

THE SOCIAL LOCATION OF THE BABI MOVEMENT: A PRELIMINARY NOTE

FACTORS AFFECTING CONVERSIONS

The sense of anticipating the return of the Imam Mahdi (1) is much stronger among Shi'is than the anticipation felt by Christians for the return of Christ or even the comparable phenomenon of awaiting the Mahdi among Sunnis. It is frequently referred to in the course of the ordinary conversation of Shi'is and the wish for his speedy advent is a common subject of the exclamations and imprecations in everyday use. Thus it is not surprising that anyone claiming to be that return should occasion much interest and turmoil. However there were a number of specific factors that affected the response to the Bab's claims.

Any analysis of the Bab's claims and of the Babi movement would be distorted if it does not fully take into account the different phases in the nature of the claims put forward by the Bab. This subject has been discussed in more detail elsewhere (2) but for the present it is sufficient to state that in his early writings (1844-1848), the Bab appeared to be formally claiming to be only the agent of the Hidden Imam although the use of certain words and phrases in the text of these writings made it clear to those familiar with religious terminology that the Bab was hinting at a much greater claim, that of being the recipient of a new revelation from God (i.e. a status equivalent to that of Muhammad himself) thus abrogating Islam. These hints were clearly perceived by his leading early disciples (3) and were also the subject of the earliest attacks upon him by the ulama (4). But the generality of the people and of his supporters initially accepted him in the setting of his lesser formal claim, that of being the agent of the Hidden Imam. However even this was too much for the orthodox ulama who had, after what were often violent disagreements in the previous century, come solidly behind the view that they, the ulama as a body, were the general agents or vicegerents (nā'ib-i 'āmm) of the Hidden Imam (this was the position of the majority Usuli school). Even the lesser claim of the Bab to be the specific agent (nā'ib-i khāss) of the Hidden Imam would in effect remove the ulama's claim to legitimacy and authority (5). It was only in 1848 that the Bab openly advanced his greater claim, that he was the bearer of a new revelation from God which abrogated the Islamic dispensation. From this time onwards, the writings of the Bab took on a completely different tone. With regard to legal matters, for example, prior to 1848, the Bab was basically only reiterating the Qur'anic position on matters of ritual, jihād (holy war), etc. After 1848, and in particular in the Persian Bayān, the Bab departed wholesale from the Qur'an and the Islamic Shari'a in setting up an independent religious system. Thus for example most ritual acts were altered from their Islamic form and the position of jihād was substantially downplayed. The question of factors affecting conversions to the Babi movement must therefore be taken in the context of these internal developments.

During the earliest period of his ministry (1844-48), the Bab appears

to have directed his claim primarily, but not exclusively, towards the Shaykhi community. The Shaykhi movement had been founded by Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (1753-1826). Its teachings were primarily an extreme philosophical esotericism. However two aspects of its teachings were to be of crucial importance in paving the way for the Bab's claims. Firstly, the Shaykhi doctrine held that the world had a hierarchy of spiritual beings at the apex of which was a Perfect Shi'i (ash-Shi'i al-kamil) who, whether recognised or not was the instrument of God's guidance and blessings upon the world. This perfect Shi'i was considered to be the intermediary of the Hidden Imam. Although Shaykh Ahmad and his successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti (c.1795-1843), never appeared to have formally claimed to be the Perfect Shi'i, it would seem that their followers thought of them thus. In some Shaykhi sources they are referred to as the two Babs. When Sayyid Kazim died in 1843, he had not appointed a successor and so it was perhaps not a major step for many Shaykhis to accept Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad as their new leader, to think of him as the Perfect Shi'i and to accept his title of the Bab. The second aspect of the Shaykhi teachings that was to be of importance with respect to the Babi movement was the fact that the Shaykhi leaders had interpreted many of the fundamental Islamic teachings such as the return of the Twelfth Imam and the Resurrection as being statements symbolic of spiritual truths rather than literal physical occurrences. Thus the Shaykhis were more prepared than other Shi'is to accept the Bab's later general claim that he was the returned Imam Mahdi and that the Day of Judgement had arrived.

Conversely there were certain aspects of the Bab's teachings that made it attractive to many of the Shaykhis. Two of the features of Shaykhism that made it socially and doctrinally distinctive from the majority Usuli school were the already-mentioned tendency to explain religious concepts in terms of symbols and its anti-clericism. The anti-clericism took the form of attacks upon the ulama in the writings of the Bab and a tendency to emphasise the importance of individual intuitive knowledge as a guide to action rather than the application of the religious law through the interpretation of the religious class. If one now compares, with respect to these two points, the teachings of the Bab and those of the other claimants to the leadership of the Shaykhi movement, it is clear that the Bab develops these two areas further whereas the other claimants tended towards a position of rapprochement with the Usuli majority. Thus we may assume that those Shaykhis more inclined to be radical with regard to these two areas would be more attracted to the Bab's teachings.

When the Bab did put forward his claims, there was a considerable response. Initially this response came mostly from the Shaykhis who were the first to be acquainted with the Bab's claims. Notable among non-Shaykhis to respond were Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali Hujjat Zanjani who was an Akhbari, the sect that had tried to oppose the Usulis in their excessive concentration of power and authority in the hands of the clerical class, and Sayyid Yahya Darabi whose father was known as Kashfi on account of his claim to intuitive religious knowledge. Thus even these non-Shaykhis were representative of a tendency towards anti-clericism and esotericism.

