

LUVAH

JOURNAL OF THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION



EDITED BY FARASHA EUKER

Luvah: Journal of the Creative Imagination

Luvah, ISSN 2168-6319 (online), is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal of philosophy, theology, and literature. Luvah provides a space to reflect on modernity, tradition, and metaphysics.

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**Invoking the Seven Worlds: An
acrostic prayer by Mīrzā Yahyā Nūrī
Şubḥ-i-Azal**

N. Wahid Azal

نورُ أَشْرَقَ مِنْ صُبْحِ الْأَزَلِ

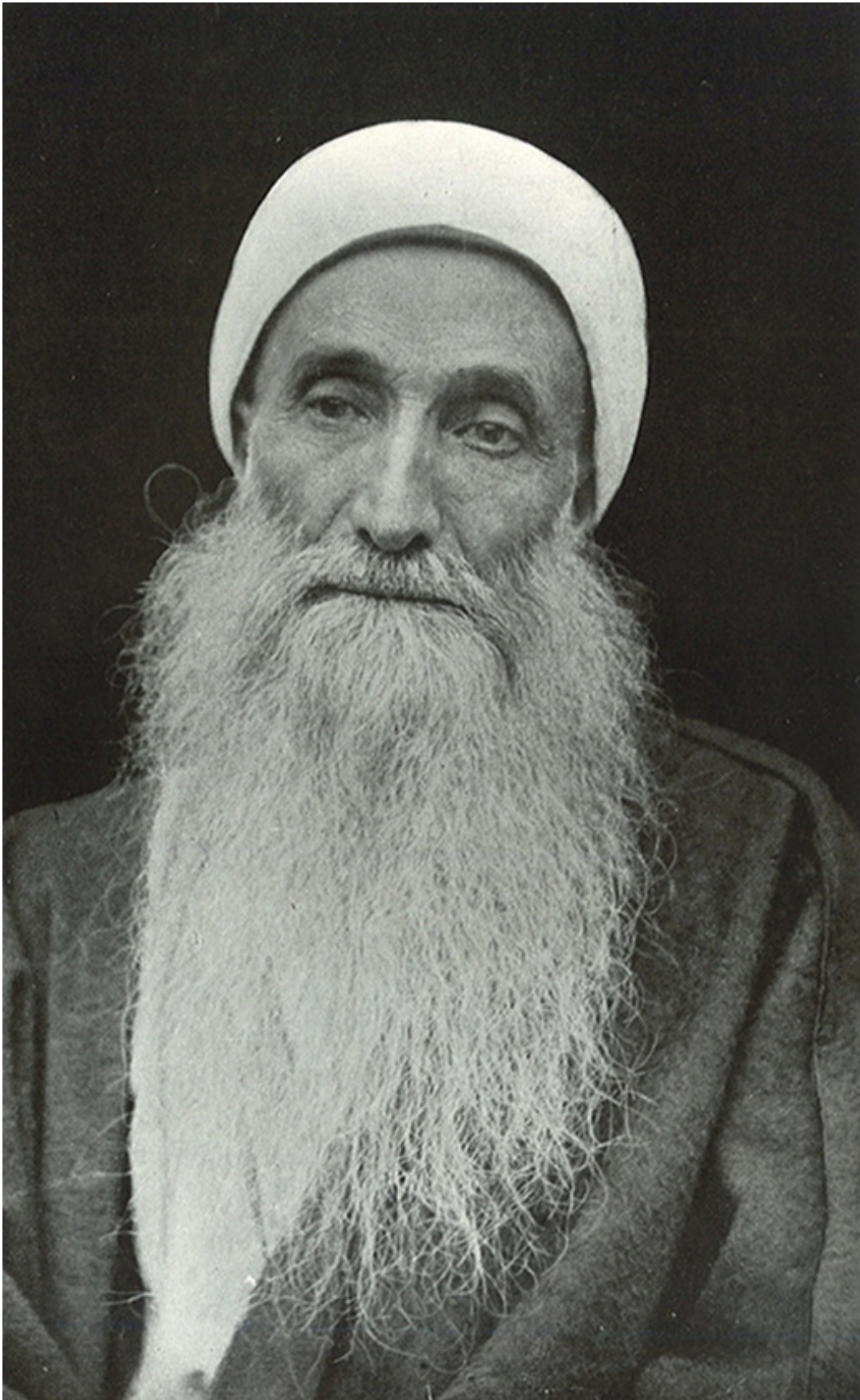


Figure 1: *Mirzā Yahyā Nūrī Ṣubḥ-i-Azal* (d. 1912) (From H.C. Lukach *The Fringe of the East*, 1913, facing p. 264)

Introduction

During the past decade, a substantial number of the writings of the Azalī Bābī (i.e. *Bayānī*)¹ patriarch and leader Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī Şubḥ-i-Azal (the Dawn of Pre-Eternity) (d. 1912) have gradually emerged from the obscurity and disciplinary neglect they were relegated to for nearly a century. As a result these Arabic and Persian spiritual writings of a central figure of the nineteenth century *post-Islamic*² Bābī movement are now coming into the larger focus of both enthusiasts as well as a few academic specialists in Islamic studies. This has occurred in large measure thanks to the efforts of the Iranian Bayānī community itself in launching the website Bayanic.com in late 2004 where they have progressively opened up their own private manuscript collections to the outside world. Additionally the digitization of Arabic and Persian Bābī MSS. collections by Princeton University Library as well as the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, among others, has likewise allowed for a better gauge in assessing the nature of these writings as well as the overall corpus currently available (including the number of manuscript exemplars existent) than was otherwise possible at a previous stage.³

Scholarly debates coupled with, and often informed by, sectarian controversies raging over (and beyond) the internet surrounding the exact nature of the original Bābī move-

¹Although the term *Azalī* and *Azalī Bābī* has gained wide currency since the late nineteenth century, it is nonetheless inaccurate and originally one of pejorative derision first coined by the Bahā'īs and then uncritically repeated. Per the founder's own writings, as well as the continual insistence of this community itself, the proper term of designation should be *Bayānī*, that is, followers of the *Bayān*, i.e. the central proof-text of this creed. For a general discussion of this community, see Denis MacEoin's *EIr* (Encyclopedia Iranica) entry «AZALĪ BĀBISM», although we caution the reader as to a few of the author's overall conclusions that require some slight revision. Note here we will be using *Bābī*, *Bābism*, *Azalī*, *Bayānī* and the *religion of the Bayān* interchangeably.

²We place *post-Islamic* in italics here because this issue needs to be highlighted from the outset. See more below.

³With the exception of lithograph editions undertaken by the Bayānī community itself of two major works of Şubḥ-i-Azal together with a single anthology volume consisting of devotional pieces by both the Bāb and Şubḥ-i-Azal (published in Iran between the late 1940s to mid 1960s)—i.e. *Mustayqiz* (Tehran: n.d.), *Mutammim'ul-Bayān* (Tehran: n.d.) and *Majmū'ī-i-Āthār-i-Nuqta-i-Ūlā va Şubḥ-i-Azal* (n.p., n.d.)—the bulk of nearly all of these works have remained in handwritten manuscript form among various Western university library MS. collections, or otherwise privately held, for nearly a century. The Princeton Bābī collection of William M. Miller (47 volumes in all and originally bought from Sa'īd Khān Kurdistānī) is the only exception here in that it was bequeathed by its owner to that institution only in the late 1960s/early 1970s. This collection has now been made digital and public as of 2011, but only of the microfilms made of its contents in the late 1970s, see http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/Babi/listing.html (accessed 13 March 2013). Since the efforts of E.G. Browne himself, and until fairly recently, no systematic attempt was made to study the works of Şubḥ-i-Azal belonging to the Browne collection at Cambridge University: a collection that holds the most extensive number of titles among any single collection of Şubḥ-i-Azal's corpus outside of that belonging to the Iranian Bayānī community. The Cambridge collection still remains to be digitized, although we studied the bulk of its relevant contents personally during the summer of 2011, see R.A. Nicholson *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental MSS. belonging to the late E.G. Browne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 53-87, esp. 64, 69-75 (vols. F.25; F.35-F.52); see as well M. Clement Huart "Note sur trois ouvrages Babis," *Journal Asiatique* (Paris) 10 (8eme serie 1887): 133-44, which details the MSS. of three important works of Şubḥ-i-Azal still held by the Bibliothèque Nationale.

ment⁴ have likewise generated interest in some quarters regarding this barely studied yet fascinating (not to mention pivotal) central figure of early and middle Bābism: the man first dramatically represented in Western print by the controversial French diplomat and racist Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau (d. 1882) in his *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale* (1866)⁵ as being the successor of the Iranian heresiarch known to posterity as the Bāb (the Gate) (d. 1850).⁶

Neglect of this figure throughout the twentieth century was due in large measure to the Bahā'ī influence exerted over the academic study of the Bābī movement—a focus at once

⁴That is, when contextually (and quite correctly) disassociated from its later Bahā'ī (mis)appropriation and conflation, see Denis MacEoin “From Babism to Baha'ism: problems of militancy, quietism and conflation in the construction of a religion,” *Religion* 13 (1983): 219–255. For an informed treatment of the Azalī-Bahā'ī division, the works of E.G. Browne remain exemplary although somewhat outdated. See especially his *A Travellers Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, Volume 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), Appendix: Note W, 349–90, and the introductory comments to his translation and edition of *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd or New History of Mīrẓā 'Alī Muḥammad the Bāb by Mīrẓā Ḥusayn Hamadānī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893; reprint: Amsterdam, 1975), esp. viii–lii. See also Denis MacEoin’s “Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism, 1850–66” *Studia Iranica*, 18 (1989): 93–129. Even though a purportedly historical critical piece, Juan R.I. Cole’s “The Azalī-Bahā'ī Crisis of September 1867,” in *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004), 227–52, should be handled with a degree of caution as both the thrust as well as the selectively partial sources employed by the author betray a completely lopsided, tendentious and transparently pro-Bahā'ī historiographical bias on the question, a feature also noticed recently by Hamid Dabashi regarding some of Cole’s other Bahā'ī related studies; see Dabashi’s pertinent comments in *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (New York & London: Routledge, 2008), 269n19 and esp. 276n34; Cole’s bias is also noticeable in the flippant and somewhat caustic introductory remarks made by him in his translation to Subḥ-i-Azal’s *Treatise on Kingship*, H-Bahai, Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'ī Texts, vol.8, no.1, October 2004.

⁵See <http://archive.org/details/lesreligionsetle3gobiouft> (accessed 14 March 2013). Surprisingly a recent English translation of the relevant Bābī sections of Gobineau’s work omits in entirety the section of the narrative dealing with Subḥ-i-Azal and his early ministry, see trans. D. O’Donoghue & ed. G. Nash, *Comte de Gobineau and Orientalism: Selected Eastern Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Gobineau’s narrative of the post-Bāb period of the 1850s (classified by MacEoin as the period of ‘Middle Babism’, being the period when Subḥ-i-Azal was deemed the supreme pontiff of the Bābī ecclesia), albeit garbled and inaccurate in a few instances, nevertheless represents a significant aspect of the original work’s Bābī account, not to mention it was certainly based on the account provided by *Nuqtat’ul-Kāf* (see below for more on this primary source).

⁶See A.-L.-M. Nicolas Séyyèd Ali Mohammed, dit le Bāb (Paris: Dujarric, 1905), which still stands as the most extensive biography of the Bāb undertaken in any language; see also Denis MacEoin’s *EI* entry «BĀB, SAYYED ‘ALĪ-MOḤAMMAD ŠĪRĀZĪ». For more recent Western academic literature dealing with the early Bābī movement, its figures and doctrines, see Denis MacEoin *The Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Babism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009); Abbas Amanat *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi movement in Iran, 1844–50* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989; reprinted, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005); Armin Eschraghi *Frühe Saibī- und Babi-theologie: Die Darlegung der Beweise für Muhammads besonderes Prophetentum (Ar-Risala fi Itbat an-Nubuwa al-Hassa)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004); Hamid Dabashi *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (Harvard: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011), chp. 6; and, especially, Todd Lawson’s recent *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam: Qur'an, Exegesis, Messianism and the Literary Origins of the Babi Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); see also our self-published “Journey with me unto the Divine Throne: A short response by the Essence of the Seven Letters, the Bāb (d. 1850), on the ars operativa of the Elixir,” (2011) <http://www.scribd.com/doc/56690194/Journey-With-Me-Unto-the-Divine-Throne> (accessed 15 March 2013).

exclusively sectarian and purely ideological in scope, even when pretending to academic scholarship⁷ – that witnessed Şubḥ-i-Azal relegated to footnotes as, at best, a marginal figure of the movement; or, at worst, viciously maligned as, for example, throughout official Bahā'ī literature.⁸ The systematic, institutional attempt by the Bahā'īs over the course of the twentieth century to suppress, distort, or otherwise obfuscate the biography and overall *situs* of Şubḥ-i-Azal (let alone any adequate representation of his writings and views) should not be underestimated.⁹ Luckily the efforts of the past decade are now, slowly but surely, beginning to change all that as many of those Bahā'ī narratives and Bahā'ī influenced historiographies of Bābism are now increasingly being challenged by the evidence of important primary source material that some of this literature represents.¹⁰

That stated, the prayers, invocations/supplications and general devotional pieces (i.e. *munājāt*) of Şubḥ-i-Azal (which in the Bābī lexicon are classified as falling under the second grade of writings enumerated by its founder¹¹) constitute unique literary gems in their own right that deserve greater scholarly attention and appreciation in and of themselves. While the prose or poetic output of any given spiritual figure of Islam are poured

⁷An effort that has systematically projected a distorted and flawed picture of the movement and its early figures as a matter of policy. For example, with the exception of MacEoin's reasonably balanced entries in the *Encyclopedia Iranica*, almost none of the entries authored by the members of the official Bahā'ī scholarly cadre on Bābī and Bahā'ī related topics, with some notable exceptions, are to be taken at face value because a bulk of such entries reflect the biased, tendentious, sectarian slants and historical falsifications we are referring to.

⁸Sans the invective and scurrilous attacks replete within the works of the Bahā'ī central founders, such things are a regular feature of virtually all official Bahā'ī literature discussing the subject and not a few contemporary works by Bahā'īs purporting to be scholarly as well, such as, for instance, Moojan Momen's "The Cyprus Exiles," in *Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 3—vol. 6, no. 1, June 1991, 84–113.

