

*Gennady Kurin*

## “Ascertaining the Truth about the Religion and Ways of the Deifiers of ‘Alī’”: The Qajar Elite and the Ahl-e Ḥaqq

*This paper presents some of the preliminary findings of the research on the history and religion of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq in nineteenth century Iran. It seeks to shed light on the Qajar-era statesmen’s efforts to learn more about and thus better understand the otherwise enigmatic community, their origins, identities, beliefs, and practices as well as political loyalties. In particular, the article discusses arguably the most important text pertaining to the group and produced in late nineteenth century Iran, addresses the question of its authorship and sources, seeks to contextualize its composition and finally offers its full translation. Lastly, the paper offers a partial review of the most important Persian-language research and scholarship on the subject, points to several hitherto untapped primary sources for the study of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq, and also discusses the major actors and trends essential to understanding of and further research on the history of the community during the period in question and beyond.*

**Keywords:** Sources, Ahl-e Ḥaqq; ‘Alī Allāhī; Qezelbāsh-Alevi; Moḥammad Ḥosayn Forūghī; Zokā’ al-Molk; E’temād al-Saltāneh; Dār al-Tarjomeh; Seyyed-e Kalār-dashtī; Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh

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Gennady Kurin is a DPhil Student and an ONGC Scholar at the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford.

Most of the research for this article was conducted between 2016 and 2018 and its earlier version was presented at the *9th European Conference of Iranian Studies* held in Berlin in September 2019. While I had translated Forūghī’s text prior to commencing my doctoral studies in the fall of 2017, the rest of the article evolved out of two seminar papers I wrote during my time at the University of Maryland. Throughout this period, I greatly benefited from the knowledge and expertise of several scholars and friends to whom I would like to express my sincere gratitude. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor Ahmet T. Karamustafa who, besides helping me refine the translation section, provided valuable comments on various drafts of this work. Secondly, I should thank my dear friend Reza Radbeh who not only greatly helped me during the earliest stages of this research but has also been a true fountain of knowledge on most subjects related to Iranian history, literature, and culture. Thirdly, I would also like to thank H. Khodapanahi, K. Nejad, A. Qurboniev, C. Melville, A. Borrut, M. Bazargan, and in particular my life partner Derya Özdemir, all of whom have in significant ways contributed to improving the quality of this work. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the useful comments of the anonymous reviewers of *Iranian Studies*, and of course the journal editors, at different stages of the review process. Obviously, the responsibility for any errors, omissions or inaccuracies herein is entirely my own.

*Introduction*

Despite almost two centuries of research by European travelers, missionaries, and scholars on the Ahl-e Haqq, commonly referred to by non-initiates as ‘Alī Allāhīs (“Deifiers of ‘Alī”),<sup>1</sup> our understanding of their history and the development of their religion remains fairly limited. In fact, most of the present scholarship on this religious community is based on the pioneering works by Arthur de Gobineau (d. 1882), Valentin Jukovsky (d. 1918), and chiefly Vladimir Minorsky (d. 1966) whose *Notes sur la Secte des Able-Haqq*, published a century ago in Paris, remains the most authoritative monograph on the subject in a European language.<sup>2</sup> The research conducted ever since appears scattered and unfortunately lacks efforts to collect, systematically study, critically edit, translate and annotate the important Ahl-e Haqq texts, in particular *Nāmeḥ-ye Sarānjām* and *Tazkereḥ-ye A’lā*.<sup>3</sup> The notable exceptions include the few works by Wladimir Ivanow, Mohammad Mokri, and, most recently, the hitherto unpublished dissertation by Mojan Membrado.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, until more sources for the study of the Ahl-e Haqq become widely available, the subject is likely to linger on the peripheries of different fields of scholarly inquiry, from ethnomusicology to Shi’i studies.

The existing scholarship in European languages and the general state of the field notwithstanding, what is less known is that during the Qajar era learned individuals, often affiliated with the state, much like the inquisitive foreigners, were also mindful of this religious group and made various efforts throughout the nineteenth century to establish who these mysterious deifiers of ‘Alī actually were.<sup>5</sup>

These efforts are manifest in the gradual proliferation of textual materials pertaining to the group, arguably the most notable of which is the work of

<sup>1</sup>The two names will be used interchangeably throughout this article.

<sup>2</sup>de Gobineau, *Trois ans en Asie*; Jukovsky, “Sekta ‘Lyudey Istiny”; Minorsky, *Materialy dlya Izucheniya Sekty* (1911). The reworked and expanded French version appeared, in two parts, a decade later – “Notes sur la Secte des Ahle-Haqq.” See also Minorsky’s “Etudes sur les Ahl-i Haqq.” The revised and expanded French work, however, does not contain the abridged annotated translation of *Nāmeḥ-ye Sarānjām* included in the earlier Russian publication. A facsimile of the Persian text of the *Sarānjām* used by Minorsky is currently kept, along with other materials of his personal library, at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg (*Fond-Arkhiw V.F. Minorskogo*, catalogue number not available to me).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Edmonds, “The Beliefs and Practices of the Ahl-i Haqq”; Mir-Hosseini, “Inner Truth and Outer History” and “Redefining the Truth”; or the recent volume containing a number of entries on the subject: Raei, *Islamic Alternatives*.

<sup>4</sup>Ivanow, *The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan*; Ivanow, “An Ali-Ilahi Fragment”; Mokri, *Shāhnāmeḥ-ye Haqiqat*; Ozgoli-Membrado, “*Forqān Al-Akhhār* de Hāj.”

<sup>5</sup>Over the past few decades numerous books and articles on the Ahl-e Haqq have been published in Iran. While some of them can hardly be characterized as scholarly, a few that can, despite certain flaws, have remained largely unknown or willfully ignored by researchers outside of Iran, not least by those working in the field of the Anatolian Qezelbāsh-Alevi history. See, for example, Delfāni’s *Tārikh-e Mosha’sha’iyān: Peyrovān-e Ahl-e Haqq and Peydāyesh-e Selseleh-ye Ahl-e Haqq*, or Solṭāni, in two volumes, *Qiyām va Nehzat-e ‘Alaviyān-e Zāgros*.

Moḥammad Ḥosayn Forūghī (d. 1907), also known as Zokā' al-Molk ("Sun of the Realm"),<sup>6</sup> purporting to "ascertain the truth (*tahqīq*) about the religion and ways of the 'Alī Allāhīs." Given that a comprehensive inquiry into the nature of the relationship between the Qajar state and the Ahl-e Haqq, which would require substantial research in archives and private libraries in Iran, is hardly possible at the moment, my goal here is to introduce this little-known source, provide the context in which it was composed (and is to be understood) as well as offer its translation. Although not produced within the community in question, the text is certainly of interest, not least because it reflects both how much the Qajar authorities knew about the group (i.e. their supposed origins, beliefs and practices, organization, geographical distribution and population numbers, or the extent of their loyalty to the Shi'ī polity) as well as their perceptions of and attitudes towards the Ahl-e Haqq.<sup>7</sup>

### *Manuscripts, Authorship and Sources*

Two manuscripts titled *tahqīq dar mazhab va tarīqeh-ye 'alī allāhī keh beh noṣayrī va ghālī va ahl-e haqq nīz ma'rūf mī bāshand* are preserved in the National<sup>8</sup> and the Parliament<sup>9</sup> libraries of the Islamic Republic. Both copies were published in Iran twenty years apart but have remained virtually unknown to foreign researchers.

The *Majles* copy first appeared in the *Vahīd Journal* right in the middle of the revolutionary commotions in the summer of 1978.<sup>10</sup> The text contained neither an introduction nor annotations of any kind, nor the name of the person who had prepared it for publication. It did, however, indicate that Moḥammad Ḥosayn Forūghī was the author of the text. Just over twenty years later, Moḥammad 'Alī Solṭānī published the *Mellī* copy, along with Persian translations of Minorsky's

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<sup>6</sup>It is sometimes mistakenly assumed that the Arabic word *zokā'* (زكّاء) means intelligence, astuteness, or intellect, leading to a rather prosaic translation of "Zokā' al-Molk" into English as "the Intelligence of the Realm." However, the word for intelligence is *zakā'* (زكّاء) whereas *zokā'* in fact means "the Sun" (ibn *al-zokā'*, for example, is commonly translated as dawn or morning). Figuratively speaking, and given the Sun's illuminating and enlightening qualities, "Zokā' al-Molk" is better rendered into English as "the Sun of the Realm." See, for example, Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, 558.

<sup>7</sup>For two contemporary and somewhat similar, though significantly shorter, reports on the Anatolian Qezelbāsh-Alevis prepared upon Abdülhamid II's (d. 1918) orders by the governors of Ankara and Tokat, in 1894 and 1899 respectively, see Alandağlı's "Kızılbaşlara Dair İki Rapor."

<sup>8</sup>National Library of the Islamic Republic of Iran – catalogue number: 918 ف; see the digitalized version at <http://opac.nlai.ir/opac-prod/bibliographic/1714697>. Although there is nothing in the text itself to confirm that, the online bibliographical description indicates that the text was dedicated to (*ehdā' beh*) Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh.

<sup>9</sup>The *majmū'eh* containing the second copy is also freely accessible through the Digital Library of the Museum and Center for Documents of the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran; catalogue number: 717588, <http://dlib.ical.ir/site/catalogue/717588>

<sup>10</sup>*Majaleh-ye Vahīd*, Khordād–Tīr 1357 (June–July 1978), no. 234–235: 46–55.

*Notes* as well as the article by Saeed Khan Kordestani.<sup>11</sup> Solṭānī was obviously unaware of the existence of the other copy and assumed that the signature at the end of the manuscript he had access to belonged to the author. This quite clearly was not the case.

The *Melli* manuscript, written in *shekasteh nasta'liq* on fifteen folios of European (*farangī*) paper, with ten lines on each side, was signed by certain Moḥammad Hasan Motarjem and dated Jumādā al-Thānī 1310 (December–January 1892–93).<sup>12</sup> It is clear that the said “translator” is none other than Moḥammad Hasan Khān Moqaddam Marāgha'ī (d. 1896), the director of the Press and Publishing Department (*dār al-ṭebā'ah*) and the Translation Bureau (*dār al-tarjomeh*), better known as E'temād al-Saltaneh.

The *Majles* manuscript, also in *shekasteh nasta'liq*, yet neither signed nor dated, is included in a collection containing a diverse body of texts, along with various maps and other sketches, known as *Korrāsah-ye al-Ma'ī* (pp. 2206–32). The owner of this *korrāsah* (“notebook”), Gholām Ḥosayn Afzal al-Molk (d. 1929/30), alternatively known by his penname al-Ma'ī, was a poet, historian and *mostoufi-ye divān-e a'lā*.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, he was also employed at both the Press and Publishing Department and the Translation Bureau under the directorship of E'temād al-Saltaneh.

