
SYMBOL & SECRET

Qur'an Commentary
in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i Íqán

STUDIES IN THE BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í RELIGIONS

VOLUME 7



Íqán

BY CHRISTOPHER BUCK

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"[The Kitáb-i-Íqán: An Introduction to Bahá'u'lláh's Book of Certitude, with Two Digital Reprints of Early Lithographs](#)."

"[Bahá'ís](#)." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān: Supplement* (original version).

"[The Seal of the Prophets, Unsealed](#)."

See also the following recommended self-study guides to the Book of Certitude:

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Fazel Naghdly, Ph.D., [A Tutorial on the Kitáb-i-Íqán: A Journey through the Book of Certitude](#) (Kindle Edition).

See also the following recommended introduction to the Bahá'í Faith:

Christopher Buck, [Bahá'í Faith: The Basics](#) (2021).

باسم ربنا العليّ ^{عليه}
الباب المذكور في بيان ان العباد ان يصلون الى ساطع بحر العرفان
الا بالانقطاع الصروف عن كل من في السموات والارض فلتتدس
انفسكم يا اهل الارض لعل تصلون الى مقام الذي قدر الله لكم
وتدخلن في سرادق الذي جعله الله في سما، البيان مرفوعا
جوهر ريزه بكتب ساكنين سبل ميان و با بدين با وس ايقان با نيزه نوحه
از جميع شهنوا ت عرضته با كن و عهده سنانيد نميزه نوحه سرادق
و قديك از رضوناه ت متعته سجات عديل در حمله از تعق سجات
حوشله از جمله كهوات فانه و متوكه سله و متوكه سله ساكن شوند
تا كونه قابل تجليات شرفات شمس و عرفان لهر شه و محل صورت
فيوضات غيب نامر كمنز زلكه اكر عبه نجلهم كه اقوال و اعمال
از عا و روح هم ميزان معرفت حق و اوين اقول در هر ريز بر صولان معرفت
الغزاه و غير نشو و بعين نود و حكمت سرتان حضرت فائز كزود و هر كز
سرسوزل تقاضا رسد و از جدم قرب ضامه روق كزود با نظر با ايم شويده
كه چه قدر محمد از اعالي اولاد كه همیشه فخرت حضرت اعتراف در بهيا كل قدسية

MANUSCRIPT ORIGINAL

Fig. 1: The opening page of the original manuscript of the *Kitáb-i Íqán* in the handwriting of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, produced in 1278 A.H. (1861–62 C.E.). Minor marginal additions were made by Bahá’u’lláh himself. The manuscript was given to Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad in Baghdad, in reply to his questions, and remained in his family until 1948, when it was donated to the Bahá’í World Centre. (Courtesy of the Bahá’í World Centre.)

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STUDIES IN THE BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í RELIGIONS
VOLUME SEVEN

General Editor

ANTHONY A. LEE

**SYMBOL AND SECRET:
QUR'AN COMMENTARY IN
BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S KITÁB-I ÍQÁN**

By

CHRISTOPHER BUCK

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Yet, shouldst thou reflect upon these statements [Rev. 1:16–17], thou wouldst find them to be of such surpassing eloquence and clarity as to mark the loftiest heights of utterance and the epitome of wisdom. Methinks it is from them that the suns of eloquence have appeared and the stars of clarity have dawned forth and shone resplendent.

... Know then that He [Jesus] who uttered these words in the realms of glory meant to describe the attributes of the One Who is to come in such veiled and enigmatic terms as to elude the understanding of the people of error.

Bahá'u'lláh

Gems of Divine Mysteries, 52–53; 54–55.

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بس که کشیدند چنانچه مذکور شد از روایات می شود و آیه ای را که در این
 با حجاب و ترسیده و میساید تا مغنین آنچه در قلب نهادند از آن برهید و چنان
 با برکت اینست صیقل لب چه میساید بر دلها میسودن و لعل لعل بر لب اینست
 لعل و صیقل لب چه میساید بر لبها میسودن و لعل لعل بر لب اینست
 که در مطهره و نفوس مرصیه و سوره مجده و قصه در شان اینگونه بیایست معانی
 محمد و آلش نماید و سوره نیت صیقل لب که در سوره مجده و سوره
 بین الناس لا ظفر و اذا قام التمام مشتمل بر الوجه بین الناس و صیقل لب که در سوره
 سخن بگفته و نیز میسر در سوره مجده و لعل لعل صیقل لب که در سوره
 در لعل و روایات بیایست در عالم کائنات انوار ظاهر شده در صیقل لب و سوره
 لعل که در سوره مجده و سوره نیت و لعل لعل صیقل لب که در سوره مجده و سوره
 چنانچه در حدیث استعلام شده پس با چنانچه با چنانچه در حدیث استعلام شده چنانچه در حدیث
 و در حدیث استعلام شده تا سوره سوره لعل لعل صیقل لب که در سوره مجده و سوره
 از حدیث استعلام شده تا سوره سوره لعل لعل صیقل لب که در سوره مجده و سوره
 تا سوره سوره لعل لعل صیقل لب که در سوره مجده و سوره
 میسودن و سوره سوره لعل لعل صیقل لب که در سوره مجده و سوره
 کانا با یا تی سجود و منهم القول قبوله تعالی و من یعیش عن ذکر الرحمن نقض له
 شیطانا فصوله قرین من اعرض عن ذکرى فان له معیبه
 وكذلك نزل من قبل ان یقرعوا
 المنزول من الباء و الهماء
 فرسدة الغنم
 و اسلام من سمع نغمه الورد
 فسبح ربنا الاعلى

FINAL PAGE OF ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

Fig. 2: Last page of original manuscript of the Kitáb-i Íqán in the hand of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Note that the term “revealed” (al-manzúil) appears in Bahá’u’lláh’s own colophon. (Courtesy of the Bahá’í World Centre.)

FOREWORD

Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892), the Prophet–Founder of the Bahá'í religion, penned an enormous number of works, but it can be argued that the 1862 Book of Certitude (the *Kitáb-i Íqán*) is his masterpiece. Christopher Buck has, in this well-argued book, advanced our understanding of the context, literary techniques, and interpretive aims of Bahá'u'lláh's Book of Certitude, producing the first book-length academic study devoted entirely to a major work of Bahá'í scripture.

No reader of the Book of Certitude can fail to be struck by how much of it consists of commentaries and references to verses of the Qur'án. Its first audience was after all a Shiite Muslim, an uncle of Bahá'u'lláh's predecessor, the Báb (1819–1850). The traditions and sciences of the Qur'án commentary constitute one of the more important branches of Islamic learning. It is the virtue of *Symbol and Secret* that it takes account of several overlapping intellectual traditions in elucidating the Book of Certitude's approach to Islamic scripture. The author shows an awareness of the main schools of Muslim Qur'án commentary, and also of contemporary academic scholarship on the subject. It is the latter, especially the work of scholars such as Wansbrough and Rippin, that provide the author with the analytical leverage to illuminate for us the place of the Qur'án in the Book of Certitude. Buck succeeds in demonstrating how important academic training and a knowledge of Islamics are for a profounder appreciation of Bahá'í scripture. [p. xii]

As soon as it was penned, friend and foe recognized the Book of Certitude as an extraordinarily powerful book, written in a crisp and straightforward style (commented on favorably by the Cambridge Orientalist E. G. Browne in his *A Literary History of Persia*). It exhibits a lucid and tantalizing view of sacred history, theology, and the mystical path that attempted to vindicate the Bábí movement and yet to prepare the way for the emergence from it of something new. It was authored only a year or so before Bahá'u'lláh's initial declaration of himself as the promised one of the Báb at the Garden of Necip Paşa (the "Garden of Riḍván") in Baghdad. There is little doubt that the early Bahá'í community in Iran considered it their most central text of scripture, and it was perhaps the first Bahá'í book to be printed, in Bombay, around 1882. Bahá'u'lláh himself referred to it, in a letter to the Zoroastrian agent in Tehran, as the "Lord of Books" (*sayyid-i kutub*), and he put forward its framework for the understanding of universal religious history as a way of reconciling the "prophetologies" of Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam.

The eminent Bahá'í scholar Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání (1844–1914) initially refrained from writing anything about the Bahá'í religion, after adopting it in 1876, feeling that such works of Bahá'u'lláh as the Book of Certitude made any further discussion unnecessary. Even once he was prevailed upon to begin writing on Bahá'í spirituality and doctrine, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl referred frequently to this book. He wrote to a correspondent in 1888: “It is therefore incumbent upon you to cup your hand and drink from the spring of certitude [the Kitáb-i Íqán] that has flowed from the pen of the All-Merciful throughout these times. It is, for all its conciseness, the key to the psalms and tablets, and is the interpreter of the books of God, Who dispels the darkness at each dawn. Thereby have the seals of the prophets been broken and the abstrusities of the allusions of past scriptures [p. xiii] been resolved. Exert yourself to the utmost and reflect on this holy book, that you might be inspired to the correct understanding of every chapter.” Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání's own masterwork, his 1898 *Kitáb al-Fará'id* (“Book of Priceless Gems”) was devoted to the rebuttal of an attack on the Book of Certitude by a Shiite cleric resident in Tiflis (Tbilisi), Georgia.

The salience of the Book of Certitude has not lessened with time. An English translation by Ali-Kuli Khan, published in New York in 1904, became popular in the nascent American Bahá'í community of the early twentieth century. The work's continued significance for those from a Christian background is no doubt related to the attention Bahá'u'lláh gives to the Gospel verses and prophecies, discussion of which occupies some one-fourth of the book.

Bahá'u'lláh's great-grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbání (1897–1957), the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, published a fresh translation of the Book of Certitude in 1931 and elsewhere called it “foremost among the priceless treasures cast forth from the billowing ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.” He adds: “Well may it be claimed that of all the books revealed by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, this Book alone, by sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world, has laid down a broad and unassailable foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers.”

Juan R. I. Cole

Ann Arbor, Michigan

9 February 1995

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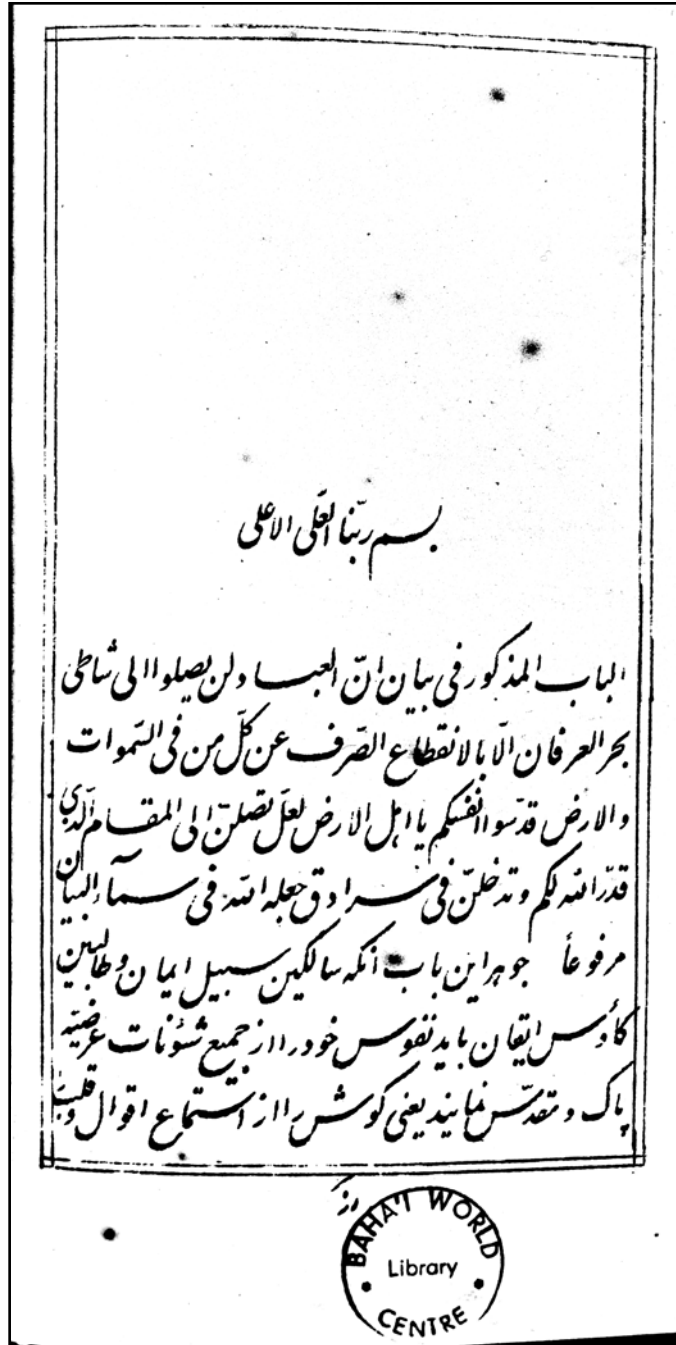
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CHRISTOPHER BUCK



1893 BOMBAY LITHOGRAPH: FIRST PAGE

Fig. 3: *Kitáb-i mustaṭāb-i íqán* (Bombay: Náṣirí Press, 1310/1892–93), the first dated lithograph of the *Íqán*, calligraphed by Mishkín-Qalam, *nasta'liq*, 214 pages. This volume is indexed as catalogue no. "BP362.K8.1892.c.3" at the Bahá'í World Centre. The "1892" number represents the tentative date given the book when it was catalogued. There are only several copies of this edition known to still exist. (Courtesy of the Bahá'í World Centre.)

INTRODUCTION

Interpretation creates meaning.

Scriptural interpretation has the power to reverse its own role: ostensible interpretation of the past is, in reality, the past interpreting the present. Particularly susceptible to this process are the non-transparent passages of scripture—parables, figurative speech, and apocalyptic visions—which are in some sense “dark” and require what Kermode calls “completion.” In the interpretation of dreams, for instance, “the dream-text, when understood, disappears, consumed by its interpretation.”¹

This study explores one interpretive journey into the mysterious landscape of the Qur’án, into its fantastic opacity, its apocalyptic drama, where the heavens burst asunder (Qur’án 84:1), and become as molten brass (70:8), where stars are scattered (82:2) and hurled to earth (81:2), where bedrock quakes (99:1) and mountains move (81:3), crumble (73:14), vaporize (78:20), where the seas boil (81:6), smoke enshrouds (44:10), and all who are on earth fall into a swoon (39:68).

This study will focus on the power of interpretation to produce meaning and to create new truth, as Jabès says: “To discover means, after all, to create.”² So powerful is the potential for exegesis to create, that it can become the vehicle for bringing a new religion into being. Exegesis, in the last century, did just that, giving life to a new world religion known as the Bahá’í Faith. The exegete and prophet-founder [p. xx] was Mírzá Ḥusayn-’Alí Núrí, known as Bahá’u’lláh (Bahá’ Alláh) (1233–1309 A.H./1817–1892 C.E.).

Bahá’u’lláh’s Book of Certitude is a work of biblical and Qur’anic exegesis. Works of exegesis, whether academic or pastoral, are usually inconsequential. They proliferate in hermeneutical circles, to die the quiet death of being superseded by yet further commentaries. The Book of Certitude, on the other hand, has succeeded in creating the doctrinal framework for a new religion.

Although overtly Islamic in its approach, the new ethos the text adopts makes it unique in its role as a non-Muslim work of Qur’anic exegesis. There is no conceptual contradiction here. The Book of Certitude constructs an eschatological bridge, on the far side of which stands Bahá’u’lláh, whose worldview is constructed along the lines of a unity paradigm. In one of his writings on unity, Bahá’u’lláh addresses the world:

O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth! Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you ... This wronged One hath, ever since the early days of His life, cherished ... no wish except this wish. There can be no doubt that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source ... Arise and ... shatter to pieces the gods ... of dissension amongst you.³

Unity is the key to all Bahá'í thought. The Book of Certitude must be seen in this wider light, even though the text was written at an early stage in Bahá'u'lláh's ministry. Bahá'u'lláh's thinking on unity considerably predates the Book of Certitude. Since childhood, Bahá'u'lláh resolved to consecrate his life to the pursuit of world peace. In so saying, no attempt is made in this study to construct a "psycho-history" of the development of Bahá'u'lláh's ideas.⁴ Context, not originist reductionism, is sought here. [p. xxi]

The vision of unity (*ittihád*) that unfolds in Bahá'u'lláh's writings extends beyond Islam, but originates within it. Reverence for the Qur'an is unflagging, within his view of history and his theory of civilization. He categorically states that "the unfailing testimony of God to both the East and the West is none other than the Qur'an."⁵ The need to produce a commentary on Qur'anic eschatology—a need that occasioned the writing of the Book of Certitude—will become evident to the reader in due course.

The Book of Certitude is much more than a work of exegesis. The text was written (or "revealed") while Bahá'u'lláh was a professed follower of the Persian prophet known as the Báb (the Gate) (1235–1266 A.H./1819–1850 C.E.) in order to vindicate the latter's prophetic credentials. This book became the preeminent doctrinal work of the Bahá'í Faith, not only by virtue of its content, but also because of its influence over believers in the early days of the Faith. The text exerts a strong influence to this day, especially among Bahá'ís from non-Muslim backgrounds. The Book of Certitude is probably the most widely circulated and influential of all Bahá'í doctrinal works. Evidently, it was the first Bahá'í text to have an authorized printing. The text is a living scripture, but it does not embody all of Bahá'í thought. For this reason, it is necessary to place the Book of Certitude within the range of other Bahá'í sacred writings.

To appreciate the significance the Book of Certitude has for those who regard it as an inspired work, one need only read the interpretation that Shoghi Effendi (d. 1957), great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, gave it: "Well may it be claimed that of all the books revealed by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, this Book alone, by sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world, has laid down a broad and unassailable foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers."⁶

[p. xxii] From an academic perspective, the Book of Certitude is foundational to Bahá'í studies.

Although the Bahá'í Faith has yet to become entrenched in Religious Studies curricula, its position as an independent religion has been vindicated by a growing consensus in the academic literature. Statistically, the religion has shown substantial success in its missionary enterprise. Within the past century, the nascent faith has established itself in 205 countries and major territories of the world.⁷ Demographically, the majority of Bahá'ís today are to be found in Third World countries and are from non-Muslim backgrounds. This study will explain how a religion with Islamic roots ended up breaking decisively from Islam, not unlike the doctrinal and ethnic rupture of early Christianity with its parent faith, Judaism.

In a recent reference work, *A Handbook of Living Religions*, the Bahá'í Faith is treated separately in the final chapter,⁸ by Irish Islamicist Denis MacEoin [d. 2022], whose research has, in general, propelled Bahá'í studies in a text-critical direction. He frames the problem of the typology of the Bahá'í Faith so:

The outsider is faced with a genuine ambiguity in seeking a relatively unbiased approach to Baha'ism. In terms of numbers, influence, social position, voluntariness of membership, and so on, it is most usefully treated as a sect or denomination (with major regional fluctuations), rather than as a wholly independent tradition. But Baha'is themselves emphasize other criteria, such as the lives of the movement's founders and saints, the richness of its scriptural literature, the breadth and rapidity of its geographical expansion, and the ontological assumption of a divine revelation subsequent to and abrogatory of Islam. The scholar must try to shift between these and other approaches as far as possible. Perhaps the central focus of interest lies in the conscious promulgation of an alternative religion, not primarily as an outgrowth of an existing major tradition, but as a potential new tradition.⁹

[p. xxiii] As to the fate of this "potential new tradition," MacEoin concludes predictively: "Baha'ism would seem to be the first of the new religious movements that shows signs of developing as an independent tradition."¹⁰ Most new religious movements (NRMs) originate within some religious system, there to maintain a denominational or marginal existence. Therefore, MacEoin's classification of the Bahá'í Faith as a New Religious Movement would be somewhat inadequate, had he not admitted the possibility of the Faith evolving into "an independent tradition."

Some scholars have not sufficiently addressed the Faith's revolutionary break from Islam. This rupture has much broader typological implications than can be dealt with within a sectarian paradigm. By self-identification alone, Bahá'ís are not Muslims. No self-professed Christian, historical Jewish origins notwithstanding, would ever claim to be a Jew by religion. Scholarship at times is deficient in adopting a methodology that is commensurate with religious self-definition. In a classroom setting, the very presence of a religious minority might change the complexion of how that tradition is broached academically. Such has often been the case with Bahá'ís. Bausani's typology of monotheisms seems much more attractive, from a phenomenological perspective.¹¹

In the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh endeavors to prove that the Qur'án actually anticipates a future revelation (and thus another prophet after Muḥammad). This is no small exegetical feat. Once the obstacle of revelatory finality is swept aside, Bahá'u'lláh the exegete becomes Bahá'u'lláh the revealer.

It is not that Bahá'u'lláh has or has not "discovered" the true meaning of the Qur'án. Rather, Bahá'u'lláh reveals its truth—that is, its meaning. (Although hermeneutically distinct, truth and meaning are functionally equivalent here.) By use of identifiable exegetical devices, Bahá'u'lláh produces meaning from scripture to legitimize his truth.

Bahá'u'lláh's use of exegetical techniques is controlled [p. xxiv] by the phenomenological "fact" of fresh revelations from God through the person of the Báb and, it will be argued, through Bahá'u'lláh himself. When interpretation serves as a crucial means for recognizing and embracing a post-Islamic revelation, the interpretation functions as part of that revelation. The key is part of the door.

In this study, therefore, the text of the Qur'án will be viewed as dynamic rather than static, in that it produces meaning through the process of interpretation. Methodologically, we will have to dispense with the idea that the text has a fixed meaning and look instead to the power of the Qur'án, as a living scripture, to inspire or generate meaning. While the scripture is preserved, the interpretation itself, rather than the scripture, has doctrinal force.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE

Bahá'u'lláh is the charismatic founder of the Bahá'í Faith, transformed out of the nineteenth-century reformist Bábí movement to emerge as a new world religion, after a decisive break from Islam.¹² The most complete biography of this understudied religious figure is that by Hasan M. Balyuzi. As the only full-length biography of Bahá'u'lláh in a Western language, this masterwork is anchored in original sources, some unpublished. But, it has not escaped the charge of hagiographical tendency.¹³ Other sources provide supplemental data.¹⁴

Bahá'u'lláh was a scion of nobility, descended from the pre-Islamic monarchs of Iran. His ancestral home was the remote village of Tákur, in the district of Núr, in the province of Mázarandán, a forested region bordering on the Caspian Sea. Born in 1817 in Tehran into a family of wealthy landowners, Bahá'u'lláh was raised in luxury in courtly circles. His father, 'Abbás Buzurg, titled Mírzá Buzurg, and known as Vazír-i Núrí, was a master calligrapher, a skill [p. xxv] which won royal approbation and facilitated his appointment as *vazír* (chief administrator) to the commander-in-chief of the imperial guard.¹⁵

Two significant events in Bahá'u'lláh's youth predisposed him toward both a religious and reformist vocation. In 1868, from the prison-city of 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh addressed a letter (known as *Lawḥ-i Ra'ís*) to the Ottoman Grand Vizier, in which he relates a childhood memory. Bahá'u'lláh recalls how as a child he watched a grand puppet show which held him spell-bound. Based on an episode of history, the performance was elaborate. Bahá'u'lláh recounts the puppet representation of Sulṭán Salím in considerable and vivid detail.

When the show was over, the child asked the puppeteer what had become of the king and all his men. The puppeteer answered that they were all in the box he was carrying. The child was deeply struck by this answer. In this rare autobiographical disclosure, Bahá'u'lláh recalls that from that day forward all of the trappings of the transient world had no significance whatsoever for him.¹⁶

At another point in his early life, Bahá'u'lláh read Mullá Muḥammad Báqir Majlisí's (d. 1700 C.E.) traditional account of the massacre of all males of the Jewish tribe of Banú Qurayza by order of the Prophet Muḥammad (cf. Qur'án 33:26) on grounds of treason. MacEoin's account of the impact this had on the child's psyche is based on Bahá'u'lláh's own description of this psychological turning point. MacEoin writes that "the effect of this was to plunge him [Bahá'u'lláh] into a state of acute depression for some time, despite his recognition that 'what occurred had been the decree of God.'"¹⁷ A sense of horror and remorse moved the child to cry to God to change the world, that the tragedy never be reenacted.

Apparently, this youthful wish later matured into a sense of resolve. From his reminiscence, it is clear that Bahá'u'lláh traces his predisposition toward social and moral [p. xxvi] reform to a precocious sensitivity. Taherzadeh paraphrases Bahá'u'lláh's account:

He [Bahá'u'lláh] then describes how suddenly on a certain day before dawn, He was overcome by a condition which completely affected His manners, His thoughts and His words. It was a transfiguration which gave Him the tidings of ascendancy and exaltation, and which continued for twelve days. After this He testifies that the ocean of His utterance began to surge, and the Sun of Assurance shone forth and He continued in this state until He manifested Himself to man. He further testifies in the same Tablet that in this Dispensation, He has, on the one hand, removed from religion anything which could become the cause of suffering and disunity and, on the other, ordained those teachings which would bring about the unity of the human race.¹⁸

The development of Bahá'u'lláh's religious consciousness took later turns which must be understood in the context of the Bábí movement, within which his first religious reform activity took place.

Bahá'u'lláh's life has been divided into four stages by Shoghi Effendi: (1) the first twenty-seven years of his life, spent in wealth and ease and "solicitude for the interests of the poor" (1817–44); (2) conversion to and "discipleship" within the Bábí movement (1844–52); (3) imprisonment (of four months' duration), when mystical raptures awakened within Bahá'u'lláh a powerful sense of mission (1852); and (4) a ministry of nearly forty years as a prolific and charismatic figure (1853–1892).¹⁹ Bahá'u'lláh's forty-year ministry may be divided further into three periods, corresponding to his successive exiles as a prisoner of the Ottoman regime: (1) the Baghdad period (1853–63); (2) the Constantinople/Adrianople period (1863–68); (3) the 'Akká period (1868–92).

During this time, Bahá'u'lláh penned or dictated in excess of fifteen thousand "Tablets" (*alwáh*) in Persian and [p. xxvii] Arabic.²⁰ Though the majority of these were composed in Arabic, the Book of Certitude was written in Persian, as were some of Bahá'u'lláh's other important works. It is estimated that Bahá'u'lláh's writings if bound together would comprise around a hundred volumes.²¹ Afnán and Hatcher inform us that: "Indeed, even though the works of Bahá'u'lláh currently published in English comprise about two thousand pages, there are at least forty thousand manuscript pages of his writings which have not yet been translated or published in any Western language."²² All of these writings are taken by Bahá'ís as revelation.

To a certain extent, Bahá'u'lláh's writings during the Baghdad period may be thought of, in paradoxical terms, as covert revelation. If we accept Bahá'u'lláh's autobiographical remarks, a tension develops between Bahá'u'lláh's 1852 prophetic call and the messianic secrecy he maintained for over a decade. There also seems to have been some reluctance on Bahá'u'lláh's part to assume a prophetic office: "Whenever I chose to hold My peace and be still, lo, the Voice of the Holy Spirit, standing on My right hand, aroused Me, and the Most Great Spirit appeared before My face, and Gabriel overshadowed Me, and the Spirit of Glory stirred within My bosom, bidding Me arise and break My silence."²³ Bahá'u'lláh broke this silence on April 22, 1863 (1279 A.H.).

THE BREAK FROM ISLAM AND FROM THE BÁBÍ RELIGION

The Book of Certitude provided an eschatological bridge into a new religious worldview. It began at the shore of Islam, crossing reformist currents through the gate of Babism, progressively distancing itself from Islam. Already, the Bábí movement had mediated the formal break from Islam by means of a "new Qur'án" and a new code of law, although the latter was scarcely implemented. All of the [p. xxviii] initial elements of Bábí thought and praxis were Islamic in nature, though often heterodox, and much that was Bábí became Bahá'í.²⁴ The Bábí movement was not only transitional, it was formative.

It is a historical truism that the Bábí and Bahá'í religions exhibit obvious continuities with Islam, as well as profound discontinuities. The writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh employ a predominantly Islamic terminology, representing the extension of certain Islamic concepts. There are also certain specific Bábí and Bahá'í technical terms which, though drawn from existing Arabic or Persian vocabulary, are invested with specific Bábí or Bahá'í symbolism.

Beyond these points of continuity, discontinuities became far more important. It is by these discontinuities that the Bahá'í worldview is best defined. Such differences were, on an ideological level, revolutionary enough to precipitate a distinct genesis from Islam. Bahá'u'lláh's claim to a post-Qur'anic prophetic office and his legislation of an extra-Qur'anic rival system of law were definitive distinctions. Extensive, even pervasive, Islamic influences are insufficient to account for the major paradigm shift from the Islamic ideal of surrender to the central Bahá'í ideal of world unity.

The Bábí religion was an indigenous reform movement born on Persian soil. The Báb presented an ideology that sought to effect religious renewal without reversion to the ossified Shí'í past. Through a new messianic paradigm employing the old symbols of Shiism, the Hid-

den Imám appeared in the person of the Báb as the locus of fresh authority. The importance of such authority cannot be overestimated.

Authority was all-important, for no change in Shiism was possible without it. In theory, at least, such authority had to be divine before there could be any real possibility of legislative creativity and/or adaptation to new historical circumstances. The appearance of the Báb put a theoretical [p. xxix] end to the age-old confusion over the simultaneous presence and absence of the Hidden Imám. The Báb claimed to be that Hidden Imám.

The self-ascribed authority of the Uṣúlí mujtahids (doctors of law) was challenged by the appearance of a rival authority figure. The Báb's legislative innovations were perceived as a real threat to the Shí'í establishment. As Arjomand points out, the ulama "dreaded" the Bábí movement, "whose success would have eliminated them and the orthodox Shiism they represented."²⁵ But the Bábí movement collapsed after suffering charismatic and collective martyrdom, through the execution of the Báb and the subsequent Bábí holocaust. Out of these historical ashes, the Bahá'í Faith emerged.

The establishment of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic status within Bábí circles was a gradual process marked by several developmental stages. I have mentioned his youthful spiritual inclinations, which for a time found fulfillment in his conversion to Bábí spirituality. Bahá'u'lláh converted to the Bábí religion at the age of twenty-seven, presumably in late August 1844, when a special envoy (Mullá Ḥusayn Bushrú'í) dispatched by the Báb arrived in Tehran.²⁶ It was this movement which mediated Bahá'u'lláh's break from Islam, preparing the way for his vocation as a legislator of universal laws for a new dispensation.

In 1844, the Báb had implicitly advanced the messianic claim that he was the Resurrector (*Qá'im*) of the Day of Resurrection (*Qiyáma*). After 1847, this claim became increasingly explicit. Contrary to the prevailing Shí'í notion that the Qá'im would secure the ascendancy of the Islamic *sharí'a* (legal system) through holy war, the Báb spoke of the wholesale abrogation of Islam.²⁷ In 1847–48, the Báb revealed the Persian Bayán, his most important doctrinal work and his own code of laws meant to supplant the whole of Islamic law.

[p. xxx] "The birth of the Babi movement should thus be seen," according to Amanat, as "... an attempt to employ the sanctified ideals of the past—almost a mythological rather than historical past—to interpret a changing age."²⁸ By 1853, the Bábí movement was forced to go underground because of external repression. This repression was largely precipitated by a series of militant Bábí-Qájár clashes that had erupted at the shrine of Shaykh Ṭabarsí (1848–1849), Nayríz (May/June 1850), and Zanján (1850–1851).²⁹ This militarism, although defensive, gravely imperiled the Bábí community. In the aftermath of the execution of the Báb in 1850,

and the subsequent attempt on the life of the shah in 1852 by a small group of Bábís (moved to avenge the execution of the Báb and the recent massacres of their co-religionists), there ensued a reign of terror against Bábís throughout Iran.

The Bábí community was subjected to a bloodbath of persecution that shocked European observers, who wrote eyewitness accounts of the atrocities. Bahá'u'lláh was arrested, along with scores of other Bábís, and imprisoned in the notorious Síyáh-Chál (Black Pit), a subterranean dungeon in Tehran.³⁰ It was in this pestilential pit that Bahá'u'lláh underwent a transformation through a series of mystical experiences in the form of visions. Of these mystical transports, Bahá'u'lláh later recalls:

During the days I lay in the prison of Tihrán, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.³¹

In his Sura of the Temple (*Súratu'l-Haykal*), Bahá'u'lláh describes the first of a series of visions of a celestial maiden, [p. xxxi] who reappeared to him throughout the years. This intimation of divine mission, according to Bahá'u'lláh, occurred a full decade prior to the revelation of the Book of Certitude. In Bahá'í metaphysics, the “Maid of Heaven” is the Holy Spirit personified. Bahá'u'lláh has left this record of his first mystical encounter with the maiden:

While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden—the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord—suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul, that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good-pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God's honored servants. Pointing her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying:

“By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive.”³²

For more than a decade after his imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál, Bahá'u'lláh was reticent about these visions. His messianic election was kept secret until April 22, 1863 in Baghdad, when, on the eve of his exile to Constantinople, Bahá'u'lláh declared himself to be “He Whom God Shall Make Manifest” (*man yuzhiruhu'lláh*) as foretold by the Báb.³³ It is the development of Bahá'u'lláh's sense of his own mission which is so problematic during the Baghdad period of his ministry (1853–1863), especially as it relates to the interpretation of the Kitáb-i Íqán.

[p. xxxii] Bahá'u'lláh and the Bábí exiles reached Istanbul (Constantinople) in August of 1863, remaining there for several months. They were exiled again in December to Edirne (Adrianople) in Turkey. A leadership crisis between Bahá'u'lláh and his half-brother Mírzá Yaḥyá—known by his spiritual title Şubḥ-i Azal (Morn of Eternity)—led Bahá'u'lláh to dissociate himself and his followers from Azal on March 10, 1866.³⁴ This split gave birth to the Bahá'í religion as a distinct community. The Bábí dissidents became known as Azalís, or Azalí Bábís.³⁵ Certain incidents precipitated by this crisis impelled the Ottoman authorities to banish most of those who henceforth called themselves Bahá'ís to 'Akká, in Palestine, and most of the Azalís to Cyprus (1868). The Azalí community has since dissipated, although a few Azalí families remain.

During the latter years of the Adrianople period, Bahá'u'lláh openly proclaimed his prophetic mission in epistles to the reigning sovereigns of Europe and the Middle East, inviting them to support his cause. Because of his longstanding leadership of the Bábí community and his personal charisma, the great majority of Bábís accepted Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation. It is important to have a sense of the force of Bahá'u'lláh's charisma, as it not only plays an essential role in Bahá'u'lláh's assertion of authority, but determines the doctrinal associations the Book of Certitude would inevitably take on. We would expect hagiographical accounts to lionize Bahá'u'lláh. For this reason, two independent sources will be cited.

In 1890, Cambridge Orientalist Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926) became one of the few Westerners to be granted an audience with Bahá'u'lláh. Browne's record of his encounter shows how deeply impressed he was by the prisoner he came to see. He describes Bahá'u'lláh as “a wondrous and venerable figure,” whose “piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul.” “Power and authority sat on that [p. xxxiii] ample brow,” Browne observed, “while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance seemed to belie.” Bahá'u'lláh's charisma was obvious. Browne continues: “No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!”³⁶

Though this experience did not convert him, Browne's pen portrait documents the power of Bahá'u'lláh's charisma on a Western psyche. The essential elements of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are reflected in his words addressed to Browne on that occasion:

We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations. ... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled—what harm is there in this? ... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “Most Great Peace” shall come. ... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind. ...³⁷

Another description of Bahá'u'lláh was published in a leading French periodical by Lebanese Druze journalist Amír Amín Arslan:

I have had the honour of catching a glimpse of him who is the incarnation of “the Word of God” in the eyes of the Persians, during a journey that I made to St Jean d’Acre [’Akká]. I was eager to pay a visit to ‘Abbás Effendi, the eldest son of “the Word” who was in charge of the external relations of the community. ... Naturally, I solicited from him the honour of an audience with his holy father. He explained to me, in a very kindly manner, that it was not the custom of the Divinity to admit to his presence unbelieving mortals. Since I [p. xxxiv] insisted, he promised to make every possible effort to bring about the realization of my wish.

... I had to content myself with a glimpse of the illustrious Bahá'u'lláh at the moment when he came out to take his daily walk ... in the evening, a time when he could better elude the prying attention of outsiders. But ‘Abbás Effendi had carefully positioned me behind a part of the wall, along his path, in such a manner that I could easily contemplate him for a short while. ... His [Bahá'u'lláh's] appearance struck my imagination in such a way that I cannot better represent it than by evoking the image of God the Father, commanding, in his majesty, the elements of nature, in the middle of clouds (*Dieu le Père, commandant dans sa majesté, au milieu des nuées, aux éléments de la nature*).³⁸

Seen within the wider context of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, intimation preceded proclamation which, in turn, preceded legislation. Bahá'u'lláh chose to consolidate the Bábí community in Baghdad before embarking on any further enterprise. The fragmentation and demoralization of the community following the near extermination of the Bábí movement by the Qájár sword would scarcely have predisposed it to any sudden assertion of charismatic authority,

whether from Bahá'u'lláh or other claimants. Before the tiny religious enclave could even conceive of the salvation of others, its own welfare had to be secured.

Amanat characterizes Bahá'u'lláh's pre-messianic leadership of the Bábí community in terms of its gradual disencumberment from the political burden of Shí'í utopia:

Bahā'u'llāh's later redirection of the course of militant Babism after 1852 (and more noticeably after 1864) toward moderation was in sharp contrast to the policies of the radical wing of the movement, headed, at least nominally, by his own brother, Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī Ṣubḥ-i Azal. The politically pacifist current founded by Bahā'u'llāh, which eventually evolved into the Bahā'ī religion, was no doubt affected by his frustration [p. xxxv] with the disastrous outcome of the Babi experience. Unlike many of his co-religionists, who were preoccupied with the Shi'ite vision of a utopian political order under the aegis of the Imam of the Age, Bahā'u'llāh focused his efforts on disentangling moral ideals from political claims; a Sufi legacy that he stretched to new frontiers in order to resolve an eternal problem of Islamic faith. By forging a new source of loyalty on a largely moral basis, Bahā'u'llāh envisioned a suprarreligious ecumen free from the political claims of the Islamic community (*umma*).³⁹

The Book of Certitude addressed itself primarily to eschatological concerns. It is important to note that Bahá'u'lláh made moral reform a precondition to the realization of the eschaton, the anticipated apocalypse. In so doing, he was better able to present the eschaton within a moral, rather than political, framework. Moral and doctrinal reform of the Bábí exile and native communities, effected under Bahá'u'lláh's leadership (particularly between the years 1856-63), prepared the Bábís for a messianic figure who would fulfill a radically redefined eschaton.

Characteristic of nearly all of his writings during the Baghdad period were Bahá'u'lláh's veiled allusions to his long-contemplated messianic office. If the Book of Certitude is read in this light, it is clear such messianic secrecy was necessary until the Bábí community was ripe for charismatic renewal, an eventuality which, in the post-Baghdad period, saw the allegiance of most Bábís carry over to Bahá'u'lláh.

ADDENDUM

See now "[Scholar Meets Prophet: Edward Granville Browne and Bahá'u'lláh \(Acre, 1890\)](#)." By Christopher Buck and Youli A. Ioannesyan. *Baha'i Studies Review* 20 (cover date, 2014; publication date, 2018): 21–38. (Edited by Steve Cooney.) (Published online: January 11, 2018.) [May 30, 2022.]

NOTES

1. F. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p. 24.
2. E. Jabès, "The Key," in *Midrash and Literature*, p. 350.
3. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 217; *Múntakhabátí az Áthár-i Haḍrat-i Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 141–42. With few exceptions, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh were not titled, and so have come to be known by certain associations in literary or popular usage. In the case of *Lawḥ-i Ittihád*, more than one Tablet is known by this name. The more common reference for *Lawḥ-i Ittihád* is to a Tablet described by A. Taherzadeh in *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. III, pp. 191–95. Both Tablets are printed consecutively in *Ad'íyyih-i Haḍrat-i Maḥbúb* (Prayers of Bahá'u'lláh), pp. 388–406 and 407–409 (containing the passage quoted). See Vahid Rafati, "Ma'ákhidh Kitáb-i Múntakhabátí az Áthár-i Haḍrat-i Bahá'u'lláh," *'Andalíb*, Vol. 5 (Winter 1984–85), p. 67, who refers to the Tablet cited also as *Lawḥ-i Ittihád*.

The equivalence drawn here between divisive ideology and idolatry is interesting to note, since idolatry is conceptually rarefied to the level of principle. This finds its Islamic counterpart in twentieth-century Islamic reformism. See E. Sirriyeh, "Modern Muslim Interpretation of *Shirk*," *Religion*, Vol. 20 (1990), p. 145.

4. See Chapter 4, note No. 77, p. 223, below.
5. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 210.
6. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 139. This sentiment is borne out by egalitarian fraternity of the Bahá'ís as individuals, and as a community, which Bahá'ís see as a model for a society of "unity in diversity."
7. See D. Barrett, "World Religious Statistics," in *1988 Britannica Book of the Year*, p. 303: "Over 14 major religious systems are each now found in over 80 countries. Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í World Faith are the most global."
8. Denis MacEoin, "Baha'ism," in *A Handbook of Living Religions*, pp. 475–98.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 476.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 494.
11. A. Bausani, "Can Monotheism Be Taught?" *Numen*, Vol. 10 (1963), p. 168, in which monotheisms are ordered along a triple [p. xxxvii] scheme: (1) Monotheisms proper (Judaism and Islam [primary]); Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith [secondary]); (2) Failed monotheisms (Zoroastrianism [primary]; Manichaeism [secondary]; Akhenaton's reform [archaic]); and (3) Para-monotheisms (Sikhism and various mysticisms).

12. On this point, MacEoin's analysis is apt: "Apart from their undoubted intrinsic interest, Babism and Baha'ism seem to me to be significant in the present context for a number of reasons. It is, first of all, worth noting that, although nineteenth-century Islam witnessed the emergence of several messianic movements, such as the Mahdiyya of Sudan or the Ahmadiyya in India, all of these remained within the bounds of Islam, from their own point of view, at least. It was only in Shi'i Iran that a movement appeared which broke entirely from Islam and, in the end, successfully established itself as a new and, in some areas, even a rival religion." MacEoin, "The Shi'i Establishment in Modern Iran," in *Islam in the Modern World*, p. 95.)
13. H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh, The King of Glory*, which MacEoin discounts as "emphatically hagiographical" ("From Babism to Baha'ism," p. 244). The only other full-length biography of Bahá'u'lláh is in Persian: M. A. Faydí, *Hayát-i Haḍrat-i Bahá'u'lláh*. See also A. Bausani, q.v. "Bahá' Alláh," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd Edition).
14. Certain of these supplemental primary sources are cited by Amanat: "M. A. Malik Khusravī's *Iqlīm-i Nūr* (Tehran, 118 Badī / 1962) contains new material on Bahá'u'lláh's family background and early life. Beside Babi-Bahā'ī primary accounts, including Nabīl, which covers Bahá'u'lláh's life in some detail, three other accounts are of special importance: Sayyid Mahdī Dahajī, Browne Or. MSS no. F.57(9); Mīrzā Jawād Qazvīnī, Browne Or. MSS. no. F.26, tr. E. G. Browne in *MSBR* 3-112; and 'Izzīya Khānum, *Tanbīh al-Nā'imīn*, Browne Or. MSS no. F.60(8) and F.61(9)." (Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850*, p. 361, n. 156.)

As to the last source cited, MacEoin is a little more circumspect as to the authenticity of the texts ascribed to Bahá'u'lláh in stating: "If these are authentic ..." (*Studia Iranica*, Vol. 18 [1989] p. 115). Descriptions of Browne Or. MSS. F.57(9), F.26, [p. xxxviii] F.60(8) and F.61(9) are given in Browne, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, pp. 78, 65, and 79, respectively.

15. The principle duty of this office was the collection of taxes. Cf. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 16, note.

On Mīrzá Buzurg's calligraphy and administrative career, see P. Soucek, s.v. "Abbas," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd Edition). See also H. M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís*, Appendix, "The Village of Quch-Ḥiṣār," pp. 339–45. His marriage to a daughter of Fath 'Alī Sháh, and his forced divorce from her later, sealed his sudden ruination (Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 362).

16. "From that day all the [material] instruments of this world in the eye of this slave [himself] resembled that performance, and had no significance whatsoever [for me], even as much as a grain of mustard. The people of insight can see with the eye of certainty beyond the pomp of possessors of material power its decline. Like those puppets, soon the superficial instruments [of power], the apparent treasures, the worldly ornaments, the military ranks, the luxurious clothes, and their arrogant possessors will proceed toward

the grave chest. In the eyes of the people of insight, all those conflicts, struggles, and arrogance resemble children's toys." (Translated by Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 363–64.)

For a full translation of the Tablet, see *Bahá'í Scriptures*, pp. 81–88. Cf. the Persian text of Lawḥ-i Ra'ís (Bahá'u'lláh's second Tablet to 'Alí Páshá) in *Majmú'iy-i Alwáḥ-i Mubáraka*, pp. 107–111.

17. MacEoin, "From Babism to Baha'ism," p. 223, citing Bahá'u'lláh, *Má'iday-i Ásmání*, 9 vols. (hereinafter referred to as *Má'ida*) vol. 7, p. 136. Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Alwáḥ-i Mubárakay-i Haḍrat-i Bahá'u'lláh Shámil-i Ishráqát wa Chand Lawḥ Dígar* (hereafter referred to as *Ishráqát*), 34. See also a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh addressed to a certain "Mahdí" in *Iqtidárát*, pp. 116ff.
18. Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. II, pp. 348–49, citing Fáḍil-i Mázandarání, *Asrár al-Áthár*. A glossary of Bahá'í terms, Vol. 2, pp. 17–18.
19. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 106–107.
20. S. Lambden, "The Sinaitic Mysteries: Notes on Moses/Sinai Motifs in Bábí and Bahá'í Scripture," in *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, p. 109.
21. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 220. [p. xxxix]
22. M. Afnán and W. Hatcher, "Western Islamic Scholarship and Bahá'í Origins," *Religion*, Vol. 15 (1985), p. 47, n. 6.
23. Cited by Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 102.
24. Goldziher perhaps understates the phenomenology of the Bábí religion by saying: "the Báb's revelation ... had been, in reality, no more than a reform of Islam." (*Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 249). Evidently, for Goldziher the Bahá'í Faith outstrips this reductionism. See further, G. Lèderer, "Goldziher's 'Bahá'í correspondence,'" in *The Arabist. Budapest Studies in Arabic*, Vol. 1, pp. 103–119, and Goldziher, "Verhältnis des Báb zu früheren Šúfí-Lehrern," *Der Islam*, Vol. 11 (1921), pp. 252–54. The definitive academic history of the Bábí religion is now Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*. For a sociological approach to the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith, see P. Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From messianic Shi'ism to a world religion*.
25. S. A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 233, n. 9.
26. Amanat, *Resurrection*, p. 261, regarding the date of Mullá Ḥusayn's visit to Tehran.
27. The Báb's early writings do speak of holy war to a considerable degree, while his later writings do not. This fact has given rise to a controversy over how to interpret the Bábí movement as a whole. See MacEoin, "The Bábí Concept of Holy War," *Religion*, Vol. 12 (1982), pp. 93–129; and "From Babism to Baha'ism: Problems of Militancy, Quietism, and Conflation in the Construction of a Religion," *Religion*, Vol. 13 (1983), pp. 219–55. The re-

sults of MacEoin's analyses in the former article are challenged by M. Afrán and W. Hatcher, "Western Islamic Scholarship and Bahá'í Origins," *Religion*, Vol. 15 (1985), pp. 29–51. MacEoin's rejoinder appears in the same journal, "Bahá'í Fundamentalism and the Academic Study of the Bábí Movement," *Religion*, Vol. 16 (1986), pp. 57–84. All three neglected to consider the views of R. Mehrabkhani, "Some Notes on Fundamental Principles: Western Scholarship and the Religion of the Báb," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 2, no. 4 (March 1984), pp. 22–43, esp. 29–35.

28. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 207.
29. Momen, "The Social Basis of the Bábí Upheavals in Iran (1848-53)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 15 (1983), pp. 157–83. [p. xl]
30. On the circumstances of his imprisonment, see F. Kazemzadeh and K. Kazemzadeh, "Bahá'u'lláh's Prison Sentence: The Official Account," *World Order*, Vol. 13, no. 2 (Winter 1978-79), pp. 11–14.
31. Translated by Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 101.
32. *Ibid.*, 101–102.
33. In a discourse on the topic of Christian symbolism, 'Abdu'l-Bahá adduces a passage in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to the Shah, in which Bahá'u'lláh looks back at the commencement of his revelatory visions: "O King! I was but a man like others, asleep on My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been." Interpreting this statement, 'Abdu'l-Bahá remarks:

This is the state of Manifestation (*tajallí*): it is not sensible; it is an intellectual reality, exempt and freed from time, from past, present and future; it is an explanation (*ta'bír*), a simile (*tamthíl*), a metaphor (*majáz*) and is not to be accepted literally; it is not a state to be comprehended by man. ... For example, it is a Persian and Arabic expression to say that the earth was asleep, and the spring came, and it awoke; or the earth was dead, and the spring came, and it revived.

These expressions are metaphors (*ta'bír-i tamthílí*), allegories (*tashbíh*), mystic explanations (*ta'wíl*) in the world of signification (*'álam-i ma'ání*). Briefly, the Holy Manifestations have ever been, and ever will be, Luminous Realities. ... Before declaring Their manifestation, They are silent and quiet like a sleeper, and after Their manifestation, They speak and are illuminated, like one who is awake.

Literally, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement is: *ín tá'bír wa tamthíl ast, majáz ast, nah haqíqat*, "This is an explanation and comparison; it is figuration, not [literal] reality." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 85; Persian text in *Mufávađát*, p. 63.) The reason this statement was made is that, in Bahá'í theophany, Bahá'u'lláh had a pre-existence (unlike other men) and was from that time forward destined to become a Manifestation of God. The same ideology does concede, however, that Bahá'u'lláh's personal conscious-

ness of his destiny did progress through stages of increasing self-awareness of his mission. [p. xli]

34. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 230. This schism at the leadership level of the Bábí exile community is known in Bahá'í history as the “Most Great Separation.”
35. The Azalí faction continued to be known as the “people of the Bayán” and the followers of Bahá'u'lláh became known as the “people of Bahá” (*ahl al-Bahá'*).
36. Cited by M. Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 229–30.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 230. Browne was granted four successive interviews with Bahá'u'lláh during the five days he was a guest at Bahjí (April 15–20, 1890). Evidently, Bahá'u'lláh's only reference to that historic encounter is in a Tablet in which reference to Browne is oblique: “The youth mentioned ... attained Our presence. Although this Wronged One had not consorted for many years past with people from foreign lands, We received him on several occasions. Portents of sincerity could be discerned on his visage. We beseech God to aid him in such undertakings which would be conducive to ... the betterment of the world.” (Translation and facsimile of original Tablet in H. M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*, 52 and frontispiece). Bahá'u'lláh sent Browne a pair of spectacles imported from China, a photograph of which appears in Browne, *Selections*, Figure 3.
38. Cited in Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, pp. 224–25. A similar reaction is recorded of the Christian watchmaker, Constantine, who on August 28, 1868, on behalf of Dr. Fáris Effendi—the first known Christian convert to the Bahá'í Faith—delivered a letter to Bahá'u'lláh aboard the steamship en route to the prison-city of 'Akká. After catching up with the steamer just as it was leaving the Port of Alexandria, Constantine caught a glimpse of Bahá'u'lláh, and exclaimed to Fáris on returning: “By God! I saw the Father of Christ!” See Balyuzi's translation of Nabíl's unpublished history of Bahá'u'lláh in *Bahá'u'lláh, The King of Glory*, pp. 265–68. See also K. Beveridge, “From Adrianople to 'Akká, the Austrian Lloyd,” *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (March 1986), pp. 8–32; and A. Faizi, *From Adrianople to 'Akká* (1969/1974), pp. 21–25.
39. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 365.

[p. xlii]

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STUDIES IN THE BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í RELIGIONS

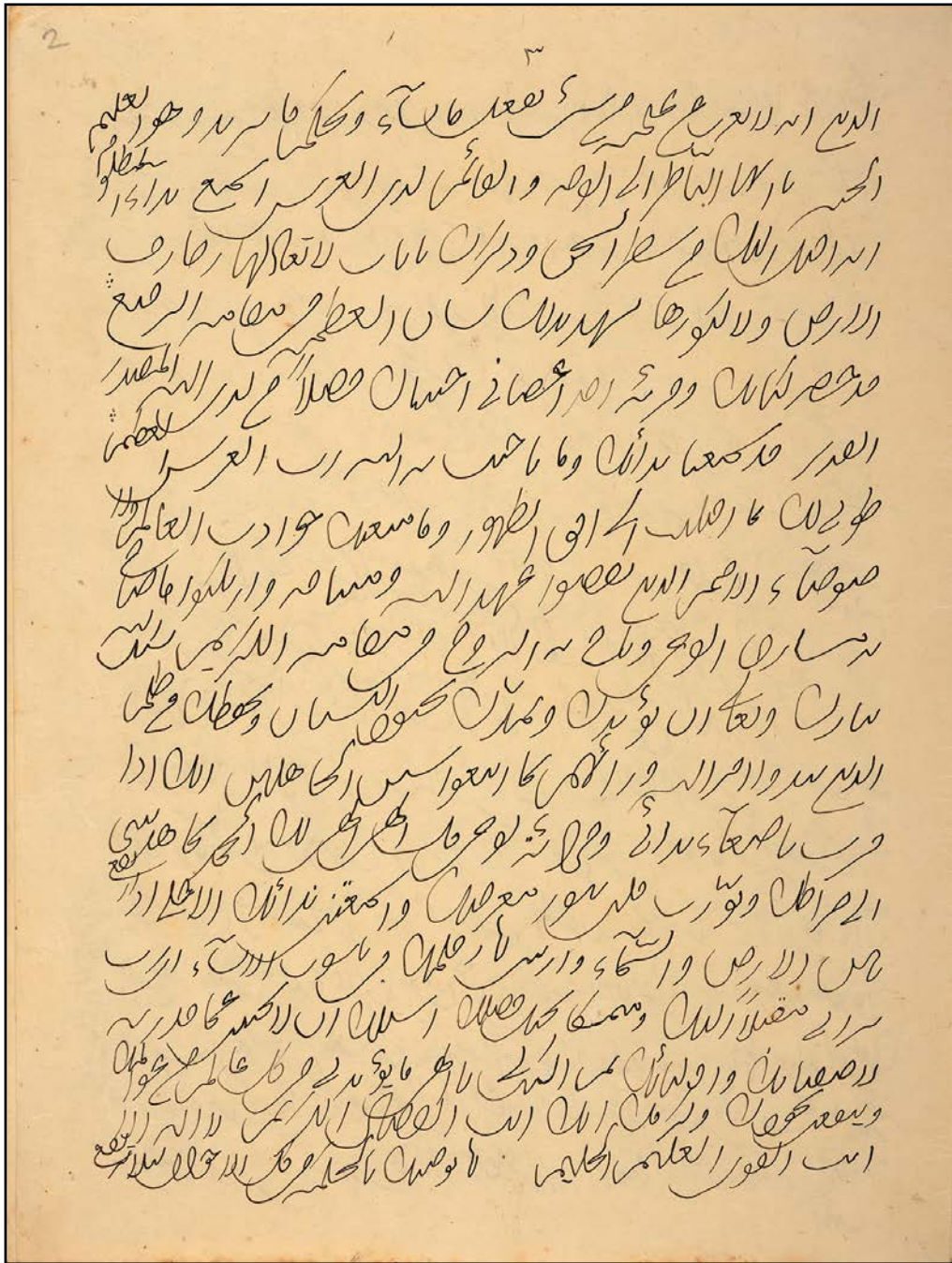
VOLUME SEVEN

SYMBOL AND SECRET

QUR'AN COMMENTARY IN
BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S KITÁB-I ÍQÁN

REVELATION WRITING

Fig. 4(a): "Revelation writing" in the hand of Mírzá Aqá Ján, Bahá'ú'lláh's amanuensis, taken down in almost illegible script at a rapid pace as Bahá'ú'lláh extemporaneously revealed verses. (Courtesy of the [British Library](#).) The stenographic "revelation writing"—presumed to have been the first copy of the *Kitáb-i Iqán*—has been lost.



[p. 1]

CHAPTER ONE

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH
AND THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE

THE NATURE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S REVELATION

Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be the revealer of God's will for a new period in history. But this claim was made explicit in 1863, after the Book of Certitude was written. Therefore, the status of this work relative to Bahá'u'lláh's own self-consciousness at the time is an important issue in Bahá'í studies.

The spontaneity and rapidity with which Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Book of Certitude became a matter of some renown among early Bábís, the majority of whom would later accept Bahá'u'lláh's ability to "reveal verses" from God as a sign of prophetic authenticity. Bahá'u'lláh did not fail to astonish Bábís on this account. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the Book of Certitude constitutes an act of revelation, a few general remarks on the nature of Bahá'u'lláh's acts of revelation would provide a wider context for understanding the work in question.

One account of Bahá'u'lláh's revelatory experiences is given by Sayyid Asadu'lláh-i Qumí, who met Bahá'u'lláh in 1886. In those days it was customary to write Persian and Arabic with reed pens, which often produced a shrill sound, [p. 2] described as a shriek. The calligrapher could control the sound to a certain extent, arousing a rush of excitement in onlookers:

I recall that as Mírzá Áqá Ján [Bahá'u'lláh's scribe] was recording the words of Bahá'u'lláh at the time of revelation, the shrill sound of his pen could be heard from a distance of about twenty paces. In the history of the Faith not a great deal has been recorded about the manner in which the Tablets were revealed. For this reason ... I shall describe it. ...

Mírzá Áqá Ján had a large ink pot about the size of a small bowl. He also had available about ten to twelve pens and large sheets of paper in stacks. In those days all letters which arrived for Bahá'u'lláh were received by Mírzá Áqá Ján. He would bring these into the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and, having obtained permission, would read them. After-

wards the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] would direct him [Mírzá Áqá Ján] to take up his pen and record the Tablet which was revealed in reply.

Such was the speed with which he used to write the revealed Word that the ink of the first word was scarcely yet dry when the whole page was finished. It seemed as if someone had dipped a lock of hair in the ink and applied it over the whole page. None of the words was written clearly and they were illegible to all except Mírzá Áqá Ján. There were occasions when even he could not decipher the words and had to seek the help of Bahá'u'lláh. When revelation had ceased, then in accordance with Bahá'u'lláh's instruction Mírzá Áqá Ján would rewrite the Tablet in his best hand and dispatch it to its destination.¹

Although this anecdote reflects as much upon Mírzá Áqá Ján as upon Bahá'u'lláh's celerity, it does show how spontaneous Bahá'u'lláh's dictations were, at least in the eyes of his followers.

The question of exactly when Bahá'u'lláh assumed his role as revelator affects considerably the interpretation of the Book of Certitude. In New Testament scholarship, the counterpart to this question is that of the "messianic secret." Jesus is often portrayed in the Gospels (primarily in Mark) as having an air of secrecy about his messiahship.²

[p. 3] The classic 1901 study by Wrede (*Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*) takes the secrecy pericopes in Mark as unhistorical. Wrede theorized that the secrecy motif was a literary device contrived to reflect the post-resurrection belief in Jesus as Messiah.³ Although questions of literary falsification are not applicable in the Book of Certitude, one may ask: Does the theme of messianic secrecy afford a parallel here? Was Bahá'u'lláh in fact harboring his own messianic secret during the Baghdad period? We will explore this possibility. It is an attractive hypothesis, but its verifiability presents a problem.

IS THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE "REVELATION"?

Knowing whether Bahá'u'lláh regarded the Book of Certitude as "revelation" at the time of its writing would tell us a great deal about his self-concept at that time. Was he or was he not keeping a messianic secret?

Do Bahá'u'lláh's implicit claims during the Baghdad period (1853-63) indicate a "Secret that stirred within His bosom," as official Bahá'í history maintains, or are such claims to be understood within the context of the exalted theophoric language characteristic of Bábí mysticism at the time? The language of ecstatic mysticism typically exhibits a kind of spiritual

bravado. In contrast, the language of revelation is typified by allusion to (or assertion of) divine authority, with a commission intended for individuals, for groups, or for the entire human race. Was Bahá'u'lláh consciously “revealing” the Book of Certitude?⁴

The answer, of course, greatly influences the reading of the text. If Bahá'u'lláh gives no indication that the text is revealed, then the reader might be justified in simply reading the Book of Certitude as a Bábí apologetic. If, on the other hand, there is evidence to show that the author considered the [p. 4] text revealed at the time of its composition, the reader may be fairly sure that Bahá'u'lláh already had a strong sense of divine election.

Internal evidence suggests that the author of the Book of Certitude did indeed consider the text to be “revealed.” The most telling ground on which to draw this conclusion may be found in Bahá'u'lláh's authorial colophon at the end the text, which makes explicit a claim that the Book of Certitude is “revealed.” If the text was expressly claimed as revelation at the time of its writing, it should be added that this claim was given little prominence prior to Bahá'u'lláh's declaration.

E. G. Browne was puzzled by the colophon ending the Kitáb-i Íqán, since he had difficulty reconciling any such revelatory claim to the fact that Bahá'u'lláh was still a Bábí. The Bábí community at that time was, at least nominally, under the leadership of Bahá'u'lláh's half-brother Şubḥ-i Azal. The relationship between these two rival claimants will be discussed below. On the colophon itself, Browne observes:

The colophon with which the Íqán closes deserves notice. It runs as follows: *'Al-munzalu min al-Bá wa'l-Há, wa's-salámu 'alá man sami'a naghmata'l-warqá fí sidrati'l-muntahá fasubḥána Rabbaná 'l-A'lá,* “Revealed from the B. and the H. (i.e., Behá) and peace (be) upon whomsoever heareth the song of the dove on the 'lote-tree beyond which there is no passing,' and glory (be) to our Lord the Most High.”⁵

Shoghi Effendi translates the colophon as follows:

Revealed by the “Bá” and the “Há.”

Peace be upon him that inclineth his ear unto the melody of the Mystic Bird calling from the Sadratu'l-Muntahá!

Glorified be our Lord, the Most High!⁶

The reference to the *Sidrat al-muntahá* (the Lotus-Tree of the boundary, or the Lote-Tree beyond which there is no passing) is Qur'anic (Qur'án 53:14). The association clearly is [p. 5] revelatory. On the explicit claim to revelation, Browne remarks:

The expression *munzal* ('revealed,' 'sent down') is remarkable, since we have seen that Bahá at this date asserted that he 'claimed no authority over any one,' which statement could scarcely be put forward if he intended the work in which it occurs to be regarded in the light of a revelation. I therefore think it most probable that the colophon was added at a later date, after Bahá's claim had been put forward and accepted by the majority of the Bábís, and when all his writings (including, probably, those composed at a date previous to this claim) were regarded as inspired. The point can only be settled definitely when a copy of the *Íqán* written previously to this date (i.e., before A.H. 1283, A.D. 1866–67) can be obtained and examined. The British Museum MS. ends with the same colophon, except that *al-manzúl* is written instead of *al-munzal*.⁷

Browne is correct in raising the issue of the presence of the colophon in the earliest manuscripts of the text. It is hoped that some day a critical edition of the *Kitáb-i Íqán* will be undertaken, which will no doubt settle such textual questions. The most reliable manuscripts I have consulted indicate that the original word was *al-manzúl*. The definitive answer would come, of course, from examining the original manuscript.

Although there is no doubt that the expression "revealed" does exist in the original colophon, we must find corroboration for the assertion of revelation on other internal grounds. One passage for which a case can be made for implied claim to revelation is the following:

By God! This Bird of Heaven, now dwelling upon the dust, can, besides these melodies, utter a myriad songs, and is able, apart from these utterances, to unfold innumerable mysteries. Every single note of its unpronounced utterances is immeasurably exalted above all that hath already been revealed,⁸ and immensely glorified beyond that which hath streamed from this Pen. Let the future disclose the hour when the Brides of inner **[p. 6]** meaning will, as decreed by the Will of God, hasten forth unveiled, out of their mystic mansions, and manifest themselves in the ancient realm of being.⁹

Is this a mystical claim or a prophetic claim? The designation "Bird of Heaven" is more literally rendered "earthly Dove" (*ḥamámíy-i turábí*) by Ali-Kuli Khan.¹⁰ The translation given by Shoghi Effendi reflects the sense that, since a bird normally flies in the sky or perches in a tree, the "earthly Dove" (or, inelegantly, "bird of dust") signifies a man of God obliged to live in mortality. At any rate, what the dove claims to do is incontestably a gift from "heaven." Bahá'u'lláh's professed ability to unfold "innumerable mysteries" (*rumúz-há*) seems contextually related to the intimation, "let the future disclose the hour." Bahá'u'lláh follows with a quotation in Arabic,¹¹ which ends:

All proclaim His Revelation (*amr*)¹² and all unfold the mysteries (*asrár*) of His Spirit.¹³

The entire passage would appear (albeit in retrospect) to be a claim to impending revelation, expressed obliquely, with a deliberate artifice of ambivalence.

In similar fashion, Bahá'ú'lláh opens Part Two of the book with these words in Arabic:

Verily He Who is the Day-Star of Truth and Revealer of the Supreme Being holdeth, for all time, undisputed sovereignty over all that is in heaven and on earth, though no man be found on earth to obey Him. He verily is independent of all earthly dominion, though he be utterly destitute. Thus We reveal (*nazharu*) unto thee the mysteries of the Cause (*asrár al-amr*) of God, and bestow upon thee the gems of divine wisdom, that haply thou mayest soar on the wings of renunciation to those heights that are veiled from the eyes of men.¹⁴

[p. 7] This is oblique self-disclosure. The verb *nazharu* comes from the root *zahara*, from which derives the Bahá'í technical term for one unto whom God reveals and in whom God metaphorically “appears,” i.e., a “Manifestation” (*zuhúr*) of God.¹⁵ The verb does not necessarily denote (or exclude) revelation, but it can carry that connotation. In an Islamic context, any claim to expounding the “mysteries of God” could easily be construed as an explicit claim to some kind of divine election. But deliberate ambiguity is artfully maintained here.

DATE OF REVELATION

Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 to 1957, produced what became the standard translation of the Book of Certitude. Ideally, a translator should also be an authority on the text. Thus we look to Shoghi Effendi's pronouncements, as the logical starting point for dating the text in question. As to the date of revelation, Shoghi Effendi has fixed 1278 A.H. on internal grounds. In a letter written in the early years of his leadership, the Guardian initially had given 1861 as the year.¹⁶ Because the year 1278 A.H. converts to 1861–62, Shoghi Effendi presumably did not have any more specific data at his disposal at that time. Later, he quite definitely designated the year as 1862.¹⁷

Shoghi Effendi also is quite definite about the fact that the Book of Certitude was revealed in two days and two nights.¹⁸ The Báb's unconverted maternal uncle, Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad, at the urging of his Bábí relative Mírzá Áqáy-i Núru'd-Dín, had submitted certain questions to Bahá'ú'lláh, but had not much time to receive his answers.¹⁹ In *Khándán-i Afnán*, the Persian biography of the Afnán family (the relatives of the Báb), Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad states that Bahá'ú'lláh completed the Íqán within two days of having received the

questions submitted to him. This is confirmed in the unpublished memoirs of Áqáy-i Núru'd-Dín.²⁰

[p. 8] Originally it had been thought that the text was revealed in one night. Based on information obtained from Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, in the preface to his first English translation of the Book of Certitude, Ali-Kuli Khan states:

According to the prevailing opinion of the Bahais, it was written in one night by the Supreme Pen [Bahá'u'lláh]. It is certain that Persian pilgrims to the holy sanctuaries in Irak do not stop in Baghdad more than one day. Even if Ḥájí-Seyd-Mohammed, as an exception to this custom, had remained in Baghdad a longer time, it is not probable that he could have attained to the presence of Baha Ullah more than two or three times. The Seyd submitted his questions through Ḥájí-Seyd-Jawad of Karbila, to whom Baha Ullah had sent this message, "Let the maternal uncle of the Bab write down his questions; We will then write an answer to each." This strengthens the opinion of the rapidity of the Book.²¹

It appears that the pilgrim returned with the original in hand, and this was kept in the family of the Báb's uncle until 1948, when it was presented to the Guardian.

It is remarkable that a work of this size (some 200 pages in Persian) should have been revealed *and copied* within so short a time. Both reports, of the one-day and two-day periods of revelation, are reconcilable if the text was revealed within the first twenty-four hours and transcribed from "revelation writing" (*khaff-i tanzil*), now lost, within the next day and night. A further possibility has been raised by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. In its Memorandum dated 22 January 1995, the Research Department writes:

Aside from the statements of the Guardian, on page 138 of *God Passes By*, we have located no other historical evidence of the span of time in which the book was revealed. It is interesting to note that Shoghi Effendi says only that the book was revealed within the space of two days and nights. The question of when **[p. 9]** a copy was made is not addressed. At the top of the same page, the Guardian states that "the unrecorded verses that streamed from His lips averaged, in a single day and night, the equivalent of the Qur'án!" Bahá'u'lláh Himself testifies to this phenomenon. See, for instance, His description in the *Lawḥ-i Naṣír in Majmú'ih* (Cairo: 1920), p. 175.

On the 1278 A.H./1861–62 C.E. date of composition [see post-publication "Note" at the end of this Chapter], Browne (writing in 1889) at one point concurred, giving a literal translation of the internal evidence from the Book of Certitude itself:

One thousand two hundred and seventy-eight years have passed since the Manifestation of the 'Point of the Furqán' (*i.e.* Muḥammad, who is so called in correspondence with the title 'Point of the Beyán' applied to the Báb), and all these worthless wretches have read the Qur'án every morning, and have not yet attained to a single letter of the purport thereof. (*Hál hazár ú divíst ú haftád (ú) hasht siné az zuhúr-i-Nuḳṭa-i-Furqán guzash, va jamí'-i-ín hamaj-i-ra'á' dar har šabáh talávat-i-Qur'án namúde-and, va hanúz bi-ḥarfí az maḳsúd-i-án fá'iz na-shudé.*)²²

Browne reminds us that although "the Báb is very fond of dating not from the *hijra*, but from the *bí'sat*²³ (mission) of Muḥammad, which he places ten years earlier," no compelling reason requires that Bahá'u'lláh, though at the time a Bábí, followed the Báb's system of dating. (Had Bahá'u'lláh followed the Báb's method of reckoning, the reference to 1,278 years would have converted to 1268 A.H.) Furthermore, Browne concludes, judging from the two references to Baghdad in the text itself, that 1278 A.H., and not 1268 A.H. (when Bahá'u'lláh was in Tehran), is intended.²⁴ In 1892, Browne revised his dating based on other internal grounds, complicating the problem somewhat.

Browne notes that Bahá'u'lláh chose to return from exile when, "the order to return emanated from the source of command" (*az mašdar-i amr ḥukm-i rujú' šádir shud*).²⁵ In the sentences immediately following in the Persian text, Bahá'u'lláh [p. 10] states, "What pen can recount the things We beheld upon Our return! Two years have elapsed during which Our enemies have ceaselessly and assiduously contrived to exterminate Us, whereunto all witness."²⁶ Browne understood the reference to "two years" as the period immediately following Bahá'u'lláh's return in 1856 from a self-imposed exile in the mountains of Kurdistán.

But it seems that Browne's reading may be mistaken. According to Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini, the presence of the adverb "now" (*hál*) in the Persian text clearly identifies the present. Bahá'u'lláh evidently is referring to machinations against him which had been ongoing for the past two years from the time of writing. This is probably a reference to the schemes of Sayyid Muḥammad Iṣfahání, Bahá's mortal enemy.²⁷

In an apparent preference for Browne's revised determination, MacEoin now favors the year circa 1858²⁸ over 1861–62, such that Browne's argument is still maintained in some current scholarship. Browne reasoned:

[A]ll the writings wherein Behá [Bahá'u'lláh] clearly advances a claim to supremacy, contain internal evidence to prove that they were not written before the Adrianople period. The *Íḳán*, which is the only one of Behá's works certainly known to have been written in Baghdad, contains no declaration of such a claim. ... Now, according to Nabíl's poem

(stanza 6), Bahá returned to Baghdád from his two years' retirement at the age of forty, i.e. in A.H. 1272–3 (A.D. 1856), so that the *Íqán* must have been concluded ... in A.D. 1858.²⁹

However, the return from exile is, at best, a past event, a *terminus a quo* (another of which may be the citation of Arabic Hidden Word No. 62, included without quotation formula in the Book of Certitude itself).³⁰

There is, however, one further piece of internal evidence which corroborates—I think conclusively—the 1278 date. In speaking of the persecution of the Bábís, Bahá'u'lláh draws [p. 11] an interesting comparison, and contrast, to the martyrdom of Imám Ḥusayn:

Were not the happenings of the life of the “Prince of Martyrs” regarded as the greatest of all events, as the supreme evidence of his truth? Did not the people of old declare those happenings to be unprecedented? Did they not maintain that no manifestation of truth ever evinced such constancy, such conspicuous glory? And yet, that episode of his life, commencing as it did in the morning, was brought to a close by the middle of the same day, whereas, these holy lights have, for eighteen years, heroically endured the showers of afflictions which, from every side, have rained upon them.³¹

The reference to eighteen years squares with the explicit mention of 1278, as the declaration of the Báb (and thereafter the Bábí movement) took place in 1260 A.H./1844 C.E. Amanat states: “All the sources agree with the Bab [Bayán II, 7, 30] that it was on the night of 5 Jumādā al-Ūlā 1260/22 May 1844 that Mullā Ḥusayn fully accepted Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad’s claim” to *bábiyya* (Gatehood).³² This date should have been a matter of general knowledge among the Bábís, irrespective of when formal use of the Badí’ calendar commenced among them and among Bahá’ís thereafter. (The Badí’ calendar of 19 months of 19 days each, with intervening intercalary days to complete the solar year, was established by the Báb in the *Kitáb al-Asmá’*, and was later ratified, with minor changes, by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*, which stated that it should begin with the Báb’s declaration.)³³

There is no question that Bahá'u'lláh had in mind the year 1260 A.H., as references to the apocalyptic significance of that date occur elsewhere in the *Kitáb-i Íqán*, as well as an explicit reference to the Báb’s declaration in the year 1260.³⁴ By simple calculation, 22 May 1844, plus eighteen solar years equals 22 May 1862. But Bahá'u'lláh was not referring to solar years. For lunar years, the rule of thumb is that a lunar [p. 12] year is around eleven days shorter than the solar year. To approximate dating, we shall take Bahá'u'lláh literally and exclude the possibility of his having rounded up. Disregarding leap years, let us subtract 198 days (11 days x 18 years), from 22 May 1862. This yields early November 1861, give or take a few days. Only if Bahá'u'lláh meant a period of time well over eighteen years, does a dating some time in 1862

become likely. For this reason, the more conservative dating for the revelation of the Book of Certitude would be 1278 A.H., equivalent to 1861–62 C.E.

