

DENIS M. MACEOIN

## NINETEENTH CENTURY BABI TALISMANS\*

One of the chief features of early Babism is the remarkable combination within the same movement of elements from both popular and official religion. The members of the original core group of converts centred around Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb, from the spring of 1844, were all middle- or low-ranking 'ulamā' recruited exclusively from the ranks of the semi-heterodox Shaykhī school, to which the Bāb himself was affiliated. As the movement spread, converts were made outside the circle of Shaykhism, and the provincial Bābī leaders of the late 1840's included important local 'ulamā' such as Sayyid Yaḥyā Dārābī in Nayrīz and Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Zanjānī in Zanjān. At the same time, Shīrāzī himself and some of his early converts, including members of his own family, were not 'ulamā', but rather laymen with an intense interest in religious matters and a smattering of theological and philosophical knowledge<sup>1</sup>. Although the leadership of the sect remained firmly in the hands of 'ulamā', lay members played a greater role within it than they could have done in the wider context of official Shi'ism and, as time went on, an increasing number of merchants, urban workers, and peasants affiliated themselves in some degree to the movement<sup>2</sup>.

It is clear from some early Bābī writings that a major preoccupation of many of those who accepted the claims of Shīrāzī was the possibility of dispensing with rational proofs or knowledge in religious

\* This paper was originally delivered at the Annual Conference of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, Cambridge, 1983.

<sup>1</sup> On the amateur scholarship of some of the Bāb's relatives, see A. Amanat, 'The Early Years of the Bābī Movement', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1981, pp. 111-113.

<sup>2</sup> For analyses of the social origins of the Babis in several major centres, see M. Momen 'The Social Basis of the Bābī Upheavals in Iran (1848-1853): A Preliminary Analysis', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15 (1983): 157-183.

matters. In an important but hitherto neglected Bābī treatise<sup>3</sup> dating from the early period (about 1846), the anonymous author condemns those who depend on proofs such as the Qurʾān and *sunna* for their knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of ‘the new word’<sup>4</sup>. By way of contrast, the same writer praises the earliest followers of the Bāb for having believed without proofs<sup>5</sup> and urges the ‘brethren’ to ‘abandon those imaginations which you have conceived and which you have named “knowledge”’<sup>6</sup>. The same treatise stresses the value of the organs of the heart (*fuʿād*) in reaching true understanding<sup>7</sup> and emphasizes spiritual love as the prerequisite for gnosis<sup>8</sup>. This concern for pure knowledge was exhibited by both laymen and ‘*ulamāʾ*’, and owed much to the Shaykhī origins of the movement, in which traditional Islamic pre-occupations with ‘*ilm* and *maʿrifa* were given an unusual emphasis<sup>9</sup>.

From its inception, Shaykhism had been particularly concerned with the problem of securing uncorrupted and comprehensive knowledge. Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Zayn al-Dīn al-Aḥsāʾī (1166/1753-1241/1826)<sup>10</sup>, upon whose teachings the school was based after his death, was one of the most brilliant Shīʿī theologians of his day. Although his major works<sup>11</sup> were concerned primarily with aspects of theological Shīʿism (*ḥikma ilāhiyya*), he also wrote at length on most areas of Shīʿī doctrine and practice, including theology, Qurʾān, *ḥadīth*, and *fiqh*. His chief disciple and successor, Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (d.1260/1844), emphasized the universality of al-Aḥsāʾī’s knowledge, enumerating some thirty sciences in which he was adept<sup>12</sup>. These

<sup>3</sup> This untitled and anonymous *risāla* is contained in a manuscript collection entitled *Šūrāt-i nivishtijāt wa āthār-i ašhāb-i awwalīyya-yi amr-i aʿlā ki dar itḥbāt-i amr-i badiʾ nivishtānd*, Iranian National Bahāʾī Archives. A xerox edition of the manuscript bearing the number 80 was produced in 133 *badiʾ*/1977. The *risāla* in question is on pp. 212-282. The name of the writer is not given anywhere, but the style and content strongly favour attribution of the treatise to Fāṭima Baraghānī Qurrat al-ʿAyn, a possibility which is strengthened by the writer’s personal description in the feminine as *hādhihi ʿl-aqalla min al-dharra* (p. 278).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>9</sup> On traditional theories of knowledge, see F. Rosenthal *Knowledge Triumphant* (Leiden, 1970), especially pp. 142-154, on Shīʿī notions.

<sup>10</sup> See D. M. MacEoin ‘*From Shaykhism to Babism*’, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1979, chapter 2; *idem* ‘Šayḡ Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī’, *Encyclopaedia Iranica* vol. 1, pp. 674-8.

<sup>11</sup> A full list of al-Aḥsāʾī’s works is given in Abu ʿl-Qāsim ibn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (Ibrāhīmī), *Fihrist-i kutub-i ... Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsāʾī wa sāʿir-i mashāyikh-i ʿiẓām*, 3rd. ed. (Kirman, n.d. [1977]), pp. 219-288.

<sup>12</sup> Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī *Dalil al-mutaḥayyirīn* (n.p., 1276/1859-60), pp. 13-16.

include the main occult sciences of astrology, alchemy, numerology, gematria, *jafr*, and the four disciplines known as *limiyā*, *himiyā*, *simiyā*, and *rimiyā*<sup>13</sup>.

The breadth of al-Aḥsā'ī's knowledge was, however, less significant for his followers than the source from which it was supposed to come. Despite his excommunication (*takfir*) towards the end of his life, al-Aḥsā'ī may be fairly regarded, not just as one of the leading Shī'ī thinkers of the early nineteenth century, but, more particularly, as the chief representative of a central strand in the Uṣūlī tradition, in which non-rational modes of understanding in religious matters were emphasized<sup>14</sup>. The possibility that knowledge could be acquired, not through learning or *taqlīd*, but through intuitive revelation (*kashf*) involving direct contact with supernatural agencies in the interworld of the *barzakh*, was for many Uṣūlī scholars a necessary corollary to the use of reason in the pursuit of the traditional sciences. Al-Aḥsā'ī went much further than any of his contemporaries in claiming more or less perpetual access to supernatural sources of knowledge: 'The *'ulamā*', he writes, 'derive their knowledge one from the other, but I have never followed in their way. I have derived what I know from the Imāms of guidance, and error cannot find its way into my words, since all that I confirm in my books is from them and they are preserved from sin and ignorance and error. Whoso derives (his knowledge) from them shall not err, inasmuch as he is following them'<sup>15</sup>.