One factor that occurs repeatedly among the various conversion accounts is that meeting the Bab himself was often a critical factor in the conversion process. However this factor does not follow the usual pattern of personal charisma in that the meeting with the Bab that is referred to is often one that occurred prior to the Bab putting forward any claim, when the usual factors that lead to an intensification of charisma would not have been operating in the mind of the subsequent disciple. For many of those Shaykhis who went on to become prominent Babis, meeting the Bab in Karbala in 1841-42, prior to his putting forward any claim, had such a marked effect upon them that they later acknowledged his claim immediately they heard of it (6). Similarly among non-Shaykhis, the Bab's address in the Masjid-i Vakil in Shiraz in 1845, although it is said to have been in the nature of a recantation of any claim on his part, had nevertheless such a profound effect upon his audience that 18 or more of the Babis of Shiraz dated their conversion from this experience (7). Comparable to this factor of meeting the Bab face-to-face is the fact that the writings of the Bab appear to have had an equally remarkable effect upon some of those who converted to the Babi movement. For example the leading Babi in Zanjan, Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali Hujjat, never met the Bab face-to-face but the perusal of a single page of the writings of the Bab is reported to have been sufficient to cause him to give his allegiance to the Bab (8).

There was however one further factor within the Shaykhi community that seems to have facilitated the conversion of part of it to the Bab's movement. Sayyid Kazim Rashti himself did, according to a number of reports, lay some emphasis on adventist themes in his teaching sessions (9) although this is not clearly reflected in his writings. There is some evidence that already within the lifetime of Rashti there was something of a split between those Shaykhis more interested in esotericism and those more interested in the adventist themes in Rashti's teaching (10). Not unexpectedly, those interested in adventist themes were among those who later became Babis, while some of those identified as being more interested in esotericism became leading opponents of the Bab.

Apart from the Shaykhis, the Bab was able to address himself to the very considerable adventist tension that was present at this time due to the fact that it was the Islamic year 1260. Since this was the one-thousandth anniversary of the beginning of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam and there were prophecies to the effect that he would reappear at this time, adventist expectation had reached a peak throughout the Shi'i world (11). Certain specific events, and in particular the sacking of Karbala by the Ottomans under Najib Pasha, intensified the expectation that the Hidden Imam Mahdi would appear - to avenge this dishonour to one of the holiest shrines of Shi'ism (12).

During the course of the six turbulent years of the Bab's ministry, certain events occurred which were interpreted by the disciples of the Bab as fulfilling the adventist prophecies in Islam. This factor came into particular prominence from 1848 onwards when the Bab identified himself as the return of the Imam Mahdi and a number of the leading disciples of the Bab were identified as being the "returns" of the

Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima and the Imams who, in Shi'i eschatology, were expected to return in the company of the Imam Mahdi. Similarly, certain opponents of the Bab such as Hajj Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmani were identified with the Anti-Christ figure of the Dajjal which also figures prominently in Shi'i prophecy relating to the advent of the Mahdi. The raising of the Black Standard in Khurasan by Mulla Husayn Bushru'i also was very significant in that this was a very well-known eschatological prophecy, familiar to both Shi'is and Sunnis. The result of all of this was an intensification of the messianic motif as a factor in conversions to the new movement.

Comparable to and bound up with this chiliastic fervour, was an appeal to certain very emotive Shi'i themes. In Shi'i Islam, all of the Twelve Imams (except the last) are popularly regarded as having been martyred. Many of the other key figures of Shi'i history were also martyred and thus martyrdom and being oppressed have become, for Shi'is, key symbols of being on the side of truth. Thus the Babis, once they came into conflict with the civil and religious authorities were able to portray themselves as the oppressed and their killed co-religionists as martyrs. Perhaps the key event in this connection was the Upheaval at Shaykh Tabarsi in Mazandaran where a number of the leading Babis were surrounded by large numbers of Government troops and after a protracted siege put to death by treachery. This was widely regarded as having been a re-enactment of the episode of Karbala and doubtless gained the Babi movement much secret support. This episode and others such as the Seven Martyrs of Tihiran, the persecutions in the village of Milan in Adharbayjan, and the transport of the heads of the martyrs of Nayriz were all interpreted by the Babis in this mixture of Adventist and Martyrdom motifs. There is even evidence that their opponents saw this symbolism clearly too (13).

The stages in the unfoldment of the public understanding of his claim (from that of being the Gate of the Hidden Imam to being the Imam himself to being a Prophet bearing an independent revelation from God) appear to have been a deliberate policy of the Bab. He himself in his writings states that he did this in order that at first "men might not be disturbed by a new Book and a new Cause" (13a). In this, the Bab appears to have been remarkably successful in that he was able initially to gather around himself a large group of disciples mainly from the Shaykhi community many of whom would probably have balked at joining the movement had it been presented as a complete departure from Islam. It seems that initially the Bab intended to proclaim himself as the Mahdi at Karbala after his return from Mecca but seeing the hostile reception that his emissaries received at the hands of the leading Shaykhi and Usuli ulama at Najaf and Kirman, he decided to postpone this announcement (13b). During the next three years, he was able to build up a community of disciples and to bind them closely to him. During this period, some of his leading disciples, such as Tahirih, would hint to the generality of the Babis of his "true station". Then when he did eventually put forward his more radical claims in 1848, the majority of the Babi community was now able to accept these. Only a few Babis withdrew at this stage.

MOBILIZATION

In this section, we will consider the diffusion of the Babi movement throughout Iran and Iraq and also look briefly at the network of communications used by the Babists and at their organization. Once again there are considerable differences between the early period, up to about 1848, and the later period.

