tabriz.¹¹³ On their return to the north, they reportedly took 200,000 prisoners and slaves with them.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Golden 1996: 66.

¹⁰⁹ As is well-known, the Turkic-speaking peoples of the Golden Horde were mainly Kipchak. I. e., they mostly used Turkic dialects that were different from the Oghuz Turkic dominant in Azerbaijan and Anatolia. In order not to complicate matters, I nevertheless use a Modern Azerbaijani transcription for Toxtamış' name. – The presumed years of Toxtamış' birth and death are taken from Spuler 1986: 1107, who also gives their possible alternatives 1375–1406.

¹¹⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 330.

¹¹¹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 330.

¹¹² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 330.

¹¹³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 330.

¹¹⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 330.

4.3.5. The Qaraqoyunlu

The ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlu are often described in terms of a tribal federation rather than a sedentary state – just as the ¹⁰⁰⁰Aqqoyunlu (¹⁰⁰⁰“Those with the White Sheep”).¹¹⁵ The ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlus' ruling dynasty belonged to the ¹⁰⁰⁰Yivə tribe from the Oghuz (Southwestern) branch of the Turkic peoples.¹¹⁶ The Oghuz ¹⁰⁰⁰Baharlı tribe also played a leading role in the federation over many years.¹¹⁷

Incidentally, the designations of the ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlu and ¹⁰⁰⁰Aqqoyunlu tribal federations were meaningful. Sheep husbandry constituted the major form of economic activity in both federations.¹¹⁸ There was a black sheep symbol in the flag of the ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlu, and a white one in that of the ¹⁰⁰⁰Aqqoyunlu.¹¹⁹

Just like the Jalairids, the ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlu benefitted from the decline of Ilkhanid rule and the power vacuum they had left behind. They seem to have appeared for the first time in the west of Lake Van in Anatolia.¹²⁰ The city of Van itself was their capital and power center.¹²¹ From their Anatolian homeland, the ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlu expanded towards the cities of ¹⁰⁰⁰Erzincan and ¹⁰⁰⁰Sivas, as well into northern Georgia from the early 1370s onward.¹²²

The founder of the ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlu state was a certain ¹⁰⁰⁰Bayram Xoca, who died in 1380.¹²³ He was succeeded by ¹⁰⁰⁰Qara Məhəmməd, who ruled the ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlu until his death in 1389.¹²⁴

The reign of ¹⁰⁰⁰Qara Məhəmməd was marked by the ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlus' rival-

¹¹⁵ For instance, Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359 refer to the ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlu as *az.tayfa* (“tribe”), and Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 370 to the ¹⁰⁰⁰Aqqoyunlu as *az.tayfa itifaq* (“tribal confederation”). Cf. also Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23. More on the ¹⁰⁰⁰Aqqoyunlu can be found in chapter 4.3.6. below.

¹¹⁶ Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23. On the origin of the ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlu, cf. Akiner 1986: 106; Golden 1996: 66; Mahmudov 2004–2005, vol. 2, 116–126, s.v. *Qarabağ*, here p. 118.

¹¹⁷ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359.

¹¹⁸ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359.

¹¹⁹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359.

¹²⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359; Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23.

¹²¹ Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23.

¹²² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359. On the early history of the ¹⁰⁰⁰Qaraqoyunlu cf. Yücel 1970: 152 et passim.

¹²³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359.

¹²⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359. The kinship relationship between ¹⁰⁰⁰Bayram Xoca and ¹⁰⁰⁰Qara Məhəmməd is described in various ways in the historical sources, in which ¹⁰⁰⁰Qara Məhəmməd is either referred to as either the son of ¹⁰⁰⁰Bayram Xoca or as the son of ¹⁰⁰⁰Bayram Xoca's brother (Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359).

ry with the Jalairids. ¹²⁵Qara Məhəmməd married off one of his daughters to the Jalairid ruler ¹²⁶Sultān Aḥmad.¹²⁵ In spite of the act of marriage diplomacy, the mutual relationship was mostly bellicose. In September 1382, the ¹²⁷Qaraqoyunlu carried out a large-scale attack on the Jalairid capital Tabriz, defeating the Jalairid prince ¹²⁸Şayb 'Alī.¹²⁶

In 1383, ¹²⁹Qara Məhəmməd defeated a certain ¹³⁰Səlim, who had ruled over parts of Syria.¹²⁷ After his defeat, ¹³¹Səlim fled to Aleppo, where the local governor ¹³²Əl-Nəsiriyyə gave him asylum.¹²⁸

¹³³Qara Məhəmməd used the campaign season of 1384 to launch an attack against the city of Mardin. He defeated its ruler and secured peace by marrying the ex-ruler's sister.¹²⁹

The following year, ¹³⁴Qara Məhəmməd established direct diplomatic contacts with the Mameluke ruler ¹³⁵Barqūq (1339–1399, ruled 1382–1389 and 1390–1399).¹³⁰ This detail is insofar of direct relevance to the life of Nəsimi as it illustrates the increase of Mameluke influence in Syria at the end of the 14th century, which would probably become even more important around the presumed time of Nəsimi's death. ¹³⁶Qara Məhəmməd's diplomatic initiative aimed at obtaining ¹³⁷Barqūq's permission to engage in military operations inside Syria. The Mameluke Sultan agreed, after which ¹³⁸Qara Məhəmməd began an attack on the ¹³⁹Aqqoyunlu. He still defeated them in 1385.¹³¹

Everything changed when Tamerlane appeared on the scene for the first time. The showdown with the ¹⁴⁰Qaraqoyunlu began in 1387 when Tamerlane attacked them from ¹⁴¹Naxçıvan.¹³² ¹⁴²Qara Məhəmməd was able to push back the Tamerlane's army after a battle near ¹⁴³Çarabağ (present-day Bingöl in Turkey).¹³³ Tamerlane had to withdraw but took his revenge by taking the ¹⁴⁴Qaraqoyunlu capital Van shortly after.¹³⁴

In 1387, ¹⁴⁵Qara Məhəmməd negotiated an alliance with the Mameluke renegade ¹⁴⁶Mintāš and the ruler of Sivas, ¹⁴⁷Burhāneddīn.¹³⁵

1388 was one of the most successful years for ¹⁴⁸Qara Məhəmməd, for it, brought him control over the Jalairid capital, Tabriz.¹³⁶

Under their charismatic leader ¹⁴⁹(Kəmaləddin) Qara Yusif, who was chief of the confederation from 1389 until his death in 1421, the ¹⁵⁰Qaraqoyunlu reached the heyday of their might.¹³⁷ During various times at the end of the 14th century, ¹⁵¹Qara Yusif's men managed to control parts of present-day northern and southern Azerbaijan, including ¹⁵²Naxçıvan and Tabriz.¹³⁸ However, their control was frequently unstable. For instance, ¹⁵³Qara Yusif took Tabriz twice in 1392 but had to abandon it to Tamerlane's approaching army soon after.¹³⁹

Tamerlane's second appearance on the Middle Eastern scene led to a strategic rapprochement between the ¹⁵⁴Qaraqoyunlu and their long-standing Jalairid enemies.¹⁴⁰ ¹⁵⁵Qara Yusif and ¹⁵⁶Sultān Aḥmad formed a military alliance against Tamerlane's army¹⁴¹ but their effort was in vain. Tamerlane crushed their combined forces in a battle near Baghdad in 1394.¹⁴² Following this defeat, ¹⁵⁷Qara Yusif fled first to on Ottoman territory and then to the Mameluke Egyptian court, where he met his strategic ally ¹⁵⁸Sultān Aḥmad again.¹⁴³ These events made the year 1395 one of the most difficult ones for the ¹⁵⁹Qaraqoyunlu as the confederation was on the brink of dissolution.¹⁴⁴ From his exile, ¹⁶⁰Qara Yusif kept it from disintegration only with great efforts.¹⁴⁵

After the disaster, ¹⁶¹Qara Yusif's personal situation was far from safe, too. Tamerlane demanded his and ¹⁶²Sultān Aḥmad's extradition from Sultan ¹⁶³Barqūq.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁵ For details, see chapter 4.3.8. below.

¹³⁶ For details, see p. 32 above.

¹³⁷ On him, see Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360ff. (where the year of birth and death is taken from). Cf. Akiner 1986: 106; Golden 1996: 66; Mahmudov 2004–2005, vol. 2: 116–126, s. v. *Qarabağ*, here p. 118; Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23.

¹³⁸ Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23.

¹³⁹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 361.

¹⁴⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 361.

¹⁴¹ Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23.

¹⁴² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 361.

¹⁴³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 361; Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23.

¹⁴⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 362.

¹⁴⁵ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 362.

¹⁴⁶ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 362.

¹²⁵ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359.

¹²⁶ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359.

¹²⁷ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359.

¹²⁸ According to Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359.

¹²⁹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360.

¹³⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360.

¹³¹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360.

¹³² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360.

¹³³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360.

¹³⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360.

The Circassian rebuffed this demand and executed Tamerlane's envoy instead.¹⁴⁷ This was an extremely risky, if not daredevil step, but ^{arab}Barqūq got away with it. The Mameluke sultan ^{arab}Nāṣir ad-Dīn Faraḡ, who succeeded ^{arab}Barqūq in 1399, also kept the two former rulers in prison.¹⁴⁸ This was a way of keeping a balance in the relationship with Tamerlane: they stayed alive but were neutralized.

When Tamerlane died in 1405, the Mamelukes finally set ^{arab}Qara Yusif free, as they did ^{arab}Sulṭān Aḥmad.¹⁴⁹ ^{arab}Qara Yusif and the Jalairid sultan then jointly occupied Baghdad and from there moved towards Tabriz (June 1406).¹⁵⁰ Learning about their presence, Mīrān Šāh's son ^{arab}Abū Bakr (Mīrzā) also moved in that direction, leading a mighty army.¹⁵¹ Thereupon, ^{arab}Sulṭān Aḥmad fled to Baghdad, leaving ^{arab}Qara Yusif alone to face the Timurid attack.¹⁵² The battle was fought at ^{arab}Şonbi-Qazan in the autumn. ^{arab}Qara Yusif defeated ^{arab}Abū Bakr.¹⁵³

After this setback, the Timurids regrouped their forces in order to confront the ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu a second time. Another battle took place on April 21, 1408, at ^{arab}Serdurud.¹⁵⁴ This time, ^{arab}Abū Bakr fought side by side with his father ^{mpcr}Mīrān Šāh.¹⁵⁵ Amongst their forces were also 20,000 fighters sent by Mīrān Šāh's brother ^{mpcr}Şāhroḡ (1377–1447, ruled 1406–1447).¹⁵⁶ Once again, the ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu were victorious.¹⁵⁷ ^{mpcr}Mīrān Šāh himself was killed during the fight.¹⁵⁸ This marked the end of Timurid domination over Azerbaijan.¹⁵⁹ The remaining Timurid troops left Western Iran for the east.¹⁶⁰

Soon after, ^{arab}Qara Yusif settled accounts with ^{arab}Sulṭān Aḥmad, whom he defeated at ^{arab}Şonbi-Qazan on August 30, 1410,¹⁶¹ ^{arab}Sulṭān Aḥmad was executed.¹⁶²

This victory made the ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu the dominating political force in northern Iran for the next six or so decades. The territory of their state comprised present-day Azerbaijan south of the ^{arab}Kür river, parts of modern Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran.¹⁶³

In 1418, the Timurid ^{mpcr}Şāhroḡ, who was eager to avenge the death of his brother ^{mpcr}Mīrān Šāh at the hands of ^{arab}Qara Yusif personally led a campaign against the ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu into Azerbaijan.¹⁶⁴ ^{mpcr}Şāhroḡ repeated the attack in 1420.¹⁶⁵ ^{arab}Qara Yusif was able to defend his country both times. However, he was wounded in one of the battles, and his injury seems to have precipitated his death (1420 or 1421).¹⁶⁶

After ^{arab}Qara Yusif's death, competition between his heirs broke out.¹⁶⁷ The ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu's arch-enemy ^{mpcr}Şāhroḡ tried to benefit from this situation and attacked, combining forces with the Shirvanshah and some other local leaders.¹⁶⁸ On August 1, 1421, two of ^{arab}Qara Yusif's sons, ^{arab}İskāndar and ^{arab}İsfōndiyar were defeated by the Timurid and his allies near ^{arab}Dərbənd.¹⁶⁹ Apparently, ^{mpcr}Şāhroḡ had abandoned the plan to include Azerbaijan into his empire at that point of time, for he left the region for Herat that same year.¹⁷⁰

As most accounts of ^{arab}Nāsımī's life assume that ^{arab}Nāsımī died before 1420, ^{arab}Qara Yusif's successors ^{arab}İskāndar (ruled 1421–1438) and, *in extremis*, ^{arab}Cahaṅşāh (1438–1467) come are only of relevance to the present investigation if one doubts the authenticity of these accounts.

4.3.6. The Aqqoyunlu

The ^{arab}Aqqoyunlu was yet another of the major political forces of post-Genghizid Iran of similar origin and ethnic composition as the ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu and were their frequent rivals and enemies,¹⁷¹

Just as the ^{arab}Qaraqoyunlu, the ^{arab}Aqqoyunlu became widely known in the 1370s.

¹⁶³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 364.

¹⁶⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 365.

¹⁶⁵ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 365.

¹⁶⁶ The date of his death is uncertain, see Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 365.

¹⁶⁷ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 366.

¹⁶⁸ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 366.

¹⁶⁹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 366.

¹⁷⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 366.

¹⁷¹ Cf. the beginning of chapter 4.3.5. above.

¹⁴⁷ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 362.

¹⁴⁸ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 362.

¹⁴⁹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 362.

¹⁵⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 362.

¹⁵¹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 363.

¹⁵² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 363.

¹⁵³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 363; Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23.

¹⁵⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 363.

¹⁵⁵ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 363.

¹⁵⁶ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 363.

¹⁵⁷ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 363.

¹⁵⁸ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 363.

¹⁵⁹ Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23.

¹⁶⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 363.

¹⁶¹ Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23. Cf. Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 363.

¹⁶² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 364.

The founder of the ²²Aqqoyunlu tribal federation is believed to have been a certain ²²Pahlavan, who ruled 1370–1388.¹⁷² His successors were ²²Ələddin Turalı (ruled 1388–1392) and ²²Fəxrəddin (ruled 1392–1394).¹⁷³

No doubt the pivotal figure in the early history of the ²²Aqqoyunlu was ²²Fəxrəddin's son ²²Qara Yuluq Osman aka ²²Qara Osman (ca. 1344–1434, ruled 1394–1434).¹⁷⁴ He was the most talented and brilliant amongst his brothers, who became so jealous of him that they imprisoned him.¹⁷⁵ However, they had to release him when a ²²Qaraqoyunlu attack made ²²Qara Yuluq Osman's military abilities were indispensable to the survival of the ²²Aqqoyunlu federation.¹⁷⁶ After being freed, he indeed won an important victory for the ²²Aqqoyunlu near the Anatolian town of Sivas.¹⁷⁷ However, ²²Qara Yuluq Osman's last fight against the ²²Qaraqoyunlu ended with his being killed by them (1434).¹⁷⁸

4.3.7. The Mamlukes

Of central importance to the biography of Nəsimi are the Mamelukes of Egypt. They were in control of the city of Aleppo at the presumed time that Nəsimi died there.

The Mamelukes had traditionally been involved in the politics of Palestine and Syria even in the times of the Kipchak Mameluke dynasty (i. e., before 1382). As the Jalairids, ²²Qaraqoyunlu and other powers of their time, they benefitted from the post-Ilkhanid power vacuum and used it to extend their influence even further into Syria and Anatolia in the second half of the 14th century.¹⁷⁹

The period of Mameluke history that is the most important to the life of İmadəddin Nəsimi begins with the first accession of Sultan ²²Barquq, in 1382. It marked an ethnic shift within the Mameluke ruling class because of ²²Barquq was of Cir-

cassian origin. His advent to power marks the beginning of the Circassian Burji dynasty and the end of the exclusive rule of the Kipchak (i. e., Turkic) Mamelukes.

²²Barquq briefly lost power to a Kipchak pretender (²²Şalāh ad-Din Həgğ) from June 1389 to January 1390 but ruled again from then until his death in 1399.

From ²²Barquq's takeover and onwards, the political balances in Syria seem to have shifted at a particularly rapid pace. The ethnic rift between Circassians and Kipchaks within the Mameluke sultanate played an important role in this. A key figure in this ethnic conflict was a certain ²²Mintāš. He was apparently the leader of the pro-Kipchak and anti-Circassian faction.¹⁸⁰ He occupied the position of the local governor (²²nā'ib) in the town of ²²Malatya, which then was under Mameluke control. ²²Mintāš is believed to have tried to subvert Mameluke power by creating a broad political alliance against his Egyptian overlord ²²Barquq. In 1387, he contacted the ruler of Sivas, ²²Burhāneddin (1345-around 1398) and persuaded him to be part of the anti-Circassian coalition, to which the ²²Qaraqoyunlu were also invited.¹⁸¹ As a reward, ²²Mintāš offered ²²Burhāneddin control of the town of ²²Malatya.¹⁸² However, the anti-Egyptian alliance of ²²Mintāš and ²²Burhāneddin went to pieces even before it produced any effects. When ²²Burhāneddin sent an advance party to ²²Malatya in order to take possession of the town, ²²Mintāš had its members imprisoned.¹⁸³ It is unclear whether ²²Mintāš played a double game at this occasion or had simply changed his mind and committed second treason. ²²Burhāneddin in his turn was not interested in punishing the Mameluke ²²nā'ib for his disloyalty and just withdrew to his stronghold Sivas.¹⁸⁴ This decision was probably dictated by the threat posed by Tamerlane. Apparently, both sides knew that their only chance to survive against the Central Asian ruler was, in the long run, their cooperation.

The fruits of this conciliatory diplomacy were reaped when Tamerlane marched into Syria that same year 1387. At this occasion, ²²Burhāneddin and ²²Mintāš resumed their mutual negotiations. Once more, the ruler of Sivas was offered ²²Malatya.¹⁸⁵ After consultations with his innermost circle of consultants, ²²Burhāneddin accepted ²²Mintāš' proposal yet another time.¹⁸⁶ However, this second attempt at an alliance between the Mameluke traitor and ²²Burhāneddin again came to

¹⁷² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 370.

¹⁷³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 370.

¹⁷⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 370. The element ²²Yuluq is sometimes rendered with front vocalization, in forms like ²²Yölük.

¹⁷⁵ Yücel 1970: 151; Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 370.

¹⁷⁶ Yücel 1970: 151; Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 370.

¹⁷⁷ Yücel 1970: 151; Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 370.

¹⁷⁸ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 370.

¹⁷⁹ On this period of Mameluke expansion, cf. Mordtmann 1988: 655.

¹⁸⁰ Yücel 1970: 96.

¹⁸¹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 360. Cf. Yücel 1970: 95.

¹⁸² Yücel 1970: 95.

¹⁸³ Yücel 1970: 97.

¹⁸⁴ Yücel 1970: 97.

¹⁸⁵ Yücel 1970: 98.

¹⁸⁶ Yücel 1970: 98.

nothing over the formalities of handing over ¹⁸⁴Malatya. The whole episode ended with ¹⁸⁵Burhāneddīn leading ¹⁸⁶Mintās' as a prisoner back to Sivas.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁸Burhāneddīn knew that the ¹⁸⁹Mintās affair conjured up the risk of a Mameluke punitive expedition against him. He tried to prevent such revenge by sending an appeasing letter to ¹⁹⁰Barqūq's governor (¹⁹¹*nā'ib*) in Aleppo, ¹⁹²Yelboğa. In his message, ¹⁹³Burhāneddīn gave his version of what had transpired between him and ¹⁹⁴Mintās, hoping that his openness would impress and satisfy the Mamelukes.¹⁸⁸ Unfortunately for him, the letter had exactly the opposite effect: ¹⁹⁵Barqūq ordered ¹⁹⁶Yelboğa to undertake a punitive expedition against Sivas. The Mameluke army appeared before the gates of the town in the month of Rabī' II A. H. 790 (March-April 1388).¹⁸⁹ They came very close to conquering the city, but in the end, they had to move away without success.¹⁹⁰

A little later, events took yet another improbable turn when the relationship between ¹⁹⁷Yelboğa and his Egyptian overlord turned sour. ¹⁹⁸Barqūq reacted by first giving out the order to keep ¹⁹⁹Yelboğa out of Aleppo and then trying to have him killed.¹⁹¹ This triggered an open revolt by ²⁰⁰Yelboğa against the sultan.¹⁹² The ²⁰¹*nā'ib* tried to forge an anti-²⁰²Barqūq alliance with ²⁰³Burhāneddīn, ²⁰⁴Mintās, and the ruler of ²⁰⁵Dū'l-qaḍr, ²⁰⁶Sūli.¹⁹³ ²⁰⁷Yelboğa's endeavors were not without success. For instance, he managed to kill the local Mameluke representative in Aleppo and install himself in the city again.¹⁹⁴

²⁰⁸Barqūq was succeeded by his son ²⁰⁹Nāšir ad-Dīn Farağ, who stayed in power from June 1399 to May 1412. Another of ²¹⁰Barqūq's sons, ²¹¹Izz ad-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz, ruled for a couple of months in 1405 before ²¹²Nāšir ad-Dīn Farağ resumed power. He remained sultan until May 1412, when he was followed by ²¹³Al-Musta'in bi'llāh.

On November 6, 1412, ²¹⁴Şayḫ al-Maḥmūdī, who used the throne name Al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad, came to power (until January 13, 1421).¹⁹⁵ ²¹⁵Şayḫ al-Maḥmūdī is pivotal to the biography of İmadāddīn Nāsīmī because his name is mentioned in a number of accounts of Nāsīmī's death as the sultan who actually confirmed his death sentence.

¹⁸⁷ Yücel 1970: 99f.

¹⁸⁸ Yücel 1970: 100.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Yücel 1970: 100.

¹⁹⁰ Details of the complicated military engagements are given in Yücel 1970: 100-102.

¹⁹¹ Yücel 1970: 102f.

¹⁹² Yücel 1970: 103P.

¹⁹³ Yücel 1970: 103. On the ²⁰⁵Dū'l-qaḍr background, cf. chapter 4.3.8. below.

¹⁹⁴ Yücel 1970: 103 gives the name of this representative as ²⁰⁶Sudun el-Muzafferī.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Sümer 1990: 623, who gives his name in the form ²¹⁴Al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad Şayḫ.

The years 1421 and 1422 can be described as a rather chaotic phase of Mameluke history. ²¹⁶Şayḫ al-Maḥmūdī was followed by three short-lived sultans, namely ²¹⁷Aḥmad (ruled January 13- August 29, 1421), ²¹⁸Sayf ad-Dīn Tātār (ruled August 29-November 30, 1421), and ²¹⁹Nāšir ad-Dīn Muḥammad (November 30, 1421-April 1, 1422). The period of instability ended only when ²²⁰Sayf ad-Dīn Barsbay came to power on April 1, 1422. He ruled until 1438.

4.3.8. The Dū'l-qaḍr dynasty

Much smaller than any of the powers discussed in the previous chapters was the Anatolian state known by the name of ²²¹Dū'l-qaḍr, whose ruling dynasty is referred to as ²²²Dulkadiroğulları ("the sons of Dū'l-qaḍr"). Nevertheless, this relatively marginal state is particularly important for the biography of Nāsīmī as the Poet mentioned its capital ²²³Maraş in one of his poems:

*Rüzqül-ürzâqımız Mar'aş degil
Rızqı Mar'aşdan umarsaq xvaş degil!*¹⁹⁶

"The nourisher who provides our nourishment is not Maraş.
If you are hoping for nourishment from Maraş, it is not pleasant."

These lines might be interpreted as a pungent poetic reaction by Nāsīmī to an unsuccessful attempt to find a livelihood in the town. Part of the sarcasm of these lines seems to be owed to the fact that the final prediction of the second line (*xvaş degil!*) does not have a grammatical subject. So the reader may supplement a first actant referent according to his own feeling, which can be "it" in the sense of the whole experience or situation, the "nourishment", the city of ²²³Maraş, or more than one of these referents at a time.

Just as the ²²⁴Aqqoyunlu and ²²⁵Qaraqoyunlu, the ²²⁶Dulkadiroğulları were a dynasty of Oghuz Turkic origin. Their first important representative ²²⁷Zayn ad-Dīn Karama b. Dū'l-qaḍr belonged to the Oghuz Turkic tribe ²²⁸Bozoq.¹⁹⁷ As the patronym of ²²⁹Zayn ad-Dīn Karama indicates, a certain ²³⁰Dū'l-qaḍr was regarded as his father, and hence as the founding figure of the dynasty. According to one theory,

¹⁹⁶ The text has been adapted to a presumed or possible Old Western Oghuz pronunciation from Kırkçioğlu 1985: 390.

¹⁹⁷ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

the Arabic name ^{arab}Dū'l-kaḍr (which roughly translates as "The possessor of the power") can be explained as a folk etymology of a Turkic word meaning "helmet"¹⁹⁸

As most regional forces discussed in the previous subchapters, the ^{iraq}Dulkadıroğulları owed their rise to the post-Genghizid power vacuum. ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā's first documented activity is dated A. H. 735 (1334 / 1335),¹⁹⁹ which corresponds to quite exactly to the end of Ilkhanid's rule in Iran. In that year ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā undertook an invasion into Cilician Armenia, leading a force of five thousand armed horsemen.²⁰⁰ Soon after, ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā and his son ^{arab}Hasan managed to conquer the town of ^{iraq}Elbistan situated some fifty kilometers to the north of ^{iraq}Marāğ. ^{iraq}Elbistan had already passed through the hands of several local potentates after the demise of the last Ilkhanid ruler ^{arab}Abu Sa'īd in 1335.²⁰¹

In 1337, ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā managed to have the title ^{arab}nā'ib bestowed upon him by the Mameluke sultan, ^{arab}Al-Malik an-Nāṣir.²⁰² Although this was still a nominally dependent position, the year 1337 is sometimes identified as the beginning of the ^{iraq}Dulkadıroğulları state.²⁰³ In the space of the following five years, ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā systematically extended the territory under his control by using military force. He did this at times with the permission of his Egyptian overlord and sometimes without.²⁰⁴

Around 1341, the relationship between ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā and the Mameluke sultan began to deteriorate in a serious manner. One of the reasons for this seems to have been the disappearance (by murder) of the Mameluke governor of Aleppo, who until then had patronized ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā.²⁰⁵ Soon after this, in A. H. 742 (1341 / 1342), ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā concluded a strategic al-

liance with one of his former enemies, ^{erena}Eretna, who was also of Turkic (allegedly Uyghur) extraction.²⁰⁶ Around the same time and probably in connection with this step, the master of ^{iraq}Marāğ formally dissociated himself from the Mamelukes.²⁰⁷

Meanwhile, the Mameluke sultan had appointed a new governor to Aleppo, by the name of ^{arab}Tās-Timūr as-Sākī. ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā managed to come to amicable terms with this person.²⁰⁸ ^{arab}Tās-Timūr as-Sākī participated in a revolt against the Mameluke sultan ^{arab}Alā' ad-Dīn Kūğūk, who had assumed power in August 1341 after the execution of sultan ^{arab}Sayf ad-Dīn Abū Bakr.²⁰⁹ When ^{arab}Alā' ad-Dīn Kūğūk was removed from the throne again on January 21, 1342, ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā accompanied ^{arab}Tās-Timūr as-Sākī on a trip to Cairo, where they found out how the situation under the new ruler, ^{arab}Shihāb ad-Dīn Aḥmad, appeared.²¹⁰ As it turned out, the new conditions were quite unfavorable to ^{arab}Tās-Timūr as-Sākī, and he fell from grace with the new sultan.²¹¹ Thereupon, ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā returned to Syria, where he prepared for a war against the Mamelukes. This included a siege of Aleppo.²¹²

In A. H. 743 (1342 / 1343), ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā raided a caravan that transported loot to Aleppo. The goods were the fruits of a victory over the Ilkhanid pretender ^{arab}Sulaymān Shāh that had been won by Eretna, who by that time had nominally turned into one of ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā's allies again.²¹³ Upon learning about the violent incident, the then Mameluke governor of Aleppo, ^{arab}Yil-Buğā al-Yahyāvī sent a punitive military expedition against ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā. The son of ^{arab}Dū'l-kaḍr first succeeded in crushing ^{arab}Yil-Buğā's forces.²¹⁴ A little later, in A. H. 744 (1343 / 1344), he also defeated the main force of the Mameluke Sultanate, which had been sent as reinforcement, near Mount ^{iraq}Dūldūl.²¹⁵ In a well-calculated strategic step, ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Kārağā then dispatched most of the booty and prisoners he had made during these two campaigns to Cairo, thus dodging further hostile action by sultan ^{arab}Imād ad-Dīn Abū'l-Fidā (ruled 1342-1345).²¹⁶

¹⁹⁸ The theory is by Annemarie von Gabain, see Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239. – Cf. also the rendering of the name in the form "Turcadiroly" in the travelogue of Bertrandon de la Brocquière (La Brocquière 1807: 160), who passed through Syria in A. D. 1432. De la Brocquière's spelling might be his own folk etymology, possibly based on the Arabized form of the dynasty founder's name, and perhaps taking into account such Turkic morphemes as *Türk ("Turk"), *oğul ("son"), and / or -li, -li, -lu, -lü (a denominal derivative morpheme that forms nouns or adjectives). – In favour of a non-Arabic etymology of the dynastical name ^{arab}Dū'l-kaḍr might also speak a passage from ^{arab}Sibt b. al-A'ġamī's ^{arab}Kumūz ad-dahab fi-tārīḫ Halab (written before A. H. 884 / 1479-1480), where it is given in the form ^{arab}DLĠD'R (see footnote 883).

¹⁹⁹ Mordtmann 1988: 654.

²⁰⁰ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239; Mordtmann 1988: 654.

²⁰¹ Mordtmann 1988: 654f.

²⁰² Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁰³ For instance, by Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²⁰⁵ Mordtmann 1988: 655. Cf. Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁰⁶ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²⁰⁷ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²⁰⁸ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²⁰⁹ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²¹⁰ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²¹¹ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²¹² Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²¹³ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²¹⁴ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²¹⁵ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²¹⁶ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

In the following years, the conflict between ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa and the Mamelukes continued with its ups and downs. Aleppo's Mameluke governor, ^{arab}Amīr Ariġtay took a particularly hostile stance against ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa.²¹⁷ However, under ^{arab}Amīr Ariġtay's successor, ^{arab}Arġun Šāh an-Nāširi, who took office in 1347 and was also Mameluke governor of Damascus, the relationship grew more friendly.²¹⁸

Everything took a turn for the worse again when ^{arab}Arġun Šāh an-Nāširi was removed from his post in Aleppo in 1348 and replaced by ^{arab}Amīr Ariġtay, who got his second term.²¹⁹ At this point, ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa intensified his raids into the Mameluke territories around Aleppo. He provoked the Egyptians by giving himself the title ^{arab}"Al-Malik Al-Ƙāhir" ("the Victorious King"), which imitated forms of Mameluke throne names.²²⁰ He also summoned the Armenian king of Cilicia, Constantine III. (ruled 1344–1362) to henceforth pay his tribute to him and not to the sultan in Cairo.²²¹

The situation became even tenser when ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa took part in a rebellion against the Mameluke sultan in 1352. The insurrection was initiated by the then governor of Aleppo ^{arab}Bay-Buġa Urus al-Ƙāsimi and the governors of Hama and Tripoli (Lebanon).²²² This was the final straw for the Mameluke sultan ^{arab}Šalāh ad-Dīn Šāliġ (ruled 1351–1354). He personally led a military campaign against the rebels, which resulted in them eventually giving up. Together with the other insurrectionists, ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa escaped to ^{arab}Elbistan.²²³ The Mameluke sultan offered to spare ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa if he would extradite his fellow conspirators. Upon ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa's refusal to accept the deal, ^{arab}Šalāh ad-Dīn Šāliġ declared the former's emirate abolished.²²⁴ All plenipotentiary powers and revenues belonging to it were transferred to ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa's rivals to the southwest, the ^{arab}Ramazanoġulları, who had their center of power around the town of Adana.²²⁵ In the end, ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa yielded to this

massive pressure by sending his two fellow insurgents to Aleppo, where they were unsurprisingly executed.²²⁶

This belated move could not, however, mend the poisoned relationship. At this moment, the Mamelukes were determined to solve the problem once and for all. To do this effect, they at first used a trick. It consisted, the offer to recognize ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa as the most important leader of the Turkic-speaking tribes north of the Mameluke territories of Syria. ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa would only have to come to Aleppo to receive his letter of appointment and the traditional cloak of honor!²²⁷ ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa felt the ruse and stayed away.²²⁸ The Mamelukes, therefore, decided to get rid of their enemy the hard way. They sent a mighty army against him. It was headed by the governor of Aleppo, who conquered and devastated most of ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa's territories.²²⁹ The son of Dū'l-Ƙadr himself was able to get away once more, accompanied by a small number of loyalists. They made it to Mount ^{arab}Dūldūl.²³⁰ There, they were able to resist the Mamelukes for twenty days but were overpowered in the end. ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa narrowly escaped, leaving behind all his followers and equipment. He made it to the Anatolian town of ^{arab}Kayseri.²³¹ There, his lucky streak finally ended. The city's commander, a Mongol by the name of ^{arab}Ƙutlu Šāh, captured him and handed him over to the son of his one-time ally and enemy Eretna, ^{arab}Meġhemmed Beg.²³² ^{arab}Meġhemmed Beg passed the prisoner on to Aleppo (September 22, 1353), from where he was brought to Cairo by order of the sultan (October 22, 1353).²³³ At first, ^{arab}Šalāh ad-Dīn Šāliġ refrained from executing the insubordinate prince, but when news came in about ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa's sons gathering troops, he passed the death sentence (December 11, 1353).²³⁴

After ^{arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ƙaraġa's death, the Mameluke once again nominally transferred his territories to the ^{arab}Ramazanoġulları.²³⁵ However, this decision was not accepted by the majority of the ^{arab}Bozok tribes, which were brought together

²¹⁷ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²¹⁸ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²¹⁹ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²²⁰ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²²¹ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²²² Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²²³ Mordtmann 1988: 655.

²²⁴ Mordtmann 1988: 655f.

²²⁵ Mordtmann 1988: 655f. – On the ^{arab}Ramazanoġulları cf. Sümer 1988: 612. See also La Brocquière 1807: 161, 163, 165f.

²²⁶ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²²⁷ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²²⁸ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²²⁹ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²³⁰ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²³¹ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²³² Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²³³ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²³⁴ Mordtmann 1988: 656. Cf. Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²³⁵ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

by ^{Arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳaraġa's sons.²³⁶ These tribes multiplied their attacks on the Mameluke lands of northern Syria.²³⁷ In the end, the Egyptians recognized one of ^{Arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳaraġa's sons, ^{Arab}Ḥalīl, as chief of the ^{Arab}Bozok, hoping to calm the situation with this step.²³⁸

In his first period in power (the exact chronology remains obscure), ^{Arab}Ḥalīl made inroads into the possessions of Eretna's son, *intending to avenge his father's death*.²³⁹ Later on, he took up his family's old habits and attacked Mameluke territories in Syria. For instance, in A. H. 762 (1360 / 1361), ^{Arab}Ḥalīl penetrated into the outskirts of Aleppo. He defeated an expeditionary corps sent against him by the city's governor ^{Arab}Aḥmad b. al-Ḳuṣ-Timurī.²⁴⁰ In the same period, ^{Arab}Ḥalīl also tried to take the city of Malatya, which Eretna's son had placed under Mameluke protectorate but failed.²⁴¹ In contrast, he was able to take possession of ^{Arab}Harpūt, then also controlled by Eretna's son.²⁴²

Freshly alarmed by the expansion of ^{Arab}Ḥalīl's power, the Mameluke sultan ordered his governor in Aleppo, ^{Arab}Sayf ad-Dīn *Ġarġī*, to perform a punishing operation (May 1366).²⁴³ ^{Arab}Sayf ad-Dīn *Ġarġī* besieged ^{Arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳaraġa's son in ^{Arab}Harpūt but could not take the city. This punitive expedition apparently impressed ^{Arab}Ḥalīl. Afterward, he publicly uttered remorse about his deeds and even traveled to Cairo in order to submit himself to the sultan.²⁴⁴

As in many other similar cases in those days, repentance was not forever. Soon ^{Arab}Ḥalīl fell back into his own habits, and the Mamelukes had to send another army to discipline him in A. H. 783 (1381 / 1382).²⁴⁵ The Mamelukes drove ^{Arab}Ḥalīl out of Elbistan and advanced until they reached Malatya.²⁴⁶ The massive Mameluke victory left ^{Arab}Ḥalīl no other choice than to submit again.²⁴⁷ However, as had been the case with his father, ^{Arab}Ḥalīl never again managed to restore full Mameluke

confidence in him. In A. H. 788 (1386 / 1387), ^{Arab}Barġuq put an end to all doubts by first deposing and then killing him.²⁴⁸

^{Arab}Ḥalīl's successor was his younger brother Süli, who has already been discussed in the ^{Arab}Mintaš episode.²⁴⁹ As it were, many behavior patterns discernible in the action of ^{Arab}Mintaš, Süli, and other local rulers resemble those in the times of ^{Arab}Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳaraġa and his brother ^{Arab}Ḥalīl, in particular, vis-à-vis the Mamelukes. Thus, Süli placed himself in the current anti-^{Arab}Barġuq conspiracy but had to submit to the Mameluke ruler in 1391.²⁵⁰ As in the times of his father and brother, this submission was only pragmatic. This became apparent in 1395 when Süli made an offer to Tamerlane that he would lead the latter's troops into Syria.²⁵¹ Süli's life ended in A. H. 800 (1397 / 1398), when ^{Arab}Barġuq finally had him killed, too.²⁵²

Following Süli's death, there was a brief phase in which one of his sons and a son of his brother ^{Arab}Ḥalīl, ^{Arab}Nāšir ad-Dīn Muḥammad, struggled for power. In A. H. 802 (1399 / 1400), the contention was decided in favor of ^{Arab}Nāšir ad-Dīn Muḥammad following an intervention by the Ottoman sultan ^{Arab}Bayezid I.²⁵³

In 1400, ^{Arab}Nāšir ad-Dīn Muḥammad managed to survive a punitive military expedition by Tamerlane against his subjects, who had dared to attack the Mongol monarch during his siege of Sivas.²⁵⁴

^{Arab}Nāšir ad-Dīn Muḥammad interfered in the Ottoman civil war, which had broken out after the defeat of sultan ^{Arab}Bayezid I. at the hands of Tamerlane in the Battle of Ankara (1402). Thus, in A. H. 815 (1412 / 1413), he sent troops to support prince ^{Arab}Meḥmed (*Ālebi*) against his brother ^{Arab}Mūsā.²⁵⁵ This proved to be a lucky decision, as ^{Arab}Meḥmed *Ālebi* finally was victorious over his brothers in 1413.²⁵⁶

In the years thereafter, ^{Arab}Nāšir ad-Dīn Muḥammad continued to support ^{Arab}Meḥmed *Ālebi* against the Ottomans' most powerful adversary in Anatolia. These were the rulers of the town of ^{Arab}Karaman / ^{Arab}Larende-Laranda (the ancient Λάρπυδα),²⁵⁷ known as the ^{Arab}Karamanoğulları. Incidentally, the importance of

²³⁶ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²³⁷ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²³⁸ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²³⁹ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²⁴⁰ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²⁴¹ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²⁴² Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239; Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²⁴³ Mordtmann 1988: 656. Cf. Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁴⁴ Mordtmann 1988: 656.

²⁴⁵ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁴⁶ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁴⁷ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁴⁸ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁴⁹ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239. The spelling of the name Süli is probably Arabic. – For ^{Arab}Mintaš see p. 47.

²⁵⁰ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁵¹ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁵² Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁵³ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁵⁴ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁵⁵ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁵⁶ On this strain of events, cf. Beldiceanu 1989: 30.

²⁵⁷ On the ancient history of ancient Λάρπυδα, cf. Treidler 1979.

these two rivaling powers is also mentioned by Näsîmi. One of his most beautiful ghazals begins with the following lines, which mention both the then Ottoman town (and one-time capital) Bursa and the town of Laranda:

*Neylbrâm bân bunda durmaq çünki dildâr anda-dur
Sanma kim anda dedüüm Bursa yâ Laranda-dur*²⁵⁸

“What shall I do, staying here? For the holder of my heart is there.
Do not think that what I mean by ‘there’ is Bursa or Laranda!”

The mention of the two cities Bursa and Laranda in these lines can perhaps add some indirect evidence to the biography of Näsîmi, even if one has to admit that this evidence is, in any case, vague and speculative. As to the reference to Laranda, it does not seem to provide any historically relevant evidence, as this city had been existing under this name at least since Roman times. This does not change if one argues that the reason for the mention of Laranda in the verses was it being the capital of the principality of ^{osm} Karaman. For this principality had been existing since the 13th century.²⁵⁹ Hence, even if one assumes that Laranda appears in the above lines in its quality as the ^{osm} Karaman capital, this still does not furnish any chronologically relevant clue. The case is somewhat different from the town of Bursa. Again, in order to come to any relevant theory, one must hypothesize that it is mentioned in Näsîmi’s verses because of its status as a capital city (and not just as one amongst many Ottoman cities). This seems to be at least not a totally implausible assumption, for Laranda obviously is and appears as a capital city in the above lines, and both words, Laranda, and Bursa, appear as parallel elements of a disjunctive syntagm (*Bursa yâ Laranda*). Hence, it appears as a possible interpretation to assume the same status for Bursa as that which Laranda has (capital). Bursa became the Ottoman capital in 1326 after it had been conquered by ^{osm} Orhan on April 6, 1326.²⁶⁰ Bursa was replaced as the Ottomans’ capital by Edirne in the last decades of the 14th century. There is disunity among the experts as to the exact year when Edirne was taken and immediately became the Ottoman capital. Most of them speak out in favor of a date

between 1361 and 1371.²⁶¹ Now if – hypothetically – one assumes that Bursa was mentioned by Näsîmi in its property as a capital, in parallel to Laranda, then one might cautiously assume that he would not have done so very long after Edirne replaced Bursa as the Ottoman capital between 1361 and 1371. This would mean that the above lines would have been composed probably not too long after 1371. From there one could, by taking into account the high quality of the above-quoted lines – and the whole ghazal, for that matter – further speculate that Näsîmi was quite an accomplished poet when he composed them, which would probably mean that he was no minor. This would, for instance, possibly be an argument against Näsîmi’s traditionally assumed birth year 1369. However, all the above-given speculations are very uncertain and vague. They need confirmation by other data.

Returning to ^{arab} Näsîr ad-Dîn Muḥammad, one can say that his pro-Ottoman and consequently inherently anti-Karaman politics combined with the traditional dependence of the ^{osm} Dulkadroğulları on Mameluke benevolence. Against this backdrop, it was quite natural that the ^{arab} Dūl-kadr ruler actively participated in sultan ^{arab} Al-Malik al-Muʿayyad’s punitive expedition against the ^{osm} Karamanoğulları in A. H. 822 (1419 / 1420).²⁶² In addition to his participation in the Mamelukes’ campaign, ^{arab} Näsîr ad-Dîn Muḥammad also pursued his struggle against Karaman on his own. Thus in 1419, he even managed to capture their ruler ^{osm} Mehmed (in power from 1413–1419 and 1421–1423) and sent him as a prisoner to Cairo.²⁶³ ^{arab} Al-Malik al-Muʿayyad recompensed ^{arab} Näsîr ad-Dîn Muḥammad with the town of ^{osm} Kayseri, which had formerly been under the ^{osm} Karamanoğulları’s control.²⁶⁴ The city was lost to the ^{osm} Dulkadroğulları under ^{osm} Mehmed’s successor ^{osm} Tâğ ad-Dîn İbrâhîm (ruled 1423–1464), but retaken by the Ottomans and handed back to ^{arab} Näsîr ad-Dîn Muḥammad in A. H. 840 (1436 / 1437).²⁶⁵

^{arab} Näsîr ad-Dîn Muḥammad ruled until 1443. This means that his life extended beyond that of Näsîmi, at least according to most accounts of the poet’s life. Näsîr ad-Dîn Muḥammad’s reign was mostly characterized by a pragmatic and flexible policy. He managed with good success to balance the interests of the great pow-

²⁵⁸ The text was adapted from Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, MS Yazma Bağışlar 4318. Fol. 37v. The ghazal can also be found in Mehmed Saʿid 1844: 44 and Kürkcüoğlu 1985: 297. The metre is ^{arab} Ramal (-v - - / -v - - / -v - - / -v - -).

²⁵⁹ On the early history of ^{osm} Karaman, cf. Matuz 1985: 23; Sümer 1990: 619; Faroqhi 2003.

²⁶⁰ Beldiceanu 1989: 20; Goodwin 1994: 17; Lowry 2003: 57.

²⁶¹ Vatin 1989: 39; Kreiser / Neumann 2005: 76. – Adamović 1985: 2 more concretely opts for 1363, while Kaplan 2016: 22 gives the year 1370. Kreiser 2015: 391 places the conquest of Edirne between 1361 and 1366.

²⁶² Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁶³ Sümer 1990: 623. It would seem logical to assume that this capture occurred after the joint ^{arab} Dūl-kadr-Mameluke campaign, but I have left the sequence open because the literature does not provide the exact dates. – On the Karaman ruler ^{osm} Mehmed cf. also Kreiser / Neumann 2005: 74.

²⁶⁴ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

²⁶⁵ Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239. On ^{osm} Tâğ ad-Dîn İbrâhîm, see also Babinger 1959: 6.

ers surrounding him, such as the Ottomans, the rulers of Karaman, and the Mamelukes, against each other. In this way, he managed to preserve the rather small principality's independence.

4.3.9. The Muzaffarids

The Muzaffarids was a relatively small local dynasty which originated in southern Iran. They conquered Shiraz (1353) and temporarily Isfahan and Tabriz (1357).

They attained their heyday under ^{mpen}Şāh Şoğā' (ruled 1358–1384). However, after his death, internal divisions weakened the state. The last Muzaffarid ruler was ^{mpen}Şāh Mansūr (ruled 1387–1393).²⁶⁶ The Muzaffarid state was destroyed by Tamerlane in 1393.

4.3.10. A place of special meaning: Əlinçə

In contrast to the previous subsections, the present one is not dedicated to a political entity but to a place. The reason for this is that this particular location, ^{ac}Əlinçə, not only plays an important role in the history of the 14th and 15th century Azerbaijan but also concretely in the biography of Nəsimi.²⁶⁷ For it was a site where Nəsimi's teacher ^{mpen}Fəzlöllāh is assumed to have been imprisoned. Knowing about the general history of ^{ac}Əlinçə might provide us with further important clues for the chronology of both ^{mpen}Fəzlöllāh's and Nəsimi's lives.

^{ac}Əlinçə is a medieval mountain fortress that is situated approximately 12 kilometers from the town of ^{ac}Naxçıvan. Today, ^{ac}Əlinçə is no more than a ruin. The shattered remains of the medieval fortress can be found to the north of the Araxes (^{ac}Araz) river, not far from where the ^{ac}Qotur joins it from the south and the Araxes itself bends to the east.²⁶⁸ Not far from ^{ac}Əlinçə, a small river of the identical name disembogues southward to the Araxes. The river ^{ac}Əlinçə is likely to have had the

same name already in medieval times.²⁶⁹ Apparently, the ^{ac}Əlinçə fortification owes at least some of its strategic importance to its proximity to the confluence. Another factor in defining its significance is no doubt it's being situated on a steep mountain. Even in its present, ruined state, pictures of ^{ac}Əlinçə give the impression of an impregnable stronghold that distantly reminds of the antique fortress of Masada.²⁷⁰

The original fortress is said to have been erected between the 7th and 12th centuries.²⁷¹ It was of utmost strategic importance from at least the beginning of the Mongol raids into Iran in the 1220s. The Mongols, the Golden Horde khans, and Tamerlane all passed near it during some of their major campaigns.²⁷² In their fortification, Tamerlane's men interned the last Atabeg of Azerbaijan, ^{mpen}Mozaffaroddin Ozbak (^{ac}Müzaffaroddin Ozbək, ruled 1211–1225).²⁷³

In the post-Genghizid era, ^{ac}Əlinçə preserved its importance as a stronghold when the Jalairids made use of it in their defensive struggle against Tamerlane. This was seen, for instance, in the year 1386. In that year, Tamerlane returned to Azerbaijan in order to oust ^{ac}Toxtamış.²⁷⁴ In order to achieve his goal, he first took Tabriz and then moved on in the direction of ^{ac}Naxçıvan.²⁷⁵ At this point, a number of Jalairid commanders had already sought shelter in ^{ac}Əlinçə.²⁷⁶ A series of skirmishes between Tamerlane and the Jalairids emirs ensued before Tamerlane eventually moved on to Karabakh without having been able to take the fortress.²⁷⁷

The strength of the fortress and its garrison was manifested again in 1391. When news came in that the ^{ac}Qaraqoyunlu ruler, ^{ac}Qara Yusif was approaching Tabriz, the fortress commander ^{mpen}Altun put himself at the head of an expedition force to meet him.²⁷⁸ The move was successful, and ^{ac}Qara Yusif had to withdraw.²⁷⁹

A year later, Tamerlane sent an army detachment in order to neutralize ^{ac}Əlinçə

²⁶⁶ Berthels / Bruijn 2019.

²⁶⁷ The name of ^{ac}Əlinçə appears in many variants in the literature, including *Alangək* (Bausani 1979: 600; Divshali / Luft 1980: 18) or its transcription variant *Alangaq* (Halm 1988: 99), and *Alanca* (Bashir 2002: 175).

²⁶⁸ For the location of the fortress, see Mahmudov et al. 2011: 21. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 17, 18, 22, 25.

²⁶⁹ See the map in Mahmudov et al. 2011: 21. I did not come across any theory about whether the hydronym owes its name to the toponym, or vice versa. In fact, the etymology of the name ^{ac}Əlinçə is not discussed in the literature, either.

²⁷⁰ Cf. the picture, which might be a photograph or a visual reproduction, in Mahmudov et al. 2011: 17.

²⁷¹ Mahmudov et al. 2011: 17.

²⁷² See Mahmudov et al. 2011: 21.

²⁷³ Cf. Boyle 1968: 327. On the last Atabeg, cf. Bünyadov 2007: 261.

²⁷⁴ See p. 36.

²⁷⁵ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 330.

²⁷⁶ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 330, speaking of ^{ac}Əlainsi *əmirlərinin bir qismi* "a part of the Jalairid emirs".

²⁷⁷ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 330.

²⁷⁸ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 361.

²⁷⁹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 361.

once and for all but failed to claim it again.²⁸⁰ Thanks to such successes, ²⁸¹Əlinca became one of the very few places in Azerbaijan not taken by Tamerlane and his substitutes during the 1390s.²⁸¹ This automatically turned it into a center of anti-Tamerlane resistance. For this reason, both the rulers of ²⁸²Şaki and Georgia supported the defenders of ²⁸³Əlinca.²⁸²

In the end, the Jalairids managed to hold out in the fortress for a full thirteen years. Among its commanders were ²⁸⁴Şah Sulţān Aĥmad's son ²⁸⁵Şah Sulţān Tāhir, the already mentioned ²⁸⁶Altun and another person named ²⁸⁷Qövhər.²⁸³ Ziya Bünyadov and Y. B. Yusifov estimates that the fortress garrison counted more than 300 fighters.²⁸⁴

Yet after more than a decade of successful resistance, ²⁸⁸Əlinca was finally doomed when Tamerlane returned to Azerbaijan from his campaign in India in September 1399. Internal conflicts between the parties within the fortress broke out, and it had to capitulate at last before Tamerlane.²⁸⁵

The fortress was apparently destroyed at some unknown point of time after that date. For we learn that after the Jalairid ruler ²⁸⁹Şah Sulţān Aĥmad who had occupied Tabriz (together with his ²⁹⁰Qaraqoyunlu ally ²⁹¹Şah Qara Yusif) in June 1406, ordered ²⁹²Əlinca to be rebuilt.²⁸⁶

4.4. Outlook: The relevance of the political landscape for the understanding of Nəsimi

The political and geographical landscape in which Nəsimi passed his life was characterized by enormous degrees of fragmentation and instability. In a way, the geological, geographical and geostrategic composition of the Caucasus region had always a predestined volatility, quick flows of populations and culture, and rapid change on all levels. It was situated at the borderline between large empires, such as the Greek, Roman and Persian ones, already in antiquity.

The decay and eventual disappearance of the Mongol empire that had been set up in Iran and Azerbaijan in the second half of the 13th century led to a particularly

chaotic and volatile phase of Anatolian, Caucasian and Middle Eastern history. The speed at which invasions were carried out and how often cities and territories had new masters, was sometimes staggering. Many of these conquests were obviously not motivated by the will to develop or support the local population but above all, by greed and the desire of power. This seems to be the case, for instance, as regards to the many campaigns by ²⁹³Toxtamış and Tamerlane, who were notorious for their cruelty and lack of respect for human lives.

In this torn political landscape, which was characterized by the absence of strong political controls both in the Islamic and the neighboring non-Islamic lands, all kinds of religious, ethnic, linguistic and political conflicts appeared or became at least more pronounced. The downfall of Ilkhanid empires had left behind a situation that was marked by a plurality of actors, entities, and interests.

The above-described situation had direct consequences on Nəsimi, both on the intellectual and the material level.

Firstly, there is the problem of the relationship between the doctrinal, spiritual and intellectual dimensions of religions and the material world in general. Apparently, this is one of the cardinal questions in the history of religions. Up to which point does 'reality' – whatever that may be – and religion exist as separate entities, and what is their precise relationship? Religions, and in particular the 'Abrahamic' religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are often eminently political. And even the quietest form of religion certainly has a social and therefore political dimension. On the other hand, religion is often claimed to be independent of the historical, social and political realities. This is the case, for instance, when religions representatives argue that certain political events, although manifestly carried out in the name of a particular religion, using its vocabulary, material apparel, and way of thinking, was not representative of the 'true' form of that religion. At an intuitive level, it seems reasonable to assume some kind of mutual relationship between historical reality, already as a consequence of the fact that *nothing* in this universe exists separated from the rest.

If we follow such a philosophical axiom, the above-described instability and insecurity prevailing in the 13th and 14th centuries could not have shaped the religious ideas of the time and vice versa.

As to Nəsimi, his life offers evidence for such a mutual influence of religious thought and historical events. The clearest case is perhaps the tradition regarding Nəsimi's judgment before a Sharia court in Aleppo. Such courts had a political function – supplying the judicial order within a given Islamic state – as well as a religious one, which was based on their use of scriptures that are considered to be the embodiment of religion *par excellence*. A more speculative, but still not improbable interface between the realities of Nəsimi's times and his poetry may be seen in their overall content. Nəsimi's poems articulate the often painful and difficult search for union with a principle of absolute validity. It stands to reason that such a mental

²⁸⁰ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331.

²⁸¹ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331.

²⁸² Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 332.

²⁸³ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331.

²⁸⁴ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331. However, they do not give a reference time in this place.

²⁸⁵ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 332.

²⁸⁶ Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 363.

search at the same time responded to the general political situation in Nāsīmī's times, which, as has been shown above, was characterized by the relativization of authority. The renewed insistence on the belief in and pursuit of a God that would provide ultimate security and final answers could probably also be read as a way of opposing or trying to escape from the chaotic developments of the post-Genghizid period.

Secondly, the plurality of heterogeneous political actors and power centers in the post-Genghizid sphere also meant that a degree of intellectual and religious variety prevailed that was more articulated than in the pre-Genghizid period. For instance, the Abbasid caliphate had presented a larger degree of religious and intellectual unity and conformity, although "heterodox" and non-conformist views had always existed and debates between the various currents, schools, and sects of Islam were numerous. In the post-Genghizid period, any of the many local potentates were free to choose their own confession, sect, or brand of Islam if they liked. In fact, this allowed wandering preachers-cum-poets such as Nāsīmī to try their luck in various smaller or bigger courts. The above-quoted verse about ¹⁰⁰Maraş probably gives evidence of Nāsīmī's attempt to influence the small ¹⁰¹Dü'î-kadr principality in his sense. Religious homogeneity, as it was for instance favored by the Mamelukes as nominal holders of the caliph title, was assured only in parts of the geographical landscape touched upon here. Seen from this perspective, the heterogeneity of the political landscape and the resulting potential for intellectual pluralism was yet another important precondition for religious missionaries as Nāsīmī was one.

Finally, a third point relevant to the work of Nāsīmī is the question of language. The Mongol invasions and the collapse of Mongol rule had left a landscape in which Turkic idioms became more and more important. It is only from the end of the 13th century onward that the use of Oghuz Turkic variants as literary languages began to spread. This was, of course, one of the prerequisites that allowed Nāsīmī to appear as a poet who not only performed in the traditional literary languages of the Islamic world, Arabic and Persian but also in his own Western Oghuz idiom. Had he lived a century earlier, he might not have chosen to write in this language variety.

4.5. The Ḥurūfiya of Fazlollāh Astarābādī

After the above brief glance at the general political situation before and during ¹⁰²Nāsīmī's lifetime it is important to look in more detail at the religious movement, ¹⁰³Nāsīmī dedicated most of his energy and poems too. Many aspects of this movement, which is usually referred to as the ¹⁰⁴Ḥurūfiya, remain obscure to this day. There are several reasons for this. These include the often esoteric and secretive

character of the ¹⁰⁵Ḥurūfiya, the complexity of its doctrinal system, and the state of research, which still has not resolved many issues.

In the most general sense, what can be concluded about the ¹⁰⁶Ḥurūfiya regardless of its various interpretations, is that it concentrated on the Quran and the other fundamental texts and oral traditions that were (and in fact are still today) at the core of mainstream Islam. In order to understand the ¹⁰⁷Ḥurūfiya movement, it is helpful to bring to mind the importance of these texts.

On one hand, speculating and writing about these texts was tantamount to addressing the largest audience imaginable. For everybody in the post-Genghizid Islamic sphere was supposed to have, and certainly had at least to a certain degree, familiarity with the classics of the Islamic mainstream. Put the other way around, anyone who came up with an idea or issue that he wanted to communicate to as many people as possible almost automatically had to include references to these texts. No message whatsoever could be communicated to a larger audience if it did not, at least formally, respect the habits and conventions of Islamic religious literature that had evolved since the 7th century A. D.

On the other hand, the ¹⁰⁸Ḥurūfiya's habit of making comments on the Quran and the other authoritative elements of the Islamic tradition not only offered a chance to address huge audiences and win them over, but it also involved an enormous danger. This hazard resulted from the opinion, held by large sections of the Islamicate world, that Islam had been perfected, that nothing more was to be added to it, and that the revelation and its interpretation was complete. Any suggested new interpretation of the Islamic foundational texts even concerning limited aspects of them attacked this opinion, and any attempt to introduce novelty (¹⁰⁹bid'ā) tantamounted to heresy and sin.

The history of the ¹¹⁰Ḥurūfiya and of its founder, ¹¹¹Fazlollāh of ¹¹²Astarābād is marked by the desire to communicate a new interpretation of the Islamic foundational texts to as many people as possible, and by the often violent reaction this mission brought about amongst the representatives of mainstream Islam. ¹¹³Fazlollāh and his disciples devoted much time and effort to the attempt to convince their fellow Muslims of their ¹¹⁴Ḥurūfi ideas. This alone implied the overt or hidden assertion that what was believed to be the correct interpretation of the Islamic tradition until that date was no longer true or up to date. For instance, when ¹¹⁵Fazlollāh's model pupil ¹¹⁶Aliyō'l-A'lā went to Anatolia to spread "the logos of God" (¹¹⁷kalām-e Hakik) amongst Muslim rulers,¹¹⁸ this could be understood as being tantamount to saying that the "logos of God" was not sufficiently known in these realms. It must have been clear to ¹¹⁹Fazlollāh and the ¹²⁰Ḥurūfis from the start that they would face the same kind of resistance that had been encountered by many of the prophets in the Abrahamic tradition, including the Jewish prophets, Jesus, and

¹²¹ See chapter 4.5.5.2.

