

Baha'u'llah's Bishārāt (Glad-Tidings): A Proclamation to Scholars and Statesmen

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Abstract

This article is a historical and textual study of the one of the major writings of Baha'u'llah: the Lawḥ-i Bishārāt ('Tablet of Glad-Tidings'), revealed circa 1891, and advances new theories as to its provenance and purpose. The 'Tablet of Glad-Tidings' is a selective compendium of Baha'u'llah's laws and principles, sequentially presented in a series of 15 'Glad-Tidings'. As the Arabic term, Bisharat, suggests, these 'Glad-Tidings' were a public announcement of some of the essential teachings of the new Baha'i religion. The 'Glad-Tidings' is the most extensive of several 'tablets' by Baha'u'llah that present key teachings in a numbered structure. The Glad-Tidings may, in part, be regarded as serially articulated 'world reforms' intermixed with religious reforms emanating from Baha'u'llah in his professed role as 'World Reformer'. The 'Glad-Tidings' also functioned analogously (albeit anachronistically) to a press release, serving not only as a public proclamation but to rectify the inaccuracies and gross misrepresentations that had previously circulated in print. Intended for widespread translation and publication, the Glad-Tidings was sent to scholars – notably Russian orientalist, Baron Viktor Rosen (1849–1908) and Cambridge orientalist, Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926) – and possibly pre-revolutionary Russian statesmen as well. As a 'Proclamatory Aqdas', the Tablet of Glad-Tidings was part of a much broader proclamation by Baha'u'llah, who proclaimed his mission to the political and religious leaders of the world. This study will argue that Baha'u'llah may have revealed the Tablet of Glad-Tidings for E. G. Browne – or rather through him, since Baha'u'llah evidently intended that Browne should translate and publish the Bisharat in order to make the nature of the Baha'i teachings more widely known. This would then correct the distortions that had previously been published regarding Baha'u'llah's purpose and the nature of the religion that he founded, thereby promoting a public awareness that a new world religion was on the horizon of modernity.

Keywords

Baha'u'llah
Edward Granville
Browne
Baron Viktor Rosen
Bishārāt
Tablet of
Glad-Tidings
Proclamatory Aqdas
world reforms
modernity
sacralizing/
desacralizing

This article is a historical and textual study of the one of the major writings of Baha'u'llah: the Lawḥ-i Bishārāt ('Tablet of Glad-Tidings'), revealed circa 1891, and advances new theories as to its provenance and purpose.¹ The manuscript of this work used in this article is manuscript F. 25 of the Edward Granville Browne Collection held at Cambridge University Library. The manuscript contains the Bisharat itself (ff. 372–7), the anonymous inscription that immediately precedes it, along with a cover letter, dated 22 January 1891,

1. See English translation: Bahā'u'llāh, *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh Revealed After the Kitāb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1988) 21–9 (hereinafter TB). For the

Persian/Arabic original, see: Bahā'u'llih, *Majmū'a-yi alwāh-i Hadrat-i Bahā'u'llāh* ('Collected Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh'; hereinafter 'MMA'); available at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/TB/tb-3.html> and following pages. Ed. Muhyi'd-Dīn Ṣabrī Kurdī Sanandajī Kanimishkānī (Cairo: Matb'at as-Sa'adah, 1333 AH/1920 CE) 116–24; Bahā'u'llāh, *Majmū'ih-iy az Alvāh-i Jamāl-i Aqdas-i Abhā kih ba'd az Kitāb-i Aqdas Nāzil Shudih* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i-Verlag, 1980); *Bisharāt*, F. 25(9) Edward Granville Browne Manuscripts (Cambridge University Library).

2. See R. A. Nicholson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental MSS belonging to the late E. G. Browne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932) 64–5. Available at http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/arabic_catalogues/nicholson1932/index.php. The authors express their appreciation to Catherine Anson, Head of Near and Middle Eastern Department, Manuscripts and Printed Collections, Cambridge University Library, for providing digital (greyscale) scans.
3. TB 57–80.
4. TB 101–34.
5. TB 83–97.
6. TB 47–54.

from one of Baha'u'llah's sons, Mīrẓā Badī'u'llāh (ff. 368–9), and a second cover letter, dated 29 January 1891, from Haji Muhammad (ff. 366–7).²

Born Mīrẓā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī (1817–92), Baha'u'llah was the prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith. The 'Tablet of Glad-Tidings' is a selective compendium of Baha'u'llah's laws and principles, sequentially presented in a series of 15 'Glad-Tidings'. As the Arabic term, *Bisharāt*, suggests, these 'Glad-Tidings' were a public announcement of some of the essential teachings of the new Baha'i religion. The proclamatory purpose of this short, but significant Baha'i text is transparent, in that the Bisharāt is addressed to the entire world: 'O people of the earth (*yā ahl-i ard!*)!'

The Glad-Tidings is the most extensive of several 'tablets' by Baha'u'llah that present key teachings in a numbered structure. Its closest analogue is the *Kalimāt-i Firdawsīyih* (Words of Paradise), which features 11 core principles (each metaphorically described as a 'leaf of the Most Exalted Paradise').³ The *Ishrāqāt* (Splendours), presents 9 principles, each characterized as an *Ishrāq* (Splendour).⁴ The *Lawḥ-i Duniyā* (Tablet of the World) gives 5 numbered principles, collectively represented as among 'the fundamental principles for the administration of the affairs of men'.⁵ Similarly, the *Tajalliyāt* (Effulgences) articulates a series of 4 teachings, each a *Tajallī* (Effulgence), which are collectively described as that 'which hath dawned from the Day-Star of Truth'.⁶ In their original order, the 15 'Glad-Tidings' are as follows:

1. Holy war is abolished.
2. (a) Peoples and (b) Religions should unite in friendship.
3. A world language and script should be chosen.
4. Baha'is must serve and support any king who protects the Faith.
5. (a) Baha'is must obey their governments. (b) Peoples of the world should aid the Baha'i cause. (c) Weapons of destruction should be converted into instruments of reconstruction.
6. World peace is promised.
7. Freedom of dress is permitted, within the bounds of decency.
8. Priestly celibacy is discouraged.
9. Confession of sins is abolished.
10. Destruction of books is banned.
11. Sciences and arts are commended, provided they are useful.
12. (a) All must learn and earn a livelihood. (b) Work is worship.
13. Affairs of state are entrusted to the House of Justice.
14. Pilgrimages to the shrines of the dead are no longer obligatory and funds for doing so should be contributed to the House of Justice.
15. Republican democracy and kingship are recommended and should ideally be combined.

These 15 principles (or, by another count, 21, because more than one precept may be presented under a single 'Glad-Tidings') were selected from Baha'u'llah's most important work, the *Kitāb-i Aqdas*, ('The Most Holy Book', circa 1873) and supplementary texts. Because the Glad-Tidings is a proclamation of selected principles from the *Aqdas*, it therefore served – and

may thus be characterized – as a ‘Proclamatory Aqdas’. And because misinformation regarding the Baha’i religion had been published in the Egyptian press and in the first modern Arabic encyclopaedia as well (see below), the Bisharat also served as a corrective to such damaging mischaracterizations of the nascent faith. Intended for widespread translation and publication, the Glad-Tidings was sent to scholars – notably Baron Viktor Romanovich Rosen (1849–1908) and Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926) – and possibly pre-revolutionary Russian statesmen as well. As previously mentioned, this present study offers new theories as to the provenance and purpose of this public proclamation of essential Baha’i teachings.

The Bisharat as a ‘Proclamatory Aqdas’: public announcement of selected principles from ‘The Most Holy Book’

The Bisharat was a public announcement of the new Baha’i teachings. Its function was analogous (albeit anachronistically) to a press release, serving not only as a public proclamation but to rectify the inaccuracies and gross misrepresentations that had previously circulated in print. The first known newspaper article, in Arabic, on the Babi movement (the religious precursor to the Baha’i religion) was Adib Iṣḥāq’s article, ‘Ḥarakat al-Afkār’ (‘The Movement of Thought’). Published in the Egyptian newspaper *Misr* in 1878, Iṣḥāq’s article ‘may well be the first significant mention of the Babi-Baha’i movement in the Arabic press’.⁷ This generally positive account of the Babi religion was based on a negative source of information. Iṣḥāq’s contemporary, Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asādābādī (1838–97), who became renowned as ‘al-Afghani’, had published an article on Babism for the *Beirut Encyclopaedia* of Arabic author and scholar, Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819–83). The *Beirut Encyclopaedia* (*Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif*) was apparently the first modern encyclopaedia in Arabic.⁸ By contrast to Iṣḥāq’s article, Afghani’s entry was manifestly critical, achieving its purpose through a biased distortion of the facts.⁹ In another proclamatory text, the *Lawḥ-i Dunyā* (‘Tablet of the World’), Baha’u’llah exposes the motives and subsequent duplicity of Afghani:

The aforesaid person [Afghānī] hath written such things concerning this people in the Egyptian press and in the *Beirut Encyclopedia* that the well-informed and the learned were astonished. He proceeded then to Paris where he published a newspaper entitled *Urvatu’l-Vuthqā* [The Sure Handle] and sent copies thereof to all parts of the world. He also sent a copy to the Prison of ‘Akkā, and by so doing he meant to show affection and to make amends for his past actions. In short, this Wronged One hath observed silence in regard to him.¹⁰

Afghani’s encyclopaedia and newspaper articles on the Babi and Baha’i religions are apparently among the ‘lying tales (*qiṣaṣ-i kāḏiba*)’ of which Baha’u’llah speaks in the preamble of the Tablet of Glad-Tidings.¹¹ One important purpose of the Bisharat, therefore, was to create a public awareness of the true tenor of Baha’i teachings, to counteract the disinformation deliberately disseminated by detractors, in their efforts to propagandize against the Baha’i religion, while purporting to portray accurately its principal claims and character. It is in this sense that the ‘Glad-Tidings’ served a purpose not unlike that of a press release.

7. See anonymous author’s comments in ‘Adib Ishaq, “Ḥarakat al-Afkār” (‘The Movement of Thought’)’. Online at <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/vol5/ishaq.htm>.
8. See anonymous author’s comments in ‘Sayyid Jamal al-Din ‘al-Afghani’ Asadabadi: Correspondence with Butrus al-Bustani’ Online at <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/afghani/bustani.htm>.
9. As for note 7.
10. TB 94–5.
11. TB 21.

12. Lawḥ-i Ra'īs' in Bahā'u'llāh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 2002) 161. See also Baha'u'llah to Queen Victoria in *Summons* 92.

