

The Provincial Politics of Heresy and Reform in Qajar Iran: Shaykh al-Rais in Shiraz, 1895-1902

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Abu al-Hasan Mirza, known as Shaykh al-Rais (1848-1920), has been called the poet laureate of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911). A prince, a cleric, a poet, and a heretic, he played an important role in agitating for a constitution and parliament, and he served as speaker of the house briefly once it had been established.¹ His activities in Tehran from 1902 have a prologue, however, in his involvement in politics in Shiraz 1895-1902. For the first time, in Shiraz, Shaykh al-Rais managed to acquire and keep as patrons powerful nobles such as Rukn al-Dawlih and Shua al-Saltanih, two Qajar governors to whom he was close. Even his ultimate eviction from the city, which depended on local notables' skillful use of crowd politics and public opinion, offered him key lessons as a budding revolutionary. In Shiraz, his secret commitment to the Bahai religion gradually became common knowledge and ultimately proved fatal to his attempts to remain in the city as part of the political elite. Yet he would have been justified in concluding that when he could garner enough support from elite patrons and other quarters, his enemies among the Shiite clergy could not touch him. Only when his own patron proved weak was he finally expelled.

Shaykh al-Rais was born in Tabriz, where his father was under house arrest for having opposed the ascension to the throne of Muhammad Shah (r. 1834-1848). His father, Husam al-Saltanih, was a son of Fath Ali Shah but backed the wrong brother as his successor and so was politically undesirable. At length the family was allowed to move to Tehran, where Shaykh al-Rais received his early schooling. He was sent to the military academy, which he found tedious. His father died in 1862. He convinced his mother to take him with her when she went to live in Mashhad to be near the tomb of the Eighth Imam, where he entered seminary and became a Shiite cleric. His mother is said to have been a secret Babi, and he retained heterodox tendencies, becoming a Bahai in the 1870s under the influence of some secret members of the new religion in the provincial elite of Khurasan.² In the early 1880s he studied with Mirza Hasan Shirazi in Samarra and became a full *mujtahid* (jurist). He also blossomed as a poet and prose writer of some distinction.

On his return to Mashhad he came at length into conflict with a new governor appointed by Nasir al-Din Shah and was forced to leave the city. Ultimately he settled in Istanbul briefly before being summoned back to Iran by the shah. In the Ottoman capital he made contact with Sultan Abdulhamid II and offered to cooperate in the latter's project of pan-Islam. His return to Khurasan ended unhappily when he was arrested in September of 1890, apparently for participating in a public protest, and immured at the Qalat-i Nadiri fortress. In 1892 he returned to Istanbul and began work on the pan-Islamic project in concert with Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and others, but had to leave again. He made a pilgrimage to

see the Bahai leader Abdul-Baha in Akka, after which he went to Bombay, where he was a guest of the Aqa Khan (the young man, only eleven, was probably hosting him on behalf of his mother, an Iranian princess and granddaughter of Fath Ali Shah, and thus the cousin of Shaykh al-Rais). In late 1894 Shaykh al-Rais left India for Iraq.³ Shaykh al-Rais lived there according to Fadil Mazandarani "for a year," though in actuality his stay there was much shorter.⁴ At that point he was probably still a paid agent of Sultan Abdulhamid working for the pan-Islam project among the Shiites of Baghdad province, and he may also have been on Mirza Malkum Khan's payroll as a secret distributor of the reformist journal, *Qanun* (Law).

Several authors say he went to Iran in 1312 A.H., which fell between the summers of 1894 and 1895. We know that he only arrived back in Basra from India around 1 January 1895. If he stayed in Iraq any length of time at all, he probably went to Iran toward the end of the Muslim year, perhaps around June 1895. Shaykh al-Rais left Basra for Shiraz, where he lived for a few months, and then journeyed to Tehran. Having enjoyed the climate of Shiraz and the cleanliness of its people, he returned from the capital to that city to live, probably in late 1895. He would reside in this provincial capital until 1902. Shiraz, with a modest population of about 28,000 at that time, had a complicated society, with many immigrants from nearby villages and towns such as Zarqan, Ardikan, and Kazirun. Members of pastoral groups including the Turkic-speaking Qashaqais had also settled there in search of work. Shiraz was anything but religiously monochrome. In the nineteenth century, about fifteen percent of the population was Jewish, including many merchants. It had a small Zoroastrian community. It was also a center for heterodox Shiite Sufi orders such as the Nimat-Allahis and the Zahabis.⁵ Shaykh al-Rais had many opportunities for building alliances not only within clerical factions but also among Bahais, Zahabis, and Jews, and he appears to have taken advantage of them.

We have an early notice of his presence in the city by the local historian Muhammad Nasir Fursat Shirazi, who in his book on Shiraz and Fars province, mentions that Shaykh al-Rais had settled in the city and had led prayers at the New Mosque during the fasting month. Fursat Shirazi finished his book in 1313 A.H., and Ramadan that year began in mid-February 1896.⁶ The enthusiasm with which some Shirazi intellectuals greeted the advent of Shaykh al-Rais is evident in his remarks:

His blessed existence is a compendium of spiritual branches of knowledge and a locus of the divine emanations. He is a witness to the mysteries of this world and the next, and to the lights of sanctification and the realm of might. In these times, he has made Shiraz his exalted domicile because of his own exigencies, causing glory to descend upon it. During the month of fasting

he led group prayers and gave the people good counsel at the New Mosque. The people were illuminated by the discourse of that beneficent one. Now, he also has begun teaching lessons concerning the rational and traditional branches of religious knowledge.⁷

Remarkably, Fursat Shirazi says he has read the three books by Shaykh al-Rais, including the one on pan-Islam, published in Bombay only the year before.⁸ He comments especially on the refutation of the Ahmadiyah (based in the Punjab, British India) and its claims of the coming of a Muslim promised one, or Mahdi.⁹ The writing of that work appears to have been intended to demonstrate his orthodoxy without necessitating open apostasy from his Bahai commitments, and this ruse seems initially to have worked (though it seems a bit hard on the poor Ahmadis to have used them in this way). In any case, the way in which publishing his memoirs, poetry and essays in British India helped create for Shaykh al-Rais a sort of celebrity in Iran points to the growing impact of printing and lithography at this time.

