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

Azerbaijan´s immortal poet
İmadəddin Nəsimi

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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.

GULANDOT

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Məscudilə sacid oldu vahid
Məscudi-həqiqi oldu sacid

İmanilə küfr bir şey oldu
Tatlu ilə acı bir mey 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.

Aşiq 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

Faẓlollāh of Astarābād

ašhadu al-lā ilāha illā F-ʾ-H
va-ašhadu anna Ādama ḫalīfat Allāh
va-ašhadu 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

Amīr Ġiyāsoddīn (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.

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

… Nesīmīyāt türrehāt u küfriyātïndan …
… from the shenanigans and kafir rubbish à la Nəsimi …

ʿĀšiḳ Čelebi (1520–1572)

CONTENTS

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I am grateful to everyone in Baku and Berlin who supported me during the stressing three months (February-May 2019) in which this book was planned, researched, and written from scratch. It is impossible to enumerate all these precious friends and supporters here. I am also indebted to Thomas, Erika, and the rest of the Hangar crew.

Michael Heß
Shanghai, June 25, 2019

1. INTRODUCTION

Many have undertaken to write about [az.]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 [az.]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 Turcologist. Incidentally, to my knowledge, no scholar ever presented a comprehensive analysis of Nəsimi´s works in all two languages. In fact, such a comprehensive investigation into and perhaps the interpretation of Nəsimi´s complete work constitutes one of the far-off goals of Nəsimi scholarship. This adds yet another challenge to those encountered by readers and scholars of Nəsimi, 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 İmadəddin Nəsimi. In this way, it is hoped that this might stimulate future research into Nəsimi. Indeed, much remains to be done.

The book was written from a scratch to honor Azerbaijan´s 2019 Year of Nəsimi. 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; Imadeddin Nesimi 2012; Imadeddin 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 Saʿīd. 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 Nəsimi 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 Nəsimis Azerbaijanian origins more appropriately.[2]

Table 1 Transcription system for Medieval Azerbaijani

Original letter	Transcription	Original letter	Transcription
ا	ā, a, ə; nothing or ʾ	ص	ṣ
ب	b	ض	ż
پ	p	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	s	ع	ʿ
ج	c	غ	ğ
چ	ç	ف	f
ح	ḥ	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; -ə
س	s	و	o, u, ū, ü; v
ش	ş	ى	e, ı, i, ī; 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 *Paris*	/a/	Q q	mostly *g* as in *great*	/ɢ/ or /q/
B b	*b* as in *book*	/b/	L l	as *l* in the English words *love* or *like*; the pronunciation is influenced by the surrounding vowels	/ʎ/ or /l/
C c	either *j* as in *joy* or z as in the Italian *zio*	/dʒ/, /dz/	M m	*m* as in *make*	/m/
Ç ç	either *ch* as in *change* oder *ts* as in *tsar*	/tʃ/, /ts/	N n	n as in *nun*	/n/

Letter	Approximate pronunciation	IPA symbol	Letter	Approximate pronunciation	IPA symbol
D d	*d* as in *drop*	/d/	O o	mostly *o* as in *Lord*; in some Russian loanwords in Azerbaijani it is also pronounced as the *a* in the French pronunciation of *Paris*	/o/ or /a/
E e	so-called closed *e* sound, similar to Russian e in *neft'*	/e/	Ö ö	sounds somewhat similar to the *u* in *turn* or the *i* in *bird*	/œ/
Ə ə	so-called open *e* sound, approximately as the *a* of *share*	/æ/	P p	*p* as in *pay*	/p/
F f	*f* as in f*ish*	/f/	R r	a special kind of r, with no common equivalent	/ʀ/
G g	*g* as in *great*	/g/	S s	always voiceless as in *seven*	/s/
Ğ ğ	approximately similar to the French *r* in *rouge*	/ɣ/	Ş ş	*sh* as in *shop*	/ː/
H h	an audible *h* sound, as in *her*	/h/	T t	*t* as in *tie*	/t/
X x	a *ch* sound as in *Loch Ness*, or *j* in the Spanish proper name *Juan*	/χ/	U u	similar to the *o* in *do* or the *oo* in *good*, but always pronounced short	/u/
I ı	sounds similar to the *o* in *liquor*	/ɨ/	Ü ü	as the *u* in French *tu*	/ʏ/
İ i	clear *i* sound, as in *mean* or *me*	/i/	V v	*v* as in *voice*	/v/
J j	*j* as in the French word *jour*	/ʒ/	Y y	y as in *you*	/j/
K k	*k* as in *can* or *cunning*	/k/	Z z	z as in zoom	/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 "ġ"replaces „ɣ" (< Kazakh Ғ ғ), the Cyrillic letter "ë" is represented by "yo", and the hard sign ("ъ") 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.	*Anno Hegirae*, in the year … of the Muslim lunar calendar (beginning in A. D. 622)
arab.	Arabic language
az.	Azerbaijani language
čağ.	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 [az.]Nəsimi´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 Nəsimi.

Some of these difficulties, such as the absence of reliable historico-critical editions of Nəsimi´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 Nəsimi´s work such a difficult endeavor.

3.1. The need for new text editions

Probably the most urgent thing to do concerning İmadəddin Nəsimi 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 Nəsimi´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 Nəsimi´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 Nəsimi´s Turkic works. In particular, they did not have access to the many priceless Nəsimi 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 of this

[5] Qəhrəmanov 1973.

[6] For information on some Nəsimi 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.

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 at any scientific analysis.[7] Other editions of Nəsimi´s diwan either consider only single or tardive manuscripts,[8] are partial [9] 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

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.

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 [az.]Nəsimi´s Turkic poems have never been substantiated. The Ottoman lexicographer [osm.]Bursalï Meḥmed Ṭāhir (1861–1925) claimed that such an autograph was kept at the [ttü.]Cennetzade Library of the Anatolian town of Erzurum.[11] The Turkish scholar and editor Kemâl Edib Kürkçüoğlu (1902–1977) stated that in March 1960 the expert in Ottoman literature, Prof. Dr. [ttü.]Abdülkadir Karahan (1913–2000), contacted him and told him that he had seen that autograph in the Bodleian Library in London.[12] 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 [az.]Nəsimi´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 Azerbaijan 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,

11 Quoted in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XXVII. On [osm.]Bursalï Meḥmed Ṭāhir, 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 Nəsimi, in the ideal case in the respective original languages and with philological and historical annotations, similar to what 吴玉贵 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 [az.]Nəsimi, as well as the open questions that remain.

3.3. The nature of Nəsimi´s poetry

Nəsimi wrote in a highly elaborate prosodic system called *əruz* in Azerbaijani. *Əruz* 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, *əruz* is so complicated that only a few experts ever mastered it.[15] What is more interesting is that *əruz* is not particularly well adapted the kind of Oghuz Turkic dialects Nəsimi 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 *əruz* is very demanding. Fortunately, it is possible to find literature both on Azerbaijani *əruz*[16] and on the way Nəsimi used it in his poems.[17]

In addition to the difficulties presented by the formal structure of the poems, Nəsimi´s poetry is characterized by its richness in possible meanings. Of course, this is a feature Nəsimi´s works share with many other medieval poets, and perhaps with all good poets. However, Nəsimi´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 Nəsimi alludes to in his verses was designed for an esoteric public.

The list of difficulties that stand between the modern reader and Nəsimi 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.

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14 吴玉贵 Wú Yù Guì 2009.

15 On the Arabic and Persian origins of *əruz* 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 Səfərova 2006.

17 For instance, Džafar 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 Ἀτροπατηνή (*Atropatēnē*), which is a shortened form of Μηδία Ἀτροπατηνή (*Mēdia Atropatēnē*). Ἀτροπατηνή / Μηδία Ἀτροπατηνή 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 Dareios III. in 330, Ἀτροπάτης submitted to Alexander, who conferred on him the

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18 Yarshater 1983: 762.

19 On the origin of the toponym see also Balcı 2015: 139. In contrast, the direct derivation of the modern Azerbaijani designation *Azərbaycan* (and its counterparts in other modern languages) from the Ancient Greek Ἀτροπατηνή 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 Ἀτροπατηνή in the classical Greek sources cf. Gemoll 1988: 138, s. v. *Ἀτροπατηνή*.

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 *Ādurbādagān*/ (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 mpers. Rey(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 mpers. *dehḳān*s in the eastern parts of Iran from around 1147 onward. The mpers. *dehḳān*s were a class of relatively small landowners, who traditionally had served as intermediaries between the central government and the local populace. Gradually, the mpers. *dehḳān*s 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 az. Nəsimi.[27] Finally, in 1194, the Greater Seljuq state fell prey to the Ḫvārezmians.[28]

The first wave of Mongols reached Azerbaijan in the winter of 1220–1221.[29] They quickly overcame resistance by the local Muslim Atabek (az. Atabəylər)/ Ildengizid (az. Eldənizlər) 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 az. Şamaxı.[31] This marked the beginning of a period of turmoil and instability. In 1225, arab. Ǧalāl ad-Dīn, theoretically heir to the Ḫvārezmian 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 Rūm 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 Hülakülər və Cəlairilər dövlətlərinin mərkəzi vilayəti olmaqla, inzibati-ərazi bölgüsü baxımından əsas 4 əyalətə – 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; Guzev 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 Ḫvārezmian state, see also below p. 28.

29 Golden 1996: 62. Cf. Vəliyev / 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 Vəliyev / Şirinov 2016: 18.

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

33 Matuz 1985: 28.

34 Vəliyev / Şirinov 2016: 18.

the Mongol Great Khanate (1239–1256) and then of the Ilkhanid state ([az.]Elxanilər dövləti or [az.]Hülakular 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 [az.]Marağa, which was followed by Tabriz.[36]

When the Mongols conquered Iran, their ruling class did not adhere to any of the Abrahamitic 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 [az.]Nəsimi.

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 ʻOs̲mān, disobeyed.[39] After the death of the Ilkhanid khan [arab.]Abū Saʿīd (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; Vəliyev / 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. Vəliyev / 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 Saʿīd´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 Nəsimi 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 [az.]Marağa, 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 ([az.]Cəlairilər) quickly became one of the most influential local powers in post-Genghizid Iran and Azerbaijan. The dynasty was founded by [arab.]Šayḫ 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, [arab.]Šayḫ 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 [az.]Marağa cf. the episode around [az.]Səlim 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.]Šayḫ Uways ruled until his death in 1374, when he bequeathed the throne to his son [arab.]Sulṭān Ḥusayn.[51] Under his rule, the Jalairid state lived through a grave crisis when the local ruler of Shiraz, [arab.]Šāh Šuǧāʿ, routed a Jalairid army and temporarily occupied its capital (1376).[52] However, [arab.] Sulṭān 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.]Sulṭān Ḥusayn managed to quell it.[54] In 1381, [arab.] Šāh Šuǧāʿ marched on Tabriz again but had to give up on the way to it.[55]

In 1382, it was [arab.]Sulṭān Ḥusayn´s own brother [arab.]Sulṭān 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 Toxtamış in Central Asia.[57] [arab.]Sulṭān 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 [az.]Dövlətyar, who had remained in the city, invited [az.]Qaraqoyunlu military to help.[59] The call was promptly answered, and on May 24, the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu drove the Jalairids out of the city again.[60] In Dū'l-Ḥiǧǧa A. H. 790 (December 1388), The [az.]Qaraqoyunlu chief [az.]Qara Məhəmməd himself arrived in Tabriz.[61]

After 1399, [arab.]Sulṭān 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.]Sulṭān Aḥmad was defeated and executed in an open battle 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.

the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu ruler [az.]Qara Yusif.[63] This was the end of the Jalairid dynasty and state.[64]

4.3.2. The Shirvanshahs

[az.]Şirvan is the name of territory and state between the [az.]Kür river and the Caspian Sea, with the cities [az.]Dərbənd and the capital [az.]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 [az.]Şirvan began to loosen its dependence on Baghdad. As a consequence of their continued struggle for independence, the rulers of [az.]Şirvan gave themselves the title of Shirvanshahs ([az.]Şirvanşahlar), i. e., "Kings of [az.]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 [mpers.]Ḫvārezm, [arab.]Ǧalāl 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 [az.]Kavus (ruled 1345–1372)tried twice in vain to conquer the Jalairid capital Tabriz.[69] [arab.] Šayḫ Uways responded to the aggression by launching a military campaign against

63 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 332, 364. On the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu and this particular battle, see chapter 4.3.5. below.

64 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 329f.

65 According to Minorsky 1978: 521, the name [mpers.]*Šīrvān* (>[az.]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 [mpers.]*Šarvān*. For the territorial borders of [mpers.]*Šarvān*~ [mpers.]*Šīrvān* 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.

az. Şirvan in 1367. This resulted in a three-month occupation of the coastal kingdom.[70] arab. Šayḫ Uways imprisoned az. Kavus 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 az. Kavus´s death, his son az. Hušəng (1372–1382) took power. He was succeeded by az. İbrahim 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, az. İbrahim I. went to meet Tamerlane in person in Karabakh and offered the Central Asian invader sumptuous presents.[74] In exchange, Tamerlane recognized az. İbrahim I. as ruler of the Shirvan kingdom.[75] Later on, az. İbrahim I. managed to include the ruler of az. Şəki, az. Seyid Əhməd, in his alliance with Tamerlane.[76]

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

After Tamerlane´s death, az. İbrahim I. occupied the city of Tabriz for a short while but had to give it up when the joint forces of the az. Qaraqoyunlu az. Qara Məhəmməd and the Jalairid arab. Sulṭān Aḥmad approached in June 1406.[78]

In 1410, az. İbrahim had his son az. Kəyumərs fight alongside the Jalairids against the az. Qaraqoyunlu. az. Kəyumərs 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 az. Qaraqoyunlu az. Qara Yusif over his ally arab. Sulṭān Aḥmad in the (second) battle in a place near Tabriz called az. Şənbi-Qazan (August 30, 1410).[79] He was surprised by az. Qaraqoyunlu units and taken prisoner. az. Qara Yusif later ordered him to be freed. az. Kəyumərs was able to return to Shirvan. Notwithstanding this, the whole episode had a bad ending for him, because his father ordered him to

70 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333, 335.

71 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333.

72 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 333. Cf. Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam 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 Balcı 2015: 139.

78 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 362.

79 On this battle, see p. 43 below.

be executed out of his suspicion that he and az. Qara Yusif might have been engaged in a conspiration against himself.[80]

In 1411 or 1412, a decisive battle between the az. Qaraqoyunlu and the Shirvanshah took place, possibly near the river az. Kür.[81] The Georgian king Constantine II. and the ruler of az. Şəki fought on az. İbrahim´s side.[82] The battle ended in yet another of az. Qara 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] az. İbrahim 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 az. Qaraqoyunlu.[84]

az. İbrahim´s successor az. Xəlilullah I. (1417–1462) renounced az. Qaraqoyunlu suzerainty. Soon after his accession, he concluded an alliance with Tamerlane´s son mpers. Šāhroḫ 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 terrible leader of horsemen scorched Eurasia´s soil: Tamerlane (1336–1405), whose name is also given in alternative forms such as Timur, az. Teymur, 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Xīnjiāng 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

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 İmadəddin Nəsimi is Tamerlane´s conquest of [mpers.]Astarābād or [mpers.]Esterābād ("City of Stars"), a town on the Caspian Sea coast, in 1383.[90] [mpers.]Astarābād was the hometown of [mpers.]Fażlollāh, Nəsimi´s spiritual leader and teacher. Seeing his native city overrun by a foreign invader probably left some impact on [mpers.]Fażlollāh and therefore, indirectly, on Nəsimi.

In 1385, Tamerlane took Iran´s strategically important cultural hub Tabriz for the first time.[91] He briefly lost it to [az.]Toxtamış that same year before being able to reclaim it in the spring of 1386.[92]

In contrast, the Muẓaffarids still resisted the Mongol invader. [mpers.]Zaynol-ʿĀbidīn, who had succeeded [mpers.]Šāh Šoǧāʿ 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 ([mpers.]ʿolamā) contacted the beleaguerers. 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 [az.]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 Mongol 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 [mpers.]Mīrān Šāh (1366–1408) as a vice-regent.[98] [mpers.]Mīrān 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 [az.]Qaraqoyunlu capital Van. He then launched a successful attack on [az.]Toxtamış from [az.]Dərbənd, which belonged to the territory of his ally, the Shirvanshah [az.]İbrahim 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 [mpers.]Mīrān Šāh´s sons.[106]

Timurid rule over Azerbaijan finally ended in 1408 when the Timurid [arab.]Abū Bakr was decisively defeated by the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu ruler [az.]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 [az.]Toxtamış, see chapter 4.3.4. below.

93 Lambton 1990: 102. – On [mpers.]Šāh Šoǧāʿ 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: [az.]Məhəmməd Dəvati and [az.]Qara Bəstam (joint governors of Tabriz), [az.]Əxi İranşah (Soltaniyeh), [az.]Šah Əli ([az.]Marağa), [az.]Hacı Əhməd ([az.]Pişki or [az.]Pişkin).

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 [az.]Mirzä Ömər.

107 Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23. On the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu and [az.]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 owo. Ğanibeg invaded Azerbaijan.[108] His move was caused by a crisis in his own territory, which was linked to a terrible plague epidemic. owo. Ğanibeg was also attracted by the political chaos and instability in the former Ilkhanid lands.

The Golden Horde ruler az. Toxtamış (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, az. Toxtamış 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, az. Toxtamış´ forces gathered in Karabakh, from where they returned to the Golden Horde.[112] az. Toxtamış 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´s 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 az. Qaraqoyunlu are often described in terms of a tribal federation rather than a sedentary state – just as the az. Aqqoyunlu ("Those with the White Sheep"). [115] The az. Qaraqoyunlus´ ruling dynasty belonged to the az. Yivə tribe from the Oghuz (Southwestern) branch of the Turkic peoples.[116] The Oghuz az. Baharlı tribe also played a leading role in the federation over many years.[117]

Incidentally, the designations of the az. Qaraqoyunlu and az. Aqqoyunlu 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 az. Qaraqoyunlu, and a white one in that of the az. Aqqoyunlu.[119]

Just like the Jalairids, the az. Qaraqoyunlu 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 az. Qaraqoyunlu expanded towards the cities of ttü. Erzincan and ttü. Sivas, as well into northern Georgia from the early 1370s onward.[122]

The founder of the az. Qaraqoyunlu state was a certain az. Bayram Xoca, who died in 1380.[123] He was succeeded by az. Qara Məhəmməd, who ruled the az. Qaraqoyunlu until his death in 1389.[124]

The reign of az. Qara Məhəmməd was marked by the az. Qaraqoyunlus´ rivalry

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

116 Mahmudov et al. 2011: 23. On the origin of the az. Qaraqoyunlu, 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 az. Qaraqoyunlu cf. Yücel 1970: 152 et passim.

123 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 359.

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

with the Jalairids. [az.]Qara Məhəmməd married off one of his daughters to the Jalairid ruler [arab.]Sulṭān Aḥmad.[125] In spite of the act of marriage diplomacy, the mutual relationship was mostly bellicose. In September 1382, the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu carried out a large-scale attack on the Jalairid capital Tabriz, defeating the Jalairid prince [arab.]Šayḫ ʿAlī.[126]

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

[az.]Qara 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, [az.]Qara Məhəmməd established direct diplomatic contacts with the Mameluke ruler [arab.]Barqūq (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. [az.]Qara Məhəmməd´s diplomatic initiative aimed at obtaining [arab.]Barqūq´s permission to engage in military operations inside Syria. The Mameluke Sultan agreed, after which [az.]Qara Məhəmməd began an attack on the [az.]Aqqoyunlu. He still defeated them in 1385.[131]

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

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.

In 1387, [az.]Qara Məhəmməd negotiated an alliance with the Mameluke renegade [arab.]Mintāš and the ruler of Sivas, [owo.]Burhāneddīn.[135]

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

Under their charismatic leader [az.](Kəmaləddin) Qara Yusif, who was chief of the confederation from 1389 until his death in 1421, the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu reached the heyday of their might.[137] During various times at the end of the 14th century, [az.]Qara Yusif´s men managed to control parts of present-day northern and southern Azerbaijan, including [az.]Naxçıvan and Tabriz.[138] However, their control was frequently unstable. For instance, [az.]Qara 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 [az.]Qaraqoyunlu and their long-standing Jalairid enemies.[140] [az.]Qara Yusif and [arab.]Sulṭān Aḥmad formed a military alliance against the Mongol[141] but their effort was in vain. Tamerlane crushed their combined forces in a battle near Baghdad in 1394.[142] Following this defeat, [az.]Qara Yusif fled first to on Ottoman territory and then to the Mameluke Egyptian court, where he met his strategic ally [arab.]Sulṭān Aḥmad again.[143]These events made the year 1395 one of the most difficult ones for the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu as the confederation was on the brink of dissolution.[144] From his exile, [az.]Qara Yusif kept it from disintegration only with great efforts.[145]

After the disaster, [az.]Qara Yusif´s personal situation was far from safe, too. Tamerlane demanded his and [arab.]Sulṭān Aḥmad´s extradition from Sultan [arab.]Barqūq.[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.

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 Farağ, 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 [az.]Qara Yusif free, as they did [arab.]Sulṭān Aḥmad.[149] [az.]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 [az.]Qara Yusif alone to face the Timurid attack.[152] The battle was fought at [az.]Şənbi-Qazan in the autumn. [az.]Qara Yusif defeated [arab.]Abū Bakr.[153]

After this setback, the Timurids regrouped their forces in order to confront the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu a second time. Another battle took place on April 21, 1408, at [az.]Sərdurud.[154] This time, [arab.]Abū Bakr fought side by side with his father [mpers.]Mīrān Šāh.[155] Amongst their forces were also 20.000 fighters sent by Mīrān Šāh´s brother [mpers.]Šāhroḫ (1377–1447, ruled 1406–1447).[156] Once again, the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu were victorious.[157] [mpers.]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, [az.]Qara Yusif settled accounts with [arab.]Sulṭān Aḥmad, whom he defeated at [az.]Şənbi-Qazan on August 30, 1410,[161] [arab.]Sulṭān Aḥmad was executed.[162]

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.

This victory made the [az.]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 [az.]Kür river, parts of modern Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran.[163]

In 1418, the Timurid [mpers.]Šāhroḫ, who was eager to avenge the death of his brother [mpers.]Mīrān Šāh at the hands of [az.]Qara Yusif personally led a campaign against the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu into Azerbaijan.[164] [mpers.]Šāhroḫ repeated the attack in 1420.[165] [az.]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 [az.]Qara Yusif´s death, competition between his heirs broke out.[167] The [az.]Qaraqoyunlu´s arch-enemy [mpers.]Šāhroḫ 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 [az.]Qara Yusif´s sons, [az.]İskəndər and [az.]Isfəndiyar were defeated by the Timurid and his allies near [az.]Dərbənd.[169] Apparently, [mpers.]Šāhroḫ 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 [az.]Nəsimi´s life assume that [az.]Nəsimi died before 1420, [az.]Qara Yusif´s successors [az.]İskəndər (ruled 1421–1438) and, *in extremis*, [az.]Cahanşah (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 [az.]Aqqoyunlu was yet another of the major political forces of post-Genghizid Iran of similar origin and ethnic composition as the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu and were their frequent rivals and enemies,[171]

Just as the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu, the [az.]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.

The founder of the [az.]Aqqoyunlu tribal federation is believed to have been a certain [az.]Pəhləvan, who ruled 1370–1388.[172] His successors were [az.]Əlaəddin Turəli (ruled 1388–1392) and [az.]Fəxrəddin (ruled 1392–1394).[173]

No doubt the pivotal figure in the early history of the [az.]Aqqoyunlu was [az.]Fəxrəddin´s son [az.]Qara Yuluq Osman aka [az.]Qara 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 [az.]Qaraqoyunlu attack made [az.]Qara Yuluq Osman´s military abilities were indispensable to the survival of the [az.]Aqqoyunlu federation.[176] After being freed, he indeed won an important victory for the [az.]Aqqoyunlu near the Anatolian town of Sivas.[177] However,[az.]Qara Yuluq Osman´s last fight against the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu 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, [az.]Qaraqoyunlu 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 [arab.]Barqūq, in 1382. It marked an ethnic shift within the Mameluke ruling class because of [arab.]Barqūq was of Circassian origin. His advent to power marks the beginning of the Circassian Burjī dynasty and the end of the exclusive rule of the Kipchak (i. e., Turkic) Mamelukes.

[arab.]Barqūq briefly lost power to a Kipchak pretender ([arab.]Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn Ḥāğğ) from June 1389 to January 1390 but ruled again from then until his death in 1399.

From [arab.]Barqūq´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 [arab.]Mintāš. He was apparently the leader of the pro-Kipchak and anti-Circassian faction.[180] He occupied the position of the local governor ([arab.]*nāʾib*) in the town of [ttü.]Malatya, which then was under Mameluke control. [arab.]Mintāš is believed to have tried to subvert Mameluke power by creating a broad political alliance against his Egyptian overlord [arab.]Barqūq. In 1387, he contacted the ruler of Sivas, [owo.]Burhāneddīn (1345-around 1398) and persuaded him to be part of the anti-Circassian coalition, to which the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu were also invited.[181] As a reward, [arab.]Mintāš offered [owo.]Burhāneddīn control of the town of [ttü.]Malatya.[182] However, the anti-Egyptian alliance of [arab.]Mintāš and [owo.]Burhāneddīn went to pieces even before it produced any effects. When [owo.]Burhāneddīn sent an advance party to [ttü.]Malatya in order to take possession of the town, [arab.]Mintāš had its members imprisoned.[183] It is unclear whether [arab.]Mintāš played a double game at this occasion or had simply changed his mind and committed second treason. [owo.]Burhāneddīn in his turn was not interested in punishing the Mameluke [arab.]*nāʾib* 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 mighty Mongol aggressor 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, [owo.]Burhāneddīn and [arab.]Mintāš resumed their mutual negotiations. Once more, the ruler of Sivas was offered [ttü.]Malatya.[185] After consultations with his innermost circle of consultants, [owo.]Burhāneddīn accepted [arab.]Mintāš´ proposal yet another time.[186] However, this second attempt at an alliance between the Mameluke traitor and [owo.]Burhāneddīn again came to not-

172 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 370.

173 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 370.

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

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.

hing over the formalities of handing over ttü. Malatya. The whole episode ended with owo. Burhāneddīn leading arab. Mintāš´ as a prisoner back to Sivas.[187]

owo. Burhāneddīn knew that the arab. Mintāš affair conjured up the risk of a Mameluke punitive expedition against him. He tried to prevent such revenge by sending an appeasing letter to arab. Barqūq´s governor (arab. *nā'ib*) in Aleppo, owo. Yelboġa. In his message, owo. Burhāneddīn gave his version of what had transpired between him and arab. Mintāš, hoping that his openness would impress and satisfy the Mamelukes.[188] Unfortunately for him, the letter had exactly the opposite effect: arab. Barqūq ordered owo. Yelboġa to undertake a punitive expedition against Sivas. The Mameluke army appeared before the gates of the town in the month of Rabīʿ 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 owo. Yelboġa and his Egyptian overlord turned sour. arab. Barqūq reacted by first giving out the order to keep owo. Yelboġa out of Aleppo and then trying to have him killed.[191] This triggered an open revolt by owo. Yelboġa against the sultan.[192] The arab. *nā'ib* tried to forge an anti-arab. Barqūq alliance with owo. Burhāneddīn, arab. Mintāš, and the ruler of arab. Dū'l-ḳadr, arab. Sūlī.[193] owo. Yelboġa´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]

arab. Barqūq was succeeded by his son arab. Nāṣir ad-Dīn Farağ, who stayed in power from June 1399 to May 1412. Another of arab. Barqūq´s sons, arab. ʿIzz ad-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, ruled for a couple of months in 1405 before arab. Nāṣir ad-Dīn Farağ resumed power. He remained sultan until May 1412, when he was followed by arab. Al-Mustaʿīn bi'llāh.

On November 6, 1412, arab. Šayḫ al-Maḥmūdī, who used the throne name Al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad, came to power (until January 13, 1421).[195] arab. Šayḫ al-Maḥmūdī is pivotal to the biography of İmadəddin Nəsimi because his name is mentioned in a number of accounts of Nəsimi´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 arab. Dū'l-ḳadr background, cf. chapter 4.3.8. below.

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

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

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

4.3.8. The Dū'l-ḳadr dynasty

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

Rāziqül-ərzāqımız Marʿaş degil
Rızqı Marʿaşdan umarsaŋ 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 Nəsimi 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 ttü. Maraş, or more than one of these referents at a time.

Just as the az. Aqqoyunlu and az. Qaraqoyunlu, the ttü. Dulkadıroğulları were a dynasty of Oghuz Turkic origin. Their first important representative arab. Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa b. Dū'l-ḳadr belonged to the Oghuz Turkic tribe owo. Bozoḳ.[197] As the patronym of arab. Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa indicates, a certain arab. Dū'l-ḳadr 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 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: 390.

197 Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

the Arabic name [arab.] Dū'l-ḳadr (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 [ttü.] Dulkadıroğulları owed their rise to the post-Genghizid power vacuum. [arab.] Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa*'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 Ḳarağa undertook an invasion into Cilician Armenia, leading a force of five thousand armed horsemen.[200] Soon after, [arab.] Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa and his son [arab.] Ḥasan managed to conquer the town of [ttü.] Elbistan situated some fifty kilometers to the north of [ttü.] Maraş. [ttü.] Elbistan had already passed through the hands of several local potentates after the demise of the last Ilkhanid ruler [arab.] Abu Saʿīd in 1335.[201]

In 1337, [arab.] Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa 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 [ttü.] Dulkadıroğulları state.[203] In the space of the following five years, [arab.] Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa 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 Ḳarağa 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 Ḳarağa.[205] Soon after this, in A. H. 742 (1341 / 1342), [arab.] Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa concluded a strategic alliance

198 The theory is by Annemarie von Gabain, see Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239. – Cf. also the rendering of the name in the form "Turcgadiroly" 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"), **oġul* ("son"), and / or *-*lü*, *-lı*, *-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-ḳadr might also speak a passage from [arab.] Sibṭ b. al-ʿAğamī´s [arab.] *Kunūz ad-dahab fī-tārīḫ Ḥalab* (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.

with one of his former enemies, [owo.] Eretna, who was also of Turkic (allegedly Uyghur) extraction.[206] Around the same time and probably in connection with this step, the master of [ttü.] Maraş formally dissociated himself from the Mamelukes.[207]

Meanwhile, the Mameluke sultan had appointed a new governor to Aleppo, by the name of [arab.] Tāš-Tīmūr as-Sāḳī. [arab.] Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa managed to come to amicable terms with this person.[208] [arab.] Tāš-Tīmūr as-Sāḳī participated in a revolt against the Mameluke sultan [arab.] *ʿAlā'* ad-Dīn Kūğūk, who had assumed power in August 1341 after the execution of sultan [arab.] Sayf ad-Dīn Abū Bakr.[209] When [arab.] *ʿAlā'* ad-Dīn Kūğūk was removed from the throne again on January 21, 1342, [arab.] Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa accompanied [arab.] Tāš-Tīmūr as-Sāḳī on a trip to Cairo, where they found out how the situation under the new ruler, [arab.] *Šihāb* ad-Dīn Aḥmad, appeared.[210] As it turned out, the new conditions were quite unfavorable to [arab.] Tāš-Tīmūr as-Sāḳī, and he fell from grace with the new sultan.[211] Thereupon, [arab.] Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa 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 Ḳarağa raided a caravan that transported loot to Aleppo. The goods were the fruits of a victory over the Ilkhanid pretender [arab.] Sulaymān *Šāh* that had been won by Eretna, who by that time had nominally turned into one of [arab.] Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa*´s* allies again.[213] Upon learning about the violent incident, the then Mameluke governor of Aleppo, [arab.] Yil-Buġa al-Yaḥyāvī sent a punitive military expedition against [arab.] Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa. The son of [arab.] Dū'l-ḳadr first succeeded in crushing [arab.] Yil-Buġa´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 [ttü.] Düldül.[215] In a well-calculated strategic step, [arab.] Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa 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.] *Ġmād ad*-Dīn Abū'l-Fidā (ruled 1342–1345).[216]

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 Ḳarağa and the Mamelukes continued with its ups and downs. Aleppo´s Mameluke governor [arab.]Amīr Arıḳtay took a particularly hostile stance against [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa.[217] However, under [arab.]Amīr Arıḳtay´s successor, [arab.]Arġun Šāh an-Nāṣirī, 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-Nāṣirī was removed from his post in Aleppo in 1348 and replaced by [arab.]Amīr Arıḳtay, who got his second term.[219] At this point, [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa intensified his raids into the Mameluke territories around Aleppo. He provoked the Egyptians by giving himself the title [arab.]"Al-Malik Al-Ḳāhir" ("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 Ḳarağa 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-Ḳāsimī and the governors of Hama and Tripoli (Lebanon).[222] This was the final straw for the Mameluke sultan [arab.]Ṣalāh ad-Dīn Ṣāliḥ (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 Ḳarağa escaped to [ttü.]Elbistan.[223] The Mameluke sultan offered to spare [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa if he would extradite his fellow conspirators. Upon [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa´s refusal to accept the deal, [arab.]Ṣalāh ad-Dīn Ṣāliḥ declared the former´s emirate abolished.[224] All plenipotentiary powers and revenues belonging to it were transferred to [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa´s rivals to the southwest, the [ttü.]Ramazanoġulları, who had their center of power around the town of Adana.[225] In the end, [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa 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 Ḳarağa as the most important leader of the Turkic-speaking tribes north of the Mameluke territories of Syria. [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa would only have to come to Aleppo to receive his letter of appointment and the traditional cloak of honor![227] [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa 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 Ḳarağa´s territories.[229] The son of Dū'l-ḳadr himself was able to get away once more, accompanied by a small number of loyalists. They made it to Mount [ttü.]Düldül.[230] There, they were able to resist the Mamelukes for twenty days but were overpowered in the end. [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa narrowly escaped, leaving behind all his followers and equipment. He made it to the Anatolian town of [ttü.]Kayseri.[231] There, his lucky streak finally ended. The city´s commander, a Mongol by the name of [owo.]Ḳutlu *Šāh*, captured him and handed him over to the son of his one-time ally and enemy Eretna, [owo.]Meḥemmed Beg.[232] [owo.]Meḥemmed 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.]Ṣalāh ad-Dīn Ṣāliḥ refrained from executing the insubordinate prince, but when news came in about [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa´s sons gathering troops, he passed the death sentence (December 11, 1353).[234]

After [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa´s death, the Mameluke once again nominally transferred his territories to the [ttü.]Ramazanoġulları.[235] However, this decision was not accepted by the majority of the [owo.]Bozoḳ 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 [ttü.]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 Ḳarağa´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 Ḳarağa´s sons, [arab.]Ḫalīl, as chief of the [owo.]Bozoḳ, hoping to calm the situation with this step.[238]

In his first period in power (the exact chronology remains obscure), [arab.]Ḫalīl 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.]Ḫalīl penetrated into the outskirts of Aleppo. He defeated an expeditionary corps sent against him by the city´s governor [arab.]Aḥmad b. al-Ḳuš-Tīmurī.[240] In the same period, [arab.]Ḫalīl 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 [ttü.]Harput, then also controlled by Eretna´s son.[242]

Freshly alarmed by the expansion of [arab.]Ḫalīl´s power, the Mameluke sultan ordered his governor in Aleppo, [arab.]Sayf ad-Dīn *Ǧarğī*, to perform a punishing operation (May 1366).[243] [arab.]Sayf ad-Dīn *Ǧarğī* besieged [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa´s son in [ttü.]Harput but could not take the city. This punitive expedition apparently impressed [arab.]Ḫalīl. 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.]Ḫalīl 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.]Ḫalīl out of Elbistan and advanced until they reached Malatya.[246] The massive Mameluke victory left [arab.]Ḫalīl no other choice than to submit again.[247] However, as had been the case with his father, [arab.]Ḫalīl never again managed to restore full Mameluke

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.

confidence in him. In A. H. 788 (1386 / 1387), [arab.]Barqūq put an end to all doubts by first deposing and then killing him.[248]

[arab.]Ḫalīl*´s* successor was his younger brother Sūlī, who has already been discussed in the [arab.]Mintaš episode.[249] As it were, many behavior patterns discernible in the action of [arab.]Mintaš, Sūlī, and other local rulers resemble those in the times of [arab.]Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳarağa and his brother [arab.]Ḫalīl, in particular, vis-à-vis the Mamelukes. Thus, Sūlī placed himself in the current anti-[arab.]Barqūq conspiration 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 Sūlī made an offer to Tamerlane that he would lead the latter´s troops into Syria.[251] Sūlī´s life ended in A. H. 800 (1397 / 1398), when [arab.]Barqūq finally had him killed, too.[252]

Following Sūlī*´s death, there was a brief phase in which one of his sons and a son of his brother* [arab.]Ḫalīl, [arab.]Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad, struggled for power. In A. H. 802 (1399 / 1400), the contention was decided in favor of [arab.]Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad following an intervention by the Ottoman sultan [owo.]Bāyezīd I.[253]

In 1400, [arab.]Nāṣir 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.]Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad interfered in the Ottoman civil war, which had broken out after the defeat of sultan [owo.]Bāyezīd 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 [osm.]Meḥmed (*Čelebi*) against his brother [osm.]Mūsā.[255] This proved to be a lucky decision, as [osm.]Meḥmed *Čelebi* finally was victorious over his brothers in 1413.[256]

In the years thereafter, [arab.]Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad continued to support [osm.]Meḥmed *Čelebi* against the Ottomans´ *most powerful adversary in Anatolia*. These were the rulers of the town of [osm.]Ḳaraman / [osm.]Larende~Laranda (the ancient Λάρανδα),[257] known as the [ttü.]Karamanoğulları. Incidentally, the importance of these two rivaling powers is also mentioned by Nəsimi. One of his most beauti-

248 Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

249 Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239. The spelling of the name Sūlī 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 Λάρανδα, cf. Treidler 1979.

ful ghazals begins with the following lines, which mention both the then Ottoman town (and one-time capital) Bursa and the town of Laranda:

Neylərəm bən bunda durmaq çünki dildār anda-dur
Sanma kim anda dedüğüm Bursa yā La:randa-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 Nəsimi, 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 owo. Ḳaraman. 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 owo. Ḳaraman 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 Nəsimi´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 yā 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. Orḫan 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

258 The text was adapted from Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, MS Yazma Bağışlar 4318. Fol. 37v. The ghazal can also be found in Meḥmed Saʿīd 1844: 44 and Kürkçüoğlu 1985: 297. The metre is arab. Ramal (– v – – / – v – – / – v – – / – v –).

