

William McCants and Kavian Milani

The History and Provenance of an Early Manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* Dated 1268 (1851–52)

It has been more than one hundred years since E. G. Browne discovered two manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*, a history of the Babi movement, in the Bibliothèque Nationale. When he published a critical edition of the book based on these two manuscripts in 1910, Browne attributed it to Hajji Mirza Jani Kashani, a Babi killed in 1852, and appraised it as one of the earliest histories of the Babi movement.¹ Baha'i leaders of the time contended that the book was not authored by Mirza Jani, but rather that it was a late Azali forgery.² Subsequent researchers have reached a middle ground, arguing that the historical portion of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* was written in the early 1850s, perhaps by several authors, on the basis of a shorter, earlier history by Mirza Jani; they also contend that an earlier theological treatise was appended to the work at this

William McCants is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University.

Kavian S. Milani, M.D. is an M.A. candidate in the Department of History at George Mason University.

¹In 1892 Browne asked Subh Azal (see below) about the identity of the author of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*. He replied, "The history to which you allude must, by certain indications, be by the uplifted and martyred Hajji for none but he wrote (such) a history." Browne inferred that Subh Azal was speaking of Hajji Mirza Jani. See Edward Granville Browne, *Kitab-i Nuqtat al-Kaf: Being the Earliest History of the Babis compiled by Haji Mirza Jani of Kashan* (Leiden, 1910), 3–4.

²Soon after the book's publication, 'Abdu'l-Baha'—the eldest son of Baha'u'llah, and the head of the Baha'i Faith from 1892 to 1921—dismissed the *Nuqtat al-kaf* and especially its introduction as an Azali-inspired forgery and instructed a number of prominent and scholarly Baha'is to write refutations of the book and forward them to the Baha'i scholar, Mirza Abu al-Fadl (for 'Abdu'l-Baha's reaction, see 'Abdul-Hamid Ishraq-khavari, *Ma'idih-yi asmani* (Tehran, 129 BE/1973) 5: 206–10; for Abu al-Fadl's role, see Ruhullah Mihrabkhani, *Zindigani-yi Mirza Abu al-Fadl Gulpaygani* (Hofheim-Langenhain, 1988), 427). A number of Baha'is carried out 'Abdu'l-Baha's wishes, with the most significant apology written by Mirza Na'im Sidih and Mirza Hasan-i Adib as early as 1911–1912. In a letter dated 16 Shawwal 1330 (September 28, 1912) Mirza Abu al-Fadl mentions that he had written five or six sections of a refutation (which was later incorporated into his *Kashf al-ghita'*) when he received a letter from Ibn Abhar (a prominent Baha'i) and correspondence from Adib and Na'im. Abu al-Fadl relates that these men informed him that they had found a copy of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* and discovered the identity of its author and scribe: Mirza Mustafa, a Babi scribe living in Tehran. See Mirza Abu al-Fadl Gulpaygani, *Rasa'il va raqa'im*, ed. R. Mihrabkhani (Tehran, 134 BE/1978), 452–3. As we will see, it is certainly possible that they had discovered a manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* in Mirza Mustafa's handwriting, but their attribution of authorship to him was premature.

time. These authors differ, however, on whether or not the *Nuqtat al-kaf* was heavily redacted by later authors.³ Dating the text and determining its redaction history is important since it determines how historians can use it. If it was written in the early 1850s and underwent little redaction, then it is one of the earliest internal histories of the Babi movement as well as a valuable window into the confused state of that community during the time it was composed. If it was written later or heavily redacted, then it may be the product of the animosity between the partisans of Mirza Yahya (known as Azal or Subh Azal), the head of the Babi community nominated by the Bab, and those of his half-brother Mirza Husayn ‘Ali (known as Baha’ or Baha’u’llah), who began to establish a new religion in 1863. As such, it would be less valuable as a source for early Babi history, although it could be used to gauge later communal tensions.

So far, those who have examined the *Nuqtat al-kaf* have dated it based on internal evidence and the reports of those who saw early manuscripts of the text. However, the absence of any manuscripts with colophons containing an early date has made the matter inconclusive.⁴ With the discovery of a manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* dated 1268 (1851–52) in Princeton’s collection of Babi works we are now able to confirm Browne’s hypothesis that the *Nuqtat al-kaf* was written in the early 1850s, although we agree with other contemporary scholars that Browne mistakenly attributed the entire book to the Kashani merchant.⁵ Moreover, the 1268 manuscript is not markedly different from Browne’s edition, which indicates that the *Nuqtat al-kaf* underwent little substantive

³In 1974, Muhi-t-i Tabataba’i argued that the *Nuqtat al-kaf* was actually a combination of two originally separate works: a theological treatise and a history (see his “Kitabi bi nam ba nami taza,” *Gawhar*, (1353/1974) 11–12: 952–61). Tabataba’i points out that in the first part, a theological treatise, the author states that it was written 1277 years after the *ba’tha* (Muhammad’s call to prophethood). Depending on how this is calculated, it gives us the date of either 1267/1850–51 or 1264/1848 (see Dennis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History* (Leiden, 1992), 147–8). In the historical part of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*, the author mentions that 1270 years have passed since the Hijra, thus giving us the date of 1270/1853–54. Since the latest date mentioned is 1270 (1853–54), Tabataba’i conjectures that in this year someone combined an earlier theological treatise with a historical work written around 1270/1853–54. MacEoin agrees with this hypothesis, although he differs with Tabataba’i over who might have authored the work (*Sources*, 151). Abbas Amanat and Juan Cole also agree with Tabataba’i’s hypothesis, but they differ from him and MacEoin in that they posit that the book might have been redacted later. Thus, Amanat believes that much of the material was written in the early 1850s but some passages detailing the leadership of the Babi community in 1851 may have been redacted in the 1860s (see his *Resurrection and Renewal* (Ithaca, 1989) 423). Going beyond Amanat, Cole argues that the work which was written in the 1850s was definitely redacted in the 1860s (“Nuqtat al-Kaf and the Babi Chronicle Traditions,” *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Babi and Baba’i Studies*, 2, no. 6 (1998), <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/notes/vol2/Babihist.htm>).

⁴Browne used two manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* acquired by Comte de Gobineau and purchased by the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1884 after his death. One incomplete manuscript was appended to the end of a copy of the Bab’s Persian *Bayan*. The Persian *Bayan* ends with a colophon dating it to 1279 (1862–63). Although the incomplete copy of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* does not have its own colophon, we can surmise that it was appended to the 1279 Persian *Bayan* sometime soon after this date. The other copy of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* in the Bibliothèque is complete but has no date.

redaction prior to its publication in 1910. Finally, we believe that this manuscript is not only significant for its early date; it may also be a clean copy of the original draft of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*. In this article we will present our preliminary findings on the provenance of the text and its history, beginning with the two people who played a key role in its preservation: Mirza Mustafa and Sa'id Khan Kurdistanî.