Initially the Bab announced his claim during the spring and summer of 1844 to a small group of eighteen persons who had been pupils of Sayyid Kazim Rashti, the Shaykhi leader who had died a few months previously. Sayyid Kazim had appointed no-one to take over the leadership of the Shaykhis after him but this group of eighteen were not by any means persons who could have been considered viable contenders for this leadership. They were rather the best of the younger generation among the pupils of Sayyid Kazim. At least one of them, Mulla Husayn Bushru'i, had already distinguished himself by his journey to Isfahan where he had succeeded in obtaining from Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Shafti, the renowned mujtahid of that city, an endorsement of the Shaykhi teachings. But even this would not have made Mulla Husayn a realistic contender for the Shaykhi leadership as his youthful age would have been against him. Those who did consider themselves contenders for the Shaykhi leadership all eventually came out in opposition to the claims of the Bab.

The Bab gathered this small group of disciples around himself at Shiraz (except for Tahiri who became a member of this initial group of disciples through written communication) and from there dispersed them to various parts of Iran, Iraq and India. His instructions to them appear to have been to travel through these areas announcing his claim but without giving details of his specific identity until he himself performed the pilgrimage to Mecca and made his initial announcement there (14). The initial diffusion of the Babi movement was the result of the travels of these "Letters of the Living" from town to town throughout Iran and Iraq (15) and subsequent conversions within the Shaykhi network of each town visited. It is not clear whether this initial Shaykhi predominance among the converts was the result of the specific instructions of the Bab or whether it was a natural result of the fact that these "Letters of the Living" had all themselves been Shaykhis.

In the later stages of Babi history, the importance of itinerant propagandists remained very great except that there was an increasing tendency to widen the scope of those contacted beyond the Shaykhi circle. Thus for example one of the key Babi figures after 1846 was Sayyid Yahya Darabi, known as Vahid, who had not been a Shaykhi and as he travelled around the country, he succeeded in converting many of those associated with the network of contacts built up by himself and his father, Sayyid Ja'far Kashfi, a prominent mujtahid of that era.

Another way in which the Babi movement spread was that news of the Bab's claim spread through the country even more rapidly than the Babi propagandists and this frequently caused individuals to set out for

Shiraz in order to investigate the matter for themselves. In a few instances, an individual would be delegated by a group to go and investigate and report back to them. The conversion of Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali Hujjat Zanjani followed the dispatch of such a messenger to Shiraz. Similarly, Mulla Muhammad Furughi was deputed by the inhabitants of the Turbat-i Haydari area to proceed to Mashhad and investigate the uproar caused by the teaching of Mulla Husayn Bushru'i (16). Another important example of this phenomenon, in that it led to the enrollment of a tribal group into the Babi community, was the journey of Shaykh Salman of Hindijan to Shiraz and his later conversion. He then returned to his home town and succeeded in converting some seventy families of the Afshar tribe (17).

One of the notable features of Iranian urban life which remained remarkably constant over many centuries was the tendency to form mutually-antagonistic factions. In many towns in Nineteenth century Iran, this factionation took the form of a division between the Shaykhis and the Usulis of the town. In other towns the divisions were according to the more traditional Ni'mati and Haydari quarters of the town (18). There is some evidence that, in a few towns at least, the diffusion of the Babi movement occurred within one of these factions only, resulting in the automatic enmity of the opposing faction. In Qazvin for example there was long-standing enmity between the Shaykhi faction led by such figures as Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab, Hajji Mulla 'Ali Baraghani and Hajji Asadu'llah Farhadi and the Usuli faction led by Mulla Muhammad Taqi Baraghani. With the advent of the Babi movement, this Shaykhi-Usuli split became transformed into a Babi-Usuli split. Similarly there is some evidence that the Babis in Barfurush obtained most of their support from the Ni'mati faction in the town led by Shari'atmadar and were opposed by the Haydari faction led by Sa'idu'l-'Ulama (19). What is not clear however is to what extent this factor was important in other towns. In Nayriz, for example, it would appear from most accounts that almost the whole of one of the town's quarters became Babis but it is not clear whether it was factionalism or the conversion of Hajji Shaykh 'Abdu'l-'Ali, the Imam-Jum'a of that quarter, that was the major factor in these conversions. The issue is even less clear in the case of Zanjan where the town had, prior to the advent of the Babi movement, been split into two opposing factions by the outspoken stand taken by Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali. He had adopted the Akhbari school and was followed by an appreciable proportion of the town's population. Not suprisingly in view of the antagonistic stance taken by this school towards mujtahids, he was opposed by the town's Usuli mujtahids such as Hajji Sayyid Abu'l-Qasim. Then when Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali became a Babi, many of the townspeople who had formerly followed him also became Babis and the Akhbari-Usuli split within the town became a Babi-Usuli one. It is difficult in these two cases of Nayriz and Zanjan to separate the inter-related factors of factionalism and the tendency of the populace to follow their leader.

During the whole of his ministry, the question of communicating with his widespread following was always a potentially difficult one for the Bab. His family were wholesale merchants and had an extensive network of offices and agents covering much of Iran and the Gulf. During the early period of his ministry, the Bab appears to have used this network

quite extensively. Thus for example, when Mulla Husayn reached Khurasan in 1844, he communicated all that had happened to him by means of a letter that he sent through partners of the Bab's uncle in Tabas to Yazd where the family had a major office and thence to the Bab in Shiraz.

