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

The earliest reference to his *Rasa’il* is found in the *Jami’ al-asrar* (pp. 238-39) of Sayyid Haydar-i Amuli written about 1350 CE. Amuli calls him ‘Aziz al-Din al-Nasafi and refers to him as the ‘disciple’ (*telmidh*) of Sa’d al-Din al-Hamu’i (d. 649 AH / 1252 CE). Though rather vague and general, this reference appears to be based on a passage (pp. 320-21) in the collection that has come to be known as the *Kitab al-insan al-kamil*; a misnomer due to a bibliographical error, more likely the original title was *Kitab manazil al-sa’irin*. By about 1400 CE, another important work of Nasafi, [*Kitab-i*] *tanzil* (as yet unpublished), was well known in India. Sayyid Muhammad-i Gisudiraz (d. 825 AH / 1422 CE), who refers to the author as ‘Abd al-‘Aziz hakim-i Nasafi, used this work extensively in his *Asmar al-asrar* (e.g. p. 265; also see Hussaini). From about 1450 CE we have the earliest extant manuscripts of Nasafi’s writings, notably an excellent *majmu’a* of the Majlis Library (no. 4136) which contains two mature works, the *Kashf al-haqayiq* and the *Bayan al-tanzil* (not identical with the *Kitab-i tanzil*). By the 16th century CE, he was also very well known in Ottoman Turkey (cf. Karamustafa). The *Maqсад-i aqsa*, perhaps Nasafi’s most popular work, exists in numerous manuscripts and in various versions or rearrangements in the original Persian, as well as in several Turkish translations. A Persian fragment of six pages (corresponding, with few omissions of specifically Sufi passages, to the standard text as available in *Ganjinah-yi ‘irfan*, p. 273, l. 16 to p. 277, l. 16) is found at the beginning of a collection of Isma‘ili texts which contains at the end the oldest extant manuscript of Tusi’s *Tasawwurat* (copied in 1560 CE from the autograph, cf. Badakhchani, 1989). A Turkish translation of the *Maqсад* provided the basis for the Latin extracts which were already published in 1665 CE in Germany and eventually found their way into the work of the celebrated German theologian F. A. G. Tholuck (1799-1877 CE), *Ssufismus sive Theosophia Persarum Pantheistica* (Berlin, 1821), while a rearrangement of the Persian original (not, of course, a Persian translation, see Storey, *Persian Literature* I/1, p. 178) appears to have served as a basis for E. H. Palmer’s English paraphrase of 1867 CE. Nasafi’s *Zubdat al-haqayiq* is also available



in various versions, including one preserved among the Isma‘ilis of Badakhshan as part of a collection of Isma‘ili writings (ed. A. E. Bertel, 1970).

Despite the popularity of Nasafi’s writings, historical sources afford very little reliable information about his life, which accordingly must be outlined from indications in his own works (the fundamental study is Meier, 1953). Jami does not even mention Nasafi, and the one relatively early source (much used by later writers) that does provide a rather detailed entry on him, Gazargahi’s *Majalis al-‘ushshaq* (pp. 163-64), is notoriously unreliable. While Gazargahi’s claim that Nasafi died and was buried in Abarquh seems plausible enough, the two dates he offers for his death, namely, 616 and 661 AH are not only incompatible but are both incorrect. Nasafi was evidently alive on the 1st Rajab 671 AH / 22 January 1273 CE, when the troops of Aq Beg engaged in massacre and plunder at Bukhara (Rashid-al-Din, *Jami‘ al-tawarikh* II, pp. 766-67; tr. Pt. 3, p. 536), for he himself explains in the *Kashf al-haqayiq* (p. 2) that due to an imminent attack by the “heathen forces” (*lashgar-i kuffar*), on that day he had to leave Bukhara and cross the Oxus to reach safety in Khurasan. After this, he must have spent some time near the tomb of Shaykh Sa‘d al-Din-i Hamu‘i in Bahrabad, and then moved further south to Kerman, Isfahan, Shiraz and finally perhaps settled in Abarquh, where he completed the *Kashf al-haqayiq* in 1281 CE. But he must have been active well beyond that date. According to the colophon of one manuscript (see *Kitab al-insan al-kamil*, p. 493), he would still have been writing in Abarquh in 1292 CE. The available text of the *Bayan al-tanzil* also suggests a very late date. However, it seems unlikely that he lived beyond the end of the 13th century CE, and if his statement in the *Maqsad-i aqsa* (p. 254) to the effect that it had taken him “eighty years to reach the end of this path” is to be taken literally, he must have been born by the end of the 12th century CE; for the *Maqsad* was certainly written before the *Kashf* and thus before 1281 CE. At any rate, we know from the *Kitab-i tanzil* that he was born in Nasaf, and that he wrote at least the first ten chapters of this work partly there and partly in Bukhara. He had evidently been exposed to a long Sufi education in Nasaf and/or Bukhara, and although he never mentions his Transoxanian masters by name, he may well have known Sayf al-Din-i Bakharzi (d. 659 AH / 1261 CE) in Bukhara. The first *Risala* of the *Kitab al-insan al-kamil* (cf. p. 80) is dated at Bukhara in 660 AH / 1261-62 CE. Both Bakharzi and Sa‘d al-Din-i Hamu‘i were among the “twelve disciples” of the famous Sufi Najm al-Din-i Kubra (d. 618 AH / 1221 CE).