Mirza Mustafa was born around the year 1259/1843, presumably in his home village of Sidih, near Isfahan.⁶ Then known as Isma'il Sabbagh Sidihi, he worked as a dyer (*sabbagh*) in Sidih. At some point in his youth, he met Sayyid Yusuf Dihnuhi, a Babi who converted him to the movement.⁷ Before Dihnuhi left he entrusted Mirza Mustafa's religious instruction to the prominent mujtahid, Zayn al-'Abidin (later known as Zayn al-Muqarrîbin), a Babi who lived in nearby Najafabad.⁸ Zayn left Najafabad around 1864 and settled in Baghdad.⁹ During this time he became a supporter of Baha'u'llah, who claimed to have received a new revelation from God—a claim his half-brother Subh Azal rejected.

Unlike his teacher, Mirza Mustafa remained an ardent supporter of Subh Azal;¹⁰ however, he paid a heavy price for his devotion and his efforts to

⁵Kavian Milani offers some new insights on the authorship of *Nuqtat al-kaf* in his forthcoming "The Bab's Stay in Kashan: A Critique of the *Nuqtatu'l-kaf* Based on the Kashan Pericope," *Baba'i Studies Review*.

⁶There is no birth date for Mirza Mustafa although both Bamdad and Qasimi say that he died in 1339/1921 when he was over eighty years old. See Mahdi Bamdad, *Sbarb-i bal-i rijal-i Iran dar qarn 12, 13, 14 hijri* (Tehran, 1974) 6: 264, and Ali Muhammad Qasimi's brief biographical notice on Mirza Mustafa written in 1351/1932 and published in the introduction of Mirza Mustafa's *Pasukb* (Refutation) of Zayn al-Muqarrîbin (see below) published online at H-Baha'i: <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol5/zayn/zaynresp.htm>.

⁷Sa'id Kahn Kurdistanî, "Notes on Babi Mss. by Dr. Saeed Khan," (William McElwee Miller Papers, box 4, envelope labeled "Notes on Babi Books by Dr. Saeed," Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library), 31. William McCants recently discovered the envelope containing these detailed notes by Kurdistanî on the history of each manuscript in his private collection. William Miller (see below), in a footnote of his *The Baba'i Faith: Its History and Teachings*, mentions that the "Notes of Dr. Sa'eed" are located at Princeton (xix, n. 17). Although they are not separately catalogued, they are located in box 4 of William Miller's papers in an envelope marked "Valuable! Notes on Babi Books by Dr. Saeed." Miller acquired these notes and Kurdistanî's collection of Babi manuscripts while he was living in Iran and later donated them to Princeton University. The notes, numbering over thirty pages, are not only valuable for information on the background of many of the manuscripts in the collection; they also contain unique biographical information on Azali and Baha'i figures. Miller translated all of these notes (excluding a few Arabic passages). McCants hopes to publish Miller's rendition after comparing it with the original and translating the Arabic passages that Miller excluded.

⁸Kurdistanî, "Notes," 31, and Hasan Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Baba'i Faith* (London, 1970) 34, n. 3, citing a letter from Mirza Mustafa to Browne (see *Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental Mss. Belonging to the Late E. G. Browne*, ed. R. A. Nicholson (Cambridge, 1932), 81). Zayn had become a Babi in 1851 (see Balyuzi, *Eminent Baba'is in the Time of Baha'u'llah* (Oxford, 1985), 274).

⁹Balyuzi, *Eminent Baba'is*, 275.

convert others to his religion.¹¹ Around 1870, Mirza Mustafa fled Sidih due to a famine and the local persecution of Babis. He sought refuge in Isfahan with Robert Bruce, a Christian missionary who had settled there in 1869. Although Bruce baptized him, Mirza Mustafa likely converted for the protection afforded by the powerful reverend, not out of conviction.¹²

Despite this conversion, Mirza Mustafa could not escape the stigma of being a Babi and the accompanying persecution. At some point it seems that Mirza Mustafa returned to Sidih, since two of his biographers say that he again fled the city for Isfahan in 1307 (1889–1890) when seven “Babis” (which could either mean Babis or Baha’is) in Sidih were beheaded on the order of the powerful Usuli mujtahid of Isfahan, Shaykh Muhammad Taqi, known as Aqa Najafi.¹³ Mirza Mustafa was arrested several days after his arrival and, on the order of the governor of the time, the Zill al-Sultan, one of his ears was cut off.¹⁴ He was then bridled like a camel and paraded in the streets and the bazaar of Isfahan, after which he was expelled from the city. Some of the Babis of Isfahan brought him back to the city under the cover of darkness and, after several days of hiding, he traveled to the village of Tar. Tar, one of the suburbs of Natanz, was the home of Mulla Muhammad Baqir, known as Akhund Tari, a local mujtahid and a Babi. Mirza Mustafa sought out Akhund Tari and stayed with him for some time, transcribing the writings of the Bab which the mujtahid had in his possession.¹⁵

¹⁰Apparently Zayn later wrote Mirza Mustafa a letter and tried to convince him of Baha’u’llah’s claims (Kurdistani, “Notes,” 32). In reply, Mirza Mustafa wrote a lengthy refutation in 1337/1919 that has recently been published online (see note above).

¹¹That Mirza Mustafa was engaged in clandestine efforts to spread his faith is demonstrated by the account of a well-known Baha’i poet, Na’im, who says that he first heard about the Bab’s teachings and obtained copies of his writings through his fellow townsman, “Mulla Isma’il” (Mirza Mustafa). See ‘Aziz’u’llah Sulaymani’s *Masabih-i hidayat* (Tehran, 123 BE/1967) 3: 140.

¹²This episode is related by Kurdistani (“Notes,” 1). Here Kurdistani writes that even though Mirza Mustafa converted, “we knew that he was at heart a Babi, and only outwardly Christian.” For more information on Mirza Mustafa’s conversion, see Moojan Momen, “Early Relations between Christian Missionaries and the Babi and Baha’i Communities,” in *Studies in Babi and Baha’i History* (Los Angeles, 1982), 60–63.

¹³Bamdad, 242–243. This date squares with Mirza Mustafa’s own testimony. In the *Descriptive Catalogue* of manuscripts owned by E. G. Browne, Nicholson mentions a note written by Browne who states that Mirza Mustafa disclosed his real name to him as Isma’il-i Sabbagh of Sidih and said that he fled the persecutions in Isfahan about 35 years ago; Browne received this note along with several manuscripts on September 15, 1922 (see *Descriptive Catalogue*, 81). For general details on the 1890 persecution of Babis and Baha’is in Isfahan, Sidih, and Najafabad, see Edward Granville Browne, *A Traveller’s Narrative* (New York, 1930), 400–412; and Moojan Momen, *The Babi and Baha’i Religions, 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford, 1981), 284–91.

¹⁴Kurdistani asserts that the Zill al-Sultan cut off his ear in order to appease the people and save Mirza Mustafa’s life (“Notes,” 3).

¹⁵Bamdad, 243; Qasimi, introduction. Qasimi says that Akhund Tari hid Mirza Mustafa in his brother’s cellar.

