

Interpretation as Revelation: The Qur'án Commentary of the Báb Todd Lawson

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Abstract

This article attempts to describe and place in context two of the earliest writings of the Báb. Both writings are commentaries on the Qur'án. The earliest of these, a commentary on the Chapter of the Cow, was written before the Báb made his claim to be the Promised One; the second is the famous Qayyúm al-Asmá or Commentary on the Chapter of Joseph. Apart from pointing out the dramatic differences in style and content between these two commentaries, the article offers some observations on the nature of these contents, the history of the ideas put forth, and their relationship to Shí'í Islam and the thought of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í and Siyyid Kázim Rashtí.

Résumé

Cet article tente de décrire et de replacer dans leur contexte deux des premières oeuvres du Báb. Ces deux oeuvres sont des commentaires sur le Coran. Le premier, un commentaire sur le Chapitre de la Vache, a été écrit avant que le Báb ne se soit proclamé Le Promis; le second est le fameux Qayyúm al-Asmá ou Commentaire sur le Chapitre de Joseph. En plus de faire ressortir les différences dramatiques quant au style et au contenu de ces deux commentaires, cet article propose quelques observations portant sur la nature de ces contenus, sur l'histoire des idées avancées et sur leur relation avec l'islam Shi'ite et de la pensée de Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í et de Siyyid Kázim Rashtí.

Resumen

Este artículo se esfuerza a describir y poner en contexto dos de los primeros escritos del Báb. Ambos escritos son comentarios sobre el Corán. El primero de estos, un comentario sobre el Capítulo de la Vaca, fué escrito antes de que el Báb se anunciara ser El Prometido; el segundo es el famoso Qayyúm al-Asmá o Comentario sobre el Capítulo de José. A su vez de hacer visible la diferencia tanto de estilo como de contenido entre estos dos comentarios, el artículo presenta algunos comentarios sobre el carácter de estos contenidos, los antecedentes históricos de las ideas expuestas, y su relación a el Islam Chiíta y al pensamiento del Jeque Ahmad al-Ahsá'í el Siyyid Kázim Rashtí.

The writings of the Báb are many; on his own estimate they exceed 500,000 verses.¹ In the past, these writings have been examined mainly for what they have to tell us about the history of the Bábí movement. The purpose of this discussion is to draw attention to the literature itself in order to begin an evaluation of what must surely be one of the most important questions to be raised not only by students of the Bábí and Bahá'í religions but also by those interested in the history of the nineteenth-century Iran, upon which the dramatic events associated with the name of the Báb made such a vivid mark. That question, how did the Báb read the Holy Book of Islam, will automatically be of interest to those engaged in studying the history of the interpretation of the Qur'án. It should be mentioned that *tafsír* represents only one of several types of exposition to which the Báb applied Himself. That it should be regarded as among the most important types is clear from the mere fact that it comprises a large percentage of his extant work and that it was by means of a *tafsír* that He first made his claims known.

It was the *Tafsír súrát Yúsuf*, also known as the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*, which the Báb's earliest followers used to propagate his cause. It has been referred to by Bahá'u'lláh as "the first, the greatest and mightiest of all books" (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 231), and by Shoghi Effendi as being "universally regarded, during almost the entire ministry of the Báb, as the Qur'án of the people of the Bayán" (*God Passes By* 23). In addition to this work, there are three other major *tafsírs* extant and a series of shorter commentaries.² It appears that all of these belong to the earliest period of the Báb's career and are, therefore, important in themselves as a source for his earliest thought (E.G. Browne, *Encyclopedia* 2:300-305a).

As will be seen, some of this material represents a distinct type of scriptural interpretation; this is particularly apparent in the *Tafsír súrát Yúsuf*, excerpts from which will appear below. That there are problems connected with the proper categorization of some of these writings is something that Browne suggested long ago; in

speaking of the above-mentioned *tafsír* he said: “A *Commentary* in the strict sense of the word it is not, but rather a mystical and often unintelligible rhapsody.”³

In the following pages an attempt will be made to show some aspects of this work and one other of the Báb’s *tafsír* in an attempt to indicate, in however limited a form, some elements of the logic of structure and content of this important work while calling attention to the clear transformation of style and thought between it and the earlier *Tafsír súrat al-baqara*. Before proceeding directly to the texts, a brief outline of the life of the Báb will help put the following discussion in perspective.

1. LIFE OF THE BÁB

The Báb was born in Shiraz on 20 October 1819 (1 Muharram 1235) into a family of prosperous merchants. His father died when the Báb was about seven years old, and the responsibility for the Báb’s upbringing devolved upon his uncle. His formal education consisted of six or seven years at a local *maktab* under the direction of one Shaykh ‘Ábid, who happened to be an adherent of the then somewhat popular Shaykhí school. It appears that the Báb, whose name was ‘Alí Muhammad, was not particularly fond of school, although, according to some reports, this antipathy was not the result of any intellectual incapacity. On the contrary, the few reports that exist tend to show the Báb at this early stage as the owner of a precociously inquisitive and outspoken nature.⁴

At age thirteen the Báb left the *maktab* and two years later moved with his uncle to Búshíhr to pursue the family business there. After about four years of working in partnership with his uncle, the Báb became independent. There is disagreement about what the Báb’s attitude to trade was, but so far no compelling evidence has been brought to light to support the statement that this basic attitude was negative.⁵ While in Bushíhr the Báb began to write various religious works. Although it is not known exactly what these were, they probably included essays on various theological topics and eulogies of the Imáms. Some of these were apparently written at the request of certain of his fellow merchants. There is also an indication that even before voicing any particular claim to spiritual authority, the Báb had aroused a certain amount of attention, and even ill will, by the production of these earliest works (Balyuzi 40; MacEoin, “Charismatic” 138-39).

In 1840, the Báb closed his business and left Bushíhr for the region of ‘Atabat (lit. “thresholds,” it refers to the holy cities of Karbalá’ and Najaf), where He remained for nearly a year.⁶ It was during this time that He attended lectures by Siyyid Kázim Rashtí, the undisputed successor of Shaykh Ahmad, founder of the Shaykhí school. It seems that the Báb’s family did not approve of his preoccupation with things religious and that his marriage, in 1842, was arranged in the hope of inducing Him to concentrate his attention more on the practicalities of existence. Prior to his marriage, while He was still in Karbalá’, it is said that the Báb became acquainted with and attracted a certain amount of attention from a number of Shaykhís, some of whom later became his followers (Smith, *In Iran* 3:60 and references). Even his arch-enemy, Muhammad Karím Khán Kirmání, says in his polemical *Izháq al-bátíl* that, although he himself never met the Báb, it was true that the Báb was held in respect in Karbalá’ and that He did in fact meet and serve Siyyid Kázim (MacEoin, “Charismatic” 140).

The picture that emerges, then, is of a pious young man, who, despite a lack of formal training in the higher religious sciences was nevertheless motivated to produce religious works, the nature of which was sufficiently impressive to win the respect of his readers. Indeed, it was undoubtedly the very fact of this lack of training, together with his status as a merchant, that called attention to his undeniable spiritual and literary gifts. Thus, a variation on the Islamic theme of the “unlettered prophet” begins to take shape. In this connection it is also interesting, and perhaps instructive with reference to the way in which Muhammad’s so-called illiteracy may be understood, to observe that the Báb was manifestly not illiterate; in fact, many of his writings were produced before witnesses. That these works were written by one untutored, or at best self-taught, and perhaps more convincingly, that they were written with astonishing speed and fluency, combined to present to some people at least an evidentiary miracle comparable, in every way, to the Qur’án itself.⁷

In 1844, shortly after the death of Siyyid Kázim, the Báb put forth his claim, in writing, to be in direct contact with the Hidden Imám and so a locus of tremendous spiritual authority. Mullá Husayn and seventeen other young Shaykhís, including the famous poet Táhirih, gave their allegiance to Him, and the Bábí movement was born. Some months later the Báb departed on his pilgrimage, returning to Shíráz in March 1845. As a result of the activity of his followers, He was now arrested for the first time and shortly released. In 1846, the Báb took up residence in Isfahán where He remained from September of that year until March 1847, shortly after his powerful protector, the *mu’tamad-i dawla*, Manuchir Khán, died on February 21. At this time He was arrested by government troops and escorted to the western frontier of Iran where He was to spend the rest of his life in secluded imprisonment.

During this last stage of his career, the Báb continued to experience and record revelations. It was at this time that his Persian *Bayán* was written, together with many prayers, *ajwiba*, and other correspondence to his by now numerous following throughout Iran. According to Nabíl, the Báb, during the nine months He was held in the

castle at Máh-kú, produced no less than nine complete commentaries on the Qur'án (Nabíl, 31). As is well known, the Báb's literary activity came to an end on 9 July 1850, when He was publicly executed in Tabríz.⁸

2. THE SHAYKHÍ SCHOOL

In a foreword to his account of the first hundred years of the Bábí/Bahá'í religion, Shoghi Effendi asserts the significance of the Shaykhíya in Bábí and Bahá'í history:

I shall seek to represent and correlate, in however cursory a manner, those momentous happenings which have insensibly, relentlessly, and under the very eyes or successive generations, perverse, indifferent or hostile, transformed a heterodox and seemingly negligible offshoot of the Shaykhí school of the Ithná-'Asharíyyih sect of Shí'ah Islám into a world religion ... (*God Passes By* xii)

The "seemingly negligible offshoot" here mentioned is of course the Bábí religion. It has already been mentioned that the Báb's teacher, Shaykh 'Ábid, was a follower of this Shaykhí school. It is also known that several of the Báb's merchant relatives were attracted to the teachings of this movement (Nabíl, 30). As was mentioned above, the Báb Himself attended the lectures of Siyyid Kázim Rashtí and in at least two works directly refers to him as "my teacher" (*mu'allimí*).⁹ It is therefore important that some brief statement on the history and teachings of the Shaykhí school be offered so that a better understanding can be gained of the context in which the Báb wrote his quranic commentaries.

