

**A Lost Turk Play : actors Mufti Nassuf &c (1614–42)**

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## *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c (1614-42)*

Between 1579 and 1624, over sixty "Turk plays" - plays featuring Islamic themes, characters, or settings - were performed in England.<sup>1</sup> The Caroline theatre saw the staging of yet more. These plays form a genre which, as many recent scholars have argued, negotiates complex ideas around topics such as global trade and international politics; the relativity of standards of gender and sexuality; and relations between Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam. Over the last ten years the group of early modern Turk plays has emerged as a new and important area of study in its own right.<sup>2</sup> This article aims to add an extra detail to our knowledge of this group of plays by describing a lost drama about Turkish political history, hitherto unrecognized as such, originating (arguably) in London's professional theatre, and datable (arguably) to the years 1614-42. No title for it is preserved, so it is here given, for convenience, the title *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c*.

This article will start by considering the one surviving record of the play; then move on to using EEBO-TCP to identify one of its characters, "Nassuf", as almost certainly a historical figure. The numerous seventeenth-century accounts of this Nassuf will then be discussed, at some length, before the article returns to the surviving record and re-interrogates it in the light of Nassuf's contemporary reputation. Finally, the article attempts to place *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c* within a framework of theatrical history.

### **Hill's List**

That *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c* ever existed at all is indicated by one document: a manuscript list of play-titles compiled by the antiquarian and bibliophile Abraham Hill, and preserved among Hill's papers in the British Library. In this enigmatic list, comprising about fifty titles, Hill appears to have been recording the results of a hasty inspection of a collection of manuscripts. Some of the plays Hill mentions are extant. Others, although lost, are known from other records of their existence. Most are entirely unknown. In G. E. Bentley's pithy summary of the problem, the list "seems to have been Hill's record of the stock of some bookseller, set down between 1677 and 1703, but it is notable that nearly all the identifiable plays and playwrights in the list are Jacobean and Caroline".<sup>3</sup>

In an article published in 1939, Joseph Quincy Adams made a full transcription of Hill's List, adding numbers for ease of reference. The section of the list that concerns us runs as follows in Adams's transcription:

- |    |                              |     |
|----|------------------------------|-----|
| 33 | The City night cap.          |     |
| 34 | Tereus with a pastoral       | M.A |
|    | Actors. Agnostus Eupathus &c |     |

	Actors Mufti Nassuf &c	
35	the 2 Spanish Gentlemen	
36	Challenge for beauty (is in print)	Tho Heywood

Records 33 and 36 both describe plays which do survive: Davenport's *The City Nightcap* and Heywood's *Challenge for Beauty*. Nothing at all is known about the play referred to in number 35, *The 2 Spanish Gentlemen*. This leaves Record 34.

The only previous discussions of this record are those of Adams and Bentley. Both list Record 34 as if a single play, and then consider the possibility that there might be two separate plays contained within it. Thus, Adams comments that the details of Record 34 are hard to interpret:

To me it seems likely that Hill is describing a single dramatic manuscript in two parts, and quoting the name of typical "actors" from both parts by way of illustrating each.

The implication here is that the two parts are, firstly, a play about Tereus, and secondly, a pastoral, and that one should imagine a mufti somehow featuring in a pastoral, perhaps as comic relief. Similarly, in his catalogue of known Jacobean and Caroline plays, Bentley discusses the problem under an entry for M.A.'s *Tereus with a Pastoral (?)*, observing that "This rather enigmatic set of notes might indicate one play or two", or, again, one dramatic manuscript in two parts. Bentley adds: "neither *Tereus* nor any of the character names is familiar from other seventeenth-century records".<sup>4</sup>

Hill's list as a whole is ripe for re-examination using the new resources provided by electronic databases. Shelving, for the moment, the question of how exactly the various parts of Record 34 relate to one another, this article will start by reconsidering the two characters named in the last line of the record.

### **Identifying the characters**

One of the "Actors", i.e. characters, is identified simply as Mufti. For a sidelight on how a Mufti might be handled in a play of this period, one can turn to Robert Daborne's tragedy *A Christian Turn'd Turk*, in which "A mufti or cheefe priest" is one of the supporting cast.<sup>5</sup> Daborne's Mufti enters, in dumb show, to take part in a ritual associated with the conversion of Christians to Muslims; and at the end of the play he arrives on the scene of a murder, as a generic figure of authority with the job of establishing what has happened. "Mufti", in short, for Daborne, is a role more than an individual, and perhaps the same was true of the Mufti in the play described by Hill here.

