

The family and early life of Tahirih Qurrat al-'Ayn

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to bring together a large amount of information about the ancestry and immediate family of the Babi heroine, poetess, and martyr, Tahirih Qurrat al-'Ayn, that has become available in Persian and Arabic, mainly in biographical dictionaries of Shi'i religious scholars and from family sources. Among the interesting points that emerge is the fact that Tahirih, whom the Babis regarded as the return of Fatimih, the daughter of the prophet Muhammad, was also descended from this lady on her mother's side. The paper also tries to sketch out what these sources say about the early life of Tahirih, her education, her marriage and her introduction to the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, up to the time that she first heard of the Bab and became a Babi. The paper describes some of the tensions in the paternal family of Tahirih, which must have affected her as she grew up.

Tahirih Qurrat al-'Ayn, the Babi heroine, poetess, and martyr, has become something of a legendary figure – both among Iranian women who regard her as one of the initiators of the women's movement in Iran¹ and among Baha'is who see her as a proto-Baha'i role model for women.² This paper, written partly to commemorate the 150th anniversary of her death, seeks not to add to the legend but rather to bring to the fore a certain amount of historical material that is not currently part of the historical picture that we have of Tahirih, thus serving to bring into sharper focus the picture that we have of her.³ This new material is mainly material derived from the descendants of Tahirih's family who have in recent years either directly or indirectly published a certain amount of new information about the family and early life of Tahirih, in biographical dictionaries of Shi'i scholars and other places.⁴ This

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- 1 See, for example, Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992.
 - 2 See, for example, Susan Maneck, 'Tahirih: A Religious Paradigm of Womanhood', *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 2: 2 (1989) 35-48.
 - 3 For a bibliography on Tahirih, see *Khūshih-hā az Kharman-i Adab wa Hunar* 3 (1992): 135–42 listing 180 works in oriental languages; 4 (1993): 205–22 listing 206 works in Western languages. Some of these are only passing references, however.
 - 4 This information is mainly from 'Abdu'l-Husayn ('Abbūd) Šāliḥī, a descendant of one of Tahirih's brothers. Among the items frequently cited in this paper, he wrote the Introduction to Muḥammad Šāliḥ Baraghānī, *Mawsū'a al-Baraghānī fī Fiqh al-Shī'a*, and is the source of the information in al-Wardī, *Lamaḥāt Ijtīmā'iyyah* and almost certainly also the source of the information in Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a*. 'Abdu'l-Husayn Šāliḥī is a scholar specializing in the biography of Shi'i clerics. He is the biography editor of a Shi'i encyclopaedia, the *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Tashayyu'* (see below). He appears to have written a book entitled *Qurrat al-'Ayn 'alā Ḥaqīqatihā wa Wāqī'ihā*, which has not been published but to which 'Alī al-Wardī had access. Āghā Buzurg Tīhrānī, who was the foremost scholar in the field of Shi'i biography of the last century, also appears to have been close to the family and wrote an account of the family, *Sīrat Āl Baraghānī*, which only exists in a manuscript with the family, and hence was not accessible to the present author. Various volumes of his biographical series, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a*, and his monumental bibliography, *adh-Dharī'a ila Tasānīf ash-Shī'a*, are cited below. Thus most of the sources cited in this article come back one way or another to the family of Tahirih.

new information is both complementary, in the sense of confirming from different sources, and supplementary, in the sense of adding new facts, to some of the information previously published in Persian in Nosratollah Mohammadhoseini's Persian biography of Tahirih, which is the most comprehensive account yet written of her.⁵

In the course of this paper, mention will be made of two rival schools of law in Shi'ism, the Usulis and the Akhbaris. Briefly, the Akhbaris maintained that rulings on religious law could only be made on the basis of the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Imams, while the Usulis widened the bases of religious law by maintaining that rulings could also be given based on the principles of consensus and on the application of reason. During the late Safavid period (approximately the 17th century), the Akhbaris had predominated, but towards the end of the period between the fall of the Safavids in 1722 and the rise of the Qajar dynasty in 1794, the Usulis, under Shaykh Muhammad Baqir 'Vahid' Bihbihani (1706–92), had triumphed in the shrine cities of Iraq (Najaf and Karbala) and were prevailing in most Iranian cities – this school is followed by the majority of Shi'is today. The third movement that will be mentioned is the Shaykhi movement, based on the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (1753–1826), which was to become an important foundation for the movement of the Bab (1819–50). The Shaykhi movement was, at the time that Tahirih lived, only just emerging as a separate movement. There is evidence that, at least in some cities, many Akhbaris became Shaykhis, as this new movement spread throughout Iran.

The Safavids forced Shi'ism upon the people of Persia. Most of the 'ulama of Iran were Sunni at the start of the Safavid period and so the Safavid kings were compelled to bring Shi'i 'ulama from Lebanon and elsewhere to teach the people Shi'ism. Qazvin was one of the most important cities of Iran during the Safavid period, especially during the first half of this period when it was the capital of the empire. As the Safavid era progressed, a new generation of Iranian Shi'i 'ulama began to emerge and Qazvin was one of the cities to which they were attracted. Tahirih's ancestors, on both her mother's and father's side, were among those families of 'ulama who migrated to Qazvin during Safavid times.

Tahirih's maternal family

Aminih Khanum, the mother of Tahirih, was descended from some of the leading families of Qazvin. Her mother, Fatimih, was a member of a distinguished Qazvin family of Sayyids (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) and 'ulama. They trace their ancestors to the Imam Husayn and from him to Fatimih, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, and Imam 'Ali, and hence to the Prophet Muhammad himself. Thus it is of some interest that Tahirih, whom the Babis regard as the return of Fatimih, the Prophet's daughter, was descended through her mother and grandmother from Fatimih herself. This family of Qazvin Sayyids appears to have originally resided in Tabriz. Amir Muhammad Ma'sum Husayni Qazvini (1007–1091 AH/1598–1680 AD), son of Amir Muhammad Fasih, grandson of Amir Awliya and great-grandson of Sayyid Safi'u'd-Din, moved as a child with his father to Qazvin, where he lived as a religious scholar during the second half of the Safavid era.⁶ His son, Sayyid Amir Ibrahim was a student of Mulla Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, the foremost scholar of the end of the Safavid period. Sayyid Amir Ibrahim lived for about 80 years and died in about 1149 AH/1736 AD.

5 *Ḥadrat-i-Tāhirih*, Dundas, Ont.: Association for Baha'i Studies in Persian, 2000. The material presented here complements and supplements the material in chapters 2–7 of the second section of this book.

6 *Tīhrānī, adh-Dharī'a ila Tasānif ash-Shī'a* (25 vols., Qumm: Isma'īliyyah, 1408/1987), 22: 438, no. 7784; Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar yā Bab al-Jannat Qazvīn*, Tehran: Chāpkhānīh Dānīshgāh, 1337 Sh/1958, pp. 337–38; Hasan al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a*, (10 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Ta'arruf li'l-Matbū'āt, 1408/1987–1410/1989), 9: 281–82.

He was a scholar and poet and some 14 works of his are known.⁷ He had five sons, the youngest of which was Sayyid Husayn Qazvini, the great-grandfather of Tahirih, about whom it was written: ‘his knowledge was not confined to jurisprudence but he had perfected many skills’. He was a teacher of Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Bahr al-‘Ulum (d. 1212/1797, who went on to become one of the foremost ‘ulama of his age) and his biographer lists some 26 works of his. He died in Qazvin in 1208/1793.⁸ The family were Usulis and opposed the Akhbaris.⁹

Sayyid Husayn Qazvini’s daughter, Fatimih, the grand-mother of Tahirih, was born in Qazvin in 1172/1756. She studied under her father and her uncle Sayyid Hasan. When she grew up she married Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali and she continued her studies under him. She memorized the Qur’an as well as studying commentaries upon it. She also studied the Islamic Traditions and religious jurisprudence. She is stated to have excelled in all of these. She is also said to have had a voice that carried well and she was known for the lectures she gave from the pulpit. Many of the women of the town gathered around her and listened to her classes. She died in 1260/1844.¹⁰

Aminih’s father was Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali Qazvini. Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali could trace his ancestry back to a long line of ‘ulama of Qazvin. Rafi’ud-Din Muhammad, the son of Fathullah, was the author of a book *Abwāb al-Janān* and died in 1089/1678.¹¹ His son was Muhammad Shafi’ who completed his father’s book. The latter’s son, Mulla Muhammad Yahya Qazvini, wrote a work called *Tarjumān al-Lughat*, translating into Persian and explaining the famous Arabic dictionary *al-Qāmūs* of al-Firuzabadi for the Safavid king, Sultan Husayn – a work that took over two years and was completed in 1705 and later published in 1273/1856.¹² His grave became a shrine in Qazvin.¹³ The latter’s son, Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Karim (d. 1134/1721) was also among the ‘ulama of Qazvin and wrote several works explaining the terminology of the sermons and letters of Imam ‘Ali.¹⁴ One of Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Karim’s sons, Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali, was the grandfather of Tahirih. Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali was one of the ‘ulama of Qazvin.