In the later stages of his ministry, the Bab used itinerant messengers in order to remain in communication with his following. By this time the Bab was imprisoned in the remotest corner of Adharbayjan and so communications were even more problematical. There was however a steady stream of Babis who travelled from all parts of the country to Maku and Chihriq to visit the Bab and were therefore able to take with them letters for the Bab and also to take back the Bab's letters and instructions. In addition to this a number of individuals and in particular Mirza Adi Ghuzal, known as Hajji Sayyah, became full-time messengers travelling around the country taking with them the messages and writings of the Bab and then returning to the Bab when they had completed their task. Associated with Hajji Sayyah in his task were persons such as Mulla 'Abdu'l-Karim Qazvini (known as Mirza Ahmad Katib) who spent their time transcribing the writings of the Bab so that there would be more copies for the messengers to distribute. The effectiveness of this system of communications was demonstrated when in 1848 the Bab issued instructions for as many of the Babis as possible to attend the Conference of Badasht, to rally to the Black Standard that Mulla Husayn had raised in Khurasan and later to go to the assistance of Quddus and Mulla Husayn who were besieged at Shaykh Tabarsi. The large number of Babis from a wide geographical distribution (20) who responded to this call (even though many of them were unable to penetrate the ring that the besieging forces had put around the Babis at Shaykh Tabarsi and had to return disappointed) is ample evidence of the efficient workings of this network.

The Babi community never achieved any significant level of organization. Circumstances were against this. The ministry of the Bab was too brief and turbulent, the persecutions that marked its final stages too devastating in their effect and the proclamation of the claim of 'Baha'u'llah followed too soon to allow any real degree of organization and cohesion to develop among the Babis. In the writings of the Bab and in the instructions that he gave the "Letters of the Living", there are the barest outlines of a hierarchical system. It would appear that the Bab intended his followers to be constituted into groups of 19 (equivalent to the word wāḥid - unity), the first of these wāḥids was to consist of the 18 "Letters of the Living" together with himself. These wāḥids were to be further made up into groups of 19 (i.e. $19 \times 19 = 361$) called kullu shay' (meaning "All Things", this word being equivalent to 361). But what the exact organizational functions of these groups were to have been is not clear. In any case these wāḥids and kullu shay's were never formed as far as is known. The Bab also referred to a number of his followers as mir'āt (mirrors). This was clearly a rank below that of the "Letters of the Living" (Hurūf-i Ḥayy) but again the functions of these different designations from an organizational point of view is not clear and they appeared to have denoted spiritual rank rather than any particular function.

In 1848, when the Bab put forward his claim to be the Imam Mahdi, he began to apply to himself such titles as "The Primal Point" (nugṭa-yi ulā). Some of the histories indicate that he then transferred the title of "Bab" to one or two of his leading disciples (21). With this transfer of title there appears to have also been a certain degree of transfer of function and authority. There is only indirect evidence for this but certainly in some of the earliest Babi histories, Qudḍus is referred to as Qa'im-i Mazandarani and Mulla Husayn Bushru'i as Qa'im-i Khurasani (22). Moreover, the raising of the Black Standard in Khurasan appears to have been done by Mulla Husayn in his new status as the Qa'im (the Qa'im being one of the titles of the Imam Mahdi and the prophecy relating to the raising of the Black Standard states that the Mahdi is with the Black Standard). The fact that the Bab sent Mulla Husayn his green turban (green signifying descent from the Prophet Muhammad) and gave him the new name Sayyid 'Ali (23) may also be of significance with regard to this assumption by Mulla Husayn of the role of the Mahdi. However it must be stressed that all of these are only hints and indications in the histories, and the Bab's writings, insofar as they are known to the present author, provide no basis for this putative transfer of authority (24).

In practice the Babi communities seem to have had no uniform formal organization. In some places, there appears to have been some degree of hierarchical importance attached to the question of how early in the history of the movement any particular individual became a Babi. In at least one source those who became Babis at an early stage are called the sābigūn (the forerunners) and their interpretations of the Bab's teachings are regarded as more authoritative (25). But in other places the Babis themselves gathered around a natural leader. This was often someone who had already held a leading position in the community before the advent of the Bab: usually someone who had held religious leadership such as Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali Hujjat at Zanjan but occasionally a leading lay figure such as Aqa Rasul Bihnamiri who was the landowner at Bihnamir and led the Bihnamiri Babis at Shaykh Tabarsi. In most of the large cities such as Shiraz, Isfahan, Tihran, Mashhad and Tabriz however, it would seem that there was no overall leadership except when someone of the stature of the Bab himself or Mulla Husayn was resident for a time in the town. In the cities, there is some evidence that leadership was divided with certain persons having an individual following among the Babis of the city (26).

SOCIAL LOCATION OF THE BABI COMMUNITY

The question of how many Babis there were in Iran at the time of its maximum spread is a difficult one to resolve since there is very little basis on which to form a judgement. However, it is interesting that several estimates, one by the Bab himself and another by the British Minister in Tihran Sir Justin Shiel, agree upon a figure of 100,000 (27). One estimate puts the number of Babis in Baghdad at 70 during the time that Tahirih was there (28) and there was probably an equal number at Karbala.

In the same way as it is impossible to obtain any accurate estimate of the number of Babis in Iran, it is also impossible to make any except generalised statements regarding the social location of the Babi community as a whole. It is however possible to make a more accurate assessment of the Babi leadership since sufficient biographical information is available about this group to enable us to come to some definite conclusions. Analysing the Babi leadership cadre will in turn give us a firmer basis on which to make statements regarding the social location of the whole Babi community.

