

Home



THE ARABIC BAYĀN

01

The al-Bayān al-`Arabī (The Arabic Bayān)

The al-Bayān al-`Arabī (The Arabic Bayān) or 'The Arabic Exposition' of Sayyid `Alī Muhammad Shirazi, the Bāb (1819-1850 CE) is an innovative, post-Islamic doctrinal-legal work expressive of the mid-late Bābī religion dating to the period of its author's imprisonment in Persian Adhirbayjan (NE Persia) in 1264/1848-9 CE. Like the Persian Bayān it is incomplete consisting of eleven seemingly complete wāḥids ("Unities") though the first wāḥid ("Unity") is not divided up into abwāb ('gates'). Wāḥids ("Unities") two until eleven (II-XI) each have nineteen abwāb ('gates'). It is thus incomplete by eight Wāḥids ("Unity") each of which should have nineteen abwāb ('gates'). The Arabic Bayān is more succinct than the Persian Bayān even though it extends for a further few Wāḥids ("Unities") by including all the early sections as well as from VIII: 11-19 then the complete ninth tenth and eleventh Wāḥids ("Unities") which are not included in the Persian Bayān at all.

The Arabic Bayān of Sayyid `Alī Muhammad Shirazi, the Bāb

Translation by Stephen Lambden UC-Merced 2009-10

Abbreviations & Select Manuscripts consulted

- Arabic Bayān. Ms. up to Wāḥid IX in the form of a Haykal (Pentacle) Azali publication. = Ar. Bayān-Haykal
- Arabic Bayān in INBMC 43 pp. 1-ADD.
- Azalī Tehran lithograph. Semit critical edition of the Arabic Bayan based on 5 mss.
- Add
- al-Bābīyyūn (see above)
- Paris Ms. B[ibliothèque]. N[ationale]. Suppl. Arabe 2511 = Trans. Gobineau, 1865 Livre des Préceptes (see above).
- MacEoin, Sources.
- Browne, E.G. Kitāb-I Nuqtat al-Kaf.
- Nicholas, 1905 Le Beyan Arābe (see above).
- Taherzadeh, SWB (= Selections from the Writings of the Bāb).
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Translation of the Arabic Bayān Stephen Lambden 2009-10

The translation below and spanning successive web pages remains very much a *beta* version in progress. It is being made from various mss. including the Iraqi Baha'i supplied mss. utilized in making the semi-critical text printed in `Abd al-Razzāq al-Ḥasānī (ed.), *al-Bābiyyūn wa'l-Bahā'iyyūn fī ḥadīthihim wa madīhim* (Sidon: Matba`at al-`Irfān, 1962), pp. 81-107. Critical readings aside from this latter text will gradually be registered and assessed including one in the handwriting of the Bab himself. Parts of the translation below were last updated and corrected on 20-09-09



I

The First Unity (al-wāḥid al-awwāl)

يا هو

O He (Yā Hū)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الْأَمْنِ الْأَقْدَسِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الْأَمْنِ الْأَقْدَسِ

In the Name of God, the Most Inaccessible (al-amna`), the Most Holy (al-aqdas).

[Prolegomenon]

اننبي انا الله لا اله الا انا و ان ما دوني خلقي
 قل ان يا خلقي اياي فاعبدون
 قل خلقتك و رزقتك و امنتك و احببتك و بعثتك وجعلتك مظهر نفسي
 لتتلون من عندي آياتي ولتدعون كل من خلقته إلى ديني هذا صراط عز منيع

[1] I, verily, I am God! No God is there except Me. What is other than Me is indeed My creation. [2] Say: `O My creation [creatures]! Render ye service of Me! [3] I have indeed created Thee and I have provided for Thee; [4] I have protected Thee and I have loved Thee; [5] I have raised Thee up and made Thee a manifestation of My Logos-Self (mazhar nafsī). [6] This [to the end] that thou (pl.) might assuredly recite My verses (ayātī) which are indeed of Me. [7] And this to the end that all whom I have created might call out [unto God] through My religion (dīnī) [cf. Q. 10:22] for this is a Path (ṣirāṭ) which is Mighty and Unfathomable [Impenetrable] ('izz wa manī').

