

AN EPISODE IN THE CHILDHOOD OF SIYYID ALI MUHAMMAD THE BĀB

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Very little is known about the childhood of Siyyid <sup>c</sup>Alī Muhammad the Bāb (1819-1850) the founder of the Bābī movement and only son of the Shirāzī merchant Siyyid Muḥammad Ridā (c.1778?- c.1820/1826-7?) and Fātima Bagum (d.1882).<sup>1</sup> It is clear though that he commenced his elementary studies as a boy of about five under the tutelage of a certain Shaykhī teacher variously known as Shaykh Zayn al-<sup>c</sup>Abidīn (<sup>c</sup>Abīd), Shaykh-i Mu<sup>c</sup>allim, Shaykh-i Anām, Shaykh Muḥammad and Shaykhunā(d.c.1263.A.H./1846-7) in a school situated in the Bazar-i Murgh (Poultry Market) of Shirāz.<sup>2</sup> Various stories exist in Bābī-Bahā'ī literature about the school days of the Bāb which underline his alleged supernatural knowledge and extraordinary piety. They are reminiscent of countless legendary anecdotes which came to be related of the childhood of Jesus in the apocryphal infancy Gospels and of hagiographic expressions of the miraculous youth of the Prophet Muhammad and the Imāms in Shī'ī Muslim literature.<sup>3</sup> Pious devotees of those who came to be seen as saints, prophets or messengers of God have pictured the childhood and youth of the object of their adoration as being attended by extraordinary phenomena and miraculous deeds often utilising time-honoured hagiographic motifs or legends. To some extent this kind of piety found oral and literary expression in 19th century Bābī-Bahā'ī circles. It is particularly noteworthy in connection with the story of the Bāb's being taught the alphabet or asked to recite Bismi'llāh al-Rahman al-Rahim on his first day at the school of Shaykh <sup>c</sup>Abīd.<sup>4</sup>

The accounts of the Bāb's first day at school:

1) In the Tārīkh-i Jadīd<sup>5</sup>

The Tārīkh-i Jadīd (New History) of Mīrzā Husayn Hamadānī (d.c.1299.A.H./c.1881-2) exists in various recensions written in the early 1880's or roughly between 1296.A.H. and 1300.A.H. Apart from Mīrzā Husayn Hamadānī whose original draft appears to have made considerable use of the Kitāb-i Nuqtat al-Kāf (c.1852?) a number of writers including Mīrzā Abū al-Fadl Gulpāyḡānī (d.1914) Mānakjī Līmjī Hātayārī (the Zoroastrian agent in Iran, d.c.188) and Fadīl-i Qā'inī (= Nabīl-i Akbar, d.c.1309.A.H./1892) had a hand in the emergence of this variously entitled work.<sup>6</sup> At least one recension of it, transcribed in June 1881/Rajab 1298.A.H. and referred to by E.G. Browne as the 'London Codex' (= British Museum [Library] Or.2942), contains the following version of the story of the Bāb's first day at school attributed to Shaykh <sup>c</sup>Abīd himself:<sup>7</sup>

