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The Kitab-i Iqan:

An Introduction to Baha'u'llah's Book of Certitude with Two Digital Reprints of Early Lithographs

by Christopher Buck

The Book of Certitude (Kitab-i Iqan) is the preeminent doctrinal work of the Baha'i Faith. Mirza Husayn `Ali Nuri, Baha'u'llah (1817-1892), the author, later designated the Iqan as the "Lord of all books" ("sayyid-i kutub": idem, "Lawh-i Mubarak dar javab-i `Aridih-'i Jinab-i Abu'l-Fada'il-i Gulpaygani," in Ma'ida-yi Asmani, ed. `Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari [Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 129 Badi` [Baha'i Era)/1972-3], Vol. 7, pp. 148-73), reflecting on the text's status as divine revelation and on its historical importance in ideologically propagating the new Faith.

In addition to having been the most widely disseminated Baha'i text in the early history of the faith, the Iqan was the first book Baha'u'llah himself authorized for publication (lithographed, Bombay, c. 1881-2). The first Bombay lithograph was followed by a second, dated Dhu'l-Qa`adah 1310 A.H./May-June 1893 C.E. in the hand of the celebrated Baha'i calligrapher, Mishkin-Qalam. I have appended a facsimile of the Mishkin-Qalam Iqan as Appendix One, and the undated Bombay lithograph as Appendix Two. This is the first time these texts have been published since their original publication.

Circumstances of "Revelation":

The Iqan focused on spiritual authority from an Islamic perspective, rationalizing the eschatologically conceived fulfillment of Islam in the advent of Sayyid `Ali-Muhammad Shirazi (d. 1850), who was known as the Bab (the "Gate"). The Bab had created a firestorm of controversy following the declaration his prophetic mission at the end of the Shi`i millennium (1260/1844), a millennium that dating from the occultation of the Twelfth Imam in the year 260 A.H. While Baha'u'llah maintained continuity with Islam at a doctrinal level, historically this claim of fulfillment was tantamount to a break from Islam. The Iqan also served to heighten the adventist fervor current in the Babi community, in anticipation of the advent of a messianic figure foretold by the Bab. Details of the circumstances of revelation are given in the present writer's monograph, Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Baha'u'llah's Kitab-i Iqan. Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions, vol. 7 (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1995).

The Book of Certitude may be among the first texts by Baha'u'llah explicitly designated as "revelation," since the colophon at the end of the book refers to it as having been "revealed" (al-manzul [British Museum MS., BL Or. 3116, foll. 78-127] or in some MSS al-munzal [Browne's MS.]), by the "Ba' " and the "Ha' ", as Cambridge Orientalist Edward Granville Browne first pointed out (ET, 257). In Islamic thought use of such terminology is reserved for books written by prophets, and so it represents an early claim to such a theophanic status by Baha'u'llah.

That the reading "al-manzul" is the better one is apparent from the manuscript original at the Baha'i World Centre Archives, in the hand of Baha'u'llah's eldest son `Abdu'l-Baha (facsimile in Buck 1995, frontispiece), which was reviewed, with emendations and marginalia, by Baha'u'llah himself. Browne was at pains to reconcile this claim with Baha'u'llah's erstwhile disavowals of any spiritual station or authority, and so Browne supposed the colophon to have been a later interpolation (Selections, 253-4). Subsequent scholarship continues to debate the stages of Baha'u'llah's evolving messianic self-consciousness, but has moved beyond Browne in accepting the Iqan as reflecting the crystallization of Baha'u'llah's messianic vocation as intimated in the colophon.

An important source for an accurate reconstruction of the background to the writing of this book is to be found in Baha'u'llah's Tablet, dated 27 Muharram 1306 A.H./3 October 1888, in honor of Aqa `Abdu'l-Hamid Shirazi, a working translation of which was recently shared by Dr. Ahang Rabbani. Briefly, the initial revelation of the Iqan was occasioned by questions posed by the Bab's maternal uncle, Haji Mirza Sayyid Muhammad, on a visit to the holy shrines in Karbala in the Islamic year 1278 (1861-2), or possibly in 1277 A.H. The precise date of this visit will be discussed below. A facsimile reproduction of the original handlist of questions by Haji Mirza Sayyid Muhammad was published in Muhammad `Ali Fayzi's Kitab-i Khandan-i Afnan Sidra-yi Rahman (Tehran: Mu'assasi-yi Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, 124 B.E. [1970-1]), inserted at p. 41. (See Denis MacEoin. "Questions of Sayyid Muhammad Shirazi, Uncle of the Bab" *Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts* vol. 1, no. 2 [June, 1997]). The questions

posed by the Bab's uncle may be summarized as follows: (1) The Day of Resurrection: Will it be corporeal? How will the just be recompensed and the wicked dealt with?; (2) The Twelfth Imam: How can traditions attesting to his occultation be explained?; (3) Qur'anic Interpretation: How can the literal meaning of the Qur'an be reconciled with the interpretations current among Babis?; (4) Advent of the Qa'im: How can the apparent lack of fulfillment of Imami traditions concerning the Resurrector be explained? (Balyuzi, Baha'u'llah, the King of Glory, 164-5; see also the working translation by Dr. Ahang Rabbani.). These questions typified the paradox precipitated by the advent of the Bab: the apparent contradiction between a realized eschaton (prophecy fulfillment) and unrealized popular expectations. Because the Iqan was revealed in direct response to these questions, the book was first known as the Treatise for the Uncle (Risala-yi Khal).

Style:

Shoghi Effendi describes Baha'u'llah's style as "a model of Persian prose, of a style at once original, chaste and vigorous, and remarkably lucid, both cogent in argument and matchless in its irresistible eloquence" (God Passes By 138-139). This assessment appears to be based on E. G. Browne, who wrote of the Iqan that "it is a work of great merit, vigorous in style, clear in argument, cogent in proof, and displaying no slight knowledge of the Bible, Qur'an, and Traditions" (Selections, 254). Baha'u'llah's choice of Persian for such a work as the Kitab-i Iqan optimized its diffusion among the Babi community. While the Babis are surely the immediate audience, Baha'u'llah addresses the world in such words as: "Sanctify your souls, O ye peoples of the world..." (ET, 3) and "Behold, O concourse of the earth, the splendours of the End" (ET, 168).

One of the striking expressive features of the Book of Certitude is its abundant use of what Persian grammar terms the "metaphorical" genitive (izafa-yi isti`ari). The izafa (Arabic: idafa) is a construct--an enclitic to be precise--used for possessive, partitive, and descriptive purposes. Baha'u'llah's use of this construct becomes, in itself, an important exegetical device. In the course of exegesis, Baha'u'llah interprets a verse, explicating a symbol by suggesting its referent. He then uses both symbol and referent together, bound grammatically by the Persian construct, to reinforce his exegesis. Baha'u'llah coordinates his various explications by means of extended metaphors, invariably drawn from nature:

> "In like manner, endeavour to comprehend the meaning of the 'changing of the earth' [Matt. 24:29, variant]. 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 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' [Q. 14:48]" (ET, 46-47).

Here, eschatological "earth"--in a variant saying of Jesus--has come to signify knowledge and understanding and, generally, the capacity of the human heart to become angelic.

According to Alessandro Bausani, who has remarked upon some of the difficulties raised by "the Baha'i expressive style" for those unfamiliar with it, "the difficulty that Westerners experience in fully understanding the style of the Baha'i writings lies in our having lost the living sense of the tripartition of reality: Unknowable God, World of Symbols, material world" ("Some Aspects of the Baha'i Expressive Style," World Order 13 [1978-79], p. 43).

Qur'anic Exegesis in the Kitab-i Iqan:

The Book of Certitude is a work of symbolic exegesis of the Qur'an and, to a lesser extent, of the New Testament. Baha'u'llah advances arguments that are, in certain respects, analogous to the strategies of Sunni rhetoricians who demonstrated occurrences of figures of speech in the Qur'an as a feature of its eloquence and inimitability. In the Iqan, prior to his actual symbolic exegesis, Baha'u'llah logically demonstrates the presence of figurative language in the Qur'an, based largely on appeals to absurdities that result from literal readings. Once the symbolic valence of the Qur'an has been established, symbols in prophecy are interpreted and then contemporized within Baha'u'llah's own historical present, leaving the reader to accept or reject their fulfillment.