Muḥammad. However, ^{mpers.}Fazlollāh decided that the time was right to present his new interpretation of the Islamic sources.

The following subsections at first discuss some of the terminological and methodological problems that inevitably appear in dealing with the ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya movement and then give a short summary of some stages in its historical development.

4.5.1. A short note about terminology

The word ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya has its origin in the classical Arabic language. It derives from the morpheme ^{arab.}hurūf, which means "letters, (alphabetic) characters" and is the plural form of ^{arab.}ḥarf ("letter of the alphabet").²⁸⁸ In the Arabic language (and other Semitic languages including Hebrew), the lexical meaning is coded by so-called roots that combine consonants in a fixed sequence. For instance, the root *S-L-M* means "peace", and *K-T-B* "to write". Accordingly, ^{arab.}ḥarf belongs to the root *H-R-F*, which apparently conveys the basic meaning "to be crooked".²⁸⁹ Thus, in a sense, the noun ^{arab.}ḥarf can be thought to owe its name to the fact that many letters of the Arabic alphabet have a warped shape.

In the grammatical system of the Arabic language, roots such as *H-R-F*, *S-L-M*, and *K-T-B* serve as the basis to form the morphological paradigm, including both nouns and verbs. The individual nominal, verbal and other forms are distinguished by their vowels (cf. ^{arab.}ḥarf ↔ ^{arab.}hurūf) and a limited number of non-vowel auxiliary morphemes (as, for instance, the prefixed consonant *m-* in the word ^{arab.}maktūb "letter, something written", from the root *K-T-B*). A large number of morphemes that show the great formal variety, display hugely different meanings and belong to various grammatical categories that may, in the end, belong to the same root. For instance, to the root *H-R-F* also belong the nouns ^{arab.}ḥirfa "trade, handicraft", and ^{arab.}ḥurf "pepperwort".²⁹⁰ In light of the fact that all these words belong to an identical root (*H-R-F*), they can, of course, be said to be related in a certain, very general sense. However, it is essential not to overestimate this latent relationship. One must not assume that belonging to the same root automatically implies semantical closeness (although sometimes it does), let alone synonymy. Many words that belong to the same Arabic root share no more than the above mentioned distant etymological connection, which is established through the roots, but not a manifest semantical

relationship on the synchronic level. Regardless of these linguistic facts, a part of the literature of the ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya postulates that a semantical relationship between the word ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya and the previously mentioned noun ^{arab.}ḥirfa existed. On the basis of this etymology, it has been argued that the ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya religious movement had an inherent closeness to trade or business circles. This was an important postulate in Soviet theories about the ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya, for these rated the role of craftsmen and traders in the movement particularly high. In a way, this helped to give the ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya similarity to a movement of workers, which was welcome to the *interpretation Sovietica*. However, this argumentation is erroneous. For although ^{arab.}ḥirfa very likely²⁹¹ belongs to the same root as ^{arab.}hurūf, it only has an etymological but no direct semantic relationship with the word ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya. ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya belongs to ^{arab.}hurūf (and therefore to ^{arab.}ḥarf), but not to ^{arab.}ḥirfa or another derivative of the *H-R-F* root.²⁹²

As to the second morphological element of the word ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya, *-iyya*, it may be used in the classical Arabic language to form abstract nouns.²⁹³ Among other things, nouns formed with this suffix denote groups of people who share the same creed or orientation. Formally, the Arabic *-iyya* morpheme is a feminine extension of so-called ^{arab.}nisba ending *-ī*. This ending forms nouns that denominate people who belong to certain things or places. For instance, a ^{arab.}Ḥurūfi denotes an individual member of the ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya movement,²⁹⁴ or can be understood as "somebody who has to do with letters". Incidentally, the ^{arab.}nisba ending also appears in such English words as Iraqi ("somebody from Iraq") and Qatari ("person from Qatar").

Thus, from the morphosemantic viewpoint, the Arabic term ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya is a group of people who have something to do with letters. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov accordingly refers to it as a *mouvement étymologiquement «lettré»*.²⁹⁵

The morphological structure of the Arabic terms ^{arab.}Ḥurūfiyya and ^{arab.}Ḥurūfi also influenced translations of the term into other languages. Many of them combine the pronunciation of the Arabic word for "letters" in the respective idioms with abstract morphemes that convey abstract meanings or are more or less similar in meaning to the Arabic *-iyya*. Examples are the English term *Hurufism*, the Russian ^{rus.}Xurufizm, the Persian ^{pers.}Ḥurūfīgīrī, the Turkish ^{tr.}Hurufiik (all denoting the

²⁸⁸ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 250. – On ^{arab.}ḥarf and ^{arab.}hurūf see Wehr 1985: 246., s.v. *ḥarf*.

²⁸⁹ See Wehr 1985: 245f., s.v. *H-R-F*.

²⁹⁰ See Wehr 1985: 246, *sub vocibus*.

²⁹¹ I have added the adverbial phrase "very likely" here in order to allow for the theoretical possibility that on a diachronic level, two or more originally different Arabic (or perhaps Semitic) roots might have blended into a single one. I do not have enough knowledge of Semitic languages to exclude such a possibility in the present case.

²⁹² Mir-Kasimov 2009: 250.

²⁹³ On this morpheme, cf. Fischer 1987: 38, 44.

²⁹⁴ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 250. Cf. Ritter 1954 (title and *passim*).

²⁹⁵ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 250.

movement), the French *Hourotfi* and the Persian ^{mpers} *Ḥorūfi* (denoting the person),²⁹⁶ Also, the Arabic form may directly be transcribed into the foreign language, as is the case in the Persian ^{mpers} *Ḥorūfiya*.²⁹⁷

The Arabic term ^{arab} *Ḥurūfiya* and the corresponding adjective-noun ^{arab} *Ḥurūfi* are used in medieval sources to denote the religious movement that ^{arab} *ʿImādoddin Nāsīmī* adhered to from very earliest times onward. If the ^{mpers} *ʿEmād Ḥorūfi* mentioned in ^{mpers} *Šarafoddin Rāmī Tabrizī*'s ^{mpers} *Anīšo ʿ-ʿOssāk* can indeed be identified as ^{arab} *ʿImādoddin Nāsīmī*, the term ^{arab} *Ḥurūfi* was probably used during ^{arab} *Nāsīmī*'s lifetime.²⁹⁸ Another early text that uses the term ^{arab} *Ḥurūfiya* is ^{arab} *Inbāʿ al-ḡumr fi-abnāʾ al-ʿumr* (which roughly translates as "Information for simple-minded people about the sons of the age") by the famous Arab historian ^{arab} *Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAškālānī* (1372–1449).²⁹⁹ As a matter of fact, ^{arab} *Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAškālānī*'s work is one of the most important sources on the ^{arab} *Ḥurūfiya*.

4.5.2. On the history and theory of *Ḥurūfi* "lettrism"

Orkhan Mir-Kasimov's designation of the ^{arab} *Ḥurūfiya* as "lettrist" movement (*mouvement étymologiquement «lettriste»*) points to a broader context of religious schools, movements, and authors who in the development of their spiritual concepts gave special importance to the properties of letters. In fact, the term "lettrism" is useful as an umbrella term because it allows the inclusion of non-Islamic as well as Islamic currents and will, therefore, be used in this sense henceforward. Without anticipating an exhaustive account of the special brand of lettrism that was invented by ^{mpers} *Fazlollāh* in the 14th century A. D., which will be discussed in more detail below,³⁰⁰ one may describe various aspects of this particular form of religious world sight in a more abstract way. These include:

I.The idea that writing, and in particular the shape, number, phonetic value of the letters of alphabets was not the result of human convention or contingency

²⁹⁶ Some of the examples quoted can be found in Huart / Tévfiq 1909; Kuli-zade 1970; Amoretti 1986: 624; Mir Feṭrūs 1999, *passim*; Macit 2007: 220.

²⁹⁷ As in Mir Feṭrūs 1999, *passim*.

²⁹⁸ See p. 164.

²⁹⁹ Ritter 1954: 7f. – The biographical data about ^{arab} *Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAškālānī* are taken from Şixıyeva 1999: 64.

³⁰⁰ See chapter 4.5.2.5.

but the expression of meaningful universal laws, which in the medieval mind were comparable to natural laws.

II.The idea that the 'laws' and regularities that can be read from any form of letter or scripture, independently from its use in words or texts, are directly related to the meaning of the ultimate source of human knowledge, which in the case of the Muslims is the *Quran*.

III.A link between the letters and mathematics, which puts the number of letters of the alphabet as well as numerical values given to each individual letter into a relationship with certain meanings or interpretations.

IV.The drawing of analogies between letters, other elements of writing and the mathematical values of letters and other phenomena, such as the human face or celestial bodies.

Although the particular shape that ^{mpers} *Fazlollāh* gave to his ^{arab} *Ḥurūfiya* was new, all of the above characteristics can be found not only in other forms of Islamic lettrism before him but also have their analogies in pre-Islamic lettrism. Therefore, in order to understand the origin of ^{mpers} *Fazlollāh*'s ^{arab} *Ḥurūfiya*, we need to look at these previous traditions. For they are likely to have shaped, consciously or unconsciously, ^{mpers} *Fazlollāh*'s mindset.

There is direct and clear evidence of the filiation of Islamic lettrism from pre-Islamic, including Christian, sources. This proof includes linguistic data, such as the Greek etymology of one of the Arabic words used to denote Islamic lettrism, ^{arab} *as-Şimīya*,³⁰¹ as well as the general knowledge about the influence of Christian, Jewish and other cultures on the emergence of Islam. Therefore, even if many elements of Islamic lettrism, including its interpretation by ^{mpers} *Fazlollāh*, cannot be linked to specific pre-Islamic antecedents, the history of pre-Islamic lettrism has prepared many aspects of the Islamic lettrist tradition. The pre-Islamic traditions of lettrism form the backdrop of the Islamic interpretations, even if their influence frequently remains invisible. This kind of visible and invisible influencing from generation to generation seems to be the outcome of one of the general laws of cultural history. Referring to the field of folklore, René Guénon (1886–1951) clad this regularity in the following words:

"Dans son folklore, le peuple conserve, sans les comprendre, les débris des traditions anciennes, remontant même parfois à un passé si lointain qu'il serait impossible de le déterminer [...]; il remplit en cela la fonction d'une sorte de mémoire collective

³⁰¹ See p. 78.

plus ou moins 'subconsciente', dont le contenu, une somme considerable de données d'ordre ésotérique, est manifestément venu d'ailleurs."³⁰²

4.5.2.1. On the pre-Islamic history of lettrism

Just as the antique, Jewish and Christian cultures prepared the ground for Muslim culture, various forms of lettrism existed in these cultures long before the spread of lettrism within Islam.

One of the sources of lettrist speculation seems to have the Greek and Roman tradition of soothsaying (μαντική τέχνη, *augurium, divination*). It played an eminent role especially in Roman culture but also had a large impact on Christianity. Perhaps the most famous examples of how elements of Roman soothsaying culture influenced the Christian religion are the legends around the victory of Constantine the Great at the Milvian Bridge A. D. 312, which have become famous due to the motto *In hoc signo vinces*.

Greek and Roman soothsaying were not necessary, and only occasionally linked to writing and scripture. It could use birds, meteorological phenomena, sacrificial animals, etc. However, even in pre-Christian Roman times, scripture was used for the art of soothsaying. The most famous example of a pre-Jewish and pre-Christian scriptural oracle probably was the Sibylline Books. In any case, the juxtaposition of scripture and soothsaying – a linkage that became crucial in many forms of Christian, Jewish and Islamic lettrism, as shall be seen below, seems to have come before the rise of the Christian religion to the dominating cultural force of the Imperium Romanum at the end of the 4th century A. D. For instance, Plotin (A. D. 203-270) describes the art of the soothsayer as “a reading of the graphic characters of nature, which reveals order and rule”.³⁰³ In Plotin’s statement, it is still nature that is supposed to contain the truth in the form of graphemes. However, one only needs to replace “nature” by “God” in order to receive a fairly exact description of one of the basic principles of Christian and Islamic lettrism, which is the derivation of universal laws from readings of the sacred texts. Even ^{pers}Fazlollāh’s way of thinking follows lines that are similar to Plotin’s assertion, which predates the ^{arab}Hurūfiyya by more than a millennium. There are apparent lines of continuity from Plotin and other neo-Platonists to the Christian and Islamic way of speculation about natural phenomena.³⁰⁴ For instance, the neo-Platonists used verses from the Homeric epics

³⁰² Quote from Jodorkowsky / Costa 2004: 21f.

³⁰³ “Ein Lesen der Schriftzeichen der Natur, welche Ordnung und Regel offenbaren” (quote from Curtius 1948: 310).

³⁰⁴ On the influence of neo-Platonist thought on Islam, cf. Halm 1982.

in support of their theorems similarly to how Bible verses were quoted by Church Fathers.³⁰⁵ One of the most influential neo-Platonists, Proklos (412-485), entreats in one of his hymns all of the Gods – who even at that time had not yet merged into the One – to offer him enlightenment from “sacrosanct books”.³⁰⁶ Here, the neo-Platonist perspective, perhaps distantly remembering the Sibylline Books, and Christian worldview seems to be almost compatible.

In a similar vein, the poet Nonnos of Panopolis (5th century A. D.) imagines in his epic poem *Dionysiaka* that the apparently personalized “primordial will” (ἀρχέγονος φρήν) had “written down the future history of the world with red ink on tablets”.³⁰⁷ This is a remarkable prefiguration of the Islamic myth about a “hidden tablet” (^{arab}lauh mahfūz), mentioned in Quran 85: 22, which became so popular with many Sufis.³⁰⁸ It is possible and not even unlikely that Nonnos was already influenced by ideas from the Judeo-Christian culture. In any case, his image reveals how deeply ideas about scripture as a source of knowledge had become ubiquitous in the fifth century.

With the spread of Christianity and the Christianization of the Roman Empire and other states, lettrism ultimately became a Christian phenomenon, too. Of course, scripture and its constitutive elements, the letters, were even more meaningful to the Christian religion than they had been in pre-Christian antiquity. For the scripture par excellence, the Bible was the most important, perhaps only, means to know the will of God.³⁰⁹

Isidor of Seville (560-636), one of the most powerful archbishops and influential scholars of the Catholic Church, was an important figure in the history of Christian lettrism. He considered some letters of the alphabet to carry a mystical meaning.³¹⁰ This is important because similar ideas about the secret or magical meaning of letters came into being in the Islamic sphere at most a century later.³¹¹ That is, the ‘magical’ interpretation of letters in the Islamic world began only shortly after it was popularized by Isidor. Incidentally, speculations about magical meanings of individual letters are also said to be found in the works of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, a Christian author who lived approximately in the late 7th and early 8th century A. D.³¹²

Particularly interesting from the point of view of comparison with the ^{pers}

³⁰⁵ Curtius 1948: 310.

³⁰⁶ “Hochheilige Bücher” (Curtius 1948: 310).

³⁰⁷ “Hat mit roter Schrift die kommende Weltgeschichte auf Tafeln verzeichnet” (quoted in Curtius 1948: 310).

³⁰⁸ Cf. Pala 1998: 254f., s. v. *Leah-i mahfūz*.

³⁰⁹ Cf. Curtius 1948: 312.

³¹⁰ Curtius 1948: 315.

³¹¹ See chapter 4.5.2.2.

³¹² Curtius 1948: 315.

Hurūfiya of ^{mpen}Fazlollāh Astarābādī are two Christian authors that were active in the 12th or early 13th century A. D. One of them was Henry of Settimello, who is assumed to have died before 1200, the other Alanus ab insulis (died 1202). Both had close relations to the Mediterranean space. Alanus ab insulis spent time as a teacher in Montpellier, and Henry of Settimello originated in Italy. That is, they lived relatively close to Andalusia, which from the 10th to the 14th century was one of the main areas of cultural exchange between Jews, Christians, and Muslims.³¹³ What these two authors thought and wrote, might have traveled to and fro between the Muslim and the Christian world.

Interestingly, Alanus ab insulis compared the human face with a book.³¹⁴ From here, we can draw a parallel to one of the basic techniques of ^{mpen}Fazlollāh's mystical speculation, namely the observation of the human face and its lines, and the invention of a calculus which associates these observations with a lecture of the Quran.³¹⁵ In three famous lines, Alanus ab insulis extends the comparison with the book to all creatures (*omnis mundi creatura*), i. e., apparently not only to human beings and their faces. The whole creation becomes readable like a book (*liber*):

*Omnis mundi creatura
Quasi liber et pictura
Nobis est et speculum*

"Every creature of the world
Is like a book and a painting
To us, and a mirror."³¹⁶

Similar ideas seem to have been quite widespread in Alanus ab insulis' times. For instance, Hugh of St. Victor (1097–1141) declared the whole creation and the God-Man to be "Books of God".³¹⁷

As for Henry of Settimello, his comparison of the human face to a book seems to be primarily interested in the possibility to guess at individuals' thoughts by looking at them:

Nam facies habitum mentis studiumque fatetur,

³¹³ Curtius 1948: 345; Jodorkowsky / Costa 2004: 21.

³¹⁴ Curtius 1948: 318.

³¹⁵ See chapters 4.5.2.5.3. and 4.5.2.6.2.

³¹⁶ Quote from Curtius 1948: 322, my English translation.

³¹⁷ "Die Schöpfung, aber auch der Gottmensch, sind «Bücher» Gottes" (Curtius 1948: 322).

*Mensque quod intus agit, nuntiat illa foris;
Internique status liber est et pagina vultus.*

"For the face professes the condition of the mind and the spirit,
And it announces to the outside what the mind ponders within.
And the face is a book and a page of the internal state."³¹⁸

Similar ideas can be compared to ^{mpen}Fazlollāh's reference to the beholding of young males' faces as a source of inspiration.³¹⁹ Apparently, there was a link between letterism, scriptural magic, and physiognomy both in the Christian and in the Islamic world.

Just as in the Islamic world, people in the Christian Middle Ages loved using numbers as symbols. In Latin Europe, mathematical symbolism was referred to as *mysteria numerorum* ("the mysteries of the numbers"), *sacramenta* ("sacraments"), *vestigia* ("traces"), and *signa* ("signs").³²⁰ The Latin term *signa* is particularly interesting for the purposes of our present investigation as its Greek equivalent σημεῖα is the etymological source of one of the Arabic terms for letter (and number) mysticism, *arab-as-Sīmiyā*.³²¹ In medieval Europe, the symbolic interpretation of numbers was an inherent part of biblical exegesis.³²² Christian numerical symbolism seems to have had as long a history as Christian scriptural mysticism.³²³ Amongst the eminent authors who have contributed to the development of Christian numerical mysticism one may mention Origenes (ca. 184-254), Hieronymus (347-420), Ambrose of Milan (339-397), Augustine (354-420), Gregor the Great (540-604), Beda Venerabilis (672-735), Hrabanus Maurus (780-856), Ruprecht von Deutz (12th century), and the already mentioned Isidor of Seville.³²⁴

³¹⁸ Quote from Curtius 1948: 318, my English translation.

³¹⁹ See p. 109.

³²⁰ Suntrup 1998: 444.

³²¹ See p. 78 and chapter 4.5.2.2.

³²² Suntrup 1998: 444.

³²³ Daxelmüller 1998: 449 even discovers its beginnings in the culture of pre-Christian Mesopotamia.

³²⁴ Suntrup 1998: 444.

4.5.2.2. Letters are equal to numbers: lettrism between antiquity and Islam

Around the beginning of the Christian calendar, a momentous novelty appeared in the history of the alphabets, and therefore of lettrism: In the Greek language, which, at least in its κοινή form, was still the most widely used language of the antique world, each letter of the alphabet received a fixed numerical value. This system was quickly transferred to the Hebrew language as well. Numismatic sources attest that the new system was used for Hebrew between A. D. 66 and 70.³²⁵ Sometime later, this method was applied to the Syriac and Arabic alphabets, too.³²⁶ Although the system had to be adapted in order to account for the different phonetic structure of the various languages, the numerical values given to the letters of the alphabet remained by and large the same from the Greek origins to the Islamic Middle Ages, and even to Ottoman times.³²⁷

Almost simultaneous with its invention this system was used to encode linguistic expressions by means of numbers, and vice versa. Possibly one of the first and arguably the most famous example of this practice is Revelation 13: 18. Here, the number "666" is referred to as the number of the "beast". Following a widespread interpretation of this New Testament passage, the number "666" encodes the name and title of the Roman emperor Nero (*Neron Caesar*). For it can be rendered into Hebrew by using the sequence of Hebrew letters *Nun-Ref-Waw-Nun* (>*Neron*) and *Qof-Samek-Ref* (>*Caesar*). The numerical values of these letters (*Nun*=50, *Ref*=200, *Waw*=6, *Qof*=100, *Samek*=60) add up to 666 (50+200+6+50 plus 100+60+200).³²⁸ Similar plays with the letters of the Greek alphabet and their numerical values appear in the Epistle of Barnabas (about 2nd century A. D.), considered to be "apocryphal" by today's mainstream churches.³²⁹

In the Jewish tradition, this art of correspondences between letters by numbers was called Gematria (from the Greek γεωμετρία).³³⁰ It was practically known to everybody who used the Hebrew language and not only to members of esoteric groups. The Muslims got to know this system either through the Syriac, Aramaic

and Hebrew lineage or directly from the Greek language. The Greek language was used in the administration of the Umayyad caliphate until the year A. D. 706.³³¹

As can be seen, both the systematic allocation of a numerical value to each letter of the alphabet and the use of this system to encode more or less secret messages was firmly established throughout the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world, both in its Greek- and Semitic-speaking cultural spheres, many centuries before the revelation of Islam. When Islam rose to become the dominant civilization in the Middle East with Arabic as its main official language, the Arabic alphabet was a system that was used both for linguistic and for mathematical encoding. By this means, linguistic meaning could be put into a relationship with numbers.

To religious minds, the enormous amount of time in which the numerical values of the letters had practically been left unchanged also could suggest the idea that the letters and their numerical values resembled a law of nature, something that was impossible to alter. From there, it was not a big step to think that, just as letters corresponded to certain numbers and *vice versa*, both might carry religious or other 'truths'. The arbitrary and conventional mechanisms that had been behind the ascription of numerical values to letters of the alphabet had simply been forgotten. This is one of the examples that show that the Dark Ages, which had destroyed philosophy and replaced it by belief-based thinking in so many ages, are not always just a metaphor.

4.5.2.3. Islamic lettrism before and outside the Ḥurūfiya

4.5.2.3.1. Ğafr

Long before ^{مغرب}Fazlollāh of ^{مغرب}Astarābād invented his ^{مغرب}Ḥurūfiya, numerous religious speculations that were based on the letters of the Arabic alphabet and their numerical values had been developed in the Islamic world. A part of these speculations was used in order to determine an alleged secret meaning of the Quran, just as it would be in ^{مغرب}Fazlollāh's ^{مغرب}Ḥurūfiya.

The origins of at least one branch of Islamic lettrism seem to be related to the Shia-Sunna split, which came about after the death of the Prophet ^{مغرب}Muḥammad.³³² Early Shiites were of the idea that ^{مغرب}Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (around 600-661) and his children kept secret knowledge about everything, and that there was an

³²⁵ Menninger 1958: 71.

³²⁶ Menninger 1958: 71.

³²⁷ Compare the table with the data for the Greek, and Hebrew alphabets given in Menninger 1958: 70 to the numerical values of the ^{مغرب}Abjad system in Pala 1998: 119.

³²⁸ Menninger 1958: 73.

³²⁹ Rebell 1992: 200f, 205.

³³⁰ Menninger 1958: 71f.

³³¹ Menninger 1958: 225.

³³² On this split see Halm 1988.

invisible and infallible book that contained all the mysteries of the universe.³³³ For instance, the famous Arab biographer ^{arab}Ibn Sa'd (784-845) ascribed to ^{arab}Ali b. Abi Tālib the authorship of a book that was supposed to reveal the hidden meaning of the Quran.³³⁴ The Shiites used such allegations as arguments to legitimize their claim to power against the other Muslim groups. At the latest from that time on, the Islamic world was familiarized with the idea that apart from the wording of the Quran and those of its meanings that were obvious and accessible to everyone, about which the Quran itself (2: 256) states, "the right guidance has been distinguished from error" (^{arab}*ḥad tabayyana 'r-rūḥu mina 'l-ḡayy*) there might be yet another meaning, which was not easily accessible or understandable to everyone but known only to the privileged.

Such Shia pretensions to possess esoteric insight into the Quran were regularly criticized during the history of Islam. Sometimes they were even ridiculed by the Shiites' Muslim opponents such as the Ḥārīḡites and the Mu'tazilites.³³⁵ For instance, the founder of the Mu'tazilite branch of Islam, which supported rather rationalist positions, ^{arab}Biṣr b. al-Mu'tamir (died 825) reproached the Shiites with being misguided by the book called "^{arab}*Ġafr*".³³⁶ A book with this title is also quoted by the Arab historian and philologist (of Iranian extraction) ^{arab}Ibn Kutayba (828-889).³³⁷ Independently of whether this book actually existed, its appearance in the sources is a very important event in the history of Arab Islamic lettrism. For the word ^{arab}*ḡafr* itself became synonymous of one of Islamic letter mysticism, or of certain of its branches.

Incidentally, the etymology of the Arabic lexeme ^{arab}*ḡafr* does not seem to be ascertained. One explanation concerning its origin was made by ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn (1332-1406). His major work, the ^{arab}*Muḥaddima* ("Introduction"), written between 1375 and 1405, is one of the most important medieval sources on Islamic lettrism. A whole chapter of the ^{arab}*Muḥaddima* (chapter 28 of book three) is dedicated to this subject.³³⁸ According to ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn, the original meaning of the Arabic word ^{arab}*ḡafr* was "young", and the book ^{arab}*Ġafr*. owed its name to the fact that it was

written on a young cow's skin.³³⁹ However, this might be folk etymology, perhaps based on the phonetic resemblance to the name of the imam ^{arab}Ġa'far aṣ-Ṣādiq (traditionally assumed to be one of the most eminent representatives of the art of ^{arab}*ḡafr*³⁴⁰), or to the word γραφή;³⁴¹ yet in theory, it could also be the other way round. In any case, there does not seem to be any further direct or indirect (by linguistic reconstruction, etc.) evidence for ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn's theory, and it is not clear whether it is based on material from ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn's own times or from the early centuries of Islam.

Following a radically different path, the Dutch Orientalist Gerlof van Vloten (1866-1903) suggested that ^{arab}*ḡafr* might be connected to the Greek γράφι.³⁴² This would mean that according to its etymological meaning, ^{arab}*ḡafr* was the art of interpreting the "graphic" appearance. The etymology on the basis of the Greek word also has the advantage of furnishing an explanation for the mystical meaning of ^{arab}*ḡafr*, as Greek letters probably made an exotic and mysterious impression on Arabs who looked at them (which they did on a large scale at least until A. D. 706, as we have seen). It is true that there does not seem to be any direct proof of this theory, either. However, it does not seem to be implausible from the phonetic point of view. For the Arab and the Greek etymon are phonetically relatively close to each other, the differences between γράφι and ^{arab}*ḡafr* essentially amount to metathesis and palatalization. Metathesis seems to be quite a universal phenomenon and also to be attested sporadically in some loans into Classical Arabic, such as ^{arab}*rafl* (a weight unit),³⁴³ which might be a derivative of the Latin *litrum*. The palatalization of original Greek or Latin /g/ (graphically: "γ") as Arabic /ḡ/ is a well-attested phenomenon, for instance in proper names such as ^{arab}*Ḡirḡis*. In favor of a Greek etymology of ^{arab}*ḡafr* could speak that one of the synonyms of ^{arab}*ʿilm al-ḡafr* "the knowledge of ^{arab}*ḡafr*", ^{arab}*as-Simiyā*, definitely has a Greek etymology, as it is derived from the Greek σμῆψα "signs" (in Middle Greek pronunciation).³⁴⁴ As the classical Arabic language did not possess the phoneme /g/, the replacement of a foreign /g/, as it appears in

³³³ Macdonald 1913: 1037.

³³⁴ Macdonald 1913: 1037.

³³⁵ Macdonald 1913: 1037.

³³⁶ Macdonald 1913: 1037.

³³⁷ Macdonald 1913: 1037.

³³⁸ Ibn Ḥaldūn 1958: 171ff. – At least one more work by ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn on lettrism has been conserved, see Matton 1977: 25-70 for its translated text.

³³⁹ Ibn Ḥaldūn 2002: 687. – This etymological explanation is also reflected in the Steingass Persian dictionary, where the meaning of the word *jafr* (which is an Arabic loan-word in Modern Persian) is given as "a lamb or calf four months old (when it begins to ruminate); doe-skin parchment for writing; the art of divining from certain characters written by Ali upon a camel's skin, which contains all events, past, present, and future; according to others, the art of making amulets or charms, said to originate with the Imām Ja'far Ṣādiq" (Steingass 1998: 365f., s.v. *jafr*).

³⁴⁰ See p. 80.

³⁴¹ See the discussion below.

³⁴² Quoted in Macdonald 1913: 1037.

³⁴³ Cf. Wehr 1985: 479, s.v. *rafl*.

³⁴⁴ Cf. the commentary by Franz Rosenthal in Ibn Ḥaldūn 1958: 171.

γράφῆ, by another Arabic phoneme was a necessity. As to the semantic side, the meaning "scripture" of the Greek word would seem to be satisfactory.

There are other possibilities to search for the etymological origin of ^{arab} *ḡafr*. One of them is the speculative assumption that the phonetic side of the Arabic word ^{arab} *ḡafr* might be related to one of the Hebrew words for letrism, Gematria (and therefore, of course, ultimately to another Greek word, γεωμετρία).³⁴⁵ However, this would be a rather challenging operation from the viewpoint of phonetics. For instance, it would involve the assumption of a reduction of the original number of four syllables to one. Also, the correspondence between the phonemes would seem to be rather vague, even if, as would be natural for Semitic languages, one would value consonants higher than vowels or even place the vowels on a secondary level. The consonant phonemes /g/, /m/, /t/, /r/ of the Hebrew and Greek original words Gematria and γεωμετρία would then be assumed to correspond to the Arabic phonemes /ḡ/, /f/, and /r/. Such a theory needs not to be totally improbable as at least some parts do not seem to pose a problem. For instance, the phoneme /r/ is the same in all the words, and the development from /g/ to /ḡ/ basically does not constitute a problem a well, as has been shown above. However, some problematic aspects would still remain. For instance, one would have to explain the omission of the /t/ and the development /m/ > /f/. As for the omission, it could possibly be explained by the desire to make the etymon conform to the usual structure of Arabic roots, which usually contain three consonants instead of four, two or another number of consonants. However, there are roots with four radicals even in Classical Arabic, so this explanation does not seem to be compelling. As regards a presumed replacement of /m/ by /f/ or development from /m/ to /f/, it implies the difficulty that the Classical Arabic language, in fact, does possess the phoneme /m/, so a priori there is no necessity to replace /m/ by another phoneme in loans. To save the hypothesis, one could point to the fact that /m/ and /f/ are at least partially phonetically related, as both involve a labial element (/m/ being a labial nasal and /f/ a labiodental). However, it has to be admitted that on the phonological level the relationship between ^{arab} *ḡafr* and Gematria / γεωμετρία remains a shaky proposal. In contrast, from the semantic and historical point of view even indirect, the relationship between these terms would not come as a surprise. For both ^{arab} *ḡafr* and Gematria / γεωμετρία denote similar phenomena, and the relatedness of all forms of Arabo-Islamic letrism to the pre-Islamic letrist tradition in the Greek and Hebrew languages is beyond debate, as has been illustrated above.

In conclusion, one may say that whether or not the word ^{arab} *ḡafr* has a non-Arabic or even non-Semitic etymology remains an open question. One of the elements that seem to speak in favor of a foreign origin seems to be that the root Ḡ-F-R, to which ^{arab} *ḡafr* might be attributed from the point of view of Arabic grammar, seems to be

³⁴⁵ On Gematria / γεωμετρία, see p. 75.

defective. Only very few other words, including the ^{arab} *ḡafr* "young" quoted by ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn, but apparently no verbs, are derived from it.³⁴⁶

The British Museum in London is said to conserve a manuscript bearing the title "The book of ^{arab} *ḡafr*" (^{arab} *Kitāb al-ḡafr* = ^{arab} *Kitāb al-ḡafr*). Secondary literature ascribes this manuscript to the sixth Shii imam, ^{arab} Ḡā'far aṣ-Ṣādiq (699 or 703-765).³⁴⁷ According to ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn, the book had been passed on to ^{arab} Ḡā'far aṣ-Ṣādiq by other members of the Alid family.³⁴⁸ A priori, the information about ^{arab} Ḡā'far aṣ-Ṣādiq's alleged authorship of this book should be treated with caution. For the manuscript, conserved in the British Museum might not be, or only in parts, the ^{arab} *Kitāb al-ḡafr* originally authored by ^{arab} Ḡā'far aṣ-Ṣādiq – if the Imam really was its author. Doubts about the authenticity of the ^{arab} *Kitāb al-ḡafr* are raised by ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn, who writes that the handing down of this book had been interrupted and that only fragments of doubtful origin had been conserved in his times.³⁴⁹

Another book entitled ^{arab} *Kitāb al-ḡafr* = ^{arab} *Kitāb al-ḡafr* is ascribed to the Arab author ^{arab} Hārūn b. Sa'd al-Iḡlī (died around 768).³⁵⁰ According to ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn, ^{arab} al-Iḡlī had received both this book and the authorization to hand down its text from ^{arab} Ḡā'far aṣ-Ṣādiq himself.³⁵¹ However, this statement by ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn about the presumed origin of the ^{arab} *Kitāb al-ḡafr* seems to be as doubtful as to the previous one. It is based on very distant and indirect information, as ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn obviously neither saw the book itself nor is even able to be positive about its existence.

Independently, the question of whether the ^{arab} *Kitāb al-ḡafr* existed or not, the name of ^{arab} Ḡā'far aṣ-Ṣādiq became inseparably linked to the practice of ^{arab} *ḡafr*³⁵² and therefore to Islamic letrism as a whole. The phonetic similarity between ^{arab} *ḡafr* and the *nomen proprium* ^{arab} Ḡā'far (aṣ-Ṣādiq), as well as the fact that both the theory of arab *ḡafr* and the name of the imam were associated with the Shia, might have played a role here. According to the Arab scholar ^{arab} ad-Damīrī (about 1344–1405) and the American Orientalist Duncan Black Macdonald (1863–1943),

³⁴⁶ For instance, Wehr 1985: 188, s.v. *ḡafr* only gives one other word, which is the noun ^{arab} *ḡufrā* "pit".

³⁴⁷ Sezgin 1967: 530. The biographical data follow Sezgin 1967: 528.

³⁴⁸ Ibn Khaldūn 1967: 209f.

³⁴⁹ Ibn Khaldūn 1967: 210; Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 687.

³⁵⁰ According to Franz Rosenthal's footnote in Ibn Khaldūn 1967: 209, the name ^{arab} Hārūn b. Sa'd al-Iḡlī was "more commonly" spelt ^{arab} Hārūn b. Sa'd. Rosenthal writes that ^{arab} Hārūn b. Sa'd had been a companion of a certain ^{arab} Ibrāhīm b. 'Abdallāh b. Ḥasan.

³⁵¹ Ibn Khaldūn 1967: 209; Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 687.

³⁵² Cf. Ibn Khaldūn 1967: 203.

the link between ^{arab}Ğa'far aṣ-Şādiq and ^{arab}Ğafr-^{arab}ğafī was already remarked by ^{arab}Ibn Kutayba.³⁵³

In Shia circles, special books with secret meanings or revelations were also ascribed to other famous figures from the Alid clan apart from ^{arab}ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and ^{arab}Ğa'far aṣ-Şādiq.³⁵⁴ These included the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, ^{arab}Fāṭima (604-632).³⁵⁵

As it seems, even more, books entitled "The book of ^{arab}Ğafr-^{arab}ğafī" (^{arab}*Kitāb al-Ğafr-^{arab}Kitāb al-Ğafī*) appeared or were at least assumed to appear, in the course of time. Once more following ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn, one of them belonged to ^{arab}al-Kindī (ca. 800-873) and was dedicated to astrology.³⁵⁶ ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn surmises that ^{arab}al-Kindī's ^{arab}*Kitāb al-Ğafr* was lost during the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258.³⁵⁷ As for other alleged "Books of ^{arab}Ğafr-^{arab}ğafī", ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn critically remarks that they never existed in his eyes.³⁵⁸ Incidentally, the proliferation of books with the title of ^{arab}Ğafr-^{arab}ğafī might constitute an indirect confirmation of the above-suggested etymology on the basis of the Greek word *φαρῆν*. For the Greek lexeme is originally a generic term, which could offer an explanation of its abundant use in Arabic titles if the etymology was correct. Apart from his critical remarks on the existence of certain "Books of ^{arab}Ğafr-^{arab}ğafī", ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn does not seem to be very fond of the literary genre of ^{arab}Ğafr-^{arab}ğafī books in general. For instance, he writes about them the following: "In most cases, the authors of these booklets are falsifiers that in this way try to come closer to feeble-minded statesmen".³⁵⁹ We should keep this in mind when we look at the way ^{pers}Fāzīllāh tried to convince various rulers of his lifetime – which largely coincides with the lifetime of ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn.³⁶⁰ It seems to have been a widespread phenomenon during the 14th century and earlier that teachers with letrist theories tried to approach rulers for support. For the genesis of ^{pers}Fāzīllāh's own letrist movement this could mean that the possibility of gaining political (and hence, financial) support for such a religious organization may have been known to him right from the beginning. In any case, the art of ^{arab}ğafī and similar speculations offered serious opportunities.

³⁵³ Macdonald 1913: 1037.

³⁵⁴ Ibn Khaldūn 1967: 203.

³⁵⁵ Macdonald 1913: 1037.

³⁵⁶ Ibn Khaldūn 1967: 194 and 209f.; Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1248. – The death year of ^{arab}al-Kindī is given according to Matton 1977: 73.

³⁵⁷ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1249.

³⁵⁸ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1248.

³⁵⁹ *Le plus souvent, les auteurs de ces feuillets sont des falsificateurs qui cherchent par ce moyen à se rapprocher des hommes d'État faibles d'esprit.* (Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1248).

³⁶⁰ See, for instance, p. 133.

If we return to the general history of ^{arab}Ğafr-^{arab}ğafī in Islam, we see that the initially more or less occasional references to ^{arab}Ğafr-^{arab}ğafī developed into a whole branch of scholarship in the course of time. These type of studies became known as ^{arab}*ʿilm al-ğafī* "the knowledge of *ğafī*".³⁶¹ According to ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn, the expression ^{arab}*ʿilm al-ğafī* was synonymous of ^{arab}*as-Stimjā* and of ^{arab}*ʿilm al-ḥurūf* "the knowledge of the letters".³⁶² Again, this is a very important remark, for it proves on the terminological level that ^{pers}Fāzīllāh's ^{arab}*Ḥurūfīya* was directly linked to ^{arab}*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*, ^{arab}*as-Stimjā*, and ^{arab}*ʿilm al-ğafī*.

One of the most influential authorities on ^{arab}*ʿilm al-ğafī* was without any doubt ^{arab}Ibn al-'Arabī (1165–1240). Among other things, he left behind "The Book of the knowledge of *al-ğafī*" (^{arab}*Kitāb ʿilm al-ğafī*).³⁶³ At least one of ^{arab}Ibn al-'Arabī's pupils, ^{arab}Sa'd ad-Dīn Ḥammū'ī (died 1252), was keenly interested in letrism, too.³⁶⁴ To ^{arab}Ibn al-'Arabī is ascribed the statement that everything could be seen as a sign of God.³⁶⁵ Among his ultimate goals was "to show how the *Ḳur'ān* manifests the reality of God in its every chapter, verse, word, and letter".³⁶⁶ These are formulations that prefigure some expressions in ^{arab}Ḥurūfī literature, and even in the divan of ^{arab}Nāsīmī.

Importantly, ^{arab}Ibn al-'Arabī's thought is likely to have influenced ^{pers}Fāzīllāh and ^{arab}Nāsīmī. Among other things, the impact can be traced to the intermediary of ^{arab}Ibn al-'Arabī's pupil ^{arab}Šadr ad-Dīn Ḳonavī (1210–1274). For ^{arab}Šadr ad-Dīn Ḳonavī was a close friend of ^{pers}Rūmī and thoroughly influenced his worldview, and ^{pers}Rūmī's verses, in turn, played an important role in the spiritual awakening of ^{pers}Fāzīllāh.³⁶⁷ One must also not forget that ^{arab}Ibn al-'Arabī was an extremely prolific writer and had many other pupils – such as ^{arab}al-Badr al-Ḥabašī (died around 1221), ^{arab}Ibn Saudakīn (died 1248) and ^{arab}ʿAlī ad-Dīn at-Tilimsānī (died 1291)³⁶⁸ – who contributed to the spread his of ideas. All this makes it very unlikely

³⁶¹ Macdonald 1913: 1038. Cf. Wehr 1985: 188, s. v. *ğafī*.

³⁶² Macdonald 1913: 1038. – For the dating of ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn's authorship, see Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1248.

³⁶³ Text edition: Arabi n. y. [ca. 1998].

³⁶⁴ In the words of William C. Chittick he "delights in expounding the symbolism of letters and numbers" (Chittick 1998–1999: 321).

³⁶⁵ Chittick 1998 4.

³⁶⁶ Chittick 1998–1999: 317 (emphasis by M. R. H.).

³⁶⁷ On the relationship between ^{arab}Ibn al-'Arabī, ^{arab}Šadr ad-Dīn Ḳonavī, and ^{pers}Rūmī, see Chittick 1998–1999: 320; Heß 2018b: 67-72. For the inspiration of ^{pers}Fāzīllāh by ^{pers}Rūmī's verses, see p. 106.

³⁶⁸ In the words of William C. Chittick he "delights in expounding the symbolism of letters and numbers" (Chittick 1998–1999: 321).

that ⁹⁰⁹Fazlollāh would not have been influenced by it, either directly or indirectly, in particular, if one considers ⁹⁰⁹Fazlollāh's strong interest in letter mysticism.

The influence that ⁹⁰⁹Ibn al-'Arabī and ⁹⁰⁹Rūmī had on ⁹⁰⁹Fazlollāh allows for an analysis of the ⁹⁰⁹Hurūfiya in the broader context of the development of intellectual currents within Islam. Together with other Sufis, ⁹⁰⁹Ibn al-'Arabī and ⁹⁰⁹Rūmī represent an important turning point in Islamic history. This turn can be described as an orientation towards mysticism (Sufism) and away from rationalist approaches, and it marked large segments of the elites. This renewed interest in Sufism seems to have begun roughly at the end of the 12th century and reached its peak during the 13th century.³⁶⁹ There were historical as well as intellectual causes of this reorientation, such as the physical annihilation of certain rationalist movements like the ⁹⁰⁹Futūva / ⁹⁰⁹Ahilik in Anatolia as a result of the Mongol conquests.³⁷⁰ In the end, both ⁹⁰⁹Fazlollāh and his pupil and successor ⁹⁰⁹Nāsīmī became part of this Sufi revival roughly a century after its heyday. Many traits of the ⁹⁰⁹Hurūfiya, both as regards predilection for plays with letters and numbers and its overall speculative and eclectic mindset, have their parallels in the unsystematic and frequently irrational and antirationalist mode of thinking that characterizes ⁹⁰⁹Ibn al-'Arabī and ⁹⁰⁹Rūmī. Crucially, there is a direct causal relationship between ⁹⁰⁹Ibn al-'Arabī's irrational approach and his love of letrism. According to the Andalusian enthusiast, the reason was only one, and very likely not the most important way to try and grasp the meaning of the Quran and understand the will of Allah. William C. Chittick emphasizes, in the eyes of ⁹⁰⁹Ibn al-'Arabī and other Sufis

“what conveys the basic message of the *Ḳur'ān* is not so much the explicit content as the psychological impact on the listener. The single most important feature of Ṣūfī poetry is beauty, a beauty that entrances and intoxicates.”³⁷¹

In the preference of emotional and aesthetic perspectives over rationalist ones, we may also find one of the reasons why ⁹⁰⁹Fazlollāh also chose to be a poet (using the pen name ⁹⁰⁹*Na'imī*) in addition to his activities as a preacher, and why the poet ⁹⁰⁹Nāsīmī was able to sing with such fervor about ⁹⁰⁹Hurūfī themes. There does not seem to be much contradiction between the emotional and intuitive technique of poetry and the pseudo-rationalist letter and number play that are so distinctive of ⁹⁰⁹Fazlollāh and which can also be found in the writings of ⁹⁰⁹Ibn al-'Arabī.

The above developments offer us an interesting way of understanding ⁹⁰⁹Hurūfiya. They mean that the arbitrariness and the irrationalism that is manifest

in its principles, especially in the light of rationalist science, were not necessarily seen as flaws. For such irrationalism was an essential part of the mainstream Sufi thought in those days. The widespread use of fantasy (⁹⁰⁹*ḥayāl*) was not an excluding alternative to the reason (⁹⁰⁹*ʿaql*) but its complement and corrective. All these faculties were united in a holistic approach where all elements of human *ἐπιστήμη* were put together in their effort to come closer to the knowledge of God. Seen from this perspective, ⁹⁰⁹*ilm al-hurūf* could offer other ways to access the divine truth that was different from the paths of merely rationalist thinking.

In addition to ⁹⁰⁹Ibn al-'Arabī and his pupils and imitators, there were other important representatives of Islamic letrism as well. One of them was ⁹⁰⁹Aḥmad al-Būnī (died 1225), who was born in present-day Algeria and died in Egypt. ⁹⁰⁹Aḥmad al-Būnī was a contemporary of ⁹⁰⁹Ibn al-'Arabī, who came through Egypt on his way from Andalusia to Syria. Theoretically, the two might even have met. ⁹⁰⁹Ibn Ḥaldūn qualifies the Andalusian mystic as one who initiated the “science of the secrets of the letters”.³⁷² ⁹⁰⁹Ibn Ḥaldūn's statement possibly means a special kind of interpretation of the Quran and other religious texts by means of letrism. For we know letrist mechanisms to have been already used for the interpretation of the Quran by ⁹⁰⁹al-Kindī in the 9th century.³⁷³

However, the most important topic of ⁹⁰⁹*ilm al-ḡafr* does not seem to have been the Quran but fortune telling.³⁷⁴ More concretely, it denoted a method of soothsaying that used the numerical equivalents of the letters of the Arabic alphabet according to the ⁹⁰⁹*Abḡad* system.³⁷⁵ This meaning given to ⁹⁰⁹*ilm al-ḡafr* seems to have been very widespread across the centuries. For instance, it is attested in the writings of the Ottoman scholar ⁹⁰⁹Kātib Çelebi (1609–1657).³⁷⁶

Yet, the most important use of ⁹⁰⁹Fazlollāh and the ⁹⁰⁹Hurūfiya made of ⁹⁰⁹*ilm al-ḡafr* / ⁹⁰⁹*ilm al-hurūf* was probably their theological speculation. To Islamic letrists of the ⁹⁰⁹Hurūfī type, looking at the letters of the Arabic alphabet, the numbers corresponding to them, and the regularities that they revealed showed a path to come closer to the language of the Prophet, and by implication to Allah himself.³⁷⁷ In order to grasp the central role that the “knowledge of the letters” played in the ⁹⁰⁹Hurūfī religion, we must recall that the conventional character of all human scripts had been partially obliterated in the post-Genghizid space. Whereas Islamic letrist in Andalusia had included the Latin alphabet alongside

³⁷² Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 172, cf. *ibid.* 181.

³⁷³ Cf. p. 92.

³⁷⁴ Pala 1998: 87, s. v. *ḡfr*. Cf. Wehr 1985: 188, s. v. *ḡfr* (“Wahrsagekunst”).

³⁷⁵ Macdonald 1913: 1038.

³⁷⁶ Macdonald 1913: 1038.

³⁷⁷ Macdonald 1913: 1038.

³⁶⁹ Chittick 1998–1999: 319. For the rise of Sufism in Anatolia, cf. also Heß 2018b.

³⁷⁰ For details, see Heß 2018b.

³⁷¹ Chittick 1998–1999: 320.

the Arabic one into their meditations,³⁷⁸ the school created by ^{مفسر}Faḫlollāh does not seem to have included non-Arabic writing into its system (the special symbols they introduced to represent certain aspects of their theory were shaped according to Arabic letters, too). The ^{عربی}Hūrūfī were either unconscious of or indifferent to the fact that the number, shape, and value of letters and all other graphic symbols is always the result of historical development and subject to social convention, and that other system of writing is used outside the Islamicate world. All the things we know today about the history of the Arabic alphabet and its conventionality, such as its filiation from other Semitic alphabets, was omitted from the discourse, either by lack of knowledge or because it would have perturbed the practice of theological speculation. This is quite surprising in view of the long-standing contacts of the Islamicate, including the post-Genghizid, world with other writing systems including Aramaic, Syriac, Greek, Uyghur, Latin, and Chinese. Only the Arabic script, including the shape and number of the letters and the numerical values ascribed to them, was regarded as relevant to the ^{عربی}Hūrūfī doctrine. The reason for this was probably that ^{مفسر}Faḫlollāh was able to read only one alphabet, the Arabic one. ^{عربی}Ibn Ḥaldūn states about this mindset, which not only characterizes the ^{عربی}Hūrūfīs but also other letrist movements, that according to it, “the letters of the alphabet indicate numerical values which by convention and nature are generally accepted to be (inherent in) them. Thus, there exists a relationship between the letters themselves as a result of the relationship of their numerical values.”³⁷⁹ And, “(magic) activity based on letter magic thus merges with that based on number magic, because there exists a relationship between letters and numbers.”³⁸⁰

In conclusion of the present subchapter, which was largely dedicated to the Islamic tradition linked to the word ^{عربی}Ġafr-^{عربی}gafr a, it makes sense to discuss possible echoes of ^{عربی}Ġafr-^{عربی}gafr in Christian Europe as well. As is shown below, there seems not to be compelling evidence that the history of ^{عربی}Ġafr-^{عربی}gafr was prolonged into Europe. However, there is much to indicate that this is a serious possibility. If – possible as the result of an extensive and specialized investigation – the influence of ^{عربی}Ġafr-^{عربی}gafr on European intellectual history can indeed be proven one day, the impact will probably prove to be quite significant.

To begin with, it may be recalled that the reality of the influence of Islamic culture on Europe in the first centuries after the Hegira is beyond discussion.³⁸¹ This particularly concerns the natural sciences. From a general point of view, it would

³⁷⁸ See p. 91.

³⁷⁹ Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 173.

³⁸⁰ Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 174.

³⁸¹ Cf. the mention of Andalusia on p. 72.

therefore not come as a total surprise if the Islamic literature on ^{عربی}Ġafr-^{عربی}gafr could actually have left its traces in the Occident.

The European group of words that contains the most likely candidate to have its origin in ^{عربی}Ġafr-^{عربی}gafr seems to be that of the French *chiffre* (to which German *Chiffre*, etc., can be related). The Arabic origin of this word seems to be universally accepted, in particular as it does not have a known etymology in any other European language.³⁸² In Old French, the word *chiffre* has at least three different meanings. These are (1) “zero” (attested from 1220 onward, orthographically represented in spellings such as *chifre*), (2) “number, digit” (from 1485) and (3) “code, secret writing” (attested in 1497–1498).³⁸³ The first of these meanings almost certainly proves that Old French *chiffre* = *chiffre*, modern French *chiffre* and their equivalents in other European languages were derived from the Classical Arabic word for “zero”, ^{عربی}sifr.³⁸⁴ The second of the above meanings can easily be assumed to have evolved by way of metonymy from the first one. However, metonymy as an explanation seems to be somewhat forced if one wants to come from the first two semanticizations to the third one.³⁸⁵ According to the etymological explanation given by Alain Rey, the meaning “code, secret writing” of the Old French word *chiffre*, which is of Arabic origin, was a secondary development of the first two, mathematical, meanings.

Of course, such a secondary development, which means that all three meanings of the Old French *chiffre* would eventually go back to ^{عربی}sifr is indeed possible. However, there is no direct proof of this theory, which is only based on hypotheses. Therefore, another hypothesis might be proposed as well. According to one such theory, there might be a more obvious explanation for the meaning (3), “code, secret writing”, which is attested for the Old French *chiffre* as early as 1497–1498. According to this etymological hypothesis, the source of the word attested in 1479–1498 and its meaning was not the Arabic lexeme *sifr* but ^{عربی}Ġafr-^{عربی}gafr. The strongest argument in favor of this interpretation seems to be the fact that the meaning “code, secret writing” can more easily be derived from ^{عربی}Ġafr-^{عربی}gafr than from ^{عربی}sifr – in fact, if ^{عربی}sifr (or European words derived from it) can be proven to have had this meaning at all. In this connection it should be recalled that in the oldest attestations of the meaning “code, secret writing” for the Old French *chiffre*, the Old French

³⁸² Rey 2010: 444, s. v. *chiffre*.

³⁸³ Rey 2010: 444, s. v. *chiffre*.

³⁸⁴ Cf. Wehr 1985: 717, s. v. *sifr*.

³⁸⁵ This is done by Rey 2010: 444, s. v. *chiffre*, who states that the meanings *écriture secrète* and *code* of the Old French *chiffre* were derived from the first two meanings. For, according to Rey, “d’après l’usage des chiffres dans la tradition ésotérique et cabalistique (notamment le zéro, doué d’un pouvoir magique), il a pris au singulier (*le chiffre*) le sens d’«écriture secrète» et «code» (1497–1498), s’appliquant par métonymie aux règles permettant son décodage.”

word appears in the *singular* – at least according to the data given by Rey.³⁸⁵ Appearing exclusively in the singular is, of course, one of the characteristics of the Arabic ^{arab} *Ġafr* → ^{arab} *ġafr*. There does not seem to be an inherent reason to assume that the meaning “code, secret writing” would be incompatible with grammatical plural marking, as the English words “code” and “secret writing” and their equivalents in other modern languages *can* actually be marked for plural.

Nevertheless, the third meaning of the French word *chiffre*, of the German *Chiffre*, etc., i. e. “code, secret writing” – has invariably been derived from the Arabic ^{arab} *šifr* to this day. Among those who adhere to this traditional etymology is the eminent Romanticist Ernst Robert Curtius (1886–1956). As to the origin of the German *Chiffre*, he writes:

„Der islamisch-spanischen Kultur verdanken wir noch eine Schriftmetapher, die hier angeschlossen sei: die Chiffre. Das ist das arabische Wort šifr. Es bedeutet «leer» und bezeichnet im arabischen Zahlensystem die Null.“³⁸⁷

This explication is given concerning “das arabische Wort šifr” seems to indicate that the Arabic etymon Curtius kept in mind must have been ^{arab} *šifr* (the háček being only a different way of transcribing the Arabic voiceless denti-alveolar emphatic fricative, which is usually transcribed as “š”). Curtius then goes on to quote various references from German literature across the centuries, including Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788), Novalis (1772–1801), and Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), in which the word *Chiffre* denotes, mostly in a figurative, symbolic and associative way, a secret code (German “Chiffreschrift”).³⁸⁸

However, against the backdrop of the above discussion of the three meanings of the Old French word *chiffre*, it would seem more likely to assume that the German word *Chiffre*, was to be linked to ^{arab} *Ġafr* → ^{arab} *ġafr* and not to ^{arab} *šifr*. This is particularly likely if one considers that the meaning “figure, the number” is rendered in German, not by ^{form} *Chiffre*, but by the phonetically and orthographically different ^{form} *Ziffer*, which is assumed to be derived from ^{arab} *šifr*.³⁸⁹

The pivotal question to ask in the whole discussion about the origin and meanings of the Old French *chiffre*, as well as the European words related to it, is whether the source of *chiffre* in the meaning “secret writing” is ^{arab} *Ġafr* → ^{arab} *ġafr*, or ^{arab} *šifr*, or whether perhaps a more complex historical process that involves both Arabic

lexemes may be assumed to have taken place. Traditionally, in modern histories of numbers and the word “zero”, the Arabic lexeme ^{arab} *Ġafr* → ^{arab} *ġafr* does not appear at all, and the only ^{arab} *šifr* is quoted as a source word of European lexemes.³⁹⁰ However, from a purely morphological point of view, some of the European forms may give rise to the idea that two source lexemes could have been involved at some point of the process. For a variety of heterogeneous lexemes from several languages has come down to us, some of which would need to be made the subject of special investigation in order to determine its source. These include the Middle Greek τζήφρα, attested by Maximos Planudes (1260–1320), who, living in Constantinople, might have had direct contact with speakers of Arabic and Persian, as well as the two Latin word families, both attested from around the 12th or 13th century),³⁹¹ of *cifra*–*cifra* (from which the Old French *chiffre* developed), and *cephirum* or *cephirum* (first attested by Leonardo da Pisa, 1170–1240), from which the Italian forms *zefiro*, *zefero*, *zero* as well as the French *zéro* and the English *zero* originated). There seem to be at least three ways by which these words have entered the European lexicon: through Byzantium, via the Iberian Peninsula (the word family of *cifra*, etc.), and through Italy (*cephirum*, etc.).³⁹²

For the time being, the question regarding the origin of the third meaning of the Old French word *chiffre* must be left unanswered. For it seems to need profound and extensive research of the relevant sources in Arabic, Latin, Romance (in particular, Spanish), and other languages, including their standard and non-standard forms, and also including a discussion about the relationship between the graphic, phonetic, and phonological levels.³⁹³ In such an investigation, questions like the following could be asked: Do the Middle Latin words *cifra* and *cifrus*, which appear from the middle of the 13th century onward, on the graphic, phonetic, and phonological level (not to speak about the semantic level) really have ^{arab} *šifr* and not ^{arab} *Ġafr* → ^{arab} *ġafr* as their source in all attested examples?³⁹⁴ Using what kind of method could one distinguish examples of European words that have ^{arab} *šifr* as their ultimate source from others that, hypothetically, could be related to, or influenced by, ^{arab} *Ġafr* → ^{arab} *ġafr*?

³⁸⁶ See the quote in footnote 385.

³⁸⁷ Curtius 1948: 349f.

³⁸⁸ Curtius 1948: 349f.

³⁸⁹ For instance, Menninger 1958: 215.

³⁹⁰ For instance, Corominas 1954: 796f., s. v. *cifra*; Menninger 1958: 215; Gómez de Silva 1985: 117, s. v. *zero* and 119, s. v. *cifra*.

³⁹¹ Curtius 1948: 349f.; Machado 1956: 602, s. v. *cifra*; Menninger 1958: 215; Rey 2010: 444, s. v. *chiffre*; Kunitzsch 1998: 461.

³⁹² Corominas 1954: 796.