The founder of the Shaykhíya, or the Kashfíya as its adherents preferred to be designated, was Shaykh Ahmad ibn Zayn al-Din ibn Ibráhím ibn Saqr ibn Ibráhím ibn Dághir al-Ahsá'í. He was born in 1752 in a small village in Bahrayn (namely al-Ahsá) apparently of pure Arab lineage, and his family had been followers of the Shí'í version of orthodoxy for five generations. From his early childhood, it was clear that Shaykh Ahmad was strongly predisposed to the study of religious texts and traditions. By the age of five he could read the Qur'án, and during the remainder of his primary education he studied Arabic grammar and became exposed to the mystical and theosophical expressions of Ibn 'Arabí (d. 638/1240) and the less well-known Ibn Abí Jumhúr (d. c. 901/1495-6), author of the *Kitáb al-mujlí*. In 1772, Shaykh Ahmad left his home to pursue advanced religious studies in the area of the 'Atabát in Iraq. He received his first *ijáza* (degree) from the renowned scholar Siyyid Muhammad Mahdí Bahr al-'Ulúm (d. 1797), and eventually six others from various recognized teachers.¹⁰

Shaykh Ahmad remained away from Bahrayn for about a year and then returned to pursue his studies, presumably independently, for the next twenty-five years. As a result of the Wahhábí attack on his native al-Ahsá, he travelled to Basra in 1797 and remained in the religious centres and other localities of Iraq and Iran until the end of his life. He died on pilgrimage to Mecca in 1825 and was buried in the famous Baqí' cemetery of Medina. The work of Shaykh Ahmad was continued by his favorite student, Siyyid Kázim Rashtí (1798-1844). After the death of Siyyid Kázim, his students divided into several groups, one centred around the personality of Muhammad Karím Khán Kirmání, another around Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Báb.

3. SHAYKHÍ TEACHINGS

The distinguishing features of this school, as is the case with most Muslim religious sects, are related to the manner in which spiritual authority is to be defined. At this time, the Shí'í world was experiencing an active controversy carried on by the followers of two groups called the *usúliya* and the *akhbá'íya*. These terms refer to the way each group tended to support its statements on Islamic law and theology. The debate was based on the question of whether *ijtihád*, "exerting individual effort to form an opinion," rather than wholesale acceptance of the guidance contained in the preserved statements (*akhbár*) of Muhammad and the Imáms, was the best way to resolve the questions of religion, which would of course include questions of law. Finally the *usúliya*, those in favor of *ijtihád*, won the day, and for the last 200 years this basic attitude towards the written sources of the Islamic religion has held sway over most of the Shí'í world.

Shaykh Ahmad grew up in one of the last bastions of the *akhbá'í* approach, and his synthesis can be seen as a radicalization of this method. By means of propounding a doctrine of the Perfect Shí'a, an obvious adaptation of the Sufi idea of the Perfect Man (*al-insán al-kámil*), Shaykh Ahmad was able, at least in theory, to circumvent the restrictions imposed by either of the two above methods and arrive at a much less fettered and independent position *vis-à-vis* the reinterpretation of the raw material of the Islamic religion—the Qur'án, the sunna, and the teachings of the Imáms that were preserved in the *akhbár*. In short, this doctrine held that the Perfect Shí'a was always present on earth as a direct link to the Hidden Imám, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, the twelfth Imám of the Shí'a, who disappeared from public ken at the age of six after succeeding his late father as Imám and whose occultation had now lasted nearly one thousand years. While neither Shaykh Ahmad nor Siyyid Kázim ever publicly claimed the rank of Perfect

Shí'a, it seems fairly certain that their followers considered them as such.

Shi'ism has traditionally based itself on five main principles: divine unity (*tawhíd*), prophethood (*nubúwa*), return (*ma'ád*), the imamate (*imáma*), and divine justice (*'adl*). Shaykh Ahmad reduced these to three by combining 'justice' with 'unity' and placing the 'return' in the category of 'prophethood'. To these three, Unity, Prophethood, and the Imamate, was added the idea of the Perfect Shí'a sometimes referred to by the Shaykhís as the Fourth Support (*al-rukhn al-rábi'*) or religion, an allusion, in parallel, to the four pillars of God's throne (*'arsh, kursí*).¹¹ Other distinguishing characteristics of the beliefs held by the Shaykhís pertained to eschatology, in which a corporeal resurrection was denied in favor of a somewhat complex recourse to a separate reality in which a resurrection of one's spiritual or subtle (*latíf*) body underwent a process designated by the familiar terminology of *ma'ád, qiyáma*, and so forth. Surely the emphasis here is on the denial of the scientifically untenable bodily resurrection that so many Muslim philosophers prior to Shaykh Ahmad also found impossible to believe.¹² Shaykh Ahmad's contribution on this matter is in the form of a sufficiently detailed and appealingly possible alternative—even the most hard-bitten skeptic would never completely deny the possibility of the totally spiritual process that Shaykh Ahmad propounded. These three features—the doctrine of the Perfect Shí'a, the extreme veneration of the Holy Family, and the denial of bodily resurrection—are perhaps the most important with regard to the relationship of Bábism to Shaykhism.

The doctrine of the Perfect Shí'a was inseparable from the Shaykhí apophatic theology and implied a virtual deification¹³ of the Fourteen Pure Ones (*chehardeh ma'súm*) of orthodoxy: Muhammad, Fátimih, 'Alí, al-Hasan, al-Husayn, and the remaining Imams of Twelver Shi'ism. God here is eternally unknowable (rather than remote) and makes his will known through various stages. Eternally crucial to this process is the twofold institution of prophecy/imamate, and whenever any positive statement about divinity is made, its proper reference is to this institution. The Prophet and Imams are a different order of creation as mediators between God and humanity. The Perfect Shí'a acts as mediator between the Imams, represented by the twelfth, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, and humanity. Therefore, when the Báb claimed to have received the *Tafsír súrat Yúsuf* from the Imám (see below), even though He did not explicitly claim for Himself the title of the Perfect Shí'a, those Shaykhís who were his first readers were already convinced of the necessity for such a link as a *Báb* (gate), even if they were not agreed as to who was best qualified to act as such, or, less important, what the exact name for such a link should be.

Before leaving the subject, it is important to point out that up until the period of time in which the Báb wrote, the Shaykhíya were probably not yet seen as a separate sect of Twelver Shi'ism. According to Rafati:

Although the terms "Shaykhí," "Posht-i Sarí," and "Kashfiya" refer to a certain group of people, and were intended to distinguish them from the rest of Shí'a, the group solidarity and identity of the Shaykhís was in fact not so distinct as to sharply separate them from the rest of the Shí'í community of Iran as an independent sect or even branch of Twelver Shí'a. The Shaykhís considered themselves true Shí'a who thought and behaved in accordance with the teaching of the Shí'í *imáms*; they did not consider themselves innovators. It is difficult to believe that during Shaykh Ahmad's lifetime he was considered the founder of a new school of thought within the Shí'í framework. However, as time went on and the nature of his ideology received greater intellectual attention, a group of fundamentalist *'ulamá* perceived a radical distinction between his views and the established doctrines of the Shi'a and increasingly differentiated themselves from the Shaykhís. The Shaykhí school, then, gained more group solidarity as it developed historically, reacting as a group against the main body of the Shi'a when it encountered social and intellectual opposition.¹⁴

4. TAFSÍR WORKS

Among the Báb's writings there are numerous works of *tafsír*.¹⁵ Some of these are commentaries on such important traditions as the *hadíth al-jaríya* or the *hadíth Kumayl*. Most of the others are commentaries on either a complete *súra* of the Qur'an or one of the more notable verses, such as the light verse (Q. 24/35) or the throne verse (Q. 2/255). These commentaries present a broad range of ideas and exegetical techniques—to such a degree that any attempt to discuss all of them here would ultimately be meaningless. This is so in spite of the fact that they all seem to come from the same general period, usually referred to as early Bábism (Browne, *Encyclopedia*). Despite the astonishingly varied nature of the style and content of these commentaries, or more accurately because of it, they are of course extremely valuable for a study of the development of the Báb's thought. Collectively they represent a unique individual corpus of Islamic scriptural commentary.

Of the numerous titles in this genre, however, four stand out as major works. In chronological order they are commentaries on *al-baqara* (*súra* 2), *Yúsuf* (*súra* 12), *al-kawthar* (*súra* 108), and *wa'l-'asr* (*súra* 103). In the following discussion attention will be focused exclusively on the first two of these commentaries.¹⁶

i. Tafsír súrat al-baqara

The Báb was just under twenty-five when He completed the first volume of this work in Muharram 1259.¹⁷ The work was therefore completed a few months before He made his momentous claim to Mullá Husayn, the young Shaykhí, on the evening of 22 May 1844 (4 Jumádá 1, 1260). In corroboration of this dating, Mullá Husayn is reported to have noticed this *tafsír* resting on a shelf in the Báb's house during the course of that very evening.¹⁸ This earliest sustained religious work of the Báb includes a brief commentary on *al-fátiha* (*súra 1*), prefaced in some manuscript copies by an introduction noteworthy for the reference it makes to the date on which composition was begun. Here the Báb says that the night before He began the work, He had a dream in which the entire city of Karbalá' (*ard al-muqaddas*) rose bit by bit into the air and came to rest before his house in Shiráz, whereupon He was informed of the approaching death of Siyyid Kázim Rashtí, the Shaykhí leader, to whom He here refers as his revered teacher (TBA 6).

