The al-Bayān al-ʿArabī (The Arabic Bayān)

The al-Bayān al-ʿArabī (The Arabic Bayān) or 'The Arabic Exposition' of Sayyid ʿAli 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 wāḥīds ("Units") though the first wāḥīd ("Unity") is not divided up into abwāb ("gates"). Wāḥīds ("Units") two until eleven (II-XI) each have nineteen abwāb ("gates"). It is thus incomplete by eight Wāḥīds ("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 Wāḥīds ("Units") by including all the early sections as well as from VIII: 11-19 then the complete ninth tenth and eleventh Wāḥīds ("Units") which are not included in the Persian Bayān at all.

The Arabic Bayān of Sayyid ʿAli Muhammad Shirazi, the Bāb

Translation by Stephen Lambden UC-Merced 2009-10

Abbreviations & Select Manuscripts consulted

- Arabic Bayān. Ms. up to Wāḥīd IX in the form of a Haykal (Pentacle) Azail publication. = Ar. Bayān-Haykal
- Arabic Bayān in INBMC 43 pp. 1-ADD.
- Add
- al-Bābīyyūn (see above)
- MacEoin, Sources.
- Nicholas, 1906 Le Bayan Arabe (see above).
- Tahrzadeh, SWB (= Selections from the Writings of the Bāb).

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 mas., including the Iraqi Baha’i supplied mas., utilized in making the semi-critical text printed in 'Abd al-Razziq al-Kásînî (ed.), al-Bûbîyyûn wa't-Bahâ’îyyûn lf ǧâdilîhm wa madîhm (Sidôn: Matba’a at’l-Irîfân, 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 20-06-09.

I

The First Unity (al-wâhîd al-awwâlī)

O He (Yâ Hî)

بسم الله الرحمن الأقدس

بسم الله الرحمن المجيد

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

[Prolegomenon]

إني أنا الله لا إله إلا أنا و إن ما دوني خلق
قل إن يا خلقني إياي فاعدلون
قل خلقتك و رزختك وأمستك وأجبنتك وجعلتك مظهر نفس
لتنلون من عندي آياتي ولدعون كل من خلقته إلى ديني هذا صرط 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 nafsî). [6] This [to the end] that thou (pl.) might assuredly recite My verses (ayâtî) which are indeed of Me. [7] And this to the end that all who have created might call out [unto God] through My religion (dinî) [cf. Q. 10:22] for this is a Path (ṣirât) which is Mighty and Unfathomable [Impenetrable] ('izz wa ma'ni).

وخلقتم كل شيء لك وجعلتم من لنا سلطانا على العالمين وآمن ونحن دخل في ديني يتوحدي وأقرنته بماكركم ثم ذكر من قد جعله حرر الحق بنانه 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 (aulîya’llâh) unto all the worlds. [9] And I gave permission for whomsoever desired to enter My Religion (dinî) to do so through [assent to] My divine Unity (bi-tawhidî). [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] (harûfâtî al-ḥaqq [al-ḥayyî]). [11] And whatsoever was indeed sent down in the Bayân is [expressive] of My Religion (dinî). [12] This indeed is that which was expressed therein, a veritable Râdkân ('Contented Repose', "Paradise") for My sincere servants (lîbâlî al-mukhlîlîn).

https://web.archive.org/web/20150404145644/http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/
[13] The sun (al-shams) is but a sign (liyat) of Me in order that believing servants might thereby bear witness with every [Divine] Manifestation [theophany] (kull zuhūr) to the similitude of its ascent.

[14] I did indeed create Thee through Thine Own Self than all things [everything else] (kull shay'), through Thine Utterance (qawl), a veritable Command (amr ʾ”) on Our part [15] for We are Indeed Supremey Powerful (qālidin). [16] I made Thee to be the First and the Last (al-awwāl wa’t-akhir), the Manifest and the Hidden (wa’l-akhir wa’t-bālīn). [17] And We are Indeed All Informed (al-ʿālimīn).

[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-muhaymin), the Best Beloved (al-māḥbūb).

