

Moojan Momen

## Usuli, Akhbari, Shaykhi, Babi: The Tribulations of a Qazvin Family

THE LAST HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AND THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH century saw Twelver Shi'ī Islam, especially in Iran, undergoing a number of upheavals as a result of conflicts between different schools of thought. These upheavals were primarily ideological but they also led to conflict, fighting and even deaths. This period began in the political turmoil following the collapse of the Safavid Empire. The Akhbari school of Twelver Shi'ism had been in the ascendant during the latter half of the Safavid era, but the period following the overthrow of the Safavids saw the defeat of the Akhbari school and the triumph of the Usuli school at the hands of Aqa Muhammad Baqir Bihbihani, known as Vahid Bihbihani (d. ca. 1207/1792) in the shrine cities of Iraq, the main centre of Twelver scholarship. The Usuli school enabled the ulama to give legal opinions (*fatwās*) and hence intervene in social areas from which the more restrained Akhbari school would refrain. It also enabled the emergence of a powerful leadership of the Twelver ulama through the emergence of the position of *marja' al-taqlīd*, leading to the present-day hierarchy involving the ranks of Hujjat al-Islam, Ayatullah, and Grand Ayatullah (*Āyat Allāh al-uzmā*). By taking on the title and aura of *nā'ib al-Imām* (deputy of the [Hidden Twelfth] Imam)<sup>1</sup> and proclaiming that every ordinary Shi'ī needed to follow in religious matters the judgements (*taqlīd*) of one of the ulama who had striven to perfect himself in religious jurisprudence (a *mujtahid*), the Usuli ulama were able to direct towards themselves a considerable flow of income. These sources of wealth included the *khums* (one-fifth of net income), judicial income, income from religious endowments as well as stipends from the state.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of the Usuli school was not, however, a smooth process. As it established itself throughout Iran in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it faced a number of challenges in the shape of the Akhbari, Shaykhi and Babi movements. The meeting and overcoming of these challenges itself helped to shape the development of the Usuli school. Here, I hope to shed light on this process by examining the manner in which it affected one Qazvini family of ulama, the Baraghanis, a family that was

---

Moojan Momen is an independent scholar (momen@northill.demon.co.uk).

1. This title was that of *nā'ib al-āmm* (general vicegerent) rather than *nā'ib al-khāṣṣ* (specific vicegerent, i.e. the four Babs who claimed to be in touch with the Hidden Twelfth Imam in the ninth–tenth century C.E.). See Moojan Momen, *Introduction to Shi'ī Islam* (New Haven, 1985) 189–91; Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago, 1984) 141–44.

2. Willem Floor, "The Economic Role of the Ulama in Qajar Persia," in *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*, ed. Linda Walbridge (New York, 2001), 53–81.

engulfed in conflict, division, exile, divorce, and death as a result of the turbulence caused by these currents during this period. While the present-day biographical dictionaries and family histories depict the family as having been uniformly orthodox Usulis, we will look at three crises that occurred as this family faced these three movements, the Akhbari, Shaykhi and Babi; the splits this caused within the family and in the town of Qazvin; and the resolution of each crisis. In this process, we will gain some insights into the presence of heterodoxy in Shi'ī ulama families and the way that a present-day façade of orthodoxy may conceal heterodoxy in the past.

The Baraghani family's own biographers paint a picture of a family that had been prominent ulama for generations. They trace their descent from the Shi'ī Buyid (Buwayhid) kings of the Middle Ages and from a moderate-ranking scholar of the Safavid period, Shaykh Muhammad Kazim Talaqani (d. 1094/1683), the first of the family to move to Qazvin from Talaqan.<sup>3</sup> He had been a student of Shaykh-i Baha'i (1547-1622) and Mir Damad (d. 1631) and had built the Madrasa-i Navvab (now called the Imam al-Sadiq Madrasa) in Qazvin, where he taught a circle of students.

#### *The Baraghani family and the Akhbari movement*

The first crisis that affected the Baraghani family occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century and involved the Akhbari movement. During the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century, the Akhbari school predominated in the Arab Shi'ī world, including the shrine cities of Iraq, and in India, and many of the prominent Iranian ulama were also Akhbaris.<sup>4</sup> In brief, it may be said that the Akhbaris favored a more cautious approach to jurisprudence, giving legal opinions only where there is a clear precedent for doing so in the Traditions (*akhbār*) from the Prophet and the Imams. They rejected the Usuli method of deriving legal opinions using reason as one of the principles (*uṣūl*) of jurisprudence.

Qazvin had been an Akhbari stronghold in Safavid times when Shaykh Khalil ibn al-Ghazi Qazvini (d. 1089/1678), an important Akhbari scholar, dominated the town. He was fanatical in his Akhbari views, even holding the Usulis to be unclean (*najis*). At that time, it was said that if you wanted to carry an Usuli book around the town with you, you would wrap it in a handkerchief.<sup>5</sup> His contemporary in Qazvin was Shaykh Muhammad Kazim Talaqani, the progenitor of the Baraghani family. It is not clear whether the latter was an Usuli or an Akhbari. His teachers included a mixture of Usulis and Akhbaris.<sup>6</sup> His son, Shaykh Muhammad Ja'far Firishtah, is the first in the family to

---

3. See for example the "Introduction" to Muhammad Salih Baraghani, *Mawsū'a al-Baraghānī fī Fiqh al-Shī'a*, (n. p., 1985) 8–65, written by 'Abd al-Husayn al-Salihi, a descendant of Muhammad Salih Baraghani. On Shaykh Muhammad Kazim, see *ibid.*, 12–13; also Agha Buzurg Tihrani, *Ṭabaqāt A'lām al-Shī'a* (eleventh century), (Tehran, 1367/1988), 463, and Hasan al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt A'yān al-Shī'a*, 7 vols. (Beirut, 1408/1987), 2: 301.

4. Juan Cole, "Shi'ī clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722–1780: The Akhbari-Usuli Conflict reconsidered", *Iranian Studies* 18 (1985): 3–34.

5. al-Salihi, "Introduction," 25–26.

6. al-Salihi, "Introduction," 12.

be described as an Usuli (albeit by present-day biographers).<sup>7</sup> The latter studied under the leading Shi'ci ulama of the late Safavid period such as Mulla Muhammad Baqir Majlisi. As far as it can be determined, however, the next two generations, Shaykh Muhammad Taqi (d. 1161/1748) and Shaykh Muhammad, known as Mala'ikah (see below), were of local importance only.

Qazvin in the middle of the eighteenth century was a divided town, split by the Bazaar River (Rudkhanah-yi Bazar). The eastern half of the town was Usuli and the western half Akhbari.<sup>8</sup> The above-mentioned Shaykh Muhammad Mala'ikah (d. 1200/1785) is described as the leader (*za'im*) of the Usulis in Qazvin. The Akhbaris still dominated the town, however. In about 1751, Mala'ikah had a public debate with a prominent visiting Akhbari scholar, Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani (d. 1184/1770), at which a large number of the ulama of both schools were present. According to Baraghani family history, Mala'ikah caused Shaykh Yusuf to moderate his extreme Akhbari views.<sup>9</sup> Following this debate, however, there was an uproar and an Akhbari mob attacked the house of Mala'ikah and set fire to it, destroying his library. The governor intervened but ordered Mala'ikah to remove himself from the town. He left for Baraghan, a village approximately mid-way between Qazvin and Tehran, from which the family name derives. This episode occurred during the winter months and Mala'ikah's children died of exposure to the cold on the journey.<sup>10</sup>

#### *The Baraghani Family and the Shaykhis*

The Baraghani family might have faded into obscurity as village mullas in Baraghan had Shaykh Muhammad Mala'ikah and his wife Fatima<sup>11</sup> not had three able and ambitious sons. The eldest was Shaykh Mulla Muhammad Taqi (hereafter called Mulla Taqi), born in about 1167/1753<sup>12</sup>; the second was Shaykh Mulla Muhammad Salih (hereafter

---

7. al-Salihi, "Introduction," 13–14; Tihrani, *Ṭabaqāt*, 463.

8. al-Salihi, "Introduction," 25–26.

9. al-Salihi, "Introduction," 26; on al-Bahrani in particular and the Usuli-Akhbari conflict in the eighteenth century in general, see Robert Gleave, "The Akhbari-Usuli Dispute in *Ṭabaqāt* Literature: The Biographies of Yusuf al-Bahrani and Muhammad Baqir al-Bihbahani," *Jusūr: The UCLA Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 10 (1994): 79–109. Although al-Bahrani is said to have moderated his Akhbari views in several biographical sources, no other source attributes this to Shaykh Muhammad Mala'ikah.

10. al-Salihi, "Introduction," 26. He is called leader (*za'im*) of the Usulis in al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 4: 159 and 6: 276. This event must have occurred in about 1751 since all of the surviving sons of Mala'ikah are said to have been born in Baraghan.

