

Hiding in Plain Sight: The Case for the Authenticity of an Alternative Portrait of the Bab

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One of the highlights of Baha'i pilgrimage is viewing the portrait of the Bab, whom Baha'is regard as the herald and co-founder of their faith. The watercolor Persian miniature portrays a fair-skinned man in his thirties with a black beard of medium length; large, dark eyes; continuous eyebrows arching like a soaring bird; and a slender, slightly-curved nose. The subject is seated outside, and in the background there is a tree, a wall, and a building with arches. If memory serves, he is facing to the viewer's right and his right side is turned three-quarters toward the viewer with his legs and tan robe folded beneath him. He wears a medium-size green turban that covers most of his hair and a green garment under his robe. The image was drawn in black pen and later painted in watercolor by Aqa Bala Bayg, a court artist who obtained tacit permission from the Bab in 1848 to sit for the portrait during his brief stay in Urmia, Iran. The provenance of the portrait is well-established: the artist gave it to a prominent Baha'i in Tabriz in the early 1880s, who sent it to Haifa. Its resemblance to the Bab was verified by a close cousin of the Bab and by Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith. On this basis, Baha'i leadership today regards it and the copies made by Aqa Bala as the only authentic images of the Bab.

A little over two decades after the Aqa Bala portrait was sent to Haifa, other three-quarter profile portraits identified as the Bab began to emerge in books written by non-Baha'is.

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Although the face depicted in the portraits changes slightly from image to image, they all depict a bearded man with delicate arching eyebrows and a slender, slightly curved nose wearing a dark turban and a dark embroidered aba or robe. I will refer to these portraits collectively as the embroidered robe portraits.

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There are two subsets of these portraits: one is the Nicolas subset, the first instance of which was published in A.L.M. Nicolas' 1905 biography of the Bab. These are portraits of the upper-half of a subject wearing a dark embroidered cloak and large dark turban. The subject's embroidered robe is folded right-over-left. The other subset is the Atrpet subset, the first instance of which was published in 1909 by the Armenian author Sargis Mubayeajian, better known by his pen name Atrpet. These full-body portraits depict a man wearing a dark

¹ See presentation online at https://bahai-library.org/mccants_hiding_plain_sight

embroidered cloak folded left-over-right on top of an embroidered tunic. The subject is wearing a medium-sized dark turban that covers his hair and is seated on a carpet next to a book with his right hand on top of his left. All the portraits are black and white, either because the publisher could not or would not reproduce color images or, more likely, the images themselves were black and white photographs of color portraits. The provenance of the portraits is unknown, and Baha'i leadership does not regard them as authentic portraits of the Bab. In the past, some Baha'i historians claimed these images were actually portraits of Sayyid Kazim Rashti, the Bab's teacher--a claim the Universal House of Justice and the most recent scholarship also rejects.² So if the man in the portraits is neither the Bab nor Rashti, who is he?

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In this paper, I will argue that the man depicted in one of these portraits--the full-body, embroidered robe portrait of the Bab published in Atrpet's 1909 book, *Imamat*, and again in his 1910 book *Babizm i Bekhaism*--is in fact the Bab; that this "work of a Persian artist" (as Atrpet calls it) is either the source of the other full-body embroidered robe portraits or an early copy of the source; and that the portrait emerged in Tabriz. Its origin in Tabriz is significant because that is where Aqa Bala, the artist who painted the Bab, lived and where several copies of his portraits of the Bab circulated and were available for viewing. As such, the 1909 image could have been rendered by Aqa Bala or based on his work. More speculatively, it could have been painted by another artist in an unknown sitting with the Bab. Later attestations of the 1909 Persian portrait--one as recent as 2013--bear witness to a continuing underground visual tradition that identifies the embroidered robe images as the Bab.

