

# An Epistle of Sayyid ‘Alí Muḥammad ‘the Báb’ to Sultan Abdulmecid

## Some Notes on Early Bábís in the Ottoman Empire

introduced and translated by Necati Alkan

### Introduction

In its first days the Bábí community encountered a combined opposition from the Iranian and Ottoman authorities. Sayyid ‘Alí Muḥammad Shírází (1819-1850) ‘the Báb,’ the founder of the Bábí Religion, commenced the proclamation of His mission to eighteen disciples from among the followers of the Shaykhí school. He then directed them to go out and spread the tidings of the advent of the forerunner or gate (*Báb*) of the Hidden 12<sup>th</sup> Imam, al-Mahdi, in His person, without disclosing His real name. The new movement constituted a real danger to the Shi‘i clerics in an atmosphere of growing social and economic hardships in times of decline and the intrusion of Europe in the Middle East. Furthermore, the completion of thousand *hijr* years since the Great Occultation of Muḥammad al-Mahdi in 1260 (1844-1845) served as a basis for messianic movements, in particular the Shaykhiyya school, in the Shi‘i holy cities of Najaf and Karbala in Ottoman Iraq. The triangle of the Ottoman Empire, Iran and the Sunni/Shi‘i ‘ulama, is important in this context. This paper deals with the rise of the Bábí religion and the reactions it received from the secular and religious powers vis-à-vis developments, mainly the religious policy during the *Tanzimat* (‘reordering period’) in the Ottoman Empire during early years of Sultan Abdulmecid’s reign (1839-1861) and in particular in the *vilâyet* (province) of Iraq ruled by Necib Pafla, followers have in turn responded to the challenges they faced.

### The Historical Context

#### 1.1. Sultan Abdulmecid

Abdulmecid (1823-1861) was the son of Sultan Mahmud II. (r. 1808-1839) and only sixteen years old when he ascended the throne. We are told about his personality that he had a graceful ‘girlish’ face, his stature being fragile and slender,<sup>1</sup> and that he hated violence and bloodshed to the extent that he changed the death penalty passed on some of his adversaries who wanted to kill him, to life-long imprisonment in a citadel. His reign from 1839 until 1861 is described as an ‘enlightened absolutism’ during the *Tanzimat*, which was between the rulers before him and the *Birinci Mevritiyet*, the ‘First Constitutional period’ (1876-1908) which comprises the rules of his brother Abdulaziz and his son Abdulhamid II.<sup>2</sup> Ten prime ministers under Abdulmecid formed twenty-two cabinets, and Mustafa Reffid Pafla, ‘father of Tanzimat,’ who drafted the first reform edict, held six times the office of *Sadrâzam* (prime minister).

Abdulmecid, who became sultan and caliph at a very young age, was a decent and polite person. Academic literature usually emphasises that he sincerely wanted to carry on his father’s reforms with the same resolution, yet his gentle but weak character obstructed the management of affairs and his reformist efforts. It was during his reign that imitation of European ways was

introduced and luxury and wasteful extravagancy, the building of new palaces and the court's expenses resulted in the financial ruin of the state.<sup>3</sup> On the whole, he is presented as 'young and inexperienced'.<sup>4</sup> He had, however, won the sympathy of the majority of his subjects and, moreover, the appreciation of particularly Britain and France, basically thanks to the drafting of the first (*Gülhâne Hatt-ı Hümayûn*, 1839) and the second Tanzimat decrees (*Islâhat Fermânı*, 1856) and their propagation.<sup>5</sup>

As to the first reform edict, modern historiography stresses that it was written under Western influence, its ideas were borrowed from Western political theory and attribute the drafting of the Gülhane Rescript mainly to Mustafa Reflid Pafla, Sultan Abdulmecid being not involved. A recent study by Butrus Abu-Manneh, however, provides ample evidence that contradicts this classical view in that it shows the impact of orthodox Islamic principles of the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi order on Sultan Abdulmecid, taught by his mother Bezmiâlem, and the contribution of several high ranking political and mostly religious leaders in its drafting. In sum, this rescript was composed in order to respond to the disregard of the *sharî'a* in governmental and juridical levels, the prevailing misconduct and injustice by local governors and the sultans themselves since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, it appears that not only members of the royal family were influenced by the teachings of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya but also several Palace functionaries at the *Bâb-ı Âli*, the Sublime Porte.<sup>6</sup>

At the closing years of Abdulmecid's reign, however, the Empire had a huge amount of debts which it could pay only by means of more debts, and the tendencies of more and more ethnic groups towards autonomy was a proof for its physical disintegration.<sup>7</sup> While in the 1840s the *sharî'a* had played an important role in measures for reform, after 1850 they took less and less account of it, as Ottoman statesmen increasingly borrowed Western secular ideals and ideologies. During those years Abdulmecid appears too weak as to participate in the decisions of daily politics and was in the grasp of his grand vizier Mustafa Reflid Pafla. It is reported that the sultan was found slamming his head on the wall while praying to God to liberate him from Reflid's clutches.<sup>8</sup> The same was the case with Âli Pafla and Fu'ád Pafla who in his and later in the reign of Abdulaziz held the reins of state affairs in their hands: the sultan had almost no right of decision in political affairs and seemed to have been a slave of his Paflas. Thus the 'Young Ottoman' reformers' critique in the 1860s was not directed against the sultan but mainly the two pillars of the Porte, the 'well-liked' Âli and Fu'ád who are remembered by historians as reform-minded precursors of modern Turkey.<sup>9</sup> From the outset of Abdulmecid's time in power, he was surrounded by inexperienced wily bureaucrats who involved the unconscious Sultan in their schemes.<sup>10</sup> In the time of Abdulaziz those 'little despots' shot out branches into other governmental institutions and had achieved unrestrained influence whereby they usurped much power, interfering in all administrative details.<sup>11</sup>

For our purpose here, we may look at Abdulmecid's religious policy. Be it through pressure from Europe or not, he wanted to unite all of his subjects regardless of race and religion, into one people as a rampart against nationalism; 'in one word to nationalize all these fragments of nations who cover the soil of Turkey, by so much impartiality, gentleness, equality and tolerance that each other finds its honour, its conscience in a sort of monarchical confederation under the auspices of the Sultan.'<sup>12</sup> Before the proclamation of the first imperial reform edict, Abdulmecid announced that 'because God had entrusted to our care the lands and the people (*memâlik ve 'ibâd*), we have to depend upon divine support and upon the spiritual aid of the Prophet. Consequently it is our wish to see that the exalted *ferî'at* is applied in all matters and that "all the inhabitants" (*kâffeyi ehâlí . . . ve beriya*) should enjoy tranquility and peace.'<sup>13</sup> It is noteworthy that the sultan's addresses such as this to his ministers to follow 'the law of jus-

tice and equity in all matters,' to be upright and honest, to eschew bribery and the like were read in a council meeting and were not concerned with general principles of conduct.<sup>14</sup> Still later, Abdulmecid's subsequent *Islâhat Fermânı* underlined the 'attainment of full happiness for all classes of our imperial subjects who are bound to one another by the heartfelt bonds of a common patriotism and are equal in our equitable compassionate view.'<sup>15</sup> Encouraged by the atmosphere of religious liberty, Sufi *tarîqas* flourished again, like the Mevlevi and Bektaflı, and new ones like the Naqshbandi were established in Istanbul.<sup>16</sup>