While the second copy of our text, written on paper of lower quality and glued onto the larger sheets of the codex, is virtually identical to the one in the National Library, their handwriting styles are not the same and, as already mentioned, the signature of Moḥammad Hasan Motarjem is missing. Instead, there is a page-long note (with four lines deliberately erased and unfortunately illegible) at the end of the text by Afzal al-Molk removing all questions as to who the author of the text may have been.

He begins by stating that the handwriting (*khatt*) of this “little book” (*ketābcheh*) is that of Āqā Mīrzā Ḥosayn Forūghī (p. 2232) who was the head (*ra'īs*) of the Translation Bureau and one of the close associates of the minister of press and publishing (*vazīr-e dār al-tā'lif āqā-ye e'temād al-saltaneh*). Afzal al-Molk further informs us that Forūghī mastered French towards the end of his life, was a mystically minded individual (*ahl-e solūk va 'erfān būdand*) versed in history, literature, and Arabic (*tārīkh va fann-e adab va 'arabiyyat-rā kāmel būdand*) as well as able to write accurately and beautifully (*khatt-rā dorost va nīkū mī nevesht*). Finally, we are told that on a number of occasions the author of the note, along with Zokā' al-Molk, traveled with the royal camp (*ordū-ye doulatī*) to the countryside of Tehran, staying in the same tent, eating lunch and dinner together with their director

<sup>11</sup>Solṭānī, *Seh Gofṭār-e Taḥqīqī dar Āyīn-e Abl-e Ḥaqq*, 4–19. Solṭānī's edition is partially redacted and the elements of the original text concerning the group's alleged views on the Qur'an, the Prophet and the first three caliphs, as well as Sunnis in general, are missing. See also, Kordestani, “The Sect of Ahl-i Haqq.”

<sup>12</sup>The date most likely indicates when this copy was produced rather than when the original was written.

<sup>13</sup>Afzal al-Molk is the author of *Afzal al-tavārikh* as well as several travelogues.

E‘temād al-Saltāneh (*keh ra ‘īs-e mā būd*) and, all in all, enjoying themselves (*khosh mī gozash*t).

When we consider that E‘temād al-Saltāneh often claimed authorship of works he had not actually composed, as well as the apparently well-known fact that the Qajar minister of press and publishing never excelled in Arabic, there can hardly remain any doubt that he was not in fact the author of the work in question.<sup>14</sup> That being said, the appearance of a copy of the work in Afzal al-Molk’s collection suggests that the text was circulating within the educated circles of the Qajar society, and most certainly among those employed at the Translation Bureau. Although his note clearly indicates that it was not the author who gave Afzal al-Molk this “booklet,” unfortunately he does not tell us just how he got his hands on it.

As for Zokā’ al-Molk, it is worth saying a few words about him to better understand the context in which our text was composed. A truly fascinating figure, Moḥammad Ḥosayn Forūghī Adīb Eṣfahānī was much more than just a translator employed by E‘temād al-Saltāneh. Born in Isfahan into a mercantile family in 1839, he received a traditional education and tried his fortune as a merchant in international trade for fourteen years. After losing his merchandise during a storm in the Persian Gulf, he eventually came to Tehran in 1872 where, thanks to his education and knowledge of Arabic and French, he was able to find a job at the Translation Bureau, an intellectual hub and a de facto research institution of the period. A progressive figure, Zokā’ al-Molk favored the promotion of modern education in Iran along with the introduction of basic democratic reforms into the country’s political system.<sup>15</sup> In addition to his translations of a number of scientific and philosophical works from French, he is also known to have translated the *Letter of Imām ‘Alī to Mālek al-Ashtar* as well as historical works such as *History of the Sasanian Empire* by George Rawlinson, or literary works such as Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Additionally, Forūghī taught Persian literature at the Tehran College of Political Sciences (*madreseh-ye ‘olūm-e siyāsī-ye tehrān*) and eventually went on, along with his son and the future prime minister of Iran, Moḥammad ‘Alī Forūghī (d. 1942), to found the first non-governmental newspaper in the country — *Rūznāmeḥ-ye Tarbiyat*.

Citing E‘temād al-Saltāneh’s diary, Farzin Vajdani relates an interesting episode when Moḥammad Ḥosayn was accused of having written articles for Mīrzā Malkam Khān’s (d. 1908) London-based newspaper *Qānūn* and for some time had to take refuge in the stables of Mīrzā ‘Alī Aṣghar Amīn al-Solṭān (d. 1907) until Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh (d. 1896) eventually pardoned him. More importantly, besides the political dimension of this episode, according to E‘temād al-Saltāneh, rumors also circulated about Moḥammad Ḥosayn’s “heterodox religious affiliations” and “it was widely believed that for some time [his house] was a Babi gathering place.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Kia, “Inside the Court of Naser od-Din Shah Qajar” pp. 109-11; Amanat, “E‘temād-al-saltāna.”

<sup>15</sup>Kasheff, “Forūghī, Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Khān Dokā’-al-Molk.”

<sup>16</sup>Vajdani, *Making History in Iran*, 41-2.

Vejdani sheds further light on the role of the Forūghī in writing a new kind of Iranian history textbook and thus walking “a fine line between praising the ruling dynasty while introducing *people-centered narratives*.”<sup>17</sup> Such intellectual profile, erudition, interest in mystical matters, coupled with the “people-centered” perspective on history, did not simply make Zokā’ al-Molk an obvious choice for the task of “establishing the truth” about the ‘Alī Allāhīs. Instead, it is possible to speculate that rather than being assigned this job he may have actually volunteered to personally investigate the subject, in order to better understand the enigmatic group and potentially to temper existing misconceptions about the ‘Alī Allāhīs in the eyes of some Qajar statesmen.

Moving on, Afzal al-Molk’s comment on Forūghī’s affiliations with Sufi circles (*ahl-e solūk va ‘erfān būdand*) provides an insight into how our author went about conducting his research and what sources and informants he relied upon. Zokā’ al-Molk’s connection with the Ne‘matollāhīs, and in particular with Moḥammad Ma‘šūm Shīrāzī, also known as Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh (d. 1925), the author of *Ṭarāyeq al-Ḥaqāyeq*, is attested by his composition of the preface to this work.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, at one point in our text, when discussing the relationship between the Sufis and the Ahl-e Ḥaqq, Forūghī makes a reference to “one of his trusted friends”—most likely Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh himself. Not surprisingly, *Ṭarāyeq al-Ḥaqāyeq* contains various sections, sometimes word for word, also found in the treatise (e.g. on ‘Abdollāh ibn Sabā’, the Gholāt, their presumed origins, beliefs, or their alleged sub-sects, including the Noṣayriyyeh). There is, however, no separate chapter dedicated to the ‘Alī Allāhīs and instead the information pertaining to them is scattered throughout the sections talking about the Gholāt in general or, for instance, the Noṣayriyyeh.<sup>19</sup>

Although Zokā’ al-Molk, unlike Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh, does not explicitly state his sources, except for Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd’s (d. 1258) *Commentary on Nahj al-Balāghah*, it is possible to discern which texts he consulted while conducting his investigations. For example, the sections on the Gholāt and their various subsections are undoubtedly at least in part derived from al-Shahristānī’s (d. 1153) *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*.<sup>20</sup> He also sometimes quotes from *Dabestān-e Mazāheb* (first published in Iran in 1850), which includes a short section on the ‘Alī Allāhīs containing fragmen-

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Shīrāzī, *Ṭarāyeq al-Ḥaqāyeq*; for Zokā’ al-Molk’s preface see volume one of Maḥjūb’s edition, 7–11. Lewisohn, citing M. Homāyūnī, writes that the first volume of the work was composed by Raḥmat ‘Alī Shāh (d. 1861) while Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh wrote the other two. The first lithographed edition of the three volumes was apparently published between 1316 and 1319 [1898 and 1901]; see Lewisohn, “An Introduction,” 449.

<sup>19</sup>See, for example, Shīrāzī, *Ṭarāyeq al-Ḥaqāyeq*, vol. 2, 191–7, 247–9, 299, 523.

<sup>20</sup>What Forūghī refers to as the “books of trusted and respected authors” and “those who have studied and know about the religions (*adyān*) and denominations (*mazāheb*) as well as nations (*melal*) and sects (*nehāl*) of the world” – see the translation below.

tary and highly dubious information on the subject and thus revealing the author's lack of familiarity with the group.<sup>21</sup>

Of greater consequence, Zokā' al-Molk as well as Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh somewhat extensively used the works of Zayn al-'Ābedīn Shīrvānī, another Ne'matollāhī *qotb*, alternatively known as Mast 'Alī Shāh (d. 1838). Shīrvānī, described by Lewisohn as "by far the strongest nineteenth-century Ne'matollāhī master," wrote three large travelogues (*Riyāz al-Siyāḥah*, *Ḥadā'yeq al-Siyāḥah*, *Bostān al-Siyāḥah*) recording his journeys and adventures throughout most of the Islamic world.<sup>22</sup> He also appears to be the first Qajar-era man of learning to begin collecting information on the 'Alī Allāhīs (while also referring to them by this name), many of whom he must have encountered on his travels through West and South Asia. To this, however, it is worth adding Lewisohn's caution that "despite claiming to have intimate knowledge of one hundred different religions, Shīrvānī's actual accounts tend to repeat themselves."<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, these travelogues are full of references, though at times somewhat fragmentary, to the 'Alī Allāhīs, including the author's numerous encounters with them in the Ottoman lands, some of which seem to have made it into Zokā' al-Molk's treatise.<sup>24</sup> More importantly, *Bostān al-Siyāḥah*, completed in 1831 in Shiraz but published only in 1897, contains an entry on the Gholāt.<sup>25</sup> At least a part of this short entry is based on information about the 'Alī Allāhīs in the *Dabestān* (first published in 1809 in Calcutta and possibly acquired by Shīrvānī during his travels in India). However, it also contains some elements which do not appear in the *Dabestān* and are thus either derived from other sources or Shīrvānī's own observations (*rāqem az sādāt-e 'alī allāhī besyār dādeh va beh soḥbat-e īshān mokarrar resīdeh*).<sup>26</sup> Shīrvānī undoubtedly had some insight as to who the 'Alī Allāhīs were and what they believed in. For example, he mentions the beliefs in the divinity of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, his cyclical manifestations (*dar har doureh 'alī beh ṭaurī zoḥūr kardeh*) as well as the transmigration of souls (*tanāsokh*).<sup>27</sup> He also provides information on where they lived (*dar Rūm, Shām, Irān, Jebāl, Tūrān, Torkestān va gheyreh besyār-and*) and gives the name by which they referred to themselves (*guyand har keh 'alī-rā beh khodā-yī shenākht ū-rā ahl-e ḥaqīqat-ast*). Apparently one of his informants also told Shīrvānī that last time "Alī manifested himself

<sup>21</sup>Mohsen Fānī, *Dabestān-e Mazāheb*. There is quite a bit of scholarship on the *Dabestān*, including an apparently ongoing debate over its authorship; see, for example, Ali, "Pursuing an Elusive Seeker of Universal Truth"; or Sheth, "Manuscript Variations of Dabistān-i Mazāhib."

