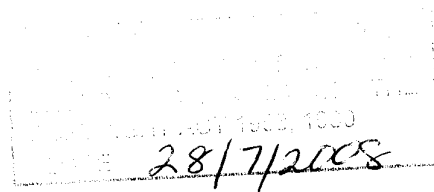


Studia Iranica

Tome 18 - 1989 - fascicule 1

**PUBLIÉ PAR L'ASSOCIATION POUR
L'AVANCEMENT DES ÉTUDES IRANIENNES
AVEC LE CONCOURS
DU CENTRE NATIONAL DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE
ET
DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE LA SORBONNE NOUVELLE — PARIS III**



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DIVISIONS AND AUTHORITY CLAIMS IN BABISM (1850-1866)

In a recently-published article ("Hierarchy, Authority and Eschatology in Early Bābī Thought," in P. Smith [ed.], *In Iran: Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History*, vol. 3, Los Angeles, Kalimat Press, 1986, pp. 95-155), I have analysed the nature of charismatic authority within the early Bābī movement (from 1844 to about 1850) and shown how this was linked to both long- and short-term eschatological expectations, both in the thought of the Bāb and in more popular notions held by some of his followers.

In this article I propose to move on from the theoretical considerations of the early period to examine in some detail the events of the period following the Bāb's death.

The question of succession

It will, I think, be best to begin with the controversial question of whether or not the Bāb appointed a successor and, if, so, what his intention in doing so may have been. The point is controversial precisely because it lies at the heart of the Bahā'ī/Azalī debate, but I have felt it better to take it, as far as possible, out of that context in order to treat it on its own merits. In order to clarify the issues involved, however, it will probably prove simplest to begin with a description of the Bahā'ī position — or, rather, positions, since there seems to be more than one — on the question of succession.

The earliest expression of the Bahā'ī attitude is, as far as I can tell, found in the writings of Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Bahā' Allāh from the Edirne period (1864-68), such as the *Lawḥ-i sirāj*. Here, it is categorically stated that "my previous manifestation effaced the decree of succession (*ḥukm-i*

wiṣāyat) all at once from the Book” and that the *Bayān* referred only to “letters” and “mirrors,” the latter being unnumbered.¹

This is, of course, both the simplest and the most consistent Bahā’ī position. By ruling out from the start any possibility of a legitimate claim to *wisāya* on the part of Ḥusayn ‘Alī’s half-brother Yaḥyā, it makes the former’s own claim to the position of “him whom God shall manifest” [*man yuzḥiruhu ‘llāh*: the Bābī messiah] more readily defensible and the latter’s rejection of him less of a stumbling-block. It remains a standard Bahā’ī position down to the present,² though usually presented more by implication or omission than direct affirmation.

A modified version first appeared in ‘Abbās Effendi ‘Abd al-Bahā’³ *Maqāla-yi shakhṣī sayyāh*, where it is stated that Bahā’ Allāh and Mullā ‘Abd al-Karīm Qazvīnī (one of the Bāb’s secretaries) devised a plan whereby Yaḥyā was to be made well known so that his brother could “remain protected from the interference of all men,” an arrangement the Bāb himself is said to have approved.³ Despite obvious ethical objections, this has remained a popular explanation of the affair for Bahā’īs. The modern Bahā’ī writer Taherzadeh states that the original suggestion came from Bahā’ Allāh himself and was known only to Qazvīnī and another brother of Ḥusayn ‘Alī and Yaḥyā, Mīrzā Mūsā.⁴

Both the above positions are combined and sanctioned by Shoghi Effendi in his official history, *God Passes By*, where he states that “a successor or vicegerent the Bāb never named, an interpreter of His teachings He refrained from appointing,” before proceeding to accept ‘Abbās Effendi’s notion of the nomination of Azal as a figure-head.⁵

¹ Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī Nūrī Bahā’ Allāh, “Lawḥ-i sirāj,” in ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishāq Khāvarī (ed.), *Mā’ida-yi āsmānī* (Tehran, 1971-73), vol. 7, p. 40; cf. p. 70.

² See, for example, Sayyid Mahdī Dahajī, *Risāla-yi Sayyid Mahdī Dahajī*, MS F57, E. G. Browne Or. MSS, Cambridge University Library, pp. 97ff.

³ ‘Abbās Effendi ‘Abd al-Bahā’, *Maqāla-yi shakhṣī sayyāh*, ed. and trans. E.G. Browne as *A Traveller’s Narrative written to illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1891), vol. 1, pp. 79-80; vol. 2, pp. 62-63.

⁴ A. Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahā’u’llāh*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1974), p. 53. The complicity of Mīrzā Mūsā and ‘Abd al-Karīm Qazvīnī may be based merely on a reference by Bahā’ Allāh in his *Lawḥ-i Naṣīr* to the effect that these two individuals were “informed about the beginnings of this affair [or ‘cause’: *amr*]” (text in Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī Nūrī Bahā’ Allāh, *Majmū’a-yi alwāḥ-i muḥāraka* [Cairo, 1920], p. 174). See also Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 62.

⁵ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill., 1944), pp. 28-29. Shoghi Effendi’s discussion of the question of *wisāya* in Babism involves a curious but important contradiction. Before the passage just referred to, he states that the Bāb’s own appearance fulfilled a “Greater Covenant” made by God “from time immemorial” regarding the Bābī revelation. He then goes on to say that this was now supplemented by a “lesser Covenant,” such as had existed in all previous religions, concerning the Bāb’s successor, identified as Bahā’ Allāh (ibid., pp. 27-28). Normally, however, Bahā’ī doctrine refers to the “Greater Covenant” as that involving the acceptance of each successive prophet by mankind and the

It is highly unlikely that the Bāb should have totally ignored the question of succession. The concept of *wiṣāya* is one of the most fundamental of Shīrāzī doctrines, not only with regard to Islam, but in respect of every previous revelation.⁶ In my earlier article (pp. 123-25), I observed that the Bāb spoke frequently of the need for guides in every period of *zuhūr* and *butūn* and anticipated such individuals in his own revelation. Nor was this simply a generalized reference to unnumbered mirrors and witnesses. The Bāb was quite explicit as to the identity of individuals authorized to interpret his writings or answer questions on his behalf.

Such authority was certainly granted Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī, who received the title *bāb* from Shīrāzī around the mid-point of the latter's career ("Hierarchy," pp. 105-106). According to Fāḍil-i Māzandarānī, during the period the Bāb was under house-arrest in Shīrāz (1845-46), Bushrū'ī was appointed to take charge of all affairs on his behalf, and to reply to questions from believers and others.⁷

It is hard to say just how much direct authority was delegated in this way to later Bābī leaders such as Bārfurūshī, Dārābī, Zanjānī, or Qurrat al-ʿAyn, who taught and interpreted the Bāb's writings and teachings in the provinces after 1846; but it is certain that, in the final stages of his career, Shīrāzī instructed his followers to ask about anything they did not understand from his secretary, Sayyid Ḥusayn Yazdī.

In the *Haykal al-dīn*, the Bāb writes: "Ask of him who writes down the verses of God in his presence what we have taught him of the explanation of knowledge."⁸ Although the precise range of matters about which Yazdī was authorized to give answers is nowhere specified, it would appear to have included all questions relating to legislative and related topics, as is clear from the following passage from a letter to

"Lesser Covenant" as that securing the appointment of the prophet's immediate successor, not the next manifestation. (See Anon [ed.], *The Covenant of Bahā'u'llāh* [London, 1063], Introduction, p. XXI; Anon [ed.], *The Covenant and Administration* [Wilmette, Ill., n.d.], pp. 7-12; Shoghi Effendi, quoted *Bahā'ī News* [January, 1934], 80:5; *idem* in *ibid* [August, 1948], 210: 3.)

⁶ See Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, "Iṣma wa raj'a," in *idem*, *Jawāmi' al-kilām*, 2 vols. (Tabriz, 1856, 1860), vol. 1, p. 77. This argument is followed by Mullā Rajab ʿAlī Iṣfahānī (*Risāla-yi Mullā Rajab ʿAlī Qahīr*, MS F24, E.G. Browne Or. MSS, Cambridge University Library, f. 19a). It is significant to observe that this is also the strict Bahā'ī doctrine although it is negated in the case of Babism. Thus, Shoghi Effendi, referring to the covenant between each prophet and his followers regarding his immediate successor, writes: "This is merely to establish and strengthen the succession of the series of Lights that appear after every Manifestation" (quoted *Bahā'ī News* [January, 1934], 80:5).

⁷ Mīrzā Asad Allāh Fāḍil-i Māzandarānī, *Kitāb-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 3 (n.p., n.d.), pp. 121, 388.

⁸ Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb, *Haykal al-dīn* (n.p. [Tehran], n.d.; printed with *idem*, *al-Bayān al-ʿArabī*), 1: 12, p. 3.

Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Qazvīnī: "Ask about the ways [*al-manāḥij*, i.e. the laws and ordinances] from him who writes down the verses of God."⁹

At the very least, then, it seems that the Bāb did, in fact, appoint at least two "interpreters" of his laws and teachings, and there is evidence that he may have wished to formalize and perpetuate this system.

Evidence for this may be found in a late work entitled the *Kitāb-i panj sha'n*. Having spoken about "a number of guides" and the appointment of the Imam 'Alī by Muhammad, the Bāb writes: "we have granted you [i.e. Shaykh 'Alī Turshīzī] a mighty station on our part. Since neither the first to believe [i.e. Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī] nor any of the other initial guides [i.e. the Letters of the Living] had any offspring, God shall grant you what he ordained for a *wāḥid* [*? mā qadara li-wāḥid*] and (shall grant) to whom he wishes what he has ordained."¹⁰

Vague as it is, this passage provides sufficient evidence for the view that the Bāb had originally intended to continue leadership of his religion in lines of descent from Bushrū'ī and other Letters of the Living, but was prevented from doing so by an absence of descendants. A second generation of converts — among whom the most important were Yazdī, Turshīzī, Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khū'ī Dayyān, Sayyid Yaḥyā Dārābī Wāḥid, and, above all, Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī Ṣubḥ-i Azal — to replace the *ḥurūf al-ḥayy* (who had either been killed or forced to opt for obscurity) as authorities and teachers.

The criterion for leadership was no longer simple priority of belief or even membership of the 'ulamā' class. It was now the possession of a pure, untarnished *fiṭra* or innate capacity for receiving divine knowledge. In the *Haykal al-dīn*, for example, the Bāb says: "Regard all who arise in the Bayān with innate knowledge [*'ilm fiṭrī*] as being like the first mention [i.e. the Bāb] in the name of *al-Wāḥid*."¹¹

It seems to have been on account of his supposed innate knowledge and ability to write divinely-revealed verses that Ṣubḥ-i Azal was appointed as principal authority next to the Bāb himself, to whom affairs were to be referred after the latter's death. Around 1849, when he was about nineteen, Azal began to "speak with an unlettered tongue, (uttering) words from the heart and innate verses."¹² His writings were sent to the Bāb, who is said to have been deeply impressed by them.¹³

⁹ Shīrāzī, letter in *idem* and Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī Ṣubḥ-i Azal, *Majmū'a'ī az āthār-i Nuqṭa-yi Ulā wa Ṣubḥ-i Azal* (n.p. [Tehran], n.d.), p. 38; quoted Rajab 'Alī Qahūr, *Risāla*, f. 59b.

¹⁰ Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb, *Kitāb-i panj sha'n* (n.p. [Tehran], n.d.), p. 278.

¹¹ *Idem*, *Haykal al-dīn*, 1: 17, p. 4.

¹² Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kirmānī and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht* (n.p. [Tehran], n.d.), p. 300. For statements of the Bāb as to Azal's *fiṭra*, see 'Izzīyya Khānum, *Tanbīh al-nā'imīn*, (n.p., [Tehran], n.d.), pp. 61-62.

¹³ Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, p. 300. Cf. Ḥājī Mīrzā Jānī Kāshānī, *Kitāb-i*

The Bāb's own subsequent references to the topic indicate that he regarded Azal's writings as inspired and wanted copies of them sent to him in prison. Particularly revealing in this context is a letter written by Yazdī, to Mullā ʿAbd al-Karīm Qazvīnī, who is described as "the amanuensis of the writings of Azal" (*Kātib-i āthār-i azaliyya*). Yazdī says: "I have seen all that you sent with Salmān of red, yellow, and white paper, and what you penned of the writings of your lord, the lord of all things. I have read them many times to your lord [i.e. the Bāb], who creates lordship in whomever he wills from among his servants. All that may be sent after this of the writings of that Eternity [*dhālika ʾl-azal*], that peacock of the primal heaven, whether in your (own) hand or the hand of God [presumably Azal's hand] shall be much appreciated by his holiness the Loved One [i.e. the Bāb]." ¹⁴ The Bāb himself expressly asks in several places to be sent the works of Azal: "Send me whatever shines forth of the writings of Azal, for we love them." ¹⁵

Regarded as directly inspired by God, ¹⁶ Azal was held by the Bāb to be someone to whom his followers could turn for knowledge and guidance on religious matters. In a letter to Mullā Ḥusayn Khurāsānī, ¹⁷ the Bāb tells his followers to "cling to the mirror" before the appearance of *man yuzhiruhu ʾllāh*. This mirror (which is clearly meant to be Azal) "will command you (to observe) the paths of the eleven *wāhids* (of the Bayān); whatever has not been explained of the verses of the paths [i.e. verses dealing with legal matters] will be explained by him.... Preserve that [this letter?] and send it to the mirror, then to all the guides of your lord, and command all of them not to spread abroad mention of the mirror, lest he should be saddened: until God sends to him all God's writings. He sends whom he wishes at his command and through his

nuqṭat al-kāf, ed. E.G. Browne (London and Leiden, 1910), p. 238.

