Little is known of Sa’id al-Din’s life. In his Manāhidj al-ībād (Istanbul 1988, 184) he tells us that he entered Sufism at the hand of Shaykh Naḍjb al-Dīn ’Alī b. Buzghūsh of Shirāz (d. 678/1279), a disciple of Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn ’Umar Suhrawardī. Later, he benefited from Shaykh Šadr al-Dīn Ḵūnāwī (d. 673/1274), and then from Shaykh Muḥammad b. al-Sukrān al-Baghdādī and “others.” Ḵūnāwī tells us that Farghānī and several other scholars were his companions when he travelled in the year 643/1245-6 to Egypt and began teaching Ibn al-Īrād’s famous Kāṣida, Nażm al-sulūk (also known as al-Tā’īyya). Several people took notes with the aim of composing books, but only Farghānī was successful (letter of approval to Farghānī. Mašhārik al-darārī, ed. S.Dj. Āṣḥīṭiyānī, Maşhhad 1398/1978, 5-6, 77-8). Sibt Ibn al-Īrād quotes Şams al-Dīn Iki (d. 697/1298), a disciple of Ḵūnāwī’s and shaikh al-shuyukh in Cairo, to the effect that after lecturing on Ḥadīṯ in Arabic, Ḵūnāwī would recite one verse of Nażm al-sulūk and explain its meaning in Persian, and it was these explanations that Sa’id al-Din recorded (Th. E. Homerín, From Arab poet to Muslim saint, Columbia, S.C. 1994, 29; cf. Djāmī, Naťafat al-uns, ed. M. Tawhidāpur, Tehran 1336/1957, 542).

Farghānī is best known for his Persian and Arabic commentaries on Nażm al-sulūk. The full name of the first is Mašhārik al-darārī al-zuḥar fi kashf ḫākā iḵ naźm al-durār, while the second is called Muntahā ‘l-madārīk wamuṣḥtahā lubb kull kāmil aw ‘arīf wa-sālik (2 vols., Cairo 1293/1876). Ḵūnāwī’s just-cited letter of approval is appended to the end of the introduction to the Persian text. The Arabic commentary is half again as long as the Persian and includes a much expanded introduction, without Ḵūnāwī’s letter; it was being read in Cairo as early as 670/1271 (Massignon, The Passion of al-Ḥallāj, Eng. tr. Princeton 1982, i, 44). Both works were widely cited as authoritative expositions of the teachings of Ḵūnāwī. Djāmī was particularly fond of Muntahā ‘l-madārīk and called its introduction an unparalleled exposition of “the science of reality” (Naťafat, 559).

Farghānī’s third work, the Persian Manāhidj, al-ībād ila ‘l-maʿād, outlines the five pillars of Islam along with basic Sufi ādāb. It was not as widely read as the other two, but it gained more readership than it might have because Kutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311 [q.v.]), who studied Ḥadīṯ with Ḵūnāwī, incorporated it into his philosophical encyclopedia, the Durrat al-tādīf, as the last and “most important” part of the book (see J. Walbridge, A Sufi scientist of the thirteenth century: the mystical ideas and practices of Qutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, in L. Lewisohn (ed.), The legacy of mediaeval Persian Sufism, London 1992, 323-40; idem, The science of mystic lights. Qutb al-Dīn Šīrāzī and the Illuminationist tradition in Islamic philosophy, Cambridge, Mass. 13, 176-8). According to Ḥadīṯi Khāliфа, the Manāhidj was translated into Arabic with the title Madārīd’al-ī tīkād by
Abu ’l-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Bidlīsī. Ḥādīṭi Khalīfa (no. 1263) also attributes a commentary on Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Ḥusūs al-ḥikam to Saʿīd al-Dīn, but the ascription is unlikely. Another book that is often attributed to Farghānī is the important unedited compendium of Ẓūfī technical terms, Ḵaṭṭ āfī al-ʿilm fī ḥārāt ahl al-ilām, some of the definitions are indeed taken from Muntahā l-madārīk. However, neither the style of the work nor what the author says about himself allows for this attribution; he speaks of his own works on kalām (under the definition of al-rūḥ) and mentions (under al-ʿilm al-laduni) that he was a disciple of ‘Alāʾ al-Dawla Simnānī (659-736/1261-1336 [q.v.]).

The Māshārīḵ al-darārī and Muntahā l-madārīk are important as two of the earliest commentaries on Ibn al-Fārīd’s poem, but their main significance lies in their formative influence on the way in which the teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī were developed. Like Kūnawi, Farghānī singled out certain of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s discussions and technical terms for emphasis. The net result was that Ibn al-ʿArabī’s well-known followers were drawn much closer to the philosophical ¶ mode of expressing Islamic teachings than was the Shaykh al-Ākbar himself. Farghānī’s introduction to Muntahā l-madārīk is an especially good example of a dense philosophical and relatively systematic exposition of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s teachings. It provides a better survey of the technical terms and discussions that were to play major roles in theoretical Ẓūfīsm in the coming centuries than does Ibn al-ʿArabī’s own Ḥusūs al-ḥikam, which was to be the object of over one hundred commentaries.

(W.C. Chittick)

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See also W.C. Chittick, Spectrums of Islamic thought: Saʿīd al-Dīn Farghānī on the implications of oneness and manyness, in Lewisohn, op. cit., 203-17.

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