

THIRD SERIES · VOLUME 8 · PART 3  
NOVEMBER 1998

# Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
FOR THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

DESINFORMATION ALS METHODE. DIE BAHÁ'ISMUS MONOGRAPHIE DES F. FICICCHIA. By UDO SCHAEFER, NICOLA TOWFIGH and ULRICH GOLLMER. (Religionswissenschaftliche Texte und Studien, Band 6). pp. xiii, 685. Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag, 1995. DM 65.

*Desinformation als Methode*, written by three German Baha'i scholars, is the first comprehensive work in a western language which tries to encounter and halt a hostile campaign against the Baha'i religion in the West. It authentically and in the style and language of the best scholastic tradition responds to the largest accumulation of issues raised in polemical writings against the Baha'is in Europe during the last one hundred years, and to a lesser extent in the United States.

The appearance of *Der Baha'ismus – Religion der Zukunft? Geschichte, Lehre und Organisation in kritischer Anfrage*, a monograph written by F. Ficicchia (Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen, Stuttgart 1981), in itself would not have prompted the authors to come up with such a vehement defence of their faith if the antagonistic allegations of the author had not received the uncritical approval and wholesale support of certain missionary and Church-affiliated institutions.

Ficicchia was a member of the Swiss Baha'i community from 1971 to 1974. In 1978, after a period of uncertainty and vacillation, in a letter written to the Baha'i World Center in Haifa he vowed henceforth to be "an embittered enemy" of the Baha'is, determined "to fight them by all means wherever possible" (Desinf. 26–27). Thus he wrote *Der Baha'ismus*, a sizeable volume denouncing the founders of the new religion, its history, its teachings, and its institutions.

For years the book went unchallenged. Dr Schaefer, a jurist and well-known author, describes why the Baha'is at first were hesitant as to how to react. "If you try to invalidate the attacks", he writes, "the verdict will sound: Qui s'excuse s'accuse. If you keep silent . . . then it will sound: Qui tacet, consentire videtur" (p. 3). However, when Ficicchia's volume started bearing the anticipated fruit, both in the life of the small Baha'i community, as once happened in Berlin (pp. 6–7), and through the adaptation and wide circulation of its charges in various publications (the authors mention, among others, *Lexikon der Religionen*, *Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften*, *Lexikon der Sekten*, *The Journal Anthropos*, *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionsgeschichte* (Desinf. p. 3, f. 5), ignoring it did not seem wise any longer.

Attacking the Baha'is has been a national sport in the land of its origin since its inception in 1844. In Europe, disregarding prohibitions and persecutions the Baha'is suffered under such regimes as the Bolshevik in the Soviet Union and the Nazi in Germany, the only opposition to them has been in the form of critical monographs and articles, usually from the pen of Christian theologians (Schaefer, 15–23). The fact that the Baha'i Faith has taken root in Europe, seems to have moved at least some Christian authorities to make good use of Ficicchia by uncritically accommodating to his needs in their publications. Michael Mildenerger tags the monograph a "religionswissenschaftliches Standardwerk" . . . "that treats its theme comprehensively and may hardly be outstripped for a long time to come" (*Baha'ismus*, Vorwort 12). It is unfortunate that, as it seems, nobody checked Ficicchia's credentials. It bothered no-one that he had no training in theology and science of religions. The question never crossed the mind of his publishers, manuscript readers, and then the reviewers, how someone illiterate in Arabic and Persian – the two languages of the entire body of Babi-Baha'i scripture and primary sources – could possibly be qualified to write a bulky volume attacking the sacred tenets and history of this religion (Desinf. 28). It is surprising that even the reputable academic journal *Der Islam* carried a review praising it in terms unsustainable by the quality of its contents (*Der Islam*, LXII, 1988, pp. 184–6).

Within the framework of three parts (1. Methodisches, 2. Gemeinde und Lehre, 3. Historische Fragen) which are divided into 11 chapters and 105 (my counting) interrelated articles, plus ca. 3, 700 (my counting) footnotes and annotations, *Desinformation* responds to a very large number of polemics written by Christian missionaries, renegades, and even renowned scholars.

Udo Schaefer tackles Ficicchia's methodology and corrects his portraits of the Bab, Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha, and Shoghi Effendi. Among many other subjects elucidated by Schaefer in an impressively erudite style are the quality of the Baha'i community, teachings and laws, claim to finality, freedom, censorship, organization, "dissimulation" of *Kitab-i Aqdas*, etc. Gollmer writes about political concepts such as world parliament, world government, peace, human rights, kingship, universalism and nationalism, religious persecution, "political Mahdism", etc. He also responds to Ficicchia's unfair allegation that the Baha'is of Iran bear the responsibility for the persecution which they suffered following the Islamic Revolution of 1979 (pp. 352–58). Gollmer is also the author of