In order to give our assessment of the Babi leadership cadre a more quantitative basis, we have analysed the biographical information to be found in one of the standard historical works, Fadil Mazandarani, Kitāb-i Zuhūru'l-Hagg, Volume 3. This work takes each Babi community and gives biographical information about the leading individuals in that community. We have analysed the information regarding the leading Babis named for each area (where Mazandarani has on occasions given just lists of names, such as names of those proceeding to Shaykh Tabarsi, we have assumed these individuals to be rank-and-file Babis rather than the leadership and therefore not included these in our analysis). Table 1 gives an analysis of the Babi community of Iran by occupation and geographical location (29).

It can immediately be seen from Table 1 that the preponderating social class of the Babi leadership was that of ulama, and in particular the minor ulama. Indeed all of the "Letters of the Living" belonged to this category as did most of the other important leaders. Wholesale merchants (the tujjār) are another prominent group. Socially, the ulama and the tujjār were very closely linked both in their day-to-day activities and by intermarriage (30). Thus it is interesting to note that these two groups together constitute almost 70% of those Babi leaders whose occupation is known. The peasant category primarily consists of fruit-growers from Nayriz.

One factor that is readily apparent from this table is the manner in which networks of people of the same occupation operated in the process of diffusion. Thus for example, in Qazvin, fifteen of the Babi leaders were wholesale merchants while Isfahan and Tabriz both of which had many merchants resident had very few of them become Babis. In Isfahan, one of the main networks through which the movement spread was the Asnāf (the guilded craftsmen). In Zanzan, although large numbers in the town became Babis, very few of the ulama did but in most other towns the ulama were one of the main networks through which the movement spread (31).

The further information derived from the analysis of Babi leaders is summarised in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 demonstrates that the Babi leadership was drawn almost equally from the towns and the villages. There was little involvement of the tribes people that at this time are generally thought to have constituted some 30-40% of the Iranian population. The 5 tribal people to be found in Table 1 include one Kurdish tribal leader from the Qazvin area and one Afshar tribal leader from Hindijan (there were in fact another two tribesmen, one an Afshar and the other a Turkaman, but as these had occupations, they are listed

TABLE ONE: PROMINENT BABIS BY OCCUPATION AND GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGIN

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	TOTAL
Khurasan (Qa'in & Simnan)	6	32	0	3	0	2	2	0	0	0	3	48
Mazandaran	2	8	1	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	6	23
Azerbaijan	2	22	0	6	3	2	2	3	0	0	6	46
Gazvin & Khamsih	2	10	0	0	4	17	0	9	1	3	1	47
Tehran & Qumm	2	5	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	11
Kashan & Mahallat	1	8	0	0	0	9	0	2	0	0	7	27
Isfahan	1	14	1	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	3	24
Fars	1	13	1	1	0	3	2	2	12	2	2	39
Yazd & Kerman	2	8	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	14
Kirmanshah & Hamadan	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Iraq	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	7
Total	19	125	4	19	7	34	9	20	15	6	31	289
Percentage (Excluding column K)	7	48	2	7	3	13	3	8	6	2		99

- A - Major Ulama: mujtahids, Imam-Jum'is and any ulama who had a following
 B - Minor Ulama: all other ulama and tullāb (religious students)
 C - Landowners & Employers: landowners and landowning farmers
 D - Notables & High Govt. Officials: governors, court officials, army officers of rank of sartip and above, high government officials
 E - Minor Govt. Officials: secretaries, couriers, soldiers, kadkhudās
 F - Wholesale Merchants (tujjār)
 G - Retail Merchants: Guilded retail merchants, petty commodity producers
 H - Skilled Urban Workers: guilded craftsmen (asnāf) and other service workers
 I - Peasants
 J - Tribal elements
 K - Occupation unknown

SOURCE: Māzandarānī, Zuhūru'l-Haqq, vol. 3

elsewhere in the table). But these represent the more settled tribes rather than the nomads.

Table 3 analyses the Babi leadership according to whether they became Babis before or after the year A.H. 1264 (A.D. 1848), which as described above, was in many ways a critical year. It can be seen from this table that the majority of the Babi leadership was converted in the early period, before 1264, and comparatively few after that date. The division between Shaykhi and non-Shaykhi clearly demonstrates the importance of the Shaykhi movement as a source for conversions especially in the earlier period. It should be noted that this table probably in fact underestimates the number of Babis who had previously been Shaykhis. It tends to be only those who had travelled to Karbala to study under Sayyid Kazim Rashti that can readily be identified as Shaykhis. Others may well have held to the Shaykhi position but, since at this time the lines between the Usulis and the Shaykhis had not yet been rigidly drawn, there was no ready method of identifying them. One suspects that many of those whom Mulla Husayn Bushru'i contacted on his first journey from Shiraz were probably Shaykhis whom he had previously met but they are not all identified as such and so appear in the non-Shaykhi section of the table.

Having analysed the Babi leadership, it remains to be seen what statements can be made with any degree of certainty regarding the Babi community as a whole. In making these statements reliance has been placed on an analysis previously made on the Babis participating in the Shaykh Tabarsi upheaval (32) as well as the information presented in the present paper and the general impression created by the histories.