This knowledge was, moreover, transferable. In speaking of his successor, Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī, al-Aḥsā'ī emphasized his own role as a medium for the transmission of what was ultimately divinely-inspired knowledge: 'He (Rashtī) has learnt what he knows orally from me (al-Aḥsā'ī), and I have learnt (what I know) orally from the Imāms, and they have learnt from God without the mediation of anyone'<sup>16</sup>. Later Shaykhī leaders, notably Ḥājj Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (1225/1809-1288/1870), the first *shaykh* of the Kerman

<sup>13</sup> Together with alchemy (*kimiyā*), these form the 'five occult sciences' that are the subject of the *Asrār-i Qāsimī* (Bombay, 1302/1885), attributed to Ḥusayn Wā'iz-i Kāshifī (d.1505). Their initial letters form the words *kulluhu sirr*, 'it is all a mystery'. *Limiyā* is the science of talismans, *himiyā* that of spells and suchlike, *simiyā* seems to be equivalent to mesmerism, and *rimiyā* to be nothing more than conjuring. See E. G. Browne *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental MSS. belonging to the late E. G. Browne*, ed. R. A. Nicholson (Cambridge, 1932), p. 200.

<sup>14</sup> On this theme, see Amanat, 'Early Years', pp. 23-29.

<sup>15</sup> Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ al-fawā'id* (n.p., 1272/1856), p. 4 (the original text was completed in 1233/1818).

<sup>16</sup> Quoted Ḥājj Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī *Hidāyat al-tālibin*, 2nd. ed. (Kirman, 1380/1960-61), p. 71.

branch of the school, even sought to bypass al-Aḥsā'ī in claiming access to direct knowledge from God for themselves. Karīm Khān, for example, speaks of God's eternal 'Book of knowledge' and says that 'whatever I write here is a dictation from that Book. The visible book I am writing with my hand is the copy of that Book written by God Himself'<sup>17</sup>.

The implications of such direct access to knowledge are discussed with respect to Karīm Khān by a later head of the school in the following terms: 'The best introduction and explanation of his life is his books, which dealt in an original fashion with all arts and sciences. They were not copied from anyone else, for he obtained all his knowledge from the Family of Muḥammad (i.e. the Imāms). In contrast to most men, who imagine that the knowledge of the Family of Muḥammad is limited to the explanation of the regulations of the religious law, acts of worship, and social relations, he believed that all sciences relative to this world and the next, to the past and the future, were to be found in their correct form in the possession of the Family of Muḥammad'<sup>18</sup>. Karīm Khān's own faith in the universality of his knowledge was enough to encourage him to write on an extraordinary range of topics, from medicine to optics to the occult sciences<sup>19</sup>.

Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1235/1819-1266/1850) began his career with claims very similar to these<sup>20</sup>. In his early writings, he describes himself as the 'gate' (*bāb*) of the hidden imām, sent by him as his Proof and Remembrance to men, in order to prepare them for his imminent return. His writings are 'revealed' to him by the Imām, who has received them from God<sup>21</sup>, or, in different terminology, the Imām inspires (*awḥā*) the Bāb with what God has inspired him<sup>22</sup>. Thus, he maintains, his knowledge consists of what God himself has taught him<sup>23</sup>. One of the Bāb's leading followers, Qurrat al-'Ayn, a female scholar who was the effective head of the Bābī community in Iraq, writes in a letter of how, in every age, God reveals what she terms 'the bearer of the knowledge of the unseen' (*ḥāmil-i*

<sup>17</sup> Quoted M. Bayat *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse University Press, 1982), p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> Ibrāhīmī, *Fihrist*, p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> A full bibliography of his writings may be found *ibid.*, pp. 360-487.

<sup>20</sup> On the early claims of the Bāb, see MacEoin, 'From Shaykhism to Babism', chapter 5; *idem* 'Early Shaykhī Reactions to the Bāb and his Claims' in M. Momen (ed.) *Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History*, vol. I (Los Angeles, 1983), pp. 16-19.

<sup>21</sup> Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, Ms. F. 11 in the E. G. Browne Oriental Collection, Cambridge University Library, f. 196b; cf. f. 29b.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 4b; cf. f. 90b.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 5b.

'ilm-i ghayba)<sup>24</sup>. She goes on to say that knowledge of the unseen has now been revealed and that her recipient should recognize the Bāb as 'the bearer of divine knowledge' (*ḥāmil-i 'ilm-i rabbāniyya*)<sup>25</sup>. In the anonymous *risāla* referred to earlier—which may, in fact, be by Qurrat al-'Ayn—the author states that 'in this day, there is no knowledge except what the Remembrance (i.e. the Bāb) has taught. And he teaches only what he has beheld within himself, according to what his Lord has caused him to behold upon himself, from the description of His own Self'<sup>26</sup>.

In 1848, the Bāb, possibly encouraged by Qurrat al-'Ayn's increasing emphasis on the advent of an age of inner truth succeeding that of outward observance, proclaimed himself to be the hidden Imām in person. Using this as a starting-point, as it were, he went on to develop his claims in a radical manner, describing himself as a manifestation of the Universal or Primal Will empowered to abrogate the religious dispensation of Islam and to usher in a new revelation<sup>27</sup>. As such, he was not so much in contact with divine knowledge as its source, just as he was the cause of the entire creation and the one who had sent all the previous prophets and their books<sup>28</sup>. He could, therefore, reveal to men not only material knowledge, but also gnosis located in the interworld of *barzakh* or *hūrqalyā*<sup>29</sup>.