The way in which *súrat al-fátiha* is treated is in some ways characteristic of the rest of the commentary. For the Báb, meaning may be derived from the book chiefly by way of relating its contents to the Holy Family (Muhammad, Fátimih, and the twelve Imáms). To this end, each of the seven verses of the opening *súra* is designated as a writing (*kitáb*) of one of these sacred figures. Beginning with Muhammad, these include (in this order) 'Ali, Fátimih, al-Hasan, al-Husayn, Ja'far al-Sadiq, and finally Músá ibn Ja'far. As will be seen below, the number seven plays an important part throughout this work.¹⁹ In this instance, the seven names represent the different names by which each of the fourteen Pure Ones are known. That is, each of the names Muhammad, 'Ali, and al-Hasan may be applied to more than one figure. The names Fátimih, al-Husayn, Ja'far, and Músá, however, may only be used once. The name Muhammad is applicable not only to the Prophet Himself but also to Muhammad al-Báqir, the fifth Imám (d. 113/731–2), Muhammad al-Jawád, the ninth Imám (d. 220/835), and Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-'Askari, the twelfth Imám, also known as al-Mahdí (disappeared 260/873–4). The name 'Ali may properly designate not only the first Imám (d. 40/661) but also his grandson the fourth Imám, 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (d. 94/712–13), the eighth Imám, 'Alí al-Ridá (d. 202/817–18), and 'Alí al-Hádí, the tenth Imám (d. 254/868). The name al-Hasan may be applied to both the second Imám (d. 50/670) and the eleventh (d. 260/873–4). The result is that although there are fourteen different personalities involved, it may be said that there are in reality only seven different names. That the Báb has chosen to associate each verse with one of these seven names has, as will be seen, implications for the way in which He understood one of the more common names for this *súra*, namely, *al-sab' al-mathání* ("The seven oft repeated" or "the seven doubled") (cf. Q. 15/87), the meaning of which is disputed by the classical exegetes.²⁰ Later in the commentary, the Báb states that one of the results of the process of creation is that seven becomes fourteen.²¹ Thus this opening chapter, which is also known as the "Mother of the Book" (*umm al-kitáb*) because in it is contained the essence of the entire Qur'án, may be likened to the divine will which, in Shaykhí thought, is represented by the pleroma of the Holy Family and may be understood as containing, *in potentia*, all creation.²²

One of the main concerns of this *tafsír* is in fact the propounding of this particular metaphysical notion. This, together with the method adopted for such—constant reference to the Holy Family as the principle of this process—is the most distinctive and distinguishing feature of the work and may be designated by the rather awkward term "imamization." It is unlikely that this represents, at the time and place it was written, a polemic in the context of an immediate Sunní–Shí'í debate.²³ Rather, it would seem that this method of interpretation is linked to at least two factors. The first is that it reflects the extreme veneration in which the Imams were held by the Shaykhís,²⁴ and, of course, the Shaykhí influence on the author of this work. But perhaps more important, especially for understanding the eventual development of the Báb's teaching, it allows the Báb to assert his complete independence from all others, including Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kázim (who are not mentioned in the main body of the *tafsír*²⁵), apart from the Holy Family, and, of course, the Qur'án itself.

A ready example of this allegorical method is found at Q. 2/26: "God is not ashamed to strike a similitude even of a gnat, or aught above it."²⁶ Here the "gnat" is explained as being 'Alí Himself, while "aught above it," *má fawqahá*, is none other than Muhammad. This interpretation is not new with the Báb; it is found in at least three other well-known Shí'í commentaries where it is ascribed to the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sádiq. Unlike his practice in similar instances in the commentary, the Báb cites no *isnád* here. The adoption of this interpretation must therefore be seen as an example of the abundantly attested and universally approved process of selection from the overall tradition (rather than "creation") as a means of offering an "original" interpretation, which is so characteristic of Muslim religious scholarship.²⁷ That the Báb was creative in the modern sense as well will be seen in what follows.

A more extended allegory is found at Q. 2/49–51 in the Báb's reading of the story of Moses in the wilderness with his troublesome retinue:

(49) And when We delivered you from the folk of Pharaoh who were visiting you with evil chastisement,

slaughtering your sons, and sparing your women; and in that was a grievous trial from your Lord. (50) And when We divided for you the sea and delivered you, and drowned Pharaoh's folk while you were beholding. (51) And when We appointed with Moses forty nights then you took to yourselves the Calf after him and you were evildoers

The Báb says verse 49 is being addressed to (*mukhâtabatanli-*) Fátimih, her husband, and her father.²⁸ “Pharaoh” stands for “Abú'l-Shurúr”²⁹ while his “folk” stands for “wherever *kufir*, *shirk* or *sharr* exist, because these are the various places where he appears (*mazâhir nafsihi*).” In this place the specific reference is to Yazíd, the Umayyad caliph responsible for the killing of Husayn, while “slaughtering of your sons” is a direct reference to “the sons of the Messenger and their lord, Abú'Abd Alláh al-Husayn” (the third Imám).

At this point, the Báb embarks upon a rather lengthy discussion to justify why God would allow such a heinous deed as the murder of one of the Holy Family to take place. During the course of this discussion, the Báb compares the killing of Husayn with the sin of Adam. The main point seems to be that this apparent victory of evil over goodness, the murder of an Imám, was not due to any weakness in Husayn. On the contrary, the Imám, because of the strength of his perfect (*mu'tadil*: “harmonious”) body, would have been able to destroy the whole world had such been the divine purpose. At verse 50 the “sea” is the “sea of divine power.” Those being addressed are the “People of Infallibility” (*ahl al'isma*), another name for the Holy Family. “The meaning of the second ‘Pharaoh,’” says the Báb, “is the one who rejected the signs of ‘Alí, upon him be peace, which exists in all things.” “Moses,” at verse 51, “according to the primary meaning (*fa'l-murád bi' l-haqíqat al-awwalíya*) is Muhammad.” “Forty” is understood as referring to ‘Alí and the ten proofs (*hujaj*) from his progeny. The Báb explains as follows: “‘Alí stands for thirty since he lived for thirty years after the death of Muhammad. ‘Forty’ is arrived at when reference is made to the ten remaining Imáms (who were allowed to fulfil their mission, the mission of the last or twelfth Imam being at this time still incomplete and therefore the number ‘ten’ would not pertain to the length of time spent in the wilderness precisely because the *parousia* of the last Imám will signal the end of this spiritual banishment).”³⁰ But “nights” alludes to the concealment of the glory of the Imáms by the darkness of disbelief.

This section is concluded with a reference to the *qá'im*, whose return will cause all that has been alluded to in the foregoing to appear (TBA 179–84). This is an example of the idea that each divine manifestation (*zuhúr*) sets in motion a replay of the major events of a kind of primal sacred history. Later, in some of his other writings, the Báb refers to his very first followers, the eighteen “Letters of the Living,” as the reappearance of the fourteen Pure Ones and the four *abwáb*—those leaders of the *Shi'a* who are believed to have been in contact with the Hidden Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hasan during to so-called Lesser Occultation (MacEoin, “Charismatic” 146; Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 32).

In the course of this interpretation, the Báb alludes to the metaphysics from which it ultimately springs. Repeated reference is made, for example, to the process of divine self-manifestation—*tajallí*. Once again, the commentary on *súrat al-fátiha* provides a characteristic example. The third verse of the opening *súra* is characterized by the Báb as the “book (*kitáb*) of Fátimih.” He continues by saying that

God has put in it all that is hers and all that pertains to her. This verse is the Garden of Grace. God has provided its shade for whoever believes in her and loves her after he has properly recognized her—according to what she manifested to him (*li'l- 'arif*) by means of his own capacity for understanding. At this time this Garden will open to him.³¹

The operative phrase here is: *kamá tajallat li'l-'arif lahu bihi*.³² An interesting parallel to this usage is found in the *Fusús al-hikám* of the great mystic Ibn 'Arabi. Here the author discusses *tajallí* or the way in which God makes Himself known to humanity, with these words: *fa-wasafa nafsahu laná biná*, “He has described Himself to us by means of us,” or, less concisely: “He has described Himself to us by means of our own ability and willingness to perceive His description”(Ibn al-'Arabi, *Fusús al-hikam* 1:53). It is not intended to go into great detail here on the relation of the Báb's thought to that of Ibn 'Arabi, nor is it intended to go into great detail about the nature of the Báb's thought *per se*; attention is drawn to this subject only by way of indicating the kinds of ideas that find expression during the task the Báb has set for Himself (and which is the subject of this discussion), namely, the interpretation of the Qur'án. Suffice it to say that here both the Báb and Ibn 'Arabi appear to rely on Q. 41/53 for the ultimate justification of such a view: “We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, till it is clear to them that it is the truth.” The frequency with which this idea is encountered in the *Tafsír súrat al-baqara* throws into sharp relief the curious fact that there seems to be no mention of it at all, at least in the above terms, in the *Tafsír súrat Yúsuf*.