¹⁴ Yazdī, in Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī and Sayyid Ḥusayn Yazdī, *Qismatī az-
alwāḥ-i khaṭṭ-i Nuqṭa-yi ʾUlā wa ʾĀqā Sayyid Ḥusayn Yazdī* (n.p. [Tehran], n.d.), pp. 33-32
(sic). This letter is also of interest for its clear identification of several names with their
titles. Thus, "Azal" and "al-Thamara al-Azaliyya" ("the Eternal Fruit") are identical;
"Jamīl" is applied to ʿAzīm (Mullā Shaykh ʿAlī Turshīzī, who seems to be identified as the
Imām ʿAlī, "the Lord of the cycle and the return"); "al-Qawīm" is applied to Karīm (ʿAbd
al-Karīm Qazvīnī, who is described as "the herald [*mubashshir*] of the Eternal Joy [*bihjat al-
azaliyya*," sic — i.e. Ṣubḥ-i Azal]); "al-Ḥayy" belongs to Wahīd (Sayyid Yahyā Dārābī,
whose appearance [*zuhūr*] is described as "better than the worship of all created things;" "al-
Bahāʾ" is given to Qurrat al-ʿAyn; "al-Dayyān" is the title of Asad (Asad Allāh Khuṭī); and
"al-ʿAlī" belongs to Sayyid ʿAlī Shīrāzī, an uncle of the Bāb. It is, perhaps, significant that
Yazdī makes no mention in this list of Mīrzā Ḥusayn ʿAlī Bahāʾ Allāh.

¹⁵ Sayyid Ḥusayn Yazdī, letter quoted Rajab ʿAlī Qahīr, *Risāla*, f. 56a.

¹⁶ Shīrāzī, *Panj shaʾn*, pp. 122, 185.

¹⁷ On whom, see Muḥammad ʿAlī Malik Khusrawī, *Tārīkh-i shuhadāʾ-i amr*, vol. 3
(Tehran, 1973-74), p. 260.

wisdom explains the decrees of what was sent down in the Bayān.”¹⁸

In several passages, the Bāb instructs his followers to send his writings to Azal, who is commissioned with the task of preserving them. Thus, for example, in a letter to ‘Abd al-Karīm Qazvīnī, he gives instructions for the preservation of “all that has been sent down from God” and its despatch to “al-Wahīd” [i.e. Azal].¹⁹ Elsewhere, he states that the Bayān (in this case probably a reference to his works as a whole) is to be presented to *man yuzhiruhu ʿllāh* on his appearance; but first it is to be collected in its entirety so that not a letter may be omitted, after which it is to be given to Azal, who, it seems, is to act as its interpreter.²⁰

Azal’s role as a revealer of inspired verses and as preserver and interpreter of the Bāb’s writings does not seem to have been envisaged as limited to the Bāb’s lifetime. There are a number of passages that state or imply that the latter anticipated some kind of revelatory continuity centred on Azal. In one prayer, for example, he refers explicitly to the succession of prophets from Adam to Muḥammad, together with their immediate successors from Seth to ‘Alī, going on to say: “... and then him whom you manifested with verses in the Bayān [i.e. himself]. And you made him whose heart you opened a sign for him in the mother of the book, for the recitation of your verses and their protection by night and day as a decree [? — *minhājan*] on your part.”²¹

More directly, he writes in a letter to Azal: “O Azal [*yā ism al-azal*]... if this throne [i.e. himself] should be cut off, then recite of the verses of your lord what God shall cast upon your heart as a remembrance from him.”²² According to the *Nuqtat al-kāf*, before his death the Bāb sent his pencase, papers, writings, clothing, seal, and other items to Azal and made a clear appointment [*naṣṣ*] of him as his *waṣī* and *walī*.²³

Most explicit of all is the Bāb’s letter to Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Qazvīnī, referred to previously, in which he says: “The affair shall return to God; and it shall reach the name of al-Wahīd, for his appearance is in itself a proof. And after him if God should reveal one like him, possessed of proof, it shall go to him; otherwise the affair is in the hands of the witnesses.”²⁴

¹⁸ Shīrāzī, letter quoted Rajab ‘Alī Qahīr, *Risāla*, f. 57a-57b.

¹⁹ *Idem*, letter in *idem* and Yazdī, *Qismatī az alwāḥ*, p. 1 (transcription, p. 2).

²⁰ *Idem*, passage quoted Rajab ‘Alī Qahīr, *Risāla*, f. 60a.

²¹ *Idem*, passage quoted *ibid.*, ff. 23b, 61a.

²² *Idem*, letter quoted *ibid.*, f. 54a.

²³ Kāshānī, *Nuqtat al-kāf*, p. 244. Bahā’ī sources make much the same statement about Bahā’ Allāh (see, for example, Mullā Muḥammad Nabīl Zarandī, *The Dawn-Breakers*, ed. and trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill., 1932), pp. 504-05).

²⁴ Shīrāzī, letter in *idem* and Nūrī, *Majmū‘a’ī az āthār*, p. 38. The word *amr*, translated here as “affair,” may, of course, be rendered differently (as, for example, by “cause”).

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The Azalī writer Rajab ʿAlī Qahīr maintains that Ṣubḥ-i Azal was the effective leader of the Bābī community during the Bāb's lifetime (when the latter was in prison),²⁵ but there is no contemporary evidence to support this. It is clear that Azal's name did become well known around 1849/50; but his position then appears to have been simply that of a subordinate revealer of verses. There is, of course, little doubt that, after the Bāb's death, Azal came to be regarded as the central authority within the sect, to whom the majority of Bābīs turned for guidance and as a source of continued revelation.

This sense of continuity is expressed particularly clearly in a letter from Sayyid Ḥusayn Yazdī to ʿAbd al-Karīm Qazvīnī, in which he addresses a woman called Maryam:²⁶ "Be saddened at the setting of (the sun of) your lord, and weep for the disappearance of your master. But rejoice in his (re-)arising in the eternal Azal [al-azal al-azāl], for before his setting he had already risen in him. And be gladdened at the (re-)appearance of your lord in the ripe fruit [*al-thamar al-thamīr* — one of Azal's titles], for before his disappearance he had already appeared in him."²⁷

Yazdī was particularly active in promoting Azal's succession. In a letter that seems to have been written from near Tabrīz shortly after the Bāb's death in July 1850,²⁸ he gives the following instructions to Ḥājī Sulaymān Khān Tabrīzī: "While you are in Tehran [arḍ-i bahāʾ = arḍ-i ṭāʾ], please inform this recluse living in the cell of remoteness and exile whenever you meet with your lord. And whenever verses are revealed from the heaven of *azaliyyat*, enclose them with your own letters."²⁹

As we shall see presently, even Bahāʾī accounts acknowledge the fact that, in the early period of the Baghdad exile, Azal was very definitely regarded by the majority of Bābīs as the primary focus of their faith and obedience. Recognition of Ṣubḥ-i Azal was, however, only one of a number of doctrinal positions — some of them mutually contradictory — that were available to Bābīs in the 1850s and early 1860s, and it now remains for us to examine the course of events in Baghdad and elsewhere in his period in order to obtain a clearer perspective on the gradual fission of the Bābī community into Azalī and Bahāʾī factions.

²⁵ Rajab ʿAlī Qahīr, *Risāla*, f. 24b.

²⁶ The identity of this individual is unclear. She may have been Ṣubḥ-i Azal's cousin Maryam, who was married to his half-brother Ḥājī Mīrzā Rīdā Qulī Nūrī.

²⁷ Yazdī, letter in Shīrāzī and Yazdī, *Qismatī az alwāḥ*, p. 23 (transcription, p. 24).

²⁸ The text reads: "I am burning with the fire of separation and dwelling near the place of martyrdom [*mashhad*]."

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37 (transcription, p. 38).

The *zuhūrāt* of the post-1850 period

The most striking feature of Babism during the 1850s is the proliferation of claims to some form of theophanic status on the part of individual members of the sect. ‘Abbās Effendi maintains that no fewer than twenty-five separate individuals claimed to be *man yuzhiruhu ʿllāh* at this time.³⁰ Browne goes even further, saying that religious speculation “threatened, especially during the two or three years succeeding the Bāb’s martyrdom (1850-1853), to destroy all order and discipline in the young church by suffering each member to become a law unto himself, and by producing as many ‘Manifestations’ as there were Bābīs.”³¹ Both these statements are exaggerations: the real number of distinct *zuhūrāt* may indeed have been around twenty-five; but it would not seem that most of these actually claimed to be “he whom God shall manifest.”

A number of works provide lists of the names of claimants during this period, from which the following represents a distillation:

- 1) An otherwise unidentified young man known only by the title “Dhabīḥ.”³²
- 2) Sayyid Baṣīr [alternatively, “Sayyid A‘mā’] Hindī.³³
- 3) Mullā Shaykh ‘Alī Turshīzī “‘Azīm.”³⁴
- 4) Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khu‘ī “Dayyān.”³⁵
- 5) A certain “Sayyid ‘Uluww” in Karbalā’.³⁶
- 6) Āqā Muḥammad Karāwī.³⁷
- 7) Ḥājī Mīrzā Mūsā Qummī.³⁸
- 8) Mullā Muḥammad Nabīl Zarandī.³⁹
- 9) Muḥammad Ja‘far Kāshānī (Narāqī).⁴⁰

³⁰ ‘Abbās Effendi, cited Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 125.

³¹ E.G. Browne, introduction to M.H. Pheips, *The Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, 2nd. ed. (New York, 1912), p. xxii.

³² Kāshānī, *Nuqtat al-kāf*, pp. 252-55.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-59; Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 59; Mīrzā Yahyā Nūrī, Ṣubḥ-i Azal, *Kitāb-i mustayqiz* (n.p. [Tehran,], n.d.), p. 28; Mullā Muḥammad Ja‘far Narāqī, *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn*, MS F63, E.G. Browne Or. MSS, Cambridge University Library, pp. 14, 29, 95.

³⁴ Kāshānī, *Nuqtat al-kāf*, p. 259.

³⁵ Dahajī, *Risāla*, pp. 59, 87; Nūrī, *Mustayqiz*, pp. 7ff. and passim; Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, pp. 302-303; Narāqī, *Tadhkira*, pp. 14, 29, 95. Dayyān may be the “individual in the land of *tā* [Tabriz]” referred to by Kāshānī (*Nuqtat al-kāf*, p. 260).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 260-261; Zarandī, *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 593.

³⁷ Kāshānī, *Nuqtat al-Kāf*, p. 261.

³⁸ Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 59; Narāqī, *Tadhkira*, pp. 14, 29; H.M. Balyuzi, *Bahā’u’llāh* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 122, 131.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128; *idem*, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahā’ī Faith* (London, 1970), p. 44; Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, p. 303.

⁴⁰ Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 69.

- 10) Ḥusayn Mīlānī.⁴¹
- 11) ʿAbd al-Karīm Tabrīzī.⁴²
- 12) Ismāʿīl Iṣfahānī.⁴³
- 13) A certain Mahdī from near Iṣfahān.⁴⁴
- 14) Mullā (or Sayyid) Ḥusayn Hindiyānī.⁴⁵
- 15) ʿAlī Akbar Shīrāzī.⁴⁶
- 16) ʿAbd Allāh Ghawghā.⁴⁷
- 17) Ḥājī Mullā Hāshim Kāshānī.⁴⁸
- 18) Sayyid Ḥusayn Iṣfahānī.⁴⁹
- 19) A certain “Shaykh Ismāʿīl.”⁵⁰
- 20) Unidentified individuals in Tabrīz, Fārs (possibly Shīrāz), and Hamadān.⁵¹

Many of the above-mentioned are extremely obscure and are likely to remain so; for others we possess only the most rudimentary information. It is difficult to establish with any clarity or in any detail what sort of claims were made by them or what kind of doctrines they taught. Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī (at one time himself a claimant — see 9 above) identifies three levels of claim in the case of those individuals to whom he refers:

- (a) *Ḥusayniyyat* (i.e. the claim to be the return of the Imām Ḥusayn), which he says was advanced by Ḥājī Mullā Hāshim Kāshānī [17] and Ḥusayn Mīlānī [10].

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95; Nūrī, *Mustayqiz*, p. 28; Narāqī, *Tadhkira*, pp. 14, 29, 95; Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, p. 303. Browne has surmised that Ḥusayn Mīlānī may be identical with the ‘Sulṭān Maṣṣūr’ referred to in the *Nuqtat al-kāf* (p. 259) — see Mīrzā Ḥusayn Hamadānī, *The New History (Tārīkh-i-Jadīd) of Mīrzā ʿAlī Muḥammad the Bāb*, ed. and trans. E.G. Browne (Cambridge, 1893), p. 392, f.n.4. But cf. Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Zawāraʿī, *Waqāyīʿ-i mīmiyya*, MS F28, item 1, E.G. Browne Or. MSS, Cambridge University Library, p. 17, where Bushrūʿī is referred to by this title.

⁴² Nūrī, *Mustayqiz*, p. 28 (he, and not Khūʿī, may be the “individual in the land of *tā*” referred to in Kāshānī, *Nuqtat al-kāf*, p. 260).

⁴³ Nūrī, *Mustayqiz*, p. 28 (this may possibly be the Dhabīh referred to at length in the *Nuqtat al-kāf*).

⁴⁴ Nūrī, *Mustayqiz*, p. 28.

⁴⁵ Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 95.