³⁹³ For the difficulties and complexity such an endeavor would present, cf. Corriente 1977; Corriente 1997; Kiegel-Keicher 2005, in particular, p. 16f., 145f.

³⁹⁴ Curtius 1948: 349f. quotes these forms as going back to the Arabic ^{arab} *šifr* “zero”. The same is done for *cifra* alone by Rey 2010: 444, s. v. *chiffre*.

4.5.2.3.2. Other forms of Islamic lettrism

Islamic lettrism was very popular and appeared in countless forms besides ^{arab} *Ġa-f-^{arab} ḡgfr*. A number of these letrist activities are described in some detail by the conservative Sunni author ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn.

One of these letrist methods was called ^{arab} *ḥisāb an-nīm*.³⁹⁵ Apparently, various procedures were subsumed under this name. ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn ascribes at least one of them to the mathematician and astrologer and master of ^{arab} *as-Simjā* ^{arab} Abū 'Ab-bās b. al-Bannā' (1256–1321). ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn describes ^{arab} *ḥisāb an-nīm* basically as a kind of oracle that serves to predict the fortunes of war. The numerical equivalents of two opponents were added and divided by nine. Then one tried to predict the future according to the result.

Another magical procedure discussed by ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn is called ^{arab} *az-zā'iraḡa*.³⁹⁶ ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn states that it was invented by a certain ^{arab} *Aḥmad as-Sabtī*.³⁹⁷ ^{arab} *Aḥmad as-Sabtī* came from Ceuta and was active under the Almohad caliph ^{arab} Abū Yūsuf Ya'kūb al-Mansūr (ruled 1184–1199).³⁹⁸ The central element of ^{arab} *az-zā'iraḡa* was a concentral arrangement of celestial bodies, elements, and other things. The drawing used for ^{arab} *az-zā'iraḡa* contained a number of lines that parted from the center. On each line, a series of numbers and letters were placed. According to ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn, the practitioners of ^{arab} *az-zā'iraḡa* used this method to predict "the invisible", apparently by asking certain questions that the oracle would then answer.³⁹⁹ In a poem by ^{arab} *Aḥmad as-Sabtī* that ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn quotes, the mystic from Ceuta uses ^{arab} *az-zā'iraḡa* to make predictions about a Mahdi.⁴⁰⁰ Interestingly, this very cryptic poem also mentions a representation (of the unclear kind) "in Latin without linguistic error".⁴⁰¹ This proves that ^{arab} *Aḥmad as-Sabtī* had active cultural (and perhaps personal) contacts with Latin Europe. In his usual effort to classify all religious activities according to their compatibility with Sunni Muslim dogma,

³⁹⁵ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1201–1203. The Arabic transcription has been created by myself on the basis of the expression "ḥisāb an-nīm" in the French text.

³⁹⁶ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1202–1205. The Arabic transcription has been created by myself on the basis of the expression *la zā'iraḡa* in the French text. – For another version of ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn's text, see Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 182–227.

³⁹⁷ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1202. Cf. Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 183.

³⁹⁸ Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 183, 185. Cf. the explanations of Abdessalam Cheddadi in Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1202, according to which ^{arab} *Aḥmad as-Sabtī* lived in the 12th and 13th centuries.

³⁹⁹ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1205 ("l'invisible").

⁴⁰⁰ Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 185.

⁴⁰¹ Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 185.

^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn considered that the practitioners of ^{arab} *az-zā'iraḡa* were in error and that ^{arab} *az-zā'iraḡa* did not give reliable information about invisible things.⁴⁰² ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn added a few remarks to his chapter about ^{arab} *az-zā'iraḡa* that are not only helpful in understanding this particular form of lettrism but also the place of such practices in Muslim society in general. Concretely, he states that those who busied themselves with ^{arab} *az-zā'iraḡa* belonged to "the top layer of society".⁴⁰³ If we put all this together we may imagine certain high-class members of the Maghrebian society engaged in lettrism with the aim of acquiring knowledge of the secrets. These secrets might have been private secrets, public or state secrets, philosophical or religious secrets, – ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn's text is not precise about this point. However, the possibility to apply letrist oracles of the ^{arab} *az-zā'iraḡa* type not only to individual questions but to the foundations of religion was already there. It is only a very small step from this type of speculation to what ^{magreb} Faḡlollāh would do to the deepest questions about man, God, and the Quran. Not surprisingly, ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn's descriptions of letrist and magical practices are accompanied by a criticism of "extremist Sufis", who, in his eyes unjustifiedly, claimed to have knowledge of supernatural things that were hidden to others.⁴⁰⁴ Thus, ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn and ^{magreb} Faḡlollāh represented opposite poles in the religious landscape of their times. For ^{magreb} Faḡlollāh used precisely the kind of occult and "extremist" techniques that the Maghrebian philosopher would consider to be dangerous and possibly erroneous. It is not surprising that, as a result of their radically diverging approaches to religion, both even became direct rivals for the favor of Muslims political leaders such as Tamerlane.⁴⁰⁵

^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn also dwells on the particular branch of Islamic lettrism that was dedicated to the interpretation of the so-called "separated letters" (^{arab} *ḥurūf mukatta'a*) and their numerical values. These "separated letters" are mysterious sequences of letters that appear at the beginning of certain surahs of the Quran. An idiosyncratic interpretation of the ^{arab} *ḥurūf mukatta'a* also is central to ^{magreb} Faḡlollāh's doctrine.⁴⁰⁶ According to ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn's text, this kind of letrist speculation was already practiced by ^{arab} al-Kindī (ca. 800–873).⁴⁰⁷ ^{arab} Ibn Ḥaldūn ascribes an important stage in the history of the interpretation of the ^{arab} *ḥurūf mukatta'a* to the historian ^{arab}

⁴⁰² Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1205: "Mais sur ce point, ils [i.e., the practitioners of ^{arab} *az-zā'iraḡa* – M. R. H.] sont dans l'erreur". Cf. Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1206.

⁴⁰³ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1205 ("certains membres des élite").

⁴⁰⁴ "Certains soufis extrémistes sont tombés dans l'erreur en prétendant avoir des perceptions de particularités infinies [du monde céleste]. Ils ont été poussés à ces excès par l'exagération et l'égarement." (Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1206)

⁴⁰⁵ See p. 122.

⁴⁰⁶ See chapter 4.5.2.5.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 674.

as-Suhayli (1114–1185),⁴⁰⁸ arab. As-Suhayli came from Fuengirola, a city in Southern Spain that was called arab. as-Suhayl during the Arab domination. arab. As-Suhayli is the author of a commentary on the classical biography of the Prophet Muḥammad by arab. Ibn Ishāq (ca. 704-768),⁴⁰⁹ arab. Ibn Ḥaldūn writes that arab. as-Suhayli was inspired by the story about the two Jewish letrists arab. Abū Yāsir b. Aḥṭab and arab. Ḥuyayy b. Aḥṭab, which arab. Ibn Ishāq narrates.⁴¹⁰ In this story, the passage Qaran 3: 7 plays an important role, in which the expression “the mother of the Scripture” (arab. *Umm al-Kitāb*) occurs.⁴¹¹ According to arab. Ibn Ḥaldūn, it was arab. as-Suhayli who discovered for the first time that there are 14 arab. *ḥurūf muḳattaʿa*, which he arranged in a special order.⁴¹² This means that the letrist speculation of arab. as-Suhayli shows three very concrete parallels to one of mpen. Fazlollāh: Both systems are concerned with the arab. *ḥurūf muḳattaʿa*, both relate them to the number “14”, and in both the Quranic expression arab. *Umm al-Kitāb* plays an important role.

arab. Ibn Ḥaldūn’s mention of arab. al-Kindī in the context of letrism is important also from another point of view. In yet another passage of his arab. *Muḳaddima*, arab. Ibn Ḥaldūn refers to the adherents of “letrism” – at this point, he uses the term arab. *Simiyū*.⁴¹³ “They believed in the gradual descent of existence from the One.”⁴¹⁴ This is, of course, a periphrasis of one of the central dogmata of Plotin’s philosophy, of which arab. al-Kindī is known to have been one of the most important mediators in the Islamic world.⁴¹⁵ Incidentally, arab. Ibn Ḥaldūn himself gives a hint about the pre-Islamic origin of the view referred to by arab. al-Kindī, albeit he tries to choose a wording that respects the Islamic claim to be the sole source of truth: “This science originated in Islam after some time of (its existence) had passed.”⁴¹⁶ Of course, something cannot originate in Islam after some time has passed after its existence (and therefore its origin), as this would assume the existence of two origins. In fact, this sentence points to the adaptation of antique philosophy by Islamic authors. As we have already seen in the preceding paragraph, arab. al-Kindī, and mpen. Fazlollāh shared an interest in the interpretation of the arab. *ḥurūf muḳattaʿa*. If this shared interest is based on the direct or indirect influence of arab. al-Kindī on mpen. Fazlollāh (possibly by the intermediary of other Muslim authors such as arab. as-Suhayli, or

arab. Ibn al-ʿArabī), this creates some likelihood for the assumption that some of arab. al-Kindī’s ideas other ideas also trickled down to mpen. Fazlollāh in the course of the centuries. As regards “the gradual descent of existence from the One”, to which may be added the cyclical nature of Plotin’s cosmology, it does resemble certain aspects of mpen. Fazlollāh’s teaching, which also divides history into cycles.⁴¹⁷ The continuity between arab. al-Kindī and other Islamic philosophers that were influenced by the Neo-Platonist thinking and mpen. Fazlollāh’s speculative ideas about the mystical meaning of letters become even more plausible if one reads another remark made by arab. Ibn Ḥaldūn about the people who believed in “the gradual descent of existence from the One”. “They believed that verbal perfection consists of helping the spirits of the spheres and the stars (through words). The nature and secrets of the letters are alive in the words, while the words, in turn, are correspondingly alive in the created things.”⁴¹⁸ Here, we witness a direct connection between Neoplatonist figures of thought and magical interpretations of letters and words. This connection apparently existed in the Islamic world many centuries before mpen. Fazlollāh made his own letrist ideas public. Among other things, it had been established by means of the extensive translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic that began in the 9th century A. D.⁴¹⁹ Antiquity, including Neoplatonist thought finally also found its way into the Persianate world. Here, what was achieved by two members of the mpen. Sohravardī family: mpen. Yahyā ebne Ḥabaṣā as-Sohravardī (1154–1191), who is also known as arab. Ṣayḥ al-Isrāq (“The Master of the Enlightenment”) and arab. al-Maḳtūl (“The Killed One”, because he was executed for his beliefs), and mpen. Abū Ḥafṣ ʿOmar as-Sohravardī (1145–1234).⁴²⁰ Strongly influenced by Neoplatonism and the Gnosis was also arab. Ibn al-ʿArabī, in particular in his seminal half-philosophical, half-religious system, which is referred to by the name of “the unity of the being” (arab. *waḥdat al-wuḡūd*),⁴²¹ although this designation does not seem to have been used by arab. Ibn al-ʿArabī himself. Arab. Ibn al-ʿArabī influenced as good as all Sufis after him, and as for presumed Neoplatonist influences on mpen. Fazlollāh and his movement, arab. Ibn al-ʿArabī is also a particularly likely intermediary because he was also an important representative of arab. *ʿilm al-ḡayb*.⁴²²

Finally, there is a particularly interesting mention in arab. Ibn Ḥaldūn’s account

⁴⁰⁸ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 684. Cf. Cheddadi’s comment in Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1527.

⁴⁰⁹ On this biography, cf. below p. 97.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. below p. 97.

⁴¹¹ Ibn Khaldūn 1967: 206; Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 685.

⁴¹² Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 684.

⁴¹³ On this term, cf. p. 78.

⁴¹⁴ Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 171.

⁴¹⁵ On Plotin, cf. p. 70 above.

⁴¹⁶ Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 171.

⁴¹⁷ See chapter 4.5.7.1.

⁴¹⁸ Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 171f.

⁴¹⁹ Massignon / Radke 1998–1999: 315.

⁴²⁰ Cf. Massignon / Radke 1998–1999: 315. On mpen. Yahyā ebne Ḥabaṣā, see Corbin 1960: 178 and Sohravardī 1970.

⁴²¹ Massignon / Radke 1998–1999: 315.

⁴²² Cf. p. 82.

of lettrism of a certain ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī.⁴²³ Initially, ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī was a jurist of the ^{arab}Hanafi school, ^{arab}Ibn Haldūn calls him “the master of the Turkic ^{arab}Hanafis of Egypt”,⁴²⁴ which seems to indicate Turkic, possibly Qipchak, origin, as the ruling Mameluke dynasty had Qipchak Turkic roots. Later on, ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī became a mystic and for some time a member of the antinomian ^{arab}Ḳalandariya dervish movement.⁴²⁵ In the end, as ^{arab}Ibn Haldūn writes, ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī set up his own, radically antinomian and even atheistic movement, called ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqīya, which “was known for its denial of the Creator”,⁴²⁶ ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī died on April 11 or 12, 1324 in ^{arab}al-Ḳābūn,⁴²⁷ which today belongs to the city of Damascus. ^{arab}Ibn Haldūn quotes a number of verses that he ascribes to ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī, and in some of the letter and number symbolism is employed.⁴²⁸ In an apocalyptic tone (“The world is in the night, and everywhere darkness rules”), they speak about a menace to religion (“Is there nobody to defend the faith?”) and incites to social rebellion (“Men of the plains and the mountains, go to Syria!”).⁴²⁹ Structurally, ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī’s ideas are quite similar to ^{arab}Faẓlollāh’s, in addition to the fact that both movements are geographically and chronologically close to each other. Both authors experienced an initiation to the world of Sufism, then placed themselves at the head of a soteriological movement, which means that they articulated answers to what they perceived as an era of moral, religious and political disaster. Both of them use mystical discourses that involve letters and numbers. Both also belonged to socially and / or ethnically marginalized groups, ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī as a (presumed) Turk and ^{arab}Ḳalandari dervish, ^{arab}Faẓlollāh as a hat maker from a prominent jurist family. The fact that both ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī and ^{arab}Faẓlollāh were somehow involved in Islamic jurisprudence – ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī personally, ^{arab}Faẓlollāh through his father⁴³⁰ – might be a coincidence. However, it probably also facilitated their access to the foundational texts of Islam, as jurists needed to be able to read and write, especially the Qurān and other important Arabic texts, and had to be particularly meticulous in reading and interpreting them. Another interesting detail in the above-mentioned verses of ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī is that they directly address

⁴²³ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 701 (“Al-Bāġarbaqī”).

⁴²⁴ *Le maître des hanafites turcs d’Égypte* (Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 700).

⁴²⁵ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 700f.

⁴²⁶ *Cennue pour sa négation du Créateur* (Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 701).

⁴²⁷ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 701.

⁴²⁸ Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 701f.

⁴²⁹ *Le monde est dans la nuit et partout règnent les ténèbres ... N’y-a-t-il personne pour défendre la foi? ... Hommes des plaines et des montagnes, partez pour la Syrie!* (Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 702).

⁴³⁰ See chapter 4.5.4.1.

the intellectual elites of their times.⁴³¹ If we compare this to what ^{arab}Ibn Haldūn writes about the target audience of the ^{arab}az-ẓā’irāga practitioners,⁴³² this sounds like proof of the hypothesis that lettrism anywhere and at every time throughout the Middle Ages was a pursuit of the educated classes. Possibly no parallel to ^{arab}Faẓlollāh himself but certainly to the ^{arab}Hūrūfiya movement after his death is the incitement to social unrest. In sum, the ^{arab}al-Bāġarbaqī the example shows that in the Eastern Mediterranean region lettrism had become a means for the articulation of social issues from the 14th century onward and that the creation of the ^{arab}Hūrūfiya by ^{arab}Faẓlollāh was part of a larger preexisting tendency. Even before the preacher from ^{arab}Astarābād set out for his mission, the time was ripe for it.

4.5.2.4. The Kabbalah question

One cannot write a history of Islam – and in fact, also Christian – lettrism without mentioning the Kabbalah.⁴³³ Jews transported a great number of cultural concepts between the Islamic and Christian spheres, in particular in the first centuries of Islam. The most vivid area of contact was doubtlessly Spain, where Islamic, Christian, and Jewish cultures interacted more intensely than probably anywhere else – even if the idyllic notion of a mostly peaceful, harmonic and tolerant encounter of these cultures in Andalusia has been deconstructed as the product of modern wishful thinking.⁴³⁴

Although the historical origins of the Kabbalah remain obscure, it seems to have been put to writing for the first time in the 12th century. Possibly the first Kabbalistic text was the *Sefer Ha-Bahir*, which was completed in the south of France towards the end of the 12th century. The most influential Kabbalistic text is undoubtedly the (*Sefer Ha-’Zohar*, which was probably created in the north of Spain around 1300.

Historical contacts between Islamic and Jewish lettrism, in general, seem to have been as old as Islam itself, i. e., they appeared long before the first Kabbalistic texts were written down. Amongst the sources that inform about contacts between Jewish and Arabic lettrists is the already mentioned biography (^{arab}*Sira*) of the Prophet ^{arab}Muḥammad by ^{arab}Ibn Ishāq. In this work, which is considered one of the authoritative texts on the life of the Prophet in mainstream Islam, ^{arab}Ibn Ishāq relates a

⁴³¹ For instance, he addresses his readers with the words: *Comprends bien, en homme habile et intelligent, ma description* (Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 702).

⁴³² See p. 91.

⁴³³ For an introduction into principles of the Kabbalah, one may still refer to Papus 1994.

⁴³⁴ Fanjul 2017. – On the importance of Andalusia for cultural contacts between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, cf. the discussion on p. 72.

meeting that took place between ^{arab}Muhammad and two Jews. These were ^{arab}Abū Yāsir b. Aḥṭab, a tribal leader, and his brother ^{arab}Hūyayy b. Aḥṭab. The subject of the discussion was the significance of the Arabic letters ²-L-M, which appear at the beginning of certain surahs of the Quran. Looking at these letters, the two Jews made a forecast about the duration of Islam.⁴³⁵ If this anecdote, which may be legendary as it was written down only more than a century after the presumed events, can be trusted, it shows that during the lifetime of the Prophet ^{arab}Muhammad Jews and Arabs were able to debate on letrism on an equal footing. This seems to indicate that letrism at that time formed a cultural substrate that was accessible to both communities.

This cultural substrate seems to have continued or have had its analogon in Andalusia. Here, direct influences between the Kabbalah and Islamic letrism have probably taken place. The fact that ^{arab}as-Suhayli lived in Andalusia in the 12th century, i. e., roughly one century before the creation of the first written Kabbalistic sources⁴³⁶ makes such an impact likely. Incidentally, Andalusian Islamic letrism had cultural contacts with Latin Europe, for instance, in the person of ^{arab}Aḥmad as-Sabīī.⁴³⁷ Jews are known to have participated in this cultural transfer from the Arabic to the Christian world and back. For instance, Rambam / Moses ben Maimon (1138–1204), who was born in Cordoba, frequently quotes Arabic works on letrism.⁴³⁸ The time gap between Islamic letrists such as ^{arab}Aḥmad as-Sabīī and ^{arab}as-Suhayli on one hand and the *Sefer Ha-Bahir* on the other could mean that the Kabbalah owed more to Islamic letrism than vice versa.

In sum, if one takes into account the similarities between the interpretation of ^{arab}as-Suhayli and the letrist doctrine of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh⁴³⁹, one would not be surprised if there also was a certain amount of similarities between ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's teachings and Kabbalah.

4.5.2.5. Some basic aspects of Ḥurūfiya letrism

Sections 4.5.2.5. and 4.5.2.6. try to summarize some important aspects of the doctrine of the ^{arab}Ḥurūfiya as it was created by ^{mpers}Fazlollāh and to discuss ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's sources of inspiration. These chapters are placed before the biographi-

⁴³⁵ See Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1464 (explication by Abdesslem Cheddadi).

⁴³⁶ See p. 92.

⁴³⁷ See p. 91.

⁴³⁸ Matton 1977: 132.

⁴³⁹ See p. 93.

cal chapter on ^{mpers}Fazlollāh⁴⁴⁰ in order to preserve the continuity to the preceding chapters about Islamic letrism in general. Readers wishing to be informed about the life of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh first are requested to skip to chapter 4.5.4. first.

4.5.2.5.1. Fazlollāh's main works

By far the most important reference texts of the ^{arab}Ḥurūfiya are the books written by ^{mpers}Fazlollāh, the founder of the movement, himself. All of them show traces of the Modern Persian dialect of the region around ^{mpers}Astārābād,⁴⁴¹ which adds difficulty to their interpretation. In order to understand them, one needs to be a thoroughly trained Iranologist. One can only speculate about the reasons why ^{mpers}Fazlollāh chose this dialect, as it seems to be unknown. Was he more fluent in his native dialect than in literary Modern Persian? Did he want to articulate himself in a way that could more easily be understood by people from his region? Did he intend to add even more mystery to his writings? Did he consider that his native dialect was psychologically or theologically more suitable for his writings?

Among ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's theological texts, certainly the most important one is the ^{mpers}*Ġāvidān-nāme* ("Book of the Eternal"),⁴⁴² which contains an elaborate description of the ^{arab}Ḥurūfi belief system. Because of its importance, it is also referred to as "The Great ^{mpers}*Ġāvidān-nāme*" (^{mpers}*Ġāvidān-nāme-ye Kabīr*).⁴⁴³ The ^{mpers}*Ġāvidān-nāme* and two other of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's books, the ^{mpers}*Mahabbat-nāme* ("Book of Love") and the ^{mpers}*ʿArš-nāme* ("Book of the Throne"), were held in such high esteem by ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's pupils that the adjective ^{mpers}*elāhī* "divine" was frequently added to them. Hence, they could either be referred to by the above-mentioned titles or as ^{mpers}*Ġāvidān-nāme-ye elāhī*, ^{mpers}*Mahabbat-nāme-ye elāhī*, and ^{mpers}*ʿArš-nāme-ye elāhī* ("Divine Book of the Eternal", "Divine Book of Love", "Divine Book of the Throne").⁴⁴⁴ The ^{mpers}*Ġāvidān-nāme*, the ^{mpers}*Mahabbat-nāme* ("Book of Love") and the ^{mpers}*ʿArš-nāme* ("Book of the Throne") were considered to be holy books by ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's pupils.⁴⁴⁵

The ^{mpers}*ʿArš-nāme-ye elāhī* is a ^{mpers}*masnavī* (narrative poem with the rhyme structure a b b c c ...) of didactic content. In it, ^{mpers}Fazlollāh discusses some of his basic

⁴⁴⁰ Chapter 4.5.4.

⁴⁴¹ Divshali / Luft 1980: 22.

⁴⁴² Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIV.

⁴⁴³ Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIV (^{1st} *Ġāvidān-i Kebīr*).

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Divshali / Luft 1980: 18 and below p. 99.

⁴⁴⁵ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 263.

religious and philosophical ideas, mostly on the basis of verses from the Quran and of traditions about the Prophet ^{arab}Muhammad / hadiths.⁴⁴⁶

The ^{pers}*Mahabbat-nāme-ye elāhi* is similar in content to the ^{pers}*Arš-nāme-ye elāhi*. as the title implies, it particularly focuses on the role of love.⁴⁴⁷

4.5.2.5.2. Letters and numbers

^{pers}Fazlollāh's version of lettrism assumed that the "letters" (^{arab}*hurūf*, singular ^{arab}*harf*) of the Arabic alphabet and the "phonemes" (^{arab}*kalimāt*, singular ^{arab}*kalima*) that correspond to each of these letters from the medium by means of which Allah first and foremost articulates himself.⁴⁴⁸ The "phonemes" have to be imagined as invisible, purely imagined counterparts of the letters (of the Arabic alphabet).⁴⁴⁹

Some commentators believe that to the mind of the ^{arab}Hurūfī, the phonetic / acoustic level was more basic than the graphics one.⁴⁵⁰ The reason behind this seems to be the speculative assumption that sounds were immaterial and therefore placed on a higher ontological level than scripture.⁴⁵¹

Certain numbers and letters are given special value in the ^{arab}Hurūfī system. Some of them are discussed briefly in this book.

⁴⁴⁶ A text of the ^{pers}*Arš-nāme-ye elāhi* is conserved in MS Pers. 46 of the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen (Divshali / Luft 1980: 19).

⁴⁴⁷ A text of the ^{pers}*Mahabbat-nāme-ye elāhi* is also conserved in MS Pers. 46 of the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen (Divshali / Luft 1980: 20f.). – The ^{pers}*Mahabbat-nāme-ye elāhi* might be identical with the ^{pers}*Mahabbat-nāme-ye gavīd* ("Eternal Book of Love") mentioned by Eilers / Heinz 1968: 228, a manuscript of which is conserved in the Staatsbibliothek Berlin. – On the importance of love in the ^{arab}Hurūfī system, see below p. 4.5.2.5.5.

⁴⁴⁸ *Pour comprendre la véritable portée de la connaissance représentée par les lettres séparées il faut rappeler que, dans les textes hurūfī, les phonèmes (kalima, pl. kalimāt) et les lettres (harf, pl. hurūf) qui leurs correspondent sont la première émanation de l'Essence divine* (Mir-Kasimov 2009: 255). – The aim of the present chapter is neither a thorough discussion of Hurūfī speculation nor of the terminology used to describe it (both as self-designations and as modern scholarly terms). Therefore, a number of conventional designations from the modern literature are used without questioning their adequateness. This also concerns the notion "phoneme" (French *phonème*), the application of which to the Hurūfī doctrine might be criticized due to its anachronistic character.

⁴⁴⁹ *Les lettres, contrepartie visible des phonèmes* (Mir-Kasimov 2009: 255).

⁴⁵⁰ For instance, Ritter 1954: 2; Kürkcüoğlu 1985: XI.

⁴⁵¹ Ritter 1954: 2.

A particular important place is given to the number "7".⁴⁵² It has a fundamentally important symbolic value because 7 is the number of verses of the first surah of the Quran (^{arab}*al-Fāṭiha*). Multiples of 7 play also an important role in ^{arab}Hurūfī theology. For instance, "7" and its multiples are central constituents in the ^{arab}Hurūfī theory about the human face.⁴⁵³

In connection with the interpretation of the human face, the numbers "28" and "32" are also given a particular meaning. Importantly, 28 is the number of the "letters" (^{arab}*hurūf*) of the Arabic alphabet (if one disregards the digraph ^{arab}*Lām-Alif*, *ﻻ*), to which the movement owes its name, and of course also a multiple of 7. 32 is the number of letters in the variant of the Arabic alphabet that was used to write Modern Persian. The difference comes into being as the result of the additional four letters (more precisely: variants of letters that are enhanced by diacritic marks) *ﻻ*, *ﻻ*, *ﻻ*, and *ﻻ*, which are necessary to represent Persian phonemes that do not exist in the Classical Arabic language.

Analogies that use the numbers "28" and "32" were not only created between letters and the human face but for instance also between these categories and the number of body movements (singular: ^{arab}*rak'as*) during the Muslim ritual prayer. For instance, the number of obligatory ^{arab}*rak'as* per day is 17 for non-travelers but 11 for travelers, which adds up to 28.⁴⁵⁴ Non-travelers also have to perform only 15 ^{arab}*rak'as* on Fridays. This number of 15 ^{arab}*rak'as* added to the 17 non-traveler ^{arab}*rak'as* on other days give 32. Of course, these are tautologies, because the results that are to be 'proven' by adding the ^{arab}*rak'as* are given in advance, and the pseudo-mathematical operations applied are designed in such a way as to arrive at the desired results, i. e., 28 and 32. Incidentally, such operations seem to indicate that the lettrism of the ^{arab}Hurūfīya was probably not the basis of their worldview but a subserving level which aimed at making their central theological statements (including the potential equality of man and Allah) plausible to an audience whose thinking had over many centuries been conditioned to the habit of 'reading' letters, numbers, analogies, and mythemes into literally everything.

Many other numbers have symbolic values in the ^{arab}Hurūfīya's system, too. For instance, "18" is said to represent the Book of Psalms (^{pers}*Zabūr*), "22" the Pentateuch (^{pers}*Taurāt*), and "33" the ^{pers}*Gāvidān-nāme*, ^{pers}Fazlollāh's main work, which is also referred to as ^{pers}*ketāb-e Ādam* – ^{pers}*ketāb-e ādam* "The Book of Adam / man".⁴⁵⁵ Note that "33" can be mathematically analyzed as "32+1", which can then be iden-

⁴⁵² For instance, in the ^{pers}*Mahabbat-nāme-ye elāhi* (Divshali / Luft 1980: 21).

⁴⁵³ See chapter 4.5.2.5.3.

⁴⁵⁴ Kürkcüoğlu 1985: XIII.

⁴⁵⁵ Divshali / Luft 1980: 23.

tified as the numbers of the Perso-Arabic alphabet plus "one", which could be the most emblematic number of Allah.

Amongst the letters of the Arabic alphabets, ^{arab}Šād (ص) occupies a special position.⁴⁵⁶ Some ^{arab}Ḥurūfī writings say that this letter can be replaced by the letter ^{arab}Dād (ض), which looks similar.⁴⁵⁷ In this context, one should note that ^{arab}Dād is also the second consonant in ^{pers}Fazlollāh's name, which is transcribed as "z" in Modern Persian texts.

Not surprisingly, the ^{arab}ḥurūf *mukalla'a*, which according to their non-grammaticality had already been the subject of speculations for many centuries,⁴⁵⁸ played a central role in the ^{arab}Ḥurūfīya's mindset.⁴⁵⁹

4.5.2.5.3. Lines, writing, and the human face

The ^{arab}Ḥurūfīya's esoteric speculation operates on the basis of thorough observation of the anatomy of the human face. For instance, twelve anatomical points on the face are defined to describe its properties.⁴⁶⁰

The emphasis on the human face and its properties are justified, among other things, with the Quranic verse "everything will perish except for His face" (^{arab}*kullu šay'in ḥālīkun illā waḡha-hū*, from the 28th surah, *al-Kisās*, verse 88).⁴⁶¹

A unique characteristic of ^{pers}Fazlollāh's ^{arab}Ḥurūfīya is the equation of the lines on the human face with the lines created by writing, both of which are designated by the word ^{pers}*arab* *ḥaṭṭ*.⁴⁶² The only 'evidence' given for these equations seems to be the principle of analogy or correspondence itself, which, as we have seen, had underlying letrist thought for many centuries.

^{pers}Fazlollāh's fantasy assumes that seven basic lines mark the human face, both that of men and women. These are one line for the hair, two lines for the eyebrows

(left and right), and four lines for the eyelashes (left and right, above and below).⁴⁶³ In addition to these seven "mother lines", there are seven more lines that appear only on the face of men. These are the two lines of the mustache (left and right), two lines of the whiskers (left and right), two lines for the hair in the nostrils (left and right), and one line for the chin beard.⁴⁶⁴ In order to arrive at the central 'argument' of the letrist mantra, the number of these 14 lines is then multiplied by two. Formally, this is justified by arguing that both the lines themselves and the places where they appeared had to be counted.⁴⁶⁵ However, this once again seems to be a circular argument: the operation by which the result is achieved is determined by the desired result. By way of these fanciful operations, the necessary total of 28 alleged lines, ^{pers}*arab* *ḥaṭṭ*, is arrived at.⁴⁶⁶ In this way, an analogy is created between the 28 letters that constitute the Arabic alphabet (and the Quran) and the lines on the human face.

The connection between the alleged 28 lines on the face of a man and the Quran is also supported by a close reading of the first surah (^{arab}*al-Fātiḥa*). Here, ^{pers}Fazlollāh points out the fact that this surah contains seven verses. To them, he adds the seven names that are traditionally given to ^{arab}*al-Fātiḥa*. Finally, he applies the same operation as with the human face by insinuating that the resulting number of 14 must be multiplied by two, i. e., one count for the verses and the names of the surah, and one count for the places where they can be found.⁴⁶⁷ Due to its crucial role in the letrist argumentation, the first Quran surah is referred to as "the mother of the book" (^{arab}*Umm al-Kitāb*) in the ^{arab}Ḥurūfīya.⁴⁶⁸ *Per extensionem*, all this creates an analogy between the physical appearance of man on one hand and Allah and his word, the Quran, on the other hand.

^{pers}Fazlollāh did not forget to make room for his mother tongue Persian in his theory about the human face, too. He overcame the theoretical problem that Modern Persian was not written with 28 letters (as Arabic) but with 32⁶⁹ by adding the concept of the ^{pers}*istiwā* line. The lexical meanings of the word ^{pers}*istiwā* (<Arabic) include "to be symmetrical" and "to raise vertically".⁴⁷⁰ In the ^{arab}Ḥurūfī magic, the ^{pers}*istiwā* line is an imagined vertical line that divides the human face into two

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. the vision of this letter described by ^{pers}Fazlollāh in his "Book of Dreams" (see p. 108).

⁴⁵⁷ Divshali / Luft 1980: 22, who do not give the source(s) of this assertion.

⁴⁵⁸ See p. 92ff.

⁴⁵⁹ See Divshali / Luft 1980: 30, who quote texts by ^{pers}Sayyid Ishāq.

⁴⁶⁰ Divshali / Luft 1980: 23.

⁴⁶¹ This interpretation is put forward in a "Lettrist treatise" (^{pers}*Risāle-ye ḥurūfīya*, this may be the title of the work or its classification) ascribed to ^{pers}Fazlollāh, which is conserved in MS Pers. 45 of the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen (see Divshali / Luft 1980: 24).

⁴⁶² According to the ^{pers}*Mahabbat-nāme-ye elāḥī* (Divshali / Luft 1980: 21).

⁴⁶³ Kürkçuoğlu 1985: XI.

⁴⁶⁴ Kürkçuoğlu 1985: XI.

⁴⁶⁵ Kürkçuoğlu 1985: XI.

⁴⁶⁶ Kürkçuoğlu 1985: XI.

⁴⁶⁷ Kürkçuoğlu 1985: XII.

⁴⁶⁸ Kürkçuoğlu 1985: XII.

⁴⁶⁹ See p. 100.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. Wehr 1985: 617, s. v. *sawṭa*, VIII.

symmetrical halves.⁴⁷¹ This means that the human hair is split into two separate lines, which makes the number of “mother lines” increase to eight.⁴⁷² Similarly, the ^{pers} *istiwā* line also divides the chin beard line, which appears only on the face of grown-up men, into two lines. By this stratagem, a total of 16 lines can be counted on the human faces, which by the addition of the places where these lines are found once more gives the necessary number of 32.⁴⁷³

The inclusion of the number 32 and therefore the letters of the Persian alphabet into the ^{arab} Hurūfī equation of anatomical and divine categories is an absolutely crucial element in ^{pers} Fazlollāh’s home-made mystic letrism. For it undermines the superiority of the Arabic language as a means of the transmission of Allāh’s message and the discriminatory perspective that is encapsulated in it. By including the Persian language into his system of divine mathematics, ^{pers} Fazlollāh prepared the ground on which his own writings could be given the same holy status as for instance the Quran. In this context, it may also be mentioned that the Old Western Oghuz written idiom that ^{ar} Nāsīmī used was written with the 32 letters of the Perso-Arabic alphabet, too. At least from a numerological point of view, both ^{ar} Nāsīmī’s Persian and his Old West Oghuz poems, therefore, had their place in the ^{arab} Hurūfī imaginary.

The ‘theory’ according to which the analogy between the human face, the Quran, and other phenomena operates, as well as the numerous concrete pseudo-mathematical operations that are applied are entirely arbitrary and fictitious by any rational standard. They are not based on evidence and are completely useless outside a strongly belief-based worldview. In fact, they are often circular. However, the true significance of such sand table exercises might not lie in the fantasy world they try to create but in the theological message that results from it. This message is the ultimate amalgamation of the human and the ‘divine’ aspect of being (which is assumed to exist in all Abrahamic religions). As we have seen in the preceding chapters, this equalization had been prepared by several centuries of Sufi thought, but only seldom with the same vigor and provocativeness. If one sees it from this angle, all the ^{arab} Hurūfī letrist and pseudo-mathematical analogies could better be interpreted not as the basis of (theological or other) knowledge (as they provide no knowledge or evidence whatsoever on their own) but as a secondary level on which the primary theological message (which includes the dogma that man and Allāh are potentially identical) is presented to a public which cannot access reality otherwise than by means of the traditional mythological thinking, which includes letrist fantasies.

⁴⁷¹ Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIf.

⁴⁷² Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIf.

⁴⁷³ Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIf.

4.5.2.5.4. The apotheosis of the Perfect Man

The ^{arab} Hurūfīya is not a completely abstract religion or philosophy. Whereas much of its content is derived from myths and, often esoteric and not rarely bizarre, speculation, it also integrates some quite pertinent observations about human nature. For instance, ^{pers} Fazlollāh’s pupil ^{pers} Sayyid Iṣḥāk wrote in his “Book of the Dust” (^{pers} *Turūb-nāme*) that human beings were not only able to rise higher than angels but also sink lower than animals.⁴⁷⁴ How true such a statement rings if one looks not only at the undescribable massacres perpetrated by the Mongols but also at the history of the 20th and 21st centuries!

In the ^{pers} *Turūb-nāme*, ^{pers} Sayyid Iṣḥāk distinguishes five stages in the life of a human being: conception, birth, puberty, mission (^{pers} *bi’ḡat*) and the final stage, which he describes as “the transfer from the visible world to natural death” (^{pers} *naki az ‘alam-e zāher be-mout-e ṭabi’i*).⁴⁷⁵ It is only in the last two stages that man might be united with God.⁴⁷⁶

From this, it is apparent that the classical Sufi idea according to which the human soul could come closer to God by following a spiritual path was held in high esteem in the ^{arab} Hurūfīya. As to the final point of this development, though, at least some ^{arab} Hurūfīs went a step further than the Sufi mainstream as represented by ^{arab} Ibn al-‘Arabī – whom we have seen to be one of the most important intellectual sources of the ^{arab} Hurūfīya – and other mainstream Sufis.⁴⁷⁷ Although ^{arab} Ibn al-‘Arabī had already introduced the notion of “the perfect man” (^{arab} *al-insān al-kāmil*), he did not explicitly equalize man and God but only came close to this theological position. In the words of William C. Chittick, ^{arab} Ibn al-‘Arabī’s “perfect man” “is the origin and goal of the universe, the model and criterion for human development, and the guide on the path to God”⁴⁷⁸ – but not God himself. According to ^{arab} Ibn al-‘Arabī, the criterion of divinity is ultimately to be found within man, but man was not Allāh. However, it was only a small distance from such an understanding of the relationship between man and God to the radical stage on which the ^{arab} Hurūfīs identified the perfected human being (^{pers} *insān-e kāmil*) as God himself.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁴ Divshali / Luft 1980: 28.

⁴⁷⁵ Divshali / Luft 1980: 28, quoting from the ^{pers} *Turūb-nāme* according to the text in MS Pers. 45 of the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen.

⁴⁷⁶ ^{pers} *Turūb-nāme*, same source as indicated in footnote 475.

⁴⁷⁷ See p. 83f.

⁴⁷⁸ Chittick 1998–1999: 317.

⁴⁷⁹ Divshali / Luft 1980: 25, quoting a treatise (^{pers} *risāle*) of the ^{arab} Hurūfī author ^{pers} Sayyid Šarifoddin from the manuscript MS Or. Oct. 2849, fol. 621-66a of the Staatsbibliothek Berlin. – Cf. also chapter 6.1.

4.5.2.5.5. Love

Love is another principle that plays a central role in ^{pers}Fazlollāh's thinking. In the ^{pers}*Mahabbat-nāme-ye elāhī*, he praises love as the shortest way the soul can take in order to be reunited with God.⁴⁸⁰ Love is an instrument that allows one to circumvent the negative influence of the appetitive soul (^{arab}*nafs*).⁴⁸¹

Such references to love as a means to come closer to God do not come as a surprise if one considered the inspiration ^{pers}Fazlollāh had taken from ^{pers}Rūmī/^{pers}Moulānā (1207–1273).⁴⁸² ^{pers}Rūmī was probably the most emphatic advocate of love as a path to God that Sufi literature ever knew, and an opponent of rationalistic approaches to religion.⁴⁸³ If we look at ^{pers}Fazlollāh's life, the influence he got from ^{pers}Rūmī seems to have predated ^{pers}Fazlollāh's ideas about the science of letters and numbers.⁴⁸⁴ However, seen in the complete context of ^{pers}Fazlollāh's ideas, the important position of love in his thinking does raise the question of how it relates to all the mathematical operations ^{pers}Fazlollāh came up with. For at least from a modern perspective these do seem to contain quite a rationalistic dimension.

Incidentally, the strong emphasis on love made by ^{pers}Fazlollāh must have been one factor that attracted ^{arab}Nāsīmī to his religious system. For most of ^{arab}Nāsīmī's poems where ghazals, which by definition are supposed to have love as its main subject.

4.5.2.5.6. Apocalyptic drama

Like many other religious movements in post-Genghizid Iran, the ^{arab}Hūrūfiya was an apocalyptic movement.⁴⁸⁵ Like so many other Middle Eastern religious movements before and after it, it was marked by the expectation that the Day of Judgement was near. In accordance with similar earlier ideas, as can be found in early Christianity or Shii Islam, ^{pers}Fazlollāh and his followers believed that the world would soon live through a dramatic period of upheaval, in which the Messiah (^{pers}

⁴⁸⁰ Divshali / Luft 1980: 21.

⁴⁸¹ A text of the ^{pers}*Mahabbat-nāme-ye elāhī* is also conserved in MS Pers. 46 of the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen (see Divshali / Luft 1980: 19). – On the theory of ^{arab}*nafs* in Sufism cf. Massignon / Radke 1998–1999: 314.

⁴⁸² See p. 120.

⁴⁸³ For details, see Heß 2018b.

⁴⁸⁴ See p. 120ff.

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. chapter 4.5.3.

Masīh), and his opponent, the ^{pers}*Dagǧāl*, would make their appearance, before the world would ultimately be destroyed.⁴⁸⁶

This belief added urgency and drama to the teachings of ^{pers}Fazlollāh: They had to be adhered to and believed in quickly before the imminent end of the world was there. For then, it would be too late to repent, and those who followed the wrong doctrine would be punished by eternal damnation and the fire of Hell.

To a certain degree, the popularity of such Parousia expectations was probably the result of the chaotic and often catastrophic general political and societal situation in post-Genghizid Iran.⁴⁸⁷ To the many wars and massacres, natural disasters such as the plague which swept from Central Asia through the Middle East towards Europe in the middle of the 14th century were added. All this contributed to a situation in which people sought refuge in eschatological myths.

4.5.2.6. Fazlollāh's sources of inspiration

Before following some stations of ^{pers}Fazlollāh's biography in chapter 4.5.4., it is interesting to look at some answers to the question from which sources of inspiration he might have drawn in addition to the ones already discussed, such as the scriptural and philosophical tradition and the general circumstances of his times.

4.5.2.6.1. Dreams

^{pers}Fazlollāh himself believed to have found inspiration for his ideas about the special meaning of letters, as well as of other aspects of his teaching, in dreams. As shall be shown in another chapter,⁴⁸⁸ dreams are regarded as privileged access to divine knowledge in Islam and played a crucial role in ^{pers}Fazlollāh's spiritual biography. In this sense, "dreaming" has quite the opposite meaning of dreaming or day-dreaming in our modern sense. It is not an act of drifting away from clear and objective perception and knowledge, but of coming closer to it.

In many of the short notes in which ^{pers}Fazlollāh describes his dreams he uses the verb ^{pers}*eḥsās kardan* to describe his experience.⁴⁸⁹ It literally means "to feel", which reveals intuition to be an important factor in ^{pers}Fazlollāh's worldview.

⁴⁸⁶ Divshali / Luft 1980: 22.

⁴⁸⁷ See chapter 4.3.

⁴⁸⁸ 4.5.4.4.

⁴⁸⁹ For instance, in dreams nr. 32 and 73 from the "Book of Dreams", see Mir-Kasimov 2009: 283, 287.

A typical dream that is related to the letrist layer of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's thinking is one in which he describes to have seen an eye in the sky, which then took the form of the Arabic letter ^{arab}Šād (ص),⁴⁹⁰

Also by way of a dream, ^{mpers}Fazlollāh claims to have become aware of one of the central principles of the ^{arab}Ḥurūfiya, the idea that ^{arab}Ādam (man) is the place where everything becomes manifest, and everything shows man:

"I had another dream, in which the topic was that all things are the place of manifestation of man, or that man was the place of manifestation of all things (^{mpers}*hame ašyā mazhar-e ādam ast yā ādam mazhar-e hame ašyāst*)."⁴⁹¹

4.5.2.6.2. Eroticism

Another factor and motif in the genesis of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's ideas about the correspondences between the human face and other aspects of reality seem to have been eroticism. Even without any textual evidence, the mutual relationship between the lines formed by human hair and beard on one hand and letters, numbers, celestial bodies, etc. on the other hand that appears in ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's religious system gives reason to assume that he must have contemplated long and intensely the faces of men. However, there is also direct evidence to this effect. For in one dream from the "Book of Dreams", ^{mpers}Fazlollāh relates how the observation of "many young people and beardless men and youths with only freshly sprouting beards" (^{mpers}*bešyār šavānān o amradān o nau-ḥaḥḥ*), possibly in Isfahan, inspired in him the philosophical idea about the correspondence between the human face and other things.⁴⁹² Here are ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's words:

⁴⁹⁰ Dream nr. 12, see Mir-Kasimov 2009: 280.

⁴⁹¹ *J'ai vu un autre rêve ou il était question du fait que toute chose est lieu de manifestation d'Adam, ou Adam est lieu de manifestation de toute chose.* (Dream nr. 25, my translation from the French translation of Mir-Kasimov 2009: 282; the Persian text is taken from Mir-Kasimov 2009: 269).

⁴⁹² *J'ai vu beaucoup de jeunes gens, ce devait être Isfahan. Je percevais les objets matériels par [les traits] de leurs visages, je savais qu'il y a une loi et un procédé déterminés selon lequel les objets matériels se trouvent en contrepartie [des traits du visage humain]* (translation of dream nr. 14 from Mir-Kasimov 2009: 280; in my English version, I have changed only the translations of *beaucoup de jeunes gens*, ^{mpers}*bešyār šavānān o amradān o nau-ḥaḥḥ*, for the reasons indicated in the main text, and *je percevais* (Modern Persian, dialect of Astarābād: *ešās kīn*), because the verb seems to indicate a feeling or intuition rather than a direct perception – M. R. H.).

"I have seen many young people and beardless men and youths with only freshly sprouting beards, probably in Isfahan. I felt the material objects across [the features] of their faces. I knew that there is a law and a determined procedure according to which the material objects correspond [to the features of the human face]."⁴⁹³

The text tells us that the persons ^{mpers}Fazlollāh dreamed of were young and male and that he came close enough to them to be able to distinguish the length of their peach fuzz. This dream may contain one of the explanations for the central role that the human face (^{arab}*vuḡḡ*) occupies in ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's religious speculations. By looking at real or imagined (in the present case: dreamed of) faces he obviously drew some conclusions about constants of the human nature and of its relationship with the non-human elements of the universe. A key sentence in the above passage is "I felt the material objects across [the features] of their faces." This indicates that ^{mpers}Fazlollāh attained his philosophical discoveries as a result of his gazing at the boys and young men but not vice versa (gazing at them as if to control an a priori philosophical opinion). Importantly, the sentence is one of the places where ^{mpers}Fazlollāh reveals the central role of "feeling" and intuition in his worldview. In the above quote, no rational argument is the starting point for drawing any conclusions, but a dream, and an act of feeling within this dream.

If beholding the young men is the primary act in what ^{mpers}Fazlollāh relates to, then this leaves the open question of why ^{mpers}Fazlollāh should have gazed so intensely at men, young men, and especially beardless young men in the first place. A possible explanation would be conscious or subconscious homoeroticism, which is, of course, a possibility and no ascertained fact. As for the editor and translator of the above passage, Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, he does not seem to take such an interpretation into account at all. For he translates the above expression ^{mpers}*bešyār šavānān o amradān o nau-ḥaḥḥ* simply by *beaucoup de jeunes gens* ("many young people"). However, this is clearly a misleading translation, for it not only omits essential and meaning parts of the original text but also distorts the signification of the original so as to disguise the important erotic dimension. For in contrast to the original, Mir-Kasimov's rendering does not specify the gender of the referents, let alone their approximate age and beard form, all of which are given in detail in the original text. In sum, Mir-Kasimov's abridged and tendentious translation reveals a heteronormative perspective, which also dominates the overwhelming majority of the rest of the literature about the ^{arab}Ḥurūfiya.

It is, of course, well-known that ^{mpers}Fazlollāh was married more than once and

⁴⁹³ Dream nr. 14, Persian text, quoted from Mir-Kasimov 2009: 268.

had half a dozen children.⁴⁹⁴ However, having children or not obviously does not tell anything about a person's sexual nature, not to speak about bisexuality or other forms of sexual imprinting. In the Islamic Middle Ages, homosexuality was as widespread as in other cultures. The strongest and most extensive evidence comes of course from the vast amounts of sharia literature that condemns homosexuality and same-sex intercourse (^{عربى} *liwāf*): For generations of Islamic pundits could not have issued their fatwas and written thousands of pages against homosexuality had it not manifested itself on a large scale in the Islamicate societies.⁴⁹⁵ There are innumerable positive references to (mostly male, in rarer cases female) homosexuality from all periods of Islamic history, and from practically all literary genres.⁴⁹⁶ Essential traits of the way Islamicate societies dealt with homoeroticism and homosexuality seem to have been the separation into a public, controlled, and a private, not controlled, sphere as well as the use of penetration as a criterion to determine the degree of (il)legitimacy of sexual activity.⁴⁹⁷ If male homosexuality was made public and involved penetration, it was likely to cause societal or juridical sanctions. On the other hand, if the homoerotic practice did not involve penetration or other acts incriminated by the shariah law, it was sometimes tolerated. Quite certainly, the latent homoeroticism of ^{مصرى} Faḡlollāh's above dream was within the limits of societal and juridical acceptance.

4.5.2.6.3. Christianity

Another interesting source of ^{مصرى} Faḡlollāh's inspiration is the Christian religion. Sufism always seems to have been relatively open for the integration of originally non-Islamic elements within certain limits. This is, in particular, true about the Sufi revival that had reached its climax in the 13th century.⁴⁹⁸ For instance, the doctrine that Allah was ubiquitous, which was developed in some Sufi circles, could easily be

⁴⁹⁴ See chapter 4.5.4.7. below.

⁴⁹⁵ For an introduction into classical Islamic and in particular and Ottoman discourses on sexuality, including homosexuality, see Ze'evi 2006. Cf. also Erdoğan 1996; Heß 2009a.

⁴⁹⁶ See the relevant entries in Malek Chebel's monumental encyclopedias on Islamic sexuality Chebel 1997 and Chebel 2003, as well as Chebel 2004 and Chebel 2006. For male homosexuality cf. Abū Nuwās 2004, for female homosexuality Ahmet Râsim 2012 and Heß 2009.

⁴⁹⁷ See Ze'evi 2006 for details.

⁴⁹⁸ See p. 84.

used to adapt statements from outside the mainstream of the Islamic tradition,⁴⁹⁹ or even from without Islam. One of the Sufi authors who frequently made reference to Christianity – as well as to Judaism and Buddhism – in his poems was ^{مصرى} Rūmī.⁵⁰⁰ We have already seen in a number of examples how the thought and poetry of ^{مصرى} Rūmī directly influenced ^{مصرى} Faḡlollāh.⁵⁰¹

In the dreams collected in ^{مصرى} Faḡlollāh's ^{مصرى} *Noumnāme* ("Book of Dreams"), Christians and the city of Constantinople appear at various instances and ^{مصرى} Faḡlollāh claimed to have encountered Christians.⁵⁰² One of these dreams begins with a description of the beginning of Creation which is similar to the wording of the initial lines of the Gospel according to John. In the dream, the speaker (^{مصرى} Faḡlollāh) uses these words to form a question that he puts to a Christian who sits beside him. In fact, he may be quoting the Gospel in order to confront the Christian with his co-religionists' ideas about God:

"I said to the Christian who was sitting to my right that the first thing that originated in God was the word and that God is with that word. [...]"⁵⁰³

If the similarity between the above quote and the Gospel of John is accepted, this automatically means that Christian thought influenced ^{مصرى} Faḡlollāh, independently of the fictional or non-fictional character of the passage and from the perspective of the speaker. For it then proves that ^{مصرى} Faḡlollāh was familiar with or influenced by a passage from the Gospel.

Independently of the above quote from the ^{مصرى} *Noumnāme*, ^{مصرى} Faḡlollāh's familiarity with the Gospel is evident from numerous places in his ^{مصرى} *Ġāvidān-nāme*.⁵⁰⁴

Possibly, the echos of Christian theology in the ^{مصرى} *Ġāvidān-nāme* and the ^{مصرى} *Noumnāme* did not result from personal contacts with Christians or from a lecture of Christian scriptures. For Christian ideas, including the Gospel according to John, were known to Shii authors and Islamic mystics well before the time of ^{مصرى} Faḡlollāh. One of them was ^{مصرى} Yahyā ebne Ḥabaṣa as-Sohrawardī (1154–1191).⁵⁰⁵ However,

⁴⁹⁹ Chittick 1998–1999: 321.

⁵⁰⁰ Ghomi 1999: 197.

⁵⁰¹ See p. 120.

⁵⁰² Mir-Kasimov 2009: 262.

⁵⁰³ *J'ai dit à ce chrétien qui était assis à ma droite que la première chose issue de Dieu était la parole, et Dieu est avec cette parole* (translation of dream nr. 104 from Mir-Kasimov 2009: 293; my English translation from the French; for the Persian (Astarābādī) original text see Mir-Kasimov 2009: 275).

⁵⁰⁴ According to Bausani 1979: 600.

⁵⁰⁵ Sohrawardī 1970: 29f.

discussions with Christians as the one narrated in the above-quoted dream were a reality in post-Genghizid Iran during ^{mpcr}Fazlollah's lifetime. The ^{arab}Hurūfī author ^{mn}Firīsteoğlu describes such a debate, which is supposed to have taken place in the presence of the Jalairid sultan ^{arab}Şayh Uways, i. e., between 1356 and 1374.⁵⁰⁶

Christian influence on the ^{arab}Hurūfīya was also observed by Karl Binswanger.⁵⁰⁷ According to him, some ^{arab}Hurūfī rituals that used wine, bread, and cheese resemble Holy Communion.⁵⁰⁸ The ^{arab}Hurūfīya is also said to have known a kind of penance ritual.⁵⁰⁹

4.5.3. Parenthesis: Messianic movements in the post-Genghizid space

Before some stations of ^{mpcr}Fazlollah's life will be looked at in chapter 4.5.4., the survey of ideas that are likely to have shaped his ^{arab}Hurūfīya must be completed by a contextualization of this movement with other Messianic groups of its time. For what makes the ^{arab}Hurūfīya movement initiated by ^{mpcr}Fazlollah of Astarābād so unique is perhaps not its idiosyncratic interpretation of letter mysticism but its combination of lettrist speculations with Messianic aspirations that led to the articulation of an open claim to power. The Messianic character of the ^{arab}Hurūfīya is directly manifest in its teachings, as has been shown.⁵¹⁰ In this respect, the ^{arab}Hurūfīya was similar to a number of other religious movements in of its time.

Many of these movements were shaped on the model of the Nizari Ismailites (^{arab}*Nizārīyūn*), who are also known as the Assassins. Famously, the terrorist policies the Nizaris used to propagate their religion gave English the word "assassin". The ^{arab}*Nizārīyūn* were a branch of the Ismaili Shia which separated from the other Ismailis at the end of the 11th century. According to Shahzad Bashir, they were the "intellectual progenitors" both of the ^{arab}Hurūfīya and of several other Messianic movements.⁵¹¹ Among the elements that the Nizarites shared with the ^{arab}Hurūfīya one finds the conviction that the *Q*uran must not only be understood according to

its literal meaning but also figuratively.⁵¹² Besides their terrorism, the Nizarites took other ostensibly radical measures that set them apart from the majority of the Muslims. These included the abrogation of the shariah and the proclamation, in 1164, that the Day of Judgment (^{arab}*ḳiyāma*) had come.⁵¹³

In spite of the similarities between the Nizaris and the ^{arab}Hurūfīs, the latter cannot technically be regarded as a Nizari (or Ismaili) movement. One of the reasons for this is that the ^{arab}Hurūfīs venerated all twelve Shīi imams and not just seven as the Ismailis.⁵¹⁴ Incidentally, the history of the Assassins had ended with their complete annihilation at the hands of the Mongols in 1256.

Corresponding to the highly fragmented post-Genghizid political landscape, a number of new and relatively small movements of the above mentioned appeared. They are sometimes labeled "heterodox" (the term "marginal" might be preferred as it eliminates the claim to possess the "right doctrine" that etymologically is contained in the antonym "orthodox"⁵¹⁵). These new movements, which also included the Sabdarādis,⁵¹⁶ have in common that they use idiosyncratic and more or less eccentric interpretations of the Islamic tradition to legitimize their religious authority and / or political claims.⁵¹⁷ Many of them, including ^{mpcr}Fazlollah's ^{arab}Hurūfīya, promised to reform or rectify the dominant cultural and religious landscape.

4.5.4. Fazlollah of Astarābād

The history of the ^{arab}Hurūfīya movement *stricto sensu* begins with the life of its founder. It is, therefore, worthwhile to have a closer look at the life of its founder ^{mpcr}Fazlollah.

⁵⁰⁶ MS 2916 of the Mevlana Museum Konya, fol. 37b-39a. – On ^{arab}Şayh Uways, see above p. 31; on ^{mn}Firīsteoğlu and the text quoted here, see footnote 588.

⁵⁰⁷ Binswanger 1974.

⁵⁰⁸ Binswanger 1974.

⁵⁰⁹ Binswanger 1974.

⁵¹⁰ See chapter 4.5.2.5.6. and Divshali / Luft 1980: 22.

⁵¹¹ Bashir 2002: 171.

⁵¹² Bashir 2002: 170. Other similarities between the Nizaris and the ^{arab}Hurūfīya are mentioned in Huart / Tevfik 1909: XIII.

⁵¹³ Bashir 2002: 170.

⁵¹⁴ Huart / Tevfik 1909: XVI.

⁵¹⁵ On the problems associated with using the terms "heterodox" and "orthodox" in similar contexts, cf. Dressler 1999, Dressler 2002.

⁵¹⁶ Cf. p. 35.

⁵¹⁷ Cf. Halm 1988: 98; Mir-Kasimov 2009: 252.

4.5.4.1. Names and descent

According to the Arab historian ^{arab}Al-Makrīzī (1364–1442) ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh's full Arabic name is ^{arab}'Abd ar-Raḥmān Faḍlallāh Abū'l-Faḍl al-Astarābādī.⁵¹⁸ ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh's pupil and successor ^{mpcrn}Aliyū'l-A'lā adds to this the sobriquet ^{arab}Šihāb ad-Dīn,⁵¹⁹ which can be translated as "the star of the religion", "the meteor of the correct religious practice", "the falling star of the correct religious practice", "the flame of the correct religious practice", etc. This epithet may (or may not) contain an allusion to the name of ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh's birthplace,⁵²⁰ or, perhaps, to the initiating dream he is said to have had in the city of ^{mpcrn}Hvārezm.⁵²¹

As ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh was also a poet, he had to use a literary sobriquet (^{mpcrn}*maḥlas*, ^{mpcrn}*taḥallas*). His choice went for ^{mpcrn}Na'imī.⁵²² This pseudonym is derived from the Persian word ^{mpcrn}*na'im*, which has such meanings as "pleasant life, happiness, comfort."⁵²³ The lexeme is of Arabic origin and belongs to an Arabic root that has the meaning "to be pleasant" in the first stem.⁵²⁴ The same root with the same meaning also exists in Biblical Hebrew, and other parallel forms are attested in other Semitic languages as well.⁵²⁵ Hence, in a deep etymological analysis the sobriquet ^{mpcrn}Na'imī can be interpreted as having a meaning like "one who has something to do with pleasure."

