

# Introduction

## Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and the Ismailis

Naṣīr al-Dīn Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, the renowned Persian astronomer, philosopher and theologian, often referred to in general Shi'i literature as *muḥaqqiq-i Ṭūsī* (the great scholar Ṭūsī) and in the Ismaili circles of his time as *sultān al-du'āt* (king of the *dā'īs*),<sup>1</sup> was born in Ṭūs, which is now a small town in the suburbs of Mashhad, Khurāsān, on 11 Jumādā I 597/17 February 1201, and died in Baghdād on 18 Dhu'l-Ḥijja 672/25 June 1274.

Not much is known about Ṭūsī's childhood and youth other than what we find in the present autobiographical work, the *Sayr wa sulūk*. In this account Ṭūsī tells us that he was born in a family who followed 'the exoteric aspects of the *sharī'at*'<sup>2</sup> and whose profession was 'to promulgate the exoteric sciences,' which means that they were probably associated with the Twelver Shi'i clergy. It has been suggested, though without convincing evidence, that Ṭūsī was born in an Ismaili family and received his early education in Twelver Shi'i surroundings,<sup>3</sup> but it is clear from the *Sayr wa sulūk* that his parents were not of Ismaili persuasion and that his affiliation with the Ismailis was a later development in his life.

From an early age, Ṭūsī was an avid listener to his family's opinions on the principles and rulings of the *sharī'at*, assuming that apart from strict observance of the religious law there could not be any other path in religion. But his father was not altogether satisfied with a purely prescriptive approach to the faith. He was an open-minded person who had received his

own education from his maternal uncle, a student of Tāj al-Dīn Shahrīstāna (d. 548/1153).<sup>4</sup> Ṭūsī's father wanted him to receive a sound education and encouraged him to study all branches of knowledge and to examine the views of various schools and sects.

One of Ṭūsī's early teachers, chosen by his father, was Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāsib who, according to Ṭūsī, had been a student of the poet and philosopher Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī (d. c. 610/1213–14),<sup>5</sup> and it was under him that he began to study mathematics. But it seems that Kamāl al-Dīn's teaching was not confined to this subject, as he would often find cause to comment on religious matters which aroused Ṭūsī's curiosity. The pupil plied his teacher with numerous questions to which, however, the latter was either unable or unwilling to give specific answers. For instance, Kamāl al-Dīn would sometimes disparage 'those who blindly follow the rules of the *sharī'at*,' but when Ṭūsī wanted to discuss the matter further he would say: 'That which is the core and essence of the truth cannot yet be mentioned to you, for you are young and do not have experience of the world. If you grow up and are successful, seek for it until you attain it.' [§7] It was probably the combined influence of Ṭūsī's father and Kamāl al-Dīn that inspired in him from a very early age an enduring thirst for knowledge. The strength of this vocation became evident shortly after his father's death, when the young man left home 'in search of the truth, intending to acquire the knowledge which guides people to the happiness of the next world.' [§8]

In the *Sayr wa sulūk*, Ṭūsī gives a brief account of his theological and philosophical education, but he does not go into details about the scholars with whom he became acquainted, nor of his studies in mathematics and astronomy which later became important areas of investigation for him. But we know from other sources that Ṭūsī was a precocious learner who travelled far and wide in search of knowledge. By the time he was seventeen or eighteen, he had studied Ibn Sīnā's major philosophical work, *al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt*, with Farīd al-Dīn Dāmād, attended the lectures of Quṭb al-Dīn Sarakhsī in Nishapur where

he is said to have met the famous poet and mystic Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. 617/1220), and in 614-18/1217-21 he is known to have studied jurisprudence with Mu'īn al-Dīn Sālim b. Badrān Māzinī.<sup>6</sup>

Ṭūsī informs us that although he benefited greatly from his theological studies, he was becoming increasingly disenchanted with his fruitless search for 'the recognition of the True One, the exalted, the most high, and knowledge of the origin and the return.' He appreciated what he had learnt from theologians about the different positions of the sects, but he could not accept their approach to the faith which constituted 'a doctrine in which they blindly imitated their ancestors' and one that was 'entirely confined to practices of the exoteric side of the *sharī'at*.' [§9]

As for the discipline of philosophy, Ṭūsī found it more congenial to his temperament because of the primacy it accorded to reason; but he could not admit the philosopher's claim that, by using the intellect, it was somehow possible to arrive at 'something which is not within its scope,' that is, the knowledge of God. As Ṭūsī continued to ponder this matter further, it gradually dawned on him that since mankind is divided in its great diversity of opinions, the attainment of the truth is not possible through intellect and reason alone but requires the additional intervention of a *mukammil*, an agent of perfection, an authoritative instructor or preceptor who is aware of such knowledge in its very essence. [§12] Thereafter he began to inquire into the main propagators of this doctrine, the Ismailis, although he dared not talk about it to others out of fear of arousing their hostility and prejudice. [§13]