If he had thought to escape the persecution of Aqa Najafi, Mirza Mustafa had picked the wrong place to hide, for the Shaykh soon set his sights on Akhund Tari. With the consent of the Zill al-Sultan, horsemen were sent to arrest the two men and they were forced to flee. Mirza Mustafa went to Tehran and tried to keep a low profile, changing his name from Isma‘il to Mirza Mustafa and taking up the occupation of a scribe.¹⁶ He continued to transcribe the writings of the Bab and Subh Azal and even managed to visit the latter in Cyprus with his two daughters in 1317 or 1318 (ca. 1900), where he remained for three years. He must have been favored by Subh Azal since one of his daughters, Hamidih, was given in marriage to Subh Azal’s son, ‘Abd al-Wahid. When the latter died, Mirza Mustafa returned with his daughters to Tehran and lived there until his death on July 28, 1921.¹⁷

Sometime between his return and 1911,¹⁸ Mirza Mustafa made the acquaintance of Dr. Sa‘id Khan Kurdistani, a Sunni Muslim convert to Christianity from Senneh. Kurdistani was somewhat of a polymath who had received a traditional Sunni religious education in Senneh and was there inducted into the Naqshabandi Sufi order.¹⁹ As a young man, he converted to Christianity through contact with an Assyrian missionary from Urumiyya (who also taught him Syriac) and then fled to Hamadan to avoid persecution; there he learned English and the practice of medicine at a Christian mission.²⁰ In 1893, he traveled to London and stayed there for two and a half years.²¹ At this time Kurdistani may have met E. G. Browne, the British orientalist, with whom he would later correspond and whom he would introduce to Mirza Mustafa.

When he returned to Iran, Kurdistani set up his own clinic in Hamadan. At the turn of the century, ‘Ayn al-Dawla, the governor of Luristan and Khuzistan

¹⁶Bamdad, 243; Qasimi, introduction. Mazandarani, a Baha’i historian, gives a brief biographical notice of an Azali named Sayyid Aqa Khan Talkhunchih’i of Isfahan who also had a severed ear and moved to Tehran after a wave of Baha’i executions in 1296 (1879). Although Mazandarani’s date does not match that of Mirza Mustafa’s flight, he must certainly be talking about him since he reports that this man also took the name “Mulla Mustafa” and worked as a scribe of Babi and Azali writings (*Zubur al-baqq* [Tehran, 1974. Digitally reprinted, East Lansing, MI: H-Bahai, 2001] 8: 505).

¹⁷Qasimi, introduction. Kurdistani notes that during his time in Cyprus, Mirza Mustafa was very agitated by the behavior of his daughter’s husband, who, according to Mirza Mustafa, “had thirty prostitutes as his companions” (Kurdistani, “Notes,” 1).

¹⁸In an English note appended by Kurdistani to a copy of *Tarikh-i jadid* that Mirza Mustafa had transcribed, he writes: “The witness is M. Mostafa the writer of many Babi mss[.] he is a reliable man, though now/owns [sic] has got tired of Babism and all his own sufferings.” The note is dated Dec. 18, 1911 (see folio 228a, *Tarikh-i jadid*, vol. 8, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library).

¹⁹Isaac Yonan, *The Beloved Physician of Teheran* (Nashville, 1934), 22–23. The *Beloved Physician* is a hagiographical biography of Kurdistani written by one of his relatives through marriage, Isaac Malek Yonan. Yonan was a professor at Urumiyya College in Urumiyya in the north-western part of Azerbaijan. The college was established around 1878 by the American Presbyterian Mission.

²⁰Yonan, 28–73; William Miller, *Ten Muslims Meet Christ* (Grand Rapids, 1969) 15–35.

²¹Miller, *Ten Muslims*, 35.

from 1899–1901, made him his personal physician during an insurrection of Luri tribesmen.²² Afterward, the governor brought him back to Tehran, where he received the title of “Khan” and a yearly stipend. Kurdistani was allowed to return to Hamadan after he successfully operated on one of the wives of Muzaffar al-Din Shah, which also made him one of the most sought-after doctors in the area. By 1901 he had returned to Hamadan.²³

As an enthusiastic convert to Christianity with training in the traditional Islamic sciences, Kurdistani did not shrink from debating with his former Sunni coreligionists or Shi’is. He also seems to have developed an interest in the Babi movement since one of his biographers writes of him engaging in a debate with Babis during a trip to Urumiyya in 1901. In this debate, his biographer notes, Kurdistani exhibited a substantial knowledge of the Bab’s Persian *Bayan*.²⁴ As the anecdote indicates, Kurdistani’s interest in Babis and Baha’is probably stemmed from evangelical concerns—he and his coreligionists were worried about the successful missionary activities of the Baha’is in Iran, which they saw as a threat to their own efforts. Regarding this threat, Kurdistani’s biographer and relative by marriage, Isaac Malek Yonan, writes:

Babism was soon changed to Bahatism and the *Bayan* was superseded by the *Ikan* (the written revelation of the sect). The cult has since made deep inroads in the ranks of the intelligentsia of Persia, and has even attempted a wide propaganda throughout the world, with aspiration of becoming the world religion.²⁵

With some relief, he notes that Kurdistani had made it his business to become an expert on these religious movements:

There is no living person to-day who knows more and understands better the fallacies of Bahatism and who has done more both by his writings and his controversies in exposing the hypocrisies and inconsistencies of its claims than Dr. Sa’eed, who is an acknowledged authority on the whole system.²⁶

Aside from his evangelical motivation for seeking knowledge about the Babis and Baha’is, Kurdistani may have also had a personal grudge against the movements’ adherents. In the winter of 1904, according to William Miller,²⁷ some Jewish physicians of Hamadan who had become Baha’i told several local Shi’i

²²See “‘Ayn al-Dawla,” *Elr.*

²³Yonan, 73–6; Miller, *Ten Muslims*, 35.

²⁴Yonan, 88–89. Yonan does not supply a date but Miller says that Kurdistani left for Urumiyya in the winter of 1901 (*Ten Muslims*, 36).

²⁵Yonan, 89.

²⁶Yonan, 90.

²⁷Miller was a Presbyterian missionary in Iran who wrote a number of exposés on the Baha’i religion.

clerics that Kurdistani had written *The Sources of Islam*, a refutation of the Qur'an actually penned by W. St. Clair-Tisdall, a Christian missionary in Iran. Miller does not tell us much about their motives for doing so, only that they were "jealous of his successes."²⁸ Whether or not this actually happened, it is worth noting that these converts were not responsible for the book's initial attribution to Kurdistani. Rather, Miller records that Kurdistani had previously given a copy of the book to a mulla in Hamadan who then accused him of writing it and ordered his death while he was away on his 1901 trip to Urumiyya.²⁹ Similarly, in Miller's account of the 1904 incident, the mullas of Hamadan decreed Kurdistani's death for writing the book and for his attempts to convert Muslims to Christianity. A wealthy landowner, Amir Afkham, whose wife and daughter Kurdistani had saved from cholera in 1904, did not immediately intervene because he wanted the disturbance to continue in order to put pressure on the governor to resign. When the crisis escalated, he provided protection for Kurdistani. In the meantime, the region's governor contacted the prime minister of Iran and informed him of the situation. The prime minister summoned Kurdistani to Tehran where he went with his wife and remained for seven years before returning to Hamadan.³⁰

During this period of time in Tehran, his search for manuscripts and information on the Babi and Baha'i religions led him to Mirza Mustafa, from whom he began to commission copies of manuscripts in the latter's substantial collection.³¹ One of the books he commissioned was a copy of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*.³² Although we

²⁸Miller, *Ten Muslims*, 37. Whatever the nature of Kurdistani's personal grudge against the Baha'is or his view of their religion, he did not refrain from providing them medical treatment after his move to Tehran. One of his Baha'i patients, Hasan Balyuzi, writes: "The present writer, having been Dr. Sa'id Khan's patient in his boyhood, remembers him well; the doctor's probity was unquestionable" (Balyuzi, *Browne and the Baha'i Faith*, 34, n. 3).

