

As attested in a number of anecdotes, the Bab was a gentle, precocious, and gifted child who displayed qualities of spiritual and intellectual excellence (Lambden 1986: 2-9; Amanat 2005: 110-121; Afnan 2000: 30-37). Owing to His acumen and wisdom, the Bab was taken out of the traditional primary school He attended (Mazindarani 1938: 193). The Bab had some consciousness of His unique station as a Manifestation of God from a young age. In the *Qayyumu'l-Asma'*, the first major work authored by the Bab after His declaration, He states that He was aware of the truth of His station as a child (Afnan 2008: 9 n. 38). In the

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(The Bab, Selections 12)

The declaration of the Bab and his pilgrimage to Mecca

The nineteenth century was a period of messianic expectation in many parts of the world.

In the Shi'ih Muslim heartlands of Persia and Iraq, the year 1844 marked a thousand lunar years since the alleged disappearance of the Twelfth Imam, who is identified by Shi'ih

Muslims as the *Qa'im* (the promised messianic deliverer of Shi'ih Islam). As such,

expectations of the Imam's return in Persia and Iraq were heightened (Amanat 2005: 70-

105). A few hours before sunset on 22 May 1844, the Bab encountered a religious student

named Mulla Muhammad Iusayn-i-Bumru'i, who came to be known as Mulla Iusayn (d. 1849),

at the Darvazih Kazirun in the south of Shiraz (Afnan 2000: 61). Mulla Iusayn had been a

student of the recently deceased Siyyid Ka'im-i-Ramti in Karbala for some nine to eleven

years. The Bab had months earlier been apprised of the passing of Siyyid Ka'im-i-Ramti: in

one of His earliest writings, He states that He learned the news of the death of Siyyid

Ka'im-i-Ramti in a dream in which the land of Karbala disintegrated into pieces, hovered in

the air, and presented itself before the house of the Bab in Shiraz (quoted in Lawson 1987:

76; Amanat 2005: 168) (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 The house of the Bab in Shiraz, Iran, destroyed in 1979.

Source: Baha'i World News Service.

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a tablet addressed to the Shah, that others in the royal court, out of jealousy, ignorance, greed, or spite, prevented Mulla I:Iusayn from delivering the Bab's epistle to him:

I despatched a messenger and a book unto thee, that thou mightest act towards the Cause of Him Who is the Testimony of God as befitteth the station of thy sovereignty. But inasmuch as dark, dreadful and dire calamity had been irrevocably ordained by the Will of God, the book was not submitted to thy presence, through the intervention of such as regard themselves the well-wishers of the government.

(The Bab, Selections 13)

Upon receiving a report from Mulla I:Iusayn about his travels, in the fall of 1844, the Bab, accompanied by Qyddus and Mubarak, His Ethiopian servant, 2 embarked on a journey to Arabia to undertake the hajj. In Mecca, the Bab by one account publicly announced that He was the promised one of Islam (other accounts suggest He only told selected people) and addressed a letter to the custodian of the Kaaba. Throughout the journey, the Bab dictated numerous treatises and sermons. On the return trip to Persia, from the port of Mak.ha (Mocha in present-day Yemen) He addressed a letter to His uncle and a tablet to His followers, in which He exhorted them to proclaim His Cause (Afnan 2013: 182-183, 192-193). He subsequently sojourned in Masqat (Muscat in present-day Oman) for approximately six weeks as a guest of the Sultan. During this time, He addressed numerous tablets to ecclesiastical leaders in Iraq, Persia, and Masqat. To fulfill Shi'ih messianic prophecies about the appearance of the Qa'im, the Bab had originally intended to travel from Mecca to Karbila in order to proclaim His Cause. During His pilgrimage to Mecca, word reached the Bab that Mulla 'Aliy-i-Bastami (the second person to profess belief in Him)-whom the Bab had sent to Iraq with a copy of the Qayyumu'l-Asma' to deliver a proclamatory message from the Bab, without divulging His identity, to the foremost Shi'ih cleric of the time and to share His writings with the students