The geographical spread of the Babi movement appears to have been closely related to the initial diffusion of the "Letters of the Living". The largest numbers of Babis were to be found in a broad band across central Iran stretching from Shiraz and Yazd northwards to Tihran and Mazandaran and thence north-eastwards to Khurasan and north-westwards to Adharbayjan. There were comparatively few Babis along the Gulf littoral, in the south-western towns such as Kirmanshah and Hamadan, in the south-eastern area centred on Kirman and in the province of Gilan (centred on Rasht) on the Caspian coast. This variation in the distribution can mostly be accounted for by the activities of the "Letters of the Living". The areas that have large numbers of Babis were the areas to which the "Letters" dispersed and began their propaganda on behalf of the Bab. Hamadan and Kirmanshah were not visited until comparatively late (by Tahirih in 1847) and so the community there was not well established before the persecutions began in earnest from 1848 onwards. Another indication that the Babi communities there were but weak is the fact that in later years, the Baha'i communities in those cities were not based on an earlier Babi community as was the case for the major central cities. Gilan does not appear to have been visited by any of the "Letters of the Living". No propaganda activity was carried out along the Gulf littoral either. The situation in Kirman was somewhat different. Quddus did visit this city as did Mulla Sadiq Muqaddas but the opposition of the Shaykhi leader in that city, Hajj Mirza Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmani, was so rigorous that little headway was made in that city. In Iraq, the main

TABLE TWO: RURAL/URBAN ORIGINS OF PROMINENT IRANIAN BABIS

		%
Large Towns (>22,000)	114	40
Medium-sized Towns (7,000-22000)	65	23
Small Towns (2,000-7,000)	37	13
Villages	66	23
	---	--
Total	282	99

SOURCES: Mazandarani, Zuhūru'l-Hagg, vol. 3. For this Table, the list of towns given by Thompson in Parliamentary Papers, vol. 69 for 1867-68, pp. 507-15 (reprinted by C. Issawi, Economic History of Iran, p.28) has been used for the large and medium-sized towns. For the small towns and villages, I have used information from Gazetteer of Persia. However it should be realised that this information is very imprecise and it is impossible to determine the size at that time of certain large villages such as Bushru'iyih which has been classified here under villages but may well have had more than 2,000 inhabitants.

NOTE: The seven Iraqis included in Tables 1 and 3 have been excluded from this table hence the difference in totals.

TABLE THREE: PREVIOUS RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES OF PROMINENT BABIS BY DATE OF CONVERSION

Conversion before 1264 - Shaykhis	75
- not identified as Shaykhis	70

- total	145
Conversion 1264 or after - Shaykhis	2
- not identified as Shaykhis	38

- total	40
Date of conversion not known	104

Total -	289

SOURCE: Māzandarānī, Zuhūru'l-Hagg, vol. 3

Shaykhi centre of Karbala soon had a major Babi community through the efforts of Tahirih and others. At Baghdad and Kazimayn also there was much propaganda and a community was built up but no headway was made at the other main Shi'i centre, Najaf, probably because there was no Shaykhi presence there.

With regard to the occupational and class constitution of the Babi community, it cannot be assumed that the community as a whole would share the bias towards the ulama and tujjar shown among the leadership in Table 1. Indeed in places such as Zanjan and Nayriz where large numbers became Babis, the evidence seems to indicate that the converts were a complete cross-section of the community and the analysis of the participants at Shaykh Tabarsi (33) confirms that this was probably the case with the Babi community as a whole. Indeed in the case of the Zanjan Babis there is even a hint that there was a slight predominance of the poorer classes (34). At the other end of the social scale, the Babis even succeeded in making one or two converts from among the court and nobility. Tahirih, at various stages of her travels, is reported to have contacted a number of Qajar princesses and to have converted a few of them (35). Manuchihr Khan Mu'tamidu'd-Dawlih was probably the most influential figure converted but several others including Mirza Rida Khan Turkaman, Rida Quli Khan Afshar and Baha'u'llah himself had access to court circles.

With regard to the urban/rural distribution of the Babis also, there would appear to have been no bias towards either urban or rural populations among the Babi converts. However, whereas there was a fairly even distribution of Babis throughout most of the major cities of Iran (with the exceptions noted above), this did not apply to the villages. Conversions in the villages tended to occur wherever there was already a link to that village through a Babi that had been converted in one of the towns or through the Shaykhi network. In such a situation large numbers would sometimes become Babis within one particular village while another nearby village would have no Babis at all. In addition it appears to have been largely in the north of the country that large numbers of villagers became Babis, particularly in Adharbayjan, Mazandaran and Khurasan. Apart from those who became Babis as a result of the journey of Sayyid Yahya Darabi Vahid from Yazd to Nayriz in 1850, there is no other record of significant conversions in the villages of the south. Thus the distribution of rural Babis was rather patchy but their total numbers were not inconsiderable and probably balanced the urban Babis. The paucity of tribal Babis mentioned above in the analysis of Babi leaders also holds true for the Babi community as a whole. The 70 Afshar families converted by Shaykh Salman in Hindijan are the only reference to be found of substantial numbers of tribal people becoming Babis. But these, as with the other tribal members mentioned above, represent the more settled rather than the nomadic tribes.

Apart from the tribes, the Babi movement made no significant converts among other major groups in the Iranian population. There is only a record of one conversion from among the Zoroastrians (36), a few Jews (37), a few Ahl-i Haqq ('Aliyu'llāhīs) (38) and no Christians or Sunnis.

