Autobiography and Silence: The Early Career of Shaykh al-Ra'īs Qājār

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When the dying Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shāh signed the first Iranian Constitution, joyous crowds gathered before the seat of the National Assembly, celebrants wept and hugged one another, the city was illuminated for two whole nights, and commemorative poems were penned by Shaykh al-Ra'īs and others. So we are informed by E.G. Browne, who gleaned these scenes from contemporary Persian newspapers published at the beginning of the year 1907.[1] Browne does not, however, tell us more about this last figure, the major littérateur and opponent of absolutism, Abū'l-Ḥasan Mīrzā Shaykh al-Ra'īs (1848-1920). This thinker has left behind a brief autobiography that discusses his intellectual and political formation in the years from his childhood to 1894, when it was written. Unfortunately, it is characterized by an elliptical style, the suppression of much relevant information, and a reticence about his subjective impressions and his motivations for his actions. The book in which the autobiographical sketch appears contains also specimens of letters and poetry, into which much of the subjective dimension of his life is displaced. Thus, his report of an incident often tells us little about what he felt about it, but his poetry on the same event is more expressive. Much of his account, and his poetry, however, can only be understood at a deeper level if one is aware of Shaykh al-Ra'īs's affiliation with proscribed and persecuted religious movements, including the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions.[2] The millenarian themes of these new religions, which saw the advent of their Manifestations of God, the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh, as a world-historical turning point, are important for understanding Shaykh al-Ra'īs's later development into a constitutionalist revolutionary. As Christopher Hill argued for the seventeenth-cen-

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[1] E.G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1906* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966 [1910]), p. 133; citing, *Nidā-yi Vaṭan*, 18 Dhu'l-Qa'dah 1324/3 Jan. 1907.

[2] For the Baha'i religion, see Peter Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From Messianic Shi`ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

In *Iran im 19. Jarhundert und die Entstehung der Baha•i-Religion,* edited by Johann Christoph Bürgel and Isabel Schayani, 91-126. Religionswissenschaftliche Texte und Studien, 8. Zürich: Georg Olms, 1998.

tury English Revolution, in times of social crisis "millenarian doctrines become equivalent to social revolution".[3] The task of recovering the chiliastic dimension of Shaykhu'r-Ra'īs's thought is expedited insofar as the Iranian Bahā'ī community retained memories of Shaykh al-Ra'īs and developed a distinctive exegetical approach to his poetry, which aims at filling in his profound silences, and transforming the void into fullness.

I wish here to examine the early career of this prince, clergyman, millenarian and constitutionalist in the triple light of his autobiographical sketch, his poetry, and the Bahā'ī historiographical tradition about him, employing as well mainstream Qājār historical sources. This task is complicated by the refusal of his descendants to make available his papers, so that we must work from printed works by and about him. This silence from beyond the grave is surely because of the Bābī and Bahā'ī references in those papers, which would be extremely embarrassing, if not dangerous, to his great-grandchildren in contemporary Khomeinist Iran, where nearly two hundred Bahā'ī have been judicially murdered for their faith since 1979. The embarrassment extends to Iranian modernism as a whole, insofar as he became an important figure in the constitutionalist movement. His major mainstream biographer, Ibrāhīm Ṣafā'ī, has gone so far as to deny altogether Shaykh al-Ra'īs's affiliation with the Bahā'īs.[4]

In assessing the role of strategic silence in the writings of Shaykh al-Ra'īs, it must be kept in mind that Qājār Iran was an authoritarian state wherein free expression of idiosyncratic views could be punished by death. Francis Bacon, who lived in a similar sort of society, suggested three degrees of self-concealment. The first was secrecy, the second dissimulation ("when a man lets fall signs and arguments, that he is not that he is"), and the third simulation, the act of pretending to be what one is not. It is the second degree, of teasing and partial unveiling, that creates the ambiguities with which we are concerned here.[5] As Leo Strauss argued, a person who holds to heterodox truths in such a society need not be completely silent, but does have to employ a measured ambiguity. "He can even utter them in print without incurring any danger, provided he is capable of writing between the lines."[6] Strauss

[3] Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986 [1958]), p. 311.

[4] Ibrāhīm Ṣafā'i, *Rahbarān-i mashrūṭih*, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1984 [1966]), 1:561-591. Ṣafā'i's account is riddled with errors of detail and chronology, as well, and I want to signal to others how unreliable it is when compared to Shaykh al-Ra'īs's own writings and other primary sources.

[5] Francis Bacon, *Essays, in Works*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Ellis and Douglas Heath, 2 vols. (New York, 1878), 2:96-99, cited in Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 256.

[6] Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988 [1952]), p. 24.

emphasized the technique of positive implication, the one the dissident prince employed in his poetry. But in his prose remarks on his own life he resorted to a different approach, that of silence and excision (Bacon's first degree). Both sorts of text, characterized by artful indirection, need to be read against one another for fuller understanding.

That Shaykh al-Ra'īs possessed multiple identities and so left behind many diverse images of himself should come as no surprise. As Nikki Keddie demonstrated, Siyyid Jamāl al-Dīn "al-Afghānī" dissembled his Iranian origins and his Shi'ite beliefs while in Sunni cities such as Cairo and Istanbul (and contemporary Arab intellectuals, who see him as having authorized Islamic modernism, still insist that he was a Sunni Afghan in the face of all Keddie's extensive evidence).[7] Keddie pointed to a background in the ideas of Islamic philosophy that might help explain such dissimulation, wherein truths reserved for the elite were not thought suitable for sharing with the laity. I would, however, prefer to see intentional ambiguity as a universal human response to heavy censorship and political or religious persecution. After all, so foundational an author for Western thought as Shakespeare produced his work under a censorship regime.[8] I will argue that one important dynamic in Shaykh al-Ra'īs's multiple roles and identities was his affiliation with the Bahā'ī faith, recognition of which will allow a more nuanced reading of the millenarian passages in his literary works.

Early Life and Education

Shaykh al-Ra'īs's childhood was shaped by his having been born into the household of a prince, but of a disgraced prince under house arrest. Minor, sometimes disgraced royalty, suffered the same dissatisfactions in Qājār Iran as they did in ancien régime France, and in both places their disgruntlement could turn into political radicalism. Shaykh al-Ra'īs might have been royalty, but he was doomed to be far from the levers of power. Moreover, his immense attraction to literature and a life of the mind led him away from a military or bureaucratic career and fostered in

[7] Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din "al-Afghani": A Political Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972); Rudi Matthee, "Jamal al-Din Al-Afghani and the Egyptian National Debate," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21 (May 1989):151-169.

[8] Nikki Keddie, "Symbol and Sincerity in Islam," *Studia Islamica* 19 (1963):27-63; but compare Annabel M. Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984) and Lev Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature*, trans. Jane Bobko (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1984).

him a capacity for social and political criticism that gradually alienated him from most of the other members of his social class.

His father, Muḥammad Taqī Mīrzā, the Ḥusāmu al-Salṭanih, the son of Fatḥ-'Ali Shāh (r. 1798-1834) had a more prominent early career than many Qājār princes (of whom there were then perhaps as many as 150). He participated in military operations aimed at defending the Khurāsān border from incursions by the Khān of Khīva in 1817; by the early 1830s he was governor of Burujird; in 1834 his father the shah sent him to Fārs to collect four years' worth of arrears in taxes, as part of a power struggle between Tehran and Fārs governor Farmān-Farmā. When Fatḥ-'Alī Shāh died later in 1834, however, a succession struggle broke out. Muḥammad Mīrzā, the son of 'Abbās Mīrzā and grandson of Fatḥ-'Alī Shāh had been designated as heir apparent, and he won the throne (with British military help). Ḥusāmu's-Salṭanih appears to have backed Ḥusayn-'Alī Mīrzā Farmān-Farmā, the prince-governor of Fars, and he and and ten other princes were imprisoned as rebels by the new monarch in the fortress of Ardabīl. After four of the princes escaped and sought asylum in Russia, the other seven were brought to Tabriz and kept under strict surveillance.[9]

Shaykh al-Ra'īs's mother, Khurshīd Begum, was the daughter of Suhrāb Khān, a Georgian notable made captive by the first Qājār shah, Aghā Muḥammad Shāh. Khurasānī Bahā'ī sources assert that Khurshīd Begūm admired the Bābī movement and later instilled a love for this religion in her sons, Shaykh al-Ra'īs and Muḥammad Hāshim-Mīrzā.[10] The Bābī religion was begun in 1844 by Siyyid 'Alī Muḥammad, a young Shirazi merchant who ultimately claimed to be the *mahdī* or Islamic messiah and an intermediary (Bāb) between humans and the divine. He was exiled to fortresses near Tabriz in 1848, and remained in the area till his execution in 1850, and he appears to have gained adherents during this imprisonment in Azerbaijan. Bābism, with its millenarian promise of a radically changed society and of at least some improvements in the position of women, attracted a number of accomplished women, including the poet Ṭāhirih Qurrat al-'Ayn and the Qājār princess

[9] Hasan-e Fasa'i, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, trans. Heribert Busse New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 157, 199, 228-232; Mihdī Bāmdād, *Sharḥ-i Ḥāl-i Rijāl- Irān: dār qarn 12 va 13 va 14 Hijrī*, 6 vols. (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi Zuvvār, 1968-1975), 3:310-312; for [illegible] about princely survivors of the Fars revolt, see Roger Savory, "A Qājār Prince's Sojourn in England in 1836: Najaf Quli Mīrzā's Memoirs," paper presented at a conference on "Nineteenth Century Persian Travel Memoirs," University of Texas, Austin, April 8-9, 1994.

[10] Fāḍil Māzandarānī, "Tārīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq," Vol. 6, MS., Afnan Library, London, p. [illegible]; 'Azīzu'llāh Sulaymānī, *Maṣābiḥ-i hidāyāt*, 9 vols. (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1948-1[illegible] 7:425, citing 'Azīzu'llāh Jadhdhāb Khūrāsānī, "Sharḥ-i shahādat-i Jināb-i Ḥajjī 'Abdu'l-Majīd-i [illegible]hapūrī (Abā Badī')," MS.

Shams-i Jahān Fitnih.[11] If Khurshīd Begum did indeed have a positive view of the Bāb, this may have been her private protest against the Qājār system, which had made her princely husband virtually a prisoner in his house. Tabriz in the 1850s held many horrors for even a secret Bābī, from the execution of the Bāb at the beginning of the decade to the fierce anti-Bābī pogroms and executions after the failed 1852 Bābī attempt on the life of Naṣīr al-Dīn Shāh.

Shaykh al-Ra'īs reports that he was born in 1848 in Tabriz. He describes his mother as highly intelligent and remarkably well educated, able to speak eloquently with nobles and clergymen, and to support her points with citations from the Qur'ān or classical Persian poetry. She also carried on a lively correspondence, and she ably ran the large noble household of her husband, who gave its management into her hands.[12] It is difficult to read this passage about his mother without concluding that Shaykh al-Ra'īs felt his literary abilities owed a great deal to Khurshīd Begum's own linguistic gifts. That they secretly shared a millenarian fervor might further explain his obvious feelings of closeness to her. His father, Ḥusām al-Salṭanih, also wrote poetry, under the name of "Shawkat", but oddly enough Shaykh al-Ra'īs does not refer to his father's literary forays. The young prince did not have a happy childhood, quite aside from being in a household under surveillance, which was only gradually lifted by Naṣīr al-Dīn Shāh after his accession in 1848. He suffered a debilitating case of smallpox, which left him blind in one eye for some time. Then plague struck Tabriz, infecting him. His parents, panicking, assumed he would not survive and left him with a nursemaid as they fled the city. He recovered from the plague, however, and in the process regained his sight, which left him with a conviction that even apparent disasters can ultimately be harbingers of God's benevolence. Still, we must wonder about how his knowledge of his parents' abandonment of him, which he states matter-of-factly and with no elaboration, affected his personality and his attitude toward such authority figures. Did he, as a child hearing this story, feel betrayed by the central authority figures in his life? At the age of six he was sent to Qur'ān school, to study with Mullā 'Abd al-'Alī, who taught all the princes. Shaykh al-Ra'īs finished the Qur'ān in a relatively short period of time, then proceeded to calligraphy and Persian books, making what he says was almost miraculous progress, so that he quickly surpassed the other students and his own

[11] For Ṭāhirih, see Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement*, 1844-1850 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), chapter 7; for Shams-i Jihān, see Māzandarānī, "Tārīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq," 6:412-414 and Ni'matu'llāh Bayḍā'ī, *Tadhkirih-'i shu'arā-yi qarn-i avval-i Bahā'ī*, 4 vols. (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 126 B.E./1969), 3:172-74, 185-87. Shams-i Jahān's memoirs survive in the form of an autobiographical poem, reproduced by Mazandarānī, most of which Bayda'i printed and of which he gave a prose summary.