وخلقت كل شيء لك وجعلتك من لدنا سلطانا على العالمين . وأذنت لمن يدخل في ديني بتوحيدي وأقرنته بذكرك
 ثم ذكر من قد جعلته حروف الحق بإذني وما قد نزل في البيان من ديني فإن هذا ما يدخل به الرضوان عبادي
 المخلصين

[8] I created all things (kull shay') for Thee and I, on My part, established Thee as a Sovereign (sulṭān^{an}) unto all the worlds. [9] And I gave permission for whomsoever desired to enter My Religion (dīnī) to do so through [assent to] My divine Unity (bi-tawḥīdī). [10] And I associated this [assent] with thy Remembrance (dhikr) and then [with] the Remembrance (dhikr) of such as I made, with My permission, to be `Letters of the True One' [the Living] (ḥurūf[āt] al-ḥaqq [al-ḥayy]). [11] And whatsoever was indeed sent down in the Bayān is [expressive] of My Religion (dīnī). [12] This indeed is that which was expressed therein, a veritable Riqḍān ("Contented Repose", "Paradise") for My sincere servants ('ibādī al-mukhlisīn).

وإن الشمس آية من عندي ليشهدن في كل ظهور مثل طلوعها كل عبادي المؤمنين

[13] The sun (al-shams) is but a sign (āyat) of Me in order that believing servants might thereby bear witness with every [Divine] Manifestation [theophany] (kull zuhūr) to the similitude of its ascent.

قد خلقتك بك ثم كل شيء بقولك أمراً من لدنا إنا كنا قادرين . وجعلتك الأول و الآخر والظاهر والباطن
إنا كنا عالمين

[14] I did indeed create Thee through Thine Own Self then all things [everything else] (kull shay') through Thine Utterance (qawl), a veritable Command (amr^{an}) on Our part [15] for We are indeed Supremely Powerful (qādirīn). [16] I made Thee to be the First and the Last (al-awwāl wa'l-ākhir), the Manifest and the Hidden (wa'l-ẓhir wa'l-bāḥin). [17] And We are indeed All Informed (al-ālamīn).

وما بعث على دين إلا إياك وما نزل من كتاب إلا عليك وما بعث على دين إلا إياك وما نزل من كتاب
إلا عليك ذلك تقدير المهيمن الحبوب

[18] He did not commission anyone for Our religion save Thee, neither did We send down any Book (kitāb) save for Thyself. [19] He did not commission anyone for Our religion save Thee, neither did We send down any Book (kitāb) save for Thyself. [20] Such was set forth by the One Who is the Help in Peril (al-muḥaymīn), the Best Beloved (al-maḥbūb).

وإنما البيان حجتنا على كل شيء بعجز عن آياته كل العالمين ذلك كل آياتنا من قبل ومن بعد مثل أنك
انت حينئذ كل حجتنا ندخل من نشاء في جنات قدس عظيم ذلك ما يبدأ في كل ظهور من الأمر
من لدنا إنا كنا حاكمين

[21] The Bayān (Exposition) is Our Proof (ḥujjat) unto all things (kull shay') for it is an inimitable expression of His verses (ayat) for all the worlds (al-ālmīn). [22] It enshrines all of Our verses, be they of the past or of the future, for thereby Thou, at this moment, are the totality of Our Proof (ḥujjat). [23] We verily, enable to enter Our Mighty, Sacred Paradises (jannāt quds `aẓīm), whomsoever We desire. [24] Such is that which He originated in every religious era [dispensation] (zuhūr) through a [divine] Command (amr), a Command (amr^{an}) which derives from Us. [25] And We are indeed of the Wise ones (al-hakīmīn).

وما نبداً من دين إلا لما يبدع من بعد وعدا علينا إنا كنا على كل قاهرين

[26] We did not generate any religion (dīn) save that We subsequently, on Our part, clearly promised to regenerate it ! [27] And in this respect We stand among the Forceful (qāhirīn).

