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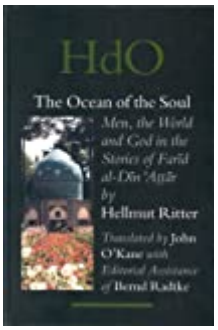

Hellmut Ritter. *The Ocean of the Soul: Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din Attar.* Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003. xxvi + 833 pp. $190.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-12068-6.

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Colors Mirrored, Colored and Uncolored

Hellmut Ritter's classic study on Attar and his world of ideas, *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Fariduddin Attar* (1955), has been with us for a long time in the original German only. Fortunately for the majority of interested readers, this situation has now been doubly changed. We now have a Persian translation by Mihrafaq Bayburdi, an obvious sign of recognition coming from Attar's own homeland and the English translation here under review.[1]

In his "translator's preface" John O'Kane gives a brief account of Ritter's life and scholarly work, based largely on Fritz Meier's beautiful obituary.[2] He also provides a useful if concise outline of the contents and the organizational structure of the *Ocean of the Soul*, pointing to the virtues of Ritter's art of constructing an integrated picture of Attar's rich treasure of ideas as found in the four unquestionably authentic mystical *mathnawis*, and to the "dazzling array of primary sources in Arabic, Persian and Turkish" adduced, and translated or paraphrased by Ritter by way of a running commentary "in order to map out the broad cultural context which constitutes the parameters of Attar's spiritual and intellectual world" (p.xv of the "Translator's Preface" in the same volume). The translation itself is on the whole very faithful to the German original. The transcription has been adapted to English usage.

The "parameters" just referred to are, of course, those of the mystical tradition of Islam. In a sense, therefore, Ritter's vast documentation of virtually every major theme occurring in Attar's didactic poetry amounts to an encyclopedic reference work on Sufism itself, which can easily be used as such, thanks to the extensive "analytical index." For the present English edition, Bernd Radtke (presumably–the interventions of the "Assistant Editor" are not marked as such) has taken it upon himself to update Ritter's references to primary sources and to add more recent secondary sources to the bibliography. Since Ritter often refers to manuscripts or early editions of texts that are not easily located or commonly used nowadays, such updating could indeed have been very useful had it been done in a systematic and sensible way. Such, however, can hardly be said to be the

case. Some references to primary sources (e.g. Ansari's *Tabaqat al-sufiyya*) have been correctly updated, others, equally in need of updating or more so (e.g. the references to manuscripts of the writings of Aynulqudat-i Hamadani), have been left unchanged. In a volume such as this, which is meant to reach those finding it difficult to read Ritter's German original, it surely makes little sense to add numerous references to other German works, even Richard Gramlich's translations of classical Sufi sources, meritorious as they may be, while omitting standard English translations (including those of Attar's own works). One also wonders why secondary sources of questionable interest to the study of Attar and his thought have been added to the bibliography while studies of more obvious relevance, for example Peter Awn's *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi psychology* (1983), to name but one, are not listed. Fritz Meier's substantial Eranos-lecture on Attar's *Ilahinama*, "Der Geistmensch bei dem persischen Dichter Attar," had surprisingly not been listed even in Ritter's original bibliography.[3] The same scholar's more recent study of Attar's religious conservatism, which was published posthumously under the title "Ismailiten und Mystik im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert," has not been taken notice of in the present volume either.[4]

In any case, it should perhaps be recalled that Ritter's *Ocean* is not primarily a reference work on Sufism, despite its usefulness as such, but a masterful study of Attar's ideas and his poetic persona. This is not to say that one cannot have reservations about certain doctrinal issues as presented by Ritter, for example his frequent use of rather vague terms like "pantheism." Ritter too was a child of his time and culture, and not everybody will take his introductory and closing remarks on Heidegger's "Being-toward-death" for an adequate characterization of the thought of a medieval mystic (pp. 42, 656). His assertion that Attar "does not belong to the Sufis" (p. 342), which is taken from one of Attar's statements about himself, should probably not be interpreted too literally. Ritter evidently did not deem it useful to consider any possible links between the poetic persona he so masterfully portrays and the immediate context in which the historical figure lived–a point for which he has come under excessive though not entirely unjustified criticism from the pen of Julian Baldick, who offers a rather more socio-political interpretation of the *Ilahinama*.[5] But it remains true that one has to be extremely careful with such issues, for the very simple reason that we have only scant information about Attar's life, and even that is quite uncertain. The present volume contains one reference (p. 832) to B. Reinert's article on Attar in the *EncyclopÃ¡dia Iranica* for the purpose of correcting Attar's dates as given by Ritter at the beginning of the book (i.e. d. 618/1221 rather than any of the dates mentioned by Ritter on p. 1). However, even Reinert's information is now subject to revision, especially thanks to M. R. Shafii Kadkani's recent research on Attar.[6]

Thus, while Ritter's *Ocean* remains fundamental, and the English translation is a most welcome addition to our bookshelves, research is going on. More on this can be expected from the proceedings of a recent conference on *Farid al-Din Attar and the Persian Sufi Tradition* convened by L. Lewisohn and C. Shackle, to be published by the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

Notes

[1]. *Darya-yi Jan: Sayri dar Ara wa ahwal-i Shaykh Fariduddin-i Attar-i Nayshaburi*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Intisharat-i Baynulmilali Al-Huda, 1377/1998); vol. 2 (Tehran: Intisharat-i Baynulmilali Al-Huda, 1379/2000).

[2]. *Der Islam* 48 (1972), pp. 193-205; reprinted in Fritz Meier, *Bausteine: Ausgewaehlte Aufsaetze zur Islamwissenschaft*, ed. E. Glassen and G. Schubert (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1992) pp. 7-19.

[3]. *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 13 (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1946), pp. 283-353; also available in an English translation by R. Manheim in *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Eranos-Yearbooks*, ed. Joseph Campbell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 267-304.

[4]. Edited from the *Nachlass* by G. Schubert and B. Radtke in *Persica* 16 (2000), pp. 9-29.

[5]. In *History of Persian Literature from the Beginning of the Islamic Period to the Present Day*, ed. G. Morrison (Leiden: Brill, 1981), pp. 113-132.

[6]. M. R. Shafi'i Kadkani, *Zabur-i Parsi: Nigahi bi zindagi wa ghazalha-yi Attar* (Tehran: 1378/1999).

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