Shaykh al-Rais established himself in a fine mansion. Muhammad Taqi Mirza Rukn al-Dawlih, the Qajar prince (fourth son of Muhammad Shah) who had befriended him while ruler of Khurasan, had been appointed governor of Fars province for a year in 1891-1892, and then again every year since 1893, and the presence of this governor was certainly among the attractions for Shaykh al-Rais of Shiraz.¹⁰ One suspects that his earlier foray into the city had been a scouting expedition to test the waters and that he returned precisely because he had some indication that the governor viewed his advent with favor. Given that Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848-1896) had hated and had twice exiled Shaykh al-Rais, the assassination of that monarch in May of 1896 by a follower of Sayyid Jamal al-Din "Afghani" made it easier for the prince-*mujtabid* to live in Iran. Muzaffar al-Din Shah, the new king, by contrast, was well known to have some sympathy for reform and the intellectual life, and his interest in the heterodox Shaykhi movement appears to have caused him to be lenient toward those whom the orthodox clergy of the rationalist Usuli school would term heretics.

The ulema of the city are said by Mazandarani to have cheered his arrival, and seminary students flocked to study with him. That the welcome was this warm is made plausible by Fursat Shirazi's contemporary remarks, quoted above. Shaykh al-Rais continued to give sermons at the Shah Chiragh, a shrine to the brother of the eighth Imam that was associated with the mystical Zahabiyyih order, and at the New Mosque attached to it. Among the more important places of pilgrimage in Iran, this shrine had great spiritual charisma, and it was a coup for him to be allowed to preach there.¹¹ His sermons, which stressed ethical counsel for the people, he would preach for four hours on a single issue. Seminary students took copious notes on his sermons, and some began coming to study with him in the mornings at his own courtyard. Secretly, he would induct some of these seminarians into Bahai belief.

Initially his heterodoxy was discounted. While in Shiraz, Shaykh al-Rais married off his eldest daughter to Mirza Abu al-Qasim Fakhr al-Ashraf, and gave another daughter in marriage to the son of Hajji Ahmad Khan Kurrani, a man of great wealth and a notable.¹² He became extremely prominent in Shiraz society, and this provoked the jealousy of some

other clerics, who began a whispering campaign against him. Rumors of his heretical beliefs flew, despite the care he took and his occasional dissimulation.

One of the Shirazi clerics, Mulla Abdullah Fadil, became fast friends with Shaykh al-Rais, and they began sending verse queries to one another. Originally from the nearby town of Zarqan, Abdullah Fadil had a reputation of erudition not only in Arabic *belles lettres* and the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams, but also in Islamic philosophy and wisdom literature. A respected teacher, he was also noted for his perfect calligraphy in the difficult script called "broken" (*shikastih*) because of its elongation of letters and lack of diacritics to distinguish letters. A surviving bit of verse demonstrates that he leaned toward the "unity of being" (*wahdat al-wujud*), a school associated with the followers of the Andalusian mystic Ibn al-Arabi whom some view as pantheistic. Abdullah Fadil wrote:

Being is like generosity and does not become nothing;
Therefore, the Eternal Truth is Himself, otherwise what is the Eternal
Truth?

Ask not about the condition of nothingness or of quiddity;
For these both subsist in our imagination by virtue of your imagination.¹³

In the course of their exchanges, it became clear to Shaykh al-Rais that Abdullah Fadil was also a secret Bahai. Abdullah Fadil was thereafter habitually at the house of Shaykh al-Rais.¹⁴ The Bahai community of Shiraz then consisted of several hundred individuals. Its bulwark was the Afnan clan of great merchants, but it included dozens of humble members of a clan of tailors from the nearby town of Kazarun as well.¹⁵ Shaykh al-Rais established secret relations with this community, and it is likely that the monetary support of the Bahai merchants (who had a far-flung commercial network that reached even to Hong Kong) was among the secrets of his success in the city. Of course, he married his daughters into and received the support of prominent wealthy Shiite notable families, as well.

In 1313 [A.H.] (probably, more specifically, in spring 1896), two prominent Bahais came to the city. Mirza Aqa Nur al-Din, a nephew of the Bab who had become a known Bahai, returned from commercial business abroad. The Bahai missionary Mirza Mahmud Furughi also arrived.¹⁶ Also visiting the city at that time were Muhammad Alam al-Huda, the *mujtabid* of Bushihr, and Thiqtat al-Islam Isfahani (the brother of Isfahan's leading cleric, Aqa Najafi). These two became aware of Furughi's presence and Bahai activities. Furughi met frequently with large Bahai gatherings, and this was reported to the *mujtabids*, apparently by clerical spies who had infiltrated the Bahai community. Alam al-Huda and Thiqtat al-Islam sent a message to Rukn al-Dawlih that a Bahai missionary had come to Shiraz and was misleading the people, urging that he be seized and punished in order to make an object lesson of him. That very day the Bahais had a big meeting in the house of the Kazaruni tailor, Aqa Muhammad Hasan Khayyat, where word reached them that they had been informed on. They decided that a trustworthy local Bahai should escort Furughi from Shiraz.¹⁷

They appointed Mashhadi Abbas, an upright and clever man, to the task of ushering out their endangered guest. But the complaint of the two *mujtabids* had reached the prince-governor. Although Abbas and Furughi had already set out, they were apprehended on the road to Zarqan and brought to the citadel in Shiraz. Rukn al-Dawlih met Furughi and seems

to have admired his courage. At one point the prince-governor used vehement, scatological language, and Furughi rebuked him, quoting the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet and Imams, leading him to apologize. In the end, Rukn al-Dawlih placed Furughi under house arrest at the home of the rifle corps commandant. Furughi immediately set about making his jailer a Bahai, a project in which he is said to have succeeded.