259 On the early history of owo. Ḳaraman, 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 givs the year 1370. Kreiser 2015: 391 places the conquest of Edirne between 1361 and 1366.

mentioned by Nəsimi 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 Nəsimi 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 Nəsimi´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. Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad, one can say that his pro-Ottoman and consequently inherently anti-Ḳaraman politics combined with the traditional dependence of the ttü. Dulkadıroğulları on Mameluke benevolence. Against this backdrop, it was quite natural that the arab. Dū'l-ḳadr ruler actively participated in sultan arab. Al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad´s punitive expedition against the ttü. Karamanoğulları in A. H. 822 (1419 / 1420).[262] In addition to his participation in the Mamelukes´ campaign, arab. Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad also pursued his struggle against Ḳaraman on his own. Thus in 1419, he even managed to capture their ruler owo. Meḥmed (in power from 1413–1419 and 1421–1423) and sent him as a prisoner to Cairo.[263] arab. Al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad recompensed arab. Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad with the town of ttü. Kayseri, which had formerly been under the ttü. Karamanoğulları´s control.[264] The city was lost to the ttü. Dulkadıroğulları under owo. Meḥmed´s successor owo. Tāğ ad-Dīn İbrāhīm (ruled 1423–1464), but retaken by the Ottomans and handed back to arab. Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad in A. H. 840 (1436 / 1437).[265]

arab. Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad ruled until 1443. This means that his life extended beyond that of Nəsimi, at least according to most accounts of the poet´s life. Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad´s reign was mostly characterized by a pragmatic and flexible policy. He managed with good success to balance the interests of the great powers surrounding him, such as the Ottomans, the rulers of Ḳaraman, and the Mamelukes, against each other. In this way, he managed to preserve the rather small principality´s independence.

262 Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

263 Sümer 1990: 623. It would seem logical to assume that this capture occurred after the joint arab. Dū'l-ḳadr-Mameluke campaign, but I have left the sequence open because the literature does not provide the exact dates. – On the Ḳaraman ruler owo. Meḥmed cf. also Kreiser / Neumann 2005: 74.

264 Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239.

265 Mordtmann / Ménage 1983: 239. On owo. Tāğ ad-Dīn İbrāhīm, see also Babinger 1959: 6.

4.3.9. The Muẓaffarids

The Muẓaffarids 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 [mpers.]Šāh Šoǧāʿ (ruled 1358–1384). However, after his death, internal divisions weakened the state. The last Muẓaffarid ruler was [mpers.]Šāh Manṣūr (ruled 1387–1393).[266] The Muẓaffarid state was destroyed by Tamerlane in 1393.

4.3.10. A place of special meaning: Əlincə

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, [az.]Əlincə, 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 [mpers.]Faẓlollāh is assumed to have been imprisoned. Knowing about the general history of [az.]Əlincə might provide us with further important clues for the chronology of both [mpers.]Faẓlollāh´s and Nəsimi´s lives.

[az.]Əlincə is a medieval mountain fortress that is situated approximately 12 kilometers from the town of [az.]Naxçıvan. Today, [az.]Əlincə is no more than a ruin. The shattered remains of the medieval fortress can be found to the north of the Araxes ([az.]Araz) river, not far from where the [az.]Qotur joins it from the south and the Araxes itself bends to the east.[268] Not far from [az.]Əlincə, a small river of the identical name disembogues southward to the Araxes. The river [az.]Əlincə is likely to have had the same name already in medieval times.[269] Apparently, the [az.]Əlincə 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.

266 Berthels / Bruijn 2019.

267 The name of [az.]Əlincə appears in many variants in the literature, including *Alanǧaḳ* (Bausani 1979: 600; Divshali / Luft 1980: 18) or its transcription variant *Alanǧaq* (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 toponpym, or vice versa. In fact, the etymology of the name [az.]Əlincə is not discussed in the literature, either.

Even in its present, ruined state, pictures of [az.]Əlincə 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, [mpers.]Moẓaffaroddīn Ozbak ([az.]Müzəffərətddin Özbək, ruled 1211–1225).[273]

In the post-Genghizid era, [az.]Əlincə 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 [az.]Toxtamış.[274] In order to achieve his goal, he first took Tabriz and then moved on in the direction of [az.]Naxçıvan.[275] At this point, a number of Jalairid commanders had already sought shelter in [az.]Əlincə.[276] A series of skirmishes between Tamerlane and the Jalairids emirs ensued before the Mongol ruler 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 [az.]Qaraqoyunlu ruler, [az.]Qara Yusif was approaching Tabriz, the fortress commander [oaz.]Altun put himself at the head of an expedition force to meet him.[278] The move was successful, and [az.]Qara Yusif had to withdraw.[279]

A year later, Tamerlane sent an army detachment in order to neutralize [az.]Əlincə once and for all but failed to claim it again.[280] Thanks to such successes, [az.]Əlincə 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-Ta-

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 [az.]*Cəlairi əmirlərinin bir qismi* "a part of the Jalairid emirs".

277 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 330.

278 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 361.

279 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 361.

280 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331.

281 Bünyadov / Yusifov 1994: 331.

merlane resistance. For this reason, both the rulers of [az.]Şəki and Georgia supported the defenders of [az.]Əlincə.[282]

In the end, the Jalairids managed to hold out in the fortress for a full thirteen years. Among its commanders were [arab.]Sulṭān Aḥmad´s son [arab.]Sulṭān Ṭāhir, the already mentioned [oaz.]Altun and another person named [az.]Qövhər.[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, [az.]Əlincə 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 the mighty Mongol ruler.[285]

The fortress was apparently destroyed at some unknown point of time after that date. For we learn that after the Jalairid ruler [arab.]Sulṭān Aḥmad who had occupied Tabriz (together with his [az.]Qaraqoyunlu ally [az.]Qara Yusif) in June 1406, ordered [az.]Əlincə 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,

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.

by greed and the desire of power. This seems to be the case, for instance, as regards to the many campaigns by [az.]Toxtamış 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 'Abrahamitic' 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 search at the same time responded to the general political situation in Nəsimi´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-Genghiz 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 Nəsimi to try their luck in various smaller or bigger courts. The above-quoted verse about [ttü.]Maraş probably gives evidence of Nəsimi´s attempt to influence the small [arab.]Dū'l-ḳadr 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 Nəsimi was one.

Finally, a third point relevant to the work of Nəsimi 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 Nəsimi 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 Ḥurūfīya of Fażlollāh Astarābādī

After the above brief glance at the general political situation before and during [az.]Nəsimi´s lifetime it is important to look in more detail at the religious movement, [az.]Nəsimi dedicated most of his energy and poems too. Many aspects of this movement, which is usually referred to as the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya, remain obscure to this day. There are several reasons for this. These include the often esoteric and secretive character of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya, 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfīya´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 ([arab.]*bidʿa*) tantamounted to heresy and sin.

The history of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya and of its founder, [mpers.]Fażlollāh of [mpers.]Astarābād 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. [mpers.]Fażlollāh and his disciples devoted much time and effort to the attempt to convince their fellow Muslims of their [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s model pupil [mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā went to Anatolia to spread "the logos of God" ([mpers.]*kalām-e Ḥaḳḳ*) amongst Muslim rulers,[287] 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh and the [arab.]Ḥurūfīs from the start that they would face the same kind of resistance that had been encountered by many of the prophets in the Abrahamitic tradition, including the Jewish prophets, Jesus, and Muḥammad. However, [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 metho-

[287] See chapter 4.5.5.2.

dological problems that inevitably appear in dealing with the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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.]Ḥurūfīya" has its origin in the classical Arabic language. It derives from the morpheme [arab.]*ḥurūf*, 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 *Ḥ-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 *Ḥ-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* ↔ *ḥurūf*) 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 *Ḥ-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 (*Ḥ-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.]Ḥurūfīya postulates that a semantical relationship between the word [arab.]Ḥurūfīya and the previously mentioned noun [arab.]*ḥirfa* existed. On the basis of this etymology, it has been argued that the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya religious movement had an inherent closeness to trade or business circles. This was an important postulate in Soviet theories about the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya, for these rated the role of craftsmen and traders in the movement particularly high. In a way, this helped to give the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya similarity to a movement of workers, which was welcome to the *interpretation Sovietica*. However, this argumentation is erroneous. For although [arab.]*ḥirfa* very likely[291] belongs to the same root as [arab.]*ḥurūf*, it only has an etymological but no direct semantic relationship with the word [arab.]*Ḥurūfīya*. [arab.]*Ḥurūfīya* belongs to [arab.]*ḥurūf* (and therefore to [arab.]*ḥarf*), but not to [arab.]*ḥirfa* or another derivative of the *Ḥ-R-F* root.[292]

As to the second morphological element of the word [arab.]*Ḥurūfīya*, *-īya*, 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 *-īya* 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.]*Ḥurūfī* denotes an individual member of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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.]Ḥurūfīya is a group of people who have something to do with letters. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov accordingly refers to it as a *mouvement étymologiquement «lettriste»*.[295]

The morphological structure of the Arabic terms [arab.]Ḥurūfīya and [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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 -īya. Examples are the English term *Hurufism*, the Russian [russ.]*Xurufizm*, the Persian [mpers.]*Ḥorūfgīrī*, the Turkish [ttü.]*Hurufilik* (all denoting the movement), the French *Houroûfî* and the Persian [mpers.]*Ḥorūfī* (denoting the person).[296]

288 Mir-Kasimov 2009: 250. – On [arab.]*ḥarf* and [arab.]*ḥurūf* see Wehr 1985: 246., s. v. *ḥarf*.

289 See Wehr 1985: 245f., s. v. *Ḥ-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 possiblity 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.

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

Also, the Arabic form may directly be transcribed into the foreign language, as is the case in the Persian [mpers.] *Ḥorūfīya*.[297]

The Arabic term [arab.] Ḥurūfīya and the corresponding adjective-noun [arab.] Ḥurūfī are used in medieval sources to denote the religious movement that [az.] İmadəddin Nəsimi adhered to from very earliest times onward. If the [mpers.] ʿEmād Ḥorūfī mentioned in [mpers.] Šarafoddīn Rāmī Tabrīzī´s [mpers.] *Anīsoʾl-ʿOššāḳ* can indeed be identified as [az.] İmadəddin Nəsimi, the term [arab.] Ḥurūfī was probably used during [az.] Nəsimi´s lifetime.[298] Another early text that uses the term [arab.] Ḥurūfīya is [arab.] *Inbāʾ al-ġumr fī-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 Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsḳalānī (1372–1449).[299] As a matter of fact, [arab.] Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsḳalānī´s work is one of the most important sources on the [arab.] Ḥurūfīya.

4.5.2. On the history and theory of Ḥurūfī "lettrism"

Orkhan Mir-Kasimov´s designation of the [arab.] Ḥurūfīya 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.] Fażlollāh 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 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.] Fażlollāh gave to his [arab.] Ḥurūfīya 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.] Fażlollāh´s [arab.] Ḥurūfīya, we need to look at these previous traditions. For they are likely to have shaped, consciously or unconsciously, [mpers.] Fażlollāh´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-Sīmiyā*,[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.] Fażlollāh, 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 people conserve, sans les comprendre, les débris des traditions anciennes, remontant même parfois à un passé si lointain qu´il serait impossible de le determiner […]; il remplit en cela la function d´une sorte de mémoire collective

297 As in Mīr Feṭrūs 1999, *passim*.

298 See p. 164.

299 Ritter 1954: 7f. – The biographical data about [arab.] Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsḳalānī are taken from Şıxıyeva 1999: 64.

300 See chapter 4.5.2.5.

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 (μαντικὴ τέχνη, *augurium*, *divinatio*). 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s way of thinking follows lines that are similar to Plotin´s assertion, which predates the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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.] *lauḥ maḥfūẓ*), 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]

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. *Levh-i mahfûz*.

309 Cf. Curtius 1948: 312.

310 Curtius 1948: 315.

311 See chapter 4.5.2.2.

312 Curtius 1948: 315.

Particularly interesting from the point of view of comparison with the mpers. Ḥurūfīya of mpers. Fażlollāh 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 mpers. Fażlollāh´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:

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).

Nam facies habitum mentis studiumque fatetur,
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 mpers. Fażlollāh´s reference to the beholding of young males´ faces as a source of inspiration.[319] Apparently, there was a link between lettrism, 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-Reš-Waw-Nun* (>*Neron*) and *Qof-Samek-Reš* (>*Caesar*). The numerical values of these letters (*Nun*=50, *Reš*=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 Ḥurūfīya

4.5.2.3.1. Ǧafr

Long before mpers.Fażlollāh of mpers.Astarābād invented his arab.Ḥurūfīya, 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 mpers.Fażlollāh´s arab.Ḥurūfīya.

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 arab.Muḥammad.[332] Early Shiites were of the idea that arab.ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (around 600-661) and his children kept secret knowledge about everything, and that there was an invisible

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 arab.*Abǧad* 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.

and infallible book that contained all the mysteries of the universe.[333] For instance, the famous Arab biographer [arab.]Ibn Saʿd (784-845) ascribed to [arab.]ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib 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.]*ḳad tabayyanaʾ-r-rušdu minaʾl-ġayy*) 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 Ḫāriğites and the Muʿtazilites.[335] For instance, the founder of the Muʿtazilite branch of Islam, which supported rather rationalist positions, [arab.]Bišr b. al-Muʿtamir (died 825) reproached the Shiites with being misguided by the book called "[arab.]*Ǧafr*".[336] A book with this title is also quoted by the Arab historian and philologist (of Iranian extraction) [arab.]Ibn Ḳutayba (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.]*ğafr* itself became synonymous of one of Islamic letter mysticism, or of certain of its branches.

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

333 Macdonald 1913: 1037.

334 Macdonald 1913: 1037.

335 Macdonald 1913: 1037.

336 Macdonald 1913: 1037.

337 Macdonald 1913: 1037.

338 Ibn Khaldûn 1958: 171ff. – At least one more work by [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn on lettrism has been conserved, see Matton 1977: 25-70 for its translated text.

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.]Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiḳ (traditionally assumed to be one of the most eminent representatives of the art of [arab.]*ğafr*[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 Ḫaldūn´s theory, and it is not clear whether it is based on material from [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn´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.]*ğafr* might be connected to the Greek γραφή.[342] This would mean that according to its etymological meaning, [arab.]*ğafr* 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.]*ğafr*, 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 γραφή and [arab.]*ğafr* 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.]*raṭl* (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 / ğ/ is a well-attested phenomenon, for instance in proper names such as [arab.]*Ǧirğis*. In favor of a Greek etymology of [arab.]*ğafr* could speak that one of the synonyms of [arab.]*ʿilm al-ğafr* "the knowledge of [arab.]*ğafr*", [arab.]*as-Sīmiyā*, definitely has a Greek etymology, as it is derived from the Greek σημεῖα "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

339 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 687. – This etymological explanation is also reflected in the Steingass Persian dictionary, where the meaning of the word *jafr* (which is an Arabic loanword 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 Alī 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 Jaʿfar 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. *raṭl*.

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

γραφή, 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.] *ǧafr*. One of them is the speculative assumption that the phonetic side of the Arabic word [arab.] *ǧafr* might be related to one of the Hebrew words for lettrism, 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 / ǧ/, /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 / ǧ/ 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.] *ǧafr* 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.] *ǧafr* and Gematria / γεωμετρία denote similar phenomena, and the relatedness of all forms of Arabo-Islamic lettrism to the pre-Islamic lettrist 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.] *ǧafr* 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 *Ǧ-F-R*, to which [arab.] *ǧafr* 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.] *ǧafr* "young" quoted by [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn, 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.] *Ǧafr*~[arab.] *ǧafr*" ([arab.] *Kitāb al-Ǧafr*~[arab.] *Kitāb al-ǧafr*). Secondary literature ascribes this manuscript to the sixth Shii imam, [arab.] Ǧa'far aṣ-Ṣādiḳ (699 or 703-765).[347] According to [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn, the book had been passed on to [arab.] Ǧa'far aṣ-Ṣādiḳ by other members of the Alid family.[348] A priori, the information about [arab.] Ǧa'far aṣ-Ṣādiḳ'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-Ǧafr* originally authored by [arab.] Ǧa'far aṣ-Ṣādiḳ – if the Imam really was its author. Doubts about the authenticity of the [arab.] *Kitāb al-Ǧafr* are raised by [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn, 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-Ǧafr*~[arab.] *Kitāb al-ǧafr* is ascribed to the Arab author [arab.] Hārūn b. Sa'd al-Iǧlī (died around 768).[350] According to [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn, [arab.] al-Iǧlī had received both this book and the authorization to hand down its text from [arab.] Ǧa'far aṣ-Ṣādiḳ himself.[351] However, this statement by [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn about the presumed origin of the [arab.] *Kitāb al-Ǧafr* seems to be as doubtful as to the previous one. It is based on very distant and indirect information, as [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn avowedly neither saw the book itself nor is even able to be positive about its existence.

Independently, the question of whether the [arab.] *Kitāb al-ǧafr* existed or not, the name of [arab.] Ga'far aṣ-Ṣādiḳ became inseparably linked to the practice of [arab.] *ǧafr*[352] and therefore to Islamic lettrism as a whole. The phonetic similarity between [arab.] *Ǧafr*~[arab.] *ǧafr* and the *nomen proprium* [arab.] Ǧa'far (aṣ-Ṣādiḳ), as well as the fact that both the theory of arab.ǧafr 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. *ǧafr* only gives one other word, which is the noun [arab.] *ǧufra* "pit".

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

[348] Ibn Khaldûn 1967: 209f.

[349] Ibn Khaldûn 1967: 210; Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 687.

[350] According to Franz Rosenthal´s footnote in Ibn Khaldûn 1967: 209, the name [arab.] Hārūn b. Sa'd al-Iǧlī 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 Khaldûn 1967: 209; Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 687.

[352] Cf. Ibn Khaldûn 1967: 203.

the link between [arab.] Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiḳ and [arab.] *Ǧafr*~[arab.] *ǧafr* was already remarked by [arab.] Ibn Ḳutayba.[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.] Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiḳ.[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.] *Ǧafr*~[arab.] *ǧafr*" ([arab.] *Kitāb al-Ǧafr*~[arab.] *Kitāb al-ǧafr*) appeared or were at least assumed to appear, in the course of time. Once more following [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn, one of them belonged to [arab.] al-Kindī (ca. 800-873) and was dedicated to astrology.[356] [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn surmises that [arab.] al-Kindī´s [arab.] *Kitāb al-Ǧafr* was lost during the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258.[357] As for other alleged "Books of [arab.] *Ǧafr*~[arab.] *ǧafr*", [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn critically remarks that they never existed in his eyes.[358] Incidentally, the proliferation of books with the title of [arab.] *Ǧafr*~[arab.] *ǧafr* might constitute an indirect confirmation of the above-suggested etymology on the basis of the Greek word γραφή. 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.] *Ǧafr*~[arab.] *ǧafr*", [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn does not seem to be very fond of the literary genre of [arab.] *Ǧafr*~[arab.] *ǧafr* 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 [mpers.] Fażlollāh tried to convince various rulers of his lifetime – which largely coincides with the lifetime of [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn.[360] It seems to have been a widespread phenomenon during the 14th century and earlier that teachers with lettrist theories tried to approach rulers for support. For the genesis of [mpers.] Fażlollāh´s own lettrist 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.] *ǧafr* and similar speculations offered serious opportunities.

353 Macdonald 1913: 1037.

354 Ibn Khaldûn 1967: 203.

355 Macdonald 1913: 1037.

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

357 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 1249.

358 Ibn Khaldûn 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 Khaldûn 2002: 1248).

360 See, for instance, p. 133.

If we return to the general history of [arab.] *Ǧafr*~[arab.] *ǧafr* in Islam, we see that the initially more or less occasional references to [arab.] *Ǧafr*~[arab.] *ǧafr* developed into a whole branch of scholarship in the course of time. These type of studies became known as [arab.] *ʿilm al-ǧafr* "the knowledge of *ǧafr*".[361] According to [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn, the expression [arab.] *ʿilm al-ǧafr* was synonymous of [arab.] *as-Sīmiyā* 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 [mpers.] Fażlollāh´s [arab.] *Ḥurūfī*ya was directly linked to [arab.] *ʿilm al-ḥurūf*, [arab.] *as-Sīmiyā*, and [arab.] *ʿilm al-ǧafr*.

One of the most influential authorities on [arab.] *ʿilm al-ǧafr* was without any doubt [arab.] Ibn al-ʿArabī (1165–1240). Among other things, he left behind "The Book of the knowledge of *al-ǧafr*" ([arab.] *Kitāb ʿilm al-ǧafr*).[363] At least one of [arab.] Ibn al-ʿArabī´s pupils, [arab.] Saʿd ad-Dīn Ḥammū'ī (died 1252), was keenly interested in lettrism, too.[364] To [arab.] Ibn al-ʿArabī 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 [az.] Nəsimi.

Importantly, [arab.] Ibn al-ʿArabī´s thought is likely to have influenced [mpers.] Fażlollāh and [az.] Nəsimi. Among other things, the impact can be traced to the intermediary of [arab.] Ibn al-ʿArabī´s pupil [arab.] Ṣadr ad-Dīn Ḳonavī (1210–1274). For [arab.] Ṣadr ad-Dīn Ḳonavī was a close friend of [mpers.] Rūmī and thoroughly influenced his worldview, and [mpers.] Rūmī´s verses, in turn, played an important role in the spiritual awakening of [mpers.] Fażlollāh.[367] One must also not forget that [arab.] Ibn al-ʿArabī 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.] ʿAfīf 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. *ǧafr*.

362 Macdonald 1913: 1038. – For the dating of [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn´s authorship, see Ibn Khaldûn 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-ʿArabī, [arab.] Ṣadr ad-Dīn Ḳonavī, and [mpers.] Rūmī, see Chittick 1998–1999: 320; Heß 2018b: 67-72. For the inspiration of [mpers.] Fażlollāh by [mpers.] 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh would not have been influenced by it, either directly or indirectly, in particular, if one considers [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s strong interest in letter mysticism.

The influence that [arab.]Ibn al-ʿArabī and [mpers.]Rūmī had on [mpers.]Fażlollāh allows for an analysis of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya in the broader context of the development of intellectual currents within Islam. Together with other Sufis, [arab.]Ibn al-ʿArabī and [mpers.]Rūmī 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 [arab.]Futūva / [ttü.]Ahilik in Anatolia as a result of the Mongol conquests.[370] In the end, both [mpers.]Fażlollāh and his pupil and successor [az.]Nəsimi became part of this Sufi revival roughly a century after its heyday. Many traits of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya, 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 [arab.]Ibn al-ʿArabī and [mpers.]Rūmī. Crucially, there is a direct causal relationship between [arab.]Ibn al-ʿArabī´s irrational approach and his love of lettrism. 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 [arab.]Ibn al-ʿArabī 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh also chose to be a poet (using the pen name [mpers.]*Naʿīmī*) in addition to his activities as a preacher, and why the *poet* [az.]Nəsimi was able to sing with such fervor about [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh and which can also be found in the writings of [arab.]Ibn al-ʿArabī.

The above developments offer us an interesting way of understanding [arab.]Ḥurūfīya. They mean that the arbitrariness and the irrationalism that is manifest

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.

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 ([arab.]*ḫayāl*) was not an excluding alternative to the reason ([arab.]*ʿaḳl*) 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, [arab.]*ʿilm al-ḥurūf* could offer other ways to access the divine truth that was different from the paths of merely rationalist thinking.

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

However, the most important topic of [arab.]*ʿilm al-ǧafr* 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 [arab.]*Abǧad* system.[375] This meaning given to [arab.]*ʿilm al-ǧafr* seems to have been very widespread across the centuries. For instance, it is attested in the writings of the Ottoman scholar [osm.]Kātib Čelebi (1609–1657).[376]

Yet, the most important use of [mpers.]Fażlollāh and the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya made of [arab.]*ʿilm al-ǧafr* / [arab.]*ʿilm al-ḥurūf* was probably their theological speculation. To Islamic lettrists of the [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfī religion, we must recall that the conventional character of all human scripts had been partially obliterated in the post-Genghizid space. Whereas Islamic lettrist in Andalusia had included the Latin alphabet alongside

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

373 Cf. p. 92.

374 Pala 1998: 87, s. v. *cifr.* Cf. Wehr 1985: 188, s. v. *ǧafr* ("Wahrsagekunst").

375 Macdonald 1913: 1038.

376 Macdonald 1913: 1038.

377 Macdonald 1913: 1038.

the Arabic one into their meditations,[378] the school created by [mpers.]Faẓlollāh 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfī were either unconscious of or indifferent of 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfī doctrine. The reason for this was probably that [mpers.]Faẓlollāh was able to read only one alphabet, the Arabic one. [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn states about this mindset, which not only characterizes the [arab.]Ḥurūfīs but also other lettrist 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 [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr* a, it makes sense to discuss possible echoes of [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr* in Christian Europe as well. As is shown below, there seems not to be compelling evidence that the history of [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr* 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 [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr* 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 Khaldûn 1958: 173.

[380] Ibn Khaldûn 1958: 174.

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

therefore not come as a total surprise if the Islamic literature on [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr* 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 [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr* 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 *chifre*~ *chiffre*, modern French *chiffre* and their equivalents in other European languages were derived from the Classical Arabic word for "zero", [arab.]*ṣifr*.[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 [arab.]*ṣifr* 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 *ṣifr* but [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr*. 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 [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr* than from [arab.]*ṣifr* – in fact, if [arab.]*ṣifr* (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. *ṣifr*.

[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.[386] Appearing exclusively in the singular is, of course, one of the characteristics of the Arabic [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr*. 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.] *ṣifr* to this day. Among those who adhere to this traditional etymology is the eminent Romanicist 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.]*ṣifr* (the háček being only a different way of transcribing the Arabic voiceless denti-alveolar emphatic fricative, which is usually transcribed as "*ṣ*"). 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 *Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr* and not to [arab.]*ṣifr*. This is particularly likely if one considers that the meaning "figure, the number" is rendered in German, not by [germ.]*Chiffre*, but by the phonetically and orthographically different [germ.] *Ziffer*, which is assumed to be derived from [arab.]*ṣifr*.[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.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr*, or [arab.]*ṣifr*, or whether perhaps a more complex historical process that involves both Arabic

386 See the quote in footnote 385.

387 Curtius 1948: 349f.

388 Curtius 1948: 349f.

389 For instance, Menninger 1958: 215.

lexemes may be assumed to have taken place. Traditionally, in modern histories of numbers and the word "zero", the Arabic lexeme [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr* does not appear at all, and the only [arab.]*ṣifr* 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 τζίφρα, 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*~*ciphra*~*cifrus* (from which the Old French *chiffre* developed), and *cephirum* or *zephirum* (first attested by Leonardo da Pisa, 1170–1240), from which the Italian forms *zefiro*, *zevero*, *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 (*zephirum,* 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.]*ṣifr* and *not* [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr* as their source in all attested examples?[394] Using what kind of method could one distinguish examples of European words that have [arab.]*ṣifr* as their ultimate source from others that, hypothetically, could be related to, or influenced by, [arab.]*Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr*?

390 For instance, Corominas 1954: 796f., s. v. *cifra*; Menninger 1958: 215; Gómez de Silva 1985: 117, s. v. *cero* 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.]*ṣifr* "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.] *Ǧafr*~[arab.]*ǧafr*. A number of these lettrist activities are described in some detail by the conservative Sunni author [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn.

One of these lettrist methods was called [arab.]*ḥisāb an-nīm*.[395] Apparently, various procedures were subsumed under this name. [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn ascribes at least one of them to the mathematician and astrologer and master of [arab.]*as-Sīmiyā* [arab.]Abū ʿAbbās b. al-Bannāʾ (1256–1321). [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn 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 Ḫaldūn is called [arab.]*az-zāʾirağa*.[396] [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn 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 Yaʿḳūb al-Manṣūr (ruled 1184–1199).[398] The central element of [arab.]*az-zāʾirağa* was a concentrical arrangement of celestial bodies, elements, and other things. The drawing used for [arab.]*az-zāʾirağa* 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 Ḫaldūn, the practitioners of [arab.]*az-zāʾirağa* 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 Ḫaldūn quotes, the mystic from Ceuta uses [arab.]*az-zāʾirağa* 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, [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn considered that the practitioners of [arab.]*az-zāʾirağa* were in error and that [arab.]*az-zāʾirağa* did not give reliable information about invisible things.[402] [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn added a few remarks to his chapter about [arab.]*az-zāʾirağa* 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-zāʾirağa* 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 Ḫaldūn´s text is not precise about this point. However, the possibility to apply lettrist oracles of the [arab.]*az-zāʾirağa* 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh would do to the deepest questions about man, God, and the Quran. Not surprisingly, [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn´s descriptions of lettrist 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 Ḫaldūn and [mpers.]Fażlollāh represented opposite poles in the religious landscape of their times. For [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 Ḫaldūn also dwells on the particular branch of Islamic lettrism that was dedicated to the interpretation of the so-called "separated letters" ([arab.]*ḥurūf muḳaṭṭaʿ*) 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 muḳaṭṭaʿ* also is central to [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s doctrine.[406] According to [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn´s text, this kind of lettrist speculation was already practiced by [arab.]al-Kindī (ca. 800-873).[407] [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn ascribes an important stage in the history of the interpretation of the [arab.]*ḥurūf muḳaṭṭaʿ* to the historian [arab.]

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

396 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 1202–1205. The Arabic transcription has been created by myself on the basis of the expression la zâiraja" in the French text. – For another version of [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn´s text, see Ibn Khaldûn 1958: 182-227.

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

398 Ibn Khaldûn 1958: 183, 185. Cf. the explanations of Abdessalam Cheddadi in Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 1202, according to which [arab.]Aḥmad as-Sabtī lived in the 12th and 13th centuries.

399 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 1205 ("l´invisible").

400 Ibn Khaldûn 1958: 185.

401 Ibn Khaldûn 1958: 185.

402 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 1205: "Mais sur ce point, ils [i.e., the practitioners of [arab.]*az-zāʾirağa* – M.R.H.] sont dans l´erreur". Cf. Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 1206.

