



NASAFI, 'AZIZ

NASAFI, 'AZIZ b. Moḥammad, 7th/13th century mystical thinker and scholar from Nasaf (Naḵṣab) in Transoxania (present Qarshi or Karshi in Uzbekistan), author of many works in Persian written in an easy, didactic style for anonymous dervish groups. The spread of his fame soon after his death was mainly through the popularity of his writings. These must have been circulated from early on, as references to them are found in works of various provenances from the middle of the 14th century onwards.

The earliest reference to his *Rasā'el* is found in the *Jāme' al-asrār* (pp. 238-39) of Sayyed Ḥaydar-e Āmoli written about 1350. Āmoli calls him 'Aziz-al-Din al-Nasafi and refers to him as the 'disciple' (*telmid*) of Sa'd-al-Din al-Ḥamu'i (d. 649/1252). Though rather vague and general, this reference appears to be based on a passage (pp. 320-21) in the collection that has come to be known as the *Ketāb al-ensān al-kāmel*. A misnomer due to a bibliographical error, more likely the original title was *Ketāb Manāzel al-sā'erin*. By about 1400, another important work of Nasafi, [*Ketāb-e*] *tanzil* (as yet unpublished), was well known in India. Sayyed Moḥammad-e Gisu-darāz (d. 825/1422), who refers to the author as 'Abd-al-'Aziz *ḥakim-e* Nasafi, used this work extensively in his *Asmār al-asrār* (e.g. p. 265; also see Hussaini). From about 1450 we have the earliest extant manuscripts of Nasafi's writings, notably an excellent *majmu'a* of the Majles Library (no. 4136) which contains two mature works, the *Kašf al-ḥaqāyeq* and the *Bayān al-tanzil* (not identical with the *Ketāb-e tanzil*). By the 16th century, he was also very well known in Ottoman Turkey (cf. Karamustafa). The *Maqṣad-e aqṣā*, perhaps Nasafi's most popular work, exists



in numerous manuscripts and in various versions or rearrangements in the original Persian, as well as in several Turkish translations. A Persian fragment of six pages (corresponding, with few omissions of specifically Sufi passages, to the standard text as available in *Ganjina-ye 'erfān*, p. 273, l. 16 to p. 277, l. 16) is found at the beginning of a collection of Ismā'ili texts which contains at the end the oldest extant manuscript of Ṭusi's *Taṣawwūrāt* (copied in 1560 from the autograph, cf. Badakhchani, 1989). A Turkish translation of the *Maqṣad* provided the basis for the Latin extracts which were already published in 1665 in Germany and eventually found their way into the work of the celebrated German theologian F. A. G. Tholuck (1799-1877), *Ssufismus sive Theosophia Persarum Pantheistica* (Berlin, 1821), while a rearrangement of the Persian original (not, of course, a Persian translation, see Storey, *Persian Literature I/1*, p. 178) appears to have served as a basis for E. H. Palmer's English paraphrase of 1867. Nasafi's *Zobdata-ḥaqāyeq* is also available in various versions, including one preserved among the Ismā'ilis of Badakṣhān as part of a collection of Ismā'ili writings (ed. A. E. Bertel's, 1970).

Despite the popularity of Nasafi's writings, historical sources afford very little reliable information about his life, which accordingly must be outlined from indications in his own works (the fundamental study is Meier, 1953). Jāmi does not even mention Nasafi, and the one relatively early source (much used by later writers) that does provide a rather detailed entry on him, Gāzargāhi's *Majāles al-'oṣṣāq* (pp. 163-64), is notoriously unreliable. While Gāzargāhi's claim that Nasafi died and was buried in Abarquh seems plausible enough, the two dates he offers for his death, namely, 616 and 661 are not only incompatible but are both incorrect. Nasafi was evidently alive on the 1st Rajab 671/22 January 1273, when the troops of Aq Beg engaged in massacre and plunder at Bukhara (Rašid-al-Din, *Jāme' al-tawāriḳ* II, pp. 766-67; tr. Pt. 3, p. 536), for he himself explains in the *Kašf al-ḥaqāyeq* (p. 2) that due to an imminent attack by the "heathen forces" (*lašgar-e koffār*), on that day he had to leave Bukhara and cross the Oxus to reach safety in Khorasan. After this, he must have spent some time near the tomb of Shaikh Sa'd-al-Din-e Ḥamu'i in Baḥrābād, and then moved further south to Kerman, Isfahan, Shiraz and finally perhaps settled in Abarquh, where he completed the *Kašf al-ḥaqāyeq* in 1281. But he must have been active well beyond that date. According to the colophon of one manuscript (see *Ketāb al-ensān al-kāmel*, p. 493), he would still have been writing in Abarquh in 1292. and the available text of the *Bayān al-tanzil* also suggests a very late date. However, it seems unlikely that he lived beyond the end of the 13th century, and if his statement in the *Maqṣad-e aqṣā*