This metaphysics is also related to ethical concerns .in one interesting passage of the commentary on *súrat*

al-baqar, ad.Q. 2/3: “[Those] who believe in the Unseen, and perform the prayer, and expend of that We have provided them.” Here the Báb chooses to comment on the significance of “faith” (*imán*) represented in the above citation by the verb “believe.” In his introductory remarks to this lengthy section He says the following:

*If man knew how God had created His creation, no one would ever blame another.*³³ This means that God has created mankind (*khalq*) according to the creature’s already existing propensities for acceptance or rejection [of the truth]. The cause of rejection is the same as the cause of acceptance, namely, choice (*ikhtiyár*). God has given to each what he deserves according to his already existing propensity (*bi-má huwa ‘alayhi*). This divine knowledge is the knowledge of potentialities. (TBA 22)

The object of the discussion is an extended treatment of the problems surrounding the perennial mystery posed by the ideas of an individual’s free will and God’s role in determining a person’s fate. Once again, statements of the Báb appear to have much in common with the views of Ibn ‘Arabi, in particular his notoriously difficult idea of *al-‘ayán al-thábita*.³⁴ It is probably the case here, as in the above comparison with Ibn ‘Arabi, that these coincidences are due more to the traces of Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought existing in the teaching of the *Shaykhís* (which, as has been said, is acknowledged to be of the single most formative influence on the way on which the Báb expressed his ideas) than to any direct borrowing by the Báb from Ibn ‘Arabi himself. Indeed, in one of his later *tafsír*, the Báb makes it clear that He does not agree with Ibn ‘Arabi at all on at least one point.³⁵

Continuing with the Báb’s commentary on this same verse, we are soon in the presence of another major pattern in the work. The importance of the number seven has already been mentioned and briefly illustrated; a few more brief examples are added here for emphasis.

In his discussion of *imán*, the Báb speaks of seven different levels or grades (*marátib*). The first is applied to the people of the garden, or paradise, of the Divine Will (*ahl jannat al-mashíya*). The remaining six grades are respectively applicable to the people of the heaven of the Divine Purpose (*al-iráda*), the sea of the Divine Decree (*bahr al-qadr*), Eden (*‘adn*), Divine Permission (*idhn*), Eternity (*khuld*), and finally Refuge, or Repose (*ma’wá*). Other examples of this seven-fold structure of spirituality may be found in the *tafsír* at Q. 2/1 where eight gardens, or paradises, and seven hells are described. Here, each hell is but the shadow of the heaven above it. The reason that there are only seven is because the highest heaven casts no shadow, in fact, it is completely isolated from the rest of the structure. The highest heaven represents the Absolute of this apophatic theological model.³⁶ At Q. 2/2 we are introduced to seven classes of people (TBA 14); at Q. 2/5 we read of seven different grades of lordship (*rubúbíya*) (TBA 38–40). A final example is at Q. 2/22, where seven heavens and seven earths are enumerated (TBA 81–82). Another example of the Báb’s exegesis may be taken once again from Q. 2/3, which is divided into two parts for the purposes of the commentary: “[Those] who believe in the Unseen, and perform the prayer.” *Ghayb* (“Unseen”) is interpreted in the following way. The Báb says that it represents Muhammad because He is truly known only by Himself, and only God knows his true nature (*kunh*). The particular place (*wa mahall tafsil hádhá’l-ghayb*³⁷) is none other than the currently concealed *Qá’im*, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan. The Báb then quotes a tradition from the sixth Imam Ja‘far al-Sádiq wherein several stages of *ghayb* are enumerated (TBA 23-24). It has already been explained how for the Báb, who at the time of writing this particular commentary was making use of the terminology and thought of the *Shaykhís*³⁸; the number seven represents the totality of the Holy Family. While it may be of some interest to try to determine other influences apart from the *Shaykhí* school, to insist on such would be to miss this most important point. One of the more pertinent lessons to be learned here, it would seem, is how the number seven can have importance for both the *Ithná ‘Ashariya* (“Twelvers”) and the so-called *Sab’iyya* (“Sevens”), or the *Ismá‘íliya*.³⁹

To conclude this somewhat random sampling from this earliest of the Báb’s commentaries, attention will be paid to his reading of the word *salát* (prayer, divine service) in this same verse, Q. 2/3. First of all, its performance symbolizes obedience to Muhammad and his legatees and progeny—which in turn represents absolute guardianship (*waláya*). From the beginning to the end of its performance, it is the “form of divine aloneness” (*súrat al-tafríd*), the shape of divine unity (*haykal al-tawhíd*), and the “outward representation of love or allegiance” (*shabah al-waláya*). However, none but Muhammad and his Family performs it properly, because *salát* is the foremost station of distinction between the lover and the Beloved (God). The Holy Family is the collective bearer of this love and as such is the object of the famous *hadíth qudsí*, “I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known, therefore I created mankind [*khalq* here refers specifically to Imáms, according to the Báb’s interpretation] in order to be known.” Thus it is through the Imám that “lordship” (*rubúbíya*) appeared and “servitude” (*marbúbíya*) was perfected. The perfect performance of *salát* by the Imáms is therefore an ability or quality directly from God (*wasf Alláh*) which they have been endowed with by means of their own innate capacities (*lahum bihim*), while in the case of others who perform the *salát*, this ability comes from the Imáms. This is a perfect example of the *Shaykhí*

imamology referred to above.⁴⁰

The Báb then states that the Imáms are in fact the seven *mathání*. This becomes clear when the worshipper recites the *fátiha*, in each verse of which God has described one of the Holy Family by means of the tongue of the servant, who, in the course of two prostrations, will have uttered the seven verses of the *fátiha* twice, which is, of course, an affirmation of the sanctity of the Fourteen Pure Ones. If the prayer is performed in this spirit, then the worshipper has succeeded in performing it as properly as he or she can. The prayer has then become a meeting with the Beloved and the Face of the worshipped One—a true means of spiritual elevation, *mi'ráj*, for the individual believer.⁴¹

Having briefly examined the Báb's very early work, which, it must be remembered, was written before his declaration in which He claimed special spiritual authority and is therefore concerned more with the Shí'í tradition than with any new system, we will now turn to a *tafsír* of a very different order.

ii. *Tafsír sūrat Yūsuf*

Approximately four months after the completion of the commentary on *sūra 2*, the Báb began his commentary on the quranic story of Joseph (*sūra 12*). This *tafsír* is utterly different in all of its aspects from the *Tafsír sūrat al-baqara*. Unlike the previous commentary, this work contains no direct references to doctrinal discussions on such important Shaykhí topics as the Fourth Support, and no architectonic metaphysical representations.⁴² Although allegory and typological exegesis are still among the chief methods of the actual interpretation, they are of a somewhat different character. Indeed, direct interpretation of the verses represents only a portion of the material. In one way, the work is much more structured, taking as its model the Qur'án in its use of *sūra* divisions, and in another way it is much less "logical," in that it is difficult many times to see just how the text is tied to the quranic material itself. It is also a very long work and one in which a variety of concerns, images, terminology, laws, exhortations, and prayers are presented. Interestingly, there seem to be no *hadíth*. What is offered in the next few pages is merely a very brief description of the work. The intention is to give some idea of the kinds of problems the *tafsír* presents to the student of the history of Qur'án commentary, to point out the dramatic difference between the two works that are the subject of this discussion, and to make some very general conclusions.

The *Tafsír sūrat Yūsuf* also known widely as the *Qayyúm u'l-Asmá*⁴³ and the *Ahsan al-qasas*, which is of course the name that the Qur'án gives to the *sūra* of Joseph (Q. 12/3), was described in some detail by Rosen in 1877 and discussed by Browne in 1889 and again in 1892.⁴⁴ Since then, it has received a certain amount of attention from scholars concerned chiefly with the social history of the Bábí movement.⁴⁵ Several manuscripts of the work exist, two of which have been consulted for the purposes of this study.⁴⁶ The older of the two, and perhaps therefore the most reliable, was transcribed in 1261AH/AD1845 and differs from the later manuscript in many details. The work itself is quite long, the manuscript of 1261 running to 234 pages, with each 9.5 x 17.5 cm.⁴⁷ page bearing 25 lines of closely written text; this copy is today found in Haifa.

The text is modelled after the Qur'án, with its use of disconnected introductory letters, *sūra* divisions, and verse divisions. In fact, the older Haifa manuscript, in imitation of the *sajdat al-tiláwa* tradition in the Qur'án, carries the instruction *sajda wájiba* at various places on the margin of the text where the word *sajada* or some derivative occurs, to indicate that a prostration should be performed while reading the particular verse. In addition, the Haifa manuscript supplies at the head of the 111 *sūras* (each chapter of the commentary is called a *sūra* by the Báb) the number of verses, which in this manuscript is invariably forty-two, and the Cambridge manuscript, where the verses number forty, indicates the place of revelation, which is invariably Shíráz.⁴⁸ The number of verses is thought to represent the *abjad* value of the word *balá*, which according to the Qur'án, was the word used to convey humanity's ascent to the primordial divine covenant (Q. 7/172).⁴⁹

Immediately following this comparatively technical information comes the standard Islamic *basmala*: "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." This occurs without exception at the beginning of each chapter and is followed by the verse from the Qur'án that is to be the subject of the commentary. However, the first *sūra* of the *tafsír* does not contain such a citation and is anyway of a slightly different order from the rest, being something of an introduction.