The paternal family of Tahirih

The paternal family of Tahirih claim descent from the Buyids, an Iranian Shi‘i dynasty from Mazandaran who, in the 10th and 11th centuries, were among the first to challenge successfully the dominance of the ‘Abbasid caliphate and to establish a fiefdom throughout Iran and Iraq. In later times, however, the ancestors of Tahirih settled in the rural area known as Talaqan,¹⁵ a cluster of some

7 Muḥsin al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* (11 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Ta’arruf li’l-Matbū‘āt), 2: 227–28, no. 433; Ṭihrānī, *adh-Dharī’a ila Tasānīf ash-Shī’a* 12: 209–10, no. 1390.

8 Muḥsin al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* 5: 414–15, no. 893; see also the biography of his son, Sayyid Javād or ‘Abdu’l-Javād, Muḥsin al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* 3: 117, no. 134.

9 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 9: 281–82.

10 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 3: 159, no. 214.

11 Al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* 10: 96, no. 314. For the date of his death, see Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 3: 191, no. 240.

12 Āghā Buzurg Ṭihrānī, *adh-Dharī’a ila Tasānīf ash-Shī’a*, 4: 72, no. 296. With regard to another book he wrote, see Ṭihrānī, *adh-Dharī’a* 5: 146, no. 617. See also Al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* 10: 98, no. 324.

13 Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 683.

14 The best known of these is called *Naẓm al-Ghurur wa Naḍad ad-Durar*, Ṭihrānī, *adh-Dharī’a* 24: 214, no. 1134. See also 4: 121, no. 578 and 14: 133, no. 1973.

15 The prophecies to be found in Shi‘i sources speak of a number of figures who will appear at the time of the advent of the Mahdi. One these, Muhammad Nafs Zakiyyih (the pure soul), was identified by Babis with Quddus. Another, the Khurasani, was identified as Mulla Husayn Bushru‘i. It would seem likely that a third figure who is called al-Talaqani in the sources could have been identified as Tahirih (albeit that al-Talaqani is the masculine form) but the present writer has not seen this in any of the Babi sources.

78 villages situated along the valley of the Shahrud River and its tributaries to the east of Qazvin – the river eventually becomes the Sifidrud River and flows into the Caspian. Hamd Allah Mustawfī, a 14th-century writer from Qazvin, states in the *Nuzhat al-Qulūb* that the inhabitants of Talaqan at that time although outwardly appearing to be Sunni were secretly inclined towards the Isma‘ili sect of Shi‘ism¹⁶ (the Isma‘ili stronghold of Alamut had been close by before it was destroyed by the Mongols). The area, along with most of the rest of Iran, came to adhere to Twelver Shi‘ism under pressure from the Safavid dynasty in the 16th and 17th centuries.

It is during the latter part of the Safavid era that we find the first of Tahirih’s known paternal ancestors. Shaykh Muhammad Kazim Talaqani (henceforward referred to as Shaykh Kazim) was a cleric who was educated in Isfahan under some of the leading Shi‘i ‘ulama of his age: Shaykh-i Baha‘i, Mir Baqir Damad, and Mir Findiriski. From this list of teachers, we may assume that he was somewhat interested in the school of mystical philosophy that was, at that time, reaching its peak in Isfahan. Shaykh Kazim then established himself in Qazvin, the first of the family to migrate from Talaqan to Qazvin. He built a madrasah (religious college) in Qazvin called the Madrasah-yi Navvab (now called the Madrasah Imam as-Sadiq) and taught there. A contemporary of his, al-Hurr al-‘Amili, considered him one of the great scholars of that age.¹⁷ He is known to have written a commentary on the Qur’an. He died in Qazvin in about 1683.¹⁸

Shaykh Kazim’s son, Shaykh Muhammad Ja‘far Talaqani, known as Firishtih (angel), also received his education from the leading religious scholars of his time. He received a certificate of completion of his education in the year following his father’s death from the great Shi‘i scholar Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, the author of the *Bihār al-Anwār*. Among other writings, he wrote a work on *fiqh* (religious jurisprudence) and is the first of the family to be called an Usuli. He died in 1133/1720 just at the end of the Safavid era and was buried in Talaqan.¹⁹

Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Talaqani, the son of Shaykh Muhammad Ja‘far, studied philosophy (*hikmat*) and theology (*kalām*) under Mirza Hasan Lahiji in Qumm, and then went on to Iraq, where he studied at Najaf, Karbala and Kazimayn. He was present in Najaf when Nadir Shah held a meeting there to try to reconcile Sunnism and Shi‘ism. He died in 1161/1748.²⁰

Shaykh Muhammad Taqi had three sons and at least one daughter: one son was named Muhammad Ja‘far after his grandfather, about whom little is known (but a son of his, Mulla Aqa Hikami, taught philosophy to Tahirih); one son was named Muhammad Na‘im and was known as Mulla Na‘ima (d. 1180/1766), who specialized in philosophy and mystical philosophy (a grandson of this man, Mulla Yusif Hakami, also taught philosophy to Tahirih); a third son was named Shaykh Muhammad, who was known as Mala‘ikah (angels). This last named was the grandfather of Tahirih. He studied under Mulla Isma‘il Khaju‘i (d. 1173/1760) in Isfahan during the turbulent years after the Afghan invasion had ended the Safavid dynasty. He is stated to have gained his title Mala‘ikah on account of his extreme piety.²¹ Mah Sharaf Khanum, a sister of these three brothers, after studying at Isfahan and the shrine cities, was taken into Fath-‘Ali Shah’s household to act as secretary, on account of her excellent composition and calligraphy. According to one account she assisted in particular with

16 Cited in Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, Supplement, p. 11 and ‘Alī-Akbar Dihkhudā, *Lughat-nāmih*, CD-ROM published by Intishārāt Dānishgāh Tīhrān, see under Tālaghān.

17 Al-Hurr al-Amīlī, *Amal al-Āmil*, (2 vols., Baghdad: al-Andalūs, 1385/1965), 2: 295, no. 888.

18 Introduction, written by ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Ṣāliḥī, a descendant of Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Baraghānī, to Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Baraghānī, *Mawsū‘ah al-Baraghānī fī Fiqh al-Shī‘a*, Tehran: Namāyishgāh Da‘imī-yi Kitāb, 1985, pp. 12–13. Also Āghā Buzurg Tīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A‘lām ash-Shī‘ah* (11th century), Tehran: Intishārāt Dānishgāh Tīhrān, [1367/1988], p. 463 and Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A‘yān al-Shī‘a* 2: 301.

19 Al-Ṣāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 13–14. Tīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A‘lām ash-Shī‘a* (11th century), p. 463

20 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A‘yān al-Shī‘a* 2: 301–2.

21 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A‘yān al-Shī‘a* 2: 286, no. 168.

the correspondence with the ‘ulama,²² according to another account she was the personal secretary of Tāj as-Salṭāniḥ, a wife of Faṭḥ-‘Alī Shah.²³

Shaykh Muhammad Mala’ikah was, by the middle of the 18th century, established as the leading Usuli cleric in Qazvin. He was not, however, in a very strong situation since the town of Qazvin had since the time of his great grandfather, Shaykh Muhammad Kazim, been dominated by the rival Akhbārī school of jurisprudence. Sometime in about 1750, the great Akhbārī scholar, Shaykh Yusif Bahrāni, passed through Qazvin. The ‘ulama of the town took the opportunity to stage a debate between him and Mala’ikah. After the debate, an angry Akhbārī mob ransacked Mala’ikah’s house and burned his library. In an attempt to quell the disturbances in the town, government officials forced Mala’ikah to remove himself from the town. He chose to go into exile to the village of Baraghan, about midway between Qazvin and Tehran and some miles north of the road between these two cities. It was as a result of this exile that the family became known as Baraghāni.

We have very little information about the wife of Mala’ikah, except that her name was Fatimih.²⁴ The couple had had some children while they were living in Qazvin, but it was winter when they were forced to leave the city and their children died from the cold on their way to Baraghan.²⁵ Once in Baraghan, Mala’ikah and Fatimih had three more children, all sons (see below). Mala’ikah remained in Baraghan for the remainder of his life and died in 1200/1785.