[21] The Bayān (Exposition) is Our Proof (hujjāt) unto all things (kull shay') for it is an inimitable expression of His verses (ayāt) for all the worlds (al-ʿālimīn). [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 (hujjāt). [23] We verily, enable to enter Our Mighty, Sacred Paradises (jannāt quds ‘ażm), whosoever We desire. [24] Such is that which He originated in every religious era [dispensation] (zuhūr) through a [divine] Command (amr), a Command (amr ʾ”) which derives from Us. [25] And We are Indeed of the Wise ones (al-hakīmīn).

[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 (qālidīn).

[28] And We decreed that the gates of this religion (abwāb dhallik 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-ṭawr) [19x19 = 361 days in the Bābī year] for every day is as a gate (bāb ʾ”) 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-wilāyih (the "Unity", abjad = 19), a letter of the primordial letters before God (harf min ʿurūf al-awwāl illī-ḥabīb), 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.
And We determined that there be the first al-Wāḥid (the "Unity") what God does indeed witness of His Own Logos-Self (naṣṣa) 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 'All Muhammad = the Bābi] is the Gate of God (Báb Allāh) before whosoever 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 (Al-Faṭār Allāh) which come forth from Him.

Then every gate (bāb) is for the mention of the Name of the True One [God] (dhikr ism ḥaqiq) on Our part and for the mention of anyone of the Letters of the Living (ḥurūf al-bayy) for they return unto the primordial life (al-ḥayāt al-awwal) though Muhammad, the Messenger of God (rāsūl Allāh) along with those who were witnesses before God (shuhādā' min 'ind Allāh) [the Imams]. [36] So too the Gates of guidance (awwāb al-huda) for they were created in the ultimate recreation (nasā'ah al-ukhrāj) [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" = ābjad 19) in the first al-wāḥid ("Unity") [of the Bābi era]. [38] This is indeed a Bounty (faḍl) from before Us for We are Indeed among the givers of Bounty (al-ṣālibīn).

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 Bābi 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) which originated with Us for We are indeed Powerful beyond all who are possessed of power (muqtaḍīn).

Thou indeed enumerated the numbers (al-a’l-dāli) 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] (fir-ḥurūf al-awwal). [43] And they were indeed present through the proximity of their utmost hearts between Our two Hands. [44] And naught is seen therein except the wāḥid ("Unity") without enumeration. [45] Wherefore does God expound the destinies (maqādhir) 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.

The first Wāḥid (Unity) of the Arabic Bayān is not divided up into abwāb (gates) or subdivisions of any kind and read as a kind of theological prologomenon 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 Bābi himself did not versify the first Wāḥid (Unity) of the Arabic Bayān.
[0] The new Basma of al-‘Ashqāq: "In the Name of God, the Most Inaccessible (al-amma’), the Most Holy (al-‘aṣṣāh)" is the same as the one opening the probably earlier Persian Bayán. Instead of the Qur’ānic Divine Attributes al-Rahman and al-Rahim ("the Merciful, the Compassionate") of the standard Islamic basmāl 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 light ("Meeting", "Encounter") with God could be realized through Him.

[2] "Say: 'O My creation! [or creatures] Render ye service of Me!' This Divine address to God's created humanity could mean either "creation" or "creatures". The subsequent plural form from the word 'abd (lit. "servant"), might imply that "creatures" would be the better rendering though "creation" itself implies all creatures anyway. Habib Taherzadeh has "My creatures" (SWB p.135). This Arabic address at the very beginning of the Arabic Bayan is taken by both Gobineau (1865: Les Religions, 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 Bahá’-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-Bábúyún, page 62 line 7 I have read here ҷӯрӯфӣ al-ḥaqq "Letters of the True One" even though the reading ҷӯрӯфӣ al-ḥayy "The Letters of the Living" is that translated in SWB: 158 as spelled out (without ms. support) in Muntakhabát, 112 line 3. The Azali printed ms. in the handwriting of the Báb definitely supports the ҷӯрӯфӣ al-ḥaqq reading. ҷӯرӯфӣ al-ḥaqq is also the reading in the Arabic Bayán which opens the compilation of the writings of the Bab in INBC 43 (page 1).