The Glad-Tidings, in part, may be regarded as serially articulated 'world reforms' intermixed with religious reforms emanating from Baha'u'llah in his professed role as 'World Reformer' (*muṣliḥ al-'ālam*). In the Lawḥ-i Ra'īs, Baha'u'llah explicitly refers to himself as 'Lifegiver and World Reformer'.¹² By proclaiming the sum and substance of core Baha'i teachings, the Glad-Tidings presents the quintessence of the Baha'i message in a more or less systematic fashion. In addition to its *prescriptive* purpose (in promulgating world reforms), the Bisharat has a descriptive and normative function, in presenting some of the more distinctive laws and principles that, as salient features of the Baha'i religion, differentiate it from Babism, Islam and Christianity. The Bisharat has the further distinction of arguably being the most succinct, yet the most representative of Baha'u'llah's major tablets.

The Tablet of Glad-Tidings, as previously stated, privileges selected Baha'i principles. In other words, the very fact that Baha'u'llah has *selected* these 15 'Glad-Tidings' privileges them. This selection process – this privileging of principles for proclamatory purposes – arguably invests these new religious laws with a heightened significance. Although there are many more Baha'i teachings, these 15 principles effectively served as an epitome, or summary, highlighting some of the most distinctive Baha'i teachings drawn from the Kitāb-i Aqdas and supplementary texts. Because a conscious selection process was involved in the revelation of the Tablet of Glad-Tidings – historical evidence of which will be cited below – the Bisharat may justifiably be considered to be a 'proclamatory' epitome of the Aqdas, in which certain provisions were privileged for the purpose of proclamation.

From another perspective, these 'Glad-Tidings' collectively functioned as a new 'gospel' or *kerygma* (to use two Christian terms); that is to say, it was, and still is, a Baha'i 'gospel'. This tablet, functionally speaking, may be regarded as the 'Gospel of Baha'u'llah', proclaiming the 'good news' of social salvation for the transformation of human society globally. It is a Baha'i counterpart to the 'Sermon on the Mount' in the Gospel of Matthew (or 'Sermon on the Plain' as in Luke's evangel).

As a 'Proclamatory Aqdas', the Tablet of Glad-Tidings was part of a much broader proclamation by Baha'u'llah, who proclaimed his mission – as anyone with passing familiarity with Baha'i history well knows – to the political and religious leaders of the world. Given the special history of this singular text, this study will argue that Baha'u'llah may have revealed the Tablet of Glad-Tidings for the Cambridge orientalist, Edward Granville Browne. If the Bisharat was revealed *for* Browne, it was intended to be transmitted *through* him. In other words, Baha'u'llah evidently intended that Browne should translate and publish the Bisharat in order to make the nature of the Baha'i teachings more widely known, and, in so doing, serve to correct the distortions that had previously been published regarding Baha'u'llah's purpose and the nature of the religion that he founded, while promoting a public awareness that a new world religion was on the horizon of modernity.

Responding to a query by one of the co-authors, the Research Department at the Baha'i World Centre has identified a tablet in which Baha'u'llah states that the Bisharat should be sent to state officials, but selectively and only with advance authorization to do so: 'In a Tablet dated 1 Rabi' I 1309 (October 1891) addressed to Ḥājī Siyyid 'Alī Afnān in 'Ishqābād, Baha'u'llah indicates

that earlier He had instructed that a copy of Lawḥ-i-Bishārāt be given to the state authorities. He indicates, however, that it should not be distributed widely without His permission.¹³ The Research Department further states: “Abdu’l-Bahā suggested that the Tablet of Bishārāt be sent to Tolstoy and Lord Curzon.¹⁴ At another time, He advised a believer to give the Tablet of Bishārāt to a “writer of history” (*tārīkh-nivīs*)¹⁵ whom the believer had met’.¹⁶ Given direct evidence that Baha’u’llah had specific recipients in minds, it is now safe to say that the Bisharat was revealed for (or at least intended for transmission to) western scholars and statesmen.

Around the turn of the 20th century, there emerged a group of scholars in Europe who collected information about a new religious and social phenomenon, an emerging new religion, the Babi religion, which evolved into what is now known as the Baha’i Faith. These highly trained and competent scholars based their findings on primary sources, on firsthand reports and accounts, as well as on their own personal experiences and communications with adherents of the Baha’i Faith. These scholars, moreover, widely collaborated in their research efforts and willingly shared the primary source materials and information they obtained. However right or wrong they may have been in their assumptions, and in their judgments and ultimately in the conclusions they reached, these scholars were, for the most part, honest in their approach. Their hidden biases notwithstanding, they strove to remain unbiased towards their subject, and, by so doing, set an exemplary standard for the future generations of scholars. Among these, Shoghi Effendi (grandson of, and successor, from 1921 to 1957, to ‘Abdu’l-Baha) refers to the work of two such scholars, Baron Rosen and E.G. Browne:

The earliest published writings of Baha’u’llah date from the nineties of the last century. Over forty years ago the Aqdas, a volume of general Tablets including Tarazāt, Ishrāqāt, and others were published in Ishqābād (Russia) and Bombay respectively and copies of these though rare are still procurable. Simultaneously with these, if not earlier, some of the writings of Baha’u’llah were published by the Oriental Department of the Imperial Russian University at St. Petersburg under the supervision of its director Baron Rosen (and more particulars about these could be found in the books of E. G. Browne) and these of course are not undated like some of those published in Bombay.¹⁷

An interesting article in Arabic from the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* is preserved for us in Baron V. R. Rosen’s archival materials in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg. This article, which is undated and provided only with the number of the newspaper edition (no. 5524), was sent to Rosen by Aleksandr G. Tumanski (1861–1920), with a letter dated 10 June 1896, in which it was described as ‘a recent article’. Commenting on the disinformation in prior publications on the Babi and Baha’i religions, as previously recounted, Tumanski notes to what great lengths detractors of the Baha’i religion would go in order to cast aspersions on it:

And there was not anything abominable left which they would not attribute to them (i.e. to the Baha’is), nor was there any wickedness by which they would not characterize them. So rumours increased, minds became disturbed and

13. Research Department, ‘Distribution of Lawḥ-i-Bishārāt to scholars and leaders, author of a quotation, and confidentiality and the original letters of Alain Locke to Shoghi Effendi’ (Haifa, Israel: Memorandum, 14 December 2008). Sent to co-author, Dr Christopher Buck, in response to his research questions.
14. *Makātib-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahā*, vol. 3 ([Cairo]: Faraju’llah Zakīyy al-Kurdī, 1921) 455 and 456.
15. The individual in question was Sargis Mubayejian, the Armenian writer better known by his pen name, Atrpet. See ‘Azīzu’llah Sulaymānī, *Maṣābīḥ-i Hidāyat*, vol. 5 ([Tehran]: Bahā’ī Publishing Trust, 118 BE [1961–2]) 199–202.
16. Research Department, ‘Distribution of Lawḥ-i-Bishārāt to scholars and leaders’.
17. Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 9 February 1930, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahā’ī Community* (London: Bahā’ī Publishing Trust, 1981) 424.

18. Aleksandr Tumanski to Baron Viktor Rosen, 10 June 1896. *Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences* (St Petersburg), fund: 777; inventory: 2; unit: 460 (trans. Youli Ioannesyan).
19. This (and some other dates featured in the correspondence) are according to the old Julian calendar used in pre-revolutionary Russia that by then differed by 12 days from the Gregorian calendar.
20. Captain Aleksandr G. Tumanski, *Kavkāz*, no. 180 (9 July 1892) (trans. Youli Ioannesyan).

the matter became obscure for the most excellent Europeans. Consequently, a group of learned and noble people among them rose to investigate the Babis' [*sic*] beliefs and to find out about their habits. One of them is the illustrious scholar Baron Rosen, who is among the pre-eminent and celebrated doctors in the academies of [St] Petersburg. He sent one of his students, Captain Tumanski, to the city of Ashkabad, and then to Iran. So, he lived with the Babis for over three years and got to know all their commandments and customs. He obtained their books, published them and put them into circulation in Russia and other European countries. Also among them is Mr Edward Browne – a teacher of Oriental languages in Cambridge University. This [scholar] travelled to Iran in the year 1303 of the Hijrah, too. He lived with different peoples inhabiting Iran, became knowledgeable in the habits of all [of them] and obtained Babi books. From thence he travelled to Syria, arrived in 'Akka, and had the honour of entering into Baha'u'llah's presence. He returned to Europe and published all his observations in scholarly journals.¹⁸

In marked contrast to the negative press on the Babi and Baha'i movements that had circulated during both Baha'u'llah's and 'Abdu'l-Baha's ministries, the Russian scholar Captain Aleksandr G. Tumanski published an obituary on the death of Baha'u'llah, in which the latter is generously (if not befittingly) eulogized:

A report has been received the other day about the death of the Head of the Babis and their prophet, which occurred in Akka (St Jean d'Acre) in Syria on 16 May.¹⁹ This was a remarkable person, who managed to attract about a million followers in different parts of Persia and bestowed upon Babiism the peace-loving nature which is now characteristic of the adherents of this religion. This teaching has made the proud Shi'i Persian, who accepts friendship only with his coreligionists and fully turns his back on people of other beliefs (*tabarra' va tavalla*), into a humble person, a Babi, who considers everybody to be his brother.²⁰

The investigation of the Babi and Baha'i religions by European scholars had some unexpected consequences, one of which may loosely be described the 'observer effect' – not in the strict scientific sense, of course, but insofar as the extent to which the act of observing may have an impact on the phenomenon being observed. Certainly this seems to hold true for Browne himself, as well as in the case of Baron Viktor Rosen. The transmission history of the Bisharat provides ample evidence of this. On 22 January 1891, Baha'u'llah himself had ordered the Bisharat to be sent to Browne at Cambridge University. Shortly thereafter, in December 1891, the Baha'is of Ashkabad sent Russian orientalist, Baron Viktor Rosen, a copy as well. Browne's and Rosen's subsequent scholarship on the Bisharat will be discussed shortly. Here, the 'observer effect' of scholarly investigation into Baha'i origins and beliefs was that certain Baha'i leaders made efforts to acquaint scholars and statesmen with the principles and practices of the Baha'i religion. Such contacts with scholars and statesmen thereby became part of Baha'i history.

In their day, Baron Viktor Rosen and Edward Granville Browne were among the leading scholars on the Babi and Baha'i religions. Together, they represented not only scholarship itself, but a class of professional scholars.

