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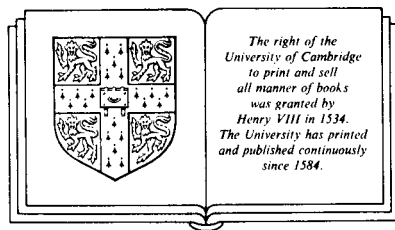
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THE BABI
AND BAHAI RELIGIONS
FROM MESSIANIC SHI'ISM
TO A WORLD RELIGION



PETER SMITH

*Department of Humanities, Mahidol University, Thailand
and
Department of Sociology, University of Lancaster*



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

*Cambridge
London New York New Rochelle
Melbourne Sydney*

Cambridge University Press

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521301282

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First published 1987

This digitally printed version 2008

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Smith, Peter, 1947 Nov. 27–

The Babi and the Baha'i religions.

Bibliography.

Includes index.

1. Bahai Faith – History. 2. Babism – History.

I. Title.

BP330.S65 1987 297'.88 87-16781

ISBN 978-0-521-30128-2 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-31755-9 paperback

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To my mother, Wyn Smith,
and to the memory of my father,
Edward Peatfield Smith (1913–82)

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Man is so intelligent that he feels impelled to invent theories to account for what happens in the world. Unfortunately, he is not quite intelligent enough, in most cases, to find correct explanations.

Aldous Huxley
Texts and Pretexts

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TRANSLITERATION



I have employed a modified version of the system of transliteration employed within the Baha'i community, diverging from that system in order to distinguish more clearly separate Arabic and Persian usages, and in much greater Anglicization of oriental terms and place names in common Western usage or of frequent occurrence.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Western scholarly interest in the Babi and Baha'i religions flourished first in the period from the 1880s to the 1910s, notably in the work of Mirza Kazem-Beg, E.G. Browne, A.L.M. Nicolas, V. Rosen and A. Tumanskii. There then followed a lengthy period of scholarly neglect which came to an end only in the 1970s. Within the Baha'i community, the writings of H.M. Balyuzi and the formation of the Canadian Association for Baha'i Studies (in 1974) contributed significantly to this revival of interest. Within the academic community, interest was primarily reflected by an increasing number of doctoral dissertations. Whilst from the 1920s up to 1970 fewer than a dozen dissertations had been produced, since that date there have been at least twenty. We now at last have a substantial scholarly base for a general academic survey such as the present work.

Let me acknowledge my debts of gratitude. This book had its genesis during my years at the University of Lancaster, first as a graduate student in the Department of Sociology, and later as a research fellow. To the members of that Department and also to those of the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster, I owe my introduction to academic life and debate. More specifically, the two Departments jointly sponsored a series of Baha'i Studies Seminars, held under my convenorship (1977–80), which contributed both to the present work, and to the development of Baha'i Studies as a venture in co-operative scholarship. In terms of that venture, my thanks are due to all the participants at those Lancaster seminars, and also to the organizers and participants at the Los Angeles Baha'i History Conferences, which from 1983 on were their successors. My particular thanks must go to Juan Cole, Stephen Lambden, Anthony Lee, Denis MacEoin and Moojan Momen for their years of friendship and argument about Baha'i Studies.

I must thank the many individuals who have at one time or other commented on various drafts of this work, or on the doctoral dissertation for which much of the research was originally done. These include Nicholas Abercrombie, John Hughes, Bryan Turner, and Michalina

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Acknowledgements

Vaughan at Lancaster; Eileen Barker from the London School of Economics; and for the present (final) draft, Denis MacEoin, Moojan Momen, Sammireh Smith, and, at Cambridge University Press, Elizabeth Wetton.

I must also thank Sylvia Stackhouse, Mavis Conolly and Shirley Govindasamy for their invaluable secretarial work; archivist Roger Dahl for his co-operation during my extended visit to the American National Baha'i Archives at Wilmette, Illinois; the staffs at the National Baha'i Centres of Canada and the United Kingdom, and at the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa for facilitating my access to library materials; the Department of the Secretariat and the Department of Statistics at the Baha'i World Centre for their responses to my various queries; and the International Baha'i Audio-Visual Centre for the photographs which illustrate this book. Above all, my thanks are due to my parents, my wife and my children for their support over the long years of research. As is customary, I should record the particularly immeasurable nature of my indebtedness to my wife, and the complete innocence of any of the above for such errors as may still linger in the pages which follow.