⁴⁶ Nūrī, *Mustayqiz*, p. 28.

⁴⁷ Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 95; Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, p. 303.

⁴⁸ Narāqī, *Tadhkira*, pp. 14, 29; Balyuzi, *Bahāʾuʾllāh*, p. 131. Is this the “Point of Kāf” [*nuqta-yi kāfī*] referred to in Kāshānī, *Nuqtat al-kāf*, p. 259, and possibly related to the title of that work? He may be the “blind person from Kāshān” referred to by Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, p. 303.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Mīrzā Yahyā Nūrī, *Ṣubḥ-i Azal*, cited Browne, *Traveller's Narrative*, vol. 2, p. 331.

⁵¹ Kāshānī, *Nuqtat al-kāf*, p. 260; Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 88. Nūrī says there were such claimants “in every land” (*Mustayqiz*, p. 28).

- (b) The claim to be *man yuẓhiruhu ʾllāh*, which was claimed by Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khūʾī Dayyān [4] and Ḥājī Mīrzā Mūsā Qummī [7].
- (c) Both of these simultaneously, as claimed by Sayyid Baṣīr Hindī [2] and Mīrzā Ḥusayn ʿAlī Nūrī Bahāʾ Allāh.⁵²

While there is independent confirmation of a number of the claims noted by Narāqī (such as those of Ḥusayn Mīlānī and Bahāʾ Allāh to *ḥusayniyyat*),⁵³ I am not convinced that all the claims advanced in this period were so precise or consistent. The author of the *Nuqtat al-kāf* describes the claimants to whom he refers as “possessors of verses and mystical attractions [*jadhabāt*],”⁵⁴ which implies a rather generalized sense of divine inspiration, the numerous *ẓuhūrāt* being regarded as leaves and branches of the tree of Ṣubḥ-i Azal, the appearance of which ought to be considered a sign of the tree’s perfection.⁵⁵

The first of these *ẓuhūrāt* was, according to the *Nuqtat al-kāf*, a young man of seventeen or eighteen known as “Dhabīḥ” (and therefore probably originally called Ismāʿīl), who appeared in the year seven (1850-51).⁵⁶ Dhabīḥ was a confectioner, and our sources describe him as “unlettered” [*ummi*]. I have elsewhere⁵⁷ advanced the hypothesis that he was actually Ḥājī Mīrzā Ismāʿīl Kāshānī, a brother of Mīrzā Jānī Kāshānī (the supposed author of the *Nuqtat al-kāf*) and later a partisan of Mīrzā Ḥusayn ʿAlī Nūrī. In addition, I have suggested that he may have been in part responsible for the writing of the *Nuqtat al-kāf*.⁵⁸ These hypotheses must remain extremely tentative; but if it could be demonstrated that Ismāʿīl was Dhabīḥ and that he had helped pen such an interesting work, we would be in a position to guess at some of the views he may have been putting forward around the mid-1850s.

According to the account given in the *Nuqtat al-kāf* (which does, in fact, contain a lengthy apologia in the first person), Dhabīḥ began his activities when he met an unidentified young man, possibly Ṣubḥ-i Azal. After having been captivated by this youth, Dhabīḥ says that “the traces of his everlasting lordship appeared in the mirror of my existence, and my tongue was loosed with verses [*āyāt*] and prayers in his court.

⁵² Narāqī, *Tadhkira*, p. 14.

⁵³ See Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 95; Rajab ʿAlī Qahīr, *Risāla*, f. 43a; ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Rahīq-i makhtūm*, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1974-75), vol. 1, pp. 190-191.

⁵⁴ Kāshānī, *Nuqtat al-kāf*, p. 261.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 255.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁵⁷ D. MacEoin, *Early Bābī Doctrine and History: A Survey of Source Materials* (forthcoming).

⁵⁸ If this is correct, we must take this reference to his being *ummi* (as in the cases of both the Bāb and Ṣubḥ-i Azal) to mean that he was not an *ʿālim* — not that he was literally unlettered.

Constantly, from his presence unto his own self [*az ḥadrat-i ū bi-jināb-i ū*] I spoke the words 'Truly, I am God; no god is there but me.'⁵⁹

The initial response of the other believers was to reject these claims and complain of Dhabīḥ to Azal. The latter, however, supported Dhabīḥ's claims in somewhat cryptic fashion, saying "I do not know him," words which, according to the author of the *Nuqtat al-kāf*, meant that Azal himself was manifested in Dhabīḥ. Later, however, following further complaints, Azal instructed Dhabīḥ not to speak, write, or associate with the other Bābīs.⁶⁰

Of greater interest is the story of Sayyid Baṣīr Hindī [2] (referred to in some sources as "Sayyid-i A'cā," "the blind sayyid"),⁶¹ a blind Indian regarded by the author of the *Nuqtat al-kāf* as the second *zuhūr* to appear in the year seven. Born to an important Sūfī family in India,⁶² Sayyid Baṣīr was blinded by smallpox at the age of seven. On his way to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca at the age of twenty or twenty-one, he passed through Iran and, on his return journey, visited the Shī'ī shrines in Iraq, where he met the Shaykhī leader, Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (d. Jan. 1844).

After his return to Bombay (or, according to one source, Multan), he heard about the appearance of the Bāb in Iran and returned in order to meet him. Finding on his arrival that Shīrāzī had gone on the *hajj*, he followed him to Mecca and finally encountered him in the Masjid al-Ḥarām. More probably, he may have met him in Shiraz after his return from the pilgrimage. What seems certain is that he remained in Iran for several years after that.

From about 1848, following an unsuccessful attempt to join the Bābī defenders at Shaykh Ṭabarsī, he stayed with Mullā Shaykh 'Alī Turshīzī, in whom he is said to have recognized "the signs of lordship." After this, he visited Gīlān in the company of a certain Mīrṣā Muṣṭafā the Kurd, a Qalandar given to the utterance of extreme statements [*shathīyāt*] — behaviour which led to the expulsion of both men from the port of Enzeli. Travelling through Qazvīn, where they appear to have attracted much attention from the large Bābī community, they headed for Tehran to visit Ṣubḥ-i Azal and his brother Mīrṣā Ḥusayn 'Alī.

Bahā' Allāh in particular seems to have formed a very close attachment to Baṣīr (possibly because of his own continuing predilection for Sufism) and to have exercised considerable influence over him. In the

⁵⁹ Kāshānī, *Nuqtat al-kāf*, p. 253.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 252-55.

⁶¹ "Baṣīr" ("sharp-sighted") is not, of course, his real name, but a reference to his physical condition. According to Kāshānī, the title was given him by Ṣubḥ-i Azal (*ibid.*, p. 255).

⁶² Kāshānī says this was the family of Sayyid Jalāl Hindī, which had for a long time provided leaders for the Dāghdārī order (*ibid.*, p. 255).

words of the *Nuqtat al-kāf*, "the effulgences [*tajalliyāt*] of the lordship of that splendour of paradise [i.e. Bahā' Allāh] shone forth in the temple of his [Baṣīr's] servitude."⁶³

The major influence on Sayyid Baṣīr, however, seems to have been Dhabīḥ, who associated closely with him in Tehran. The *Nuqtat al-kāf* speaks of the reflection of Dhabīḥ's divinity in the sayyid, in terms reminiscent of Ṣūfī theophanology (particularly the concepts of *fanā' fi l-shaykh* or the contemplation of young men).⁶⁴ In evidence of his status, Sayyid Baṣīr began to reveal verses, sermons, and prayers. He then set out his claims in a letter addressed to both Ṣubḥ-i Azal and Bahā' Allāh, with whom he spent four months at their home in Nūr. Some time after this, he travelled to Qazvīn (or, according to some sources, Qum) and Kāshān. In this latter town he stayed in the house of someone referred to as "the point of Kāf" [*nuqta-yi kāfī*] — very possibly Mīrzā Ismā'īl Dhabīḥ. It appears that this "point of Kāf" acknowledged the sayyid's spiritual superiority in the course of this visit.

Such was not the case with Mullā Shaykh 'Alī Turshīzī. A serious disagreement occurred between him and Sayyid Baṣīr, with each claiming spiritual superiority. This led to a breach within the community (particularly in Iṣfahān), which lasted six months. Sayyid Baṣīr finally left for Persian Iraq where he preached the Bābī gospel until his arrest and execution on the orders of the governor of Burūjird.⁶⁵

It is difficult to determine what the claims of Sayyid Baṣīr entailed. He certainly appears to have regarded himself as a receptacle for spiritual manifestations [*zuhūrāt*] mediated to him by other individuals such as Bahā' Allāh and Dhabīḥ, and to have stressed his ability to reveal inspired verses. More specifically, the *Nuqtat al-kāf* indicates that he claimed at one point to be the return of the Imām Ḥasan or (by another,

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⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 258. This section is of considerable importance with respect to the problem of authorship of the *Nuqtat al-kāf*. The author here (as elsewhere) displays an attitude of reverence towards Bahā' Allāh that would seem to discount the theory that this work is a later Azalī production (a theory that is, in any case, readily dismissable on other grounds).

⁶⁴ Although such an approach runs the danger of reductionism (not that reductionism is such a bad thing), there are grounds for supposing that some of the ecstatic phenomena exhibited in the cases under discussion may be traced back to repressed emotions. On the role of such emotions in trance states and related phenomena, see I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (London, 1971), pp. 58-63, 73-74, 91-92, 100-101. It is equally important to note the relation shown by Lewis between social marginality and spirit possession.

⁶⁵ Details of Sayyid Baṣīr are given in Kāshānī, *Nuqtat al-kāf*, pp. 255-60; Hamadānī, *New History*, pp. 244-47; Zarandī, *Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 588-90. According to Zarandī, another Indian dervish, named Qahr Allāh, visited the Bāb in Chahrīq, whence he was ordered to return to India; this man was, it seems, at one point regarded as "an exponent of Divine Revelation," but is said to have "disclaimed such pretensions" (*ibid.*, pp. 305-06). I am not altogether sure that this is not Sayyid Baṣīr and that Qahr Allāh was his original name.

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more plausible, reading) Ḥusayn.⁶⁶ Narāqī suggests that he claimed *wiṣāya mirʿātiyya*, presumably in tandem or competition with Ṣubḥ-i Azal.⁶⁷

In describing the brief careers of Dhabīḥ and Sayyid Baṣīr, we have uncovered a much wider network of theophanic activity during this period. It is striking to observe the links that seem to have been forged between so many of the leading claimants, each of whom appears to have been in contact with the others. Dhabīḥ, Sayyid Baṣīr, Ṣubḥ-i Azal, Bahāʾ Allāh, and ʿAzīm (Turshīzī) all seem to have been members of a loosely-knit group centred, as far as can be determined, on the Nūrī household in Tehran.

Possibly connected with this group was a certain Mīrzā Ḥusayn Mīlānī [10], who, while in Teheran, claimed to be the return of Ḥusayn and possibly *man yuzīruhu ʾllāh*.⁶⁸ According to Azal, Mīlānī was "at once the most turbulent and eager for mischief and yet the most pusillanimous of those who professed to follow the Bāb."⁶⁹ A weaver by trade, it was to his workshop in Tabriz that Ḥājī Sulaymān Khān Tabrizī transferred the corpses of the Bāb and Muḥammad ʿAlī Zunūzī after their execution.⁷⁰ He later lived in Tehran with Sulaymān Khān, whose house in the Sarchashma quarter became an important meeting-place for the city's Bābīs.⁷¹

It was here that Mīlānī first advanced spiritual claims,⁷² and it must also have been in Sulaymān Khān's house that he held the meetings which, according to Dahajī, were attended by large numbers of Bābīs.⁷³ These meetings probably included some at least of the individuals just referred to: Sulaymān Khān is known to have been extremely close to ʿAzīm,⁷⁴ Bahāʾ Allāh⁷⁵ and, presumably, the latter's brother, Azal — all

⁶⁶ Kāshānī, *Nuqṭat al-kāf*, p. 258 reads *rajaʿat-i Ḥusaynī*, but Browne (Hamadānī, *New History*, Appendix II, p. 390) translates "Ḥuseyn" without indicating the reason for this variant. The point will have to be checked against the full text used by Browne (Suppl. Pers. 1071 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).

⁶⁷ Narāqī, *Tadhkira*, p. 95.

⁶⁸ Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 95; Browne, in ʿAbbās Efendi, *Traveller's Narrative*, vol. 2, p. 331. Dahajī denies that he ever claimed to be *man yuzīruhu ʾllāh*.

⁶⁹ Browne, in *ibid.*, vol. 2, Note T, pp. 330-331.

⁷⁰ Malik Khusrawī, *Tārīkh-i shuhadāʾ*, vol. 3, p. 259.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 227, 238; Māzandarānī, *Zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 3, p. 26.

⁷² Browne, in ʿAbbās Efendi, *Traveller's Narrative*, vol. 2, Note T, p. 331.

⁷³ Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 95. Ḥājī Sulaymān Khān's house was, in fact, the first to be raided by government officials following the attempt on Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh's life in 1852; some eighty-one Bābīs were arrested on that occasion (Balyuzi, *Bahāʾuʾllāh*, p. 77; Malik Khusrawī, *Tārīkh-i shuhadāʾ*, vol. 3, pp. 238-39).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-28.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

of whom belonged like him to families connected to the court.⁷⁶

Other links join the Tehran Bābī groups with a number of possible claimants resident in the Nūrī family's ancestral village of Tākūr, situated to the north of the city. Although our evidence for the theophanic claims made by individuals in Tākūr is tenuous, it is sufficient to suggest further lines of enquiry.

