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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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2.3 The Bābī- Bahāī transcendence of *khātamiyya* (Q.33:40b), the finality of prophethood

Muhammad is not the father of any man among but he is the *rasūl-Allāh* (Messenger of God) and the *khatām al-nabbiyyīn*, (the 'seal' 'last'. 'acme') of the prophets (Q. 33:40).

Understanding the reading *khātām* to mean "last" in Q. 33:40, Muslims have considered this verse foundational for the post-qur'ānic doctrine of the 'finality of prophethood', that no *nabī* (or *rasūl*) would appear after Muhammad, the final *rasūl Allāh* (messenger of God). Probably echoing earlier claims of Manī (d. c. 277), the son of a Parthian prince and messianic claimant (al-Bīrūnī, Sachau, 1879:190) the (Aramaic loanword?) *khātām* came throughout the Muslim world to indicate that the succession of prophets was "sealed up" or "ended" in Muhammad just as it had been in Manī. It was thought that after Muhammad, even after the eschatological consummation, no future prophet would appear to found a new or renewed religion. Many commentators on Q. 33:40 have it that the Islamic belief in the second coming of Jesus indicates the reappearance of this *nabī* (a prophet) in a role subservient to Muhammad and Islamic law on the Day of resurrection (Zamaksharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:544-5).

The finality of prophethood through Muhammad became a firmly accepted Islamic dogma. Even though it is not at all clear that the absolute finality of prophethood was the original intention of Q. 33:40, this is today a firmly entrenched in both Sunnī and Shīī orthodoxy [68] (Friedmann, 1986; 1989: 49ff). Any hint of another post-Islamic prophetic claim or a challenge to the *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* (inimitability of the Q.) has generally met with the dire consequences of theological castigation, accusations of heresy and imprisonment or death. Early on in his *Izhāq al-bāṭil* (The Crushing of Falsehood, 1845) on the basis of his

analysis the QA the third Shaykhī leader Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1871) correctly accused the Bāb of such heresy as went well beyond the constraints of Shī'ī piety.

From the outset of his six year messianic career (1844-50) the Bāb in his QA. (mid. 1260/1844) and other writings (INBMC 91) challenged both the finality of prophethood and the inimitability of the Q. In the light of his eschatologically charged, high Shī'ī- Shaykhī imamology, he modified the standard understanding of the 'finality of prophethood' by incorporating rewritten forms of the *khātim al-nabiyyīn* (Q.33:40b) into his first major work (QA):

O people of the earth! God did not create Muhammad the father of any of your men but he made him in the midmost heart of the celestial Throne (*fī kabd al-'arsh*) for His greatest [eschatological] Day. God, hath in very truth concluded this matter as something hidden and treasured up (QA 44:164)...

The Bāb's rewrites of Q. 33:40 such as the above modify or pass over the note of finality which most Muslims read into Q. 33:40b. He regularly all but negates any tone of the finality of prophethood in Q. 33:40b. Through his supernatural link with the *Dhikr*, and/or occulted twelfth Imām, the Ḥujjat-Allāh (messianic 'Proof of God'), the Bāb several times radically modified any straightforward notion of the finality of prophethood.

In QA 4 the Bāb addresses the *ahl al-madīna* ("people of the city" of Shīrāz?) accusing them of polytheism if they acknowledge Muhammad as the "seal of the Prophets" and affirm his book (the Q.) yet fail to bear witness to the fact that God also revealed the QA to the Bāb ("Our servant"; cf. Q. 2:23) which is certainly "the like of it" (the Q.). In QA 64 the Bāb similarly set down a messianic rewrite of Q.12:63 in the light of Q. 33:40. He exhorts believing Muslims gathered before Muhammad, the *khātam al-nabiyyīn*, to utter the following words:

O our father [Muhammad] the [messianic] *dhikr* ("Remembrance"), is a further measure (*al-kail*) which has been denied to us. So dispatch with us, the sign of the *Dhikr* for the greater magnification [69] (*li'l-takbīr al-akbar*)... (QA 64:260).

A few sūras later in QA 66 the Bāb speaks of a "Book" (= QA) sent down to inform the people that the messianic *Hujjat -Allāh* (Proof of God = 12th Imam) is closely associated with the *Dhikr* even the likeness of the *Hujjat* (Proof) nigh Muhammad, the *khātām al-nabiyyīn*. It seems to be implied that the messianic "Hour" is about to be realized through the close relationship between the *Dhikr* (Remembrance) and the twelfth Imam or *Hujjat-Allāh*, the messianic Proof of God. In subsequent years (1848-50) the sometimes thinly veiled 'messianic secret' of the Bāb's being the Qā'im / Mahdī was publicly broadcast and his more exalted claims openly promulgated.