The date of revelation of the Book of Certitude is, I think, established as 1278 A.H. on fairly straightforward and explicit internal grounds. But conversion to the Gregorian calendar is not so precise. The official Bahá'í date, though at one time 1861 C.E., is now 1862 C.E. To err on the side of caution, until specific justification for 1862 comes to light, a more conservative estimate of 1861–62 is to be preferred for purposes of academic investigation. Apart from intrinsic interest over the date of the text itself, its fixed place within an overall time frame goes far toward situating the Book of Certitude within Bahá'u'lláh's developing messianic self-consciousness.³⁵

[**Note:** Subsequent to the publication of *Symbol and Secret*, fresh evidence for the dating of the Iqan has been brought to light by Dr. Ahang Rabbani, "The Conversion of the Great-Uncle of the Báb," *World Order* 30.3 (Spring 1999): 19–38. Dr. Rabbani has translated a letter published in Muḥammad 'Alí-yi Fayḏí, *Kitáb-i Khándán-i Afnán Sidriy-i Rahmán* (Tehran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 127 B.E. [1970–71]), pp. 42–43, written by Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad (1798–1896), known as the "Greater Uncle" (*Khál-i Akbar*), the eldest maternal uncle of the Báb—the one to whom Bahá'u'lláh revealed the *Kitáb-i Íqán*—to his eldest son, Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taqí, known as the *Vakíl-Dawla*, after the former had visited Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad and had received the *Kitáb-i Íqán*. The letter, dated 5 Rajab 1277 A.H. (17 January 1861), reads, in part: "Praised be God. I do not have much time to write. I attained the presence of His Holiness Bahá, upon Him be God's peace. ... He showered us with utmost affection and kindness and asked that we stay for the night and we remained in His presence." (Tr. Rabbani, "Conversion," 35.) The date of this letter provides a *terminus ad quem*, placing the date of the Iqan squarely in 1277 A.H. rather than 1278, and probably just a few days prior to 17 January 1861. This new finding may be decisive in arriving at a nearly precise date for the revelation of the Iqan. Dr. Rabbani is to be credited with unearthing this new (and possibly conclusive) evidence, although the present writer [i.e., Buck] may have been the first to realize its implications for dating the Iqan. This new evidence now appears to overrule the internal evidence of 1278 A.H. given in the Iqan itself, upon which evidence Shoghi Effendi based his own dating of 1861–62. The discovery requires further investigation. See Christopher Buck, "The Kitáb-i Íqán: An Introduction to Bahá'u'lláh's Book of Certitude, with Two Digital Reprints of Early Lithographs." *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi & Bahá'í Studies* 2.5 (June 1998) at <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/bhpapers/vol2/iqan&sn.htm>.]

CIRCUMSTANCES OF REVELATION

In Bahá'í terms, the Book of Certitude is considered a demonstrative (but technically, not a philosophical) treatise (*istidláliyya*). Bahá'u'lláh advances and explains various Qur'anic and New Testament passages for a dual purpose: (1) to vindicate the divine mission of the Báb; and (2) implicitly, to establish Bahá'u'lláh's own prophetic credentials on the eve of his proclamation that a cycle of fulfillment has dawned upon the historical horizon, ushering in its wake a global reformation.

The events which led to the revelation of the Book of Certitude were mentioned above. Bahá'u'lláh himself has [p. 13] recounted those events. In a Tablet addressed to Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Majíd-i Shírází, he relates that Hájí Sayyid Javád-i Karbalá'í came to Bahá'u'lláh and informed him that the two uncles of the Báb were at that time in Baghdad, having visited the sacred shrines in Najaf and Karbalá. They were soon to return home. Bahá'u'lláh admonished Hájí Sayyid Javád for failing to teach these uncles, at so opportune a time, of the truth of their Nephew's mission. Hájí Sayyid Javád was then instructed to bid the two brothers to visit Bahá'u'lláh.³⁶

Although the younger brother declined, Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad arrived the next day. Impressed by what Bahá'u'lláh had to say, the Báb's uncle prevailed upon him to vindicate the truth of the Báb's mission, in light of the Báb's apparent failure to fulfill popular eschatological expectations. Bahá'u'lláh agreed and bade the uncle draw up a list of his questions. When the questions were submitted the next day, Bahá'u'lláh revealed a lengthy epistle (over 200 pages in Persian) within forty-eight hours. The Book of Certitude was thus originally known as *Risáliy-i Khál (Epistle to the Uncle)*, but was later designated by Bahá'u'lláh as the *Kitáb-i Íqán*.³⁷

QUESTIONS OCCASIONING THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE

The questions posed by the Báb's uncle make up the structure of the Book of Certitude. These original questions, preserved in family archives, have been published in facsimile.³⁸ They were penned on two sheets of paper and organized under four headings, all dealing with popular Shí'í expectations of the Islamic eschaton, the principal actor of which was to be the heralded Qá'im. The questions may be summarized so:

- (1) *The Day of Resurrection*: Will it be corporeal? How will the just be recompensed and the wicked dealt with?
- (2) *The Twelfth Imám*: How can traditions attesting his occultation be explained?

[p. 14]

- (3) *Qur'anic Interpretation*: How can the literal meaning of scripture be reconciled with the interpretations current among Bábís?
- (4) *Advent of the Qá'im*: How can the apparent non-fulfillment of popular Imámí traditions concerning the Resurrector be explained?³⁹

These questions all center on the seeming contradiction caused by the Báb's claim to a realized eschaton in the absence of a literal fulfillment of scripture and popular expectation.

The recipient of the treatise is addressed throughout the text with such salutations as, "O my brother!"⁴⁰ and "Dear friend!"⁴¹ and "O affectionate seeker!"⁴² Although the circumstances of revelation are specific, one should consider the wider audience Bahá'u'lláh had in mind. Naturally, the Bábís constitute the immediate wider audience: "Give ear, O people of the Bayán," and so on.⁴³ The Bábís, interestingly enough, are addressed in the same way that Bahá'u'lláh would address Christians in later writings: "May God assist us and assist you, O concourse of the Spirit! that perchance ye may in the time of His Manifestation ... attain unto the Presence of God."⁴⁴

Finally, the entire world is addressed: "Sanctify your souls, O ye peoples of the world,"⁴⁵ and: "Behold, O concourse of the earth, the splendours of the End, revealed in the Manifestations of the Beginning!"⁴⁶ Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation to a wider audience is arguably rhetorical, perhaps even a fictive device. But judging from the nature of his later proclamations to potentates and pontiffs, it is quite possible he did have a wider audience in mind.

MANUSCRIPT HISTORY

The manuscript history of the Kitáb-i Íqán presents some difficulties which Bahá'u'lláh himself addresses, attesting to the presence of defective manuscripts of the book already in circulation during his lifetime. In an unpublished Tablet, dated 1298 A.H., to Hand of the Cause Mullá 'Alí-Akbar Shah- **[p. 15]** mírzádi (Ḥájí Ákhúnd), Bahá'u'lláh writes, "some of the copies of the Kitáb-i Íqán are extant in this land [Akká], but all are not correct."⁴⁷ This statement by Bahá'u'lláh would alone warrant the publication of a critical edition of the Kitáb-i Íqán. It may have been a contributing factor in Bahá'u'lláh's decision to authorize publication of the work in Bombay. Publication, of course, went far towards standardizing the text. Textual irregularities are alleged to have been introduced into this printing. This largely polemical issue, raised by a detractor of the Bahá'í Faith, will be resolved in the next section.

It makes sense to deal with the manuscript tradition before discussing its publication. Shoghi Effendi explains:

The main bulk of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh however are to be found in manuscript form written by noted scribes after the fashion of orientals. These scribes did not leave all their manuscripts undated and Jinábi Zain, a very noted Bahá'í scribe, always dated his copies of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh at the end of the volume in what E. G. Browne calls "colophons" and the description of some of these colophons could be found in the works of the Cambridge Professor.

The son of the above-mentioned scribe is still living in Haifa and does very much the same work as his father. He claims that as early as 1868 his father used to write copies of the Íqán for the Bahá'ís in Persia as a source of livelihood, and that after 1885 when he went to 'Akká to join Bahá'u'lláh's party his entire work and time was devoted to copying the sacred writings for sale among Bahá'ís. These copies are to be found throughout the East and are almost invariably dated.⁴⁸

The frontispiece to Balyuzi's *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory* presents a facsimile of the first page of one of the early manuscripts of the Book of Certitude.⁴⁹ Browne was in possession of two manuscripts, both of which are preserved in the E. G. Browne Oriental Collection at the Cambridge University Library: (1) catalogued as MS. F.58(10), acquired by Browne in Shíráz on March 1, 1888; (2) catalogued as MS. [p. 16] F.59(9) (the superior manuscript)⁵⁰, given to Browne in 'Akká on April 20, 1890.⁵¹

The latter manuscript includes a colophon signed by "the letter Zá" and dated 11 Jamáda I 1306 (January 13, 1889).⁵² The same colophon, inscribed in the form of a diamond superimposed on a triangle, tells us that this was the sixty-seventh copy made by "Zá." In Browne's estimation, the manuscript "is an extremely accurate and trustworthy transcript."⁵³

Presumably, Bahá'u'lláh would have dictated the Kitáb-i Íqán, and Mírzá Áqá Ján would have taken it down. This is partly speculation, but is probably true, since the majority of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets were recorded by the same scribe over the forty-year period of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry. Lost would be the transcript itself, the so-called documents of "revelation writing," a specimen of which has been published.⁵⁴

What is now considered the original manuscript of the Kitáb-i Íqán is the copy given to the Báb's uncle. It is in the handwriting of Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, with a few changes and additions penned in the margins by Bahá'u'lláh himself. During the Baghdad period, much of the scribal work was done by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who was eighteen-years old when he transcribed the Kitáb-i Íqán. For decades this manuscript original was an heirloom of the

family of Ḥájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad. In 1948, his great-granddaughter Fátimih Khánum Afnán, presented it to the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith.⁵⁵ The manuscript is now preserved in the International Bahá'í Archives on Mount Carmel.⁵⁶

The existence of this manuscript original would seem sufficient to settle any textual problems encountered in other manuscripts. The original, however, has not been published in facsimile, and so is not readily available for comparison. It is also not altogether certain which manuscript(s) the published editions of the Kitáb-i Íqán are based upon. In one documented case, Monjazeb relates: **[p. 17]**

In the period between its composition and its first printed edition (early 1880s), the Kitáb-i Íqán was widely circulating in Persia through the customary method of hand transcription. This procedure naturally gave rise to the existence of less accurate copies which prompted Bahá'u'lláh to approve several other manuscripts as authoritative versions for the purpose of duplication. One such version, according to Bahá'u'lláh in a Tablet to Jamál-i Burújirdí, was given to Mullá 'Alí-Akbar-i Shahmírzádi who had been appointed earlier by Bahá'u'lláh as a "Hand of the Cause."⁵⁷

These and related problems in the manuscript tradition invite further investigation. Reconstruction of the publication history of the Íqán is no less challenging.

PUBLICATION

The Book of Certitude was possibly the first of Bahá'u'lláh's works to appear in print.⁵⁸ Besides the obvious advantages in disseminating the work, there was perhaps a need to standardize the text as well. A beautifully lithographed edition, bearing no date, was published by relatives of the Báb (the Afnáns) in Bombay possibly in 1299 A.H. (1882 C.E.) by Ḥasaní Zívar Press.⁵⁹

The exact date of the first publication of the Kitáb-i Íqán is itself a matter of controversy. The approximate time frame is fixed by Shoghi Effendi:

The subject you had raised with regard to the date of the publication of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh is interesting as it is important. If I remember correctly the same issue was raised as an open challenge in India by some spokesman of the Ahmadiyya sect. The earliest published writings of Bahá'u'lláh date from the nineties of the last century [i.e., the 1890s].⁶⁰

The nature of the Ahmadiyya-Bahá'í controversy in India is not specified by Shoghi Effendi, but possibly it was a debate [p. 18] over which movement was the first to publish ideas which the two might have had in common.

There is, however, some dispute over exactly when the first edition was printed. According to the Muslim cleric Sayyid Muḥammad Báqir Najafí, the first edition of the Kitáb-i Íqán appeared in "1308" A.H. (1890–1891 C.E.) and not in 1310 A.H. (1893 C.E.), as one Bahá'í scholar asserts.⁶¹ Other evidence suggests that an edition came out prior to either of these alleged first editions of 1308 and 1310. This comes from E. G. Browne.

In the course of his travels in Persia, Browne says he was shown "a copy of the lithographed Bombay edition" by Shaykh Mihdí Qumí, an Azalí Bábí, on July 15, 1888, in Kerman: "(T)he Sheykh began to speak more freely about Behá than he had hitherto done. He produced a copy of the lithographed Bombay edition of the *Íqán*, which he told me had been sent him by the Behá'ís, and pointed out with great disapproval a passage where the Shí'ites are called 'that foul and erring sect.'"⁶² Evidently, the lithographed edition Browne was shown predates the 1308 "first" edition of which Najafí speaks.

Evidence for a possible 1308 edition comes from an editorial written by Shua Ullah Behai (i.e., Shú'a'u'lláh) published in 1935. Speaking of services rendered by his father (Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, Ghuṣn-i Akbar, the "Greater Branch"), a younger son of Bahá'u'lláh who opposed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's leadership of the Bahá'í religion after the death of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892, Shua Ullah writes:

I shall record hereunder one of his [Ghuṣn-i Akbar's] services of which I was fortunate in being an eye witness and a participant. In the year eighteen eighty-nine, by the command of Beha 'U'llah, he journeyed to East India for the sole purpose of publishing some of the sacred Books; India being the only country in which printing presses were available at that time. ... We remained in Bombay over a year, during which time Ghusni Akbar succeeded in organizing a printing firm called 'Naseri [p. 19] Press,' and published five volumes of the teachings of Beha 'U'llah in the Persian and the Arabic languages. After our return to 'Akká, copies of the said volumes were brought to the presence of Beha 'U'llah and received His approval. Indeed, this was a great service to the cause, ... for to this day, of which forty-four years have elapsed, these are the only outstanding volumes of the teachings of Beha 'U'llah ever published.⁶³

Five volumes of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, including the *Kitáb-i Íqán*, were lithographed by Náṣirí Press between 1308 and 1310/1890–1893 C.E. Of the five volumes, two were *Kitáb-i iqtidárát* and *Kitáb-i mubín*, both said to be in the hand of Mishkín-Qalam.⁶⁴ One of the volumes, according to Shoghi Effendi, included the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*.⁶⁵

Mention should also be made of two Bombay lithographs that were published, but without authorization by Bahá'u'lláh. At the request of the Afnáns (relatives of the Báb) in Bombay, Bahá'u'lláh had sent Sulaymán Khán-i Tunukábuní, known as Jamálu'd-Dín and as Jamál Effendi, to India to serve as the first Bahá'í “pioneer” (missionary) of the subcontinent (hence, his Bahá'í renown as the “spiritual father” of the Bahá'ís of India and Burma). Jamál Effendi's first of two missionary sojourns in India lasted a decade, from 1878 to 1888, during which time he “had some of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh printed and widely circulated.”⁶⁶ What Balyuzi does not mention, perhaps out of respect for this outstanding teacher of the Faith, is that Jamál Effendi had, on his own initiative, published writings of Bahá'u'lláh without authorization. In his missionary zeal, but without explicit authorization, Jamál Effendi arranged for the publication of Bahá'u'lláh's *Haft vādí* (*The Seven Valleys*) and the *Kalimát-i maknúnih* (*The Hidden Words*), but without Bahá'u'lláh's name as author, leading many to believe that Jamál himself had written these books.

Returning to the five Bombay lithographs whose publication was authorized by Bahá'u'lláh, one of the five volumes Browne describes as follows: “A collection of selected *Alwáh* ('Tablets') of Bahá'u'lláh, lithographed in 1308/1890–1 in excellent *naskh*, and comprising 360 pages. The place of production and publication is not indicated, but this, and several similar volumes uniform with it, were, I believe, produced in India at some press officially recognized by the Bahá'í leaders. ... There is no title-page, the volume beginning immediately with the *Súratu'l-Haykal*. The copyist's name appears at the end, but unfortunately only in the 'New Writing' [*Khatt-i-Badí*] of the Bahá'ís, which I am unable to read.”⁶⁷ Another source confirms the identities of four of the volumes of Bahá'u'lláh's writings that were published in 1308–1310 A.H.⁶⁸: (1) *Al-Kitáb al-aqdas wa nabdhah min alwáh Bahá' Alláh* (Bombay: Náṣirí Press, 1308/1890–91), a collection of sixty-eight tablets of Bahá'u'lláh in the hand of Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥusayn of Shíráz (“Ḥusayn who was imprisoned in Kharṭúm”), *naskh*, 380 pages of fifteen lines each; (2) *Alwáh-i Bahá'u'lláh mushtamil bar Súrat al-Ḥaykal, Lawḥ al-Ra'ís, Lawḥ al-Aqdas, Lawḥ al-'Amr va ghayrih*—popularly known as *Kitáb-i mubín* (Bombay: Náṣirí Press, 1308/1890–91), a collection of 96 Arabic tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, beginning with *Súratu'l-Haykal*, in the hand of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí (Ghuṣn-i Akbar), *naskh*, 360 pages of 15 lines each; (3) *Iqtidárát va chand lawḥ-i digar* (Bombay: Náṣirí Press, 13th Rajab, 1310/31 January 1893), a collection of thirty-three tablets of Bahá'u'lláh (mostly Persian, some Arabic), in the hand of Mishkín-Qalam, *nasta'liq*, [p. 20] 329 pages of 15 lines each; (6) *Ishráqát va chand lawḥ-i digar* (Bombay: Náṣirí Press, 1310/1892–93), a

collection of thirty-seven Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh (mostly Persian, some Arabic), in the hand of Mishkín-Qalam, *nasta'liq*, 295 pages; (4) *Majmú'iy-i az alvaḥ-i Ḥaḍrat-i Bahá'u'lláh bih khaṭṭ-i Jináb-i Zayn* (Bombay: Náṣirí Press, 1310/1892–93), a collection of twenty-three tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, in the hand of Zayn al Muqarribín, 296 pages. To this list should be added: (5) *Kitáb-i mustaṭáb-i íqán* (Bombay: Náṣirí Press, 1310/1892–93), the first dated lithograph of the Íqán, in the hand of Mishkín-Qalam, *nasta'liq*, 214 pages.

The following two Bombay lithographs may provide important clues to the publication of the two Bombay lithographs (i.e. the undated and the dated) of the Íqán: 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Maqáliy-i shakhṣi sayyah* (known in the West under the title of its English translation, *A Traveller's Narrative*) (Bombay: Náṣirí Press, 26th of Rabí' II, 1308/6th December 1890)—in the hand of Zayn al-Muqarribín, *nasta'liq*, 240 pages of 9 lines each, 21 x 13.5 cm., grey paper; and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Asrár al-ghaybíyya li-asbáb al-madaníyya* (perhaps more widely known by its English translation, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*) (Bombay: Ḥasaní Zívar Press, Rabí' I 1299/January-February 1882), in the hand of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí Shírází, *nasta'liq*, 101 pages of 17 lines each, bearing the hallmark: "Abdoolally Abdoolrahim & Co., Importers." This latter lithograph is the first published work by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but published anonymously. Its publication was arranged by al-Ḥájj Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ḥakim al-Bahá'í. The publication of *Asrár al-ghaybíyya li-asbáb al-madaníyya* may well provide the most reliable attestation of the undated lithographed Íqán to which Balyuzi refers.

There are presently two Bombay lithographs of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Asrár al-ghaybíyya li-asbáb al-madaníyya* in St. Petersburg. One is at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Science (Catalogue of Lithographed Books in Persian, No. 434 (HD II 267)) and the other at St. Petersburg State University (Catalogue of Lithographed Books in Persian, No. 168 (O II 1871)), according to Youli Ioannesyan, Ph.D., Senior Researcher of the Department of the Middle East Studies of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (2006). They are identical. These are catalogued by Baron Rosen in *Collection scientifiques*, vol. 6, p. 253.

Then there are the five volumes were published by Náṣirí Press, formerly located at Frere Road near the blue gate of the Victoria Dock in Bombay; and one volume by Dutt Prashad Press. A survey of early Bombay lithographs confirms the first dated lithograph of the Íqán to be the 1310 A.H. edition in the hand of the celebrated calligrapher, Mishkín-Qalam. I could find no record of a 1308 edition of the Íqán. Najafí states that Browne had used the 1308 edition of the Kitáb-i Íqán in the latter's translation of the *Nuḡṭatu'l-Káf*. Browne himself, however, does not refer to this edition. More puzzling is the fact that Najafí nowhere states where he

found his copy of the putative 1308 Bombay lithograph. This forces the conclusion that Najafí's information is unreliable.

Also suspect are Najafí's charges of errors in Qur'án citations present in the first lithographed edition of the Íqán. In its Memorandum dated 22 January 1995, the Research [p. 21] Department writes: "In neither of the two early lithographed editions of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* are any of the Qur'anic quotes used differently from the *textus receptus* other than the verse 2:210 in the first edition." To his credit, Najafí does provide a facsimile of the first two and final pages of the Íqán in question, which attest an undated, rather than a dated, lithograph.

This still leaves unexplained Browne's record of having been shown a lithographed edition of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* in 1888 A.D. It is Balyuzi who confirms the existence of a pre-1308 A.H edition. On the whole Balyuzi's scholarship was impeccable and meticulous. He states, unfortunately without documentation (though there is no reason to doubt his information): "The Book of Certitude was perhaps the earliest of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh to appear in print. A beautifully lithographed copy, which does not bear a date and must have been printed in Bombay, is known to have been in circulation in the early eighties of the last century."⁶⁹

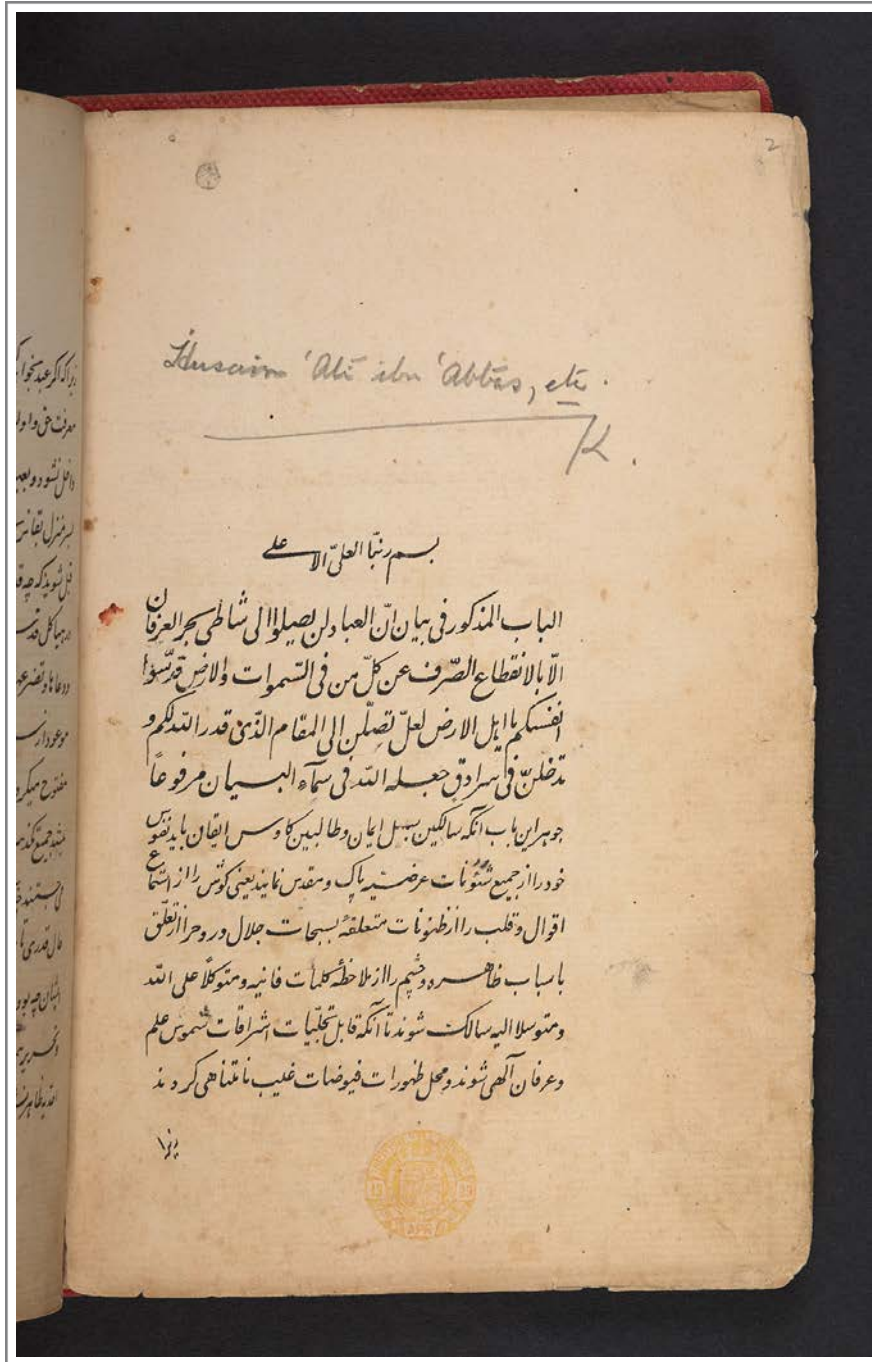
Based on a near-consensus that the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* was probably the first Bahá'í book ever to be (officially) published, and on the strength of the preceding data establishing the second Bahá'í work ever published, it is my conclusion that the first edition of the Íqán, an undated lithograph, [p. 22] was lithographed under the title: *Kitáb-i mustaṭab-i iqán* (although the surviving lithograph is missing the title page), published in Bombay, probably by the Ḥasaní Zívar Press in 1299/1882 (although the extant copy bears neither publication date nor publisher), likely in the hand of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí Shírází, *nasta'líq*, 157 pages of 15 lines each, the lithographing of which was quite possibly arranged by al-Hájj Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ḥakim al-Bahá'í.⁷⁰

Examination of photocopies of pages from an undated early lithograph of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* held at the Bahá'í World Centre and a comparison with a facsimile of the same text in Najafí's *Bahá'íyán*, p. 469, resulted in a perfect match and verification of the identity of the text in question. Moreover, there is a descriptive match with the undated Íqán lithograph Baron Rosen delineates in *Collections scientifiques*, Vol. 6, p. 144:

N. 50/467. 20.5 x 13 c. 157 pages. 151. (longues de 7.5 c.)

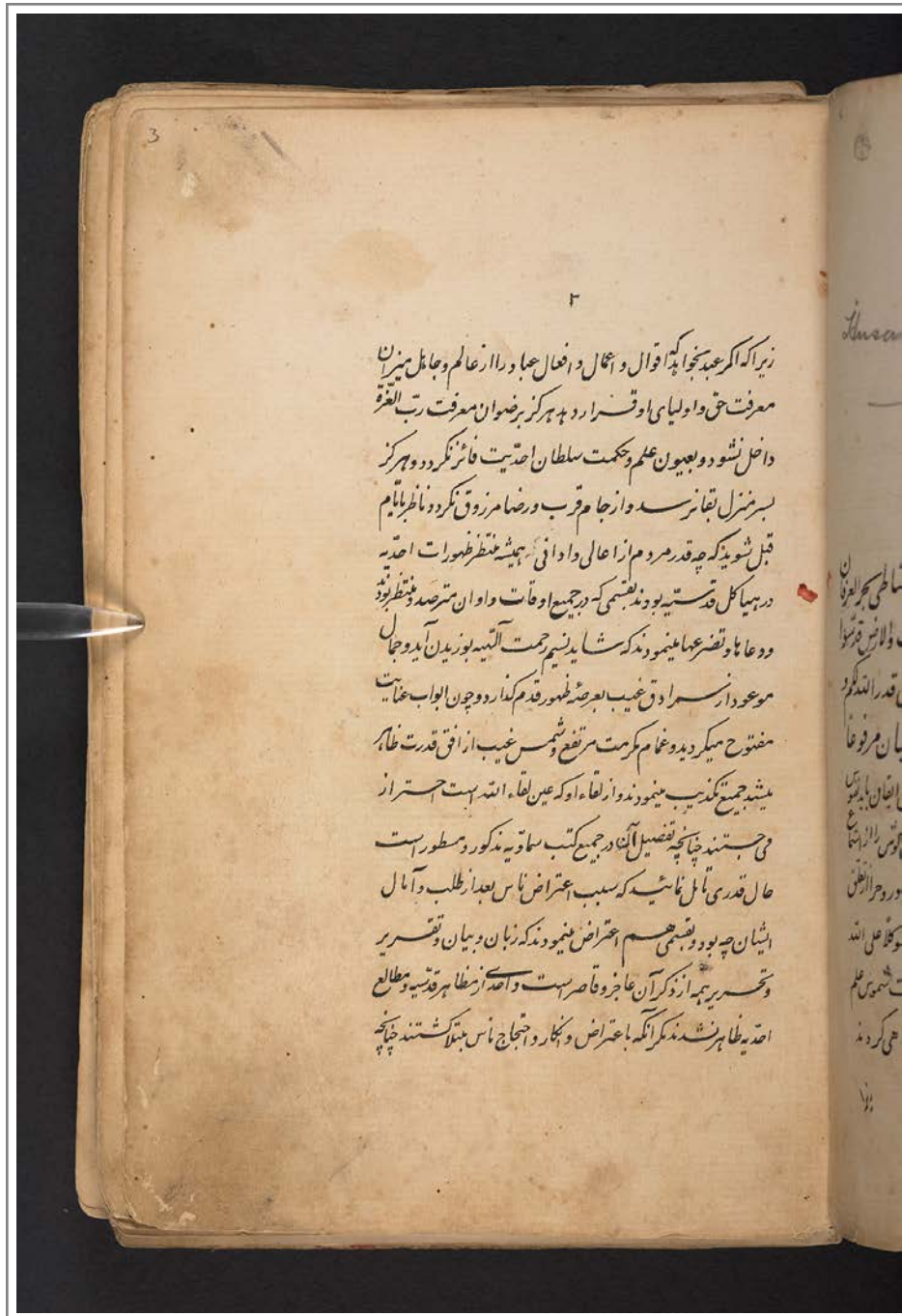
Une édition lithographiée du même, sans titre, ni indication de lieu et date. M. Browne, II, 944, nous apprend qu'il existe une lithographie faite à ce qu'il paraît aux Indes et exécutée avec beaucoup de soin. Elle ne se vend pas ouvertement, tous les exemplaires étant dans les mains d'adhérents de la secte. Il est évident que notre exemplaire est un spécimen de cette édition. Il est en effet que notre exemplaire est un spécimen de cette édition. Il est en effet d'une exécution très-soignée; les caractères *ta'liq* en trahissent l'origine indienne et le papier—très-beau et très fort—porte la marque "Abdoolally Abdoolrahim & Co, Importers".—A la fin on lit la même phrase que dans le autres exx., à savoir: [Arabic text of final sentence of the *Íqān* cited here].

In fine, there are five extant copies of the undated *Íqān* lithograph known to the present writer, the existence of which is verifiable, although locations exist for only three of the four: (1) A lithograph donated by Orientalist M. Gamazof sometime between 1886 and 1889. Baron Rosen concludes: "Il est évident que notre exemplaire est un spécimen de cette édition." It was archived as MS. no. 50/467 in the Institute of Oriental Languages of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in St. Petersburg. [p. 23] It is probably now kept at the Leningrad branch of the Institute of the Peoples of Asia (Institut Narodov Azii), which had absorbed the oriental institutions of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Akademiiia Nauk SSSR). However, in O. F. Akimushkin *et al.*, *Persidskie Tadzhiiskie rukopisi, Instituta Narodov Azii an SSSR* (ed. N. D. Miklukho-Maklai: Moscow, 1964) vol. 1, p. 66,⁷¹ *Collections scientifiques* entry 245 does not appear alongside entry 244, as expected. (2) There is the undated *Íqān* lithograph held by the Bahá'í World Centre Library (Haifa, Israel), indexed as no. BP 362.K8.1892 (tentative dating when catalogued). (3) Another is privately held by Mr. Payam Afsharian, co-owner of Kalimát Press, Los Angeles. (4) There is Najafí's text, the alleged 1308 edition in the hand of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí (Ghuṣn-i Akbar). Najafí gives no location for this text. (5) British Library, Shelfmark 14728.c.21. Fuller details: Title: *Íqān*. Author: Ḥusayn 'Alī ibn 'Abbās Bahā Ullāh. Language: Persian. Identifier: System number: 013154739. Notes: A Persian exposition and defence of Bahā'ī doctrine. Physical Description: 157 pages ; cm. (8°). Shelfmark(s): Asia, Pacific & Africa 14728.c.21. UIN: BLL01013154739. See: Moojan Momen, "The earliest Baha'i publication," <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-earliest-bahai-publication>. See the first two pages of main body of the text below:



THE OPENING PAGE

Fig. 4(b): The opening page of the first lithograph (undated) of the Kitáb-i Íqán, published in Bombay c. 1882. Courtesy of the [British Library](#) (public domain), Asia, Pacific & Africa Collections. [Added May 30, 2022.]



THE NEXT PAGE

Fig. 4(c): The opening page of the first lithograph (undated) of the Kitáb-i Íqán, published in Bombay c. 1882. Courtesy of the [British Library](#) (public domain), Asia, Pacific & Africa Collections. [Added May 30, 2022.]

The first *dated* lithograph of the Kitáb-i Íqán is the 1310 A.H. edition in the hand of Mishkín-Qalam, catalogued as BP 362.K8.1893 in the Bahá'í World Centre Library. "Three copies of the lithograph known to have been lithographed in Bombay, dated 1310/1892," writes the Research Department in its 14 February 1995 Memorandum, "are also held at the Bahá'í World Centre. We know of no others; however, the friends around the world continue to forward historical material to the Bahá'í World Centre when they find it, and there is always hope that other copies may come to light."

The first printed (typeset) edition was published in Cairo, 1318/1900 by al-Mawsú'át Press (216 pages). Based on the above data, the publication record of the Kitáb-i Íqán may be tentatively reconstructed and chronologically ordered as follows:

First edition:				
	Bombay ⁷²	Ḥasaní Zívar Press	1299?/1882?	Lithographed
Text revision:				
	By order of Bahá'u'lláh		1305–1306/1887–89	
Second edition:				
	Bombay ⁷³	Náṣirí Press	1310/1892–93	Lithographed

[p. 24]

Third edition:				
	Cairo ⁷⁴	Mawsú'át Press	1318/1900	Printed
Fourth edition:				
	Cairo ⁷⁵	Faráj Alláh Zakí Pub.	1352/1933	Printed
Fifth edition:				
	Tehran	n.p.	1319 Solar/1941	Cyclostyled
Reprinted:				
	Germany ⁷⁶	Bahá'í-Verlag	136 B.E./1980	Printed
	Karachi	Bahá'í Publishing Trust	144 B.E./1990	Printed

An oblique witness to this chronology is a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to Mullá 'Alí-Akbar, in which we learn that Bahá'u'lláh, for an undisclosed period of time, suspended dissemination of the Kitáb-i Íqán some twenty years after it had first circulated. This, owing to dangers posed to the Faith had too many copies of this work fallen into the hands of its enemies. Taherzadeh states:

... Bahá'u'lláh advised caution and prudence. He explained that it was not wise at that time to print books, because should a large number of books become available, the enemies of the Cause (who were waiting for an excuse) could be provoked into bringing about an upheaval in that land. Bahá'u'lláh intimates that it was for the same reason that He had stopped the dissemination of the Kitáb-i Íqán which had been printed [sic] some twenty years before.⁷⁷

Reference here to twenty years is confusing. In my own study of this unpublished Tablet, recently provided to me by the Universal House of Justice, it seems that Bahá'u'lláh, some twenty years before, had granted permission to a certain Ḥubbu'lláh (perhaps a numerically equivalent code name for a known Bahá'í) to have the Íqán “printed” (*tab' shud*). Permission was granted for only a few copies (*chand jild*) to be disseminated. Bahá'u'lláh states that these copies had not been proofread. In my opinion, this reference to some kind of “printing” cannot have meant a mechanical reproduction.⁷⁸

Bahá'u'lláh's policy of restricting distribution of the Kitáb-i [p. 25] Íqán is stated in this Tablet to Ḥájí Ákhúnd. As for dating, although it is undated, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the two previous pilgrimages the recipient had previously made to 'Akká. Since it is known that the two pilgrimages of Ḥájí Ákhúnd during Bahá'u'lláh's lifetime took place around 1873 and 1888, it is certain that Bahá'u'lláh had revealed this Tablet sometime between 1888 and 1892. Bahá'u'lláh seems to say that the restrictions placed on disseminating the Kitáb-i Íqán had been relaxed for around one year.

Matched with all of the fixed dates established above, it is now possible to map out a chronology that accounts for all of the data adduced so far in this investigation. The first fixed date is 1278 A.H./1861–62 C.E. for the revelation of the Kitáb-i Íqán, on incontrovertible internal grounds. The second fixed date is the Bombay lithograph of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Asrár al-ghaybíyya li-asbáb al-madaníyya* (known in the West as *The Secret of Divine Civilization*) in 1882, which is known either to have followed or coincided with the first lithograph of the Kitáb-i Íqán.⁷⁹

We now have a perfect match with Taherzadeh's notice of Bahá'u'lláh's suspension of publication: (1) The Book of Certitude was revealed in 1278/1861–62. (2) Permission was granted to a certain Ḥubbu'lláh for some kind of limited dissemination, the Íqán described as having been “printed” (unpublished Tablet to Ḥájí Ákhúnd, revealed in 1888 or post-1888). (3) For around twenty years (circa 1868–88), dissemination of the Kitáb-i Íqán was restricted due to very real dangers that mere possession of the book posed to Bahá'ís (same Tablet). (4) Nevertheless, for those twenty years, defective copies of the Íqán did circulate, transcribed by hand (unpublished Tablet to Ḥájí Ákhúnd, dated 1298 A.H./1880-81 C.E.). (5) Notwithstanding, around twenty years after its revelation, an undated Íqán lithograph was published in Bombay

in the early 1880s (probably c. 1299/1882). (6) A hiatus of approximately ten years between the undated (and perhaps [p. 26] unedited) Íqán lithograph and the dated 1310/1892–93 lithograph is partially confirmed by Browne, who in 1889 observed: “Except for a small tract in Persian called *Muduniyyat* [sic] (Civilization), which does not deal directly with religious questions, the Iḵān is, so far as I am aware, the only one of their books which the Babis have published. It was lithographed, I think in India, and much care was bestowed on its execution.”⁸⁰ Note that Browne speaks of one edition only at this point in time—a time prior to 1308 A.H./1890–91 C.E., thus rendering Najafí’s dating of the “first edition” suspect. (7) During 1305–06 A.H./1887–89 C.E., Bahá’u’lláh began the process of editing the Íqán (several Tablets cited by Fáḍil Mázandarání [see below]). (8) Bahá’u’lláh entrusts Ḥájí Ákhúnd with an approved copy (tablet cited by Fáḍil Mázandarání). (9) In 1310/1892–93, a lithograph in the hand of Mishkín-Qalam is published by the Afnáns in Bombay. (10) In 1318/1900, the first authentically printed, rather than lithographed, version is published in Cairo. (11) The current version is the 1352/1933 version and its reprintings.

Throughout this process, the role of Ḥájí Ákhúnd invites further research. In 1880–81, Bahá’u’lláh communicated to Ḥájí Ákhúnd the problem of defective copies of the Íqán. Then, either in 1888 or shortly after, Ḥájí Ákhúnd requested permission to publish the Íqán. Presumably after Bahá’u’lláh’s editing of the text in 1887–89, Ḥájí Ákhúnd was entrusted with an approved copy of the Íqán to which all subsequent copies of the book were supposed to conform. The question remains as to whether or not the Ḥájí Ákhúnd exemplar, or a copy from it, had served as the master copy for the 1310 lithograph.

Bahá’u’lláh is known to have sent three calligraphers to Bombay: (1) Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí (Ghuṣn-i Akbar); (2) Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Khartúmí, and (3) Mishkín-Qalam. In addition to the volume containing the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*, published by Dutt Prashad Press in 1308, it has been possible to verify that five volumes of Bahá’u’lláh’s writings were in fact published by [p. 27] Násirí Press between 1308 and 1310: (1) *Kitáb-i mubín* (1308); (2) *Kitáb-i Íqán* (1310); (3) *Iqtidárát* (1310); (4) *Ishráqát* (1310); and (5) *Majmú’ih* (1310). This perhaps satisfies Shoghi Effendí’s historical note in *God Passes By*. This list does not, however, support Shú’á’u’lláh’s allegation that Bahá’u’lláh was shown all five lithographs for approval upon Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí’s return to ‘Akká in 1891.

Although the problem of the exact identity of the five Bombay lithographs to which the Guardian referred remains unresolved, another approach may be taken in an effort to place the undated Íqán lithograph. The 1890 volume known as *Kitáb-i mubín*, containing the text of the *Súratul-Haykal*, is known to be in the hand of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí. This lithograph ends with a distinctive colophon in the peculiar and indecipherable “new writing” (*khaṭṭ-i badí’*) in-

vented by this particular copyist. The noticeable absence of such a colophon in the undated Bombay Íqán lithograph is incongruent with Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí’s scribal signature of the period around 1308 A.H./1890–91 C.E. Najafí definitely had access to an undated Íqán lithograph, the facsimile of which is a perfect match with the Bahá’í World Centre’s text and with that in the private archives of Payam Afsharian.⁸¹

NAJAFÍ’S ALLEGATIONS

Although his intentions are polemical rather than academic, Sayyid Najafí has drawn attention to the editing of the Kitáb-i Íqán. By so doing, he has sought to scandalize Bahá’u’lláh by pointing to alleged “errors” in Qur’án citations. Moreover, he tries to show that Bahá’ís involved in the publication of the Íqán were party to emendations of the text and suppression of the first edition of the Íqán. According to Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini, Najafí is a Shiite theologian, one of the more committed contemporary critics of the Bahá’í Faith in Iran.

In his book *Bahá’íyán*, in the section subheaded *Tamáruk [p. 28] bi Qur’án*.⁸² Najafí argues that passages in the “original” 1308 edition of the Íqán clearly documented Bahá’u’lláh’s deference to his half-brother, Şubḥ-i Azal, in implicit acknowledgment of Azal’s authority within the Bábí community. Such deferential passages, according to Najafí, were purged or altered in the 1310 lithograph, while copies of the first edition were surreptitiously collected and destroyed. But this is not the end of the accusations of tampering. Najafí alleges that errors in Qur’án citations, as well as misrepresentations of traditions (*ḥadīth*), had existed in the 1308 edition. Ten such errors in Qur’án citation (since corrected) are listed by Najafí.⁸³

Bahá’í authorities were, at first, oblivious to these alleged errors, Najafí maintains. But there soon followed a 1310 edition with some emendations, which Bahá’ís tried to pass off as the actual first edition. The 1318 edition corrected these, and thus represents the first fully corrected version, on which subsequent printings were modeled, according to Najafí.

Support for the “corrupt” text of the 1308 “first” edition is said to exist in manuscripts found in Egypt. Najafí states that he went to Egypt in 1356 A.H. (1977), where he conducted research at the Dár al-Kutub wa’l-Wasá’l-Qumíya Library. After long research, he chanced upon a manuscript of the Kitáb-i Íqán (8cm x 13.5cm), catalogued as No. 5061-S[i]. The manuscript was 92 pages long with nine lines per page (though, judging from the facsimile on p. 472, 19 lines per page seems more accurate). The scribe was anonymous, but Najafí believes it was none other than Zaynu’l-Muqarrabín (1818–1903), one of the Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh and probably the most reliable copyist. The colophon dates the copy at 1295 A.H. (1878).⁸⁴

Najafí took photographs of the manuscript, and compared them against the text of the 1308 first edition, finding they matched exactly. Further support was found in another such manuscript (dated 1294 A.H.) in the Parliamentary Library in Tehran.⁸⁵ Najafí provides a facsimile of the stamp of the Dár al-Kutub Library, followed by the first page and ending [p. 29] colophon, together with page 47.⁸⁶ Both manuscripts are said to agree with the 1308 edition of the Kitáb-i Íqán. For this reason, Najafí believes the “first” edition was based on the text of a Zaynu’l-Muqarrabín copy.

Najafí’s allegations may be charted as follows:

Manuscripts	1st Lithograph	2nd Lithograph	1st Printing
Egypt, 1295 A.H.	<i>Cháp-sangí</i>	<i>Cháp-sangí</i>	<i>Cháp-surbí</i>
Tehran, 1294 A.H.	Bombay, 1308 A.H.	Bombay, 1310 A.H.	Cairo, 1318 A.H.
Presumed faithful	Exactly as mss.	Partially corrected	Partially corrected
Servant of Azal passages	Servant of Azal passages	Excised	Excised
Qur’án errors	Qur’án errors	Qur’án errors	Corrected

Najafí’s hypothesis that a manuscript copied by Zaynu’l-Muqarrabín stood behind the first Íqán lithograph is plausible. In its Memorandum dated 22 January 1995, the Research Department writes: “The master copies used for each edition have not, to our knowledge, yet been identified; at least there is no record of their existence or whereabouts. Usually, published works of Bahá’u’lláh were based on manuscripts copied by Zaynu’l-Muqarrabín, one of the authorized scribes of Bahá’u’lláh. ... The copyist for the Bombay lithographs has not, to date, been identified.”

RESPONSE OF THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

As the reader can appreciate, there are a number of confusing details to sort out and harmonize. Some of these details are conflicting, in great measure due to the lack of a coherent, documented publication history of the text in question. In response to the Najafí allegations, the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, Israel, wrote a memorandum in which the following information and analysis is provided.

[p. 30]

Alleged Expurgation of Deferential References to Şubḥ-i Azal:

In its Memorandum dated 10 September 1991 sent to the present writer through the Universal House of Justice, the Research Department responds:

Najafí states that Bahá'u'lláh's acknowledgement of Azal's authority is found in the 1308 A.H. edition of the *Íqán* and such acknowledgement is corrected in the subsequent editions of the *Íqán* (Najafí, pp. 464–65). The verse of the *Íqán* referred to by Najafí as indicative of Bahá'u'lláh's acknowledgement of Azal's authority, reads:

... until the hour whence, from the Mystic Source, there came the summons bidding Us return whence We came. (*Kitáb-i Íqán*, p. 251).

Najafí and Azalí sources have taken the term “Mystic Source” to be a reference to Azal (Najafí, p. 464 and 311–313).

Although Najafí claims that the verse quoted above is corrected in the subsequent versions of the *Íqán* (Najafí, p. 465), he himself has quoted that very verse on pages 311-312 of his book, and, he himself has shown the source of the verse as the *Íqán*, p. 195 [1933 edition] (Najafí, p. 311, footnote 23). This edition of the *Íqán* is the very edition whose title page, first page, and pages 58–59 are photographed on page 467 in Najafí's book and captioned as “corrected version.”

In brief, the verse of the *Íqán* which Najafí claims to have been corrected since the earliest edition of the book is found, in fact, in all editions of the *Íqán*, and Najafí himself has taken it from the 1933 edition and quoted it in his book.

This response does not resolve the controversy over interpretation of the words “Mystic Source,” but if one were, for the sake of argument, to concede the Azalí position that this was a reference to Şubḥ-i Azal, Najafí's allegation that this reference was expurgated from later editions of the *Kitáb-i Íqán* is contradicted by his own references to this verse as found in the so-called “corrected version.” **[p. 31]**

Alleged Withdrawal and Destruction of the “First Edition” of the Íqán:

Najafí's intention was to scandalize both Bahá'u'lláh and his followers by the alleged expurgation of putative deferential statements regarding Azal, and by the alleged recall and disposal of original lithographs of the *Kitáb-i Íqán*. In response to the latter allegation, the Research Department writes:

Mr. Buck's statement [*sic*: actually, Najafi's statement] that the "copies of the first edition were surreptitiously collected and destroyed" is simply not supported by any evidence. As can be seen from the following section of this memorandum, Bahá'u'lláh's own corrections to the Íqán made a new version of the book and, very naturally, other versions fell into disuse.

This statement, a flat denial of any Bahá'í conspiracy to suppress the so-called "first edition" of the Kitáb-i Íqán, neither confirms nor denies the existence of a 1308 A.H. edition, though the context of the Research Department's rejoinder seems to assume that edition for the sake of argument. The ambiguity of the statement, "very naturally, other versions fell into disuse," does not distinguish between manuscript and lithograph.

Since it appears certain that the most important and explicit witness in the text of the "original" Kitáb-i Íqán, attesting Bahá'u'lláh's alleged subservience to Şubḥ-i Azal was in fact not expurgated from the text in any edition, doubt is cast on the relative importance of all other alleged pro-Azalí excisions. No other study of the Íqán has ever found that there were excisions from the original manuscript. We know that Bahá'u'lláh made additions in the margins of the original, but not subtractions. We now move to the problem of alleged misquotes of the Qur'án.

[p. 32]

Alleged Errors in Citations from Qur'án and Islamic Traditions:

As to the charge of Bahá'u'lláh having made "errors" in his extemporaneous recall of passages from the Qur'án, the Research Department responds:

During His lifetime, Bahá'u'lláh Himself reviewed the book and indicated necessary changes so that, subsequently, a new, revised version of the book became available. In several Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, indications are found that during 1305-1306 A.H. (1887–1889 A.D.), Bahá'u'lláh undertook the task of revising the book particularly in order to bring the Qur'anic quotations in line with the common standard. A sample of such a Tablet is published in the *Asráru'l-Áthár*. A provisional translation of a portion of this Tablet follows:

... a copy of a correct Íqán was given to Jináb-i-'Alí Akbar, My Glory be upon him. Existing copies should be brought into conformity with this copy, or new transcriptions made from it. The latter is better and more appropriate. ([Bahá'u'lláh, cited in] Fádil Mázandarání, *Asráru'l-Áthár* [Tíhrán: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 124 B.E.] Vol. 1, p. 278.)

A careful study of the changes that were made clearly shows that the verses of the Qur'án that were not quoted exactly in the first edition of the *Íqán* were brought into exact conformity in the new edition. As Mr. Buck is undoubtedly aware, when Bahá'u'lláh quotes His *own* Writings in a Tablet, He not infrequently quotes them in a form that, while conveying the essential meaning of the original, is not in exactly the same words. It would seem that in revealing the *Kitáb-i Íqán*, He followed the same practice in relation to passages He quoted from the Qur'án. The fact that He Himself had them later changed to be in accordance with the accepted text of the Qur'án makes it clear that He was fully aware of the matter and, moreover, that the change in wording had no effect on the purport of His argument.

Here is positive confirmation by Bahá'í authorities of an original version of the *Íqán* and "a new revised version." [p. 33] Qur'anic citations were brought into alignment with the standard Qur'án between 1887–88. On the basis of this information, Najafí's 1308 A.H. dating for an unrevised first lithographed edition of the *Íqán* is too late. In its Memorandum dated 22 January 1995, the Research Department writes: "In neither of the two early lithographed editions of the *Kitáb-i Íqán* are any of the Qur'anic quotes used differently from the *textus receptus* other than the verse 2:210 in the first edition."

This contradicts Najafí. The Research Department states that there was one unaligned Qur'án citation (2:210) in the first *Íqán* lithograph, while Najafí alleges there were ten verses exhibiting "errors" in citation. Without access to these two Bombay lithographs, the present writer cannot make an independent determination.

The Research Department speaks of other kinds of textual changes as well: stylistic and grammatical. In his Questions and Answers, supplemental to the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh himself discloses the editing process and reasons for it: "Many Tablets were revealed and dispatched in their original form without being checked and reviewed. Consequently, as bidden, they were again read out in the Holy Presence, and brought into conformity with the grammatical conventions of the people in order to forestall the cavils of the opponents of the Cause."⁸⁷ This anticipates attacks like those of Najafí.

Such disclosures of editing, particularly by Bahá'u'lláh himself, steals from Najafí's thunder. Corroboratively, in the same memorandum, the Research Department discloses:

Regarding stylistic and grammatical changes: numerous changes are recorded, all of which are reflected in the texts transcribed during the time of Bahá'u'lláh, i.e., assumed to have been seen and approved by Him. Some of these changes, however, were not incorporated into the early lithographed copies. Please see the attached document where some of these changes are listed.

[p. 34]

... It is important to note that the stylistic and grammatical changes mentioned above took place over time—often it was Zayn himself that suggested them—and therefore the various manuscripts differ somewhat, one from the other.

... It is regrettable that the World Centre does not have a copy of the British Museum manuscript BL Or. 3116, foll. 78127. Obviously no comparison studies can be made at the World Centre until it is possible to obtain a facsimile. If Mr. Buck has such a facsimile and can forward a copy to the Bahá'í World Centre, it would be appreciated.

... It is not possible to provide photocopies of the entire volume of the lithographed editions for the purpose of research at this time.

As requested, I did send a copy of the British Museum manuscript to the Bahá'í World Centre. However, facsimiles of the original manuscript of the Kitáb-i Íqán and the two Bombay Íqán lithographs are unavailable to scholars. At the present time, no critical edition of the Íqán is possible until these manuscripts are available for collation. In fact, there are simply no critical editions of Bahá'í scripture. This is the present state of textual scholarship on the Kitáb-i Íqán.

Discussion:

Although Najafí seems relatively well informed, his prime example of a pro-Azal text in the Book of Certitude is the “Mystic Source” passage, which was in fact not excised but rather retained in all editions of the text. The allegation of excised references to Azal of a laudatory or servile nature is not disproven, but the burden of proof rests with Najafí. Although Najafí appears to have had access to two lithographed editions of the Book of Certitude, nowhere does he cite a suppressed pro-Azal reference.

The mixed results of consulting hostile literature is methodologically significant here. The researcher ought to make every effort to exhaust the literature which is available. While Bahá'ís may be disinclined to include the hostile literature with- [p. 35] in the scope of any such research project, the academic is obliged to take note of this literature, always circumspect

as to bias but open to new data irrespective of its provenance. It is hoped that the ethos of the present study will be enhanced by such a procedure, even if it is misconstrued by readers with an overriding religious interest.

The Persian edition consulted for this study is the 1980 reprint of the 1933 Egyptian printing. This is the same text as that published in 1990 (144 B.E.) by the Pakistan Bahá'í Publishing Trust in Karachi (fourth edition, also based on the 1352 “corrected” version).

The colophon on p. 199 of the 1352 Egyptian edition, concludes, in very awkward Persian, that the text is free of all printing errors: *va taṣḥīh-i án aghlāt-i maṭba'ish* [sic; read *maṭba'i*] *na-dárad* (“and the correction of that [edition] does not have errors of printing”). But the colophon itself appears to have at least one error: the strange (non-)word *naḥsín* [sic] may be a mistake for *taḥsín* (beautification). From an academic perspective, this hardly inspires confidence in the text. A critical edition, requisite to the scholarly study of religious texts in all other traditions, is needed here as well.

The text suffers from the lack of a printed *gáf* throughout.⁸⁸ Neither is the text free of errors. For instance, there is a passage which Shoghi Effendi renders, in part: “He [the true seeker] will likewise clearly distinguish all the signs of God ... from the doings, words and ways of men, even as the jeweller who knoweth the gem from the stone.”⁸⁹ In the Persian text, due to the idiosyncracies of Persian word order and Bahá'u'lláh's mastery of style, the term for “jeweller”—lit., “Jewellers” (*ahl-i lúlú*)—is immediately followed by the word for “gem”: *lu'-rá* (sic). This latter word should be emended to read *lúlú-rá*, where the enclitic accusative marker *-rá* is suffixed (for the purpose of specification) to “pearl” or “gem” (*lúlú*). The corrected text would thus read: *ahl-i lúlú lúlú-rá*, instead of *ahl-i lu'-rá*. This technical discussion was [p. 36] necessary in order to prove an important point that directly bears on future study of the Book of Certitude.

Contrary to Najafí, no one should be scandalized by emendations in the text. These are all part of the Íqán's manuscript history and publication record. The errors in manuscript copies of the Íqán which Bahá'u'lláh himself noted, together with the aforementioned irregularities in printed editions, probably raise more questions in the absence of a critical edition than they would in a scholarly publication, the critical apparatus of which places all of these problems in perspective.

TRANSLATIONS

The first English translation was undertaken by noted Persian diplomat and Bahá'í Ali-Kuli Khan, apparently at the instruction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1900, according to Monjazeb. Four years later, *The Book of Ighan* was published in New York by George Blackburne Company, with a revised printing in 1924, by Brentano's of New York, under the new title *The Book of Assurance*.⁹⁰ Shoghi Effendi thought it necessary to improve on Khan's translation, hoping that "a proper rendering of it would infinitely enhance the teaching work in the West."⁹¹ In an advance announcement of his new translation in 1931, it was said on the Guardian's behalf that "he hopes that this new rendering will be an improvement on the previous one, but he fully admits that it is far from perfect, far from the original itself."⁹² Given its overall superiority in terms of accuracy and eloquence, in addition to its status as the official Bahá'í translation, Shoghi Effendi's translation is the preferred rendering for the purpose of this thesis.

As to other languages, among the following translations of the *Kitáb-i Íqán* have been published: Albanian (1932), Arabic (1934), Bengali (1975), Chinese (193?), Danish (1974), Dutch/Flemish (1937/1976), English Braille (1961), French [p. 37] (1904/1965), German (1969), Japanese (1977), Portuguese (193?), Russian (1933/2001), Spanish (1937/1971), Swedish (1936), Turkish (1969), Urdu (1955), Xhosa (1979). Manuscript translations are said to include Armenian, Bulgarian, Burmese, Czech, Esperanto, Gujarati, Kurdish, Norwegian and Serbian.⁹³

NOTES

1. From the spoken chronicle of Sayyid Asadu'lláh-i Qumí, *Maṣābīh-i Hidáyat*, Vol. 4, pp. 446–47. Translated by Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, pp. 33–34.
2. Jesus maintains this secrecy in various ways: (1) Jesus commands demons to be silent over his true identity (Mark 1:25; 1:34; 3:11f.); (2) Jesus orders silence as to his miracles (Mark 1:43f.; 5:43; 7:36); (3) Jesus instructs his disciples to keep their silence (Mark 8:30; 9:9); (4) Jesus wishes his whereabouts undisclosed (Mark 7:24; 9:30); (5) Jesus gives private teachings to a chosen few (Mark 7:17; 10:10); (6) Jesus conceals his meaning within parables (Mark 4:11f.); (7) the disciples are often at a loss to fathom Jesus (Mark 6:52; 8:17–21). See C. Tuckett, "Messianic Secret," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, p. 445.
3. Tuckett, "Messianic Secret," p. 445.
4. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 115.

Phenomenologists of religion have established five criteria of revelation: (1) Origin or author: God, spirits, ancestors, power (*mana*), forces. In every case, the source of revelation is something supernatural or numinous. (2) Instrument or means: sacred signs in nature (the stars, animals, sacred places, or sacred times); dreams, visions, ecstasies; finally,

words or sacred books. (3) Content or object: the didactic, helping, or punishing presence, will, being, activity, or commission of the divinity. (4) Recipients or addressees: medicine men, sorcerers, sacrificing priests, shamans, soothsayers, mediators, prophets with a commission or information intended for individuals or groups, for a people or the entire race. (5) Effect and consequence for the recipient: personal instruction or persuasion, divine mission, service as oracle, all this through inspiration or, in the supreme case, [p. 38] through incarnation. (J. Dininger, "Revelation," *Encyclopedia of Religion*). See also Geo Widengren, "Phenomenology of Revelation." *Studia Missionalia* Vol. 20 (1971), pp. 301–19.

5. Browne, "The Bábís of Persia," p. 947; Momen, *Selections*, p. 253.
6. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 257.
7. Browne, "The Bábís of Persia," p. 948; Momen, *Selections*, p. 254.
8. Persian: *bayán shud*.
9. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 175 / Persian, p. 136.
10. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Assurance*, p. 125. In Arabic, *ḥamám* is, literally, "dove" or "pigeon."
11. Not indicated in either translation. Besides Qur'án and *ḥadīth* citations in Arabic, Bahá'u'lláh in a number of other passages in the Book of Certitude switches from Persian to Arabic.
12. Literally, "command." But sometimes in Qur'anic use, and frequently in Bahá'í use, the idea of divine "command" is bound up with the act or concept of revelation.
13. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 176.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 97 (Persian, pp. 72–73).
15. Wehr/Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 583.
16. Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community: The Messages of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of the British Isles*, p. 430: "As to the date of the *Íqán* I think it can be calculated from the actual text and I have it in my papers as 1278 A.H., i.e. 1861 A.D. You will find that in the text itself." In what would be corroborative of the early date (1861), Taherzadeh ([The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 4, p. 295](#)) makes the curious statement that Hand of the Cause Ḥájí Ákhúnd was actually known to have perused the *Kitáb-i Íqán* in 1861! ["Bahá'u'lláh was then in Baghdád, and a few copies of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* were circulating among the believers. It appears that a perusal of that heavenly Book in about the year 1861 ignited the fire of faith in his pure heart." (May 30, 2022.)]
17. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 99.
18. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 138.

19. See Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, pp. 155–56.
20. Muḥammad 'Alí-yi Faydí, *Kitáb-i Khándán-i Afnán Sidriy-i Raḥmán* (Tehran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 127 B.E. [1970–71]), pp. 42ff. I am indebted to Shahrokh Monjazez for this reference. For Mírzá Áqá's testimony, see Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís*, p. 227. [p. 39]
21. Ali Kuli Khan, "Introduction" to Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Assurance (The Book of Ighan)*, pp. vii–viii.
22. Browne, *Selections*, p. 251; idem, "The Bábís of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 21 (1889), p. 945.

Shoghi Effend's rendering reads: "Twelve hundred and eighty years have passed since the dawn of the Muḥammadan Dispensation, and with every break of day, these blind and ignoble people have recited their Qur'an, and yet have failed to grasp one letter of that book!" (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 172, Persian, p. 134.) The Guardian evidently took license in rounding off the figure for an English-speaking audience unconcerned with precise Islamic dates.

Khan's translation was more literal: "To be brief: Twelve hundred and seventy-eight years have passed since the Manifestation of the Point of the Koran." (*The Book of Assurance*, pp. 122–23)

23. Arabic: *bi'that*.
24. Browne, *Selections*, p. 251.
25. Browne, "The Bábís of Persia," p. 946; *Selections*, p. 252.

Shoghi Effendi translates this phrase as "from the Mystic Source, there came the summons bidding Us return." (*The Book of Certitude*, p. 251.) There has been some controversy over who is intended by "the Mystic Source." Shoghi Effendi states that God is meant. MacEoin maintains that the Bábí leader Şubḥ-i Azal is alluded to ("Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism," pp. 118–19): "There are no very good grounds for translating the phrase in question as 'the Mystic Source' nor for identifying it unequivocally with the God-head. ... Taken together, these and similar passages lend considerable support to the view, first put forward by E. G. Browne, that the term *maşdar-i amr* in the *Kitáb-i Íqán* is to be interpreted as a reference, not to the divinity, but to Azal, as the locus of revelation at that time."

MacEoin and Shoghi Effendi agree on one point: "Mírzá Yaḥyá [Şubḥ-i Azal], realizing full well to what a pass his unrestrained leadership of the Faith had brought him, had, moreover, insistently and in writing, besought Him to return" (*God Passes By*, p. 126). I think Bahá'u'lláh's mystical orientation, reflected in all of his writings during this period, conclusively points to his sense of Divine Will as the ultimate source of authority. This seems to be [p. 40] borne out in his Persian *Lawḥ-i Maryam* (Tablet of Mary—the wife of

his brother Ḥájí Mírzá Riḍá-Qulí, referred to by Bahá'u'lláh as “the Red Leaf” [*al-Waraqatu'l-Ḥamrá*]):

O Maryam! ... From the Land of Tá [Tehran], after afflictions which cannot be enumerated, we reached the 'Iráq-i 'Arab by command of the Tyrant of Persia, where, after the fetters of foes, we were afflicted with the perfidy of friends. Thereafter God knoweth what befell me, until I chose solitary exile, cut off from my household and what it contained, and from the Spirit and what is connected therewith. I journeyed through the deserts of resignation, travelling in such guise that all men wept over my strangerhood, and all things shed tears of blood over my sorrows.

I kept company with the beasts of the field, passing beyond this transitory world like spiritual lightning, while for two years or rather less I avoided all beside God and shut my eyes to all but Him. ... Until God's Predestination reminded some of His spiritual servants of this Youth of Canaan, and they began to make enquiry and to establish correspondence with all places and persons, until they discovered a sign of that signless one in a mountain cave. Verily he guideth all things into a straight path. (Translated by Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*, p. 8.)

This Tablet was revealed in the 'Akká period, so is not a contemporary witness. With this caveat, the retrospective testimony of Bahá'u'lláh is still evidential. Though the “Mystic Source” is likely the same as “God's Predestination,” in practical terms the return seems to have been occasioned at the urging of several Bábís: Şubḥ-i Azal, Bahá'u'lláh's twelve-year-old son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's brother Áqá-yi Kalím, Shaykh Sulṭán, and Javád the woodcutter (Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, pp. 121–22). Bahá'u'lláh himself is referred to as *maşdar-i amr* by the Zoroastrian agent Mánakjí in the conclusion to the Bábí history, *Tárikh-i Jadíd*, tr. by Browne as, *The New History of Mírzá 'Alí Muḥammad, the Báb*, pp. 315 and 316, n. 3.

26. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 251–52. Bahá'u'lláh's departure from Baghdad is determined to have taken place on April 10, 1854. He returned to Baghdad on March 19, 1856, “exactly two [p. 41] lunar years ... since Bahá'u'lláh's departure.” (Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 122.)
27. Personal communication from Bahá'í scholar Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini. See Persian text in Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i Íqán*, p. 195. On Sayyid Muḥammad Işfahání, stigmatized in Bahá'í history as the “Antichrist of the Bahá'í Revelation,” see Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, pp. 246–56.
28. MacEoin, “Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism (1850–1866),” *Studia Iranica*, Vol. 18 (1989), p. 117.
29. Browne, “Some Remarks on the Bábí Texts edited by Baron Victor Rosen,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 24 (1892), p. 305. Browne's vacillation over the date of the Book of Certitude is evident in his other works: “Yet simplicity and directness is to be found in

modern as well as in ancient writers of Persian verse and prose: the Íqán ("Assurance") of the Bábís, written by Bahá'u'lláh about A.D. 1859, is as concise and strong in style as the *Chahár Maqála*, composed some seven centuries earlier." (*A Literary History of Persia from Firdawsí to Sa'dí*, Vol. 2, p. 89.) In his entry on the "Báb, Bábís" for *Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 2, p. 302, Browne states that the Kitáb-i Íqán was "composed ... in 1861–1862."

30. I cannot prove the direction of dependence at this point, which in any event rests entirely on the validity of the date established for the Hidden Words as 1274 A.H. (c. 1858 C.E.). (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 140.) In all likelihood, Bahá'u'lláh is quoting one of his previous divine sayings, as nowhere else in the Book of Certitude does Bahá'u'lláh assume the voice of God. The Hidden Word embedded in the text of the Book of Certitude (p. 228) reads: "O Son of Man! Many a day hath passed over thee whilst thou hast busied thyself with thy fancies and idle imaginings. How long art thou to slumber on thy bed? Lift up thy head from slumber, for the Sun hath risen to the zenith, haply it may shine upon thee with the light of beauty." This may be an oblique hint at revelation. Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 62.
31. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 226.
32. *Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 170.
33. W. Momen, *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary*, "Calendar, Bahá'í," p. 49. [p. 42]
34. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 201, 234, 253. On date of the Báb's declaration, Bahá'u'lláh states: "No sooner that eternal Beauty [the Báb] revealed Himself in Shíráz, in the year sixty, and rent asunder the veil of concealment, than the signs of the ascendancy, the might, the sovereignty, and power, emanating from that Essence of Essences and Sea of Seas, were manifest in every land." (p. 234.)
35. The Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre legitimated this dating, stating:
- Mr. Buck is correct that an excerpt from a letter published *Unfolding Destiny: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'í Community of the British Isles* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 430 states: "As to the date of the Íqán, I think it can be calculated from the actual text and I have it in my papers as 1278 A.H., i.e. 1861 A.D. You will find that in the text itself. It was written in answer to questions put by a distinguished Bábí." The Bahá'í Centre Archives does not, to date, have this letter in its collection. However, the Research Department sees no reason why Mr. Buck should not use the year 1861 as the date of the revelation of the Kitáb-i Íqán. (Research Department, Memorandum date 6 March 1995.)
36. A. Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, pp. 157–58. Ishráq-Khávarí, *Qámús-i Íqán*, Vol. 1, pp. 4–6. Elsewhere it is stated that the Báb's uncle received Bahá'u'lláh's invitation through Hájí Sayyid Javád-i Karbalá'í when the latter found the uncle in Kázi-

mayn, “which is distant one hour from Baghdád.” See Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*, p. 12.

37. Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, pp. 157–58.
38. A reproduction of the original handwritten questions by Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad was published in Fayḏí's *Kitáb-i Khándán-i Afnán Sidriy-i Raḥmán* (Tehran: Mu'assasy-i Millíy-i Matbu'át-i Amrí, 124 B.E. [1970–71 C.E.]) between pp. 40–41. See S. Monjazeb, “Kitáb-i Íqán,” in *A Shorter Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith*, ed. by M. Momen, et. al. (Wilmette: Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, forthcoming).
39. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 164–65.
40. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 43. [p. 43]
41. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
47. Text in Iran National Bahá'í Archives, No. 28, p. 193. I am indebted to for this reference and translation. Personal communication.
48. Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 424.
49. Opening page of the *Kitáb-i Íqán* from a copy dated 1871 in the hand of Áqá Mírzá Áqáy-i Rikáb-Sáz, the first Bahá'í martyr of Shíráz.
50. Browne, *Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 79.
51. Momen, *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne*, p. 488.
52. Browne, “Description,” pp. 665–66; Momen, *Selections*, p. 488.
53. Browne, “Description,” p. 666.
54. Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, plates between pp. 110 and 111.

In a letter dated 29 December 1994 to the present writer, the Universal House of Justice writes:

Regarding your question whether any “revelation writing” is still extant from the time when the *Kitáb-i Íqán* was written, no research has yet been done on revelation writing, and none has been identified as coming from the period in question. Furthermore, it is rather unlikely that revelation writing from the period when Bahá'u'lláh was itinerant would have survived; the material in the Bahá'í World Centre

Archives is more likely to be from the 'Akká period than from any other period of His ministry.

Corroboratively, the Research Department, in its Memorandum dated 22 January 1995, writes: "The oldest copy of the Kitáb-i Íqán held in the Archives is in the handwriting of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and contains additions on the margin by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. To date there is no copy identified as in the handwriting of Mírzá Áqá Ján."

55. Ibid., p. 159, with reference to U. Giachery's *Shoghi Effendi—Recollections*, for an account of this fortunate event. [p. 44]
56. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, p. 165.
57. S. Monjazebeh, "Kitáb-i Íqán." Cf. Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Mullá 'Alí-Akbar Shahmírzádí, in Iran National Bahá'í Archives, No. 15 (132 B.E.), p. 424. Reference provided by Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini, personal communication, July 11, 1993.
58. H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, p. 165.
- This is Balyuzi's assertion, but it should not go unqualified. There is evidence to suggest that the Bahá'í teacher Jamál Effendi (see Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís*, pp. 120–28) had published, in India, two unauthorized editions of Bahá'u'lláh's writings: one *The Hidden Words*, and the other, *The Seven Valleys*. See note 65 below.
59. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 121; assuming publication of the Íqán prior to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Treatise.
60. Letter of Shoghi Effendi (dated February 9, 1930) in *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 424.
61. Sayyid Muḥammad Báqir Najafí, *Bahá'íyán*, p. 464, citing Fáḍil Mázandarání (*Asrár al-áthár*, q.v. *Íqán*) who states that the 1310 edition was in the hand of the illustrious Bahá'í calligrapher, Mishkín-Qalam (an identification Najafí doubts). If the first dated edition had not been in the hand of Qalam, there were two other possibilities. According to Balyuzi, the two other calligrapher-scribes who produced copies of Bahá'u'lláh's writings for publication were Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí (Bahá'u'lláh's third son) and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Kharṭúmí. (*Eminent Bahá'ís*, p. 121.)
62. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, p. 554. Momen, *Selections*, p. 107n.
63. S. Behai, untitled editorial, *Behai Quarterly*, Vol. 2, no. 1 ("First Quarter," 1935), p. 14. My thanks to Dr. Robert Stockman, Research Office, Bahá'í National Center, Wilmette, Illinois, for this reference. Personal communication, August 17, 1990.
64. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, p. 338. As to the *Kitáb-i mubín*, Balyuzi could be mistaken, since the colophon is in an undecipherable script which I take to be the invented *khaṭṭ-i badí'* of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí.

