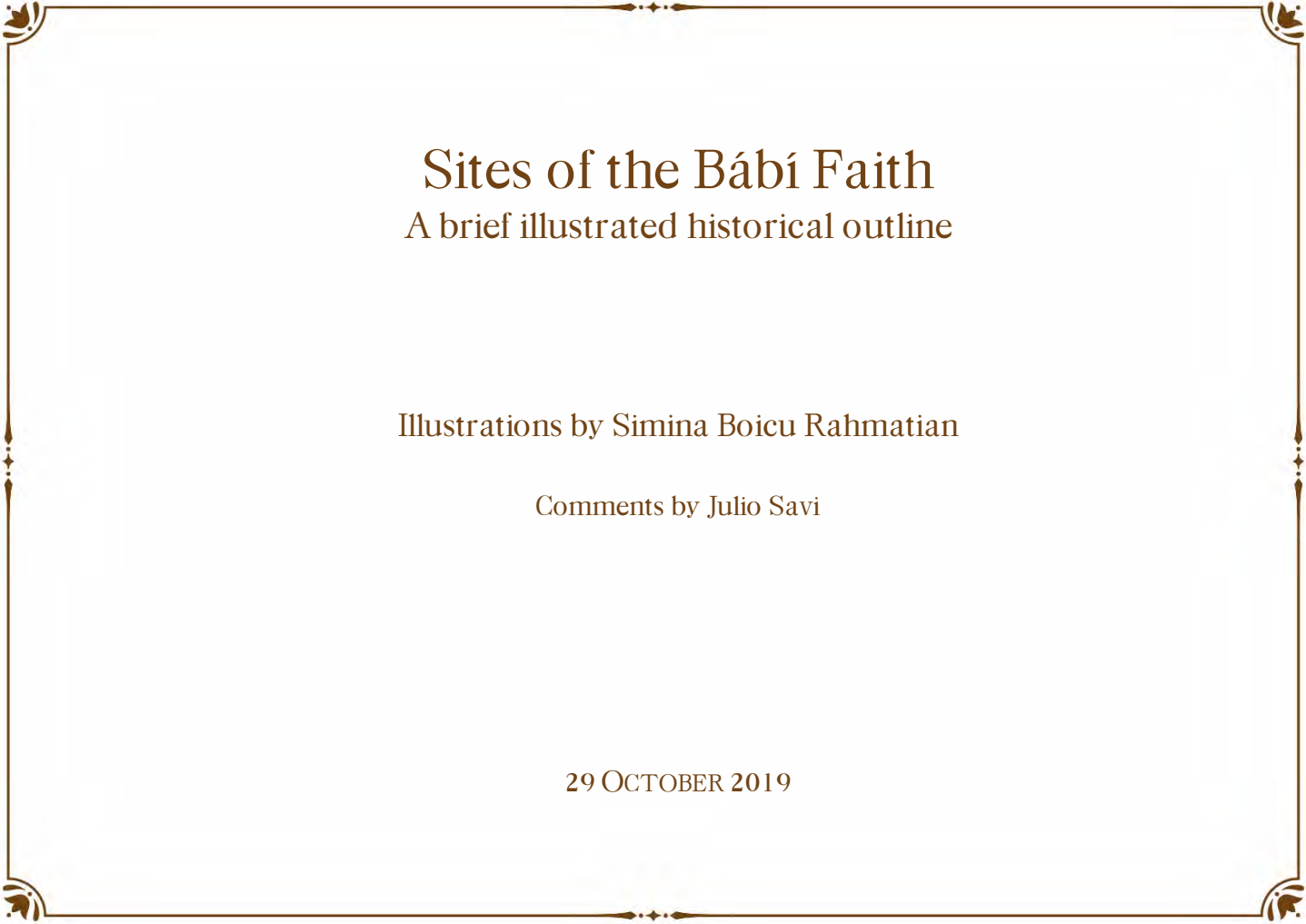




Sites of the Bábí Faith

A brief illustrated historical outline

Illustrations by Simina Boicu Rahmatian

Comments by Julio Savi

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To “the worthy heirs of the Dawn-Breakers”

The first period (1844–1853) [of Bahá'í history] centers around the gentle, the youthful and irresistible person of the Báb, matchless in His meekness, imperturbable in His serenity, magnetic in His utterance, unrivaled in the dramatic episodes of His swift and tragic ministry.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*

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INTRODUCTION

He was a very mild and delicate-looking man, rather small in stature and very fair for a Persian, with a melodious soft voice, which struck me much. Being a Siyyid [a descendant of the family of the Prophet], he was dressed in the habit of that sect, as were also his two companions. In fact his whole look and deportment went far to dispose one in his favour.”¹ This is the only existing pen-portrait of the Báb written by a European observer. It was penned by Dr William Cormick, the British personal physician of the Crown-Prince, who was called to treat the wounds the Báb had received while being bastinadoed in 1848 in Ṭabriz. His words, however, were not published in Europe until 1918.

The Báb, His Faith and His community had begun to be the object of Western attention several years before that. *The Times* of London was the first European newspaper to publish, on 1 November 1845, an account of the earliest persecutions against the Bábís. *The Times* was very soon followed by other newspapers. The fame of the Writings and Utterances of the Báb as well as the echoes of His followers’ exploits attracted the attention not only of journalists and politicians, but also of scholars, especially in the British Empire and in France. An extensive literature on the new Prophet, His doctrines and His followers proliferated in Europe, Edward G. Browne of Cambridge University, the French diplomat and philosopher Joseph Arthur de Gobineau and the historian and orientalist A.-L.-M. (Louis Alphonse Daniel) Nicolas, being its earliest authors.²

This book offers twenty-three images of sites where the Bábí feats happened, accompanied by brief explicative comments and a number of pertinent quotations by external authors, expressing their secular points of view on the Bábí-Bahá’í Faith. The first chapter presents Nabíl-i-Zarandí, the author of the most complete history of the Bábí Faith. The second and third chapters are devoted to the doctrinal and historical background of the Bábí Faith, namely the Shaykhi School that anticipated it and the two Qájár sovereigns and their three Grand Viziers who ruled Persia in the years during which it was born and blossomed. The fourth briefly mentions the family in which the Báb was born and which raised Him. The other chapters summarize the whole course of that Faith: 23 May 1844, the day when the Báb first announced He was the Messianic Figure expected by the Islamic

¹ Edward G. Browne (ed.), *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 1918) 262.

² See Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981) 3-47, 69-174. From now on Momen, *Religions*.

world and the subsequent recruitment of His first eighteen disciples; His pilgrimage to Mecca to publicly repeat His announcement; the earliest trips made by those eighteen disciples to divulge that announcement; the Báb's return to Shiráz, the immediate hostile reactions of the Persian establishment to His proclamation, and His consequent vicissitudes until His martyrdom in Ṭabriz on 9 July 1850; the harsh persecutions suffered by His followers up to the great 1852 slaughter in Tehran. This description is necessarily concise, but the interested readers may complete their study through reading the books recommended in the annotated bibliography at the end of this volume. In support of our narrative a number of passages have been quoted from documents written by such non Bahá'í authors and witnesses who lived during the 19th and 20th century, as Gobineau, Browne, and Abbas Amanat, historian at Yale University.

This book, dedicated to the “worthy heirs of [the] Dawn-Breakers,”³ is being published on the occasion of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb (Shiráz, 20 October 1819), when large gatherings of people are remembering the Báb throughout the world. In fact, His imprisonment, His execution on 10 July 1850 and the bloody persecution unleashed against His followers before and after His execution did not extinguish His Faith, which resulted in the Bahá'í Faith, founded by Bahá'u'lláh, the bicentenary of Whose birth (Tehran, 12 November 1817) was celebrated in 2017. The Bahá'í Faith has grown to become the most geographically widespread religion in the world after Christianity and its followers are scattered throughout the world. Ever since the beginning of their Faith Bahá'ís have been very active in promoting a new civilization based on many innovative concepts, such as the oneness of humankind and the balance between the material, intellectual and spiritual aspects of life, especially between faith and reason.

Julio Savi

Bologna, 10 July 2019

³ The Universal House of Justice, 16 July 1980, to the Bahá'ís of the World, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986. The Third Epoch of the Formative Age* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996) 453, ch. 254, para. 1.

Shiráz. Front door of the Báb's house, where
He announced He was the Gate (Báb, in Ara-
bic) to a new age for humankind



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TRANSLITERATION

Persian and Arabic names and words have been transliterated according to the method suggested by Shoghi Effendi in 1923 at the beginning of his ministry, see Nabil-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation* (Wilmette, Illinois, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932) 676, "Appendix: Guide to the Pronunciation of the Proper Names Transliterated in the Narrative" (see, <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/nz/DB/db-53.html>, retrieved on 27 June 2019). In quotes the transliterations have been left unchanged.

S i t e s
of the
Bábí Faith

The guesthouse of this madrasa (theological school) of Tehran repeatedly hosted Nabil-i-Zarandi (1831-1892)—the author of *The Dawn-Breakers*,¹ a narrative of the early days of the Bahá'í Revelation written between 1887 and 1888—during his various stays in the Persian capital, as it did many other disciples of the Báb. In 1848, barely an eighteen year old youth, he joined the Bábi ranks and witnessed events and knew characters that later enabled him to write his book in full knowledge of the facts, a book that is widely regarded as “by far the most complete of the general narratives” of the Bábi Faith.²

“I have profited by the leisure of the summer to read *Nabíl's Narrative*... Everyone interested in religion and also in history owes you a very great debt of gratitude for publishing such a fine piece of work. The deeper side of the work is so impressive, that it seems hardly fitting to compliment you upon some of the practical matters connected with the translation...

“... The force of the book is very great, because the translation is so scientific and the original authorship so spontaneous, that the whole work must seem genuine, even to the most cynical critic.

