
TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

A. Kudriavtceva

MIND, SOUL, SPIRIT, BODY... BĀBĀ AFDĀL AND HIS TREATISE *MADĀRIJ AL-KAMĀL*

ای آنکه تو طالب خدائی بخود آ
از خود بطلب کز تو جدا نیست خدا
اول بخود آ چون بخود آئی بخدا
کآقرار نمائی بخدائی خدا [1]

O you, who seek God, turn to yourself,
Seek [Him] in yourself, for God is not distant from you.
First, come to yourself, once you come to yourself, —
[you will come] to God,
In order to acknowledge God due to divine attributes
[within you].

The current article is dedicated to the philosophical mystical work *Madārij al-Kamāl* (“The Degrees of Perfection”) of Irānian philosopher and poet Afḍal al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn Marāqī-yi Kāshānī, “virtually unknown in Europe, in spite of being an extremely original thinker” [2], the author of “witty and bright quatrains, theosophical and metaphysical treatises” [3], written in Persian language and marked with a simple yet elegant style. Known written sources do not allow to recreate the picture of life of this author in full, better known in Irān by his pen name or pseudonym (*takhalluṣ*) Bābā Afḍal. The dates of his birth and death still remain unclear until today: according to Irānian philologist Sa‘īd Nafīsī, Bābā Afḍal was born *ca.* 582/1186–87 or 592/1195–96 and died sometimes after 654/1256 or 664/1265–66 [4], however the opinion of Mujtabā Mīnuwī, who thinks that Bābā Afḍal passed away in the beginning of the 7th/13th century, ought to be taken into account. The date of his death, suggested by E. G. Browne to be 707/1307–08 is evidently incorrect [5].

It is known that the tomb (*mazār*) of Bābā Afḍal is located in Marāq, a small mountain village, situated about forty kilometres away to north-west from the city of Kāshān in Central Irān. In the *mazār*, “one of the *sultāns* of Zanzibar” is buried next to his grave. According to a legend he became one of his faithful followers, clothed himself in the garments of humility, left his

rightful throne and the rest of his life he spent serving Bābā Afḍal [6]. Before his death Afḍal al-Dīn lived in Marāq, which is indicated by the lines of one of his last letters, but most likely that village was not the only place of his residence. Possibly he left Kāshān for Marāq in order to flee from the vanities of city and completely devote himself to philosophical reflections and tutoring. The works of Bābā Afḍal do not contain any autobiographical information with the only exclusion being one *qaṣīda*, which reports one circumstance of his life — he was imprisoned by a local ruler on a false charge of witchcraft (*sihr*) [7].

According to the data given by some earlier sources Bābā Afḍal was an uncle of famous Nāṣir al-Dīn Abū Ja‘far al-Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (597—673 / 1201—1274), a prominent philosopher, astronomer, mathematician and physician, who was under the protection of ismā‘īlite rulers. The anthologies of poets (*tadhkira*) mention also the fact of correspondence between Ṭūsī and Kāshānī, who were exchanging quatrains. However, William Chittick, the author of the deepest and most detailed study of life and artistic heritage of Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī, considers this fact to be hardly probable [8].

Ṭūsī in his autobiographical work *Sayr wa sulūk* (“Journey and Pilgrimage”) mentions that in his early years he was studying mathematics under certain Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāsib, one of the students of Bābā