Rather than being *religious scholars*, they were *scholars of religion*. In the early history of the Baha'i Faith, therefore, the Baha'i teachings were not only publicly proclaimed to *political leaders* and *religious leaders*, but to *leaders of thought* as well. Thus the Baha'i proclamation extended from 'kings and ecclesiastics' to include academics and statesmen, where the latter perhaps served as prospective conduits to their respective governments and persons of influence.

As public intellectuals, these academics served as important channels for disseminating information about the nascent Faith, as obtained from primary sources. Given the relatively high social status of scholars (both in the West and in the East) – and granting the considerable authority that the academic world exercised in the world of thought generally – such scholars made enormous contributions to public knowledge of Baha'u'llah's message, if not on a global scale, then at least in the countries in which they lived.

Historically, the enumeration of these progressive principles had a certain intellectual appeal to at least a few scholars, in both East and West, who became acquainted with the Baha'i religion. Perhaps the best example of this is Asadu'llāh Fāḍil Mazandarānī, an illustrious Baha'i scholar and teacher. According to his own testimony, the first Baha'i text that he read, as a young man, was the Bisharat and, on the merits of that tablet alone, was persuaded of the truth of the Baha'i Faith. Mazandarānī elsewhere states that the Bisharat was revealed in the Mansion of Bahjī (*qaṣr-i bahjī*).²¹ But the precise circumstances of revelation have yet to be determined. What is known of the revelation of this distinctive Baha'i text?

Circumstances of revelation: a clue from the anonymous 'inscription' sent to Browne

After a 40-year ministry, Baha'u'llah died on 29 May 1892. He had penned or dictated in excess of 15,000 'tablets' (*alwāḥ*; sing., *lawḥ*) in Persian and Arabic. In sheer volume, it is estimated that the entirety of Baha'u'llah's writings would, if bound together, comprise around 100 volumes, or at least 40,000 manuscript pages. The estimated number of unique archival items of Baha'u'llah is 7,160, and the estimated total of items is around 15,000.²² Based on the extant abundance of texts, it is fair to say that Baha'u'llah was remarkably prolific. However, the preponderance of this primary source material is private correspondence, not public proclamation – although the former is equally classed as 'revelation' with the latter and therefore possesses roughly the same authority as whatever Baha'u'llah propounded publicly.

Even so, the more formal and universal writings of Baha'u'llah are clearly a class of their own, in view of their privileged status and their widespread use by Baha'is. These texts are programmatic expositions of Baha'u'llah's world reforms, alongside religious reforms, of which the Tablet of Glad-Tidings (Bisharat) affords a prime example. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi describes the Bisharat as among 'the most noteworthy' of the tablets of Baha'u'llah, and as one of the 'mighty and final effusions of His indefatigable pen' which 'must rank among the choicest fruits which His mind has yielded, and mark the consummation of His forty-year-long ministry'.²³

That the Tablet of Glad-Tidings was revealed in the 'Akka period (1868–92) is made clear in the opening of the tablet: 'This is the Call of the All-Glorious which is proclaimed from the Supreme Horizon in the Prison of

21. See Asadullāh Fāḍil Mazandarānī, *Asrār al-Āthār* vol. 2, part 1 (Tehran: 2 parts) 46, where Fāḍil states that the first Baha'i text that he studied was the Bishārāt. See http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/mazandarani/Mazandarani_Asrar_Athar_v2_part1of2.pdf. The authors are indebted to Adel Shafipour for this reference. Tarikh list-serve posting, 2 Nov. 2008.
22. Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm* 141–2.
23. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1979) 216.

24. Baha'u'llah, *Tablets 19–21* [21], online <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/TB/tb-4.html>.
25. Browne, *Descriptive Catalogue* 65. Online at http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/arabic_catalogues/nicholson1932/view.php?id=85.
26. Edward Granville Browne, 'Catalogue and Description of 27 Bābī Manuscripts', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 24 (1892) 433–99 and 637–710, see p. 676 (emphasis added).
27. Anson to Buck, e-mail message dated 2 January 2009.

Akkā'.²⁴ The Bisharat was revealed between 1873 (date of the Kitāb-i Aqdas) and 1891 (the year in which the tablet was sent to Browne and Rosen). This date range can be narrowed to 1885–91 by virtue of the fact that a passage from an earlier major tablet of Baha'u'llah, the Ishrāqāt ('Splendours', dated c.1885) is cited in the 13th Glad-Tidings.

The term '*bishārāt*' (glad-tidings) has both Islamic and Christian associations. In Islam, a prophet is a *bashīr* – the bearer of glad-tidings. In Arabic translations of the New Testament, *bishārāt* is used for the term 'gospel' or 'good news'. Here, Baha'u'llah's use of the term '*bishārāt*' conveys what might be considered a 'social gospel' – the teachings of which would conduce to the 'salvation', as it were, of society as a whole.

On 29 January 1891, Baha'u'llah ordered the Tablet of Glad-Tidings to be sent to Browne at Cambridge University. This manuscript is preserved in the Browne Manuscripts in the Cambridge University Library. Browne's shorter description is as follows:

(8) A letter dated Jan. 29, 1891, from Hājī Muḥammad; another dated Jan. 22, of the same year, from Bahā'u'llāh's son Mirza Badī', both accompanying a very well written copy of the 'Tablet of Good Tidings' (*Lawḥ-i-Bishārāt*) fully described under the class-mark BBA. 5 in my *Catalogue and Description*, 676–679.²⁵

Browne's longer description of this manuscript begins as follows:

BBA. 5.

Selected Precepts of Behā'u'llāh.

Ff. 6 (f. 1a bears a short inscription, ff. 6a–6b blank), 20.0 x 12.5 centimetres, 13 lines to the page. Written in bold graceful *naskh*.

In this little MS., containing 15 clauses called Bishārāt [written in Persian script] or 'Good Tidings' (each of which indicates some reform or law conducive to the general well-being of mankind embodied by Behā'u'llāh in one or other of his 'revelations'), was received by me from Acre on February 7, 1891, together with a letter from Mīrzā Badī'u'llāh dated *Jemādi-uth-thānī* 11th, A.H. 1308 (Jan. 22, 1891). This selection of precepts, or compendium of reforms aimed at by the new religion, was, as the letter seems to imply, *compiled for my benefit by order of Behā'u'llāh*. As indicating the ideals held up by Behā for the guidance of his followers it is interesting and important, and I hope at some future date to publish it in its entirety. For the present I must content myself with giving the inscription on f. 1a, the first and last clauses, and an abstract of contents in English.²⁶

Catherine Anson, head of the Near and Middle Eastern Department, Manuscripts and Printed Collections, Cambridge University Library, reports that the layout of Browne's manuscript does not appear to correspond accurately to the details in the Browne catalogue, but did not elaborate.²⁷ The Cambridge manuscript has the following structure:

- The anonymous inscription appears on f. 1a
- The text of the tablet begins on f. 1b, Glad-Tidings 1, 2, 3 (the beginning) are on f. 1b
- Glad-Tidings 3, 4, 5 are on f. 2a

- Glad-Tidings 6, 7, 8, 9 (the beginning) are on f. 2b
- Glad-Tidings 9 is on f. 3a and f. 3b
- Glad-Tidings 10 and 11 (the beginning) are on f. 3b
- Glad-Tidings 11 is on f. 4a
- Glad-Tidings 12 and 13 (the beginning) are on f. 4b
- Glad-Tidings 13 is on f. 5a
- Glad-Tidings 14 and 15 are on f. 5b

The prefatory note (which Browne calls the ‘inscription’) appears on the first page of Browne’s copy of the Bisharat. The origin of this note, which is absent from Baron Rosen’s manuscript copy of the Bisharat, is unknown. Browne’s translation of the ‘inscription’ or prefatory note is as follows (with transliterations provided by the present authors, based on the Persian original):

These Divine ordinances and commands (*in aḥkām va avāmir-i ilāhī*), formerly revealed (*az qabl ... nāzil*) in sundry epistles (*dar alvāḥ-i mutafarriqih*), in the *Kitāb-i Akdas*, in the ‘Illuminations’ (*Ishrāqāt*), ‘Effulgences’ (*Tajalliyāt*), ‘Ornaments’ (*Tarāzāt*), etc., have, agreeably to the Supreme and Most Holy Command, been collected (*jam’ shud*), that all may become cognizant of the grace, mercy, and favour of God (great is His Glory!) in this Most Mighty Manifestation (*dar in zuhūr-i ‘azam*) and this Great Announcement (*va nabā’-i ‘azīm*), and may engage in praise and thanksgiving to the Desired Object of all the inhabitants of the world. Verily He helpeth His servants unto that which He willeth, for He is the Wise Ordainer.²⁸

The inscription reveals one key piece of information regarding the revelation of the Bisharat: that certain ‘Divine ordinances and commands’ had ‘been collected’ in the process of compiling (or ‘re-revealing’) the Tablet of Glad-Tidings. This discovery regarding the circumstances of the revelation of the Bisharat will be further developed in the course of the present study, beginning with an analysis of the cover letter by one of Baha’u’llah’s sons, Mirza Badi’u’llah (who was later to oppose the Baha’i leaders, ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi).

Circumstances of revelation: further clues from Mirza Badi’u’llah’s cover letter sent to Browne

Accompanying the manuscript of the Bisharat that Browne sent to Rosen at the latter’s request, Browne attached a copy of Mirza Badi’u’llah’s cover letter, dated 22 January 1891. Concerning this cover letter, Browne wrote to Rosen: ‘I also send you a *complete copy* of the letter written by Behā’s son, Mirza Badi’u’llah to accompany the *Lawḥ*, as I think it may interest you.’²⁹ The cover letter, ostensibly written by Mirza Badi’u’llah, together with the prefatory note (inscription on the first page of the text), served the purpose of introducing the Bisharat to Professor Browne. This brief letter indicates something of the process by which the Bisharat was composed. The full text of Mirza Badi’u’llah’s cover letter is as follows:

In the name of Him, Who binds together the hearts, in the name of Him, the Great, the Beloved

Praise be to God, Who having increased the friendship of [His] chosen ones and their love, caused a new remembrance and a new word to appear every

28. Browne, ‘Catalogue’, 677. Browne provided the original Persian text on the same page. See also Baron Viktor Rosen, ‘Eshcho o Poslanii “Blagiye Vesti”’ (‘More about Bishārāt’), *Zapiski Vostochnago Otdeleniya Imperatorskago Russkago Arkheologicheskago Obshestva*, 7 (1893) 311–16, see p. 313. This and all subsequent translations of this article are by Youli Ioannesyan.