“From the point of history, the work is of the greatest possible value. It is also tremendously useful, as it explains the psychology which lies back of our great movements of religious revelation. Of course the chief value is the light that is thrown upon the early history of the Bahai Movement. The lives of the first converts are tremendously inspiring.”³

¹ Nabil-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation* (Wilmette, Illinois, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932).

² Abbas Amanat (historian of the Middle East), *Resurrection and Renewal. The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989) 425. From now on, Amanat, *Resurrection*.

³ Bayard Dodge, a professor of the American University of Beirut, to Shoghi Effendi, the Head of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 to his passing in 1957, who in 1932 translated Nabil's narrative into English under the title of *The Dawn-Breakers*, quoted in Rúḥiyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969) 215-6.

Tehran. The Madrassa (theological school) of Masjid-i Dáru'sh-Shafá that hosted many disciples of the Báb



THE DOCTRINAL BACKGROUND: THE TWO GREAT SHAYKHI MASTERS

Karbala is the most sacred city of the Shī'i world because of the presence of the Shrine of Imam Ḥusayn, the most venerated Muslim martyr. In the first half of the nineteenth century the Shaykhi school⁴ flourished in this religious centre. This school was at least initially based “on two points, one deeply religious and the other with rational tendencies... The first point is the very strong feeling that God’s authority must always be present and active through an ‘intermediary’ among men... The other point is a tendency to symbolic explanations... of the miraculous aspect of traditional theological legends.”⁵ Its first two masters emphatically preached the imminent advent of the promised Qá'im of Islam—the messianic peacemaker awaited for by Shī'i Muslims at the end of time—and prepared its numerous disciples for that long-awaited event. This school was attended by the Letters of the Living, the first eighteen disciples of the Báb, and many other prominent figures of Bábi history.⁶

“There seems to be conclusive evidence that Seyyid Kazim [the leader of the Shaykhi School between 1826 and 1843] adverted often near the close of life to the divine Manifestation which he believed to be at hand. He was fond of saying, ‘I see him as the rising sun.’ He was also wont to declare that the ‘Proof’ [one of the titles of the Qá'im] would be a youth of the race of Hashim [the great-grandfather of the Prophet], i.e. a kinsman of Muḥammad, untaught in the learning of men. Of a dream which he heard from an Arab (when in Turkish Arabia), he said, ‘This dream signifies that my departure from the world is near at hand’; and when his friends wept at this, he remonstrated with them, saying, ‘Why are ye troubled in mind? Desire ye not that I should depart, and that the truth [in person] should appear?’

“I leave it an open question whether Seyyid Kazim had actually fixed on the person who was to be his successor, and to reflect the Supreme Wisdom far more brilliantly than himself. But there is no reason to doubt that he regarded his own life and labours as transitional, and it is possible that by the rising sun of which he loved to speak he meant that strange youth of Shiraz who had been an irregular attendant at his lectures.”⁷

⁴ See Alessandro Bausani, *Religion in Iran From Zoroaster to Baha'u'llah* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2000) 340-3.

⁵ Bausani, *Religion in Iran* 341-2.

⁶ Shoghi Effendi wrote that the Bábi Faith was born as “a heterodox... offshoot of the Shaykhi school” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* [Wilmette, Illinois, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944] xii).

⁷ Thomas Kelly Cheyne (1841-1915, English Biblical critic), *The Reconciliation of Races and Religions* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1914) 19. See <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/7995> (retrieved on 4 July 2019). The Báb had sporadically attended Siyyid Kázim's lessons during His brief sojourn in the 'Atabát between 1841 and 1842.

Karbala. The shrine of
Imám Ḥusayn



THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: TWO SHAHS AND THREE GRAND VIZIERS

From this sumptuous royal palace Muḥammad Sháh and Naṣiri'd-Din Sháh, the two Qájár⁸ sovereigns who ruled Persia in the years during which the Bábí Faith was born and flourished, issued—assisted and often urged by their three Grand Viziers, Ḥájí Mírzá Áqásí, Mírzá Taqí Khán, and Mírzá Áqá Khán-i-Núrí—their oppressive decrees that, after having exiled the Báb to the remote northern province of Azerbaijan, gave rise to the bloodiest pages of Bábí history: the repression of the Bábis in the Fort of Shaykh Tabarsí, in the northern province of Mázinarán on the Caspian Sea; the slaughter of the seven martyrs of Tehran; the persecutions of the Bábis of Nayríz, a town in the southern province of Fárs; the martyrdom of the Báb in Ṭabriz, the capital of Azerbaijan; the massacre of the Bábis of Zanján, a town halfway between Ṭabriz and Tehran; and the great butchery in Tehran in 1852, which followed the failed attempt against the life of Naṣiri'd-Din Sháh.

“The Qajars revived the concept of the shah as the shadow of God on earth and exercised absolute powers over the servants of the state. They appointed royal princes to provincial governorships and, in the course of the nineteenth century, increased their power in relation to that of the tribal chiefs, who provided contingents for the shah’s army. Under the Qajars, the merchants and the ulama, or religious leaders, remained important members of the community....

“The Shah was regarded as Vicegerent of the Prophet; consequently his acts were those of an absolute monarch, and his will was the acknowledged law of the State....

“In no court was there more rigid attention paid to ceremony. The looks, words and even the movements of the body were all regulated by the strictest forms. When the King was seated in public his sons, ministers and courtiers stood erect, with their hands crossed and in the exact place belonging to their rank. They watched his looks and a glance was a command. If the Shah spoke to them, a voice replied and the lips moved, but not a motion or gesture betrayed that there was animation in the person thus addressed. The Shah often spoke of himself in the third person, as ‘The King is pleased. The King commands.’ His ministers addressed him with high-sounding titles... For instance he is called... ‘The object of the world’s regard,’ ‘Kiblah i Alam,’ or The Point of the Universe’, ‘King of Kings’, and ‘The Lord of the Universe.’”⁹

⁸ The dynasty of Turkic origin that ruled Persia from 1794 to 1925.

⁹ “1794-1925—Qajar Dynasty,” *globalsecurity.org* (300 N. Washington St. Suite B-100, Alexandria, VA 22314).

See <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iran/history-qajar.htm> (retrieved on 4 July 2019).

Tehran. Golestan Palace (16th-19th century), the royal residence of the Qájár kings



THE BÁB'S RELATIVES

The Báb's father suffered an early death and for this reason His mother moved, together with her Son, to the house of one of her three brothers, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí, who took care of his Nephew with great love. From this House, the “young Prince of Glory”¹⁰ moved at age 15 to Būshihir, a port on the Persian Gulf, where He ran the commercial activities of His maternal uncles. Later the Báb had an independent residence in Shīrāz, where He lived with His mother and His wife. In the summer of 1846, after providing for the future of His mother and His wife, He moved again to His uncle's house, so that He might be ready to leave His town, if the Governor expelled Him—as did soon happen—because of His preaching a new Message (see p. 18).

“As far as the genealogy of the Bab can be traced, it appears that up to the sixth generation his paternal ancestors were all sayyids from Shiraz...¹¹ Though the status of *siyāda* (descendancy from the house of the Prophet) did not indicate any specific material advantage over other families, it contributed to the high esteem that its members enjoyed in Shiraz.”¹²

“His father, Āqá Mír[zá] Muhammad-Ridá, passed away¹³ when the Báb was only nine years old, and from then on He was reared in the bosom of His maternal uncle, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí.”¹⁴

“Like many children of his age and background, when he was only eight or nine, he began to spend part of his time in his father's shop. 'On his father's death... his maternal uncles undertook his education, especially Hājji Mīrzā Sayyid 'Alī, who was reputed to be the most

¹⁰ Shoghi Effendi, in Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers* 657, “Epilogue”.

¹¹ Siyyid (or Sayyid) is a title given in the Muslim World to the descendants of the house of the Prophet. Shīrāz, the capital of the Persian Empire in the 18th century, is today the capital of Fārs, a southern province of Iran.

¹² Amanat, *Resurrection* 110.

¹³ “...at the age of forty-nine, possibly during one of the cholera outbreaks in Fars (circa 1243/1826)” (Amanat, *Resurrection* 111).

¹⁴ Mirza Habibu'llah Afnan (1875-1951, a grandson of the sister of the Báb's wife), *The Genesis of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faiths in Shīrāz and Fārs*. Translated and Annotated by Ahang Rabbani (Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2008) 9.

Shiráz. View of the room where the
Báb was born



sympathetic of the brothers.’¹⁵ Sayyid ‘Alī’s care and attention were not confined to the Bab’s education or investing in trade the capital left by his brother-in-law to support him, but revealed a deep sympathy toward his somewhat unusual nephew. Later he was to play a significant role in the development of the Bab’s early claims and to take an important part in the events of the first two years of the Bab’s residence in Shiraz after his declaration.

“With his father’s death, the hours spent in the bazaar occupied most of Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad’s [the Báb’s given name] time as he continued his practical training in the office of his uncles. Whether this was because of his own disinclination to continue school, lack of financial support, or more probably the concern of his uncles to train him as a merchant rather than anything else, the question of future studies was gradually set aside. One account states that Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad’s own lack of enthusiasm for formal school learning finally forced Shaykh ‘Ābid [His teacher] to send him back to his mother complaining of his strange remarks which were, he thought, beyond the capacity of an ordinary child.”¹⁶

“...reports on the early life of Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad support his portrayal as an unconventional child... once... when his teacher instructed him to memorize the Qur’ānic verse “He is the Deliverer, the All-Knowing” [XXXIV, 25], he insisted first on understanding the meaning, enraging Shaykh ‘Ābid.¹⁷ In another instance he replied to a fellow classmate who asked him about his reluctance to follow the other students in their reading exercises with a couplet from Ḥāfiz: “Hearest thou not the whistle’s call, this snare should now thy prison be”...¹⁸ one of his school friends... remembered that while other students were playing games, Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad spent his time in prayers... a friend of his uncles and a frequent visitor to their house... related that the Bab was deeply devoted to his daily prayers when he was a child of about ten. One day, when Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad had come late to school and was questioned by the schoolmaster, he replied that he had been in the house of his ancestor, presumably referring to the Prophet. To his teacher’s remonstrance that as a child daily prayer was not demanded of him, he

¹⁵ Agha Mirza Muhammad Khan Bahadur, trans., “Some New Notes on Babiism,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, n.v. [July 1927] 443-69 (Extracts translated into English from the unpublished history of Mirzā Aḥmad ibn Abul-Ḥasan Sharīf Shīrāzī Divān Bagī).

