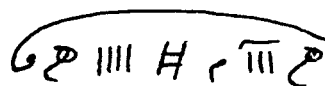
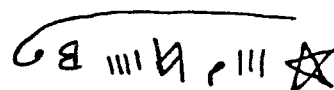
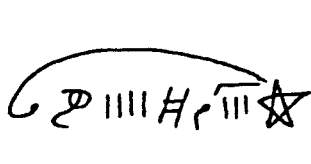
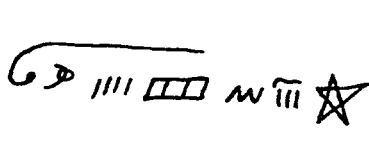


SOME BAHĀ'Ī AND SHAYKHĪ INTERPRETATIONS OF 'THE MYSTERY OF REVERSAL' (I)

In my paper on 'Ritual and Semi-Ritual Practices in the Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions' (Lancaster Bahā'ī Studies Seminar, 1980), I mentioned two cryptic forms of the ism al-a^czam ('greatest name')¹ attributed to the Imam ^cAlī and interpreted by Bahā'īs as indicative of the 'true' greatest name of God, Bahā' (p.44 and note 309). The two forms given by me in my paper were:



At least three other forms of this device, not given there, may also be found:



This cipher is frequently encountered as a representation of the greatest name in works on Islamic magic by both Shī^cī and Sunnī authors. As is commonly the case in such matters, attempts have been made to demonstrate the orthodoxy of the cipher by tracing it back to holy individuals from the early period. Thus, for example, Ahmad al-Būnī, who describes it in detail, cites the authority of Abd Allāh ibn ^cAbbās, a cousin of the Prophet frequently referred to as the source for ahādīth, for the actual form of the cipher. He goes on to give statements about it and its efficacy from Dhū 'l-Nūn al-Misrī, Abū 'l-Dardā', Ibn al-Warrāq, and ^cAlī.² Leaving aside the probably insoluble question of the actual origin of this figure, it seems likely that most of the variants found in different works are based on a poem attributed to ^cAlī and quoted in the above passage by al-Būnī. The poem is as follows:

على رأسها مثل السنان المقوم
الى كل مأمول وليس بسلم
تشير الى الخيرات من غير اعصم
كأنبوب حجام وليس بمعجم
فان كنت لم تعلمه من قبل فاعلم
فتعظف من الآفات ايضاً وتسلم
الى كل خلق من نصيح واعجم

ثلاث عصي صفت بعد فاتم
وميم طميس ابتر ثم سلم
واربعة مثل الامابع صفت
وهاء شقيق ثم وار منكس
فلها هو الاسم العظيم قدره
فيا حامل الاسم العظيم به اتنى
مذلك اسم الله جل جلاله

Three sticks in a row after a seal; above them the semblance of a straightened lance

A blind mim (م) without a tail, then a ladder unto all that is hoped for, but which is not a ladder

Four things like fingers in a row, pointing to good deeds, but without a wrist

And a hā' (ح) that has been split, then an inverted wāw (و) like the syphon of a phlebotomist, but not a blood-letting cup

This is the name whose worth is magnified; if you were ignorant of it before, know it now

O bearer of the great name, take sufficiency in it -- you shall be preserved from misfortunes and shall be kept safe

It is the name of God, may His glory be glorified, unto all men, be they Arab or non-Arab.³

Apart from the three Arabic letters ح و ه, it seems likely that the symbols employed in the cipher are, like the letters in most Islamic 'magic alphabets',⁴ ultimately derived from real or supposed characters from pre-Islamic Arabic scripts such as Liḥyanite, Thamūdīc and Safaitic, or from the Berber tifinagh script. Thus, for example, the ladder (H and sometimes #) is found as the letter d in the Thamudic and Safaitic scripts, the three lines (III) are one form of the letter t in Safaitic, while the w that appears in one version is probably a horizontal alternative for the letter š in the Sabaeen, Liḥyanite and Thamudic alphabets.⁵ This is not, of course, to suggest direct conscious or knowledgeable borrowing of the type which would enable us to 'decipher' the name, but to indicate its probable relationship to other alphabetic systems used in Islamic magic. Many of the symbols used in Bābī talismans and the Bahā'ī ringstone symbol are based on characters from these magical alphabets, in particular the 'spectacle letters' that are one of the basic elements of them. I hope to return to this topic in a later article.