What was the content of this supernatural knowledge that the Bāb claimed to make known in his writings? In the broadest sense, it differs little from most other systems of esoteric knowledge in Sufism or extreme Shi'ism, in that it purports to reveal the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) and structure of exoteric reality and, in particular, the true

<sup>24</sup> Untitled *risāla* in possession of Mr Nūri Nazārī, p. 12 (copy in possession of present author).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> *Risāla* in *Ṣūrat-i nivishtijāt*, pp. 288-289.

<sup>27</sup> This claim is consistently urged in the Bāb's later works, principally the *Bayān-i Fārsi* ([Tehran], n.d.), *Dālā'il-i sab'a* (Tehran), n.d.), and *Kitāb-i panj sha'n* (Tehran), n.d.).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, *Bayān-i Fārsi* 2:1 (p. 18): 'let him ... ask whatever he wishes on any question, to be answered in the form of verses, so that he may hear for himself how the source (*mubdi'*) neither hesitates nor composes artificially nor consciously considers the order of words'; 2:8 (p. 39): 'one should regard all things as coming into existence through the Primal Will'; 2:8 (p. 37): 'Whatever is mentioned concerning the "appearance" of God (*ẓuhūr Allāh*) refers to the Tree of Reality (i.e. the manifested Primal Will), which is a token of none but Him. That is a Tree which has been and is responsible for sending forth all the divine Messengers and causing all the Books to descend'.

<sup>29</sup> See *ibid.*, 2:9 (p. 44): 'How often has that same locus of the Universal Will (*maẓhar-i mashiyyat-i kullīyya*) opened up a gate of mystic knowledge (*ma'rifa*) in the Interworld (*barzakh*)'. On Karīm Khān Kirmānī's ideas regarding the availability of knowledge in the interworld, see Bayat *Mysticism and Dissent*, pp. 75, 77. On the Shaykhī concept of *hūrqalyā*, see H. Corbin *Terre Céleste et Corps de Résurrection* (Paris, 1960), *passim* (see index).

significance of expressions of that reality in conventional scriptural terminology. The Bāb is especially concerned to uncover the meaning behind eschatological concepts such as resurrection, the grave, the questioning of the dead, death itself (and life), the hour, the bridge, the book, and so forth, which he reinterprets in an original allegorical manner within the framework of an elaborate metaphysical system. The Bāb's view of the world is rooted in a subtle vision of existence as structured according to a series of correspondences between names and the realities that underlie them, in patterns familiar to us from Hurūfī, Bektāshī, and related speculations.

This system of correspondences is linked in a unique way to the Bāb's theory of knowledge in general, much as the idea of *kashf* is central to Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology<sup>30</sup>. A knowledge of the realities lying behind words and letters is not merely part of a more comprehensive knowledge, but serves as the key to such a knowledge and forms the most distinctive feature of the Bāb's revelation of hidden truth. In one of the last sections of the *Kitāb-i panj sha'n* or *Shu'ūn-i khamsa*<sup>31</sup>, an extremely late major work of the Bāb's, written between 19 March and 5 April 1850, God is credited with the following statement: 'I have created the letters and made them the keys of every science (*mafātīḥ kulli 'ilm*)'<sup>32</sup>. He then goes on to address all things, saying 'consider everything from the most exalted heights to the lowliest atom: you shall behold it all in the twenty-eight letters, just as you have beheld all the letters in it; and you shall behold all the spirits of the letters in their spirits'<sup>33</sup>. Some lines later, He continues: 'I created an essence of hidden<sup>34</sup> and concealed knowledge, and I stored it up behind the veils of the unseen from the beginning that has no beginning until now ... We did not see any servants on whom to send down that knowledge, and so We kept it hidden in Our

<sup>30</sup> On Ibn al-'Arabī's theory of the soul being able to know its own *qadar* in its archetype when in a state of *kashf*, see T. Izutsu *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism. Part One: The Ontology of Ibn al-'Arabī* (Tokyo, 1966), pp. 73-74.

<sup>31</sup> See note 27 above. This book derives its name from the 'five grades' in which the Bāb wrote his works, these being *āyāt* (Quranic-style 'verses'), *munājāt* (prayers), *khūṭba* (homilies), *tafsīr* (commentaries), and *Fārsī* (Persian-language writings): see *Bayān-i Fārsī* 3:17 (p. 102), 6:1 (p. 184), 9:2 (p. 313), where *ṣuwar 'ilmiyya* (scientific treatises) replace *khūṭba*. The last five sections of the *Kitāb-i panj sha'n* (which were addressed to Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khū'ī Dayyān), seem to have been distributed independently and to have been variously named the *Lawḥ-i ḥurūfāt*, *Risāla-yi Ja'fariyya*, and *Kitāb-i haykal* (or *hayākil*): see D. M. MacEoin 'The Identity of the Bāb's *Lawḥ-i ḥurūfāt*' in *Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin* 2:1 (June 1983): 78-79.

<sup>32</sup> *Panj sha'n*, p. 405.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Text reads *masṭūr*, but on analogy with the recurring phrase *'ilm maknūn makhzūn*, I prefer to read *mastūr*.

presence until now ... But We taught (it to) the Thrones of the Reality<sup>35</sup> and then to the first believers<sup>36</sup> in every revelation, and We commanded them to conceal (it). But now, since We have observed in this Resurrection<sup>37</sup> that the names of all (things) have become Our tokens, We have desired to show bounty towards them through this knowledge, as an act of grace on Our part ...'<sup>38</sup>

This knowledge or science is, of course, the science of gematria and, in particular, the science of letters as expressed in the construction of talismanic devices. In a later section of the *Panj sha'n*, the Bāb, now writing in his own person, explains the importance of this knowledge and provides a brief summary of what it entails.