<sup>22</sup>Lewisohn, "An Introduction," 446.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>For a discussion of some of these accounts see Musalī, "Hacı Zeynel Abidin."

<sup>25</sup>Shīrvānī, *Bostān al-Siyāḥah*, 378–9.

<sup>26</sup>While the *Dabestān* was composed in the second half of the seventeenth century, it is not at all clear whether the chapter on the Deifiers of 'Alī was included in the original work. In other words, at present there is not enough evidence to suggest that the term 'Alī Allāhī was commonly used before the nineteenth century.

<sup>27</sup>Shīrvānī, *Bostān*, 378.

three hundred years ago [then] establishing the law and customs [for the community]" (*sīšad sāl qabl az īn zohūr nemūdeh va rasm va qānūn miyān-e īshān nehādeh*).<sup>28</sup> Our author further mentions that the members of this community call their co-religionists (*ham-kīshān*) *yār* ("friend") and all others *khār* ("despicable"). He then describes the initiation ritual before moving on to tell us that "shaving of moustaches (*shāreb*), prayer (*namāz*) and fasting [during Ramazān] (*rūzeh*) are great sins (*gonāb-e kabīreh*)." Instead of the latter, Shīrvānī continues, they fast for three days in winter, calling it the "Fast of Reunion [with the Beloved]" (*ṣoum-e veṣāl*). Regarding the organization and leadership of the community, he says that the 'Alī Allāhīs of Iran are divided into several groups,<sup>29</sup> all of which call their leaders (*moqtadā-ye khod*) *seyyed*, consider them manifestations of 'Alī (*ṣāheb-e karam*), and follow their orders (*aḥkām*) unquestioningly. Finally, the leader at the time, Shīrvānī informs us, was a certain Seyyed 'Abbās who resided in Kermanshah and commanded everyone's respect (*dar nazd-e jamī'-e feraq-e īshān mohtaram-ast*).<sup>30</sup> By virtue of being the key source, along with the *Dabestān*, used over half a century later by Zokā' al-Molk, this rather brief account would ultimately become one of the important elements in the emergence of Persian-language scholarship on the 'Alī Allāhīs and at least partially contribute to the crystallization of the official stance vis-à-vis the group.

All in all, Shīrvānī's own attitude towards this religious community cannot be characterized as particularly hostile. Although he does bring up the largely apocryphal story (also found in the *Dabestān*) of 'Alī ordering the execution of a group of *gholāt* affiliated with 'Abdollah ibn Sabā' or, for example, asserts that the 'Alī Allāhīs reject "the Sufi path" (*monker-e tariqat va shari'at va haqiqat-and*) as well as all "official learning" (*'elm-e rasmi*), he concludes by saying that "despite not veiling [their women], depravity, adultery and sodomy are extremely rare among them" (*fesād va zenā va levāt dar ānhā beh ghāyat nāder-ast*). This detail, subsequently echoed by Forūghī, in the long run may have shielded the community from outbursts of bigotry, unsolicited attention, and/or possibly outright persecution.<sup>31</sup> While the fun-

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Though Shīrvānī gives no names, Forūghī offers a detailed though partly suspect and confused catalogue while failing to clearly distinguish the historical (or imaginary) Gholāt sects from the contemporary Ahl-e Haqq *ojāq-seyyeds* and their followers.

<sup>30</sup>The *seyyed* in question appears to be Mīrzā 'Abbās Beg (d. 1797/8), the head of the Moshā'shā'ī *ojāq*; see Delfānī, *Tārikh-e Mosha'sha'iyān*, 250. Even though Seyyed 'Abbās, at least according to Delfānī's research, had already been dead for almost three decades by the time of the completion of *Bostān al-Siyāḥab* (early 1830s) and had been succeeded by his son Mīrzā Neẓām (d. 1820), who was in turn replaced upon his death by Shāh Āqā Mīrzā Moshā'shā'ī (d. 1870), it is possible that our author was simply misinformed or not completely up to date regarding the affairs of the community during the composition of the section on the Gholāt. The genealogy of the Moshā'shā'ī *ojāq-seyyeds* is also found in Ivanow's copy of *Tazkereh-ye A'lā*; see Ivanow, *Truth-worshippers*, 146.

<sup>31</sup>It is noteworthy that *Ṭarāyeq al-Haqāyeq* also contains passages reproduced almost verbatim from *Bostān al-Siyāḥab*: "*rāqem az sādāt-e 'alī allāhī besyār dīdeh va beh soḥbat-e īshān resīdeh*," followed by "while they deny all formal learning [and] do not veil their women there is little or no immorality among them." *Shīrvāzī, Ṭarāyeq al-Haqāyeq*, vol. 2, 247.



damentally Shi'ī identity was certainly helpful in facilitating relations with the religious classes, it was not always sufficient to ensure an amicable relationship with the Qajar authorities, as will be shown below when discussing reasons behind Forūghī's efforts to "ascertain the truth about the religion and ways of the 'Alī Allāhīs."

Zokā' al-Molk's erudition notwithstanding, his work cannot be described as an article or a study. The different themes within the text are erratically arranged, lacking subtitles or any real structure, while the overall narrative is rather confusing and sometimes even self-contradictory. Instead, we should perhaps view this text as a series of notes jotted down by Forūghī as he consulted a number of books readily available to him: *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, *Dabestān-e Mazāheb*, *Bostān al-Siyāḥah*, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, and probably a couple of other titles, though not including any Ahl-e Haqq religious texts. On top of that, he also interviewed people who had first-hand knowledge on the subject, including Ma'šūm 'Alī Shāh and Āqā Seyyed Mīrzā (d. 1913/14), better known as Seyyed-e Kalārdashtī. The latter, a member of the community, "a disciple of the Seyyed Mīrzā'ī *ojāq*" (see the translation) and the very reason our author endeavored to investigate the matter, was most likely the source of Forūghī's passages on the legends, miraculous stories, and religious practices within the Ahl-e Haqq tradition. It appears that Forūghī deemed this somewhat hastily prepared report sufficient to shed light on the otherwise enigmatic group as he does not seem to have followed through with this research. And yet it is also possible that Ma'šūm 'Alī Shāh in turn had access to Forūghī's "notes" while writing his own sections on the Gholāt and the 'Alī Allāhīs.

### *Reasons for Writing*

As has already been mentioned, the immediate reason for the composition of this report by Forūghī is the alleged rebellion of Āqā Seyyed Mīrzā which took place in Mazandaran in the autumn of 1891, all amid the rapidly escalating Tobacco Protests.<sup>32</sup> This incident, however, certainly should not be singled out as the sole factor behind the Qajar authorities' interest in the 'Alī Allāhīs. Instead, it should be understood in the context of the sociopolitical upheavals of nineteenth century Iran brought about by the messianic expectations of the populace.

Aptly characterized by Abbas Amanat as the period of "resurrection and renewal," in the introduction to the eponymous book he points out that "the task of materializing the messianic expectations almost exclusively fell within the domain of heterodoxy, if not heresy."<sup>33</sup> "Bāṭenī thought," writes Amanat, "has consistently been preoccupied with the notion of cyclical time" and has for centuries "tried to stretch the Islamic revelation by implicitly challenging the accepted doctrine of Islam's finality."<sup>34</sup> The resur-

<sup>32</sup>See Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*, 136–40; or the recent, and not available to me, Omid, *Seyyed-e Kalārdashtī*. For the Ahl-e Haqq account of the events see Delfānī, *Tārikh-e Mosha'sha'iyān*, 323–46.

<sup>33</sup>Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 3.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

gence of messianic themes was thus “the predictable outcome of the doctrine of successive revelations” in the long run making the Ahl-e Ḥaqq tradition contribute to the expansion of Babism in rural communities.<sup>35</sup>

The period from the end of the eighteenth to the early years of the twentieth century saw multiple individuals from among the Ahl-e Ḥaqq make various claims and allusions regarding the impending eschaton while many others were receptive to the message of the Babis (and later on the Baha'is). This particular theme, the nature of the relations between the Babi/Baha'is on the one hand and various Ahl-e Ḥaqq *seyyeds* and their “constituencies” on the other, for obvious reasons, remains largely unexplored beyond a short discussion and occasional further references in the work of Amanat.<sup>36</sup> Significantly, he goes as far as to assert that “[although] often overlooked, the conversions from the Ahl-e Ḥaqq and associated ‘extremists’ to the Babi movement were perhaps second only to the Shaykhīs.”<sup>37</sup>

A few examples of messianic activism within the Ahl-e Ḥaqq community are recorded in the Qajar-era chronicles. ‘Abd al-Razzāq Donbolī (d. 1827–28) relates a story of Qāsem Shabān, a shepherd from a village south of Tabriz by the name of Dehkhwāreqān (today’s Azarshahr), who in 1777, having experienced some mystical vision, claimed to be the deputy of the Hidden Imām.<sup>38</sup> He attracted many followers and even seems to have convinced ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s father and governor of Tabriz, Najafqolī Khān Donbolī (d. 1785), of these claims, only to lose his favor a few years later when the advent of the Qā’em did not materialize. In the 1830s another figure, Mollā Ṣādeq of Ordūbād, preached the impending advent of the Savior, chiefly among the Ahl-e Ḥaqq communities of Azerbaijan (north and south of the Aras River). “The essence of his prophecies was carried through by another preacher,” and Mollā Ṣādeq’s fellow townsman, ‘Abd al-Karīm, until the latter, following the denunciation by the ‘*olamā*, was exiled by the Russians to Smolensk on the pretext of disturbing social order.<sup>39</sup>

An episode of seemingly greater significance than those described above was recorded by Moḥammad Taqī Lisān al-Molk (d. 1880). He presents an account of what seems to have been an abortive rebellion by a young man from the Guran and once a disciple of Seyyed Barākeh,<sup>40</sup> Taymūr-e Bānyārān. His persona appears to have stirred the authorities’ interest in the Ahl-e Ḥaqq, not least because his activi-

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>36</sup>It is noteworthy, though hardly surprising, that none of the books on the Ahl-e Ḥaqq published in Iran in recent decades contains any references to the Babis (or Baha'is) as if there was virtually no interaction between these groups.

<sup>37</sup>Amanat, *Resurrection*, 370.

<sup>38</sup>‘Abd al-Razzāq Donbolī, *Tajribat al-Ahrār va Tasliyat al-Abrār*, ed. H. Qāzī Ṭabāṭabā’i, 2. Vols. (Tabriz, 1971), II, 196-197, cited in Amanat, *Resurrection*, 85.

<sup>39</sup>Amanat, *Resurrection*, 87. ‘Abd al-Karīm apparently joined the Babis during his stay in the ‘Atabāt in the 1840s.