of the deceased Siyyid K~im-i-Rafil}ti-had been rebuked, arrested, tried, condemned, and banished to Istanbul by a joint tribunal of Sunni and Shi'ih 'ulama. The tribunal's edict denounced the Qayyumu'l-Asma' as a heretical text and charged that its author deserved to be killed because He claimed to have the ability to reveal divine verses. The Bab's desire that no further sadness, conflict, or dissension ensue, and His concern that His followers not be harmed as a result of injustice and tyranny, motivated Him to change His plan and return to Persia. From Masqat, He instructed His followers who had gathered in Karbala to proceed to Isfahan (Afnan 2000: 183-186; Amanat 2005: 252; Momen 2018: 5). Returning to Bushehr in early June 1845 on the last leg of His journey home, He instructed Qyddus to travel to Shiraz ahead of Him and begin sharing His message in that city. The first person-after the Letters of the Living-to embrace the Cause of the Bab in Shiraz was the Bab's aforementioned uncle I:Iaji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali, who was later executed for his adherence to the message of his nephew ([Zarandi] 1932: 75). Qyddus and another prominent early believer named Mulla Sadiq-i-Khurasani were subsequently arrested, tortured, and expelled

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from the city by order of the Governor of Fars, I:Iusayn Khan, who summoned the Bab from Bushehr to answer for the commotion and excitement His message had aroused in Shiraz.

The return of the Bab to Shiraz and his stay in Isfahan

Upon the Bab's arrival in Shiraz in the summer of 1845, He was detained and brought before I:Iusayn Khan. The governor reproached the Bab and released Him to the custody of His uncle I:Iaji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali, but not before commanding his attendant to strike the Bab in the face. In His writings, the Bab laments the abuse He suffered at the hands of I:Iusayn Khan and his numerous attempts to suppress His message: 'While I was in Shiraz the

indignities which befell Me at the hands of its wicked and depraved Governor waxed so grievous that if thou wert acquainted with but a tithe thereof, thou wouldst deal him retributive justice' (The Bab, Selections 13). The Bab was subsequently asked to visit one of the central mosques of the city to clarify His position and calm the excitement of the masses. Thus, during Friday prayers, the Bab publicly affirmed His faith in God, the Prophet Muhammad, and the Imams and disavowed any claim to being the gate, representative, or intermediary of the Hidden Imam ([Zarandi] 1932: 154). In doing so, the Bab was not only implicitly rejecting superstitions associated with the Hidden Imam-an imaginary figure believed to have entered occultation in the ninth century-but also hinting that His station was far greater than that of an Imam or a representative to the Imam. This clarification of His position had the opposite effect of what the governor intended. His tone, conduct, behaviour, and calm demeanour before a partly hostile audience impressed many of those in attendance and encouraged others in Shiraz to inquire further about His position and become adherents (Fayc;li1987: 160-169). The proclamation efforts of the Bab's disciples throughout Persia excited further interest in the Bab. It was at this time that two notable Muslim scholars embraced His message: Siyyid Yal.yay-i-Darabi (d. 1850) and Mulla Mul_iammad-'Aliy-i-Zanjani (d. 1851). The former, associated with the Qajar royal court, was sent by Mul_iammadShah to investigate the claims of the Bab. In the course of three interviews, the Bab answered the questions the proud scholar posed to Him and, in response to a wish Dara.bi held in his heart but had not voiced, the Bab wrote a voluminous commentary on the shortest Surih of the Qyr'an. Astonished by the interpretations, the speed at which the Bab wrote, the force of His style, and His mellifluous voice as He chanted the verses, Dara.bi resigned his post at the royal court and embraced the Cause of the Bab. The Bab surnamed him Val).id(meaning 'unique')

(Mazindarani 2008: 231, 361-375; Mazindarani n.d.: 87-90; Rabbani 2006: 17-41; Ahdieh and Chapman 2013: 53-57).