Exegetical Devices:

Interpretation of the Qur'an is technically known as tafsir. The most useful and comprehensive introduction to this literature is that of Rippin, "tafsir," Encyclopedia of Religion; the most comprehensive study in English is Rippin's edited volume, Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an (Oxford, 1988). Baha'u'llah's exegetical techniques are well attested in the classical tafsir tradition of Islam. In Symbol and Secret, the present writer has identified Baha'u'llah's use of eleven "procedural devices" attested to in the classical Islamic tradition of tafsir: poetic loci probantes, lexical explanation, grammatical explanation, rhetorical explanation, periphrasis, analogy, abrogation, circumstances of revelation, identification of the vague and ambiguous, prophetical tradition, and anecdote. One instance of Baha'u'llah's wide range of interpretive procedures--rhetorical explanation--will give the reader a glimpse into a topic, the analysis of which far exceeds the scope of an encyclopedia entry. Furthermore, though many of Baha'u'llah's interpretations have an elegant simplicity, certain of them conflict with received exegeses at the level of text and require a rather involved syntactical and semantic analysis. The reader should not assume on the basis of the following discussion that Baha'u'llah's interpretations do not entail some very complex and remarkable acts of exegesis.

Rhetorical explanation:

Literal texts require little interpretation beyond explication, whereas symbolic texts are not as

they appear to be and require interpretation. For the latter approach to be accepted, the reader must be convinced that a text has a symbolic dimension. Trationally, as with Maimonides (Guide of the Perplexed II, 29), the most effective strategy for arguing symbolism, beyond assertion, is to predicate symbolism on figurative language. As tropical discourse, figurative language, by nature, excludes literal interpretation, which would otherwise lead to absurdity. Baha'u'llah therefore advanced a figuratively based rationale to establish Qur'anic symbolism demonstratively. Baha'u'llah overrules the literal reading of most eschatological passages of the Qur'an, effectively excluding received interpretations. Upon demonstrating the absurdity of unwarranted literal readings, the author adduces Qur'anic passages of an anomalous, non-literal, or patently metaphorical character to attest the presence of figurative language in the Qur'an.

Baha'u'llah shows that figurative language underlies Qur'anic symbolism, although literal texts may have symbolic import as well. (The danger in treating literal verse symbolically is a tendency to disregard the literal authority of the text, thus leading to antinomianism.) Tradition has frequently ignored the opacity of figurative or "ambiguous" 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 fantastic and surreal apocalyptic imagery of the Qur'an. 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 (majaz) formulated by the rhetorician Ibn Rashiq (d. 456/1063 or 463/1070): "Whatever goes beyond the proper meaning in [the] case of each word, without then becoming absolutely absurd, that is majaz, because it admits of the different ways of interpretation: thus the comparison (tashbih) and 'borrowing' (isti`ara) and other beauties of speech have come to fall under the category of majaz" (tr. Heinrichs, Hand of the Northwind, 48-49). 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 overruled the surface meaning of anthropomorphisms in scripture. Hence, Baha'u'llah's exegetical procedure at Q. 39:67 overrules a literal reading of the eschatological hand of God, as it entails both impossibility and anthropomorphist 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 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" (ET, 47-8).

So far, Baha'u'llah's reading of this verse was anticipated by al-Zamakhshari (Bonebakker, Some Early Definitions of the Tawriya, 25-6). The point of adducing this passage is to show that, not infrequently, Baha'u'llah first dispenses with some 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." (ET, 48). Baha'u'llah 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 (kalimat-i marmuza) and abstruse allusions (isharat-i mulghaza), 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" (ET, 49).

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 the clerical authority with which such a reading is enforced. The act of replacing miracle with symbol, and anthropomorphism with metaphor, divests the interpreter of an essentially magical world view. Instead, such a reading places emphasis on ethics and interiority rather than on the miraculous. The reading Baha'u'llah rejects is a 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.

Shi`i Background:

Exegesis is typically far more than interpretation. Especially in post-classical works of tafsir, the exegete has a definite agenda. Interpretation thus becomes the vehicle for propounding that agenda. While the interpretation serves to elucidate the text, the inverse holds true, too. The interpreter invokes the authority of the Qur'an as revelation to validate a particular view. In such a case, exegesis is apology, written in defense of a position held. When the Iqan was revealed, the Qur'an remained inviolable as the primary authority in an erstwhile Islamic context. The interpretive strategies in Baha'u'llah's work are amply attested in the classical Sunni heritage, which have been taken up and asimilated to the Shi`i domain. Beyond the classical Islamic tradition, to what extent is the Book of Certitude prefigured by Shi`i tafsir? The answer is clear: The principles of exegesis found in Akhbari (referring to the Akhbari sect of Shi`ism which lost out to the Usulis [mujtahid based tradition] in the 18th-century) works of Shi`i tafsir

are manifestly present in the Kitab-i Iqan. These principles have more to do with the subject of exegesis than with its procedures.

There are sufficient formal similarities and thematic emphases between later Shi`i (those known as Akhbari) works of tafsir and the Book of Certitude to warrant comparison. Such a background study would present itself as the logical starting place for a foundational study of Baha'u'llah's work. To treat simply the Shi`i context of the text is too narrow, however, as such a focused study tends to atomize the text. While Baha'u'llah's conception of spiritual authority presupposes Shi`i structures, to regard the Book of Certitude as simply an extension of Shi`ism is reductionist. The pitfall of a such an approach is that the presence of identifiable Shi`i 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 Shi`i tradition.

Twelver Shi`ism, the dominant form of Shi`ism today, views spiritual authority as vested in the Imamate. The very identity of Shi`ism is bound up with authority claims. Shi`i assertions of authority explicitly contest rival Sunni claims. The Qur'an, tradition (hadith) and especially the Imami oral legacy (khabar [pl. akhbar]) are invoked for legitimation. The selective and tendentious use of such authorities is meant to validate what Sunni Islam rejects. Arguably the most salient feature of Akhbari Shi`i interpretations of the Qur'an is how such commentaries reflect on issues of authority. According to B. Todd Lawson, what characterizes Akhbari Qur'an commentaries is the exegetical procedure of "finding the true reading of the verse in question through metonomy or metaphor for the Imam or some related topic such as walaya" (Lawson, "Akhbari Shi`i Approaches to tafsir," 175). Shi`i arguments are somewhat circular in this regard. Esteemed by both Sunni and Shi`i orthodoxies, Ja'far al-Sadiq, who was a truly universal figure in early Islam, is frequently cited in Akhbari Qur'an commentaries in what amounts to an Imamocentrism which is the hallmark of Akhbari exegesis.

Walaya as the Core Concept of Shi`ism:

Islam is founded on the conviction that Muhammad is the "Seal of the Prophets" and thus the last Messenger. In Shi`a Islam, however, this did not preclude the availability of divine guidance in salvation-history subsequent to Muhammad. After Muhammad, Shi`is have always maintained that walaya continued to manifest itself in the spiritual leadership of the Twelve Imams. Walaya (Persian: vilayat) refers to divine authority, residing in the notion of "Covenant" ("The Dangers of Reading," 190). Lawson is emphatic in asserting that: "There is, in Shi`ism, no more important a doctrine" ("The Dangers of Reading," 177).

When the twelfth Imam was said to have been occulted in the Islamic year 260, his absence was reconstituted as a mystical presence, such that the now Hidden Imam was continued to exercise spiritual sovereignty. (The Bab eventually claimed to be the "return" of the Hidden Imam.) Perhaps Lawson's greatest contribution to our understanding of the Shi`i and Babi background of the Kitab-i Iqan resides in his thesis that "walaya is a structure/institution that

was 'designed' to allow for post-prophetic revelation" (Lawson, personal communication, 3 April 1998). This is a profound statement. Its implications are far-reaching. It is almost as if to say that, had there been no walaya, there might have been no Bab or Baha'u'llah, even though any post-prophetic claim to revelation is, from the position of normative Islam, extremist, innovative (rather than renovative), and heretical.

