

Chronicles of a Birth Part III

Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions in Spain (1873-1895)*

by Amín E. Egea

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Francisco de Paula Canalejas

Francisco de Paula Canalejas (b. 1834, Córdoba, Spain – d. 1883, Madrid, Spain) was a distinguished nineteenth century Spanish scholar. Chair of the history of philosophy at the Universidad Central de Madrid, prolific author, and follower of Krausist philosophy [after German philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause], today he is mostly known for having been the uncle and mentor of assassinated Spanish president José Canalejas.

On May 3, 1874, he published in *Revista Europea*¹ the first installment of an article titled *La Historia de las Religiones*

* The text of “*Chronicles of a Birth: Early References to the Bábi and Bahá'í Religions (1854-1876)*” published in *The Lights of 'Irfán, Book VII* was republished, by mistake, under the title of “Chronicles of a Birth: Early References to the Bábi and Bahá'í Religions (1873-1895” in *The Lights of 'Irfán, Book VIII*. The correct text of this article is now published in the present volume. The sequence of these series of articles on *Chronicles of a Birth* by Amin Egea, so far published in *The Lights of 'Irfán*, is as follows:

Part I : 1850-1853 in *The Lights of 'Irfán, Book V*

Part II: 1854- 1876 in *The Lights of 'Irfán, Book VII*

Part III: 1873-1895 in *The Lights of 'Irfán, Book XI*

[The History of Religions], which he dedicated to the poet Ramón Campoamor (b. 1817, Navia, Spain – d. 1901, Madrid, Spain). Like Juan Valera in his *La Religión de la Humanidad* [Humanity's Religion]², Canalejas sought in his work to justify religion's enduring legacy and man's need for spirituality. The article would later become a chapter in his book titled *El problema religioso: Doctrinas religiosas del racionalismo contemporáneo* [The Question of Religion: Contemporary Rationalism's Religious Doctrines] (Madrid, 1875).

La Historia de las Religiones opens with an interesting critique of certain academic trends at the heart of the study of the history of religion. After a brief introduction to the Vedic and Avestan religions, Canalejas introduces Babism as follows:

Even today heresies in the Oriental countries, whether in India, China, or Persia, surface as frequently as the philosophical theories circulating in German universities, the only difference being that the former move the hearts of entire populations and uproot them, as in the days of Muhammad, and give rise to revolutions that rival those of 16th century Europe.

Babism is a sterling example of this vitality of religious thought in the Orient. Its history, though rooted in the present century, displays characteristics reminiscent of past ages.³

Canalejas cites Gobineau as his source of information about the Báb's religion. His article goes on to narrate some of Babism's most relevant historical episodes: the Báb's declaration, His pilgrimage to Mecca, the features of His influential personality, the rapid spread of His doctrines, opposition from the Muslim clergy, the vicissitudes faced by Mullá Husayn and Táhirih, the Bábí resistance at the Fort of Shaykh Tabarsí, and, finally, the Báb's martyrdom. As for Bábí doctrine itself, Canalejas, in closing his exposition, summarizes it thus:

Babism's sacred literature is extremely copious. It defends Muhammadan monotheism without rejecting Christian hypostases [i.e., Trinitarian doctrines]. God is the Creator, according to Babism, but God's

creation does not proceed directly from God, but rather is one of His effects limited by time and space. Creation is equivalent to a temporal separation of that which has been created with respect to pure essence; but everything shall return to God at the end of times, and, not until the day of final judgment will God's essence become fully known. Humanity's occupation is to seek God; all of man's obligations revolve around obedience to Him. In short, Babism is an Alexandrian doctrine, a Gnostic teaching, which breaks off from Muhammadanism and seeks points of commonality and agreement with Christianity. The Bab is not God's prophet; rather he is only the prophet *for the century* [emphasis Canalejas's], inasmuch as divine revelation complements itself through a series of human manifestations that arise throughout time, until the full revelation is consummated on the day of final judgment.

Let the aforesaid suffice, my dear friend, to prove my thesis and conclude, like Max-Muller, that it is just as important to document the authentic and pristine religious doctrines of ancient peoples as it is to follow their history with a view toward what they eventually become or what direction they take through centuries and generations.