<sup>40</sup>According to Minorsky, the *seyyed* died in 1873, was succeeded by his son Seyyed Ayāz and subsequently by Seyyed Rostam who was still alive as late as 1920; see his “The Guran,” *BSOAS*, 11:1 (1943), 95. Minorsky’s article also contains a brief survey of Gurani literature most of which remains in manuscript form.

ties happened to coincide with the peak of the Babi movement and their persecution. To gain a glimpse into what Taymūr's political message may have been like, a few lines of his poetry seem like a good starting point:

*The villagers of the World are seeking the Kingdom of the World  
They are after the throne of Kiyan, and you do not know who they are*

*The day of resurrection is upon us, upon every city and land  
Everyone is after a throne, a crown and a jewel of kingship*

*The shah shall fall from his throne and the minister from his seat  
You see all the injustice and you do not know who is responsible*

*Whenever cries come from warlords and generals  
Cities are completely ruined, heads are on gallows*

*In Iran, the generals and the chiefs are in agony  
The capital city, the land of Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh, is in ruins.*<sup>41</sup>

A great sense of injustice, coupled with a call for renewal or a longing for resurrection, were quite clearly at the heart of Taymūr's memorandum. No doubt reflective of the political and socioeconomic conditions felt by a lot more than a handful of villagers and tribesmen in this period, such verses were potentially highly subversive.

According to Lisān al-Molk, in the early 1840s Taymūr declared himself the deputy of the Hidden Imām and apparently claimed to have come from him in order to rid the face of the earth of all states and to defeat and subdue the kings of all lands. He is said to have gathered around six thousand followers by late 1840s and, judging by the information in *Nāsekh al-Tavārikh*, seems to have alarmed the Qajar authorities as our author describes crowds of people coming to pledge allegiance to him from Kermanshah, Kurdistan, Luristan, and Sulaymaniyeh. "For him," we are told, "[the followers] would sacrifice their lives and those of their children and relatives, and at the time, much like 'Alī Moḥammad the Bāb, this movement presented a great threat to the religion and the state." So much so that the governor of Kermanshah, Imāmqolī Mīrzā, doubtful of the loyalty of the soldiers stationed in Zohāb, instead of ordering them to arrest Taymūr, lured him to Kermanshah. There, the governor had made an agreement with other soldiers, of whose loyalty he was certain, and sent them to capture the troublemaker. Thus, before the followers learnt of Taymūr's arrest, he had been brought to the city where, without delay, Imāmqolī Mīrzā ordered his head to be cut off (1268/1851–52). Once the followers saw him dead, "they understood that his claims to prophesy

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<sup>41</sup>Farāhānī, *Divān-e Kāmel-e Mīrzā Ṣādeq Khān*, pp. 699–83. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

were all lies and as a result their zeal dwindled and the life in this land returned to law and order."<sup>42</sup>

Given its generic character and unambiguously pro-government stance, this account could just as well have been about any other rebellion regardless of time or place. And yet, the tone of the account shows that Taymūr's movement caused real anxiety to the Qajar authorities and, given the ongoing Babi activism in the 1840s and 1850s, not least in the areas inhabited by the Ahl-e Ḥaqq, is likely to have prompted them in the long run to learn more about the group's beliefs, practices, and identities.

It is worth noting that in 1847 Qorrat al-'Ayn (d. 1852), during her journey from Baghdad to Qazvin, also spent around forty days in Kermanshah. In the nearby Kerend, and also in Şahneh, she is said to have received a warm welcome and even pledges of allegiance from the local Ahl-e Ḥaqq population (apparently as many as twelve thousand in total).<sup>43</sup> Despite the fact that she declined their offer to participate in the march, such excitement and level of enthusiasm could hardly have remained unnoticed by the state authorities. Indeed, the local 'olamā "plead[ed] with the governor for expulsion of the troublesome heretic and her more than thirty Arab and Persian disciples."<sup>44</sup>

At around the same time, another energetic Babi preacher, Mollā Yūsef Ardabīlī, is said to have "brought about conversions first in Azerbaijan and then in Yazd, Kerman, and Qazvin."<sup>45</sup> Amanat suggests that he mostly preached in towns and villages that were "possibly exposed to Ahl-e Ḥaqq teachings," resulting in "mass conversions in the communities of Milan, Osku, Salmas, and Saysan."<sup>46</sup> Could such mass conversions of Ahl-e Ḥaqq to Babism, so obvious and even predictable according to Amanat, have been somewhat harder for the Qajar authorities to discern? Curiously, during Minorsky's first stay in Iran in the spring of 1902, even his earliest 'Alī Allāhī acquaintance—"a courier at one of the Russian institutions [in Tabriz]" who "turned out to be extremely thick-witted" (*krayne bestolkoviĭ*)—claimed to have "recently converted to Babism."<sup>47</sup>

The rebellion of Taymūr-e Bānyārān, certainly not without the Babi activism in the background, can be said to have rendered visible the otherwise largely clandestine religious group and thus became a tipping point beyond which the Qajar authorities began to take an interest in the history and creed of the 'Alī Allāhīs. And although further research to fully substantiate this claim is necessary, the proliferation of manuscript copies of *Parīshān-nāmeḥ*, a collection of devotional/didactic poetry widely known among the Ahl-e Ḥaqq, certainly attests to a surge in interest towards this religious community by the non-initiates.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Sepehr, *Nāsekh al-Tavārikh*, 29–30.

<sup>43</sup>Amanat, *Resurrection*, 312.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 313.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 284.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Minorsky, *Materialy*, viii.

<sup>48</sup>I have been able to find at least nine copies (including a translation into Persian) in Iranian and European libraries produced in the decades following Taymūr's rebellion, and not even one from the

A mysterious figure and apparently a contemporary of Seyyed ‘Alī ‘Emād al-Dīn Nasīmī (d. 1417) and Seyyed Mo‘īn al-Dīn better known Qāsem-e Anvār (d. 1433), Mollā Parīshān (d. circa early fifteenth century) is believed to have lived six centuries ago in Dinavar (the remains of which are located in the Şaḥneh County of Kermanshah), while his poems continue to circulate among some Ahl-e Haqq *seyyeds* up until today. This sudden surge in attention towards an obscure collection of devotional poetry in a western-Iranian idiom and a proliferation of manuscript copies of Mollā Parīshān’s *dīvān* can only be explained by the overall hike in interest towards the group that he was associated with by the outsiders.<sup>49</sup>

In fact, even Taymūr’s own *dīvān*, albeit much later, was partially translated into Persian by Adīb al-Mamālek Farāhānī (d. 1917), who spent many years in western Iran while attached as a poet to Ḥasan ‘Alī Khān Garrūsī Amīr Nezām (d. 1900), governor of Azerbaijan and commander-in-chief of the Qajar crown prince’s forces.<sup>50</sup> Adīb’s *Dīvān-e Kāmel*, which includes a substantial number of Taymūr’s poems, was published posthumously in 1933.

Last but not least, underscoring the Qajar authorities’ likely awareness of the relationship between the Ahl-e Haqq and the Babi/Baha’is, there is a number of texts containing polemical exchanges (first pointed out by Oskar Mann and later Vladimir Minorsky but still virtually unstudied) between representatives of these groups. Mustafa Dehqan very briefly describes and discusses three such treatises, produced by both sides, one of which is kept at Staatsbibliothek in Berlin (Mann/Hadank Collection) and the other two in private libraries in Kermanshah. Dehqan’s article contains some interesting passages, reproduced from the treatises, suggesting attempts on behalf of a recent Baha’i convert (from among the Ahl-e Haqq) to reconcile the belief in divine incarnation with the teachings of Bahā’ollāh (d. 1892).<sup>51</sup> In fact, instead of seeking to justify the doctrine of divine incarnation, the author of the treatise tries to make an argument that God in fact manifested Himself to the world in Bahā’ollāh, both facilitating the transition of the recent converts to their new faith

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period before. The oldest version, dated Sha‘bān 1271 (April–May 1855), is kept in Qom at the Library of Āyatollāh Mar‘ashī Najafī (33r. 9799). The text was copied by Moḥammad Ḥosayn Tafrīshī on the order of Mīrzā Mūsā Mostoufi Ashtiyānī (d. 1881). The latter, described by Amanat as “crafty and Machiavellian,” eventually went on to become the Qajar minister of army (*vazīr-e lashkar*); Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 381. The translation (at least partial) of the *dīvān*, currently kept at the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin (VOHD 30, 7), was prepared by Moḥammad Qolī Harsīnī (a native of the eponymous country in Kermanshah just, south of Şaḥneh, both areas inhabited by the Gurani-speaking Ahl-e Haqq even today) in 1896, just three years after the composition of the report by Zokā’ al-Molk.

<sup>49</sup>Interestingly, during his *trois ans en Asie*, between 1855 and 1858, Comte de Gobineau described the Ahl-e Haqq religious assemblies and the recited poetry in the following way: “None of [their] compositions exist in the Persian language; they are all in Chaghatay Turkish or Azerbaijani, in Lurish or in Kurdish. Many are quite ancient, but of those I have seen none dated back more than four centuries.” De Gobineau, *Comte de Gobineau and Orientalism*, 54. Could these be references to Mollā Parīshān, Nasīmī, Khaṭā’ī, others?

<sup>50</sup>Farāhānī, *Dīvān-e Kāmel-e Mīrzā Şādeq Khān*.

<sup>51</sup>Dehqan, “Notes on a Baha’i Polemic,” 137–141.

and offering something of an explanation as to why so many from among the Ahl-e Ḥaqq may have found initially Babism and subsequently Baha'ism attractive.<sup>52</sup>

As suggested at the beginning of this section, it is in light of the precedents outlined above, the Ahl-e Ḥaqq's associations with other potentially subversive groups, and the Qajar authorities' perpetual sense of alert and insecurity, only exacerbated by the large-scale protests against the government's Tobacco Concession, that the composition of Forūghī's text should be understood. Thus, when reports of a *seyyed* having raised a rebellion in Mazandaran reached Tehran in the late autumn of 1891, the authorities took no chances and promptly dispatched a military unit to subdue the uprising.