Phenomenologically speaking, revelation is somewhat tradition-bound. Shi`ism identified its messianic figure, the Qa'im, as the occulted Twelfth Imam. But, historically, both Baha'u'llah and `Abdu'l-Baha state that the Twelfth Imam never existed. Despite the historical improbability of a Twelfth Imam, the existence of traditions attesting his occultation and eventual return created a kind of messianic determinism, in which a body of speculation represented as Imami akhbar raised fantastic and thus unrealistic expectations about any future religious renewal. Thus, the Bab's identification with the Qa'im/Mahdi is purely formal. But the formality had to be taken with the utmost seriousness. Both the Bab's and Baha'u'llah's Qur'an commentaries followed some very traditional Akhbari lines, as Lawson has shown in the case of the Bab.

Principles of Shi`i exegesis:

A recent study by Lawson has contributed to Western understanding of the principles of Shi`i exegesis. For descriptive purposes, how does one systematize this material? Lawson has located such a systematization, ready made, and authentically Shi`i: the prologues of works of Akhbari tafsir. Distinctively, Akhbari works of tafsir rely on "reports" of the sayings of the Imams from the "Holy Family" of Shi`ism, and the corresponding Imamocentrism of such works. These commentaries are quite different from such classical Shi`i commentaries as those of al-Tusi (d. 1067) and al-Tabarsi (d. 1144). The extensive corpus of Imami hadith that overburdened the Shi`i world is technically referred to as akhbar ("reports"; sing. khabar). Lawson provides a useful summary of the prologues of four such works. Through Lawson's enterprise, a comparison of the Book of Certitude with works of Shi`i tafsir is greatly facilitated.

The methodological elegance of Lawson's study is that he has presented representative, traditionally acclaimed systematizations of Shi`i thought by Shi`i authorities themselves. These systematizations, propounded in the tafsir prologues, are illuminating. These native programmatic statements reveal the extent to which Akhbari interpretations of the Qur'an are characteristically Imamocentric. In such commentaries, we are not sure if Imami reports are not so much used to explain the Qur'an (this is the formal procedure) as the Qur'an is used to legitimate a Shi`i agenda. In any case, the Qur'an effectively becomes a Shi`i text.

Lawson's "Akhbari Shi`i Approaches to tafsir" crystallizes, perhaps more than any other single study, those structures that render works of tafsir both methodologically and ideologically distinctive. Lawson epitomizes four tafsir prologues, from the following Akhbari works: (1) Kitab tafsir nur al-thaqalayn by 'Abd 'Ali al-Huwayzi (d. before 1693); (2) al-Safi fi tafsir

kalam Allah al-wafi of Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani (d. 1640); (3) Kitab al-burhan fi tafsir al-Qur'an by Hashim al-Bahrani (d. ca. 1695); and (4) Mir'at al-anwar wa-mishkat al-asrar fi tafsir al-Qur'an by Abu'l-Hasan al-Isfahani, al-Sharif al-'Amili (d. 1724). [B. Todd Lawson, "Akhbári Shi`i Approaches to tafsir," in Approaches to the Qur'án (ed. G. Hawting and A.-K. Shareef; London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 173-210.] What follows below is the present writer's summary of key principles of interpretation as defined in the fourth work, the Anwar.

Prologue I
* The Qur'an has esoteric dimensions.
* Its verses are susceptible of esoteric interpretation (ta'wil).
* The meaning of the Qur'an is not restricted to time or place. It pertains to all people at all times.
* The inner meaning of the Qur'an relates to the holy Imams, to their authority or continuing guidance (walaya), and to their followers.
* Harmonizing (tanasub) the interior and exterior dimensions of the Qur'an is an exegetical ideal.
* Belief in both dimensions of the Qur'an is imperative. So also is adherence to both the clear (muhkam) and the ambiguous (mutashabih) verses of the Qur'an.
* Complete knowledge of inner exegesis of the Qur'an (ta'wil) resides with the Imams.
* The anchor of faith (iman) is guardianship (walaya), love (mahabba), and obedience to the Imams.
* Confession of belief in the authority of the Imams is a necessary adjunct to profession of faith in the unity of God and in the authority of the Prophet.
* Walaya, together with belief in the unity of God (tawhid), was presented by God to the cosmos, physical and spiritual. God's covenant regarding it was imposed on all creation. The conditions of walaya--of revelation and inspired guidance respectively personified in the Prophet and in his patrilineal successors, the Imams--was set forth in all scriptures and was made obligatory for all nations.
* The Prophets and Imams enjoyed a state of pre-existence. their walaya is the efficient cause of all creation and the core principle of obedience.

Prologue II
* Prologue II alleges alterations (taghyir) in the Qur'an. Such a textual, or anti-textual argument is not once adduced in the Book of Certitude. Baha'u'llah concedes corruption of scripture only insofar as it applies to interpretation. Thus, according to Baha'u'llah, this Shi`i charge is baseless. There is no taghyir but rather corrupt tafsir.

Prologue III
* Certain verses in the Qur'an are figurative (batin).
* These are explained by pertinent Imami traditions (akhbar).
* Such traditions provide the true, hidden interpretation (ta'wil).
* This is done through recourse to through metonomy and allusion (majaz).

* Certain verses require metaphorical ("abstract"/"intellectual") interpretation (al-majaz al-`aqliyya).
* The figurative nature of certain other verses is self-evident. These are also elucidated through metaphorical ("linguistic") interpretation (al-majaz al-lughawi).
* The essence of esoteric (batini) interpretation is this: Whatever is good in the Qur'an pertains to the Imams or to the Shi`a.
* Past refers to present (the "people of Moses" signify the "people of Islam").
* In some passages, for one person outwardly addressed, another is meant: "By contrast, what is ascribed to God about Himself by majaz is related to His near servants...."
* By ta'wil, many pronouns in the Qur'an are allusions to the Imams.
* Past events may be interpreted as last events.
* Many things God says of Himself also apply to the Prophet and Imams (Lawson, "Akhbari Shi`i Approaches to tafsir," 196-200).

This systematization of Akhbari 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 Shi`i exegetical tendencies, which are ultimately, if carried to their logical conclusion, self-transcending. The validity of this explanation depends entirely on the reader's theoretical acceptance of one crucial substitution: the authority of the Bab (in the shadow of whose authority stands Baha'u'llah) as the eclipse of traditional authority: Qur'an and Imami tradition, Prophet and Imam. The revelation of the Bab simply constitutes the new locus of spiritual authority, an authority-transfer cast in terms of eschatological prerogative. This transfer is legitimated in terms of prophetic "fulfillment."

Two images of Shi`ism in Baha'u'llah's discourse thus emerge. The first is historical and doctrinal. It is nostalgic and purist. The Imams are revered. Various traditions ascribed to them are adduced as proof texts. In the Book of Certitude, the frequency of Baha'u'llah's recourse to Imami akhbar is second only to his appeals to the Qur'an. This is a patently Akhbari procedure. The second picture of Shi`ism Baha'u'llah portrays is one of the perceived failings of Shi`ism, particularly in its contemporary (nineteenth century) setting. This critique of Shi`ism is not revisionist. There is no agenda for restoring Shi`ism to its pristine state. It would appear that in Baha'u'llah's view of salvation history, Shi`ism had run its course. It was institutionally spent. Baha'u'llah's critique of contemporary Shi`i authority is more than "protestant." It is tantamount to a shared Shi`i concern over authority, but a reversal of its legitimation as invested in the clerical order of his day. Baha'u'llah's exegesis may therefore be overstated as a kind of counter-Shi`ism, due to the rivalry of authority claims.

