

The Cyprus Exiles

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The Cyprus Exiles

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Bahá'u'lláh made an open declaration in Edirne in about 1866 of his claim to be the messianic figure "He Whom God shall make manifest" prophesied by the Bab. Bahá'u'lláh's half-brother, Mirza Yahyá, who had been widely considered the leader of the Babis, rejected this claim and so a split occurred in the Babi community. Eventually, this split was resolved in favour of Bahá'u'lláh as some 90% of Bab is became followers of Bahá'u'lláh. This article is mainly concerned with the fate of Mírzá Yahyá, the unsuccessful rival of Bahá'u'lláh.

After the events that led to the split between Bahá'u'lláh and Mirza Yahya, two of Mírzá Yahyá's leading supporters, Sayyid Muhammad Isfahani and Aqa Jan Big-i Kaj-Kuláh went to Istanbul.

According to Bahá'í histories, while there they began to stir up trouble with the Ottoman authorities against the Bahá'ís.[1]

At about the same time, a number of Bahá'u'lláh's supporters also went to live in Istanbul. One group was Mírzá `Ali Sayyáh, Mishkín-Qalam, and Aqa Jamshíd Gurjí. It appears that they had found it difficult to earn a living in Edirne and thought that with Mishkín-Qalam's talent for calligraphy, they would fare better in Istanbul.[2] A while later, Bahá'u'lláh instructed Darvish

Sidq-`Alí, Áqá Muhammad-Báqir Mahallátí
(Qahvihchi) and Ustád Muhammad-`Ali Salmani to proceed to Istanbul
in order to sell some horses that had been sent to Bahá'u'lláh.[3]

Aqa `Abdu'l-Ghaffár Isfahání had also been sent to Istanbul.[4]

1. Hasan Balyuzi, Bahá'u'lláh: the King of Glory, Oxford: George Ronald, 1980, p. 248.
2. Ustád Muhammad `Alí Salmání, My Memories

of Bahá'u'lláh (trans. M. Gail), Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982, p.59

3. Salmání, Memories, pp. 58-9. Balyuzi, Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 250-2

4. Balyuzi, Bahá'u'lláh, p. 252

[page 85]

In about early 1868, these seven Bahá'ís in Istanbul were arrested together with the two follower of Mírzá Yahyá who were also in Istanbul.[5] A short time later, Bahá'u'lláh and companions were arrested in Edirne and precipitously sent to Gallipoli, not knowing their ultimate destination

All of those who were arrested in Edirne with Bahá'u'lláh were eventually sent to `Akka with him but a different fate awaited the seven followers of Bahá'u'lláh arrested in Istanbul. Only one of them was sent with the rest of the exiles to `Akka, Darvish Sidq-`Alí. Two of them were sent back to Iran, Ustád Muhammad-`Alí Salmání and Áqá Jamshid. The other four were condemned to imprisonment in Cyprus along with Azal and his family. The two followers of Mírzá Yahyá that were also arrested in Istanbul were sent to `Akka.

On 31 August 1868, the Austrian Lloyd liner carrying Bahá'u'lláh and his companions reached Haifa. As the exiles were disembarking, Áqá `Abdu'l-Ghaffár, one of the four condemned to go on to Cyprus threw himself into the sea. He was rescued and resuscitated but the officials would not alter the sentence and he was taken on to Cyprus.

The exiles arriving at Famagusta in Cyprus on 5 September 1868 were:
Followers of Bahá'u'lláh:

Aqa `Abdu'l-Ghaffar Isfahani

Mirza `Alí Sayyah

Mishkin-Qalam

Aqa Muhammad-Baqir Mahallati (Qahvihchi)

Mirza Yahya and family:

Mírzá Yahya, Subh-i Azal

Fatima, wife

5. Regarding the circumstances of these arrests, see Salmani, Memories, pp. 58-65; Balyuzi, Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 248, 250-2

[page 86]

Ruqiyya, wife

Ahmad, son

Ridvan-`Ali, son

`Abdu'l-`Ali, son

Rafí`a, daughter

Bahjat Raf`at, daughter

Tal`at, daughter

Fatima, daughter[6]

Two servants also accompanied the exiles, one named Ruqiyya was a servant of Shaykh `Ali Sayyah, the other was Mishkin-Qalam's. The exiles, after interrogation by the police, were allocated houses in Famagusta. It is not clear from the records and accounts whether the family of Shaykh `Ali Sayyah, one of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, accompanied them on their arrival or joined them later(probably the latter as one account gives the total number of the exiles as 14 persons and two servants[7]).

Aqa `Abdu'l-Ghaffar escaped from Cyprus on 29 September 1870 and went to `Akka. He lived in the Khan-i Afranj and in order to conceal his identity he changed his name to Aqa `Abdu'llah. After the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, he moved to Damascus where he died.

Mírzá `Ali Sayyah died in Famagusta on 4 August 1871.

His widow, Fatima, married Mishkin Qalam.

6. List in Browne's diary of trip to Cyprus and `Akka, Browne manuscripts, Cambridge University Library, Sup 21(8), p. 20; as amended in E.G. Browne, A

Traveller's Narrative written to illustrate the Episode of the Báb, Cambridge: University Press, 1891, vol. 2, 376-389.

