

### The Case of 'Imād al-Dīn Nasīmī

'Imād al-Dīn Nasīmī (most probably executed in 820/1417–1418) was one of the most famous followers of Faḡl Allāh and a well-known poet, who made an important contribution to the development of Western Turkic literary languages, including Ottoman and Azeri Turkish, and his case seems to confirm the view that the persecution of the Ḥurūfis was based more on political grounds than on religious or doctrinal grounds.

Nasīmī became a legendary figure, in particular in the Turkic world, where he is revered for his poetry and his unwavering courage in maintaining the truth of the mystical experience in face of religious bigots, who eventually brought him to a terrible death. In addition to the Ḥurūfī ideas that are clearly visible in his poetry, Nasīmī was apparently deeply influenced by the example of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, the famous mystic killed for his ecstatic utterings.<sup>37</sup>

One of the central motifs of Nasīmī's poetry is the praise of the divine dimension of the human being. The poet frequently repeats the Ḥallājīan formula 'I am God the Real' (*anā'l-ḥaqq*),<sup>38</sup> and he has many other verses that could potentially be interpreted as a claim to divinity<sup>39</sup>—and therefore heresy—by the contemporary religious establishment. He also alludes to Faḡl Allāh Astārābādī as a manifestation of divine attributes.<sup>40</sup> Nasīmī's poetry is permeated by the *malāmātī* spirit, with its characteristic ironical outlook at the bigotry of religious scholars, but also ridiculing conventional Sufis and philosophers for their inability to attain genuine knowledge of God.<sup>41</sup>

37. Louis Massignon devoted a chapter to Nasīmī in his monumental work on Ḥallāj. See L. Massignon, *La Passion de Husayn ibn Mansūr Hallāj*, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard 1975), vol. 2, pp. 261–268.
38. K. R. F. Burrell, *The Quatrains of Nesimī: Fourteenth-century Turkic Hurufi* (The Hague; Paris: Mouton 1972), Turkic Quatrains nos. 28 (p. 118), 32 (p. 122), 76 (p. 167), and 109 (p. 197).
39. See, for example, *ibid.*, Turkic Quatrains no. 107 (p. 195): 'Absolute Being am I. With absoluteness I have declared. The truth is witnessed. The Truth knows that the truth I have declared. The secret of "I was a (Hidden) Treasure" in mystic manner I have declared. I pointed my finger. The moon cleft, I have declared.'
40. *Ibid.*, Turkic Quatrains nos. 33 (p. 123), 55 (p. 146), 56 (p. 147), 137 (p. 222), and 155 (p. 238).
41. *Ibid.*, Turkic Quatrains nos. 14 (p. 104, against zahids), 61 (p. 152, against Sufis), and 129 (p. 216, against philosophers).

However, by the time of Nasīmī, and especially after Ḥāfiz Shīrāzī (d. 791/1389 or 792/1390), the *malāmātī* provocative vocabulary—with its praise of the things formally prohibited by the Islamic 'orthodoxy', such as enjoying wine and being drunk, erotic descriptions of the beauty of the human body and face, and its deriding hypocritical religiosity—had become an accepted artistic norm. Even though some of the verses of Nasīmī<sup>42</sup> may sound somewhat radical in their deification of a human being, and could be used as evidence to provide formal grounds for an accusation of heresy, it is unlikely that his poetry was the only reason for Nasīmī's persecution and execution.

The historical information concerning Nasīmī, particularly the circumstances in which he was condemned and executed, is scarce. One of the most credible accounts is probably that provided by Sibṭ ibn al-'Ajāmī (d. 884/1479) in his *Kunūz al-dhahab fi tā'riḫ Ḥalab*, reproduced by Muḥammad Rāghib b. Maḥmūd Hāshim al-Ṭabbakh al-Ḥalabī in his *I'lām al-nubalā' bi-tā'riḫ Ḥalab al-Shahabā'*, an account that gives us an insight into the possible political reasons behind Nasīmī's execution.<sup>43</sup> According to the *Kunūz*, Nasīmī was arrested and tried for heresy (as a *zindīq*) in Aleppo. But the judges failed to reach an agreement as to whether he should be executed, and the final sentence for Nasīmī's death came not from the judges; but from the Mamluk Sultan al-Mu'ayyad (r. 815–824/1412–1421), who also ordered different parts of his body to be sent to 'Uthmān Kara Yulūk (Bahā' al-Dīn Kara 'Uthmān, d. 838/1434–1455), leader of the Akkoyunlu confederation, as well as to Nāṣir al-Dīn (r. 1399–1442), ruler of the Dhulkadir principality (beylik) in Anatolia, and to his brother 'Alī bey, because Nasīmī 'had perverted their beliefs' (*afsada 'aqā'id hā'ulā'i*).

Another indication of the political influence of Nasīmī is his possible relationship with the movement of Badr al-Dīn Samāwnā (d. 1416), who inspired an anti-Ottoman rebellion in 1415–1416. With reference to the accounts of medieval European travellers, Michel Balivet provided some elements for this connection between Nasīmī and Badr al-Dīn and his followers, but further research is needed to clarify the possible links between Nasīmī and the Ḥurūfis in general

42. E.g. those cited in note 38 above.

43. Muḥammad Rāghib b. Maḥmūd Hāshim al-Ṭabbakh al-Ḥalabī, *I'lām al-nubalā' bi-tā'riḫ Ḥalab al-Shahabā'*, 7 vols. (Aleppo: Maṭba'a al-'Ilmiyya 1923–1926), vol. 3 (1925), pp. 15–16.