Soheila Divshali and Paul Luft also mention that ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh was given the epithet ^{mpcrn}Mašhadī,⁵²⁶ which could either refer to a pilgrimage he is said to have made to Mashhad⁵²⁷ or a longer stay in it.

In a number of writings by his pupils, ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh is said to be a descendant of the seventh Shii imam, ^{arab}Mūsā al-Kāzīm (745-799).⁵²⁸ Independently of the justification of such a claim, it is one of the elements that prove that ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh was part of the Shia tradition. For similar assertions are commonplace in Shia Is-

⁵¹⁸ Ritter 1954: 7. Cf. Amoretti 1986: 632. – On ^{arab}Al-Makrīzī, cf. Wiederhold 1999 and Wiederhold 1999a.

⁵¹⁹ ^{mpcrn}Aliyū'l-A'lā quoted in Gölpınarlı 1973: 4.

⁵²⁰ Cf. p. 35.

⁵²¹ Cf. p. 35.

⁵²² Divshali / Luft 1980: 18.

⁵²³ Junker / Alavi 1986: 808, s. v. *na'im* ("glückseliges Leben", "Luxus", "Glück").

⁵²⁴ Gesenius 1962: 509, s. v. *נָעַם*.

⁵²⁵ Gesenius 1962: 509, s. v. *נָעַם*.

⁵²⁶ Divshali / Luft 1980: 18.

⁵²⁷ See p. 121.

⁵²⁸ See p. 123; Halm 1988: 99. Halm sounds doubtful as to the legitimacy of this claim, he adds to it the adverb "allegedly" (^{germ}*angeblich*).

lam, which is marked by thinking in clan structures and links religious authority to descent from the family of the Prophet Muḥammad. It is unknown whether ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh's descent from the seventh imam is really factual. From a statistical point of view at least, ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh's being a relative of ^{arab}Mūsā al-Kāzīm would not seem to be impossible given the fact that ^{arab}Mūsā al-Kāzīm alone is said to have had more than 30 children and that 541 years passed between his death and ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh's birth. If one adds the other members of the Prophet's family and their children, there could probably have been millions of descendants of ^{arab}Muḥammad during ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh's lifetime. Another version of ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh's genealogy claims him to be an offspring of the first Shii imam, ^{arab}Ali b. Abi Tālib, through the sixth imam ^{arab}Ġa'far aṣ-Ṣādiq.⁵²⁹ A genealogy that includes ^{arab}Ġa'far aṣ-Ṣādiq was, of course, important because of the role that was traditionally ascribed to this imam as a symbolic figure of Islamic letterism.⁵³⁰ One of ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh's followers, ^{mpcrn}Mīr Šarīf, even claims that ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh was a direct descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad, a ^{arab}Sayyid.⁵³¹

As for ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh's father ^{mpcrn}Bahā'ū'd-Dīn, at least one source states that he was a chief justice (^{arab}*kādī al-kudāt*) of ^{mpcrn}Astarābād.⁵³²

4.5.4.2. Birth and early life

^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh was born in 1339 or 1340⁵³³ in the city of ^{mpcrn}Astarābād on the Caspian Sea coast.⁵³⁴

⁵²⁹ Ritter 1954: 8f., quoting fol. 80b of ^{mpcrn}Mīr Fāzīlī's ^{mpcrn}*Risāle* from MS Ali Emīri Farsça 1039 of Istanbul's Millet Library.

⁵³⁰ See chapter 4.5.2.3.

⁵³¹ Gölpınarlı 1973: 4, quoting from ^{mpcrn}Mīr Šarīf's ^{arab}*Bayān al-Yāqī* ("The explanation of the factual"), the ^{mpcrn}*Ṣalāt-nāme-ye İṣkurt Dede* ("İṣkurt Dede's Book on Ritual Prayer), and the ^{mpcrn}*Risāle* of ^{mpcrn}Mīr Fāzīlī, all of which are contained in the MS Ali Emīri Farsça 1039 of Istanbul's Millet Library.

⁵³² Bashir 2002: 172.

⁵³³ The ^{mpcrn}*İstivā-nāme* ("Book of the symmetry line"), written by ^{mpcrn}Amīr Ġiyāğoddin after A. H. 846 (1442 / 1443) gives the birth year as A. H. 740 (first day: July 9, 1339; last day: June 26, 1340), see the text from MS Ali Emīri Farsça 269 of Istanbul's Millet Library quoted in Gölpınarlı 1973: 3. Most modern authors accept the birth year to be 1340: See for instance Caferoğlu 1964: 637; Bausani 1979: 600; Amoretti 1986: 632; Gölpınarlı 1991: 733; Bashir 2002: 171. In contrast, Minorsky 1964 [1958]: 250; Divshali / Luft 1980: 18 and Mir-Kasimov 2009: 250 decide in favour of the year 1339.

⁵³⁴ On ^{mpcrn}Fazlollāh's birth in ^{mpcrn}Astarābād see Gölpınarlı 1973: 4 (who quotes relevant primary sources) and Halm 1988: 99.

⁵⁵² Astarābād had become a prospering city from at least the 13th century onward. Incidentally, its history ended only in the 20th century. At that time, it was incorporated into the present-day city of ⁵⁵³ Gorgān, the center of which is a few kilometers' away from the Caspian Sea coast. In antiquity, the region around Astarābād had been known as Hyrkania (Ἰρκανία),⁵⁵⁴ which changed its name to ⁵⁵⁵ Tabaristān after the Arab occupation, and finally became known as the historical region of ⁵⁵⁶ Māzanderān. Today, the city of Gorgān is part of Iran's Golestān province, to the east of the present-day province of Māzanderān.

Hyrkania was relatively removed from the political and cultural centers of the Iranian world. Time and again, this allowed local rulers to acquire degrees of independence. For instance, in the time of the Parthian ruler Artabanos III. (who was in power about A. D. 12-38), the region is said to have had its own king.⁵⁵⁷

From the times of the Arab conquest (7th century A. D.) to the middle of the 14th century, the local dynasty of the Bāvandids managed to rule Māzanderān with varying amounts of autonomy. Their control over the region was interrupted several times, for instance, as a consequence of Ghaznavid and Hvērezmian invasions. In 1238, the Bāvandids eventually became vassals of the Mongols.⁵⁵⁸ The Bāvandid dynasty finally disappeared in 1349.⁵⁵⁹ That year, ⁵⁶⁰ Fazlollāh was about nine years of age.

⁵⁶¹ Fazlollāh is said to have learned and exerted the profession of a hat maker.⁵⁴⁰ This is an interesting piece of information if we compare it to the fact that his father Bahā'o'd-Dīn occupied the post of a ⁵⁶² *kādī al-kudātī* in Astarābād.⁵⁴¹ Apparently, ⁵⁶³ Fazlollāh was not able to inherit or continue the profession of his father. There is a number of possible reasons for this. For instance, ⁵⁶⁴ Fazlollāh might not have been the oldest son, there might have been discord between him and his father, the family might have lost the office, the post might not have been hereditary at that time in Astarābād, etc. Incidentally, we know that the office of ⁵⁶⁵ *kādī* or judge (albeit not chief justice) was hereditary in some parts of the post-Genghizid space at that time. For instance, the family of ⁵⁶⁶ Burhāneddīn, the ruler of Sivas, had inherited the post of the ⁵⁶⁷ *kādī* in that town.⁵⁴²

⁵⁵² Bosworth 1987: 839.

⁵⁵³ Cf. Treidler 1979a.

⁵⁵⁷ Altheim 1959: 11.

⁵⁵⁸ Cf. Madelung 2019 [1984 / 2011].

⁵⁵⁹ Madelung 2019 [1984 / 2011].

⁵⁶⁰ Bausani 1979: 600.

⁵⁶¹ See p. 116 above. – Halm 1988: 99 refers to the profession of ⁵⁶² Fazlollāh's father as "city judge" (⁵⁶³ *Stadtrichter*).

⁵⁶⁴ Alparslan 1977: XIII-LIIL.

In any case, information about ⁵⁶⁴ Fazlollāh's occupational life indicates a significant break in his life. One can describe it as an example of steep downward social mobility. Being a judge (⁵⁶⁵ *kādī*) was a relatively prestigious and influential social rank, which required a sophisticated education. Among other things, judges had to be able to read and write, which was a rare qualification in the Middle Ages. The ⁵⁶⁶ *kādī* acted as a kind of intermediary between the profane world and the law of Allah, which gave him power and respect. To be chief justice (⁵⁶⁷ *kādī al-kudātī*) was naturally even more prestigious and tantamount to having reached the top end of the social pyramid, with *de facto* only very few living persons, including the local ruler, above one. Being a hat maker, on the other hand, did not require to be able to read and write or much other qualification, and implied a comparatively low social status. Against the backdrop of the above information, ⁵⁶⁸ Fazlollāh appears to have rather been socially underprivileged.

This loss of social prestige, in turn, could offer one of the explanations of why he became the founder of a movement that set itself radically apart from the mainstream. For breaks in the biography, such as the loss of important caregivers, social degradation, or suffered discrimination, mark the lives of many who radicalize themselves religiously or otherwise.⁵⁴³ Seen from ⁵⁶⁹ Fazlollāh's personal perspective, becoming the self-styled prophet of a new religious school offered the promise to recapture some of the things he had been deprived of. These included the social status he had lost by not being able to remain part of the upper class. Moreover, his choice of religion as the instrument of his social resurgence held the advantage to succeed in the very area that his father had excelled in. If we assume that ⁵⁷⁰ Fazlollāh admired and esteemed his father, as was obligatory in the radically patriarchal society of his times, we can also interpret his career as a kind of indirect rapprochement to the father figure. As a prophet of his own creation, ⁵⁷¹ Fazlollāh achieved a social status that was at least comparable to his father's achievements, he entered a profession that was related to his father's (both had to do with interpreting the Quran), and, last but not least, he procured himself the means to become a respected father himself, with many women and children.⁵⁴⁴

4.5.4.3. Becoming a Sufi

During the 1350s, ⁵⁷² Fazlollāh's hometown was taken over by the Sarbadarids.⁵⁴⁵ The Sarbadarids were Shiites, with particularly strong messianic orientations. Their

⁵⁴³ These mechanisms are elucidated in Enzensberger 2005.

⁵⁴⁴ On ⁵⁷³ Fazlollāh's family, cf. section 4.5.4.7.

⁵⁴⁵ On the Sarbadarids, cf. p. 35.

system of belief and thought directly influenced ^{mpers}Fazlölläh's ideas.⁵⁴⁶ Perhaps it also played a role in his decision to become a professional mystic.

Around the year 1357, ^{mpers}Fazlölläh began to develop a profound interest in Islamic mysticism (also called Sufism).⁵⁴⁷ His subsequent pupil ^{mpers}Sayyid Ishäk claimed that one of the reasons for this new orientation was an encounter ^{mpers}Fazlölläh had with a wandering mendicant (^{mpers}*darvîš*). The dervish recited verses of the great Persian mystical poet ^{mpers}Rümi (= ^{mpers}Moulânâ or ^{mpers}Ġalâlodđin, 1207–1273).⁵⁴⁸ Among the verses were the following two lines:

mpers Az marg ê andîšî cûn ġân-e bakâ dârî
Dar ġâr koġî gonġî cûn nûr-e Hodâ dârî⁵⁴⁹

"What are you fearing from death as you have the life⁵⁵⁰ of permanence?
Why are you staying in the grave as you have the light of God?"

The rhyming couplet holds the traditional promise of the Abrahamic religions, eternal life in God. It uses central epithets that are ascribed to God in the Islamic imagery, such as being or having "light" (^{mpers}*nûr*) and "imperishability" (^{mpers}*bakâ*). It suggests to the addressed or listener that he is the holder or possessor of such eternal life / soul and the light of God. This can be understood in such a way that all of these promises are to be sought within the human self.⁵⁵¹ Hence, the two ^{mpers}Rümi lines may have given an important stimulus to the focus on this self, which later on became such a pivotal element of ^{mpers}Fazlölläh's imagination. For there are clear parallels between ^{mpers}Rümi's phrases and the ideas ^{mpers}Fazlölläh developed by himself. They stand in a continuity of thought and tradition.

Around the time when ^{mpers}Fazlölläh was impressed by the above verses, he is said to have had a teacher by the name of ^{mpers}Kamâl od-Dîn.⁵⁵² In one of his poems, ^{mpers}Fazlölläh also mentions a certain ^{mpers}Šayġ Ĥasan, the pole of the world, a "man of knowledge" (^{mpers}*koġb-e 'âlem mard-e ma'nâ Šayġ Ĥasan*) and calls him "the

one who brought me on the right path" (^{mpers}*moršed-e man*).⁵⁵³ According to ^{na}Kemâl Edib Kûrkçüoġlu, ^{mpers}Šayġ Ĥasan was a "Sufi shaykh".⁵⁵⁴ Nothing more seems to be known about either ^{mpers}Kamâl od-Dîn or ^{mpers}Šayġ Ĥasan. However, even their mentioning reflect historical facts that are meaningful. This shows that ^{mpers}Fazlölläh did not seem to have been a complete autodidact.

After his first mystical initiations, ^{mpers}Fazlölläh went on the pilgrimage to Mecca for the first time.⁵⁵⁵ Before returning home, he visited the ^{mpers}Ĥvârezm oasis.⁵⁵⁶ It is not known whether this was the trip to ^{mpers}Ĥvârezm on which ^{mpers}Fazlölläh had the famous dream in which he saw the star.⁵⁵⁷ If this was, the case, the travel could be dated to A. D. 1363 / 1364. However, ^{mpers}Fazlölläh might have visited ^{mpers}Ĥvârezm more than once.

Among the places visited by ^{mpers}Fazlölläh was also the town of ^{mpers}Yazd⁵⁵⁸ and the important Shii city Mashhad.⁵⁵⁹ In sum, the number of ^{mpers}Fazlölläh's trips and their chronology is not certain.

4.5.4.4. Fazlölläh's dreams and prophethood

In the Islamic world, dreams can be turned into a particularly effective tool for claiming religious authority. One of the reasons for this is that having dreams is supposed to be related to prophecy. The reasoning behind this strange juxtaposition seems to be based on the assumption that the dreaming human soul was free from all the contaminations, such as doubt or greed, that haunt it in the awakened state. During the time of dreams, the soul of common men, therefore, resembles the souls of the prophets, which are also supposed to be pure.⁵⁶⁰ Ibn Ĥaldûn (1332–1406) describes the religious bearing of dreams in the following terms, pointing to a hadith:

"This proves that an analogy between dreams and prophecy exists, but only God knows its extent. All perceptions of the invisible apart from the perception which

⁵⁴⁶ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 250.

⁵⁴⁷ Gölpinarlı 1973: 5; Bausani 1979: 600.

⁵⁴⁸ Bashir 2002: 172. – On Rümi, cf. Bayram 2008 and Heß 2018b.

⁵⁴⁹ Text adapted from Gölpinarlı 1973: 5, who quotes from ^{mpers}Sayyid Ishäk's ^{mpers}*Ĥ'âb-nâme* (cf. footnote 566).

⁵⁵⁰ Or "soul".

⁵⁵¹ On similar expressions in ^{na}Nasimi's poems, cf. chapter 6.2.

⁵⁵² ^{mpers}Sayyid Ishäk, ^{mpers}*Ĥ'âb-nâme*, quoted in Gölpinarlı 1973: 5.

⁵⁵³ Gölpinarlı 1973: 5f. quotes the poem from the manuscript MS Farsça 448 (fol. 114b–115b) of the library of Istanbul University.

⁵⁵⁴ ^{na}*Bâtunî şeyh* (Kûrkçüoġlu 1985: XIV).

⁵⁵⁵ Bashir 2002: 172. This was the first of a total of two pilgrimages to Mecca, cf. Divshali / Luft 1980: 18.

⁵⁵⁶ The source of this statement is again ^{mpers}Sayyid Ishäk's ^{mpers}*Ĥ'âb-nâme* (quoted by Gölpinarlı 1973: 5 from fol. 19a of the Ali Emiri Farsça 1042 manuscript).

⁵⁵⁷ See p. 122.

⁵⁵⁸ Gölpinarlı 1973: 6.

⁵⁵⁹ Bashir 2002: 172.

occurs during sleep are nullified and dissolve in the moment of prophecy and in the presence of the revelation.⁵⁵⁶

The fact that ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn and the ^{arab}Ḥurūfīs agree on the significance of dreams is quite meaningful. It shows that the theological value of dreams was accepted throughout the Islamic world across various doctrinal borders between the mainstream and conservative and the more marginal currents. In a way, ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn and ^{pers}Fāzillōh even were direct rivals. For it is well-known that ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn missionized at the court of Tamerlane. Albeit it is doubtful whether ^{pers}Fāzillōh was granted the occasion to present his ideas to Tamerlane in person, he did approach the conqueror's court.⁵⁶¹ Similar endeavors were undertaken by ^{pers}Fāzillōh's at the court of Tamerlane's son ^{pers}Mirān Šāh. The direct comparison of ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaldūn and ^{pers}Fāzillōh reveals some similarity in the motivations behind their activities, even if they were doctrinally opposed. This similarity lies in the wish to reestablish legitimate forms of Islamic religious practice after the moral, spiritual and mental shock of Mongol rule.

It is against the background of the theological relevance of dreams that one must understand the pivotal role played by dreams in the life and work of ^{pers}Fāzillōh.⁵⁶² According to one statement by his pupil ^{pers}Sayyid Ishāḡ, ^{pers}Fāzillōh saw the Prophet ^{arab}Muḥammad in one of his dreams already in A. H. 756 (first day: January 16, 1355; last day: January 4, 1356).⁵⁶³ In A. H. 765 (first day: October 10, 1363; last day: September 27, 1364), ^{pers}Fāzillōh had the first in a series of spiritual dreams that step by step led him to become aware of his particular religious mission.⁵⁶⁴ The first of these dreams is said to have occurred during one of ^{pers}Fāzillōh's visits in ^{pers}Hvārezm.⁵⁶⁵ In the dream as it is described by his pupils, ^{pers}Fāzillōh sees a bright star that rises in the east. Then a beam of light from this star penetrates his right eye. After this, the star completely disappears inside the eye. After waking up

⁵⁶⁰ *Cela prouve qu'il existe une analogie entre le rêve et la prophétie, mais dont Dieu seul connaît le degré. Toutes les autres perceptions de l'invisible, hormis celle qui se produit au cours du sommeil, sont annulées et se dissipent au moment de la prophétie et en présence de la révélation* (French translation by Cheddadi, Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 1198; my English translation). Similar statements by Ibn Ḥaldūn are given in Ibn Khaldūn 2002: 681, 1192, and 1194.

⁵⁶¹ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257.

⁵⁶² Cf. Bausani 1979: 600.

⁵⁶³ ^{pers}Sayyid Ishāḡ, ^{pers}*Ḥ'ābnāme*, quoted in Gölpinarlı 1973: 5.

⁵⁶⁴ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 250.

⁵⁶⁵ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 250. There are two sources of this statements: The ^{pers}*Ḥ'ābnāme* of ^{pers}Fāzillōh's pupil ^{pers}Sayyid Ishāḡ Astarābādi, and a marginal note in ^{pers}Fāzillōh's own ^{pers}*Ḥ'ābnāme*. See the bibliographic references given Mir-Kasimov 2009, *loc. cit.*

from the dream, ^{pers}Fāzillōh stated that he heard the birds singing and realized that he was able to understand their language. From that time onward he claimed to have had the power of oneiromancy.⁵⁶⁶

Probably the most interesting element in ^{pers}Fāzillōh's dream is the reference to the "language of the birds". In the Quran (27: 16), the prophet ^{arab}Sulaymān states that "we" (i. e., probably either himself or a group of referents that includes himself) "have been taught the language of the birds" (^{arab}*ullimnā manṭiḡā ḡ-layr*). By ascribing the same skill, to understand the language of the birds, to himself, ^{pers}Fāzillōh implicitly raises himself to the rank of a prophet, just like ^{arab}Sulaymān is regarded as a prophet in Islam. The rank of the prophets, the most eminent and venerated of which is of course ^{arab}Muḥammad is believed to be the highest that can be attained by any human being. The dream of ^{pers}Hvārezm, therefore, constitutes an act of religious self-empowerment. With the communication of this dream to the outside world, ^{pers}Fāzillōh implicitly lays the foundations for placing himself above any kind of criticism that might be raised against his theses. For no other living human being can claim to have a higher position than a prophet. From a propagandist's point of view, this dream has yet another tremendous advantage. For although the claim to prophethood is clear both from the Islamic ideas about the value of dreams and ^{pers}Fāzillōh's assertion that he is able to understand the birds' language (just like ^{arab}Sulaymān did), ^{pers}Fāzillōh does not proclaim himself a prophet overtly, but only indirectly. If accused, he could always maintain that another kind of "bird language" was meant in his dream, perhaps a metaphorical understanding of language that refers to the utterances of the human soul. Hence, the dream reveals another characteristic, which is crucial for the understanding of both the ^{arab}Ḥurūfīya movement in general and ^{arab}Nāsīmī in particular: the use of veiled and equivocal language. As we have already seen, both follow the ancient Shīi and Sufi tradition in this, which assumed that there are hidden meanings of the Quran besides the obvious ones. Such an approach to semantics is, of course, a two-edged sword. While it may help its author to conceal potentially dangerous meanings in a hostile environment, the play with 'hidden' meanings also holds the danger of losing control over these meanings. This was probably one of the reasons why schisms appeared in the ^{arab}Ḥurūfīya after ^{pers}Fāzillōh's death.⁵⁶⁷

This above-quoted first initiation dream was followed by a second one, this time

⁵⁶⁶ This is the version of the dream given in the ^{pers}*Ḥ'ābnāme* of ^{pers}Fāzillōh's pupil ^{pers}'Alī Nafāḡī. A more detailed version of it is contained in ^{pers}Sayyid Ishāḡ Astarābādi's ^{pers}*Ḥ'ābnāme*. For bibliographical data on all of these sources, see Mir-Kasimov 2009: 252.

⁵⁶⁷ See chapter 4.5.5.

in Tabriz. It happened at least ten years after the one seen in ^{mpers}Hvārezm.⁵⁶⁸ In this second dream, ^{mpers}Fazlollāh reiterates the claim to dispose of knowledge directly revealed to him by God and not deduced from (human) intermediaries.⁵⁶⁹ If one accepts the account of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's pupil ^{mpers}Alī Nafāgī, the master heard a divine voice that explained to him that he was superior even to the Prophet ^{arab}Muhammad himself:

"He is the Master of the time, *the sultan of all the prophets*. Other people acquire their knowledge about elevated levels of ^{arab}Muhammad by means of imitation and by the intermediary of explanations by third parties, whereas to him that knowledge has come by the instruments of the spiritual discovery and direct observation."⁵⁷⁰

This means that from that moment onward, there was nothing and nobody in between Allah and ^{mpers}Fazlollāh. Anything said or written by any human being could not invalidate his statements. Read literally, the first sentence even abrogates the Quran, for according to this phrase, not the Prophet ^{arab}Muhammad is the "Sultan of all prophets" (^{mpers}*sultān-e hame paygāmbarān*),⁵⁷¹ but — ^{mpers}Fazlollāh. Of course, the fact that ^{mpers}Fazlollāh already presented himself as a prophet contradicts mainstream (both Sunni and Shii) Islam, which assumes ^{arab}Muhammad to be the last of all prophets. Nevertheless, ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's pupils accepted his prophethood and venerated him accordingly.⁵⁷²

The importance of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's dreams to his career became so great that

they were eventually put down in the "Book of Dreams" (^{mpers}*Noumnāme*)⁵⁷³ The systematic way in which ^{mpers}Fazlollāh collected his dreams seems to indicate that he consciously intended to make use of them for his mission. Obviously, he belonged to the people who aspired to acquire knowledge about secrets or the future by means of their dreams. About these, ^{arab}Ibn Haldūn wrote: "Many people are found who desire to learn about these things in their sleep (through dreams)."⁵⁷⁴ In contrast to ^{mpers}Fazlollāh, ^{arab}Ibn Haldūn dismisses the idea that knowledge about religious truths could be acquired in this way, as for him the only way to so-called transcendental truth was Revelation.⁵⁷⁵

Many of the dreams collected in the ^{mpers}*Noumnāme* confirms the extraordinary religious authority that ^{mpers}Fazlollāh wanted to confer upon himself. They compare him to the most important Islamic prophets, including ^{arab}Ādam, ^{arab}Ibrāhīm, ^{arab}Īsā, and ^{arab}Muhammad.⁵⁷⁶ In one particular dream ^{mpers}Fazlollāh compares himself to the imam ^{arab}Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and claims that his sword is longer than that of the Imam.⁵⁷⁷ In another one, the third Shii imam, ^{arab}Al-Ḥusayn identifies ^{mpers}Fazlollāh as the person who would unify the different confessions,⁵⁷⁸ this is a function traditionally ascribed to the Mahdī.⁵⁷⁹ According to Heinz Halm, ^{mpers}Fazlollāh described himself as the Shii imam of his times by assuming the title ^{arab}*sāhib az-zamān* ("the lord of the time").⁵⁸⁰ In yet another dream, the celestial bodies perform the circumambulation around ^{mpers}Astarābād in a way similar to the annual circumambulation (^{arab}*ṭawāf*) of the Kaaba in Mecca.⁵⁸¹ Accordingly, the House of God was not located in Mecca, but in ^{mpers}Astarābād.⁵⁸²

The already unique rank, superior to all human beings including the prophet ^{arab}Muhammad and the Shii imams, that ^{mpers}Fazlollāh bestowed upon himself by virtue of his dreams was exalted even a step further in the works of his pupils. For instance, they assumed the habit of having his name being followed by Ar-

⁵⁶⁸ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 253 quotes various ^{arab}Hurūfī sources that give the dates A. H. 775 (first day: June 6, 1373; last day: May 12, 1374), A. H. 778 (first day: May 21, 1376; last day: May 9, 1377), and A. H. 788 (first day: February 2, 1386; last day: January 21, 1387) for this dream.

⁵⁶⁹ *Il est devenu ainsi le maître (spirituel, dispensateur) d'un enseignement. Sa connaissance avait pour fondement la découverte (venant directement de) Dieu (et n'était pas acquise par étude et imitation).* "In this way, he has become the (spiritual) master (teacher) of a doctrine. His knowledge had as its basis the revelation, which came directly from God, and which had not been acquired by study and imitation." (French translation of a section about ^{mpers}Fazlollāh from ^{mpers}Alī Nafāgī's ^{mpers}*H'ābnāme*, quoted in Mir-Kasimov 2009: 253f; my English translation)

⁵⁷⁰ *C'est le Maître du temps, le roi de tous les prophètes. Autres gens acquièrent leur connaissance au sujet des degrés élevés de Muhammad par l'imitation et à travers l'explication des tiers, tandis qu'à lui cette connaissance est venue par les moyens de la découverte spirituelle et de l'observation directe.* (French translation of a passage from ^{mpers}Alī Nafāgī's ^{mpers}*H'ābnāme*, quoted in Mir-Kasimov 2009: 254; translation and emphasis by M. R. H.)

⁵⁷¹ The original Persian quote is adapted from Mir-Kasimov 2009: 255.

⁵⁷² Mir-Kasimov 2009: 263.

⁵⁷³ Mir-Kasimov 2009, *passim*. — On the "Book of Dreams", see also Bashir 2002: 172. — A text of the ^{mpers}*Noumnāme* is conserved in MS Pers. 46 of the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen (Divshali / Luft 1980: 22f).

⁵⁷⁴ Ibn Khaldūn 1967: 200.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibn Khaldūn 1967: 201.

⁵⁷⁶ Dreams nr. 20, 40, 73, 87, 120, see Mir-Kasimov 2009: 263.

⁵⁷⁷ Dream nr. 78, see the text in Mir-Kasimov 2009: 288.

⁵⁷⁸ Dream nr. 8, see Mir-Kasimov 2009: 263.

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. Halm 1988: 99, who outright identifies ^{mpers}Fazlollāh as one of the "Mahdis" of his time.

⁵⁸⁰ Halm 1988: 99.

⁵⁸¹ Dream nr. 13, see Mir-Kasimov 2009: 263.

⁵⁸² Dream nr. 28, see Mir-Kasimov 2009: 263.

abic eulogies of the type ^{arab} *galla ʿizzu-hū wa-ʿazza faḍlu-hū* “His power is mighty, and his virtue is powerful” (with the word ^{arab} *faḍl* “virtue” simultaneously being the abbreviated form of ^{pers} *Fazlollāh*’s proper name).⁵⁸³ The similarity to eulogies that in mainstream Islam refer to God, such as ^{arab} *galla ḡalātu-hū* “His might is mighty”,⁵⁸⁴ is striking. Also, ^{pers} *Fazlollāh*’s disciples usually added to the titles of the master’s works the adjective ^{pers} *elāhi* “divine”.⁵⁸⁵ Furthermore, in the ^{pers} *Korsīnāme* (“Book about the Throne”, written in 1410), ^{pers} *Fazlollāh*’s model student ^{pers} ʿAlīyoʻl-ʿAlā, referred to ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* with the honorific expression ^{pers} *zāmīr-e munīr-e Faḍl-e Rabboʻl-ʿĀlamīn* “the enlightening mind of the Grace” ^{arab} *Faḍl* of the Lord of the Worlds”.⁵⁸⁶ Of course, this is a polysemic phrase, like most assertions in the ^{arab} *Ḥurūfī* literature, and its meanings could include a divinization. Whether or not one interprets this as an instance of apotheosis depends on the semantic relationship between the word ^{pers} *Faḍl* (“Grace” / ^{pers} *Faḍl(ollāh)*), and the status constructus ^{pers} *Rabboʻl-ʿĀlamīn* “the Lord of the Worlds”. If an identity relationship is assumed between them this means that the ^{pers} *Faḍl* is identical with ^{pers} *Rabboʻl-ʿĀlamīn*, which in turn is identical with Allāh. In other words, the phrase can be read as an apotheosis of ^{pers} *Faḍl(ollāh)*. On the other hand, due to the inherent polysemy or structural ambiguity of the Persian ^{pers} *eżāfe*, ^{pers} *Rabboʻl-ʿĀlamīn* might also be the determinans of ^{pers} *Faḍl*. In this case, “the Lord of the Worlds” would not be the same as “Grace” / ^{pers} *Faḍl(ollāh)*, but would denote something that “Grace” / ^{pers} *Faḍl(ollāh)* possesses. In any case, the juxtaposition of ^{pers} *Rabboʻl-ʿĀlamīn* and the word ^{pers} *Faḍl*, which can both mean “Grace” and be used as an abbreviated form of the name ^{pers} *Faḍl(ollāh)*, is striking. Another formulation that may sound like an apotheosis is the phrase ^{pers} *ḡalāt-i ʿīk-i Faḍl-i zūʻl-ḡalāl* “martyr of the love of Faḍl, the Lord of Glory”, which is applied to ^{arab} *Nasīmī* in ^{pers} *Refīʿīs* ^{pers} *Beʿāret-nāme*.⁵⁸⁷ If ^{pers} *Faḍl* refers to ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* here, this quotation qualifies him by using the expression ^{pers} *zūʻl-ḡalāl* (“the Lord of Glory”), which in mainstream Allah is frequently used for Allah.

4.5.4.5. Missionizing

^{pers} *Fazlollāh* did not content himself with being a self-made prophet, author of

religious texts and teacher, but also proactively approached others in order to gain their support. In fact, after the initiation dream of ^{pers} *Hvārezm*, he spent much of his time traveling around, and frequently he used his journeys to seek support for his ideas and his organization.

One instrument that ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* used to enlarge his influence was his proficiency as a dream interpreter. He used it not only for his own dreams but also for dreams that other people told him. ^{pers} *Fazlollāh*’s capabilities in the art of oneirancy built a bridge between ^{pers} *Fazlollāh*’s rise of consciousness and society at large. For instance, one man once told ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* that he had dreamt his underwear went up in flames. Upon this, ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* explained to the man that he had had a nocturnal ejaculation.⁵⁸⁸ Actually, one does not need to have second sight to come up with such an interpretation of this dream. However, in the superstitious environment of ^{pers} *Fazlollāh*’s days, similar displays of oneirancy doubtlessly raised his prestige as well as the number of his supporters.

After his first advances into mysticism, ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* is believed to have lived for a number of years at Isfahan.⁵⁸⁹ *A terminus ante quem* for his arrival there is possibly given by his pupil ^{pers} *Sayyid Ishāḡ* in his ^{pers} *Hʻābnāme*. This text mentions that ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* went through a period of spiritual exercises in Isfahan’s ^{pers} *Toḡčī* quarter in the year A. H. 772 (first day: July 26, 1370; last day: July 14, 1371).⁵⁹⁰ The ascetic program during this retreat included a strict nutritional regime. This dietary asceticism gained ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* the epithet ^{pers} *ḡalāl-ḡor* “eating only things that are allowed by the religion (halal)”.⁵⁹¹

At the latest from that time onward, the ^{pers} *Toḡčī* quarter with the eponymous mosque became one of the most important centers of activities of ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* and his school. It appears in a number of primary sources. Gathering in the ^{pers} *Toḡčī* mosque with his followers, ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* continued to interpret the dreams of the local population. This helped him to gain more influential supporters.⁵⁹²

In 1374, ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* met the Muḡaffarid ruler ^{pers} *Šāh Šoḡāʻ* in Tabriz. ^{pers} *Šāh Šoḡāʻ* had been able to take the city after the death of the Jalairid ruler ^{arab} *Šayḡ*. Uways in that same year but lost control over it again after only a few months.⁵⁹³ ^{pers} *Fazlollāh* tried to endear himself to the Muḡaffarid court by writing a book

⁵⁸³ Quoted improperly by Mir-Kasimov 2009: 263 in the form *jalla ʿizzahu wa ʿizza faḍlahu*.

⁵⁸⁴ See Wehr 1985: 188, s. v. *galla*.

⁵⁸⁵ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 264.

⁵⁸⁶ Quote from Ritter 1954: 22, where also the date of the composition of the ^{pers} *Korsīnāme* is given.

⁵⁸⁷ See p. 201.

⁵⁸⁸ This dream is told in ^{pers} *Firīsteoḡlī*’s Turkish translation of ^{pers} *Sayyid Ishāḡ*’s ^{pers} *Hvābnāme* (MS Konya, Mevlana Museum, Turkish Manuscript MS 2916, fol. 17b).

⁵⁸⁹ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 279, footnote 83.

⁵⁹⁰ Quoted in Gölpınarlı 1973: 4. Cf. *ibidem*, p. 7.

⁵⁹¹ Ritter 1954: 7. Vgl. Amoretti 1986: 632.

⁵⁹² Bashir 2002: 173.

⁵⁹³ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 262.

about Islamic law for one of its princes, ⁵⁹⁴ *Ḥazz ad-Dīn Šoḡā'*.⁵⁹⁴ Here, we already see a clear attempt to enter political influential circles.

After he had stayed in Tabriz for a while, ⁵⁹⁵ *Fazlollāh* went back to Isfahan.⁵⁹⁵ There, he withdrew into a cave,⁵⁹⁶ apparently in imitation of traditional legends about the life of the Prophet Muḥammad.

At some point in time, which cannot be determined exactly but must have been between 1373 and 1388, ⁵⁹⁷ *Fazlollāh* had the ultimate spiritual experience of his life. This event is referred to as "the manifestation of greatness" (⁵⁹⁸ *ḥuzūr-e kibriyā'*), and it happened in Tabriz.⁵⁹⁷ The precise nature of this mysterious event seems to be unknown.⁵⁹⁸ Perhaps the essence of it was known only to ⁵⁹⁹ *Fazlollāh* himself. In any case, one should note the etymological relationship between the word ⁵⁹⁹ *kibriyā'* and the Arabic comparative-superlative ⁵⁹⁹ *akbar* ("greater", "the greatest"), which occurs, for instance, in the traditional formula ⁵⁹⁹ *Allāhu akbar* ("Allah is great"). The wording in which the experience is referred to seems to indicate that a manifestation of God was supposed to be involved. The event can probably be interpreted as the culmination of a prolonged meditative period. Once it ended, ⁶⁰⁰ *Fazlollāh* publicly declared to have been given the last revelation about the nature of prophethood (⁶⁰⁰ *nobūwa*) and, more importantly, the secret meaning of the letters of the Arabic alphabet.⁵⁹⁹

The ⁶⁰¹ *ḥuzūr-e kibriyā'* was the preliminary culmination of a long process in ⁶⁰² *Fazlollāh's* spiritual (self-)education in which he had advanced from the status of an ordinary hat maker with some family background qualifying him for Islamic studies to a mystic, then to an inspired teacher who by means of his dreams claimed to have direct access to divine knowledge and finally to an interpreter of the secret meaning of the letters and numbers of the Quran and other supposedly divine sources. On a personal level, this shows ⁶⁰³ *Fazlollāh* to be a creative mind who was always seeking to progress on his inner path. He lived through many stages of development, many of which implied a qualitative change. Seen in a larger context, the path of his progress logically followed the steps that were possible according to the mystical and philosophical traditions of Islam. For, as one of the most eminent authorities on Islamic lettrism, ⁶⁰⁴ *Fazlollāh's* contemporary ⁶⁰⁴ *Ibn Ḥaldūn* states,

only those who had access to revealed – i. e., divine – knowledge could be trusted to express themselves about the "knowledge of the letters":

"The real significance of the relationship existing between letters and natural humor and between letters and numbers is difficult to understand. It is not a matter of science or reasoning. According to the (authorities on letter magic), it is based on mystical experience and the removal (of the veil). Al-Būnī said 'One should not think that one could get at the secret of the letters with the help of logical reasoning. One gets to it with the help of vision and divine aid.' [...] The activity of people who work with words, on the other hand, is the effect of the divine light and the support of the Lord which they obtain through exertion and the removal (of the veil). [...] „Such activity comes to them accidentally, as an act of divine knowledge."⁶⁰⁰

The ⁶⁰⁵ *ḥuzūr-e kibriyā'* was probably also the occurrence which completed the establishment of the ⁶⁰⁶ *Ḥurūfiya* doctrine, as it is documented in the writings of ⁶⁰⁷ *Fazlollāh* and his pupils, including ⁶⁰⁸ *Nāsīmī*. The fact that it cannot be dated with exactitude constitutes a major obstacle to our understanding of the development and chronology of the religious movement founded by ⁶⁰⁹ *Fazlollāh*.

Writing in 1442 / 1443, the ⁶¹⁰ *Ḥurūfī* author ⁶¹¹ *Amir Ğiyāḡoddīn* dates the ⁶¹² *ḥuzūr-e kibriyā'* to the year A. H. 788 (first day: February 2, 1386; last day: January 21, 1387).⁶⁰¹ This date is confirmed by an anonymous note in ⁶¹³ *Ḥurūfī* manuscript.⁶⁰² According to another anonymous note in another and quite early ⁶¹⁴ *Ḥurūfī* manuscript, ⁶¹⁵ *Fazlollāh* publicly proclaimed himself as the Mahdi in that year, which might be a reference to the ⁶¹⁶ *ḥuzūr-e kibriyā'* or describe an event that was temporally and factually closely related to it.⁶⁰³ In contrast, *Shahzad Bashir* does not follow the dating of these sources but alternatively suggests that the ⁶¹⁷ *ḥuzūr-e kibriyā'* took place already in A. H. 775 (first day: February 14, 1373; last day: March 15, 1374).⁶⁰⁴ A. H. 775 is also mentioned as the date of an important spiritual event in the life of ⁶¹⁸ *Fazlollāh* in the ⁶¹⁹ *Korsīnāme* ("Book about the Throne") written in 1410 by his prominent successor ⁶²⁰ *ʿAlīyō'l-ʿAlā*. However, the text of the ⁶²¹ *Korsīnāme* does

⁵⁹⁴ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 262.

⁵⁹⁵ Gölpınarlı 1973: 7; Bausani 1979: 600.

⁵⁹⁶ Gölpınarlı 1973: 7; Bausani 1979: 600.

⁵⁹⁷ According to ⁶⁰⁰ *ʿAlīyō'l-ʿAlā's* ⁶⁰⁰ *Korsīnāme*, quoted in Ritter 1954: 22. Ritter translates the name of the experience by "erscheinen der göttlichen Erhabenheit".

⁵⁹⁸ Ritter 1954: 22.

⁵⁹⁹ Bausani 1979: 600; Bashir 2002: 174.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 174-176.

⁶⁰¹ See his ⁶⁰¹ *Isṭiḡā-nāme*, quoted in Gölpınarlı 1973: 3. *Ibidem*, Gölpınarlı also quotes another, anonymous *Ḥurūfī* manuscript contained in the Ali Emiri Farsça 1032 manuscript of Istanbul's Millet Library. – This date is also quoted in Halm 1988: 99, with the additional remark that it is an approximate date.

⁶⁰² Codex 6381 from the British Museum (referred to in Ritter 1954: 22).

⁶⁰³ Divshalī / Luft 1980: 23.

⁶⁰⁴ Bashir 2002: 174.

not use the expression ^{pers} *zohūr-e kibriyā* but only described the occurrence by stating that, "the being of what exists that ... was revealed upon the enlightening mind of the Grace of the Lord of the Worlds" ^{pers} *hast-e ma'ūdāt ke ... bar zāmīr-e muir-e Faḏl-e Rabbo'l-Ālamin nozūl kard*, where the expression ^{pers} *Faḏl-e Rabbo'l-Ālamin*, as has been mentioned above, is probably a reference to ^{pers} Faḏlollāh.⁶⁰⁵ Therefore, one cannot be sure whether the event described here by ^{pers} 'Aliyō'l-A'lā and the ^{pers} *zohūr-e kibriyā* are really identical.

Bashir tries to reconcile the extant contradictions between the various dates by suggesting that they might refer to two different events or to two stages in the process of revelation (such as receiving and promulgating the knowledge).⁶⁰⁶ In fact, this resembles an earlier suggestion by Abdūlbāki Gölpinarlı. Referring to ^{pers} Sayyid Ishāḳ's ^{pers} *Fābānāme*, Gölpinarlı had argued that what happened in A. H. 775 might in fact not yet have been the ^{pers} *zohūr-e kibriyā* but the authority is given to ^{pers} Faḏlollāh (by himself) to dispose of "the knowledge necessary to give the ultimate interpretation of the prescripts of the sharia" (^{pers} *ser'i hükümleri te'vīl bilgisi*).⁶⁰⁷ Finally, one may also note the fact that there are 14 lunar years between A. H. 775 and A. H. 789. If these two dates are accepted as referring to some kind of event in the life of ^{pers} Faḏlollāh, they might have been chosen according to an interpretation that presupposes a meaningful relationship between them. For "14" is a highly symbolic number in the ^{arab} Ḥurūfī literature.⁶⁰⁸ Other information that might be related to the ^{pers} *zohūr-e kibriyā* probably happened three years after ^{pers} Faḏlollāh's second pilgrimage to Mecca.⁶⁰⁹ However, this does not help much, as we do not know when this pilgrimage took place.

To sum up, the present state of research does not seem to allow a decision about the point of time when ^{pers} Faḏlollāh received or began to disseminate his famous idiosyncratic interpretation of the letters of the Arabic script. One can only say that according to the extant sources, it seems to have occurred sometime between 1373 and 1387.

The uncertainty about the time of the ^{pers} *zohūr-e kibriyā* means that it is difficult to evaluate interactions between this event and the general political events of the times. In particular, one cannot say whether ^{pers} Faḏlollāh's ultimate spiritual awakening was influenced by or played a role in some of the dramatic developments

of the period in question. These occurrences include a series of events in Tabriz, such as the city's ephemeral occupation by the Muḏaffarids (1376), the defeat of the Jalairids at the hands of the ^{arab} Qaraqoyunlu not far from it (September 1382), it is being conquered by Tamerlane and subsequently lost to ^{arab} Toxtamış in 1385, as well as its second taking by Tamerlane in 1386. *In extremis*, Tamerlane's capture of Isfahan in 1387 and the subsequent bloodbath might have played a role as well, if one opts for the latest hypothesis about the time the ^{pers} *zohūr-e kibriyā* happened.

Another consequence of the above described chronological uncertainty is that one does not know when exactly ^{pers} Faḏlollāh wrote his main work, the ^{pers} *Čāvidān-nāme* ("The Book of the Eternal"). For ^{pers} Faḏlollāh is said to have written it around the time he experienced the ^{pers} *zohūr-e kibriyā*.⁶¹⁰

After the ^{pers} *zohūr-e kibriyā*, ^{pers} Faḏlollāh returned from Tabriz to Isfahan.⁶¹¹ There, he communicated his new message to a number of pupils. Their initial number is said to have been eight.⁶¹² This is an interesting moment in ^{pers} Faḏlollāh's life, for it, marks the beginning of a missionizing religious movement, in which a leader claiming to possess divine revelation communicates it to his disciples.⁶¹³

Following his crucial spiritual awakening, ^{pers} Faḏlollāh continued to travel. Probably all of his journeys that followed the ^{pers} *zohūr-e kibriyā* stood in connection with his religious mission. Only very few of these journeys can be dated, most are impossible to locate on the timeline. For instance, ^{pers} Faḏlollāh himself mentioned that he stayed in ^{pers} Dāmḡān⁶¹⁴ and ^{pers} Boruġerd at unknown times.⁶¹⁵ He is also said to have traveled to the Iranian region of ^{pers} Gilān.⁶¹⁶

^{pers} Faḏlollāh was so convinced of his mission and his charisma that he did not hesitate to approach the top Muslim leaders of his age for support on numerous occasions. For instance, he interacted with the Muḏaffarids, Jalairids, Sarbadarids⁶¹⁷ and – fatally – the Timurids. In these efforts, he did not give an advantage to any side *a priori*, but contacted various political figures who were each others' enemies.

⁶¹⁰ Bausani 1979: 600.

⁶¹¹ Bashir 2002: 174.

⁶¹² Bashir 2002: 174, quoting the ^{pers} *Korīdnāme* (see p. 126).

⁶¹³ Cf. Bashir 2002: 174.

⁶¹⁴ In dreams nr. 86, 89 and 100 of the ^{pers} *Noumnāme*, quoted in Mir-Kasimov 2009: 290, 293. The stay at ^{pers} Dāmḡān is also mentioned by Gölpinarlı 1973: 7.

⁶¹⁵ Dreams nr. 34, 38, and 196 of the ^{pers} *Noumnāme*, quoted in Mir-Kasimov 2009: 284, 285, 297.

⁶¹⁶ Gölpinarlı 1973: 7.

⁶¹⁷ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257. On the Muḏaffarids and Jalairids, see the respective subchapters of chapter 4.3. For the Sarbadarids, see p. 35.

⁶⁰⁵ Quoted in Ritter 1954: 22. – On the interpretation of ^{pers} *Faḏl-e Rabbo'l-Ālamin*, see above p. 126.

⁶⁰⁶ Bashir 2002: 174.

⁶⁰⁷ Gölpinarlı 1973: 6, quoting the Istanbul manuscript Ali Emīrī Farsḡa 1042, fol. 19a-b.

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. Ritter 1954: 22 and chapter 4.5.2.5.2.

⁶⁰⁹ That is, if one ascribes the statement "Drei Jahre nach seiner zweiten Mekka-Pilgerfahrt hatte er die Erleuchtung" (Divshali / Luft 1980: 18) to the ^{pers} *zohūr-e kibriyā*.

also, he does not seem to have any kind of ethnolinguistic preferences but addressed Persian-speaking rulers as well as Turkic-speaking ones.

One of the political figures that ^{mpers}Fazlollāh approached was ^{tt}Toxtamış.⁶¹⁸ Details of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's contacts with the Golden Horde khan are not known. A possible moment in which a personal encounter between the two might have taken place is the year 1385 when ^{tt}Toxtamış was in person in Iran for one of his invasions.⁶¹⁹ The seriousness of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's plans concerning ^{tt}Toxtamış can be seen from his (unanswered) proposal to marry the Khan's daughter.⁶²⁰ This was an attempt to get access to the circles which held the supreme political power. For by marrying into ^{tt}Toxtamış' family, ^{mpers}Fazlollāh would automatically have become part of the ruling élite. Marriage interaction was the most important and direct instrument of politics in Antiquity and the Middle Ages – not only in the Islamicate world – following the equally classic and phylogenetically obvious instrument of directly using physical violence.⁶²¹ From this alone, we understand that ^{mpers}Fazlollāh had evolved from an ordinary Sufi into an aspirant for political power. Therefore, even if we do not know whether ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's advances toward ^{tt}Toxtamış took place before or after the ^{mpers}*zohūr-e kibriyā*' and the beginning of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's ^{arab}Hurūfī missionizing campaign,⁶²² it appears to be a natural assumption to ascribe a political intention to the ^{arab}Hurūfīya, besides its obvious religious, mystical and philosophical aspects, from its earliest stages onward. This is proven, among other things, by the continuity of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's endeavors to find support for his movement at leading courts. From an early stage, or perhaps even from the moment it came into being, the ^{arab}Hurūfīya was an amalgam of private and political self-interest and religious ideas.

For at least a certain period of the year A. H. 790 (first day: January 1, 1388; last day: December 30, 1389), ^{mpers}Fazlollāh once more stayed in Isfahan's ^{omc}Toḳčī quarter.⁶²³ He must have been there for a longer time, or perhaps he interrupted his sojourn and returned. For he himself states in the ^{mpers}*Noumnāme* that he had one of

his dreams in the ^{omc}Toḳčī mosque in A. H. 792 (first day: December 20, 1389; last day: December 8, 1390).⁶²⁴ Incidentally, the fact of his having spent enough time in a mosque to have slept and seen a dream at that time is interesting. For it illustrates that ^{mpers}Fazlollāh was not anathematized or excluded from ordinary Muslim life. Probably, this amounts to his being able to be termed a Muslim, at least at that moment.⁶²⁵

At some point in time, ^{mpers}Fazlollāh must have made the long travel from Isfahan to Baku, which at that time was a relatively small town and frequently called ^{mpers}Bākūye.⁶²⁶ At that time, it belonged to the kingdom of Shirvan. The overall political situation was latently unstable, as the region was the scene of the conflict in which the Shirvanshah Ibrahim I. and his ally Tamerlane confronted ^{tt}Toxtamış. The territory of the Golden Horde was not far away. ^{tt}Toxtamış' interest in the place is manifested by the fact that he had coins minted in his name in Baku between 1388 and 1389.⁶²⁷ However, when ^{mpers}Fazlollāh arrived at Baku, the city must have been under Tamerlane's control. For the ^{arab}Hurūfī leader managed to win the protection of Tamerlane's son ^{mpers}Mirān Šāh there,⁶²⁸ which implies that ^{mpers}Mirān Šāh wielded some power at that moment. However, this period of favor ended when Tamerlane convoked a gathering of Islamic scholars at Samarqand to discuss the validity of the ^{arab}Hurūfī theories. For the convention came up with an unequivocal condemnation of the ^{arab}Hurūfīya doctrine.⁶²⁹ As a result of this verdict, ^{mpers}Mirān Šāh had ^{mpers}Fazlollāh was thrown into prison in Baku.⁶³⁰

This marks the beginning of the final episode in the remarkable life of the author maker from ^{mpers}Astarābād.

4.5.4.6. Imprisonment and death

In the spring of 1394, ^{mpers}Fazlollāh seems to have had a premonition about his approaching death. On April 26, he had a dream in a place called ^{arab}/^{mpers}Ğazira in

⁶¹⁸ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257.

⁶¹⁹ See p. 38.

⁶²⁰ Bausani 1979: 600.

⁶²¹ Cf. the famous statement by 张柬之 Zhāng Jiǎn Zhī (625-706), a leading 唐 Táng court official, who, without mentioning them by their true name, also targeted the 突厥 Tūjié: "Since antiquity, it has never occurred that Chinese princes married daughters of the Eastern or Northern barbar tribes." (自古未有中国亲王娶夷狄女者 zì gǔ wèi yǒu Zhōng Guó qīn wáng qū Yì Dì nǚ zhē; quoted in 吴玉贵 Wú Yù Guì 2009, vol. 1, "Notes to the use of the book" (凡例 Fánlì): 2, Nr. 4.

⁶²² See above p. 132.

⁶²³ Gölpinarlı 1973: 7.

⁶²⁴ Dream nr. 2, see Mir-Kasimov 2009: 279.

⁶²⁵ Cf. the discussion in chapter 4.5.7.3.

⁶²⁶ An extensive list with the names of the city according to medieval Islamic and other sources can be found in Aşurbaylı 1998: 43-45. – ^{mpers}Fazlollāh mentions being in Baku in the dreams nr. 28 and 33 of the ^{mpers}*Noumnāme* (quoted in Mir-Kasimov 2009: 282, 284), but these are possibly references to earlier stays in the Caspian town.

⁶²⁷ Aşurbaylı 1998: 86.

⁶²⁸ Bausani 1979: 600.

⁶²⁹ Bausani 1979: 600.

⁶³⁰ Bausani 1979: 600.

which he fancied the sun rising from the west. He took this to be a sign that the Last Judgement (مپەرس *hijəmat*), i. e., the end of the world, was finally imminent.⁶³¹

In the text about the dream, no details are given about the location referred to as *arab./mpers. Ğazira*. In Arabic, the name can mean "island" (مپەرس *ğazira*). This Arabic word is assumed to be the source of a number of toponyms on the Absheron Peninsula. For instance, there is a number of islands on the Absheron Peninsula that contain the element ^{arab./mpers.} *Zirə*, which apparently communicates the meaning "island". These include ^{arab./mpers.} *Böyük Zira*, an island directly opposite of Baku,⁶³² ^{arab./mpers.} *Daş Zira* ("Stone Island"), and ^{arab./mpers.} *Xorə Zira*. Also, there is a modern village by the name of ^{arab./mpers.} *Zira*, which is situated close to the eastern tip of the Absheron Peninsula. The fact that this village is not far from the *island* of ^{arab./mpers.} *Pirallahı*⁶³³ could offer a metonymical explanation for its name. Yet, none of the toponyms mentioned so far has any proven relationship with the place *arab./mpers. Ğazira* mentioned in connection with ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh*'s dream. Perhaps this *arab./mpers. Ğazira* actually designated the whole of the Absheron Peninsula, in which case one would assume that it had been mistaken for an island.

Possibly on the basis of the above-quoted source, Heinz Halm has concluded that ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh* was imprisoned in the city of Baku.⁶³⁴ He considers this imprisonment to have taken place on the orders of ^{mpers.} *Mirān Šāh*.⁶³⁵ Similarly, ^{os.} *Kemāl Edib Kürkçüoğlu* states that ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh* was arrested in ^{arab./mpers.} *Şamaxı* and spent the final period of his life both in that town and in Baku.⁶³⁶ ^{os.} *Kürkçüoğlu* also mentions that a fatwa was issued by a certain ^{mpers.} *Şayh Ebrāhīm* to justify ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh*'s execution.⁶³⁷

The Iranian Iranologist ^{mpers.} *Şadeğ Kiyā* has published a short text which he considers to be ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh*'s final letter from captivity.⁶³⁸ Together with some instructions for his relatives and friends, the text contains a short elegy in which ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh* likens his own situation to the martyrdom of the imam *arab.* *Al-Ĥusayn* at Kerbela:

Dar hame 'omr-am ma-rā yek düst dar-Şevān na-büd
Düst ki bāstad koğā-i kās büdi āşina

⁶³¹ Dream nr. 36, see Mir-Kasimov 2009: 284f.

⁶³² On this island and its history, cf. Aşurbəyli 1998: 55.

⁶³³ See the map in Adžalov 2015:13.

⁶³⁴ Halm 1988: 99.

⁶³⁵ Halm 1988: 99.

⁶³⁶ Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIV.

⁶³⁷ Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIV (مپەرس *Şeyh İbrāhīm*).

⁶³⁸ Kiyā 1951: 30f.

Man Hosayn-e vakti o nā-ahlān Yazid o Şemr-e man
*Rüz-ğar-am gomle Ĥisr o Şevān Kerbalā*⁶³⁹

"In my whole life, I did not have a single friend from Shirvan.
Who is supposed to be a friend? Where are you? Oh, if you only were known!
I am the ^{mpers.} *Hosayn* of these times, and these brutes are like ^{mpers.} *Yazid*⁶⁴⁰ and ^{mpers.} *Şemr*⁶⁴¹ to me.

All my days are like the 10th of *Muĥarram*,⁶⁴² and Shirvan is like Kerbela."

In addition to this letter, at least one testament (مپەرس *vaşiyat-nāme*) is ascribed to ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh*.⁶⁴³

It is most frequently assumed that ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh* was executed in the month *arab.* *Dū'l-Ĥada* of the year A. H. 796 (first day: August 28, 1393; last day: September 26, 1394).⁶⁴⁴ The order to execute ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh* had been given by ^{mpers.} *Mirān Šāh* from a place called ^{mpers.} *Astābād*.⁶⁴⁵ *Astābād* no longer exists but it was situated not far from ^{arab.} *Əlinca* and ^{arab.} *Naḫçıvan*. It must not be confused with ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh*'s birthplace ^{mpers.} *Astarābād*. The execution is said to have been carried out in the fortress of ^{arab.} *Əlinca* by ^{mpers.} *Mirān Šāh* in person.⁶⁴⁶ The fact that Tamerlane's son himself killed ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh* with his own hands can be interpreted as a sign of utmost hate.

⁶³⁹ Kiyā 1951: 30f.

⁶⁴⁰ This is the name of the caliph who ordered the death of the imam *arab.* *Al-Ĥusayn*.

⁶⁴¹ This is the name of the soldier who is said to have killed *arab.* *Al-Ĥusayn*.

⁶⁴² This is the date on which *arab.* *Al-Ĥusayn* was killed and the most important Shii mourning day.

⁶⁴³ *Gölpınarlı* 1973: 8f. These two texts are preserved in manuscripts from Istanbul's Millet Library, the first one in MS Ali Emiri Farsça 993, fol. 104b, the second one in MS Ali Emiri Farsça 1009 (beginning) and MS Ali Emiri Farsça 1291, fol. 38a-45a. I have not been able to check whether the first of these two texts is identical with the above letter quoted by Kiyā. – For a modern edition of one of the testaments, see Begdeli 1970.

⁶⁴⁴ Ritter 1954: 1. Cf. Savory 1987: 191; Mir-Kasimov 2009: 261; cf. *ibid.* 250 and 257; Macit 2007: 220. In contrast, Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIV dates the execution to *arab.* *Dū'l-Ĥiğga* 6, A. H. 796. An anonymous marginal note in an early *arab.* *Ĥurūfī* manuscript mentions the year A. H. 799 (first day: October 5, 1396; last day: September 23, 1397) as the date of ^{mpers.} *Fazlollāh*'s execution (quoted in *Divshali* / *Luft* 1980: 23).

