

°Aṭṭār, Sufism and Ismailism: a re-appraisal

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Abstract

While there can be no doubt that °Aṭṭār was genuinely attached to the Sufi tradition and sought to revive it through his literary work, he was first and foremost a great poet; and although he appears to have been close to certain Sufis of his time, notably the circle around Najmuddīn-i Kubrā, there is no real evidence confirming later hagiographic attempts to link him up with *ṭarīqa* - lines of initiation. On the other hand, it has been suggested that °Aṭṭār might have been involved in the °Abbāsīd caliph Al-Nāṣir's *da°wa hādiya* and his *futuwwa* organisation (J. Baldick, 1981), and most recently, °Aṭṭār's possible awareness of the Ismā°ilī Da°wa of Alamūt was examined by F. Meier (2000), who concluded that he knew about it but must have rejected it as he ultimately rejected a supposed substitution of God by a philosophical Intellect. The present paper should be seen as an attempt to re-examine the whole question. Starting from reflexions on the frame stories of °Aṭṭār's major narratives in the light of Corbin's and Eliade's notions of *initiation* as well as Meier's earlier notion of "spiritual man" or *Geistmensch*, and focussing on °Aṭṭār's rather unique doctrine of spiritual transformation and resurrection as proclaimed in the *Asrār-nāma*, it will argue that there are serious grounds for a comparison with Ismā°ilī doctrine, especially as reflected in Ṭūsī's *Taşawwurāt*. Without making °Aṭṭār a crypto-Ismā°ilī, it will conclude that either he drew upon Ismā°ilī sources, among others, or, more likely, that Ṭūsī's presentation of Ismā°ilī doctrine was in fact influenced by °Aṭṭār, whom he had met personally as a young man in Nayshāpūr.