During this incident Rukn al-Dawlih asked Shaykh al-Rais if he knew Furughi, and he answered "No!"

Rukn al-Dawlih then asked Furughi if he knew Shaykh al-Rais, and the prisoner said emphatically "Yes! I know him well."

According to Habib Allah Afnan, the three of them were later present and the governor asked Shaykh al-Rais to explain the discrepancy. Furughi immediately realized that the latter had been practicing dissimulation and said to him teasingly, "Do you not remember the day at our courtyard when you said something incorrect and my father corrected you?"

Shaykh al-Rais then said, "Yes, I had forgotten." He then praised Furughi and his father. At length the Bahai missionary was released.¹⁸ In fact, it may well be that Shaykh al-Rais and Furughi met while both were imprisoned in the Nadiri Fortress in Khurasan during the Tobacco Revolt, a circumstance the former would have been reluctant to bring up quite apart from the issue of heresy.

As yet, Shaykh al-Rais's position was unharmed. On 21 February 1897 (the eighteenth of Ramadan) at a ceremony where he was adorned with a robe of honor he was presented with a bejeweled scepter on behalf of Muzaffar al-Din Shah. In response, he gave out sweets in the evening to notables, merchants and magnates for the rest of the fasting month.¹⁹ That summer, on 17 July 1897 the governor invited the Friday prayers leader (Shaykh Yahya), Shaykh al-Rais, the local grandee Muhammad Riza Khan, the Qavam al-Mulk III (c. 1851-1908), and a number of other notables to the garden of Hajji Mirza Karim, where he hosted them.²⁰

Shaykh al-Rais was so confident of his position, indeed, that he intervened in local clerical politics. In August of 1897 he and Shaykh Abd al-Jabbar, along with some other ulema and seminary students, complained to Hajji Mirza Hasan Tabib-i Fasai at the New Mosque about the endowment properties in the vicinity of Fasa. This endowment was in the name of the shrine of the Imamzadih Mansuriyyih, and its supervision was in the hands of Fasai.²¹ Every month, by its terms, he was obligated to give something to the students at the Mansuriyyih Seminary, but he had not done so and wanted to give them only a part of what was due them. For this reason, the clergy and the students were outraged.

Aqa Ali Aqa Mujtahid and other clerics and merchants also weighed in on the issue, which now took a new twist. It seems that not only had this Fasai clan been accused of lining its pockets at students' expense, but another member was also involved in the newly established bank in the city, which some among the clergy despised as usurious and a stalking horse for Western economic penetration. Aqa Ali Aqa and his allies had the head of the bank (the nephew of Fasai) thrown in the government jail. Taking collective refuge in the New Mosque, they insisted that the government expel the bank administration from Shiraz. Some 200 clerics, seminarians, merchants

and local leaders gathered at the New Mosque. Abd al-Jabbar and Aqa Ali Aqa took turns providing them with food, tea, and fruit juices.

The turmoil became so serious that Rukn al-Dawlih felt compelled to act. He sent a message to the protesting students decreeing that seventy *tumans* a month be taken from Hajji Mirza Hasan Fasai and given to the seminarians. As for the bank, the governor had no authority to remove it from Shiraz. He suggested that those who so desired should have nothing to do with it, and those who wanted to could patronize it. The bank, he said, had nothing to do with the people, but was an affair of the central government. He suggested they take any views they had on it to Tehran. Finally, protesters accused bank official Muhammad Taqi Fasai of engaging in corruption in connection with his position on the Judicial Inquiry Board (*Majlis-i Istintaq*). In response, Rukn al-Dawlih prorogued that body and said Fasai would not be allowed to attend government councils. The local reporter for the British said that he praised the protesters, mollified them, and enticed them away from the mosque strike. Because of the turmoil in town, however, order had declined in the tumultuous outlying regions.²²

Shaykh al-Rais had been in a difficult position, insofar as he supported the initial protest of Shaykh Abd al-Jabbar that led to an embarrassing collapse of order in the city for his patron, Rukn al-Dawlih. He may have felt, however, that he needed allies among the ulema as well as the ruling elite, and had no choice but to support his clerical friends. Around the same time as the other incident, in late August of 1897, on the "night of lamps" at the shrine of Shah Chiragh, the son of Shaykh Muhammad Tahir Arab mounted the pulpit and cursed Shaykh al-Rais, accusing him of being a "Babi." The local reporter for the British wrote that the next night a group of men, some of them allegedly followers of Shaykh al-Rais, grabbed this son of Shaykh Muhammad Tahir in an alleyway near his house and poured liquor on him, accusing him of being drunk, then beat him badly, wounding his face and lightly stabbing his body. The son managed to get himself home. Shaykh Muhammad Tahir immediately went to the home of the great notable Qavam al-Mulk and informed him of what had happened.²³ The street gang members in Qavam al-Mulk's quarter, who for the most part derived from the Turkic Bayat tribe, assembled with the intent of attacking the mansion of Shaykh al-Rais, but Qavam al-Mulk forbade it.

The next morning Shaykh Muhammad Tahir, Aqa Mirza Hidayat Allah Mujtahid, and Hajji Sayyid Ali Akbar went to the Hajji Nasir al-Mulk Mosque, gathering there with a group of seminarians and the people of the quarter. They wrote a statement to Nazim al-Dawlih (former police chief in Tehran who had been transferred to Shiraz) demanding that he either expel Shaykh al-Rais from the city or they would expel him themselves. Nazim al-Dawlih promised them that after ten days he would send Shaykh al-Rais out of the city, but that at that moment he was engaged in a project of reform.²⁴ Of course, he never made good on his promise, nor could have, given Rukn al-Dawlih's (and apparently even Muzaffar al-Din Shah's) support for Shaykh al-Rais at that point.