⁶⁴⁵ *Gölpınarlı* 1973: 8, quoting the ^{mpers.} *Korsināme*. – *Divshali* / *Luft* 1980: 18 and Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIV confirm that ^{mpers.} *Mirān Šāh* gave the order for the execution but do not indicate a place.

⁶⁴⁶ Ritter 1954: 1.

4.5.4.7. Progeny

^{mpers}Fazlollāh was married, apparently more than once. An anonymous note in a ^{arab}Ḥurūfī manuscript gives the name of three of his wives. The first of them was ^{mpers}Maḥdūme-ye Bozorg Fāṭema, the second ^{mpers}Maḥdūm-zāde, and the third ^{mpers}Maḥdūme-ye Noşrat.⁶⁴⁷

^{mpers}Fazlollāh had numerous children, both daughters, and sons. The list below comprises of four daughters and six sons. The daughters are sometimes mentioned together with the respectful title ^{mpers}*bībī* ("lady"), and the sons with the title ^{mpers}*amīr*. ^{mpers}*Amīr* is originally a political and military term meaning "commander" or "ruler", literally "the one who gives orders" (from Arabic). Furthermore, ^{arab}*amīr al-mu'minīn* ("the commander of the believers / Muslims") was a title used, among other things, by the Abbasid caliphs. However, it is unknown whether the use of this title for ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's son expressed any kind of political or military ambition, even metaphorically. At least, the use of the title ^{mpers}*amīr* seems to express a certain intention to rule or give commands, perhaps not necessarily in a political sense but in a more informal interpretation.

Practically all of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's children bear speaking names that allude to the religious mindscape of their father.

Perhaps the most famous of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's daughters was ^{mpers}Kalemetollāh (which translates as "The single word of Allah"), who played an eminent role in the ^{arab}Ḥurūfīya movement even many decades after the demise of its founder.⁶⁴⁸ Her name is also given in the variants ^{mpers}Kalemetollāh-e 'Olyā and ^{arab}Kalimatullāh hiya'l-'Ulyā, which translate as "The More (or Most) Elevated Kalemetollāh / Single word of Allah".⁶⁴⁹ The epithet probably reflects her elevated position in the ^{arab}Ḥurūfī movement. ^{arab}Ḥurūfī texts designate her as ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's locum tenens (^{mpers}*kā'im-makām*) and heir (^{mpers}*arab* *ḡaṣf*).⁶⁵⁰ The adjective ^{mpers}'Olyā / ^{arab}al-'Ulyā is a feminine relative or superlative form, the masculine equivalent of which is ^{arab}/^{mpers}*Aḡā*. Therefore, the epithet bestowed upon ^{mpers}Kalemetollāh belongs to the

same grammatical category as that of ^{mpers}Alīyo'l-Aḡā.⁶⁵¹ This seems to indicate that both persons had a particularly important position within the movement. They might have been of comparable rank.

From the marriage with ^{mpers}Maḥdūm-zāde, ^{mpers}Fazlollāh had a daughter named ^{mpers}Bībī-ye Ommolketāb ("Lady The mother of the Book").⁶⁵² A third daughter, also honored with the form of address ^{mpers}*bībī*, was called ^{mpers}Hātūn Hāndaḡār.⁶⁵³ She was from the marriage with ^{mpers}Maḥdūm-ye Noşrat, ⁶⁵⁴ just like another daughter who was called ^{mpers}Bībī 'Elmolketāb ("Lady The Knowledge of the Book").⁶⁵⁵

Of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's sons we know ^{mpers}Amīr Ḥabibollāh ("Commander The Friend of Allah"),⁶⁵⁶ ^{mpers}Amīr Kalimollāh ("Commander The Speaker of Allah"),⁶⁵⁷ ^{mpers}Amīr Masiḥollāh ("Commander the Messiah of Allah"),⁶⁵⁸ ^{mpers}Amīr Nūrollāh ("Commander The Light of Allah"),⁶⁵⁹ ^{mpers}Rūhollāh ("The Soul of Allah"),⁶⁶⁰ and ^{mpers}(Amīr) Salāmollāh ("(Commander) The Peace of Allah").⁶⁶¹ ^{mpers}Amīr Kalimollāh, ^{mpers}Amīr Nūrollāh, and ^{mpers}(Amīr) Salāmollāh were sons from the marriage with ^{mpers}Maḥdūm-zāde.⁶⁶² ^{mpers}Amīr Ḥabibollāh and ^{mpers}Amīr Masiḥollāh were from the marriage with ^{mpers}Maḥdūme-ye Noşrat.⁶⁶³

^{mpers}Kalemetollāh was not the one only of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's children who participated in spreading his religious ideas. For instance, ^{mpers}Amīr Nūrollāh missionized in Anatolia. As a consequence, he was imprisoned in the town of ^{trk}Bitlis.⁶⁶⁴ The names with ^{arab}Ḥurūfī meanings, and perhaps also the politically, militarily and religiously

⁶⁵¹ On him, see chapter 4.5.5.2. below.

⁶⁵² Marginal note to ^{mpers}Mir Šarīf's ^{arab}*Bayān al-Vākī'* on fol. 61b of the Ali Emīri Farsça 1027 manuscript of Istanbul's Millet Library, quoted in Gölpinarlı 1973: 9.

⁶⁵³ The source is the same one as indicated in footnote 652.

⁶⁵⁴ Or perhaps one of the two women known by this name, see footnote 647.

⁶⁵⁵ Same source as indicated in footnote 652.

⁶⁵⁶ Same source as indicated in footnote 652.

⁶⁵⁷ Same source as indicated in footnote 652.

⁶⁵⁸ Same source as indicated in footnote 652.

⁶⁵⁹ Same source as indicated in footnote 652, and Algar 1995: 44.

⁶⁶⁰ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 262.

⁶⁶¹ Marginal note to ^{mpers}Mir Šarīf's ^{arab}*Bayān al-Vākī'* on fol. 61b of the Ali Emīri Farsça 1027 manuscript of Istanbul's Millet Library, quoted in Gölpinarlı 1973: 9; Mir-Kasimov 2009: 262.

⁶⁶² Same source as indicated in footnote 652.

⁶⁶³ Or perhaps one of the two women known by this name, see footnote 647.

⁶⁶⁴ Algar 1995: 44.

⁶⁴⁷ Marginal note to ^{mpers}Mir Šarīf's ^{arab}*Bayān al-Vākī'* on fol. 61b of the Ali Emīri Farsça 1027 manuscript of Istanbul's Millet Library, quoted in Gölpinarlı 1973: 9. – The name ^{mpers}Maḥdūm-zāde is also confirmed in Gölpinarlı 1973: 2. As to ^{mpers}Maḥdūme-ye Noşrat, a text reproduced in Gölpinarlı 1973: 9 speaks in one instance about ^{mpers}Maḥdūme-ye Noşrat-e avval ("The first ^{mpers}Maḥdūme-ye Noşrat") and in another place about ^{mpers}Maḥdūme-ye Noşrat-e diḡar ("The other ^{mpers}Maḥdūme-ye Noşrat"). This could mean that there were two women by the name of ^{mpers}Maḥdūme-ye Noşrat in ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's entourage.

⁶⁴⁸ See p. 149 below. Cf. Also Mir-Kasimov 2009: 262.

⁶⁴⁹ Ritter 1954: 32; Usler 2009: 23.

⁶⁵⁰ Ritter 1954: 32.

meaningful title of ^{میر}amīr probably indicate that their bearers were expected to take part in the ^{عرب}Hurūfī mission even if they might have had other plans.

4.5.5. The political movement after Fazlollāh's death

In the following subchapter, the ^{عرب}Hurūfīya movement as an organization with political ambitions is distinguished from people who made references to ^{میر}Fazlollāh, his pupils, or their writings without fostering such ambitions, for instance, by writing poems or treatises that were inspired by ^{عرب}Hurūfī ideas.

As an organization with serious political ambitions, the ^{عرب}Hurūfīya movement existed until approximately the middle of the 15th century, which is the date when the last ^{عرب}Hurūfī propagandists are known to have tried to win (in vain) the favor of important political authorities.⁶⁶⁵ From that time on, the ^{عرب}Hurūfīya movement gradually transformed into a non-formalized, clandestine and dispersed network. In the course of time, the use people made of these ideas became increasingly targeted at gaining political influence and blended into more or less distant and often indirect references to ^{عرب}Hurūfī ideas.⁶⁶⁶ In the end, these ideas became part of the cultural heritage of Iran and adjacent territories. It was probably to a very important extent thanks to the poems of ^نNāsīmī and not so much to the many but usually obscure and esoteric writings left behind by ^{میر}Fazlollāh and his pupils that ^{عرب}Hurūfī ideas survived beyond that date, and to this day.

4.5.5.1. The character of the political movement after Fazlollāh's death

^{میر}Fazlollāh's execution must have been a tremendous blow to the young ^{عرب}Hurūfīya movement, at least for a certain moment. It lost its spiritual and intellectual father as well as its leader. However, this was not the end of the organization.

One of the reasons for this was that, by way of the magical mechanisms of martyrdom culture, ^{میر}Fazlollāh's violent death kept him on the agenda.⁶⁶⁷ He continued to be an object of worship and was perhaps venerated even more intensely than he had during his lifetime. To the making of martyrdom narratives, real or presumed

⁶⁶⁵ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257.

⁶⁶⁶ For more, see chapter 4.5.6.

⁶⁶⁷ On martyrdom culture, with particular focus on Islamic and Turkic Islamic discourses as well as ^نNāsīmī, with numerous references to the specialized literature, cf. Heß 2006a; Cook 2007; Heß 2007a; Heß 2008a; Heß 2008b; Heß 2016; Heß 2017.

historical facts about the supposed martyr are only of secondary importance, if at all. In fact, the fictional factor in martyrdom narratives seems to be more real than the reality some might think these narratives depict or communicate. A living man is not a martyr, at least if we adhere to the common definition of a martyr as somebody who dies for a cause, or for God. However, a dead man cannot be a martyr, either; for *per definitionem* he is not. As a result of this paradox, martyrdom does not exist but is a notion that can only be imagined, narrated, or created by the means of art. It needs strong, colorful, convincing fictional narratives. This must be one of the reasons why martyrdom narratives always come into being where they are needed. Another pivotal element of every martyrdom narrative is a community that wants to communicate a certain message through the martyrdom legend. Such a community existed in the form of ^{میر}Fazlollāh's extensive family, his pupils, adherents, and his friends, who together formed the ^{عرب}Hurūfīya. Similar to what happened after the death of Jesus of Nazareth and in the early phase of the Shia history, the ^{عرب}Hurūfīs were not destroyed as a result of the killing of their leader, but the quite the opposite happened.

An important element in early ^{عرب}Hurūfī martyrdom narratives seems to have been the site of ^{میر}Fazlollāh's execution. They gave it the name ^{میر}makṭal-gāh, which can be translated as "the place of killing".⁶⁶⁸ This designation had the potential to lay claim to continuity with traditional Islamic martyrdom narratives. In Shia Islam, it could easily be associated with the Shia martyrdom tradition. For in Shia Islam, the Arabic word ^{عرب}makṭal "killing", which appears as a determinant in ^{میر}makṭal-gāh, is often understood to be the killing par excellence, i. e., the martyrdom of the imam ^{عرب}Al-Ḥusayn at Kerbela on October 10, A. D. 680. Several more or less hagiographic works entitled ^{عرب}Makṭal al-Ḥusayn ("The killing of ^{عرب}Al-Ḥusayn) was dedicated to this subject in early Islamic literature, and a whole genre of literature developed around them. The creation of a ^{میر}makṭal-gāh at ^{عرب}Qinco physically underscores martyr status that the ^{عرب}Hurūfīs claimed for ^{میر}Fazlollāh and which was similar to that of ^{عرب}Al-Ḥusayn. Its establishment was yet another conscious step towards the establishment of ^{میر}Fazlollāh's school as an independent religious organization within Islam. By disposing of a holy site that was meaningful only to the ^{عرب}Hurūfīs and irrelevant to everybody else, they would be able to use it as a destination of their own pilgrimages. In such a way, they could compete with the extant Islamic pilgrimage sites, such as Mecca or Kerbela and could try to consolidate their place within the Islamic landscape. Importantly, also the creation of such a pilgrimage site opened up the prospect for the revenues that were inevitably generated at such holy places.

The secondary literature does not give any information about the precise location or the outward appearance of the ^{عرب}Hurūfī ^{میر}makṭal-gāh. For instance, it is not

⁶⁶⁸ Bausani 1979: 600.

stated whether the term ^{mpcr}*maḳtal-gāh* referred to a place within the ²²Ḍinca fortress (such as a dungeon or special chamber for executions), to the whole fortress, or some other place, which might have been the fortress plus surrounding settlements. Of course, the meaning of the term might have changed over time. Also, the chronology of the creation of the appellation ^{mpcr}*maḳtal-gāh* is unknown, apart from the necessary *terminus post quem*, which is defined by ^{mpcr}Fazlollāh's execution in August or September 1394. It is tempting to imagine that the creation of the ^{mpcr}*maḳtal-gāh* took place in that period after ^{mpcr}Fazlollāh's death when ²²Ḍinca was still held by the Jalairids and their supporters, i. e., before 1399.⁶⁶⁹ ^{mpcr}Fazlollāh's direct interaction with the leaders of this dynasty and their mutual sympathy would, in theory, speak in favor of such an interpretation.⁶⁷⁰ However, there is no direct data in support of this theory. The demolition of the ²²Ḍinca fortress in 1399 or sometime later as well as its reconstruction on orders of ²²Qara Yusuf) after June 1406 must have been historical episodes that also influenced the status of the ^{mpcr}*maḳtal-gāh*. Yet, again nothing definite seems to be known in this respect.

With the ^{mpcr}*maḳtal-gāh* at ²²Ḍinca, the early ^{arab}Hurūfīs had apparently acquired a place where they could commemorate the martyrdom of their leader. Both the principle of erecting such a commemorative site and the name by which it is referred to establishes a link with the Shia tradition. To this tradition ^{mpcr}Fazlollāh had himself frequently alluded to in his writings and by using titles such as ^{arab}*sāhib az-zamān*⁶⁷¹ and Mahdi,⁶⁷² and the adherence to it was supported by his genealogy. Another feature that created a parallel between the ^{arab}Hurūfī martyrdom narrative and classical Shia martyrdom legends was the existence of a bad tyrant figure. This was ^{mpcr}Mirān Šāh, whose name was deformed in early ^{arab}Hurūfī literature to ^{mpcr}Mārān Šāh "The King of the Snakes".⁶⁷³ Seen from a broader perspective, the ^{arab}Hurūfī martyrdom narrative appeared, just as the Shia one, as a variant of dualism, in which good and evil are personalized. This does not seem to be surprising for a religion that came from the homeland of Manichaeism.

There were other reasons besides martyrdom why ^{mpcr}Fazlollāh's the organization did not fall apart after his death. Importantly, he had left behind a doctrinal system laid down in a number of books. In theory, the movement could, therefore, continue to exist even independently from the fate of its individual members. Another very important element which at least temporarily secured the persistence of

the movement was the existence of successors who were both willing and able to continue the mission.

4.5.5.2. 'Aliyo'l-A'lā and the mission in Anatolia

The most influential, and probably also the first, of ^{mpcr}Fazlollāh's successors (singular: ^{mpcr}*halīfā*, literally "caliph) was ^{mpcr}'Aliyo'l-A'lā.⁶⁷⁴ The epithet *al-A'lā* means as much as "the more elevated one".

^{mpcr}'Aliyo'l-A'lā followed in ^{mpcr}Fazlollāh's footsteps in two ways: as a missionary and as the author of ^{arab}Hurūfī writings.⁶⁷⁵ Primary sources date the initial phase of ^{mpcr}'Aliyo'l-A'lā's mission to the year A. H. 802 (first day: September 3, 1399; last day: August 21, 1400).⁶⁷⁶ At the beginning of his caliphate, ^{mpcr}'Aliyo'l-A'lā traveled to Syria and Jerusalem.⁶⁷⁷ After this, he proceeded to Anatolia, which became the central area of his missionizing activity.⁶⁷⁸ ^{mpcr}Fazlollāh had already had a dream about the possibility of missionizing in this region.⁶⁷⁹ ^{mpcr}'Aliyo'l-A'lā himself states in his ^{mpcr}*Korsīnāme* that although he was not the first to spread "the logos of God" (^{mpcr}*kalām-e Hakik*) in Anatolia (^{mpcr}*Rūm*) he became the first one who did so *successfully*.⁶⁸⁰

However, ^{mpcr}'Aliyo'l-A'lā's only major success in his effort to spread "the logos of God" was the conversion of the ^{arab}Ḍū'l-ḳadr ruler ^{arab}Nāšir ad-Dīn Muḥammad.⁶⁸¹ He also tried to win over the ²²Qaraqoyunlu ruler ²²Qara Yusuf, but failed.⁶⁸² ^{mpcr}'Aliyo'l-A'lā undertook some more mission journeys throughout Anatolia, very likely with the aim to convert other important figures. One of these trips apparently led him as far as Bursa.⁶⁸³ In a passage of his ^{mpcr}*Korsīnāme* he states that he even sent "the Book" (perhaps ^{mpcr}Fazlollāh's ^{mpcr}*Gāvidānnāme*) "to the other side of the water,

⁶⁷¹ Ritter 1954: 6, Bausani 1979: 600.

⁶⁷² Cf. Bausani 1979: 600.

⁶⁷³ Bausani 1979: 600. Cf. Algar 1995: 44.

⁶⁷⁴ Algar 1995: 44.

⁶⁷⁵ Bausani 1979: 600.

⁶⁷⁶ Algar 1995: 43f., quoting Ritter 1954: 25.

⁶⁷⁷ Algar 1995: 44. On the ^{mpcr}*Korsīnāme* cf. p. 126.

⁶⁷⁸ Algar 1995: 45. On ^{arab}Nāšir ad-Dīn Muḥammad, see p. 55.

⁶⁷⁹ Bausani 1979: 600. On ²²Qara Yusuf, see p. 41. Cf. also Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257.

⁶⁸⁰ Bashir 2002: 180.

⁶⁶⁹ See p. 60 for the historical background.

⁶⁷⁰ See p. 128 and 133.

⁶⁷¹ See p. 126.

⁶⁷² See p. 130.

⁶⁷³ Bausani 1979: 600.

to Constantinople.⁶⁸⁴ At that time, the city of Constantinople itself was of course still in Christian hands.

All in all, the success of ^{mpers}Aliyo'l-A'lā's mission in Anatolia seems to have been rather limited. Apart from ^{rab}Nāsir ad-Dīn Muḥammad no political leader agreed to accept the ^{rab}Hurūfīs' teachings. The political turmoil that was ongoing in Asia Minor at the beginning of the 15th century, which included the Battle of Ankara in 1402, must have rendered ^{mpers}Aliyo'l-A'lā's work particularly difficult.

During ^{mpers}Aliyo'l-A'lā's lifetime, ^{rab}Hurūfīs are also known to have actively participated in the movement of ^{om}Şeyḥ Bedreddin of ^{ms}Simavna (present-day Kipri- nos in Greece).⁶⁸⁵ This fact is interesting from the chronological point of view and because it sheds a light on the history and nature of the ^{rab}Hurūfīya movement. ^{om}Şeyḥ Bedreddin (1358 or 1359–1416) was one of a number of local leaders who tried to benefit from the Ottoman civil war that had begun after the defeat of sultan Bāyezid I. by Tamerlane in the Battle of Ankara.⁶⁸⁶ ^{om}Şeyḥ Bedreddin originated in Thracia, but was at times also active in Anatolia, for instance, in the town of Sinop. He was finally defeated and executed in 1416. Together, this gives us a *terminus ante quem* for the presence of ^{rab}Hurūfīs in Anatolia.

Besides being a figure with clear political ambition, ^{om}Şeyḥ Bedreddin was also an Islamic scholar and mystic.⁶⁸⁷ In a way that shows certain parallels to the life of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh, he came up with his own interpretation of the Islamic tradition and gathered around him a large community of followers, who venerated him like a savior. From their general way of feeling, thinking, and behavior, his followers must have been not unlike the ^{rab}Hurūfīs, who also believed in a savior figure that gave an idiosyncratic account of the Islamic tradition. As has been shown, both movements were united by the drive to approach and infiltrate political power. Furthermore, the overall political situation in the former Ottoman lands between 1402 and 1416 was similar to the situation in post-Genghizid Iran in which ^{mpers}Fazlollāh had been thrown, i. e., frequently marked by political chaos, suffering, and economic hardship. This naturally made people long for savior figures.⁶⁸⁸

Incidentally, ^{om}Şeyḥ Bedreddin's movement was structurally similar to that of another warlord in the previously Ottoman lands, namely ^{om}Börklüğe Muştafā who made his bid for power in the former Ottoman province of ^{ms}Aydın in 1416.

Like ^{mpers}Fazlollāh, ^{om}Börklüğe Muştafā claimed to be a prophet.⁶⁸⁹ On the model of the Nizaris, ^{om}Börklüğe Muştafā even abrogated shariah.⁶⁹⁰ Such behavior seems to constitute a parallel to some of the more radical and solipsistic tendencies that were also visible in ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's ^{rab}Hurūfīya. ^{om}Börklüğe Muştafā even had a direct personal relationship with ^{om}Şeyḥ Bedreddin, for he was his former majordomo (^{om}*keḥūdā*).⁶⁹¹

Returning to ^{mpers}Aliyo'l-A'lā, it has to be mentioned that his life ended tragically, like that of his teacher and in fact like most other early ^{rab}Hurūfī leaders, he was executed. Various dates are given for his event. According to Franz Babinger, ^{mpers}Aliyo'l-A'lā was killed only a few weeks after ^{om}Şeyḥ Bedreddin; the famous Thracian pretender was executed on December 18, 1416.⁶⁹² An alternative date is A. H. 822 (first day: January 28, 1419; last day: January 16, 1420).⁶⁹³

^{mpers}Aliyo'l-A'lā is believed to have been buried not far from ^{mpers}Fazlollāh.⁶⁹⁴

4.5.5.3. Other pupils of Fazlollāh

^{mpers}Aliyo'l-A'lā was not the one only of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's deputies (singular: ^{mpers}*ḥalfī-fā*). Others were ^{mpers}Ḥākikī ("The Truthful"),⁶⁹⁵ ^{mpers}Sayyid Işhāk, who lived from A. H. 771 (first day: August 5, 1369; last day: July 25, 1370) until A. H. 821 (first day: February 2, 1418; last day: January 27, 1419),⁶⁹⁶ and of course ^{ms}Nāsimi.

An important question for the history of the early ^{rab}Hurūfīya – which is also relevant for the reconstruction of ^{ms}Nāsimi's biography, as shall be seen⁶⁹⁷ – is whether there was only one ^{mpers}*ḥalfī-fā* in the movement at a time. Alternatively, ^{mpers}Fazlollāh might have designated more than one person who held this office simultaneously. The same question would then, in turn, have to be asked for ^{mpers}Fazlollāh's ^{mpers}*ḥalfī-fās* themselves: did each of them have only one ^{mpers}*ḥalfī-fā* or more than one at a time? The only statement concerning these questions seems to have been given by

⁶⁸⁹ Dressler 2002: 70.

⁶⁹⁰ Dressler 2002: 70.

⁶⁹¹ Dressler 2002: 70.

⁶⁹² Babinger 1959: 5.

⁶⁹³ Huart / Tevfik 1909: XX; Ritter 1954: 21; Bausani 1979: 600; Halm 1988: 99; Algar 1995: 44f. – Cf. Akarpnar 2007: 663, who only gives the year 1419 (quoting ^{ms}Hüsamettin Aksu).

⁶⁹⁴ Algar 1995: 45.

⁶⁹⁵ Divshali / Luft 1980: 26.

⁶⁹⁶ Divshali / Luft 1980: 18.

⁶⁹⁷ See chapter 5.2.4.1.

⁶⁸⁴ See the quote in Algar 1995: 44.

⁶⁸⁵ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257.

⁶⁸⁶ As introductions to the life of ^{om}Şeyḥ Bedreddin see Kissling 1950 and Balivet 1995. Cf. also Cerrahoglu 1966; Dressler 2002: 68-71; Kreiser / Neumann 2005: 77.

⁶⁸⁷ Öztelli 1989: 12.

⁶⁸⁸ Öztelli 1989: 12; Dressler 2002: 66f.

Hellmut Ritter. For Ritter mentions that ^{pers.}ʿAliyōʾl-Aʾlā was ^{pers.}Fazlollāh's first ^{pers.}halifa.⁶⁹⁸ If ^{pers.}ʿAliyōʾl-Aʾlā was ^{pers.}Fazlollāh's first successor, this automatically means that at least for some time nobody else was ^{pers.}Fazlollāh's ^{pers.}halifa. This might point to a line of succession in which there was only one ^{pers.}halifa during ^{pers.}ʿAliyōʾl-Aʾlā's term in office. After his death, this system might have changed. In sum, the number of ^{arab.}Hurūfī ^{pers.}halifas that existed at a time is not fully known.

In addition to the ^{pers.}halifas mentioned so far, we know the names more of ^{pers.}Fazlollāh's earliest pupils. These include ^{pers.}Mir Šarīf, ^{pers.}Fahroddīn, a certain ^{pers.}Ġalāl, who was from ^{pers.}Borūġerd, ^{pers.}Fazlollāh (a namesake of the sect's founder, he was from Khorasan), a certain ^{pers.}Abdol from Isfahan, a ^{pers.}Ḥosayn,⁶⁹⁹ and ^{pers.}Sayyid Šamsoddīn.⁷⁰⁰ Also, there was a dervish whose name is not mentioned but who is simply called "The Visitor" (^{pers.}*Mosāfer*). Gölpinarlı wants to identify him with ^{pers.}Fazlollāh Astarābādī's early teacher ^{pers.}Šayḥ Ḥasan.⁷⁰¹

Another of the first and most prominent disciples of ^{pers.}Fazlollāh was, of course, Nasimi, who will be dealt with at length in chapter 5.

4.5.5.4. Other early Hurūfī activities

Anatolia was not the only target area of the ^{arab.}Hurūfī mission. From its area of origin – ^{pers.}Māzanderān and the central areas of Iran including Tabriz, where ^{arab.}Hurūfī communities had already been established by ^{pers.}Fazlollāh himself – the new creed was carried in all directions. After the sudden death of their master, ^{arab.}Hurūfī groups were present in Kurdistan, ^{pers.}Lorestan, present-day Iraq, Shirvan, ^{pers.}Gīlān, Khorasan, and in Herat in present-day Afghanistan.⁷⁰²

A good deal of the ^{arab.}Hurūfīs' efforts was made in order to gain the support of rulers. While trying to win over some political leaders by persuasion, the ^{arab.}Hurūfīs strove to subvert some of those powers that were hostile to their doctrine, such as the Timurids. The political character of the movement revealed itself at various occasions when organized ^{arab.}Hurūfī groups participated in open insurrections. Such political and often violent ambition characterized the ^{arab.}Hurūfī movement in its first phase, roughly up to the middle of the 15th century. Later, this kind of activity became rarer and eventually ceased, probably due to the lack of opportunities and means.

⁶⁹⁸ Ritter 1954: 21 ("seines ersten chalifen").

⁶⁹⁹ Gölpinarlı 1973: 7.

⁷⁰⁰ Huart / Tevfik 1909: XIX.

⁷⁰¹ Gölpinarlı 1973: 7. On the other ^{pers.}Šayḥ Ḥasan, see p. 120.

⁷⁰² Cf. Bashir 2002: 180.

One of the earliest rebellions with significant ^{arab.}Hurūfī participation happened in A. H. 808 (first day: June 29, 1405; last day: June 17, 1406) in Khorasan.⁷⁰³ The date of this insurrection is possibly related to Tamerlane's death in February 1405. The loss one of their most powerful of enemies probably gave the ^{arab.}Hurūfīs a respite that allowed them to reorganize their forces and renew the effort to assume power.

Another ^{arab.}Hurūfī revolt followed in ^{pers.}Fazlollāh's homeland ^{pers.}Māzanderān in A. H. 809 (first day: June 18, 1406; last day: June 7, 1407).⁷⁰⁴ Both uprisings were quelled with much bloodshed.⁷⁰⁵

Of course, these rebellions contributed to the further deterioration of the already negative image of the ^{arab.}Hurūfīs in the Timurid lands. Possibly as a consequence of this worsening climate, an assassination attempt was perpetrated against ^{pers.}Šāhroḥ, the then ruler of the Timurid empire, in Herat on February 21, 1427.⁷⁰⁶ The would-be assassin was a certain ^{pers.}Aḥmad-e Lor ("Aḥmad the Lur", the Lurs being one of Iran's ethnic groups), whose name is also given in the variant ^{pers.}Aḥmadī Lor.⁷⁰⁷ ^{pers.}Aḥmad-e Lor used a knife to stab his victim but was killed on the spot before he was able to kill ^{pers.}Šāhroḥ.⁷⁰⁸ The anecdote is frequently included in histories of the ^{arab.}Hurūfīya movement, as the perpetrator is believed to have been one of its members.⁷⁰⁹ If ^{pers.}Aḥmad-e Lor was indeed a member of the ^{arab.}Hurūfīya movement, his motive might have been revenge for the execution of ^{pers.}Fazlollāh and the persecution of ^{arab.}Hurūfīs under the Timurids. After the failure of ^{pers.}Aḥmad-e Lor's assassination attempt, a number of ^{arab.}Hurūfīs were arrested in Herat.⁷¹⁰

In A. H. 835 (1431 / 1432), many ^{arab.}Hurūfīs took part in a larger rebellion in Isfahan.⁷¹¹

Another important event in the history of the early ^{arab.}Hurūfīya movement was the attempt made by ^{pers.}Fazlollāh's daughter ^{pers.}Kalemetollāh to convert the ^{arab.}Qaraqoyunlu ruler ^{arab.}Caḥanṣāh to her father's faith in A. H. 845 (1441 / 1442)

⁷⁰³ Usluer 2009: 20f.

⁷⁰⁴ Usluer 2009: 21.

⁷⁰⁵ Usluer 2009: 20f.

⁷⁰⁶ Ritter 1954: 7; Savory 1987: 189; Bashir 2005: 102; Usluer 2009: 21. Cf. Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257.

⁷⁰⁷ Ritter 1954: 7; Savory 1987: 189; Bashir 2005: 102; Usluer 2009: 21.

⁷⁰⁸ Ritter 1954: 7; Bashir 2005: 102; Usluer 2009: 21.

⁷⁰⁹ Savory 1987: 190; Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257.

⁷¹⁰ Usluer 2009: 21.

⁷¹¹ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257; Usluer 2009: 22.

in Tabriz.⁷¹² ^{mpcr}Kalemetollâh was assisted by a certain ^{mpcr}Yüsef.⁷¹³ The initiative ended in a complete failure for ^{mpcr}Kalemetollâh and her adherents. She and around 500 of her supporters were executed.⁷¹⁴ According to some medieval sources, the reason for the killing of the ^{arab}Hürüfîs were accusations that they had been trying to subvert ^{ac}Cahañşah's rule.⁷¹⁵

Probably one of the last serious attempts of ^{arab}Hürüfîs to infiltrate political power was made in the then Ottoman capital Edirne in A. H. 848 (first day: April 20, 1444; last day: April 8, 1445). A ^{arab}Hürüfî missionary, whose name is unknown, tried to convert prince ^{om}Mehmed, who, as sultan ^{om}Mehmed II. would change the course of world history nine years later by conquering Constantinople.⁷¹⁶ ^{om}Mehmed was known for his intelligence and open-mindedness, which allowed him to develop a special interest in Islamic mysticism. In 1444, he was a fourteen-year-old boy. These circumstances might have been amongst the reasons why the ^{arab}Hürüfî missionary chanced his luck with the Ottoman prince. Furthermore, ^{om}Mehmed was at that time in a uniquely unstable and troubled position, both externally and psychologically. This might have suggested to outsiders that he would seek consolation or advice in the arcane soteriological teachings of ^{mpcr}Fažlollâh and his followers. To the surprise of many contemporaries, ^{om}Mehmed's father, sultan ^{om}Murâd II. had abdicated in the spring of 1444 in favor of his son.⁷¹⁷ But in the autumn of that same year, Christian forces led by John Hunyadi and the Wallachian voivode Vlad II. (Dracula) performed the last of all crusades against the Ottomans, which made the situation so dangerous for the Ottomans that ^{om}Murâd II. decided to return to power. Having accessed the throne again, he led a strong army against the Crusaders, who were defeated near Varna on November 10, 1444.⁷¹⁸ Meanwhile, in September 1444, troubles had broken out in Edirne. At the same time, tensions between ^{om}Mehmed and his advisors appeared.

It is unknown at what moment of these developments the ^{arab}Hürüfî mission was active. In the end, the ^{arab}Hürüfî missionizing attempt failed.⁷¹⁹ The main reasons seem to have been opposition from influential conservative Sunni Islamic scholars (^{om}'ulemâ), who prevailed at ^{om}Mehmed's court. These ^{om}'ulemâ managed to convince the future ^{om}Fâtiḥ ("Conqueror") of the Second Rome that the ^{arab}

Hürüfî doctrine was a heresy. As a result, they had the missionary burned on the stake.⁷²⁰ His followers were executed together with him.⁷²¹ This seems to have been the first and last ^{arab}Hürüfî attempt to convert an Ottoman prince or ruler to their religion.

4.5.5.5. Towards the end of the political movement

The classification of those ^{arab}Hürüfîs who are not known to have participated in attempts to influence political authorities is not always easy or clear-cut. They might still have perceived themselves as part of the same movement as their predecessors, who were only deprived of occasions to 'enlighten' the highest political echelons with the "logos of God". Or they might in some way have accepted that they were part of a movement that was *de facto* changing its nature.

A member of the third generation of ^{arab}Hürüfîs was ^{mpcr}Ezz ad-Dîn 'Abdol-mağid ebne Fereste alias ^{om}Firîsteoğlı alias ^{arab}Ibn Malak (the patronyms ^{mpcr}ebne Fereste, ^{om}Firîsteoğlı and ^{arab}Ibn Malak all mean "the son of the Angel"), who died in A. D. 874 (1469 / 1470).⁷²² ^{om}Firîsteoğlı's teacher was a certain ^{om}Bäyezîd (also referred to as ^{om}Mevlânâ Bäyezîd), who had been a pupil of ^{mpcr}Fažlollâh's disciple ^{mpcr}Sayyid Şamsoddîn.⁷²³ ^{om}Firîsteoğlı's most influential ^{arab}Hürüfî work was the ^{om}'İşk-nâme ("Book of Love"), which was completed in the month of ^{arab}Şavvâl of the year A. H. 833 (June 23-July 21, 1430).⁷²⁴

4.5.6. The Hürüfiya and its afterlife after the political failure of the movement

The initial phase of the ^{arab}Hürüfiya's mission, which had started around the time of ^{mpcr}Fažlollâh's ^{mpcr}zohûr-e kibriyâ' at the end of the 14th century ended with a nearly complete failure on the political level. Except for some ephemeral successes such as the winning over of ^{arab}Nâşir ad-Dîn Muḥammad of ^{arab}Dûl-kadr, the ^{arab}Hürüfiya movement had not been able to establish itself as an officially recognized

⁷¹² Usluer 2009: 23. Cf. Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257. – On ^{mpcr}Kalemetollâh, see p. 138.

⁷¹³ Usluer 2009: 23.

⁷¹⁴ Bashir 2002: 181f. Cf. Usluer 2009: 23.

⁷¹⁵ Usluer 2009: 23.

⁷¹⁶ Bausani 1979: 600.

⁷¹⁷ Vatin 2015: 775.

⁷¹⁸ Vatin 2015: 775.

⁷¹⁹ Vatin 2015: 776.

⁷²⁰ Bausani 1979: 600.

⁷²¹ Bashir 2002: 182.

⁷²² Huart / Tefvîq 1909: XIX; Akün 1965: 924; Götz 1968: 178.

⁷²³ Huart / Tefvîq 1909: XIX; Akün 1965: 924.

⁷²⁴ Akün 1965: 924; Götz 1968: 178.

group anywhere in the Islamic landscape, although they paid for their missionary zeal with the extinction of most of their leaders together with probably thousands of followers. However, the ^{arab}Hürüfî teachings continued to be present and to spread across the Islamicate world and beyond as a cultural current. In fact, this cultural interpretation of ^{arab}Hürüfîya ideas continues to this day – the present publication bears witness to this.

Probably no other figure has contributed to the continuity of ^{arab}Hürüfî ideas as much as ^{arab}İmadoddin Näsîmi did. Already in the Middle Ages, ^{arab}Näsîmi's poems secured ^{arab}Fazlollâh's ideas an audience that no other author, including the master himself, could equal. ^{arab}Fazlollâh's theological prose could at best be understood by those who dedicated much time of their lives to the study of ^{arab}Hürüfî speculation, but their full understanding would also have required mastery of the remote Persian dialect of ^{arab}Astarâbâd. As a poet, ^{arab}Fazlollâh is a *quantité négligeable* in Persian literary history, but even ^{arab}Näsîmi's Persian poems are probably not, not to speak about ^{arab}Näsîmi's Turkic poems, which revolutionized Azerbaijani literary history. As a consequence, ^{arab}Näsîmi may safely be termed the most popular and influential ^{arab}Hürüfî author of all times, including the 20th and 21st centuries.

^{arab}Näsîmi's poetry uniquely contributed to the popularization of ^{arab}Hürüfî terminology and figures of thought in the Oghuz-speaking territories. This included many areas to the west of Iran, including the Anatolian ^{arab}hıylık and the Ottoman Empire. Several Ottoman poets wrote in the tradition of ^{arab}Näsîmi and his contemporary ^{arab}Refîî.

One of these Oghuz-speaking ^{arab}Hürüfî poets who were inspired by ^{arab}Näsîmi was ^{arab}Hâbibî (1470–1520).⁷²⁵ He is said to have met the ^{arab}Aqçoynlu ruler ^{arab}Yaqub (ruled 1478–1490) while working as a young shepherd. A perhaps legendary account describes how they met: Impressed by the young man's wittiness, the ruler invited him to his palace, where he rose to become a famous poet.⁷²⁶ After the end of the ^{arab}Aqçoynlu, ^{arab}Hâbibî changed over to the Şafavid court. The founder of the Şafavid state, shah ^{arab}İsmâ'îl (also known by his pen name ^{arab}Hağâ'î; ruled from 1501), continued to employ him as a court poet and had the title "the king of the poets" (^{arab}melikü'l-şuarâ) bestowed upon him.⁷²⁷ Later on, ^{arab}Hâbibî came to the Ottoman court.⁷²⁸ Although only around fifty of ^{arab}Hâbibî's poems survived,⁷²⁹ his rank and influence are enormous. This is evident, among other things, from the fact that ^{arab}Məhəmməd Füzüli (around 1485, 1489 or 1494–1556), doubtlessly one

of the greatest Islamic poets of all times, wrote some of his poems by extending ^{arab}Hâbibî's verses.⁷³⁰

Another important place in the history of Oghuz-language ^{arab}Hürüfî poetry belongs to the Ottoman ^{arab}Uşüli (died 1538). He came from ^{arab}Vardar Yenice (present-day Giannitsa, north of Thessaloniki). After having studied in a madrasa, ^{arab}Uşüli joined the circles of non-conformist and socio-critical dervishes.⁷³¹ Similar to ^{arab}Hâbibî, ^{arab}Uşüli is considered to be a literary heir to ^{arab}Näsîmi, even if not all of the poems in his divan contain ^{arab}Hürüfî elements.⁷³² One of the things in which ^{arab}Uşüli shows similarities to ^{arab}Näsîmi is his interpretation of love (^{arab}şîk-^{arab}şîk). According to ^{arab}Uşüli, true love must be directed toward a spiritual being or idea and to be taken so seriously that one is ready to die for it.⁷³³ ^{arab}Uşüli was spitefully and maliciously attacked by his compatriot ^{arab}Âşîk Çelebi (1520–1572) for his anti-mainstream interpretation of Islam and for his ^{arab}Hürüfî leanings.

^{arab}Şeyh İbrâhîmîlere isnâd olınan ilhâd tohmin Rümâda ekmişdür ve Nesimiyât türre-hâtından⁷³⁴ getürdüğü nihâl-i nihâd-i dalâli ol dökmişdür. Nite olup bîmeyegeler gelip ol tohmi ekmeğe başlamışlar ve nite ber-hurdâr olmayoğaklar ol nihâle budaklar asilamışlardır. Hağ Te'âlâ tohmlarin cüride ve köklerin kurida.

"He [^{arab}Uşüli – M. R. H.] was the one who sowed the seed of anti-Islam (^{arab}ilhâd) that was ascribed to the Şeyh-İbrâhîmîs⁷³⁵ in ^{arab}Rüm.⁷³⁶ And he was the one who planted the readily available bough of aberration, which he had plucked from the ^{arab}Näsîmi shenanigans.⁷³⁷ So many of those who would never grow to be good or thrive have come along and begun to sow this seed, and how many of those who

⁷²⁵ Kürküçüoğlu 1985: XXV.

⁷²⁶ Macit 2007a: 48.

⁷²⁷ Aralı 1977: 4; Macit 2007a: 48; Celâl / Hüseyinov 2008: 27.

⁷²⁸ Macit 2007a: 48.

⁷²⁹ Cf. Macit 2007a: 48; Celâl / Hüseyinov 2008: 27.

⁷³⁰ Celâl / Hüseyinov 2008: 27.

⁷³¹ On the life of ^{arab}Uşüli, cf. Özkırımlı 1983; Macit 2007a: 40, 43, 47. – He must not be confused with another Ottoman poet who used the pen name ^{arab}Uşüli and died in 1684 (see Horata 2007: 464).

⁷³² Macit 2007a: 43.

⁷³³ Şentürk 2007: 369.

⁷³⁴ Here, a *varia lectio* is indicated by Filiz Kılıç: ^{arab}türrehât u küfriyatından [M. R. H.]

⁷³⁵ Apparently an antinomian order [M. R. H.].

⁷³⁶ ^{arab}Rüm denotes the former territories of the Byzantine Empire and Slavic kingdoms conquered by the Ottomans (İşlek 2015). [M. R. H.]

⁷³⁷ According to the *varia lectio* mentioned in footnote 734: "...which he had plucked from the shenanigans and kafir rubbish à la ^{arab}Näsîmi" [M. R. H.]

would never be lucky have grafted twigs on that bough. May Allah The High putrefy their seeds and dry up their roots!⁷³⁸

An interesting element of ^{om}Āşik Çelebi's rhetorically brilliant and angry invective is the neologism ^{om}*Nesimiyât* "things belonging to or coming from ^{om}Nesimi", which, as the context suggests, has probably a pejorative sense. ^{om}*Nesimiyât* shows that ^{om}Nesimi's name had already at that point of time become proverbial for poetically elegant expressions of ^{arab}Hürüfî heresy. Also, the quote shows that ^{om}Nesimi had become part of a polemic discussion in literary Ottoman circles, which was probably linked to the general intellectual combats that went on between conservative and more open and tolerant circles in the Ottoman Empire at that time.⁷³⁹

Another important poet with ^{arab}Hürüfî tendencies who was active in the Ottoman lands was ^{om}Muhtî Dede (around 1553-before 1621). He left behind a versed opus with the title ^{om}*Ķismet-nâme* ("Book of Destiny").⁷⁴⁰ One of ^{om}Muhtî Dede's pupils was ^{om}ArĶi Dede, who wrote a *divan* of ^{arab}Hürüfî poems.⁷⁴¹

One may also mention ^{om}Nesimi's quasi-namesake ^{om}Kul Nesimî ("^{om}Nesimî the slave"), who lived in the 17th century.⁷⁴² He is frequently confused with (^{om}Ķmadadd-din) ^{om}Nesimi because he also used ^{arab}Hürüfî motifs in his poetry.

In addition to the aforementioned, there are some minor poets who are credited with having fostered ^{arab}Hürüfî penchants.⁷⁴³ The affiliation of some other poets to a ^{arab}Hürüfî current is disputed. For instance, while ^{om}Şun'ullāh Ķaybî (17th century) is considered to be a ^{arab}Hürüfî by some,⁷⁴⁴ he was also a member of the ^{om}Halvetiye order.⁷⁴⁵ Apparently, in those days when the ^{arab}Hürüfîya had long ceased to be an organization with a clear political orientation the boundaries between ^{arab}Hürüfîya and non-^{arab}Hürüfîya had blurred.

Importantly, the ^{arab}Hürüfîya had a lasting impact on the ^{om}Kızıllbaş / Alevi-Bektaşî culture.⁷⁴⁶ This was already discovered by the first generation of scholars that

investigated the ^{arab}Hürüfîya, including Edward Granville Browne⁷⁴⁷ (1862–1926) and Georg Jacob (1862–1937).⁷⁴⁸ In the Turkish Alevi tradition, ^{om}Nesimi is considered to be one of the Seven Great Poets (^{om}*Yedi Ulu Ozan*).⁷⁴⁹ Another of the ^{om}*Yedi Ulu Ozan* whose work betrays strong ^{arab}Hürüfî influence was ^{om}Āşik Virani (17th century), who also used the pen names ^{om}Virani and ^{om}Viran Abdal.⁷⁵⁰ Although he has left only a small oeuvre (about 40 poems and a treatise), he is considered to be the most important representative of ^{arab}Hürüfî literature in the 17th century.⁷⁵¹

Interest in ^{om}Nesimi and ^{arab}Hürüfî literature was renewed in the Ottoman Empire from the ^{om}Tanzîmât period (1839–1876) onward. This was one of the few periods of Ottoman and Turkish history in which freedom of expression was comparatively unrestrained. Following the begin of the ^{om}Tanzîmât era, the first printed editions of ^{om}Nesimi's Turkic *divan* appeared in Constantinople (twice in 1844, then in 1860, 1869 and 1881).⁷⁵² After the annihilation of the Janissaries and the abolishment of the Bektashi order in the "Benevolent Event" (^{om}*Yak'a-yi Ķayriye*, ^{om}*Vaka-yi Ķayriye*) of 1826, members of the order and their sympathizers nevertheless continued to foster ^{arab}Hürüfî leanings.⁷⁵³ Some tardive texts even seem to try to emphasize the importance of the historical ties between the ^{arab}Hürüfîya and the Bektashis more than had probably been the case before. For instance, the ^{om}*Ķāṣifî'l-esrâr ve Dāṣifî'l-Esrâr* ("The Discoverer of the secrets and the Defender against the evils") written by ^{om}HoĶa İĶṣāṣ Efendi in 1873 pretends to know that ^{om}Aliyo'l-Alâ visited the ^{om}*tekke* (monastery) named after ^{om}Hacı Bektaş in ^{om}KırĶehir.⁷⁵⁴ Even if this statement has no historical value whatsoever already due to the time interval, the influence of the ^{arab}Hürüfîya on Alevism-Bektashism is a reality.⁷⁵⁵

In a number of cases, the ^{arab}Hürüfîya has even inspired modern authors. The most famous is probably the Turkish nobel prize winner Orhan Pamuk (*1952). There is a number of references to the ^{arab}Hürüfîya in his 1990 novel "The Black Book" (^{om}*Kara Ķitap*).⁷⁵⁶ Similar allusions can be found in another of Pamuk's novels, "Snow" (^{om}*Kar*, 2002). To start with, the text of ^{om}*Kar* directly mentions ^{om}Ibn al-

⁷³⁸ The text is from Āşik Çelebi 2010: 366f. Filiz KılıĶ' transcription has been adapted to the system used in the present book.

⁷³⁹ On these discussions cf. Heß 2018d, where they are illustrated with the example of coffee.

⁷⁴⁰ Edition: Muhittî Dede 2016. Cf. KürĶçioĶlu 1985: XXV.

⁷⁴¹ Götz 1968: 177.

⁷⁴² AkarĶınar 2007: 663.

⁷⁴³ Cf. the poet ^{om}Caferî (>^{om}*omĶaferî) mentioned in KürĶçioĶlu 1985: XXV.*

⁷⁴⁴ Cf. KürĶçioĶlu 1985: XXV.

⁷⁴⁵ AkarĶınar 2007: 663.

⁷⁴⁶ Cf. Halm 1988: 99.

⁷⁴⁷ Browne 1907.

⁷⁴⁸ Jacob 1909.

⁷⁴⁹ Öztelli 1989: 16; Öker / Koparan 1999: 3-13; Kaplan 2004: 34, 192; AkarĶınar 2007: 663 (who refers to them as the "Seven Great Ones" (^{om}*Yedi Ulular*)).

⁷⁵⁰ AkarĶınar 2007: 663.

⁷⁵¹ AkarĶınar 2007: 663f.

⁷⁵² Mehmed Sa'îd 1844; No editor 1860; No editor 1869 / 1870; KürĶçioĶlu 1985: XXVI.

⁷⁵³ On the "Benevolent Event", see Kreiser 2005: 316, 325; SakaoĶlu 2011: 425f.

⁷⁵⁴ Algar 1995: 45f.; Bausani 1979: 600.

⁷⁵⁵ Bausani 1979: 600.

⁷⁵⁶ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 258. First edition of the novel: Pamuk 1990.

'Arabi',⁷⁵⁷ which we have come to know as one of the most influential Arab authorities on letter mysticism and authority who influenced the ^{arab}Hürüfiya. Although Pamuk does not mention the ^{arab}Hürüfiya movement in ^{10a}*Kar expressis verbis*, this novel contains many elements that can easily be deciphered as hidden references to the ^{arab}Hürüfi doctrine. As a matter of fact, even the masking of ^{arab}Hürüfi elements in this novel itself might constitute a reference to ^{mpc}Fazlollah's religious movement, which loved to express its ideas in their own coded ways. Another hint at ^{arab}Hürüfi motifs could be the soundwise relation between the title of ^{10a}*Kar* and the name of its main character, ^{10a}*Ka*. Again, the *tertium comparationis* between Pamuk's text and the ^{arab}Hürüfi tradition would be the use of wordplay. In addition to these more or less vague connections, ^{10a}*Kar* also contains a number of motifs that seem to point more directly at a ^{arab}Hürüfi background. For instance, the number of lines in the poems revealed to the hero ^{10a}*Ka* is explicitly mentioned in the novel's text.⁷⁵⁸ This is a way of relating writing to mathematics which structurally resembles some of the basic principles of ^{arab}Hürüfi speculation. An even stronger hint seems to be the name of one of those poems in the novel, which is "The Secret Symmetry" (^{10a}*Gizli Simetri*).⁷⁵⁹ The expression used as this poem's title also appears elsewhere in its variant "the secret symmetry of his [= *Ka's* - M. R. H.] life" (^{10a}*hayatının gizli simetrisi*).⁷⁶⁰ In another place, Pamuk speaks about "a secret geometry of life, the logic which he [= ^{10a}*Ka* - M. R. H.] had not been able to decipher"⁷⁶¹ (^{10a}*hayatın mantığını çözemediği gizli bir geometrisi*).⁷⁶¹ All these references to invisible but crucially meaningful "symmetries" create possible associations with the ^{mpc}*istivâ* line, the imaginary line which in ^{arab}Hürüfiya texts divides the human faces into two halves and has a central place in the religious system invented by ^{mpc}Fazlollah.⁷⁶² An additional feature that makes some ^{arab}Hürüfi influence behind the ^{10a}*Gizli Simetri* and similar expressions in "Snow" likely is the mention of interrelation between the reading of poems and the observation of the face of the beloved one. For instance, in one passage ^{10a}*Ka* states that ^{10a}*Okurken yüzünü görmek istiyorum* ("While reading, I want to see your face").⁷⁶³ The juxtaposition of observing somebody's face and reading is, of course, another pivotal element of ^{arab}Hürüfi belief, which has found its expression in many of ^{arab}Nasimi's poems.

⁷⁵⁷ Pamuk 2002: 108.

⁷⁵⁸ Pamuk 2002: 89-96, 102f.

⁷⁵⁹ Pamuk 2002: 103.

⁷⁶⁰ Pamuk 2002: 91.

⁷⁶¹ Pamuk 2002: 134.

⁷⁶² See p. 103.

⁷⁶³ Pamuk 2002: 93.

4.5.7. Is the ^{arab}Hürüfiya Islamic or not?

Any survey of the ^{arab}Hürüfiya would not be complete without addressing the above question. Both from Oriental and Western, contemporary and anachronistic perspectives, this is a crucial question. Quite naturally, it has played importance in all kinds of primary sources and secondary literature. For instance, the notions "islam" (^{arab}*islam*) and "disbeliever" (^{arab}*küfür*) are already discussed by ^{arab}Nasimi himself in his *Turkic divan*,⁷⁶⁴ and the 15th-century Arab author ^{arab}Sibt b. al-'Ağami condemns ^{arab}Nasimi for being an "infidel" (^{arab}*kafir*).⁷⁶⁵ Conservative Muslim authorities use Islam as one element in strictly binary opposition: There is Islam and disbelief, *tertium non datur*. However, ^{arab}Nasimi's approach seems to be different: Although repeating this traditional dualism, he transcends it by equalizing the opposites.⁷⁶⁶ We may describe the two approaches as a dualist versus a holistic one. ^{arab}Nasimi's holistic use of the terms ^{arab}*islam* and ^{arab}*küfür*, of course, reduces the question "Is the ^{arab}Hürüfiya Islamic or not?" to absurdity, because according to it, the answer could both be yes and not. In other words, ^{arab}Nasimi himself might have answered this question that it is *a priori* a wrong question to ask.

Even from a modern perspective, the question whether the ^{arab}Hürüfiya should be considered as "Islamic" or not, is a very difficult, and perhaps futile, question to ask given the fact that any kind of definition of "Islam" is far from uncontroversial.⁷⁶⁷ Hence, the answer to the question changes in the function of what one accepts to define as "Islamic". What today is accepted to be "Islamic" by hundreds of millions of people may differ from what might have been understood to be the essence of Islam during the lifetime of the prophet ^{arab}Muhammad or during the first centuries after his death. In any case, the overwhelming mass of what nowadays is believed to be the textual and ritual basis of Islam was fixed only long after the death of the Prophet. For instance, the legitimacy to accept the so-called "five pillars of Islam" (the confession of faith, ritual prayer, the pilgrimage to Mecca, the Ramadan fast, and almsgiving) as defining elements of Islam of the Prophet's times has been doubted on the basis of serious interpretations of traditional texts, including the Quran.⁷⁶⁸ Also, even the available texts of the Quran – of which no historical-critical edition has ever been prepared – were not fixed in the times of the Prophet, but later. The sequences of the surahs were changed in the course of time, diacritical marks added,

⁷⁶⁴ Cf. chapter 6.1.

⁷⁶⁵ See chapter 5.4.2.1.

⁷⁶⁶ See again chapter 6.1.

⁷⁶⁷ One of the few modern authors who discuss the problems of defining Islam in a philosophically profound manner is Ibn Warraq 2003.

⁷⁶⁸ Chabbi 2016.

etc. Finally, if one looks at the genesis of Islam as a historical phenomenon, one will quickly discover that apart from plenty of completely uncheckable oral traditions that belong to the category self-representation the amount of verifiable source data is very limited.⁷⁶⁹

However, instead of speaking about "Islam" in a categorical way, one might compare the ^{arab}Hurūfiya movement to politically, socially and militarily relatively dominant currents that can, with all due caution, be named "mainstream Islam". If we accept such an approach, we may try to look at some features of the ^{arab}Hurūfiya that set it apart from such mainstream Islamic religions, as were practiced, for instance under the Abbasid caliphate, but also in Mameluke Egypt.

As for the modern scholarly literature, classifications of the ^{arab}Hurūfiya range from considering it as an Islamic group to presenting it as a religion *sui generis*. For instance, the British-American professor with Shii and Iranian roots Hamid Algar (*1940) wants to see in the ^{arab}Hurūfiya one of many movements within the framework of Islam.⁷⁷⁰ He is agreed upon in this respect by Shahzad Bashir (*1968), who states that both ^{pers}Fazlollāh himself and his followers considered themselves to be Muslims.⁷⁷¹ Similarly, but with a slightly stronger emphasis on the ^{arab}Hurūfiya's non-mainstream character, Hellmut Ritter (1892–1971) calls it a "sect" (^{germ}*Sekte*).⁷⁷² In this, he follows the terminology established by the founder of modern scholarship on the ^{arab}Hurūfiya, the British orientalist Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926) in his article, "Some Notes on the Literature and Doctrines of the Hurufi Sect".⁷⁷³ In contrast to all the previously mentioned scholars, Abdūlbāki Gölpınarlı (1900–1982) applies to the ^{arab}Hurūfiya the word ^{ira}*dīn* "religion".⁷⁷⁴

It is not fully clear whether ^{pers}Fazlollāh himself really intended to leave the framework of mainstream Islam for good. His own statements might have been marginal or extreme, but need not necessarily be seen as being directed at breaking with the concept of being a Muslim.

However, after his death, the ^{arab}Hurūfiya movement as it was carried on by his successors, followers, and admirers, began to display certain characteristics that are at least hard to reconcile with any mainstream understanding of Islam.

One such element is the idea that ^{pers}Fazlollāh was the "Sultan of all the prophets" (^{pers}*sultān-e hame paygāmarān*), which, according to his pupils, can be ascribed

to himself.⁷⁷⁵ This statement is to be put into a relationship with the assumption held by the vast majority of Muslims that the Prophet ^{arab}Muḥammad was "The Seal of the Prophets".⁷⁷⁶ At least to unprejudiced ears, "sultan" sounds like something that ranges even above "seal". And what is more, as "all the prophets" also includes the Prophet ^{arab}Muḥammad, the above quote expresses that ^{pers}Fazlollāh rules over the Prophet ^{arab}Muḥammad. This does not seem to be a ranking that the majority of Muslims living today would seem ready to accept. Not surprisingly, Orkhan Mir-Kasimov has argued that the above expression contains the "suggestion of an original interpretation of Islam or even a transformation of Islam into a new universal religion".⁷⁷⁷

Another feature of post-^{pers}Fazlollāh ^{arab}Hurūfiya that certainly deviates from the way the majority of Muslims understand their religion is the introduction of a new formula for the confession of faith. In mainstream Islam, the expression "I witness that there is no god except for Allah, and I witness that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah" (^{arab}*ašhadu al-lā ilāha illā ʾ-llāh wa-ašhadu anna Muḥammadan rasūl Allāh*) is used in the call to prayer (^{arab}*adān*). Writing half a century after the death of ^{pers}Fazlollāh, the ^{arab}Hurūfi author ^{pers}Amir Giyāgoddin gives the following alternative form of the ^{arab}*adān* in his ^{pers}*Istiwā-nāme* ("The Book of the Symmetry Axis"): ^{arab}*ašhadu al-lā ilāha illā F-ʾ-H wa-ašhadu anna Ādama ḥalfat Allāh wa-ašhadu anna Muḥammadan rasūl Allāh* ("I witness that there is no god except for *Fāh*, and I witness that Man is the locum tenens of Allah, and I witness that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah").⁷⁷⁸ According to Heinz Halm, the ^{arab}Hurūfi ^{arab}*adān* with the identification of *F-ʾ-H* and Allah was also inscribed on ^{pers}Fazlollāh's shrine in ^{az}Əlinca.⁷⁷⁹

One does not even have to start interpreting the text of the the ^{arab}Hurūfi ^{arab}*adān* in order to understand the provocation it presents to mainstream Muslim ears. For even, the idea that the most important of the "five pillars of Islam" could be

⁷⁷⁵ See p. 125.

