

*Religion
and
State
in
Iran
1785-1906*

*The Role of
the Ulama in the
Qajar Period
by
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VIII

Bābism, Bahā'ism, and the Ulama

The rise of Bābism and its successor Bahā'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 Bābism has not been closely studied. It was, however, the ulama who formulated the most explicit reaction to Bābism 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 Bābīs and Bahā'īs 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. Bābism, 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

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 Bābism are opposed in emotional and religious emphasis; yet if Bābī 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 'Alī Muḥammad, in 1259/1843, first claimed to be the Bāb, the "gateway" to the Hidden Imām, he clashed immediately with the ulama. One of the earliest writers on the history of Bābism, 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.¹ More significant a cause for the hostility of the ulama to the Bāb was doubtless provided by the realization that his doctrines constituted *bid'at*, i.e., reprehensible innovation in matters of faith. Mullā 'Alī Akbar Ardistānī, one of the early converts, appended to the *idhān* (call to prayer) he proclaimed from the mosque of Āqā Qāsim in Shiraz: "I bear witness that 'Alī Muḥammad is the 'remnant' (*baqīya*) of God."²

The governor of Shiraz, Ḥusayn Khān Niẓām ud-Daula (also entitled Ājūdānbāshī) had been absent from the town. After his return, the ulama persuaded him, on Sha'bān 16/September 11, to punish Mullā 'Alī Akbar, Mullā Muḥammad Ṣādiq, and other followers of the Bāb.³ Some were whipped, others, such as Muḥammad 'Alī Bārfurūshī, were paraded around the bazaar with blackened faces and burnt beards.⁴ On Ramaḍān 15/October 9, Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad 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.⁵ Accounts given of this confrontation by sources hostile to the Bāb 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., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd or New History of Mirzā 'Alī Muḥammad the Bāb* (Cambridge, 1893), p. 200. According to Khan Bahadur Agha Mirza Muhammad ("Some New Notes on Babism," *JRAS*, n.v. [July 1927], 451), Mullā Muḥammad Ṣādiq was the first to proclaim this deformed *idhān*.

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.

the traditional religious sciences, and his recantation.⁶ While it is legitimate to question the accuracy of these accounts, and details may have been invented or emphasized to discredit the Bāb, the silence of Bābī sources on the course of the confrontations suggests that the Bāb was in fact worsted by the ulama in debate. The confrontations demonstrate the role of the ulama in refuting Bābism: 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 Bāb was beaten and then conducted by 'Abd ul-Ḥamīd Khān Kalāntar to the Masjid-i Vakīl, where he publicly repeated his recantation.⁷ Bābī accounts agree that a meeting between the Bāb and the ulama took place, without offering any detail, and that it was attended by Sayyid Yaḥyā Dārābī, who was subsequently to lead the Bābī insurrection at Nayrīz.⁸

Although thus far Ḥusayn Khān Nizām ud-Daula appears to have acted in cooperation with the ulama, differing approaches by the state and the ulama to the problem of Bābism can be detected. According to Gobineau, both the ulama of Shiraz and Ḥusayn Khān wrote to Tehran explaining the situation; and their example was followed by the Bāb.⁹ It seems entirely possible that at this stage the Bāb hoped to secure his position by winning the support of Muḥammad Shāh and his minister. Even when imprisoned in Mākū, the Bāb still considered it worth his while to compose a risāla dedicated to Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī.¹⁰ Although Bābī political theory left little room for the exercise of regal power,¹¹ Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad 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 Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī was

⁶ MN, III, 184.

⁷ Muhammad, *op. cit.*, pp. 452-454. According to this account, the Bāb 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 Bābism as a movement of revolt proceeded more or less independently of the Bāb and his pronouncements.