403 Ibn Khaldûn 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 célèste]. Ils ont été poussés à ces excès par l'exagération et l'égarement." (Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 1206)

405 See p. 122.

406 See chapter 4.5.2.5.

407 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 674.

as-Suhaylī (1114–1185).[408] [arab.]As-Suhaylī came from Fuengirola, a city in Southern Spain that was called [arab.]as-Suhayl during the Arab domination. [arab.]As-Suhaylī is the author of a commentary on the classical biography of the Prophet Muḥammad by [arab.]Ibn Isḥāḳ (ca. 704-768).[409] [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn writes that [arab.]as-Suhaylī was inspired by the story about the two Jewish lettrists [arab.]Abū Yāsir b. Aḫṭab and [arab.]Ḥuyayy b. Aḫṭab, which [arab.]Ibn Isḥāḳ narrates.[410] In this story, the passage Quran 3: 7 plays an important role, in which the expression "the mother of the Scripture" ([arab.]*Umm al-Kītāb*) occurs.[411] According to [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn, it was [arab.]as-Suhaylī who discovered for the first time that there are 14 [arab.]*ḥurūf muḳaṭṭaʿ*, which he arranged in a special order.[412] This means that the lettrist speculation of [arab.]as-Suhaylī shows three very concrete parallel to one of [mpers.]Fażlollāh: Both systems are concerned with the [arab.]*ḥurūf muḳaṭṭaʿ*, both relate them to the number "14", and in both the Quranic expression [arab.]*Umm al-Kītāb* plays an important role.

[arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn's mention of [arab.]al-Kindī in the context of lettrism is important also from another point of view. In yet another passage of his [arab.]*Muḳaddima*, [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn refers to the adherents of "lettrism" – at this point, he uses the term [arab.]*Sīmiyā*:[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 Ḫaldūn 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh shared an interest in the interpretation of the [arab.]*ḥurūf muḳaṭṭaʿ*. If this shared interest is based on the direct or indirect influence of [arab.]al-Kindī on [mpers.]Fażlollāh (possibly by the intermediary of other Muslim authors such as [arab.]as-Suhaylī, or

408 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 684. Cf. Cheddadi's comment in Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 1527.

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

410 Cf. below p. 97.

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

412 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 684.

413 On this term, cf. p. 78.

414 Ibn Khaldûn 1958: 171.

415 On Plotin, cf. p. 70 above.

416 Ibn Khaldûn 1958: 171.

[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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh'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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh's speculative ideas about the mystical meaning of letters become even more plausible if one reads another remark made by [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh made his own lettrist 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] Antique, including Neoplatonist thought finally also found its way into the Persianate world. Here, much was achieved by two members of the [mpers.]Sohravardī family: [mpers.]Yaḥyā ebne Ḥabaš as-Sohravardī (1154–1191), who is also known as [arab.]Šayḫ al-Išrāḳ ("The Master of the Enlightenment") and [arab.]al-Maḳtūl ("The Killed One", because he was executed for his beliefs), and [mpers.]Abū Ḥafs 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.]*vaḥdat al-vuǧūd*),[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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh and his movement, [arab.]Ibn al-ʿArabī is also a particularly likely intermediary because he was also an important representative of [arab.]*ʿilm al-ǧafr*.[422]

Finally, there is a particularly interesting mention in [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn's account of

417 See chapter 4.5.7.1.

418 Ibn Khaldûn 1958: 171f.

419 Massignon / Radke 1998–1999: 315.

420 Cf. Massignon / Radke 1998–1999: 315. On [mpers.]Yaḥyā ebne Ḥabaš, see Corbin 1960: 178 and Sohrawardi 1970.

421 Massignon / Radke 1998–1999: 315.

422 Cf. p. 82.

lettrism of a certain [arab.]al-Bāğarbaqī.[423] Initially, [arab.]al-Bāğarbaqī was a jurist of the [arab.]Ḥanafī school. [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn calls him "the master of the Turkic [arab.]Ḥanafīs of Egypt",[424] which seems to indicate Turkic, possibly Qipchak, origin, as the ruling Mameluke dynasty had Qipchak Turkic roots. Later on, [arab.]al-Bāğarbaqī became a mystic and for some time a member of the antinomian [arab.]Ḳalandarīya dervish movement.[425] In the end, as [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn writes, [arab.]al-Bāğarbaqī set up his own, radically antinomian and even atheistic movement, called [arab.]al-Bāğarbaqīya, which "was known for its denial of the Creator".[426] [arab.]Al-Bāğarbaqī died on April 11 or 12, 1324 in [arab.]al-Ḳābūn,[427] which today belongs to the city of Damascus. [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn quotes a number of verses that he ascribes to [arab.]al-Bāğarbaqī, and in some of the letter and number symbolism is employed.[428] In an apocalyptical 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-Bāğarbaqī´s ideas are quite similar to [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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-Bāğarbaqī as a (presumed) Turk and [arab.]Ḳalandarī dervish, [mpers.]Fażlollāh as a hat maker from a prominent jurist family. The fact that both [arab.]al-Bāğarbaqī and [mpers.]Fażlollāh were somehow involved in Islamic jurisprudence – [arab.]al-Bāğarbaqī personally, [mpers.]Fażlollāh through his father[430] – 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 Quran 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-Bāğarbaqī is that they directly address the intellectual elites of their times.[431] If we compare this to what [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn writes about the target audience of the [arab.]*az-zā'iraǧa* 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh himself but certainly to the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement after his death is the incitement to social unrest. In sum, the [arab.]al-Bāğarbaqī 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.]Ḥurūfīya by [mpers.]Fażlollāh was part of a larger preexisting tendency. Even before the preacher from [mpers.]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 Islamic – 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.]*Sīra*) of the Prophet [arab.]Muḥammad by [arab.]Ibn Isḥāḳ. In this work, which is considered one of the authoritative texts on the life of the Prophet in mainstream Islam, [arab.]Ibn Isḥāḳ relates a

423 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 701 ("Al-Bâjarbaqî").

424 *Le maître des hanafites turcs d'Egypte* (Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 700).

425 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 700f.

426 *Connue pour sa négation du Créateur* (Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 701).

427 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 701.

428 Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 701f.

429 *Le monde est dans la nuit et partout règnent les ténèbres … N'y-a-til personne pour défendre la foi? … Hommes des plaines et des montagnes, partez pour la Syrie!* (Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 702).

430 See chapter 4.5.4.1.

431 For instance, he addresses his readers with the words: *Comprends bien, en homme habile et intelligent, ma description* (Ibn Khaldûn 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.]Muḥammad and two Jews. These were [arab.]Abū Yāsir b. Aḫṭab, a tribal leader, and his brother [arab.]Ḥuyayy b. Aḫṭab. The subject of the discussion was the significance of the Arabic letters *ʾ-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.]Muḥammad Jews and Arabs were able to debate on lettrism on an equal footing. This seems to indicate that lettrism 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 lettrism have probably taken place. The fact that [arab.]as-Suhaylī lived in Andalusia in the 12th century, i. e., roughly one century before the creation of the first written Kabbalistic sources [436] makes such an impact likely. Incidentally, Andalusian Islamic lettrism had cultural contacts with Latin Europe, for instance, in the person of [arab.]Aḥmad as-Sabtī.[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 lettrism.[438] The time gap between Islamic lettrists such as [arab.]Aḥmad as-Sabtī and [arab.]as-Suhaylī on one hand and the *Sefer Ha-Bahir* on the other could mean that the Kabbalah owed more to Islamic lettrism than vice versa.

In sum, if one takes into account the similarities between the interpretation of [arab.]as-Suhaylī and the lettrist doctrine of [mpers.]Fażlollāh[439], one would not be surprised if there also was a certain amount of similarities between [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s teachings and Kabbalah.

4.5.2.5. Some basic aspects of Ḥurūfīya lettrism

Sections 4.5.2.5. and 4.5.2.6. try to summarize some important aspects of the doctrine of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya as it was created by [mpers.]Fażlollāh and to discuss [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s sources of inspiration. These chapters are placed before the biographical chapter on [mpers.]Fażlollāh[440] in order to preserve the continuity to the preceding chapters about Islamic lettrism in general. Readers wishing to be informed about the life of [mpers.]Fażlollāh first are requested to skip to chapter 4.5.4. first.

4.5.2.5.1. Fażlollāh´s main works

By far the most important reference texts of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya are the books written by [mpers.]Fażlollāh, 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.]Fażlollāh 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.]Fażlollāh´s theological texts, certainly the most important one is the [mpers.]*Ǧāvidān-nāme* ("Book of the Eternal"),[442] which contains an elaborate description of the [arab.]Ḥurūfī belief system. Because of its importance, it is also referred to as "The Great [mpers.]*Ǧāvidān-nāme*" ([mpers.]*Ǧāvidān-nāme-ye Kabīr*).[443] The [mpers.]*Ǧāvidān-nāme* and two other of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s books, the [mpers.]*Maḥabbat-nāme* ("Book of Love") and the [mpers.]*Arš-nāme* ("Book of the Throne"), were held in such high esteem by [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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.]*Ǧāvidān-nāme-ye elāhī*, [mpers.]*Maḥabbat-nāme-ye elāhī*, and [mpers.]*Arš-nāme-ye elāhī* ("Divine Book of the Eternal", "Divine Book of Love", "Divine Book of the Throne").[444] The [mpers.]*Ǧāvidān-nāme*, the [mpers.]*Maḥabbat-nāme* ("Book of Love") and the [mpers.]*Arš-nāme* ("Book of the Throne") were considered to be holy books by [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s pupils.[445]

The [mpers.]*Arš-nāme-ye elāhī* is a [mpers.]*masnavī* (narrative poem with the rhyme structure aa bb cc …) of didactic content. In it, [mpers.]Fażlollāh discusses some of his basic

435 See Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 1464 (explication by Abdesselam Cheddadi).

436 See p. 92.

437 See p. 91.

438 Matton 1977: 132.

439 See p. 93.

440 Chapter 4.5.4.

441 Divshali / Luft 1980: 22.

442 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIV.

443 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIV ([ttü.]*Câvidân-i Kebîr*).

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.]Muḥammad / hadiths.[446]

The [mpers.]*Maḥabbat-nāme-ye elāhī* is similar in content to the [mpers.]*Arš-nāme-ye elāhī*. as the title implies, it particularly focuses on the role of love.[447]

4.5.2.5.2. Letters and numbers

[mpers.]Faẓlollāh´s version of lettrism assumed that the "letters" ([arab.]*ḥurūf*, singular [arab.]*ḥarf*) 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.]Ḥurūfīs, 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.]Ḥurūfī system. Some of them are discussed briefly in this book.

446 A text of the [mpers.]*Arš-nāme-ye elāhī* is conserved in MS Pers. 46 of the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen (Divshali / Luft 1980: 19).

447 A text of the [mpers.]*Maḥabbat-nāme-ye elāhī* is also conserved in MS Pers. 46 of the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen (Divshali / Luft 1980: 20f.). – The [mpers.]*Maḥabbat-nāme-ye elāhī* might be identical with the [mpers.]*Maḥabbat-nāme-ye ǧavīd* ("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.]Ḥurūfī 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* ḥurūfī, *les phonèmes (*kalīma, *pl.* kalīmāt*) et les lettres (*ḥarf, *pl.* ḥurūf*) 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 Ḥurūfī speculation nor of the terminology used to describe it (boths 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 Ḥurūfī 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; Kürkçüoğlu 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-Fātiḥa*). Multiples of 7 play also an important role in [arab.]Ḥurūfī theology. For instance, "7" and its multiples are central constituents in the [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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.]*ḥurūf*) 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) پ, چ, ژ, and گ, 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.]*rakʿa*s) during the Muslim ritual prayer. For instance, the number of obligatory [arab.]*rakʿa*s 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.]*rakʿa*s on Fridays. This number of 15 [arab.]*rakʿa*s added to the 17 non-traveler [arab.]*rakʿa*s on other days give 32. Of course, these are tautologies, because the results that are to be 'proven' by adding the [arab.]*rakʿa*s are given in advance, and the pseudo-mathematical operations applied are designed in such a way as to a arrive at the desired results, i. e., 28 and 32. Incidentally, such operations seem to indicate that the lettrism of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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.]Ḥurūfīya´s system, too. For instance, "18" is said to represent the Book of Psalms ([mpers.]*Zabūr*), "22" the Pentateuch ([mpers.]*Tourāt*), and "33" the [mpers.]*Ǧāvidān-nāme*, [mpers.]Faẓlollāh´s main work, which is also referred to as [mpers.]*ketāb-e Ādam*~[mpers.]*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 [mpers.]*Maḥabbat-nāme-ye elāhī* (Divshali / Luft 1980: 21).

453 See chapter 4.5.2.5.3.

454 Kürkçüoğlu 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.]Ṣād (ص) occupies a special position.[456] Some [arab.]Ḥurūfī writings say that this letter can be replaced by the letter [arab.]Ḍād (ض), which looks similar.[457] In this context, one should note that [arab.]Ḍād is also the second consonant in [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s name, which is transcribed as "*ż*" in Modern Persian texts.

Not surprisingly, the [arab.]*ḥurūf muḳaṭṭaʿ*, 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 hālikun illā vağha-hū*, from the 28th surah, *al-Ḳïṣaṣ*, verse 88).[461]

A unique characteristic of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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 [mpers./arab.]*ḫaṭṭ*.[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 lettrist thought for many centuries.

[mpers.]Fażlollāh´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 lettrist 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, [mpers./arab.]*ḫaṭṭ*, 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, [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 lettrist 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.

[mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 32[469] by adding the concept of the [mpers.]*istivā* line. The lexical meanings of the word [mpers.]*istivā* (<Arabic) include "to be symmetrical" and "to raise vertically".[470] In the [arab.]Ḥurūfī magic, the [mpers.]*istivā* line is an imagined vertical line that divides the human face into two symmetrical halves.[471] This means that the human hair is split into two separate

456 Cf. the vision of this letter described by [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Sayyid Isḥāḳ.

460 Divshali / Luft 1980: 23.

461 This interpretation is put forward in a "Lettrist treatise" ([mpers.]*Risāle-ye ḥōrūfīya*, this may be the title oft he work or its classification) ascribed to [mpers.]Fażlollāh, which is conserved in MS Pers. 45 of the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen (see Divshali / Luft 1980: 24).

462 According to the [mpers.]*Maḥabbat-nāme-ye elāhī* (Divshali / Luft 1980: 21).

463 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XI.

464 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XI.

465 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XI.

466 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XI.

467 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XII.

468 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XII.

469 See p.100.

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

471 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIf.

lines, which makes the number of "mother lines" increase to eight.[472] Similarly, the [mpers.]*istivā* 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.]Ḥurūfī equation of anatomical and divine categories is an absolutely crucial element in [mpers.]Faẓlollāh´s home-made mystic lettrism. For it undermines the superiority of the Arabic language as a means of the transmission of Allah´s message and the discriminatory perspective that is encapsulated in it. By including the Persian language into his system of divine mathematics, [mpers.]Faẓlollāh 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 [az.]Nəsimi used was written with the 32 letters of the Perso-Arabic alphabet, too. At least from a numerological point of view, both [az.]Nəsimi´s Persian and his Old West Oghuz poems, therefore, had their place in the [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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 Abrahamitic 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.]Ḥurūfī lettrist 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 Allah are potentially identical) is presented to a public which cannot access reality otherwise than by means of the traditional mythological thinking, which includes lettrist fantasies.

4.5.2.5.4. The apotheosis of the Perfect Man

472 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIf.

473 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIf.

The [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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, [mpers.]Faẓlollāh´s pupil [mpers.]Sayyid Isḥāḳ wrote in his "Book of the Dust" ([mpers.]*Ṯurāb-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 [mpers.]*Ṯurāb-nāme*, [mpers.]Sayyid Isḥāḳ distinguishes five stages in the life of a human being: conception, birth, puberty, mission ([mpers.]*biʿṯat*) and the final stage, which he describes as "the transfer from the visible world to natural death" ([mpers.]*naḳl az ʿālam-e ẓāher be-mout-e ṭabīʿī*).[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.]Ḥurūfīya. As to the final point of this development, though, at least some [arab.]Ḥurūfīs went a step further than the Sufi mainstream as represented by [arab.]Ibn al-ʿArabī– whom we have seen to be one of the most important intellectual sources of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya – and other mainstream Sufis.[477] Although [arab.]Ibn al-ʿArabī 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-ʿArabī´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-ʿArabī, the criterion of divinity is ultimately to be found within man, but man was not Allah. 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.]Ḥurūfīs identified the perfected human being ([mpers.]*insān-e kāmil*) as God himself.[479]

474 Divshali / Luft 1980: 28.

475 Divshali / Luft 1980: 28, quoting from the [mpers.]*Turāb-nāme* according to the text in MS Pers. 45 of the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen.

476 [mpers.]*Turāb-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 ([mpers.]*risāle*) of the [arab.]Ḥurūfī author [mpers.]Sayyid Šarīfoddīn 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s thinking. In the [mpers.]*Maḥabbat-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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh had taken from [mpers.]Rūmī / [mpers.]Moulānā (1207–1273).[482] [mpers.]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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s life, the influence he got from [mpers.]Rūmī seems to have predated [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s ideas about the science of letters and numbers.[484] However, seen in the complete context of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s ideas, the important position of love in his thinking does raise the question of how it relates to all the mathematical operations [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh must have been one factor that attracted [az.]Nəsimi to his religious system. For most of [az.]Nəsimi ´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.]Ḥurūfīya 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, [mpers.]Fażlollāh and his followers believed that the world would soon live through a dramatic period of upheaval, in which the Messiah ([mpers.]*Maṣīḥ*), and his opponent, the [mpers.]*Daǧǧāl*), would make their appearance, before the world would ultimately be destroyed.[486]

This belief added urgency and drama to the teachings of [mpers.]Fażlollāh: 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. Fażlollāh´s sources of inspiration

Before following some stations of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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

[mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh describes his dreams he uses the verb [mpers.]*eḥsās kardan* to describe his experience.[489] It literally means "to feel", which reveals intuition to be an important factor in [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s worldview.

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480 Divshali / Luft 1980: 21.

481 A text of the [mpers.]*Maḥabbat-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.

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 lettrist layer of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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.]Ṣād (ص).[490]

Also by way of a dream, [mpers.]Fażlollāh claims to have become aware of one of the central principles of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya, 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 maẓhar-e ādam ast yā ādam maẓhar-e hame ašyāst*)."[491]

4.5.2.6.2. Eroticism

Another factor and motif in the genesis of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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.]Fażlollāh´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.]Fażlollāh relates how the observation of "many young people and beardless men and youths with only freshly sprouting beards" ([mpers.]*besyār ǧavānān o amradān o nav-ḫaṭṭ*), possibly in Isfahan, inspired in him the philosophical idea about the correspondence between the human face and other things.[492] Here are [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s words:

> "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.]Fażlollāh 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.]*vaǧh*) occupies in [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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.]Fażlollāh 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.]Fażlollāh 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.]Fażlollāh relates to, then this leaves the open question of why [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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.]*besyār ǧavānān o amradān o nou-ḫaṭṭ* 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 tendencious translation reveals a heteronormative perspective, which also dominates the overwhelming majority of the rest of the literature about the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya.

It is, of course, well-known that [mpers.]Fażlollāh was married more than once and

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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 Ispahan. Je percevais les objets materiels par [les traits] de leurs visages, je savais qu'il y a une loi et un procédé déterminés selon lequel les objets materiels 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.]*besyār ǧavānān o amradān o nou-ḫaṭṭ*, for the reasons indicated in the main text, and *je percevais* (Modern Persian, dialect of Astarābād: *eḥsās kīn*), because the verb seems to indicate a feeling or intuition rather than a direct perecption – M. R. H.).

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 ([arab.]*livāṭ*): 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s above dream was within the limits of societal and juridical acceptance.

4.5.2.6.3. Christianity

Another interesting source of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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 Chebels monumental encyclopedias on Islamic sexuality Chebel 1997 and Chebel 2003, as well as Chebel 2004 and Chebel 2006. For male homosexuality cf. Abû Nuwâs 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 [mpers.]Rūmī.[500] We have already seen in a number of examples how the thought and poetry of [mpers.]Rūmī directly influenced [mpers.]Fażlollāh.[501]

In the dreams collected in [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s [mpers.]*Noumnāme* ("Book of Dreams"), Christians and the city of Constantinople appear at various instances and [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 ([mpers.]Fażlollāh) 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh, independently of the fictional or non-fictional character of the passage and from the perspective of the speaker. For it then proves that [mpers.]Fażlollāh was familiar with or influenced by a passage from the Gospel.

Independently of the above quote from the [mpers.]*Noumnāme*, [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s familiarity with the Gospel is evident from numerous places in his [mpers.]*Ǧāvidān-nāme*.[504]

Possibly, the echos of Christian theology in the [mpers.]*Ǧāvidān-nāme* and the [mpers.]*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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh. One of them was [mpers.]Yaḥyā ebne Ḥabaš as-Sohravardī (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 a 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 Sohrawardi 1970: 29f.

discussions with Christians as the one narrated in the above-quoted dream were a reality in post-Genghizid Iran during [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s lifetime. The [arab.]Ḥurūfī author [owo.]Firišteoġlï describes such a debate, which is supposed to have taken place in the presence of the Jalairid sultan [arab.]Šayḫ Uways, i. e., between 1356 and 1374.[506]

Christian influence on the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya was also observed by Karl Binswanger.[507] According to him, some [arab.]Ḥurūfī rituals that used wine, bread, and cheese resemble Holy Communion.[508] The [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s life will be looked at in chapter 4.5.4., the survey of ideas that are likely to have shaped his [arab.]Ḥurūfīya must be completed by a contextualization of this movement with other Messianic groups of its time. For what makes the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement initiated by [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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.]Ḥurūfīya is directly manifest in its teachings, as has been shown.[510] In this respect, the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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.]Ḥurūfīya and of several other Messianic movements.[511] Among the elements that the Nizarites shared with the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya one finds the conviction that the Quran must not only be understood according to its literal meaning but also figuratively.[512] Besides their terrorism, the Nizarites took other ostentatively 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.]Ḥurūfīs, the latter cannot technically be regarded as a Nizari (or Ismaili) movement. One of the reasons for this is that the [arab.]Ḥurūfīs venerated all twelve Shii 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 Sarbadarids,[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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s [arab.]Ḥurūfīya, promised to reform or rectify the dominant cultural and religious landscape.

4.5.4. Fażlollāh of Astarābād

The history of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh.

506 MS 2916 of the Mevlana Museum Konya, fol. 37b-39a. – On [arab.]Šayḫ Uways, see above p. 31; on [owo.]Firišteoġlï 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.]Ḥurūfīya are mentioned in Huart / Tevfíq 1909: XIII.

513 Bashir 2002: 170.

514 Huart / Tevfíq 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-Maḳrīzī (1364–1442) [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s full Arabic name is [arab.]ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān Faḍlallāh Abū'l-Faḍl al-Astarābādī.[518] [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s pupil and successor [mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s birthplace,[520] or, perhaps, to the initiating dream he is said to have had in the city of [mpers.]Ḫvārezm.[521]

As [mpers.]Fażlollāh was also a poet, he had to use a literary sobriquet ([mpers.]*maḫlaṣ*, [mpers.]*taḫalloṣ*). His choice went for [mpers.]Naʿīmī.[522] This pseudonym is derived from the Persian word [mpers.]*naʿīm*, 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 [mpers.]Naʿīmī can be interpreted as having a meaning like "one who has something to do with pleasure."

Soheila Divshali and Paul Luft also mention that [mpers.]Fażlollāh was given the epithet [mpers.]Mašhadī,[526] which could either refer to a pilgrimage he is said to have made to Mashhad[527] or a longer stay in it.

In a number of writings by his pupils, [mpers.]Fażlollāh is said to be a descendant of the seventh Shii imam, [arab.]Mūsā al-Kāẓim (745-799).[528] Independently of the justification of such a claim, it is one of the elements that prove that [mpers.]Fażlollāh was part of the Shia tradition. For similar assertions are commonplace in Shia Islam, 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s descent from the seventh imam is really factual. From a statistical point of view at least, [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s being a relative of [arab.]Mūsā al-Kāẓim would not seem to be impossible given the fact that [arab.]Mūsā al-Kāẓim alone is said to have had more than 30 children and that 541 years passed between his death and [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s lifetime. Another version of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s genealogy claims him to be an offspring of the first Shii imam, [arab.]ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, through the sixth imam [arab.]Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiḳ.[529] A genealogy that includes [arab.]Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiḳ was, of course, important because of the role that was traditionally ascribed to this imam as a symbolic figure of Islamic lettrism.[530] One of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s followers, [mpers.]Mīr Šarīf, even claims that [mpers.]Fażlollāh was a direct descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad, a [arab.]Sayyid.[531]

As for [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s father [mpers.]Bahā'o'd-Dīn, at least one source states that he was a chief justice ([arab.]*ḳāḍī al-ḳuḍāt*) of [mpers.]Astarābād.[532]

4.5.4.2. Birth and early life

[mpers.]Fażlollāh was born in 1339 or 1340[533] in the city of [mpers.]Astarābād on the Caspian Sea coast.[534]

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518 Ritter 1954: 7. Cf. Amoretti 1986: 632. – On [arab.]Al-Maḳrīzī, cf. Wiederhold 1999 and Wiederhold 1999a.

519 [mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā 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. *naʿim* ("glückseliges Leben", "Luxus","Glück").

524 Gesenius 1962: 509, s. v. מענ.

525 Gesenius 1962: 509, s. v. מענ.

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*).

529 Ritter 1954: 8f., quoting fol. 80b of [mpers.]Mīr Fāżilī´s [mpers.]*Risāle* from MS Ali Emîrî Farsça 1039 of Istanbul´s Millet Library.

530 See chapter 4.5.2.3.

531 Gölpınarlı 1973: 4, quoting from [mpers.]Mīr Šarīf´s [arab.]*Bayān al-Vāḳiʿ* ("The explanation of the factual"), the [mpers.]*Ṣalāt-nāme-ye* İšḳurt *Dede* ("*İšḳurt* Dede´s Book on Ritual Prayer), and the [mpers.]*Risāle* of [mpers.]Mīr Fāżilī, all of which are contained in the MS Ali Emîrî Farsça 1039 of Istanbul´s Millet Library.

532 Bashir 2002: 172.

533 The [mpers.]*Istivā-nāme* ("Book of the symmetry line"), written by [mpers.]Amīr Ġiyāṣoddīn 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 Emîrî 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s birth in [mpers.]Astarābād see Gölpınarlı 1973: 4 (who quotes relevant primary sources) and Halm 1988: 99.

[mpers.]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 [mpers.]Gorgān[535], the center of which is a few kilometers´ away from the Caspian Sea coast. In antiquity, the region around [mpers.]Astarābād had been known as Hyrkania (Ὑρκανία),[536] which changed its name to [arab.]Ṭabaristān after the Arab occupation, and finally became known as the historical region of [mpers.]Māzanderān. Today, the city of [mpers.]Gorgān is part of Iran´s [mpers.]Golestān province, to the east of the present-day province of [mpers.]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.[537]

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 [mpers.]Māzanderān with varying amounts of autonomy. Their control over the region was interrupted several times, for instance, as a consequence of Ghaznavid and Ḫvārezmian invasions. In 1238, the Bāvandids eventually became vassals of the Mongols.[538] The Bāvandid dynasty finally disappeared in 1349.[539] That year, [mpers.]Fażlollāh was about nine years of age.

[mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Bahā'o'd-Dīn occupied the post of a [arab.]*ḳāḍī al-ḳuḍāt* in Astarābād.[541] Apparently, [mpers.]Fażlollāh was not able to inherit or continue the profession of his father. There is a number of possible reasons for this. For instance, [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Astarābād, etc. Incidentally, we know that the office of [arab.]*ḳāḍī* or judge (albeit not chief justice) was hereditary in some parts of the post-Genghizid space at that time. For instance, the family of [owo.]Burhāneddīn, the ruler of Sivas, had inherited the post of the [arab.]*ḳāḍī* in that town.[542]

535 Bosworth 1987: 839.

536 Cf. Treidler 1979a.

537 Altheim 1959: 11.

538 Cf. Madelung 2019 [1984 / 2011].

539 Madelung 2019 [1984 / 2011].

540 Bausani 1979: 600.

541 See p. 116 above. – Halm 1988: 99 refers to the profession of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s father as "city judge" ([germ.]*Stadtrichter*).

542 Alparslan 1977: XIII-LIII.

In any case, information about [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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 ([arab.]*ḳāḍī*) 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 [arab.]*ḳāḍī* 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 ([arab.]*ḳāḍī al-ḳuḍāt*) 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, [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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, [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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, [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s family, cf. section 4.5.4.7.

545 On the Sarbadarids, cf. p. 35.

system of belief and thought directly influenced mpers.Fażlollāh´s ideas.[546] Perhaps it also played a role in his decision to become a professional mystic.

Around the year 1357, mpers.Fażlollāh began to develop a profound interest in Islamic mysticism (also called Sufism).[547] His subsequent pupil mpers.Sayyid Isḥāḳ claimed that one of the reasons for this new orientation was an encounter mpers.Fażlollāh had with a wandering mendicant (mpers.*darvīš*). The dervish recited verses of the great Persian mystical poet mpers.Rūmī (= mpers.Moulānā or mpers.Ǧalāloddīn, 1207–1273).[548] Among the verses were the following two lines:

mpers.*Az marg če andīšī čūn ǧān-e baḳā dārī*
Dar gūr koǧā gonǧī čūn nūr-e Ḫodā dārī[549]

"What are you fearing from death as you have the life[550] 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 Abrahamitic 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.*nūr*) and "imperishability" (mpers.*baḳā*). 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. Rūmī lines may have given an important stimulus to the focus on this self, which later on became such a pivotal element of mpers.Fażlollāh´s imagination. For there are clear parallels between mpers.Rūmī´s phrases and the ideas mpers.Fażlollāh developed by himself. They stand in a continuity of thought and tradition.

Around the time when mpers.Fażlollāh was impressed by the above verses, he is said to have had a teacher by the name of mpers.Kamāl od-Dīn.[552] In one of his poems, mpers.Fażlollāh also mentions a certain "mpers.Šayḫ Ḥasan, the pole of the world, a man of knowledge" (mpers.*ḳoṭb-e* ʿālem *mard-e maʿnā* Šayḫ *Ḥasan*) and calls him "the one who brought me on the right path" (mpers.*moršed-e man*).[553] According to ttü.Kemâl Edib Kürkçüoğlu, mpers.Šayḫ Ḥasan was a "Sufi shaykh".[554] Nothing more seems to be known about either mpers.Kamāl od-Dīn or mpers.Šayḫ Ḥasan. However, even their mentioning reflect historical facts that are meaningful. This shows that mpers. Fażlollāh did not seem to have been a complete autodidact.

After his first mystical initiations, mpers.Fażlollāh went on the pilgrimage to Mecca for the first time.[555] Before returning home, he visited the mpers.Ḫvārezm oasis.[556] It is not known whether this was the trip to mpers.Ḫvārezm on which mpers.Fażlollāh 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.Fażlollāh might have visited mpers. Ḫvārezm more than once.

Among the places visited by mpers.Fażlollāh was also the town of mpers.Yazd[558] and the important Shii city Mashhad.[559] In sum, the number of mpers.Fażlollāh´s trips and their chronology is not certain.

4.5.4.4. Fażlollāh´s dreams and prophethood

In the Islamicate 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 prophesy. 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. arab.Ibn Ḫaldūn (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 Gölpınarlı 1973: 5; Bausani 1979: 600.

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

549 Text adapted from Gölpınarlı 1973: 5, who quotes from mpers.Sayyid Isḥāḳ´s mpers. *Ḫvābnāme* (cf. footnote 566).

550 Or "soul".

551 On similar expressions in az.Nəsimi´s poems, cf. chapter 6.2.

552 mpers.Sayyid Isḥāḳ, mpers.*Ḫvābnāme*, quoted in Gölpınarlı 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 ttü.*Bâtınî şeyh* (Kürkçüoğlu 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 Isḥāḳ´s mpers.*Ḫvābnāme* (quoted by Gölpınarlı 1973: 5 from fol. 19a of the Ali Emiri Farsça 1042 manuscript).

557 See p. 122.

558 Gölpınarlı 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."[560]

The fact that [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn 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 Ḫaldūn and [mpers.]Fażlollāh even were direct rivals. For it is well-known that [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn missionized at the court of Tamerlane. Albeit it is doubtful whether [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s at the court of Tamerlane´s son [mpers.]Mīrān Šāh. The direct comparison of [arab.]Ibn Ḫaldūn and [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh.[562] According to one statement by his pupil [mpers.]Sayyid Isḥāḳ, [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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), [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s visits in [mpers.]Ḫvārezm.[565] In the dream as it is described by his pupils, [mpers.]Fażlollāh sees a bright star that rises in the east. Then a beam of light from this star penetrates his right eye. After waking up

560 *Cela prouve qu'il existe une analogie entre le rêve et la prophétie, mais dont Dieu seul connaît le dégré. 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 Khaldûn 2002: 1198; my English translation). Similar statements by Ibn Ḫaldūn are given in Ibn Khaldûn 2002: 681, 1192, and 1194.

561 Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257.

562 Cf. Bausani 1979: 600.

563 [mpers.]Sayyid Isḥāḳ, [mpers.]*Ḫᵛābnāme*, quoted in Gölpınarlı 1973: 5.