"The first day that they brought him [the Bāb] to me at the school, I wrote down the alphabet for him to learn, as is customary with children. After a while I went out on business. On my return I heard, as I approached the room, someone reading the Qur'an in a sweet and plaintive voice. Filled with astonishment, I entered the room and enquired who had been reading the Qur'an. The other children answered < pointing to His Holiness [the Bāb] > 'He was.' 'Have you read the Qur'an?' I asked. He was silent. 'It is best for you to read Persian books,' said I, putting the Hāqq al-Yaqīn [ of Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī ] before him, 'read from this.' At whatever page I opened it I saw that he could read it easily. 'You have read Persian,' said I; 'Come, read some Arabic; that will be better.' So saying, I placed before him the Sharh-i Amthila. When I began to explain the meaning of the Bismi'llāh to the pupils in the customary manner, he asked, 'Why does the word Rahmān include both believers and infidels, while the word Rahīm applies only to believers?' I replied, 'Wise men have a rule to the effect that < extension of form implies > extension of meaning, and Rahmān contains one letter more than Rahīm.' He answered, 'Either this rule is a mistake or else the tradition which you refer to 'Alī is a lie.' 'What tradition?' I asked. 'The tradition' replied he, 'which declares that King of Holiness to have said; - "The meanings of all the Sacred Books are in the Qur'an, and the meanings of the whole Qur'an are in the Sūrat al-Fātiha, and the meanings of the whole Sūrat al-Fātiha are in the Bismi'llāh, and the whole meaning of the Bismillah is in the < initial letter > B, and the meaning of the B is in the point < under the B > , and the point is inexplicable.'" On hearing him reason thus subtly I was speechless with amazement and led him back to his home. His venerable grandmother came to the door. I said to her, 'I cannot undertake the instruction of this young gentleman,' and told her in full all that had passed. Addressing him, she said, 'Will you not cease to speak after this fashion? What business have you with such matters? Go and learn your lessons.' 'Very well,' he answered, and came and began to learn his lessons like the other boys. He began with the alphabet though I urged him not to do so." 8.

## 2) In Tārīkh-i Nabīl Zarandī

Mullā Muhammad, a Bābī (from 1265.A.H./1848-9) who became one of the leading disciples of Mīrzā Husayn 'Alī Bahā'u'llāh and who was known as Nabīl-i Zarandī and Nabīl-i A<sup>c</sup>zam (1247.A.H./1831-1310.A.H./1892-3), completed his lengthy history of the Bābī-Bahā'ī movements in about 1308.A.H./1890-91.<sup>9</sup> The first part of this history was translated into English by the late Guardian of the Bahā'ī Cause Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957) under the title, The Dawn-Breakers. Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā'ī Revelation (1932).<sup>10</sup> The following episode, which obviously differs from the loosely parallel account in the 'London Codex' of the Tarikh-i Jadīd (see further below), is again narrated on the authority of Shaykh 'Abīd:

"One day", he [Shaykh 'Abīd] related, "I asked the Bāb to recite the opening words of the Qur'an : 'Bismi'llāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm'. He hesitated, pleading that unless He were told what these words signified He would in no wise attempt to pronounce them. I pretended not to know their meaning. 'I know what these words signify,' observed my pupil; 'by your leave I will explain them.' He spoke with such knowledge and fluency

that I was struck with amazement. He expounded the meaning of 'Allāh', of 'Rahmān', and 'Rahīm', in terms such as I had neither read nor heard. The sweetness of His utterance still lingers in my memory. I felt impelled to take him back to his uncle and to deliver into his hands the Trust he had committed to my care. I determined to tell him how unworthy I felt to teach so remarkable a child. I found his uncle alone in his office. 'I have brought Him back to you,' I said, 'and commit Him to your vigilant protection. He is not to be treated as a mere child, for in Him I can already discern evidences of that mysterious power which the Revelation of the Sahib al-Zaman [= 'The Lord of the Age', one of the titles of the promised Qā'im ] alone can reveal. It is incumbent on you to surround Him with your most loving care. Keep him in your house, for He, verily, stands in no need of teachers such as I.' Hājī Mīrzā Siyyid <sup>c</sup>Alī [11.] sternly rebuked the Bāb. 'Have you forgottōn my instructions?' he said. 'Have I not already admonished You to follow the example of Your fellow-pupils, to observe silence, and to listen attentively to every word spoken by Your teacher?' Having obtained his promise to abide faithfully by his instructions, he bade the Bāb return to His school. The soul of that child could not, however, be restrained by the stern admonitions of His uncle. No discipline could repress the flow of His intuitive knowledge. Day after day he continued to manifest such remarkable evidences of superhuman wisdom as I am powerless to recount ". " 12.

3) In the Tārīkh-i Amrī-yi Shirāz. 13.