Gobineau in the 1865 translation of the Arabic Bayan as the ‘Livre des Préceptes’ has ADD HERE in rendering Paris ms. Bib. Nat. Supple Arabe 2511 (see Les Religions... ed. 1928 p. 397). Nicholas in his 1905 rendering Le Bayan Arabe translates here les lettres du vivant which obviously renders hurūfūf al-ḥayy ("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 Bayan Arabe page 89 + fn. 140).

[18-19] In the original Arabic these two verses or lines are identical. The trans in SWB 158 does not reflect this and completely bypasses this repetition. The Arabic text printed in Muntakhabát, 112 lines 6-7 , however, supports this reading as does the text printed in al-Bábúyún, 62 lines 10-11. Whether or not this is a copyist’s duplicate or a repetition originated by the Báb remains to be critically established.

Persian Synopsis by the Báb of Wáḥíd (Unity) I of the Arabic Bayán

جوهر مجرد ابن واحد ائمه خداوند خزوجل هميشه بوده وثبت ودرحم زمان خداوند جه وعز كتاب
وحسني از برای خلق مقدر فرموده و میفرمایم و در سنة ۱۷۷۰ از عبید اللهد را ریبان
وخدای را ذات حروف مص و قرار داده وایواب دین را واحد تردد وزد و حاقد ردیف دند وصفات واعبد واعبد حکم فرموده

[1] The singular essence of this [first] Wáḥíd ("Unity") is that God, exalted and glorified be He, for all Eternity (hamiša) 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 Bayán ["Exposition"] (cf. the Qayyum al-asmā’, 1250 AH / mid. 1844 CE) and a (messianic) Proof (ḥujjat) — the Essence of the Seven Letters (dāḥāt- al-ṭurūf-ī sab’a) [= the 7 Arabic letters of the personal name `All Muhammad = the Báb; see above Wáḥíd ("Unity") i:33]. And He established and numbered the Gates of religion (abwāb-ī dīn) as nineteen Wāḥídās ("Unités"). In the first Wáḥíd ("Unity") He decreed the tawhīd-ī dāḥāt (Oneness of the Divine Essence) and of the Divine Attributes (ṣūfīf) and of the Divine Activity (afāʾī) as well as of [the station of] servitude (ībādat).

ودمل بر این بار را من بین زهوراند وحروف حی او قرار داده وقبل از زهوره، از زهوره، از ذات حروف مص و قرار داده
وخدای را ذات حروف مص و قرار داده ویواب دین، وحیت به بعد بینه حیت قبل است که فرقان بانش این

The evidential substance of this gate (bāb) is the establishment of (the messianic centrality of) Man yūzīr-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’ (ḥurūf-i avvāl). They now take precedence in [the domain of] the Tawhīd (the Divine Unity) through the instrumentality of this [new] wāḥid (‘unity’) which corresponds to the [old] wāḥid (‘unity’) of the Qurʾān. Such is evident in the Bayān as what hath even been the Manifest and the Hidden (zāhir va bāṭīn) as well as the First (avvāl) and the Ultimate [Last] (ākhir). So the subsequent Proof (ḥujjat) is even as the Proof (ḥujjat) of times past even as was indicated in the Furqān [= the Qurʾān]. 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*) (arrāh anhā) such that in every theophany [dispensation] (zuhūrī) the decree of fulfillment [termination] (ḥukm-i ākhirat) relative to the previous theophany [dispensation] (bi-zuhūr-i qabl) was realized.

Wherefore was it that with this Theophany (zuhūr) [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 x 19 = 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 wāḥdat) [the Bab] in [His very] Aloneness [Oneness, solitude] (vahdat).

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 (laḥu 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 (almuḥaymin 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‘il-‘izzat wa‘il-jalāl) attained faith in this [first Babi] 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-‘Arabī) 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.