It was around this time that Ṭūsī came to hear about the learning and wisdom of the Ismaili governor of Quhistān, Muḥtashim Shihāb al-Dīn (d. after 644/1246),<sup>7</sup> and sent him a letter requesting the latter's views on some philosophical questions.<sup>8</sup> Although Shihāb al-Dīn declined to enter into a correspondence with him, Ṭūsī had an opportunity to meet the Muḥtashim briefly when he was in the vicinity of Gird Kūh during the course of one of his journeys. [§15]

The turning-point in Ṭūsī's search for knowledge came a few days later in Khurāsān when he accidentally came across a compilation of the *Fuṣūl-i muqaddas* (Sacred Chapters), the sermons and sayings of the Nizārī Ismaili Imam Ḥasan 'Alā Dhikrihi al-Salām (d. 561/1166),<sup>9</sup> which had a profound impact on him: 'I gained endless benefit from those sacred words which are the light of hearts and the illuminator of inner thoughts.' [§15] It was as a result of these encounters and circumstances that Ṭūsī decided to embrace the Ismaili faith. But it was only after persistent efforts on his part and the personal intervention of Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥtashim (d. 655/1257),<sup>10</sup> who succeeded Shihāb al-Dīn as governor of Quhistān sometime after 621/1224, that Ṭūsī was admitted as a *mustajīb* (novice) into the Ismaili community. [§16] At about this time or shortly thereafter, Ṭūsī joined the service of Nāṣir al-Dīn, thus beginning his close association with the Ismaili leadership which was to continue for more than thirty years of his life.

There has been much speculation among scholars as to the precise nature of Ṭūsī's relationship with the Ismailis and whether it was motivated by religious allegiance or purely professional considerations. The information that Ṭūsī gives in the *Sayr wa sulūk* leaves little doubt of his genuine conversion to the Ismaili faith. It is significant to note here that some of the people responsible for Ṭūsī's education besides his father and maternal uncle, such as Tāj al-Dīn Shahrastānī, Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī and Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāsib, were associated with the Ismailis in one way or another, or they were inclined towards the spiritual and esoteric understanding of Islam as advocated by the Ismailis.

In Quhistān, Ṭūsī appears to have developed a close personal and professional relationship with his Ismaili patron, Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥtashim. A highly learned man with a special interest in ethical philosophy, Nāṣir al-Dīn had prepared an outline of a book on ethics but was unable to complete it because of the burdens of his administrative duties as the governor of Quhistān. He therefore turned to his young protégé who had earlier expressed an interest in completing the work, and in

whose scholarship he had clearly a great deal of trust and confidence. The book was not meant to be an independent work by Ṭūsī, but based on the Muḥtashim's notes and instructions. Hence, when the work was completed, Ṭūsī named it *Akhḫāq-i Muḥtashimī* (The Muhtashimid Ethics).<sup>11</sup>

During the next ten years or so that Ṭūsī stayed in Quhistān, he composed a number of other works, such as *Gushāyish-nāma* (Unveiling Notes)<sup>12</sup> on ethics and *Risāla-yi Mu'iniyya* (The Mu'inid Treatise)<sup>13</sup> on astronomy. In 633/1235, he completed the first version of his most famous work on ethics, *Akhḫāq-i Nāṣirī* (The Nasirean Ethics).<sup>14</sup> Many other treatises, including *Tawallā wa tabarrā* (Solidarity and Dissociation) and *Āghāz wa anjām* (The Beginning and the End)<sup>15</sup> should probably be dated to this period of his life.

It was shortly after the completion of 'The Nasirean Ethics' that Ṭūsī accompanied Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥtashim to the central Ismaili strongholds of Alamūt and Maymūn Dizh, situated in the Rūdbār district of Daylamān province in northern Iran. There are several spurious stories about Ṭūsī's move, including one that he was coerced to go on account of the discovery of his secret correspondence with the 'Abbāsīd authorities in Baghdād.<sup>16</sup> But the most likely explanation is that the journey to Alamūt was one of the regular visits made by Nāṣir al-Dīn to the Ismaili headquarters in order to report in person on administrative affairs, and it was natural for the governor to take along with him a number of his most trusted confidants. In any case, Ṭūsī would have regarded the journey as a matter of great honour and opportunity, especially as Alamūt was the seat of the Ismaili Imams, it housed the most important library in the Ismaili state, and it offered refuge to many scholars, Sunni and Shi'i alike, fleeing from the Mongol invasions of Central Asia and Khurāsān.

