



BĀB, 'ALI MOḤAMMAD ŠĪRĀZĪ

BĀB, SAYYED 'ALĪ MOḤAMMAD ŠĪRĀZĪ (1235/1819-1266/1850), the founder of **Babism**. Born in Shiraz on 1 Moḥarram 1235/20 October 1819, he belonged to a family of Ḥosaynī *sayyeds*, most of whom were engaged in mercantile activities in Shiraz and Būšehr. Conflicting accounts indicate that the Bāb's father, Sayyed Reżā Bazzāz, died either when he was in infancy or when he was aged nine and that Bāb's guardianship was undertaken by a maternal uncle, Ḥājī Mīrzā Sayyed 'Alī, who later became a disciple and was martyred in Tehran in 1850 (Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, p. 32). The family had few direct links with the 'olamā', apart from Mīrzā Moḥammad Ḥasan Šīrāzī (the Mīrzā-ye Šīrāzī of the Tobacco Rebellion, q.v.) and Ḥājī Sayyed Jawād Šīrāzī (an *emām-e jom'a* of Kermān), but several of them were active adherents of the Shaikhi school (q.v.; Zarandī, *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 30). After six or seven years schooling at a local *maktab*, the Bāb began work in the family business, entering into partnership at the age of fifteen, at which point he went to Būšehr with his guardian. References in some of his early writings, however, suggest that he had little love for business pursuits and instead applied himself to the study of religious literature, including works on *feqh*. At some point during the five or so years he remained in Būšehr, he began to compose prayers and sermons, an activity which seems to have excited unfavorable comment (Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, p. 40). The Bāb's short period of study in Iraq, his composition of *tafāsīr* and works on *feqh* and *kalām*, his references to theological literature in his early writings, and his idiosyncratic, ungrammatical Arabic all serve to paint a picture of him in his early youth as a would be 'ālem with original aspirations and ideas, whose lack of *madrassa* education, however, excluded from the rank of the



'*olamā*'.

In 1255/1839-40, he headed for the '*atabāt*' in Iraq, where he spent a year, mostly in Karbalā', where he regularly attended the classes of the then head of the Shaikhi school, Ḥājj Sayyed Kāẓem Raštī (q.v.) and where he became acquainted with several of the latter's younger disciples, including a number who later became his own followers. This obviously crucial period in his development remains virtually undocumented, however, and it is difficult to define the exact dimensions of the Bāb's relations with Shaikhism at this time. In 1256/1840-41, the Bāb returned reluctantly to Shiraz at the insistence of his family and in Rajab, 1258/August, 1842, married Kādīja Begom, a daughter of his mother's paternal uncle. A child, Aḥmad, was born in 1259/1843 but died in infancy or was, possibly, stillborn.

Some months later, Sayyed 'Alī Moḥammad had what seems to have been the first of a number of dreams or visions through which he was convinced of a high spiritual station for himself; on the following day, he began the composition of his first major work, a *tafsīr* on the *sūra al-Baqara* (see [bayān](#)). A second such experience occurred on 15 Rabī' II 1260/4 May 1844, which he describes as "the first day on which the spirit descended into his heart" (*Ketāb al-fehrest*, p. 286); this experience seems to have been accompanied or followed by a dream in which he imbibed blood from the severed head of the Imam Ḥosayn, to which he later attributed "the appearance of these verses, prayers and divine sciences" (*Ṣaḥīfa-ye 'adliya*, p. 14). It must have been immediately after this that he began the composition of his first work of an unconventional nature, the unusual *tafsīr* on the *sūra Yūsof* entitled *Qayyūm al-asmā'*. He continued to experience dreams or visions until at least Ramaẓān, 1260/September-October, 1844 (see MacEoin, *From Shaykhism*, p. 153 n. 134) and possibly much later, but their significance dwindled as he came to believe himself in a state of perpetual grace and a recipient of direct verbal inspiration from the twelfth imam or God Himself.