### 1.2. The Rule of Necib Pafla in Ottoman Iraq and the Relationship with Iran

Despite this atmosphere of religious tolerance in the Ottoman capital, the situation in the problematic territory of Baghdad was at odds. The conflict between the Sunni Ottomans and Shi'i Iranians was aggravated by Shi'i 'ulama who during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were driven by a missionary zeal to convert as many tribes. This can be attributed to several reasons. An important factor was the religious and psychological motives of the Shi'i clergymen with their mentality of a minor sect, which had suffered persecution and restriction to proclaim their faith due to the dominance of the majority group. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the 'ulama in Iraq were engaged in missionary activity on many levels. The Shi'i among them frequently engaged their Sunni counterparts and Ottoman officials and even Jewish rabbis in polemical debates so as to prove the superiority of their sect. And as stated by Shi'i sources, they always controlled the situation, which led to the conversion of the Sunnis to Shi'a Islam. Shi'i 'ulama were actively proselytising among the ranks of the Ottoman Sixth Army and the police force in Iraq, as well.<sup>17</sup>

From 1831 the Ottomans tried to restore direct central rule in Iraq, superseding Mamluk rule, which had enjoyed local autonomy since 1747. In 1842 the conservative Gürcü ('the Georgian') Necib Pafla,<sup>18</sup> the *vâli* (governor general) of the Baghdad district came to power and embarked upon the task of centralising Ottoman rule there, 'by force if necessary.' He was also known for opposing religious minorities. Necib Pafla was granted complete powers and rights and assigned 'the implementation of the Tanzimat' of direct and centralised rule. Early in his career he became a follower of the Mujaddidiyya, a branch of the religious order of the Naqshbandiyya, founded by Shaykh Khalid. Necib was a deeply believing Sunni, and the concept of Islam he favoured was Sufism. Thus, in his seven years as governor general in Baghdad he not only promoted his own Khalidiyya order but also the Qadiriyya. On the other hand, he neglected traditional Islamic institutions like mosques and madrasas. His disrespectful treatment of the mufti Shaykh Mahmud al-Alusi shows Necib's religious inclinations. A similar policy towards regarding Sufism can be seen later in the reign of Abdulhamid II, when Mahmud Nedim Pafla—son of Necib—was advisor to the sultan.<sup>19</sup>

Necib's appointment as *vâli* was in the eyes of the sultan 'acceptable to reason.'<sup>20</sup> And when Necib demanded for Karbala to be an Ottoman stronghold, and in view of the hostilities between the Empire and Iran, he was not willing to 'leave in his rear a populous town, containing many Persians, and governed by a set of lawless vagabonds . . . [who] defied the Sultan's authority, with a powerful tribe of Arabs close at hand ready to assist them in case of emergency.'<sup>21</sup> He decided to put an end to Iranian 'oppression' because Karbala belonged to the Sultan by virtue of hereditary right, and that the sanctity of the city was no reason for Iranians to live their in great numbers. Following some clashes with tribal and gang leaders, the Ottomans violently took Karbala in January 1843.<sup>22</sup>

### 1.3. The Rise of the Bábí Faith

In addition to the hostility between Sunnis and Shi'is and the disregard of especially the Shi'i

'ulama of Ottoman rule, the intensified messianic expectations at the beginning of the millennium of Imam Mahdi's occultation in the year 1260/1844 worsened the Ottoman-Iranian crisis. Necib Pafla was labelled as 'Yazid,' thus equating him with the much-hated Umayyad caliph who had instigated Imam Husayn's death at Karbala. Shi'i poets begged the Hidden Imam to return and liberate his people from Ottoman oppression who were the usurpers:<sup>23</sup> '[T]he modern Karbala tragedy was seen by many Shi'is as cataclysmic events preceding the awaited appearance of the Mahdi. It heightened messianic expectations in Shi'ism, which were already rising due to the approaching millennium of the Occultation of the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam, and apparently facilitated the appearance of the Bábí claims at least within the Shaykhí community.'<sup>24</sup> The Bábí Religion with its roots in the messianic Shaykhi movement within Shi'a Islam, was a threat to the Sunni officials who were traumatised by the conversions of not only Sunni tribes but also Ottoman officials to Shi'ism; so they wanted to prevent further rebellions.

After Sayyid Kázim-i Rashtí's (Shaykh Aḥmad's successor) refusal to designate a successor, the Shaykhís split in different groups, one headed by Mullá Ḥusayn Bushrú'í. He refused all candidates for succession and decided to retire for fasting and devotional acts with his friends in order to seek guidance, as was customary for seminary students. It was Mullá Ḥusayn who first accepted the Báb's claim to be the Promised One at a meeting in the Báb's house in Shiraz (22 May 1844). Before going Himself to the *hajj* and His intended visit to the Shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala to announce His appearance (*zuhúr*) and proclaim His mission, the Báb dispatched Mullá Ḥusayn to Tehran and Khorasan. Another disciple, Mullá 'Alí Baṣṭámí, was sent as an emissary to the holy land,<sup>25</sup> the 'Atabat, with the purpose of spreading the Báb's message before His arrival there. Baṣṭámí's task was to win over the Shaykhís and Shi'i mujtahids for the Báb's cause.

#### 1.4. The Trial of Mullá 'Alí Baṣṭámí, the Báb's messenger

In mid-summer the same year Mullá 'Alí arrived in Iraq. The Báb had entrusted him with a message to the Shaykhi community, which was in the middle of an unsettled dispute over leadership after Rashtí. Baṣṭámí could convince a significant number of Shaykhis. In Najaf Baṣṭámí met Muḥammad Ḥasan Najafí,<sup>26</sup> then the highest Shi'i cleric, and gave him portions of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, one of the earliest and most important writings of the Báb. In Najafí's assembly Mullá 'Alí declared that the Promised One had appeared in Shiraz and should be accepted as the only legitimate religious source of authority in Islam and that His book supersedes all former holy books. Baṣṭámí's statements caused an uproar among those present and Najafí, being an enemy of heterodoxies and heresies, instantly pronounced Baṣṭámí a heretic. This was a serious challenge to the orthodoxy and authority of the 'ulama. Headed by Najafí, the mujtahids of Najaf and Karbala condemned the message Baṣṭámí had delivered as a blasphemy. The Báb's envoy was captured and a letter was sent to the government in Baghdad where he was charged with stirring up mischief and uttering slanders against Islam and Muḥammad.<sup>27</sup> This decision was agreed upon also to lessen the impact of messianic tensions in the Shi'i holy land as manifested by a considerable number of pilgrims. Otherwise this could lead to another conflict and defeat by the Ottoman authorities.<sup>28</sup>