⁹For context, see Vance Salisbury *A Critical Examination of Suppression and Distortion in 20th Century Bahā'ī Literature* (unpublished transcript, 1997). Note the current electronic version of the piece at baha'i-library.com has dropped two crucial words from the author's original title, http://bahai-library.com/salisbury_critical_examination_literature (accessed 6 March 2013); see as well, Denis MacEoin "Bahā'ī Fundamentalism and the Academic Study of the Babi Movement," *Religion* 16 (1986): 57–84.

¹⁰For our part, we have spent a good portion of the last decade reading extensively through this material in the MSS. and in some cases making translations in drafts of a few essentials. See the small handful of translations we have already started making public on the internet: 1. A translation of one of Şubḥ-i-Azal's prayers from *The Ethics of the Spiritually-Minded* (*Akhlāq al-Rūḥāniyyīn*) together with our summary of the Persian abridgement of the Arabic text of the treatise by Hājji Mīrzā Hādī Dawlatābādī <http://wahidazal.blogspot.com/2011/07/prayer-of-mirza-yahya-nuri-subh-i-azal.html> (accessed 15 March 2013), 2. a prayer by Şubḥ-i-Azal invoking light <http://wahidazal.blogspot.com/2012/07/short-prayer-by-subh-i-azal-invoking.html> (retrieved 15 March 2013), 3. the 33rd *sūrah* (chapter) of Şubḥ-i-Azal's *Aḥmadiya*, i.e. his first written tablet as successor to the Bāb <http://www.scribd.com/doc/19675533/AhmadiyaSur33> (accessed 15 March 2013) and 4. the opening *sūrah* (chapter) of the *Book of Light* (*kitāb al-nūr*) <http://www.scribd.com/doc/20506396/From-Book-of-Light> (accessed 15 March 2013).

¹¹The five-fold pentadic division (or the 'five grades') of the writings of the Bayānī scriptural corpus were divided by the Bāb as follows: 1. *āyāt* (Arabic verses in imitation of the *Qur'ān*); 2. *munājāt* (doxologies, prayers and invocations, i.e. in Arabic); 3. *khuṭba* (sermons, i.e. in Arabic), or, alternatively, *shu'ūn-i-ilmīya* (scientific and philosophical treatises, i.e. usually in Arabic but may also include Persian tracts); 4. *tafsīr* (scriptural commentary, i.e. in Arabic), and 5. *fārsī* (works in Persian), see *The Book of the Five Grades* (*Kitāb-i-Panj Sha'n*) (n.d. n.p.).

over and analyzed by the scholarly community; prayers and devotional pieces are seldom taken into more careful, analytical consideration,¹² and we believe this to be a mistake because in the prayers and invocations/supplications of these figures a virtual treasure trove can be found where a great deal of doctrinal as well as other pertinent information can be gleaned in condensed, summarized fashion, not to mention where the vibrant inner life of these figures finds its most elegant, ecstatic and animate, personal expression. After all, in both its ritual and non-ritual forms, in its formulated or spontaneous varieties, prayer constitutes a centerpiece of the practical, devotional life of almost every Muslim in any era of Islamic civilization. As Henry Corbin pointed out, prayer performs a central function in any doctrine.¹³

Şubḥ-i-Azal's prayers and devotional invocations (which exercise a pivotal role in the Bayānī doctrine *eo ipse*) are, to us, among some of the finest, most inspiring and beautiful specimens to be found among his works, and these pieces have for us distilled a great deal of information over the years about Şubḥ-i-Azal himself and his deeper insights into the spiritual life and the greater mysteries. As such we very much agree with Corbin that prayer and invocation constitute the supreme form of a given author's *Creative Imagination* and so the consummate manner of their expressed insights. As attested by their rich and fairly numerous prayers and devotional pieces, in both the Bāb and his successor Şubḥ-i-Azal this is eminently the case.¹⁴

Moreover, and beyond the pious or any mere aesthetic considerations, prayer and invocation are sometimes even held among some important segments of this spiritual universe as bearing simultaneously a significant (and dare we say, a practical) occult or magical functionality. While the prayer that is the subject of the present discussion does not technically fall under the rubric of the occult or magical (i.e. *'ulūm khafīya* or *'ulūm gharība/rūḥānīya*)—such features occurring in abundance elsewhere in the writings of Şubḥ-i-Azal¹⁵—nevertheless due to its openly theosophical content, together with its

¹²Presently only a single full-length monograph covers this important area, namely, Constance E. Padwick's *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use* (London: S.P.C.K., 1961; reprinted, London: Oneworld, 1996).

¹³Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 246.

¹⁴In Western academic print, besides E.G. Browne and Denis MacEoin's *Divisions* article cited above, the only balanced and properly contextualized treatment of the question of Şubḥ-i-Azal's succession to the Bāb still remains A.-L.-M. Nicolas' *Que est le successeur du Bab?* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1933). Sepehr Manouchehri's "*Will and Testament of the Primal Point*," *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'I Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 2 (H-Bahai: September, 2004)—being one of several testamentary documents wherein Şubḥ-i-Azal was explicitly nominated by the Bāb—offers a good general analysis of, and semi-critical reading from, four versions of the document (three from lithograph editions and one from a typescript). But the whole article suffers from issues of solecisms in diction, style, spelling, not to mention, in our view, incorrect interpretation of passages. See also our translation, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/134049111/Will-Testament-of-the-Bab> (accessed 2 April 2012). We will be returning to the Will and Testament of the Bāb again in the near future in order to provide a more critical reading (as well as a complete translation of the whole epistle, which Manouchehri does not offer, nor ours in the first draft of 2004) and now with several more complete MSS. versions at our disposal than the mere four originally explicated by Manouchehri.

¹⁵Let us instance here one of the concluding prayers in the longer Arabic MS. (private) of Şubḥ-i-Azal's *The Ethics of the Spiritually-Minded (Akhlāq al-Rūḥānīyīn)* (not the one referenced above) where, much like al-Būnī (d. 1225) or any of the other authors writing in this genre, Şubḥ-i-Azal explicitly

acrostic arrangement, it also bears some of those same hallmarks implicitly (we would say, even quite transparently). In short, through our prayer below its author intends to invoke the divinity of the Bāb himself; that is, the metaphysical reality of the Bāb as the Perfect Man (*insān kāmil*), the manifestation of the Primal Will (*mashīyat al-ūlā*), the talismanic-temple of the divine (*ḥaykal al-ilāhīya*) and Primal Point (*nuqṭat al-ūlā*) to whom Ṣubḥ-i-Azal is held in the Bayānī perspective to function in the capacity of Mirror (*mir'āt*) as in the relationship of 'Alī, the Gate, to the City of Knowledge that is Muḥammad.¹⁶

Now some remarks regarding the *post-Islamic* status of Bābism are in order here, which is a necessary digression, before offering Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's biography.

As opposed to Bahā'ism, which unabashedly and categorically defines itself beyond the pale of Islam (and beyond the pale of *Islamicate* typologically understood as well); with Bābism, the religion of the Bayān, matters are not as straightforward as that because this creed very much inhabits all the contextual spaces of *Islamicity* in its specifically Iranian Twelver Shī'i hue. To underscore one crucial point as an example here: all of the founding central figures of the religion of the Bayān (i.e. the Bāb and his eighteen Letters of the Living) are held in this doctrine to be the archetypal return (*raja'a*) of one of the central figures of the Twelver Shī'i Islamic pantheon (i.e. God, the 14 infallibles and the four gates to the Hidden Imām) while the person of its projected future messianic fulfillment (i.e. 'He whom God shall make Manifest' *man yuzḥiruhu 'Llāh*) is explicitly held to be the archetypal return of the Prophet Muḥammad (a pivotal issue in the texts glossed over in total silence by the Bahā'īs).¹⁷ Indeed for orthodox Islam, Bābism stands as one of many historical representatives of heretical *ghulūww*. Yet, to us, it also possesses one of the richest possibilities in facilitating an adequate understanding of the ultimate *meaning* of *integral Islam* and its inner core, which to us remains the pristine Shī'ism of the Imāms.

Elsewhere¹⁸ we have characterized the religion of the Bayān as a post-Islamic form of *bāṭinī* Twelver Shī'ism that re-validates as well as revalorizes (while radically augment-

invokes the Hebrew Tetragrammaton towards the prayer's closing. We have also come across numerous prayers and invocations by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal with accompanying magic squares where angelic presences or spirit guardians (*muwwaklīn*) are meant to be invoked; such items often sometimes arranged as outright magical operations (*'amal*). These specific items are what within the rich occult literature of Islam are usually classified as being *mujarrabāt* (prayers and invocations that have been 'experienced' for their occult/magical efficacy). Contrast this with the Bahā'ī writings where all such elements are either completely absent or have otherwise been sanitized or 'explained away'.

¹⁶For context of these ideas in its immediate esoteric Twelver Shī'i context, see chapter 4, 'The Pre-Existence of the Imam', in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi's *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers and The Institute of Ismā'īlī Studies, 2011).

¹⁷Let us quote a key passage from the *Book of the Five Grades* (from the section addressed to Ṭāhīriḥ Qurra'tu'l-'Ayn under the heading of the attribute *bahā'* /splendour) that beautifully underscores the point: "Say, verily God shall manifest He whom God shall make Manifest in the manner just like He manifested Muḥammad the Messenger of God from before; and He manifested 'Alī before Muḥammad afterwards how He desired by His command. Verily He is powerful over all things..." 176 (my trans.) Countless other examples such as this can be cited where verbatim or similar have been asserted by the Bāb regarding the future Bābī messiah. None of these crucial textual and doctrinal points have ever, to our knowledge, been adequately or honestly dealt with by Bahā'ī literature.

¹⁸In our July 2011 talk at SOAS in London.

ing) the Twelver Shī'ite narrative in its total gnostic and esoteric spectrum(s).¹⁹ In other words, while on the face of things it is certainly heterodox to mainstream Twelver Shī'i thinking with the limits of its exoteric *weltanschauung*; nevertheless there is almost nothing *un-Islamic* or un-Shī'a about the religion of the Bayān either. It is both *within* the conceptual boundaries of Twelver Shī'ism while simultaneously beyond it. It is beyond it only by virtue of its insistence on the infinite, eternal and unceasing divine *parousias* occurring from one cyclical age to the next (the Bābī *adwār* and *akwār*, thoroughly Ismā'īlī ideas as well as terminology to be sure); where the doctrine of the finality of the Islamic revelation²⁰ becomes merely the finality of a specific *hierohistorical* process culminating in that particular cycle with the historical Muḥammad. These endless divine cycles of *hierohistory* are held to have preceded historical Islam just as they will unfold endlessly subsequently after it.²¹ The primary Bayānī scriptural texts²² argue that revelatory Theophany and who 'It' chooses to embody, not to mention its historical dispensations, cannot end without there occurring a contradiction in the divine theodicy and the greater soteriology of things. But this is already in seed form a Twelver Shī'i idea to begin with. Bābism merely pushes it to its logical (or, rather, *radical*) conclusion. Thus the chief transgression vis-à-vis orthodox (establishmentarian) Shī'ism, if it can even be called that,

¹⁹We have never quite understood why in his *EIr* entry Denis MacEoin finds this a negative point, especially when he somewhat cynically characterizes Azalī Bābism (the religion of the Bayān) as a creed only fit for a "...gnostic elite." To us, at least, this primarily serves as its chief focus of appeal. What neither MacEoin, or others saying the same, have yet to adequately explain is how this religion for a "gnostic elite" with such sparse numbers managed to exert such a far reaching influence and profound social reform impact on modern Iranian history, especially on its political landscape, particularly during the period of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-09 and thereafter. MacEoin asserts, "Paradoxically, Azali conservatism in religious matters seems to have provided a matrix within which radical social and political ideas could be propounded," but then cannot explain why, in his mind, these two are necessarily inconsistent, or mutually exclusive. A revolutionary religious movement—leaning fundamentally on an esoteric interpretation of religion—who preaches the fulfillment of the eschaton (but in a complex metaphysical fashion) and propounds a political program that can only be described as a *theophanocracy* and a *liberation theosophy* cannot but be an esoteric religion of the radical political Left, hence why it can in fact explicitly provide "a matrix within which radical social and political ideas could be propounded," a matrix that later on indeed witnessed the ultimate downfall of the Qājār monarchy. The same can be said to some degree of those notable brotherhoods and Iranian Sūfī masters as well (such as the famous Ṣāḥib al-Dawlih Ṣafā'alīshāh and Mūnis'alīshāh Dhu'l-Riyāsatayn Kirmānshāhī) who likewise participated on the side of the revolution during the Constitutional period when institutionalized *ṭarīqa* Sufism for much of the nineteenth century preceding it (generally remaining a hotbed of pro-regime social conservatism and mostly populated by members of the court aristocracy, urban notables and rural landed gentry) up until that point acted mainly as a pillar of the Qājār state.

²⁰But not of its holy *persons* (esp. the fourteen infallibles) who are now transformed into eternal, reoccurring archetypes who will henceforth *inhabit* their future, physical *loci* of divine manifestation both in the *present* Bayānī revelation as the Point and his Letters, and, more importantly, in the future messianic fulfillment of He whom God shall make Manifest—known also as the Most Mighty, Resplendent Light (*nayyir-i-a'zam*) and the Aid Invoked (*mustaghāth*)—who archetypally stands as the Manifestation (capital 'M') of the Muḥammadan quintessence.

²¹Appropos is a famous report (*khābar*) attributed to the fifth Shī'i Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 713) and cited in the 38th chapter of Ibn Bābūya's *kitāb al-tawḥīd*, where the Imām asserts, "...Do you think this is the only world God created? That He did not create races of humanity other than you? Certainly not, for He has created thousands upon thousands of worlds with thousands upon thousands of Adams, and you dwell upon only the last of these worlds, in the midst of the last of these Adamic humanities," cf. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices*, 158n51.

²²Especially throughout the *Persian Bayān* (Tehrān: 1946) and the *Book of the Five Grades*.

is Bābism's unequivocal claim that the *Revelation* continues—and will do so infinitely for all eternity because there is no, nor can there ever be, interruptions to God's theophanic self-disclosures (*tajalliyāt*). As such the only metaphysical finality and terminus in Bābī doctrine is *tawḥīd* itself; yet a *tawḥīd* that endlessly projects itself through the multiverse of worlds and upon the mirror of the plane of *hierohistory* and its cycles of dispensations in the dominion of the material universe.