The protesters were not wrong, however. Poetry survives from this period that demonstrates Shaykh al-Rais's continued Bahai commitments, despite his outward caution. In 1318 A.H./1900 the body of the Bab was interred in a simple mau-

soleum on Mt. Carmel in Haifa at the orders of the then leader of the Bahai faith, Abdu'l-Baha.²⁵ Shaykh al-Rais composed an Arabic poem in commemoration of the event:

God has honored the holy Carmel,
The sign of the throne has descended upon it;
The seat of the throne of our lord, the most high,
The point of the cause, the lord of men;
The epiphany of justice, the source of beneficence,
The essence of intellect, the pure of soul;
In the precincts of glory (Baha') since it was raised,
The dome of grandeur (stands) by that tomb;
The inspirer of the spirit cried out in my heart:
The sacred fold has been dated (1318).²⁶

There is also evidence in his poetry that Shaykh al-Rais supported Abd al-Baha's claims to supremacy over those of his younger half-brother, Mirza Muhammad Ali.²⁷

Shaykh al-Rais continued to have difficulties because of his heterodoxy. The local news reporter for the British discussed another incident in May of 1900. Sayyid Rawzih-Khvan Sarvistani, he said, often mounted the pulpit and spoke badly of Shaykh al-Rais, accusing him of being a Babi and demanding his removal from Shiraz. Shaykh al-Rais in that month sent a message over to Shaykh Yahya, the leader of Friday prayers, complaining, "Why does he, at your instigation, say these things about me?" The Friday prayer leader convened an assembly of clerics, *kbans*, and great merchants. In front of everyone, he asked Sarvistani, "Did I say to you that you should mount the pulpit and speak badly of Shaykh al-Rais?" Sarvistani is said to have thrown his turban on the ground and asserted, "Shaykh al-Rais is a Babi! I will establish it myself—it has nothing to do with you!" He again called, in that gathering, for the expulsion of Shaykh al-Rais from the city. The Friday prayer leader wrote out a statement, witnessed by all present, that Sayyid Sarvistani was acting on his own in attacking Shaykh al-Rais, and sent it to the latter. The reporter for the British cleverly observed that the very convening of such a gathering was, however, evidence that the Friday prayer leader was the instigator and wished to ruin Shaykh al-Rais's reputation.²⁸

Behind the scenes, Shaykh al-Rais ensured that the local Bahais were beneficiaries of his contacts. The young cleric Fadil-i Jahrumi, one of the more knowledgeable secret Bahais in the city, was with Shaykh al-Rais's support appointed to a teaching post at a seminary. In the meantime, the conservative mujtahid, Ali Akbar Fal-Asiri was exiled to Iraq (perhaps with Shaykh al-Rais's connivance?) Jealousies continued to mount among the conservative ulema, especially the leader of Friday prayers, Shaykh Yahya.²⁹ Fadil-i Jahrumi, the seminary student whom Shaykh al-Rais had converted to the Bahai faith, had a longstanding rivalry with a Sayyid from Sarvistan, presumably the same enemy of Shaykh al-Rais mentioned above, or a relative of his. On 21 January 1901, Shaykh al-Rais preached at the Shah Chiragh shrine. According to the news writer for the British, after the sermon, Jahrumi and Sarvistani got into a fight. Two groups formed, and a battle royal ensued. One or two persons on each side were injured before the attendants of the shrine could expel the lot from the courtyard.³⁰ Another, unnamed protégé of Shaykh al-Rais among the seminary students was expelled in February 1901 from the Mansuriyyih Seminary by its rector, Hajji Mirza Sayyid Ali. The expelled student went to Aqa Mirza Hidayat Allah Pishnamaz and asked him to intercede. Mirza Hidayat

Allah sent a note over to the rector asking for the student to be readmitted, but Mirza Sayyid Ali refused. On 27 February Aqa Mirza Hidayat Allah brought the student back to the seminary, accompanied by Shaykh al-Rais, a crowd of other students, and some street gang members, such as Akbar Dai Muhammad. They took him to his dormitory room and installed him in it. Then they ate lunch at the seminary. In order to avoid provoking them and starting a riot, no one spoke to them.³¹ Shaykh al-Rais had mastered the street politics of religion in Shiraz, with its dependence on the street gangs, or *lutis*, and it is not impossible that some of his supporters were laboring-class young men of Bahai convictions who could play that role just as well as Qavam al-Mulk's Qashaqais.

In 1901 Rukn al-Dawlih died and was succeeded by a number of governors, each of which ruled for only a short period. Then the prince Shua al-Saltanih was made governor of Fars. Mazandarani says that his firm hand established good security, which probably means that he protected the heterodox. Shaykh al-Rais spent a lot of time with the new governor and also socialized with the high notables of the city, including Bashir al-Sultan and Mirza Ali Rida Khan.³² The passing of his patron, Rukn al-Dawlih, was therefore not an immediate disaster for him. However, he had now hitched his star to a new governor, one who lacked the decades of experience and the ability to mollify local elites. The issue of his heterodoxy would also not go away. Ishraq-Khavari reports that once, while giving a sermon, Shaykh al-Rais saw the Bahai poet, Mirza Ali Ashraf Lahijani, known as "Andalib" (the "Nightingale") in the audience. He greeted him publicly with a verse in his honor, which was sure to raise further suspicions.³³ Shaykh al-Rais's association with the local Bahai community became more and more common knowledge, and his enemies branded him a "Babi," and even called the governor, Shua al-Saltanih, by that epithet.³⁴