Baṣṭámí was transferred to Baghdad. The governor Necib Pafla put him on trial by a special commission consisting of high-ranking Sunni and Shi'i 'ulama, headed by the mufti Shaykh Maḥmúd al-Alúsí. This was apparently the first of its kind in Ottoman history, for it is not recorded that 'ulama of the two factions had gathered in a joint assembly to try somebody. One account of the trial states that this meant that the Ottoman government officially acknowledged the Shi'a.<sup>29</sup> But although non-Muslim communities were given legal autonomy as part of their *millet*-system, in fact the Ottomans refused to confer the Shi'is the status of a separate *millet*

(‘religious nation’), as the Shi‘is were not a protected minority (*dhimmi*) according to Sunni law, but sinning Muslims. And granting them an independent *millet* status would be the same as their exclusion from Islam and a separate religion like the Christian and Jewish *millets*.<sup>30</sup> Consequently the Baṣṭámí affair was a welcome opportunity for Iran to complain about the Ottoman’s infringement upon the rights of Shi‘i subjects in Iraq.<sup>31</sup>

Despite Mullá ‘Alí Baṣṭámí’s rejection by the Shi‘i ‘ulama around Najafí, he had success in disseminating his call among theological students who struggled with the strenuous orthodox Islamic learning. Whereas the Shi‘i ‘ulama denounced him as a heretic and wanted him to be expelled to Iran and his writings destroyed, the Sunni clerics sanctioned this and accused Baṣṭámí of blasphemy. He should be punished by death penalty. The accounts of the trial differ from each other.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, as Abbas Amanat puts it, the ‘new heresy’ provided a consensus despite the traditional enmities between the Sunni Ottomans and Shi‘i Iranians. The joint *fatwá* condemned it, and as a turning point in their relations demonstrated that longstanding doctrinal disputes could be temporarily settled in view of a threat that could cause a new schism among Muslims, and to a certain extent reduced the ‘already dim prospects of a Bábí mass success’ in the holy cities in Iraq and stood for the imminent enmities the new creed would face.<sup>33</sup>

In Necib Pafla’s report to the Sublime Porte we read that a certain Mullá ‘Alí from Baṣṭám in Khorasan, pupil of the late dissident mujtahid Sayyid Kázim in Karbala who led people astray, came ‘two months ago’ (end of November 1844) to Najaf and showed to some people a book composed of verses from the Qur‘án which were blended with certain kinds of heretical fabrications. Baṣṭámí had stated, ‘This book is divine revelation. It is incumbent upon us to act according to its laws. On the tenth day in the month of Muḥarram the Mahdi will come from Mecca to Karbala and manifest Himself. Await his coming.’ He proceeded to Karbala and repeated his comments and showed his book to all sorts of people. Baṣṭámí thereby secretly won over some hundred heretics (*mülhed*), and the book was copied. Necib points out that unless this situation, which entails unprecedented mischief (*fesâdât-ı azîme*) and is harmful to the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic world, is noticed; it will change the minds of many ignorant persons from among diverse people (*milel-i muhtelif ve cehele*) and in particular mostly heretical tribes (*aflâir-i vükerâ*), and mislead them from the straight path. Necib Pafla then cites what Baṣṭámí said at the interrogation:

*When I was about to return from my native land [Iran] to here, a man from among the sayyids [i.e., the Báb] ordered me and entrusted me [with the message]: “You are going to Baghdad; take this book and give it to the mujtahids in Najaf and Karbala. Tell them that I am the ná’ib [deputy] of the Mahdi. I will go to ḥajj this year and from the ḥajj I will go to Karbala. The Mahdi will manifest Himself in [the month of] Muḥarram in Karbala.” I directly went to Najaf. All the ‘ulama were assembled in one place. I took the book and gave it to them and conveyed what the sayyid had said. They opened the book; each of them read one or two sheets of it and then threw it away. They did not treat me with courtesy. Two days later I came to Karbala. The aforesaid book was circulated, and they sent [me] to Karbala. The sheets were brought together there, and the kâ’im-makâm [the local governor] arrested me and sent me to you.*

Upon asking Baṣṭámí who sent this book and what his name was and if he had the whole book with him, he responded, ‘The book I took with me should consist of approximately sixteen, seventeen portions. But I do not know the sayyid’s name or the content of the book.’ Necib says that this was a manifest lie (*kezb-i sarîh*), and every time Baṣṭámí was tried, he gave contradictory answers. In addition, according to people possessed of information, the book in

question was evidently the composition of his master Sayyid Kázim, and Baṣṭámí one of his rebellious followers. Even in prison when two ostensibly uninformed men from among the local people were imprisoned in order to befriend him and come around to an opinion during their conversations, asked Baṣṭámí why he was imprisoned; he recounted his aforementioned statements to them and added that he will not recant his beliefs even if he were killed. Considering Baṣṭámí’s repeated denials and because the writings he had with him could be dispersed among all kinds of people and result in an unpleasant situation, the heretics (Shaykhis?) in Najaf, Karbala and Kazimayn who profess to be mujtahids, were transferred to an assembly comprising several ‘ulama and the Iranian consul. There the confiscated writings were read and examined. It was concluded that those contained sheer blasphemies and the author is an infidel. Necib Pafla finally adds that he cautioned the people that should anyone read those texts and consent with its contents, he will be punished according to *sharí’a* regulations and that he is willing to enact whatever is decreed by the Sultan regarding Baṣṭámí’s fate.<sup>34</sup>

In a second report Necib Pafla notes that although Baṣṭámí is detained in prison in Baghdad following the verdict passed on him, it was proposed that it would be more appropriate to send Baṣṭámí to Istanbul in order to prevent mischief because of the manifest blasphemies (*küfriyyât-ı saríha*) in the writings he was carrying. It was anticipated that if he were set free, his presence in Baghdad would cause rumour among the people and the ‘ulama would be disturbed by his grievous and infamous crime (*fazíha-yı azíme*).<sup>35</sup>