⁸ Browne, ed., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, 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.

initially disposed to let him come.¹² One of such heterodox outlook as Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī can scarcely have been scandalized by the Bāb's claims; more probably he hoped for some amusement from the spectacle of the Bāb'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-Ḥusayn 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 Bāb, they were capable of doing so.¹³ As in the case of the demand for war against the Ottoman Empire, Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī appears to have made all unavoidable outward concessions, while being careful not to encourage the expression of clerical power. He sent orders to Ḥusayn Khān prohibiting further discussion between the Bāb and the people of Shiraz.¹⁴ The Bāb was confined to his house, but evidently his confinement was not strict, for it was in Shiraz that Mullā Ḥusayn Bushravayh, on his way from Arab Iraq to Kirman, accepted the Bāb's claims.¹⁵ He it was who, on being converted, organized the insurrections in Khurasan and Mazandaran. Thus far-reaching were the consequences of the Bāb's residence in Shiraz. The ulama protested against the inefficacy of his confinement, but without success.¹⁶ The danger of Bābism, not only to orthodoxy but also to the state, was not yet apparent. The failure to isolate the Bāb 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 Bāb, do not yet appear to have demanded his death.¹⁷ The imām jum'a of Shiraz considered his release from prison permissible if he recanted;¹⁸ and others of the ulama considered the Bāb insane and therefore neither responsible for his words, nor liable to the punishment they would otherwise bring him.¹⁹ 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 fatvā for the killing of the Bāb. It should be remembered that the Bahā'ī 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.

an ambiguity in the attitude of the state is observable, and the ultimate execution of the Bāb was preceded by several fatvās declaring him deserving of death.²⁰

Mullā Husayn Bushravayh, on his way from Shiraz to Khurasan, had passed through Isfahan and informed the governor, Manūchihr Khān Mu'tamad ud-Daula, of the appearance of the Bāb.²¹ Both Bābī and other Persian sources agree that Manūchihr Khān was favorably inclined to the Bāb and had him brought to Isfahan to satisfy his personal curiosity.²² With Manūchihr Khān, the identification of the Bāb with the state almost became a reality. In order, presumably, to conceal his inclinations and to nullify any possible agitation, Manūchihr Khān caused the Bāb to be accommodated in the residence of the imām jum'a, and after a period of forty days, to be publicly confronted with the ulama of Isfahan, gathered in the Masjid-i Shāh.²³ It is clear that the ulama suspected the nature of Manūchihr Khān's intentions. By again confronting the Bāb 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 Bāb's pretensions with the sharī'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.²⁴ This appears to have been the first clear demand by the ulama for the execution of the Bāb. Only the imām jum'a, Āqā Mir Muḥammad Mihdī, and Mīrzā Hasan Nūrī, son of Mullā 'Alī Nūrī, 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 Bābism as the chief example. We have already noted, however, the alienation of the ulama from the state; and in the case of Bābism, 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., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, p. 208; *RSN*, X, 312; *NT*, p. 426; *MN*, III, 185. The last three imply that Manūchihr Khān was deceived as to the nature of the Bāb's claims.

²³ Browne, ed., *Traveller's Narrative*, II, 16; Browne, ed., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, p. 210.

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

the meeting in the Masjid-i Shāh.²⁵ Mīr Muḥammad Mihdī inquired of the Bāb 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. Mīrzā Ḥasan Nūrī asked him to describe the circumference of the earth, since the knowledge of this, among other matters, was a sign of the Mahdī.²⁶ Both questions he was unable to answer, and the meeting was dissolved without conclusive result.²⁷ Manūchihr Khān protected the Bāb until his death, and again the Bāb appears to have had enough freedom to maintain and even expand contact with his followers.²⁸ The ulama protested to Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī, but received only a noncommittal reply.²⁹

On the death of Manūchihr Khān in 1263/1847, Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī gave orders that the Bāb be brought to Tehran.³⁰ According to the *Traveller's Narrative*, the Bāb, when a few stages distant from Tehran, wrote a letter to Muḥammad Shāh, asking to be granted an audience.³¹ Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī, anxious neither to arouse the opposition of the ulama, nor to give them an opportunity of asserting themselves, refused his consent.³² Instead the Bāb was sent in chains to be imprisoned at Mākū in Azerbaijan. En route, he spent forty days in Tabriz, but the ulama refused to meet him.³³ From Mākū, he was transferred to the fortress at Chih-rīq 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.³⁴ The disquiet caused by the Bābī uprisings, together with the continuing agitation of the ulama, led Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī, three months after the Bāb had been brought to Chih-rīq, to have recourse again to the device of a confrontation, one little more conclusive than the preceding ones in Shiraz and

²⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 17.

