



Bâbism, Bahâ'ism,  
and the Ulama

The rise of Bâbism and its successor Bahâ'ism was swift and accompanied by much bloodshed; it seemed at least initially to be of great importance for the history of Iran, and even, it was thought, for the whole of the Middle East. As such, it has received much attention, and several attempts at interpretation have been made. In these, the reaction of the ulama to the appearance of Bâbism has not been closely studied. It was, however, the ulama who formulated the most explicit reaction to Bâbism and its claims, and in this case as in others we see the ulama functioning as *de facto* leaders of the nation, concerned on this occasion to preserve its religious uniformity. Both Bâbîs and Bahâ'îs recognized the ulama as among their chief adversaries, and this recognition was expressed in word and deed.

That this should be so was perhaps inevitable. Bâbism, at all stages of its doctrinal development, was of necessity opposed to Islam, for its claim to validity presupposed the supersession of Islam. The coming of a new revelation would have destroyed the worth of the existing one, which regarded itself as final. The ulama, on the other hand, were the institutional expression of the power

138

Religion and State in Iran

of Islam, the expositors and guardians of its doctrine and the enforcers of its law, and among their functions was the rebuttal of heresy and innovation.

The sources for the history of Bâbism are opposed in emotional and religious emphasis; yet if Bâbî accounts are stripped of their hagiographical elements, and state chronicles of their polemical fervor, a fairly reliable narrative can be established. It is clear that when Sayyid 'Alî Muhammad, in 1259/1843, first claimed to be the Bab, the "gateway" to the Hidden Imam, he clashed immediately with the ulama. One of the earliest writers on the history of Bâbism, Comte Arthur de Gobineau, suggests that anticlerical themes formed a large part of his early preaching, and that their acceptability was an important element in the earliest conversions to the new faith.<sup>1</sup> More significant a cause for the hostility of the ulama to the Bâb was doubtless provided by the realization that his doctrines constituted *bidat*, i.e., reprehensible innovation in matters of faith. Mullâ 'Alî Akbar Ardîstânî, one of the early converts, appended to the *idhân* (call to prayer) he proclaimed from the mosque of Âqâ Qâsim in Shiraz: "I bear witness that 'Alî Muhammad is the 'remnant' (*baqiya*) of God."<sup>2</sup>

The governor of Shiraz, Husayn Khân Nizâm ud-Daula (also entitled *Âjüdânbashî*) had been absent from the town. After his return, the ulama persuaded him, on Sha'bân 16/September 11, to

punish Mullâ ‘Alī Akbar, Mullâ Muhammad Sâdiq, and other followers of the Bâb.<sup>3</sup> Some were whipped, others, such as Muhammad ‘Alī Bârfurūshī, were paraded around the bazaar with blackened faces and burnt beards.<sup>4</sup> On Ramadân 15/October 9, Sayyid ‘Alī Muhammad was brought to Shiraz from Bushire, where he had first publicly announced his claims. In Shiraz, he was confronted for the first time with the ulama.<sup>5</sup> Accounts given of this confrontation by sources hostile to the Bâb contain two elements recurring in later interrogations—his deficient knowledge of Arabic and

1 A. de Gobineau, *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l’Asie Centrale* (Paris, 1865), pp. 148-149.

2 E. G. Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadīd or New History of Mirzâ ‘Alī Muhammad*

the Bâb (Cambridge, 1893), p. 200. According to Khan Bahadur Agha Mirza Muhammad (“Some New Notes on Bâbism,” *JRAS*, n.v. [July 1927], 451), Mullâ Muhammad Sâdiq was the first to proclaim this deformed *idhân*.

3 Browne, ed., op. cit., p. 200; *RSN*, X, 311; *MN*, III, 184.

4 E. G. Browne, *A Traveller’s Narrative, Written To Illustrate the Episode of the Bab* (Cambridge, 1891), II, 7.

5 *MN*, III, 185; *RSN*, X, 311.

Bâbism, Bahà’ism, and the Ulama

139

the traditional religious sciences, and his recantation.<sup>6</sup> While it is legitimate to question the accuracy of these accounts, and details may have been invented or emphasized to discredit the Bâb, the silence of Bâbī sources on the course of the confrontations suggests that the Bâb was in fact worsted by the ulama in debate. The confrontations demonstrate the role of the ulama in refuting Bâbism: by employing that scholastic knowledge which was one of their chief qualifications, they questioned the legitimacy of his claims; and by accepting his recantation, visibly asserted their own authority. At the end of his interrogation, the Bab was beaten and then conducted by ‘Abd ul-Hamid Khàn Kalàntar to the Masjid-i Vakil, where he publicly repeated his recantation.<sup>7</sup> Bâbī accounts agree that a meeting between the Bâb and the ulama took place, without offering any detail, and that it was attended by Sayyid Yahyà Dârâbī, who was subsequently to lead the Bâbī insurrection at Nayrlz.<sup>8</sup>