About the time of the Bābī attempt on the life of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (August 1852), Shaykh 'Azīz Allāh Nūrī, an uncle of the brothers Yaḥyā and Ḥusayn 'Alī, sent two letters to the king. In these, he supplied the names of several Bābīs (both nobles [*buzurgān*] and commoners [*ra'āyā*]) living in or connected with Tākūr, whom he considered dangerous and deserving of arrest and punishment. These included his nephews Yaḥyā and Ḥusayn 'Alī, several mullās, and a few individuals clearly belonging to high-ranking families.

What is of chief interest about Shaykh 'Azīz Allāh's list is that, according to the accompanying letters, several of the men named in it had claimed to be manifestations [*mazāhir*] of various figures from the past, including Muḥammad, 'Alī, Ḥusayn, the Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn, Salmān, and Abū Dharr.⁷⁷ Such identifications must, of course, be treated with caution, since they appear in what is, after all, an accusation of heresy: they may be no more than Shaykh 'Azīz Allāh's own attempt to darken yet further the names of his intended victims. Indeed, some of the supposed identifications do seem on the face of it to be improbable, notably those of al-Mukhtār and the angel Gabriel. And it is significant

⁷⁶ Sulaymān Khān's father, Yaḥyā Khān, was in the service of 'Abbās Mīrzā Nā'ib al-Saltāna, and other members of his family held government posts. He was related to Maḥd-i 'Ulyā, Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh's mother (see *ibid.*, pp. 226, 233).

⁷⁷ The full list of *mazāhir* runs as follows (titles or personae in parentheses):

1. Mīrzā Yaḥyā [Ṣubḥ-i Azal]
2. Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī [Bahā']
3. Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan [Mālik-i Ashtar]
4. Mīrzā Ghulām 'Alī [Ibrāhīm ibn Mālik (al-Ashtar)]
5. Mullā Zayn al-'Ābidīn [Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn or Imām Ḥusayn]
6. Muḥammad Taqī Khān [Imām 'Alī]
7. Mullā 'Alī Bābā Buzurg Tākūrī [Salmān al-Fārisī]
8. Mullā 'Alī Bābā Kūchik Shīrāzī [Abū Dharr al-Ghiffārī]
9. Mullā ('Abd al-) Fattāḥ [Muḥammad]
10. Muḥammad Taqī, a son of Ismā'īl Khān [al-Mukhtār]
11. Ḥājī Ismā'īl, (another) son of Ismā'īl Khān ['Alī Akbar]
12. Mullā Šālīḥ Nārīdī [Abū Lu'lu']
13. Muḥsin, a brother of Mīrzā Rafī' [the angel Gabriel]
14. Mīrzā Rafī' ['Abbās 'Alī].

The texts of the letters are given in Mīrzā Faḍl Allāh Nizām al-Mamālīk, *Tārīkh-i amrī-yi Nūr*, Iran National Baha'ī Archives (INBA) MS (copy in possession of present author), pp. 6, 7.

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that there are so many apparent claims to be manifestations of men whose names were associated in some form or another with rebellion or assassination, such as Mālik al-Ashtar, Ibrāhīm ibn Mālik al-Ashtar, and Abū Luṭluṭ.

At the same time, there is evidence that there may have been a modicum of truth in these allegations. According to Balyuzi, Ṣubḥ-i Azal attempted to organize an uprising in Nūr to coincide with the activities in Tehran of Turshīzī and Ḥusayn Mīlānī (presumably those which led to the attempt on the Shāh's life).⁷⁸ A certain Mullā 'Alī Bābā (Buzurg) (who, according to Shaykh 'Azīz Allāh, claimed to be Salmān), Muḥammad Taqī Khān (who claimed to be 'Alī), and several others armed themselves and prepared for an uprising, only to abandon their plans when news of the abortive assassination attempt reached them.⁷⁹

When Mīrzā Abū Ṭālib Khān's troops sacked Tākūr in the autumn of 1852, among those arrested were several of the claimants named in the accusatory letter, including Mullā 'Abd al-Fattāḥ, Mullā 'Alī Bābā Buzurg, Mullā 'Alī Bābā Kūchik, and Muḥammad Taqī Big (the son of Ismā'īl Khān?), all of whom died later in prison.⁸⁰

Whatever the truth behind these events in Nūr and Tehran, the arrests and executions that followed the attempt on the Shāh's life seem to have put an effective end to the Bābī network in that region. Mullā Shaykh 'Alī Turshīzī 'Azīm, Ḥusayn Mīlānī, Ḥājj Sulaymān Khān Tabrīzī, Mīrzā Rafī' Nūrī, and the four men from Tākūr mentioned above, all perished in the period immediately following the attempt. Ṣubḥ-i Azal succeeded in escaping to Baghdad, where he was followed in 1853 by his brother Ḥusayn 'Alī, who chose to go there after he had been released from prison in Tehran on the intervention of the Russian Minister. Before long, Baghdad became the new centre of Bābī activity, attracting a sizeable community seeking to live there in proximity to Azal.

There is ample evidence that it was Azal and not Bahā' Allāh who, in the first instance, drew large numbers of Bābīs to Iraq. Sayyid Mahdī Dahajī, a Bahā'ī writer generally concerned to play down Azal's role at this period, states that "everyone who came to Baghdad [*Dār al-salām*] did so in order to meet with that person Azal."⁸¹ He himself, he says, originally went there with that same intention but, like others before him, was unable to obtain permission to see Azal in person.⁸²

⁷⁸ Balyuzi *Bahā'u'llāh*, p. 90. This is, in itself, important evidence that the plot against the king was far from as limited or haphazard as Bahā'ī sources maintain.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Nizām al-Mamālik, *Tārīkh-i amrī*, pp. 6, 7.

⁸⁰ Balyuzi, *Bahā'u'llāh*, p. 91.

⁸¹ Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 149.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

A similar account is given by another Bahā'ī writer, the Qājār princess Shams-i Jahān (Fitna-yi Qājār), whose autobiographical *mathnavī* is of much interest for the history of Babism prior to the Bahā'ī/Azalī period. Towards the end of the Bāb's life, she asked other Bābīs who was to be regarded as their leader while Shīrāzī was in prison. They recommended her to Šubḥ-i Azal, whom she subsequently met and accepted with evident esteem and affection. During the period of the Baghdad exile, however, she — like Dahajī and others — was refused access to him and eventually shifted her allegiance to his brother.⁸³

Mullā Muḥammad Nabīl Zarandī [8], an early claimant who later became well known as a Bahā'ī poet and chronicler, also went to Baghdad in order to meet Azal and was refused admission to his presence, being advised instead to leave the city for Karbalā'.⁸⁴

Azal's inaccessibility was, in fact, a major factor in precipitating changes in the orientation of the Bābī community at Baghdad. According to Dahajī, Azal lived with his three wives in a house apart from the other Bābīs, under the name of Ḥajī 'Alī Lās-furūsh.⁸⁵ Only Mīrzā Āqā Jān Kāshānī, a servant in Baha' Allāh's employ, enjoyed regular access to him; no-one else even knew where his house was situated. On more than one occasion, it seems, he moved house when knowledge of his whereabouts leaked out. Kāshānī acted as a go-between for Šubḥ-i Azal and his brother, and it appears that the former visited Bahā' Allāh every few days, making his way to his house after nightfall.⁸⁶

This account may, however, be a little exaggerated. The Azalī authors of the *Hasht bihisht* do not conceal the fact that "in accordance with the instructions given him by his holiness the Point of the Bayān [the Bāb], his excellency [Azal] spent his days and nights behind the tabernacle of concealment from the believers and others;" but they add that "only his brothers and the elite among the believers had access to him,"⁸⁷ suggesting that Azal was rather more accessible than Dahajī makes out.

Bahā'ī polemic has made much capital out of Azal's behaviour at this period, attributing it to a mixture of incompetence and cowardice.⁸⁸ But it is clear that he actually continued to identify himself as head of the

⁸³ Ni'mat Allāh Dhukā'ī Baydā'ī, *Tadhkira-yi shu'arā-yi qarn-i awwal-i Bahā'ī*, vol. 3 (Tehran, 1970-71) pp. 170-72, 180-83.

⁸⁴ Balyuzi, *Bahā'u'llāh*, pp. 128-29.

⁸⁵ This house was situated in the street of the charcoal vendors [*dhughāl-furūshān*] — see *ibid.*, p. 107.

⁸⁶ Dahajī, *Risāla*, pp. 45-46.

⁸⁷ Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, p. 301.

⁸⁸ For examples, see: Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 112; Balyuzi, *Bahā'u'llāh*, pp. 119, 226; Marzieh Gail, foreword to Ustād Muḥammad-'Alī-yi-Salmānī, *My Memories of Bahā'u'llāh*, trans M. Gail (Los Angeles, 1982), p. xi.

Bābīs, to write books, reply to letters, and on occasion meet with other leaders of the community. His behaviour seems, therefore, to have been dictated less by cowardice than by the adoption of a policy of *taqiyya*. Not only was this an approved practice in Shi'ism, but there was particular sanction for it in the seclusionist policies of the last Imams and, in particular, the original *ghayba* of the twelfth Imam, who went into hiding out of fear of his enemies.

The notion of a *walī* who chose to remain in occultation would not, therefore, have surprised or disturbed most Bābīs at this juncture. The Bahā'ī missionary, Ḥājī Mīrzā Haydar 'Alī Iṣfahānī, writing at a much later date, states that he explicitly drew this parallel at this time, asking "What is difference between the 'hidden Azal' and the Hidden Imām of Islām?"⁸⁹

In keeping himself hidden, Azal was, in fact, merely acting on the Bāb's instructions to him. Those who had access to him, including his brother, Ḥusayn 'Alī, clearly regarded it as their duty to keep him out of the reach of the community at large. In a letter to Azal, the Bāb says: "Preserve yourself, then preserve yourself [sic], then what has been sent down in the Bayān, then what is sent from you."⁹⁰

In a passage of the *Kitāb-i panj sha'n* referring to Azal as "the Fruit that ripened in the year six [1850]" and the return of the Imām Ḥusayn, the Bāb writes: "Protect that Fruit lest there approach him what may cause his heart to be saddened."⁹¹ In a letter to 'Abd al-Karīm Qazvīnī, he refers to Azal as "the Eternal Mirror" and tells Qazvīnī to "take the greatest care, in the first place to protect him and in the second to make him happy and joyful, so that not even the least trace of sadness may come upon his blessed heart."⁹²

The Bāb also wrote in similar terms to Bahā' Allāh, instructing him to "take the greatest care of his [Azal's] spirit and his contentment [reading *irtwāḥ* as a variant for *irtyāḥ*], lest fierce [?] winds [*aryāḥ-i mushriqa*] should blow upon his heart; and supply him in the best manner with what will cause him to be eager for writing and composition, that he may behold no sadness whatever, whether inwardly or outwardly. And do your utmost to protect him and the verses treasured up within him until your own time comes."⁹³

The *ghayba* motif was underlined by Azal's use of various individuals as intermediaries between himself and the community at large, echoing

⁸⁹ Ḥājī Mīrzā Haydar 'Alī [Iṣfahānī], *Stories from the Delight of Hearts*, trans. and abridged A.Q. Faizi (Los Angeles, 1980), p. 8.

⁹⁰ Letter quoted Rajab 'Alī Qahīr, *Risāla*, f. 55a.

⁹¹ *Idem.*, *Panj sha'n*, pp. 255-56.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Idem.*, letter quoted 'Izziyya Khānum, *Tanbīh al-nā'imīn*, p. 32.

the *wikāla* system of the later Shīʿī Imams and, more particularly, the supposed appointment of agents by the twelfth Imam during the lesser occultation. According to the Bahāʾī writer Taherzadeh, he ‘employed a Persian merchant named Abu ʿl-Qāsim and used him as a link between himself and the believers in Baghdād. Being nominally the leader of the Bābī community, he now began to disseminate his misguided ideas to them, using Abu ʿl-Qāsim as his intermediary.’⁹⁴

Of unquestionably greater importance as a representative of Azal in the Baghdad region was Sayyid Muḥammad Iṣfahānī, who was appointed one of the “witnesses of the Bayān.”⁹⁵ Shoghi Effendi states that he was, indeed, given the rank of first among these witnesses.⁹⁶ Resident in Karbalāʾ, Iṣfahānī appears to have been extremely active on Azal’s behalf, although later Bahāʾī accounts tend to portray him as a baneful influence on his master rather than his mouthpiece or agent.

According to Dahajī, Azal wrote to seven individuals, naming them all “witnesses of the Bayān.”⁹⁷ These included (apart from Iṣfahānī) Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī and his brother, Mullā Muḥammad Taqī, both resident in Kāshān.⁹⁸ Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar himself gives the names of a number of leading Azalī Bābīs, most of whom were, he says, “appointed witnesses by his holiness Azal.” These were Hajī Sayyid Muḥammad (Iṣfahānī), Hājī Sayyid Jawād (al-Karbalāʾī), Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Mutawallī-bāshī Qummī, and Mullā Rajab ʿAlī Qahīr.⁹⁹

It is, however, hard to establish just what the functions of these witnesses were. Like the *wukalāʾ* of the Imams and later Bahāʾī trustees, they collected funds (*huqūq* — a Shīʿī term) from the believers to send to the headquarters of the sect.¹⁰⁰ From a comment of Dahajī’s, it would seem that each witness was appointed as Azal’s agent for the community of a particular town or region. Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Narāqī, for example, was the *shahīd* for Kāshān, while his brother Muḥammad Taqī was *shahīd* for Narāq.¹⁰¹ If this was the case — and it follows Shīʿī precedent — it would imply that the network of *shuhadāʾ* was fairly extensive, although it is not clear how Azal actually exercised control over it or, indeed, how much real authority he possessed. Shoghi Effendi

⁹⁴ Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahāʾuʾllāh*, vol. 1, p. 247.