²⁶ *NT*, p. 427. The *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd* (Browne, ed., p. 209) claims that Mīr Muḥammad Mihdī accepted the claims of the Bāb.

²⁷ *NT*, p. 428.

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

²⁹ Text given in Aḥmad Kasravī, *Bahā'igari* (Tehran, n.d.), p. 26; Firīdūn Ādamīyat, *Amīr Kabīr va Irān* (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 Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī was afraid of Muḥammad Shāh transferring his spiritual loyalties to the Bāb. See Browne, ed., *op. cit.*, II, 21.

³³ *Ibid.*, II, 22.

³⁴ Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

Isfahan. The *Traveller's Narrative* represents Ḥājji Mīrzā Āqāsī as being still reluctant to conform with the wishes of the ulama;³⁵ 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 Nāṣir 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 Muḥammad Mamaqānī, chief of the Shaykhī ulama of Tabriz;³⁶ Ḥājji Mullā Maḥmūd Nizām ul-'Ulamā;³⁷ Mīrzā 'Alī Aṣghar Shaykh ul-Islām; Mīrzā Aḥmad Mujtahid Imām Jum'a; and Ḥājji Murtaḍā Qulī Marandī.³⁸ Various questions were put to the Bāb, concerning Arabic grammar and syntax, and the signs traditionally associated with the coming of the Hidden Imam.³⁹ Unable to answer them, he again recanted, and after being beaten by the shaykh ul-Islām in person, was sent back to Chihriq.⁴⁰ 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,⁴¹ but it is difficult to see in what manner these doubts

³⁵ Browne, ed., *op. cit.*, II, 25.

³⁶ Nādir Mīrzā, *Tārīkh va Jughrāfi-yi Dār us-Saltāna-yi Tabriz* (Tehran, 1323 Q/1905), p. 117.

³⁷ Mullā Maḥmūd was tutor to Nāṣir 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., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, p. 285; Kasravī, *op. cit.*, p. 29; *RSN*, X, 423; *NT*, p. 470. According to the *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, the Bāb was lodged in the house of Mīrzā Aḥmad; according to *NT*, in that of Kāzīm Khān Farrāshbāshī.

³⁹ The substance of this examination of the Bāb is not seriously disputed by either the *Traveller's Narrative* or the *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, both Bahā'ī sources. Ridā Qulī Khān claims to base his account on the information of Ḥājji Mullā Maḥmūd (*RSN*, X, 423). Together with the versions given in *Q'U* (p. 46) and *NT* (pp. 470-472), it corresponds in detail with the report sent to Tehran by Nāṣir ud-Dīn Mīrzā (original in Majlis library, Tehran; text reproduced by Ādamīyat, [*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., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, p. 290.

⁴¹ Kasravī, *op. cit.*, p. 34. The fact that the Bāb 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.