The maternal uncles of Tahirih

The maternal grandparents of Tahirih, Shaykh Muhammad ‘Alī and Fatimih, had four sons and at least two daughters. The most well known of their sons was Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab Sharif Qazvini. The designation ‘Sharif’ after his name indicates that his mother was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. He studied in Karbala, Najaf and Kazimayn and is said to have received certificates of completion of studies from more than 40 of the most learned scholars of his time. He is described as one of the most learned of the ‘ulama of his age and some 30 of his works are known.²⁶ Although all of his main teachers were Usulis, he went somewhat away from the main Usuli school and in some of his books takes up an Akhbārī position.²⁷ He was put in charge of the Masjīd Shah (the Shah Mosque), the second most important mosque of Qazvin by Muhammad Shah. He was a pious man and tended to be abstemious, using his wealth to make benefactions throughout the city of Qazvin, including four cisterns for public use.²⁸

22 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 222–23, no. 148.

23 Muḥammad Hasan Rajabi, *Mashāhūr Zanān Irānī va Parsī-gū’ī*, Tehran: Sourush, 1995, p. 209.

24 The name of Shaykh Muhammad’s wife is given in Muhammad Tunukabuni, *Qisas al-‘Ulamā*, Tehran: Kitābforūshī ‘Ilmiyyah Islāmiyyah, n.d., p. 32.

25 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 286, no. 168, 2: 304. Al-Ṣāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 14, 26.

26 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 3: 137–38. Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī’ah ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī’ah*, lists ten of his works: 1: 267, no. 1404; 3: 349, no. 1263; 4: 389, no. 1717; 6: 268, no. 1460; 11: 81, no. 501; 15: 75, no. 497; 15: 225, no. 1479; 15: 237, no. 1540; 16: 87, no. 12; 25: 193, no. 217. See also the compilation of his certificates of completion of education from prominent ‘ulama, 20: 59, no. 1899.

27 In the *Hidāyat al-Mustarshidīn*, he takes an Akhbārī position when he opposes the standard Usuli position taken by Mulla Muhammad Baqir Shafī that, after the death of a mujtahid, it is necessary for those who follow him to choose a new living mujtahid. Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī’ah ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī’ah* 25: 193, no. 217. Another of his works, *Risālah fī ‘Adam al-Hujjiyah al-Zann fī al-Ahkām* (Treatise rejecting that Opinion can be a Basis for Giving a Legal Ruling) would appear from its title to have tended to the Akhbārī position; Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī’ah* 15: 237, no. 1540. See Momen, *Introduction to Shī’ī Islam*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 223–25.

28 Parviz Varjavand, *Sīmā-yi Tārīkh va Farhang-i Qazvīn* (3 vols. Tehran: Nashrāni, 1377/1998) 2: 1074–76. *Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif-i Tashayyu’* (ed. Ahmad Sadr Haj Sayyid Jawadi et al., Tehran: Bunyād Islāmī Ṭāhīr, 1366/1987), 1: 501.

In 1230/1814, Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab travelled with his brother-in-law Mulla Salih, Tahirih’s father, on pilgrimage to Mecca. After completing the pilgrimage he travelled on to Cairo, where he studied at the al-Azhar, the foremost religious college of the Sunni world, and obtained a certificate from some of the ‘ulama of the Shafī‘i school of jurisprudence. As we shall see presently, Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab became a Shaykhi and eventually even a Babi. He had at least three sons: Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali and Mirza Muhammad Hadi, who were both Shaykhis and became Babis and Letters of the Living, and Mirza Yusuf, who may have also become a Babi.

The brothers of Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab were Haji Rida (who built a caravanserai called after him) and Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Karim, known as Haji Aqa or Haj Karim (who built some baths which were named Hamam Haj Karim), who were both merchants, and Mulla ‘Ali Mardan, who was also a cleric. Manuscripts of the writings of Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab exist in the handwriting of the latter two brothers.²⁹ One sister of these brothers was Aminih, Tahirih’s mother. We know that there was at least one other sister, since the son of that sister, Mulla Javad Vilyani, played a role in Tahirih’s story and in Babi history (see below).

The paternal uncles of Tahirih

Tahirih’s father, Mulla Salih, was the middle of three brothers. The eldest was Shaykh Mulla Muhammad Taqī, known as Mulla Taqī, and was born in about 1166/1752;³⁰ the middle brother was Shaykh Mulla Muhammad Salih, who was known as Mulla Salih and was Tahirih’s father (born in 1167/1753);³¹ and the third brother was Shaykh Mulla Muhammad ‘Ali, who was called Mulla ‘Ali and was born in 1175/1761.³² All three brothers were initially taught by their father in Baraghan and then went to Qazvin and Isfahan, where they studied philosophy and mystical philosophy under such scholars as Mulla ‘Ali Nuri (d. 1246). They then went on to the shrine cities of Iraq where Vahid Bihbahani (see above) was in the process of completing the Usuli victory over the Akhbari school, and thereby setting the scene for all developments in Twelver Shi‘ism up to the present day. The brothers studied under Bihbahani and under such figures as Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Bahr al-‘Ulum (d. 1212/1797), Shaykh Ja‘far Kashif al-Ghita (d. 1228/1813) and his son Shaykh Hasan (1201/1786–1262/1846) and Sayyid ‘Ali al-Tabataba‘i (d. 1231/1816), who were the senior students of Bihbahani.³³

After the completion of their studies, the brothers came to Tehran to establish themselves there. After a short period of time in Tehran, the brothers entered into a heated dispute with Mulla Muhammad ‘Ali Jangali at the court of Fath-‘Ali Shah and were exiled to Iraq. When Shaykh Hasan Kashif al-Ghita, a leading scholar who had been one of the teachers of the three brothers, went on a trip to Iran, they accompanied him. Shaykh Hasan interceded with the Shah on behalf of the three

29 Tihirānī, *adh-Dharī‘a ila Tasānīf ash-Shī‘a* 6: 268–69, no. 1460. Varjavand, *Sīmā-yi Tārīkh* 2: 1074–75.

30 Most of the biographies do not give a date of birth for Mullā Taqī. I have here taken a date from al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A‘yān al-Shī‘a* 2: 303, where the date and place (Baraghān) of birth of Mullā Taqī has, I think, been mistakenly given as that of his son, Shaykh Muḥammad Ja‘far. The Bahā‘ī historian, Fāḍil Māzandarānī, states that at the time of his death in 1263/1847, he was about 80 years old, which would make his date of birth about 1183/1769. *Tārīkh Zuhūr al-Haqq*, vol. 3, Tehran: n.p., n.d., p. 309.

31 Muḥsin al-Amīn, *A‘yān al-Shī‘a*, 9: 369–70, no. 802 gives Mullā Ṣāliḥ’s date of birth as 1200/1785. This would be more reasonable as it would make him 69 years of age at his death in 1271/1854. I have, however, given 1167/1753 as the date of birth in the text as this is based on family records and presumably more accurate. This would make him aged more than 100 years of age (in Islamic lunar years) at the time of his death. Usually, it is specifically noted and commented upon in the biographical literature when one dies at an age in excess of 100. Mullā Ṣāliḥ’s father is in any case stated to have died in 1200/1785, see above.

32 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A‘yān al-Shī‘a* 2: 299, no. 181.

33 Al-Ṣāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 22–23.

brothers and gained royal assent to their remaining in Iran, provided they did not remain in Tehran. So they chose to settle in Qazvin, where they soon established themselves among the senior 'ulama of the city. They settled in the western part of the city, the Dimaj and Qumlaq quarters, which were predominantly Turkish-speaking. Here the two older brothers built mosques for themselves (Mulla Taqi in the Dimaj quarter). They themselves or their children married into the other leading families of 'ulama in the city.