564 Mir-Kasimov 2009: 250.

565 Mir-Kasimov 2009: 250. There are two sources of this statements: The [mpers.]*Ḫᵛābnāme* of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s pupil [mpers.]Sayyid Isḥāḳ Astarābādī, and a marginal note in [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s own [mpers.]*Ḫᵛābnāme*. See the bibliographic references given Mir-Kasimov 2009, *loc. cit.*

from the dream, [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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.]*ʿullimnā manṭiḳa'ṭ-ṭayr*). By ascribing the same skill, to understand the language of the birds, to himself, [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Ḫvārezm, therefore, constitutes an act of religious self-empowerment. With the communication of this dream to the outside world, [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s assertion that he is able to understand the birds´ language (just like [arab.]Sulaymān did), [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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 [az.]Nəsimi in particular: the use of veiled and equivocal language. As we have already seen, both follow the ancient Shii 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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 [mpers.]*Ḫᵛābnāme* of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s pupil [mpers.]ʿAlī Nafaǧī. A more detailed version of it is contained in [mpers.]Sayyid Isḥāḳ Astarābādī´s [mpers.]*Ḫᵛābnāme*. 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.] Ḫvārezm.[568] In this second dream, [mpers.] Fażlollāh 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.] Fażlollāh´s pupil [mpers.] ʿAlī Nafağī, the master heard a divine voice that explained to him that he was superior even to the Prophet [arab.] Muḥammad himself:

> "He is the Master of the time, *the sultan of all the prophets*. Other people acquire their knowledge about elevated levels of [arab.] Muḥammad 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.] Fażlollāh. 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.] Muḥammad is the "Sultan of all prophets" ([mpers.] *suḷṭān-e hame payġāmbarān*),[571] but – [mpers.] Fażlollāh. Of course, the fact that [mpers.] Fażlollāh already presented himself as a prophet contradicts mainstream (both Sunni and Shii) Islam, which assumes [arab.] Muḥammad to be the last of all prophets. Nevertheless, [mpers.] Fażlollāh´s pupils accepted his prophethood and venerated him accordingly.[572]

The importance of [mpers.] Fażlollāh´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.] Fażlollāh 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 Ḫaldūn wrote: "Many people are found who desire to learn about these things in their sleep (through dreams)."[574] In contrast to [mpers.] Fażlollāh, [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn 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.] Fażlollāh wanted to confer upon himself. They compare him to the most important Islamic prophets, including [arab.] Ādam, [arab.] Ibrāhīm, [arab] ʿĪsā, and [arab] Muḥammad.[576] In one particular dream [mpers.] Fażlollāh compares himself to the imam [arab.] ʿAlī 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.] Fażlollāh as the person who would unify the different confessions;[578] this is a function traditionally ascribed to the Mahdi.[579] According to Heinz Halm, [mpers.] Fażlollāh described himself as the Shii imam of his times by assuming the title [arab.] *ṣāḥib 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.] *ṭavāf*) 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.] Muḥammad and the Shii imams, that [mpers.] Fażlollāh 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 Arabic eulo-

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568 Mir-Kasimov 2009: 253 quotes various [arab.] Ḥurūfī 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 maitre (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.] Fażlollāh from [mpers.] ʿAlī Nafağī´s [mpers.] *Ḫ*ᵛ*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 dégrés élevés de Muḥammad 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.] ʿAlī Nafağī´s [mpers.] *Ḫ*ᵛ*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 Khaldûn 1967: 200.

575 Ibn Khaldûn 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.] Fażlollāh 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.

gies of the type arab.*ǧalla ʿizzu-hū va-ʿazza faḍlu-hū* "His power is mighty, and his virtue is powerful" (with the word arab.*faḍl* "virtue" simultaneously being the abbreviated form of mpers.Fażlollāh´s proper name).[583] The similarity to eulogies that in mainstream Islam refer to God, such as arab.*ǧalla ǧalālu-hū* "His might is mighty",[584] is striking. Also, mpers.Fażlollāh´s disciples usually added to the titles of the master´s works the adjective mpers.*elāhī* "divine".[585] Furthermore, in the mpers.*Korsīnāme* ("Book about the Throne", written in 1410), mpers.Fażlollāh´s model student mpers.ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā. referred to mpers.Fażlollāh with the honorific expression mpers.*żāmīr-e munīr-e Fażl-e Rabbo'l-ʿĀlamīn* "the enlightening mind of the Grace / arab.*Fażl* 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 mpers.*Fażl* ("Grace / mpers.Fażl(ollāh)", and the status constructus mpers.*Rabbo'l-ʿĀlamīn* "the Lord of the Worlds". If an identity relationship is assumed between them this means that the mpers.*Fażl* is identical with mpers.*Rabbo'l-ʿĀlamīn*, which in turn is identical with Allāh. In other words, the phrase can be read as an apotheosis of mpers.Fażl(ollāh). On the other hand, due to the inherent polysemy or structural ambiguity of the Persian mpers.*eżāfe*, mpers.*Rabbo'l-ʿĀlamīn* might also be the determinans of mpers.*Fażl*. In this case, "the Lord of the Worlds" would not be the same as "Grace / mpers.Fażl(ollāh)", but would denote something that "Grace / mpers.Fażl(ollāh)" possesses. In any case, the juxtaposition of mpers.*Rabbo'l-ʿĀlamīn* and the word mpers.*Fażl*, which can both mean "Grace" and be used as an abbreviated form of the name mpers.Fażl(ollāh), is striking. Another formulation that may sound like an apotheosis is the phrase owo.*šehīd-i ʿišḳ-i Fażl-i zü'l-ǧelāl* "martyr of the love of Fażl, the Lord of Glory", which is applied to az.Nəsimi in owo.Refīʿī´s owo.*Bešāret-nāme*.[587] If owo.*Fażl* refers to mpers.Fażlollāh here, this quotation qualifies him by using the expression owo.*zü'l-ǧelāl* ("the Lord of Glory"), which in mainstream Allah is frequently used for Allah.

4.5.4.5. Missionizing

mpers.Fażlollāh 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

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

584 See Wehr 1985: 188, s.v. *ǧalla*.

585 Mir-Kasimov 2009: 264.

586 Quote from Ritter 1954: 22, where also the date of the composition of the mpers.*Korsīnāme* is given.

587 See p. 201.

their support. In fact, after the initiation dream of mpers.Ḫvārezm, 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 mpers.Fażlollāh 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. mpers.Fażlollāh´s capabilities in the art of oneiromancy built a bridge between mpers.Fażlollāh´s rise of consciousness and society at large. For instance, one man once told mpers.Fażlollāh that he had dreamt his underwear went up in flames. Upon this, mpers.Fażlollāh 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 mpers.Fażlollāh´s days, similar displays of oneiromancy doubtlessly raised his prestige as well as the number of his supporters.

After his first advances into mysticism, mpers.Fażlollāh 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 mpers.Sayyid Isḥāḳ in his mpers.*Ḫvābnāme*. This text mentions that mpers.Fażlollāh went through a period of spiritual exercises in Isfahan´s owo.Toḳči 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 mpers.Fażlollāh the epithet mpers.*ḥalāl-ḫor* "eating only things that are allowed by the religion (halal)".[591]

At the latest from that time onward, the owo.Toḳči quarter with the eponymous mosque became one of the most important centers of activities of mpers.Fażlollāh and his school. It appears in a number of primary sources. Gathering in the owo.Toḳči mosque with his followers, mpers.Fażlollāh continued to interpret the dreams of the local population. This helped him to gain more influential supporters.[592]

In 1374, mpers.Fażlollāh met the Muẓaffarid ruler mpers.Šāh Šoǧāʿ in Tabriz. mpers.Šāh Šoǧāʿ had been able to take the city after the death of the Jalairid ruler arab.Šayḫ Uways in that same year but lost control over it again after only a few months.[593] mpers.Fażlollāh tried to endear himself to the Muẓaffarid court by writing a book

588 This dream is told in owo.Firišteoġlï´s Turkic translation of mpers.Sayyid Isḥāḳ´s mpers.*Ḫvābnāme* (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, mpers.ʿEzz ad-Dīn Šoǧāʿ.[594] Here, we already see a clear attempt to enter politically influential circles.

After he had stayed in Tabriz for a while, mpers.Fażlollāh 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, mpers.Fażlollāh had the ultimate spiritual experience of his life. This event is referred to as "the manifestation of greatness" (mpers.*ẓohūr-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 mpers.Fażlollāh himself. In any case, one should note the etymological relationship between the word arab.*kibriyā'* and the Arabic comparative-superlative arab.*akbar* ("greater", "the greatest"), which occurs, for instance, in the traditional formula arab.*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, mpers.Fażlollāh publicly declared to have been given the last revelation about the nature of prophethood (mpers.*nobūva*) and, more importantly, the secret meaning of the letters of the Arabic alphabet.[599]

The mpers.*ẓohūr-e kibriyā'* was the preliminary culmination of a long process in mpers.Fażlollāh´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 mpers.Fażlollāh 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, mpers.Fażlollāh´s contemporary arab.Ibn Ḫaldūn states,

594 Mir-Kasimov 2009: 262.

595 Gölpınarlı 1973: 7; Bausani 1979: 600.

596 Gölpınarlı 1973: 7; Bausani 1979: 600.

597 According to mpers.ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā´s mpers.*Kursīnāme*, 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.

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-Bûnî 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 mpers.*ẓohūr-e kibriyā'* was probably also the occurrence which completed the establishment of the arab.Ḥurūfīya doctrine, as it is documented in the writings of mpers.Fażlollāh and his pupils, including az.Nəsimi. 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 mpers.Fażlollāh.

Writing in 1442 / 1443, the arab.Ḥurūfī author mpers.Amīr Ġiyāṯoddīn dates the mpers.*ẓohūr-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 arabḤurūfī manuscript.[602] According to another anonymous note in another and quite early arabḤurūfī manuscript, mpers.Fażlollāh publicly proclaimed himself as the Mahdi in that year, which might be a reference to the mpers.*ẓohūr-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 mpers.*ẓohūr-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 mpers.Fażlollāh in the mpers.*Korsīnāme* ("Book about the Throne") written in 1410 by his prominent successor mpers.ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā. However, the text of the mpers.*Korsīnāme* does

600 Ibn Khaldûn 1958: 174-176.

601 See his mpers.*Istivā-nāme*, quoted in Gölpınarlı 1973: 3. *Ibidem*, Gölpınarlı also quotes another, anonymous Ḥurūfī manuscript contained in the Ali Emîrî Farsça 1052 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 Divshali / Luft 1980: 23.

604 Bashir 2002: 174.

not use the expression [mpers.] *ẓohūr-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" ([mpers.] *hast-e mouǧūdāt ke … bar żāmīr-e munīr-e Fażl-e Rabbo'l-ʿĀlamīn nozūl kard*, where the expression [mpers.] *Fażl-e Rabbo'l-ʿĀlamīn*, as has been mentioned above, is probably a reference to [mpers.] Fażlollāh).[605] Therefore, one cannot be sure whether the event described here by [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā and the [mpers.] *ẓohūr-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 Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı. Referring to [mpers.] Sayyid Isḥāḳ's [mpers.] *Ḫᵛābnāme*, Gölpınarlı had argued that what happened in A. H. 775 might in fact not yet have been the [mpers.] *ẓohūr-e kibriyā'* but the authority is given to [mpers.] Fażlollāh (by himself) to dispose of "the knowledge necessary to give the ultimate interpretation of the prescripts of the sharia" ([ttü.] *şer'î hükümleri te'vîl 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 [mpers.] Fażlollāh, 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.] Ḥurūfi literature.[608] Other information that might be related to the [mpers.] *ẓohūr-e kibriyā'* probably happened three years after [mpers.] Fażlollāh'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 [mpers.] Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.] *ẓohūr-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 [mpers.] Fażlollāh's ultimate spiritual awakening was influenced by or played a role in some of the dramatic developments of

605 Quoted in Ritter 1954: 22. – On the interpretation of [mpers.] *Fażl-e Rabbo'l-ʿĀlamīn*, see above p. 126.

606 Bashir 2002: 174.

607 Gölpınarlı 1973: 6, quoting the Istanbul manuscript Ali Emîrî Farsça 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 [mpers.] *ẓohūr-e kibriyā'*.

the period in question. These occurrences include a series of events in Tabriz, such as the city's ephemeral occupation by the Muẓaffarids (1376), the defeat of the Jalairids at the hands of the [az.] Qaraqoyunlu not far from it (September 1382), it is being conquered by Tamerlane and subsequently lost to [az.] 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 [mpers.] *ẓohūr-e kibriyā'* happened.

Another consequence of the above described chronological incertitude is that one does not know when exactly [mpers.] Fażlollāh wrote his main work, the [mpers.] *Ǧāvidānnāme* ("The Book of the Eternal"). For [mpers.] Fażlollāh is said to have written it around the time he experienced the [mpers.] *ẓohūr-e kibriyā'*.[610]

After the [mpers.] *ẓohūr-e kibriyā'*, [mpers.] Fażlollāh 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 [mpers.] Fażlollāh'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, [mpers.] Fażlollāh continued to travel. Probably all of his journeys that followed the [mpers.] *ẓohūr-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, [mpers.] Fażlollāh himself mentioned that he stayed in [mpers.] Dāmġān[614] and [mpers.] Boruǧerd at unknown times.[615] He is also said to have traveled to the Iranian region of [mpers.] Gīlān.[616]

[mpers.] Fażlollāh 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 Muẓaffarids, Jalairids, Sarbadarids[617] 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 [mpers.] *Korsīnāme* (see p. 126).

613 Cf. Bashir 2002: 174.

614 In dreams nr. 86, 89 and 100 of the [mpers.] *Noumnāme*, quoted in Mir-Kasimov 2009: 290, 293. The stay at [mpers.] Dāmġān is also mentioned by Gölpınarlı 1973: 7.

615 Dreams nr. 34, 38, and 196 of the [mpers.] *Noumnāme*, quoted in Mir-Kasimov 2009: 284, 285, 297.

616 Gölpınarlı 1973: 7.

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

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. Fażlollā approached was az. Toxtamış.[618] Details of mpers. Fażlollāh´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 az. Toxtamış was in person in Iran for one of his invasions.[619] The seriousness of mpers. Fażlollāh´s plans concerning az. 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 az. Toxtamış´ family, mpers. Fażlollāh 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. Fażlollāh had evolved from an ordinary Sufi into an aspirant for political power. Therefore, even if we do not know whether mpers. Fażlollāh´s advances toward az. Toxtamış took place before or after the mpers. *zohūr-e kibriyā'* and the beginning of mpers. Fażlollāh´s arab. Ḥurūfī missionizing campaign,[622] it appears to be a natural assumption to ascribe a political intention to the arab. Ḥurūfīya, besides its obvious religious, mystical and philosophical aspects, from its earliest stages onward. This is proven, among other things, by the continuity of mpers. Fażlollāh´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. Ḥurūfīya 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. Fażlollāh once more stayed in Isfahan´s owo. Toḳči 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

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 *Türk* (突厥 Tūjué): "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 qǔ Yí Dí nǚ zhě; 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 Gölpınarlı 1973: 7.

his dreams in the owo. Toḳči 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. Fażlollāh 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. Fażlollāh 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 İbrahim I. and his ally Tamerlane confronted az. Toxtamış. The territory of the Golden Horde was not far away. az. 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. Fażlollāh arrived at Baku, the city must have been under Tamerlane´s control. For the arab. Ḥurūfī leader managed to win the protection of Tamerlane´s son mpers. Mīrān Šāh there,[628] which implies that mpers. Mīrān 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. Ḥurūfī theories. For the convention came up with an unequivocal condemnation of the arab. Ḥurūfīya doctrine.[629] As a result of this verdict, mpers. Mīrān Šāh had mpers. Fażlollāh was thrown into prison in Baku.[630]

This marks the beginning of the final episode in the remarkable life of the hat maker from mpers. Astarābād.

4.5.4.6. Imprisonment and death

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

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 Aşurbəyli 1998: 43-45. – mpers. Fażlollāh 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 Aşurbəyli 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 (mpers. *ḳiyāmat*), 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. Ǧazīra. In Arabic, the name can mean "island" (arab. *ǧazīra*). 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 az. Zirə, which apparently communicates the meaning "island". These include az. Böyük Zirə, an island directly opposite of Baku,[632] az. Daş Zirə ("Stone Island"), and az. Xərə Zirə. Also, there is a modern village by the name of az. Zirə, which is situated close to the eastern tip of the Absheron Peninsula. The fact that this village is not far from the *island* of az. 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. Ǧazīra mentioned in connection with mpers. Fażlollāh´s dream. Perhaps this arab./mpers. Ǧazīra 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. Fażlollāh was imprisoned in the city of Baku.[634] He considers this imprisonment to have taken place on the orders of mpers. Mīrān Šāh.[635] Similarly, ttü. Kemâl Edib Kürkçüoğlu states that mpers. Fażlollāh was arrested in az. Şamaxı and spent the final period of his life both in that town and in Baku.[636] ttü. Kürkçüoğlu also mentions that a fatwa was issued by a certain mpers. Sayḫ Ebrāhīm to justify mpers. Fażlollāh´s execution.[637]

The Iranian Iranologist mpers. Ṣādeḳ Kiyā has published a short text which he considers to be mpers. Fażlollāh´s final letter from captivity.[638] Together with some instructions for his relatives and friends, the text contains a short elegy in which mpers. Fażlollāh likens his own situation to the martyrdom of the imam arab. Al-Ḥusayn at Kerbela:

Dar hame ʿomr-am ma-rā yek dūst dar-Šervān na-būd
Dūst kī bāšad koǧā-ī kāš būdī āšinā

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 (ttü. Şeyh İbrâhîm).

638 Kiyā 1951: 30f.

Man Ḥosayn-e vaḳt o nā-ahlān Yazīd o Šemr-e man
Rūz-gār-am ǧomle ʿĀšūr o Šervān 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. Ḥosayn of these times, and these brutes are like mpers. Yazīd[640] and mpers. Šemr[641] to me.
All my days are like the 10th of Muḥarram,[642] and Shirvan is like Kerbela."

In addition to this letter, at least one testament (mpers. *vaṣīyat-nāme*) is ascribed to mpers. Fażlollāh.[643]

It is most frequently assumed that mpers. Fażlollāh was executed in the month arab. D̲ū'l-Ḳaʿda of the year A. H. 796 (first day: August 28, 1393; last day: September 26, 1394).[644] The order to execute mpers. Fażlollāh had been given by mpers. Mīrān Šāh from a place called mpers. Astābād.[645] mpers. Astābād no longer exists but it was situated not far from az. Əlincə and az. Naxçıvan. It must not be confused with mpers. Fażlollāh´s birthplace mpers. Astarābād. The execution is said to have been carried out in the fortress of az. Əlincə by mpers. Mīrān Šāh in person.[646] The fact that the Tamerlane´s son himself killed mpers. Fażlollāh 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-Ḥusayn.

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

642 This is the date on which arab. Al-Ḥusayn 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 Emîrî Farsça 993, fol. 104b, the second one in MS Ali Emîrî Farsça 1009 (beginning) and MS Ali Emîrî 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. D̲ū'l-Ḥiǧǧa 6, A. H.796. An anonymous marginal note in an early arab. Ḥurūfī manuscript mentions the year A. H. 799 (first day: October 5, 1396; last day: September 23, 1397) as the date of mpers. Fażlollāh´s execution (quoted in Divshali / Luft 1980: 23).

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

646 Ritter 1954: 1.

4.5.4.7. Progeny

mpers.Fażlollāh 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.Maḫdūme-ye Bozorg Fāṭema, the second mpers.Maḫdūm-zāde, and the third mpers.Maḫdūme-ye Noṣrat.[647]

mpers.Fażlollāh 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.Fażlollāh´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.Fażlollāh´s children bear speaking names that allude to the religious mindscape of their father.

Perhaps the most famous of mpers.Fażlollāh´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 ʿOlyā and arab.Kalimatullāh hiya'-l-ʿUlyā, 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.Fażlollāh´s locum tenens (mpers.*ḳā'im-maḳām*) and heir (mpers., arab.*vaṣī*).[650] The adjective mpers.ʿOlyā / arab.al-ʿUlyā is a feminine relative or superlative form, the masculine equivalent of which is arab./mpers.*Aʿlā*. Therefore, the epithet bestowed upon mpers.Kalemetollāh belongs to the same grammatical category as that of mpers.ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā.[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.Maḫdūm-zāde, mpers.Fażlollāh 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.Ḫātūn Ḫāndagār.[653] She was from the marriage with mpers.Maḫdūme-ye Noṣrat, [654] just like another daughter who was called mpers.Bībī ʿElmolketāb ("Lady The Knowledge of the Book").[655]

Of mpers.Fażlollāh´s sons we know mpers.Amīr Ḥabībollāh ("Commander The Friend of Allah"),[656] mpers.Amīr Kalīmollah ("Commander The Speaker of Allah"),[657] mpers.Amīr Masīḥollāh ("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 Kalīmollah, mpers.Amīr Nūrollāh, and mpers.(Amīr) Salāmollāh were sons from the marriage with mpers.Maḫdūm-zāde.[662] mpers.Amīr Ḥabībollāh and mpers.Amīr Masīḥollāh were from the marriage with mpers.Maḫdūme-ye Noṣrat.[663]

mpers.Kalemetollāh was not the one only of mpers.Fażlollāh´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 ttü.Bitlis.[664] The names with arab.Ḥurūfī meanings, and perhaps also the politically, militarily and religi-

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647 Marginal note to mpers Mīr Šarīfs arab.*Bayān al-Vāḳiʿ* on fol. 61b of the Ali Emîrî Farsça 1027 manuscript of Istanbul´s Millet Library, quoted in Gölpınarlı 1973: 9. – The name mpers Maḫdūm-zāde is also confirmed in Gölpınarlı 1973: 2. As to mpers.Maḫdūme-ye Noṣrat, a text reproduced in Gölpınarlı 1973: 9 speaks in one instance about mpers.Maḫdūme-ye Noṣrat-e avval ("The first mpers.Maḫdūme-ye Noṣrat") and in another place about mpers.Maḫdūme-ye Noṣrat-e digar ("The other mpers.Maḫdūme-ye Noṣrat"). This could mean that there were two women by the name of mpers.Maḫdūme-ye Noṣrat in mpers.Fażlollāh´s entourage.

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

649 Ritter 1954: 32; Usluer 2009: 23.

650 Ritter 1954: 32.

651 On him, see chapter 4.5.5.2. below.

652 Marginal note to mpers Mīr Šarīf´s arab *Bayān al-Vāḳiʿ* on fol. 61b of the Ali Emîrî Farsça 1027 manuscript of Istanbul´s Millet Library, quoted in Gölpınarlı 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 Mīr Šarīfs arab *Bayān al-Vāḳiʿ* on fol. 61b of the Ali Emîrî Farsça 1027 manuscript of Istanbul´s Millet Library, quoted in Gölpınarlı 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.

ously meaningful title of [mpers.]*amīr* probably indicate that their bearers were expected to take part in the [arab.]Ḥurūfī mission even if they might have had other plans.

4.5.5. The political movement after Fażlollāh´s death

In the following subchapter, the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement as an organization with political ambitions is distinguished from people who made references to [mpers.]Fażlollāh, his pupils, or their writings without fostering such ambitions, for instance, by writing poems or treatises that were inspired by [arab.]Ḥurūfī ideas.

As an organization with serious political ambitions, the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement existed until approximately the middle of the 15th century, which is the date when the last [arab.]Ḥurūfī propagandists are known to have tried to win (in vain) the favor of important political authorities.[665] From that time on, the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement gradually transformed into a non-formalized, clandestine and dispersed network. In the course of time, the use people made of these ideas became decreasingly targeted at gaining political influence and blended into more or less distant and often indirect references to [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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 [az.]Nəsimi and not so much to the many but usually obscure and esoteric writings left behind by [mpers.]Fażlollāh and his pupils that [arab.]Ḥurūfī ideas survived beyond that date, and to this day.

4.5.5.1. The character of the political movement after Fażlollāh´s death

[mpers.]Fażlollāh´s execution must have been a tremendous blow to the young [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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, [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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 [az.]Nəsimi, 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s extensive family, his pupils, adherents, and his friends, who together formed the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya. Similar to what happened after the death of Jesus of Nazareth and in the early phase of the Shia history, the [arab.]Ḥurūfīs were not destroyed as a result of the killing of their leader, but the quite the opposite happened.

An important element in early [arab.]Ḥurūfī martyrdom narratives seems to have been the site of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s execution. They gave it the name [mpers.]*maḳtal-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 particular, it could easily be associated with the Shia martyrdom tradition. For in Shia Islam, the Arabic word [arab.]*maḳtal* "killing", which appears as a determinant in [mpers.]*maḳtal-gāh*, is often understood to be *the* killing par excellence, i. e., the martyrdom of the imam [arab.]Al-Ḥusayn at Kerbela on October 10, A. D. 680. Several more or less hagiographic works entitled [arab.]*Maḳtal al-Ḥusayn* ("The killing of [arab.]Al-Ḥusayn) was dedicated to this subject in early Islamic literature, and a whole genre of literature developed around them. The creation of a [mpers.]*maḳtal-gāh* at [az.]Əlincə physically underscores martyr status that the [arab.]Ḥurūfīs claimed for [mpers.]Fażlollāh and which was similar to that of [arab.]Al-Ḥusayn. Its establishment was yet another conscious step towards the establishment of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s school as an independent religious organization within Islam. By disposing of a holy site that was meaningful only to the [arab.]Ḥurūfīs 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfī [mpers.]*maḳtal-gāh*. For instance, it is not

668 Bausani 1979: 600.

stated whether the term [mpers.] *maḳtal-gāh* referred to a place within the [az.] Əlincə 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 [mpers.] *maḳtal-gāh* is unknown, apart from the necessary *terminus post quem*, which is defined by [mpers.] Faẓlollāh´s execution in August or September 1394. It is tempting to imagine that the creation of the [mpers.] *maḳtal-gāh* took place in that period after [mpers.] Faẓlollāh´s death when [az.] Əlincə was still held by the Jalairids and their supporters, i. e., before 1399.[669] [mpers.] Faẓlollāh´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 [az.] Əlincə fortress in 1399 or sometime later as well as its reconstruction on orders of [az.] Qara Yusif) after June 1406 must have been historical episodes that also influenced the status of the [mpers.] *maḳtal-gāh*. Yet, again nothing definite seems to be known in this respect.

With the [mpers.] *maḳtal-gāh* at [az.] Əlincə, the early [arab.] Ḥurūfīs 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 [mpers.] Faẓlollāh had himself frequently alluded to in his writings and by using titles such as [arab.] *ṣāḥib 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.] Ḥurūfī martyrdom narrative and classical Shia martyrdom legends was the existence of a bad tyrant figure. This was [mpers.] Mīrān Šāh, whose name was deformed in early [arab.] Ḥurūfī literature to [mpers.] Mārān Šāh "The King of the Snakes".[673] Seen from a broader perspective, the [arab.] Ḥurūfī 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 [mpers.] Faẓlollāh´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

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.

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

4.5.5.2. ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā and the mission in Anatolia

The most influential, and probably also the first, of [mpers.] Faẓlollāh´s successors (singular: [mpers.] *ḫalīfa*, literally "caliphs) was [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā.[674] The epithet *ol-Aʿlā* means as much as "the more elevated one".

[mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā followed in [mpers.] Faẓlollāh´s footsteps in two ways: as a missionary and as the author of [arab.] Ḥurūfī writings.[675] Primary sources date the initial phase of [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā´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, [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā traveled to Syria and Jerusalem.[677] After this, he proceeded to Anatolia, which became the central area of his missionizing activity.[678] [mpers.] Faẓlollā had already had a dream about the possibility of missionizing in this region.[679] [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā himself states in his [mpers.] *Ḵorsīnāme* that although he was not the first to spread "the logos of God" ([mpers.] *kalām-e Ḥaḳḳ*) in Anatolia ([mpers.] *Rūm*) he became the first one who did so *successfully*.[680]

However, [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā´s only major success in his effort to spread "the logos of God" was the conversion of the [arab.] Dū'l-ḳadr ruler [arab.] Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad.[681] He also tried to win over the [az.] Qaraqoyunlu ruler [az.] Qara Yusif, but failed.[682] [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā 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 [mpers.] *Ḵorsīnāme* he states that he even sent "the Book" (perhaps [mpers.] Faẓlollāh´s [mpers.] *Ǧāvidānnāme*) "to the other side of the water,

674 Ritter 1954: 6, Bausani 1979: 600.

675 Cf. Bausani 1979: 600.

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

677 Algar 1995: 44.

678 Bausani 1979: 600.

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

680 Algar 1995: 44. On the [mpers.] *Ḵorsīnāme* cf. p. 126.

681 Algar 1995: 45. On [arab.] Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad, see p. 55.

682 Bausani 1979: 600. On [az.] Qara Yusif, see p. 41. Cf. also Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257.

683 Bashir 2002: 180.

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.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā´s mission in Anatolia seems to have been rather limited. Apart from [arab.]Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad no political leader agreed to accept the [arab.]Ḥurūfīs´ *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.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā´*s work particularly* difficult.

During [mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā´*s lifetime,* [arab.]Ḥurūfīs are also known to have actively participated in the movement of [osm.]Šeyḫ Bedreddīn of [ttü.]Simavna (present-day Kiprinos 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement. [osm.]Šeyḫ Bedreddīn (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 Bāyezīd I. by Tamerlane in the Battle of Ankara.[686] [osm.]Šeyḫ Bedreddīn 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfīs in Anatolia.

Besides being a figure with clear political ambition, [osm.]Šeyḫ Bedreddīn was also an Islamic scholar and mystic.[687] In a way that shows certain parallels to the life of [mpers.]Fażlollāh, 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfīs, 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.]Fażlollāh had been thrown, i. e., frequently marked by political chaos, suffering, and economic hardship. This naturally made people long for savior figures.[688]

Incidentally, [osm.]Šeyḫ Bedreddīn´s movement was structurally similar to that of another warlord in the previously Ottoman lands, namely [osm.]Börklüğe Muṣṭafā who made his bid for power in the former Ottoman province of [ttü.]Aydın in 1416.

684 See the quote in Algar 1995: 44.

685 Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257.

686 As introductions to the life of [osm.]Šeyḫ Bedreddīn see Kissling 1950 and Balivet 1995. Cf. also Cerrahoğlu 1966; Dressler 2002: 68-71; Kreiser / Neumann 2005: 77.

687 Öztelli 1989: 12.

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

Like [mpers.]Fażlollāh, [osm.]Börklüğe Muṣṭafā claimed to be a prophet.[689] On the model of the Nizaris, [osm.]Börklüğe Muṣṭafā 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.]Fażlollāh´s [arab.]Ḥurūfīya. [osm.]Börklüğe Muṣṭafā even had a direct personal relationship with [osm.]Šeyḫ Bedreddīn, for he was his former majordomo ([osm.]*ketḫüdā*).[691]

Returning to [mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā, it has to be mentioned that his life ended tragically, like that of his teacher and in fact like most other early [arab.]Ḥurūfī leaders, he was executed. Various dates are given for his event. According to Franz Babinger, [mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā was killed only a few weeks after [owo.]Šeyḫ Bedreddīn; 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.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā is believed to have been buried not far from [mpers.]Fażlollāh.[694]

4.5.5.3. Other pupils of Fażlollāh

[mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā was not the one only of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s deputies (singular: [mpers.]*ḫalīfa*). Others were [mpers.]Ḥaḳīḳī ("The Truthful"),[695] [mpers.]Sayyid Isḥāḳ, 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 [az.]Nəsimi.

An important question for the history of the early [arab.]Ḥurūfīya – which is also relevant for the reconstruction of [az.]Nəsimi´s biography, as shall be seen[697] –is whether there was only one [mpers.]*ḫalīfa* in the movement at a time. Alternatively, [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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.]Fażlollāh´s [mpers.]*ḫalīfa*s themselves: did each of them have only one [mpers.]*ḫalīfa* 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 / Tevfíq 1909: XX; Ritter 1954: 21; Bausani 1979: 600; Halm 1988: 99; Algar 1995: 44f. – Cf. Akarpınar 2007: 663, who only gives the year 1419 (quoting [ttü.]Hüsamettin Aksu).

694 Algar 1995: 45.

695 Divshali / Luft 1980: 26.

696 Divshali / Luft 1980: 18.

697 See chapter 5.2.4.1.

Hellmut Ritter. For Ritter mentions that [mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā was [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s first [mpers.]*ḫalīfa*.[698] If [mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā was [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s first successor, this automatically means that at least for some time nobody else was [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s [mpers.]*ḫalīfa*. This might point to a line of succession in which there was only one [mpers.]*ḫalīfa* during [mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā´s term in office. After his death, this system might have changed. In sum, the number of [arab.]Ḥurūfī [mpers.]*ḫalīfa*s that existed at a time is not fully known.

In addition to the [mpers.]*ḫalīfa*s mentioned so far, we know the names more of [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s earliest pupils. These include [mpers.]Mīr Šarīf, [mpers.]Faḫroddīn, a certain [mpers.]Ǧalāl, who was from [mpers.]Boruǧerd, [mpers.]Fażlollāh (a namesake of the sect´s founder, he was from Khorasan), a certain [mpers.]ʿAbdol from Isfahan, a [mpers.]Ḥosayn,[699] and [mpers.]Sayyid Šamsoddīn.[700] Also, there was a dervish whose name is not mentioned but who is simply called "The Visitor" ([mpers.]*Mosāfer*). Gölpınarlı wants to identify him with [mpers.]Fażlollāh Astarābādī´s early teacher [mpers.]Šayḫ Ḥasan.[701]

Another of the first and most prominent disciples of [mpers.]Fażlollāh was, of course, Nəsimi, who will be dealt with at length in chapter 5.

4.5.5.4. Other early Ḥurūfī activities

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

A good deal of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīs´efforts was made in order to gain the support of rulers. While trying to win over some political leaders by persuasion, the [arab.]Ḥurūfīs 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.]Ḥurūfī groups participated in open insurrections. Such political and often violent ambition characterized the [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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 Gölpınarlı 1973: 7.

700 Huart / Tevfîq 1909: XIX.

701 Gölpınarlı 1973: 7. On the other [mpers.]Šayḫ Ḥasan, see p. 120.

702 Cf. Bashir 2002: 180.

One of the earliest rebellions with significant [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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.]Ḥurūfīs a respite that allowed them to reorganize their forces and renew the effort to assume power.

Another [arab.]Ḥurūfī revolt followed in [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s homeland [mpers.]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.]Ḥurūfīs in the Timurid lands. Possibly as a consequence of this worsening climate, an assassination attempt was perpetrated against [mpers.]Šāhroḫ, the then ruler of the Timurid empire, in Herat on February 21, 1427.[706] The would-be assassin was a certain [mpers.]Aḥmad-e Lor ("Aḥmad the Lur", the Lurs being one of Iran´s ethnic groups), whose name is also given in the variant [mpers.]Aḥmadī Lor.[707] [mpers.]Aḥmad-e Lor used a knife to stab his victim but was killed on the spot before he was able to kill [mpers.]Šāhroḫ.[708] The anecdote is frequently included in histories of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement, as the perpetrator is believed to have been one of its members.[709] If [mpers.]Aḥmad-e Lor was indeed a member of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement, his motive might have been revenge for the execution of [mpers.]Fażlollāh and the persecution of [arab.]Ḥurūfīs under the Timurids. After the failure of [mpers.]Aḥmad-e Lor´s assassination attempt, a number of [arab.]Ḥurūfīs were arrested in Herat.[710]

In A. H. 835 (1431 / 1432), many [arab.]Ḥurūfīs took part in a larger rebellion in Isfahan.[711]

Another important event in the history of the early [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement was the attempt made by [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s daughter [mpers.]Kalemetollāh to convert the [az.]Qaraqoyunlu ruler [az.]Cahanşah to her father´s faith in A. H. 845 (1441 / 1442) in

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.