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

Mullā Ḥusayn Bushravayh had gone from Shiraz by way of Tehran to Khurasan, and there attempted to secure acceptance of the Bāb's claims. He met with partial success in Nayshapur, and then moved to Mashhad, where in the last years of Muḥammad Shāh's reign, the Sālār and Ḥamza Mīrzā Ḥishmat ud-Daula were struggling for the possession of the town.⁴² However, Mullā Ḥusayn was repulsed by both of them, and Ḥamza Mīrzā imprisoned him at the bidding of the ulama.⁴³ Escaping, he moved in the direction of Sabzavar, where he and his followers were armed by a certain Mīrzā Taqī Juvaynī.⁴⁴ At this point, the rebellion against the state began. This fact was obscured by the death of Muḥammad Shāh, and the Bābī revolt became one element in the chaos surrounding the succession. Mullā Ḥusayn, together with Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Bārfurūshī and Qurrat ul-'Ayn, moved into Mazandaran, and here the first battles between Bābism and the state took place. The immediate threat was, however, to the ulama, just as the claims of the Bāb appeared initially to endanger only religion. The ulama of Bārfurūsh (modern Bābul) were threatened by Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī 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."⁴⁵ Sa'id ul-'Ulamā Bārfurūshī led the resistance to the Bābīs, constantly pleading for troops to be sent against them.⁴⁶ Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shah was preparing to leave for Tehran, and evidently the matter was thought too trivial to warrant serious attention.⁴⁷ At the request of Sa'id ul-'Ulamā, however, 'Abbās Qulī Khān, governor of Lārījān, sent three hundred troops to Bārfurūsh,

⁴² See above, p. 125.

⁴³ *NT*, p. 473; *RSN*, X, 422; Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁴⁶ Browne, ed., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, p. 52. The same work (p. 91) claims that Sa'id ul-'Ulamā' was a Jewish convert to Islam, implying, perhaps, that his resistance to Bābism was inspired by the enthusiasm of a proselyte. The short biographical notice of Sa'id ul-'Ulamā' in Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan Khān I'timād us-Saltāna, *al-Ma'āthir va-l-Āthār* (Tehran, 1306 Q/1889, p. 150) makes no mention of any Jewish origin.

⁴⁷ Muhammad, *op. cit.*, p. 457.

and Mullā Ḥusayn and his followers withdrew from the town.⁴⁸ There then followed the siege of the Bābī stronghold at Shaykh Ṭabarsī. In the course of the repeated defeats suffered by government troops, Sa'īd ul-'Ulamā exhorted them constantly to persist against the Bābīs; when ultimately Shaykh Ṭabarsī fell, he executed some of the survivors with his own hands in the marketplace at Bārfurūsh.⁴⁹ As the most important of the ulama of Mazandaran, he thus played a central role in combating Bābism.

Whereas the Bābīs in Mazandaran established themselves in a stronghold at some distance from the main towns of the region, the insurrection in Zanjān was a more direct challenge to governmental authority. There it was led by Mullā Muḥammad Zanjānī, who before adopting Bābism had followed the Akhbārī madhhab. It appears that even before his conversion to Bābism, he had constantly been in dispute with both state and ulama.⁵⁰ When visiting the governor of Zanjān, he was always accompanied by a group of armed followers.⁵¹ His disputes with the Uṣūlī ulama of Zanjān became so acrimonious that they wrote to Tehran requesting his removal from the town.⁵² He was banished on several occasions; it was on one of these, toward the end of the reign of Muḥammad Shāh, that he met Mullā Ḥusayn Bushravayh in Tehran.⁵³ In the confusion following the death of Muḥammad Shāh and the fall from power of Ḥājji Mīrzā Āqāsī, he returned to Zanjān, where he was enthusiastically received by his former followers.⁵⁴ He proclaimed that he had become a Bābī, and his followers decided also to adopt the new faith. Initially, his violence was directed only against the ulama; a Bahā'ī source records that a mullā was dragged down from his *minbar* (pulpit),⁵⁵ and the son of the shaykh ul-Islām was murdered.⁵⁶ The ulama informed the capital

⁴⁸ Gobineau, *op. cit.*, pp. 186–187.

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

⁵⁰ Gobineau (*op. cit.*, p. 233) writes: "A s'en faire une idée tout a fait impartiale, 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 l'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., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, p. 135.

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

⁵⁴ Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

⁵⁵ Browne, ed., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, p. 371.