Continuing this imitation of the form of the Qur'án, the Báb has placed between the *áya* to be commented upon the main text of each *sūra* (except four⁵⁰), a series of disconnected letters, some of which are quranic. Thus, chapter 3, *sūrat al-imán*, bears the two letters *tá' -há'*, while the *sūra* immediately following, *al-madína*, carries the unquranic *alíf-lám-mím- tá' -há'*. While the vast majority of these sets of letters must remain at this stage somewhat mysterious, it is interesting to note that at the head of *sūras* 108 and 109, the following combinations occur: '*ayn-lám- yá'* and *mím-há' -mím-dál*, giving the names 'Alí and Muhammad. The titles of these two *sūras* are respectively *al-dhikr* and *al-'abd*, both of which represent titles assumed by the Báb in the course of his commentary (QA 223 and 225, respectively). It is likely, therefore, that these two names pertain first of all to the Báb Himself

(Siyyid ‘Alí Muhammad) and indirectly to the first Imám and the Prophet Muhammad. Needless to say, the ambiguity was no accident.

Following the disconnected letters, there are usually one or perhaps two verses (terminations of which are marked in QA by the typical quranic verse marker, an independent *há’ marbúta*, and in the Cambridge manuscript by means of a space), which offer some variation on the frequent quranic introductory formula: *dhálika al-kitáb ...* (Q. 2/2), or *kitab^m unzila ilayka ...* (Q. 7/2), which has been shown to be one of the common elements shared by those *suwar* that bear disconnected letters (Welch, ‘*af-Kur’án*, E/2 v, 414a). A few examples will serve as illustrations.

Súra 1, al-mulk, begins after the title material described above and the respective quranic verse as follows:

(1) *al-hamdu li-lláh alladhí nazza/a al-kitáb ‘alá ‘abdihi bi’ l-haqq li-yakúna li’l-‘al/amin sirájan wahnájan.* (QA 3)

Súra 2, al-‘u/amá’: (1) *alif lám mím, dhálika al-kitáb min ‘imdi Alláh, al-haqq fí shán al-dhikr qad kána bi’ l-haqq hawl al-nár’ manzúlan*; (2) *wa inna nahnu qad ja‘alná’l-dhálika’ l-kitáb mubínan [sic].* (QA 5)

Súra 3. al-imán: (1) *tá’ -há’*; (2) *Alláh qad anzala al-Qur’án ‘alá ‘abdihi li-ya’lama al-nas anna Alláh qad kána ‘alá kulli shay’ qadíran.* (QA 6)

Súra 37, al-ta’bír: (1) *fa’ ‘ayn sín nún*; (2) *al-hamdu li-lláh alladhí anzala ‘alá ‘abdihi al-kitáb li-yakúna ‘alá’ l-‘alamin bi’l-kalimat al-‘alí shahídan.* (QA 67)

The slightly variant *súra 59, al-af’ ida*, just as one example, has the following, which is however still concerned with the way God communicates to humanity:

(1) *káf há’ ‘ayn sád*; (2) *Alláh qad akhbará’ l- ibád bi’l-ism al-akbar: an lá iláh illá huwa al-hayy al-qayyúm.* (QA 116)

Finally, the example of *súra 111, al-mu’minin*, is offered by way of emphasizing the more or less standard pattern that obtains throughout the work:

(1) *alif lám mím*; (2) *inná nahnu qad ja‘alná baynakum wa bayna al-qurá’l-mubáraka min ba’d al-báb hádhá unásun táhirín yad’úna al-nás ilá dín Alláh al-akbar wa lá yakháfúna min dún Alláh al-haqq ‘an shay’, ulá’ika hum qad kánú ashhab al-ridwán fí umm al-kitáb maktúban*; (3) *wa inná nahnu qad ja‘alná hádhá’l-kitáb áyat li-ulí al-albáb alladhína yusabbihúna al-layl wa’l-nahár wa lá yafturúna [cf. Q. 21/20] min amr Alláh al-haqq min laday al-báb ‘alá dharra min ba’d al-shay’ qitmíran.* (QA 231)

This then gives some idea of the Báb’s conscious desire to make his *tafsír* structurally resemble or “imitate” the Qur’an. It is doubtful whether one of the reasons *súra 12* was chosen was because the number of its verses closely approximates the total number of quranic *suwar*,⁵¹ although the effect of this coincidence was undoubtedly not lost upon the readers of the commentary. The quranic story of Joseph is a favorite among Muslims because it contains within the confines of a single sustained narrative many subjects of importance to Islam, including its link with past religions.⁵² The *súra* had also been the subject of earlier commentaries and elaborations; thus, the renowned Abú Hamíd al-Ghazzálí (d. 505/1111) composed a somewhat mystical *tafsír* on this *súra*.⁵³

The great mystic Ibn ‘Arabí also took up the quranic Joseph in his *Fusús al-hikam* as a basis for his discussion of the spiritual imagination (1:99-106). It would seem also that the choice of the *súrat Yúsuf* as the subject of this commentary of the Báb is connected with a long tradition that reveres the story of Joseph as representing the spiritual mystery of *taqíya*, or cautious concealment, which is so important to Shí’í religiosity in general,⁵⁴ and Shaykhí religious thinking in particular. According to Nabíl, Mullá Husayn, the young Shaykhí who was the first to accept the Báb’s claim, had once asked the Shaykhí leader Siyyid Kázim Rashtí to write a commentary on *súrat Yúsuf*. His teacher responded that such a task was beyond his abilities but that the “great One, who comes after me will, unasked, reveal it for you. That commentary will constitute one of the weightiest testimonies of His truth, and one of the clearest evidences of the loftiness of His position” (Nabíl, 59). Rashtí’s response here would appear to be conditioned by numerous *hadíths* which say that the *qá’im* will resemble Joseph in several respects.⁵⁵ Throughout the Báb’s commentary it seems clear that He is seeing Himself as Joseph, in that the quranic story is read as a prefiguration, however allegorical, of the Báb’s own mission.

After the disconnected letters and the above-mentioned introductory verses that claim divine revelation, the

next section of a given *súra* begins. This section is most difficult to characterize because of the variety of concerns that may appear in it. Generally speaking, the last section of a *súra* is where the Báb turns his attention directly to the verse of the Qur'án under which his commentary is written. The method of exegesis, then, is usually simple paraphrase of the Qur'án in which the Báb makes various substitutions with words that give a meaning much more specific to his own claims and situation. In the course of his exegesis, there is never recourse to the usual markers of an interpretative statement such as *ay* or *ya'ní* ("that is"), or *aqúlu* ("I say"). Rather, the exegetical equivalences are offered by the Báb as much closer to the quranic material than would be the case if the above words, along with the semantic distance to be travelled that their use implies, were used.⁵⁶ Before giving examples of this kind of commentary, it may be of interest to discuss in some detail the first *súra* of the *tafsír*.

The *súrat al-mulk*, which is in fact the part of the work that was written in the presence of Mullá Husayn on the night of 22 May 1844, forms a kind of introduction to the whole and is unusual in that it is not written under a verse of Qur'án *súra* 12. Evidence that it is indeed part of a commentary on the Qur'án does not occur until well into the text, where the following statement is found:

God hath decreed that this book, in explanation (*fí tafsír*) of the 'best of stories' ... should come forth from Muhammad, son of Hasan, son of 'Alí, son of Músá, son of Ja'far, son of Muhammad, son of 'Alí, son of Husayn, son of 'Alí, son of Abú Tálib, unto his servant [the Báb] that it may be proof of God on the part of the Remembrance (*dhikr*) reaching the two worlds. (Trans. Browne, *JRAS* 2 [1889]: 908)

The title of this *súra* is related to the fact that the entire chapter, rather than dealing with subjects connected to an understanding of the twelfth chapter of the Qur'an, is a sustained and impassioned challenge first to Muhammad Sháh, the reigning monarch of Iran at that time, and then to his Prime Minister, Hájí Mírzá Aqásí, to submit to the command of the Remembrance (*dhikr*, that is, the Báb). In the course of this *súra* we see several elements that are, however, characteristic of the whole book. The first of these is the proclamation of the Báb's spiritual rank, either as Báb or *dhikr*, to name only two of the several different designations used throughout the text.⁵⁷ Then there are the fluent paraphrases of the Qur'án, the call to absolute obedience, the summons to the world beyond Iran, the reference to laws (*ahkám*), the language, and the imagery, which is striking in the extreme. An example of this last is the Báb's juxtaposition of opposites. In the *súrat al-mulk*, one reads, for example: *inna al-nár fí nuqtati' Imá' li'lláh al-haqq sájid^{am} 'alá'l-ard* ("the fire which is in the drop of water is itself prostrate upon the earth before God, the Reality").⁵⁸ This may, of course, be a simple case of an echo of basic alchemical imagery, particularly in this instance; in later *suwar*, however, this combining of opposites appears to take on original characteristics that seem to somehow designate the source of the Báb's inspiration.⁵⁹

This third section of a given *súra* may also consist of a running exegetical paraphrase of extended sections of the Qur'án. For example, chapters 52 and 53, *al-fadl* and *al-sabr* (QA 100–105) present a detailed rewriting of the first fifty or so verses of the second *súra* of the Qur'án, *al-baqara*.