[12] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab-i nafīs*, 2 vols. in 1 (Tehran: Mahmūdī, repr. c. 1960 [Bombay, 1896]), 1:5.

older brothers. He found even difficult grammatical problems easy. In 1859, when he was aged 11, he accompanied his father when the Shah called him to Tehran. There he continued his education at the seminary of Mullā Āghā Riḍā', where he pursued his studies of grammar and logic with Mullā 'Alī Damāvandī. He says he was able to learn in a week what took others a month. When he had newly learned Arabic, he composed a bit of simple verse, "The youngest of the children/ Is the most learned of them." His older brothers, outraged, retaliated with curses and beatings, and reported him to the teacher for egotism and arrogance. He says that he had many such stories, and this section of the autobiographical sketch is replete with references to the quranic account of how Joseph was treated by his siblings, suggesting that he felt long-term grievances toward some of his older brothers.[13]

In 1862, his aged father, having grown weary of his monitored life in the capital, was granted permission by Nāṣir al-Dīn's Shāh to permission to settle in Mashhad and spend the rest of his days in the precincts of the shrine of Imām Riḍā'.[14] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, aged 14, accompanied his father and the rest of the family to Mashhad, where his father became ill. On his deathbed, the patriarch gathered around the family members and gave each of them his last counsel. To Shaykh al-Ra'īs he said, "Son, become a *mullā*." This was unusual advice, since no other prince had followed such a path, but it shows that the father had recognized in his son a genuine intellectual. It may also indicate his disaffection with the royal estate. Ḥusāmu al-Salṭanih died and was buried in the vicinity of the Imām's shrine. On the family's return to Tehran, the question arose of whether Shaykh al-Ra'īs should follow his father's recommendation. The extended family and close friends in royal circles were apparently appalled at the thought, and insisted that he should join the other princes at the military academy. Khurshīd Begum, against her own better judgment, acquiesced, and contacted Muḥammad Khān Qājār, the Iranian army chief of staff, who obligingly arranged for the young man's acceptance into the military academy in the capital. For nearly two years, Shaykh al-Ra'īs studied engineering, accounting, and military drills. Every day he spent time marching in formation in the main square with a heavy rifle on his shoulder. He could not, however, muster any of the youthful martial enthusiasm felt by his fellow cadets, and instead found himself bored to tears. In his spare time, he sought out Shaykh Ja'far Turk, with whom he enthusiastically discussed and studied literature and literary technique.[15]

[13] Ibid., 1:6-7.

[14] Muḥammad Taqī Mīrzā Ḥuṣām al-Salṭanih was thought by Bāmdād (*Rijāl*, 3:312) to have died much earlier than this, because Sulṭān Murād Mīrzā was given the title Ḥusām al-Salṭanih for his services in the siege of Herat in 1856, and the title should not have been devolved on him while its possessor was still alive. Shaykh al-Ra'īs's memoirs make clear, however, that his father did not die until 1862, and it may be that a prince so long under house arrest on suspicion of treasonous intentions had no monopoly on his own title.

Around 1864, when he was about 16, his mother decided to go and live in the environs of the shrine of Imām Riḍā', and she offered him the opportunity to accompany her. He leapt at the chance to escape any further rifle drill, and with his brother, Muḥammad Hāshim Mīrzā (who became assistant to the supervisor of the Imām's Shrine, Mu'īn al-Tawliyih), they set out. In 1863, 'Alī Akbar Qavām al-Mulk had been appointed supervisor of the shrine of Imām Riḍā' in Mashhad. This old patrician from Fars province had lost a power play with his rivals in Shiraz and been summoned to Tehran by Nāṣir al-Dīn's Shāh, and this appointment, which was a prerogative of the shah, seems likely to have been a way of symbolically honoring him while removing him from the political scene in the south.[16] Qavām al-Mulk felt he owed the family of the late Ḥusām al-Salṭanih, and the grandsons of Fatḥ-'Alī Shāh, a debt of gratitude. He therefore helped Shaykh al-Ra'īs as though he were his own son, arranging a large gathering in which he presented the young man for the first time in the dress of one of the *'ūlamā'* rather than that of a prince. Shaykh al-Ra'īs, interestingly, characterizes the robe and turban of the clergyman as the costume of knowledge and *āzādigī*. The latter word literally means freedom, and might here signify nobility, its premodern connotation. But by 1894 when Shaykh al-Ra'īs was writing, it also had taken on the more modern connotation of political "liberty", and this may be part of what Shaykh al-Ra'īs meant by the word, since many Iranians of his generation saw the Muslim clergy as potential allies of the progressives. Qavām al-Mulk then arranged for Shaykh al-Ra'īs to be taught literature and Islamic disciplines by Mullā Muḥammad Taqī Māzinānī. With Mīrzā Naṣru'llāh Shīrāzī Mudarris he studied mathematics and the elements of theology (*kalām*). Qavām also took an interest in the young man's poetry, encouraging him in his literary pursuits; Shaykh al-Ra'īs took the pen-name Ḥayrat (Bewildered), and began writing in the various Persian verse forms.[17]

In summer, 1865, Qavāmu'l-Mulk died, and thereafter Shaykh al-Ra'īs developed an interest in metaphysics and philosophy, studying such works with Mullā Ibrāhīm Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī. This man, a disciple of the eminent philosopher Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī, was well-qualified to teach the latter's works. In the late 1860s, Shaykhu'-Ra'īs had the opportunity to travel to Tehran, where he lived for two years, studying Shi'ite philosophy with Āghā 'Alī Mudarris-i Ḥakīm [Zunūzī], particularly

[15] Ibid., 1:7.

[16] Fasā'ī, *History*, pp. 348-350; Mahdī Bāmdād, *Sharḥ-i Hāl-i Rijāl- Irān: dār qarn-i 12 va 13 va 14 Hijrī*, 6 vols. (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi Zuvvār, 1968-1975), 2:433-34.

[17] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 1:8-9.

concentrating on The Four Journeys (*al-Asfār al-Arba'ah*) of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1641). As Seyyed Hossein Nasr has pointed out, the philosophy of Mullā Ṣādra was more cultivated in Qājār Iran than ever before, despite the lingering conviction of legalistic *'ūlamā* that his thought was somewhat heretical, and the opposition to him of the strict Avicennian peripatetic philosophers.[18] Shaykh al-Ra'īs's participation in this Ṣadrā revival, and his training with some of its major exponents, signals his interest in heterodox, non-scriptural sciences. When a group of students came to him wishing to study Maybudī's gloss on the medieval philosophical work by Abharī, *Ḥidāyat al-Ḥikmah*, he refused on the grounds that the approach of this gloss was based on traditional texts (*naqlī*) rather than being rationalist (*'aqlī*).[19] Mullā Ṣadrā wrote a gloss on the same work, which presumably was more to Shaykh al-Ra'īs's taste. Although educated as a Shi'ite clergyman, his center of gravity was poetry, philosophy, and the ethical thought that was central to sermonizing.

On his return to Mashhad, Shaykh al-Ra'īs spent some time studying traditional Greco-Islamic medicine, especially the writings of Avicenna. Thereafter he turned to Islamic law, working through major works in Shi'ite principles of jurisprudence with Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā' Mujtahid-i Sabzavārī and Mīrzā Naṣru'llāh Mujtahid.[20] He was introduced to the legal thought of Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī (d. 1864), the leading Shi'ite jurisprudent of the 1850s and early 1860s, by one of his disciples, Mullā 'Abdu'llāh Mujtahid-i Kāshānī, then residing in Mashhad.[21] In addition to his Islamic studies, Shaykh al-Ra'īs devoted much of his energy to literature, and developed many literary friends in Mashhad, among them Muḥammad Kāẓim Ṣabūrī (1853-1904). Shaykh al-Ra'īs said he once asked the great poet Mīrzā Shuhrat Shīrāzī whether, when he came to Khurāsān in the late 1850s, he had spotted any major poets there. Shuhrat replied, "I saw no poet, but one child of a merchant of silk cloth (*sha'r-bāf*), who had begun to spin poetry (*shi'r-bāf*), had an agreeable disposition and a lively literary taste. Soon he will be the foremost poet in Iran." Shuhrat was speaking of Ṣabūrī, whose father, a merchant, had come to Mashhad from Kāshān.

[18] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Metaphysics of Sadr al-Din Shirazi and Islamic Philosophy in Qājār Iran," in Edmund Bosworth and Carole Hillenbrand, ed., *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change, 1800-1925* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1983), pp. 177-198, esp. pp. 190-91 for Mulla 'Ali Muddarris Zunūzī; for Mullā Ṣadra's thought see Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra (Sadr al-Din Shirazi)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975); for an essay by Shaykh al-Ra'īs on ontology see *Muntakhab*, 2:140-145.

[19] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 2:100.

[20] For Mīrzā Naṣru'llāh, see Muḥammad Ḥasan Khān I'timad al-Saltanih, *Maṭla' al-shams*, 3 vols. in 2 (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Farhangsara, 1984-1984), p. 690; even this expert in Islamic law was also trained in philosophy by Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī, so that Shaykh al-Ra'īs's foray into law was not at the hands of a narrow specialist though Mīrzā Naṣru'llāh did possess diplomas in law and the principles of jurisprudence.

[21] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 1:10.

When Naṣīr al-Dīn Shāh formally bestowed on Ṣabūrī the title of Mālik al-Shu'arā' (King of Poets), it was Shaykh al-Ra'īs who did the calligraphy for the firman.[22] Having immersed himself in philosophy and literature, as well as Islamic law and other seminary disciplines, Shaykh al Ra'īs had by the end of the 1870s (when he was in his early 30s) probably exhausted the educational potential of Mashhad, having mastered the most difficult and abstruse disciplines at the hands of the city's acknowledged authorities.

There were reasons for any intellectual to be somewhat dissatisfied with the Qājār state in the 1870s. The government responded with gross inadequacy to the Great Famine of 1869-1873, and the governor, Sulṭān Murād Mīrzā Ḥusām al-Salṭanih, admitted that 120.000 died in Khurāsān alone. The Russian advance on nearby regions of Central Asia was also worrying to Iran's elite, especially in Mashhad.[23] But Shaykh al-Ra'īs had other reasons for disaffection, as well. Although he, of course, says nothing about it in his memoirs, throughout the late 1860s and the 1870s Shaykh al-Ra'īs was close to prominent Bahā'ī in the city. In 1863, Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī Bahā'u'llāh had declared himself to a handful of close disciples as the promised one of the Bābī religion, and from about 1865 he began making the assertion publicly. Soon most Bābī in Iran had accepted him and become Bahā'ī. The cornerstone of the new religion, along with its universalist messianism, was liberal social principles such as the unity of the world religions, the unity of humankind, an improved status for women, the need for a form of world government, the need to reduce armaments and promote peace, and the desirability of elected, accountable government. Shaykh al-Ra'īs, raised by his mother as a secret Bābī, also accepted Bahā'u'llāh. Several sources attribute his interest in the Bahā'ī faith to his association with two eminent Bahā'ī brothers, Mīrzā 'Alī Riḍā' Mustawfī and Mīrzā Muḥammad Riḍā' (who rose to the rank first of Mustashār al-Mulk and then of Mu'tamin al-Dawlih), both originally from Sabzavār.[24] Mīrzā 'Alī Riḍā' had become a Bābī through the Bāb's disciple Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī in the 1840s. His younger brother, Mīrzā Muḥammad Riḍā' Mu'taminu's-Salṭanih (d. 1890), also a Bābī and then Bahā'ī, became a long-time chief minister (*vazīr*) of Khurāsān province.[25] From 1873 the former foreign minister Mīrzā Sa'īd Khān Mu'tamin al-Mulk

[22] Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān Afḍalu'l-Mulk, *Safarnāmih-'i Khurasān va Kirmān*, ed. Qudratu'llāh Rawshānā Za'farānlu (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ṭūs, 197?), pp. 70-76.

[23] Henry W. Bellew, *From the Indus to the Tigris* (London: Trubner, 1874, repr. Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1977), pp. 362-365.

[24] 'Abdu'l-Ḥamīd Ishrāq-Khavārī, "Ḥayrat-i Qājār: Abū'l-Ḥasan Mīrzā mulaqqab bih Shaykh al-Ra'īs," *Ahang-i Badi`*, vol. 5 (1948?): 282; Sulaymani, *Maṣābīḥ*, 7:424.