⁵⁶ Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

of what was happening, but it was not until one of the Bābīs was arrested that fighting broke out. He was arrested for nonpayment of fiscal arrears, and Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī attempted to free him by force.⁵⁷ Although the insurrection was in the name of Bābism 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.⁵⁸ One of the many motives that led to the dissemination of Bābism was thus the readiness of a devoted following to obey the directives of a mullā, even after his conversion to Bābism. Here, one aspect of clerical power is reflected in Bābism; but the case of Zanjān, with the exception of that of Nayrīz, is isolated.

Sayyid Yaḥyā Dārābī, as mentioned above, attended the first interrogation of the Bāb in Shirāz, doing so, according to Bahā'ī sources, on behalf of Muḥammad Shāh.⁵⁹ From Shiraz he had gone to Yazd, whence he was expelled for preaching Bābism in 1850.⁶⁰ Reaching Nayrīz, he enclosed himself in the citadel from which he was driven after a prolonged siege.⁶¹ His father, Sayyid Ja'far, had enjoyed wide popularity which was transferred to him, while a dispute between the townspeople and their governor, Mīrzā Zayn ul'Ābidīn, supplied an additional reason to welcome him.⁶² Here again it is evident that loyalty to the person of a powerful mullā survived his conversion to Bābism, when he fulfilled the traditional role of opposition to the oppression of the governor. The *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd* confirms that Sayyid Yaḥyā relied on the faithfulness of his father's followers.⁶³

The insurrection in Zanjān at last decided Amīr Kabīr to do away with the Bāb, as ultimate source of the unrest.⁶⁴ Again he was brought from Chihriq to Tabriz, and fatvās were delivered by

⁵⁷ Browne, ed., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, p. 140; Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

⁵⁸ See above, pp. 111–112.

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

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

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁶² *RSN*, X, 457.

⁶³ P. 118. See, too, Muhammad, *op. cit.*, p. 466. It is questionable how well the participants in Bābī-led revolts were acquainted with Bābī tenets. Browne (introduction to *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, p. xxvii) points out that the devotion of the Bābīs was, in general, more to leaders than to books and precepts.

⁶⁴ *RSN*, X, 456. The *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd* (p. 292) bears witness to Amīr Kabīr's reluctance, and to his being motivated solely by reasons of state.

various of the ulama condemning him to death. The *Traveller's Narrative* mentions Mullā Muḥammad Mamaqānī, Mīrzā Bāqir Mujtahid, and Mullā Murtaḍā Qulī Marandī.⁶⁵ 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'bān 27, 1266/July 8, 1850, the Bāb was shot dead in the citadel of Tabriz.⁶⁶

This ended the first stage in the development of the religious movement resulting in the syncretist doctrines of Bahā'ism.⁶⁷ It was the ulama who were first threatened by it and often suffered from its violence. In Qazvin, Ḥājjī Mullā Muḥammad Taqī Burg-hānī was killed in the *miḥrāb* (niche) of a mosque by Mīrzā Ṣāliḥ Shīrāzī for his persistent denunciation of Bābism.⁶⁸ The Bāb himself, though largely remote from the activities of his followers, indicated his attitude to the ulama by breaking a stick over the chief mullā of Mākū.⁶⁹ 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 Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī or Amīr Kabīr. Their function of defending the religious-national community was, then, again exemplified in the struggle against Bābism, 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 Bābīs were drawn from the ulama, though only one mujtahid, Āqā Sayyid Ḥusayn Turshīzī, appears to have joined their ranks.⁷⁰ The majority of these were Shaykhīs, and in the light of the expectations implicit in Shaykhī teaching, their conversion is not remarkable.⁷¹ We have seen that, on the other hand, Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Zanjānī was an Akhbārī 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 Bāb 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 Bāb from Chihriq.

⁶⁶ Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 263; *NT*, p. 489.

⁶⁷ It is arguable that the movement began with Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī, or even earlier. See Kasravī, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-20.

⁶⁸ *Q'U*, p. 22.

⁶⁹ Browne, ed., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, p. 352.