¹⁶ Amanat, *Resurrection* 114-5.

¹⁷ Mirzā Ḥabību’llāh ibn Mirzā Āqā Afnān A’lā’i [Mirza Habibu’llah Afnan], *Tarīkh-i Amrī-yi Shīrāz* (INBA [Iranian National Bahá’i Archives] Library, ms. n. 1027d 6-7) 10-1.

¹⁸ Amanat writes that he is quoting the English translation by Arthur J. Arberry, *Fifty Poems of Ḥāfiz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962) 89. In reality Arberry translates this couplet as follows: “Hearest thou not the whistle’s call / From heaven’s rampart shrills for thee? / What chanced I cannot guess at all / This snare should now thy prison be”.

answered, “I wish to be like my ancestor.”¹⁹ Again on a day trip to... [a] shrine... in the neighborhood of Shiraz, his uncle Sayyid ‘Alī was deeply impressed when he found his young nephew in a small cave in the nearby mountain reading his prayers in the middle of the night.”²⁰

“His poor educational background, regarded by his critics as a great handicap to his claims [to be the Qá’im], was considered by him as a divine merit demonstrating his intuitive knowledge...”²¹

“As he himself points out, interestingly enough in his ‘letter to the ‘ulamās [the learned Muslim theologians]:’ ‘When this youth reached the age of compulsory learning, in the tradition of the Prophet of God in the past, he arrived in *Jazīrat al-Baḥr* (lit. the island of the sea; i.e. Būshīhr). He did not study your scientific methods with any of you (i.e. with the ‘ulama) and thus in the preserved tablet of the divine order, he is an uneducated... ‘Ajamī (non-Arab, Persian) and descendant of the Prophet of God.’”²²

¹⁹ Mirzā Abu’l-Faḥr al-Gulpāyigānī (a celebrated Bahá’í scholar) and Sayyid Maḥdī Gulpāyigānī (Mirzā Abu’l-Faḥr’s cousin), *Kaṣṣ al-Ghiṭā ‘an Ḥiyāl al A’dā* (Tashkand, n.d.) 84.

²⁰ Amanat, *Resurrection* 115.

²¹ Amanat, *Resurrection* 117.

²² Amanat, *Resurrection* 121 (brackets of the Author changed into parentheses to distinguish them from our brackets). This excerpt from the Báb’s letter to the ‘ulamās is quoted in INBA, no. 91, XXII, 85-6. See also Abu’l-Qásim Afnán, *‘Aḥd-i-A’lá* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), pp. 107–11. The concept of Muḥammad as an “unlearned” man is part of Islamic Prophetology. The Qur’án must be a totally Divine work, since the Prophet had not by Himself the scholarly capacity for producing such a monumental work.

THE EARLY DISCIPLES: THE LETTERS OF THE LIVING

This is the House where, on 24 May 1844, the Báb gave Mullá Ḥusayn-i-Bushrú'í (circa 1813-1848) the honor of being the first person to recognize Him as the much-anticipated and invoked promised Qá'im of Islam. Within forty days another seventeen people, including a woman, the poetess Tahereh,²³ joined him in that act of allegiance to the Báb, Who called them Letters of the Living. He immediately made it clear that His Revelation would be completed by a Person, "He Whom God will make manifest," to Whom, when He appeared, His followers were expected to submit. In 1863 one of His disciples, Mirzá Ḥusayn-'Alí-i-Núri (1817-1892), announced that He was that Person, and made Himself known as Bahá'u'lláh (see "Introduction," pp. 16 and 44-5). Most of the Bábis later followed Him.

"The birth of the Babi movement should thus be seen as a spontaneous process that engaged claimant and converts alike in a messianic enterprise. The fulfillment of such an enterprise may seem like an irrational indulgence in fantasies by a handful of remote individuals isolated from the realities of their time. Yet owing to its very formation, the Babi movement was an attempt to employ the sanctified ideals of the past... to interpret a changing age... They were too preoccupied with their Utopian ideals to plan a sensible and effective course of action and... too inconsistent to execute it. Yet they had a dynamism in their outlook and a will to put their message across that most of their contemporaries lacked."²⁴

"In the aftermath of the Babi persecutions of 1852... Bahá'ulláh gradually transformed the messianic militancy of the Babis into a pacifist, largely nonpolitical current.... The Bahá'í current most effectively regained the loyalty of the Babis, to whom it offered ethical values attuned with temporal success and a theology reasonably rationalized to relieve the community from excessive preoccupation with ritual and religious prohibitions. The social message of the new faith spilled over the bounds of Babi religion and implied in its universalism a greater reconciliation with the needs of the modern secular world. Increasingly in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, Bahá'í social doctrine tended to... move in the direction of modern morality and ethics."²⁵

²³ Tahereh (circa 1817-1852), born to a family of celebrated Persian priests, was one of the very few learned women in her country. See Bahiyih Nakhjavani, *The woman who read too much* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

²⁴ Amanat, *Resurrection* 207.

²⁵ Amanat, *Resurrection* 414. The Bahá'ís consider themselves lovers of peace, but not strictly pacifists.

Shiráz. The Báb's House where He
declared His mission



THE UNHEEDED ANNOUNCEMENT: MECCA AND MEDINA

At the beginning of October 1844, the Báb sailed on board a vessel similar to those drawn in the image at p. 18, from the port of Būshihir on the Persian Gulf to Mecca and Medina. He was accompanied by Quddús (circa 1822-1849), the most illustrious of the Letters of the Living, and His faithful Ethiopian servant Mubárak (Benedict). In front of the Kaaba He declared, before hundreds of pilgrims, that He was the promised Qā'im of Islam. He also sent a number of His Writings to the Sheriff of Mecca, through Quddús. But His announcement remained unheeded.

“The Bab’s pilgrimage to Mecca was intended primarily as the first stage of his public declaration... [A Bábí historian]... clearly states that at the end of the Ḥajj [pilgrimage], when the floor and the roof of Masjid al-Ḥarām [the Great Mosque of Mecca] were entirely filled with pilgrims, the Bab stood against the wall, holding the ring knob of the Ka’ba door and three times in ‘the most eloquent and exquisite voice’ announced, ‘I am that Qā’im whom you were expecting.’ [The same historian]... continues: ‘It was extraordinary, that in spite of the noise, immediately the crowd became so silent that even the flapping of the wings of a passing sparrow was audible.’²⁶ All the pilgrims heard the Bab’s call, he maintains, and interpreted it for one another. They discussed it, and reported the new proclamation in letters to the people in their homelands... The Bab’s own account makes clear that his declaration did not meet wide response, favorable or unfavorable... [and] acknowledges the pilgrims’ general lack of insight in recognizing his true position...”²⁷

²⁶ Afnān, *Tarīkh* 40-1.

²⁷ Amanat, *Resurrection* 243-4.

Old Persian vessels in the
port of Búshihr, where
the Báb embarked on His
pilgrimage to Mecca



EARLY BELIEVERS IN PERSIA AND THE ‘ATABÁT

Soon after His Declaration, the Báb sent His first disciples to Persia and the ‘Atabát²⁸ to announce the advent of the Promised One of Islam. Among the first of those who received and accepted that announcement was Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí-i-Núri (see “Introduction,” pp. 12 and 44-5), a nobleman of the province of Núr in Persia, Who, later in 1863, founded the Bahá’í Faith under the name of Bahá’u’lláh. The Báb went to Mecca to proclaim the new advent, but only after having been informed of Bahá’u’lláh’s enrolment in the new Cause. The Báb’s envoys recruited many followers, but also aroused the opposition of the religious and political, Shiite and Sunni establishment. The treatment accorded to the first of the Báb’s disciples sent to bring His announcement to the ‘Atabát was emblematic. He was brought before a court in Baghdad and sentenced to hard labor. Transferred to Constantinople to serve the sentence, he died shortly after, seemingly because of hardship. Meanwhile, another assembly of Muslim lawyers in the same town declared a book revealed by the Báb to be heretic and its author and propagators worthy of death.

“The spirit of impending Qiyāma [the advent of the Qá’im, the Promised One] preached by the Babi emissaries alarmed the Shi’ite establishment to the extent of allowing solicitation from Turkish authorities. Fears of recurring unrest and the ominous prospects of a shifting loyalty among the Shi’ite rank and file were grave enough to push the reluctant mujtahids [a Shi’ite doctor of law] onto the bosom of the shrewd pasha [the Turkish governor of the province]... [who] used the occasion to convene an ecumenical assembly...

“Despite all the traditional enmities and irreconcilable doctrinal divisions between the Sunnis and the Shi’ites, condemnation of a new heresy was one issue upon which a consensus was conceivable and necessary. The concluding fatwā [an Islamic legal pronouncement] condemning the new da’wa [missionary activity] in the strongest terms... demonstrated that doctrinal conflicts, acute as they were even in the nineteenth century, could be temporarily bridged when the threat of a new schism loomed large.”²⁹

²⁸ Literally “the (sacred) thresholds,” an Iraqi region so called because of the presence within its borders of four towns, sacred for the Shi’i world for the presence of the shrines of six Imams.

²⁹ Amanat, *Resurrection* 237-8.