11. The name of Shaykh Muhammad's wife is given in Muhammad Tunukabuni, *Qiṣaṣ al-'Ulamā*, (Tehran, n.d.), 32.

12. Most of the biographies do not give a date of birth for Mulla Taqi. I have here taken a date from al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2:303, where the date and place of birth (Baraghan) of Mulla Taqi has, I think, been mistakenly given as that of his son, Shaykh Muhammad Ja'far. The Baha'i historian, Fadil Mazandarani, states that at the time of his death in 1263/1847, he was about 80 years old, which would make his date of birth about 1183/1769, but this would not accord with the dates of birth of his brothers; *Tārīkh Zuhūr al-Ḥaqq*, (Tehran, n.d.), 3: 309.

called Mulla Salih) who was also born in 1167/1753<sup>13</sup>; and the third son was Shaykh Mulla Muhammad °Ali (hereafter called Mulla °Ali ) who was born in 1175/1761.<sup>14</sup>

The three brothers grew up and had their early education in Baraghan with their father, then in Qazvin and Isfahan. However, to complete their education, they proceeded to the centre of Shi°i scholarship at this time, the shrine cities of Iraq. Here there was a major change underway at the hands of Mulla Baqir Vahid Bihbihani (d. 1205/1790) in Karbala. The latter had defeated the Akhbari school of Shi°i jurisprudence in the shrine cities and was promoting the Usuli school. The older two brothers studied under Bihbihani himself and all three studied under Bihbihani's senior pupils, Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Bahr al-°Ulum (d. 1212/1797), Shaykh Ja°far Kashif al-Ghita (d. 1228/1813) and Sayyid °Ali al-Tabataba'i (d. 1231/1816).<sup>15</sup>

Upon completion of their studies, the brothers moved to Tehran and tried to set themselves up there. It is presumably at this time that Mulla Taqi married a daughter of Fath-°Ali Shah.<sup>16</sup> Eventually, however, Mulla Taqi fell out with several of the leading figures in Tehran, such as Hajji Mirza Aqasi, the Prime Minister, and Mirza-yi Qummi, the most prominent of the court ulama, and the brothers moved first back to Iraq and finally to Qazvin.<sup>17</sup>

The Baraghani brothers were among the first generation of ulama to bring the results of the Usuli victory in the shrine cities of Iraq back to Iran. Assisted by the resurgence of the Usuli school throughout Iran, the brothers were soon able to establish themselves among the leading ulama of Qazvin. It must have been heart-warming to the Baraghani brothers to witness the defeat in Qazvin of the Akhbaris who had driven their father from the town.

The Baraghani brothers soon consolidated their preeminence in Qazvin. The eldest brother, Mulla Taqi, became a focus of political power in the town. He was quick to benefit from the freedom that the Usuli school gave to the ulama to give legal opinions on a very wide range of social issues. He became powerful in the town and also very wealthy, not being averse to lining his own pockets and even involving himself in shady dealings.<sup>18</sup> For example, the usual practice of the ulama is not to charge for giving legal opinions. Mulla Taqi took the position that although he was obliged to give the opinion free of charge, he was not obliged to write it out without a fee. Of course, it was neces-

---

13. Muhsin al-Amin, *A°yān al-Shi°a* 11 vols. (Beirut, 1406/1985) 9: 369–70, no. 802, gives Mulla Salih's date of birth as 1200/1785. This would make him 69 years of age at his death in 1271/1854. I have, however, given 1167/1753 as the date of birth in the text as this is based on family records and is presumably more accurate. This would make him more than 100 years of age (in Islamic lunar years) at the time of his death. Usually, it is specifically noted and commented upon in the biographical literature when one dies at an age greater than 100. Mulla Salih's father is in any case stated to have died in 1200/1785, see above, so this is unlikely to be the date of Mulla Salih's birth.

14. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 299, no. 181.

15. al-Salihi, "Introduction," 22–23.

16. Tihrani, *Ṭabaqāt* (thirteenth century), (Najaf, 1954), 2: 51, 228. Mulla Taqi had three of his sons by this woman.

17. Tunukabuni, *Qiṣaṣ al-°Ulamā*, 22, 27.

18. Willem Floor, "The Economic Role of the Ulama in Qajar Persia," 61, 63.

sary to have almost every opinion in written form to act as legal evidence in case of a future challenge, so the result was a considerable income from an activity that other ulama provided free. With it, however, also came the accusation that he was in effect taking bribes for his legal opinions.<sup>19</sup> He appears to have been an aggressive man, not afraid of taking on other ulama in disputes in order to elevate his own standing. He had already had disagreements with some of the most influential ulama of his time, among them Mirza-yi Qummi and Mulla Ahmad Naraqī.<sup>20</sup> Shortly after his arrival in Qazvin, he had fallen out with Mulla °Abd al-Wahhab Sharif (d. 1270/1853). Although the latter had helped Mulla Taqī when he first set up in Qazvin and his sister had married Mulla Taqī's brother (see below), these two clerics clashed over a legal opinion and there was stated to be *niqār* (enmity or rancour) between them, especially after the visit of Aqa Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba'i to Qazvin, during which Mulla Taqī's status as a mujtahid had been called into question.<sup>21</sup> There is also some evidence that Mulla °Abd al-Wahhab leaned towards an Akhbari position<sup>22</sup> and, if true, this would have increased the antagonism between the two men.

While the older brother was achieving political power in Qazvin and mulcting its inhabitants, the middle brother, Mulla Salih, was developing a reputation as a scholar and teacher. The madrasa that he founded in Qazvin in 1233/1817, the Salihīyya, attracted students from a wide area of Iran and even from as far away as India. It is said that as many as 700 students were attending the Salihīyya.<sup>23</sup> Apart from Mulla Salih himself, there were several other ulama teaching at the Salihīyya: Mirza °Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1294/1877), the eldest son of Mulla Salih; Mulla Yusuf Hakami (d. 1276/1859) and Mulla Aqa Hakami (d. 1285/1868), two cousins of the Baraghani brothers who specialised in peripatetic and mystical philosophy; Mir Rafi° Talaqani and his son, Sayyid Hibat Allah Rafi°i, who taught medicine; Shaykh Muhammad Baqir Ashtiyani, Shaykh °Abd al-Wahhab Bihishti, and others. Among those who later studied at this madrasa was Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi "al-Afghani."<sup>24</sup>

---

19. Tunukabuni, *Qiṣaṣ al-°Ulamā*, 23; Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period*, (Berkeley, 1969), 15. For more details on Mulla Taqī's methods in acquiring wealth and power, see Tunukabuni, *Qiṣaṣ al-°Ulamā*, 22-23, 27-29; also in Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement, 1844-1850*, (Ithaca, 1989), 317-20

20. Tunukabuni, *Qiṣaṣ al-°Ulamā*, 22, 30, 31.

21. Tunukabuni, *Qiṣaṣ al-°Ulamā*, 22-24.

22. It is true that the main teachers of Mulla °Abd al-Wahhab were all Usulis. However, in at least one of his books, *Hidāyat al-Mustarshidīn*, he opposes the standard Usuli position taken by Mulla Muhammad Baqir Shafti that, after the death of a *mujtahid*, it is necessary for his *muqallid* to choose a new living mujtahid; Agha Buzurg Tihrani, *al-Dharī°a ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī°a*, 25 vols. (Qum, 1408/1987), 25: 193, no. 217. Another of his works, *Risāla fī °adam al-ḥujjiya al-°zann fī'l-ahkām* (Treatise rejecting that Opinion can be a Basis for Giving a Legal Ruling) would appear from its title to have tended to the Akhbari position. Tihrani, *al-Dharī°a* 15: 237, no. 1540. On these differences between Usulis and Akhbaris, see Momen, *Introduction to Shi°i Islam*, 223-25.

23. Sayyid Muhammad °Ali Gulriz, *Minūdar yā Bāb al-Jannat Qazvīn*, (Tehran, 1337/1958), 576.

24. al-Salihi, "Introduction," 52; al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 304-305.

The youngest of the Baraghani, Mulla ʿAli, was different from his brothers. He was particularly interested in mystical philosophy and was known for his ascetic practices and austerities.<sup>25</sup> Indeed there are even some indications that he may have been inclined to the Akhbari school at first.<sup>26</sup> He also taught at the Salihiyya and had no aspirations for political power.