29. Rosen, ‘Eshcho’ 316.

30. Translated from the Persian by Youli A. Ioannesyan.
 31. Rosen, 'Eshcho' 315.

day from the treasuries of the hearts in such manner that attracted prepared and faithful souls. Exalted is His utterance and exalted is His argument, and there is no God but Him. The letter of that spiritual friend (*an ḥabīb-i rūḥānī*) overwhelmed the [whole] being and opened the gate of joy and delight. Indeed, exultation and joy having assumed shape appeared in the form of a leaf of paper. Its arrival is [the source of] exultation and its fragrance is a blessing. We ask [God], the True One, that this blessing will not change [or] be replaced and will not be withheld by the Heaven of Will, because He is the Excellent, the Generous. A letter from friend to friend is a great blessing. Its station is so high that the gems of oceans cannot equal it. At certain moments [lit. at one moment of moments] this most high Word arises from the Dawn of the Utterance of the One Who is the Desire of the denizens of the world. His Word [reflects] the full grandeur of His Utterance. If there is a way to conceive an analogy or parallel for the breezes of Revelation, it is the breezes of the utterance of a true friend. The truth is God's [who is] the Most High and Great.

After the arrival of the letter, [its] consideration [lit. contemplation] and reading, it was directed to the Horizon of the Heaven of Command and was reported on in His presence. He decreed: 'Praise God [Who] is embarked on a Cause which is the means of the tranquillity of [His] servants and the peace of the inhabitants of the lands. We testify that He planted the lotus-tree of love with a mighty hand [lit. hand of firmness] and watered it with the spring rain of closeness and benevolence. This tree will soon be made manifest by visible and invisible fruits. These ripe fruits are, by God's grace, abiding and everlasting.' Some of the Divine ordinances contained in sundry epistles were sent to this spiritual friend (*nazd-i an ḥabīb-i rūḥānī irsāl shud*) a little while ago. After the report on them in the Most Holy Realm, He decreed: 'Write down and send the ordinances and commands which have so far been collected, to wit the commands which are the cause of the grace of God, glorified be He.' They have now been collected, reported on [in His] presence and sent. [We] hope that the inhabitants of the world will become aware of that which profits them and will hold fast to it. We ask [God], the True One: May He increase the light of love at any time. For He is the All-Mighty and is quick in responding to prayers.

22nd January 1891 corresponding to 11th Jamādī uth-thānī 1308

Badi'³⁰

In a footnote, Rosen explains that 'that spiritual friend' is, as clearly indicated by Persian epistolary style, a conventionally polite, oblique reference to the recipient of the letter – that is, E. G. Browne himself.³¹ This is because the Persian expression, 'that spiritual friend (*an ḥabīb-i rūḥānī*)' is a transparent reference to the second person ('you'), as a third-person lexical metaphor for reference to a second person. There are, in fact, many expressions in Persian epistolary style to obliquely refer to the addressee, like '*ān jināb*' (a title of respect), which actually refers to the second person. Thus, '*an ḥabīb*' is a Persian circumlocution for 'you', and Mirza Badi'u'llah's variation of this expression is perforce a reference to Professor Browne himself.

One must approach texts cautiously and judiciously. Here, the *nominal* author is not necessarily the *actual* author. Was this cover letter really authored by Mirza Badi'u'llah? Browne comments on a textual similarity between the cover letter and the Bisharat: 'I think Behā not infrequently

quotes his own previous sayings thus in the course of other epistles. You will see, for instance that his son, Mirza Badi'u'llah, concludes his letter (enclosed copy) with the words ...' and then quotes an Arabic phrase that is 'nearly the same as the closing words of the *bishārāt-i chahār-dahum*'.³² Here, by showing the textual affinity between the conclusion of Mirza Badi'u'llah's cover letter and the end of the fourteenth Glad-Tidings, and by further observing that Baha'u'llah often quotes himself, Browne, without realizing it, practically implies that Mirza Badi'u'llah's cover letter, by virtue of the fact that one of its phrases is practically identical with the end of the fourteenth Glad-Tidings, may actually be the words of Baha'u'llah himself!

While Browne does not go so far as to suggest that Baha'u'llah was the actual author of the cover letter, the style of the letter itself arguably comports with Baha'u'llah's style and characteristically rhetorical flourishes. The presence of a passage in the cover letter that is identical to the same wording found in the Bisharat itself offers a tantalizing internal clue – and perhaps definitive, source-critical evidence – that Baha'u'llah was the real author of Mirza Badi'u'llah's cover letter. And a further comparison of the discourse with Mirza Badi'u'llah's *Diary* reveals a disparity, not an affinity, between the two texts. Mirza Badi'u'llah's literary style (as exemplified by his diary) was arguably not susceptible of the relative sophistication exemplified by the cover letter. Under this theory (that Baha'u'llah was the real author of the cover letter), the attribution of the cover letter to Mirza Badi'u'llah was a literary artifice or device used to explain the purpose of the Bisharat in the course of its transmission to Professor Browne. Thus Mirza Badi'u'llah's 'cover letter' may, in actuality, have been authored by Baha'u'llah, in precisely the same way that he revealed tablets in the 'voice' of Mirza Āqā Jān, who was Baha'u'llah most well-known amanuensis. But a decisive determination requires further investigation. Close stylistic analysis is needed to justify this tentative thesis.

While the cover letter is clearly addressed to Browne, what about the Bisharat itself? To whom was it revealed? Notwithstanding Adib Taherzadeh's assertion that the recipient of the Bisharat is not known,³³ what is known is that E. G. Browne was convinced that Baha'u'llah had personally revealed the Tablet of Glad-Tidings for Browne himself. Baron Rosen writes:

E. G. Browne assumes that the whole epistle was composed for him and he had every right to think so, since the letter of Behā'u'llāh's son, Badi'ullāh, with which the epistle [the Bisharat] was sent to him [Browne], doesn't really admit of any other interpretation, as the reader will now see from the quotation from the text [of the letter] related to the circumstances of the sending of the epistle.³⁴

The logic here is that the one *to whom* the Tablet of Glad-Tidings was sent (i.e. E. G. Browne) was the one *for whom* the Tablet of Glad-Tidings was revealed, albeit for an ulterior purpose (i.e., for translation and publication to the West). Thus Rosen provides independent attestation of Browne's belief that the Bisharat was revealed for him personally: 'Browne suggests that the Glad-Tidings epistle was composed specially for him. However, I dare think that the Glad-Tidings were not originally composed for E. G. Browne but rather for the "other-religious" authorities of a city or region where Babis [*sic*] reside and especially for the Russian authorities in Ashkabad.'³⁵ The idea that the Bisharat was for the 'Russian authorities in Ashkabad' fully

32. The fourteenth Glad-Tidings (Persian). The reference in parenthesis is to Rosen's publication.
33. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahā'u'llāh, Volume 4: Mazrā'ih and Bahjī, 1877–92* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987) 161.
34. Rosen, 'Eshcho' 315.
35. Rosen, 'Eshcho' 316.

36. Rosen, 'Eshcho' 316.

37. Rosen, 'Eshcho' 316.

comports with the new information provided by the Research Department at the Baha'i World Centre (*supra*), that Baha'u'llah 'had instructed that a copy of Lawḥ-i-Bishārāt be given to the state authorities'.

Browne's belief notwithstanding, Rosen questions the idea that the Glad-Tidings were originally composed for Browne and offers an alternative theory, grounded in the contemporary-historical context. He goes on to say that its transmission could have been prompted by the news of the murder of the Babi [Ḥājī Muḥammad Riḍā Iṣfāhānī] by Shi'i Muslims in Ashkabad in 1889. Rosen concludes: 'To give the believers answers to these kinds of questions [how to treat peoples of other faiths, cultures and how to behave towards the authorities, etc.] articulated by Baha'u'llah himself is probably the goal of Baha'u'llah's epistle "Glad-Tidings"'.³⁶ Rosen's counter-arguments to Browne's thesis – that the Tablet of Glad-Tidings was both revealed *for* him as well as sent *to* him – are found in the following passage:

E. G. Browne was personally too well-known to all the Babi leaders, including Behā'u'llāh (*sic*) himself, for his sympathy towards the Babis, as well as for his substantial knowledge of the Babi teaching, to need further 'illuminating' by such a summary presentation of this teaching. It is different in the case of other-religious authorities who are not yet familiar with Babism. The Babi agents (*sic*) in Ashkabad had undoubtedly reported to 'Akkā on their communications with the Russians, on their conversations with them and, among other things, on the questions which must have been often addressed to them. Especially the notorious murder case in which a Babi was killed by Shī'ih [Moslems] in 1889 might have provided good reasons for such questions. Giving the believers' answers to those questions as laid down by Behā'u'llāh (*sic*) himself is probably the aim and purpose of the 'Glad-Tidings' epistle. It seems to me that it is only with this purpose in mind that one can explain the complete absence of dogmatic abstractions [from the text]. Upon careful consideration of the 14 'Glad-Tidings', one will discover that all of them are nothing but answers to very natural questions, to wit: What is your attitude towards people of other religions? Are you going to show loyalty to the local authorities? Will you avoid learning the local language? Does your faith oblige you to visit different holy places etc.? Even the strange ninth 'Glad-Tidings' will become somewhat clearer were it to be considered as an answer regarding the attitude of the followers of the new religion to Christian priesthood.³⁷

Here, Rosen speculates as to the historical circumstances that may have occasioned the revelation of the Bisharat. It was inconceivable to Rosen that Baha'u'llah should have revealed this tablet especially for Browne, notwithstanding the fact that Browne was one of the leading scholars on the Babi movement, which evolved into the Baha'i religion. (At this time, scholars did not differentiate between 'Babi' and 'Baha'i' or explore the distinctions they invited.) What made more sense to Rosen was a historical explanation. He was keenly aware of the fact that the Babi and Baha'i religions had generated considerable controversy, resulting in the martyrdom of a significant number of their adherents, not to mention the isolated event of the aforementioned murder. This being the case, Rosen evidently saw a dialectic with the immediate historical context, where certain issues (or 'questions', as Rosen puts it) were raised. These questions by outsiders

created a need for ready answers and thus occasioned the revelation of the Bisharat, according to Rosen.