(p. 254) to the effect that it had taken him “eighty years to reach the end of this path” is to be taken literally, he must have been born by the end of the 12th century; for the *Maqṣad* was certainly written before the *Kaṣf* and thus before 1281. At any rate, we know from the *Ketāb-e tanzil* that he was born in Nasaf, and that he wrote at least the first ten chapters of this work partly there and partly in Bukhara. He had evidently been exposed to a long Sufi education in Nasaf and/or Bukhara, and although he never mentions his Transoxanian masters by name, he may well have known Sayf-al-Din-e Bāḳarzi (d. 659/1261) in Bukhara. The first *Resāla* of the *Ketāb al-ensān al-kāmel* (cf. p. 80) is dated at Bukhara in 660/1261-62. Both Bāḳarzi and Sa‘d-al-Din-e Ḥamu‘i were among the “twelve disciples” of the famous Sufi Najm-al-Din-e Kobrā (d. 618/1221).

Since Nasafi alludes to the time he spent with Shaikh Sa‘d-al-Din-e Ḥamu‘i in Khorasan (*Ketāb al-ensān al-kāmel*, pp. 316-22), he must have crossed the Oxus at least once before his final emigration from Transoxania. This was certainly before Ḥamu‘i’s death in 1252, but probably not before 1244 when Ḥamu‘i returned from a long journey, which had taken him to various cities of the Middle East including Damascus (where he is said to have met Ebn ‘Arabi, d. 1240 and Ṣadr-al-Din Qōnavi, d. 1274). For Nasafi’s own spiritual development, the encounter with Ḥamu‘i was doubtless of greatest significance. Though not uncritical of some of Ḥamu‘i’s more peculiar views, particularly the messianic expectation of the imminent coming of the “Lord of the Time (*ṣāhib al-zamān*)” (cf. *Ketāb al-ensān al-kāmel*, pp. 321-22; *Maqṣad*, pp. 245-46), Nasafi always speaks of him with great reverence. Some thirty years after Ḥamu‘i’s death, he still has him appear, together with the Prophet Moḥammad and the saint of Shiraz, Ebn Ḳafif, in a dream (recorded in *Kaṣf*, pp. 3-4; rephrased in *Majāles al-‘oṣṣāq*, p.164) in which the author is warned not to publish the entire *Kaṣf al-ḥaqāyeq* before the advent of the year 700 (1300-01) (and, apparently as a result of this, only seven out of a total of ten treatises promised in the table of contents have come down to us). The Ḥamu‘i of that dream shows concern about Nasafi’s explaining in clear and plain language what he himself had been trying to hide in 400 difficult treatises (440 according to the version in *Majāles*). In this way the author in effect portrays himself as a spokesman for Ḥamu‘i’s esoteric doctrine. Of course this should not necessarily be taken at face value.

Though of a well-known Sunni family, Ḥamu‘i soon acquired a reputation as a Shi‘ite esotericist, doubtless because of his frequent allusions to the all-important function of *walāyat/welāyat* and the *awliā’* as esoteric counterparts



respectively of prophecy and the prophets (see e.g. *Al-Meşbāh fi al-taşawwof*, pp. 137-38). In one treatise (briefly discussed by Elias, pp. 71-72) he identified the “Seal of the *awliā*” with Jesus, as did Ebn ‘Arabi; but according to one as yet unidentified statement attributed to him by Āmoli (*Jāme’ al-asrār*, p. 431), he is said to have insisted that after the Prophet Moḥammad, the name *al-wali* may be applied only to ‘Ali and his children. Nasafi does not report this statement, nor does he exactly speak of “the twelve imāms” when reporting on Ḥamu’i’s doctrine, as Āmoli (pp. 238-39) also implies; but he does point out in his “Treatise explaining *walāyat*, prophecy, angel, revelation, inspiration, and true dreams” (*Ketāb al-ensān al-Kāmel* pp. 313-25) that according to Ḥamu’i, there could be only twelve *awliā*’ in the Muslim community, with the twelfth among them being called the “seal,” or the *mahdi*, or the *ṣāhib al-zamān* (*Ketāb al-ensān al-kāmel*, pp. 320-21). He also carefully points out a theological difference between Ḥamu’i and Ṣadr-al-Din-e Qōnavi concerning the relation between the divine attributes and the essence, which may indeed point to Shi’ite leanings (see Landolt 1996, pp.188-90). However, Twelver Shi’ite “orthodoxy” does not really seem to have been more attractive to Nasafi than ordinary Sunnism.

The available evidence shows that Nasafi was quite responsive to Ismā’ilism, and (as noted), the Iranian Ismā’ilis in any case did not wait for long to incorporate some of his works into their own. One element of Ismā’ili influence on Nasafi’s thought can be seen in the fact that the three missing final treatises of the *Kašf al-ḥaqāyeq* are the very ones which according to the table of contents would have dealt with esoteric subjects such as the relation between the *ṣāḥeb-e šari’at* and the *qā’em-e qiāmat*, the number of Revealed Laws, and the meaning of abrogation. More importantly, Nasafi never identifies himself directly as a Sufi but clearly sympathizes with those he usually calls *ahl-e waḥdat* ‘monists’; and the expression *ahl-e waḥdat* is found in the Ismā’ili works of Naṣir-al-Din Ṭusi (d. 672/1274) in the first place.