Thematically, and in good Shi`i fashion, concern over authority is of paramount interest in the Book of Certitude. This is thoroughly Shi`i. The same exegetical agenda--demonstrating the quranic basis of the authority of the Twelve Shi`i Imams--is invoked by Baha'u'llah not to validate Shi`i tradition but to effect a break from that tradition. A paradox of authority surfaces in the structure of Baha'u'llah's argument: the authority of the institution of the Imamate is

confirmed, but not, as it were, the "apostolic succession"--to use a Christian term--that derives from it. In the Iqan, Shi`i exegetical principles are invoked in order to counter Shi`i authority, though formally it appears otherwise. The Book of Certitude shares Akhbari concerns over authority, but looks ahead in historical time and in sacred time to a post-quranic and post-Imamite Dispensation. Baha'u'llah's emphasis on authority is equal to Shi`i 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 Shi`i institutions to a new source of charisma--the Bab.

In Defense of the Bab and the Babi Qur'an:

The Qur'an is said to contain coded language. The Bab's spiritual precursor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti, wrote: "When you have understood that the true meaning, the spiritual Idea (haqiqa) of the Qur'an is a code (ramz) which only God Most High, the Prophets and the members of His House understand, ...then it will be clear that our understanding of this code varies according to the diversity of our faculties of understanding" (Lawson, "Akhbari Shi`i Approaches to tafsir," 204). This "code" (ramz) obviously requires decoding. The Book of Certitude reinforces this view of the Qur'an, that it has a symbolic dimension that only an inspired interpreter might accurately demytistify. In Akhbari Shi`ism, the Qur'an as a text is functionally inseparable from its valid interpretation. Although interpretation is still a human enterprise, the methodological guarantor of accuracy is reliance upon traditions ascribed to the Imams. In this respect, the sacred text is imbued with the charisma of both the Prophet and the Imams. "Because of the fusion of the Imam and text," Lawson observes, "the Qur'an is experienced as a charismatic text" ("Akhbari Shi`i Approaches to tafsir," 203).

The Grand Prayer of Visitation, composed by the Bab's other spiritual precursor, Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (d. 1826), as Lawson notes, "may have achieved in his own lifetime something of the status of an alternative Qur'an, being arranged in 114 verses" (Lawson, “Akhbari Shi`i Approaches to tafsir,” 203). Lawson concludes: "This points to one of the most remarkable results of the Akhbari project, namely the transformation of the Qur'an text into 'another Qur'an.' That is, the Qur'an of the Akhbaris becomes something of a New Testament for Islam" (Lawson, "Akhbari Shi`i Approaches to tafsir," 203-204).

In the case of Baha'u'llah's immediate precursor, the Bab, this tendency becomes even more pronounced. Lawson remarks: "We see the 'logical' culmination of this process in the Qur'an commentaries of the Bab (d. 1850), who depended heavily on the akhbar in his early tafsir, 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 Imam. In short, the exegetical act became scripture" ("Akhbari Shi`i Approaches to Tafsir," 203; and Todd Lawson. "Reading Reading Itself: The Bab's `Sura of the Bees,' A Commentary on Qur'an 12:93 from the Sura of Joseph— Text, Translation and Commentary."

Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies, vol. 1, no. 5 [November, 1997].) From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the principles of Shi`i hermeneutics do indeed inform the Book of Certitude.

The Iqan represents, from a certain perspective, a clear development of existing Shi`i tendencies, which Lawson has brought to light. It is now possible to explain, in retrospect, how it was theoretically possible for a new authority claim to be asserted without appearing to usurp the authority of the Qur'an. Such a procedure was effected through Akhbari exegesis, in which the exegesis, invoking the authority of sacred Imami tradition, functionally supersedes the text it is intended to elucidate. Since a break from the past had already been effected by the Bab in both the Arabic and Persian Bayan, the Book of Certitude may be seen as a development of Babi "revelation" that overshot the renewal of Shi`ism by a proverbial distance of two bows--that is, from mujtahid to Manifestation. The revelation of the Bab had made explicit what was for the most part implicit in Shi`i visions of the end. Through the Bab, a new eschatological landscape was outspread, canopied by a new heaven of faith. The Book of Certitude further reified this symbolic universe. Baha'u'llah's commentary on the Qur'an was effectively the legitimation of the Babi Qur'an.

Overcoming the Doctrine of the "Seal of the Prophets":

The Qur'an dignifies Muhammad as the "Seal of the Prophets (Q. 33:40). In the earliest currents of Islamic consciousness, this honorific was by no means understood uniformly (see Yohanan Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood in Islam," Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 7 [1986]). The concept of Muhammad being the final messenger of God was firmly entrenched in Islamic doctrine, both Sunni and Shi`a. In Shi`ism, however, the concept of walaya, as stated above, allowed for a continuation of divine guidance after the death of the Prophet. Such guidance was considered subordinate to the revelation of the Qur'an. But the Bab had dared to proclaim himself more than an Imam, and a messenger equal to or greater than Muhammad, with a revelation that surpassed the Qur'an in scope and authority. This, obviously, challenged the very foundations of Islam.

From the perspective of classical Sunni Islam as well as Shi`ism, Baha'u'llah achieved the seemingly impossible: to show that God could reveal a prophet after Muhammad. In a masterful feat of exegesis, Baha'u'llah applied Qur'anic concepts of the oneness of the prophets to relativize the idea of the "Seal of the Prophets." He shows that orthodox claims to Muhammad's finality as having traded on notions of triumphalism unmitigated by the clear, Qur'anic teaching of prophetic unity. Affirming that Muhammad was indeed the last prophet within the "Prophetic Cycle" or Adamic Cycle (kur-i Adam), a new epoch of human history was said to have commenced with the advent of the Bab. In Baha'i parlance, this is the "Cycle of Fulfillment" or Baha'i Cycle (kur-i Baha'i).

While the accepted notion of the "Seal" as meaning "Last" is kept intact, Baha'u'llah stresses

the transcendent importance of the term "Seal" over considerations of historical sequence. Wedding the Qur'anic doctrine of the oneness of the Prophets with Muhammad's distinctiveness as the "Seal," Baha'u'llah writes: "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..." (ET, 179). Through an associative equivalence, Muhammad's uniqueness as the "Seal of the Prophets" is distributed among all other Messengers of God as an equally applicable title, relatively speaking.

The Qur'anic encounter with God:

The notion of divine encounter forms an exegetical leitmotiv in the Book of Certitude. Maintaining an exegetical constant, Baha'u'llah takes pains to distance God from all anthropomorphisms, Qur'anic or otherwise. The author extends his purge of anthropomorphism to Qur'anic eschatology as well, such that God never makes a personal appearance in the apocalyptic drama (except by proxy), but rather directs it. Since God cannot otherwise be "seen" or even "known," in God's stead stands the theophany referred to by the Baha'i technical term, "Manifestation of God." Thus understood, the Qur'an'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 Muhammad is said to "manifest" the Deity, so must the Qur'anic eschatological "God" or "Presence of God" represent a mediated Deity. Across the horizon of history this Mediator stands. The Qur'an is thought to contain cryptic hints of this eschatological figure. A theology of transcendence will not allow the cryptic references in the Qur'an to the "Presence of God" to be anthropomorphic. If the "God" of the last Day cannot be a man, perhaps a man on the Last Day can be "God" (as His Messenger):

"Even as the Lord of being hath in His unerring Book, after speaking of the "Seal" in His exalted utterance: "Muhammad is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets," [Q. 33:40] hath revealed unto all people the promise of "attainment unto the divine Presence" [Q. 33:44]. To this attainment to the presence of the immortal King testify the verses of the Book... The one true God is My witness! Nothing more exalted or more explicit than "attainment unto the divine Presence" (liqa' Allah) hath been revealed in the Qur'an...And yet, through the mystery of the former verse, they have turned away from the grace promised by the latter..." (ET, 169).

In this remarkable passage, Baha'u'llah suggests that what became the most definitive prophetological proof-text in Islam had totally ignored the implications of theophanic language appearing just four verses later.