Before I begin, let me first say that all but two of the images I am going to survey were cataloged in the Masumians' excellent [article](#) on the history of Aqa Bala's portrait of the Bab.³ The two exceptions are Atrpet's 1909 Persian portrait that is the subject of my talk today and a similar portrait that emerged online in 2013. I strongly urge you to read that article to get the full picture.

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Let's begin with the Nicolas subset of the embroidered robe portraits, the first instance of which was published in A.L.M. Nicolas' 1905 biography *Seyyid Ali Mohammed dit le Bab*. Nicolas captions the image, "Seyyid-Ali-Mohammaed called the Bab (from a watercolor portrait)," but provides no details about its provenance. Although Nicolas never met the Bab, he was a Babi living in Iran,⁴ so the 1905 image was likely circulating in that community. According to the Baha'i missionary Mirza Haydar Ali Uskui, who was friends with Nicolas, he displayed the

² For the current stance of Baha'i leadership on alternative images of the Bab, see the letter from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom, May 10, 2015. For the comparison with known portraits of Rashti, see World of Images, fn64 and below.

³ Bijan and Adib Masumian, "The Bab in the World of Images," *Bahá'í Studies Review* (2013), 19:171-190, https://bahai-library.com/masumian_bab_world_images.

⁴ For Nicolas' confessional identity, see the interview he gave an American Baha'i at the end of his life Peter Terry, *Modern Prophet*, 7-8, https://bahai-library.com/terry_nicolas_prophet_modern.

portrait on the wall of the French consul's formal room in Tabriz, next to an image of Abdu'l-Baha.⁵

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The Guardian opined in a 1934 letter written on his behalf and signed by him that the image “presents great similarity to the original drawings of the Báb’s portrait,”⁶ a surprising statement given how little it resembles the man in Aqa Bala’s portrait. Yet despite the alleged similarity, the Guardian concluded the portrait “is not authentic” because it was not a replica of Aqa Bala’s portrait of the Bab. In this letter, authenticity is tied to reproduction of the Aqa Bala image rather than just resemblance of the face in the image. It is a perspective that still characterizes the Baha’i interpretation of alternative portraits of the Bab.

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In 1923, then-Baha’i historian Avarih published an image closely resembling Nicolas’ 1905 portrait in the first volume of his *Kawakib Durriyya*. Avarih identifies the man in the portrait as Sayyid Kazim Rashti, the Bab’s teacher. Avarih does not tell us where he obtained the image or why he believes it is Rashti, but he is sure it was not the Bab because it does not resemble the face of the man in Aqa Bala’s painting:

Some thought that this drawing [tasvir] attributed to the Primal Point is taken from the pen drawing [tasvir-i qalami]. But after the pen drawing was visited in the presence of Abdu'l-Baha, it was realized that this is not a representation [timthal] of the Primal Point. Rather, that holy one is younger and more handsome than this, and his blessed turban was much smaller than this. Lately, it has become known that this is a picture [aks] of Hajji Sayyid Kazim Rashti, the son of Aqa Sayyid Abu al-Qasim the silk merchant who was engaged in trade in Rasht. (*Kawakib*, 1:26)

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Avarih seems to be the first Baha’i historian to assert that a portrait identified as the Bab was actually Rashti, although it is unclear why. As the Masumians observed in their 2013 article, the Shaykhi community has portraits of Sayyid Kazim and they do not resemble the man portrayed in Aqa Bala’s portrait.⁷ They also bear no resemblance to the man in the 1923 image or any of the other embroidered robe portraits. As stated earlier, the Universal House of Justice agrees with this assessment.

⁵ https://bahai-library.com/manuchehri_tarikh_azarbeyjan_nicolas

⁶ Letter on behalf of the Guardian (signed) to the US National Spiritual Assembly, May 1934 <<http://bahai-library.com/books/bahainews.guardian/>>, excerpted in *Directives from the Guardian*, 1973, p.7.

⁷ *World of Images*, fn64. The Masumians report that the “Shaykhis use a different image for him at the entrance to their Kermanshah religious centre: <http://alabrar.info/images/mashayekh/-2.jpg>. The authors learned about this Shaykhi mosque through correspondence with a Baha’i who lives in Kermanshah.”