38. Rosen, 'Eshcho' 315.

39. Rosen, 'Eshcho' 315.

Was Browne right, or Rosen? Perhaps both were. Through Browne, some of the answers to these pressing questions could be made available to the English-speaking world. The fact that a copy of the Bisharat was independently sent to Baron Rosen indicates the same purpose, but in a different venue. Just like Browne, evidently it was hoped that Rosen would publish and translate the Bisharat. Thus the tablet would become available in two major languages, English and Russian. On this particular motivation for the revelation of the Bisharat, the cover letter by Mirza Badi'u'llah is silent.

Mirza Badi'u'llah's cover letter essentially validates what is said in the anonymous 'inscription' or prefatory note. But the cover letter is more specific: 'After the report on them in the Most Holy Realm, He decreed: "Write down and send the ordinances and commands which have so far been collected, to wit the commands which are the cause of the grace of God, glorified be He." They have now been collected, reported on [in His] presence and sent.'³⁸ Here, it appears that Baha'u'llah had ordered the collection of some of the more important laws and principles that were salient features of the Baha'i religion. These were then compiled and edited into what became the Bisharat. If this theory withstands scrutiny and further textual analysis, then this thesis represents a breakthrough in reconstructing the circumstances of the revelation of this major tablet of Baha'u'llah.

Both the anonymous prefatory note and 'cover letter' state that the Bisharat is basically a compendium of Baha'u'llah's salient principles and laws. But the aforementioned 'cover letter' goes further: 'They have now been collected, reported on [in His] presence and sent.'³⁹ This suggests that Baha'u'llah ordered the entire process, which consisted of three stages, to wit: (1) 'They have now been collected'; (2) 'reported on [in His] presence'; and (3) 'sent'. Note that Mirza Badi'u'llah's 'cover letter', dated 22 January 1891, was written one week before Haji Muhammad's 'cover letter', dated 29 January 1891. Based on a close reading and analysis of the 'introductions' to the Bisharat (i.e. the anonymous 'inscription' and Mirza Badi'u'llah's cover letter), the present writers theorize the following reconstruction of the circumstances of revelation of the Bisharat:

1. '*They have now been collected*': Here, Baha'u'llah ordered someone (presumably Badi'u'llah) to compile '[s]ome of the Divine ordinances contained in sundry epistles'. In rough form, these became the 15 principles of the Bisharat.
2. '*reported on [in His] presence*': Someone (Mirza Badi'u'llah?) then presented 'the report on them [compilation of selected Divine ordinances] in the Most Holy Realm', that is, to Baha'u'llah. Baha'u'llah approved, and perhaps (or presumably) edited the 15 principles into what is now the present text of the Bisharat.
3. '*and sent*': Then, on Baha'u'llah's instructions, Haji Muhammad, on 29 January 1891, sent the Bisharat, along with his and Mirza Badi'u'llah's cover letter (written one week earlier, on 22 January 1891), as well as with the prefatory note of unknown origin on the first page of the Bisharat, to Browne at Cambridge University.

40. Translated from the Persian by Youli Ioannesyan, with additional suggestions by Ahang Rabbani.

Circumstances of revelation: further clues from Ḥājī Muḥammad's cover letter sent to Browne

Accompanying the manuscript of the Bisharat that Browne sent to Rosen on the latter's request, Browne also attached a copy of Haji Muhammad's cover letter, dated 29 January 1891, a translation of which is as follows:

He is God

May I be a sacrifice for you. After giving praise to the One who in His holiness is above the world of creatures and creation and whatever there is in the invisible and visible [realm] and acknowledging the sanctity and purity of the Holy Essence, I report [the following]: The undated kind and spiritual letter of Your Excellency having reached its destination, [was received] with gladness and joy and became the cause of exultation and rejoicing since it brought (lit. was the bearer of) glad tidings of [your] good health which is one of God's greatest bounties and gifts. Truly, the eyes and the heart were filled with delight by its contemplation. Praise God, you have arisen in full health and, applying yourself to service, have attained unto unique Divine grace. May the confirmed (?) souls [i.e. souls confirmed by God] appreciate this eternal bounty. I express hope day after day that you will be successful in what is worthy of [your] high station as you have been [until now] and partake of the gems of the fruit of human existence. I was also happy [to learn] that the first and second message of this humble one arrived [safely] as you kindly mentioned [in the letter]. It became the means of [attracting] overflowing [bounties], though not verbally expressed [lit. in words] but in God's grace. I partook of them myself since I observed the gems of autograph ... [word unclear] for a while. At any rate, despite the delay in communication, I kept waiting for a bounty from the Maqdas (i.e. Holy Land) till [finally], praise God, there arrived something that surpassed my expectation – the gracious and blessed pamphlet of His holiness my Lord ... Mirza Badi'u'llah, may my soul be a sacrifice for him. What more can I say? So happy and grateful I am that I am writing this letter with zeal, eagerness and exultation! Since you intended to travel to London, God willing, you are completely in good health ... [one word is unclear], for you also mentioned that because of many issues involved, you didn't have a chance [to do so]. God willing, you have recovered [lit. rose with dignity] ever since. May a new spirit from the far ends of the blissful green valleys of the flower-garden of life breathe over [your] human frame for everything indicates and testifies to [your] special affection, attraction and eagerness. This is for no other reason than pure intentions and a heart overflowing with life (?), which are behind the repeated most exalted words.

Meanwhile, the friends in this land convey their respect and best wishes and, praise God, are not suffering from any disease (?). Since the mail is going out now I am finishing this letter. I am not supplicating more. I look forward [lit. lying in wait] to your letters every day.

Best regards. May I be a sacrifice for you, the least (lowly) Ḥājī Muḥammad

29 Jan. 1891 (corresponding to 18 Jamādī uth-thānī 1308)⁴⁰

As the reader can plainly see, Haji Muhammad's letter adds very little by way of any useful information relating to the Lawh-i Bisharat. What appears to

be the sole reference to that tablet is this statement: '[T]here arrived something that surpassed my expectation – the gracious and blessed pamphlet of His holiness my Lord ... Mirza Badi'u'llah.' If the Glad-Tidings is being referenced here, then the statement is as problematic as it is unhelpful, in that Haji Muhammad appears to think that the Lawh-i Bisharat was actually the work of Mirza Badi'u'llah! This ascriptive anomaly may be explained in light of our theory of the compilation and editing of the Bisharat, as proposed above, for Haji Muhammad's ascription of the Tablet of Glad-Tidings to Mirza Badi'u'llah tends to lend support to our three-stage analysis above, which suggests that Baha'u'llah directed Mirza Badi'u'llah to: (1) compile the Glad-Tidings from among the principal teachings of the Kitāb-i Aqdas and supplementary texts; (2) present the compilation to Baha'u'llah for review and approval (with some editing by the latter quite likely); and (3) then send the Bisharat to Browne to acquaint him with some of the distinctive precepts and laws of the Baha'i Faith, especially as these relate to Islam and Christianity.

If this reconstruction of the circumstances of the revelation of the Bisharat is fundamentally correct, there remains the question, not of *how* the Bisharat was revealed, but *why*. Baron Rosen's theory has already been presented (*supra*). But, before establishing the context, it is necessary to establish the text, or at least to explain why there are significant textual variants, as between Browne's and Rosen's respective manuscript of the Bisharat.

Textual variants in the Bisharat: Baron Viktor Rosen's manuscript

Russian was the first European language into which the writings of Baha'u'llah were translated.⁴¹ One reason for this is the fact that, during the 19th century, the Russian Empire was highly interested in the current events and political changes which were developing in Persia, especially those events surrounding the appearance of the Babi and Baha'i Faiths. Persia has always been a strategic concern of Russia's geopolitical interests.

This special Russian interest in Persia has materialized in hundreds, if not thousands, of documents and writings collected by the pre-revolutionary Russian government. Among these materials, which were constantly flowing into the Russian Empire, was information about the original writings of the Babi and Baha'i religions. Fortunately this information was supplied regularly and systematically by Russian diplomats and scholars working in Persia. Among these Russian diplomats were also trained orientalists, who could rightly ascertain the significance of the various Babi and Baha'i manuscripts they collected.⁴² As early as 1877, the first part of a manuscript collection of the writings of Baha'u'llah was delivered, by M. Bezobrazoff, to Russia's General Consul in (Persian) Azerbaijan, and then dispatched to the library of the Educational Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through M. A. Gamazoff.⁴³

The work of gathering, preserving, identifying, classifying, studying, translating and publishing the materials on the Babi and Baha'i religions was conducted by a number of individuals, the most prominent of whom were diplomat and scholar, A. G. Tumanski, and Baron Viktor Rosen, a leading academic. Some other notable figures were scholars like Professor

41. Youli A. Ioannesyan, 'The St. Petersburg 19th Century Orientalist Collection of materials on the Bābī and Baha'i Faiths: Primary and other Sources' *Lights of 'Irfān: Papers Presented at the 'Irfān Colloquia and Seminars*, 7 (2006), 75–100, see p. 76.
42. Ioannesyan, 'St. Petersburg ... Collection' 76.
43. Ioannesyan, 'St. Petersburg ... Collection' 76.

44. Ioannesyan, 'St. Petersburg ... Collection' 75.
45. Ioannesyan, 'St. Petersburg ... Collection' 76.
46. Baron Viktor Rosen, 'Poslaniye: "Blagiye Vesti"' ('Translation of the Lawh-i Bishārāt with the original text and footnotes), *Zapiski Vostochnago Otdeleniya Imperatorskago Russkago Arkheologicheskago Obshestva*, 7 (1893), 183–92; Ioannesyan, 'St. Petersburg ... Collection' 95.
47. Rosen, 'Poslaniye' 187.
48. See Browne's letter to Baron Rosen, dated 9 October 1892. *Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences* (St Petersburg), fund: 777; inventory: 2; unit: 44.
49. Rosen, 'Poslaniye'.
50. Rosen, 'Poslaniye' 187.