Baghdad. A mosque and the market place



THE BÁB IN SHÍRÁZ AFTER HIS PILGRIMAGE

From this pulpit the Báb reassured the Muslims concerned about His messianic announcement, uttering these solemn words: “O people! Know this well that I speak what My Grandfather,³⁰ the Messenger of God, spoke twelve hundred and sixty years ago, and I do not speak what My Grandfather did not. ‘What Muhammad made lawful remains lawful unto the Day of Resurrection and what He forbade remains forbidden unto the Day of Resurrection.’”³¹ Alas, all to no avail. The establishment, frightened by His growing ascendancy, became increasingly hostile to Him and finally on 23 September 1846 He was expelled from the city.

“Withdrawn within himself, always absorbed in pious practices, of extreme simplicity of manner, of a fascinating gentleness, those gifts further heightened by his great youth and his marvellous charm, he [the Báb] drew about himself a number of persons who were deeply edified. People then began to speak of his science and of the penetrating eloquence of his discourses. He could not open his lips (we are assured by those who knew him) without stirring the hearts to their very depths.

“Speaking, moreover, with a profound reverence regarding the Prophet, the Imáms and their holy companions, he fascinated the severely orthodox while, at the same time, in more intimate addresses, the more ardent and eager minds were happy to find that there was no rigidity in his profession of traditional opinions which they would have found boring. His conversations, on the contrary, opened before them unlimited horizons, varied, colored, mysterious, with shadows broken here and there by patches of blinding light which transported those imaginative people of Persia into a state of ecstasy.”³²

³⁰ The Báb was a descendant of Muḥammad, and thus He was entitled to call the Muslim Prophet “Grandfather”.

³¹ Hasan M. Balyuzi, *The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973) 98.

³² Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882, French author and philosopher), *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale* (Paris, Rue de Sèvres: Les Éditions G. Crés et Cie., 1928) 118; English translation in Emily McBride Périgord, *Translation of French Foot-Notes of The Dawn-Breakers* (Wilmette, Illinois, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1939), “Pages 79-80, Note 4” 10.

Shiráz. Masjid-i-Vakíl
from whose pulpit the
Báb addressed the con-
gregation and clarified
His claims



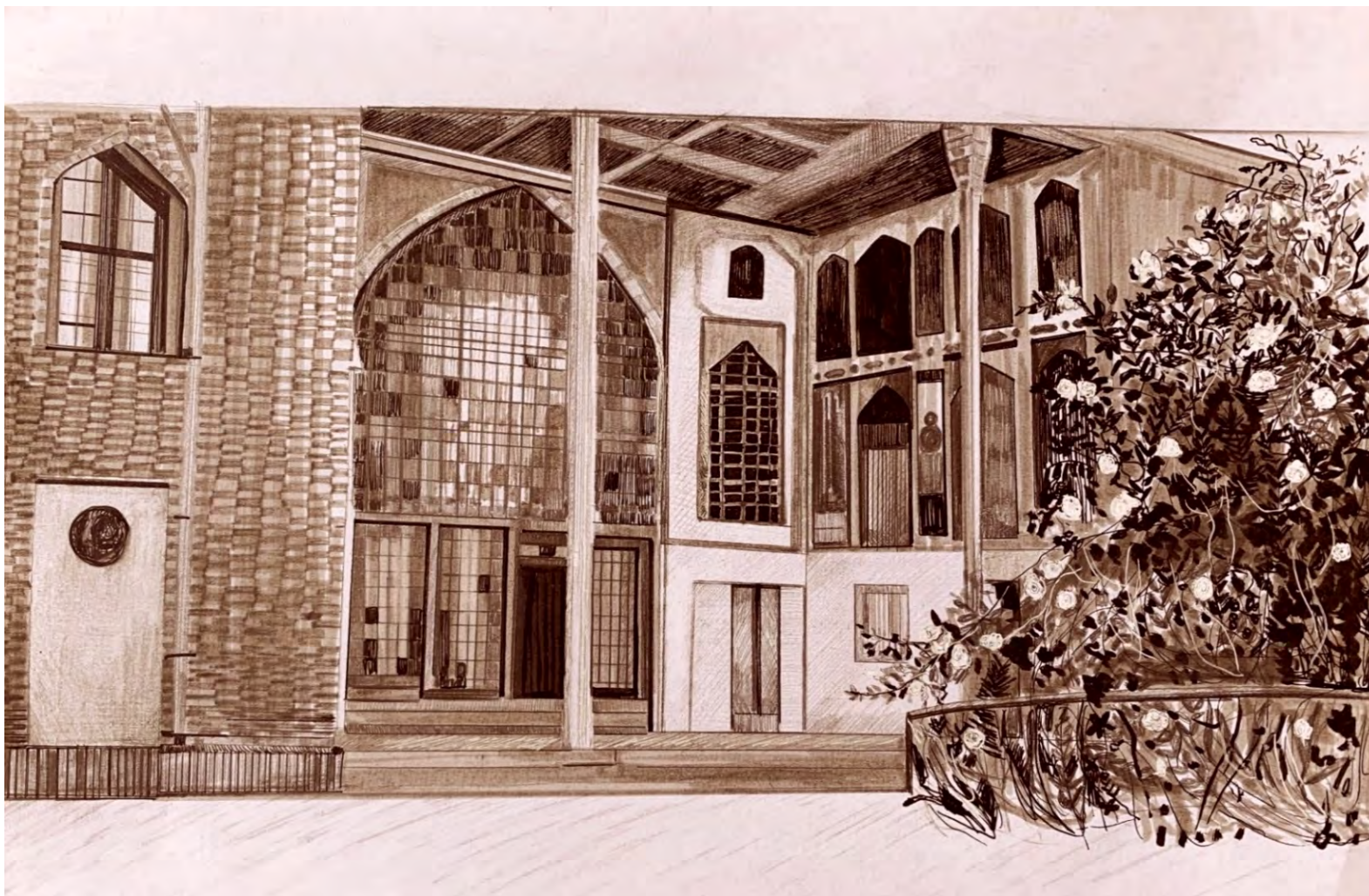
FRIENDS AND FOES IN IṢFĀHĀN

When the Báb was expelled from Shīrāz, He moved to Iṣfāhān, the Persian town well-known today for its splendid 16th-17th century architecture. Manūchihr Khān-i-Gurjī, the powerful Governor of the province, asked the most important ‘ulamā’ of the city to accommodate Him and the theologian received Him with full honors. Getting to know the Báb better, the Governor hosted Him in his magnificent residence, known as Imārat-i-Khurshīd, “Palace of the sun”, accepted His Message, protected Him from the many enemies that surrounded Him and finally offered Him all his substance for the dissemination of His teachings. However, a few weeks after this generous offer, he passed away. The Báb was then summoned to court by the Shah, who was very curious about this Person so much spoken of throughout his Kingdom. On March 1847 He set out from the city under escort and proceeded towards the capital.

“Manūchihr Khān’s motives aside, the successive episodes of Shiraz and Isfahan illustrated above all the potency of the ‘ulama’s opposition. Even the support of a governor unique in his own time for autonomy and control of the clergy could not guarantee the free advocacy of an otherwise popular movement, even when combined with the backing of an influential imām jum’a [the most important imam of the town]. The case of Isfahan was more or less true wherever the agents of the state showed the slightest leniency to the new movement. Whatever the Bab’s and his followers’ expectations, the failure of Manūchihr Khān also ruled out the possibility of coming to terms with the state...”³³

³³ Amanat, *Resurrection* 258.

Iṣfáhán. The residence of Manúchíhr Khán-i-Gurjí, the Governor who hosted and protected the Báb from the hostile clergy



TRAVEL ENCOUNTERS FROM IŞFÁHÁN TO ṬABRÍZ

While traveling under armed escort towards Tehran, where the Shah had summoned Him, the Báb made a stop in Káshán, an ancient town midway between Işfáhán and the Persian capital. In this place He spent the third Naw-Rúz [21 March 1847, Persian New Year] after His Declaration as a guest of one of His followers, Ḥájí Mirzá Janí. Here He also met His host's brother, who was a poet, and whose pen-name was Dhabíḥ (meaning “slaughtered”). Later the Bábí poet wrote that he had foreseen the Báb's arrival in his hometown more than 20 years earlier: “Whether it was a vision or a dream, I cannot say what state I was in, / I only know that I saw him, twenty years prior to his Advent.”³⁴