²⁹Miller, *Ten Muslims*, 36.

³⁰Miller, *Ten Muslims*, 38.

³¹By 1912 Kurdistani had put Browne in touch with Mirza Mustafa, from whom the professor also commissioned a number of manuscripts from him. Regarding the size and significance of Mirza Mustafa's collection, Browne writes:

For several rare manuscript works I am indebted to an old Babi scribe of Isfahan, resident at Tihran, with whom I was put in communication by Dr Sa'id Khan of Hamadan, who, though coming of a family of *mullas*, is a fervent Christian, while preserving in true Persian fashion a keen interest in other religious beliefs. This old scribe, a follower of Subh-i-Azal, seems to have been in close touch with many Babis in all parts of Persia, and on several occasions when persecutions threatened or broke out to have been entrusted by them with the custody of books which they feared to keep in their own houses, and which in some cases they failed to reclaim, so that he had access to a large number of rare Babi works, any of which he was willing to copy for me at a very moderate charge (Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion* (Cambridge, 1918), xi); diacritics removed in conformity with the style of *Iranian Studies*.

³²Perhaps Kurdistani first learned of the existence of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* from the introduction and appendices of Browne's edition of the *Tarikh-i jadid*; there the British orientalist argued that the *Tarikh-i jadid* (written by a Baha'i) was a distorted revision of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* (Browne, *New History* (Cambridge, 1893), Introduction, xxviii-xxix). If so, Kurdistani would no doubt have wanted a copy of a history that would challenge Baha'i historiography, particularly concerning

do not know how many copies Kurdistani commissioned or how many other manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* he may have already possessed,³³ we know that Mirza Mustafa made at least one copy in 1327/1909 (hereafter referred to as NK1327) which eventually ended up in Kurdistani's Babi collection. However, Kurdistani did not seem to know that it was copied by Mirza Mustafa or that it was a recension of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*. In his notes on the manuscript, he writes:

Number 264. This is a history of Babism [*tarikb-i babiyyih*]. Like the *Nuqtat al-kaf*, it was copied in Kashan in 1268 A.H. They say that one copy was also printed. Much of the material is like the *Nuqtat al-kaf*, but it by no means has the simplicity and conciseness of *Nuqtat al-kaf*. It contains long and wearisome sermons. It recounts briefly the ignominy of Badasht.³⁴

This copy was labeled “Tarikh-i Babih (sic)” in keeping with Kurdistani's comments³⁵ and, along with the rest of Kurdistani's Babi manuscript collection, was purchased by William Miller who later donated the manuscripts to Princeton University.³⁶ That Kurdistani misread the colophon of this manuscript and did not examine the text closely will become evident below.

In the colophon of NK1327—the colophon to which Kurdistani refers in his note above—Mirza Mustafa tells us what manuscripts he used to prepare his copy:

the successorship of Subh Azal. The polemical value of the work was further enhanced after Browne published his edition in 1910. Soon after, ‘Abdu’l-Baha’ denounced it as a complete Azali forgery (see note above). Since Kurdistani was aware of early manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* that preceded the Baha’i-Azali split, he knew that the publication of such statements by ‘Abdu’l-Baha’ might cast the latter in a negative light. Thus, in a letter to William Miller written November 17, 1929, Kurdistani tells him about one such statement in *Bada’i’ al-athar*, a journal kept by one of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s amanuenses, and promises to send him a copy once he has obtained the book from a Baha’i acquaintance (Letter from Saeed Khan to William Miller dated 11-17-29, box 4, “Miller Papers”). So far we have been unable to find the specific comments of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’ that Kurdistani mentions in his letter.

³³Tabataba’i learned that Kurdistani's Assyrian servant stole a copy of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* from him in 1315/1946; however, Kurdistani considered it to be defective. See MacEoin, *Sources*, 146.

³⁴Kurdistani, “Notes,” 16. In this and a later quotation, we have modified Miller's translation for accuracy and transliteration (see footnote 7 for details on the translation). Despite Kurdistani's assertion, NK1327 is not substantially different from NK1268, including its treatment of the Badasht episode. This is further evidence that Kurdistani did not compare the two manuscripts carefully (see below).

³⁵This manuscript consists of 172 folios and it is catalogued as vol. 38, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, although it bears Kurdistani's old catalogue number of 264. This may be the same manuscript cited by Mangol Bayat as “Tarikh-i babiyya” in her *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse, 1982), 208. If so, it appears that she confused this manuscript with some other text as it contains no reference to Mirza Malkum Khan's association with Babis in Baghdad after his exile from Persia (Bayat, 149).

³⁶The manuscripts are catalogued as vols. 1-47, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

I finished copying this book on 24 Dhu Qi‘da 1327 AH [December 7, 1909]. Let it be known that the lowly scribe of letters [i.e. Mirza Mustafa] copied this book from a manuscript that had spelling errors and mistakes which was written in the year 1268 AH in Kashan. In the beginning of the book the author [*musannif*] and scribe asks forgiveness for his illiteracy and bad spelling.

Moreover, let it be known that a manuscript dated 1269—based on which a printed edition has been made—became available in a printed manuscript, and the present book was compared with it and corrected.³⁷

While Mirza Mustafa seems to have written the first two passages at the same time, the hurried handwriting of the final passage concerning a 1269 manuscript indicates that he may have appended it to the colophon at a later date.

Although the language in the final passage is somewhat vague, it seems that Mirza Mustafa made a transcription of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* based on a 1268 manuscript, which he finished in 1327/1909. Sometime later he added a postscript in which he says that he obtained a published edition of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*, compared it with his transcription, and made emendations based on it. It would seem, therefore, that Mirza Mustafa had finished copying a 1268 manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* and then made emendations to it based on Browne’s 1910 published version of the text, the only edition of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* ever published.³⁸

Although we do not fully understand why Mirza Mustafa says that the published edition of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* was based on a 1269 manuscript,³⁹ a preliminary survey

³⁷NK1327, 171a.