V. A. Zhukovski and B. Dorn, and diplomats F. A. Bakulin, M. Bezobrazoff and M. A. Gamazoff. The latter was the head of the School of Oriental Languages of the Asian Department of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. A substantial contribution to the collection of manuscripts – and especially that of lithographs – was made by a prominent Russian scholar W. A. Ivanow.⁴⁴

Baron Viktor Rosen must be given special credit for classifying, identifying and describing these manuscripts, and for establishing the Russian Geographical Society. Rosen also edited a periodical journal, *Memoires (Notes) of the Oriental Department of the Russian (Royal) Archaeological Society*, known under its abbreviated title, ZVORAO (*Zapiski Vostochnogo Otdeleniya Russkago" Arkheologicheskogo Obshestva*), where his and Tumanski's translations of Baha'i texts were published. This journal covered a large range of subjects including history, linguistics, religion and culture.⁴⁵

A Russian aristocrat of German descent, Baron Rosen was a professor of Arabic, head of the Oriental Branch of the Russian Archaeological Society, and the translator of several Baha'i writings into Russian. He prepared for publication, in the original Arabic and Persian, a volume of epistles by Baha'u'llah and left descriptions of many Babi and Baha'i manuscripts, which now belong to the manuscript collection of the St Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Rosen also properly identified some important epistles such as the Sūriy-i Mulūk (The Surih of the Kings), revealed by Baha'u'llah. Rosen encouraged his students, A. G. Tumanski and others, to collect and study materials related to the Babi and Baha'i Faiths.

In 1891, the Baha'is of Ashkabad sent Baron Rosen a copy of the Bisharat, which was subsequently translated and published by Rosen, followed by the publication of a sequel journal article, in which there was Rosen's further commentary on the Bisharat.⁴⁶ The manuscript sent to Rosen was owned by him personally and it is therefore not preserved in the St Petersburg 19th-Century Orientalist Collection. Rosen's manuscript copy of the Bisharat, unlike Browne's own manuscript version of the same, is therefore not available, and perhaps is no longer extant.

Oddly, in Rosen's manuscript copy of the Bisharat, the passage on constitutional monarchy in the fifteenth Glad-Tidings (which appears in Browne's manuscript) was conspicuously absent,⁴⁷ while the rest of the fifteenth Glad-Tidings was joined to the fourteenth. Thus, structurally and numerically, Rosen's manuscript was comprised of 14 – not 15 – 'Glad-Tidings'. Whether or not the omission was deliberate, or due to a scribal error, has not yet been determined. This major textual variant was described by Browne as an 'expedient suppression'.⁴⁸

Baron Rosen quickly found out about the fifteenth Glad-Tidings from his colleague at Cambridge, E. G. Browne. This discovery prompted a separate study, such that Baron Rosen actually published two journal articles on the Bisharat. These are among the very first academic studies published on a single Baha'i text.⁴⁹ The first study was the publication of the text itself, accompanied by a Russian translation of the tablet in the form in which he had received it.⁵⁰ Soon after, Rosen found out about the missing section, and compared variants against another manuscript, presumably the Cambridge MS.

In a letter dated 9 October 1892 to Baron Rosen, Browne reports: 'I ... send you the collations of the Bishārāt. I have inserted them in the

margin of the proof you sent me.’⁵¹ Browne adds that the major difference between the manuscript copy of the Bisharat in his possession, and that of Rosen’s, is this: ‘(1) The suppression of the *bishārāt-i pānzdāhum*⁵² about the advantage of Republican, or rather, as the context shows, of what we call “Constitutional government”, in your MS.’⁵³ Browne agrees with Rosen’s explanation that the fifteenth Glad-Tidings was omitted for reasons of expediency: ‘I have no doubt at all that you are right in your conjecture as to the reason of this suppression. Other similar suppressions are found [*sic*] in the *Lawḥ-i Sulṭān*⁵⁴ as contained in the *Trav. Narr. [A Traveller’s Narrative]*, evidently effected to avoid giving offence to a non-Babi public.’⁵⁵

Baron Rosen notes this same difference: ‘From the proofs of E. G. Browne’s article [JRAS 1892, vol. XXIV (New Series), 433–90 and 637–710] kindly sent to me by the author I found out that a copy of the ‘Glad-Tidings’ epistle had also been sent to E. G. Browne from ‘Akkā and that it contains 15 tidings and not 14.’⁵⁶ Contrary to Browne, Rosen does not view the issue in terms of the ‘expedient suppression’ of the fifteenth Glad-Tidings. On the contrary, Rosen theorizes that the fifteenth Glad-Tidings was an expedient ‘*addition*’ (rather than an expedient *omission*) to Browne’s manuscript in order ‘to please the British’, since it concerns parliamentarism and constitutional monarchy.⁵⁷

Browne notes a second difference between the two manuscripts as well: ‘(2) The transposition of my long passage which in your M.S. concludes the *Lawḥ*.’⁵⁸ Browne adds: ‘There are a few verbal variants of no great importance ... all of which I noted in the margin.’⁵⁹ Rosen’s second journal article, therefore, focused on the question of the fifteenth Glad-Tidings and minor textual variants between the St Petersburg and Cambridge manuscripts.⁶⁰ The differences between Rosen’s and Browne’s manuscript copies are classed by Rosen under the following categories:

1. Minor spelling errors of no importance or interest.
2. Omissions and additions of certain words and word replacements. Such instances are rare and they never change the meaning [of the text].
3. ‘Interpolations’ in Browne’s copy: (a) the passage on constitutional monarchy; (b) the prefatory note/inscription on the first page of the Bisharat itself (as discussed above).⁶¹

The question of these textual variants (and why they exist) has never been fully addressed in scholarship to date, nor do Baha’i sources venture explanations or make authoritative pronouncements as to the significant variants in Browne’s and Rosen’s respective manuscript copies of the Bisharat.

Transmission of the Bisharat to Baron Viktor Rosen: the role of a ‘secret agent’

On whose authority was the Bisharat sent to Rosen? Unfortunately, Rosen does not mention this. In his first journal article on the Bisharat, Rosen says: ‘The new epistle has been delivered to us from Ashkabad.’⁶² In his second journal article on the Bisharat, ‘Eshcho’, Rosen offers more information on the provenance and transmission history of the Bisharat. Here, Rosen discloses that someone – whom he refers to as ‘my correspondent’ –

51. Rosen, ‘Eshcho’ 311.
52. The ‘fifteenth Glad-Tidings’.
53. Rosen, ‘Eshcho’ 311.
54. ‘Tablet to Nāṣiru’d-Dīn Shāh’. Browne writes *Lawḥ-i Sulṭān* in Persian here.
55. Rosen, ‘Eshcho’ 311.
56. Rosen, ‘Eshcho’ 311.
57. Rosen, ‘Eshcho’ 311.
58. ‘Tablet’. Browne writes *lawḥ* in Persian here.
59. Rosen, ‘Eshcho’ 311.
60. Rosen ‘Eshcho’ 312–13.
61. Rosen ‘Eshcho’ 312–13.
62. Rosen, ‘Poslaniye’ (trans. Youli Ioannesyan).

63. Rosen, 'Eshcho' 316.
64. Rosen, 'Eshcho' 316.
65. The word means 'Termination, end, extremity; utmost point or limit, summit; utmost extent; completion' (Arabic/Persian). Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, 105.
66. Letter dated 25 March 1892, sent from Ashkabad, *Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences* (St Petersburg), fund: 777; inventory: 2; unit: 186, p. 18(a-b) (trans. Youli Ioannesyan).
67. See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 300.

sent him the Bisharat in December 1891.⁶³ However, neither of these two articles identifies the scribe in whose hand the manuscript was penned. There was a 'cover letter', so to speak, that accompanied Rosen's manuscript copy, which letter served to introduce the Bisharat to Rosen. This anonymous cover letter is mentioned casually, in passing, in the 'Eshcho o Poslanii', without further elaboration.⁶⁴

We can only speculate as to who this unknown 'correspondent' might be. Rosen received quite a few Baha'i texts through A. G. Tumanski from Ashkabad (some of which were published in the ZVORAO in the original language and in Tumanski's Russian translations). On no other occasion was Rosen so reluctant to disclose the name of the sender of a text. The 'secrecy' which enshrouded this case indicates some special circumstances and suggests that the sender of the Bisharat may not have been Tumanski, but someone regarding whose identity Rosen was bound by a promise not to reveal. It is highly unlikely that such a person could have been a private individual. But in the case of a (Russian) government official, sent on a secret mission in the region, this 'secrecy' would be well justified.

Based upon this assumption, we can try to find a person among Rosen's correspondents who matches this description. One of them definitely does. It is Vladimir Ivanovich Ignatyev, another of Rosen's former students, who was a diplomat working in Tehran, Ashkabad and Bukhara (and who, according to unconfirmed information, was also Russia's consul in Rasht). His status in Bukhara was that of a 'secret agent'. There are passages in his letters to Rosen preserved in the St Petersburg Archives, which may hold a key to resolving the issue of how, and by whom, the 'Glad-Tidings' were sent to Rosen. Below is one such passage:

Please, receive my apologies for such a long delay in my response to your letter. I had a lot of urgent work to do before Kuropatkin's departure, after which I was busy compiling political reports, which I sent to [St] Petersburg quite recently. The reason for this delay was partly due to the fact that it was impossible to entrust our Office's illiterate clerks with copying the translation, while the only proper clerk, who had already written a copy for Kuropatkin, was overloaded with work.

First of all I would like to express to you our sincere appreciation for the translation both from myself and on Kuropatkin's behalf. He took the translation with him to [St] Petersburg. I am enclosing herewith copies of the originals, made with Tumanski's assistance, as well as copies of the translation. All your corrections, according to Tumanski, the Babis considered proper and explained the mistakes by the haste in [their] copying. The first half of the second document up to the word, *intihā*,⁶⁵ as the Babis explained, is recorded from Baha'u'llah's mouth by his Secretary Ḥājī'ullāh, who then speaks on his own.

I presented the translation to Kur[opatkin] with a short report, in which I conveyed [to him] your opinion about the documents.⁶⁶

Aleksey Nikolayevich Kuropatkin was lieutenant-general, governor-general of the Transcaspian Region (1890–8) and later war minister.⁶⁷ A passage from another letter provides even more information in this regard:

In reply to your letter dated April 8, which I received on the 20th, I need to inform you urgently that for some political considerations, when publishing Babi documents it seems to me more proper not to mention my name as well as the fact that these documents were presented by the Babis to General Kuropatkin. As you well know, our Ministry is not quite sympathetic to the attempts of the authorities of the Transcaspien Region to offer the Babis exceptional support. The mention of my name, given my official status here, would accord to the delivery of Bahā'ullāh's epistles into my hands by the Babis a somewhat official character, which is undesirable. Therefore, it would be better to confine yourself to just pointing out that the epistles were addressed to the Babis living in Ashkabad, from whom you received them.⁶⁸

68. Letter dated 23 April 1892, sent from Ashkabad (trans. Youli Ioannesyan), see note 66.

69. Rosen, 'Poslaniye' 183 (trans. Youli Ioannesyan).

If we assume, in the above paragraphs, that, among the documents in question, the 'Glad-Tidings' are implied, then we may well have found the missing link for completing the picture of how the 'Glad-Tidings' might have been sent to Rosen from Ashkabad. The dates of the letters also support the following hypothesis: In 1891, sometime before December, the Baha'is of Ashkabad delivered a copy of the Bisharat to General Kuropatkin, the governor of the Transcaspien Region, the capital of which was Ashkabad. General Kuropatkin shared the tablet with Ignatyev, diplomat and the government's 'secret agent' in the region. They needed someone competent enough to translate the text into Russian. After seeking Tumanski's advice, they decided to send the copy to Rosen for translation into Russian.