Mulla Taqi was the most political of the three brothers, gaining a position of influence for himself in the city and, at the same time, accumulating a great deal of wealth. He indulged in a number of questionable activities and practices that even gave rise to claims that he was taking bribes.³⁴ He considered himself one of the leading mujtahids of the Shi'i world and had had several disputes with some of the leading scholars of his time such as Mirza-yi Qummi and Mulla Ahmad Naraqī.³⁵

Mulla Taqi had several wives including a daughter of Fath-'Ali Shah.³⁶ He had ten sons and the name of at least one daughter is known. Of these sons, the oldest was Mulla Muhammad, who married Tahirih and was later Imam-Jum'ih of Qazvin (for their children, see below). Tahirih was not his only wife, however. He also married into the Taqavi family of 'ulama of Qazvin and had a son, Mirza Husayn, who was later elected to the Majlis (Iranian Parliament) as deputy for Qazvin.³⁷ When Mulla Muhammad died, his position as Imam-Jum'ih was inherited by Mulla Taqi's second son, Shaykh 'Abdu'llah. The other sons of Mulla Taqi were Shaykh Baqir, Shaykh Hasan, Shaykh Kazim, then the sixth son, Shaykh Muhammad Ja'far (1222/1807–1311/1893) who became a Shaykhi and married one of Tahirih's sisters. The seventh son was Shaykh Sadiq (1222/1807–1311/1893), who succeeded to religious leadership in Qazvin,³⁸ and the eighth son, Shaykh Abu'l-Qasim, married another of Tahirih's sisters. The last two sons were Shaykh Mahmud and Shaykh 'Isa.³⁹ The only daughter of Mulla Taqi of whom we know is Umm Kulthum (c. 1224/1809–after 1268/1851) who married the oldest surviving son of Mulla Salih, Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab.⁴⁰

The youngest of the three Baraghani brothers, Mulla 'Ali, was very different from his eldest brother. He was more inclined towards mysticism and asceticism. During his days as a student, he used to weep at nights and put chains around his neck.⁴¹ It is even stated in some sources that he rejected the Usuli school championed by his brothers and leaned towards the Akhbaris.⁴² Once in Qazvin, he contented himself with teaching mystical philosophy at his brother's religious college, the Salihyyih. He eventually became, as we shall see, a Shaykhi and a Babi. Some 30 works of his are known.⁴³ The exact number of his children is not known but he had at least one daughter Fatimih (d.

34 Tunukabuni, *Qisas al-'Ulamā*, p. 23. For more details on Mulla Taqi's methods in acquiring wealth and power, see Tunukabuni, *Qisas al-'Ulamā*, pp. 22–23, 27–29; Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement, 1844–1850*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, pp. 317–20.

35 Tunukabuni, *Qisas al-'Ulamā*, pp. 22, 30, 31.

36 Agha Buzurg Tīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (13th century), Najaf: al-'Ilmiyyah, 1954, 2: 51, no. 228. Mulla Taqi had three of his sons by this lady.

37 Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 329.

38 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 3: 92, no. 117.

39 Al-Ṣāliḥī, 'Introduction', pp. 18–19.

40 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 68, no. 37.

41 Tunukabuni, *Qisas al-'Ulamā*, p. 20.

42 He had studied under the Akhbārī scholar, Mīrzā Muḥammad Akhbārī, al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 299, no. 181. He is called an Akhbārī in Mu'īnu'd-Dīn Miḥrābī, *Qurrat al-'Ayn: Shā'ir-i Azādīkhāh va Millī-yi Irān*, 3rd printing, Koln: Rūyish, 1994, p. 54.

43 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 299, no. 181.

c. 1300/1882) who married the third son of Mulla Salih, Shaykh Hasan,⁴⁴ and one son Shaykh ‘Abdu’l-Husayn, who married Fatimih, a daughter of Mulla Salih.⁴⁵

Tahirih’s mother and father

Tahirih’s mother, Aminih (Āminih), was born in Qazvin in 1202/1787. She was educated by her mother and father, and also by her brother Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab. She was about 17 when she was married to Mulla Salih Baraghani in about 1219/1804. She was not his first wife as he had several sons whose dates of birth precedes his marriage to Aminih. She continued her studies in the women’s section of her husband’s religious college, the Salihyyih, learning religious jurisprudence from her husband and his brother, and philosophy and mystical philosophy from her husband’s cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She was very pious and abstemious and had memorized the Qur’an. Later she taught in the women’s section of the Salihyyih, becoming an authority on religious matters for the women of Qazvin and leading prayers for women in the Salihyyih. She was also a poet and among her writings is a poem (*qasidah*) of some 480 lines relating the story of Zaynab, the daughter of the Imam Husayn, from the time of her arrival in Karbala and her father’s martyrdom there, to her being taken in captivity to Damascus and Medina. There also exists some of her correspondence with Sayyid Mahmud al-Alusi, the Mufti of Baghdad, during the time when her daughter, Tahirih, was confined in his house.⁴⁶

Tahirih’s father, Mulla Salih, after he had completed his studies in the shrine cities of Iraq, settled in Tehran and gathered around himself a circle of students. He and his brothers, however, fell out with Fath-‘Ali Shah who ordered their expulsion from Iran to Iraq. From there, Mulla Salih went on pilgrimage to Mecca and he remained in Medina for two years teaching Shi‘i jurisprudence. He then returned to Najaf in Iraq and settled there teaching and gaining a reputation as a scholar. We have seen above how the brothers came to return to Iran and settle in Qazvin.

In Qazvin, Mulla Salih occupied himself with religious scholarship and teaching. He built, in 1233/1817, a large religious college (*madrassih*), *Madrassih-yi Salihyyih* in the Qumlaq quarter of the town, where he taught religious jurisprudence. It grew into a very large institution with, reportedly, 700 students at its peak, coming from all of the surrounding parts of Iran, and even from India. His oldest surviving son Mirza ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab (not to be confused with Tahirih’s maternal uncle) also taught religious jurisprudence there; Mulla Aqa Hakami (d. 1285/1868) and Mulla Yusuf Hakami (d. 1276/1859), respectively a cousin and the son of another cousin of Mulla Salih, taught peripatetic and mystical philosophy; Mir Rafi‘ Talaqani and his son, Sayyid Hibatu’llah Rafi‘i, taught medicine; Shaykh Muhammad Baqir Ashtiyani taught logic; Shaykh ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab Bihishti and others also taught there. Perhaps the most famous person who attended this college, in later years, as a student was Sayyid Jamalud-Din Asadabadi ‘Afghani’.⁴⁷ Interestingly, Mulla Salih was sufficiently concerned about women’s education to build a women’s section of the Salihyyih. All of the women of the family as well as other women from Qazvin studied there.

Mulla Salih was a meticulous scholar. His most important works are 5 commentaries on the Qur’an that he wrote, amounting to some 55 volumes in all. He also wrote an important book on religious jurisprudence in 14 volumes, which is still in print at the present time, and some 48 other works.⁴⁸

44 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 68, no 37.

45 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 201, no. 322.

46 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 7, no. 1; *Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif Tashayyu’* 1: 236.

47 Al-Šālīhī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 52; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304–5.

48 Al-Šālīhī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 29–36; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 300–5, no. 183.

The brothers and sisters of Tahirih

Mulla Salih had eight sons and at least seven daughters. Since Babi and Baha'i sources say that Tahirih had only one sister and one brother, this may indicate that these were the children of Aminih Khanum and the rest were from other wives. The sisters of Tahirih may be listed thus:

(1) Mardiyih Khanum (1233/1817–c.1313/1895). She is the only sibling known to be a full sister of Tahirih. She studied under her mother, her sister Tahirih, her father and both of her uncles, as well as her father's cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She was married to Mirza Muhammad 'Ali, the oldest son of her maternal uncle, Mulla 'Abdu'l-Wahhab. Like her sister and her husband, she first became a Shaykhi and then, when they became Babis and Letters of the Living, she also became a Babi. She accompanied her sister to Iraq and was confined with her in the house of Sayyid Mahmud Alusi, the Mufti of Baghdad. When her husband died in the Shaykh Tabarsi upheaval, she married his brother Mirza Yusif. She left several works including some poetry. She had one daughter.⁴⁹

(2) Nargis Khanum (1240/1824–1322/1904). She studied under Tahirih, her brother, Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab, her father and both uncles, as well as her father's cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She married Shaykh Muhammad Ja'far, the son of Mulla Taqi and had two daughters, Khadijih and Sakinih. Both she and her husband were Shaykhis and she lived out her last days in Karbala where she is buried close to the tomb of Sayyid Kazim Rashti.⁵⁰

(3) Zahra (1240/1824–1320/1902). She studied under Tahirih, her brother, Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab, her father and both uncles, as well as her father's cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She married her cousin, Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, son of Mulla Taqi and had two sons.⁵¹

(4) Fatimih (d. 1295/1878). She studied under Tahirih, her brother, Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab, her father and both uncles, as well as her father's cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She married her cousin, Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Husayn, the son of Mulla 'Ali and had one son. She taught at the Salihyyih and used to discuss religious matters on equal terms with the men of the family. Women resorted to her for legal judgements. She wrote several works.⁵²

(5) Khadijih Sultan Khanum (d. 1321/1903). She studied under Tahirih, her father and both uncles, as well as her father's cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She was married to Sayyid Mirza Mufid of the Shaykhu'l-Islam family of Qazvin, who were descended from Muhaqqiq al-Karaki, the foremost Shi'i scholar of the early Safavid period. She had five sons. She must have been inclined to the Shaykhi school because three of her sons, Mir Sayyid 'Ali, known as Mirza Buzurg, Mirza Mansur and Sayyid Mirza Mahmud became Shaykhis, while two were Usulis.⁵³ Such was the dissension in the family that Sayyid Mirza Mas'ud expressed his displeasure at his Shaykhi sons in his will and specified that only his Usuli sons should have control over his library which he left as a religious endowment (*waqf*).⁵⁴ Mirza Buzurg did however succeed to the title of Shaykh al-Islam.⁵⁵

49 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 319, no. 421; Shaykh Kazim Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar va Mulhaqqāt*, Tehran: Mu'assih Millī Maṭbū'āt Amrī, 131 BE/1974, p. 345.