The second and final installment of the article was published on May 10, though the references it contained about Babism were less relevant.

Adolfo Rivadeneyra

Two centuries of estrangement between Spain and Persia came to a close in 1842, with the signing in London of a treaty meant to foster friendly relations and trade between the two nations. Very little came about as a result of the treaty, which was ratified some thirty years later, and it would not be until 1874 that Spain dispatched a diplomatic mission to Persia.

Said delegation consisted of a vice-consul whose primary objective was to explore potential trade routes in Persia. The mission was placed in the charge of Adolfo Rivadeneyra.

Rivadeneýra (b. 1841, Valparaíso, Chile – d. 1882, Madrid, Spain)⁴ began his diplomatic career in 1863 as a *joven de lenguas* (attaché) assigned to the consulate in Beirut. By then he was already fluent in five living languages, in addition to Latin.

In Beirut he devoted himself to the study of Arabic at the monastery in Ain-Warka. A mere fifty days following his arrival, the Spanish Consul, Antonio Bernal O'Reilly, wrote to his superiors in astonishment over how quickly Rivadeneýra had learned Arabic. Within a year he was able to write a treatise on grammar that he titled *Estudio sobre el mecanismo de la lengua árabe* [A Study of the Mechanism of the Arabic Language]. Displaying the same tenacity with which he had learned Arabic, he subsequently learned Turkish, Sinhalese, Hebrew, Armenian, Sanskrit, and, eventually, Persian.

After his tour of duty in Beirut, he continued his diplomatic career occupying several positions such as Vice-Consul or Provisional Consul in Palestine, Turkey, Syria, Ceylon [Sri Lanka], and Morocco, while at the same time publishing articles in the Spanish press and a book about his travels titled *Viaje de Ceilán a Damasco* [Journey from Ceylon to Damascus].⁵

On September 17, 1873, Emilio Castelar, President of the Republic [of Spain], authorized Rivadeneýra's appointment as Vice-Consul of Persia, and, on April 11 of the following year, he assumed his post in Tehran.

Barely a year and a half had passed before Rivadeneýra asked to return. His departure signaled the end of Spain's Vice-Consulate in Persia. Once back in Madrid, Rivadeneýra began writing, on the basis of his travel notes, his *Viaje al Interior de Persia* [Journey Into Persia]⁶, a work encompassing three volumes and which, in several instances, makes references to Babism.

In the fifth chapter of volume one, Rivadeneyra includes a lengthy summary of the history of Persia and ancient Iran. The last twelve pages contain an exposition on Babism:

Before bringing to a close this cursory report on a Nation plagued by so many tragic, though not unrelated, events, I wish to focus on one incident that took place not long ago; that is, in the latter days of the indolent Muhammad Shah's reign.

It was an extraordinary incident, not only in and of itself, but also because of what it could have led to; an incident that will demonstrate yet again how fragile is the foundation on which seemingly everlasting monuments are erected, where we declare them to be the handiwork of gods, when, in reality, they are but the by-products of chance.

Around 1844, in Shiraz, the cradle of insight, lived a nineteen-year-old youth by the name of Mirza Alí Muhammad, the descendant of an Imam, like many of his fellow countrymen, and deeply devoted to the study of religions in general, his own especially. He was handsome, affable, eloquent in speech, and, in addition to possessing such enviable traits, had great reserve, the product not of ignorance or timidity, but rather of reflection.⁷

Rivadeneyra then continues with a thorough account — based entirely on Gobineau's work — of Bábí history and precepts, occasionally interspersing throughout the narrative his own observations:

To get an idea of the fear that the Bábís, now scattered throughout all of Iran, inspire even today, suffice it to say that I, a European, would never dare utter the name of that sect in any bazaar for fear of inciting a riot.

It is truly regrettable that the apostles of the new Messiah were not more prudent; had they been, their victory would have been assured. Whenever the Government seeks to intensify its battle against the converts, it finds them in the majority. And it is not that the believers were being led by the goodness that

the religious impulse generates. Those poor souls lack such motivation; earning their daily bread is struggle enough. But the idea of enhancing their national identity by enthroning an Imam descended from Alí – and related by blood to Yazdigird, the last Sassanid ruler, no less – stroked their egos, so bruised today by the presence of a Turanian sitting upon Cyrus's throne.