There is a disturbing report that Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí “when sent on a mission to India, had tampered with the text of the holy writings entrusted to his care for publication.” (*God Passes By*, p. 249.) [p. 45]

65. Shoghi Effendi speaks of “the publication in India of five volumes of the Author of the Faith, including His Most Holy Book.” (*God Passes By*, p. 195.)
66. (Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá’ís*, pp. 122–23. Referring to these two lithographs that were *not* authorized by Bahá’u’lláh, see J. Armstrong-Ingram, Preface to Sydney Sprague, *A Year with the Bahá’ís in India and Burma*. See also Momen, “Esslemont’s Survey of the Bahá’í Community in 1919–20: Part IV. India by Mírzá Maḥmúd Zarqání,” *Bahá’í Studies Bulletin* Vol. 2, no. 1 (June 1983), p. 3: “After spending some five years in India, he [Jamál Effendi] returned to the Holy Land. Bahá’u’lláh reproved him for having published ‘*Seven Valleys*’ in his name.” Momen notes an historical inaccuracy here, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (*Memorials of the Faithful*, p. 136) states that Jamál had returned to ‘Akká after the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh (*ibid.*, p. 6).
67. [p. 46] Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*, p. 190. It should be noted that, apart from its incidental use as in the colophon of which Browne speaks, the so-called “New Writing (*Khatt-i Badí*)” of the Bahá’ís” is a misnomer, since this curious script was invented by Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí and, if used at all, would have been used primarily by the partisans of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí. The script evidently gained little currency, if any, among Bahá’ís.
68. *First Bahá’í Centenary Souvenir: The Hundred Years History of the Bahá’ís of India and Burma* (N.p.: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, n.d. [1944]), p. 61. I am indebted to Stephen Lambden for this reference.
69. Balyuzi, *Bahá’u’lláh: The King of Glory*, p. 165.
70. In its Memorandum (dated 28 December 1994) to the author, the Research Department states:

In an email message dated 28 November 1994, Mr. Christopher Buck requested information on the first published edition of the *Kitáb-i Íqán*. He specifies an edition, evidently known to him, published in Bombay at the Ḥasaní Zívar Press in Rabí’ I, 1299 (1882). The Research Department would be interested to know the source of Mr. Buck’s information about such a lithographed edition, inasmuch as the earliest dated edition of this book known to the Bahá’í World Centre to be printed in Bombay was published in 1310 (1892–93) in 214 pages.

There is another early edition of the *Kitáb-i Íqán* at the World Centre, lithographed in 157 pages, but it has no title page, no date and no place of publication. It is possible that this edition might be the one that Mr. Buck has described in his letter. We attach a photocopy of the first and last pages of this edition for Mr. Buck’s

information. It will be noted that the Bahá'í World Centre Library has attributed a tentative date of 1893 to this copy.

The Research Department adds a caveat to my subsequent identification of the undated lithograph in St. Petersburg with the one held at the Bahá'í World Centre. Responding to my question, "Are any Bombay lithographs of the *Íqán* known to the Research Department apart from the one in St. Petersburg and the two at the [p. 47] Bahá'í World Centre?" the Research Department states: "We assume Mr. Buck intends by this description the undated lithographs. Although the probability is acknowledged, it is still only an assumption that these were lithographed in Bombay." (Research Department, Memorandum dated 14 February 1995) I should add a further disclaimer: The connection I have hypothesized between the publication of 'Abdul-Bahá's *Asrár al-ghaybíyya li-asbáb al-madaníyya* in Bombay by Ḥasaní Zívar Press in 1299/1882 and the undated *Íqán* lithograph is admittedly speculative.

71. I am indebted to J. R. I. Cole for this reference.
72. Perhaps 1882. Momen without supporting documentation, states as fact that the first Bahá'í book ever printed was the *Kitáb-i Íqán* in Bombay, followed by the publication of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Kitáb-i asrár-i ghaybíyya li-asbáb al-madaníyya* in 1882. See idem, "The Bahá'í Influence on the Reform Movements of the Islamic World in the 1860s and 1870s," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (September 1983), pp. 52 and 62, n. 17.
73. Najafí, *Bahá'íyán*, p. 464.
74. Ibid., p. 463, n. 121. The first printing of the *Kitáb-i Íqán* in Egypt was by al-Mawsú'át Press in Cairo, 1318/1900. Cf. Cole's reference to the 1318/1900 Cairo edition in Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, *Letters and Essays, 1886-1913*, p. 8n.
75. Najafí, *Bahá'íyán*, p. 463, n. 122. This edition has been reprinted (sans index): Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i Íqán* (Germany: Bahá'í Verlag, 1980/136 B.E.). The title page reads, in part: "Reprinted from the original printing, Egypt, 1934 [sic]." This is incorrect. The colophon to the 1933 edition (following p. 199 on what should be p. 200 but which is unnumbered) states that the book was published in the year 1352 A.H. (1933). The typeset 1933 edition was published by a certain Faráj Alláh Zakí. It bears the title, *Kitáb-i mustaṭāb-i íqán*. Both the 1933 edition and its 1980 German reprint are in the author's possession.
76. The Tehran edition, *Kitáb-i Mustatāb-i Íqán*, is written in the hand of 'Alí-Akbar Rúḥání, cyclostyled 1319 A.H. (solar), 97 B.E. A copy is in the author's possession.
77. A. Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 4, pp. 321–22, citing Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Mullá 'Alí-Akbar, from an unpublished compilation, National Archives Committee, No. 15, pp. 423–24. [p. 48]
78. With this conclusion, the Research Department agrees:

We attach a copy of the Tablet in question. We note that Bahá'u'lláh does refer to the reproduction of the Íqán twenty years before. It is felt that there are reasons not to leap to the conclusion that He is speaking of an attempt which involved lithography, binding, or other production techniques that might be attached to the term "publication". There is no date given on the Tablet, so it is very difficult to calculate the situation of the Faith twenty years earlier. We note that even if the Tablet was revealed as late as the early 1890s, twenty years before that date marked a time when Bahá'u'lláh was still in prison and when His life and the lives of Bahá'ís in Persia and other parts of the Eastern World were in jeopardy, and it would have been unwise to reproduce literature for dissemination. (Research Department, Memorandum dated 14 February 1995.)

And, further:

... Mr. Christopher Buck asks the Research Department to comment on ... use of the word "printed" in connection with the Tablet written by Bahá'u'lláh to Mullá 'Alí-Akbar-i-Shah Mírzadí. The Research Department concurs that the verb was probably inaccurate. Mr. Buck will have noted that in the letter dated 14 February, in which the Research Department commented more fully on this Tablet, the verb "reproduced" was used. (Research Department, Memorandum dated 6 March 1995.)

79. M. Momen, "The Bahá'í Influence on the Reform Movements of the Islamic World in the 1860s and 1870s," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* Vol. 2, no. 2 (September 1983), pp. 52 and 62, n.17. Cf. Horace Holley, "Introduction," in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (translated by M. Gail) (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957 [1975]) "Written in the year 1875, the original Persian text was lithographed in Bombay in 1882."
80. Browne, "The Bábís of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 21 (October 1889), p. 944; idem, *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne*, p. 250.
81. The Research Department's position on the undated Íqán lithograph is as follows: **[p. 49]**

The Research Department takes the position that until historical details about problematic issues of any kind are demonstrable by solid evidence, it is preferable to leave them as "unresolved". The date of 1308 A.H. and the identification of the calligraphy as that of Muḥammad-'Alí have been propounded by some scholars and doubted by others, and, as yet, the Research Department has no conclusive proof that the attribution of the date and the hand of the calligrapher is beyond question. Indeed, we have proposed that 1308 A.H. (1891) is probably too late a date to attach even tentatively to the undated edition, inasmuch as E. G. Browne was aware of a lithographed edition of the Kitáb-i Íqán in 1888 or 1889 A.D. In the opinion of the Research Department, it is likely that this is the one of which he had knowledge. (Research Department, Memorandum dated 14 February 1995.)

This is the same conclusion independently reached by the present writer.

82. Najafí, *Bahá'íyán*, pp. 457–75.
83. *Ibid.*, pp. 463–64. These are: Qur'án 2:206; 2:172; 6:35; 74:51; 76:5; 29:22; 19:23; 3:115; 50:19; 33:30.
84. This reported Cairo manuscript should not be confused with the printed Cairo edition of the Kitáb-i Íqán.
85. Najafí, *Bahá'íyán*, pp. 468–69. Facsimile of colophon on p. 473.
86. *Ibid.*, pp. 470–72. Najafí has not discussed the manuscript original in the hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
87. Bahá'u'lláh, "Questions and Answers" 57, in *idem*, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), p. 123.
88. There are two possible reasons for this: (1) As the text was printed in Cairo, the typesetting may reflect the fact that Arabic lacks this Persian character; (2) the more probable reason may be extrapolated from an observation made by Palmer: "In modern Persian, print or MS., the diacritical bar distinguishing gáf from káf is rarely employed." (Palmer, "Persian Grammar Simplified," *A Concise Dictionary, English-Persian*, p. 3).
89. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 197.
90. S. Monjazeb, "Kitáb-i Íqán." Stockman gives the following [p. 50] citation: Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Assurance*, translated by Ali Kuli Khan, assisted by Howard MacNutt (New York: George V. Blackburne, Co., 1904). A French rendering appeared in the same year: Bahá'u'lláh, *Le Livre de la certitude* translated by H[ippolyte] Dreyfus and Mírzá Habib-Ulláh Chirazi [Mírzá Habíb'u'lláh Shírází]; Paris: E. Leroux, 1904.) Citation by Stockman, "New Word and Old: The Bible and the American Bahá'ís" (Ph.D. dissertation: Harvard Divinity School, 1990), p. 12, n. 25.
91. From a letter dated June 28, 1930, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly. Cited in an anonymous typescript, "Aids for the Study of the Kitáb-i Íqán." My thanks to Ms. Furugh Ardakani, graduate student at the University of Alberta at Edmonton, for providing this manuscript.
92. *Ibid.*
93. *Ibid.*

[p. 51]

CHAPTER TWO

EXEGESIS AND IDEOLOGY: THE DOCTRINAL CONTENT OF THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE

THE PLACE OF THE KITÁB-I ÍQÁN IN BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S WRITINGS

All of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh in the post-Baghdad period (1863-1892) ideologically presuppose the Book of Certitude. Its ever-expanding dissemination was boosted after 1863 by its post-declaration status as revelation. This single work went far toward establishing Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic credentials in every missionary enterprise. One reason for the popularity of the Book of Certitude, according to sociologist Peter Smith, was its "lucidity" which, in the context of contemporary Bábí literature, was "revolutionary."¹ "To an unprecedented degree," Smith writes, "in terms of their own literary tradition the Bábís now had access to books which not only evoked feelings of wonderment or spiritual ecstasy, but which communicated coherent statements of belief."²

Those who wished to oppose Bahá'ís on doctrinal grounds were obliged to refute the Kitáb-i Íqán, which was in circulation among Bahá'ís wherever they went. The work became so closely identified with Bahá'u'lláh that its place as the first [p. 52] published Bahá'í work was assured, not merely because of its doctrinal importance but by virtue of its popularity.

From a Bahá'í perspective, the Book of Certitude occupies a position of "unsurpassed preeminence among the doctrinal ... writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Dispensation."³ Bahá'u'lláh himself distinguishes the Kitáb-i Íqán as "the Lord of Books" (*sayyid-i kutub*).⁴ Beyond this is the fact that Browne attests that "almost every Bábí [meaning, Bahá'í] who possesses any books at all has a copy of it, and from its pages their arguments are for the most part drawn."⁵

Bahá'u'lláh's authorization of its printing established the Kitáb-i Íqán as the ideological foundation upon which was based the more weighty Kitáb-i Adqas (Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws).⁶ Bahá'u'lláh's choice of the Persian language for the Book of Certitude was helpful in its diffusion, since most of the early Bahá'ís, for much of the first century of Bahá'í expansion, were Persians.⁷ Persian Bahá'ís who "pioneered" to other countries to spread the Faith invariably were confronted with the need to translate the text (or its ideas) into the languages of new teaching frontiers.

In the three decades after the Kitáb-i Íqán, literally thousands more Tablets were revealed. Even so, Bahá'u'lláh expresses satisfaction with the work as sufficient, in argument, unto itself. In his last major work, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Bahá'u'lláh states: "Briefly, there hath been revealed in the Kitáb-i Íqán concerning the Presence and Revelation of God that which will suffice the fair-minded."⁸ Its importance in Bahá'í personal "deepening" and propagation of the Faith cannot be overemphasized. Shoghi Effendi recommended:

The [Bahá'í] friends, and particularly those who wish to be come competent and useful teachers, should indeed consider it to be their first duty to acquaint themselves, as thoroughly as they can, with each and every detail in this Holy Book, so that they may be able to present the Message in a befitting manner.⁹ [p. 53]

The importance of the Book of Certitude is by no means restricted to the realm of faith, since the text is fundamental to the study of the Bahá'í religion. Its significance resides in its doctrinal content, epitomized by Shoghi Effendi as follows:

Within a compass of two hundred pages it proclaims unequivocally the existence and oneness of a personal God, unknowable, inaccessible, the source of all Revelation, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent and almighty; asserts the relativity of religious truth and the continuity of Divine Revelation; affirms the unity of the Prophets, the universality of their Message, the identity of their fundamental teachings, the sanctity of their scriptures, and the twofold character of their stations; denounces the blindness and perversity of the divines and doctors of every age; cites and elucidates the allegorical passages of the New Testament, the abstruse verses of the Qur'an, and the cryptic Muḥammadan traditions which have bred those age-long misunderstandings, doubts and animosities that have sundered and kept apart the followers of the world's leading religious systems; enumerates the essential prerequisites for the attainment by every true seeker of the object of his quest; demonstrates the validity, the sublimity and significance of the Báb's Revelation; acclaims the heroism and detachment of His disciples; foreshadows, and prophesies the worldwide triumph of the Revelation promised to the people of the Bayán; upholds the purity and innocence of the Virgin Mary; glorifies the Imáms of the Faith of Muḥammad;

celebrates the martyrdom, and lauds the spiritual sovereignty, of the Imám Ḥusayn; unfolds the meaning of such symbolic terms as “Return,” “Resurrection,” “Seal of the Prophets” and “Day of Judgment,” adumbrates and distinguishes between the three stages of Divine Revelation; and expatiates, in glowing terms, upon the glories and wonders of the “City of God,” renewed, at fixed intervals, by the dispensation of Providence, for the guidance, the benefit and salvation of all mankind. Well may it be claimed that of all the books revealed by the Author of the Bahá’í Revelation, this Book alone, by sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the [p. 54] world, has laid down a broad and unassailable foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers.¹⁰

ADVANCE LEGITIMATION OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S OWN MISSION

From a historical perspective, the Book of Certitude was written in support of the prophetic vocation of the Báb. It focused on spiritual authority from an Islamic perspective. The Book of Certitude rationalized the eschatologically conceived break from Islam. At the same time, this work served to heighten the adventist fervor current in the Bábí community in anticipation of the appearance of another prophetic figure foretold by the Báb.

In the Book of Certitude, a subtext may be discerned, in which Bahá’u’lláh intimates his own mission through a new messianic paradigm employing the old symbols of Shiism. To the extent that Bahá’u’lláh succeeded in vindicating the *qá’imiyya* (messianic status) of the Báb, he succeeded, by implication, in legitimating his own authority as well. The Book of Certitude is, after all is said and done, an apology for two eschatological figures: the Báb (as Qá’im) and, in anticipation of Bahá’u’lláh’s own mission, “He Whom God Shall Make Manifest” (*man yuzhiruhu’lláh*).

From this vantage, the Book of Certitude may be thought of as a work of covert revelation, during the period of Bahá’u’lláh’s messianic secrecy (1852–63), when intimation preceded proclamation. In actual usage, the Book of Certitude—within a year or two of its circulation among the Bábí community—reflexively legitimated Bahá’u’lláh’s own spiritual authority. Internal evidence within the text suggests that the Book of Certitude was ideologically circumlocutional. In the course of foreshadowing his own authority through a defense of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh sought to disenchant popular as well as clerical speculations on the eschaton. [p.

55]

This approach to the text has heuristic value in discerning the structure of Bahá'u'lláh's argument and in following how the author overcame theoretical obstacles to a realized eschaton, the most formidable of which was Islam's doctrine of revelatory finality.

BEYOND THE "SEAL OF THE PROPHETS"

Classical Islam is firmly grounded on the conviction that Muḥammad is the final Messenger of God, marking the revelatory crescendo of prophetic history. The Prophet is first among equals, but last in historical sequence, having imparted to humankind the fullest revelation ever vouchsafed by God in history. The residue of this revelation is the Qur'án, arguably the most influential book in human history. The term "Seal of the Prophets" is Qur'anic; thus the doctrine of the Prophet's finality brooks no compromise in Muslim eyes.

Bahá'u'lláh faced a doctrinal impasse. This was no mere creedal abstraction. The doctrine was central. It was effectively enforced throughout Islamic history to ward off any attempts at innovation. Fresh in Bahá'u'lláh's memory was the fate of his predecessor, the Báb, silenced by a firing squad in 1850. The Báb had dared advance a claim to revelation and to effect a renovation of Islam, tantamount to a break from it. Muslim and state authorities had all but exterminated the Bábís. In effect, it took no less than a new revelator, Bahá'u'lláh, to revitalize the movement. In the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh advanced what might be thought of as a theory of religious relativity. This theory was grounded in the Qur'án. By way of background, it is illuminating to look back in retrospect to the origins of Islam, as a kind of prospectus on the emergence of Bahá'í doctrine.

The history of religions shows evidence that new religions are often first proclaimed through universalisms, and later through dogmatic exclusivities and triumphal formulas [p. 56] expressing revelatory and salvational uniqueness. Tension between inclusive and exclusive proclamations is seen in Acts 10:34-35 and Acts 4:12 in the New Testament. In the former verse, salvation is given to righteous God-fearers among the gentiles, whereas in the latter "no other name" apart from Jesus can effect salvation. In the case of Islam, Friedmann observes:

Bearing in mind the notion of Islamic superiority, so manifest in the Qur'an as well as in numerous other branches of Islamic literature, it is noteworthy that a considerable body of material found in the earliest sources regards all prophets as equal and refrains from according the Prophet Muḥammad any superior standing among them.¹¹

But this egalitarian approach toward other prophets (i.e., Qur'án 2:136, 285; 3:84; 4:152) soon lost its primacy. The notion of differences of rank between prophets (i.e., Qur'án 2:253; 17:55) helped to justify the superiority of Muḥammad. Accordingly, no doctrine is more cardi-

nal to Islam than the belief that Muḥammad is the “Seal of the Prophets” (*khátam* [or *khátim*] *al-nabiyyín*). This distinct title derives from Qur’án 33:40: “Muḥammad was not the father of any man among you, but the messenger of Alláh and the Seal of the Prophets.”¹² In the earliest currents of Islamic consciousness, however, this honorific was by no means understood uniformly. There is, moreover, no logical relation between the denial of paternity on Muḥammad’s part and his being the Seal of the Prophets.¹³ Yet, according to some traditionalists, were a person to acknowledge Muḥammad as a prophet, but not as the *last* prophet, such a person is not a believer.¹⁴

As formulated and interpreted, the doctrine of the Seal effectively denies the possibility of future revelations from God, securing the Qur’án as the last word on God and sacred law. This doctrine of finality safeguards the authority of [p. 57] institutional Islam. Questions of Islamic legislative adaptability aside, on principle alone the doctrine of revelatory finality precludes any claim to a fresh revelation from God. The received understanding of Qur’án 33:40, and the priority given to it, override consideration of any and all future revelatory acts of God. This single verse stood as the most formidable doctrinal obstacle facing Bahá’u’lláh, who not only recognized this fact, but had to bear the brunt of its institutional enforcement throughout his forty-year imprisonment and exile.

The Book of Certitude is formally and ostensibly a vindication of the divine mission of the Báb. Bahá’u’lláh argues that: (1) although Muḥammad is the Seal of the Prophets, this is a title that can be meaningfully applied to all the messengers of God; (2) Muḥammad is not the last prophet in a temporal sense; (3) Shí’í as well as Sunní tradition foretells the advent of another eschatological figure (the Mahdí/Qá’im); (4) exegetically, the Qá’im is to be identified with the Qur’anic promise of divine encounter (“meeting God”); (5) this “Manifestation of God” is none other than the Báb; (6) the world awaits another theophany, “He Whom God Shall Make Manifest.” The significance of Bahá’u’lláh’s argument against revelatory finality (the foundation for which argument was laid by the Báb) is seen in Amanat’s observation:

As the Qur’án itself points out, Islam is the final revelation and Muḥammad the “seal of the prophets.” This claim, consistently upheld by Islamic orthodoxy, not only militates against the notion of prophetic continuity but also hinders any attempt at the renovation of doctrine. No intellectual current in the course of Islamic history—not even the Sufis’ claim to intuitive inspiration or the philosophers’ rational exposition of the fundamentals of the Islamic faith—has ever escaped this predicament.¹⁵

Bahá'u'lláh overrides the obstacle of the “Seal” from several directions. In so doing, he defines the designation as an attribute common to all messengers of God. The concept of [p. 58] the “Seal” as “Last” is kept intact, but “Last” indicates importance rather than temporality. Bahá'u'lláh sets up his argument by citing a tradition in which Muḥammad is reported to have said, “I am Jesus.”¹⁶ Enlarging on the Qur'anic theme of the oneness of the prophets, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Hath not Muḥammad, Himself, declared: “I am all the Prophets.”? Hath He not said as We have already mentioned: “I am Adam, Noah, Moses, and Jesus.”? Why should Muḥammad, that immortal Beauty, Who hath said: “I am the first Adam,” be incapable of saying also: “I am the last Adam.”? For even as He regarded Himself to be the “First of the Prophets”—that is Adam—in like manner, the “Seal of the Prophets” is also applicable unto that Divine Beauty. It is admittedly obvious that being the “First of the Prophets,” He likewise is their “Seal.”¹⁷

Viewed in this light, they [the Prophets] are all but Messengers of that ideal King, that unchangeable Essence. And were they all to proclaim: “I am the Seal of the Prophets,” they verily utter but the truth, beyond the faintest shadow of a doubt. For they are all but one person, one soul, one spirit, one being, one revelation. They are all the Manifestation of the “Beginning” and the “End,” the “First” and the “Last,” the “Seen” and the “Hidden”—all of which pertain to Him Who is the innermost Spirit of Spirits and eternal Essence of Essences.¹⁸

Having linked Qur'anic concepts of prophetic unity with this Qur'anic distinction (Qur'án 33:40), a tenable leap in logic for Bahá'u'lláh was to suggest that if the prophets share the same essence, they should also share the same attributes, including that expressed by the title, “Seal of the Prophets.” (Bahá'u'lláh does allow for distinctions in station and intensity of revelation, however.) By the force of this argument, Jesus is fully equal with the prophet Muḥammad, since Jesus is considered “the Seal of the Prophets” as well. The same is likewise the case with the prophet Adam and the Patriarchs of yore:¹⁹ “Behold, O concourse of the earth,” Bahá'u'lláh [p. 59] exclaims, “the splendours of the End, revealed in the Manifestations of the Beginning!”²⁰

In fine, Bahá'u'lláh applies Qur'anic concepts of the oneness of the prophets to relativize the idea of the “Seal of the Prophets.” The accepted notion of the “Seal” as meaning “last” is kept intact, but “last” indicates authority rather than succession. Through an associative equivalence grounded in the Qur'án's message of prophetic oneness, the “Seal of the Prophets” distinguishes all the Messengers of God. The argument has other nuances as well. Some of these will be discussed later. In the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh shows orthodox claims to Muḥammad's ultimacy as trading on notions of triumphalism to the exclusion of the

Qur'anic concept of prophetic unity. Bahá'u'lláh has used one Qur'anic doctrine as a constraint on another.

So far, such argumentation in itself is highly abstract. Islamic history, indeed religious history, is presented by Bahá'ís, with a test case: the Báb's claim to be an eschatological figure of world historical proportions. To complicate matters, the Báb himself spoke of yet another eschatological figure, with some indications that the advent of such a figure was imminent. This problem had to be worked out in an Islamic context; but, as destiny would have it, Bahá'u'lláh's arguments in the Book of Certitude were soon to be applied, in principle, to non-Islamic contexts as well. We proceed now to Bahá'u'lláh's apologetic as it applies to the Báb.

THE QÁ'IM AND HE WHOM GOD SHALL MAKE MANIFEST

As stated, the formal purpose of the Book of Certitude is to vindicate the prophetic credentials of the Báb. The Báb is identified with the eschatological figure known in Sunnī Islam as the Mahdí, and known more commonly in Shiism as the Qá'im. In Sunnī Islam, the Mahdí (literally, "Guided One") is a restorer who re-establishes a just theocracy under [p. 60] Islamic law. In Shiism, the Qá'im (literally, "Riser") is a redresser of wrongs, an avenger. Though in both traditions the Mahdí is to be a descendant of Muḥammad, Shí'í tradition is more specific: the Qá'im is the visible return of the Twelfth Imám, who disappeared in year 260 A.H. The Báb identified himself with this figure. Less dramatic than his many other proclamations but explicit as to this specific identification is the Báb's affirmation: "He Who hath revealed the Qur'án unto Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, ... hath likewise revealed the Bayán ... unto Him Who is your Qá'im, your Guide, your Mahdí."²¹

The Báb's proclamations took various forms. Many were expressed in a language of power and authority. More significant, as far as Bahá'u'lláh's own authority is concerned, is the Báb's foretelling of a future prophetic advent following his own. This has little to do with Shí'í tradition itself, which expects no major eschatological figure after the Qá'im. Even the return of Imám Ḥusayn (with whom Bahá'u'lláh would later identify himself) plays a relatively minor role in Shí'í expectations. The Báb, however, was quite emphatic about the advent (imminent or distant is a matter of dispute) of an eschatological figure more important than he. The Bábís were, of course, quite aware of the Báb's teachings on this count. To be a Bábí was not only to believe in the Báb, but to prepare for the advent of a still greater Manifestation of God. The currency and vitality of this expectancy is evident in the rash of eschatological claims made by Bábís immediately following the martyrdom of the Báb.²²

The Báb is clear as to the ultimate purpose of his mission:

It behooveth you to await the Day of the appearance of Him Whom God shall manifest. Indeed My aim in planting the Tree of the Bayán hath been None other than to enable you to recognize Me. In truth I Myself am the first to bow down before God and to believe in Him. Therefore let not your recognition become fruitless, inasmuch as the Bayán, notwithstanding the [p. 61] sublimity of its station, beareth fealty to Him Whom God shall make manifest. ...

O congregation of the Bayán ...! ... Suffer not yourselves to be shut out as by a veil from God after He hath revealed Himself. For all that hath been exalted in the Bayán is but as a ring upon My hand, and I Myself am, verily, but a ring upon the hand of Him Whom God shall make manifest—glorified be His mention!²³

We have seen how Bahá'u'lláh uses Qur'anic concepts of prophetic oneness to explain the concept of the Seal of the Prophets. This distinction, which in Islamic tradition is exclusively reserved for Muḥammad, is distributed by Bahá'u'lláh to the other Messengers of God as well. But Qur'anic interpretation can be taken only so far. Bahá'u'lláh stretched interpretation of "Seal of the Prophets" far beyond Islamic limits. To bolster interpretation, Shí'í traditions were available in abundance, a fund on which any exegete might legitimately draw. Islamic traditions have a certain attraction: though less authoritative, they tend, on the whole, to be quite literal, forthright, and easy to understand. Bahá'u'lláh, somewhat reluctantly it seems, invokes Shí'í tradition, selecting some rather unusual and striking traditions on the figure of the Qá'im and his legislative role in the eschaton.²⁴

The gist of the traditions cited is that a new code of law (*sharí'a*) will replace the old. For example: "A Youth from Baní-Háshim shall be made manifest, Who will reveal a new Book and promulgate a new law. Most of His enemies will be the divines." Ascribed to Ja'far al-Şádiq, the Sixth Imám (d. 148 A.H./765 C.E.), is a similar tradition: "There shall appear a Youth from Baní-Háshim, Who will bid the people plight fealty unto Him. His Book will be a new Book, unto which He shall summon the people to pledge their faith. Stern is His Revelation unto the Arab. If ye hear about Him, hasten unto Him!"²⁵ Momen locates such traditions in Majlisí's *Bihár al-anwár* and in Shaykh al-Mufíd's *Kitáb al-irshád*.²⁶

[p. 62] Drawn from the often contradictory and overburdening fund of Shí'í traditions, Bahá'u'lláh's citations suggest the eventuality of a new *sharí'a*, with a clear anti-clerical strain. Bahá'u'lláh states:

Notwithstanding all the verses of the Qur'án, and the recognized traditions, which are all indicative of a new Faith, a new Law, and a new Revelation, this generation still waiteth in expectation of beholding the promised One who should uphold the Law of the Muḥammadan Dispensation. The Jews and the Christians in like manner uphold the same contention.²⁷

Beyond the "Seal of the Prophets" is uncharted exegetical territory. Bahá'u'lláh opens up a whole new line of interpretation by drawing a simple Qur'anic equation: The Qá'im of Islamic tradition is the "presence of God" in the Qur'án. Throughout the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh consistently identifies the figure of the Qá'im with the Qur'anic "presence of God," in which God's "presence" (not essence) is incarnated in the person of an eschatological fulfiller whose charisma is the numinosity of God. The latter identification is not exclusive to the Qá'im for good reason, since it equally applies to the messenger foretold by the Báb.

The Book of Certitude then, after all is said and done, is an apology for two eschatological figures: the Báb (as Qá'im) and "He Whom God Shall Make Manifest." In this light, the Book of Certitude can be seen as advance legitimation for Bahá'u'lláh's own prophetic credentials, regardless of whether or not his own self-consciousness was messianic in 1861–62. The common denominator here is the significance of the eschatological "presence of God" found in the Qur'án's forewarnings of the meeting with God on the Day of Judgment.

[p. 63]

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL "PRESENCE OF GOD"

The notion of divine encounter in the eschaton forms a major exegetical theme in the Book of Certitude. Bahá'u'lláh, nonetheless, takes pains to distance God from all anthropomorphisms, Qur'anic or otherwise. He extends his purge of anthropomorphic concepts to Qur'anic eschatology as well, such that God never makes a personal appearance in the apocalyptic drama, but rather directs it.

The divine encounter, therefore, is realized through the person of the Manifestation of God, since God cannot otherwise be seen or even known. Thus understood, the Qur'án's repeated threat of encounter with God on the Judgment Day must refer not to God as a person but to a person ("Manifestation") of God. Just as Muḥammad manifests the Will and Presence of the transcendent deity, so also must the Qur'anic eschatological "God" be a mediated deity. According to Bahá'u'lláh, the Qur'án refers to this deputy of God in various ways, one of which is its cryptic references to "the presence of God":

Even as the Lord of being hath in His unerring Book, after speaking of the “Seal” in His exalted utterance: “Muḥammad is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets,” [Qur’an 33:40] hath revealed unto all people the promise of “attainment unto the divine Presence.” [Qur’an 33:44] To this attainment to the presence of the immortal King testify the verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned. The one true God is My witness! Nothing more exalted or more explicit than “attainment unto the divine Presence” hath been revealed in the Qur’an. ...

It hath been demonstrated and definitely established, through clear evidences, that by “Resurrection” is meant the rise of the Manifestation of God to proclaim His Cause, and by “attainment unto the divine Presence” is meant attainment unto the presence of His Beauty in the person of His Manifestation. For verily, “No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision.” [Qur’án 6:103] [p. 64] Notwithstanding all these indubitable facts and lucid statements, they have foolishly clung to the term “seal,” and remained utterly deprived of the recognition of Him Who is the Revealer of both the Seal and the Beginning, in the day of His presence.²⁸

Bahá’u’lláh attaches great importance to the Qur’án’s forebodings of the eschatological encounter with God. Every reference to “presence of God” (*liqá’ Alláh*) in the Qur’án has particular significance for Bahá’u’lláh, who suggests that the “Seal of the Prophets” verse at Qur’án 33:40 is eclipsed four verses later by the eschatological event of meeting God.

DOES THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE HARBOR A “MESSIANIC SECRET”?

The problem arises as to whether Bahá’u’lláh was harboring his own messianic secret during the Baghdad period, and whether the Book of Certitude should be interpreted in this light. If so, the entire work can be read in allusive, self-referential terms, much like the Nazareth pericope in Luke 4 in which Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah, concluding with the momentous declaration: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” (Luke 4:21) The imminence of the Báb’s predictions is a matter of controversy,²⁹ but if the Bábí eschaton was considered imminent, the Book of Certitude would have resonated with the heightened expectations of the Bábí community at that time.

Having argued on behalf of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh would soon find it necessary to shift the focus of the Bábí community to himself as the source of new authority. Within less than a year or two he would advance his own eschatological claims. To what extent, therefore, does the Book of Certitude foreshadow this event? And to what degree had Bahá’u’lláh’s messianic self-consciousness evolved at the time of writing?

[p. 65] The Book of Certitude, as Gulpáygání points out, is ostensibly not an apology for Bahá'u'lláh himself.³⁰ It was written while he was still a Bábí, before he had advanced any prophetic claim.³¹ This is significant, since a reading of the text is likely to disappoint expectations that Bahá'u'lláh states his own case, though the effect of the text became just the same for Bahá'ís at a later date. Purposed as an apology for the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh articulates an open-ended prophetology within a theology of revelation.

Bahá'u'lláh develops his argument exegetically, by means of a rhetorical rationale, with occasional appeals to the reader's common sense (i.e., pointing out the rhetorical fallacies to which literalism leads). This style of argument will be analyzed in Chapter Four. That the allusive self-referential style which characterizes Bahá'u'lláh's writings in the Baghdad period presents real difficulties is a given. A further complication is the plethora of claims to divinity which overburdened the Bábí community in the 1850s. Questions over successorship (*wişáya*) to the Báb and messianic claims to being "Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest" (*man yuzhiruhu'lláh*) are two distinct but interrelated problems. MacEoin has brought together the relevant texts and presented them with greater clarity and precision than perhaps any other study so far.³²

The problem of Bahá'u'lláh's self-consciousness having been stated, a look at certain Shí'í and Bábí eschatological expectations is in order. What of Shí'í traditions regarding the return of Imám Ḥusayn? Indeed, there is a legitimate question over how important the Ḥusayn traditions in Shí'í apocalypticism actually were. Certainly these presuppose and are overshadowed by the sheer weight and confusion of traditional material concerning the return of the Twelfth Imám, who was identified with the Mahdí of Sunní tradition (though the early Mahdí traditions might themselves have had a Shí'í provenance).

[p. 66] One of the traditions concerning the return of Ḥusayn is a well-known *ḥadīth* related by al-Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar from Ja'far al-Şádiq, the Sixth Imám. Its importance is underscored by the fact that it is "perhaps the longest tradition ever recorded in the Imamite *ḥadīth* literature."³³ However, in this tradition, Ḥusayn plays a relatively minor role compared to that of the Qá'im (or Mahdí). The purpose of his return in this tradition is to exact revenge for his martyrdom and for the massacre of his followers at Karbalá.³⁴ But another tradition, described by Sachedina, ascribes a more significant role to Ḥusayn:

Al-Şádiq, in explaining the passage of the Qur'an which says "Then returned We unto you the turn [to prevail] against them and aided you ..." (17:6) says that by "returned" is meant the return of al-Ḥusayn, who will be accompanied by his seventy-two companions who were killed with him on the battlefield of Karbalá'. The companions will announce the return of al-Ḥusayn to the people. At the same time, the Imám says, the believers

should not doubt him, since he is neither Antichrist (*al-dajjāl*) nor the devil. The Qá'im will be among the people. When the people have gained certainty about his being al-Ḥusayn, the Qá'im will die, and al-Ḥusayn will perform his funeral rites and bury him.³⁵

Supplementing Sachedina's description, MacEoin adds material with a direct bearing on Bábí eschatological expectations:

According to a number of traditions, the Qá'im will be the first of the Imáms to return to earth, after which he will rule for seven or nine years, each of which will be the equivalent of ten normal years. ... After fifty-nine years of the Qá'im's rule have passed, the Imám Ḥusayn will come forth; he will remain silent (*ṣámit*) for eleven years (i.e., until the year seventy) whereupon the Qá'im will be killed and his place taken by Ḥusayn for nineteen years until the appearance of 'Alí.³⁶

[p. 67]

Was Bahá'u'lláh consciously observing this prophecy?³⁷

A much longer period of time associated with the expected return of Ḥusayn is to be found in the tradition Rafati has culled from Shaykhí sources:

Then Ḥusayn will take over the Qá'im's responsibilities and will kill Shimr, Yazíd, and other enemies who will have returned. Finally, Ḥusayn will defeat all the enemies and will reign for fifty thousand years.³⁸

In any event, far from espousing reincarnation, Bábí doctrine and practice simply aimed at a symbolic re-enactment of the past projected into the eschatological drama of the future. As Amanat points out: "The Traditions provided the general context, whereas the Shaykhi theory of nonmaterial *Ma'ād* [Return of the Dead] permitted symbolic identification with past heroes."³⁹ Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be the return of Ḥusayn was not given prominence in the Baghdad period, nor is this expectation specifically set up in the Book of Certitude. One reason for this, as MacEoin tentatively concedes for the sake of argument, may be that "the view that Bahá' Alláh was the return of Ḥusayn ... is subsumed by wider notions of messianic fulfillment."⁴⁰

These wider notions included the narrower expectations of the Bábí community, which was oriented by the Báb toward anticipation of "He Whom God Shall Make Manifest" (*man yuzhiruhu'lláh*). This, in turn, may be subsumed under the concept of independent manifestation (*mazhar*) of God, since this was also part and parcel of Bábí doctrine.

To give the reader an idea of the kinds of messianic claims Bahá'u'lláh was to advance not long after the revelation of the Book of Certitude, what follow are three representative proclamations. Bahá'u'lláh's messianic declarations are partially described in the following Tablets:

(1) the Tablet to Naşír (*Lawḥ-i Naşír*), revealed in Adrianople (1864–68); (2) the Words of Paradise (*Kalimát-i firdawsúyyih*); and (3) the [p. 68] Tablet of the Challenge (*Lawḥ-i mubáhilih*), in which Bahá'u'lláh recounts what he proclaimed in the face of the counterclaims made in 1867 by rival Bábí leader Şubḥ-i Azal:

(1) *Claim to be the Return of Imám Ḥusayn:*

By God! This is He Who hath at one time appeared in the name of the Spirit [Jesus Christ], thereafter in the name of the Friend [Muḥammad], then in the name of 'Alí [the Báb], and afterwards in this blessed, lofty, self-subsisting, exalted, and beloved Name. In truth, this is Ḥusayn, Who hath appeared through divine grace in the dominion of justice, against Whom have arisen the infidels, with what they possess of wickedness and iniquity. Thereupon they severed His head with the sword of malice, and lifted it upon a spear in the midst of earth and heaven. Verily, that head is speaking from atop that spear, saying: "O assemblage of shadows! Stand ashamed before My beauty, My might, My sovereignty, and My grandeur. Turn your gaze to the countenance of your Lord, the Unconstrained, so that ye may find Me crying out among you with holy and cherished melodies."⁴¹

(2) *Claim to be He Whom God Shall Make Manifest:*

Were the Point of the Bayán [the Báb] present in this day and should He, God forbid, hesitate to acknowledge this Cause, then the very blessed words which have streamed forth from the wellspring of His Own Bayán would apply to Him. He saith, and His word is the truth, "Lawful is it for Him Whom God will make manifest to reject him who is the greatest on earth [the Báb]." Say, O ye that are bereft of understanding! Today the Most Exalted Being [the Báb] is proclaiming: "Verily, verily, I am the first to adore Him."... The Dawn hath broken, yet the people understand not. ... Who else but the face of Bahá hath the power to speak before the face of mankind? ... Peruse ye the Persian Bayán revealed by Him Who heralded this Revelation and look at it with the eye of fairness.⁴²

(3) *Claim to be an Independent Manifestation of God:*

He Who is the Spirit [Jesus = Bahá'u'lláh] hath, verily, issued from His habitation, and with Him have come forth the souls of God's chosen ones and the realities of His Messengers. Behold, then, the dwellers of the realms on high above Mine head, and all the [p. 69] testimonies of the Prophets in My grasp. Say: Were all the divines, all the wise men, all the kings and rulers on earth to gather together, I, in very truth, would confront them, and would proclaim the verses of God, the Sovereign, the Almighty, the All-Wise. I am He Who feareth no one, though all who are in heaven and all who are on earth rise up

against Me. ... This is Mine hand which God hath turned white for all the worlds to behold. This is My staff; were We to cast it down, it would, of a truth, swallow up all created things.⁴³

Bahá'u'lláh frequently draws parallels between other messengers of God and himself. This affinity is also expressed in terms of specific eschatological proclamations centering on fulfillment. For example, a Christian who was to embrace the new faith would be deemed the most faithful follower of Christ, as Christ himself (in Bahá'í belief) had foretold the advent of Bahá'u'lláh. In this way, the eschatological terms of the “covenant” of Christ are satisfied.

Correlating, moreover, to the four religions which then predominated in Persia, Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be four messianic figures at once: (1) Shí'í Islam: the return of Ḥusayn; (2) Christianity: the Comforter/Spirit of Truth; (3) Judaism: the Everlasting Father, the Lord of Hosts; (4) Zoroastrianism: Sháh Bahrám Varjávand. To this list, a fifth messianic figure may be added: He Whom God Shall Make Manifest, the Bábí messiah.⁴⁴

In principle, Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be all messiahs. It is obvious that such a proclamation, its veracity apart, could scarcely be more universal. Why, then, was it kept secret for over ten years? MacEoin has documented Bahá'u'lláh's outward attitude of servitude to Azal during the Baghdad period,⁴⁵ and at the same time has speculated on the emerging sense of personal mission Bahá'u'lláh had erstwhile been incubating.⁴⁶ In what may perhaps be his methodological reluctance to adduce later texts as evidence, MacEoin has not exhausted the concept of *ayyám-i buṭún* (“Days of Concealment”), [p. 70] a term used by Bahá'í chroniclers and evidently coined by Bahá'u'lláh himself. A concept traceable to the Báb,⁴⁷ *ayyám-i buṭún* must be factored into any contextual reading of the Book of Certitude, if Bahá'u'lláh's later testimony on this question is to be admitted as evidence. What Bahá'u'lláh retrospectively termed the “delay” and the “set time of concealment”⁴⁸ was a decade-long silence. One Arabic passage in the Book of Certitude typifies the ambiguity Bahá'u'lláh adopts in self-referential contexts—a passage that can be taken either as mystical ebullience or as oblique disclosure of divine mission:

Say: O people of the earth! Behold this flamelike-Youth that speedeth across the limitless profound of the Spirit, heralding unto you the tidings: “Lo: the Lamp of God is shining,” and summoning you to heed His Cause which, though hidden beneath the veils of ancient splendour, shineth in the land of 'Iraq above the day-spring of eternal holiness.⁴⁹

Shoghi Effendi succeeds in capturing a vigorous sense of Bahá'u'lláh's imminent mission on the verge of disclosure, as well as the grandeur of the Íqán itself. The many hints to this effect in Bahá'u'lláh's writings during the Baghdad years are not all that subtle. In reflecting on this period, Shoghi Effendi speaks of “Bahá'u'lláh's reluctance to unravel the mystery sur-

rounding His own position,"⁵⁰ though, from another point of view, such a sense of destiny must have been hard to contain.

From the official Bahá'í perspective, the Book of Certitude was indeed "revealed on the eve of His [Bahá'u'lláh's] declaration of His Mission."⁵¹ If the burden of proof rests with documenting beyond any doubt Bahá'u'lláh's self-consciousness in this regard, an equally binding methodological caveat must be added: There is the countervailing burden of proof in interpreting such texts in conformity with known Islamic mystagogical paradigms. Is there any precedent in Islam for a mystic to openly speak of a divine mission with a [p. 71] claim to revelation? If the answer is negative, this means that Bahá'u'lláh spoke as a mystic but knew himself to be a revealer. His discourse thus required decoding. This hermeneutic is arguably the heuristic key to all of Bahá'u'lláh's pre-declaration writings.

Throughout his writings in Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh evidently develops the theme of secrecy. During his two-year sojourn in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan (1854–1856), Bahá'u'lláh composed a mystical ode in Arabic, "The Ode of the Dove" (*al-Qaṣída al-Warqá'iyya*) styled after Ibn al-Fáriq's "Poem of the Way" (*Naẓm al-sulúk*). After returning to Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh appended some Persian annotations to the ode. One comment is explicit over secrecy.⁵²

Cole states that this ode betrays a sense in which "Bahá'u'lláh feels tortured, not simply by his remoteness from his beloved, but also because of his messianic secret."⁵³ This perception reflects Cole's sensitive reading of the ode itself, and his interpretation of it is no doubt served by his close reading of other works of Bahá'u'lláh written in the Baghdad period.

A similar motif is found in the opening of the *Gems of Divine Mysteries* (*Jawáhir al-Asrár*), also written in the Baghdad period, a translation of which passage is as follows: "Encompassed as I am at this time by the dogs of the earth and the beasts of every land, concealed as I remain in the hidden habitation of Mine inner Being [lit., "My Nest of Mystery" (*wakr al-sirri*)], forbidden as I may be from divulging that which God hath bestowed upon Me of the wonders of His knowledge (*badá ilmih*), the gems of His wisdom, and the tokens of His power...."⁵⁴

In his Sura of Sufficiency (*Súrat al-Kifáya*) tentatively dated in the early mid-Baghdad period, Bahá'u'lláh calls upon the reader to hearken to the captivating melodies of the Countenance (*tal'at*) sitting upon the couch of proximity (*sarír al-iqtiráb*), the Point of Manifestation (*nuqṭat al-zuhúr*), the mystery of Interiority (*sirr al-butún*), the inner reality of the Book (*mus-tasirr al-kitáb*). This passage is immediately [p. 72] followed by reference to "the two stationary [letters] *alifs*," which Lambden interprets as an allusion to Bahá'u'lláh and Şubḥ-i Azal.⁵⁵

Reference to Azal need not diminish the secrecy motif of passages such as this. Relevantly, Cole develops an original and involved theory of Bahá'u'lláh's purpose in prolonging his messianic secrecy until the time was ripe for disclosure. In fine, the Báb never appointed a successor or regent (*waṣíy*), as stated by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Lawḥ-i Siráj*. Instead, Bahá'u'lláh chose to deflect attention away from himself through exploiting Azal's fondness for leadership, representing Azal as the figurehead of the Bábí community. Azal maintained his own secrecy for reasons of personal security, to evade the very real dangers his position posed.

Azal's titular leadership permitted Bahá'u'lláh's effective leadership. With Azal in perpetual hiding, under assumed names and guises, Bahá'u'lláh was free to direct the affairs of the Bábís. Furthermore, a great deal of eschatological ferment surrounded the year 1280 A.H. (1863-64 C.E.), and only then would Bahá'u'lláh openly advance his claims. That would be the time when, as Cole puts it: "The true situation would become manifest, that the exoteric play (of Azal as the leader and Bahá'u'lláh as his lieutenant) would close and the esoteric truth (that Bahá'u'lláh was the Manifestation and Azal his lieutenant) would become apparent."⁵⁶ In 1850, even while the Báb was alive, Cole believes that Bahá'u'lláh wrote letters to the Báb in Azal's name and that the Báb addressed Bahá'u'lláh through Azal.⁵⁷

Returning to the passage above, the reader may discern here the deliberate apposition of manifestation and concealment, a recurrent theme throughout Bahá'u'lláh's writings. The secrecy motif is sustained, while a clue to Bahá'u'lláh's covert messianic status as a Manifestation of God is given for the reader to ponder. Lambden paraphrases another passage from this same Tablet: "O people of the realms of being! [p. 73] Eat of the succulent fruit of the Crimson Tree which hath been planted in the land of realization, the Point of Origin, the Sealed Mystery, the Secret of the Divine Decree. ... Issue forth from your habitations before the Presence."⁵⁸ Here the secrecy motif evokes the eschatological theme of divine encounter, entering into the "presence" of God.

Secrecy is one thing, the secret another. Its messianic content is, I think, possible to divine from the following exhortation to the Bábís at the close of Part One of the two-part Book of Certitude:

And now, We beseech the people of the Bayán, all the learned, the sages, the divines, and witnesses amongst them, not to forget the wishes and admonitions revealed in their Book. Let them, at all times, fix their gaze upon the essentials of His Cause, lest when He, Who is the Quintessence of truth, the inmost Reality of all things, the Source of all light, is made manifest, they cling unto certain passages of the Book, and inflict upon Him that which was inflicted in the Dispensation of the Qur'án. For, verily, powerful is He, the King of divine might, to extinguish with one letter of His wondrous words, the breath of

life in the whole of the Bayán and the people thereof, and with one letter bestow upon them a new and everlasting life. ... Take heed and be watchful ... that haply ye may seek the shelter of the shadow extended, in the Day of God, upon all mankind.⁵⁹

SYMBOLISM AS SOLUTION TO THEORETICAL OBSTACLES TO A REALIZED ESCHATON

The foregoing remarks concerned specific eschatological figures which came to be associated with the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. There was also the problem of certain omens and miraculous events which, both in tradition and in exegesis, were expected to signal the eschaton. In this respect, Bahá'u'lláh was confronted with official as well as popular notions of the eschaton, largely derived from a literal reading [p. 74] of the Qur'án. A number of objections could be raised to challenge a claim to revelation. One category of denial on interpretive grounds is lack of fulfillment of prophecy. A prophet's credentials are, after all, predicated on such fulfillment. The eschaton depends on it. One may be in the dark as to what the Islamic deliverer might look like, but the contours of the eschatological earth, given the fantastic Last Day imagery in the Qur'án, should not be hard to recognize.

Bahá'u'lláh employs an array of exegetical techniques to demonstrate the figurative nature of the Qur'anic eschaton. Making the case for underlying figuration, Bahá'u'lláh proceeds to interpret symbolically eschatological verses in terms of their contemporary fulfillment. This hypothetical pattern of rhetorical method and symbolic exegesis in the Book of Certitude will be tested in the course of our investigation.

Having given a cursory overview of the origin and impact of the Book of Certitude, I will now concentrate on Bahá'u'lláh's Qur'anic exegesis. The Book of Certitude is essentially an extended rhetorical argument leading to a symbolic interpretation of eschatological images which occur and recur in the Qur'án.

ADDENDUM

See now Buck, "[Bahā'īs.](#)" *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān: Supplement*. Edited by Jane McAuliffe. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. (Published online on December 1, 2016.) DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_050505. [Original, longer article](#) that was invited, accepted, and edited (6,160 words) and briefly published online (as I recall). Then a new word-limit was imposed, such that I had to cut 2,255 words. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.17267.25123>. [May 30, 2022.]

NOTES

1. Smith, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, p. 63.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 63–64.
3. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 140.
4. Bahá'u'lláh, "*Lawḥ-i mubárah dar javábh-i 'aridih-i jináb-i 'Abu'l-Fádhá'il-i Gulpáygání,*" in *Ma'idih-i ásmání*, ed. by 'Abdu'l Hamíd Ishráq-Khávarí (Tehran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 129 B.E. [1972–73]), p. 157. Also cited by Khazeh Fananapazir and Seena Fazel in "The Station of the *Kitáb-i Íqán,*" *Bahá'í Studies Review*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (1993), p. 56.
5. E. G. Browne, "The Bábís of Persia, II: Their Literature and Doctrines," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 21 (October 1889), p. 945. [p. 75]
6. Shoghi Effendi writes: "The *Íqán* is, from a Bahá'í point of view, far more important and significant than any other of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, with the exception of the *Aqdas*. In it, the entire religious philosophy of the Cause is clearly sketched and every thoughtful student of religion cannot but be interested in it." (From a letter dated December 2, 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer.)
7. Circumstances now being different, Persian Bahá'ís account for around 7% of the world-wide Bahá'í community.
8. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 119.
9. From a letter dated August 7, 1943, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer.
10. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 139.
11. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunní Islám," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, Vol. 7 (1986), p. 178.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
15. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 7.
16. Cited by Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 20–21. Ishráq-Khávarí states that this tradition is variously reported, at times ascribed to the Prophet Muḥammad, at other times to 'Alí, One work which has attributed the tradition to Muḥammad is that by Shaykh Rajab Bursí, entitled *al-Alfayn*. See entry in Ishráq-Khávarí, *Qámús-i Íqán*, Vol. 4, pp. 1539–40. Cf. B. Todd Lawson, "The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty in the Divine Secrets Connected with the Commander of the Faithful by Rajab Bursí (d. 1411)," in *The Legacy of Medieval*

Persian Sufism, ed. L. Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatulláh Publications/SOAS Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, University of London, 1992), pp. 261–76.

17. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 162. A similar tradition, known as the *Ḥadīth al-Sahába*, reports 'Alí to have said: "I am Adam, I am Noah, I am Abraham, I am Moses, I am Jesus, I am Muḥammad; I move through the forms as I wish—whoso has seen me has seen them, and whoso has seen them has seen me." (Cited by MacEoin, "Hierarchy, Authority, and Eschatology," pp. 103 and 142, n. 55, where it is noted that Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í—founder [p. 76] of the Shaykhí school—quotes this tradition in *Sharḥ al-ziyára*, Vol. 2, p. 54.) Bahá'u'lláh acknowledges the dual ascription of this tradition to both Muḥammad and 'Alí in Shiism (though the longer form has to be attributed to the latter, since Muḥammad would scarcely have committed the tautology of stating his own name). Bahá'u'lláh observes, "Similar statements have been made by 'Alí." (*The Book of Certitude*, p. 153.)
18. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
19. Islamic belief in the prophethood of Adam finds roots in Jewish tradition (especially in certain midrashes on Genesis 2:21 in which the sleep that overtakes Adam is the "torpor of prophecy") and, more prominently, in Ebionite Christianity, according to patristic reports and possibly the older strata of the pseudo Clementine *Homilies and Recognitions* (the latter was a doctrinal quarry for Maximinus and Gothic Arianism). See Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity*, passim.
20. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 168.
21. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 139.
22. See MacEoin's useful survey of Bábí claimants, in which he states, "The most striking feature of Babism during the 1850s is the proliferation of claims to some form of theophanic status on the part of individual members of the sect. 'Abbás Effendi ['Abdu'l-Bahál maintains that no fewer than twenty-five separate individuals claimed to be *man yuzhiruhu'lláh* at this time." ("Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism," p. 100.) Cf. *idem*, "Hierarchy, Authority, and Eschatology," pp. 109–13.
23. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, pp. 167–68. The second paragraph was translated by Shoghi Effendi.
24. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 237, writes, "Although We did not intend to make mention of the traditions of a bygone age, yet, because of Our love for thee, We will cite a few which are applicable to Our argument. We do not feel their necessity." (p. 241.)
25. Cited by Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 241.
26. Momen, *Shí'í Islam*, p. 169, item 6, and 337 n. 29, also citing Howard's English translation of Shaykh al-Mufíd's *Kitáb al-Irshád* (1981), p. 552. I am at a loss to explain the curious transmission of such traditions, although Persian anti-Arab sentiment is undoubtedly a

factor. All of the various traditions Bahá'u'lláh cites are to [p. 77] be found in the composite picture of the Shí'í Mahdí, which Momen has conveniently sketched out from Shí'í sources. (Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, pp. 166–70 and notes.)

27. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 239–40.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 169–70.
29. See MacEoin's informative sections on "Long-Term Eschatological Expectations" and "Short-Term Eschatological Expectations" in "Hierarchy, Authority, and Eschatology," pp. 123–29 and pp. 129–35, respectively.
30. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, *Kitáb al-Fará'id*, pp. 317–23.
31. Taherzadeh identifies three stages in the proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh: (1) The declaration in the Garden of Riḍván to a few selected Bábís in Baghdad, 1863; (2) the wider announcement to the Bábí community at large; (3) the proclamation to the world at large through epistles addressed to the great monarchs and religious potentates of the day. (*Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 2, pp. 301–303.)

The first public proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh in the form of letters to world leaders appears to have taken place after March 1866 to early fall of the same year during Bahá'u'lláh's exile to Edirne, with the revelation of the Sura of the Kings (*Súrat al-mulúk*). Bahá'u'lláh's 1863 declaration was made only to a few selected individuals. It might accurately be referred to as his "private declaration."

32. MacEoin, "Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism (1850–1866)," *Studia Iranica*, Vol. 18 (1989), pp. 93–129.
33. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, p. 166.
34. On the motive for Ḥusayn's return, see also Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism*, p. 9.
35. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, pp. 168–69, citing Majlísí's *Biḥár al-anwár*. Of this collection, Vol. 13, containing the bulk of Shí'í eschatological ḥadíth, has been printed separately as *Mahdíy-i maw'úd*. For reference, see Sachedina, p. 221.
36. MacEoin, "Hierarchy, Authority, and Eschatology," p. 131.
37. Whether coincidental or intentional, Bahá'u'lláh's self-stated period of messianic secrecy does approach eleven lunar years. The calculation can be roughly made on the basis of Islamic dates. The mystical raptures he experienced in the Síyáh-Chál dungeon transpired some time during his imprisonment, between the last two months of the year 1268 A.H. and the first two months of the year [p. 78] 1269 A.H. (August–December 1852). For reasons of coincidence with prophecy fulfillment, Bahá'í history inclines towards "the year nine" (1269 A.H.) to which the Báb had referred as an eschatologically significant year. Bahá'u'lláh himself has made this linkage. (Bahá'u'lláh, cited in Shoghi Effendi, *God Pass-*

es By, p. 92. Cf. Browne, “Note V. Texts from the Persian *Bayán* Illustrating the Báb’s View of His Relation to ‘Him Whom God Shall Manifest,” in *A Traveller’s Narrative*, pp. 347–49.)

Historians may defer to autobiographical disclosures insofar as they are deemed veracious. The year 1269 A.H. commenced on 15 October 1852. Bahá’u’lláh’s declaration in Baghdad occurred 3 Dhí-l-Qa’dih 1279 A.H. (22 April 1863). Therefore, at the outermost, the period of time that had elapsed between Bahá’u’lláh’s annunciation in the Síyáh-Chál and his declaration in Baghdad would have been ten (solar) years, five months and around seven days. Rounding up or down, this period of time is slightly closer to eleven lunar years than to ten.

Aside from this Shí’í reference to an eleven-year silence, perhaps this anticipated secrecy motif was an element in Bahá’u’lláh’s own “concealment” (*buṭun*) for close to eleven lunar years, from Tehran to the close of the Baghdad period. One can only speculate.

38. Rafati, *The Development of Shaykhí Thought in Shí’í Islam*, p. 183.
39. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 196.
40. MacEoin, “Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism,” p. 120.
41. Buck, “A Unique Eschatological Interface,” p. 163. [Note: For the authorized translation (nearly identical to the original provisional translation), see “Additional Tablets and Extracts from Tablets Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh,” www.bahai.org/r/107788893. (Accessed May 30, 2022.)]
42. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kalimát-i Firdawsíyyih*, in *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 75–76.
43. Bahá’u’lláh, cited in *God Passes By*, p. 168–69.
44. See Buck, “A Unique Eschatological Interface,” *passim*. My thanks to Prof. E. Segal for pointing out that the Lord of Hosts is not a messianic figure in Judaism. Although the Lord of Hosts is not a messianic figure, he is still an apocalyptic figure. As E. Jenni, “Eschatology of the Old Testament,” in the *International Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 127, points out: “The coming of Yahweh is the central idea of the Old Testament eschatology.” I owe this reference to Stephen Menard.
45. MacEoin, “Divisions and Authority Claims,” pp. 114–16. [p. 79]
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 121–26.
47. See text cited by MacEoin, “Hierarchy, Authority, and Eschatology,” p. 123.
48. Bahá’u’lláh, cited in *God Passes By*, p. 151.
49. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 147.
50. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 127.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

52. “Likewise comprehend the intention of the blessed verse in which He says: “Who made a fire for you out of the green tree” [Qur’an 36:80]. Would that a hearing ear might be found that but a drop out of the depths of the ocean of fire (*bahr-i nár*) or out of this sea that is brimming with sparks might be mentioned. Yet it is best that this pearl (*lúlu*) remain hidden (*maknún*) in the shell of the ocean of ipseity (*bahr-i huviyya*) and continue to be treasured up in the repositories of mystery (*sirr*) in order that those that are not worthy may be shut out and those that are of the select may put on the garb of pilgrimage to the Ka’ba of glory and enter the sacred precincts of beauty.” MacEoin, “Bahá’ Alláh’s *al-Qaṣída al-Warqá’iyya*: an English translation,” *Bahá’í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (September 1983), p. 15. Transliteration supplied by the present writer after consulting the Persian original in *Áthár-i qalam-i a’lá* (Tehran: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 129 B.E. [1972-1973]) Vol. 3, p. 198.

Self-referential use of “pearl” can be seen in the writings of the Báb. In Sura 108 of the *Qayyúm al-asmá’* (1260/1844), the Báb refers to himself as the most concealed mystery (*al-sirr fí mustasirr al-sirr*) and the glorious pearl (*al-durr al-jalíl*) in the shell of the Friend (*ṣadaf al-khalíl*) preserved in the ocean of unknowing (*al-bahr al-‘amá’*). See S. Lambden, “An Early Poem of Mírzá Ḥusayn ‘Alí Bahá’u’lláh: The Sprinkling of the Cloud of Unknowing (Rashḥ-i ‘Amá’),” *Bahá’í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (September 1984), pp. 66–67.

53. J. Cole, “Bahá’u’lláh and the Naqshbandí Sufis in Iraq, 1854–1856,” in *From Iran East and West*, p. 15.
54. *Áthár-i qalam-i a’lá*, Vol. 3, p. 5. My paraphrase.
55. Translated by Lambden, “The Sprinkling of the Cloud of Unknowing,” p. 84. I have not yet accessed the Arabic text of the *Súrat al-kifáya*, privately published in the *Iran National Bahá’í Archives*, Vol. 36, pp. 277–80. [p. 80]
56. Cole, “Bahá’u’lláh’s Surah of the Companions: An Early Edirne Tablet of Declaration (c. 1864). Introduction and Provisional Translation,” *Bahá’í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 5, no. 3 and Vol. 6, no. 1 (June 1991), p. 5 of Cole’s pre-published manuscript.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.
58. Lambden, “The Sprinkling of the Cloud of Unknowing,” p. 84.
59. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 92–93.

[p. 81]

CHAPTER THREE

**BEYOND ISLAM:
HERMENEUTICAL TERMINOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE**

Yet, shouldst thou reflect upon these statements [Rev. 1:16–17], thou wouldst find them to be of such surpassing eloquence (*balágha*) and clarity (*faṣáḥa*) as to mark the loftiest heights of utterance and the epitome of wisdom. Methinks it is from them that the suns of eloquence (*shumús al-balághat*) have appeared and the stars of clarity (*anjum al-faṣáḥat*) have dawned forth and shone resplendent.

... Know then that He [Jesus] who uttered these words in the realms of glory meant to describe the attributes of the One Who is to come in such veiled and enigmatic terms as to elude the understanding of the people of error (*ahl al-majáz*).

Bahá'u'lláh,

Gems of Divine Mysteries, 52–53; 54–55.¹

As a Persian and hermeneut, Bahá'u'lláh enriches a spectacular legacy of exegesis by Persians. ‘Most Qur’an commentators (*mufasssírún*),’ observed Ibn Khaldún (d. 1406 C.E.), “were Persians.”² Long before the nineteenth century, however, classical Qur’anic *tafsír* was abandoned in Persia in favor of more specialized works of commentary. “The well-known books of *tafsír* written in this period,” observes Rafati, [p. 82] “are commentaries on a few verses or chapters of the Qur’án. A full, comprehensive commentary was not attempted.”³ The Book of Certitude reflects this change. Although not a classical commentary in form, this Bábí *tafsír* exhibits well-attested exegetical procedures to be found in classical works.

In this chapter, Bahá'u'lláh’s hermeneutical terminology will be discussed in light of its Islamic heritage. A study of the technical terms the author employs will help to place the Book of Certitude within the overall *tafsír* tradition.

In so doing, we shall be careful to avoid the pitfalls of reductionism. The reader should bear in mind that the Book of Certitude went far beyond Islam's doctrinal boundaries and, over a period of time, effected the exegetical creation of the Bahá'í Faith. Its Islamic roots planted in the matrix of Abrahamic tradition, the Book of Certitude is fed by the trunk of classical *tafsír* that had branched into Shí'í *ta'wíl* (symbolic interpretation). The work is the fruit of a complex exegetical tradition and represents Bahá'í theology, ideology and principles in their seed form.

The Book of Certitude is a specialized work of exegesis. It treats the so-called "third part" of the Qur'án, eschatological verses requiring an interpreter (*mu'avvil*), one who performs *ta'wíl*. Properly speaking, therefore, Bahá'u'lláh's role is that of a *muavvil*.⁴ According to McAuliffe: "Although apparently synonymous in the earliest period, the significations of *tafsír* and *ta'wíl* began to diverge as the Qur'anic sciences developed in the classical period. *Tafsír* remained the term of more limited denotation, often restricted largely to philosophical exegesis, while *ta'wíl* connoted hermeneutical principles that sought to uncover deeper meanings in the text or to align the text with particular theological or philosophical orientations."⁵ McAuliffe's functional definition of *ta'wíl* equally applies to the Book of Certitude: the deeper meanings which Bahá'u'lláh draws out from Qur'anic texts are aligned with the Bábí, rather than traditional Islamic, worldview.

[p. 83] Prime texts for *ta'wíl* are the "ambiguous" or "figurative" verses of the Qur'án, known as the *mutashábihát* on the basis of Qur'án 3:7 (in its Shí'í reading, distinct from the Sunní reading): "It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are clearly formulated verses, those are the essence of the Book, and others ambiguous (*mutashábihát*). ... And none knows its interpretation (*ta'wíl*) save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge."⁶ The phrase, "those firmly rooted in knowledge," is understood by Shí'ís to refer to the Imáms of the lineage of Muḥammad, each of whom (be they the Imámí Shí'í twelve, or the Ismá'ílí seven, or the Zaydí five) is believed to have possessed divine enlightenment (inspiration, not revelation).

In typical Shí'í fashion, Bahá'u'lláh adduces the Shí'í reading of this verse. He does so twice, near the beginning and toward the end of the Book of Certitude.⁷ His application of the Shí'í reading, however, is atypical. The verse is clearly self-referential with regard to Bahá'u'lláh's authority to interpret. In Shiism, the authority to elucidate the Qur'án is vested in the Imáms. Bahá'u'lláh has not contested this traditional investiture. He has, nevertheless, passed beyond the Imáms. This arrogation of authority to interpret is a major structural element in Bahá'u'lláh's transformation of *ta'wíl* into realized eschatology.

THE PEOPLE OF TAFSÍR AND THE COMMON PEOPLE

It has already been pointed out that, as an exegete, Bahá'u'lláh stands within the classical *tafsír* tradition. His heritage is thoroughly Islamic, in the broadest sense. At the same time, his work is steeped in Shiism. In the scholastic sense, Bahá'u'lláh's vocation as a Qur'án commentator was entirely extra-curricular. Elements of his commentary were in fact counter-curricular. The Bahá'í idea that the Qur'anic [p. 84] expression "Seal of the Prophets" does not indicate finality of revelation, but rather finality of prophecy prior to a cycle of fulfillment, while grounded in *tafsír*, actually runs counter to it.⁸ It is also apparent that the Book of Certitude was in some respects an anti-text to that tradition.

There are many indications of this antithetical edge, particularly with regard to the Qur'án commentators themselves, of whom Bahá'u'lláh was critical. He rejects the authority and invalidates the pronouncements of the "commentators of the Qur'an" (*'ulamáy-i tafsír*).⁹ In his eyes, it appears that the institution (loosely speaking) of the Shí'í sacerdotal order stood as a collective Caiaphas over the Bábí holocaust. It should be added that Bahá'u'lláh respected those highly principled divines who were not persecutors. This counterbalancing positive evaluation comes out in other texts, however.¹⁰

In terms of a typology of *tafsír*, this critical attitude towards the ulama aligns the Book of Certitude somewhat with Sufi *tafsír*.¹¹ Neither is such a critical stance unknown in the eschatological traditions of Islam. The great Shí'í *ḥadīth* master al-Kulaynī (d. 939–40 C.E.) cites the Sixth Imám, Ja'far al-Şádiq (d. 765 C.E.), who in turn cites an agraphon (non-canonical saying) of Jesus: "Jesus, Son of Mary, said: 'Woe to the wicked ulama! How the fire will blaze for them!'"¹² This vituperative vaticination is echoed and amplified in the Book of Certitude. In the opening (on the first page in fact), Bahá'u'lláh alludes to a tradition known as the "*ḥadīth* of Kumayl"—a tradition which reappears from time to time throughout the book. The passage below is taken from Ali-Kuli Khan's translation, because it is the more literal rendering in this particular case:

The quintessence of this chapter is that travellers in the Path of Faith and seekers for the Cup of Assurance must sanctify and purify themselves from all material things; that is, the ear from hearing statements, the heart from doubts which [p. 85] pertain to the veils of glory (*az qalb-rá zunúnát-i muta'alliqih bi-subuḥát-i jalál*).¹³

Authority and power resided in the sacerdotal order of Shí'í Islam. Knowledge and devotion, in theory, certify this institutional pastoralism over all things religious. The genitive metaphor “veils of glory” ties in with the idea that knowledge itself is a veil. Excessive learning can lead to an overweening hubris that is vigilant and coercive. Only rarely did divines benefit from Bahá'u'lláh's insights as each was blinded by his own knowledge. Bahá'u'lláh speaks of “the mysteries of divine wisdom (*asrár-i hikmat-i rúháníyyih*), hidden ere now beneath the veil [lit., veils] of glory (*bí subuḥát-i jalál*).”¹⁴ It was not so much pride as it was persecution that Bahá'u'lláh objected to. In his eyes, the turbans of the clergy were stained red in the bloodbath that engulfed the Bábís.

Further on in the Book of Certitude, Shoghi Effendi translates the phrase *subuḥát-i jalál*¹⁵ as Ali-Kuli Khan does. Bahá'u'lláh explicitly cites the tradition in his indictment of the ulama:

And, now, strive thou to comprehend the meaning of this saying of 'Alí, the Commander of the Faithful: “Piercing the veils of glory, unaided.” Among these “veils of glory” are the divines and doctors living in the days of the Manifestations of God, who, because of their want of discernment and their love and eagerness for leadership, have failed to submit to the Cause of God, nay, have even refused to incline their ears unto the divine Melody.¹⁶

Bahá'u'lláh considers the problem of personal understanding of the Qur'án, equally constrained as it is illumined by the interpretation of the learned. It seems that Bahá'u'lláh was as critical of restriction of interpretation as he was of exclusive or unwarranted literal interpretation. He actually accuses the learned of his day of *tahríf*, of perverting the text of the Qur'án!¹⁷ Moreover, there was a hegemony of [p. 86] interpretive authority which the learned maintained. In Islamic history of thought, this exclusivism extended to philosophers as well. Averroes, for example, states:

In general, everything in these [Qur'anic texts] which admits of allegorical interpretation can only be understood by demonstration. The duty of the élite here is to apply such interpretation; while the duty of the masses is to take them in their apparent meaning in both respects, i.e. in concept and judgement, since their natural capacity does not allow for more than that.¹⁸

One source for this division may be the well-known *ḥadīth* of Imám Ja'far al-Ṣádiq, who is reported to have said: “The Book of God contains four things: the announced expression (*'ibara*); the allusion (*ishára*); the hidden meaning related to the suprasensible worlds (*latá'if*); and the spiritual truths (*ḥaqá'iq*). The literary expression is for the common people (*'awámm*); the allusion is for the elite (*khawáṣṣ*); the hidden meaning is for the friends of God [or saints] (*awliyá'*); and the spiritual truths are for the prophets (*anbiyá'*).”¹⁹

While it would be uncharacteristic of Bahá'u'lláh to contradict an established tradition such as this one, it is presumably elitism that Bahá'u'lláh attacks when he writes:

Heed not the idle contention of those who maintain that the Book and verses thereof can never be a testimony unto the common people (*'avámm*), inasmuch as they neither grasp their meaning nor appreciate their value. And yet, the unfailing testimony of God to both the East and the West is none other than the Qur'án. Were it beyond the comprehension of men, how could it have been declared as a universal testimony unto all people?²⁰

In any case, Bahá'u'lláh believes that “the exalting of the illiterate faithful above the learned opposers of the Faith”²¹ is arcanelly augured in the Qur'án. It is no surprise, therefore, that, in respect of audience, the Book of Certitude [p. 87] was populist. The recipient of the Book of Certitude, Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad Shírází, was himself a merchant. One gets the distinct impression that Bahá'u'lláh is making every effort to talk to the reader and not speak beyond the reader's comprehension. Conceptually, Bahá'u'lláh rejected any notion of there being a privileged elite (*al-khawáṣṣ*) who alone could harvest pearls from the depths of the Qur'án. The Book of Certitude was not only conceptually, but linguistically populist as well. Written in the vernacular of the majority of his followers, a *tafsír* in Persian (rather than in Arabic) was far more accessible to the common people, the vast majority of whom were untutored and illiterate. Those who could read taught others the “proofs” established in the Book of Certitude.

This powerful teaching tool invested the sympathetic reader with a sense of personal understanding of the Qur'án, which had long been the exclusive domain of professional clerics. Even the text of the Qur'án is made accessible through Bahá'u'lláh's occasional translations into Persian of the verses he cites in Arabic. These are what might be thought of as Persian “targums” or edifying paraphrases of sacred text. The reader in English might be oblivious to this populist feature except for one passage in which Shoghi Effendi does translate the Persian paraphrase. In this instance, the sacred text is the Gospel (in Arabic), not the Qur'án. After citing Matthew 24:29–31, Bahá'u'lláh introduces his paraphrase with the formula: “Rendered into the Persian tongue, the purport of these words is as follows:”²²

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S REVERENCE FOR THE QUR'ÁN

It should come as no surprise that Bahá'u'lláh's respect for the Qur'án was heartfelt and genuine. Bahá'u'lláh was, after all, a Muslim. The Book of Certitude is infused with a spirit of reverence for the sacred text. Such reverence is to

[p. 88] be distanced from the very critical statements Bahá'u'lláh makes regarding the Muslim clerics of his day. His praise of the Qur'án, though traditional, was not conformist. Bahá'u'lláh's heterodox ideology does not diminish his profound reverence for the text. He had his own insight into the deep structure of Qur'anic revelation, and for the polysemy of its symbols:

For it is evident that whoso hath failed to acknowledge the truth of the Qur'án hath in reality failed to acknowledge the truth of the preceding Scriptures. ... Were We to expound its inner meanings and unfold its hidden mysteries, eternity would never suffice to exhaust their import, nor would the universe be capable of hearing them. God verily testifieth to the truth of Our saying!²³

This praise is double-edged. Belief in the Gospel, according to such a view, is fully validated in acknowledging that the Qur'án comes from the same source of revelation. This is a Muslim perspective, not a Christian one. The eye that beholds a revelation from God in the former surely cannot be blind to the authenticity of the latter. Such logic suggests that he who believes in just one revelation believes in none. To be a true believer, and certainly to perfect one's faith, one must believe in all the revelations from God.