If the governor's relationship with Shaykh al-Rais was dangerous for him as ruler, Shaykh al-Rais's identification with Shua al-Saltanih also exposed him to danger. In Ramadan, 1310 A.H. (December 1901), Muin al-Shariah, the son of Shaykh Yahya the Friday prayer leader, held gatherings on several evenings at his home and other places. There he took pledges from attendees that on 27 Ramadan (7 January 1902) they would gather at the Shah Chiragh shrine to make a disturbance and to protest against the government. Of course, Shaykh al-Rais was the sermonizer at Shah Chiragh, and was at that point progovernment. He apparently got word of the plot and worked with the state to quiet things down and succeeded in preventing the demonstrations. The news writer observed that Muin al-Shariah was pained by this development because he enjoyed stirring up trouble.³⁵ Still, The British consular agent for Shiraz, Haydar Ali Khan Navab, reported on 15 January that "The ulema have decreed Haji Shaykhu'r-Rais to be an infidel [*bukm-i-takfir*] and pronounced his death to be imperative [*vajibu'l-qatl*] because it has been proved to them that he is a Babi."³⁶

Shaykh al-Rais could not in the end forestall the stirring up of major trouble against Shua al-Saltanih, which roiled the city for months. Issues of heterodoxy alone, however, had proven themselves too weak to drive major disturbances. Rather, weather was decisive. Fars province had been undergoing a prolonged cycle of dry weather, making bread expensive and setting nerves on end, contributing to the frequent

outbreaks of urban violence, which served as harbingers of a major bread riot. This popular unrest intersected with local politics, insofar as Qavam al-Mulk had fallen out with the Qajar governor and wanted him out. On Saturday, 8 March 1902, a strike broke out in the bazaar; all the shops, stalls and caravanserais were closed. Some alleged that thugs forced the closing of shops in the bazaar at Qavam al-Mulk's orders. Masses, including both women and men, Muslims and Jews, poured into the Cannon Square. The Friday prayer leader, Hajji Shaykh Yahya, came with seminary students, notables, merchants and a great crowd to the telegraph office, where they erected tents. Another crowd gathered with the city notable Qavam al-Mulk and such clerics as Aqa Mirza Ibrahim Mahallati at the New Mosque. They shouted continuously, "Ya Ali!" and protested, "We don't want this governor, by whom bread has been made expensive and we have been reduced to dragomans [for foreign embassies]!" Bread, which had been six *abbasis* per man, was now being sold for two *qirans* per man.³⁷

Heterodoxy was not the primary issue in the bazaar strike and citywide demonstrations (as witness the participation of the Jews). The factional fighting did, nevertheless give an opening to the anti-Bahai forces. During the disturbances, they recalled the talks Shaykh al-Rais had given, which so many listeners had transcribed, and accused him of being a "Babi" based on their interpretation of his words. With the money of Qavam al-Mulk and the legal authority of Mahallati, they stirred up the merchants and the street gangs. Women of the Turkic Aq-Ivili and Bayat tribes took up staves, demonstrating, and shouting, "Haydar, Haydar!" (referring to the Imam Ali). They cursed the governor, Shua al-Saltanah and Shaykh al-Rais as Babis. This agitation was to last for a month or so, and it was rumored that movements were afoot to kill or imprison other Bahais.³⁸

On the following Monday, 10 March, the crowd gathered at the New Mosque. That afternoon, the shah telegraphed a message that Shua al-Saltanah was urgently required in the capital to accompany Muzaffar al-Din to Europe. Qavam al-Mulk and Mutamad al-Saltanah would be deputy governors until such time as a new governor was appointed, the telegram said. And Qavam al-Mulk should fix the problem of the high price of bread. Qavam al-Mulk and the Friday prayer leader mounted the pulpit in the New Mosque and read out the telegram to the people. Qavam al-Mulk promised that he would, in the space of a few days, make bread cheap, news that, according to the local reporter for the British, cheered up the populace.³⁹

Shua al-Saltanah initially let it out that he would leave town in mid-March. But on Tuesday, 11 March 1902, the news writer for the British says he sent for Shaykh al-Rais and gave him a sum of money to buy a crowd. They were to chant, "We want this governor, but Qavam al-Mulk instigated us to make this tumult!" The next morning Shaykh al-Rais took some street gang members, "senseless women," "Jews," and other princes resident in Shiraz to the Telegraph Station. They chanted that they wanted Shua al-Saltanah as their governor, and that Qavam al-Mulk had stirred them up to say otherwise. "Otherwise, we only wanted cheap bread." Most of these people who were defending the governor, the news writer said, were servants or maids of the local Nuri clan. At the same time, Shua al-Saltanah opened the grain storehouse

and distributed the grain to the people. The bakers began selling bread for only four *abbasis* per man. Flour was sent to the Bakers' Alley so that they should continuously provide bread to the people. Government servants were even sent to the bakeries to pick up the bread and deliver it to the people and to the pro-Shua demonstrators at the Telegraph Station.

In the meantime, the great ulema, merchants and guild masters, some 5,000 persons, had pitched tents at the New Mosque, where they were staying day and night. They chanted, "We do not want the governor!" The clergy continued to call for Shaykh al-Rais's execution as a heretic. The city was now divided into two factions, the pro-Shua crowd at the Telegraph Station, and the pro-Qavam crowd at the New Mosque, with each man providing meals to his supporters. The two crowds taunted and insulted one another. Occupying the government Telegraph Office seemingly provided a monopoly on getting information to the outside world for the pro-governor forces, but Qavam's supporters used the British telegraph office and British embassy to send messages, threatening violence against foreigners in the city if the telegrams did not arrive.⁴⁰