There was also a women's section of the Salihiyya Madrasa and the female members of the Baraghani family both studied and taught there. There was a tradition of learning among the women of the Baraghani family. One of the aunts of the Baraghani brothers, Mah Sharaf Khanum, after studying at Isfahan and the shrine cities, was taken into Fath-ʿAli Shah's household to act as secretary on account of her excellent composition and calligraphy.<sup>27</sup>

As part of their consolidation of power, the Baraghani brothers married into other prominent religious families in Qazvin. Mulla Salih married the sister of the abovementioned Mulla ʿAbd al-Wahhab Sharif Qazvini, a member of one of the powerful religious families in Qazvin and imam of the Masjid-i Shah (the Shah Mosque).<sup>28</sup> One of Mulla Salih's daughters, Mardiyya, also later married Mirza Muhammad ʿAli, the son of this Mulla ʿAbd al-Wahhab Sharif Qazvini.<sup>29</sup> Another daughter, Khadija Sultan Khanum, married Sayyid Mirza Mufid, the eldest son of the Shaykh al-Islam family of Qazvin who were descended from Muhaqqiq al-Karaki, the foremost Shiʿi scholar of the early Safavid period.<sup>30</sup> A third daughter, Rubaba, married the son of Mir Rafiʿ Talaqani, a prominent physician and scholar of Qazvin.<sup>31</sup> There was also a considerable consolidation of ties within the Baraghani family through at least six cousin marriages, four of them involving daughters of Mulla Salih.

The future must have seemed rosy to the Baraghani brothers in the first decade of the nineteenth century after their defeat of the Akhbaris. From their base in the western part of the town, the Dimaj and Qumlaq quarters, they were extending their power over the rest of the town. When Sayyid Muhammad Taqi, the *imām-jumʿa* of the Jamiʿ Mosque, the oldest, most important and most extensively endowed mosque in Qazvin, failed to perform the prayers, Mulla Taqi lost no time in seizing his position.<sup>32</sup> Nothing now seemed to stand in the way of their continued enjoyment of the fruits of their successful struggle for power and wealth. It was perhaps, therefore, not clear to them at first that there was a cloud gathering on the horizon. This was in the form of Shaykh

---

25. Tunukabuni, *Qiṣaṣ al-ʿUlamā*, 20.

26. He had studied under the Akhbari scholar, Mirza Muhammad Akhbari. Hasan al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 299, no. 181. He is called an Akhbari in Muʿin al-Din Mihrabi, *Qurrat al-ʿAyn: Shāʿir-i Azādikhāh va Millī-yi Īrān*, (3rd printing, Köln, 1994), 54.

27. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 222–23, no. 148.

28. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 3: 136, no. 161; *Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif-i Tashayyuʿ* (ed. Ahmad Sadr Haj Sayyid Jawadi et al., vol. 1, Tehran, 1366/1987), 501.

29. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6: 319, no. 421.

30. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 4: 104, no. 25 and 6: 320, no. 424.

31. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 4: 104, no. 28.

32. This despite the fact that Mulla Taqi had previously been opposed to the performance of the Friday Prayer during the Imam's Occultation. Tunukabuni, *Qiṣaṣ al-ʿUlamā*, 29.

Ahmad al-Ahsa'i who was spreading his teachings in Iran. The school that was eventually to emerge from the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad is usually called the Shaykhi school, although it should perhaps more correctly be called the Kashfi school. At this time, however, it was not a separate school, but rather a distinctive teaching that Shaykh Ahmad was giving. Shaykh Ahmad had an impeccable scholarly background, having studied and obtained certificates of completion (*ijāzas*) from several of the most prominent scholars of the shrine cities of Iraq—these were many of the same scholars as had taught the Baraghani brothers. While maintaining more or less orthodox Usuli teachings with respect to the principles of jurisprudence,<sup>33</sup> Shaykh Ahmad's major writings represented a reemergence of the concerns of the mystical philosophy (*ḥikmat-i ilāhī*) of the Safavid School of Isfahan, the legacy of such figures as Mulla Sadra, Mir Damad, and Mulla Muhsin Fayz. This school which flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was gradually quashed under the anti-philosophy, anti-Sufi onslaught of such figures as Mulla Muhammad Baqir Majlisi towards the end of the Safavid period. The emergence of the Usuli school with its overwhelming emphasis on legalism and jurisprudence, served to push mystical philosophy even further to the edges of the world of Twelver Shi'ism. This marginalization was so complete that when Shaykh Ahmad tried to reintroduce such subjects back into the Shi'ic world, he met with considerable disquiet among some of the ulama. There was particular concern over some of his teachings that implied that many of the theological tenets of Shi'ism such as the occultation of the Hidden Imam and the resurrection should be understood as occurring in a subtle spiritual world rather than in the material world. Perhaps most worrying of all for the orthodox Usuli scholars was Shaykh Ahmad's insistence that the authority for his teaching came from his direct contact with the Imams in the realm of visions—the truth was uncovered or revealed (*kashf*) to him in these visions. This was at direct variance with the Usuli insistence that truth should be obtained by *ijtihād* and through rational processes.

Shaykh Ahmad taught at Yazd from 1806 until 1814 when he moved to Kirmanshah at the insistence of Muhammad 'Ali Mirza Dawlatshah, the eldest son of Fath-'Ali Shah, who was governor there. Many scholars came from all parts of the Shi'ic world to study under Shaykh Ahmad and his teachings enjoyed widespread support. Among the ulama of Qazvin, the above-mentioned Mulla 'Abd al-Wahhab became an enthusiastic follower of the new teachings.<sup>34</sup> In November 1821, Muhammad 'Ali Mirza died and Mulla 'Abd al-Wahhab took the opportunity to invite Shaykh Ahmad to Qazvin, where he arrived in 1822. Mulla 'Abd al-Wahhab was imam of the Shah Mosque and had a madrasa in Qazvin. He immediately offered these facilities to Shaykh Ahmad for his use. Shaykh Ahmad began to lead prayers in the Shah Mosque and to teach. Soon students were coming to Qazvin from all parts of the Shi'ic world.

At first, relations appear to have been amicable between the Baraghani family and Shaykh Ahmad. Several members of the family, including the youngest brother, Mulla

---

33. See Juan Cole, "Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i on the Sources of Religious Authority" in *The Most Learned of the Shi'a*, 82–93.

34. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 3: 136–37, no. 161.

‘Ali,<sup>35</sup> and Mulla Salih’s wife Amina<sup>36</sup> who was the sister of Mulla ‘Abd al-Wahhab, came to study under Shaykh Ahmad and became followers of his teachings, while three of Shaykh Ahmad’s sons, Shaykh Muhammad Taqi, Shaykh ‘Ali Naqi, and Shaykh ‘Abd Allah studied under the Baraghani brothers at the Salihyya Madrasa.<sup>37</sup>

Mulla Taqi, however, was not happy. Of the three brothers, it was he who was most affronted by the challenge posed by Shaykh Ahmad’s teaching to the strict legalistic view of Islam that the Usuli school championed. Being the most political of the three brothers, he was also, no doubt, alarmed by the challenge to the Baraghani’s position in the town. It was not only Shaykh Ahmad’s challenge to the religious leadership in the town that concerned Mulla Taqi. There was only a limited pot of religious income to be divided among the ulama of Qazvin, and Shaykh Ahmad’s arrival had probably disturbed the equilibrium and tilted the balance away from the Baraghani.<sup>38</sup> Additional factors include the preexisting bad feeling between Mulla Taqi and Shaykh Ahmad’s host, Mulla ‘Abd al-Wahhab (see above), and it is even suggested that Mulla Taqi, considering himself the foremost cleric in Qazvin, was angry that a prominent figure such as Shaykh Ahmad had come to Qazvin and had chosen to stay with Mulla ‘Abd al-Wahhab and not himself.<sup>39</sup>

On one occasion when Shaykh Ahmad was making a courtesy call on him, Mulla Taqi took the opportunity to ask Shaykh Ahmad about his views on the resurrection (*ma‘ād*) and to object to these.<sup>40</sup> Following this visit, Mulla Taqi began to preach against Shaykh Ahmad, citing his heterodox views on subjects such as the resurrection and the *mi‘rāj*. Once again the town of Qazvin was split into two camps.<sup>41</sup> Mulla Taqi’s power base was in the west of the town, the Dimaj and Qumlaq quarters. Mulla ‘Abd al-Wahhab was based in the Dar al-Shafa district to the immediate east and south of the Shah Mosque in the center of the town. Although there is no firm evidence to this effect, it is not improbable, given the indications that Mulla ‘Abd al-Wahhab had been an Akhbari prior to becoming a follower of Shaykh Ahmad,<sup>42</sup> that this split replicated a previous geographical Usuli-Akhbari split in the town (although it differs from the division in the eighteenth century mentioned above).

---

35. Mulla ‘Ali studied 2 years with Ahsa’i and had an *ijāza* from him. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 299, no. 181.

36. See *Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif-i Tashayyūc* 1: 236. The article is probably by Dr ‘Abd al-Husayn Shahidi Salihi (as he is editor for biographies for the encyclopaedia. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 7, no. 1.

37. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 3: 218, no. 280, 3: 138, no. 166 and 3: 134, no. 153.