Among the bounties bestowed by God on the Point of the Bayān (i.e. the Bāb)<sup>39</sup> is the knowledge of all things in a single person (*nafs-i wāhid*), so that he may behold the creation (*takwīn*) in the world of letters, with the eye of certitude. This is a perfect proof unto all men, like the verses. It was one of those things hidden in the divine knowledge which was not sent down until now, and it is more glorious than any other knowledge. All the (holy) books were sent down and shall be sent down on the basis of this knowledge ... In brief, all things are confined to the twenty-eight letters (of the alphabet). Likewise, the creation of all things is confined to the meanings contained in these letters. God has collected together these letters in eleven degrees within His knowledge (i.e. 11 degrees corresponding to the sum of the letters *hā'* and *wāw*, representing existence or *huwiyya*) and has established them as the talisman (*haykal*) of the Primal Will (*mashiyyat-i awwaliyya*), which is the Primal Man (*insān-i awwal*). The outward form (*zāhir*) of the talisman is the *hā'* (= 5), while its inward nature (*bāṭin*) is the *wāw* (= 6). He then created eighteen talismans in the shadow of this talisman, within the ocean of names (i.e. in the world of the divine names). Nor can they become twenty, for the utmost limit of the number of the names is the name *mustaghāth* (= 2001)<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> *A'rāsh al-ḥaqīqa*, i.e. the manifestations of the Universal Will. On this use of 'throne', see *ibid.*, p. 422; *Bayān-i Fārsī* 7:10 (p. 252).

<sup>36</sup> *Al-ḥayy al-awwal*, the 'first Living', that is the 'Letters of the Living' (*al-ḥayy* = 18), who are the first eighteen to believe in the manifestation of the Will (see MacEoin 'From Shaykhism to Babism', chapter 4).

<sup>37</sup> *Tilka 'l-qiyāma*. In the Bābī system, a 'resurrection' occurred each time the manifestation of the Universal Will appeared (see *Bayān-i Fārsī*, 2:7, pp. 30-33).

<sup>38</sup> *Panj sha'n*, p. 405.

<sup>39</sup> *Nuqta-yi Bayān*: the manifestation of the Universal Will is the 'Point' from which all things originate, like a line of writing from an initial dot, and is the essence of the divine word in each era. Thus, Jesus was the 'Point of the Gospel', Muḥammad the 'Point of the Qur'ān', and the Bāb the 'Point of the Bayān'. The Bab is more frequently referred to as *Nuqta-yi Ūlā*, the 'Primal Point'.

<sup>40</sup> *Panj sha'n*, pp. 446-447.

The meaning of this rather obscure passage is made somewhat clearer a few lines later, when the Bāb states that this knowledge has only been revealed so that the 'guides of the Bayān' may be enabled to prove to others how the whole of the Qur'ān is contained in a single point<sup>41</sup>. This is, of course, a reference to the tradition that the whole of the *Fātiḥa* is in the *basmala*, the whole of the *basmala* in the *bā*', and the whole of the *bā*' in the point beneath it. In Shī'ī tradition, the point is identified with 'Alī. A related tradition, of considerable relevance to the present discussion, is that 'knowledge is a single point which the ignorant have multiplied'.

According to the system elaborated by the Bāb in the Persian *Bayān*, the 'Primal Point' from which all things originate is the Universal Will, which first manifests itself in the form of nineteen letters, the numerical equivalent of the divine name *al-wāḥid*. In the religious sphere, this is expressed by the appearance of the Point in the person of the manifestation of the Universal Will, followed by his first eighteen disciples, the first things to be created in each cycle. When nineteen of these *wāḥids* have been brought into being, 'all things' (*kullu shay'* = 361) are symbolically created. This process is again reflected in the structure of the *Bayān* in nineteen sections of nineteen chapters, or the Babi year of nineteen months, each of nineteen days<sup>42</sup>.

In the *Kitāb-i panj sha`n*, however, the Bāb describes this process in a rather more complex way, using as the basis of his system the concept of the Primal Will as a talisman or temple (*haykal*), a notion that can be found in the Persian *Bayān*, where God says, 'there is nothing whatsoever whose decree does not return to this human talisman (*haykal-i insānī*), which has been created at My command. And that talisman returns by degrees until it reaches My Prophet'<sup>43</sup>. This procession of talismans is illustrated in the *Panj sha`n* by the case of Muḥammad, who is the 'first talisman', followed by the second, who is 'Alī. Although the talisman of 'Alī and his inner being were created by Muḥammad, 'Alī nevertheless possessed what was sent down by God in the Qur'ān, and this was true of each of the succeeding talismans through to the nineteenth, which was the fourth of the *abwāb*<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 447; cf. p. 434.

<sup>42</sup> A useful summary of this subject may be found in A. L. M. Nicolas (trans.) *Le Béyan Persan*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1911-1914), vol. I, pp. 7-9, f.n. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Bayān-i Fārsī* 2:1 (pp. 14-15).

<sup>44</sup> *Panj sha`n*, p. 412. In fact, the fourth *bāb* was the eighteenth, if we count Muḥammad, Fāṭima, and twelve Imāms.



This concept is not restricted to Muḥammad and his successors, however, as the following passage shows :

‘You, O all things, had your origin in a single individual and you shall return to a single individual. You shall recognize that individual, for it is throne of the manifestation (*zuhūr*) of God and the talisman of talismans (*haykal al-hayākil*) in the talisman of God ... Compare this by way of analogy to the sun, then consider the fruits of such an analogy. It shall be your salvation in every revelation and your guidance during every period of inner truth<sup>45</sup>. Whenever the sun of reality rises up, it is but a single sun, and whenever it sets, it is (still) but a single sun<sup>46</sup>.