Tabriz.[712] mpers.Kalemetollāh was assisted by a certain mpers.Yūsef.[713] The initiative ended in a complete failure for mpers.Kalemetollāh 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.Ḥurūfīs were accusations that they had been trying to subvert az.Cahanşah´s rule.[715]

Probably one of the last serious attempts of arab.Ḥurūfīs 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.Ḥurūfī missionary, whose name is unknown, tried to convert prince osm.Meḥmed, who, as sultan osm.Meḥmed II. would change the course of world history nine years later by conquering Constantinople.[716] osm.Meḥmed 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.Ḥurūfī missionary chanced his luck with the Ottoman prince. Furthermore, osm.Meḥmed 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 mpers.Fażlollāh and his followers. To the surprise of many contemporaries, osm.Meḥmed´s father, sultan osm.Murād 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 osm.Murād 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 osm.Meḥmed and his advisors appeared.

It is unknown at what moment of these developments the arab.Ḥurūfī missionary was active. In the end, the arab.Ḥurūfī missionizing attempt failed.[719] The main reasons seem to have been opposition from influential conservative Sunni Islamic scholars (osm.*ʿulemā*), who prevailed at osm.Meḥmed´s court. These osm.*ʿulemā* managed to convince the future osm.Fātiḥ ("Conqueror") of the Second Rome that the arab.Ḥurūfī 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.Ḥurūfī attempt to convert an Ottoman prince or ruler to their religion.

712 Usluer 2009: 23. Cf. Mir-Kasimov 2009: 257. – On mpers.Kalemetollāh, 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.

4.5.5.5. Towards the end of the political movement

The classification of those arab.Ḥurūfīs 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.Ḥurūfīs was mpers.ʿEzz ad-Dīn ʿAbdolmağīd ebne Ferešte alias owo.Firišteoġlï alias arab.Ibn Malak (the patronyms mpers.ebne Ferešte, owo.Firišteoġlï and arab.Ibn Malak all mean "the son of the Angel"), who died in A. D. 874 (1469 / 1470).[722] owo.Firišteoġlï´s teacher was a certain owo.Bāyezīd (also referred to as owo.Mevlānā Bāyezīd), who had been a pupil of mpers.Fażlollāh´s disciple mpers.Sayyid Šamsoddīn.[723] owo.Firišteoġlï´s most influential arab.Ḥurūfī work was the owo.*Ïšḳ-nāme* ("Book of Love"), which was completed in the month of arab.Šavvāl of the year A. H. 833 (June 23-July 21, 1430).[724]

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

The initial phase of the arab.Ḥurūfīya´s mission, which had started around the time of mpers.Fażlollāh´s mpers.*ẓohūr-e kibriyā'* 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.Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad of arab.Dū'l-ḳadr, the arab.Ḥurūfīya movement had not been able to establish itself as an officially recognized group anywhere in the Islamic landscape, although they paid for their missionary

720 Bausani 1979: 600.

721 Bashir 2002: 182.

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

723 Huart / Tevfïq 1909: XIX; Akün 1965: 924.

724 Akün 1965: 924; Götz 1968: 178.

zeal with the extinction of most of their leaders together with probably thousands of followers. However, the [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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.]Ḥurūfīya ideas continues to this day – the present publication bears witness to this.

Probably no other figure has contributed to the continuity of [arab.]Ḥurūfī ideas as much as [az.]İmadəddin Nəsimi did. Already in the Middle Ages, [az.]Nəsimi´s poems secured [mpers.]Faẓlollāh´s ideas an audience that no other author, including the master himself, could equal. [mpers.]Faẓlollāh´s theological prose could at best be understood by those who dedicated much time of their lives to the study of [arab.]Ḥurūfī speculation, but their full understanding would also have required mastery of the remote Persian dialect of [mpers.]Astarābād. As a poet, [mpers.]Faẓlollāh is a *quantité négligeable* in Persian literary history, but even [az.]Nəsimi´s Persian poems are probably not, not to speak about [az.]Nəsimi´s Turkic poems, which revolutionized Azerbaijani literary history. As a consequence, [az.]Nəsimi may safely be termed the most popular and influential [arab.]Ḥurūfī author of all times, including the 20th and 21st centuries.

[az.]Nəsimi´s poetry uniquely contributed to the popularization of [arab.]Ḥurūfī terminology and figures of thought in the Oghuz-speaking territories. This included many areas to the west of Iran, including the Anatolian [ttü.]*beylik*s and the Ottoman Empire. Several Ottoman poets wrote in the tradition of [az.]Nəsimi and his contemporary [owo.]Refīʿī.

One of these Oghuz-speaking [arab.]Ḥurūfī poets who were inspired by [az.]Nəsimi was [owo.]Ḥābībī (1470–1520).[725] He is said to have met the [az.]Aqqoyunlu ruler [az.]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 [az.]Aqqoyunlu, [owo.]Ḥābībī changed over to the Ṣafavid court. The founder of the Ṣafavid state, shah [mpers.]İsmāʿīl (also known by his pen name [mpers.]Ḫaṭāʾī; ruled from 1501), continued to employ him as a court poet and had the title "the king of the poets" ([owo.]*melikü'ş-şuarā'*) bestowed upon him.[727] Later on, [owo.]Ḥābībī came to the Ottoman court.[728] Although only around fifty of [owo.]Ḥābībī´s poems survived,[729] his rank and influence are enormous. This is evident, among other things, from the fact that [az.]Məḥəmməd Fuzūlī (around 1485, 1489 or 1494–1556), doubtlessly one

725 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XXV.

726 Macit 2007a: 48.

727 Araslı 1977: 4; Macit 2007a: 48; Celâl / Hüseynov 2008: 27.

728 Macit 2007a: 48.

729 Cf. Macit 2007a: 48; Celâl / Hüseynov 2008: 27.

of the greatest Islamic poets of all times, wrote some of his poems by extending [owo.]Ḥābībī´s verses.[730]

Another important place in the history of Oghuz-language [arab.]Ḥurūfī poetry belongs to the Ottoman [osm.]Uṣūlī (died 1538). He came from [ttü.]Vardar Yenice (present-day Giannitsa, north of Thessaloniki). After having studied in a madrassa, [osm.]Uṣūlī joined the circles of non-conformist and socio-critical dervishes.[731] Similar to [owo.]Ḥābībī, [osm.]Uṣūlī is considered to be a literary heir to [az.]Nəsimi, even if not all of the poems in his divan contain [arab.]Ḥurūfī elements.[732] One of the things in which [osm.]Uṣūlī shows similarities to [az.]Nəsimi is his interpretation of love ([osm.]*išḳ*~[osm.]*ašḳ*). According to [osm.]Uṣūlī, 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] [osm.]Uṣūlī was spitefully and maliciously attacked by his compatriot [osm.]ʿĀšīḳ Čelebi (1520–1572) for his anti-mainstream interpretation of Islam and for his [arab.]Ḥurūfī leanings:

> [osm.]*Šeyḫ İbrāhīmīlere isnād olïnan ilḥād toḫmïn Rūmda ol ekmišdür ve Nesīmīyāt türrehātından*[734] *getürdüği nihāl-i nihād-i ḍalālï ol dikmişdür. Niče oŋup bitmeyeğekler gelüp ol toḫmï ekmeğe bašlamïšlar ve niče ber-ḫurdār olmayağaḳlar ol nihāle budaḳlar ašïlamïšlardur. Ḥaḳ Teʿālā toḫmlarïn čüride ve köklerin ḳurïda.*

"He [[osm.]Uṣūlī – M. R. H.] was the one who sowed the seed of anti-Islam ([osm.]*ilḥād*) that was ascribed to the Šeyḫ-İbrahīmīs[735] in [osm.]*Rūm*..[736] And he was the one who planted the readily available bough of aberration, which he had plucked from the [az.]Nəsimi 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

730 Celâl / Hüseynov 2008: 27.

731 On the life of [osm.]Uṣūlī, cf. Özkırımlı 1983; Macit 2007a: 40, 43, 47. – He must not be confused with another Ottoman poet who used the pen name [osm.]Uṣūlī 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: [osm.]*türrehāt u küfriyātïndan* [M. R. H.]

735 Apparently an antinomian order [M. R. H.].

736 [osm.]*Rūm* denotes the former territories of the Byzantine Empire and Slavic kingdoms conquered by the Ottomans (Işıksel 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 [az.]Nəsimi" [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 osm.ʿĀšiḳ Čelebi´s rhetorically brilliant and angry invective is the neologism osm.*Nesīmīyāt* "things belonging to or coming from az.Nəsimi", which, as the context suggests, has probably a pejorative sense. osm.*Nesīmīyāt* shows that az.Nəsimi´s name had already at that point of time become proverbial for poetically elegant expressions of arab.Ḥurūfī heresy. Also, the quote shows that az.Nəsimi 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.Ḥurūfī tendencies who was active in the Ottoman lands was osm.Muḥīṭī Dede (around 1553-before 1621). He left behind a versed opus with the title osm.*Ḳiṣmet-nāme* ("Book of Destiny").[740] One of osm.Muḥīṭī Dede´s pupils was osm.ʿAršī Dede, who wrote a divan of arab.Ḥurūfī poems.[741]

One may also mention az.Nəsimi´s quasi-namesake owo.Ḳul Nesīmī ("owo.Nesīmī the slave"), who lived in the 17th century.[742] He is frequently confused with (az.İmadəddin) az.Nəsimi because he also used arab.Ḥurūfī motifs in his poetry.

In addition to the aforementioned, there are some minor poets who are credited with having fostered arab.Ḥurūfī penchants.[743] The affiliation of some other poets to a arab.Ḥurūfī current is disputed. For instance, while owo.Ṣunʿullāh Ġaybī (17th century) is considered to be a arab.Ḥurūfī by some,[744] he was also a member of the ttü. Halvetiye order.[745] Apparently, in those days when the arab.Ḥurūfīya had long ceased to be an organization with a clear political orientation the boundaries between arab.Ḥurūfīya and non-arab.Ḥurūfīya had blurred.

Importantly, the arab.Ḥurūfīya had a lasting impact on the ttü.Kızılbaş / Alevi-Bektaşi culture.[746] This was already discovered by the first generation of scholars

738 The text is from Âşık Çelebi 2010: 366f. Filiz Kılıç´ 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: Muhîtî Dede 2016. Cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XXV.

741 Götz 1968: 177.

742 Akarpınar 2007: 663.

743 Cf. the poet ttü.Caferî (>*owo.Ǧaʿferī) mentioned in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XXV.

744 Cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XXV.

745 Akarpınar 2007: 663.

746 Cf. Halm 1988: 99.

that investigated the arab.Ḥurūfīya, including Edward Granville Browne[747] (1862–1926) and Georg Jacob (1862–1937).[748] In the Turkish Alevi tradition, az.Nəsimi is considered to be one of the Seven Great Poets (ttü.*Yedi Ulu Ozan*).[749] Another of the ttü.*Yedi Ulu Ozan* whose work betrays strong arab.Ḥurūfī influence was ttü.Âşık Virani (17th century), who also used the pen names ttü.Virani and ttü.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.Ḥurūfī literature in the 17tth century.[751]

Interest in az.Nəsimi and arab.Ḥurūfī literature was renewed in the Ottoman Empire from the osm.Tanẓīmāt 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 osm.Tanẓīmāt era, the first printed editions of az.Nəsimi´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" (osm.*Vaḳʿa-yi Ḫayrīye*, ttü.*Vaka-yı Hayriye*) of 1826, members of the order and their sympathizers nevertheless continued to foster arab.Ḥurūfī leanings.[753] Some tardive texts even seem to try to emphasize the importance of the historical ties between the arab.Ḥurūfīya and the Bektashis more than had probably been the case before. For instance, the osm.*Kāšifü'l-esrār ve Dāfiʿü'l-Eşrār* ("The Discoverer of the secrets and the Defender against the evils") written by osm.Ḫoğa İsḥaḳ Efendi in 1873 pretends to know that mpers.ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā visited the ttü.*tekke* (monastery) named after ttü.Hacı Bektaş in ttü.Kırşehir.[754] Even if this statement has no historical value whatsoever already due to the time interval, the influence of the arab.Ḥurūfīya on Alevism-Bektashism is a reality.[755]

In a number of cases, the arab.Ḥurūfīya 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.Ḥurūfīya in his 1990 novel "The Black Book" (ttü.*Kara Kitap*).[756] Similar allusions can be found in another of Pamuk´s novels, "Snow" (ttü.*Kar*, 2002). To start with, the text of ttü.*Kar* directly mentions arab.Ibn al-

747 Browne 1907.

748 Jacob 1909.

749 Öztelli 1989: 16; Öker / Koparan 1999: 3-13; Kaplan 2004: 34, 192; Akarpınar 2007: 663 (who refers to them as the "Seven Great Ones" (ttü.*Yedi Ulular*).

750 Akarpınar 2007: 663.

751 Akarpınar 2007: 663f.

752 Meḥmed Saʿīd 1844; No editor 1860; No editor 1869 / 1870; Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XXVI.

753 On the "Benevolent Event", see Kreiser 2005: 316, 325; Sakaoğlu 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.

ʿArabī,[757] which we have come to know as one of the most influential Arab authorities on letter mysticism and authority who influenced the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya. Although Pamuk does not mention the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement in [ttü.]*Kar expressis verbis*, this novel contains many elements that can easily be deciphered as hidden references to the [arab.]Ḥurūfī doctrine. As a matter of fact, even the masking of [arab.]Ḥurūfī elements in this novel itself might constitute a reference to [mpers.]Faẓlollāh´s religious movement, which loved to express its ideas in their own coded ways. Another hint at [arab.]Ḥurūfī motifs could be the soundwise relation between the title of[ttü.]*Kar* and the name of its main character, [ttü.]*Ka*. Again, the *tertium comparationis* between Pamuk´s text and the [arab.]Ḥurūfī tradition would be the use of wordplay. In addition to these more or less vague connections, [ttü.]*Kar* also contains a number of motifs that seem to point more directly at a [arab.]Ḥurūfī background. For instance, the number of lines in the poems revealed to the hero [ttü.]*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.]Ḥurūfī speculation. An even stronger hint seems to be the name of one of those poems in the novel, which is "The Secret Symmetry" ([ttü.]*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" ([ttü.]*hayatının gizli simetrisi*).[760] In another place, Pamuk speaks about "a secret geometry of life, the logic which he [= [ttü.]*Ka* – M.R.H.] had not been able to decipher"([ttü.]*hayatın mantığını çözemediği gizli bir geometrisi*).[761] All these references to invisible but crucially meaningful "symmetries" create possible associations with the [mpers.]*istivā* line, the imaginary line which in [arab.]Ḥurūfīya texts divides the human faces into two halves and has a central place in the religious system invented by [mpers.]Faẓlollāh.[762] An additional feature that makes some [arab.]Ḥurūfī influence behind the [ttü.]*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 [ttü.]*Ka* states that [ttü.]*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.]Ḥurūfī belief, which has found its expression in many of [az.]Nəsimi´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 Ḥurūfīya Islamic or not?

Any survey of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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" ([az.]*islam*) and "disbelief" ([az.]*küfr*) are already discussed by [az.]Nəsimi himself in his Turkic divan,[764] and the 15th-century Arab author [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī condemns [az.]Nəsimi for being an "infidel" ([az.]*kafir*).[765] Conservative Muslim authorities use Islam as one element in strictly binary opposition: There is Islam and disbelief, *tertium non datur*. However, [az.]Nəsimi´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. [az.]Nəsimi´s holistic use of the terms [az.]*islam* and [az.]*küfr, of course,* reduces the question "Is the Ḥurūfīya Islamic or not?" to absurdity, because according to it, the answer could both be yes and not. In other words, [az.]Nəsimi 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.]Ḥurūfīya 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.]Muḥammad 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.]Ḥurūfīya 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.]Ḥurūfīya 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.]Ḥurūfīya 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.]Ḥurūfīya 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh himself and his followers considered themselves to be Muslims.[771] Similarly, but with a slightly stronger emphasis on the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya´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.]Ḥurūfīya, 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, Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı (1900–1982) applies to the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya the word [ttü.]*din* "religion".[774]

It is not fully clear whether [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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.]Ḥurūfīya 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh was the "Sultan of all the prophets" ([mpers.]*sulṭān-e hame payġāmbarān*), 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh 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-[mpers.]Fażlollāh [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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'l-lāh va-ašhadu anna Muḥammadan rasūl Allāh)* is used in the call to prayer ([arab.]*adān*). Writing half a century after the death of [mpers.]Fażlollāh, the [arab.]Ḥurūfī author [mpers.]Amīr Ġiyāṣoddīn gives the following alternative form of the [arab.]*adān* in his [mpers.]*Istivā-nāme* ("The Book of the Symmetry Axis"): [arab.]*ašhadu al-lā ilāha illā F-ʾ-H va-ašhadu anna Ādama ḫalīfat Allāh va-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.]Ḥurūfī [arab.]*adān*) with the identification of *F-ʾ-H* and Allah was also inscribed on [mpers.]Fażlollāh´s shrine in [az.]Əlincə.[779]

One does not even have to start interpreting the text of the the [arab.]Ḥurūfī [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

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.

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 … *Ont tenté à [sic] proposer une interprétation originale de l'Islam, voir[e] une transformation de l'Islam en une nouvelle religion universelle* (Mir-Kasimov 2009: 255).

778 Ritter 1954: 1, quoting from the Vatican manuscript Vat Pers. 34, fol. 124a. – On the [mpers.]*Istivā-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.]Ḥurūfī [arab.]*adān* (…*illā Fāh*) was prosodically equivalent to the corresponding place in the traditional mainstream Muslim [arab.]*adān* (…*illā'llāh*), 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.]Ḥurūfī call to prayer.

779 Halm 1988: 99.

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 [mpers.]Amīr Ġiyāṣoddīn´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 godhead, *Allāh*, is replaced by the three letters *F-ʾ-H*. If we recall the special theological position accorded to [mpers.]Fażlollāh both by himself and by his followers and the phonetic similarity between the letter sequence *F-ʾ-H* and the name "[mpers.]Fażlollāh", it seems to be a possible interpretation to identify this Allah surrogate with the man from [mpers.]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.]Ḥurūfīya 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.]*nubūva*), 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh and is called "divinity" ([arab.]*uluhīya*, 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 [mpers.]Fażlollāh himself, who initiated the era of [arab.]*uluhīya*. This periodic vision of global history, which allots a central position to [mpers.]Fażlollāh was one of the ways in which the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya tried

[780] Mir-Kasimov 2009: 256.

to argue for the superiority of their doctrine over other Muslim traditions. All previous interpretations of Islam are inferior to those that started with [mpers.]Fażlollāh´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.]Ḥurūfīya 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.]Ḥurūfīya 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 [az.]Nəsimi´s divan show that another reason for the special status of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya 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.]Ḥurūfīya 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.

5. NƏSİMİ

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, [az.]Nəsimi 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 [az.]Nəsimi, 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.

"[az.]Nəsimi" itself is technically speaking a pen name ([mpers.]*maḫlaṣ*, [mpers.]*taḫalloṣ*). Oriental poetry required to use such a pseudonym in certain places. For instance, it appears in the final [az.]*beyt* of most ghazals (which is the poetical form that [az.]Nəsimi 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 [az.]Nəsimi´s names, for instance, [az.]Seyyid, [az.]İmadəddin, or [az.]Ali.[782]

As a matter of fact, [az.]Nəsimi 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 [mpers.]*maḫlaṣ* [mpers.]Ḥosaynī~[owo.]Ḥüseynī in some cases.[783] [mpers.]Ḥosaynī~[owo.]Ḥüseynī has been claimed to be an older pen name.[784] The change might be explained by [az.]Nəsimi´s conversion to the [arab.]Ḥurūfī creed. [mpers.]Ḥosaynī~[owo.]Ḥüseynī means "belonging to

781 For a definition of the [az.]*beyt* see footnote 957.

782 On these other names of [az.]Nəsimi, see below. – For other medieval figures bearing the name [owo.]Nesīmī see p. 154 and cf. Heß 2011.

783 Ciopiński 1988: 73.

784 Ciopiński 1988: 73.

arab.al-Ḥusayn", and most likely refers to the third Shii imam.[785] Therefore, it is likely to express sympathy for the Shii cause.

In the annals arab.*Kunūz ad-dahab fī-tārīḫ Ḥalab*, which was written before 1479, the Arab historian arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī refers to az.Nəsimi as arab.ʿAlī an-Nasīmī, [786] or just arab.an-Nasīmī.[787] The second element of this Arabic phrase directly corresponds to the Modern Azerbaijani az.Nəsimi.[788] In the Oriental, and particularly Arabic tradition, arab.an-Nasīmī~mpers.Nasīmī~owo.Nesīmī~ az.Nəsimi 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-ʿAǧamī, which would mark the given name, would, therefore, be arab.ʿAlī. That arab.ʿAlī was az.Nəsimi´s personal name is also confirmed by the Arab jurist arab.Ibrāhīm al-Ḥalabī (1460–1549), who was from Aleppo.[789]

The Persian *poeta laureatus* mpers.Šarafoddīn Rāmī Tabrīzī mentions in his poetological encyclopedia mpers.*Anīso'l-ʿOššāḳ* ("The companion of the lovers") a certain mpers.ʿEmād Ḥorūfī ("ʿEmād the arab.Ḥurūfī"), of whom he quotes the following Persian verses:

mpers.*Ḫaṭṭ-e to ke dar-šān-e to nāzel šode*
Lāmist ke bar-āyat-e ḥosnat 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

785 On arab.al-Ḥusayn, cf. p. 126, 136 and 142.

786 Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī al-Ḥalabī 1997: 125. For the whole of arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s text and its discussion, see chapter 5.2.4.1.

787 Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī al-Ḥalabī 1997: 125.

788 See p. 184.

789 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: II. ttü.Kürkçüoğlu also mentions a speculative theory according to which az.Nəsimi´s original personal name had been mpers.ʿOmar / owo.ʿÖmer but then changed to arab./owo.ʿAlī / az.Əli in order to avoid the Shii name taboo pronounced against mpers.ʿOmar (who was a caliph considered illegitimated by the Shiites). According to ttü.Kürkçüoğlu, this speculation appears only in the works of very tardive authors such as osm.Bursalï Meḥmed Ṭāhir, and is therefore quite doubtful. For the same reason, the claim made by the Ottoman writer osm.ʿAlī Emīrī Efendi (1857–1924) that az.Nəsimi´s personal name was owo.Muṣliḥu'd-Dīn (quoted in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: II) should be discarded. – The theory that arab./mpersʿAlī was az.Nəsimi´s personal name is accepted by a number of modern scholars, cf. Paşayev 2010: 42, 44.

mpers.*Asrār-e to ʿoššāḳ-e to dānand kamāhī*
Ān ḫāl na ḫālist ke serrīst elahī

"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."[790]

Unfortunately, the precise lifetime of mpers.Šarafoddīn Rāmī Tabrīzī 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 Muẓaffarid ruler mpers.Šāh Manṣūr (ruled 1387–1393).[791] Also, we know that one of the manuscript copies of the mpers.*Anīso'l-ʿOššāḳ* was created in A. H. 823 (first day: January 17, 1420; last day: January 5, 1421).[792] 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 mpers.Šarafoddīn Rāmī Tabrīzī that roughly corresponds with what is believed to be az.Nəsimi´s approximate lifetime according to most accounts.[793] This, the use of the epithet mpers.*Ḥorūfī* and the content of the above four verses make it quite likely that the person referred to as mpers.ʿEmād Ḥorūfī by mpers.Šarafoddīn Rāmī Tabrīzī was indeed az.Nəsimi. The verses contain typical arab.Ḥurūfī keywords, such as mpers.*ḫaṭṭ* "lines (of writing or on the face"), mpers.*ḫāl* "macule" and mpers.*elāhī* "divine". The mention of mpers.*āyat*, which is a term that usually designs verses from the Quran, and of "secrets" (mpers.*asrār*) is also typically both of the arab.Ḥurūfīya and of az.Nəsimi´s poetry, as is the creative and quite elegant wordplay that involves the shapes of the Arabic letters arab.*Lām* and arab.*Dāl*.[794] It should be noted that the mpers.*Anīso'l-ʿOššāḳ* 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 mpers.Šarafoddīn Rāmī Tabrīzī´s poetological encyclopedia gives a certain indication of their quality. This coincides with our knowledge that az.Nəsimi indeed was a proficient author of Persian poetry.

Frequently, az.Nəsimi is also referred to with the name variant owo.ʿİmādeddīn / az.İmadəddin. For instance, this form is used by the Ottoman literary historians osm.

790 Şərəfəddin Rami Təbrizi 2012: 92, 105, 187. I have transcribed the texts from the Persian version in Arabic script but using az.Nəzakət Məmmədli´*s Modern Azerbaijani transcription but without checking the text through scanning*. – The editor az.Nəzakət Məmmədli gives the name in its Modern Azerbaijani form (az.İmad Hürufi). However, as mpers.Šarafoddīn Rāmī Tabrīzī 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 / Bruijn 2019; Karaismailoğlu 2019 [2007].

792 Şərəfəddin Rami Təbrizi 2012: 16.

793 See chapters 5.2.1. and 5.2.4.

794 On the interpretation of this wordplay, see Şərəfəddin Rami Təbrizi 2012: 92.

Laṭīfī (1491–1582), osm. Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ğārullāh (end of the 16th century) and osm. Ḥasan Čelebi (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*). owo. ʿİmādeddīn means "the pillar" (arab. *ʿimād*) "of the religion". The word arab. *ʿimād* is the Arabic equivalent of mpers. *ʿemād* as it appears in the above-discussed mpers. ʿEmād Ḥorūfī. If both mpers. ʿEmād Ḥorūfī and owo. ʿİmādeddīn / az. İmadəddin are variants of az. Nəsimi´s name, it seems quite likely that owo. ʿİmādeddīn / az. İmadəddin is an extension of the originally shorter form of the name, or, *vice versa*, mpers. ʿEmād a shortened variant of the fuller form of epithtet, owo. ʿİmādeddīn~mpers. ʿEmādoddīn. The Persian form mpers. ʿEmādoddīn is ascribed to az. Nəsimi in the mpers. *Maǧāleso'l-ʿOššāḳ* (15th / 16th century)[796] and in mpers. Mīrzā Ḥasan-e Fesā'ī´s mpers. *Farsnāme-ye Nāṣerī* in the second half of the 19th century.[797]

The mpers. *Maǧāleso'l-ʿOššāḳ* also adds the title mpers. *amīr* to az. Nəsimi´s name (the full name being mpers. Amīr Sayyid ʿEmādoddīn Nasīmī.)[798] This is an interesting detail because we know that mpers. *amīr* was used as a title in the arab. Ḥurūfīya movement, for instance, by some of mpers. Fażlollāh´s children and at least one arab. Ḥurūfī author.[799] If the information is true, az. Nəsimi had the rank of somebody who "commanded" (in whatever sense), at least within the arab. Ḥurūfīya organization.

As we have seen at the example of the name variant mpers. Sayyid ʿEmād, already in the Middle Ages the element az.,owo. Seyyid was added to az. Nəsimi´s name. This marked his claim to belong to the family of the Prophet Muḥammad.[800] Among those who applied this title to az. Nəsimi were osm. Laṭīfī[801] and osm. ʿĀšīḳ Čelebi.[802]

795 The forms from the works of osm. Laṭīfī and osm. Ḥasan Čelebi are quoted in Ayan 1990: 13. For the reference from osm. Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ğārullāh see Beyâni Mustafa bin Carullah 1997: 290. – On osm. Laṭīfī, see Karahan 1979: 228; on osm. Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ğārullāh cf. also p. 169.

796 Quoted in Ayan 1990: 12. On the mpers. *Maǧāleso'l-ʿOššāḳ* see below p. 202.

797 Quoted in Ayan 1990: 12.

798 *Emir Seyyid İmadü´d-din Nesîmî* (Ayan 1990: 12).

799 See chapter 4.5.4.7. and p. 159.

800 See p. 175 below. Cf. also Ciopiński 1988: 73.

801 Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435, also quoted in Ayan 1990: 13.

802 Âşık Çelebi 2010: 865.

5.2. Life

No full synopsis of the available sources on az. Nəsimi 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. Nəsimi´s life. For even if the extant source material was combined most of az. Nəsimi ´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. Nəsimi´s life in order to give the modern reader a general impression.

5.2.1. Presumed year of birth

az. Nəsimi ´s year of birth is unknown. All dates are given in modern literature, such as A. D. 1369,[805] or 1370[806] are purely speculative.

In the absence of reliable positive information about the time az. Nəsimi 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. Nəsimi´s life can also not be dated with certainty.[807]

803 The Nəsimi 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 decennies. As introductions the following modern references may be given: Begdeli 1970: 193-198; Ibragimov 1973; Quluzade 1973: 5-30; Divshali / Luft 1980: VII-XI, 18-30; Kürkçüoğlu 1985: I-XXVI; 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. Nəsimi´s birth of all, also because it was officially introduced already in Soviet Azerbaijan. It is still widely used in official references to az. Nəsimi, 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.]Nəsimi´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.]Nəsimi´s possible birthplace.

5.2.2.1. *Nəsim?

One of the oldest suggestions as to [az.]Nəsimi´s birthplace is that he originated in a place called *[az.]Nəsim ([osm.]Nəsīm). This theory was put forward by the Ottoman literary historian [osm.]Laṭīfī (d. 1582).[808] [osm.]Laṭīfī is the author of a prestigious biographical and literary encyclopedia, the [osm.]*Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'arā* ("The lexicon of the poets"). He presented this work upon its completion to the Ottoman sultan [osm.]Süleymān in 1546. According to [osm.]Laṭīfī, [osm.]Nəsīm was the name of a district not far from Baghdad.[809] The statement was also repeated by the Ottoman historian [osm.]Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ğārullāh (died 1597), who claimed that [osm.]Nəsīm was a district ([osm.]*nāḥīye*) in the vicinity of Baghdad [810]

At first sight, [osm.]Laṭīfī´s assertion seems to be plausible. As we have already seen, [az.]Nəsimi´s pen name ([arab./mpers.]Nasīmī, [owo.]Nesīmī) contains the so-called *nisba* ending -*ī*.[811] This means that at least formally, [az.]Nəsimi´s sobriquet might look as if it was derived from a word *[arab.]Nasīm, *[mpers.]Nəsīm, or *[owo.]Nesīm. 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 ([owo.]*maḫlaṣ*) that is created from a place name is a very rare thing in Turkic literature.[812] In most cases, poets use [owo.]*maḫlaṣ*es that are derived from important generic terms that are helpful in generating the poetic effect. More importantly, despite its mention by [osm.]Laṭīfī, [osm.]Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ğārullāh as well as a number of modern scholars, the existence of *[arab.]Nasīm, *[mpers.]Nəsīm, or *[owo.]Nəsīm is still doubtful, not to speak about any further hints at it being [az.]Nəsimi´s birthplace.[813] One of the modern authors who accept the authenticity of the tradition about [az.]Nəsimi´s been born at *[arab.]Nasīm 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.]*Mu'ğam al-Mu'allifīn*), a certain [arab.]Muḥammad b. Dāvūd an-Nasīmī was killed in *[arab.]Nasīm in the year in A. H. 901 (1495 / 1496); incidentally, nothing is said about whether [arab.]Muḥammad b. Dāvūd an-Nasīmī was personally related to [az.]Nəsimi. 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.]Nasīm (which in theory could be the name of more than one location). Is this supposed to be the place mentioned by [osm.]Laṭīfī? If we remember that [osm.]Laṭīfī does not characterize [osm.]Nəsīm as a city but as a district, this creates further doubt. There is also an important time gap between [az.]İmadəddin Nəsimi´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.]İmadəddin Nəsimi, and not vice versa.[816]

Incidentally, another (or the same?) "[osm.]Nəsīm" is mentioned by the Ottoman writer [osm.]Süleymān Sa'deddīn Efendi Müstaḳīmzāde (1719–1780).[817] [osm.]Müstaḳīmzāde allegedly describes this place as "one of the villages of Aleppo".[818] Naturally, the time gap between the time of [az.]Nəsimi and that of [osm.]Müstaḳīmzāde 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.]Nəsimi´s birthplace as a "village" ([az.]*kənd*) bearing his name in the [arab.]Kifrī 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.]Nəsimi. If not, the village might again owe its name to the poet, and not vice versa.

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808 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: V; Şıxıyeva 1999: 60; Paşayev 2010: 44.

809 Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435. Cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: V.

810 Beyâni Mustafa bin Carullah 1997: 290.

811 P. 164. – On the *nisba* ending, cf. also p. 66.

812 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: III.

813 Cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: I, who considers all theories of [az.]Nəsimi´s coming from *[arab.]Nasīm to be baseless. – In contrast, Səadət Şıxıyeva has compiled statements by a number of modern authorities who claim that such a place really existed (Şıxıyeva 1999: 60).

814 Stern n. y.: 107.

815 [az.]*Şəhər* in Şıxıyeva´s translation (Şıxıyeva 1999: 60).

816 This possibility is considered to be likely by Şıxıyeva 1999: 60.

817 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: III.

818 [ttü.]*Haleb köylerinden biri* (quote from Kürkçüoğlu 1985: III).

819 Paşayev 2010: 43.

In addition to all the problems shown above, the mention of so many "*arab. Nasīm"s means that for each alleged birthplace of the poet not only its existence before az. Nəsimi´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 "*arab. Nasīm"s was the right one.

In addition, assuming the existence of a place named *arab. Nasīm, *mpers. Nəsīm, or *owo. Nəsīm is not the only way to etymologize the pen name az. Nəsimi. There are other plausible suggestions as well, including the formal parallel to mpers. Faẓlollāh´s pen name mpers. Naʿīmī. According to ttü. Kemâl Edib Kürkçüoğlu, az. Nəsimi´s famous line az. *Adımı həqdən Nəsimi yazaram* "I write my name (as) az. Nəsimi from God" expresses that the poet was given his pen name by mpers. Faẓlollāh himself.[820]

Finally, what also raises some suspicions about a place called *arab. Nasīm (etc.) being at the origin of the pen name az. Nəsimi is az. Nəsimi´s other pen name, mpers. Ḥosaynī~owo. Ḥüseynī, 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 *arab. Nasīm~osm. Nəsīm 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, *mpers. Nəsīm, or *owo. Nəsīm really existed, osm. Laṭīfī remains the only medieval source that actually claims that az. Imadəddin Nəsimi was born there.