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Apparently, the alleged portrait of the Bab obtained by Avarih was not the only one in circulation. In volume two of his history, he notes the existence of other purported images of the Bab that were circulating in print and in private photographs:

Some people have circulated images [suvvar] that are in books and some on photographic paper, all of which are fanciful images [suvvar-i khiyaliyyih] and imaginary drawings [nuqush-i vahmiyyih] and have absolutely no resemblance to the drawing [rasm] of his holiness the Bab. (Kawakib 2:219)⁸

Abdu'l-Baha also wrote of the existence of at least one alternative image of the Bab circulating among the Babis, who, he said, had fabricated the picture. The letter containing the charge is not publicly available and has only been summarized by the Universal House of Justice, so I cannot offer more information about what image Abdu'l-Baha is referring to.⁹ But Abdu'l-Baha's letter, like Avarih's testimony, documents the existence of purported images of the Bab circulating underground during Abdu'l-Baha's ministry.

Among the alternative images of the Bab that Avarih and Abdu'l-Baha objected to may have been three portraits published by the Armenian author Sargis Mubayeajian, who went by the pen name Atrpet.¹⁰

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In 1906, Atrpet published a book on the Shi'i imamate in Armenian that contained two images: one of a Shi'i scholar, Fadil Sharbiyani, and one of the Bab's execution simply captioned, "[unclear]¹¹ Bab." Atrpet provides no further information about the portrait although the surrounding text makes it clear that it is not the drawing of the Bab's remains attributed to a Russian consular official in Baha'i histories, which Atrpet also mentions.

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⁸ Avarih also documents Abdu'l-Baha's approval of an image drawn from memory after the artist viewed Aqa Bala's portrait:

There is one image [tasvir] the painter of which seems to have visited the original representation [timthal-i asli] in the presence of Abdu'l-Baha, drew it on the page of imagination, and then transferred it from the page of imagination to the page of paper. Since there was some resemblance, he asked for a signature (endorsing) that from Abdu'l-Baha. In the margin, he (Abdu'l-Baha) wrote in his own pen, "This is a bit similar." (Kawakib 2:219-220)

⁹ For the current stance of Baha'i leadership on alternative images of the Bab, see the letter from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom, May 10, 2015. For the comparison with known portraits of Rashti, see World of Images, fn64 and below.

¹⁰ Atrpet presents the portraits side-by-side between pages 89 and 90.

¹¹ The text is in stylized Armenian that an Armenian friend was unable to decipher. Presumably it says "execution," as it does in the later Russian translation.

Atrpet reproduced the image in the 1909 Russian translation of his book, which he captions: "Execution of 'Bab'/The only portrait of the author,/in Alexandropol." (Alexandropol is modern Gyumri, Armenia.) Atrpet's language is ambiguous here but he could not have meant that this was the only alleged portrait of the Bab circulating at that time since he published two new portraits of him in the 1909 Russian translation of his book. They are among many images of Babi and Baha'i leaders Atrpet included in the work.

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The portrait on the left is captioned "Seyd Ali Mahomet 'Bab' (work of a European artist)" and the portrait on the right is captioned "Seyd Ali Mahomet 'Bab' (work of a Persian artist)." The work of the European artist is signed, whereas the work of the Persian artist is not (or at least the signature does not appear in the portion of the portrait reproduced in the book.) Atrpet provides no further details about the portraits, which he also included in his 1910 *Babizm i Bekhaizm*, a reprint of the section on Babis and Baha'is in the 1909 Russian translation of *Imamat* that includes an additional portrait of Baha'u'llah and of Abdu'l-Baha.

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The 1910 image appears to be the same as the 1909 image based on an identical detail in the lower-left corner, which may be the edge of photographic paper. The 1910 image is clearer so we will use it as the basis of our comparisons later in the paper.