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

⁷¹ A list of some Shaykhī mullās who accepted Bābism is given in *ibid.*, p. 6.

pects of the new faith. The *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd* estimates the number of ulama to have accepted Bābism at 400, and claims that they occupy "the position of a touchstone or measure for the proving of his [the Bāb's] claims, which distinguishes base metal from true."⁷² That indeed the vast majority of the ulama rejected the Bāb's claims was probably the most important single factor working against their acceptance. Had the Bāb 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 Bahā'is realized that the ulama had only two possible courses of action: to reject as false the Shi'ite traditions considering the manner of the appearance of the Hidden Imam, or to consider the Bāb a blasphemous apostate.⁷³

Bābism had certain consequences for the ulama and for Iran as a whole, many of which are suggested by a comparison with Ismā'ilism. The comparison was made in the Qajar period and has been repeated by later investigators.⁷⁴ Both Ismā'ilism and Bābism were heresies of Shi'ite origin seeking to overthrow orthodoxy (Sunni and Ithnā'asharī respectively) by violence, and spreading their doctrines by secret instruction.⁷⁵ Doctrinally, too, there were similarities: the title of Bāb was given in Ismā'ilism to one of the seven grades of the esoteric hierarchy.⁷⁶ The Bābīs for their part revived the mystic use of the numeral seven with the theory of the seven letters (*hurūf*) by means of which God accomplished the task of creation.⁷⁷ As Bābī-Bahā'ī doctrine lost its Shi'ite tinge, it tended to attract the religious minorities, particularly the Zoroastrians⁷⁸

⁷² Pp. 231-235.

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

⁷⁴ *Q'U*, p. 46; article on Bābism by Jamāl ud-Dīn Asadābādī in *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif*, ed. Buṭrus Bustānī (Beirut, 1881), V, 26; Jamāl ud-Dīn Asadābādī, "Radd-i Naychariya," in *Ārā va Mu'taqadāt-i Sayyid Jamāl ud-Dīn-i Afghānī*, ed. M. Chahārdihī (Tehran, 1337 Sh/1958), p. 49; 'Abd ar-Razzāq al-Ḥasanī, *al-Bābiyūn wa-l-Bahā'iyūn fī Hādīrihim wa Mādīhim* (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 (Bābism a "neo-Ismā'ilī interpretation of Shaykhī Imāmism").

⁷⁵ On Ismā'ilī 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 Bābism and its successors is attempted here.

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

in much the same way as Ismā'ilism had proclaimed "interconfessionalism" in its attempts to subvert orthodoxy.⁷⁹ The threats presented by Bābism and Ismā'ilism, 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 Bābism, after the attempted assassination of Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh.⁸⁰

Taqīya, 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 taqīya, self-protection from Sunni intolerance, had virtually ceased to exist,⁸¹ but the habits of concealment and ambiguity it engendered lived on. Many of the Bābīs who remained in Iran found themselves obliged to practice taqīya, as the violence of the early Bābīs 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 Bahā'īs and Azalīs added a further element to the opposition to the Qajar monarchy, one that became entwined with the ulama themselves.

Probably the emergence of Bābism affected the Shaykhīs more than other sections of the ulama, and taqīya was in practice forced on them too. The process had started when Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, successor to Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī as leader of the sect, was obliged to confess that the apparent meaning of certain of Shaykh Aḥmad's doctrines constituted misbelief.⁸² On the death of Sayyid Kāẓim, not only the Bāb, but two other rival successors emerged, both hostile to the pretensions of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad.⁸³ Mullā Muḥammad Mamaqānī, a follower of Mirzā Shafī' Tabrizī, one of the claimants to the succession, was among the ulama who condemned the Bāb to death in Tabriz. Ḥājjī Muḥammad Karīm Khān, the other claimant, was not less decisive in his reaction to Bābism. In Kirman, he gave a fatvā for the killing of two Bābī missionaries.⁸⁴ He wrote a treatise refuting the Bāb's claims, allegedly at the request of Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh, but more probably to

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

⁸⁰ Gobineau, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

⁸¹ See below, p. 228.