7. Browne, Traveller's Narrative, p. 381.

[page 87]

Mishkin-Qalam moved from Famagusta to Nicosia in 1879, and to Larnaca in 1885. He was employed by Mr Cobham, Commissioner at Larnaca, as Persian secretary. His departure from Cyprus is noted in a letter from Cobham, dated 18 September 1886: "The Persian heresiarch and calligraphist Mushkín Kalam left Cyprus for St. Jean d'Acre on the night of Tuesday September 14-15, renouncing his pittances and the protection of the Island Government. He found an unwonted opportunity in a Syrian vessel going directly to Acre . . .[8]. It appears that some members of Mishkin-Qalam's family remained in Cyprus, at least for a time, since a list of pilgrims to `Akka shows the arrival of Mishkin-Qalam's son, `Ali-Akbar, from Cyprus on 29 March 1888 for a stay of 116 days. [9]

Aqa Muhammad-Baqir Mahallati died on 22 November 1872 (in Famagusta?).

During his time in Cyprus, Mishkin Qalam had succeeded in converting

a Turkish Cypriot by the name of Na'im Effendi. He came to `Akka twice. He achieved a high position in later life and his sons were also prominent in Cyprus and Turkey in government and the military. It is not clear what happened to this family. The descendants of Na'im Effendi have been traced by the present-day Cyprus Bahá'í community and do not appear know anything about the Bahá'í Faith.

The Family of Mírzá Yahyá

Mírzá Yahyá is reputed to have been an uxorious man. His own son Ridvan-`Ali reports him to have had eleven or twelve wives [10] while another source gives fourteen

8. Browne, Traveller's Narrative, p. 388

9. Manuscript list of pilgrims that came to `Akka in 1304-5, copy in Afnan library; original in Haifa. It would also appear that Mishkín-Qalam's wife (the widow of Shaykh `Alí Sayyáh) stayed on in Cyprus; see Traveller's Narrative, p. 387, last few lines of the table on this page.

10. Browne, "Personal Reminiscences of the Babi Insurrection at Zanzan in 1850, written by Aqa `Abdu'l-Ahad-i-Zanzani," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, (1897, pp. 761-827) p. 767.

[page 88]

wives.[11] The following table is the best that the present author has managed thus far by way of a reconstruction of Mirza Yahya's wives and their children.

The sources for this list are abbreviated as follows:

T - Browne, Traveller's Narrative, pp. 384-6;

P - Browne, "Personal Reminiscences", pp. 766-7;

M - Browne, Materials, pp. 314, 321-2;

J - Notes of Jalal Azal at Princeton University Library, pp. 560-572.

C - Browne's notebook for his journey to Cyprus and `Akka in 1890, University of Cambridge, Browne Manuscripts, Sup. 21 (8), p .20

S - the genealogical table compiled by Shoghi Effendi and published in Bahá'í World, vol. 5: 1932-4, New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1936, between pp. 204 and 205;

K - Malik-Khusravi, `Iqlim-i-Nur, pp. 202-205; and

I - information obtained during my trip to Cyprus.

1. Wife: Fatima,[12] daughter of Mirza Muhammad, the younger full brother of Mirza Buzurg Nuri and thus Mirza Yahya's cousin. Married in Iran in about 1850. She was arrested when Government troops attacked Takur. Mirza Yahya left her behind with the children when he fled to Baghdad. Resided

in Takur (T,M,J,K)

Children:

i. Muhammad Hadi, b. 1848, Tihiran; d. 1896, Tihiran (T,P,M, J,S,K)

- had descendants living in Iran, among whom:

a. Mahdi (S)

b. Diya'u'llah (S)

11. Muhammad `Ali Malik-Khusravi, `Iqlim-i-Nur, Tihiran: Mu'assisih Matbu`at Amri, 115 B.E./1958 pp. 202-5

12. Also called Hajjiyya by Sayyid Mahdí Dihají in his risala, Browne Manuscripts, Cambridge University Library, Mss no. F.57, p. 94 and in Malik-Khusravi, op cit. p. 202; but in other accounts her sister Ruqiyya, see below, is called Hajjiya.

[page 89]

ii. Muhammad Mahdi, died young (J)

2. Wife: Narjis. Married in Iran. Left behind when M i rza Yahya fled (J)

iii. son (J)

3. Wife: Maryam, known as Qanita[13]. Married in Iran. Left behind in Baghdad in the care of Mirza Ja`far Naraqí when Mirza Yahya moved on to Istanbul. They returned to Iran in 1286/1869-70 (J,K)

iv. Mirza Nuru'llah, b. 1848 - a physician who lived at Rasht.

Visited Cyprus on at least three occasions, once being in 1878 (T,P,M,J,S).