"Nassuf", however, is a rather more informative string of letters. The database EEBO-TCP currently records 110 examples of it, and all 110 of them refer to one particular historical figure: Nassuf, Grand Vizier of Constantinople, rich, powerful, and notorious until his gruesome death in the year 1614.

An EEBO-TCP search for the word "Nassuf", variant spellings disabled, currently returns 110 hits from seven texts. In chronological order, these texts are:

- Herbert, Sir Thomas. *A relation of some yeares trauaile begunne anno 1626. Into Afrique and the greater Asia*. London: William Stansby, 1634.
- Baudier, Michel. *The history of the imperiall estate of the grand seigneurs*. London: Richard Meighen, 1635.
- Moore, Andrew. *A compendious history of the Turks*. London: John Streater, 1660.
- Tavernier, Jean-Baptiste. *The six voyages of John Baptista Tavernier, Baron of Aubonne through Turkey, into Persia and the East-Indies*. London: Robert Littlebury, 1677.
- Smith, Thomas. *Remarks upon the manners, religion and government of the Turks*. London: Moses Pitt, 1678.
- Tavernier, Jean-Baptiste. *Collections of travels through Turkey into Persia, and the East-Indies*. London: Moses Pitt, 1684. [Note that this is another version of the fourth item on the list].
- Knolles, Richard. *The Turkish history from the original of that nation, to the growth of the Ottoman empire with the lives and conquests of their princes and emperours*. London: Thomas Bassett, 1687.

In all these hits, the context sufficiently indicates that the word "Nassuf" refers to a single identifiable historical figure, namely the man usually referred to now as Nasuh or Nasuf Pasha, Grand Vizier of Constantinople in the reign of Ahmed I.<sup>6</sup> Four of these texts - to which we shall return later in the paper - contain fairly extensive discussions of Nassuf, while the other three make more glancing reference. The search result is useful, of course, in that it suggests "Nassuf" could refer to the Grand Vizier of that name, but even more useful in that it doesn't suggest that anyone else could be referred to. The only "Nassuf" found by this search is the Grand Vizier.

At this point, one should add caveats about results from EEBO-TCP searches. As Ian Gadd notes, EEBO-TCP does not cover all extant English printed books; it is by no means a complete record even of the books it includes; and it does not cover manuscript records or non-English books.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, in this period Ottoman names are spelt with great variety, and this search only looks at one particular spelling. On the other hand, and having said that, for the purposes at hand this is a useful result. EEBO-TCP can certainly be considered a large and indicative sample

of the extant English corpus, and no other meaning of the precise string "Nassuf" is represented in it at all. These 110 examples establish a basis for thinking that another seventeenth-century English reference to a "Nassuf" in which the context is not available for inspection, namely the one in Hill's List, is unlikely not to be a reference to the Grand Vizier.

With these texts as a starting-point, additional references to the historical Nassuf in his lifetime are not hard to find in international correspondence and newsletters, which is what one would expect of the second most powerful man in the Ottoman Empire. Sir Henry Wootton, for instance, reported on his activities.<sup>8</sup> In particular, in 1613 Nassuf caused outrage in England when he attempted to hold the English Ambassador to Constantinople, Paul Pindar, personally responsible for the losses inflicted by English pirates in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>9</sup> He was, then, in his lifetime a figure of particular interest to an English audience.

But it was Nassuf's violent end, in 1614, at the orders of his sultan Ahmed I, that gave him genuine and lasting celebrity. His murder was described in diplomatic correspondence and newsletters across Europe, including at least one contemporary English newsletter: and thereafter in a number of seventeenth-century printed texts. By 1626, as we shall see, there were at least six separate print publications across Europe which gave long and detailed accounts of Nassuf's last moments to an audience eager to hear about the killing.

In this connection, one might note that whereas in Record 34 the Mufti is given a job description and not a name, Nassuf is given a name and no job description, which suggests his role in the play was more than merely that of being a generic Vizier or Bashaw. Equally, Nassuf would not have been merely a supporting character in a play about anyone else, except possibly about Ahmed I himself. Nassuf was simply too important, and his fall too sensational, for that. "Nassuf", in short, is identifiable; it is significant that he is referred to by his name and not his title; and his story, which fascinated a contemporary European audience, has obvious dramatic possibilities.



Figure 1: Ahmed I, as pictured in the 1610 edition of Knolles's *Generall Historie*.