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This "work of a Persian artist" is unique among the images of Babi and Baha'i leaders in Atrpet's 1909 and 1910 books. The other images are either works of named artists or staged reenactments.

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All of the images Atrpet published of Babi and Baha'i leaders in his three books can be categorized as follows: One category consists of two profile portraits done by the same artist or studio, one of the Bab and one of Baha'u'llah. The drawing of the Bab seems loosely based on the Persian portrait, while the one of Baha'u'llah is pure fancy, perhaps inspired by Atrpet's belief that Baha'u'llah's image found in Akka partially conceals his face--a belief he states in his book, as we will hear later in the presentation.

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The artist was likely commissioned by Atrpet to draw the images since Atrpet employed the same artist to transform a photograph of a Shi'i scholar in his 1906 *Imamate* book into a drawing for his 1909 Russian translation.

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The second category of images consists of two drawings by an artist named “Pottep,” which are only found in the 1910 edition as noted earlier. One is a fanciful drawing of Baha’u’llah and the second is based on Abdu’l-Baha’s famous passport photo.

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The third category of images consists of a drawing of Haji Sulayman Khan’s martyrdom, which is one of two drawings by the same artist depicting the execution of Babis.¹²

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The fourth and final category of images consists of Babi heroines Tahirih and Zaynab, who have two images each. All four appear to be staged reenactments of scenes from their lives.

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That leaves the full-body embroidered robe portrait as the only work that is both explicitly attributed to a Persian artist and painted in a manner consistent with artistic norms current in Iranian society at the time.

Atrpet’s images of Babi and Baha’i leaders and his Russian writings about them soon attracted the attention of the Baha’i community in Iran. Sometime between the publication of the 1909 and the 1910 books, Atrpet met with the Baha’i missionary Mirza Haydar Ali Usku’i, most likely in Tabriz where Atrpet lived from time to time. The account of the meeting is found in the *Masabih-i Hidayat* of Azizullah Sulaymani, who heard it from Usku’i himself.¹³ During the meeting, Atrpet reportedly stated, “I am an historian, and I have written the book, *Imamate*, which contains the image of his holiness the Bab and Suleiman Khan and other martyrs and now I want to get information about the Baha’i religion and its teachings.” Atrpet specifically asked about Baha’i teachings regarding the beginning of creation, a question Usku’i relayed to Abdu’l-Baha in a letter. This is likely the first time Abdu’l-Baha became aware of Atrpet and his work as a historian.

Usku’i conveyed the content of Abdu’l-Baha’s reply to Atrpet and repeatedly met with the author thereafter. At some point, Usku’i discovered Atrpet was also talking to a partisan of Abdu’l-Baha’s rival and estranged brother Muhammad Ali in Tabriz, whom Sulaymani identifies as “Khalil.” Although there was a follower of Muhammad Ali by that name in the area, this is likely either a typo or Sulaymani misremembered because in Atrpet’s three books, he names his Baha’i interlocutor as “Mirza Jalil,” i.e. Mirza Jalil Khu’i, which a committee at the Baha’i World Centre later confirmed in their own investigations.

¹² A third picture by the same artist depicts an “apostate” cleric punished by riding backwards on a donkey.

¹³ See volume 5, pages 199-202.

Khu'i, who stayed with Baha'u'llah for a few months and received the Ishraqat from him, was likely the source of much of Atrpet's information in his book about the rift between Abdu'l-Baha and his brother Muhammad Ali. Unsurprisingly, Atrpet's treatment of the rift reflects the views of Muhammad Ali's partisans like Khui. Nevertheless, Atrpet's only reference to Khu'i, found in all three books, is confined to a paragraph describing the beauty of Baha'u'llah.