All of this can be expressed in a more direct fashion through the construction of actual talismans in which the pattern of the reality underlying all creation can be discerned. In the *Dalā'il-i sab'a*, which would appear to have been completed shortly after the *Panj sha'n*, the Bāb writes that ‘among the firm evidences is the knowledge of all things in a single individual, the elaboration of which is on the level of miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*). This hidden and concealed knowledge has been explained in the *Kitāb-i hayākil-i wāhid*, nor was anyone aware of it before this. The fruit of it is this, that one should see in the letters how all things are joined together in eleven degrees, which is the talisman of existence (*haykal-i huwiyyat*). When you cause the first talisman to journey through the ocean of names, it reaches as far as nineteen, but it does not enter the number twenty’<sup>47</sup>.

The above-mentioned *Kitāb-i hayākil-i wāhid* is, as is evident from a number of other sources, nothing other than the last five sections of the *Kitāb-i panj sha'n*, which are devoted to the explanation of this subject. In these sections, the Bāb provides practical guidance as to how to construct a series of nineteen talismans containing various divine names calculated on an elaborate mathematical basis, as follows<sup>48</sup> :

The first name is obtained by writing down the letters of the alphabet in their numerological order. Since these number twenty-eight, the divine name *wahid* (= 28) is obtained.

<sup>45</sup> The *zuhūr* is when the manifestation of the Will is actually manifested, the *buqūn* the period from his death to his reappearance.

<sup>46</sup> *Panj sha'n*, p. 423. On the return to a single individual, cf. p. 411 and *Bayān-i Fārsī* 1:1 (p. 5).

<sup>47</sup> *Dalā'il-i sab'a*, pp. 45-46. See also *Panj sha'n*, pp. 422-423: ‘He (God) chose out of the arena of existence a Throne for the revelation of His Essence and a Chair for the dawning of His Self. And He shone forth upon him in Himself through His Self, then sent down the verses of His holiness upon him, then taught him the knowledge of all things in the knowledge of the talismans of oneness’.

<sup>48</sup> *Panj sha'n*, pp. 406-411.

Next, the dots representing these letters numerically are taken, these being nine units, eighteen tens (i.e. the tens plus the units), twenty-seven hundreds (i.e. the hundreds plus the tens plus the units), and four thousands (i.e. the thousand plus the three other groups). These number fifty-eight in all, which gives us the name *maḥbūb* (= 58).

Next, the *alifs* (that is, the ones) are taken, as follows: 1, 10, 11, 100, 101, 110, 111, 1000, 1001, 1010, 1011, 1100, 1101, 1110, 1111. There are thirty-two occurrences of the numeral one, so we have the name *bīdawī* (= 32). Like many of the names that follow, this is obviously an artificial construction of the Bāb's.

This pattern is continued through the rest of the units up to nine, giving us a total of eleven names, arranged in the following talismanic device:

	يا اله ٣٦	يا جزل ٤٠	يا بيدوى ٣٢	يا محبوب ٥٨	يا وعيد ٢٨	الميكال الاول
يا حق ١٠٨	يا ملوك ٩٦	يا عزز ٨٤	يا بساط ٢٢	يا دويم ٦٠	يا ليوب ٤٨	

Fig. 1.

In this diagram, the top five lines (those of the *hā'*) are the exterior (*ẓāhir*) of the first talisman, while the bottom six (those of the *wāw*) are its interior (*bāṭin*). This first talisman, the Bāb writes, is 'the essence of the talismans, whereby all are created. It is the unity without numbers; you all originate in it and you shall all return to it'<sup>49</sup>.

The remaining eighteen talismans are constructed on the same pattern, except that the numbers used to obtain the names are doubled in the second, trebled in the third, and so on. In other words, the first talisman is constructed on the basis of *alif* (1), the second on the basis of *bā'* (2), the third on the basis of *jīm* (3), up to *tā'* and *yā'* (19)<sup>50</sup>. In the final talisman, it is possible to see 'the form of comprehensiveness' (*ṣūrat al-jam'*)<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407. On the '*wāḥid* without numbers' contrasted with the '*wāḥid* with numbers', see p. 409.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 408.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

The Bāb seems to have regarded knowledge of the science of talismans as important for two connected reasons. It was, first of all, to serve as a means whereby his followers would be aided to recognize *man yuzhiruhu 'llāh*, him whom God shall manifest, the messianic figure of the Bāb's later works, on his appearance<sup>52</sup>. More significantly, perhaps, this science was seen as a rational proof of the truth of the Bāb. We have already quoted a passage from the *Panj sha'n* in which this knowledge is declared 'a perfect proof to men, like the verses', and another from the *Dalā'il-i sab'a* in which it is described as a 'firm evidence' and given the status of *i'jāz*. In the *Panj sha'n*, moreover, the Bāb says that 'this knowledge of talismans has not been sent down except as a means of evidence (*istidlāl*) for the guides of the Bayān in respect of others, to explain how the entire Qur'ān is contained in a single point and is manifested from it'<sup>53</sup>. More generally, 'the knowledge of all things in the knowledge of the talismans of oneness' is regarded as 'a proof (*hujja*) to all that has been and will be created, providing confirmation of his unprecedented wisdom'<sup>54</sup>. This emphasis on the need for rational proofs, which stands in contrast to the earlier stress on the need to abandon such evidences in favour of intuitive recognition of the truth, seems to have become extremely important for the Bāb, who was highly sensitive to attacks made on him by the 'ulamā', who criticized his ignorance of the religious sciences and of Arabic grammar. Towards the end of the *Panj sha'n*, indeed, he writes that 'it has been prohibited in the Bayān to believe in a religion except through demonstration (*dalil*) and evidence (*burhān*), proof (*hujja*) and certitude (*iqān*)'<sup>55</sup>. It should not be assumed, however, that the Bāb intended this science of letters and talismans to remain purely speculative or evidentiary. Even at the beginning of his career, he had 'fashioned amulets (*hayākil*), charms (*aḥrāz*), and talismans (*ṭilismāt*)'<sup>56</sup>, and in an early work entitled the *Khasā'il-i sab'a*, he instructed each of his followers to wear round his neck a talisman (*haykal*) in his (the Bāb's) hand, containing various names of God and other mysterious devices based on the divine names<sup>57</sup>. Another early work, the *Ṣaḥīfa bayn*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428. This element has led to a later Bahā'ī interpretation of this part of the *Panj sha'n* as a prophecy of the appearance of Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī Bahā' Allāh. See *idem*, letter to Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, ms. 3003.C in Iranian National Bahā'ī Archives (incorrectly attributed to the Bāb), *passim*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 447; cf. p. 434.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 437.