Although thus far Husayn Kliàn Nizàm ud-Daula appears to have acted in cooperation with the ulama, differing approaches by the state and the ulama to the problem of Bâbism can be detected. According to Gobineau, both the ulama of Shiraz and Husayn Khàn wrote to Tehran explaining the situation; and their example was followed by the Bâb.<sup>9</sup> It seems entirely possible that at this stage the Bâb hoped to secure his position by winning the support of Muhammad Shâh and his minister. Even when imprisoned in Màkū, the Bâb still considered it worth his while to compose a

risàla dedicated to Hâjjî Mirzâ Âqâsî.<sup>10</sup> Although Bâbî political theory left little room for the exercise of regal power,<sup>11</sup> Sayyid ‘AH Muhammad may have sought to make use of the conflict between ulama and state by presenting himself as an instrument for the destruction of clerical power. Gobineau writes that he asked for permission to come to Tehran, and that Hâjjî Mirzâ Âqâsî was

« MN , I I I , 184.

7 Muhammad, op. cit., pp. 452-454. According to this account, the Bâb was interrogated twice by the ulama in Shiraz, the second meeting being caused by the rashness of his followers. If this is so, we see here already how the development of Bâbism as a movement of revolt proceeded more or less independently of the Bâb and his pronouncements.

8 Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadîd*, p. 203; Browne, ed., *Traveller's Narrative*, I, 10.

9 Gobineau, op. cit., p. 151.

10 Browne, ed., op. cit., II, 274.

11 Gobineau, op. cit., p. 335.

140

#### Religion and State in Iran

initially disposed to let him come.<sup>12</sup> One of such heterodox outlook as Hâjjî Mirzâ Âqâsî can scarcely have been scandalized by the Bab's claims; more probably he hoped for some amusement from the spectacle of the Bab's clash with the ulama, and even for an amount of support in his own constant struggle with the clerical class. The opposition of Shaykh ‘Abd ul-Husayn Mujtahid forced him to change his intentions. He pointed out that if the ulama were to be obliged to defend themselves against the government and the Bab, they were capable of doing so.<sup>13</sup> As in the case of the demand for war against the Ottoman Empire, Hâjjî Mirzâ Âqâsî appears to have made all unavoidable outward concessions, while being careful not to encourage the expression of clerical power. He sent orders to Husayn Khân prohibiting further discussion between the Bâb and the people of Shiraz.<sup>14</sup> The Bâb was confined to his house, but evidently his confinement was not strict, for it was in Shiraz that Mullâ Husayn Bushravayh, on his way from Arab Iraq to Kirman, accepted the Bab's claims.<sup>15</sup> He it was who, on being converted, organized the insurrections in Khurasan and Mazandaran. Thus far-reaching were the consequences of the Bab's residence in Shiraz. The ulama protested against the inefficacy of his confinement, but without success.<sup>16</sup> The danger of Bâbism, not only to orthodoxy but also to the state, was not yet apparent. The failure to isolate the Bâb completely represented not only the customary inefficiency of the administration, but also its indifference to the support of orthodoxy. The ulama, for their part, although dissatisfied with the laxity of the measures taken against the Bâb, do not yet appear to have demanded his death.<sup>17</sup> The imâm jum‘a of Shiraz considered his release from prison permissi-

ble if he recanted;<sup>18</sup> and others of the ulama considered the Bâb insane and therefore neither responsible for his words, nor liable to the punishment they would otherwise bring him.<sup>19</sup> Despite all this,

12 Ibid., p. 153.

13 Ibid., p. 154.

14 Ibid., p. 155.

15 Ibid., p. 157.

16 Ibid., p. 155.

17 The Traveller's Narrative (ed. Browne, I, 7, 14) claims that the ulama of Shiraz issued a fatvâ for the killing of the Bâb. It should be remembered that

the Bahâ'î histories lay great emphasis on the role of the ulama. This is largely

justified; but in this case events appear to have been anticipated.

18 Muhammad, op. cit., p. 453.

19 RSN, X, 311.

Bâbism, Bahâ'ism, and the Ulama

141

an ambiguity in the attitude of the state is observable, and the ultimate execution of the Bab was preceded by several fatvâs declaring him deserving of death.<sup>20</sup>

Mullâ Husayn Bushravayh, on his way from Shiraz to Khurasan, had passed through Isfahan and informed the governor, Manüchihr Khân Mu'tamad ud-Daula, of the appearance of the Bab.<sup>21</sup>