38. Shaykh Ahmad states that he believed that financial consideration were at the root of Mulla Taqi’s enmity, see his letter to Mulla Abd al-Wahhab, written from Karbala after his departure from Qazvin in Abu al-Qasim Ibrahimī, *Fihrist-i Kutub-i Mashāyikh ‘Izām*, (3rd ed., Kirman, n.d.), 1: 157.

39. ‘Abd al-Rida Ibrahimī in his introduction to Ahmad al-Ahsa’i, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra*, (Kirman. n.d. [1397/1976]), 1: 17.

40. Tunukabuni, *Qiṣaṣ al-‘Ulamā*, 42.

41. *Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif-i Tashayyūc*, 1: 501.

42. See note 22.



The tensions created also split the Baraghani family. Mulla °Ali, the youngest brother, was an enthusiastic adherent of Shaykh Ahmad, while Mulla Taqi was unrelenting in his hostility. Mulla Salih was neutral, perhaps divided by his loyalties to his older brother on the one hand and to his wife and younger brother on the other. He tried at first to act as a mediator in the dispute.<sup>43</sup>

Mulla Taqi decided to resolve the matter through an open debate. He invited Shaykh Ahmad to his house together with many of the prominent ulama of Qazvin. Perhaps realizing his own inability to tackle Shaykh Ahmad, Mulla Taqi also invited his two cousins who were experts in philosophy and mystical philosophy, Mulla Aqa Hakami and Mulla Yusuf Hakami, and they seem to have taken the lead in the discussions on the Usuli side. According to one account, the main subject of discussion at this meeting was resurrection.<sup>44</sup> This was one of the areas in which Shaykh Ahmad's views appeared to go against the standard Usuli view that this is something that will happen literally and physically.

The outcome of the debate is not clear. The Usuli sources claim that the debate demonstrated the error of Shaykh Ahmad's views — “[it] established the bankruptcy of his philosophy and his lack of understanding of the principles of *ḥikmat*.”<sup>45</sup> The Shaykhi accounts, of course, deny this.<sup>46</sup> They also insist on the orthodoxy of Shaykh Ahmad's views—that he did indeed teach a bodily resurrection. This is, however, somewhat disingenuous since Shaykh Ahmad had cleverly concealed his views by asserting the existence of two bodies (*jismayn*), a physical body that perishes and a body that is composed of “primordial substances purified from dross” and it is this latter body that is resurrected.<sup>47</sup> Thus when Shaykh Ahmad writes of a bodily (*jismānī*) resurrection, he is really speaking about something different from what orthodox Shi'ī ulama meant by the same term (although Shaykh Ahmad and his followers responded by pointing out that this usage has the authority of such figures as °Allama al-Hilli and Mulla Muhammad Baqir Majlisi<sup>48</sup>).

What is not in dispute, however, is that, following this meeting, Mulla Taqi issued a *takfīr* (declaration that someone is an unbeliever) against Shaykh Ahmad. The great ulama of the Shi'ī world had always had differences of opinion (*ikhtilāf*) among themselves, but it was not until the eighteenth century and the Usuli-Akhbari dispute that *takfīr* had become the ultimate sanction against ideas and individuals who threatened the established orthodoxy. The prince-governor, °Ali Naqi Mirza Rukn al-Dawla, tried to mediate and invited both sides to a meal of reconciliation, but Mulla Taqi refused to eat

43. al-Salihi, “Introduction,” 27.

44. Ibrahimi, *Fihrist*, 1: 152.

45. al-Salihi, “Introduction,” 27.

46. Ibrahimi, *Fihrist*, 1: 151–53; °Abd al-Rida Ibrahimi in Introduction to *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra*, 1: 17–18.

47. Introduction to Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, *Rasā'il al-Raj'a* (Beirut, 1993), 12.

48. See letter from Shaykh Ahmad to Mulla °Abd al-Wahhab in Ibrahimi, *Fihrist*, 1: 157–58; see also a similar defence by °Abd al-Rida Ibrahimi in his introduction to al-Ahsa'i, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra*, 1: 18; and the introduction to al-Ahsa'i, *Rasā'il al-Raj'a* (Beirut, 1993), 12.

from the same tray of food as Shaykh Ahmad and persisted in his denunciations.<sup>49</sup> There are differing accounts of the extent that ulama in the rest of Iran heeded Mulla Taqi's *takfīr*,<sup>50</sup> but in Qazvin itself, it had the desired effect and, after a residence of about two years there,<sup>51</sup> Shaykh Ahmad left the town.

It is ironic that, of the sons of these two great adversaries, two of Shaykh Ahmad's sons, Shaykh Muhammad Taqi and Shaykh °Abd Allah, rejected their father's teachings in later years, lived in Qazvin, and became strict Usulis,<sup>52</sup> while one of Mulla Taqi's sons, Shaykh Muhammad Ja°far, became a Shaykhi and went off to live in Kirman with the Shaykhi leader, Hajji Mirza Karim Khan Kirmani.<sup>53</sup>

In 1242/1826, Mulla Taqi, together with some of the other members of the Baraghani family participated in the ill-fated *jihād* called by Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba'i against the Russians after the first Russo-Persian War. The eldest son of Mulla Salih, Mirza Muhammad, died in this conflict.

### *Qurrat al-°Ayn Tahira*

To Mulla Taqi it must have seemed in 1824 that he had successfully seen off the Shaykhi crisis. He had managed to reassert the Usuli dominance and his own religious authority over the town. There were still Shaykhi supporters, even in the Baraghani family, but conditions in Qazvin were against them now and they had been driven into silence.

There was, however, a girl growing up in the bosom of the Baraghani family who would shatter Mulla Taqi's illusions and again cause turmoil in both the family and the town. She was the eldest daughter of Mulla Salih, who had a total of seven daughters and eight sons.<sup>54</sup> It appears that her given name was Fatima, but that she was not called

49. Tunukabuni, *Qiṣaṣ al-°Ulamā*, 43

50. Usuli scholars maintain that, following the *takfīr*, Shaykh Ahmad was shunned wherever he went (see article in *Dā°irat al-Ma°ārif Tashayyu°*, 1: 501). Against this view, however, it can be pointed out that when Shaykh Ahmad died, there were three days of mourning for him organized by the leading ulama of Isfahan. See Muhammad Baqir Khwansari, *Rawzat al-Jannāt*, 6 vols. (Beirut, 1991), 1: 103.

51. The length of time that Shaykh Ahmad spent in Qazvin is not clear. Some of the biographical accounts of the shaykh seem to imply that he was merely passing through Qazvin on his way between Kirmanshah and Mashhad. I have, however, given the figure of approximately two years from the statement that Mulla °Ali Baraghani studied under al-Ahsa°i for two years (al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 299, no. 181). It is true that Mulla °Ali could have traveled to Kirmanshah and studied under al-Ahsa°i there for part of this period. However, Amina, the wife of Mulla Salih, is also stated to have obtained an *ijāza* from Shaykh Ahmad (al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 7, no. 1) and she would not have traveled to Kirmanshah—and a two-year period would have been about right for obtaining an *ijāza*.

52. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 3:218–19, no. 280 and 3: 134, no. 153, respectively.

53. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 303; °Abd al-Rida Kirmani in Ibrahimī, *Fihrist*, 156.

54. al-Salihi, "Introduction," 47–52 for the sons: Muhammad (1205/1790–1240/1825), °Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1294/1877), Hasan (d. 1281/1864), Husayn (d. 1309/1891), Rida (d. 1308/1890), Musa (d. 1298/1880) and Muhammad °Ali (d. 1315/1897). al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 304, no. 183, lists a further son, Shaykh Muhammad, Kashif al-Asrar (1240/1824–1294/1877) between

this out of respect to her grandmother who would have been living in the same house. She was therefore at first called Umm Salmah, but her extraordinary abilities meant that even in childhood she was called Zarrin-Taj (Crown of Gold). Later she was given the nickname Qurrat al-°Ayn (Consolation of the Eyes) by the Shaykhi leader Sayyid Kazim Rashti and is hereinafter called Tahira (the Pure One), the name given her by the Bab.<sup>55</sup>

Tahira's mother was Amina (1202/1787-1268/1851), the daughter of Shaykh Muhammad °Ali Qazvini, who came from a long line of Qazvini ulama.<sup>56</sup> Amina's mother was Fatima (1172/1756-1260/1844), the daughter of Sayyid Husayn Qazvini, a teacher of Bahr al-°Ulum (see above) and a scholar and preacher of note.<sup>57</sup> Amina's brother was the above-mentioned Mulla °Abd al-Wahhab Sharif, a Shaykhi and the adversary of Mulla Taqi—the word “Sharif” appended to his name indicated his maternal descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Amina had studied under and obtained certificates (*ijāzas*) from her brother, her husband and Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i. She was much younger than Mulla Salih and was not his first wife since they were married in 1219/1804,<sup>58</sup> while Mulla Salih's eldest son Shaykh Muhammad was born in 1205/1790 while he was still in Karbala.<sup>59</sup> A statement from a Baha'i source that Tahira had just one sister, Mardiyya, and one brother<sup>60</sup> may indicate that these three were Amina's children, as distinct from the rest of Mulla Salih's children. There is some doubt about the date of Tahira's birth. Baha'i sources give the date of 1233/1817,<sup>61</sup> but °Ali al-Wardi, an Iraqi historian, gives 1814, based on family sources.<sup>62</sup>

---

Rida and Musa. For the daughters, I have collected the list from individual entries in al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*: Qurrat al-°Ayn, Tahira 6: 239, no. 328; Mardiyya (c. 1233/1817–c. 1313/1895) 6:319, no. 421; Nargis (1240/1824–1322/1904) 4:213, no. 96; Zahra (1240/1824–1320/1902) 5: 218–19, no. 199; Fatima (d. 1295/1878) 6: 201, no. 322; Rubaba (d. 1297/1879) 4: 104, no. 28; and Khadija Sultan (d. 1321/1903) 4: 104, no. 25.

