
STUDIES IN THE BÁBÍ & BAHÁ'Í RELIGIONS

VOLUME 5

**STUDIES IN HONOR OF THE LATE
HASAN M.**

BALYUZI



Edited by Moojan Momen

STUDIES IN THE
BĀBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í RELIGIONS
(formerly Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History)

VOLUME FIVE

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THE LATE HASAN M. BALLYUZI

Edited by
MOOJAN MOMEN



KALIMÁT PRESS
LOS ANGELES

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
(Revised for vol. 5)

Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í history.

Vol. 5 has title: Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í religions.
Includes bibliographies.

Contents: v. 1. [no title]—v. 2. From Iran east and west/edited by
Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen—[etc.]—v. 5. Studies in honor of
the late Hasan M. Balyuzi/edited by Moojan Momen.

1. Baha'i Faith—History. 2. Babism—History.

I. Momen, Moojan. II. Cole, Juan Ricardo. III. Smith,
Peter, 1947 Nov. 27– . IV. R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram.

V. Title: Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í religions.

BP330.S78 1982 297'.89 83-227

ISBN 0-933770-16-2 (v. 1)

ISBN 0-933770-72-3 (v. 5)

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NOTE

All dates in this volume are given as either B.C.E. (Before the Christian, or Common, Era) or C.E. (Christian, or Common, Era) in place of B.C. and A.D., respectively. This usage has been adopted by many in the field of religious studies because it avoids the theological implications of the latter (B.C. = Before Christ, and A.D. = *anno domini*, In the year of our Lord), which believers in non-Christian religions may not find acceptable.

M. MOMEN

FOREWORD

In the range of Bahá'í literature that has been published in recent years, there has been a great deal of historical work done—biographies of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith, general histories, biographies of prominent Bahá'ís, as well as the series *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History* and various papers that have appeared in scholarly periodicals. This upsurge of interest in Bahá'í history was to a large extent prompted by the work of Hasan Balyuzi, whose contribution to Bahá'í studies is commemorated in this volume. Other areas of Bahá'í studies have not, however, received so much attention. In this volume, the aim is to broaden this stream of scholarly material so that it will include areas of study other than history. The reader will note that, in keeping with this purpose, the title of the series has been changed.

The first paper takes us on to textual studies. It has always been assumed, particularly by Western scholars, that when Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad Shírázī took on the title of the Báb (Gate) at the beginning of his ministry, this title referred to those earlier Bábs, who in Shí'í history had acted as intermediaries between the occulted Twelfth Imám and the believers. Todd Lawson has, however, carried out a careful study of Shí'í literature in the tradition of which the Báb was writing, and he demonstrates that the term *báb* more usually referred to the Imám himself, as does the associated term

dhikr (Remembrance) which the Báb also used to refer to himself in his early writings. Lawson goes on to examine the text of the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* which was written in the first year of the Báb's ministry. He produces further evidence here which suggests that the Báb claimed a station equivalent to that of Muhammad or to that of the Imáms from the very beginning of his ministry, albeit his claim was somewhat camouflaged initially.

The second paper also explores the field of textual studies. Stephen Lambden examines the manner in which the episode of Moses' encounter with the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai has become, in the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, a typological theme which serves to denote the manifestation of the deity on the earthly plane. Lambden's detailed study shows that Bahá'u'lláh uses this imagery to expound his teachings on this subject and also to defend himself against charges of having claimed to be God.

The third paper explores the area of Bahá'í metaphysics. Very little has been written on this subject in the past. This paper attempts to show that there is a good reason for this, since the Bahá'í position is that it is not possible to obtain any absolute knowledge of metaphysics. All metaphysical statements are purely relative to the person who makes them. Hence even seemingly contradictory positions can be simultaneously "true." This metaphysical relativism serves as the theoretical foundation for the Bahá'í position on the essential unity of all religions.

In a volume commemorating Hasan Balyuzi, it would not be appropriate to have included no history at all, since this was his main area of interest. Therefore, the last two papers are historical ones. One of these deals with a subject that was close to Hasan Balyuzi's heart, the history of the British Bahá'í community. More specifically, Phillip Smith examines the way British Bahá'ís saw themselves during the first two decades of the present century. Although the presentation of the

Bahá'í teachings in literature from this period may seem similar to what is expounded today, Smith argues that the Bahá'ís themselves viewed their Faith very differently. The Bahá'í movement was, to many of the Bahá'ís of that time, not a separate and independent religion. Rather, it was a revival of mankind's religiosity, a revival that could occur within the context of established religious forms.