Both Bâbi and other Persian sources agree that Manüchihr Khân was favorably inclined to the Bab and had him brought to Isfahan to satisfy his personal curiosity.<sup>22</sup> With Manüchihr Khân, the identification of the Bab with the state almost became a reality. In order, presumably, to conceal his inclinations and to nullify any possible agitation, Manüchihr Khân caused the Bâb to be accommodated in the residence of the imâm jum'a, and after a period of forty days, to be publicly confronted with the ulama of Isfahan, gathered in the Masjid-i Shâh.<sup>23</sup> It is clear that the ulama suspected the nature of Manüchihr Khân's intentions. By again confronting the Bâb with the ulama, he may have hoped to erase the impression left by his experience in Shiraz, or at least to provide a pretext for postponing any final decision. Most of the ulama refused to attend the confrontation saying that as the incompatibility of the Bâb's pretensions with the shari'at was "clearer and brighter than the sun," any further discussion was superfluous, and all that remained to be done was to enforce the relevant provision of the law.<sup>24</sup> This appears to have been the first clear demand by the ulama for the execution of the Bâb. Only the imâm jum'a, Àqâ Mir Muhammad Mihdl, and Mîrzâ Hasan Nürî, son of Mullâ 'Alî Nürî, attended

20 A. K. S. Lambton ("Persian Society under the Qajars," JRCAS, XLVIII [1961], 136) writes that in Qajar times as earlier, movements of social revolt

tended to take on a religious coloring “because orthodoxy was associated with the ruling institution,” and that “because there was no separation between Church and State, unorthodoxy was almost automatically regarded as a threat to the existing régime”; and cites Bâbism as the chief example. We have al-

ready noted, however, the alienation of the ulama from the state; and in the case of Bâbism, the danger was initially only to orthodoxy. The state reacted

seriously only when its own security was affected. The most significant movements of social revolt in the Qajar period took place precisely within an “orthodox” frame of expression, drawing on a long tradition in so doing.

21 Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

22 Browne, ed., *op. cit.*, II, 15; Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadid*, p. 208; RSN, X,

312; NT, p. 426; MN, III, 185. The last three imply that Manüchihir Khân was deceived as to the nature of the Bab’s claims.

23 Browne, ed., *Traveller’s Narrative*, II, 16; Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadid*, p.

210.

24 Browne, ed., *Traveller’s Narrative*, II, 16.

142

#### Religion and State in Iran

the meeting in the Masjid-i Shah.<sup>25</sup> Mîr Muhammad Mihdî inquired of the Bâb what was the source of his certainty, for after the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, certain knowledge on any point of religious law was to be had only by a pronouncement of the Hidden Imam, vouchsafed in a vision. Mirzâ Hasan Nürî asked him to describe the circumference of the earth, since the knowledge of this, among other matters, was a sign of the Mahdi.<sup>26</sup> Both questions he was unable to answer, and the meeting was dissolved without conclusive result.<sup>27</sup> Manüchihir Khan protected the Bâb until his death, and again the Bâb appears to have had enough freedom to maintain and even expand contact with his followers.<sup>28</sup> The ulama protested to Hâjji Mirzâ Âqâsi, but received only a noncommittal reply.<sup>29</sup>

On the death of Manüchihir Khân in 1263/1847, Hâjji Mirzâ Âqâsi gave orders that the Bâb be brought to Tehran.<sup>30</sup> According to the *Traveller’s Narrative*, the Bâb, when a few stages distant from Tehran, wrote a letter to Muhammad Shâh, asking to be granted an audience.<sup>31</sup> Hâjji Mirzâ Âqâsi, anxious neither to arouse the opposition of the ulama, nor to give them an opportunity of asserting themselves, refused his consent.<sup>32</sup> Instead the Bâb was sent in chains to be imprisoned at Mâkü in Azerbaijan. En route, he spent forty days in Tabriz, but the ulama refused to meet him.<sup>33</sup> From Mâkü, he was transferred to the fortress at Chih-riq near the Ottoman border. Here again he appears to have been able to maintain contact with his disciples, who were by now engaged in revolt in Mazandaran.<sup>34</sup> The disquiet caused by the Bâbi

uprisings, together with the continuing agitation of the ulama, led Hājji Mīrzā Āqāsī, three months after the Bāb had been brought to Chihriq, to have recourse again to the device of a confrontation, one little more conclusive than the preceding ones in Shiraz and

26 N T , p. 427. The *Tārikh-i-Jadīd* (Browne, ed., p. 209) claims that Mir Muhammad Mihdī accepted the claims of the Bāb.

27 N T , p. 428.

28 Browne, ed., *Traveller's Narrative*, II, 15.

29 Text given in Ahmad Kasravī, *Bahā'igari* (Tehran, n.d.), p. 26; Firīdūn

Ādamīyat, *Amir Kabīr va Iran* (Tehran, 1334 Sh/1955), p. 202.

30 Browne, ed., *op. cit.*, II, 18.

31 *Ibid.*, II, 20.

32 *Ibid.*, II, 19. There may be some truth in the suggestion that Hājji Mīrzā

Āqāsī was afraid of Muhammad Shah transferring his spiritual loyalties to the

Bāb. See Browne, ed., *op. cit.*, II, 21.

33 *Ibid.*, II, 22.