This circumstance will continue to feed and nourish Babism, and will someday allow it to acquire renewed vigor. It is doubtful, however, that it will triumph in the end, because such enterprises can not be frustrated; they either triumph or die out.⁸

Rivadeneyra admits that he tried in vain to obtain any of the Báb's writings:

It has been impossible, despite my best efforts, to obtain a sample of the writings of the Bab – the name adopted by the alleged herald of the 'Great Redeemer' – nor of any accounts from the period during which he lived and which are still being written today. Mr. Gobineau found himself in special circumstances that allowed him to acquire the *Biyan* [sic] or *Exposition on What Is Important to Know*. What he has published is but a small fragment of the Bab's writings. The most complete collection of same are to be found in St. Petersburg.⁹

And he concludes his article with the following reflection:

I do not know how to describe the revolution consummated by Babism. What I do know is that in the time of Darius, during the Sassanid dynasty, [and] throughout the entire Muhammadan period, those men that proclaimed a religious idea went on to become their Nation's favored sons. Lacking an exemplar, they embrace the first man that presents himself to them, and they embrace him with faith and heroism; proof of this being that they are still in the earliest stage of moral development, which is faith carried to the altar of sacrifice. Perhaps due to this the Persians will arrive

before we do at the ideal of human society, which, I suppose, is *equalitas sub more*; in other words, what was in the beginning.¹⁰

The remaining volumes contain assorted detailed references to Babism of relative importance. The third volume contains the following anecdote:

On the eve of my departure, a youth approached me and asked if I would help out the lovers of truth; neither the Mirza nor I could guess who those lovers were, and since the lad would not give me a straight answer, I gave him some loose change and sent him on his way. As soon as he departed, the cook came over to inform me that said individual was a Bábí, and that, therefore, I should avoid him in the future, lest the Governor become suspicious of me.¹¹

This encounter is reminiscent of another very similar one recounted by E. G. Browne while in Isfahan.¹² Both stories, however, to Rivadeneyra's dismay, had very different outcomes.

Once back in Madrid, Rivadeneyra gave a talk about Persia before the Real Sociedad Geográfica [Royal Geographic Society], of which he was a member, correspondent, and secretary. Unfortunately, said society's archives are not accessible at present and it is not known for the moment whether he ever mentioned Babism either in his talk¹³ or in his correspondence.

Following his premature death, several tributes were paid to the young diplomat. On March 28, 1882, Eduardo Saavedra, president of the Sociedad Geográfica, gave a talk in memory of his friend and colleague. In the middle of his eulogy, while discussing Rivadeneyra's trip to Persia, Saavedra interjected the following:

... so as not to bore you with accounts dealing with other sects, I will just mention the one inaugurated in 1852 by an obscure yet highly energetic and ardently imaginative figure, who donned the sobriquet of *Bab* or *Door of Renewal*, and who claimed to bring a new Koran. No one disturbed him so long as his preaching

restricted itself to theological matters, but when it began threatening the empire's political and social fabric, the Government became alarmed, ordered savage persecutions, and was unable to quash either him or the disturbances caused by his followers. In the end, it had to turn to the assistance of a Christian regiment hardly impressed by the false apostle's eloquence.¹⁴

One of Madrid's leading newspapers, *La Correspondencia de España*, reprinted *Viaje al Interior de Persia* [Journey Into Persia] as a supplement, so that the references Rivadeneyra made to Babism reached the public at large by way of various printings between 1882 and 1883.¹⁵

His book became somewhat influential and helped to spread beyond the usual circles news of the new religion. This is demonstrated, for example, by the fact that in 1896, following the Sháh of Persia's assassination, numerous press articles about Babism quoted Rivadeneyra. Even as late as 1908, one author referred to *Viaje al Interior de Persia* as the first work to have mentioned Babism in Spain.¹⁶

The Sháh Visits Europe

Násiri'd-Dín Sháh was the first Persian monarch to visit Europe. He did so on three separate occasions: 1873, 1878, and 1889. The historic nature of his visits and, particularly, his and his entourage's exotic demeanor, captivated the European press, especially in the United Kingdom, Austria, and France, where the Sháh prolonged his stay in order to visit the expositions and fairs being held there.¹⁷

The Carlist wars, to his regret, prevented the Sháh from visiting Spain. The Spanish press, nevertheless, gave extensive coverage to his European tour. Naturally, in discussing the monarch's biography or the situation in Persia, some newspapers touched on the subject of Babism, recalling for the most part the events of 1852.