Whatever plans and aspirations Ṭūsī may have had, his lengthy stay of some twenty years in Alamūt and Maymūn Dizh was probably the most productive period of his life. His creativity seems to have flourished under the patronage of the Imam 'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 653/1255)<sup>17</sup> and the elite of the

Ismaili community of the time. It appears that Ṭūsī enjoyed a great deal of intellectual freedom, enabling him to write on a variety of subjects, including astronomy, mathematics, philosophy and various branches of the applied sciences. Ṭūsī completed the most important of his philosophical works on Ismaili thought, *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* (Paradise of Submission),<sup>18</sup> in 640/1242 and *Asās al-iqtibās* (Principles of Acquisition) in 642/1244.<sup>19</sup> His famous defence of Ibn Sīnā against the criticism of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ishārāt wa al-tanbihāt* (Commentary on the Book of Directives and Remarks),<sup>20</sup> received its final touches in 644/1246. These are in addition to numerous works on astronomy and translations which were produced in his final years at Alamūt.<sup>21</sup> It is probably as a result of these literary efforts, among other factors, that Ṭūsī was honoured with the title of *sultān al-du'āt*.

Ṭūsī's early years at Alamūt must have been fairly secure and tranquil in so far as his personal and scholarly life was concerned, but his later writings reflect increasing signs of anxiety arising from the approaching threat of the Mongols. Having overwhelmed Central Asia and northern Khurāsān, the Mongols were now making preparations to invade Iran with the avowed aim of annihilating the Ismaili strongholds as their first priority. Already by 651/1253 several Ismaili fortresses in Quhistān had been overrun and captured. In 654/1256 the Mongol warlord Hūlāgū himself arrived in Rūdbār and laid siege to Alamūt and Maymūn Dizh. After protracted skirmishes and negotiations, the Ismailis finally capitulated and the Mongols commenced a general destruction of their castles, followed by widespread massacres of Ismaili populations in the country at large. As for Alamūt, the centre of the Ismaili state founded by Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ 166 years earlier, it was systematically torched and dismantled, although the historian 'Aṭā Malik Juwaynī (d. 681/1282), who had accompanied the conquerors, was allowed to salvage a few books and astronomical instruments from its library.<sup>22</sup>

Ṭūsī's role in these fateful events is perhaps the most confusing and controversial aspect of his life. As a senior

member of the Ismaili team negotiating with the Mongols, he had advocated peaceful surrender in opposition to those who had argued for continued resistance from their fortresses in the same way as they had held out for so long against the Saljūqs and the Khwārazmians. Nonetheless, shortly after the fall of Alamūt, Ṭūsī disassociated himself from the Ismailis, claiming that he was held by them against his will, which undoubtedly paved the ground for his preferment in the Mongol court. Ṭūsī has been further accused of encouraging Hülāgū to invade Baghdād in spite of the latter's superstitious dread of divine retribution if he were to shed the blood of the 'Abbasid caliph.<sup>23</sup>

Ṭūsī's apparent renunciation of the Ismailis and his defection to the Mongols raise a number of questions which are central to any assessment of his life and works. What role did he play in the fall of Alamūt and the destruction of Ismaili power in Iran? Was he all along a Twelver Shi'i who encouraged the Ismailis to surrender and the Mongols to overthrow the pro-Sunni 'Abbāsids in order to ensure the ascendancy of his co-religionists? Was Ṭūsī perhaps still an Ismaili, giving expression to the principle of *taqiyya* (dissimulation) in the hope of a resurgence of Ismaili fortunes? Or is Ṭūsī's case simply one of personal opportunism and professional ambition? These are some of the questions to which it is difficult to find clear and precise answers, as is evident in the diversity of opinions among scholars regarding Ṭūsī's intentions and actions.<sup>24</sup>

The transference of Ṭūsī's loyalty to the Mongols was well-placed for him at least on one count, for he succeeded in persuading his new patrons to finance the construction of a great new observatory at Marāgha in Azarbayjan.<sup>25</sup> Ṭūsī devoted the last decade of his life to supervising this ambitious project, preparing astronomical tables and organizing its library, in addition to his administrative duties in the Mongol court. However, such preoccupations did not prevent him from writing several treatises on philosophical theology, such as *Muṣāri al-muṣāri* (Downfall of the Wrestler)<sup>26</sup> and *Talkhīṣ al-muḥaṣṣal* (Summary of the *Muḥaṣṣal*),<sup>27</sup> as well as works in support of Twelver Shi'ism, such as *Risālat al-imāma* (Treatise on

Imamate)<sup>28</sup> and *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād* (Abstraction of Belief).<sup>29</sup>