50 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 4: 212, no. 96.

51 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 5: 218–19, no. 199.

52 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 201, no. 322.

53 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 4: 104, no. 25; 6: 324, no. 430; Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, pp. 327–28 states that the couple only had four boys and names them as Mīr Sayyid 'Alī, Mīrā Mas'ūd, Mīrā Bahā'ud-Dīn and Mīrā Ismā'īl.

54 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 324, no. 430.

55 Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 327.

(6) Rubabih Khanum (d. 1297/1879). She studied under Tahirih, her brother, Mirza ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab, her father and both uncles, as well as her father’s cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami. She married Mirza Hibatu’llah Rafi’i (d. 1320/1902),⁵⁶ a physician who taught at the Salihyyih. She was learned in religious matters and used to debate with male religious scholars on equal terms. Women would resort to her for legal judgements and she was known as the refuge of the poor.⁵⁷

With regard to Tahirih’s brothers, they may be listed thus:

(1) Shaykh Muhammad. He was born in Karbala, studied under his father and older uncle and under some of the prominent ‘ulama of Karbala such as Sayyid ‘Ali Tabataba’i. He was killed in 1825–6 during the attempt of the ‘ulama to raise a *jihad* (holy war) against the Russians.⁵⁸

(2) Mirza ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab (d. January 1877). He studied under his father and older uncle and under the leading ‘ulama of Najaf and Karbala. He specialized in philosophy and mystical philosophy, but was also sufficiently expert in religious jurisprudence to be regarded as a mujtahid and to be able to take his father’s place when he died. He composed poetry and was a good orator.⁵⁹ Towards the end of his life he moved to Tehran. There is an indication in Nabil that he came to believe in the Bab but ‘failed to demonstrate subsequently by his acts the sincerity of his belief’.⁶⁰ His son Shaykh Aqa Sadru’d-Din (d. 1337/1918) was also a prominent scholar, at first taking his father’s place as a religious leader in Qazvin and a teacher at the Salihyyah and later teaching at Karbala at the Madrasah Hasan Khan.⁶¹

(3) Shaykh Hasan (d. 1281/1864). He studied under his father and older uncle and was one of the senior students of Shaykh Murtada Ansari, the leading religious scholar of his age. He became a mujtahid and settled at first in Karbala where he established himself as a teacher. Later he moved to Mecca and Medina, where he taught Shi’i religious jurisprudence in accordance with the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence. He was opposed by the Sunni ‘ulama and was attacked one evening as he was walking home and died as a result of a blow to the head. He was married to Fatimih, the daughter of his uncle Mulla ‘Ali and had two sons who became prominent ‘ulama of Karbala, ‘Allamah al-Ha’iri (1249/1833–1310/1892) and Mulla ‘Ali Naqi Ha’iri (1253/1837–1320/1911) and a daughter, Sultan Khanum (d. c. 1336/1917), who married Mirza Shafi’ Shaykh al-Islam of Qazvin.⁶²

(4) Shaykh Husayn (d. 1309/1891). He studied under his father and older uncle and under the most important ‘ulama of Karbala and Najaf. He then returned to Qazvin and taught at the Salihyyah. His son was Shaykh ‘Ali Akbar.⁶³

56 Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 325.

57 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 4: 104–5, no. 28.

58 Al-Šāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, p. 48; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304. Both of these sources give the date as Dhu’l-Hijjah 1240/June–July 1825, but this is likely to be a mistake since the fighting did not begin until Dhu’l-Hijjah 1241/July 1826.

59 Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 330.

60 Nabil [Zarandī], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá’i Revelation*, Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 285.

61 Al-Šāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 48–49, 53; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304.

62 Al-Šāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 49–50, 53–55; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304, 6: 174, no. 277.

63 Al-Šāliḥī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 50–51; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304.

(5) Mulla Shaykh Muhammad Rida (d. 1308/1890 in Karbala). He studied under his father and older uncle and under the leading ‘ulama of Najaf and Karbala and became a mujtahid. He married a daughter of Shaykh Murtada Ansari and established himself as one of the senior ‘ulama and teachers in Karbala. He had a son, Mulla Muhammad Husayn, known as Shaykh Aqa (1262–1333)⁶⁴ and a daughter named Fatimih (1277–1345), known as Karbala’i Khanum. The latter first married her cousin Mulla ‘Ali Naqi, the son of Shaykh Hasan. After his death, she married Shaykh ‘Isa, the youngest son of Mulla Taqi Baraghani and moved to Qazvin with him, where she taught in the Salihyyah.⁶⁵

(6) Shaykh Muhammad, known as Kashif al-Asrar (1240/1824–1294/1877). He studied under his father and older uncle and under the leading ‘ulama of Najaf and Karbala and became a mujtahid.⁶⁶

(7) Shaykh Musa (d. 1298/1880). He studied under his father and older uncle and under the leading ‘ulama of Najaf and Karbala. He then returned to Qazvin where he taught at the Salihyyah.⁶⁷

(8) Shaykh Muhammad ‘Ali (d. 1315/1897). He studied under his father and older brothers and then under the leading ‘ulama of Najaf and Karbala. He returned to Qazvin and taught at the Salihyyah. In his later years, he became the leading religious authority in Qazvin. He was a fellow-student of Sayyid Jamalu’d-Din ‘Afghani’ at the Salihyyah and a close friend of his. He joined him for a time in India.⁶⁸

Tahirih’s early life

Some sources, including ‘Abdu’l-Baha, state that the name of the eldest daughter of Aminih Khanum and Mulla Salih was Umm Salmih.⁶⁹ This was the name of one of the heroines of early Islamic history who had been one of the first women to believe in Muhammad and had been sent by him to Ethiopia when the persecutions in Mecca were at their height. Because of her loving care for all of the Muslims she was given the title ‘Mother of the Believers’ and much later, when her husband died, Muhammad himself married her as a way of honouring her. Other sources, including Shoghi Effendi, state that her name was Fatimih.⁷⁰ Fadil Mazandarani explains the discrepancy thus: that although she was named Fatimih at birth after her father’s mother (in fact her mother’s mother was also named Fatimih), she was not actually called this out of respect for her grandmother who would have been living in the same house. She was therefore called Umm Salmih. Later, when her qualities became evident, she began to be called Zarin-Taj (crown of gold). There is some doubt as to the date of her birth. Baha’i

64 Al-Şālihī, ‘Introduction’, p. 51; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304.

65 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 9: 139.

66 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304.

67 Al-Şālihī, ‘Introduction’, pp. 51–52; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304.

68 Al-Şālihī, ‘Introduction’, p. 52; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 2: 304–5.

69 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* (trans. Marzieh Gail), Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1971, p. 190. This name is also given in a family genealogy published recently: Yahya Shahidi, *Shajarih-yi Khānivādih-hā-yi Shahidī – Şalihī – ‘Alavī-Shahidī*, (2 vols, Tehran: privately published, 1376/1997), p. 931.

