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**SOME ASPECTS OF
ISRĀ'ĪLIYYĀT AND THE EMERGENCE
OF THE
BĀBĪ-BAHĀ'Ī INTERPRETATION
OF THE BIBLE**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface and Introductory Note.....	iv
Note on Abbreviations and Transliteration.....	vi

THE BIBLE & ISRĀ'ĪLIYYĀT IN ISLAMIC AND BĀBĪ-BAHĀ'Ī SOURCES

■ Chapter One

Isrā'īliyyāt : Dimensions of the Islamic and Bābī- Bahā'ī background

1.1	Isrā'īliyyāt and its Islamic assimilation	2
1.2	Positive and negative Islamic / Shī'ī attitudes towards Isrā'īliyyāt.....	7
1.3	Modern academic definitions and discussion of Isrā'īliyyāt	14
1.4	Isrā'īliyyāt and its Bābī- Bahā'ī assimilation and exegesis.....	18

■ Chapter Two

From Islamic *Nubuwwa* (Prophetology") to Bābī- Bahā'ī
Mazhariyya ("Theophanology")

2.1	<i>Anno mundi</i> , millennialism and some chronological aspects of Islamic and Bābī- Bahā'ī prophetology.....	21
2.2	The traditional 'twenty-eight', the myriad prophets and the <i>ūlū al-'azm</i> ("possessors of steadfastness") in Islamic and Bābī- Bahā'ī literatures	41
2.3	The Bābī- Bahā'ī transcendence of <i>khātamiyya</i> (Q.33:40b).....	67
2.4	<i>Mazhariyya</i> : The roots and Bābī- Bahā'ī concept of the <i>mazhar-I ilāhī</i> , the "Divine Theophany" or "Manifestation of God".....	72

■ Chapter Three

The Bible and Isrā'īliyyāt Pt.1: *Tafsīr* (Qur'ān Commentary) and *aḥādīth /
akhbār* (Compendia of traditions) in Islamic and Bābī- Bahā'ī primary sources

3.0	The Bible and Isrā'īliyyāt in Islamic and Bā bī- Bahā'ī sources	82
3.1	The Bible and Isrā'īliyyāt in <i>tafsīr</i> (Qur'ān commentary)	84
3.2	The Bible and Isrā'īliyyāt in <i>aḥādīth / akhbār</i> (Compendia of traditions).....	102

■ Chapter Four

The Bible and Isrā'īliyyāt Pt. 2: *Sīra / Tārīkh* (Historical works) and *Qīṣaṣ
al-anbiyā'* (Stories of the Prophets) in Islamic and Bābī- Bahā'ī primary sources

4.1	The Bible and Isrā'īliyyāt in <i>Sīra / Tārī kh</i> , Biographical / Historical works	112
4.2	The Bible and Isrā'īliyyāt in <i>Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'</i> (Stories of the prophets).....	126

■ **Chapter Five**

The Bible and Isrā'liyyāt in Shī'ī Islam

5.1	Pre-Islamic revelations, the Bible and biblical <i>taḥrīf</i> ("falsification").....	143
5.2	Isrā'liyyāt and the Bible in early Shī'ī Islam.....	151
5.3	Isrā'liyyāt and the Bible: the 'School of Isfahān' and the Safavid period.....	173
5.4	Isrā'liyyāt, Bible translation and dialogue during the early Qajar period.....	184

■ **Chapter Six**

The Bible and Isrā'liyyāt in early Shaykhism

6.1	The Bible and <i>Isrā'liyyāt</i> in works of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī.....	193
6.2	The Bible and <i>Isrā'liyyāt</i> in works of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī.....	207
6.3	The Bāb & the Bābī- Bahā'ī exaltation of the first two Shaykhs.....	220

**FROM THE B°B AND ISR°iLIYY°T TO BAH°'- ALL°H AND
THE EMERGENCE OF THE B°B_i- BAH°'_i INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE**

■ **Chapter Seven**

The Bāb, Pre-Islamic scripture and the Bible

7.1	Pre-Islamic scripture in the writings of the Bāb	224
7.2	The Delphic Maxim and an Islamicate citation from the <i>Injīl</i>	234
7.3	The Bāb and alleged biblical citations in primary and secondary sources.....	238
7.4	The Bible and the address of the Bāb to the Letters of the Living.	256

■ **Chapter Eight**

Bahā'- Allāh, Isrā'liyyāt and the emergence of the Bābī- Bahā'ī interpretation of the Bible

