

lunar and Babi calendars. There are certain minor difficulties relating to the dating, but nothing that casts doubt on the authenticity of the document.

The notes on the Bab's writings are divided into three columns. The first is headed, "that which was sent down from God most high" contains a note of the general content of the Bab's writing that day. This gradually dwindles from a long paragraph on the first day to a few words or nothing later in the document. Beginning on the second day, the second column contains a brief statement about the amount and type of writing on that day. For example on day 2, on which the Bab revealed a chapter in each of the five styles on the theme, "God is unique," we read, in commentary on the name 'unity' revealed in the five modes. That which flowed from the Pen of God was five sheets." The third column, "that which ascended unto God most high by the Primal Point," seems to be notes concerning outgoing correspondence, with addressees indicated by abbreviations and numbers indicating the number of sheets. In some cases, the addressees can be identified, but not always.

The contents of the present book are clearly indicated by the entries for the month of Baha, the first month of the Babi year; and it was this that enabled the Azali scribe to compile his edition and put the chapters in their proper order. After 17 Baha there are no further entries indicating writing in this style, evidence that the book as we have it is largely complete.

The log continues for several more Babi months. Many days are blank except for the name of God for that day and the dates. Other days record the writing of talisman, prayers, etc. Mid-May saw a burst of correspondence, ending abruptly on 14 May. This presumably marks the departure of Sayyih3, the last Bab courier to leave Chihriq, who carried the Bab's remaining papers to Mulla `Abdu'l-Karim Qazvini. Though the latter part of the month saw considerable writing, it was mainly prayers and other such things not necessarily intended to be sent immediately to the believers. The last recorded revelation was 1 Nr/3 June. The last ten days bear the same name of God, "God is most high" (Allah A`la). The log ends on Friday, 18 Nur/20 June 1850, apparently the day after the Bab reached Tabriz. Most likely Siyyid Husayn Yazdi carried the log with him to safety after the execution of the Bab. Presumably it then passed into Bahá'u'lláh's hands and was among the Babi manuscripts kept by Azal.

The historical interest of this document is clear, but its full use must await a more determined effort to decipher its cryptic notations.

The Style and Content of Panj Sha'n

The Panj Sha'n, as I have indicated, consists of 14 sets of passages in each of the five styles into which the Bab conventionally divided his revelation:

verses (ayat)

prayers (munajat)

sermons (Khutbih)

commentary (tafsir)

Persian (fars) Each day of the month, and presumably year, was assigned a name of God. These are all in the relative and are repeated twice:

al-a'lah al-a'lah

al-awhad al-awhad

al-a'had al-a'had

4: al-ahy al-ahy

These are dedicated—sometimes—to particular believers, including Dayyan, Azal, Tahirih, Bahá'u'lláh, and—forlornly—the Bab's beloved uncle, Haji Mirza Siyyid `Ali, who had been killed a month earlier in Tehran and of whose death the Bab was never told. Others are more difficult to identify.

The book contains nothing that might reasonably be called an argument. Instead names of God and invocations are endlessly repeated and varied, often in ways unsanctioned by Arabic usage. Syntax is nearly as ideosyncratic. Thus, for example, the first page has Allah used as a superlative in the form a'lah, an infinitive ilhn, participles mu'talih, mu'lah, and so on. To the extent that the book has content, it is not in the form of an extended argument but in enraptured rhapsodies about particular themes. Thus the sermon on the first day rhapsodizes about the first day of Baha—Naw-Ruz—as the "day of God," the name given it by the Bab in the Bayan. It such respects it is similar to the Kitabu'l-Asma', written sometime earlier and also arranged on a calendrical basis.

Evaluation

The question now arises as to why the Bab might have wished to write such a book—and why many Babis chose to copy it and the Azalis publish it. As one of my Baha' teachers commented about the Kitabu'l-Asma', "After a while a modern person gets bored, put down the book, and reads something else." My tentative explanation is this:

In the Persian Bayan viii:14 the Bab commands his followers to recite 700 verses of the Bayan every twenty-four hours. Bayan in the Bab's usage refers to his writings in general, not just to the Bayan proper. Each part of Panj Sha'n is about thirty pages long, roughly equalling the requisite 700 verses (a verse according to the Bab being forty letters or about a line). Now it also seems clear that the Bab envisioned the believer meditating on a different name of God each day. Lists are given in the Kitabu'l-Asma' and the correspondence log mentioned above (though the lists do not agree). Thus the believer, I infer, might fulfil his obligation by reciting one chapter of five

parts from the Panj Sha'n each day.

With this the stylistic quirks of the book begin to make sense. The book is to be understood as a sort of Babi breviary, a work of devotions not of instruction. For this the Bab's style is appropriate. While his style in this work may be numbing in large doses, it is unquestionably hypnotic in smaller doses. Recited the Panj Sha'n is akin to Sufi dhikr, in which the same evocative words are repeated ceaselessly with in this case gradual variations. The aesthetic is thus rather modern in certain ways with its contempt for convention and rigorous formal rules. Perhaps we should see Panj Sha'n as a minimalist work or a sort of devotional *Finnegans Wake*.

— Kitab-i-Panj Sha'n (Used by permission of the curator)