Times of transition are critical periods in the history of any religion. In Bahá'í history, a number of these critical periods have been associated with the transfer of religious leadership. Loni Bramson-Lerche examines one such period (from the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá into the beginnings of the institution of the Guardianship) from the viewpoint of what occurred within the American Bahá'í community. As with other critical periods, the spectre of schism and disintegration arose. In this case, it was associated with opposition to Shoghi Effendi's efforts to establish the Bahá'í administrative system.

In all, it is hoped that the publication of this volume will serve both to develop Bahá'í history and at the same time to widen the field of Bahá'í studies. Although an effort was made to include here papers on Bahá'í theology and philosophy, these essays were not completed in time. They will, it is hoped, be included in subsequent volumes in the series.

M. MOMEN
BEDFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND
DECEMBER 1987



HASAN M. BALYUZI
as a young man.

HASAN M. BALYUZI (1908–1980)

A Bio-bibliographical Sketch

Hasan Muvaqqar Balyuzi was born into a distinguished Iranian family on 7 September 1908. His forebearers had been merchants on the Gulf Coast of Iran. His father, Mírzá 'Alí Muḥammad Khán, Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih, had received part of his education in England and had risen to high office on his return to Iran, becoming governor of Bushihr and the Gulf Ports and later Minister of Public Works until his death in 1921. When the British occupied Bushihr in 1915, Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih, who was then the governor, and his family were exiled to India. Thus, Hasan Balyuzi received some of his early education in English at Poona. Later, after spending some time in Tehran and Shiraz, Balyuzi traveled to the American University at Beirut to continue his studies.

The links between the family of Balyuzi and the Bahá'í Faith were strong. His father was one of the paternal relatives of the Báb, and his mother was a relative of the Báb's wife. Although both of his parents were Bahá'ís, the restrictions on openly discussing the new religion in the presence of servants and others in the household meant that Hasan learned little about the Bahá'í Faith in his childhood years. But later, his reading of a few Bahá'í books, and in particular his meeting with Shoghi Effendi in Haifa in 1925, while on his

way to take up his studies in Beirut, turned him into a confirmed believer.

His initial studies were in chemistry, but when it came to post-graduate work, he chose the field of history. In 1932, he came to London where he pursued his study of history at the London School of Economics. He obtained a master's degree and was proceeding with his doctorate when the outbreak of the Second World War interrupted his studies. He thereafter took up an appointment with the newly formed Persian Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation. His numerous broadcasts included talks on Iranian culture, Western history and culture, translations into Persian of many classics of English prose and poetry, as well as features on current affairs, and interviews with Iranian personalities. His talks were greatly admired by the Iranian audience of the BBC over the course of more than twenty years. Some of his translations of English literature were published in Iran.

During the Second World War, Hasan Balyuzi married Mary (Molly) Brown (the daughter of Kathleen Brown, later Lady Hornell), who was a member of Sadler's Wells Ballet. They lived temporarily in Evesham, where the BBC Persian Service had moved for the duration of the war. They had five sons. Balyuzi was, by this time, very fully involved in the work of the British Bahá'í community. From 1933, he had been elected each year to the national administrative body, the National Spiritual Assembly. In 1942, he became its chairman, a position that he held almost continuously until 1960. In addition, he was appointed to numerous committees of this body, played an active role in the London Bahá'í community and traveled and lectured around the country. His Bahá'í responsibilities greatly increased when, in 1957, he was appointed by Shoghi Effendi as one of the Hands of the Cause of God, the highest rank of service and honor in the Bahá'í community. His responsibilities included the propagation and protection of the Bahá'í Faith; but the full range of the role of the