Given this, any perceived ruptures with Twelver Shī'i Islam are simultaneously only nuances or points of emphases merely apparent in outward forms (and even this is sometimes debatable), but not in the trajectories of their quintessential meanings or inner intentions and thrusts. Put another way, the religion of the Bayān is Twelver Shī'ism universalized; simultaneously its apotheosis as well as its *eidaiic* eternalization (even *permutation*) beyond (as in *augmented*) *originary* intention(s). The events at Badasht during the summer of 1848 (the Bābī dramaturgy of Alamūt) are thus to be seen as a dramaturgical re-appraisal reminiscent of the shifting locus of the *qibla* much like what Muḥammad himself enacted in changing an earlier *ḥanīfī* focus from Jerusalem to Mecca. This is how, to us, *post-Islamic* needs to be correctly contextualized vis-à-vis the religion of the Bayān.

The same cannot be said of Bahā'ism, the Bayān's schism, which no longer finds such values and perspectives outlined above meaningful, and whose rupture with Islam and *Islamicate* alike is total and complete (at least among contemporaries).²³ Historical conflation aside, which Denis MacEoin has highlighted so well, to us the cultural, ideational, contextual, paradigmatic, discursive, and, most importantly for us, the metaphysical chains and connectives that make for any valid genealogy are effectively absent where any legitimate connection of Bahā'ism with the original Bābī movement is concerned (nor are we the first to have pointed this out); and given this, whatever the difficulties, Bābism needs to be reassessed from scratch, especially in academic print, from whatever legacy Bahā'ism may be claiming for itself and capitalizing on. We cannot emphasize this last point enough.

Not wishing to digress any further, we will say here that we plan to address all the questions briefly touched upon above more extensively in a future piece.

Şubḥ-i-Azal²⁴

²³For example, *Islamophobia* has often found a fertile breeding ground among some contemporary Bahā'ī cultures (whether among exiles or converts), especially online. For all the reasons highlighted above, such a thing is well nigh impossible among Bayānīs. As an aside, it should be noted that as a precautionary measure to avoid persecution (given both the hostility of the orthodox Twelver Shī'i ecclesiastical establishment as well as that of the Bahā'īs), and to some degree on the urging of Bayānī leader Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī (d. 1939) (private communication, 2009), with the outside world many Bayānīs in Iran exercise *taqīya* and nominally identify themselves as orthodox Muslims. Among other reasons, not to mention that there is presently no organization as such, this is why actual Bayānī numbers are difficult (almost impossible) to gauge sometimes.

²⁴Our account here is a summary based on three sources: 1. E.G. Browne's edition of Hājji Mīrzā Jānī Kāshānī's (d. 1852) *Kitāb Nuqṭat'ul-Kāf: Being the Earliest History of the Bābīs* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1910), 238-44, 2. the Persian typescript of a short account by his kinswoman 'Atīyya Rūḥī, http://www.bayanic.com/lib/typed/hist/AzalHist/SA_Bio_Persian.pdf (accessed 15 March 2013), and 3. the fragment of the longer Persian typescript of the more extensive biography attributed to the same kinswoman held in the Qamar Tāj Dawlatābādī collection at Harvard University (i.e. Women's Worlds

His preeminent title in reference to the fifth theophanic sequence of the *ḥadīth kumayl/ḥadīth al-ḥaqīqa*,²⁵ Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī *Ṣubḥ-i-Azal* (d. 1912) was born in the Arab quarter of Tehrān in 1831²⁶ during the final years of the reign of Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh Qājār (d. 1834). He was the son of the wealthy Māzandarānī Qājār courtier and calligrapher Mīrzā ‘Abbās *Bozorg* Tākūrī Nūrī ibn Riḍā Qulī Beg (d. 1834)²⁷ and his sixth wife Kūchak Khānūm Kirmānshāhī who died during childbirth. After his birth *Ṣubḥ-i-Azal* was entrusted to the care of his father’s fifth wife Khadījah Khānūm (d. 1844), the mother of Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī Nūrī and future *Bahā’u’llāh* (d. 1892).²⁸ Before his third birthday and at the commencement of the reign of Muḥammad Shāh Qājār (d. 1848)—who as a consequence of a scandal involving one of his daughters, divested Mīrzā ‘Abbās *Bozorg* Nūrī of a large sum of his wealth, prestige and influence²⁹—*Ṣubḥ-i-Azal*’s father also died and it appears that his care and upbringing were from this period onward entrusted

in Qajar Iran), <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/31794511?n=1&printThumbnails=true> (accessed 15 March 2013). As for the third source, we are now informed that this longer piece is incorrectly attributed to Rūḥī and that it is actually the work of Nāṣir Dawlatābādī (private communication, April 2013). Here throughout Rūḥī refers to the shorter account. A recent Master’s thesis from Tehran University by S.M. Nabavi-Razavi Rohani entitled *Tārīkh-i-Firqī-i-Bābī’i dar Baghdād az 1268 tā 1280* (The History of the Bābī sect in Baghdad from 1852 to 1863) (Unpublished dissertation: 2013) offers the first real critical biography and modern scholarly treatment of *Ṣubḥ-i-Azal* since the studies of E.G. Browne and A.-L.-M. Nicolas. It surpasses all previous literature on the subject in any language thus far. This monograph (the most extensive study to date) will go a long way in properly contextualizing and locating *Ṣubḥ-i-Azal* within the larger orbit of nineteenth century Iranian history as well as the intellectual history of Persianate Islam during that era. An augmented and expanded critical biography that will extend well into the period of the Cyprus exile (1868-1912) is presently being prepared by the same author. A full English translation of this important work is currently in the preparation stages by us.

²⁵I.e. ‘*A Light Illuminating from the Dawn of Pre-Eternity (ṣubḥ al-azal) and shedding its traces upon tablets of the talismanic-temples of unicity*’ (my trans.), see <http://wahidazal.blogspot.de/2011/07/hadith-kumayl-or-hadith-al-haqiqa-of.html> (accessed 15 March 2013). See also Dwight M. Donaldson, “*Al-Kumail: A Companion of the Secret*,” *The Muslim World*, Volume 28, Issue 3, July 1938: 249-57; Reza Shah-Kazemi *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ‘Alī* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers and The Institute of Isma‘īlī Studies, 2006), 170 & 201n96; and, Bruce Wannell and Hermann Landolt *A Tradition of Esoteric Commentary: Imām ‘Alī’s ḥadīth al-ḥaqīqa* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris and The Institute of Isma‘īlī Studies, forthcoming). Among other lofty titles (*viz.* Light/*nūr*, Fruit/*thamara*, the Pre-Eternal Fruit/*thamarat al-azaliya*, Face/*wajh*, the Splendid/*bahīya*, the One/*wahīd*, the Unique/*farīd* etc.) this title by which he has become most well known was bestowed upon him specifically by the Bāb indicative of the completion of the fifth year of the Bāb’s ministry (1848-49/50) as each of these years (and the following) were held by the Bāb to symbolize with each of the six theophanic sequences of the *ḥadīth kumayl/ḥadīth al-ḥaqīqa*, see *Nuqtat’ul-Kāf*, *passim.*, and especially the Bāb’s *Dalā’il al-Saba’a* (The Seven Proofs), <http://www.bayanic.com/lib/fwd/saba/Saba-FWD.html?id=seven> (accessed 15 March 2013); and (A.L.M Nicolas’ French translation) <http://www.bayanic.com/showItem.php?id=fSeven> (accessed 15 March 2013).

²⁶No month or day is provided by any of the sources.

²⁷Also famously known by the epithet Mīr ‘Imād *Thānī* (the second) in recognition of his unmatched calligraphic skills and so a successor to the court calligrapher of the Safavid era Mīr ‘Imād Ḥasanī Qazvīnī (d. 1615).

²⁸According to the account in *Nuqtat’ul-Kāf*, which the author ascribes to *Bahā’u’llāh*, at first reluctant to take on the responsibility, this occurred as a result of a veridical dream by Khadījah Khānūm involving the appearance of the Prophet Muḥammad and Imām ‘Alī who urged the salvific nature of this specific undertaking upon her, *ibid.* 239.

²⁹Rūḥī, 1.

jointly to his step-mother and his aforementioned step-brother who was thirteen years his senior. In the same year as the commencement of the Bābī movement (1844-5), his step-mother died as well and the guardianship of Şubḥ-i-Azal, now fourteen years of age, devolved upon his older brother. Of his younger step-brother during these early days, the future founder of the Bahā'ī faith and future rival of Şubḥ-i-Azal, per a direct quotation in *Nuqṭat 'ul-Kāf*, recounts:

I was engaged with the upbringing and education of His Eminence the Pre-Eternal (*jenāb-i-azal*). Traces of the pure, innate nature (*fiṭrat*) and goodness of character (*nīkū'ī-i-ākhlāq*) were manifest from the mirror of his being, and he always preferred dignity, poise, good manners and modesty. He refrained from mixing in the company of children or engaging in their behaviours. But I did not realize he would one day become the possessor of such a distinctly high station. He studied Persian [literature] but did not take well to Arabic and excelled in [the calligraphy of] *nasta'liq*. The poetry of the folk of gnosis and the divine unicity (*abl-i-ma'rifat va tawḥīd*) appealed to him (my trans. *ibid.*)

According to Şubḥ-i-Azal's own testimony, his conversion to Bābism occurred approximately during the period when the movement was gaining its formative momentum and building its base of converts (1844-1846). As urban notables and members of the landed gentry, what specifically attracted the initial Bābī emissaries to the Nūrī household in Tehrān (and made the Nūrīs particularly receptive to the Bābī message) remains somewhat opaque in details because the Nūrīs weren't particularly known to be part of any active Shaykhī networks from which the bulk of the initial Bābī membership, and specifically its missionary activists, were mostly drawn. Nevertheless Şubḥ-i-Azal states:

At the beginning when the Manifestation (*ẓuhūr*) of the Cause of His Holiness [the Bāb] occurred I had desired upon engaging in the emulation (*taqlīd*) of one among the learned clerics of religion. I was investigating their ranks and stations at the very time His Eminence my brother [i.e. Bahā'u'llāh] was bringing the companions of His Holiness [the Bāb] to our house. At night they would converse and read from His writings, and I would retire to a corner listening intently. Until [one night] they read from one of His prayers (*munājāt*) wherein the refrain³⁰ “*And oh, oh, O my God!*” (*fa-āh āh yā ilāhī*) was copiously strewn within it. The magnetic spiritual attraction (*jadhābīyat*) of the spirit of those words caught my heart and [as a consequence] love for His Holiness took firm hold. Later I perused the Traditions (*aḥādīth*) of the Imāms of religion and looked upon the Perspicuous Writings of His Holiness and I testified in certainty [to the truth of the Bābī cause] (my trans. *ibid.*, 238-9).

In 1847 when the Bāb³¹ bid his followers to join his initial disciple in Khurāsān, the first Letter of the Living Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī *Bāb 'ul-Bāb* (the Gate of the Gate) (d.1849),³²

³⁰Literally ‘paragraphs’ (*fiqarāt*).

³¹Then banished by the state and incarcerated in remote north-western Iran in Mākū.

³²See MacEoin's *Elr* entry «BOŞRŪ'Ī, Mollā Moḥammad-Ḥosayn».

Şubḥ-i-Azal then a young adolescent of fifteen years immediately set out on his own from Tehrān to join the other Bābī partisans assembling there.³³ On his way he was intercepted by his older brother who redirected him back to Tehrān and from there they soon advanced together towards Mazandarān in the north where en route they were met by the Bāb's most eminent female—and most radical—disciple (celebrated as the 'remover of the veil' and renowned for being second to the Bāb himself in influence), the seventeenth Letter of the Living Ṭāhirih Qurra't'ul-'Ayn (d. 1852)³⁴ who was deemed to be none other than the 'return' of Fāṭima Zahrā', the Prophet Muḥammad's daughter.³⁵³⁶ In Sabzivār they were joined by the last Letter of the Living Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Bārfurūshī *Quddūs* (d. 1849),³⁷ also known as the First and Last Name of God (*ism allāh al-awwal wa al-ākhir*), who had been the Bāb's companion on the ḥajj journey in 1844-5 and esteemed by some as even equal in spiritual rank to him.³⁸ However, Şubḥ-i-Azal himself was only to spend exclusive time in Quddūs' presence in Bārfurūsh after the gathering at Badasht. Nevertheless, Hājji Mīrzā Jānī's account in *Nuqtat'ul-Kāf* explicitly suggests that special attention was showered upon Şubḥ-i-Azal personally by Quddūs during his brief time in Bārfurūsh, and this is significant.³⁹

Given the Nūrī family's increasing prominence within the movement, Şubḥ-i-Azal and his older brother⁴⁰ remained in continual contact (if not proximity) of these two foremost Bābī leaders leading up to the late summer of 1848,⁴¹ just after the conclusion of the

³³Rūhī, 2; *Nuqtat'ul-Kāf*, 240.

³⁴Who had recently fled her native Qazvīn as a consequence of the murder of her uncle and father-in-law Mullā Muḥammad Taqī Baraghānī (the famous denunciator of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī who some two decades earlier had issued a *takfīr* against the Shaykhī founder) at the hands of a Shaykhī zealot in the town: an act that was indiscriminately blamed on the Bābīs.

³⁵The most reliable, critical biography of this much celebrated Bābī heroine, revolutionary mystic and ecstatic poet remains Soraya Adambakan's monograph *Qurra't al-'Ayn: Eine Studie der religiösen und gesellschaftlichen Folgen ihres Wirkens* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2008).

³⁶*Nuqtat'ul-Kāf*, *ibid.* Here the accounts of Rūhī and *Nuqtat'ul-Kāf* can be slightly confusing and contradictory in the timelines provided for these meetings, how long each lasted, where they occurred, where the termination points were and when they were precisely interrupted and/or picked up again. We have striven to provide a balance between two means in this part of the account. We freely admit, however, that this may be open to some minor chronological criticism.

³⁷See MacEoin's *EI* entry «BĀRFORŪŠĪ, MOḤAMMAD-'ALĪ».

