

## The *Kalām-i pīr* and Its Place in the Central Asian Isma‘ili Tradition

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### Abstract

This paper is a study of the *Kalām-i pīr*, a text on religious doctrine preserved among the Isma‘ili Shi‘i community of the Badakhshan region of Central Asia, attributed to the fifth/eleventh-century Isma‘ili author Nāṣir-i Khusraw. An edition and translation of this work was first published by Wladimir Ivanow, who judged it to be a ‘forgery’ by the tenth/sixteenth-century Isma‘ili missionary Khayrkhwāh Harātī. Ivanow concluded that while the text overall holds value as a specimen of Isma‘ili doctrinal writing, its first chapter, which purports to be an autobiographical account of its reputed author, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, is an irrelevant appendage to the work. Since then, Ivanow’s interpretation has remained broadly authoritative within the field. In recent years, however, multiple new manuscripts of the work and a range of related materials have come to light, indicating the need for a thorough re-evaluation of the text and its history. In this article I demonstrate that Harātī had no role in the development of the *Kalām-i pīr* and that its production should be dated to the eighteenth century, rather than the sixteenth. Furthermore, I argue that the attribution to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, elaborated in the first chapter, is not incidental to the text, but central to understanding its significance within the Isma‘ili tradition of Central Asia. The text must be considered within the context of the history of Badakhshan in the eighteenth century, which saw an energetic expansion of the Isma‘ili mission (*da‘wa*) in the region and the development of a competitive hagiographical tradition connected with Nāṣir-i Khusraw among various constituencies. This re-evaluation of the *Kalām-i pīr* demonstrates the need for a revision of the broader framework by which we understand both the legacy of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and the historical development of the Isma‘ili *da‘wa* in Central Asia.