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Nowhere is Baha's portrait or photographic card, since he did not like to be photographed at all. A single portrait has survived in Akka, and even then with a half-closed face so that almost nothing is visible. As reported, he was of average height, pleasant appearance with black pensive eyes and hair and a small beautiful beard. I had heard from Mirza Jelil (Мирзы Джелиль), who lived with Baha for more than two months and received Lawh Ishraqat from him, that Baha's face was so charming and attractive...¹⁴

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When Atrpet's *Babizm* book was published in Tiflis in 1910, it created a stir among the Baha'is, even though the book's written content was already available in the 1906 Armenian edition and its 1909 Russian translation. According to Usku'i, the Baha'is of Badkubih (present-day Baku) met with Atrpet after they saw the book and rebuked him for writing "things that contradicted reality." Usku'i also confronted Atrpet, who he says apologized and asked for more photos and documents so he could correct the record in a new book. If Atrpet contemplated such a book, it was never written.

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For Baha'i leadership, Mirza Jalil Khu'i's association with Atrpet's book contributed to discrediting the authenticity of the previously unknown images he included of Babi and Baha'i leaders. Among them was one of the three portraits of the Bab, which was sent to Abdu'l-Baha. He replied: "The photograph thou hast sent is not that of His Holiness, the Báb. A contemptible person hath given it to that hapless Russian author and even taken from him a sum of money in return for lies and slander. Announce this to all the friends."¹⁵ The original text of the letter is not available, so it is unclear which of Atrpet's three images of the Bab Abdu'l-Baha is referring to. A later report "found among the documents filed by Shoghi Effendi" asserts that Khu'i sold Atrpet images and that those identified as Baha'u'llah, the Bab, and Tahirih are forged. Whether the author of the report was able to substantiate those claims with additional evidence is unknown

¹⁴ *Imamat* 1906 (Armenian), 122 (Mirza Jalil=Միրզա- Չէլիլը); *Imamat* 1909 (Russian), 182-3; and *Babizm* 1910, 115.

¹⁵ Abdu'l-Baha's letter is quoted in translation in private correspondence between the UK National Spiritual Assembly and the Department of the Secretariat dated May 10, 2015. See Masumian, *World of Images*, fn61.

since only a brief summary of the report is publicly available.¹⁶ If that assertion is based on Abdu'l-Baha's letter, it is noteworthy that Abdu'l-Baha did not allege Khu'i had sold photographs to Atrpet; rather, he says Khu'i sold him "lies and slander," a reference to Atrpet's sympathetic retelling of Muhammad Ali's claims.

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In the decades following the publication of Atrpet's books, new manifestations of the full-body embroidered robe portrait continued to emerge. In 1982, Mikhail Ivanov, a non-Baha'i Russian scholar of Babism, published an embroidered robe portrait that strongly resembles the portrait painted by the "Persian artist" published by Atrpet. Ivanov captions the portrait as the Bab but does not explain where he obtained the image. A related, washed-out image is found in Denis MacEoin's 1982 article on "Early Shaykhí Reactions to the Báb and His Claims." Although MacEoin identifies the man as Sayyid Kazim, a label attached to the portrait says in Persian *Hazrat-i Nuqtih*, "His Holiness, the Point," a reference to the Bab.

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Although the 1982 images were the last new embroidered robe portraits to appear in print, a new embroidered robe portrait emerged online as early as 2013 and has become the basis of many of the images circulating online that purport to be of the Bab. Its provenance is also unknown but its distinctive fingerprint smudge is often visible in other copies.

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A comparison of the portraits suggests that Atrpet's so-called "work of a Persian artist" is either their common source or a copy of the common source because of the level of detail not found in the other portraits. The subject in Atrpet's image has a slight smile that disappears in the other images. There is slight shading to indicate hair between the eyebrows in the Atrpet image and between the beard and cheeks, details which are also absent in the other images. There may also be a mole on the left cheek that is absent in the others. Like a picture circulating in photocopies of photocopies, the loss of such details suggests that the images are paintings of paintings circulating underground. One could argue that the later images were painted directly from the image in Atrpet's book but that does not negate the chronological priority of the Persian portrait or explain why the finer details are missing.