55. On Tahira, see Nusratu'llah Muhammad-Husayni, *Hadārat-i Tāhira*, (Dundas, Ont., 2000); Mazandarani, *Zuhūr al-Haqq* 3: 311–69, Nabil [Zarandi], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā'ī Revelation*, (trans. and ed. Shoghi effendi, Wilmette, Ill., 1962), 81–84, 268–99, 621–29; *Chahār Maqāla dar bārah-yi Tāhira Qurrat al-°Ayn*, (ed. Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, Wienacht, Switzerland, 1991); *Khūshah-hā'ī az Kharman-i Adab va Hunar*, vol. 3: *Dawra-i Tāhira*, (Wienacht, Switzerland, 1992).

56. His lineage went back to several Safavid ulama who had written a number of well-known books. See Tihrani, *al-Dharī°a*, 4: 72, no. 296; 5: 146, no. 617; 24: 214, no. 1134.

57. Muhsin al-Amin, *A°yān al-Shī°a* 5: 414–15, no. 893; al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 3:159, no. 214.

58. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 7, no. 1.

59. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 304, no. 183.

60. Mazandarani, *Zuhūr al-Haqq*, 3: 311.

61. Mazandarani, *Zuhūr al-Haqq*, 3: 311.

62. °Ali al-Wardi, *Lamahāt Ijtimā°iyya min Ta°rīkh al-°Irāq al-°Hadīth*, 2 vols. (Baghdad, 1969), 2: 152, 154n (the section of this work on Tahira has been published separately under the title *Hākadha qatalū Qurrat al-°Ayn*, [Koln, 1991]). al-Wardi's source is an unpublished manuscript by °Abbud (=°Abd al-Husayn) al-Salihi, a descendant of Mulla Salih. See also Denis Mac-

The initial education of all of Mulla Salih's children was at the Salihiyya Madrasa. Concerning Tahira, we know that she studied Persian literature (*adab*) and poetry (*shī'ar*) with her mother; religious jurisprudence (*fiqh*), principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), the Traditions (*ḥadīth*) and Qur'anic commentary (*tafsīr*) with her father, her uncle, Mulla Taqi, and her elder brothers, Mirza °Abd al-Wahhab and Shaykh Hasan; and philosophy (*falsafa*), mystical philosophy (*hikma*), and gnostic philosophy (*°irfān*) with Mulla Aqa Hakami and Mulla Yusuf Hakami, who were cousins of her father.<sup>63</sup> She memorized the Qur'an and excelled in all of the above subject. Even Muslim sources admit that she was "famed for her eloquence (*faṣāḥa*), rhetoric (*balāgha*) and beauty of expression in prose and poetry, in Persian and Arabic."<sup>64</sup> The same source states that "in addition to her virtues and knowledge, she was also a paragon (*fā'iqa*) of beauty."<sup>65</sup> Concerning the extraordinary abilities of Tahira, her older brother Mirza °Abd al-Wahhab is reported to have said: "We were all, her brothers and cousins, fearful to speak in her presence, so much did her knowledge intimidate us, and if we hazarded to put forward an opinion on a point of doctrine that was in dispute, she would prove to us where we were going wrong in a manner so clear, precise and magisterial that we were thrown into confusion and withdrew."<sup>66</sup>

Tahira's extraordinary abilities meant that she became a teacher in the women's section of the Salihiyya Madrasa and all of her sisters are recorded as having studied under her there. Unusually she is even listed among the teachers of her sons. She married her cousin Mulla Muhammad, the son of Mulla Taqi, when she was aged fourteen (i.e. in about 1828 or 1831) and shortly afterwards accompanied him to the shrine cities in Iraq. Here they settled in the family house in Karbala in the Khaymgah Quarter,<sup>67</sup> where they lived for about 13 years (c. 1828-1841),<sup>68</sup> broken only by a pilgrimage to Mecca and a period of time spent pursuing studies in Najaf.<sup>69</sup> According to many sources, they had two sons and a daughter: Shaykh Isma°il (d. 1306/1888), Shaykh

---

Eoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism: A study in Charismatic Renewal," Ph. D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1979, 222, n. 76.

63. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6: 239, no. 328.

64. Ibid. It is probable that Tahira grew up speaking both Persian and Turkish since her family lived in the Turkish-speaking quarters of Qazvin. An Azeri scholar Azize Caferzade, cites a poem of Tahira which she says was composed in Turkish and is preserved in a library in the Republic of Azerbaijan; see idem, *Azərbaycanın aşık və şair qadınları* (in Cyrillic letters, [Baku, 1991]), 65–66. I am grateful to Necati Alkan for this reference.

65. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6: 239, no. 328.

66. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6: 241, no. 328, quoting al-Wardī, *Lamaḥāt ijtimā°iyya*, 2: 152, which in turn quotes from the Arabic translation of [Zarandī], *The Dawn-Breakers*, 63–66 (English translation 84n.) which is taken from A. L. M. Nicolas, *Seyyed °Ali Mohammed dit le Bab*, (Paris, 1905), 273. The source of this account is probably an oral report by Mirza Hasan Adīb (who was one of Nicolas's informants) who studied under Mirza °Abd al-Wahhab and who gives a similar account in a short biography of Tahira that he wrote: "Sharḥ-i aḥvāl-i Janāb-i Ṭāhirah," in *Chahār Maqāla dar bārah-yi Ṭāhira Qurrat al-°Ayn*, 68–69.

67. al-Wardī, *Lamaḥāt*, 2: 153.

68. al-Wardī, *Lamaḥāt*, 2: 153.

69. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6: 174, no. 273.

Ibrahim (d. 1310/1892), who were born in Karbala, and Zaynah (1253/1837-1333/1914), who was born in Najaf.<sup>70</sup> However, some sources give the name of a third son, Shaykh Ishaq (d. ca. 1311/1893), who was born after their return to Qazvin.<sup>71</sup> In Shi'ī Islam, many families of religious scholars are known by the name of a famous ancestor; for example, Al Bahr al-°Ulum (the family of Bahr al-°Ulum) are the descendants of the famous eighteenth-century scholar, Sayyid Mahdi Bahr al-°Ulum. It is a further testimony to her prodigious abilities that, despite her heresy, her sons are called Al Qurrat al-°Ayn (family of Qurrat al-°Ayn) in one Shi'ī biographical dictionary.<sup>72</sup>

At the time of Shaykh Ahmad's stay in Qazvin, Tahira was only a child of five or eight years old and so would barely have been aware of the reaction to him, and it appears that Mulla Taqi firmly shut down all discussion of the subject as Tahira was growing up. There is some doubt as to how old she was when Tahira first learned of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad, but it may not have been until after her return from Karbala, since Babi and Baha'i sources indicate that she never met Sayyid Kazim Rashti, the successor of Shaykh Ahmad, and it is unlikely that she would have spent many years in Karbala and not met Sayyid Kazim if she already knew of these teachings. Once she was aware of these teachings however, she would have obtained a great deal of information and writings from her paternal uncle, Mulla °Ali, her maternal uncle, Mulla °Abd al-Wahhab, her mother and her maternal cousin, Mulla Javad Viliyani.<sup>73</sup> She became an ardent follower of the Shaykhi teachings.

Tahira and her husband returned to Qazvin in 1841 but relations between them began to deteriorate as Mulla Muhammad followed his father in vehement opposition to Shaykhi teaching. Finally, Tahira could bear the tensions no more and left her husband and moved to her father's house with the children. Eventually in late 1843, Tahira returned her sons to their father and set off with her daughter, her sister Mardiyya, and her brother-in-law, Mirza Muhammad °Ali, for Karbala and her beloved teacher, Sayyid Kazim.