One of the major social thrusts of the Babi movement, at least as perceived by contemporary observers (39) and probably by the Iranian population itself, was in the improvement of the social position of women. The laws enacted by the Bab certainly made some improvements in the position of women. These included: the abolition of the veil and of the seclusion of women (40), the consent of both parties being necessary for marriage (41), and restrictions on the ease of divorce including the necessity of waiting one year (42). But the actions of Tahirih, her assumption of a leading role among the Babis and the Bab's evident approval of this obviously set an example which the Babis seem to have followed. What information exists in the historical sources seems to indicate that there was a significant degree of conversion among the women as well as the men. Certainly our analysis of the Babi leadership in the tables in this paper includes 11 women out of the 282 leading Babis (a better proportion than achieved by women in the British Parliament and U.S. Congress in 1984!). And conversions also occurred at all levels of society. The accounts of the upheavals at Zanjan and Nayriz speak of the women sharing in the defence of the Babi positions and even, in the case of Zaynab at Zanjan, taking a leading role in the fighting (43).

Dr. Moojan Momen
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December 1984

NOTES

1) In Shi'i doctrine, the Twelfth Imam disappeared in A.D. 260 (A.D. 873). He went into Occultation and will reappear to fill the earth with justice. He is the Imam Mahdi. See M. Momen, Introduction to Shi'i Islam, Oxford, 1985, Chap. 8.

2) M.Momen, "The trial of Mulla 'Ali Bastami: a combined Sunni-Shi'i fatwa against the Bab" Iran, Vol. 20, pp. 113-143; see in particular pp. 140-42.

3) Thus for example, the leading female Babi, Tahirih, was openly referring to the abrogation of the Islamic Shari'a in Karbala in 1845-47 several years before the Bab himself publically advanced such a position; see Mazandarani, Zuhuru'l-Hagg, Vol. 3 (Tihran, n.d., hereinafter referred to as ZH3), p. 318 and statement by a Shaykhi in Mazandarani, ZH3, p.35. See also statement regarding Tahirih in Samandar, Tarikh (Tihran 131), p.349, and statements regarding her pronouncements in Kirmanshah in 1847 (Mustafa Baghdadi, Risala Amriyya, Cairo, 1919, pp. 113, 114). Similarly regarding Hujjat, see Nabil's Narrative (London, 1953 and Wilmette, 1932, hereinafter referred to as Nabil with page number for British edition first and U.S. edition second) pp.392/538-9.

4) The combined Sunni-Shi'i fatwa against the Bab in Baghdad in 1845 and the book of Hajj Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmani, Izhag al-Batil written in 1845, both clearly demonstrate that these ulama were well aware of the implications behind the Bab's writings. See Momen "Trial of Mulla 'Ali", pp. 140-42.

5) See M. Momen, Introduction to Shi'i Islam, pp. 189-190.

6) See for example statements regarding the conversions of: Mulla Ahmad Mu'allim, Hajji Muhammad Rida of Isfahan, Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Nahri, Mulla Zaynu'l-'Abidin Shahmirzadi (Mazandarani, ZH3, pp. 158, 101, 97, and 200 respectively); also Mulla Muhammad Sadiq Muqaddas (Nabil, p. 69-70/100) and Hajji Rasul, the father of Nabil Qazvini (Samandar, Tarikh p. 16-17). Similarly for Sayyid Javad Karbala'i who had known the Bab from childhood (H.M. Balyuzi, The Bab, Oxford, 1973, pp. 37-8.

7) Personal communication of material to be presented in forthcoming book by Abu'l-Qasim Afnan.

8) Nabil, p. 129/179.

9) al-Qatil ibn al-Karbala'i quoted in Mazandarani, ZH3, p.506-7; see also Nabil Zarandi, pp.19-20, 28-32/24-5,38-45.

10) Mulla Yusuf Ardibili, one of the disciples of Sayyid Kazim at Karbala, is reported to have openly advocated adventist themes in Karbala during Sayyid Kazim's lifetime and to have clashed as a result of this with Shaykh Hasan Gawhar and Hajj Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmani (Mazandarani, ZH3, pp. 49-50); Ardibili later became a Babi while

Gawhar and Kirmani became leading opponents of the Bab. Similarly, Hajji Asadu'llah of Saysan was proclaiming an adventist message before he even became a Shaykhi. Later he warned his disciples against Mulla Muhammad Mamaqani, a leading Shaykhi of Tabriz (Mazandarani, ZH3, p. 44-46); the followers of Hajji Asadu'llah later became Babis while Mamaqani became an opponent of the Bab.

11) On messianic expectation in Iran, Iraq and the Caucasus at this time, see Amanat "Babi Movement", pp. 75-90. Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali states that the Shi'is with whom she was in contact in Oudh in India in the 1820s were "said to possess prophecies that lead them to expect the twelve hundred and sixtieth year of the Hegirah as the time for his [the Imam Mahdi's] coming" (Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali, Observations on the Musulmans of India, p. 76, quoted in J.R. Cole "Imami Shi'ism..." pp. 348-49.

12) See J.R. Cole and M. Momen, "Mafia, Mob and Shi'ism in Iraq: The rebellion of Ottoman Karbala 1824-43" Past and Present, forthcoming.

13) Mazandarani, ZH3, p. 42

13a) The Bab in Dala'il-i Sab'ih, translated in Selections from the Writings of the Bab, Haifa, 1976, p. 119

13b) See the Bab, quoted in A. Ishraq-Khavari, Qamus-i Igan, [Tihran], 128/1971, Vol. 2, p.1003-4. See note in R. Mehrabkhani, "Some Notes on fundamental principles...", Baha'i Studies Bulletin, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 40-41.