This "all or none" logic is conceivably extendable into the future, in the event of a post-Qur'anic revelation. But Islamic doctrine precludes such a possibility. Traditionally, the Qur'án is seen as completing the historical sequence of revelations. The Qur'án is the consummation and perfection of the revelatory process. If isolated from its context, Bahá'u'lláh's statement in the following passage stands in perfect conformity with such a view:

Behold, how lofty is the station, and how consummate the virtue, of these verses which He hath declared to be His surest [p. 89] testimony, His infallible proof, the evidence of His all-subduing power, and a revelation of the potency of His will. He, the divine King, hath proclaimed the undisputed supremacy of the verses of His Book over all things that testify to His truth. For compared with all other proofs and tokens, the divinely-revealed verses shine as the sun, whilst all others are as stars. To the peoples of the world they are the abiding testimony, the incontrovertible proof, the shining light of the ideal King. Their excellence is unrivalled, their virtue nothing can surpass. They are the treasury of the di-

vine pearls, and the depository of the divine mysteries. ... Through them floweth the river of divine knowledge, and gloweth the fire of His ancient and consummate wisdom.²⁴

There are echoes here of the doctrine of the inimitability (*i'jáz*) of the Qur'án. Praise of the Qur'án in his own *tafsír* was also to be expected, as one of the formal characteristics of *tafsír*. There may also have been a more practical reason behind Bahá'u'lláh's reverential remarks.

Without aspersing the sincerity of this eulogy of the Qur'án, Bahá'u'lláh may well have had a purpose similar to that of his predecessor, the Báb. As attested by the Báb himself, the Báb's claims to a new revelation were unfolded gradually, in this sequence: Gatehood (*bábíyya*), Remembranceship (*dhikriyya*), Qá'imship (*qá'imíyya*), and finally Divine Manifestation (*mazhariyya*).²⁵ In the initial stages of his proclamation, the Báb had expressed his reverence for the Qur'án to soften the impact of his revolutionary (and abrogatory) claims. The Báb states, in retrospect, that in his first revealed book, the *Qayyúm al-asmá'* (a *tafsír* on the Sura of Joseph), he had "enjoined the observance of the laws of the Qur'án, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by reason of a new Book and a new Revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own."²⁶

With Bahá'u'lláh, the Qur'án is indeed confirmed, but relativized. Although exegetical consciousness typically [p. 90] extends the authority of ancient material, Bahá'u'lláh's commentary circumscribes the Qur'án at the same time. This ambivalent relationship to the Qur'án is seen in Bahá'u'lláh's praise of it as "the mightiest instrument and surest testimony for the seekers; a guide for the people until the Day of Resurrection."²⁷ In Bahá'u'lláh's view, the advent of the Báb had precipitated the Day of Resurrection, thus eclipsing the primacy of the Qur'án. His express veneration of the Qur'án served to ameliorate the impact on the Muslim reader who, reading further on in the Book of Certitude, would encounter explicit traditions²⁸ (drawn from Islamic sources)²⁹ alluding to post-Qur'anic revelation and the implied supersedure of Islam in its present form. Cast in Islamic terms, the idea of a new revelation and law code was represented as the transformation of Islam, but an "Islam" beyond Islam.

THE QUR'ÁN'S EXOTERIC AND ESOTERIC DIMENSIONS

Ayoub states categorically: "The most important principle of Shí'í *tafsír* therefore is that 'the Qur'an has an outer dimension (*ẓāhir*) and an inner dimension (*bāṭin*); its inner dimension has yet another dimension, up to seven inner dimensions'."³⁰ This cardinal principle of interpretation Ayoub considers unique to Shí'í *tafsír*. Two other unique characteristics of *bāṭiní tafsír* are postulated: that of *jarí* (continuous relevance) and *intibāq* (analogical application). The principle of *jarí* views history as darkly mirrored in revelation. Events in history have references in the Qur'an, hidden in its inner dimension (*bāṭin*). Esoteric interpretation is the key to discovering those special verses that disclose foreknowledge of an event. Ayoub cites a tradition which states in part: "Were a verse to be revealed concerning a people, and were it to die with their death, nothing would remain of the Qur'an."³¹

[p. 91] A distinction should be drawn between *bāṭin* and *bāṭiniyya*. According to Hodgson, the *bāṭin* as historically practiced among the *bāṭiniyya* or Ismá'ílís may be systematically analyzed in terms of four essential notions: (1) *bāṭin* ("a distinctive type ... of scriptural interpretation ... symbolical or allegoristic in its method, sectarian in its aims, hierarchically imparted, and secret")³²; (2) *ta'wil* (the educing of the *bāṭin* from the *ẓāhir*); (3) *khawaṣṣ* (the elite who know the *bāṭin*); and (4) *taqiyya* (keeping the *bāṭin* secret).³³ This paradigm does not square with Bahá'í notions.

Bahá'u'lláh reflects an otherwise characteristic Shí'í hermeneutic toward the conclusion of the Book of Certitude:

It is evident unto thee that the Birds of Heaven and Doves of Eternity speak a two-fold language (*du bayán*). One language, the outward language (*ẓāhir*), is devoid of allusions (*bí ramz*), is unconcealed and unveiled; that it may be a guiding lamp and a beaconing light whereby wayfarers may attain the heights of holiness, and seekers may advance into the realm of eternal reunion. Such are the unveiled traditions and the evident verses already mentioned. The other language is veiled and concealed. ...³⁴

Positing the existence of an esoteric dimension in the Qur'an is one thing. Assessing its interpretive priority is another. In secular terms, what is the relative value of the profane versus arcane? Bahá'u'lláh sought to harmonize both the exterior and interior dimensions of the Qur'an. In his *Tafsír* on the Sura of the Sun, Bahá'u'lláh uses language similar to that of Sa'd al-Dín al-Taftázání (d. 1389 or 1390 C.E.)³⁵ and al-Ghazálí (d. 1111 C.E.),³⁶ in expressing the view that whoever takes the the outward sense only and forsakes the inward is ignorant (*jāhil*), while the one who accepts the inward sense without regard to the outward is oblivious (*ghāfil*).

Conversely, whoever takes the inward and balances it with the outward interpretation is a perfect (*kámil*) scholar [p. 92] (*'álím*), in which case the scripture becomes catholic or complete (*kalimát al-jamí'*).³⁷

This philosophy of interpretation stands squarely within respected Islamic tradition, yet in practice it seems that commentaries which combined exoteric and esoteric interpretations were more the exception than the rule. Although Bahá'u'lláh has sought to make the Qur'án more accessible to the “common people,” exegetical primacy still resides in the Messenger of God.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S TECHNICAL TERMS FOR SYMBOLISM

Bahá'u'lláh's hermeneutical terminology is based on polyvalence (multi-dimensionality of meaning) or polysemy (multiplicity of meanings), predicated on the Qur'án. This interpretive license gives symbolical *tafsír* its broad scope and versatility. At the edge of that explicative range is the historical present, in which the voice of the divine incurs. It telescopes through centuries. Its fulfillment is predicated on symbols come alive, realized in iconic reenactment. The realized eschatology of the Book of Certitude depends not on bodily resurrection, but on the resurrection of symbols. These symbols had lain on the plain of the text as dry bones. Contemporarizing reinterpretation reinfuses the symbols with marrow, ideologically fleshing them with thew and sinew.

With regard to polysemy, the discipline of rhetoric put forth semantic rationale for identifying incidences of figuration in scripture. Generally speaking, Bahá'u'lláh does not appeal to the “science” of Islamic rhetoric when explaining Qur'anic figuration.³⁸ He does, however, make considerable use of the appeal to absurdity—a rhetorical form of argumentation exercised by rhetoricians to overrule the literal sense of the text. Bahá'u'lláh's recourse to appeals to absurdity will be treated in the next chapter.

[p. 93] In the passage below, which alludes to Qur'án 3:7,³⁹ it appears that Qur'anic symbolism, in Bahá'u'lláh's view of it, is predicated on three interoperative parameters: (1) figuration (nonliteral meaning); (2) polyvalence (multi-dimensionality of meaning); (3) the authority to interpret (the production of meaning). Of these three, authority to interpret takes priority:

This is the divine standard, the Touchstone of God, wherewith He proveth His servants. None apprehendeth the meaning of these utterances except them whose hearts are assured, whose souls have found favour with God, and whose minds are detached from all else but Him. In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended. Thus it is recorded: “Every knowledge has seventy

meanings, of which only one is known amongst the people. And when the Qá'im shall arise, He shall reveal unto men all that which remaineth."⁴⁰

Although its textual justification is based on the assertions of figurization and multi-dimensionality of the text, the interpretation itself is still, in a sense, arbitrary, even if it is sound exegesis. Bahá'u'lláh's production of meaning (which for Bahá'ís is equated with the presumed intent of the Qur'án) is predicated on polyvalence of meaning which in turn is justified by the existence of nonliteral meaning. In modern hermeneutics, the notion of authorial intention is so problematic that the idea is now treated as a fallacy. But in a religious worldview, the case may be otherwise. The result is still the same: from the sacred text, new meaning is derived in the name of the old. One of the primary functions of the Qá'im is to interpret. This interpretation is effected by revelation.

Why were Qur'anic prophecies for the most part ignored by rhetoric? One reason may be theological. The apocalyptic texts of the Qur'án formed part of a class of Qur'anic material [p. 94] on which the classical commentators were disinclined to interpret. The first great exegete of the classical *tafsír* tradition, al-Ṭabarí (d. 923 C.E.), maintains that for this class of verses, only God possesses true knowledge of their significance.⁴¹ Such verses comprise what is euphemistically referred to in Persian as "the silent Qur'án" (*Qur'án-i šámit*), requiring a divinely inspired interpreter.

Throughout the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh expatiates on a range of apocalyptic themes, each of which was but "one of the mysteries hidden in the symbolic terms (*ramz* *az asrár*) 'resurrection,' 'judgment,' 'paradise,' and 'hell'."⁴² Among Bahá'u'lláh's hermeneutical terms, therefore, are *ramz* (pl., *rumúz*) and *sirr* (pl., *asrár*). Two further hermeneutical terms are introduced in Bahá'u'lláh's stated purpose in revealing the Book of Certitude:

This servant will now share with thee a dewdrop out of the fathomless ocean of the truths treasured in these holy words, that haply discerning hearts may comprehend all the allusions (*talwíhát*) and the implications (*ishárát*) of the utterances of the Manifestations of Holiness, so that the overpowering majesty of the Word of God may not prevent them from attaining unto the ocean of His names and attributes, nor deprive them of recognizing the Lamp of God which is the seat of the revelation of His glorified Essence.⁴³

So far, we have seen reference in the Book of Certitude to the terms symbol (*ramz*), secret (*sirr*), symbolic term or implication (*talwíh*), and allusion (*ishára*).⁴⁴ These terms appear to be more or less synonymous for Bahá'u'lláh. They also are non-technical in that they lack the specificity which might decisively link them with a particular Islamic exegetical approach. Here, the presence of such terms does not demarcate discreet spheres of exegesis. Rather, they

form a hermeneutical chain, bound by a common logic. They are only slightly differential in terms of nuance, as will be explained [p. 95] below. Bahá'u'lláh's terminology must therefore be seen within the set of assumptions one finds in the Book of Certitude. According to Bahá'u'lláh, incidences of figurative and symbolic discourse in the Qur'án are purposeful and have a special reason for requiring interpretation:

Know verily that the purpose underlying all these symbolic terms (*kalimát-i marmúzih*) and abstruse allusions (*ishárát-i mulghazih*), which emanate from the Revealers of God's holy Cause, hath been to test and prove the peoples of the world; that thereby the earth of the pure and illuminated hearts may be known from the perishable and barren soil. From time immemorial, such hath been the way of God amidst His creatures, and to this testify the records of the sacred books.⁴⁵

The terms *ishára*, *talwíh*, *sirr*, and *ramz* recur throughout the Book of Certitude and are conceptually compatible with the old dichotomy of *ẓáhir* and *báṭin* (terms also employed in the text).

Ramz (*symbol, secret, mystery*): Though *ramz* (pl., *rumúz*) derives from the Arabic verb *ramaza*, etymologically *ramz* is of Persian origin. Lexically, *ramz* is defined as “sign, nod, wink, motion, hint, allusion, intimation; allegory; riddle; symbol, symbolic figure, emblem, character; secret sign, code sign.”⁴⁶ In a work falsely ascribed to Qudáma, Isháq ibn Wahb defines *ramz* as “hidden obscure meaning.”⁴⁷ Another rhetorician of the same period describes *ramz* as “cryptic language.”⁴⁸ An Arabic treatise on *ramz* was published in Cairo in 1972, adducing exemplars from the Qur'án.⁴⁹ From all accounts, *ramz* is hidden. Although one can allude to it,⁵⁰ a *ramz* must be discovered or deciphered.

Elsewhere in Bahá'u'lláh's writings of the Baghdad period, there are special self-referential usages of *ramz*, possibly hinting at his undisclosed messianic consciousness. But such usages are outside of the purview of this discussion.

[p. 96] The personification of symbols, is, however, a crucial hermeneutical principle in the Book of Certitude. While metaphorical competence might succeed in detecting figuration, deciphering the symbolic code of the Qur'án is more a matter of identification. Each symbol is a kind of glass slipper. On whom does the symbolic shoe fit? The “veils of glory” mentioned above are identified by Bahá'u'lláh with the ulama. To discern the identity of the symbol and not just its meaning is an essential element of Bahá'í interpretation. Symbols have objective subjects but their referents are subjective objects. Symbols relate to persons, or to events, or to

conditions that pertain to the world of humanity. Bahá'u'lláh stresses the “who” of the symbol and not just the “what.”

Sirr (*secret, mystery*): For Bahá'u'lláh, “symbol” (*ramz*) and “secret” (*sirr*) are synonymous. *Sirr*, however, is primarily a mystical term. “Both the singular and the plural [*sirr* and *asrár*],” writes Lambden, “are very common in Islamic esoterica, in Sufi texts and in Bábí/Bahá'í scripture. It often has the sense of ‘secret’ or ‘mystery’ as well as, on occasion, the inner dimension of human beings: their ‘heart’ or ‘thought’.”⁵¹ While the term *ramz* is common to both Islamic philosophy and mysticism, the term *sirr* is more frequently encountered in mystical contexts. It is disclosed to the seeker by virtue of capacity and purity of heart. Since *sirr* transcends reason, it is not subject to the constraints of reason.

In the *Sufistic Lexicon* (*Iṣṭilahát al-ṣúfiyya*) of ‘Abd al-Razzáq al-Qáshání (d. 1330 C.E.), the “secret of the reality” (*sirr al-ḥaqíqa*) means “that which the symbolic expression (*ishára*) touches upon.”⁵² Bahá'u'lláh uses almost the identical expression, speaking of the divine inspiration he was experiencing: “Without word It unfoldeth the inner mysteries (*ramz-i ma'ání*), and without speech It revealeth the secrets of the divine sayings (*asrár-i tibyán*). ... Upon the anemones of the garden of love, It bestoweth the mysteries [p. 97] of truth (*asrár-i ḥaqá'iq*), and within the breasts of lovers, It entrusteth the symbols of the innermost subtleties (*daqá'iq-i rumúz va raqá'iyiq-i án-rá* [*án = rumúz*]).”⁵³ The parallelism between *asrár* and *rumúz* is apparent. In this passage, Shoghi Effendi renders these words, in translation, interchangeably.

Possibly the most strikingly apt metaphor for “mystery” in the Book of Certitude is the pearl within the shell. Bahá'u'lláh refers to a Qur'anic verse in which “pearls of mysteries” (*la'álíy-i asrár*) lie hidden (*maknún*).⁵⁴ He extols all the verses of the Qur'án: “They are the treasury of the divine pearls (*kanz-i la'álíy-i iláhiyyih*) and the depository of the divine mysteries (*makhzan-i asrár-i aḥadiyyih*).”⁵⁵ Here “pearls” and “mysteries” are employed as parallel imagery. An independent attestation reinforces this parallelism: “In the disconnected letters of the Qur'án the mysteries of the divine Essence (*asrár-i huviyyih*) are enshrined, and within their shells (*dar ṣadaf*) the pearls of His Unity (*la'álíy-i aḥadiyyih*) are treasured.”⁵⁶ The same image is used by Bahá'u'lláh of himself, after speaking of the heart's potential to “become the treasury of the mysteries of divine knowledge”: “Notwithstanding all that We have mentioned, how innumerable are the pearls (*la'álí bí-shumár*) which have remained unpierced in the shell of Our heart (*dar ṣadaf-i qalb*)!”⁵⁷

It is important to appreciate that these “mysteries” are not only to be fathomed and understood, but are to be realized and experienced as well: “Then shalt thou witness all these mysteries (*jami’-i ín asrár-rá*) with thine own eyes. O my brother! Take thou the step of the spirit, so that, swift as the twinkling of an eye, thou mayest flash through the wilds of remoteness and bereavement, attain the Riḍván of everlasting reunion, and in one breath commune with the heavenly Spirits.”⁵⁸ In this striking passage, the entire crux of exegesis in the Book of Certitude becomes apparent. “Bereavement”—possibly a reference to the martyrdom of the Báb, felt as a personal loss by the uncle of the Báb whom [p. 98] Bahá’u’lláh addresses as “Brother”—is to be transformed into a realized eschatology.

Finally, of great consequence is Bahá’u’lláh’s claim that all of the essentials of symbolical scriptural exegesis are epitomized in the Book of Certitude: “In fact, all the Scriptures and the mysteries thereof are condensed into this brief account (*va fí’l-ḥaqíqa jami’-i kutub va asrár-i ándar in mukhtaṣar dhikr shudih*). So much so, that were a person to ponder it a while in his heart, he would discover from all that hath been said the mysteries of the Words of God, and would apprehend the meaning of whatever hath been manifested by that ideal King.”⁵⁹ The veracity or falsity of this claim is purely a faith issue. The very claim itself entails an assertion of authority quite rare in Islam, even among mystics. As we shall see in the next chapter, this is a further instance of “interpretation as revelation,” which began with Bahá’u’lláh’s precursor and herald, the Báb.⁶⁰

Talvîḥ (symbolic language, allusion): *Talvîḥ* (pl., *talvîḥát*) conveys the idea of “veiled” rather than “hidden.” One lexical entry for *talvîḥ* is “beckoning, waving, flourishing, brandishing; sign, signal, wink, wave; allusion; hint, intimation, insinuation; metonymy; pl. hints, references; remarks, annotations, marginal notes.”⁶¹

Shoghi Effendi did not render the same term identically each time in translation.⁶² *Talvîḥát* in the following passage is translated as “allusions”: “Conceive accordingly the distinction, variation, and unity characteristic of the various Manifestations of holiness (*ittihád-i mazáhir-i qudsí-rá*), that thou mayest comprehend the allusions (*talvîḥát-i kalimát-i án*) made by the Creator⁶³ of all names and attributes to the mysteries of distinction and unity.”⁶⁴ The more frequent rendering seems to be that of “symbolic language.” For example: “This is the purpose underlying the symbolic words of the Manifestations of God (*talvîḥát-i kalimát-i mázâhir-i iláhi*).”⁶⁵ Further in the [p. 99] same passage, *talvîḥát*, without modifiers, is rendered “symbolic language.”⁶⁶

This rendering is also used of *talvīḥ* in the singular: “Even as he [Ja’far al-Ṣādiq] hath said in another passage: ‘A true believer is likened unto the philosopher’s stone.’ Addressing subsequently his listener, he saith: ‘Hast thou ever seen the philosopher’s stone?’ Reflect, how this symbolic language (*án talvīḥ*), more eloquent (*ablagḥ*) than any speech, however direct (*taṣrīḥ*), testifieth to the nonexistence of a true believer.”⁶⁷ The *talvīḥ* (referring to the rhetorical question) is hardly recondite at all in this passage, as it follows an explicit simile (comparison of believer and philosopher’s stone). The usage here is therefore more on the order of an implication. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi alternatively renders *talvīḥ* “implication.”⁶⁸

Ishára (allusion): According to Nwya, *ishára* has both concrete and and abstract definitions. Physically, *ishára* denotes “gesture,” “sign,” “indication.” Conceptually, *ishára* means “allusion” or “allusive language.”⁶⁹ In rhetoric, Qudáma ibn Ja’far (d. 948 C.E.) defined *ishára* in terms of its compactness of expression and its capacity to express “many meanings” (*ma’ání kathíra*).⁷⁰ This term gained currency among Sufis, for whom *ishára* signified “the esoteric language of the inexpressible mystical experience.”⁷¹

Probably the most significant and recurrent metaphor for allusions in the Book of Certitude is “veils.” Bahá’u’lláh cites one of five “answers” in the *ḥadīth* of Kumayl, which defines Truth as: “Unfolding the veils of glory without allusion” (*kashf-i subuhát al-jalál min ghayr-i ishárát*).⁷² In this tradition, “veils of glory” are obviously associated with “allusions.” These terms appear together elsewhere in the Book of Certitude in this apposition: “Then will thine eyes no longer be obscured by these veils, these terms, and allusions (*ḥujubát⁷³ va ishárát va kalimát*).”⁷⁴

[p. 100] At times *ishárát* is translated as “implications” when *talvīḥát* is rendered alongside it as “allusions.” To wit: “This servant will now share with thee a dewdrop out of the fathomless ocean of the truths treasured in these holy words, that haply discerning hearts may comprehend all the allusions (*talvīḥát*) and the implications (*ishárát*) of the utterances of the Manifestations of Holiness.”⁷⁵ It would seem that, in Bahá’u’lláh’s usage of the term, what an *ishára* hints at is already known, but is not readily understood. Thus, an *ishára* is more on the order of an indirect reference rather than something completely hidden.

In the hierarchy of interpretation, generally speaking, *ramz* and *sirr* are opaque, while *talvīḥ* and *ishára* are oblique. All are abstruse. This is somewhat of an overgeneralization, however, based on patterns of usage and associated imagery. Despite these observable associations of metaphor and meaning, Bahá’u’lláh himself seems to press little distinction among these terms. Three of these four terms in fact appear together in the following passage:

Thus at the hour when Muḥammad, that divine Beauty, purposed to unveil one of the mysteries hidden in the symbolic terms (*ramzī az asrār*) “resurrection,” “judgement,” “paradise,” and “hell,” Gabriel, the Voice of Inspiration, was heard saying: “Erelong will they wag their heads at Thee, and say: ‘When shall this be?’ Say: ‘Perchance it is nigh.’”⁷⁶ [Qur’án 17:51] The implications (*talwīh*) of this verse alone suffice the peoples of the world, were they to ponder it in their hearts.

After all is said and done, these terms serve their hermeneutical purpose: the production of meaning to educe new truth, particularly in legitimating a new revelation beyond the Qur’án. On a continuum of meaning, these hermeneutical terms range from a hint to a secret, from a veil to a barrier, from a riddle to an enigma, from allusion to symbol. These technical terms present a referential field that [p. 101] stretches from simple figuration to unmarked symbolism.

Now that Bahá’u’lláh’s hermeneutical terminology has been discussed, we will turn to equally technical questions as they pertain to his cumulative argument. Which exegetical procedures or traditional interpretive devices does he employ? How does Bahá’u’lláh’s exegesis lay the foundation for revelation beyond Islam? In what way does Bahá’u’lláh extend the “*nabí-imám syzygy*”?⁷⁷ How are the figures of the Báb and the Bábí messiah, “Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest” (*man yuzhiruhu’lláh*) legitimated in Islamic terms?⁷⁸ These are questions that will be explored in the next chapter.

ADDENDUM

See now Buck, “[Islamic Approaches to Symbolism](#).” Published online by the Burhán Institute, February 2, 2017. (Previously unpublished section of the author’s Master’s thesis: *Symbolic Quranic Exegesis in Bahá’u’lláh’s Book of Certitude: The Exegetical Creation of the Bahá’í Faith*, Chapter 3, “Islamic Approaches to Symbolism,” pp. 69–145.) Arabic translation, by Gamal Hassan, “[Islamic Approaches to Symbolism](#), أساليب الرّمزية في الإسلام, published online by the Burhán Institute, March 7, 2022. [May 30, 2022.]

NOTES

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Essence of Mysteries (Jawáhir al-asrár)*. Translation authorized by the Universal House of Justice, 28 July 1993. Arabic transliteration and brackets added.
2. Ibn Khaldún, *The Muqaddimah*, p. 313. Upon making this observation, the great Islamic chronicler cites a prophetic *ḥadīth*: "If scholarship hung suspended in the highest part of heaven, the Persians would (reach and) take it." J. D. McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 63, n. 129.

According to Leah Kinberg, Islamic empire-building was reared on the Persian model. Although Persians were, in effect, second class citizens, they were vital to Islamic civilization. Persians did practically everything except become Caliphs. Persians dominated works of translation in Islam, and so were important in the transmission of culture. This enormous contribution to Islam did not go unnoticed by the Persians themselves. They developed a Persian literary movement known as the *Shu'ubiyya*. Persians in this movement maintained that without them, the Islamic empire would collapse. One finds a curious piece of Persian literary polemic emanating from the *Shu'ubīs*: "When God is pleased, he speaks in Persian, but when he is angry, He speaks in Arabic." (L. Kinberg, course lecture in Sufism, University of Calgary, 19 January 1990.) [p. 102] Cf. H. Balyuzi, *Muḥammad and the Course of Islám*, p. 289, who, after discussing the *Shu'ubiyya*, judiciously remarks: "The civilization of Islam was neither Arab, nor Persian, nor Syriac. It had all those elements within its fold: Egypto-Coptic, Indian, Greek, Spaniard, Berber, and Turkish. Jews, Christians, Muslims, Mazdeans, Sabeans, even Pagans, were equally proud to bear its burden and rear its structure."

3. V. Rafati, *The Development of Shaykhi Thought in Shi'i Islam* (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1979), p. 17.
4. On this pair of exegetical terms, see J. Stetkevych, "Arabic Hermeneutical Terminology: Paradox and the Production of Meaning," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 48 (1989), pp. 81–96.
5. J. McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, p. 18, n. 15.
6. Poonawala, p. 209.
7. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 17/Persian, p. 14; and p. 213/Persian, p. 166.
8. Cryptically, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the Manifestation of God as "the Revealer of both the Seal (*mújid-i khatm*) and the Beginning" (*The Book of Certitude*, p. 170/Persian, p. 132). If this is to be interpreted as a circumlocution, it would intimate Bahá'u'lláh's sense of authority for radically reinterpreting the Qur'anic appellative, "Seal of the Prophets." The

term *mújid*, derived from *wajada*, lexically means “originator, author, creator.” Bahá’u’lláh’s authority claims are discussed in the final chapter of this book.

9. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 43/Persian, p. 33.
10. See texts cited by Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, pp. 110–11.
11. Cf. Jullandri, “Qur’anic Exegesis and Classical Tafsír,” p. 103.
12. J. Taylor, “Man’s Knowledge of God in the Thought of Ja’far al-Şádiq,” *Islamic Culture*, Vol. 40 (1966), p. 200.
13. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Assurance* (Khan’s translation), p. 1/Persian text, p. 2. In its masculine form, *muta’alliq* means “pertaining to.” (Wehr/Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 635) *Zunún-át* simply means “doubts, opinions, surmises.” (Steinglass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, p. 827)
14. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 16/Persian, p. 13.
15. Ishráq-Khávarí, “*subuḥát-i jalál*,” in *Qámús-i Íqán*, Vol. 2, pp. 858–59. [p. 103]
16. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 164.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 86/Persian, p. 67.
18. Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise (Kitáb faşl al-máqál)*, Chapter 3. Tr. G. Hourani, *Averroes On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, p. 65.
19. S. Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, p. 59. Cf. M. Ayoub, *The Qur’an and Its Interpreters*, Vol. 1, p. 24.
20. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 210/Persian, p. 163.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 72/Persian, p. 55.
22. See, Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, Persian, p. 127 and passim throughout the entire Persian text, sometimes with the explanatory formula *ya’ní* (“meaning,” “that is to say,” “to wit,” “namely”). *Ibid.*, p. 25.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 204
24. *Ibid.*, p. 205
25. *Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 199.
26. The Báb, *The Seven Proofs (Dalá’il-i sab’a)*, in *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (tr. H. Taherzadeh), p. 119. Cf. *Amanat*’s translation of this passage in *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 199.
27. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 202. The importance of this circumscription was pointed out by S. Scholl, *Imámí Shí’ism and the Bahá’í Faith: A Preliminary Study* (Honors Thesis; University of Oregon, 1980), p. 68.

28. Even so, Bahá'u'lláh was critical of the *ḥadīth* material: "Moreover, the traditions themselves grievously differ, and their obscurities are manifold." (*The Book of Certitude*, p. 201.)
29. In the *Book of Certitude*, it is interesting to note, one does not encounter the typical apocalyptic traditions known as *malāḥim*, which deal mostly with bloody battles supposed to take place at the end of the age.
30. M. Ayoub, "The Speaking Qur'án and the Silent Qur'án: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imámí Shí'í *tafsír*," in Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'án*, p. 187. Ayoub was citing the twentieth-century Iranian theologian Ṭabátabá'í.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
32. M. Hogsdon, "Báṭiniyya," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd ed.), p. 1098. [p. 104]
33. *Ibid.*, p. 1099.
34. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 254–55 / Persian, pp. 197–98.
35. See W. Haddad, q.v. "Taftázání," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 14, p. 244, and C. Storey, "al-Taftázání," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1st ed.). Al-Taftázání states: "The *Báṭiniyya* are heretics because they claim that the verses should not be taken in their obvious meanings and that they have hidden meanings known only to the teachers. The object of their claim is to reject the Sharí'a altogether. But the Sufi attitude is that the verses, apart from having obvious spiritual meanings, in addition have deep meanings discernible only by those who are inspired. A harmony between the normal understanding of the verses and the hidden meaning is possible. This kind of understanding is the result of perfect faith and pure inspiration." (Tr. Jullandri, "Qur'anic Exegesis and Classical Tafsír," p. 106.)
36. In *The Niche for Lights* (*Mishkát al-anwár*), al-Ghazálí writes: "Pray do not assume from this specimen of symbolism and its method that you have any license from me to ignore the outward and visible form, or to believe that it has been annulled. ... The annulment of the outward and visible sign is the tenet of the Spiritualists (*báṭiniyya*), who looked, utterly one-sidedly, at one world, the Unseen, and were grossly ignorant of the balance that exists between it and the Seen. ... In other words, whoever abstracts and isolates the outward from the whole is a Materialist (*ḥashawíyya*), and whoever abstracts the inward is a Spiritualist, while he who joins the two together is catholic, perfect." (Tr. W. Gairdner, *Four Sufi Classics* [London: Octagon, 1980], pp. 138–39. Cf. Jullandri, "Qur'anic Exegesis and Classical Tafsír," p. 112.)
37. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tafsír-i súray-i va al-Shams* (Persian title by which it is commonly known, though the work is Arabic), in idem, *Majmú'ay-i maṭbú'ay-i alvāḥ-i mubárakay-i Ḥaḍrat-i Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978), p. 11; J. Cole, "Bahá'u'lláh's Commentary on the *Súrah of the Sun*: Introduction and Translation," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 3, nos. 3/4 (April 1990), p. 18.

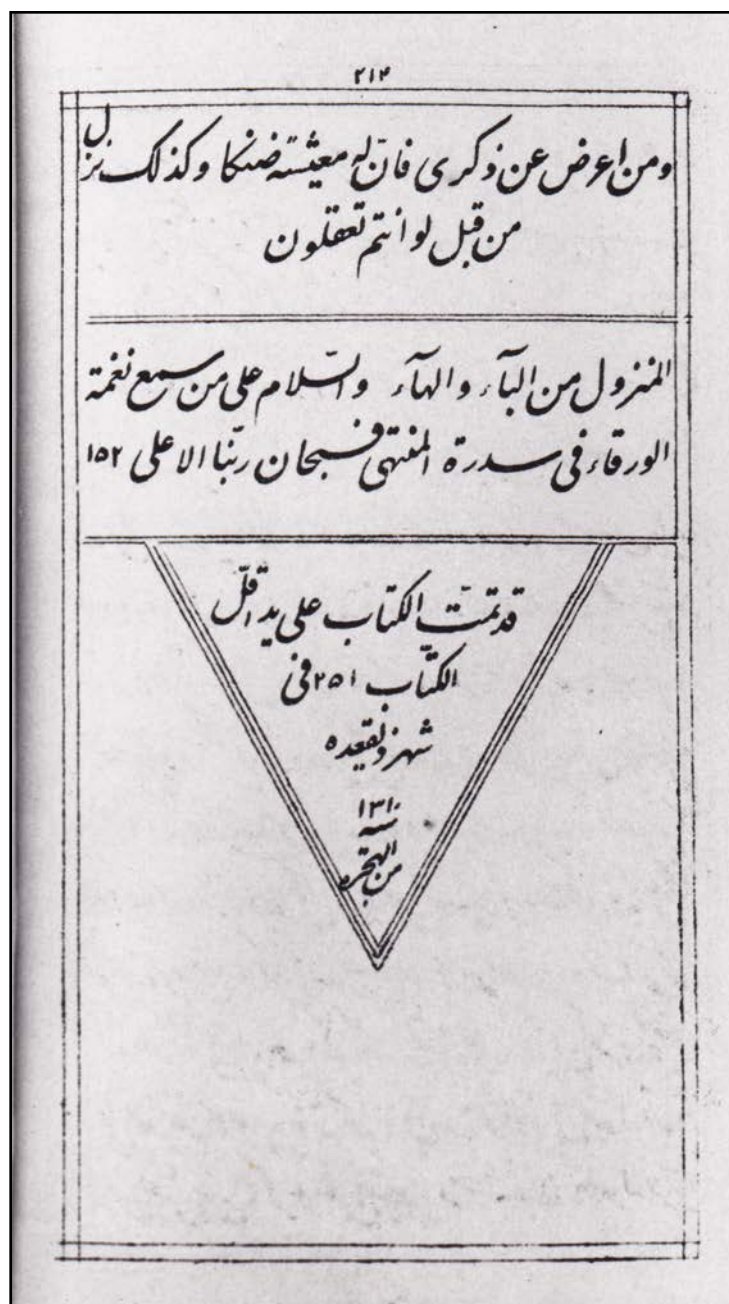
38. Bahá'u'lláh's explicit references to rhetoric are rare. He develops an interesting argument from it in a "Tablet" known as [p. 105] the *Lawḥ-i Qiná'* ("Tablet of the Veil"), in idem, *Majmú'ay-i maṭbú'ay-i alvāḥ-i mubárakay-i Ḥaḍrat-i Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 67–68. Bahá'u'lláh refers to the following technical terms in rhetoric: *al-ma'ání wa'l-bayán*, *balágha*, *majáz*, *ḥaqíqa*, *tash-bíh*, *isti'ára*. I owe this reference to N. Kinberg.
39. On Qur'án 3:7 in Shí'í exegesis concerning the authority to interpret, cf. M. Ayoub, "The Speaking Qur'án and the Silent Qur'án," pp. 186–87.
40. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 254–55/Persian, pp. 197–98.
41. J. D. McAuliffe, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarí and Ibn Kathír," in Rip-pin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'án*, pp. 49–50.
42. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 117/Persian, p. 89.
43. *Ibid.*, 28/Persian, p. 22.
44. In colloquial Arabic, *ishára* means "hint" as in the aphorism: "A hint sufficeth for the intel-ligent" (*al-'áqil yakfíhi al-ishára*). (Cited in Algar, *Mírzá Malkum Khan*, p. 223.)
45. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 49/Persian, p. 38.
46. Wehr/Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 359.
47. Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjání's Theory of Poetic Imagery*, p. 163, n. 101.
48. W. Heinrichs, *The Hand of the Northwind*, p. 37.
49. D. al-Jindí, *Al-Ramziyya fí al-'adab al-'Arabí* (Cairo, 1972).
50. In one passage, Shoghi Effendi renders *bí ramz* as "devoid of allusions." Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 254–55/Persian, p. 197.
51. S. Lambden, "The Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh: A Provisional Translation with Occasional Notes. Part 1," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 6, no. 2/3 (February 1992), p. 43.
52. *Ibid.* Cf. R. Harris (tr.), "Sufi Terminology in Ibn 'Arabí's *Iṣṭilahát al-Şúfiyyáh*," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, Vol. 3 (1984), pp. 27–54.
53. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 59–60/Persian, p. 46.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 210/Persian, p. 162.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 205/Persian, p. 158.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 202–203/Persian, p. 156.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 70/Persian, p. 54. [p. 106]
58. *Ibid.*, p. 43/Persian, p. 33.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 237/Persian, p. 184.

60. See B. Todd Lawson, "Interpretation as Revelation: The Qur'án Commentary of Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad Shírází, the Báb (1819–1850)," in A. Rippin, *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'án*, pp. 223–53; reprinted in *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, Vol. 2, no. 4 (1990), pp. 17–43.
61. Wehr/Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 882.
62. In one place, it would appear that Shoghi Effendi has translated the expression *dar talvīḥ* adverbially as "solemnly" rather than "allusively" or "indirectly": "Behold how He hath solemnly warned (*kih chigúnih dar talvīḥ indhár farmúdiḥ*) them that have repudiated the verses of God" (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 215/Persian, p. 167).
63. Not capitalized in text.
64. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 21/Persian, p. 17.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 41/Persian, p. 31.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 41/Persian, p. 32.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 79/Persian, p. 61.
68. E.g., "The implication of this utterance is ... (*talvīḥ-i bayán ín-ast*)." (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 110/Persian, p. 83.)
69. P. Nwyia, "Ishára," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd ed.), pp. 113–14.
70. Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjání's Theory of Poetic Imagery*, p. 164.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
72. This tradition is Persianized, not cited in Arabic. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Assurance* [Khan's translation], p. 117/Persian text, p. 128.)
73. Compound plural.
74. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 163/Persian, p. 127.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 28/Persian, p. 22.
76. At this juncture, Bahá'u'lláh renders the Arabic verse into Persian. Shoghi Effendi chose not to translate this paraphrase as it would be redundant. Even so, this Persian "targum" is interesting reading.
77. A useful term employed by S. Scholl, "Imámí Shí'ism and the Bahá'í Faith," p. 62.
78. A final note on terminology: I. Golziher notes the relatively [p. 107] late appearance of this term in Islamic literature, in the *Laṭá'if al-minan* (Cairo, 1321 A.H.) of 'Abdu'l-Waḥḥáb al-Sha'rání (d. 1565 C.E.), who writes: "The interval (*al-fatra*) existeth for a brief period of time after every summoner (*dá'í*) unto God; until there is manifested *Man Yuzhiruhu Alláh* after him." Tr. by B. Walker and S. Lambden, "A Note by Ignáz Golziher (1850–1921) on

the Relationship between the Báb and Sufism," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 6, nos. 2–3 (February 1992), p. 68.

On the concept of renewal in Islam, see H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "Tajíd al-Dín: A Reconsideration of Its Meaning, Roots and Influences in Islam," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, W. Brinner and S. Ricks, eds. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp. 99–108.

[p. 108]



1893 BOMBAY LITHOGRAPH: THE LAST PAGE

Fig. 5: The last page of the first dated lithograph of the Kitáb-i Íqán, published in Bombay by Násirí Press. This edition, 214 pages, bears the date 1310 A.H. (1892–93 C.E.) and is in the hand of the celebrated Bahá'í calligrapher, Mishkín-Qalam. The second colophon, by the scribe, reads: "The book has been finished by the humblest (lit., "the least") of the scribes of Bahá' (lit., "251" (if read l. to r.) or "152" (r. to l.), a cryptogram standing for "Bahá'") in the month of Dhū al-Qa'da of the year 1310 of Hijra" (= May/June 1893).

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CHAPTER FOUR

EXEGETICAL TECHNIQUES IN THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE

The Book of Certitude is not a *tafsír* in the classical sense. Its exegetical thrust is demonstrative; hence Bahá'u'lláh's own designation of it as an evincive argument (*istidlál*).¹ Exegesis is a means to an end. In this case, it is a means for realizing the "end of the age."²

Bahá'u'lláh considered his exegetical insights to be universal, applicable to any scripture: "In fact, all the Scriptures and the mysteries thereof are condensed into this brief account."³ By focusing on the author's argumentation itself, the question of which texts are interpreted becomes secondary. Presumably, the techniques Bahá'u'lláh employs to prosecute his exegeses remain the same for both Qur'anic and non-Qur'anic scripture. As we will see, Bahá'u'lláh's longest exegesis is on a biblical text: three verses from the so-called Minor Apocalypse. In the English translation, Bahá'u'lláh's exegesis of Matthew 24:29–31 spans some 57 pages (44 pages in the original Persian), comprising close to one-fourth of the entire text.⁴

[p. 110] Rippin offers some insights which certainly apply to the Book of Certitude:

Purpose of Tafsír. Interpretation aims to clarify a text. Tafsír takes as its beginning point the text of the Qur'an, paying full attention to the text itself in order to make its meaning clear. It also functions simultaneously to adapt the text to the present situation of the interpreter. In other words, most interpretation is not purely theoretical; it has a very practical aspect of making the text applicable to the faith and the way of life of the believers. The first of these two interpretive aspects is generally provoked by insoluble problems in meaning, by insufficient detail, by intratextual contradiction, or by unacceptable meanings. Interpretation that fits the text to the situation serves to align it with established social custom, legal positions, and doctrinal assertions.⁵

The adaptive function of *tafsír* of which Rippin speaks is, in the case of the Book of Certitude, a legitimizing function. The aim of this work is to authenticate the prophetic credentials of the Báb and, beyond him, of the messianic figure whose advent the Báb foretold: “He Whom God Shall Make Manifest.” Questions over the imminence of that advent may be answered in historical terms: The messianic advent was considered imminent enough to have invited a flurry of messianic claims. Within the Bábí community there was a heightened eschatological fervor. This tension precipitated a number of pretensions. What Amanat characterizes as “the sense of vigilance for future divine revelations” among the Bábís effectively became “an open invitation for messianic innovation.”⁶ On the strength of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as a historical source, we are informed that no less than twenty-five individual Bábís openly advanced claims to be “He Whom God Shall Make Manifest” (*man yuzhiruhu’lláh*).⁷

This historical situation minimizes the importance of long-range expectations also set up in the Báb’s writings. [p. 111] The high incidence of Bábí messianic contenders undercuts any attempt to dismiss the tension generated by short-range expectations.

The revelation of the Book of Certitude was prompted by certain “insoluble problems in meaning” that weighed heavily on the mind of the Báb’s uncle, who was faced not with a textual contradiction in scripture as such, but with contradictory views of the eschaton. The most acute source of inner conflict for the Báb’s uncle concerned the messianic claim made by his nephew. That claim had little to do with the popular apocalyptic scenario. Like Christ, the Báb was a messianic “scandal” and, by Islamic eschatological standards, a failed messiah. But the Bábí community had the means to rationalize what effectively was a martyred eschaton. Ultimately, it was Bahá’u’lláh who defended the “doctrinal assertions” of the Báb and, in some respects, translated to the less-literate, non-clerical Bábí populace the gist of those assertions.

The Book of Certitude cannot be read without noticing the extraordinary attention Bahá’u’lláh devotes to New Testament apocalyptic. This extensive treatment is remarkable in an Islamic context for its high degree of proportionality relative to Qur’anic exegesis, and for the effective shift in focus to a scripture having little authority for an ordinary Muslim. Bahá’u’lláh’s frequent references to the Qur’án and to tradition in his discourse on Matthew 24 tells us much about his Islamic perspective. In fact, this interscriptural approach dominates Part I of the two-part Book of Certitude. Bahá’u’lláh juxtaposes two apocalypses in exegetical dialogue.

THE NEW TESTAMENT AS A FOIL FOR QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

Bahá'u'lláh did not take the Qur'án as his starting point in the Book of Certitude. Rather, his exegetical point of [p. 112] departure was New Testament apocalyptic. This exegetical enterprise—an ideal lead-in for approaching the Qur'án later—is the centerpiece of Part I of the text. All this attention paid to a non-Qur'anic scripture serves as a foil from which the subject of Qur'anic interpretation can be developed more neutrally and thus less controversially. The New Testament section of the Book of Certitude also provides insights into Bahá'u'lláh's attitude toward scripture.

For Bahá'u'lláh, since all scripture is revealed from the same Source, exegesis of one by the other is legitimate. Bahá'u'lláh therefore has no compelling reason not to interpret a Christian text by a Qur'anic exemplar. Bahá'u'lláh's biblical/Qur'anic or “interscriptural” exegesis is not unlike the practice of interbiblical exegesis. This is the single most extensive exegetical device Bahá'u'lláh employs in the Book of Certitude: Qur'anic exegesis by means of New Testament exegesis. It is as if Bahá'u'lláh had anticipated a Christian audience beyond his immediate readership.

Interscriptural exegesis is initially predicated on parallelism:

Gracious God! Notwithstanding the warning which, in marvellously symbolic language (*talvīhāt-i gharīb*) and subtle allusions (*ishárát*), hath been uttered in days past, and which was intended to awaken the peoples of the world and to prevent them from being deprived of the billowing ocean of God's grace, yet such things as have already been witnessed have come to pass! Reference to these things hath also been made in the Qur'an, as witnessed by this verse: “What can such expect but that God should come down to them overshadowed with clouds?” (Qur'an 2:210).⁸

Following an extended exordium which recapitulates salvation history up until the advent of Jesus,² Bahá'u'lláh's exegetical point of departure in the Book of Certitude is the problem of the parousia, Christ's Second Coming, in glory. [p. 113] Bahá'u'lláh begins with John 14:28 and John 16:7, 12–14 (with an allusion to John 14:16); Matthew 24:29–31; Luke 21:33; Matthew 2:2 and 3:1–2, all of which are either eschatological or adventist in Bahá'u'lláh's presentation. He interprets these verses through reason and appeal to common sense, invoking Qur'án and Shí'í tradition as well. This technique of interscriptural citation permits functional equivalency among biblical, Qur'anic, and traditional texts, all considered non-contradictory as well as validating.

That the Qur'án reinforces Bahá'u'lláh's biblical exegesis is hardly surprising in light of Muslim interpretation in general. As Rippin points out: "Within itself, the Qur'án provides Muslims with a view of the Bible."¹⁰ But Bahá'u'lláh departs radically from one classical Islamic view: that the texts of both Torah and Gospel are corrupt (*tahrif*). For Bahá'u'lláh's argument, biblical exegesis would be of little avail if the text were suspect. Putative "corruption" of Jewish and Christian scripture was a stock charge in Muslim anti-Jewish/Christian polemics, such charges leveled more often at the Hebrew Bible. Such criticism stems from a literal reading of the Qur'anic charge of *tahrif* (Qur'án 4:45; 2:75).

Bahá'u'lláh's departure from so stock a Muslim charge would become a mark of Bahá'í doctrinal self-definition:

We have also heard a number of the foolish of the earth assert that the genuine text of the heavenly Gospel doth not exist among the Christians, that it hath ascended unto heaven. How grievously have they erred! How oblivious of the fact that such a statement imputeth the gravest injustice and tyranny to a gracious and loving Providence! How could God, when once the Day-star of the beauty of Jesus had disappeared from the sight of His people, and ascended unto the fourth heaven, cause His holy Book, His most great testimony amongst His creatures, to disappear also?¹¹

[p. 114] With the Qur'anic accusation, "They pervert the text of the Word of God" (Qur'án 4:45), Bahá'u'lláh fires the arrow back at the archer to indict Muslim clerics with *tahrif*: "Nay, rather by corruption of the text is meant that in which all Muslim divines are engaged today, that is the interpretation of God's holy Book in accordance with their idle imaginations and vain desires."¹² As a point of interest, Bahá'u'lláh was not alone in this minority opinion. Sayyid Aḥmad Khán likewise accepted the integrity of the Christian witness.¹³

It should be pointed out that many of Bahá'u'lláh's interpretations—possibly most—have precedents in Islamic tradition. It is what he does with such interpretations that is powerfully original. Moreover, his themes and overall argument are Islamic in form, but hardly Islamic in their applications. From an orthodox perspective, Bahá'u'lláh's argument against revelatory finality places him well outside of an Islamic worldview. If nothing else, Muslims would surely disavow the implications Bahá'u'lláh draws out of his symbolic exegesis of the Qur'án. After all, how could the Qur'án supersede itself?

JESUS AND COMFORTER

Bahá'u'lláh's first act of exegesis in the Book of Certitude resolves an apparent contradiction in scripture regarding Jesus's Second Coming. To wit, how can Jesus come again, yet send another "Comforter" in his stead? Bahá'u'lláh has identified two distinct traditions behind Jesus' farewell discourse as it relates to the parousia:

He [Jesus] the Revealer of the unseen Beauty ... referred unto His passing, and, kindling in their hearts the fire of bereavement, said unto them: "I go away and come again unto you." And in another place He said: "I go and Another will come Who will tell you all that I have not told you, and will [p. 115] fulfill all that I have said." Both these sayings have but one meaning, were you to ponder the Manifestations of the Unity of God with divine insight.¹⁴

Bahá'u'lláh has identified a possible contradiction in the text. If both statements are true, two advents would be expected: the return of Jesus and the advent of the second Comforter. Without reading too much into Bahá'u'lláh's analysis, his formulation of the textual problem does appear to be an original argument in Islamic circles. Be this as it may, it does anticipate critical questions raised in modern biblical scholarship. Windisch and others have discerned two distinct and incompatible traditions embedded in Jesus' "Farewell Discourse" (John 14–17): (1) the promise of the returning Son (John 14:28) and (2) the promise of the Comforter (John 14:16).¹⁵

In his 1927 monograph on the Comforter (or Paraclete) sayings,¹⁶ Windisch took the position that the promise of the Paraclete and the promise of the returning Son were incommensurate. To resolve this problem, Windisch pursued a literary-critical solution, concluding that the Paraclete sayings were secondary.¹⁷ Windisch drew attention to the fact that the Paraclete represents a successor to Jesus, one who takes the place of Jesus following inevitable martyrdom. Windisch believes that Jesus' last act on behalf of the disciples was "to provide a successor."¹⁸

The Paraclete promise is therefore incompatible with the Second Coming of Jesus, except insofar as it has been "Mystically reinterpreted" at John 14:18ff.¹⁹ The Paraclete, according to Windisch, is the virtual "double" of Christ with respect to function, and both figures function as prophets. The extensive functional parallelism between Christ and Paraclete has also been noted by Isaacs, who systematically develops the extended parallel.²⁰ Are the two figures identical but manifested in different modalities, or are they two distinct figures?

[p. 116] The distinction between the two savior figures originates nominally with the appellative, "another Comforter." ²¹ Jesus is referred to as a "*paráklêtos*" in 1 John 2:1 (albeit in a juridical sense). Reflexive evidence is interesting, for, as Riesenfeld has pointed out, currents in

early Christian circles continued to look upon Jesus as the “Comforter” despite the identification of the Comforter with the Holy Spirit as reflected in the Gospel of John.²² A further witness occurs in a fragment from the apocryphal Acts of John discovered in one of the Oxyrhynchus papyri, bearing the invocation: “O Jesus, the Comforter” (POxy 850, verso 10).²³ Jesus must have been the one originally invoked as Comforter, rather than the Holy Spirit.

In the final analysis, according to Windisch, in the Paraclete sayings there is “a faint gleam of the succession of two reigns or ages: the reign of Christ comes to an end so that the reign of the Paraclete can commence.”²⁴ In the fifth saying, Windisch detects “a sudden glimpse of a thought which ascribes a certain superiority” to the Paraclete.²⁵

Bahá’u’lláh endeavors to resolve, on a higher plane of unity, the problem of the two distinct eschatological figures: the returning Jesus and the “other Comforter.” Historically, the relationship between Jesus and the Paraclete was not an Islamic issue as such. But there was considerable interest in the identity of the Paraclete in relation to Muḥammad. In the Qur’án, Jesus foretells the coming of Muḥammad. The Qur’anic Jesus refers to this future prophet as “Aḥmad” (Qur’án 61:6). Aḥmad is traditionally regarded as one of the five names of Muḥammad (both derive from the same root, *HMD*). This does not accord with the biblical record. In the Gospel of John, Jesus does not refer to “Aḥmad” at all. A contemporary Muslim response is to suggest that the biblical text (esp. John 16:7) had somehow been altered. We shall return to this problem shortly. In an Islamic context, it is significant that Bahá’u’lláh did not opt for this solution.

[p. 117]

“I AM JESUS”: THE UNITY OF THE PROPHETS

Without recourse to a *tahrif*-based approach, Bahá’u’lláh has perceptively discerned the Jesus/Paraclete contradistinction as a conceptual problem rather than textual incongruence. Indeed, his formulation of the problem was probably calculated to pique the interest of the reader. In any event, his resolution of this eschatological dilemma will have far-reaching implications for his prophetology, as well as his interpretation of the Qur’án:

Every discerning observer will recognize that in the Dispensation of the Qur’an both the Book and the Cause of Jesus were confirmed. As to the matter of names, Muḥammad, Himself, declared: “I am Jesus.” He recognized the truth of the signs, prophecies, and words of Jesus, and testified that they were all of God. In this sense, neither the person of Jesus nor His writings hath differed from that of Muḥammad and of His holy Book, inasmuch as both have championed the Cause of God, uttered His praise, and revealed

His commandments. Thus it is that Jesus, Himself, declared: “I go away and come again unto you” (John 14:28).²⁶

Bahá'u'lláh's resolution of this apparent scriptural contradiction is predicated on the Qur'anic doctrine of the equality of prophets. Yet he also seems to invoke an Ismá'ílí tradition. The tradition Bahá'u'lláh adduces—“I am all the Prophets,” and likewise “I am Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus”—allows him to distribute Adam's distinction as the “first of the prophets”²⁷ to every prophet, including Muḥammad.²⁸ Conversely, the honorific “Seal of the Prophets” will be relativized to all Manifestations of God.

The “I am Jesus” traditions in Bahá'u'lláh's argument appear to confirm the ubiquitous presence of “crypto-Ismá'ílí currents” that Amanat speaks of as circulating in heterodox Shí'í circles. These ideas were also important to Shí'í extremists, most notably Rajab Bursí.²⁹ Ironically, what [p. 118] survived as an extremist tradition reflects an early universalist stance toward the prophets (e.g., Qur'án 2:136, 285; 3:84; 4:152, etc.), a worldview that enjoyed a short-lived primacy in Islamic origins. On this classical background, Friedmann observes:

The egalitarian approach toward the prophets did not last long. Islamic tradition soon began to insist that Muḥammad was the best of creation and consequently better than any other prophet. ... This view could find no less Qur'anic support than its egalitarian counterpart. ... The Muslim scholars of *ḥadīth* were aware of the apparent incompatibility of the early egalitarian traditions with utterances that asserted Muḥammad's superiority among the prophets with ever-increasing certainty and self-confidence. They explained the contradiction by saying that the Prophet had declined a superior status to avoid rivalry with other faiths, to steer clear of disparaging the ancient prophets, or out of modesty. Most of them also suggested that the Prophet had uttered the egalitarian statements before he became aware that he indeed was the best prophet and even the “Lord of the sons of Adam” [*sayyid wuld Ádam*].³⁰

Bahá'u'lláh, far removed from Christian Pentecostal presuppositions and arriving at the traditional Muslim position through another line of argumentation, interprets the Johannine Christ's promise of “another Comforter” as a transparent reference to the future advent of a prophet like unto Jesus, namely Muḥammad.³¹ Some background on the Muslim identification of Muḥammad with the Paraclete will serve to differentiate Bahá'u'lláh's argument from the prevailing Islamic approach. Inspired by Marracci's conjecture in his seventeenth-century translation of the Qur'án into Latin, the following textual argument has won some notoriety among Muslim apologists: that the promise of the παρακλητος (*paráklētos*, “advocate,” “consoler”) at John 14:16 (and parallels) is a corruption of the original word which [p. 119] stood behind the text, namely, παρακλυτος (*paraklytós*, “illustrious”; “celebrated”).³²

Were this proposed emendation tenable, then Jesus could be shown to have foretold the advent of Muḥammad, whose name means “excellent” or “illustrious,” on the basis of a lexical equivalence between the two names. The identification of the Spirit of Truth with Muḥammad was first made by Ibn Ishāq in the earliest extant biography of the Prophet (Síra 1:150, gloss on John 15:23), but independent of any Qur’án-inspired association with the name Aḥmad (Qur’án 61:6).³³

By contrast, Bahá’u’lláh’s identification of the Paraclete (not named but alluded to in the Book of Certitude³⁴) with Muḥammad is achieved through an argument based on a spiritual (not philological) relationship between Jesus, Paraclete, and Muḥammad. For Bahá’u’lláh, identity and distinction are exegetical frames of reference, in which both hold true.

The argument simply provides an ideological foundation which Islam accepts in principle. Transition from the familiar to the new (vindication of the Báb’s prophetic credentials) is part and parcel of Bahá’u’lláh’s argument-building. Lest the argument be entirely exegetical, Bahá’u’lláh switches to an appeal to reason. This different tact makes use of an analogy drawn from nature:

Consider the sun. Were it to say now, “I am the sun of yesterday,” it would speak the truth. And should it, bearing the sequence of time in mind, claim to be other than that sun, it still would speak the truth. In like manner, if it be said that all the days are but one and the same, it is correct and true. And if it be said, with respect to their particular names and designations, that they differ, that again is true. For though they are the same, yet one doth recognize in each a separate designation, a specific attribute, a particular character.

Conceive accordingly the distinction, variation, and unity characteristic of the various Manifestations of holiness, that [p. 120] thou mayest comprehend all the allusions made by the Creator of all names and attributes to the mysteries of distinction and unity, and discover the answer to thy question as to why that everlasting Beauty should have, at sundry times, called Himself by different names and titles.³⁵

This analogy serves to strengthen the premise that the prophets of God not only are equal but share an essential identity irrespective of differences in name. This approach is not intended to diminish the status of Muḥammad, but it will be used to undermine the cardinal Islamic dogma that no prophet would appear after him. The argument against revelatory finality dominates the whole of the Book of Certitude.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S MINOR APOCALYPSE

Bahá'u'lláh progresses now to the problem of realized eschatology as it relates to the new religious situation created by the appearance of the Báb. Bear in mind that the purpose behind Bahá'u'lláh's exegesis is two-fold: (1) to vindicate the mission of the Báb; and (2) to reorient the Bábí community in anticipation of the Bábí messiah. In so doing, Bahá'u'lláh heightens the eschatological fervor of the Bábís. He piques the short-term messianic prophecies of the Báb, which revolve around the prophetic figure mysteriously referred to as "He Whom God Shall Make Manifest" (*man yuzhiruhu'lláh*), otherwise known as the *mustagháth* (He Who shall be invoked). But first the pieces of the apocalyptic puzzle have to be put together.

Bahá'u'lláh turns to the problem of eschatological fulfillment. The Minor Apocalypse of Matthew 24 together with the Farewell Discourse of Jesus in John 14-17 are far more explicit about the advent of a messianic figure at the eschaton than is the Qur'án. In fact, the Qur'án is not at all explicit about such a figure. In the absence of direct Qur'anic [p. 121] references, Bahá'u'lláh's recourse to Matthew 24:29–31 is all the more advantageous for his development of the theme of progressive revelation. The biblical text reads:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, the moon shall not give its light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet.³⁶

Bahá'u'lláh's exegesis of Matthew 24:29–31 (having no ostensible place in Islamic doctrine) is arguably the most detailed exegesis undertaken in the Book of Certitude, and it is performed at considerable length. The major conceptual sequences of interpretation for this verse can be summarized so: Tribulation refers to spiritual deprivation. The imagery of celestial bodies in apocalyptic discourse aptly befits prophets and saints. Ideally, it can also apply to religious leaders. But this symbolism can be positive or negative, and, in certain cases, literal as well as metaphorical. Historicity apart, Bahá'u'lláh's acceptance of the star of the Magi as literal³⁷ perhaps reflects the interpretive perpetuation of a biblical metaphor taken literally.³⁸

Religious leaders are stars in the heaven of God's religion, but can become spiritually dark and plummet to their demise. Corruption in the sacerdotal order precipitates this fall from grace. By virtue of the lofty position such divines occupy, their fall is of stellar magnitude, and it is to such benighted stars that Jesus refers. These anti-clerical fulminations are not

simply exegetical. There is a point to all this interpretation. Small wonder that Bahá'u'lláh anticipates [p. 122] opposition from the divines of his day, as in the days of Jesus. The parallelism Bahá'u'lláh develops is explicit, entertaining the possibility of a new Jesus or Moses:

And now, take heed, O brother! If such things be revealed in this Dispensation, and such incidents come to pass, at the present time, what would the people do? I swear by Him Who is the true Educator of mankind and the Revealer of the Word of God that the people would instantly and unquestionably pronounce Him an infidel and would sentence Him to death. How far are they from hearkening unto the voice that declareth: Lo! a Jesus hath appeared out of the breath of the Holy Ghost, and a Moses summoned to a divinely-appointed task!³⁹

This is not simply theoretical. From the Bábí perspective, a new Moses or Jesus had indeed appeared, in the person of the Báb. And there befell him the same kind of opposition that afflicted Jesus all the way to the cross. The Báb was executed in 1850. What if another prophetic advent were in the offing? Bahá'u'lláh's transparent allusion to the Báb could easily have doubled as an oblique circumlocution for his own impending messianic advent:

Great God! When the stream of utterance reached this stage, We beheld, and lo! the sweet savours of God were being wafted from the Day-spring of Revelation, and the morning breeze was blowing out of the Sheba of the Eternal. ... Upon the anemones of the garden of love It bestoweth the mysteries of truth, and within the breasts of the lovers It entrusteth the symbols of innermost subtleties.

At this hour, so liberal is the outpouring of Its grace that the Holy Spirit itself is envious! ... So great are the overflowings of Its bounty that the foulest beetle hath sought the perfume of the musk, and the bat the light of the sun. It hath quickened the dead with the breath of life, and caused them to speed out of the sepulchres of their mortal bodies. ... [p. 123] The universe is pregnant with these manifold bounties, awaiting the hour when the effects of Its unseen gifts will be made manifest in this world. ...

From the garden of whose soul will the blossoms of the invisible realities spring forth? ... Thus have We illuminated the heavens of utterance with the splendours of the Sun of divine wisdom and understanding, that thy heart may find peace, that thou mayest be of those who, on the wings of certitude, have soared unto the heaven of the love of their Lord, the All-Merciful.⁴⁰

Note the abundant use of what Persian rhetoric calls the “metaphorical” genitive (*iḍāfay-isti'ārī*).⁴¹ The *iḍāfa* is a particle—an enclitic, to be precise—used for possessive, descriptive, and partitive purposes. Bahá'u'lláh's use of this construct becomes an important exegetical device.

Why? Because he interprets a verse in a certain way, explicating a symbol by suggesting its referent. He then uses both symbol and referent together, bound grammatically by the Persian metaphorical genitive, to reinforce his exegesis.

How does this work in the Book of Certitude? Take, for example, Bahá'u'lláh's exegesis of "earth." In Bahá'u'lláh's citation of Matthew 24:29, the variant of "earth" occurs in place of "heaven" found in the received text: "Immediately after the oppression of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the powers of the earth shall be shaken."⁴²

Notwithstanding, reference to the earth in this apocalyptic context is thematically supported by Isaiah 13:10, 13 (which appears to stand behind this verse), Joel 2:10, 30–31; 3:15–16, and Luke 21:25. Here, then, is Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation of eschatological "earth":

In like manner, endeavour to comprehend the meaning of the "changing of the earth." Know thou, that upon whatever hearts the bountiful showers of mercy, raining from the "heaven" of divine Revelation, have fallen, the earth of those hearts hath [p. 124] verily been changed into the earth of divine knowledge and wisdom. What myrtles of unity hath the soil of their hearts produced! What blossoms of true knowledge and wisdom hath their illumined bosoms yielded! ... Thus hath He said: "On the day when the earth shall be changed into another earth." (Qur'an 14:48.)⁴³

Bahá'u'lláh coordinates his various explications by means of extended metaphors. The sun, responsible for all life on earth, is the perfect metaphor for the source of spiritual guidance or "life." The pastoral imagery of Jesus' parables functioned in much the same way. Further on, Bahá'u'lláh cites the eschatological verse al-Zamakhsharí (d. 1144 C.E.) had analyzed as the incidence of *takhyíl* (imagery to convey the abstract):

And now, comprehend the meaning of this verse: "The whole earth shall on the Resurrection Day be but His handful, and in His right hand shall the heavens be folded together. Praise be to Him! and high be He lifted above the partners they join with Him!" (Qur'an 39:67). And now, be fair in thy judgment. Were this verse to have the meaning which men suppose it to have, of what profit, one may ask, could it be to man? Moreover, it is evident and manifest that no such hand as could be seen by human eye could accomplish such deeds, or could possibly be ascribed to the exalted Essence of the one true God!

Nay, to acknowledge such a thing is naught but sheer blasphemy, an utter perversion of the truth. And should it be supposed that by this verse are meant the Manifestations of God, Who will be called upon, on the Day of Judgment, to perform such deeds, this too seemeth far from the truth. On the contrary, by the term "earth" is meant the

earth of understanding and knowledge, and by “heavens” the heavens of divine Revelation. Reflect thou, how, on one hand, He hath, by His mighty grasp, turned the earth of knowledge and understanding, previously unfolded, into a mere handful, and, on the other, spread out a new and highly exalted earth in the hearts of men, thus causing the freshest and loveliest blossoms [p. 125] to spring forth from the illumined bosom of man.

In like manner, reflect how the elevated heavens of the Dispensations of the past have, in the right hand of power, been folded together, how the heavens of divine Revelation have been raised by the command of God, and have been adorned by the sun, the moon, and stars of His wondrous commandments. Such are the mysteries of the Word of God, which have been unveiled and made manifest.⁴⁴

This passage is quoted at length to give a fair impression of the kind of argumentation Bahá'u'lláh employs in the course of his exegesis. Rather than appeal to the authority of a classical *tafsír*, Bahá'u'lláh argues by an appeal to absurdity. In ruling out the plausibility of a literal reading of this verse, “earth” now becomes a symbol. Bahá'u'lláh's explication of it as the ground of consciousness—the good earth yielding spiritual verdure—is more plausible within the extended nature metaphor Bahá'u'lláh uses.⁴⁵

Note again Bahá'u'lláh's stylistic use of the metaphorical genitive in order subtly to reinforce his exegesis. Eschatological “earth”—in a variant saying of Jesus—has come to mean knowledge, understanding, and, generally, the capacity of the human heart. This line of interpretation underlies Bahá'u'lláh's references to inner spiritual gardens. The Persian literary tradition is rich in such imagery.⁴⁶

In a passage that is likely reflexive, Bahá'u'lláh appears to intimate the imminence of his own revelation:

The universe is pregnant with these manifold bounties, awaiting the hour when the effects of Its unseen gifts will be made manifest in this world. ... In the soil of whose heart will these holy seeds germinate? From the garden of whose soul will the blossoms of the invisible realities spring forth? Verily, I say, so fierce is the blaze of the Bush of love, burning in the Sinai of the heart, that the streaming waters of holy utterance can never quench its flame. Oceans can never allay this Leviathan's [p. 126] burning thirst, and this Phoenix of the undying fire can abide nowhere save in the glow of the countenance of the Well-Beloved.

Therefore, O brother! kindle with the oil of wisdom the Lamp of the spirit within the innermost chamber of thy heart, and guard it with the globe of understanding, that the breath of the infidel may extinguish not its flame nor dim its brightness. Thus have We

illuminated the heavens of utterance with the splendours of the Sun of divine wisdom and understanding, that thy heart might find peace, that thou mayest be of those who, on the wings of certitude, have soared unto the heaven of the love of their Lord, the All-Merciful.⁴⁷

The abundance of metaphorical genitives in this passage is self-evident. Each relates, directly or indirectly, to a given interpretation in the Book of Certitude.

To recapitulate, the interpretive point of departure in the Book of Certitude is exegesis of New Testament apocalyptic as a foil for the Qur'anic exegesis pursued throughout the rest of the book. The textual integrity of the Paraclete sayings as well as Jesus' apocalyptic discourse at Matthew 24:29–31 is defended against Muslim charges of corruption (*tahrif*). Bahá'u'lláh then takes recourse to “interscriptural exegesis” (interpretation of the New Testament by the Qur'án and vice versa). Bahá'u'lláh adduces Qur'án 55:5⁴⁸ and 70:40⁴⁹ to expound the significance of the eschatological sun and moon to which Jesus refers.

Moreover, Qur'án 82:1⁵⁰ and 39:67⁵¹ are cited and explicated, and the interpretation transferred to Matthew 24, as is Qur'án 51:22⁵² on the meaning of “heaven.” As to the significance of eschatological “clouds,” Qur'án 2:87,⁵³ 25:25⁵⁴ and 25:7⁵⁵ are adduced. It would appear that Bahá'u'lláh's interpretive procedures involve what Fishbane refers to as “those hermeneutical strategies whereby meaning is produced for a given text.”⁵⁶

[p. 127]

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE TO SHÍÍ TAFSÍR

Embedded in Bahá'u'lláh's discourse are specifically Shíí technical terms, traditions, and techniques of exegesis. This section will address the question of precedent: To what extent is the Book of Certitude prefigured by Shíí *tafsír*? The answer is clear: The principles of exegesis found in Akhbárí (*imámí* tradition-based) Shíí *tafsír* are manifestly present in the Kitáb-i Íqán. These principles have more to do with the subject of exegesis than with its procedures. The interpretive strategies in Bahá'u'lláh's work are amply attested in the classical Sunnī heritage, which has permeated the Shíí domain. The branch, after all, stems from the trunk. Both are fed by the same roots.

There are sufficient formal similarities and thematic emphases between later Shíí (those known as Akhbárí) works of *tafsír* and the Book of Certitude to warrant comparison. Such a study would present itself as the logical starting place for a foundational study of Bahá'u'lláh's work. To treat simply the Shíí context of the text is too narrow, however. The pitfall of such a reductionist approach is that the presence of identifiable Shíí features of exegesis in the text

can elucidate, but cannot “explain,” the event of the Book of Certitude purely in terms of a natural extension or development of Shí‘í tradition. The same exegetical agenda—demonstrating the Qur’anic basis of the authority of the Twelve Shí‘í Imáms—is invoked by Bahá’u’lláh not to validate Shí‘í tradition but to effect a break from that tradition.

A paradox of authority surfaces in the structure of Bahá’u’lláh’s argument: the authority of the institution of the Imámate is confirmed, but not, as it were, the “apostolic succession”—to use a Christian term—that derives from it. Bahá’u’lláh’s critique of contemporary Shí‘í authority is more than “protestant.” It is tantamount to a shared Shí‘í concern over authority, but a reversal of its legitimation as invested in [p. 128] the clerical order of his day. The exegetical aims are parallel. But they clash. Bahá’í and Shí‘í authority claims are at cross purposes. The former subordinates the latter.

Thematically, and in good Shí‘í fashion, concern over authority is of paramount interest in the Book of Certitude. This is thoroughly Shí‘í. One must not be seduced by the continuity, however. While Bahá’u’lláh’s conception of spiritual authority presupposes Shí‘í structures, to regard the Book of Certitude as simply an extension of Shí‘í thought is to turn a blind eye to Bahá’u’lláh’s doctrinal revolution—the overruling of Shí‘í constraints on authority in favor of a new locus of authority: a post-Qur’anic revelation. The figures of the Báb himself and the Bábí messiah ubiquitously anticipated in the Báb’s writings represent in effect two new claims to revelation and the theoretical dissolution of Shí‘í ulama. To make matters worse, from a Shí‘í perspective, there is a decidedly anti-clerical strain in the works of both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh.

Two images of Shiism in Bahá’u’lláh’s discourse thus emerge. The first is historical and doctrinal. It is nostalgic and purist. The Imáms are revered. Various traditions ascribed to them are adduced as proof texts. In the Book of Certitude, the frequency of Bahá’u’lláh’s recourse to *imámí akhbár* is second only to his appeals to the Qur’án. This is a patently Akhbárí procedure. The second picture of Shiism Bahá’u’lláh portrays is one of its perceived failings, particularly in its contemporary (nineteenth-century) setting. Bahá’u’lláh’s exegesis may be characterized as polemically anti-Shí‘í, but explicitly pro-‘Alí. This critique of Shiism is not revisionist. There is no agenda for restoring Shiism to its pristine state. It would appear that in Bahá’u’lláh’s view of salvation history, Shiism had run its course.

Bahá’u’lláh’s exegesis may be overstated as a kind of counter-Shiism, due to the rivalry of authority claims. Since a break from the past had already been effected by the Báb [p. 129] in both the Arabic and Persian Bayán, the Book of Certitude may be seen as a development of Bábí “revelation” beyond the renewal of Shiism. Where, one might ask, is there any precedent in Shí‘í exegetical tradition for Bahá’u’lláh’s supersedure of the assumed finality of “Seal of the

Prophets" (Qur'án 33:40) by the eschatological certainty of encountering God (Qur'án 33:44)? Here, the single most crucial prophetological verse in the Qur'án is overruled, in Bahá'u'lláh's exegesis, by another verse just four verses later in the same sura. This latter verse is glossed as the refraction of beatific vision realized in the "Manifestation of God" who is the eschatological "God" by proxy, even as Moses was said to be "as God unto Pharaoh." Such an exegesis is not to be found in Twelver Shí'í *tafsír*. The stark nature of this contrast, far from discouraging comparison, invites further comparison.

A recent study by Lawson has contributed to Western understanding of the principles of Shí'í exegesis. Bahá'u'lláh's argument against revelatory finality finds no precedent in Shiism. But the Book of Certitude represents, from a certain perspective, a clear development of existing Shí'í tendencies, which Lawson has brought to light. It is now possible to explain, in retrospect, how it was theoretically conceivable for a new authority claim to be asserted without appearing to usurp the authority of the Qur'án. Such a procedure was effected through Akhbá'í exegesis, in which the exegesis, invoking the authority of sacred Imámí tradition, functionally supersedes the text it is intended to elucidate.⁵⁷

Discussions of Shiism run the risk of certain biases of selectivity, of interpretation and of weight in terms of emphasis. Systematization is a well-intentioned structure, but one nevertheless imposed. The methodological elegance of Lawson's study is that he has presented representative, traditionally acclaimed systematizations of Shí'í thought by Shí'í authorities themselves. These systematizations, [p. 130] propounded in the *tafsír* prologues, are illuminating. These native programmatic statements reveal the extent to which Akhbá'í interpretations of the Qur'án are characteristically Imamocentric. In such commentaries, Imámí reports are not so much used to explain the Qur'án (this is the formal procedure) as the Qur'án is used to legitimate a Shí'í agenda. In any case, the Qur'án effectively becomes a Shí'í text.