⁸² *Q'U*, p. 31.

⁸³ Kasravī, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

⁸⁴ Browne, ed., *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, p. 200.

establish a distance between himself and the Bāb.⁸⁵ In his treatise *Sī Faṣl*, he later claimed that, far from suffering from Bābī inclinations, he was the first to pronounce the Bāb an infidel.⁸⁶ It is clear that a certain similarity existed between the initial claims of the Bāb and the Shaykhī concept of the *shī'a-yi kāmil* (the perfect shī'a) as human intermediaries between the community of believers and the Hidden Imam. Therefore, the followers of Ḥājjī Muḥammad Karīm Khān found it prudent to reexplain the concept as no more than an idea, not to be identified with any one person.⁸⁷ When he wrote a treatise summarizing Shaykhī beliefs, significantly such typical Shaykhī concepts as the *jism-i hūrqaliyā'i*⁸⁸ received no mention.⁸⁹ A successor of Ḥājjī Muḥammad Karīm Khān even went so far as to suggest that the differences between Uṣūlīs and Shaykhīs were purely terminological.⁹⁰ Thus did the emergence of Bābism 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 Revolution and was another element in the confusion of motive surrounding that event.

The development of Bābism into Bahā'ism confirmed the existing hostility to the ulama.⁹¹ Thus Mīrzā Jānī Kāshānī, author of the *Nuqṭat ul-Kāf*, looked forward to the beheading of 70,000 mullās by the Hidden Imam on his emergence,⁹² and thought them less valuable than the carcass of a dog.⁹³ The attempt on the life of Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh was preceded by a similar plot against the imām jum'a of Tehran, which however was not put into operation. The Bahā'īs dissociated themselves from the attack on the Shah,

⁸⁵ Browne, *A Year amongst the Persians*, p. 608; 'Abd ul-Husayn Navā'ī, "Ḥājj Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī," *Yādgār*, V (1328 Sh/1949-1950), 117.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 72.

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

⁸⁸ *Jism-i hurqaliyā'i*: "Hurqalyan body," the subtle body in which the Hidden Imam subsists in the realm of Hurqaliyā, a region intermediate between spirit and matter (see Henry Corbin, *Terre Celeste et Corps de Résurrection* [Paris, 1960], pp. 99-164).

⁸⁹ Navā'ī, *op. cit.*, IV, 68.

⁹⁰ Shaykh Abū-l-Qāsim Kirmānī, *Fihrist-i Kutub-i Marḥūm Shaykh Aḥmad-i Aḥsā'i va Sā'ir-i Mashāyikh-i 'Izām* (Kirman, 1337 Sh/1958-1959), p. 105.

⁹¹ Azalism, the other successor to Bābism, becomes of importance later than Bahā'ism.

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

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

and in fact sought to achieve with Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shāh what the Bāb had failed to accomplish with Muḥammad Shāh: to present themselves as allies of the state against the ulama. 'Abd ul-Bahā wrote in this vein to Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shah.⁹⁴ Not only was the role of the ulama in suppressing Bābism emphasized, but they were held responsible for preventing Nāṣir ud-Dīn Shah from introducing a policy of toleration.⁹⁵ The charge was hardly justified; in reality the Bahā'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 Bahā'is by the ulama, but would equally, when occasion demanded, permit action against the Bahā'is.

Despite these consequences of the rise of Bābism, the contradiction between ulama and state, its origins and its results, remained largely unchanged. Not long after the execution of the Bāb, Amīr Kabīr expelled the shaykh ul-Islām and the imām jum'a from Tabriz. Even while Sayyid Yaḥyā Dārābī was leading the Bābī insurrection in Nayrīz, a not less violent conflict was raging in Isfahan between clerical and secular power. Bābism was ultimately no more than a side issue in the Qajar history.

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

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