## Nassuf's obituary

In 1615, Nassuf's life and death were commemorated in a pamphlet biography: *Coppie d'une lettre escrite de Constantinople à vn Gentil-homme François, Contenant la trahison du Bascha Nassouf, sa mort estrange, & des grandes richesses qui luy ont esté trouuees* (Paris: Guillaume le Noir, 1615). Lightly paraphrased, this in turn formed the principal source for the account of "le Bacha Nassuf" which extends across three pages of the third volume, published in 1616, of the French chronicle history, *Mercure François*.<sup>10</sup> One of these two sources is then paraphrased, more or less wholesale, into English by Edward Grimeston, in his 1621 continuation of Richard Knolles's *Generall Historie of the Turkes*, to form the earliest English-language biography of Nassuf. This obituary-like account is a good starting-point for exploring seventeenth-century perceptions of Nassuf's story.

Grimeston's version runs as follows:

[T]o comprehend more plainly the fall and declining of [Nassuf's] fortune, let us behold him in his beginning and first rising. Hee was the Son of a Greeke Priest, borne in a little Village neere vnto *Solonica*, and hauing been taken by the tribute, which the Turks exact from Christians upon their miserable children, taking one of three; he was carried verie young to *Constantinople*, and there sold for three chequines or sultanins (euery one of which is not above eight Shillings starling) to an Eunuch of the Sultans, who nourished him and bred him vp till he came to the age of twentie yeares...<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, then, Nassuf turns out to have been born a Christian. The young Nassuf is sold to one of the Sultana's stewards, who recognizes his potential and promotes him to be an overseer. Soon Nassuf is himself Chief Steward to the Sultana. From there he continues his rise, made Bashaw of Aleppo and then Governor General of Mesopotamia.

The commoditie of his gouernment (frontiring upon *Persia*) stirred vp his ambitious Thoughts, and his disordinate desire to become soueraigne of that countrey, and made him to entertaine many practices with the King of *Persia*, an ancient enemy to his master.

(1335)

The Sultan, aware both of his ability and of his potential treacherousness, continues to reward him.

...he honoured him with the place of graund Visier, and gaue him all his goods, and in his place made him Generall of the armie against the Persian, with promise to giue him his daughter in mariage. Thus was *Nassuf* advanced by his dexteritie, wit, diligence, and trecherie, to the greatest charges of the greatest empire of the world.

(1335)

Now Lieutenant-General of his master's army, he invades Persia like a latter-day Tamburlaine, and forces the King of Persia to capitulate to him. Returning to Constantinople,

He enters in pompe, presents a million of gold vnto his Emperour, is well receiued at the seraglio, much made of by the Bassas, but more by the Sultan, who caused him to marrie his daughter. Fortune having thus aduanced him to the height of greatnesse, not being possible to climbe higher, she overthrowes him, & doth precipitate him to the lowest degrees of misery...

(1335)

As the account slips into the historic present, it even sounds like the summary of a play, particularly given the metaphor of the Wheel of Fortune which occurs repeatedly in Grimston's version of it. It moves on to describe Nassuf's fall from Ahmed's favour, and his death.

The Sultan feares his spirit, too headstrong by reason of his ambition; he growes ielous of his actions, and about the end of the yeare [1614] concludes his ruine and death. The commandement is given to Bostangi Bassa, that is to say, the Sultans chiefe gardiner, & ouerseer of his seraglio, and all his houses, one of the goodliest dignities of the court. *Nassuf* was at that time sicke in his house, Bostangi goes thither to visit him, & to cause him to be strangled, being accompanied onely with 7 or 8 men.

Arriving at the house, the Bostangi Bassa gains admittance after some argument, and enters Nassuf's bedroom with his men.

hauing demanded some questions of him touching his health, he drew out of his Pocket a commandement from the Sultan to *Nassuf*, to deliver unto him the seales of the empire, the which being presently done, he drew out another commandement vnto him, by the which he was enioyned to send him his head.

(1335-6)

The Bostangi Bassa's men are all mutes, a fact which gives an extra element of *grand guignol* to the horrible execution that follows.



*Nassuf* cried out aloud, and desired to speak with the Sultan, but the Bostangi answered, that he had no commission to conduct him to the seraglio, but to cause his life to be taken away presently: vpon this refusall, he intreats him to giue him leaue to wash himselfe in the next chamber, to the end that his soule (said hee) should not depart this world in the estate of pollution, according to the Turkes beliefe, who hold the washing of the body for a true purification. This fauour was also denied him; he saw there was no remedie in his miserie, not any hope of grace. Bostangi Bassa's followers (which were seuen or eight Capigies [*i.e. mutes*]) being come to take away his life, and inuironing his bed, which was an vndoubted summons that hee must die; in the end he resolues, and turning himselfe vnto these executioners, he willed them to doe their duties; whereupon they fell to worke, and casting themselues vpon him, they put a coad [*sc. cord*] about his necke, and sought to strangle him; but seeing that the fatnesse of his repleat bodie would not suffer them to take away his life presently, they cut his throat with a knife.

