

al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj

One of the most famous mystics of Islam, al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (857–922C.E.), was born in present-day Iran. While still young, he listened to the teachings of the Ṣūfī Sahl al-Tustarī. He then went to Baghdad and became a pupil of the celebrated mystic al-Junayd. During his life, he made three pilgrimages to Mecca and undertook many long journeys to Central Asia, and even reached the western boundaries of China. In Iraq and elsewhere he aroused the passion and the interest of his listeners through his fiery rhetoric. He spoke about the necessity of union with God, exclusive love for Him, and continuous repentance and prayer. The authorities were convinced that he was a political agitator, and when he was still in his thirties he was put on trial.

In harmony with al-Junayd's teachings, al-Ḥallāj professed rigorous adherence to the law, but his alleged orthodoxy was called into question by his unusual theopathic experiences. During ecstasy, al-Ḥallāj went so far as to proclaim, “I am the Truth” (*anā al-Ḥaqq*), that is, “I am God.” Although he complied with the religious duty of the pilgrimage, he suggested that it is not necessary to visit Mecca in body, because what is needed is a spiritual pilgrimage. Al-Ḥallāj was credited with many miracles: multiplying food for his disciples; healing the sick; igniting and extinguishing fires at a distance, and so on.

In his verbal utterances, he seemed to claim that God inhabited his body during ecstasy (*ḥulūl*). He said however: “As my humanity is destroyed in Your divinity without any mixing, so

Your divinity gets possession of my humanity without any contact” (Alberto Ventura, *Il Cristo dell’Islam* (The Christ of Islam). Milan, 2007, p. xx). His potentially heretical religious attitude, coupled with incoherent behavior with regard to the legal acts of worship, aroused the suspicions of the authorities and the conservative ‘*ulamā*’ against him. He was arrested and put on trial twice, and ultimately sentenced to death. Similar to Jesus, he was whipped and then crucified. While dying, he called on God not to punish his persecutors because they were unaware of what they were doing. During his agony, he uttered a mysterious sentence: “The real concern of the Lover is the One in His absolute isolation” (Ventura, p. xvi). The meaning of this assertion is a kind of *via negationis*: it is necessary to negate every human quality in order to allow only God to persist. In other words, divine Unity is established through perfect and absolute isolation (*infirād*).

The posthumous fame of al-Ḥallāj was widespread and enduring, and today he is very popular in all parts of the Muslim world. A legend of holiness and purity grew up around his figure. The singular circumstances of his life and death, in addition to his continuous emphasis on the goodness and love of God, led some Western scholars, like the prominent Arabist Louis Massignon, to portray al-Ḥallāj as a “second Jesus,” the Jesus of Islam. The later mystic Ibn al-‘Arabī said that al-Ḥallāj “owned the science of Jesus,” that is, a divine knowledge unveiling hidden secrets. Like Jesus, al-Ḥallāj was recognized as having the faculty to express the inexpressible through language.

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