[25] H.M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Baha'is in the Time of Bahā'u'llāh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), pp. 52-59; Bāmdād, *Rijāl*, 3:404-406; a letter and some poetry from Shaykh al-Ra'īs to Mīrzā Muḥammad

was made supervisor of the shrine of Imām Riḍā', until 1880 when he was recalled as foreign minister. His period in Mashhad may be seen as one of political exile, during the ascendancy in Tehran of the reformer Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān Mushīr al-Dawlih. Bahā'ī sources maintain that Mīrzā Sa'īd Khān had repented of his earlier hostility to the Bahā'ī faith and his role in having Bahā'u'llāh exiled from Baghdad to Istanbul, and now looked with favor upon Bahā'ī.[26]

In the decade of the 1870s, several key works of Bahā'u'llāh with a bearing on political change circulated among Bahā'ī in Iran. Bahā'u'llāh's 1869 Tablet to Queen Victoria praised her for putting the reins of consultative government into the hands of the people. In his 1873 Most Holy Book, he addressed Tehran, predicting "Ere long will the state of affairs within thee be changed, and the reins of power fall into the hands of the people'" (literally, "affairs within you will undergo a revolution (*yanqilibū*) and a democracy (*jumhūr*) of the people (*al-nās*) will rule over you").[27] In his 1869 *Lawḥ-i Fu'ād* Bahā'u'llāh had strongly denounced Ottoman despotism and predicted that God would "lay hold" of Sulṭān 'Abdu'l-'Azīz, a prediction that seemed fulfilled by his deposition and suicide in 1876, followed by the implementation of an Ottoman constitution and the election of the first Ottoman parliament. From the point of view of the conservative Qājār elite, the Bahā'ī religion's approval of parliamentary governance and constitutionalism would have made it appear quite radical.[28] If, as seems likely, he saw these texts of Bahā'ī scripture, and followed the news of the 1876 Ottoman Constitutional Revolution, these developments would have piqued Shaykh al-Ra'īs's interest in, and given him a positive image of, what we would now call democracy. He is, again, silent about all these developments.

Despite the power of the patrician Bahā'ī of Mashhad, trouble broke out there in 1879. Another prominent local Bahā'ī was Mīrzā 'Abdu'l-Majīd Nīshāpūrī, a wealthy merchant who had also accepted Bābism from Mullā Ḥusayn in the 1840s. He had fought government troops at the Bābī fort at Shaykh Tabarsī in 1848-49, and survived when he and his coreligionists were defeated and enslaved. He managed to regain his freedom and to resume his commercial activities in Mashhad. In 1869, his

Riḍā' when he was Mustashār al-Mulk and the chief minister in Khurasān survives in Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 1:36, 2:175-76.

[26] Mazandarānī, "*Tarīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq*," 6:39.

[27] Bahā'u'llāh, *The Most Holy Book: The Kitāb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1993), p. 54; Bahā'u'llāh, *al-Kitāb al-Aqdas* (Bombay: n.p., n.d.), p. 98; for the Tablet to Queen Victoria see Bahā'u'llāh, "*Lawḥ Malikah Wiktūriya*," *Alvāh-i nāzilih khitāb bi mulūk va ru'asā-yi arḍ* (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1968), p. 131; tr. Bahā'u'llāh, *Proclamation of Bahā'u'llāh*, tr. Shoghi Effendi (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1967), p. 33.

[28] Juan R.I. Cole, "Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic Thought in the Nineteenth Century," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (1992):1-26.

teenaged son, Badī', dared deliver Bahā'u'llāh's Tablet to the Shah (*Lawḥ-i Sulṭān*) to Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh, and met torture and execution as a result. Thereafter he was proudly known as Ābā Badī', the father of Badī', the martyr. In 1876 he journeyed to 'Akka to see Bahā'u'llāh, and was the first to bring back to Khurasān a copy of the latter's new book of laws, the Most Holy Book (*al-Kitāb al-Aqdas*). Āba Badī', already in his late eighties, had a falling out with his own brother and sister over his heterodoxy, and in 1877 they reported him to a local mujtahid, Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Bujnūrdī, who issued a *fatwa* against the old man, making the taking of his life lawful.[29] Two years later, in 1879, Shaykh Muḥammad Bāqir of Isfahan visited Mashhad, after having that same year been involved in the persecution and judicial murder of two prominent Bahā'ī merchants in his home city, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥasan and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nahrī. He was told of the issue of Abā Badī', whom he summoned for an interrogation. When the latter refused to appear, Shaykh Muḥammad Bāqir convinced local mujtahids such as Bujnūrdī to petition the governor of Khurāsān, Muḥammad Taqī Khān Rukn al-Dawlih, to execute him. Bowing to this clerical pressure, Rukn al-Dawlih had Āba Badī arrested, but was reluctant to put him to death. Shaykh Muḥammad Bāqir, impatient, contacted the shah, who in turn pressured the governor to act unless Abā Badī would recant. Rukn al-Dawlih made one last effort to save the old man, sending Mīrzā Sa'īd Khān and Shaykh al-Ra'īs to him to attempt to convince him to practice pious dissimulation, denying Bahā'u'llāh with his lips while affirming him in his heart. Shaykh al-Ra'īs and his fellow emissary pointed out that they had practiced "wisdom" (*ḥikmat*) to preserve themselves from the evil of the wicked, especially the mujtahids, and advised him to do the same so that he could live to accomplish further great works for his religion. Abā Badī', an old man near death anyway, saw himself as being offered the opportunity to attain martyrdom. He refused to recant, and in the end was executed.[30]

In 1880 (1297), Shaykh al-Ra'īs left Mashhad for the Shi'ite shrine cities of Iraq. In his memoirs he says he did so in order to escape the necessity of emulating a more learned clergyman in matters of religious law, by achieving the status of independent jurisprudent (*mujtahid*) through higher studies.[31] It seems likely, however, that the execution of Āba Badī' raised questions about the continued safety of the heterodox in the city, and that his departure was at least in part a reaction to the old man's martyrdom. It may also be that he saw the power of the mujtahids and felt that by attaining that rank himself he might increase his own security. The suppression in

[29] Bujnurdī is noticed briefly in I'timād al-Saltanih, *Maṭla' al-shams*, p. 690, where we are informed that he kept his distance from state officials.

[30] Māzandarānī, *Tarīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq*, 6:39; Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahā'u'llāh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973-1986), 2:129-136.

[31] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 1:11.

his memoirs of any mention of his role in the negotiations with Ābā Badīʿ or of the latter's execution helps him present his departure for Iraq as merely symptomatic of a thirst for further Islamic knowledge. The motive he does admit, of not wanting to have to blindly obey (*taqlīd*) the rulings of other clergymen, teases more than explains. He does not, in any event, appear to have left under overt political pressure.[32]

Shaykh al-Raʾīs spent six months in Karbala, then four months in Najaf, studying with the great teachers of that era. He then moved to Samarra and began pursuing the studies that would make him a mujtahid with Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī, who was then emerging as the most respected legal thinker in the Shiʿite world. In his memoirs, Shaykh al-Raʾīs lionizes his teacher, calling him "the perfect man" (*insān-i kāmil*), a Sufi term for a realized master. On his part, Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī had a reputation for showing special regard to any of his students who demonstrated great spirituality, even if he were a tyro, and we know that Shaykh al-Raʾīs had a mystical side.[33] Shaykh al-Raʾīs also studied with Shīrāzī's main local disciples, spending nearly two straight years in Samarra.

Around the end of 1882 Shaykh al-Raʾīs went on pilgrimage to Mecca, during which he was greatly honored by the Amīr of Jabāl, Muḥammad b. Rashīd, for whom he wrote an Arabic ode of praise. On his return he passed the better part of another year in Samarra, attaining the status of mujtahid and emerging briefly as one of Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī's more promising students.[34] As unlikely as it might seem, even these studies in Samarra have a Bahāʾī connection. Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī was a relative of the Bāb, and according to cousins such as Ḥabību'llāh Afnān, he secretly maintained an admiration for the Bābī-Bahāʾī movement, which he claimed he tried to protect from persecution by working behind the scenes.[35] Shaykh al-Raʾīs and Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī appear to have become close enough to share their secret esteem for the Bahāʾī faith with one another, as the Bahāʾī scholar ʿAbdu'l-Ḥamīd

[32] Ṣafāʾī, *Rahbarān*, 1:568, maintains that Rukn al-Dawlih banished Shaykh al-Raʾīs on this occasion and says that it was in 1880 that Shaykh al-Raʾīs was imprisoned in the Fortress of Nadir Shah. I have found no evidence for these assertions, and believe them to be incorrect. Shaykh al-Raʾīs wrote in 1885 to Prime Minister Amīn al-Sulṭān that he had never previously had any altercation with the provincial government of Khurasān (Shaykh al-Raʾīs/Amīn al-Sulṭān, Quchan [late 1884], in *Muntakhab*, 2:178), and more reliable sources put the incarceration in the Nadiri Fortress a decade later.

[33] Shaykh al-Raʾīs, *Muntakhab*, 1:11-12. For Mīrzā Ḥasan Shirāzī, see Roy Mottahedeh, *Mantle of the Prophet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), pp. 214-215; and Aqā Buzurg Tihrānī, *Mīrzā-yi Shirāzī*, Persian trans. (Tehran: Vizārāt-i Irshād-i Islāmī, 1984), esp. p. 56 for the passage about his treatment of students. Tihrānī has excluded Shaykh al-Raʾīs from his list of students of Mīrzā Ḥasan, presumably because of the prince's Bahāʾī adherence.

[34] Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh*, 6:38; Sulaymānī, *Maṣābīḥ*, 7:423.

[35] ʿAbdu'l-Ḥamīd Ishrāq-Khavārī, *Muḥādarāt* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i-Verlag, 1987), pp. 986-987.

Ishrāq-Khavārī has argued. The main evidence here is a poem that Shaykh al-Raʾīs wrote in honor of his teacher on the day observed by Shiʿites as the birthday of the *qāʾim* or promised one, which is laced with Bahāʾī terminology. It begins, for instance, with a reference to the "Garden of Riḍvān," the garden of Necip Pasha in Baghdad where Bahāʾu'llāh first declared himself a manifestation of God in 1863.[36] He wrote, "The earth has through today's bliss become a Garden of Riḍvān,/ The heavens of the world by gladness have become a rose bower." Another revealing hemistich is "The beauty of `the earth shall shine with the light of its Lord' has appeared." Bahāʾu'llāh was called by his followers "the Blessed Beauty" (*Jamāl-i Mubārak*), and the Qur'an verse quoted is 39:69, referring explicitly to the advent of the Judgment Day and the second blowing of the Trump (the allusion is probably to the Bāb being the first trumpet blast, and Bahāʾu'llāh the second, referred to in Qur'an 39:66-69). These verses are unmistakably Bahāʾī in character to anyone familiar with the technical terminology and use of Qur'anic imagery employed in that religion, but they remained opaque to most other Iranians. Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī, as a relative of the Bāb and of the Bahāʾī Afnān clan of Shiraz, certainly knew enough to recognize this poem for what it was, and that he did not denounce his student is some evidence for his having at the least no animus against Bahāʾīs.

From precocious young prince to independent jurisprudent, Shaykh al-Raʾīs's educational formation was remarkable. His social background might have guaranteed him some degree of advancement in the military or the bureaucracy, but it was of no particular help, and may have been a liability, in his being recognized as a great Shiʿite scholar. His remarkable accomplishments were his own. His studies with Zunūzī in Tehran, and with the disciples of Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī in Mashhad, gave him a firm foundation in logic and metaphysics, and his stint in Samarra acquainted him with the vanguard of Shiʿite legal thought. Up until this point, his life is all one of secrecy and simulation. Still, signs of future trouble loomed on his horizon. His affiliation with the heterodox Bahāʾī religion put him, potentially, at odds with the central Iranian government and with the clerical hierarchy at Mashhad. He must have been shaken by the cold-blooded judicial murder of Mīrzā ʿAbdu'l-Majīd "Āba Badīʿ" Nishāpūrī, and must have known he could easily meet the same fate. Therein may lie one important impetus to dissidence. We can only speculate about the impact on his thought of living in the Ottoman empire for nearly four years in the early 1880s. He certainly would have been exposed to the Tanẓīmāt reforms, which attempted to rationalize education, the bureaucracy and tax collection. And the newspapers of Baghdad would have been full of accounts of the ʿUrābī revolu-

[36] Shaykh al-Raʾīs, *Muntakhab*, 2:9-12; Ishrāq-Khavārī, "Hayrat-i Qājār," pp. 261-263. The Garden of Riḍvān has been a favorite theme for Bahāʾī poets. See, for example, Robert Hayden, "Bahāʾu'llāh in the Garden of Riḍvan," in *Angle of Ascent* (New York: Liveright, 1975), p. 117.

tion in Egypt during 1881-1882, where one of the major demands of the revolutionaries was the calling of the Egyptian parliament and the drawing up of an organic law defining the powers of the various branches of government. The parliament was elected in the fall of 1881 and met into the winter. This experiment in constitutional monarchy was, however, thwarted by British and French intervention, ending with the British invasion of Egypt in August-September 1882. Shaykh al-Ra'ís, by virtue of residing in the Ottoman vilayet of Baghdad, was certainly more aware of these events and their dynamics than he would have been had he remained in Mashhad. His autobiography, however, never lifts its gaze from the Shi'ite study circles in the shrine cities, so that we would hardly know he was living abroad in turbulent times.