The abovementioned narrative of the history of the Bābī-Bahā'ī movements in Shirāz composed by Hājī Mirza Habīballāh Afnān (c.1875-1951) the son of Āqā Mīrzā-Āqā ( a nephew of the Bab's wife) and grandson of Āqā Mīrzā Zayn al-<sup>c</sup>Abidīn ( a paternal cousin of the father of the Bāb) remains in manuscript. 14. It apparently contains valuable information on the childhood of the Bāb including a version of the story of his first day at school related by Āqā Muhammad Ibrāhīm-i Ismā<sup>c</sup>īl Bag an older fellow-pupil of Shaykh <sup>c</sup>Abīd. Hasan Balyuzi in his book The Bab summarizes this account as follows:

"The Bāb had taken a seat with great courtesy, in between this boy and another pupil who was also much older than Himself. His head was bowed over the primer put in front of him, the first lines. But he would not utter a word. When asked why he did not read aloud as other boys were doing He made no reply. Just then two boys sitting near them, were heard to recite a couplet from Hāfīz, which runs thus:

From the pinnacles of Heaven they call out unto thee;  
I know not what hath thee here entrapped.

'That is your answer,' said the Bāb, turning to Āqā Muhammad Ibrāhīm." 15.

While this account of the Bāb's first day at school is independent of the the two versions purportedly related on the authority of Shaykh <sup>c</sup>Abīd quoted above, its essential point is the same; namely, that the youthful Bāb stood in no need of human instruction initially holding a noble silence.

[ \* insert: of which he had been taught to repeat. ]

It will be obvious to the reader of the three accounts of the Bāb's first day at school that they cannot all be eye-witness or strictly accurate historical narratives. Accounts 1 & 2 cannot both, in all their details, be exact records of the words or observations and actions of Shaykh <sup>c</sup>Abīd. While the Bāb does appear to have been a remarkable pupil in the days of his youth the basically legendary nature of the accounts of his first day at school contained in the Tārīkh-i Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl is strongly suggested by the fact that the gist of these accounts told in connection with the youth of Jesus is contained in loosely parallel versions in Christian and Islāmic literatures. It thus seems highly likely that accounts 1 & 2 of the Bab's first day at school originated in Bābī-Bahā'ī circles sometime before the early 1880's drawing upon and embellishing much older legends about Jesus' first day at school.

The apocryphal accounts of Jesus' first day at school.

The canonical Gospels, as is well known, record little of nothing (in the case of Mark and John) of the childhood of Jesus. It is only in Luke 2:41ff that we are told something of the precocious learning of the young Jesus.<sup>16.</sup> By the time of the rise of Islām however, a very large number of apocryphal stories about Jesus' childhood and youth were circulating in written form—some of which are mentioned in the Qur'ān. One such apocryphal story which is widely attested is that of Jesus at school in Nazareth which affords some remarkable parallels to the accounts of the Bāb's first day at school in the Tārīkh-i Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl. There are a very large number of versions of this story (which cannot possibly all be set down here). It must suffice to refer to one of the versions of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas the many recensions of which (6th cent. A.D.? > including Arabic versions) attempt to portray Jesus as an infant prodigy:<sup>17.</sup>

"Now a certain teacher, Zacchaeus by name, who was standing there, heard in part Jesus saying these things to his father, and marvelled greatly that, being a child he said such things. And after a few days he came near to Joseph and said to him: "You have a clever child, and he has understanding. Come, hand him over to me that he may learn letters, and I will teach him with the letters all knowledge, and to salute all the older people and honour them as grandfathers and fathers, and to love those of his own age. And he told him all the letters from Alpha and Omega clearly, with much questioning. But he looked at Zacchaeus the teacher and said to him: "How do you, who do not know the Alpha according to its nature, teach others the Beta." Then he began to question the teacher about the first letter, and he was unable to answer him. And in the hearing of many the child said to Zacchaeus: "Hear, teacher, the arrangement of the first letter, and pay heed

to this, how it has lines and a middle mark which goes through the pair of lines which you see, (how these lines) converge, rise, turn in the dance, three signs of the same kind, subject to and supporting one another, of equal proportions; here you have the lines of the Alpha." [ The text here appears to be corrupt].

