



## BABISM III. BABISM IN NEYRIZ

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### iii. Babism in Neyriz

Neyriz (Niriz) is a town in [Fars](#) south of Iran, located about 220 km southeast of [Shiraz](#) on the eastern side of [Baḳtagān Lake](#). In the medieval period, the *nesba* “Neyrizi” is attested by Abu’l-‘Abbās Faḳr b. Ḥātem Neyrizi (d. ca. 309/921; cf. Mas‘udi, p. 199), an astronomer and mathematician who wrote commentaries on the works of Ptolemy and Euclid (Hogendijk; O’Connor and Robertson; in Latin, called Anaritius: see Busard, p. xv), and Mirzā Aḥmad Neyrizi (d. 631/1233), a master calligrapher of the *nask* style who produced over 100 Qor’ān manuscripts (Semsār). In the 19th century, notable buildings of the city were a bazaar, a bathhouse, a caravansary, and, above all, the Great Friday Mosque, which may have been built over an ancient Zoroastrian fire temple and dated back to 974 CE (Bosworth; Monazzah and Khazaei, pp. 302-5). Water flowed into the city through underground channels (*qanāt*).

In 1850, Sayyed Yaḥyā [Dārābi](#), who had been renamed Waḥid by the [Bāb](#), arrived in the city. He was a cleric who had met the Bāb in Shiraz and converted to Babism after three personal encounters with him. As Waḥid approached Neyriz, many of the residents came to greet him (Fayzi, p. 52; Ruḥāni, I, p. 55). He entered the Friday Mosque on 27 May 1850 and proclaimed the appearance of the Bāb as the promised one of Islam to a large crowd (Ruḥāni, I, pp. 57-58; Nicolas, p. 395; Nabil, p. 354; Fayzi, p. 54; ‘Ahdia and Čapman, pp. 76-79, 87-88). A local Muslim, Sayyed Ebrāhim, wrote his impressions of Waḥid in Neyriz on the wall of the Jāme‘-e Ṣaḡir Mosque in the Bāzār quarter. This led to a violent confrontation between those who had



converted to Babism and the governor of Neyriz, Ḥāji Zayn-al-‘Ābedin Khan, who feared that the townspeople would rally around Waḥid (Fasā’i, I, pp. 792-94; Momen, 2002; idem, 1981, pp. 109-10; ‘Ahdia and Čapman, pp. 88 ff.).

In the conflict of 1850, Waḥid and many of the Bābis of Neyriz were killed (Fasā’i, I, p. 794; ‘Ahdia and Čapman, pp. 109-12). By 1852, the local Bābis were rallying around a new leader, ‘Alī Sardār (b. 1823). Fearing that the governor was planning a new round of reprisals, a few Bābis, against the expressed teachings of the Bāb, assassinated the governor in the public bath (Nicolas, 410; Momen, 1981, p. 147; ‘Ahdia and Čapman, p. 139). There was a failed attempt at reconciliation when a new governor arrived. The Bābis armed themselves for protection (Ruḥāni, I, p. 176), and violence broke out. Six hundred Bābi women and children followed their men up into the mountains to the south (Māzandarāni, IV, p. 36.). Mirzā Fażl-Allāh, the British agent in Shiraz, wrote in his October 1853 report: “... the people (Bābis) returned and having withdrawn their families from the place, again fled to the mountains where they have conveyed provisions, enough to maintain them for three to four months ...” (Momen, 1981, p. 148).

Gunmen were hired from surrounding villages to trap the Bābis, who were putting up a stiff resistance (Nicolas, pp. 415-16). By late October, 1853, around twelve thousand reinforcements had been assembled (Nicolas, p. 418; Ruḥāni, I, p. 184). Many Bābis were killed in sorties, including ‘Alī Sardār (Fayzi, p. 112; Nicolas, p. 41; Ruḥāni, I, p. 187; ‘Ahdia and Čapman, pp. 162 ff.). Temperatures dropped, and food ran out. The Bābi men were captured or killed in the last sortie. Estimates of total casualties were in the hundreds (Shoghi Effendi, p. 165; Ruḥāni, I, p. 190). About 400 men participated in the battles. The women, children, and old men, and severed heads mounted on spears were marched under miserable conditions into Shiraz. A conservative estimate for the total number of prisoners is 450 to 500, including some 300 women, with an unknown number of children. Several hundred more believers were rounded up in a sweep of the Čenār-sukta quarter; Ruḥāni (II, p. 458), describes the men as mostly elderly or/and ill.

The Bahai cleric Moḥammad-Šafi’ worked with others in the late 19th century to repopulate the Čenār-sūkta quarter with survivors of the conflict and their descendants. With the transformation of the Bābi faith into the Bahai faith, Neyriz now had a Bahai community that developed friendly relationships with the Muslim residents. Bahai ‘teachers’ such as Ṭarāz-Allāh Samandari and Mirzā ‘Alī-Akbar Rafsanjāni came through Neyriz in 1909 and inspired local



believers. The meetings grew in size with some townspeople standing on roofs to hear Samandari who spoke in the courtyard below.

Centralized authority in Persia broke down during the period of the [Constitutional Revolution](#) in 1909. A local cleric, Shaikh Zakariyā, under the orders of a regional warlord, Sayyed ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Lāri, attacked Neyriz (Ruḥāni, II, p. 40), taking advantage of the political turmoil to settle a personal dispute in town (Balyuzi, p. 94). The attacks are blamed variously on Sayyed ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Lāri (Ruḥāni, II, p. 40), and/or the local clergy of Neyrīz, who directed Shaikh Zakariyā to go after the Bahais (Balyuzi, p. 94). Bahais fled into the surrounding countryside and neighboring towns, while their homes were ransacked and, in some cases, torched; 18 Bahais were killed (Fayzi, p. 146; Ruḥāni, II, 45; Ma‘ani, p. 9; Momen, 1981, p. 369; ‘Ahdia and Čapman, pp. 231-41).

Despite these persecutions, the Bahai community of Neyriz was able to elect its first spiritual assembly (*maḥfel-e ruḥāni*), during the years 1909-21. Among its first members were Shaikh Moḥammad-Ḥosayn, its secretary, Jenāb Mirzā Moḥammad-Bāqer Paymāni, Mirzā Faḏl-Allāh Paymāni, K̄āja Moḥammad, and Karbalā’i Moḥammad Šāleḥ. Mrs. Nṣrat Miṭāqi would be the first woman elected to the Assembly. Soon this Assembly became very influential in Neyriz with Muslims seeking its advice and referring to it as “the body of nine.”

Again, in 1928 and in 1929, mobs organized by Sayyed ‘Aziz Yazdi and Shaikh Moḥammad Yazdi attacked Bahai homes and demanded large sums of money. They broke up only when government troops intervened (Ḥesāmi, p. 268). By the late 1950s, large-scale persecution of the Bahais of Neyriz had ended. Instead, clerics warned *against any association with the Bahais and encouraged the destruction of Bahai graves, harvests, and livestock* (Ruḥāni, II, p. 374). The Bahai community of Neyriz eroded as Bahai businesses closed down and families moved away. Some left for Arabia and the Persian Gulf states, where they prospered financially.

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