From Mashhad to Istanbul

It was apparently with some reluctance that Shaykh al-Ra'ís returned to Mashhad in the autumn of 1883, since he says that in doing so he had to give up the happiness he had found in Samarra. He found a post as a teacher at the Fāḍiliyyih Seminary and as a sermonizer, speaking after Friday congregational prayers in its mosque.[37] He was made head of the library of the Imām Riḍā' Shrine. It is likely during this period that Shaykh al-Ra'ís first met Aghā Khān Kirmānī, the progressive Bābī thinker who had come to study in the library of the shrine. Unlike some Bahā'ís, Shaykh al-Ra'ís had an ability to get along with 'Azalī Bābīs, who supported Bahā'u'llāh's half-brother Mīrzā Yaḥyā Ṣubḥ-i 'Azal, concentrating on the progressive ideas the two groups had in common and remaining silent about their differences. He wrote a warm appreciation of Aghā Khān Kirmānī's erudition, marvelling at his mastery of the Greek philosophers and his deep knowledge of both Shi'ite and Sunni Islam, and his familiarity with Bābī and "other" texts.[38]

Shaykh al-Ra'ís's heterodox associations began to cost him political capital. When Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh visited Mashhad in November and December of 1883, he removed Shaykh al-Ra'ís as head librarian and gave the post symbolically to one of his own wives. I'timādu's-Salṭānih visited with him on 9 December 1883, and found him depressed as a result of his demotion.[39] Nāṣir al-Dīn's Shāh may have been displeased at the rumors of heterodoxy swirling around his learned cousin. The anecdote was told by Sayyid 'Abbās 'Alāvī that on one of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh's visits to Mashhad, Shaykh al-Ra'ís was among those assembled to greet him. As the shah passed the prince-mujtahid, he is said to have muttered under his breath "This man has disgraced two estates."[40] This story, if it is not true, should be.

He was nevertheless apparently a popular preacher, and was backed by his coreligionist, the chief minister of Khurasān, Mīrzā Muḥammad Riḍa', whom the shah had just promoted to the rank of Mu'tamin al-Salṭānih ("The Guarantee of the State").[41] The prince-mujtahid's growing eminence, he says, was met with jealousy on the part of some ulama, who began to make trouble, which he attempted to ignore. Ṣafā'ī says his sermons were extremely attractive, employing the logical rigor of philosophy and the striking imagery of poetry, in both of which fields he had immersed himself. It is suggested by the Bahā'ī historian Fāḍil Māzandarānī that the *'ulamā'* objected to the content of some of his sermons, into which he had woven Bahā'ī themes.[42] To make matters worse, Rukn al-Dawlih was at that point succeeded by Mīrzā 'Abdu'l-Wahhāb Khān Shīrāzī, newly entitled the 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih. Shīrāzī began his career in the Foreign Ministry, and was posted to Tabriz for a while. He later served as chief of customs and then minister of commerce. He has been accused of using men such as the successive foreign ministers, Mīrzā Sa'īd Khān and Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān Mushīr al-Dawlih, to climb the ladder of success and of then turning on them. In late summer, 1884 (Dhū'l-Qa'dah 1301) he arrived in Mashhad as governor of Khurasān and Sistān. His short term, of less than two years, was marked by turmoil, and he was perceived by local notables as unduly harsh and dictatorial.[43] He attempted to force a prominent local notable, Abū'l-Qāsim Khān, to sell him some of his lands. When Abū'l-Qāsim refused, transferring them to someone else and taking refuge (*bast*) in the Imām Riḍā' Shrine, 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih ignored Mashhad's reverence for the shrine by ordering the recalcitrant landlord dragged from it. He also rusticated from the capital some of his local opponents, and dismissed Mīrzā Muḥammad Riḍā' Mu'taminu's-Salṭānih as chief minister.[44] Shaykh

[37] For the Fāḍiliyyih Seminary, see I'timād al-Salṭanih, *Maṭla' al-shams*, pp. 538-539.

[38] Farīdun Adamiyyat, *Andishih-hā-yi Mīrzā Aqā Khān Kirmānī* (Tehran: Tahuri, 1967), pp. 6, 12. Adamiyyat mistakenly dates this visit to early 1303/fall 1885, but this is impossible because Shaykh al-Ra'ís was by then in Istanbul.

[39] Mīrzā Ḥasan Khān I'timād al-Salṭanih, *Ruznāmih-'i Khāṭirāt*, ed. Irāj Afshar (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1971), p. 280 old/ 252 new.

[40] Sulaymānī, *Maṣābīḥ*, 7:429.

[41] Mīrzā Muḥammad Riḍā' was promoted from Mustashāru'l-Mulk to Mu'tamin al-Salṭanih on 30th August 1883 according to the diary of I'timād al-Salṭanih, *Ruznāmih-'i Khāṭirat*, p. 280 old/252 new.

[42] Māzandarānī, "*Tārīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq*," 6:39; Ṣafā'ī, *Rahbarān*, 1:567.

[43] I'timā-Salṭanih, *Maṭla' al-Shams*, p. 671; Bāmdād, *Rijāl*, 2:308-311; Maḥmūd Farhad Mu'tamad, "Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh va Shaykh al-Ra'ís," *Yaghma* 3 (1329/1950-51): 343-344; Sayyid 'Alī Mirniyā, *Vaqāyi'-i Khavār-i Irān* (Tehran: Nashr-i Parsa, 1988), pp. 146-148.

[44] 'Abbās Iqbāl, "Mīrzā 'Abdu'l-Vahhāb Khān 'Asaf al-Dawlih," *Yadgar*, vol 5, no. 4 (1327-28/1948-49):30; Bāmdād, *Rijāl*, 3:405. Mu'tamin al-Salṭanih went to Tehran, where he was briefly a candidate for the prime ministership, but his enemies let it be known that he and his brother were Bahā'ís, damaging his reputation with Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh. Two years later, Rukn al-Dawlih and

al-Ra'īs, with his close ties to the chief minister and to other Mashhad notables, fell out with the governor, and wrote unflattering poetry and prose about him. He said, "O crazed 'Aṣaf, if your temperament is bellicose,/ Do not wage war with such as me; what noisy drum is this?"[45]

Without Mu'tamin al-Salṭānih's help, the sharp-tongued poet was in an exposed position. Realizing that he was about to be seized and exiled from Mashhad himself, Shaykh al-Ra'īs anticipated the governor and departed to the northwest for the frontier city of Qachan, one of several tribally dominated settlements near the Russian border created as buffers by the Safavid shahs by the transportation there of Kurds. Quchan's ruler was the Kurdish chieftain Amīr Ḥusayn Shujā'ū'd-Dawlih. This city had the benefit for the refugee prince of being less firmly under the central government's control than was Mashhad.[46] In a letter to Prime Minister Amīnu's-Sulṭān written from Quchan, Shaykh al-Ra'īs writes, "Your telegraph saying that as long as I am in Khurasān I am under the authority and good-pleasure of 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih arrived."[47] This phrase indicates that he had attempted to have the central government recognize his princely prerogatives with regard to a commoner governor, and had failed. He protests that he had lived for many years in Khurasān and never took a step against the provincial government, nor had one ever shown displeasure with him. "But," he adds in the same letter, "'Aṣaf al-Dawlih has an entirely immoderate temperament. To be under his authority and pleasure is beyond my ability to bear and beyond that of all reasonable persons." He declares his intention of returning to Samarra, where he says he will occupy a corner and pray for the shah.

Shaykh al-Ra'īs resided in Quchan for a year, and was given the patronage of its khān or governor, Amīr Ḥusayn Khān Shujā' al-Dawlih, the hereditary chief of the Za'farānlū Kurdish tribe, who showered the refugee prince with honor and gifts.

Mu'tamin al-Salṭanih were reinstated as governor and chief minister respectively: I'timād al-Salṭanih, *Ruznāmih*, p. 584 old/ 514 new, entry for 14 Dhū'l-Ḥijjah 1304/3 September 1887.

[45] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 2:76.

[46] The journal of his journey to Quchan has been published: Shaykh al-Ra'īs Qājār, *Badā'i' as-Samar wa Waqā'i' as-Safar*, ed. Sayfu'llāh Vaḥīd-Niyā (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Vaḥīd, 1352 s.); I am grateful to Elton Daniel for this citation. For Quchan see Kalimu'llāh Tavaḥḥudī, *Ḥarakāt-i Tārīkhi-yi Kurd bih Khurasān dār Difā' az Istiqlāl-i Irān* (Mashhad: Chapkhānih-'i Kushīsh, 1981), esp. pp. 376-453 for Shuja' al-Dawlih; see also I'timād al-Salṭanih, *Maṭla' al-shams*, pp. 161-162; for a Westerner's impressions of Quchan and of Shuja' al-Dawlih only a few years later see George E. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* 2 vols. (London: Longman, Greens, and Co., 1892), 1:94-112; for the vassal system in place there see A.K.S. Lambton, "Land Tenure and Revenue Administration in the Nineteenth Century," *The Cambridge History of Iran* Volume 7, eds. P. Avery, G. Hambly and C. Melville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 490-491.

[47] Shaykh al-Ra'īs/Amīn al-Sulṭān, Qūchān [1884], in *Muntakhab*, 2:178-179, this quote on 2:178; cf. Ishrāq-Khavārī, "Hayrat," pp. 283-284.

Shujā' al-Dawlih was not by all accounts a particularly devout man, but he did have an interest in religions, and appears to have known something of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Like a handful of other independent-minded Khurasānī notables, he increasingly inclined toward the Bahā'ī Faith, and his son became a prominent member of the Khurasānī Bahā'ī community. Shaykh al-Ra'īs presumably knew this when he chose the city for his refuge. The chieftain arranged for him to teach Islamic disciplines locally and to give sermons. The poet composed many odes in praise of his patron while in Quchan. He also associated with the small Bahā'ī community, and wrote some verse with Bahā'ī allusions. "Everywhere his visage is reflected/ Look at a single countenance in a thousand mirrors," Shaykh al-Ra'īs wrote, presumably referring to Bahā'u'llāh's manifestation. Some sources allege that during his year there in 1884-1885, he received a Tablet (letter) from Bahā'u'llāh, which sent him into mystical ecstasy. If so, however, its text has not been identified.[48] That he met with Shujā' al-Dawlih and other Bahā'īs to discuss mystical poetry about the movement is hinted at when he says,

> "While residing in Qūchān one day in the presence of Shujā' al-dawlih, the great tribal chieftain of Khurasān, someone quoted verses of love and of divine ecstasy. Immediately, those present in that sublime gathering threw down a challenge, saying that no one else could author poetry in this unprecedented (*badī'*) and new style."[49]

The word *badī'*, "new," or "original," was frequently employed by Bahā'īs to refer to their religion. The new script developed by some of them was referred to as the *khaṭṭ-i badī'* or "innovative script." Māzandarānī informs us that this discussion in fact concerned some verses written by Bahā'u'llāh's disciple Nabīl-i A'zam Zarandī, which began:

> "The beauty of the Friend has appeared,/ snap your fingers, snap your fingers;/ That very divine beloved, that coral cheek,/ snap your fingers, snap your fingers."[50]

Taking up this challenge, Shaykh al-Ra'īs produced one of his most celebrated poems, "Walk and Behold," one of the verses of which reads,

> "An ecstasy, while we were in Quchan,/ Descended upon us from the land of souls."[51]

[48] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 1:13-14; Māzandarānī, "Tārīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq," 6:39-40; Ishrāq-Khavārī, "Ḥayrat," pp. 264, 282-285, 329-331; Sulaymani, Masabih, 7:423-429.

[49] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 2:41; the poem is on 2:41-46.

[50] Fāḍil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq*, vol. 8, pt. 1 (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 217-218. For another specimen of Bahā'ī poetry by Nabīl-i A'zam Zarandī, see E.G. Browne, "Some Remarks on the Babi Texts edited by Baron Victor Rosen," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24 (1892):323-35, appendix: "A Poem Attributed to Nabil."