70 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 72–73. This name is also given in one of the Muslim sources who had access to Tahirih’s family: Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 239, no. 328. It was also traditional for the first daughter of a family to be named Fatimih.

sources give the date as 1233/1817,⁷¹ but ‘Ali al-Wardī, an Iraqi historian, gives 1814, based on family sources.⁷²

She would have been only 5 or 8 years old (according to which date of birth one accepts) when, in 1822, Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i came to Qazvin. Her maternal uncle, Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab, who, as we have noted previously, had at first been inclined towards the Akhbari school had at some stage become an ardent student and follower of the Shaykh and had invited him to the city. He arranged accommodation for the Shaykh and his family and ceded to him his position as leader of prayers in Shah Mosque of the city, as well as asking him to teach a small religious college that he had founded. Apart from Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab, several other of Tahirih’s relatives became admirers and followers of Shaykh Ahmad, including her mother Aminih and her younger paternal uncle Mulla ‘Ali, who had also previously probably inclined towards the Akhbari school. However, Shaykh Ahmad’s presence in the city challenged the predominance of Tahirih’s older paternal uncle, Mulla Taqi, and threatened his income. So one day, when the Shaykh was paying a courtesy call on Mulla Taqi, the latter took the opportunity to question the Shaykh about some of his teachings regarding resurrection. After the Shaykh had explained that he considered that the resurrection would occur in a subtle spiritual body and not in the physical body, Mulla Taqi declared that this view was contradictory to Islam and began to denounce Shaykh Ahmad from the pulpit. The town was split between supporters and opponents of Shaykh Ahmad. Tahirih’s family was similarly split. Her maternal family was largely supportive of Shaykh Ahmad but her paternal family was split. Her youngest paternal uncle, Mulla ‘Ali supported Shaykh Ahmad, her oldest uncle was his fiercest critic and was supported by others on the paternal side, while her father remained neutral trying to mediate.

Eventually, Mulla Taqi arranged for a large conference of the ‘ulama of Qazvin to convene in his house to discuss the Shaykh’s views. Shaykh Ahmad himself came, accompanied by his sons and Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab. On the opposing side, Mulla Taqi had asked his relatives, the above-mentioned Mulla Aqa Hakami and Mulla Yusif Hakami, who were experts in philosophy and mystical philosophy, to attend. Mulla Salih and Mulla ‘Ali also attended. The discussion centred again around Shaykh Ahmad’s views on resurrection and the same disagreements emerged. At the end of the debate, Mulla Taqi issued a decree against Shaykh Ahmad of *takfir* – declaration that someone is an unbeliever. Shaykh Ahmad’s position in Qazvin became untenable and he left. Although most accounts seem to indicate that Shaykh Ahmad only passed through Qazvin, the evidence from these biographical accounts indicates that he remained there for about two years; long enough, for example, for Tahirih’s mother to obtain a certificate (*ijāzih*) from him.

Tahirih, who was only 7 or 10 years old when Shaykh Ahmad left Qazvin, was probably largely unaware of all this as she grew up. But another event probably had a stronger impact upon her. In 1241–2/1825–6, the second Perso-Russian War occurred. The ‘ulama were to a large extent responsible for this as they had pressured Fath-‘Ali Shah into war. One of the leading ‘ulama of Karbala, Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba’i, marched into Qazvin on his way to confront the Shah and insist on a *jihad* against the Russians. He had taught the Baraghani in Karbala and now stayed in the house of Mulla Salih. Several of the members of the Baraghani family joined him in his *jihad*. Tahirih’s oldest half-brother, Shaykh Muhammad, was killed in this conflict.

As with the other children of the family, Tahirih began her studies at an early age in the religious college founded by her father. She had lessons in literature and poetry from her mother and studied religious jurisprudence, the principles of jurisprudence, the Islamic Traditions and the Qur’an and its

71 Nablī, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 628; Māzandarānī, *Zuhūr al-Ḥaqq*, vol. 3, p. 311.

72 ‘Alī al-Wardī, *Lamahāt Ijtīmā’iyyah min Ta’rīkh al-‘Irāq al-Ḥadīth*, (2 vols., Baghdad, 1969), pp. 152 and 154n. Al-Wardī’s source is an unpublished manuscript by ‘Abbūd al-Ṣāliḥī, a descendant of Mullā Ṣāliḥ. See also Denis MacEoin, ‘From Shaykhism to Babism: A study in Charismatic Renewal’, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1979, p. 222, n. 76.

commentary with her father, her paternal uncles, and her older brothers, Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab and Shaykh Hasan. She studied philosophy (*falsafa*) and mystical philosophy (*hikmat* and '*irfān*') with her paternal relatives Mulla Aqa Hakami and Mulla Yusuf Hakami (see above).⁷³ She memorized the Qur'an and excelled in all of these subjects and reached a high level of studies in them. One Muslim source describes her thus: 'When she had finished her studies, she was a female paragon of knowledge and virtues . . . She was famous for her eloquence in writing and speech (*bi 'l-faṣāḥah wa al-balāghah wa jamāl al-bayān*), in both prose and poetry, in both Arabic and Persian . . . And Qurrat al-'Ayn, with all of her knowledge and virtues, was also a paragon of beauty.'⁷⁴ Concerning the extraordinary abilities of Tahirih, her older brother Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab is reported to have said: 'We were all, her brothers and cousins, fearful to speak in her presence, so much did her knowledge intimidate us, and if we hazarded to put forward an opinion on a point of doctrine that was in dispute, she would prove to us where we were going wrong in a manner so clear, precise and magisterial that we were thrown into confusion and withdrew.'⁷⁵

Since the Baraghani family lived in the Turkish-speaking quarters of Qazvin, Tahirih almost certainly grew up speaking both Persian and Turkish. Indeed, an Azeri scholar, Azize Caferzade, cites a poem of Tahirih which she says was composed in Turkish and is preserved in a library in the Republic of Azerbaijan.⁷⁶

At the age of 14, Tahirih was married to Mulla Muhammad (d. 1296/1878), the son of her older uncle Mulla Taqi. Mulla Muhammad was eager to complete his education and so the couple left for Iraq, where they remained for about 13 years. In Karbala, the family had a residence in the Khaymgah quarter.⁷⁷ We know that during the 13 years or so that Tahirih and her husband spent in Iraq, they lived for most of the time in Karbala, but they also lived for a time in Najaf and went on pilgrimage to Mecca. In about 1841, Tahirih and Mulla Muhammad returned to Qazvin. Tahirih began to teach at the Salihyyih and, as can be seen from the above notes, was responsible for teaching all of her sisters, as well as her sons (see below) and others.

It appears that, after the departure of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i, Mulla Taqi had managed to impose his will upon the family and had silenced the supporters of the Shaykh, since, as Tahirih grew up and acquired her education, no word of the teaching of Shaykh Ahmad reached her, despite the support for these teachings by her mother and both her maternal uncle and younger paternal uncle. It is not clear when exactly Tahirih first heard of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad. Most sources are agreed that she first heard of these in Qazvin.⁷⁸ Some sources seem to indicate that Tahirih was already a follower of Shaykh Ahmad when she went to Karbala after her marriage and that she attended the lectures of

73 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 239, no. 328.

74 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 239, no. 328.

75 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a*, 6: 241, no. 328, quoting al-Wardī, *Lamaḥāt Ijtimā'iyyah*, p. 152, which in turn quotes from the Arabic translation of [Zarandī], *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 63–66 (English translation p. 84n.) which is taken from A. L. M. Nicolas, *Seyyed 'Alī Mohammed dit le Bab*, Paris: Paul Guethner, 1905, p. 273. The source of this account is probably an oral report by Mirza Hasan Adib (who was one of Nicolas' informants) who studied under Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab and who gives a similar account in a short biography of Tahirih that he wrote: 'Sharḥ-i aḥvāl-i jināb-i Ṭāhirih', in *Chahar Maqālīh dar bārih-yi Ṭāhirih Qurrat al-'Ayn* (ed. Abu'l-Qasim Afnan), Wienacht, Switzerland: Landegg Academy, 1991, pp. 65–74, see pp. 68–69.

76 Azize Caferzade, *Azerbaycan'ın aşık ve Şair kadınları* (in Cyrillic letters) Baku, 1991, pp. 65–66. See also her *Zerrintac-Tahire*, Baku: Gytrk, 1996, p. 4. I am grateful to Mr Ali Nakhjavani for drawing this matter to my attention and to Necati Alkan for these references.

77 Al-Wardī, *Lamaḥāt*, p. 153.

78 The exception being Samandar (*Tārīkh*, pp. 344–45) who seems to indicate that Tahirih first studied the Shaykhi teachings by attending the lectures of Sayyid Kazim.

Sayyid Kazim Rashti, the successor of Shaykh Ahmad there.⁷⁹ This information differs from other sources that state that Tahirih never met Sayyid Kazim; only arriving for the first time in Karbala shortly after his death.⁸⁰ Since there is little doubt that Tahirih did go to Iraq after her marriage (three of her children were born in Iraq), it may be that Tahirih did not learn of the Shaykhi movement until her return from Iraq in 1841.