Later, in a memorandum from the *Sadrâzam* (prime minister) Rauf Pafla<sup>36</sup> to Sultan Abdulmecid it was stated that it was understood in a recent consultation that if the messenger of the Mahdi remains imprisoned in Baghdad this will cause a dispute and provoke remarkable annoyance; he therefore should be send to Mosul and afterwards be dealt with. However, because the situation in Mosul was not much different from Baghdad and the ‘ulama’s rebellion there had manifested itself at another instance, it was more appropriate that he be send to the town of Bolu.<sup>37</sup> And from there he may be send further ‘to one of the islands (*adalardan birine*)’ where he can be further dealt with. It has been suggested that the word for ‘island’ reads *jazíra* or *cezíre* in Ottoman Turkish and could have meant Cyprus, Crete or Rhodes,<sup>38</sup> or even Algeria.<sup>39</sup> While it is true that those islands were traditional places of exile, it is not likely that Algeria is meant here because in Turkish it is *Cezayir*. Moreover, the original text does not say *cezíre*, but *ada*, being the Turkish word for ‘island’.<sup>40</sup>

In the same memorandum mention is made that the local governor of Bolu was informed of the danger the book constitutes and is not to be exposed to the public, but should be burned and destroyed. Abdulmecid approved the report of the Prime Minister.<sup>41</sup> Yet obviously the decision was altered. After the arrival of Mullá ‘Alí Baṣṭámí to Istanbul, the Sublime Porte referred his case again to Abdulmecid. This time it was suggested that if Baṣṭámí was send to an island, his activities could not be controlled; he might not keep his tongue and could convert the people to his false ideas. Hence he should be put to hard labour imprisonment with exile, or *kürek*, literally condemnation to the ‘galleys,’ in the imperial naval yard. Again, the Sultan approved this decision.<sup>42</sup>

A report in Persian, probably written by the then Persian charge d’affaires in Istanbul, throws some light on Baṣṭámí’s fate. We learn that the Ottoman authorities had ‘summoned him to a gathering and inquired about certain matters, and he, without practicing *taqíyya*, made certain verbal confessions. Therefore according to the declaration of the ‘ulama of Baghdad and in view of his own confessions, for a while he was sent for forced labor (*kürek*).’ And that on his way to Istanbul ‘he was held for a while in Búli [Bolu], before being removed to the capital.’ One month after Baṣṭámí’s confinement at the imperial dockyard, the Persian representative in the

Ottoman capital protested at this decision, saying that he must be sent back to Iran, since he was a Persian subject and ‘if he is found guilty of any charges, he will be punished by the exalted Persian government.’ But the Ottoman authorities ‘first denied that he was a Persian subject by claiming that he had been a citizen of Baghdad, but after long persistence they gave way.’ About his tragic end it is said: ‘When they sent orders to lift his chains and release him from forced labor, he had already passed away a few days earlier and come to the mercy of God.’ As Amanat points out, we do not know the exact cause of his death.<sup>43</sup>

Baṣṭámí’s appearance and the incidents associated with him not only caused an uproar among Shi’i and Sunni ‘ulama circles but also led to the acceptance of his message by large numbers, especially among the Shaykhis. This was the first conflict between ‘ulama in Bahá’í history, and the religious and secular opposition which Baṣṭámí had met changed the Báb’s own plans to go to the holy cities of Iraq after His *ḥajj*, and thus changed the course of events in early Bábí history.<sup>44</sup>

### The Báb’s Epistle to Sultan Abdulmecid

#### 2.1 Circumstances and Response to the Ottomans

The Báb heard of Baṣṭámí’s arrest while He was still in the Arabian Peninsula performing the *ḥajj*. According to Abu’l-Qásim Afnán’s account of the Báb,<sup>45</sup> the Báb asked Mullá Ḥasan Gawhar (who saw himself as the leader of the Shaykhi school and successor of Sayyid Kázim) to deliver an epistle to the Caliph-Sultan Abdulmecid via Necib Pafla and to arrange for the release of Mullá ‘Alí Baṣṭámí. Unfortunately the initiatives did not take place, and instead Gawhar signed the death warrant and condemnation (*takfír*) of the Báb and His disciple in the joint Sunni-Shi’i *fatwá*. In addition, we do not know whether the Báb’s letter in which He pleaded for justice, ever reached Abdulmecid.

Afnan does moreover say that according to Báb’s *Khuṭbatu’l-Jidda*<sup>46</sup> He returned from Mecca to Masqat around Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1261/ca. 10 March 1845. He stayed in Mosqat for a while to proclaim His mission to some local ‘ulama and arranged for the release of His disciple from the hands of the *váli* of Baghdad and the ‘ulama.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Afnan writes, after His return from Mecca the Báb sent letters to Muḥammad Sháh, the Iranian prime minister Ḥájí Mírzá Áqásí, Sultan Abdulmecid and Gawhar from Bushihr in Iran and Masqat in present Oman (March/April 1845) to bring about the release of Baṣṭámí from the prison of Necib Pafla.<sup>48</sup>

The Tablet the Báb intended to send to Sultan Abdulmecid is one of His early works.<sup>49</sup> Shoghi Effendi makes a note of the ‘Tablets to Sulṭán ‘Abdu’l-Majíd and to Najíb Páshá, the Váli of Baghdád’.<sup>50</sup> Whereas Denis MacEoin mentions this in his bibliography of the Báb’s early works and was not aware of the original Tablets or copies,<sup>51</sup> the Tablet to Abdulmecid is extant at the Bahá’í World Centre.<sup>52</sup> There is no copy among the documents related to Baṣṭámí’s trial at the Baflbakanlık Arflivi in Istanbul.<sup>53</sup> We may assume that the Tablets neither reached Abdulmecid nor Necib Pafla. As to the Tablet to the latter, the Bahá’í World Centre could not locate It in its archives.

Overall, there are some addresses of the Báb to kings. In an epistle to Muḥammad Sháh (written some time in mid-May 1845, after His pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina), the Báb summons him to gather ‘the believers in God’s oneness’ (the ‘ulama?) to His presence and to deliver them a letter which He has received from the ‘Remembrance of God’ and to bring forward a single verse as He did. Then, speaking of Mullá ‘Alí Baṣṭámí’s trial in Baghdad, the Báb asks the Sháh to send ‘the letter of your Lord’ to Sultan Abdulmecid and all other kings.<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere

the Báb commands the kings to ‘[d]eliver with truth and in all haste the verses sent down by Us to the peoples of Turkey and of India, and beyond them, with power and with truth, to lands in both the East and the West . . .’.<sup>55</sup>

## 2.2. The Contents of the Epistle to Abdulmecid

The Báb begins His Tablet to the Ottoman Sultan with the Qur’anic *Bismi’lláhi’r-Raḥmání’r-Raḥím*, the glorification of God. He says that ‘this Book is the decree of God’ (*ḥukmu’lláh*) for those on earth, sent down (*nuzzila*) from His ‘Servant ‘Alí, the All-Wise’ (*min ladun ‘abdihi ‘alí ḥakím*), i.e. the Báb, Who is the ‘path of God in the heavens and on earth’ (*ṣiráṭu’lláh fí’s-samáwát wa’l-arḍ*).<sup>56</sup> He advises the people to come forth for the Covenant of *Baqiyyatu’lláh* (‘Remnant of God’),<sup>57</sup> the ‘living, undoubted Leader’ (*imám ḥayy mubín*), Who is the ‘Book wherein there is no doubt’ (*kitáb lá rayba fih*) and calls men to the ‘straight path’ (*ṣirát qawím*). The Báb identifies Himself as the ‘Mystery in the heavens’ (*as-sirr fí’s-samáwát*), conveying the ‘Cause from the presence of the Remnant of God’ who is the ‘light from the right side of the Mount [Sinai]’ (*an-núr ‘an yamín aṭ-ṭúr*).