Establishing the Bab as the Mahdi/Qa'im:

To have ventured the logical possibility of revelation after Muhammad is one thing. To argue

the authenticity of a latter-day revelation is quite another. Baha'u'llah turns the reader's attention to a specific eschatological figure, who is clearly not Muhammad, and whose work is that of a revelator and no mere renovator.

Shi`i as well as Sunni traditions presage the advent of an messianic figure, known to both traditions as the as the Mahdi, and to Shi`ism as the Qa'im. In Sunni Islam, the Mahdi (literally, the "Guided One") is a restorer who is to reestablish a just theocracy under Islamic law. In Shi`ism, the Qa'im (literally, "Riser") is more of a redresser of wrongs, an avenger. The Bab identified with this figure. Baha'u'llah elaborates on the Babi argument, already formulated by the Bab, in defense of the Bab's mission.

Oblique self-disclosures:

The Baha'i technical term for the period of Baha'u'llah's messianic secrecy is ayyam-i butun ("Days of Concealment"), a term used by Baha'i chroniclers and evidently by Baha'u'llah himself, a term that connotes the image of embryonic development. A concept traceable to the Bab (text cited by Denis MacEoin, "Hierarchy, Authority and Eschatology," 123), ayyam-i butun must be factored into any contextual reading of the Book of Certitude, if Baha'u'llah's retrospective testimony is to be admitted.

What Baha'u'llah termed the "delay" and the "set time of concealment" (cited in Shoghi effendi, God Passes By [1944], p. 151) is intimated in several self-referential passages in the Book of Certitude, such as: "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" (ET, 147). The translator, Shoghi Effendi, succeeds in capturing a vigorous sense of mission on the verge of disclosure. The many hints to this effect in Baha'u'llah's writings during the Baghdad period are in fact not, in the final analysis, all that subtle. Such hints were not missed. Doubtless, there were at least a few Babis perceptively alive to these hints, who "recognized" Baha'u'llah before his Declaration. Thus, on a thematic level, Baha'u'llah has articulated an eschatologically conceived break from Islam. Soon after the revelation of the Book of Certitude, Baha'u'llah would, in effect, transform Qur'anic eschatology into messianic authority. The Author's exegetical techniques, therefore, played a key role in preparing his readers for such an eventuality.

Relationship of the Bab to Baha'u'llah:

In Baha'i thought, the relationship of the Bab to Baha'u'llah is complex and multivalent. The Bab's mission was both universal and particular: While the Bab's mission was rhetorically addressed to the rulers and peoples of the entire planet, the revelation of the Bab exhibited a decidedly Islamic focus. In the Persian Bayan (II, 7), the Bab writes: "He [the Bab] appeareth

not, save for the purpose of gathering the fruits of Islam from the Qur'anic verses which He [Muhammad] hath sown in the hearts of men" (SWB 108). The eminent Baha'i scholar Fadil Mazandarani explained: "The Bab declared that he had brought in but the Lesser Resurrection because his message was circumscribed, limited to the Islamic people and to one part of the world. But there would arise a new consciousness, a universal resurrection, and this new spiritual consciousness would sweep over the entire world" ("The Life of the Bab," in Star of the West 14.7 [Oct. 1923] 202). Within Baha'i salvation-history, the advent of the Bab, in eschatological terms, therefore inaugurated the "Lesser Resurrection" (qiyamat-i sughra) while Baha'u'llah's advent precipitated the "Greater Resurrection" (qiyamat-i kubra), or, as in the Bab's second Tablet to He Whom God Shall Manifest, "the Latter Resurrection" (SWB 7).

However, the revelation of the Bab can scarcely be reduced to a renovation of Islam. In the Kitab-i Asma' (XVI, 18), the Bab stated: "My Revelation is indeed far more bewildering than that of Muhammad" (SWB 139). While the Bab spoke in terms of the rejuvenation of Islam, Baha'u'llah largely abandoned that approach, while `Abdu'l-Baha further distanced the Faith from its Islamic orbit. The Bab's primary Islamic focus notwithstanding, the scope of his religion was universal. Baha'u'llah later took up these universal features and incorporated much of the principles and precepts of the Bab into the Baha'i religion. Considerations of Shi`i, Babi, and Baha'i boundaries apart, the Islamic "content" of both the Bab's and Baha'u'llah's revelations needs to be appreciated as foundational. The Islamic ground of Babi and Baha'i thought can best be appreciated if only we can distinguish the distinctive "innovations" effected by the Bab and Baha'u'llah.

Advance legitimation of Baha'u'llah's own mission:

In the Book of Certitude, a subtext may be discerned, in which Baha'u'llah intimates his own mission in the same terms of reference, through a new messianic paradigm employing the old symbols of Shi`ism. To the extent that Baha'u'llah succeeded in vindicating the messianic status (Qa'imiya) of the Bab, he succeeded, by implication, in legitimating his own authority as well. The Book of Certitude thus doubles as an apology for two eschatological figures: explicitly, as an apology for the Bab (as Qa'im) and, implicitly in anticipation of Baha'u'llah's own mission, "He Whom God shall manifest" (Man yuzhiruhu Allah). From this vantage, the Iqan may be thought of as a work of covert revelation, during the period of Baha'u'llah'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 Babi community--reflexively legitimated Baha'u'llah's own spiritual authority.

In the course of foreshadowing his own authority through a defence of the Bab, Baha'u'llah sought to enchant, through a persuasive suspension of disbelief, popular anticipation of the eschaton, while disenchanting clerical speculations, which tended to focus on miraculous preconditions of apocalyptic fulfillment. This analysis of the Iqan has heuristic value in

discerning the structure of Baha'u'llah's argument, in following how the author surmounted theoretical obstacles to a realized eschaton, the most formidable of which was Islam's doctrine of revelatory finality.

Significance and Influence:

Nineteenth-century Islam saw the rise of several Islamic movements, of which only one broke decisively with Islam: the Baha'i Faith. Though overtly Islamic in its hermeneutical enterprise, the new ethos of a post-Qur'anic revelation which the Book of Certitude defends makes it unique in its role as, paradoxically, a non-Muslim work of Qur'anic exegesis. Exegesis established a doctrinal foundation for the Faith Baha'u'llah was to create, in which eschatology was transformed into spiritual and legislative authority.

The Book of Certitude provided an eschatological bridge into a new religious world view. It started from the shore of Islam, crossing reformist currents through the gate of the Babi movement, progressively distancing itself from Islam. Already the Babi movement had mediated a formal break from Islam by means of a "new Qur'an" and a new law code, though the latter was scarcely implemented. On the other side of the bridge stood the Babi messiah, the mystery figure of "He whom God shall manifest" (man Yuzhiruhu'llah), who would appear at the time indicated by the cabbalistic code word, mustaghath. Subsequent to his writing of the Book of Certitude, Baha'u'llah successfully identified himself as this figure.

Both in principle and in practice, the Book of Certitude helped crystallize Baha'i identity and lent considerable impetus to its missionary expansion. By virtue of its diffusion in 205 or more sovereign and non-sovereign countries and territories, the Kitab-i Iqan emerges as the most influential work of Qur'anic exegesis outside of the Muslim world. Though the Qur'an is not, strictly speaking, part of the Baha'i scriptural corpus, the importance of this fact of non-Muslim Qur'anic exegesis may be instanced in the parallel diffusion of Jewish scriptures (the so-called Old Testament) at the hands of Christian missionaries. What began as a Babi text has ended up to be the principal doctrinal work of a nascent world religion.

