

Field Research on the Mystical Poet ‘Attār

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Site of field research: Islamic Republic of Iran

Kido Ishikawa

Key words: mode of expression, perfumes, library

Research backgrounds

Persian literature, which flourished from the era of the Sāmānid dynasty (873-999), developed a new aspect in the 12th century by incorporating mysticism. The trend centered in the Khorasan region, which was then larger than the present-day state of Khorasan in Iran. Unlike the most prominent mystical school, that of Ibn ‘Arabī. The poet of Khorasan did not aim to construct a theoretical mysticism; instead they expressed the mystic idea through metaphorical language based on daily life and on familiar motifs. This was especially true of ‘Attār (Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār, ca. AH d. 617/1221) who could express his ideas without restraint because of his independence from the palace. His various expression are worthy of study.

Research purpose and aim

‘Attār employed diverse motifs in his poems; one of the most significant was perfumes, which to him were signs of God. When I planned to go to Iran, the primary purpose of my field research was investigation of perfumes. In the field, I also aimed to improve my facility with the Persian language because reading Persian poems requires enough knowledge of the language’s metaphors to understand the references. Another goal was to expand my knowledge by buying reference works on ‘Attār and/or interviewing persons familiar with his life and works.

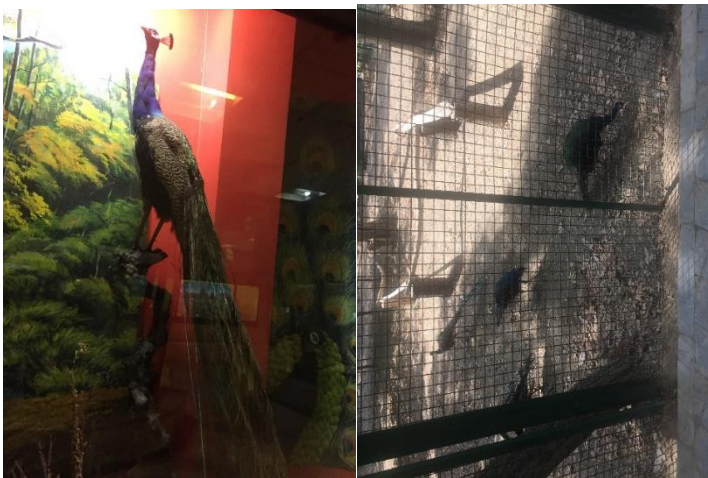


Figure1. Peacocks (one of the birds in the masterpieces of ‘Attār)

Result of field research

In the field, I stayed in Tehran, the capital of Iran, and in Nīshāpūr, where ‘Aṭṭār dwelled and his mausoleum is situated. In Tehran, I did field research on agarwood and musk; both perfumes play significant roles in ‘Aṭṭār’s poems. I acquired knowledge of shops dealing in perfumes and discovered that both perfumes are still of great importance in Iran.

Also in Tehran, I greatly improved my skills in the language by using the Persian dictionaries in the Parliament Library. The staffs of inn where I stayed also helped me learn the language. While there, I also bought some of the masterpieces of mystic poetry and reference works.

In Nīshāpūr, I went to the mausoleum of ‘Aṭṭār and the atmosphere of the place. Many people who were visiting took pictures with a smile, while others revered ‘Aṭṭār as a holy man. The place was completely a touristic spot. I gained more information on ‘Attar’s life by interviewing the townspeople of Nīshāpūr.

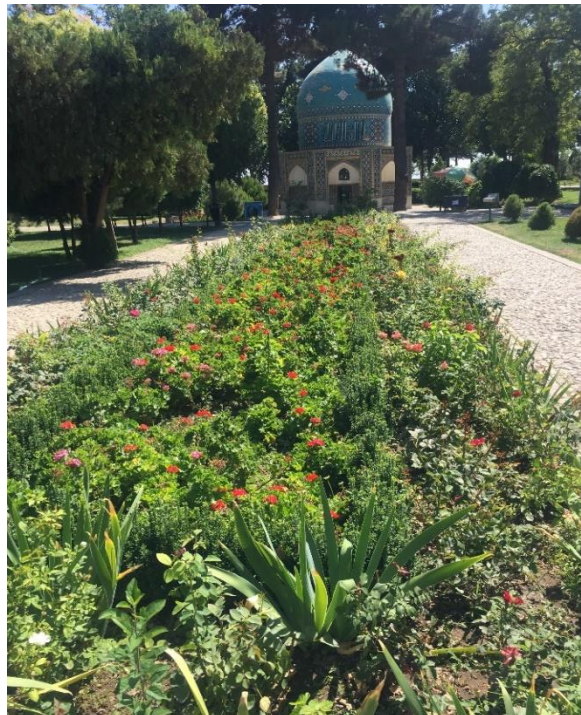


Figure 2. The mausoleum of ‘Attar.

Plan for future research

There is still much more room for improvement in my knowledge of Persian before I can fully understand the manuscripts, and therefore I feel keenly the necessity to acquire fluency in the language.

I will also continue my study of 'Aṭṭār by using the knowledge I have acquired in my field research.



Figure3. Esfand(another perfume famous in Iran)