He had many wives and children, among whom:

a. `Abdu'l-`Ali (S)

b. Ahmad (Ruhu'llah), visited Cyprus in 1896 (P,S)

aa. `Inayat, `Inayatu'llah, b. c. 1889 (P,S)

bb. `Atiyyih (S)

c. Maryam (S)

d. `Aliyyih (S)

One of these two daughters was called Khanum Gul and married Mutarjim Humayun[14] (S,K)

aa. Hushang (S)

bb. Manuchihr (S)

cc. Fakhru'z-Zaman (S)

4. Fatima (Mulk-i-Jahan, Malakih Khanum) of Shiraz, the sister of Mirza Baqir. Married in Iran. Followed her husband to Baghdad, Edirne and

Famagusta. d. 1868 in Famagusta. (T,M,J,C,K)
v. Ahmad Bahhaj. b. 1853. m. `Ulaviyya (or Fatima). Moved to
Istanbul in

13. Sayyid Mahdí Dihají, in his risala (Browne Manuscripts,
Cambridge University Library, Mss no.F. 57, pp. 94, 189), states that she
was from Isfahan. Malik-Khusraví states that she was from Kirmanshah
(op. cit., p. 203)

14. Shoghi Effendi's genealogical chart (Bahá'í World, vol. 5:
1932-4, between pp. 204 and 205), however, seems to have Khanum-Gul as
a daughter of Mírza Yahya himself.

[page 90]

1884. His wife and two daughters adopted Protestantism in Istanbul.
He moved to Haifa in 1921. d. 1933 and is buried in Bahá'í cemetery in
Haifa. (For further details on him see below). (T,P,M,J,C,S,K)

Daughters:

a. `Adila (`Adila Sultan, Ayatu'llah) b. Cyprus, 1880, moved
to Istanbul - then moved to France and later became a missionary in Algeria.
d. Switzerland - no issue (P,M,J,S)

b. `Ala'iyya (Grace) - married a German and went to live in Federal
Republic of Germany - one son, one daughter (J,S)

vi. `Abdu'l-`Ali, (known as `Ali Effendi) b. 1857-8. Was a cloth merchant.
m. `Ismat, daughter of Sayyid Muhammad. Lived on in Famagusta. Died 1956.
(T,P,M,J,C,S,I,K)

Children:

a. Wahida - a spinster, died of cancer of the breast (J,I)

b. Nayyira - was taken to Haifa by her uncle Ahmad but later returned
to Cyprus - a spinster (had been engaged to a pilot who was killed in the
war; is said to have gone mad after this) (J,I)

c. Jalal Azal (Celal Ezel) - went to visit `Abdu'l-Bahá and through
him was employed in the Palestine civil service. Some time after 1948,
he returned to Cyprus and was employed at a radio monitoring station in
Cyprus - m. `Ismat, daughter of Badi`u'llah, son of Bahá'u'lláh. d. 5 April
1971. No children. (For further details of him see below.) (J,S)

d. `Alíma - married a Turk, Fadil Urfzadih (Fazel Orfzade).
Is said to be still alive (J,I) Children:

[page 91]

aa. Sule Orfi (Shulay Urfi) married Mr. Hakki Suha, a prominent
newspaper owner and later in charge of a television station. He died in
1987. She herself is a prominent person in Nicosia, works in the Australian

High Commission and the U.N. High Commission for Refugees. Have several children (I)

bb. Dr. Ezel (Orfzade (Urfi). Has English wife and is now living in Canada and is a radiologist. Returned to Cyprus for a time in 1970 (I)
e. Tali`a - married but died without issue (J)

f. The list of Ridvan-`Ali contains several other names. I am not sure if these are the same as the above or may have been children who did not survive to adulthood:

`Azima Sultan, Satwatu'llah, together with a daughter who died when 14 days old (P)

vii. Ridvan-`Ali, b. 1863. Went to Istanbul to join his brother Ahmad. Visited `Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa in about 1894. Adopted Christianity, took the name Constantine the Persian and married a Greek woman. Lived for a time in Larnaca where he was employed by Mr Cobham the British Commissioner - died without issue in about 1917 (T,P,M,J,C,S,K)

viii. Muhammad (Mehmed, Bayanu'llah, Wali-Muhammad, Jamalu'llah), b. 1867. Described in 1912 as "not quite right in the head." [15] Went to Istanbul for a time to join his brother Ahrnad. Came to Haifa in

15. E.G. Browne, Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918, p. 314.

[page 92]

the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá, but proved troublesome and so was sent to Iran, where he was put into the care of his half-brother Mirza Nuru'llah. m. an Iranian woman and died without issue (T,P,M,J,S,K[16])

5. Wife: Ruqiyya, known as Hajjiyya, was sister of Fatima, Mirza Yahya's first wife (see above) and thus also cousin of Mirza Yahya. Married in Baghdad. d. Cyprus. (T,M,J,C,K [16])

ix. Raf`at (Bahjat Raf`at, Bahjat al-Quds, Raf`atu'llah) b. 1861-2. died a spinster (T,P,J,C)

x. Fu'ad (Fu'adu'llah). b. 1868-9. d. unmarried, Famagusta, 1888 (T,P,J,K)

xi. `Abdu'l-Wahíd (also known as `Abdu'l-Jalil, Muhammad Jamil, `Abdu'r-Rashid and is also probably identical with the Vahid on some lists). b. 1871-2. m. Hamida, daughter of Mirza Mustafa (Mirza Isma`il Sabbagh). He died without issue and his wife returned to Iran with her father and remarried (T,P,J,S,K)

xii. Maryam, b. 1873 - moved to Tihiran in A.H. 1315 (1897), married her cousin in Iran and left several children, among whom: (T,J,S,K)
a. `Aliyyih (S)

b. Maymanat (S)

xiii. Taqíu'd-Dín, also called Diya'u'd-Din, b. 1876-8. He

died unmarried but in his will, he recognised an illegitimate son (from an affair with a Turkish Cypriot married woman, the wife of `Alí Rúhí): (T,P,M,J,S,K,I)

a. Riza Ezel, to whom he left a plot of land near Mirza Yahya's grave. Riza Ezel worked in the Customs department and is currently the caretaker of Mirza Yahya's grave and lives in a nearby house (I)