Yet Ṭūsī was never able to dispense altogether with the Ismaili ideas he had imbibed so deeply and for so long. In fact, the philosophical impetus arising from his acquaintance with Ismaili thought remained a major influence to the last years of his life. In the second edition of *Akhḫāq-i Nāṣirī*, although Ṭūsī deleted the introductory eulogy of the Imam 'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad and Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥtashim, he did not revise the work substantially and retained its Ismaili mode of expression.<sup>30</sup> In the *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id* (Canon of Beliefs),<sup>31</sup> he gave a far more elaborate and precise account of Ismaili principles than of Twelver Shi'ism, some of which is a word-for-word translation in Arabic of what he had said earlier in the *Sayr wa sulūk*. Similarly, in his Sufī treatise, the *Awṣāf al-ashrāf* (Attributes of the Illustrious),<sup>32</sup> Ṭūsī retains an Ismaili viewpoint, especially on the subject of spiritual union. In the *Talkhīs al-muḥaṣṣal*, which was his last work composed in 669/1271, he even appears to defend the Ismaili doctrine of *ta'līm* while seeming to correct Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's misrepresentation of it,<sup>33</sup> and rejects the possibility of *badā'* (detraction) of the *naṣṣ* (formal designation) of an Imam as maintained by the Twelver Shi'is. In the light of such tendencies, as well as his long journey around the year 665/1266 to Quhistān, where among the Ismaili population the remnants of his own family may have survived,<sup>34</sup> it is possible that Ṭūsī did not altogether cut off his relations with the Ismailis of Iran after the fall of Alamūt.

### *Sayr wa sulūk*

It is a common phenomenon in all religions for certain individuals whose beliefs and attitudes have undergone a radical transformation to write accounts of their spiritual growth and conversions. There are many examples of such autobiographical writings in religious literature. In the Christian tradition, the classic example is that of St Augustine (d. 430 CE).<sup>35</sup> In all such narratives, there is common ground in the author's attempt to present a rational understanding of the circumstances



leading to his or her spiritual transformation, including a justification of the new faith and a refutation of other competing creeds.

Among the best specimens of this genre in Islamic literature are *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl* (Redemption from Error) by al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) in Arabic and Ṭūsī's *Sayr wa sulūk* in Persian. There are also numerous confessional poems, such as the *Qaṣida-yi i'tirāfiyya* of Nāṣir Khusraw (d. after 465/1072),<sup>36</sup> which give expression to the same kind of religious experience. In the case of both al-Ghazzālī and Ṭūsī, their conversions took place against the background of one of the great debates that engaged the minds of Muslim thinkers for several centuries, namely the relation between reason and revelation, and whether it is possible for human beings to attain the ultimate truths of religion. For al-Ghazzālī, the eminent Sunni jurist and theologian who was preoccupied with this issue for much of his life, the central question was the relative merits of scholastic theology (*kalām*), philosophy (*ḥikmat*), authoritative teaching (*ta'lim*) and mysticism (*taṣawwuf*) for the acquisition of this body of truths.<sup>37</sup> After a long period of deliberation and seclusion, al-Ghazzālī came to favour the Sufi path, although in the *Munqidh* he was unable to refute the principle of *ta'lim* as such, for he recognized in it the rationale for the necessity of prophethood. For Ṭūsī, however, who came a century later and for whom Sufism was not incompatible with Shi'ism, the choice was essentially between speculative philosophy and the guidance of an authoritative teacher, and the process of resolving this conflict forms the subject matter of the *Sayr wa sulūk*.

In his edition of the text, Mudarris Raḍawī says that the manuscript bears no title and was designated as *Sayr wa sulūk* by whoever first published it. However, a glance at the contents of the treatise recounting the author's conversion process demonstrates the appropriateness of the title.<sup>38</sup> In any case, the *Sayr wa sulūk* ranks among the most important of Ṭūsī's works because of the unique information it contains on the author's early life, education and spiritual conversion, as well as for the clear and vivid insights it provides of Ismaili thought towards

the closing decades of the Alamūt period in Ismaili history. It is on account of this autobiographical and other internal evidence that Ṭūsī's authorship of the text has now come to be clearly recognized by a majority of leading scholars.<sup>39</sup>