14) For a more detailed list of the putative instructions of the Bab to the "Letters of the Living", see Momen, "Sunni-Shi'i fatwa", p. 115.

15) There appears to be no information as to what happened to Shaykh Sa'id Hindi, the "Letter of the Living" who was delegated to proceed to India beyond what is mentioned in Nabil p. 432/ 588-9.

16) Mazandarani, ZH3, 155n

17) Mazandarani, ZH3, p.301. From a previous analysis of the Babi converts at the Upheaval at Shaykh Tabarsi, it had appeared that there were negligible tribal converts to the Babi movement (Momen "Social Basis of the Babi Upheavals", International Journal of Middle East Studies, 15, 1983, pp. 166, 173). It is clear from this reference that this statement requires some modification. There are also references to conversions from among Kurds (Mazandarani, ZH3, p. 386).

18) A. Amanat, "The Early Years of the Babi Movement; Background and Development", Ph.D., Oxford, 1981, 383-4

19) Mazandarani, ZH3, p. 406-7

20) M. Momen "Social Basis", pp. 162-166.

21) Nuqtatu'l-Kaf, pp. 202, 206-207. See also Gobineau, Religions et Philosophies, Paris, 1957, p. 144

22) For example the Wagayi'-i Mimiyya by Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Zawari'i known as Mahjur. The beginning of the Wagayi'-i Qal'ia by Mir Muhammad Rida Shahmirzadi speaks of the desire of his relatives, when they heard of Mulla Husayn being at Shaykh Tabarsi, to join his company in order that "we may suffer martyrdom at the stirrups of the Lord of the Age (i.e. the Imam Mahdi)."

23) Nabil, pp. 235-6/324-5. Mulla Husayn was not in fact a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. There is evidence that Mulla Husayn wore the green turban throughout the Shaykh Tabarsi episode, see Gobineau, Religions, p. 193.

24) The examples cited by E.G. Browne (Traveller's Narrative, pp. 230-234) are unconvincing as there are more obvious interpretations of these passages.

25) See letter by Shaykh Sultan Karbala'i written in 1263 (1847), regarding the disagreement between Tahiri and Mulla Ahmad Khurasani; quoted in Mazandarani, ZH3, pp. 240-250.

26) That at any rate was the situation among the Babis of Isfahan in 1870-73; see M.Momen "Early relations between Christian Missionaries and the Babi and Baha'i Communities" Studies in Babi and Baha'i History, Vol. 1, pp. 58-63.

27) See P. Smith, "A note on Babi and Baha'i numbers in Iran" Baha'i Studies Bulletin, vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 3-7.

28) Mazandarani, ZH3, p.317.

29) The categories and geographical divisions have been kept as close as possible to those in Momen "Social Basis..." in order to facilitate comparisons. Of particular interest is the comparison between Table 2 in that paper, the table for participants at Shaykh Tabarsi, and the present table. Participants at Shaykh Tabarsi included leaders as well as rank-and-file Babis.

30) On the close links between the ulama and the tujjar, see A. Mahdavi, "The significance of Private Archives for the Study of the Economic and Social History of Iran in the Late Qajar Period" Iranian Studies, Vol. 16, 1983, pp. 259-260.

31) On asnaf in Isfahan, see also Table 2 in Momen, "Social Basis...", p.162. On Zanjan, see also Table 7 in Momen "Social Basis...", p.170. The lack of conversions among the ulama in Zanjan is almost certainly due to the unorthodox Akhbari views of Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali Hujjat which would have alienated the majority of the ulama from him prior to the advent of the Babi movement.

32) Momen, "Social basis...", pp. 161-66, 173-75

33) Ibid., Table 2

34) In a manuscript history by Mirza Husayn Zanjani, it is recorded that: "...as for the Babis, whichever of them were of the poorer classes of the town, or the traders or the sayyids or the religious students or others resisted the enemy with complete constancy and began to build fortifications. Some who were rich however, and wealth had become a veil for them, went over to the side of the Muslims, and these were those whose place had always been at the head of the assembly or at the front of the mimbar. Quoted in Momen, "Social Basis...", p.170

35) Avarih, Kawakibu'd-Durriyyih, vol. 1, pp. 114, 117-8

36) Mazandarani, ZH3, p. 395n.

37) There were six Jewish converts in Turbat-i Haydari in about 1850 (although these were probably Jews who had been forcibly converted to Islam) and a number in Baghdad. there may also have been a small number of Christian converts in Baghdad. The whole question will be dealt with in more detail in a forthcoming Ph. D. thesis by Stephen Lambden at the University of Newcastle.

38) These include Muhammad Big Chaparchi, the Bab's escort from Isfahan to Tabriz (see Nugtatu'l-Kaf, Leiden, 1910, p. 124; Hamadani, Tarikh-i-Jadid, Cambridge, 1893, p. 217); and three residents of Qazvin, including one Kurdish tribal leader (see Mazandarani, ZH3, pp. 385, 386.

39) See end of account by Cormick of his interview with the Bab, Momen, The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944; Some Contemporary Western Accounts, Oxford, 1981, p. 75; see also articles by Jablonowski cited in the same work.

40) Arabic Bayan, Wahid 19, Chapter 2

41) Persian Bayan, Wahid 6, Chapter 7

42) Ibid, Wahid 6, chapter 12

43) See accounts cited in Momen "Social Basis...", p. 175-6