Diario de Barcelona, for example, published on July 16, 1873, a letter written in Paris on July 12 containing information

about the Sháh. It concluded as follows: "He has a very affable personality; he has not had to punish any of his subjects following the Bábí insurrection."¹⁸

Several days later this newspaper published the following:

In 1852, Nasser-ed Din nearly fell victim to an assassination plot hatched by the Bábís, a Sufi sect of Persian free thinkers and revolutionaries, who charge that the Muhammadan clergy have distorted the tenets of Islam and, in their greedy lust, have deceived the Persian nation by interpreting the Koran literally and not according to its spirit.

One day, as the king made his way on horseback toward Chimran, at the foot of Mount Albourz, four individuals of the Bábí sect awaited his approach by the roadside and handed him a petition. The king, unsuspecting, and led by his innate kindness, stopped his horse and extended his hand to take the document, whereupon the assassins rushed him, firing three shots at point-blank range. Fortunately, the Shah turned quickly and was only mildly injured. The assassins were arrested and beheaded at the scene of the crime, and their confessions resulted in horrible punishments being meted out to the Bábí chiefs that had plotted the conspiracy.

Secret societies have made the Shah's personal safety a cause for concern: in addition to Sufi and Bábí conspiracies, he has had to do battle with Freemasonry, which his Minister of State, Malcom [sic] Khan, introduced into Persia.¹⁹

One Madrid newspaper, *La Época*, published the following account of a military parade held in the Sháh's honor:

The review [of the troops] in Longchamps has impressed both the Asian prince and the French public, who are witness to how the nation, thanks to law and order, has lifted itself up in the last two years from the greatest of catastrophes and is still today a great nation. Mac-Mahon [sic] has acted with prudence, bringing fresh life to imperial feasts and spectacles. He

has taken a great step toward reestablishing the monarchy. Moreover, Nasser-Eddin would recall that other grand spectacle in 1852 in Tehran, when, early in his reign, the Bábí conspiracy sought to kill him and the loyalty of his army saved him.²⁰

La Justicia published the following on July 29, 1889:

Now that the public's eyes are fixed with interest on the Oriental sovereign, we take pleasure in reporting to our readers some details related to this very important figure.

Nass-ed-Dine, Shah of Persia, is a cold, determined, and resolute man.

Some years ago, the Bábí fanatics had whipped up Persia into a frenzy with their sermonizing. The Shah squelched the unrest with typical Oriental zeal, but that very harshness proved counterproductive and the Bábís' fanaticism only intensified.

Nass-ed-Dine was returning one day from the hunt — a pastime he avidly enjoys — when Bábís took him by surprise when he separated from his retinue. They held his steed and with a pistol opened fire on the horseman.

The Shah, uninjured, and in sheer cold blood, approached one of his attackers, felling him with one savage thrust from his sword. To the other attacker he gave a terrific blow with the hilt of his Kandjar, also killing him on the spot.

The next minute he was proceeding on his interrupted journey without betraying the slightest emotion.²¹

Emilia Pardo Bazán

The Exposition Universelle held in Paris in 1889, which Násiri'd-Dín Sháh attended, attracted much of the European public's attention.

One Spaniard that visited the fair was the famous writer and intellectual Emilia Pardo Bazán (b. 1851, La Coruña, Spain – d. 1921, Madrid, Spain).