In their writings the Bāb and BA* never ceased referring to Muhammad as the *khātām al-nabiyyīn* (INBMC 91; BA* KI:05ff/ 87ff). Q 33:40b was not understood as underlining the finality of prophethood in the sense of outruling an eschatological theophany. Great messianic, theophanological importance was given by the Bāb and BA* to the qur'ānic references to *liqā' - Allāh*, the latter day meeting or encounter with God (Q. 6:31;130,154; 7:51,147; 10:7ff; 13:2 etc). The word *khātām* in *khātām al-nabiyyīn* need not signify "seal" implying "last" of the prophets but more appropriately indicate Muhammad as the "acme of the prophets" during the era before the *yawm al-qiyāma* (Day of Resurrection) when the *liqā' - Allāh* through a messianic *mazhar-i ilāhī* would be realized. Then the *liqā' - Allāh* is realized through the parousia of the theophanic *mazāhar-I ilāhī*. In it on these lines that BA* in his *K. īqān* argues that *khatām al-nabiyyīn* as an epithet of Muhammad underlines the elevated nature of the Arabian prophet and not the absolute finality of prophethood. Understood with the sense of utter finality, *khātām al-nabiyyīn* degenerates into one of the

subuhāt al-jalāl ("veils of glory") which hinder the realization of unfolding reality (KI:129f/107f,136-7).

Among the earliest passages of BA* dealing with the issue of the *khātām al-nabiyyīn* (Q. 33:40b) is his testimony to the theophanic mission of the Bāb in his *L.Ḥurūfāt al-muqatta'āt* (Tablet on the Isolated Letters, c. 1858). The Bāb, it is said, came with all manner of "dazzling [70] proofs" though the people "waxed proud" in their denial despite the Qur'ānic promise of the *liqā'-Allāh*. When God sealed prophethood (*khatama al-nubuwwat* through Muhammad (Q. 33:40) "he gave the servants the glad-tidings of the encounter with Him [God]" and the matter was "definitively resolved" (*khatama al-makhtūm*). In the person of the Bāb

"God came [unto them] in the shadows of the clouds (*fī ḡulal al-ghamām*, Q.2:210), breathed into the Trumpet of the Cause (*nafakha fī ṣūr al-amr*; cf. Q.18:99; etc), split the Heaven asunder (*inshaqqat al-samā'* cf. Q.55:37;69:16;84:1) and crushed the mountains to dust (Q.56:5;69:14, etc) whereupon all retreated back upon their heels (cf. Q.3:144;6:71) (Ma'idih, 4:65).

BA* continued to argue that in spite of the theophany of the Bāb the people acted like Jews and Christians. They continued to await the realization of the promises and the eschatological *liqā'-Allāh*. In his decade or so later lengthy Persian Tablet to `Alī Muhammad Sarrāj (c.1867 CE), BA* himself touches upon the subject of the obscurity of eschatological prophecies in Abrahamic religious scripture. He highlights the supremely clear implications (*aṣraḥ al-kalimāt*) of finality in *khātām al-nabiyyīn* (Q. 33:40b) but thinks it as an unacceptable veil inhibiting post-Islamic faith in another supreme agent of God. Despite its implications of finality, pure-hearted persons still came to true faith in Point of the Bayān (*bi-irfān nuqṭa-yi bayān* = the Bāb). Indeed, BA* adds, such pure-hearted persons so

comprehended the matter of *khātimīyyat* ("sealedness") that they would happily acknowledge the appearance of a "prophet" (*nabī*) "from the beginning which has no beginning unto the end which has no end" (L. Sarr āj, Ma'idih, 7:28ff).

For the Bāb and BA* the qur'ānic *khātam al-nabiyyīn* in no way rules out the theophany of divinity on the eschatological "Day of God" (*yawm Allāh*). Even if it is taken to outrule the finality of the appearance of a post-Muhammad *nabī* (prophet) or even *rasūl* (sent one) it does not outrule an eschatological theophany. Both the Bāb and BA* claimed to be fully human yet fully divine *mazhar-i ilāhī* in a way that transcends issues revolving around the meanings of [71] *khātam al-nabiyyīn*. In fact BA* so transcended these matters that in numerous theophanological passages he presents himself as having sent out the *nabī* and *rasūl* of the pre-Islamic era. In an important Arabic Tablet of the Acre period BA* defends himself against accusations that he has contradicted the Muslim understanding of

Q. 33:40b by stating:

You have assuredly confirmed [the truth] by what you have announced [in citing Q. 33:40b]. We do indeed testify that through him [Muhammad] messengership and prophethood (*al-risāla wa'l-nubuwwa*) were sealed up. Whomsoever after him [Muhammad] makes claim to such an elevated station is indeed in manifest error.... The carpet of prophethood (*bisāt al-nubuwwa*) has been rolled up and there has appeared the one who sent them out (*arsal*) [=BA*] in manifest sovereignty... (Untitled Tablet to Ḥasan [L. Khātam al-nabbiyīn]).