The Kitab-i Iqan and the "Sun of Iqan":

Doctrinally, had there been no walaya, there might have been no Bab or Baha'u'llah.) At once an agent of evolution and revolution, the Bab pushes the possibilities of Shi`i concepts of authority to their "logical" extremes. The Bab revealed laws that could scarcely be fulfilled. Effecting a formal break from Islam by purporting to renew it, the Bab's laws were part of his rhetoric, not enduring institutions. In the twilight of the eschaton, the Bab was the "voice crying in the wilderness"--like John the Baptist--and yet was the wilderness itself, beyond the cultivated plains of traditional Islam. If one deconstructs his rhetoric, one can see that the Bab was not a mujaddid (renovator), in the Sunni sense. The Qa'im (Riser), after all, is supposed to inaugurate the Qiyama (Resurrection). This eschatological end of history presupposes the formal end of Islam.

Thus a distinction obtains between renovation and fulfillment. "Fulfillment" of Islam, while expressed in terms of renewal, is tantamount to a break from it, from both directions. The Bab had shifted the Shaykhi doctrinal kaleidoscope in ways that only a trained Islamicist can fully appreciate. Todd Lawson's work fills a lacuna--a chasm actually--in Babi and Baha'i studies, by carefully nuancing the Bab's own originality against its nearly seamless continuity with Shaykhi thought. After the Bab's martyrdom, Baha'u'llah filled the charismatic vacuum, and eventually revealed laws that totally dissolved traditional Islamic distinctions between the non-Muslim Dar al-Harb ("the Realm of War") and the Muslim-ruled lands of Dar al-Islam. Baha'u'llah's "Great Peace" was inherently transconfessional, which Juan Cole terms a "metareligion" (1998, p. 150). This paradigm-shift required the authority of a messiah--actually, of two messiahs.

Associated with Baha'u'llah's messianic claims are his teachings. If one were to plot a "trajectory" of the Iqan in terms of its influence and the body of teachings with which it became associated, one might say that the authority to reveal presupposes the revelation itself. In his "Sura of Our Name, the Sender" (AQA IV, p. 313), Baha'u'llah refers to himself as the "Sun of the Iqan" (shams al-Iqan). The Iqan was the dawn of that Sun. The Most Holy Book (Kitab-i Aqdas) and the constellation of texts known collectively as "Tablets of Baha'u'llah revealed after the Kitab-i Aqdas" represent its zenith.

In fine, the Kitab-i Iqan focused on spiritual sovereignty, on the moral and spiritual authority of the prophets of God, particularly on the authority of the Bab and, by implication, of Baha'u'llah himself. Later, Baha'u'llah sacralized the temporal authority of just governments and stressed the need for temporal authority to draw upon religion as an indispensable resource, from which moral authority could best be derived. Considering that religious virtue is potentially superior to purely civic virtue, Baha'u'llah's system of religious governance, symbolized as "the Crimson Ark" (safina al-hamra'--the quaternary set of colors--snow-white, emerald green, crimson-red and golden yellow--forms an important tetrad in Babi and Baha'i thought, as Todd Lawson and Stephen Lambden have shown), is designed to spiritualize humanity in ways that are simply beyond the power of the state. Religion can ideally exercise a sovereignty that derives its power from the spiritual King, the prophet of the age. This is one of the key themes of the Kitab-i Iqan, as Baha'u'llah writes: "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 unto 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" (ET 97; Persian/Arabic 72).

Unresolved Textual Issues: Dating the Text

Having surveyed the style and content of the work, let us now turn to some difficult issues surrounding the history of the text. Internal evidence would appear to fix the date of the

revelation of the Kitab-i Iqan in the Islamic year 1278 A.H. (hezar o devist o haftad o hasht), which corresponds to 9 July 1861 through 29 June 1862. However, as Frank Lewis points out in his review [Baha'i Studies Review 6 (1996): 76-92] of my book, Symbol and Secret (1995), some manuscripts of the Kitab-i Iqan indicate the time of its revelation to have been year1280 A.H. (hizar o devist o hashtad), which manuscript variant appears to have been followed by Shoghi Effendi in the authorized Baha'i translation of the text. Lewis theorizes that Baha'u'llah, when reviewing the master copy of the Iqan that his son `Abdu'l-Baha had transcribed, had either updated the text to reflect the time during which he had later added marginalia and made other editorial changes, or had rounded off the date 1278 A.H. to a more "general, rather than specific date" of 1280 A.H. (80-1). Moreover, as Lewis also points out, no less an authority than the great Baha'i scholar Fazil Mazandarani (Asrar al Asrar, s.v. "Iqan," pp. 266-84) discusses the problem of dating the time of revelation on the basis of internal evidence and proposes his own solution by venturing the year 1279 A.H. as the date of revelation! This, in the present writer's opinion, is clearly an effort harmonize the dates, without adequately accounting for the manuscript variants themselves.

Thomas Linard (personal communication) drew attention to the 1280 date as a manuscript issue with regard to the French translation of the Iqan. In Symbol and Secret, I had speculated that Shoghi Effendi was rounding off the 1278 date to 1280. My reason for saying this (which is not spelled out in Symbol and Secret) was that Shoghi Effendi, in a letter published in Unfolding Destiny, mentions the 1278 date as internal evidence for dating the revelation of the Iqan in 1861. (A later letter on behalf of the Guardian mentions 1862, presumably because 1278 A.H. falls within both those years.) Moreover, in the first English translation of the Iqan, published as The Book of Assurance (1904), translator Ali-Kuli Khan evidently worked from a manuscript that read 1278 as well. As scholarship is a learning process, as well as a community of discourse, I now agree with Thomas Linard and Frank Lewis that the 1280 figure is indeed a manuscript issue that needs to be addressed. In Symbol and Secret, I have spoken of Baha'u'llah's "editing of revelation" as a feature of the manuscript and publication history of the Iqan. Clearly, a redaction history of the Iqan needs to be written. This could only be done if all of the master copies as well as lithographed and printed editions of the Iqan could be collated for comparison. This is why I have submitted copies of both Iqan lithographs to H-Bahai for as appendices to the electronic publication of this paper.

Fresh evidence for the dating of the Iqan has been brought to light by Dr. Ahang Rabbani, in a draft manuscript, "Conversion of the Great Uncle of the Bab," submitted for publication in World Order Magazine. Dr. Rabbani has translated a letter published in Khandan-i Afnan, pp. 42-3, written by Haji Mirza Sayyid Muhammad to his eldest son, Haji Mirza Muhammad-Taqi, known as the Vakil-Dawla, recounting the former's visit to the Shrines of the Twin Imams at Kazimayn. This letter was written from the `Atabat by the Bab's "Great Uncle" (Khal-i Akbar) after he had visited Baha'u'llah and had received the Kitab-i Iqan. The letter is dated 5 Rajab 1277 A.H. (17 January 1861). The letter, in part, reads: "Praise be God, for what I have to write you is that we attained the presence of His Holiness Baha, upon Him be God's peace. Your

place was indeed empty. He showered us with utmost affection and kindness and asked that we stay for the night and we remained in His presence. The evident truth is that to be deprived of the blessing of His presence is a mighty and evident loss. May God bestow His grace upon us so that we would everlastingly attain unto the blessing of His presence" (translated by Ahang Rabbani).

The date of this letter provides a terminus ad quem, which enables us to bracket the time of the revelation of the Kitab-i Iqan, 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, even though I may have been the first to realize its implications for dating the Iqan. The discovery requires further investigation, as it would appear 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 (see discussion in Symbol and Secret). Dr. Rabbani has written to the Universal House of Justice to locate the original of this important letter, in order to verify its date.

Manuscripts, editions, translations, studies:

A work of some two hundred pages in Persian and Arabic admixed, the Kitab-i Iqan was probably the most copied, widely circulated and influential of all Baha'i works, and was, as stated above, the first Baha'i text to have been authorized for publication. Except for the later marginalia, emendations and subsequent editing authorized by Baha'u'llah (esp. in aligning Qur'anic citations with the textus receptus) prior to the publication of the text, the entire book was dictated extemporaneously, at an extraordinary pace, reportedly within the span of forty-eight hours. (One authority, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani, claimed the text was revealed within twenty-four hours! See introduction to Ali-Kuli Khan's The book of Assurance [1904]) It is not certain but probable that Baha'u'llah dictated the Kitab-i Iqan to his amanuensis Mirza Aqa Jan who was the most likely scribe to have taken it down, while, as stated above, `Abdu'l-Baha, then eighteen years of age, produced, with marginal additions by Baha'u'llah himself (on internal grounds, added in the year 1280 A.H.), what is now considered the manuscript original and master exemplar.