[51] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 2:46

In this poem Shaykh al-Ra'īs came closer than in any other piece of his public writing to declaring openly his Bahā'ī belief, and it caused him much trouble later in life when his enemies among the mullas printed it and distributed it to fanatical mobs to incite them against him. He speaks of the return of Christ (a spiritual station claimed by Bahā'u'llāh), and of the succession of prophets.

> "Sometimes he came upon an ass,/ Sometimes he rode on camel-back,/ Sometimes he came on a wild stallion to the Friend:/ Walk and behold." The references are to Jesus, Muḥammad and Bahā'u'llāh (who rode through Māzandarān as a young noble in his youth). He says of Bahā'u'llāh without naming him, "The world is drunk with his wine,/ Given reason by his Word,/ His arising has brought the Resurrection,/ Walk and behold."

He speaks of the advent of a "new creation" (*khalq-i jadīd*), a Qur'ān-derived term with a technical sense in the thought of Ibn 'Arabī and Mullā Ṣadrā that Bahā'u'llāh had employed to describe the community of belief he was creating. He says the "distant Return" has occurred, referring to the Shi'ite doctrine that during the end-time past figures of sacred history would reappear (it is this theory that underpinned Bahā'u'llāh's assertion that he was the return of the Imām Ḥusayn and of Jesus Christ). He adds,

> "An earth full of justice and of good will,/ God in the temple of a human being,/ has appeared in this form,/ Walk and behold."

This verse alludes to the Bahā'ī doctrine of the prophet as a manifestation of God (*maẓhar-i ilāhī*), and to the Muslim tradition that when the promised *mahdī* comes he will fill the world with justice.[52] Again, the autobiography reveals nothing of this bonhommie among coreligionists or the true subject of the Quchan-era poetry, which is barely vague enough to keep it from being proof of heresy.

For his part, 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih thundered against Shaykh al-Ra'īs among his contacts in Tehran. Some Iranian progressive thinkers, such as Muḥammad 'Alī Sayyāḥ Maḥallatī, criticized Shaykh al-Ra'īs's position and took 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih's side, on the grounds that he was trying to make government more honest and the real reason local notables were pillorying him was because he would not take bribes to allow them to overtax the people.[53] The evidence given by Bamdād, some derived from the archives of the Imām Riḍā' Shrine, however, shows that 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih mulcted Mashhad landlords of their land and took it for himself.

[52] J. Cole, "The Concept of Manifestation in the Baha'i Writings," *Baha'i Studies* 9 (1982):1-38.

[53] Muḥammad 'Alī Sayyāḥ Maḥallātī, *Khāṭirat-i Ḥajj Sayyāḥ ya Dawrih-'i Khawf va Vaḥshat*, ed. Hamid Sayyah (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 3rd edn., 1981), pp. 284-285.

Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh supported his governor, making Shaykh al-Ra'īs's position less and less tenable and putting Shujā' al-Dawlih in danger for harboring him. Once before, the government had sent troops to punish the Kurdish chieftain for insubordination, and he would not have wished to risk such an attack again.[54] The prince therefore responded as disgruntled nobles frequently did when faced with political setbacks. Early in 1885 he announced that he would set out on pilgrimage for Mecca. From Ashkhabad in Russian Transcaspia, some say, he sent a poem via Kamrān Mīrzā Nā'ib al-Salṭanih for Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh in which he wrote,

> "Nā'ib al-Salṭanih, say to the good-intentioned Shāh/ That one of the people of Khurasān did write you this letter;/ May 'Aṣaf and the kingdom and Khurasān be of small value to you;/ We have chosen the path of love, whether in the mosque or in the fire-temple."

Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh, who dabbled in poetry himself, is said to have replied in verse:

> "Nā'ib al-Salṭanih, say to the rude Khurasānī/ That the king of kings has in this letter replied to you:/ Let 'Aṣaf and the province of Khurasān be of little value to me;/ In the end, everyone reaps the harvest that he sows."[55]

Shaykh al-Ra'īs's conventional Sufi imagery (echoing a line from Ḥāfiẓ), of one who has chosen the path of ascetic, divine love, giving up all worldly goods and even a close identification with orthodox Islam, takes on a different connotation when we remember his Bahā'ī inclinations. His phrase "whether in the mosque or in the [Zoroastrian] fire temple" was heartfelt. If, as suggested above, the shah by this time knew of his Bahā'ī affiliation, that might help to explain his very harsh reply, since Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh made no distinction between Bābīs and Bahā'īs and he hated Bābīs with a passion.

Shaykh al-Ra'īs proceeded from to the Caucasus and Istanbul, then to the Hijaz, accompanied by his boon companion Mullā Muḥammad Qā'inī. Also present on this pilgrimage was Mīrzā Mūsā, son of the Bahā'ī 'Alī Riḍā' Mustawfī, the former chief accountant of Khurasān, who was also a refugee from 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih. In August, 1885, at the tomb of the Prophet in Medina Shaykh al-Ra'īs composed a long ode of complaint, praising Muḥammad, castigating his persecutors, and speak-

[54] Curzon, *Persia*, 2:101.

[55] Mu'tamad, "Nasir al-Din Shah," p. 344; this version of the exchange appears to me better textually than the one given in Bāmdād, *Rijāl*, 1:43, though neither is sourced and they both could be apocryphal.

ing of his homesickness for Khurasān.[56] His experience of what he and his fellow Khurasānīs perceived as tyranny at the hands of 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih, for which there was no redress through consultation with the central government, must be accounted one element in his formation as a revolutionary. He was very bitter about having been exiled, and had lost any trust he had earlier reposed in the government in Tehran. He then returned to Istanbul, where he resided for two years, preaching in a Shi'ite mosque for some of the 17,000 Iranians then resident in that city. Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Farahānī saw him sermonize there late in 1885 when he broke his journey home after the same pilgrimage. In a passage concerning the Iranian ambassador to Istanbul, Mu'īn al-Mulk, he wrote:

> Mo'īn ol-Molk seemed to be a very sociable, good-natured person, an eloquent conversationalist and good company. I observed his affairs to be in order and understood his actions and deeds to be reasonable. I had the opportunity to visit with [him] at numerous meetings; for example, in the Mosque of the Valedeh Khan (which is especially for Iranians). The merchants were holding a *rowzeh-khvani* there. Abū'l-Ḥasan Mīrzā, known as Shaykh or-Ra'īs-e Khorāsānī, was in the pulpit. Mo'īn ol-Molk had come to the mosque in order to propagate the Shi'ite religion and to honor Shaykh or-Ra'īs. One must pardon [me] for not being able to write bits of praise or reproach of people according to their merits. It is not possible to write or talk about everyone and everything one knows.[57]

The puzzlement of Farahānī's translators about his clear dislike of Shaykh al-Ra'īs is easily resolved once we know that the latter was widely rumored to be a Bahā'ī. Farahānī, a conservative Qājār notable, found it ironic that Mu'īn al-Mulk should attempt to "propagate the Shi'ite religion" by honoring someone most Shi'ites would consider a heretic.

To have a dissident Qājār prince resident in Istanbul was an unpleasant prospect for Tehran, for such persons had frequently in the past become tools of Ottoman interference in Iranian politics. Tehran therefore ordered the ambassador, Mu'īn al-Mulk, to induce Shaykh al-Ra'īs to return to Iran in 1887.[58] The ambassador told the poet-mujtahid that his (Mu'īn al-Mulk's) own honor was at stake if he could not persuade him to go back, and this plea proved convincing. Shaykh al-Ra'īs wrote later that he was fully aware that the various promises that he would be treated differently this time were worthless, and that he nevertheless plunged into the ensuing disaster.[59]

[56] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 2:2-8; see also Mīrzā Mohammad Hosayn Farahani, *A Shi`ite Pilgrimage to Mecca, 1885-1886*, ed. and trans. Hafez Farmayan and Elton L. Daniel (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 192.

[57] Farahani, *A Shi`ite Pilgrimage*, p. 298. The editors note that Shaykh al-Ra'īs published a memoir of his stay in the Ottoman capital (*Safarnāmih-'i Istanbul*), but that they could not find a copy.

[58] For Mu'īn al-Mulk's long tenure as ambassador to Istanbul, see Khān Malik Sasānī, *Yadbudha-yi Sifārat-i Istānbul* (Tehran: Firdawsī, 1966), pp. 255-264.

His expulsion from Khurasān by 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih had been a defining moment in Shaykh al-Ra'īs's life. His principles and local loyalties had forced him to make a stand for the first time in his life against duly constituted authority. He did not take his own advice, given only five years previously, to Ābā Badī', to acquiesce outwardly while keeping one's own counsel privately and working secretly for one's beliefs. Perhaps he felt his princely status would cause Tehran to support him; if so he was rudely disabused of this idea. His declaration that not only he, but any rational person, would find life under 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih's rule to be unbearable, placed the individual conscience above the corporate demands of the state, and placed reason above monarchical authority. Shrewdly aware of his own propaganda value as a Qājār prince, he took refuge in Istanbul, Tehran's rival, as a way of stating his individual worth. In contrast to the entire secrecy and simulation of his early life, he had now revealed himself politically, and had begun dropping hints in his poetry (and in the company he kept) as to his religious heterodoxy. Political forthrightness and religious ambiguity characterized him for the rest of his life.

Tobacco Revolt and Imprisonment

Khurasān in the late 1880s was racked by local disturbances, especially those associated with Turkmen tribespeople, and Iran itself was on the brink of its first modern national dissident movement, the revolt against a British monopoly on the marketing of Iranian tobacco. Shaykh al-Ra'īs, whether as a result of temperament or of conviction, was to become embroiled in the province's turbulence once again.

He travelled by way of Rasht to Tehran, where he found the prime minister, Amīn al-Sulṭān, a gracious host who gave him one of his own ornate mansions in which to reside during his stay in the capital. It was decided at length that Shaykh al-Ra'īs should return to Mashhad. (The prince may have accepted this suggestion in part because his patron and coreligionist, Mīrzā Muḥammad Riḍā' Mu'tamin al-Salṭānih, had been returned as Khurasān chief minister in September of 1887). Amīn al-Sulṭān bestowed on his princely guest a diamond-studded ring as a going-away present, and he drew up strict orders for the governor of Khurasān, Mīrzā Taqī Khān Rukn al-Dawlih, instructing him to extend his protection to the prince. Shaykh al-Ra'īs ruefully observes that these firmans meant nothing, given that "the custom of implementing governmental decrees had never arisen in Iran" and personal inclina-

[59] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 1:15; Māzandarānī, "*Tārīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq*," 6:40.

tion over-ruled all other laws.[60] This flash of ironic wit is perhaps the closest his prose comes to revealing a heated emotion, here profound frustration with the lack of anything resembling a rule of law in Iran.

He must have arrived in Mashhad around 1888, where he again took up a post sermonizing. The governor, Rukn al-Dawlih, at first showed him great kindness. It may be in this period that he also became supervisor of the hospital attached to the shrine of the Imām Riḍā' Shrine. Rumors began to circulate, however, that Amīn al-Sulṭān had privately assured Shaykh al-Ra'īs that he would like to ease him into the prestigious post of supervisor of the shrine of Imām Riḍā'. Organized opposition emerged to the prince's continued presence in Mashhad, and Shaykh al-Ra'īs says he then experienced "a thousand inconveniences." Over the next year or two, the movement grew more and more turbulent. The minister of publications, Muḥammad Ḥasan Khān I'timād al-Salṭanih, recorded in his diary for 8 September 1890 (23 Muharram 1308), "[Mushīr al-Dawlih] relates that Khurasān is in turmoil. By order of the government they have arrested Shaykh al-Ra'īs."[61] We are not told the nature of the turbulence, or what Shaykh al-Ra'īs's role in it was. On 20 November 1890 his patron, Mu'tamin al-Salṭanih the chief minister of Khurasān, died on a visit to Tehran (some say poisoned by the shah's order), depriving him of a powerful advocate.[62] It is not clear how long Shaykh al-Ra'īs remained in custody, or whether it was the entire period till his departure from Mashhad in 1892.

In the spring of 1890 the Iranian government announced its intention to award a monopoly for the marketing of Iranian tobacco to a British speculator. The deal was confirmed late in 1890, and by the spring of 1891 revolts had begun breaking out in protest against this concession. Outraged Iranian merchants, landlords and even small farmers protested vehemently, in what became the first nationwide challenge to the Qājār state. A ruling attributed to (and later affirmed by) Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī, the supreme exemplar for Shi'ites in matters of law, forbade the smoking of tobacco until the concession was revoked, and it is said that Nāṣir al-Dīn's own wives put away their water pipes for the duration.[63] Shaykh al-Ra'īs had

[60] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 1:15.