About the time of his second vision in Rabī' II, 1260/early May, 1844, Sayyed 'Alī Moḥammad seems already to have been in contact with [Mollā Moḥammad Ḥosayn Bošrū'ī](#), a young Shaikhi who had come to Shiraz from Karbalā' following the death there of Sayyed Kāẓem Raštī on 11 Du'l-ḥejja 1259/1 January 1844. In common with other Shaikhis, Bošrū'ī was searching for a possible successor to Raštī (see [babism](#)) and, on 5 Jomādā I/22 May, Sayyed 'Alī Moḥammad told him privately that he was indeed Raštī's successor as the bearer of divine knowledge and, more specifically, the channel of



communication with (or “gate to”) the Hidden Imam (*bāb al-emām*), a theme which is pursued in the pages of the *Qayyūm al-asmā’*. This date is mentioned by the Bāb in several places, notably his Persian *Bayān* (2:7, p. 30). Bošrū’ī accepted these claims after some consideration, as did several other Shaikhis who arrived in Shiraz from Karbalā’ shortly after this (see [babism](#)). A small group of disciples, to whom he gave the title *ḥorūf al-ḥayy* (Letters of the Living) was thus formed around the Bāb, instructed by him, and sent out as missionaries on his behalf to various parts of Iran and Iraq.

The Bāb claimed to be the “gate” (*bāb*) and “representative” (*nā’eb*) of the Hidden Imam, succeeding [Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsā’ī](#) and Sayyed Kāẓem Raštī (*Qayyūm al-asmā’*, fols. 41a, 64b, 139a; *resāla* in Iran National Bahai Archives 6003c, p. 321; see also MacEoin, “From Shaykhism,” pp. 172-73). In his early works, he describes himself as the “remembrance” (*dekr*) of the imam, the “servant of the *baqīyat Allāh*” (i.e., of the Hidden Imam), and the “seal of the gates” (*kātem al-abwāb*) and makes it clear that he has been sent by the Hidden Imam to prepare men for his imminent advent. An anonymous Babi *resāla* dated 1848 speaks of how, during the lesser occultation of the imam, there appeared the “four appointed gates” (see [bāb](#)) while, in the greater occultation, there were in every age “gates not appointed by name or connection” until the appearance of two further specific gates—Aḥsā’ī and Raštī (*resāla* in Iran National Bahai Archives, MS 6006.C, p. 8). The Bāb himself is the third of these gates (Qorrat-al-‘Ayn, *resāla* in Golpāyegānī, *Kašf*, p. 2), after whom the Qā’em will appear (*ibid.*, pp. 14-15). In several passages, however, the Bāb already identifies himself effectively with the imam, while retaining a distinction of function (MacEoin, *From Shaykhism*, p. 174; for a full discussion of the earliest claims of the Bāb see MacEoin, *ibid.*, chap. 5).

While his earliest disciples spread news of his appearance, the Bāb left Shiraz on 26 Ša’bān 1260/10 September 1844, accompanied by Mollā [Moḥammad ‘Alī Bārforūšī](#) and an Ethiopian slave, heading for Mecca by way of Būšeher. After performing the *ḥajj* and visiting Medina, he returned to Būšeher on 8 Jomādā I 1261/15 May 1845 and stayed there until around mid-Rajab/July. Before leaving for the *ḥajj*, he had sent instructions to his followers to gather in Karbalā’ to await his arrival there, which would be a signal for the appearance of the imam and the waging of the final *jehād*. For reasons that are still unclear, but which may be linked to the arrest and dispatch to Istanbul of his emissary to Karbalā’, [Mollā ‘Alī Beštāmī](#), the Bāb decided to return instead to Shiraz. An incident there involving some Babis (including Bārforūšī, who had