⁹⁵ Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 76.

⁹⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 114.

⁹⁷ Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 72.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁹⁹ Narāqī, *Tadhkirat al-ghāfilīn*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁰ Dahajī, *Risāla*, pp. 70, 72.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61. There was, says Dahajī, a disagreement between these two as to which was the more learned.

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says he appointed a total of eighteen witnesses (presumably on the pattern of the Bāb's eighteen *ḥurūf al-hayy*), eleven of whom later rejected him in favour of Bahā' Allāh.¹⁰²

The appointment of witnesses by Azal was certainly a major step towards routinization of charismatic authority within early Babism; but there is evidence that the move did not meet with widespread acceptance and that considerable tension still existed between such routinizing tendencies and the appeal of original charisma. According to Dahajī, Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī [9], one of the witnesses, himself laid claim to the position of *man yuzhiruhu'llāh*, apparently during the Baghdad period.¹⁰³ At the same time, other individuals began or continued to advance similar claims, including at least one other of the probable witnesses, Ḥājī Mīrzā Mūsā Qummī, who later sided with Bahā' Allāh.¹⁰⁴

The Episode of Dayyān

By far the most serious challenge to Azal's authority came from Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khū'ī "Dayyān," whose activities provoked him to pen his lengthy refutation entitled *Kitāb al-mustayqiz*. Mīrzā Asad Allāh was a native of Khūy in Ādharbāyjān. His father had been a state auditor [*mustawfi*] under Muḥammad Shāh, and he himself is said to have held a government position as a secretary for taxes in Khūy. He was, it is said, a learned and cultured man who knew several languages, including Persian, Turkish, Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac.¹⁰⁵ Zarandī gives an account of his conversion to Babism during the period of the Bāb's confinement in Chihriq, and refers to his having composed a treatise in defense of his new faith which received particular praise from the prophet.¹⁰⁶

Soon after the Bāb's death, Dayyān — who seems to have been deeply interested in occult sciences such as alchemy and gematria¹⁰⁷ — began to advance claims on his own behalf.¹⁰⁸ The precise nature of these claims is, as usual, hard to establish. Most sources say he gave himself out to be

¹⁰² Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 233.

¹⁰³ Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59; Balyuzi, *Bahā'u'llāh*, pp. 122, 131.

¹⁰⁵ Muḥammad 'Alī Fayḍī, *Kitāb-i la'ālī-yi dirakhshān* (Shīrāz, 1967), p. 367.

¹⁰⁶ Zarandī, *Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 303-04.

¹⁰⁷ My evidence for this statement is the content of those sections of the *Kitāb-i panj sha'n* addressed to him (see pp. 68-105, 405 to end). On the identity of this final section, see D. MacEoin, "The Identity of the Bāb's *Lawḥ-i ḥurūfāt*," *Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin* 2: 1 (June, 1983), pp. 78-79.

¹⁰⁸ Narāqī, *Tadhkira*, p. 95; Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 59.

man yuzhiruhu ʾllāh,¹⁰⁹ but Azal adds that he claimed to be the Qāʾim, apparently in the sense that he was the fulfilment of all previous scriptural prophecy, his name appearing in the Torah, Psalms, Gospel, Qurʾān, and Bayān.¹¹⁰

It certainly seems that Dayyān claimed to be more than just another *zuhūr* beneath the Bāb's shadow. A passage from a letter of his quoted in *al-Mustayqiz* declares that "the heavens of the Bayān have been rolled up; regard not its verses also [*sic*], and regard not its words also [*sic*]." ¹¹¹ Later, he claims to be able to raise the dead and calls on the Bābīs to reveal Azal's whereabouts and to challenge him to do the same, something he maintains the latter will be unable to do.¹¹²

In her well-known *risāla* written in reply to a letter from ʿAbbās Effendi, ʿIzziyya Khānum (Sultān Khānum), a sister of Ṣubḥ-i Azal, states that Dayyān "openly and in public apostatized from the faith of the Bayān, and in numerous gatherings spoke without concealment in refutation of his holiness the Primal Point" and says that he even burned a large quantity of the Bāb's writings.¹¹³

Beginning with his chief representative, Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Tabrīzī,¹¹⁴ Dayyān acquired a following in Ādharbāyjān and possibly elsewhere, who came to call themselves, not Bābīs but Asadīs.¹¹⁵ How large this group was is not clear, but Dayyān's activities seem to have continued without interruption until about 1856, when he appeared in Baghdad, possibly in response to Azal's attack on him in the *Kitāb al-mustayqiz*.¹¹⁶ How long Dayyān spent in Baghdad is not known, but it would not seem

¹⁰⁹ Narāqī, *Tadhkira*, p. 95; Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, pp. 302-03; Fayḍī, *Laʾālī*, p. 369; Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne*, p. 43.

¹¹⁰ Nūrī, *Mustayqiz*, p. 8. It is conceivable that this latter claim of Dayyān influenced Bahāʾ Allāh in his later allusions to prophecies of his appearance in scripture, a recurring theme in later Bahāʾī apologia.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 9.

¹¹³ ʿIzziyya Khānum, *Tanbīh*, p. 89.

¹¹⁴ Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, p. 302. Azal considered Qazvīnī as the real force behind Dayyān, much as later Bahāʾī writing was to consider Sayyid Muḥammad Iṣfahānī as the instigator of Azal's activities (Nūrī, *Mustayqiz*, p. 16).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5; H.M. Balyuzi, *The Bāb* (Oxford, 1973), p. 239.

¹¹⁶ On the dating of Dayyān's stay in Baghdad and his murder, see Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, p. 302; Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 88; Mīrzā Ḥusayn ʿAlī Nūrī Bahāʾ Allāh, *Kitāb-i badīʿ* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 102ff. (and quoted ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Rahīq-i makhtūm*, 2 vols. [Tehran, 1973-75], vol. 1, p. 498). Ishrāq Khāvarī quotes from a book entitled *al-Fāriq*, by ʿAbd al-Rahīm Big (p. 629), describing a dust-storm in Baghdad, which is taken to correspond to the dust said to have arisen after Dayyān's murder. The date for this event is given as 27 Ramaḍān 1274/11 May 1858, which would make it much later than I have suggested. Ishrāq Khāvarī's dating, however, contradicts that of Dahajī, which seems more reliable.

to have been more than a few months. Azal's refutation of him had contained passages that implied that he wanted both Dayyān and Mīrzā Ibrāhīm (whom he named Abu'l-Shurūr [Father of Evils] and Abu'l-Dawāhī [Father of Calamities] respectively) put to death.¹¹⁷

According to Bahā' Allāh, Azal actually wrote a *fatwā* for Dayyān's execution during the period of his (Bahā' Allāh's) retirement in Kurdistān (1854-56).¹¹⁸ When Dayyān came to Baghdad, the Bābī community was, therefore, determined to have him killed, but Bahā' Allāh — who had recently returned to the city and assumed a position of considerable authority — spoke individually with each of them and forbade them in strong terms to harm him. Two days after this, Dayyān spoke with Bahā' Allāh, denying the "lies" that had been ascribed to him. A few days later, however, he was found murdered.¹¹⁹ The killer, Mīrzā Muḥammad Māzandarānī, had acted in pursuance of Azal's *fatwā*.

Bahā' Allāh's rise to ascendancy

With Dayyān thus disposed of, his followers appear to have dispersed rapidly, for nothing more is heard of them. His deputy, Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Tabrīzī, was also put to death, and the entire Asadī movement either reintegrated itself with mainstream Babism or was abandoned for a return to Islam.

No other serious claimants survived. Sayyid Ḥusayn Hindiyanī remained in touch with the Bābī leadership in Baghdad, but is said to

¹¹⁷ E.G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bābī Religion* (Cambridge, 1918), p. 218. It must be borne in mind that, although the Bāb had prohibited the execution of believers ('Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb, *Bayān-i Fārsī* [n.p. (Tehran), n.d.], 4: 5, p. 118), it may have been assumed that the law of apostasy was much the same as that in Islam, permitting the passing of a death sentence on Dayyān.

¹¹⁸ Nūrī, *Kitāb-i badr* (quoted Isḥrāq Khāvarī, *Rahīq*, vol. I, p. 498).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* It is, however, worth noting a reference in a work of Bahā' Allāh's from the Baghdad period, in which he briefly mentions Dayyān as "Abu'l-Shurūr" (quoted 'Izziyya Khānum, *Tanbīh*, p. 86). It has never been entirely clear to me why Bahā' Allāh should later have tried as he did to defend Dayyān's reputation, unless it was because of the importance of linking the latter to himself in order to benefit from the Bāb's description of Dayyān as "the third letter to believe in him whom God shall manifest." It is possible that later approbatory passages concerning Dayyān in works such as the *Kitāb-i badr*, *Lawḥ-i Sirāj*, or *Lawḥ-i Shaykh* represent a retrospective opinion contradicting Bahā' Allāh's original view.

For details of Dayyān's murder, see Dahajī, *Risāla*, pp. 87-88. Narāqī maintains that Bahā' Allāh originally protected Dayyān's killer (*Tadhkira*, p. 48); but this would appear to be contradicted by Māzandarānī's own account, assuming that Dahajī's version of it is correct.

have had no more than forty followers in his home town of Hindiyān near Muḥammara, and cannot be said to have constituted anything of a threat.¹²⁰ Others are said to have retracted their claims, usually — according to Bahā'ī sources — in personal disavowals made to Bahā' Allāh.¹²¹ The stage was now set for what was to prove the most serious and, in the end, the most successful challenge to Ṣubḥ-i Azal's authority — that posed by the emergence of his half-brother Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī as an effective claimant to the status, not merely of head of the sect, but of *man yuḏhiruhu 'llāh*.

The appearance of Bahā' Allāh as principal contender for leadership of the Bābī community represents the clearest expression of a theme already observable in many of the earlier *zuhūrāt*, namely the emergence of a non-clerical (or even anti-clerical) leader as the bearer of the values and purposes of the movement, and, indeed, of charismatic authority within it.

The outstanding claimants to divine afflatus in this period belonged with few exceptions to classes other than that of the Shī'ī hierocracy. Even individuals like Sayyid Baṣīr Hindī or Dayyān, who are described as well read even, in a sense, learned, had not followed conventional *madrasa* educations and were unversed in the type of learning associated with the professional religious elite. Those 'ulamā' who do figure in this group — such as Mullā Shaykh 'Alī Turshīzī, Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Narāqī, or Ḥājī Mīrzā Mūsā Qummī were far from eminent among that class. Others, significantly, were merchants or tradesmen, such as Dhabīḥ or Ḥusayn Milānī.

This stands in marked contrast to the situation in early Babism where, with the important exception of the Bāb himself, all the movement's leading figures, including individuals such as Qurrat al-'Ayn, Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī, or Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Bārfurūshī, who advanced theophanic claims for themselves, belonged to the hierocracy and in some cases held important positions within it.

With claimants such as Dhabīḥ, Sayyid Baṣīr, and even, as we have noted, Azal himself, the theme of the unlettered man [*ummi*] who is capable of revealing verses from his *fiṭra* (as did the Bāb), comes to the fore again, notably in connection with extreme claims to divine or semi-divine status.

There seems no good reason to doubt that, during the early Baghdad period, Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī occupied a position subordinate to his half-brother. We possess evidence that Bahā' Allāh himself, whatever his personal thoughts on the subject, was prepared to acknowledge publicly

¹²⁰ See Browne, *Traveller's Narrative*, vol. 2, p. 331, note T.

¹²¹ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 131.

a superior status for Azal and to define his own role as that of protector and intermediary between him and the community at large.

Bahā' Allāh's half-sister 'Izziyya Khānum seems to have had access to several texts written by him in the early part of the Baghdad exile, some of which she quotes in *Tanbīh al-na'imīn*. If these are authentic, they would indicate that Bahā' Allāh's veneration for and submission to Azal were more than the mere front they have been described as in Bahā'ī histories.