34 Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

Bābism, Bahā'ism, and the Ulama

143

Isfahan. The Traveller's Narrative represents Hājji Mīrzā Āqāsī as being still reluctant to conform with the wishes of the ulama;<sup>35</sup> but on this occasion, the ulama of Tabriz, hoping possibly for a definitive solution of the problem, consented to meet the Bāb in the presence of Nāsir ud-Dīn Mīrzā, at the time heir apparent and governor of Azerbaijan. The Bāb was brought from Chihriq by Sulaymān Khān Afshār, and the day after his arrival in Tabriz was interrogated by Mullā Muhammad Mamaqāni, chief of the Shaykhī ulama of Tabriz;<sup>36</sup> Hājji Mullā Mahmūd Nizām ul-'Ulamā;<sup>37</sup> Mīrzā 'Alī Asghar Shaykh ul-Islām; Mīrzā Ahmad Mujtahid Imām Jum'a; and Hājji Murtadā Qulī Marandī.<sup>38</sup> Various questions were put to the Bāb, concerning Arabic grammar and syntax, and the signs traditionally associated with the coming of the Hidden Imam.<sup>39</sup> Unable to answer them, he again recanted, and after being beaten by the shaykh ul-Islām in person, was sent back to Chihriq.<sup>40</sup> Still, then, the Bāb was left alive; and it was only when Amīr Kabīr thought the state endangered that the penalty for apostasy was applied. Religious duty had to wait on the state for its fulfillment. The episode of the Bāb provided one of the clearest examples of the dependence of shar' law on the state for the execution of its judgments. The shaykh ul-Islām of Tabriz wrote to the Bāb that only doubts concerning his sanity prevented his immediate execution,<sup>41</sup> but it is difficult to see in what manner these doubts

35 Browne, ed., op. cit., II, 25.

36 Nadir Mīrzâ, *Târikh va Jughrâfi-yi Dâr us-Saltana-yi Tabriz* (Tehran, 1323 Q/905). P- n 7-

37 Mullâ Mahmūd was tutor to Nâsir ud-Dīn, and when his pupil mounted the throne, he occupied a position of some importance at court. See below, p. 160.

38 Browne, ed., op. cit., II, 20; Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadīd*, p. 285; Kasravī,

op. cit., p. 29; RSN, X, 423; N T, p. 470. According to the *Târikh-i-Jadīd*, the

Bâb was lodged in the house of Mīrzâ Ahmad; according to N T, in that of Kâzim Khân Farrâshbâshī.

39 The substance of this examination of the Bâb is not seriously disputed by either the Traveller's Narrative or the *Târikh-i-Jadīd*, both Bahâ'ī sources.

Ridâ Qulī Khân claims to base his account on the information of Hâjjī Mullâ

Mahmūd (RSN, X, 423). Together with the versions given in Q'U (p. 46) and N T (pp. 470-472), it corresponds in detail with the report sent to Tehran by Nâsir ud-Dīn Mīrzâ (original in Majlis library, Tehran; text reproduced by

Âdamiyat, [op. cit., p. 202], Kasravī, [op. cit., pp. 30-32] and E. G. Browne

[*Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion* (Cambridge, 1918), pp. 253-256]).

40 Browne, ed., *Traveller's Narrative*, II, 27; Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadīd*, p. 290.

41 Kasravī, op. cit., p. 34. The fact that the Bâb was a sayyid (Gobineau [op.

cit., p. 143] considers his claim weak) may have been a further cause for delaying

his execution, and also for choosing Armenian troops to shoot him.

\*44 Religion and State in Iran

were dispelled before the execution of the Bâb in 1266/1849. On the other hand, the threat posed to secular authority became ever clearer.

Mullâ Husayn Bushravayh had gone from Shiraz by way of Tehran to Khurasan, and there attempted to secure acceptance of the Bab's claims. He met with partial success in Nayshapur, and then moved to Mashhad, where in the last years of Muhammad Shah's reign, the Sâlâr and Hamza Mīrzâ Hishmat ud-Daula were struggling for the possession of the town.<sup>42</sup> However, Mullâ Husayn was repulsed by both of them, and Hamza Mīrzâ imprisoned him at the bidding of the ulama.<sup>43</sup> Escaping, he moved in the direction of Sabzavar, where he and his followers were armed by a certain Mīrzâ Taqī Juvaynī.<sup>44</sup> At this point, the rebellion against the state began. This fact was obscured by the death of Muhammad

Shàh, and the Bâbî revolt became one element in the chaos surrounding the succession. Mullà Husayn, together with Mullà Muhammad ‘Alî Bârfurûshî and Qurrat ul-‘Ayn, moved into Mazandaran, and here the first battles between Bâbism and the state took place. The immediate threat was, however, to the ulama, just as the claims of the Bâb appeared initially to endanger only religion. The ulama of Bârfurûsh (modern Bâbul) were threatened by Mullà Muhammad ‘AH who marched through the streets of the town at the head of three hundred men with drawn swords: “le clergé jugea qu’il était grandement temps d’engager la lutte si l’on ne voulait pas courir le risque d’être un plus peu tard anéanti sans combat.”<sup>45</sup> Sa’id ul-‘Ulamâ Bârfurûshî led the resistance to the Bâbîs, constantly pleading for troops to be sent against them.<sup>46</sup> Nâsir ud-Dîn Shah was preparing to leave for Tehran, and evidently the matter was thought too trivial to warrant serious attention.<sup>47</sup> At the request of Sa’id ul-‘Ulamâ, however, ‘Abbàs Qulî Khàn, governor of Làrjân, sent three hundred troops to Bârfurûsh,