gone ahead from Būšehr) about mid-June led the governor, Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan Moqaddam Marāḡaī Ājūdānbāšī, to seek the Bāb's arrest; the latter was, accordingly, taken into custody while en route from Būšehr at the end of June. Placed under house-arrest in his uncle's home, the Bāb occupied himself with writing and with meeting a stream of visitors now making their way to Shiraz, many of them Shaikhis from Karbalā'. Kept thus in communication with his followers in Iran and Iraq, he was able to direct the course of the growing movement which had by now taken its name from his principal title. Although the leaders of the Babi movement in the provinces played a significant part in the development of doctrine and the working out of policies, the role of the Bāb ought not to be underestimated. Successive imprisonments between 1261/1845 and 1267/1850 prevented him from active participation in the affairs of the sect, but his writings were copied and widely disseminated and large numbers of pilgrims succeeded in obtaining personal interviews with him, in spite of official disapproval. His authority over his followers remained supreme: Thus, during the controversies centered on the figure of Qorrat-al-'Ayn (q.v.) which rocked the Babi community of Karbalā' in the early period, final appeal was made to the Bāb in person (Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, p. 68; MacEoin, *From Shaykhism*, pp. 203, 207).

There is evidence that, in Būšehr and again in Shiraz, the Bāb adopted a policy of *taqīya*, which involved the public renunciation of his original claims (see Fayzī, *Kānedān*, pp. 25-28; Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, pp. 94-98; Mīrzā Asad-Allāh Fāzel Māzandarānī, *Asrār-al-āṭār* I, Tehran, 124 B. (*Badī'*)/1968-69, pp. 179-82). In writings dating from this period and the one following, he denies that there can be an "appointed gate" (*bāb manṣūṣ*) for the Hidden Imam after the first four gates and argues that any "revelation" (*waḥy*) claimed by him is not comparable to that given to Moḥammad (see *ibid.*). On one occasion, he was pressed to make a public appearance in the Wakīl mosque of Shiraz, in the course of which he denied all claim to *bābīya* (see Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, pp. 94-98).

During an outbreak of cholera in Shiraz in September, 1846, the Bāb succeeded in escaping to Isfahan, where he had already sent a number of disciples to await his arrival, and where he was favorably received in the home of the *emām-e jom'a*. For a brief period, he was involved in public discussions of his claims, but growing opposition from the 'olamā' ended in the issue of a *fatwā* for his execution. At that point he was secretly transferred to the residence of the governor, Manūčehr Khan Mo'tamed-al-Dawla, whose interest in the Bāb's message may have also been tinged by political



considerations. Mo'tamed-al-Dawla's plans, which included the introduction of the Bāb to Moḥammad Shah (possibly with a view to his ultimately replacing Ḥājī Mīrzā Āqāsī as the king's advisor), collapsed on his death in February, 1847. The loss of his supporter, who had already protected him from the 'olamā' of Isfahan by concealing him in his own residence, was a serious blow to the Bāb. Gorgīn Khan, Mo'tamed-al-Dawla's nephew and successor, discovered the prophet and sent him under escort to Tehran, notifying the court of his action. At Kolayn near the capital, however, instructions came that the Bāb was to be taken to the town of Mākū in Azarbaijan, where he arrived, after a stay of forty days in Tabrīz, about July, 1847. It has been suggested that the prime minister, Ḥājī Mīrzā Āqāsī, prevented the Bāb's arrival in Tehran out of fear that he might supplant him as an influence on Moḥammad Shah (Zarandī, *Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 231-32). In Mākū the Bāb was placed under what was originally close confinement in the castle overlooking the town, but before long conditions were sufficiently relaxed to permit the arrival of visitors and the resumption of communications between him and his followers.

The Bāb's growing popularity and the ease with which he was still able to orchestrate the movement for which he was the figurehead gave considerable cause for concern to Ḥājī Mīrzā Āqāsī. At this point, the Russian Minister in Tehran, Dolgorukov, began to exert pressure on the Prime Minister to have the Bāb removed from Mākū, which was located dangerously close to the Russian border; a recent messianic movement in the Caucasus had caused serious problems for the Russians and their fears of renewed chiliastic agitation in the region seem to have been behind their request for the Bāb's removal (see Momen, *Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, p. 72). From Mākū, the Bāb, was, accordingly, transferred to Čahrīq near Urmia, at a fair distance from the sensitive border region but still sufficiently far from the heart of Iran. He arrived there in early May, 1848, and was placed under strict confinement.