A distinction should be made between the original manuscript and the manuscript original. The original manuscript was the actual transcript of Baha'u'llah's Kitab-i Iqan--the text as recorded in the scribal shorthand known as "revelation writing"--taken down in great haste, in an effort to keep pace with the celerity of Baha'u'llah's dictation. As the actual record of the revelatory event of the Iqan, this "revelation writing" is not extant and is presumed lost. Therefore, what is here termed the manuscript original (the first master copy) is actually a decipherment, reconstitution and redaction of the original manuscript, which, as stated, is no longer extant. Thus, the authority of the latter supersedes that of the former, although the differences between the two are indeterminate. Simply put, the Iqan is a case in which the revealer has "re-revealed" a major revelation by editing it.

For decades, the manuscript original of the Kitab-i Iqan was an heirloom in the family of Haji Mirza Sayyid Muhammad, until, in 1948, his great-granddaughter Fatima Khanum-i Afnan presented it to the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi (A. Taherzadeh, Revelation, I, 159). This manuscript is now preserved in the International Baha'i Archives on Mount Carmel. Other manuscript copies of the Kitab-i Iqan are preserved in the same archives in Haifa, and in various Oriental collections in Europe, such as British Museum manuscript, BL Or. 3116, foll. 78-127, of which Dr. Juan Cole (University of Michigan), has kindly provided me a copy.

The Problem of Defective Manuscripts:

For around two decades following its revelation, the Iqan circulated by hand transcription, the customary means of reproduction. Textual errors were known to have been made during the process of copying, resulting in defective manuscripts. In an unpublished Tablet, dated 1298 A.H., revealed for Mulla `Ali-Akbar Shahmirzadi (Haji Akhund, whom Baha'u'llah had appointed a "Hand of the Cause"), Baha'u'llah states that "some of the copies of the Kitab-i Iqan are extant in this land [`Akka], but all are not correct" (text in Iran National Baha'i Archives [INBA], no. 28: 193; personal communication, Dr. Nosrat M. Hosseini). In order to rectify this problem, Baha'u'llah oversaw the production of several authoritative master copies. In a tablet to Jamal-i Burujirdi, Baha'u'llah mentions having entrusted one such authoritative manuscript of the Iqan to Mulla `Ali-Akbar-i-Shahmirzadi (Monjazeb, op. cit.; cf. Baha'u'llah's Tablet to Mulla `Ali-Akbar Shahmirzadi, in Iran National Baha'i Archives, no. 15 [132 B.E.]: 424 [reference provided by Dr. Nosrat M. Hosseini, personal communication, 11 July 1993]). This need to standardize so important a text may have been a contributing factor in Baha'u'llah's decision to authorize publication of the work in Bombay.

The First Bombay Lithograph:

As stated before, it is thought that the Iqan was the first Baha'i text officially authorized for publication. The second such text was `Abdu'l-Baha's Treatise on Civilization (Risala-yi Madaniya), written in 1875 and presumed to have been lithographed in 1882. If this is true, then a terminus ad quem is possible to fix, in view of the fact that Rosen attests to the existence of a "lithographed book published in 1299 A.H. in Bombay 'al-Asrar al-ghaybiyyih al-sabab al-madaniyyih' pp. 94-101, about which see Collections Scientifiques VI, 253-5." (p. 175, note 1, translated from the Russian by Michael McKenny). Momen states that The Secret of Divine Civilization (as `Abdu'l-Baha's treatise was known in the West) was printed in 1882 ("Baha'i Influence," 52 and 62, n. 17). Thus, the undated Iqan lithograph cannot have been published later than 1882. Corroboratively, Balyuzi states that the Iqan circulated in the early 1880s (Balyuzi, Baha'u'llah: The King of Glory, 165).

A handsome lithographed edition of 157 pages of 15 lines each, and bearing no date, is arguably the first lithograph of the Iqan. E. G. Browne was shown such a copy on 15 July 1888

in Kirman (A Year Amongst the Persians, 554). A copy of the undated lithograph is preserved in the Baha'i World Centre archives, catalogue no. BP362.K8.1893 (based on tentative dating when catalogued). It matches Najafi's facsimile (Baha'iyan, 469), the so-called 1308 A.H. edition. Three other copies of this edition are known to exist: (1) the undated Bombay lithograph described by Baron Rosen, donated in 1890 to the Library of the Institute of Oriental Languages of St. Petersburg by M. Gamazof; (2) one held in the private Afsharian Library, Los Angeles; (3) and another privately auctioned in Chicago (Frank Lewis, personal communication, 25 Oct 1996). Presumably other unattested, undisclosed copies are held in private hands.

The St. Petersburg lithograph is evidently the one of which Baron Rosen speaks (Collections scientifiques 6:142-4; cf. "Novuiya Babidskiya rukopisi," Zapiski 4 [1889], 112-14). Rosen provides the following catalog entry: "No. 245. This item is the lithograph edition of the Kitab-i iqan produced in Bombay without title, place or date. Apparently in ta'liq script printed on good Indian paper with the hallmark, "Abdoolally Abdoolrahim & Co., Importers" (Collections scientifiques 6:144, trans. from the French by Stephen Lambden, who located this reference for me at my request). It should be noted that Baha'u'llah's colophon at the end of the text read manzul rather than munzal.

On the basis of this information, I believe that that the undated Bombay lithograph of the Kitab-i Iqan archived in the Institute of Oriental Languages library in St. Petersburg is likely to have been printed by the same publisher either in Rabi' I/January-February 1882 or slightly before. The aforementioned importers are not likely to have been the publishers. The undated Bombay lithograph of the Iqan was most likelly published c. 1299/1881-82 (cf. Balyuzi, King of Glory, 165) by Hasani Zivar Press, and that it was likely that the publication was arranged by al-Hajj Muhammad-Husayn al-Hakim al-Baha'i, and that the lithograph is in the hand of Mirza Muhammad-`Ali Shirazi. I am basing this identification on the assumption that the first Bombay Iqan was published prior to or concurrent with the publication of `Abdu'l-Baha's Risala-yi Madaniya (cf. Rosen, Collections scientifique 6:253). A caveat is in order here. The Research Department of the Universal House of Justice comments: " 'al-Hakim al-Baha'i' and also 'Shirazi' are cognomens that mask, rather than reveal, the identities of these men involved with the production of Baha'i books" (letter dated 9 March 1995). An alternative suggestion has been made that Baha'u'llah's son Mirza Muhammad-`Ali, who was personally sent by Baha'u'llah to Bombay to transcribe books for publication, was the one in whose hand the undated lithograph was written. The memoirs of Syed Mustafa Roumie may perhaps answer this very question. However, I have my doubts that Mirza Muhammad-`Ali did so, as the first Bombay lithograph lacks a colophon in the "Khatt-i Badi`" ("the New Writing" which Mirza Muhammad-`Ali designed as the script for a new universal language), which seems to have been his calligraphic trademark. A facsimile of the undated Bombay Iqan lithograph is provided in Appendix Two.

Suspension of Publication:

In the epistle to Mulla `Ali-Akbar, we learn that Baha'u'llah, for an undisclosed period of time, had suspended dissemination of the Kitab-i Iqan some twenty years after it had first circulated, owing to the threat of even greater dangers posed to the Faith if too many copies of this work were to have fallen into the hands of its enemies. Taherzadeh states: "...Baha'u'llah 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. Baha'u'llah intimates that it was for the same reason that He had stopped the dissemination of the Kitab-i Iqan which had been printed [sic] some twenty years before" (A. Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, 4: 321-22, citing Baha'u'llah's Tablet to Mulla `Ali-Akbar, from INBA, No. 15, pp. 423-424.) The term "printed" here is problematic, and probably should be construed as "reproduced" or "disseminated." The reference to twenty years prior should be understood "publication" of the Iqan by transcription.