#### *The Baraghani Family and the Babis*

When Tahira reached Karbala in January 1844, Sayyid Kazim had just died. With the approval and encouragement of Sayyid Kazim's wife, she set up in her late teacher's

---

70. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6: 240, no. 328; Agha Buzurg Tihriani, *Ṭabaqāt-i A°lām al-Shī°a* (14th century), (Najaf, 1943), 1: 23, 164. Tahira is listed as the teacher of these two sons in al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 302–303; On Zaynah, see al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6: 174, no. 273.

71. al-Salihi, "Introduction," 18; al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 305, no. 183; 3: 32, no. 48; Tihriani, *Ṭabaqāt-i A°lām al-Shī°a* (14th century), 1: 132.

72. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 2: 302–303, 3: 32, no. 48.

73. Baha'i sources state that Tahira first heard of Shaykh Ahmad's teaching when she chanced upon one of his books at the house of a cousin, Mulla Javad Viliyani (Mazandarani states that he was the son of a maternal aunt), in 1253/1837. This man became a Babi but later left the Bab and returned to Shaykhism as a follower of Hajji Karim Khan Kirmani. See °Abdu'l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* (trans. Marzieh Gail, Wilmette, Ill., 1971), 191; Fadil Mazandarani, *Zuhūr al-Ḥaqq*, 3:312; Nabil, *Dawn-Breakers*, 159, 161 (where he is called Mulla Javad Baraghani, but this would appear to be an error).

house and effectively continued his private classes, teaching to the men from behind a curtain. Thus she became one of several Shaykhis in Karbala contending for leadership of the movement (Sayyid Kazim had not designated a successor). According to one account, she also continued Sayyid Kazim's practice of teaching an open class in the shrine of Imam Husayn and attracted over two thousand students.<sup>74</sup> It was at this point that the Babi movement arose. The teachings of Sayyid ʿAli Muhammad the Bab (1819-1850) involved a radical development in the Shaykhi teachings. The Shaykhi teachings kept the Hidden Imam in a state of continual messianic tension with the world. If human beings achieved a certain spiritual station, they could reach the presence of the Hidden Imam in the world of Hurqalya; such contact was, by its very nature, however, limited to a spiritual elite. The Bab on the other hand announced that the state of spiritual tension had ended; contact with the Hidden Imam had now taken an immediate and physical form and was available to all. At first, the Bab merely appeared to claim to be the intermediary to the Hidden Imam, but later in his ministry (in 1848), he claimed to be the Hidden Imam himself, and even more, that like the prophet Muhammad, he was the inaugurator of a new religious dispensation. Even his early books were worded in such a way that the perceptive and learned were quickly able to discern that he was in fact claiming much more than what his explicit claim appeared to be.<sup>75</sup>

Among the earliest to accept the Bab was Tahira.<sup>76</sup> She was accepted by him into the ranks of the Letters of the Living (*Hurūf al-Hayy*), the first and foremost group of the Bab's disciples, as were her two cousins, Mirza Muhammad ʿAli and Mirza Muhammad Hadi, the sons of Mulla ʿAbd al-Wahhab. Her sister Mardiyya, the wife of Mirza Muhammad ʿAli, also became a Babi in Karbala, while in Qazvin, some members of Tahira's family who had been Shaykhis, such as her paternal uncle Mulla ʿAli and her maternal uncle Mulla ʿAbd al-Wahhab, now became Babis although they kept their new allegiance secret.<sup>77</sup> It is not certain what position her mother took.

Mulla Taqi, as may be expected, strongly opposed the Bab and began to preach against him in his sermons. As well as the close connections of the Babi movement with the Shaykhis, another reason for Mulla Taqi's opposition to the Bab was very likely the Bab's strong anti-clericalism. Even in his early book, the *Qayyum al-Asma*, the Bab had declared that only the knowledge of his book was lawful and the knowledge of the

---

74. Parviz Varjavand, *Simā-yi Tārīkh va Farhang-i Qazvīn*, 3 vols. (Tehran, 1377/1998) 2: 1081.

75. This more elevated claim was to being the recipient of divine revelation and thus on a par with Muhammad. This was evident, for example, to the Shiʿi and Sunni ulama gathered in January 1845 in Baghdad to try Mulla ʿAli Bastami, the Bab's envoy to the shrine cities of Iraq. See Moojan Momen, "The Trial of Mullā ʿAlī Bastāmī: a combined Sunnī-Shiʿī fatwā against the Bāb." *Iran* 20 (1982): 113-43.

76. Although most sources state that Tahira arrived in Karbala in early 1844 and was there when she first heard of the Bab's claim, there is the puzzling statement in a letter that she wrote to Mulla Javad Vilyani, saying she was in Qazvin when she first heard of the claim of the Bab (Mazandarani, *Zuhūr al-Ḥaqq*, 3: 494).

77. While some Muslim sources deny that Mulla ʿAli was a Babi, this is affirmed by at least one source that was close to the Baraghani family: Tunukabuni, *Qīṣaṣ al-ʿUlamā*, 19, 20. See also Mazandarani, *Zuhūr al-Ḥaqq*, 3: 309.

ulama was unlawful.<sup>78</sup> In his later works, he forbade the learning of the very sciences upon which Usuli Shi'ism is based, jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). Recourse to the Silent Book (i.e. the books of learning of the Shi'ī ulama), the Bab wrote, only serves to veil one from the truth in the days when the Speaking Book (i.e. the Bab) is present and can provide access to the truth, free from the limitations of human cognitional constructs.<sup>79</sup>

The attitude of the middle brother, Mulla Salih, towards the Babi movement can best be summed up by an anecdote recorded in a Baha'i source. When the Bab was passing by Qazvin on the way to Tabriz and Maku in 1847, he wrote to the ulama of Qazvin to meet him at Siyah-Dihan (now Takistan), which was the nearest that his guards would allow him to approach the town of Qazvin itself, and to investigate his claims for themselves. Mulla Taqi predictably is said to have torn up the letter. Mulla 'Abd al-Wahhab sent a message to his brother-in-law Mulla Salih, suggesting that they go together to Siyah-Dihan to investigate the claims. Mulla Salih is said to have replied: "Two of your sons are accused of being attracted to and believing [in this new movement] and two of my daughters also. If we were to make this move, my fear is that the other ulama will accuse us of betrayal and we will completely lose our position of respect. It would be better if other ulama take the initiative in this matter."<sup>80</sup>

In Karbala, Tahira boldly asserted the claims of the Bab and continued to teach from the house of Sayyid Kazim Rashti, gathering around her a group of Babi adherents. Although at first she strictly followed the laws of Islam, after she received a letter from the Bab in June-July 1846, she perceived that the writings of the Bab presaged the abrogation of these laws and she began to pull away from them, being one of the first Babis to do so.<sup>81</sup> Also, during a six-month stay in Kazimayn in 1846, she gained a reputation for allowing the veil to slip from her face in the heat of her oration.<sup>82</sup> As a result of her open divergence from Islamic orthodoxy, she was opposed by a more cautious and conservative group of the followers of the Bab and her supporters became known as the Qurratiyya or Qurriyya.<sup>83</sup>

Since the focus of this paper is a description of the impact of this new movement on the Baraghani family and Qazvin, we will only here briefly describe events until Tahira's return to Qazvin. Her activities led to her expulsion from Karbala in early 1847 and her confinement in Baghdad in the house of Sayyid Mahmud Alusi, the famous mufti of Baghdad. He is reported to have written about her, probably in response to allegations made about her virtue, that: "I saw in her an excellence (*al-fadl*) that I have not seen in most men. She was intelligent and cultured and unique in her virtue and chastity.

78. *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* (mss. prepared for Mulla Husayn Bushru'i, dated 1261, in photocopy collection of Iranian National Baha'i Archives, vol. 3) Surah 2, Surat al-'Ulamā, v. 9–13, p. 5.

79. *Persian Bayān*, ([Tehran], n.d.), vahid 4, chap. 10, pp. 120–21. The summary translation of this by Browne can be found in *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne on the Bābī and Bahā'ī Faiths* (ed. M. Momen, Oxford, 1987), 354.

80. Shaykh Kazim Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar va Mulḥaqāt*, (Tehran, 131 BE/1974), 98.

81. Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar*, 349. Denis MacEoin, "From Shaykhism to Babism", 211.

82. al-Wardi, *Lamaḥāt*, 2: 153–57; al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6: 242, no. 328.

83. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 300; al-Wardi, *Lamaḥāt*, 2: 169.