During the later period of the Bāb's confinement in Mākū, he began to advance claims even more startling than those of *bāb* and *nā'eb*. In a letter written shortly before his transfer to Čahrīq, copies of which were soon distributed on his instructions among his followers, he proclaimed himself the Imam Mahdī in person and announced the abrogation of the laws of Islam (Māzandarānī, *Zohūr*, pp. 164-66). Not long after his arrival in Čahrīq, he was brought temporarily to Tabrīz, where he was examined by a tribunal of religious and civil dignitaries, including Nāṣer-al-Dīn Mīrzā, the crown prince, then governor of Azarbaijan. At this hearing, the Bāb made public his claim to be



the return of the Hidden Imam and was unofficially sentenced to death by several of the 'olamā' present. The charge of insanity was introduced in order to prevent his execution at this juncture.

In an account of the Bāb's interrogation possibly written by Amīr Aṣḡlān Khan Majd-al-Dawla, it is stated that, following his bastinado, the Bāb recanted his claims and gave a "sealed undertaking" that he would not repeat his errors. What appears to be the original of this latter document was discovered in the Iranian state archives after the deposition of Moḡammad-'Alī Shah in 1909; it is now understood to be preserved in the Majles Library. The authenticity of the recantation document seems to rest, not only on the handwriting, which bears comparison with that of the Bāb, but also on the explicit denial in it of specific viceregency (*nīāba kāṣṣa*) on behalf of the imam, something the Bāb had already denied several times before. (Facsimiles of both these documents are reproduced by Browne in *Materials*, pp. 248-56.) The implications of his claim to *qā'emīya* had already been made clear to the authorities when he was brought through Urmia en route to Tabrīz. Several accounts, including some by American missionaries, indicate that large numbers of people turned out to greet him with an enthusiasm bordering on acceptance of him as the imam in person (Momen, op. cit., pp. 73-74). Repeated scenes of this kind, were they to be allowed, could only lead in one direction. That direction was further indicated (almost simultaneously with the Bāb's examination in Tabrīz, see above) at a gathering of some eighty Babi activists in the village of Badašt in Māzandarān, where the Bāb's claim to be the Hidden Imam was announced together with a proclamation abrogating the Islamic *Šarī'a*. The Badašt gathering seems to have acted as a signal, in concert with the Bāb's own announcement of his more developed claims, for the successive Babi-led risings in Māzandarān, Neyrīz (Nīrīz) and Zanjān, between 1848 and 1850 (see [babism](#)).

Following his return to Čahrīq in August, 1848, however, the Bāb devoted himself to the elaboration of a yet more radical development of his position. In the works written between then and his execution in July, 1850, notably in the later parts of the Persian *Bayān*, he claimed to be, not merely the Imam Maḡdī, but a theophanic representation of the godhead, a divine manifestation (*mazhar-e elāhī*) empowered to reveal a new *Šarī'a*, the basic outline of which may be found in the Persian and Arabic *Bayāns*. It is unlikely that these claims of the Bāb were widely known to his followers in the period before his death (the *Bayān*, for example, was not much distributed before then), but they



proved an important influence on later Babism with its numerous theophanic claimants, and, in particular, on Bahaism as it developed this strand of the Bāb's teaching from the 1860s. Several of the Bāb's writings during this period, such as the *Ketāb al-asmā'* and *Ketāb-e panj ša'n* indicate growing doctrinal idiosyncrasy and a preoccupation with the amplification of ritual practices largely unrelated to the actual circumstances of the Babi community.