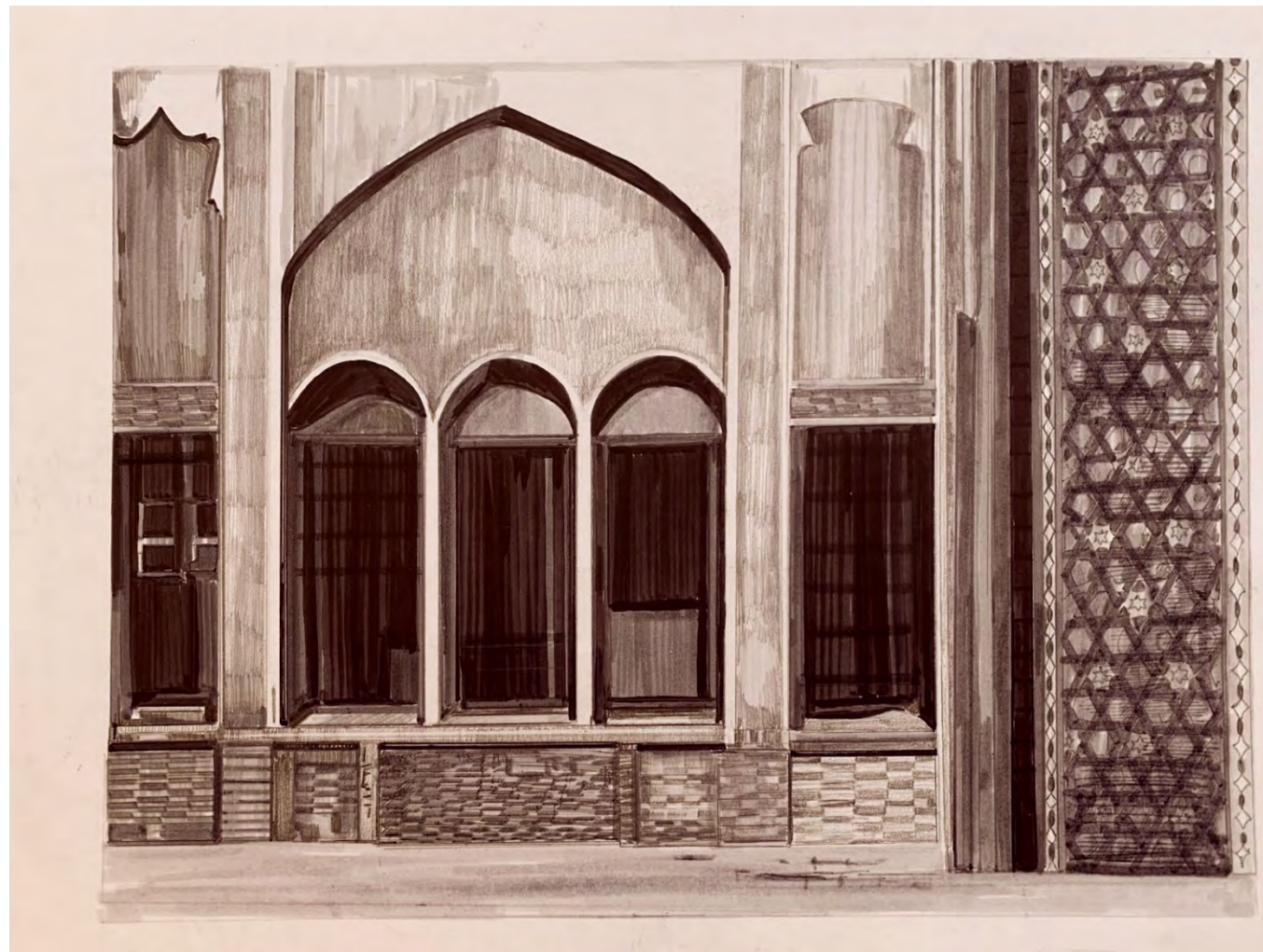
“The Kāshānī Babís also offered their assistance to the Bab to be rescued from the government escort that was taking him to the capital. Zabíḥ, in conformity with the other believers, declared that they were ready to provide the necessary means for his escape, ‘and we will attend and accompany you wherever it be; for we will thankfully and gladly give up our lives, our wealth, our wives, and our children for your sake.’³⁵ The Bab's response to this offer was his usual unwillingness to take any violent action lest such action would ruin his dim chances of coming to terms with the government: ‘We need the help and support of none but God, and His will only do we regard.’”³⁶

³⁴ Amanat, *Resurrection* 346. See Ḥájí Mirzá Muḥammad Ismā‘íl [Fānī] Zabíḥ Kāshānī, *Maṣnavī* (Mināsīān Collection, Wadham College Library, Oxford, Ms. no. 87) 2 b-3 a.

³⁵ *The Ṭārīkh-i-Jadíd or New History of Mirzá ‘Alí-Muḥammad the Báb*, translated from the Persian by E. G. Browne (London: Cambridge University Press, 1893) 216. See https://bahai-library.com/hamadani_browne_tarikh_jadid (retrieved on 29 March 2019).

³⁶ Amanat, *Resurrection* 346-7. The Báb's words are quoted in *Ṭārīkh-i-Jadíd* 216.

Káshán. Hájí Mirzá Janí's house,
where the Báb spent Naw-Rúz 1847



MÁH-KÚ: THE “OPEN MOUNTAIN”

When the Báb was very close to the capital, the Shah, pressed by his jealous Grand Vizier, cancelled their meeting and exiled Him to the Castle of Máh-Kú, in Persian Azerbaijan, the northernmost province of the Empire. In this fortress the Báb spent nine months between 1847 and 1848. Initially He was subjected to a strict isolation, but later He won the allegiance of the warden of the Castle and thus He could receive His disciples who came there to attain His presence. For this reason, He named that somber place the “Open Mountain.” At Naw-Rúz 1848, Mullá Ḥusayn-i-Buṣhrú’i, His first disciple, arrived in the Castle and the Prophet-Herald foretold the imminent martyrdom of both.

“Resignation and willingness to die are a predominant theme in the Bab’s writings of the Azarbaijan period, paralleling his utmost reluctance to accept exile and imprisonment. His complaints rang with the indignation of a wronged ascetic dishonored by the king’s heedless treatment. In another letter to the shah, from Mākū, he makes his objection bitterly plain: ‘When I learned of your command, I wrote to the administrator of the kingdom: “By God! Kill me and send my head wherever you please because for me to live and be sentenced to the place of the criminals is not honorable.” No reply was ever received since I am certain his excellency the Ḥajji [the Grand Vizier Ḥájí Mírzá Āqásí] has not fully brought the matter to your attention.’”³⁷

³⁷ Amanat, *Resurrection* 373. This letter addressed by the Báb to the Shah is quoted in INBA, no. 64, 103-26 (117-8).

Máh-Kú. The Castle where the Báb was imprisoned for nine months between 1847 and 1848



CHIHRIQ: THE “GRIEVOUS MOUNTAIN”

At the beginning of April 1848 the Báb was transferred from Máh-Kú to the even more remote Castle of Chihríq, by order of the Grand Vizier, which was solicited by the Russian Minister. Both of them feared lest the reputation acquired by the Prisoner in that inhospitable place would generate disturbances. In that Castle, dominated by a peak that He surnamed “Grievous Mountain”, the Báb spent more than two years, from 1848 to 1850. From there He openly proclaimed Himself to be the promised Qá’im of Islám and apostrophized Muḥammad Sháh and his Prime Minister, Háji Mírzá Āqásí, sending to them strong letters of condemnation for having opposed His reforming mission. Meanwhile, in the summer of 1848, His disciples had gathered in the village of Badasht in the northwestern province of Khurásán, for a Conference during which they proclaimed the independence of the new Faith.

“The Bab’s open repudiation of the shah and Āqāsī is symbolic of his growing impatience with the state authorities, whom he now holds, together with the ‘ulama, accountable for opposition to his cause. But his criticism of the state is still primarily motivated by religious concerns rather than temporal ambitions. The myth of martyrdom and the predestined divine plan, as the Bab saw it, prevented him from entertaining any immediate desire for political power. He remains a prophet who, in spite of his sharp criticism of the temporal ruler, is essentially loyal to the de facto separation of the religious and political spheres, a position that is further developed in the *Bayān* [the Báb’s book of laws] into a de jure distinction.”³⁸

[At the beginning of the Conference of Badasht] “... They were all unanimous as to this point, that Seyyèd Ali Mohammed was a new prophet, greater than those who preceded him and, even as Jesus abrogated the law of Moses, even as Mohammed abrogated that of Christ, the Bab abrogated the Qoran, which was represented by this formula: ‘God has manifested Himself and the previous religion is abrogated; the old law is uprooted, one must sow the new one among men.’”³⁹

³⁸ Amanat, *Resurrection* 383.

³⁹ A.-L.-M. (Louis Alphonse Daniel) Nicolas (1864-1939, Persian born French orientalist), *Seyyed Ali Mohammed dit Le Bab. Les religions des Peuples Civilises* (Paris: Dujarric & Cie, Editeurs, 1905) 280. See <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5715455v.texteImage> (retrieved on 4 July 2019).

Chihriq. The Castle where
the Báb was imprisoned
from 1848 to 1850



According to many authors, the Bábí Faith is an independent religion calling for a mystical and religious reform of Islam. Some of them considered it as a genuinely revolutionary movement, a forerunner of the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905. From the spiritual point of view, the Báb teaches a metaphorical reading of certain passages from the Koran and the Traditions, and highlights the essential importance of the virtuous life prescribed by Islam's Holy Book. Socially, the new Master refuses, in the name of God, the laws of Muslim societies that He considered outdated and repressive, especially those regulating the condition of women, children, slaves, convicts and non-Muslims. He condemns the secular alliance between the sword and the turban; castigates the tyranny of the rulers; deplores the oppression suffered by the people; supports equal rights between men and women and the necessity of universal education; calls for the abolition of slavery and of the death penalty; recommends the re-education of delinquents; and rejects any corporal punishment. His most heated criticism hits the affluent clergy that He considers responsible for the cultural backwardness of the population.¹⁰ According to Abbas Amanat, a well-known historian of the Middle East, "at the heart of the Babi ethos was a spirit of rebellion against social injustice and moral mischief, for which the Babis held both the ruler and the 'ulama responsible."¹¹ These strong and earnest solicitations of justice and peace resonate in the verses of the Bábí poetess, Tahirih (see p. 12 and note 23). We quote some of them.

...Cast aside the clouds to show
them the sun in its full splendour
by removing the veils
from the beauty of your face
so that the wise ones
will become astonished with wonderment
and those whose brains have withered
will be replenished with wisdom...
so that the slave and the master
will become so intermingled
that no distinction between them
can be found.¹²

⁴⁰ See Foad Sabéran, «Les bahá'ís : le destin tragique d'une communauté réprimée en Iran», in *Orients stratégiques* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015-), n. 5 (2017), 68.

⁴¹ Amanat, *Resurrection* 407.

⁴² John S. Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat (ed.), *The poetry of Ṭáhirih* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2002) 38.

Look up! Our dawning day draws its first breath!
The world grows light! Our souls begin to glow!
No ranting shaykh rules from his pulpit throne!
No mosque hawks holiness it does not know!
No sham, no pious fraud, no priest commands!
The turban's knot cut to its root below!
No more conjurations! No spells! No ghosts!
Good riddance! We are done with folly's show!
The search for Truth shall drive out ignorance
Equality shall strike the despots low
Let warring ways be banished from the world
Let Justice everywhere its carpet throw
May friendship ancient hatreds reconcile
May love grow from the seed of love we sow!⁴³

... The day of truth is here! Lies have turned to dust!
Order, justice, law are now possible.
Smashed, the despot's fist! God's hand opens;
grace pours down-not sorrow, pain, and trouble
Minds in darkness now burn light with knowledge
Tell the priest: Shut your book! Lock the temple!
Hatred and doubt once poisoned all the world.
The bloodied cup holds milk now-pure, ample!
Let nations hear who's come to set them free:
Broken the chain, and smashed the manacle!⁴⁴

⁴³ Amin Banani (ed.), *Táhirih: A Portrait in Poetry. Selected Poems of Qurratu'l-'Ayn* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2005) 47, trans. Jascha Kessler.