In my paper on ritual practices, I also mentioned in passing what is considered by some to be another form of the greatest name:

ح و ه, ه ه ه ه ه ه ه ه ... X // ه ه ه ه ه ه


Like the symbol just considered, this also appears in variant forms, mainly because it too is based on reported verbal descriptions. The main alternatives are:

ح و ه, ه ه ه ه ه ه ه ه X = ه ه ه ه ه ه
ح و ه, ه ه ه ه ه ه ه ه X // ه ه ه ه ه ه
ح و ه, ه ه ه ه ه ه ه ه X // ه ه ه ه ه ه

These last two forms are mentioned by Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn ^CAlī al-Kaḥḥāmī (d.900/1495) in his commentary on a work entitled Jannat al-amān. The first is described as 'five hā's (ح) and a line above a line, and a

cross, above it four dots, (then) seven hamza's (ء) and a wāw (و) after them, then a hā' and a cross like the migatt (the piece of ivory etc. on which a pen is cut, but here, more probably, a pair of scissors).' The second he says he saw in the copy (? of Jannat al-amān) belonging to Jamāl al-Dīn Ahmad ibn Hajab, who stated it had come from one of the Imāms, who had described it as follows: 'five hā's and a line above a line and a cross around which are four dots, then hamza's which, when you have numbered them they are seven, you have not found in them an error, then a wāw, then a hā' after it, then a sād (س), then a mīm (م) in the middle, then at its end you should follow the description of a letter whose form is that of the migatt.'⁶

In a discussion of this cipher, Karīm Khān Kirmānī states that he knows of no evidence for its having originated with one of the Imams,⁷ and it is clear from al-Kaf^camī's remark that it is intended to be written on the palm of the left hand as a cure for colic and flatulence (?),⁸ that it is nothing more than a medical charm of uncertain antiquity.

In my paper, I also mentioned rather briefly a complex interpretation of the letter waw which is seen with its tail stretched back over the other elements of the first series of devices, thus: , and noted that this interpretation was based on a letter of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsā'ī. The character of my paper did not permit me to enter into any details of this matter, so I now propose to make up for this deficiency by attempting to explain the principal features of the interpretation in question. In subsequent parts of this article, I shall examine other interpretations of the wāw and of al-Ahsā'ī's letter.

It will probably be simplest to begin with a translation of this latter text, which is cited in the 'Lawh-i qinā^c', a letter from Bahā' Allāh to Hāj Mullā Muhammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī, the Shaykhī leader.⁹ It will be as well to warn the reader in advance that this letter is virtually incomprehensible without some kind of commentary and that my translation must, for that reason, be more than usually tentative throughout.

Bahā' Allāh introduces his quotation of al-Ahsā'ī's letter by explaining that, when he was in Iraq, Mīrzā Husayn Qummī brought him a copy of it and stated that the Shaykhīs (? of Karbalā) had requested him to explain its meaning. He refused to do so other than allusively, however, on the grounds that he could find no-one truly seeking divine knowledge. He now challenges Kirmānī either to provide an interpretation or to seek one from him. The letter, he states, was written in answer to a question regarding the words 'the Qā'im (exists) in the loins'.¹⁰ He begins his quotation at the point where al-Ahsā'ī commences his explanation:

'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. I reply that it has

been transmitted that, after the expiry of alif lām mīm sād (ALMS اليمس) by alif lām mīm rā' (ALMR الير) the Mahdī shall arise, upon him be peace. And the alif (ا) has come upon the end of the sād (س) and the sād is with you, wider than the two thighs, and how can it be one of the two? And also, the wāw is (composed of) three letters, six and an alif and six.¹¹ Six days have elapsed and the alif is the completion, no more need be said, and the (other) six refers to the other days. Otherwise, why was the going back produced, for it is the mystery of inversion for the cipher of the chief (sirr al-tankīs li-ramz al-ra'īs)? And if there should be acknowledgment on the part of someone else to the remaining six, the matter will end in the Proof and the greatest name will appear in the two alifs standing upright in the word which is two letters from God, for they are both eleven and with them (i.e. the two alifs) they are thirteen. And there has appeared the wāw which is hā', and where is the division? But the unit between the six and the six is decreed for the expiration of the mīm sād by the mīm rā' and the secret of the six and the sixty has appeared in a sixth of it, which is a quarter of it, and all of the sixth which is the quarter with the alif both inserted in it. And its mystery is the descent of the alif from the wide point with the six and the six, and the second descended in the blessed night with the eleven, which (? the night) is that which is the mystery and the first concealed name manifest in the mystery of Thursday; and the mystery shall be completed on Friday. And the pure water shall flow forth upon the day when the sky shall come with manifest smoke. All of this is in the wāw inverted from the mumbled hā', so where is the union before the confirmer of the disjunction? There is no other in the single nor between it, otherwise it would be other than single. And we make such parables for the people, but only the knowledgeable shall comprehend them.'