The author of nearly twenty novels and six hundred articles and short stories, she was the editor in chief of *Revista de Galicia*, *Biblioteca de la Mujer*, and *Nuevo Teatro Crítico*. Her long literary career earned her the title Countess de Pardo Bazán, an honor bestowed personally by King Alfonso XIII in 1908. From 1910 she served as Director of Public Education; from 1916, as professor of literature at the Universidad Central de Madrid. Though nominated on more than one occasion to serve as a member of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española, her membership was disallowed on account of her being a woman. Today she is remembered as one of the preeminent Spanish writers of the nineteenth century and as one of the pioneers in the struggle for women's emancipation. From France she collaborated on series of articles for the journal *La España Moderna* and the Argentine newspaper *La Nación*. These letters, together with others composed in Germany, were compiled in 1890 in a single volume under the title *Por Francia y Alemania* [Dispatches from France and Germany].²²

In Paris, she had the opportunity to meet with Násiri'd-Dín Sháh personally, and she was moved by the experience to write a letter, dated August 9, addressed, presumably, to the Buenos Aires-based *La Nación*. The letter bore the rather blunt title *Un Diocleciano* [A Diocletian (an allusion to Roman emperor Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus, noted for his persecution of Christians)].

The Countess's letter opens as follows:

The Shah of Persia is the talk of the town in Paris... The Shah, that is, Nasreddin, has that great city intoxicated by his spell, and all that people think about is going to see him, catching a glimpse of even his most trivial activities, counting the diamonds on his crown, and offering to wine and dine him with feasts, dinners, performances, and diversions of every sort.

There are those who say that Paris's enthusiasm for Nasreddin is due to that inevitable and hush-hush

monarchical fascination so persistent in the Latin republics. The Shah is a king for sure, a king with all the usual trappings: the magnificence, power, solemnity, and irresponsibility of a true monarch. Nasreddin can chop off heads; populate his harem with virgins uprooted from their parents' homes, or wives snatched from their husbands' arms; embroider his horse's saddlery with precious stones and have his slave trailing behind carrying a jug of ice-cold water so that the king should not have to trouble himself by asking for a drink in some café. Nasreddin's subjects refer to him as "King of kings" and "The Shadow of God," and this is what Paris sees. Paris: demolisher of Bastilles, revolutionary, herald of freedom and equality. And instead of exclaiming, as logic would dictate, "What stupid fools these Persians are!", Paris follows in their footsteps and prostrates herself before Nasreddin, who is nary a prodigy of culture, neither wisdom, neither magnanimity, neither talent. Everyone that sees him suffers the same impression: that of a vulgar, stout, not very tall man, possessed of little majesty and deprived of that constant and laudable affectation of personal worth nowadays characteristic of monarchs (Nasreddin would not even enter the Eiffel Tower's elevators). The sovereign of Persia possesses nothing, then, to justify the febrile curiosity and ardent sympathy that Paris has shown him.

Maintaining this sarcastic tone, she continues her letter with a few paragraphs containing some anecdotes and biographical items about the Sháh. The central thrust of her letter then follows:

For although Nasreddin, with all of these familiar details, will appear herein to be a simple and naïve sovereign willing to educate himself, like the emperor of Brazil, let us not fool ourselves: the story of his reign contains a dark and bloody page calling to mind the annals of a decadent Rome during the persecutions. In 1843, five years before the young Nasreddin assumed the throne, a religious sect called Babism, founded by a Persian from Eschiraz named Mirza-Ali Mahomet,

allegedly a descendant of Muhammad's, came into being and swept through Persia. The new religion, theologically speaking, was a sort of reform movement in the pantheistic sense; socially speaking, it was gentle, charity-oriented, progressive, and humane, especially in comparison with the religion it sought to substitute. Its tenets included – and still include, since Persia is full of Bábís – the inviolability of one's home and correspondence, cordiality in one's relations, respect for women and full recognition of their rights, the elimination of corporal punishment in education, nonviolence, compassion, hospitality, monogamy, trade, honest work as a life principle, and a multitude of ideas that, truth be told, seem very good, wise, and practical, and that are at heart essentially Christian.