In the letter dated only a few months after Rosen received his manuscript copy of the Bisharat, Ignatyev thanked Rosen – on his own and Kuropatkin's behalf – for Rosen's translation of the Bisharat, and for his comments and for his corrections of the copyist's errors. Ignatyev also warned Rosen against mentioning his or Kuropatkin's names when publishing the text. We will not know for sure who initiated the subsequent publication of the text in the ZVORAO journal, whether it was Kuropatkin and Ignatyev who acted on behalf of the Russian authorities (one should also bear in mind that Ignatyev, as it appears from his letters to Rosen, was least favourable towards the Baha'i Faith among Rosen's correspondents), or Rosen himself, who acted wholly on his own initiative.

Notwithstanding, it is obvious from the letter, cited above, that both Kuropatkin and Ignatyev did know about the subsequent publication and translation of the Bisharat and by no means objected to it. It would be reasonable to suppose, therefore, that one of the ultimate goals behind the Baha'is' passing the Glad-Tidings to Russian government officials (apart from proclaiming the Baha'i Faith to government circles) was to have the Glad-Tidings published, by and through Russian scholars. The correspondence cited above also shows what a tremendously important role Baron Rosen – and scholars like him – played in shaping the Russian government's attitude towards the Baha'i Faith.

Rosen characterizes the Tablet of Glad-Tidings as a compendium of teachings, the general purpose of which was to enable Babis to live in peace on terms agreeable to both Babis and non-Babis. He writes: 'It is very interesting especially since it contains very precise ordinances as to how the Babis (*sic*) should act as they live in a country which is "other-religious" (*sic*) but not hostile to Babiism in principle.'⁶⁹ Rosen goes on to say that

70. Rosen, 'Poslaniye' 183 (trans. Youli Ioannesyan).
71. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahā'u'llāh, Volume 4: Mazrā'ih and Bahjī, 1877–92* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987) 372.
72. TB 21. MMA 116.

Bahā'u'llah's message in general 'is full of peace, love, gentleness and non-violent response to evil'.⁷⁰

Selective 're-revelation'

One of the structural features of the Tablet of Glad-Tidings is what may be referred to as its 'Aqdas content'. Revealed (or compiled) in 1873, the Kitāb-i Aqdas, the pre-eminent Baha'i scripture, propounds Bahā'u'llah's major laws and principles. Not all of these principles were for public proclamation at that time, as previously pointed out. Bahā'u'llah was selective. He precisely chose which *principles* – and to what *principals* – to proclaim these vaunted 'world reforms' and religious reforms embodied in the Most Holy Book. In this selection process, it should be borne in mind that the Kitāb-i Aqdas exhibits a certain textual and ideological extensibility through the phenomenon of 're-revelation' – a term coined by Adib Taherzadeh.⁷¹ By 're-revelation' is meant those works of Bahā'u'llah that are excerpted and quoted (and thus, 're-revealed') within other works (also considered revelation). A source-critical analysis of the Bisharat shows that Bahā'u'llah's proposed reforms, indeed, were drawn almost entirely from the Kitāb-i Aqdas and its subsidiary texts.

Analogy to a 'press release'

Contemporary distortions of the aims and purpose of the nascent Baha'i Faith were a serious problem in the early days of the religion. Given this historical context, Bahā'u'llah was naturally concerned about fair treatment by the press generally. Because the press had either ignored Bahā'u'llah or had not treated him or his movement fairly, and, to make matters worse, had completely ignored the persecution of the Baha'is, en masse, in Iran, this may be one of the reasons for the way in which the Tablet of Glad-Tidings opens, in this exordium:

This is the Call of the All-Glorious which is proclaimed from the Supreme Horizon in the Prison of 'Akkā. He is the Expounder, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

God, the True One (*ḥaqq*), testifieth and the Revealers of His names and attributes bear witness that Our sole purpose in raising the Call and in proclaiming His sublime Word (*kawthar-i bayān*) is that the ear of the entire creation may, through the living waters of divine utterance, be purged from lying tales (*qiṣaṣ-i kāḏība*) and become attuned to the holy, the glorious and exalted Word which hath issued forth from the repository of the knowledge (*'ilm*) of the Maker of the Heavens and the Creator of Names. Happy are they that judge with fairness.⁷²

Space does not permit a historical elaboration of this problem. More important was the dissemination, not of *corrective* information, but *normative* information. As an epitome of Baha'i principles, it appears that Bahā'u'llah revealed the Bisharat so that leaders in the West, and westerners in general, might become familiar with some of his world reforms, as enshrined in the Most Holy Book and in related texts. As such, this tablet, as previously stated, functioned in much the same way that a 'press release' would today.

Selected Aqdas *principles* being the provenance of the Bisharat, selected *principals* (political and religious leaders, as well as statesmen and scholars) were among those chosen to be recipients of the Bisharat. There is contemporary historical evidence to support this: one of a very few Europeans who had actually met Baha'u'llah was 'Count Cottrell' (Henry Edward Plantagenet). Count Cottrell was in 'Akka during the last year or two of Baha'u'llah's life, in connection with the 'Akka–Damascus railway. Together with his wife and daughter, Count Cottrell had enjoyed Baha'u'llah's hospitality sometime between 1891 and 1892. On that occasion, the Count was given a copy of the Kitāb-i Aqdas in the hand of Mirza Āqā Jān, Baha'u'llah's amanuensis. Count Cottrell wrote:

I have personal and intimate knowledge of the present leaders of the Babist movement in Persia, the four sons of the late Mirza Hussein [Baha'u'llah], who are political prisoners in Akka ... The father in his will directed his sons to transmit to all the sovereigns of Europe copies of certain of his works, accompanied by an autograph letter. The late Czar of Russia, since Mirza Hussein's decease, sent to the sons and obtained copies of several of the principal works and had them translated into Russian. The princes are very anxious to carry out the wish of their late father [Baha'u'llah], and to have copies of the works presented to Her Majesty the Queen; and also to obtain, unofficially, the countenance of the British Foreign Office to enable them to reach the other sovereigns with a similar object. They have furnished me with summaries of the principal works in Arabic and Persian, with the object of having them translated and published in Britain and in the United States of America.⁷³

Through a selection process, Baha'u'llah revealed tablets whose function was to represent, more or less, 'summaries' (as Cottrell says) of the Kitāb-i Aqdas, which were chosen as those texts to be sent to royalty, to 'all the sovereigns of Europe' as Cottrell has said. The Tablet of Glad-Tidings may be considered to be a prime example of what Count Cottrell described as 'summaries of the principal works in Arabic and Persian, with the object of having them translated and published in Britain and in the United States of America'.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a 'press release' as 'an official statement issued to the media giving information on a particular matter'.⁷⁴ Here, the Tablet of Glad-Tidings meets the threshold of 'an official statement ... giving information on a particular matter'. The major difference between an actual press release and the Bisharat is that the latter was issued to scholars and statesmen, not to journalists. The desired end result, however, was much the same: Baha'u'llah's purpose, *inter alia*, was to correct some of the misinformation that had previously appeared in the press.

Response to modernity: desacralizing the sacred and sacralizing the secular

Just as certain patterns have emerged as to the selection of the principles of the Bisharat, other patterns, as previously stated, in the Bisharat are discernible as well: (1) *Desacralizing* – that is, religious reform effected by the

73. Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bābī and Baha'ī Religions, 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981) 236. See also Count Cottrell, Henry Edward Plantagenet, 'Babism', *The Academy* (Syracuse, NY), vol. 47, no. 1192 (9 March 1895) 220.
74. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. 'press release' (under 'press').

75. Peter Smith, *The Bābī and Baha’i Religions: From Messianic Shi’ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 74.

76. English: TB 21.
Persian: MMA 116–17.

77. English: TB 22.
Persian: MMA 117.

78. English: TB 23.
Persian: MMA 118–19.

79. English: TB 24.
Persian: MMA 119.

80. English: TB 24–5.
Persian: MMA 119–20.

81. English: TB 25.
Persian: MMA 121.

82. English: TB, 27–8.
Persian: MMA 123.

abrogation and prohibition of certain Christian, Islamic and Babi practices; and (2) *Sacralizing* – that is, making *sacred* certain otherwise *secular* values (assimilation of ‘civic virtues’) as part of the Baha’i response to modernity. This process of ‘sacralizing’ certain secular values may be viewed as part of the Baha’i response to modernity.

In his sociology of the Babi and Baha’i religions, Peter Smith identifies social reformism, modernization and the millennial perspective as a major motif in Baha’i consciousness during the formative period: ‘The second major motif which permeated the Bahā’ī Faith in the 1866–1921 period represented a complex of religious and social concerns centering on the idea of the transformation of the world. These concerns involved both a clear millennial vision and a programme of more “secular” social reformism. Both elements were strongly imbued with a religious ethos, however, and both formed part of what was regarded as the latest stage of God’s plan for mankind.’⁷⁵

Briefly, Baha’u’llah’s process, in the Bisharat, of desacralizing the sacred consisted of abolishing the following religious laws and practices:

1. Holy war (first Glad-Tidings).⁷⁶
2. Inter-religious conflict (second Glad-Tidings).⁷⁷
3. Religious proscriptions against manner of dress (seventh Glad-Tidings).⁷⁸
4. Priestly celibacy (eighth Glad-Tidings).⁷⁹
5. Confession of sins (ninth Glad-Tidings).⁸⁰
6. Destruction of books (tenth Glad-Tidings).⁸¹
7. Pilgrimages to the shrines of the dead (fourteenth Glad-Tidings).⁸²

Sacralizing the secular is the complement of desacralizing the sacred in Baha’u’llah’s programme of world reform. This process of sacralizing the secular is may be seen in the principles that Edward Granville Browne personally heard from Baha’u’llah himself, and which principles are also to be found in the Bisharat.