In sum, despite its being mentioned by the eminent medieval source osm. Laṭīfī, there is no definite proof of the theory that az. Nəsimi came from a place called *az. Nəsim.

Further development of osm. Laṭīfī´s theory was the allegation that the ominous *arab. Nasīm was actually a place in the vicinity of the Azerbaijani town of az. Şamaxı. This theory seems to have appeared for the first time in the late 20th century.[822] It is doubtful on which basis it was development. In fact, it seems to be a creative invention that combines osm. Laṭīfī´s statement with theories about az. Nəsimi´s origin from az. Şamaxı or Shirvan.[823]

820 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: II. For mpers. Faẓlollāh´s pen name, see p. 84 and 115.

821 See p. 163.

822 Ciopiński 1988: 73, who speaks about "the village Nesîm in the environs of Shemakha", quotes as his source the Azerbaijani scholar az. Mirzağa A. Quluzadə.

823 See the next subchapter.

5.2.2.2. Shirvan or Şamaxı?

Quite popular is the theory that az. Nəsimi came from Shirvan, or more concretely, the city of az. Şamaxı, which was Shirvan´s capital for a long time.

The theory that Shirvan was the place of az. Nəsimi´s birth was popularized by two of Azerbaijan´s most prominent literary critics in the Tsarist and early Soviet era, az. Firidun bəy Köçərli (1863–1920) and az. Səlman Mümtaz (1884–1941).[824]

Several late Soviet authorities including az. Həmid Araslı (1902–1983) concretized this theory by declaring az. Şamaxı to be az. Nəsimi´s home.[825] Many post-Soviet Azerbaijanian 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 az. Nəsimi´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 az. Nəsimi was born in Iran. Amongst the Iranian cities quoted as his birthplaces are Tabriz and Shiraz.[828]

The first to mention Tabriz as az. Nəsimi´s home was probably arab. Ibn Ḥağar al-ʿAsḳalānī, who died A.D. 1449.[829] arab. Ibn Ḥağar referred to az. Nəsimi as "*arab. Nasīm ad-Dīn at-Tabrīzī."[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-Nasīmī[831] as well as the various forms containing the element arab./owo. *ʿimād* / mpers. *ʿemād*.[832] In other sources than arab. Ibn Ḥağar al-ʿAsḳalānī, 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 "*arab. *Nasīm ad-Dīn at-Tabrīzī*" by arab. Ibn Ḥağar al-ʿAsḳalānī could, the-

824 Şıxıyeva 1999: 60.

825 See the quotes in Şıxıyeva 1999: 60.

826 For instance, Qurbansoy 2019: 13.

827 Şıxıyeva 1999: 60.

828 Cf. the references collected in Şıxıyeva 1999: 60.

829 On arab. Ibn Ḥağar al-ʿAsḳalānī, cf. p. 67.

830 Quoted in Ayan 1990: 11. Ayan quotes the name in a Turkish transcription as "Nesîmü´d-din-i Tebrîzî". Because of the ttü. *izafe*, this cannot be the original Arabic form, which I therefore assume to have been *arab. Nasīm ad-Dīn at-Tabrīzī.

831 See p. 178ff.

832 See chapter 5.1.

refore, be the result of a misinterpretation. For one hand we know from hundreds of [az.]Nəsimi´s own poems that he used the form [owo.]Nesīmī / [mpers.]Nasīmī as his standard pen name. On the other hand, if the element [arab.]ad-Dīn (> [mpers.]ad-Dīn / [owo.]ad-Dīn) does appear in reference to [az.]Nəsimi elsewhere, it never occurs with [arab.]*nasīm* (or its equivalents in other languages) as its determination but as good as always with [arab./owo.]*ʿimād* / [mpers.]*ʿemād* in this function. [arab.]Ibn Ḥağar´s unique form *[arab.]Nasīm ad-Dīn at-Tabrīzī" therefore might be an *ad hoc* creation in which the pen name ([arab.]*taḫalluṣ* / [arab.]*maḫlaṣ*) [arab./mpers.]Nasīmī and the nickname ([arab.]*laḳab*) "so-and-so-[arab.]ad-Dīn"/ "[arab.]ʿImād ad-Dīn" have become mixed up.

As a consequence of the rather doubtful way [arab.]Ibn Ḥağar refers to [az.]Nəsimi as "*[arab.]Nasīm ad-Dīn at-Tabrīzī", we may also ask ourselves whether the indication of Tabriz as a place of origin is really credible. If we do believe that [arab.]Ibn Ḥağar´s mention of Tabriz has some weight, we may still think of various ways of interpreting it. [arab.]At-Tabrīzī "the man from Tabriz" may not necessarily mean that [az.]Nəsimi was born in Tabriz but could also be a reference to a larger region of which Tabriz was the cultural metropolis. However, possibly on the basis of [arab.]Ibn Ḥağar al-ʿAsḳalānī´s information, Tabriz was still considered to be [az.]Nəsimi´s birthplaces by some 20th-century historians.[833]

Shiraz is given as [az.]Nəsimi´s birthplace in [mpers.]Reżā Ḳuli Ḫān Hedāyat´s (1800–1871) literary encyclopedia [mpers.]*Reyāżo'l-ʿĀrefīn* ("The gardens of the mystics").[834] The source of this statement is unknown and given the time gap between [az.]Nəsimi´s [mpers.]Reżā Ḳuli Ḫān Hedāyat´s times it does not have much value on its own.

5.2.2.4. Other suggestions

Several other suggestions have been made in the literature. All of them rely on rather a doubtful source material.

A source which could, in theory, be of interest due to its age is the "Garden of the sultans" ([osm.]*Hadīḳatü's-selāṭīn*), a work ascribed to the Ottoman historian [osm.]Ǧelālzāde Ṣāliḥ Čelebi (ca. 1493–1565). This text contains a statement that [az.]Nəsimi was from "Iraq".[835] However, this assertion actually does not bring anything new in comparison to other sources. For the word "Iraq" ([osm.]*İrāḳ*) does not necessarily denote the territory roughly corresponding to "Iraq" as we know it today, which of course did not exist as a state in that time. Instead, [osm.]*İrāḳ* may either refer to parts of present-day Iraq (=[osm.]*İrāḳ-i ʿArab* "the Arab Iraq") or (Northern) Iran (=[osm.]*İrāḳ-i ʿAǧem* "the Iranian Iraq"). Hence, the information of the [osm.]*Ḥadīḳatü's-selāṭīn* cannot be read as a confirmation or confutation of other source material that claims [az.]Nəsimi came from the surroundings of Baghdad.[836]

The Ottoman poet and literary critic [osm.]ʿĀšiḳ Čelebi (1520–1572) writes that [az.]Nəsimi was [osm.]*Āmid-diyār*, i. e., from Amid (present-day [ttü.]Diyarbakır).[837] However, he seems to be the only medieval author to indicate this city as [az.]Nəsimi´s birthplace. As we have seen, [osm.]ʿĀšiḳ Čelebi had a very hostile attitude towards [az.]Nəsimi, which could mean that he had no or limited access to pro-[arab.]Ḥurūfī sources and gave his information by conjecture.

Equally doubtful is the suggestion that [az.]Nəsimi might have been born in Aleppo.[838] The reason for this statement might be the confusion of the city where he was executed with his birthplace.

Finally, the Ottoman lexicographer [osm.]Bursalï Meḥmed Ṭāhir (1861–1925) mentions the city of Nusaybin as a possible birthplace.[839] In support, he quotes a manuscript of one of [az.]Nəsimi´s divans of unknown age or provenience.[840] According to its origin, this is a very doubtful piece of information.

5.2.3. What we know about Nəsimi´s life

Much less is known about the life of [az.]Nəsimi than about [mpers.]Fażlollāh. Amongst the reasons for this may be that he was a much less notorious person than the master from [mpers.]Astarābād, who, among other things, had direct contact with leading political figures of his times. Only [az.]Nəsimi is known to have written poetry, most of which is lyrical and quite abstract. This type of classical Oriental poetry usually contains only very scant autobiographical information.

As for [az.]Nəsimi´s descent, we have already heard that he is said to have been a

833 Cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: V.

834 Quoted in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: V and Ayan 1990: 12; Şıxıyeva 1999: 60.

835 *İrak halkından* (quoted in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: V).

836 See chapter 5.2.2.1.

837 Âşık Çelebi 2010: 865, quoted in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: V and Ayan 1990: 14. The statement was later also repeated by the late Ottoman author [osm.]ʿAlī Emīrī Efendi (see Kürkçüoğlu 1985: V). Cf. Şıxıyeva 1999: 60. – On [osm.]Aşıḳ Čelebi cf. Karahan 1979: 228; Parlatır / Hazai / Kellner-Heinkele 2007: 311; Macit 2007a: 40.

838 See Şıxıyeva 1999: 60.

839 Quoted in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: V amd Şıxıyeva 1999: 60f.

840 Şıxıyeva 1999: 61.

Sayyid, i. e., belonged to the family of the Prophet Muḥammad.[841] This is already claimed by osm. Laṭīfī.[842] As we have seen in the case of az. Faẓlollāh, 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. Nəsimi.[843]

Many modern authors have discussed az. Nəsimi´s "Turcoman" origin. In this case, the English word "Turcoman" usually renders owo. Türkmān~owo. Türkmen. One problem with this (and similar other discussions) is that the meaning of owo. *Türkmān*~owo. *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. Nəsimi himself uses the word owo. *Türkmān* in opposition to owo. *ʿArab* ("Arab") in the ghazal az. *Əgərçi candasan candan nihansan*.[845] This could possibly mean that owo. *Türkmān* referred to Turkic-speaking populations, or the Turkic-speaking communities of Iran, in general. One of the authors who applied an Arabic equivalent of owo. *Türkmān*, arab. *Turkmānī*, to az. Nəsimi is osm. ʿĀšïḳ Čelebi.[846] osm. ʿĀšïḳ Čelebi refers to the poet with the Arabic arab. *iḍāfa ġayr al-ḥaḳīḳīya* construction arab. *Turkmānīyu'l-ġins* "belonging to the Turcoman (or: Turkic-speaking?) people".[847]

Some interesting details about az. Nəsimi´s life are given by the Ottoman writer osm. Laṭīfī,[848] However, osm. Laṭīfī´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. Ḥurūfīs doubtlessly belonged.[849] This kind of attitude might have influenced his narrative in some places. One of osm. Laṭīfī´s doubtful assertions is that az. Nəsimi 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 osm. Laṭīfī´s assertion that az. Nəsimi was actually not a arab. Ḥurūfī but a member of the arab. Niʿmetullāhīya order, which was founded by mpers. Šāh Neʿmatollāh (Valī, 1330–1431). osm. Laṭīfī makes this statement with reference to the osm. *Menāḳıbü'l-ʿĀrifīn* ("The legends of the mystics") by osm. Eflākī, which was terminated in 1353.[851] Of course, it is impossible that osm. Eflākī´s work contained any reference to az. Nəsimi, 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 mpers. Šāh Neʿmatollāh was born in Aleppo. Again, in the absence of much other material about az. Nəsimi´s life, osm. Laṭīfī is still widely used in the literature.

One of the things osm. Laṭīfī writes about az. Nəsimi 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 owo. Yūnus Emre (ca. 1240–1320),[853] owo. Sulṭān Veled (1226–1312), or az. Həsənoğlu (end of 13th / beginning of the 14th century).[854] However, these poets were no match to az. Nəsimi as regards the composition of perfect examples of Classical Islamic court poetry (so-called az. *əruz* poetry), as they predominantly used the folkloristic style (the so-called az. *heca vəzni*). osm. Laṭīfī, who was himself very close to the Ottoman court, obviously used perfection in az. *əruz*-style poetry as the criterion to define az. Nəsimi´s quality.

One of the most famous anecdotes in az. Nəsimi´s life also has its origin in osm. Laṭīfī´s osm. *Tezkiretü'ş-Šuʿarā*. This story narrates az. Nəsimi´s conversion to the arab. Ḥurūfī doctrine. Full of enthusiasm about his new discovery, so the story goes, he tells his brother, az. Şah Xəndan, about it. Contrary to what az. Nəsimi might have expected, az. Şah Xəndan emphatically dissuades his brother from revealing his "secret" to other people. Thereupon, az. Nəsimi composes his famous az. *məsnəvi* (rhymed poem) az. *Dəryayi-mühit cuşə gəldi* ("The encompassing ocean has come to ebullition"),

841 arab. Sayyid *stricto sensu* refers to desendants of arab. Muḥammad´s grandson arab. al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, while the word arab. Šarīf can be used for descendants of arab. Muḥammad´s grandson arab. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī. However, arab. Sayyid can also be used as an umbrella term for both categories (explanations from Kürkçüoğlu 1985: IIIf.).

842 Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435, also quoted in Ayan 1990: 13.

843 Cf. the critical remarks of Kürkçüoğlu 1985: I.

844 Of course, references to az. Nəsimi´s alleged "Turcoman"~owo. Türkmān~owo. Türkmen affilition cannot be directly connected with the modern Turkmen language, which started to acquired its distinctive features from approximately the 18th century onward (see Tekin / Ölmez 1995: 114; Schönig 1998: 261; Dwyer 2007: 28).

845 Quoted in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: 191.

846 On ʿĀšïḳ Čelebi see p. 174.

847 Quoted in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: VII. See also Âşık Çelebi 2010: 865.

848 On osm. Laṭīfī, see p. 169.

849 Cf. Anetshofer 2011: 87.

850 Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435.

851 According to Ayan 1990: 14. On the osm. *Menāḳıbü'l-ʿĀrifīn* and its author, see Yazıcı 2019.

852 Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435.

853 On him, cf. Abbasov 1983: 7f.; Heß 2018c.

854 On az. Həsənoğlu, see. Rüstəmova 1990: 41f.; Akpınar 1994: 20; Celâl / Hüseynov 2008: 26.

in which the basic philosophical and theological principles of this religion are enthusiastically sung.[855] [az.]Şah Xəndan is considered to be a historic figure and to have died in A. H. 830 (first day: November 2, 1426; last day: October 21, 1427).[856] It is unknown whether he was [az.]Nəsimi´s younger or elder brother.[857] In 1926, the Soviet Azerbaijanian literary scholar [az.]Səlman Mümtaz (1884–1941) came up with the contention that [az.]Şah Xəndan had been born and died in [az.]Şamaxı and was buried in the eponymous cemetery of that city, the colloquial pronunciation of which was [az.]Şaxanda.[858] There is no further, especially no older, support for these assertions. The mention of local pilgrimages to [az.]Şah Xəndan´s supposed grave that took place in modern times, of course, proves nothing.

Again according to [osm.]Laṭīfī, [az.]Nəsimi himself visited at least once [osm.]*Rūm* – which denotes former Byzantine territory most likely in Anatolia – during the reign of the Ottoman sultan [osm.]Murād I, i. e., before June 15, 1389.[859]

Apart from being an [arab.]Ḥurūfī poet and propagandist, [az.]Nəsimi was also a teacher. One of his pupils was a poet who used the pen name [owo.]Refīʿī ("The Sublime").[860] [owo.]Refīʿī composed [arab.]Ḥurūfī poetry in an Old Western Oghuz idiom that is practically indistinguishable from the Old Western Oghuz language [az.]Nəsimi wrote in. One of his poems is the [owo.]*mesnevī* (=[az.]*məsnəvi*) [owo.]*Bešāret-nāme* ("Book of the Good News").[861] The date of the [owo.]*Bešāret-nāme´*s completion is known to be A. H. 811 (first day: May 27, 1408; last day: May 16, 1409).[862] This evinces May 27, 1408, as the *terminus post quem* for [owo.]Refīʿī´s death. However, the precise dates of his birth and death remain unknown.[863] Another work by [owo.]Refīʿī is the [owo.]*Genǧ-nāme* ("The Book of the Treasure"), which is described as being a eulogy about [mpers.]Faẓlollāh.[864] Both of [owo.]Refīʿī´s works are considered to be important [arab.]Ḥurūfī texts.[865]

855 Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435. – Cf. the passages from this [az.]*məsnəvi* discussed in chapter 6.

856 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: IV.

857 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: IV.

858 [ttü.]*Şahanda* in the Turkish transcription of Kürkçüoğlu 1985: VI. – See Mümtaz 1926.

859 Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435, also quoted in Ayan 1990: 13. – On Murād I., see Vatin 2015: 829.

860 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XVIII; Heß 2009: 496.

861 Partial edition and German translation in Heß 2009: 496-567.

862 Kartal 2007: 505.

863 Kartal 2007: 505.

864 Kartal 2007: 505.

865 Kartal 2007: 505.

5.2.4. Death

5.2.4.1. According to Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī and Ibn Ḥaǧar

Perhaps the most detailed source that informs us about [az.]Nəsimi´s death is [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s [arab.]*Kunūz ad-dahab fī-tārīḫ Ḥalab* ("The treasures of gold concerning the history of Aleppo"). [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī died in A. H. 884 (1479 / 1480).[866] This information is relevant for the evaluation of the value of this source, as it means that he wrote his work relatively close to [az.]Nəsimi´s lifetime, even if he was almost certainly not an eye-witness.

As the title of [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s work implies, it concentrates on the city of Aleppo. This explains why the narration about [az.]Nəsimi [arab.]*Kunūz ad-dahab fī-tārīḫ Ḥalab* almost exclusively dwells on the last episode in the poet´s life, which unfolded in that city. [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s account of [az.]Nəsimi´s execution in Aleppo is of such importance to the understanding of this poet that it seems justified to reproduce here in full, in particular as none of the modern historical analyses of [az.]Nəsimi´s life contains it full and *verbatim*:

Va-fī-ayyāmi Ɣašbak[867] *al-madkūr ḳutila ʿAlī an-Nasīmī az-zindīḳ. Uddiʿa bi-dāriʾl-ʿadl bi-ḥuḍūri šayḫi-nā al-mudīl va-Šams ad-Dīn b. Amīn ad-Daula va-kāna id dāka nāʾiba'š-šayḫ ʿIzz ad-Dīn va-ḳāḍī al-ḳuḍāt Fatḥ ad-Dīn al-mālikī va-ḳāḍī al-ḳuḍāt Šihāb ad-Dīn va-aḫī-hi*[868] *al-ḥanbalī al-madʿū Ibn al-Ḥāzūḳ bi-alfāẓi-hī al-mansūba ilay-hi: Allahumma innā naʿūdu bi-ka an narǧiʿa ʿalā-aʿḳābi-nā, au nuftana ʿan-dīni-nā va-kāna ḳad aġvā baʿḍa man lā ʿaḳla la-hū va-tabiʿū-hu ʿalā-kufri-hī va-zandaḳati-hī va-ilḥādi-hī.*
Fa-ḳāma liʾd-daʿvā ʿalay-hi Ibn ʾLŠNQŠŶ al-ḥanafī va-ʿulamāʾ al-balad.
Va-ḳāla la-hū an-nāʾib: in anta asbatta mā taḳūlu fī-hi va-illā ḳataltu-ka.
Fa-ḥaǧama ʿinda-samāʿi-hī hādāʾl-kalām ʿani-ʾd-daʿvā. Vaʾn-Nasīmī lā yazīdu fī-kalāmi-hī ʿalāʾl-lafẓ bi-ʾš-šahādatayni, va-nafā mā ḳīla ʿan-hū fa-ḥaḍara ʿinda-dālika aš-šayḫ Šihāb ad-Dīn b. Hilāl va-ǧalasa fauḳaʾl-ḳāḍī al-mālikī va-aftā fī-hādāʾl-maǧlis biʾanna-hū zindīq va anna-hū yuḳtal …[869] *lammā ǧalasa fauḳa-ʾl-mālikīʾnḥarafa min-hū.*
Tumma innaʾbna Hilāl ḳāla liʾl-mālikī: li-mā lā yuḳtal hādāʾz-zindīḳ. Fa-ḳāla la-hū al-mālikī: a-taktubu ḫaṭṭa-ka biʾanna-hū yuḳtal.
Fa-ḳāla la-hū: naʿam.

866 Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī al-Ḥalabī 1997, title page.

867 Graphically: YŠBK [M. R. H.].

868 According to a note by the editors, the word is not well legible and has been emendated [M. R. H.].

869 The editors mark that this passage cannot be read [M. R. H.].

Fa-kataba la-hū ṣūrata fatvā, fa-kataba ʿalay-hā fa-ʿaraḍa ḫuṭṭa ʿalā-šayḫi-nā al-mudīl va-baḳīyati'l-ḳūdāt va'l-ʿulamā' al-ḥāḍirīna fa-lam yuvāfiḳ-hū ʿalā-dālika fa-ḳāla la-hū al-mālikī: id kāna'l-ḳuḍāt va'l-ʿulamā' lā yuvāfiḳūna kayfa aḳtula-hū bi-ḳauli-ka.
Fa-ḳāla Yašbak: anā lā aḳtulu-hū fa'inna'ṣ-sulṭān rasama lī an uṭāliʿa-hū va-anẕura mā-dā yarsuma'ṣ-sulṭān fī-hi.
Va'nfaṣala'l-maǧlis ʿalā-dālika va-dāma ʿinda-'n-nā'ib bi-dāri'l-ʿadl fī-iʿtiḳāl va-ṭūliʿa al-Mu'ayyad bi-ḫabari-hī.
Tumma baʿda-dālika ḥasala li'n-nā'ib ḫurūǧ ilā-'l-ʿumḳ fa-aḫraǧa-hū ilā-siǧni'l-ḳalʿa fa-varada marsūm al-Mu'ayyad bi-'an yuslaḫa va-yušhara bi-Ḥalab sabʿa ayyāmin va yunādā ʿalay-hi tumma tuḳṭaʿa aʿḍā'u-hū va yursala min-hā šay'un li-ʿAlī Bak b. DLĠD'R va-aḫī-hi Nāṣir ad-Dīn va-ʿUtmān Ḳara Yuluk fa-'inna-hū kāna ḳad afsada ʿaḳā'id hā'ūlā fa-faʿala dālika bi-hī va-hādā'r-raǧul kāna kāfiran mulḥidan naʿūdu bi-'llāhi min-ḳauli-hī va-fiʿli-hī va-la-hū šiʿr raḳīḳ

"In the days of the above-mentioned owo.Yašbeg, the heretic arab.ʿAlī an-Nasīmī was killed.[870] He was charged at the House of Justice (arab.*Dār al-ʿadl*) in the presence of our shaykh, who puts other people into the dust,[871] of arab.Šams ad-Dīn b. Amīn ad-Daula, who at that time was the deputy (arab.*nā'ib*) of arab.Šayḫ ʿIzz ad-Dīn b. Amīn ad-Daula, of the chief justice (arab.*ḳāḍī al-ḳuḍāt*) arab.Fatḥ ad-Dīn the Malikite,[872]of the chief justice (arab.*ḳāḍī al-ḳuḍāt*) arab.Šihāb ad-Dīn and of his brother (?),[873]

870 Or "executed". The Arabic stem I verb arab.*ḳatala* conveys both meanings.

871 "Our shaykh, who puts other people into the dust" (arab.*šayḫu-nā al-mudīl*): An editors´ note explains that the person referred to here was called arab.Ibn Ḫaṭīb b. Nāṣirīya [M. R. H.].

872 Throughout the text, it is not absolutely certain whether the word arab.*al-mālikī* means "Malikite", i. e., adherent of the Malikite school of jurisprudence (arab.*madhab*), which was founded by arab.Mālik b. Anas al-Aṣbaḥī (ca. A. D. 711-795) and is one of the four major schools of jurisprudence of Sunni Islam, or whether arab.*al-Mālikī* is part of the proper name of arab.Fatḥ ad-Dīn. 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 arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī 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, arab.Fatḥ ad-Dīn is not the only person that is qualified by epithets that can also designate schools of jurisprudence: This is also true of arab.Ibn al-Ḥāzūḳ and of arab.Ibn 'LŠNQŠY. 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 arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s text, Kemâl Edib Kürkçüoğlu does assume the word arab.*al-mālikī* to mean "Malikite" (Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIX) [M. R. H.].

873 Uncertain reading, see footnote 868 [M. R. H.].

the Ḥanbalite,[874] who was also known as arab.Ibn al-Ḥāzūḳ, 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 arab.*al-ḥanbalī* is part of the proper name or whether it means "Ḥanbalite", i. e., adherent of the Ḥanbalī / Ḥanbalite school of jurisprudence (after arab.Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, A. D. 767-820). As in the case of arab.*al-mālikī*, 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 assumes that the school of jurisprudence is meant (Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIX).

875 The edited text of arab.*Ḳunūz ad-dahab fī-tārīḫ Ḥalab* 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 az.Nəsimi´s words arab.*Allahumma innā naʿūdu bi-ka an narǧiʿa ʿalā-aʿḳābi-nā* seems to indicate that the immediately subsequent expression, arab.*au nuftana ʿan-dīni-nā*, belongs to a different level of language. If this was the case, it would be a logical assumption that arab.*au nuftana ʿan-dīni-nā* was not part of the statement attributed to az.Nəsimi but a comment made by somebody else. The most natural person to which arab.*au nuftana ʿan-dīni-nā* should then be ascribed is the author of the text, arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī. Therefore, it could be assumed that arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī initially reproduced the uttering arab.*Allahumma innā naʿūdu bi-ka an narǧiʿa ʿalā-aʿḳābi-nā* "My God, we take refuge with You so that we may go back on our heels", that is ascribed to az.Nəsimi, and then made an explanatory note in which he suggests an explanation of the metaphorical meaning of the last part of this uttering, arab.*an narǧiʿa ʿalā-aʿḳābi-nā* "so that we may go back on our heels". According to this interpretation, arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī would have introduced his explanatory note with the word arab.*au* ("or"/"i. e.)", and the wording of the explanatory note would be "so that we be seduced away from our religious practice" (arab.*nuftana ʿan-dīni-nā*). az.Nəsimi would therefore have been accused on the basis of an ambivalent, metaphorical expression which arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī explained as denoting an incitation to the abandonment of the correct religious practice, i. e., of Islam.

The accusation was brought against [az.]Nəsimi by [arab.]Ibn ʾLŠNQŠY̱ the Ḥanafite[876] and the Islamic scholars ([arab.]*ʿulamāʾ*) of the country.
The [arab.]*nāʾib*[877] said to him [[arab.]Ibn ʾLŠNQŠY̱ – M. R. H.]:

'If you cannot prove what you are saying about him, I will have you executed! '

When he [[arab.]Ibn ʾLŠNQŠY̱ – M. R. H.] heard these words, he backed away from the accusation.
As to [az.]Nəsimi, he did not say anything more than the two articles of the Islamic confession of faith[878] 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 [[az.]Nəsimi – 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:

'Yes.'

Upon this, he [the Malikite – M. R. H.] made out a form ([arab.]*ṣūra*) 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.]*ʿulamāʾ*) 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 [owo.]Yašbeg 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 [=[az.]Nəsimi– M. R. H.].'

Upon this, the session was terminated. He [=[az.]Nəsimi – M. R. H.] continued to stay in custody with the [arab.]*nāʾib* [=[owo.]Yašbeg – M. R. H.] at the House of Justice, and [arab.]al-Muʾayyad[881] was informed about the news concerning him [=[az.]Nəsimi – M. R. H.].
After this, it happened to the [arab.]*nāʾib* that he had to go out to [arab.]Al-ʿAmḳ.[882] He got him [=[az.]Nəsimi – M. R. H.] out and put him into the prison of the citadel. Afterward, [arab.]al-Muʾayyad´s written order arrived, stating that he [=[az.]Nəsimi – 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

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-Nuʿmān b. T̲ābit (699-767) and is another of the leading schools of jurisprudence of Sunni Islam. Cf. the discussions in footnotes 874 and 875. Again, Kemâl Edib Kürkçüoğlu assumes that the school of jurisprudence is meant (Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIX). – The name [arab.]Ibn ʾLŠNQŠY̱ 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 <*[owo.]*čanaḳčï* "bowl-maker"?). This interpretation is suggested by Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIX.

877 I. e., [owo.]Yašbeg.

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 illāʾl-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).

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 *"they did not consent". However, [arab.]Šauḳī Šaʿat´s and [arab.]Fāsiḥ al-Bakkūr´s edition of [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s text clearly only admits the reading "he did not consent" ([arab.]*fa-lam yuvāfiḳ-hū*). However, one may point to the fact that there is only a slight graphical difference (the addition of the letter [arab.]*Vāv*) between [arab.]*fa-lam yuvāfiḳ-hū* "he did not consent" and *[arab.]*fa-lam yuvāfiḳū-hū* "they did not consent". Perhaps the latter is the original form and was misspelt in the process of copying.

881 The Mameluke sultan [arab.]Šayḫ al-Maḥmūdī / [arab.]Al-Malik al-Muʾayyad (see p. 47).

882 Perhaps to be read as [arab.]Al-ʿUmḳ. [arab.]Al-ʿUmḳ~ [arab.]Al-ʿAmḳ ("The depth") could be a place name, or just designate some lower terrain.

be cut up and that bits of them be sent to owo.*ʿAlī* Beg of the arab.Dū'l-ḳadr[883] dynasty, to his brother arab.Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad,[884] as well as to az.Qara Yuluq Osman.[885] For he [=az.Nəsimi – M. R. H.] had perverted their religious practice. He [=owo.Yašbeg– M. R. H.] then actually did this to him [=az.Nəsimi – M. R. H.]. This man [=az.Nəsimi – 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."[886]

There can be little doubt that the arab.ʿAlī an-Nasīmī mentioned in the text is indeed the person known to us as az.Nəsimi. 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.Nasīmī. This corresponds exactly to mpers.Nasīmī, owo.Nesīmī, and therefore az.Nəsimi. 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 az.Nəsimi from his own poems and with the bulk of the information from other sources. This includes how he was considered a "heretic" (arab.*zindīḳ*) from a Sunni Islamic mainstream perspective, his being identified as the author of "subtle poetry" (arab.*šiʿr raḳīḳ*), 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, owo.Yašbeg. The expression "the above-mentioned owo.Yašbeg" (arab.*Yašbak al-madkūr*) in the text refers back to a previous passage in the arab.*Kunūz ad-dahab*. There, this owo.Yašbeg-~arab.Yašbak, mentioned by the fuller name arab.Yašbak 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 iḥdā va-ʿašrīn*).[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.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s text, az.Nəsimi´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.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s narrative is confirmed by the second important Arab source about the life of az.Nəsimi, arab.Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsḳalānī. The value of arab.Ibn Ḥaǧar´s account is extremely high because he was a contemporary of az.Nəsimi and could, in theory, even have been a direct witness of the tribunal and / or the execution.[888] arab.Ibn Ḥaǧar agrees with arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī in that az.Nəsimi was executed in the times of the arab.*amīr* owo.Yašbeg.[889] As for the chronology, arab.Ibn Ḥaǧar´s version is even more precise than that of arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī, for he indicates only A. H. 821 as the year in which az.Nəsimi was executed.[890] If we combine the versions of the two Arab authors, az.Nəsimi 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 az.Nəsimi´s year of death by a number of medieval and modern scholars. These include osm.Kātib Čelebi,[891] osm.ʿAlī Emīrī Efendi[892] and a number of modern authors from Azerbaijan,[893] – possibly on the basis of arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s narrative alone.

If we follow the information provided by arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī and arab.Ibn Ḥaǧar, 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.Ḥurūfīya movement. If we take the information that az.Nəsimi was one of mpers.Faẓlollāh´s mpers.*ḫalīfa*s (successors) as the basis of an interpretation, we can try to determine az.Nəsimi´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.*ḫalīfa*s at the time in the arab.Ḥurūfīya movement after mpers.Faẓlollāh had been executed. However, the fact that mpers.ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā is described as mpers.Faẓlollāh´s *first* mpers.*ḫalīfa*s might give support to

883 Interestingly, the name of the arab.Dū'l-ḳadr dynasty is not written arab.Dū'l-ḳadr but arab.DLĠD'R, 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 Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī al-Ḥalabī 1997: 125-126. The passage is also discussed in Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XIX. – There is a French translation of arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´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 Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī 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; Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XVII.

891 According to Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XVIII. – On osm.Kātib Čelebi, cf. p. 85.

892 According to Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XVIII. – On osm.ʿAlī 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 [mpers.] *ḫalīfa* succession there was, for a certain time, only *one* [mpers.] *ḫalīfa*, namely, [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-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 [mpers.] *ḫalīfa* at a time continued to be at the head of the [arab.] Ḥurūfīya movement until (at least) the time of [az.] Nəsimi´s death, we might be able to locate [az.] Nəsimi´s place in the succession of the [mpers.] *ḫalīfa*s. Here, a second difficulty becomes manifest. For in addition to the problem of our not knowing with certainty whether more than one [mpers.] *ḫalīfa* existed in the [arab.] Ḥurūfīya movement at any given point in time until [az.] Nəsimi´s execution, there are other problems with this chronology. The first of them is that the time of the presumed first [mpers.] *ḫalīfa* [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā´s death is disputed. As has been seen, there are two suggestions as to when [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-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.] Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s account is correct and at the same time assume that there was only one [arab.] Ḥurūfī [mpers.] *ḫalīfa* at a time we must also assume that [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā died a few weeks after December 18, 1416. For had he died after January 27, 1419 (the other alternative), he would have been [mpers.] *ḫalīfa* during the whole of the time that [arab.] Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s and [arab.] Ibn Ḥaǧar´s accounts allow for [az.] Nəsimi to have been executed, which automatically would mean that [az.] Nəsimi could never have been [mpers.] *ḫalīfa*.

Following this – admittedly very speculative – chronology [az.] Nəsimi would have followed [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā in the office of [mpers.] *ḫalīfa* after [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā´s death at the end of 1416 or at the beginning of 1417. At some point after this, the new [mpers.] *ḫalīfa* [az.] Nəsimi 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 [mpers.] *ḫalīfa*s had existed between [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā and [az.] Nəsimi.

As an argument in favor of the above – unproven – reconstructed chronology one may point to the fact that [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā´s mission focused on predominantly Oghuz-speaking areas, in particular, Anatolia. Writing in a Turkic idiom perfectly understandable in this Oghuz-speaking sphere[896] and very likely having himself penetrated there,[897] [az.] Nəsimi must have been the ideal successor of [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā. The two were of comparable fervor in their advocation of the [arab.] Ḥurūfī creed. That [az.] Nəsimi went to Aleppo as the next [mpers.] *ḫalīfa* after [mpers.] ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā would, therefore, be quite a plausible assumption, independently of whether it could be proven or not.