His death could not be displeasing to the Christians, seeing that all his designs tended to their ruine: He had perswaded his master to break the peace with the Emperour, the French king, and the Venetians, promising him to make him soueraigne monarch of the whole world, to the end he might keepe his spirit in action, and make himselfe necessarie to his master, and liue more safely in combustions than in a calme; whereas the enuie and malice of his enemies gave him a thousand furious assaults. Thus *Nassuf Bassa* ended his dayes and fortune; before Gouvernor of *Mesopotamia*, Generall of an Imperiall armie, and grand Visier of the Turkish Empire, aduanced to these supreme dignities by the great actions of his mind, but ouerthrowne shamefully to his ruine by his boundlesse ambition... The riches of *Nassuf* were so great and proportionable to his Fortune, as after his death they found about two bushels of diamonds and pearles.

(1335-6)

Rich, Machiavellian, anti-Christian, and fat, *Nassuf* would make an ideal overreaching villain for a Renaissance tragedy, and his ending, for Grimeston, is a most satisfactory piece of poetic justice.

### **Other accounts of *Nassuf***

The account described so far is self-contained, but it is not the only material about *Nassuf* to be found in Grimeston's continuation of the *Generall Historie*. In the overall account of Ahmed's reign, *Nassuf* has been one of the principal characters, and much greater detail is given about incidents merely alluded to in the biography given above: earlier in Grimeston we have heard more about the fabulous wealth

gained by Nassuf in the wars, his murderous machinations, and his efforts to preserve his city once appointed Vizier. At one point, for instance,

There happened another great fire [in Constantinople], at which the Visier [Nassuf] caused many Ianizaries to be hanged, finding them too busie in rifling houses: and hee went vp and downe the streets with his Cemiter in one Hand, and a Ianizaries Head in the other, which he had cut off.<sup>12</sup>

As this example shows, Nassuf is an energetic, dynamic figure throughout Grimeston's main narrative, and there is far more material about Nassuf in Grimeston than just the obituary derived from the *Coppie d'une Lettre*.

Grimeston also offers a second account of the death scene:

This death of *Nassuf* is related after another maner by one who was then present in *Constantinople*, the which I have thought good to set downe as I have receiued it from him. The grand Seignior being much discontented with his Visier; whether incensed with such as were neere about him, who both hated and feared *Nassuf*, or doubting his great power, he dissembled his spleene, vntill hee might find some opportunitie for reuenge...

(1336)

The murder is then described again. A few details differ - for instance, the Bostangi Bassa disguises himself as the Sultan so as to gain entrance to Nassuf's house - but more conspicuous is the extent to which this is the same story as in the two French accounts and in Grimeston. The distinctive sequence of actions in the house itself is exactly the same. The Bostangi Bassa first demands the seals of office; only once he has them does he produce the death warrant; Nassuf submits himself to being strangled by the Bostangi Bassa's assistants; and his head is cut off to be taken to the Sultan. The newsletter concludes:

It was thought his death was procured by the wife of *Cicala*, Bassa of *Babylon*... He [i.e. the correspondent] writes, that there were found in *Nassufs* house 80 bagges of gold, each Bag containing 10000 chequinos.

(1336-7)

Anders Ingram comments that the inclusion of the newsletter about Nassuf in the 1621 edition attests to Grimeston's use of merchants as sources and to English "contemporary interest in Ottoman affairs".<sup>13</sup> However, nothing further, I think, is known about the earlier circulation of this document before its printing by Grimeston, so one must conclude that it was potentially available as a source from 1614 onwards.