The struggle between a group of Babis and state forces in Māzandarān (September, 1848-May, 1849) caused considerable anxiety in the early months of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah's reign, but its eventual suppression and the fact that it had been restricted to a rural area lessened the fear of the government. When, however, violence broke out in the urban centers of Neyrīz and Zanjān in May, 1850, Mīrzā Taqī Khan Amīr Neẓām decided to take the extreme step of having the Bāb put to death. He was, accordingly, brought to Tabrīz at the end of June, 1850, and executed by firing squad in the barracks square there at noon on either July 8 or 9. (The Bahais celebrate this event on 9 July, stating that it occurred on 28 Ša'bān 1266, but several contemporary sources give the date as 8 July—see Momen, *op. cit.*, p. 78 and n.) Accounts of the execution exist, but none is a direct eye-witness description, although there are a few second-hand versions based on the testimony of eyewitnesses. The Bāb survived the first volley, when the bullets cut ropes suspending him and Mīrzā Moḥammad-'Alī Zonūzī, a disciple, condemned to death with him; a second regiment had to be brought in to complete the task. The corpses of the Bāb and his fellow-victim were thrown together into a ditch, where they were said to have been eaten by dogs, an action which prompted Justin Sheil, then British Minister in Tehran, to address a note to the prime minister expressing outrage at its barbarity (Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religion*, p. 79). Babi sources maintain, however, that the bodies were removed from the ditch through the efforts of a certain Ḥājī Solaymān Khan Mīlānī and eventually brought to Tehran, where they were buried in secret at the Emāmzāda Ḥasan, in which location some modern Babis believe them to remain (Nicolas, *Sayyed Ali Mohammed*, pp. 379-85). Bahai accounts, however, state that the remains were at one point removed from the Emāmzāda on the instructions of Mīrzā Ḥosayn-'Alī Bahā'-Allāh and transferred from hiding-place to hiding-place for almost fifty years before being brought to Palestine in 1899. A shrine to house the remains was begun on Mt. Carmel by 'Abbās Effendī 'Abd-al-Bahā', who interred them there in 1908 (Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, pp. 189-92). Some time later, a marble superstructure topped by a gold-tiled dome was erected over the original shrine and is today a well-known landmark in Haifa, forming the central feature of the complex of



Bahai buildings there.

The Bāb's personality remains elusive in the absence of detailed contemporary descriptions and the presence of so much later hagiographical material. According to Dr. William Cormick, an Irish physician who treated the Bāb following his *bastinado* in Tabrīz in 1848, 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 Sayyid, he was dressed in the habits of that sect In fact his whole look and deportment went far to dispose me in his favour” (quoted in Browne, *Materials*, p. 262). This picture of the Bāb is borne out by more concrete evidence, such as a portrait preserved in the Bahai archives in Haifa, clothing and other personal effects, and examples of penmanship all testify to a highly-developed aesthetic temperament. The influence of this love of delicacy and fine things is apparent in many of the Bāb's injunctions in the Persian *Bayān* and elsewhere, including regular bathing and depilation, the use of perfumes, rose-water, and henna, the wearing of precious stones, the use of the best paper and calligraphy for writing the scriptures, the detailed rules for the washing, adornment, and burial of the dead, and even in the prohibition on beating children. Such an image must be balanced, however, by reference to the Bāb's obvious harshness in such matters as *jehād*, the treatment of unbelievers and their property (including religious shrines), and the destruction of non-Babi books.

During the nineteenth century, something of a myth of the Bāb was perpetuated in some intellectual and literary circles in Europe, largely owing to the widespread influence of the Comte de Gobineau's *Religions et philosophies dans l'Asie centrale* (Paris, 1865), which presented an extended and somewhat inaccurate picture of the Bāb not unlike that of Moḥammad popular during the French Enlightenment. This phenomenon is best described by the French journalist Jules Bois, who wrote of the Bāb's death: “All Europe was stirred to pity and indignation. . . . Among the litterateurs of my generation, in the Paris of 1890, the martyrdom of the Bāb was still as fresh a topic as had been the first news of his death. We wrote poems about him. Sarah Bernhardt entreated Catulle Mendès for a play on the theme of this historic tragedy” (“Babism and Baha'ism,” *Forum* 74, 1925, quoted in Momen, *op. cit.*, p. 50). Among others attracted to the Bāb in this period figured Matthew Arnold, Ernest Renan, and, in Russia, Turgenev and Tolstoy; little of this enthusiasm survived into the twentieth century (for further details, see



Momen, op. cit., pp. 3-56).