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According to the Universal House of Justice, an image similar to one of these images was sent to the Guardian. In a 1951 letter written by Ruhyyih Khanum on his behalf, the Guardian responded that "[t]he picture supposed to be of the Báb is not authentic at all. He advises you

¹⁶ "A Memorandum in reply to several questions posed by Mr. Robert Stauffer to the Research Dept. of the Universal House of Justice," February 9, 1983, https://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/sites/hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/ncbm_2-1.pdf.

to destroy these as we never under any circumstances circulate pictures of either the blessed Báb or Bahá'u'lláh, and this one is not even of Him.”¹⁷

As with the Guardian's 1934 letter about Nicolas' portrait of the Bab, the authenticity of an alternative image hinges on its fidelity to Aqa Bala's portrait. But whereas the 1934 letter asserts that Nicolas' image bears a “great similarity to the original drawings of the Báb's portrait,” the 1951 letter denies any similarity between the image the Guardian received and the man depicted in Aqa Bala's portrait even though it more closely resembles the man in that portrait than Nicolas' image does. This may be due to a change in the Guardian's attitude toward these images, a poor copy of an original portrait, or simply differences between the secretaries writing on his behalf.

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Is the man in Atrpet's Persian portrait actually the Bab? It will be hard for me to answer this question to your satisfaction because I cannot compare it onscreen with the image in Haifa, which is not available to view outside the Archive's building. Absent that, here are three reasons why I believe the man in Atrpet's Persian portrait is the Bab:

Firstly, the appearance of the man in the Persian portrait does not contradict Muhammad Faizi's description of the man portrayed in Aqa Bala's portrait:

It is clear from careful contemplation of the rare image of His Highness that its Yusufian beauty and divine perfection dazzle the eyes like the sun shining from the face of Homayoun on account of his beautiful visage and face, which has an open forehead; continuous eyebrows and arches; large, somewhat black [siyah-fam] eyes; a mole on the right side of the cheek; and a long, slender nose, the upper part of which has a prominence that is the curved nose [aqna al-anf] described in the writings and traditions relating to the coming of that divine beauty. The color of the face and body is white tending to wheatlike. He is of medium stature, neither long nor short, and the composition of the limbs is perfect without any defects. The blessed clothing is made of soft Iranian fabrics and (he had) a black robe with delicate embroidery, as is still common in Arabistan [i.e. Arabia], over the shoulders and clothes. He had a green turban on the head as a sign of Hashemi sayyids and a shawl on the waist, also in the same way from the green cashmere shawls known as Khalil Khani. When sitting, as shown in the blessed image, he always sits on two knees politely and takes his hand out of the sleeve of his robe to the level of his fingers and puts it on his knee.¹⁸

The description of the face and posture are consistent with the Atrpet portrait. The mole that may be present in the Atrpet image is on the wrong cheek but that may only indicate that the image was flipped when it was published.

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¹⁷ Letter on behalf of the Guardian, June 16, 1951 <https://bahai-library.com/shoghieffendi_dear_coworker>.

¹⁸ Faizi, *Nuqtih Ula*, 374-5.

Flipping it the other way not only solves the mole problem; it is also the direction the Bab is gazing in the Aqa Bala portrait, in which he gazes to the viewer's right. As for the curvature of the nose, it is also found in the Atrpet image and is either diminished or exaggerated in the other embroidered robe portraits.

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As for the clothing, the turban is of the same style and proportion as that found in Aqa Bala's portrait, which is wound in the same manner as the turban worn in a photo of the Bab's cousin Haji Mirza Muhammad-Ta'iqiy-i-Afnan who grew up with him. It is unclear whether the turban in Atrpet's Persian portrait is green.

The Bab's cloak is tan in Aqa Bala's portrait, so the black cloak Faizi describes is the Bab's black embroidered robe found in the Baha'i archives. It too is consistent with the style of cloak worn by the subject of the Atrpet portrait.