⁷⁷⁶ On this metaphor, which was already applied by Mani (A. D. 216-276) to himself, see Scopello 2005: 261.

⁷⁷⁷ ... *Oni onté à [sic] proposer une interprétation originale de l'Islam, ainsi[que] une transformation de l'Islam en une nouvelle religion universelle* (Mir-Kasimov 2009: 235).

⁷⁷⁸ Ritter 1954: 1, quoting from the Vatican manuscript Vat Pers. 34, fol. 124a. – On the ^{pers}*Istiwā-nāme* and its date of composition, see footnote 533. – Halm 1988: 99 suggests the reading of the graphemes *F-ʾ-H* as /fāh/ ("Fāh"). To read the three letters as a single, long syllable seems to be plausible, as it would mean that the end of the first line of the ^{arab}Hurūfi ^{arab}*adān* (... *illā Fāh*) was prosodically equivalent to the corresponding place in the traditional mainstream Muslim ^{arab}*adān* (... *illā ʾllāh*), and because it rhymes with the other lines. The identical rhyme in /āh/ would be assumed to be a property both of the traditional and the ^{arab}Hurūfi call to prayer.

⁷⁷⁹ Halm 1988: 99.

⁷⁶⁹ For instance, compare the discussion of the extant sources in Nagel 2008.

⁷⁷⁰ Algar 1987, *passim*.

⁷⁷¹ Bashir 2005: ix.

⁷⁷² So Ritter 1954, *passim*.

⁷⁷³ Browne 1898.

⁷⁷⁴ Gölpınarlı 1973: 2.

changed or enhanced in any fashion is something that most mainstream Muslims have always considered and still continue to consider to be outright blasphemy. In their view, such an amendment amounts to admitting the possibility of change in central aspects of their religion, the most important claim of which is its unchangeability. Hence, even the smallest perceptible alteration of the Muslim confession of faith challenges the very essence of mainstream Islam. To accept the most atomic change in the allegedly unchangeable central elements of the religion would create a precedent that could easily lead to further modifications, which could include the revolutionizing or even abolishment of the traditional system. Essentially for the same reason, present-day mainstream Muslims refuse to accept changes of even the smallest amount in the text of the Quran, the rules about sexuality, etc., even if the relevant passages and regulations are manifestly anachronistic.

If one does look also at the content of ^{pers}Amir Ğiyāṣoddīn's new ^{arab}*adān* formula, it offers further elements that are likely to be interpreted as non-Islamic by mainstream Muslims. Above all, the traditional Islamic designation of the god-head, *Allāh*, is replaced by the three letters *F-ʿ-H*. If we recall the special theological position accorded to ^{pers}Fāzllōllāh both by himself and by his followers and the phonetic similarity between the letter sequence *F-ʿ-H* and the name "^{pers}Fāzllōllāh", it seems to be a possible interpretation to identify this Allāh surrogate with the man from ^{pers}Astarābād himself. Of course, the addition ^{arab}Ādam ("man") to the confession of faith is yet another element that deviates from the traditional Muslim credo. Here, the mythological father of all human beings, who can metaphorically stand for the entirety of mankind, is literally put at the center of the religion.

Another criterion that might be helpful in deciding whether the ^{arab}Ḥurūfiya should be classified as a mainstream Muslim movement or not is its view of history. In the context of medieval Islam, 'history' means the imagination of history as imagined in the mythological accounts of the religious scriptures. ^{arab}Ḥurūfī writings distinguish three phases of the universal history understood according to these lines. The first is the era of "prophethood" (^{arab}*nubūwa*), which ends with the death of the Prophet ^{arab}Muḥammad. It is followed by the era of "holiness" (^{arab}*valāya*). This is the era that belongs to the Shii imams. The last and ontologically most important era comprises the lifetime of ^{pers}Fāzllōllāh and is called "divinity" (^{arab}*ulūhiya*, from the same root as the word "Allah"). According to the ^{arab}Ḥurūfī view, the true will of Allah and the real meaning of his utterances are revealed in their definitive and valid form exclusively in this third and final phase, and this manifestation happens through a human intermediary.⁷⁸⁰ Of course, the most important intermediary by which "divinity" spread on earth was no other than ^{pers}Fāzllōllāh himself, who initiated the era of ^{arab}*ulūhiya*. This periodic vision of global history, which allots a central position to ^{pers}Fāzllōllāh was one of the ways in which the ^{arab}Ḥurūfiya tried

to argue for the superiority of their doctrine over other Muslim traditions. All previous interpretations of Islam are inferior to those that started with ^{pers}Fāzllōllāh's revelations.

Summarizing, we can say that the question which appears in the title of the chapter is not resolved. On one hand, this is because "Islam" defies clear-cut definitions. On the other hand, it is because the ^{arab}Ḥurūfiya cannot unambiguously be categorized even if a more or less vague and unprecise definition of "Islam" is accepted as a basis for discussion. Perhaps it could be termed an Islamoid movement because it borrows many things from Islam but changes many of them radically in meaning but also in form. The ^{arab}Ḥurūfiya accepted the use of a confession of faith and a call to prayer but altered both. More importantly, the movement valued man higher than many forms of mainstream Islam. The quotes from ^{ar}Nāsimi's divan show that another reason for the special status of the ^{arab}Ḥurūfiya between Islam and non-Islam is philosophical and lies in the negation of the existence of the duality "Islam: non-Islam" by the Azerbaijanian poet.

The fact that the ^{arab}Ḥurūfiya used the Arabic language, the Quran and many features of mainstream Islam prevented it from being quickly and easily recognizable (and suppressible) as non-Islamic, although the affiliation of some of its elements to Islam was debatable. It was a movement that introduced change without targeting at a break. It had subversive potential. Therefore, it is quite unsurprising that the ^{arab}Ḥurūfīs were persecuted with so much vigor once the representatives of mainstream Islam understood the nature of the threat.

⁷⁸⁰ Mir-Kasimov 2009: 256.

5.1. Names

In the Islamicate Orient people usually have a number of names, which denote different aspects of the personality (such as place of origin, descent, and children, artistic activity, special characteristics). One or more of these names can be used according to the requirement of the situation. As a consequence, ²²Nəsimi is known by more than one name, too.

Like generic terms, proper names may receive different interpretations. For instance, the designation ^{arab}at-Tabrīzī "man from Tabriz" might not only denote a person who was born or lived in that city but someone who came from the larger area centered around Tabriz, or from an area which had Tabriz as its cultural hub.

As for ²²Nəsimi, he is not only referred to by a number of different names that might have different meanings according to the places they are used in. Also, his names appear in a considerable number of variants, both in the primary sources and in the secondary literature.

"²²Nəsimi" itself is technically speaking a pen name (^{mpcr}maḥlas, ^{mpcr}taḥallas). Oriental poetry required to use such a pseudonym in certain places. For instance, it appears in the final ²²beyt of most ghazals (which is the poetical form that ²²Nəsimi used most frequently).⁷⁸¹ This is by far the most widely used form of the name. However, as this pen name (or its equivalents in other Oriental languages) was also used by or applied to other figures, it may be appropriate to disambiguate it by adding another of ²²Nəsimi's names, for instance, ²²Seyyid, ²²İmadəddin, or ²²Ali.⁷⁸²

As a matter of fact, ²²Nəsimi is only one of at least two pen names that the poet used – albeit by far the most frequent. In addition, he also employed the ^{mpcr}maḥlas ^{mpcr}Hosaynī~^{owc}Hüseynī in some cases.⁷⁸³ ^{mpcr}Hosaynī~^{owc}Hüseynī has been claimed to be an older pen name.⁷⁸⁴ The change might be explained by ²²Nəsimi's conversion to the ^{arab}Ḥurūfī creed. ^{mpcr}Hosaynī~^{owc}Hüseynī means "belonging to

⁷⁸¹ For a definition of the ²²beyt see footnote 957.

⁷⁸² On these other names of ²²Nəsimi, see below. – For other medieval figures bearing the name ^{owc}Nesimi see p. 154 and cf. Heß 2011.

⁷⁸³ Ciopiński 1988: 73.

⁷⁸⁴ Ciopiński 1988: 73.

arab-al-Ḥusayn⁷⁵”, and most likely refers to the third Shii imam.⁷⁶ Therefore, it is likely to express sympathy for the Shii cause.

In the annals ^{arab} *Kunūz ad-dahab fi-tārīḥ Ḥalab*, which was written before 1479, the Arab historian ^{arab} Sibṭ b. al-ʿĀgamī refers to ^{arab} Nāsīmī as ^{arab} al-An-Nasīmī,⁷⁶ or just ^{arab} an-Nasīmī.⁷⁷ The second element of this Arabic phrase directly corresponds to the Modern Azerbaijani ^{arab} Nāsīmī.⁷⁸ In the Oriental, and particularly Arabic tradition, ^{arab} an-Nasīmī ~ ^{pers} Nasīmī ~ ^{pers} Nesīmī ~ ^{arab} Nāsīmī is to be considered as an epithet, which is recognizable from the ending ^{arab} -ī, the so-called ^{arab} nisba ending. According to the Arab system, the core element of the name given by ^{arab} Sibṭ b. al-ʿĀgamī, which would mark the given name, would, therefore, be ^{arab} ʿAlī. That ^{arab} ʿAlī was ^{arab} Nāsīmī’s personal name is also confirmed by the Arab jurist ^{arab} Ibrāhīm al-Ḥalabī (1460–1549), who was from Aleppo.⁷⁹

The Persian *poeta laureatus* ^{pers} Šarafoddīn Rāmi Tabrizī mentions in his poetological encyclopedia ^{pers} *Aniṣoʿ-ʿOṣṣāk* (“The companion of the lovers”) a certain ^{pers} Emād Ḥorūfī (^{arab} Emād Ḥurūfī), of whom he quotes the following Persian verses:

^{pers} *Ḥaṭṭ-e to ke dar-šān-e to nūzel Sode*
Lāmīst ke bar-āyat-e hosnat dāl ast

“Your lines, that have been revealed in Your honor,
Are a *Lām* that has become a *Dāl* in front of the beauty of your verse.”

and

⁷⁵ On ^{arab} al-Ḥusayn, cf. p. 126, 136 and 142.

⁷⁶ Sibṭ b. al-ʿĀgamī al-Ḥalabī 1997: 125. For the whole of ^{arab} Sibṭ b. al-ʿĀgamī’s text and its discussion, see chapter 5.2.4.1.

⁷⁷ Sibṭ b. al-ʿĀgamī al-Ḥalabī 1997: 125.

⁷⁸ See p. 184.

⁷⁹ Kürkçüoğlu 1985: II. ^{arab} Kürkçüoğlu also mentions a speculative theory according to which ^{arab} Nāsīmī’s original personal name had been ^{pers} ʿOmar / ^{pers} ʿOmer but then changed to ^{arab} / ^{pers} ʿAlī / ^{arab} ʿAlī in order to avoid the Shii name taboo pronounced against ^{pers} ʿOmar (who was a caliph considered illegitimated by the Shiites). According to ^{arab} Kürkçüoğlu, this speculation appears only in the works of very tardive authors such as ^{arab} Bursalı Mehmed Ṭāhīr, and is therefore quite doubtful. For the same reason, the claim made by the Ottoman writer ^{arab} ʿAlī Emīrī Efendi (1857–1924) that ^{arab} Nāsīmī’s personal name was ^{pers} Muṣliḥu’d-Dīn (quoted in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: II) should be discarded. – The theory that ^{arab} / ^{pers} Emād ʿAlī was ^{arab} Nāsīmī’s personal name is accepted by a number of modern scholars, cf. Paşayev 2010: 42, 44.

^{pers} *Asrār-e to ʿoṣṣāk-e to dānand kamāhī*
Ān ḥāl na ḥālist ke serrīst elāhī

“Your secrets are known by those who love you the way you are,
That macule is not a macule, for it is the divine secret.”⁷⁹

Unfortunately, the precise lifetime of ^{pers} Šarafoddīn Rāmi Tabrizī is unknown. However, the historical sources offer some information that allows for an approximate determination. To these belongs that he is said to have been the court poet of the Muzaḥḥarī ruler ^{pers} Šāh Maṣṣūr (ruled 1387–1393).⁷⁹ Also, we know that one of the manuscript copies of the ^{pers} *Aniṣoʿ-ʿOṣṣāk* was created in A. H. 823 (first day: January 17, 1420; last day: January 5, 1421).⁷⁹ That is, the above verses must have been written before January 5, 1421. In any case, the above dates indicate a period of activity for ^{pers} Šarafoddīn Rāmi Tabrizī that roughly corresponds with what is believed to be ^{arab} Nāsīmī’s approximate lifetime according to most accounts.⁷⁹ This, the use of the epithet ^{pers} *Ḥorūfī* and the content of the above four verses make it quite likely that the person referred to as ^{pers} Emād Ḥorūfī by ^{pers} Šarafoddīn Rāmi Tabrizī was indeed ^{arab} Nāsīmī. The verses contain typical ^{arab} Ḥurūfī keywords, such as ^{pers} *ḥaṭṭ* “lines (of writing or on the face)”, ^{pers} *ḥāl* “macule” and ^{pers} *elāhī* “divine”. The mention of ^{pers} *āyat*, which is a term that usually designates verses from the Quran, and of “secrets” (^{pers} *asrār*) is also typically both of the ^{arab} Ḥurūfīya and of ^{arab} Nāsīmī’s poetry, as is the creative and quite elegant wordplay that involves the shapes of the Arabic letters ^{arab} *Lām* and ^{arab} *Dāl*.⁷⁹ It should be noted that the ^{pers} *Aniṣoʿ-ʿOṣṣāk* is a poetological manual that contains a systematic arrangement of commendable examples from the works of good poets. This means, that already the inclusion of the above-quoted lines into the ^{pers} Šarafoddīn Rāmi Tabrizī’s poetological encyclopedia gives a certain indication of their quality. This coincides with our knowledge that ^{arab} Nāsīmī indeed was a proficient author of Persian poetry.

Frequently, ^{arab} Nāsīmī is also referred to with the name variant ^{pers} ʿImādeddīn / ^{arab} ʿImādeddīn. For instance, this form is used by the Ottoman literary historians ^{arab}.

⁷⁹⁰ Šarafoddīn Rami Tabrizi 2012: 92, 105, 187. I have transcribed the texts from the Persian version in Arabic script but using ^{arab} Nazakat Mommdāli’s *Modern Azerbaijani transcription but without checking the text through scanning*. – The editor ^{arab} Nazakat Mommdāli gives the name in its Modern Azerbaijani form (^{arab} ʿImād Ḥurūfī). However, as ^{pers} Šarafoddīn Rāmi Tabrizī wrote did not write in Turkic but in Persian, the pronunciation can be assumed to have originally been in the Modern Persian language.

⁷⁹¹ Berthels / Brujin 2019; Karasmailoğlu 2019 [2007].

⁷⁹² Šarafoddīn Rami Tabrizi 2012: 16.

⁷⁹³ See chapters 5.2.1. and 5.2.4.

⁷⁹⁴ On the interpretation of this wordplay, see Šarafoddīn Rami Tabrizi 2012: 92.

Laṭīfī (1491–1582), ^{om} Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ğārullāh (end of the 16th century) and ^{om} Hasan Ćelebi (1540–1604).⁷⁹⁵ Technically, this is yet another an epithet, but it is not formed with the ^{arab} *nisba* ending but belongs to the category nicknames (singular: ^{arab} *laḳab*). ^{om} İmādeddīn means “the pillar” (^{arab} *ʿimād*) “of the religion”. The word ^{arab} *ʿimād* is the Arabic equivalent of ^{mper} *ʿemād* as it appears in the above-discussed ^{mper} *ʿEmād* Hürüfī. If both ^{mper} *ʿEmād* Hürüfī and ^{om} İmādeddīn / ^{az} İmādeddīn are variants of ^{az} Nasīmī’s name, it seems quite likely that ^{om} İmādeddīn / ^{az} İmādeddīn is an extension of the originally shorter form of the name, or, *vice versa*, ^{mper} *ʿEmād* a shortened variant of the fuller form of epithet, ^{om} İmādeddīn ~ ^{mper} *ʿEmād* od-dīn. The Persian form ^{mper} *ʿEmādeddīn* is ascribed to ^{az} Nasīmī in the ^{mper} *Mağālesoʻ-ʻOṣṣāk* (15th / 16th century)⁷⁹⁶ and in ^{mper} *Mirzā Ḥasan-e Feṣāʻī’s* ^{mper} *Farsnāme-ye Nāserī* in the second half of the 19th century.⁷⁹⁷

The ^{mper} *Mağālesoʻ-ʻOṣṣāk* also adds the title ^{mper} *amīr* to ^{az} Nasīmī’s name (the full name being ^{mper} *Amīr Sayyid ʻEmādeddīn Nasīmī*).⁷⁹⁸ This is an interesting detail because we know that ^{mper} *amīr* was used as a title in the ^{arab} *Ḥurūfiya* movement, for instance, by some of ^{mper} Fażlollāh’s children and at least one ^{arab} *Ḥurūfī* author.⁷⁹⁹ If the information is true, ^{az} Nasīmī had the rank of somebody who “commanded” (in whatever sense), at least within the ^{arab} *Ḥurūfiya* organization.

As we have seen at the example of the name variant ^{mper} *Sayyid ʻEmād*, already in the Middle Ages the element ^{az} *om Seyyid was added to ^{az} Nasīmī’s name. This marked his claim to belong to the family of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁸⁰⁰ Among those who applied this title to ^{az} Nasīmī were ^{om} Laṭīfī⁸⁰¹ and ^{om} *ʻAṣīk Ćelebi*.⁸⁰²*

⁷⁹⁵ The forms from the works of ^{om} Laṭīfī and ^{om} Hasan Ćelebi are quoted in Ayan 1990: 13. For the reference from ^{om} Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ğārullāh see Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ćarullah 1997: 290. – On ^{om} Laṭīfī, see Karahan 1979: 228; on ^{om} Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ğārullāh cf. also p. 169.

⁷⁹⁶ Quoted in Ayan 1990: 12. On the ^{mper} *Mağālesoʻ-ʻOṣṣāk* see below p. 202.

⁷⁹⁷ Quoted in Ayan 1990: 12.

⁷⁹⁸ *Emir Seyyid İmadüʻd-din Nesimî* (Ayan 1990: 12).

⁷⁹⁹ See chapter 4.5.4.7. and p. 159.

⁸⁰⁰ See p. 175 below. Cf. also Ciopiński 1988: 73.

⁸⁰¹ Latif 1979 [1950]: 435, also quoted in Ayan 1990: 13.

⁸⁰² *Āṣīk Ćelebi* 2010: 865.

5.2. Life

No full synopsis of the available sources on ^{az} Nasīmī in the various relevant languages, such as Arabic, Persian, and Oghuz Turkic, has ever been made, and no monograph about his life published. Consequently, the information about the poet has to be gathered from scattered editions of primary sources, and from a number of scholarly publications in various languages.⁸⁰³

However, this is not the only problem encountered in writing about ^{az} Nasīmī’s life. For even if the extant source material was combined most of ^{az} Nasīmī’s life would probably still remain in the dark, and many questions would be left unanswered.⁸⁰⁴

The following subchapters do not intend to replace a systematic and complete biography. Instead, they highlight important aspects of ^{az} Nasīmī’s life in order to give the modern reader a general impression.

5.2.1. Presumed year of birth

^{az} Nasīmī’s year of birth is unknown. All dates are given in modern literature, such as A. D. 1369,⁸⁰⁵ or 1370⁸⁰⁶ are purely speculative.

In the absence of reliable positive information about the time ^{az} Nasīmī saw the light of the world, one may try to use arrive at theories by using indirect information. However, this is also very problematic as most other events in ^{az} Nasīmī’s life can also not be dated with certainty.⁸⁰⁷

⁸⁰³ The Nasimi bibliography edited by A. C. Xəlilov (Xəlilov 2013) is of some help to find literature in Russian and in Oriental languages, but contains many errors and omits much of the international literature of the recent decades. As introductions the following modern references may be given: Begdli 1970: 193–198; İbragimov 1973; Quluzade 1973: 5–30; Divshali / Luft 1980: VII–XI, 18–30; Kürkçüoğlu 1985: I–XX–VI; Roemer 1989: 80–90; Ayan 1990: 11–16; Çiftçi 1997: 21–27; Şıxıyeva 1999; Heß 2001; Ayan 2002; Bashir 2005 (relevant sections); Heß 2009; Heß 2009b; Heß 2009c; Heß 2010 / 2011; Heß 2011; Heß 2015; Heß 2016; Heß 2007; Heß 2018.

⁸⁰⁴ See, for instance, Şıxıyeva 1999: 64.

⁸⁰⁵ Qurbansoy 2019: 13. “1369” is the most widespread date assumed for ^{az} Nasīmī’s birth of all, also because it was officially introduced already in Soviet Azerbaijan. It is still widely used in official references to ^{az} Nasīmī, such as the celebrations on the occasion of the 650th anniversary of his birth in 2019.

⁸⁰⁶ Cf. Macit 2007: 220, who adds a question mark to this date.

⁸⁰⁷ Cf. the argumentation in Heß 2011.

5.2.2. Theories about his place of birth

As with the year of ^{az}Nāsīmī's birth, nothing definite is known about the place where he was born. The discussion in the literature has not yet arrived at a convincing conclusion. However, the subject has been debated on a much larger scale than the year of birth. The following subchapters resume some of the statements about cities and regions that have been suggested as ^{az}Nāsīmī's possible birthplace.

5.2.2.1. *Nasim?

One of the oldest suggestions as to ^{az}Nāsīmī's birthplace is that he originated in a place called ^{az}Nasim (^{om}Nasim). This theory was put forward by the Ottoman literary historian ^{om}Laṭīfī (d. 1582).⁸⁰⁸ ^{om}Laṭīfī is the author of a prestigious biographical and literary encyclopedia, the ^{om}*Tezkiretü Ş-Şu'arā* ("The lexicon of the poets"). He presented this work upon its completion to the Ottoman sultan ^{om}Süleymān in 1546. According to ^{om}Laṭīfī, ^{om}Nasim was the name of a district not far from Baghdad.⁸⁰⁹ The statement was also repeated by the Ottoman historian ^{om}Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ğarullāh (died 1597), who claimed that ^{om}Nasim was a district (^{om}*nāhiye*) in the vicinity of Baghdad.⁸¹⁰

At first sight, ^{om}Laṭīfī's assertion seems to be plausible. As we have already seen, ^{az}Nasimī's pen name (^{arab}*ḥusn*^{az}Nasimī, ^{om}Nesimī) contains the so-called *nisba* ending *-ī*.⁸¹¹ This means that at least formally, ^{az}Nasimī's sobriquet might look as if it was derived from a word ^{arab}Nasim, ^{om}Nesim, or ^{om}Nesim. In theory, this might very well be the name of a place or town.

However, this theory is problematic for a number of reasons. To begin with, the use of a pen name (^{om}*maḥlas*) that is created from a place name is a very rare thing in Turkic literature.⁸¹² In most cases, poets use ^{om}*maḥlas*es that are derived from important generic terms that are helpful in generating the poetic effect. More importantly, despite its mention by ^{om}Laṭīfī, ^{om}Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ğarullāh as well as a number of modern scholars, the existence of ^{arab}Nasim, ^{om}Nesim, or ^{om}Nesim is still doubtful, not to speak about any further hints at it being ^{az}Nasimī's

birthplace.⁸¹³ One of the modern authors who accept the authenticity of the tradition about ^{az}Nasimī's been born at ^{arab}Nasim is Bernhard Stern, who expressed this view early in the 20th century.⁸¹⁴

According to an Arabic biographical lexicon from the end of that century (^{arab}‘Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla’s ^{arab}*Muḡam al-Muḥallifin*), a certain ^{arab}Muḥammad b. Dāvūd an-Nasimī was killed in ^{arab}Nasim in the year in A. H. 901 (1495 / 1496); incidentally, nothing is said about whether ^{arab}Muḥammad b. Dāvūd an-Nasimī was personally related to ^{az}Nasimī. In this context, the place is described as a “city”.⁸¹⁵ Yet, this is rather doubtful information. For neither are we given the source on which ^{arab}‘Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla relied on nor is there any indication about the location of the mysterious ^{arab}Nasim (which in theory could be the name of more than one location). Is this supposed to be the place mentioned by ^{om}Laṭīfī? If we remember that ^{om}Laṭīfī does not characterize ^{om}Nasim as a city but as a district, this creates further doubt. There is also an important time gap between ^{az}‘Imādoddin Nasimī’s lifespan and the year A. H. 901 (not to speak about the time of ^{arab}‘Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla). This even opens up the possibility that this “city” was (indirectly) named after ^{az}‘Imādoddin Nasimī, and not vice versa.⁸¹⁶

Incidentally, another (or the same?) ^{om}Nasim¹ is mentioned by the Ottoman writer ^{om}Süleymān Sa‘deddin Efendi Müstaḳimzāde (1719–1780).⁸¹⁷ ^{om}Müstaḳimzāde allegedly describes this place as “one of the villages of Aleppo”.⁸¹⁸ Naturally, the time gap between the time of ^{az}Nasimī and that of ^{om}Müstaḳimzāde leads to the same problems as with the source quoted by ^{arab}‘Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla.

Recently, the prominent Azerbaijanian scholar ^{az}Qəzənfər Paşayev has identified ^{az}Nasimī’s birthplace as a “village” (^{az}*kənd*) bearing his name in the ^{arab}Kifri district of present-day Iraq’s ^{arab}Diyālā province.⁸¹⁹ It is not clear whether the village mentioned by ^{az}Paşayev is supposed to be identical with any of the aforementioned places, and, importantly if its existence can then be traced back until the times of ^{az}Nasimī. If not, the village might again owe its name to the poet, and not vice versa.

⁸¹³ Cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: I, who considers all theories of ^{az}Nasimī’s coming from ^{arab}Nasim to be baseless. – In contrast, Saadot Şirxiyeva has compiled statements by a number of modern authorities who claim that such a place really existed (Şirxiyeva 1999: 60).

⁸¹⁴ Stern n. y.: 107.

⁸¹⁵ ^{az}Şokor in Şirxiyeva’s translation (Şirxiyeva 1999: 60).

⁸¹⁶ This possibility is considered to be likely by Şirxiyeva 1999: 60.

⁸¹⁷ Kürkçüoğlu 1985: III.

⁸¹⁸ ^{om}*Haleb köylerinden biri* (quote from Kürkçüoğlu 1985: III).

⁸¹⁹ Paşayev 2010: 43.

⁸⁰⁸ Kürkçüoğlu 1985: V; Şirxiyeva 1999: 60; Paşayev 2010: 44.

⁸⁰⁹ Latifi 1979 [1950]: 435. Cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: V.

⁸¹⁰ Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ğarullāh 1997: 290.

⁸¹¹ P. 164. – On the *nisba* ending, cf. also p. 66.

⁸¹² Kürkçüoğlu 1985: III.

In addition to all the problems shown above, the mention of so many ^{46arab} Nasīm's means that for each alleged birthplace of the poet not only its existence before ²²Nasīm's birth and its identity with his birthplace would have to be demonstrated but also that one would have to show that none other than the alleged ^{46arab} Nasīm's was the right one.

In addition, assuming the existence of a place named ^{46arab}Nasīm, ^{46pers}Nāsīm, or ⁷⁰⁰⁰Nasīm is not the only way to etymologize the pen name ²²Nasimi. There are other plausible suggestions as well, including the formal parallel to ^{6pers}Fāzlōllāh's pen name ^{6pers}Na'īmī. According to ¹⁰⁰Kemāl Edib Kürküoğlu, ²²Nasīm's famous line ²²*Adımı haqdan Nasimi yazaram* "I write my name (as) ²²Nasimi from God" expresses that the poet was given his pen name by ^{6pers}Fāzlōllāh himself.⁸²⁰

Finally, what also raises some suspicions about a place called ^{46arab}Nasīm (etc.) being at the origin of the pen name ²²Nasimi is ²²Nasīm's other pen name, ^{6pers}Hosaynī~⁶⁰⁰⁰Hüseynī, which he is said to have used at first.⁸²¹ Pen names are usually chosen as part of the poet's artistic expression, and it would seem hard to understand how this should match with a pen name referring to a rather little-known place of birth.

In any case, it is safe to say that the alleged ^{46arab}Nasīm~⁶⁰⁰⁰Nāsīm was at best an obscure location, about which only very few authors were able to provide information. Even if we assume that a place called ^{arab}Nasīm, ^{6pers}Nāsīm, or ⁷⁰⁰⁰Nāsīm really existed, ⁶⁰⁰⁰Laṭīfī remains the only medieval source that actually claims that ²²İmādadīn Nasīmī was born there.

In sum, despite its being mentioned by the eminent medieval source ⁶⁰⁰⁰Laṭīfī, there is no definite proof of the theory that ²²Nasimi came from a place called *²²Nasim.

Further development of ⁶⁰⁰⁰Laṭīfī's theory was the allegation that the ominous ^{46arab}Nasīm was actually a place in the vicinity of the Azerbaijani town of ²²Şamaxı. This theory seems to have appeared for the first time in the late 20th century.⁸²² It is doubtful on which basis it was developed. In fact, it seems to be a creative invention that combines ⁶⁰⁰⁰Laṭīfī's statement with theories about ²²Nasīm's origin from ²²Şamaxı or Shirvan.⁸²³

⁸²⁰ Kürküoğlu 1985: II. For ^{6pers}Fāzlōllāh's pen name, see p. 84 and 115.

⁸²¹ See p. 163.

⁸²² Ciopiński 1988: 73, who speaks about "the village Nesim in the environs of She-makha", quotes as his source the Azerbaijani scholar ²²Mirzāğa A. Quluzada.

⁸²³ See the next subchapter.

5.2.2.2. Shirvan or Şamaxı?

Quite popular is the theory that ²²Nasimi came from Shirvan, or more concretely, the city of ²²Şamaxı, which was Shirvan's capital for a long time.

The theory that Shirvan was the place of ²²Nasīm's birth was popularized by two of Azerbaijan's most prominent literary critics in the Tsarist and early Soviet era, ²²Firidun bəy Kōçarlı (1863–1920) and ²²Salman Mümtaz (1884–1941).⁸²⁴

Several late Soviet authorities including ²²Həmid Araslı (1902–1983) concretized this theory by declaring ²²Şamaxı to be ²²Nasīm's home.⁸²⁵ Many post-Soviet Azerbaijani authors still uphold this assumption.⁸²⁶

There does not seem to be any support from primary sources for this theory.⁸²⁷ It might be based on the assumption that ²²Nasīm's language and relationship with places in Azerbaijan automatically speak in favor of his also having been born there.

5.2.2.3. Places in Iran?

Some authors have advocated the opinion that ²²Nasimi was born in Iran. Amongst the Iranian cities quoted as his birthplaces are Tabriz and Shiraz.⁸²⁸

The first to mention Tabriz as ²²Nasīm's home was probably ^{arab}Ibn Hağar al-ʿAşkalānī, who died A. D. 1449.⁸²⁹ ^{arab}Ibn Hağar referred to ²²Nasīm as ^{46arab}Nasim ad-Dīn at-Tabrizī.⁸³⁰ This form of the name is at odds with other renderings that appear both in Arabic and non-Arabic sources. These include ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-ʿAğamī's (^{arab}ʿAlī) an-Nasīmī⁸³¹ as well as the various forms containing the element ^{arab}ʿmād/^{6pers}ʿemād.⁸³² In other sources than ^{arab}Ibn Hağar al-ʿAşkalānī, the element ^{arab}ad-Dīn "of the correct religious practice" is apparently never combined with ^{arab}nasīm, the lexical meaning of which is "breeze". The creation of the status constructus ^{46arab}Nasim ad-Dīn at-Tabrizī? by ^{arab}Ibn Hağar al-ʿAşkalānī could, there-

⁸²⁴ Şixıyeva 1999: 60.

⁸²⁵ See the quotes in Şixıyeva 1999: 60.

⁸²⁶ For instance, Qurbansoy 2019: 13.

⁸²⁷ Şixıyeva 1999: 60.

⁸²⁸ Cf. the references collected in Şixıyeva 1999: 60.

⁸²⁹ On ^{arab}Ibn Hağar al-ʿAşkalānī, cf. p. 67.

⁸³⁰ Quoted in Ayan 1990: 11. Ayan quotes the name in a Turkish transcription as "Nestmü d-din-i Tebrizi". Because of the ¹⁰⁰izaf, this cannot be the original Arabic form, which I therefore assume to have been ^{arab}Nasim ad-Dīn at-Tabrizī.

⁸³¹ See p. 178ff.

⁸³² See chapter 5.1.

Sayyid, i. e., belonged to the family of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁸⁴¹ This is already claimed by ^{om}-Laṭîfî.⁸⁴² As we have seen in the case of ^{az}-Fazlollah, about whom similar claims were made, such genealogies were widespread, especially in Shii circles. In addition to the fact that seven or so centuries after the Prophet's death is a member of the Prophet's family was a quite loosely defined notion, there is no positive proof of the validity of such a claim in the case of ^{az}-Nasimi.⁸⁴³

Many modern authors have discussed ^{az}-Nasimi's "Turcoman" origin. In this case, the English word "Turcoman" usually renders ^{om}-Türkman~^{om}-Türkmen. One problem with this (and similar other discussions) is that the meaning of ^{om}-Türkman~^{om}-Türkmen is not always fully clear. Does it denote the fact of being of Turkic linguistic or ethnic origin or has it a more precise meaning?⁸⁴⁴ The issue is further complicated by the fact that linguistic and ethnic divides were not the same in the 14th and 15th centuries as they are today. Incidentally, ^{az}-Nasimi himself uses the word ^{om}-Türkman in opposition to ^{om}-Arab ("Arab") in the ghazal ^{az}-*ğarçî candasan candan nihansen*.⁸⁴⁵ This could possibly mean that ^{om}-Türkman referred to Turkic-speaking populations, or the Turkic-speaking communities of Iran, in general. One of the authors who applied an Arabic equivalent of ^{om}-Türkman, ^{arab}-Türkmanî, to ^{az}-Nasimi is ^{om}-Âşik Çelebi.⁸⁴⁶ ^{om}-Âşik Çelebi refers to the poet with the Arabic ^{arab}-*idâja gayr al-hakîkiya* construction ^{arab}-Türkmanîyu'l-ğins "belonging to the Turcoman (or: Turkic-speaking?) people".⁸⁴⁷

Some interesting details about ^{az}-Nasimi's life are given by the Ottoman writer ^{om}-Laṭîfî.⁸⁴⁸ However, ^{om}-Laṭîfî's value as a source is not beyond doubt. For instance, he is said to be generally hostile towards wandering dervishes and other members of so-called 'heterodox' religious communities, to which the ^{arab}-Hürûfîs doubtlessly

belonged.⁸⁴⁹ This kind of attitude might have influenced his narrative in some places. One of ^{om}-Laṭîfî's doubtful assertions is that ^{az}-Nasimi wrote a divan (complete collection of poems) in the three great languages of Islam, i. e., Arabic, Persian, and Turkic.⁸⁵⁰ However, only the divans in Turkic and Persian have been discovered to this day. Apparently erroneous is also ^{om}-Laṭîfî's assertion that ^{az}-Nasimi was actually not a ^{arab}-Hürûfî but a member of the ^{arab}-Nîmetullâhiya order, which was founded by ^{om}-Şâh Ne'matollah (Vali, 1330-1431). ^{om}-Laṭîfî makes this statement with reference to the ^{om}-*Menâkıbü'l-Ârifîn* ("The legends of the mystics") by ^{om}-Eflâki, which was terminated in 1353.⁸⁵¹ Of course, it is impossible that ^{om}-Eflâki's work contained any reference to ^{az}-Nasimi, who according to most accounts had not even been born and was certainly an unknown figure at the time it was completed. Perhaps the basis this doubtful assertion is the fact that ^{om}-Şâh Ne'matollah was born in Aleppo. Again, in the absence of much other material about ^{az}-Nasimi's life, ^{om}-Laṭîfî is still widely used in the literature.

One of the things ^{om}-Laṭîfî writes about ^{az}-Nasimi is that he was the first person who became famous through his Turkic poetry.⁸⁵² It is true that there were other poets who composed works in Turkic language. As for the Western (Oghuz) sphere, one might think of ^{om}-Yünus Emre (ca. 1240-1320),⁸⁵³ ^{om}-Sulṭân Veled (1226-1312), or ^{az}-Hâsanoğlu (end of 13th / beginning of the 14th century).⁸⁵⁴ However, these poets were no match to ^{az}-Nasimi as regards the composition of perfect examples of Classical Islamic court poetry (so-called ^{az}-*ruz* poetry), as they predominantly used the folkloristic style (the so-called ^{az}-*heca vâzî*). ^{om}-Laṭîfî, who was himself very close to the Ottoman court, obviously used perfection in ^{az}-*ruz*-style poetry as the criterion to define ^{az}-Nasimi's quality.

One of the most famous anecdotes in ^{az}-Nasimi's life also has its origin in ^{om}-Laṭîfî's ^{om}-*Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'arâ*. This story narrates ^{az}-Nasimi's conversion to the ^{arab}-Hürûfî doctrine. Full of enthusiasm about his new discovery, so the story goes, he tells his brother, ^{az}-Şah Xandan, about it. Contrary to what ^{az}-Nasimi might have expected, ^{az}-Şah Xandan emphatically dissuades his brother from revealing his "secret" to other people. Thereupon, ^{az}-Nasimi composes his famous ^{az}-*masnâvi* (rhymed poem) ^{az}-*Daryayi-mühit cuş galdî* ("The encompassing ocean has come to ebullition"),

⁸⁴¹ ^{arab} Sayyid *stricto sensu* refers to descendants of ^{arab}-Muḥammad's grandson ^{arab}-al-Ḥasan b. 'Alî, while the word ^{arab}-Şarîf can be used for descendants of ^{arab}-Muḥammad's grandson ^{arab}-al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alî. However, ^{arab}-Sayyid can also be used as an umbrella term for both categories (explanations from Kürküoğlu 1985: IIII).

⁸⁴² Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435, also quoted in Ayan 1990: 13.

⁸⁴³ Cf. the critical remarks of Kürküoğlu 1985: I.

⁸⁴⁴ Of course, references to ^{az}-Nasimi's alleged "Turcoman"~^{om}-Türkman~^{om}-Türkmen affiliation cannot be directly connected with the modern Turkmen language, which started to acquire its distinctive features from approximately the 18th century onward (see Tekin / Ölmez 1995: 114; Schönig 1998: 261; Dwyer 2007: 28).

⁸⁴⁵ Quoted in Kürküoğlu 1985: 191.

⁸⁴⁶ On 'Âşik Çelebi see p. 174.

⁸⁴⁷ Quoted in Kürküoğlu 1985: VII. See also Âşik Çelebi 2010: 865.

⁸⁴⁸ On ^{om}-Laṭîfî, see p. 169.

⁸⁴⁹ Cf. Anetshofer 2011: 87.

⁸⁵⁰ Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435.

⁸⁵¹ According to Ayan 1990: 14. On the ^{om}-*Menâkıbü'l-Ârifîn* and its author, see Yazici 2019.

⁸⁵² Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435.

⁸⁵³ On him, cf. Abbasov 1983: 7E; Heß 2018c.

⁸⁵⁴ On ^{az}-Hâsanoğlu, see. Rüstomova 1990: 41f.; Akpınar 1994: 20; Celâl / Hüseyinov 2008: 26.

Fa-kataba la-hü sürata fatwâ, fa-kataba 'alay-hâ fa-'arađa hutta 'ala-'sayhi-nâ al-mudîl va-ba'iyati-7-küddat va-l-'ulamâ' al-hâdîrîna fa-lam yuwâfik-hü 'alâ-dâlika fa-kâla la-hü al-mâlikî: id kâna-7-küddat va-l-'ulamâ' lâ yuwâfikûna kayfa aqtula-hü bi-kauli-ka. Fa-kâla Yasbak: an lâ aqtulu-hü fa-'inna-3-sultân rasama li an uqâlî'o-hü wa-anzura mâ-dâ yarsuma-3-sultân fi-hi.

Va-hfayala-7-mağlis 'alâ-dâlika va-dâma 'nda-n-nâ'ib bi-dâri-7-adl fi-'i-tikâl va-tûli'a al-Mu'ayyad bi-habari-hi.

Tumma ba'â-dâlika hasala li-n-nâ'ib hurûj ilâ-7-umk fa-ahrağa-hü ilâ-signi-7-ka'va fa-varada marsum al-Mu'ayyad bi-'an yushala va-yushara bi-Halab sab'a eyyâmin va yunâdâ 'alay-hi tumma tukta'a a-çû'u-hü va yursala min-hâ say'un li-'Alî Bak b. DLGD'R va-ahî-hi Nâsir ad-Dîn va-'Uimân Kara Yuluk fa-'inna-hü kâna kad afsada 'akâ'id hâ'ülâ fa-fa'âla dâlika bi-hi wa-haddâ-7-rağul kâna kâfiran mulhîdan na'ûdu bi-'lâhi min-kauli-hi va-fi-ti-hi wa-la-hü S'r raçik

"In the days of the above-mentioned ⁸⁰⁶Yaşbeg, the heretic ⁸⁰⁶Alî an-Nasimî was killed.⁸⁷⁰ He was charged at the House of Justice (⁸⁰⁶*Dâr al-'adl*) in the presence of our shaykh, who puts other people into the dust,⁸⁷¹ of ⁸⁰⁶Şams ad-Dîn b. Amin ad-Daula, who at that time was the deputy (⁸⁰⁶*nâ'ib*) of ⁸⁰⁶Şayh 'Izz ad-Dîn b. Amin ad-Daula, of the chief justice (⁸⁰⁶*kâdî al-kudât*) ⁸⁰⁶Faṭḥ ad-Dîn the Malikite,⁸⁷² of the chief justice (⁸⁰⁶*kâdî al-kudât*) ⁸⁰⁶Şihâb ad-Dîn and of his brother (?),⁸⁷³

⁸⁷⁰ Or "executed". The Arabic stem I verb ⁸⁰⁶*katata* conveys both meanings.

⁸⁷¹ "Our shaykh, who puts other people into the dust" (⁸⁰⁶*sayhu-nâ al-mudîl*): An editors' note explains that the person referred to here was called ⁸⁰⁶Ibn Hâfiḥ b. Nâsiriya [M. R. H.].

⁸⁷² Throughout the text, it is not absolutely certain whether the word ⁸⁰⁶*al-mâlikî* means "Malikite", i. e., adherent of the Malikite school of jurisprudence (⁸⁰⁶*madhab*), which was founded by ⁸⁰⁶Mâlik b. Anas al-Aşbaḥî (ca. A. D. 711-795) and is one of the four major schools of jurisprudence of Sunni Islam, or whether ⁸⁰⁶*al-Mâlikî* is part of the proper name of ⁸⁰⁶Faṭḥ ad-Dîn. The Arabic writing does not distinguish proper names from other grammatical categories. In the present context, the former interpretation seems to be the more likely one. For firstly, it makes sense for ⁸⁰⁶Sibṭ b. al-Ağamî to indicate to which schools of jurisprudence certain members of the tribunal belonged to; also it is likely from a historical point of view that representatives of several schools of jurisprudence were actually present during the tribunal in order to guarantee its balance. Secondly, ⁸⁰⁶Faṭḥ ad-Dîn is not the only person that is qualified by epithets that can also designate schools of jurisprudence: This is also true of ⁸⁰⁶Ibn al-Hâzûk and of ⁸⁰⁶Ibn 'LŞNQŞY. One would have to assume an interesting coincidence if three leading figures of the tribunal happened to have designations of schools of jurisprudence as part of their proper names. Incidentally, in his analysis of ⁸⁰⁶Sibṭ b. al-Ağamî's text, Kemâl Edib Kürkçüoğlu does assume the word ⁸⁰⁶*al-mâlikî* to mean "Malikite" (Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIX) [M. R. H.].

⁸⁷³ Uncertain reading, see footnote 868 [M. R. H.].

the Hanbalite,⁸⁷⁴ who was also known as ⁸⁰⁶Ibn al-Hâzûk, on the basis of his following words, that had been attributed to him:

'My God, we take refuge with You so that we may go back on our heels.'

I. e.: '... so that we be seduced away from our religious practice.'⁸⁷⁵ He had already seduced several perfect idiots, and they had followed him in his disbelief, his heresy, and his anti-Islam.

⁸⁷⁴ Again, it is not fully clear whether the word ⁸⁰⁶*al-hanbalî* is part of the proper name or whether it means "Hanbalite", i. e., adherent of the Hanbali / Hanbalite school of jurisprudence (after ⁸⁰⁶Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, A. D. 767-820). As in the case of ⁸⁰⁶*al-mâlikî*, there seems to be more plausibility to the assumption that the school of jurisprudence is meant (see the discussion in footnote 872). However, it is not absolutely certain which of the interpretations is true. Again, Kemâl Edib Kürkçüoğlu does assume that the school of jurisprudence is meant (Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIX).

⁸⁷⁵ The edited text of ⁸⁰⁶*Künûz ad-dahab fi-târîḥ Halab* generally does not distinguish direct from indirect speech. However, the comma placed (perhaps by the editors, but possibly already in the manuscript(s) they used) after ⁸⁰⁶Nasimî's words ⁸⁰⁶*Allahumma innâ na'ûdu bi-ka an narğî'a 'alâ-a'kâbi-nâ* seems to indicate that the immediately subsequent expression, ⁸⁰⁶*au nufšana 'an-dîni-nâ*, belongs to a different level of language. If this was the case, it would be a logical assumption that ⁸⁰⁶*au nufšana 'an-dîni-nâ* was not part of the statement attributed to ⁸⁰⁶Nasimî but a comment made by somebody else. The most natural person to which ⁸⁰⁶*au nufšana 'an-dîni-nâ* should then be ascribed is the author of the text, ⁸⁰⁶Sibṭ b. al-Ağamî. Therefore, it could be assumed that ⁸⁰⁶Sibṭ b. al-Ağamî initially reproduced the uttering ⁸⁰⁶*Allahumma innâ na'ûdu bi-ka an narğî'a 'alâ-a'kâbi-nâ* "My God, we take refuge with You so that we may go back on our heels", that is ascribed to ⁸⁰⁶Nasimî, and then made an explanatory note in which he suggests an explanation of the metaphorical meaning of the last part of this uttering, ⁸⁰⁶*an narğî'a 'alâ-a'kâbi-nâ* "so that we may go back on our heels". According to this interpretation, ⁸⁰⁶Sibṭ b. al-Ağamî would have introduced his explanatory note with the word ⁸⁰⁶*au* ("or"/"i. e."), and the wording of the explanatory note would be "so that we be seduced away from our religious practice" (⁸⁰⁶*nufšana 'an-dîni-nâ*). ⁸⁰⁶Nasimî would therefore have been accused on the basis of an ambivalent, metaphorical expression which ⁸⁰⁶Sibṭ b. al-Ağamî explained as denoting an incitation to the abandonment of the correct religious practice, i. e., of Islam.

The accusation was brought against ⁸⁷⁶ Nāsimi by ^{Arab} Ibn 'LŠNQŠY, the Ḥanafite⁸⁷⁶ and the Islamic scholars (^{Arab} *ulamā'*) of the country.

The ^{Arab} *nā'ib*⁸⁷⁷ said to him [^{Arab} Ibn 'LŠNQŠY – M. R. H.]:

'If you cannot prove what you are saying about him, I will have you executed!'

When he [^{Arab} Ibn 'LŠNQŠY – M. R. H.] heard these words, he backed away from the accusation.

As to ⁸⁷⁸ Nāsimi, he did not say anything more than the two articles of the Islamic confession of faith⁸⁷⁸ in his answer, and he denied the things that had been said about him.

At that point of time shaykh ^{Arab} Šihāb ad-Dīn b. Hilāl took his seat above the Malikite judge, and in that session, he gave a fatwa saying that he [⁸⁷⁹ Nāsimi – M. R. H.] was a heretic and that he should be executed. ...⁸⁷⁹ While he was sitting above the Malikite, he turned his face away from him.

After this, Hilāl's son said to the Malkite:

'Why should this heretic not be executed?'

The Malikite answered:

'Are you going to write down a verdict that he must be executed?'

He answered:

⁸⁷⁶ Once more, it seems to be more plausible to assume that the adjective ^{Arab} *al-ḥanafī* was not part of the proper name but denoted the Ḥanafite school of jurisprudence. This school is named after ^{Arab} Abū Ḥanīfa an-Nu'mān b. Tābit (699-767) and is another of the leading schools of jurisprudence of Sunni Islam. Cf. the discussions in footnotes 874 and 875. Again, Kemāl Edib Kürkçüoğlu assumes that the school of jurisprudence is meant (Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIX). – The name ^{Arab} Ibn 'LŠNQŠY does not seem to have an Arabic or Persian etymology. Perhaps its second element is an Arabized form of a Turkic word (^{Arab} al-Šanaḳšī < ^{Arabicized} *šanak* 'bowl-maker'?). This interpretation is suggested by Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIX.

⁸⁷⁷ I. e., ^{Arabicized} *Yaşbeg*.

⁸⁷⁸ "The two articles of the Islamic confession of faith", literally "the two confessions of faith": "I witness that there is no God except for Allah" (^{Arab} *ašhadu al-lā ilāha illā 'l-lāh*) and "I witness that ^{Arab} Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah" (^{Arab} *ašhadu anna Muḥammadan rasūl Allāh*). Cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIX.

⁸⁷⁹ Here, something is missing from the text (cf. footnote 869).

'Yes.'

Upon this, he [the Malikite – M. R. H.] made out a form (^{Arab} *sūra*) of a fatwa to him. He [^{Arab} Šihāb ad-Dīn b. Hilāl – M. R. H.] filled it out. Then he offered the draft to our shaykh, who puts other people into the dust, and to the rest of the judges and Islamic scholars (^{Arab} *ulamā'*) that were present. However, he did not consent.⁸⁸⁰ Upon this, the Malikite said to him [^{Arab} Šihāb ad-Dīn b. Hilāl – M. R. H.]:

'How am I supposed to have him executed on the basis of your assertions if the judges and the Islamic scholars do not consent?'

At that moment ^{Arabicized} *Yaşbeg* said:

'I will not have him executed. For the sultan has written to me that I am to inform him and wait for what the sultan will write concerning him [^{Arab} Nāsimi – M. R. H.]'

Upon this, the session was terminated. He [^{Arab} Nāsimi – M. R. H.] continued to stay in custody with the ^{Arab} *nā'ib* [^{Arabicized} *Yaşbeg* – M. R. H.] at the House of Justice, and ^{Arab} al-Mu'ayyad⁸⁸¹ was informed about the news concerning him [^{Arab} Nāsimi – M. R. H.].

After this, it happened to the ^{Arab} *nā'ib* that he had to go out to ^{Arab} Al-'Amḳ⁸⁸². He got him [^{Arab} Nāsimi – M. R. H.] out and put him into the prison of the citadel. Afterward, ^{Arab} al-Mu'ayyad's written order arrived, stating that he [^{Arab} Nāsimi – M. R. H.] should be skinned and publicly exposed in Aleppo for seven days, that his name should be publicly proclaimed and that then the parts of his body should

⁸⁸⁰ As the draft fatwa was presented not to only one person but to a group of scholars and judges, one would have expected that the text should have said ^{Arabicized} 'they did not consent'. However, ^{Arab} Šauḳī Ša'at's and ^{Arab} Fāsiḥ al-Bakkūr's edition of ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-A'ġamī's text clearly only admits the reading "he did not consent" (^{Arabicized} *fa-lam yu'afik-hū*). However, one may point to the fact that there is only a slight graphical difference (the addition of the letter ^{Arabicized} *Vāv*) between ^{Arabicized} *fa-lam yu'afik-hū* "he did not consent" and ^{Arabicized} *fa-lam yu'afik-hū* "they did not consent". Perhaps the latter is the original form and was mis-spelt in the process of copying.

⁸⁸¹ The Mameluke sultan ^{Arab} Šayḥ al-Maḥmūdī / ^{Arab} Al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad (see p. 47).

⁸⁸² Perhaps to be read as ^{Arab} Al-'Umḳ, ^{Arab} Al-'Umḳ ~ ^{Arab} Al-'Amḳ ("The depth") could be a place name, or just designate some lower terrain.

be cut up and that bits of them be sent to ^{om̄}Alī Beg of the ^{arab}Dūl-kaḍr⁸⁸³ dynasty, to his brother ^{arab}Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad,⁸⁸⁴ as well as to ^{arab}Qara Yuluq Osman.⁸⁸⁵ For he [=^{arab}Nāsīmī – M. R. H.] had perverted their religious practice. He [=^{om̄}Yaşbeg – M. R. H.] then actually did this to him [=^{arab}Nāsīmī – M. R. H.]. This man [=^{arab}Nāsīmī – M. R. H.] had been a kafir and an anti-Muslim. We take refuge with Allah from his words and deeds! However, he has produced some very subtle poetry.¹⁸⁸⁶

There can be little doubt that the ^{arab}Alī an-Nāsīmī mentioned in the text is indeed the person known to us as ^{arab}Nāsīmī. The definite article (in this case ^{arab}an-) can be added to foreign names if they are imported into the Arabic language, and it does not necessarily constitute a part of the original name. Therefore, the core of the second part of the name can be supposed to be ^{arab}Nāsīmī. This corresponds exactly to ^{mpers}Nasīmī, ^{om̄}Nesimī, and therefore ^{arab}Nāsīmī. In addition to the phonetical identity of the Arabic, Persian and Old Western Oghuz forms, everything said in the text also corresponds with what we can learn about ^{arab}Nāsīmī from his own poems and with the bulk of the information from other sources. This includes how he was considered a “heretic” (^{arab}zindīk) from a Sunni Islamic mainstream perspective, his being identified as the author of “subtle poetry” (^{arab}ḥīʿī rakīk), and, of course, his being judged and executed in Aleppo on the basis of statements that are likely to be given a religious interpretation.

What makes the above passage particularly valuable is the dates that it is associated with. For it mentions the local governor (^{arab}nāʾib) of Aleppo, ^{om̄}Yaşbeg. The expression “the above-mentioned ^{om̄}Yaşbeg” (^{arab}Yaşbak al-madkūr) in the text refers back to a previous passage in the ^{arab}Kunūz ad-dahab. There, this ^{om̄}Yaşbeg ~ ^{arab}Yaşbak, mentioned by the fuller name ^{arab}Yaşbak al-Yūsifī and qualified as emir (^{arab}amīr), is said to have occupied the office of ^{arab}nāʾib in Aleppo from A. H. 820 “until the year [A. H. 8]21” (^{arab}ilā sana ihḍā va-ʾaṣrīn).⁸⁸⁷ This may mean that he was the ^{arab}nāʾib of Aleppo either only in A. H. 820 (first day: February 18, 1417; last day: February 1, 1418) or from this year until the end of A. H. 821 (first day: February 2, 1418;

last day: January 27, 1419). According to these dates given in ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿĀgamī’s text, ^{arab}Nāsīmī’s execution in Aleppo must have taken place after February 17, 1417, and not later than January 27, 1419. Importantly, the chronology of events that appears in ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿĀgamī’s narrative is confirmed by the second important Arab source about the life of ^{arab}Nāsīmī, ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAṣkalānī. The value of ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaḡar’s account is extremely high because he was a contemporary of ^{arab}Nāsīmī and could, in theory, even have been a direct witness of the tribunal and / or the execution.⁸⁸⁸ ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaḡar agrees with ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿĀgamī in that ^{arab}Nāsīmī was executed in the times of the ^{arab}amīr ^{om̄}Yaşbeg.⁸⁸⁹ As for the chronology, ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaḡar’s version is even more precise than that of ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿĀgamī, for he indicates only A. H. 821 as the year in which ^{arab}Nāsīmī was executed.⁸⁹⁰ If we combine the versions of the two Arab authors, ^{arab}Nāsīmī should have been executed in A. H. 821, i. e., not before February 2, 1418, and not after January 27, 1419. Notwithstanding, “1417” has been accepted as ^{arab}Nāsīmī’s year of death by a number of medieval and modern scholars. These include ^{om̄}Kātib Ćelebi,⁸⁹¹ ^{om̄}Alī Emīrī Efendi⁸⁹² and a number of modern authors from Azerbaijan,⁸⁹³ – possibly on the basis of ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿĀgamī’s narrative alone.

If we follow the information provided by ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿĀgamī and ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaḡar, we may in a second step try to contextualize it with other historical data as well. However, in doing so, much is subject to speculation. The main reason for this is that there is a number of ways to interpret the remaining data.

One method of trying to link the data from the Arabs sources to other historical information is to look at the various successors (singular: ^{mpers}ḫalīfa) that existed in the ^{arab}Hurūfīya movement. If we take the information that ^{arab}Nāsīmī was one of ^{mpers}Fazlollāh’s ^{mpers}ḫalīfas (successors) as the basis of an interpretation, we can try to determine ^{arab}Nāsīmī’s place in the line of this succession. However, the first problem comes into play here. For as has been stated previously,⁸⁹⁴ we do not know with certainty whether there was one or there were more ^{mpers}ḫalīfas at the time in the ^{arab}Hurūfīya movement after ^{mpers}Fazlollāh had been executed. However, the fact that ^{mpers}Alīyoʻl-Aʻlā is described as ^{mpers}Fazlollāh’s first ^{mpers}ḫalīfas might give support to

⁸⁸³ Interestingly, the name of the ^{arab}Dūl-kaḍr dynasty is not written ^{arab}Dūl-kaḍr but ^{arab}DLĠDʾR, which may give rise to the opinion that it originally did not have an Arabic etymology (cf. the beginning of chapter 4.3.8.).

⁸⁸⁴ On him, see p. 55ff.

⁸⁸⁵ On him, see p. 44.

⁸⁸⁶ My transcription and translation of the text from Sibt b. al-ʿĀgamī al-Ḥalabī 1997: 125-126. The passage is also discussed in Kırkçuoğlu 1985: XIX. – There is a French translation of ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿĀgamī’s work (Sibt-Ibn-al-Agami 1950). However, in order to be able to discuss all the subtleties of the Arabic text the original has been used here.

⁸⁸⁷ Sibt b. al-ʿĀgamī al-Ḥalabī 1997: 120.

⁸⁸⁸ On him, see p. 67.

⁸⁸⁹ Ayan 1990: 11, quoting from the manuscript Yeni Cami Kütüphanesi 814, fol. 122b of Istanbul’s Süleymaniye Library.

⁸⁹⁰ Ayan 1990: 11, quoting the same reference as given in footnote 889; Kırkçuoğlu 1985: XVII.

⁸⁹¹ According to Kırkçuoğlu 1985: XVIII. – On ^{om̄}Kātib Ćelebi, cf. p. 85.

⁸⁹² According to Kırkçuoğlu 1985: XVIII. – On ^{om̄}Alī Emīrī Efendi, cf. footnote 789.

⁸⁹³ For instance, Qurbansoy 2019: 13.