³⁸It is possible that this is also the manuscript that Mirza Mustafa mentioned in a letter to E. G. Browne dated March 9, 1912. In this letter, he tells Browne that he had obtained the published edition of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*. Before this time, he writes, he possessed three manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*: one was a partial copy of one of the Paris manuscripts (loaned to him by Nicolas), his own defective copy, and a manuscript from “the friends in Naraq” dated 1267/1850–1. Mirza Mustafa then says that he made two complete copies based on these manuscripts and sent one to the “American College” and the other to Kurdistan (MacEoin, *Sources*, 145–146). Since Mirza Mustafa’s original letter has been lost and we have to rely on MacEoin’s summary of Browne’s notes on the letter (for which he gives no archival reference), it is difficult to resolve the discrepancies between this letter and the colophon of NK1327. First, the dates of the manuscripts do not match. It is of course possible that Browne misread the date of the Naraq manuscript in Mirza Mustafa’s letter; the loss of the original, however, makes it impossible to conclusively resolve the discrepancy. Second, Mirza Mustafa also mentions that he had sent a copy of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* to Kurdistan before seeing Browne’s edition. Perhaps he later retrieved the manuscript from Kurdistan and compared it with the published version. This would explain why he later added a final postscript to the NK1327 colophon mentioning that he had compared it with the published text. An alternative explanation is that NK1327 and the copy of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* sent to Kurdistan by Mirza Mustafa are two different manuscripts. If these two manuscripts were identical, Kurdistan would certainly have known that Mirza Mustafa was the scribe of NK1327, which he does not.

³⁹Browne’s manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* are not dated. However, Kurdistan also says that the published edition is based on a 1269 AH manuscript in Paris; he must be referring to Suppl Pers. 1071, the only complete manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* that Browne consulted when preparing his edition.

of the marginal notations in NK1327 indicate that he had indeed consulted Browne's edition and "corrected" it by noting its differences from the 1268 text in the margins. Further, we believe we have found this 1268 manuscript in the Princeton Babi collection of Kurdistan (hereafter referred to as NK1268).⁴⁰ Concerning this manuscript, Kurdistan writes:

This book is the *Nuqtat al-kaf* of Mirza Jani Kashi, who was the host of the Bab for two nights in Kashan. This manuscript was written in the very year they killed Mirza Jani in Tehran, and it is a year older than the manuscript in the Louvre museum [muzih-yi lur] in Paris.⁴¹ The book which Professor Browne published was taken from the manuscript in Paris. Aqa Ayati Avarih⁴² and Aqa Niku⁴³ compared this manuscript with Professor Browne's manuscript and found that they agreed perfectly. Perhaps these are the only hand-written manuscripts (of this book) in the world; first this one, and then the Paris manuscript. For this reason this manuscript is very authentic. I secured it with great difficulty.⁴⁴

Although Kurdistan does not tell us how he procured NK1268, we do know from textual clues that Mirza Mustafa used it as the base text for his transcription, NK1327. First, Mirza Mustafa mentions in the colophon of NK1327 that he copied a manuscript dated 1268. To our knowledge, NK1268 is the only manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* that bears this date. The colophon says, "1268—The Letter Ta' prepared a clean copy of it (*barraraba harf al-ta'*)."⁴⁵ If Mirza Mustafa was referring to a different manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* copied in 1268 it has not yet come to light.

Second, there are marginal notes throughout NK1268 in Mirza Mustafa's unmistakable handwriting. These are not corrections to the text but notes of manuscript variants. Further, the variants listed in the margins of NK1327 and NK1268 are largely the same and, based on a preliminary survey, it seems that

⁴⁰Vol. 43, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. The Princeton cataloger has erroneously dated the manuscript 1248 A.H. The cataloger simply misread a Persian 6 as a 4. The *NK1268* manuscript has 181 folios.

⁴¹Kurdistan is mistaken here. The manuscript was actually held at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

⁴²Abd al-Husayn Ayati (Avarih) was a Baha'i historian who left the religion and later published an exposé on it called *Kashf al-biyal*. In it, he mentions seeing a manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* in Kurdistan's possession that was written "one year before the death of Hajji Mirza Jani" and identical to the edition published by Browne. See *Kashf al-biyal*, 4th. ed. (Tehran, 1340 Sh./1961), 139, cited by MacEoin, *Sources*, 146.

⁴³Hasan-i Niku was a Baha'i and a close friend of Avarih who also left the religion and wrote several tracts against it.

⁴⁴Kurdistan, "Notes," 5 (we have modified Miller's translation). Two scraps of paper bearing Kurdistan's handwriting that were found tucked between the pages of the Princeton 1268 text are further confirmation that he is talking about this manuscript.

⁴⁵NK1268, 180b.

they are derived from Browne's published version of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*.⁴⁶ For example, in Browne's edition it says that the mother of Quddus, the most prominent follower of the Bab, was "three-months pregnant and a virgin" (*sib mahib hamilih bud va dukhtar ham bud*) when she married her husband.⁴⁷ This phrase is not found in the main texts of NK1268 or NK1327 but is noted in the margins of both manuscripts in Mirza Mustafa's handwriting.⁴⁸ This further reinforces our theory that Mirza Mustafa's reference to a published edition of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* in the colophon of NK1327 refers to Browne's edition.

Third, Mirza Mustafa says that the 1268 text from Kashan which he consulted had spelling errors and mistakes (*bi imla' va maghlut*) which the author apologized for in the beginning of the book.⁴⁹ This is certainly an accurate description of the text of NK1268. The text contains a significant amount of spelling mistakes which indicate that the author was not highly literate in either Persian or Arabic. Thus the author breaks up verbal elements at the end of a line and continues them on the next line, something an educated man or a professional scribe would not do. Moreover, the author must have been a native Persian speaker because he often writes Persian words and Arabic loanwords as they are spoken, not written. Thus *رأساً* instead of *راثاً*,⁵⁰ *دس* instead of *دص*,⁵¹ and *ريذن يب* instead of *ريظن يب*.⁵² Further, he often drops the Persian silent (*و*) as evidenced by his spelling of (*راهخ*) and (*دناهخ*).⁵³ Additionally, the author writes several place names in an unconventional fashion. Thus Bushruih is written as *بوش رونه* rather than *بشرويه*.⁵⁴ Chihriq, the fortress where the Bab was imprisoned in the latter part of his ministry, is found as *هي قيرهچ* and not as *قيرهچ*,⁵⁵ and Urumiyya is written as *ي مورا* and not as the more standard *اروميه*.⁵⁶ Therefore, while we are not sure who penned NK1268, we can say that it was not prepared by a well-educated man or a professional scribe.

A fourth clue that Mirza Mustafa consulted NK1268 is that many of its unique phrases are found in NK1327 and not in the two Paris manuscripts (although we concede that they could appear in manuscripts we have not yet consulted). One interesting example is found in the account of a dream that the Prince

⁴⁶For example, the handwriting and content of the marginal notes in *NK1268* (12b, 72b, 98b) are identical to those in *NK1327* (11b, 64b, 88b). These notes are all based on the published edition of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*.

⁴⁷*Nuqtat al-kaf*, 199.

⁴⁸NK1268, 137b; NK1327, 125a.

⁴⁹This apology must not have been part of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* proper since Mirza Mustafa does not transcribe it in his NK1327. Moreover, we have not been able to find this apology in the text of NK1268 or any other manuscript.

⁵⁰NK1268, 114b.

⁵¹NK1268, 111a.

⁵²NK1268, 111a.

⁵³NK1268, 137b and 137x, a.

⁵⁴NK1268, 95a.