16. Malik-Khusravi incorrectly makes him the son of Badri-Jan

[page 93]

aa. Ruhi Ezel, the son of Riza is in the Police force in Cyprus (I)

xiv Muhtaram, this may be the same as Raf`at above (S,K)

6. Wife: Fatima, the second wife of the Bab, the sister of Mulla Rajab-`Alí Isfahání; married in Baghdad in about 1854-6 (while Bahá'u'lláh was wandering in the hills of Sulaymaniyyih) for about a month before divorcing her and giving her in marriage to Sayyid Muhammad Isfahani[17].

7. Wife: Badri-Jan (Badr-i-Jahan), the sister of Mirza Nasru'llah and Mirza Rida-Quli Tafrishi; married in Baghdad but she had refused to live with him after a time and was exiled to `Akka with Bahá'u'lláh. She was sent to Cyprus by her brother but still refused to live with Mirza Yahya and went to live in Nicosia instead. In 1886, she moved to Izmir and then to Istanbul where her daughters married. In 1888, she returned to Cyprus and died there after Azal (J)

xv. Safiyya (Rafiyya), b. 1861; exiled to Cyprus with her father, then moved to Istanbul with her mother in 1886. Married Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani. But after two years left him and returned to Cyprus. Returned to Istanbul in about 1889. Died without issue (T,J,C,K[18])

xvi. Tal`at or Tal`atu'llah, b. 1864; exiled to Cyprus with her father, then moved to Istanbul with her mother in 1886. Married Shaykh `Alí Rúhí. Left her husband in 1888 and returned to Cyprus. Returned to Istanbul in about 1889. She later remarried to Mirza Mahdi of Isfahan and died in childbirth (T,J,C,K)

Children from her first husband:

a. Muhammad Diya'u'llah (Nuru'd-Din, Kalimu'd-Din,

17. Hasan M Balyuzí, Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith, London: George Ronald, 1970, p. 35n

18. Malik-Khusravi incorrectly has her as the daughter of Fatíma Mulk-i-Jahan.

[page 94]

`Izamu'd-Din), died before 1896. (P)

b. Fadila (Fadila Sultan). d. unmarried. (P,J)

c. `Aliyya. Married to Tām ibn `Abdu's-Salam, no issue[19] (J)

d. The list of Ridvan-`Ali also contains the name Abadiyya Sultan - this may be the last-named above (P)

8. Wife: Daughter of an Arab, married in Baghdad (K)

xvii. Mirza Rivanu'llah (K)

9. Wife: Daughter of Mulla `Abdu'l-Ghani or, by some accounts, Mulla `Abdu'l-Fattáh (K)

10. Wife: Daughter of Mirza Haydar-Quli Namad-sab; she was half-sister of Khanum-Jan, a cousin of Mirza Yahya (was possibly named Fatima) (K)

11. Wife: the wife of Mulla Muhammad Mu`allim Nuri, who was martyred at Shaykh Tabarsi (K)

12. Wife: Ruqiyya, daughter of A`raj Isfahani (K)

13. Wife: Nisa Khanum Tihrani (K)

14. Wife: Qanita, described as Ahl-i Balada and a companion of Tahirih when she was in Nur (K)

15. Wife: Sahib-Jan Isfahani (K)

xviii. Mirza Ruhu'llah (K)

16. Wife: Wife of Shaykh `Ali Zanjani. Nabil Zarandi reports that he heard from Aqa

19. Mazandarani, Zuhur al-Haqq, vol. 6 (manuscript), p. 906-7

[page 95]

Yahya, the son of Muhammad Hasan-i Fata, a leading Azali of Qazvin, that when he went to Cyprus he heard the following from Shaykh `Ali Kaffash Zanjani[20]: His wife was taken into service in Mirza Yahya's household in Cyprus. Later she said to him that Mirza Yahya wanted her and so her husband consented to this. A while later, she was turned out of Mirza Yahya's house pregnant. Mirza Yahya and his eldest son Ahmad accused each other of being the father. The matter eventually went before the local court (saray). Aqa Yahya wanted to check this story that he had heard and therefore he asked Mirza Yahya about it. The latter asserted that it was his son, Ahmad, who had made the woman pregnant and on account of this he had withdrawn him from the position of being his heir and had made Mirza Yahya Dawlatabadi his heir.[21]

17. Wife: Mirza Yahya married the wife of the martyr Mirza `Abdu'l-Wahhab Shirazi in Baghdad.[22]

There are a number of other children mentioned in some of the sources whom I have not been able to place exactly:

xix. Hibatu'llah or Jazbatu'llah. b. 1860; a daughter who was in Istanbul in 1896 - this may be another name for Safiyya (see above) (P)

xx. Mashiiyyatu'llah; a daughter who died in 1875, then aged 8 (P)

xxi. Maryam Sultan; b. 1876, married in Istanbul in 1895 (P)

xxii. Fatima; d. 29 August 1871 (T,C)

xxiii. Ruhullah (S)

20. Presumably the same as Shaykh `Ali Bakhsh Zanjani met by Browne in Cyprus. See "Personal Reminiscences of the Babi Insurrection at Zanzan in 1850", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 29 (1897) 761.