Yet further versions exist. There is also a long account of Nassuf in "De la vida, y muerte de Nasuff Baxà", Chapter 14 of Octavio Sapiencia's *Nuevo Tratado de Turquia*, published in Madrid in 1622. This also resembles in its broad lines the account offered by Grimeston - the humble origins: the military career: and the spectacular fall from grace. This time, however, a particular cause is given for Nassuf's fall: the intervention of his rival Cycala, who alleges to the Sultan that Nassuf is in league with the Persians. Furthermore, the killer is identified not as the Bostangi Bassa, but as a "Secretario". It offers another long version of the death scene, reporting dialogue between Nassuf and his killers. Again, Nassuf is made to hand over the seals before he is told that he must die, and again it is stated that Nassuf proved too fat to strangle, so they had to cut his throat. Like the other sources, Sapiencia gives a long description of the wealth found in Nassuf's house after his death.<sup>14</sup>

Sapiencia's book was then mined by the poet Lope de Vega, who inserted several episodes from it into his Moorish novella *La desdicha por la honra* ("Misfortune brought about by honour"), published in 1624. In particular, *La desdicha por la honra* includes a fairly close paraphrase of Sapiencia's account of the episode of Nassuf's murder. Nassuf's death in Lope's novel is strangely causally detached from the rest of the narrative – he does not feature as a character beforehand, and the scene functions as an extended digression to give thematic colour to the adventures of the hero Felisardo – but it demonstrates that Nassuf's story could cross with ease the line between current affairs and imaginative writing, as evidently it also did in our play.<sup>15</sup>

Michel Baudier tells the story of Nassuf's death in very similar terms again, in a work first published in Paris in 1626 and translated into English (by the indefatigable Grimeston) in 1635. Both French and English versions could be direct sources for this play, since we do not know the date at which the play was written. Equally, Baudier's account may be a possible indirect source, since it records a version of the story that was potentially in wider circulation even before 1626.

Remarking that "The Court is the Theater, wherein the Tragical Scene of change, shewes it selfe" - a phrase which is a useful one to bear in mind when looking at Record 34 - Baudier offers various examples of mighty Turkish favourites brought low by their Sultan.<sup>16</sup>

[T]he Turkish Princes many times write absolutely; as it happened in the yeare 1614, in the person of *Nassuf, Bassa, Grand Vizir* of the Turkish Empire. The Emperour *Achmat* the first would haue his life and his treasure: He sends vnto him being in *Constantinople*, the *Bostangibassi*, with two Letters written by his own hand, whereof this was the tenour of the first: *Faile not presently vpon the receipt hereof, to send mee by the Bostangibassi the Seales of my Empire. Nassf* obeyed, and deliuered them into the great Gardiners hands; hauing receiued them, he drew another of the *Sultans* Letters out of his pocket to *Nassuf*,

wherof these were the words: *After that thou hast sent me my Seales, send mee thy Head by him that shall giue thee this Note.* This command was rough, and the stile of his Letter troublesome, yet hee must obey...

(157)

Nassuf permits himself to be strangled by the Bostangi Bassa and the mutes. Elsewhere in Baudier we hear in more detail about the fabulous wealth of Nassuf:

they found in his Cofers at the time of his death a Million of Gold in *Sequins*, and in siluer Coine eight hundred thousand Crownes, three bushels of precious Stones not wrought, a bushell of Diamonds not set in gold, and two bushels of great round Pearles of inestimable value.

(151)

The bushels of pearls clearly made a great impression on a Renaissance audience.

Yet another early retelling of the death of Nassuf is by Thomas Herbert, writing in 1634 about his travels in Asia. He offers a brief account of Nassuf's career as an example of the dangers that befall powerful individuals in the Turkish empire.

*Nassuf*, in the height of his fortunes, at the instigations of his wife (the *Grand Signiors* daughter) was strangled in his bed by eight *Caepigies*, and his treasure (no lesse then eighty bags of gold, and in stones then two bushels of Diamonds and Pearles) fell to his Master, for which perhaps this infortunate Vsurer, lost his life, a iust recompence for thrusting *Cycala Bassa*, *Visier* of *Babylon*, from his principality.<sup>17</sup>

This is new insofar as it identifies as the instigator of Nassuf's downfall his wife, blameless in other accounts. However, the other details, notably the distinctive numbers, seem to derive from the same tradition as the other texts discussed here. Herbert's allegation about Nassuf's wife might well, one therefore suspects, result simply from a misunderstanding of the allusions in Grimeston (or elsewhere) to the involvement of the wife of the Vizier of Babylon. Herbert's brief account is valuable, not so much because it is a possible source text - although technically it is - but because it indicates, economically, both the type of "noise" that might be introduced to the story simply in another retelling, and features that remain constant.