Three diary entries describing the *seyyed*'s arrival, likewise personally witnessed by E. G. Browne, in the Qajar capital "to the joyful strains of a military band"<sup>53</sup> and his subsequent encounter with the Shah offer us a vivid glimpse into the episode and finally reveal just how the idea to write a report verifying the truth about the religion and ways of the 'Alī Allāhīs was conceived:

A *seyyed* has appeared in the Kalārdasht district of Mazandaran. Making claims to Imāmate and prophesy he gathered several disciples and killed a few people. It has been ten to fifteen days since Sā'ad al-Douleh, Ḥabībollāh Khān Tonekābonī, with horsemen, soldiers and two canon wagons, was dispatched to capture [him]. Two days ago, the news came that the [*seyyed*] had been captured and will be brought [to Tehran].<sup>54</sup>

The *seyyed* whose rebellion in Kalārdasht an army had been sent to suppress was brought to Tehran today, along with other booty and valuables such as canons and *zamburaks*. The regiments of Tehran, the Cossacks, musicians, and others, all went to see [him].<sup>55</sup>

He entered [the city] through the Shamīrān Gate and was brought down the Cherāgh-e Gāz Avenue. Around twenty thousand people of the city, men and women, gathered [in the streets] and were watching [the procession]; a crowd of around a thousand people gathered in the same square.<sup>56</sup>

They brought him, with his green turban and the handkerchief, chains upon his neck and arms bound; it resembled the entry of Imām Sajjād (P.B.U.H.) to Damas-

<sup>52</sup>A book by a Baha'i author titled *Estedlāliyyeh barā-ye Ahl-e Ḥaqq* apparently contains some later messianic prophecies and, judging by the title, is likely to shed further light on the nature of the relationship between the Ahl-e Ḥaqq and the Babi/Baha'is: see Ṣaḥīḥ Forūsh, *Estedlāliyyeh barā-ye Ahl-e Ḥaqq*, cited in Amanat, *Resurrection*, 86. Unfortunately, the book was not available to me and Professor Amanat could not locate it in his private library.

<sup>53</sup>Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 52.

<sup>54</sup>*Rūznāmeḥ-ye khāterāt-e 'Ayn al-Saltaneh*, ed. Sālvar and Afshār 319–20.

<sup>55</sup>*Rūznāmeḥ-ye khāterāt-e E'temād al-Saltaneh*, ed. Afshār, 778

<sup>56</sup>*Rūznāmeḥ-ye khāterāt-e Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh*, ed. Khalīlī and 'Abdamīn, 321.

cus. All of the people were crying. I was surprised. For a poor *seyyed*, who himself had told Nāyeb al-Saltāneh and then the Shah that every year he goes to [Mazandaran] to collect alms (*niyāz*) and is neither a rebel nor is he able to do a thing, they assembled all the soldiers and armaments (*tajammolāt*). [I wonder] what they would have done had they captured a foreign warlord ... According to the soldiers of Nāyeb al-Saltāneh, around two thousand people, including men, women, youths, elderly and even children, had been killed.<sup>57</sup>

They brought the *seyyed* to the home of Nāyeb al-Saltāneh. Then I came to the Brilliant Hall [of Gulistan Palace] and ordered for the bastard *seyyed* (*pedar sūkhteh*) to be brought in, so that I could see what sort of man he was and what he has been up to (*cheh gūh mī khord*). They brought him into the garden; I ordered for the sashes of the Brilliant Hall to be raised and so he appeared in front of me, unchained. Eunuchs, caretakers and dignitaries gathered to see [him]. He is from Kermanshah, there are a lot of 'Alī Allāhī *seyyeds* like him over there. In Kermanshah, they follow one another, attributing to each other greater or lower status. So from Kermanshah he had traveled to Azerbaijan and Maku ... He had a long, red beard the bottom of which was all tied up [*gereh gereh*]. He was very tall, as tall as Hājji Sarvar Khān, and had broad shoulders. He had small blue eyes with eyebrows like thin threads, a long nose, and a pale white face. On his head he had a felt, dervish-like, hat around which he had wrapped a green turban. He also had a robe and long socks, like the European socks, upon his feet. I ordered for the robe to be removed so that we could see him properly. He was around fifty years old. I asked him about the “nonsense” (*harzegī*) he had done, and he began to talk incessantly saying that he was traveling and that he is from Kermanshah, and so on. He was talking in such a way that we realized that if he wanted to, he could give everyone satisfactory answers. He was very afraid lest we cut his head off. I ordered for his photograph to be taken before removing him to the cell where he would remain until the necessary investigations have been carried out—who is he, what are his and his father's names, and so on ... After the investigation, a detailed [report] is to be written (*ba'd az taḥqīq beh tafṣīl dar īn jā khwāhīm nevesht*).<sup>58</sup>

In the evening I was summoned to the palace (*darkhāneh*). The Shah said [to me]: “The *seyyed* is a strange man ... but very witty, talkative and brave (*kbeylī ḥarrāf va bā del-ast*).” He [apparently] told the Shah: “Why, for a poor *seyyed* such as I am, did you ruin Kalārdasht and kill two thousand of your own subjects? Had you only sent one person after me, I would have come myself.” In a hurry, they detained him in the cellar (*anbār*) but when they left, the Shah ordered for the green turban to be removed from his head, lest he be jailed with it on. I came home at four.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup>E' temād al-Saltāneh, *Rūznāmeḥ*, 778.

<sup>58</sup>Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh, *Rūznāmeḥ*, 321.

<sup>59</sup>E' temād al-Saltāneh, *Rūznāmeḥ*, 778.

*Some Concluding Remarks*

Their brevity notwithstanding, these diary entries provide some insight into the Qajar ruling class' views on the group in question. While Nāṣer al-Dīn's tone is condescending, he undeniably seems to have been at least superficially familiar with the 'Alī Allāhīs; he knows where their leaders, and co-religionists, reside and even suggests the existence of some sort of socioreligious hierarchy within the group.<sup>60</sup> Fortunately, the *seyyed's* "satisfactory" answers seem to have sparked the Shah's interest in his community so that, instead of simply ignoring and forgetting all about this episode, Nāṣer al-Dīn felt the need "to ascertain the truth about [their] religion and ways," resulting in the composition of our text. E'temād al-Saltāneh in turn likens the *seyyed's* entry into Tehran to that of Imām Zayn al-'Ābedīn to Damascus, unconsciously anticipating, despite the stated surprise, the public's reaction to this scene: "All of the people were crying." Such a reaction may also be suggestive of the presence of members of the community in Tehran as well as E'temād al-Saltāneh's realization of the degree of reverence and awe common people accorded to figures such as the *seyyed* of Kalārdasht.

From the perspective of the Qajar statesmen, arguably the most important take-away from Forūghī's *Notes*, besides some valuable yet fragmentary information about the history and religious 'beliefs of the group, was the notion that "it is only natural" that an 'Alī Allāhī dislikes a Sunni" while "[their] relations with the Shi'a are not so bad, as they see the latter group akin to themselves." Forūghī neither recommends any policy vis-à-vis the group to be implemented, nor does he warn against potential threats emanating from them, nor is a suggestion of their past or present associations with the Babi/Baha'i circles anywhere to be found. Is he actually unaware of this connection or does he consciously choose to leave any predictably counterproductive speculations out? He even goes as far as to explicitly suggest that even the accusations of sodomy are untrue "as they believe there is no greater sin." This set of details, as it emerges from Forūghī's report, is in stark contrast with how the two contemporary Ottoman accounts on the Anatolian Qezelbāsh-Alevis depict the group. Perhaps the most striking difference between the Qajar and Ottoman reports, the sectarian attitudes and misconceptions aside, is the very explicit emphasis of the latter on the relationship and closeness between the Armenians and the Qezelbāsh-Alevis in the Ottoman domains. They are said to be "akin to the Armenians in their temperament and spirit," while such claims, we are told, are

<sup>60</sup>For the discussion of Nāṣer al-Dīn's lifelong devotion to 'Alī as his protector and patron saint, as well as the intellectual mark upon the young monarch left by Sorūsh Eṣfahānī, see Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 66–7. Sorūsh "was a court poet of some repute who later became the first poet laureate of the Shah ... [and] also left his intellectual mark on the young Nāṣer al-Dīn." Amanat, judging by his poetry, decidedly declares him a *ghālī*—"an excessive admirer of 'Alī with extremist beliefs concerning his incarnation"—and goes on to assert that his influence upon the young Shah was both "subtle and enduring." For Sorūsh's biography, see Jalāl al-Dīn Homā'i and Moḥammad Ja'far Maḥjūb's introductions to the following works *Divān-e Sorūsh* and *Shams al-Sho'arā*, ed. M.J. Maḥjūb, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1339/1960), 1–90 and 91–208, cited in Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 66–7.



widely known.<sup>61</sup> The governor of Ankara, Memduh Paşa (1893–95), for example, further asserts that since “the Qezelbāsh believe that God once descended upon the earth and manifested himself in the body of Jesus and subsequently in that of ‘Alī, the difference between the two [groups] is virtually none (*soğan zarı kadar*).” In addition, the Paşa suggests that the Qezelbāsh, whenever they find an opportunity, will most certainly (*muhakkak*) betray the Sunnis (*ehl-i sünnet*) as they consider such acts an important [religious] duty (*bir vazife*).<sup>62</sup> Lastly, when describing the Qezelbāsh-Alevi religious assemblies, Memduh Paşa echoes the misconceptions typically associated with religious minorities, suggesting that participants in these gatherings, accompanied by music and singing, get drunk, dance all night and do things “he does not want to describe” (*tarif etmek istemediği*).<sup>63</sup> It should also be pointed out that these reports were written during and shortly after the Hamidian Massacres (1894–96) in which, according to some estimates, as many as a couple of hundred thousand Armenians had perished. The Ottoman statesmen’s paranoia and mistrust towards the ostensibly Shi‘i and historically less than loyal group is thus hardly surprising.<sup>64</sup>

More importantly, and also in stark contrast to Forūghī’s lack of any recommendations as to how to deal with the ‘Alī Allāhīs within the Qajar domains,<sup>65</sup> the Ottoman statesmen explicitly recommend construction of mosques and schools as a sure means of bringing these deviant elements back to the fold of “real Islam.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, given the contrasting attitudes in these reports, it seems reasonable to suggest that Forūghī was hardly skeptical about the long-term loyalties of the ‘Alī Allāhīs to the Qajar Shi‘i polity. Therefore, while he may have pointed out their simplicity, naiveté, or lack of education, he is clear in his assertion that their relationship with the Shi‘a is nothing to be concerned about. Although it may have taken as long as one year to prepare the report, the implications seem to have been quite significant for the *seyyed* of Kalārdasht. Eventually, he was provided with a residence in Tehran, assigned a pension, and even seems to have become something of a local celebrity to which a substantial collection of his photographs (many now in the public domain) taken by Antoin Sevruguin (d.1933), as well as the fact that he was one of Vladimir Minorsky’s informants, no doubt testify. The latter, calling Āqā Seyyed Mīrzā an “honorary captive” (*pochetnīy plennik*),

<sup>61</sup> Alandağlı, “Kızılbaşlara Dair İki Rapor,” 234.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>64</sup> Another document from the region of Gömeç in the Province of Tokat, dated 4 August 1894, reports an incident of an ambush by Armenian gangs on a postal carriage. Eventually, we are told, over fifty people were arrested among whom was a “qezelbāsh” by the name of Kelbaba. Alandağlı, “Kızılbaşlara Dair İki Rapor,” 229.