21. Mazandarani, Zuhur al-Haqq, vol. 6, p. 541n-2n..

22. Mazandarani, Zuhur al-Haqq, vol. 6, p. 1010

[page 96]

xxiv. Hamidih (5) 96 l

xxv. `Aliyyih (S,I)

a. Muhammad Rishat (Resat). A carpenter in Famagusta. Married a Turkish Cypriot woman named Munevver, d. 1986 (I)

aa. Ismet Ezel, works for the Famagusta lycee and is a part-time newspaper reporter (I)

There is another grand-daughter (?great-grand-daughter) of Azal whose name is Sirin Birinci and who lives in Nicosia (I). The number of Mirza Yahya's wives led to some unusual domestic arrangements. An English observer describes a daily ritual that was to be observed in Famagusta:

He had two wives, each of whom had a separate house, and every day, at four in the afternoon, the first wife took him to the door of the second wife's house and handed him over. After twenty-four hours had passed, and punctually at 4 p.m., the second wife took Subh-i-Ezel back and handed him over to the safe-keeping of the first wife.[23]

After some years in Cyprus, Mirza Yahya was joined by three of his followers from Zanzan: Aqa `Abdu'l-Ahad[24], Usta Mahmud and Shaykh `Ali Bakhsh.

23. Rupert Gunnis, Historic Cyprus, London: Methuen, 1936, p.

89. I am grateful to Mr Tacgey Debes for this reference.

24. He was the author of the account of the Zanzan upheaval which E.G. Browne published: "Personal reminiscences of the Babi Insurrection at Zanzan in 1850" Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, vol. 29, 1897, pp. 761-827. Sayyid Mihdí Dihaji reports that this man was the brother of Aqa Naqd-`Alí Aba Basír, the blind Bahá'í who was martyred in about 1867; Risala of Sayyid Mihdí Dihají, University of Cambridge Library, Browne mss, F57, p. 286. While it is certainly true that Aqa `Abdu'l-Ahad had a brother Aqa Naqd-`Ali as he states in

his reminiscences (p. 780), the account does not seem to indicate that this brother was blind as Aba Basír had been since childhood.

[page 97]

Mirza Yahya remained a recluse in Famagusta - there are no reports of him going to the mosque or to coffee-shops. The inhabitants of Famagusta appear to have regarded him as Muslim holy man and Mirza Yahya went along with this. When people called to greet on Muslim feasts like Bayram (it being customary to visit a holy man on such occasions), he accepted this. There was no attempt to teach the local people the Babi or Azali religious beliefs.

Although freed from the conditions of his exile in 1881 after the British occupation of Cyprus Mirza Yahya preferred to remain in Famagusta as a pensioner of the British Government. Mirza Yahya died on 29 April 1912 at the age of about 80. According to the account by his son, Ridvan-`Ali, who had by this time become a Christian and taken the name Constantine the Persian, no "witnesses to the Bayan" (i.e. Babis) could be found to carry out the funeral ceremony and so it was carried out by the Imam-Jum`a of Famagusta and other Muslim clerics.[25]

All of Mirza Yahya's family in Cyprus maintained an outward appearance of being Muslims. The people of Famagusta used to call them sun-worshippers because of their custom of leaving the city at sunrise to go to Mirza Yahya's grave to pray. Mirza Yahya's descendants at the present time appear to know little about their family history or religious past and can for all practical purposes be regarded as Turks and Muslims. Riza Ezel, the caretaker of Mirza Yahya's grave at present, told us that his grand-father was a Muslim holy man. Since Jalal Azal's death, his widow `Ismat has put an annual notice in the newspapers on the anniversary of his death inviting people to a Mevlid recital and Qur'an reading in his memory (this being the traditional Turkish Muslim custom).[26]

25. Browne, Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion, p. 312

26. The information in the last two paragraphs was obtained during my trip to Cyprus in October and November 1989. I am most grateful to Mr Mustafa Salman and Mr Erol Olkar, two Bahá'ís of Famagusta whose families have been closely associated with Mirza Yahya's descendants. I am also grateful to Mr Tacgey Debes for much information conveyed to me in correspondence since my visit.

[page 98 (previously erroneously numbered 99)]

The Grave of Mirza Yahya

The grave of Mirza Yahya was originally about a mile from the old walled city of Famagusta but the modern city has now encompassed it. The grave is situated inside a small simple flat-roofed shrine building about 7 metres

by 5 metres with a small portico at the front. I was unable to ascertain the date of the building. Inside the building, there is a single bare-walled room with a low grave in the centre. There are two chairs at one end of the grave and at the other end of the grave there were placed three books:

- a Qur'an;
- a hand-written volume consisting of a number of ziyarat-namihs (tablets of visitation) for Mirza Yahya, Tahirih, `Azím, and other material;
- a printed book of poems called Sham`-i Jam` by Fathu'llah Qudsi (pen-name Fu'ad, of Kirman), presented by Jalíl Karímí (?) in 1366 (A.D. 1987).