وإنا قد جعلنا ابواب ذلك الدين عدد كل شيء مثل عدد الحول لكل يوم بابا ليدخلن كل شيء في جنة
الأعلى وليكونن في كل عدد واحد ذكر حرف من حروف الأولى لله رب السموات ورب الأرض رب كل
شيء رب ما يرى وما لا يرى رب العالمين

[28] And We decreed that the gates of this religion (abwāb dhalik al-dīn) accord with the number of "all things" (kull shay) [abjad = 361]. [29] This [number] corresponds to the number of the [days = 19x19 of the] year (al-ḥawl) [19x19 = 361 days in the Bābi year] for every day is as a gate (bāb^{an}) through which every thing (kull shay') may indeed enter the [His] Supreme Paradise (jannat al-a`lā). [30] And there shall be for all according to the number of al-wāḥid (the "Unity", abjad = 19), a letter of the primordial letters before God (ḥarf min ḥurūf al-awwālī li-lāh) , the Lord of the heavens [above] and the Lord of the earth [below], the Lord of all things (kull shay'), the Lord of what can be seen and the Lord of what cannot be seen, the Lord of all the worlds.

وانا قد فرضنا في باب الاول ما قد شهد الله على نفسه على انه لا إله الا هو رب كل شيء وان ما دو
نه خلق له وكل له عابدون وان ذات حروف السبع باب الله لمن في ملكوت السموات و الارض وما
بينهما كل بآيات الله يهتدون

[31] And We determined that there be for the first al-Wāḥid (the "Unity") what God does indeed witness of His Own Logos-Self (nafs) since, He, no God is there except Him, the Lord of all things (kull shay). [32] What is aside from Him He created for Him and all besides Him are his servants. [33] And the Essence of the Seven Letters (dhāt ḥurūf al-sab') [= the 7 Arabic letters of the personal name `Alī Muhammad = the Bāb] is the Gate of God (Bāb Allāh) before whomsoever is in the Kingdom of the heavens and of the earth and whatsoever lies between them. [34] And all should be guided aright by the verses of God (āyāt Allāh) which come forth from Him.

ثم كل باب ذكر اسم حق من لدنا وذكر احد من حروف الحي بما رجعوا على الحيوه الاولى محمد
رسول الله والذين هم شهداء من عند الله ثم ابواب هدى وخلقوا في النشأة الاخرى بما وعد الله في
الفرقان الى ان يظهر عدد الواحد في الواحد الاول فضلا لدنا انا كنا فاضلين

[35] Then every gate (bāb) is for the mention of the Name of the True One [God] (dhikr ism ḥaqq) on Our part and for the mention of anyone of the 'Letters of the Living' (ḥurūf al-ḥayy) for they return unto the primordial life (al-ḥayat al-awwal) though Muhammad, the Messenger of God (rasūl Allāh) along with those who were witnesses before God (shuhadā' min `ind Allāh) [the Imams]. [36] So too the Gates of guidance (abwāb al-hudā) for they were created in the ultimate recreation (nash'a al-ukhrā) [37] since God had promised in the Qur'ān that there would [in the fullness of time] appear [persons to] the number of al-wāḥid ("the unity" = abjad 19) in the first al-wāḥid ("Unity") [of the Bābī era]. [38] This is indeed a Bounty (faḍl^{an}) from before Us for We are indeed among the givers of Bounty (al-fāḍilīn).

ذلك واحد الاول من الواحد المعد يذكر في شهر البهاء قد بدتنا ذلك الحلق به ولنعيدن كلا به وعدا
علينا انا كنا على كل مقتدرين

[39] This is indeed the first wāḥid ("unity"), the wāḥid ("unity") enumerated through mention of the [first] month of Bahā' (radiant "Splendor-Glory", the name of the first month of the Bābī calendar). [40] We indeed originated that [calendar] creation through Him and thereby do We initiate all festivities through Him [41] This is indeed a promise (wa'd^{an}) which originated with Us for We are indeed Powerful beyond all who are possessed of power (muqtadirīn).