Muzaffar al-Din Shah appears to have viewed Shua al-Saltanah's attempts to remain in office with anger and dismay. He sent a message to the governor that he was to leave for Tehran immediately, and if even one person's blood were spilled he would be responsible for it to the state. Shua al-Saltanah took the warning from Tehran seriously, at last, and asked Shaykh al-Rais to disperse the crowd at the telegraph office and sent him home. On 14 March 1902, Shua al-Saltanah left Shiraz in the middle of the night. Habib Allah Afnan maintains that he feared that announcing the dismissal would bring ridicule upon himself, so he had the cannon fired as a proclamation of a new governor. He says that on hearing the cannon blasts, the crowds in the New Mosque dispersed in fear. According to Habib Allah Afnan, ulema pulled their robes over their heads and hurried home. Then the governor left. We know from the news writer for the British, however, that the crowds at the New Mosque did not disperse, though it is possible that they thinned out; his depiction of the clergy as pusillanimous appears to have little basis in fact.⁴¹

Shua al-Dawlih stayed at the nearby village of Akbarabad for two nights while his companions and servants caught up to him; then the entire party set off for the capital. Qavam al-Mulk was also summoned to Tehran. Ali Pasha Khan, the commander of the Cossack Brigade in Shiraz, was ordered to expel him from the city. Qavam al-Mulk appears to have made preparations to leave, camping out at his Afifabad Garden, but the clergy, great merchants and artisans at the New Mosque did not wish him to leave, and they refused to disperse. They said that until a new governor came and their petitions were answered, they would not leave the mosque. Because neither Shua al-Saltanah nor Qavam al-Mulk was any longer distributing grain, the price of bread rose again, this time to thirty-two *shabis* per man and more. The lieutenant governor stepped in to serve as acting ruler of the province and ordered the price of bread lowered. Another telegram arrived for Qavam, insisting he come to Tehran.⁴²

Shua al-Saltanah's supporters, unwilling to throw in the towel, got up one last attempt to retrieve him. Ijlal al-Dawlih, his maternal uncle, and Jala al-Mulk, the acting Beglarbegi, floated a plan around the first of April to have Shaykh al-Rais

raise another crowd and go back to the telegraph office to send a message to the shah that they wanted their old governor back. Word of this plan, however, leaked to the clergy and others at the New Mosque, who vowed to have Shaykh al-Rais torn to pieces if he so much as stepped out of his house. To back up their threats, they sent an armed gang of street thugs to surround his mansion. He decided to remain within. Tehran then announced that Mirza Abdul-Vahhab Khan Shirazi, entitled Asaf al-Dawlih, had been appointed governor of Shiraz. Shua al-Saltanih sent word that his relatives and followers should leave Shiraz. Ijlal al-Dawlih and the others prepared to do so.⁴³

Despite his precarious position, Shaykh al-Rais declined to depart with the others. In fact, the Babi-baiting died down with Shua al-Saltanih's exit. Qavam al-Mulk proclaimed that his aim had been the removal of the governor and Shaykh al-Rais and that now no one had the right to even pronounce the word "Babi." That is, he forbade further action against the Bahais.⁴⁴ Still, the shah had appointed as the new governor Shaykh al-Rais's old nemesis Asaf al-Dawlih, who had been responsible for his first exile from Iran back in the 1880s, and it seems unlikely that he could have hoped to remain long in the same province with him. In addition, the shah appears to have viewed Shaykh al-Rais as having been partly at fault in the factional fighting that had divided the city. By early August 1902, a telegraph had come from Tehran ordering him to leave Shiraz for the shrine cities of Ottoman Iraq. He began making preparations, but was so deeply in debt that he could not immediately set off. He made three requests of the new governor, Asaf al-Dawlih. He wanted a fifteen-day grace period to prepare for the journey; he wanted to go by way of Isfahan, and he asked that a telegram be sent to the cabinet (Majlis al-Vuzara) informing them that he was 4,000 *tumans* in debt and asking them to cover his obligations so that he might leave. Asaf al-Dawlih granted the first two requests, but said he could not send such a telegram. Instead, he would defray the debts of Shaykh al-Rais himself. At the end of August, Shaykh al-Rais set out for Isfahan. His followers sent him contributions (*tasarrufat*), and he received two years worth of a government stipend (*buquq-i divani*), all of which amounted to some 3,000 *tumans*, allowing him to leave the city "in a respectable manner."⁴⁵

The *mujtahids* of Shiraz telegraphed ahead to those of Isfahan, warning that Shaykh al-Rais was a "Babi." At that time, the Qajar prince Muhammad Husayn Mirza, a devoted Bahai, was head of the Isfahan telegraph office, and he saw the telegram. He prepared a magnificent house just outside the city for Shaykh al-Rais, and when he arrived, explained the situation to him. Shaykh al-Rais, however, insisted on entering Isfahan anyway. Wealthy Bahais there such as Mirza Ali Khan and Muhammad Javad Sarraf encouraged him in this. They made ready an opulent mansion next to their houses, despite the eyebrows it raised. That Friday morning they sat him on a chair and had him speak of abstruse points for a group of listeners. He became renowned, and men of great social weight began seeking him out. Nicolas reported that throngs of 10,000 came to hear him preach, and even if this figure is an exaggeration, there can be little doubt that the crowds were impressive.⁴⁶ This growing prominence provoked the ire of Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Najafi, the preeminent jurist in the city who had ordered a number of Bahais executed, and he

prevailed on Isfahan's governor, Zill al-Sultan, to force Shaykh al-Rais to leave the city.⁴⁷ Despite the shah's command that he go to the shrine cities, he set out instead for Tehran, settling in the capital on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution, in which he was to play an important role. He continued to enjoy there the patronage of the prince and former provincial governor, Shua al-Saltanih.