⁸⁹⁴ P. 146.

the assumption that at least at the very beginning of the ^{mpeca}halifa succession there was, for a certain time, only one ^{mpeca}halifa, namely, ^{mpeca}ʿAliyoʻl-Aʿlā. If we accept this interpretation – even if it might prove to be a faulty one in the end – and then suppose that indeed only one ^{mpeca}halifa at a time continued to be at the head of the ^{arab}Hurūfiya movement until (at least) the time of ^{aa}Nasimi’s death, we might be able to locate ^{aa}Nasimi’s place in the succession of the ^{mpeca}halifas. Here, a second difficulty becomes manifest. For in addition to the problem of our not knowing with certainty whether more than one ^{mpeca}halifa existed in the ^{arab}Hurūfiya movement at any given point in time until ^{aa}Nasimi’s execution, there are other problems with this chronology. The first of them is that the time of the presumed first ^{mpeca}halifa ^{mpeca}ʿAliyoʻl-Aʿlā’s death is disputed. As has been seen, there are two suggestions as to when ^{mpeca}ʿAliyoʻl-Aʿlā was executed: either a couple of weeks after December 18, 1416, or during the year A. H. 822 (first day: January 28, 1419; last day: January 16, 1420).⁸⁹⁵ If we believe that ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAgāmī’s account is correct and at the same time assume that there was only one ^{arab}Hurūfī ^{mpeca}halifa at a time we must also assume that ^{mpeca}ʿAliyoʻl-Aʿlā died a few weeks after December 18, 1416. For had he died after January 27, 1419 (the other alternative), he would have been ^{mpeca}halifa during the whole of the time that ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAgāmī’s and ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaḡar’s accounts allow for ^{aa}Nasimi to have been executed, which automatically would mean that ^{aa}Nasimi could never have been ^{mpeca}halifa.

Following this – admittedly very speculative – chronology ^{aa}Nasimi would have followed ^{mpeca}ʿAliyoʻl-Aʿlā in the office of ^{mpeca}halifa after ^{mpeca}ʿAliyoʻl-Aʿlā’s death at the end of 1416 or at the beginning of 1417. At some point after this, the new ^{mpeca}halifa ^{aa}Nasimi would have appeared in Aleppo, been accused and executed not earlier than February 2, 1418, and not later than January 27, 1419. By the way, this interpretation would not be falsified if one or more ^{mpeca}halifas had existed between ^{mpeca}ʿAliyoʻl-Aʿlā and ^{aa}Nasimi.

As an argument in favor of the above – unproven – reconstructed chronology one may point to the fact that ^{mpeca}ʿAliyoʻl-Aʿlā’s mission focused on predominantly Oghuz-speaking areas, in particular, Anatolia. Writing in a Turkic idiom perfectly understandable in this Oghuz-speaking sphere⁸⁹⁶ and very likely having himself penetrated there,⁸⁹⁷ ^{aa}Nasimi must have been the ideal successor of ^{mpeca}ʿAliyoʻl-Aʿlā. The two were of comparable fervor in their advocacy of the ^{arab}Hurūfī creed. That ^{aa}Nasimi went to Aleppo as the next ^{mpeca}halifa after ^{mpeca}ʿAliyoʻl-Aʿlā would, therefore, be quite a plausible assumption, independently of whether it could be proven or not.

The theory that ^{aa}Nasimi had become a ^{arab}Hurūfī ^{mpeca}halifa before being executed in Aleppo also offers an explanation for why he visited the north Syrian city at all: It was part of his mission. As we have seen, Aleppo had been a bone of contention between the Mamelukes and a number of smaller principalities surrounding it for quite a long time.⁸⁹⁸ And as we learn both from ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAgāmī’s account and our general knowledge of local history, some of these small principalities were Turkic-speaking, and some even harbored sympathies for the ^{arab}Hurūfiya. Amongst them, the staunchest supporters of the ^{arab}Hurūfī religion were probably the rulers of ^{arab}Dūʾl-qaḍr, who were the only dynasty ever to be converted to this creed.⁸⁹⁹ In sum, Aleppo was an important place for the ^{arab}Hurūfī missionaries because of its closeness to pro-^{arab}Hurūfī territories, its large Turkic-speaking population, and the chances that its notorious political instability offered for propagators.

^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAgāmī’s account of ^{aa}Nasimi’s trial and death is precious to historians not only because it offers an approximate date for ^{aa}Nasimi’s death but also because of many other details it contains. One of them is that the accusations against ^{aa}Nasimi reposed on quite shaky grounds from the beginning. In an interesting parallel to the tribunal against the famous Baghdadi mystic ^{arab}Al-Ḥallāḡ (also called ^{arab}Manṣūr), who had been executed for allegedly saying “I am Allah” (^{arab}Anāʾl-Ḥakk) in A. D. 922 and is frequently mentioned by ^{aa}Nasimi in his poems,⁹⁰⁰ the sentence against ^{aa}Nasimi was based on the interpretation of a single uttering. What is more, in ^{aa}Nasimi’s case this uttering did not even contain his (pen) name (unlike many other sayings and verses ascribed to him) or exist in written form but was only “ascribed to him” (^{arab}mansūba ilay-hi). As a matter of fact, the so-called evidence in ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAgāmī’s narration boils down to not much more than a rumor, based on a certain, possibly tendentious, interpretation. Yet, if this kind of libel was confirmed, it could form the basis of an accusation for blasphemy, which was inevitable punishable with the death penalty.

The initial stage of ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAgāmī’s account shows how the shariah court’s attempt to sentence ^{aa}Nasimi on the basis of that single utterance fails. This is because of the scrupulousness and righteousness of the local political authority, who was also responsible for jurisprudence: The ^{arab}nāʾib considers the so-called evidence to be too weak to arrive at a sentence and demands more proof from the accusing side. How serious the ^{arab}nāʾib is in his determination not to let himself be drawn into unfounded accusations is proven by his quite drastic threat to execute the Ḥanafite accuser less he provided more material to support his charge. The text does not state that any kind of additional evidence was actually furnished as a result of this

⁸⁹⁵ See chapter 4.5.5.2.

⁸⁹⁶ On ^{aa}Nasimi’s language, cf. Heß 2009.

⁸⁹⁷ Cf. the mention of the city of ^{arab}Marʾāsh by ^{aa}Nasimi (p. 48).

⁸⁹⁸ See, for instance, chapter 4.3.8.

⁸⁹⁹ Again, see chapter 4.3.8.

⁹⁰⁰ See Heß 2016 and Heß 2017.

intervention, and in the face of ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAḡamī’s anti-^{arab}Nāsīmī attitude we are probably not wrong in concluding that there was none.

The whole tribunal could have ended at this point. ^{arab}Nāsīmī’s behavior at this junction is very interesting. Apparently, he tries to get himself out of the dangerous situation by publicly appearing as a perfectly loyal Muslim. The means of his choice to create this impression is that he utters the two sentences of the Sunni Islamic confession of faith.⁹⁰¹ That is, he does not appear as the kind of martyr-to-be that the lyrical ego of a number of his poems presents itself as,⁹⁰² neither as a hero who died for his cause willingly and unhesitatingly, as much of the modern ^{arab}Nāsīmī folklore wants to have it. Rather, he gives the impression of a rational being that values human life higher than religious fervor, provocation, or fanaticism.

That the tribunal actually does *not* end at this junction illustrates above all the determination of ^{arab}Nāsīmī’s opponents to have him sentenced. The driving force behind ^{arab}Nāsīmī’s accusation seems at that point to have been ^{arab}Šihāb ad-Dīn b. Hilāl, whom the text describes as one of the chief justices of Aleppo. He and his brother had already been part of the board that looked into the accusations raised against ^{arab}Nāsīmī at the beginning, although the use of the passive voice in the text does not permit to say whether he was also one of the instigators of the whole tribunal.⁹⁰³ On this second stage of the tribunal, the accusing side comes up with a fatwa against ^{arab}Nāsīmī. Yet again, the attempt at having ^{arab}Nāsīmī sentenced to death failed, just as the previous one. Apparently, the *ad hoc* fatwa had not been convincing enough. The majority of judges and scholars that are consulted decline the interpretation that ^{arab}Nāsīmī was a heretic. Possibly, this is the result of rivalry or divergences between the representatives of the Ḥanbalī and Malīkite schools of jurisprudence, if one assumes that the adjectives ^{arab}hanbalī and ^{arab}malīkī really denote these schools and are not parts of proper names. Bowing to this result, the ^{arab}nāʾib once again refuses to bring in a verdict against ^{arab}Nāsīmī.

It is quite interesting that the tribunal again does not end at this stage. Apparently, the ^{arab}nāʾib is caught in between two fronts. On the one side, he does not follow the demands of those who wish to have ^{arab}Nāsīmī sentenced to death. On the other side, he does not dare to put an end to their efforts by calling off the tribunal for good. Perhaps he was afraid of possible consequences that might have incurred had he canceled the lawsuit. Could people like ^{arab}Šihāb ad-Dīn b. Hilāl have posed a danger for ^{omn}Yaşbeg himself, perhaps by accusing him of collusion with heretics, or by filing another suit against him, or by complaining about him at the sultan’s court

⁹⁰¹ This might be put into perspective with the fact that some ^{arab}Ḥurūfīs had their own, quite different confession of faith (see p. 159).

⁹⁰² Cf. Heß 2016 and Heß 2017.

⁹⁰³ On the interpretation of the passive voice in the text, see below.

in Egypt? Be it as it may, the fact that ^{omn}Yaşbeg submits the whole matter to the highest political authority, the sultan in Cairo seems to indicate that he must have begun to waver.

On the third and final stage of the tribunal, which presents the sultan’s decision, the text does not specify for what reasons ^{arab}al-Muayyad decided in the way he did. The verdict from Cairo almost appears like a *deus ex machina* message. However, his order to send body parts of ^{arab}Nāsīmī to two Turkic-speaking principalities reveals that there must have been a certain political dimension behind the whole affair – if one does not limit oneself to the reasoning offered by ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAḡamī, according to which ^{arab}Nāsīmī “had perverted the religious practice” of these rulers. Obviously, ^{arab}al-Muayyad used the sentence pronounced against ^{arab}Nāsīmī as a cautionary tale against his political rivals.

The detailed narration that ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAḡamī provides about ^{arab}Nāsīmī’s trial enables us also to discuss one of the questions that are most vividly debated in the secondary literature: the reasons for the accusations against ^{arab}Nāsīmī and eventual execution. In modern times, this has frequently been discussed on the basis of a dichotomy between so-called political and allegedly religious motives. Before actually discussing possible answers that the evidence from ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAḡamī’s narration might give to this question, one should remember that the legitimacy of the above dichotomy itself continues to be very much a matter of debate.⁹⁰⁴ From its creation, Islam was very often a political, social, juridical, economic and military religion, and the political and religious spheres were not fully separated throughout much of its history. Hence, the answer to the above question will likely not be an absolute negation of one or the other of its alternatives. To the religious and political (or religious-cum-political) dimension, one must, of course, add another possible layer of motives, which is that of personal or private interests: Could ^{arab}Nāsīmī have become the victim of personal aversion, hatred, or revenge? Unfortunately, even ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAḡamī’s relatively elaborate narration does not allow us to answer this question. If such motivations existed, they have been carefully concealed, either by the participants in the tribunal, or by the historian, or by all of them.

In trying to evaluate the relationship between religion and politics in ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAḡamī’s narration, one must in any case not lose sight of the two phases of the trial, i. e., the initial session(s) in Aleppo, which is (or are) eventually closed by ^{omn}Yaşbeg with no sentence having been arrived at, and the final sentence, which is given by the sultan.

As for the first stage, it focusses heavily on religion, at least according to the way ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAḡamī presents it. In his view, it is clearly a religious issue that lies at the core of the accusation. For the accusation is based on the assertion that ^{arab}Nāsīmī’s words were aimed at “seducing us away from our religious practice” (^{arab}

⁹⁰⁴ Cf. the discussion in chapter 4.5.7.

nyftana 'an-dīni-nā). The verb form ^{arab}*nyftana* belongs to stem I of the root *F-T-N*. The meaning of this stem is also encoded by the noun ^{arab}*fiṭna*, which is one of the most important notions of lived Islam. ^{arab}*Fiṭna* denotes the opposite of order and orderliness in a religious, political, and sexual perspective. Whoever causes ^{arab}*fiṭna* attacks the religious fundaments of Muslim society, as well as the political and social order.⁹⁰⁵ The religious dimension already contained in the form ^{arab}*nyftana* is rendered even more explicit by the emphasis on ^{arab}Nāsīmī's "heresy" (^{arab}*zandaḳa*), "disbelief" (^{arab}*kufri*) and "anti-Islam" (^{arab}*ihād*). All of these terms belong to the religious sphere. They denote people who violate the precepts of the Islamic religion, or at least what the mainstream Muslims consider to constitute it. As changing or abandoning Islam is considered to be illegitimate by Muslims, these words automatically denote crimes. The accusation that ^{arab}Nāsīmī had "seduced" some people "into aberration" (^{arab}*agwā*) points in the same direction. Hence, the first stage of the tribunal is clearly marked, and even dominated, by religious arguments, even if other aspects might play a role in the background (such as the fact that ^{arab}Nāsīmī and his followers formed a group, which might have posed a threat to social order, etc.).

As to the final part of the tribunal, sultan ^{arab}al-Mu'ayyad's verdict, the political dimension is much more important than in the first part. How far the sultan's decision takes into account the religious side of the accusations is not fully clear. For the text does not disambiguate whether the statement "For he [= ^{arab}Nāsīmī – M. R. H.] had perverted their religious practice" (^{arab}*fa-inna-hū kāna ḳad aḳḳad hā'ūlū*) belongs to ^{arab}al-Mu'ayyad or ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī.

If we put the two decision-making levels of the trial – Aleppo, and Cairo – with their different weighing of religious and political considerations together, both levels seem to appear as interdependent: The religious argumentation put forward by the tribunal members might only have been so bold and aggressive because the denouncers knew that they could, in case of need, count on the sympathy of the supreme political authority – the sultan – for their views. As for the sultan, he seems to have made use of the religious rigor of the judges in order to deal a blow to his political opponents and prevent infiltration of Aleppo by people who were closer to his Turkic-speaking rivals than to himself. Religion and politics could not be separated.

Against the backdrop of what has been said above, an interesting linguistic detail in ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī's narration appears. It lies in the fact that the text does not reveal the cause and the authors of the lawsuit that was filed against ^{arab}Nāsīmī. Instead, ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī prefers to use the passive voice ^{arab}*uddi'a* "he was accused"; without specification of the grammatical agent. None of the five persons that are said to have been present during the initial phase of the court procedure – "our shaykh, who puts other people into the dust" [= ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaṭīb b. Nāṣiriya], ^{arab}Šāms ad-Dīn b. Amin ad-Daula, ^{arab}Faṭḥ ad-Dīn, ^{arab}Šihāb ad-Dīn, and ^{arab}Ibn al-

⁹⁰⁵ On the concept of ^{arab}*fiṭna* cf. Heß 2009a.

Ḥāzūk – is actually said to be one of the people who came up with the accusations against ^{arab}Nāsīmī. Instead, ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī's text only specifies that "an accusation was made" (^{arab}*uddi'a*) "in their presence" (^{arab}*bi-ḥuḍūrī* ...). The omission of the grammatical agent and, correspondingly, of the accuser(s), as well as the person or persons who had instigated the lawsuit, means that ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī either did not know who he, she or they were, did not consider his, her or their mention to be essential, or consciously maintained silence about him, her, or them. In any case, this already tells us something about how the whole litigation came into being. Obviously, it was based on accusations whose authors were not known, were not considered to be important or did not want to reveal themselves at the time of the lawsuit and / or at the time ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī wrote down his account. This interpretation is supported by the fact that ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī uses the passive voice also in another crucial passage of his description of ^{arab}Nāsīmī's trial. This is the passage where it comes to the quoting of the utterances ^{arab}Nāsīmī is incriminated for. Again, the one or ones who must have overheard and reported his alleged statement are not named. Using the impersonal passive voice once more, ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī only speaks about "his words, that had been attributed to him" (^{arab}*affiḏi-hi al-mansūba ilay-hi*). By whom, when, for what reason and to what purpose these words, which were of such deadly impact, had been reported and "attributed", is left open. What is more, ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī does not even consider it worthwhile to ask these questions. In passing, though, ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī provides a possible reason for the above omissions: He was in a dependency relationship with one of the participants in the tribunal, namely "our shaykh, who puts other people into the dust", whom the modern editors of the text identify in a footnote to be a certain ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaṭīb b. Nāṣiriya]. This further undermines belief in ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī's impartiality. He was certainly more sympathetic to those who had to decide upon ^{arab}Nāsīmī's fate than to ^{arab}Nāsīmī himself and his friends. He might even have been so close to the accusing side that he knew more about the lawsuit than he chose to write down in ^{arab}*Kuntiz ad-dahab fi-tārīḫ Ḥalab*.

We have already seen that ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī cannot be considered a fully impartial observer. For in addition to what has been said before, ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī's overtly anti-^{arab}Hurūfī position is evident from a number of text details. For instance, he labels ^{arab}Nāsīmī a "heretic" (^{arab}*zindīk*) right in the first sentence of his narration and repeats the accusation of "heresy" (^{arab}*zandaḳa*) throughout the text. He qualifies ^{arab}Nāsīmī's mindset as "disbelief" (^{arab}*kufri*) and "anti-Islam" (^{arab}*ihād*), which are among the worst things a Sunni mainstream Muslim can say about a human being. As we have seen, ^{arab}Nāsīmī's followers are labeled "perfect idiots" (^{arab}*man lā 'akla la-hū*), whom ^{arab}Nāsīmī had "seduced into aberration" (^{arab}*agwā*). Certain doubts as to the impartiality of ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī may also arise if one looks at the passage where he introduces the accuser ^{arab}Ibn 'LŠNQŠY. On one hand, ^{arab}Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡāmī's text singles out this person, whose name is unfortunately not

to be vocalized, as the one who pronounced the accusation in court (^{Arab} *fa-kāma li-lā-da'ū 'alay-hi*) and provides a dialogue between ^{Arab} Ibn 'LŠNQŠY and the Mameluke sultan's viceregent (^{Arab} *nā'ib*), as if both had been present in person during ^{Arab} Nāsīmī's trial. On the other hand, ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī's wording "the accusation was brought against ^{Arab} Nāsīmī by ^{Arab} Ibn 'LŠNQŠY, the Hanafite and the Islamic scholars of the country" (^{Arab} *fa-kāma li-lā-da'ū 'alay-hi Ibn 'LŠNQŠY al-ḥanaḥī wa-'ulamā' al-balad*) may at first sight seem to indicate that ^{Arab} Ibn 'LŠNQŠY was in fact *not* the only accuser during the court proceedings but that he was accompanied there by "the Islamic scholars of the country". However, these "Islamic scholars of the country" do not appear as partners in the dialogue with the ^{Arab} *nā'ib*. This leads to the question of whether ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī imagines them to have been present at the tribunal at all. In sum, ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī might have mixed up two narrative levels: the one of what was said and done during the lawsuit, and one of the opinions that came from "the country" at large. If seen in this way, the text makes the impression of having been edited, or perhaps even patched up, which would add some more doubts as to the objectivity of ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī. Finally, one should also note that at the point of the narration where ^{Arab} Šihāb ad-Dīn b. Hilāl gives his fatwa ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī refers to him as "chief justice" (^{Arab} *kādī al-kuḍāt*) but to his opponent ^{Arab} Fath ad-Dīn the Malikite only as "judge" (^{Arab} *kādī*), although ^{Arab} Fath ad-Dīn is also given the rank of ^{Arab} *kādī al-kuḍāt* earlier in the text. This means that ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī presents ^{Arab} Nāsīmī's enemy ^{Arab} Šihāb ad-Dīn b. Hilāl more respectfully than the other judge. Again, this might raise some concerns as to ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī's impartiality. The value of ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī's account as a primary source must not be overestimated for other reasons as well. ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī probably does not write as an eyewitness. At least, he does not mention this in the text. his direct participation is unlikely as a result of his age. Consequently, he must have drawn on other sources, which he does not mention, though. By implication, we may deduce that one of his informants must have been ^{Arab} Ibn Ḥaṭīb b. Nāšīriya, because ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī refers to him as his "shaykh", which means that they had a close relationship. However, nothing more is said about information passing from one to the other. As for textual sources used by ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī, they possibly included ^{Arab} Ibn Ḥaġar al-'Asḳalānī, because ^{Arab} Ibn Ḥaġar was a very famous author who must have been known to ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī, who was born not too long after him. The use of material from ^{Arab} Ibn Ḥaġar al-'Asḳalānī's works would offer an explanation for the correspondences between him and ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī.

Notwithstanding, ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī's text is still priceless as a source of historical information. Even if one does not fully believe in his objectivity, there are many interesting details that he furnishes about the tribunal. To begin with, two of the participants in the tribunal, ^{Arab} Fath ad-Dīn and ^{Arab} Šihāb ad-Dīn, are identified as chief justices (^{Arab} *kādī al-kuḍāt*). This means that the lawsuit must have been quite an important one, which was not given into the hands of an ordinary judge (^{Arab} *kādī*),

but to some of the top legal authorities. The fact that the tribunal took place in the "House of Justice" (^{Arab} *Dār al-ʿadl*) can probably be interpreted in the same way, even if we do not know what kind of location or building this was.

Another important piece of information that is held by ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī's text is mentioning of the schools of jurisprudence. Even if the text is not absolutely precise as to whether three of the tribunal members belonged to major Sunni schools of jurisprudence (Malikites, Hanbalites, and Hanafites), this seems to be the most likely way to interpret the textual evidence, in particular given the fact that the tribunal took place in a Sunni environment. In this case, the members of the tribunal would have been chosen in such a way as to satisfy the opinions of not only one but three of the leading schools of Sunni jurisprudence (out of a total of four).

^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī's narrative also contains some hints about the kinship relations between some members of the tribunal. For we are told that two of them, ^{Arab} Šihāb ad-Dīn and ^{Arab} Ibn al-Ḥāzūk, were brothers. It is not clear whether this might have an impact on our interpretation of the tribunal. Could it point to nepotism? Could it be another hint – besides the shakiness of the charges, the absence of further evidence and the presumed partiality of ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī – that indicates that the charges against ^{Arab} Nāsīmī might have been manipulated?

Another important thing that we learn from ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī's account is that ^{Arab} Nāsīmī had a number of followers who had some visibility even in Aleppo, i. e., to all likelihood far away from ^{Arab} Nāsīmī's home region. For the text states that "some perfect idiots" (^{Arab} *ba'ḍu man lā 'akla la-hā*) "followed him in his disbelief" (^{Arab} *tabī'ū-hu 'alā-kufri-hi*). As a result of ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī not giving the identities of those who accused ^{Arab} Nāsīmī and the circumstances in which these accusations were raised, we do not know whether the existence of this group of ^{Arab} Nāsīmī's followers might have been one of the reasons why he ended up before the tribunal. This could have been the case given the fact that the group of "perfect idiots", who obviously shared ^{Arab} Nāsīmī's "disbelief", must have been perceived as rivals by such people as ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī, his shaykh and the other members of the tribunal, as all of them, articulated an exclusive claim to truth from a Sunni mainstream perspective.

Amongst the important details in ^{Arab} Sibṭ b. al-'Aġamī's text is the statement that ^{Arab} Nāsīmī "was flayed" (^{Arab} *yuslaḥa* – the Arabic conjunctive form is tantamount to the indicative, as the text explicitly states that this order of the sultan was indeed carried out).

As is well-known, "flaying" (^{Arab} *salaha*, ^{Arab} *soy-*, ^{Arab} *darisimi soy-*) plays a crucial role both in ^{Arab} Nāsīmī's own poems and in the folkloristic and legendary traditions that have been created around him. For instance, in a number of his poems (or poems attributed to him), ^{Arab} Nāsīmī's lyrical ego states that being flayed was a fate that

awaited him.⁹⁰⁶ Against this backdrop, it is a pivotal question whether ²²Nāsīmī's flaying – real or imagined – is assumed to have taken place *corpore vivo* or *post mortem*.

As a matter of fact, both medieval and modern literature about ²²Nāsīmī frequently believes that his skin had been peeled off while he was still alive. In his fanciful account of ²²Nāsīmī's death, ²²Āşīk Çelebi states that the inhabitants of Aleppo and Syria first pulled off ²²Nāsīmī's skin, then bought it for the full price (²²*ba'te-hū metā'-i 'ömrü derisi tolu bahāya al-*) and then put it on him on the gallows (²²*ber-dār iderler*).⁹⁰⁷ Technically speaking, this version does not necessarily have to mean that the victim's skin was pulled off before he was executed. ²²Āşīk Çelebi's narrative must probably not be taken literally. It is highly stylized, which is in part due to ²²Āşīk Çelebi's enmity with ²²Nāsīmī, his indignation about ²²Nāsīmī's "heresy" (²²*zendekā*) as well as about his "words full of lies" (²²*kelimāt-i müzahrefe*).⁹⁰⁸ The expression "put him on the gallows" (²²*ber-dār iderler*) might rather be a topos than the reflection of historical fact, as this is a standard way heretics are put to death in legendary and poetical accounts. Consequently, the whole account including the sequence of events during the execution perhaps need not be taken at face value.⁹⁰⁹ Incidentally, ²²Āşīk Çelebi is singular, and therefore perhaps questionable, also as regards another information he gives about the life of ²²Nāsīmī, which is the poet's alleged origin from ¹⁵²Diyarbakır.⁹¹⁰ In sum, it does not seem to follow with certainty from ²²Āşīk Çelebi's narrative that ²²Nāsīmī had his skin pulled off while he was still living.

In contrast, one of the first medieval authors who clearly and openly spread the claim that ²²Nāsīmī was flayed alive was the very influential Ottoman lexicographer ²²Laṭīfī.⁹¹¹ The unimaginably gruesome detail of being flayed alive gave the figure of ²²Nāsīmī an extremely dramatic and unique position amongst the Islamic martyrs and victims of oppression. For there does not seem to be another martyr figure who is supposed to have been flayed alive in Islam and parallels with much earlier, non-Islamic flayed figures such as Marsyas⁹¹² or St. Bartholomew to not receive much attention in the Islamic sphere.

One of the earliest modern propagators of the narration of ²²Nāsīmī's execution by flaying who probably contributed to the spreading of this version of the story was the German-Austrian Jewish journalist and writer Bernhard Stern (1867–1927;

also known by his pseudonyms Bernhard Stern-Szana and Bernhard Szana). Stern traveled to Constantinople, interviewed locals and collected documents about many things that looked interesting to him. It might have been in that city that he got to know narratives with the motif of ²²Nāsīmī's being flayed alive. Amongst his sources, he might have found ²²Laṭīfī or authors or informants that were influenced by ²²Laṭīfī. Stern mentions ²²Nāsīmī's alleged being flayed *corpore vivo* in a passage about the ²²Hürūfiya in his book "Modern Turkey", which was published before World War I, perhaps in 1908 or 1911.⁹¹³ By his natural disposition, Stern was probably more inclined to believe and reproduce the *corpore vivo* motif than to doubt its authenticity, all the more as it was believed in many parts of the Orient itself. Stern was a journalist by training and a prolific writer with a marked predilection for erotic and saucy subjects. His has published numerous books, some of which bear graphic titles. They include "The Romanows: intimate episodes from the life at the Russian court" (1893),⁹¹⁴ "Abdülhamid II. His life and his household" (1901), dramatically and mysteriously presented as "according to own investigations" by the author),⁹¹⁵ two volumes of "The history of public morals in Russia. Culture, superstition, manner, and customs. Own investigations and collected reports", of which the first volume bears the additional title "Culture, superstition, the church, the clerics, sects, vices, amusement, sufferings" and the second one "Russian cruelty, women and marriage, syphilis, folkloristic documents" (1907–1908)⁹¹⁶ and also an "Illustrated history of the erotic literature of all ages and nations" in two volumes (1908).⁹¹⁷ Against the backdrop of the inclination that such titles betray, it does not come as a too big surprise that Stern adhered to a version in which ²²Nāsīmī is flayed alive.

In order to form an opinion about what might actually have happened during ²²Nāsīmī's execution, it is worthwhile to look at the reality or fictionality of flaying *corpore vivo* in general history.

There are many examples of this barbaric execution method that can be found in myths and fictional literature. In some famous cases, the boundaries between legend and historical fact are unclear. The most famous example is perhaps Mani (A. D. 216–276), who is sometimes referred to in contributions about ²²Nāsīmī, because he was a prophet, just like ²²Nāsīmī's teacher ²²Fazlollāh. According to a number of sources, Mani was flayed, but it is not clear whether he was supposed to have been flayed alive. According to some traditions, his dead body was stuffed with straw

⁹⁰⁶ For details, see Heß 2016 and Heß 2017.

⁹⁰⁷ Āşık Çelebi 2010: 865.

⁹⁰⁸ Ottoman Quotations are from Āşık Çelebi 2010: 865, translations mine.

⁹⁰⁹ Āşık Çelebi 2010: 865.

⁹¹⁰ See chapter 5.2.2.4.

⁹¹¹ Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435.

⁹¹² Cf. Heß 2007.

⁹¹³ Stern n.y.: 107.

⁹¹⁴ Stern 1893.

⁹¹⁵ Stern 1901.

⁹¹⁶ Stern-Szana 1907; Stern-Szana 1908.

⁹¹⁷ Stern-Szana 1908a.

and suspended from the gates of the town where he had been killed. However, the credibility of all these accounts is doubted.⁹¹⁸

Sadly, there is also ample evidence that flaying *corpore vivo* was applied by real human beings to real human beings as well.⁹¹⁹ As for the Turkic-speaking Middle Eastern cultural sphere, a case of flaying *corpore vivo* is described for the year 1812. Franz Heinrich Ungewitter describes how "in that year the Turks had killed a pirate by flaying his skin. They began peeling off his skin from the head, and when they arrived at the breast the pirate had no longer been able to stand the pain and died."⁹²⁰ The grammatical form used in the text to describe that the pirate was killed "by flaying his skin" (¹⁰⁰*derisini yüzerek*), explicitly expresses that the flaying and the killing took place at the same moment, or that the flaying was instrumental in the killing. Therefore, the possibility that ¹⁰⁰Nasimi was really flayed alive and that the corresponding accounts do not necessarily belong to myths or folklore must be regarded as a theoretical possibility.

Yet, the practice of flaying *postmortem* is also well attested in the Muslim Middle East throughout the Middle Ages. A famous example is the way of ⁹⁹⁹Şara Muştafâ Paşa, the Ottoman commander who failed to conquer Vienna in 1683, was treated after his execution. After ⁹⁹⁹Şara Muştafâ Paşa had been strangled, the skin of the dead body's head was pulled off. The skin was then stuffed and sent to Edirne in order to prove ⁹⁹⁹Şara Muştafâ Paşa's death to the Ottoman sultan.⁹²¹ In ⁹⁹⁹Şara Muştafâ Paşa's case, the act of flaying *post mortem* obviously had the purpose of preventing premature putrefaction. Incidentally, ⁹⁹⁹Şara Muştafâ Paşa was executed on December 25, 1683, and the stuffed head arrived in Edirne on January 13, 1684, which gives an impression of the stretches of time that were relevant to conservative skinning. That severed heads of executed high-ranking personnel were sent to the sultan was quite a common practice in the Ottoman Empire. Usually, the heads were placed in bags, which were filled with honey to optimize the preservation process, and then sent away. In most cases, the final destination of the heads that had been prepared in this way was the Empire's capital Constantinople.⁹²² In many cases, these heads were then publicly displayed at the gate of the sultan's palace.⁹²³

⁹¹⁸ Scopello 2005: 263.

⁹¹⁹ On the global history of flaying, cf. Benthien 2001: 76-110.

⁹²⁰ 1812 yılında Türkler bir korsanı, derisini yüzerek öldürmüşlerdi. Deriyi yüzmeze kafadan başlamışlardı, göğüse geldiklerinde korsan acılara dayanamayarak ölmüştü (quoted in Akçam 1995: 75).

⁹²¹ Kreutel 1976 / 1977.

⁹²² Akçam 1995: 51.

⁹²³ Bu kesilmiş başlar saray kapısı önünde teşhir edilirdi (Akçam 1995: 51, see also *ibid.*, p. 52).

If we return to ¹⁰⁰Sibṭ b. al-ʿAğami's text we see that it does not give a direct answer to the question if ¹⁰⁰Nasimi's skin was removed while he was still alive (and / or conscious, which would, in theory, be another important distinction) or not. Whereas the text does not mention explicitly that ¹⁰⁰Nasimi's skin was removed while he was still living, the expression "that he be flayed" (¹⁰⁰*yuslahā*) does not *a priori* exclude such an interpretation, either. However, there are some parallels between ¹⁰⁰Sibṭ b. al-ʿAğami's account of ¹⁰⁰Nasimi's execution and the above examples from Ottoman history, in which flaying occurs *post mortem*. The most important of these correspondences lies in the purpose of the act of flaying. For in both kinds of narration this special treatment of the body or its parts are elements in an act of the public exhibition of the victim or its remains. In fact, the Arabic verb ¹⁰⁰Sibṭ b. al-ʿAğami uses (¹⁰⁰*yuslahā* "let him be publicly displayed") and the word ¹⁰⁰*teşhir* ("exhibiting, displaying publicly") used in the secondary literature to describe the Ottoman examples⁹²⁴ are directly related to each other (the latter being a causative voice of the former), which is perhaps not entirely without relevance. Another parallel lies in the fact that parts of ¹⁰⁰Nasimi's body – we are not told which ones, though – were sent to places of political importance, which is what happened with some of the heads that were severed from high-ranking Ottoman bodies, too. As there are similar elements in both types of narratives, it is at least theoretically possible, although admittedly not compelling, assumption that the act of flaying also had a similar purpose in both cases.

A possible scenario for ¹⁰⁰Nasimi's execution could accordingly be that he was first killed and then had the skin removed from either the whole of his body or parts of it (such as the head). Then the stuffed body or parts of it (such as the head) would have been put on public display for seven days while announcements were made all over the city, possibly together with a description of his crime (i. e., heresy). As it were, the mention of the period of seven days in ¹⁰⁰Sibṭ b. al-ʿAğami's account might be an additional hint at the plausibility of the above interpretation. For displaying a dead body or its parts for a week would lead to a perhaps unpleasant degree of putrefaction if no conserving treatment was applied. In fact, the prevention of putrefaction was the reason why the severed heads of Ottoman beheaded victims were pickled in honey before being sent away.⁹²⁵

Another important consideration in the discussion about whether ¹⁰⁰Nasimi was flayed alive or not could be the question whether it was in the interest of the sultan or the ¹⁰⁰*nāʾib* (or both) to have the poet skinned alive at all. Would this exceptional act of cruelty not have created a bad image for the Mamelukes? Would this have been in their interest in the ethnically and religiously complicated situation that prevailed

⁹²⁴ A number of times in Akçam 1995: 51f. Cf. footnote 923.

⁹²⁵ Cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XXI. – Kürkçüoğlu also quotes the 20th century Arab historian ¹⁰⁰Abbās az-Zāwī (sic?) as stating that ¹⁰⁰Nasimi was first beheaded and then flayed.

in the northern parts of Syria? And does not the lawsuit, and the meticulous way in which it was carried out, show that the accusers were striving to keep their actions within the framework of law and orderliness? That is, exceptional and tyrannical violence does not seem to have been on the order of the day. Again, we can only speculate about the answers to these questions.

Finally, there also seem to be some more general considerations that increase the plausibility of the *post mortem* theory. One of these arguments concerns the dramatic nature of the assumption that ²²Nasimi would have been flayed alive. As mentioned above, even by medieval standards, removing somebody's skin while that person was still living was an exceptionally cruel method of execution and occurred only extremely rarely during Islamic times. Had ²²Nasimi been killed in that way, one should have expected ^{arab}Sibt b. al-'Aġami to mention this. However, the order "that he be flayed"⁹²⁶ (^{arab}*yuslaḥa*) is just mentioned as one element in a series of other acts that are to be done to ²²Nasimi's body: ^{arab}*bi-ṭn yuslaḥa wa-yuḥara bi-Ḥalab sab'a ayyāmin wa yunādā 'alay-hi tumma tuḫṭa'a aḫḫu-hū wa yursala min-hā sayrun ...* ("that he [=²²Nasimi] should be skinned and publicly exposed in Aleppo for seven days, that his name should be publicly proclaimed and that then the parts of his body should be cut up and that bits of them should be sent to ...") This sounds as if all of these acts were fairly routine procedures as they normally took place after the execution of an important person. To interpret this passage in such a way that it encapsulated an execution by skinning the living victim would be tantamount to stating that such killing was perfectly ordinary and normal to ^{arab}Sibt b. al-'Aġami, so much so that he did not even care to mention it. This would seem rather extraordinary. Furthermore, the assumption that the flaying was carried out after ²²Nasim's death is not incompatible with the fact that belief in his being flayed alive became so strong ever after. For there are certain concrete reasons for which belief in the *corpore vivo* version might have become dominant. Among other things, this version of the narrative constitutes a kind of confirmation of ²²Nasimi's self-image, if we remember that he celebrated himself as a "martyr" who was "flayed" in his own poems.⁹²⁶ The *corpore vivo* narrative fits in well with ²²Nasimi's being hailed as one of the most important martyr figures by certain communities (including Turkey's Alevis). In sum, the detail of ²²Nasimi being flayed *alive* could have been added to the historical information in order to emphasize his special status as a symbolic figure.

At the end of the day, we have to admit that there does not seem to be any definitive proof of either the *corpore vivo* or *post mortem* variant, at least if one limits oneself to the text of ^{arab}Sibt b. al-'Aġami.

If we turn our attention away from the question when and to what purpose the act of skinning was carried out we may emphasize the importance of the public exhibition of ²²Nasimi's dead body or parts of it. As the skinning, be it *corpore vivo*

or *post mortem*, and the sending of skulls or body parts to rulers, the public exhibition of human remains documents the importance of the executed person. Thus, independently of our understanding of the way ²²Nasimi was actually killed, the known circumstances of his execution tell us that he was quite famous already at the moment of his death.

In conclusion, we may also look at ^{arab}Sibt b. al-'Aġami's narrative from an ethnolinguistic angle. At least four of the five persons who formed the tribunal (i. e., ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaṭīb b. Našīriya, ^{arab}Šams ad-Dīn b. Amīn ad-Daula, ^{arab}Faṭḥ ad-Dīn, and ^{arab}Šihāb ad-Dīn), bear Arabic names while the etymology of the fifth one, ^{arab}Ibn al-Ḥāzūk, is not clear. In contrast, both ²²Nasimi and the ^{arab}*naḫīb* ⁹²⁶Yašbeg were recognizably of Turkic origin. As we have seen from the description of the lawsuit, ⁹²⁶Yašbeg insists on a fair trial for ²²Nasimi and twice refuses to execute him. This could be a sign of ethnic solidarity, although it does not have to. One should also note that a certain amount of ethnic conflict becomes apparent in the answer of the sultan ^{arab}al-Mu'ayyad, who sent parts of ²²Nasimi's body to the two Turkic-speaking rulers. Of course, the question of the ethnic divides is linked to the religious and political ones, with the borders between these categories not always being clear-cut.

In this context, another interesting detail in ^{arab}Sibt b. al-'Aġami's text is the question of language. The author quotes ²²Nasimi's words in Arabic, and his text does not contain any material in other languages (apart from the non-Arabic name of ⁹²⁶Yašbeg and the words with an unclear etymology). Does this automatically mean that ²²Nasimi uttered the incriminated statement in the Arabic language? This is a possibility given the fact that ²²Nasimi's poems include whole sentences in Arabic, which means that he should have been able to formulate a sentence such as the one ascribed to him in the text. However, the quoted phrase might also be a translation, without this being marked in the text. If this is the case, the next questions to ask would be from which language it might have been translated (Persian or Turkic), and by whom (^{arab}Sibt b. al-'Aġami, or somebody else?). The same problem concerning the language(s) used is also important to the interpretation of the very last sentence of ^{arab}Sibt b. al-'Aġami's text, in which he praises ²²Nasimi's poetry. As ²²Nasimi wrote most of his poetry in Turkic and Persian, this seems to presuppose that ^{arab}Sibt b. al-'Aġami must have been told about ²²Nasimi's poetry in these languages, or else have heard or read them by himself.

5.2.4.2. Other versions of Nasimi's death

There are other accounts of ²²Nasimi's death besides the descriptions according to ^{arab}Sibt b. al-'Aġami and ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaġar. This concerns various aspects of the narrative, including the time of the execution.

As to the place of ²²Nasimi's death, ⁹²⁶Rezā Ḳulī Ḥān Hedāyat mentions a vil-

⁹²⁶ See again Heß 2016 and Heß 2017.

lage called ^{mpcr}Zarqān, which belongs to Shiraz.⁹²⁷ It very likely belongs to the eponymous modern rural district (^{mpcr}*dehestān*) of Iran's Shiraz province (^{mpcr}*dehestān-e Zārqān*). Perhaps, ^{mpcr}Rezā Ḳulī Ḥān Hedāyat's statement does not imply that ²²Nasimi was executed in ^{mpcr}Zarqān but that he was only buried there. Another 19th-century Iranian text, ^{mpcr}Mirzā Ḥasan-e Fesā'ī's ^{mpcr}*Farsnāme-ye Nāserī*, explicitly claims that ²²Nasimi was buried in ^{mpcr}Zarqān, more precisely, outside of the village.⁹²⁸ In theory, the claim that ²²Nasimi was buried in ^{mpcr}Zarqān – and not in Aleppo or in the principalities to which his body parts were allegedly sent – is compatible with ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAḡamī's and ^{arab}Ibn Ḥaḡar's historical narratives about his death if we assume that ^{mpcr}Zarqān was actually the ultimate burial place of some of ²²Nasimi's body parts, that had been dispatched from Aleppo after his execution. However, both ^{mpcr}Mirzā Ḥasan-e Fesā'ī and ^{mpcr}Rezā Ḳulī Ḥān Hedāyat are very tardive and quite unreliable sources.

As for the date of ²²Nasimi's death, one proposal is based on his designation as ^{omc}*shhid-i ʿiṣḡ-i Faḡl-i zūʿ-ḡelāl* “martyr of the love of ^{omc}Faḡl, the Lord of Glory” in ^{omc}Refīʿī's ^{omc}*Bešāret-nāme*. It has been argued that this expression refers to ²²Nasimi as a dead person, as “martyrs” can be assumed to be deceased figures according to conventional understanding.⁹²⁹ As we know the ^{omc}*Bešāret-nāme* to have been completed before May 16, 1409,⁹³⁰ ²²Nasimi could accordingly be assumed to have died before that day, too. However, the argumentation is not entirely free of doubts because the word ^{omc}*shhid* “martyr” can also be used figuratively, i. e., it must not necessarily state that the figure referred to is really dead. In this context, we may again remind ourselves that ²²Nasimi speaks about himself paradoxically as a dead person in his own poems.⁹³¹ Therefore, the expression ^{omc}*shhid-i ʿiṣḡ-i Faḡl-i zūʿ-ḡelāl* need not be a statement about ²²Nasimi's death.

^{mpcr}Kamālō'd-dīn Ḥosayn Fānī (end of 15th / beginning of the 16th century) proposes two years for ²²Nasimi's execution in his ^{mpcr}*Maḡāleso ʿ-ʿOṣṣāk* (“The gatherings of the lovers”). The first is A. H. 807 (1404 / 1405).⁹³² It was spread among others by the Orientalist Bernhard Dorn (1805–1881).⁹³³

The second date suggested in his ^{mpcr}*Maḡāleso ʿ-ʿOṣṣāk* is the year A. H. 837 (first

day: August 18, 1433; last day: August 6, 1434),⁹³⁴ which was adapted by ^{omc}Laṭīf.⁹³⁵ Of course, there is an inherent contradiction in the fact that ^{mpcr}Kamālō'd-dīn Ḥosayn Fānī seems to present two dates simultaneously. That is, he probably was not sure himself which of the dates was more convincing. We are also not told whether there are further arguments to support one of them.

Not far away from ^{mpcr}Kamālō'd-dīn Ḥosayn Fānī's second date is the proposal in ^{mpcr}Mirzā Ḥasan-e Fesā'ī's ^{mpcr}*Farsnāme-ye Nāserī*, which states that ²²Nasimi was killed in A. H. 840 (first day: July 16, 1436; last day: July 4, 1437).⁹³⁶ The ^{mpcr}*Farsnāme-ye Nāserī* might have been influenced by ^{mpcr}Rezā Ḳulī Ḥān Hedāyat, who in turn drew upon the ^{mpcr}*Maḡāleso ʿ-ʿOṣṣāk*.

5.3. Alleged grave

There is a building in Aleppo that some people consider to be ²²Nasimi's grave. It has a coffin and an inscription commemorating the poet. There is a guardian who claims to belong to ²²Nasimi's family. The authenticity of the grave is frequently accepted as a fact in modern non-fictional works from Azerbaijan.⁹³⁷

However, the evidence that the site in Aleppo – which seems to have survived the ongoing Syrian civil war with minor damages – is really ²²Nasimi's burial place seems quite doubtful.

To begin with, there are some questions to be asked as to the time when the extant site was erected. Mameluke rule in Aleppo ended shortly after the Mamelukes were routed by the Ottomans in the battle at nearby Marḡ Dābīk (August 24, 1516).⁹³⁸ We have seen how hostile and spiteful the attitude of the Mameluke author ^{arab}Sibt b. al-ʿAḡamī, who died in 1479 / 1480, was vis-à-vis ²²Nasimi and his followers. This hostility can by no means be considered to be exceptional or marginal, but it reflects the Sunni mainstream opinion in the Mamluke caliphate. Against this backdrop, it

⁹²⁷ *Shiraz'in Zerkān köyü dısında* (quoted in Ayan 1990: 12).

⁹²⁸ *Shiraz'in Zerkān köyü* (quoted in Ayan 1990: 12).

⁹²⁹ Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XVIII.

⁹³⁰ See p. 178. – Cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XVIII, who uses a different date (A. H. 811 / 1408–1409) for the completion of the ^{omc}*Bešāret-nāme*.

⁹³¹ Heß 2016; Heß 2017.

⁹³² Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XVIII.

⁹³³ Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XVIII. – Cf. Macit 2007: 220.

⁹³⁴ Ayan 1990: 12. According to Ayan, ^{mpcr}Rezā Ḳulī Ḥān Hedāyat quotes the same date on the basis of the ^{mpcr}*Maḡāleso ʿ-ʿOṣṣāk*. – As for the author of the ^{mpcr}*Maḡāleso ʿ-ʿOṣṣāk*, Yakubcan İshakov has recently contradicted the traditional assumption that it was the Timurid ruler ^{mpcr}Ḥosayn Baykara (1438–1506) and argued in favour of ^{mpcr}Kamālō'd-dīn Ḥosayn Fānī (İshakov 2019 [2017]: 1).

⁹³⁵ Ayan 1990: 13.

⁹³⁶ Ayan 1990: 12.

⁹³⁷ For instance, Şıxıyeva 1999: 61.

⁹³⁸ Sakaoğlu 2011: 123; Vatin 2015b: 1057. Cf. Raymond 2015: 63.

seems to be rather improbable that a grave and / or commemorative site would have been erected in honor of the “kafir”, who had “seduced people into aberration”.

Another point which leads to questions about the authenticity of the alleged site of the grave is ^{arab}Sibt b. al-‘Aġami’s description of what happened to ^{arab}Nasimi’s body after the execution. If we accept this narrative, parts of ^{arab}Nasimi’s body were posthumously sent to at least two geographical locations outside of Aleppo, that is, to members of the ^{arab}Dūl-kaḍr dynasty and to the ^{arab}Aqqoyunlu ^{arab}Qara Yuluq Osman. Perhaps, these body parts were even sent to three places, if we assume that ^{arab}Ali Beg and his brother ^{arab}Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad of ^{arab}Dūl-kaḍr separately received their shares of the dead body. As a consequence, ^{arab}Nasimi’s alleged grave in Aleppo should only contain mutilated remains of a dead body. A question that would have to be asked then is: Does the supposed grave in Aleppo contain the complete remains of a human body or only parts of it. To my knowledge, no scientific or other investigation has ever been carried out to verify this. In theory, scientific methods could also be used in order to determine the age of whatever organic material would be found inside the coffin.

If we turn to historical traditions in order to reconstruct the story of the alleged grave, we do not seem to receive a clearer picture, either. The Azerbaijanian literary scholar ^{arab}Qazanfar Paşayev mentions that the Mameluke sultan ^{arab}al-Aṣraf Qānṣūh al-Ġūrī (1441–1516, ruled from 1501 until his death) ordered the restoration of the “mosque” (^{arab}maṣīd) in which ^{arab}Nasimi had been buried, in A. H. 910 (1504 / 1505).⁹⁴⁹ Even if this tradition is true, it, of course, does not prove that ^{arab}Nasimi really was actually buried in that mosque.

^{arab}Al-Aṣraf Qānṣūh al-Ġūrī’s initiative might also have been a belated effort to appease and win over the Turkic-speaking population of Aleppo and its surroundings in his power struggle against his two most serious political rivals, the Ottomans, and the Şafavids both of whom were of Turkic origin. The alleged restoration of the mosque took place in the expansionist phase of the rule of ^{arab}Şāh İsmā‘īl (1487–1524), who had founded the Şafavid dynasty in 1501. As is well-known, ^{arab}Şāh İsmā‘īl composed poems in both Old Western Oghuz and Persian, using the pen name ^{arab}Ḥaṭā‘ī (^{arab}Xatāi), and his works clearly betray influence from ^{arab}Nasimi and the ^{arab}Hurūfiya. Consequently, ^{arab}Al-Aṣraf Qānṣūh al-Ġūrī might have been more than willing to pride himself about a site in commemoration of ^{arab}Nasimi, an eminent Old Western Oghuz and Persian poet, at a junction where he was threatened militarily by ^{arab}Şāh İsmā‘īl and where the Şafavid shah tried, by all means, to win over his enemies’ subjects by way of propaganda. Here as before, the existence of a mosque where ^{arab}Nasimi is thought to have been buried is potentially at odds with ^{arab}Sibt b. al-‘Aġami’s mentioning of his body parts being sent away. For

⁹⁴⁹ Paşayev 2010: 60. Paşayev does not indicate the source of this information.

if the whole of ^{arab}Nasimi’s body is supposed to repose in the mosque, only one of the two versions can be true.

^{arab}Nasimi’s alleged burial place in Aleppo is said to contain an inscription in Arabic which mentions ^{arab}Nasimi’s death as a “martyr” (^{arab}shāhid) in A. H. 824 (a date corrected by ^{arab}Paşayev to A. H. 820).⁹⁴⁰ Although an Azerbaijanian delegation visited the site in 2008,⁹⁴¹ no scientific investigations as to the authenticity of the site and the inscription have ever been carried out. However, even if seen from the distance some elements seem to raise doubts. These include the absolutely unblemished state of preservation of the Arabic inscription (at least judging from the pictures in ^{arab}Paşayev’s book) as well as the appearance of the word ^{arab}hiġri (“according to the Hegira calendar”) in it.⁹⁴² The addition of the adjective ^{arab}hiġri would make little sense in Mameluke Aleppo, where the Hegira calendar was the official standard. The adjective is not needed at all if the Hegira year itself is mentioned. The distinction between Muslim lunar and Christian (or other) years is only meaningful in an age where rivaling calendar systems were in use (such as 20th-century Syria). In any case, a profound analysis of the inscription seems to be demanding for the time being, in particular as the pictures of the Arabic inscription in ^{arab}Paşayev’s book look more like paintings than photographs.⁹⁴³ Further suspicions about the authenticity of at least the inscription in ^{arab}Nasimi’s grave were created by a remark by the eminent Turkish scholar ^{arab}Kemal Edib Kürkçüoġlu (1902–1977). Kürkçüoġlu quotes a certain “Prof. Dr. İzzet Hasen” – whom I have not been able to identify – as claiming that ^{arab}Nasimi’s mausoleum does not bear an inscription at all.⁹⁴⁴ As ^{arab}Kürkçüoġlu passed away in 1977, the personal communication or publication from which he quotes must be prior to the end of that year. If the utterance actually refers to the same architectural structure discussed by ^{arab}Paşayev and visited by the Azerbaijanian delegation in 2008, this would mean that the inscription in the building that is passed off as ^{arab}Nasimi’s grave had been created between 1977 and 2008 and was, therefore, a fake. ^{arab}Kürkçüoġlu can be considered one of the most serious and extensive authorities on the life of ^{arab}Nasimi. Therefore, his remarks should not be ignored even if their source has not yet been clearly identified. The whole matter clearly needs some thorough investigation.

⁹⁴⁰ Paşayev 2010: 74, 136f. (with photographs).

⁹⁴¹ Paşayev 2010: 131.

⁹⁴² Paşayev 2010: 74.

⁹⁴³ The printed Arabic text visible on the picture of the “^{arab}Nasimi convent” (^{arab}Nasimi ṭayyari) in Paşayev 2010: 135 need not be discussed, as their irrelevance the discussion about ^{arab}Nasimi’s burial place is self-evident. – For the location of this convent, see Kürkçüoġlu 1985: XX.

⁹⁴⁴ Kürkçüoġlu 1985: XXI.

Finally, if the guardian's claim to be a descendant of ²²Nəsimi is accepted this means that he must dispose of a genealogy that goes back to ²²Nəsimi. Where is this genealogy? If it exists, is it authentic? For how many generations has the existence of a grave been noted in the family? These are only some of the questions one should ask before a definite statement as to the authenticity of the Aleppo site.

For the time being, the existence of ²²Nəsimi's grave in Aleppo cannot be considered a fact.

5.4. Works

²²Nəsimi left a divan both in Oghuz Turkic and in the Persian language. Most of the poems in these divans are ghazals, but other forms are also used.⁹⁴⁵

In addition, to these poetical works, the Azerbaijanian literary scholar ²²Səadət Şıyxeva claims to possess information about a prose treatise with the title "Man" (²²*İnsan*) that may be ascribed to ²²Nəsimi. She also recently mentioned having heard about his "Book of the Order" (²²*Təriqətnamə*), which is said to be alternately written in prose and verse.⁹⁴⁶ According to ²²Şıyxeva, the first of these texts can be found in Turkey, while the second is being prepared for print, as of 2019.⁹⁴⁷

For a long time, a prose text entitled ²²*Mukaddime* ("Introduction") or ²²*Mukaddimetü'l-ḥaqā'ik* ("Introduction to the Truths") had been ascribed to ²²Nəsimi by some people. However, there were always doubts as to its authenticity. Recently, these suspicions have been renewed by a linguistic study of the text.⁹⁴⁸

According to ²²Səadət Şıyxeva, ²²Nəsimi was also the author of a short poem called ²²*Manzūma fī-maslakī'l-ḥurūfiyya* ("Poem about the Ḥurūfī path"), which has been lost.⁹⁴⁹

5.5. Afterlife

It is safe to say that no other adherent of the ²²*Ḥurūfiyya* has enjoyed the level of posthumous notoriety and popularity that ²²Nəsimi did.⁹⁵⁰ This can be ascribed to the combination of his performance as a poet and the traditions, both factual and legendary, about his death. These two interact. For instance, ²²Nəsimi himself prepared his afterlife in his poems by imagining his own death,⁹⁵¹ and more or less legendary accounts about ²²Nəsimi's execution are frequently adorned with some of his verses.

After his death, ²²Nəsimi became an object of veneration, chiefly as a religious figure, amongst the ²²*Kızılbaş* of the Ottoman and adjacent lands, the precursors of the present-day Turkish Alevis. In the course of time, ²²Nəsimi turned into a more important martyr figure than his teacher ²²Fazlollāh.⁹⁵² This is not surprising given the effect ²²Nəsimi's Turkic poems had and continue to have on the Oghuz-speaking ²²*Kızılbaş* / Alevi.

As a poet, ²²Nəsimi has left a lasting mark on the poetry of the Turkic-speaking world. This does not only concern mystical or ²²*Ḥurūfī* poets. Among the poets influenced by ²²Nəsimi, one of the first to name is ²²Xətai / ²²Şah İsmayıl (1487–1524).

⁹⁴⁵ See Heß 2009c.

⁹⁴⁶ Şıyxeva 2019.

⁹⁴⁷ Şıyxeva 2019.

⁹⁴⁸ Heß 2013.

⁹⁴⁹ ²²*Manzūma fī-maslakī'l-ḥurūfiyya* (Şıyxeva 2019).

⁹⁵⁰ On the afterlife of the ²²*Ḥurūfiyya* in general, in which ²²Nəsimi already has his place, cf. chapter 4.5.6. – The present chapter adds some details to this that are more distinctive of ²²Nəsimi.

⁹⁵¹ Cf. Heß 2016 and Heß 2017.

⁹⁵² Macit 2007: 220, referring to ²²Nəsimi's ²²*mazlum şehit imajı* and quoting Mélikoff 1993: 183–198.

6. SOME CHARACTERISTIC TOPICS OF NƏSİMİ'S TURKIC DIVAN

Whom did ²²Nəsimi write for? Whom did he address himself to? All "Muslims"? If the answer to this question is yes, what was "Islam"? Would this term have included people who branded him "kafir" and executed him in the name of Islam? Would this term have included himself, who was, as we have seen, denounced as a "kafir"? Or was the deeper semantic level of ²²Nəsimi's poems only destined for the adepts of the ^{22ab}Ḥurūfiya religious movement? Or, to come up with yet another possible interpretation, did he address all adherents of so-called 'revealed religions' of the Abrahamic type, such as Samaritans, Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Or did he even compose his lyrical poetry also for those who are considered by all these religious groups as 'infidels', such as polytheists, Manichaeans, agnostics, or atheists?

In addition to these and similar questions – the answer to which might never be known with absolute certainty and in part perhaps *cannot* be given without unambiguousness – one may interrogate oneself in the following way: For whom does it make sense to interpret ²²Nəsimi's poems in our modern times? Only Muslims (again, supposing we know who that is to be exactly)? Those who are more or less familiar with ^{22ab}Ḥurūfī texts? Or just anybody, possibly even including non-believers in any religion and in the meaningfulness of religious practice?

Depending on the answers one gives to these questions, the relevance of ²²Nəsimi may either be limited to a more or less closed circle of 'believers' (the word can or even must be put in inverted commas when we are talking about a poet who equalized belief and its opposite) in whatever faith or esoteric teaching or to a larger, even global, audience. Such a community of readers or listeners could, in the end, comprise everybody who is inspired not necessarily by the doctrine, rituals, the often absurd pseudo-mathematical gimmicks and traditions of the ^{22ab}Ḥurūfiya but by those of its elements that are valuable beyond these spheres. In fact, it is for such a global public that the following subchapters discuss some passages from ²²Nəsimi's Turkic divan.

Any kind of analysis of ²²Nəsimi's divans, be it the Turkic or the Persian one, faces *inter alia* the problem that the text corpus consists of a multitude of poems which are structurally independent of each other and sometimes very short and condensed.⁵⁵³ The largest part of Nəsimi's divans consists of ghazals, the majority of which does

⁵⁵³ For other problems that arise during the interpretation of ²²Nəsimi's work, see chapter 3.3.

not exceed the length of twenty couplets. ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī left a considerable number of even shorter poems, such as quatrains. ⁵⁵⁴ In many of these types of poems, the individual ⁵⁵⁴ *beḡts*, in turn, represent closed semantical units (even if they are arranged together according to the similarity in topic or tone). It is true that ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī sometimes also used the poetical form of the ⁵⁵⁴ *masnawi*. This is a poetical form which due to its very simple rhyme pattern (aa bb cc ...) can easily be used for very long narrative poems. However, even ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī's few extant ⁵⁵⁴ *masnawis* are comparatively moderate in size, the longest one containing approximately fifty couplets.