[61] I'timād al-Saltanih, *Ruznāmih-'i Khāṭirat*, p. 817 old/p. 715 new.

[62] I'timād al-Salṭanih, *Ruznāmih-'i Khāṭirat*, p. 827 old/ 724 new, attributes Mu'tamin al-Salṭanih's death to diarrhea brought on by a medicine he took to deal with his impotence, given his recent marriage. Balyuzi, *Eminent Baha'is*, p. 59 alleges that he was secretly poisoned (given a cup of "Qājār coffee") at the behest of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh, but gives no proof.

[63] See Nikki R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891-1892* (London, 1966); Ann K.S. Lambton, "The Tobacco Regie: Prelude to Revolution," *Studia Islamica* 22 (1965):119-57, 23 (1965):71-90; and Faridun Adamiyyat, *Shūrish bar imtiyāznāmih-'i rizhi: Taḥlīl-i siyāsī* (Tehran, 1981).

been close to Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī and was probably identified with him in Mashhad, so that the provincial government had yet another reason to question his loyalty. Moreover, he wrote some millenarian poetry on the Tobacco Revolt. He said,

> They mounted a blockade like smoke rings
> When turmoil arose throughout Iran.
> The smoke of this apocalyptic commotion
> Like manifest fumes overtook the world.[64]

The poem ends with the couplet, "The fumes stood up in the midst and said,/ 'A day when heaven shall bring a manifest smoke.'" The last line gives the Islamic date of the revolt if the letters are read numerically, and it quotes Qur'ān 44:9, referring to the Judgment Day when God will chastise the people with this palpable smoke for not recognizing the prophets he has sent to them. As a Bahā'ī, Shaykh al-Ra'īs believed that the Judgment Day was a metaphor for the cyclical renewal of religion through the advent of a new Manifestation of God, in this instance Bahā'u'llāh. The latter was "a clear Messenger" who "already came to them, then they turned away from him." (Qur'ān 44:13-14). During the Tobacco Revolt, in several instances warehouses containing the crop and belonging to the new British monopoly were set afire, producing billowing clouds of smoke in cities such as Isfahan. This poetry playfully paints the revolt as the fulfillment of one of the Qur'ān's prophecies about occurrences in the Last Days, thus supporting Bahā'u'llāh's assertion of messianic status.

Bahā'u'llāh, as well, responded to the Tobacco Revolt from Palestine in his 1891 Tablet of the World (*Lawḥ-i Dunyā*). There he denounced Qājār tyranny, especially the killing of seven Bahā'īs under Jalāl al-Dawlih in Yazd, called for a return of Iran to the apex of civilization it had scaled in ancient times, criticized the Iranian government for having no agricultural policy to speak of, reaffirmed that Great Britain's constitutional monarchy was the best form of government, and said that Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh could only quell the revolt by calling a national assembly.[65] As in all periods of turmoil, the government scapegoated "Bābīs" (mainly in fact Bahā'īs) as fomentors of unrest, and the constitutionalist emphases of the Tablet of the World would have been alarming to any Qājār officials who saw a copy. Shaykh al-Ra'īs

[64] Māzandarānī, "*Tārīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq*," 6:39.

[65] Bahā'u'llāh, "Lawḥ-i dunyā," in *Majmū'ih-'i az alvāḥ-i Jamāl-i Aqdas-i Abha kih ba'd az kitāb-i aqdas nāzil shudih*, (Hofheim, 1980), pp. 47-53; trans. in Bahā'u'llāh, *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh revealed after the Kitāb-i-Aqdas*, tr. Ḥabīb Taherzādeh (Haifa, 1978), pp. 84-90; for the persecution at Yazd in May of 1891, see the diplomatic reports in Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, pp. 301-305, which confirm the role of Maḥmūd Mīrzā.

tells us nothing of this period in his memoirs, but his double identification, as a disciple of Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī and as a secret Bahā'ī, can only have caused him to be viewed dimly indeed by the Khurasān authorities, especially given the apocalyptic imagery he employed in his poetry about the revolt. It has not been possible for me to determine whether Shaykh al-Ra'īs watched the entire Tobacco Revolt from Rukn al-Dawlih's prison, or whether he was intermittently free during it and possibly took part in it. He makes no reference to this arrest in his memoirs, though he does include in *The Priceless Selections* poetry written while he was kept at the Nādirī fortress, some 70 miles due north of Mashhad, and this is (as Ishrāq-Khavārī says) presumably where he was imprisoned in the early 1890s. The provincial government appears to have maintained the polite fiction that he had been put in protective custody to safeguard him from hostile mobs.[66] Other Bahā'īs were arrested shortly thereafter, in 1891-92, including Ibn Abhar in Tehran, 'Alī Akbar Shāhmīrzādī and Abū'l-Ḥasan Ardikānī in Qazvin, and the Baha'i preacher Mīrzā Muḥammad Furūghī in Khurasān: the latter was alos sent to the Kalāt-i Nādirī and his stay may have overlapped with that of Shaykh al-Ra'īs.[67]

While much is murky about Shaykh al-Ra'īs's role in Khurasān in 1888-1892, it seems clear that it was controversial. He faced opposition from other *'ulamā'* to his bid to become supervisor of the Imām Riḍā' shrine. He appears to have gradually fallen out with the governor, Rukn al-Dawlih, and by the summer of 1890 he was involved in public turmoil. In September of that year he was arrested and confined in the Nādirī Fortress, perhaps for as many as eighteen months. He saw the Tobacco Revolt as a sign of the last days, and was freed to depart Khurasān only once it had wound down.

Istanbul and Pan-Islam

Subsequent events were to thrust Shaykh al-Ra'īs into the maelstrom of expatriate radical politics in Istanbul, but also into the vortex of a profound spiritual crisis. Denied the sort of prominent political role he had sought in Khurasān, humiliated and imprisoned, he had good reason to be bitter against Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh and Rukn al-Dawlih. His religion's liberality and ecumenical spirit made the conception of pan-Islam congenial to him, and he found himself able to write in favor of

66 Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 1:15-16 and 2:32-33; Ishrāq-Khavārī, "Ḥayrat," p. 331; a visit to the Nādirī Fortress was undertaken by Curzon only a few months before Ishrāq-Khavārī says Shaykh al-Ra'īs was confined there: Curzon, Persia, 1:113-147.

67 Abū'l-Ḥamīd Ishrāq-Khavārī, *Taqvīm-i Tārīkh-i 'Amr* (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 126 B.E.), pp. 112-113.

it on behalf of the idea's chief sponsor, Sulṭān 'Abdu'l-Ḥamīd II. But he could not in the end gain the full protection of the Ottoman state, so that he was cast adrift, a royal refugee, yet again.

In January of 1892 Nāṣir al-Din Shāh finally bowed to public pressure and cancelled the Tobacco monopoly he had granted Colonel Talbott, after which the political turmoil in the country gradually subsided. Shaykh al-Ra'īs was allowed to depart from Mashhad with his entire family on 10 April 1892, heading for Ashkhabad in Russian territory. In the years since he had last visited Transcaspia, Ashkhabad had with the help of the railroad grown into a flourishing town of 12,000, possessing an increasing Iranian population, and a significant Bahā'ī community had developed there.[67] He was lionized by the latter, and given a respectful welcome even by the Shi'ites and Sunnis (most of whom were probably ignorant of his heterodoxy). He travelled around the Emirate of Bukhara and Russian Turkestan, visiting Samarqand, Bukhara and Chaharju, and traversing the Turkmen desert. Shaykh al-Ra'īs demonstrates his nationalist sentiments in poetry he wrote during this journey, when he saw regions that had once been under Iranian suzerainty and had now passed to the Russians or their ally, the Khanate of Khiva. His quatrain ended with the plaint: "Why should the enemy have made away with such pleasing lands?"[68]

In May of 1892 he departed Ashkhabad for the Caucasus, and there he says he was welcomed by "acquaintances and by the Friends (*aḥbāb*)." The last term is one used among Bahā'īs to refer to one another, rather as the Quakers call each other "Friends." In Tblisi (Tiflis) he was graciously hosted by the great merchant Ḥajjī Muḥammad Bāqir Tājirbāshī-yi Tabrīzī, and by Mu'tamadu's-Sulṭan Mīrzā Riḍā' Khān Mu'īn al-Vizārih, with both of whom he carried on memorable conversations. Secretly he met with the Bahā'ī community in Tblisi, as well, and may have discovered from them that Bahā'u'llāh had died on 29 May, having appointed his eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahā', to head the Bahā'ī community after him.[69]

Shaykh al-Ra'īs proceeded with his family to Istanbul, from which he wanted to make another pilgrimage, though he wished to reside in the Ottoman capital upon his return. There he was welcomed by the 17.000-strong Iranian community of ex-

67 Moojan Momen, "The Baha'i Community of Ashkhabad: Its Social Basis and Importance in Baha'i History," in Shirin Akiner, *Cultural Change and Continuity in Central Asia* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1991), pp. 278-305.

68 Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 1:16; Ishrāq-Khavārī, "Ḥayrat," p. 332, quotes this poem; another quatrain he wrote during this journey, for the headman of Miyami, is preserved in Afḍal al-Mulk, *Safarnāmih-'i Khurasān*, p. 34.

69 Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, 1:16; Ishrāq-Khavārī, "Ḥayrat," p. 332.

patriates, especially, he says, by the Azerbaijanis (Shaykh al-Ra'ïs had spent his childhood in Tabriz and spoke the Azeri as well as the Qājār Turkic dialects). He says that he found Ḥajjī Muḥammad Tahbāz, the great merchant and the defender of the rights of all Iranian nationals in the Ottoman capital, especially warm. It may be that the Iranian expatriates felt that having a Qājār prince among them would improve their political leverage, both with their Ottoman hosts and with Tehran. He also had friendly meetings with Asadu'llāh Khān Ṭabātabā'ī Nāẓim al-Dawlih, who had been the Iranian ambassador to the Sublime Porte since the spring of 1891. Shaykh al-Ra'ïs prepared for his pilgimage (again, this journey served as a political protest against his imprisonment in Mashhad), but faced a family problem. His youngest son, Ḥusām al-Dīn Mīrzā, was still a suckling child, and could not be separated from his mother. His friends forbade Shaykh al-Ra'ïs to leave the baby with a nursemaid, but on the other hand he did not wish to risk exposing it to the heat of a Hijazi summer. He performed divination (*istikhārih*: typically one opens at random a page of the Qur'ān or of the *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ and follows the advice gleaned from the verse upon which one's eyes first fall). He frankly admits, however, that it did not help him resolve his problem. Finally he did leave the baby with a nursemaid, and he and the rest of the family performed the pilgrimage. His admission that divination was no help, and his unwillingness to trust to fate or to the blessedness of the Hijaz in trying to protect his child, show an at least somewhat secular sensibility.[70]

He stayed in Istanbul for one year upon his return, till the fall of 1893, during which time Nāẓim al-Dawlih wrote back to Iran on his behalf (without success). Shaykh al-Ra'ïs's return to Istanbul coincided with arrival there of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī from London to join the sultan's circle. 'Abdu'l-Ḥamīd II was still interested in promoting the notion of Pan-Islam or the unity of all Muslims, Sunni and Shi'ite, under his religious leadership. Such an ideology would help strengthen his authority in the largely Shi'ite provinces of what is now Iraq and Eastern Arabia, and might also give him a toehold inside Iran. Nikki Keddie found and translated the account of what happened, presumably in fall or early winter, 1892, given by Afḍal al-Mulk Kirmānī, the brother of the 'Azalī figure Aghā Khān Kirmānī:

> "The Ottoman Sultan came to believe in the unity of the different Islamic groups and asked Sayyed Jamāl ed Dīn to write to the Shi'ite ulama in Iran and Iraq and call them to unity. The late Sayyed Jamāl ed Dīn . . . said if he had the power of the sultanate and the necessary money . . . he could accomplish this great work with the help of a circle of patriotic (*mellat parast*) intellectuals. The Ottoman Sultan gave guarantees and obligations for this. The Sayyed formed a society of Iranian and other Shi'ite men of letters who were in Istanbul. This Society was made up of twelve men: Novvab Vala Hajj Sheikh ol Ra'is, Feizi Efendi Moāllem Irani, Reza Pasha Shi'i, Sayyed Borhan ed Din Balkhi, Novvab Hossein Hindi, Ahmad Mirza (who had just come from Iran to Istanbul), Hasan Khan (the Iranian Consul General), Mīrzā Aqa Khan Kermani, Sheikh Ahmad Ruhi, myself (Ruhi's brother), Abdol Karim Bey and Hamid Bey Javaherizadeh Esfahani . . ."[71]

[70] Shaykh al-Ra'ïs, *Muntakhab*, 1:16-21.