Since Nasafi alludes to the time he spent with Shaykh Sa‘d al-Din-i Hamu‘i in Khurasan (*Kitab al-insan al-kamil*, pp. 316-22), he must have crossed the Oxus at least once before his final emigration from Transoxania. This was certainly before Hamu‘i’s death in 1252 CE, but probably not before 1244 CE when Hamu‘i returned from a long journey, which had taken him to various cities of the Middle East including Damascus (where he is said to have met Ibn al-‘Arabi, d. 1240 CE, and Sadr al-Din Qunavi, d. 1274 CE). For Nasafi’s own spiritual development, the encounter with Hamu‘i was doubtless of greatest significance. Though not uncritical of some of Hamu‘i’s more peculiar views, particularly the messianic expectation of the imminent coming of the “Lord of the Time (*sahib al-zaman*)” (cf. *Kitab al-insan al-kamil*, pp. 321-22; *Maqsad*, pp. 245-46), Nasafi always speaks of him with great reverence. Some thirty years after Hamu‘i’s death, he still has him appear, together with the Prophet Muhammad and the saint of Shiraz, Ibn Khafif, in a dream (recorded in *Kashf*, pp. 3-4; rephrased in *Majalis al-*



'*ushshaq*, p.164) in which the author is warned not to publish the entire *Kashf al-haqayiq* before the advent of the year 700 AH (1300-01 CE) (and, apparently as a result of this, only seven out of a total of ten treatises promised in the table of contents have come down to us). The Hamu'i of that dream shows concern about Nasafi's explaining in clear and plain language what he himself had been trying to hide in 400 difficult treatises (440 according to the version in *Majalis*). In this way the author in effect portrays himself as a spokesman for Hamu'i's esoteric doctrine. Of course this should not necessarily be taken at face value.

Though of a well-known Sunni family, Hamu'i soon acquired a reputation as a Shi'i esotericist, doubtless because of his frequent allusions to the all-important function of *walaya/wilaya* and the *awliya'* as esoteric counterparts respectively of prophecy and the prophets (see e.g. *Al-Misbah fi al-tasawwuf*, pp. 137-38). In one treatise (briefly discussed by Elias, pp. 71-72) he identified the "Seal of the *awliya'*" with Jesus, as did Ibn al-'Arabi; but according to one as yet unidentified statement attributed to him by Amuli (*Jami' al-asrar*, p. 431), he is said to have insisted that after the Prophet Muhammad, the name *al-wali* may be applied only to 'Ali and his children. Nasafi does not report this statement, nor does he exactly speak of "the twelve imams" when reporting on Hamu'i's doctrine, as Amuli (pp. 238-39) implies; but he does point out in his "Treatise explaining *walayat*, prophecy, angel, revelation, inspiration, and true dreams" (*Kitab al-insan al-Kamil* pp. 313-25) that, according to Hamu'i, there could be only twelve *awliya'* in the Muslim community, with the twelfth among them being called the "seal," or the *mahdi*, or the *sahib al-zaman* (*Kitab al-insan al-kamil*, pp. 320-21). He also carefully points out a theological difference between Hamu'i and Sadr al-Din-i Qunavi concerning the relation between the divine attributes and the essence, which may indeed point to Shi'i leanings (see Landolt 1996, pp.188-90). However, Twelver Shi'i "orthodoxy" does not really seem to have been more attractive to Nasafi than ordinary Sunnism.

The available evidence shows that Nasafi was quite responsive to the Isma'ilis, and (as noted), the Iranian Isma'ilis in any case did not wait for long to incorporate some of his works into their own. One element of Isma'ili influence on Nasafi's thought can be seen in the fact that the three missing final treatises of the *Kashf al-haqayiq* are the very ones which according to the table of contents would have dealt with esoteric subjects such as the relation between the *sahib-i shari'at* and the *qa'im-i qiyamat*, the number of Revealed Laws, and the meaning of abrogation. More importantly, Nasafi never identifies himself directly as a Sufi but clearly sympathises with those he usually calls *ahl-i wahdat* 'monists'; and the expression *ahl-i wahdat* is found in the Isma'ili works of Nasir-al-Din Tusi (d. 672 AH / 1274 CE) in the first place.

