



## BAYĀN (2)

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**BAYĀN** (declaration, elucidation), term applied to the writings of the **Bāb** in general (*Bayān-e fārsī* 3:17, p. 102; 6:1, pp. 184-85) and to two late works in particular, the *Bayān-e fārsī* and *al-Bayān al-'arabī*. The Bāb's first full-length work was a *tafsīr* of the *sūra al-Baqara*, begun in late 1259/1843 or early 1260/1844 and finished several months later; the original manuscript of the second half was stolen during the Bāb's *hajj* journey of 1260-61/1844-45, but several copies of the first part have survived. This portion at least contains little of a strikingly heterodox nature, although the *tafsīr* itself is highly interpretative. More important is the *tafsīr* on the *sūra Yūsof*, known as the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* or *Aḥsan al-qeṣaṣ* or simply the *Tafsīr* par excellence. Dating of this work is somewhat problematic, but there is internal evidence that it was begun in 1260/1844 and completed later that year or in early 1261/1845; other accounts state that it was finished by June, 1844, and it is certain that disciples of the Bāb carried copies of the entire work or large portions of it when they left Shiraz that summer. The Bāb himself states that this work was widely distributed during the first year of his career (*Bayān-e fārsī* 4:18, p. 148). Divided into 111 *sūras* (each devoted to a verse of the *sūra Yūsof*), this is a work of some 400 pages composed in a style similar to that of the Qur'ān. It is described as having been sent down by God to the Hidden Imam and subsequently revealed by him to the Bāb (for details, see MacEoin *From Shaykhism to Babism: A study in Charismatic Renewal in Shi'i Islam*, Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1979, p. 159). Early copies, dated 1845 and 1846, are extant in Haifa and Tehran. The Bāb penned several shorter works during the year between the announcement of his claims in May, 1844, and his



return to Būšehr from the *hajj* in May, 1845. There has been confusion as to what these works were, but they can be identified from detailed references in the *Ketāb al-fehrest*, written by the Bāb in Būšehr in Jomādā II, 1261/June, 1845. This short work lists the *Do'ā-ye ṣaḥīfa*, *Ṣaḥīfa bayn al-ḥaramayn*, *Tafsīr besmellāh*, *Ketāb al-rūḥ*, *Ṣaḥīfat a'māl al-sana*, thirty-eight letters to individuals, twelve *koṭbas* delivered on the *hajj* journey, and replies to forty-one questions. The titles are also given of several works stolen in February, 1845, between Medina and Jedda. The *Do'ā-ya ṣaḥīfa* seems to have been contemporary with the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* and may be referred to in it (fol. 67b). It is also known as the *Ṣaḥīfa-ye maḳzūna* and contains fourteen prayers for use on specific days or festivals; at least seven mss. are extant. The *Ṣaḥīfa bayn al-ḥaramayn* was written between Mecca and Medina for Mirzā Moḥīṭ Kermānī and Sayyed 'Alī Kermānī, two leading Shaikhs from Karbalā' also on the *hajj*. Only about 100 short pages long, it is an unsystematic collection of replies to questions together with prayers; it contains a particularly interesting passage detailing the daily routine of the seeker (*sālek*; pp. 66-84). Several mss. are extant, including two dated 1261/1845, in Haifa and Tehran. Several mss. exist of a *Tafsīr ḥorūf al-besmellāh*, which appears to be identical with the *Tafsīr besmellāh* referred to and which is a short allegorical commentary. The *Ketāb al-rūḥ*, composed at sea on the return journey from the *hajj*, was highly regarded by the Bāb, who described it as “the greatest of all books” (Māzandarānī, *Asrār* IV, p. 44); it was seized at the time of the Bāb's arrest in June, 1845, and thrown into a well in Shiraz, from which it was later rescued in a seriously damaged condition. Some five incomplete mss. are in existence. It is said to have consisted originally of 700 *sūras* (*Ketāb al-fehrest*). The *Ṣaḥīfat a'māl al-sana* seems to have been written in Būšehr after the Bāb's return from the *hajj*, between May and June, 1845. It contains fourteen sections interspersed with unnumbered sections and deals with the observances and prayers for important dates in the Muslim calendar. Only two mss. of this breviary are known to exist. Not mentioned by name in the *Ketāb al-fehrest* is another work composed during the *hajj*, the *Ḳasā'el-e sab'a*, which includes seven interesting but scarcely radical rules prescribed for the Bāb's followers at this juncture. It is known to the present writer only through quotations in later works, but at least one ms. appears to exist in private hands.