the entire chapter on "The Will and Testament" of Abd'ul-Baha and its authenticity (pp. 541-623). The main thrust of Towfigh's contribution is in the field of Baha'i history. The complex problems surrounding the relation between Baha'u'llah and his half-brother Mirza Yahya Azal, their claims to supremacy and the resulting conflicts dividing them into two hostile fronts, thoroughly analyzed by Towfigh, should be of particular interest to scholars in the field (pp. 475-540). Admirers of E. G. Browne, whose involvement with the Babi-Baha'i history is the subject of a separate article (pp. 417-31), may need to revise what they have learned from him exactly about this topic. Browne who initially was an enthusiastic admirer of the new religious movement in Iran, was gradually trapped by the sworn enemies of Baha'u'llah and lent his talent to the cause of discrediting the claim of one whom he once had praised in words never surpassed by anyone of his intellectual calibre. In another chapter Towfigh explains the background and origins of the two controversial books of history: *Tarikh-i Jadid* and *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* which Browne annotated and published in 1893 and 1910 respectively. She also offers useful information about *Hasht Bihisht* and its author Shaykh Ahmad Ruhi who played a key role in changing Browne's heart and mind (pp. 387-415). Actually, it was the celebrated Mirza Muhammad Khan Qazvini who wrote the lengthy anti-Baha'i introduction to *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* which Browne, for reasons difficult to fathom, allowed to appear in his name (s. Abbas Iqbal, *Yadegar*, V, 1949, no. 10, p. 54; *Mohit-i Tabataba'i*, Gowhar, II, 1975, nos. 11-12, p. 961). Towfigh uses all the relevant sources including the articles of another anti-Baha'i scholar, Mohit-i Tabataba'i (in "Gowhar", Tehran 1975-76). But she does not seem to have known the articles written by Ali-Morad Da'udi and Navvabzadeh Ardakani which question Tabataba'i's conclusions. ("Mutale'a-yi Ma'arif-i Baha'i", parts 11 and 12, Tehran 1976). Another anti-Baha'i source of Ficicchia is *Die Babi-Beha'i. Die jüngste muhamedanische Sekte* (Potsdam, 1912), by Hermann Roemer, a Protestant pastor who in turn relied heavily on Browne. But unlike the latter who, in addition to having joined the anti-Baha'i camp, was dismayed by the apolitical attitude of the Baha'is, Roemer's concern was the spread of their religion in the West which he wanted to stop (Gollmer, 432-52).

A book of this magnitude obviously treats a full array of major and minor issues that the limits of a review do not allow to be mentioned. Following are a couple of examples which show why Ficicchia has to blame himself for the blow this book inevitably inflicts on his credibility.

Ficicchia's presumption that the Baha'i claim of the title of Baha'u'llah and his "order" ("nazm-i Baha'ullah". s. *Persian Bayan*, 3/16) that appears in a prophetic allusion in the *Persian Bayan* is untrue, and his assertion that the *Bayan* is locked up in Baha'i archives and remains inaccessible to researchers, are not atypical examples of Ficicchia's faulty statements. The *Bayan* is available, 1. in a published edition, 2. in about 50 ms. copies in Europe, 3. is accessible to anyone who needs to check the text in the copy or copies in Haifa. Moreover, a French translation of it by A. L. M. Nicolas was published in France over 80 years ago (Paris 1911-14. Schaefer, 78-79, Gollmer, 379, f. 24). To declare that the famous scholar of Islam Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani came from a Jewish background (*Baha'ismus* 183), is indeed another surprising error.

And yet, notwithstanding the flaws and intentional distortions by Ficicchia, the authors of *Desinformation* should have avoided blasting at him with a list of names and epithets which, although understandable as a reaction to his provocative style, not only lacks scholarly objectivity, but is also discourteous and at times insulting.

Like any other book, *Desinformation* suffers from its own lapses and shortcomings. Feeling safer on the grounds of history and literature, I restrict my comments to a couple of points relevant to these fields. Towfigh's statement that following the Bab's martyrdom almost all "18 Letters of the Living" died ("so starben fast alle achtzehn Buchstaben des Lebendigen", p. 397), is inaccurate. As a matter of fact, six of them remained alive: two of them became inactive, two others defected, one disappeared (Shaykh Sa'id Hindi who took the message to India and was never heard of again), and one accepted

Baha'u'llah and died in Istanbul (s. *Zuhur al-Haqq*, vol. 3; A. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, Cornell University Press 1989, pp. 178-79; Nosratullah Muhammad-Husayni, *Hadrat-i Bab*, Institute for Baha'i Studies in Persian, Canada 1995, index). While discussing the thorny problem of Browne's assertion that the Bab had nominated Mirza Yahya as his successor, Towfigh quotes the appropriate text of the *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* (p. 399, f. 65) and offers a translation thereof which I doubt to be more persuasively correct than that of Browne.

The syntax of the original text leaves, in the absence of any other grammatical reference for the pronoun "ishan", no alternative for the person meant by the author of the text other than Azal. This does not mean, of course, that Browne's thesis is plausible. The problem lies rather in the wording of the text which originates in the questionable *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*. Typographical mistakes, not too many, are mostly in transliterated words and diacritical signs. The few examples worthy to be mentioned are: in the Persian poem (p. 487, f. 65) where in the third line the letter "d" must replace "b", i.e. "uftad" instead of "aftab" (also in the first line the meter requires the addition of the preposition "ze", meaning "from", to be inserted between "shod" and "umr"). This omission, though, comes from Browne's original printing, *JRAS* 1889, (p. 988). p. 516, f. 205 read "litu'ayyiduh", instead of "altu yidduh". On the technical side, I would have preferred a method of footnoting which would have reduced the space taken by many repetitions of titles throughout the book. These are minor points which do not diminish the importance of the work or lower the high standard of its scholarly quality. *Desinformation* is a mine of original research and information which crosses the boundaries of several religious traditions and by clarifying many misconceptions, presents a picture of the Baha'i Faith that no future researcher in the field can afford to overlook.

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