ولقد عدت الاعداد بذلك الواحد اذ بعد هذا لن يحصى، وقيل هذا لم يكمل حروف الواحد في الآية الاولى
و هم حضروا بقرب أفندتهم بين ايدينا ولا يرى فيها الا الواحد من دون عدد كذلك يبين الله مقادير كل
شيء في الكتاب لعل الناس في ايام ربهم يشكرون

[42] Thou indeed enumerated the numbers (al-a`dād) through that wāḥid ("unity") since after this there is no [real] computation and before this there is no perfection for the Letters of the Unity (ḥurūf al-wāḥid) though the primordial verse [sign] (fi'l-āyāt al-awwal). [43] And they were indeed present through the proximity of their inmost hearts between Our [two] Hands. [44] And naught is seen therein except the wāḥid ("unity") without enumeration. [45] Wherefore does God expound the destinies (maqādir) of all things (kull shay') in the Book (al-kitāb), perchance the people might contemplate during the Days of their Lord.

Textual and other Notes to Wāḥid (Unity) I.

[1ff] The first Wāḥid (Unity) of the Arabic Bayān is not divided up into abwāb (gates) or subdivisions of any kind and reads as a kind of theological prolegomenon to the extended text. This first first Wāḥid (Unity) is also followed by a brief Persian synopsis reminiscent of the Persian Bayān which commences with an Arabic summary of its contents. None of the other Wāḥids (Unities) of the Arabic Bayān appear to have Persian digests of their contents. The 45 verse versification I have introduced above is my own and is solely for the purpose of commentary. The Bāb himself did not versify the first Wāḥid (Unity) of the Arabic Bayān.

[0] The new Basmala : **بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الْأَمْنَعِ الْقُدْسِ** "In the Name of God, the Most Inaccessible (al-amna`), the Most Holy (al-aqdas)" is the same as the one opening the probably earlier Persian Bayān. Instead of the Qur'anic Divine Attributes al-Rahman and al-Rahim ("the Merciful, the Compassionate") of the standard Islamic basmala the Bab has two superlative Divine Attributes expressive of the transcendent Otherness and Sanctity of the Ultimate Apophatic Deity. As the representative of God in the subordinate Divinity expressed on eschatological the Day of God, the Bab himself did not make God remote. Rather, as he himself argues in the Bayans he brought Him near such that the long awaited liqā' ("Meeting", "Encounter") with God could be realized through Him.

[2] "Say: `O My creation! [or creatures] Render ye service of Me!" **قُلْ اِنْ يٰ خَلْقِيْ اِيّايْ فَاَعْبُدُوْنَ** This Divine address to God's created humanity (**خَلْقِيْ** this could mean either "creation" or "creatures". The subsequent plural form from the word `abd (lit. "servants"), might imply that "creatures" would be the better rendering though "creation" itself implies all creatures anyway. Habib Taherzadeh has "My creatures" (SWB p.138). This Arabic address at the very beginning of the Arabic Bayan is taken by both Gobineau (1865 : Les Religiones, ed.1928, page 396) and Nicholas (Le Bayan Arabe 1905 page 88 fn. 140) to be directed to the Bab in his humanity. The subsequent phrases have the singular address and may well also (?) be addressed to the Bab (he being the "Thee") though this is not sustained into [6]. Certain other writings of the Bab and Baha'-Allah (e.g. the beginning of the Haft Vadi, Seven Valleys) also leave one wondering whether the Divine Manifestation of God is being celebrated and addressed or him indirectly, in his humanity, or whether it is ordinary creatures who are being addressed and communicated with. Perhaps more than one answer is simultaneously possible.

[10] Following al-Bābiyyūn, page 62 line7 I have read here ḥurūfāt al-ḥaqq "Letters of the True One" even though the reading ḥurūfāt al-ḥayy "The Letters of the Living" is that translated in SWB: 158 as spelled out (without mss. support) in Muntakhabat, 112 line 3. The Azali printed ms. in the handwriting of the Bāb definitely supports the ḥurūfāt al-ḥaqq reading. حروف الحق Ḥurūf al-ḥaqq is also the reading in the Arabic Bayān which opens the compilation of the writings of the Bab in INBMC 43 (page 1).