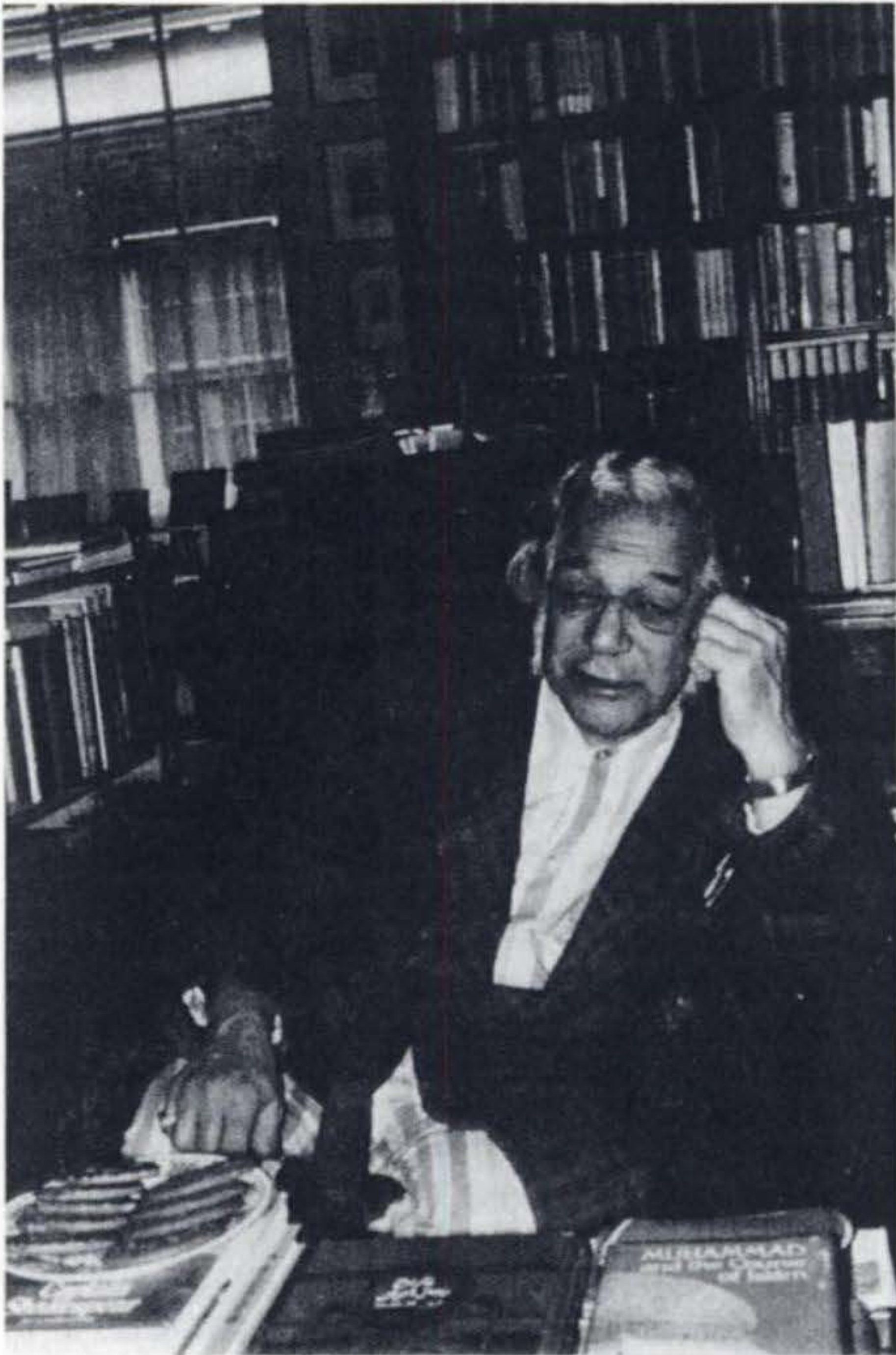
Hands was only revealed by the death of Shoghi Effendi one month after Balyuzi's appointment. Since Shoghi Effendi had named the Hands of the Cause as the "Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth," it fell to them to organize the affairs of the Bahá'í Faith in the period from 1957 until the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963.