³⁸Rūhī *ibid.*; *Nuqtat'ul-Kāf*, *ibid.*, which elsewhere states: "...His Eminence the Hājji [i.e. Quddūs] was claimant to the station of Sanctity (*quddūsīyat*), which was indeed [the station of] the Return of the Messenger of God (*rasūl'ullāh*). With His own veracious proofs, He proved Himself, amongst these being His versical-signs (*āyāt*), prayers (*munājāt*) and sermons (*khutab*)...It is from such enunciations from His Holiness the Remembrance [i.e. the Bāb] where it became evident that the promised *Qā'im* [i.e. the Resurrector] was in fact His Holiness Quddūs whereupon 313 individuals amongst the [eschatological] helping directors (*nuqabā'*) gathered around Him [at Shaykh Ṭabarsī]...And His Holiness the Remembrance was His Gate (*bāb*). Immediately when the Manifestation of Quddūs occurred, His Holiness the Remembrance ceased laying pen to paper, and then His Holiness Quddūs independently proclaimed His Cause. During the time His Holiness the Remembrance was Speaking (*mutinātiq būdand*), His Holiness Quddūs was Silent (*sākīt*). His Holiness [Quddūs] was the Heaven of Will (*samā'-i-mashīyat*) while His Holiness the Remembrance was the Earth of Volition (*ard-i-irādih*)..." 152 & 202 (my trans.).

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰Who had personally financed one of the two leaders as well as the gathering, *ibid.*

⁴¹Now sixteen/seventeen years of age.

gathering at Badasht (where the Bābī *qiyāma* had been proclaimed publicly),⁴² and the beginnings of the Shaykh Ṭabarsī uprising, which were just beginning to stir. Qurra't'ul-'Ayn was to remain in the company of the Nūrīs in their ancestral home of Nūr while Quddūs was to proceed to the shrine fortress to join Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī and ultimately become the foremost spiritual leader (and later the most eminent martyr) of the uprising. Here Şubḥ-i-Azal (who was later to be lauded as the 'return' of Quddūs) was to be separated from Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Bārfurūshī permanently and return to Tehrān. During this sojourn he had become quite attached to Quddūs in a typically close master/disciple type spiritual bond. *Nuqtat'ul-Kāf* relates:

[He][i.e. Şubḥ-i-Azal] possessed a strange attachment to His Holiness Quddūs. In a sweet, melodious voice he would often recite with the utmost joy the sermons and prayers of that master of contingency where his listeners would be made to taste soul and the spirit of life from the chalice of ecstatic attraction...When in the space of approximately forty days news of the martyrdom of Quddūs reached that Eminence [i.e. Şubḥ-i-Azal], I heard afterwards that upon hearing the news, for three days an intense fever overtook that Eminence, the intensity of whose fiery heat would not subside. Then after three days the traces of holiness (*āthār-i-qudsī*) dawned in the holy temple/form (*baykal*) of that Eminence, and the meaning of 'return' became manifest... (*Ibid.*, 243, my trans.)

Şubḥ-i-Azal and his older brother weren't to participate in the bloody uprising at Shaykh Ṭabarsī—nor the ones that later broke out in Zanjān and Nayrīz—but not for want of trying. He, his older brother, one of their Bābī uncles and other family were together apprehended by government forces on their way to the shrine fort some distance from the town of Amul and delivered over to the governor who imprisoned them in a local mosque. Şubḥ-i-Azal escaped and spent a whole night in the forests of the vicinity and was discovered by hostile townspeople the next morning, who mistreated him with taunts and spitting before delivering him to the authorities. Reunited with his kin, the governor ordered all the apprehended to be bastinadoed. When it came Şubḥ-i-Azal's turn, his older brother pleaded with the authorities to be beaten in his stead. After the

⁴²During the gathering the Bāb, *in absentia*, had been publicly declared to be the Imām Mahdī with the *qiyāma* officially proclaimed. But in correspondences between the Bāb and his leading disciples this declaration had already taken place prior to it, see the text of two of these proclamations in *Qismatī az Alwāb-i-Khaṭṭ-i-Nuqta-i-Ūla va Āqā Ḥusayn-i-Kātib* (n.p., n.d.), 13-12; 14 facsimile; 17; 18 facsimile (text edition). At the occasion of the gathering it was made public beyond the circle of close disciples and confidantes. Conservative elements present, who had previously been well disposed to the movement, are said to have voted with their feet and left the movement altogether as a result of what they perceived to be scandal, innovation and heresy. Many accounts highlight Qurra't'ul-'Ayn's decisive role during the gathering by removing the veil amongst the assembled company of men during one significant part of the convocation while simultaneously making Hallājīan declarations of her divinity (she had also apparently removed the veil in public previously in Karbalā as well). In light of her regarded status as the 'return' of Fāṭima Zahrā', such incidents need to be put into the larger context of the dramaturgy (not to mention *theophanology*) these Bābī leaders believed they were enacting. In any case, the comparisons between the events of Badasht in the summer of 1848 and the *qiyāma* declaration by Ḥasan II 'alā dhikrihi salām in 1164 CE at Alamūt are obvious, which is why we have dubbed this whole episode the *Bābī Alamūt*.

beatings, learning of their eminent social rank and position as landed gentry and former courtiers, the governor released them.⁴³

Now, although the exclusive correspondence between the Bāb and Ṣubḥ-i-Azal wasn't to commence in earnest until after the Shaykh Ṭabarsī uprising (late spring 1849), there is no question for us that these two foremost Bābī leaders (Quddūs and Qurra't'ul-'Ayn) had independently made specific introductions with—not to mention positive representations to—the Bāb on his behalf during the period when they were in each other's proximity. Thus after the defeat and bloody massacre of the remaining Bābīs at Shaykh Ṭabarsī—especially of Quddūs in a mob-induced slaughter at the public square in Bārfurūsh⁴⁴—the Bāb (now in remotest Chihrīq) was robbed of two of his most distinguished, able-bodied lieutenants and spiritual deputies (not to mention countless other followers). With his own life now hanging in the balance, following his trial and condemnation for heresy in Tabrīz in July 1848, the issue of succession would have certainly been an overriding concern. Hājji Mīrzā Jānī relates:

After the martyrdom of His Holiness Quddūs and that of his companions, that Illustrious One (*bozorgvār*) became mournful and despondent until such time as the writings of His Eminence the Pre-Eternal (*jināb-i-azal*) attained the blessed notice.⁴⁵ From the intensity of joy, several times He rose up from his place and then sat down again, offering thanksgiving and praise to the Presence of the One Worshipped (*hadrat-i-ma'būd*) (*ibid.* 238, my trans.)

These writings of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal⁴⁶ were soon esteemed highly by the Bāb as divinely inspired—i.e. versical-signs (*āyāt*) issuing from the former's pure, innate knowledge (*fiṭra*)—and so in a series of testamentary epistles that were publicized widely among the scattered Bābī *ecclesia*, its remaining leadership and hierarchy, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal was formally nominated as the Bāb's successor, legatee (*waṣī*) and Mirror (*mir'āt*) whose status would be equal to the Bāb's; this, with a distinction in an operative theophanic function whereby the Bāb was the Point (*nuqṭa*), the inaugurator of the cycle of the Bayān, and Ṣubḥ-i-Azal the Mirror of the Bayān, its executor, mirror and embodiment. In other words, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal was to be 'Alī to the Bāb's Muḥammad. Reminiscent of Ismā'īlī categories and terms, during the remaining lifetime of the Bāb (less than a year), he, the Bāb, would act as the Speaker (*nāṭiq*) while Ṣubḥ-i-Azal would be the Silent One (*sāmit*). Upon the Bāb's physical demise, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal would be elevated to the rank of Speaker (*nāṭiq*) and all of the writings of the Bāb would henceforth function

⁴³Rūhī, 2-3.

⁴⁴Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī had already lost his own life inside the shrine fort during the latter part of its siege.

⁴⁵A scan of a typescript taken from an original MS. (in private possession) of an early direct correspondence of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal with the Bāb (as well its response) recently came into our possession in February 2013. It is an Arabic prayer of about one and half pages (in typescript) by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal addressed to the Bāb and written from Tehrān to Chihrīq, and begins, "He is Thou (*huwa anta*)! In His Name the [One] Seated (*bismihī al-jālīs*) upon the Point of the earth (*fi nuqṭat'ul-turāb*), the wondrous Hidden Cloud degraded! God verily testifies that no other god is there besides He who is Thee, and all are acting by Thy Command and all are beseeching Thy Grace!" (my trans.).

⁴⁶Now at eighteen/nineteen years of age.

now as the Silent One (*sāmit*) in the face of the Speaking Mirror (or the *Speaking Bayān*) who is now elevated as the foremost, official divine interpreter, sole hierophant, providential guide (*walī*) and expositor (*mubayyin*) of the new religious dispensation and its scriptural texts, hence Mirror (*mir'āt*).⁴⁷

It is worth quoting here a few passages from what the Bāb said to Şubḥ-i-Azal in these testamentary epistles:

Thou art I and I am Thou (*anta anā wa anā anta*), He and I (*hūwa wa anā*), He and Thee (*hūwa wa anta*), God, and I am God and Ye are God (*al-lāh wa anā allāh wa anta'llāh*)⁴⁸ ...this is a Book from God the Protector, the Peerless/the Self-Subsistent, unto God the Protector, the Peerless/the Self-Subsistent...this is a Book from 'Alī before Nabīl, the Remembrance to the Worlds, unto He whose name is equivalent to the Name of the One, the Remembrance to the Worlds! O Name of the One (*yā ism al-wahīd*), protect that which has been revealed in the Bayān and command by it, for verily Thou art a Mighty way of Truth⁴⁹ ...O Name of the Pre-Eternal (*yā ism al-azal*), verily, I testify that there is no other God besides Me the Tremendous, the Best Beloved, and then I testify that there is no other God besides Thee the Protector, the Peerless/Self-Subsistent! God created all that which He created from a firstness before all firstness to Him and all things He shall create from a lastness without a lastness unto Him in order to manifest His own Logos-Self...When you are cut off from this Throne [i.e. the Bāb] recite the versical-signs (*āyāt*) God causes to be inspired into your heart...Whomsoever attains the presence of the Throne of Thy Lordship has attained to the presence of God...proclaim the Cause of Thy Lord unto the worlds. Call them to that which hath been revealed in the Bayān through the perspicuous paths of Lofty Might...And if God manifests one like unto Thee, he is accounted by God as the one singular inheritor of the Cause...And if God manifests grandeur in Thy days, manifest the Eight Paths [i.e. the remaining chapters of the Arabic Bayān]⁵⁰ ...We have made the distributor of the tablets which have been written of the versical-signs of God a deliverance to the One Supreme (*wahīd al-a'lā*, i.e. Şubḥ-i-Azal)⁵¹ ...(my trans.)

To his older brother and future rival,⁵² the Bāb had instructed, and unequivocally en-

⁴⁷According to the text of the Will and Testament of the Bāb (referenced above), should Şubḥ-i-Azal not be able to appoint one like himself of equal spiritual capacity and rank to succeed him, then authority devolves upon the Witnesses of the Bayān (*shāhidīn/shuhadā'*). But in this situation the Speaker now becomes the holy writings of both the Bāb and Şubḥ-i-Azal, and specifically the Arabic and Persian Bayāns, until the revelation and appearance of the Bābī messiah (to appear between 1511 to 2001 years from the revelation of the Bayān, cf. PB 2:17 & 3:15) who abrogates it.

⁴⁸See original in *Qismatī az Alvāh-i-Khaṭṭ-i-Nuḡṭa-i-Ūla va Aqā Husayn-i-Kātib*, 3 facsimile; 4-8.

⁴⁹The original facsimile of this particular document was first published in print by E.G. Browne in Appendix IV, facing p. 426, of his edition of *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*. It was subsequently reproduced in *Qismatī az Alvāh-i-Khaṭṭ-i-Nuḡṭa-i-Ūla va Aqā Husayn-i-Kātib*, 1 facsimile; 3.

⁵⁰That, together with the Persian Bayān, remained unfinished by the Bāb.

⁵¹This whole section quoted is from the longest of the testamentary epistles referenced above.

⁵²Who was only ever referred to as either 238 (the numerical value of Husayn 'Alī) or the "brother of the fruit" (*ākh al-thamara*). Contrary to the assertions made by Bahā'ī texts, the Bāb never actually be-

joined, the protection of Şubḥ-i-Azal, his authority and writings, saying:

From the element of the Most Splendorous (*az 'unşur-i-abhā'*), namely Yaḥyā (*samī yaḥyā*), the written tablets (*alvāḥ-i-mastūriḥ*), which hath self-disclosed from the simple substance of ecstatic [divine] attraction (*kih az jawhar-i-valih-i-sāzīj-i-injizāb mutajallī gashtih*), were perused, thanks be the Discloser of Majesty, majestic and tremendous be He! Exercise the utmost watchfulness (*kamāl-i-tarāqub*) over the spirit and vitality (*rūḥ va irtivāḥ*) of that considered one so that the fierce simoom winds (*aryāḥ-i-mushbriqa*) do not settle upon the heart of that inhabitant; and, in [the work of] writing and dictation, the means of joy and delight in the acme of perfection should be facilitated for his sake such that he, absolutely, never ever beholds any grief or sorrow, neither secretly nor openly. And take the utmost care of him (*kamāl-i-ḥifẓ-i-ān*) and his compiled works (*āthār-i-makbẓūna*) until thy own time [arrives] (*tā waqt-i-khud*) [i.e. 'until the end of thy life'], for God is with the patient!"⁵³ (my trans.)

At noon on July 8th 1850,⁵⁴ the Bāb together with a disciple were publicly executed by firing squad in the Tabrīz military barracks by the regiment commanded by Mīrzā Taqī Khān *Amīr Kabīr*, Şadr-i-A'zam. The mangled bodies of the Bāb and his disciple were then hung on display at the city gates for several days until secretly retrieved by Bābī agents—exercising bribery, trickery and guile—who then delivered them over to Şubḥ-i-Azal who buried them with his own hands.⁵⁵ Afterwards Şubḥ-i-Azal traveled with his older brother to Nūr in Māzandarān where he would tarry for some time. Earlier, as a token of his bestowal of succession upon Şubḥ-i-Azal, the Bāb had sent over to his successor his writings, pen case, papers, clothing and personal effects, copies of the testamentary epistles sealed by him and, importantly, his official seals and signet ring⁵⁶ as well as a *haykal* (pentalpha) talisman consisting of 350 permutations of the divine attribute *bahā'* (*splendour*). Thus began the tumultuous first eighteen years of Şubḥ-i-Azal's ministry that would eventually culminate in a bloody schism from within his own family and tear Bābism apart from the inside in a manner the Qājār state-clergy persecutions in Iran could have scarcely anticipated.⁵⁷ Here we have also entered the period of what MacEoin has called Middle Bābism.

stowed the title *Bahā'u'llāh* (the splendour of God) upon the Bahā'ī founder. The title was in fact bestowed by the Bāb before the Badasht gathering upon Qurra'tul-'Ayn. Qurra'tul-'Ayn in turn bestowed this title at the gathering upon the Bahā'ī founder, see 'Izziya Khānūm *Tanbīh al-Nā'imīn* (n.p. n.d.), 5 & *passim*.