<sup>65</sup> It is worth noting that Forūghī is keenly aware, in part certainly from reading Shīrvānī’s works, of the existence of ‘Alī Allāhīs beyond the Qajar dominions as well as the long-standing connection between the communities in Iran and Anatolia, where, he tells us, “people call them Qezelbāsh.”

<sup>66</sup> Akpınar, “II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Devlet,” 223.

met the famous *seyyed* during his second visit to Iran in 1904–5.<sup>67</sup> It was also during this trip that the Russian scholar collected most of his *Materials for the Study of the Ahl-e Haqq* upon which so many later students of their history and religion, both inside and outside of Iran, came to rely.<sup>68</sup> And yet, over a century later, researchers still lack sources for a comprehensive study of this polycentric religious community that transcends not only political but also ethnolinguistic boundaries. It is therefore hoped that the translation of Moḥammad Ḥosayn Forūghī's *Notes* along with the above discussion, despite obvious limitations, will serve as a valuable contribution to this field of scholarly inquiry.

### Translation<sup>69</sup>

Among the *'olamā* and men endowed with virtue and learning, those who have studied and know about the religions (*adyān*) and denominations (*mazāheb*) as well as nations (*melal*) and sects (*nehāl*) of the world have written very briefly about the community (*jamā'at*) and sect (*ferqeh*) of 'Alī Allāhīs.<sup>70</sup> This scarcity of information is due to the fact that this creed (*ṭarīqeh*) is not based upon scientific principles and laws of reason and wisdom. It is unheard of that a learned and erudite man became a follower of this religion, except perhaps out of prudence and expediency. Indeed, this faith (*kīsh*) and sect (*āyīn*) is particular to nomads and mountain dwellers who are entirely ignorant and illiterate.

The 'Alī Allāhīs' religion is based upon a belief in transmigration of souls or some sort of reincarnation. The real belief of this group (*zomreh*) is that God manifests himself in human form and those of animals, such as hawks, falcons, and so on, as he may see fit—"High indeed be He exalted above that they say!" [Arberry's translation—*al-Isra*'—17:43]. The legend among this people (*qoum*) has it that God once appeared in the form of a falcon, landed on such-and-such mountain, and did such-and-such thing.

One of the figures they revere with excessive devotion and whose name they pronounce with the utmost respect is Dāvud Kabūd Savār ("the Azure Rider").<sup>71</sup> They believe that the King of the World (*khodāvand-e 'ālam*) reveals himself from time to time and, in these emanations, deals with different tasks and issues orders [to the believers]. The manifestation of Dāvud Kabūd Savār is one of the miracles claimed by 'Alī Allāhīs (*ṭāyefeh-ye 'alī allāhī*).

<sup>67</sup>For the *seyyed*'s letter to Minorsky see "Notes," *Revue du Monde Musulman* XLV (1921): 273.

<sup>68</sup>Minorsky, *Materials*, x.

<sup>69</sup>Throughout I have tried to keep the flow of the text as simple as possible, avoided translating honorifics (of God or, for example, the Imāms or the Prophet) and largely avoided various epithets unless deemed essential. The translations of the few Qur'anic passages found throughout the text are taken from Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*. Finally, I have not rearranged the different sections and paragraphs thematically, instead keeping everything in the order it appears in the original Persian text.

<sup>70</sup>Terms such as *ṭarīqeh*, *ṭāyefeh*, *zomreh*, *ferqeh*, *jamā'at*, or *qoum* are used interchangeably and with little consistency throughout the text.

<sup>71</sup>For a discussion of this figure see Mokri, "Le kalam gourani."

One of the learned men, who considers celestial bodies to be the lords of [different] species (*arbāb-e anvā*'), seeking to correct the opinions of this community, said: "Although the current leaders and elders of this group do not know the roots and principles of their own beliefs and their speech is vulgar, their past chieftains and leaders, who had great insight into the foundation of the religion (*dīn-e 'alī allāhī*), believed in and worshipped the "illuminators" (*forūzandegān*), that is to say, stars." Dāvud Kabūd Savār is thus an allusion to the moon; these days he is mentioned more than before because this period is the period of the moon and the period of the moon is the period of mourning. The moon appears in the shape of a rider sitting upon an azure horse, a sign of grief and mourning. That is why people these days are naturally inclined towards reciting the accounts of suffering and hence the spread of grieving and weeping over the martyrdom of Imām Ḥosayn.

In this [our own] time and era, one of 'Alī Allāhī leaders (*morshed*), speaking about the revelation of the occult secrets disclosed only to the tried and trusted disciples, used to say that Gabriel was once called *akhī* ("my brother"). Apparently, he [the *morshed*] deduced the story from one of the traditions (*akbbār-e manqūleh*) [according to] which the Prophet referred to Gabriel as *akhī*.

Those who have interacted closely with this people understand that the 'Alī Allāhīs do not have a sincere love and devotion for the Prophet. They are not even entirely free of hatred and animosity towards him. They call themselves Ahl-e Haqq while Sunnis and Shi'a call them Ghālī or Gholāt; [that is] because they exceed bounds in matters concerning 'Alī and think that God has entered his auspicious body. They boast about [their] asceticism and poverty while some even claim to practice absolute celibacy. Thus, as occasioned by their place of habitation and due to lacking any kind of science, profession, or industry, they are a people pure in heart leading simple lives. The outcome of this way of living is scarcity of fraud and deception. The majority among them are candid and honest folks, while the charlatans among them are generally those who have mixed with other peoples and tribes (*bā sāyer-e qabāyel-e ahl-e 'ālam āmīzesh-e kollī dāshteh-and*).

It is frequently said that their adepts (*kommālīn*) walk on fire and touch it with bare hands without being burnt or harmed. Two reasons are given for these miraculous feats. One of these is the exceptional endurance of hardship. Just as a community that believes that in every religion and faith, the person who leads an ascetic life will be given a reward by divine grace, this community considers this strange practice to be both a result and reward of the asceticism, austerity, and sincerity of the Ahl-e Haqq. Others, those who are skeptical about the supernatural or do not even believe in it, say that trickery and deception are behind these feats and they have no basis in reality.

According to [their] religious precepts, the disciples (*morīd*) among the 'Alī Allāhīs should give a certain amount, evidently one-tenth, of their annual earnings to their leaders (*morād va morshed*), be it from agriculture or other professions. It is a rare person who cheats in this duty. Most of the time a religious leader's share stays with his disciples for [up to] two–three years as the latter do not see him and are thus unable to make the offering. They keep it until meeting their leader

and are able to deliver it to him; and that is another proof of the folksy candor of this people.

It is only natural that an 'Alī Allāhī dislikes a Sunni as the latter sees the persona of 'Alī, whom 'Alī Allāhīs consider to be God or his perfect manifestation, as coming after the three Caliphs in terms of rank. However, [their relations] with the Shi'a are not so bad, as they see the latter group (*tāyefeh*) akin to themselves. Yet the great Sufis (*bozorgān-e ahl-e taṣavvof*), both Sunni and Shi'i, have intermixed with the chiefs (*ro'asā*) of 'Alī Allāhīs and, without faulting them, referred to them as common people (*'avām*) in search of the Truth (*ḥaqq-ṭalab*) and considered them as seekers who had lost their way, rather than calling them swindlers and charlatans.

The leaders and the heads of the 'Alī Allāhīs (*morshed-hā va morād-hā*) everywhere are descendants of the Prophet (*sādāt*). The disciples call them *ojāq* and have great respect for them. The main source of their popularity and authority (*moṭā'iyyat*) is that they do not impose strict rules and duties upon the disciples. [Qualities such as] affection, beneficence, compassion, and fraternity have persisted among them more than among other peoples and tribes. Once again, this is the result of their ignorance, lack of learning, simple-mindedness, and naïveté.

Consumption of liquors such as wine, spirits, and the like is prohibited and illegal in the 'Alī Allāhī religion. However, they do not consider smoking of hashish (*chars*) to be so bad, and it is widespread among them. If one day a respected person finds himself among them and gets drunk, they, in order to attract him, tend to turn a blind eye to such behavior. Nonetheless, deep inside they do not believe in its permissibility and consider a person who drinks a sinner; perhaps what is permissible for the adepts (*kommālīn*) is illicit for the unaccomplished (*nāqeṣīn*).

The religious practices and duties for the disciples, such as prayer and fasting and the like, are very few. Their leaders have to bear the burden of the believers' religious obligations, and the tithes or gifts (*'oshr yā niyāz*) they collect are a compensation for taking this trouble. The leaders also are not restricted by too many exterior obligations, daily recitations, or chanting. However, they should not engage in acts of leisure and pleasure, as the physical hardships and renunciation of comforts are their duty and responsibility. Lust and other guilty pleasures are sinful for them, and thus they consider abstaining from such acts to be worthy of reward (*thavāb*).

Every once in a while, when there is an intelligent and knowledgeable person among them who, having heard the speech of the elders, is attentive [to the fact] that claiming God's incarnation in the creation is abominable, [they] change their words and say: "'Alī is a perfect manifestation of God. [Claims of] reincarnation and divine embodiment are meaningless; these are not our beliefs. We do not consider 'Alī to be God, yet we do not consider him to be separate from God" (*mā 'alī-rā khodā nemī dānīm az khodā ham jodā nemī dānīm*).

Many great Shi'i Sufis (*akāber va mashāyekh-e ahl-e taṣavvof*) were and are adherents to the same beliefs. One of the trusted friends told me that he had had three or four meetings with an Ahl-e Ḥaqq *seyyed* (*yek nafar az sādāt va ojāq-e ahl-e ḥaqq*) who had a few hundred, or perhaps even two thousand, disciples. The *seyyed*, during the initial exchange of pleasantries, wanted to say: "There is [no need] for cer-

emony (*takallofi*), this is [the life of] poverty (*darvīshī*)—but he ended up saying—this is *dabrīshī*” (sic, a meaningless word, thus betraying his lack of education). And yet, with regard to honorable traits, etiquette, and good manners, he was a remarkable gentleman, and few could match him in generosity and courtesy. Even if one supposes that he has chosen this path (*ṭarīqeh*) for purposes of fooling the common people and gathering disciples, even this much is [a sign of] some intelligence and capability for a man of humble origins.

The founder of the ‘Alī Allāhī religion is said to have been a Jewish scholar and clerical figure named ‘Abdollah or ‘Obaydollāh ibn Sabā’ who, towards the end of the Prophet’s life, converted to Islam.<sup>72</sup> During the Caliphate of Abū Bakr, he held the judicial office of some provinces. In the time of the third Caliph, ‘Abdollah ibn Sabā’ had petitioned him asking to be appointed judge of a province but ‘Othmān did not heed [his request]. ‘Abdollah or ‘Obaydollāh, filled with indignation, left for Egypt where, in assemblies and congregations, he engaged in the defamation of the third Caliph. He spoke of his faults and instigated a revolt against ‘Othmān and even his murder, while encouraging people to follow ‘Alī (*amīr al-mo’menīn*). When ‘Alī adorned the throne of the Caliphate, everywhere [ibn Sabā’] spread Qur’anic verses and hadith reports in praise of his illustriousness and magnificence. He expressed excessive love for ‘Alī and went as far as to say: “You are God and the Creator of the universe.” ‘Alī called this speech blasphemous, obscene, and delirious, disowning and banishing him to Madayen.