Now when Zacchaeus the teacher heard so many such allegorical descriptions of the first letter being expounded, he was perplexed at such a reply and such great teaching and said to those who were present: "Woe is me I am forced into a quandary, wretch that I am; I have brought shame to myself in drawing to myself this child. Take him away, therefore, I beseech you, brother Joseph. I cannot endure the severity of his look, I cannot make out his speech at all. This child is not earth-born; he came tame even fire. Perhaps he was begotten before the creation of the world. I strove to get a disciple, and have found myself with a teacher. Therefore I ask you, brother Joseph, take him away to your house. He is something great, a god or an angel or what I should say I do not know."

"And when Joseph saw the understanding of the child and his age, that he was growing to maturity, he resolved again that he should not remain ignorant of letters; and he took him and handed him over to another teacher. And the teacher said to Joseph: "First I will teach him Greek, and then Hebrew". For the teacher knew the child's knowledge and was afraid of him. Nevertheless he wrote the alphabet and practised it with him for a long time; but he gave no answer. And Jesus said to him: "If you are indeed a teacher, and if you know the letters well, tell me the meaning of the Alpha, and I will tell you that of the Beta". And the teacher was annoyed and struck him on the head. And the child was hurt and cursed him, and he immediately fainted and fell to the ground on his face. And the child returned to Joseph's house. But Joseph was grieved and commanded his mother: "Do not let him go outside the door, for all those who provoke him die."

"And after some time yet another teacher, a good friend of Joseph, said to him: "Bring the child to me to the school. Perhaps I by persuasion can teach him the letters." And Joseph said to him: "If you have the courage brother, take him with you". And he took him with fear and anxiety, but the child went gladly. And he went boldly into the school and found a book lying on the reading-desk [Cf. Lk. 4:16f.] and took it, but did not read the letters in it, but opened his mouth and spoke by the Holy Spirit and taught the law to those that stood by. And a large crowd assembled and stood there listening to him, wondering at the grace of his teaching and the readiness of his words [Cf. Lk. 4:22], that although an infant he made such utterances. But when Joseph heard it, he was afraid and ran to the school, wondering whether this teacher also was without skill (maimed). But the teacher said to Joseph: "Know, brother, that I took the child as a disciple; but he is full of great grace and wisdom; and now, I beg you brother, take him to your house."

And when the child heard this, he at once smiled on him and said: "Since you have spoken well and have testified rightly, for your sake shall he also that was smitten be healed". And immediately the other teacher was healed. And Joseph took the child and went away to his house." 18.

Central to the many versions of the story of Jesus and the alphabet or of his first day at school is the so-called Alpha-Beta logion which is found in the Epistula Apostolorum (4) and attributed to the Marcosians by Ireneus (Adv. Haer. I. xx. 1) as well as in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (Greek A+B+Syriac+Latin+Arabic, etc) and the related Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (Latin+Slavonic+Arabic+Ethiopic, etc). Perhaps having originated among 2nd century Christian

Gnostics the following are a few versions of it: 19.

Epist. Apost

"[ Before I say Alpha] First tell me what Beta is" (Gk. text corrupt?).

Greek A [Infancy Gosp. Thom.]

"How do you, who do not know the Alpha according to its nature, teach others the Beta" ( also quoted above, p. ).

Greek B [Infancy Gosp. Thom.]

"Thou that knowest not the Alpha, how canst thou teach another the Beta?"

Arabic

"Explain to me Alaph, and then I shall say Beth." 20.

While Brian McNeil has argued that the source of the legend of Jesus and the alphabet is to be found in a proverb contained in the Story of Ahikar ( Syriac viii.36/ Arabic viii.33/ Armenian viii.23) Stephen Gero has speculated as to its Christian developmental sequence: 21.