Gobineau in the 1865 translation of the Arabic Bayan as the 'Livre des Préceptes' has ADD HERE in rendering Paris mss. Bib. Nat. Supple Arabe 2511 (see Les Religiones... [ed. 1928] p. 397). Nicholas in his 1905 rendering *Le Beyan Arabe* translates here "les lettres du vivant" which obviously renders hurufat al-hayy ("Letters of the Living"). This second French version, however, is not exactly the assured translation of an established critical text but simply what the mss. text translated most probably had (see Le Beyan Arabe page 89 + fn. 140).

[18-19] In the original Arabic these two verses or lines are identical. The trans in SWB 159 does not reflect this and completely bypasses this repetition. The Arabic text printed in Muntakhabat, 112 lines 6-7, however, supports this reading as does the text printed in al-Bābiyyūn, 62 lines 10-11. Whether or not this is a copyists duplicate or a repetition originated by the Bāb remains to be critically established.

Persian Synopsis by the Bāb of Wāḥid (Unity) I of the Arabic Bayān

جوهر مجرد این واحد آنکه خداوند عزوجل همیشه بوده و هست و در هر زمان خداوند جل و عز کتاب و حجتی از برای خلق مقدر فرموده و میفرماید در سنه ۱۲۷۰ از بعث محمد رسول الله کتاب را بیان و حجة را ذات حروف سبع قرار داده و ابواب دین را عدد نوزده واحد قرار داده و در واحد اول توحید ذات و صفات و افعال و عبادت حکم فرموده

[1] The singular essence of this [first] Wāḥid ("Unity") is that God, exalted and glorified be He, for all Eternity (hamisha) hath ever been and forever will be. [2] In every age (zamān) God, exalted and glorified be He, hath established and will forever establish for all creation [humanity] a Book (kitāb) and a Proof (ḥujjat). [3] And in the year 1270 after the commissioning of Muhammad, the Messenger of God [in c. 612 CE., a decade or so prior to the Hijra in 622 CE], He established the Book (kitāb) – a Bayān ["Exposition"] (cf. the Qayyūm al-asmā', 1260 AH / mid. 1844 CE.) and a (messianic) Proof (ḥujjat) – the Essence of the Seven Letters (dhāt-i ḥurūf-i sab`a) [= the 7 Arabic letters of the personal name `Alī Muhammad = the Bāb; see above Wāḥid ("Unity") I:33]. And He established and numbered the Gates of religion (abwāb-i dīn) as nineteen Wāḥids ("Unities"). In the first Wāḥid ("Unity") He decreed the tawḥīd-i dhāt (Oneness of the Divine Essence) and of the Divine Attributes (ṣifāt) and of the Divine Activity (af`āl) as well as of [the station of] servitude ('ibādāt).

و مدلل بر این باب را من يظهره الله و حروف حی او قرار داده و قبل از ظهور او ذات حروف سبع را قرار داده با حروف اولی که سبقت در توحید گرفته و بعینه این واحد همان واحد قرآن است که در بیان ظاهر خواهد که ظاهر و باطن و اول و آخر بوده و حجت بعد بعینه حجت قبل است که فرقان باشد این

است که ۱۲۷ سال کلمات ترقی نموده با ارواح آنها و در هر ظهوری حکم آخرت بالنسبة بظهور قبل
میکرد

The evidential substance of this gate (bāb) is the establishment of (the messianic centrality of) Man yuzhīru-hu Allāh ('Him Whom God shall make manifest') and of his 'Letters of the Living' (ḥurūf-i ḥayy). Prior to his [future] manifestation [theophany] the 'Essence of the Seven Letters' [= the Bab] is established along with his 'Primal Letters' (huruf-i avvalī). They now take precedence in [the domain of] the Tawḥīd (the Divine Unity) through the instrumentality of this [new] wāḥid ("unity") which corresponds to the [old] wāḥid ("unity") of the Qur'ān. Such is evident in the Bayān as what hath even been the Manifest and the Hidden (zāhir va bāṭin) as well as the First (avval) and the Ultimate [Last] (ākhir). So the subsequent Proof (hujjat) is even as the Proof (hujjat) of times past even as was indicated in the Furqān [= the Qur'an]. Therein it is indicated that for 1270 (lunar) years (up to 1260/1844 CE) there have been expressions of [human] advancement (kalimāt-i taraqqī) along with their spiritual dimensions ["spirits"] (arvāḥ anḥā) such that in every theophany [dispensation] (zuḥūrī) the decree of fulfillment [termination] (hukm-i ākhirat) relative to the previous theophany [dispensation] (bi-zuḥūr-i qabl) was realized.