The second Muslim scholar, Mulla Muḥammad-'Aliy-i-Zanjani, was a highly erudite cleric and skilled orator who served as one of the foremost religious authorities in the northwest city of Zanja. Upon hearing about the Bab, he sent a representative to Shiraz to investigate

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the matter and receive a copy of the Qayyumu'l-Asma' or a letter from the Bab.

Witnessing

the Bab's 'overwhelming authority and knowledge' (Walbridge 1996: 345), Zanjani embraced His message and was surnamed I:Iujjat (meaning 'proof') (Mazindarani 2008:

142-148; Walbridge 1996: 345-350).

The unabated animosity of I:Iusayn Khan and a cholera outbreak in Shiraz caused the

eventual transfer of the Bab from Shiraz to Isfahan in September 1846. Upon arriving in

Isfahan, the Bab stayed for forty days at the home of one of the main prelates of the city.

During this time, the governor, Manuḥihr Khan, the Mu'tamidu'd-Dawlih (d. 1847),

investigated and embraced the Cause of the Bab and offered Him his protection.

When a

number of clerics issued an edict condemning the Bab to death, Manurnihr Khan surreptitiously concealed the Bab in his home, until his death in March 1847.

In His

writings, the Bab noted that

the Mu'tamidu'd-Dawlih ... became aware of the truth of the Cause and manifested exemplary servitude and devotion to His chosen ones. When some of the ignorant people in his city arose to stir up sedition, he defended the divine Truth by affording Me protection for a while in the privacy of the Governor's residence.

(The Bab, Selections 14-15)

The Shah of Persia, now curious about the youth who had converted one of his most

trusted governors and one of the most respected clerics associated with his court, desired

to meet the Bab and ordered that He be brought to the capital.

The Bab in Azerbaijan

Fearful that a meeting with Muḥammad Shah might influence the monarch and thus

diminish the influence he exerted over the Shah as his spiritual guide, the grand vizier, I:Iaji Mirza Aqasi (d. 1849), convinced the Shah not to bring the Bab to the capital but rather to assign Him to a fortress reserved for criminals in Maku in the mountains of Azerbaijan near Persia's border with the Ottoman Empire. The death of Manu.£hihr Khan in March 1847, therefore, precipitated the transfer of the Bab, a month later, from Isfahan to the northwestern reaches of Persia. After stops in Kashan and Kulayn, the Bab travelled via Tabriz and arrived in Maku in the summer of 1847 (Figure 2.2).

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Figure 2.2 The fortress of Ma-Ku.

Source:Baha'i World News Service.

The conditions of the fortress were described by the Bab in a letter addressed to

Muhammad

. -Shah:

I swear by the Most Great Lord! Wert thou to be told in what place I dwell, the first person to have mercy on Me would be thyself. In the heart of a mountain is a fortress [Maku] ... the inmates of which are confined to two guards and four dogs. Picture, then, My plight ... I swear by the truth of God! Were he who hath been willing to treat Me in such a manner to know Who it is Whom he hath so treated, he, verily, would never in his life be happy. Nay-I, verily, acquaint thee with the truth of the matter-it is as if he hath imprisoned all the Prophets, and all the men of truth and all the chosen ones.

(The Bab, Selections 14)

The decision to incarcerate the Bab in Maku was, after His declaration, the most critical turning point in His life. During the approximately nine months He was

imprisoned in
Maku, the Bab declared His true station as the promised Qa'im and abrogated the social laws of Islam. He affirmed that out of compassion, God had decreed that the Bab enjoin the observance of the laws of the Qyr'an in His earlier writings-this, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by a new book and a new revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own. He further stated that earlier in His ministry, He did not wish His identity to be divulged and gave instructions that His name and true station be deliberately concealed behind a veil of ambiguity on account of the inability of the masses to understand the independent nature of His message and the potency of His Cause. Even

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His use of the title 'Gate' was meant to lessen the impact of His otherwise unequivocal claim to be a Manifestation of God. He wrote:

Consider the manifold favours vouchsafed by the Promised One, and the effusions of His bounty which have pervaded the concourse of the followers of Islam to enable them to attain unto salvation. Indeed observe how He Who representeth the origin of creation, He Who is the Exponent of the verse, 'I, in very truth, am God', identified Himself as the Gate [Bab] for the advent of the promised Qa'im, a descendant of Mul:iammad, and in His first Book enjoined the observance of the laws of the Qyr'an, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by reason of a new Book and a new Revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own, perchance they would not turn away from the Truth and ignore the thing for which they had been called into being.