895 See chapter 4.5.5.2.

896 On Nəsimi´s language, cf. Heß 2009.

897 Cf. the mention of the city of [owo.] Marʿaš by [az.] Nəsimi (p. 48).

The theory that [az.] Nəsimi had become a [arab.] Ḥurūfī [mpers.] *ḫalīfa* 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.] Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´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.] Ḥurūfīya. Amongst them, the staunchest supporters of the [arab.] Ḥurūfī religion were probably the rulers of [arab.] Dū'l-ḳadr, who were the only dynasty ever to be converted to this creed.[899] In sum, Aleppo was an important place for the [arab.] Ḥurūfī missionaries because of its closeness to pro-[arab.] Ḥurūfī territories, its large Turkic-speaking population, and the chances that its notorious political instability offered for propagators.

[arab.] Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s account of [az.] Nəsimi´s trial and death is precious to historians not only because it offers an approximate date for [az.] Nəsimi´s death but also because of many other details it contains. One of them is that the accusations against [az.] Nəsimi reposed on quite shaky grounds from the beginning. In an interesting parallel to the tribunal against the famous Baghdadi mystic [arab.] Al-Ḥallāǧ (also called [owo.] Manṣūr), who had been executed for allegedly saying "I am Allah" ([arab.] *Ana'l-Ḥaḳḳ*) in A. D. 922 and is frequently mentioned by [az.] Nəsimi in his poems,[900] the sentence against [az.] Nəsimi was based on the interpretation of a single uttering. What is more, in [az.] Nəsimi´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.] Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´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.] Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s account shows how the shariah court´s attempt to sentence [az.] Nəsimi 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.] *nā'ib* 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.] *nā'ib* 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

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.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s anti-[az.]Nəsimi attitude we are probably not wrong in concluding that there was none.

The whole tribunal could have ended at this point. [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Nəsimi 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 [az.]Nəsimi´s opponents to have him sentenced. The driving force behind [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Nəsimi 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 [az.]Nəsimi. Yet again, the attempt at having [az.]Nəsimi 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 [az.]Nəsimi was a heretic. Possibly, this is the result of rivalry or divergences between the representatives of the Ḥanbali and Malikite schools of jurisprudence, if one assumes that the adjectives [arab.]*ḥanbalī* and [arab.]*mālikī* 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 [az.]Nəsimi.

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 [az.]Nəsimi 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 [owo.]Yašbeg 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 [owo.]Yašbeg 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 [az.]Nəsimi 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.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī, according to which [az.]Nəsimi "had perverted the religious practice" of these rulers. Obviously, [arab.]al-Muayyad used the sentence pronounced against [az.]Nəsimi as a cautionary tale against his political rivals.

The detailed narration that [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī provides about [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Nəsimi 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.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´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 [az.]Nəsimi have become the victim of personal aversion, hatred, or revenge? Unfortunately, even [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´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.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´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 [owo.]Yašbeg 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.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī 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 [az.]Nəsimi´s words were aimed at "seducing us away from our religious practice" ([arab.]*nuftana ʿan-*

904 Cf. the discussion in chapter 4.5.7.

dīni-nā). The verb form [arab.]*nuftana* belongs to stem I of the root *F-T-N*. The meaning of this stem is also encoded by the noun [arab.]*fitna*, which is one of the most important notions of lived Islam. [arab.]*Fitna* denotes the opposite of order and orderliness in a religious, political, and sexual perspective. Whosoever causes [arab.]*fitna* 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.]*nuftana* is rendered even more explicit by the emphasis on [az.]Nəsimi´s "heresy" ([arab.]*zandaḳa*), "disbelief" ([arab.]*kufr*) and "anti-Islam" ([arab.]*ilḥād*). 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 [az.]Nəsimi had "seduced" some people "into aberration" ([arab.]*aġvā*) 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 [az.]Nəsimi 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-Muʾayyad´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 [=[az.]Nəsimi – M.R.H.] had perverted their religious practice" ([arab.]*fa-ʾinna-hū kāna ḳad afsada ʿaḳāʾid hāʾūlā*) belongs to [arab.]al-Muʾayyad or [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī.

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-ʿAǧamī´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 [az.]Nəsimi. Instead, [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī prefers to use the passive voice [arab.]*uddiʿa* "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 Ḫaṭīb b. Nāṣirīya], [arab.]Šams ad-Dīn b. Amīn ad-Daula, [arab.]Fatḥ ad-Dīn, [arab.]Šihāb ad-Dīn, and [arab.]Ibn al-Ḥāzūḳ – is actually said to be one of the people who came up with the accusations against [az.]Nəsimi. Instead, [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s text only specifies that "an accusation was made" ([arab.]*uddiʿa*) "in their presence" ([arab.]*bi-ḥuḍūri* …). 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-ʿAǧamī 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-ʿAǧamī wrote down his account. This interpretation is supported by the fact that [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī uses the passive voice also in another crucial passage of his description of [az.]Nəsimi´s trial. This is the passage where it comes to the quoting of the utterances [az.]Nəsimi 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-ʿAǧamī only speaks about "his words, that had been attributed to him" ([arab.]*alfāẓi-hī 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-ʿAǧamī does not even consider it worthwhile to ask these questions. In passing, though,[arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī 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 Ḫaṭīb b. Nāṣirīya]. This further undermines belief in [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s impartiality. He was certainly more sympathetic to those who had to decide upon [az.]Nəsimi´s fate than to [az.]Nəsimi 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.]*Kunūz ad-dahab fī-tārīḫ Ḥalab.*

We have already seen that [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī cannot be considered a fully impartial observer. For in addition to what has been said before, [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s overtly anti-[arab.]Ḥurūfī position is evident from a number of text details. For instance, he labels [az.]Nəsimi a "heretic" ([arab.]*zindīḳ*) right in the first sentence of his narration and repeats the accusation of "heresy" ([arab.]*zandaḳa*) throughout the text. He qualifies [az.]Nəsimi´s mindset as "disbelief" ([arab.]*kufr*) and "anti-Islam" ([arab.]*ilḥād*), which are among the worst things a Sunni mainstream Muslim can say about a human being. As we have seen, [az.]Nəsimi´s followers are labeled "perfect idiots" ([arab.]*man lā ʿaḳla la-hū*), whom [az.]Nəsimi had "seduced into aberration" ([arab.]*aġvā*). Certain doubts as to the impartiality of [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī may also arise if one looks at the passage where he introduces the accuser [arab.]Ibn ʾLŠNQŠY. On one hand, [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s text singles out this person, whose name is unfortunately not to be voca-

[905] On the concept of [arab.]*fitna* cf. Heß 2009a.

lized, as the one who pronounced the accusation in court (arab. *fa-ḳāma li'd-daʿvā ʿalay-hi*) and provides a dialogue between arab. Ibn ʾLŠNQŠY̱ and the Mameluke sultan´s viceregent (arab. *nāʾib*), as if both had been present in person during az. Nəsimi´s trial. On the other hand, arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s wording "the accusation was brought against az. Nəsimi by arab. Ibn ʾLŠNQŠY̱ the Ḥanafite and the Islamic scholars of the country" (az. *fa-ḳāma li'd-daʿvā ʿalay-hi Ibn ʾLŠNQŠY̱ al-ḥanafī va-ʿulamāʾ al-balad)* may at first sight seem to indicate that arab. Ibn ʾLŠNQŠY̱ 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. *nāʾib*. This leads to the question of whether arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī imagines them to have been present at the tribunal at all. In sum, arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī 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-ʿAǧamī. 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-ʿAǧamī refers to him as "chief justice" (arab. *ḳāḍī al-ḳuḍāt*) but to his opponent arab. Fatḥ ad-Dīn the Malikite only as "judge" (arab. *ḳāḍī*), although arab. Fatḥ ad-Dīn is also given the rank of arab. *ḳāḍī al-ḳuḍāt* earlier in the text. This means that arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī presents az. Nəsimi´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-ʿAǧamī´s impartiality. The value of arasb. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s account as a primary source must not be overestimated for other reasons as well. arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī 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 Ḫaṭīb b. Nāṣirīya, because arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī 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-ʿAǧamī, they possibly included arab. Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsḳalānī, because arab. Ibn Ḥaǧar was a very famous author who must have been known to arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī, who was born not too long after him. The use of material from arab. Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsḳalānī´s works would offer an explanation for the correspondences between him and arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī.

Notwithstanding, arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´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. Fatḥ ad-Dīn and arab. Šihāb ad-Dīn, are identified as chief justices (arab. *ḳāḍī al-ḳuḍāt*). This means that the lawsuit must have been quite an important one, which was not given into the hands of an ordinary judge (arab. *ḳāḍī*),

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-ʿAǧamī´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, Ḥanbalites, and Ḥanafites), 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-ʿAǧamī´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-Ḥāzūḳ, 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-ʿAǧamī – that indicates that the charges against az. Nəsimi might have been manipulated?

Another important thing that we learn from arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s account is that az. Nəsimi had a number of followers who had some visibility even in Aleppo, i. e., to all likelihood far away from az. Nəsimi´s home region. For the text states that "some perfect idiots" (arab. *baʿḍu man lā ʿaḳla la-hū*) "followed him in his disbelief (arab. *tabiʿū-hu ʿalā-kufri-hī*). As a result of arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī not giving the identities of those who accused az. Nəsimi and the circumstances in which these accusations were raised, we do not know whether the existence of this group of az. Nəsimi'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 az. Nəsimi´s "disbelief", must have been perceived as rivals by such people as arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī, 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-ʿAǧamī´s text is the statement that az. Nəsimi "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. *salaḥa*, az. *soy-*, az. *dərisini soy-*) plays a crucial role both in az. Nəsimi´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), az. Nəsimi´s lyrical ego states that being flayed was a fate that

awaited him.[906] Against this backdrop, it is a pivotal question whether [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Nəsimi frequently believes that his skin had been peeled off while he was still alive. In his fanciful account of [az.]Nəsimi´s death, [osm.]ʿĀšïḳ Čelebi states that the inhabitants of Aleppo and Syria first pulled off [az.]Nəsimi´s skin, then bought it for the full price ([osm.]*baʿde-hū metāʿ-i-* ʿömri *derisi tolu bahāya al-)* and then put it on him on the gallows ([osm.]*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. [osm.]ʿĀšïḳ Čelebi´s narrative must probably not be taken literally. It is highly stylized, which is in part due to [osm.]ʿĀšïḳ Čelebi´s enmity with [az.]Nəsimi, his indignation about [az.]Nəsimi´s "heresy" ([osm.]*zendeḳa*) as well as about his "words full of lies" ([osm.]*kelimāt-i müzaḫrefe*).[908] The expression "put him on the gallows" ([osm.]*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, [osm.]ʿĀšïḳ Čelebi is singular, and therefore perhaps questionable, also as regards another information he gives about the life of [az.]Nəsimi, which is the poet´s alleged origin from [ttü.]Diyarbakır.[910] In sum, it does not seem to follow with certainty from [osm.]ʿĀšïḳ Čelebi´s narrative that [az.]Nəsimi 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 [az.]Nəsimi was flayed alive was the very influential Ottoman lexicographer [osm.]Laṭīfī.[911] The unimaginably gruesome detail of being flayed alive gave the figure of [az.]Nəsimi 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 Marsyas[912] or St. Bartholomew to not receive much attention in the Islamicate sphere.

One of the earliest modern propagators of the narration of [az.]Nəsimi´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;

906 For details, see Heß 2016 and Heß 2017.

907 Âşık Çelebi 2010: 865.

908 Ottoman Quotations are from Âşık Çelebi 2010: 865, translations mine.

909 Âşık Çelebi 2010: 865.

910 See chapter 5.2.2.4.

911 Latîfî 1979 [1950]: 435.

912 Cf. Heß 2007.

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 [az.]Nəsimi´s being flayed alive. Amongst his sources, he might have found [osm.]Laṭīfī or authors or informants that were influenced by [osm.]Laṭīfī. Stern mentions [az.]Nəsimi´s alleged being flayed *corpore vivo* in a passage about the [arab.]Ḥurūfiya in his book "Modern Turkey", which was published before World Word 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 [az.]Nəsimi is flayed alive.

In order to form an opinion about what might actually have happened during [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Nəsimi, because he was a prophet, just like [az.]Nəsimi´s teacher [mpers.]Faẓlollāh. 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

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" (ttü. *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 az. Nəsimi 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 the body of osm. Ḳara Muṣṭafā Paša, the Ottoman commander who failed to conquer Vienna in 1683, was treated after his execution. After osm. Ḳara Muṣṭafā Paša had been strangulated, the skin of the dead body´s head was pulled off. The skin was then stuffed and sent to Edirne in order to prove osm. Ḳara Muṣṭafā Paša´s death to the Ottoman sultan.[921] In osm. Ḳara Muṣṭafā Paša´s case, the act of flaying *post mortem* obviously had the purpose of preventing premature putrefaction. Incidentally, osm. Ḳara Muṣṭafā Paša 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]

If we return to arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s text we see that it does not give a direct answer to the question if az. Nəsimi´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 az. Nəsimi´s skin was removed while he was still living, the expression "that he be flayed" (arab. *yuslaḫa*) does not *a priori* exclude such an interpretation, either. However, there are some parallels between arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s account of az. Nəsimi´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 arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī uses (arab. *yušhara* "let him be publicly displayed") and the word ttü. *teşhir* ("exhibiting, displaying publicly") used in the secondary literature to describe the Ottoman examples[924] 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 az. Nəsimi´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 az. Nəsimi´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 arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´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 az. Nəsimi was flayed alive or not could be the question whether it was in the interest of the sultan or the arab. *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 in the northern parts of Syria? And does not the lawsuit, and the meticulous way in

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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 yüzmeye 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).

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 arab. ʿAbbās az-Zāvī (sic?) as stating that az. Nəsimi was first beheaded and then flayed.

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 [az.]Nəsimi 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 [az.]Nəsimi been killed in that way, one should have expected [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī to mention this. However, the order "that he be flayed" ([arab.]*yuslaḫa*) is just mentioned as one element in a series of other acts that are to be done to [az.]Nəsimi´s body: [arab.]*bi-ʾan yuslaḫa va-yušhara bi-Ḥalab sabʿa ayyāmin va yunādā ʿalay-hi tumma tuḳṭaʿa aʿḍāʾu-hū va yursala min-hā šayʾun* … ("that he [=[az.]Nəsimi] 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.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī, 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 [az.]Nəsim´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 [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Nəsimi´s being hailed as one of the most important martyr figures by certain communities (including Turkey´s Alevis). In sum, the detail of [az.]Nəsimi 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.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī.

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 [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Nəsimi 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.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s narrative from an ethnolinguistic angle. At least four of the five persons who formed the tribunal (i. e., [arab.]Ibn Ḫaṭīb b. Nāṣirīya, [arab.]Šams ad-Dīn b. Amīn ad-Daula, [arab.]Fatḥ ad-Dīn, and [arab.]Šihāb ad-Dīn,) bear Arabic names while the etymology of the fifth one, [arab.]Ibn al-Ḥāzūḳ, is not clear. In contrast, both [az.]Nəsimi and the [arab.]*nāʾib* [owo.]Yašbeg were recognizably of Turkic origin. As we have seen from the description of the lawsuit, [owo.]Yašbeg insists on a fair trial for [az.]Nəsimi 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-Muʾayyad, who sent parts of [az.]Nəsimi´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.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s text is the question of language. The author quotes [az.]Nəsimi´s words in Arabic, and his text does not contain any material in other languages (apart from the non-Arabic name of [owo.]Yašbeg and the words with an unclear etymology). Does this automatically mean that [az.]Nəsimi uttered the incriminated statement in the Arabic language? This is a possibility given the fact that [az.]Nəsimi´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.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī, or somebody else?). The same problem concerning the language(s) used is also important to the interpretation of the very last sentence of [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s text, in which he praises [az.]Nəsimi´s poetry. As [az.]Nəsimi wrote most of his poetry in Turkic and Persian, this seems to presuppose that [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī must have been told about [az.]Nəsimi´s poetry in these languages, or else have heard or read them by himself.

5.2.4.2. Other versions of Nəsimi´s death

There are other accounts of [az.]Nəsimi´s death besides the descriptions according to [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī and [arab.]Ibn Ḥaǧar. This concerns various aspects of the narrative, including the time of the execution.

As to the place of [az.]Nəsimi´s death, [mpers.]Reżā Ḳuli Ḫān Hedāyat mentions

[926] See again Heß 2016 and Heß 2017.

a village called mpers.Zarqān, which belongs to Shiraz.[927] It very likely belongs to the eponymous modern rural district (mpers.*dehestān*) of Iran´s Shiraz province (mpers.*dehestān-e Zarqān*). Perhaps, mpers.Reżā Ḳuli Ḫān Hedāyat´s statement does not imply that az.Nəsimi was executed in mpers.Zarqān but that he was only buried there. Another 19th-century Iranian text, mpers.Mīrzā Ḥasan-e Fesā'ī´s mpers.*Farsnāme-ye Nāṣerī*, explicitly claims that az.Nəsimi was buried in mpers.Zarqān, more precisely, outside of the village.[928] In theory, the claim that az.Nəsimi was buried in mpers.Zarqān – and not in Aleppo or in the principalities to which his body parts were allegedly sent – is compatible with arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s and arab.Ibn Ḥaǧar´s historical narratives about his death if we assume that mpers.Zarqān was actually the ultimate burial place of some of az.Nəsimi´s body parts, that had been dispatched from Aleppo after his execution. However, both mpers.Mīrzā Ḥasan-e Fesā'ī and mpers.Reżā Ḳuli Ḫān Hedāyat are very tardive and quite unreliable sources.

As for the date of az.Nəsimi´s death, one proposal is based on his designation as owo.*šehīd-i ʿišḳ-i Fażl-i zü'l-ǧelāl* "martyr of the love of owo.Fażl, the Lord of Glory" in owo.Refīʿī´s owo.*Bešāret-nāme*. It has been argued that this expression refers to az.Nəsimi as a dead person, as "martyrs" can be assumed to be deceased figures according to conventional understanding.[929] As we know the owo.*Bešāret-nāme* to have been completed before May 16, 1409,[930] az.Nəsimi could accordingly be assumed to have died before that day, too. However, the argumentation is not entirely free of doubts because the word owo.*šehīd* "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 az.Nəsimi speaks about himself paradoxically as a dead person in his own poems.[931] Therefore, the expression owo.*šehīd-i ʿišḳ-i Fażl-i zü'l-ǧelāl* need not be a statement about az.Nəsimi´s death.

mpers.Kamālo'd-dīn Ḥosayn Fānī (end of 15th / beginning of the 16th century) proposes two years for az.Nəsimi´s execution in his mpers.*Maǧāleso'l-ʿOššāḳ* ("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 mpers.*Maǧāleso'l-ʿOššāḳ* is the year A. H. 837 (first day: August 18, 1433; last day: August 6, 1434),[934] which was adapted by osm.Laṭīfī.[935] Of course, there is an inherent contradiction in the fact that mpers.Kamālo'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 mpers.Kamālo'd-dīn Ḥosayn Fānī´s second date is the proposal in mpers.Mīrzā Ḥasan-e Fesā'ī´s mpers.*Farsnāme-ye Nāṣerī*, which states that az.Nəsimi was killed in A. H. 840 (first day: July 16, 1436; last day: July 4, 1437).[936] The mpers.*Farsnāme-ye Nāṣerī* might have been influenced by mpers.Reżā Ḳuli Ḫān Hedāyat, who in turn drew upon the mpers.*Maǧāleso'l-ʿOššāḳ*.

5.3. Alleged grave

There is a building in Aleppo that some people consider to be az.Nəsimi´s grave. It has a coffin and an inscription commemorating the poet. There is a guardian who claims to belong to az.Nəsimi´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 az.Nəsimi´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 arab.Marǧ Dābiḳ (August 24, 1516).[938] We have seen how hostile and spiteful the attitude of the Mameluke author arab.Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī, who died in 1479 / 1480, was vis-à-vis az.Nəsimi 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 *Şiraz´ın Zerkan köyü dışında* (quoted in Ayan 1990: 12).

928 *Şiraz´ın Zerkan 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 owo.*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, mpers.Reżā Ḳuli Ḫān Hedāyat quotes the same date on the basis of the mpers.*Maǧāleso'l-ʿOššāḳ*. – As for the author of the mpers.*Maǧāleso'l-ʿOššāḳ*, Yakubcan İshakov has recently contradicted the traditional assumption that it was the Timurid ruler mpers.Ḥosayn Bayḳara (1438–1506) and argued in favour of mpers.Kamālo'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.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s description of what happened to [az.]Nəsimi´s body after the execution. If we accept this narrative, parts of [az.]Nəsimi´s body were posthumously sent to at least two geographical locations outside of Aleppo, that is, to members of the [arab.]Dū'l-ḳadr dynasty and to the [az.]Aqqoyunlu [az.]Qara Yuluq Osman. Perhaps, these body parts were even sent to three places, if we assume that [owo.]*Ālī* Beg and his brother [arab.]Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad of [arab.]Dū'l-ḳadr separately received their shares of the dead body. As a consequence, [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Qəzənfər Paşayev mentions that the Mameluke sultan [arab.]al-Ašraf Qānṣūh al-Ġūrī (1441–1516, ruled from 1501 until his death) ordered the restoration of the "mosque" ([az.]*məscid*) in which [az.]Nəsimi had been buried, in A. H. 910 (1504 / 1505).[939] Even if this tradition is true, it, of course, does not prove that [az.]Nəsimi really was actually buried in that mosque.

[arab.]Al-Ašraf 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 Ṣafavids both of whom were of Turkic origin. The alleged restoration of the mosque took place in the expansionist phase of the rule of [mpers.]Šāḥ İsmāʿīl (1487–1524), who had founded the Ṣafavid dynasty in 1501. As is well-known, [mpers.]Šāḥ İsmāʿīl composed poems in both Old Western Oghuz and Persian, using the pen name [mpers.]Ḫaṭāʾī ([az.]Xətai), and his works clearly betray influence from [az.]Nəsimi and the [az.]Ḥurūfīya. Consequently, [arab.]Al-Ašraf Qānṣūh al-Ġūrī might have been more than willing to pride himself about a site in commemoration of [az.]Nəsimi, an eminent Old Western Oghuz and Persian poet, at a junction where he was threatened militarily by [mpers.]Šāḥ İsmāʿīl and where the Ṣafavid shah tried, by all means, to win over his enemies´ subjects by way of propaganda. Here as before, the existence of a mosque where [az.]Nəsimi is thought to have been buried is potentially at odds with [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s mentioning of his body parts being sent away. For if the whole of [az.]Nəsimi´s body is supposed to repose in the mosque, only one of the two versions can be true.

[az.]Nəsimi´s alleged burial place in Aleppo is said to contain an inscription in Arabic which mentions [az.]Nəsimi´s death as a "martyr" ([arab.]*šahīd*) in A. H. 824 (a date corrected by [az.]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 [az.]Paşayev´s book) as well as the appearance of the word [arab.]*hiǧrī* ("according to the Hegira calendar") in it.[942] The addition of the adjective [arab.]*hiǧrī* 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 [az.]Paşayev´s book look more like paintings than photographs.[943] Further suspicions about the authenticity of at least the inscription in [az.]Nəsimi´s grave were created by a remark by the eminent Turkish scholar [ttü.]Kemâl Edib Kürkçüoğlu (1902–1977). Kürkçüoğlu quotes a certain "Prof. Dr. İzzet Hasen" – whom I have not been able to identify – as claiming that [az.]Nəsimi´s mausoleum does not bear an inscription at all.[944] As [ttü.]Kürkçüoğlu 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 [az.]Paşayev and visited by the Azerbaijani delegation in 2008, this would mean that the inscription in the building that is passed off as [az.]Nəsimi´s grave had been created between 1977 and 2008 and was, therefore, a fake. [ttü.]Kürkçüoğlu can be considered one of the most serious and extensive authorities on the life of [az.]Nəsimi. 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.

939 Paşayev 2010: 60. Paşayev does not indicate the source of this information.

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 "[az.]Nəsimi convent" ([az.]*Nəsimi təkyəsi*) in Paşayev 2010: 135 need not be discussed, as their irrelevance the discussion about [az.]Nəsimi´s burial place is self-evident. – For the location of this convent, see Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XX.

944 Kürkçüoğlu 1985: XXI.

Finally, if the guardian´s claim to be a descendant of [az.]Nəsimi is accepted this means that he must dispose of a genealogy that goes back to [az.]Nəsimi. 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 [az.]Nəsimi´s grave in Aleppo cannot be considered a fact.

5.4. Works

[az.]Nəsimi 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 [az.]Səadət Şıyıxeva claims to possess information about a prose treatise with the title "Man" ([az.]*İnsan*) that may be ascribed to [az.]Nəsimi. She also recently mentioned having heard about his "Book of the Order" ([az.]*Təriqətnamə*), which is said to be alternatingly written in prose and verse.[946] According to [az.]Şıyıxeva, 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 [owo.]*Muḳaddime* ("Introduction") or [owo.]*Muḳaddimet*ü'l-ḥaḳā'iḳ ("Introduction to the Truths") had been ascribed to [az.]Nəsimi 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 [az.]Səadət Şıyıxeva, [az.]Nəsimi was also the author of a short poem called [arab.]*Manẓūma fī-maslaki'l-ḥurūfīya* ("Poem about the Ḥurūfī path"), which has been lost.[949]

945 See Heß 2009c.

946 Şıxıyeva 2019.

947 Şıxıyeva 2019.

948 Heß 2013.

949 [az.]*Mənzumə fimələkihürufiyyə* (Şıxıyeva 2019).

5.5. Afterlife

It is safe to say that no other adherent of the [arab.]Ḥurūfiya has enjoyed the level of posthumous notoriety and popularity that [az.]Nəsimi 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, [az.]Nəsimi himself prepared his afterlife in his poems by imagining his own death,[951] and more or less legendary accounts about [az.]Nəsimi´s execution are frequently adorned with some of his verses.

After his death, [az.]Nəsimi became an object of veneration, chiefly as a religious figure, amongst the [owo.]Ḳïzïlbaš of the Ottoman and adjacent lands, the precursors of the present-day Turkish Alevis. In the course of time, [az.]Nəsimi turned into a more important martyr figure than his teacher [mpers.]Faẓlollāh.[952] This is not surprising given the effect [az.]Nəsimi´s Turkic poems had and continue to have on the Oghuz-speaking [owo.]Ḳïzïlbaš / Alevi.

As a poet, [az.]Nəsimi has left a lasting mark on the poetry of the Turkic-speaking world. This does not only concern mystical or [arab.]Ḥurūfī poets. Among the poets influenced by [az.]Nəsimi, one of the first to name is [az.]Xətai / [az.]Şah İsmayıl (1487–1524).

950 On the afterlife of the [arab.]Ḥurūfiya in general, in which [az.]Nəsimi already has his place, cf. chapter 4.5.6. – The present chapter adds some details to this that are more distinctive of [az.]Nəsimi.

951 Cf. Heß 2016 and Heß 2017.

952 Macit 2007: 220, referring to [az.]Nəsimi´s [ttü.]*mazlum şehit imajı* and quoting Mélikoff 1993: 183-198.

6. SOME CHARACTERISTIC TOPICS OF NƏSİMİ′S TURKIC DIVAN

Whom did [az.] Nəsimi 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 [az.] Nəsimi´s poems only destined for the adepts of the [arab.] Ḥurūfīya religious movement? Or, to come up with yet another possible interpretation, did he address all adherents of so-called 'revealed religions' of the Abrahamitic 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 [az.] Nəsimi´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 [arab.] 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 [az.] Nəsimi 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 [arab.] Ḥurūfīya 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 [az.] Nəsimi´s Turkic divan.

Any kind of analysis of [az.] Nəsimi´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.[953] The largest part of Nəsimi´s divans consists of ghazals, the majority of which does

[953] For other problems that arise during the interpretation of [az.] Nəsimi´s work, see chapter 3.3.

not exceed the length of twenty couplets. [az.]Nəsimi left a considerable number of even shorter poems, such as quatrains.[954] In many of these types of poems, the individual [az.]*beyt*s, in turn, represent closed semantical units (even if they are arranged together according to the similarity in topic or tone). It is true that [az.]Nəsimi sometimes also used the poetical form of the [az.]*məsnəvi*. 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 [az.]Nəsimi ´s few extant [az.]*məsnəvi*s are comparatively moderate in size, the longest one containing approximately fifty couplets.

For the interpretation of [az.]Nəsimi´s Turkic divans, the above-described characteristics mean that it must be based on a plurality of formally independent poems or even [az.]*beyt*s. [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]*beyt*s against that of others. While it is already difficult to establish the meaning of every line of the [az.]*beyt*s 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 [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Nəsimi 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 [arab.]Hurūfīya. Possibly, these tendencies were not yet fully developed by [mpers.]Faẓlollāh himself. However, they seem to have become more manifest among some of his pupils after his death.[955]

954 The most important study on [az]Nəsimi*´s* quatrains is Burril 1972.

955 Cf pp. 99 and 126.

Some verses in [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]*məsnəvi* [az.]*Dəryayi-mühit cuşə gəldi*. This poem occupies a very special place in the work of [az.]Nəsimi for a number of reasons. Firstly, this is because [az.]Nəsimi has written only very few [az.]*məsnəvi*s. A second reason is that [az.]*Dəryayi-mühit cuşə gəldi* contains a number of central theological statements of the [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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 [az.]*Dəryayi-mühit cuşə gəldi* special results from the ascription of special importance to it in [az.]Nəsimi´s spiritual biography.[956] The poem has assumed such importance that its initial line [az.]*Dəryayi-mühit cuşə gəldi* is sometimes quoted as a landmark of [az.]Nəsimi. This [az.]*məsnəvi* contains a striking formulation of human apotheosis in [az.]*beyt* 11:[957]

[az./owo.]*Məscūdilə sācid oldu vāḥid*
Məscūdi-ḥəqiqi oldu sācid[958]

"The worshipped and the worshipper has become the one.
The truly worshipped one has become the worshipper."

In these two lines, [az.]Nəsimi uses morphological derivatives of the stem I of the Arabic root *S-Ǧ-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.[959] 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.[960] Incidentally, to the same root *S-Ǧ-D* belongs also the "place of worship" *par excellence*, i. e., the mosque, [arab.]*masǧid*) – the English word is etymologically derived from the Arabic.[961] The first derivative of *-Ǧ-D* stem

956 See p. 177.

957 In classical Oriental poetry, a [az.]*beyt* is a formal unit of two verse lines. – The sequence of [az.]*beyt*s varies in the manuscripts of [az.]Nəsimi´s divan. However, the place of the [az.]*beyt*s discussed here is fairly consistent in 8 out of 9 manuscripts, including some of the oldest (see Heß 2009: 466).

958 Adapted from Heß 2009: 470.

959 Wehr 1985: 552, s. v. *sağada*: "sich niederwerfen (mit der Stirn den Boden berührend, bes. als Teil des muslim. Gebetsritus), sich prosternieren".

960 Cf. Wehr 1985: 552, s. v. *sağada*.

961 Cf. Wehr 1985: 552f, s. v. *masǧid*.

I that appears in az. Nəsimi´s above text is the passive participle, az./owo. *məscūd*. Its ultimate source is the Arabic passive participle arab. *masǧūd*, which in the Arabic language is marked [+male] and [+singular]. However, the Old Western Oghuz language does not distinguish grammatic gender, and singular words may also be interpreted as plural, possibly even feminine, depending on the context. The lexical meaning of az./owo. *məscūd*, 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-Ǧ-D* that appears in the text is an active participle: az./owo. *sācid*~arab. *sāǧid* "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. *vāḥid*, 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. *vāḥid* 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. *beyt* basically repeats the assertion made in the first, but adds the adjective az./owo. *ḥəqiqi* "the true" to "the worshipped one". az./owo. *Ḥəqiqi* 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. Nəsimi´s poems. However, it stands out because of its succinctness, its clearness and the stressed position it occupies in the az. *Dəryayi-mühit cuşə gəldi* az. *məsnəvi*.

A quite similar expression can be found in the same az. *məsnəvi* a few dozen lines down the text:

az./owo. *Ādəm dükəli Ḥəq oldu bilgil,*
Məscūdi-ḥəqiqə səcdə qılğıl[962]

"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

[962] Adapted from Heß 2009: 476.

az. 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. Nəsimi so unambiguously formulates does away with the fundaments 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. 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. *beyt* which immediately follows az./owo. *Məscūdilə sācid oldu vāḥid / Məscūdi-ḥəqiqi oldu sācid* in the az. *məsnəvi*:

az./owo. *Īmānilə küfr*^{v} *bir şey oldu:*
Ṭatlu: 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. *beyt* uses one of the most pejorative and aggressive combat terms of mainstream Islam: az./owo. *küfr* = arab. *kufr*. 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. *kufr* is also the verbal noun that corresponds to the word "kafir"(arab. *kāfir*). As we have already seen, this word is used against az. Nəsimi by arab. Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī in conclusion of his account of the Aleppo tribunal.[964] What az. Nəsimi realizes in the last of the above text quotes is, in fact, a subversion of this reproach to be a arab. *kāfir* 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. Nəsimi not only wards off the attacks of the conservative establishment, who threaten him with death by accusing him of arab. *kufr*, but also reduces their way of thinking to absurdity. In the way he puts things, arab. *kufr*, 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. *Īmānilə küfr*^{v} *bir şey oldu:* occur

[963] Adapted from Heß 2009: 470. – The colons indicate metrical length.

[964] P. 179.

elsewhere in [az.]Nəsimi´s Turkic poems, too. For instance, the first [az.]*beyt* of the ghazal [az.]*Aşiq qatında küfrilə islam birdir*[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 [az.]*islam* "Islam" instead of [az./owo.]*īmān*"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 [az.]Nəsimi and the other [arab.]Ḥurūfīs, [mpers.]Faẓlollāh, is worshipped as God, too.[966] Therefore, it is a perfectly plausible interpretation to identify the word [mpers./owo.]Faẓl in the following [az.]Nəsimi [az.]*beyt* with the prophet from [mpers.]Astarābād:

Hər ki, Nəsimitək sücud Fəzli-ilahə qılmadı
Div kimi bu gün anı bəlkə bu yolda dayinə.[967]

"As to those who do not worship God [mpers./owo.]Faẓl[ollāh],
You should know[968] that they err on this path today, just like the devil."

In the first line of the above [az.]*beyt*, another morphological derivative of the first stem of the Arabic root *S-Ǧ-D* is used. This time it is the phraseological verb [az.]*sücud qı*"to prostrate oneself".