Of considerable importance are two works probably composed shortly after the Bāb's return to Shiraz in July, 1845. These are two related treatises, the *Ṣaḥīfa-ye 'adlīya* and the *Resāla forū' al-'adlīya*, the former dealing with *oṣūl al-dīn* and the latter with certain *forū'* of Shi'ite *feqh*. The first consists of five



*abwāb*: 1. on the mention of God, 2. in explanation of the Balance, 3. on the knowledge of God and his *awliā'*, 4. on the return to God, 5. on the prayer of devotion to God. It appears to have been the first Persian work of the Bāb's (see pp. 3-4) and is of particular importance in helping us form a clear picture of his thought at this juncture, especially since it seems to represent his first effort at addressing a wider audience than the Shaikhi *'olamā'*. For details of some of its contents, See *bāb*. Some dozen mss. are extant. The second of these works is less common but has the distinction of being the earliest of the Bāb's works to have been translated (from Arabic to Persian between 1262/1846 and 1263/1847). It consists of seven chapters (*abwāb*): 1. a short prayer for all the imams (*ziāra jāme'a šaḡīra*), 2. on daily prayer (*ṣalāt*), 3. on the regulations for prayer (*aḥkām al-ṣalāt*), 4. on the alms tax (*zakāt*), 5. on *koms*, 6. on jihad, 7. on borrowing (*dayn*), all dealt with in the traditional manner. Only three mss. are known to the present writer. Another important work from this period is a *tafsīr* on the *Sūrat al-kawṭar*, a commentary of over 200 pages written for [Sayyed Yaḥyā Dārābī](#) during a visit he made to Shiraz to interview the Bāb, possibly on behalf of Moḥammad Shah. This commentary consists largely of highly abstract and insubstantial speculations on the verses, words, and letters of the *sūra* in question. Of greater interest are numerous Hadiths quoted in a section toward the end, which indicate the Bāb's familiarity with works of tradition and his concern with prophecies relating to the advent of the Qā'em. There is evidence that this work was highly regarded by the Bāb's followers and widely distributed by them. Some ten mss. are extant, including one in Cambridge and one in London. During this period, the Bāb wrote several short *tafsīrs*, including those on the *Āyat al-nūr*, the *Sūrat al-qadr*, the *Sūrat al-tawḥīd*, and various Hadiths; he also continued to pen replies to queries from a large number of correspondents and to write brief treatises on topics such as compulsion and free will (*jabr* and *tafwīz*), predestination (*qadar*), and even grammar and syntax (*naḥw wa ṣarf*). Mss. of most of this material are extant.

Only two works of any importance may be ascribed to the period of the Bāb's residence in Isfahan from September, 1846, to March, 1847: a *tafsīr* on the *Sūra wa'l-aṣr* and a *resāla* on the topic of the *nobowwa kāṣṣa* of Moḥammad. The first of these was written for the *emām-e jom'a* of Isfahan, Mīr Sayyed Moḥammad: some 100 pages in length, it was, apparently, penned in the space of about one day. Eight mss. are known, including one in Cambridge. The second was composed in two hours for Manūčehr Khan Mo'tamed-al-Dawla, governor of Isfahan. It is a short work of some fifty pages designed as an apologetic for the prophethood of Moḥammad. Some seven mss. are extant.



Several surviving minor works—mostly letters—may also be dated from this period.