8.1	Isrā'liyyāt and Bahā'- Allāh as the personification of the <i>ism Allāh al-a`ẓam</i>	270
8.2	Bahā'- Allāh and the emergence of the Bābī- Bahā'ī interpretation of the Bible.....	291
8.3	Conclusions: from neo-Shī'ī Bābī faction to the global Bahā'ī 'religion of the Book'.....	311

■ **Bibliography**

1)	Primary mss. and select printed texts	317
	[1] Bābī- Bahā'ī primary texts and printed materials	
	[A] The writings of the Sayyid `Alī Muhammad, the Bāb	318
	[B] The writings of Mīrzā }usayn `Alī, Bahā'- Allāh	321
	[C] The writings of `Abd al-Bahā' and Shoghi Effendi	323
	[2] Bābī- Bahā'ī and other secondary sources.....	324

■ PREFACE

This thesis was begun about nineteen years ago. For medical reasons it was largely abandoned for more than a decade. Several actual or nominal doctoral supervisors encouraged me, though I was initially unable to accomplish much. I did, however, manage to collect relevant material, struggle to keep up to date in the research area, maintain contacts in the fast evolving field of Bābī- Bahā'ī studies, and attempt to become computer literate.

My initial supervisor within the Dept of Religious Studies (Univ. of Newcastle upon Tyne) Dr. Denis MacEoin (1982-86, then lecturer in [Arabic and] Islamic Studies) had been and (unofficially remained) wonderfully supportive and generous with advice and loans from his excellent library. After him the now retired head of the Newcastle Dept., Prof. John Sawyer, offered encouragement and support for an extended period, witnessing little evidence of completion. More recently and despite multitudinous academic and other commitments, Dr. William Telford generously and patiently guided me on the right path through writing up and submission.

In the early 1980s I benefited considerably by extending my meagre knowledge of Arabic and Persian through the study of Persian grammar and the translation of Babi-Bahā'ī texts at the University of Durham with Dr. Paul Luft (until recently, at Manchester Univ.) and his assistant, the now late Dr. Reza Navabpour. A good many professional and lay and experts in the field of Shī'ism and Bābī- Bahā'ī studies have also, over the years, assisted in various ways; including, for example, Dr. Juan Cole (Univ. Michigan), Dr. B. Todd Lawson (Univ. Toronto), Dr. Moojan Momen (Cambridge), Dr. Sholeh Quinn (Athens, Ohio) and Dr. Peter Smith (Univ. Mahidol, Thailand). The institutions at the Bahā'ī World Centre (Haifa Israel), the family of the late Hasan Balyuzi including the trustees of the (now Tonbridge, UK based) Afnān Library, as well as numerous other families and friends, generously provided me with an almost unending supply of the primary Persian and Arabic and other Bābī- Bahā'ī source materials as well as notice of important books and mss. of diverse kinds. I remain in great debt to all of the above persons and to others too numerous to mention here, for their longstanding patience, friendship, support and understanding.

■ INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Bābī- Bahā'ī studies had its apologetic genesis in the first half of the 19th century when learned, predominantly Shaykhī, disciples of the Bāb expounded and defended their religion in the face of increasingly hostile, largely Shī'ī clerical attacks. Later, numerous apologetic writings of the founders of the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions and their followers were written. Bābī- Bahā'ī primary, and to some extent secondary literatures, are extremely vast and in a very wide range of languages. Many Bābī and Bahā'ī manuscripts and documents remain uncatalogued and unstudied awaiting academic examination and publication. Secondary literatures are often uneven. They exhibit a very wide range of perspectives from the banal and uninformed to works of considerable insight and integrity. Most academic writing remains highly speculative and often misleading in a field that remains in its infancy.

The prominent western orientalist who published studies in the nascent Bābī (-Bahā'ī) religions, include several persons then active in Tsarist Russia, including Alexander (Mīrzā) Kāzem-Beg (1802-c.1870), Alexander G. Tumanski (1805-1881) and their German born associate, Jean-Albert-Bernard Dorn (1805-1881). It is a curious twist of history, however, that the notorious French journalist, diplomat, and 'Father of Racism', Joseph Arthur, Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882) in his *Religiones et Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale* (Paris, 1865+ many subsequent editions), made spirited and more than passing mention of the religion of the Bāb. He thus stimulated interest in the Bābī rooted Bahā'ī religious movement which ultimately promoted an anti-racist universal perspective highlighting the oneness of humankind. It was this volume of Gobineau which first inspired the Cambridge scholar E. G. Browne (1862-1926) to devote many years to the study of the Bābī- Azalī and to a far lesser extent Bahā'ī religion.