Shaykh al-Rais's visit to Isfahan and the turmoil in Shiraz has an epilogue. Momen explains that the leading cleric of Isfahan, Aqa Najafi:

...bided his time waiting for a favourable opportunity to strike back at the Bahais. His chance came when the death occurred of Haji Muhammad-Isma'il, a Bahai [banker]. Knowing that both Aqa Muhammad-Javad and Mirza Ali Khan, the two Bahais who had played a prominent role in conducting Haji Shaykhu'r-Rais's meetings, would be present at the funeral, Aqa Najafi instructed his religious students to raid the funeral and conduct the two Bahais to him. The raid succeeded in capturing only one of them, Mirza Muhammad-Javad, who was severely beaten, and it was this that caused the Bahais to flock to the Russian Consulate and thus precipitate the Isfahan and indirectly the Yazd upheavals [of 1903].⁴⁸

Once a group of Bahais had taken refuge in the Russian consulate in May of 1903, an angry mob of supporters of Aqa Najafi ran through the streets, pillaging their houses. When the crowd of 5,000 was around the consulate, some managed to seize an old Bahai man, Sayyid Abu al-Qasim Marnani, marching him toward the Masjid-i Shah and beating him so badly along the way that he died. On 4 June, the British consul reported that a mob had killed two brothers for allegedly being "Babis." Abu al-Qasim Zanjani, the second-rank clergyman who condemned the two merchants, allegedly owed them 1,500 *tumans*. Thereafter some Bahais were killed in the nearby village of Najafabad.⁴⁹

Ironically, this anti-"Babi" agitation in Isfahan spilled over, not only to Yazd, where a major pogrom against Bahais took place, but to Shiraz as well. There, Aqa Mirza Ibrahim Mujtahid wrote a pamphlet and distributed it among the people, saying that whoever got hold of a Babi and killed him would receive a great spiritual reward. The pamphlet excited some among the populace, and a riot very nearly took place. The official Ala al-Dawlih was informed of the pamphleteering and its effects, and he sent a sharp message to Aqa Mirza Ibrahim ordering him into silence. He also rounded up some professed "Babis" and expelled them from the city, so that the people were mollified. The great Isfahani preacher Malik al-Mutakallimin, a secret Azali Babi, had at that time been residing in Shiraz for four or five months. His sermons were full of clandestine Babi themes. In mid-June he hosted a gathering of local Azalis and gave a talk to them. Ala al-Dawlih heard of this meeting and sent two Cossacks to arrest Malik al-Mutakallimin and take him first to Kinarih and then to Abadih. The governor of Abadih then expelled him from Fars province altogether.⁵⁰ He, of course, went on to Tehran, where he joined in the circle of dissident, often heterodox intellectuals who had begun imagining the Constitutional Revolution. Among his colleagues there would be Shaykh al-Rais, thrown out of Shiraz the previous year under similar circumstances.

Shiraz was a crucial proving ground for Shaykh al-Rais's training as a revolutionary. There, he parlayed his rhetorical skills into widespread popularity, basking in the mystical exuberance associated with the Shah Chiragh shrine and other venues in the city. For the first time he successfully navigated, for a period of years, the intricacies of court politics. He even received a bejeweled scepter from Muzaffar al-Din Shah! The sources are not specific about the "reforms" he pressed on the governor, but it does seem clear that he was an agent for progressive change in Fars province, and his commitment to a rule of law must have formed part of this program. He networked with mystics among the city's more adventurous intellectuals and was acclaimed for his erudition and wisdom. His secret membership in the Bahai religion was a political liability in some ways, but in others it provided him with a ready-made circle of supporters and admirers, including high bureaucrats in the local administration, merchants of large property, and some freethinking clergymen. The usefulness of this circle of notable admirers becomes obvious during his move to Isfahan, where they helped offset the hostility of the orthodox clergy, at least initially. It seems obvious that he could have weathered the storms created by rumors of his heterodoxy in Shiraz had his patron, the governor, retained the confidence of key local notables and of the shah.

He established warm relations with merchants and local notables, and even married into two prominent and wealthy provincial elite families. Shaykh al-Rais later established a relationship with the prince Shua al-Saltanih, who served briefly as governor of the province and who continued to be his patron in opposing Muzaffar al-Din Shah in Tehran. He learned how to forge alliances with other members of the clergy over their grievances with the top clerics' control of economic resources. He emerged as a champion of underpaid seminary students and joined popular protests of corruption high in the clerical hierarchy. He grew expert in the use of gangs of street ruffians both to defend himself and to put his enemies on the defensive. He learned how to stage a demonstration, buy a crowd, and influence public opinion. In the fall of 1902 he appeared politically washed up, an exiled and disgraced reformer/heretic in an absolute monarchy with no room for him. Three years later the shah had bowed to his wishes and the wishes of other constitutionalists and allowed the election of the country's first parliament, in which Shaykh al-Rais would serve as speaker.

NOTES

¹For Qajar politics see Shaul Bakhash, *Iran, Monarchy, Bureaucracy, & Reform under the Qajars, 1858-1896* (London: Ithaca Press for the Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, 1978); Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); A. Reza Sheikholeslami, *The Structure of Central Authority in Qajar Iran, 1871-1896* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); Nikki Keddie, *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan, 1796-1925* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1999); Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism: the Iranian Revolution of 1906* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989); Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (Columbia: Colum-

bia University Press, 1996); and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

²For the millenarian Babi movement, see Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); for the Bahai faith, see Peter Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Juan Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Baha'i Faith in the Nineteenth Century Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). For heterodoxy and Qajar politics see Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982).

³For the earlier career of Shaykh al-Rais see Juan R. I. Cole, "Autobiography and Silence: The Early Career of Shaykh al-Rais Qajar," in *Iran in 19. Jarhundert und die Entstehung der Baha'i-Religion*, ed. Johann Christoph Bürgel and Isabel Schayani (Zürich: Georg Olms Verlag, 1998), 91-126; and Cole "Shaykh al-Rais and Sultan Abdülhamid II: The Iranian Dimension of Pan-Islam," in *Histories of the Modern Middle East: New Directions*, ed. Israel Gershoni, Hakan Erdem, and Ursula Woköck (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 167-185.