⁴⁴ Banani (ed.), *Táhirih* 79, trans. Jascha Kessler.

THE CHALLENGE IN ṬABRÍZ

During summer 1848 the Báb was brought to Ṭabriz to be examined by a mixed secular and religious court, strongly determined to humiliate Him. But He availed Himself of that sham trial to openly proclaim His Mission. Irritated by the Báb's unruffled majesty, the priests—alarmed by His open denunciation of their temporal power—convinced the lay members of the court to approve their verdict that He should be bastinadoed. In the courtyard shown in the illustration at p. 31, the cruel Shaykhu'l-Islám, the head of the religious court of the city, personally attended to the enforcement of the sentence, which was executed with such cruelty as to cause conspicuous injuries on the face of the Prophet-Herald.

“The trial of Tabriz symbolized the ongoing encounter between two opposing interpretations of religion. Whatever the outcome, here was a messianic claimant who sought to restore the long-overshadowed authority of the Imam [i.e. Scripture] by challenging the legitimacy of the mujtahids who claimed the Imam's collective deputyship [i.e. the authority of interpreting Scripture] in their own right. The confrontation between the ‘prophet’ and the ‘priests’ brought to the surface the deep tension ingrained within the body of Shi'ism. The gulf of difference between the two world views could not have been bridged by a theological disputation. The irreconcilability of the two positions was clear at the outset and neither side seems to have had any illusions. What the Tabriz trial denoted, however, was the struggle for winning over the public.

“The victory of the ‘ulama was partial at best. Popular sympathy for the Bab forced them to be more cautious and less candid in their judgment.”¹⁵

⁴⁵ Amanat, *Resurrection* 393.

Ṭabriz. The Namáz-
khānih (prayer-house)
of Mīrzá ‘Alī-Aṣghar,
the Shaykhu’l-Islām of
the city, where the Báb
was bastinadoed



During July 1848, while in Mashhad, the Persian holy city par excellence, Mullá Ḥusayn-i-Buṣhrú'í received a message from the Báb inviting him to hoist the Black Standard of Muslim tradition,⁴⁶ to rally his fellow disciples and join Quddús to proclaim the advent of the Qá'im. Mullá Ḥusayn obeyed and immediately set off. Along the way he enrolled those of his fellow-believers who were willing to follow him. Attacked for no reason by the population of Bárfurúsh, Máẓindarán, on 10 October 1848, he and his companions took refuge in the Shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsí located a short distance from the town, where they built a fort for self-defense. According to the canons of Islam they felt entitled to fight back against the unwarranted armed attacks of their opponents. Later, besieged by an imposing army, they heroically withstood their assaults until May 1849, when they abandoned their fort after a solemn promise of peace signed by the Commander of the Imperial army, a promise that was totally disregarded. The long battle ended with the massacre of almost all the Bábis.

“According to the latest news received by the Government of the Shah, the expedition against the Babis in Mazindaran has put an end to his worries.

“When, according to the Prime Minister, those fanatics risked leaving the little fortress where they had fortified themselves, the troops of Abbas-Quli Khan Larijani and Sulayman Khan Afshar [two generals of the Shah] engaged them in combat, as a result of which 1,300 men were left on the battlefield. Others maintain, and their stories sound less suspicious to me, that the Babis were invited to leave their fortifications in order to come to a friendly agreement; and when they were coming out, they were attacked and pitilessly slaughtered by the troops of Sulayman Khan.

“Perhaps you, Your Excellency, will think that the successes thus achieved are more worthy of pity than defeats, because the indignation which these successes arouse in questions where religious fanaticism is supreme, excites the spirit of a new and even more dangerous resistance.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ According to Muslim tradition, the advent of the Promised One will be proclaimed by a group of horsemen from the Persian north-eastern region of Khurásán, whose capital is Mashhad, who will march hoisting black banners.

⁴⁷ Prince Dimitri Dolgorukov, a Russian diplomat in Persia, to the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Karl Robert Nesselrode, 5 May 1849, quoted in Momen, *Religions* 94-5.

The shrine of
Shaykh Ṭabarsí,
the scene of the he-
roic deeds of Mullá
Ḥusayn and his
companions



THE SEVEN MARTYRS OF TEHRAN: THE COURAGE OF INNER CONSISTENCY

Many Bábís were slain in the Sabzih-Maydán, the market place of Tehran, first among them were the so-called Seven Martyrs of Tehran, seven heroic believers who did not adopt the practice of *kitmán*, literally “concealment,” recognized in the Islamic world, which authorizes a believer to conceal his faith when faced by serious religious persecution, and accepted with gladness to be martyred. One of them, while being slaughtered, sang these verses by an unknown poet: “The thought of the Beloved fills my Spirit, / There is not left for aught beside a place; / Let the foeman take the Here and the Hereafter; / Enough for me to see the Loved One’s face!”⁴⁸

“... These persons, numbering seven, and arrested at random, since the Babis are counted already by thousands within the very capital, would by no means deny their faith and met death with an exultation which could only be explained as fanaticism brought to its extreme limit. The Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs... on the contrary affirms that those people have confessed nothing and that their silence was interpreted as a sufficient proof of their guilt.

“One can only regret the blindness of the Shah’s authorities who imagine that such measures could extinguish religious fanaticism, as well as the injustice which guides their actions when examples of cruelty, with which they are trying to frighten the people, are committed without distinction against the first passer-by who falls into their hands....”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Tárikh-i-Jadid* 257.

⁴⁹ Prince Dolgorukov, to Count Nesselrode, 12 February 1850, in Momen, *Religions* 104.

Tehran. The Sabzih-Maydán,
where many Bábís were ruth-
lessly slaughtered



THE NAYRÍZ UPHEAVAL: VAHÍD AND HIS COMPANIONS

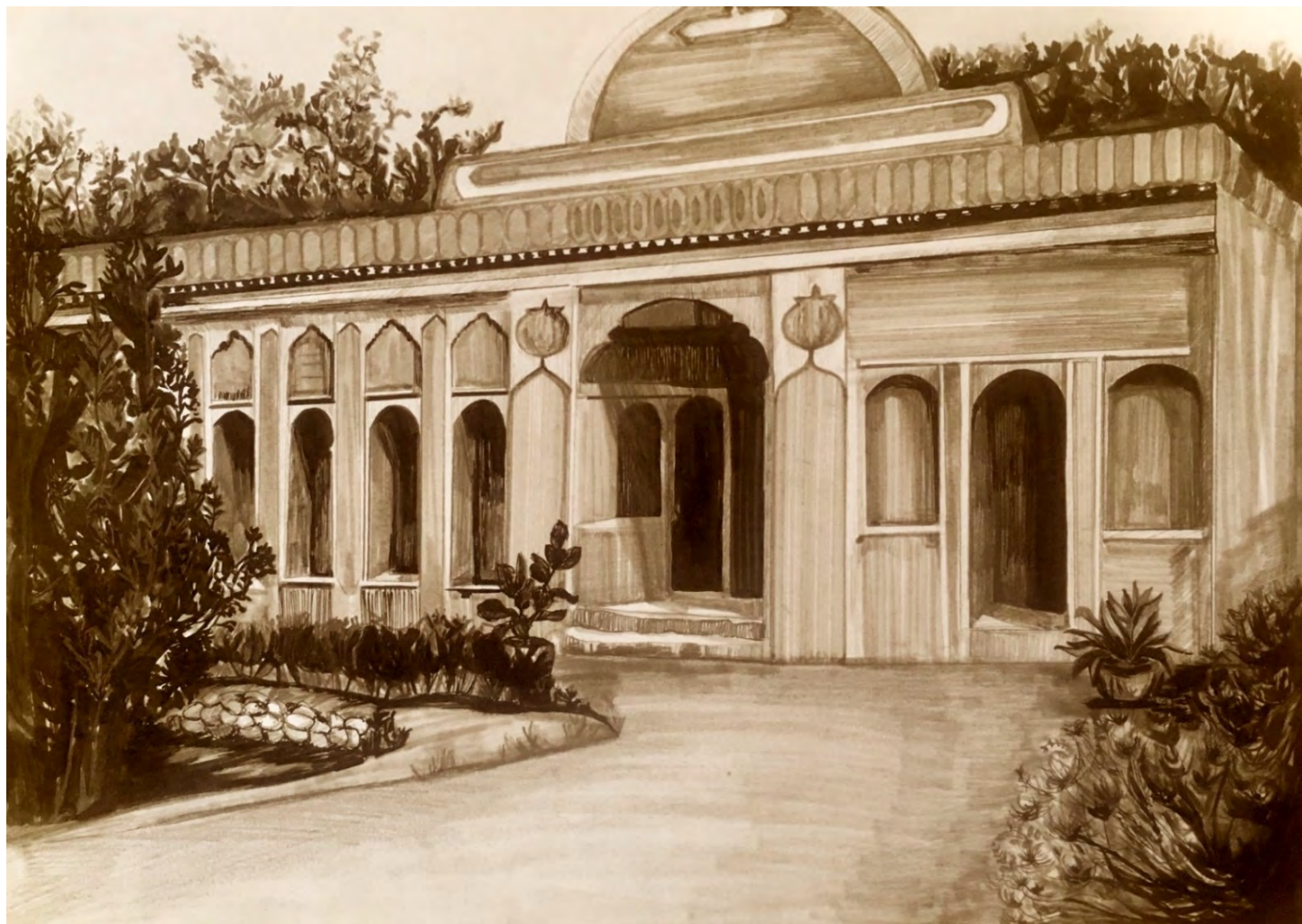
From 27 May to 21 June 1850, secular and clerical forces joined against the peaceful Bábís of Nayríz, a town in the southern province of Fárs, to prevent them from professing and spreading their new Faith. The Bábís were led by the famous Siyyid Yáhyá, surnamed Vahíd (the peerless) by the Báb, one of the most distinguished theologians of Persia who had embraced the Message of the Báb. Those combined forces fought the Bábís by fair means or foul and finally convinced them, with false promises of peace, to renounce defending themselves, and then killed them all in the most ruthless ways. A Bahá'í historian remarks: "Although a famous town in ancient Iran, when the Bab declared His Mission in 1844, Nayriz was an obscure place on the map of that country. What made it prominent again was the heroism of the Babis of the town who fought alongside Jinab-i-Vahid in the Fort of Khajih and defended their right to adhere to a new system of belief they considered the pathway to individual and collective transformation and salvation."⁵⁰