The genius of the idiosyncratic 'Father of Islamic Studies', Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), penned an occasional paper on matters Bābī- Bahā'ī. He had cordial association with 'Abbas Effendi, 'Abd Al-Bahā, the son and successor of Bahā'- Allāh. So too did his early mentor, the

turkologist Armin Vambery (1832-1913), a Jewish-Hungarian linguist and one-time dervish who ultimately considered himself a Bahā'ī. This also became the professed religious orientation of the Oxford Hebraist, Thomas K. Cheyne (1841-1915). The one time 'Oriental Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture' at Oxford, Cheyne adopted the epithet *Rūḥānī* ("Spiritual") and authored a now largely forgotten Bahā'ī book, *The Reconciliation of Races and Religions* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1914).

Scholars, orientalists and academics of the subsequent couple of generations following Browne's death, largely paid little or no attention to the Bābī- Bahā'ī religions. This despite the fairly impressive global diffusion and growth of Bahā'ī (now approx., 5-6 million, Smith, 1996:132). They tended to dismiss it as an insignificant outgrowth of Islam, an alien movement or crankish faction neither exactly Islamic nor Christian and frequently attacked by narrow-minded followers of both these world Faiths. It has largely been in the last few decades that things have begun to change. There are now several professorships in Bahā'ī studies and a growing number of lectureships in the subject in academically respectable universities including the Hebrew University at Jerusalem.

Bābī- Bahā'ī studies was a fairly respectable orientalist-academic pursuit from the 1860s up till roughly the 1920s. The succeeding decades up to the 1960s were very largely a period in which Bahā'īs were persecuted in the Middle East and, on the whole, no longer taken particularly seriously in the West. The majority of Bahā'īs were heavily engaged in matters evangelical. Intellectual adherents were generally marginalised or too ensconced in their own academic or other careers (sometimes in the field of Iranian-Middle Eastern Studies) to give sustained or serious attention to the academic analysis of their own Faith. Until recently few built upon or scrutinized the findings of the above-mentioned pioneer orientalists. Very little non-evangelical writing or research had, for practically 60 years, been published within or without the Bahā'ī community.

It was largely amongst western Bahā'ī intellectuals in Europe and America in the late 60s and early 70s that early glimmerings of an academic Bābī- Bahā'ī studies appeared. This was partly inspired by the example and writings of the academically oriented Bahā'ī historian and apologist, Hasan M. Balyuzi (1908-1980). Through him British Bahā'īs became fascinated with seemingly approachable aspects of Bābī- Bahā'ī history. The largely historically oriented legacy of Browne and others began to be pondered and critically assessed. Very little or no attention was initially given, however, to the academic analysis of Bābī- Bahā'ī religious doctrine, to the intricacies of its theologized historiography, theology or theophanology. Few analysed the Bābī- Bahā'ī phenomenon

and its sacred writ. Among the exceptions was the somewhat unique 1923 Edinburgh University doctoral thesis of S. Alter entitled *Studies in Baháism*. This thesis attempts to research some aspects of the genesis of Bábī- Bahā'ī religious doctrine, the origins of its biblical citation and interpretation in the light of Isrā'īliyyāt (Israelitica); loosely, Abrahamic biblical and related materials within Islamic sources.

■ TERMINOLOGY AND ABBREVIATIONS.

In view of the existence of a myriad Shīrāzīs of note, the name of Sayyid `Alī Muhammad Shīrāzī (1819-1859 CE) will not be abbreviated in this manner. Rather, his well-known title the Bāb (The Gate) will be used --in bibliographical contexts Bāb will occasionally be further abbreviated as B*. Mīrz ā ḡusayn `Alī N-rī (1817-1892) who came to be entitled Bahā'- Allāh (The Splendour of God) and founded the Bahā'ī religion, will be abbreviated BA*. His eldest son and successor `Abbās known as `Abd al-Bahā' (1844-1921) will be indicated by AB* and his great-grandson, the Bahā'ī leader Shoghi Effendi (Shawqī Rabbānī; c. 1896-1957) by SE*.

■ CALENDRAL AND GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

Years will be given (when appropriate) according to the Islamic Hijri calendar followed by a forward slash and then the corresponding date[s] of the Common Era. CE indicates the date of the Common Era and AH (*Anno Hegrie*) that of the Muslim (lunar) calendar. The calendral abbreviation BE will indicate the solar Bábī- Bahā'ī or *Badī'* (new) era which began in May 1260/1844 and is in use by contemporary Bahā'īs.