The *Sayr wa sulūk* takes the form of an extended letter written by Ṭūsī and addressed to the 'chief of the *dā'īs* and ministers,' [§2] Muẓaffar b. Muḥammad,<sup>40</sup> to be delivered to him through the intermediary of Muẓaffar b. Mu'ayyad. Not much is known about the first Muẓaffar other than what Ṭūsī tells us in his eulogy of the chief *dā'ī*, but the second Muẓaffar referred to as 'the great governor' [§4] in all probability is none other than his patron in Quhistān, Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥtashim. Since the letter is submitted through Nāṣir al-Dīn, and Ṭūsī admits that he had not yet had the good fortune of meeting the chief *dā'ī*, this indicates that Ṭūsī may have composed the epistle in the Ismaili stronghold of Qā'in in Quhistān and subsequently revised it in Alamūt or Maymūn Dizh sometime after 644/1246, following the death of his old friend Shihāb al-Dīn.<sup>41</sup>

The letter is clearly intended to be autobiographical and confessional, that is, to convey an account of Ṭūsī's personal search for knowledge which led him to embrace the Ismaili faith, together with a declaration of his religious convictions. But the philosophical and theological content of the work gives it special importance in the collection of Ṭūsī's writings that have come down to us because the author has clearly an expository purpose which manifests itself in his highly skilful elaboration of the doctrine of *ta'lim*.

The principle of *ta'lim*, that is the authoritative religious guidance of a legitimate Imam, is fundamental to Shi'i Islam. The elucidation of how mankind can recognize the Imam, who by his very existence substantiates and preserves the truth of faith and religion, is an outstanding feature of Ismaili doctrinal writings. The *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Epistles of the Brethren of Purity)<sup>42</sup> reflect an early Ismaili attempt. The *Kitāb al-iftikhār* (The Book of Pride)<sup>43</sup> by Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), the *Rāḥat al-'aql* (The Quietude of Intellect)<sup>44</sup> by Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. ca. 411/1020-1), *al-Majālis* (The

Lectures)<sup>45</sup> by al-Mu'ayyad fī al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078), and the *Zād al-musafirīn* (The Travellers' Provisions)<sup>46</sup> by Nāṣir Khuṣraw – to name but a few Fatimid Ismaili sources – are all in various degrees devoted to this subject. But the person who has come to be most closely associated with the doctrine of *ta'lim* is the *dā'i* Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124).

Commonly referred to as Bābā Sayyidnā by the Nizārī Ismailis of the Alamūt period, Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ was the architect of the Ismaili state in Iran.<sup>47</sup> It was Ḥasan who reformulated the doctrine of *ta'lim* into a powerful intellectual tool to prove the necessity of a supreme guide for mankind, which became the central feature of what al-Shahrastānī calls 'the new preaching' (*al-da'wa al-jadīda*). Although the text of Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ's exposition of this doctrine, *al-Fuṣūl al-arba'a* (The Four Chapters), has not survived, it is possible to conceptualize the gist of it from the summary of Ḥasan's four propositions given in al-Shahrastānī's heresiographical work, *Kitāb al-milal wa al-nihāl*.<sup>48</sup>

From the evidence of al-Shahrastānī's condensed account, it seems that Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ's original text must have been a highly forceful and sustained piece of work. In fact, the intellectual challenge it posed to the Sunni establishment under the Saljūqs was serious enough to provoke al-Ghazzālī to refute it in several of his treatises.<sup>49</sup> But al-Shahrastānī devotes only a few pages to the doctrine in the *Milal*, which makes it difficult to follow Ḥasan's finely balanced dialectical process of reasoning. It is therefore to the works of Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī, in particular the *Sayr wa sulūk* and *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*,<sup>50</sup> that we must turn for a more elaborate and coherent treatment of the subject.

Needless to say, Ṭūsī's purpose, approach and treatment of the subject are different from those of Ḥasan. His arguments, though not presented in the syllogistic style of Ḥasan, are rigorous in their demonstration of deductive logic and proofs, drawing upon a wide array of evidence from theological and philosophical sources. Moreover, the ontological and epistemological framework in which he posits the doctrine is something we do not apparently find in Ḥasan's exposition. At

the same time, there is much in common between the two accounts, and Ṭūsī's presentation must therefore be seen as a development of Ḥasan's earlier formulations. As such, Ṭūsī's work represents the Ismaili doctrine of *ta'lim* in the fullness of its maturity as it evolved more than a century after Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ articulated it.

