

which retained language that evoked the realities of the pre-state Yishuv. Though the author does not mention this, the kibbutz movement was far from alone in its difficulty in coming to terms with the new reality of the State of Israel. Thus, one of the most important political institutions in the country, the Jewish Agency, took a full decade after the founding of the State of Israel before changing its official name from the Jewish Agency for Palestine to the Jewish Agency for Israel in 1958.

In this informative book, the author clearly exhibits both sympathy and nostalgia for the ideology of the Kibbutz ha-Me'uchad as a path the State of Israel did not take. Libman expresses the hope that “the once radical and universal political potential that the kibbutz as a social form may still hold” can yet be rethought and re-presented as a potential avant-garde for Israel to follow (188–89).

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The Shaykhi Religious School: Historical Subjects, Teachings (Including publication of manuscript samples). By Y. A. Ioannesyan. Nestor-Historia, 2023. 372 pages. 57.00 €. Sold online at, <https://www.esterum.com/product.aspx?section=Books&product=1425769>.

Readers may wonder why *Nova Religio* would publish a review on so arcane a topic as Shaykhism, a comparatively little-known school within Islam. Apparently anticipating this key question, Youli Ioannesyan (Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences) notes that “Shaykhism” is intrinsically interesting as “a highly remarkable phenomenon,” being “esoteric in orientation” and “thus creating an alternative to Islamic mysticism—Sufism on a purely Shi’ite basis.” He hastens to add: “Its importance, however, went beyond Islam, for it paved the way for an independent religious system, the Babi Faith, which, in turn, paved the way for a new religion, the Baha’i Faith” (223).

How Shaykhism “paved the way” for the emergence of the post-Islamic religious phenomena of the Babi religion and ultimately the Baha’i Faith is fascinating. Chapters 1 and 2 present a biography of the first of the two founders of Shaykhism, Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa’i (1753–1826), all of whose writings are in Arabic. His successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti (d. 1843), considered the cofounder of Shaykhism, was prolific, whose “works in Arabic and Persian amounted to more than three hundred volumes” (38). Ioannesyan provides an abundance of direct translations from primary sources, which is a major strength of this monograph. It is as though Ioannesyan is trying to make these rare sources accessible to the wider world, which he succeeds in doing.

Of special interest is the appendix, “SUPPLEMENT: Illustrations” (235–357) of selected Shaykhi primary sources, featuring scanned pages of Shaykhi manuscripts from the archives of the Institute of

Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IOM RAS). The first of several scanned manuscripts is of special interest: the *Sharh-i Qasida* (*Sharh-i Qasida Lamiya 'Abd al-Baqi Afandi*), pp. 235–55. A late work (1257 AH = 1841/1842 CE by Sayyid Kazim), it contains an allusion to the Bab (1819–1850) who, in 1844, founded the Babi religion. Among other selections translated by Ioannesyan, the following passage is of historic interest in its apparent allusion to the Bab: “So, keep what we have conveyed to you. . . . Behold, I have told/am telling you news about him who is with me and about him who is before me. Verily, God is Knowing and Wise” (151).

Unique to Shaykhism is its theory of religious cycles. Baha’u’llah (1817–1892), the prophet-founder of the Baha’i Faith, alluded to Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa’i in the former’s most important work:

Behold, the “mystery of the Great Reversal in the Sign of the Sovereign” hath now been made manifest. Well is it with him whom God hath aided to recognize the “Six” raised up by virtue of this “Upright Alif”; he, verily, is of those whose faith is true. (The Kitab-i-Aqdas, ¶ 157, www.bahai.org/r/685560959. See Note 172 for interpretation by Shoghi Effendi, www.bahai.org/r/415985870).

Without directly referring either to this statement by Baha’u’llah or to the interpretation by Shoghi Effendi, Ioannesyan explains that the name of the Arabic letter, *waw*, when pronounced, consists of three letters, *waw*, *alif*, and *waw*. The first *waw*, according to Ioannesyan, symbolizes the six major prophets who appeared during the Adamic cycle, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. The *alif*, which stands between the two *waws*, represents the *Qa’im*, which is another eschatological title for the expected messianic figure, the Mahdi, while the second *waw* stands for the prophet who would follow, as Ioannesyan translates directly from Sayyid Kazim Rashti’s *Sharh-i Qasida*:

In other words, the first cycle of the Sun of prophethood [Muhammad] was for the nurturing of bodies and the souls associated with them. . . . And when the first cycle of the Sun of prophethood, which aimed to nurture all that is outward/external and necessary for the manifestation of the name “Muhammad,” has ended, there came the *second cycle of the Sun of prophethood* to nurture all that is inner/deep (147–48, italics in original).

Ioannesyan notes that these passages “serve as a missing logical link in reconstructing the worldview and historical picture of the transition from Shaykhism (still within Islam) of a significant part of its adherents to the Babi Faith as an independent religious system.” He observes that “this treatise builds a bridge between these two phenomena” (153). Since a new prophetic cycle is projected to come after Muhammad, “Shaykhism is fundamentally different not only from Sufism, but also from any other Islamic school, including Shi’ite ones” (147).

Because Shaykhism was the immediate and fundamental ideological matrix from which the Babi and Baha'i religions sprang, *The Shaykhi Religious School* should be considered foundational to academic studies on origins of the Babi and Baha'i religions. This book is therefore recommended for university libraries with significant holdings in religious studies, Islamic studies, and/or Babi/Baha'i studies, and for graduate courses in Islamic studies, and/or Babi/Baha'i studies.

A preview of *The Shaykhi Religious School* (i.e. "Table of Contents" and 15-page "Introduction") is readily available online: http://www.orientalstudies.ru/eng/images/pdf/book_on_the_shaykhi_school_2023.pdf. (Note that, in transliteration, Ioannesyan omits subscript and "superscript diacritical marks for Arabic and Persian terms, names, and titles of works (except in quotes from and references to other published sources" [14].) Due to ongoing sanctions imposed on Russia at the time of this review, *The Shaykhi Religious School* cannot be ordered directly from the publisher by readers who live outside of Russia. The book can be obtained only through Esterum: <https://www.esterum.com/product.aspx?section=Books&product=1425769>.

Christopher Buck, Independent Researcher

Sonia Johnson: A Mormon Feminist. By Christine Talbot. University of Illinois Press, 2024. 136 pages. \$110.00 hardcover; \$14.95 softcover; ebook available.

Perhaps the greatest strength of Christine Talbot's book, *Sonia Johnson: A Mormon Feminist*, is that when you have finished reading it you leave wanting more. That is also its greatest weakness, however. The books in the series, *Introductions to Mormon Thought*, are meant to be short introductions to key figures and topics in Mormon Studies, and as series editor Matthew Bowman says, "a coming of age of scholarship on this religious tradition" (vii). But at least in this case, there is so much more to be said.

Sonia Johnson was by no means the only Mormon woman to publicly fight for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), but she was easily the most famous. For much of her life, Johnson was a fairly ordinary Mormon housewife, carving out a home for her husband and children, participating in service through her Mormon ward, and making friends with like-minded women. But in the 1970s, her activist sensibilities were aroused in part by the inequities she observed between men and women, particularly in the context of her church, but also the spirit of the time—she was swept up in the feminism of the 1970s and 1980s. It is not at all surprising that she exercised her emergent feminist activist self in the context of her church, encouraging her church leaders, the women, and the men around her, to get with the times, to notice what