The Báb then addresses Abdulmecid:

*Read the Book of thy Lord, O Majíd, through the command of thy Lord in the preserved Book (kitáb ḥafíz). Know thou that God hath knowledge of all things in the heavens and on earth, and that thou art concerning the verdict passed on the messenger (rasúl, i.e. Baṣṭámí), the lord of great oppression (wa má kunta fí ḥukmí’r-rasúl la-dhú zulm ‘azím). Fear God, O thou man (rajul), for today there is no escape for anyone (fa-inna’l-yawma lá mafarr li-aḥad) except he believeth in the signs of thy Lord and is accounted among those who prostrate [before Him].*

Likewise, the Book was sent down for the kings (*al-mulúk*) that they might learn of the command of a new creation (*bad’*) from the Remnant of God.

After commanding the Sultan to read this Epistle, the Báb asks him to assemble the people of learning (*úlú’l-‘ilm*, ‘ulama) in his presence and to deliver them on behalf of the ‘Remembrance of God’ (*Dhikru’lláh*), to read His Book with justice and to be fair in their judgment. For God has knowledge of all things and ‘He ordaineth the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-qiyáma*) among all with equity (*qisṭ*).’<sup>58</sup> One single verse of ‘this Book,’ the Báb says, is sufficient and equals the verses that were previously sent down to Muḥammad’s heart (*qalb*), and through it the ‘testimony of God’ (*ḥujjatu’lláh*) has been completed. ‘We make no distinction between the Messengers of God, and to them do we bow our will’ (*Inná naḥnu lá nufarriqu bayna aḥadín min rusulí’lláhi wa-inná la-hum muslimún*).<sup>59</sup>

Among the addressees in this Tablet are also the inhabitants of Istanbul (*mala’ min ahl ar-Rúm*). They are warned to fear God and not to follow the command of *ṭághút* lest they be reckoned as the ‘people of the fire’ (*úlá’ika hum aṣḥáb an-nár*). The Qur’anic *ṭághút*<sup>60</sup> is usually translated as ‘the evil,’ ‘the one who exceeds all bounds,’ ‘transgressor,’ ‘the Satan’ or ‘false deities/gods’. Those who disbelieve in *ṭághút* and believe in God hold the ‘sure handle’ (*al-‘urwatu’l-wuthqá*). But those who disbelieve, their patrons are *ṭághút*; they are led from light to darkness and will be the companions of the fire wherein they abide (*úlá’ika hum aṣḥáb an-nár fihá khálidún*), while the believers’ patron is God who leads them from darkness to light.<sup>61</sup> The people of *ṭághút* whom God has cursed and left without a helper, say that the disbelievers are better guided than the believers. Those misguided are so greedy that they do not give their fellow men even a speck in a date stone.<sup>62</sup> Outwardly they speak of their belief in God’s prophets but in reality they resort to the judgment of *ṭághút*, although they are forbidden to do so. Thus Satan misleads them.<sup>63</sup> The believers in God who fight in the way of God are asked to fight ‘the friends of Satan’ (*awliyá’ ash-shayṭán*).<sup>64</sup>

## An Epistle of the Báb to Sultan Abdulmecid

---

The Báb also states that God bears witness to ‘His Servant ‘Alí in the Qur’án’ and that He is ‘the path of God in the heavens and on earth . . . He verily is the heir of the Messenger of God (*waṣīy rasúli’lláh*) in the lucid Book (*kitáb mubín*).’ The following verse, ‘And on this day the dominion belongeth to one from His progeny,’ again refers to Himself, as He was a descendant of Muḥammad. These statements are crucial in that the Báb establishes the fulfilment of prophecies for the establishment of the Hidden Imam, the Mahdi. The Báb challenges the accepted reading of the phrase *ṣirátá ‘alayya mustaqím*, ‘This is a straight path incumbent upon me,’ in Q. 15:41. The Báb renders it as *ṣirát ‘alí mustaqím*, which means ‘the straight path of ‘Alí.’<sup>65</sup> The beauty and interpretation of this verse is also echoed in other instances: ‘Verily God is My Lord and your true Lord, therefore worship Him, while this Path from ‘Alí [the Báb] is none but the straight Path in the estimation of your Lord.’<sup>66</sup> And further, ‘Verily God hath revealed unto Me that the Path of the Remembrance which is set forth by Me is, in the very truth, the straight Path of God. . . .’<sup>67</sup>

The Báb then asks the people to bring forward a proof from the Qur’án if they have doubts regarding this command. His verses are the same as those of the Qur’án which were revealed to the Seal of the Prophets (*khátam an-nabiyyín*), and that He is ‘the One who leadeth aright to the path of God’ or the ‘Mahdi of the path of God’ (*mahdí ṣirát Alláh*). One verse revealed by the Báb equals the verses previously revealed by the Prophets. ‘We have delivered the decree of God in the Mother of the cities (*ummu’l-qurá*) [Mecca] and its surroundings in three Books,’ thereby probably alluding to *Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’*, *Ṣaḥífa Bayna’l-Ḥaramayn* and another book. Hence the people must follow the Cause of God in order to attain happiness. And should one of them die disregarding God’s command, he is accounted of the people of the fire on the Day of Judgment. ‘And whosoever repudiath Our verses and leaveth not his home emigrating to the city of the Remembrance (*muhájiran ilá balad adh-Dhikr*), We will send down his judgment in the Book, like We have done in the Qur’án regarding Abu Lahab,’ a reference to Muḥammad’s uncle, titled ‘father of the flame,’ and His fiery enemy, mentioned in Sura 111.

Once more, the Báb castigates Abdulmecid:

*O thou man (rajul)! Thou hast followed Satan (shayṭán)<sup>65</sup> regarding the verdict to imprison the messenger of the Remembrance (rasúl adh-Dhikr). Fear God after thou hast read a single wondrous letter (ḥarfan badí’an) from Our Book. Do not repudiate the command of God and send the messenger in accordance with the command We have send down in the Book addressed to thee . . . Thou art not aware of the matter of the caliphate (khiláfa). The messenger is a weak servant in those lands. Yet know full well that it is We that sent him . . . Know thou God’s decree and send him after [thou hast read] this Book. . . . Follow God’s command, O Majíd, and not thine idle imaginings that lead thee astray from the path of God (sabíl).*

Would Sultan Abdulmecid have acted in favour of Mullá ‘Alí Baṣṭámí if he had received the Báb’s epistle? We do not know, but it is known that he later pursued favourable policies towards the Bábís on two subsequent occasions. The first is regarding Fáṭima Baraghání or ‘Ṭáhirih,’ the noted and only female disciple of the Báb;<sup>69</sup> the second is the respectful manner in which Abdulmecid approached Bahá’u’lláh during His exile in Baghdad.