In 1892-93 members of a group, including Shaykh al-Ra'ïs, carried on a series of discussions with Ottoman officials aimed at laying the groundwork for a thoroughgoing ideology of pan-Islam.[72] Later, in 1894, some members of the group began a letter-writing campaign directed at the Shi'ite *'ulamā'* in Iraq and Iran, attempting to secure their loyalty on a pan-Islamic basis for the Sultan. Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah reacted so vehemently that he succeeded in having the Iranian expatriate group broken up, with the sultan retreating before injured Iranian pride.

Shaykh al-Ra'ïs, however, probably did not remain in Istanbul long enough to be part of the letter-writing effort. He did carry on serious discussions of pan-Islamic principles with Ottoman officials, and he penned a manuscript setting forth his ideas in this regard, entitled The Unity of Islam (*Ittiḥād-i Islām*), which was later printed in Bombay.[73] His Shi'ite-Sunni ecumenism was probably sincere, and accorded with the emphasis in Bahā'ī scripture on the unity of religions and the need to avoid religious disputes and polemics. In his poetry, Shaykh al-Ra'ïs argued that all the great religions and prophets taught the same message:

> Turmoil in the world comes from whom?
> What is the source of all this wrangling?
> When only one Word exists:
> There is no god but God . . .
> He who speaks of three Persons,
> If you disregard the fancy therein,
> In three words is one meaning:
> There is no god but God . . .
> The Hindu comes walking gravely
> Making mention of "Ram, Ram;"
> By this saying the intention is:
> "There is no god but God."
> Zarathustra went to the desert,
> His fire in his fist;

[71] From the appendix in Nikki R. Keddie, "Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4 (1962):265-95, reprinted in Nikki Keddie, *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), this passage on p. 43.

[72] Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din "al-Afghani"*, pp. 377-78; Shaykh al-Ra'ïs, "Mudhakkarāt raji'ih bi ittiḥād-i Islām ba Jināb-i Cevdet Pāshā," in *Muntakhab*, 2:110-123.

[73] Abū'l-Ḥasan Mīrzā Shaykh al-Ra'ïs, *Ittiḥad-i Islām*, ed. Ṣādiq Sajjādī (Tehran: Naqsh-i Jahān, repr. 1984 [Bombay, 1894]).

Striking flames from each finger:
There is no god but God.[74]

For a Shi'ite mujtahid to admit the underlying monotheism of Christianity, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism makes little sense, whereas this is a well-known Bahā'ī teaching. A mere concord between two branches of Islam was in comparison a relatively minor affair.

While in Istanbul, probably through his renewed contact with Aghā Khān Kirmānī, Shaykh al-Ra'īs began taking an interest in the work of Mīrzā Malkum Khān. Malkum had been a long-time reformist thinker and had served in the foreign ministry, but more than once suffered the shah's wrath, as in 1862 when he was exiled for having founded an Iranian form of freemasonry. While Iranian ambassador in London in 1889 he sold a lottery concession to British speculators, but this was cancelled by the prime minister (because he did not receive a kickback?) and Malkum, after fraudulently pocketing some of the concession payments, was dismissed as ambassador. Perhaps as a way of redeeming himself, he then broke decisively with Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh and began a dissident newspaper, *Qānūn* (The Law), which argued for a rule of law, supported the Tobacco Revolt, and from 1892 began calling for parliamentary governance in Iran. Malkum had been influenced by Saint-Simonian and Masonic ideas about human unity, and also began a "League of Humanity" (*Majmā'-i ādamiyyat*). Algar tells us that Malkum's *Qānūn* reported the prince-mujtahid's presence in Istanbul: Now Shaykh al-Ra'īs has joined him [Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn], and it is said that he is attempting with the support of the Sulṭān, to become the supreme manifestation (*maẓhar-i a'ẓām*)."[75] As Algar notes, the meaning of the latter phrase is unclear, but probably has some reference to a Bābi or Bahā'ī idea of spiritual progress (Bahā'u'llāh, e.g., spoke of the spiritually perfected human being as the "supreme talisman" (*tilism-i a'ẓām*) and considered human beings manifestations [sing. *maẓhar*] of the attributes of God). While in Istanbul, Shaykh al-Ra'īs not only deepened his knowledge of Malkum's League of Humanity, but he also joined a Masonic lodge.[76]

Shaykh al-Ra'īs's second stay in Istanbul saw him drawn into a number of progressive intellectual and political networks. His activities on behalf of pan-Islam arose out of conviction, but also allowed him to take revenge on Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh

[74] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Guzidih-`i az surudih-ha-yi Shaykh al-Ra'īs*, ed. Mīr Jalāl al-Dīn Kazzāzī (Tehran: Nashr-i Markaz, 1990), pp. 122-123.

[75] Qānūn, no. 28, quoted and translated in Hamid Algar, *Mīrzā Malkum Khan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 226.

[76] Isma`il Ra'in, *Faramushkhanih va Framasunri dar Iran*, 3 vols. (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1968), 3:39, cited in Algar, *Mīrzā Malkum Khan*, p. 225, n. 90.

for his humiliating imprisonment at the Nādirī Fortress. Although his ex-Azalī associates and Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn had no use for the Bahā'ī religion, many of their reformist social ideas were close to its, and this shared modernism formed a basis upon which Shaykh al-Ra'īs could ally himself with them. He was drawn in the same way to Malkum Khān and his *Qānūn*, and to enlightened freemasonry. He was, however, in a far less stable position than he imagined, and his association with the pan-Islamic circle (itself disbanded under Iranian pressure only two years later) proved short-lived.

The Pilgrimage to `Akka and the Visit to India

The Ottoman government abruptly withdrew Shaykh al-Ra'īs's permission to reside in Istanbul in fall of 1893, for reasons that remain obscure.[77] It is possible that the Iranian government was extremely alarmed at Shaykh al-Ra'īs's presence in Istanbul, and put enormous pressure on the Ottomans to deny him asylum. Ishrāq-Khāvarī maintains that he was in any case increasingly unhappy with Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn's intrigues against Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh, into which he was in danger of being drawn, but does not cite any source for this contention.[78] Whatever its roots, the Ottoman decision created a spiritual crisis for Shaykh al-Ra'īs, and he announced his resolve to settle in the Shi'ite shrine cities of Iraq. On the way, however, he secretly intended to make a pilgrimage to Bahā'u'llāh's grave (as he had earlier visited the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad), perhaps in hopes that exposure to its blessedness make his path clear. In October, 1893, Shaykh al-Ra'īs set out with family and friends.

He announced to his Muslim friends, upon reaching Port Said, that he had decided to visit Jerusalem, which he did. Jerusalem, however, was a code word for 'Akka, to which he next proceeded. When he first arrived in this small port city on the coast of Palestine, which the Ottomans used as a place of exile for political prisoners, he made a quiet visit to Bahā'u'llāh's resting-place on its outskirts, at the mansion of Bahjī. He then stayed with the local Ottoman governor (*mutaṣarrif*) as his guest. The sultan had sent telegrams to his officials in Palestine instructing them to treat Shaykh al-Ra'īs with honor. His host arranged for a great gathering of the local notables, at which Shaykh al-Ra'īs was asked to give a speech. He paused every once and a while during his discourse to smoke a water pipe. 'Abdu'l-Bahā' arrived during the presentation, and in Bahā'ī eyes Shaykh al-Ra'īs committed several im-

[77] Mīrzā Aqā Khān/Mīrzā Malkum Khān, Dhu'l-Ḥijjah 11, 1311/June 15, 1894, in Bibliotheque Nationale, Supplement Persan, 1996, ff. 76-77, cited in Algar, *Mīrzā Malkum Khan*, p. 225 and n. 92.

[78] Ishrāq-Khavārī, "Ḥayrat," pp. 331-332.

proprieties. He continued to sit and speak, and continued to smoke, even in the presence of his religion's supreme head. This behavior is in keeping with Shaykh al-Ra'īs's practice of pious dissimulation, since for him to act in any other way would have betrayed his Bahā'ī affiliation to the Ottoman and Muslim authorities. It may also be that he had been devoted to Bahā'u'llāh as a spiritual guide but had not yet decided on his attitude to his successor. After a short time, 'Abdu'l-Bahā' left. One or two days later, Shaykh al-Ra'īs, on the pretext that it was rude not to return a visit, went to 'Abdu'l-Bahā's house. A number of other Bahā'īs were also present. 'Abdu'l-Bahā' suggested that the two go for a walk and have a private conversation. The Bahā'īs observed that as they strolled along and 'Abdu'l-Bahā' discoursed, Shaykh al-Ra'īs's demeanor changed markedly. At first he walked abreast of 'Abdu'l-Bahā', but slowly began to hang back a bit, showing deference. The content of their conversation, which occurred out of earshot of the others, is unknown, and Shaykh al-Ra'īs himself appears never to have spoken of it. The witnesses saw him break down and weep copiously, and one said that by the time he left his eyes were so red from crying that they looked like two cups of blood. On subsequent visits, when in 'Abdu'l-Bahā's presence he stood and and refrained from smoking.[79]

Shaykh al-Ra'īs developed a powerful devotion to 'Abdu'l-Bahā', whom he supported against his rival, another of Bahā'u'llāh's sons, and in his sermons later on he frequently wove references to the Bahā'ī leader into his sermons. Since Shi'ites revered " Ḥaḍrat-i 'Abbās", the half-brother of the martyred Imām Ḥusayn, and 'Abdu'l-Bahā's given name was 'Abbās, he could employ double entendre by appearing to refer to the former but actually alluding to the latter. He wrote poetry while in 'Akka wherein he announced, "I attained to the cup of intimacy in the precincts of Jerusalem", speaking of an experience of mystical intoxication.[80] In his autobiography, he speaks cryptically of his spiritual experiences in the Holy Land, writing, "I made my pilgrimage to all the holy spots in that land that has produced prophets and been the site of Revelation, and things were disclosed to the heart (*inkishāfat-i qalbiyyih*) and revelations from the unseen (*futūḥāt-i ghaybiyyih*) appeared."[81] Palestine's long sacred history served as a camouflage for his Bahā'ī experiences, since it was associated with David, Solomon and Jesus as well as with Ba-

[79] Māzandarānī, "*Tārīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq*," 6:41; Ishrāq-Khavārī, "Ḥayrat," p. 333; Sulaymani, *Maṣābīḥ*, 7:431-32.

[80] Ishrāq-Khavārī, "Ḥayrat," p. 333. The double entendres are confirmed in personal correspondence to me from Khazeh Fananapazir, 22 October 1993, reporting what his grandfather heard at a sermon given by Shaykh al-Ra'īs in Isfahan early in the twentieth century: "Who says that 'Abbās lost his hands? No, 'Abbās's hands, through the strength given to them by Ḥusayn, have become victorious in the West as well as the East." Bahā'īs would read 'Abbās as 'Abdu'l-Bahā ' 'Abbās and Ḥusayn as Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Bahā'u'llāh.

[81] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhabat*, 1:22.

hā'u'llāh, and most of his readers would assume he was referring to the biblical/qur'anic prophets. In 1899, when 'Abdu'l-Bahā' succeeded in having the remains of the Bāb brought to Haifa from Iran, with the intention of establishing a mausoleum for the martyred prophet, Shaykh al-Ra'īs composed a commemorative poem. He also penned verse supporting 'Abdu'l-Bahā' against his rebellious younger brother, Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī. When E.G. Browne published the Bābī chronicle, *Nuqṭatu'l-Kaf*, Shaykh al-Ra'īs wrote a ditty dismissing it as an 'azālī forgery. This poetry survives only in Bahā'ī sources.[82]

He spent several days in 'Abdu'l-Bahā's company. Mazandarānī says that 'Abdu'l-Bahā' warned him against continuing to associate with Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī, a man who had after all attacked the Bābī-Bahā'ī movement, and had, through his activities during the Tobacco Revolt, incurred the undying enmity of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh.[83] This is plausible, and Māzandarānī was in a good position to hear from Bahā'ī pilgrims then present their accounts of the later discussions between the two (which might have been less private than the first).

