

ABS RELIGIOUS STUDIES SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP, BI-ANNUAL SEMINAR NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
July 26-28, 2013
ABSTRACTS

■ **Lil Abdo, London, UK, “The Extraordinary Life and Work of Wellesley Tudor Pole - Baha’i Seer”**

This paper seeks to evaluate the role of Wellesley Tudor Pole in the Baha’i Movement and examine the place of Baha’ism in the wider context of The Quest which dominated Pole’s spiritual life for several decades. Recent research has brought to light further information surrounding Pole’s beliefs about the bowl he discovered in Glastonbury and its links to a lost library in Constantinople, his spirit guides and their role in conflicts in different spheres.

Pole’s relationship with the Baha’is raises a number of questions, where did it fit with Pole’s wider belief system? Why he was such a dominant figure in the Baha’i Movement and what was his legacy when he ultimately rejected the Baha’i Faith?

Pole remains a significant figure in the alternative spirituality milieu and arguably the single most influential individual in the re-emergence of Glastonbury as a spiritual centre, he was undoubtedly the saviour of Abdul Baha from the advancing Turkish army – but was he a Baha’i?

■ **Lil Abdo, London, UK, “Prepubescent Pole Dancers and the Reemergence of Paganism.”**

Pre-pubescent Pole Dancers and the re-emergence of Paganism

This paper seeks to examine the background to the inclusion of folk art forms in the school curriculum; it discusses the networks of folklorists and their interface with the educational establishment and considers their possible motives; finally it considers the impact of the curriculum on popular culture, in particular the re-emergence of Paganism.

Children’s literature has frequently been cited as a factor in the resurgence of belief in magic, from traditional fairy tales retold to Harry Potter, however, some material imbedded in the primary curriculum is suggestive of a deliberate attempt to pass on awareness of what was believed to be survivals of pre Christian festivals and culture to a new generation. Folk song and dance, harvest festivals and nativity plays have been part of school life since the inception of compulsory education to the present day, ensuring that familiarity with folk

custom has been prolonged and reintroduced into areas where it would have been dislodged by urbanisation. This paper argues that the now academically discredited theories of Fraser and Murray, were central to the understanding of many individuals interest in folk dance, which in turn has played a role in the revival of interest in Paganism.

■ **Kristine Asuncion, “Leonora Holsapple Armstrong – Maidservant of God - Herald of the Kingdom - Mother of the Baha’is of South America”**

The little-known story of the Mother of the Baha’is of South America, Leonora Stirling Holsapple [Armstrong], who pioneered to Brazil in January 1921, after receiving a Tablet from Abdu’l-Bahá and advice and support from May Maxwell and Martha Root. This is the story of a unique young women raised as a Bahá’í in the early 1900’s American Bahá’í community; about the practice of obedience and faith; of the transformation of a timid young woman into a humble spiritual giant. It is a story of obedience to the call of Abdu’l-Bahá in His Tablets of the Divine Plan, of stalwart perseverance, and unstinting service. Through examination of the aspects of her many tests and difficulties, her obedience to her two Tablets from Abdu’l-Bahá and her correspondence with Shoghi Effendi, an attempting to present for future generations of Baha’is the inspiration of her humble and selfless example.

■ **Stephen N. Lambden, University of California, Merced, “The Etymology of *hurqalya* [sic.] and Some Aspects of its Shi’i, Shaykhi, and Babi/Baha’i Implications**

■ **Stephen N. Lambden, University of California, Merced, “Riḍwān Revisited and the Lawḥ-i Riḍwān-i ‘Adl”**

■ **Moojan Momen, Cambridge, UK, “Between Karbala and Tabriz: the role of martyrdom and resilience in setting boundaries.”**