⁵⁵NK1268, 95b and 98a.

⁵⁶NK1268, 94a and NK1327, 84b.

Mihdi Quli Mirza had about the Bab. In it, the prince dreamt that he was part of the honor guard of Muhammad Shah. When a young Sayyid approached the monarch, Muhammad Shah became highly anxious and identified the man as Sayyid-i Bab. He ordered those around him to arrest the Bab as he believed that he had come to kill him, but no one noticed. The Bab then approached the Shah, fired a handgun (*tapanchib*), and killed the monarch.⁵⁷ In the Princeton manuscripts the word used for the handgun is *pishtabi*, which is a much more antiquated term.⁵⁸

Another example occurs in that portion of the narrative which details the examination of the Bab in Tabriz in the presence of the Crown-Prince Nasir al-Din Shah. The Browne edition suggests that the maternal uncle of Nasir al-Din, Amir Arslan Khan, was especially hostile to the Bab and challenged him on a few occasions.⁵⁹ Both NK1268 and NK1327 make no mention of Amir Arslan Khan and merely refer to him as *kasi* (someone).⁶⁰

Finally, it should be noted that Mirza Mustafa was very faithful to the text of NK1268; we were only able to find one difference between it and NK1327 that cannot be explained by a normal scribal error. This discrepancy is illuminating since he clarifies the language of the original in favor of Baha'u'llah and not Subh Azal. When detailing the childhood of Subh Azal, NK1268 reads:

However, his [Subh Azal's] mother died in childhood and his mother was a special wife. His father tells his honored wife [Baha'u'llah's mother] to watch over this child so that the maids serve him well.⁶¹

Compare the above with NK1327, which reads:

However, his mother dies when he was still a child. His father placed him in the care of his special, honored wife and tells (her) to watch over this child so that the maids serve him well.⁶²

Here, Mirza Mustafa clarifies the rather vague phrase about the death of the mother and then designates Baha'u'llah's mother, not Subh Azal's, as a special (*kbassib*) and honored wife.⁶³

Now that we have demonstrated that Mirza Mustafa used NK1268 when preparing his 1327 copy, we will consider the authenticity of its date. For most scholars, a dated colophon is sufficient for dating a manuscript. However, since

⁵⁷*Nuqtat al-kaf*, 138.

⁵⁸NK1268, 98a; NK1327, 88b.

⁵⁹*Nuqtat al-kaf*, 135.

⁶⁰NK1268, 96a; NK1327, 86b.

⁶¹NK1268, 160b.

⁶²NK1327, 149a–149b.

⁶³The word used for wife here is *kawcb*. The word *kbassib* is more problematic but it may indicate a first wife (for example, see Steingass under *kbass mahal*).

the provenance of *Nuqtat al-kaf* is so controversial we will provide additional evidence that suggests there is no convincing reason to question the authenticity of the date of NK1268.

The early date of NK1268 cannot be proven or refuted based on the manuscript paper. There are only two folios that bear watermarks: 128 and 144.⁶⁴ Although these watermarks clearly indicate the British origin of these two folios, the paucity of distinguishing signs and the current state of Iranian filigranology make it impossible for us to cull a date from these pages at the present time. The rest of the paper seems to be of local origin.⁶⁵

This lack of conclusive physical evidence leaves us with internal clues as to its early date. First, various passages in both the published and manuscript forms of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* indicate that it was written before the Baha'i-Azali split in the 1860s. Second, linguistic evidence indicates that NK1268 is an early copy of the original manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*. While this alone does not prove that it was written in 1268, it does indicate that it existed prior to every other known manuscript.

Juan Cole has argued that Browne's edition of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* contains redactions made to the text during the Baha'i-Azali split in the 1860s.⁶⁶ In 1863, Baha'u'llah told a small number of followers that he was the messianic figure foretold by the Bab, *manyuzhirubullab* ("Him Whom God shall make manifest"), a claim rejected by Subh Azal and his followers when it became more public in the ensuing decade. If, as Cole suggests, the book was altered or redacted after 1863, one would expect the text to show some signs of this split; in other words, Subh Azal would be extolled and Baha'u'llah would be excoriated.

A close reading of NK1268 and Browne's published manuscript exhibits no trace of this split. While there are glowing statements about Subh Azal, this is to be expected from a text written in the early 1850s when he was hailed as the Bab's nominee for leadership of the community. Moreover, the three versions of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* under consideration also contain effusive statements about Baha'u'llah; such phrases should not appear in a book allegedly redacted by Azali-Babis after 1863. Thus the author describes Baha'u'llah as "a person with perfections (*kamal*), with a command of the subjects pertaining to the Unity of God (*tawhid*), and possessor of praiseworthy attributes and desired characteristics."⁶⁷ Another example occurs in the portion of the narrative that deals with the mystic Basir. The author describes Basir as attaining "the grace of the presence of the manifest light of Jinab-i Baha' al-Imkan" (*fayd-i budur-i babir-i al-nur-i jinab-i baba' al-imkan*). The author goes on to say "the emanations of the

⁶⁴Both pages have chain lines and both have scrolls with words pertaining to the size of the paper. Page 144 reads "UNIVERSAL" while page 128 says "FOOLSCAP." 144 also contains a very faint coat-of-arms.

⁶⁵There are two identical, oval imprints on 154a and 169a that seem to contain English letters, but they are too faint for the naked eye to distinguish.

⁶⁶Cole, "Nuqtat al-Kaf."

⁶⁷*Nuqtat al-kaf*, 239.

lordship of that glory of paradise (*baba' al-ridwan*) were manifested in his temple of servitude.”⁶⁸

A few authors have also argued that some passages in the *Nuqtat al-kaf* contain anachronistic language; hence, they are later additions. For example, the author of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* states that Babism had spread to Anatolia, India, and Turkistan and that there is a group of Babis in Istanbul.⁶⁹ Moojan Momen argues that this passage is a later addition because the movement did not spread to these regions until after 1863.⁷⁰ This argument, however, is not convincing since this statement—which is found in all of the manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* we have consulted, including NK1268—could just as easily be the result of hyperbole or rumor rather than later redaction.

Finally, all of the contemporary authors who have written about the *Nuqtat al-kaf* have accepted that it is a composite of an earlier theological treatise and a history of the Babi movement written in 1270/1853 at the earliest. These dates are based on Tabataba'i's observation that the author of the historical section of *Nuqtat al-kaf* mentions that 1270 years have passed since the *hijra* of Muhammad while the author of the theological section mentions that 1277 years have passed since the *ba'tha* (Muhammad's call to prophethood in 610 AD), which would make the date 1267/1850–51.⁷¹ We concede that the date of 1267 is too precise to be dismissed; yet it does not invalidate the date in the colophon of NK1268. On the other hand, the date of 1270 (1853–4), if accepted at face value, does invalidate the date of the colophon of NK1268. However, the date is suspiciously round and comes at the end of a long passage detailing the growing power of Islam after its humble beginnings; thus, such a number seems to be more of a rhetorical device than a hard and fast date. In a similar rhetorical flourish, the author of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* scolds Muslims in another passage for still waiting, after a period of 1270 years, for the appearance of the Qa'im when his theophany has already arrived.⁷² To argue, based on the previous instance of 1270, that these two works were written at different times by different individuals and then combined into a single work around 1853 seems imprudent, particularly when proponents of this view have offered no persuasive linguistic evidence or anachronistic historical references to corroborate it.