Bahā'ī arguments against the finality of prophethood usually operate on a somewhat lower level than these elevated theophanological challenges. In modern Bahā'ī apologetics a distinction is often made between a future *rasūl* as a founding *mazhar-i ilāhī* (Manifestation of God) and the role of the (lesser) *nabī* or secondary prophet. Diverse lexical and Islamic understandings of *khātam* (kh-t-m) are commented upon in the light of



the non-finality of prophethood. The Islamic understandings of Q. 33:40b might, it is sometimes held, outrule the further appearance of Israelite type *nabiyyīn* (prophets) but this phrase does not negate future appearances of *rasūl* or *mursalīn* (sent messengers) the like of which is hinted at in the following qur'ānic verse:

O children of Adam! There shall come among you *mursalīn* (sent messengers) from among yourselves rehearsing my signs unto you... (Q. 7:43)

Many thousands of eschatological traditions were assiduously compiled into sometimes bulky *Istidlāliyya* (testimonia) tracts by 19th-20th century disciples of the Bāb and BA*. Considerable attention was given to overcoming any finality implied by Q. 33:40b.¹ Some, at BA*'s command, followed the lead of the Bāb's *Dalā'il-i sab'ih* and his own *K-īqān*. This with a view to arguing that all manner of messianic predictions and apocalyptic "signs" had come to [72] pass (cf. INBMC 80). Bābīs and Bahā'īs claimed that for many thousands of years divine messengers (*rusul*) or *mazhar-i ilāhī* (divine Manifestations) will found and progressively renew the eternal religion of God (= Islam).

It is today a central Bābī- Bahā'ī teaching that future divine messengers (*rusul*) or *mazhar-i ilāhī* (divine manifestations) will, for many thousands of years, found and progressively renew the eternal religion of God (= 'Islam'). The Bāb's claim to be the Shī'ī messiah did not prevent or inhibit his also predicting numerous future messianic advents of the originally Sufī figure *man yuzhiruhu-Allāh* (Goldziher, 1921 tr. Lambden & Walker 1992). This is indicated in a passage from the Bāb's *K. panj sha'n* (Book of the Five Grades; 1850 CE) where the following words could be taken to indicate an infinite number

¹ See Gulpaygān ī, K. Farā'id, index; Ishrāq Khavarī, QI:383ff; *al-Tibyān wa'l-burhān*, I:59ff Rawshānī, Khātamiyyat; Momen 1999:34f, 87ff.

of future theophanies of the Bābī theophanic messiah, *man yuzhiru-hu-Allāh* (He whom God shall make manifest').

.. And after the Bayān it is [the theophany of] *man yuzhiru-hu All āh* (He whom God will make manifest) [1]. And after *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [1] *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [2]. And after *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [2] *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [3]. And after *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh*, [3] *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [4]. And after *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [4] *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [5]. And after *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [5] *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [6]. And after *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [6] *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [7]. And after *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [7] *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [8]. And after *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [8] *man yuzhiru-hu Allāh* [9]. (K. Panj-S: 314-5, cf. 397).

The position of the Bāb is thus the exact opposite of the Islamic proponents of the doctrine of the finality of prophethood. The mention of nine successive theophanies most likely indicates their endless future realization. Towards the end of his life in his *Haykal al-dīn* (Temple of Religion, 1266/1850) the Bāb made increasing mention of "He whom God will make manifest". He variously indicated the time of his advent at after nine (=1269/1852), nineteen (= 1279 =1862-3) or between 1511 (abjad of Ar. *ghiyāth* = 'the Assistance') and 2001 years (abjad of Ar. *mustaghath* = 'The One Invoked for help') from 1260/1844 (MacEoin, 1986:95-155). These latter figures were understood by BA* as either numerically and messianically suggestive Names of God of non-chronological import, or allusions to the time of another theophany after himself (BA* L. Khaḫlī Shīrāzī ; 'O Thou Creator 'mss).

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2. 4 Mazhariyya : The roots and significance of the Bābī- Bahāḫ concept of the *mazhar- i ilāhī* ("Divine theophany", "Manifestation of God").

It was out of the abovementioned nexus of Islamic prophetological, imamological and theophanological Sufi and Shīrī- Shaykhī concepts, that the terminology and many aspects