42 See above, p. 125.

43 N T , p. 473; RSN, X, 422; Gobineau, op. cit., p. 171.

44 Ibid., p. 173.

45 Ibid., p. 185.

46 Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadîd*, p. 52. The same work (p. 91) claims that Sa’id ul-‘Ulamâ’ was a Jewish convert to Islam, implying, perhaps, that his re-

sistance to Bâbism was inspired by the enthusiasm of a proselyte. The short biographical notice of Sa’id ul-‘Ulamâ’ in *Mîrzâ Muhammad Hasan Khan I’timâd us-Saltana, al-Ma’athir va-l-Âthâr* (Tehran, 1306 Q/1889, p. 150) makes

no mention of any Jewish origin.

47 Muhammad, op. cit., p. 457.

Bâbism, Bahâ’ism, and the Ulama

\* 4 5

and Mullà Husayn and his followers withdrew from the town.<sup>48</sup> There then followed the siege of the Bâbî stronghold at Shaykh Tabarsl. In the course of the repeated defeats suffered by government troops, Sa’id ul-‘Ulamâ exhorted them constantly to persist against the Bâbîs; when ultimately Shaykh Tabarsl fell, he executed some of the survivors with his own hands in the marketplace at Bârfurûsh.<sup>49</sup> As the most important of the ulama of Mazandaran, he thus played a central role in combating Bâbism. Whereas the Bâbîs in Mazandaran established themselves in a stronghold at some distance from the main towns of the region, the insurrection in Zanjàn was a more direct challenge to governmental authority. There it was led by Mullà Muhammad Zanjànî, who before adopting Bâbism had followed the Akhbârî madhhab. It appears that even before his conversion to Bâbism, he had con-

stantly been in dispute with both state and ulama.<sup>50</sup> When visiting the governor of Zanjàn, he was always accompanied by a group of armed followers.<sup>51</sup> His disputes with the Usulî ulama of Zanjân became so acrimonious that they wrote to Tehran requesting his removal from the town.<sup>52</sup> He was banished on several occasions; it was on one of these, toward the end of the reign of Muhammad Shâh, that he met Mullà Husayn Bushravayh in Tehran.<sup>53</sup> In the confusion following the death of Muhammad Shâh and the fall from power of Hâjjî Mîrzâ Âqâsî, he returned to Zanjân, where he was enthusiastically received by his former followers.<sup>54</sup> He proclaimed that he had become a Bâbî, and his followers decided also to adopt the new faith. Initially, his violence was directed only against the ulama; a Bahâ'î source records that a mullà was dragged down from his minhar (pulpit),<sup>55</sup> and the son of the shaykh ul-Islâm was murdered.<sup>56</sup> The ulama informed the capital

48 Gobineau, op. cit., pp. 186-187.

49 Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadid*, pp. 58, 72, 88; RSN, X, 446.

50 Gobineau (op. cit., p. 233) writes: "A s'en faire une idée tout a fait im-

partiale, on peut voir en lui un de ces nombreux musulmans qui, au vrai, ne le sont pas du tout, mais que pressent un fond très ample et très vivace de foi et de

zèle religieux dont ils cherchent emploi avec passion." The analysis does not,

however, give an immediate impression of impartiality.

51 RSN, X, 448.

52 Gobineau, op. cit., p. 234; Browne, ed., *Traveller's Narrative*, II, p. 13; Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadid*, p. 135.

53 Browne, ed., *Traveller's Narrative*, II, 12.

54 Gobineau, op. cit., p. 235.

55 Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadid*, p. 371.

56 Gobineau, op. cit., p. 238.

146 Religion and State in Iran

of what was happening, but it was not until one of the Bâbîs was arrested that fighting broke out. He was arrested for nonpayment of fiscal arrears, and Mullà Muhammad 'All attempted to free him by force.<sup>57</sup> Although the insurrection was in the name of Bâbism and was pursued with great ferocity, we see here a repetition of one of the traditional motives for movements of disobedience led by the ulama: in particular it may be compared with the rising of 1253/1837—1838 in Isfahan.<sup>58</sup> One of the many motives that led to the dissemination of Bâbism was thus the readiness of a devoted following to obey the directives of a mullà, even after his conversion to Bâbism. Here, one aspect of clerical power is reflected in Bâbism; but the case of Zanjân, with the exception of that of Nayrîz, is isolated.