Finally, one should mention Pierre Du Puy's fifteen-page account of Nassuf in his compilation, *Histoire des plus illustres favoris anciens et modernes* (1659). Too late to be a direct source for a pre-1642 play, this includes an account of Nassuf's life and death which has a close family resemblance to the seven already seen except that it is longer and more detailed, offering, in effect, a prose dramatization of the story and inventing direct speech for a number of the characters. It is interesting for two reasons: firstly, it features as a character the Grand Mufti of Constantinople,

identified simply as "le Mufty". The climax of Du Puy's version is constructed almost as a series of scenes:

- Sultan Ahmed has a meeting with the deposed bashaw Cychala, who produces a letter which appears to indicate that Nassuf is in league with the Persians. The Sultan is furious.
- Nassuf goes to the palace and has an inconclusive meeting with the Sultan.
- Nassuf's wife, the Sultan's daughter, has an interview with her father, defending her husband.
- The Sultan asks the Mufti if it is lawful to have Nassuf killed, and the Mufti states that it is.
- Accordingly, the Bostangi Bassa is sent to Nassuf's house: the two men have a particularly full version of the conversation described in the other narratives; and Nassuf eventually submits himself to being strangled and beheaded.

Record 34's "Mufti", then, may well be merely a generic figure of authority: but there is at least one, admittedly late, version of the Nassuf story in which a Mufti has a more specific and sinister role.

Secondly, Du Puy's version of the story is interesting in that it accommodates Nassuf's story within existing generic categories. It does this by including the story within an anthology of stories of favourites who meet bad ends, including Sejanus, Piers Gaveston, and Thomas Wolsey: and the implicit association with tragedy is made explicit when, in the middle of Nassuf's death-scene, the events are described as "cette Tragedie".<sup>18</sup>

To summarize: detailed accounts of Nassuf's life and death survive in a considerable number of early modern printed texts, written in English, French, and Spanish. All of the accounts discussed here offer fundamentally the same narrative both of the life and in particular of the killing. At Ahmed's orders, Nassuf is sought out and killed in his own house, almost always by the Bostangi Bassa, or Chief Gardener, and a group of men, often identified as mutes. Nassuf is first forced to hand over his seals of office, and then told he must be strangled, a fate to which he ultimately consents. However, in many of the accounts he is too fat to be strangled easily; his throat is cut; and his head is taken away to Ahmed. All the accounts also give prominent mention to the bags of treasure found in the house.

The details given above all seem suitable for inclusion in a dramatization of the story, and in particular it is hard to imagine a seventeenth-century English dramatist passing up the opportunity to show (as all the other accounts do) Nassuf's move from resistance to acquiescence in his own death. In such a scene one would see the Grand Vizier of Constantinople brought to his knees and resembling perhaps, for a moment, the heroine of *The Duchess of Malfi*.

## Record 34

All of this brings us back to Record 34 of Abraham Hill's list. To an extent, the information about the recorded meaning of the name "Nassuf" cuts the Gordian knot of the record. A text which features as a character the near-contemporary figure of Grand Vizier Nassuf could not possibly have been part of a play about the Greek myth of Tereus, nor part of a pastoral, nor part of a play featuring the (still otherwise untraced) Agnostus and Eupathus. The last line of Record 34 describes a different item, rather than being, as Adams thought, an amplification of the preceding lines. The text under discussion in it, to which one might give the working title *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c*, is therefore not apparently connected with the previous lines or with "M.A."

The fact that the formula "Actors Mufti Nassuf &c" is unconnected with the items preceding it has, in turn, repercussions for the interpretation of the other three formulae elsewhere on Hill's list that begin with the word "Actors". Generally, it has been assumed that they too are amplifications, describing in more detail the last play listed. But this is demonstrably untrue in the case of the formula "Actors Mufti Nassuf &c". It may be untrue of the others as well. Record 34, for instance, was thought to cover one or two lost plays, but it seems likely to cover three or even four.

Furthermore, this observation speaks to the character of the manuscript Hill was looking at when he made these notes. In it, *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c* didn't have an obvious title. Perhaps the manuscript contained only an extract from a play. Alternatively, it may be that the manuscript had merely lost its title-page. In tenuous support of this second possibility, one may note in passing that "Actors Mufti Nassuf &c" could well be a description deriving from Act One Scene One of a tragedy. The situation would be exactly analogous, for instance, to Act One Scene One of Ford's tragedy *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. This begins with a two-person scene featuring an unnamed Friar and the tragic hero Giovanni, in which the Friar speaks first to warn the hero that he is behaving dangerously and storing up trouble for himself. Someone looking at a manuscript of *'Tis Pity* which lacked a title page or *dramatis personae* could well record the play as "Actors Friar Giovanni &c".

However, other explanations are certainly possible, and the situation is made more complicated by the Mufti who features as a character in Du Puy's version of the Nassuf story. Unless and until more can be found out about the other items on Hill's list which begin with the word "Actors", not much further progress can be made on the question of the manuscript that underlies Hill's record of this play. One can, however, start to address the ways in which *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c* might have fitted into other drama of the period.