⁵³ Quoted in 'Izziya Khānūm, 32. A copy of the original facsimile (as well as a highlight of the relevant passage) of the epistle in the hand of the Bāb's scribe and Letter of the Living, Aqā Ḥusayn Yazdī (d. 1852), can be found online, here: <http://www.bayanic.com/notes/grounds/groundo7.html> (accessed 4 March 2013).

⁵⁴ A date disputed by the Bahā'īs who locate it on the following one.

⁵⁵ *Nuqṭat 'ul-Kāf*, 250. Rūḥī, 5, claims the bodies were buried at the Imāmzādih Ma'sūm shrine in Tehrān.

⁵⁶ *Nuqṭat 'ul-Kāf*, 244.

⁵⁷ It should be noted that the Bāb's own scribe, a Letter of the Living, and the one closest in physical proximity to him for most of his sojourn through Iran from 1846 to 1850 until just before the execution in Tabrīz (the man responsible for night and day transcriptions of the works of the Bāb during that period), namely, Āqā Ḥusayn Yazdī, was one of the most active partisans of Şubḥ-i-Azal's succession. MacEoin translates part of one of the letters Yazdī sent to another prominent member of the Bābī hi-

Now as supreme head of the Bābī ecclesia; with Bābī uprisings raging in Zanjān, and then ending and starting up again in Nayrīz; with the persecution of this community by the combined forces of the state and clergy becoming ever more fierce by the day; upon the Bāb’s martyrdom in July 1850, the nineteen/twenty year old Şubḥ-i-Azal found a community where, due to the lack of any order, discipline or central command, in the words of E.G. Browne, “...each member...[had] become...a law unto himself...producing as many ‘Manifestations’ as there were Babis...”⁵⁸ In this situation Şubḥ-i-Azal was encountering challenges to his leadership from its very inception and from every corner. While the remaining inner core of the Bābī hierarchy recognized the legitimacy of the Bāb’s designation of Şubḥ-i-Azal as Mirror of the Bayān, and the overriding authority vested in that designation; not to mention the Bāb’s explicit command to Şubḥ-i-Azal himself in the Will and Testament to preserve himself at any cost; nevertheless below the inner rung of this circle, one by one, soon after the Bāb’s execution there began emerging various claimants to divine theophany and Manifestation (*ẓuhūr*),⁵⁹ some claimant to the supreme authority itself as the Bābī messiah (*man yuẓhiruhu’Llāh*). This situation was due in large measure to the fact that the late (what some have called ‘the mature’) doctrinal works of the Bāb, especially the Arabic and Persian Bayāns (where the ordinances as well as the features of Bābī eschatology are laid out) seemingly weren’t disseminated or made to trickle down far enough below these inner rung of circles close to the top. But this was not due to any attempted concealment or caprice on the part of the Bābī leadership; rather this was so, to some degree, because the state and clerical enemies of the Bābīs were systematically destroying any and all works of the Bāb and his early companions they could seize their hands upon; and since many of the original high-leadership at the time were either dead, incarcerated, silenced, hunted down or otherwise in hiding and on the run, leaving meager numbers around Şubḥ-i-Azal, this added more to the general confusion and disarray prevailing at the time among the rank and file. Hājji Mīrzā Jānī (per Browne’s Leiden text), spending the last three chapters of *Nūqtat’ul-Kāf* discussing several of these claimants in turn,⁶⁰ attempts in his overall summation of the situation to minimize the overall impact of such ‘manifestations’ vis-à-vis Şubḥ-i-Azal’s authority as divine Mirror, ultimately characterizing them as mere theophanies overshadowed by the “*blessed Tree of Pre-Eternity*” (*shajara-i-mubāraka-i-azalīya*),⁶¹ i.e. Şubḥ-i-Azal.⁶² Yet

erarchy, and also a Bābī scribe, Mullā ‘Abd’ul-Karīm Qazvīnī (d. 1852), during the period immediately after the execution, in it addressing a woman called Maryām, which is instructive to quote here: “Be saddened by the setting of (the sun of) your lord, and weep for the disappearance of your master. But rejoice in his (re-)arising in the eternal Azal [al-azal al-azil]. And be gladdened at the (re-)appearance of your lord in the ripe fruit (al-thamar al-thamīr—one of Azal’s titles), for before his disappearance he had appeared in him,” cf. *Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism, 1850-66*, 99; see facsimile of the original letter and its transcription in *Qismatī az Alvāb-i-Khaṭṭ-i-Nuqṭa-i-Ūla va Āqā Husayn-i-Kātib*, 23 facsimile; 24.

⁵⁸Introduction to Myron H. Phelps *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi: A Study of the Religion of the Babis, or Beha’is, Founded by the Persian Bab and his Successors, Beha Ullah and Abbas Effendi* (Second Revised Edition, New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1912), xxvi.

⁵⁹MacEoin lists twenty, nineteen by name, the twentieth being a sub-category of unidentified individuals in Tabrīz, Fārs province and Hamadān, see *Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism, 1850-66*, 101.

⁶⁰255-261 in Browne’s Leiden edition.

⁶¹*Nūqtat’ul-Kāf*, 255.

⁶²Our position as to why such ‘manifestations’ did occur in the first place does not diverge too far from the intentions of *Nūqtat’ul-Kāf*’s author. We will say here that, given the deep theophanological potency

these were only minor preludes of what was to come in due course, the infernal flowering of which the author of *Nūqtat'ul-Kāf* was, thankfully or no, not to witness for himself.

On the morning of August 15th 1852 a group of six to seven Bābīs, primitively armed with bad hand-held muskets and knives, and seeking to avenge the martyrdom of the Bāb, waited outside the gates of Nāṣiruddīn Shāh Qājār's Niyāvarān palace in Tehrān. As the Shāh rode out of the palace gates on his horse, the would-be Bābī assassins acted and attempted to ambush him and finish him off. Unfortunately, they failed to achieve their objective, only managing to pull the king off his horse, and soon overpowered by the palace guards, instead only injured him.⁶³ At this time, following a dispute in Tākūr instigated by a non-Bābī relative (an uncle) for purposes of opportunistic gain that quickly escalated into a huge political disturbance, Şubḥ-i-Azal was on his way traveling from Nūr back to the capital. Learning of the events, and of his older brother's involvement in the assassination plot, and then arrest; and although not personally involved, learning also that he had been personally named as one of the plot's instigators by authorities (perhaps he was denounced by the same aforementioned opportunist relative who had meanwhile made his own way to Tehrān); half way to Tehrān, he redirected course towards Rasht, and now dressing as a wandering dervish in order to remain incognito, with an official price on his head, Şubḥ-i-Azal made his way out of Iran and on to Karbalā in Irāq and then to Baghdād where he would only later be joined by his older brother.⁶⁴ The aftermath of the botched assassination attempt on the Shāh was bloody, brutal and decisive. All of the remaining Bābī leadership hiding in the city, or otherwise under custody, were soon killed *en masse*. Among these were Qurrat'ul-'Ayn, Āqā Ḥusayn Yazdī, Mullā 'Abd'ul-Karīm Qazvīnī, famously Hājji Sulaymān Khān Tabrīzī, the author of *Nūqtat'ul-Kāf* Hājji Mīrzā Jānī Kāshānī, Shaykh 'Azīm Turshīzī, and many others besides. The ferociousness of the Qājār state's retaliation against the Bābīs was merciless and

of the Bāb's writings that is rarely encountered elsewhere, and when the implied Shaykhī-Bābī reiteration of the Delphic maxim is taken into account (viz. "whomsoever knows their self, knows their Imām, who is their Lord"), then such 'manifestations' may become inevitable as a matter of course under an order of *theophanocracy*. For a more scholarly, reasoned and detached treatment of an aspect of what we are alluding to here, see Todd Lawson's illuminating "*The Dangers of Reading: Inlibration, Communion and Transference in the Qur'an Commentary of The Bab*," in ed. Moojan Momen *Scripture and Revelation* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997), 171-216.

⁶³See the account in Abbas Amanat's *The Pivot of the Universe: Nasir Al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997), 204-211.

⁶⁴Rūhī, 5. Both 'Izzīya Khānūm and Badī'ih Mir'atī Nūrī provide the same account. We note that all of the Bahā'ī accounts without exception claim that Şubḥ-i-Azal followed his older brother into Irāq, and not the other way around. However, the chronology provided by the Bahā'ī histories can easily be challenged for its inconsistencies, but we will leave this matter here for the time being and return to it at another opportunity. We should also note that all of the Bahā'ī sources have placed exclusive blame as chief instigator of this plot upon Shaykh 'Azīm Turshīzī. They bolster their claim based on Turshīzī's public confession. But most of the balanced sources agree that this was a forced confession (and made under duress) (Amanat explicitly admits as much, 211): a confession made after his arrest and not too long before his execution. All of our Bayānī sources, however, place equal blame on the Bahā'ī founder—who immediately after the failed assassination attempt took refuge in the Russian embassy due to the efforts of a native consular official who also happened to be a close relative—even naming him as the chief facilitator of the whole conspiracy to assassinate the king.

unforgiving, leaving the Bābī leadership inside Iran completely decimated from there on: a leadership who now was forced to relocate its base of operations to Baghdād.

With the establishment of the seat of the Bābī ecclesia in Baghdād in late 1852, the internal political challenges to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's leadership did not end. But first, due to the explicit instructions of the Bāb, Ṣubḥ-i-Azal was to adopt a policy of complete protective isolation, with his older brother and other family members in Baghdād acting as intermediaries between him, the community and the outside world. In this, adopting the policy of *taqīyā*, he was compared to the Hidden Twelfth Imām of Shī'ism during the period of the lesser occultation—i.e. the Imām who sought concealment from his enemies and only acted through the intermediary of his four deputy gates (*abwāb arba'a/wukalā'*)—wherein during most of the Baghdād period (1852-1863) Ṣubḥ-i-Azal was generally characterized by the Bābī ecclesia as being the 'Hidden Azal'.⁶⁵ Due to this it appears that several individuals, including Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's older brother, took advantage of the situation and began advancing various theophanic claims on their own behalf. Although he publicly, at least, denied the charge,⁶⁶ nevertheless Bahā'u'llāh was run out of Baghdād (even though technically Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's official patron and intermediary) and over to remote Sulaymāniya in Irāqī Kurdistan for two years (1854-6) by some of the prominent Bābīs, who had come now to Irāq and who charged Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's older brother with making precisely such claims. Meanwhile, Mīrzā Asad'ullāh *Dayyān*, one of the Bāb's later prominent disciples; learned in Syriac, Arabic and Hebrew and well known as an adept of the occult sciences; who had also been explicitly instructed by the Bāb to act as Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's protector and intermediary, and also appointed a scribe to Ṣubḥ-i-Azal by the Bāb; suddenly began advancing claims to the supreme theophanic authority as the Bābī messiah himself (*man yuzḥiruku'llāh*). This forced Ṣubḥ-i-Azal to pen his forceful refutation *Kitāb-i-Mustayqīz* (the Book of the Awakened Sleeper). According to 'Izzīya Khānūm, additionally to this, Dayyān, upon making his claim, had also unequivocally denounced the Bāb in the most explicitly unseemly terms and destroyed those handwritten works of his in his possession.⁶⁷ Following Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's summons to him to come back from Irāqī Kurdistan, with Dayyān now in Baghdād, upon Bahā'u'llāh's return from Sulaymāniya, matters came to a head. Deputized to interview him personally to ascertain his claims, following the lengthy meeting's conclusion, on his explicit instructions, Dayyān together with a disciple were then immediately murdered by one of the servants of Bahā'u'llāh, one Muḥammad Māzandarānī.⁶⁸ With the most serious contender yet now out of the way the stage was finally set for the Direful Mischief (*fitnih-i-ṣaylam*).⁶⁹

⁶⁵MacEoin, *Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism, 1850-66*, 109, cf. Hājji Mīrzā Ḥaydar 'Alī *Stories from the Delight of Hearts*, trans. and abridged A.Q. Faizi (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1980), 8.

⁶⁶See Juan R.I Cole's translation of Bahā'u'llāh's *Book of the Tigris* (*ṣaḥīfa shattīya*), who in the final part of his translation does not identify who *ṭa'lat-i-ḥayy* (rendered by him as the 'Living Countenance') refers to. It is actually one of the well known epithets of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, http://bahai-library.com/bahauallah_sahifah_shattiyih_cole (accessed 13 April 2013).

⁶⁷'Izzīya Khānūm, 89.

⁶⁸Āqā Khān Kirmānī and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī *Hasbt Bibisht* (Bayani Digital Publications, 2001), 216.

