

## Reviews/Critiques/Reseñas

### RESURRECTION AND RENEWAL: THE MAKING OF THE BABI MOVEMENT IN IRAN, 1844–1850

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Bahá'í readers of *Resurrection and Renewal* may spare themselves some confusion and disgruntlement if they bear in mind at the outset that this is history written not of the operation of God's will in human affairs but of the affairs of humans who are firmly convinced of being instruments of God's will. The distinction is between history as written by a believer and history as written by a social historian.

We have a relative wealth of histories of the origins of the Bábí movement written by believers. *The Dawn-Breakers* by Nabil-i-A'zam, and *Zuhúr al-Haqq* by Fádíl Mázandarání are the best-known examples of that genre. Amanat's book is the first truly original work based on exhaustive first-hand analysis of hard-to-assemble primary sources that offers a thorough reexamination of the subject since the valuable, but unavoidably superficial and flawed works of Gobineau, Nicolas, Tumanski, and E. G. Browne nearly a century ago. Scholars who have had no access to primary sources and who have invariably reflected the shortcomings in the works of those earlier authors may now turn with appreciation to this volume. In *Resurrection and Renewal*, Amanat displays a remarkable degree of intellectual sophistication, command of the primary and the comparative literature, conceptual and structural soundness, and clarity of thought.

Amanat sets out to study the emergence and early development of the Bábí movement in the broader context of modern Iranian history and over the evolutionary course of Shiism. In doing so, he underscores the interaction between doctrinal innovations and long-term socioeconomic trends. He makes it clear for the reader that in its widespread following, its serious political repercussions, and above all in the impact of its millenarian message, the Bábí movement is largely unrivalled in the history of modern Islam.

The study is concerned with three basic issues, which shape its structure. In the first part the crucial features of the Shiite mindset are examined, focusing on the mutual themes of worldly decline and moral renewal. In the second part the formation of the Bábí movement and the character of its founder and early adherents are scrutinized, suggesting the return of the Twelfth Imám and the commencement of the Resurrection, which entailed the renewal of the Time and the initiation of a new religious cycle. In the third part the process of transformation of a Bábí nucleus into a movement and the circumstances of its final

break with Islam are examined. This section contains the most original and significant historical-sociological insights that alone would merit broad scholarly appreciation.

Having forewarned Bahá'í readers to avoid misplaced expectations of this truly valuable book, this reviewer nevertheless must voice what he feels is not an irrelevant complaint. Taking the date 1850 as the terminus of this study, the author is largely justified in concluding on a note of failure. But he could have given some intimation of the transformation of the seemingly failed Shiite resurrection into a potent force for religious revival in the world today. The germination of the potential seeds of renewal in the Bábí movement were not permanently arrested in 1850. They were transmuted and given their ultimate chance for development and success by Bahá'u'lláh in founding the Bahá'í Faith.

A second note of slight difference of opinion has to do with the role of Ṭáhirih, the Bábí heroine. She is the subject of much heated debate in our time when virtually every phase of scholarship is coming to grips with issues of gender. Attempts are made in some quarters to portray her as a prototype of today's feminism. Responding to that kind of ahistorical claim, Amanat may be correct in writing that Ṭáhirih had nothing explicit to say on the rights of women. The statement attributed to her at the hour of her death—"You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women" (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 75)—was probably never uttered, just as Louis XIV probably never said "*L'état c'est moi.*" But they both should have done so, for every act of their lives was a testament to the truth of those statements. Ṭáhirih's indomitable will, her forthright claim to equal power based on learning, her uncompromising defense of her beliefs in the face of opposing men, her implacable refusal to bow to domestic pressures; her choice to abandon home, husband, and children rather than submit to injustice; and above all the dramatic gesture of public unveiling are more eloquent than a thousand tracts on the rights of women. In the context of nineteenth-century Persian Shiite society, what more could a woman do that would mark her a greater champion of women's rights?

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