It is, however, as an author and scholar that Hasan Balyuzi is most remembered. To appreciate the importance of his work, it is necessary to understand the situation in the 1960s when his books began to appear. The work of Balyuzi began the process of correcting three major deficiencies that existed at this time in the range of literature about the Bahá'í Faith. First, although more than half a century earlier there had been much research done on Bahá'í subjects by scholars such as Prof. E. G. Browne, and the Russian scholars Baron Rosen and Capt. Tumansky, this effort had not been followed up by subsequent generations of scholars and almost nothing of an academic nature had appeared for fifty years or more. There was, therefore, a pressing need to revitalize the academic study of the Bahá'í Faith. Second, in 1960, the only information that most Bahá'ís had about the history of their religion came from a very few books. The history of the Bábí period was covered at length in Shoghi Effendi's translation of Nabíl's narrative, *The Dawn-Breakers*, and popularized by William Sears in his *Release the Sun*. But for information about subsequent periods, the Bahá'ís only had the masterful but sketchy outline in Shoghi Effendi's *God Passes By*, the relevant chapters in Esslemont's *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, and a few narrative and anecdotal works such as Lady Blomfield's *The Chosen Highway* and May Maxwell's *An Early Pilgrimage*. The earlier works by scholars such as Browne were by this time out of print and, in any case, they were mainly concerned with the earlier Bábí period. Even in the Persian language, there was no comprehensive history of the Bahá'í Faith in print.

There had been several attempts to produce such a work, but all of these were either incomplete, unpublished, or out of print. It was, therefore, urgent that someone do the research necessary to bring out a readable, concise but comprehensive account of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith. Third, since the death of George Townshend in 1957, very little good new material of any kind had been published on any aspect of the Bahá'í Faith. There was a dearth of first-rate authors who could produce a flow of books, and this lack was keenly felt by the Bahá'í community.

When Balyuzi published a brief essay on the life of Bahá'u'lláh in 1938 (an enlarged version of this work appeared in 1963), Shoghi Effendi encouraged him to continue this work by adding essays on the lives of the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. But his numerous other pressing duties prevented him. During the period from 1957 onwards, grief at the passing of Shoghi Effendi and the burden of his responsibility as a Hand of the Cause took a heavy toll on Balyuzi's physical and psychological health. During the course of these years ill health caused him to give up full-time work at the BBC, which led to financial problems and increased the strain on him. When in 1963, ill health also forced his premature retirement from an active, public life in the Bahá'í community, he determined to return to the project of completing his trilogy on the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith. Confined to his home, he produced a series of books that were published over the next twenty-two years.

The first book was a biography of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He had completed some of the preliminary work twenty years earlier after receiving Shoghi Effendi's encouragement to write his trilogy. As work progressed on this book, however, it became clear to him that the subject of Prof. Browne's relations with the Bahá'í Faith required a separate monograph if he was to avoid a "diversion" of a "magnitude that was inappropriate"¹ in his book on 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Thus it was that *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith* was published in 1970, while



HASAN M. BALLYUZI
relaxing in his study, c. 1978.

the publication of *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Center of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* was delayed until 1971.

As he started to write *The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days*, the book that completed his trilogy, Balyuzi was concerned that his book should not be merely a rewriting of Shoghi Effendi's translation of Nabíl's narrative. His problem was resolved when documents from the British Public Records Office relating to the period of the Báb were made available to him. His book became "the first in the range of Bahá'í Faith literature to make extensive use of official documents from governmental archives.²" It was published in 1973.

Muhammad and the Course of Islám (published in 1976) was the next book. He wrote this because he felt that there was no history of Islam available that combined accuracy and scholarship with a sympathetic approach to the religion. He also felt that it was essential for Western Bahá'ís to obtain a better grasp of Islam to improve their understanding of their own religion.

Having completed his trilogy of the central figures, it became clear that the relatively small and sketchy nature of the volume on Bahá'u'lláh was inappropriate when compared with the much fuller volumes on the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Balyuzi therefore decided to begin research on a more detailed biography of Bahá'u'lláh, even while he was writing his book on Islam. It was always his practice work on several projects simultaneously.

For *Bahá'u'lláh: the King of Glory*, Balyuzi read every source he could obtain. He planned from the start to make this project more than one volume. But as he wrote and came across more and more material, so the projected size of the work increased to four volumes. Then in October 1979, he suffered a heart attack. He appeared to make a good recovery, and his energy and enthusiasm increased. But, in the event, he had completed only one volume and had written most of a second when he passed away in his sleep on 12 February 1980.