<sup>56</sup> Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī Zunūzī, quoted Mīrzā Asad Allāh Fāḍil Māzandarāni *Kitāb-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 3 ([Cairo], n.d.), pp. 31-32.

<sup>57</sup> Cited M. A. Fayḍī *Ḥadrat-i Nuqta-yi Ūlā* (Tehran, 132 *badi'*/1975-76), pp. 53-54.

*al-haramayn*, contains a section dealing with talismans, with general instructions for their construction<sup>58</sup>.

In the *Panj sha'n*, he instructs his followers to teach their children the science of talismans when they reach the age of eleven (the Bābī age of maturity). He also instructs them to write out the talismans of unity given in the book and to protect themselves with them<sup>59</sup>. More specifically, they are to read eleven *haykals* every day, completing one cycle of readings every Bābī month (i.e. in nineteen days)<sup>60</sup>, a practice which suggests that this particular talismanic design may owe its basic shape to square Shī'ī talismans used on specific days of the week. The following example of such a talisman may be compared with the *haykal* above from the *Panj sha'n*<sup>61</sup>:

و افوض	اىرى	الى الله	ان الله	بصير بالعباد
محمد على	۵۳	۷۶	۱۲۰۲	۷
۱۷۳	ي	۱۲	ع	۱۷
۶	و ۷۰	۸۱۷۵	۱۹	۱۷
۱۸	۱۷	۹۶	ع	۱۰۲۱
لا	اله	الا الله	محمد رسول	الله

Fig. 2. — (from Philott and Shirazi, JASB 2:10 (1906) p. 534).

<sup>58</sup> *Sahifa bayn al-haramayn*, ms. F. 7, Browne Oriental Collection, Cambridge University Library, chapter two, pp. 27-37. Two forms of talisman (*tilism*; *haykal*) are referred to: rectangular (*shikl al-tarbi'*) and triangular (*shikl al-tathlith* — see p. 28. This latter would seem from the description on p. 30 (which says it should not be regarded as resembling a Christian cross) to be identical with the pentagram talisman which the Bāb later made the Bābī *haykal* proper.

<sup>59</sup> *Panj sha'n*, pp. 409, 413.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 412. This cycle works out exactly.

<sup>61</sup> For examples, see D. C. Philott and M. K. Shirazi 'Notes on certain Shī'ah Tilisms', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 2:10 (1906), pp. 534-537.

In the case of talismans, perhaps more clearly than in any other instance, we can see how the Bāb sought to incorporate within his system practices derived from popular Shi'ism alongside legal and ritual prescriptions of a more formal nature. The Persian *Bayān*, which is the principal text of the Bābī *sharī'a*, contains a number of regulations relating to the preparation and use of talismans. Two basic forms are mentioned: the *haykal*, which is to be worn by men, and the *dā'ira*, to be worn by women<sup>62</sup>. The Persian *Bayān* also refers to the construction of a *haykal* consisting of 2001 names of God (to the number of *al-mustaghāth*), which is to be worn as an amulet (*hīrz*) from the moment of birth and never left off<sup>63</sup>. The Arabic *Bayān* and the related *Haykal al-dīn* make it obligatory for every individual either to write or to have written for him from the moment of his conception the phrase *Allāhu a'zam* nineteen times per month; if it is light enough, this is to be carried about as a talisman. Should someone fail to complete his talisman up to the time of his death, his youngest heir is to do so for him. These amulets are, in any case, to be passed on to one's heirs<sup>64</sup>.

It is not entirely clear what relationship (if any) exists between the *haykals* described in the *Panj sha'n* and those in the shape of a pentagram commonly found by that name and evidently identical with the 'triangular' talisman referred to in the *Ṣaḥīfa bayna 'l-ḥaramayn*. Pentagram *haykals*, many of them in the hands of the Bāb and Mīrzā Yaḥyā Ṣubḥ-i Azal, are quite common, consisting in general of repetitious phrases, sometimes incorporating Quranic verses and the names of Muḥammad, Fāṭima, 'Alī, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn. Fig. 3 and 4 will give some idea of the basic form<sup>65</sup>.

There appear to be several variant forms of the *dā'ira* or circle talisman, intended for the use of women. In the Persian *Bayān*, the Bāb instructs that it be divided into five *wāḥids*, each to be divided into nineteen sections, and that women may write within it whatever they wish<sup>66</sup>. There is, however, a short but detailed treatise by the Bāb, in which the method for constructing a *dā'ira* is given step by

<sup>62</sup> *Bayān-i Fārsī*, 5:10 (p. 166).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:10 (pp. 252-253).

<sup>64</sup> *Al-Bayān al-'Arabi* ([Tehran], n.d.), 7:8 (p. 30); *Haykal al-dīn* (published with foregoing), 7:8 (p. 29).

<sup>65</sup> For examples of pentagram *haykals*, see Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī and Sayyid Ḥusayn Yazdī *Qismatī az alwāḥ-i khaṭṭ-i Muḥṭa-yi Ūlā wa Āqā Sayyid Ḥusayn Kātib* ([Tehran], n.d.), pp. 19, 26.

<sup>66</sup> *Bayān-i Fārsī* 510 (p. 166).