This systematization of Akhbá'í exegetical principles illuminates the immediate context of the Book of Certitude. Lawson's study has made it possible to explain the Book of Certitude as representing, in effect, the logical trajectory of Shí'í exegetical tendencies, which are ultimately, if carried to their logical conclusion, self-transcending. This trajectory depends entirely on the reader's theoretical acceptance of one crucial substitution: the authority of the Báb (in the shadow of whose authority stands Bahá'u'lláh) as the eclipse of the traditional authorities: Qur'án and Imámí tradition, Prophet and Imám. The revelation of the Báb constitutes the new locus of spiritual authority, an authority transfer cast in terms of eschatological prerogative and legitimated in terms of prophetic "fulfillment."

Arguably, the most salient feature of Akhbárí Shí'í interpretations of the Qur'án is how such commentaries reflect on issues of authority. All of Islam revolves around notions of authority: guidance, the Path, the Caliphate, pedagogy, etc. In Shí'í Islam, the Imamate is paramount. According to Lawson, what characterizes Akhbárí Qur'án commentaries is the exegetical procedure of “finding the true reading of the verse in question through metonymy or metaphor for the Imám or some related topic such as *waláya* [inspired guidance].”⁵⁸ In its various manifestations throughout Islamic history, Shiism, from its inception, has always been predicated on various conceptions of authority. Twelver Shiism, the dominant form of Shiism today, views spiritual authority as vested in the Imámate. The very identity of [p. 131] Shiism is bound up with authority claims. Shí'í assertions of authority explicitly contest rival Sunní claims. The Qur'án, tradition (*ḥadīth*), and especially the Imámí oral legacy are invoked for legitimation. The selective and tendentious use of such authorities is meant to validate what Sunní Islam rejects.

The Book of Certitude shares similar concerns, but looks ahead in time to a post-Qur'anic and post-Imamate Dispensation. Bahá'u'lláh's emphasis on authority is equal to Shí'í concerns. Such concerns preoccupied the immediate audience at least. This agenda had to be addressed in order to facilitate a transfer of spiritual authority, mediated by faith—a transfer from Shí'í institutions to a new source of charisma—the Báb. The revelation of the Báb had made explicit what was for the most part implicit in Shí'í visions of the end. Through the Báb, a new eschatological landscape was outspread, canopied by a new heaven of faith.

Bahá'u'lláh effects what might be considered the thematic inversion of Shí'í hermeneutics through a stated continuity expressed as “fulfillment.” Such fulfillment is tantamount to abrogation, however. In the Book of Certitude, Shí'í exegetical principles are invoked to counter Shí'í authority, though formally it appears otherwise. This is the subtlety of Bahá'u'lláh's argument.

The Book of Certitude reinforces the Shí'í view of the Qur'án, that it has a symbolic dimension that only an inspired interpreter might accurately demystify. In Akhbárí Shiism, the Qur'án as a text is functionally inseparable from its valid interpretation. Although interpretation is still a human enterprise, the guarantor of accuracy is reliance upon traditions ascribed to the Imáms. In this respect, the sacred text is imbued with the charisma of both the Prophet and the Imáms. “Because of the fusion of the Imám and text,” Lawson observes, “the Qur'án is experienced as a charismatic text” and as “encounter.”⁵⁹ [p. 132] In the case of Bahá'u'lláh's immediate precursor, the Báb, this tendency became even more pronounced. Lawson remarks: “We see the ‘logical’ culmination of this process in the Qur'án commentaries of the Báb (d. 1850), who depended heavily on the *akhbár* [Imámí traditions] in his early *tafsír*, but appears to

have abandoned their explicit use in later similar works. In this later phase of commentary, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between commentary, text, reader, God, Prophet, and Imám. In short, the exegetical act became scripture."⁶⁰ From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the principles of Shí'í hermeneutics do indeed inform the Book of Certitude. The supplanting of Sunní authority by Shí'í sources and their extensive, even dominant use in exegesis had, in a sense, paved the way for innovative authority claims initially posing as commentary.

Phenomenologically speaking, revelation is somewhat tradition-bound. To communicate within the constraints of context, the exercise of ingenuity and subtlety becomes a necessary transitional preliminary before any open arrogation of fresh authority is possible. Procedurally, Bahá'u'lláh followed one with the other. Exegesis, as performed in the Book of Certitude along some very traditional Akhbá'í lines, was followed by proclamation. This sequence is what characterized the birth of a new world religion, which at once had to speak to Islamic tradition and yet effect a break from it.

TAFSÍR-RELATED STYLISTIC FEATURES

OF THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE

A word should be said as to the prosaic style of the Book of Certitude, and what purpose such a style might serve. Bahá'u'lláh's writings strike many Western readers as flowery. Such embellishments often are seen as unnecessary and distracting, or worse. Orientalist Alessandro Bausani has remarked on some of the difficulties raised by "the Bahá'í [p. 133] expressive style" for those unfamiliar with it. According to Bausani: "The difficulty that Westerners experience in fully understanding the style of the Bahá'í writings lies in our having lost the living sense of the tripartition of reality: Unknowable God, World of Symbols, material world."⁶¹ Momen has shown the ontological reality behind Bahá'í symbolism. Bahá'í metaphysics does postulate such a "World of Symbols," as Bausani has indicated. Bahá'u'lláh, in a Tablet known as the *Lawḥ-i Varqá*, states:

The meaning of the Kingdom (*malakút*) in its primary sense and degree is the scene of transcendent glory. In another sense it is the world of similitudes (*'álam-i mithál*) which existeth between the Dominion on high (*jabarút*) and this mortal realm (*násút*); whatever is in the heavens or on the earth hath its counterpart in that world.⁶²

This much is implicit throughout the Book of Certitude: There exists a law of correspondences between the physical and spiritual worlds. What else would scriptural symbols represent? The presence of the spiritual dimension in this life is what religious symbols, after all, try to evoke.

As early in the book as the exordium—before any actual exegesis is engaged in—Bahá'u'lláh's description of the mission of Moses is implicitly exegetical, setting up an expectation of the approach Bahá'u'lláh will later take:

... there came the turn of Moses. Armed with the rod of celestial dominion (*'aṣay-i amr*), adorned with the white hand of knowledge (*bayḍay-i ma'rifat*), and proceeding from the Párán of the love of God (*fárán-i muḥabbat-i iláhiyya*), and wielding the serpent of power and everlasting majesty (*thu'bán-i qudrat wa shawkat-i ṣamaddániyya*), He shone forth from the Sinai of light (*sínáy-i núr*) upon the world. He summoned all the peoples and kindreds of the earth to the kingdom of eternity, and invited them to partake of the fruit of the tree of faithfulness.⁶³

[p. 134] Symbolism arises from a common poetic stock, expressed in a metaphorical view of reality. Figurative language and ideology are often linked in historical texts.⁶⁴ This relationship is even more pronounced in the case of “salvation history,” which designation fits the Book of Certitude quite well. Salvation history is a view, not of the past, but of the present. Henry Corbin, in one of his useful overstatements, observes: “Hence, the *ta'wíl* is preeminently the hermeneutics of symbols. ... *Ta'wíl* presupposes the superimposition of worlds and inter-worlds, as the correlative basis for a plurality of meanings in the same text.”⁶⁵

WANSBROUGH'S *TAFSÍR* TYPOLOGY

Adopting a particular methodology involves a choice between adapting an existing one to the research at hand or creating a new one. I have opted for the former. The framework of analysis chosen for this book is the *tafsír* typology developed by John Wansbrough. His elaboration of classical exegesis of the Qur'án is theoretically elegant, testable, and predictive.

On methodological grounds alone, Wansbrough has contributed much to our understanding of *tafsír* by proposing a critical assessment of Qur'án commentaries. He advocates a literary analysis⁶⁶ of revelation as well, freeing both Qur'án and tradition from their splendid theological isolation. Wansbrough proposes two types of criteria in his study of *tafsír*: (1) functional criteria; and (2) stylistic criteria. By “concentrating on the elements of explication both in and out of context,” Wansbrough hopes to “isolate and identify methodological devices which can be recognized.”⁶⁷ These stylistic devices act as criteria for analysis of the dynamics of exegesis within functional types of *tafsír*. The presence and distribution of these “methodological devices” (more often termed “procedural devices”) are claimed to be “mutually [p. 135] corroborative.”⁶⁸ It could prove productive, perhaps illuminating, to apply this framework of analysis to the Book of Certitude, bearing in mind that procedural devices are each “potential-

ly variable but not beyond recognition."⁶⁹ As in Wansbrough's own study, the functional and stylistic analysis of Bahá'u'lláh's Qur'án commentary pursued in the present monograph is essentially an "experiment."⁷⁰

Wansbrough has classified classical *tafsír* into five types, which roughly follow a chronological sequence of development of increasing sophistication: Narrative, Legal, Textual, Rhetorical, and Symbolic/Allegorical. Of this literary taxonomy, Rippin writes: "While the historical sequence itself may be open to some debate, the categorization itself is, in true scientific fashion, functional, unified, and revealing."⁷¹ These categories are comprehensive, but do not constitute the total typology. They represent the domains across which Islamic hermeneutics spread its wings. What makes these categories come to life are the exegetical dynamics that enliven them. Thus, Wansbrough's typology consists of five *tafsír* types and twelve procedural devices: i.e. "the twelve explicative elements proposed as criteria for a descriptive analysis of exegetical literature."⁷²

Wansbrough's identification of these explicative elements offers a literary framework of analysis for any given work of *tafsír*, isolating its major interpretive components. The number and distribution of each of these techniques within a given text should tell us more precisely what the exegete is doing with his material, and should add to our understanding of what makes up a particular exegetical type.

All but two of Wansbrough's procedural devices were employed by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i Íqán*. The two absent are: variant readings and poetic exemplars (save for a single citation of poetry, rather for exclamatory than for exegetical purposes). The absence of variant readings indicates something of Bahá'u'lláh's attitude towards the Qur'án: [p. 136] The text is not only sacred, but fixed—that is, fixed within canonical limits, not interpretive ones. This clearly reflects nineteenth-century Muslim attitudes to the text: the Qur'án is intact as given, the text taken for granted as received. The question of Bahá'u'lláh's alleged inexact Qur'án citations will be addressed briefly, but will be dismissed as referential and not as alternate readings for exegetical purposes.

Using Wansbrough's typology as a framework of analysis for study of the Book of Certitude, it is not my intent to present Bahá'u'lláh as an Islamic scholastic or as a formal Qur'án commentator in the classical sense. Indeed, the analysis given might strike the reader as somewhat disjointed. This was inevitable, in attempting to break down a text into its explicative procedures. The exemplars adduced are, for the most part, wrenched out of sequence and atomized; but they are, at the same time, framed in exegetical theory.

Even so, using Wansbrough's model, the Book of Certitude is more effectively presented for its unity of argument, sustained at every turn through recourse to a variety of procedural devices, the use of which alone reflects the cumulative nature of the Islamic exegetical heritage in which Bahá'u'lláh stood. In his ostensibly Islamic argument, Bahá'u'lláh develops a paradox of world historical proportions: If the Qur'án is shown to have presaged a future revelation, such exegesis carries an implicit challenge to the authority of Islam in the wake of the dual claims advanced by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

PROCEDURAL DEVICES IN THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE

We will now take a closer look at the ways in which Bahá'u'lláh interprets the Qur'án. His methods will not correspond, in every instance, to what Wansbrough has identified as interpretive mechanisms, but approximations are [p. 137] as useful as they are illustrative. I will argue that a consistent approach to interpretation in the Book of Certitude may be discerned: As a first-level premise, Bahá'u'lláh argues that eschatological discourse is figurative. In the Qur'án, Bahá'u'lláh reads such figurative eschatological discourse as functionally symbolic. Symbolic value depends on the representational quality of such discourse, which the reader is taught to recognize as nonliteral.

Bahá'u'lláh offers rhetorical explanations, enabling the reader first to recognize figurative discourse. The interpretation of symbols depends on this underlying view of text and its use of representational language. The recognition of symbols, which are often unmarked for figurative discourse, is context-dependent, interpreted through a law of correspondence. Such correlativity has in view an ontologically higher reality, or at least a psychologically deeper worldview. The dynamic between figure and symbol, then, is foundational to the overall argument which the Book of Certitude presents: that is, that post-Qur'anic revelation is possible, predicted, and present in the world today.

A word should be said about the general Islamic style of argumentation which Bahá'u'lláh stood to inherit. Bahá'u'lláh's analysis and exegesis of selected Qur'anic texts is accomplished primarily by analogy and appeal to tradition. Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh's approach exhibits what might be called an exercise in philosophical aesthetics, as applied to revelation. Kemal defines aesthetics in classical Arabic literary criticism as "a concern with characterising the nature of the poetic discourse generally, ... through displaying how ... poetic and aesthetic discourse works."⁷³

In the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh's aesthetic appreciation of the Qur'án is bound up with his appreciation of its wealth of figurative expression. Despite his argument for post-Qur'anic revelation, Bahá'u'lláh's reverence for the Qur'án should never go unheeded. There are several explicit [p. 138] appreciations of the Qur'án in the Book of Certitude, one of which extols the holy book so:

He, the divine King, hath proclaimed the undisputed supremacy of the verses of His Book [the Qur'an] over all things that testify to His truth. For compared with all other proofs and tokens, the divinely-revealed verses shine as the sun, whilst all others are as stars. To the peoples of the world they are the abiding testimony, the incontrovertible proof, the shining light of the ideal King.

Their excellence is unrivalled, their virtue nothing can surpass. They are the treasury of the divine pearls and the depository of the divine mysteries. ... Through them floweth the river of divine knowledge, and gloweth the fire of His ancient and consummate wisdom.⁷⁴

Beyond aesthetics is interpretation proper, the act of exegesis. Bahá'u'lláh states his purpose quite simply: "All these things which We have cited from divers sources, have no other purpose but to enable thee to grasp the meaning of the allusions in the utterances of the chosen Ones of God."⁷⁵ In the course of his exegeses, interpretation is mostly predicated on the non-literal nature of eschatological texts. While Bahá'u'lláh was no literary theorist, I think the conceptions underlying his approach to the text are as literary as they are theological. Younger sums up the nature of figurative language as it applies to biblical texts. His statement seems to apply with equal validity to Qur'anic figuration and its symbolic possibilities:

Thus, in figurative language there is, of course, a stratification of meaning, in which an incongruity of sense on one level produces an influx of significance on another. ... The power of metaphor derives precisely from the interplay between discordant meanings it symbolically coerces into a unitary conceptual framework and from the degree to which that coercion is successful in overcoming the psychic resistance such [p. 139] semantic tension inevitably generates in anyone in a position to perceive it.⁷⁶

Wansbrough's stylistic criteria, or "procedural devices," will be presented in the order in which he treats them. Though somewhat arbitrary, this is illustrative for our purposes. Bear in mind that this methodological framework is being imposed on Bahá'u'lláh's work for purposes of analysis, and that this framework formed no part of the author's [Bahá'u'lláh's] conscious enterprise. Bahá'u'lláh was not a scholar. He had no clerical background. He received the

rather unsophisticated traditional education of the nobility. This involved private instruction in Qur'án and tradition.

Far more important are Bahá'u'lláh's mystical experiences, which gave rise to a sense of divine election, continually reinforced throughout his forty-year ministry by a remarkable ability to "reveal" a wealth of Tablets, all of which came to have a status that, for Bahá'ís, collectively superseded the authority of the Qur'án. Bahá'u'lláh displays an awareness of some important *tafsír*-related issues, in discussions of debated topics in Islam as well as in his occasional references to Qur'án commentators, not by name but rather by argument.⁷⁷

VARIAE LECTIONES

Nowhere in the Book of Certitude does Bahá'u'lláh explicate the Qur'án by adducing variant readings. His attitude toward the canonical text seems to preclude this approach. His orientation toward canonical authenticity completely ignores some of the traditional Shí'í misgivings over critical parts of scripture.⁷⁸

In Chapter Two, evidence was presented documenting Bahá'u'lláh's own instructions to bring all Qur'án citations in the Book of Certitude into alignment with the standard [p. 140] text of the Qur'án. This was because, in the original Bombay lithograph of the Book of Certitude, citations of the Qur'án were inexact paraphrases. Critics of the Bahá'í Faith questioned the integrity of the Book of Certitude as a "revealed" text, because revelation cannot admit of error.

Whether paraphrase or error, the inexact citations are not exegetically intrusive. Such imprecisions are slight and likely represent a paraphrasing from memory. Inexact references to the Qur'án are referential and not text-critical. The reader recognizes the verse, gets the exegetical point, and the inexact citation serves its purpose. Jeffery's remarks on variants to the opening sura of the Qur'án which he encountered in Cairo as well as in Shí'í circles apply with equal (albeit unintended) validity to the inexact Qur'án citations in the Book of Certitude:

There is no ascertainable reason for the variant readings. They are not alterations in the interests of smoother grammatical construction or of clarity, nor do they seem to have any doctrinal significance. They are just variants as one might expect in the transmission of a prayer at first preserved in oral form.⁷⁹

Bahá'u'lláh's respect for the sacred text is very explicit:

For instance, the Qur'an was an impregnable stronghold unto the people of Muḥammad. In His days, whosoever entered therein, was shielded from the devilish assaults, the menacing darts, the self-devouring doubts, and blasphemous whisperings of the enemy. Upon him [the believer] was also bestowed a portion of the everlasting and goodly fruitst—the fruits of wisdom, from the divine Tree. To him was given to drink the incorruptible waters of the river of knowledge, and to taste the wine of the mysteries of divine Unity.

All the things that the people required in connection with the Revelation of Muḥammad and His laws were found to be revealed and manifest in that Riḍván of resplendent glory. [p. 141] That Book constitutes an abiding testimony to its people after Muḥammad, inasmuch as its decrees are indisputable, and its promise unfailing. All have been enjoined to follow the precepts of that Book until “the year sixty” [1260 A.H.]—the year of the advent of God's wondrous Manifestation [the Báb].⁸⁰

One might question how far Bahá'u'lláh's respect for the Qur'án went if he believed the text was already abrogated by the revelation of the Báb. But, this likely has no bearing on how Bahá'u'lláh regarded the integrity of the text itself. Unlike some strains of Shí'í tradition that have called into question whether the Qur'án is even complete—the standard edition of 'Uthmán having allegedly suppressed passages favorable to 'Alí—Bahá'u'lláh takes no issue with the Qur'anic text itself. Its interpretation, as we shall see in some detail, is an entirely different matter.

POETIC *LOCI PROBANTES*

In adapting Wansbrough's categories to a text which performs exegesis yet is not a *tafsír* in the classical sense, some conceptual modifications are necessary to fit the text to the methodology intended to elucidate it. In the classical tradition, those exemplars adduced from the corpus of principally “pre-Islamic” poetry by literary theorists “eager to illustrate their rhetorical figures” are termed in Arabic: *shawáhid*. The technical equivalent in Western literary theory is poetic *loci probantes*.⁸¹ There is one instance in the Book of Certitude in which Bahá'u'lláh does adduce poetry. Shoghi Effendi renders this verse: “Marvel not if in the Qur'an the unbeliever perceiveth naught but the trace of letters, for in the sun, the blind findeth naught but heat.”⁸² For comparison, in the first English translation of the Kitáb-i Íqán, Khan sets apart the poetic citation so:

*'ajab nabvad kih az Qur'án naşíbí níst juz naqshí,
kih az khurshíd juz garmí nayábad chashm-i nábíná.⁸³ [p. 142]*

Be not astonished if from the Koran no portion is gained except its letters,
For in the sun, the eye of the blind findeth nothing but heat.⁸⁴

These two translations do not differ significantly, except that Khan has set off the citation of poetry by presenting it formally as verse. This verse is exclamatory, reinforcing Bahá'u'lláh's reiterative argument against literalist interpretation of Qur'anic passages in which deeper meaning resides. The provenance of this piece of poetry is itself unclear. No citation formula is given. It is possible that Bahá'u'lláh has cited from his own mystical poetry (much of it no longer extant) but the verse here has a very traditional ring.

With respect to his writings in general, Bahá'u'lláh is not inclined to adduce poetry often, except in his Sufi-oriented mystical works. Yet he does draw attention to some of the obviously poetic Qur'anic passages when illustrating figuration and symbolism. That is not to say that the Qur'án itself is poetry: Bahá'u'lláh, as with Muslims universally, would never draw such equivalence.

There is an implicit motive for citing this couplet, beyond its presence as an intensifier. Bahá'u'lláh has just cited several Qur'anic verses dealing with the rejection of revelation (Qur'án 2:23; 45:5; 45:6; 45:8; 26:187; 8:32) and draws what for him is the obvious parallel to his own historical present. The revelation of the Báb had, of course, been rejected by the vast majority of the Shí'ís of his day. The rejection was extreme in the case of the divines, many of whom conspired with the state to persecute and exterminate the Bábí community.

Bahá'u'lláh was critical of contemporary Shí'í leaders, whom he typologically finds condemned by the Qur'án as possessed of the same hard-heartedness as the disbelievers of yore: "These people," writes Bahá'u'lláh, "... sought to exchange the divinely-revealed verses for their foul, their vile, and idle desires."⁸⁵ Bahá'u'lláh does not mean the [p. 143] "exchange" of Qur'anic verses, though a cursory reading of the passage might not reveal this. He has in view the Shí'í rejection of the so-called "Bábí Qur'án." "Although the seas of life ... are surging within the Riḍván of the heart, yet these people ... [have] contented themselves with the stagnant waters of a briny lake."⁸⁶ This rejection of the Báb's revelation, according to Bahá'u'lláh, is actuated by spiritual blindness:

Gracious God! How strange the way of this people! They clamour for guidance, although the standards of Him Who guideth all things are already hoisted. They cleave to the obscure intricacies of knowledge, when He, Who is the Object of all knowledge, shineth as the sun. They see the sun with their own eyes, and yet question that brilliant Orb as to the proof of its light. ... Yea, the blind can perceive naught from the sun except its heat, and the arid soil hath no share of the showers of mercy. "Marvel not if in the Qur'an the unbeliever perceiveth naught but the trace of letters, for in the sun, the blind findeth naught but heat."⁸⁷

The verse citation concerns the Qur'án, but Bahá'u'lláh makes its rejection motif double for rejection of the Báb's revelation, and, perhaps allusively, his own. The Báb is clearly intended as the subject of this passage. This reading might be strengthened by the possible allusion to the term "Mahdí" in the statement, "They clamour for guidance," since the Mahdí is the "Rightly-Guided" One. But it is hard to suppress the reading that Bahá'u'lláh is speaking reflexively of himself, in a highly allusive way, and that the Qur'án (in the verse cited) is his own revelation.

LEXICAL EXPLANATION⁸⁸

(1) "*Oppression*": In the first part of this chapter, we discussed Bahá'u'lláh's treatment of New Testament apocalyptic. [p. 144] We return to this section of the Book of Certitude briefly, since his interpretation will be generalized to a parallel verse in the Qur'án. Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh's interpretations in this case entail certain lexical considerations. As stated, Bahá'u'lláh writes at considerable length on the words of Jesus in the Minor Apocalypse of Matthew 24 at verses 29–31:

Immediately after the oppression of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the earth shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet.⁸⁹

Shoghi Effendi's translation—modeled stylistically upon the King James Version—is from the Arabic text cited in the Persian original of the Kitáb-i Íqán. (Bahá'u'lláh cites these biblical verses in Arabic translation. He follows with a paraphrase in Persian.) Two differences in citation/translation of this text present themselves: The first, a difference over the choice of an English equivalent (Shoghi Effendi favoring "oppression" over the King James Version "tribu-

lation"). The second is a difference reflected in the Arabic text itself, "the powers of the heavens" (King James Version) becomes, in the Book of Certitude, "the powers of the earth" (*quwát al-ard*), though the cosmic sense of the passage is retained.⁹⁰ In the Arabic citation, the term for "oppression" (*ḍíq*) is rendered into Persian as *tangí* (emended from *tankí* [sic] in Persian text). The lexical definition Bahá'u'lláh supplies in his Persian paraphrase of the Arabic *ḍíq* is rather straightforward: The Persian word *tangí* means "tightness" (abstract⁹¹ formed from *tang*, "tight").

As to "oppression" versus "tribulation," the Greek word [p. 145] found in the New Testament original is *thlipsin*.⁹² As Shoghi Effendi notes, *thlipsis* literally means "pressure," while figuratively it means "oppression."⁹³ Since the figurative meaning is already supplied in the King James Version and all English versions, Bahá'u'lláh's argument might strike a Western reader as specious.

Not so to the popular audience for whom the Book of Certitude was intended. To bring out that fact, Shoghi Effendi inserts a parenthesis into his translation: "Were this 'oppression' (*which literally meaneth 'pressure'*) to be interpreted that the earth is to become contracted, or were men's idle fancy to conceive similar calamities to befall mankind, it is clear and manifest that no such happenings can ever come to pass" (emphasis added).⁹⁴ At each interpretive turn, Bahá'u'lláh takes full advantage of the opportunity to argue against literalism with regard to eschatological texts. Shoghi Effendi makes every effort to reflect this in his translation.

(2) "Heaven cloven by the clouds" at *Qur'án* 25:25: In apocalyptic drama, clouds often serve as the *deus ex machina* of the eschatological savior. Clouds are literal or figurative. Since, as a rule, clouds do not descend, they are open to interpretation in passages such as this. The descent of clouds can be considered either as the suspension of natural law which is a divine prerogative at the eschaton or as a marker, signaling the incidence of figurative speech. The first reading is governed by theological considerations (i.e., it is entirely within God's power to suspend natural law), while the latter gives interpretive priority to the text itself. In the former reading, clouds are taken literally. In the latter, the passage is figurative and clouds are representational, requiring either metaphorical or symbolic interpretation. Bahá'u'lláh opts for the latter:

By the term “clouds” is meant those things that are contrary to the ways and desires of men. ... These “clouds” signify, in [p. 146] one sense, the annulment of laws, the abrogation of former Dispensations, the repeal of rituals and customs current amongst men, the exalting of the illiterate faithful above the learned opposers of the Faith. In other words, they mean the appearance of that immortal Beauty in the image of mortal man, with such human limitations as eating and drinking, poverty and riches, glory and abasement, sleeping and waking, and other such things as cast doubt in the minds of men, and cause them to turn away. All such veils are symbolically referred to as “clouds.” These are the “clouds” that cause the heavens of the knowledge and understanding of all that dwell on earth to be cloven asunder. Even as He hath revealed: “On that day shall the heaven be cloven by the clouds.” Even as the clouds prevent the eyes of men from beholding the sun, so do these things hinder the souls of men from recognizing the light of the divine Luminary.⁹⁵

Bahá'u'lláh's reading of verse 25:25, “On that day shall the heaven be cloven *by* the clouds” (emphasis added), is quite interesting. The text is cited accurately in Arabic, but there still is a variant reading here. It is not textual but is, rather, a lexically variant reading, in that the function or effective meaning of a single preposition is under question. The Arabic text of the verse Bahá'u'lláh interprets here is as follows:

wa yawm^a tashaqqaq^u as-samá'^u bi'l-ghamámi

Of significance is the reading of the prefixed preposition *bi* as an instrumental preposition (*ḥarf al-álah*) carrying the lexical value “by,” rather than “with,” in Bahá'u'lláh's reading of the verse (the same lexical options—instrumentality and accompaniment—are likewise characteristic of the English “with”). This runs counter to the conventional sense of the text, for which, in translation, Arberry is representative: “Upon the day that heaven is split asunder with the clouds.” A double interpretation obtains here through [p. 147] Shoghi Effendi's translation of the Arabic text which Bahá'u'lláh adduces. Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation of the verse in the sentence immediately following the citation suggests the instrumentality of the preposition *bi*, but it is Shoghi Effendi's rendering of the Qur'anic text that makes explicit—and reads into the verse—instrumentality ascribed to the preposition *bi*.

To sustain the figurative reading required for the symbolic parallel—clouds = veils (e.g., abrogation/mortality/doubts)—Bahá'u'lláh must make “the clouds” (*al-ghamámi*) the logical agent of the action of “cleaving.” In the verse's formal structure, heaven (*samá'*) is the syntactical agent of *tashaqqaq*, which is a fifth-stem reflexive. So, grammatically speaking, “heaven,” though logically passive, is the agent of the verb “cleave/cloven,” which is why the preposi-

tion *bi* is usually read as “with,” in the sense of accompaniment. Bahá’u’lláh allows for an anomalous reading here, though the figurative sense of clouds as agents of cleaving does not explicitly convey personification. This may be why Bahá’u’lláh refrains from interpreting clouds as divines (as he does elsewhere in the Book of Certitude) and restricts the symbolism to inanimate “veils.” Indeed, the verbal form *ghamma* can be read figuratively as “to veil.”

Bahá’u’lláh’s reading of *bi* in this verse assumes an unconventional syntactical analysis, though he says nothing specific about the preposition itself. But the reading is not incorrect. The verse presents a situation of polysemy with regard to *bi*, in which the interpreter is obliged to supply the context. The syntactical ambiguity in the text allows for the possibility of alternative deep structures.

Bahá’u’lláh’s reading results from an original interpretation of the agent/patient relationship in this verse, wherein, according to Bahá’u’lláh, the underlying structure presents the clouds as *agent*, and heaven as *patient*. By virtue of word order and case, the preposition *bi* in this [p. 148] verse shows a hierarchy in which heaven is higher than clouds, though this does not necessarily bear informationally on the interpretation. The instrumentality of *bi* is shown vividly in Shoghi Effendi’s translation.

According to O’Shaughnessy, the verb *tashaqqaq*⁹⁶ is to be read non-literally here:

The scriptural and rabbinic symbolism of the throne is paralleled by other concrete signs of approaching judgment found especially in the older suras of the Qur’an. One most commonly mentioned is the splitting open of the heavens, a phenomenon expressed by the Arabic verbs *fatara*, to cleave, split, rend; *shaqq*^a, to cut lengthwise, cleave split; and *faraja*, to make an opening between, open, split. This type of figurative language implies, as the Hebrew Bible does, that the heaven is a canopy or metal strip that can be torn open or rolled up. Similar notions are repeated in the New Testament, for example, in Revelation, 2 Peter, and Mark’s Gospel.⁹⁶

O’Shaughnessy has pointed out that heaven is split or fragmented not only as a sign of the approaching day of Judgment (Qur’an 14:48; 21:104; 25:25; 39:67; 44:10; 52:9; etc.), but also as a sign to confirm belief: to confirm a prophet’s mission (Qur’an 17:92; 26:187), to vindicate Noah (54:11); as a sign rejected by disbelievers (15:14; 34:9; 52:44); and also as a sign of moral lapse: blasphemy (19:90; 42:5), polytheism (1:22). Conversely, the heaven is unsplit, either to exclude disbelievers (7:40), or as a sign of God’s perfection (50:6 and 67:3).⁹⁷

Is realized eschatology really an eschatology? Read literally or symbolically, Beggiani is right to point out that: “Eschatology speculates on the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation.”⁹⁸ The plot of the apocalyptic drama thickens with a sudden twist of agent here. The clouds are

no longer passive in Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation. This example goes to show what kinds of new meaning can be produced from a [p. 149] text with the slightest change in reading: in this case, the change in lexical value of an innocent preposition.

What is Bahá'u'lláh's overall interpretive objective here? "Clouds" now drift into the human psyche, as the entire range of apocalyptic imagery is transferred into the realm of faith represented by a symbolic spiritual landscape. In this new location, the reader will have to exercise the same sort of judgment regarding Qur'anic interpretation as with any other matter of faith. If the interpretation of this verse were not obvious—and indeed the symbolic gist of it has been missed (from Bahá'u'lláh's perspective) for centuries—the reader may also have to reconsider prophetic credentials from the standpoint of prophecy fulfillment. A claimant who does not literally fulfill prophecy is rejected out of hand by scriptural fundamentalists. However charismatic the Báb was, he was no miracle worker. On the other hand, a claimant who points out that prophecy is not literal cannot be rejected out-of-hand for having wrought no signs and wonders. Such a candidate for prophecy fulfillment has to be considered in much more subtle terms.

Bahá'u'lláh's exegesis of "clouds" represents his broad interpretive strategy. In a sense, all prophecy concerns people and spiritual events. It is the inner landscape that the Qur'án paints a symbolic picture of. The Qur'án's "similitudes" are sometimes marked and sometimes not marked. Bahá'u'lláh's reading of "clouds" represents his reading of the text as an unmarked Qur'anic similitude, which he then must decode.

GRAMMATICAL EXPLANATION

(1) *Against received grammatical analyses at Qur'an 50:20*: This is probably the most textually controversial of Bahá'u'lláh's interpretations in the Book of Certitude. To appreciate Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation of this verse, it is [p. 150] necessary to consider first the use of verbs in Arabic generally, particularly with reference to figurative uses of tense (i.e., so-called "tense metaphors").

Linguistically speaking, figuration can occur in two ways: (1) figurative use of form (i.e., syntax, morphology, grammar); or (2) lexical figuration. Both can result in a semantic interpretation which is figurative, since any instance of figuration is semantic. Diachronically, many languages demonstrate subjective location in time. This is characteristic of Western languages in which anteriority, simultaneity, and posteriority are expressed explicitly.

Not always explicit is subjective judgment of time. Subjective judgment of time does not merely draw distinctions as to past, present, and future but uses different verbal forms to express degrees of remoteness. This latter kind of judgment seems to reflect the situation in classical Arabic, in which the reference point is not necessarily the present moment of speech, but can be located in past or future. Comrie's work on tense discusses the Arabic verbal system. He represents this system as one of relative tense (in which there are relative points of reference with respect to time) rather than absolute tense (in which the point of reference for time is the present moment at the time of utterance).

Tense is *form*, not time. Tense can therefore act symbolically as well as literally. "The only time-marked verb (unless time-marked by a modifying functional or an adverbial)," according to Beeston, "is the suffix set verb in cases where it has dynamic aspect."⁹⁹ In other words, the Arabic verbal system shows itself to be a relative tense system rather than an absolute tense system. Subjective judgment of time may depend on syntactical (i.e., use of conditionals), lexical (i.e., time adverbials), or contextual (i.e., situational) considerations.

Those instances in which figurative uses of tense become conventional result in undermining the verbal system, [p. 151] culminating in different degrees of interdependence in tense, modality, and aspect. Thus, extra-linguistic considerations can be used to locate a reference point in time.

Another factor that should be considered is ellipsis. Arab linguists would often reconstruct a missing element along an assumed deep structure of a given text. Missing elements would then be supplied in the course of analysis.

At this juncture Bahá'u'lláh challenges the assumptions which governed (and still govern) the received grammatical analysis of Qur'án 50:20. His argument is bold and presents a new reading of the text against the view which had achieved a level of consensus. In the passage below, Bahá'u'lláh recapitulates the received exegesis of the verse. Two traditional analyses are presented: (1) ellipsis; and (2) tense figuration:

As the commentators of the Qur'an (*'ulamáy-i tafsír*) and they that follow the letter thereof (*ahl-i zâhir*) misapprehended the inner meaning (*bâṭin*) of the words of God and failed to grasp their essential purpose, they sought to demonstrate that, according to the rules of grammar, whenever the term "*idhâ*" (meaning "if" or "when") precedeth the past tense, it invariably hath reference to the future. Later, they were sore perplexed in attempting to explain those verses of the Book wherein that term did not actually occur. Even as He hath revealed: "And there was a blast on the trumpet,—lo! it is the threatened Day! And every soul is summoned to a reckoning,—with him an impeller and a witness" (Qur'an

50:20). In explaining this and similar verses, they have in some cases argued that the term “*idhá*” is implied.

In other instances, they have idly contended that whereas the Day of Judgment is inevitable, it hath therefore been referred to as an event not of the future but of the past. How vain their sophistry! How grievous their blindness! They refuse to recognize the trumpet blast which so explicitly in this text was sounded through the revelation of Muḥammad.¹⁰⁰

[p. 152]

The Arabic text of the Qur’anic verse is as follows:

wá-nufikha fí’l-šúri dhálika yawmu al-wa’ídi
wa-jú’at kullu nafsin ma’ahá sá’iqun wa shahídun
la-qad kunta fí ghaflatin min hádhá fakashafná ‘anka
ghaṭá’aka fa-bašáruka al-yawma hadídun

Bahá’u’lláh ascribes to Qur’án commentators two possible justifications for reading futurity into this highly representative eschatological verse: futurity due to the ellipted particle *idhá*; and futurity due to use of a past tense metaphor for a future event due to certainty of occurrence (subjective judgment of time). The former is a syntactical analysis, while the latter is a contextual approach.

As to the implied (ellipted) *idhá* in the verse’s deep structure, Arab grammarians would have had little difficulty citing Qur’anic verses in which the *idhá nufikha* construction explicitly occurs (e.g., Qur’án 23:101, 36:51, 39:68, 69:13). Verses in which *idhá* is lacking in connection with *nufikha*—ellipted or otherwise—are 18:99, 6:73, 20:102, 27:87, 78:18, thus providing textual parallels to 50:20. Arab grammarians tended to resolve the use of past tense in clearly eschatological contexts as instances of *majáz* (figuration).¹⁰¹

As Naphtali Kinberg points out:

A formal integration of grammatical tropes as a sub-category of figures is exhibited by as-Suyúṭí (d. 911/1505). In his work on Qur’anic sciences (*al-Itqán fí ‘Ulúm al-Qur’án*), as-Suyúṭí dedicates a chapter to literal and figurative language in the Qur’an. In this chapter, the author specifies a sub-category of trope in which a grammatical form is used in a “transferred, deviant” way (*majáz*), instead of its “regular, ordinary” usage (*ḥaqíqa*). In this sub-category he adduces examples of anomalous occurrences of certain verbal deriva-

tions; ... expressing the future by means of a past verb due to the certainty of its occurrence (namely, the so-called “prophetic perfect”).¹⁰²

[p. 153] This kind of analysis does not require an ellipted *idhá*. Al-Suyúṭí, for instance, adduces a parallel verse at Qur’án 39:68 to argue that the Qur’án exhibits a figurative use of tense (in this case, of passive past tense) to imply futurity.¹⁰³ A similar analysis in the discipline of Islamic rhetoric is also discussed by Kinberg:

An interesting observation regarding figurative use of tenses is made by al-Qazwíní (d. 1338 C.E.) in his commentary on as-Sakkákí. In a short discussion about non-literal usage of grammatical forms, he not only mentions the use of past tense to express the future, but also specifies the rhetorical motive behind this anomalous use of tense, namely: “in order to call attention to the certainty of its occurrence.”¹⁰⁴

This presumed tense figuration has its analogue in the biblical use of “prophetic perfect.”¹⁰⁵ The coexistence of two alternate explanations for the assumed futurity of the verse in question shows the interpretation of Qur’án 50:20 to be less decisive than thought, and oblivious to a possible reading of the text in which the point of reference in time is Muḥammad’s own historical present.

Concerning Arabic verbs generally, one cannot speak of definite markedness for time. In any event, what follows in the text (“Lo! it is the threatened Day!”) is a nominal clause (with no verb), identificatory relative to theme and predicate, static in aspect, and thus not marked for time (though here expressing simultaneity with the preceding clause). However, one can establish a hierarchy of futurity, in which *idhá* + suffix conjugation, and *yawma* + prefix (imperfect) conjugation (as in Qur’án 20:102) stand at one end of the time continuum, whereas the suffix conjugation with no *idhá* stands at the other end.

As to the former approach, the verb *nufikha* (“was blown”) is an internal passive. As to aspect (considered by Beeston to be “more important than time”¹⁰⁶), the event-stating predicate **[p. 154]** is dynamic (depicting a change from one situation to another, in contrast to static aspect). Given the aspectually dynamic nature of the verb in this instance, the verb has a necessary setting in time. This verb—as a suffix set item—predicates a fact (whereas the prefix set embodies a notional concept, represented in English by the auxiliary use of “could,” “might,” “would,” etc.).¹⁰⁷ It is clearly marked for past tense (tense, defined as a grammaticalized indication of time). In this special context, the time reference of the suffix conjugation would most naturally be interpreted as past, unless extra-grammatical considerations locate the point of reference either in the past or in the future. But the question as to whether or not past tense

here is past time is a matter of interpretation, if Comrie's analysis of the Arabic verbal system is correct, i.e., that Arabic is a system structured on relative tense.

If one assumes that all trumpet blasts in the Qur'án consistently refer to eschatological events, and that the eschaton is in the distant future, then it is easy to argue—on the basis of those verses where *idhá* does occur—that there must be an ellipted *idhá* at Qur'án 50:20. It could be argued from silence that Bahá'u'lláh seems to disregard the other trumpet blast verses having an actual *idhá* present, and privileges this verse for an unconventional—though literal—reading with respect to time. In rejecting both arguments adduced by grammarians—ellipted *idhá* and futurity expressed as certainty—by implication, Bahá'u'lláh appears to accept the *idhá nufikha* parallels as references to a future eschaton, whereas Qur'án 50:20 is taken to refer to a past eschaton, contextualized with the revelation of Muhammad. However, Bahá'u'lláh does accept the futurity of the trumpet blast at Matthew 24:31.

One remaining question is whether Bahá'u'lláh read this verse as iterative (that is, reenacting itself in every prophetic dispensation). There is no marked form to express this notion. [p. 155] Since iterative notionalty expresses recurrence, Arabic (as other languages) tends to present such notionalty as a state. Moreover, such notions of habituality are most often expressed in the present (e.g., the present simple tense). A suffix conjugation can express iterativity (as in proverbs or in oaths [performative]). But the dynamic aspect of Qur'án 50:20 seems to rule out this possibility.

The functional *idhá*—as a time-marking subordinator—takes the syntactical structure of a conditional (medieval Arab grammarians construed this functional as an adverbial as well as a conditional). Since an event envisaged in the future cannot be a fact (as it might not take place), future time using *idhá* would take the characteristic conditional construct. In other words, in order for the analysis of an implied *idhá* to be valid, a corresponding conditional structure (protasis/apodosis) must obtain. But in the case of Qur'án 50:20, a conditional structure is not necessarily present. If protasis/apodosis can be ruled out here, so can an ellipted *idhá*. Otherwise, a prefix set item—with its notional value—should be used here to express futurity.¹⁰⁸ But the problem with this analysis is that ellipses of apodoses in Qur'anic Arabic is a common construction.¹⁰⁹

How else could this verse express futurity when the verb here clearly indicates past time? The other alternative, leading to the same interpretive result, is figurative use of tense—similar to that of the “prophetic perfect” in Hebrew—in which the subjective location of point of reference is in the future. The more natural reading of this verse would be to find a present point of reference identical with the present moment of speech. In Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation, Qur'án

50:20 is coextensive with the revelation of Muḥammad. Bahá'u'lláh's argument for a contemporary historical approach to the passage cited is the controlling hermeneutical principle here.

A principle to bear in mind is that figurative usage of [p. 156] language is often not marked, but context-dependent. The present tense implication of the nominal clause is rendered so by Arberry ("That is the Day of the Threat") and by Sher 'Alí ("This is the Day of Promise") and Rodwell ("It is the Threatened Day!") where the same verb can be rendered "promised" or "threatened," depending on positive or negative connotations associated with the text.

In arguing against tense figuration, Bahá'u'lláh comes close to arguing for figuration on a lexical level. Remember that grammarians would analyze the deep structure of texts in terms of ellipsis when the surface structure did not support their reading. Virtually all commentators on this passage work under the assumption that, since the text is manifestly eschatological, it must have a future meaning. The circular argument to which Bahá'u'lláh objects is recourse by grammarians to one of two explanations to support an assumed reading. If the argument for (1) an ellipted *idhá* fails, due to lack of a corresponding conditional structure, the grammarians fall back on (2) a context-dependent argument. This is tantamount to having one's cake and eating it, too. Bahá'u'lláh, however, introduces a third possibility: (3) a literal reading of the verse as to time.

In accepting a literal reading with respect to time, Bahá'u'lláh adopts what amounts to an anti-*majázi* analysis of time in order to realize a greater rhetorical potential for the verse. A literal reading as to time here results in a figurative meaning for the entire constellation of eschatological imagery found in the Qur'án. At this interpretive juncture, exegesis becomes purely symbolic, since Bahá'u'lláh's argument is still a *majázi* one on a lexical level.

The significance of this exegesis becomes apparent when Bahá'u'lláh's literal reading of the verse regarding time effects a sweeping interpretive reversal of the traditional Islamic understanding of Qur'anic apocalyptic as invariably [p. 157] located in the future. The traditional Islamic view allows for miracles to abound in this interpretive eschaton, permitting a literal understanding of the eschaton itself with scarce regard for implausibility. By contrast, in Bahá'u'lláh's reading of Qur'án 50:20, all eschatological imagery becomes symbolic, since the impossibility of the Qur'anic scenario having literally come to pass in Muḥammad's lifetime should be apparent.

(2) *"Perchance it is nigh" in Qur'an 17:51*: Bahá'u'lláh sustains his contemporary and historical reading of Qur'án 50:20 in his exegesis of Qur'án 17:51, concerning the imminence of the eschatological "Hour." The identification of the Day of Judgment with the advent of Muḥammad is, for Bahá'u'lláh, borne out in the verse at Qur'án 17:51: "Erelong will they wag their heads at Thee, and say, 'When shall this be?' Say: 'Perchance it is nigh.'"¹¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh's commentary on this verse illustrates one of the exegetical devices whereby *ta'wíl* is brought into alignment with the controlling hermeneutical principle of a repeated eschaton at each theophanic advent:

Nay, by "trumpet" is meant the trumpet-call of Muḥammad's Revelation, which was sounded in the heart of the universe, and by "resurrection" is meant His own rise to proclaim the Cause of God. He bade the erring and wayward arise and speed out of the sepulchres of their bodies, arrayed them with the beauteous robe of faith, and quickened them with the breath of a new and wondrous life. Thus at the hour when Muḥammad, that divine Beauty, purposed to unveil one of the mysteries hidden in the symbolic terms "resurrection," "judgment," "paradise," and "hell," Gabriel, the Voice of Inspiration, was heard saying: "Erelong will they wag their heads at Thee, and say, 'When shall this be?' Say: 'Perchance it is nigh.'" The implications of this verse alone suffice the peoples of the world, were they to ponder it in their hearts.¹¹¹

[p. 158] Expectation of an imminent eschaton ("the Hour") is one thing. Acceptance of its realization is quite another. If Bahá'u'lláh can succeed in convincing the reader that an eschaton did take place at the advent of Muḥammad, by appealing to the past as a foil for the present, the plausibility of a realized eschaton in the reader's own present is not so untenable as once thought. Once the eschaton is voided of its supernatural character, its realization becomes a matter of spiritual discernment.

A choice will have to be made by the reader as to who is right: the ulama or Bahá'u'lláh. The reader initially predicates legitimacy on interpretive grounds. If the learned divines can be discredited, the reader will naturally be expected to entertain the validity of another source of authority who can offer a better interpretation. Bahá'u'lláh's interpretations throughout the Book of Certitude undermine the consensus vested in learned Islamic exegesis. Bahá'u'lláh's first challenge to traditional authority rests on interpretive grounds. In the post-Baghdad period (1863–92), Bahá'u'lláh will challenge that authority on other grounds.

RHETORICAL EXPLANATION

(1) *The mathal of bread/fruit in Qur'an 76:9; 5:117; 14:24*: Figurative language is nonliteral representation. The trick for the reader is to recognize symbolic language when it is not obvious. In good didactic fashion, Bahá'u'lláh exposes the reader to obviously representational verses from the Qur'án, as an approach to nonexplicit symbolism:

This wronged One will cite but one of these instances, thus conferring upon mankind, for the sake of God, such bounties as are yet concealed within the treasury of the hidden and sacred Tree, that haply mortal men may not remain deprived of their share of the immortal fruit, and attain to a dewdrop [p. 159] of the waters of everlasting life which, from Baghdád, the "Abode of Peace," are being vouchsafed unto all mankind. We ask neither meed nor reward. "We nourish your souls for the sake of God; we seek from you neither recompense nor thanks" (Qur'án 76:9).

This is the food that conferreth everlasting life upon the pure in heart and the illumined in spirit. This is the bread of which it is said: "Lord, send down upon us Thy bread from Heaven" (Qur'an 5:117). This bread shall never be withheld from them that deserve it, nor can it be exhausted. It groweth everlastingly from the tree of grace; it descendeth at all seasons from the heavens of justice and mercy. Even as He saith: "Seest thou not to what God likeneth a good word? To a good tree; its roots firmly fixed, and its branches reaching unto heaven; yielding its fruit in all seasons" (Qur'an 14:24).¹¹²

We immediately notice the self-reference to "the hidden and sacred Tree" in keeping with messianic secrecy. But this is not the main point of the passage. Clearly, the term *ka-* (like; as) in the text is a rhetorical flag. Even more explicit is the inevitable allusion to the verse following at Qur'án 14:25. Arberry renders both verses so:

Hast thou not seen how God has struck a similitude? A good word is as a good tree—its roots are firm, and its branches are in heaven; it gives its produce every season by the leave of its Lord. So God strikes similitudes for men; haply they will remember.

The equation, nourishment = bread = fruit from heaven, is an effective inner-Qur'anic exegesis which identifies references to food in the Qur'án as having spiritual purport.

Behind the general reference lies a specific one. Bahá'u'lláh states that his exegesis promises to vouchsafe to "mortal men" their "share of the immortal fruit" which comes from Baghdad, the "Abode of Peace." This allusion to Qur'án 10:25 and 6:127 redraws the eschatological map. The sacred [p. 160] cartography of paradise finds its literal Cartesian coordinates in the "Abode of Peace." Earthly Baghdad, unlikely enough, ends up as the literal location of an eschatological symbol in this interpretation. Subtly—in retrospect obviously—Bahá'u'lláh

hints at his concealed station as the “hidden and sacred Tree” in eschatological paradise, from which flow the “waters of everlasting life” and in which is grown “the immortal fruit.”¹¹³

(2) *God’s Light (Qur’an 9:33) and God as Light (Qur’an 24:35)*: Bahá’u’lláh’s writings are rife with metaphors. In the passage below, for example, he takes up a biblical metaphor in saying: “Gird up the loins of endeavour” (*kamar-i himmat-rá muḥkam báýad bast*). The metaphor of girding up one’s loins had its origin in ancient belt-wrestling,¹¹⁴ but over time the metaphor eclipsed its original referent and transformed into a faded or “dead” metaphor. Bahá’u’lláh works in Qur’anic metaphors stylistically as well, such that there is an implicit reinforcement of every act of exegesis with the abundant literary use of metaphorical expression.

As much for rhetorical as well as exclamatory purposes, Bahá’u’lláh adduces two verses with light imagery:

Dear friend! Now when the light of God’s everlasting Morn (*ṣubḥ-i azal* [a reference to Bahá’u’lláh himself]) is breaking, when the radiance of His holy words: “God is the light of the heavens and of the earth” (Qur’an 24:35) is shedding illumination upon all mankind; when the inviolability of His tabernacle is being proclaimed by His sacred utterance: “God hath willed to perfect His light” (Qur’an 9:33); and the Hand of Omnipotence, bearing His testimony: “In His grasp He holdeth the Kingdom of all things,” is being outstretched unto all the peoples and kindreds of the earth; it behooveth us to gird up the loins of endeavour, that haply, by the grace of God, we may enter the celestial City.¹¹⁵

[p. 161] The former verse, of course, is the celebrated “Light Verse” of the Qur’án. Bahá’í scholar, Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl Gulpáýgání, following the authoritative rhetorician al-Taftázání, observes that in the same verse the statement “the likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a Lamp” (Qur’án 24:35) is an explicit simile (*tashbíh*).¹¹⁶ Bahá’u’lláh takes full advantage of known and accepted Qur’anic similes and metaphors (i.e., the general Islamic acceptance of God’s “light,” God’s “hand,” etc. as figurative) and, through frequent use of Persian genitive-metaphors, stylistically inundates the reader with metaphorical expressions.

Far from being merely ornate, his style renders the actual task of interpretation easier, as Bahá’u’lláh acclimates the reader to a metaphorical view of reality. Any reference to God’s “hand” is likely to be understood as a patent metaphor, though the reader is immediately presented with an unfamiliar metaphor: “the celestial City.” This non-Qur’anic expression is explained later in the Book of Certitude:

Therefore, whosoever, and in whatever Dispensation, hath recognized and attained unto the presence of these glorious, these resplendent and most excellent Luminaries, hath verily attained unto the “Presence of God” Himself, and entered the city of eternal and immortal life. Attainment unto such presence is possible only in the Day of Resurrection, which is the rise of God Himself through His all-embracing Revelation.¹¹⁷

In the course of this passage, distinctions between Qur’anic figurative language and Bahá’u’lláh’s own become blurred. Exegesis is ongoing, nevertheless, as Bahá’u’lláh reiterates his “Presence of God” as “Manifestation of God” equivalence. In this passage, light imagery is subtly woven into the exegetical process, such that the very use of the expression “Luminaries” to mean Messengers of God resonates with the entire range of Qur’anic light imagery. In [p. 162] fine, much of Bahá’u’lláh’s rhetorical exegesis is augmented by his rhetorical style.

(3) “Wherefore slew ye them?”—*Typology at Qur’an 3:183 and Qur’an 2:89*: As to ingenuity in argument and the use of rhetorical reasoning, one of the most interesting sections of the Book of Certitude is Bahá’u’lláh’s commentary on a Qur’anic accusation that can best be read typologically. Bahá’u’lláh wishes to establish that the persecutors of the Báb are essentially the same in character as the slayers of the prophets of old. He cites a Qur’anic proof-text to this effect, arguing that a literal reading of the verse would lead to absurdity:

And it came to pass that on a certain day a number of opponents of that peerless Beauty, those who had strayed far from God’s imperishable Sanctuary, scornfully spoke these words unto Muḥammad: “Verily, God hath entered into a covenant with us that we are not to credit an apostle until he present us a sacrifice which fire out of heaven shall devour” (Qur’án 3:183). The purport of this verse is that God hath covenanted with them that they should not believe in any messenger unless he work the miracle of Abel and Cain, that is, offer a sacrifice, and the fire from heaven consume it; even as they had heard it recounted in the story of Abel, which story is recorded in the scriptures. To this, Muḥammad, answering, said: “Already have Apostles before me come to you with sure testimonies, and with that of which ye speak. Wherefore slew ye them? Tell me, if ye are men of truth” (Qur’án 3:183).

And now be fair: How could those people living in the days of Muḥammad have existed, thousands of years before, in the age of Adam or other Prophets? Why should Muḥammad, that Essence of truthfulness, have charged the people of His day with the murder of Abel or other Prophets? Thou hast none other alternative except to regard Muḥammad as an impostor or a fool—which God forbid!—or to maintain that those peo-

ple of wickedness were the self-same people who in [p. 163] every age opposed and caviled at the Prophets and Messengers of God, till they finally caused them all to suffer martyrdom.¹¹⁸

The reader will recall that Bahá'u'lláh cites the Qur'án in Arabic and chooses at times to paraphrase the gist of it in Persian for those on whom the Arabic is lost. The argument here is clearly rhetorical, where Muḥammad's exclamation, "Wherefore slew ye them?" (Qur'án 3:183)¹¹⁹ is shown to be typological. This verse is understood in much the same vein as Christ's indictment of the Jewish leaders of his day of complicity in the death of the prophets of yore (Matthew 23:34-35).

Likewise, Bahá'u'lláh adduces Qur'án 2:89 to establish that the hard-heartedness of the people in his day convicts them, even in Qur'anic terms, of being the self-same oppressors of old:

Likewise, Muḥammad, in another verse, uttereth His protest against the people of that age. He saith: "Although they had before prayed for victory over those who believed not, yet when there came unto them, He of Whom they had knowledge, they disbelieved in Him. The curse of God on the infidels!" (Qur'án 2:189.) Reflect how this verse also implieth that the people living in the days of Muḥammad were the same people who, in the days of the Prophets of old, contended and fought in order to promote the Faith, and teach the Cause of God. And yet, how could the generations living at the time of Jesus and Moses, and those who lived in the days of Muḥammad, be regarded as being actually one and the same people?

Moreover, those whom they had formerly known were Moses, the Revealer of the Pentateuch, and Jesus, the Author of the Gospel. Notwithstanding, why did Muḥammad say: "When He of Whom they had knowledge came unto them"—that is Jesus or Moses—"they disbelieved in Him?" Was not Muḥammad to outward seeming called by a different name? [p. 164] How then can the truth of this verse be established, and its meaning be made clear?¹²⁰

This mode of reasoning is consistent with the treatment of Qur'án 3:183 above, and it should be pointed out that two verses later (at Qur'án 2:91) there is a parallel to verse 3:183: "Say: Why were you slaying the Prophets of God in former time, if you were believers?"¹²¹ This would seem to corroborate Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation.

Some simple rhetorical reasoning is sufficient to flesh out a typology which can be applied across prophetic history to the present. If the infidels of Muḥammad's day were the same as the disbelievers of old, then the persecutors of the Bábís must be seen to be the same, ac-

ording to this line of interpretation. Yet the “return” of the infidels of yore is an incomplete reenactment in the apocalyptic drama unless there is a prophet who “returns” as well. The villain is meaningless without the hero. And when he does return in a later age, what happens?

Bahá’u’lláh carries the extended typological metaphor one step further:

Strive therefore to comprehend the meaning of “return” which hath been so explicitly revealed in the Qur’án itself, and which none hath as yet understood. What sayest thou? If thou sayest that Muḥammad was the “return” of the Prophets of old, as is witnessed by this verse, His Companions must likewise be the “return” of bygone Companions, even as the “return” of the former people is clearly attested by the text of the above-mentioned verses. ... Furthermore, it is evident to thee that the Bearers of the trust of God are made manifest to the peoples of the earth as the Exponents of a new Cause and the Bearers of a new Message.¹²²

Within Islam, certain eschatological predictions foretell the return of Jesus and other prophets, as well as the return of al-Dajjál (i.e., Abú-Sufyán) and other evil men. [p. 165] By accepting the concept of the return of certain ancient worthies and their enemies, Bahá’u’lláh completes the extended metaphor, pointing out that if the circumstances surrounding the advent of a past messenger are to be reenacted, it is only logical to expect that a new religion replete with scripture and law would be brought as well. This idea of a new revelation and a new law is developed throughout the Book of Certitude. What is ostensibly a commentary on certain eschatological verses of the Qur’án ends up to be an argument for its supersession by a new revelation.

PERIPHRAISIS

(1) *Periphrasis on the Mysterious Letters at Qur’an 2:1*: On the isolated letters (*alif, lám, mím*) that open the Sura of the Cow, Bahá’u’lláh’s interpretation is as mainstream as it is incidental. He states: “In the disconnected letters of the Qur’án the mysteries of the divine Essence are enshrined, and within their shells the pearls of His Unity are treasured. For lack of space We do not dwell on them at this moment. Outwardly they signify Muḥammad.”¹²³ This is one standard interpretation in Muslim exegesis. For instance, Ibn al-’Arabí states that *mím* refers to Muḥammad.¹²⁴ Bahá’u’lláh’s purpose is not to advance a fresh interpretation, but rather to show that even Qur’anic letters have symbolic significance.

Through an unostentatious reiteration of an existing Islamic interpretation, Bahá'u'lláh reinforces the symbolic dimension of the Qur'án. Unlike his predecessor, Bahá'u'lláh resists giving what Lawson refers to as the Báb's "exploded commentary" on single letters of the Qur'án.¹²⁵

Bahá'u'lláh's discourse represents a stylistic departure from the writings of the Báb, but not necessarily a prophetological one. From a historical perspective, the Book of Certitude functions as an apology for the Báb by making more [p. 166] accessible—as well as defensible—the Báb's prophetology. Bahá'u'lláh's own theophanology represents a crystallization of the ideological foundation already laid by the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh's presentation of what originated as a Bábí theory of prophecy is much different not in content but in accessibility.

The Báb's mystical writings were convoluted, fascinating (this is not a subjective assessment, but rather an observation of its impact on the reader), and assertive. Bahá'u'lláh's presentation, on the other hand, is calculated to persuade by force of "explicative logic." Throughout the Book of Certitude, the symbolic dimension of the Qur'án is argued in a variety of ways (including the use of ten standard procedural devices), but more often than not, symbolism is explained as predicated on underlying figuration. The representational possibilities of Qur'anic discourse are demonstrated in the isolated letters themselves, in their presumed abbreviatory function.

ANALOGY

(1) *"The hand of God is chained up" in Qur'an 5:67*: The "hand of God" appears in most works on rhetoric as the classic example of Qur'anic figuration. According to al Jurjání, the value of a metaphor resides in its ability to render "hidden meanings clear and revealed to the eye." Moreover, one of the merits of the *isti'ára* is its ability to convey "delicate ideas" which are "buried in the intellect" as if "the eye actually sees them."¹²⁶

Given the evident anthropomorphism here which tradition had long recognized, the figurative intent of Qur'án 5:67 is assumed, while Bahá'u'lláh pursues a typological exegesis based on the idea of rejectionism. He sets up this analogy to strike a parallel between the Shí'í disbelievers of his day and the Jewish detractors in the time of [p. 167] Muḥammad, represented in the verse which polemicizes: "'The hand of God,' say the Jews, 'is chained up.' Chained up be their own hands! And for that which they have said, they are accursed. Nay, outstretched are both His hands." (Qur'án 5:67.) Bahá'u'lláh's commentary on this verse is worth citing to see how the analogy is developed between the Jews against whom the Qur'án inveighs, and Muslim intransigence against any further revelation:

Although the commentators of the Qur'an have related in divers manners the circumstances attending the revelation of this verse, yet thou shouldst endeavour to apprehend the purpose thereof. He saith: How false is that which the Jews have imagined! How can the hand of Him Who is the King in truth, Who hath caused the countenance of Moses to be made manifest, and conferred upon Him the robe of Prophethood—how can the hand of such a One be chained and fettered? How can He be conceived as powerless to raise up another Messenger after Moses?

Behold the absurdity of their saying; how far it hath strayed from the path of knowledge and understanding! Observe how in this day also, all these people have occupied themselves with foolish absurdities. For over a thousand years they have been reciting this verse, and unwittingly pronouncing their censure against the Jews, utterly unaware that they themselves, openly and privily, are voicing the sentiments and belief of the Jewish people!¹²⁷

This comparison must have been an invidious one to Shí'ís challenged by it. The pill was made even harder to swallow when Bahá'u'lláh, a few sentences later, referred to his Shí'í detractors as "small-minded, contemptible people."¹²⁸

Harsh words, but the treatment Bahá'u'lláh received at the hands of Shí'í ulama was considerably harsher. "These people have imagined," continues Bahá'u'lláh, "that the flow of God's all-encompassing grace and plenteous mercies, the cessation of which no mind can contemplate, has been [p. 168] halted."¹²⁹ This indictment against Muslim theology for keeping to the belief that "out of the Tabernacle of ancient glory the Messengers of God have ceased to be made manifest"¹³⁰ is prosecuted on the basis of analogy with similar assertions of revelatory finality in Judaism.

(2) *Past/Present Analogy—No Messenger after Joseph at Qur'an 40:34*: In the Qur'an, the Jews are singled out repeatedly as the classic rejectionists of God's revelations. Bahá'u'lláh takes advantage of this Qur'anic theme to invert the Qur'anic indictment upon the Muslim clerics themselves. The Qur'an represents the Jews as saying, after the passing of Joseph, "God will by no means raise up a Messenger after him." (Qur'an 40:34.) An analogy is struck by the mere citation of this verse; yet in Bahá'u'lláh's comment on it, the Jews are not directly mentioned:

Therefore, understand this verse and know of a certainty that the people in every age, clinging to a verse of the Book, have uttered such vain and absurd sayings, contending that no Prophet should again be made manifest to the world. Even as the Christian divines who, holding fast to the verse of the Gospel to which We have already referred,

have sought to explain that the law of the Gospel shall at no time be annulled, and that no independent Prophet shall again be made manifest, unless He confirmeth the law of the Gospel. Most of the people have become afflicted with the same spiritual disease. Even as thou dost witness how the people of the Qur'an, like unto the peoples of old, have allowed the words "Seal of the Prophets" to veil their eyes.

And yet, they themselves testify to this verse: "None knoweth the interpretation thereof but God and they that are well-grounded in knowledge" (Qur'an 3:7). And when He Who is well-grounded in all knowledge, He Who is the Mother, the Soul, the Secret, and the Essence thereof revealeth that which is the least contrary to their desire, they bitterly oppose Him and shamelessly deny Him. These thou hast already heard [p. 169] and witnessed. Such deeds and words have been solely instigated by leaders of religion, they that worship no God but their own desire, who bear allegiance to naught but gold, who are wrapt in the densest veils of learning, and who, enmeshed by its obscurities, are lost in the wilds of error.¹³¹

This is obviously another assault upon an Islamic dogma. The blow is softened only to the extent that Jews and Christians are equally culpable for having rejected Muḥammad. The past again is used as a foil for the present. It is interesting that the very cornerstone of the Islamic doctrine of revelatory finality is questioned. Bahá'u'lláh implies that Islamic tradition has been overconfident in its interpretation of the "Seal of the Prophets."

What is unclear in Bahá'u'lláh's commentary is this: to whom does he allude when he speaks of "the Mother, the Soul, the Secret, and the Essence thereof?" Is the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh himself in view here? Had the context a clear contemporary time frame, the reference to Bahá'u'lláh himself would be probable, since the Báb had already fallen victim to rejection when he suffered martyrdom eleven or twelve years earlier (1850). However, even in the original Persian the reference is unclear. The safest reading would be to identify the Báb as the subject of this passage, since he is the subject of the Book of Certitude as a whole.

I am obliged to exercise some interpretive restraint here. Had this passage a clear reflexive intent on the part of Bahá'u'lláh, our working hypothesis would have been strengthened. A third possibility presents itself: Perhaps Bahá'u'lláh has been intentionally vague here, so that the passage could be read either way. This possibility is consistent with the hypothesis of Bahá'u'lláh's "messianic secret," to which he could only allude at this time.

(3) *Analogy with Alchemy*: An important aspect of Bahá'u'lláh's argument is his use of analogies drawn from [p. 170] topical issues of interest within popular religion. The occult science of alchemy had certainly been of more than passing interest to many Bábís. In the passage below, Bahá'u'lláh compares spiritual transformation to the process of alchemy:

Such is the potency of the Divine Elixir, which, swift as the twinkling of an eye, transmuteth the souls of men! For instance, consider the substance of copper. Were it to be protected in its own mine from becoming solidified, it would, within the space of seventy years, attain to the state of gold. ... Be that as it may, the real elixir will, in one instant, cause the substance of copper to attain the state of gold ... Likewise, these souls, through the potency of the Divine Elixir, traverse, in the twinkling of an eye, the world of dust and advance into the realm of holiness. ... It behooveth thee to exert thine utmost to attain unto this Elixir which, in one fleeting breath, causeth the west of ignorance to reach the east of knowledge, illumines the darkness of night with the resplendence of the morn, guideth the wanderer in the wilderness of doubt to the well-spring of the Divine Presence and Fount of Certitude, and conferreth upon mortal souls the honor of acceptance into the Riḍván of immortality.¹³²

Elsewhere in the Book of Certitude Bahá'u'lláh criticizes alchemy as a figment in “the realm of fancy” existing on “the plane of mere pretension.”¹³³ Yet the topic had provided a descriptive model for Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í (d. 1826 C.E.) in his treatise on “Alchemy and the Resurrection Body”¹³⁴ as part of the immediate intellectual background for the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions.

At the time the Book of Certitude was written, many (probably most) Bábís were quite fascinated by alchemy, so it was natural for them to approach Bahá'u'lláh on the subject. Several of his Tablets on alchemy have been published, but none has been translated. These are among the most arcane and recondite of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, and unless one has been exposed to the occult terminology of [p. 171] alchemy, one will be at an utter loss to fathom even one sentence of such a Tablet. Bahá'u'lláh's alchemical Tablets are somewhat like secret recipes, mystifying to read.¹³⁵ It seems that during the Baghdad period, Bahá'u'lláh not only concentrated on mysticism, ethics, and doctrine, he also satisfied the curiosity of his fellow Bábís who took an interest in the esoteric.¹³⁶

In so doing, Bahá'u'lláh was able to redirect their energies toward more useful enterprises, like personal transformation. Since the mythical “Elixir” had been sought in vain by alchemists for centuries, it provided a perfect symbol for the object of a spiritual quest. By transferring alchemical imagery to the realm of faith, Bahá'u'lláh could begin to speak of an elixir

within reach of the true believer. With regard to the above passage, the interpretive question again arises: Is “this Elixir” an allusion to the Báb or to Bahá’u’lláh, or both?

(4) *Analogies from Nature—the Sun*: The sun is one of the most frequently used analogies in Bahá’í teachings. Bahá’u’lláh draws analogy with other elements of nature (such as the rose),¹³⁷ but the sun—as developed in the Book of Certitude—is a more compelling metaphor for prophetology. The prophets of God are frequently compared to the sun. Just as the sun is effectively the source of all life on earth, so is the Manifestation of God the source for all spiritual life, according to Bahá’í theology.

There is longstanding Shí’í precedent in identifying celestial bodies with holy persons. Take the Qur’anic oath: “By the Sun and his noonday brightness! By the Moon when she followeth him! By the Day when it revealeth his glory! By the Night when it enshroudeth him!” (Qur’án 91:1-4, Rodwell). Respectively, “sun” and “moon” are said by al-Qummí (author of one of the best-known Shí’í commentaries on the Qur’án) to represent Muḥammad and ‘Alí. The “day” is the Imám (or, in [p. 172] some traditions, precisely the Mahdí), while the “night” represents collectively the enemies of the Imáms, particularly Abú Bakr, whose caliphate “enshrouded” ‘Alí.¹³⁸

In light of Shí’í readings such as these, Bahá’u’lláh refers to a received interpretation of Qur’án 55:5. It is important to take a look at this text for a moment, in order to make a point about his use of analogies. Lest the reader think that all of his interpretations of the sun are the same, the sun can serve as a negative analogy as well as a positive one. In the passage below, Bahá’u’lláh turns a positive analogy into a negative one, and then cites Qur’án 55:5 as his proof-text, assuming that the reader already is conscious of its interpretation. Pay close attention to the verse itself, because its translation is surprising:

That the term “sun” hath been applied to the leaders of religion is due to their lofty position, their fame, and renown. Such are the universally recognized divines of every age, who speak with authority, and whose fame is securely established. If they be in the likeness of the Sun of Truth, they will surely be accounted as the most exalted of luminaries; otherwise, they are to be recognized as the focal centres of hellish fire. Even as He saith: “Verily, the sun and moon are both condemned to the torment of infernal fire.” (Qur’an 55:5.) You are no doubt familiar with the interpretation of the term “sun” and “moon” mentioned in this verse; no need therefore to refer to it. And whosoever is of the element of this “sun” and “moon”, that is, followeth the example of these leaders in setting his

face towards falsehood and in turning away from the truth he undoubtedly cometh out of infernal gloom and returneth thereunto.¹³⁹

Loftiness is Bahá'u'lláh's constant for the symbol of the sun. That status can be good or bad. In the ancient Near East, the nimbus of the sun was referred to as its "glory." This glory denoted solar radiance. It connoted fame. Bahá'u'lláh is tapping into a venerable interpretive heritage [p. 173] here. He puts a moral spin on such imagery, however. The image of light can trade on notions of hell-fire, expressive of corrupt leadership. This is a departure from the stock light/darkness dichotomy.

Now Qur'án 55:5 is Bahá'u'lláh's proof-text. He is not interpreting the text as such. Rather, he is alluding to an already accepted interpretation. This verse citation presents a problem for the present-day reader, however. Surely every reader of Shoghi Effendi's translation of the Book of Certitude who has ever looked up Qur'án 55:5 in any standard translation of the Qur'án has failed to find this verse in the form in which Shoghi Effendi has rendered it. The Arabic text for verse 55:5 as cited by Bahá'u'lláh in the Persian original is in standard Qur'anic form:

al-shamsu wa al-qamaru bi-husbánⁱⁿ¹⁴⁰

Verily, the sun and moon are both condemned
to the torment of infernal fire.

(tr. Shoghi Effendi)

Rodwell's translation provided a model which, as a rule, Shoghi Effendi closely adhered to. In this particular instance, there is a significant departure from that standard. Compare Shoghi Effendi's translation with Rodwell and others, as provided below. Verse 55:6 has been added for contextual reasons, as will be explained shortly:

The Sun and the Moon have each their times,
And the plants and the trees bend in adoration.

(Rodwell)

The sun and the moon to a reckoning,
and the stars and the trees bow themselves.

(Arberry) [p. 174]

The sun and moon are made punctual.

The stars and the trees adore.

(Pickthall)

The sun and the moon move according to a fixed reckoning;
and the stars and trees submit to Him.

(Zafrulla Khan)

The sun and moon run their courses according to a fixed reckoning.
And the stemless plants and the trees *humbly* submit to *His will*.

(Sher 'Alí)

The sun and moon adhere to a schedule,
and the stars and the trees, all bow in worship.

(Maududi)

In the above translations, an extra verse was cited. This is because the context of Qur'án 55:5 is supplied by Qur'án 55:6. It was added to show how easily such a verse could lend itself to symbolic interpretation, as the imagery of stars (or plants!) and trees doing obeisance to God in verse 55:6 is so patently tropical. Qur'án 55:6 is clearly an instance of *prosopopkia* (*fictio personae* or personification), a literary device.¹⁴¹

Bahá'u'lláh's adducing of Qur'án 55:5 as symbolic is consistent with the already figurative reference to nature in Qur'án 55:6, where stars (or plants) and trees submit to, or even worship, God. Acknowledgement of figuration allows for equivalences to be drawn, to supply a veridical meaning in place of the tropical. A literal rewording suffices as a gloss on the figurative. Symbolic interpretation goes one step further. It provides the putative referent; it points to the symbol's presumed allusion or identity. Bahá'u'lláh thus reads Qur'án 55:5 as symbolic of benighted religious leaders, depicted as celestial bodies by virtue of their lofty status, but who, in the end, are consigned to hell.

[p. 175] In light of the dynamic interpretive interplay between notions of reckoning and judgment, the balance does not tip in favor of the benighted divines of whom Bahá'u'lláh speaks, and of whom Qur'án 55:5 has already spoken in Shí'í circles. (We are taking Bahá'u'lláh at his word here, when he asserts: "You are no doubt familiar with the interpretation of the term 'sun' and 'moon' mentioned in this verse; no need therefore to refer unto it."¹⁴²) This in-

terpretation could have been generally Shí'í, or specifically Sufi, Shaykhí, or Bábí. An anti-clerical bias is clearly evident in this line of interpretation, however.