Balyuzi had hoped to publish a series of small booklets on the lives of prominent members of the Afnan family, the family of the Báb. After his death, a short volume on the wife of the Báb, *Khadíjih Bagúm*, the first of these, was published in 1981, while the material written for the second was incorporated (as Chapter 17, on Núri'd-Dín Afnán) into the second volume of his series on Bahá'u'lláh, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, published in 1985. He had left written instructions that a trust, the Afnan Library Trust, be set up which would form a Bahá'í Faith research library, and to this he donated all of his Bahá'í books and papers. This trust was established. It is hoped that it will eventually fulfill his wish and develop into a research library for all scholars.

Of Balyuzi's character and ability, it must be left to future writers to assess these adequately. Only the passage of time will allow them to be justly appreciated. Much of his writing ran counter to present-day styles of scholarly prose. But his work is imbued with two qualities which will cause it to be remembered long after much other material written to such standards has been forgotten. First, was his assiduous pursuit of truth. He would take endless trouble to track down even the most minor fact or date. He would write several letters in pursuit of just one piece of information which might take up only one line in his book. He did not hesitate to discard large sections of his manuscript if his researches left any doubt as to the truth of what he had written. *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith* was rewritten three times because new facts emerged that caused him to reconsider his earlier versions.

Second, was his integrity. There are no hidden motives in his writings. He wrote nothing for fame or self-advancement. He wrote only what he thought correct after due consideration. His books clearly show him to be a Bahá'í, but nothing is concealed or distorted to protect the Bahá'í Faith, or anyone, or anything. He always maintained that it was best to tell it "warts and all."

Another characteristic that marked him out was his generosity with the materials in his possession. Not for him to jealously guard his sources to prevent others from using them before he could get into print. He lent whatever he had freely and without hesitation. He was particularly anxious to promote Bahá'í studies, and it was to this end that he arranged for the establishment of the Afnán Library Trust. He had an extensive knowledge of the history of Iran, as well as a profound grasp of the undercurrents of Iranian affairs. He could recount biographical information and family background for almost any notable of the last two hundred years of Iranian history, particularly if the person hailed from his native Shiraz.

To those who knew him, he was warm, witty, urbane, a keen follower of current affairs (his family still possesses an enormous collection of newspaper cuttings extending over many years), and much given to recounting stories (particularly if these were amusing). His gentle, unassuming nature would perhaps have led him to go unnoticed in a group, had he not had great natural dignity and nobility. He held a warm affection for all aspects of Iranian culture, and particularly for those emanating from his beloved Shiraz. But he also appreciated the cultural achievements of the British and other nations. Towards the end of his life, events occurring in Iran caused him great pain, none more than the destruction of the House of the Báb in Shiraz by the revolutionary government. His interests were wide-ranging and he could converse on almost any topic, but he never made a pretence of knowledge in areas where he had none.

The following passage from the writings of Mírzá Abú'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, whom Balyuzi much admired, sums up well the philosophy that imbued the character and writings of Balyuzi himself:

Although the author is a believer in the holy path of the Bahá'í Faith, God is my witness—and He suffices as a witness—that I

have not been unduly influenced in the writing of this history by my love or faith. My devotion to Bahá'u'lláh has not deflected me from the path of fairness. For the station of a historian is beyond that of love and devotion and too sacred to be defiled by bias and prejudice. A historian must put to one side his love or hate for various groups when writing about historical events and must with the utmost justice and equity record what he knows. For truthfulness is a precious gem and the fairness of human beings is their purest ornament.

The following is a list of his publications:

English Works:

- Bahá'u'lláh*. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1938.
A Guide to the Administrative Order. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1941.
Bahá'u'lláh: A Brief Life, Followed by an Essay on the Manifestation of God entitled: The Word made Flesh. London: George Ronald, 1963.
Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith. London: George Ronald, 1970.
'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. London: George Ronald, 1971.
The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days. Oxford: George Ronald, 1973.
Muhammad and the Course of Islám. Oxford: George Ronald, 1976.
Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory. Oxford: George Ronald, 1980.
Khadíjih Bagum: The Wife of the Báb. Oxford: George Ronald, 1981.
Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh. Oxford: George Ronald, 1985.

Persian Works:

- Nábarádará*. Tehran: Chápkháníh Tábán, 1351.

Tundbád Havádith. Tehran: Chápkhánih Fárús, 1353.

Vázhih-háy-i Farsí dar Zabán Ingilísí. Tehran: Chápkhánih Fárús, 2535.

M. MOMEN

NOTES

1. *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. xi.
2. *The Báb*, p. xi.