"A rather interesting, though admittedly very hypothetical, developmental sequence of the story of Jesus and the teacher emerges from this discussion. The original logion [ the 'Alpha-Beta logion], in the first stage of oral transmission (1st-2nd century) developed into a concise controversy apophthegm. The apophthegm was written down in the second century (Epistula Apostolorum, Marcians, Irenaeus), but not thereby removed from oral circulation. In the next "tunnel period" of oral transmission, from the second to the sixth century, the narrative material was considerably expanded, but the saying itself was preserved unchanged. The narrative was then fixed in writing in the sixth century, and did not thereafter undergo much further development. However, in this third stage of mainly written transmission, between the sixth and tenth centuries, the saying itself began to be expanded, and brought into conformity, by two successive additions, with a synoptic model. This final stage is represented by the Greek Vorlage of the Slavonic and Greek versions and by the Syrian prototype of the late Syriac versions." 22.

There are then, as noted, many versions of the story of Jesus and the alphabet in Christian apocryphal and other literatures. As Mc Neil notes however, they all agree in telling a story with the following features: " the master attempts to teach Jesus the alphabet, but cannot get beyond the first two letters, for Jesus demands that he explain the meaning of the letter Alpha; in most versions he himself then expounds the mystic meaning of the alphabet." 23.

Not only is the **story** of Jesus and the alphabet found in the abovementioned ( and other) Christian sources but exists in many different forms in both Sunni and Shī'ī Islāmic literatures. It is doubtless these Muslim transformations of the Christian story that have contributed to both the form and the content of the story of the Bāb's first day at school as reported in the Tārīkh-i Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl. Only a few examples of the Islāmic versions can be mentioned here.

Some Examples of the 'Story of Jesus and the Alphabet'  
in Islāmic literatures.

- 1) "The son of <sup>c</sup>Adī related on the authority of Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>id al-Khadri a tradition that when his mother handed over Jesus, son of Mary, to the school that one should teach him, the teacher said to him, "Write Bismillāhi (In the name of God)." Jesus said to him [the teacher], "What is Bismi (In the name)?" The teacher replied, "I do not know." Then Jesus said,
- " [ The letter ] bā' is Bahā Allāh [ the Glory of God ], and  
[ The letter ] sīn is Sanahu [ His Granduer ], and  
[ The letter ] mīm is Mulkuhu [ His Kingdom ], and  
Allāh is the God of gods. And al-Rahman [ the Merciful ]  
means merciful in this world and the next; and al-Rahīm 24.  
means Compassionate in the next world, ...etc.."

Here Jesus is represented as giving a profound explanation of Bismillāh al-Rahman al-Rahim on his first day at school like the Bāb in the Tārīkh-Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl. The teacher does not know its deep meaning so the child enlightens him.

- 2) " Mary took Jesus to a teacher. The teacher asked, "What is your name?"  
"Jesus" he said.  
"Say the alphabet," said the teacher.  
"What is the alphabet?" asked Jesus.  
"I do not know," he replied.  
Then said Jesus, "Get up from your place so I may sit there, and I shall teach you the explanation of the alphabet." The teacher got up, and Jesus sat down and said, "The alphabet begins with four letters, alif, be, jim and dal:
- Alif: Allāh, "God";  
Be : Bahā'Allāh, "God's splendour";  
Jim : Jalāl Allāh, "God's awesomeness";  
Dal : Dīn Allāh, "God's religion";  
He : Huwa Allāh, "He is God";  
Waw : Waylat Allāh, "God's woe";  
Zayn: Zabaniyat al-kāfirin", "the myrmidons of infidels";  
Ha : Hitta li'l-Khati'in , "forgiveness for those in error";  
Ta : Shājarat Tuba li'l-mu'minin, "the Tuba tree for believers";  
Ya : Yad Allāh 'alā khalqihī ajma'in, "God's hand over all of His creation";  
Kaf : Kalām Allāh, "God's Word";  
Lam : Liqā' Allāh, "meeting God";  
Mim : Malik yawm al-dīn, "the king of the Day of Resurrection";  
Nun : Nūr Allāh, "God's light";  
Sin : Sunnat Allāh, "God's path";  
cAyn : ʿilm Allāh , "God's knowledge";  
Fa : Fiʿl Allāh , "God's action";  
Sad : Sidq Allāh fī waʿdih, "God's sincerity in His promise";  
Qaf : Qudrat Allāh, "God's might";  
Ra : Rabūbiyyat Allāh, "God's divinity";  
Shin: Mashi'at Allāh, "God's will";  
Te : Taʿallā Allāh camma yashkurun, "God is more exalted than that for which he is thanked."