At the same end of the room there are a number of items on the wall:

- on the right as viewed a plaque in English which reads: "The holy tomb of Subh-i-Azal Mirror of God 1831 - 1912. The text on the wall has been written by the Bab, "The Primal Point" - Great and Glorious is His Dignity - nominating Subh-i-Azal as His Successor in the Babi Religion."
- in the centre a portrait of Mirza Yahya. I was informed that it was painted by Dr. Philotheos Mughapghap, a well-known citizen of Famagusta[27], but that it is not a good likeness.

27. Presumably the same person as in Browne, Materials, p. 314.

[page 99 (previously erroneously numbered 98)]

- on the left is the text referred to above of the nomination in Arabic. This also records the information that Mirza Yahya was born in 1247 and died at 7 in the morning on Saturday 12 Jamadi al-Awwal 1330. The building is immediately surrounded by some twelve cypress trees and it is set in a field of some 10 acres. But the city is encroaching on it and a few years ago Mehmed Resat sold one large lot on the edge of this area which is already being built upon. The caretaker of the grave and shrine is a grandson of Mirza Yahya, Riza Ezel but the overall control rests with Mrs Sule Orfi.

Ahmad Bahhaj and Jalal Azal

Ahmad Bahhaj was the eldest of Mirza Yahya's children to accompany him to Cyprus. In 1884, he moved to Istanbul where he worked in a bank. He was joined there by his wife and daughters. At some stage, his wife and daughters became Protestant Christians in Istanbul. In about 1899, Ahmad's employment at the bank ceased for some reason and by 1912, we find him impoverished and working as a railway porter in Famagusta. His wife and daughters appear to have remained in Istanbul. Then in 1921, learning of `Abdu'l-Bahá's presence in Palestine from his nephew Jalal and remembering `Abdu'l-Bahá's kindness to him as a young boy in Baghdad and Edirne, he came to Haifa.[28] He appears to have become a Bahá'í and remained in Haifa as a rather reclusive figure until his death in 1933. He is buried in the Bahá'í cemetery in Haifa.

28. Based on statements made by Ahmad to Lady Blomfield in 1922; Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1967, pp. 237-8. See also Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh, King of Glory*, p. 232n

[page 100]

In about 1915, during the First World War, Jalal Azal, the son of `Abdu'l-`Ali and grandson of Mirza Yahya, volunteered for service to the British Government and was sent as personal assistant, chief censor and head interpreter to Lt-Col. Bidwell who was in charge of a British prisoner-of-war camp in Madras in India. When one of the internees, Murad Bey of Baghdad, heard of his relationship to `Abdu'l-Bahá, he praised `Abdu'l-Bahá greatly and urged Jalal in the strongest terms to seek out `Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance and assistance in his moral and material education. On his return to Cyprus, Jalal Azal wrote in 1920 to `Abdu'l-Bahá, asking for permission to visit him. He was also responsible for bringing about Ahmad Bahhaj's journey to Haifa. `Abdu'l-Bahá managed to get for Jalal Azal a good position in the Palestine Civil Service. He was Land Settlement Officer in the Land Court in the Haifa-`Akka area. Jalal Azal remained therefore in Palestine. It is difficult to know whether he regarded himself as a Bahá'í at this time but almost certainly he was regarded by others as a Bahá'í and he was in communication with the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, for example.

After some years however, he appears to have become disaffected. This was also perhaps connected with his marriage to `Ismat, the daughter of Badi`u'llah, the son of Bahá'u'lláh and brother of Mirza Muhammad `Ali. At some time, presumably in 1948 at the end of British Mandate, he returned with his wife to Famagusta. He took up employment in the radio monitoring station at Cyrenia run by the American intelligence services. Some in the 1950s or 1960s, Jalal Azal changed to active attempts to advance the Azali cause and to attack the Bahá'í Faith. This may have been precipitated by the arrival in Famagusta of Bahá'í "pioneers" and the conversion of a number of local people well-known to Jalal Azal. There was a concerted effort by a number of people including Jalal Azal, his wife `Ismat, and her sister Qamar Musa Bahá'í (d. 10 November 1970), who had

[page 101]

married Musa Bahá'í, the son of Mirza Muhammad `Ali, to unite all three generations of the internal opponents of the Bahá'í Faith, the "Covenant-Breakers"[29]. By three generations is meant:

First generation: Followers of Mirza Yahya in his opposition to Bahá'u'lláh.

Second generation: Followers of Mirza Muhammad `Ali in his opposition to `Abdu'l-Bahá.

Third generation: Opponents of Shoghi Effendi, both from within the family

of `Abdu'l-Bahá and others such as Ahmad Sohrab who rejected Shoghi Effendi's authority.