This passage, together with a number of others from Shaykhī literature, has been understood by later Bahā'ī writers to encode a prophecy relating to the date of the appearance of the Qā'im and has been interpreted accordingly. It will probably be easiest if we turn straight away to these interpretations.

According to Āqā Kīrzā Haydar ^cAlī Isfahānī,¹² the words 'And the alif has come upon the end of the sād, and the sād is with you, wider than the two thighs, and how shall it be one of the two?' may be interpreted as follows: in the abjad system (hisāb-i jummal), the letter sād (س) belongs to the tens (it equals 90) and alif (ا) to the units (it equals 1). When the alif comes to the end of the sād (i.e. 99), the hundreds are reached (100). When the letters lām mīm and sād are calculated, they add up to 160, and when we add the previous 100 to this, we get 260. 'The two thighs' are a reference to the units and tens, since a standing man takes the shape of the number 11 (which

contains both tens and units). So al-Aḥsā'ī is saying that the sād must be made to go beyond the units and tens and must be given the rank of the hundreds (i.e. it becomes 900). Since he said at the beginning 'the alif has come upon the end of the sād' (now 999), this raises the whole thing to one thousand. And when 260 is added to one thousand, it becomes 1260, 'the year of the appearance of the promised one' (i.e. 1260 A.H./1844 A.D.). Al-Aḥsā'ī says 'how can it be one of the two?', meaning how can the sād be accounted as belonging to the units or the tens, 'because if it does not reach the stage of the hundreds, the purpose in constructing the year of the manifestation would not be attained'.¹³

The following sentence, beginning 'and also the wāw is (composed of) three letters....' is interpreted on the basis of various Bahā'ī scriptural texts as follows: the wāw as pronounced has three letters, a wāw (و) = 6 (which refers to the 'six manifestations' before the Bāb -- according to the Twelver Shī'ā, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad); an alif (ا) (which refers to the appearance of the Bāb, the Qā'im of the House of Muḥammad); and a wāw = 6 (which refers to the universal manifestation of Bahā' Allāh, which appeared after the alif). The 'mystery of inversion' refers to the appearance of the second wāw after the first wāw; that is, after the first six manifestations the alif 'rising up at the command of God' will arise, and after it the universal manifestation of God will appear in the form of wāw with the numerical value of six, which indicates that the manifestation of Bahā' Allāh will be the equivalent of all past manifestations.¹⁴

In a letter to an individual called 'Asad' (Asad Allāh), Bahā' Allāh relates the idea of the first wāw being completed by the alif to the Quranic verse 'We created the heavens and the earth in six days' (50:38; cf. 7:54; 10:3; 11:7; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4), stating that the (first) heaven and earth had been folded up like a scroll, that is the heavens raised in the Qur'ān, together with their suns, moons, and stars (which are the ulamā', mystics, laws, and religious systems (sharāyi') have all ended with the alif between the two wāws.¹⁵

The 'mystery of inversion (sirr al-tankīs)' itself is related in several Bahā'ī texts to the Islamic tradition (obviously an echo of Matthew 19:30; 20:16; Mark 10:31; or Luke 13:30) 'He shall make the highest of them the lowest and the lowest of them the highest', the understood meaning being that, in the new creation, the true worth of men will be the inverse of their outward rank.¹⁶ A further meaning is given by ^CAbd al-Bahā' in a letter to Mu'āwin al-Tujjār Narāqī, that all the revolutionary events of the past would be reproduced exactly in the subsequent revelation.¹⁷ The word 'chief' (al-ra'īs) in the following phrase is interpreted by ^CAbd al-Bahā' as a direct reference to Bahā' Allāh. In the exordium to a tafsīr written by him on the Quranic verse 'He knows the unseen and reveals not His unseen to anyone'

(72:26), he refers to the letters of the title Bahā' and continues: 'he desired to free them from vain fancy and to draw them nigh unto the known; he sent down to them the explanation and gave them tidings of the "remaining six" and their appearance in the realm of creation and explained to them the mystery of the inversion and the appearance of the chief; and when he appeared, all created things were thrown into confusion....'.¹⁸

The basic Bahā'ī interpretation of the first part of this text owes something to statements made by al-Ahsā'ī himself and by Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī. It is evident, however, that this has at times involved blatant distortion of the original intention of these writers. A modern Bahā'ī writer, Vahid Rafati, provides a particularly clear example of tendentious interpretation of such statements. In his study entitled 'The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam', he writes:

According to the Shaykhī theory, a prophetic cycle began with Adam and continued to the Prophet Muḥammad. During this Adamic cycle, six major prophets appeared: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. While most Muslims believe that Muḥammad was the last Prophet, Shaykh Aḥmad maintains that he was the last Prophet only within this cycle. The Shaykh expresses his idea by making use of the cabalistic system: he explains that the letter wāw (و), when pronounced, consists of a consonant " و ," and " ا " (alif) and another " و ." The first " و ," which has a numerical value of six according to the abjad system, stands for the six prophets in the Adamic cycle. The " ا " (alif), which stands between the two wāws, represents the Qā'im (literally, the word Qā'im means "standing"), and the second " و " represents the prophet who will follow the Qā'im and will be a new manifestation of God, identified as the Second Christ or the Return of Ḥusayn. The Qā'im, thus, stands between the six previous prophets and the one who will succeed him, like the " ا " (alif) which stands between the two wāws.¹⁹

Rafati's reference is to a section of al-Ahsā'ī's Al-risāla al-Rashtīyya, a letter written in 1226/1811 in reply to questions from Fullā ^CAlī ibn Mīrzā Jān Rashtī. In this section, al-Ahsā'ī deals with the topic of the wāw in the greatest name in the course of answering a question on the nature of the Imām's existence in the realm of Hūrqalyā.²⁰ It will be instructive to compare Rafati's presentation of the 'Shaykhī theory' above with what al-Ahsā'ī actually writes. In order to keep the general context clear, I propose to translate the relevant passage along with the rest of the question and answer sequence in which it occurs; the section of principal interest to us is underlined:

He (the questioner) has said: (another) question is this: it is mentioned in your noble reply to what (illegible) that our Lord the Proof (i.e. the twelfth Imām), on him be peace, is in Hūrqalyā, but his appearance (zuhūr) and return (raj'ā) will be in the world of archetypes (Ālam al-mithāl). I do not understand the meaning of his being in Hūrqalyā. Is it what is to be understood from some traditions, that, when Ṣāliḥ ibn Sa'īd had alighted at the Sa'ālik caravanserai and was grieved at his having to stay there, our Lord 'Abu 'l-Ḥasan the second (i.e. the ninth Imām, ^CAlī ibn Muḥammad Naqī al-Hādī, d.254/868) showed him elegant gardens and flowing streams and bowers in which there were scented flowers and boys like hidden pearls, until Ṣāliḥ's gaze became baffled? And he said, on him be peace, 'wherever

we may be, these belong to us, O Ibn Sa^cīd'. These things are not limited to some of them (? the Imāms) or to one time but not another or in any other way, so explain (the matter to us), because it is a place where one may imagine the descent of a discharge from the elemental temple and a discharge into the archetypal matrix, and that is all. Thus, (the concept of) the creation of the Shī^ca and the generation of one thousand from one of them contradict (the notion of) the return taking place in the world of archetypes.

I reply that Hūrḡalyā is in the eighth clime and the meaning of the term is another realm, in which there are two cities, one in the West -- Jābarsā -- and one in the East -- Jābulqā. About (each of) them is a wall of iron and within each wall one thousand thousand doors. They speak seventy thousand thousand languages, each people possessing a language different to that of any other ... (next few words incomprehensible). Every day there go forth from each city seventy thousand who shall not return until the day of resurrection and there enter into each seventy thousand who shall not go out until the day of resurrection. Those who go forth and those who enter meet one another between heaven and earth and those who have come forth from Jābulqā go westwards, while those who have come forth from Jābarsā go eastwards. Anyone who rises up about midnight shall not hear (even) a faint noise, but shall hear from them a murmuring like the murmuring of a bee. The Proof, on him be peace, is in his occultation beneath Hūrḡalyā in that world in a village called Kar^ca (كرمة) in the Wādī Shamrūkh, and it is related that it (? the Wādī) is in Thebes (طيبة). And there are with him thirty abdāl. And each of these villages is in that world and he, on him be peace, is manifest to their inhabitants. But when he desires to enter these seven (other) climes, he puts on a form from among the forms of the people of these climes, and none shall recognize him and no eye shall behold him with recognition until all eyes behold him.

As for the matter of his appearance (zuhūr), may God hasten his glad advent, and the explanation of its time and place, know that in this world he feared his enemies, and when he fled from this (realm) called the world (al-dunyā -- 'the nearer'), he transferred his residence to the (realm of) the primal (al-ūlā). The creation travels towards him, but he, on him be peace, is swift in his progress and has traversed the distance in an instant, whereas mankind's progress towards the primal is controlled by the divine decree (al-taqdīr) at the speed of a ship with its passenger on this stagnant river called Time (al-zamān). The two ends of Time, its beginning and its end, are both subtle (latīf) according to the subtlety of the bodies that stand in them and the subtlety of those places. But the middle of Time is dense like the density of its bodies and its places. So, when they reach him, he shall arise in the cause and the religion shall appear in its totality.