Ṭáhirih was a famous poetess and scholar, well-versed and eloquent in Islamic theology and very successful in the proclamation of the new Bábí creed both in Iran and in Ottoman Iraq, especially in Najaf and Karbala. Her success in converting many to Bábism in Karbala provoked the jealousy and anger of the Shi’i ‘ulama, to such an extent that guards had to be placed at her house for protection. In order to prevent further annoyance she was granted permission by the Ottoman government to leave for Baghdad.<sup>70</sup>

In Baghdad Ṭāhirih was hosted in the house of the chief mufti Mahmud al-Alusi, the same individual who a short time earlier had been the leading mulla who issued a *fatwá* condemning Mullá ‘Alí Baṣṭámí and the Báb. Al-Alusi seems to have later changed his attitude towards Bábism because, according to a Bahá’í source,<sup>71</sup> in his seminal work *Rúh al-Ma‘ání* he wrote positively of conversations he had with Ṭāhirih. In these unconfirmed references al-Alusi states that he shares her beliefs but, because of the fear of being punished by the Ottomans, he was not able to utter this publicly.<sup>72</sup> In Baghdad, Ṭāhirih continued spreading the Bábí Faith freely, which caused a great outcry among the divines. The issue was taken to the governor general Necib Pafla who asked Istanbul whether Ṭāhirih was allowed to continue spreading Bábí teachings. Three months later, an order was received from Sultan Abdulmecid to release her under the condition that she stop advocating the Bábí Faith and leave the Ottoman empire.<sup>73</sup>

About a decade later, when Bahá’u’lláh was in exile in Baghdad, Sultan Abdulmecid seems to have received positive reports about Him from various governors:

*So struck, indeed, had the Sulṭán ‘Abdu’l-Majíd been by the favorable reports received about Bahá’u’lláh from successive governors of Baghdád (this is the personal testimony given by the Governor’s deputy to Bahá’u’lláh Himself) that he consistently refused to countenance the requests of the Persian government either to deliver Him to their representative or to order His expulsion from Turkish territory.<sup>74</sup>*

In Kurdistan Bahá’u’lláh had personal contacts with distinguished Sufi shaykhs, among whom He had won the heart of Shaykh ‘Uthman, the leader of the Naqshbandiyya Order. As noted previously, Sultan Abdulmecid was a follower of that order, and we are told by Shoghi Effendi that Abdulmecid was an adherent of Shaykh ‘Uthman.<sup>75</sup> It is quite possible that the Sultan’s high regard of Bahá’u’lláh was increased through this relationship.

Epistle of Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad 'the Báb' to Sultan Abdulmecid\*

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Praise be to Him Who hath sent the Book unto whosoever He willeth among His servants. Verily, there is none other God beside Him, the All-Possessing, the All-Praised. In His grasp He holdeth the kingdom of all things. Nothing escapeth His knowledge. There is none other God beside Him. Say: Him do all worship. Verily, this Book is a command from God unto all who are on earth. Issue forth from your cities for the Covenant of the Remnant of God, the living, the undoubted Leader [Imám]. He is indeed the Book wherein there is no doubt,<sup>76</sup> sent down from the presence of His Servant 'Alí, the All-Wise. And He, verily, is 'Alí, the All-Wise, the Path of God<sup>77</sup> in the heavens and on the earth. He calls the people to the Straight Path at the bidding of thy Lord. He verily is the Mystery of the heavens, Who commands from the Presence of the Remnant of God, the true and undoubted Leader. He, verily, is the Light from the right side of the Mount Sinai in the Book of thy Lord. There is no God but Me. Say: Him do they all fear.

Read the Book of thy Lord, O Majíd, through the command of thy Lord in the preserved Book. Know thou that God hath knowledge of all things in the heavens and on the earth, and that thou art concerning the verdict passed on the messenger [Baṣṭámí], possessed of great wrongdoing. Fear God, O thou man! For today no place is there for anyone to flee except he believeth in the signs of God and is accounted among those who worship Him. We have sent down a Book unto the kings that they learn of the command of the new creation from the presence of the Remnant of God, the just and true Leader. Thus was sent down the Book. Gather them that are possessed of knowledge [ulama] in thy presence, and say unto them on behalf of the Remembrance of God: Read ye the Book of God with justice and be ye fair in the presence of God in what it ordaineth. God, verily, ordaineth the Day of Judgment among all with equity. He in truth is the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful. O concourse [of 'ulama?]?! Bear ye witness that the Testimony of God is completed for you after reading the verses of this Book. God, verily, is the omniscient Witness. O concourse! Fear ye God and judge fairly: Is there any distinction in the sovereignty of God, whether one verse or several verses were to be revealed? Nay, by the Qur'án! We make no distinction between the Messengers of God, and to God do we bow our will.<sup>78</sup> If the Qur'án was sent down as a single verse, how could anyone be able to fathom the matter and say something with respect to it and utter such words? Sanctified be God from those who join partners with Him. Sufficient is the Book for this as a witness to all in the heavens and the earth, and God is the omniscient Witness. Were men to gather in order to read a Book like this, which We have sent down now unto thee, they shall not and never will be able to do this, even if the Jinn were to assist them<sup>79</sup> despite their weakness. God is the All-Informed, the All-Knowing. And We have sent down a Book aforetime; in it are evident verses from Our presence to a people with hearing ears. Verily those who follow the verses of God in truth, they are the rightly guided; and those who follow their vain imaginings, they are the transgressors. O concourse of the people of Istanbul! Fear God, thy Lord, the Compassionate, regarding this decree. He verily is the Truth, even as ye have believed in the Covenant of God.<sup>80</sup> Those who have joined partners with God have followed the command of the Evil One (*ṭághút*) after [some words missing in text], such are rightful owners of the Fire. They will abide therein,<sup>81</sup> according to the Book of God.

---

\* This is a provisional translation for presentation and discussion at 'Irfán Colloquia. It is not to be reproduced or further distributed in any form or medium. Translation revised with assistance of Khazeh Fananapazir.