Browne’s correspondence with Rosen comprises 73 letters, dating 1889–1902 (one letter is in Persian, the rest are in English). These letters cover a very wide range of issues and show Browne’s close cooperation with Rosen in the course of his research on the Babi and Baha’i Faiths. In his letter dated 6 May 1890, Browne writes of his five interviews with Baha’u’llah:

[D]uring these 5 days I was completely amongst the Babis, who treated me with unbounded kindness. I was granted 5 interviews with Beha himself, but of course I could not ask him any questions. I sat humbly before him while he talked. His discourse was oracular but rather general in character. He spoke as ‘one having authority’, but not exactly as I had expected – like a Master, and a Prophet – but not as an Incarnation of the Divinity ... His manner is gracious and dignified, but somewhat restless, suggesting great stores of energy. He talked for the most part of the necessity of all nations choosing one language as a means of international communication & one writing (a sort of sermon on the concluding text of the *Lawḥ al-aqdas* [*al-Kitāb*

al-Aqdas] & of the necessity of putting down war & international jealousy & hostility. Of doctrine properly so called he spoke little.⁸³

However, in his introduction to *A Traveller's Narrative*, Browne states that he had four interviews:

During the five days spent at Behjé (Tuesday, April 15th to Sunday, April 20th [1890]), I was admitted to Behā's presence four times. These interviews always took place an hour or two before noon, and lasted from twenty minutes to half-an-hour. One of Behā's sons always accompanied me, and once Ākā Mīrzā Akā Jān (Jenāb-i-Khādimū'llāh) the amanuensis (*kātib-i-āyāt*) was also present. In their general features these interviews resembled the first, of which I have attempted to give a description.⁸⁴

Thus, during the course of his visits with Baha'u'llah – from Tuesday 15 April to Sunday 20 April 1890 – Browne says that he had five audiences with Baha'u'llah, elsewhere he states that he had four interviews, while Mirza Badi'u'llah reports three. According to Mirza Badi'u'llah:

We went to Haifa and rented a house. The house was called Oliphant. It was for the purpose of a summer residence. The house was located in the German [Templar] colony. After residing in that house for a little while, there the news came that Mr. Browne of England, a professor and orientalist at Cambridge, had returned from Iran and that he was coming by way of land to Bahjī ('Akka). He asked to attain the holy presence of Baha'u'llah. Because it was not proper to accept Mr. Browne into His [Baha'u'llah's] presence at that house in Haifa, then Baha'u'llah moved back to Bahjī. In the year 1890, ... Mr Browne arrived in 'Akka. Ghusn-i Akbar (the Great Branch, Mirza Muhammad 'Ali) had gone to India for publication of some holy texts. Ghusn-i A'zam (the Most Great Branch, 'Abdu'l-Baha) was residing in 'Akka. This writer [Mirza Badi'u'llah] and Ghusn-i Aṭhar (Mirza Ḍiyā'u'llāh = the Purest Branch)⁸⁵ were hosting this dear guest [Browne] ... He was a very learned man. He spoke eloquently well in the sweet Persian language ...

The first time that he had the honour of attaining Baha'u'llah's holy presence, although he [Browne] had a few questions, [in fact] he only asked one question about discord and disunity of all religions. Then he observed silence and the condition and manner of his behaviour changed. After he had been dismissed from His [Baha'u'llah's] presence, he [Browne] entered the room that we had provided for him. He was dazed [senseless] and unable to move his legs ... After that, he became motionless and quiescent. I asked him, 'What happened to you? You became completely silent!' He replied: 'After He [Baha'u'llah] looked at me, I saw a power and authority that changed my normal condition. I noticed such penetrating and influential power and authority in His eyes that I have never seen in any of the kings or rulers that I have ever met ...

The time of staying (residing) at the mansion of Bahjī was one week. On one occasion, Mr. Browne and the Blessed Beauty went to Junaynih. He took the book, *A Traveller's Narrative*, with him, which he translated into English, and published both English and Persian versions of that book and sent a copy of that book [to the Baha'is in 'Akka] in both languages.⁸⁶

83. See Youli A. Ioannesyan, 'Baron Rosen's Archive Collection of Bābā and Bahā'ī Materials'. *Lights of 'Irfān. Papers Presented at the 'Irfān Colloquia and Seminars. Book Eight* (2007), 11–34.
84. Edward G. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative (Makāla-i-Shakhsī Sayyāh) Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb* (2 vols., Cambridge: University Press, 1891) 2:xli.
85. This title was given to Mirza Diya'u'llah after the death of Mirza Mihdi.
86. Mirza Badi'u'llah, *The Memoirs of Badi'u'llah, Bahā's Youngest Son* (provisional trans. Adel Shafipour), 10–11. Persian text online <http://www.bayanic.com/show-Pict.php?id=badi&ref=10&err=0&curr=10>.

87. English: TB 22.
Persian: MMA 117.
88. English: TB 22–3.
Persian: MMA 118.
89. English: TB 23.
Persian: MMA 118.
90. English: TB 26.
Persian: MMA 121.
91. English: TB 26.
Persian: MMA 121.
92. English: TB 28.
Persian: MMA 123.
93. TB 144.
94. Christopher Buck,
Paradise and Paradigm
142–79.

In a letter dated 6 May 1890 to Baron Rosen, Browne made reference to Baha'u'llah's call for a universal language and international peace. These were principles of the Aqdas that were clearly selected as two of the fifteen Glad-Tidings of the Bisharat. Briefly, Baha'u'llah's process, in the Bisharat, of sacralizing the secular – may be epitomized as follows:

1. A world language and script should be chosen (third Glad-Tidings).⁸⁷
2. Weapons of destruction should be converted into instruments of reconstruction (fifth Glad-Tidings).⁸⁸
3. World peace is promised (sixth Glad-Tidings).⁸⁹
4. Sciences and arts are commended, provided they are useful (eleventh Glad-Tidings).⁹⁰
5. (a) All must learn and earn a livelihood; and
(b) Work is worship. (twelfth Glad-Tidings).⁹¹
6. (a) Republican democracy and kingship are recommended; and
(b) Republican democracy and kingship should ideally be combined (fifteenth Glad-Tidings).⁹²

In a metaphysical realm of discourse, beyond praise or blame of the West, Baha'u'llah ascribes the ascendancy of the West, in part, to an unconscious actualization of some of the very world reforms that Baha'u'llah had been advocating all along. In the Tablet of Wisdom (Lawḥ-i Hikmat), Baha'u'llah states: 'When the eyes of the people of the East were captivated by the arts and wonders of the West, they roved distraught in the wilderness of material causes, oblivious of the One Who is the Causer of Causes, and the Sustainer thereof, while such men as were the source and the wellspring of Wisdom never denied the moving Impulse behind these causes, nor the Creator or the Origin thereof. Thy Lord knoweth, yet most of the people know not.'⁹³ Here, Baha'u'llah quite openly indicates that the material advancements in the West are largely outcomes of the power and progressive influence of his powerful socio-moral principles. Obviously this is a truth-claim, beyond verification or falsification.

Implications for future study of the Bisharat

It is remarkable that neither Edward Browne nor Baron Rosen – who, respectively, introduced the Bisharat to their fellow English-speaking and Russian-speaking academics and to other intelligentsia – commented on the singularity of Baha'u'llah's grand vision. To Rosen's credit, the Bisharat was published in both the Persian/Arabic original and in Russian translation. But Rosen's work was, and still is, largely inaccessible in the West. It is hoped, therefore, that the present study will serve to draw fresh attention to Russian as well as British contributions to scholarship on the Babi and Baha'i religions. Renewed study of the work of Browne and Rosen is repaid in the proposed reconstruction of the circumstances of the revelation of the Bisharat. For a more detailed analysis of contemporary-historical, functional, structural and source-critical aspects of the Bisharat, see Christopher Buck's *Paradise and Paradigm* (1999).⁹⁴

This article demonstrates how *seminal* Baha'i studies remain *foundational*. Although keen on the revolutionary implications of the new religion,

and fully alive to aspects of its social significance within the Islamic world, both Browne and Rosen viewed the Baha'i religion through the lens of western ascendancy. Their methodological acuity was clouded by their cultural and, to a certain extent, Christian biases. Even so, our *present* study of their *past* studies of the Bisharat has implications for *future* study of this and other Baha'i texts.

The Tablet of Glad-Tidings was addressed to the peoples of the world, delivered to scholars, hand-copied, lithographed, printed, translated and presented to various individuals as representing the basic Baha'i agenda for world reform. The Bisharat was one important way in which Baha'u'llah himself highlighted, epitomized and proclaimed the essence of the Kitāb-i Aqdas. One may well ask: 'What is 'glad' about the Glad-Tidings?' Clearly, the socio-moral principles of the Lawh-i Bisharat are global in scope, progressive in purview and sweeping in application. While the actual text is quite short – even referential, in pointing to Baha'u'llah's teachings as propounded and expounded elsewhere – the Tablet of Glad-Tidings would have profound implications were its world reforms actually put into practice. At the end of the tablet, Baha'u'llah actually characterizes the Glad-Tidings as divine legislation ('Divine laws and ordinances').

Through the agency of the Bisharat serving as a 'Proclamatory Aqdas', Baha'u'llah set in motion a process of sacralization through spiritualization of 'civil religion' at its finest – thereby promoting certain emergent 'global values' in the interests of world reform. This was in anticipation of, and in preparation for, a world civilization that Baha'u'llah clearly envisioned. Regarding this progressive orientation of the Baha'i system generally, Ninian Smart wrote of the Baha'i Faith: 'It is an example of a spiritual revolution which intuitively recognized the global state of world culture before its time and gave religious preparation for this unified world.'⁹⁵

Suggested citation

Buck, C. and Ioannesyan, Y. A. (2010), 'Baha'u'llah's Bishārāt (Glad-Tidings): A Proclamation to Scholars and Statesmen', *Baha'i Studies Review* 16, pp. 3–28. doi: 10.1386/bsr.16.3/1

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95. Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 480. The authors extend their appreciation to the pre-publication readers of this article, whose constructive recommendations have proved most helpful: Don Addison, Steve Cooney, Betty Fisher, Iskandar Hai, Todd Lawson, Sen McGlinn, Hajir Moghaddam, David Piff, Brent Poirier, Konrad Popp, Ahang Rabbani, Andrew Rippin, Adel Shafipour, Peter Terry and Iscander Micael Tinto. The authors express special appreciation to BSR editor, Dr. Moojan Momen, for his editing and his recommendations which have served to refine and sharpen our theory.

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