Let me close these remarks by noting two aspects of my work on this book. Firstly, whilst I am primarily a sociologist of religion by training, what is here presented is basically a work of history. I see no anomaly in this fact, for I would argue that sociologists need also to be historians. Nevertheless, the reader will note that although sociological ideas are implicit in many sections of this book, formal sociological analysis has been excluded. Secondly, in writing about a minority religion, some brief confession of faith is perhaps required, if only to rebut potential allegations of bias. Let it be said, then, that without claiming to have attained some mystical state of sociological value freedom, I have sought to write without conscious bias and with a general sense of questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions which form part of my background as a Baha'i.

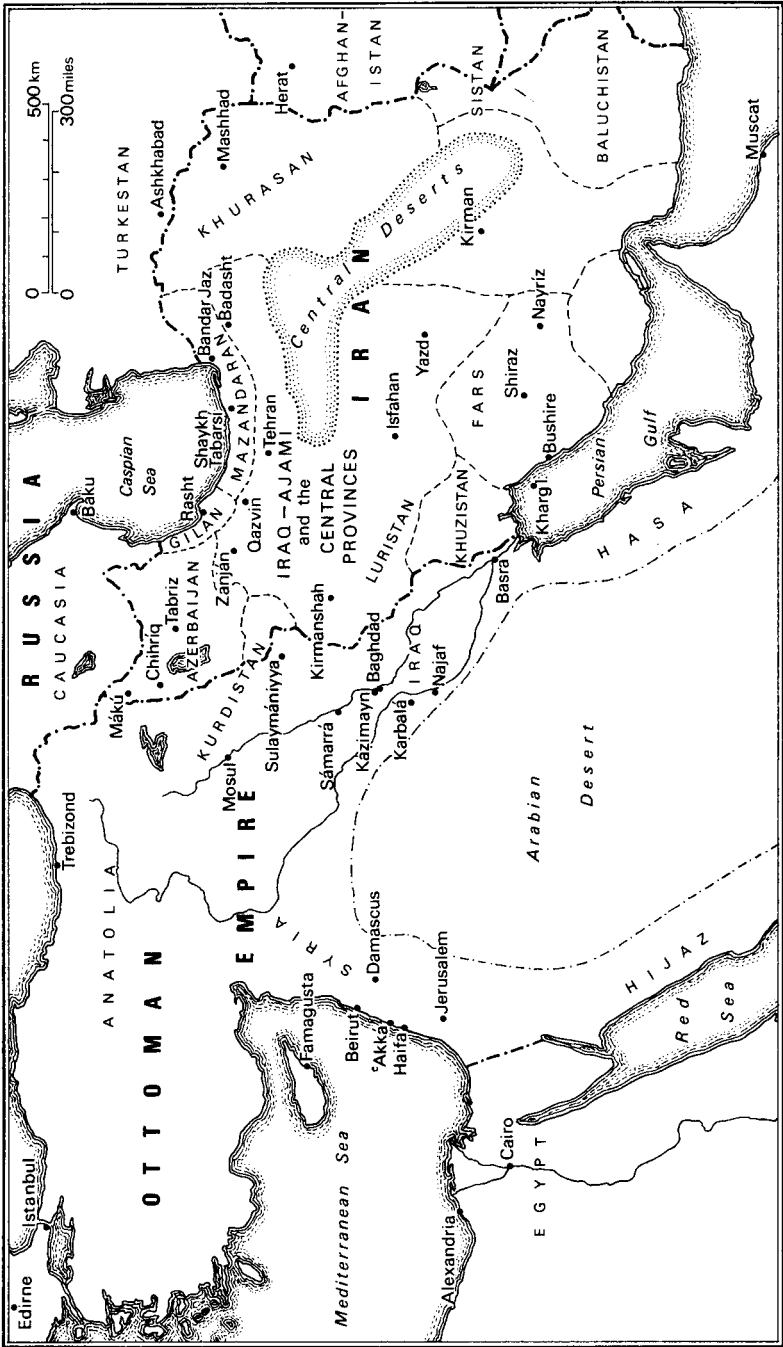
Bangkok
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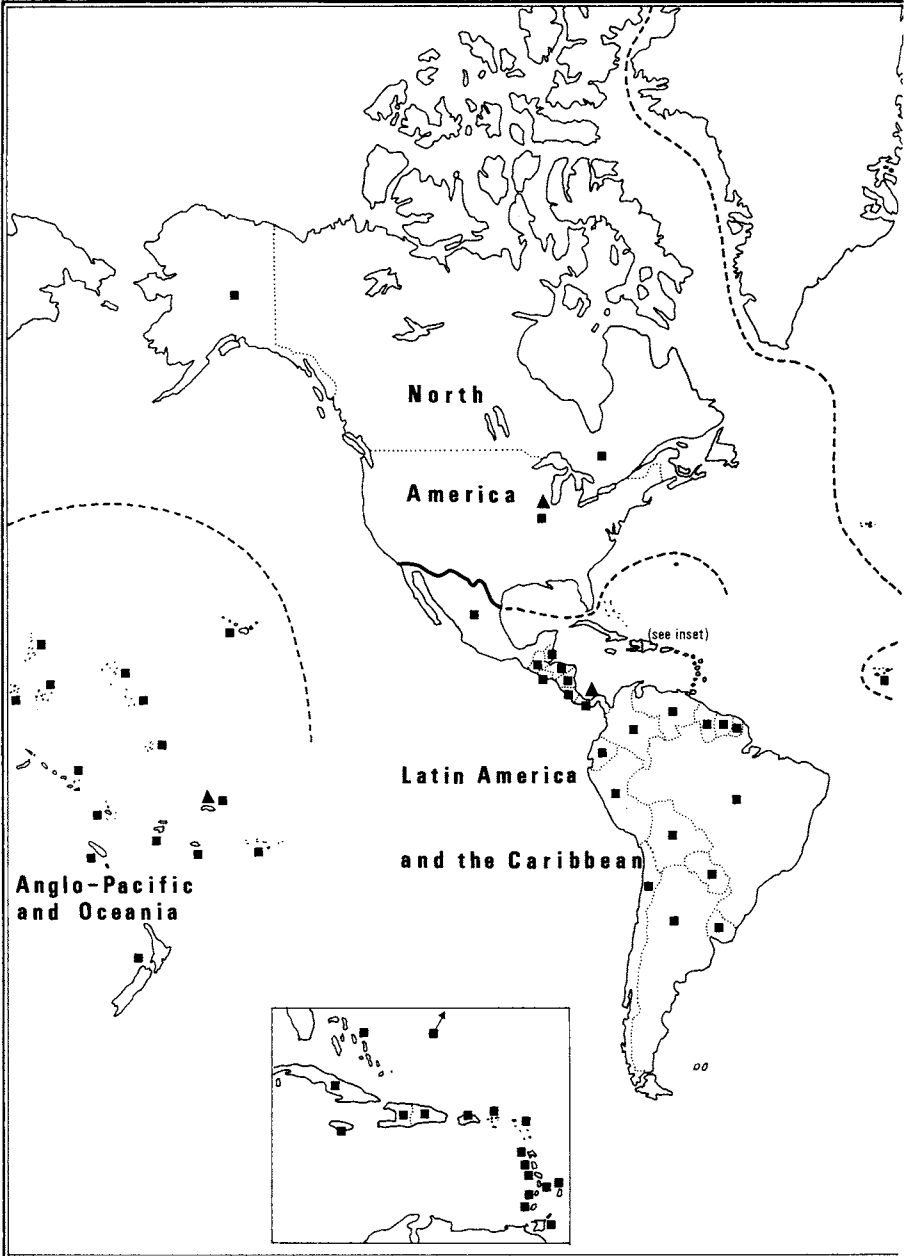
Map 1. Iran and the Ottoman Empire in the mid-nineteenth century. The international boundaries to the east of Iran were not defined or demarcated until the late nineteenth century. Iran's internal provincial boundaries were frequently changed

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Map 2. Global expansion of the Baha'i Faith (April 1985)

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