⁴Fadil Asad Allah Mazandarani, *Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq*, 9 vols. (East Lansing: H-Bahai Digital Publications, 1999), 6:42, <<http://www2h-netmsuedu/~bahai/arabic/vol3/tzh6/tzh6.htm>>.

⁵For Shiraz see John I. Clarke, *The Iranian City of Shiraz*, Research Papers Series, no. 7 (Durham: Department of Geography, University of Durham, 1963); Hasan Imdad, *Shiraz dar Guzashatih va Hal*, (Shiraz: Ittihadiyyih-'i Matbuati-yi Fars, 1960); Laurence D. Loeb, *Outcaste: Jewish Life in Southern Iran* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1977); and Setrag Manoukian, "The City of Knowledge: History and Culture in Contemporary Shiraz" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2001); for the Sufis and politics see Matthijs van den Bos, *Mystic regimes: Sufism and the State in Iran, from the Late Qajar Era to the Islamic Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); for the Turkic tribespeople see Lois Beck, *The Qashaqai of Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

⁶Muhammad Nasir Fursat Shirazi, *Athar al-'Ajam dar tarikh va jughrifiya-yi masbrub-i bilad va amakin-i Fars* (Tehran: Farhangsara, 1362 A.H./1983 or 1984), 529.

⁷Mazandarani, "Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq," 6:42.

⁸Shirazi, *Athar al-Ajam*, 530; for an analysis of the book on pan-Islam, see Cole, "Shaykh al-Rais and Sultan Abdülhamid II."

⁹Abu al-Hasan Mirza Shaykh al-Rais Qajar, *Kitab al-Abrar* (Bombay: Matba'ih-i Ja'fari, 1312/1895).

¹⁰Mazandarani, "Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq," 6:42; Afnan, *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz*, (East Lansing: H-Bahai, 2000), 314, <<http://www2h-netmsuedu/~bahai/arabic/vol4/shiraz/shiraz.htm>>; for dates of Rukn al-Dawlih's appointments in Fars, see Shirazi, *Athar al-Ajam*, 589.

¹¹For Shah Chiragh see Shirazi, *Athar al-Ajam*, 444-448; for a contemporary anthropological account of the shrine see Anne Betteridge, "Specialists in Miraculous Action: Some Shrines in Shiraz," in *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Alan Morinis (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992), 189-209.

¹²Afnan, *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz*, 322.

¹³Shirazi, *Athar al-Ajam*, 131.

¹⁴Afnan, *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz*, 315-21; Mazandarani, "Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq," 6:43.

¹⁵Juan R. I. Cole, "Religious Dissidence and Urban Leadership: Baha'is in Qajar Shiraz and Tehran." *Iran: Journal of the British Institute for Persian Studies* 37 (1999): 123-142.

¹⁶For Furughi see Aziz Allah Sulaymani, *Masabih-i Hidayat*, vol. 3 (Tehran: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1947-1975), 435-504; H. M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Baha'is in the Time of Baba'u'llah* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), 156-170; for Mirza Aqa Nur al-Din, the Afnan merchant, see Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahais in the Time of Baba'u'llah*, 216-236.

¹⁷Afnan, *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz*, 350-353.

¹⁸Afnan, *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz*, 353-358.

¹⁹Ali Akbar Sa'idi Sirjani, ed., *Vaqa'i-i Ittifaqiyyih: majmu'ih-i guzarish-ba-yi kbafiyih-i nivisan-i Inglis dar vilayat-i janubiyi Iran, az sal-i 1291 ta 1322 qamari* (Tehran: Nashr-i Naw, 1361 s.), 521.

²⁰Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 529.

²¹For the Mansuriyyih Seminary see Shirazi, *Athar al-Ajam*, 497-498.

²²Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 531-32.

²³For the Qavam al-Mulk family of provincial notables, see William Royce, "The Shirazi Provincial Elite: Status Maintenance and Change," in *Modern Iran: The Dialectics of Continuity and Change*, ed. Michael Bonine and Nikki R. Keddie (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 289-300.

²⁴Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 533.

²⁵H. M. Balyuzi, *Abdu'l-Baba: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahau'llah*, chap. 7 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1971).

²⁶Afnan, *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz*, 412.

²⁷Abd al-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari, *Muhadarat*, (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahai-Verlag, 1997), 944-946.

²⁸Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 608.

²⁹Mazandarani, "Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq," 6:44-45.

³⁰Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 627.

³¹Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 632.

³²Mazandarani, "Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq," 44-45;

³³Khavari, "Shaykh al-Rais," 351.

³⁴The following account is from Afnan, *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz*, 426-432.

³⁵Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 659.

³⁶U.K., Public Record Office, Kew Gardens, Foreign Office 248 773, Haydar Ali Khan's report of 15 January 1902, trans. and quoted in Moojan Momen, *The Babi and Bahai Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980), 364.

³⁷Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 664; Afnan, *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz*, 428-429.

³⁸Afnan, *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz*, 429-430.

³⁹Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 664

⁴⁰Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 664-665.

⁴¹Afnan, *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz*, 430. Note that Afnan's dates are incorrect by about a year, compared to the contemporary reports of the news writer for the British in Sirjani.

⁴²Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 665-666.

⁴³Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 667.

⁴⁴Afnan, *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz*, 431.

⁴⁵Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 680-681.

⁴⁶Nicolas, *Massacres de Babis*, 13, quoted in Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 364.

⁴⁷Mazandarani, "Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq," 45-46.

⁴⁸Momen, *Babi and Bahai Religions*, 364.

⁴⁹See the various accounts in Momen, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 376-385; and Hadji Mirza Heidar Ali [Isfahani], *Bahai Martyrdoms in Persia* (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1904), 5-9.

⁵⁰Sirjani, *Vaqa'i*, 707-708.