At Q. 2/2–5, for example, we have:

Qur'án

That is the Book wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the godfearing who believe in the Unseen, and perform the prayer, and expend of that We have provided them; who believe in what has been sent down to thee and what has been sent down before thee, and have faith in the Hereafter; those are upon guidance from their Lord, those are the ones who prosper.

The Báb

By thy Lord! Thou [the Hidden Imám and, by implication, the Báb Himself] art the Book wherein there is no doubt, and thou art praiseworthy in the estimation of God. Those who believe in the Remembrance of God, in his *ghayba*, and rule among mankind with truth by means of his verses, We will, in very truth,⁶⁰ bestow upon them, as a blessing from Our side, a great reward. Those are upon a guidance with the Remembrance of God, and those are the ones who hastened first, in truth, in the Book of God. (QA 100)

Another more extended example of this running paraphrase may be found in *súras* 80 to 95 inclusive (QA 160–95), which treat most of the quranic material from Q. 10/57 up to the first few verses of Q. 17. A random example in the Báb’s rewriting of Q. 10/87.

Qur’án

And We revealed to Moses and his brother, ‘Take you, for your people, in Egypt certain houses; and make your houses a direction for men to pray to; and perform the prayer; and do thou give good tidings to the believers.’

The Báb

And We revealed to Moses and his brother, “Take you, [or ‘set aside’] in the Egypt of the hearts, for the people of the earth, houses consecrated to the exclusive unity (*ahadíya*) of the Most Great Remembrance of God, the Living, and He is God, the Knowing, the Judge. And verily God made them [houses] a direction for men to pray to, and to perform all the prayers in, so give good tidings to the sincere servants of God.” (QA 161)

As mentioned above, the fourth section of a given *súra* usually returns to the verse of the Qur’án under which it is written. The method again is paraphrase, of which the last two of the following three examples are characteristic. The second chapter, *súrat al-‘ulamá*, is written under Qur’án 12/1, *‘alif-lam-rá*; “these are the verses of the Manifest Book.” The passage thus ends with a commentary on these three disconnected letters. The Báb says that God created the letter *alif*, to represent that servant of his [the Báb Himself?] who is strong in the divine cause (*amr*). The letter *lám* signifies the ascendancy of his rule over the rule of the book [the Qur’an?]. The letter *rá* was made by God for the spreading (*inbisat*) of his Cause according to the way it has been ordained in the Mother of the Book.

Súra 71, *al-qalam*, is written under Qur’án 12/70: “Then when he had equipped them with their equipment, he put his drinking-cup into the saddlebag of his brother. Then a herald proclaimed, ‘Ho, cameleers, you are robbers!’” The Báb’s paraphrase of the verse is as follows:

Verily, We command the angels to place the drinking-cup of the Remembrance in the saddlebag of the believers, by the leave of God, the Exalted, and God is Knower of all things. O crier (*al-mu’ adhdhin*), cry out! O camel-riders, you are robbers. Indeed the cup of the Remembrance is concealed from you in the highest station, in very truth. And God is the Preserver of all things. And God is powerful over all things. (QA 145)

The metaphors in the above commentary (drinking-cup/Remembrance; saddlebag/believers) are similar to the previously cited “Egypt of the hearts.” In this instance, however, they refer to a subject raised in the *Tafsír súrat al-baqara*, namely one’s innate, and in a sense predetermined, capacity for accepting or rejecting the Imám as the locus of divinity, in this case represented by the Báb. The believers are therefore privileged to be so because they hold within themselves the “signs” of Remembrance, here represented by “drinking-cup.” Likewise, the “robbers” are prevented from accepting the truth because these signs have been withheld from them.⁶¹

The *súrat al-hajj*, number 103, is written under Qur’án 12/102: “That is of the tidings of the Unseen that We reveal to thee; thou wast not with them when they agreed upon their plan, devising.” The Báb’s paraphrase is as follows:

This (*dhálika*) *tafsír* is of the tidings of *al-‘amá*, written upon the leaf of the heart by the permission of God, the Exalted, in the vicinity of the sacred fire. Verily, God has revealed to you the tidings of the Unseen while you were the most Great Truth, when their word conflicted, lying. God is, in very truth, Witness over you.⁶²

The examples of the textual concerns of *Tafsír súrat Yúsuf* provided here, along with the general description of the work, are sufficient to make possible a few very general observations. While it is clear that the work is most unusual *vis-á-vis* the *tafsír* tradition, or for that matter any other genre of Arabic literature, it would appear that by categorizing the work as *tafsír* the author wished it to be read and judged in this context. This, of course, raises the question of what in fact distinguishes *tafsír* from other types of literature. It should not be assumed that since the Báb was not a typical religious scholar, He was therefore unaware of the standard works of *tafsír*⁶³ or that he thought this work of his should be received as a continuation of the tradition. Rather, the contrary would

seem to be the case, particularly in view of the earlier *Tafsír súrat al-baqara*, which, however different from the main sources of orthodox Shí'í Qur'án commentary it may be, exhibits many of the usual approaches and methods found in those works. In composing the later commentary, the Báb was attempting a break with a tradition He perceived as moribund, particularly so in the context of the advent of a new order of which He Himself claimed to be the herald. In addition, there seems to have been a certain amount of eschatological expectation centred on the appearance of one who would produce a commentary on the twelfth *súra* of the Qur'án.

Browne's statements that the work is inappropriately titled notwithstanding, it is abundantly clear that it not only offers interpretative statements on the *súra* of Joseph but also comments on a large portion of the rest of the Qur'án in the process, albeit usually by means of paraphrase. Unusual, there is no doubt. To say that it is not interpretative or that it does not make clear what the Qur'án meant, at least to the Báb, is either not to have read it or to have imposed too rigid a notion about what constitutes *tafsír*, which is after all fundamentally only "explanation." Given the method of allegorical and typological exegesis that is fluently and ceaselessly expressed in the constant use of such rhetorical devices as metaphor and simile, in addition to the "heresy of paraphrase" and the exploitation of ambiguity—all of which have been cast in an unabashed imitation of the Qur'án⁶⁴—the work is clearly one of interpretation. The *Qayyúm u'l-Asmá'* is the result of a re-ordering of the basic elements of the scripture of Islam that have been fully internalized and transformed by the apparently opposite processes of imitation and inspiration to become finally an original "act" of literature. Taken as a whole, this remarkable work of the 25-year-old merchant from Shíraz, representing as it does a text within a text that strives to interpret itself, offers a concrete and literary example of a singularly heroic attempt to transform what became known much later, and in a culture quite alien to his own, as the hermeneutic circle,⁶⁵ into a hermeneutic spiral.

By comparing these two works, which were written at about the same time, we see how differently the act of interpretation, yet springing from the same source, is capable of expressing itself. And with the second work, we not only have a new example for the history of *tafsír* but (because the work itself is a call to action) also the rather startling example of *tafsír* directly affecting history—in a sense, becoming history.⁶⁶

Notes

1. 'Ali Muhammad Shírází, *Bayán-i fársí: Le Béyan Persan* 3:113. See also the discussion of the amount of the Báb's work that has survived, in Denis MacEoin, "A Critical Survey of the Sources for Early Bábi Doctrine and History" 8–10.

2. All works of the Báb referred to in this paper are, unless otherwise noted, still in MS, and all translations are provisional translations by the author of this article. The following are titles of his works that contain either the word *tafsír* or *sharh* (the first four being in chronological order): (1) *Tafsír súrat al-baqara* (actually the first four of the Qur'án); (2) *Tafsír súrat Yúsuf* (Q. 12); (3) *Tafsír súrat al-kawthar* (Q. 108); (4) *Tafsír súrat wa'l-'asr* (Q. 12); (5) *Tafsír súrat al-hamd* (Q. 1)(distinct from (1) above, which includes *súrat al-fátiha*); (6) *Tafsír súrat al-tawhíd* (Q. 112); (7) *Tafsír súrat al-qadr* (Q. 97); (8) *Tafsír bismilláh*; (9) *Tafsír há'* (commentary on the significances of the Arabic letter *há'*, the 26th of the alphabet); (10) *Tafsír áyat al-kursí* (Q. 2/255); (11) *Tafsír áyat al-núr* (Q. 24/35); (12) *Tafsír hadíth Kumayl*; (13) *Tafsír hadíth al-járiya*; (14) *Tafsír nahnu wajhu'lláh*. Not all of these works concern quranic material.

3. E. G. Browne, "Some Remarks on the Bábi Texts Edited by Baron Victor Rosen in Vols. I and VI of the *Collections scientifiques de l'Institut des Langues Orientales de Saint Petersburg*," JRAS 24(1892): 261.

4. H. M. Balyuzi, *The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days* 34–39. Other treatments of the Báb's life are: Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Bábi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850*: 109-52. Denis MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Bábism: A Study in Charismatic Renewal in Shí'í Islam" available from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, hereafter: MacEoin, "Charismatic" 137-42. Another important discussion of the problems associated with the biography of the Báb, is Stephen Lambden, "An Episode in the Childhood of Sayyid Ali Muhammad the Báb," in Peter Smith, ed., *In Iran: Studies in Bábi and Bahá'í History* 3:1–3 1

5. The Báb's statement, cited by MacEoin, "Charismatic" 138, that a dog belonging to a Jew is to be preferred to the people of the bazaar because of the latter's lack of religious devotion, must be seen as an indictment of the people themselves, not their occupation.