Sayyid Yahyà Dârâbî, as mentioned above, attended the first in-

terrogation of the Bâb in Shirâz, doing so, according to Bahâ'î sources, on behalf of Muhammad Shâh.<sup>59</sup> From Shiraz he had gone to Yazd, whence he was expelled for preaching Bâbism in 1850.<sup>60</sup> Reaching Nayrîz, he enclosed himself in the citadel from which he was driven after a prolonged siege.<sup>61</sup> His father, Sayyid Ja'far, had enjoyed wide popularity which was transferred to him, while a dispute between the townspeople and their governor, Mirzâ Zayn ul'Abidin, supplied an additional reason to welcome him.<sup>62</sup> Here again it is evident that loyalty to the person of a powerful mullâ survived his conversion to Bâbism, when he fulfilled the traditional role of opposition to the oppression of the governor. The *Târikh-i-Jadid* confirms that Sayyid Yahyâ relied on the faithfulness of his father's followers.<sup>63</sup>

The insurrection in Zanjân at last decided Amir Kabir to do away with the Bâb, as ultimate source of the unrest.<sup>64</sup> Again he was brought from Chihriq to Tabriz, and fatvâs were delivered by

57 Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadid*, p. 140; Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

58 See above, pp. 111-112.

59 Browne, ed., *Traveller's Narrative*, II, 10; Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadid*, p. 113.

60 Browne, ed., *Traveller's Narrative*, II, 254.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 254.

62 RSN, X, 457.

63 p. u8. See, too, Muhammad, *op. cit.*, p. 466. It is questionable how well the participants in Bâbî-led revolts were acquainted with Bâbî tenets. Browne (introduction to *Târikh-i-Jadid*, p. xxvii) points out that the devotion of the

Bâbîs was, in general, more to leaders than to books and precepts.

64 RSN, X, 456. The *Târikh-i-Jadid* (p. 292) bears witness to Amir Kabir's reluctance, and to his being motivated solely by reasons of state.

Bâbism, Bahâ'ism, and the Ulama

\*47

various of the ulama condemning him to death. The *Traveller's Narrative* mentions Mullâ Muhammad Mamaqânî, Mirzâ Bâqir Mujtahid, and Mullâ Murtadâ Qulî Marandî.<sup>65</sup> At last, the state decided to enforce the penalty for apostasy; but the offense causing it to do so was one in nature less religious, and more directly threatening itself. On Sha'bân 27, 1266/July 8, 1850, the Bâb was shot dead in the citadel of Tabriz.<sup>66</sup>

This ended the first stage in the development of the religious movement resulting in the syncretist doctrines of Bahâ'ism.<sup>67</sup> It was the ulama who were first threatened by it and often suffered from its violence. In Qazvin, Hâjjî Mullâ Muhammad Taqî Burg-hânî was killed in the mihrâb (niche) of a mosque by Mirzâ Çâlih Shîrâzî for his persistent denunciation of Bâbism.<sup>68</sup> The Bâb him-

self, though largely remote from the activities of his followers, indicated his attitude to the ulama by breaking a stick over the chief mullâ of Mâkû.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, it was the ulama who throughout encouraged the state to suppress the movement, and their resistance to it was more consistent than that of either Hâjjî Mîrzâ Àqâsî or Amîr Kabîr. Their function of defending the religious-national community was, then, again exemplified in the struggle against Bâbism, while in this struggle the role of the state appeared to them, at best, as lacking in enthusiasm and, at worst, as ambiguous.

It is, nonetheless, necessary to recall that many of the leading Bâbîs were drawn from the ulama, though only one mujtahid, Aqâ Sayyid Husayn Turshîzî, appears to have joined their ranks.<sup>70</sup> The majority of these were Shaykhîs, and in the light of the expectations implicit in Shaykhî teaching, their conversion is not remarkable.<sup>71</sup> We have seen that, on the other hand, Mullâ Muhammad ‘Ali Zanjânî was an Akhbârî before his conversion, but it appears possible that he was attracted above all by the insurrectionary as-

65 II, 55. Gobineau (op. cit., p. 260) says that another discussion between the ulama and the Bâb was provided for, which most of them refused to attend. It is probable, however, that he is confusing these events with the earlier bringing of the Bâb from Chihriq.

66 Gobineau, op. cit., p. 263; N T , p. 489.

67 It is arguable that the movement began with Shaykh Ahmad Ahsâ’î, or even earlier. See Kasravî, op. cit., pp. 2-20.

68 Q‘U, p. 22.

69 Browne, ed., Târikh-i-Jadîd, p. 352.

70 Browne, ed., Traveller's Narrative, II, 212.

71 A list of some Shaykhî mullâs who accepted Bâbism is given in *ibid.*, p. 6.

ij 8

#### Religion and State in Iran

pects of the new faith. The Târikh-i-Jadîd estimates the number of ulama to have accepted Bâbism at 400, and claims that they occupy “the position of a touchstone or measure for the proving of his [the Bab’s] claims, which distinguishes base metal from true.”<sup>72</sup> That indeed the vast majority of the ulama rejected the Bab’s claims was probably the most important single factor working against their acceptance. Had the Bab in fact been acknowledged as the Hidden Imam, the function of the ulama would have ceased to exist. It may be conceded that they thus had a vested interest in the continued occultation of the Hidden Imam; but even Baha’is realized that the ulama had only two possible courses of action: to reject as false the Shi’i traditions considering the manner of the appearance of the Hidden Imam, or to consider the Bab a blasphemous apostate.<sup>73</sup>