Babism's doctrines of loving kindness, enlightenment, and fairness spread in such a manner that the Shah was soon trembling in his throne as he foresaw an approaching social revolution that would probably be the ruin of his all-embracing and despotic power and of the age-old and barbaric establishment of his States. At once he launched a bitter and terrible campaign of persecution against the Bábís. They were rounded up like beasts, surrounded in areas where they had established strongholds, and put to the sword; women and children under the age of fourteen were eviscerated. Believers displayed heroism, steadfastness, and the faith of martyrs. Their chief, Mirza-Ali, was paraded nude through the streets, bound by a rope, while mobs hurled mud, stones, and spit at him; later they hung him on a high wall and, from below, finished him off in a hail of bullets, along with a young and faithful disciple that they hung next to him as he professed his faith out loud. Such brutality upset and riled the Bábís, in spite of their meekness, and three from among their ranks resolved to kill Nasreddin. The murder plot against the king was foiled, and all three conspirators were subjected to incredible and savage torture. One woman, a priestess of the new sect, was burned alive.

A lugubrious procession made its way through the streets of Tehran: scores of Bábí children and women, surrounded by their executioners, paraded by, the entire flesh on their bodies ripped to shreds and lighted candles thrust into each of their wounds. The executioner's would goad them on with their whips, and the victims, instead of moaning, would sing in unison their hymn: "We come from God, and unto God do we return." Every so often, a child would collapse, dead at last, free and happy. The mothers would continue their march, treading over their children's lifeless bodies. One father's two sons had their throats slit atop his breast. Later their heads were hung on stakes. Such was the bloodbath that brought Persian Babism to its knees. But clandestinely, and through the fire and zeal that persecution engenders, the sect has continued to gain converts; it has gone underground; it possesses potential both mysterious and powerful; and would that the egotistic policies of the European states not prefer Muhammadan backwardness over more civilizing, beneficent, and milder doctrines, the Shah would find himself dethroned when he least expected it and the bulk of the Persian empire would be Bábí.

In wining and dining the Diocletian of Iran, Paris operates according to her pragmatic interests; she could care less about humanity's interests. Why is it that religious tolerance, which is *de rigueur* the world over, which is invoked against Catholicism in order to protect impure rites and discarded and vain beliefs, can not become a fact of life in Persia, where an idea whose social ramifications portend greater benefits than Muhammadanism is being forced to go underground like some outlaw, and, as such, to face persecution and extermination? No doubt the French will hint at our own Inquisition (which for over 150 years was as imaginary as the boogeyman used to frighten children) and continue to portray us as Torquemadas who burn at the stake every living creature. The hecatombs of Persia will not prevent the Parisian press from depicting Nasreddin as a kind,

paternal *roi d'Yvetot* figure. Material advancements – telegraphs, roads, schools, new and improved firearms – are all fine and good; but does not moral advancement, an improvement of habits that Babism, in lieu of Christianity, would have brought to Persia, stand for anything? And could any man be called *civilized*, in the strict sense of the word, who decrees such tortures and fails to hear in the shadows of night, gripped by the fear of his own remorse, the groaning of scalded and broken children, or the youth's final gasp as his throat is slit open atop his own father's breast?

After these gripping ruminations, Emilia Pardo Bazán focuses anew on personal aspects of the Sháh's life – his relationship with women, his opulence, his physical appearance, etc. – and then brings to a close her letter as follows:

As for the Shah, cursed be the curiosity he inspires in me. Were it not for the atrocities committed against the Bábís, I would indulge him. But in the end, Nasreddin is a tyrant; and every tyrant, when he exerts his tyranny against that divine ether which we call *an idea*, and persecutes souls by torturing bodies, is odious and loathsome. Someone in the crowd yells, “Long live the Shah!” and I recall those gloom-filled victims, those hapless souls, outlawed for wanting to give to Asia a better, gentler, more humane nation... And I am forced to appeal to reason so as not to betray any displeasure, which would no doubt astonish these people, so captivated that a Spanish commoner would turn out to see ‘the darling of Persia.’

Por Francia y Alemnia enjoyed several reprintings, and, in 1891, a Mexican newspaper, *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, published it as a supplement.²³ It has been impossible to determine to date in which issue of *La Nación* this letter was published.

It would not be the last time, however, that Emilia Pardo Bazán mentioned Babism. It happened again – as we shall see on another occasion – in 1899, this time as part of one of her fictional stories.

Other Authors

During the years that this article focuses on, other authors also mentioned Babism in their writings.