The style and content of the Bāb's works change markedly in the three-year period Rabi' II, 1263/March, 1847-Ramaẓān, 1266/July, 1850) of his imprisonment in Azarbaijan, when his claims and doctrines underwent a major transition (see bāb). The most important work of this period and, indeed, the central book of the Babi canon, is the *Bayān-e fārsī*, a lengthy but incomplete work of nine *wāḥeds* (units) each of nineteen *abwāb* (chapters), except for the last, which has only ten. It was originally intended to complete this work in nineteen *wāḥeds*, an aim which seems to have been frustrated by the Bāb's death. (A continuation entitled *Motammem-e Bayān* was later written by Mīrzā Yaḥyā Ṣobḥ-e Azal and has been published.) The *Bayān-e fārsī* was begun toward the end of the Bāb's stay in Mākū and contains a full expression of his doctrine as elaborated between then and his execution, together with the basic laws and regulations of the Babi *Šarī'a*. Its contents have been discussed in a number of places, to which reference may be made (Rosen, III, pp. 1-32; Browne, 1889, pp. 918-33; idem, *Nuḡṭatu'l-kāf*, London, 1910, pp. LIV-XCV; Wilson, "The Bayan"). A lithograph edition of this work, based on several mss., was published in Tehran about 1946 by the Azalī Babis, but copies of it are now rare. A. L. M. Nicolas published a French translation between 1911 and 1914. Preliminary materials for a collated edition based on six mss. may be found among the Browne papers in Cambridge University Library. Some fifty mss. are known to this writer, including two in Cambridge, two in Leningrad, two in London, two in Paris, and a defective but important copy in the hand of the Bāb's amanuensis, Sayyed Ḥosayn Yazdī, preserved by the Bahais in Haifa. The much shorter Arabic *Bayān* was also written in Mākū and, like the Persian *Bayān*, is incomplete, with only eleven *wāḥeds*. Each *wāḥed* has nineteen *abwāb*, but these latter are each little more than a verse in length, the overall effect being one of great compression with little or no logic in the sequence of subjects, dictated by the fact that this work is basically little more than a statement of the principal doctrines and regulations of the Persian *Bayān*. Gobineau's statement (*Religions et philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*, 10th ed., Paris, 1957, pp. 279-80) that there are three *Bayāns*, two in Arabic, is unfounded. Much rarer than its Persian equivalent, this work exists in some thirteen mss. (one an autograph), two of which are in Paris. It has been lithographed from the holograph ms. by the Azalī Babis in Tehran (n.d.), printed (in 'Abd-al-Razzāq Ḥasanī, *al-Bābīyūn wa'l-Bahā'īyūn*, Sidon, 1957, pp. 81-107), and twice translated into French (Gobineau, *Religions*, appendix:



“Ketab-è Hukkam,” pp. 409-82 [incomplete and inaccurate]; Nicolas—see bibliography). A related work, composed in the last period of the Bāb’s life, is the *Haykal al-dīn*, originally written in two copies, one in the hand of the Bāb, one in that of Sayyed Ḥosayn Yazdī, both of which appear to have been lost. Other copies have since been located, however, and the text has been published in lithograph together with the Arabic *Bayān*. It is a compendium in eight *wāḥeds* of the laws of the Bāb and, although it parallels the contents of the Arabic *Bayān* in most particulars, it frequently gives fresh or modified regulations. Another short but important work is the Persian *Dalā’el-e sab’a*, supported, like the Persian *Bayān*, by an even briefer Arabic version. There has been disagreement as to the date of its composition, but clear internal evidence indicates that it was written at the end of 1264/1848 in Mākū. There has also been some controversy as to the identity of the recipient addressed in the text (the two main theories favoring either Sayyed Ḥosayn Yazdī or Mollā Moḥammad-Taqī Heravi), but all that can be said with certainty is that this individual was either not a believer or was a believer with doubts, had been a pupil of Sayyed Kāẓem Raštī, and had met Mollā Moḥammad Ḥosayn Bošrū’ī. This work provides seven “proofs” of the Bāb’s mission, discusses his claim to *qā’emīya*, cites numerous Hadiths of a prophetic nature, and refers by name to several of the Bāb’s followers. Thirteen mss. are known to me, of which two are in Cambridge, one in London, and one in Paris. A lithograph edition has been published. An extremely lengthy work of this period is the *Ketāb al-asmā’* (also *Tafsīr al-asmā’* and *Ketāb asmā’ koll šay’*) which consists largely of lengthy variations on the names of God, interspersed with doctrinal statements. It has been ascribed to the later Čahrīq period. Normally found in two volumes, the entire work consists of nineteen *wāḥeds* of nineteen *abwāb* each, but defective copies are almost standard. Its popularity is clear from the large number of extant mss., twenty-six of which are known to me (three in Cambridge, seven in London, four in Paris). Another of the Bāb’s last works, similar in character to the last, is the *Ketāb-e panj ša’n* or *Šo’un-e kamsa*. This originally consisted of seventeen sections of five passages each, arranged according to the “five grades” in which the Bāb stated his works to have been written (*Bayān-e fārsī* 3:17; 6:1; 9:2): *āyāt*, *monājāt*, *koṭba* (= *šowar ‘elmīya*), *tafsīr*, and *fārsī*. The work was written over a seventeen-day period during Jomādā I, 1266/March-April, 1850, completed sections being sent, apparently, to individuals named in them. Eleven mss. are extant, one in Cambridge, two in London, and one in Paris. Numerous letters and *zīārat-nāmas* from this period are also extant, as are examples of talismans (*dawā’er*, *hayākel*) in the Bāb’s hand or containing passages from his writings.