6. Opinion is divided on just how long the Báb stayed in Karbalá', where Siyyid Kázim held his classes. The discussion appears rooted in polemic; sources favorable to the Báb prefer a shorter length of time.

7. See, for example, A.-L.-M. Nicolas, *Seyyed Alí Mohammed dit le Báb* 234.

8. There is some disagreement about the exact date; see Moojan Momen, cd., *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* 77–82.

9. The two works are *Risála al-sulúk* and *Tafsír súrát al-baqara*; they are, as it happens, probably the two earliest of the Báb's works remaining to us.

10. The most recent detailed account of the *Shaykhíya* is: Vahid Rafati, "The Development of Shaykhí Thought in Shí'í Islam." Other important discussions of this subject are: Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*, see index, "Shaykhism"; Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* 37–58; Henri Corbin, *En Islam iranien* 4:205–300. See also Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 48–69.

11. Concern with the doctrine of the Fourth Support is, therefore, one of the most convincing evidences that the Báb was writing his first tafsír in a *Shaykhí* milieu. Early in his commentary on *súrát al-baqara* He says that the Fourth Support is, in fact, the main body of the *Shí'a*. That the Báb understood the Fourth Support in this way is also evidence that at this time He either did not harbor any claims to the special spiritual authority implied by other uses of this term, or He did not want to be perceived as doing so. Compare with the way in which later *Shaykhís* were to eventually discuss the idea of the Fourth Support (viz., as *ecclesia spiritalis*), in Corbin, *En Islam iranien* 4:274–86, esp. 285. Also see D. MacEoin, "Early Shaykhí Reactions to the Báb and his Claims," in M. Momen, *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History* 1:1–42.

12. See Oliver Leamas, *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy* 17.

13. This statement must be tempered by reference to the innumerable assertions of the servitude of Muhammad and the Imáms to the essence of God. It would be misleading in the extreme to suggest incarnationism. See a characteristic statement on this question by the Báb in his *Risálah-ye i'tiqadál* in *Majmú'ah-yi athár-yi hazzat-i A'lá*, Iran National Bahá'í Archives, Tehran, 69:411–16.

14. Rafati, 48–49. For a helpful summary of the points that came to be regarded as representing the most important differences between the *Shaykhís* and the *Shí'a*, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shí'í Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* 226–28; on the importance of the doctrine of the Perfect *Shí'a*, see Browne, "Báb, Bábís," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*.

15. See note 2 above.

16. The other two works deserve some brief mention at this time, inasmuch as they both exhibit one of the more distinctive exegetical procedures of the Báb, and one which is not applied by Him to the two *suwar* under detailed discussion here. Both of *Suwar* 108 and 103, which are among the shortest chapters in the Qur'án, are explained by the Báb not verse by verse, or even word by word, but rather letter by letter. In this way, the quranic material is "exploded" by the commentator in an attempt to mine it for as much meaning as possible. See B.T. Lawson, "Exploded Commentary," paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Anaheim, California, 1985, for a study of this method and its antecedents, *hurúfí*, *súfi*, and others.

17. Numerous manuscripts of this work, which represents a commentary on the complete first *juz'* of the Qur'án, exist; five copies have been consulted for this discussion: Cambridge, Brown F. 8; Teheran Bahá'í Archives 6014 C (hereafter: TBA); the privately published limited edition, in photocopy, found in *Majmú'ah-yi athár-yi hazzat-i A'lá*, Iran National Bahá'í Archives, 69 (1976): 157–410; two uncatalogued manuscripts in the Princeton University "Bábí Collection." Many thanks to Mr. James Weinberger, curator of the Near Eastern Collection, Princeton University, for access to these last two items. All references in this paper, are to TBA (which has been paginated in a photocopy).

A word should also be said about the notorious vol. ii or the *Tafsír súrát al-baqara*. According to Nicolas (n. 7 above), this was among those works by the Báb that were stolen from Him during his pilgrimage (see pp. 45–46). However, MacEoin, "Critical" 36, lists a manuscript of the Biblioteque Nationale which he says may be this missing volume. An examination of BN Or. 5805 indeed discloses that it is a commentary on the second *juz'* of the Qur'án. At this time, however, it is not possible to ascribe its authorship to the Báb with complete confidence. The manuscript in the British Library (BL Or7845) is a similar case. Finally, a few pages of a commentary on this second *juz'* are found in the *Majmú'a* (mentioned above) 377–410. There seem to be some important stylistic differences between this material and the preceding *tafsír*, one example being a much more frequent use of the first person.

18. See the *Tárikh-i-jadíd* as quoted by E. G. Browne, "Catalogue and Description of 27 Bábí Manuscripts" 496.

19. The question, often raised, of Ismá'ílí ("Sevensers") influence on the Báb is probably best answered by emphasizing the importance of *Shaykhí* influence on his writings (see Rafati, 167). The better question to ask would be about the Ismá'ílí influences on the writings of *Shaykh* Ahmad and the later elaboration of his school, especially

by Siyyid Kázim Rashtí. To quote a recent treatment of this problem: “The Babi movement derived both its theoretical formulation and its converts more from Shaykhism than from any other school. Such a continuity in esoteric thought can be best appreciated when Shaykhism in itself is considered as the final outcome of a fusion of three major trends in post-Safavid Shi’ism: (1) the Sadrá’í theosophic school of Isfahan, which itself benefited from the theoretical Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi, as well as the illuminist theosophy of Suhrawardí; (2) the Akhbári Traditionist school of Bahrain, which traced its chain of transmission to the early narrators of hadíth and (3) the diffuse gnosticism that was strongly influenced by crypto-Isma’íli ideas as well as other heterodoxies of southern and southwestern Iran” (Amanat, 48). It would appear that Browne’s advice and hope, written nearly one hundred years ago, that “a full and critical study of the Shaykhí doctrines would ... form an indispensable preliminary to such a philosophical history of the Bábís as must some day be written” (Browne, *Encyclopedia*) remains to be completely acted upon.

20. See below, pp. 31–32; also see Mahmoud Ayoub. “The Prayer of Islam: A Presentation of *súrat al-fátiha* in Muslim Exegesis,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Thematic Issue* 635–47, esp. 638.

21. TBA 112–13, *ad Q. 2/29*: “It is He who created for you all that is in the earth, then He lifted Himself to heaven and levelled them the seven heavens; and He has knowledge of everything.” The Báb’s Arabic is: *wa’l-sab’ idhá karrarat fí’l-ibdá’ wa’ l-ikhhtirá’ sárat arb’a ‘ashar*.

22. For the idea of *tajallí* much used by the Shaykhís, but which as a technical term in Muslim discussions of ontology and metaphysics has a much longer history. see Rafati, 69–101. For one of the major antecedents for this usage, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* 152–58.

23. This “imamization” is reflected in *tafsír* works of Akhbári Shi’ism. See, for example, Muhsin Fayz al-Káshání (d. 1092/1680), *al-Safí fí tafsír kalám Alláh al-wáff*, and Siyyid Hashim al-Bahrání (d. 1107/1695), *Tafsír al-burhán*. On these authors and the Akhbári hermeneutic, see Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. I, chs. 4 and 5.

24. See sect. 2, above. This veneration was one of the main reasons that the Shaykhíya ran afoul of the more orthodox interpretations of Shi’ism, which did, in fact, denounce the group as extremists (*ghulát*) on several occasions. In his *Tafsír súrat al-baqara* it is clear that the Báb was sensitive to such charges. Very early on in the work He cites the following tradition from al-Báqir, the fifth Imám: “O concourse of the Shí’a....Be the true Shí’a—a middle position (*al-numraqat al-wustá*) so that even the extremist (*al-gháli*), might return to you and the one who lags behind (*al-táli*) might catch up to you.” See TBA 20.

25. They are, however, referred to in the *Tafsír súrat Yúsus*, as, for example, the “two gates” (*bábayn*). It is just this kind of terminological association which, of course, represents a doctrinal or philosophical affinity that was so instrumental in the Báb’s winning to his cause a number of Shaykhís.

26. All translations of the Qur’án are from A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*. In some cases the translation has been adapted slightly.

27. Al-Bahrání, al-Burhan, 1:70; ‘Abd ‘Alí al-Huwayzi, *Tafsír núr al-thaqalayn* 1:37–38; *al-Tabarsí, Majma’ al-bayán fí tafsír ai-Qur’án* 1:38.

28. Two of the manuscripts add “and her grandfather” (*jadd*), although this word is not quite so clear in TBA 179.

29. “Father of Iniquities.” The term, a way of referring to one of the usurpers of ‘Alí’s right to the caliphate (possibly ‘Umar) reflects the Shí’í milieu in which the Báb wrote. That such terminology is extremely rare in other of the Báb’s writings indicates (1) that He was not interested in what He obviously considered to be a vain and destructive sectarian dispute and (2) that He was more interested in evil or iniquity as such than in associating it with a particular historical figure. See Goldziher, *Richtungen* 288, 298.

30. Cf. Q. 7/142 where God extends the desert sojourn from 30 to 40 days.

31. TBA 7–8. The quranic verse thus explained is *al-rahmán al-rahím*—“the Beneficent and Merciful.”

32. My thanks to Dr. Muhammad Afnan for suggesting the above translation.

33. Unascribed statement of one of the Imáms or the Prophet.

34. See, for example, Izutsu, 159, where the author defines *al-‘ayán al-thábita* as the “eidetic realities” of possible things. A possible thing becomes actualized in the phenomenal world, each according to the requirements of its own personal archetype.