God beareth witness to His Servant 'Alí in the Qur'án. He, verily, is the Path of God in the heavens and on earth.<sup>82</sup> Nothing escapeth His knowledge. He is verily the heir of the Messenger of God [Muḥammad] in a lucid Book. The heir of the dominion today is someone from His progeny and a true Leader. He is the One in Whose hand is the kingdom of all creation and all are powerless before His might. And at the behest of the Book all creatures are submissive to Him. If ye have any doubts concerning this Command then depart from the command of the Qur'án. God hath verily sent down these verses, as He hath sent down the Qur'án to the heart of the Apostle of God, the Seal of the Prophets. And with the permission of God He hath sent down to the heart of Him Whom He hath made the Proof for those in the heavens and on earth. Verily, He is the One who leadeth aright to the Path of God in a lucid Book. I, verily, am a Servant and have believed in God and His verses and what He hath sent down in the Qur'án from One, mighty and wise. Say: I verily do deliver the Cause with the permission of God from the true and mighty Leader. He is in truth the Mystery in the Mother Book upon an ancient Edifice.<sup>83</sup> Know ye, O people of the earth, that on this day nobody can escape the Cause of God. All will return to God on the Day of Resurrection. One verse, which We sent down unto you, now equals the verses of the Prophets in accordance with the Book of God. Afterwards, all the people will ask about the proofs of God.

We have delivered the Command of your Lord in the Mother of the Cities [Mecca] and to those in her vicinity, in three Books of verses of truth. Say: Follow the Cause of God that perchance ye may be of them with whom it shall be well. If someone amongst you should die rejecting this Command, verily he is among the people of Fire on the Day of Resurrection and will be amongst those who are gathered [in God's Presence]. Send thou a Book like unto this Book to the King in that land in golden ink that perchance ye may be among the helpers. He who disbelieveth in our verses and doth not leave his house emigrating to the City of the Remembrance, We shall send down his verdict in the Book, the like of which hath been sent with regard to Abu Lahab in the Qur'án.<sup>84</sup> Fear God, O concourse, and have mercy on yourselves. And bring not shame upon yourselves should ye have fear of that which hath been revealed unto after God's decree hath come to and these verses have been recited.

O thou man! Thou hast followed Satan regarding the verdict to imprison the messenger of the Remembrance. Fear God after thou hast read a single wondrous letter from Our Book. Do not repudiate the command of God and send the messenger [back] in accordance with the command We have sent down in the Book addressed to thee according to a mighty and wondrous command. Thou art not aware of the matter of the caliphate. The messenger is a weak servant in those lands. Yet know thou full well that it is We that sent him. We, verily, art potent over all things. We, verily, bear witness unto everything. We, verily, art powerful over all things with the permission of God. Know thou God's decree and send him after [thou hast read] this Letter. Verily do We write the decree of thy death at thine own hands, and We art aware of what We accomplish. Follow God's command, O Majíd, and not thine idle imaginings that mislead thee from the path of God. God's decree is naught but a manifest announcement. Exalted is God, thy Lord, the Lord of might, from what they do ascribe unto Him. Peace be unto the emigrants and praised be God, the Lord of all worlds!

---

### Notes

\* I should like to thank the participants of the 42<sup>nd</sup> 'Irfán Colloquium, London 19-21 July 2002, for their comments. Iraj Ayman, Armin Eschraghi, Stephen Lambden, Moojan Momen, and Sholeh Quinn, in particular have contributed to this paper. Sholeh and Stephen, thank you very much for your part during our stay in Istanbul.

1) 'He loved wine, women and reform' is a historian's plain summary of Abdulmecid's personality; Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire* (Penguin Books: London 1997), 265.

## An Epistle of the Báb to Sultan Abdulmecid

---

- 2) On Abdulmecid, see e.g. A.H. Ongunsu, *İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul 1941-), I:92-94; *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul 1958 ff), vol. 1, s.v. 'Abdulmecid'; Jean Deny, *El<sup>2</sup>* (Encyclopedia of Islam, Leiden 1960 ff), 1:74-75; Cevdet Küçük, *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul 1988 ff), 1:259-63.
- 3) For a vivid description of this, see Mansel, 272.
- 4) C. Baysun, 'Mustafa Reffid Pafla' in *Tanzimat* (Istanbul 1940), 734.
- 5) Ongunsu, 94.
- 6) Butrus Abu-Manneh, 'The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript', *Die Welt des Islams* 34 (1994), 173-203.
- 7) fierif Mardin, *Yeni Osmanlı Düffüncesinin Do€uflu* (İletiflim: Istanbul 1996), 123. This book is a translation of *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*.
- 8) Abdurrahman fierif, *Tarih Musâhabeleri* (Matbaa-i Âmire: İstanbul 1339/1920-1921), 106.
- 9) For a critique of their ministries with regard to internal and external affairs and an account of their faults, see Baflbakanlık Osmanlı Arflivi (Prime Ministry's Ottoman Archive/Istanbul; henceforth BOA), *Yıldız Esas Evrakı* 32/1 (lengthy letter in French), no date but probably written in the 1870's after their deaths in 1869 and 1871.
- 10) Edouard Engelhardt, *La Turquie et le Tanzimat* (Cotillon: Paris 1882-1884), I:158.
- 11) Frederick Millingen, *La Turquie sous le Règne d'Abdul Aziz 1862 [sic] - 1867* (Libr. Internationale: Paris 1868) 255. For the whole question, see Mardin, *Yeni Osmanlı* 128-29.
- 12) Cited in Mansel, *Constantinople* 265.
- 13) Cited in Abu-Manneh, 'Islamic Roots' 189.
- 14) Ibid. 190.
- 15) Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton University Press 1963), 3-4. He moreover passed a verdict on slavery and abolished it by saying that it is a shameful and barbarous practice to buy and sell fellow creatures, and that though they were treated better in the Empire than else where, they were ill-treated. Still, slavery was not abolished until the end of the Ottoman Empire. The best example was the buying of slave women for his harem; Mansel, 264.
- 16) Thierry Zarcone, *Mystiques, philosophes et franc-masons en Islam* (Jean Maisonneuve: Paris 1993), 31, 117, 317.
- 17) Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The 'ulama' of Najaf and Karbala'* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 128-34, 140-42.
- 18) Butrus Abu-Manneh, 'The Wâli Nejîb Pâshâ and the Qâdirî Order in Iraq,' *Journal of the History of Sufism* (Simurg Press: Istanbul, 2000), no. 1-2, 115-122. My thanks to Mr. Abu-Manneh for sending me a copy of his article.
- 19) Idem. 'Sultan Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda Al-Sayyadî', *Middle East Studies* 15, no. 2 (May 1979), 131-53.
- 20) BOA, *İradeler-Dahiliye*, no. 2749; cited in Abu-Manneh, 'Nejîb Pâshâ', 115.
- 21) FO 78/518 Baghdad, no. 4, Farrant to Canning, 22 April 1843; cited in Litvak, 138.
- 22) Juan Cole/Moojan Momen, 'Mafia, Mob and Shi'ism in Iraq: The Rebellion of Ottoman Karbala', 1824-1843', *Past and Present* 112 (1986), 118-30. For the Ottoman tribal policy, see also Stephen H. Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Clarendon: Oxford 1925), 288-92.
- 23) Ibid. 138-43 (esp. 143).
- 24) Ibid. 144.
- 25) Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, London 1989), 211.
- 26) On Najafi, see Litvak, 61-72.
- 27) Nabil-i Zarandi, *The Dawn-Breakers* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette 1974), 90-91.
- 28) Litvak, 145.
- 29) Al-Wardî, *Lamaḥât İjtimâ'iyya min Ta'rikh al-'Iraq* (3 vols. Baghdad 1969), 2:138-39.
- 30) Litvak, 152.
- 31) Ibid. 146.
- 32) Moojan Momen, 'The Trial of Mullâ 'Alî Basṭâmî: A Combined Sunnî-Shî'î Fatwâ Against the Báb' (*Iran* 20, 1982; British Institute of Persian Studies), 117-18.
- 33) Amanat, 238.
- 34) BOA, *İradeler-Dahiliye*, no. 5067, 15 Muḥarram 1261/24 January 1845, sealed: Mehmed Necib; document no. 1 in the addendum in Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bábî and Bahá'î Religions: Some Contemporary Western Accounts, 1844-1944* (George Ronald: Oxford 1981), 89-90; henceforth *BBR*.