The Bāb's fame has endured chiefly within the context of Baháism (see [bahai faith](#)) in which he plays an important role as an independent divine manifestation in some respects equal, in others subordinate to, Mīrzā Ḥosayn-ʿAlī Bahāʾ-Allāh, for whom he is held to act as a herald (*mobaššer*). Although Bahai accounts of the Bāb are more reliable than those of Gobineau and other early European writers, they are frequently edited in order to fit into the wider perspective of Bahai history and are often hagiographic. The standard account, on which all later versions are based to a greater or lesser extent, is Mollā Moḥammad Nabil Zarandī's history available only in English translation as *The Dawn-Breakers* and subtitled *Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahāʾī Revelation*. Among Western Bahais the image of the Bāb is frequently compared to the Christ of popular devotion and made to figure as the saint par excellence of the religion. Few references are made in the published materials to his early claims, his laws, his ritual innovations, or other matters felt to be inconsistent with this image.

For details of the Bāb's works, see [bayān](#).

Doctrines. It is difficult to summarize the doctrines taught by the Bāb, largely because these changed substantially between the earliest and latest periods of his career. In works written during the first years following his claim to be *bāb al-emām*, considerable stress is laid on the theme that his teachings represent the "true Islam" (*al-dīn al-kāleš*). Thus, "this religion is, before God, the essence of the religion of Moḥammad" (*Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, fol. 78a), while God has "made this book the essence of the Qurʾān, word for word" (*ibid.*, fol. 72b; cf. fol. 53b) and "The pure faith is the Remembrance in security; whoever desires Islam, let him submit himself to his cause" (*ibid.*, fol. 2a). The laws of Moḥammad and the imams were to remain binding "until the day of resurrection" (*ibid.*, fol. 185b): Islamic injunctions as to what was *ḥarām* and *ḥalāl* were to remain in force (*Šaḥīfa-ye ʿadliya*, pp. 5-6; cf. Balyuzi, *The Bāb*, pp. 97-98). At the same time, the Bāb claimed authority to clarify obscure issues relating to the details of the *Šarīʿa*, such as *ṣalāt*, *zakāt*, and *jehād*, and also introduced some ordinances extending or intensifying the standard Koranic regulations. According to one of his followers, in his early letters, the Bāb "put desirable matters (*mostaḥabbāt*) in the place of obligatory (*wājebāt*), and undesirable matters (*makrūhāt*) in the place of forbidden (*moḥarramāt*). Thus, for example, he regarded it as obligatory to have four tablets (*mohr*) from the soil (from the shrine) of the prince of martyrs, [i.e., Imam Ḥosayn], on which to



place the hands, forehead and nose during the prostration of *namāz*; he considered the pilgrimage of *Āšūrā* a duty; he laid down prayers (*aḏī'a*) and supererogatory observances (*ta'qībāt*); he proclaimed the obligation of Friday prayer . . . ; and he fashioned amulets (*hayākel*), charms (*aḥrāz*), and talismans (*ṭelasmāt*) such as are prepared among the people All his companions acted with the utmost circumspection according to the *oṣūl* and *forū'* of Islam" (Moḥammad-'Alī Zonūzī, quoted by Māzandarānī, op. cit., pp. 31-32). Several important supererogatory injunctions are to be found in the *Kaṣā'el-e sab'a*, written by the Bāb during his *ḥajj* journey, and in another work of this period, the *Šaḥīfa bayn al-ḥaramayn*.