"The sect of the Bábís is increasing each day, and now counts numerous new adherents in every province. They have had more successes than reverses during the course of this month. Their position is good in Iraq, Gílán, Mázindarán, Yazd and Kirmán, but they have suffered a check in Fárs, when Siyyid Yahyá, one of their leaders, who had taken possession of the fortress of Nayríz, situated in the west of this province, was attacked, defeated and made prisoner by the troops sent against him by Fírúz Mírzá [the Qajár prince governing Nayríz in those years]... what is certain is that all the sectaries who have been executed up to this day have borne their punishment with a courage and a faith worthy of the heroic times of the first martyrs."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Baharieh Rouhani Maani (the author of a biography of the women closest to Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb), "Eyewitness Account of the Massacre of Baha'is in Nayriz on the Naw-Ruz 'Abdu'l-Baha Interred the Remains of the Bab on Mount Carmel," in *Lights of 'Irfán* 14 (Wilmette, Illinois: Haj Mehdi Armand Colloquium, 2013): 240-1. See http://irfancolloquia.org/113/ma%27ani_nayriz (retrieved on 4 July 2019).

⁵¹ Joseph Philippe Ferrier, a French soldier in Persia, to Jean-Ernest Ducos Vicomte de LaHitte, French Minister of Foreign Affair, 25 July 1850, quoted in Momen, *Religions* 111, 112.

Nayríz. The house of Vaḥíd,
the famous theologian who as-
sisted the Bábis during the
Nayríz upheaval



JULY 9 IN ṬABRÍZ: LOYALTY AND DISLOYALTY

The decision to execute the Báb was made by Mirzá Taqí Khán, the Grand Vizier of Nāṣiri'd-Din Sháh. He was concerned because of the growing fame of the Prophet-Herald, exasperated by the resistance of His followers to the State forces that tried to prevent them from professing and spreading the new Message and hostile to the spiritual and social renewal that He preached. The Báb and His young companion to whom He granted the privilege of sharing His martyrdom emerged unscathed from a first volley of 750 muskets, but their bodies were immediately after crushed by a second platoon who volunteered to replace the first, who after that extraordinary event had refused to repeat the attempted execution. This unusual event is reported by many Western sources, including in a letter sent by the diplomat Justin Sheil, who was in Persia at that time, to Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston, British Foreign Secretary, on 22 July 1850, preserved in the archives of the Foreign Office.⁵²

“... The Báb’s passionate sincerity could not be doubted, for he had given his life for his faith. And that there must be something in his message that appealed to men and satisfied their souls was witnessed to by the fact that thousands gave their lives in his cause and millions now follow him. If a young man could, in only six years of ministry, by the sincerity of his purpose and the attraction of his personality, so inspire rich and poor, cultured and illiterate, alike, with belief in himself and his doctrines that they would remain staunch though hunted down and without trial sentenced to death, sawn asunder, strangled, shot, blown from guns; and if men of high position and culture in Persia, Turkey and Egypt in numbers to this day [1923] adhere to his doctrines, his life must be one of those events in the last hundred years which is really worth study.”⁵³

“... Christians believe that if Jesus Christ had wished to come down from the cross he could have done so easily; he died of his own free will because it was written that he should and in order that the prophecies might be fulfilled. The same is true of the Báb, so the Bábís say, who, in this way, gave a clear sanction to his teachings. He likewise died voluntarily because his death was to be the salvation of humanity. Who will ever tell us the words that the Báb uttered in the midst of the unprecedented turmoil which broke out as he ascended? Who will ever know the memories which stirred his noble soul? Who will reveal to us the secret of that death....”⁵⁴

⁵² See Momen, *Religions* 78.

⁵³ Sir Francis Younghusband (1863-1942, a British explorer and spiritual writer), *The Gleam* (London, John Murray, 1923) 183-4.

⁵⁴ Nicolas, *Sıyyid ‘Alī-Muḥammad* 376; English translation in *Translation of the French Notes of the Dawn-Breakers* 60, “Pages 514-6, Note 2” 60.”

Ṭabriz. The barrack-square
where the Báb was martyred



ZANJÁN UPHEAVAL: THE ENTHUSIASM OF FAITH

From 13 May 1850 to early January 1851, the combined forces of the State, and of the Zanján clergy, fought the Bábís led by Ḥujjat. He was a well-known theologian who was greatly admired and loved by Muḥammad Sháh, but unpopular among his colleagues, who were envious of both his growing fame and the favor of the King. He became a Bábí around summer 1845 and immediately began to actively spread the new spiritual Message. The establishment wanted to prevent him and the Bábís of Zanján, peaceful people, respectful of laws, from professing and spreading their Faith. A bloody conflict followed during which the Bábí forces were always victorious, but gradually became weaker and weaker due to their repeated human losses and their inability to replace their fallen fighters, because of the close siege to which they were subjected. Only when Ḥujjat was wounded and killed, was their resistance broken. In early January 1851 the Zanján upheaval ended in a terrible bloodbath. This “terrific siege and slaughter”⁵⁵ is considered the most cruel and painful episode in Bábí-Bahá’í history.⁵⁶

“...Zenjan has been at length captured.... [Ḥujjat], the leader of the insurgents, had received a wound in the arm, which terminated in his death. His followers dismayed by the loss of their chief, yielded to an assault which their relaxation in the energy of their defence encouraged the commander of the Shah’s troops to make. This success was followed by a great atrocity. The pusillanimity of the troops, which the events of this siege had rendered so notorious, was equalled by their ferocity. All the captives were bayoneted by the soldiers in cold blood, to avenge... the slaughter of their comrades... Four hundred persons are said to have perished in this way, among whom it is believed were some women and children.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ George Nathaniel Curzon (1859-1925, a British politician, traveler, and writer) *Persia and the Persian Question* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892) 1: 498, note 2.

⁵⁶ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 46, chapter 3.

⁵⁷ Justin Sheil, a British soldier and diplomat in Persia, to Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston, British Foreign Secretary, 6 January 1851, quoted in Momen, *Religions* 123.

Zanján. Square where Huj-
jat's body was left exposed
for three days



THE “GREAT MASSACRE” OF 1852

On 15 August 1852 three young Bábís, blinded by grief for having lost the Báb as well as many of their comrades, attempted to take the life of Náṣiri’-d-Dín Sháh, but failed to kill him. A massacre followed that has been defined by a French historian as “a day perhaps unparalleled in the history of the world.”⁵⁸ At the Gate of Naw, one of the gates in the North of Tehran, standing between the market and the Sabzi-Maydán, where many Bábís were martyred, the remains of many of those Bábís, who were brutally slaughtered in those terrible days were hung.

“...this attempt itself (apart from the fact that, so far as can be ascertained, it was utterly unauthorised on the part of the Bábi leaders) was caused by the desperation to which the Bábís had been driven by a long series of cruelties, and especially by the execution of their Founder in 1850. Amongst the victims also, were several persons who, inasmuch as they had been in captivity for many months, were manifestly innocent of complicity in the plot, notably the beautiful Ḳurratu’l-‘Ayn [one of the titles of the poetess Tahereh], whose heroic fortitude under the most cruel tortures excited the admiration and wonder of Dr Polak [the physician of the Shah], the only European, probably who witnessed her death.

“These executions were not merely criminal, but foolish. The barbarity of the persecutors defeated its own ends, and instead of inspiring terror, gave the martyrs and opportunity of exhibiting a heroic fortitude which has done more than any propaganda, however skilful, could have done to ensure the triumph of the cause for which they died.... The impression produced by such exhibitions of courage and endurance was profound and lasting; nay, the faith which inspired the martyrs was often contagious....”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ernest Renan, *The Apostles*. Translated from the original French (New York, Carleton; Paris: Michel Levy Frères, 1866) 283.

⁵⁹ Edward G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians* (London: Messrs. A. and C. Black, Ltd, 1893) 111-2.

Tehran. The Gate of Naw, on whose sides the bodies of many Bábí martyrs were suspended



As soon as Mírzā Ḥusayn-‘Alíy-i-Nūrí embraced the Message of the Báb in 1844, He immediately became an active supporter of His new Faith. Initially the early Bábis considered Him as one of their many fellow-believers. But very soon at least three of the eighteen Letters of the Living, Quddūs, Mullá Ḥusayn-i-Buṣhrú’í and Tahirih, recognized His greatness. In 1852 He was arrested on suspicion of being one of the “damnable conspirators”⁶⁰ involved in the attempt on the life of the Shah, and was cast into the most terrible of the dungeons of Tehran. In a few months, though, His innocence was conclusively established, and thus He was released from prison, but condemned to exile, which He chose to spend in Baghdad. In that city many Bábis went to Him seeking encouragement and inspiration. Most of them did not fail to understand that He was “He Whom God will make manifest,” as promised by the Báb, and honored Him under the name He had assumed, Bahá’u’lláh (see “Introduction,” pp. 12 and 16).