- 35) BOA, *Īradeler-Dahiliye*, no. 5067, shorter letter of Necib Pafla, same date; cf. Momen, *BBR* 90, document no. 2.
- 36) Mehmed Emin Rauf Pafla held the office of Sadrâzam from 30 August 1842 to 28 September 1846 under Abdulmecid; see Ibrahim A. Gövsa, *Türk Meşhurları Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara 1946), 316; *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, 1:128.
- 37) Ca. 260 km east of Istanbul.
- 38) Momen, ‘Trial’ 140; Amanat, 236, n. 189.
- 39) Momen, *ibid.*; Denis MacEoin, ‘The Fate of Mullá ‘Alí Bastamí’ (*Bahá’í Studies Bulletin* 2, June 1983), 77; Amanat, *ibid.*
- 40) BOA, *Īradeler-Dahiliye*, no. 5067, no date but it should be later than January 1845 since it stated here that the reports of Necib Pafla were received.
- 41) *Ibid.* and document no. 4 in the addendum in Momen, *BBR* 90, though no mention of Bolu is made here. Momen, ‘Trial’ (140, n. 36) mentions a letter of the Governor of Bolu but no document in the file in question indicates this. Another document (BOA, *Īradeler-Hariciye*, no. 1340, 14 Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1261/23 March 1845) in which Bolu is mentioned and the present author has come across in a catalogue, could not be found in the Archive; see also no. 5 in *ibid.*: ‘Letter from the Sublime Porte to the Sulţán . . .’
- 42) Momen, *BBR* 90; letter of Sami Doktoro lu, dated 14 July 1978, to Moojan Momen, making references to documents the present author could not get hold of. My thanks to Mr. Momen for sharing this information.
- 43) This letter in Persian is to be found in Fađil Mázandarání, *Kitáb-i Zuhúr al-Ĥaqq*, vol. 3 (Tehran, n.d. [1323/1944?]), 109; cited in Amanat, 236.
- 44) Moojan Momen, ‘Mulla ‘Ali Bastami’, draft article for the *Encyclopedia of the Bahá’í Faith*, online at [www.bahai-library.org/encyclopedia/alibast.html](http://www.bahai-library.org/encyclopedia/alibast.html) (accessed on 3 April 2002).
- 45) *‘Ahd-i Hađrat-i Báb* (Oneworld: Oxford 2000).
- 46) Cited in ‘Abdu’l-Ĥamid Ishráq-Khávarí, *Muĥáđirát* (Bahá’í-Verlag: Hofheim 19943), 729-31; see also Amanat, 238, n. 198.
- 47) Afnan, 80.
- 48) *Ibid.* 157.
- 49) The Báb lists it in His *Kitáb al-Fihrist*; see Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Brill: Leiden et al. 1992), 51.
- 50) *God Passes By* (Wilmette 1974), 24.
- 51) Denis MacEoin, *Sources* 58.
- 52) I am grateful for sending me a copy of this Tablet.
- 53) Since most of the documents in this Archive are still not catalogued, these Tablets or other important documents related to Bábi-Bahá’í history will possibly be discovered.
- 54) Cited in MacEoin, *Sources* 64.
- 55) *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (trans. Habib Taherzadeh, Haifa 1976), 43.
- 56) See the details below.
- 57) Qur n (Q) 11:86: ‘. . .’ (transl. Yusuf Ali); Baqiyyatu’lláh is one of the titles of the Hidden Imam of Shi‘a Islam; see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam* (George Ronald: Oxford 1985), 165.
- 58) Cf. Q. 5:42.
- 59) The Báb cites Q. 2:285 and 3:84, though in different wording.
- 60) Occurs eight times.
- 61) 2:256-57.
- 62) 4:51.
- 63) 4:60.
- 64) 4:76.
- 65) I am most grateful to Khazeh Fananapazir for sharing this insight with me.
- 66) *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* 45; the ‘straight Path’ refers to Q. 3:50.
- 67) *Ibid.* 63.
- 68) Cf. Q. 4:60.
- 66) Cf. Q. 10:37, 32:2.
- 67) Cf. Q. 2:285.
- 68) Cf. Q. 7:201.

## An Epistle of the Báb to Sultan Abdulmecid

---

- 69) See the section on her in Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1989).
- 70) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful* (trans. Marzieh Gail; Bahá’í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, Ill, 1971), 182; Zarandi, *Dawn-Breakers* 272.
- 71) *Kashf al-Ghitá’* is a refutation by Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl Gulpáygání of the Azali work *Kitáb-i Nuḡtatu’l-Káf*, a so-called early history of the Bábí religion. Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl died before he could finish it. His nephew Sayyid Mahdi did it in his stead, and it was published in Ashqabad. But because Sayyid Mahdi had stepped beyond the limits of modesty and the book contained some factual errors, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stopped its circulation.
- 72) Cited in Zarandi, *Dawn-Breakers* 272.
- 73) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *A Traveller’s Narrative* (trans. E.G. Browne), 310 (Note Q); idem. *Memorials* 196. The present author could not locate documents relating to this episode in the Ottoman Archive.
- 74) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 132. The present author was not able to discover these reports or Abdulmecid’s edict with regard to Ṭáhirih in the Ottoman Archive.
- 75) Ibid. 122. No references could be found on this in non-Bahá’í sources.
- 76) Cf. Q. 10:37, 32:2.
- 77) See footnote 65.
- 78) Cf. Q. 2:285.
- 79) Cf. Q. 7:201.
- 80) Cf. Q. 51:23.
- 81) Cf. Q. 2:39.
- 82) See footnote 65.
- 83) It is not clear what this refers to.
- 84) Sura 111.