For example, in a letter from Bahā' Allah written in the hand of Mīrzā Jawād Khurāsānī, he writes: "He [God] removed the covering of glory from the face of beauty, whereupon the holy and eternal Mirror [*mīr'āt-i qudsiyya-yi azaliyya*], the everlasting glass of light [*nūr*], the essence of existence and the pure reality of outward appearance raised up the banner of being and removed the veil of divine light from his unique countenance."¹²² In a marginal note to the same letter, written in Baha' Allāh's own hand, there is a reference to the *Kitāb-i nūr*, one of the early works of Azal: "The *Kitāb-i nūr* has not been sent, although I insisted and pressed (for it). Do not neglect it, for it is extremely necessary for all the people of the Bayān. His excellency Mullā Zayn al-'Ābidīn must make great efforts to finish (copying) it. By the Lord of the heavens and the earth, it is the book of a glorious and loved one, and (consists of) the verses of the Protector, the Self-Subsisting. Write it in the best handwriting with the greatest perfection of which you are capable."¹²³

Of even greater interest are marginal comments in Bahā' Allāh's hand attached to a letter written to Mīrzā Muḥammad Hādī Qazvīnī. Here, he refers to a statement that had been made to Muḥammad Hādī by a certain Ḥājī Ḥasan regarding himself [Bahā' Allāh] and someone called Mīrzā Riḍā Qulī — possibly Bahā' Allāh's brother of that name. Although Ḥājī Ḥasan's views appear to have been considerably compressed, it seems that he regarded Bahā' Allāh as a divine attribute [*ṣifa*] and Riḍā Qulī as a manifestation of the divine names [*az mazāhir-i asmā'*]; the Bayān, the Bāb, and the "Guides" of the Bayān all, seemingly, existed beneath his shadow in the stations as the meanings [*ma'ānī*] and the external aspects of the names and attributes.¹²⁴

Baha' Allāh does not seem to regard these claims as unduly disturbing. He goes on to refer to statements he himself is said to have made concerning Ṣubḥ-i Azal:

You have written that it appears from statements of mine that the eternal sun [*shams-i azalī*] has shone forth in the everlasting glass [*zajāja-yi šamadī*]. This is

¹²² Quoted 'Izziyya Khānum, *Tanbīh*, p. 38.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 40. The letter runs from p. 37 to p. 41. See also passages from Bahā' Allāh's *Khutba-yi ṣalawāt*, quoted *ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

¹²⁴ Quoted *ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

true, there can be no doubt of it. First of all, the eternal essence [*jawhar-i azal*] and the point of pre-existence has been and is the Lord, the Most Exalted [*rabb-i a'ālā*, i.e. the Bāb]; the Eternal Mirror [*mir'āt-i azal*, i.e. Azal] is known to have been and to be his holiness the Living, the Self-Subsisting. The Eternal Sun, which is the mention of real existence, has appeared and become manifest in the glass [*zajāja*], which is "they" [*īshān*, i.e. himself].¹²⁵ Apart from this, the glass is a thousand times lower and more humble than the Mirror — it does not matter to whom you may ascribe it [i.e. the term "glass"].¹²⁶

Parallel statements occur in an Arabic testament [*kitāb wiṣāyatī min ba'dī*] written by Bahā' Allāh in Baghdad,¹²⁷ in which he declares that "the remnant of God" [*baqiyyat Allāh* — originally a term for the hidden Imam] is "the Face of Light" [*ṭal'at al-nūr*, i.e. Azal] and that he himself is "a servant who has believed in God and in the Face of Light."¹²⁸ He maintains that he has spoken no more than "a word of servitude" and that it is other people who have exaggerated his position. These latter he condemns, asking "is the Face of Light not enough for you?"¹²⁹

In acting as the chief promoter and defender of his brother's role as supreme authority within the movement, Bahā' Allāh easily and effectively acquired the position of leading intermediary between Azal and his followers. This function also involved the general management of the community's affairs and responsibility for relations with the outside world.

In the testament just quoted, Bahā' Allāh indicates his ready acceptance of Azal's *ghayba* when he states that the "Face of Light" issues his decrees "from behind the veil,"¹³⁰ something to which he also alludes in his letter to Muḥammad Hādī Qazvīnī.¹³¹ 'Izziyya Khānum relates a story from an early Bābī who went to see Azal at the time when he was "hidden and concealed" in Baghdad. This man first came to Bahā' Allāh and was informed that it would be impossible to meet Azal. When asked about his own station in the movement, Bahā' Allāh said he was "a lantern that protects that candle of guidance [Azal] from the hurricanes of events."¹³²

¹²⁵ On the use of *īshān* as a title for Bahā' Allāh in this period, see Mīrzā Husayn Āvāra, *al-Kawākib al-durriyya*, 2 vols. (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 1, part 2, pp. 271-81, including the text of a letter of Qurrat al-'Ayn which appears to provide contemporary evidence for this.

¹²⁶ Letter quoted 'Izziyya Khānum, *Tanbih*, pp. 85-86.

¹²⁷ This dating seems clear from a subscription in the hand of Bahā' Allāh which refers to the possible erasure of the text "in the river" (*fi 'l-shatt*) — see facsimile printed at end of *ibid.*, p. [144].

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. [143-44].

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. [144].

¹³⁰ *Wiṣāya*, quoted *ibid.*, p. [144].

¹³¹ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 87.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

Husayn 'Alī's role as manager of the affairs of the Bābī community is freely acknowledged by the authors of the *Hasht Bihisht*, who go on to say that he associated with all types and classes of people, including *lūṭīs*, dervishes, government officials, and poets.¹³³ It was, indeed, his custom to spend part of every day in the coffee-house of a certain Sayyid Ḥabīb in the old city, where he would meet other sect members as well as notables, 'ulamā', and others.¹³⁴

External evidence for Bahā' Allāh's role exists in a report from the British Consul in Baghdad, Capt. Arnold Burrowes Kemball, who in 1859 described him (under the name "Meerza Hassan Ali") as "the Chief of the Babees" and said that "though the ostensible agent [he] is not the real representative of Bab."¹³⁵ Burrowes goes on to say that the secret of Azal's whereabouts was "mysteriously perserved" but that Bahā' Allāh enjoyed "a consideration which partakes of absolute devotion and reverence on the part of his followers" and was recognized as "the Director and Guide" of the Bābīs of Iran.¹³⁶

It is obvious that such a situation was bound to provoke and sustain tension. The first attempt to resolve that tension seems to have been Bahā' Allāh's departure from Baghdad on 10 April 1854. Writing later about this in the *Kitāb-i īqān* (c. 1858), he stated that "since I became aware of events that had not as yet occurred, I chose in advance to go into exile [*muhājirat*].... I swear by God that there was no thought of return in this exile, nor did my journeying hold any hope of reunion. My only object was that I should not become a centre for dissension between the friends, nor a source of disturbance among my companions, nor the cause of harm to anyone, nor a reason for the sadness of any heart."¹³⁷

There seems no reason why we should not take Bahā' Allāh at his word and accept that he genuinely intended to separate himself permanently from the Bābī community, being content to live the life of a Ṣūfī dervish in the mountains of Kurdistān. The details of his two-year self-imposed exile and the circumstances of his return at the express

¹³³ Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, p. 301. Similar remarks are made by Dahajī (*Risāla*, pp. 93, 148).

¹³⁴ Salmānī, *Memories of Bahā'u'llāh*, pp. 16-17; cf. Dahajī, *Risāla*, p. 148.

¹³⁵ Report from Kemball to Bulwer, no. 51, 28 September 1859: F.O. 195624, quoted M. Momen (ed.), *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions 1844-1944*, Oxford, 1981, p. 182.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Mīrzā 'Alī Nūrī Bahā' Allāh, *Kitāb-i mustatāh-i īqān* (Cairo, 1352/1933), p. 194; cf. Bahā'u'llāh, *The Kitāb-i-Īqān: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, London, 1961, p. 160. Note that Shoghi Effendi's use of capitalized "We" and "Our" for the Persian first person singular gives a misleading impression of Bahā' Allāh's own view of his status at the time of writing. In the later *Lawḥ-i Sirāj*, written in Edirne, Bahā' Allāh attributes his departure to the behaviour of Azal and Sayyid Muḥammad Iṣfahānī (in Ishraq Khāvarī, *Mā'ida*, vol. 7, pp. 72-73).

request of some of the Bābīs in Baghdad have been adequately discussed elsewhere.¹³⁸ On only one point does there seem to be any serious controversy, namely the question of whether or not he returned in obedience to the wishes of Ṣubḥ-i Azal.

The origins of this controversy lie in a phrase used by Bahā' Allāh in the *Kitāb-i īqān*, where, writing of his decision to go back to Baghdad, he says: "(Matters were thus) until the decree of return issued forth from the source of command [*maṣḍar-i amr*]. Of necessity, I submitted myself and returned."¹³⁹ The words I have here translated "source of command" (and which might conceivably be equally well be conveyed by the phrase "centre of the cause [sc. of God]") have been rendered in the official Bahā'ī translation of Shoghi Effendi as "the Mystic Source"¹⁴⁰ — an interpretation which has been defended on the uncertain grounds that the *maṣḍar-i amr* "is obviously the Godhead."¹⁴¹

This has led to much confusion. There are no very good grounds for translating the phrase in question as "the Mystic Source" nor for identifying it unequivocally with the Godhead. Nonetheless, several passages in the writings of Bahā' Allāh employ this phrase (or others very like it), indicating that the term, however unusual, was much used by him.¹⁴²

Although a few of these passages are ambiguous as to whether God or his manifestation is intended by the *maṣḍar-i amr*, most are readily interpreted as referring to the latter. In the *Lawḥ-i Jināb-i Amīn* (dated 23 Ṣafar 1304/21 November 1887), for example, he writes: "Greetings and peace be upon him whom he [God] has made the horizon of his names, the dawning-place of his attributes, the repository of his knowledge, and the source of his command [*maṣḍar amrihi*]."¹⁴³ In the *Lawḥ-i Mānakjī*, he refers to "whatsoever is revealed today from the source of command

¹³⁸ See Balyuzi, *Bahā'u'llāh*, pp. 115-122; Dahajī, *Risāla*, pp. 47-48. Dahajī supports the view that Bahā' Allāh had no intention of returning to Baghdad (*ibid.*, p. 47).

¹³⁹ Nūrī, *īqān*, p. 195.

¹⁴⁰ Bahā'u'llāh, *The Kitāb-i-īqān*, p. 160.

¹⁴¹ Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne*, p. 79. The Bahā'ī argument against the view that *maṣḍar-i amr* refers to Azal seems to have begun with Dahajī's attempt to refute Browne's statement to that effect (*Nuqtat al-kāf*, Persian introduction, pp. 39-40) in his *risāla* (pp. 43-44).

¹⁴² I am grateful to Mr Stephen Lambden for drawing my attention to these passages. Apart from those referred to in the text here, the following may be noted: "Untitled letter," in *Ishrāqāt*, p. 227 [*maṣḍar-i a'lā*: cf. *qalam-i a'lā*]; "Untitled letter," in uncatalogued INBA ms [wa ba'ḍī (*bayānāt*)-i dīgar az maṣḍar-i amr wa maṭla'-i wahy 'alā mā arāda 'llāh bilisān-i Pārsī nāzil]; *Āthār*, vol. 6, pp. 299 [*maṣḍar-i awāmīr wa aḥkām*], 314-15, 327 [*nayyir-i amr*]; letter in INBA, MS 73, p. 561; Nūrī, "Kull al-ṭa'ām," in *Ishrāq Khāvarī*, *Mā'ida*, vol. 4, p. 274 [*mazhar al-amr*].

¹⁴³ INBA, uncatalogued Ms, p. 163.

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and the manifestation of God's self."¹⁴⁴ Similarly, in the *Lawḥ-i bismillāh* he speaks of the prophets as "the manifestations of the commands [*maẓāhir-i awāmir*] and sources of the divine decrees [*maṣādir-i aḥkām-i rabbānī*]." ¹⁴⁵ Finally, in an explicit statement couched in the words of his amanuensis, he writes: "One day a letter was revealed from the source of command, while this servant was before him, writing it down."¹⁴⁶

Taken together, these and similar passages lend considerable support to the view, first put forward by E. G. Browne, that the term *maṣḍar-i amr* in the *Kitāb-i īqān* is to be interpreted as a reference, not to the divinity, but to Azal, as the locus of revelation at that time.¹⁴⁷ If this is so, it would seem that, even after his return to Baghdad, Bahā' Allāh remained subordinate to his brother. There is, of course, ample evidence that he continued to act as the effective head of the community and that his prestige was even greater than before. Rumours about his "station" seem to have persisted, possibly enhanced by his period of seclusion and his association with numerous important Ṣūfīs, some of whom came to visit him in Baghdad.

The claim to Ḥusayniyyat

According to Dahajī, some individuals in Baghdad began to say that Bahā' Allāh was the sun and Azal merely the mirror reflecting it.¹⁴⁹ At some point, the opinion spread that he was the return of the Imām Ḥusayn, and there is some evidence that he may have held this opinion himself.

In my earlier article (p. 134), I mentioned several references made by the Bāb to the appearance of John the Baptist and the Imām Ḥusayn — a concept somehow linked to the maturing of the Bāb's revelation. Although the relevant passages (*Kitāb-i panj sha'n*, pp. 256, 280) are far from clear, it does appear from nearby references to "the two *waḥīds*" that Sayyid Yaḥyā Dārābī and Ṣubḥ-i Azal (both of whom were titled *Waḥīd*) are intended by the "two signs" expected to make their appearance in the year six¹⁴⁹ — a view that seems to have given rise to a

¹⁴⁴ "Lawḥ-i Mānakjī," in *Mā'ida*, vol. 7, p. 154.

¹⁴⁵ *Majmū'a*, p. 277.

¹⁴⁶ "Lawḥ-i istināq," in *Mā'ida*, vol. 4, p. 228.

¹⁴⁷ Browne seems to have first advanced this theory in "The Bābīs of Persia" II, *JRAS* 21 (1889), p. 946.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68. Others regarded him as the 'promulgator' [*murawwij*] of the Bābī religion (*ibid.*).

¹⁴⁹ Shīrāzī, *Panj sha'n*, pp. 258, 259. This point is argued by Rajab 'Alī Qahār (*Risāla*, ff. 43b-44a).

later Azalī belief that the present age is that of the return of Ḥusayn following the appearance of the Bāb.¹⁵⁰ Hence various references to Azal as *al-nūr* (or simply *nūr*), *ṭalʿat al-nūr*, or *wijhat al-nūr* (sic), or to his writings as *āyāt al-nūr*, *ṣaḥāʾif al-nūr*, and so on, all of which relate back to the identification of the word *nūr* with Ḥusayn (see "Hierarchy," pp. 132-33).