One thing is clear: Bahá'u'lláh has read *ḥusbán* as “hell.” The word *ḥusbán* is a verbal noun derived from *ḥasba*, “to compute, reckon, calculate.”¹⁴³ In Arabic, *ḥusbán* means “calculation, reckoning, accounting, computation.”¹⁴⁴ This lexical denotation is borne out in the translations cited above. In Persian, the word *ḥusbán* takes on a particular connotation as well. Lexically, the definition of *ḥusbán* in Persian is “calculation; severe punishment; a short arrow.”¹⁴⁵ “Severe punishment” is the relevant sense here. Colloquially, many Iranians will say that *ḥusbán* signifies “hell.”¹⁴⁶ This is because of the word’s eschatological associations. A standard Islamic designation is *yawn al-ḥisáb*, the “Day of Reckoning” or “Judgment Day.”¹⁴⁷ The cognate term *muḥtasab* is “that for which one can expect reward in the hereafter (e.g., suffering, loss, etc.).”¹⁴⁸ There is a tie-in with “reckoning” here. “Reckoning” in this sense is judgment under the laws of reward and retribution, not the laws of nature. When *ḥusbán* is read as “hell,” the verse would literally read, as a nominal sentence in Arabic:

al-shams^u wa al-qamar^u bi-ḥusbánⁱⁿ

The sun and the moon [are] in hell.

[p. 176] Probably because the application of this verse to Bahá'u'lláh's argument might have been lost on the reader, Shoghi Effendi supplied the missing conceptual elements in his translation. These supplements to the actual Qur'anic text are bracketed below.

[Verily,] the sun and moon [are both condemned]

to [the torment of] infernal fire.

Bahá'u'lláh's citation of Qur'án 55:5 as a proof-text is enriched by Shoghi Effendi, who provides a periphrastic rendering of the verse in translation. Bahá'u'lláh's use of the sun and moon as an analogy is seen to have Qur'anic precedence. Symbolic interpretation is already warranted in Shí'í exegesis.

Bahá'u'lláh employs the analogy of the sun to explain what is meant by the “return” of a prophet, such as the eschatological return of Jesus. Recall that in Sunnī tradition Jesus is expected to return at the eschaton to break crosses and kill swine. In the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh disregards such Islamic traditions in favor of the biblical tradition.

Another verse construed as symbolic runs thus: “He let forth the two seas that meet together, between them is a barrier which they do not overpass. O which of your Lord's bounties will you deny?” From them come forth the pearl and the coral” (Qur'án 55:19–22, Arberry).

The “two seas” are taken by Ibn Bábúya (one of the first exponents of Shí’í orthodoxy) as ‘Alí and Fátíma, while the “coral” and “pearls” are the Imáms Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.¹⁴⁹

The Qur’án, after all, has little to say about the eschatological “return” of ancient figures. But Shí’í tradition does. Prominent in Shí’í speculation is the return of the Twelfth Imám, the Qá’im. Not so prominent, but still part of the apocalyptic drama, is the return of Imám Ḥusayn, the third [p. 177] Imám. It appears that the Mahdí in Sunní tradition is specified as the Qá’im in Shí’í tradition. (No Sunní Muslim would accept that the Mahdí is the Twelfth Imám!) Similarly, although Shí’í tradition still expects the return of Jesus, it appears that the figure of the martyred Ḥusayn displaces in importance the Sunní attention given to Jesus’s Islamicized Second Coming.

Returning to analogy as a procedural device, Bahá’u’lláh attempts to solve the problem of what exactly Jesus had meant when he spoke of his own return. The solution is simple. It is the reality of the prophet, and not his personality or physicality that is intended. Here the analogy of the sun comes into play. Note how that in the passage below, for the purposes of analogy, the sun is personified:

As to the matter of names, Muḥammad, Himself, declared: “I am Jesus.” ... In this sense, neither the person of Jesus nor His writings hath differed from that of Muḥammad and of His holy Book, inasmuch as both have championed the Cause of God, uttered His praise, and revealed His commandments. Thus it is that Jesus, Himself, declared: “I go away and come again unto you.” (John 14:28.) Consider the sun. Were it to say now, “I am the sun of yesterday,” it would speak the truth. And should it, bearing the sequence of time in mind, claim to be other than that sun, it would still speak the truth. ... For though they are the same, yet one doth recognize in each a separate designation, a specific attribute, a particular character.

Conceive accordingly the distinction, variation, and unity characteristic of the various Manifestations of holiness, that thou mayest comprehend the allusions made by the Creator of all names and attributes to the mysteries of distinction and unity, and discover the answer to thy question as to why that everlasting Beauty should have, at sundry and different times, called Himself by different names and titles.¹⁵⁰

It would be a mistake to read reincarnation into Bahá’u’lláh’s analogy. The theme of return is purely typological. [p. 178] But what of the various “mysteries of distinction and unity” that eschatological traditions attach to different prophetic personalities? As to scripture, Bahá’u’lláh discusses the problem of what Lawson refers to as “voice”¹⁵¹ and frame of reference, with re-

spect to theophanic locutions ascribed to various prophets. Each Manifestation of God has three voices, according to the Book of Certitude, according to frame of reference:

(1) *"The Voice of Divinity, the Call of God Himself":*¹⁵²

Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: "I am God!" He verily speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto. For it hath been repeatedly demonstrated that through their Revelation, their attributes and names, the Revelation of God, His name and His attributes, are made manifest in the world. Thus, He hath revealed: "Those shafts were God's, not Thine!" (Qur'án 8:17) And also He saith: "In truth, they who plighted fealty unto thee, really plighted fealty unto God." (Qur'án 48:10.)¹⁵³

(2) *The Voice of the Manifestation of God:*

And were any of them to voice the utterance: "I am the Messenger of God," He also speaketh the truth, the indubitable truth. Even as He saith: 'Muḥammad is not the father of any man among you, but He is the Messenger of God.' (Qur'án 33:40.) Viewed in this light, they are all but Messengers of that ideal King, that unchangeable Essence. And were they all to proclaim: "I am the Seal of the Prophets," (Qur'án 33:40) they verily utter but the truth, beyond the faintest shadow of doubt. For they are all but one person, one soul, one spirit, one being, one revelation. They are all the Manifestation of the "Beginning" and the "End," the "First" and the "Last," the "Seen" and the "Hidden"—all of which pertain to Him Who is the innermost Spirit of Spirits and eternal Essence of Essences.¹⁵⁴

[p. 179]

(3) *The Voice of the Servant of God:*

And were they to say: "We are the servants of God," this is also a manifest and indisputable fact. For they have been made manifest in the uttermost state of servitude, a servitude the like of which no man can possibly attain. Thus in moments in which these Essences of being were deeply immersed beneath the oceans of ancient and everlasting holiness, or when they soared to the loftiest summits of divine mysteries, they claimed their utterance to be the Voice of divinity, the Call of God Himself.

Were the eye of discernment to be opened, it would recognize that in this very state, they have considered themselves utterly effaced and Nonexistent in the face of Him Who is the All-Pervading, the Incorruptible. Methinks, they have regarded themselves as utter

nothingness, and deemed their mention in that Court an act of blasphemy. For the slightest whisperings of self, within such a Court, is an evidence of self-assertion and independent existence.¹⁵⁵

This is one of the most important passages in the Book of Certitude. This explanation resolves the problem of “voice” in scripture and in the theophanic locutions of the prophets of God. The passage is self-explanatory. The reader may wish to note the frequent references to Qur’án 33:40 throughout the Book of Certitude, direct or oblique.

The Islamic doctrine of revelatory finality is firmly predicated on verse 33:40. This is the most crucial verse Bahá’u’lláh has to deal with. In effect, the entire Book of Certitude may be said to be an exegesis of Qur’án 33:40. The analogy of the sun is repeated later in the Book of Certitude, where it serves to reinforce the overall argument. Bahá’u’lláh acknowledges that this proof had been advanced previously by the Báb.¹⁵⁶

Given the aforementioned Shí’í identifications of celestial imagery with prophets and imáms, this is one of the more readily accepted symbol/referents. What remains [p. 180] controversial is the interpretive destabilization of the Qur’anic epithet “Seal of the Prophets” from an exclusivist to an inclusivist interpretation. In an Islamic context, this exegetical innovation is unacceptable, even though Bahá’u’lláh’s argument is entirely Islamic in form. The traditional exegesis of verse 33:40 is too entrenched for any fresh perspective to be seriously entertained by orthodox Islam. No matter how persuasive Bahá’u’lláh’s argument may have been, that argument was a dangerous one to make in a Muslim context. It still is.

ABROGATION¹⁵⁷

Change of Qibla at Qur’an 2:143-149: In theory, what God has enacted He should be at liberty to repeal. No constraints should be placed on this divine prerogative. Or should there be? Will the eschaton validate Islam and vindicate the *sharí’a*? This is open to question. Amanat has remarked on the abrogatory implications of the eschaton for Islam. He states:

The Resurrection comes after a series of apocalyptic events that terminate historic time and put an end to the decaying terrestrial world, of which the Islamic *sharí’a* is also a part. According to the prophetic tradition, what is lawful and unlawful in the Muhammadan revelation is valid only until the Day of Judgment. Thus, Islamic *sharí’a* ceases its purpose once the Qiyāma occurs. The purpose of religion, according to Islam, is to prepare the way in this world for man’s ultimate salvation. After the Day of Judgment, the redeemed will live eternally in Paradise (a non-*Shar’ī* world). The theological obstacles thus reduce the chances of the Qiyāma being perceived as an allegory by seekers of the

Resurrection achievable in the material world. Accordingly, the obstacles to the occurrence of the Qiyāma also remove the contingency for a new prophetic revelation.

The finality of Islam and its endurance are guaranteed [p. 181] until the Day of Judgment, and any attempt to initiate a new phase of prophecy must be considered illegitimate. As the Qur'an itself points out, Islam is the final revelation and Muhammad the "seal of the prophets." This claim, consistently upheld by Islamic orthodoxy, not only militates against the notion of prophetic continuity but also hinders any attempt at the renovation of doctrine. ... But when a claimant went so far as to declare the abrogation of the accepted *sharī'a*, he would be compelled to provide a symbolic interpretation for the occurrence, or the near occurrence, of the Qiyāma—without which the previous *sharī'a* could not be nullified.¹⁵⁸

The problem could scarcely have been better articulated. Already the precedent for such an abrogation—along with a symbolic legitimation of it—had been effected by the Báb. He had established a new *sharī'a* by the revelation of the Arabic Bayán, and he had elaborated on it in the unfinished Persian Bayán—which the Kitáb-i Íqán is said to have mystically completed.

As to the question of whether Wansbrough's category of "abrogation" operates as a procedural device here, it should be made clear that, rather than analyzing a Qur'anic verse in terms of its abrogating or being abrogated by another verse, Bahá'u'lláh uses concepts of abrogation drawn from scripture and tradition to establish precedents for abrogation as part of the legislative prerogative of the prophet. This line of argument points to one of the major consequences of the claim to a new revelation, that is, the power to effect a new *sharī'a*.

One such argument advanced by Bahá'u'lláh concerns altering of the sacred direction of prayer:

And likewise, reflect upon the revealed verse concerning the "Qiblih." When Muḥammad, the Sun of Prophethood, had fled from the dayspring of Baḥhá [Mecca] unto Yathrib [Medina], He continued to turn His face, while praying, unto Jerusalem, the holy city, until the time when the Jews began to utter [p. 182] unseemly words against Him. ... Muḥammad strongly resented these words. Whilst, wrapt in meditation and wonder, He was gazing toward heaven, He heard the kindly Voice of Gabriel, saying: "We behold Thee from above, turning Thy face to heaven; but We will have Thee turn to a Qiblih which shall please Thee." (Qur'an 2:144.) On a subsequent day, when the Prophet, together with His companions, was offering the noontide prayer, and had already performed two of the prescribed Rik'ats [prostrations], the Voice of Gabriel was heard again: "Turn Thou Thy face towards the sacred Mosque." (Qur'an 2:149—Mecca.)

In the midst of that same prayer, Muḥammad suddenly turned His face away from Jerusalem and faced the Ka'bih. Whereupon a profound dismay seized suddenly the companions of the Prophet. Their faith was shaken severely. So great was their alarm, that many of them, discontinuing their prayer, apostasized their faith. Verily, God caused not this turmoil, but to test and prove His servants.¹⁵⁹

Bahá'u'lláh establishes the reason for God's command to change the sacred direction of prayer: "Verily, God caused not this turmoil, but to test and prove His servants."¹⁶⁰ This is a traditional interpretation and an early one as well. Al-Ṭabarí relates on the authority of Ibn 'Abbás that the alteration of the Qibla was effected "so that we may distinguish the people of certainty from the people of association (*shirk*) and doubt."¹⁶¹ Though al-Ṭabarí's point is made in a different context, the test of faith is presented as an important issue.

Bahá'u'lláh then adduces the figurative verse, descriptive of those who failed the test: "Affrighted asses fleeing from a lion." (Qur'án 74:50.)¹⁶² In concert with the commonplace trope for courage (i.e., lion), Bahá'u'lláh adduces the same kind of figure in the Qur'án, which employs the metonym "asses" for cowards. This verse is not interpreted. It is exclamatory.

Abrogation always involves a test of faith. Any alteration of the *sharí'a* poses a problem. The wholesale abrogation of [p. 183] the Islamic law code would provoke a crisis, which is why Bahá'ís in Middle Eastern countries have had to exercise prudence in their contacts with Muslims. Sacred direction is an important part of piety: One's whole devotional orientation in Judaism or Islam (as well as in early Jewish Christianity) is expressed by it. The *tafsír* master al-Nísábúrí has written a meditation on the notion of sacred direction:

It is that the servant must turn his face toward the king and serve him. It is also in order that unity and harmony among the people of faith may be established. ... The Jews faced the west, which is the direction of the setting of lights. ... The Christians faced the east, which is the direction of the rising of the lights ... but the people of faith faced the manifestation of lights, which is Mecca. ... The Throne is the *qiblah* of its bearers, the *kursí* [footstool] is the *qiblah* of the righteous ones, ... and the Kaaba is the *qiblah* of the people of faith.¹⁶³

In relating the story of the abrogation of the Qibla at the time of Muḥammad, Bahá'u'lláh recounts the circumstances of revelation pertaining to two verses having to do with that event (Qur'án 2:144, 149). Where Bahá'u'lláh is perhaps untraditional here is in adducing Qur'án 2:115 as pertaining to the Qibla:

None of the many Prophets sent down, since Moses was manifest, as Messengers of the Word of God, such as David, Jesus, and others among the more exalted Manifestations who have appeared during the intervening period between the Revelations of Moses and Muḥammad, ever altered the law of the Qiblah. These Messengers of the Lord of creation have, one and all, directed their peoples to turn unto the same direction. In the eyes of God, the ideal King, all the places of the earth are one and the same, excepting that place which, in the days of His Manifestations, He doth appoint for a particular purpose. Even as He hath revealed: “The East and West are God’s: therefore whichever way ye turn, there is the face of God.” (Qur’an 2:115.)

[p. 184] Notwithstanding the truth of these facts, why should the Qiblah have been changed, thus casting such dismay amongst the people, causing the companions of the Prophet to waver, and throwing so great a confusion into their midst? Yea, such things as throw consternation into the hearts of all men come to pass only that each soul may be tested by the touchstone of God, that the true may be known and distinguished from the false.¹⁶⁴

On Qur’án 2:115, which Bahá’u’lláh cites, Rippin states: “One thing unites all the *asbáb* reports adduced for this verse: virtually all of the material is constructed such that the verse is not to be included as part of the Qibla controversy.”¹⁶⁵ That is to say, no legal meaning was extracted from this text regarding the problem of the Qibla. (This verse did, however, have legal bearing on the direction of prayer when foggy or dark.) Bahá’u’lláh runs counter to the Islamic legal precedent in relating verse 2:115 to the Qibla controversy, in both a legal as well as spiritually edifying context. Bahá’u’lláh makes clear that abrogation poses a clear test of faith. There is, in fact, no symbolic exegesis here, except for the analogy which will be drawn elsewhere in the Book of Certitude between the unfaithful of yore and those who will be tested by whatever God desires to abrogate or confirm in the course of a new revelation.

So Bahá’u’lláh, after citing Qur’án 13:41 (“What He pleaseth will God abrogate or confirm”), implies the imminence of a new revelator (and thus a new abrogator):

Say: O people of the earth! Behold this flamelike-Youth that speedeth across the limitless profound of the Spirit, heralding unto you the tidings: ‘Lo: the Lamp of God is shining,’ and summoning you to heed His Cause which, though hidden beneath the veils of ancient splendour, shineth in the land of ‘Iráq above the day-spring of eternal holiness.¹⁶⁶

Later in the course of his ministry, Bahá’u’lláh himself [p. 185] would alter the Qibla. With this abrogation of the Meccan Qibla, it could relevantly be observed that such “use of *qibla*” was, indeed, a “sectarian emblem.”¹⁶⁷

CIRCUMSTANCES OF REVELATION

“Circumstances of revelation” (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) refers to a sub-genre of *tafsīr*. A classical definition of the term states that it signifies historical accounts which describe “the transmission of the *sabab* (occasion) of the revelation of a sura or verse and the time, place and so forth of its revelation. It is verified by the well-known principles of transmission from the pious ancestors (*salaf*). Its goal is the precise rendering of these matters.”¹⁶⁸

This was not necessarily Bahá’u’lláh’s principal objective in citing such traditions. Rather, he wished to adduce historical analogies to illustrate the principle of abrogation. Comparatively, Bahá’u’lláh’s use of various *sabab* reports conforms to their traditional function, which was, according to Rippin, a “haggadically exegetical” one, which could “provide a narrative account in which the basic exegesis of the verse may be embodied.”¹⁶⁹ Presented below are some occasions of revelation adduced in the Book of Certitude. In the first, Bahá’u’lláh wishes to resolve the metaphorical nature of Qur’án 6:122 by means of a *sabab* citation.¹⁷⁰

(1) *Sabab on Qur’án 6:122*: “Shall the dead, whom We have quickened, and for whom We have ordained a light whereby he may walk among men, be like him, whose likeness is in the darkness, whence he will not come forth?” (Qur’án 6:122.) Bahá’u’lláh establishes the metaphorical nature of this verse by reference to the circumstance of its revelation in its traditional historical context. According to the occasion (*sabab*) cited, Bahá’u’lláh explains:

[p. 186] This verse descended from the heaven of the Primal Will at a time when Hamzih had already been invested with the sacred mantle of faith, and Abú-Jahl had waxed relentless in his opposition and unbelief. From the Wellspring of omnipotence and the Source of eternal holiness, there came the judgment that conferred everlasting life upon Hamzih, and condemned Abú-Jahl to eternal damnation. This was the signal that caused the fires of unbelief to glow with the hottest flame in the heart of the infidels, and provoked them to openly repudiate His truth. They loudly clamoured: “When did Hamzih die? When was he risen? At what hour was such a life conferred upon him?”¹⁷¹

The figurative giveaway in this verse, of course, is *mathaluhu*, in which the text itself signals that a parable (*mathal*) has been struck: Hamza, who was spiritually lifeless before his quickening by faith, is compared explicitly to light and implicitly to life, while the reverse obtains for Abú-Jahl. It serves Bahá’u’lláh’s argument to point to a hyperbolic passage in the Qur’án which, however explicit its metaphorical nature, is said to have perplexed the prophet’s audience at the time of its revelation. Bahá’u’lláh has preceded this *sabab* with a general statement regarding scriptural concern with the life of faith, not physical longevity:

Wert thou to attain to but a dewdrop of the crystal waters of divine knowledge, thou wouldst readily realize that true life is not the life of the flesh but the life of the spirit. For the life of the flesh is common to both men and animals, whereas the life of the spirit is possessed only by the pure in heart who have quaffed from the ocean of faith and partaken of the fruit of certitude. This life knoweth no death, and this existence is crowned by immortality.¹⁷²

Bahá'u'lláh's *sabab* citation and subsequent exegesis of the verse allows him to interpret in such a way that, as in the case of an instance cited by Rippin, "an exemplum may be [p. 187] extracted directly from the wording of the text rather than being taken on a symbolic level."¹⁷³ If Bahá'u'lláh, in this and other acts of exegesis, can convince the reader of the figurative significance of the Qur'anic terms "life" and "light," it follows that the Qur'anic cluster of other eschatological symbols can be explicated in the same vein.

(2) *The new moons in Qur'án 2:189*: The verse reads: "They will ask thee of the new moons. Say: They are periods appointed unto men." One *sabab* on this verse is found in Muqátil ibn Sulaymán's (d. 767 C.E.) *Tafsír al-Qur'an* as follows:

Mu'ádh ibn Jabal and Tha'labah ibn Ghanamah said: "O Messenger! Why is it that the new moon is just visible, then it appears small like a needle, then brightens until it is strong, then levels off and becomes a circle, only to start to decrease and get smaller, until it returns just as it was? Why does it not remain at a single level?" So God revealed the verse about the new moons.¹⁷⁴

Bahá'u'lláh reserves comment until citing the verse below, which follows immediately in the text, except to comment that "they who heard him (Muḥammad) denounced him as an ignorant man."¹⁷⁵

(3) *The query as to "the Spirit" in Qur'án 17:85*: Upon being asked of the "Spirit" or agent of revelation (Gabriel), Muḥammad replied: "Say, 'the Spirit proceedeth at My Lord's command.'" According to the *sabab* Bahá'u'lláh cites: "As soon as Muḥammad's answer was given, they all clamorously protested, saying: 'Lo! an ignorant man who knoweth not what the Spirit is, calleth Himself the Revealer of divine Knowledge.'"¹⁷⁶ No figurative or symbolic exegesis is performed here. The point is simply this: tension has always existed between human and divine standards of knowledge.

[p. 188] Bahá'u'lláh has preceded these two edifying anecdotes with their moral. At the heart of that moral is an oblique and possibly significant self-reference:

These words uttered by the Luminaries of Truth must needs be pondered, and should their significance not be grasped, enlightenment should be sought from the Trustees of the depositories of Knowledge, that these may expound their meaning, and unravel their mystery. For it behooveth no man to interpret the holy words according to his own imperfect understanding, nor, having found them to be contrary to his inclinations and desires, to reject and repudiate their truth.

For such, today, is the manner of the divines and doctors of the age, who occupy the seats of knowledge and learning, and who have named ignorance knowledge, and called oppression justice. Were these to ask the Light of Truth concerning those images which their idle fancy hath carved, and were they to find His answer inconsistent with their own conceptions and understanding of the Book, they would assuredly denounce Him Who is the Mine and Wellhead of all Knowledge as the very negation of human understanding. Such things have happened in every age.¹⁷⁷

If the “Luminaries of Truth” are the prophets, then who is the “light of truth” and “the Mine and Wellhead of all knowledge?” In this case, we cannot rule out the Báb. But in terms of the contemporary time frame, it is doubtful that Bahá'u'lláh had the Báb in mind. The most natural reading of this passage is hypothetical: Whoever God might send would receive the same treatment by the divines of any age, whose overconfidence in their own interpretations would overrule even the challenge presented by a messenger of God.

There are a number of historical anecdotes that recount how various Bábís were drawn to Bahá'u'lláh. These stories, hagiographical though they may be, seem to be authentic attestations of Bahá'u'lláh's charismatic powers. These post-Bábí “conversion” narratives usually speak of some form of [p. 189] precocious “recognition of Bahá'u'lláh's “station.” One obvious problem arises in that there was no explicit “station” claimed by Bahá'u'lláh for anyone to recognize. On the other hand, given passages like this ambiguous, conditional, but contemporary “Light of Truth” reference, there may have been some perceptive second-guessing going on among the Bábís.

In Bahá'u'lláh's mystical poetry during the Baghdad period, certain of his verses can be read as Sufi ecstatic circumlocutions absorbed in emotive identification with divinity. Again, if Bahá'u'lláh is keeping a secret about his prophetic vocation—from the time of his 1852 Sýyáh-Chál prophetic “annunciation” to his 1863 Ridván declaration—it is one he does not completely contain. Throughout his writings during this period, there are carefully constructed pas-

sages of a highly ambiguous nature, some of which are clearly reflexive and others that are probably so. Many clues are secreted in these vague statements. Or are they? The resolution of this problem bears greatly on the reading of Bahá'u'lláh's writings during the Baghdad period, including interpretation of the Book of Certitude.

(4) *Sabab on Qur'án 5:62*: "Say, O people of the Book! do ye not disavow us only because we believe in God and in what He hath sent down to us, and in what He hath sent down afore-time, and because most of you are doers of ill?" (Qur'án 5:62.) Bahá'u'lláh discloses that, "this verse was revealed at a time when Islam was assailed by the infidels."¹⁷⁸ He then proceeds to elaborate on their polemic.

The *sabab* citation is non-specific, and it is not Bahá'u'lláh's intention to write history. It is his purpose, however, to draw an explicit parallel here: "In view of this, is it fair for this people to repudiate these newly-revealed verses which have encompassed both the East and the West?"¹⁷⁹ There may be a deliberate ambiguity here. Bahá'u'lláh, having as yet advanced [p. 190] no messianic claim, would not have been open about any revelatory prerogative. It is clear that "these newly-revealed verses" formally refer to the Báb's revelation.

The symbolic significance here is purely typological: the Báb is a new prophet for whom Muḥammad provides the typological symbol. Of course, Bahá'u'lláh's employment of *asbáb al-nuzú'l* for contemporizing purposes is really the inverse of the use for which the genre was intended.¹⁸⁰ Rather than focus on the Qur'anic verse, which the *sabab* is supposed to illuminate, both the verse and the *sabab* are used to point to a contemporary situation.

A little further in the text Bahá'u'lláh once again paints a picture of what would happen were God to send another prophet:

Therefore, should a person arise and bring forth a myriad verses, discourses, epistles, and prayers, none of which have ever been acquired through learning, what conceivable excuse could justify those that reject them, and deprive themselves of the potency of their grace? What answer could they give when once their soul hath ascended and departed from its gloomy temple? Could they seek to justify themselves by saying: "We have clung to a certain tradition, and not having beheld the literal fulfillment thereof, we have therefore raised such cavils against the Embodiments of divine Revelation, and kept remote from the law of God?" Hast thou not heard that among the reasons why certain Prophets have been designated as "endowed with constancy" was the revelation of a Book unto them? And yet, how could this people be justified in rejecting the Revealer and Author of so many volumes of verses ...?

... Aside from these things, if these people shun and reject such a divine Soul, such holy Breath, to whom, We wonder, could they cling, to whose face besides His Face could they turn? Yea—"All have a quarter of the Heavens to which they turn." (Qur'an 2:148).¹⁸¹

[p. 191] One of the proofs of prophecy Bahá'u'lláh would adduce within a year of writing the Book of Certitude related to his own ability to "reveal" spontaneously a substantial number of "verses," thus confronting the Qur'án's challenge of inimitability.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE VAGUE AND AMBIGUOUS

Having established the presence of eschatological symbolism in ways which informally recall rhetorical approaches to Qur'anic figuration, Bahá'u'lláh proceeds to the task of purely symbolic exegesis.

Explicating symbols by means of what Wansbrough calls "straightforward substitution/transfer," Bahá'u'lláh uses "identification of the vague and ambiguous" as a procedural device. Typically, in symbolic exegesis, a symbol is obvious in the sense that it is something identifiable, like a sun or a cloud or a mountain. The reader has no difficulty comprehending a common object named in the Qur'án. Interpretation comes into play when the exegete suggests that the sun or the cloud or the mountain represents something else, like an idea or a person. In the case of identification of the vague and ambiguous, the term itself is equivocal, apart from its interpretation.

In this section, Bahá'u'lláh's identification of the term "presence" (*liqá'*)—which is abstract and not concrete—will prove to be the single most important identification made in the Book of Certitude. Such use of identification is not theologically freighted in classical *tafsír*, but is nonetheless the same kind of procedure. The exegetical process is similar. In the Book of Certitude, this kind of exegesis is decisive.

(1) "Presence" and "Manifestation": Around one third of the Qur'án is eschatological. Perhaps the ultimate prophecy in [p. 192] the Qur'án—the most compelling of all of its promises—is that of "meeting" God. God comes on the Day of Judgment. Believers will see God. Or will they? The problem of beatific vision is a vexed one. Nevertheless, the encounter with God is a pivotal event in the apocalyptic drama. Using this procedural device, Bahá'u'lláh identifies the "Presence" of God with the "Manifestation" of God. How Bahá'u'lláh works this identifica-

tion into the structure of his argument against revelatory finality is of interest here, for it is brilliant and effective.

Central to the Book of Certitude is the argument that the Qur'anic promise of "attainment unto the Presence of God" is an allusion to the appearance of another Manifestation of God at the eschaton. Identification of the encounter with God (Qur'án 33:44, 10:45, 6:31, 2:249, 2:46, 11:29, 69:20, 13:2, 6:154, 18:111, 29:23) with the advent of the Qá'im (Riser/Resurrector) had already been established by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í (d. 1825 C.E.), founder of the Shaykhí School, the immediate ideological forebear of Bábí/Bahá'í thought.¹⁸² His approach to eschatological verses—those classified as ambiguous (*mutashábihát*)¹⁸³—was "rational" (interpreting away anthropomorphisms) and allegorical. Rafati states:

As for seeing God on the Day of Judgment, Shaykh Aḥmad has another interpretation. As previously stated, on the basis of Islamic Traditions, Shaykh Aḥmad interprets the Day of Judgment as the Day of the advent of the expected Qá'im. This interpretation, although based on Traditions, is radically different from the common Muslim belief. In the usual Muslim concept of the Day of Judgment, this Day is expected to alter the entire universe, bringing drastic revolutions, changes, and the transformation of the very phenomenon of life on earth. In the Day of Judgment as understood by Shaykh Aḥmad, revolutions, changes, and transformations will take place, but not in the way people literally understand from the text.

In this interpretation of the Day of Judgment, Shaykh Aḥmad attempts to reconcile intellect and revelation. The [p. 193] universe will not come to an end on the Day of Judgment; it has always existed and will continue to exist forever. What the Day of Judgment truly means is the Day of advent of a new Manifestation of God which puts an end to the course of its previous dispensation and opens up a new cycle for human beings. As to the Day of the advent of the expected Qá'im, the Day of Judgment will bring about changes in the social, moral, and religious life of the people.¹⁸⁴

Taking the identification a step further, the Báb devotes an entire chapter in the Persian *Bayán* (3:7) to the question of the encounter with God (the "presence of God" [*liqá' Alláh*]). The Báb teaches that to "behold God" is to behold His prophet. The substance of the Báb's commentary is epitomized by Browne (who often directly paraphrases the Báb) as follows:

Concerning this, that what God hath revealed touching the Meeting with Him, or the Meeting with the Lord, means naught else than Meeting Him whom God shall manifest, since God in His Essence cannot be seen. The Eternal Essence cannot be comprehended, or described, or qualified, or seen, though by It all things are comprehended, described,

qualified or seen; and therefore what is meant in the Heavenly Books by 'Meeting with the Lord' is meeting with the Manifestation of the Point of Truth, which is the Primal Will. Thus in the Qur'án by 'Meeting with the Lord' is meant meeting with the Apostle of God, even as it is said of the true believer, 'To behold him is to behold the Prophet of God, and to behold the Prophet of God is to behold God.' ... He is as the Sun, and all else than Him is as a mirror in which reflections of the sun appear. Whoever attains to the Meeting with Him whom God shall manifest, attains to the Meeting with God.¹⁸⁵

The reference to "Him whom God shall manifest" marks the salient leitmotiv of the Báb's extant writings, nearly all of which are in manuscript archives or private hands. The imminence of this Bábí eschatological figure has been a matter [p. 194] of some controversy.¹⁸⁶ In any event, it was the Báb's sacred mission to prepare the world for the advent of this figure. Many Bábís advanced such messianic claims, but it was Bahá'u'lláh who made the identification most tenable, owing in no small part to the argument he sets forth in the Book of Certitude.

Only by diverting the focus of prophetological attention from the "Seal" proof-text to several Qur'anic "Presence" verses could Bahá'u'lláh make a Qur'anic case for post-Islamic revelation. From a certain point of view, his entire line of argument in the Book of Certitude is calculated to establish the priority of Qur'án 33:44 over Qur'án 33:40.

This one single verse, Qur'án 33:40, is at the heart of Muslim theology. Carved in exegetical stone, the sense of ultimacy behind the "Seal of the Prophets" cannot be overruled. At most, it can only be reinterpreted. Bahá'u'lláh does just that. His exegesis is dramatic: he points his finger just four verses further to Qur'án 33:44, a relatively overlooked verse. Suddenly, the reader is transported from the last prophet to the Last Day, from the end of prophecy to the end of time. Within a few lines of revealed Arabic, the vision of Muḥammad dissolves into the vision of God. But since God cannot be seen, the promise of entering into the presence of God requires interpretation:

Even as the Lord of being hath in His unerring Book, after speaking of the "Seal" in His exalted utterance: "Muḥammad is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets," [Qur'an 33:40] hath revealed unto all people the promise of "attainment unto the divine Presence" [Qur'an 33:44]. To this attainment to the presence of the immortal King testify the verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned. The one true God is My witness! Nothing more exalted or more explicit than "attainment unto the divine Presence hath been revealed in the Qur'an. ... And yet, through the mystery of the former verse, they have turned away from the grace promised [p. 195] by the latter, despite the fact that "attainment unto the divine Presence" in the "Day of Resurrection" is explicitly

stated in the Book. It hath been demonstrated and definitely established, through clear evidences, that by “Resurrection” is meant the rise of the Manifestation of God to proclaim His Cause, and by “attainment unto the divine Presence” is meant attainment unto the presence of His Beauty in the person of His Manifestation. For verily, “No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision” (Qur’an 6:103).¹⁸⁷

This is an interesting argument. Two verses are juxtaposed here, two titles, two theophanies of God, according to Bahá’u’lláh’s exegesis. Their prophetic code names are: (1) the “Seal of the Prophets”; and (2) the “Presence of God.” (Although Qur’an 33:44 simply speaks of the “Day of Meeting,” Bahá’u’lláh also adduces Qur’an 2:46, 2:249, 13:2, 18:111, 29:23 to extract the relevant term, *liqá’ Alláh*). The interpretation of “Seal of the Prophets” has traditionally meant the “last of the prophets.” The “presence of God,” in Bahá’u’lláh’s exegesis, signifies, in effect, the “prophet of the Last Day.” The “last of the prophets” and the “prophet of the Last Day” are two theophanies in two different Dispensations. Muḥammad ends the prophetic cycle. The Báb inaugurates the cycle of fulfillment.

The concept of the “presence of God” as theophany is predicated on an anti-anthropomorphic recourse to Qur’an 6:103. Bahá’u’lláh adduces this verse to reject the possibility of beatific vision. God cannot be seen. The “Presence of God” must be “seen” in the absence of a visible God. The “Presence” is visible; God is not. The “Presence of God” is not God in person but rather the “Person of God.” The Báb is such a “Presence.” Correspondingly, Qur’an 33:40 is Muḥammad; Qur’an 33:44 is the Báb. Exegetically, Qur’an 33:44 is therefore the most crucial of all the verses in Bahá’u’lláh’s argument. Let us take a look at the verse in question: **[p. 196]**

Their greeting on the day when they shall meet Him shall be “Peace!” And He hath got ready for them a noble recompense.¹⁸⁸

From an Islamic perspective, such an exegesis is problematic, for it suggests that at the eschaton a particular man will be thought of as God. This is tantamount to heretical “extremism” (*ghuluww/gháliyya*). The idea that a man can be “God” is one extreme. At the other interpretive extreme is the idea that God is as man or is manlike (anthropomorphism). In either extreme God can, theoretically, be “met.”

In popular Islam, there is no risk of extremism in granting that God would be seen at the eschaton. In all such scenarios, it would be conceded that God could be “seen” because the Qur’an says so. The faithful accept this “without (asking) how” (*bilá kayfa*), as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal’s formula requires. But, on the surface, it would seem that this would mean that God becomes sensible and phenomenal and, therefore, limited. This, however, is irreconcilable with other Islamic tenets. Bahá’u’lláh’s doctrine of “Manifestation” tries to deal with both horns of

the dilemma: God is represented by a deputy; a vicegerent; a theophany; a messenger who, as the chosen representative, “manifests” God, for all practical purposes, by proxy.

According to Bahá’í theophanology, God “appears” in the person of the “Manifestation of God (*ṣuhúr-i iláhi*). In his “Tablet of the Manifestation” (*Lawḥ al-ṣuhúr*),¹⁸⁹ Bahá’u’lláh explains with disarming simplicity: “Consider a goldsmith: verily, he makes a ring, and although he is its maker, yet he adorns his finger with it. Likewise God, the Exalted, appears in the clothing of the creatures.”¹⁹⁰ In a mystical work written during the Baghdad period, Bahá’u’lláh distances his theophanology from any taint of anthropomorphism:

However, let none construe these utterances to be anthropomorphisms, nor see in them the descent of the worlds of God [p. 197] into the grades of the creatures, ... for God is, in His Essence, holy above ascent and descent, entrance and exit; He hath through all eternity been free of the attributes of human creatures, and ever will remain so.¹⁹¹

It is important to note that Bahá’u’lláh does not deny Muḥammad’s station as the Seal of the Prophets in its traditional sense. He does, however, relativize it within a salvation history that, far from ending with Muḥammad, undergoes a paradigm shift at the eschaton. In one of his devotions, Bahá’u’lláh in fact exalts Muḥammad beyond the latter’s Qur’anic dignity: “Glorified art Thou, O Lord my God! I beseech Thee by Thy Chosen Ones, and by the Bearers of Thy Trust, and by Him Whom Thou hast ordained to be the Seal of Thy Prophets and of Thy Messengers. ...”¹⁹²

The implication of Bahá’u’lláh’s exegesis for verse 33:44, therefore, is that whomever God sends as a representative at the eschaton transcends both categories of “Prophet” and “Messenger.” Cole suggests that “the prophet, and the messenger, was a more primitive form of theophany which came to an end with Muḥammad. With the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, in the Bahá’í view, humankind has entered a new religious cycle characterized by a fuller theophany.”¹⁹³

The theophanic term “Presence of God” (*liqá’ Allāh*) in the Book of Certitude is distributed to all prophets and messengers, but at the same time, the realized eschaton will be of a different order altogether. Islamic orthodoxy is quite correct in concluding that Muḥammad did end the cycle of prophecy. Now, however, the world has entered into the cycle of fulfillment, inaugurated by the Báb:

It is evident that every age in which a Manifestation of God hath lived is divinely-ordained, and may, in a sense, be characterized as God's appointed Day. This Day, however, is unique, and is to be distinguished from those that have preceded it. The designation "Seal of the Prophets" fully revealeth its high [p. 198] station. The Prophetic Cycle hath, verily, ended. The Eternal Truth is now come. He hath lifted up the Ensign of Power, and is now shedding upon the world the unclouded splendor of His Revelation.¹⁹⁴

The cycle of fulfillment has been inaugurated by the Báb, according to Bahá'í theophanology. Since this new cycle entails a realized eschaton, the "Presence of God" is realized as well. The one who "unseals" the scriptures and who is their fulfiller (i.e., "He Whom God Shall Make Manifest") has a greater importance than the "Seal" in the sense that the mission of the former was to prepare the world for the advent of the latter. Hence, Bahá'u'lláh's conclusion:

Notwithstanding all these indubitable facts and lucid statements, they have foolishly clung to the term "Seal," and remained utterly deprived of the recognition of Him Who is the Revealer of both the Seal and the Beginning, in the Day of His Presence.¹⁹⁵

Later Bahá'u'lláh would crystallize his theophanic salvation history such that Muḥammad not only remains the "Seal of the Prophets" but is, moreover, accorded the distinction of being the "Seal of the Messengers." Beyond this, the Báb is designated as the "King of the Messengers" (*sultán al-rusul*) while Bahá'u'lláh himself is now the "Sender of the Messengers" (*mursil al-rusul*).

(2) *Against Sufism's "Most Holy Outpouring" as the Divine Presence:* In further developing the "Presence of God/Manifestation of God" identification, Bahá'u'lláh addresses some Sufi interpretations related to the divine presence. His two-year sojourn (1854–56) as a wandering dervish in the mountains surrounding Sulaymáníyyih in Iraqi Kurdistan had brought him into contact with the local Naqshbandí Sufis there. The reason for his return to Baghdad is stated in the [p. 199] *Kitáb-i Íqán*.¹⁹⁶ Bahá'u'lláh's interest in Sufi doctrine was no doubt sustained by the vividness of his recent Súfí experience.¹⁹⁷ The mystical path, however, has certain exegetical detours. Bahá'u'lláh takes pains to distance his exegesis of "divine Presence" from Súfí doctrines of a hierarchy of descending "Presences."¹⁹⁸

According to Ibn al-'Arabí, the "Most Holy Emanation" or "Outpouring" (*fayḍ al-aqdas*) is the first decisive stage in the "Self-Manifestation of the Absolute," a movement from the state of God's being a "hidden treasure" to the state of God Who "desired to be known," referring to the famous "divine saying" (*ḥadīth qudsī*) to that effect. Bahá'u'lláh points out the impossibility of access to God at this level:

And were they to maintain that by “divine Presence” is meant the “Specific Revelation of God,” expressed by certain Şúfís as the “Most Holy Outpouring,” if this be the Essence Itself, it is evident that it hath been eternally in the divine Knowledge. Assuming the truth of this hypothesis, “attainment unto the divine Presence” is in this sense obviously possible to no one.¹⁹⁹

The essence/attribute distinction is maintained here. In whatever way divine encounter is conceived, contact with the essence of God must be excluded from any consideration. If God’s attributes could somehow be apprehended and experienced, one would see their perfect reflection in the person of the Manifestation of God, according to Bahá’u’lláh’s theophanology. As to mystically accessible “Presences,” Bahá’u’lláh remarks:

And were they to say that by “divine Presence” is meant ... the “Holy Outpouring” (*fayḍ al-muqaddas*), this is admittedly applicable to the world of creation, that is, in the realm of the primal and original manifestation of God. Such revelation is confined to His Prophets and chosen Ones, inasmuch as none mightier than they have come to exist in the world of being. ... [p. 200] These Prophets and chosen Ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God. ... Whatsoever is applicable to them is in reality applicable to God, Himself, Who is both the Visible and the Invisible. ... By attaining, therefore, to the presence of these holy Luminaries, the “Presence of God” Himself is attained.²⁰⁰

Realized eschatologies are typically “vertical.” In distancing himself from any notion of the imminence of God’s essence, Bahá’u’lláh defines the “Presence of God” as a Qur’anic symbol for prophets, not as a badge of mystic experience.

PROPHETIC TRADITION

Here Wansbrough’s category has to be adapted to a Shí’í context. The traditions of the holy Imáms are really equivalent in function and in importance to the Sunní prophetic tradition. Drawing from Shí’í tradition rather than Sunní, Bahá’u’lláh nonetheless employs the same exegetical technique: appeal to tradition.

(1) *The Tradition of Kumayl*: Given his immediate audience, Bahá'u'lláh's most persuasive method of exegesis is appeal to figurative traditions. The citing of Shí'í tradition becomes a procedural device by transferred exegesis. Bahá'u'lláh will find it expedient to interpret a tradition, and then to transfer the substance as well as method of exegesis to Qur'anic scripture. The tradition of Kumayl²⁰¹ lends itself ideally to symbolic exegesis:

Kumeyl ibn Ziyád, one of 'Alí's chosen disciples, once demanded of his Master, behind whom he was seated on a dromedary, "What is Truth?" "What hast thou to do with the Truth?" answered 'Alí, "for verily it is one of God's mysteries, and a jewel out of His treasure-house." Then said Kumeyl, "O my Master, am I not worthy to share thy secret?"

[p. 201] "Yes," answered 'Alí, "but the matter is a great one." "O my Master," said Kumeyl, "dost thou desire those who beg at the door of thy bounty to be turned away?" "Nay, verily," answered 'Alí, "I will answer the call of such as are troubled, and will sprinkle upon thee somewhat of the overflowing fullness of the Station of the Truth; receive it from me according to thy capacity, and conceal it from such as are unworthy to share it.

"O Kumeyl, the Truth is *the revelation of the splendours of Divine Majesty without a sign.*" "O my Master," said Kumeyl, "I understand not thy meaning; explain it to me further." "*The effacement of the conjectured, and the clearing of the known,*" continued 'Alí. "Explain more fully," demanded Kumeyl. "*The rending of the veil by the triumph of the mystery,*" said 'Alí. "O my beloved Master," rejoined Kumeyl, "tell me more." "*The attraction of the Divine Unity through the nature of the apprehension of its Oneness,*" added 'Alí.

"Tell me more clearly," repeated Kumeyl. Then said 'Alí, "*A light shining forth from the Morning of Eternity and irradiating the temples of the unity.*"²⁰²

Browne rightly observes that the tradition of Kumayl had great significance for the Báb. In one application of this tradition, "each of these five utterances" served the Purpose of "typifying one of the first five years of the Báb's 'Manifestation.'"²⁰³

In the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh directly invokes (as well as alludes to) the *ḥadīth* of Kumayl.²⁰⁴ Bahá'u'lláh attaches a different significance to two of the definitions of truth. One of the five "answers" in the tradition of Kumayl defines truth as: "Unfolding the veils of glory without allusion" (*kashfu subuḥát al-jalál min ghayri isháratin*).²⁰⁵ Shoghi Effendi translates: "Piercing the veils of glory, unaided."²⁰⁶ The importance of this tradition for Bahá'u'lláh may be seen in a probable allusion to it at the outset of the Book of Certitude evident in Khan's translation:

The quintessence of this chapter is that travellers in the Path [p. 202] of Faith and seekers for the Cup of Assurance must sanctify and purify themselves from all material things; that is, the ear from hearing statements, the heart from doubts which pertain to the veils of glory (*sabahat-i jalal [sic]*).²⁰⁷

The Bahá'í scholar Ishráq-Khávarí explains this tradition:

It is contemplation of God, the power, majesty and attributes of beauty and might (*jaláliyya* and *jamáliyya*) of Truth (*ḥaqq*) performed without contemplating the Divine Essence of God (*ḥaqq*) because if the Divine Essence is conceptualized then it becomes limited and encompassed and every limited thing is susceptible of sensory reference. It is only possible to think of the traces (*áthár*) of the Divinity [as opposed to the essence] which are in the world and one must search the traces, as in the verse: “We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their souls until it is clear to them that it is the truth” (Qur'an 41:53).²⁰⁸

This is more of a commentary on Bahá'u'lláh's metaphysics than on the tradition itself, which requires interpretation. Essence/attribute distinctions trace back to Aristotle and are consistently maintained in Bahá'í metaphysics (but not always in Bahá'u'lláh's theophanic locutions). In the Book of Certitude, “veils of glory” are incarnated in those who, in positions of glory or renown, misguide their followers:

And now, strive to comprehend the meaning of this saying of 'Alí, the Commander of the Faithful: “Piercing the veils of glory, unaided.” Among these “veils of glory” are the divines and doctors living in the days of the Manifestation of God, who, because of their want of discernment and their love and eagerness for leadership, have failed to submit to the Cause of God, nay, have even refused to incline their ears to the divine Melody. “They have thrust their fingers into their ears.” (Qur'an 2:19)²⁰⁹

Bahá'u'lláh's Qur'án citations are often exclamatory. In this particular case, he aims a Qur'anic indictment at contemporary [p. 203] divines. Such a charge clearly undermines clerical authority. This attitude was sure to exacerbate the policies of the ulama against Bábís and, later, against Bahá'ís. In effect, the Báb had previously said the same thing.²¹⁰

Elsewhere in the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh cites part of the *ḥadīth* of Kumayl, and follows with an interpretation which reinforces his exegesis of celestial imagery in the Qur'án—especially that of the sun—as symbolic of the Manifestations of God, by virtue of their exalted position:

Also in the tradition of Kumayl it is written: “Behold, a light hath shone forth out of the Morn of eternity, and lo! its waves have penetrated the inmost reality of all men.” Man, the noblest and most perfect of all created things, excelleth them in the intensity of this revelation, and is a fuller expression of its glory. And of all men, the most accomplished, the most distinguished and the most excellent are the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth. Nay, all else besides these Manifestations, live by the operation of their Will, and move and have their being through the outpourings of their grace. “But for Thee, I would not have created the heavens.” ... These Tabernacles of Holiness, these primal Mirrors which reflect the light of unfading glory, are but expressions of Him Who is the Invisible of the Invisibles.²¹¹

The expression “morn of eternity” is highly figurative and is treated as part of an extended metaphor. The citation of another tradition, underscoring the importance of Muḥammad, introduces the “heavens,” implying that the Prophet is the “morn of eternity” in heavenly exaltation. By adducing this enigmatic tradition, Bahá’u’lláh extends the Bábí usage of it, and uses it for explicative purposes for a readership familiar with that tradition.

(2) *‘Alí’s Lamentation*: In a sense, Shí’í traditions provide as rich an interpretive fund for Bahá’u’lláh as the corpus of so-called “pre-Islamic” poetry had for early exegetes of the [p. 204] Qur’án. From this sacred poetry of Shí’í tradition, the Prayer of Nudbih—a “Prayer of Lamentation”²¹² — is adduced by Bahá’u’lláh for its obvious metaphorical expression:

The term “suns” hath many a time been applied in the writings of the “immaculate Souls” unto the Prophets of God, those luminous Emblems of Detachment. Among those writings are the following words recorded in the “Prayer of Nudbih”: “Whither are gone the resplendent Suns? Whereunto have departed those shining Moons and sparkling Stars?” Thus, it hath become evident that the terms “sun,” “moon,” and “stars” primarily signify the Prophets of God, the saints, and their companions, those Luminaries, the light of Whose knowledge hath shed illumination upon the worlds of the visible and the invisible.²¹³

The personification of the tradition is self-evident. Bahá’u’lláh’s reference to the Prayer of Nudbih, an appeal to tradition, has rhetorical force, rendering the symbolic exegesis of similar terms in the Qur’án all the more plausible. But this kind of transferred exegesis derives its authority from Shí’í tradition.

(3) *“Fasting is illumination”*: The tradition, “Fasting is illumination, prayer is light,” permits exegesis of the symbolic sun and moon as prayer and fasting.²¹⁴ Bahá’u’lláh likewise adduces the tradition: “Islam is heaven; fasting is its sun, prayer its moon.”²¹⁵ After citing these traditions, Bahá’u’lláh comments on his method of interpretation:

This is the purpose underlying the symbolic words (*talvīhāt*) of the Manifestations of God. Consequently, the application of the terms “sun” and “moon” to the things already mentioned hath been demonstrated and justified by the text of the sacred verses and the recorded traditions. Hence, it is clear and manifest that by the words “the sun shall be darkened, the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall [p. 205] from heaven” is intended the waywardness of the divines, and the annulment of laws firmly established by divine Revelation, all of which, in symbolic language (*talvīhāt*), have been foreshadowed by the Manifestation of God [Jesus]. None except the righteous shall partake of this cup, none but the godly can share therein. “The righteous shall drink of a cup tempered at the camphor fountain.” (Qur’an 76:5)²¹⁶

Bahá’u’lláh appeals to scripture and tradition. Not solely “Qur’án and tradition,” since he does not limit his scripture citations to the Qur’án. This exegetical interplay between two traditions—Christian and Islamic—is one of the salient features of the Book of Certitude. Also significant is the deliberate invocation here of paradise imagery. Its use is inverted. If eschatology is realized in the person of the Manifestation of God, then all the concomitant imagery is realized as well. Bahá’u’lláh refers to his own interpretation here as “this cup,” that is, the eschatological draught of camphor that the righteous savor in paradise. Now the interpretation itself has become eschatological!

(4) *“Behind the Throne” and “The Philosopher’s Stone”*: Bahá’u’lláh cites two traditions from the sixth Shí’í Imám, Ja’far al-Şádiq, to interpret the eschatological descent of the angelic host at Qur’án 3:119:

And now, concerning His words: “And He shall send His angels....” By “angels” is meant those who, reinforced by the power of the spirit, have consumed, with the fire of the love of God, all human traits and limitations, and have clothed themselves with the attributes of the most exalted Beings and of the Cherubim. That holy man Şádiq, in his eulogy of the Cherubim, saith: “There stand a company of our fellow-Shí’íhs behind the Throne.” Divers and manifold are the interpretations of the words “behind the Throne.” In one sense, they indicate that no true Shí’íhs exist. Even as he hath said in another passage: “A true believer is likened unto the [p. 206] philosopher’s stone.” Addressing subsequently

his listener, he saith: “Hast thou ever seen the philosopher’s stone?” Reflect, how this symbolic language, more eloquent than any speech, however direct, testifieth to the nonexistence of a true believer.²¹⁷

The use of traditions here illustrates Bahá’u’lláh’s rhetorical rationale for symbolism. In this passage, three sayings from the sixth Imám are adduced. Those who stand “behind the Throne” are said to be Cherubim. But who are the Cherubim? Who are the angels? Bahá’u’lláh’s identification of them is quite interesting. The reader should follow his methodology closely. It epitomizes the interpretive strategy used throughout the Book of Certitude.

Of the three traditions, the first—the “Throne” saying—is explicated by means of the two other sayings. In the second saying, Ja’far al-Şádiq’s comparison of a true believer to the philosopher’s stone is an obvious *tashbíh* (simile). The third saying is not so obvious. “Hast thou ever seen the philosopher’s stone?” is a rhetorical question. Its surface reading is literal. In fact, it is not marked for figuration. Comprehension of the last saying is entirely context-dependent. Its interpretation requires knowledge of the underlying comparison of believer and philosopher’s stone. Bahá’u’lláh calls this latter kind of discourse “symbolic language” (*talvîhát*). And so it is. The “philosopher’s stone” represents, or symbolizes, the true believer.

Bahá’u’lláh’s use of technical terminology is not technical, but referential. The designation *talvîhát* is quite sound. The “Throne” saying aside, Ja’far al-Şádiq’s second saying is a simile; the third is a symbol. Bahá’u’lláh does not press any hard and fast distinctions between figure and symbol. But he does predicate symbolism on an underlying substratum of figuration. There is a certain beauty in this kind of language. Its value is more than aesthetic. It is spiritual. Its comprehension is a kind of test of discernment.

[p. 207] From Bahá’u’lláh’s perspective, it seems, spiritual perceptiveness is dependent on a kind of metaphorical competence with respect to scripture. The ability to apprehend the meaning of scripture indicates one’s readiness to perceive a new revelation from God. Slavish literal reading is indicative of a dogmatic, closed-minded mentality. Bahá’u’lláh praises symbolic language as “more eloquent than any speech, however direct.” Figurative and symbolic discourse is, of course, oblique and indirect. Bahá’u’lláh considers such language to be more expressive, more information rich than literal discourse, and more spiritually evocative. In the passage which follows, Bahá’u’lláh concludes with a symbolic interpretation of “angels.” He answers the question as to the identity of the Cherubim “behind the Throne.” He indicates his methodology as well:

And now, inasmuch as these holy beings have sanctified themselves from every human limitation, have become endowed with the attributes of the spiritual, and have been adorned with the noble traits of the blessed, they therefore have been designated as “angels.” Such is the meaning of these verses, every word of which hath been expounded by the aid of the most lucid texts, the most convincing arguments, and the best evidences.²¹⁸

(5) *“I am Jesus,” etc.*: Islamic traditions tend to be quite literal. They are often more elaborate than scripture. They are useful for interpretation when it is allowed that the Qur’án may be interpreted through recourse to traditions. One of the important features of Bahá’u’lláh’s argument is that of spiritual equality among prophets. The oneness of God’s Messengers rests securely on Qur’anic bedrock. From an Islamic as well as Bahá’í perspective, the similarity of the prophets is more profound than their differences, irrespective of personality, or the age in which each Messenger appeared, or the character of their respective revelations. [p. 208] There exist several Islamic traditions in which Muḥammad closely identifies himself with Jesus. One such tradition, presented early in the Book of Certitude, represents the Prophet as having exclaimed: “I am Jesus.”²¹⁹

The “I am Jesus” tradition Bahá’u’lláh cites is attested primarily in Ismá’ílí circles. Lawson translates one such tradition as transmitted in the *Kitáb al-Kashf*, in a sermon of ‘Alí known as the *Khuṭbat al-bayán*:

“I am the Christ who heals the blind and the leprous, creating birds and dispersing clouds.” Meaning [says the commentator]: “I am the second Christ (*al-masīḥ al-thání*)—I am he and he is I.” At this a man stood up and asked: “O Commander of the Faithful, was the Torah written in a foreign language or in Arabic?” ‘Alí said: “[In a] foreign language, but its meaning is Arabic, namely that Christ is the *Qá’im bí’l-ḥaqq*, and the king of this world and of the next. The Qur’an itself confirms this in the verse: ‘Peace be upon me the day that I am raised up alive.’ (Qur’an 19:33.) Thus ‘Ísá ibn Maryam is of me and I of him, and he is the Most Great Word of God (*kalimát alláh al-kubrâ*) and he is the witness and I am the one testified to.”²²⁰

The question of the authenticity of such a saying is not the issue here, since, at any rate, the tradition represented a sentiment in Shí’í consciousness.²²¹ For Bahá’u’lláh, this tradition provided a hermeneutical key to Jesus’ Farewell Discourse²²² and was instructive as to the real meaning of prophetic “return.”

This type of discussion is not scholastic. It is apologetic, and opens up the possibility for a sort of reciprocity of attributes among the Prophets of God. In the course of Bahá’u’lláh’s argument, he draws a series of equivalences from the implications of the statement, “I am Jesus”:

Muḥammad is Jesus.

Jesus is thus Muḥammad.

Muḥammad is the “Seal of the Prophets.”

[p. 209] Jesus is thus the “Seal of the Prophets.”

Jesus is the “Seal of the Prophets,” but not the last prophet.

Ergo, although Muḥammad is the “Seal of the Prophets,” he was not the last prophet.

The fact that Bahá’u’lláh made a saying of Jesus the exegetical centerpiece of Part One of the Book of Certitude has, in effect, already established a degree of scriptural equivalence between the New Testament and the Qur’án. This is one of the exegetical outcomes of defending the sayings of Jesus against the charge of *tahrif*.

With Bahá’u’lláh’s countercharge that by *tahrif* (corrupt scripture) is meant bad *tafsir* (corrupt interpretation), the pronouncements of Muslim authorities (as well as Christian) are rendered all the more suspect. If Muslim interpreters were wrong about the textual integrity of the Christian witness, they may be wrong on other counts as well. Bahá’u’lláh’s readers will be tempted to think along these lines.

ANECDOTE

Bahá’u’lláh uses anecdotes for exegesis, although in a different context from Wanbrough’s use of the category. Some of the anecdotes present deliberate figuration. Metaphorical or otherwise, the answer to the figurative riddles posed by each of the anecdotes will be immediately generalized to the Qur’án. Profane incidents are adduced, involving holy individuals. These are exegetically poignant anecdotes. Bahá’u’lláh rarely, if ever, adduces exemplars from secular literature.

(1) *‘Alí’s real estate transaction*: An anecdotal tradition regarding ‘Alí and two Kúfans concerns the owner of a house and a prospective buyer. Both men approach ‘Alí to [p. 210] witness the transaction. Addressing the scribe present, the “Commander of the Faithful” gave instructions:

Write thou: “A dead man hath bought from another dead man a house. That house is bounded by four limits. One extendeth toward the tomb, the other to the vault of the grave, the third to the Şirát, the fourth to either Paradise or hell.”²²³

On this tradition, Bahá'u'lláh remarks: "Reflect, had these two souls been quickened by the trumpet-call of 'Alí, had they risen from the grave of error by the power of his love, the judgment would certainly have not been pronounced against them."²²⁴

This anecdote supports Bahá'u'lláh's contention that: "If one will ponder ... this utterance of 'Alí in his heart, one will surely discover all the mysteries hidden in the terms 'grave,' 'tomb,' 'širát,' 'paradise,' and 'hell'." With rhetorical common sense, Bahá'u'lláh can logically point out that "the life of the flesh is common to both men and animals, whereas the life of the spirit is possessed only by the pure in heart who have ... partaken of the fruit of certitude."²²⁵

The economy of such an anecdote—pressed into service to explain Qur'anic eschatological terminology—is worth noting. Another example of exegetical economy is Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation of the verse (Q. 54:1–2) in which Muḥammad is supposed to have cleft the moon, giving rise to the Islamic symbol of the crescent:

The following is an evidence of the sovereignty exercised by Muḥammad, the Day-Star of Truth. Hast thou not heard how with one single verse He hath sundered light from darkness, the righteous from the ungodly, and the believing from the infidel? All the signs and allusions concerning the Day of Judgment, which thou hast heard, such as the raising of the dead, the Day of Reckoning, the Last Judgment, and others have been made manifest through the revelation of that verse.²²⁶ [p. 211]

This is Bahá'u'lláh's interpretive strategy in a nutshell: demonstrate that a Christian eschaton was ushered in by Muḥammad, relativize all eschatology as cyclical and spiritual in nature, argue for its realization in the advent of the Báb and, implicitly, in the impending revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. This line of reasoning could appeal to such a verse as Qur'án 13:31: "If there were a Koran by which the mountains could be set in motion, or the earth cleft, or the dead be made to speak,"²²⁷ completed by al-Rummání thus, "it would be this Qur'án."²²⁸

(2) "*Islam is heaven; fasting is its sun, prayer, its moon*": The anecdote presented in this section is of a personal nature, drawn from Bahá'u'lláh's own life. This story gives us a rare glimpse into Bahá'u'lláh's interactions with the Muslims of his day on a one-to-one basis. Bahá'u'lláh records a conversation that took place between himself and an unnamed cleric. The conversation that transpired was over possible interpretations of the tradition: "Islam is heaven; fasting is its sun, prayer, its moon." The informal character of conversation is at a considerable remove from the formality of writing.

In this anecdote, Bahá'u'lláh takes us step by step through his own interpretive rationale. No matter that this interpretation is of a tradition. It would be the same for a verse from the Qur'án. The sequence of exegetical logic is based on a rhetorical analysis of figurative discourse. It is as if Bahá'u'lláh assumes the role of a rhetorician.

One day, a well-known divine came to visit Us. While We were conversing with him, he referred to the above-quoted tradition. He said: "Inasmuch as fasting causeth the heat of the body to increase, it hath therefore been likened unto the light of the sun; and as the prayer of the night-season refresheth man, it hath been compared unto the radiance of the moon." Thereupon We realized that that poor man has not [p. 212] been favoured with a single drop of the ocean of true understanding, and hath strayed far from the burning Bush of divine wisdom.

We then politely observed to him saying: "The interpretation your honour hath given to this tradition is the one current among the people. Could it not be interpreted differently?" He asked Us: "What could it be?" We made reply: "Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets, and the most distinguished of God's chosen Ones, hath likened the Dispensation of the Qur'an unto heaven, by reason of its loftiness, its paramount influence, its majesty, and the fact that it comprehendeth all religions. And as the sun and moon constitute the brightest and most prominent luminaries in the heavens, similarly in the heaven of the religion of God two shining orbs have been ordained-fasting and prayer. 'Islam is heaven; fasting is its sun, prayer, its moon.'"²²⁹

This is certainly rhetorical reasoning. There is no symbolism here, because the comparisons are explicit. But there is every reason to think that this same kind of rationale enters into Bahá'u'lláh's exegeses of similar imagery in the Qur'án, where one end of the simile disappears.

OBSERVATIONS

This study has demonstrated (as Calder puts it) the "acquisitive" nature of the Qur'anic exegetical tradition.²³⁰ Bahá'u'lláh employs ten of the twelve procedural devices which Wansbrough has identified within the Islamic interpretative tradition.²³¹ The special hypothesis of this study, tested within Wansbrough's theoretical framework, was that a rhetorical line of reasoning in the Book of Certitude establishes rationale for recognizing figurative language in the Qur'án. In many of the exegeses cited, figuration precedes symbolism. For Bahá'u'lláh, an appreciation of Qur'anic figuration opens one's eyes to the Qur'án's rich symbolism, [p. 213] the

most significant of which is the Qur'anic promise of divine encounter. "Meeting God" is figurative, and it symbolizes the Manifestation of God to be encountered at the eschaton.

The equivalence Bahá'u'lláh draws between "Manifestation of God" (*mazhar-i iláhi*) and "Presence of God" or "Face of God" or "Meeting God" (*liqá' Alláh*) may be said to be the thematic heart of the Book of Certitude. Since God cannot otherwise be "seen," or even "known," in God's stead stands the theophany referred to by the Bahá'í technical term "Manifestation of God." Thus understood, the Qur'án's reiterative threat of encounter with God on the Judgment Day must refer not to God as a person but to a Person (or "Manifestation") of God. God's immediacy resides in the Mediator. Just as Muḥammad and the preceding Messengers of God are said to "manifest" the deity, so must the Qur'anic eschatological "God" or "Presence of God" represent a mediated deity.

This chapter has presented an overview of Bahá'u'lláh's exegetical techniques. Those techniques serve a purpose, which is thematic. The thematic elements will be taken up in the next chapter. In fine, Bahá'u'lláh's overall objective is to prepare the reader for "a new Faith, a new Law, and a new Revelation (*shar' va ḥukm-i jadíd va 'amr-i badí*)."²³² He adjures those who "have foolishly clung to the term 'seal,' and remained utterly deprived of the recognition of Him Who is the Revealer of both the Seal and the Beginning, in the day of His Presence (*mújjid-i khatm va bad' dar liqá'y-i ú*)."²³³ To perceive a new revelation, the seeker must be endowed with a "new life" and "a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind."²³⁴ For those who have rent asunder the "veils of glory" (*subuḥát-i jalál*), there has already appeared "the New Beloved (*maḥbúb-i tázih*)," the Báb.²³⁵ Those souls who can perceive yet another revelation are "even as the jeweller who knoweth the gem from [p. 214] the stone (*chunánchih ahl-i lúlú lu'-rá* [sic: emended text should read *lúlú-rá*] az ḥajar)."²³⁶

So, what is Bahá'u'lláh's exegetical procedure? To oversimplify, it is a two-stage process: (1) the use of informal rhetorical criticism to establish the presence of figurative language in the eschatological verses of the Qur'án, accentuating the need for symbolic interpretation; and (2) symbolic exegesis itself (*ta'wíl*), accomplished stylistically through extensive use of genitive metaphors, marking correspondences between symbol and referent.

Not every verse is symbolic in its primary application. The "clear" verses of the Qur'án are typically "historical" or ethical or legal or any combination thereof. The Book of Certitude principally concerns the apocalyptic verses of the Qur'án, which, literal or not, are of a different order of discourse. To term Bahá'u'lláh's interpretations as *bátini* would be a misnomer: symbolic interpretation is never used to overrule patently literal texts. Bahá'u'lláh states that the "outward language" (*zāhir*) of the Qur'án is "devoid of allusions" (*bí ramz*).²³⁷ On the basis of this distinction, it is clear that Bahá'u'lláh's repeated criticisms of those who adhere to liter-

alism is not criticism of all literal interpretation of verses, but of the literal interpretation of all verses. The two are easily confused.

Bahá'u'lláh's hermeneutical approach provided a foundation for his specific exegetical activity. As noted above, Bahá'u'lláh advanced a figuration-based rationale to demonstratively establish Qur'anic symbolism. In so doing, he overrules the literal reading of most eschatological passages of the Qur'án, effectively excluding traditional interpretations. Upon demonstrating the absurdity of unwarranted literal readings, he adduces Qur'anic passages of an anomalous, nonliteral, or patently metaphorical character to attest the presence of figurative language in the Qur'án.

Bahá'u'lláh shows that figurative language elliptically [p. 215] underlies Qur'anic symbolism. Tradition has largely ignored the opacity of such verses, and has succumbed to literalist entrapments. The reader is led to understand that such oblique language, even if unmarked for figuration, is entailed in the eschatological symbolism of the Minor Apocalypse of Matthew 24, and in the phantastic and surreal apocalyptic imagery of the Qur'án. Such non-transparent texts, which are in some sense "dark," may be intertextually interpreted in light of openly metaphorical texts.

One example of a rhetorical-style argument is appeal to absurdity. This kind of demonstration points to a logical or phenomenological implausibility were a literal reading of a given text allowed. Following this, the case is made for a figurative reading. The test for absurdity is an attested procedure of Islamic rhetoric, as instanced in the definition of figuration (*majáz*) formulated by the rhetorician Ibn Rashíq (d. 1063 C.E. or 1070 C.E.): "Whatever goes beyond the proper meaning in [the] case of each word, without then becoming absolutely absurd, that is *majáz*, because it admits of the different ways of interpretation: thus the comparison (*tashbíh*) and 'borrowing' (*isti'ára*) and other beauties of speech have come to fall under the category of *majáz*."²³⁸ Here, the figurative reading of a verse must not lead to absurdity. Nor should a literal reading.

Such an interpretive move often involves the verdict of absurdity after having disqualified the surface meaning of anthropomorphisms in scripture. Hence, Bahá'u'lláh's exegetical procedure at Qur'án 39:67 overrules a literal reading of the eschatological "hand of God," as it entails both impossibility and anthropomorphic entrapment:

And now, comprehend the meaning of this verse: “The whole earth shall on the Resurrection Day be but His handful, and in His right hand shall the heavens be folded together. ...” ... And now, be fair in thy judgment. Were this verse to have the meaning which men suppose it to have, of what profit, one [p. 216] may ask, could it be to man? Moreover, it is evident and manifest that no such hand as could be seen by human eye could accomplish such deeds, or could possibly be ascribed to the exalted Essence of the one true God. Nay, to acknowledge such a thing is naught but sheer blasphemy, an utter perversion of the truth.²³⁹

So far, Bahá’u’lláh’s reading of this verse is supported by al-Zamakhsharí.²⁴⁰ The point of adducing this passage is to show that, not infrequently, Bahá’u’lláh first dispenses with *received* interpretations. Literal interpretations having thus been overruled, a *positive* interpretation follows:

On the contrary, by the term “earth” is meant the earth of understanding and knowledge, and by the “heavens” the heavens of divine Revelation. Reflect thou how, in one hand, He hath, by His mighty grasp, turned the earth of knowledge and understanding, previously unfolded, into a mere handful, and, on the other, spread out a new and highly exalted earth in the hearts of men, thus causing the freshest and loveliest blossoms, and the mightiest and loftiest trees to spring forth in the illumined bosom of man.²⁴¹

Bahá’u’lláh then states the reason why such recondite language has been revealed in the first place:

Know verily that the purpose underlying all these symbolic terms (*kalimát-i marmúzih*) and abstruse illusions (*ishárát-i mulghazih*), which emanate from the Revealers of God’s holy Cause, hath been to test and prove the peoples of the world; that thereby the earth of the pure and illuminated hearts may be known from the perishable and barren soil.²⁴²

On the surface, this would seem to suggest that anyone with metaphoric competence is spiritually pure. But at the level of received interpretation, such symbolic exegesis must first disencumber itself of the preponderant weight of centuries of traditional reading and of clerical authority. The act of [p. 217] replacing miracle with symbol and anthropomorphism with metaphor divests the interpreter of a magical worldview. Instead, such a reading places emphasis on ethics and interiority rather than on the miraculous. The reading Bahá’u’lláh rejects requires the suspension of natural law. The reading he offers is an engagement of spiritual law, portrayed as vivifying the visionary landscape of the heart. The reader, open to a new interpretation, will be open to a fresh source of authority.

One might ask: If this is so, why does Bahá'u'lláh not use the technical terminology of Arabic rhetoric? The answer lies in the fact that the Book of Certitude is a theological treatise which performs symbolic—not strictly rhetorical—interpretation. Demonstration of Qur'anic figuration enhances the plausibility of the symbolic approach.

Bahá'u'lláh, possibly alluding to his divinely invested authority to interpret, is not authoritarian about such prerogative. He distances himself from the pretensions and authority of the clerics, of whom he is critical. On a popular level, nothing short of a claim to a higher source of authority could have overridden the entrenched—and at times coercive—Islamic exegetical consensus.

The Book of Certitude is a revolutionary work of exegesis. The argument for post-Qur'anic revelation and supersession of Islamic law, though rare, is not new. But the synthesis of exegetical prowess, accessible and alluring writing style, and versatile argumentation gives the Book of Certitude a force of argument sufficiently persuasive to convince many of its readers that the sun of revelation had risen and would rise again.

Bahá'u'lláh should be viewed within the framework of Qur'anic exegetical tradition, but not subsumed within it. His work stands out as having a paradigmatic and charismatic originality, daring not only exegesis of the most recondite of Qur'anic verses, but taking on Islam's most ossified dogma as well. The objective was not simply to establish the possibility of revelation after Muḥammad, nor only to vindicate [p. 218] the authenticity of the Báb. If the hypothesis of messianic secrecy is valid, Bahá'u'lláh's hidden agenda can be seen in a new light. The Book of Certitude was written to prepare the Bábí community for an imminent eschatological moment. That moment would effect a transition—from Bahá'u'lláh the interpreter to Bahá'u'lláh the revelator.

As allusions in the Book of Certitude to the revelatory authority of Bahá'u'lláh attest, it was necessary to challenge the doctrine of revelatory finality in order to prepare receptive Bábís, Muslims, Christians, Jews and (in principle as well as in practice) Zoroastrians for the advent of a new religious figure on the revelatory horizon.²⁴³

ADDENDUM

See now Buck, "[Beyond the 'Seal of the Prophets': Bahá'u'lláh's Book of Certitude \(*Ketáb-e Iqān*\)](#)." *Religious Texts in Iranian Languages*. Edited by Clause Pedersen & Fereyduun Vahman. København (Copenhagen): The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters/Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab—Historiske-filosofiske Meddelelser 98, København, 2007. Pp. 369–378. [Courtesy of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, this entire multi-au-

thor work is now available online: <http://www.royalacademy.dk/Publications/Low/2085.pdf>.] See also Buck, “Bahá’ís.” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān: Supplement*. Edited by Jane McAuliffe. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. (Published online on December 1, 2016.) DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_050505. [Original, longer article](#) that was invited, accepted, and edited (6,160 words) and briefly published online (as I recall). Then a new word-limit was imposed, such that I had to cut 2,255 words. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.17267.25123> [May 30, 2022.]