Both in *Sayr va Soluk* (Badakhchani 1998, text pp. 20-21; tr. p. 52) and *Taşawworat* (Badakhchani 1989; Ivanov MS pagination, pp. 35-36, 60, 65, *ahl-e waḥdat* designates an elite, as distinguished from the more common folk (called *ahl-e tarattob*) who have not reached the highest stage of “oneness.” Similarly, Nasafi’s *ahl-e taşawwof* or *mašāyek-e tariqat* are not identical with the *ahl-e waḥdat*; they rather play the role of the middle-of-the-roaders (cf. e.g. *Zobdat al-ḥaqāyeq* in *Ganjina*, p. 328). They are represented in the *Kašf* (p. 80, cf. pp. 73, 76, 77) with their traditional view that “the final stage of the *awliā*’ is



the initial stage of the prophets,” meaning that prophets are superior because they are chosen by God from among the *awliā*, whereas the *ahl-e waḥdat* on the contrary maintain that “a prophet is superior to a *ḥakim* but a *wali* is superior to a prophet since whoever is a prophet must first be a *ḥakim* and whoever is a *wali* must first be a prophet, but whoever is a prophet is not necessarily a *wali*” (*ibid.*, p.102). This scale is based on the degree and kind of knowledge attainable by each of the three; for a *ḥakim* knows the natures (*ṭabāye*) of things and a prophet also knows their properties or particular effects (*kawāṣṣ-e ašyā*) but only a *wali* also knows their truths (*ḥaqāyeq-e ašyā*) (*ibid.* p.102 and several other places). To be sure, Ḥamu’i figures at least by implication among the “monists” as well, even prominently so (*ibid.* p.153), as he is also credited with the “shocking” statement that “the final stage of the prophets is the initial stage of the *awliā*” (in *Kašf al-Ṣerāt*, perhaps by Nasafi himself, see Landolt 1996, p. 171; also see Ḥamu’i’s own wording of a similar point in *Al-Meṣbāh fī al-taṣawwof*, p. 137). But the idea of the *wali* being superior because he knows the *ḥaqāyeq* exclusively certainly tallies well with Nezāri Ismā’ili doctrine.

There is, however, no reason to assume that Nasafi actually joined Ismā’ilism at any time. In all of his writings, he shows a remarkable degree of spiritual independence. His liberal attitude is generally reminiscent of the classical example of the *Eḳwān al-Ṣafā*. At times he also could be an outspoken skeptic of a typically “*Ḳayyāmian*” appeal (see, for example, the quatrain in *Maqṣad*, p. 284, variant in *Ketāb al-ensān al-kāmel*, p. 438). For the same reason, he cannot really be considered a representative of “Kobraviya Sufism” either, despite his personal attachment to the figure of Ḥamu’i. He certainly did not share the rather pronounced Islamic ideology which was adopted by famous Kobraviya Sufis before and during the Mongol domination, and his *ahl-e waḥdat* even include certain forms of Indian spirituality, for which he in fact showed greatest admiration (see Landolt 1996, p. 175).

Nasafi was not a theologian in any technical sense of the word but an all-round scholar whose knowledge included also philosophy and medicine. He made a systematic attempt to describe the varieties of religious and philosophical doctrines, which were available to him from literary sources as well as through personal contacts, and to classify them in terms of their essential differences. Broadly speaking, he distinguishes between three major categories: the *ahl-e šari’at* (divided into Sunnis and Shi’ites), the *ahl-e ḥekmat* (divided into ordinary Avicennian philosophers and the *ahl-e tanāsok*



“transmigrationists”), and the *ahl-e waḥdat*, who are also divided into two groups: the “deniers” of the reality of the world, also called the “followers of Fire” (*aṣḥāb-e nār*), and the “affirmers” of that reality, or “followers of Light” (*aṣḥāb-e nur*); and both these “deniers” and “affirmers” are, again, divided into sub-groups, although all, of course, believe in their own way in the “oneness of existence” (*waḥdat-e wujud*). This quasiscientific, phenomenological approach to a great variety of doctrines clearly distinguishes Nasafi from Ebn ‘Arabi and his school; and although their influence is certainly perceptible in many ways in his works, he was not their spokesman. Perhaps his most characteristic idea about the “Perfect Man” should be seen in his vision of an ongoing process of development, both biologically and spiritually speaking, or the deployment (*enbesātá*) of “existence” or Reality itself. The creative energy at work in this process is the “Soul of God” (*nafs-e kodā* [not *nafas-e kodā* ‘Breath of God’, as some have read]) as identified with the “Lord” (*rabb*) of the famous Tradition “He who knows his ‘soul’ knows his ‘lord’.”

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