The days are (to the number of) three. He has said, exalted be He, 'remind them of the days of God' (Qur'an 14:5). The first day is the World (al-dunyā), and the second day is the Primal (al-ūlā), which is the day of his rising up (qiyām) and his return (raj^ca) with his fathers, on them be peace, and their followers (shī^ca), and the third day is the day of the great resurrection (al-qiyāma al-kubrā). In the Ziyāra al-jāmi^ca (are the words) 'the Proofs of God unto the people of the World (al-dunyā) and the Hereafter (al-ākhirā -- the utmost) and the Primal (al-ūlā)'. And that Time is subtler and its people are subtler and its places are subtler to the extent that, at its end, the subtlety of his Time shall be seventy times greater than that of this Time. And this is the meaning of my statements that he is in Hūrḡalyā and that he is in the eighth clime.

Concerning your words 'in the world of the archetypes', know that the world of archetypes (consists of) the forms of things (ṣuwar al-ashyā') and the form which is in the occasions (? al-marrāt) belongs to the world of archetypes, and when you remove these forms which you behold in the bodies from the bodies, they belong to the world of archetypes. But the Imām, on him be peace, shall not return as a form but he and all those who

shall return with him and with his fathers shall return in the same bodies in which they appeared in the World, except that in their bodies there shall be a purification from the excess of the bodies of the Imāms on account of the strength of the departure of their souls (nufūs) from the most exalted spot. And the man shall inform his people about what they shall eat and what they shall store up in their houses. And the earth shall be folded up as he walks over it, as al-Hādī, on him be peace, showed Ṣāliḥ ibn Sa'īd; nor did the latter see him in a form or as a fancy, but in reality. And the outward meaning of this is that he withdrew (the veil) from his sight and he beheld that garden in itself, not in its form. But as for its real meaning, he, on him be peace, took Ṣāliḥ to the garden and caused him to enter it, after which he brought him out of it.

And when the World (al-dunyā) ends, its last minute shall be the first minute of the Primal (al-ūlā). °Alī, on him be peace, referred to this in his khuṭba²¹ when he said 'I am he that stands between the two gulfs (al-tuṭunjayn)'²² and in the blessed name transmitted from him, which is this: عز في هـ. The inverted wāw is the Qā'im, on him be peace, and his being inverted is a reference to his return, while his being a wāw is a reference to the fact that its form is thus: واو. They have (? he has) said that the first (wāw) is a reference to the six days in which al-dunyā was created, while the second wāw is a reference to the days in which al-ūlā was created, and the alif between them is a reference to the fact that he is the Qā'im (the one rising up) between al-dunyā and al-ūlā, which are the two rivers (gulfs).²³ The Qā'im, on him be peace, shall return in al-ūlā, not in the archetypes, and, as regards his departure (from Hurqalyā?), he shall be in his elemental body (haykal) in the realm of elements (al-unṣuriyya), and in his archetypes in the realm of archetypes (al-mithāliyya), and in his eternal body (jasad) in the eternal bodies, and in his true body (jism) in the true bodies, and in his soul in the souls, and in his spirit in the spirits (i.e. he will take on the nature of each of these realms).²⁴ The birth of the shī'ca and their marriage and life are in the true bodies and the independent souls, the truth and independence of which reside in their relationship to the truth of these true bodies like the relationship of the true bodies to the accidents (al-a^crād) and the essences to the accidents. The truth of al-dunyā with regard to al-ūlā is like that of the shadow with regard to the one who casts it. And God guides to the straight path.²⁵

Rafati's presentation of the argument in this passage is obviously dishonest and academically indefensible, but it is nevertheless clear that some sort of relationship exists between al-Aḥsā'ī's original theory and later Bahā'ī use of it, even if this relationship is at best tenuous. It is clearly outside the scope of an article like this to even attempt to enter into the many ramifications of this passage, since this would entail a lengthy discussion of basic concepts such as 'Hurqalyā'. It will probably be worthwhile, however, to examine the main point at issue, namely the idea that the wāw refers to three days: al-dunyā, al-ūlā, and al-qiyāma al-kubrā.