The *Sayr wa sulūk* is composed in a highly condensed and abstract style typical of medieval scholastic texts. This aspect may be deliberate and intentional for the reason that Ṭūsī was writing a personal and confidential letter to the chief Ismaili *dā'ī*, Muẓaffar b. Muḥammad who, like Ṭūsī's patron Nāṣir al-Dīn, was an accomplished man of learning, fully grounded in the intellectual and religious discourse of his time. Since the text was addressed to the top leadership of the Ismaili community, including possibly the Imam of the time, and there is no evidence that it was intended to serve as a textbook for the Ismaili *da'wat*, it raises the question as to the author's real motives in narrating his 'innermost secrets of thought' in such a confidential and intimate manner. At the beginning of the letter, Ṭūsī admits to writing it in order to seek the chief *dā'ī*'s 'admonitory guidance about right and wrong, truthfulness and deviation,' but the subtext of the letter may be understood as an expression of Ṭūsī's need to demonstrate in writing to the Ismaili leadership his superior intellectual and scholarly talents which he could bring to serve the cause. Although for a different reason, this is reminiscent of Nāṣir Khusraw's letter to 'Alī b. Aḥmad, a high government official, when he reached the city of Baṣra in 443/1051.<sup>51</sup> But there is every reason to believe that Ṭūsī's permanent transfer from Quhistān to Alamūt and his subsequent promotion in the Ismaili *da'wat* could not have been possible without a good opinion of him generated by the submission of this letter.

Leaving aside his intentions for writing the *Sayr wa sulūk*, in this autobiographical account Ṭūsī makes a clear distinction between two major phases in his search for the truth, which he terms the exoteric and the esoteric. In the exoteric phase, corresponding broadly with his early theological and philosophical

studies, Ṭūsī is mainly concerned with rational inquiry based on the premise that it is possible to attain the knowledge of God by intellect and sound reasoning alone. The critical turning-point of this phase appears to have been his recognition of the limits of speculative reason and its contradictory results, vis-à-vis his growing awareness that the supra-rational nature of the knowledge he was seeking cannot be attained without the intervention of an authoritative teacher. The esoteric phase of Ṭūsī's quest develops after his meeting with Shihāb al-Dīn and his acquaintance with the *Fuṣūl-i muqaddas*, the sermons of the Imam Ḥasan 'Alā Dhikrihi al-Salām, which led to his conversion to the Ismaili faith.

Ṭūsī depicts this process in terms of a series of progressive stages and the uncovering of a number of veils leading to what he calls '*ilm-i yaqīnī*' (reliable or certain knowledge). He characterizes this phase as esoteric, partly because it was based upon or derived from the teachings of the Ismaili *da'wat* which became accessible to him only after his conversion, but more importantly because for Ṭūsī it represents a succession of contemplations upon the inner meanings of the principle of a universal teacher accessible to humankind.

In the course of disclosing these 'unveilings', Ṭūsī embarks on a systematic elaboration of the doctrine of *ta'lim*. He speaks of the necessity of an authoritative teacher [§ 8-13], the qualities of such a teacher and how he may be recognized [§ 17-37], the nature of his teachings and how one may attain perfection through his knowledge [§ 39-49], and the characteristics of the true religion and of its followers among mankind [§ 50-57]. The scope of this introduction does not permit a replication of Ṭūsī's highly complex and nuanced sequence of arguments, inferences and proofs. It is left to the reader to explore the full dimensions of Ṭūsī's thought in his own inimitable style in the Persian language or its translation which, as the readers may find, is a close rendering of the original text.

There are, however, several aspects of Ṭūsī's thought as recounted in the *Sayr wa sulūk*, *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* and his other Ismaili works which deserve close scrutiny by scholars of Ismaili

thought and literature. For example, there is need to establish the relationship of Ṭūsī's thinking with Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ's formulation of the doctrine of *ta'lim*, in both its historical and ideological settings. It is also essential to situate this doctrine within the broader context of the preaching of the *qiyāmat* (resurrection), which characterized Ismaili thought of the later Alamūt period and to which Ṭūsī makes a number of elusive references in his works. A comprehensive study of the principle of *ta'lim*, its place in the Ismaili literature of pre-Fatimid and Fatimid eras, and its subsequent development in the intellectual tradition of Alamūt, would enable us to ascertain the contributions of Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ and Ṭūsī to the evolution of the doctrine, and of the extent to which it was a reformulation and elaboration of an old Shi'i precept.

At a more specific level, scholarly investigations can focus upon particular facets of Ṭūsī's ontological system, for instance his understanding of the *amr* (command) or *kalīma* (word) of God. This concept featured prominently in Fatimid Ismaili metaphysical thought, at least since the time of Muḥammad al-Nasafī and Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī in the fourth/tenth century, although Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī later disputed their notion of the divine command as intermediary between God and the first intellect.<sup>52</sup> Ṭūsī's re-emphasis on the *amr* and its symbolic correspondence with the universal teacher, in terms of the *mazhar* (locus, representation or manifestation) of the command, is a significant aspect of his writings that has come to be associated with Ismaili literature of the Alamūt period in general.

Another dimension of the *Sayr wa sulūk* which deserves critical study is Ṭūsī's sophisticated and multi-layered theory of divine knowledge in its application to both the seeker and the source of the knowledge. This may turn out to be the most original contribution of Ṭūsī to the doctrine of *ta'lim*.