This paper is about the contest that is going on in Iran at present between two narratives of martyrdom and persecution: the first (identified with Karbala) being

that of the ruling elite, who have turned martyrdom into a political weapon to be used actively against their enemies, and the second (identified with Tabriz) is that of the Baha'i community, which maintains a more traditional view of martyrdom as the readiness to die (or endure persecution) in order to witness to one's belief (martyrdom being only a last resort). The paper examines the specific role played by the Baha'i martyrs and the other Baha'is in Iran who have responded to three decades of intense persecution, not by taking on a posture of victimhood or by taking the road towards opposition, subversion and violence, but rather by what has been described by one author as "constructive resilience" (taking a non-violent and non-adversarial stance, that involves actively trying to building unity and social cohesion through bringing together all of the progressive and peaceful elements in society in order to advance an agenda of social reform through direct neighbourhood action). Most of this paper is taken up with describing five ways in which the main function of the Baha'i martyrs and the posture of resilience has been to lay down boundaries. It suggests that they are, in this way, laying down boundaries that assert the legitimacy and worth of their religion, preserve the integrity and morale of their community and at the same time contrast their values with those of the government, showing up the injustice and perhaps even, within the context of the Shi'i culture of Iran, the illegitimacy of their persecutors. The paper also looks at some evidence for the effect that the martyrdoms and resilience to persecution may have had.

■ **Moojan Momen, Cambridge, UK,**
The Importance of Consultation in the Baha'i Faith

This paper looks at the history of consultation in the Baha'i Faith. It starts from the mention of this process in the Kitab-i-Aqdas and the manner in which this was initially put into practice in Iran in the late 1870s. It then looks at the ways in which each of the successive leaders of the Baha'i Faith - Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi emphasized the importance of consultation and promoted its use in the community. Finally, the paper looks at the role of consultation in the movement from the present established and customary practices in the world towards the new World Order that Baha'u'llah envisaged.

■ **Wendi Momen, LSE, "Abdu'l Baha's Articulation of the Bahá'í Concept of Peace on His Western Travels"**

A primary teaching of the Bahá'í Faith is that world peace is not only possible but inevitable. The Bahá'í writings describe two stages in the achievement of world peace: the Lesser Peace, which is a political peace agreed by national governments, and the Most Great Peace, which is associated with the evolution of a world civilization that is imbued with spiritual characteristics. As the clouds of the first world war were gathering across Europe, 'Abdu'l-Bahá accepted an invitation to the speak at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration in May 1912. He continued to develop the theme of world peace as He travelled in the West in 1911 and again in 1912-13. He spoke extensively about this principle in numerous meetings, challenging His followers and His listeners to establish peace before humankind was overwhelmed by war. This paper looks at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's elucidation of the principle of the peace in His talks in the West, primarily in the United States,

■ **Geoffrey Nash, Sunderland University, "The Future of Religion in Modern Society."**

The question as to what would constitute a suitable religion for modernity was an issue not infrequently discussed in the nineteenth century by liberal thinkers and scholars of religion. The broad discussion engaged in by the likes of Matthew Arnold, Ernest Renan and others centred on what made religion viable in the modern world: what kinds of religion held modernity back, and what enabled it. Such thinkers particularly deprecated the kind of narrow religiosity that they held to be a bar to progress and freedom of thought. Their criticisms against this type of religion are frequently rehearsed today, but belief in the possibility of a broad, tolerant modern religion seems to have given way to outright atheism or agnosticism.

■ **Saghar Sadeghian, University of Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris 3, "Women and Non-Muslim Communities: Two Minorities' Meeting Point" (Iran, 19th-20th centuries)**

The case of so-called minorities in any society is normally problematic; whereas it can be even more complicated when two of these minorities come across each other. This paper is going to study some cases in the Non-Muslim Iranian society, where gender mattered, and the way people, Iranian authorities or foreign diplomats faced, solved or ignored the issues.

Comparing to the Iranian Muslim women, the Non-Muslim ones were subject to some supplementary visible and invisible codes and rules, concerning their appearance, marriage, jobs, etc. They were the targets of attacks and kidnapping, too. One of the reasons was to force them to convert to Islam. On the other hand, Muslim women had to keep the distance from the Non-Muslims, especially from the men. One can quote the case of Muslim women forbidden working in a Non-Muslim factory in Rasht.

The first girls' schools were established by Non-Muslims, mostly Non-Iranians. The presence of Non-Iranian women; the missionaries – in hospitals and schools- and the diplomats' families were also remarkable. Some Iranian Armenian women, too, engaged in these activities as well as the Constitutional movements circa 1906. Such elements would somehow change the normality towards Iranian women.

These issues represent some examples of the cases this paper is going to study. The main sources of the paper are the reports brought in the Iranian, French or the British diplomatic archives, and this reflects the originality of this article, as compared to existing literature. For the article presentation, a power-point will be accompanied.