It is impossible to comment adequately on the Bāb's style without extensive quotation in the original languages, but some general remarks will be in order. Although there are major changes in style and form, the striking characteristic of the Bāb's writing at all periods is its opacity and the syntactical contortions of the language, something true of both Persian and Arabic works. The Bāb's Arabic grammar is consistently bad (a point often referred to in Muslim criticisms but dismissed by Babis as the prerogative of a prophet), as a result of which some passages are incomprehensible: The reader must be guided for the most part by context and a developed feeling for the style than by strict reliance on grammar or syntax. Works like the *Bayān* are couched in an eccentric Persian style which often conceals the author's meaning, while others, such as the *Ketāb al-asmā'*, are unconnected and repetitive to an exaggerated degree. Much of this apparent incoherence seems to be a result of the considerable speed at which the Bāb composed (or "revealed") his works, a point to which he frequently alludes as evidence of divine inspiration. This inspirational quality—which may owe much to the disconnected nature of the Qur'ān—becomes increasingly marked in the later works, where it is not infrequently linked to ideas and images of an exciting, vivid, and highly original nature. The effort required to penetrate the obscurities of the style of the Persian *Bayān* in particular is often rewarded by access to fresh insights, and it cannot be denied that the more developed works display an unusual genius that thoroughly justifies their study.

All of the writings of the Bāb were recorded in the first instance in his own hand or in that of one of a number of amanuenses, of whom Sayyed Ḥosayn Yazdī (a "Letter of the Living") was by far the most important. These original texts appear to have been written in some form of "revelation script" (*kaṭṭ-e waḥy*), a form of shorthand devised to accommodate the Bāb's rapid dictation; few examples of these appear to have survived, however. Transcription of these originals was carried out to a large extent under the supervision of the Bāb himself, principally by Mollā 'Abd-al-Karīm Qazvīnī and Shaikh Ḥasan Zonūzī. Numerous copies were made from these transcriptions during the Bāb's lifetime, an activity encouraged in the Persian *Bayān*, which makes the possession of a *ṣaḥīfa* of at least 1,000 verses obligatory for all Babis and gives instructions regarding the preparation of copies of the *Bayān* itself. There is evidence for wide distribution of copies of at least the major works of the Bāb before 1266/1850, but it is also clear that large numbers of manuscripts must have perished in the disturbed conditions of this and the immediately succeeding period. Those Babis who left Iran for Baghdad in 1853 seem to



have carried a substantial number of texts with them and to have made efforts in later years to assemble copies of scriptural works in Iran for transfer to Iraq. Toward the end of the 13th/19th century, the British scholar Edward G. Browne was instrumental in having numerous Babi mss. transcribed for himself, largely by Azalī scribes; these now form an important part of the Browne collection in Cambridge University Library. Other Babi mss. were also acquired by the British Museum (now British Library), the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the Oriental Languages Institute in Petrograd. An important private collection belonging to the French scholar A. L. M. Nicolas was dispersed by sale in Paris in 1969; it seems that most (but not all) of it was purchased by the Bahai World Center in Israel. By far the largest and most important collections of Babi mss. are those in the national Bahai archives of Iran in Tehran and the international Bahai archives in Haifa. The former collection is extensive but uncatalogued and remains inaccessible owing to the conditions pertaining for the Bahais in Iran; its significance is considerable, however, in that it contains much extremely rare, even unique material. The latter is at present imperfectly catalogued and not freely accessible, although I am told that this situation may improve following the expansion of library facilities in coming years. There are also large numbers of mss. in the private collections of Azalī families in Iran, but these remain scattered and, for the most part, inaccessible. The Azalīs in Tehran have issued lithograph editions of a number of works of the Bāb, copies of which have become quite rare. The publication of properly edited complete texts of major works remains a *sine qua non* of future scholarship in this field.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The only detailed study of this subject to date is the present writer's *Early Bābī Doctrine and History: A Survey of Source Materials*, Los Angeles, 1987.