The Second Bombay Lithograph (= First Dated Lithograph):

The first dated lithograph of the Kitab-i Iqan is the Dhu'l-Qa`dah 1310 A.H. (1893) edition in the hand of the celebrated calligrapher Mishkin-Qalam, in nasta'liq script, 214 pages. The text is possibly based on the master copy Baha'u'llah entrusted to Haji Akhund. This edition is catalogued as BP 362.K8.1892 in the Baha'i World Centre Library, Department of Library and Archival Services. Three copies are archived at the Baha'i World Centre. A facsimile of the first page of this edition appears on p. xviii of Symbol and Secret, where, through a publisher's error, it was misidentified as the undated lithograph. A facsimile of the final page is correctly shown on page 108 of Symbol and Secret, but is not, as the caption indicates, privately held in the Afsharian Library. A facsimile of the entire text of the 1310 lithograph is posted at the end of this article (see Appendix One).

The relatives of the Bab, known colectively as the Afnan, ran a successful printing house, called Naseri Press, in Bombay (Balyuzi, Eminent Baha'is, 121). If Hasani Zivar Press was not in fact the publisher of the undated Bombay lithograph, then it could well have been Naseri Press.

Printed Editions:

The first printed (typeset) edition of the Kitab-i Iqan was published in Egypt (Cairo: Mawsu`at Press, 1318/1900), in 216 pages. Minor editing (Arabicizing of Persian stylisms and aligning Qur'an citations with the textus receptus) in manuscript copies as well as in lithographs of the Iqan had been authorized by Baha'u'llah himself. This first typeset edition standardized all subsequent printings. A Cairo reprint in 1933 bears the title, Kitab-i mustatab-i Iqan. Presently, the Persian text is most accessible (sans index) in Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i Iqan: Book of Certitude ("Reprinted from the original printing, Egypt, 1934 [sic],"; Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i-Verlag, 1980/136 Baha'i Era).

Printed Editions of The Kitab-i Iqan

First edition: Early 1880's Bombay Lithographed
Second edition: 1310/1893 Bombay Lithographed
Third edition: 1318/1900 Cairo Printed
Reprint: 1352/1933 Cairo Printed
Other editions: Tehran, Cairo, Delhi, Germany.

A new edition of the Kitab-i Iqan, commissioned by the Universal House of Justice and edited by Fereydun Vahman (University of Copenhagen) is currently in press (Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i-Verlag). It is based on a master copy transcribed by the celebrated amanuensis, Zayn al-Muqarrabin. this raises an interesting question: Why would the manuscript original of the Iqan, in the hand of Abdu'l-Baha with Baha'u'llah's own emendations and marginal additions, be is set aside in favor of a copy from Zayn al-Muqarrabin? Since my request to Haifa for a copy of Iqan original was declined, except for facsimiles of the first and final pages, which the Universal House of Justice kindly gave permission to be published in Symbol & Secret, I have therefore not been able to compare the lithographed versions with the original. However, my educated guess is that Baha'u'llah's later editing of the Iqan for publication (aligning Qur'an citations with the textus receptus, and effecting minor stylistic changes) resulted in a new master copy(ies) which, strange to say, rendered the original Iqan MS obsolete!

Translations: The first English translation of the Kitab-i Iqan was undertaken by Ali Kuli Khan, assisted by Howard MacNutt, The Book of Assurance (New York: George V. Blackburne, Co., 1904). This translation is, in certain passages, useful for its unidiomatic fidelity to the text. A French translation appeared in the same year: Baha'u'llah, Le Livre de la Certitude (tr. H[ippolyte]. Dreyfus and Mirza Habib-Ullah Chirazi [Mirza Habib Allah Shirazi]; Paris: E. Leroux, 1904). The authorized English rendering is that of Shoghi Effendi, The Kitab-i Iqan: The Book of Certitude (Wilmette, Illinois: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1931) with several reprintings.

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121, 221, 227.

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> The present writer's forthcoming book. Complementary historical and structural analyses of Baha'u'llah's sociomoral teachings are provided in order to show a pattern whereby Baha'u'llah had selectively "sacralized the secular" developments in the West with the greatest institutional potential for world reform. At the same time, Baha'u'llah's creation of consultative Houses of Justice at local/ intermediate and international levels suggests what in some ways may be seen as a parallel system of religious governance, with a mandate to exert an equally reciprocal moral influence on the state. The notion of "separation of church and state", argued for by Cole, is thus counterpoised by the pervasive influence of religion that Baha'u'llah advocated.

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Juan R. I. Cole, "Baha'u'llah's 'Surah of the Companions': An Early Edirne Tablet of Declaration (c. 1864). Introduction and Provisional Translation," Baha'i Studies Bulletin 5.3/ 6.1 (June 1991) 4-74.

--------, "Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic Thought in the Nineteenth Century," International Journal of Middle East Studies 24.1 (1992): 1-26.

--------, Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Baha'i Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East. Studies in the Babi and Baha'i religions, vol. 9 (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1998);

This book by Cole is an important and controversial analysis of Baha'u'llah's political and humanitarian teachings--the first academic monograph on the subject. In it, Cole intends to "link Baha'i millenarianism with social reform motifs" (205, n. 4). Adducing an array of Baha'i primary sources, contextualized and interpreted in light of key political terms of reference that prevailed in the 19th-century Middle East, Cole argues that the separation of church and state was clearly advocated by both Baha'u'llah and `Abdu'l-Baha.

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Denis MacEoin, "Divisions and Authority Claims in Babism (1850-1866)," Studia Iranica 18 (1989) 93-129.

MacEoin's treatment of the question of Baha'u'llah's messianic consciousness at the time of the revelation of the Book of Certitude is a full projection of a century-old Azali view of the role of Mirza Yahya Subh-i Azal in the Babi community. MacEoin's case is widely based on Azali interpretations of Baha'u'llah's writings as represented in works such as Tanbih'un-Na'imin by `Izziyyih Khanum (d. 1322 A.H./1904). The authenticity of Baha'u'llah's Writings quoted in this work has not yet been verified. (personal communication, Research Department memorandum, 10 September 1991). Weighed with this bias in mind, MacEoin's studies provide much that is useful.

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APPENDIX ONE:

FACSIMILE OF 1310/May-June 1893 IQAN LITHOGRAPH

From the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, I received a microfilm of a copy of the 1310 Bombay lithograph of the Kitab-i Iqan. After considerable expense in duplicating the microfilm and scanning it into digitized TIFF images, I am making a complete facsimile of this rare manuscript available on H-Baha'i. There are no illuminated pages. While the text of the Iqan is in Mishkin-Qalam's hand, it is not calligraphic art, strictly speaking.

The box containing the microfilm had a label, on which is written: "Microfilm of Kitab-i Mustatab-i Iqan, label, on which is written: "Microfilm of Kitab-i Mustatab-i Iqan, Lithograph is kept in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. 108 frames." in the upper left corner of the box containing the microfilm is the number (I presume a catalogue number): "PS II 164". The microfilm is not in very good shape, with spills, scratches, and dust on it. It did not come on a spool--just loose, wound film.

For archival preservation, an ISO 9660 CD-ROM of 110 TIFF images (the 108 microfilm frames plus two start/end frames) has been mastered. The size of the images is 4512 (pixel

width = 22.56") x 3360 (pixel height = 16.8"), at a resolution of 200 dpi, in B/W 1-bit depth. The file format is TIFF (B), with a compression ratio of 1:23. For Web presentation these tifs have been converted to compressed graphic image files (gif) and each page has been cropped for presentation as a single image file.

APPENDIX TWO:

FACSIMILE OF UNDATED IQAN LITHOGRAPH

Undated Bombay lithograph (c. 1882), obtained from the Afsharian Private Collection (Los Angeles), with the kind permission of Mr. Payam Afsharian, co-founder of Kalimat Press.

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