(The Bab, Selections 119)

In Maku, the Bab laid down the fundamental laws and precepts of His dispensation in His most important works: the Persian Bayan and the shorter Arabic Bayan. Throughout His writings in this final phase of His ministry, the Bab prophesied the imminent appearance of a figure He had previously referred to in His writings using Islamic terminology, as, among other things, 'the Remnant of God,' but He now began to call 'Him Whom God shall make manifest.' Notably, the Bab did not appoint an interpreter to His writings or a

successor;
rather, He conditioned His laws and teachings on their acceptance by Him Whom
God shall
make manifest. The Persian Bayan, in fact, can be considered a eulogy of Him
Whom God
shall make manifest, rather than a code of laws designed to be implemented by
societies
and institutions in the future (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 25).
In March 1848, Mulla I:Iusayn visited the Bab for nine days. The Bab instructed
Mulla
I:Iusayn to travel and visit the Babis throughout northwest Persia and then
proceed to
Mazandaran to find 'the Hidden Treasure,' an allusion to Mirza
I:Iusayn-i-'Aliy-i-Nuri, whom
Mulla I:Iusayn subsequently met. The next month, I:Iaji Mirza Aqasi, pressured
by the
Russian Minister in Tehran (Momen 1981: 72) and alarmed by the growing
popularity of the
Bab and the access He enjoyed to the outside world, ordered that the Bab be
transferred
from the fortress of Maku to the bleak and lonely mountain fortress of Chihriq
some two
hundred kilometres to the south. In Chihriq, to which the Bab refers in His
writings as the
'Grievous Mountain,' the Bab was subjected for over two years to a confinement
that was
even harsher than that which He experienced in Maku.
In June 1848, a few months after the Bab arrived in Chihriq, some of His
followers, at the
direction of Mirza I:Iusayn-i-'Aliy-i-Nuri, convened a historic conference in
the hamlet of
Bada.s.hin northern Persia to implement the Bayan, announce the abrogation of
Islamic law
and a formal break from the traditions of the past, and proclaim the
inauguration of a new
religious dispensation, symbolized famously by the dramatic act of Tahirih's
public
unveiling. The conference was of momentous importance because it marked the
conscious

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break that many Ba.bis made with past traditions. At approximately the same
time, the Bab
was taken from Chihriq to Tabriz to face trial for apostasy before a group of
high-ranking
clerics. En route to Tabriz, the Bab sojourned for ten days in Urmia, where the
only known

portrait of Him was sketched by a local artist. 3 At the trial in Tabriz, when asked about His station in the presence of the Crown Prince and before the prominent clerics of the city, the Bab declared that He was the promised one of Islam, thus stating openly and publicly what up until then He had stated implicitly-though at times also explicitly-in writing to His disciples and detractors: namely, that His station was that of a new, independent Manifestation of God with the ability to write verses and establish laws, to abrogate the laws of Islam, and to begin a new religious cycle. In support of His claims, the Bab calmly began to utter verses yet was interrupted with demeaning and unrelated questions that derived from traditional conceptions of knowledge. He refused to dignify the insolence of the clerics (MacEoin 2009: 409-450; Kashshafi 2021). At the conclusion of the trial, the Bab was condemned to suffer corporal punishment and sustained wounds on His feet and face. Before being taken back to Chihriq, the Bab was treated by a physician of Irish origin named William Cormick (d. 1877), the only Westerner to meet the Bab, who recorded his impressions ([Zarandi] 1932: xxxii; Balyuzi 1973: 145; Momen 1981: 74; Amanat 2005: 391-392). Cormick described the Bab as a very mild and delicate-looking man, rather small in stature and very fair for a Persian, with a melodious soft voice, which struck me much In fact his whole look and deportment went far to dispose one in his favor. (Amanat 2005: 109)