For the interpretation of ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī's Turkic divans, the above-described characteristics mean that it must be based on a plurality of formally independent poems or even ⁵⁵⁴ *beḡts*. ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī's poetry, and consequently his thought, is not hierarchically structured. Although some of the poems might be considered to be more representative or important for one reason or another (such as their particular length, catchiness, compact content, formal singularity, etc.), any interpretation will have to balance the importance of some of the poems or ⁵⁵⁴ *beḡts* against that of others. While it is already difficult to establish the meaning of every line of the ⁵⁵⁴ *beḡts* and poem, it is even more complicated to combine the interpretations of the smaller units in a comprehensive analysis. Such a comprehensive analysis will probably remain a desideratum for some time, as it would mean, among other things, to combine interpretations of a significant number of ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī's Persian and Turkic poems.

Already for reasons of time and space, the following can only present a selection of interpretations of randomly chosen verses. As a consequence, it does not claim to give an interpretation of ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī or his work but only of the quoted verses, and possibly also the poems they belong to and similar verses or poems.

Each of the following subchapters discusses a particular topic. The topics are chosen according to the importance and interest they might present to the 'universal' reader defined above.

6.1. The apotheosis of man

As has been shown in the historical introduction, there were tendencies to deify human beings in the ⁵⁵⁴ *Hurūfiyya*. Possibly, these tendencies were not yet fully developed by ⁵⁵⁴ Fāzillāh himself. However, they seem to have become more manifest among some of his pupils after his death. ⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁴ The most important study on ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī's quatrains is Burril 1972.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf pp. 99 and 126.

Some verses in ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī's Turkic divan can hardly be interpreted as something different from the explicit equalization of man and Allah. One of the clearest expressions of this view can be found in the ⁵⁵⁴ *masnawi* ⁵⁵⁴ *Doryayī-mūhit cuḡa goldi*. This poem occupies a very special place in the work of ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī for a number of reasons. Firstly, this is because ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī has written only very few ⁵⁵⁴ *masnawis*. A second reason is that ⁵⁵⁴ *Doryayī-mūhit cuḡa goldi* contains a number of central theological statements of the ⁵⁵⁴ *Hurūfī* creed in a very programmatic, emphatic and concentrated form. In particular, such statements appear in quick succession in the first section of the poem, from which the below quotation is taken. A third aspect that renders ⁵⁵⁴ *Doryayī-mūhit cuḡa goldi* special results from the ascription of special importance to it in ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī's spiritual biography. ⁵⁵⁶ The poem has assumed such importance that its initial line ⁵⁵⁴ *Doryayī-mūhit cuḡa goldi* is sometimes quoted as a landmark of ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī. This ⁵⁵⁴ *masnawi* contains a striking formulation of human apotheosis in ⁵⁵⁴ *beḡt* 11: ⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ / ⁵⁵⁴ *Māscūdīlō sācīd oldu vāhīd*
Māscūdī-hāḡīḡī oldu sācīd ⁵⁵⁸

"The worshipped and the worshipper has become the one.
The truly worshipped one has become the worshipper."

In these two lines, ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī uses morphological derivatives of the stem I of the Arabic root *S-Ġ-D*. The stem I of this root conveys the meaning "to prostrate oneself (by touching the ground with one's forehead)", and in this meaning, it is in particular used to describe the Muslim ritual prayer. ⁵⁵⁹ Already the lexical meaning implies that in Muslim contexts the object of this act of prostration or worship is almost certainly to be Allah and only Allah. ⁵⁶⁰ Incidentally, to the same root *S-Ġ-D* belongs also the "place of worship" *par excellence*, i. e., the mosque, ⁵⁶¹ *masḡid* – the English word is etymologically derived from the Arabic. ⁵⁶¹ The first derivative of

⁵⁵⁶ See p. 177.

⁵⁵⁷ In classical Oriental poetry, a ⁵⁵⁴ *beḡt* is a formal unit of two verse lines. – The sequence of ⁵⁵⁴ *beḡts* varies in the manuscripts of ⁵⁵⁴ Nāsīmī's divan. However, the place of the ⁵⁵⁴ *beḡts* discussed here is fairly consistent in 8 out of 9 manuscripts, including some of the oldest (see Heß 2009: 466).

⁵⁵⁸ Adapted from Heß 2009: 470.

⁵⁵⁹ Wehr 1985: 552, s. v. *saḡada*: "sich niederwerfen (mit der Stirn den Boden berührend, bes. als Teil des muslim. Gebetsritus), sich prosternieren".

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. Wehr 1985: 552, s. v. *saḡada*.

⁵⁶¹ Cf. Wehr 1985: 552f, s. v. *masḡid*.

-*Ġ-D* stem I that appears in ^{az./owo.} ^{az./owo.} *Nəsimi*'s above text is the passive participle, ^{az./owo.} *məscüd*. Its ultimate source is the Arabic passive participle ^{arab.} *masʿūd*, which in the Arabic language is marked [+male] and [+singular]. However, the Old Western Oghuz language does not distinguish grammatical gender, and singular words may also be interpreted as plural, possibly even feminine, depending on the context. The lexical meaning of ^{az./owo.} *məscüd*, therefore, include "something or somebody (possibly a male entity) that is worshipped", but also "Allah", for in Muslim culture Allah is the only legitimate object of worship. In contrast, the second morphological stem I derivative of root *S-Ġ-D* that appears in the text is an active participle: ^{az./owo.} *säcid* – ^{arab.} *säʿid* "somebody (at least in the Arabic language by implication possibly a male being) who worships, a worshipper (by implication: of Allah)". The final word in the first line, ^{az./owo./arab.} *pähid*, belongs to an entirely different root and means "one", formally also being an active participle of stem I. Because of its meaning, ^{az./owo./arab.} *pähid* may of course also denote Allah in Muslim texts. The predicate in both above lines is the verb ^{az./owo.} *ol-*, which means, among other things, "to become" or "to be". It establishes an identity relationship between the two nominal elements of the prediction. Hence, "the worshipper" and "the worshipped one" have become "the one". Or: man – as the one, who worships Allah at home or in the mosques – and Allah – the One who is worshipped there ritually – have become the One, who at the same time is Allah.

The second line of the above ^{az./owo.} *beyt* basically repeats the assertion made in the first, but adds the adjective ^{az./owo.} *höqiqi* "the true" to "the worshipped one". ^{az./owo.} *Höqiqi* may also be a technical term of Muslim theology, meaning "referring to God or the truth" (which may be the same). This adds a further shade of divinity to man, who ontologically is the "truly worshipped one" and the "worshipper" at the same time. It would seem hard to come around to the fact that the above two lines equal Allah and man.

This is not the only statement of its kind that can be found in ^{az./owo.} *Nəsimi*'s poems. However, it stands out because of its succinctness, its clarity and the stressed position it occupies in the ^{az./owo.} *Dəryayi-mühit çuqə goldi* ^{az./owo.} *məsnəvi*.

A quite similar expression can be found in the same ^{az./owo.} *məsnəvi* a few dozen lines down the text:

^{az./owo.} *Adam dükalı Həq oldu bilgil,
Məscüdi-həqiqə sədəd qılğıl*⁹⁶³

"Adam [or: man] has entirely become Allah [or: the truth]. Know this!
Worship the truly worshipped one!"

One can perfectly understand why conservative mainstream Muslims would qualify

⁹⁶³ Adapted from Heß 2009: 476.

^{az./owo.} *Nəsimi* as an infidel on the basis of the above or similar utterances. In mainstream Islam, an equalization of God and man is unimaginable. The identification of man with God that ^{az./owo.} *Nəsimi* so unambiguously formulates does away with the fundamentals of the mainstream Islamic practice as it had existed up to that time. In mainstream Islam, man worships Allah, but never ever *vice versa*. The above statements, therefore, constitute a head-on attack on conventional mainstream Islam and have the potential to deprive a whole class of Islamic scholars of their *raison d'être*.

^{az./owo.} *Nəsimi* seems to be fully conscious of this potential to destroy conventional mainstream Islamic practice. This is evident from the first line of the ^{az./owo.} *beyt* which immediately follows ^{az./owo.} *Məscüdülə säcid oldu pähid / Məscüdi-həqiqi oldu säcid in the* ^{az./owo.} *məsnəvi*:

^{az./owo.} *İmānilə küfr bir şey oldu:
Təllu: ilə a:cı bir mey oldu.*⁹⁶³

"Belief and disbelief have become one and the same thing,
Sweet and bitter have become one and the same wine."

This ^{az./owo.} *beyt* uses one of the most pejorative and aggressive combat terms of mainstream Islam: ^{az./owo.} *küfr* = ^{arab.} *kufir*. Its lexical meaning is "disbelief", and the fact that disbelief is a completely unacceptable attitude in mainstream Islam gives the word a strongly deprecating meaning. Incidentally, ^{arab.} *kufir* is also the verbal noun that corresponds to the word "kafir"^(arab. küfir). As we have already seen, this word is used against ^{az./owo.} *Nəsimi* by ^{arab.} Sibṭ b. al-Aʿġamī in conclusion of his account of the Aleppo tribunal.⁹⁶⁴ What ^{az./owo.} *Nəsimi* realizes in the last of the above text quotes is, in fact, a subversion of this reproach to be a ^{arab.} *käfir* that, as he must have known a long time before he came to Aleppo, would be directed at him or had already been uttered against him. By declaring disbelief and belief to be indistinguishable, ^{az./owo.} *Nəsimi* not only wards off the attacks of the conservative establishment, who threaten him with death by accusing him of ^{arab.} *küfr*, but also reduces their way of thinking to absurdity. In the way he puts things, ^{arab.} *küfr*, simply does not exist in the way imagined by his opponents. He carries the argument from the juridical, social and personal level to the ontological and epistemological one, demanding a radical reinterpretation of the categories "God", "man", "belief" and "disbelief". Instead of accepting to be accused of error, he accuses his (would-be) accusers to be in even more fundamental error.

Incidentally, expressions that are similar to ^{az./owo.} *İmānilə küfr bir şey oldu: occur*

⁹⁶³ Adapted from Heß 2009: 470. – The colons indicate metrical length.

⁹⁶⁴ P. 179.

elsewhere in ²²Nāsīmī's Turkic poems, too. For instance, the first ²²*beyt* of the ghazal ²²*Aşiq qatında küfrilə islam bürdü*⁹⁶⁵ "In front of the loving one (or the love poet), disbelief and Islam are one" is even more explicit than the above lines, for it uses the word ²²*islam* "Islam" instead of ²²*İmān* "belief".

If a man and Allah can in principle be equalized, it does not come as a surprise if the most perfect man known to ²²Nāsīmī and the other ²²Hürūfīs, ²²Fazlollāh, is worshipped as God, too.⁹⁶⁶ Therefore, it is a perfectly plausible interpretation to identify the word ²²Fazlī in the following ²²Nāsīmī ²²*beyt* with the prophet from ²²Astarābād:

Hər ki, Nəsimitək sücud Fəzli-ilahə qılmadı
*Div kimi bu gün anı bəlkə bu yolda dayın.*⁹⁶⁷

"As to those who do not worship God ²²Fazl[ollāh],
You should know⁹⁶⁸ that they err on this path today, just like the devil."

In the first line of the above ²²*beyt*, another morphological derivative of the first stem of the Arabic root *S-Ġ-D* is used. This time it is the phraseological verb ²²*sücud qıl* "to prostrate oneself".

The expression ²²*Fəzli-ilah* "God ²²Fazl[ollāh]" from the first line appears in other places of ²²Nāsīmī's Turkic divan in similar meanings as well:

²²*Fəzli-ilahə canını gylə fəda, Nəsimi, sən*
*Olma məlul, ayıtma kim, bəndü hasar içindəym.*⁹⁶⁹

²²Nāsīmī, sacrifice your life⁹⁷⁰ to God ²²Fazl[ollāh]!
Do not be sad, and do not say: 'I am in shackles and behind a fence!'"

One may note that both ²²*Hər ki, Nəsimitək ...* and ²²*Fəzli-ilahə canını ...* are last ²²*beyts* of their respective ghazals. Such a final ²²*beyt* (called ²²*maqta'* "the place where (the ghazal) is cut off" in the traditional Oriental terminology) is naturally always particularly stressed. As in the above quotes, it usually also contains the poet's

⁹⁶⁵ İmadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 143.

⁹⁶⁶ On the equalization of ²²Fazlollāh and God, cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: 65.

⁹⁶⁷ İmadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 45.

⁹⁶⁸ The reading ²²*bəlkə* probably has to be emended to ²²*bilki*, for otherwise the accusative ²²*anı* cannot be explained. The translation is based upon the emendation.

⁹⁶⁹ İmadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 71.

⁹⁷⁰ Or "your soul" [M. R. H.].

pen name. The mention of ²²*Fəzli-ilah* in this marked position of the poems seems to be motivated by ²²Nāsīmī's desire to add particular emphasis to his statements.

6.2. Epistemological focus on the self

Being heirs to the Sufi tradition, ²²Fazlollāh, ²²Nāsīmī and the other ²²Hürūfīs frequently focused on the self (²²*özü* "self") as a source of insight. The ²²Rūmī verses that are said to have brought ²²Fazlollāh on the mystical path expresses such an orientation away from the futile aspects of the visible world and towards the true source of knowledge that lies within oneself.⁹⁷¹

One of the first authors to highlight the self as the source of human knowledge in the western hemisphere was probably Heraclitus (ca. 520-460 B. C.). His famous maxim *ἐδίδραχμάτην ἐμωστόν* ("I carried out investigations within myself")⁹⁷² stands for a critical philosophical approach which does not take anything, not even the greatest authorities such as Homer, Hesiod or the Gods, for granted. Instead, Heraclitus looks at major open questions of his times in an open search for answers. This he does by checking evidence, through observing and by applying logical operations.

This orientation towards the self was a crucial contribution to philosophy as we know it and to the foundations of European culture and history. In theory, it is not entirely impossible that even a direct historical link existed between Heraclitus and ²²Nāsīmī. For instance, such a connection could have passed via Plotin, who is known to have read and quoted the Dark Philosopher from Ephesus.⁹⁷³ Plotin's philosophy, in turn, found its way into the Islamic world through thinkers such as ²²al-Kindī.⁹⁷⁴ More importantly, neo-Platonic thought is assumed to have influenced Muslim mystics including ²²Ibn al-'Arabī.⁹⁷⁵ This means that a direct lineage of thought might potentially be traced from Heraclitus via Plotin, ²²Ibn al-'Arabī and ²²Rūmī to ²²Fazlollāh. Hence, ²²Nāsīmī's thinking could have been influenced by the famous Ephesian philosopher, even if there does not seem to be positive proof for such a *longue durée* contact.

⁹⁷¹ See pp. 106 and 120.

⁹⁷² Greek quote from Mansfeld / Primavesi 2012: 260, my English translation.

⁹⁷³ Cf. Mansfeld / Primavesi 2012: 270, where two Heraclitus quotes in works of Plotin are reproduced.

⁹⁷⁴ Cf. p. 70, 93.

⁹⁷⁵ See p. 94.

Independently from the Neo-Platonist tradition, the principle of self-knowledge that pervades ancient Greek philosophy has found its way into the Christian religion, where it is found in the famous apothegm from Luke 17: 21 "Behold, for the kingdom of God, is inside of you" (ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντός ὑμῶν ἐστίν).⁹⁷⁶ This in turn has inspired all important Christian writers including the Oriental church fathers such as St. Anthony.⁹⁷⁷

However, one does not need to assume direct historical contacts in order to appreciate the similarity between the critical orientation towards the self that is encapsulated in ἐδικήσάμην ἐμεωυτόν or similar Christian interpretations and the following ²²Nāsīmi verses, which are again from the ²²*Doryayī-mūhil caṣṣa goldī* ²²*masnawī* already discussed.⁹⁷⁸

²²/_{Novo} *Gər a:šūš isā: bašīraty bax*
*Gör sendo Həqi: vū gimā i:tax*⁹⁷⁹

"If your eyesight is clear, look!
 See God (or: the truth) in yourself, and do not go into the distance!"

The second of these lines presents two opposite alternatives: to see God / the truth in "yourself" (^{Novo/Nov} *isā*) or "to go into the distance" (^{Novo/Nov} *tax* *gīt*). It is not said what kind of "you" is meant, or where the "distance" begins that one is advised to avoid. However, the epistemological message is clear enough: Whosoever possesses an individual personality, something about which he can say that it is "me" should turn to this instance in his search for the essential. This is a classical Sufi statement, which ascribes the competence and authority to find the path to God to the individual. This might seem commonplace from the perspective of 21st-century open societies, but it was yet another attack on the foundations of medieval societies, where the political dominant interpretation of religion usually meant that the interpretation of God, or the truth, was socially conditioned. It passed through the hands of a caste of Quran pundits who decided what was accepted and what was not.

If we go back for a moment and compare the ²²*Gər a:šūš isā: ...* ²²*beyt* to Heraclitus and the New Testament and ²²Nāsīmi some important differences appear. Heraclitus primarily describes an action which has the speaker, i. e., the philosopher as both its agent and its patient. The Greek medium voice (ἐδικήσάμην) encodes an action that has its origin and its target within the sphere of the subject referent. This

self-reference is additionally emphasized using the accusative form of the reflexive pronoun, ἐμεωυτόν. As to the tense, Heraclitus employs the aorist, which is structurally polysemic. For its semantical scope includes, among other things, semelfactive, inchoative (ingressive) and even resultative aktionsart. As Heraclitus' statement appears without context, it is difficult to ascertain which of these interpretations is the most fitting. Independently of the possible interpretations of the aorist tense, the sentence is clearly centered around the verb, hence, the action. Heraclitus focuses on the description of an action, a process. This action may have taken place in the past, or taken place in the present, as the aorist is ambiguous in this respect, too. What seems to be important is action. In contrast, the verb considerably is less important in the Greek sentence taken from Luke, ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντός ὑμῶν ἐστίν. This is a so-called nominal or existential sentence, the predicate of which is a form of "to be" (here, ἐστίν "it is"). In Greek grammar, this is an unaccented form, which means that it does not have the same status as ordinary verbs. Cross-linguistic observation informs us that nominal or existential sentences may be expressed even without an existential verb of the type ἐστίν in many languages. These languages include Classical Arabic, many Turkic languages, and Russian. This confirms the assumption that the verbal element is probably not too important in existential sentences. Hence, the above phrase from the Gospel does not emphasize the action the same way Heraclitus' motto does, but draws attention to "the kingdom of God" (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ), something which does not have to be created, sought for, or found in a process, but which is already present, ready, at hand "inside of you" (ἐντός ὑμῶν). Similarly, ²²Nāsīmi does not put the emphasis on the action, either. It is true, the quality of the action, "to see" (²²*gōr*) is very important, as ²²Nāsīmi names "open eyesight" (²²*ašuk bašīrad*) as its ideal prerequisite. However, just as in the New Testament statement, the process or progress of the action is not placed in the foreground. For the result that is to be attained through the actions of "seeing" (²²*gōr*-) and "looking" (²²*bax*-) is again already there: "the truth" / "God" (²²*Həqi*).

To summarize: although all three quotes from different stages of cultural history describe a crucial epistemological stage in the development of human consciousness, which is the awareness of oneself and the use of the self as an epistemological instrument, a close reading reveals significant differences between the three approaches. These are conditioned by differing targets and perspectives. Heraclitus apparently is interested in investigating and carrying out research into whatever he might discover, without anticipating what that will be. In contrast, the author of the New Testament sentence and ²²Nāsīmi are involved in a less open-end approach. For even before the actual process of knowledge acquirement is engaged in, they articulate very far-reaching and precise ideas – or should we say prejudices? – about the result of their investigation. For the outcome has to be "the kingdom of God" (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ), or "God" (²²*Həqi*). Heraclitus engages in an open search, the two others are looking for confirmation concerning something preconceived.

⁹⁷⁶ Original text quote from Novum Testamentum 1981: 412.

⁹⁷⁷ Desceille 2005: 280.

⁹⁷⁸ 6.1. above.

⁹⁷⁹ Adapted from Heß 2009: 471.

There are numerous places in ²²Nasimi's poems where the importance of the self is stressed in similar terms as in the above quote from the Turkic divan. Consider the following example:

²²*Ol kim, özün bilmədi, düşdü cahana dərbədar,
Varlığın haq bilmədi, qurtarmadı əmmarədən.*⁹⁸⁰

"He who did not understand himself is astray in this world,
He did not understand that his possession is God (or the truth), and he has not
been able to save it from the appetitive soul."

With a frequency that almost can be described as a landmark of his poetry, ²²Nasimi – or his lyrical ego – directly identifies himself as the individual that contains the source of knowledge within himself. An example is the following ²²*beyt*:

²²*Mən mənədi həqqi buldum, həqqi-yəqin həq oldum,
Uyxuda qaldı münkir nəqsü xəyal içində.*⁹⁸¹

"I have found the truth (or Allah) in myself, as sure as the truth I have become God.
The deniers are still in their sleep, caught up in illusions and meaningless embellishments".

Perhaps the above described focusing on the individual self can offer an explanation for the abundant use of first-person pronouns in many of ²²Nasimi's poems. For instance, in the ghazal ²²*Mən mülki-cahan, cahən mənəm mən* ("I am the realm of the world, I am the world, I") the first person singular personal pronoun appears ²²*mən* "I" appears 60 times in a total of only 18 ²²*beyts*.⁹⁸²

6.3. World-weariness

An interesting question, to which the published biographical data about ²²Nasimi does not give a satisfactory answer, is why he and so many of his contemporaries

⁹⁸⁰ Text from Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 149.

⁹⁸¹ Text from Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 167.

⁹⁸² See the text in Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 139f. – For other ghazals with very strong incidences of first person singular predications, see Nesimi 2012a: 173, 175-177, 181, 183, 185.

joined the ²²ab-*Hürüfiya* movement at all. If we believe the story reproduced about ²²Nasimi's brother by ²²am-Latifi in his ²²am-*Təzkirətü'ş-Şu'arā*,⁹⁸³ the risks of becoming a ²²ab-*Hürüfi* or joining a similarly radical religious movement must have been apparent to ²²Nasimi from the very beginning. So many mystics, including ²²ab-Al-*Hallāğ* and ²²ab-Sohravarđi al-Makṭül, had been executed before him in a culture that was radically intolerant if its presumed religious fundamentals were at stage. In the end, ²²Nasimi's execution in Aleppo would prove how wellfounded such fears were. Incidentally, many verses in ²²Nasimi's poems give us an understanding that he considered the prospect to be given a "martyr's" death in exchange for his religious utterings quite a real possibility.⁹⁸⁴

One possible answer to the above question would be that the likes of ²²Nasimi seem to have experienced a certain degree of world-weariness and deception, not only about singular events or persons but about the visible world or life *in toto*. At least some of his verses seem to express such a state of mind, including the following:

²²*Yar ilə günkü bir oldu Nasimi,
Nə qəm, gər cümlə ələm olsa əğyar.*⁹⁸⁵

"As ²²Nasimi has become one with the Friend⁹⁸⁶
What does it matter if all the world are strangers?"

This sounds like the words of somebody who has taken refuge with a spiritual source of satisfaction – the "Friend" – which enables him to shrug at all the other people. He has no problem if they treat him as a stranger, and he has no problem with regarding them as strangers, as people who essentially do not belong to him.

Of course, similar expressions of *Weltschmerz* are a topos in medieval mystical literature. However, this does not preclude the possibility that such feelings of negation of the world were actually amongst the reasons why ²²Nasimi engaged so enthusiastically in the ²²ab-*Hürüfi* movement.

A typical reflection of a psychological process in which disillusion with and even hatred of the world leads to the embracement of the ²²ab-*Hürüfi* faith is expressed in the ghazal ²²*Yoxdur vəfəsi dünyanın, aldanma anın ələm* ("This world does not have any loyalty, do not let yourself be deceived by its swindle").⁹⁸⁷ The first 10 ²²*beyts* of this poem outdo each other in lamenting the wickedness of "this world" (²²*dünya*): "Its

⁹⁸³ See p. 177.

⁹⁸⁴ Cf. Heß 2016; Heß 2017.

⁹⁸⁵ Text quote from Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 145.

⁹⁸⁶ In Sufi literature, the "Friend"⁹⁸⁶ (²²am-*ṣawāb*) can denote God.

⁹⁸⁷ Text in Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 165.

speaker is able to assume all kinds of identities, divine and profane, and often even contradicting each other. Still, in the same poem, ²²Nāsīmī states:

²² *Zāhirəm, zahirdə fəşəm, məzhərəm, həm müzhərəm ...*⁹⁹⁶

"I am the manifest one, I am visible in the manifest, I am the place of manifestation, and I am the one who has been made manifest."

In the ²²ab-*Ḥurūfī* mindset, the ability to assume all kinds of identities, even crossing times and ages, can be the consequence of having gained knowledge about the mechanisms by which the level of the divine sounds and the level of the letters are linked to the visible world. In fact, knowing the first two levels lead to knowledge of the last, for "naming" (i. e., ascribing sounds and words to) something is considered to be the same thing according to a famous ²²ab-*Ḥurūfī* principle. This maxim has been formulated by the early ²²ab-*Ḥurūfī* author ¹⁰⁰⁰ Sayyid Šarīf in his ¹⁰⁰⁰ *Resāle-ye esm va musammā* ("Treatise about the name and the named")¹⁰⁰¹

¹⁰⁰⁰ *Esm 'ayn-e musammā ast*¹⁰⁰⁰

"The name is the same as (literally: the eye of) the named."

Of course, this statement is pure nonsense if we judge it by modern standards, which allow distinguishing between reality and imagination. Philosophically, it seems difficult to assume that the name would be identical with what it names. For if this was the case, the name would consist only of the name, and there would not be anything (outside it) that it names. In reality, something named is never identical with its name. However, to the premodern mind, the borderline between what is and what we assume to be could become nonexistent at that moment when the so-called Holy Books came into play. As we have learned from the example of the dreams,⁹⁹⁹ the realms of imagination and phantasy – areas that we would call the psychological level today – could very easily become the basis of assumptions about the 'real' world. Incidentally, that mantra of the ¹⁰⁰⁰ *Esm 'ayn-e musammā ast* type may indeed be true on the psychological level (but only there!) seems to be proven by modern psychology. For instance, the German somnologist Jürgen Zully (1945) carried out an experiment with gonarthrosis patients. All of the patients were told that they

⁹⁹⁶ Text quote from Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 175.

⁹⁹⁷ Perhaps ¹⁰⁰⁰ Sayyid Šarīf is the same person as ¹⁰⁰⁰ Fazlollāh's pupil ¹⁰⁰⁰ Mīr Šarīf (see p. 147).

⁹⁹⁸ Quote adapted from Bashir 2002: 177. For comparable expressions in early ²²ab-*Ḥurūfī* literature, cf. Huart / Tefliq 1909: 3-5.

⁹⁹⁹ See chapter 4.5.4.4.

had undergone operations. However, this was true only for some of them. Quite astonishingly, after having been given this information both subject groups were able to walk equally as well. Zully explained this surprising result in the following way:

"The idea of a thing may trigger the same processes in the human body than the thing itself."

"What we think is more important than what is."¹⁰⁰⁰

At least under certain circumstances, medieval Islamic societies were unable to realize that statements such as ¹⁰⁰⁰ *Esm 'ayn-e musammā ast* were not universally applicable but only under certain conditions, for instance, psychological perceptions as the ones described in the experiment. ²²ab-*Ḥurūfī* mysticism had no means to test the range of validity of such wrong conclusions as ¹⁰⁰⁰ *Esm 'ayn-e musammā ast*. On the contrary, the Sufi surge that had reached one of its peaks in the 13th century and strongly influenced ¹⁰⁰⁰ Fazlollāh's thought was much more likely to obliterate rational instruments that would have allowed to distinguish between imagined and real. How much sympathetic magic of the kind suggested by ¹⁰⁰⁰ *Esm 'ayn-e musammā ast* was in vogue in the fourteenth century is once more described by ²²ab-*Ibn Ḥaldūn*. In reference to a group of Muslim mystics that bear show some similarities to the ²²ab-*Ḥurūfī*s, he writes:

"They believed that verbal perfection consists in helping the spirits of the spheres and the stars (through words). The natures and secrets of the letters are alive in the words, while the words, in turn, are correspondingly alive in the created things."¹⁰⁰¹

6.5. The fantasy of immortality

In many of ²²Nāsīmī's verses, the speaker explicitly claims to be immortal. A famous example is the following ²²-*beyt*:

Ölməzəm, mən öləsi xud degilm
*Əzəlindən bəri nicatiləyəm*¹⁰⁰²

¹⁰⁰⁰ "Die Vorstellung von einer Sache kann im Körper die gleichen Prozesse auslösen wie die Sache selbst.": "Was wir denken, ist wichtiger, als das, was ist (quotes and description of the experiment from Šafy 2011).

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibn Khaldūn 1958: 171f.

¹⁰⁰² See p. 100.

"I will not die, I am not even thinking about dying.
From time out of mind I am with salvation."

The verse pair communicates a twofold temporal structure. The line ⁹⁹*Ölməzəm, mən öləsi xud degiləm* looks into the future, while ¹⁰⁰*Əzəliddən bəri nicatlıyıym* reflects the past. In the first line, ⁹⁹Nəsimi uses two grammatical forms of the verb *öl-* "to die". One of them, ⁹⁹*ölməzəm* ("I will not die") is in the aorist, which is sometimes also referred to as "present tense" (¹⁰⁰*indiki zaman*). This is a tense that may encode an action taking place in the present or in the future, but it may also be part of a non-temporal perspective or refer to habitual or permanent actions or states.¹⁰⁰³ As for the other form, ⁹⁹*ələsi degiləm*, it is an analytical grammatical construction that has been described as intentional or having a future meaning.¹⁰⁰⁴ Thus, ⁹⁹*ələsi degiləm* seems to communicate the idea that the referent will neither be concerned by the act of "dying" in the predictable future nor has the intention to even consider the possibility that he might die. In ¹⁰⁰*Əzəliddən bəri nicatlıyıym*, the past tense is encoded lexically by means of the word ¹⁰⁰*əzəl* (from Arabic), which denotes beginningless eternity.

Such statements about immortality as the one just quoted may be contextualized with the many places in ⁹⁹Nəsimi's divans where he equalizes himself with God. In particular, these include numerous verses where he quotes ⁹⁹al-Hallāğ's famous ⁹⁹*Ana'l-Hakk* ("I am Allah").¹⁰⁰⁵ One of the most emphatic expressions of such a self-apotheosis is the following ⁹⁹*beyt*:

⁹⁹*Fəli-mütləqəm, həqəm, həqilən.
Kimsə bilməz, nə boyynatılıyım.*¹⁰⁰⁶

"I am the Absolute Doer, I am Allah, with full right.
Nobody knows what proofs accompany me."

¹⁰⁰³ On the various historical and modern forms of the Azerbaijani aorist, see Mirzazadə 1990: 146-159. Cf. Hüseyinzadə 1983: 174-177.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Caferoğlu / Doerfer 1959: 304f. term it "Intentional", but give the example translation "er wird bzw. soll werfen" for ⁹⁹*ələsi(din)*. Mirzazadə 1990: 159 classifies the Modern Azerbaijani equivalent of this form as "a type of the future tense" (⁹⁹*gələcək zamanın bir növü*).

¹⁰⁰⁵ For instance, İmadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 181, 183; see also Heß 2011. – On ⁹⁹al-Hallāğ and his motto, cf. p. 187.

¹⁰⁰⁶ İmadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 185.

There can be no doubt that ⁹⁹İmadeddin Nəsimi is one of the most influential classical poets of the Turkic-speaking world. This does not only include the Western (Oghuz) Turkic literary idioms but all Turkic literature. It is above all, the beauty and perfection of his poetry that has ensured him a lasting afterlife. As we have seen, the strength and charm of his verses were even recognized by his fiercest enemies. Even ⁹⁹Şibət b. al-Ağami, who disapproved ⁹⁹Nəsimi's activities and denounced him as a kafir, admires the "elegant poetry" (⁹⁹*şif rakiği*) of the Azerbaijani genius. A large number of ⁹⁹Nəsimi's admirers – poets, writers, and others – from the Middle Ages until today speaks for itself. ⁹⁹Nəsimi's poems have been copied, imitated, and used as parts of other poems throughout the Turkic- and Persian-speaking world.

Although both ⁹⁹Nəsimi's poems and secondary information about him leave no doubt about the prominent place he occupied in the ⁹⁹al-Hallāğ movement, many aspects in ⁹⁹Nəsimi's biography remain obscure. In fact, it would not seem as an exaggeration to state that he spent most of his life without leaving much traces in the sources. The few information we can gather from various texts gives the picture of a man who was torn up between the extremes. On one hand, there is the self-stylization as a "martyr" in the footsteps of ⁹⁹al-Hallāğ, as the poet who speaks in the first person as both a human being and Allah himself. On the other hand, there is his condemnation in Aleppo as "kafir", his denouncement as the adherent of heretic and nonsensical verses. More than anything else, these extremes reflect the contradictions the Islamicate world was caught up in, and which articulated themselves on the scriptural and theological as well as on the political, social and ethnolinguistic level. As these contradictions have never been resolved in the Islamicate world at large and seem to have become more and more intense over the past decades, ⁹⁹Nəsimi and his ⁹⁹al-Hallāğ poetry continue to be material for some of the most urgent questions that concern our modern world. These include the relationship between spiritual and political aspiration, the place and definition of humanity in the context of religion, and the role of change in traditional societies.

Even if one tries to supplement the rudimentary and sometimes partisan information that the historical sources give about ⁹⁹Nəsimi from his poetry, the picture remains contradictory. One of the reasons for this is that the nature of ⁹⁹Nəsimi's poems themselves makes its interpretation as a source of biographical information challenging. ⁹⁹Nəsimi's poems are first and foremost works of fiction that seek to impress the reader or listener with their perfection in metre and rhyme, and their enormous richness in rhetorical means, allusions, quotations, wordplay, sometimes by

means of provocative statements, and by other aspects of their extravagant style, but they are not narrative historical sources which could one-on-one be translated into facts. As good as every one of ²²Nāsīmī's poems is polysemic far beyond the inevitable polysemy of colloquial speech or narrative prose.¹⁰⁰⁷ What is more, if one takes ²²Nāsīmī's poems – or a selection of them – to be reflections of biographical facts, this leads to self-contradictory results in some important questions.¹⁰⁰⁸ What ²²Nāsīmī states about himself in his poetry cannot be directly translated into statements about his life, perhaps not even about what he believed, but must be subject to a very careful analysis that tries to sift all the given information by checking it for internal coherence, analyzing its degree of literalization, and by checking it against external evidence. To all these problems is added that due to the absence of autographs or at least manuscripts that were copied during ²²Nāsīmī's lifetime the authenticity of at least a part of his poems can be doubted. The fact that many literary critics mostly use relatively tardive ²²Nāsīmī manuscripts aggravates this problem even further.

The problems described in the previous paragraph complicate attempts to confirm or refute ²²Nāsīmī's image as a heroic martyr, which he gives of himself in so many of his verses and which has been the standard interpretation of his works and personality in the Soviet Union. Further research might help to resolve the contradiction between this heroic image and, for instance, the account ²²Sibṭ b. al-Aḡamī gives about ²²Nāsīmī's trial in Aleppo. Even if one admits some doubts as to the impartiality of this author, who, as a conservative Sunni Muslim articulates a vigorously anti-²²Hūrūfī opinion, one can hardly ignore this source, as it is certainly one of the most detailed narrations of ²²Nāsīmī's end. And even if one rejects ²²Sibṭ b. al-Aḡamī's claim that ²²Nāsīmī "abnegated" (²²rab. *naḡā*) his statements before the tribunal as a piece of Mameluke Sunni Muslim propaganda, the whole structure and sequence of events show a ²²Nāsīmī who did not directly, provocatively and vociferously seek "martyrdom", if at all.

Another detail that has played an important role in representations of ²²Nāsīmī is the act of flaying. The assertion that it happened *corpore vivo*, which possibly was introduced for the first time by ^{om}.Laṭīfī has been an important element in interpretations of ²²Nāsīmī's life from then to the present day. It gave the story of ²²Nāsīmī's martyrdom a unique appeal and added to its value as an instrument of identity construction. Here again, the historical evidence seems to be far from strong. In the light of ²²Sibṭ b. al-Aḡamī's account, nothing makes the assumption compelling that ²²Nāsīmī was flayed alive, and no posterior source is able to add plausibility to this detail.

Perhaps the best-ascertained fact in ²²Nāsīmī's life is his being a leading represent-

ative and one of the most influential propagandists of the ²²Hūrūfīya, a religious movement that seems light years away from modern modes of thought but which was rather typical of its times. In the early days of the ²²Hūrūfīya, its founder ^{mpcr}.Fazlōllāh and ^{mpcr}.Fazlōllāh's influential ^{mpcr}.*ḥalīfa*, ^{mpcr}.ʿAlīyo'l-A'lā were probably more important representatives of the ²²Hūrūfīya, at least seen from inside the sect. However, ²²Nāsīmī eclipsed these figures as well as all other ²²Hūrūfī authors and poets if it comes to the impact of his poetry. Neither ^{mpcr}.Fazlōllāh nor ^{mpcr}.ʿAlīyo'l-A'lā or any other of the early ²²Hūrūfī authors managed to compose texts or poems that acquired the popularity enjoyed by ²²Nāsīmī; with a few exceptions, most of these texts were too specialized and too little audience-targeted to be appreciated outside the inner circles of ²²Hūrūfīya aficionados. Apparently, ²²Nāsīmī's immensely strong impact has something to do with the quality and the time of his literary activity. In his days, nobody was able to write ²²Hūrūfīya ²²ḥurūfī poetry in a Turkic idiom on the same level as he did, and it is probably no insult if ²²Nāsīmī's pupil ^{om}.Refīʿī is classed inferior to his teacher both as to the volume and the literary quality of his poems. Perhaps nobody was even able to compose any kind of Oghuz Turkic ²²ḥurūfī poetry with ²²Nāsīmī's quality in his time. It was the model of ²²Nāsīmī's poetry that inspired other Oghuz Turkic poets like ^{om}.Ḥābībī and ^{om}.Uṣūlī from ¹⁰.Vardar Yenice to develop their interpretations of ²²Hūrūfī poetry.

In spite of ²²Nāsīmī's efforts, the ²²Hūrūfīya always remained a marginalized movement, that later on turned into a background current in Oriental Islamic cultures. Its founder ^{mpcr}.Fazlōllāh was a self-made man in the sphere of spirituality. Coming from an obscure corner of post-Genghizid Persia he profited from the political fragmentation, Messianic climate and spiritual polyphony of his times to propagate his personal interpretation of the holy texts of Islam. By way of intuition that often relied on dreams, he created an amalgam of pseudo-rational, ethical and ritual elements that he formalized into the ²²Hūrūfīya movement. Many of the playful and imaginative speculations ^{mpcr}.Fazlōllāh used came from the tradition of letratism, which had been created in the first centuries of the Christian era and then found its way into the Islamic tradition. For a short period that lasted for about half a century and comprised ²²Nāsīmī's lifetime, ^{mpcr}.Fazlōllāh and his adherents experienced some success and even had reason to believe in their aspirations to political power.

Even if the bulk of the sophisticated codes, the allusions, and plays that refer to the letrist system of the ²²Hūrūfīya are today of interest only to specialists in the matter, or to esoterics, this marginal current of Islam, and in particular its interpretation in ²²Nāsīmī's poems, also contains a number of answers to questions that are surprisingly relevant even to our days. Perhaps the most important one of them is the relationship between "God" and "man". The explicit equalization of these two categories that ²²Nāsīmī formulated in his poetry very likely became one of the reasons for the hostility he experienced from non-²²Hūrūfī mainstream Muslims.

¹⁰⁰⁷ On polysemy as an element in ²²Nāsīmī's poetry, see Heß 2006.

¹⁰⁰⁸ See Heß 2016; Heß 2017.

As provocative as the statement that "the Worshipper and the Worshipped have become the One" must have sounded to many Muslims of ²²Nāsīmī's times, it is precisely this foregrounding of human dignity that constitutes one of the main assets of ²²Nāsīmī's heritage today. In times where the Islamicate world is still dominated by authoritarian thinking and by intolerant, mostly discriminating and often violent, interpretations of the Quran, the radical reinterpretation that the ^{22nd} Hurūfīs and in their wake ²²Nāsīmī gave to the role of man stands out as a remarkable turnabout. ²²Nāsīmī's poetry, with its richness in linguistic expression, its literary perfection and its manifold links to ancient and medieval, 'pagan', Christian, Jewish and Islamic culture constitutes a crossroads, from which a great number of literary, philosophical and religious currents that have shaped our common European and Middle Eastern history over the past two millennia can be accessed. With ²²Nāsīmī, Azerbaijan holds a treasure that can, if it is further unearthed and presented to the world, make an essential contribution to the mutual understanding of the world's peoples across ethnic, linguistic, and religious borders.

8. TIMETABLE

Ca. 520-460 B. D.	Heraclitus
A. D. 12-38	Rule of Artabanos III., in which Hyrkania had an own king
66-70	System of number and letter correspondences attested for Hebrew
Ca. 2 nd century A. D.	Epistle of Barnabas
184-254	Origenes
203-270	Plotin
216-276	Mani, who was flayed according to legend
339-397	Ambrose of Milan
347-420	Hieronymus
354-420	Augustine
5 th century	Nonnos of Panopolis
412-485	Proklos, a neo-Platonist philosopher and letrist
540-604	Gregor the Great
560-636	Isidor of Seville
Ca. 600-661	'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, first Shii imam
Ca. 7 th / 8 th century	Virgilius Maro Grammaticus
604-632	Fāṭīma bint Muḥammad

672-735	Beda Venerabilis
680, October 10 (=Muḥarram 10, A. H. 61)	Al-Ḥusayn killed at Kerbela
Ca. 699 or 703-765	Ġa'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, sixth Shīi imam
706	The Greek language is replaced by Arabic in the administration of the Umayyad caliphate
745-799	Mūsā al-Kāzim, seventh Shiite imam
Ca. 768	Death of Hārūn b. Sa'd al-Iḡlī, presumed author of <i>Ġafr</i>
780-856	Hrabanus Maurus
784-845	Ibn Sa'd
800-873	al-Kindī
Ca. 825	Death of Bīṣr b. al-Mu'tamir
828-889	Ibn Kutayba
922	Al-Ḥallāq executed in Baghdad for saying "I am Allah" (<i>Anā'l-Hakk</i>)
1097-1141	Hugh of St. Victor
End of the 11 th century	Formation of the Nizaris (Assassins)
12 th century	Ruprecht von Deutz
	<i>Sefer Ha-Bahir</i>
1114-1185	as-Suhaylī (1114-1185), important interpreter of the "separated letters" of the Quran
1138-1204	Rambam / Moses ben Maimon

1145-1234	Abū Ḥafṣ 'Omar as-Sohravardī
1146	The Nizaris (Assassins) abrogate the shariah
Ca. 1147	Collapse of the <i>dehḡān</i> system in Seljuq Iran
1154-1191	Yahyā ebne Ḥabaṣ as-Sohravardī al-Maḡtūl, aka Ṣayḥ al-Iṣrāq
1164	The Nizarites announce the beginning of the <i>ḡyāma</i>
1165-1240	Ibn al-'Arabī
1194	Greater Seljuq rule over Iran ended by the Ḥvārezmians
End of the 12 th century	Aḡmad as-Sabūṭī, Muslim letrist from Ceuta
before 1200	Death of Henry of Settimello
1202	Death of Alanus ab insulis
1207-1273	Rūmī / Moulānā
1210-1274	Ṣadr ad-Dīn Ḳonavī
1220 / 1221	Mongol forces arrive in Azerbaijan
1226-1312	Sulṭān Veled
1238	Bāvandids of Māzanderān become Mongol vassals
1239-1256	First period of Mongol rule over Azerbaijan
Ca. 1240-1320	Yūnus Emre
1256	Extermination of the Nizaris (Assassins) by the Mongols
1256-1357	Ilkhanid rule over Azerbaijan
1258	Mongol sack of Baghdad

1295–1304	Rule of the Ilkhanid Ghazan marks the re-Islamization of Iran
Ca. 1300	<i>Sefer Ha-Zohar</i>
Fl. around 1300	Həsənoğlu
1317–1335	Rule of the Abū Saʿīd, end of Ilkhanid heyday
1324, April 11 or 12	Al-Bāğarbaqī dies in present-day Damascus
1326, April 6	The Ottomans conquer Bursa
1332–1406	Ibn Haldūn
1334 or 1335 (A. H. 735)	Zayn ad-Dīn Kārāğā (Dü'l-ğadr) invades Cilician Armenia
1337	Zayn ad-Dīn Kārāğā appointed Mameluke <i>nāʾib</i>
1339 or 1340	Birth of Fāzlollāh
1343 or 1344 (A. H. 744)	Zayn ad-Dīn Kārāğā defeats strong Mameluke forces
Ca. 1344–1405	ad-Damīrī, Arab scholar
1345–1372	Rule of the Shirvanshah Kavus
1349	End of the <i>Bāvandīd</i> dynasty
1350s	Sarbadarids conquer Astarābād
1352	Zayn ad-Dīn Kārāğā participates in conspiracy against the Mameluke sultan
1353, December 11	Zayn ad-Dīn Kārāğā executed in Cairo
1356–1410 (with interruptions)	Jalairid dynasty
1356–1374	Şayḫ Uvays (Jalairid)

1356 / 1357 (A. H. 756)	Fāzlollāh sees the Prophet Muḥammad in a dream
1357	Fāzlollāh becomes a Sufi
1357 or 1358	Ġānibeg (Golden Horde) makes an inroad into Azerbaijan
1358–1384	Rule of Şāh Şoğāʾ (Muẓaffarid)
1358	Şayḫ Uvays defeats (Mongol) Chobanids
1358 or 1359–1416	Şeyḫ Bedreddīn
1360 or 1361 (A. H. 762)	Ḥalīl (Dü'l-ğadr) raids the outskirts of Aleppo
Between ca. 1361 and 1371	The Ottomans conquer Edirne
1363 / 1364 (A. H. 765)	"Star dream" of Fāzlollāh in H'ārezm
1364	The Shirvanshah Kavus tries to conquer Tabriz
1364–1442	Al-Mağrīzī
1366, May	Punitive military action by the Mameluke governor in Aleppo, Sayf ad-Dīn Ġarğī, against Ḥalīl (Dü'l-ğadr)
1369 / 1370–1418 / 1419 (A. H. 771–821)	Sayyid Işhāk, one of Fāzlollāh's successors
Around 1370 / 1371– 1374	Fāzlollāh teaches in İsfahan
1370–1388	Rule of Pahlavan (Aqqoyunlu)
1372–1382	Rule of the Shirvanshah Hüsəng
1372–1449	Ibn Ḥağar al-'Askalānī
Between 1373 and 1387 (?)	Fāzlollāh reveals his interpretation of the letters
1374	Fāzlollāh meets the Muẓaffarid ruler Şāh Şoğāʾ

1374–1382 (with interruptions)	Jalairid Sultān Ḥusayn
1376	Temporary occupation of Tabriz by Šāh Šuġā'
1380	Death of Bayram Xoca, the founder of the Qaraqoyunlu state
1381 or 1382 (A. H. 783)	Mameluke military action against Ḥalīl of Dū'l-kaḍr
1386 or 1387 (A. H. 788) – 1397 or 1398 (A. H. 800)	Sūli (Dulkadıroġulları)
1380–1389	Qara Məhəmməd (Qaraqoyunlu)
1382–1410 (with interruptions)	Jalairid Sultān Aḥmad
1382–1417	Rule of the Shirvanshah İbrahim I.
1382, September	The Qaraqoyunlu defeat the Jalairid prince Şayḫ 'Alī at Tabriz
1382–1389	First reign of Barqūq (Circassian Mameluke)
1383	Tamerlane (Timur) takes Astarābād
	A certain Salim is beaten by Qara Məhəmməd in Syria and flees to Aleppo
1384	Qara Məhəmməd defeats the ruler of Mardin
1385	Tamerlane takes Tabriz and loses it again to Toxtamış
	Qara Məhəmməd (Qaraqoyunlu) defeats the Aqqoyunlu
1386 or 1387 (A. H. 788)– 1397 or 1398 (A. H. 800)	Ḥalīl (Dū'l-kaḍr) deposed and executed by Barqūq
	Sūli (Dulkadıroġulları)

1386	Tamerlane retakes Tabriz
	Jalairids inside Əlinçə resist Tamerlane
1387	Tamerlane leaves for Central Asia and hands control over Azerbaijan to Mirān Šāh
	Tamerlane attacks the Qaraqoyunlu from Naqxıvan
	Negotiations between Qara Məhəmməd, Mintāş, and Burhāneddīn
	Tamerlane takes Isfahan, perpetrating a massacre of the civilian population, and invades Syria
	The attempted alliance between Mintāş and Burhāneddīn
1387–1392	The phase of instability during Mirān Šāh's rule
1387–1393	Rule of the last Muzaḫḫarid Šāh Manşūr, whose court poet was Şarafoddīn Rāmi Tabrizi
1388–1392	Əlaoddin Turōli (Aqqoyunlu)
1388, early spring	Jalairids retake Tabriz
1388, March–April	Mameluke army attacks Sivas
1388, May 24	The Qaraqoyunlu take Tabriz from the Jalairids
1388, December	The Qaraqoyunlu chief Qara Məhəmməd comes to Tabriz
1388 / 1389 (A. H. 790)	Fazlollāh in Isfahan
1389, June 15	Death of the Ottoman sultan Murād I; according to Latīfī, this is a <i>terminus ante quem</i> for a visit of Nəsimi to Rūm (Anatolia)
1389–1420 or 1421	Rule of Qara Yusif (Qaraqoyunlu)
1389 or 1390 (A. H. 792)	Fazlollāh has a dream in Isfahan's Toġçı mosque

1390–1399	Second reign of Barqūq (Circassian Mameluke)
1391	The commander of the Əlinco fortress wards off the Qaraqoyunlu Qara Yusif near Tabriz
	Süli submits to Barqūq
1392–1395	Tamerlane returns to Iran and the Caucasus
1392	Tamerlane takes Van
	Qara Yusif takes Tabriz twice before ceding to Tamerlane
	Tamerlane sends troops to take Əlinco but fails
1392–1394	Rule of Fəxrəddin (Aqqoyunlu)
1393	Tamerlane destroys the Muzaʿfarid state
1394–1434	Rule of Qara Yuluq Osman aka Qara Osman (Aqqoyunlu)
1394	Tamerlane beats Qara Yusif and Sulṭān Aḥmad near Baghdad, driving both into exile
1394, April 26	Fazlollāh has a dream at Ğazira
1394, August or September	Fazlollāh is executed on Mirān Šāh's order
1395	Süli offers Tamerlane to lead troops into Syria
	Tamerlane leaves for Central Asia
1399	Tamerlane returns from India and begins his last campaign in the West
	Əlinco capitulates to Tamerlane
1397 / 1398 (A. H. 800)	Süli executed by Barqūq

1399 / 1400 (A. H. 802)-1443	Nāšir ad-Dīn Muḥammad (Dulkadroğulları)
1399 / 1400 (A. H. 802)	Begin of 'Alīyo'l-A'lā's missionary activity
	'Alīyo'l-A'lā' converts Nāšir ad-Dīn Muḥammad
1399–1412	Nāšir ad-Dīn Farağ (Circassian Mameluke, son of Barqūq)
1400	Tamerlane sends army detachments against the Dulkadroğulları, but without success
1402	The allies Tamerlane and İbrahim I. of Shirvan defeat the Ottomans in the Battle of Ankara
1405, February 18	Tamerlane's death; Qara Yusif and Sulṭān Aḥmad are freed
June 1405-June 1406 (A. H. 808)	Unsuccessful Hürüfī rebellion in Khorasan
1406–1447	Rule of Tamerlane's son Šāhroḥ (1377–1447) over Central Asia
1406, June	Qara Yusif and Sulṭān Aḥmad occupy Baghdad and move in the direction of Tabriz
1406, late summer	Sulṭān Aḥmad orders Əlinco to be rebuilt
1406, autumn	Qara Yusif defeats the Timurid Abū Bakr near Şanbi-Qazan
June 1406-June 1407 (A. H. 809)	Unsuccessful Hürüfī rebellion in Mázanderān
1408, April 21	The Timurids Abū Bakr and Mirān Šāh are beaten by Qara Yusif at Sardurud, Mirān Šāh is killed
1408 / 1409 (A. H. 811)	Completion of the <i>Belāret-nāme</i> by Nasimi's pupil Refī'i
1410	'Alīyo'l-A'lā writes the <i>Korsūnāme</i>

1410, August 30	The second battle of Şənbī-Qazan: Qara Yusif kills Sultān Aḥmad; end of the Jalairid state
1411 or 1412	The decisive defeat of İbrahim I. of Shirvan against Qara Yusif
1412 or 1413 (A. H. 815)	Nāşir ad-Dīn Muḥammad (Dulkadıroğulları) sends troops to help the Ottoman prince Mehmed <i>Çelebi</i>
1412, November 6 – January 13, 1421	Şayḫ al-Maḥmūdī = Al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad (Mameluke ruler)
1413	Mehmed <i>Çelebi</i> victorious in Ottoman civil war
1413–1417	İbrahim I. rules Shirvan as a Qaraqoyunlu vassal
1413–1419	Mehmed of Karaman (first reign)
1416	Rebellion of Börklüğe Muştafā in Anatolia
1416, December 18	Execution of Şeyḫ Bedreddin, <i>terminus ante quem</i> for the presence of Hürüfīs in Anatolia
1417	Date of Nāsīmī's execution according to many modern authors
1417–1462	Xalilullah I. of Shirvan
1418	The campaign by Şāhroḫ against the Qaraqoyunlu
1418, February 2 – 1419, January 27 (= A. H. 821)	Date of Nāsīmī's accusation and execution according to Ibn Haḡar al-'Askalānī and Sibṭ b. al-'Aḡamī
1419	Nāşir ad-Dīn Muḥammad (Dulkadıroğulları) captures Mehmed of Karaman and sends him to Cairo
1419 / 1420	The punitive military campaign of Al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad against the Karamanoğulları
1419–1423	Mehmed of Karaman (second reign)

1420	Campaign of Şāhroḫ against the Qaraqoyunlu
1421, August 1	Şāhroḫ beats two of Qara Yusif's sons at Dərbənd
1421–1438	İskāndər (Qaraqoyunlu)
1423–1464	Taḡ ad-Dīn İbrāhīm, ruler of Karaman
1426 / 1427 (A. H. 830)	Presumed death of Nāsīmī's brother Şah Xəndan
1427, February 21	Aḥmad-e Lor / Aḥmad Lorī tries to assassinate Şāhroḫ in Herat
1430, June-July	Firīsteoḡlı finishes <i>İşk-nāme</i>
1432–1481	Mehmed II the Conqueror, Ottoman sultan (rules from 1451)
1433 / 1434 (A. H. 837)	Date of Nāsīmī's execution according to the <i>Maḡāleso'l-'Ostāk</i> and Laṭīfī
1438–1467	Cahanşah (Qaraqoyunlu)
1441–1442 (A. H. 845)	Unsuccessful Hürüfī rebellion with the participation of Fazlollāh's daughter Kalemtoḡlāh in Tabriz
1442–1443 (A. H. 846)	<i>Terminus post quem</i> for the composition of Amir Giyāşoddīn's <i>İstivā-nāme</i>
1444	Failed Hürüfī proselytizing attempt of prince Mehmed, the future conqueror of Constantinople
1444, spring	The Ottoman sultan Murād II. abdicates in favor of prince Mehmed
1444, early autumn	John Hunyadi and Vlad Dracula lead the last crusade against the Ottomans
1444, late autumn	Murād II. returns to the throne
1444, September	Unrests in Edirne
1444, November 10	Murād II. crushes the crusaders at Varna

1469 / 1470 (A. H. 874)	Death of Firişteoğlu
1470–1520	Hâbibî
1478–1490	Rule of Yaqub (Aqqoyunlu)
1479 / 1480 (A. H. 884)	Death of Sibt b. al-Ağamî
1487–1524	Xotai / Şah İsmayıl
1491–1582	Laṭîfî
Ca. 1493–1565	Ġelâl-zâde Şâlihî Çelebi
Ca. 1497–1498	<i>Chiffre</i> attested in Old French with the meaning “code, secret writing”
Around 1500	<i>Mağaleso'l-Ossâk</i> by Kamâlo'd-din Hoşayn Fânî
1501	Begin of Şafavid rule in Iran
1501–1516	Rule of the Mameluke sultan al-Aşraf Qânşüh al-Ġürî
1501–1524	Rule of the Şafavid shah İsmâ'îl (Haṭâ'î)
1504 / 1505 (A. H. 910)	Al-Aşraf Qânşüh al-Ġürî refurbishes an Aleppo mosque presented as Näsîmî's burial
1516, August 24	Mameluke defeat at Marğ Dâbiğ, Ottoman occupation of Aleppo
1520–1572	Âsîkî Çelebi
1538	Death of Uşûlî
1540–1604	Hasan Çelebi
1546	Laṭîfî presents his <i>Tezkiretülî Ş-Su'arâ</i> to sultan Süleymân the Magnificent
1597	Death of Beyânî Muştafâ bin Ġârullâh

ca. 1553-before 1621	Muḥîṭî Dede
17 th century	(Âşık) Virani–Viran Abdal
1609–1657	Kâtib Çelebi
1719–1780	Süleymân Sa'deddin Efendi Müstaķîmzâde
1800–1871	Rezâ Kûli Hân Hedâyat
1805–1881	Bernhard Dorn
1826	“Benevolent Event” (<i>Vak'â-yi Hıyriye</i>): Annihilation of the Janissaries and abolition of the Bektashi order in the Ottoman Empire
1839	Begin of the Tanzîmât era in the Ottoman Empire
1844	First ever printed editions of Näsîmî's Turkic divan come out in Constantinople
1862–1926	Edward Granville Browne
1862–1937	Georg Jacob
1863–1920	Firidun boy Kôçarlı
1867–1927	Bernhard Stern
1869	The new printed edition of Näsîmî's Turkic divan comes out in Constantinople
1873	<i>Kâşîfû'l-esrâr ve Dâfî'ü'l-Esnâr</i> by Hoğa İshâk Efendi
1881	The new printed edition of Näsîmî's Turkic divan comes out in Constantinople
1884–1941	Solman Mümtaz
1902–1977	Kemâl Edib Kürkçüođlu

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2019 has been declared in Azerbaijan as the official Nəsimi Year to commemorate the 650th anniversary of Nəsimi's birth by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan İlham Əliyev. The book you hold in your hands tries to bring the eminent Azerbaijani poet İmadəddin Nəsimi (ca. 1369-1418) closer to an English-speaking public, contributing to this celebratory event. Although Nəsimi is one of the most perfected poets of the Islamic tradition, he still is widely unknown in the West. Nəsimi's incontrovertible greatness as a poet results from a combination of his linguistic and literary perfection with his fervent, emotional and missionary message. Nəsimi was ultimately executed for this message.

The focus of this book is on the historical and philosophical context that shaped İmadəddin Nəsimi. A modern reader may be able to grasp some of the deeper meanings hidden in his uniquely beautiful poetry by understanding this context better.



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