

THE LIFE OF THE TEXT AND THE FATE OF TRADITION. V:  
METHOD OF ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'ĀN  
(TA'WĪL) AND THE SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE OF PERSIAN POETRY  
OF THE 11TH—12TH CENTURIES

The use of the symbolic-allegorical method of the Qur'ān interpreting called *ta'wīl* [1] as the basis for formation of the norms of esoteric expression in the sphere of mystical practice of Islam is well-known. However, the stages of formation of this specific language and its fixation in the canon of classical Persian poetry, as well as the real contribution of certain authors into this process, which began in the 11th c., has not been studied enough, if we mean the literary, or, to put it more precisely, the poetological aspect of the matter rather than the ideological-religious or predicant aspect.

The opposition of the allegorical comments on the Qur'ān and the *sunna* suggested by the Bāṭinites (*ahl al-bāṭin*, *al-bāṭiniyya*) [2] and the literal, historical-philological and jurisprudential interpretation called *tafsīr* ("comment", "interpretation") based on the tradition, did not appear suddenly and was not absolute. The method of allegorical interpretation of the Qur'ān arose in the 8th c. in the circle of the extreme Shī'ites in Iraq, and was later developed by the followers of Ismā'īlism of all trends, who were the first to be referred to as the Bāṭinites. As a result of the dispute between the supporters of the literal interpretation of the Holy Book, the Zāhirites (*al-zāhiriyya*, *ahl al-zāhir*) and those who strived to comprehend its "hidden" meaning, the Muslim community split up. With time the medieval Muslim theologians began to rank among the Bāṭinites, along with the followers of Ismā'īlism, the supporters of Ṣūfism, as well as the Mu'tazilites [3] and other adherents of rationalistic ideas in Islam. The Mu'tazilites, following other commentators of the Qur'ān, divided *āyāt* into the "clear" (*muḥkamāt*) and "vague" (*mutashābihāt*) ones. The latter, which, according to them, disagreed with common sense, had to be viewed as circumlocutions (*majāz*).

It was the Ismā'īli and Ṣūfī preachers who introduced the corresponding principles of words' treatment into the literature in the Persian language, including the poetry. Especially intensively Persian poetry developed in the 11th c. in the direction of formation of the "innermost" language. If we speak about the explicitly expressed justifications of the "bāṭinist" principle of words' treatment, the most valuable material is contained in the *qaṣīdas* by a zealous preacher of Ismā'īlism and didactic poet Nāṣir-i Khusraw (1004—1088). He was a figure typical of the early stage in the de-

velopment of the mystical-allegorical trend in the Persian poetry: being at the same time a religious philosopher and poet, he acted not only as an outstanding reformer of the Persian *qaṣīda*, but also as a theorist of poetry, eagerly talking about its nature and purpose in his works themselves.

In Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *qaṣīdas* we can find quite a few statements about the religious aspects of the notion of *taw'īl*, which in this or that way are projected on the sphere of poetic constructions:

The body of faith — is the outer [knowledge], while its soul — *taw'īl* [is inner knowledge — M. R.], // can a body live without a soul in this world?

If you are alive, why have you died for faith, // unless your heart has been caught in the snare of passions! [4].

In another text the author talks about the nature of faith even more directly, associating its body with the word of the Prophet (i. e. the Qur'ān), and its soul — with the word of his only rightful, according to the Shī'ites and the Ismā'īlites, successor, the fourth pious caliph 'Alī:

The faith is a palace (*sarā*) erected by the Prophet, // so that each mortal enters it calmly...

'Alī and his family are gates to that [palace], // blessed are those who enter this house [5].

Apart from the Prophet Muḥammad (*al-nāṭiq*, lit. "the speaking") [6] and his successor (*al-asās*, *al-waṣī*) [7] caliph 'Alī, other prophets worshiped by the Ismā'īlites are also united into such constant pairs. Shīṣ (Sif), Sām, Ismā'īl, Hārūn, Sham'un (Simon — obviously, Simon Peter, one of the apostles) were considered the successors of the prophets Ādam, Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and 'Īsā correspondingly. Characterizing *ta'wīl* as the innermost knowledge ('ilm), Nāṣir-i Khusraw mentions the successors, who perform the same function of the "gates of faith" as 'Alī in the pair with the Prophet Muḥammad:

Search for [science] of *ta'wīl*, as for the Jews // it is the word of instruction of Yūsha' ben Nūn [8].

*Ta'wīl* in the dark night is for Christians // the candle and icon-lamp of 'Īsā and Sham'un [9].