At some date, however, the *Panj shaʿn* text appears to have been applied directly to Bahāʾ Allāh, as is clear from subsequent use of it in Bahāʾī apologetics.¹⁵¹ According to Narāqī, Bahāʾ Allāh's first claim was to be the return of Ḥusayn,¹⁵² although no date is assigned to it. The point is not, in fact, contentious, since later Bahāʾī writers have put forward the view that Bahāʾ Allāh was the return of Ḥusayn, even if this is subsumed by wider notions of messianic fulfillment.¹⁵³

Bahāʾ Allāh explicitly identified himself as the return of Ḥusayn, although normally in the context of a more varied identification with a succession of prophetic and saintly figures from the past. In the *Lawḥ-i Naṣīr*, written in Edirne [1864-68], he says: "By God, this is he who appeared at one time in the name of the Spirit [*al-rūḥ*, i.e. Jesus Christ], then in the name of the Friend [*al-ḥabīb*, i.e. Muḥammad], then in the name of ʿAlī [i.e. the Bāb, ʿAlī Muḥammad], then in this blessed, exalted, inaccessible, lofty, and beloved name [i.e. Ḥusayn (ʿAlī)]. This is Ḥusayn in truth, who has appeared with grace in the kingdom of justice, against whom the unbelievers have arisen with what they possess of rebellion and wickedness."¹⁵⁴

In one place, he specifically refers to his advent as Ḥusayn in fulfilment of Shiʿite prophecy concerning the period after the reappearance of the twelfth Imam: "This is Ḥusayn in truth, who has come to you with verses, not a word of which can be matched by all that is in heaven and earth, if you are of those that understand. Say, this is he whom you were promised after the Qāʾim."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ See Narāqī, *Tadhkira*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁵¹ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 97.

¹⁵² Narāqī, *Tadhkira*, p. 14; cf. Rajab ʿAlī Qahīr, *Risāla*, f. 43b.

¹⁵³ See Mīrzā Abu ʿl-Faḍl Gulpāyḡānī, *Kitāb al-farāʾid*, (Cairo, n.d.), p. 16; Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Raḥīq*, vol. 1, pp. 190-191; Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 94; *idem.*, *Directives from the Guardian*, compiled by G. Garrida (New Delhi, 1973), p. 58; Zarandī, *Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 593-94.

¹⁵⁴ Mīrzā Ḥusayn ʿAlī Nūrī Bahāʾ Allāh, "Lawḥ-i Naṣīr," in *Majmūʿa-yi alwāḥ-i mubāraka* (Cairo, 1920), p. 196.

¹⁵⁵ *Idem.* untitled work quoted Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Raḥīq*, vol. 1, p. 191.

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The widening of Bahā' Allāh's claims

So far, there is nothing particularly remarkable about Bahā' Allāh's claims. He was only one of a number of individuals claiming *ḥusayniyyat* or a variety of other roles as personifications of figures from the past. In this respect, his claims represent a direct continuation of Bābī theophanic theory. At some point, however — certainly by the time he was living in Edirne [1864-68] — he began to extend the claim to *ḥusayniyyat* to a wider identification with other important figures of religious history, especially those who had undergone severe tribulations or suffered a martyr's death.

In the *Sūrat al-damm* (Edirne), for example, he identified himself successively with Abraham, Moses, Joseph, John the Baptist, Jesus, Ḥusayn, and the Bāb, indicating the various sufferings he had undergone in their persons.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, in a *ziyāra* written for Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī (date unknown, but seemingly late), he refers to his sufferings as Abel, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, Ḥusayn, and the Bāb.¹⁵⁷

It seems evident that we have here a clear development of a Shī'ī theme noted in my earlier article (pp. 103-105), namely the identification of both major and minor figures as, in some sense, one being. The subsequent development of Bahā' Allāh's claims and the elaboration of a scheme of "major prophets" (represented by the founders of the great religions) and "minor prophets" or other individuals in their shadow, makes these and similar passages in Bahā' Allāh's writings problematic for modern Bahā'īs, as is evident from Shoghi Effendi's attempt to resolve the obvious contradictions involved.¹⁵⁸

It is difficult to determine with any precision the stages through which Bahā' Allāh shifted from his claim to be the return of Ḥusayn to that of being *man yuzhiruhu 'llāh* and an independent *mazhar* of the divinity. The chief reason for this difficulty is the uncertainty and lack of precision in those of our sources which attempt to date or identify the works of Bahā' Allāh attributable to the Baghdad period as a whole or its later years in particular.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ *Idem*, "Sūrat al-damm," in *idem*, *Āthār-i qalam-i a'lā*, 2nd. rev. ed., ed. National [Bahā'ī] Committee for Publication and Research (Tehran, 1977), pp. 64-65. See translation in Bahā'u'llāh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh*, ed. and trans. Shoghi Effendi (London, 1949), pp. 88-89. These identifications are confirmed by the Bahā'ī leader, Shoghi Effendi (*Directives*, p. 58).

¹⁵⁷ Nūrī, *ziyāra* in *Ishrāq Khāvarī*, *Mā'ida*, vol. 8, pp. 82-83.

¹⁵⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *Directives*, p. 58.

¹⁵⁹ The two principal works devoted to this topic are: Taherzadeh, *Revelation*, vol. 1, and 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Ganj-i shāyigān* (Tehran, 1968-69), pp. 7-67. Neither author indicates in all cases his reasons or authority for ascribing any particular work to a specific

There are grounds for arguing that, in many cases, works have been dated on the basis of internal references which have in their turn been interpreted as expressions of doctrinal positions located in the period in question by other criteria. Thus, for example, the Bahā'ī writer Ishrāq Khāvarī states in reference to the *Sūrat al-dhikr* that "it appears from references in it to have been revealed in Baghdad."¹⁶⁰ There are, however, several internal indications in this work that argue in favour of a dating to the late Edirne period (1866-68).¹⁶¹

This often results in circular reasoning, running something like this: "Bahā' Allāh made such-and-such a claim while in Baghdad. This work contains references to that claim, therefore it must have been written in Baghdad. The fact that this work, known to have been written in Baghdad, refers to this claim is evidence that Bahā' Allāh advanced that claim during that period."

Now, this is manifestly unsatisfactory, as would be a reverse argument running: "Bahā' Allāh cannot have made such-and-such a claim while in Baghdad. There is a reference to that claim in this work, therefore it cannot have been written in Baghdad (and must have been written in Edirne/Acre). The fact that all works referring to this claim have been dated by me to Edirne or Acre and that, therefore, no works alluding to

period, and in several instances they contradict one another or contain obviously questionable datings.

Texts of Bahā' Allāh's principal Baghdad works are available as follows: *Īqān* (trans. *The Kitāb-i-Īqān*). *Kalimāt-i maknūna* (numerous editions, including Tehran, 1972-73; trans. Bahā'u'llāh, *The Hidden Works of Bahā'u'llāh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi [Wilmette, Ill., 1932]; an illuminated edition was published by S. Motamed in Frankfurt [n.d. (c. 1974)]); the text is also available in compilations, including Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī Bahā' Allāh, *Ad'ā-yi ḥaḍrat-i mahbūb* [Cairo, 1339/1920-21], pp. 421-76 [Persian section only], and *idem*, *Majmū'a-yi alwāh*, pp. 17-32, 373-98). *Haft vādī*, in *idem*, *Āthār-i qalam-i a'lā*, vol. 3 (Tehran, 1973-74), pp. 90-137. *Chahār vādī*, in *ibid.*, pp. 138-57. *Lawḥ-i mallāḥ al-quḍs*, in Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Mā'ida*, vol. 4, pp. 335-41, and in Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī Bahā' Allāh, *Āthār-i qalam-i a'lā*, vol. 5 (Tehran, 1975-76), pp. 176-85. *Lawḥ-i ḥūrīyya*, in *ibid.*, pp. 342-50. *Lawḥ bulbul al-firāq*, in *ibid.*, p. 324. *Sūrat Allāh*, in *ibid.*, pp. 68-72. *Lawḥ madīnat al-riḍā*, in *ibid.*, 1st. ed. only (Tehran, 1969-70), pp. 135-49. *Lawḥ madīnat al-tawḥīd*, in Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Mā'ida*, vol. 4, pp. 313-29. *Ṣaḥīfā-yi shaṭṭīyyā*, in *ibid.*, pp. 142-49. *Lawḥ-i fitna*, in *ibid.*, pp. 261-65. *Tafsīr āyat al-nūr*, in *ibid.*, pp. 49-86. *Sūrat al-ṣabr (Lawḥ-i Ayyūb)*, in *ibid.*, pp. 282-313. *Bāz-ā va bidih jāmi*, in *ibid.*, pp. 186-87. *Lawḥ al-ḥaqq*, in *ibid.*, *Ganj-i shāyigān*, pp. 37-40. *Lawḥ-i subḥāna rabbī al-a'lā*, in *ibid.*, pp. 61-64. *Hala, hala, yā bishārat*, in *ibid.*, pp. 33-35 (trans. S. Lambden, *Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin*, 2: 3 [December, 1983], pp. 105-110). *Lawḥ-i ghulām al-khuld*, in 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq Khāvarī (ed.), *Ayyām-i tis'a*, 9th. printing (Tehran, 1973-74), pp. 92-99. *Lawḥ-i shikar shikan*, in *Star of the West*, 11: 1 (March 21, 1920), pp. 24-21 (sic).

¹⁶⁰ Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Ganj-i shāyigān*, p. 60.

¹⁶¹ See Nūrī, *Sūrat al-dhikr*, in *Āthār*, vol. 4, pp. 236-45, especially p. 239 (where he speaks of the Bābīs referring to *wisāya* for "one of his enemies" [presumably Azal], and p. 244 (where he mentions a certain Aḥmad who met him in Iraq).

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it are from the Baghdad period, is evidence that the claim was not made there."

Either way, we have a problem. This is not to say that we cannot discuss the later Baghdad period sensibly, just to point out that it is, as often as not, precisely those works that contain statements of real interest that pose the most intractable problems at this stage of our knowledge. Add to this the fact that, in spite of an impressive array of individual titles, the works of Bahā' Allāh thought to have been produced in the later Baghdad period are far from substantial. Many consist of little more than a couple of pages, whose contents are often exceptionally vague and circumlocutious (many being written in poetry or poetic prose). This leaves the reader with very little from which to extract doctrinal or biographical material.

The best-known of Bahā' Allāh's Baghdad works, such as the *Kitāb-i īqān*, *Jawāhir al-asrār*, *Kalimāt-i maktūna*, *Haft wādī* — all of which can be dated with a high degree of certainty — are, unfortunately, of restricted usefulness as sources for a serious discussion of his developing claims. Along with several other works written either in Kurdistān or in the years after his return from there (such as the *Qaṣīda 'izz warqā'iyya*, *Lawḥ-i ḥūriyya*, or *Lawḥ-i ghulām al-khuld*) these writings show strong traces of Ṣūfī influence, employing language and concepts that need not have attracted undue attention at the time of their composition.

The Ṣūfī traditions of *shaṭḥiyyāt* (ecstatic utterances often voiced in the first person as though spoken by the divinity)¹⁶² and visionary experiences are so well established that it would be unwise to lay undue stress on similar statements in Bahā' Allāh's writings, let alone use them as evidence of unusual or unique claims. It is, of course, conceivable that the repeated use of *shaṭḥiyyāt* may have worked its influence on Nūrī's mind and facilitated the subsequent shift to theophanic utterance of a more personal kind.

Nevertheless, a progression can be observed in the Baghdad writings as a whole. This involves several shifts of consciousness that lead to a fully-fledged conviction of divine status around 1863. As we have seen, in some of his earliest Baghdad works, such as the *Lawḥ kull al-ta'ām* or *Sūrat al-kifāya*, he denied advancing any claim for himself and instead directed his fellow-Bābīs to turn to Ṣubḥ-i Azal.

In the *Lawḥ madīnat al-tawḥīd* (a work written in Baghdad¹⁶³ after his return from Kurdistān), he maintains that both *tawḥīd* [divine unity] and

¹⁶² For details, see J.S. Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971), p. 150 and f.n. 2.

¹⁶³ The text refers to how "the dove of al-Hijāz [i.e. himself] warbles in the land of Irāq:" see Nūrī, *Lawḥ madīnat al-tawḥīd*, in Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Mā'idā*, vol. 4, p. 327.

tajrīd [independent existence] are above his station and that he is no more than a humble servant to whom God has taught certain things.¹⁶⁴ There are no obvious references in this work to Azal, but the Bāb still holds a pivotal position in the prophetic schema, being described as the point round which all the prophets circle.¹⁶⁵

A similar position is urged in the *Ṣāḥifa-yi shatṭiyya* (a work of approximately the same period), in which he protests that miracles have been falsely attributed to him, although those ascribed to the Bāb and the mirrors emanating from him are to be regarded as authentic.¹⁶⁶ Later, he insists that he is not prepared to advance any cause [*hīch iqbāl bi-amrī nadāram*].¹⁶⁷ Here again, the focus of attention is the Bāb (“‘Alī Muḥammad”), who is described as “God’s essence” or “God in person” [*dhāt Allāh*] and his “eternal reality” [*kaynūniyyatuhu ‘l-bāqīyya*]. There is also what appears to be a reference to Azal as the “throne” after the Bāb (“the most exalted countenance”).¹⁶⁸

The theme of continuing divine activity as an extension of the Bāb’s original revelation is pursued in the *Tafsīr āyat al-nūr* (also known as the *Tafsīr al-hurūf al-muqatṭa’a*). Here, the Bāb is referred to as the manifestation of the divine essence and attributes [*mazhar al-dhāt wa mazhar al-ṣifāt*], through whom all things were created, beginning with the mirrors and letters that have proceeded from him.¹⁶⁹ These mirrors and letters are the sources of authority [*marja’*] for mankind in the “day of dispersal” [*yawm al-tanādd*]¹⁷⁰ — presumably the period following the Bāb’s death.