The *Sayr wa sulūk* has two interconnected facets: one is autobiographical and confessional, concerned with Ṭūsī's personal search for knowledge from the time of his youth to his conversion to the Ismaili faith; the other is doctrinal, in which the

author sets out to demonstrate rationally, on the basis of a series of proofs and arguments, that true or certain knowledge of the divine is attainable only through the mediation of a universal teacher, who cannot be non-existent and must be recognizable among mankind. In the presentation of both these facets, Ṭūsī's work emerges as one of the most important documents of Persian Ismaili literature. In the author's personal candour, lucidity of thought, sensitive treatment of the subject and epistolary style, it stands out among the finest works of intellectual biography in Islamic literature. At a theological and philosophical level, the *Sayr wa sulūk* provides unique insights into the character of Ismaili thought towards the end of the Alamūt period. Ṭūsī's exposition of the ontological, epistemological and spiritual dimensions of *ta'lim*, and the harnessing of these perspectives into a coherent system of thought, makes it by far the most sophisticated treatment of the subject available to us today.

### **Ṭūsī's other Ismaili works**

The three decades during which Ṭūsī was associated with the Ismailis, from around 620/1224 to 654/1256, were undoubtedly the most productive period of his life.<sup>53</sup> The greater part of his works on philosophy and science were produced under Ismaili patronage. Since the bulk of what Ismaili scholars produced in the Alamūt period perished following the collapse of Ismaili political power, the few specimens which have survived cannot tell us the whole story or enable us to assess the conditions in which Ṭūsī produced these works. What is remarkable, and perhaps unique, in Muslim history is the attitude of the Ismaili leaders who, while being involved in an epochal life and death struggle, nevertheless had time to nurture and maintain a very high standard of scholarship within the confines of their castles and fortresses. We know that the leadership consisted of people with a genuine love for learning and scholarship. The fame of the Alamūt library and its treasure of scientific instruments had reached far and wide, and the threat

of Mongol invasions was in itself a factor to encourage scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to take refuge with the Ismailis. But at the same time, life in the fortresses was not without its personal and scholarly privations. Thus, when Ṭūsī was drafting the most important chapter of *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, he notes: 'One should not write everything, especially in times like these, hastily, secretly, and in a dark place ...'<sup>54</sup>

Whatever the circumstances, it is fortunate that a good portion of what Ṭūsī produced during his Ismaili period has survived, whereas nothing has been preserved from, for example, the numerous writings of the Imam Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 607/1210) which were very popular at the time.<sup>55</sup> Among other factors, the survival of Ṭūsī's works was undoubtedly due to the scholarly appeal of his writings, which brought him fame in his own lifetime. Since most of his works in Arabic and Persian were not addressed to a specifically Ismaili audience, we can assume that they circulated freely among the scholars and savants of all communities before, as they did after, the fall of Alamūt. It is on the basis of these works, concerned essentially with issues and questions of interest to Muslim intellectuals in general and all those genuinely seeking knowledge, that Ṭūsī's considerable reputation as a scholar is founded. Nonetheless, many of these works retain a certain Ismaili outlook and orientation which, in conformity with the author's ecumenical spirit, is conveyed implicitly within an intellectual context acceptable to the various communities of Islam.

From the point of view of Ismaili studies, Ṭūsī's most important contribution was the scholarly preservation and rendering of the Ismaili tenets and principles of the Alamūt period, which have survived to our time almost exclusively in a number of treatises he wrote for the Ismaili *da'wat* in the Persian language. In addition to the *Sayr wa sulūk* and his ethical works composed under Ismaili sponsorship, the *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* and the *Akhlāq-i Muḥtashimī*, there are at least four major treatises by Ṭūsī which should be considered as Ismaili in character.



*Āghāz wa anjām*

Composed in Quhistān, the *Āghāz wa anjām* (The Beginning and the End),<sup>56</sup> or *Tadhkira* (Exhortations) as Ṭūsī calls it, is his most important work on eschatology. It is divided into twenty chapters dealing with life in the physical and spiritual worlds, the origin and return of the human soul, the phenomenon of death, the nature of the hereafter and the condition of different classes of people therein, the resurrection and the judgement, reward and punishment, heaven and hell, and a number of other Qur'ānic concepts about the afterlife. Ṭūsī's main concern is to elucidate the esoteric meanings and ethical underpinnings of Qur'ānic eschatology from a typically Ismaili point of view. Based on what Ṭūsī writes in *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* and *Āghāz wa anjām*, a comprehensive picture of Ismaili eschatology can be drawn. Among the Twelver Shi'i scholars, the *Āghāz* received special attention from Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, better known as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640), who incorporated an Arabic translation of the entire text in his famous commentary on the Qur'ān, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*,<sup>57</sup> without acknowledging his source.