Both in *Sayr wa Suluk* (Badakhchani 1998, text pp. 20-21; tr. p. 52) and *Tasawwurāt* (Badakhchani 1989; Ivanow, MS pagination, pp. 35-36, 60, 65), *ahl-i wahdat* designates an elite, as distinguished from the more common folk (called *ahl-i tarattub*) who have not reached the highest stage of "oneness." Similarly, Nasafi's *ahl-i tasawwuf* or *mashayikh-i tariqat* are not identical with the *ahl-i wahdat*; they rather play the role of the middle-of-the-roads (cf.



e.g. *Zubdat al-haqayiq* in *Ganjina*, p. 328). They are represented in the *Kashf* (p. 80, cf. pp. 73, 76, 77) with their traditional view that “the final stage of the *awliya*’ is the initial stage of the prophets,” meaning that prophets are superior because they are chosen by God from among the *awliya*’, whereas the *ahl-i wahdat* on the contrary maintain that “a prophet is superior to a *hakim* but a *wali* is superior to a prophet since whoever is a prophet must first be a *hakim* and whoever is a *wali* must first be a prophet, but whoever is a prophet is not necessarily a *wali*” (*ibid.*, p.102). This scale is based on the degree and kind of knowledge attainable by each of the three; for a *hakim* knows the natures (*tabayi*’) of things and a prophet also knows their properties or particular effects (*khawass-i ashya*’) but only a *wali* also knows their truths (*haqayiq-i ashya*’) (*ibid.* p.102 and several other places). To be sure, Hamu’i figures at least by implication among the “monists” as well, even prominently so (*ibid.* p.153), as he is also credited with the “shocking” statement that “the final stage of the prophets is the initial stage of the *awliya*” (in *Kashf al-Sirat*, perhaps by Nasafi himself, see Landolt 1996, p. 171; also see Hamu’i’s own wording of a similar point in *Al-Misbah fi al-tasawwuf*, p. 137). But the idea of the *wali* knowing the *haqayiq-i ashya*’ certainly tallies well with Nizari Isma’ili doctrine.

There is, however, no reason to assume that Nasafi actually joined the Isma’ilis at any time. In all of his writings, he shows a remarkable degree of spiritual independence. His liberal attitude is generally reminiscent of the classical example of the *Ikhwan al-Safa*’ (q.v). At times he also could be an outspoken sceptic of a typically “Khayyamian” appeal (see, for example, the quatrain in *Maqsad*, p. 284, variant in *Kitab al-insan al-kamil*, p. 438). For the same reason, he cannot really be considered a representative of “Kubrawiya Sufism” either, despite his personal attachment to the figure of Hamu’i. He certainly did not share the rather pronounced Islamic ideology which was adopted by famous Kubrawiya Sufis before and during the Mongol domination, and his *ahl-i wahdat* even include certain forms of Indian spirituality, for which he in fact showed greatest admiration (see Landolt 1996, p. 175).

Nasafi was not a theologian in any technical sense of the word but an all-round scholar whose knowledge included also philosophy and medicine. He made a systematic attempt to describe the varieties of religious and philosophical doctrines, which were available to him from literary sources as well as through personal contacts, and to classify them in terms of their essential differences. Broadly speaking, he distinguishes between three major categories: the *ahl-i shari’at* (divided into Sunnis and Shi’is), the *ahl-i hikmat* (divided into ordinary Avicennian philosophers and the *ahl-i tanasukh* “transmigrationists”), and the *ahl-i wahdat*, who are also divided into two groups: the “deniers” of the reality of the world, also called the “followers of Fire” (*ashab-i nar*), and the “affirmers” of that reality, or “followers of Light” (*ashab-i nur*); and both these “deniers” and “affirmers” are, again, divided into sub-groups, although all, of course, believe in their own way in the “oneness of existence” (*wahdat-i wujud*). This quasi-scientific, phenomenological approach to a great variety of doctrines clearly distinguishes Nasafi from Ibn al-‘Arabi and his school; and although their influence is certainly perceptible in many ways in his works, he was not their spokesman. Perhaps his most characteristic idea about the “Perfect Man” should be seen in his vision of an ongoing process of development, both biologically and spiritually speaking, or



the deployment (*inbisat*) of “existence” or Reality itself. The creative energy at work in this process is the “Soul of God” (*nafs-i khuda* [not *nafas-i khuda* ‘Breath of God’, as some have read]) as identified with the “Lord” (*rabb*) of the famous Tradition “He who knows his ‘soul’ knows his ‘lord’.”

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