⁶⁹This is the characterization given by the Bayānī texts to the Azalī-Bahā'ī schism. Note Āqā Khān Kirmānī and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī name other contenders as well who also arose after Dayyān, but these were of no significant consequence or posed any serious long-term threats. Many of them would also

Şubḥ-i-Azal now retreating again into seclusion to undertake the compilation, preservation and copying of the works of the Bāb, as well as to compose more of his own writings and to pursue his correspondences with the Bābī ecclesia in Iran and elsewhere; rarely granting audiences other than to the most notable of his loyalists; and with the Dayyān episode now behind them; Bahā'u'llāh found himself in possession of considerable authority and prestige, with the effective machinery of the Bābī leadership now in his exclusive hands. Between 1856 to 1863 when the Nūrī family took flight from Baghdād to Ottoman Turkey, bit by bit, Bahā'u'llāh undermined Şubḥ-i-Azal's authority—quietly, surreptitiously and in total stealth at first—carefully building his power base and material resources; secretly attracting his future cadre of devoted supporters; publicly disavowing any claims attributed to him whenever the rumors circulated; and all the while, once again, acting as Şubḥ-i-Azal's chief intermediary, foremost agent and protector: determining who was and who was not to have access to him, and controlling what was and what was not going to pass his notice. Outwardly in speech and writing during this time Bahā'u'llāh declared complete spiritual servitude and obeisance to Şubḥ-i-Azal, his younger half-brother. Here it is worth quoting from some of his own words of the period, from his Baghdād era Will and Testament, to wit,

Hear the call of the Most Holy Leaf [i.e. Şubḥ-i-Azal] speaking unto thee from behind the Veils, for it is He who is the One whom God [i.e. the Bāb] hath appointed as the Peerless/the Self-Subsistent (*al-qayyūm*)! Verily He is the Pre-Eternal luminary...Whomsoever turns aside from Him hath perished...He is the White Hand in the Siniatic Mount for the Israel of the Bayān...There is no god but He [Azal], the Living, the Powerful, the Peerless/the Self-Subsistent...God hath ordained in the Book that after the Remembrance [*dhikr*, i.e. the Bāb] that all should turn themselves towards the Axis of this Cause [i.e. Şubḥ-i-Azal]...O People of the Bayān, can anyone produce like versical-signs (*āyāt*) as unto those revealed in the Book?...Verily the Remnant of God (*baqīyat'u'llāh*) in these days is the Ascendant Light [i.e. Şubḥ-i-Azal]...Witness in your hearts that appearance of the Ascendant Light, for that the Remnant of God who will appear in the *mustaghāth* [i.e. 2001 years, viz. the Bābī messiah *man yuzḥiruhu'llāh*] is indeed the Real Truth, regarding which there is no doubt! And verily we are all among the expectant...Say, is not the Face of Light [i.e. Azal] sufficient unto ye all, who is seen from behind the Veils of Glory by a command from God, the All-Seeing, the Peerless/Self-Subsistent? O people, have I not summoned ye unto God and His versical-signs and unto the Ascendant Light?...Upon you be the Remembrance [i.e. the Bāb] and on those who prostrate themselves before the Face of God [*wajh'ullāh*, i.e. Şubḥ-i-Azal]...Verily God hath made that Joseph the [Ascendant] Light [i.e. Şubḥ-i-Azal] the Sovereign of the True One in the city of the Bayān! But the people are as dead, concealing themselves within the veils of their own base egos, for verily the leaves of

soon retract their claims, later joining Bahā'u'llāh as his most zealous partisans. In a humorous but poignant aside, Āqā Khān Kirmānī and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī observe, “matters reached such a state that each morning everyone rising from their bed would immediately adorn themselves with this pretension,” 217 (my trans.).

these pages are proof of my servitude to His Face [i.e. Subh-i-Azal], would ye but know it, otherwise destroy them in the river so that those in the realm of contingency might bear witness to the verses of God, their Lord! (my amended trans.)⁷⁰

Initially the theophanic claim first put forward by Bahā'u'llāh in the late Baghdād period of the late 1850s/early 1860s was to *ḥusaynīyat* (i.e. the 'return' of Imām Ḥusayn) and not specifically to the supreme theophanic authority as the Bābī messiah.⁷¹ According to the family sources, as well as several other Bayānī ones; and contrary to the official Bahā'ī position projected retrospectively; he had certainly not made any explicit claims to this supreme authority, publicly at least, in April 1863 just on the eve of his departure from Baghdād in May. This was to come in Edirne on the Black Sea coast in Ottoman Turkey only two-three years later.

Under pressure from the Iranian government to remove them from the near proximity of its borders, in early 1863 the Ottoman government agreed to remove the presence of the Bābī leadership from Baghdād and to resettle them on Ottoman Turkish soil far removed from Iranian territorial borders. The Nūrīs, their households, and those devotees who followed them into the Ottoman exile, were first resettled by the Sublime Porte in Istanbul and shortly thereafter in November 1863 in Edirne on the Black Sea coast. At this earliest juncture of the Ottoman exile Bahā'u'llāh was still officially acting in the capacity of Şubḥ-i-Azal's protector and intermediary. However, given that the number of the prominent Bābī loyalists around Şubḥ-i-Azal in Edirne had substantially decreased; where the numbers of actual supporters and partisans present were now stacked more in Bahā'u'llāh's numerical favor rather than Şubḥ-i-Azal's; from about 1864 to 1867 the nature of the claims put forth by Bahā'u'llāh became bolder and more daring by the day until by early 1867 he had emphatically made the claim to the supreme theophanic authority itself as the Bābī messiah and had his circle of partisans publicly assent to it. Given that the effective machinery and apparatus of the Bābī leadership was already in his hands, this challenge to Şubḥ-i-Azal's authority proved like none before it.

Şubḥ-i-Azal immediately and unequivocally denounced his older brother's claims verbally and in writing once it had been made explicit. As it was further publicized among the Bābī ecclesia in Irāq and Iran, the written refutations to these claims poured in from all directions by the other prominent loyalists of Şubḥ-i-Azal, which only escalated matters into outright communal violence, murder, mayhem and unparalleled treachery on the part of the Bahā'ī zealots. The complete split of the two factions was effective by September 1867. Two notable attempts to have Şubḥ-i-Azal murdered by the Bahā'īs

⁷⁰Amended from the slightly garbled version on Bayanic.com, which is originally Jalal Azal's translation. A scan of the original document in full as well as a typescript of it may be found here, <http://bayanic.com/notes/bahaTest/BahaTestament.html> (retrieved 13 April 2012). Facsimile of the original document also forms an appendix to 'Izzīya Khānūm, 142-44.

⁷¹MacEoin, *Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism, 1850-66*, 119. On the following page MacEoin notes, "...[regarding the Bayānī] belief that the present age is that of the return of Ḥusayn following the appearance of the Bāb...various references to Azal as *al-nūr* (or simply *nūr*), *tal'at al-nūr*, or *wijbat al-nūr* (sic), or to his writings as *āyāt al-nūr*, *ṣaḥā'if al-nūr*, and so on, all...relate back to the identification of *nūr* with Ḥusayn," 120. This general understanding would have surely posed a glaring contradiction to Bahā'u'llāh's early claims of *ḥusaynīyat*, a fact continually underscored and highlighted throughout those Bayānī texts refuting him.

failed on each attempt.⁷² Other loyalists of Şubḥ-i-Azal were not so lucky. E.G. Browne, summarizing *Hasbt Bibisht*, states:

All prominent supporters of Subh-i-Ezel who withstood Mírzá Huseyn ‘Alí’s [i.e. Bahā’u’llāh’s] claim were marked out for death, and in Baghdad Mullá Rajab ‘Alí “*Kabir*” and his brother, Hájí Mírzá Ahmad, Hájí Mírzá Muhammad Rizá, and several others fell one by one by the knife or bullet of the assassin...As to the assassination of the three Ezelís, Áká Ján Bey, Hájí Seyyid Muhammad of Isfahán, and Mírzá Rizá-Kulí of Tafrísh, by some of Behá’s followers at Acre, there can, I fear, be but little doubt...the passage in the *Kitáb-i-Akdas* [i.e. Bahā’u’llāh’s book of laws] alluding (apparently) to Hájí Seyyid Muhammad’s death...proves that Behá’u’llāh regarded this event with some complaisance...⁷³

Attempting to set-up Şubḥ-i-Azal personally and make serious trouble for him and his devotees with the Ottoman authorities directly, the Bahā’i partisans then manufactured a series of inflammatory pamphlets, which they attributed to Şubḥ-i-Azal, even forging his signature, in which there was expressed outright designs on the Ottoman throne and attempts to overthrow it on the part of Şubḥ-i-Azal. These pamphlets were distributed at night by Bahā’i zealots at the homes of officials in Edirne, especially one at the home of its governor. At this point Ottoman officials, who were already apprised of the violent escalation of the schism, acted and so in August 1868 banished Şubḥ-i-Azal, his family, some of his remaining supporters as well as four Bahā’is to the island of Cyprus while banishing Bahā’u’llāh, his family, his supporters and four devotees of Şubḥ-i-Azal to Acre in Palestine. They arranged matters in such a way as an initiative to spy on them thereby enabling themselves to henceforth keep abreast of the activities of each camp, especially

⁷²The first was an attempt at the house of Bahā’u’llāh where Şubḥ-i-Azal had been invited as a lunch guest, i.e. the famous ‘poisoning incident’. Of this incident, a narrative which the Bahā’i histories have retold to their own advantage, Badī’ih Mir’ātī Nūrī writes in her *Vaqā’i-i-Rāstīn-i-Tākūr-i-Nūr* (typescript, n.p., n.d., no pagination): “...[On the day in question] Sultān Khānūm [entitled the Greatest Holy Leaf], who at the time was still a believer in her most august uncle [i.e. Azal], with blinks and glances, [when the food was brought out by the servants] indicated that that he [Azal] should not partake of the meal placed before him. When the Mírzá [i.e. Bahā’u’llāh] insisted that His Holiness eat, His Holiness refused, thereupon the aforementioned saw that His Holiness had become apprised of their evil intentions [i.e. to kill him], and therefore, in order to deflect attention, he [i.e. Bahā’u’llāh] proceeded to eat a few portions from that plate of [poisoned] food himself. Immediately his [i.e. Bahā’u’llāh’s] state was overturned [i.e. he became violently ill]. He then threw the plate of food in the courtyard outside. In that yard there was a dog who immediately began to eat [the discarded food] and thereupon died shortly thereafter. When the Mírzá [i.e. Bahā’u’llāh] beheld this scene, he was embarrassed, and so sought out a physician. After regaining his health, he proceeded to spread rumours that His Holiness [Azal] had attempted to poison him...No one asks, O noble gentlemen, who had the kitchen and its cook [on that day] at their disposal? It was you who had invited His Holiness over to lunch as your guest [in your house]. Did he hide the vial of poison in his shirt sleeve whereby he deposited it in the food [right under your noses without you noticing]?” A version of this account of the incident is also corroborated by *Hasbt Bibisht*, 217-8. The second incident intended to bring harm upon Şubḥ-i-Azal, which according to *Hasbt Bibisht* occurred the following day, was a failed attempt with a razor in the public baths at Edirne by Bahā’u’llāh’s partisan, the barber Muḥammad-‘Alī Isfahānī *Salmānī*, at which point Şubḥ-i-Azal permanently separated himself from his older brother, his brother’s household and partisans.

⁷³*A Travellers Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, Volume 2, Note W, 359 & 370.

of visitors who may come from elsewhere. However, the Bahā'īs managed to kill all four of the Bayānīs sent with them en route with the remaining shortly after arrival in Acre.⁷⁴

At this point the Bābī ecclesia was to be split forever into the two rival Azalī and Bahā'ī camps; with the Bahā'īs utilizing the machinery they had already acquired earlier to great success to expand themselves; this, while projecting their own re-imagined, usually falsified, conflated, rewritten and revised sectarian narratives of history on to the past while generally suppressing the values, beliefs, aspirations and accounts of the earlier movement. The Bāb himself was now relegated by them as a mere herald and forerunner of Bahā'u'llāh with his ideas and stature demoted and sanitized to accord more with the new Bahā'ī doctrines. Şubḥ-i-Azal was *tout court* categorically and unashamedly demonized by them, as he has been ever since. Some of the works of the Bāb and Şubḥ-i-Azal, and especially earlier pre-schism histories that were deemed injurious to Bahā'ī interests, were either searched out and destroyed, suppressed or altogether concealed from their own rank and file faithful and the public at large alike. The Bayānīs were to henceforth go underground, maintain their religious beliefs privately and practice *taqīya*, and redirect their efforts towards the path of political activism and social reform in Iran in the fight against Qājār despotism.

For Şubḥ-i-Azal the next forty-three years of his exile after 1868 were to be spent in relative seclusion in Famagusta, Cyprus, where, surrounded by some of his family, and occasional visits by devoted relatives and believers, he was to find some measure of peace, security and freedom, particularly after the transference of the island from Ottoman to British control in 1878 following the Russo-Turkish war. Here he was to pursue long, fruitful correspondences with the outside world, particularly Europeans, among those being with the French diplomat turned Bābī Alphonse Louis Daniel (A.-L.-M.) Nicolas (d. 1939) and Cambridge Orientalist Edward Granville Browne (d. 1926), who was to personally meet with Şubḥ-i-Azal and his family twice in Famagusta. Many copies of the works of the Bāb as well as his own (either hand-copied by himself, by his son Riḍwān 'Alī, or arranged through other Bābī scribes like Mīrzā Muştafā Kātīb in Iran) were to begin finding their way into European Orientalist manuscript library collections at this period (esp. those at Cambridge University, the British Museum and the few in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris). There was no attempt by Şubḥ-i-Azal or his family, and those devotees with him there, to propagate the Bābī doctrine in Cyprus; but it does appear he was considered as some kind of Muslim holy man by the locals. Momen claims, for instance, that Şubḥ-i-Azal was regularly visited by townspeople and religious dignitaries during these years on the occasion of the annual feast of *Bayram*.⁷⁵

After an illness lasting nine months that progressively worsened, and surviving his older

⁷⁴E.G. Browne makes the following observation as to why he believes the Bahā'ī faction ultimately triumphed—at least materially speaking—over their Bayānī rivals in Edirne: “A community as that which existed at Adrianople [i.e. Edirne], consisting almost entirely of actual exiles and potential martyrs, and in large part of religious enthusiast, revolutionary visionaries, and speculative mystics, whose restless activities, debarred from external action, is pent up within limits too narrow for its free exercise, requires a firm hand to control and direct its energies. Such firmness Subḥ-i-Ezel, a peace-loving, contemplative, gentle soul, wholly devoted to the memory of his beloved Master, caring little for authority, and incapable of self-assertion, seems to have altogether lacked...” cf. *Tārīkh-i-Jadīd or New History of Mīrzā 'Alī Muḥammad the Bāb by Mīrzā Ḥusayn Hamadānī*, introduction, xxi.