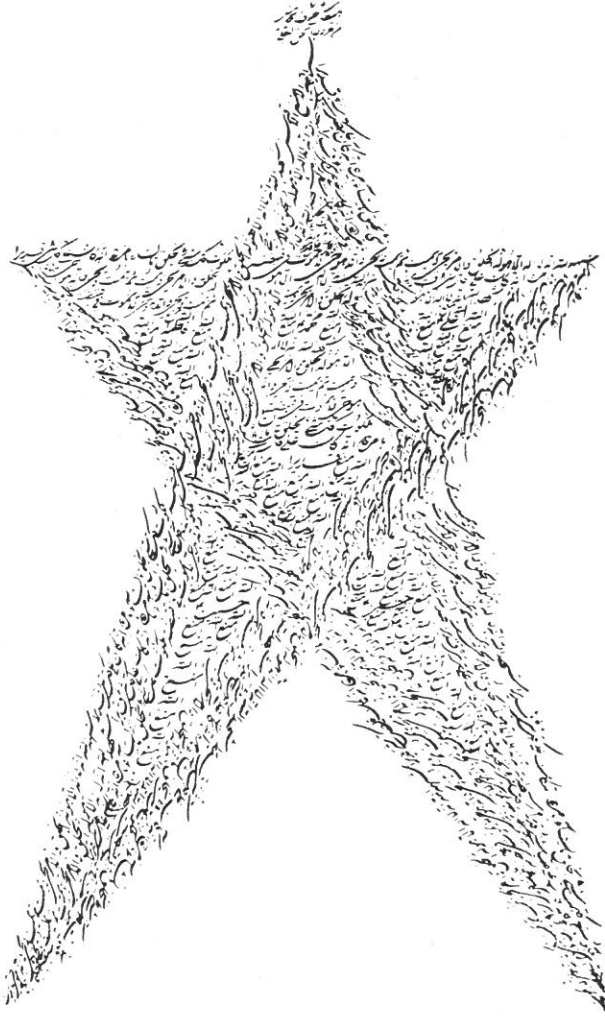


Fig. 3. — (from *Qismati az alwāh* p. 19).

step<sup>67</sup>. Fig. 5 and 6 are two examples of talismans drawn on this pattern.

It will immediately be apparent that this device is formed on fairly traditional lines, incorporating several elements derived from standard Islamic talismanic models, such as the seven seals of Solomon<sup>68</sup>,

<sup>67</sup> Published in Mirzā Asad Allāh Fādīl Māzandarānī *Asrār al-āthār*, 5 vols. ([Tehran], 124-129 *badi'*/1968-1973), vol. 4, pp. 115-120.

<sup>68</sup> On these, see H. A. Winkler *Siegel und Charaktere in der muhammedanischen Zauberei* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1930), chapter 2.

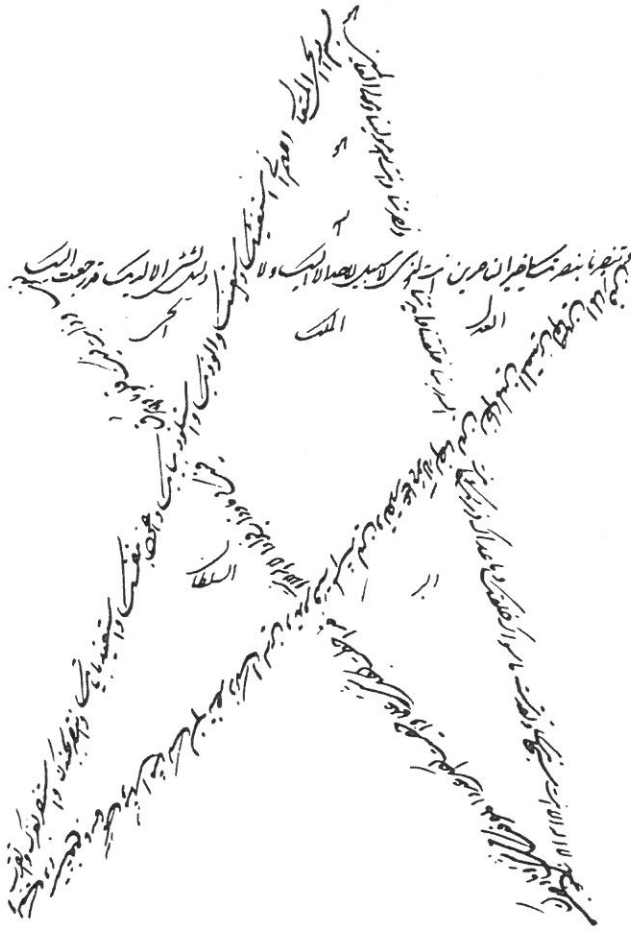


Fig. 4. — (item 10 : 5, Folder 3, E. G. Browne Oriental Collection, Cambridge University Library).

devices formed by analogy with spectacle letters<sup>69</sup>, and Quranic verses.

Apart from this more or less standardized form, however, there are two other styles of *dā'ira*, one incorporating Quranic verses around a central *jadwal* bearing the words *Allāhu a'zam*, above which is the phrase 'for 'Alī, on him be peace': fig. 7, — and one made up of concentric circles of writing alone, in a manner bearing a close resemblance to the pattern of Mesopotamian magic bowls<sup>70</sup>: fig. 8.

<sup>69</sup> See *ibid*, pp. 150-67.