جنانچه در این ظهور در مقام تکبیر اعظم از اسم حکیم آخر که ذات حروف سبع بوده ظاهر نشده که
بعده هشت و احد مرات الله بر مقعد خود بوده که از شدت نارمحبت کسیرا قدرت بر قرب بهم نرسیده
و آیه شمس وحدة در وحدة قضا کشته

Wherefore was it that with this Theophany (zuḥūr) [manifestation of the Bāb] on the level of the takbīr (= Allāh al-Akbar, "God is the Greatest") there was not evident One with a Name greater than the All-Wise Master of the Eschaton [Latter, Ultimate Era"] (ism-i ḥakīm-i ākhir), namely, He Who is the 'Essence of the Seven Letters' (dhāt-i ḥurūf-i sab`a) [= the Bāb]. Indeed, for [a period of] eight (19 day) months (wāḥids, "unities"= 8 x19 = 156 days), when the Mirror of God (mirāt Allāh) [the Bāb] was [established] upon his own seat [of divine authority] (maq`ad-i khūd), it was impossible for any person to possess the power of obtaining the nearness of Meeting with Him in view of the severity of the Fire of Love (nār-i muḥabbat). Yet was there decreed a sign of the Sun of Oneness (āyah-yi shams-i vaḥdat) [the Bab] in [His very] Aloneness [Oneness, solitude] (vaḥdat).

هر کس آیه شهد الله انه لا اله الا هو العزيز المحبوب له الاسماء الحسنی يسبح له من في السموات
والارض و ما بينهما لا اله الا هو المهيمن القيوم را تلاوت نماید وبعد بگوید اللهم صلي على ذات
حروف السبع هم حروف الحي بالعدة والجلال ايمان باين واحد آورده

Every person should recite the verse of the testimonial to God, [namely]

'He, verily, No God is there except Him, the Mighty, the Beloved One. To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names (lahu al-asmā' al-husnā) [= Q. ADD]. Whomsoever is in the heavens or upon the earth and whatever lieth between them, should magnify Him; No God is there except Him, the Help in Peril, the Self Subsisting (al-muhaymin al-qayyūm) ".

And thereafter they should recite [the words],

"O my God! Blessings and Peace be upon the 'Essence of the Seven Letters' (dhāt-i ḥurūf-i sab`a) and also upon the 'Letters of the Living' (ḥurūf-i ḥayy), who, in Might and Glory (bi'l-`izzat wa'l-jalāl) attained faith in this [first Bab] Wāḥid (Unity)."

Textual and other Notes to Wāḥid (Unity) I Pt. II, the Persian Synopsis of the Bāb.

Following the initial Arabic of Wāḥid (Unity) I (of the Arabic Bayān see above) the Bāb decides to include in synopsis in Persian. This practice echoes his including Arabic summaries preceding all of the sections (gates) constituting many of the Wāḥid (Unities) of the Persian Bayān. The Bāb did not continue to do this after Wāḥid (Unity) I within Wāḥids (Unities) II until IX. None of the subsequent nineteen gates of Arabic Bayān II-IX have any Persian summaries. This may suggest that the Arabic Bayān was written after the Persian Bayān since the Persian Bayān is already in that language and there would seem little need to replicate its longer Persian sections. The Bāb obviously felt a need, however, despite the existence of Arabic summaries prefaced to the sections of the Persian Bayān, to reveal a version of the whole work in Arabic, to communicate an Arabic Bayān (al-Bayān al-ʿArabī) in the established language of revelation addressed to the Islamic and wider world. It appears that the lengthier Persian Bayān came first then the shorter Arabic version. Nicholas evidently at one point thought similarly (Le Beyan Arabe, 1905, p. 42-3).

The Bāb's summary of Wāḥid (Unity) I (of the Arabic Bayān see above) is by no means a literal Persian translation of the Arabic. It is neither identical to the Arabic nor to either of the corresponding sections of the Persian Bayan. The content is at times unique.