... I did not observe her to put aside her obligations, that is to say her religious duties, as her enemies have accused her of doing, despite the fact that she remained in my house for about two months."<sup>84</sup>

Eventually, Tahira was expelled from Ottoman domains and returned to her home in Qazvin in about the middle of 1847, accompanied by some men sent for this purpose by her husband and also by a group of Babis. Her return home signalled the restart of hostilities between her and her husband. He tried to get her to come to his house but she refused, declared their marriage dissolved, and lived instead at the home of her father.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile her return prompted a renewal of the denunciations of the Shaykhi and Babi movement by her father-in-law, Mulla Taqi. Once more the town of Qazvin was in turmoil and split into camps. Most of the Babis came from the Shaykhi stronghold in the Dar al-Shafa district. Among the Babi families of this district, apart from the family of Mulla °Abd al-Wahhab, were the prominent Farhadi merchant family, who were descended from a brother-in-law of Fath-°Ali Shah and had supported Shaykh Ahmad financially when he lived in the town, as well as the merchant family of Shaykh Muhammad Qazvini, a grandson of Haj Riza Khuvayni, who had built a caravansarai in Qazvin and who owned considerable land in the town.

Something of the tensions in the town can be gleaned from an incident narrated by a Babi historian, who later became a Baha'i. Shaykh Kazim Samandar states that when the Bab's message began to spread in Qazvin, a certain prominent °alim (presumably Mulla Taqi) gave a religious decree (*fatwā*) for the harassment of the Babis and began to curse and abuse the new movement from the pulpit. This then encouraged the merchants and traders in the bazaar to begin to harass those of their neighbours whom they knew to be Babis. A certain itinerant kebab-seller was encouraged by the people of the bazaar to curse and abuse the religion of the Bab as he went around the bazaar selling his food. The Babis bore these taunts at first, but when the kebab-seller began to abuse Shaykh Kazim's father, his uncle who was a Babi and a hat-maker in the market (*qaysariyya*) of Qazvin, attacked the kebab-seller by throwing his scissors and other implements at him. This provided the other bazaaris with the excuse they needed and a large group of them then attacked Shaykh Kazim's uncle and beat and kicked him mercilessly, only desisting when a friend of his interposed himself between the attackers and their victim.<sup>86</sup>

Mulla Taqi eventually caused a Shaykhi of Qazvin to be seized, denounced as a heretic and publicly paraded through the streets. According to Babi-Baha'i sources, it was this event together with Mulla Taqi's intemperate language towards Shaykh Ahmad, that decided a certain Shaykhi named Mulla °Abd Allah Shirazi to enter Mulla Taqi's mosque in the Dimaj quarter<sup>87</sup> at night and, in the morning, while the Mulla Taqi was performing his dawn prayers, to stab him in the back and mouth.<sup>88</sup> This occurred on

---

84. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6: 242, no. 328, quoting from the newspaper *al-Manār* of 21 April 1967, 6.

85. Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 273–75.

86. Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar*, 63–65.

87. On this mosque see Gulriz, *Minūdar*, 557.

88. Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 276–67. This source states that Mulla °Abd Allah, who later called himself Mirza Salih, was a Shaykhi who was on his way to meet the Bab and investigate



15 Dhu al-Qa<sup>c</sup>da 1263/25 October 1847<sup>89</sup> and Mulla Taqi died two days later from his wounds.

In a paroxysm of anger, Mulla Taqi's eldest son, Mulla Muhammad, the husband of Tahira, unleashed a torrent of persecution upon everyone known as a Shaykhi or Babi in the town. Numerous Babis were arrested and some were killed. The Baraghani family was devastated. Mulla Muhammad furiously accused his wife Tahira of involvement in a plot to kill Mulla Taqi. Mulla Salih, despite his cautious approach to the Babi movement, never wavered in his support for his daughter. He kept her in his house, shielding her from the turmoil that was going on in Qazvin. When, at a meeting of Qazvin ulama, his daughter's virtue was called into question, he defended her, despite being subjected to much taunting—one of the ulama present mocked her position in Mulla Salih's household with the verse: "No glory rests upon that house / Where the cock's crow comes from the hens." An observer stated that tears streamed down Mulla Salih's face as these taunts were thrown at him and he got up without a word and departed.<sup>90</sup>

Nevertheless, Tahira's life was in great danger until Baha' Allah (Mirza Husayn <sup>c</sup>Ali Nuri, the future founder of the Baha'i faith) arranged for her to be stealthily removed from her father's house and taken to Tehran.<sup>91</sup> From Tehran, Tahira went on to attend the Babi conference at Badasht in the summer of 1848. Here she appeared without a veil and, by doing so, heralded the break with the *shari<sup>c</sup>a* and the start of a new religious dispensation.<sup>92</sup> After this episode, however, she was arrested and kept in the house of Mahmud Khan, the *kalāntar* of Tehran until her execution in August 1852.

The pressure of these events weighed heavily upon Tahira's family. Crushed by these events, by the increasing pressure on them in Qazvin, and by the violent deaths of a beloved daughter and son respectively, Mulla Salih retired to Karbala and Mulla <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Wahhab to Najaf. Mulla Salih died at the shrine of Imam Husayn in 1271/1854 and Mulla <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Wahhab at the shrine of Imam <sup>c</sup>Ali in 1270/1853.

The rest of the Baraghani family made a determined attempt to close ranks and reconstitute itself as an orthodox Usuli family. With the death of Tahira herself in 1852, of her mother in 1268/1851, and of her uncle Mulla <sup>c</sup>Ali also in 1269/1852, the three most troubling members of the family disappeared from the scene. Mulla Muhammad, the son of Mulla Taqi and husband of Tahira, who inherited not only his father's position as *imām-jum<sup>c</sup>a* but also his father's aggressiveness, browbeat the remainder of the family into at least outward compliance with Usuli orthodoxy.

The Baraghani family later tried to expurgate references to the heterodoxies and dissensions that occurred in the family. Thus, for example, a biographical notice of Mulla <sup>c</sup>Ali, written by a descendant of the family, makes no mention at all of Mulla

the latter's claims for himself. He later became a Babi and perished in the Babi upheaval at Shaykh Tabarsi.

89. al-Salihi, "Introduction," 17.

90. "Shukūhī namānd dar ān khāndān / kih bāng-i khurūs ayad az mākiyān." Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar*, 75. See a slightly different translation of this verse in Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 322.

91. Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 283–86.

92. Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 292–86.

‘Ali’s adherence to the Shaykhi or Babi movement, apart from listing Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i as one of his teachers.<sup>93</sup> Most of the descendants of all three of the brothers, including the children of Tahira herself, are accounted as pious Usulis by the Shi‘i biographical sources.<sup>94</sup> Even more remarkably, Zaynah, the daughter of Tahira, who accompanied her mother on her travels and was with her mother during her imprisonment in Tehran in the house of Mahmud Khan the *kalantar* up to the time of her execution, is stated to have maintained that her mother died a follower of Shi‘ism (*‘ala madhhab al-Shi‘a*),<sup>95</sup> while her son Shaykh Ibrahim stated that when he visited her during her confinement in Tehran, he found her praying and reading the Qur’an, and he therefore asserts she died a Muslim.<sup>96</sup>

There are, however, hints that the influence of Shaykhism and of Tahira permeated the family. We have already noted that one of the sons of Mulla Taqi, Shaykh Muhammad Ja‘far, was a Shaykhi and left Qazvin for Kirman. He was married to a sister of Tahira, Nargis, who was also a Shaykhi.<sup>97</sup> Another sister of Tahira, Khadijah Sultan Khanum, was married, as we have noted above, to Sayyid Mirza Mas‘ud of the Shaykh al-Islam family of Qazvin. She must also have been a Shaykhi since three of her five sons are said to have become Shaykhis.<sup>98</sup> Tahira’s sister Mardiyyah became a Babi and when her husband Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali died in the Babi upheaval at Shaykh Tabarsi, she married his brother Mirza Yusuf. She was in her own right a learned scholar and taught and gave *fatwās* in Karbala and later in Qazvin until her death in about 1896.<sup>99</sup> It is even reported that Tahira’s eldest brother, Mirza ‘Abd al-Wahhab, came to believe in the Bab.<sup>100</sup>

The ultimate irony then is that despite the efforts of the Baraghanis to disown or expunge the memory of their troublesome ancestor, Tahira, and to “re-veil” her and thus

---

93. al-Salihi, “Introduction,” 19–20.

94. The family came to use surnames derived from the three brothers: Shahidi, descendants of Mulla Taqi, who became known after his murder as Shahid-i Thalith, the Third Martyr, after two medieval Shi‘i martyrs; Salihi, descendants of Mulla Salihi; and ‘Alawi, descendants of Mulla ‘Ali. Some of the latter two lines of descent also attached the name Shahidi to themselves in honor of Mulla Taqi and thus became Shahidi Salihi and Shahidi ‘Alawi. Biographies of these descendants can be found in al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, Tihrani, *Ṭabaqāt A‘lām al-Shi‘a* (14th century) and Yahya Shahidi, *Shajara-yi Khānivādah-hā-yi Shahīdī, Ṣālihi, ‘Alavi-Shahīdī*, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1376/1997).

95. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6:174, no. 273.