Then the teacher said to him, "You have done very well Jesus." He took him to his mother and said, "Your child did not need a teacher." 25.

This version of the story of Jesus' first day at school translated from an Arabic recension of Muhammad b. <sup>c</sup>Abd Allāh al-Kisā'ī's Qisas al-Anbiyā' ('Tales of the Prophets', 13th century.A.D. and early translated into Persian) has Jesus assume the position of teacher and explain the significance of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Jesus' bewildered tutor takes the learned child back to his mother telling her that he is in no need of instruction just as, it may be noted here, Shaykh <sup>c</sup>Abīd takes the Bāb back home to his grandmother (Tārīkh-i Jadīd) or uncle (Tārīkh-i Nabīl) — his father being regarded as having passed away by this time in these two Bābī-Bahā'ī versions.

- 3) " Jesus was so intelligent that, when nine months old, his mother sent him to school. The master said the Bismillah— "In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate"— which the child at once repeated after him. The Master then gave a number of words to be read, of which the first was abjad. Jesus wished to know why he should do this, upon which the master became angry and struck him. The child said: "If you know, explain; if you do not listen. In abjad, a stands for Allah la ilah ('there is no God but God'), b for Bahjat Ullah ('grace of God'), j for Jalal Ullah ('the glory of God'), d for Din Ullah ('religion of God')," ". 26.

Here again, in this highly fanciful version of Jesus' first day at school as a 9 month old baby attributed to the 5th Shī'ite Imām Muhammad ibn <sup>c</sup>Alī Bāqir (c.57.A.H./675.A.D.— c.114.A.H./732.A.D.), there are obvious parallels to the accounts of the Bāb's first day at school in the Tārīkh-i Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl.

### Conclusion

In the light of the above it seems likely that the accounts of the Bāb's first day in the school of Shaykh <sup>c</sup>Abīd (quoted above) are highly hagiographic reworkings of elements contained in the Islāmic versions of Jesus' first day at school. It may be the case that the Bāb was an intelligent and unusual youth and that his teacher felt compelled to take him home in the light of this. Yet, the elaborate accounts in the Tārīkh-i Jadīd and the Tārīkh-i Nabīl doubtless owe not a little to the speculative piety of Bābī-Bahā'ī historians who were active before the 1880's. 27.