⁷⁵*The Cyprus Exiles*, 97.

step-brother and rival by nearly two decades, Şubḥ-i-Azal died at seven o'clock on the morning of Monday April 29, 1912, at approximately eighty/eighty-one years of age.⁷⁶ He was buried in a lot adjoining Famagusta's common Muslim cemetery then only a mile outside of the city. Some years later the Bayānī community built a modest structure as a shrine over it that still stands today.⁷⁷ Şubḥ-i-Azal's first marriage occurred when he was sixteen/seventeen years of age and it was to one Fāṭima Khānūm who bore him his first son named Mīrzā Muḥammad Hādī. This wife and son were left behind following the disturbances in Tākūr, Nūr, when Şubḥ-i-Azal (hearing of the botched assassination on the Shāh) took flight to Baghdād. He later married Maryam Khānūm, also known as Qānitih. She bore him Aqā-i-Nūr. He had other sons, as well as daughters, by other wives, two of whom married the founding fathers of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, Shaykh Aḥmad Rūhī (d. 1896) and Mīrzā Aghā Khān Kirmānī (d. 1896).⁷⁸ Momen's *The Cyprus Exiles* (88-95) lists a total of seventeen wives together with the names of the offspring resulting from these marriages. However, there is reason to remain cautious of that number and the specifics he provides. Contrary to Momen's claimed number, Badī'ih Mir'ātī Nūrī's *Vaqā' i-i-Rāstīn-i-Tākūr-i-Nūr* lists only six wives in all.⁷⁹ It is possible Momen has confused some Bayānī devotees for actual spouses.

The question of succession to Şubḥ-i-Azal has been a thorny one in print with several contradictory theories being propounded simultaneously. We do not claim to resolve it once and for all, but a few words are in order. Şubḥ-i-Azal had initially appointed Hājji Mīrzā Hādī Dawlatābādī⁸⁰ to succeed him as Mirror of the Bayān; but Hādī Dawlatābādī died in October 1908, three and a half years before Şubḥ-i-Azal's own passing. Other documents indicate that Şubḥ-i-Azal also appointed his grandson Hājji Mīrzā Aḥmad Rūb'ullāh Misbāḥ al-Hukamā' (d. 1940/41?) in some capacity of succession.⁸¹ However, following Hādī Dawlatābādī's death, no successive Mirror was officially appointed and so, per the Bāb's Will and Testament, technically leadership of the religion of the Bayān devolved upon its Witnesses (*shāhidīn/shuhadā'*). As an interim arrangement conceived by Şubḥ-i-Azal to take effect upon his death, it appears he then appointed Hādī Dawlatābādī's son Yaḥyā and his own grandson Misbāḥ al-Hukamā' jointly as an *ad hoc* duumvirate of *temporal* leaders to take on such affairs as administering and attending to the needs of the Bayānī community during their lifetime, but not in any infallibly guided capacity or rank as divine mirrors or the like.⁸² Given this, the unanimous consensus of the contemporary Bayānī community today is emphatic in insisting that Mīrzā Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī was not the successor to Şubḥ-i-Azal as Mirror of the Bayān. His function

⁷⁶See E.G. Browne's abridged translation of Riḍwān 'Alī's account regarding his father's passing in *Materials for the Study of the Bābī Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 310-313.

⁷⁷Badī'ih Mir'ātī Nūrī, who asserts the property, which became the final resting place, had already been acquired by the Bayānī community several years earlier prior to Şubḥ-i-Azal's passing and was, in any case, specifically purchased for that end.

⁷⁸Rūhī, 4.

⁷⁹Momen is obviously relying on Malik-Khosravi's *Iqlīm-i-Nūr* (Tehrān: Mu'assasah-i Millī-i-Maṭbū'āt-i-Amrī, 1959), which Badī'ih Mir'ātī Nūrī rightly claims to be a biased source based on scurrilous half-truths, historical whitewash and outright exaggerations without supporting evidence.

⁸⁰For his biography, see *Yād-Dāsbthā-i-Qazvīnī* ed. Iraj Afshār (Tehrān: Intishārāt-i-Ilmī, 1984), 256-60.

⁸¹See *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental MSS. belonging to the late E.G. Browne*, F.25(9), item 2, 64.

⁸²Private communication, 2009.

was entirely something else.

Prayer of the Seven Worlds

In early 2005 the webmaster of Bayanic.com uploaded to that site a scanned facsimile of the MS. of a previously unknown and unlisted work of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's entitled *On the Seven Worlds and the Sevenfold Metaphysical Subtleties (Fī 'Awwālim al-Saba'a wa Mashā'ir al-Saba'a)*⁸³ whose original MS. exemplar remains amongst the aforementioned private Bayānī collections in Iran. After further inquiries made by us with the Bayānī community, the original of the scanned text of the uploaded MS. (whose current pagination in the digital version was made by the webmaster of Bayanic.com) was revealed to be an autograph in the author's own hand and part of the concluding section of an extensive correspondence, consisting of lengthy responses by the author to twenty-four (or twenty-five) questions originally put by a now unknown querent⁸⁴ and all revolving around metaphysical topics rich in esoteric and gnostic themes.

The *Seven Worlds* details the visionary itinerary of a deep esoteric metaphysics enumerating the mesocosmic and metacosmic realms—a geosophy of the *mundus imaginalis* (*'ālam al-mithāl*) in its descending hierarchies—within a general discussion of mystical wayfaring (*sulūk*) as per the featured esoteric landscapes of the Bābī spiritual universe. Each of these seven descending worlds are,⁸⁵ in turn, held to symbolize with **1.** one of the seven letters of the name 'Alī Muḥammad,⁸⁶ that is, the proper name of the Bāb, who is

⁸³Henceforth the *Seven Worlds*, see <http://www.bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=senses&ref=o&err=o&curr=o> (retrieved 13 March 2013). This work and the collection from which it is taken is not listed by E.G. Browne because it does not seem to have been accessible or even known to him, see Browne's lists in "Catalogue and Description of 27 Bābī Manuscripts," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (JRAS), Vol. 24 (1892), 487-493; 660-662; "Personal Reminiscences of the Babi Insurrection at Zanjan in 1850," *JRAS* Vol. 29 (1897), 764-66; and the descriptive list in *Materials for the Study of the Bābī Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 211-220. This point, however, should be underscored: the Browne bibliographical lists of the works of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal are not exhaustive, as he himself admits. At the conclusion of her biography, for example, Rūḥī cites the number one-hundred and twenty as to the number of independent works of varying length authored by Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, but she only offers the names of a handful of titles. That stated, the *Seven Worlds* was originally not intended as an independent treatise in its own right possessing a unique title by its author; but, rather, it was part of a single collection consisting of responses to a larger body of correspondences including other subjects. However, one of our learned Bayānī correspondents in Iran has also explicitly referred to it as *Kitāb-i-Fī 'Awwālim al-Saba'a wa Mashā'ir al-Saba'a* (*The Book concerning the Seven Worlds and the Sevenfold Metaphysical Subtleties*) (private correspondence, 2009). The full text of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's *Seven Worlds* (composed of sixty-eight single MS. pages in its current scanned upload on Bayanic.com) will form the subject of a forthcoming annotated translation by us. The work's proper identification and classification among Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's overall corpus will be addressed in the introduction.

⁸⁴The Bābī or non-Bābī status of this correspondent remains uncertain, but more than likely he or she would have been a Bābī given the prayer and its intent for the Bayānī month of fasting. Unfortunately from the text of the work itself and the preceding items before it, this identity is impossible to determine at this stage.

⁸⁵In their Bābī configuration, these seven worlds (or '*seven divine presences*'), in descending heptadic order, appear as follows: [1] Hāhūt—the realm of the ipseity; [2] Lāhūt—the divine realm; [3] Jabarūt—the Empyrean of Power; [4] Malakūt—the Kingdom, or angelic realm; [5] 'Azamūt—the Mighteous realm; [6] Mulk—the Dominion [7] Nāsūt—the material world.

⁸⁶I.e. ع ل م ي ج د

likewise also known as the *Essence of the Seven Letters* (*dhāt-i-ḥurūf-i-saba‘a*); 2. the seven Arabic letters of the divine fiat ‘*Be and it is*’ (*kun fa-yakūn*);⁸⁷ 3. the seven creative attributive imprints of the divine (*khiṣāl*) mentioned by the Shi‘i Imāms in the Imāmī *akhbār* corpus;⁸⁸ 4. the seven earths; 5. the seven planets of traditional cosmology, and 6. the seven verses of the Qur’ān’s opening chapter, *al-fātiḥa*. The final item following the conclusion of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal’s *Seven Worlds* is the acrostic prayer that forms the subject of the present discussion.⁸⁹ We will have future occasion to discuss the *Seven Worlds* itself in greater detail. Here now we will limit the discussion to the structure and themes of the prayer itself before offering our translation.

Briefly, this prayer, besides its sonorously deep and beautiful quality, is to be seen as a summary of the contents of the *Seven Worlds* treatise. From the internal evidence of its twentieth verse (see below), it also appears to be intended for use during the holy Bayānī month of fasting, namely, the month of *Alā* (the Supreme), that is, the nineteenth and final month of the Bayānī year.⁹⁰ Given that this calendar already found its inspired genesis from its inaugurator the Bāb in the famous *Du‘ā al-Bahā’ / Du‘ā al-Saḥar* (‘*the Prayer of Splendor*’ or ‘*the Dawn Prayer*’)⁹¹ of Imām Mūḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 713), Ṣubḥ-i-Azal structures the meter of the first seven verses of this prayer upon it; that is, with the only exception of adding a slightly rephrased augmentation in wording to it at the end of each line of the verse together with the addition of an extra half-sentence at its end. However, within the acrostic of these opening seven verses that parallels the

⁸⁷I.e. ن و ك ي ف ن ك

⁸⁸These are 1. the divine Will (*mashī‘a*), 2. the divine Volition (*irāda*), 3. the divine Foreordainment (*qadar*), 4. the divine Accomplishment (*qiḍā’*), 5. the divine Authorization (*idhn*) or alternatively the divine Realization (*imḍā’*), 6. the cosmic Book (*kitāb*) and 7. the divine Allotment (*ajal*), see Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfi* 1:149. We have also seen some sources switch the sequence of 6. and 7. placing the cosmic Book (*kitāb*) last after the divine Allotment (*ajal*).

⁸⁹We should mention that the scan of the text of this acrostic prayer came into our possession in May 2007 when the webmaster of Bayanic.com kindly gave to us two CDs containing digital scans of over forty-four independent folders consisting of various Bayānī manuscripts and texts. The folder from which our piece is derived was labeled *mutifariqāt* (*miscellanea*) with the item constituting scans 3-1 and 3-2 respectively, each scanned page representing a folio. Upon examination of the handwriting and subject matter, it was quickly established to belong to the same MS. as the *Seven Worlds* itself and so in the hand of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal. As of this writing we have still not established any date for the composition of the overall work; but based on some internal evidence from within the text of the *Seven Worlds*, we tentatively conjecture that it may belong to the Baghdad period (1852-63) because a few of its themes closely parallel the Arabic original of those contained in Ṣubḥ-i-Azal’s better known *The Ethics of the Spiritually-Minded* (*Akhlāq al-Rūḥāniyyīn*) mentioned above, which was composed during that era. That said, since the intended focus of our prayer is the Bayānī month of fasting, this does allow us now a better gauge at narrowing down a date for the composition of the *Seven Worlds*.

⁹⁰For the 19 day, 19 month Bayānī calendar, see <http://www.bayanic.com/cal/bay.html> (accessed 22 March 2013); see as well Denis MacEoin’s *Rituals in Babism and Baha’ism* (London and New York: I.B Tauris Publishers and the Centre of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, 1994), Appendix V, 107-8. Contrary to the manner in which the Bahā’īs have implemented this calendar, with the Bayānīs this calendar is calculated as a straight 361 day year (19 days x 19 months) without any leap years or intercalary days. This means that the placement of its months within the calculation of any solar year will not make these days and months line-up the same way every year. This does not necessarily make the calendar lunar either like the Islamic one.

⁹¹See our “*A rūḥānī (white magical) application of the Dawn Prayer (du‘ā al-saḥar) of Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir for the Full Moon*,” <http://www.scribd.com/doc/27237496/Dawn-Prayer-Operation> (accessed 13 March 2013).

Dawn Prayer, an entirely different arrangement of divine names and attributes have been provided than those contained in Imām Mūḥammad al-Bāqir's *Du'ā al-Bahā'* / *Du'ā al-Saḥar*.⁹² These are 1. sublimity (*'ulūww*), 2. banner or standard (*liwā'*), 3. right or plenitude (*yamīn*), 4. the Kingdom (*malakūt*), 5. exaltation (*ḥamādīya*), 6. tender grace (*mann*) and 7. durationless eternity (*dayyūm*). As demonstrated in the text below, the first letters of each of these names and attributes spell out the seven lettered name 'Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb's proper name, which, to reiterate, are held as the Essence of the Seven Letters.

Now in keeping with the Bayānī understanding that the principle of the number fourteen represents the outward and inward aspects of a heptad, in the theophanic trajectory of things here, these first seven verses are thus to be taken as representing the manifest (*ẓāhir*) side of the matter with the next seven verses (8-14) as the hidden or interior (*bāṭin*) side of it—but manifest and hidden only in relation to the complexity that is the dynamic or process of the unveiling divine theophanic self-disclosure (*tajallī*). It is for this reason that the next seven lines, which now break off the stylistic parallelism with the Dawn Prayer, correspond the acrostic of the names and attributes with the Seven Heavenly Waters (*buhūr saba'a*) that are held in Islamic theology as occurring under the Divine Throne (*'arsh*). These here are held now to represent the various modes of divine power and grace, attributes descriptive of divine altitude or instantiations of the divine oneness associated with each letter of the heptad making up the name 'Alī Muḥammad.

The prayer continues by invoking the totality of the Seven Heavenly Waters and the Seven Worlds as well as the spirits, archetypal processes and divine attributes attached to these (15). Verses 16-21 supplicate and beseech divine aid and blessings while also pleading for specific divine confirmations (20). Verses 22-23, like similar formulas in Islamic prayer models (where salutations and blessings are offered to the Prophet and his Household), conclude with offering blessings (or salutations) upon the Bāb and his eighteen Letters of the Living (i.e. the manifestations of the Point) who in the Bayānī diction constitute the First Unity (*wāḥid al-awwal*). We will leave our analyses here.

The arrangement of this invocatory prayer by Şubḥ-i-Azal into twenty-three verses was made by us, although it is already implied in its structure. The verse numbers have been placed inside square brackets in bold []. Transliterated words and names have been placed inside round brackets () and *italicized*. We have also provided the actual Arabic letters of the acrostic, which have also been placed inside square brackets []. Alternative translations of words in the text have been indicated by a slash / with the two alternatives occurring on each side. Some alternative readings have been also placed inside square brackets []. Our style of translation—criticized by some as King Jamesian—is, in our belief, quite appropriate for the content here, not to mention the translation itself remains scrupulously faithful to the original meaning. Given this, we have indeed capitalized pronouns referring to the divinity as well as those attributes qualifying it. In English we have also utilized those archaic second person pronouns 'thee,' 'thou' and 'ye'. Clarifications, anomalies or textual issues have been footnoted, but these are very few.