In fact, there are historical references in the text which indicate that the historical section was written between 1851 and 1852. Thus the author of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* reports that during the siege of Zanjan, the leader of the Babi forces Mulla Muhammad Zanjani despaired of reaching a peace accord with Amir Kabir and wrote to foreign powers, including the Ottomans and Russians, asking them to intercede on behalf of the Babis. The author of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* then observes

⁶⁸ *Nuqtat al-kaf*, 258.

⁶⁹ *Nuqtat al-kaf*, 266.

⁷⁰ Momen, *The Babi and Baba'i and Baba'i Religions*, p. 34; Cole repeats the same argument (“Nuqtat al-Kaf and the Babi Chronicle Traditions,” online).

⁷¹ See footnote 3.

⁷² *Nuqtat al-kaf*, 272.

that one of the factors contributing to the Amir's later dismissal was his harsh treatment of the Babis during this time.⁷³ We know that Amir Kabir was first dismissed from his premiership on November 6, 1851 and was removed from military command shortly thereafter on November 21, 1851.⁷⁴ We also know that he was murdered by imperial decree in Kashan on January 13, 1852 and that the news of his (supposedly natural) death was publicly announced in the *Vaqayi'-i ittifaqiyyih* on January 30, 1852.⁷⁵ One would expect that if the author of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* was writing after January 1852, he would have mentioned the death of Amir Kabir and not just referred to his dismissal; it would simply have been too important a polemical point for him to ignore. This evidence, therefore, dates the writing of the historical section of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* (or at least this portion) to the interval between November 6, 1851 and January 30, 1852 (corresponding to 10 Muharram 1268–18 Rabi' al-Awwal 1268).

Having argued that there is nothing in the *Nuqtat al-kaf* that conclusively dates the genesis of its historical portion to 1853 or corroborates the assertion that material was added to it in the 1860s, we will now present linguistic evidence in NK1268 which indicates that it was one of the first copies of the original manuscript. In drawing conclusions on the basis of this evidence we are operating on the assumption that a manuscript which does not have lacunae but does have gross spelling mistakes and unrefined language is older than manuscripts which have lacunae but few spelling errors and more refined prose; in other words, a refined, but sometimes garbled, text is evidence of redaction by professional scribes or literati.

As we demonstrated earlier, NK1268 contains a number of spelling mistakes which are not the common errors of a scribe but of an author who is not well educated. A brief comparison of NK1268 with NK1327 and Browne's edition indicates that many of these spelling errors were corrected in later copies; for example, they do not appear in Mirza Mustafa's NK1327 even though he acknowledges that they were there originally.

In addition to this, there is language in NK1268 that suits the temperament of an uneducated author but not the refined sensibilities of a well-educated scribe or member of the literati. The coarseness of this language prompted at least one person to polish a few of its passages since there is evidence of some words being marked through and corrections written above them. This must have been rather early since a number of these changes were incorporated into later manuscripts. One noteworthy example is in the section of the narrative that deals with Ashraf Khan, the governor of Zanjan. The story as recorded in the published version of *Nuqtat al-kaf* is that Ashraf Khan had a forced sexual encounter with a married woman from Zanjan.⁷⁶ Once the husband informed

⁷³*Nuqtat al-kaf*, 234–235.

⁷⁴Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831–1896* (Berkeley, 1997), 142 and 154.

⁷⁵Amanat, *Pivot*, 162.

⁷⁶*Nuqtat al-kaf*, 130.

his acquaintances, they mobilized the masses who stormed his residence and looted it. The crowd then seized the governor, “did an indecent act to him” (*ba u ‘amal-i bad mikunand*), and expelled him from the city.⁷⁷ In contrast, the author of NK1268 had originally left nothing to our imagination; he writes, “they sodomized him (*livat mikunand*)” (93a). However, it appears that the person who later corrected NK1268 crossed out this offensive phrase (although it is still visible) and replaced it with (*ba u ‘amal-i bad mikunand*). This euphemism is carried over into NK1327 and Browne’s edition.

Another example of unrefined language in NK1268 that was polished by the anonymous editor is a line of poetry recited by Mirza Qurban ‘Ali, a famous mystic with connections to the Qajar court who was arrested and executed for being a Babi. All versions of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* relate that he uttered a poem when his turban fell to the ground after the executioner failed to sever his neck with the first sword blow. According to the original text of NK1268, he recited this line of poetry:

دزادنا مادک هک دنادن راتسد و رس بیبح یاپ رد هک تسم نأ شوخ یا
Well is it with that drunk who, at the feet of the beloved,
Knoweth not whether to throw his head or scarf.⁷⁸

After saying these lines, he was struck a second time and died.

The above verse is a variant from a *ghazal* of Hafiz.⁷⁹ The editor of NK 1268 inserted *halat* after *kehusha*, rendering the poetry closer to the original verse by Hafiz. Mirza Mustafa accepted this change and transcribed it in NK1327.⁸⁰ Browne’s manuscript, however, had clearly been redacted at some point by a scribe with a more Sufi bent. Thus an ‘*ashiq* (lover) is added to the first stanza and *mast* (a drunk) is changed into *sarmast* (intoxicated one):

دزادنا مادک هک دنادن راتسد و رس بیبح یاپ رد هک تسم رس قشاع نأ شوخ یا
Well is it with that intoxicated lover who, at the feet of his beloved,
Knoweth not whether to cast his head or scarf.⁸¹

The most likely explanation for these changes is that the author of the text on which NK1268 is based wrote a line of Hafiz from memory. The scribe of

⁷⁷See Muhammad Taqi Lisan ul-Mulk Sipihri Kashani, *Nasikh al-tawarikh* (Tehran, 1377) 1:913–914. The events in Zanjan and the fate of its governor as narrated by Sipihri appears to be more cautious (and perhaps more accurate) than the version narrated by the *Nuqtat al-kaf*. Sipihri, for instance, does not mention that the woman was married, nor does he mention that the governor was sodomized. On the other hand, the more embellished account presented in the *Nuqtat al-kaf* may have been based on popular gossip.

⁷⁸NK1268, 148b.

⁷⁹*Divan-i Hafiz*, ed. Muhammad Qazvini and Qasim Qani (Sina, Tehran, nd.), 102: دزادنا مادک هک دنادن راتسد و رس فیبح یاپ رد هک تسم نأ تلود شوخ یا

⁸⁰NK1327, 136a.

⁸¹*Nuqtat al-kaf*, 217.

NK1268 did not change anything but the later editor of NK1268 was not so circumspect; thus, he added a word to bring it closer to the line of Hafiz (or perhaps it reflects another popular variant then in circulation). By the time Browne's manuscripts were copied, the poetry had been further redacted by someone with Sufi sensibilities.