This in itself was a remarkable event full of bizarre contradictions. In theory, the second generation accepting as it does Bahá'u'lláh should have had nothing to do with the first followers of Mirza Yahya. Similarly, the third generation, accounting themselves loyal followers of `Abdu'l-Bahá, should have had nothing to do with the second generation who are based on opposition to `Abdu'l-Bahá (let alone supporting the first generation).[30] Jalal Azal was of course the Azali link in this scheme. His wife and her sister Qamar Musa Bahá'í were representatives of the second generation and in close contact with the other members of the second generation. The second generation had already put themselves in close contact with the third generation. After the marriage of several of `Abdu'l-Bahá's grand-children with the descendants of Sayyid `Ali Afnan (who had vacillated for some time between `Abdu'l-Bahá and Mirza Muhammad-`Ali), almost all of the-descendants

29. Evidence for this plan comes in Peter Berger, "From Sect to Church: a sociological interpretation of the Bahá'í movement", Ph. D. Thesis, New School for Social Research, New York, 1954, p. 140, n. 4; Azal's Notes, Princeton University Library, see supra.

30. I was informed by the Cyprus Bahá'ís that in fact `Ismat, although married to Jalal Azal, had no time for Mirza Yahya's claims and openly derided these even in front of her husband.

[page 102]

of `Abdu'l-Bahá threw in their lot with the followers of Mirza Muhammad-`Ali. Riyadh, Shoghi Effendi's brother, visited Jalal Azal in Cyprus on at least four occasions during which they exchanged information and material. Jalal Azal and his wife visited her relatives in Damascus. Yvonne, a daughter of `Izzu'd-Din Wudud, as well as Mirza Jalal, the grandson of Mirza Musa Kalim, both second generation opponents, collaborated with Ahmad Sohrab, the New History Society and the Caravan of East and West, third generation opponents.[31]

Part of this combined plotting was a court case raised by Qamar Bahá'í, Jalal the grandson of Mirza Musa and others in about 1950-1, challenging Shoghi Effendi's right to carry out major construction work around the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. One of their key witnesses, Nayyir Afnan, died shortly before the case was due to open, and it all came to nothing. One of the culminations of this plotting was a grand meeting that was held in Famagusta in the late 1950s. Representatives of all three generations were present including: Jalal Azal, `Ismat and other representatives of the second generation opponents and Ahmad Sohrab. One of the aims of this conference was to build

a mausoleum over the grave of Mirza Yahya. To this end, an amount of money was collected but it "disappeared" and nothing came of the project. Jalal Azal provided information to Dr Imani from Beirut who was researching a book attacking the Bahá'í Faith. Later in America, Dr Imani was in contact with Rev. William Miller. Imani put Miller in touch with Jalal Azal. Between March 1967 and February 1971, the latter provided Miller with a great deal of material with which to attack the Bahá'í Faith in his book, *The Bahá'í Faith: its history and teachings*[32]. Miller also arranged for the material that Jalal Azal had sent him to be deposited in Princeton University Library.

31. One of the of the main episodes in this planned attack was a court case over access to the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. This case was brought by Qamar Bahá'í, who was a second generation opponent and the star witness was to have been Nayyir Afnan, who was married to Shoghi Effendi's sister and was a third generation opponent. But the death of the latter in 1952 aborted the plan.

32. South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1974.

[page 103]

Jalal Azal died on 5 April 1971 of a cerebral stroke, exacerbated by his tendency to excessive alcohol consumption. His wife remained in Famagusta and used to commemorate his death by an annual announcement in the newspaper

Comparison and Analysis

In 1972, Eric Cohen published a sociological analysis of the followers of Mirza Muhammad `Ali in `Akka.[33] These were the Bahá'ís who, after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892, had turned away from `Abdu'l-Bahá's leadership and attached themselves to his half-brother, Mirza Muhammad `Ali. Cohen found that from an initial position of strength within the Bahá'í community of `Akka, they had gradually declined into stagnation, inactivity and insignificance as compared to the main-line Bahá'í community which had continuously extended its activities and influence in the Haifa-`Akka area.

Cohen was unable to find a suitable name in the existing sociological literature to describe this group. He rejected the application of the term "sect" to them because "though outwardly resembling a sect, [they had] sunk into a kind of ossification." Cohen proposes the term "residual religious community" to describe them. In his paper, Cohen defines this as a community "either a remnant of a sect which was side-tracked by its rivals, or a once important religious organisation, such as a church or denomination, which has gradually been reduced to relative insignificance." [34] He gives the remnants of the followers of Mirza Muhammad `Ali in `Akka as an example of a sect that has been side-tracked by its rivals, and the Samaritans as an example of a church that has been reduced to insignificance.

I was very struck by the parallels between the group in `Akka described

by Cohen and the remnants of the Azalis in Cyprus. My brief enquiries during the few days that I was able

33. "The Bahá'í community of Acre" Folklore Research Center Studies, vol. 3 (1972) pp. 119-141.

34. Cohen, Bahá'í community", p. 140.

[page 104]

spend in Cyprus can scarcely be compared to Cohen's research over a much more extended period. Therefore my findings are hardly adequate for anything more than a preliminary comparison. But within these limits, there are grounds for comparing the two groups.

Both groups can be described as having been side-tracked by a more successful rival. As Cohen has described, the faction of Mirza Muhammad `Ali (hereinafter called "the `Akka group") began as a very serious challenge to `Abdu'l-Bahá's leadership. Most of the leading Bahá'ís of `Akka supported the challenge as did almost all of Bahá'u'lláh's family. Similarly, Mirza Yahya's challenge to Bahá'u'lláh's leadership was at first very serious. Mirza Yahya was widely regarded as the successor of the Bab and so his rejection of Bahá'u'lláh's

claim was a serious blow. Thus initially both groups began as very considerable challenge to their rivals.

