

## An Introduction to and Commentary upon the Khuṭbah al-Jidda (Literary Oration at Jeddah) of the Bāb.

### ABSTRACT AND HANDOUT

Stephen Lambden (Ohio University)

Revised 07-09-2016



The site of the tomb of Eve in Jeddah mentioned in the Khuṭba al-Jeddah of the Bab.

وَفَرَضَ عَلَيْكُمْ حَجَّ بَيْتِهِ الْحَرَامِ، الَّذِي جَعَلَهُ قِبْلَةً لِلْأَنَامِ،

"He hath ordained for you the Ḥajj (Pilgrimage) unto His Sanctified House (baytihi al-ḥarām) which He made the Qiblah for all humankind" (Imam `Alī, Nahj al-Balagha, 46).

The roughly 5-6 page Arabic Khuṭbah al-Jiddah (Sermon at Jeddah) of Sayyid `Alī Muhammad, the Bāb (executed 1850 CE) is one of the most important of his writings of the almost nine month extended pilgrimage journey of its author (26th Sha`ban = 10th Sept. 1844 until 8th Jumada I 1261 = 15th May 1845). It contains important historical, biographical and theological materials but has been largely neglected by scholars and historians of Bābī history and doctrine because of the scarcity and unavailability of mss., the absence of any printed critical edition and the sometimes complex nature of its

Arabic text. This paper will be a tentative attempt to bring this fascinating and striking biographical and theological sermon into the universe of contemporary discourse.

The khuṭba al-Jidda or (loosely) 'Oration at Jeddah' was composed by the Bāb when Jeddah existed within the Ottoman Arabian dominions. Today it is an important port city in Saudi Arabia and remains a key point for the commencement of the Islamic ritual of pilgrimage . The Bāb passed through Jeddah and stayed there in the vicinity of the (no longer existing) tomb of Eve for about three days (16th-19th Safar 1261 AH = between Monday 24th- until Thursday 27th February 1845 CE). The khuṭba or oration associated with Jeddah and studied here was either delivered or written around this time and begins with a deeply mystical cosmological paragraph which may be loosely translated as follows :

Praised be to God!

Who raised up the Celestial Throne (al-`arsh) upon the watery Expanse (al-mā') [2] and the atmosphere (al-hawā') above the surface ("face") of the watery Expanse (al-mā'). [3] And He separated between these two through the word [beginning with "A"] **الاء** "Benefits" (alā') [4] Then he divided the firmaments from the sphere of the theophanic Cloud ( `ālam al-`amā') [5] Betwixt these twain a division (ḥifẓ <sup>an</sup>) suggestive of the letter "H" **هء** (al-hā') [6] And from this atmosphere (al-hawā') there emerged the Sinaitic Tree (shajarat al-sīnā'), its subtle graciousness overshadowing the ocean of laudation (baḥr al-thanā') nigh the watchtower of the Light of radiant Glory (li-maṭla` nūr al-bahā') above the crimson Thrones (sarā'ir al-hamrā'). [7] This that all might hearken through the Dawning-Place of the Snow-white script (khatt al-bayḍā) at the black Horizon ( `ufq al-sawdā') unto the Call of the crimson leaves (waraqāt al-ḥamrā') upon the Green Tree (al-shajarat al-khudrā'), [saying] [9] `God, there is no God except Him, the Lord of the Celestial Throne (al-`arsh) and of the heavenly realm (al-samā')'.

This beautiful though complex paragraph, at times reflects deeply theological sermons attributed to Imam `Alī (d. 40/661) in the Nahj al-Balagha (Path of Eloquence) and elsewhere such as the semi-ghuluww ("extremist") Khuṭba al-ṭutunjiyya ("Sermon of the Gulf") which was important to the twin originators of al-Shaykhiyya (Shaykhism), Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ahsāṭ (d. 1826 CE) and Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (d. 1843 CE) as well as to the Bab himself. It includes some symbolism which reflects the Bab's deep interest in the creative potencies of the letters of the Arabic alphabet. The Sayyid of Shiraz was particularly learned in these matters which were sometimes referred to as the `ilm al-jafr (loosely, the "Science of Divinatory Gematria"). It was expected by Shīṭ Muslims in accordance with various written hadith (or Islamic traditions) that the promised, messianic Qā'im ("Ariser") would be especially adept in this esoteric science. Such is illustrated in many of the writings of the Bāb from his early Qayyūm al-Asmā' (mid. 1844 CE) and Risāla fi'l-nahw wa'l-sahw ("Treatise on Grammar and Syntax") to his very late Kitāb-i panj sha`n ("Book of the Five Modes of Revelation") which was written in 1850 CE not too long before his execution or martyrdom on July 9th 1850.

A few paragraphs later in the Khuṭba al-Jiddah, the Bāb underlines the folly of the Qajar Persian located and other Ishrāqī sages who give religious and philosophical weight to al-Ḥikma al-falsafa al-ishrāqiyya or 'Illuminationist philosophy' which in Persian would be falsafa-yi ishrāqī. This indicates the intellectual and mystical or spiritual philosophy and guidance derived from the orally transmitted teachings and writings of Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā ibn Amirak Suhrawardī (549-587 AH = 1155-1191 CE) and his many disciples and followers. Suhrawardī came from a village near Zanjān in north-eastern Persia. Ultimately came to be executed at Aleppo (in Syria) in 1191 CE by the order of the famous the `Ayyubid leader Saladin (Salah al-Dīn). Suhrawardī wrote a great deal including his well-known Hikmat al-Isḥrāq ("The Philosophy of Illumination"). The Bāb did not have a high opinion of the Isḥrāqīs of his day. They were unreceptive to his message though both he and Baha'u'llah, in numerous scriptural sources or texts, utilized a good deal of Isḥrāqī-rooted terminology. At one point in the Khutba al-Jiddah the Bāb wrote:

They [the Ishrāqī sages] speculated regarding the principle of materiality (al-turāb) which [they regarded] as something other than what God destined for hellfire (al-nār). They supposed that the realities of the Divine Attributes (ḥaqā'iq al-ṣifāt) are other than the knowledge [sanctioned] in the Book (al-kitāb). And they [further vainly] supposed that they are ones well-situated on the Path of God and persons who have attained a great restraint.

Having made this judgment the Bāb shortly thereafter also criticized the followers of the renowned Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirazī (d.1050/1641), who is commonly known as Mullā Ṣadrā. His deep philosophical and theological teachings spelled out in scores of complex Arabic and Persian writings were widely known in early Qajar Persia and the Shī'ī Middle East. They remain seminal and very important in numerous philosophical and theological circles in Iran today. For the Bāb Mullā Ṣadrā's complex ontological philosophy and theology compromised the Divine transcendence and failed to inspire his devotees to seek for truth appropriately on the eschatological Day of God.