Putting aside the question of when it occurred, the story of how Tahirih came across the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad is told by ‘Abdu’l-Baha. He states that one day when she was visiting the house of one of her maternal cousins, Mulla Javad Vilyani, who was also a follower of Shaykh Ahmad, she happened upon a book of the Shaykh and started to read it. She became enamoured of these teachings and had soon mastered their complexities, assisted no doubt by her mother and other relatives. At some stage, Sayyid Kazim asked his followers to compose treatises in support of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad, Tahirih responded and sent him a treatise. When Sayyid Kazim read this treatise, he wrote her a letter which began: ‘Yā Qurrat al-‘Aynī’ (‘O Consolation of My Eyes!’). From that time forth, Tahirih became known as Qurrat al-‘Ayn, the name by which she is still most commonly known among Iranians.

Among her siblings, several also became Shaykhis – followers of Shaykh Ahmad, no doubt infected by Tahirih’s enthusiasm for the new teachings. Tahirih’s full sister Mardiyiyh adopted the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad as did her half-sister Nargis, who was married to a cousin, Mulla Muhammad Ja’far, a son of Mulla Taqi. Despite his father’s enmity towards Shaykh Ahmad, the latter was also a Shaykhi. Another half-sister, Khadijih Sultan Khanum, was almost certainly also a Shaykhi, since three of her five sons became Shaykhis. All of Tahirih’s maternal cousins were probably Shaykhis, under the influence of Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab, in particular Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali, son of Mulla ‘Abdu’l-Wahhab and husband of Mardiyiyh, and his brother Mirza Muhammad Hadi. Another maternal cousin who was a Shaykhi was the above-mentioned Mulla Javad Vilyani.

Soon strains had appeared in Tahirih’s marriage since Mulla Muhammad was, like his father, a strong opponent of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad which Tahirih had espoused. Eventually, this ended in divorce and Tahirih returned to her father’s house taking her children with her.⁸¹ Although her father loved her greatly, he was angered by the fact that her new beliefs had led to her divorce and so this led to some acrimonious exchanges between them.⁸² About two years after her return from Karbala, in late 1843, Tahirih decided that she had to go to Karbala, where her beloved teacher, Sayyid Kazim was. She returned her older two sons to their father and set off for Karbala with her daughter and youngest son who was only about 2 years old.⁸³ Accompanying her on this journey was her sister Mardiyiyh and her husband Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali, together with the latter’s brother, Mirza Hadi. Another of those who accompanied Tahirih to Karbala at this time was Khayr an-Nisa (1240/1824–1325/1907), the daughter of Shaykh Muhammad Ja’far Shari’atmadar Astarabadi and her husband Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Kashani (d. 1321/1903). The former had been a student of Tahirih at the Salihyyih.⁸⁴

79 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 241, no. 328; Nicolas, *Seyyed ‘Ali Mohammed*, p. 274; Samandar, *Tārīkh*, p. 344–45; Māzandarānī, *Zuhūr al-Haqq*, vol. 3, p. 312n.

80 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* 192.

81 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 239, no. 328.

82 ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* 192–93.

83 We know the daughter went with her to Karbala from the biography of the daughter, see below. I am here assuming that the youngest son also went, since in the Islamic law of divorce, children under six years of age stay with their mother. However, it is possible that if he was very young, Tahirih left him behind in Qazvin in view of the arduous nature of travel in those times.

84 Muḥsin al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a* 6: 162, no. 243.

Tahirih arrived in Karbala in January 1844, a short time after the death of Sayyid Kazim Rashti. She was invited by Sayyid Kazim's widow to stay at the late Sayyid's house. It is customary for the Shi'i religious leaders at the major teaching centres to have regular teaching sessions at a particular place so that students would know where to go hear their lectures. After the customary 40 days of mourning, Tahirih continued the private lectures that Sayyid Kazim used to give in his own house, thus becoming in one sense his successor. She lectured to the men from behind a curtain. One source states that she also continued Sayyid Kazim's open lectures in the western side of the courtyard of the Shrine of Imam Husayn and attracted over two thousand students.⁸⁵ There were however, other claimants to Sayyid Kazim's successorship in Karbala and her bold lectures caused some degree of tension in the Shaykhi community. Of course at this time, Mulla Husayn Bushru'i also returned from his journey and retired to the mosque at Kufah with a number of the disciples and students of Sayyid Kazim. After this, they set off for Iran and accepted the Bab's claim in Shiraz. The Bab then accepted Tahirih as one of the Letters of the Living – his earliest group of 18 disciples who were elevated to the highest rank in the Bab's religion.

Of Tahirih's family, her sister, Mardiyiyih became a Babi. Mardiyiyih's husband, Mirza Muhammad 'Ali, and his brother Mirza Hadi, who were cousins of Tahirih both became Letters of the Living. In Qazvin, Tahirih's maternal uncle, Mulla 'Abdu'l-Wahhab, and her younger paternal uncle, Mulla 'Ali, who had both been Shaykhis now became Babis, as did Mulla Javad Vilyani, who had introduced Tahirih to the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad. The latter was, however, later to betray the Bab and join up with the Bab's avowed enemy, the Shaykhi leader Haji Mulla Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmani.⁸⁶

Tahirih's Children

Tahirih is said in Baha'i sources to have had three children, two boys and a girl,⁸⁷ but it appears that she in fact had four children. The first two were boys, born while she and her husband were in Karbala, then a girl when they were in Najaf and finally a boy when they had returned to Qazvin.

(1) Shaykh Isma'il (d. 1302/1884). He was born in Karbala. He is recorded as having studied under his mother Tahirih and under his father, as well as under both of his grandfathers, Mulla Taqi and Mulla Salih. He studied philosophy and mystical philosophy under his uncle Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab Baraghani and under Mulla Aqa Hakami and Mulla Yusif Hakami. He then went to Najaf and studied under the leading scholars of his time, Shaykh Hasan Kashif al-Ghita, Shaykh Murtada Ansari and Sayyid Husayn Kuhkamari. He returned to Qazvin and was a religious authority there for a time before moving to Tehran. He was a poet and a theologian and is described in a Shi'i biographical dictionary thus: 'He had a high station in his piety, virtue, sanctity, and justice and he had a pleasing manner in his oration and a convincing manner of exposition.'⁸⁸ One of the daughters of this man, named Ma'sumih Khanum married a certain Haj Sayyid 'Azizu'llah of Urumiyyih. They lived in Tehran. Their son Sayyid Ni'matu'llah (1273 Sh/1894–1343 Sh/1964) at first took the surname Mirat and later Varta. He studied oriental philosophy under Mirza Baqir Khan Qavamu'l-Hukama Lahiji and Mirza Abu'l-Hasan Jilvih, and Western philosophy and political science under Dr Davud Hamadani.

85 Varjavand, *Sīmā-yi Tārīkh* 2: 1081.

86 Māzandarānī, *Zuhūr al-Ḥaqq*, vol. 3, pp. 312, 387–88. Nabīl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 159–62 (Nabīl incorrectly calls him Mullā Javād Baraghānī).

87 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful*, p. 191.

88 Muḥsin al-Amīn, *A'yan ash-Shī'a* 3: 402, no. 1170; See also Agha Buzurg Ṭīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (14th century), Najaf: al-'Ilmiyyah, 1954, 1: 164, no. 363; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yan al-Shī'a* 2: 302–3; Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 329.