Bâbism had certain consequences for the ulama and for Iran as a whole, many of which are suggested by a comparison with Ismâ'îlism. The comparison was made in the Qajar period and has been repeated by later investigators.<sup>74</sup> Both Ismâ'îlism and Bâbism were heresies of Shi'ite origin seeking to overthrow orthodoxy (Sunni and Ithnâ'asharî respectively) by violence, and spreading their doctrines by secret instruction.<sup>75</sup> Doctrinally, too, there were similarities: the title of Bâb was given in Ismâ'îlism to one of the seven grades of the esoteric hierarchy.<sup>76</sup> The Bâbîs for their part revived the mystic use of the numeral seven with the theory of the seven letters (*hurûf*) by means of which God accomplished the task of creation.<sup>77</sup> As Bâbî-Bahâ'î doctrine lost its Shi'ite tinge, it tended to attract the religious minorities, particularly the Zoroastrians<sup>78</sup>

72 pp. 231-235.

73 Browne, ed.. Traveller's Narrative, II, 32.

74 Q'U, p. 46; article on Bâbism by Jamâl ud-Dîn Asadâbâdî in *Dâ'irat al-*

*Ma'ârif*, ed. Butrus Bustânî (Beirut, 1881), V, 26; Jamâl ud-Dîn Asadâbâdî,

"Radd-i Naycharîya," in *Ârâ va Mu'taqadât-i Sayyid Jamâl ud-Dîn-i Afghani*,

ed. M. Chahârdihî (Tehran, 1337 Sh/1958), p. 49; 'Abd ar-Razzâq al-Hasanî,

*al-Bâbiyûn wa-l-Bahâ'îyûn fi Hâdirihim xva Mâdihim* (Sidon, 1376 Q/1956-

1957), p. 10; G. Scarcia, "A Proposito del Problema della Sovranità presso gli Imamiti," *Annali del Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, VII (1957), 121 (Bâbism a \*'neo-Ismâ'îlî interpretation of Shaykhi Imâmism").

75 On Ismâ'îlî use of violence, see Marshall G. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins* ('s-Gravenhage, 1955), pp. 110-115.

76 H. Corbin, *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique* (Paris, 1963), p. 131.

77 Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 314. No complete analysis of the doctrines of Bâbism and its successors is attempted here.

78 E. G. Browne, *A Year amongst the Persians* (new ed., London, 1950), p. 430.

Bâbism, Bahâ'ism, and the Ulama

149

in much the same way as Ismâ'îlism had proclaimed "interconfessionalism" in its attempts to subvert orthodoxy.<sup>79</sup> The threats presented by Bâbism and Ismâ'îlism, being both pervasive and hidden in their nature, permitted accusations of allegiance to heresy to become means of controversy and enmity. This was particularly the case with Bâbism, after the attempted assassination of Nâsir ul-Dîn Shâh.<sup>80</sup>

Taqîya, the prudent concealment of belief in circumstances of danger, was both a cause and a result of this pervasive fear and suspicion. The original justification of taqîya, self-protection from Sunni intolerance, had virtually ceased to exist,<sup>81</sup> but the habits of concealment and ambiguity it engendered lived on. Many of the

Bâbîs who remained in Iran found themselves obliged to practice taqīya, as the violence of the early Bâbîs was paid back to their successors by the ulama and the state. Taqīya at the same time enabled them to continue in, or penetrate, the ranks of the ulama, and the discontent of Bahâ'îs and Azalîs added a further element to the opposition to the Qajar monarchy, one that became entwined with the ulama themselves.

Probably the emergence of Bâbism affected the Shaykhîs more than other sections of the ulama, and taqīya was in practice forced on them too. The process had started when Sayyid Kâzim Rashtî, successor to Shaykh Ahmad Ahsâ'î as leader of the sect, was obliged to confess that the apparent meaning of certain of Shaykh Ahmad's doctrines constituted misbelief.<sup>82</sup> On the death of Sayyid Kâzim, not only the Bâb, but two other rival successors emerged, both hostile to the pretensions of Sayyid 'Alî Muhammad.<sup>83</sup> Mullâ Muhammad Mamaqânî, a follower of Mirzâ Shafî Tabrizî, one of the claimants to the succession, was among the ulama who condemned the Bâb to death in Tabriz. Hâjjî Muhammad Karim Khân, the other claimant, was not less decisive in his reaction to Bâbism. In Kirman, he gave a fatvâ for the killing of two Bâbî missionaries.<sup>84</sup> He wrote a treatise refuting the Bab's claims, allegedly at the request of Nâsir ud-Dîn Shâh, but more probably to