35. *Tafsír súrat wa’ l-‘asr*, MS Cambridge, Brown F. 9(6), fn. 71.

36. In the Báb’s words: *Iá didd lahá (al-jannat al-ulá) wa lá zill, bal fí’ l-haqíqa khalwa min al-jínán wa’ l-jínán khalwa minhá: wa hiya jannat al-tawhíd* (TBA 9).

37. TBA 23 has *tafdíl*, an obvious mistake.

38. See, for example, the description of Shaykh Ahmad’s ontology and his “absolute distinction between Possible Being and Necessary Being,” which is illustrated by a seven-stage hierarchy (Rafati, 103–4).

39. See, for example, one of the four Shí’í canonical books of *hadíth*, *al-Kulayní* (d. 328/939 or 329/940), *al-*

Usúl min al-káfi 1:149, no. 27; one of its chapters is headed: *báb fí annahu lá yakún shay' fí'l-samá' wa'l-ard illá bi-sab'a*.

40. See sect. 2, above.

41. TBA 26. The use of the word *mi'ráj* here brings an association with another distinctive aspect of Shaykhí theology. While the mainstream of both “orthodoxies,” Sunni and Shí'í, interpret the account of Muhammad's ascent, *mi'ráj*, through the seven heavens as an actual journey, the Shaykhí school taught that the story should rather be taken more figuratively. Therefore the journey was indeed accomplished, but in the spiritual realm of *húrqalyá* and not in the world of mundane experience; see Rafati, 115. On the Shaykhí understanding of worship, see Corbin, 1:194.

42. There are on occasion lists of “spiritual types” such as are found in the *Tafsír súrat al-baqara*. See, for example, the Haifa manuscript, *Tafsír súrat Yúsuf* 226, where nine types are detailed. Oblique reference to the “Fourth Support” may also be found. e.g., p. 107.

43. “Colui che s'erger sugli Attributi,” as translated by Alessandro Bausani, *Persia Religiosa, da Zaratustra a Bahá'u'lláh* 460.

44. In the study cited above, n. 3. For the 1889 discussion see Browne, *JRAS* 21 (1889): 904–6.

45. Moojan Momen, “The Trial of Mullá 'Ali Bastami: A Combined Sunni-Shí'í Fatwa against the Báb,” *Iran* 20 (1982):113–43. This important article contains the translation of several excerpts from the *Tafsír*. See also Amanat, 201–7 and *passim*; MacEoin, “Charismatic” 157–62.

46. For a fairly complete list of manuscripts see MacEoin, “Critical” 46. The two I used are photocopies of the Cambridge, Browne F.11 (9), dated 1891, another Haifa copy, elated 1261, which according to MacEoin, “Critical” p. xxxviii, n. 213, was discovered only recently. An addition. to MacEoin's list would be the Princeton University “Bábí Collection,” no. 55 (uncatalogued). All further references are to pages of a photocopy of the Haifa manuscript, hereafter cited as QA.

47. Dimensions are of the area covered by the text, not the actual size of the page.

48. Thus a typical chapter heading in the Cambridge manuscript would appear as follows: *Súrat al-imám, wa hiya Shírazíya, wa hiya arba'ún áya*.

49. Dr. Muhammad Afnan, personal communication. Concerning the Cambridge MS, Browne notes in “Some Remarks,” *JRAS* 24 (1892): 262, that the *abjad* value of the quranic *Ií*, “to me” or “before me,” is 40. The prepositional phrase refers of course to the dream of Joseph: “Father, I saw eleven stars, and the sun and the moon; I saw them bowing down before me [*Ií*]” (Q. 12/4). In either case, the number of verses is taken to be symbolic of either the acceptance, or the assertion, of spiritual authority.

50. *Suwar* 1, 2, 52, and 95 in QA. Incidentally, there are many blank spaces at the heading of the *suwar* in the Cambridge MS. It appears that the scribe intended to insert rubrications in these blanks to carry such information as the number of verses, and so on.

51. *Súra* has 112 verses, while 17 and 12 both have 111. No *súra* has 114 verses, the number that corresponds exactly to the total number of *suwar* in the Qur'án.

52. According to al-Tha'labí (d: 437 /1036), *Qisas al-anbiyá'*, the story of Joseph is the most beautiful (*ahsan*) “because of the lesson concealed in it, on account of Yásuf's generosity and its wealth of matter, in which prophets, angels, devils, jinn, men, animals, birds, rulers and subjects play a part.” See B. Heller, “Yúsuf ibn Ya'qub' ,” *E12, ad loc*.

53. Abú Hamid al-Ghazzálí, *Tafsír súrat Yúsuf*. The work has virtually nothing in common with the Báb's, except of course the quranic citations from the *súra* of Joseph.

54. As when Jacob warns Joseph not to tell his dream to his brothers (Q. 12/5). The concealment (*ghayba*) of the Imám is considered a kind of *taqíya*. See R. Strothmann, “*Taqíya*,” *E11, ad loc*.

55. Muhammad ibn 'Alí al-Qummí ibn Bábúya, *Ikmál al-dín wa itmám al-ni'ma fí ithbát al-raj'a* 18.

56. This method may be a reflex of the idea contained in the famous Shí'í *hadíth* that quotes the Imám al-Báqir as: “It is we who are the meanings (*ma'áni*). We are the Hand of God, His vicinity, His tongue, His command, His decision, His knowledge, His truth. We are the Face of God which is turned toward the terrestrial world in your midst. He who recognizes us has certitude for an imám. He who rejects us has Hell as an imám” cited in Corbin, *En Islam iranien* 1:194. The interesting statement “we are the meanings,” among other things, takes for granted the absolute spiritual authority implied in the act of paraphrase.

57. Some others are the word (*kalíma*). *qá'im* of the year one thousand, the blessed tree in Sinai, and the resurrection. For a discussion of these and other designations of spiritual authority, see M. Afnan and W.S. Hatcher, “Western Islamic Scholarship and Bahá'í Origins,” *Religion* 15 (1985): 29–51.

58. In this same *súra* the following statement occurs: *wa inna qad sayyarná' l-jibál 'alá'l-ard* (cf. Q. 18/47) *wa'l-nujúm 'alá' l-'arsh hawl al-nár fí qutb al-má' min ladai'l-dhikr bi-lláh al-haqq* (“We have set the mountains

in motion upon the earth, and the stars upon the Throne around the fire which is the point [lit. axis] of water in the presence of the Remembrance in God (*bi-lláh*), the Reality”).

59. Another more dramatic example of this “figure” is: “We have apportioned mountains on the earth, and placed the earth upon the water, and the musky air [we have caused to come forth] from under the hot coldness (*al-harr al-bard*),” QA 137. Numerous other examples could be cited. The coincidence of opposites is a standard figure in this work; the Báb’s use of it is undoubtedly influenced by such important traditions as the *khutbat al-tatanjiya*. For a fuller discussion see B.T. Lawson, “The Qur’án Commentary of the Báb.”

60. “In very truth” translates a frequent “refrain” throughout this work: *‘alá’l-haqq bi’ l-haqq*. The translation does not carry the all-important allusion to God, *al-haqq*, “The Truth” *par excellence*.

61. On this idea see Corbin’s discussion of *isomorphisme* in *En Islam iranien* 4:286–300.

62. QA 212. *Al-‘amá* is a frequent term in this work. For a treatment of its spiritual significance, see Stephen Lambden, “An Early Poem of Mírza Husayn ‘Alí Bahá’u’lláh: The Sprinkling of the Cloud of Unknowing (*Rashh-i ‘Amá*),” *Bahá’í Studies Bulletin* 3.2: 4–114, esp. 42 to end.

63. For example, one of the few mentions of any but an Imám in the *Tafsír súrat al-baqara* is a reference to “the author of *al-sáfi*,” i.e., Muhsin Fayd Káshání, author of the *Tafsír al-sáfi*. The reference itself is not flattering; see Majmú’a, 402. Káshání is criticized for his purely superficial (*qishr mahd*) interpretation of Q. 2/143. In addition, the Báb says that He has not referred to the *tafsír* of the “*ulamá*” because “such is not worthy of the purpose of this book.” It must be noted that this reference comes in the course of the commentary on the second *juz’* of the Qur’án, the authorship of which is open to debate.

64. The Báb repeatedly asserts that the work is in fact the same Qur’án that was revealed to Muhammad; see, for example, Adib Tahezadeh. et al., *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* 67.

65. Cf. Mohammed Arkoun, “Lecture de la Fátíha,” in his *Lectures du Coran* 41–67, esp. 49. Here the author, who appears to be speaking from a Sunní standpoint, makes reference to Ricoeur’s definition of the “cercle herméneutique” in selling forth what he considers to be the eight principles, either explicit or implicit, of classical exegesis. I stress the Sunní nature of the schema because in it he presents his seventh principle in the following terms: “La disparition du prophète a enfermé tous les croyants dans un cercle herméneutique: chacun est confronté, désormais, au texte qui *re-présent* la Parole; chacun doit ‘croire pour comprendre et comprendre pour croire’.” By comparison, it would appear that the same thing occurred within Twelver *Shí’í* Islam or at least was perceived later to have occurred, with the disappearance of the twelfth Imám.

66. I am grateful to Prof. H. Landolt, McGill University, for his interest, encouragement, and assistance with this paper.

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