## NOTES

1. Cf. Abbas Amanat, The Early Years of the Babi Movement, Background and Development (Ph.D. Thesis, Oxford University), 1981.p.100f.
2. Refer, Hasan Balyuzi, The Bāb (Oxford 1973), p.32ff+ p.230.fn.4.
3. Refer for example, on legends surrounding the birth and childhood of Imam Husayn, Mahmoud Ayoub, Redemptive Suffering in Islam. (Mouton Publishers, The Hague, 1978), p.69ff.
4. Other stories of the Bab's childhood also clearly utilize traditional motifs and legends. i.e. the notion that he exclaimed "The Kingdom is God's" ( المَلِكُ لِلَّهِ ) at the moment of his birth, refer, Kitāb-i Nuqtat al-Qaf (Ed. E.G. Browne, Leiden, Brill, 1910), p.110f, Tārīkh-i Jadīd (E. E.G. Browne, Cambridge University Press, 1893), p.262.
5. On the Tārīkh-i Jadīd (see fn.4. above) refer, Denis MacEoin, A Revised Survey of the Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History (November, 1977. Unpublished dissertation), (Pt. II), p.195ff.
6. Refer, MacEoin, Revised Survey., pp.205-6. cf. Amanat, op cit. p.427f.
7. Refer, E.G. Browne, The Tārīkh-i-Jadīd. (see fn.4. above), introduction, p.xlix.
8. E. E.G. Browne, The Tārīkh-i-Jadīd, pp.262-264.
9. Refer, Shoghi Effendi, The Dawn-Breakers. (London 1953), Preface, p.xxxv. cf. MacEoin, Revised Survey. p.214ff, Amanat, op. cit. p.429f.
10. Shoghi Effendi's translation, The Dawn-Breakers, is only an English translation of the first part of Zarandī's history (up till 1852-3). The original text has not been published.
11. Hājī Mīrzā Siyyid <sup>c</sup>Alī was one of the maternal uncles of the Bāb who looked after him after the death of his father. Refer, Balyuzi, op. cit. p.33f, 85ff.
12. E. E. Shoghi Effendi, The Dawn-Breakers. pp.51-2.
13. I assume that this is the work of Hājī Mīrzā Habīballāh which is quoted and referred to by Balyuzi in his The Bāb (pp.34-35, see below). cf. Amanat, op cit. p.444. A manuscript of Tārīkh-i Amrī-yi Shirāz exists in the Iran National Bahā'ī Archives (Lib. MS. No. 1027 D).
14. Hājī Mīrzā Habīballāh Afnān, like his father, was a Bahā'ī. He was originally named Muhammad <sup>c</sup>Alī. For some details on his life refer, Muhammad <sup>c</sup>Alī Faydī, Kitāb-i Khānidān-i Afnān (Tihiran, 132.BE/ 1975-6.A.D.), p.230ff; Balyuzi, op. cit., p.32.fn.; H. Balyuzi, Bahā'u'llāh, The King of Glory (Oxford 1980), p.403ff, p.472. cf. also Hussām Nuqabā'ī, Manābi<sup>c</sup> -i Tārīkh-i Amr-i Bahā'ī (Tihiran, 133.B.E./1966-7.A.D.), p.64.
15. Hājī Mīrzā Habīballāh, Tārīkh-i Amrī-yi Shirāz[?] paraphrased and quoted in ET in Balyuzi, The Bāb, pp.34-5.
16. On the canonical Gospel accounts of Jesus' infancy reference may be made to Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah. (London 1977).