Of course, it could be argued that the editor of NK1268 is not correcting the text based on his own literary sensibilities but according to a different manuscript tradition. Thus, he is not making changes that are then passed from NK1268 to later manuscripts but is using later manuscripts to make changes to NK1268. Even if we accept this as a possibility, it does not invalidate the early date of the manuscript or its priority to other manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*.

In addition to editorial changes that were passed on to later manuscripts, NK1268 also preserves older material that has not been obscured by scribal errors. For example, in the section on the Babi uprising at Fort Shaykh Tabarsi we read on page 169 of Browne's published edition that Prince Mihdi Quli Mirza and 'Abbas-Quli Khan joined forces and began building fortifications. The Browne version reads *va bi-asbab tartib dadan mashghul gardidand* ("they got busy building equipment"), which seems garbled. In NK1268 and NK1327, however, it reads *bastiyan tartib dadan mashghul gardidand* ("they got busy building bastions"), which makes perfect sense.⁸²

Taken together, the spelling mistakes, coarse language, and better-preserved text of NK1268 indicate that it is not the product of a series of redactions like Browne's edition; rather, it confirms that this manuscript is earlier than any of the other manuscripts that have come to light thus far. This being said, it is important to bear in mind that the cumulative differences between NK1268 and Browne's edition are minimal. Thus, while Browne based his edition on a manuscript tradition that had been edited, the editing seems to have been confined to correcting spelling mistakes and improving some passages of poetry.

In the foregoing we have suggested that NK1268 is earlier than any other recension of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* that has yet been discovered. Even more tantalizing, it may be a copy of the original manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*. The strongest argument that it is a copy of the original draft of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* is that the spelling errors and coarse language are preserved. This indicates that it has not been redacted by professional scribes or the literati. Moreover, it does not have the garbled passages that are found in later manuscripts, again indicating that it is a copy of the original that has not been redacted.

We believe it is a copy of the original draft and not the original draft itself for two reasons. First, in folio 126a there is clear evidence that the scribe's eyes have slipped down the page he was copying; he crosses out his mistake, resumes writing, and places the passage in the correct spot. Second, in the colophon the scribe writes "The Letter Ta' prepared a clean copy of it (*barraraba harf al-ta'*)."

⁸²NK1268, 118a; NK1327, 106b. See Dekhoda's entry on *bastiyan*.

The Arabic verb *barrara* is used when a scribe is making a clean copy from a rough draft.⁸³

Who was the “Letter Ta’?” We know that he was probably a Babi based on his moniker. Arabic letters were a centerpiece of the Bab’s cosmology; he even called his first eighteen disciples “The Letters of the Living (*buruf al-bayy*).” Some well-known Babis were also known by the first letter of their name; for example, Mulla Muhammad Ja’far Naraqī, a prominent Babi in the 1850s, was known as “the Letter Jim.”⁸⁴ This type of moniker also seemed to be somewhat in vogue among Babi/Baha’i scribes. Thus Zayn al-Muqarrabin (see above) signed his colophons as “The Letter Za’.”⁸⁵ This being said, we are not given any obvious clues as to what name “the Letter Ta’” stood for.

Although we have posited that the mysterious “Letter Ta’” made a clean copy of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* in 1268 and we have surmised that the source of his draft was the original *Nuqtat al-kaf*, we do not know who wrote the original draft. One possibility is that the “Letter Ta’” wrote it and then made a clean copy. This is not unusual since authors of manuscripts often produced a draft copy and then made a clean copy for distribution. It could also have been written by someone else.⁸⁶

Regrettably, the scribe of NK1268 does not help us out of our dilemma but leaves us with an enigmatic statement at the top of the first page: *tawhid-i farmayish-i jinab-i hajji*. *Tawhid* (the unity of God) is, of course, the cornerstone of Muslim dogmatics but its role in this passage is unclear. The other words are clearer: “the sayings of Jinab-i Hajji.” The scribe of NK1268 has therefore attributed the *Nuqtat al-kaf* to a certain Jinab-i Hajji, but he has not made it clear if it was written by this man or just based on his oral statements.

Who was “Jinab-i Hajji” and what relationship did he have to the *Nuqtat al-kaf*? In the introduction we noted that E. G. Browne first ascribed the authorship of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* to Hajji Mirza Jani and that later authors have disputed this. MacEoin and Tabataba’i have argued that the historical portion of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* was probably written by someone else around 1270/1853 based on Jani’s notes and then combined with an earlier theological treatise.⁸⁷ Amanat and

⁸³Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography* (Leiden, 2001), 30.

⁸⁴Kurdistani, “Notes,” 10.

⁸⁵Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, 412–419.

⁸⁶Two pages from the original text by this author might survive as part of NK1268. As mentioned above, folios 128 and 144 are the only pages with watermarks. They are also written in a different handwriting than the rest of the manuscript. Are these original pages of the first draft of the *Nuqtat al-kaf*? As stated above, we have not yet been able to date the watermarks so we do not know when these pages were added to NK1268; thus, it is also possible that they are later additions to the text, perhaps replacing damaged pages.

⁸⁷Tabataba’i conjectured that it was written by Hajji Muhammad Rida’ (“Kitabi bi nam,” 958, 960). MacEoin surmises that the historical portion of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* was written in Baghdad in 1270/1853–54 by two or three people and an earlier theological treatise was later added to it (*Sources*, 151).

Cole have accepted that an earlier theological treatise and a history written around 1853 were combined in the early 1850s; however, Amanat allows for the possibility of later redaction while Cole maintains that it was definitely redacted in the 1860s.⁸⁸ Leaving aside the issue of the dating of the historical portion of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* and its relation to the theological section, the marginal note of NK1268 indicates that it, or at least the theological portion, was based on the sayings of a venerable “Hajji;” whether or not this is Mirza Jani is still an open question. Moreover, the textual priority of NK1268—irrespective of the date of its colophon—and the absence of heavy redaction in later manuscripts invalidate Cole’s contention that material was added to the *Nuqtat al-kaf* in the 1860s.

The exact identity of the author and the scribe of NK1268 is still a mystery, but perhaps the date of the manuscript and the moniker of the scribe will help answer the question of authorship in the future. While we would like to produce a new critical edition of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* based on NK1268 and NK1327 and confirm our preliminary findings, we already know that the final product will not be drastically different from Browne’s published text. If our findings are verified, then the *Nuqtat al-kaf* is indisputably early and free of later doctrinal distortions. Thus, it is not only valuable as an authentic source for early Babi history but also as a window into the mind of a Babi in 1851 or 1852 who tried to give meaning to the history of his religion shortly after the death of its founder.

⁸⁸ Amanat argues that the historical portion was written by one or more authors (including Hajji Mirza Jani) in the early 1850s but also says it is possible that some parts may have been edited in the 1860s, particularly those pertaining to the immediate period after the Bab’s death (*Resurrection*, 423). Cole also accepts that there was a version of the *Nuqtat al-kaf* containing both the historical and theological treatises in the early 1850s, but argues that it was definitely redacted in the 1860s (“Nuqtat al-Kaf and the Babi Chronicle Traditions,” *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Babi and Baba’i Studies*, 2, no. 6 (August 1998), <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/notes/vol2/Babihist.htm>).