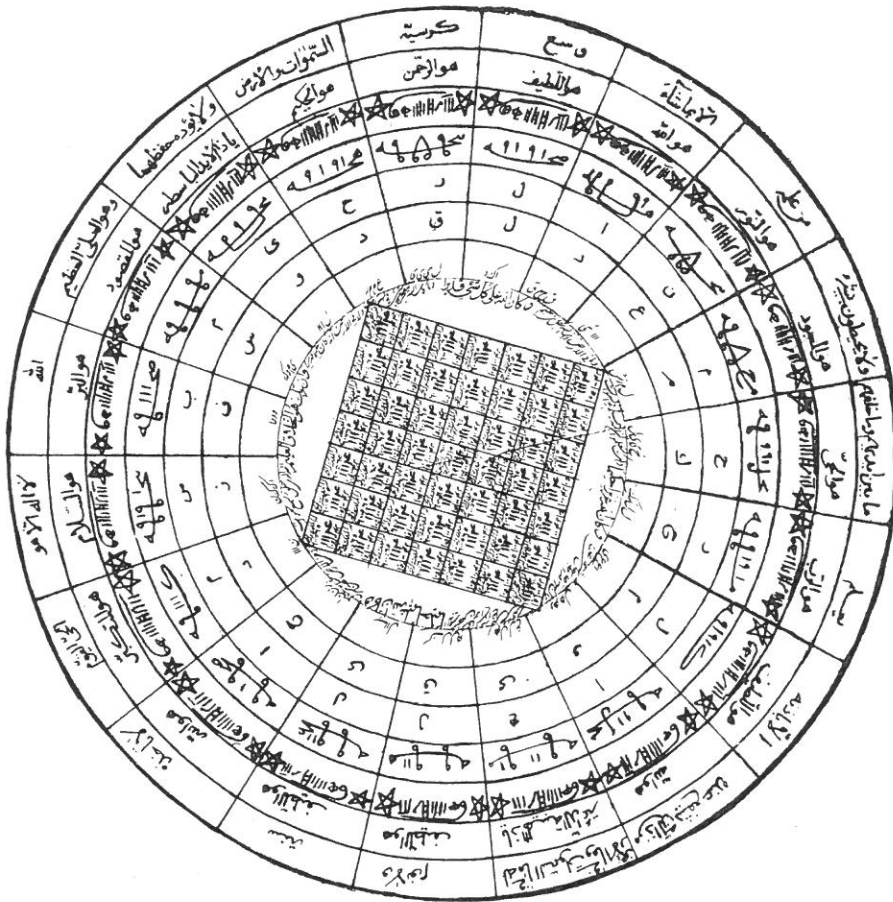


Fig. 5. — (item B. 5 in Folder 3, E. G. Browne Oriental Collection, Cambridge University Library).

I also possess a copy of a predominantly circular device made up of the complete (but slightly corrupt) text of the 'Lawḥ al-nāqūs' by Mirzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Bahā' Allāh. The incantatory style of the original suggests a talismanic use, as does the arrangement of four verses at the corners : fig. 9.

There is, indeed, a close resemblance between this figure and the *dā'ira* found in al-Būnī's *Shams al-ma'ārif*<sup>71</sup> : fig. 10.

<sup>70</sup> For these two types of *dā'ira*, see Shīrāzī, *Qismatī az alwāḥ*, pp. 11, 22. On circular talismans, see T. Canaan 'The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans', *Berytus IV* (1937), p. 109.





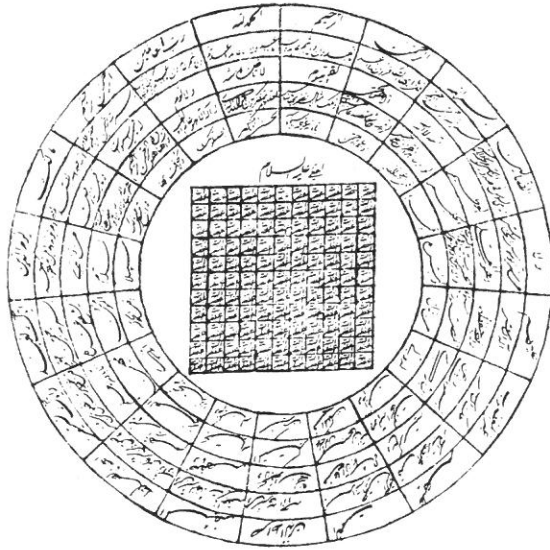


Fig. 7. — (from *Qismati az alwāh*, p. 11).



Fig. 8. — (from *Qismati az alwāh*, p. 22).





In the *Haykal al-dīn*, believers are directed to wear on their right hands a ring inscribed with two verses: 'Praise be to God, the mighty Power; praise be to God, the inaccessible knowledge'<sup>74</sup>. In his commentary on the *Sūrat al-qadr*, the Bāb recommends the inscription of the seven seals on a ringstone of red Yemeni ruby. Whoever does this 'shall gather together all good, and it shall be his protection (*ḥirz*) from all evil'<sup>75</sup>. Several other inscriptions are recommended elsewhere for use on precious stones<sup>76</sup>.

In this context, it is interesting to note the evidently magical origins of the well-known Bahā'ī ringstone symbol formed from the letters *bā'* and *hā'*, generally understood as a symbolic form of the greatest name of God (which is taken to be *al-bahā'*): fig. 11.



Fig. 11.

A number of 'spectacle letters' given by Ibn al-Waḥshiyya show a very close resemblance to this figure, and it may be fairly assumed that it has been based on one of these, even though this origin has subsequently been forgotten<sup>77</sup>: fig. 12.

Although talismanic devices and prayers do, in fact, exist in early Bahā'ī literature, their significance has largely been eroded by in-

<sup>74</sup> *Haykal al-dīn*, 6:10 (p. 24).

<sup>75</sup> *Sharḥ sūrat al-qadr*, quoted Māzandarānī *Asrār*, vol. 5, p. 241.

<sup>76</sup> See 'A.F. *Ā'in-i Bāb* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 69-70, quoting *Kitāb-i chahār sha'n* and an untitled *ṣaḥīfa*.

<sup>77</sup> Aḥmad Abū Bakr Ibn Waḥshiyya *Kitāb shawq al-mustahām fi mā'rifa rumūz al-aqlām*, trans. and reproduced in Sylvain Matton (ed.) *La magie arabe traditionnelle* (Paris, 1977), pp. 129-241. See various letters reproduced on pages 158, 160, 165 (especially the letter *ṣād*).



*Fig. 12.* — (from Ibn al-Wahshiyya).

creasing emphases within the sect on rationality and the avoidance of 'superstition'. This development is of particular interest as an example of the way in which western notions of rationality have reinforced existing orthodox disapproval of the occult sciences to displace almost entirely what was originally a major strand of belief and practice in the Bābī tradition.