### *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c* and early modern drama

From its presence on Hill's List, and its title, *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c* was certainly a drama of some sort, featuring at least three characters. Furthermore, a play featuring Nassuf could hardly be a light comedy, and the evidence presented so far leads one to think it would be a tragedy telling the story of the death of Nassuf himself. Particularly telling here are the accounts of Du Puy and Baudier, both of which, as we have seen, use the word "tragedy" in association with Nassuf's life and death: and Grimeston, who uses the motif of the Wheel of Fortune. The story would lend itself to a tight Machiavellian tragedy of palace intrigue, but also to an expansive history-type tragedy of rise and fall. As noted above, there is more than a whiff of Tamburlaine about the career of the historical Nassuf, notably his conquest of Persia, and it is easy to imagine an episodic treatment of Nassuf's life which would recall, particularly directly, Marlowe's tragedy.

As for its origin: ten plays on Hill's list *can* reasonably be identified as ones otherwise known, and all ten have a provenance in the pre-1642 professional theatre. Two others of the play titles on Hill's list, being in Latin, probably do not come from that theatre, and all the rest are of unknown origin. Therefore, one should also make the provisional assumption that *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c* was most likely a product of the pre-1642 professional theatre, although this conclusion rests purely on an observation of statistical tendency rather than any form of proof.<sup>19</sup> Its date can also be limited to some extent. *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c* should be datable to after 1614, Nassuf's death. Were the play written after 1621, it would have access to an easy and copious source in the form of Grimeston's continuation of Knolles, but it isn't certainly after 1621. On the assumption it is from the professional theatre, its latest terminal date is 1642. It is a pity that neither date nor company provenance can currently be limited any further.

Its *dramatis personae* can also be described to some extent. The play included a Mufti and Nassuf. If indeed a tragedy, it would also need the Bostangi Bassa (or an equivalent character) to carry out Nassuf's killing. Since Ahmed I is the centre around which Nassuf's whole life turns, it would be expedient for him to appear on stage at some point: and similarly convenient (though not absolutely essential) would be Nassuf's wife, Ahmed's daughter, the one obvious female character indicated by the sources. As noted above, Pierre Du Puy offers, in effect, a prose dramatization of the story which finds space for all five of these characters and also for Nassuf's enemy Cycala.

Finally, *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c* was a Turk play, and many of the favourite themes of Turk plays would come up easily in a dramatization of Nassuf's story: questions of morality and royal power, true and false religion, and the nature of betrayal. Perhaps the most conspicuous thing about it, measured against the standards of other Turk plays, is its topicality. Few other plays of this type deal with political

events so recent, and *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c*, even if it came at the end of the 1614-42 window, would still be unusually close to current affairs.<sup>20</sup> It is thus a particularly interesting lost member of the group of early modern Turk plays.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up: the lost play here called *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c* featured, as a character, Nassuf, Grand Vizier of Constantinople in the reign of Ahmed I. It was therefore a play about near-contemporary Turkish history. Given the meteoric nature of Nassuf's rise and fall, it is hard to see the play as other than a tragedy culminating in Nassuf's violent death, in his own house, by strangling and knife.

Even by the standards of Renaissance lost plays, *Actors Mufti Nassuf &c* remains unusually lost: but with this start, and with new scholarly resources becoming available all the time, it is to be hoped that something else may come to light about the intriguing drama recorded very briefly by Abraham Hill.



that great Renegade 🇹🇷🇵🇸 *Nasuff*, so famous in this Century - N. R. D. A letter to the most illustrious Lord, the Count of Hohenlo one of the imperial generals. Written by a gentleman in the army of Count Serini before Canisia. Concerning the renegades amongst the Turks. Put into English by a person of quality. With allowance, June 10. 1664. Roger Le Strange. , London : printed by John Redmayne, 1664.  
Date: 1664

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This article arises from working with, and would not have been possible without, the Lost Plays Database, <http://www.lostplays.org>, under the general editorship of Roslyn L. Knutson and David McInnis.

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579–1624* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>2</sup> For a map of the many recent developments in the field, and further references, see Linda McJannet, ed., *Early Modern Drama and the Islamic World*, a collection of essays in *Early Theatre* 12.2 (2009): 183-249, especially McJannet's "Islam and English Drama: A Critical History", 183-193. Major reference points include Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999); Daniel J. Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Matthew Dimmock, *New Turkes: Dramatizing Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942-68), 3.1; "Hill's List", *Lost Plays Database*, <http://www.lostplays.org>.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Quincy Adams, "Hill's List of Early Plays in Manuscript," *The Library* 20 (1939): 71-99, qtn from 94; Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 3.1; Alfred Harbage, "Elizabethan: Restoration Palimpsest", *Modern Language Review* 35 (1940): 287-319, concurs (see p.295).