Another “transgressor” (*shakḥ-e ghālī*) traveled along this route and continued spreading the same exaggerations about ‘Alī. He said: “Inasmuch as there has to be a way from Heaven (*malakūt*) to Earth (*nāsūt*), and a human, who is naturally imperfect, even at an extreme degree of perfection, would still say: ‘We could not understand Thee to the extent as worthy of Thee.’ And [inasmuch as] knowing the creator is among the duties and obligations of the created, [even though] his path would not lead him to the divine realm (*lāhūt*), God’s benevolence entails that He incarnates himself in a pure body and form, from time to time, or in every era and age. He reveals His divinity, manifests Himself in that form, and issues orders so that people see and recognize, know and worship Him, so that He becomes sensible to them with their external senses until no one doubts, and every soul feels and witnesses his glory and magnanimity. The embodiment of Gabriel in the form of Daḥīyyat al-Kalbī as well as the appearances of *jinn*s and daemons in different forms is analogous to that.” Those who are reasonable and who have taken steps on the path of understanding and virtue, however, know that such analogies belong to those with ill will and all of them are deviations born out of some maladies.

Among the ‘Alī Allāhīs there is no leader who knows the meaning of syllogism (*qiyās*) or utters such terms as “divine realm” (*lāhūt*) or “heaven” (*malakūt*) or understands embodiment (*tajassom*). Their tongues do not turn to say the word divinity (*olūhiyyat*). For a leader of the *Ahl-e Haqq* the utmost sophistication is when he (*pīr-e ṭarīqat-e ahl-e haqq*) takes a *komuz* (*chagūr*) or *tār* in his hand declaring:

<sup>72</sup>See Sean W. Anthony’s *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Saba and the Origins of Shi‘ism*.

“Thus said ‘Alī to Qanbar ...”—and, before the words of ‘Alī are pronounced, he plays the instrument a little, becomes ecstatic and goes into trance. And when ‘Alī’s address to Qanbar—“saddle Doldol!”—finally comes out of his mouth, a group of disciples enters a state of trance, becomes able to walk on fire and starts moving in bizarre ways.

Some Sunnis, God forbid, in order to accuse ‘Alī of shortcomings and to suggest that his honorable words were the reason for this disgrace and misguidedness say that ‘Alī declared: “I am God, the most merciful and compassionate, the sublime creator and the best of providers, the most affectionate and propitious, and the dispenser of the sperm in wombs; and if the veil is removed it will not add anything to my certitude.” Based on these words, the ‘Alī Allāhīs came to believe in ‘Alī’s divinity—“He who knows himself knows his Lord” (*wa man ‘arafa nafsahu fa-qad ‘arafa rabbahu*)—and used the tradition of the creation of man in God’s own image to justify and strengthen their claims, thus creating this dire situation. Indeed, it is a great error.

When speaking of their elders (*mashāyekh*), in order to confirm their appeal, they regard all of the above words and more as permissible, even as a perfect proof. However, when there is an intention [to prove themselves right], they begin to proffer proof [texts, saying:]

Does not Maulavī say in the *Mathnavī*—“That venerable *darvīsh*, Bāyazīd, came to his disciples, saying, ‘Lo, I am God.’”—that master of the mystic knowledge said plainly—“Hark, there is no god but I, so worship me”? Moreover, does not Shaykh Shabistarī, in his *Rose Garden of Secrets*, say: “If it is proper for a tree [to say] ‘I am God,’ why is it not worthy of a person of good disposition”? How can we be certain that the adversaries did not attribute these words to the Commander of the Faithful, Peace be Upon Him?

It is known that the Gholāt, or ‘Alī Allāhīs, recognize and consider all the prophets—such as Ādam (*ādam-e safī*), Noah (*nūh-e nabī*), Ibrāhīm (*khalīlollāh*), Mūsā (*kalīmollāh*), ‘Īsā (*rūhollāh*), as well as the prophets of the Torah, and maybe even the awaited Mahdī (*hojjatollāh*), may Allah hasten his appearance—as [manifestations of] ‘Alī. Therefore, if these claims are true, it means that the Gholāt are truly [believers in] divine incarnation and transmigration of souls. Indeed, some of the great ones, such as *Mathnavī-ye Maulavī*, have expressed such ideas—“Every time this friend arose in a different form he took a heart and disappeared” (*har lahẓeh beh shaklī digar ān yār bar āmad del bord o nehān shod*). These words are [subject to] interpretation by the believers. In any case, ‘Alī fiercely forbade and obstructed the transgressors and even had some of them killed and burned. Nevertheless, day by day they grew in number so that they became nineteen sects (*ferqeh*). Their names are as follows—Sabā’iyyeh, Kāmeliyyeh, ‘Olyā’iyyeh, Moghīriyyeh, Manṣūriyyeh, Khaṭṭābiyyeh, Heshāmiyyeh, No‘māniyyeh, Ḥanafīyyeh, Yūnesiyyeh, Janāhiyyeh, Gharābiyyeh, Razāmiyyeh, Badā’iyyeh, Banāniyyeh, Bāte-

niyyeh, Zaydiyyeh, Noşayriyyeh. The truth is that not all these groups (*ṭavāyef*) are ‘Alī Allāhīs but rather it is the intentions of the Sunnis that have resulted in such associations. Otherwise, what relationship is there between the Zaydiyyeh and Bāṭe-niyyeh [on the one hand] and the ‘Alī Allāhīs [on the other]?

The Noşayriyyeh, an ‘Alī Allāhī group (*yeki az ṭavāyef-e ‘alī allāhī*), are the followers of Moḥammad ibn Noşayr Fahrī, who was one of the learned men of Basra. He is considered as one of the companions of ‘Alī al-Naqī. However, [ibn Noşayr] was weak and hasty in belief and judgment. Following the death of this honorable Imām (al-Naqī), ibn Noşayr spoke of his divinity and later made a claim to prophecy, announcing that Ḥasan ‘Askarī was God and that he had chosen him as his prophet.<sup>73</sup>

At the time when God sent Moḥammad and ‘Alī to arrange and organize the affairs of the world and renew the law (*yāsā’i*) for the well-being of human kind, since these two honorable men did not succeed, the Almighty, in order to help the Prophet, incarnated Himself in the body of ‘Alī. Later, in order to complete [the mission] He allowed ‘Alī to be killed, and when this honorable body was emptied of sublime essence, He entered the body of Ḥosayn and every subsequent Imām until reaching Ḥasan ‘Askarī, who is now the Sun of the Ultimate Truth (*āftāb-e ḥaqīqat*), and prostrating before and worshipping him is obligatory.

‘Alī Allāhīs say that the orders in the Qur’an which is now available should not be followed and that it is not the Qur’an which ‘Alī gave to Moḥammad. They even say that Abū Bakr, ‘Omar, and ‘Othmān forged and fabricated it, and [thus] whenever and wherever they get hold of it, they must burn it.

Among their commandments is that killing of animals is not permitted, and eating meat is an abominable act, because ‘Alī said: “Do not make your stomach the graveyard of animals!” Since they do eat meat these days, they pay an annual atonement tax (*mablaghī kaffāreh*) for this sin to their *seyyed*.

They consider Iblīs, snakes, peacocks, Shaddād, Nemrūd, and Pharaoh to be Abū Bakr, ‘Omar, and ‘Othmān and say: “Worshipping idols [is] obedience to Abū Bakr and ‘Omar because ‘Alī named these two the Qorayshī idols.” [This] is the objective of all the prohibitions. They also say that just like ‘Alī cyclically manifested himself in the bodies of the prophets in the past, the three Caliphs came in the bodies of the “deniers” (*monkerān*) and so it shall always be.

Some say that Noşayrīs have intercourse with each other’s wives and treat sodomy as obligatory. These accusations are untrue, as they believe there is no greater sin than

<sup>73</sup>The Noşayrīs, while technically belonging to the Gholāt in character and beliefs, do not actually have a presence in Iran. The figure of ibn Noşayr in Iran, as Ivanow pointed out, appears to have nothing to do with the eponymous founder of the Noşayrī sect of Syria, Moḥammad ibn Noşayr (d. 873), and instead, “according to the darwish theories,” was certain Shāh Maḥmūd-e Pātīlī. Ivanow further suggests that the reason why some ‘Alī Allāhīs in Iran, especially those who live amongst the Persians, make themselves Noşayrī is simply because they are somewhat ashamed of the general style of their mythology so firmly connected with the tribal life of the “wild Kurds.” The term Noşayrī, Ivanow suggests, implies little or no definite religious content yet is somewhat attractive as more “respectable, Arabic.” Ivanow, “An Ali-Ilahi Fragment,” n. 5.

sodomy. Still, [sexual closeness] with wives in a situation where both parties agree, and under some other conditions, can perhaps be permissible.

They consider most prohibitions permissible and have neither major nor minor ritual ablution nor do they shave their moustaches, saying that it contains 'Alī's powers. They do not consider any nation (or ethnic group) to be evil (*bīch mellatī-rā bad nemī dānand*) except the Sunnis, whom they consider and call dogs, while they call the Shi'a half-Muslims, considering them to be neither friends nor enemies.

Among the known groups of the 'Alī Allāhīs of today there are four. One is the 'Olyā'iyyeh, who consider 'Alī to be God and claim that he sent Moḥammad, and that Ḥasan and Ḥosayn are sons of Fāṭemeh with no relation to 'Alī.

Another group is Kesā'iyyeh. They say that the Almighty was a divine light that split into five particles on the day of the Cloak, each one alighting in Moḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭemeh, Ḥasan, and Ḥosayn. All of them are still alive today and busy putting the world's affairs in order.

The third group is Janāhiyyeh, who say that God became incarnate in Ādam, then Akhnūkh, Nūh, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, 'Īsā, and then in Moḥammad, 'Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥosayn, and Moḥammad Ḥanafiyeh. Later, God manifested himself in the body of 'Abdol-lāh ibn Mo'āwiyyeh, who is the head of [their] religion. Ibn Mo'āwiyyeh, who hid himself in a mountain of Isfahan, will appear at the end of time. This community does not believe in resurrection (*qiyāmat*); they consider all prohibitions permissible, and view incest as a virtuous deed (*thavāb*).