A wider picture of early doctrines may be found in the *Šaḥīfa-ye 'adliya*, which, among other things, condemns the concept of *waḥdat al-wojūd* as *šerk* (p. 16), lists the seven bases (*oṣūl*) of *ma'refa* as *tawḥīd*, *ma'ānī*, *abwāb*, *emāma*, *arkān*, *noqabā'*, and *nojabā'* (pp. 20-31); states that prayer through the imam or others is *kofr* (p. 20); denies that either Aḥsā'ī or Raštī prayed through 'Alī or thought him the Creator (p. 22); regards the station of the imams as higher than that of the prophets (p. 24); states that most Twelver Shi'ites, because of their ignorance of the station of the *noqabā'*, will go to hell (p. 31); declares the enemies of Aḥsā'ī and Raštī to be unbelievers like the Sunnis (pp. 32-33); refers to the necessity of belief in a physical resurrection and *me'rāj* (p. 34); condemns the idea of spiritual resurrection and maintains that Aḥsā'ī did not speak of it (p. 34); and, finally, speaks of obedience to himself, as the "servant" of the twelfth imam, as obligatory (p. 41).

Finally, it is worth noting that messianic expectation, although far from dominant in these early works, finds a place in them, notably in the *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, where it is frequently joined with exhortation to wage *jehād*, a fact to which reference must be made in any attempt to understand the Babi-state conflicts of 1848-50 (for full details, see MacEoin, "Bābī Concept of Holy War").

The Bāb's doctrines, which exhibit many of the gnostic and Neoplatonist features common to earlier Shi'ite sects such as the Isma'ilis and Ḥorūfīs, tend to become more abstruse in the later periods. The crucial change occurs with the Bāb's abrogation of Islamic law in 1264/1848, followed by the elaboration of his own *Šarī'a* and doctrinal system. This highly elaborated body of ideas, frequently expressed in oblique and allusive language and lacking any real organization, is not easy to summarize. There have been no later Babi theologians to analyze or systematize the elements of the Bāb's scattered thoughts. At the heart of the system is the belief that the divine or eternal



essence (*dāt-e elāhī*, *dāt-e azal*) is unknowable, indescribable, and inaccessible (*Bayān-e fārsī* 3:7, p. 81; 4:1, p. 105; 4:2, p. 110). The revelation of God (*zohūr Allāh*) in this world is that of the Tree of Reality (*šajara-ye haqīqat*) (*ibid.*, 2:8, p. 37), a term frequently used for the Primal Will (*mašīyat-e awwaliya*) (*ibid.*, 4:6, pp. 120-21) which has appeared in all the prophets (*Dalā'el-e sab'a*, pp. 2-3). The Bāb compares the Primal Will to the sun which remains single and unchanged, although appearing under different names and forms in the persons of the prophets in whom it is manifested, as if in a mirror (*ibid.*; *Čahār ša'n*, quoted in *Ā'in-e Bāb*, pp. 48-49; untitled *šahīfa*, quoted *ibid.*, p. 49). This manifestation of the Primal Will is frequently referred to as the Point of Truth (*noqta-ye haqīqat*) (*Bayān-e fārsī* 3:7, p. 81) or Primal Point (*noqta-ye ulā*)—the latter term being the most common title used of the Bāb by his followers—from whom all things are originated (*ibid.*, 1:1, p. 4; 3:8, p. 37) and by whom the prophets and books have been sent down (*ibid.*, 2:8, p. 37). This Point possesses two stations; a divine station in which it is the manifestation of the divinity (*mazhar-e olūhiyat*), and a human station in which it manifests its servitude (*ibid.*, 4:1, pp. 105, 107). In his human form, the prophet is the apex of creation and the perfect man, since all things progress until they find their perfection in man and man develops until he culminates in the prophet (*ibid.*, 2:1, pp. 14-15). It is only by meeting this theophany that man can be said to meet God (*ibid.*, 2:7, p. 31; 2:6, p. 63; 3:7, p. 81); thus, references in the Qur'ān to the meeting with God (*leqā' Allāh*) are, in reality, references to meeting Moḥammad (*ibid.*, 3:7, p. 81). All things have been created to attain to this meeting (*ibid.*, 6:232, p. 222; *Dalā'el-e sab'a*, p. 31). Since the time of the revelation of Adam to that of the Bāb, 12,210 years have elapsed, although God undoubtedly had unnumbered worlds and Adams before this cycle (*Bayān-e fārsī* 3:13, p. 95); but in every world, the manifestation of the Primal Will has always been the Point of the *Bayān*, the Bāb, for he is identical with Adam (*ibid.*); thus, “in the day of Noah, I was Noah, in the day of Abraham, I was Abraham” (untitled *šahīfa* quoted in *Ā'in-e Bāb*, p. 49). Indeed, this same Point will appear again and again in future manifestations of the Primal Will (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, there is progress from one manifestation to the next: In each succeeding theophany, the appearance is nobler than in the one before; hence, all the revelations of the past were created for the appearance of Moḥammad, they and the revelation of Moḥammad were created for the appearance of the Bāb (Qā'em), and so on into the future (*Bayān-e fārsī* 4:12, p. 136). Adam is compared to the human being in the state of a seed in the womb, the Bāb to a twelve-year old child (*ibid.*, 3:13, p. 95).