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The second argument for the authenticity of the Atrpet image is that it and every other embroidered robe image were identified as the Bab by those who supplied the images to the authors who published them. The Baha'i authors who published some of the images may have disagreed with their sources who claimed they were images of the Bab, but they still bore witness to a century-old tradition of embroidered robe portraits of the Bab circulating underground in Babi and Baha'i circles, which may have been dangerous to possess. That could also be why we know so little about their provenance.

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My final argument for the authenticity of the Atrpet portrait is its likely origin in Tabriz, where Atrpet lived when he was gathering materials for his book.¹⁹ There were several copies of Aqa Bala's portrait that were circulating in and around Tabriz, where he was active as a painter until the end of the 1880s.²⁰ The last known copy was sent to the Baha'i World Centre in 1936 by the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tabriz. According to Muhammad Faizi, the portrait had been "frequently visited" by the Baha'is in the area.²¹ It is plausible, therefore, that the Persian artist who painted the 1909 portrait at least consulted a copy of Aqa Bala's work, one of which was available to Baha'is in the area for viewing. More speculatively, it could have been painted by Aqa Bala himself.

¹⁹ In his 1909 *Imamat* book in Armenian, he mentions being in Tabriz in 1904 (pages 58-9). And as detailed above, he met with Usku'i in his home in Tabriz between 1909 and 1910.

²⁰ The latest work by Aqa Bala is dated 1300 AH (1882-3). See M. A. K. Tabrizi, *Ahval va athar-i naqqashan-i qadim-i Iran va barkhi az mashahir-i nigargar-i Hind va Othmani* (London, 1985), 1:3. The Baha'i Varqa, who knew Aqa Bala in Tabriz, mentions him in a letter to Baha'u'llah on 15 Jumada Thani 1306 [16 Feb 1889]. See Masumian, "Images," 6.

²¹ Faizi, *Nuqtih*, 372.

One might object that Aqa Bala could not be associated with the portrait because his portrait of the Bab in Haifa is done in the old Persian miniature style, which could be spare when portraying bodily details like hands and faces, whereas the bodily details of the Atrpet portrait are more consistent with the new style of Iranian portraiture that was influenced by European techniques.

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But a survey of Aqa Bala's surviving works demonstrates his equal mastery of the new style, which the art historian Muhammad Ali Karimzadih Tabrizi says he learned during his travels in the Caucasus.²² So Aqa Bala certainly had the technical capability to produce the Atrpet portrait regardless of whether he did or not.

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Based on the foregoing, I believe the time has come to reevaluate the alternative portraits of the Bab that are not direct copies of the Aqa Bala portrait, especially Atrpet's so-called "work of a Persian artist." The man's face in the Persian portrait strongly resembles the face of the man in Aqa Bala's portrait; the man in the portrait and its copies was consistently identified as the Bab by those who supplied them; and the portrait emerged in Tabriz, where Aqa Bala worked as a painter and where copies of his portrait of the Bab were available for viewing by the local Baha'is well into the 1930s. If it is indeed the Bab, he has been hiding for a century in the plain sight of Baha'is, many of whom cannot afford the privilege of going on pilgrimage to Israel to view Aqa Bala's portrait of their prophet. Not only does the face strongly resemble the Bab's face in the Haifa image; it is one of the earliest public attestations of an alternative portrait of the Bab secretly circulating among Babis and Baha'is for over a century, well after the discovery of the Aqa Bala portrait in the early 1880s.

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Like other portraits of Lisa Gherardini that scholars only recognized as works by Da Vinci or his contemporaries centuries after the master painted the *Mona Lisa*, a second portrait of the Bab may still be here to see, waiting for viewers to discover the secret of its subject's smile.

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²² Muhammad Ali Karimzadih Tabrizi, *Ahval va athar-i naqqashan-i qadim-i Iran va barkhi az mashahir-i nigargar-i Hind va Othmani*. London. Vol 1, 1985, p.3