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Daborne, *A Christian turn'd Turke: or, The tragicall liues and deaths of the two famous pyrates, Ward and Dansiker* (London: William Barrenger, 1612), F2v.

<sup>6</sup> For a brief but serviceable biography see Franz Babinger, "Nasuh Pasha" in M. Th. Houtsma, ed., *E.J. Brill's first encyclopaedia of Islam*, 8 vols (1913-1936; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 6.881-2.

<sup>7</sup> See Ian Gadd, "The Use and Misuse of *Early English Books Online*", *Literature Compass* 6.3 (2009): 680-692.

<sup>8</sup> Wootton, *Letters of Sir Henry Wotton to Sir Edmund Bacon* (London: R.W., 1661), 115, where he is called "Nasuf Bassa".

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, *CSP Venice*, 13.63, and numerous other references to Nasuf Pasha throughout *CSP Venice* 12, 13, and 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Troisiesme tome du Mercure François, Diuisé en deux liures* (Paris: Estienne Richer, 1616), 568-571: cited from the excellent facsimile at the GRIHL-CRH *Mercure François* site, <http://mercurefrancois.ehess.fr/>.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes*, rev. Edward Grimeston ([London]: Adam Islip, 1621), 1334-5. Grimeston's version itself, of course, had a long afterlife. It was reprinted in further editions of Knolles in 1631 and 1638; again, in a condensed form, in Andrew Moore's *Compendious History of the Turks* (1660) detected by our initial EEBO-TCP search; and yet again in the 1687 edition of Knolles, also detected by that search.

<sup>12</sup> *Generall Historie*, 1322; as Anders Ingram notes, this event is also described in an English pamphlet, *A wonderfull and most lamentable declaration of the great hurt done, and mighty losse sustained by fire* (London: Thomas Archer, 1613), 8. The villainous "Vizier Nazut" features in it, the only reference to Nassuf in English print in his lifetime of which I am currently aware.

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See Anders Ingram, "English Literature on the Ottoman Turks in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", University of Durham PhD thesis, 2009, online at [http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/86/1/full\\_thesis.pdf](http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/86/1/full_thesis.pdf), 304.

<sup>13</sup> Ingram, "English Literature on the Ottoman Turks in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", 304.

<sup>14</sup> Octavio Sapiencia, *Nuevo Tratado de Turquia* (Madrid: por la vidua de Alonso Martin, 1622), ff. 34r-37r, qtn from 36r.

<sup>15</sup> Lope de Vega, *La desdicha por la honra* (1624), modern-spelling etext at *Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes* <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/04708409799126417632268>; establishing the source, Marcel Bataillon, "La desdicha por la honra: Génesis y sentido de una novela de Lope", *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 1 (1947) 13-42.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Baudier, *The history of the imperiall estate of the grand seigneurs* (London: William Stansby, 1635), 153.

<sup>17</sup> Sir Thomas Herbert, *A relation of some yeares trauaile begunne anno 1626. Into Afrique and the greater Asia* (London: William Stansby, 1634), 29.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Du Puy, "Nassouf Bassa", *Histoire des plus illustres favoris anciens et modernes* (Leiden: Jean Elsevier, 1659), pp. 272-287, qtns from 281, 283.

<sup>19</sup> To give a brief summary of a complex topic, discussed most fully by Adams: the ten plays are *The Welsh Ambassador*; *Your Five Gallants*; *The Witch of Edmonton*; *The City Nightcap*; *A Challenge for Beauty*; *Christianetta, or Marriage and Hanging Go by Destiny*; *All is not Gold that Glitters*; *The Younger Brother, or the Male Courtesan*; *The Dutch Painter and the French Brawle*; *The Widow's Prize*.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Robert Baron's *Mirza* (1647), a closet drama concerning events in Persia in the 1620s, but written and published after the closure of the theatres. But even Baron's play draws attention, in its subtitle, to an unusual topicality: *Mirza, a tragedie, really acted in Persia, in the last age*. Carlell's *Osmond the Great Turk*, although nominally set in 1453, seems to be "about" the death of Ahmed's successor Osman in 1622: see Friederike Hahn, "One Osmond the Great Turk, Not Two," *Notes and Queries* 54 (2007): 35-36.