NOTES

1. Bahá’u’lláh, untitled Persian Tablet cited in Ishráq Khávarí, *Qámús-i Íqán*, Vol. 4, p. 1791. He confirms that Bahá’u’lláh’s reference to his “Persian Tablets known as *istidláliyya*” is a definite reference to the Kitáb-i Íqán. Further on the definition of *istidlál*, see Wehr/Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 290.
2. To invoke Matthew 28:20.
3. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 237.
4. *Ibid.* pp., 24–81/Persian, 19–63.
5. Rippin, “Tafsír,” *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 14, p. 237. Rippin elsewhere cites Susan Sontag to the same effect as to the act of interpretation generally: “Interpretation is a radical strategy for conserving an old text, which is thought too precious to repudiate, by re-vamping it. The interpreter without actually erasing or rewriting the text, is altering it. But he can’t admit to doing this. He claims to be making it intelligible, by disclosing its true meaning.” (Sontag cited in Lawson, *The Qur’án Commentary of ... the Báb*, p. xii.)
6. *Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 410.
7. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited by Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 125.
8. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 75/Persian, p. 58. For various interpretations of this verse, see Ayoub, *The Qur’an [p. 219] and Its Interpreters*, pp. 211–13.
9. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 3–20.
10. Rippin, “Muslim Interpretation,” p. 473.
11. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 89.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
13. Parallel drawn by Rippin, personal communication, November 28, 1990.
14. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 20.
15. D. Woll, *Johannine Christianity in Conflict: Authority, Rank and Succession in the First Farewell Discourse*, pp. 69–70.

16. English translation: H. Windisch, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel*, tr. by J. Cox (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968).
17. Woll, *Johannine Christianity*, p. 71.
18. Windisch, *The Spirit-Paraclete*, p. 5; Woll, *Johannine Christianity*, p. 71.
19. Windisch, *The Spirit-Paraclete*, p. 13; Woll, *Johannine Christianity*, p. 71.
20. M. Isaacs, "The Prophetic Spirit in the Fourth Gospel," *Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 24 (1983), pp. 391–407. In the section, "Prophetic Functions Ascribed to the Paraclete" (pp. 393–99), the Spirit of Truth serves as: (1) Divine Messenger; (2) One who glorifies Jesus; (3) Teacher; (4) Witness; (5) Predictor; (6) One who is rejected; and (7) The Abiding Spirit. Isaacs's extended parallelism is brought into bolder relief in the section, "Jesus as the Model for the Paraclete-Prophet" (pp. 402–404).
21. Bornkamm, on John 16:7 and 12, observes that "the departing Jesus appears here, astonishingly enough, as a sort of 'forerunner' and 'precursor,' while the Paraclete appears as a fulfiller 'who brings the consummation'." Cited in Woll, *Johannine Christianity*, p. 73.
22. H. Riesenfeld, "A Probable Background to the Johannine Paraclete," in *Ex Orbe Religionem: Studia Geo Widengren Oblata*, Vol. 1 (1972), pp. 266–76.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
24. Windisch, *The Spirit-Paraclete*, p. 10; Woll, *Johannine Christianity*, 73.
25. Windisch, *The Spirit-Paraclete*, p. 20, cited in Woll, *Johannine Christianity*, p. 73. [p. 220]
26. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 20–21.
27. The only important Christian tradition which accepts Adam as a prophet is Ebionite Christianity. See the discussion in H.-J. Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church* (1969).
28. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 162.
29. B. Todd Lawson, personal communication, October 23, 1990.
30. Y. Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous* (1989), p. 52. Cf. *Idem*, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunnī Islām," p. 179.
31. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 81 / Persian, p. 63.
32. See Anawati, "'Ísá,'" *Encyclopaedia of Islām* (2nd edition), Vol. 4, p. 83, where, unfortunately, there are two errors in the Greek spellings of the terms under discussion: παραμλητος (sic) and παριμλυτος (sic). Cf. J. McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, p. 183, n. 10, and the literature cited.
33. See Guthrie and Bishop, "The Paraclete, Almunhamanna and Aḥmad," *Muslim World*, Vol. 41 (1951), pp. 251–52.

34. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 20, where the reference to “another will come” clearly has in view John 14:16 where there is the promise of “another Comforter.”
35. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 21–22.
36. King James Version.
37. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 62 and 64.
38. See A. Hilhorst, “Biblical Metaphors Taken Literally,” in *Text and Testimony. Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A.F.J. Klijn*, pp. 124–25.
39. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 58.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 59–61.
41. Bruijn, “Madjáz,” *Encyclopaedia of Islám* (2nd edition), Vol. 5, p. 1027, giving the example, “the sword of death.” Cf. A. Schippers, “The Genitive-Metaphor in the Poetry of ‘Abú-Tammám,” in *Proceedings of the Ninth Congress of the Union Européen des Arabisants et Islamisants*, ed. by R. Peters (Leiden: Brill, 1981), pp. 248–60. On tropes in Persian stylistics generally, see E. G. Browne’s discussion of the first extant *qaṣída* used for presentations of figures of speech, in *idem, Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 2, pp. 46–76. [p. 221]
42. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 24/Persian, p. 19. The King James Version reads: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give its light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.”
43. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 46–47/Persian, pp. 35–36.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–49.
45. The rich tradition behind this line of interpretation has been documented by H. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*.
46. See J. Meisami, “Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafiz,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 17 (1985), pp. 229–60.
47. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 60–61/Persian, pp. 46–47.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 37/Persian, p. 29.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 43/Persian, p. 33.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 44/Persian, p. 34.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 47/Persian, p. 36.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 68/Persian, p. 52.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 71/Persian, p. 55.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 72/Persian, p. 55.

55. Ibid., p. 72/Persian, p. 56. On this verse, Origen (Commentary on Matthew, Sermon 50) interprets “clouds” as “holy and divine powers” or as “the most blessed prophets.” (Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, p. 343.)
56. M. Fishbane, *The Garments of Torah*, p. 117.
57. B. Todd Lawson, “Akhhbá’rÍ Shí’Í Approaches to *tafsír*,” in *Approaches to the Qur’án*, ed. by G. Hawting and A.-K. Shareef (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 173–210.
58. Ibid., p. 175.
59. Ibid., p. 203.
60. Ibid.
61. A. Bausani, “Some Aspects of the Bahá’í Expressive Style,” *World Order*, Vol. 13 (1978–79), p. 43.
62. M. Momen, “Relativism: A Basis for Bahá’í Metaphysics,” in *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, p. 192.
63. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 11/Persian, pp. 8–9. [p. 222] See also S. Lambden, “The Sinaitic Mysteries: Notes on Moses/Sinai Motifs in Bábí and Bahá’í Scripture,” in *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, pp. 122–23.
64. See P. Stambovsky, “Metaphor and Historical Understanding,” *History and Theory*, Vol. 27 (1988), pp. 125–34; H. White, “Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination,” *Beihft*, Vol. 14 (1975), pp. 60ff.; see also S. Mailloux, “Rhetorical Hermeneutics,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 11 (1985), pp. 620–41.
65. H. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, pp. 53–54. On the opposition of *ishára* (figurative discourse) and *ibára* (plain speech) in relation to *ta’wíl*, see A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 59, and P. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langue mystique*, pp. 174–75.
66. For techniques of literary analysis, it appears that Wansbrough drew heavily on the work of W. Richter, *Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft* (Gottingen, 1971). John Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 126, n. 8. Wansbrough makes a few observations on the limitations of historical method (ibid.).
67. Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies*, p. 141.
68. Ibid., p. 119.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. A. Rippin, “*Tafsír*,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), Vol. 14, p. 238. Cf. idem, “Literary Analysis of Qur’án, *Tafsír*, and *Síra*: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough,” in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, pp. 151–63. Rippin is an advocate

of the study of Islamic texts as literature. See idem, "The Qur'án as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects," in *Bulletin of the British Society of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 10 (1983), pp. 38–47.

72. Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies*, p. 141.
73. S. Kemal, "Philosophy and Theory in Arabic Poetics," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 20 (1989), p. 129.
74. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, 205.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
76. K. Younger, "The Figurative Aspect and the Contextual [p. 223] Method in the Evaluation of the Solomonic Empire (1 Kings 1–11)," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions*, p. 164.
77. Bahá'ís do not, as a rule, try to analyze Bahá'u'lláh from the perspective of influences brought to bear on him. There is, after all, the claim to revelation, and no one dares to psychoanalyze a revelator. If Bahá'u'lláh's claims are granted, there still seems to be no reason for not taking him at his word when he speaks of his own thoughts and feelings. Bahá'ís can be expected to object to the kind of psycho-history some scholars try to construct, and here we are in dogmatic territory of another stripe. I would like to pursue a methodological course which veers away from both extremes: (1) that in which Bahá'u'lláh cannot be spoken of in terms of his human psyche at all (and is seen only as a passive vehicle for revelation); or (2) that in which Bahá'u'lláh's outlook can be entirely reduced to a psycho-history of events which present him as the composite of influences, Shí'í, Christian and Western.
78. E. Kohlberg, "Some notes on the Imámí attitude to the Qur'án," in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition*, pp. 209–24.
79. A. Jeffery, "A Variant Text of the *Fátiḥa*," *Muslim World*, Vol. 29 (1939), p. 162.
80. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 200–201.
81. Wansbrough, "Arabic Rhetoric and Qur'anic Exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 31 (1968), p. 32.
82. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 209.
83. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i Íqán*, Persian, p. 162.
84. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Assurance*, p. 149.
85. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 208.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
87. *Ibid.*, pp. 208–209.
88. See Rippin, "Lexicographical Texts and the Qur'an," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'án*, pp. 158–74.

89. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 24–25.
90. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i Íqán*, Persian, p. 20.
91. See A.K.S. Lambton, *Persian Grammar*, p. 125.
92. *The Greek New Testament*, p. 94. [p. 224]
93. Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 24, no. 1.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
95. *Ibid.*, pp. 71–72.
96. Described in some detail by O'Shaughnessy in his chapter, "The Splitting of Heaven Herald the Last Judgment," in *idem*, *Eschatological Themes in the Qur'an*, pp. 35–42.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
98. S. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology*, p. 133.
99. Beeston, *The Arabic Language*, p. 79.
100. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 115–16/Persian, pp. 87–88).
101. For a history of the term *majáz*, see Wansbrough, "Majáz al-Qur'an: Periphrastic Exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 33 (1970), pp. 247–66. See rejoinder by Almagor, "The Early Meaning of *majáz* and the Nature of Abú 'Ubayda's Exegesis," in *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D.H. Baneth*, pp. 307–26; Heinrichs, "On the Genesis of the *haqiqa-majáz* Dichotomy," *Studia Islamica*, Vol. 59 (1984), pp. 111–140.
102. N. Kinberg, "Future Time without Future Tense: A Study of Figurative Participles in Arabic" (paper presented March 20, 1990, Department of Linguistics, University of Calgary), pp. 4–5. See now N. Kinberg, "Figurative uses, polysemy and homonymy in systems of Tense, Mood and Aspect," *Lingua*, Vol. 83 (1991), pp. 319–38 (esp. p. 331); and *idem*, "Semi-imperfectives and imperfectives: A case study of aspect and tense in Arabic participial clauses," *Lingua*, Vol. 86 (1992), pp. 301–30 (esp. p. 325, n. 43).
103. *Itqán*, Vol. 3, p. 119. The foregoing analysis is based on a communication from N. Kinberg.
104. Kinberg, "Future Time without Future Tense," p. 4.
105. On prophetic perfect, see B. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. My thanks to A. Rippin for this reference.
106. A.F.L. Beeston, *The Arabic Language Today*, p. 76.
107. Beeston, *The Arabic Language*, p. 79.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
109. Pointed out by Rippin, personal communication.
110. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 117. [p. 225]

111. Ibid., pp. 116–17.
112. Ibid., pp. 22–23, Persian, p. 18.
113. Ibid.
114. Hilhorst, “Biblical Metaphors Taken Literally,” in *Text and Testimony*, p. 123.
115. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 90 / Persian, p. 70.
116. Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, *Kitáb al-Fará’id*, pp. 438f.
117. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 143 / Persian, p. 111.
118. Ibid., pp. 148–49.
119. Footnote in Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 149, off by one verse.
120. Ibid., p. 150.
121. Arberry’s translation.
122. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 151–52.
123. Ibid., pp. 202–203.
124. Ayoub, *The Qur’an and its Interpreters*, pp. 58–59.
125. B. Todd Lawson, “*The Qur’an Commentary of Sayyid ‘Alí Muḥammad, the Báb*,” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis; McGill University, 1987), pp. 60–61.
126. Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjání’s Theory of Poetic Imagery*, p. 83.
127. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 136–37.
128. Ibid., p. 137.
129. Ibid., p. 137.
130. Ibid., p. 137.
131. Ibid., p. 213 / Persian, pp. 165–66.
132. Ibid., pp. 156–57.
133. Ibid., p. 189.
134. Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá’í, “Alchemy and the Resurrection Body,” in Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, pp. 197–210.
135. The style of Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablets on alchemy is similar to the work translated by Ebied and Young, “An Anonymous Arabic Treatise on Alchemy,” *Der Islam*, Vol. 53 (1976), pp. 100–109, where a useful glossary of alchemical terms is provided.
136. Bahá’u’lláh went so far as to reveal talismans (in effect, invocations inscribed in the form of pentacles for men and circles for women) for those Bábís who requested them. This

practice gradually ended later in his ministry. See MacEoin, "Nineteenth Century Babi Talismans," *Studia Iranica*, Vol. 14 (1985), pp. 77–98. [p. 226]

137. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p.159: "Consider the rose: whether it blossometh in the East or in the West, it is none the less a rose. For what mattereth in this respect is not the outward shape and form of the rose, but rather the smell and fragrance which it doth impart."
138. Momen, *Shí'í Islam*, p. 153.
139. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 37.
140. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i Íqán*, Persian, p. 29.
141. On the use of this device in the Near East, van Gelder remarks: "The *fictio personae*, *prosopopkia*, [is] frequent in the literary debate from the time of the Sumerians. ... In pre- and early Islamic Arabic literature, objects and concepts are rarely presented as speaking. Indeed, one may discern an aversion to it. ... In the Koran, mountains, thunder, skins, Heaven and Earth, even 'everything' is said to speak in one way or another." Van Gelder then cites as examples: "Qur'an 41:10; 99:4 (heaven and earth); 21:79; 34:10; 38:17 (mountains); 13:14 (thunder); 41:19–20 (skins); 17:46 (everything). ... Later writers explain that the imaginative portrayal of objects as speaking was another of the 'habits of the Arabs' in their speech. But, far from being characteristic, it was a marginal element in early Arabic literature." G. van Gelder, "The Conceit of Pen and Sword: On an Arabic Literary Debate," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Vol. 32 (1987), pp. 331–32.
142. See Ishráq-Khávarí, *Qámús-i Íqán*, Vol. 2, p. 911.
143. Wehr/Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 175.
144. Wehr/Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 176.
145. Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, p. 419.
146. This is borne out by R. Ghadimi, *An Arabic-Persian Dictionary of Selected Words* (University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 256.
147. Wehr/Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 176.
148. *Ibid.*
149. Momen, *Shí'í Islam*, p. 153.
150. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 20–22.
151. B. Todd Lawson, "The Terms 'Remembrance' (*dhikr*) and 'Gate' (*báb*) in the Báb's Commentary on the Súra of Joseph," in *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*, p. 1.
152. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 180.
153. *Ibid.*, pp. 178–79/Persian, p. 138. [p. 227]

154. Ibid., p. 179/Persian, pp. 138–39.
155. Ibid., p. 180.
156. Ibid., p. 161.
157. Abrogation (*naskh*) was a concern of early works of *tafsír*. See Rippin, “Al-Zuhri, *Naskh al-Qur’án* and the Problem of early *Tafsír* texts,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 47 (1984), pp. 22–43.
158. *Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 6–8.
159. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 49–51.
160. Ibid., p. 51.
161. Ayoub, *The Qur’án and its Interpreters*, p. 173.
162. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 52/Persian, p. 40.
163. Cited in Ayoub, *The Qur’án and Its Interpreters*, pp. 169–70.
164. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, 51-52/Persian, 39-40.
165. Rippin, “The Function of *asbáb al-nuzúl* in Qur’anic Exegesis,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 51 (1988), p. 12.
166. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 147. The aesthetic gifts of the translator are quite evident here.
167. Rippin, “The Function of *asbáb al-nuzúl* in Qur’anic Exegesis,” p. 13.
168. Rippin, “The Exegetical Genre *asbáb al-nuzúl*: A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 48 (1985), p. 1.
169. Rippin, “The function of *asbáb al-nuzúl* in Qur’anic Exegesis,” p. 3.
170. For this use of such reports, see Rippin, “The Function of *asbáb al-nuzúl* in Qur’anic Exegesis,” p. 7.
171. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 121–22.
172. Ibid., p. 120.
173. Rippin, “The Function of *asbáb al-nuzúl* in Qur’anic Exegesis,” p. 8.
174. Rippin, “*Tafsír*,” p. 239. This *sabab* is also cited by Ayoub, *The Qur’án and Its Interpreters*, Vol. 1, p. 199.
175. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 182–83.
176. Ibid., p. 183.
177. Ibid., pp. 181–82.
178. Ibid., p. 217. [p. 228]

179. Ibid., p. 219.
180. Pointed out by Rippin, personal communication, January 10, 1990, University of Calgary.
181. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 220–21.
182. V. Rafati, “*The Development of Shaykhí Thought in Shí'í Islam*,” pp. 117–19.
183. See L. Kinberg, “*Muḥkamát and Mutashábihát (Koran 3:7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis*,” *Arabica*, Vol. 35 (1988), pp. 143–72.
184. V. Rafati, *The Development of Shaykhí Thought in Shí'í Islam*, pp. 118–19.
185. E. G. Browne, “An Abstract and Index of the Persian Bayán,” in *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne*, pp. 340–41.
186. See MacEoin, “Hierarchy, Authority, and Eschatology in Early Bábí Thought,” in *In Iran: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, pp. 95–155.
187. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 169–70/Persian, pp. 131–32.
188. Rodwell's translation.
189. Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ al-zúhur*, Bahá'í World Centre, manuscript catalogued as No. AB 201.
190. Bahá'u'lláh, “Tablet of the Manifestation,” in *Bahá'í Scriptures*, p. 206.
191. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, pp. 22–23.
192. Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 74. Bahá'u'lláh's addition of “Messengers” to “Prophets” at verse 33:40 invalidates a popular Bahá'í argument that the Qur'án, in stating that Muḥammad is the Seal of the Prophets, keeps open the possibility of future messengers of God, since Muḥammad is, strictly speaking, the last of the prophets but not the last of the messengers. The distinction between prophet (*nabí*) and messenger (*rasúl*) is blurred at times. (Cf. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, pp. 82 and 104.) The *nabí* is defined by Rahman as “a divine envoy without a law (*sharí'a*) and, presumably, without a revealed book” while a *rasúl* is “one with a law and a revealed book.” (Ibid., p. 82.)
193. Cole, *The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings*, p. 18.
194. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 60. [p. 229]
195. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 170/Persian, p. 132.
196. Ibid., p. 251.
197. See J. Cole, “Bahá'u'lláh and the Naqshbandí Sufis in Iraq, 1854–1856,” in *From Iran East and West: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, pp. 1–28.
198. See W. Chittick, “The Five Divine Presences: From Al-Qúnawí to al-Qayṣarí,” *Muslim World*, Vol. 72 (1982), pp. 107–28.
199. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 141.

200. Ibid., pp. 141–42.
201. On the Ḥadith of Kumayl, see D. Donaldson, “Al-Kumayl: A Companion of the Secret,” *Muslim World*, Vol. 28 (1938), pp. 249–57.
202. Browne, *The New History*, p. 329.
203. Ibid., p. 329.
204. A direct reference to this tradition is found in Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 102, where Bahá’u’lláh develops his anthropology (doctrine of man).
205. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Assurance*, p. 117.
206. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 164.
207. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Assurance*, p. 1. Khan’s transliteration is included as it is in his translation, from which we may deduce that Khan thought the wording significant. In the first of very few footnotes throughout his translation, Khan, on the passage cited, explains: “Veils intervening between man and the Truth of God, which must be rent before the real light of that Truth is seen. One of these veils is literal interpretation of the Divine Texts preventing true understanding of Revelation, such as the statement of the ascent of Christ into Heaven, His descent, the Station of Mohammed as the ‘Seal of the Prophets,’ etc.”

For technical reasons, Shoghi Effendi’s translation does not draw attention to this possible allusion to the Kumayl tradition, as Khan had done: “The essence of these words is this: they that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude, must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly—their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections.” (*The Book of Certitude*, p. 3.)

208. Translated by B. Todd Lawson, *The Qur’án Commentary of Sayyid ‘Alí Muḥammad Shírází, the Báb*, p. 82, n. 8, from [p. 230] Ishráq-Khávarí, *Qámús-i Íqán*, Vol. 2, p. 859 (not p. 851).
209. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 164.
210. “But those who know God know only their own selves. ... Nevertheless, he knows who knows Our word, ‘And none knows it except he who takes Our provisions and travels with Us.’ ‘Alí said: ‘Pierce the veils of glory without any pointing.’ This refers to those servants who see the Face of the Lord.” (The Báb, translated by Lawson, *The Qur’án Commentary of ... the Báb*, p. 207.)

Lawson remarks that the “Face of the Lord” is a common designation of the Imám. This passage may be a compression, as Lawson remarks further, where the intended meaning is more on the order of “in all that is seen is seen as the Face of the Lord.” (My rewording of Lawson’s comment.)

211. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 102–103.

212. On this tradition, see Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, *Kitáb al-Fará'id*, pp. 418–19. See German edition (2001), pp. 220–61. [Courtesy of Sohrab Kourosch, personal communication, January 2, 2022.]
213. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 35–36/Persian, pp. 27–28.
214. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
215. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
216. *Ibid.*, p. 41/Persian, pp. 31–32.
217. *Ibid.*, Persian, p. 61.
218. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 20–21.
219. *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80.
220. Lawson, *The Qur'án Commentary of ... the Báb*, p. 342.
221. *Ibid.*, p. 343.
222. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 20–21.
223. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
224. *Ibid.*, pp. 119–20.
225. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
226. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
227. Rodwell's translation.
228. al-Jemaey, *Al-Rummání's al-Nukat fí I'jáz al-Qur'an*, p. 107.
229. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 39–40.
230. The two exegetical procedures which Bahá'u'lláh did not use were variant readings of the Qur'án (*variae lectiones*) and the use of exemplars from poetry (*poetic loci probantes*). **[p. 231]**
231. N. Calder, personal communication (University of Calgary, March 28, 1990).
232. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 239/Persian, p. 186.
233. *Ibid.*, p. 170/Persian, p. 132.
234. *Ibid.*, p. 196/Persian, p. 151
235. *Ibid.*, p. 199/Persian, p. 154.
236. *Ibid.*, p. 197/Persian, p. 152.
237. *Ibid.*, pp. 254–255/Persian, p. 197.
238. Tr. Heinrichs, *Hand of the Northwind*, pp. 48–49.
239. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 47–48.

240. Cf. Bonebakker, *Some Early Definitions of the Tawriya*, pp. 25–26.
241. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 48.
242. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
243. On Bahá'u'lláh's "multiple messiahship," see C. Buck, "A Unique Eschatological Interface: Bahá'u'lláh and Cross-Cultural Messianism," in *In Iran: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, Vol. 3, pp. 156–79.

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THE SHRINE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH TODAY

Fig. 6: Aerial view of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh (center), the prophet and founder of the the Bahá'í Faith, and the author of the *Kitáb-i Íqán*. The Mansion of Bahjí is seen behind, and gardens surrounding. (Courtesy of the [Bahá'í Media Bank](#).)

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION:
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BRIDGE

This study seeks to examine the interplay between technique and theme, instrument and ideology, exegesis and authority. The preceding chapter focused on Bahá'u'lláh's skills as a master of symbolic interpretation (*ta'wíl*), drawing on a repertoire of "procedural devices" found in classical Qur'án commentary (*tafsír*). Wansbrough's typology, applied as a framework of analysis, illuminates the predominantly Islamic features of Bahá'u'lláh's methodology. Such skills served overt and covert purposes, both of which were decidedly post-Islamic.

Defense of the mission of the Báb—with all of its abrogatory implications—is the ostensible, indeed, the stated purpose of the Book of Certitude. On the subtle level of "sub-text," however, advance legitimation of Bahá'u'lláh's own authority looms. Within the *ta'wíl* itself is a hidden dimension. Behind the symbolic exegesis itself, a messianic secret is concealed, and partly revealed.

It is possible now to articulate a thematic statement which sums up the findings of this study. The following epitome is somewhat complex, but it will be explained in the course of this chapter: Vindicating the mission of the Báb and the break [p. 234] from Islam, Bahá'u'lláh presents a figuration-based rationale for Qur'anic symbolism. While logically overruling Islamic finality, the author creates a world of correspondences by means of genitive metaphors (realizing eschatology in the process) to prepare Bábís for the disclosure of his own messianic secret.

Four thematic approaches are interwoven here. Each of these may be outlined under the headings below:

1. The Eschatologically Conceived Break from Islam;
2. Bahá'u'lláh's Hermeneutical Approach:
figuration-Based Rationale for Symbolism;

3. Bahá'u'lláh's Exegetical Techniques:

Worlds of Correspondence and Exegetical Metaphors;

4. Transforming Eschatology into Authority:

The Problem of Bahá'u'lláh's Messianic Secret.

Messianic secrecy can be argued from evidence within the Book of Certitude itself. The secrecy motif has heuristic value; it helps to explain more fully Bahá'u'lláh's enigmatic self-references. The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the results of this study into a meaningful whole, linking Bahá'u'lláh's symbolic exegesis with messianic secrecy.

THE ESCHATOLOGICALLY CONCEIVED BREAK FROM ISLAM

Across Islam's chasm of finality, the Book of Certitude has drawn a bridge which is eschatological. Crossing over, the spiritual wayfarer can glance back and contemplate the point of origin: the homeland of Islam, the parent Faith. The vital link of continuity with Islam is never wholly lost. From this point of departure, the wayfarer's destination, referred to by Bahá'u'lláh as the City of Certitude, gains its perspective. Whether or not the wayfarer has roots in Islam,¹ the bridge [p. 235] does. Yet the promised land lies beyond, in the post-Qur'anic eschaton.

On the far shore stand two mysterious figures who, in prophetic code, are referred to in the Book of Certitude as the Qá'im (the Riser, Resurrector) and the Mustagháth (the Invoked, Beseached). Who are these figures? Is the Qá'im a restorer, a renovator, or a revealer?

In Sunnī Islam, the counterpart of the Shí'í Qá'im is the Mahdí (the Rightly-Guided One), who is the restorer of pristine Islam, consolidating an otherwise moribund Islamic system of law (*sharí'a*). In Shí'í theory, the Qá'im (who is to be of 'Alí's lineage) is a renovator, the inaugurator of a new religious dispensation, in which elements of the old Islamic law code will be abrogated in favor of a renewed Islamic system.² The Qá'im is not, however, a revealer (although some traditions might hint otherwise),³ since Muḥammad is the final revealer for all time. For Islam, the doctrine of the "special prophethood" of Muḥammad (as the "Seal of the Prophets") can never be violated.⁴

In Bábí thought, the Qá'im is a revealer. The same term now has a radically different meaning, since the Qá'im is the equal of Muḥammad, and has the power to abrogate Islamic law and to reveal new doctrine. In fine, the Sunnī Mahdí is a restorer of Islamic law; the Shí'í Qá'im is a renovator of law but not of doctrine; the Bábí Qá'im is a revealer in the full creative sense. This characterization of Sunnī, Shí'í, and Bábí conceptions of the deliverer—as, respec-

tively, restorer, renovator, and revealer—is doubtless an oversimplification, but may be of some descriptive value.

Mustagháth is another name for the Bábí messiah, “He Whom God Shall Make Manifest” (*man yuzhiruhu’lláh*). The word Mustagháth is a Bábí rather than a Shí’í term. A cryptic figure, the Mustagháth represents both a revelator and (qabbalistically) a time of revelation.⁵ In any event, the Bábí conception of the Qá’im and the Mustagháth presents a direct [p. 236] challenge to the doctrine of the finality of Islam. For in either orthodoxy (Sunní or Shí’í), Muḥammad is the last prophet. Bahá’u’lláh fully argues the challenge these two prophetic figures pose, an obstacle overcome ultimately by a leap of faith. Not in name but in principle, Bahá’u’lláh intimates that Islam will be superseded by a new revelation from God:

That a divine Revelation which for years hath been securely established; beneath whose shadow all who have embraced it have been reared and nurtured; by the light of whose law generations of men have been disciplined; the excellency of whose word men have heard recounted by their fathers; in such wise that the human eye hath held naught but the pervading influence of its grace, and mortal ear hath heard naught but the resounding majesty of its command—what act is mightier than that such a Revelation should, by the power of God, be “cloven asunder” and be abolished at the appearance of one soul?⁶

There is no revitalization of Islam envisioned here. The Bábí movement had already effected its break with Islam,⁷ a break Bahá’u’lláh further rationalized and deepened.⁸ No harking back to the Qur’án and Islamic law was contemplated in this portrayal of things to come. Rhetoric promising the victory of Islam is absent. In terms of authority, Islam is clearly superseded in an eschaton denuded of the supernatural events Muslims had come to expect. The reverse of what was traditionally expected largely defines the Bábí/Bahá’í conception of last events.

Doctrinally and in practice, the very claim to post-Qur’anic revelation was sufficient to precipitate a break from Islam. This is the doctrinal divide, the point of departure leading to non-Islamic conclusions, giving rise to Muslim objections to Bábí claims, objections ultimately etched in horrific anti-Bábí and anti-Bahá’í persecutions. These, in the final analysis, failed to silence the new claims.⁹

From 1863 onward, the exercise of Bahá’u’lláh’s charismatic [p. 237] authority over the traditional authorities of Qur’án, *sunná*, and Imámí *ḥadīth* was the most decisive factor in the founding of the Bahá’í Faith. Bahá’u’lláh’s prerogative to abrogate the laws of Islam was made possible by the Báb, himself a revolutionary personality. Out of the matrix of heterodoxy, the Báb created a religious system which, despite all of its patently Islamic features, presented a

bold alternative to Shiism. What the Báb originated has been carefully analyzed by Amanat in his social history of the Bábí movement.¹⁰ Factors contributing to the break from Islam are presented as follows:

The extent to which the teachings of the Bab and his disciples offered an alternative to the religion of the time can be demonstrated by the following factors. Foremost was the fact that Babism responded to the changing sociomoral climate by consciously incorporating the notion of recurring renewal into the body of religious doctrine; something that the orthodox Shi'ite establishment (and the later Islamic reformers of all persuasions) tended to reject or ignore. In introducing the theme of progressive revelation, the Bab benefited from the dynamics of the Bāṭinī theory of cyclical manifestations. Hence the religion of the Bayān employed the old symbols of Shi'ism in order to offer a fresh response to an equally old tension within that religion.

The earlier currents of the Bāṭinī thought, with very few exceptions, rarely exceeded the claim to the individual deputyship of the Hidden Imam. Only in Shaykhism, preoccupation with the Imam's this-worldly whereabouts subjected his existence to a historical process that ultimately was to culminate in his Advent. The Bab sought the solution to the dichotomy of the Shi'ite Imamate: the simultaneous presence and absence of the Imam, in the outward declaration of Mahdihood and its logical corollary, the Qiyāma. This revolutionary step set the Babis on the road to a complete break from Islam and the creation of a new religious dispensation. The mind that conceived this break, and set about to achieve it, though primarily religious, shared the modernity of a secular mind as it traced the stagnation of the community not in the irreversible fate of its [p. 238] members but in their failure to see the incompatibility of their past religious values with the realities of a new era. Before the introduction of Western ideologies would definitively revise the ideals of reform, this was the only answer generated in nineteenth-century Shi'ite Iran which coped with the threat of an alien and materially superior culture without resorting to rejectionism or falling prey to complacency.¹¹

The themes in Bábí theology which made possible a reformist break from Islam are analyzed by Amanat practically as counterpoints:

The three themes of progressive revelation, conditional recognition of temporal authority, and this-worldliness of human salvation were in contrast to the Islamic precepts of the finality of Islam, the totality of the prophetic authority, and the otherworldliness of the Qiyāma.¹²

What of Islamic reform? The assessment of Hamid Algar has considerable insight, in that he draws a distinction between Islamic reform and Islamic terminology:

Babism, as a movement taking its starting point within Islam and then swiftly going beyond its bounds, might also in a certain sense be thought of as a “reform” of Islam, parallel to Malkum’s own project of an “Islamic renaissance.” Malkum’s plan, like Babism, entailed the use of Islamic terminology for purposes fundamentally alien to the Islamic faith.¹³

As to the Bábí movement, Algar does not elaborate on exactly what purposes were “alien to the Islamic faith,” but he surely means the break from Islam.

Later conflation of Bábí and Bahá’í ideologies aside, if we draw the historical distinction between the Bábí and Bahá’í movements, it is clear that the Bábí movement represented one reformist solution (beyond Islam) to the pressures and perils facing Persia in the mid-nineteenth century, as Amanat points out:

[p. 239] The Babi phenomenon sprang up at a time when Persian society was on the verge of a crucial transition. Tormented by its age-old dilemmas, the Persian mind was beginning to be exposed to a materially superior civilization. The emergence of the Babi doctrine thus was perhaps the last chance for an indigenous reform movement before that society became truly affected by the consequences of the Western predominance, first in material and then in ideological spheres. Notwithstanding its weaknesses, the Babi doctrine attempted to address, rather than ignore, the issues that lay at the foundation of the Persian consciousness. The Babi solution was the product of an esoteric legacy, one that sought redemptive regeneration in a break with the past without being essentially alien to the spirit of that past.¹⁴

Amanat goes on to explain that the Bábí worldview was not consciously affected by the Western ethos; nor was it influenced by the Western positivist models of progress and humanism. Unlike later Islamic reformers, who shrank from tampering with time-honored dogma, the Báb “strove to resolve the predicaments of Islamic eschatology by returning to the basic issues of prophethood, resurrection, and the hereafter.”¹⁵

Amanat observes that the Bábí movement was not bent solely on rejuvenating Islam’s inner truth (*báṭin*), but intended to fully supplant its institutional exterior (*ẓáhir*)—principally, the Islamic law code (*sharí’a*)—with a distinct one of its own.¹⁶ In point of fact, the Bábí religion was typologically a new religion, and asserted itself as such. This is not to claim that the Bábí religion functioned as a universal world religion: It did not. But it did establish the theoretical possibilities for a new system. Indeed it legislated one.

Bahá'u'lláh's use of the Qur'án was in support of the Báb, not the other way around. In less than two years, the Book of Certitude would be used to legitimize (or, rather, to present, in a missionary context) Bahá'u'lláh's own prophetic credentials.¹⁷ As Browne was told in Shiraz in 1888:

[p. 240] All that emanates from the Source (*maṣḍar*) is equal in importance, ... but some books are more systematic, more easily understood, and therefore more widely read than others. Of these the chief are:—(1) The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Most Holy Book), which sums up all the commands and ordinances enjoined on us; (2) The *Íqán* (Assurance), which sets forth the proofs of our religion; (3) Dissertations on science—astronomy, metaphysics, and the like—which we call *Ṣuwar-i-'Ilmiyyê*; (4) Prayers (*Munáját*) and Exhortations.¹⁸

Practically from its inception, the Book of Certitude emerged as the most important doctrinal work of the Bahá'í Faith, regarded as having “set forth the proofs of our religion.” This work distanced the Bábí movement still further from a strictly Islamic worldview.

The break from Islam appears to have carried with it a more universal sense of missionary burden. The Book of Certitude in fact opens with a call: “O ye peoples of the world” (Arabic: *yá ahl al-arḍ*).¹⁹ Among the “peoples of the world” are surely the Christians. Later in the text, one encounters Bahá'u'lláh's call to the “concourse of the Spirit.” At first glance, the Arabic passage translated below could be construed as an address to Christians:

May God assist us and assist you, O concourse of the Spirit! (*yá ma'shar al-ruḥ*) that perchance ye may in the time of His Manifestation (*al-mustagháth*) be graciously aided to perform such deeds, and may in His days attain unto the Presence of God (*liqá' Alláh*).²⁰

Given this reference to the Mustagháth in the Arabic text, the more probable audience here are the Bábís.

Even if Christians are not specifically apostrophized in the Book of Certitude some of their eschatological concerns are. More than passing attention is given to Christian apocalyptic expectations. As if anticipating a Christian audience, Bahá'u'lláh devotes nearly one-quarter of the Book of Certitude **[p. 241]** to Christian subjects. In medieval Islam, anti-Christian polemics had become practically a badge of Muslim identity and were commonplace. The kind of serious consideration given Christian scriptures in Bahá'u'lláh's writing is quite apart, especially as the Gospel is accorded an interpretive parity with the Qur'án. Bahá'u'lláh defends the sayings of Jesus in the New Testament against stock Islamic charges of textual corruption (*tahríf*).²¹ Bahá'u'lláh accuses Muslim divines themselves, not of textual corruption, but of interpretive corruption.²²

In his post-declaration ministry, Bahá'u'lláh's personal identification with Jesus is striking. Occasionally Jesus' identification with Bahá'u'lláh is portrayed.²³ Though this study has focused mostly on the specifically Islamic features of the Book of Certitude, further work on its Christian elements needs to be done. It is this Christian dimension that largely accounts for the successful use of the Book of Certitude for Bahá'í teaching in the West.

Bahá'u'lláh's doctrine of the spiritual fraternity of God's prophets, though Islamic in its basic features, goes beyond Islam. Emphasis on prophetic unity is the real doctrinal groundwork for his later concern with interreligious unity, an intimation of which is seen in Bahá'u'lláh's statement: "Furthermore, how numerous are those peoples of divers beliefs, of conflicting creeds, and opposing temperaments, who, through the reviving fragrance of the Divine springtime, breathing from the Riḍván of God, have been arrayed with the new robe of divine Unity, and have drunk from the cup of His singleness!"²⁴ Bahá'u'lláh implicitly encourages the application of his exegetical arguments to other religious contexts when he says: "In fact, all the Scriptures and the mysteries (*asrár*) thereof are condensed into this brief account."²⁵ One implication of this statement is that the break from Islam is now generalized as an eschatologically conceived break from every religion in the context of apocalyptic fulfillment.

[p. 242] Beyond the break from Islam, there is also an anticipated break from Babism. In his effort to reverse the fortunes of the Bábí community, Bahá'u'lláh sustained Bábí expectations in various ways. In so doing, he linked eschatological requital to moral rectitude, making the latter a requirement for the former. It appears that moral reform had for some time been foremost in the mind of the Bábí leader, representing his strategy for consolidating the Bábí community.

During the period of 1853-54, Bahá'u'lláh had urged several major reforms in the Bábí community, mortally wounded as it was from the military disasters of the previous four years and the ensuing bloodbath of persecution, decreed by the Qajar state. Among Bábís, there was opposition to those reforms at first. In an effort to avoid schism, Bahá'u'lláh withdrew in the spring of 1854 for two years to the mountainous wilderness of Sar-Galú, in Iraqi Kurdistan around Sulaymáníyyah.

Upon his return, Bahá'u'lláh saw the crisis into which the Bábí community had plunged. Consolidation was paramount, something Şubḥ-i Azal had been powerless to effect during his half-brother's absence. Bahá'u'lláh took pains to make purity of spirit, achieved through moral rectitude, a precondition for spiritual receptivity. The promise of recognizing a new revelation from God was held out only for the moral elect, those who could prove themselves spiritually worthy. Bahá'u'lláh made effective use of the eschaton to reorient the Bábí psyche and to steel Bábí cohesiveness.

The Book of Certitude presumes a sense of eschatological imminence—a tense, palpable edge of anticipation—among those to whom it was addressed, the Bábís. Something big is on the horizon. Something momentous is in store: “The universe is pregnant with these manifold bounties, awaiting the hour when the effects of Its unseen gifts will be made manifest in this world.”²⁶ Bahá’u’lláh appeared to possess a key to these secrets. The key is the Book of Certitude itself.²⁷

To make matters more complex, the Báb had also given [p. 243] long-term, rather than imminent, predictions. To find the expected Mustagháth, one had to accept doctrinal enigmas and be prepared to embrace the unexpected. In the passage below, entrance to the City of Certitude is promised to those who are not held back by such puzzles, and who disencumber themselves of the shackles of Islamic doctrinal determinism. In order for the eschaton to be realized, the Shí’í apocalyptic scenario had to be rejected in favor of Bahá’u’lláh’s symbolic interpretations. This, in effect, radically spiritualizes the eschaton, totally demilitarizes it (for no Islamic holy war is waged), and universalizes it. It is not Shí’í Islam that prevails but, rather, a new “City” appearing in its stead:

When the channel of the human soul is cleansed of all worldly and impeding attachments, it will unfailingly perceive the breath of the Beloved across immeasurable distances, and will, led by its perfume, attain and enter the City of Certitude. ...

They that valiantly labour in quest of God’s will, when once they have renounced all else but Him, will be so attached and wedded to that City that a moment’s separation from it would to them be unthinkable. They will hearken unto infallible proofs from the Hyacinth of that assembly, and receive the surest testimonies from the beauty of its Rose and the melody of its Nightingale. Once in about a thousand years shall this City be renewed and readorned.

Wherefore, O my friend, it behooveth Us to exert the highest endeavour to attain unto that City, and, by the grace of God and His loving-kindness, rend asunder the “veils of glory.” ... That City is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muḥammad the Messenger of God the Qur’an; in this day the Bayán; and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book—the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme.²⁸

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Reference to thousand-year intervals would not necessarily have deterred Bábí readers from expecting an imminent messianic advent, for there was a fund of very definite short-term eschatological expectations that could easily have fired the imagination of the expectant Bábí. MacEoin has collated both long-term and short-term Bábí expectations in a useful study which attempts to bring clarity to rather convoluted Bábí sources.²⁹ Was this mix of long-term and short-term prophecy a ruse to keep the arcane from being profaned? Or was it due to an inconsistency on the Báb's part? No one has solved this problem in all its intricacies.

Expectations were set up in both native and diasporal Bábí communities (in Persia and Baghdad) for the advent of "He Whom God Shall Make Manifest" (*man yuzhiruhu'lláh*). The implications of this eschatological tension are obvious: In it are the seeds of relativizing the Báb's religious system to its own eventual eclipse. This eventuality was a foregone conclusion. If the Báb's primary role was that of a messianic harbinger, then the "Gate" (*Báb*) was an entrance, not a final destination. As Amanat observes:

The idea of perpetual *Zuhūr*, conceived by the Bab and enshrined in the chiliastic notion of the He Whom God Shall Manifest, essentially militated against the institutionalization of the Babi religion. The Babi theology was erected on the precept of the prophetic continuity and the sense of vigilance for future divine revelations. ...

The possibility of the Babi *sharī'a*'s being nullified and replaced by a future manifestation, particularly since the time of his advent was signaled in the *Bayān* in the cryptic code of *mustaghāth* (he who shall be called upon for help), was an open invitation for messianic innovation.³⁰

In validating the immediate past in the advent of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh's statements about the future were lent greater authenticity. Of the two eschatological figures familiar to [p. 245] Bábís in the Book of Certitude, the first is the Qá'im. The Qá'im is identified with the Báb, who is portrayed in the Book of Certitude in vivid symbolic terms, such as the Sea of Seas, the Ocean of divine wisdom, the divine Luminary, the eternal Sun, the Manifestation of the Adored.³¹

In his later writings, this kind of theophanic language is transferred to Bahá'u'lláh himself in his future role as the self-proclaimed Mustagháth.³² This transference is mediated through the doctrine of prophetic unity, in which all the prophets of God are seen as "proclaiming the same Faith."³³ Bahá'u'lláh alludes to the imminence of the mysterious Mustagháth in the closing words of Part One of the Book of Certitude:

And now, We beseech the people of the Bayán, all the learned, the sages, the divines, and witnesses amongst them, not to forget the wishes and admonitions revealed in their Book. Let them, at all times, fix their gaze upon the essentials of His Cause, lest when He, Who is the Quintessence of truth, the inmost Reality of all things, the Source of all light, is made manifest, they cling unto certain passages of the Book, and inflict upon Him that which was inflicted in the Dispensation of the Qur'án.

For, verily, powerful is He, the King of divine might, to extinguish with one letter of His wondrous words, the breath of life in the whole of the Bayán and the people thereof, and with one letter bestow upon them a new and everlasting life, and cause them to arise and speed out of the sepulchres of their vain and selfish desires.

Take heed, and be watchful; and remember that all things have their consummation in belief in Him, in attainment unto His day, and in the realization of His divine presence. "There is no piety in turning your faces toward the east or toward the west, but he is pious who believeth in God and the Last Day." (Qur'an 2:176)³⁴

The ascendancy of the Mustagháth over the Báb meant that the revelation of the latter would be subordinated to the [p. 246] former. The Bayán conceivably could be "extinguished" in one eschatological breath by the Mustagháth. Sometime following his declaration in 1863, Bahá'u'lláh explicitly identified himself as the one foretold by the Báb: as the one promised in *al-mustagháth* with the name of *man yuzhiruhu'lláh*.³⁵ Any leap of faith embracing such a claim relegating the Báb's revelation to a subordinate status, eclipsed by the preeminence of the new revelation.

Lest the same fate befall Bahá'u'lláh's religion, it was necessary later in his ministry to literalize at least one aspect of the chiliasm: its thousand-year duration. That he intended his own law-code and religious precepts to remain in force for no less than a millennium is made explicit in an incontrovertible statement in the Kitáb al-Aqdas.³⁶ Once realized in the person of Bahá'u'lláh, Bábí millenarian expectations were henceforth discarded.

The Book of Certitude, when it was written, ostensibly had little to do with Bahá'u'lláh. After his declaration in April-May 1863, the book had everything to do with him. This leap of logic and faith requires some explanation. With its focus on apocalyptic events, the literary enterprise of the Book of Certitude is that of biblical and Qur'anic exegesis, aimed at vindicating the Báb's prophetic claims. In large part this is achieved through an ingenious argument to assert the possibility (in fact, the certainty) of post-Qur'anic revelation. The argument served more to establish Bahá'u'lláh's credentials than those of the Báb, for in practice the Book of

Certitude was used extensively in the propagation of the Bahá'í cause. The reason for this is simple.

The text of the Book of Certitude remained the same, but the context underwent a radical shift following Bahá'u'lláh's declaration less than two years after the Book of Certitude was written. Once the context had shifted in terms of authority—a shift in primary authority from the Báb to Bahá'u'lláh himself the Book of Certitude—was used as a reflexive validation of the [p. 247] author's own prophetic credentials. Suffice it to say that the case argued on behalf of the Báb easily doubled for Bahá'u'lláh himself, irrespective of original intent. The picture that emerges is this: Soon (a year or so) after the revelation of the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh's defence of the Báb turned full-circle. The question remains: Was this an intentional artifice?

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH: FIGURATION-BASED RATIONALE FOR SYMBOLISM

In order to reject a reductive argument, I have avoided any formal attempt to trace lines of influence. Standing within an Islamic worldview, Bahá'u'lláh drew on a rich exegetical heritage, and the broad range of his own exegetical techniques attests to the acquisitive nature of the exegetical tradition of Qur'án commentary.

An additional “procedural device” was at work in the Book of Certitude: interscriptural exegesis. This device establishes interpretive parity between the Qur'án and the sayings of Jesus. In an Islamic context, Bahá'u'lláh's use of interscriptural exegesis is proportionally remarkable, considering that so much of the Book of Certitude concerns the Minor Apocalypse of Matthew 24. With the exception of this last device, Bahá'u'lláh's exegetical techniques are classically Islamic. At the same time, such techniques are brought to bear on the novel problem which the Báb had raised by his claim to revelation.

In terms of his overall exegetical strategy, Bahá'u'lláh advanced a figuration-based rationale for symbolism. Though his terminology shows little overlap with the sophisticated Islamic discipline of rhetoric (*ilm, al-balágha*),³⁷ some of Bahá'u'lláh's arguments from implausibility are clearly rhetorical, and as such they establish an informally semantic basis for non-literal interpretation. The use of commonsense semantic logic in the Book of Certitude is integral to the structure of Bahá'u'lláh's basic argument.

[p. 248] For rhetoricians, the classic example of Qur'anic symbolism was “the hand of God: “And they do not esteem God as He ought to be esteemed when He grips the whole earth on the Day of Resurrection and the heavens are folded in His right hand.” (Qur'án 39:67) Added to this paradigmatic verse were a number of other examples which were in effect cog-

nitive satellites. To a modern mind, the symbolic nature of such an expression might appear obvious. Not so for orthodox Islam. One champion of orthodoxy, 'Alí al-Qará al-Harawí (d. 1605 C.E.), stated categorically: "As a matter of fact, I have found that the theological fathers unanimously say that it is not allowed to interpret the hand of God metaphorically."³⁸ Whether or not one accepts the "hand of God" as figurative, the verse at Qur'án 39:67 is really no different. It is simply an *eschatological* hand of God.

On this verse, Bahá'u'lláh points to the anthropomorphistic entrapment which a literal reading poses:

And now, be fair in thy judgment. Were this verse [Qur'an 39:67] to have the meaning which men suppose it to have,³⁹ of what profit, one may ask could it be to man? Moreover, it is evident and manifest that no such hand as could be seen by human eye could accomplish such deeds, or could possibly be ascribed to the exalted Essence of the one true God. Nay, to acknowledge such a thing is naught but sheer blasphemy, an utter perversion of the truth.⁴⁰ ...

Know verily that the purpose underlying all these symbolic terms (*kalimát-i marmúzih*) and abstruse allusions (*ishárát-i mulghazih*),⁴¹ which emanate from the Revealers of God's holy Cause, hath been to test and prove the peoples of the world; that thereby the earth of the pure and illuminated hearts may be known from the perishable and barren soil.⁴²

Bahá'u'lláh's method for discriminating between literal and figurative expressions involves an analysis of logical structure versus surface structure. His approach might be [p. 249] summed up negatively: "Were it [a figurative verse just cited] to be literally interpreted, it would never correspond with the truth."⁴³ The underlying assumptions governing this assertion, apart from the resolution of anthropomorphisms ascribed to the divinity, include an overruling of belief in the suspension of natural law and a rejection of exegesis that fails to search for meaning in the deep structure of text.

One might say that, from a Bahá'í perspective, the most literal reading of scripture is not always the most "faithful." In the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh criticizes populist Christian fundamentalism, or literalism predicated on a belief in scriptural inerrancy. Perhaps it is not so much the interpretations themselves to which Bahá'u'lláh objects, but more the loss of spiritual discernment caused by literalism, particularly in the inability to perceive spiritual qualities in a new revelation which presents itself from outside of the Christian community. In terms of Bahá'í salvation history, what leads to the gravest error of faith is the loss of pattern recogni-

tion. The prophetic character of Muḥammad should have been self-evident, but the Qur'án was, in effect, the wrong “miracle,” because it was contrary to popular Christian expectations.

Those responsible for perpetuating a literalist view of prophecy are the nameless, but very real, Christian “divines”:

Inasmuch as the Christian divines have failed to apprehend the meaning of these words [Matt. 24:29–31], and did not recognize their object and purpose, and have clung to the literal interpretation (*ẓāhir*) of the words of Jesus, they therefore became deprived of the streaming grace of the Muḥammadan Revelation and its showering bounties.

The ignorant among the Christian community, following the example of the leaders of their faith, were likewise prevented from beholding the beauty of the King of glory, inasmuch as those signs which were to accompany the dawn of the sun of the Muḥammadan Dispensation did not actually come to pass.

Thus, ages have passed and centuries rolled away, and that [p. 250] most pure Spirit hath repaired unto the retreats of its ancient sovereignty. Once more hath the eternal Spirit breathed into the mystic trumpet.⁴⁴

Bahá'u'lláh's exegetical rationale for nonliteral readings of scripture is consistent with these earlier definitions of figurative language (*majāz*).⁴⁵ He points out that when the proper meaning of a text turns into an absurdity, the implausible reading acts as a flag, marking the incidence of figurative language:

This is the significance of the well-known words: “The wolf and the Lamb shall feed together.” [Isa. 65:25] Behold the ignorance and folly of those who, like the nations of old, are still expecting to witness the time when these beasts will feed together in one pasture! Such is their low estate. Methinks, never have their lips touched the cup of understanding. ... Besides, of what profit would it be to the world were such a thing to take place?⁴⁶

Bahá'u'lláh's argument for reading the Qur'án symbolically is predicated on the presence of figurative language in scripture. This figuration-based rationale for the nonliteral reading of scripture is the semantic (or semiotic) component of Bahá'u'lláh's exegetical approach. This is not to say that the Book of Certitude draws from the discipline of Islamic rhetoric as such. It does not, as the specific technical terminology of rhetoric is largely (though not wholly) absent in the text. But the two approaches share some basic similarities as to rationale.

The fact that Bahá'u'lláh takes pains to demonstrate the existence of figurative language in the Qur'án is essential to an understanding of the persuasive strategy of the Book of Certitude. The work assumes a slavish literalism in the indoctrinated Muslim's comprehension of

text. The book also assumes that the average Muslim's view of text, gained through exposure to men of the clerical turban, is not only [p. 251] deficient but wrong. What the reader has likely been taught in the mosque is a view of scriptural inerrancy based on literal truth. In the fundamentalist Islamic perspective, all scripture is to be read literally.

This kind of religious indoctrination assured that the eschaton remained essentially a cosmic combat myth, filled with bizarre, macabre, and supernatural elements, effectively a barrier to its own realization. Barring the suspension of natural law, the eschaton could never be realized, much less a new worldview embraced. The eschaton remained in the hands of the sacerdotal mythmakers in the Shí'í world, whose apocalyptic fiction was supported by a plethora of spurious traditions.

Tradition had its impact on the reader's (or, more accurately, the hearer's) encounter with the Qur'án. Being told that the ass of the Antichrist would be forty miles wide, or that the blood shed in the crusade waged by the Qá'im would reach to the stirrups of his steed, biased the average Shí'í against a symbolic reading of the text. If traditions were so phantastic in nature, one could hardly expect otherwise in interpreting the Qur'án.

To counter the monopoly of orthodox literalism, Bahá'u'lláh argues by appeal to absurdity: "Were the prophecies recorded in the Gospel [and, by implication, the Qur'án] to be literally fulfilled," Bahá'u'lláh reasons, "... who would dare ... wax disdainful?"⁴⁷ "In such utterances [speaking of scripture that should not admit of literal interpretation] the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended."⁴⁸ "Be fair," the reader is counselled, "Were these people to acknowledge the truth of these luminous words and holy allusions ... how could they continue to cleave unto these glaring absurdities?"⁴⁹ Speaking of the denials ascribed to the Jews of Muḥammad's time, Bahá'u'lláh draws the analogy to this day, saying: "Behold the absurdity of their saying; how far it hath strayed from the path of knowledge and understanding! Observe how in this day also, all these people [p. 252] have occupied themselves with such foolish absurdities."⁵⁰

Bahá'u'lláh's various appeals to absurdity are calculated to rule out received understandings of text. He exposes the contextual element of a text, arguing the unlikelihood of a given word or phrase taken at its face value. By so doing, the nonliteral dimension is opened up to idiomatic or even symbolic possibilities. Bahá'u'lláh then adduces figurative traditions as extra-Qur'anic examples of revelation, much as a rhetorician would adduce specimens of pre-Islamic poetry to throw light on an uncertain verse, though the poetry itself is not considered revelation, nor is any Qur'anic passage considered "verse."

This analysis—comparing Bahá'u'lláh's rationale for Qur'anic figuration with that of Islamic rhetoric—is not original. Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, whose *Kitáb al-Fará'id* is an important Bahá'í work in defense of the Book of Certitude, explicitly invokes the findings of rhetoric in justifying Bahá'u'lláh's symbolic interpretation of the Qur'án. Abú'l-Faḍl emphasizes the distinction between books of rhetoric (*bayániyya*) and demonstrative treatises (*is-tidláliyya*),⁵¹ as if to suggest that this is why the categories of rhetoric are absent in the Book of Certitude. Whether or not this implication is correct, Abu'l-Faḍl does refer to a work of rhetoric, the *Sharḥ al-Talkhís* of al-Taftázání (d. 1389 C.E.),⁵² for whom he expresses respect.⁵³ The thrust of Abu'l-Faḍl's subsequent remarks is that Bahá'u'lláh's figurative reading of prophetic Qur'anic verses does have an empirical basis, supported in a general way by the findings of rhetoric. In their seminary training, Muslim clerics were normally taught the rudiments of *'ilm al-bayán*, the science of rhetoric. This included some familiarity with figures of speech in Arabic. For the benefit of his learned opponent, or at least for the benefit of the reader in general, Abu'l-Faḍl reviews figures of speech in the Qur'án.

Elsewhere in *Kitáb al-Fará'id*, Abu'l-Faḍl states that literal interpretation is normally indicated for passages in [p. 253] scripture pertaining explicitly to laws and to history, whereas symbolic interpretation (*ta'wíl*) is indicated for eschatological texts.⁵⁴ In another work, *Miracles and Metaphors*, he also observes:

They [the Prophets] conversed as was appropriate to their audience and hid certain realities behind the curtain of allusion. They have secluded the holy maidens of meaning in the palaces of sacred verses, veiling them in eloquent metaphors. ... The possibility that these verses should be interpreted figuratively is hardly a remote one. ... Moreover, the traditions and practice of the Prophet have genuinely established and made it abundantly clear that the verses of the Qur'án have mysterious and profound esoteric meanings and exalted, subtle, figurative interpretations. ... By figurative interpretation is meant only the original meanings intended, which God veiled in the inner depths of the verses and hid behind a curtain of metaphors.⁵⁵

To put the matter more clearly: there is no doubt that the prophets to whom the books were revealed were human beings like all other men and spoke in the same way that other human beings speak. They expressed what was revealed to them in the same way that others express their own consciences. It is not rationally untenable that some of these expressions contain metaphors and figures of speech, metonymies, and similes.⁵⁶

... The meaning of "interpretation" is the concealed significance with which He has endued these words through metaphors, similes, metonymies, and other figurative usages.⁵⁷

[On Qur'án 13:2: "God is He Who raised up the heavens without pillars you can see."] In the holy *Book of Certitude*, the meaning of the term "heavens" was explained as referring to the religions. ... The word "heavens" was metaphorically applied to religion because of its loftiness and majesty. ... It is not possible to interpret the term "heavens" in this noble verse literally, to mean the sky. Anyone with a knowledge of astronomy knows that the physical sky cannot have pillars, since it is inconceivable that this outward sky should rest on any support, whether one depends on the ancient Ptolemaic form of astronomy or the new European form.⁵⁸

[p. 254] This kind of argument represents an extension of Bahá'u'lláh's appeal to absurdity against the excesses of literalism. Abu'l-Faḍl simply invokes the categories of Islamic rhetoric to establish Bahá'u'lláh's attitude to text on an empirical rhetorical basis. Whenever a literal reading presents an absurdity, Bahá'u'lláh would habituate the reader into questioning: "If they maintain that these terms bear reference to this material universe, how could it be possible ... ?"⁵⁹ The *Book of Certitude* did more than explicate some important eschatological texts. It established a method of interpretation.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S EXEGETICAL TECHNIQUES: WORLDS OF CORRESPONDENCES AND EXEGETICAL METAPHORS

Thanks to the elegant theoretical groundwork laid out by Wansbrough in his *Qur'anic Studies*, we were able to show how Bahá'u'lláh's tools of exegesis were drawn from the dozen or so kinds of procedural devices which the great Muslim scholars had at their disposal within the classical *tafsír* tradition. If the reader were to put all of Bahá'u'lláh's stylistic and exegetical metaphors together, an allegorical picture of a spiritual world would emerge from the resulting literary montage. This symbolically parallel universe is filled with celestial imagery, rife with metaphors from nature, and infused with what one might call royalist imagery. Allegory does require some sort of conceptual framework within which to create its extended metaphor, and this is achieved metaphysically in the *Book of Certitude* through reference to a world of correspondences.

This is as much a question of style as of content. Bahá'u'lláh's writing is infused with nature imagery, and his method of discourse involves frequent use of genitive-metaphors. In early Islamic linguistic exegesis, when confronted with difficult passages in the Qur'án exegetes would endeavor to restore the text to its natural mode of expression. One such [p. 255] technique was recourse to the "exegetical genitive" (*iḍáfat al-tafsír*).⁶⁰ Our author has employed such "exegetical genitives" for stylistic as well as explicative purposes.

Behind his poetic style is a rich Persian literary heritage. For lack of space, I cannot enumerate the many resonances struck between Bahá'u'lláh's writing style and its Persian literary background. One recent study, however, attempts to recapitulate an important conceptual element in that literary background. In her study of "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition," Meisamís observations on the Persian religious literary tradition are relevant to an appreciation of Bahá'u'lláh's mode of discourse:

Allegorical gardens abound throughout the literatures of the world but especially in medieval literature, both Western and Islamic; they reflect an important characteristic aspect of medieval thought. The medieval conception of the garden was of a place wherein the soul might read the most profound spiritual lessons.

The idea of the Book of Nature, "written" by God to provide signs of Himself, is found both in Christianity and in Islam: the Augustinian view "that beauty is not mere spectacle but God's rhetoric in the book of creation" is echoed in the Islamic, that "Nature is a fabric of symbols, which must be read according to their meanings."

... Although the concept of things as signs was primarily a theological rather than a literary notion, the view of creation as God's rhetoric undoubtedly supported the figurative use of the garden in secular literature—a usage further supported by the medieval habit of analogical thought. The medieval period (for Islam no less than Christianity) was "an era of the symbol," itself conceived of "as an instrument capable of penetrating truth, over and beyond any brief and incidental use in mere illustration."

While the concept of natural objects as "signs" is essentially metaphorical, analogical symbolism is based on the conception of the existence of harmonies and correspondences between the [p. 256] various orders of nature, the most thoroughgoing expression of which is the parallelism between the macrocosm, nature, and the microcosm, man.⁶¹

Not everything medieval is backward, and perhaps it could be said that this view of the universe pervades all religious literature, whether in the writings of mystics, in the homilies of moralists, or in formal cosmologies. Bahá'u'lláh reflects this religious heritage in the Book of Certitude.

At the center of paradise, in its allegorical garden, stands the eschatological king. Royalist imagery pervades—one might even say, dominates—all of Bahá'u'lláh's writings wherever references to authority occur. One important point that needs to be made is that all of the eschatological imagery concerning the station of the Báb was later generalized to dignify Bahá'u'lláh himself. In the course of his post-declaration proclamation to kings and ecclesias-

tics, Bahá'u'lláh assumed the panoply of messianic dignities originally associated with his precursor.

This was made possible because, doctrinally, the Book of Certitude articulated an inclusivist, mystical prophetology in which every prophetic dignity was shared by one and all of the Manifestations of God. The constellation of images for one Manifestation of God is transferable to the next such figure in salvation history. Bahá'u'lláh inherits crown and sceptre from the Báb and rules from the same spiritual throne.

The rupture with Islam having been effected by the Báb, the Bahá'í religion accepted this break and rationalized it. Though overtly Islamic in its hermeneutical enterprise, the Book of Certitude takes on a unique role as a *non-Muslim* work of Qur'anic exegesis. Bahá'u'lláh moved beyond Islam in his subsequent role as legislator. His followers could argue his authority to do so on the basis of that text.

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TRANSFORMING ESCHATOLOGY INTO AUTHORITY: BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S MESSIANIC SECRET

The fact of Bahá'u'lláh's charisma is freely acknowledged in all sources. Because of this personal magnetism, the majority of Bábís were drawn to him. One could also say that Bahá'u'lláh's writings possessed a certain literary charisma as well. The question that has to be answered is this: His personal charisma apart, is there evidence that at least a few Bábís discerned in Bahá'u'lláh's Baghdad writings a veiled theophanic claim? Was a messianic secret encoded within the Book of Certitude?⁶²

In his pre-declaration writings (1852–63), Bahá'u'lláh's theophanic expressions could have been construed as ecstatic Sufi locutions. On the face of it, resemblance to Sufi mystical claims presents a case against messianic secrecy. Cole, on the other hand, explains that Bahá'u'lláh had indeed adapted Bábí ideas and motifs to Sufi conventions for some very good reasons.⁶³

Beyond Cole's analysis is perhaps another dynamic at work. The stylized nature of Bahá'u'lláh's theophanic locutions was an artifice of ambiguity to mask, in Sufi dress, a claim to revelation, yet still allow for possible messianic readings. Some of those who personally knew the Bábí leader saw through the artifice. As Salmání the Barber recounts of Bahá'u'lláh in perhaps the very year the Book of Certitude was revealed: "The Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh]... had not yet made an explicit declaration of His Mission. He would say whatever the Manifestation of God would say, but in all He uttered there was no: 'I am He!'"⁶⁴

Without attempting a formal study of other texts in the Baghdad period, it is important to see the Book of Certitude in its historical context. MacEoin has stated rather categorically that four of the major works of the period are of limited value (at best) in determining Bahá'u'lláh's sense of mission and status, and that other writings betray a marked Sufi influence sufficient to explain Bahá'u'lláh's theophanic ebullience:

[p. 258] The best-known of Bahá' Alláh's Baghdad works, such as the *Kitáb-i Íqán*, *Jawáhir al-asrár*, *Kalimát-i maknúna*, *Haft wádí*—all of which can be dated with a high degree of certainty—are, unfortunately, of restricted usefulness as sources for a serious discussion of his developing claims. Along with several other works written either in Kurdistán or in the years after his return from there (such as the *Qaṣída 'izz warqá'iyya*, *Lawḥ-i ḥúriyya*, or *Lawḥ-i ghulám al-khuld*) these writings show strong traces of Şúfí influence, employing language and concepts that need not have attracted undue attention at the time of their composition.

The Şúfí traditions of *shathíyyát* (ecstatic utterances often voiced in the first person as though spoken by the divinity) and visionary experiences are so well established that it would be unwise to lay undue stress on similar statements in Bahá' Alláh's writings, let alone use them as evidence of unusual or unique claims. It is, of course, conceivable that the repeated use of *shathíyyát* may have worked its influence on Núrí's [i.e. Bahá'u'lláh's] mind and facilitated the subsequent shift to theophanic utterance of a more personal kind.⁶⁵

There is one methodological irony to this: MacEoin relies heavily on a passage in the Book of Certitude to argue in the other direction: that Bahá'u'lláh points to Şubḥ-i Azal as the locus of revelation at the time,⁶⁶ thus minimizing considerations of Bahá'u'lláh's own sense of what MacEoin terms "divine afflatus."

This is an interesting hypothesis, which reads Bahá'u'lláh's self-references in light of his references to Azal. An equally nuanced developmental approach has been presented by Cole, who was the first to argue, in an academic context, the role of messianic secrecy in Bahá'u'lláh's Baghdad writings.⁶⁷

One methodological issue is left unaddressed: what of the oral history of the period? Do we discount wholesale the testimony of those who read Bahá'u'lláh's writings at the time and who drew their own conclusions? Should we overrule the evidence of Bábí converts to Bahá'u'lláh prior to his declaration?

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Among the primary sources MacEoin deems of limited use for charting the development of Bahá'u'lláh's claims is the "Ode of the Dove" (*Qaṣída 'izz warqá'iyya*). After reading this text, an eminent early Bahá'í, Mullá Muḥammad-Riḍá of Yazd, became one of the first to perceive the mission of Bahá'u'lláh prior to his declaration. The mullá saw the messianic writing on the wall, so to speak, and figured out who Bahá'u'lláh "really was" purely on the basis of this ode. Samandar (one of the nineteen "Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh") writes:

He himself [Mullá Muḥammad-Riḍá] has been heard to say: "When Raḍíu'r-Rúḥ, one of the most eminent divines to believe [in the Báb], came from Baghdád to Yazd, he had certain Writings with him, including *Qaṣídiy-i-'Izz-i-Varqá'iyiyih*. [Bahá'u'lláh composed this ode in Sulaymáníyyih.] As soon as I set eyes on it, I exclaimed spontaneously: *Man yuzhiruhu'lláh* of the Bayán has come." He said: "The One Whose words these are has not made such a claim." I replied: "On the throne of these words I see the Promised One of the Bayán seated." Then Raḍíu'r-Rúḥ said: "Henceforth it is difficult to consort with you."⁶⁸

Cole has detected in the language of this poem some rather explicit prophetological self-references (lines 91-94), over which MacEoin and Cole had a debate.⁶⁹ In a study which focuses on this ode, Cole argues that the presence in this mystical poem of the terms for prophetic mission (*ba'tha*), mystical ascent (*mi'rāj*), and exile (*hijra*) indicates that Bahá'u'lláh has drawn an exact parallel to the major prophetic events in the career of the prophet Muḥammad.⁷⁰ This argument based on key words in the text is not without controversy, since MacEoin's translation of this passage stands as an alternative to Cole's.⁷¹

Messianic secrecy is bound up with the theme of concealment. Another of the texts MacEoin dismisses is "The Essence [lit., Gems] of the Mysteries" (*Jawáhir al-asrár*), to which Bahá'u'lláh alludes in the Book of Certitude.⁷² In the opening [p. 260] of this Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh states that he has concealed himself in the "nest" of his "Mystery," forbidden from revealing the wonders of God's knowledge, the gems of His wisdom, and the glories of His power which God has bestowed upon him.⁷³ Writing at a time of intense personal oppression at the hands of the proverbial "hounds" and "jackals" of the land, Bahá'u'lláh has chosen to impart a few of the "mysteries" to the recipient of this Tablet, but has left certain of the mysteries veiled.⁷⁴ He indicates that one such mystery, if disclosed, would trigger such ecstasy and instill such devotion in the hearts of men that they would willingly sacrifice their lives for its sake. But no permission had as yet been granted to unveil this concealed mystery. The secret thus remained hidden in the treasureholds of power.⁷⁵

Space does not permit a detailed survey of the forty or so works of the Baghdad period for further evidences of Bahá'u'lláh's messianic secrecy.⁷⁶ I will simply mention such works as the "Tablet of the City of Radiant Acquiescence" (*Lawḥ madínat al-riḍá*),⁷⁷ the "Chapter of Counsel" (*Súrat al-nuṣḥ*),⁷⁸ the poem "From the Divine Garden" (*Az-bágh-i iláhi*),⁷⁹ and so forth, which are expressive of Bahá'u'lláh's impending declaration.⁸⁰

Methodologically, an interpretive strategy that takes into account the reactions of fellow Bábís to Bahá'u'lláh's writings is a sound one. MacEoin uses it to support his reconstruction of stages in Bahá'u'lláh's evolving self-consciousness. Oral sources suggesting that some Bábís at least did perceive in Bahá'u'lláh's writings a veiled claim are underrepresented in MacEoin's argument. Of course, these pro-Bahá'í sources are over-represented in Bahá'í discussions.

A controversy such as this is not to be "won," but to be learned from. A certain tolerance of open discussion of these issues is academically necessary. Otherwise, the conversation lapses into polemic. In the treatment that follows, the reader should bear in mind that MacEoin is to be credited with having [p. 261] raised these issues to the level of current topical discussion within an academic context. The frequent references to MacEoin's argument in the following pages are not intended as an attack. Irrespective of the outcome of the scholarly debate, it is important to maintain an attitude of decorum, one that has not always characterized such deliberations.

To resume, if the basic problem of history is vulnerability to denial, the messianic secrecy hypothesis cannot stand on anecdotal material alone, especially if any of the reminiscences is the reflex of selective memory and verges on the hagiographical. Anecdotal material should be balanced by evidence from antagonistic sources, as well as from disinterested sources.

On methodological grounds, the way in which the Book of Certitude was read and understood by the Bábís themselves provides a check and balance to a purely textual approach. The sociology of religion has taught us one basic rule of interpretation: Associated with every important scripture is a faith community, a fact which must place constraints on interpretation. The Bábí community provides the key interpretational context for the Book of Certitude.⁸¹ From its very reception, this work had a tremendous impact among the Bábís. In Isfahan as early as 1862, initial Bábí response to the Book of Certitude was overwhelming, so much so that the partisans of Şubḥ-i Azal started the rumor that Azal had actually written it.⁸²

Doctrinally, the Book of Certitude partakes of religious reform, taking religion out of the hands of divines. The Báb had advanced his claim; Bahá'u'lláh had not. He could be open about his predecessor; his own self-references were couched in innuendo. One must appreciate

this striking element of authorial reflexivity. On it depends a proper interpretation of the Book of Certitude, without which an important dimension of the sub-text is lost.

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MESSIANICALLY CHARGED CIRCUMLOCUTIONS

For the sake of recapitulation, some possible instances of messianically charged circumlocutions in the Book of Certitude will be presented. Ten texts have been selected. These will be accompanied with a few remarks on some significant features of the Persian (and occasionally Arabic) original.

The messianic secrecy hypothesis requires evidence. To assert is not to prove. The counter-case against messianic secrecy argues along developmental lines, in which Bahá'u'lláh's self-consciousness is shown to have gradually evolved. In support of the messianic secrecy approach, the following texts may be adduced:

1. And now take heed, O brother! If such things be revealed in this Dispensation, and such incidents come to pass, at the present time, what would the people do? ... How far are they from hearkening unto the voice that declareth: Lo! a Jesus hath appeared out of the breath of the Holy Ghost, and a Moses summoned to a divinely-appointed task!

... If the eye of justice be opened, it will readily recognize, in the light of that which hath been mentioned, that He, Who is the Cause (*mazhar*) and ultimate Purpose of all these things, is made manifest in this day.

... Great God! When the stream of utterance reached this stage, We beheld, and lo! the sweet savours of God were being wafted from the day-spring of Revelation, and the morning breeze was blowing out of the Sheba of the Eternal. ... Without word It unfoldeth the inner mysteries (*ramz-i ma'áni*) and without speech it revealeth the secret of the divine sayings (*asrár-i tibyán*).

... Upon the anenomes of the garden of love It bestoweth the mysteries of truth, and within the breasts of lovers It entrusteth the symbols (*rumúz*) of the innermost subtleties (*raqáyiq*). At this hour, so liberal is the outpouring of Its grace that the holy Spirit (*rúh al-quddús*) itself is envious!