In what seems to be a reference to Azal, he speaks of the present age as “the days of the Face” [*ayyām al-wajh*], in which men are to be guided by “the lights of guidance in the manifestation of power.”¹⁷¹ Somewhat later, he urges his readers to be “among those who have entered beneath the shadow of the Face in this day.”¹⁷² His own status is again played down, being limited to a reference to “what God has taught me out of his grace”¹⁷³ as in the *Lawḥ madīnat al-tawḥīd*.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 317-18, 318.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

¹⁶⁶ *Idem*, *Ṣāḥifa-yi shatṭiyya*, in *ibid.*, p. 142.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹⁶⁹ *Idem*, *Tafsīr āyat al-nūr*, in *ibid.*, p. 51. The Bāb’s appearance is also described as the “meeting with God” promised in the Qur’ān (*ibid.*, p. 65).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52. Just before this, he refers to the “establishment of the temple of eternity [*haykal al-azaliyya*] upon the throne of lights.”

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 76. This may even be intended to refer specifically to knowledge of the sciences of gematria and alchemy, on which he has just been writing.

Contemporary with some at least of these texts, there are others in which Bahā' Allāh displays a growing preoccupation with visions of a heavenly maiden who seems to have first appeared to him in Kurdistān. The earliest contemporary reference to such a vision is probably that in the *Qaṣīda 'izz warqā'iyya*, written in the Khālidi-Naqshbandī *takiyya* in Sulaymāniyya. Later texts containing passages of this type include the *Lawḥ-i ghulām al-khuld*, *Lawḥ mallāḥ al-quds*, and *Lawḥ al-ḥūriyya*.

The last-named is by far the most extensive and evocative, detailing a fascinating colloquy in which the angel demands to know the cause of the writer's sadness and probes his mental and physical being in search of the truth, asking at last whether he is "the beloved of all worlds."¹⁷⁴

The idea is not, of course, original. It has existed as a theme in Iranian religion since pre-Islamic times¹⁷⁵ and occurs in later Ṣūfī writing, notably in the *Naẓm al-sulūk (al-ṭā'iyya al-kubrā)* of the Egyptian poet Sharaf al-Dīn 'Umar ibn al-Fāriḍ, which seems to have provided Bahā' Allāh with his principal source of inspiration.¹⁷⁶ That Bahā' Allāh remained under Ṣūfī influence even after his return from Kurdistān is implied by his continued association with two leading Ṣūfis resident in Baghdad, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and Sayyid Dāwūd al-Naqshbandī al-Khālidi.¹⁷⁷

Visions of this heavenly maiden seem to have been linked in Bahā' Allāh's mind with a growing sense of personal distress and feelings of disquiet about the conduct and future of the Bābī community. In 1859, he was aged forty, and it is arguable that, in common with other religious personalities throughout history, he underwent a life crisis whose perplexities became inextricably interwoven with external difficulties. Out of this emerged a sense of personal mission that came to be interpreted increasingly in terms of the appearance of a new revelation; but public expression of such themes seems to have occurred very late.

According to Zarandī, it was only in the period leading up to the year 1280/early 1863 that visible changes occurred in Bahā' Allāh's appearance and behaviour.¹⁷⁸ During this period, several short works were composed by him, a number in the form of poems, all expressive of a

¹⁷⁴ *Idem.*, *Lawḥ al-ḥūriyya* in *idem*, *Āthār*, vol. 4, pp. 342-50, especially pp. 346-47, 349.

¹⁷⁵ For numerous references to angelic beings of this type and their function, see Henry Corbin, *Terre céleste et corps de résurrection* (Paris, 1960).

¹⁷⁶ The *Qaṣīda 'izz warqā'iyya* was written in imitation of this work (see Balyuzi, *Bahā'u'llāh*, p. 118; J. R. Cole, "Bahā'u'llāh and the Naqshbandī Sufis in Iraq, 1854-1856," in J. R. Cole and M. Momen [eds.], *From Iran East and West: Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History*, vol. 2 [Los Angeles, 1984]). An English translation of the *Naẓm al-sulūk* was made by A. J. Arberry: *The Poem of the Way* (London, 1952). For a transcribed text of the original, see *idem*, *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ* (London, 1952), pp. 63-112.

¹⁷⁷ Balyuzi, *Bahā'u'llāh*, p. 124.

¹⁷⁸ Zarandī, quoted *Ishrāq Khāvarī*, *Ayyām-i tis'a*, p. 332.

sense of excitement and anticipation.¹⁷⁹ There is enough evidence in the *Lawḥ al-ṣabr*, which was definitely written at a point close to his departure from Baghdad (May 1863), that he had begun to lay open claim (if only within a limited circle) to a status which was bound to conflict with that of his brother unless such claims could be controlled with the overall structure of a successfully routinized Babism.

In this work, he states clearly that he has been sent by God and that verses have been revealed to him,¹⁸⁰ and indicates that he will issue his claims openly in the near future ("you shall know a call in a time which is certainly coming").¹⁸¹

Conclusion

A full discussion of the claims eventually advanced by Bahā' Allāh in Edirne and Acre would take us far beyond the dates assigned to this survey and would involve a lengthy and complex analysis of the abundant scriptural materials available. I shall instead conclude by drawing attention once more to a point I have mentioned elsewhere¹⁸², namely that Bahā' Allāh's developed claims represent the most extreme expression of Shī'ī and Bābī theories of theophany. With his mature writings, the themes discussed in this article and its predecessor reach their apogee in claims that come very close to assertions of out and out divinity or even incarnation.

One of the most striking references to this idea occurs in the undated (probably Acre — 1868-92) *Lawḥ-i milād-i ism-i a'zam*, in which he declares that "he has been born who neither begets nor is begotten"¹⁸³ — a direct allusion to and contradiction of Qur'ān 112. Similarly, in the *Sūrat al-ḥajj*, written in Edirne after the split with Azal, he declares that "the educator of all beings and their Creator has appeared in the garment of humanity, but you were not pleased with that, until he was imprisoned in this prison."¹⁸⁴

That at least some of Bahā' Allāh's followers endorsed a radical

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* The works referred to are: *Subḥāna rabbī al-a'lā*, *Ḥūr-i 'ujāb*, *Lawḥ-i ghulām al-khuld*, *Az bāgh-i ilāhī*, *Bāz-ā va bidih jāmī*, and *Hala, hala yā bishārat*.

¹⁸⁰ Nūrī, *Sūrat al-ṣabr*, in Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Mā'idā*, vol. 4, p. 290. See also p. 310, where he says he met God and was inspired by him with verses.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹⁸² MacEoin, "From Babism to Baha'ism," note 16, pp. 245-46; *idem*, "Changes in charismatic authority in Qajar Shī'ism," in E. Bosworth and C. Hillenbrand (eds.), *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change 1800-1925* (Edinburgh, 1984), p. 168. Both these sources contain references to relevant texts.

¹⁸³ Nūrī, *Lawḥ-i milād-i ism-i a'zam*, in Ishrāq Khāvarī, *Mā'idā*, vol. 4, p. 344.

¹⁸⁴ *Idem*, *Sūrat al-ḥajj*, in *Āthār*, vol. 4, p. 203.

interpretation of such claims is evident from a number of sources. Hājī Mīrzā Haydar 'Alī Isfahānī, a prominent Bahā'ī missionary in late 19th-century Iran, describes a discussion he held with an Iranian 'ālim following a visit to Bahā' Allāh in Acre. In the course of their conversation, he stated: "He is unique by Himself. No one in the world can ever compare to Him. He is the One Whom the Qur'ān has declared to have neither father nor son [i.e. God]." ¹⁸⁵ The same writer also narrates an anecdote concerning Bahā' Allāh to the effect that, when told that Shaykh Muḥammad Bāqir Isfahānī asked for a translation of *sūra* 112 to be made and sent to him, retorted that "Moses had heard the call of 'I am your God' from a burning bush. Why not from a man?" ¹⁸⁶

The authors of the *Hasht bihisht* quote two verses from the poetry of Mullā Muḥammad Nabīl Zarandī that indicate a strong tendency to the use of extreme hyperbole in reference to Bahā' Allāh:

"Lordship has entered the plain of his majesty with lacerated chest. Divinity has become like a trembling willow in the garden of his exaltation." ¹⁸⁷

And:

Men call you God, and I grow angry.

Draw aside the veil, and do not accept the shame of Godhood. ¹⁸⁸

While in Kermān, E.G. Browne encountered a number of Bahā'īs who entertained similarly exaggerated ideas about their prophet, among them a certain Shaykh Ibrāhīm, who told him: "God is something real, visible, tangible, definite. Go to Acre and see God!" ¹⁸⁹

It would be unfair to suggest that such views were typical or that the majority of Bahā'īs accepted them. Had that been the case, it is unlikely that the later, more restrained doctrine would have established itself. But it should be obvious that such responses on the part of Bahā' Allāh's own followers are the best possible indication of the immediate impact of claims of this kind.

Such claims, however they be interpreted, are neither casual nor fortuitous, but are expressions of views that could not have been advanced in other contexts or by other writers (orthodox Jews or Sunnī

¹⁸⁵ Isfahānī, *Delight of Hearts*, p. 19.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104. Confirmation that Bahā' Allāh knew of Muḥammad Taqī's remark is to be found in his *Lawḥ-i Shaykh* (Cairo, 1920), p. 31 (trans. Shoghi Effendi, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* [Wilmette, Ill., 1941], p. 41) and in an untitled letter in *idem*, *Alwāḥ-i muḥāraka-yi ḥadrat-i Bahā' Allāh shāmil-i Ishrāqāt* (n.p. [Tehran], n.d.), p. 40.

¹⁸⁷ Quoted Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, p. 315. E.G. Browne quotes a variant of this from another text of the *Hasht bihisht* in Hamadānī, *New History*, p. 395.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted Kirmānī and Kirmānī, *Hasht bihisht*, p. 315; see also Browne, in Hamadānī, *New History*, p. 395.

¹⁸⁹ E. G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 3rd. ed. (London, 1950), p. 537.

Muslims, for example). Accepted in their own right as conscious and intended expressions of religious truths that must be taken into account in the formulation of more rounded doctrinal positions, they possess an undoubted historical validity and serve as a faithful affirmation of what must be regarded as the final phases of Bābī theophanic speculation.

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RÉSUMÉ

Dans un article récent «Hierarchy, Authority and Eschatology in Early Bābī Thought» (P. Smith, ed., *In Iran: Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History*, vol. 3, Los Angeles, Kalimat Press, 1986, pp. 95-155) on a étudié la nature et le fonctionnement de l'autorité religieuse charismatique dans la communauté Bābīe en Iran depuis 1844 jusqu'aux environs de 1850. Le présent article prolonge ce travail à la période suivante que l'on pourrait appeler «le Babisme moyen» —, particulièrement chez le groupe des Bābīs qui vivaient en exil en Iraq pendant les années 1850 et le début des années 1860.

On examine les facteurs principaux qui ont mené à la fin de cette période au fractionnement des Bābīs en deux sectes, à savoir les Azalīs et les Bahā'īs. On discute d'abord le problème de succession à la tête du mouvement, en particulier les prétentions de Mīrzā Yaḥyā Šubḥ-i Azal. On assiste à un mouvement qui, de la primauté fondée sur la possession d'une capacité innée, et donc à une autorité nouvelle issue de groupes non cléricaux.

Une large place est consacré aux prétendants à l'inspiration divine à cette époque, en particulier à la carrière de trois personnages d'un intérêt spécial. On peut identifier un réseau d'activités Bābīes à Téhéran et Tākūr, lequel est examiné en détail. Suit une revue des tentatives pour routiniser l'autorité du mouvement en Iran et Iraq.

La dernière section est consacrée à une discussion historique et textuelle sur la montée au pouvoir religieux de Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī Bahā' Allāh, le fondateur de la secte Bahā'īe. On examine d'abord son attitude à l'égard des prétentions de son demi-frère Azal; on rapporte ensuite sa propre prétention au pouvoir suprême après son retour d'un exil au Kurdistan qu'il s'est lui-même imposé.

SUMMARY

In a recent article, "Hierarchy, Authority and Eschatology in Early Bābī Thought," I examined the nature and operation of charismatic religious authority within the Bābī community of Iran from 1844 to about 1850. The present article extends this work by reviewing the later period (what may be termed "Middle Babism"), chiefly in the Bābī exile group in Iraq during the 1850s and early 1860s.

The article examines the main factors leading to the division of the Bābīs into two sects, Azālīs and Bahā'īs, by the end of this period. It opens with a discussion of the question of succession within the movement, particularly with regard to the claims of Mīrzā Yahyā Subḥ-i Azal. A shift is noted from leadership based on membership of the *ʿulamā* class to claims founded on the notion of possession of innate capacity, resulting in a new leadership drawn from non-clerics.

Considerable space is devoted to claimants to divine inspiration in this period, with particular attention to the careers of three individuals. An important network of Bābī activity in Tehran and Tākūr is identified and examined at some length. This is followed by a review of attempts to routinize authority within the movement in Iran and Iraq.

The final section of the article is devoted to a historical and textual discussion of the rise to ascendancy of Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī Bahā' Allāh, the founder of the Bahā'ī sect. This begins with an examination of his attitude towards the authority claims of his half-brother Azal, and continues with an account of his eventual claim to supreme authority after his return from a self-imposed exile in Kurdistan.