Despite this initially strong position, both groups saw their position rapidly eroded as their rivals gained the initiative and won the allegiance of the majority of the community. Within a decade of the split, both groups had been comprehensively defeated and reduced to insignificance. Mirza Muhammad `Ali, was at first able to recruit most of the influential Bahá'ís of `Akka and several important figures in Iran. His flagging fortunes were then shored up again in 1900 when Ibrahim Kheiralla, the key Bahá'í teacher in America, defected to his side. During the 1930s and 1940s, a number of members of `Abdu'l-Bahá's family disobeyed Shoghi Effendi and were expelled from the Bahá'í community. These effectively became incorporated into the `Akka group. But even these events were not sufficient to reverse the steady decline in his position. A similar course of events occurred with Mirza Yahya. Over 90% of the Babis of Iran gave their allegiance to Bahá'u'lláh within a short period of his putting forward his claim. Browne, visiting Iran in 1888 was hard pressed to find any Azalis at all. Mirza Yahya's position in Cyprus became increasingly isolated and marginal. Even of his sons, one became a Christian and another later joined `Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa.

[page 105]

another feature described by Cohen is the fact that these "residual religious communities" become inward-turning and defensive; they do not try to spread their beliefs. Part of their problem arises from their indefinite

status with the authorities. Cohen describes how the main body of Bahá'ís remain outward-looking, innovative and expansionist (seeking new converts); they actively encourage the spread and universalisation of their religion. With them the religion is constantly growing and developing. The Akka group became, by contrast, inward-turning, conservative and defensive, struggling to protect its interests and right to exist. It deplored the recruitment of various nationalities (especially Americans) to run the world centre in Haifa and the changes made in the religion as it adapted itself to these new cultures. It made no attempts to reach the non-Bahá'í world. Most of the literature produced by the group consisted of apologetics for its position vis-a-vis its rival. While the main body of Bahá'ís was recognised by the Israeli government as a separate religious community, the status of the `Akka group is undefined. Similarly the Azalis, especially in Cyprus, became an inward-turning and defensive group. It represented the conservative faction who did not like the changes that Bahá'u'lláh introduced. It tried to become in effect an ossification of the structures of the earliest period of the religion, except that it could not really be that since it had neither the numbers nor the enthusiasm nor were the circumstances the same. It made no attempt to convert the local population or any other group. Its literature has mainly been polemics against Bahá'u'lláh.

Its status as a group is indefinite in Turkish Cyprus.

Cohen states that part of the conservative and traditional aspect of the `Akka group is that it remains in effect Muslim. The members of the group attend mosque and receive religious services (for births, marriages, death, etc) from the official Muslim establishment of `Akka. They remain socially identified with traditional Muslim family and social norms. This feature of outward blending with the established religious norm is also a feature of the Azalis in Cyprus. They are to all intents Turkish Muslims. They go to the mosque and receive religious services from the official Muslim establishment. `Ismat organised Mevlid recitations and Qur'an readings on the anniversaries of Jalal Azal's death.

[page 106]

Cohen also makes the point that the `Akka group is threatened by extinction within one or two generations through intermarriage and assimilation into the Muslim population of `Akka. He does not make it a part of his definition of a "residual religious group" as those groups that are substantial churches or denominations such as the Samaritans are more able to preserve a distinct identity and maintain their social boundaries. The Cyprus Azalis are also in danger of extinction. They are already extensively intermarried with the local Turkish Cypriot population. It is difficult to see how they can maintain a separate identity for more than one or two more generations. Cohen makes the point that although the `Akka group is small and threatened with extinction, it is also internally divided due to an ossified accumulation of the conflicts of the past. My sources for the Cyprus Azalis was not sufficiently informed to be able to tell me of any internal divisions.

Jalal Azal however refuted the commonly-held position that Mirza Hadi Dawlatabadi was the appointed successor to Mirza Yahya as the leader of the Azalis [35] thus indicating the existence of splits among the Azalis. Cohen refers to the fact that the `Akka group having been comprehensively defeated on all issues (especially to do with authority over the Bahá'í shrines), has acknowledged defeat, and ceased active opposition. The last serious attempt at active opposition was the 1952 court case.[36] Similarly, the Azalis have long since ceased any active opposition. The short foray into activity by Jalal Azal in the 1960s was something of an anachronism. Indeed it difficult to see it as a serious attempt to revive the Azali position. Had he been serious attempting to do this, he would scarcely have co-operated so enthusiastically with Rev. Miller, whose only interest was in combatting both Mirza Yahya's and Bahá'u'lláh's positions.

35. Jalal Azal's Notes, pp. 557, 791-2; this is alluded to in Miller, The Bahá'í Faith, p. 107, 114, n.53.

36. See note 30 above

[page 107]

There is one final comparison to be made between the two groups although this is a matter of historical accident and not a point in Cohen's definition. Both groups acquired land outside the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Several of the `Akka group now find themselves wealthy since the city has grown out and their land is now prime development land. Similarly with the Cyprus Azalis, they have been able to benefit from properties and land acquired in the past which has now greatly increased in value. It would appear therefore that the Azali community of Cyprus provides a further example of Erik Cohen's characterisation of a "residual religious community".

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