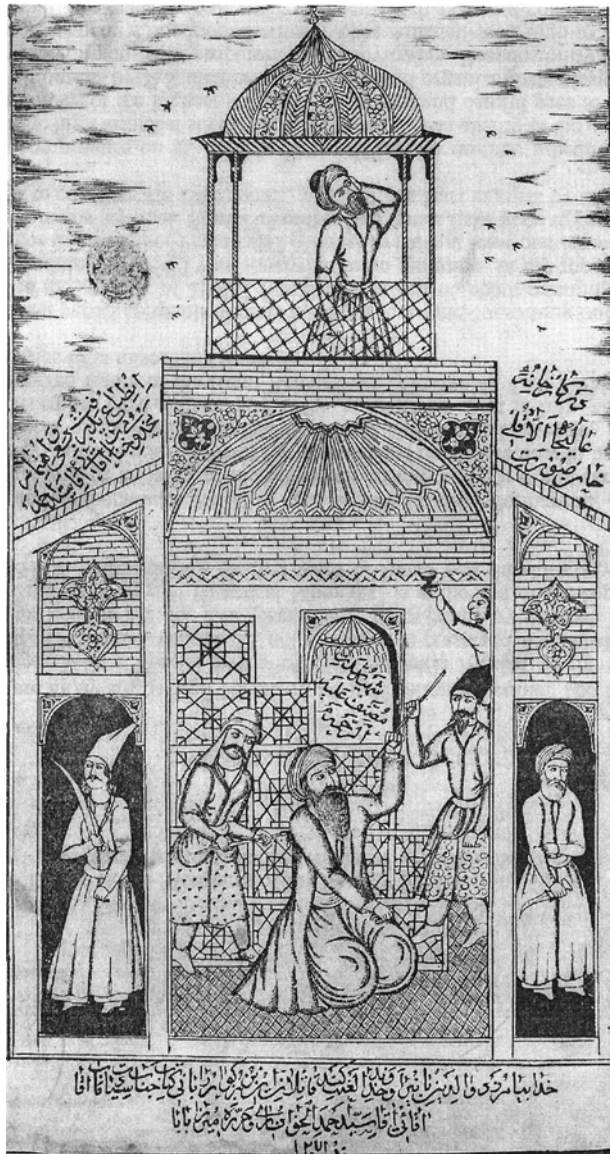
96. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6: 243, no. 328. See also Shahidi, *Shajara* 2: 931–38. Of course such activities as reading the Qur’an, praying and fasting were commonplace among the Babis and prove nothing. Such piety was part of the ethos of the Babi movement. The Bab himself is reported, while he was imprisoned in Maku, to have read and shed tears over the *Muḥriq al-Qulūb*, an account by Mulla Mahdi Naraqī of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn; Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 252.

97. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 4:213, no. 96

98. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 4:104, no. 25; 6:324, no. 430

99. al-Amin, *Mustadrakāt*, 6:319, no. 421

100. Nabil, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 285; Nabil states, somewhat enigmatically, that he came to believe in the Bab but “failed to demonstrate subsequently by his acts the sincerity of his belief.”



*The Assassination of Mulla Muhammad Taqi.* A picture from his *Majālis al-muttaqīn*, published in 1271/1854, seven years after its author's murder, depicted here. Above the head of the assassin on the right is an unflattering depiction of an unveiled woman who is rejoicing at the murder and drinking wine. It is undoubtedly intended to represent Tahira.

restore the family's orthodoxy and honour, it is only through her that the family is remembered at all today. It is her role as a symbol, icon and originator of the women's movement in Iran,<sup>101</sup> as a symbol of the Babi-Baha'i concern for gender equality and social activism,<sup>102</sup> and perhaps as a fetish representing both the attractiveness and horror of modernity in the Iranian national psyche,<sup>103</sup> that is celebrated in numerous articles and books up to the present day in Iran and throughout the world.<sup>104</sup>

### *Conclusion*

This has been a description of the effects of the religious turbulence of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries upon one Qazvin family, the Baraghani. We have described three religious encounters, each resulting in turmoil in the town of Qazvin and a crisis for three successive generations of the family. The first was the Usuli-Akhbari dispute of the late eighteenth century. This split the town of Qazvin and led eventually to the expulsion and exile to the village of Baraghan of Shaykh Muhammad Mala'ikah, who thus became the first of the family to be known as Baraghani.

The second religious encounter was between the Usulis and the Shaykhis at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This again led to divisions in the town, but this time it also split the family. Of the three sons of Mala'ikah, the eldest strongly opposed the Shaykhis, the youngest supported them and the middle brother wavered. On this occasion the crisis was resolved through the forced departure from the town of Shaykh Ahmad, the originator of the Shaykhi movement, following a heated open debate.

The third crisis arose because of the advent of the Babi movement in the middle of the nineteenth century. It involved the next generation of the family, the children of the three Baraghani brothers, as well as the brothers themselves. It came to a crisis with the murder of one of the brothers, Mulla Taqi, and threw the town into turmoil. The anger of the town and of the Baraghani family was turned in upon one of their own, Tahira, who was rocking the very foundations of their world. Her prodigious abilities despite being a woman threatened the perceived natural order which decreed that women were inferior to men; her passionate discourse as an equal among men threatened to rupture the strict

---

101. See for example, Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*, (London, 1992), 77–99.

102. See for example, Susan Maneck, "Tahiri: A Religious Paradigm of Womanhood," *The Journal of Bahā'ī Studies* 2 (1989): 35–48.

103. See Negar Mottahedeh, "The Mutilated Body of the Modern Nation: Qurrat al-<sup>c</sup>Ayn Tahira's Unveiling and the Iranian Massacre of the Babis," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 18 (1998): 38–50.

104. A number of books and papers have appeared about Tahira in the West. See, for example, John S. Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat, *The Poetry of Tahiri*, (Oxford, 2003). There has also been a continuing fascination with and a stream of publications on Tahira in the Indian sub-continent ever since Muhammad Iqbal's references to her in his *Javīdnāmah* (Lahore, 1932). On this see Annemarie Schimmel, "Iqbal and the Babi-Baha'i Faith," *The Bahā'ī Faith and Islam*, ed. H. Moayyad (Ottawa, 1990), 111–19. A bibliography of the literature on Tahira in oriental languages can be found in *Khūshah-hā'ī az Kharman-i Hunar va Adab*, 3 (1992): 135–42, which lists 180 items, and in western languages in *Khūshah-hā'ī az Kharman-i Hunar va Adab*, 4 (1993): 205–22, which lists 206 items. These items range from passing references to entire books.

separation between men and women upon which the social order was based; her behavior in removing her veil posed questions about her chastity and thus threatened the honor of the family and subverted the society's moral order; and her espousal of the anti-clerical, reforming Babi movement threatened to overturn the very basis of the family's power and wealth and to disrupt the economic order.

We have noted also some indications that the geographical split in the town continued from its possible origin as an Usuli-Akhbari division between the Dimaj and Qumlaq quarters in the west of the town and the Dar al-Shifa district in the north part of the center of the town. This then evolved into an Usuli-Shaykhi split, and finally an Usuli-Babi split.

Moreover, the second and third of these three crises had reverberations far beyond the Baraghani family and the town of Qazvin. The *takfir* pronounced by Mulla Taqi against Shaykh Ahmad was the first occasion on which Shaykh Ahmad's orthodoxy had been openly questioned. It initiated the chain of events that was to lead eventually to the splitting off of Shaykhism into a separate school in Twelver Shi'ism and to much conflict and death in such Iranian cities as Hamadan and Kirman, where there were Usuli-Shaykhi riots in later years. When Shaykh Salih Karimi, an Arab Babi who had accompanied Tahira from Iraq to Qazvin, was executed in Tehran by the government for the murder of Mulla Taqi (this merely on the accusation of Mulla Taqi's son and despite the lack of any evidence against Shaykh Salih and the confession of the actual murderer), it marked the first time that the Iranian government had acted to support the Usuli ulama in what had previously been just a religious disagreement. It was thus the first of many episodes of state support for the ulama's persecution of the Babi and later the Baha'i Faiths in Iran down to the present time.

This study shows that while many accounts seem to imply that Usuli orthodoxy has reigned supreme in the Shi'i world since the eighteenth century, such a generalization conceals a great deal of turbulence and the enormous efforts that have had to have been expended to maintain Usuli supremacy. The need to possess a uniformly orthodox distinguished clerical ancestry as an aid to achieving high clerical rank has compelled families of ulama to retrospectively rewrite and thus conceal the much more colorful heterodox family histories that they often have. Thus while Edward Shils was quite correct to indicate the importance of the presence of tradition amidst the fragmentation of modern society,<sup>105</sup> this paper shows that sometimes an appearance of monolithic family tradition and orthodoxy can belie a heterodox and fragmented past.

---

105. Edward Shils, *Tradition* (London, 1981)