*Tawallā wa tabarrā*

The Qur'ānic concept of *tawallā wa tabarrā* (solidarity and dissociation) which provides the title of this work,<sup>58</sup> occupied an important place in the Ismaili theological framework of the Alamūt period. Ṭūsī refers to it in several of his works and composed this treatise around 633/1253 to elaborate the doctrine in some detail. Dedicated to Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥtashim, it describes how one may arrive at spiritual perfection through 'solidarity' with 'Alī and the Imams, and 'dissociation' from one's base instincts such as lust, anger and hatred. Through a combination of these two dispositions, one can transmute the passions into yearning, love and *ma'rifat* (gnosis). Ṭūsī stresses the importance of the intellect and rational soul in bringing about this transformation, the outcomes of which are *riqā*

(contentment), *taslīm* (submission) and *iqān* (certitude). For the man of certitude, says Ṭūsī, hatred is submerged into love, the 'primordial past' into the 'subsequent future', and religious law into the realm of resurrection.<sup>59</sup>

### *Maṭlūb al-mu'minīn*

Ṭūsī wrote the *Maṭlūb al-mu'minīn* (Provisions for the Faithful)<sup>60</sup> in Alamūt or Maymūn Dizh in response to the request of the 'august presence' (*haḍrat-i 'ulyā*) of a noble lady from the house of the Imam 'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad who wanted the author to compile the gist of what he had read from the *Fuṣūl-i muqaddas* of the Imam Ḥasan 'Alā Dhikrihi al-Salām and other *da'wat* literature. The book has four chapters dealing with eschatology, the characteristics of an Ismaili (recognition of and love for the Imam, etc.), the doctrine of solidarity and dissociation, and the esoteric exegesis of religious law. In his discussion of the *shar'at*, Ṭūsī insists that the *mard-i ḥaqīqat* (man of truth) is one who fulfils the requirements of both the *zāhir* and the *bāṭin* of the religious law.

### *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*

The *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* (The Paradise of Submission)<sup>61</sup> is Ṭūsī's most important and extensive Ismaili work. It consists of twenty-eight 'representations' or chapters (*taṣawwūrāt*) on a variety of themes such as the Creator (*āfarīdagār*) and the cosmos, the nature of human existence, ethics and human relations, religion, eschatology, Prophethood and Imamate. The arrangement of material in the work leads the reader progressively from an understanding of the physical to the spiritual worlds. The twenty-seventh representation deals with pre-Islamic religions such as Sabaenism and idol-worship in the Indian subcontinent. The final *taṣawwūr* stands out on its own as it contains responses, some of them recorded only partially, of the Imam 'Alā' al-Dīn Muḥammad to certain inquiries put to him by Ṭūsī or others. The significance of this work arises from

its comprehensive treatment of Ismaili thought during the Alamūt period, as well as a number of direct references to the teachings of the Imam Ḥasan ‘Alā Dhikrihi al-Salām and the preaching of the resurrection. The *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* also contains Ṭūsī’s articulation of a distinctively Ismaili system of ethics centred around the recognition of the Imam of the time.

### Minor works

It is now certain that during his long association with the Ismailis, Ṭūsī wrote a number of other Ismaili treatises. These works either have not survived or their Ismaili orientation may have been altered by later scholars or scribes to adapt them to Twelver Shi‘i milieux. An example of such an amended text is *Riṣāla-yi jabr wa qadar* (Treatise on Free Will and Predestination),<sup>62</sup> a philosophical work in which quotations from the *Fuṣūl-i muqaddas* of the Imam Ḥasan ‘Alā Dhikrihi al-Salām have been removed. *Al-Dustūr wa da‘wat al-mu‘minīn li al-hudūr* (Notebook for Summoning the Faithful to the Present Imam)<sup>63</sup> is another treatise which, although attributed by the compiler to the Imam ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad, is almost certainly the work of Ṭūsī himself. It gives a detailed account of the ceremonies conducted for conversion to the Ismaili faith, which is described as ‘the religion of the theosophers and those travelling in the path of the scholars of divinity who are followers of the House of Prophethood.’

There are also several other extant Ismaili works by Ṭūsī which, apart from the *Mujārāt-i Ṭūsī* (Ṭūsī’s Debates),<sup>64</sup> I have been unable to obtain. These are *Jawāb bi Kīyā Shāh Amīr* (Answers to Kīyā Shāh Amīr) and *Riṣāla dar ni‘mat-hā, khushī-hā wa ladhdhat-hā* (Treatise on Comfort, Happiness and Joyfulness).<sup>65</sup>