17. On the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and related Infancy Gospels refer, Stephen Gero, The Infancy Gospel of Thomas in Novum Testamentum 13 (1971), pp.46ff (+ Bib.); E.Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha (Ed. W.Schneemelcher/ ET.Ed.R.McL.Wilson), Vol.I. (SCM.Press,1973), p.388ff. (+ Bib.).
18. The Infancy Gospel [Story] of Thomas, Ch.6:1ff+7:1ff+14:1ff+15:1ff, ET. New Testament Apocrypha, Vol.I. (see fn.17), p.394ff.cf.also, M.R.James, The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford 1926), p.49ff (= ET. of Greek Text A).
19. Refer S.Gero, art.cit.p.71f, for a more detailed list of versions of the 'Alpha-Beta logion'.
20. ET's from: Gk.A. New Testament Apocrypha, Vol.1.p.394; Gk.B. M.R.James, The Apocryphal New Testament, p.56; Epist.Apost+ Arabic, S.Gero, art.cit. p.71.
21. Refer, Brian McNeil, Jesus and the Alphabet, in Journal of Theological Studies (NS), Vol.21 (1971), pp.126-8. McNeil writes (p.127):
- "I suggest that the source of this legend is to be found in the Story of Ahikar, in one of the proverbs which Ahikar imparts to his nephew. This is now extant in three versions:
- (a) Syriac viii.36.
- 'My son, they say to the wolf, "Why dost thou follow after the sheep?" He said to them, 'The dust is exceedingly good for my eyes.'"..And they brought him into the schoolhouse [lit. 'the house of the scribe']: the master said to him, "Aleph, Beth"; the wolf said, "Kid, Lamb."'
- (b) Arabic viii.33.
- 'O my boy! They made the wolf go to school that he might learn to read, and they said to him, "Say A, B." He said, "Lamb and goat in my belly."'
- (c) Armenian viii.23.
- 'Son, they gave teaching to the wolf's cub, and said: "Say thou ayb, ben, gim [i.e. the first three letters of the Armenian alphabet]"; and he said, "ayts, bouts, garhn [i.e. goat, kid, lamb]."'. .." (citing texts and translations from F.C.Conybeare, J.Rendel Harris, and Agnes Smith Lewis, The Story of Ahikar [Cambridge, 2 1913]).
22. S.Gero, art.cit., pp.72-3.
23. McNeil, art.cit. pp.126-7.
24. Cited in J.Robson, Christ in Islam (John Murray, London, 1929), p.92 (= saying A.206 in Michael Asin y Palacios, Logia et Agrapha Domini Jesu apud Moslemicos Scriptorum.. in Patrologia Orientalis Vols.XIII/XLX).
25. ET. W.M.Thackston, Jr., The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i (Boston 1978), pp.332-3.
- It may be noted here that Jesus is represented as explaining the letter B (ب) as signifying Bahā'u'llāh which is the title assumed by Mīrẓā Husayn ʿAlī Nūrī (1817-1892) the founder of the Bahā'ī movement. I wonder if this fact had anything to do with the Bahā'ī adoption of this story and its being linked with the Bāb's childhood? This might be unlikely but it may also be noted that the sixth Shīʿī Imām is reported as having stated that the letter B (ب) of Bismillāh.. signifies Bahā'u'llāh— a tradition apparently quoted by Siyyid Kazim Rashti in his Sharh-i Qasida and by ʿAbdu'l-Bahā in his commentary on Bismillāh.. cf. Dhikrū'llāh.

Khadem, Bahá'u'lláh and His Most Holy Shrine in Bahá'í News No.540  
March 1976,p.1ff; A.Q.Faizi, Explanation of the Symbol of the Greatest  
Name (Baha'i Publishing Trust, New Delhi,India,nd ),p.16.fn.14.

26. Tradition attributed to Imām Muhammad ibn <sup>°</sup>Alī Bāqir cited  
 in art, Christ in Mohammedan Literature in A Dictionary of Christ and  
the Gospels (Edinburgh 1909),Vol.II,p.882.
27. It should be noted that Shaykh <sup>°</sup>Abīd is said to have written a  
 monograph or tract on the childhood of the Bāb: presumably shortly  
 before his death in 1263.A.H./1846-7.( refer, Balyuzi,The Bāb,p.231.  
 fn.4.,Amanat,opcit.p.104.fn.4. ).This tract is apparently in the hands  
 of those "not well-disposed to the Faith of the Bab and Baha'u'llah"  
 who have refused to divulge its contents or part with it.If this document  
 really does exist it may be that it is the source of the story of  
 the Bāb and the alphabet or his first day at school some of the contents  
 of which may have been orally circulated— though this possibility seems  
 to me to be unlikely.A perhaps less speculative suggestion would be that  
 the circulation of the story in Bābī-Baha'i circles owes something to  
 Siyyid Javād Karbalā'ī ( d.Kirmān,c. 1300.A.H./1882-3.A.D.) who had close  
 links with the Bāb's family ,apparently induced Shaykh <sup>°</sup>Abīd to view the  
 Bāb and Bābism with favour, and confided in Mirzā Abū al-Fadl Gulpaygānī  
 who had a hand in the writing of the Tarīkh-i Jadīd.(cf.Amanat,op.cit.p.  
 104.fn.4. referring to Gulpaygānī's Kashf al-Ghitā' can Hiyāl al-A'cda'  
 (Published, Ishqabad,nd. ).
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