



BAHĀ'-AL-DĪN 'ĀMELĪ

BAHĀ'-AL-DĪN 'ĀMELĪ, SHAIKH MOḤAMMAD B. ḤOSAYN BAHĀ'Ī, also known as Shaikh Bahā'ī, Imami scholar and author born near Baalbek on 27 Du'l-ḥejja 953/18 February 1547 (other dates are also given). He moved with the rest of his family to Isfahan and from there to Qazvīn after the execution in 966/1558 of al-Šahīd al-Tānī, who had been his father's mentor; reports that Bahā'ī was taken to Khorasan already at the age of seven are probably incorrect. Bahā'ī's father was appointed by Shah Ṭahmāsb I (r. 930/1524-984/1576) to serve as *šayk-al-eslām* in several important cities to propagate Twelver Shi'ism among the populace. According to some authorities, Bahā'ī accompanied his father throughout these years; others maintain that he remained in Qazvīn to pursue his studies. Uncertainty also surrounds Bahā'ī's whereabouts after his father relinquished his post to go on the hajj. According to one version, Bahā'ī accompanied him to Mecca and to Bahrain where he stayed until his father's death in 984/1576-77, and only then returned to Iran to take up the post in Herat that had once been his father's. A second version has it that Shah Ṭahmāsb refused to let Bahā'ī leave the country and ordered him instead to replace his father as *šayk-al-eslām* in Herat. The existence of a letter sent to Bahā'ī from his father in Bahrain argues in favor of the second version.

Bahā'ī's erudition won him the admiration of Shah 'Abbās I (r. 996/1588-1038/1629), who appointed him *šayk-al-eslām* of Isfahan after the death of the previous incumbent, Bahā'ī's father-in-law Zayn-al-Dīn 'Alī Menšār 'Āmelī (from whom Bahā'ī inherited a particularly rich library). During his years in Isfahan he befriended Mīr Dāmād and counted among his



many students Mollā Ṣadrā and Moḥsen al-Fayḏ. He was known for his charitable deeds, which included turning his home into a refuge for orphans, widows, and the poor. Bahā'ī was active in the service of the Safavid state and advocated the expansion of the powers of the 'olamā'. He resigned his post after a brief period, perhaps in reaction to attacks by rival clerics.

Bahā'ī spent a number of years traveling outside Iran. After performing the hajj he went to Egypt (where he is known to have been in 992/1584, associating with Shaikh Moḥammad b. Abi'l-Ḥasan Ṣeddīqī Ṣāfe'ī, d. 993/1585), to Jerusalem (where he spent much of his time at the Masjed al-Aqṣā) and Syria. Reports that he only returned to Iran after thirty years are, however, contradicted by his own testimony. He is thus known to have visited Tabrīz in 993/1585, Qazvīn in 1001/1592-93, Mašhad in 1007/1598-99 (or 1008/1599-1600), and Azarbaijan in 1015/1606, the latter two places in the company of Shah 'Abbās. It is likely that Bahā'ī did not leave Iran after 1019/1610. He spent his last years in Isfahan, and died there on 12 Ṣawwāl 1030/30 August 1621 (or 12 Ṣawwāl 1031/20 August 1622). He was buried in Ṭūs.

Bahā'ī was a prolific writer, composing perhaps as many as one hundred works in both Arabic and in Persian. Among the best known are the two anthologies, *Kaškūl* (written in Egypt) and the earlier *Meḳlāt*, both consisting of morsels of information on divers subjects in typical *adab* fashion. He composed works on *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, grammar, and *feqh* (such as the *Jāme'-e 'abbāsī* and the epistle prohibiting the consumption of meat slaughtered by the *ahl al-keṭāb*). His interest in the sciences is evident in works such as the astronomical treatise *Fī taṣrīḥ al-aflāk* (Anatomy of the heavens) and the summa of arithmetic, *Ḳolāṣat al-ḥesāb* (of which a German translation by G. H. L. Nesselmann was published as early as 1843). In addition, he wrote a book of divination (*Fāl-nāma*) and other works on the occult sciences. Bahā'ī was also a poet, and is best remembered for his two allegorical *maṭnawīs*, *Nān o ḥalwā* and *Šīr o šakar* (both published, together with other works, in Cairo [1347/1928-29] and later in Tehran [ed. Ġolām-Ḥosayn Jawāherī, 1341 Š./1962] under the title *Kolliyāt-e aš'ār wa āṭār-e fārsī-e Šayḳ Bahā'-al-Dīn Moḥammad al-'Āmelī mašhūr be Šayḳ Bahā'ī*).

In Imami circles, Bahā'ī is regarded as one of the leading lights of his age, and as the *mojadded* of the eleventh/seventeenth century. It is thus noteworthy that certain Sunni scholars wish to see in him one of their own. Their attitude is apparently based on a misunderstanding of Bahā'ī's behavior: since he moved between Ottoman and Safavid territories, probably he felt constrained



to suit his public utterances to the circumstances. The actions surrounding his visit to Syria are a case in point: before entering the country, he changed the introduction to a *tafsīr* originally dedicated to Shah ‘Abbās and instead dedicated the work to the Ottoman Sultan Morād III (r. 982/1574-1003/1595). During his stay in Aleppo he professed his allegiance to Shafī‘ite Sunnism and his love of the Şahāba, and claimed that his apparent Shi‘ism had been forced on him by the Safavid ruler; and he left Aleppo in haste when he heard that people from his home area of Jabal ‘Āmel were about to visit him (thus exposing him as a Shi‘ite). There is in fact no doubt that Bahā‘ī was, by both upbringing and conviction, a dedicated Imami, as witness his frequent pilgrimages to the tombs of the imams, his poem in praise of the Twelfth Imam, his verses defending the practice of vilifying Abū Bakr and ‘Omar, and especially his proselytizing efforts among non-Shi‘ite Iranians. In composing commentaries on Sunni works (such as the *tafsīrs* of Zamaḵṣarī and Bayżāwī) Bahā‘ī was continuing a tradition established by previous Imami authors.

Despite the subsequent apologetics of some Imami scholars, it is clear that Bahā‘ī had distinct Sufi leanings, for which he was severely criticized by Moḥammad Bāqer Majlesī. In fact, Bahā‘ī appears in the chain of both the Nūrbakṣī and Ne‘matallāhī spiritual genealogies (Ma‘şūm-‘Alīšāh, *Ṭarā‘eq al-ḥaqā‘eq* ed. M. J. Maḥjūb, Tehran, 1339 Š./1960, I, pp. 183, 254, II, p. 322). During his travels he dressed as a dervish and frequented Sufi circles. In his *Resāla fī’l-waḥda al-wojūdīya* (ed. Cairo, 1328/1910), Bahā‘ī speaks of the Sufis as true believers, calls for an unbiased assessment of their utterances, and refers to his own mystical experiences. His Persian verses, too, are replete with mystical allusions. At the same time Bahā‘ī called for strict adherence to the *şarī‘a* as a prerequisite for embarking on the *ṭarīqa*, and condemned pantheistic and antinomian mysticism.

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