Francisco García Ayuso (b. 1815, Segovia, Spain – d. 1897, Madrid, Spain), for example, was a noted Orientalist and Spanish philologist who specialized in Semitic and Indo-European languages. He completed his higher education in Munich under the wings of such eminent Orientalists of the time as Müller, Haug, Ethé, Haneberg, etc.

As a scholar, he at various times held chairs in the history of philosophy, metaphysics, Greek, Sanskrit, world history, and German.

As a writer, he was famous for, among other works, *El estudio de la filología en su relación con el sanskrit* [The Study of Philology in Relation to Sanskrit] (Madrid) and *Ensayo crítico de gramática comparada de los idiomas indo-europeos* [A Critical Essay on the Comparative Grammar of Indo-European Languages] (Madrid), along with numerous translations.

In 1876, he published *Irán o del Indo al Tigris* [Iran or From the Indus to the Tigris]²⁴, in which, in his narrative of the history of Persia, García closed the book with a nearly five-page summary of Bábí history and doctrine. All of his source material is taken from Count Gobineau's *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale*.

It is worth mentioning that García Ayuso founded and directed a language academy in Madrid in which Persian and other languages were taught. It is more than likely that Rivadeneyra, who we discussed earlier, and who was a personal friend of García's, learned the rudiments of Persian in his academy.

Also in 1876, in a work titled *La Cuestión de Oriente* [On the Question of the Orient]²⁵, Emilio Castelar (b. 1832, Cádiz, Spain – d. 1899, San Pedro del Pinatar, Spain), briefly mentions Babism in the chapter titled *Una Religión Decadente* [A Religion in Decline], in which he is critical of Islam and its

apologists and defenders in Europe. He writes in a jocular tone:

Our continent produces commentators of dogmas only; but the Asian continent, in its ingenuity and essence, produces the dogmas themselves. This exuberance of the Asiatic intellect continues unabated. Whereas here we sacrifice our lives in pursuit of establishing States or to fight for our wages, over there they fight and sacrifice themselves in pursuit of religious beliefs and metaphysical abstractions. Penitents still pray in self-imposed exile, prophets preach in the wilderness, sons of God descend from the heavens, and idealism's martyrs irrigate and fertilize the earth with their blood. The founder of Babism in Persia finds neither judges nor executioners among the Muslims, and he would not have died a martyr's death had not Nestorian fanatics killed him. There, from amid the founders of religions, quickly spreads the poetic genius that transports them away from their mundane sorrows to deify them in the heavens.²⁶

The reference in itself contains little of value, but it acquires relevance when we stop to consider that it was written by one of Spain's most notable nineteenth century politicians.

Emilio Castelar held the chair in history at the Universidad Central de Madrid, and he was the founder and director of the republican newspaper *La Democracia*. In 1869, he was elected to Spain's Parliament as a deputy and, with the establishment of the republic, was appointed Minister of State, a position he held until being elected President of the Government. He was the last president of the first Spanish republic. Following the establishment of the monarchy and an exile lasting several years, he returned to political life as a Parliamentary deputy.

In addition, Castelar authored numerous historical essays, novels, and newspaper articles, and was a member of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española.

The paragraph quoted above was republished inside an article that Castelar had published in December 1895 as part of

a section he collaborated on regularly for the journal *La España Moderna*.²⁷

Another author worth mentioning in this brief summary is Joan Montserrat i Archs (b. 1895, Barcelona(?), Spain), a Catalan poet and engineer who, in 1882, mentioned the Báb in a pull-out section entitled *El Mundo Ilustrado*,²⁸ describing him as “the new Muslim Luther.” His brief summary of Babism, once again, is based on Gobineau’s account.

We know little about this man beyond that, despite the political obstacles that the nineteenth century presented him, he was a determined author in prose and poetry in the Catalan tongue.

Reference Works

In another installment we mentioned two encyclopedias that early on made mention of Babism in Spain: *La Enciclopedia Moderna* (1854) and *Diccionario Universal* (1876).

During the decades this article focuses on, the number of reference works containing any mention of the new religion multiplied considerably. Volume 3 (published in 1888) of *El Diccionario Enciclopédico Hispano-Americano*, for example, contained entries for “Báb,” “Babism,” and “Bábí,” the first two of which had rather lengthy articles. Volume 15 (published in 1894) mentions Babism again, this time as part of a description of Persian history.