See also idem, "Nineteenth-Century Bābī Talismans," *Studia Iranica* 14, 1985, pp. 77-98.

The works of E. G. Browne on this subject are still invaluable: "The Bābīs of



Persia II: Their Literature and Doctrines,” *JRAS* 21, 1889, pp. 881-1009; “A Catalogue and Description of 27 Bābī Manuscripts,” *ibid.*, 24, 1892, pp. 433-99, 637-710; “Some Remarks on the Bābī Texts Edited by Baron Victor Rosen . . . ,” *ibid.*, 24, 1892, pp. 259-332; “Further Notes on Bābī Literature,” in *Materials for the Study of the Bābī Religion*, Cambridge, 1918, esp. pp. 198-208; “Writings of the Bāb and Şubḥ-i-Ezel,” in *A Traveller’s Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, 2 vols., Cambridge, 1891, I, pp. 335-47; completed by R. A. Nicholson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental MSS Belonging to the Late E. G. Browne*, Cambridge, 1932, section F. Baron Victor Rosen’s articles are also worth referring to: *Collections scientifiques de l’Institut des Langues Orientales du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères I: Manuscrits arabes*, St. Petersburg, 1877, pp. 179-212; III: *Manuscrits persans*, *ibid.*, 1886, pp. 1-51; VI: *Manuscrits arabes*, *ibid.*, 1891, pp. 141-255. The Azalī Babis in Tehran have published the following works of the Bāb: *Şahīfa-ye ‘adliya*, n.d.; *Bayān -e fārsī*, n.d.; *Dalā’el-e sab’a ‘arabī wa fārsī*, n.d.; *al- Bayān al-‘arabī* with *Ketāb-e Haykal al-dīn* and *Tafsīr-e do āya az Haykal al-dīn*, n.d.; *Qesmat-ī az alwāḥ-e kaṭṭ-e Noqṭa-ye Ūlā wa Āqā Sayyed Ḥosayn Kāteb*, n.d.; *Majmū’a-ī az āṭār-e Noqṭa-ye Ūlā wa Şobḥ-e Azal*, n.d.. The Bahais have published *Montakabāt-e āyāt az āṭār-e Ḥaẓrat-e Noqṭa-ye Ūlā*, Tehran, 134 *Badī*/1356 Š./1977), together with an English translation by Habib Taherzadeh, *Selections from the Writings of the Bāb* (Haifa, 1976), a heavily edited selection of passages from major works.

The following mss. are among the most important: *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Baqara*, Cambridge University Library [CUL], Browne Or. Ms. F. 8; *Tafsīr Sūrat al-kawṭar*, CUL, Browne Or. Ms. F. 10; *Qayyūm al-asmā’*, CUL, Browne Or. Ms. F. 11; Arabic letters, CUL, Browne Or. Ms. F. 21 and 28 (item 7); *Resāla fi’l-solūk*, Iran National Bahai Archives [INBA] 4011.C, pp. 123-27; *Ketāb al-rūḥ*, TBA, 4011.C, pp. 61-100, 7005.C; *Ḳoṭba fi Jedda*, INBA, 5006.C, pp. 330-35; *Ketāb şahīfat a’ māl al-sana*, INBA, 5006.C, pp. 262-78; *Resāla forū’ al-‘Adliya*, INBA, 5010.C, pp. 86-119; *Ketāb al-fehrest*, INBA, 6003.C, pp. 285-93; *al-Şahīfa al-makzūna*, INBA, 6009.C, pp. 1-171, CUL, Add. 3704(6).

Several translations of works of the Bāb into French were produced by A. L. M. Nicolas: *Le livre des sept preuves*, Paris, 1902 (*Dalā’el-e sab’a* Le Beyan arabe, Paris, 1905; *Le Beyan persan*, 4 vols., Paris, 1911-14. See also S. G. Wilson, “The Bayan of the Bab,” *The Princeton Theological Review* 13, October, 1959, pp. 633-54; M. Afnān, “Ketāb-e Bayān: Omm al-ketāb-e dawr-e Bābī,” *Āhang-e Badī*, 18 *Badī*/1342 Š./1963, 2, pp. 54-64; *idem*, “Majmū’a-ī az āṭār-e mobāraka-ye Ḥaẓrat-e Noqṭa-ye Ūlā”, *ibid.*, 11/12, pp. 412-16, 443.



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