One of the main problems in commenting on this concept is the absence, as far as I am aware, of any later treatment of it in Shaykhī literature. Al-Aḥsā'ī himself does not appear to have elaborated on the idea, but he does discuss the meaning of the principal terms in his commentary on the passage from the Ziyāra al-jāmi^c to which he refers above: 'they are the proofs of God to the people of the World and the Hereafter and the Primal' (جمع الله أهل الدنيا والآخرة والاول)

It is evident from this discussion that he was aware of inconsistencies in the use of these and related terms, although there is sufficient closeness to the schema proposed in Al-risāla al-Rashtiyya to allow us to apprehend the main trend of his thinking. He begins with a presentation of the fundamental meaning of the phrases 'people of (this) world (al-dunyā) and the last (al-akhira)', in which the concept of this 'material world' is contrasted with the 'hereafter'.²⁶ The definition of al-ūlā, however, is more problematic: 'the meaning of the first (al-ūlā) is the return (raj^ca) of the Family of Muhammad (i.e. the Imāms), or the rise of their Qā'im, or (the rise of) most of them. It is called al-ūlā (the first, the primal) in relationship to al-akhira (the last).'²⁷

Having given these basic definitions, he immediately turns to consider how 'these three days are called al-dunyā and al-ūlā and al-ukhrā (f. of al-ākhar, the other; also used to mean 'the hereafter')'.²⁸ In order to demonstrate that these are three distinct periods, he cites two traditions commenting on the Quranic verse 'and remind them of the days of God' (14:5). The first is from (Hāshim ibn Ahmad) Muthannā 'l-Hannāt: 'I heard Abū Ja^cfar (i.e. Muhammad al-Bāqir, the fifth Imām) say: "the days of God (consist of) the day on which the Qā'im shall arise, and the day of the return (al-kurra), and the day of resurrection'.²⁹ The second is in the tafsīr of ^cAlī ibn Ibrāhīm: 'the days of God are three: the day of the Qā'im, and the day of death (al-mawt), and the day of resurrection (al-qiya^ma).'³⁰

Al-Ahsā'ī notes that, in these traditions, the rise of the Qā'im or the return (al-raj^ca) are treated as a day distinct from the day of resurrection (yawm al-qiya^ma), which latter is referred to as al-ākhirā, and distinct also from al-dunyā. This day (of the rise of the Qā'im or al-raj^ca) cannot properly be termed al-dunyā because this latter is expressed as 'nearer' than the return (of the Imāms) or the rise of the Qā'im. Nor can it properly be termed al-ākhirā, because the qiya^ma is after it and the qiya^ma is al-ākhirā. In the traditions, there are references to al-dunyā or to al-raj^ca and the rise of the Qā'im, or to al-ākhirā. In the interpretation of the words 'the days are three', only the rise of the Qā'im, al-raj^ca, and al-ākhirā were mentioned, but not al-dunyā. The reason for this is that the Imām was threatening the punishment that would befall men; this punishment can only occur in the first three days mentioned, because al-dunyā is the place where warning (of the punishment) takes place (i.e. not the punishment itself).

He himself, however, has stated that 'the days are three: al-dunyā, the rise of the Qā'im or al-raj^ca or the return of most of them (the Imāms), and al-ākhirā. This is because the rise of the Qā'im and al-raj^ca are one in nature (in respect of justice, the establishment of the truth, the removal of iniquity, and the destruction of the barrier of taqiyya). They only differ with respect

to the return of the Imām of the Age (i.e. the rise of the Qā'im), inasmuch as 'return' refers to (new) life after death, whereas the Qā'im is still alive (i.e. he does not need to return from the dead since he is not dead but only in occultation).³¹

It is, obviously, pointless to try to develop an entirely consistent schema out of the above, any more than from the numerous traditions relating to al-raj^ca, qiyām al-qā'im, al-qiyāma al-sughrā, and al-qiyāma al-kubrā. At its most basic, it would seem that al-Aḥsā'ī thought in terms of three days or ages, the first the present state of things (al-dunyā), the second the day of the appearance of the Qā'im and the return of the Imāms (al-ūlā), and the third the last, general resurrection (al-qiyāma; al-ākhirā). To this extent, there is some justification in the Bahā'ī interpretation of the inverted wāw referred to in his letter as a reference to three ages. But it is also, I think, apparent from the foregoing and from a wider reading of al-Aḥsā'ī's writings on related subjects (as, for example, his discussion of the meaning of the creation in six days)³² that he did not conceive of a rather crude, linear movement of three successive ages, but a much more sophisticated system in which concepts of time, space, movement and so forth are elaborately inter-related. There is, in general, a tendency in Bahā'ī writing to oversimplify the often highly complex theories of al-Aḥsā'ī, most notably in references to his rejection of 'physical resurrection' in favour of 'spiritual resurrection' or a 'physical mi^crāj' in favour of a 'spiritual mi^crāj'.³³ A discussion of these more complex elements in the Shaykh's thought would, however, take us far beyond the scope proposed for this article.