A tension exists in Bahā'u'llāh's writings, between his devotion to what was then radical constitutionalist change and his desire for peace, social order, and a strong Iran with law-abiding citizens. It is difficult to see how both could be attained, except perhaps over the very long run. The Qājār shahs would clearly not acquiesce in the establishment of a constitution and parliament, unless popular protests forced them to do so, and their censorship apparatus impeded the use of liberal discussion as a tool to promote participatory ideals. Sometimes Bahā'u'llāh emphasizes the radical side of his proposals, and sometimes he underlines the need for loyalty to the state. I would suggest that his 1891 *Tablet to the World* exhibits the more radical side of his teachings, for therein he condemns the Qājārs as tyrants and appears largely to take the side of liberal reformers during the Tobacco Revolt, going them one better in calling again for an Iranian parliament. His *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, written during his last year of life, on the other hand, quotes St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans in recommending acceptance of the secular government's authority.

'Abdu'l-Bahā', upon his accession as head of the religion in late May of 1892, developed the patriotic and anti-imperialist themes more than he did the democratic ones. The same year he wrote and circulated his *Treatise on Politics* (*Risālih-'i Siyāsiyyih*), which forbids Bahā'īs to take any part in the Tobacco Revolt

[82] Māzandarānī, "*Tārīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq*", 8, i:222-223.

[83] Māzandarānī, " *Tārīkh-i Ẓuhūr al-Ḥaqq*," 6:41.

(which had wound down, in any case, with the January, 1892 revocation of the concession by the shah). He argues that such popular movements against Middle Eastern governments held the danger of weakening them and of inviting foreign intervention, and he cites the failure of the 1876 Ottoman Constitutional Revolution, foiled by the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78, as an example (he might have instanced Egypt's 'Urābī revolt, as well).[84] Despite his cosmopolitanism, 'Abdu'l-Bahā' in the early 1890s was moving toward a more patriotic position wherein he felt it was important to strengthen the indigenous state. In 1894, he had Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl Gulpāygānī, one of the greatest of the Bahā'ī learned men, wrote to Iran with his instructions that Bahā'īs should obey the government as a way of restoring Iran to its former greatness, and criticizing the Shi'ite clergy's belief in the illegitimacy of the secular state.[85] 'Abdu'l-Bahā' more than once shifted somewhat away from this policy, as in his early endorsement of the constitutionalist movement in Iran in 1905-1907, so it must be seen as policy rather than principle. Support for the state could not, moreover, take complete precedence over other Bahā'ī ideals such as the desirability of parliamentary governance, as enunciated by Bahā'u'llāh. But this pro-state patriotism, with its undertone of anti-imperialism, is presumably the sort of position 'Abdu'l-Bahā' conveyed to Shaykh al-Ra'īs in 1893.

Bahā'ī sources say that 'Abdu'l-Bahā' also advised him to go to India as a resolution of his problems, and there to preach the Bahā'ī Faith. It is difficult to know how much of this is true. British India had relative cultural freedom, Bombay was a major center for Iranian merchants and other expatriates, and Bahā'u'llāh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā' did send Bahā'īs to India as missionaries. On the other hand, in another context 'Abdu'l-Bahā' appears to have approved of Shaykh al-Ra'īs's virtual dissimulation of his religion, saying that prominent persons such as he must exercise great wisdom (*ḥikmat*), and it is not clear that he would have suggested that Shaykh al-Ra'īs openly announce himself and become a circuit preacher. I suspect that 'Abdu'l-Bahā' did suggest that he go to Bombay, where he could continue to make his point to Tehran as an expatriate, that he was disgruntled, and where the threat that he might prove useful to the British would be apparent to the shah. 'Abdu'l-Bahā' may also have seen him as someone who could add support, if only in a subtle way, to the Indian Bahā'ī community. Shaykh al-Ra'īs reports in his autobiographical sketch that he was led to go India via the Suez Canal by a divination he performed, and after a stormy and fatiguing passage he arrived in Bombay in early January of 1894. There, he appears to have suffered what we would now call a profound culture

[84] 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Risālih-'i siyāsiyyih* (Tehrān, 1907 [Bombay, 1893]).

[85] Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl Gulpaygānī, *Letters and Essays, 1886-1913*, trans. Juan R.I. Cole (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1985), pp. 87-91; this book is based on Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl Gulpaygānī, *Raqā'im va Rasā'il*, ed. Ruḥu'llāh Miḥrābkhānī (Tehrān: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1978).

shock. India, with its teeming cities, its panoply of gaudy deities, its spicy food and complex social system, has not always been found congenial by visitors from other climes. Shaykh al-Ra'īs expresses his disorientation in typically apocalyptic language, saying that what he saw there made him think that the fabled wall of Alexander had crumbled, the Day of Judgment had arrived, and the hordes of Gog and Magog been set loose. He remained only a few months in Bombay, meeting with local notables such as the great Iranian merchant Ḥajjī 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn Amīn al-Tujjār and preaching sermons to the expatriate Iranian community. He travelled in the Presidency of Bombay, for instance to Poona. According to Ishrāq-Khavārī, he associated with the Bahā'īs in India only with the utmost discretion. He arranged with friends to have published the collection of his literary works upon which this chapter has so heavily depended, the *Priceless Selection* (*Muntakhāb-i Nafīs*), as well as his book on pan-Islam. Shaykh al-Ra'īs while in India began corresponding with Malkum Khān, praising his efforts and employing the terminology of the latter's League of Humanity. For instance, he calls Malkum "Adam," implying that he is the archetype of the new humanity, and he finds playful support for Malkum's idea of the rule of law (*qānūn*) in Qur'ān verses that begin with that word's Arabic roots (*qāf and nūn*).[86] Aghā Khān Kirmānī knew of his plans to go from India to the shrine cities and perhaps to return to Mashhad, and counted on him to distribute Qānūn in those places: "in Khurasān [we have] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, who is at the moment still in Bombay, and from there will go to the shrine cities and on to Mashhad."[87] While in India Shaykh al-Ra'īs joined the circle of the Ismā'īlī leader Aghā Khān III, Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, whom he praises and who bestowed on him his patronage.[88] His choice of patrons is perhaps the final clue to his heterodoxy. Here his biographical sketch comes to an end, and the silences interspersed throughout it finally become dominant. Aside from possibly surviving papers in family hands, we have nothing from his own pen describing his Shiraz period (1894-1902), his participation in the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1908), his arrest and near execution in 1908, or the somewhat listless last twelve years of his life, passed mostly in Tehran, during which he was yet again expelled from Mashhad.

[86] Shaykh al-Ra'īs/Malkum Khan, 20 Safar 1312/23 August 1894, Supplement Persan, 1991, f. 50, cited in Algar, *Mīrzā Malkum Khan*, pp. 225-26.

[87] Aqā Khān Kirmānī/Mīrzā Malkum Khan, "'Īd al-Fiṭr" [1311/7 April 1894], in Aqā Khān Kirmānī, *Namih-ha-yi Tab'īd*, ed. Huma Nāṭiq and Muḥammad Fīrūz (Cologne: Chap-i Ufuq, 1989) p. 150; Algar, *Mīrzā Malkum Khan*, p. 225, n. 93, cites an undated letter (Mīrzā Aqā Khān/Mīrzā Malkum Khan, n.d., Supplement Persan, 1996, f. 98) about Shaykh al-Ra'īs's distribution of Qānūn in the shrine cities, but places this just before his journey to India (is this the same 'Īd al-Fiṭr letter?). I do not believe Shaykh al-Ra'īs would neglect to mention a visit to the shrine cities, and in his autobiographical sketch he clearly says he went straight to India from Palestine via the Suez Canal. I would therefore suggest that the letter is referring to his activities after leaving Bombay.

[88] Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Muntakhab*, pp. 22-25; Ishrāq-Khavārī, "Hayrat," p. 334.

Shaykh al-Ra'īs engaged in all three degrees of self-concealment outlined by Bacon. He attempted to keep his heterodox beliefs secret from fellow clergymen, and simulated the life of a Shi'ite sermonizer. Yet, in his poetry and sermons, he also engaged in what Bacon called dissimulation, the dropping of broad hints that he was not what he seemed. This partial unveiling of the self helped block his career, denying him the supervision of the Imām Riḍā' Shrine, and leading to his expulsion from Shiraz in 1902 as a result of being branded a Bahā'ī by fellow clergymen who saw through the allusions in his sermons.

The autobiographical sketch left to us by Shaykh al-Ra'īs is an act of self-censorship, which practices secrecy more than simulation. It tells us relatively little about how he became a dissident. It does not mention his mother's alleged admiration for the Bābīs, or the possible influence of Bahā'u'llāh's democratic millenarianism on his social thought. It says nothing about his activities, if any, during the Tobacco Revolt, and omits all mention of his arrest and period of imprisonment. He is silent about his association in Istanbul with Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Āghā Khān Kirmānī and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī, or what points of agreement or difference he had with their political views. Rather, the image that emerges from the autobiographical sketch is an old-fashioned one, almost a classical Islamic one, of the poet and intellectual mistreated by his patrons. His victimization at the hands of 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih in Mashhad in 1884-85 is not represented as hinging upon issues in philosophy of government or reform, but as a personal vendetta by a belligerant and rapacious governor. (His letters to Tehran on the subject do forthrightly condemn 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih for having alienated his subjects, but few details are given). Sulṭān 'Abdu'l-Ḥamīd II is represented as a gracious patron, and by implication Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh is depicted as a niggardly or boorish one. Amīn al-Sulṭān, the Prime Minister, is likewise praised for his generosity, and it is implied that his ineffectuality is not his own fault but that of Qājār Iranian political culture (wherein government decrees were routinely ignored). Rukn al-Dawlih becomes a fickle sponsor, Aghā Khān III of Bombay a faithful one. This gallery of good and bad patrons owes much to the conventions of Persian literary biography, going back to Firdawsī's disgust with his piddling payment for the *Shāhnāmih*. The convention is clearly invoked, however, to exclude any open discussion of politics in the modern sense. The artful silences and the disclosure of patrons' faults, however, are merely a form of indirection, making Shaykh al-Ra'īs an "unreliable narrator" in his autobiography, having adopted a voice meant to conceal rather than to reveal.

In politics, the correspondence included in The Priceless Selection is occasionally less opaque, particularly the condemnations of 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih. On matters of religious belief, the poetry is characterized by extensive dissimulation in the Ba-

conian sense, by the dropping of broad hints throughout that the author has dimensions that do not appear on the surface. These hints, however, had to be ambiguous, in order to remain a species of self-concealment and not become the sort of self-revelation that would bring swift martyrdom (as with Ābā Badī'. The few lines alluding to the Tobacco Revolt could be read as merely playful or as indicating that he felt it had a millenarian significance. One could read virtually all the poetry with no knowledge of Bahā'ī technical terminology and find it unexceptionable. The exegesis of Ishrāq-Khavārī and others, however, makes a plausible case that Shaykh al-Ra'īs encoded in his verse his most profound millenarian beliefs, referring in a powerful way to Bahā'u'llāh and to his conviction that the world was being turned upside down. As Strauss also noted, "Persecution . . . gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines."[89] But why drop such hints to begin with, why engage in positive implication? It is, surely, another sort of rebellion against the constituted order, a way of striking back at repression without risking all. In regard to politics, Shaykh al-Ra'īs would throw off all self-concealment during the Constitutional Revolution; in regard to religion, he never let the outside world have more than a hazy glimpse of his heterodoxy.

How Shaykh al-Ra'īs emerged, a decade after he finished his autobiographical sketch, as a major literary and political figure in the Constitutional Revolution, nevertheless now seems easier to understand. His father's long disgrace and house arrest, Shaykh al-Ra'īs's abandonment to the plague as a child, his inability to save Āba Badī' from martyrdom, his outrage at 'Aṣaf al-Dawlih's arbitrariness, his virtual exiles from Iran in 1885 and 1892, his lament about the absence of a rule of law in his homeland, his imprisonment by Rukn al-Dawlih at the Nādirī Fortress, his millenarian interpretation of the Tobacco Revolt, his acquaintance with the humanist ideas of Malkum Khān, and his association with the Pan-Islamic grouping in Istanbul, all show his evolution as a dissident. His underlying Bahā'ī belief that the world was on the verge of apocalyptic change, that various movements in Iran were manifestations of this transformation, and that "ere long . . . the state of affairs" in Tehran would be revolutionized, "and the reins of power fall into the hands of the people," must have contributed in a pivotal manner to his political formation. Its very centrality and interiority, as well as the dangers it carried of execution for heresy, caused him to bury it in poetic allusions and double entendres. The hidden and the apparent preoccupy Shaykh al-Ra'īs the poet, and this too now becomes more intelligible.

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[89] Strauss, *Persecution*, p. 25.

A hidden sun has appeared
From a spiritual thunderbolt;
Come, O lights of divinity:
Walk and behold.