... The universe is pregnant with these manifold bounties, awaiting the hour when the effects of Its unseen gifts will be made manifest in the world. ... Verily, I say, so fierce is the [p. 263] blaze of the Bush of love, burning in the Sinai of the heart, that the streaming waters of holy utterance can never quench its flame. Oceans can never allay this

Leviathan's burning thirst, and this Phoenix of the undying fire can abide nowhere save in the glow of the countenance of the Well-Beloved.⁸³

All that is lacking in this discourse is an explicit claim to revelation. The language of secrecy is obvious. "Mysteries of truth" (*asrár-i ḥaqáyiḡ*) and "symbols" (*rumúz*) are characterized by their "innermost subtleties" (*raqáyiḡ*). Bahá'u'lláh's use of such terms deserves comment. Two levels of discourse are operative. Ostensibly, Bahá'u'lláh is talking about the Báb, who is already "manifest." There is a skillful ambiguity at play here. Bahá'u'lláh could just as easily be speaking of himself, without drawing undue attention.

Then there is a transition to reflexive discourse. The author speaks of the Holy Spirit, itself the medium of revelation in Islamic context. This passage has the appearance of a mystical discourse. The author is God-intoxicated. The description of the universe could be simply poetic, inspirational. But as one works through this and later texts, one cannot escape the feeling that the author knows something we do not. Bahá'u'lláh is privy to a secret.

How, for instance, does he know that "the universe is [eschatologically] pregnant?" At least on a literary level, Bahá'u'lláh sees into the heart of the universe, perceives the workings of a spiritual force more profound than the Holy Spirit, and describes his devotion to God in the superlative. He either is given to unbridled hyperbole or is on the verge of some spiritual discovery or disclosure. Then comes the classic revelatory signature that marks Bahá'u'lláh's style: "Thus have We illuminated the heavens of utterance with the splendours of divine wisdom and understanding."⁸⁴ This literary flourish is a classic revelatory give-away. This kind of statement is a stylistically identifiable characteristic of Bahá'u'lláh's later writings. It is so recurrent as to be formulaic. It is the imprimatur of [p. 264] revelation.

The possibility is entertained that a new Jesus or a Moses (*va yá Músá*) might appear. The "Bush of love" (*sidrahy-i 'ishq*) and the "Sinai of the heart" (*sínáy-i ḥubb*) are genitive metaphors which draw from a rich tradition of biblical and Qur'anic imagery. Allusion to the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai is familiar; it recalls the revelation given to Moses. Bahá'u'lláh's use of such imagery here is self-referential. His identification with Moses is figurative, symbolic, secretive. At the same time, it is circumlocutional and expressive of his messianic secret. The universe is pregnant, because of an impending revelation. "This Phoenix of the undying fire" (*ín samandar-i nári*) is about to re-emerge from the ashes of the past. Clearly, the eschatological tension is building.

2. We have digressed (*dúr mándím*) from the purpose of Our argument, although whatsoever is mentioned serveth only to confirm Our purpose. By God! however great Our desire to be brief (*míkháham ikhtiṣár namáyam*), yet We feel (*mí-bínám*) We cannot restrain Our pen!

Notwithstanding all that We have mentioned, how innumerable are the pearls which have remained unpierced in the shell of Our heart! How many the *ḥúrís* of inner meaning that are as yet concealed within the chambers of divine wisdom! None hath yet approached them;—*ḥúrís*, “whom no man nor spirit hath touched before.” (Qur’an 55:56.)

Notwithstanding all that hath been said, it seemeth as if not one letter of Our purpose hath been uttered, nor a single sign (*ramzî*) divulged concerning Our object. When will a faithful seeker be found who will don the garb of pilgrimage, attain the Ka’bih of the heart’s desire, and, without ear or tongue, discover the mysteries (*asrár*) of divine utterance?⁸⁵

The passage above has taken on the tone of a lamentation. There appears to be recourse to Oriental hyperbole, exaggeration for effect. The hyperbole is itself exaggerated, and in support of this assertion one genitive metaphor may be adduced, [p. 265] which Shoghi Effendi translates as “the chambers of divine wisdom.” In the Persian text, we read *ghuraf-háy-i ḥikmat*. Here we encounter a curious stylistic feature in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings: the use of a compound plural in two languages at once (i.e., creating a syntactically Persianized hybrid of an Arabic loan-word for effect). In the singular, the Arabic word for “chamber” is *ghurfa*, from which derives the Arabic sound plural *ghuraf*.⁸⁶ On top of this is the Persian enclitic *há*, the plural marker classically used for irrational beings and inanimate objects. The effect of this compound plural, with a Persian suffix grafted onto an Arabic loan-word already in plural form, is to give emphasis to the superlative number of secret chambers which the elusive *ḥúrís* of paradise inhabit.

On closer examination, the element of exaggeration dissolves when we consider that figuratively Bahá’u’lláh may simply be stating that his messianic status has, for the most part, escaped the discernment of his fellow Bábís. Bahá’u’lláh clearly has some secrets. The real secret is that he is the secret: “Meditate profoundly, that the secret of things unseen may (*asrár-i umúr-i ghaybí*) be revealed unto you, that you may inhale the sweetness of a spiritual and imperishable fragrance.”⁸⁷ Subliminal hints such as this abound in the Book of Certitude. Taken singly, each proves nothing. Taken together, much is said that is left unsaid.

Paradise is somehow secreted within Bahá’u’lláh’s heart. The *ḥúrís*, who represent the inmost thoughts of our author, have not been profaned, nor has their existence ever been guessed at. The subtext of “chambers of divine wisdom” is the “chambers of [Bahá’u’lláh’s]

divine wisdom.” This allusion to his prophetic credentials is followed by a lamentation to the effect that it seemed as though not “a single sign” (*ramzī*) had been “divulged concerning Our object.” In other words, Bahá’u’lláh is the subject.

Reference to pilgrimage comes as a surprise, the not-so-subtle hint that Bahá’u’lláh himself should be an object of veneration.⁸⁸ For Islam, no earthly symbol could be more holy [p. 266] than the Kaaba in Mecca.

3. Ere long, thine eyes will behold the standards of divine power unfurled throughout all regions, and the signs of His triumphant might and sovereignty manifest in every land. ... Such are the strains of the celestial melody which the immortal Bird of Heaven, warbling upon the Sadrih of Bahá, poureth out upon thee, that, by the permission of God, thou mayest tread the path of divine knowledge and wisdom.⁸⁹

The first sentence cited above is a prophecy: “Ere long” (*‘an qarīb*). Bahá’u’lláh promises that the recipient of the Book of Certitude—the Báb’s uncle—would soon witness the evidences of divine influence at work in the world. The problem was that he could not see any such evidences. Hence his questions—doubts which occasioned the revelation of the Book of Certitude. Note that it is individual perception that is assured here, not a collective realization. Beyond all the symbolic proofs following reproofs of literalists, this prophecy should have had a psychological effect. It must have contributed to the process of transforming the uncle’s doubt into certitude. The reader should see invisibly what cannot be visibly seen.

The second sentence in this passage represents one of Bahá’u’lláh’s flights of Arabic in the otherwise Persian Kitáb-i Íqán. The obvious self-reference by name employs the metaphor of a celestial perch upon which the Bird of Heaven sings. This is no ordinary bird, so this can be no ordinary tree. The tree bears a name, the Sidra of Bahá (*Sidrat al-Bahá*, Lote-Tree of Splendor), and the reader has to discern if this is merely a poetic metaphor as part of an ornate narrative style: Or is there something of deeper significance being communicated here?

The “bird of heaven” turns out to be either a “dove of eternity” or an “immortal pigeon” (*ḥamámat al-baqá*). Should this be a Persian literary pigeon in Arabic plumage, it might well be a messenger pigeon.⁹⁰ On comparative grounds, and as far [p. 267] back as ancient Egypt, birds have symbolized spirits. If indeed a celestial pigeon, then poetically this bird of heaven is privy to revelations from Heaven. The Sidra of Bahá is an intermediary, an agent of revelation. The branch becomes the locus of revelation. Upon it, God sings. The bird sings of God, of course. But in this case, God sings through the bird. This is an interpretive reading of the text, to be sure. Yet the text is capable of supporting such a reading without demanding it.

The ambiguity is important. It is the artifice. It obscures the obvious for those who are oblivious to Bahá'u'lláh's eschatological hints. It makes obvious the obscure for the discerning—those who are willing to suspend belief in the prodigious eschaton of Shí'í tradition and who are willing to extend belief to the idealized, realized eschaton which breaks from that past while claiming continuity with it. The fulfillment motif functions as a doctrinal and legal transcendence. It is cast in the language of tradition, but redefines every decisive word within it. There may not be a new heaven and a new earth except in a poetic manner of speaking. But there is a new worldview of heaven and earth, as seen in the bird's-eye view of the "immortal Bird of heaven, warbling upon the Sadrih of Bahá."

A messianic secret is hardly a literary secret if it has no clue, nor would it invite speculation unless ambiguity were maintained. No reading of a skillfully ambiguous text can claim certainty. The intrusion of Bahá'u'lláh's name here in the narrative cannot have been whimsical, whatever the author would have had us understand by it.

4. And now, We beseech the people of the Bayán, all the learned, the sages, the divines, and witnesses amongst them, not to forget the wishes and admonitions revealed in their Book. Let them, at all times, fix their gaze upon the essentials of His Cause, lest when He, Who is the Quintessence of truth, the inmost Reality of all things, the Source of all light, is made manifest, they cling unto certain passages of the Book, and [p. 268] inflict upon Him that which was inflicted in the Dispensation of the Qur'án. For, verily, powerful is He, the King of divine might, to extinguish with one letter of His wondrous words, the breath of life in the whole of the Bayán and the people thereof, and with one letter bestow upon them a new and everlasting life. ...

Take heed and be watchful; and remember that all things have their final consummation in belief in Him, in attainment unto His day, and in the realization of His divine presence.⁹¹

The Mustagháth is a kind of eschatological mystery figure. We see his shadow, and that is about all. The admonition to the Bábís to be "watchful" has a definite hint of imminence, and succeeds in keeping taut the wire of eschatological tension. The Báb, after all, spoke over and over of the Mustagháth, in whom the eschaton will reach its final consummation. Bahá'u'lláh is at pains to remind the Bábís of such. Having as a community paid with its blood to prove allegiance to the Báb, it could not have been an easy leap of faith to transfer allegiance to another messianic claimant.

Despite certain long-term expectations connected with the numerical value of the code word *Mustagháth*, there is evidence to support a short-term expectancy associated with this figure. A bit of oral history will throw some light on the nature of this expectancy. Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí (d. 1920) relates:

In those days everyone was convinced that the coming of “Him Whom God shall make manifest” was at hand. I often used to say ... that if the Dispensation of the Báb ... were not followed immediately by the Dispensation of “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” then all the writings, tablets and testimonies of the Báb would remain unfulfilled and were useless.⁹²

The confidence with which Bahá’u’lláh writes of the *Mustagháth* must have aroused some suspicion that he knew more than he was letting on. The ambiguity of the messianic secret is adroitly maintained in the Book of Certitude through [p. 269] third-person self-references such as the excerpt above. Bahá’u’lláh strives to point the reader *beyond* the Báb. The reader will feel obliged to start looking, to keep his eyes open, and possibly to look to Bahá’u’lláh for further guidance on this question. Indeed, he makes no claim here. But, implicitly, he claims to know.

5. Our hope is that, God willing, the breeze of mercy may blow, and the divine Springtime clothe the tree of being with the robe of a new life; so that we may discover the mysteries of divine Wisdom, and, through His providence, be made independent of the knowledge of all things. We have, as yet, descried none but a handful of souls, destitute of all renown, who have attained unto this station. Let the future disclose what the Judgment of God will ordain, and the Tabernacle of His decree reveal.⁹³

Disclosure of some kind of secret is imminent. The secret is not, however, impenetrable. “As yet” (*tá ḥál*), Bahá’u’lláh informs us, a “handful [of souls]” (*ma’dúdí qalíl*) have already discovered the “mysteries of divine wisdom” (*asrár-i ḥikmat-i rabbání*). They are endowed with the “robe of a new life” (*khil’at-i jadíd*) as a result. This is a robe of honor. As Steingass informs us, a *khil’at* is “an honorific dress with which princes confer dignity upon subjects, consisting at least of turban, robe, and girdle.”⁹⁴ The dominant imagery in this passage is vernal: the “divine Springtime” (*rabí’ iláhi*) has arrived. The imagery is also eschatological. Our author wishes the reader to remain expectant. The “breeze of mercy” (*nasím-i raḥmatí*) carries whispers on the wind, intimations of a future revelation.

6. Say: O people of the earth! Behold this flamelike Youth that speedeth across the limitless profound of the Spirit, heralding unto you the tidings: “Lo: the Lamp of God is shining,” and summoning you to heed His Cause which, though hidden beneath the veils of ancient splendor, shineth in the land of ‘Iráq above the day-spring of holiness.⁹⁵

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The “people of the earth” (*ahl al-arḍ*) are clearly addressed here. For the message to be equal to the audience, it must be of universal moment, and of world-historical consequence. Accordingly, this Arabic passage breathes an air of authority. Attention is called to the author himself, “this flamelike Youth” (*hádhá fatá nári*), who traverses the spiritual realm—within the human psyche—heralding the glad-tidings that the Cause (*al-amr*) or religion of God is to be discovered in the land of Iraq. The “Lamp of God” (*siráj Alláh*) refers to the source of revelation, of illumination. The Lamp of God is Bahá’u’lláh in poetic guise.

Translucent “beneath the veils of [ancient] splendor (*taḥta ḥujubáti al-núri*), this Lamp is hidden (*bi’l-sirr*), yet witnessable (*mashhúdan*). The Lamp is not impossible to find. A veil normally allows a certain amount of light to pass through. The Lamp is so powerful that a single veil could hardly dim its light. Literally, the text suggests there are myriads of veils under which the Lamp is hidden. (The term *ḥujub-át* is the Arabic broken plural of *ḥijáb*, affixed with fem. pl. *-át*.) This Lamp, who is Bahá’u’lláh, still shines through, no matter how many veils are used to conceal it. Ironically, the veils of which Bahá’u’lláh speaks are not spun from cloth. Rather, they are veils of light. In Islamic tradition, veils of light had prevented Muḥammad, during his mystical transport or ascent (*mi’rāj*) to heaven, from beholding God. These veils not only have the power to blind. They have the power to burn. Bahá’u’lláh is speaking as though it were God that was hidden. God was indeed hidden—hidden inside Bahá’u’lláh. This is the classic dichotomy of theophany: polarization between revelation and concealment.

7. May God assist us and assist you, O concourse of the Spirit! that perchance ye may in the time of His Manifestation be graciously aided to perform such deeds, and may in His days attain unto the Presence of God. Furthermore, among the “veils of glory” [p. 271] are such terms as the “Seal of the Prophets” and the like, the removal of which is a supreme achievement in the sight of these base-born and erring souls. All, by reason of these mysterious sayings, these grievous “veils of glory,” have been hindered from beholding the light of truth.⁹⁶

This is another exhortation, addressed to Bábís. Eschatological tension is maintained with the hope, if not the promise, that fulfillment is at hand and that the Bábí must purify himself to become worthy of the requital he longs to see fulfilled. A curious pattern emerges for the more important exhortations in the Book of Certitude: A number of these are in Arabic, as in the first part of the excerpt above. In the Arabic text of this exhortation, the Bábí prophetic code word *al-mustagháth* (which the translator has rendered “Manifestation”) is used.

As if to reinforce previous exegesis, there is a deliberate association made here between the Mustagháth and the “Presence of God” (*liqá’ Alláh*). The Mustagháth, as the Bábí Messiah, is linked to the numinous “Presence,” which is the hidden Messiah of the Qur’án, emerging from behind the (hermeneutical) veil. This eschatological “Presence” undergoes an exegetical transformation at the hands of Bahá’u’lláh, in this interpretive sequence: In a momentary flash of literalism, God appears (the beatific vision), then disappears (anti-anthropomorphism), emerges again as an eschatological idea (Qur’án 33:44), incarnates into a “Manifestation of God,” and is at last identified with the Mustagháth, who is secretly, but perceptibly, Bahá’u’lláh.

8. Were these people, wholly for the sake of God, ... to ponder the verses of the Book [the Qur’an] in their heart, they would of a certainty find whatsoever they seek. In its verses would they find revealed and manifest all the things, be they great or small, that have come to pass in this Dispensation. They would even recognize in them references unto the departure of the [p. 272] Manifestations of the names and attributes of God from out their native land; to the opposition and disdainful arrogance of government and people, and to the dwelling and establishment of the Universal Manifestation in an appointed and specially designated land. No man, however, can comprehend this except he who is possessed of an understanding heart.

We seal Our theme with that which was formerly revealed unto Muḥammad that the seal thereof may shed the fragrance of that holy musk which leadeth men unto the Riqḍán of unfading splendour. He said, and His Word is the truth: “And God calleth to the Abode of Peace [Baghdád]; and He guideth whom He will into the right way” (Qur’an 10:25). For them is an Abode of Peace with their Lord! and He shall be their protector because of their works” (Qur’an 6:127). This He hath revealed that His grace may encompass the world.⁹⁷

It is a common Muslim folk belief, with which the orthodox doubtless agree, that all knowledge in the universe, past and future, is somehow encoded in the Qur'án. For this reason, the holy book is used for purposes of divination, much as one would "throw" the I-Ching. Bahá'u'lláh takes advantage of this sense of Qur'anic totality by asserting that all of the events of which he has been speaking are present in the divinatory dimension of the divine Book.

This passage evokes the Qur'anic description of Paradise as a place of repose. But, on a subtle level, it is mundane geography, not the cartography of paradise, implied here. We know this because Bahá'u'lláh has assured the reader that the Qur'án specifies "in an appointed and specially designated land" (*dar arḍ-i ma'lúm-i makhšúṣ*) the place in which the "Universal Manifestation" (*mazhar-i kulliyih*) would appear.

As if to plant the clue directly beneath the reader's nose, Bahá'u'lláh then adduces two verses which, especially for the local Bábí exiles, would surely have recalled the 'Abbásid Caliph al-Manṣúr's original name for Baghdad in 763 C.E.: *Dár al-Salám*, the Abode of Peace.⁹⁸ By calling attention to [p. 273] Baghdad,⁹⁹ and in using its eschatological epithet, Bahá'u'lláh drops another clue as to his messianic secret.

The theme of exile is also introduced here. The Báb had not been exiled out of his native land. Bahá'u'lláh had. Associating Baghdad with exile is eschatologically flirtatious: Obviously, the Bábís did not have to look very far for the place of exile in "an appointed and specially designated land." It is in their diasporal midst, just as the Qur'án had hinted at all along. In the final analysis, what matters here is not the Qur'án but the exegesis. The Qur'án provides the authority. The exegesis produces the meaning. In effect, the exegesis becomes the Qur'án, in its role as the source of guidance.

What is the purpose of the secrecy motif? Perhaps a complex of factors, not the least of which was timing. Somehow the Bábí community had to be consolidated first, while at the same time being eschatologically primed for new leadership.

9. By God! This Bird of Heaven, now dwelling upon the dust, can, besides these melodies, utter a myriad songs, and is able, apart from these utterances, to unfold innumerable mysteries. Every single note of its unpronounced utterances is immeasurably exalted above all that hath already been revealed, and immensely glorified beyond that which hath streamed from this Pen.

Let the future disclose the hour when the Brides of inner meaning, will, as decreed by the Will of God, hasten forth, unveiled, out of their mystic mansions, and manifest

themselves in the ancient realm of being. ... All proclaim His Revelation, and all unfold the mysteries of His Spirit.¹⁰⁰

This passage openly betrays a secrecy motif, easily interpreted as hidden knowledge the author possesses regarding the eschaton, bordering on the prophetic. Unless taken as pure hyperbole, Bahá'u'lláh's stated ability to unfold "innumerable mysteries"¹⁰¹ suggests an infinity of knowledge and is tantamount to a revelatory claim. This is understood as supernatural knowledge, which the future alone will disclose.

[p. 274] The last sentence in this citation is another exclamation in Arabic, the Islamic language of revelation. The "mysteries of His spirit" (*asrár al-rúh*) recall the song of the "Bird of Heaven" which unfolds "innumerable mysteries" (*rumúz-há*). An apocalypse is like a dream. Its "dream logic" requires decoding. The interpretation of the Qur'anic, eschatological dream makes Bahá'u'lláh a kind of Joseph. The dream interpreter and the interpreter of prophecy not only explicate symbolism, they influence the future. In this sense, the interpretation of prophecy is a self-fulfilling prophecy. In practical terms Bahá'u'lláh will fulfill prophecy by redefining it.

10. Revealed by the "Bá'" and the "Há'." Peace be upon him that inclineth his ear unto the melody of the Mystic Bird calling from the Sadratu'l-Muntahá!¹⁰²

Browne was fully alive to the implications of this colophon.¹⁰³ Most puzzling was the fact that Bahá'u'lláh appeared to claim revelation, yet elsewhere in the Book of Certitude he disavowed having made any claim over any one.¹⁰⁴ (See discussion in Chapter 1.) In retrospect, such hints at revelation, along with self-denials, are consistent with messianic secrecy.

These citations do not exhaust the self-referential evidence in the Book of Certitude. Taken together, the preceding ten excerpts are intended to give a fair representation of the secrecy motif, which is the principal sub-text in the Book of Certitude. The Qur'án has symbols. Each symbol has a secret. The one who knows the secret, in this case, is the Secret. The exegete is the exegesis. Beyond exegesis, the one who has the authority to interpret will assert the authority to legislate. In this light, the Book of Certitude would soon be adduced as proof of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic credentials, enabling him to prosecute his reforms as "World Reformer."¹⁰⁵

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MYSTIC LOCUTION OR THEOPHANIC CLAIM?

This study has taken an affirmative position on the question of Bahá'u'lláh's messianic secret. The secrecy motif has heuristic value in tracing the development of Bahá'u'lláh's messianic consciousness. The passages from the Book of Certitude cited above, as other writings of the Baghdad period, appear to encode artfully crafted "secret messages" intended to sensitize and prepare the Bábí community for the impending shift from Bahá'u'lláh's *de facto* leadership of a seemingly insignificant reform movement to his claim to be the messianic founder of a more international and universal system of belief. Elements of messianic secrecy, as woven into the discourse in the Book of Certitude, may be broken into the following components:

Time: First, Bahá'u'lláh exhorts his fellow Bábís to be watchful, indicating that his contemporaries should maintain an air of expectancy as the advent of the Mustagháth draws near;

Place: Next, there is the reference to Iraq and the citation of Qur'anic verses alluding to Baghdad, whence Bahá'u'lláh "revealed" the Book of Certitude;

Agent: Bahá'u'lláh suggests that his powers of sagacity are untapped and undisclosed. He employs reflexive celestial imagery excessive for even a Sufi ecstatic. Mystics are, after all, typically "vertical" in their self-identifications. Founders of religions display a universal sense of mission.

Bahá'u'lláh posits the eventuality of two "books" of revelation destined to supersede the Qur'án. In the excerpt below, we see an epitome of salvation history, in which the Qur'án is not the final revelation and in which there is no Islamic renewal as such, no harking back to a pristine past, no revitalization movement, no drive toward Islamic reform, no alternative "modern" Islam. There is only the future, and it is clearly post-Islamic:

Wherefore, O my friend, it behooveth us to exert the highest endeavour to attain unto that City, and, by the grace of God and [p. 276] His loving-kindness, rend asunder the "veils of glory"; so that, with inflexible steadfastness, we may sacrifice our drooping souls in the path of the New Beloved. ... That city is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muḥammad the Messenger of God the Qur'an; in this day the Bayán; and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book—the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme.¹⁰⁶

The “New Beloved” (*maḥbúb-i tázih*) may be another circumlocution for Bahá’u’lláh. He certainly assumed such messianic dignities following his declaration, after which such an interpretation of this passage was inevitable. Evidence that this passage is reflexive occurs prior, when Bahá’u’lláh states that once one enters the City of Certitude, therein he will “perceive all the hidden teachings (*ishárát*) ... and with his inner eye will discover the mysteries (*asrár*) of ‘return’ and ‘revival.’”¹⁰⁷ Bahá’u’lláh speaks here of a realized eschaton. Considering the text an extended discourse on such “mysteries,” the reader need only draw the conclusion that Bahá’u’lláh is “the Tree” (*shajarihy-i án*) which “flourisheth in that City” (*án madínih*).¹⁰⁸

Such internal evidence will have to be weighed against other documents in which Bahá’u’lláh’s expressions of deference toward Ṣubḥ-i Azal, the Bábí figurehead, must be explained. MacEoin proposes that the Kitáb-Íqán has little evidential value for the problem of Bahá’u’lláh’s self-consciousness in the later Baghdad period. As mentioned, MacEoin’s answer to Bahá’u’lláh’s intimations of revelation is to reduce such language to the status of mystic effusion.¹⁰⁹

The problem MacEoin raises here was also raised by Browne, who discussed it with Bahá’ís in Yazd in 1888.¹¹⁰ Is there any difference between the God-talk of a mystic and that of a prophet? MacEoin’s position assumes Bahá’u’lláh’s [p. 277] revelatory discourse to be of the same order as a Sufi’s identification with God. In other words, a sense of divine mission is equated with mystic rapture. I am of the opinion that the former subsumes the latter, but the reverse does not hold.

There is little consensus on the phenomenologies of revelation and mysticism. Despite overlap, the two do appear to be distinct. Revelation indicates more a “horizontal” or socially directed state of mind, while ecstasy remains a psychic phenomenon more “vertical” or personal in nature. The prophet is driven by a revelatory experience in which the “descent” of a divine mandate takes place, investing the prophet with his “burden” or social gospel. The mystic, on the other hand, at the pinnacle of his “ascent” toward reality, is caught up in rapture and wholly identifies with God as “Truth” or “Reality.” The consequences of prophetic and mystic experiences are different. The mystic might write poetry (as Bahá’u’lláh did), but not law.

Bahá’u’lláh’s Baghdad works, MacEoin concedes, do show a progression in which “several shifts of consciousness” are observable, leading to a personal conviction of divine status in 1863.¹¹¹ According to the Bahá’í chronicler Nabíl, during the period leading up to the year 1863 there were visible changes in Bahá’u’lláh’s appearance and demeanor.¹¹² Dahají tells us that some men in Baghdad began to say that Bahá’u’lláh was the sun and Azal was but its mirror.¹¹³

MacEoin has taken no formal position on Bahá'u'lláh's own testimony that his prophetic annunciation had taken place in 1852 in the Síyáh-Chál dungeon in Tehran. Omission of this kind of evidence is problematic. Why not, as MacEoin elsewhere suggests, "take Bahá' Alláh at his word?"¹¹⁴ On his own messianic secrecy, therefore, Bahá'u'lláh will have the final say. In an Arabic Tablet known as "The Sura of Blood" (*Súrat al-damm*), revealed c. 1864, after his declaration,¹¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh is explicit about his "set time of concealment."¹¹⁶

[p. 278] The mystical model fails to account for Bahá'u'lláh's reformist vocation. Put simply, Bahá'u'lláh experienced his visionary "annunciation" (to use a Christian term) during his incarceration in 1852, made his "declaration" in 1863 in Baghdad, and thereafter in Constantinople and Adrianople (1863-68) prosecuted his open "proclamation" to the most powerful monarchs and pontiffs of the last century. Following this, he began an extended legislative period in 'Akká (1868-92) during which he perfected his system for world reform.

BÁBÍ RESPONSES TO THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE AND ITS AUTHOR

After his declaration, Bahá'u'lláh used the Book of Certitude as proof of his own mission. In various Tablets, there are a number of exhortations that refer readers to this work. Among such endorsements, the most accessible in translation are references in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Proof (*Lawḥ-i burhán*)¹¹⁷ and the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.¹¹⁸ So successful was the Book of Certitude in its appeal to Bábís that Bahá'u'lláh's arch-rival Şubḥ-i Azal was falsely rumored to have authored the work himself. A reference in the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* indicates that the rumor had persisted for some years.¹¹⁹

One of the nineteen "Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh" was Ḥájí Mullá 'Alí-Akbar (Ḥájí Ákhúnd). Taherzadeh states that Ḥájí Ákhúnd was a youth of nineteen years when, "in about the year 1861" (sic!), he had the opportunity to read one of the few manuscript copies of the Kitáb-i Íqán then circulating and was deeply impressed.¹²⁰ It is interesting to note that the youth was won over to Bahá'u'lláh as a result, despite the fact that the work focuses on the Báb. Various personal memoirs attest to the role the Kitáb-i Íqán later played in early conversions to the Faith.¹²¹

As mentioned, the Book of Certitude possessed an engaging simplicity of style, sometimes giving the initial impression **[p. 279]** of ordinariness. Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí (d. 1920), recounts in his memoirs that: "The words and passages in the Kitáb-i Íqán were of a style easy to apprehend yet impossible to imitate."¹²² Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání at first thought he could write better than Bahá'u'lláh, but was mysteriously overcome by a psychological im-

tence to compose even the simplest letter.¹²³ After his conversion, this Islamic scholar proved to be the ablest defender of the Book of Certitude.¹²⁴

For its immediate Bábí audience, and for Bahá'ís soon after, the Book of Certitude could not fail to impress. Its simplicity, cogency, and poetic style reflected more on the author than on the subject. The Báb was vindicated, yet the literary charisma of the text drew the reader to Bahá'u'lláh himself.

TRANSFORMING AUTHORITY INTO REFORM

The Book of Certitude was charged with ideological charisma. For converts, the text revolutionized the traditional Islamic eschatological worldview. All the phantastic and surreal images in the Qur'án were demystified and personalized. Both popular as well as official speculations on the eschaton were overturned, and the Resurrection became decidedly this worldly. Bábís were dazzled by Bahá'u'lláh's interpretive ingenuity, so completely independent of the authority of the mosque. Bahá'u'lláh emerged as a new authority figure on the religious horizon. All of the Last Day savior imagery was considered "fulfilled" in the person of Bahá'u'lláh. The eschatological linkage was crucial.

Authority to reveal had to be argued before Bahá'u'lláh could openly prosecute his reformist agenda. After establishing his claim to authority, he began to effect reforms and enact laws. It is with this rich fund of legislation that the Book of Certitude later became associated. It is inadvisable to atomize the Book of Certitude simply as a work of exegesis. Its [p. 280] argument effectively established Bahá'u'lláh's authority within a short time, confirming the faith of those who were charismatically drawn to him and, later, were won over to his global peace initiative.

There were certain reforms Bahá'u'lláh envisioned which were at first local, directed at the revitalization of the Bábí community in Persia and its diasporal center in Baghdad. Once his leadership had proven itself indispensable, and the force of his charisma had impelled the allegiance of the majority of Bábís, Bahá'u'lláh could publicly announce his mission as a reformer. This mission was cast in decisive eschatological terms, requiring acceptance or rejection. For God was presented as speaking to the world in this religious figure. So the question of faith was put in terms of the belief or denial of God himself, represented by proxy.

BEYOND ISLAMIC REFORM: FACTORS IN THE CONCEPTION OF WORLD REFORM

At the heart of Bahá'u'lláh's system is his vision of world unity—a fact that should never be lost on the reader. The Bahá'í Faith is founded on a wholly different paradigm than that of Islam. To be sure, the spirit of Islam was breathed into the Bahá'í system. This Islamic heritage is proudly acknowledged. A reductive argument could even be made asserting the new Faith's essentially Islamic character. It is as if Bahá'u'lláh conserved, in reworked form, the five Pillars of the witness to faith (*shaháda*), prayer (*ṣalát*), charity (*zakát*), fasting (*ṣawm*), and pilgrimage (*ḥájj*), though the laws governing these practices are, of course, transformed in the Bahá'í system. The fundamental elements of religion held in common by Sunnis and Shí'ís—Unity of God (*tawḥíd*), Prophethood (*nabuwwa*) and the Resurrection (*ma'ád*, albeit redefined)—are likewise acknowledged in Bahá'í teachings. Specifically Shí'í emphases are preserved, although also [p. 281] transformed: the institution of the Imamate (*imáma*) and the principle of Divine Justice (*'adl*). New converts to the Faith must recognize the place of Islam in Bahá'í salvation history. In the Christian West, Bahá'ís take various opportunities to rehabilitate and correct the largely negative image of Islam that has become one of the entrenched prejudices of mass culture.

Notwithstanding, these Islamic carryovers are insufficient as a definition of what is quintessentially Bahá'í. What is Islamic in form in the Bahá'í Faith is not Islamic in content. In the course of time, the conversion of non-Muslim minorities into the new Faith made its distinctive character more apparent. One might even say that the Bahá'í movement represented not only an alternative to Islam but a reaction against its perceived excesses and limitations.

An obvious case in point is the Islamic policy of holy war (*jihád*) and pretexts for its justification. It was clear to Bahá'u'lláh that the doctrine of holy war presented a real barrier to world unity. (Note that unity is the governing paradigm here, not submission or surrender as in Islam.) Since his worldview is post-Islamic, it is not surprising that the abrogation of holy war represents Bahá'u'lláh's first legislative act in 1863.

On the question of authority, the Book of Certitude had far-reaching religious implications. It provided the rationale for looking beyond Islam. Without a corresponding vision of what a realized eschatology might look like in the realm of human affairs, the Book of Certitude would be little more than a theological, evidentiary work, invoking Qur'án and tradition to vindicate the Báb's revelatory claims. To see in what direction it steered a religious movement, the text should be examined from the perspective of its reformist associations.

For his converts, Bahá'u'lláh's theme of progressive revelation, founded on the Book of Certitude, effectively overcame the dogma of the finality of revelation vested in [p. 282] Muḥammad. Once this was accomplished, Bahá'u'lláh undertook the most public form of proclamation possible in order to announce the new Faith: the publication of open epistles to kings and ecclesiastics, Occidental and Oriental. Thereafter, Bahá'u'lláh systematized the legislation needed to give structure to Bahá'í reform.

Although outside the scope of this study, a word may be said about the nature and widening of Bahá'u'lláh's reforms. Three stages of reform can be seen within the expansion of Bahá'u'lláh's influence, culminating in activism beyond the pale of Islam. The Book of Certitude was written as a preparatory stage in Bahá'u'lláh's reformist ministry. As a reformer, Bahá'u'lláh was concerned: (1) initially with Bábí reform; (2) intermittently, with Persian reform; and (3) preponderantly, with world reform. For most of his ministry, he was fully absorbed with world reform.¹²⁵ The exposure of messianic paradigms to new historical circumstances was such that, according to Amanat:

The Bahá'í religion came to represent revisionist tendencies within the movement that sought to achieve further religious innovation by means of moral aptitude and adoption of modern social reforms.¹²⁶

Historical context makes sense of Bahá'u'lláh's mission. Persian reformers were making their presence felt, and there were other reformers in the Muslim world at large. Broadly speaking, reform in modern Islam ranges from strategies of Islamic resurgence to avowed secularism. For Bahá'u'lláh, progress became a global issue beyond Islam, and beyond the Bábí movement as well. In this sense, Bahá'u'lláh never directly pursued Islamic reform because he bypassed it.

[p. 283]

THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE AND BÁBÍ REFORM

The Book of Certitude was revealed at a time when its author was committed to the moral reform of the Bábí community. He was not at that time bent on the reform of Islam, Persia, or the world. In the power vacuum created by Azal's inaccessibility, the need arose for an effective Bábí leader. Prompted by Azal's timidity and ineffectuality as nominal chief of the Bábís, Bahá'u'lláh's post-exile (1856–92) role as leader—accepted with some reluctance—was solicited by certain of the Bábís themselves. The growth and expansion of the Bábí movement would scarcely have been possible without such leadership. This was, after all, a movement with missionary objectives. It had to carry on, to promote its own vision of reform, or suffer the fate of increasing marginalization.

In a sense, it was useful that a power crisis developed between Bahá'u'lláh and Azal in 1866–67, for it brought matters to a head and brought about the emergence of that nucleus of believers from which the Bahá'í Faith sprang. A problem does arise in trying to reconstruct Bahá'u'lláh's sense of mission as it developed during the Baghdad period, and to determine at which point that sense of destiny took on clearly messianic overtones.

In one of several autobiographical remarks in the Book of Certitude, Bahá'u'lláh discloses:

In these days ... odors of jealousy are diffused. ... For a number of people who have never inhaled the fragrance of justice, have raised the standard of sedition, and have leagued themselves against Us. On every side We witness the menace of their spears, and in all directions We recognize the shafts of their arrows.¹²⁷

Although I never exalted myself over any one in any matter, nor sought for authority over any one, I associated with every one with the utmost affection, and [was] extremely patient and accessible, and with the poor was as the poor, and with the learned and great [I was] perfectly contented.¹²⁸

[p. 284] ... I swear by God, the one true God! grievous as have been the woes and sufferings which the hand of the enemy and the people of the Book inflicted upon Us, yet all these fade in utter nothingness when compared with that which hath befallen Us at the hand of those who profess to be Our friends.¹²⁹

A question that should be asked here concerns the redactional intent of the passage: Does Bahá'u'lláh wish to say that consolidation efforts within the Bábí community were met with ill-deserved opposition due to rivalry? We can only speculate as to whether such machinations had the object of undermining Bahá'u'lláh's role as *de facto* leader only, or whether there was also a perception of Bahá'u'lláh's implicit theophanic claims and a negative reaction to them.

When did Bahá'u'lláh begin thinking seriously about world reform? A clue to this may be seen in the following anecdote. In his last major work, the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (1890), Bahá'u'lláh recounts an episode in his personal life which illustrates his thinking on the problem of language barriers:

One day, while in Constantinople, Kamál Páshá visited this Wronged One. Our conversation turned upon topics profitable to man. He said that he had learned several languages. In reply We observed: "You have wasted your life."

“It beseemeth you and the other officials of the Government to convene a gathering and choose one of the divers languages, and likewise one of the existing scripts, or else to create a new language and a new script to be taught children in schools throughout the world.”

“They would, in this way, be acquiring only two languages, one their own native tongue, the other the language in which all the peoples of the world would converse. Were men to take fast hold on that which hath been mentioned, the whole earth would come to be regarded as one country, and the people would be relieved and freed from the necessity of acquiring and teaching different languages.”

When in Our presence, he acquiesced, and even evinced great [p. 285] joy and complete satisfaction. We then told him to lay this matter before the officials and ministers of the Government, in order that it might be put into effect throughout the different countries.

However, although he often returned to see Us after this, he never again referred to this subject, although that which had been suggested is conducive to the concord and the unity of the peoples of the world.¹³⁰

According to this self-disclosure, Bahá'u'lláh's thinking on global reform commenced no later than the Constantinople period (1863), not long after the revelation of the Book of Certitude. Considering Bahá'u'lláh's focus on Bábí reform was just months earlier, the transition from so circumscribed a purview to a global reformist context is rather sudden. True, the vocation of an Islamic Mahdist figure was clearly to “fill the earth with justice and equity.” But the thinking that had to have preceded Bahá'u'lláh's reformist objectives—which were already crystallizing in 1863—had to reach back well before this time.

SPECIFIC BÁBÍ REFORMS IN THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE

In the aftermath of three bloody Bábí defensive battles (at Shaykh Ṭabarsí, Nayríz and Zanján) followed by the attempt on the life of the shah (1852), Bahá'u'lláh adopted a quietest stance. His primary concern was for the Bábí community, which was faced with the external threats of state persecution and internal threats of internecine factionalism. Within its ranks, about twenty-five Bábís entertained messianic pretensions in the leadership crisis caused by Azal's absence.

Bahá'u'lláh's pacifism served to distance the Bábís from their revolutionary stigma by disavowing violence altogether. To effect internal consolidation, Bahá'u'lláh urged moral [p. 286] reform. The moral consolidation of the Bábí community concentrated on the integrity of the individual, but also affected the collective Bábí response to state authority. The strategy was clear: Only through moral reform could the Bábí community cohere and remain viable as an agent for change.

Bahá'u'lláh linked moral purity with spiritual perspicuity. This becomes evident in a section of the Book of Certitude known among Bahá'ís as the "Tablet of the True Seeker." Here, the ability to make sense of the cryptic Qur'anic warnings concerning the eschaton is imparted only to the pure in heart. In turn, this purity is conditioned on moral rectitude. Elements of the moral dimension of Bahá'u'lláh's reformist teachings may be found in the Book of Certitude itself, which speaks of ethical preconditions to spiritual perception:

Inner Purification:

O my brother, when a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy.¹³¹

Detachment:

He must purge his breast, which is the sanctuary of the abiding love of the Beloved, of every defilement, and sanctify his soul from all that pertaineth to water and clay, from all shadowy and ephemeral attachments. He must so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error, or that hate repel him away from the truth. ... That seeker must at all times put his trust in God, must renounce the peoples of the earth, detach himself from the world of dust, and cleave unto Him Who is the Lord of Lords.¹³²

When the channel of the human soul is cleansed of all worldly and impeding attachments, it will unfailingly perceive the [p. 287] breath of the Beloved across immeasurable distances, and will, led by its perfume, attain and enter the City of Certitude.¹³³

Humility:

He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence, and refrain from idle talk.¹³⁴

Proscription against Backbiting:

That seeker should also regard backbiting as a grievous error, and keep himself aloof from its dominion, inasmuch as backbiting quencheth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul.

... For the tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison. Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endure a century.¹³⁵

Personal Piety:

At the dawn of every day he should commune with God, and with all his soul persevere in the quest of his Beloved. He should consume every wayward thought with the flame of His loving mention, and, with the swiftness of lightning, pass by all else save Him.¹³⁶

Charity:

He should succour the dispossessed, and never withhold his favour from the destitute.¹³⁷

Kindness to Animals:

He should show kindness to animals, how much more unto his fellow-man, to him who is endowed with the power of utterance.¹³⁸

Martyrdom and Living Self-Sacrifice:

He should not hesitate to offer up his life for his Beloved, nor [p. 288] allow the censure of the people to turn him away from the Truth.¹³⁹

Reciprocity:

He should not wish for others that which he doth not wish for himself, nor promise that which he doth not fulfill.¹⁴⁰

Forgiveness:

With all his heart should the seeker avoid fellowship with evil doers, and pray for the remission of their sins. He should forgive the sinful, and never despise his low estate, for none knoweth what his own end shall be. How often hath a sinner, at the hour of death, attained to the essence of faith, and, quaffing the immortal draught, hath taken his flight unto the celestial Concourse. And how often a devout believer, at the hour of his soul's ascension, been so changed as to fall into the nethermost fire.¹⁴¹

These reforms, though universal, seek no social revolution. They have no global focus. They represent a preliminary stage in Bahá'u'lláh's reformist mission: that is, that of Bábí reform based on personal integrity. Consolidation of the Bábí community was the essential prerequisite for introducing a reformist agenda that could be implemented on a world scale. In any event, these precepts were codified eleven years later in Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i Aqdas* as part of the formal Bahá'í moral code.

The ethical precepts in the Book of Certitude are not distinctive from the standpoint of Bábí and later Bahá'í self-definition. What would soon emerge as sweeping reforms, envisioned as inchoate world reforms, began with Bahá'u'lláh's express abrogation of holy war (*jihád*) followed by many other legislative acts throughout his ministry.

The quietist reforms of Babism which Bahá'u'lláh legislated and effected were—from the standpoint of prevailing Islamic ethical norms—unremarkable, yet necessary. These [p. 289] reforms did reflect a traditionally Shí'í compromise with temporal authority, except that in Bahá'í doctrine such authority is not conferred through the Hidden Imám, who is no longer hidden. Bahá'u'lláh went so far as to acknowledge that temporal power derives its ideal legitimacy from God.¹⁴²

With an emphasis on worldly salvation, moral responsibility took on a soteriological immediacy. Eschatological judgment was no longer deferred. Bábís were given an acute sense of eschatological moment and of immediate consequence, which went a long way toward effectively facilitating Bábí reform.

Whether or not the Book of Certitude ought to be read in light of messianic secrecy, as a document of covert ideological circumlocution in the pre-proclamatory and pre-legislative stage of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, soon the Qur'án would be invoked by Bábís as a proof-text for Bahá'u'lláh's own post-declaration authority. His bold new exegesis of the Qur'án served as a bridge to the recognition of a new revelation, eclipsing both Qur'án and Islam in the course of Bahá'í history.

The Book of Certitude does indeed represent the exegetical creation of the Bahá'í Faith, as Bahá'u'lláh intimates in the text itself: "Notwithstanding all the verses of the Qur'án, and the recognized traditions, which are all indicative of a new Faith, a new Law, and a new Revelation, this generation still waiteth in expectation of beholding the promised One who should uphold the Law of the Muḥammadan Dispensation."¹⁴³

With so open a declaration of the inevitability of a post-Qur'anic revelation, Bahá'u'lláh established in principle what he would soon claim in person. Vindication of the Báb provided the perfect foil for his own legitimacy. The Book of Certitude is a masterwork of ideological circumlocution. Bahá'u'lláh marshals the exegetical resources of classical *tafsír* tradition to expound the Qur'anic eschaton. Its inauguration by the Báb acknowledged, a wider eschaton would soon be realized in the person of Bahá'u'lláh. [p. 290] The Book of Certitude should be read within the framework of Qur'anic exegetical tradition, but not totally relativized within it. Bahá'u'lláh's work stands out as having a paradigmatic originality and charisma of style. Moreover, the author not only defended the Báb, but fulfilled the Báb's mission in successfully incarnating the vocation of the Mustagháth.¹⁴⁴ Assuming that this would have met with the Báb's approval, and considering also the veracity of Bahá'u'lláh's claim, the legacy and influence of the Báb, on the verge of extinction in the 1850s, was extended only through the mission of Bahá'u'lláh. In opening up new missionary vistas, it was necessary to challenge all religious doctrines of revelatory finality in order to prepare receptive Bábís, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians for the advent of a new religious figure on the revelatory horizon. Today, the Book of Certitude is read in predominantly non-Islamic mission-fields, its arguments adapted to other cultures and traditions in the Bahá'í missionary enterprise.¹⁴⁵

NEW WORLD ORDER

Exegesis has its place, but interpretation is not reform, certainly not the global reform Bahá'u'lláh envisioned. A far cry from exegesis is Bahá'u'lláh's literal prophecy, requiring no exegesis, expressing the purpose of his mission, to which modern adherents to the Bahá'í Faith convert. In words immortalized by Browne in his historic interview with Bahá'u'lláh in 1890:

We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations. ... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled—what harm is there in this? ... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “Most Great Peace” [p. 291] shall come. ... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind.¹⁴⁶

The Book of Certitude serves today as an ideological bridge to a new worldview. Over this bridge, the reader crosses a chasm of dogmatic closure and steps into a global religious perspective. It would not be too strange to say that Bahá’u’lláh’s symbolic universe is an eschatologically realized promised land of universalisms. Its authority legitimated by the Book of Certitude, the Bahá’í Faith today has little to do with the intricacies of Qur’anic exegesis. Harmony and justice among races, religions, and nations—the essence of Bahá’u’lláh’s blueprint for world peace—render speculations about the Qur’anic eschaton irrelevant to the task of building a new world order. In the course of events, it is the future that interprets any eschaton. Indeed, the eschaton will be redefined by it.

NOTES

1. Apostasy (*irtidád*) remains a capital offense in parts of the Middle East and Africa under Islamic law. On the danger facing Bahá’ís under Islamic law, see Bürgel, “The Bahá’í Attitude towards Peace,” in *The Bahá’í Faith and Islam*, p. 20. Nonetheless, Islam forms an integral part of salvation history from a Bahá’í perspective. The Book of Certitude was written in an Islamic context. But the missionary context has radically changed. Arguments from the Book of Certitude are now adapted to diverse religious perspectives in many non-Muslim cultures. Demographically, the majority of Bahá’í converts today do not come from Muslim backgrounds. From an orthodox Islamic perspective, such converts could not be considered “apostates.” For descendants of the Incas in Peru and Ecuador, for example, Bahá’u’lláh is accepted as the return of Viracocha, the ancient Incan culture hero. See Buck, “Bahá’u’lláh and Cross-Cultural Messianism,” pp. 158 and 172, n. 4.
2. *Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 5–7. [p. 292]
3. See Momen, *Shi’i Islam*, p. 169, and Bahá’u’lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 241 and 254.
4. *Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 9–10.
5. The numerical (*abjad*) reckoning of *mustagháth* is 2001, representing the *terminus ad quem* for the advent of the Mustagháth. A passage from the Persian *Bayán* bearing on the time

of *al-mustagháth* is provided by MacEoin, "Hierarchy, Authority, and Eschatology," pp. 126–27.

MacEoin can be challenged on his assertion that "the vast majority (if not all) of the Bábís in the period after the Báb's death regarded the next manifestation as an event that would occur in the distant future, possibly as much as 2001 years away" (pp. 129–30). Though there is formal evidence to support this, such as Bahá'u'lláh's Bábí creed (see *Gleanings*, pp. 73–74/Arabic text in *Múntakhabátí*, p. 55, Tablet to 'Alí-i Núrí Işfahání), the testimony of Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí flatly contradicts this assertion, as popular Bábí expectations appear to have been otherwise. See Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 2, p. 68.

In MacEoin's discussion of "Short-Term Eschatological Expectations" (pp. 129–35), no reference is made to the Báb's predictions concerning the year "19" (*Váhid*) which Shoghi Effendi adduces in *God Passes By*, p. 29. Bahá'u'lláh, in many Tablets, points to specific short-term predictions from the Báb, most notably in the *Kitáb-i Badí'*. There is an interesting suggestion by Momen that Mustagháth is simply the numerical equivalent of "Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest" (*man yuzhiruhu'lláh*). See *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne*, p. 336, n. 3.

6. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 44–45/Persian, pp. 34–35.
7. See Amanat, "The Final Break," in *Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 372–404.
8. Bahá'u'lláh was apparently not at pains to conciliate himself with Shiism. In an effort to discredit Bahá'u'lláh, in 1888 an Azalí Bábí approached E. G. Browne in Kirmán, who relates: "He [the Azalí] produced a copy of the lithographed Bombay edition of the *Íkán*, which he told me had been sent him by the Behá'ís, and pointed out with great disapproval a passage where the Shí'ites are called 'that foul and erring sect.'" (*A Year Amongst the Persians*, p. 554.) [p. 293] Evidently, the passage in question is translated by Shoghi Effendi as "these base-born and erring souls." (*The Book of Certitude*, p. 166/ Persian text, p. 129.) The two terms of deprecation here, directed specifically at Shí'í clerics and not at Shiism as a whole, are *hamaj* ("gnats," "riffraff," "barbarians") and *ra'á'* ("rabble," "hooligans").
9. Accounts by Europeans of Bábí/Bahá'í persecutions are particularly interesting for their relative impartiality. See Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844–1944*, pp. 132–38 (persecutions of Bábís); pp. 373–440 (persecutions of Bahá'ís).
10. The writings of the Báb really constitute a separate literary event. The Báb's religious system was more theoretical than actual, as Bábí militarism brought about its collapse before there was any real time for its implementation. Apart from Amanat, the most penetrating analysis of the Bábí movement to date is that of P. Smith and M. Momen, "The Bábí Movement: A Resource Mobilization Perspective," in *In Iran: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, Vol. 3, pp. 33–93.

11. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 406–407.
12. Ibid., p. 408.
13. H. Algar, *Mírzá Malkum Khán: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism*, p. 59.
14. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 413.
15. Ibid., p. 413.
16. Ibid., p. 409.
17. To be precise, Bahá'u'lláh disclaimed any need for legitimation as such, and in various Tablets he expresses a kind of disdain for adducing proof-texts and testimonia. The Manifestation of God, in Bahá'í doctrine, stands in need of no “proof,” as his revelation confirms previous scriptures and not the reverse. In present-day terms, the Book of Certitude would be thought of by Bahá'ís as an exposition of Bahá'í doctrine, not as legitimation.
18. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, pp. 343–44.
19. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 3/Persian, p. 2.
20. Ibid., p. 166/Persian, p. 129.
21. Ibid., pp. 84–90/Persian, pp. 65–70.
22. Ibid., p. 86.
23. Perhaps the most striking instance of this mystical identification with Jesus is seen in a Tablet known as the *Súrat al-sultán*, [p. 294] in which Jesus is portrayed as ascending the “Mount of Command.” On the mountaintop, a “Cloud of Sanctity” envelops him. Suddenly, beholding a sprinkling of blood upon his garment, Jesus calls out in wonderment to the Cloud, asking the meaning of this blood. The Cloud recounted the adversities that “this Youth,” (Bahá'u'lláh) had suffered in the path of God. Grieving in his heart upon hearing this tale, Jesus detached himself from the world and, ascending to the “Court of Holiness,” entered into the Presence of God. (Paraphrase based on a translation by Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini and Christopher Buck, emended by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. Personal communication, January 30, 1990.) Text in Ishráq-Khávarí, *Ganj-i Sháygán*, pp. 193–94. The *Súrat al-sultán* was partly addressed to the Bahá'ís of Sulṭánábád (present-day Arak, in Iran). The full text of the Tablet is published in *Áthár-i qalam-i a'lá*, Vol. 4, pp. 154–80.
24. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 112–13.
25. Ibid., p. 237/Persian text, p. 184.
26. Ibid., p. 60.

27. Bahá'u'lláh's extraordinary extemporaneity became legendary, adding to his prestige as an authority. The revelation of the *Kitáb-i Íqán* in two days and two nights is known from a statement by Áqá Mírzá Áqá, recorded in the unpublished memoirs of Hájí Mírzá Ḥabíbu'lláh. See Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís*, p. 227.
28. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 198–200/Persian, pp. 152–54.
29. MacEoin, "Hierarchy, Authority, and Eschatology in Early Bábí Thought," pp. 123–35.
30. *Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 410.
31. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 234.
32. See *Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 410, for a Weberian assessment of the implications this doctrine held in store for the Bábí community.
33. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 154.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 92–93/Persian, pp. 71–72.
35. See Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Áqá Mírzá Asadu'lláh Núrí, unpublished manuscript. See Lambden, "A Tablet of Mírzá Ḥusayn 'Alí Bahá'u'lláh of the early Iraq period: The Tablet of All Food," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (June 1984), p. 55, n. 3. [p. 295]
36. "Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God, ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying impostor. ... Whosoever interpreteth this verse otherwise than its obvious meaning is deprived of the Spirit of God." (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, p. 32 and Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 346). Similar statements were made by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i Badí'* and, reportedly, upon his declaration in 1863. See Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 2, p. 381 and Vol. 1, pp. 279–80.
37. Among various discussions of Islamic rhetoric, particularly important is a study by W. Heinrichs, *The Hand of the Northwind: Opinions on Metaphor and the Early Meaning of Isti'āra in Arabic Poetics*.
38. Baljon, "Qur'anic Anthropomorphisms," p. 123.
39. In the end, due to their Mu'tazilite implications, the rationalistic explanations of al-Rumání and al-Zamakhsharí failed to shake orthodox Islam from its textual fundamentalism. See M. Carter, "Linguistic Science and Orthodoxy in Conflict," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaft*, Vol. 1 (1984), pp. 212–32.
40. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 47–48/Persian, p. 37.
41. See Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i Íqán*, Persian text, p. 38, for these terms.
42. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 49.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 127/Persian, p. 137.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 26/Persian, pp. 20–21.

45. Heinrichs, "The Hand of the Northwind," pp. 48–49.
46. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 113 / Persian, p. 85.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 171–72.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 136–37.
51. Abu'l-Faḍl, *Fará'id*, p. 431.
52. Universally used throughout the Islamic world, al-Taftázání's works on rhetoric have come to supersede those of al-Sakkákí as the standard textbooks on rhetoric. (See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, "Balágha," p. 982.)
53. Abu'l-Faḍl, *Fará'id*, p. 438, referring to al-Taftázání as an "eminent man of learning" (*fáḍil-i muḥaqqiq*). [p. 296]
54. *Ibid.*, p. 353.
55. Abu'l-Faḍl, *Miracles and Metaphors*, pp. 9–11.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 154–55.
59. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 162–63.
60. W. Heinrichs, "On the Genesis of the *Ḥaqíqa-Majáz* Dichotomy," p. 124.
61. J. Meisami, "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafez," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 17 (1985), p. 230.
62. Cole was the first academic to argue for the messianic secrecy hypothesis on the basis of texts in the Baghdad period. Arguments pro and con had been around for a long time, but were polemics and not scholarship. This is hardly a bias-free controversy. Bahá'ís assume the messianic secret, while Azalís and other detractors do not. Methodologically, the question boils down to a judgment about Bahá'u'lláh's veracity. It is difficult for me to impugn Bahá'u'lláh's autobiographical statements, even though they are retrospective. Trying to limit explicit evidence to contemporary documents would be ideal, but to invalidate testimony of the religious figure in question seems extreme. In either case, we are left with having to interpret what at best are oblique messianic hints in Bahá'u'lláh's pre-declaration writings.
63. Cole, "Bahá'u'lláh and the Naqshbandí Sufis," p. 21.
64. Salmání, *My Memories of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 15.
65. MacEoin, "Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism," p. 123.

66. To wit, the *maṣḍar-i amr* controversy going back to Browne. See MacEoin, "Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism," pp. 113–19.
67. See J. R. I. Cole, "Bahá'u'lláh's Súrah of the Companions: An Early Edirne Tablet of Declaration (c. 1864): Introduction and Provisional Translation," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 5, no. 3-Vol. 6, no. 1 (June 1991), pp. 4–74.
68. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 98; cf. Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, pp. 84–85. Two other secret conversions to Bahá'u'lláh—those of Mírzá Áqá Ján (who became Bahá'u'lláh's scribe) and Hájí Mírzá Kamál al-Dín, initially [p. 297] drawn to Bahá'u'lláh through his early writings—are recounted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 115–17.
69. MacEoin, "Bahá Alláh's *al-Qaṣída al-Warqá'íyya*: An English Translation," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (September 1983), pp. 7–26; idem., "*al-Qaṣída al-Warqá'íyya*: Further comments," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 2, no. 3 (December 1983), pp. 68–72; MacEoin and Cole, "Exchanges on Bahá'u'lláh's *al-Qaṣída al-Warqá'íyya*," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 2, no. 4 (March 1984), pp. 44–56. See now Cole's entries on "Bahá'u'lláh" and "Bahá'í Faith," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.
70. Cole, "Bahá'u'lláh and the Naqshbandí Sufis," 17-18, summarizes:
- Bahá'u'lláh fixes the time of this mystical experience of the presence of God and his dying to the self during his imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál in Tehran. His language deliberately evokes the mystical experiences of the Prophet Muḥammad. He says, for instance, that he ascended (*'arajtu*) to meet God, thus echoing the ascent (*mi'ráj*) of Muḥammad from Jerusalem to the highest heavens. He says that it does not matter that he is now banished (probably meaning his exile from Iran to Iraq), for he attained to the most exalted light on the day God gave him his prophetic mission (*bi'thah*). He claims to have spiritually replicated Muḥammad's miraculous journey to Jerusalem, and says that his *hijrah*, or emigration, was in Tehran (lines 87-92). In retrospect it seems clear that Bahá'u'lláh is here discussing the experiences which ultimately led him to proclaim himself a Manifestation of God.
71. Cole's translation of the Ode of the Dove is still unpublished. On the whole, MacEoin's own rendering of the Ode remains an important working translation, available in *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*.
72. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 26.
73. Cole, "The Essence of the Mysteries" (unpublished translation), p. 1.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
76. Stephen Lambden plans to publish a survey of Bahá'u'lláh's Baghdad writings in the near future. (Personal communication.)

77. See description in Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, pp. 108–109. [p. 298]
78. Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, pp. 137–42. Lambden dates this Tablet 1861–62, (“Sinaitic Mysteries,” p. 123).
79. Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, pp. 218–19. Lambden sees in this poetic work of the late Baghdad period Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be the return of the Báb: “Hasten! Hasten! This is the Divine Sweetness (*'adhb subhání*), the Merciful Benevolence (*luṭf raḥmání*), the Becoming Elegance (*tara' 'adhbání*), from the Egypt of 'Amá' (*miṣr-i 'amá'*), that Shírází Joseph [= the Báb] come in the dark cloak of the [new?] Name [reading *bá 'ashwaṭ-i nám = 'with the darkness of the name'*].” See “An Early Poem of Mírzá Ḥusayn 'Alí Bahá'u'lláh: The Sprinkling of the Cloud of Unknowing (*Rashḥ-i 'Amá'*),” *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (September 1984), p. 91.
80. MacEoin provides a useful bibliography on the published texts of Bahá'u'lláh's principal Baghdad works in “Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism,” p. 122, n. 159.
81. This applies equally to other writings of the period. For instance, the Bábí at whose request Bahá'u'lláh's second major extant work, the “Tablet of All Food” (*Lawḥ al-kull al-ṭa'ám*), was revealed, upon receiving the Tablet, discerned Bahá'u'lláh's station, but was counselled by him to keep silent. See Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, pp. 55–56. Cole dates this Tablet as written in 1853 (“Bahá'u'lláh and the Naqshbandí Sufis,” p. 12).
82. Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí, *Bihjatu's-Ṣudúr*, pp. 20–25. I owe this reference to J. R. I. Cole, University of Michigan. (Personal communication.)
83. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 58–61 / Persian text, pp. 45–47. These excerpts have been condensed from a longer passage, but represent the spirit and substance of what is being said.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 61 / Persian, p. 47.
85. *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71 / Persian text, pp. 54–55.
86. Wehr/Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 670.
87. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 8 / Persian, p. 6.
88. But not of worship, much as in the Catholic distinction between the veneration of saints and the worship due God.
89. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 78 / Persian, p. 60–61.
90. My thanks to my Persian-born wife, Nahzy Abadi Buck, for this suggestion. For the Arabic designation of “carrier pigeon,” see lexical entry in Wehr/Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 204. [p. 299]
91. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 92 / Persian, pp. 71–72.

92. Translated by Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 2, p. 68. See also, Hájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-'Alí, *Delight of Hearts*, p. 8.
93. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 129–30; Persian text, p. 100.
94. Steingass, *A Persian-English Dictionary*, p. 471.
95. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 147/Persian, p. 114.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 166/Persian, p. 129.
97. *Ibid.*, pp. 174–75/Persian, pp. 135–36.
98. See Balyuzi, *Muḥammad and the Course of Islám*, p. 238.
99. In a similar vein, Bahá'u'lláh states: “This wronged One will cite but one of these instances, thus conferring upon mankind, for the sake of God, such bounties as are yet concealed within the treasury of the hidden and sacred Tree, that haply mortal men may not remain deprived of their share of the immortal fruit, and attain to a dewdrop of the waters of everlasting life which, from Baghdád, the ‘Abode of Peace,’ are being vouchsafed unto all mankind.” (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 221 Persian, p. 18.)
100. *Ibid.*, pp. 175–76; Persian text, p. 136.
101. The term *rumúz-há* is the Arabic broken plural of *ramz* compounded by Persian plural *-há*. This compound plural, a hybrid of Persian and Arabic syntax, is a stylistic device in Bahá'u'lláh's writings.
102. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 257/Persian, p. 199.
103. By colophon here is not intended that of the copyist. For the text of one such scribal signatures, see Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, pp. 417–18.
104. Browne, *Selections*, pp. 253–54.
105. See Buck, “Bahá'u'lláh as ‘World Reformer’,” *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 3:4 (1991), pp. 23–70.
106. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 199–200/Persian, pp. 153–54.
107. *Ibid.*, pp. 197–98/Persian, p. 153.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 198/Persian, p. 153.
109. MacEoin, “Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism,” pp. 115–16.
110. The problem as to what difference, if any, obtains between the claims of the celebrated Sufi martyr Maṣṣūr al-Ḥalláj and those [p. 300] of Bahá'u'lláh was raised by Browne in a discussion which took place on Friday, May 11, 1888, in Yazd. The Bahá'í responding to the question was Hájí Sayyid Mírzá, who answered in part: “The one [i.e., the mystic] reaches a point where, losing sight and cognisance of self, he wanders at will through the World of Divinity (*'alam al-láhu't*); the other [i.e., Bahá'u'lláh] is the throne on which God sits, as He Himself saith: ‘He set Himself upon the Throne’ (*istawá 'ala'l-'arsh*, Qur'an 7:52;

10:3, etc.).” See Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, p. 438; *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne*, p. 94.

111. MacEoin, “Divisions and Authority Claims,” p. 123.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
113. *Ibid.*, p.119.
114. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
115. See Cole, “Bahá’u’lláh and the Naqshbandí Sufis,” pp. 12 and 26, n. 32.
116. Bahá’u’lláh, cited by Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 151. He finally broke his silence in the spring of 1863 with his declaration:

O people, I bolted up the gates of Paradise for twenty years [from 1844, the Declaration of the Báb], lest anything issue from My lips which might cause the fire of hatred to blaze forth in your breasts. To this beareth witness the Tongue of Grandeur, then the Pen of Command upon the Tablets of the Holy, the Guarded. O people, I am verily ‘Alí [the Báb], and this is but another Return after the first. I have demonstrated to ye at this time things as great as any I manifested aforetime. I have come from the fountainhead of Grandeur and Glory, and the treasure-house of exaltation and majesty, with verses of which not a single letter hath heretofore been revealed in this world. This Tablet is My proof among ye, to ye and against ye, if ye be of them that comprehend.

O people, God is My witness that I remained silent in My house, and gave voice to no melody. However, the Spirit set My limbs quaking, and caused Me to speak forth by the Eternal Truth. His features then appeared in My face, if ye descry My beauty.

I barred the doors of utterance for lo, these many years, but the tongue of God loosened My tongue, did ye but know. ... This is [p. 301] My religion, if ye be of them that perceive. This is the religion of all the Messengers. ... (Translated by J. R. I. Cole, unpublished.)

117. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 211: “Peruse thou the Kitáb-i Íqán.”
118. Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 119: “Briefly, there hath been revealed in the Kitáb-i Íqán (Book of Certitude) concerning the Presence and Revelation of God that which will suffice the fair-minded.”
119. Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 168–69: “Not long ago it was stated that thou [Mírzá Hádí Dawlat-Ábádí] hadst ascribed the authorship of the Kitáb-i Íqán and of other Tablets unto others. I swear by God! This is a grievous injustice. Others are incapable of apprehending their meaning, how much more of revealing them!”

Hádí was a noted divine from Isfahan who became a prominent follower of Şubḥ-i Azal, and, upon the latter's death, claimed successorship. (My thanks to Bahá'í historian Dr. Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini of Burnaby for calling this to my attention and for sending excerpts from Bahá'u'lláh's unpublished Tablets bearing on this authorship challenge which, evidently, had been a nuisance for over two decades, ever since the work first began to circulate. See also Taherzaheh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 2, p. 69.)

120. Ibid., Vol. 4, p 295.
121. See, for instance, *ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 52–53, 69, 101, 219–20, and Vol. 3, pp. 302–303, as typical illustrations.
122. Ibid., Vol. 2, p 70.
123. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 219-20.
124. A cleric from the Caucasus, Shaykh 'Abd al-Salám, the Shaykh al-Islám of Tiflís (modern Tbilisi), wrote a comparatively sophisticated attack on the Kitáb-i Íqán.

Balyuzi (*E. G. Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*, p. 67) is right in saying that Abu'l-Faḍl's masterwork, *Kitáb al-Fará'id*, a lengthy refutation of this attack, "reveals the depth and breadth of his learning," to which the translated writings of the eminent Bahá'í apologist do little justice. Cole's translations are far and away the best of the several works of the Bahá'í savant that have appeared in English.

125. Cf. Buck, "Bahá'u'lláh as World-Reformer," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, Vol. 3, no. 4 (1991), pp. 23–70. [p. 302]
126. *Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal*, p. 414.
127. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 249.
128. Browne's translation/transliteration: [*Bá ín-ki bá aḥadí dar amrí iftikhár na-namúdam, va banafsí bartarí na-justam; ma' har nafsí muşáhibí búdam dar niháyat-i-mihrbání, va bi-gháyat burdbár ú rayagán, va bá fuḳarâ misl-i-fuḳarâ búdam, va bá 'ulamâ va 'uzamá dar kamâl-i-taslím ú riza*]. (Browne, "The Bábís of Persia," p. 946; *Selections*, p. 252.)

Shoghi Effendi translates: "This, although We have never gloried in any thing, nor did We seek preference over any soul. To everyone We have been a most kindly companion, a most forbearing and affectionate friend. In the company of the poor We have sought their fellowship, and amidst the exalted and learned We have been submissive and resigned." (*The Book of Certitude*, pp. 249–50.)

129. Ibid., p. 250.
130. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 137–38.
131. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 192/Persian, pp. 148–49.
132. Ibid., pp. 192–93.

133. Ibid., p. 197.
134. Ibid., p. 193.
135. Ibid.
136. Ibid., p. 194.
137. Ibid.
138. Ibid.
139. Ibid.
140. Ibid.
141. Ibid., pp. 194–95.
142. Bahá'u'lláh writes: “Every nation must have a high regard for the position of its sovereign, must be submissive unto him, must carry out his behests, and hold fast his authority. The sovereigns of the earth have been and are the manifestations of the power, the grandeur and the majesty of God.” (Translated by MacEoin, “From Babism to Baha’ism,” *Religion*, Vol. 13 (1983), p. 225.)
- MacEoin observes: “We are, quite clearly, moving very far away from the hopes and methods of early Babism. And, indeed, it is obvious that Ḥusayn ‘Alí [Bahá'u'lláh] went beyond even the tradition of Shí'í quietism in arguing, not that secular rulers, though usurpers of [p. 303] true authority, had to be tolerated, but that God Himself had given the government of the earth into their hands.” (Ibid.)
143. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 239.
144. See Browne, “Note V. Texts from the Persian *Bayán* Illustrating the Báb’s View of His Relation to ‘Him Whom God Shall Manifest’,” in *A Traveller’s Narrative*, Vol. 2, pp. 347–49.
145. On Bahá'u'lláh’s “multiple messiahship,” see C. Buck, “A Unique Eschatological Interface: Bahá'u'lláh and Cross-Cultural Messianism,” in *In Iran: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, Vol. 3, pp. 156–79.
146. Browne, *A Traveller’s Narrative*, Vol. 2, pp. xxxix–xl.

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APPENDIX:

The following table will provide an overview of Qur'anic verses explicitly cited (many of them exegeted as well) by Bahá'u'lláh in the course of his overall argument. The dual pages references are to Shoghi Effendi's English translation and to the 1980 reprint of the Persian original, respectively:

Qur'anic verses explicitly cited in *The Book of Certitude*:

Q. 36/30	[5/4]	Q. 40/5	[5/4]	Q. 11/38	[7/6]
Q. 71/26	[8/6]	Q. 29/2	[9/7]	Q. 35/39	[9/7]
Q. 11/61	[10/8]	Q. 11/62	[10/8]	Q. 40/28	[12/9]
Q. 2/87	[13/10]	Q. 3/70	[16/13]	Q. 3/71	[16/13]
Q. 3/99	[16/13]	Q. 3/7	[17/14]	Q. 76/9	[22/18]
Q. 5/117	[23/18]	Q. 14/24	[23/18]	Q. 55/5	[37/29]
Q. 67/2	[39/30]	Q. 76/5	[41/32]	Q. 6/91	[42/33]
Q. 41/30	[43/33]	Q. 70/40	[43/33]	Q. 82/1	[44/34]
Q. 14/48	[47/36]	Q. 39/67	[47/36]	Q. 2/144	[50/38]
Q. 2/149	[50/39]	Q. 2/115	[52/39]	Q. 2/143	[52/40]
Q. 74/50	[52/40]	Q. 28/20	[54/42]	Q. 26/19	[55/42]
Q. 19/22	[56/43]	Q. 19/28	[57/44]	Q. 3/39	[64/50]
Q. 55/29	[67/52]	Q. 51/22	[68/52]	Q. 55/5	[71/54]
Q. 2/87	[71/55]	Q. 25/25	[72/55]	Q. 25/7	[72/56]
Q. 44/10	[76/59]	Q. 3/119	[78/60]	Q. 25/7	[81/63]
Q. 4/45	[86/67]	Q. 2/75	[87/68]	Q. 2/79	[87/68]
Q. 24/35	[90/70]	Q. 9/33	[90/70]	Q. 29/51	[91/71]
Q. 2.176	[93/72]	Q. 6/103	[98/73]	Q. 3/28	[99/74]
Q. 41/53	[101/76]	Q. 51/21	[101/76]	Q. 59/19	[101/76]
Q. 2/253	[104/78]	Q. 7/145	[105/79]	Q. 6/35	[110/82]
Q. 7/17	[113/85]	Q. 11/7	[115/87]	Q. 13/5	[115/87]
Q. 50/15	[115/87]	Q. 50/20	[116/88]	Q. 17/51	[117/89]
Q. 7/178	[119/91]	Q. 6/122	[121/93]	Q.37/173	[126/96]
Q. 9/33	[126/96]	Q. 11/18	[126/97]	Q. 9/32	[127/97]
Q. 35/15	[132/102]	Q. 6/91	[135/105]	Q. 15/72	[135/105]

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Q. 5/67	[136/105]	Q. 48/10	[136/106]	Q. 29/23	[138/107]
Q. 2/46	[130/108]	Q. 2/249	[139/108]	Q. 18/111	[139/108]
Q. 13/2	[139/108]	Q. 17/44	[140/109]	Q. 78/29	[140/109]
Q. 57/3	[143/111]	Q. 2/210	[144/112]	Q. 28/5	[146/113]
Q. 13/41	[147/114]	Q. 3/183	[148/115]	Q. 3/183	[149/115]
Q. 2/89	[150/116]	Q. 2/285	[152/119]	Q. 54/50	[153/119]
Q. 43/22	[155/121]	Q. 2/19	[164/128]	Q. 36/20	[165/128]
Q. 2/85	[169/131]	Q. 33/40	[169/131]	Q. 6/103	[170/132]
Q. 16/61	[170/132]	Q. 21/23	[171/133]	Q. 55/39	[173/134]
Q. 55/41	[173/135]	Q. 10/25	[174/135]	Q. 6/127	[175/136]
Q. 2/136	[176/136]	Q. 2/253	[177/137]	Q. 8/17	[179/138]
Q. 48/10	[179/138]	Q. 33/40	[179/139]	Q. 2/189	[182/141]
Q. 17/85	[183/141]	Q. 44/43	[190/147]	Q. 44/44	[190/147]
Q. 44/49	[190/147]	Q. 6/59	[191/147]	Q. 7/57	[191/148]
Q. 16/43	[192/148]	Q. 29/69	[195/151]	Q. 2/1	[202/156]
Q. 2/23	[205/157]	Q. 45/5	[206/159]	Q. 45/24	[209/162]
Q. 29/23	[211/164]	Q. 38/67	[214/167]	Q. 34/43	[215/167]
Q. 26/227	[227/176]	Q. 2/94	[227/177]	Q. 34/13	[229/178]
Q. 59/2	[229/178]	Q. 11/113	[233/181]	Q. 54/6	[239/185]
Q. 25/44	[244/190]	Q. 43/56	[257/199]	Q. 20/124	[257/199]