It is also, I think, unclear how far al-Aḥsā'ī's scheme of three ages is to be related to the perception of immediate or imminent events. Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī also refers to this concept of 'three days' in his Sharḥ al-khutba al-tutunjiyya,³⁴ but he does not seem to have connected this to contemporary developments. These latter he interprets instead in terms of a scheme of two cycles (dawratān) of Islam, one an age of outward observance, the other an age of inward truth. This second age he believed to have begun at the commencement of the thirteenth Islamic century and to be connected with the appearance of al-Aḥsā'ī.³⁵ Many early Bābīs also adopted this latter schema or variants of it.³⁶ The matter is clearly one that deserves more detailed treatment in a future article.

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NOTES

1. On the concept of the 'greatest name of God' in Islam, see the excellent article by Georges C. Anawati, 'Le nom suprême de Dieu' in Atti del Terzo Congresso Di Studi Arabi e Islamici (Istituto Universitario Orientale Napoli, 1967) pp.7-58. (My thanks to Stephen Lamden for having drawn this useful study to my attention.)
2. Shams al-ma^cārif al-kubrā wa latā'if al-^cawārif, quoted ibid pp.23-24, 25-28.
3. Ibid quoted ibid pp.24, 27.
4. For a comprehensive list of these, see Ibn Wahshiya Kitāb shawq al-mustahēm fī ma^crifa rumūz al-aqlām in J. Hammer Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic Characters explained (London, 1806) and in S. Matton La Magie Arabe Traditionelle (Paris, 1977) pp.129 ff.
5. See table reproduced in Ḥabīb Allāh Fadā'ilī Atlas-i khatt (Isfahan, 1391/1971) p.106.
6. Quoted by Ḥāj Muhammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī, letter to Ḥāj Mullā Kaḥdī Khurāsānī, in Majmū'at al-rasā'il 67 (Kerman, n.d.) p.236.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Printed in Majmū'a-yi alwāḥ-i mubāraka (Cairo, 1333/1920) pp.85-86. On the 'Lawḥ-i qinā^c', see Mīrzā Asad Allāh Fāḍil-i Māzandarānī Asrār al-āthār 5 vols. (Tehran, 1968-74) vol.4 p.519.
10. It was, in fact, written in 1197/1783 in response to a request from Shaykh Mūsā ibn Muhammad al-Sayigh. The latter had met an unidentified man 'from the people of opposition,' who laid claim to knowledge of reality and the system of codification (al-ramz) and had disputed with him about the phrase 'the Qā'im (al-sāhib, i.e. sāhib al-zamān, Lord of the Age), on him be peace, is in the loins', the second man disagreeing with this. Shaykh Mūsā now asked al-Aḥsā'ī to write a letter containing a codified statement. If the other man failed to understand it, he would be proved false, but if he did, al-Aḥsā'ī would be humiliated. (See full text in Ḥāj Muhammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī 'Risāla fī jawāb al-Shaykh Ḥusayn ibn al-Shaykh Muhammad al-Kazīdī' in Majmū'at al-rasā'il 61 (Kerman, n.d.) pp.51-53.
11. I.e., when the letter و is written out as a word it becomes وَاو; the abjad value of و is 6, thus six followed by alif followed by six.
12. On whom see ^cAzīz Allāh Sulaymānī Masābīh-i hidāyat vol.1 (Tehran, ?) section 1.
13. Letter cited ^cAbd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq Khāvarī Rahīq-i makhtūm 2 vols. (Tehran, 130-131 B/1973-75) vol.1 pp.679-80. Ḥāj Muhammad Khān Kirmānī has written an explanation of a passage in a 'Risāla-yi sayr wa sulūk' by Sayyid Kazīm Rashtī in which the latter describes 'the progression of the units towards the tens and likewise towards the hundreds and thousands and the form of the progression of the tens towards the units' (Abu 'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī Fihrist-i kutub-i Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsā'ī wa sāyir-i mashāyikh-i 'izām 3rd. ed. (Kerman, 1977) pp. 557-58). Unfortunately, I have not so far been able to obtain a copy of either Kirmānī's work (a risāla in reply to questions from Mullā ^cAlī Uskū'ī) or that of Rashtī.
14. Interpretation given by Ishrāq Khāvarī in Rahīq vol.1 pp.680-681; cf. letter from Shoghi Effendi to idem in idem (ed.) Kā'ida-yi āsmānī 10 vols. (Tehran, 128-29 B/1971-73) vol.3 pp.4-5; letter of Bahā' Allāh to 'Asad' in ibid vol.1

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pp.15-17 and Rahīq vol.1 pp.686-88; idem letter in Mā'ida vol.1 pp.12-13, Rahīq vol.1 pp.684-85.