One of the most important elements in the Bāb's thought is his elaborate symbolic interpretation of eschatological terms. Thus, resurrection (*qīāma*) is the appearance of the Primal Will in its latest manifestation (ibid., 2:7, p. 30); just as all things were originally created in one person, so all will be resurrected in one person, whereupon they will be individually resurrected in their various places (ibid., 2:11, p. 47). Physical resurrection of bodies from their graves, however, will not take place (ibid.). The Day of Resurrection extends from the moment of the appearance of the Tree of Truth in each age until his disappearance; thus, the resurrection of Moses took place from the appearance of Jesus until his Ascension (ibid., 2:7, p. 30). The resurrection of Islam began with the Bāb's announcement of his mission two hours and eleven minutes after sunset on the evening of 5 Jomādā I 1260 and will end at his death (ibid.). In this resurrection, the return (*raj'a*) of Moḥammad, the imams, Fāṭema, and the four *abwāb*, has taken place in the persons of the eighteen *ḥorūf al-ḥayy*, the Bāb's first disciples (ibid., 1:2-19, pp. 6-10). After the death of the prophet, a *fatrat* intervenes, during which there are witnesses (*šohadā*) until his return (ibid., 2:3, p. 22); during this *fatrat*, the Primal Will is within creation, but is not recognized outwardly (ibid., 2:9, pp. 44-45). When, however, the Point is again manifested, belief in him is paradise and unbelief hell (ibid., 2:9, p. 44); indeed, the first to believe is himself the essence of paradise and the first to disbelieve the essence of hell (ibid., 2:17, p. 68). All things are in a condition of either belief or denial (ibid., 2:3, p. 23), belonging to the "Letters of Exaltation" (*ḥorūf-e 'elīyīn*) or their opposite (*ḥorūf-e dūn-e 'elīyīn*) (ibid., 2:2, pp. 20-21). In another sense, all things find their paradise in their perfection (ibid., 5:4, p. 155). Other eschatological terms such as *qabr*, *ṣerāt*, *mīzān*, *ḥesāb*, *ketāb*, *sā'a* are given similar interpretations (ibid., 2:10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18).

A constant theme of the Persian *Bayān*—and one which was to have important implications for later developments—is that of *man yoḏheroḥo'llāh* (him whom God shall make manifest) the next embodiment of the Primal Will, whose appearance is anticipated sometime between 1511 and 2001 years in the future, or sooner if God wills. Many of the prescriptions of the *Bayān* are connected in some way to respect for *man yoḏheroḥo'llāh* or preparation for his appearance. The Bāb also developed a complex legal system, much of which was clearly intended for implementation in the theocratic Babi state he anticipated; there is a marked contrast between regulations directed towards unbelievers and those applicable to Babis, the former being harsh, the latter milder than in Islam. There are regulations for marriage, burial, pilgrimage,



prayer, and other devotional and ritual practices, often in detail. (Full descriptions of these may be found in MacEoin, “Ritual and Semi-Ritual Observances.”)

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