It is difficult to find a dictionary or encyclopedia published in that time frame that did not contain entries for “Babism” or “Bábí,” although no work acquired the prestige and popularity accorded the *Diccionario Enciclopédico*.

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In 1896, Násiri'd-Dín Sháh was assassinated. The king’s murder received extensive coverage in the Spanish press, as it did in other parts of the world. The unjust accusations leveled against the Bábís (Bahá’ís) for that crime allowed equally extensive press coverage of the new religion comparable only to

— albeit to a much lesser degree — that which attended the events of 1852.

This topic will be explored in a future installment.

NOTES

¹ *La Revista Europea* (Madrid) was a publication of the Ateneo Popular de Madrid. It managed to draw into its ranks a good number of writers representative of the intellectual and political vanguard of the time.

² See *Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions in Spain, (1876-1895)*, p. 71, in *Lights of 'Irfán*, Vol. VII.

³ *La Revista Europea* (Madrid), No. 10; May 3, 1874; p. 298.

⁴ Elder son of Spanish publisher Manuel Rivadeneyra, editor in chief of the literary corpus titled *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles* [Library of Spanish Authors] (BAC). He completed his studies in Germany, England, Belgium, and Paris. There is a letter of his dated December 21, 1863, addressed to Isabel II, in which he requests to be considered for the “joven de lenguas” (translator’s apprentice) post anywhere in the Middle East. The biographical data cited are taken from his personnel file from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (File P 213) and from an article published after his death by Ramón Mesonero Romanos in *La Correspondencia de España* (Madrid) on July 24, 1882.

⁵ Adolfo Rivadeneyra, *Viaje de Ceilán a Damasco*, Madrid: Printed and Stereotyped by M. Rivadeneyra, 1871.

⁶ Adolfo Rivadeneyra, *Viaje al Interior de Persia*, Barcelona: Aribau, 1880.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 236-237.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 244-245.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 245.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 247.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 155.

¹² See Mojan Momen, *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1987, pp. 23-24.

¹³ The speech was given on April 26, 1876. The society’s newsletter announced on several occasions that it would publish it, but it was never published, probably because the detailed chronicle of his journey had already been published in the meantime.

¹⁴ *Boletín de la Sociedad Geográfica de Madrid*, 1882, Vol. XII, p. 503.

¹⁵ Specifically, in its issues dated August 15 and 16, September 7, October 19, and November 3, 1882, and January 5, February 8 and 18, 1883.

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- ¹⁶ Rafael Urbano, *Bábismo y Behaismo, Sophia*, Vol. 17, No. 1; January 7, 1908.
- ¹⁷ For a report penned by the Sháh himself about his journey, see *The Diary of H. M. The Shah of Persia during his tour through Europe in A.D. 1873. A verbatim translation*. Murray, London, 1874.
- ¹⁸ *Diario de Barcelona*; July 7, 1873; p. 7287.
- ¹⁹ *Diario de Barcelona*; July 20, 1873; p. 7410.
- ²⁰ *La Época* (Madrid); July 17, 1873; p. 2.
- ²¹ *La Justicia* (Madrid); July 29, 1873; p. 2. *El Diluvio* (Barcelona) published the exact same article in its August 7 issue.
- ²² Madrid, La España Editorial, 1890.
- ²³ The references to Bábism were published in *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* (México) on January 8 and 9, and November 2, 1891.
- ²⁴ *Irán o Del Indo al Tigris : descripción geográfica de los países iranio: Afghanistan, Beluchistan, Persia y Armenia*. Madrid: Imp. de Medina y Navarro, 1876. Retrieved from <http://www.bne.es/cgi-bin/wsirtex?FOR=WBNBIBT4&VIS=W01BIMO&FMT=WBNARIA4&ITE=0004701021645&ISN=00261808&TOT=044&NUM=024>
- ²⁵ *La Cuestión de Oriente*. Madrid: Oficinas de la Ilustración Española y Americana, 1876.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- ²⁷ *La España Moderna*, December 1895; Vol. 7, No. 84; p. 161.
- ²⁸ *El Mundo Ilustrado*, 1882, Vol. 4, cuaderno 101, segunda serie.