The expression [az.]*Fəzli-ilah* "God [mpers.]Faẓl[ollāh]" from the first line appears in other places of [az.]Nəsimi´s Turkic divan in similar meanings as well:

[az.]*Fəzli-ilahə canını eylə fəda, Nəsimi, sən*
Olma məlul, ayıtma kim, bəndü hasar içindəyəm.[969]

"[az.]Nəsimi, sacrifice your life[970] to God [mpers.]Faẓl[ollāh]!
Do not be sad, and do not say: 'I am in shackles and behind a fence'!"

One may note that both [az.]*Hər ki, Nəsimitək* … and [az.]*Fəzli-ilahə canını* … are last [az.]*beyt*s of their respective ghazals. Such a final [az.]*beyt* (called [mpers.]*maḳṭaʿ* "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 pen name. The mention of [az.]*Fəzli-ilah* in this marked position of the poems seems to be motivated by [az.]Nəsimi´s desire to add particular emphasis to his statements.

965 Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 143.

966 On the equalization of [mpers.]Faẓlollāh and God, cf. Kürkçüoğlu 1985: 65.

967 Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 45.

968 The reading [az.]*bəlkə* probably has to be emended to *[az.]*bilki*, for otherwise the accusative [az.]*anı* cannot be explained. The translation is based upon the emendation.

969 Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 71.

970 Or "your soul" [M. R. H.].

6.2. Epistemological focus on the self

Being heirs to the Sufi tradition, [mpers.]Faẓlollāh, [az.]Nəsimi and the other [arab.]Ḥurūfīs frequently focused on the self ([owo./az.]*öz*) as a source of insight. The [mpers.]Rūmī verses that are said to have brought [mpers.]Faẓlollāh 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 ἐδιζησάμην ἐμεωυτόν ("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 [az.]Nəsimi. 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 [arab.]al-Kindī.[974] More importantly, neo-Platonic thought is assumed to have influenced Muslim mystics including [arab.]Ibn al-ʿArabī.[975] This means that a direct lineage of thought might potentially be traced from Heraclitus via Plotin, [arab.]Ibn al-ʿArabī and [mpers.]Rūmī to [mpers.]Faẓlollāh. Hence, [az.]Nəsimi´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 γάρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστιν).[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 ἐδιζησάμην ἐμεωυτόν or similar Christian interpretations and the following [az.]Nəsimi verses, which are again from the [az.]*Dəryayi-mühit cuşə gəldi* [az.]*məsnəvi* already discussed.[978]

[az./owo.]*Gər a:čuğ isə: bəṣīrətiŋ bax*
Gör səndə Ḥəqi: vü gitmə i:rax[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" ([owo./az.]*sən*) or "to go into the distance" ([owo./az.]*irax git-*). 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 [az.]*Gər a:čuğ isə: …* [az.]*beyt* to Heraclitus and the New Testament and [az.]Nəsimi 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 (ἐδιζησάμην) encodes an action that has its origin and its target within the sphere of the subject referent. This

976 Original text quote from Novum Testamentum 1981: 412.

977 Deseille 2005: 280.

978 6.1. above.

979 Adapted from Heß 2009: 471.

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 γάρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστιν. This is a so-called nominal or existential sentence, the predicate of which is a form of "to be" (here, ἐστιν "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 ἐστιν 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 Hercalitus´ 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" (ἐντὸς ὑμῶν). Similarly, [az.]Nəsimi does not put the emphasis on the action, either. It is true, the quality of the action, "to see" ([az.]*gör-*) is very important, as [az.]Nəsimi names "open eyesight" ([oaz.]*ačuḳ bəṣīrət*) 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" ([az.]*gör-*) and "looking" ([az.]*bax-*) is again already there: "the truth"/ "God" ([oaz.]*Ḥəq*).

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 [az.]Nəsimi 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" ([oaz.]*Ḥəq*). Heraclitus engages in an open search, the two others are looking for confirmation concerning something preconceived.

There are numerous places in [az.]Nəsimi´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:

[az.]*Ol kim, özün bilmədi, düşdü cahana dərbədər,*
Varlığın həq 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, [az.]Nəsimi – or his lyrical ego – directly identifies himself as the individual that contains the source of knowledge within himself. An example is the following [az.]*beyt*:

[az.]*Mən məndə həqqi buldum, həqqəl-yəqin həq oldum,*
Uyxuda qaldı münkir nəqşü 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 [az.]Nəsimi´s poems. For instance, in the ghazal [az.]*Mən mülki-cahan, cahan mənəm mən* ("I am the realm of the world, I am the world, I") the first person singular personal pronoun appears [az.]*mən* "I" appears 60 times in a total of only 18 [az.]*beyt*s.[982]

6.3. World-weariness

An interesting question, to which the published biographical data about [az.]Nəsimi does not give a satisfactory answer, is why he and so many of his contemporaries joined the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement at all. If we believe the story reproduced about [az.]Nəsimi´s brother by [om.]Laṭīfī in his [osm.]*Tezkiretü'ş-Şu'arā*,[983] the risks of becoming a [arab.]Ḥurūfī or joining a similarly radical religious movement must have been apparent to [az.]Nəsimi from the very beginning. So many mystics, including [arab.]Al-Ḥallāǧ and [arab.]Sohravardī al-Maḳtūl, had been executed before him in a culture that was radically intolerant if its presumed religious fundaments were at stage. In the end, [az.]Nəsimi´s execution in Aleppo would prove how wellfounded such fears were. Incidentally, many verses in [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Nəsimi 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:

[az.]*Yar ilə çünki bir oldu Nəsimi,*
Nə qəm, gər cümlə aləm olsa əğyar.[985]

"As [az.]Nəsimi has become one with the Friend[986]
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 [az.]Nəsimi engaged so enthusiastically in the [arab.]Ḥurūfī movement.

A typical reflection of a psychological process in which disillusion with and even hatred of the world leads to the embracement of the [arab.]Ḥurūfī faith is expressed in the ghazal [az.]*Yoxdur vəfası dünyanın, aldanma anın alına* ("This world does not have any loyalty, do not let yourself be deceived by its swindle").[987] The first 10 [az.]*beyt*s of this

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.

983 See p. 177.

984 Cf. Heß 2016; Heß 2017.

985 Text quote from Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 145.

986 In Sufi literature, the "Friend" ([mpers./owo.]*yār*) can denote God.

987 Text in Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 165.

poem outdo each other in lamenting the wickedness of "this world" (az. *dünya*): "Its currency is counterfeit" (az. *nəqdi dəğəldir*), it is described as "the House of Vanity" (az. *darül-qurur*), "the only product of which is blah-blah-blah" (az. *cümlə qiylü qal imiş hasili*), even "its sugar is bitter, and poison has been added to its honey" (az. *acıdır anın şəkkəri, ağu qatılmış balına*) and "its love is the fire of hell that burns you up" (az. *sevgisi damu odudur yandırır*), etc.[988] It is only in the last three az. *misra*s (a az. *misra* = one of the two verse lines in a az. *beyt*) that az. Nəsimi´s mind finds some solace, because "he has given away his heart to the love of that matchless one" (az. *şol bimisalın eşqinə verdi könlünü*).[989]

A very similar structure underlies the ghazal az. *Cahanı tərk edib bezdim cahandan* ("I have given up on the world because I have become tired of it"), in which the word employed for this wicked world is this time, not the original Arabic term az. *dünya*, but az. *cahan*, which comes from Persian. Again, the initial (11) az. *beyt*s describe in graphic detail all the pain, moral depravity and perversion of the world, before az. Nəsimi, at last, finds comfort in "you" (az. *sən*) in the mpers. *maḳṭaʿ*.[990]

In some of his ghazals, az. Nəsimi seems to address the topic of the state of this world with slightly more optimism, though. For instance, in the ghazal owo./az. *Neylərəm bən bunda durmaq çünki dildar andadır* "What am I doing here? For the owner of my heart is there?" it is only this initial line, or more precisely only it's first half that seems to express rejection of this base world.[991] For the rhetorical question owo./az. *Neylərəm bən bunda durmaq* "What am I doing here?" about "here" (owo./az. *bunda*) – which seems to denote the same sphere as az. *dünya* and az. *cahan* in the above quotes – is quickly followed by a reminder of another sphere, "there" (owo./az. *anda*), where the consolating presence of the beloved one awaits the speaker. In the rest of this ghazal, which already through its strong rhythm, the simple and widespread arab. *ramal* meter (– v – – / – v – – / – v – – / – v –) and its vivid imagery inspires liveliness and hope, the ugliness of this world is almost completely ignored. Instead, az. Nəsimi praises in the most elegant words the beauty of his (transcendental) partner.

In summary, the pessimism and deception that az. Nəsimi expresses about the world in a number of his poems is frequently accompanied by the hope for spiritual solace or recompense.

988 Nesimi 2012a: 165.

989 Nesimi 2012a: 165.

990 Text quotes from Nesimi 2012a: 171.

991 The text quotes in this paragraph are from Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library. MS Yazma Bağışlar 4318, fol. 37v. (pagination on the manuscript). The ghazal also appears in modern printed editions, for instance, Meḥmed Saʿīd 1844: 44 (of the Turkic text) and Kürkçüoğlu 1985: 297.

6.4. Language mysticism

As a matter of course, az. Nəsimi´s poems are full of allusions to the bizarre ramifications of arab. Ḥurūfī lettrism. However, at least from a modern and non-esoteric perspective, most of these speculations can be ignored without regret, as they do not contribute to the articulation of questions that are meaningful beyond the strange world of believers in letter mysticism.

Yet there are some statements that give an insight into some philosophical aspects of the arab. Ḥurūfī thoughts on language. Such utterings may be fruitful even outside the sectarian cosmos of the arab. Ḥurūfīs. One of them is the following:

> az. *Söyləyən hər natiqin dilində məndən özgə yox*[992]
> "In the language (or: tongue) of every speaker, there is no one besides me."

In this line, we see an emphasis on the first person which is typical of az. Nəsimi´s divan.[993] By way of its connection with the linguistic aspect of the arab. Ḥurūfī religion, it offers a possible interpretation as to the identity of the polysemic "me" (az. *mən*) in many of az. Nəsimi´s ghazals. Apparently, the az. *mən* in the above quote has something do to with "speaking" (az. *söylə-*; arab. *naṭaḳa*, from which the active participle arab. *nātiḳ*~az. *natiq* is derived), and "language / tongue" (both meanings are given in az. *dil*). This "me" is of universal and all-encompassing importance because it appears in the language / tongue of everyone who speaks. All linguistic expression is completely determined by it, as nothing else (az. *özgə*) appears whenever human speech is performed.

In the az. *beyt* that follows the one from which the above quote is taken, another statement about language is made, again using a first-person singular predicate: az. *Nitq ilə səvtəm* "I am speech and sound".[994] A possible way of understanding similar expressions seems to be to identify the az. *mən* as the transcendental entity – conventionally referred to as God – which has created everything that exists. This transcendental being is tightly related to speaking and "sound" (az. *səvt*), which are considered to be on the top level of the ontological hierarchy.[995] We must assume that the author of the poem or its speaker somehow managed to reach this ontological level, so much that he has become able to speak on its behalf. On this ontological level, which is the phonetical level of linguistic expression, the nature of divinity can be known. By having gained access to the topmost ontological level, the deified

992 Text quote from Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 175.

993 See chapter 6.2., especially footnote 982.

994 Azerbaijani text quote from Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 175.

995 See p. 100.

speaker is able to assume all kinds of identities, divine and profane, and often even contradicting each other. Still, in the same poem, [az.] Nəsimi states:

> [az.] *Zahirəm, zahirdə faşam, 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 [arab.] 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 [arab.] Ḥurūfī principle. This maxim has been formulated by the early [arab.] Ḥurūfī author [mpers.] Sayyid Šarīf in his [mpers.] *Resāle-ye esm va musammā* ("Treatise about the name and the named)":[997]

> [mpers.] *Esm ʿayn-e musammā ast*[998]
> "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 [mpers.] *Esm ʿayn-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 Zulley (*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 [mpers.] Sayyid Šarīf is the same person as [mpers.] Faẓlollāh´s pupil [mpers.] Mīr Šarīf (see p. 147).

998 Quote adapted from Bashir 2002: 177. For comparable expressions in early [arab.] Ḥurūfī literature, cf. Huart / Tevfîq 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. Zulley 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 [mpers.] *Esm ʿayn-e musammā ast* were not universally applicable but only under certain conditions, for instance, psychological perceptions as the ones described in the experiment. [arab.] Ḥurūfī mysticism had no means to test the range of validity of such wrong conclusions as [mpers.] *Esm ʿayn-e musammā ast.* On the contrary, the Sufi surge that had reached one of its peaks in the 13th century and strongly influenced [mpers.] Faẓlollāh´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 [mpers.] *Esm ʿayn-e musammā ast* was in vogue in the fourteenth century is once more described by [arab.] Ibn Ḫaldūn. In reference to a group of Muslim mystics that bear show some similarities to the [arab.] Ḥurūfīs, 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 [az.] Nəsimi´s verses, the speaker explicitly claims to be immortal. A famous example is the following [az.] *beyt*:

> *Ölməzəm, mən öləsi xud degiləm*

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 Shafy 2011).

1001 Ibn Khaldûn 1958: 171f.

Əzəlidən bəri nicatiləyəm.[1002]

"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 [az.]*Ölməzəm, mən öləsi xud degiləm* looks into the future, while [az.]*Əzəlidən bəri nicatiləyəm* reflects the past. In the first line, [az.]Nəsimi uses two grammatical forms of the verb *öl-* "to die". One of them, [az.]*ölməzəm* ("I will not die") is in the aorist, which is sometimes also referred to as "present tense" ([az.]*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, [az.]*öləsi degiləm*, it is an analytical grammatical construction that has been described as intentional or having a future meaning.[1004] Thus, [az.]*öləsi degiləm* seems to communicate the idea that the referent will neither be concerned by the act of "dying" in the predictable future not has the intention to even consider the possibility that he might die. In [az.]*Əzəlidən bəri nicatiləyəm*, the past tense is encoded lexically by means of the word [az.]*əzəl* (from Arabic), which denotes beginningless eternity.

Such statements about immortality as the one just quoted may be contextualized with the many places in [az.]Nəsimi´s divans where he equalizes himself with God. In particular, these include numerous verses where he quotes [arab.]al-Ḥallāǧ´s famous [arab.]*Ana'l-Ḥaḳḳ* ("I am Allah").[1005] One of the most emphatic expressions of such a self-apotheosis is the following [az.]*beyt*:

[az.]*Faili-mütləqəm, həqəm, həqilən.*
Kimsə bilməz, nə bəyyinatiləyəm.[1006]

"I am the Absolute Doer, I am Allah, with full right.
Nobody knows what proofs accompany me."

[1002] See p. 100.

[1003] On the various historical and modern forms of the Azerbaijani aorist, see Mirzəzadə 1990: 146-159. Cf. Hüseynzadə 1983: 174-177.

[1004] Caferoğlu / Doerfer 1959: 304f. term it "Intentional", but give the example translation "er wird bzw. soll werfen" for [az.]"*atasi(dir)*". Mirzəzadə 1990: 159 classifies the Modern Azerbaijani equivalent of this form as "a type of the future tense" ([az.]*gələcək zamanın bir növü*).

[1005] For instance, Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 181, 183; see also Heß 2011. – On [arab.]al-Ḥallāǧ and his motto, cf. p. 187.

[1006] Imadeddin Nesimi 2012a: 185.

7. CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that [az.]İmadəddin 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 [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī, who disapproved [az.]Nəsimi´s activities and denounced him as a kafir, admires the "elegant poetry" ([arab.]*šiʿr rakīḳ*) of the Azerbaijanian genius. A large number of [az.]Nəsimi´s admirers – poets, writers, and others – from the Middle Ages until today speaks for itself. [az.]Nəsimi´s poems have been copied, imitated, and used as parts of other poems throughout the Turkic- and Persian-speaking world.

Although both [az.]Nəsimi´s poems and secondary information about him leave no doubt about the prominent place he occupied in the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement, many aspects in [az.]Nəsimi´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 [arab.]al-Ḥallāǧ, 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, [az.]Nəsimi and his [arab.]Ḥurūfī 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 [az.]Nəsimi from his poetry, the picture remains contradictory. One of the reasons for this is that the nature of [az.]Nəsimi´s poems themselves makes its interpretation as a source of biographical information challenging. [az.]Nəsimi´s poems are first and foremost works of fiction that seek to impress the reader or listener with their perfection in metre and rhyme, 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 [az.]Nəsimi´s poems is polysemic far beyond the inevitable polysemy of colloquial speech or narrative prose.[1007] What is more, if one takes [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Nəsimi 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 [az.]Nəsimi´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 [az.]Nəsimi manuscripts aggravates this problem even further.

The problems described in the previous paragraph complicate attempts to confirm or refute [az.]Nəsimi´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 [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī gives about [az.]Nəsimi´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-[arab.]Ḥurūfī opinion, one can hardly ignore this source, as it is certainly one of the most detailed narrations of [az.]Nəsimi´s end. And even if one rejected [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s claim that [az.]Nəsimi "abnegated" ([arab.]*nafā*) his statements before the tribunal as a piece of Mameluke Sunni Muslim propaganda, the whole structure and sequence of events show a [az.]Nəsimi who did not directly, provocatively and vociferously seek "martyrdom", if at all.

Another detail that has played an important role in representations of [az.]Nəsimi is the act of flaying. The assertion that it happened *corpore vivo*, which possibly was introduced for the first time by [osm.]Laṭīfī has been an important element in interpretations of [az.]Nəsimi´s life from then to the present day. It gave the story of [az.]Nəsimi´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 [arab.]Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī´s account, nothing makes the assumption compelling that [az.]Nəsimi was flayed alive, and no posterior source is able to add plausibility to this detail.

[1007] On polysemy as an element in [az.]Nəsimi´s poetry, see Heß 2006.

[1008] See Heß 2016; Heß 2017.

Perhaps the best-ascertained fact in [az.]Nəsimi´s life is his being a leading representative and one of the most influential propagandists of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya, 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfīya, its founder [mpers.]Faẓlollāh and [mpers.]Faẓlollāh´s influential [mpers.]*ḫalīfa*, [mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā were probably more important representatives of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya, at least seen from inside the sect. However, [az.]Nəsimi eclipsed these figures as well as all other [arab.]Ḥurūfī authors and poets if it comes to the impact of his poetry. Neither [mpers.]Faẓlollāh nor [mpers.]ʿAlīyo'l-Aʿlā or any other of the early [arab.]Ḥurūfī authors managed to compose texts or poems that acquired the popularity enjoyed by [az.]Nəsimi; with a few exceptions, most of these texts were too specialized and too little audience-targeted to be appreciated outside the inner circles of [arab.]Ḥurūfīya aficionados. Apparently, [az.]Nəsimi´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 [arab.]Ḥurūfīya [az.]*əruz* poetry in a Turkic idiom on the same level as he did, and it is probably no insult if [az.]Nəsimi´s pupil [owo.]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 [az.]*əruz* poetry with [az.]Nəsimi´s quality in his time. It was the model of [az.]Nəsimi´s poetry that inspired other Oghuz Turkic poets like [owo.]Ḥābībī and [osm.]Uṣūlī from [ttü.]Vardar Yenice to develop their interpretations of [arab.]Ḥurūfī poetry.

In spite of [az.]Nəsimi´s efforts, the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya always remained a marginalized movement, that later on turned into a background current in Oriental Islamicate cultures. Its founder [mpers.]Faẓlollāh 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 [arab.]Ḥurūfīya movement. Many of the playful and imaginative speculations [mpers.]Faẓlollāh used came from the tradition of lettrism, 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 [az.]Nəsimi´s lifetime, [mpers.]Faẓlollāh 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 lettrist system of the [arab.]Ḥurūfīya are today of interest only to specialists in the matter, or to esoterics, this marginal current of Islam, and in particular its interpretation in [az.]Nəsimi'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 [az.]Nəsimi formulated in his poetry very likely became one of the

reasons for the hostility he experienced from non-[arab.] Ḥurūfī mainstream Muslims. As provocative as the statement that "the Worshipper and the Worshipped have become the One" must have sounded to many Muslims of [az.] Nəsimi´s times, it is precisely this foregrounding of human dignity that constitutes one of the main assets of [az.] Nəsimi´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 [arab.] Ḥurūfīs and in their wake [az.] Nəsimi gave to the role of man stands out as a remarkable turnabout. [az.] Nəsimi´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 [az.] Nəsimi, 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. 2nd 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
5th century	Nonnos of Panopolis
412-485	Proklos, a neo-Platonist philosopher and lettrist
540-604	Gregor the Great
560-636	Isidor of Seville
Ca. 600-661	ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, first Shii imam
Ca. 7th / 8th century	Virgilius Maro Grammaticus
604-632	Fāṭima bint Muḥammad

672-735	Beda Venerabilis
680, October 10 (=Muḥarram 10, A. H. 61)	Al-Ḥusayn killed at Kerbela
Ca. 699 or 703-765	Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiḳ, sixth Shii imam
706	The Greek language is replaced by Arabic in the administration of the Umayyad caliphate
745-799	Mūsā al-Kāẓim, seventh Shiite imam
Ca. 768	Death of Hārūn b. Saʿd al-Iǧlī, presumed author of *Ǧafr*
780-856	Hrabanus Maurus
784-845	Ibn Saʿd
800-873	al-Kindī
Ca. 825	Death of Bišr b. al-Muʿtamir
828-889	Ibn Ḳutayba
922	Al-Ḥallāǧ executed in Baghdad for saying "I am Allah" (*Anāʾl-Ḥaḳḳ*)
1097–1141	Hugh of St. Victor
End of the 11th century	Formation of the Nizaris (Assassins)
12th century	Ruprecht von Deutz
	Sefer Ha-Bahir
1114–1185	as-Suhaylī (1114–1185), important interpreter of the "separated letters" of the Quran
1138–1204	Rambam / Moses ben Maimon

1145–1234	Abū Ḥafs ʻOmar as-Sohravardī
1146	The Nizaris (Assassins) abrogate the shariah
Ca. 1147	Collapse of the *dehḳān* system in Seljuq Iran
1154–1191	Yaḥyā ebne Ḥabaš as-Sohravardī al-Maḳtūl, aka Šayḫ al-Išrāḳ
1164	The Nizarites announce the beginning of the *ḳiyāma*
1165–1240	Ibn al-ʿArabī
1194	Greater Seljuq rule over Iran ended by the Ḫvārezmians
End of the 12th century	Aḥmad as-Sabtī, Muslim lettrist 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	*Sefer Ha-Zohar*
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 Ḫaldūn
1334 or 1335 (A. H. 735)	Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳaraǧa (D̲ū'l-ḳadr) invades Cilician Armenia
1337	Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳaraǧa appointed Mameluke *nāʾib*
1339 or 1340	Birth of Fażlollāh
1343 or 1344 (A. H. 744)	Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳaraǧa defeats strong Mameluke forces
Ca. 1344–1405	ad-Damīrī, Arab scholar
1345–1372	Rule of the Shirvanshah Kavus
1349	End of the B*āvandid d*ynasty
1350s	Sarbadarids conquer Astarābād
1352	Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳaraǧa participates in conspiration against the Mameluke sultan
1353, December 11	Zayn ad-Dīn Ḳaraǧa executed in Cairo
1356–1410 (with interruptions)	Jalairid dynasty
1356–1374	Šayḫ Uvays (Jalairid)

1356 / 1357 (A. H. 756)	Fażlollāh sees the Prophet Muḥammad in a dream
1357	Fażlollāh becomes a Sufi
1357 or 1358	Ǧanibeg (Golden Horde) makes an inroad into Azerbaijan
1358–1384	Rule of Šāh Šoǧāʿ (Muẓaffarid)
1358	Šayḫ Uvays defeats (Mongol) Chobanids
1358 or 1359–1416	Šeyḫ Bedreddīn
1360 or 1361 (A. H. 762)	Ḫalīl (D̲ū'l-ḳadr) raids the outskirts of Aleppo
Between ca. 1361 and 1371	The Ottomans conquer Edirne
1363 / 1364 (A. H. 765)	"Star dream" of Fażlollāh in Ḫʷārezm
1364	The Shirvanshah Kavus tries to conquer Tabriz
1364–1442	Al-Maḳrīzī
1366, May	Punitive military action by the Mameluke governor in Aleppo, Sayf ad-Dīn *Ǧarǧī*, against Ḫalīl (D̲ū'l-ḳadr)
1369 / 1370–1418 / 1419 (A. H. 771-821)	Sayyid Isḥāḳ, one of Fażlollāh´s successors
Around 1370 / 1371–1374	Fażlollāh teaches in Isfahan
1370–1388	Rule of Pəhləvan (Aqqoyunlu)
1372–1382	Rule of the Shirvanshah Hušəng
1372–1449	Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsḳalānī
Between 1373 and 1387 (?)	Fażlollāh reveals his interpretation of the letters
1374	Fażlollāh meets the Muẓaffarid ruler Šāh Šoǧāʿ

1374–1382 (with interruptions)	Jalairid Sulṭān Ḥusayn
1376	Temporary occupation of Tabriz by Šāh Šuǧāʿ
1380	Death of Bayram Xoca, the founder of the Qaraqoyunlu state
1381 or 1382 (A. H. 783)	Mameluke military action against Ḫalīl of Dū'l-ḳadr
1386 or 1387 (A. H. 788) – 1397 or 1398 (A. H. 800)	Sūlī (Dulkadıroğulları)
1380–1389	Qara Məhəmməd (Qaraqoyunlu)
1382–1410 (with interruptions)	Jalairid Sulṭān Aḥmad
1382–1417	Rule of the Shirvanshah İbrahim I.
1382, September	The Qaraqoyunlu defeat the Jalairid prince Šayḫ ʿAlī at Tabriz
1382–1389	First reign of Barqūq (Circassian Mameluke)
1383	Tamerlane (Timur) takes Astarābād
	A certain Səlim 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)	Ḫalīl (Dū'l-ḳadr) deposed and executed by Barqūq
	Sūlī (Dulkadıroğulları)

1386	Tamerlane retakes Tabriz
	Jalairids inside Əlincə resist Tamerlane
1387	Tamerlane leaves for Central Asia and hands control over Azerbaijan to Mīrān Šāh
	Tamerlane attacks the Qaraqoyunlu from Naxçıvan
	Negotiations between Qara Məhəmməd, Mintāš, and Burhāneddīn
	Tamerlane takes Isfahan, perpetrating a massacre of the civilian population, and invades Syria
	The attempted alliance between Mintāš and Burhāneddīn
1387–1392	The phase of instability during Mīrān Šāh´s rule
1387–1393	Rule of the last Muẓaffarid Šāh Manṣūr, whose court poet was Šarafoddīn Rāmī Tabrīzī
1388–1392	Əlaəddin Turəli (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)	Faẓlollāh in Isfahan
1389, June 15	Death of the Ottoman sultan Murād I; according to Laṭīfī, this is a *terminus ante quem* for a visit of Nəsimi to Rūm (Anatolia)
1389–1420 or 1421	Rule of Qara Yusif (Qaraqoyunlu)
1389 or 1390 (A. H. 792)	Faẓlollāh has a dream in Isfahan´s Toḳči mosque

1390–1399	Second reign of Barqūq (Circassian Mameluke)
1391	The commander of the Əlincə fortress wards off the Qara-qoyunlu Qara Yusif near Tabriz
	Sūlī 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 Əlincə but fails
1392–1394	Rule of Fəxrəddin (Aqqoyunlu)
1393	Tamerlane destroys the Muẓaffarid 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	Faẓlollāh has a dream at Ǧazīra
1394, August or September	Faẓlollāh is executed on Mīrān Šāh´s order
1395	Sūlī 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
	Əlincə capitulates to Tamerlane
1397 / 1398 (A. H. 800)	Sūlī executed byBarqūq

1399 / 1400 (A. H. 802)-1443	Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad (Dulkadıroğulları)
1399 / 1400 (A. H. 802)	Begin of ʿAlīyoʾl-Aʿlā´s missionary activity
	ʿAlīyoʾl-Aʿlā´ converts Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad
1399–1412	Nāṣir ad-Dīn Faraǧ (Circassian Mameluke, son of Barqūq)
1400	Tamerlane sends army detachments against the Dulkadıroğulları, 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 Ḥurūfī rebellion in Khorasan
1406–1447	Rule of Tamerlane´s son Šāhroḫ (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 Əlincə to be rebuilt
1406, autumn	Qara Yusif defeats the Timurid Abū Bakr near Şənbi-Qazan
June 1406–June 1407 (A. H. 809)	Unsuccessful Ḥurūfī rebellion in Māzanderān
1408, April 21	The Timurids Abū Bakr and Mīrān Šāh are beaten by Qara Yusif at Sərdurud, Mīrān Šāh is killed
1408 / 1409 (A. H. 811)	Completion of the *Bešāret-nāme* by Nəsimi´s pupil Refīʿī
1410	ʿAlīyoʾl-Aʿlā writes the *Korsīnāme*

1410, August 30	The second battle of Şənbi-Qazan: Qara Yusif kills Sulṭān 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)	Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad (Dulkadıroğulları) sends troops to help the Ottoman prince Meḥmed *Čelebi*
1412, November 6 – January 13, 1421	Šayḫ al-Maḥmūdī = Al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad (Mameluke ruler)
1413	Meḥmed *Čelebi* victorious in Ottoman civil war
1413–1417	İbrahim I. rules Shirvan as a Qaraqoyunlu vassal
1413–1419	Meḥmed of Ḳaraman (first reign)
1416	Rebellion of Börklüğe Muṣṭafā in Anatolia
1416, December 18	Execution of Šeyḫ Bedreddīn, *terminus ante quem* for the presence of Ḥurūfīs in Anatolia
1417	Date of Nəsimi´s execution according to many modern authors
1417–1462	Xəlilullah I. of Shirvan
1418	The campaign by Šāhroḫ against the Qaraqoyunlu
1418, February 2 – 1419, January 27 (= A. H.821)	Date of Nəsimi´s accusation and execution according to Ibn Ḥağar al-'Asḳalānī and Sibṭ b. al-'Ağamī
1419	Nāṣir ad-Dīn Muḥammad (Dulkadıroğulları) captures Meḥmed of Ḳaraman and sends him to Cairo
1419 / 1420	The punitive military campaign of Al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad against the Karamanoğulları
1419–1423	Meḥmed of Ḳaraman (second reign)

1420	Campaign of Šāhroḫ against the Qaraqoyunlu
1421, August 1	Šāhroḫ beats two of Qara Yusif´s sons at Dərbənd
1421–1438	İskəndər (Qaraqoyunlu)
1423–1464	Tāğ ad-Dīn İbrāhīm, ruler of Ḳaraman
1426 / 1427 (A. H. 830)	Presumed death of Nəsimi´s brother Şah Xəndan
1427, February 21	Aḥmad-e Lor / Aḥmad Lorī tries to assassinate Šāhroḫ in Herat
1430, June-July	Firišteoġlï finishes *Ïšḳ-nāme*
1432–1481	Meḥmed II the Conqueror, Ottoman sultan (rules from 1451)
1433 / 1434 (A. H. 837)	Date of Nəsimi´s execution according to the *Mağāleso'l-'Oššāḳ* and Laṭīfī
1438–1467	Cahanşah (Qaraqoyunlu)
1441–1442 (A. H. 845)	Unsuccessful Ḥurūfī rebellion with the participation of Fażlollāh´s daughter Kalemetollāh in Tabriz
1442–1443 (A. H. 846)	*Terminus post quem* for the composition of Amīr Ġiyāṣoddīn´s *Istivā-nāme*
1444	Failed Ḥurūfī proselytizing attempt of prince Meḥmed, the future conqueror of Constantinople
1444, spring	The Ottoman sultan Murād II. abdicates in favor of prince Meḥmed
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 Firišteoġlï
1470–1520	Ḥābībī
1478–1490	Rule of Yaqub (Aqqoyunlu)
1479 / 1480 (A. H. 884)	Death of Sibṭ b. al-ʿAǧamī
1487–1524	Xətai / Şah İsmayıl
1491–1582	Laṭīfī
Ca. 1493–1565	Ǧelāl-zāde Ṣāliḥ Čelebi
Ca. 1497–1498	*Chiffre* attested in Old French with the meaning "code, secret writing"
Around 1500	*Maǧāleso'l-'Oššāḳ* by Kamālo'd-dīn Ḥosayn Fānī
1501	Begin of Ṣafavid rule in Iran
1501–1516	Rule of the Mameluke sultan al-Ašraf Qānṣūh al-Ġūrī
1501–1524	Rule of the Ṣafavid shah İsmāʿīl (Ḫaṭā'ī)
1504 / 1505 (A. H. 910)	Al-Ašraf Qānṣūh al-Ġūrī refurbishes an Aleppo mosque presented as Nəsimi´s burial
1516, August 24	Mameluke defeat at Marǧ Dābiḳ, Ottoman occupation of Aleppo
1520–1572	ʿĀšīḳ Čelebi
1538	Death of Uṣūlī
1540–1604	Ḥasan Čelebi
1546	Laṭīfī presents his *Tezkiretü'š-Šuʿarā* to sultan Süleymān the Magnificent
1597	Death of Beyānī Muṣṭafā bin Ǧārullāh

ca. 1553-before 1621	Muḥīṭī Dede
17th century	(Âşık) Virani~Viran Abdal
1609–1657	Kātib Čelebi
1719–1780	Süleymān Saʿdeddīn Efendi Müstaḳīmzāde
1800–1871	Reżā Ḳuli Ḫān Hedāyat
1805–1881	Bernhard Dorn
1826	"Benevolent Event" (*Vaḳʿa-yi Ḫayrīye*): Annihilation of the Janissaries and abolition of the Bektashi order in the Ottoman Empire
1839	Begin of the Tanẓīmāt era in the Ottoman Empire
1844	First ever printed editions of Nəsimi´s Turkic divan come out in Constantinople
1862–1926	Edward Granville Browne
1862–1937	Georg Jacob
1863–1920	Firidun bəy Köçərli
1867–1927	Bernhard Stern
1869	The new printed edition of Nəsimi´s Turkic divan comes out in Constantinople
1873	*Kāšifü'l-esrār ve Dāfiʿü'l-Ešrār* by Ḫoğa İsḥaḳ Efendi
1881	The new printed edition of Nəsimi´s Turkic divan comes out in Constantinople
1884–1941	Səlman Mümtaz
1902–1977	Kemâl Edib Kürkçüoğlu

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