The fourth group is Banāniyyeh. They say that God has a human form. He Himself said: "I have created Adam in my own image." Nothing has lasting existence other than His essence, and he incarnated Himself in 'Alī, and smashed the gate and took the castle of Khaybar. Later, He revealed himself in Moḥammad Ḥanafiyeh, the son of 'Alī, and after some other intermediaries (*vāseteh*) in Banān, who is the head of [their] religion and is the same person who wrote a letter to Moḥammad Bāqer, peace be upon him, inviting the Imām to his faith. Some say the Imām fed the letter to an ignorant man, who ate it and died. These four groups are distinct and different from one another, yet others consider all of them 'Alī Allāhīs.

In the Ottoman lands, people call them Qezelbāsh, Gınî, Cherāghpuf.<sup>74</sup> They call one another 'Alī's flower [or rose] (*gol-e 'alī*) and the whole group Ahl-e Ḥaqq. Every day, at dusk, dawn, and noon, they prostrate themselves before the sun and they do not consider any animal impure. They call their *seyyeds dede*. If someone falls in love, they reveal it to a *dede*, thus seeking approval, who in turn introduces the one in love to the beloved. Yet, even if the one in love is single, the decision to introduce the two still depends on the consent of the beloved.

Most 'Alī Allāhīs predominantly speak in symbols. For example, they call Sunnis *qara-būghāz*<sup>75</sup> ("black-throat"), which is an allusion to dogs. They call wine comfort

<sup>74</sup>See Floor, "Who Were the Candle Extinguishers."

<sup>75</sup>Qezelbāsh-Alevis reportedly call those outside of their community *ağzı kara* ("black mouth") while Azeris refer to the non-Shi'a as *kara boğaz* ("black throat")—the relationship between the two expressions seems rather obvious.



of the soul. And if a foreigner comes to them, wanting to pass himself off as one of them, they understand it from his speech and gestures.

The Noşayrīs say if a deceased person has led a righteous life, he or she will be reincarnated in a bird and eternally fly around the sun. However, if he or she had lived his life in a wicked way, he will be reincarnated in a lowly, despicable animal and live in hardship forever. They consider prostrating before the image of ‘Alī a righteous deed.

In the Ottoman lands, there are seven to eight hundred thousand ‘Alī Allāhīs, and just as many in Iran and India each. The ‘Alī Allāhīs of Iran today are divided into two groups (*do tāyefeh*).

One group, namely Seyyed Mīrzā’ī, used to be the disciples of Seyyed Mīrzā but, as it has been a few years since he passed away, they are now devoted to his son—Seyyed ‘Abd al-‘Aẓīm Mīrzā—who manages the affairs of this group. He resides in a village of Dūrūfārāmān<sup>76</sup> (or *dorūpārāmān*) in Kermanshah on a border with Lorestan at the conjunction of two rivers—Qarāsū and Gāmāsb. In other words, the *ojāq* is still warm there. According to research and investigation, the ancestors of this *ojāq* once settled in Ātash Begkendī, one of the villages of Hashtrūd County, and in the reign of Nader Shāh went to Khorasan. After the murder of this great king, they came down to Qūchān and then set out for Kermanshah. They did not consider Azerbaijan. From the choice of place, it is apparent that they knew the thick-witted and unlearned Kurds would be their prey and most importantly that they should stay away from civilized places. Approximately two hundred people from among the followers of Seyyed Mīrzā have settled in the above-mentioned village, about thirty kilometers away from Kermanshah, as well as two or three other hamlets nearby.

Another group are [the followers of] Seyyed Barākeh, who lives in Gahvāreh-ye Gūrān, and it has been a long time since they made this place their home. It is well known that during the reign of the Safavid Shāh Ṣafī I [r. 1629–42], they came to the aforementioned area from Anatolia (*khāk-e rūm*). The number of disciples of Seyyed Barākeh is greater than that of Seyyed Mīrzā.<sup>77</sup> The sub-branches or

<sup>76</sup>Today’s Garrehbān or Dūrūd.

<sup>77</sup>As late as the first decade of the twentieth century, an American missionary in the Ottoman Empire, Stephen van Rensselaer Trowbridge, encountered a group of Qezelbāsh-Alevīs in Aintab who informed him that the center of their religion was in the town of Kerend, Kermanshah province of Persia, where four of ‘Alī’s male descendants were said to reside: “They are by name, Seyyid Berake, Seyyid Rustem, Seyyid Essed Ullah, Seyyid Farraj Ullah.” This community further informed the missionary that “these men sen[t] representatives throughout Asia Minor and northern Syria for preaching and for the moral training of their followers,” to which Trowbridge added, with hardly any evidence, that “in Persia and Mesopotamia there are from two to three million Alevīs.” Trowbridge, “The Alevīs, Or Deifiers of Ali,” 342–3. Significantly, the Anatolian disciples of the Gurani-speaking Kermanshah-based *seyyeds* corroborate Forūghī’s claim, the apparently “well-known” fact that it was “during the reign of Shah Ṣafī I that [their ancestors] came from Anatolian (*khāk-e rūm*) and made [Gahvāreh-ye Gūrān] their home.” Trowbridge, quoting one of his informants, tells us: “Shah Sefi Sultan was the first Alevi to sit upon the throne of Persia,” and was said, correctly, to have been followed by “four [more] Alevi Shahs, among them Abbas.” However, “since then, Sunnis and Shi’a have been upon the throne.” Shāh Ṣafī is said to have “brought about a renaissance of the faith, sent criers out upon

their *ojāq* (*ro'asā-ye īn sho'beh yā ojāqhā-ye ānhā*) are found in large numbers in Kermanshah, as well as in Angūrān of Khamsa,<sup>78</sup> and in Azerbaijan. The disciples of Seyyed Mīrzā are in Lorestan, Kangāvar, Dīnavar, Khājehvand, and Kalārdāsht district of Mazandaran. In Garrūs members of both groups can be found. Approximately one hundred thousand people from these two groups live in Iran.

From Āqā Seyyed Mīrzā Moḥammad, who is a disciple of Seyyed Mīrzā'ī *ojāq*, we have heard that the story of this group's walking on fire is inaccurate. However, it has been seen that in the state of ecstasy (*kbalseh*) and recitation (*zīkr*), they take fire in their hands or put it in their mouths without burning themselves.

The personal offerings and donations (*ṣadaqāt va nozūrāt*), both in cash and in kind, go to a community leader or to his wife and family (*morshed va ahl-e 'ayāl*). However, the sacrificial offerings of the community to God are public and thus all the Ahl-e Ḥaqq present must have an equal share from them. For instance, when a person offers a cow to the community, the leader first considers whether this cow's meat will reach all the Ahl-e Ḥaqq [community members] (*hameh-ye ahl-e ḥaqq*) in a given locality and only then decides to slaughter the animal and divide the meat. If, however, there is not enough meat for all, they sell the cow instead and buy wheat, dried fruit and sweets, sugar, or similar goods with the money, giving everyone an equal share.

This sect believes that the reason others call them 'Alī Allāhīs goes back to the time when the people of Mecca were idol-worshippers. When Moḥammad and 'Alī began to spread their religion, every time the idol-worshippers of Mecca saw these two noble ones, they would call them "Moḥammad Allāhī" and "'Alī Allāhī" and thus the name has survived from those days.

Smoking tobacco is prohibited among the Seyyed Mīrzā'īs, and they are disgusted by it. However, the disciples of Seyyed Barākeh smoke and do not consider it bad. In Tehran, the Bājmāllū as well as Ḥabībvand tribes are 'Alī Allāhīs; and some adherents also live in the region of Veramin.

In books of trusted and respected authors who have written about the 'Alī Allāhīs it is recorded that 'Alī emerged for the purpose of fighting the Khawārij at Nahrāwān. Then, some of his companions reported that the Khawārij had crossed the river. 'Alī replied: "That is not true. They will be killed on this side of the river; from among them no more than ten will escape, and the blood of no more than ten of you will be spilled." In his *Commentary on Nahj al-Balāghah*, ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says: "This tradition is so famous that it has been verified over and over again." It is one of the miracles of 'Alī that he predicted the place of slaughter and the number of those among the Khawārij who would escape, as well as limiting the number of martyrs among his companions. The truth of these prognostications

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the highways to witness for 'Alī, to bring honour to his name, to redeem the down-trodden cause, and throughout his reign proved himself a just and noble shah."

<sup>78</sup>Located in Zanjan.

is well-known to the Muslims and all the people of the world, and it was due to this kind of miracle that people began to make exaggerations about ‘Alī. They said to him: “Indeed, the divine essence has entered your body.” The Prophet too informed ‘Alī about the meaning of it, saying that two kinds of people will perish on your account—one, the “zealous lovers,” and the other, the “hateful haters” (*moḥebb-e ghālī va mobghez-e qālī*).

The first person who during the era of ‘Alī made haste to exceed the bounds [of the acceptable] was ‘Abdollah ibn Sabā’. The Commander of the Faithful was giving a sermon when ibn Sabā’ rose up from among the congregation pointing at the Imām, saying: “You! You!” He continued until the Imām noticed and asked him: “Well, who am I to you?” Ibn Sabā’ replied: “You are God!” ‘Alī instantly ordered him and the people who professed the same beliefs to be arrested. According to one report these people were saying: “You created us and you fed us!” ‘Alī threatened them and told them to repent, urging them to take back their words, but they persisted. So, ‘Alī, peace be upon him, ordered two interconnected pits to be dug—one under and one above ground. Upon ‘Alī’s nod, they threw this group underground, setting the top on fire. Thus, the smoke, going through the vent between the two pits, enveloped and killed them.<sup>79</sup>

According to the books, at that instant the group were crying and saying: “Now your divinity is certain because your cousin, whom you had sent as a prophet, once said—‘One does not torture with fire unless he is the god of fire.’” At this point, some of the Imām’s companions, among whom was ‘Abdollah ibn ‘Abbās, pleaded on behalf of ‘Abdollah ibn Sabā’ asking ‘Alī to pardon his wrongdoings. ‘Alī accepted the request with the condition that ibn Sabā’ would not stay in Kufa. He asked: “Where should I go?” ‘Alī replied: “Go to Madayen instead!” Therefore, ibn Sabā’ went to Madayen and settled there until ‘Alī was martyred. Then, ibn Sabā’ tried once again to tell people of ‘Alī’s divinity and many gravitated towards him; these verses about the incident are written in the *divān* of the followers of ibn Sabā’—“Did you see that I dug a pit when I saw indecencies, set a fire and called Qanbar?”

‘Alī Allāhīs fast three days a year; and the first day of their fasting is the 29th of Ramaḍān, and on the fourth day they celebrate the ‘Eyd. They consider Nourūz a blessed holiday and hold it dear.

[Moḥammad Ḥasan Motarjem]

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<sup>79</sup>While the story is most likely apocryphal, this particular version, Israel Friedlaender argued, is an invention of the moderate Shi‘a seeking to cast ‘Alī in the role of the foremost enemy of the Gholāt; see Israel Friedlaender, trans., “The Heterodoxies of the Shi‘ites in the Presentation of Ibn Hazm.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* XXVIII (1907): 1–80, cited in Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians*, 13.

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