The last two years of the Bab's incarceration in Chihriq witnessed the large-scale persecution of His followers and a series of confrontations between the Bab's supporters and the state in 1848 and 1849. In an attempt to quell further upheavals and impede the advancement of the new faith, the chief minister to the newly crowned Na~iri'd-Din Shah, Mirza Taqi Khan, better known as Amir Kabir (d. 1852), condemned the Bab to death. On his orders, the Bab was transferred yet again from Chihriq to Tabriz. Anticipating this move, the Bab had entrusted His last tablets and seals to one of His amanuenses

to deliver

to Jinab-i-Baha in Tehran.

The Bab arrived in Tabriz in late June 1850. Divested of His green turban, cloak, and sash

-symbols of His noble lineage as a siyyid-he was taken barefoot to the barracks in Tabriz.

One of His ardent disciples, Mirza Muliammad-'Aliy-i-Zunuzi, surnamed Anis (meaning

'companion'), threw himself at the Bab's feet and begged the guards to allow him to

accompany the Bab. Members of Anis's family attempted to persuade him to return home,

even going so far as to bring his two-year-old child into the barracks in order to plead with

him to abandon his belief in the Bab, but he maintained his unwavering allegiance and

devotion to Him and refused to recant his faith or leave the Bab's side

(Mehrabkhani 2011:

80-83).

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The life of the Bab ended with His execution-together with Anis-by a military firing

squad in Tabriz on 9 July 1850; He was thirty-one years of age. The public nature of the

execution appears to have been designed so as to demonstrate to the masses the full control

of the government (Amanat 2005: 402) and perhaps reduce the possibility of later

speculation that He was still alive. A regiment of 750 soldiers under the authority of

Colonel Sam Khan of the Christian regiment of Urmia ranged itself in three files and was

ordered to discharge a volley of bullets. When the cloud of smoke cleared, the great throng

of onlookers was astonished; the Bab had vanished. The bullets had severed the ropes by

which the Bab was suspended but had not harmed Him. The Bab was eventually found in

His prison cell concluding a private conversation with His amanuensis that had earlier been

interrupted. A second regiment under the authority of its commander, Aqa Jan Khan-i-

Khamsih, was called in, and this time, the volley tore the bodies of the Bab and Anis to

pieces. The firing squads of both regiments consisted of 750 men, though several sources

indicate even higher numbers of riflemen (Nicolas 1905: 375; Kazemzadeh 1973: 14). I:Iaji

Mu'inu's-Saltanih, for example-who, in researching his account of the martyrdom of the

Bab, personally interviewed over one hundred individuals in Tabriz who were present on

that day-writes that Sam Khan ranged his regiment of one thousand soldiers into three

files and ordered them to open fire at the Bab one after the other

(Mu'inu's-Saltanih n.d.:

fols. 308, 318-319).

The remains of the Bab and Anis, which were so intermingled as the result of the force of

the bullets that they could not be separated, were secretly removed from the edge of the

moat outside the city, in which they had been cast, and transferred in secrecy to Tehran.

After years of concealment, the Bab's remains were quietly moved under the direction of

Baha'u'llah and then 'Abdu'l-Baha to Ottoman Palestine, where they were interred in a

Shrine built by 'Abdu'l-Baha on the slopes of Mount Carmel in the port city of Haifa in

March 1909. Over forty years later, as the Baha'i community expanded under the leadership

of 'Abdu'l-Baha and His successor, Shoghi Effendi, its members were able to contribute

funds for the building of a superstructure to the Shrine, which was completed in 1953

(Figure 2.3).

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Although shorter than Balyuzi 1980, this book uses a number of sources not used in that book.

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