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PREFACE

The Babi movement, begun in Shiraz in 1844 by Sayyid ^\i
Muhammad,

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the Bab, was greeted by many Iranian Muslims as
the answer to their hopes for the coming of the messianic Promised One (Mahdi)
and the advent of Christ. Partly because of
the repression of the movement (1848-1853) by the Iranian
government and the uiaama, and partly because of the militancy
of some Babis, the original spread of the religion was accompanied by social
upheaval and, in several instances, military engagements . A second phase began
in the 1860s when Mirza

l:Iusayn-'A li. Baha'u'IIah, successfully pressed claims to being
the spiritual return of the Bab, the one whom the latter had
foretold God would make manifest. Almost all Bab,s SWiftly
became Baha'is, and new believers from other religious backgrounds were
attracted by Baha'u'IIah's charisma as well.

Baha'u'Uah, from his places of exile in Turkey and Palestine,
preached a new social doctrine centered on the unity of all mankind, the unity
of the great world religions, and peaceful approaches to the resolution of
social conflict. In the autocratic

Middle East he advocated constitutionalism and parliamentary government, and in a society not far from feudalism he proposed a more equal distribution of wealth. These social ideas were nevertheless proclaimed as part of a specifically religious message. Baha'u'llah's successor and eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Baha 'Abbas, developed the universalist and liberal aspects of his father's message even further, preaching peace, universal love, and world government on his trips to Europe and North America (1910-1913).

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x by Juan R. Cole

The early phases both of the Babi movement and its successor, the Baha'i Faith, provoked exciting and prodigious scholarship in nineteenth-century Europe, engaging the brilliant talents of Gobineau, Browne, Goldziher, Huart, von Rosen, and others in the forefront of Orientalist studies. Admittedly, they were sometimes shackled by the drawbacks of the Orientalist tradition, with its assumption of European superiority and its preoccupation with ideas and texts, almost to the exclusion of social reality. Nevertheless, they produced a solid corpus of scholarship on the Babis and early Baha'is that is only now beginning to be superseded.

Ironically, the early scholarly interest in the religion died out by the 1920s, and for nearly fifty years virtually no European or North American academic scholar published any significant work on it. Yet from 1920 to the present, the Baha'i Faith has undergone important changes and expanded greatly-becoming, if anything, more important than it was when Browne devoted so much study to it. In Iran the faith grew more organized and its intellectual culture began to take on greater sophistication. [It remained the largest non-Muslim religious minority, outnumbering the mostly Armenian Christians, the Jews, and the Zoroastrians. The American Baha'i community, founded in the 1890s, continued to show vigor, involving itself with activities aimed at bringing blacks and whites together as equals in a racist America. Baha'i communities were founded throughout the world, and in the late 1950s and the 1960s, the movement suddenly encompassed masses in Uganda, India, and elsewhere. Since 1970 academic writing on the Bab, and Baha', religions has begun once more to see print. The rapid expansion of Middle East Studies as an academic discipline in Europe and North America in the 1960s and 1970s was one factor. Anthropologists and others who went to Iran encountered Baha'is and wrote about them. The surge of growth the religion experienced in the

United States and Great Britain (1968-1975) also provoked the interest of many young Westerners. Some of them converts. Immigrant Iranian scholars, whether they were themselves Baha'is or were simply interested in the history of the movement, have also been important in the revival of European-language

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scholarship on it. Since 1979, the persecution of the Baha'is by Iran's government has further aroused interest in the imperiled minority.

Within the Baha' community, Great Britain has been the center and vanguard of the new Bab, Baha' history. Hasan Balyuzi, a distinguished Iranian Baha', originally trained at the American University in Beirut, later at the London School of Economics, and long resident in England, produced full-length treatments of the lives of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha in the seventies. Younger Baha'i scholars in Europe participated in the groundbreaking Lancaster seminars organized by British sociologist Peter Smith. Important dissertations have recently been produced on the Bab, or Baha', religions by Smith at Lancaster, Denis MacEoin at Cambridge, and Abbas Amanat at Oxford.

Moojan Momen, trained at Cambridge, not only began this series of volumes on Bab, and Baha' history but published a compilation of European archival documents bearing on Bab, and Baha'i history. It was only natural that the first volume of this series featured contributions from the Lancaster group. Although academic studies on the Baha', Faith in North America still lag behind those in Europe, new energy is apparent on the Western side of the Atlantic, as well. The first Baha' History Conference held in America took place in Los Angeles in August 1983. It is the intention of the present volume to draw together some of those academics working on the subject in America (or, in the case of Peter Smith, working on the American Baha' community). No attempt has been made at being exhaustive, and a great deal of talent exists that is not represented here. All the contributors to the present volume were present at the Los Angeles conference. Although efforts were made to attract contributions from outside that circle, they have met with no success at this point—though it is the hope of the editors that this series will increasingly publish articles from authors of many backgrounds.

If this volume has a theme, it might be the historical impact of the Baha' Faith outside the circle of Persian-speaking Iranian ~i's within which the Bab, movement originated. In my piece
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on Baha'ullah and the Kurdish Sufis of Iraq, I discuss the interplay of Babi themes of messianic advent and the Sufi mystical emphasis on internal spiritual renewal. The piece analyzes

for the first time an important but heretofore little-known early mystical poem written in Arabic by Baha'u'Uah, which contains strong hints that even in the 1850s he felt he had a private mission of reform to carry out in the Babi community. Margaret Caton of U.C.L.A. treats BaM'i influences on the Iranian court musician, Mirza I\bdullah . The mystical milieu of the traditional musicians and the BaM'i Faith's approval of music (in contradistinction to the legalist Islam of the ayatu 'llahs, which forbids it) made the religion appealing to one of the great compilers of the Persian repertoire . The BaM'i Faith touched another out-group in ~i'i Iran in a Significant way- the Zoroastrians, an ancient Iranian religious community. Susan Stiles of the University of Arizona makes interesting use of heretofore unstudied biographical materials to delineate the gradual process of conversion among some Zoroastrians to the Baha'i Faith .

Richard Hollinger of U.C.L.A. gives us a study of Ibrahim Kheiralla, the Lebanese Baha'i who first spread the religion to the United States but later renounced his allegiance to Baha'-u'llah's appointed successor, I\bdul-Baha. Hollinger makes use of a mass of primary source materials he has unearthed in public and private archives. Peter Smith of Lancaster University traces the fate of a BaM'i periodical published in New York in the 1920s, illuminating important facets of the intellectual and social history of the American Baha'i community in that formative period.

William Garlington, late of Australian National University, discusses in comparative perspective the issue of recent conversion to the Baha'i Faith by Hindu villagers in Central India, concluding that the universalist themes in the movement allowed it to act as a cultural bridge in expressing the spiritual aspirations of those who embraced it.

The contributions in this volume span the entire history of the Baha'i Faith, from its early inception in Iran and Iraq through its spread to non-Muslim communities and to other lands and

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cultures in North America and India. The rich source materials to which the contributors have drawn attention, and the exciting conclusions they have been able to draw from them, should encourage greater academic interest in the history of the Baha'i Faith. It is hoped that this series will serve all those wishing to gain a better appreciation of the sweep of Baha'i history.

JUAN R. COLE

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