He encountered the Baha'i Faith and became a Baha'i. He was a poet and wrote more than 10,000 verses of poetry.⁸⁹

(2) Shaykh Ibrahim (d. 1310/1892). He was born while Tahirih lived in Karbala. He studied philosophy and mystical philosophy under his uncle Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab Baraghani and under Mulla Aqa Hakami and then studied jurisprudence under the leading scholar of his time, Shaykh Murtada Ansari. After this, he taught for a time in Karbala before returning to Qazvin and teaching there. He is said to have been a skilled orator. He moved to Baraghan in later years and died there.⁹⁰ He had a son named Shaykh Davud (d. c.1334/1915) who studied with the prominent scholars of Najaf and then went to Samarra where he remained for 30 years studying under Mirza-yi Shirazi, the cousin of the Bab who was the leading Shi'i scholar of his time. He then returned to Baraghan and was a religious leader there until his death.⁹¹

(3) Zaynih (1253/1837–1333/1914). Born in Najaf. She studied under her mother Tahirih, her father and her maternal grandfather, Mulla Salih. She accompanied her mother on her travels. She was married to one of the Afshar family in Qazvin and had both sons and daughters. She taught in the womens' section of the Salihyyih, led prayers and was a religious authority for the women of Qazvin.⁹²

(4) Shaykh Ishaq (c.1258/1842–c.1307/1889). Born in Qazvin. He studied under his mother Tahirih and under his father; he took lessons in philosophy and mystical philosophy under his uncle Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab Baraghani and under Mulla Aqa Hakami. He travelled to Iraq where he studied under the leading scholars of his time, including Shaykh Murtada Ansari and Mirza-yi Shirazi. He then returned to Qazvin where he was a religious authority in the city and also taught religious sciences. He composed several works including some poetry.⁹³

The after-effects of Tahirih's life upon her family

We will not go into the rest of Tahirih's life once she became a Babi as that would expand this article into a book. However, we will look at what happened to her family after the advent of the Babi movement. The assassination of Tahirih's uncle Mulla Taqi by a Shaykhi on 15 Dhu al-Qa'da 1263/25 October 1847⁹⁴ had a traumatic effect on her family. Tahirih was accused of complicity in the murder of her uncle and her father Mulla Salih was forced to defend his daughter as well as his family honour. In a meeting of the 'ulama of Qazvin where his daughter's reputation was being attacked, for example, he spoke up in her defence only to be taunted by one of those present with the following lines of doggerel verse: 'No glory rests upon that house / where the cock's crow comes from the hens.'⁹⁵ Tears were observed to flow from Mulla Salih's eyes and he fell silent and left the meeting.

89 Obituary by Ni'matu'llah Dhakā'ī Baydā'ī in *Āhang-i Badī'*, year 18, no. 7, consecutive numbering no. 199, p. 259–63; I am grateful to Mina Yazdani for this reference. See also Ni'matu'llah Dhakā'ī Baydā'ī, *Tadhkirih-yi Shu'arā-yi Qarn-i Avval-i Bahā'ī*, (4 vols., Tehran: Mu'assih Millī Maṭbū'āt Amrī, 129 BE/1972), 4: 298–352.

90 Tīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (14th century) 1: 23, no. 56; Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 2: 303; Gulrīz, *Mīnūdar*, p. 329.

91 Tīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (14th century) 2: 711, no. 1154.

92 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 174, no. 273.

93 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 3: 32, no. 48; Tīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (14th century) 1: 132, no. 297.

94 Al-Šālihī, 'Introduction', p. 17.

95 *Shukūhī namānd dar ān khāndān / kih bāng-i khurūs āyad az mākiyān*. Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar*, p. 75. See slightly different translation of this verse in Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 322.

Mulla Salih found it impossible to live on in Qazvin and departed for Karbala in early 1264/1848.⁹⁶ He lived there until the end of his life, teaching and writing. He left behind in Karbala a valuable library which exists up to the present.⁹⁷ He died on 27 Jamadi II 1271/17 March 1872 while praying at the head of the tomb of the Imam Husayn.⁹⁸

The arrest of Tahirih and her confinement in the house of Mirza Mahmud Khan, the Kalantar (mayor) of Tehran no doubt weighed heavily upon her mother Aminih, who died in 1851, shortly before Tahirih's own execution in 1852 (since all of the Shaykhi members of her family became Babis, it is possible that she did also). Mulla 'Ali, Tahirih's uncle who had been both a Shaykhi and later covertly a Babi, died in 1852. The pressure of these events also led Tahirih's maternal uncle, Mulla 'Abdu'l-Wahhab, to leave Qazvin for Najaf. Here he died at the shrine of Imam 'Ali in 1270/1853. Of Tahirih's three maternal cousins whom we know had become Babis, Mirza Muhammad 'Ali, the husband of Tahirih's sister Mardiyiyih, had perished in the Shaykh Tabarsi upheaval, his brother Mirza Hadi lived on in Qazvin but hid his beliefs, and later became a follower of Azal, while Mulla Javad Vilyani had betrayed the Bab and had become a follower of Haji Mirza Karim Khan Kirmani, the main Shaykhi opponent of the Bab. Tahirih's sister was a Babi but we do not have information about her belief in later life.

Needless to say, the family of Tahirih had been split apart and heavily traumatized by the events of these years. First, the split in the family caused by the Shaykhi teachings and then by the Bab's message. The murder of Mulla Taqi had been the culminating shock. In the following years, the family of Tahirih tried to close ranks and expunge the memory of these events. In writing accounts of their family, for example, they made no mention at all of Mulla 'Ali's adherence to the Shaykhi or Babi movement, apart from listing Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i as one of his teachers.⁹⁹ Most of the descendants of all three of the brothers, including the children of Tahirih herself, are accounted as pious Usulis by the Shi'i biographical sources.¹⁰⁰

But the family has not been able to escape the growing fame of their troublesome ancestor Tahirih. Therefore, in recent years, they have even attempted to maintain that Tahirih was not a Babi at all – or that she repented of her heresy at the end of her life.¹⁰¹ Thus for example, Zaynih, the daughter of Tahirih, who accompanied her mother on her travels and was with her mother during her imprisonment in the house of Mahmud Khan Kalantar in Tehran up to the time of her execution, is stated to have maintained that her mother died a follower of Shi'ism ('*ala madhhab ash-Shi'a*) and that everything else was a false accusation against her by her enemies, the Shah and the Iranian government, who eventually brought about her death.¹⁰² Her son, Shaykh Ibrahim, is said to have stated that when he visited her during her confinement in Tehran, he found her fasting and spending her time reading the Qur'an and praying, and he therefore asserts that she died a Muslim.¹⁰³ Of course such activities as reading the Qur'an, praying and fasting were commonplace among the Babis – the

96 Al-Šāliḥī, 'Introduction', p. 25.

97 Salmān Hādī aṭ-Tu'mah, *Turāth Karbalā*, Najaf: al-Ādāb, 1383/1964, pp. 192–93, 241.

98 Al-Šāliḥī, 'Introduction', p. 25.

99 Al-Šāliḥī, 'Introduction', pp. 19–20.

100 The family came to use surnames derived from the three brothers: Shahidi, descendants of Mulla Taqi, who became known after his murder as Shahid Thalith, the Third Martyr, following on from two medieval Shi'i martyrs; Šāliḥī, descendants of Mulla Salih; and 'Alawī, descendants of Mulla 'Ali. Some of the latter two lines of descent also attached the name Shahidi to themselves in honour of Mulla Taqi and thus became Shahidi Šāliḥī and Shahidi 'Alawī. Biographies of these descendants can be found in al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* and Tiḥrānī, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām ash-Shī'a* (14th century).

101 A recent family genealogy, Yahya Shahidi, *Shajarih-yi Khānivādih-hā*, 2: 931–38, denies that Tahirih was ever a Babi.

102 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 174, no. 273.

103 Al-Amīn, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a* 6: 243, no. 328.

Bab, for example, spent his time in prison praying and reading accounts of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn and other practices that would have numbered him as a pious Shi‘i. This was part of the ethos of the Babi movement.

Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to redraw the picture that we have of Tahirih based on sources other than the Baha’i histories that are available in English and, in particular, family sources. As well as differences of facts, such as the date of birth of Tahirih and the number of brothers and sisters that she had, there are some differences in the picture drawn here as compared to the one given up to now in the Baha’i histories. For example, we see that although Tahirih was exceptional among the women of Iran at that time in being educated, she was not exceptional in this regard within her own family. It appears to have been the custom in the Baraghani family to educate girls as well as boys – of course the high levels to which Tahirih attained were exceptional. Similarly, although standard Baha’i histories depict her discovery of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad as being a fortunate chance occurrence in the home of a cousin, in fact, many members of Tahirih’s family were Shaykhis, including her mother, one paternal uncle and all of her maternal uncles and cousins. Thus it seems likely that she would have come across the Shaykhi teachings at some time from one of these sources. Similarly, the account in the Baha’i histories of her making the decision to leave her children to go to Karbala to meet Sayyid Kazim Rashti in 1843 may need to be altered in the light of the assertion that at least her daughter accompanied her on this journey and it may be that her youngest son also did.

In all, however, the sources presented in this paper confirm and even bring out in stronger relief, her towering intellectual abilities – a fact even acknowledged in accounts written by Shi‘i clerics antagonistic to the Babi and Baha’i Faiths. Despite the efforts of her family to conceal the heresy of their fiery and turbulent daughter – to ‘re-veil’ Tahirih and thus restore the family’s honour and reputation for piety – the memory of her actions and her courage lives on. Indeed, it is ironic that but for her, the family itself would now be insignificant among the masses of Shi‘i religious families.