Finally, we should mention that where correct Arabic grammar, usage and syntax is con-

⁹²A prayer that itself is primarily used by the Shī'i faithful during the holy month of Ramaḍān. As such our prayer can be held in as a Bayānī parallel to it.

cerned, like most Bābī texts, in the original (especially in the vowelling) this one may suffer from those same perceived solecisms of style that the rigor of the grammarian may probably criticize. However, as we have said elsewhere, all these criticisms, ever since they were first made in the 1840s, miss a larger point; and that being, communications with the divine in the depths of ecstatic thrall, in the face of the unveilings of Its theophanic self-disclosures (prayer being one of its outcomes), is not bound by the same rules and strictures of correct grammar, syntax and style as other literary artefacts may be. After all the Qur'ān itself has been criticized for its grammatical irregularities as well, and no one who knows literary Arabic can deny the depths of its linguistic power, profundity and the sonorous intensity and originality of its language in the source. In our view, it is precisely from such a space and wellspring, grammatical irregularities included, that these two major figures of the religion of the Bayān, the Bāb and Ṣubḥ-i-Azal, also imbibed their inspiration and composed their works.

Translation

[1] In Thy Name, O my God, and high be Thy state! Glorified art Thou, O my God, verily I beseech Thee by Thy Sublimity (*ulūwwika*) [ع] at its most supreme for the totality of Thy Sublimity is truly high with Thee! Then with the Mother of the Utterance that is Thine, O my God, I verily beseech Thee by the whole of Thy Sublimity! [2] Glorified art Thou, O my God, verily I beseech Thee by the Banner (*liwā'*) [ل] of Thy Peerlessness/Self-Subsistence (*qayyūmiyatika*) by its highest elevation for the complete Standard of Thy Logos-Command (*amr*) is truly Lofty with Thee! Then with the Mother of the Utterance that is Thine, O my God, I verily beseech Thee by the whole of Thy Standard! [3] Glorified art Thou, O my God, verily I beseech Thee by the Right/Plenitude (*yamīn*) [ي] of Thy Tremendousness at its most expansive for the totality of Thy Plenitude is truly vast with Thee! Then with the Mother of the Utterance that is Thine, O my God, I verily beseech Thee by the totality of Thy Plenitude! [4] Glorified art Thou, O my God, verily I beseech Thee by Thy Kingdom (*malakūtika*) [م] at its utmost height for the whole of Thy Kingdom is truly upraised with Thee! Then with the Mother of the Utterance that is Thine, O my God, I verily beseech Thee by the whole of Thy Kingdom! [5] Glorified art Thou, O my God, verily I beseech Thee by Thy Exaltation (*ḥamādīyatika*) [ح] at the acme of its laudation for the whole of Thy Exaltation is truly praised with Thee! Then with the Mother of the Utterance that is Thine, O my God, I verily beseech Thee by the totality of Thy Exaltation! [6] Glorified art Thou, O my God, verily I beseech Thee by Thy Tender Graciousness (*mannika*) [م] at its most primeval for all of Thy Graciousness is truly ancient with Thee! Then with the Mother of the Utterance that is Thine, O my God, I verily beseech Thee by the whole of Thy Graciousness! [7] Glorified art Thou, O my God, verily I beseech Thee by Thy Durationless Eternality (*dayyūmiyatika*) [د] at its utmost ceaselessness for the whole of Thy Durationlessness is truly constant with Thee! Then with the Mother of the Utterance that is Thine, O my God, I verily beseech Thee by the totality of Thy Durationless Eternity!

[8] Glorified art Thou, O my God, verily I beseech Thee by the Heavenly Waters [of the letter] *ʿayn* [ع] (*baḥr al-ʿayn*), the Heavenly Waters of Thy Might (*aẓimatika*) and

the Sublimity of Thy Power (*'ulūww qudratika*) and the world of Thy Lordship (*'ālam rubūbīyatika*) and the supremacy of Thy Tremendousness (*'alā' izatika*)! [9] And by the Heavenly Waters [of the letter] *lām* [ل] (*baḥr al-lām*), the Heavenly Waters of Thy Magnanimity (*laṭāfīyatika*) and the Banner of the sovereignty of Thy Peerlessness/Self-Subsistence (*liwa' sultān qayyūmīyatika*)! [10] And by the Heavenly Waters of [the letter] *yā'* [ي] (*baḥr al-yā'*), [the Heavenly Waters of]⁹³ the Right/Plenitude of Thy Lordship (*yamīn rubūbīyatika*) and the certainty of the Essence of Thy Oneness (*yaqīn dhāt waḥdānīyatika*) and the Fullness/Perfection of the arrangement that is Thine (*tamām al-a'dād ladayka*) and the Consummation of the Logos-Command of Thy Singularity (*itmām amr fardānīyatika*)! [11] And by the Heavenly Waters of [the letter] *mīm* [م] (*baḥr al-mīm*), the Heavenly Waters of Thy Kingdom (*malakūtika*) and Thy Possessive Dominion [of/over]⁹⁴ all-things (*mālikīyatika* [*li-/ 'alā*] *kulli-shay'*) and the manifestations of Thy Loftiness (*maẓābir rafatika*)! [12] And by the Heavenly Waters of [the letter] *ḥā'* [ح] (*baḥr al-ḥā'*) of Thy Penetrating Decree (*ḥukmika al-nāfidh*) within that which is created and the Life forever Abiding (*ḥayyāt al-bāqīya*) in the worlds of Thy Peerlessness/Self-Subsistence (*'awwālim qayyūmīyatika*)! [13] And by the Heavenly Waters of the second [letter] *mīm* [م] (*baḥr al-mīm al-thānī*) and what Ye have placed upon it of a state sublime (*'ulūww al-sha'n*) and the splendour of the Empyrean of Power (*bahā' al-jabarūt*) and the majesty of the Divine Realm (*jalāl al-lābūt*) and the luminescence of the Angelic Kingdom (*dīyā' al-malakūt*) and the supremacy of the Mighteous world (*'alā' al-'aẓamūt*)! [14] And by the Heavenly Waters of [the letter] *dāl* [د] (*baḥr al-dāl*), the perpetuity of the sovereignty of Thy Holiness (*dawwām sultān quddūsīyatika*) and the permanence of the suzerain rule of Thy Glorification (*istidām malīk subbūḥīyatika*) and the durationlessness of Thy Logoic-Selfhood (*dayyūmīya nafsānīyatika*), and that which Ye have placed upon it of the perpetual states from the realm of Thy Divinity (*dawwām shu'ūnāt lābūtīyatika*) and the vestigial signs of the sovereignty of Thy Peerlessness/Self-Subsistence (*'alāmāt sultān qayyūmīyatika*)!

[15] And by these, the Seven Heavenly Waters and the Seven Worlds (*al-abḥur al-saba'a wa al-'awwālim al-saba'a*), and the magnified spirits of holiness (*al-arwāḥ al-mu'aẓama al-muqaddasa*) and the metaphysical subtleties of greatness and mightiness (*mashā'ir al-kibrīyā' wa al-'aẓama*), and the epiphanic setting-placements of grandeur and power (*al-mawāqī' al-'izza wa al-qudra*), and the binding knots of Mercy, Severity and Sovereign Dominion (*al-ma'āqid al-raḥma wa al-hayba wa al-mulkana*), and the manifestations of grandeur (*maẓābir al-'izza*) and what Ye have placed upon it [or 'them'] of sublime Majesty and wealth, and the apogee of Beauty and the dawned Countenance (*'ulūww al-jalāl wa al-tharwa wa sumuww al-jamāl wa al-tal'a*)! [16] [I beseech Thee] that Ye bestow upon me what Ye have placed upon it [or 'them'] of Beautiful Excellence (*jamīl al-faḍl*) and Thy spiritual attraction of Glory (*jadhbika al-majd*) and the Noble Beneficence/Existence (*nabīl al-jūd*), O Possessor of Beneficence/Existence (*yā dhā al-jūd*)! [17] Glorified art Thou, no other god is there besides Thee, for I beseech Thee, O my God, by that which I have entreated Thee therein yonder of Thy Greatest Names (*asmā'ika al-a'ẓam*) and Thy gracious spirits (*arwāḥika al-akram*) and Thy Versical-Signs of Primordial Might (*āyātika al-'aẓīma al-qadīma*)

⁹³This is our addition for the sake of consistency because the MS. seems to drop it.

⁹⁴A preposition (either *li-* or *'alā*) is missing here in the MS. so we have added it in brackets.

and Thy exalted, abounding, overflowing Heavenly Waters (*buhūrika al-masjūra al-munīfa al-mazkhūra*)! [18] [I beseech Thee] that Ye ordain for me what Ye have preordained by Thy Logos-Self from before [temporality] and that Ye bestow upon me from Thy presence the [heavenly] delight of [divine] proximity (*farāḥan qarīban*) and the sovereignty with Thee that is victorious and assured (*sulṭānan nāṣiran wa mu'īnan*)! [19] And [I beseech Thee] that Ye dignify my soul (*ta'za nafsī*) above all things with Thy Self-Sufficiency (*bi-ghanā'ika*) from what Ye have created in the kingdom of the earth (*malakūt al-arḍ*) and what Ye have fashioned in the Celestial Empyreans, the material creation and the cause/command (*jabarūt al-samā' wa nāsūt al-khalq wa al-amr*)! [20] And [I beseech Thee] that Ye empower me (*tuqaddir lī*) within that purifying month of deliverance (*al-shahr al-takhlīs*) that is Thine with what Ye have determined through Thy Logos-Self, and that Ye account me among the company (*zumara*) of those fasting (*al-ṣā'imīn*), those prayerful/worshipful (*al-muṣalīn*), those elevated (*al-rāfi'īn*), those upraised (*al-murtafi'īn*), those sincere (*al-khālīṣīn*), those abstaining (*al-mumtani'īn*), those righteous (*al-mukhlīṣīn*), those striving (*al-mujtahidīn*), those informed (*al-mubalighīn*), those ripened (*al-bālighīn*), those gnostic (*al-'ārifīn*), those knowing (*al-'ālimīn*), those steadfast (*al-rāsikhīn*), those pious (*al-muwqanīn*)! [21] No other god is there besides Thee, bestow upon me, O my God, from Thy Mercy that is most vast with Thee; and for all of Thy sustenance [provided] in Thy Kingdom I give felicitations (*min kullu riziqika abna'uhu fī malakūtika*)! [22] Glorified art Thou, no other god is there besides Thee, and blessings be upon the Point and its manifestations (*ṣālli 'alā al-nuqṭa wa maẓābiruhā*)⁹⁵ just like Ye have [shed blessings] upon him [or 'them'] from the rank of Pre-Eternity and the sublimity of Primordiality (*fī sha'n al-azal wa 'ulūww al-qidam*)! [23] Glorified art Thou, verily I am of those who invoke (*subḥānika innī kuntu min al-dhākirīn*)!

16th of A'lā 16ṣ Bayānī

⁹⁵I.e. the Bāb and his eighteen Letters of the Living.

Facsimile of MS. in the hand of Şubḥ-i-Azal



Figure 2: folio 3-1

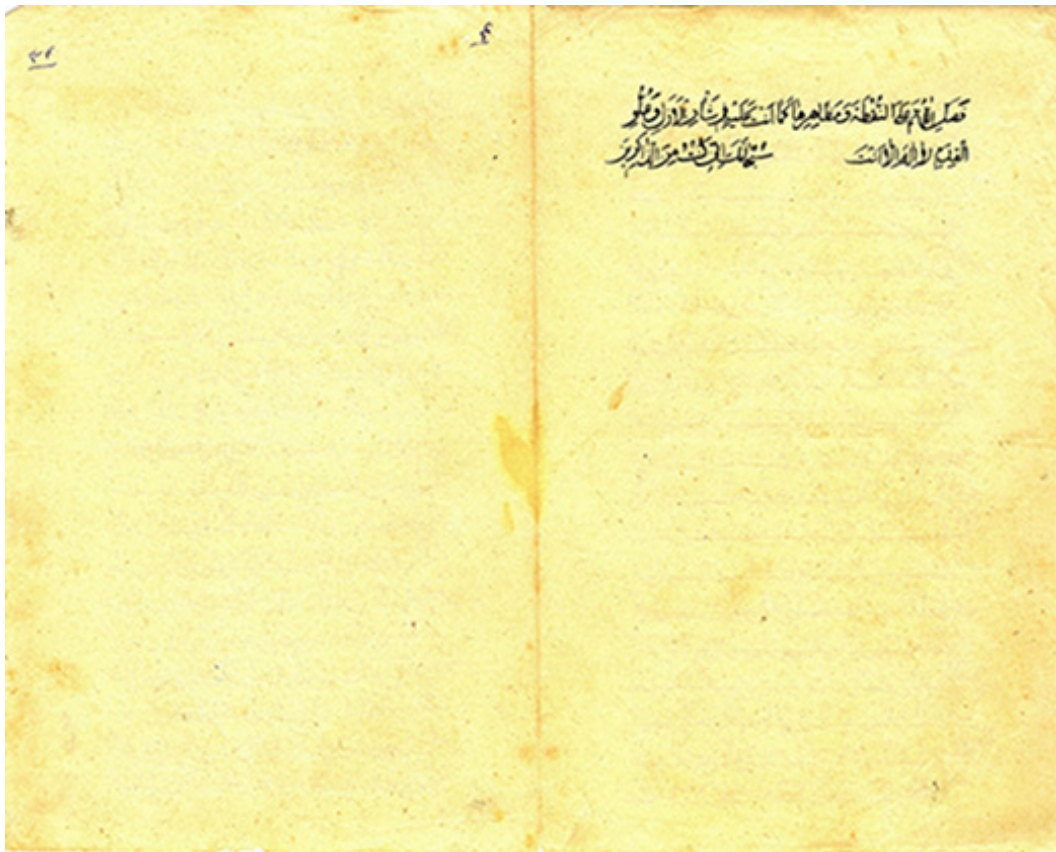


Figure 3: folio 3-2

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