79 B. Lewis, *The Origins of Ismâ'ilism* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 93-96.

80 Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

81 See below, p. 228.

82 Q T, p. 31.

88 Kasravi, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

84 Browne, ed., *Târikh-i-Jadîd*, p. 200.

150

Religion and State in Iran

establish a distance between himself and the Bâb.<sup>85</sup> In his treatise *Si Fa\$î*, he later claimed that, far from suffering from Bâbî inclinations, he was the first to pronounce the Bab an infidel.<sup>86</sup> It is clear that a certain similarity existed between the initial claims of the Bâb and the Shaykhî concept of the *shVa-yi kâmil* (the perfect shi'a) as human intermediaries between the community of believers and the Hidden Imam. Therefore, the followers of Hâjjî Muhammad Karim Khan found it prudent to reexplain the concept as no more than an idea, not to be identified with any one person.<sup>87</sup> When he wrote a treatise summarizing Shaykhî beliefs, significantly such typical Shaykhî concepts as the *jism-i hürqaliyâ'î*<sup>88</sup> received no mention.<sup>89</sup> A successor of Hâjjî Muhammad Karim Khan even went so far as to suggest that the differences between Usûlîs and Shaykhîs were purely terminological.<sup>90</sup> Thus did the emergence of Bâbism force one section of the ulama to resort to taqīya in its struggle with the majority. This struggle, though secondary to that between ulama and state, continued until the Constitutional Revo-

lution and was another element in the confusion of motive surrounding that event.

The development of Bâbism into Bahâ'ism confirmed the existing hostility to the ulama.<sup>91</sup> Thus Mirzâ Jânî Kâshânî, author of the *Nuqat ul-Kâf*, looked forward to the beheading of 70,000 mullàs by the Hidden Imam on his emergence,<sup>92</sup> and thought them less valuable than the carcass of a dog.<sup>93</sup> The attempt on the life on Nâsir ud-Dîn Shah was preceded by a similar plot against the imam jum'a of Tehran, which however was not put into operation. The Bahâ'is dissociated themselves from the attack on the Shah,

85 Browne, *A Year amongst the Persians*, p. 608; 'Abd ul-Husayn Navâ'î, "Hâjj Muhammad Karim Khân Kirmânî," *Yâdgâr*, V (1328 Sh/1949-1950), 117.

86 *Ibid.*, IV, 72.

87 Alessandro Bausani, *Persia Religiosa* (Milan, 1959), p. 406.

88 *Jism-i hurqaliyâ'î*: "Hurqalyan body," the subtle body in which the Hidden

Imam subsists in the realm of Hurqaliyâ, a region intermediate between spirit and matter (see Henry Corbin, *Terre Celeste et Corps de Résurrection* [Paris, 1960], pp. 99-164).

89 Navâ'î, *op. cit.*, IV, 68.

90 Shaykh Abû-l-Qâsim Kirmânî, *Fihrist-i Kutub-i Marhûm Shaykh Ahmad-i Ahsâ'î va Sâ'ir-i Mashâyikh-i Tzâm* (Kirman, 1337 Sh/1958-1959), p. 105.

91 Azalism, the other successor to Bâbism, becomes of importance later than Bahâ'ism.

92 Browne, ed., *Târikh-i Jadid*, p. xvii. In one sense, a curious sentiment to entertain, for the Bab had claimed precisely to be the Hidden Imam.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Bâbism, Bahâ'ism, and the Ulama

151

and in fact sought to achieve with Nâsir ud-Dîn Shah what the Bâb had failed to accomplish with Muhammad Shah: to present themselves as allies of the state against the ulama. 'Abd ul-Bahâ wrote in this vein to Nâsir ud-Dîn Shah.<sup>94</sup> Not only was the role of the ulama in suppressing Bâbism emphasized, but they were held responsible for preventing Nâsir ud-Dîn Shah from introducing a policy of toleration.<sup>95</sup> The charge was hardly justified; in reality the Bahâ'is came to occupy something of a position between the state and the ulama, not one enabling them to balance the two sides, but rather exposing them to blows each side was aiming at the other. The government, interested in maintaining order, would resist persecution of Bahâ'is by the ulama, but would equally, when occasion demanded, permit action against the Bahâ'is.

Despite these consequences of the rise of Bâbism, the contradiction between ulama and state, its origins and its results, remained largely unchanged. Not long after the execution of the Bâb, Amîr

Kabir expelled the shaykh ul-Islâm and the imâm jum'a from Tabriz. Even while Sayyid Yahyà Dârâbi was leading the Bâbi insurrection in Nayrîz, a not less violent conflict was raging in Isfahan between clerical and secular power. Bâbism was ultimately no more than a side issue in the Qajar history.

94 Text and Arabic translation in al-Hasani, op. cit., pp. 132-164.

95 Browne, ed.. Traveller's Narrative, II, 149.

— Babism, Baha'ism and the Ulama (Used by permission of the curator)