15. Mā'ida vol.1 p.16, Rahīq vol.1 p.687; cf. letter to Fullā Ahmad Ḥiṣārī in Mā'ida vol.1 pp.14-15, Rahīq vol.1 pp.685-86.
16. See Bahā' Allāh, letter in Mā'ida vol.1 pp.12-13, Rahīq vol.1 pp.684-5; idem letter to Fullā Ahmad Ḥiṣārī in Mā'ida vol.1 pp.14-15, Rahīq vol.1 pp.685-86; idem, letter to 'Asad' in Mā'ida vol.1 p.16, Rahīq vol.1 pp.687-88; idem, letter in Mā'ida vol.1 p.14, Rahīq vol.1 p.690; 'Abd al-Bahā', letter to Nu'awin al-Tujjār Marqī in Mā'ida vol.2 pp.19, 34, Rahīq vol.1 p.688.
17. In Mā'ida vol.2 pp.19, 34, Rahīq vol.1 p.688.
18. In Rahīq vol.1 p.682.
19. 'The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam', Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1979 (University Microfilms 8002497) p.169.
20. On the concept of Hūrqalyā (or Havarqalyā), see ibid pp.106-14; Henry Corbin Terre Céleste et Corps de Résurrection (Paris, 1960) passim (see index), esp.
21. This is a sermon generally known as Al-khuṭba al-tuṭunjiyya. It is not in the canonical collection of 'Alī's sermons, the Nahj al-Balāgha, but is recorded in Al-majmū'a al-rā'iq and al-Bursī's Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn (see Rafati 'Development' p.133 and p.159 notes 21, 22). Some of the expressions used in this khuṭba have raised doubts as to its authenticity and have suggested that it is in whole or part the work of Shī'ī extremists (ghulāt), but al-Aḥsā'ī maintains that it is genuine (see letter to Prince Mahmūd Mirzā in Majmū'at al-rasā'il al-hikmiyya 30 (Kerman, n.d.) pp.268-70). Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī's well-known Sharḥ al-khuṭba al-tuṭunjiyya is a commentary on this sermon.
22. The term tuṭunj (or taṭanj) is here glossed as khalīj, a gulf. But lower down al-Aḥsā'ī glosses it as nahr, a river. The word is extremely rare. In his Sharḥ al-fawā'id, al-Aḥsā'ī provides a significantly different interpretation of this phrase, explaining the words 'the one standing between the two gulfs' as a reference to man as standing midway between the higher and lower worlds (Sharḥ al-fawā'id (?Tabriz, 1272/1856) p.286).
23. See last note.
24. On al-Aḥsā'ī's views on the nature of man, see Rafati 'Development' pp.106-109 and my article 'Shaykh Ahmad al-Aḥsā'ī' (part III) in Encyclopaedia Iranica (forthcoming). The main point at issue here relates to man's four bodies: two jasad (an 'elemental' jasad composed of earthly elements, and an 'eternal' jasad composed of the elements of the interworld of Hūrqalyā) and two jism (a non-essential jism in which the human spirit leaves the physical body -- the first jasad -- and a 'true' jism, in which man is resurrected).
25. 'Al-risāla al-Rashtiyya' in Jawāmi' al-kilām 2 vols. (Tabriz, 1273/1856 and 1276/1859) vol.1 pt.2 p.103. A similar interpretation of the wāw in the greatest name is given by Rashtī in his Sharḥ al-khuṭba al-tuṭunjiyya (see I'āzandarānī Asrār vol.5 p.240).
26. Sharḥ al-ziyāra al-jāmi'a al-kabīra 4th. ed., 4 vols. (Kerman, 1355 Sh/1976) vol.1 pp.159-60.
27. Ibid p.160.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid p.161. This tradition appears in al-Shaykh al-Ṣaddūq Muḥammad ibn Bābūya

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al-Qummī's Al-khiṣāl (Tehran, 1374/1954-55) p.51.

30. Sharḥ al-ziyāra vol.1 p.161.
31. Ibid.
32. See his Sharḥ al-fawā'id pp.135-58.
33. See, for example, H.M. Balyuzi The Bāb (Oxford, 1973) p.3.
34. Quoted Kāzandarānī Asrār vol.5 p.240.
35. For details of this theory, elaborated in Rashtī's Sharḥ al-qaṣīda, see my 'From Shaykhism to Babism: a study in charismatic renewal in Shī^cī Islam', Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge, 1979 (University Microfilms 81-70,043) pp.212-13.
36. Ibid pp.213-14.