“Though he knew suspicion would fall on him, Bahā’-Allāh declined to go into hiding. He went to Zarganda, staying with his brother-in-law, Mírzā Majíd, who acted as secretary to the Russian ambassador. His presence was reported to the shah... [who] demanded that the Russian legation hand Bahā’-Allāh over, but the ambassador insisted on delivering him to Mírzā Āqā Khan Nūrī [the Grand Vizier], who sympathized with Bahā’-Allāh. Mírzā Āqā Khan, however, proved unable to protect Bahā’-Allāh when anti-Babi riots broke out in Tehran, and Bahā’-Allāh was arrested and made to walk in chains to the Sīāh Čāl (black pit) dungeon. At length he was found innocent. His stay in the crowded, filthy dungeon, where he watched several Babi friends being executed, proved important for Bahā’-Allāh’s spiritual development. He later wrote that he at that point decided to “undertake, with the utmost vigor, the task of regenerating” the Babi community⁶¹... He had several mystical experiences and dreams of a visionary nature while in prison. Despite having found him innocent, the government exiled Bahā’-Allāh, who chose to return to Iraq in the Ottoman empire,⁶² arriving in Baghdad on 12 January 1853...

⁶⁰ Eustache de Lorey and Douglas Sladen, *Queer Things about Persia* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1907) 312. The Authors report a large excerpt from the official Persian government gazette. See <https://archive.org/details/queerthingsabout00lore> (retrieved on 4 July 2019).

⁶¹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Lawḥ-i-mubárák k̲it̲áb ba Sh̲aykh Muḥammad Taqí Muḥtahid* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá’i-Verlag, 1982) 15; English translation by Shoghi Effendi, *The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, Illinois, USA: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1988) 21.

⁶² Bahá’u’lláh had sojourned in Iraq, mostly in Karbala, between August 1851 and April 1852.

Teheran. Madrisiy-i-Şadr,
the theological school where
Bahá'u'lláh sometimes so-
journed



“In the 1860s, Bahā’-Allāh’s [Bahá’u’lláh’s] gatherings attracted many local notables and Iranian pilgrims, lending him greater influence in Iran as well as in Baghdad. Despite his emphasis on communal harmony, however, sporadic communal violence broke out between Shi’ites and Babis, and among factions of Babis, especially among unruly tradesmen and religious students, and Ottoman and Persian officials often laid this violence at his door. Bahā’-Allāh’s influence worried his enemies in the Iranian government and among the Shi’ite clerics, and he narrowly escaped assassination at the hands of a man hired by the Iranian consul in Baghdad...

“Alarmed at the revival of Babi activity under Bahā’-Allāh’s de facto leadership, and at the easy access to Iranians enjoyed by the Babi leaders situated so near the Shi’ite shrine cities, ...the Iranian consul in Istanbul who at that point considered the Babis subversive, pressured the Ottomans to exile Bahā’-Allāh farther from Iran. The Ottomans complied, calling Bahā’-Allāh to Istanbul in the spring of 1863. Before he left Baghdad, Bahā’-Allāh camped for twelve days at the Garden of Necip Paşa, where a large number of friends came to bid him farewell. During these days, to intimates, ‘he would speak of the Bāb’s Cause and declare his own’⁶³... In late April, 1863, Bahā’-Allāh declared himself, to a handful of close followers, the promised one foretold by the Bāb.”⁶⁴

⁶³ Ustád Muḥammad- ‘Alí-i-Salmání (Bahá’u’lláh’s barber during His prolonged exile), *My Memories of Bahá’u’lláh*, tr. Marzieh Gail (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1982) 22.

⁶⁴ Juan R. Cole (an American academic and commentator of the Middle East), “Bahā’-Allāh,” *Encyclopædia Iranica* (London, 1982-), Vol. III, Fasc. 4, pp. 422-9; online edition (New York, 1996-). See <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/baha-allah> (retrieved on 16 July 2019).

At the conclusion of this brief historical outline we will quote the words that the British orientalist Edward G. Browne, one of the first among those who in the 19th century studied the Bábí Faith and gathered therefrom an impression of grandeur and of important future accomplishments. He wrote the following words in the introduction to his English translation from the Persian of one of the earliest Bábí-Bahá'í history books, *A Traveller's Narrative*, written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), son of Bahá'u'lláh.⁶⁵

"Now it appears to me that the history of the Bábí movement must be interesting in different ways to others besides those who are directly engaged in the study of Persian. To the student of religious thought it will afford no little matter for reflection; for here he may contemplate such personalities as by lapse of time pass into heroes and demi-gods still unobscured by myth and fable; he may examine by the light of concurrent and independent testimony one of those strange outbursts of enthusiasm, faith, fervent devotion, and indomitable heroism - or fanaticism, if you will - which we are accustomed to associate with the earlier history of the human race; he may witness, in a word, the birth of a faith which may not impossibly win a place amidst the great religions of the world. To the ethnologist also it may yield food for thought as to the character of a people, who, stigmatized as they often have been as selfish, mercenary, avaricious, egotistical, sordid, and cowardly, are yet capable of exhibiting under the influence of a strong religious impulse a degree of devotion, disinterestedness, generosity, unselfishness, nobility, and courage which may be paralleled in history, but can scarcely be surpassed. To the politician, too, the matter is not devoid of importance; for what changes may not be effected in a country now reckoned almost as a cypher in the balance of national forces by a religion capable of evoking so mighty a spirit? Let those who know what Muhammad made the Arabs, consider well what the Báb may yet make the Persians.

"But to myself, and I believe to most others who have been or shall be brought to consider this matter, the paramount interest thereof lies in this, that here is something, whether wise or unwise, whether tending towards the amelioration of mankind or the reverse, which seemed to many hundreds, if not thousands, of our fellow-creatures worth suffering and dying for, and which, on this ground alone, must be accounted worthy of our most attentive study."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Upon His Father's death in 1892, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became His successor as the Head of the Bahá'í community which His Father had founded.

⁶⁶ Edward G. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb* (Cambridge University Press, 1891) viii-ix.

GLOSSARY

Ahd-i-A'lá, Bábí Dispensation 11n22

‘Ajamī (‘ajamī), non-Arab, Persian 11

Da‘wa, missionary activity 16

Dhabīh, slaughtered, a reference to Abraham’s son—Isaac according to Christians and Ishmael according to Muslims—whom the Patriarch was ready to sacrifice to God 22

Fatwā (fatwā), an Islamic legal pronouncement 16

Hājī 8, see Hāji

Hāji, a title ascribed to a Muslim who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca 6, 8, 9, 10, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26

Hajj, the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca 14

Hajji 24, see Hāji

Hājji 8, see Hāji

Imām, in the Twelver branch of Shi‘i Islam the title of the twelve spiritual and political legitimate successors to Muḥammad; a title also used for eminent religious leaders 4, 16n27

Imām Jum‘ih (Imām Jum‘ih), the Imām who leads the Friday or Congregational prayer; the leading Imām in a town or city 20

Kashf al-Ghitā (Kashfu‘l-Ghitā), The Uncovering of Error 10n19.

Khān, tribal chief, lord, nobleman 6, 20, 21, 38

Khān 20, see Khān

Khan 32, 44, see Khān

Kitmān, literally “concealment,” a practice recognized in the Islamic world, which authorizes a believer to conceal his faith when faced with serious religious persecution 34

Kurratu‘l-‘Ayn (Qurratu‘l-‘Ayn), “solace of the eyes” (see Koran 25:74), one of the titles of the poetess Tahereh 42

Madrasa religious Muslim college 2, 3

Madrisih 45, see Madrasa

Masjid, mosque 3, 14, 19

Masjid al-Ḥarām (Masjid al-Ḥarām), the Great Mosque of Mecca 14

Masnavī (mathnavī), a typical Persian poetical form characterized by succeeding distiches whose two hemistiches rhyme with one another 22n33

Mir 8, see Mirzá

Mirzá, when affixed to a name, it signifies a prince; when prefixed, simply Mr 6, 9, 10n15, 17 and 19, 12, 16, 19, 22, 22n33 and 34, 23, 24, 26, 31, 36, 38, 44

Mirzá 8, 44, see Mirzá

Mujtahid, a Shi‘ite doctor of law 16, 30, 44n57

Namáz-khānih, prayer-house 31

Qá‘im, the Messianic Peacemaker expected by the Shi‘i world at the end of time 4, 11, 12, 14, 16, 26, 32

Qā‘im 14, see Qá‘im

Qiyāma (Qiyāma), the advent of the Qá‘im (q.v.), in the Day of Judgment 16

Sabzih-Maydān, literally Vegetable Square 34, 35, 42

Sayyid 8, 9, 10, 10n19, 11, see Siyyid

Seyyèd 26, 26n38, see Siyyid

Seyyid 4, see Siyyid

Shaykh, a title that carries the meanings leader, elder, or noble, sometimes applied to high ranking ‘ulamás (q.v.) 6, 10, 32, 33, 44n57

Haifa. The Shrine of the Báb
and the Bahá'í administrative
buildings on Mount Carmel



Shaykhu'l-Islám, head of religious court 30, 31

Shimíran, summer resorts of Shimíran on the northern outskirts of the city of Tehran

Siyāda, descendancy from the house of the Prophet 8

Siyyid, a title given in the Muslim World to the descendants of the house of the Prophet 4, 8, 8n11, 9, 10, 26, 36, 38n50

Ṭárikh, history 10n17, 14n25, 23n34 and 35, 34n 46

Tarikh-i Amrī-yi Shīrāz (Tarikh-i-Amrī-yi-Shīrāz), History of the Cause in Shīrāz 10n17 Ṭárikh-i-Jadíd, New History 22n34e 35, 34n45

‘Ulamá’ (‘ulama), the body of Muslim religious scholars and jurists, or a single member of that body 11n22, 20

‘Ulamā 11, see ‘Ulamá’

Ulama 6, 11, 20, 26, 28, 30, see ‘Ulamá’

Zabíḥ 22, 22n33, see Dhabíḥ

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