

are presented in more detail (pp. 63-85). The author is concerned with the theological interpretation of religious history as a Babi apologetic. The advent of the Qa'em is identified with the Day of Resurrection. This section is important because it provides a fairly concise presentation of Babi theology. Theologically, the apologetic section anticipates later Bahai teachings such as the nature of manifestations of God (pp. 206-7), and the station of Imam Hosayn (p. 80).

The historical section begins on page 99 and continues until a few pages before the end of the book. Textual and manuscript evidence suggests that the historical narrative is not the work of a single author, and that it was originally written in a form most closely preserved in the Haifa manuscript. The transition from the apologetic section to the historical section occurs with a short segment on Shaikh Ahmad Ahsa'i (p. 99), and transitions into the narrative of Sayyed Kazem Rašti (pp. 100-105). Here important information is given concerning the meetings between Rašti and the Bab (Sayyed 'Ali Mohammad of Shiraz). The early days of the Bab, the formation of the nucleus of early believers (letters of the living), his pilgrimage, his arrest on return (pp. 105-12) and the conversion of Sayyed Yahya Darabi and Molla Mohammad Zanjani are covered (pp. 120-26). An important feature of the narrative of the Bab is the emphasis on his miracles, cited as evidence of his supernatural powers. Many of the narrated miracles closely follow Biblical patterns such as the healing of the sick (p. 127), or Qur'anic miracles attributed to Jesus such as speaking at birth (pp. 110-11). The Isfahan, Maku and Cehriq periods, the examination of the Bab in Tabriz, and his martyrdom, are presented in detail. The clashes between the Babis and government forces in Mazandaran are described in detail, with briefer presentations of the Nayriz and Zanzan clashes. The Noqtat al-kaf is generally in accord with other histories of the period in its account.

Read the rest of this article online at
www.iranicaonline.org/articles/noqtat-al-kaf.

The Noqtat al-kaf is unique in placing Molla Mohammad-'Ali Barforuši (Qodduš) above the Bab, a point repeatedly emphasized in the book. Qodduš is identified with the return of Mohammad, whereas the Bab is identified with the return of Imam 'Ali (p. 153). In the Qodduš narrative (absent in the Haifa MS), he is identified with Jesus Christ on his return (p. 199) and his birth account implies that he was conceived through a virgin birth.

Edward Granville Browne's discovery in 1882 of the two manuscripts of the Noqtat al-kaf in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris was fortuitous. One included the historical narrative and theological preamble with no colophon (Suppl. Persan 1071). The other contained only the theological preamble attached to a copy of the Persian Bayan colophon dated 1279 (1863) (Suppl. Persan 1070). These were part of a collection of books belonging to Comte de Gobineau (q.v.) purchased at an auction in 1884 and obtained after his tenure in Persia in 1863 (Balyuzi, p. 63).

Browne introduced the history in his 1893 edition of Hamadani's *The New History of the Bab*, where he also presented a comparative analysis of the two histories. Browne had expected that the Babis would "universally" acknowledge Mirza Yahya Nuri (Sobh-e Azal) as their "sole head." He was surprised that most of the Babis had accepted Azal's older brother Mirza Hosayn 'Ali Nuri (Baha'-Allah; q.v.) as their "chief and prophet." By 1893, Browne had developed significant sympathy towards Azal. He also became convinced that his find was the original history penned by the Babi merchant Haji Mirza Jani (d. 1852). The manuscript identified Azal as the Babi messianic figure "Him whom God shall make manifest" (p. 244). Browne attributed the authorship of the (entire) book to Mirza Jani Kašani despite significant evidence to the contrary (Milani, pp. 10-14). Browne's attribution of the authorship followed an assessment made by Azal as Browne had sent him a description of the manuscripts he had found, asking him to identify them. Azal responded on May 13, 1892, and identified the two *Noqat al-kaf* manuscripts in the following note: "The history to which you allude must, by certain indications, be by the uplifted and martyred Haji [Mirza Jani], for none but he wrote [such] a history" (*Noqat al-kaf*, p. xvi). He did not mention Jani by name, but Browne understood the reference to the martyred Haji as Haji Mirza Jani, and Azal never disputed Browne's assumption.

The introductions are in Persian and English and penned by Browne (with the unacknowledged assistance of Mohammad Qazvini). Here Browne introduced the manuscripts he had found in the Gobineau collection and narrated his visits to Baha'-Allah and Sobh-e Azal.

The controversy concerning the *Noqat al-kaf* began with the publication of Browne's *The New History (Tárikh-i-Jadíd) of Mirzá 'Alí Muhammad the Báb* (Cambridge, 1983), where Browne alleged that "a large number of Babis themselves came to have a direct interest in the suppression" of this book. He argued that as Baha'-Allah's claims gradually advanced, and the religion took on a more conciliatory tone with the Qajar monarchy, the Bahais felt a need to suppress the *Noqat al-kaf* and replace it with a "revised, expurgated, and emended 'New History'" (*New History*, p. xxix). While it is true that copies of the *Noqat al-kaf* were not found in the possession of Babi-Bahais, neither were copies of the book known in the Babi-Azalis community where its absence (Azal and notables such as Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani included) cannot be accounted for by Browne's hypothesis.

The Bahais did not rebut Browne's claims until 1910, when the book was finally published. Once the Bahai scholars of the day examined the book they became convinced that it was not the original narrative. Three decades earlier, when working for Manakji Saheb the Zoroastrian agent, the Bahai scholar Abu'l-Fazl Golpayegani (q.v.) had seen a few quires of a history written by Jani, some of which was incorporated into the *New History*. He noted that the *Noqat al-kaf* did not correspond with the quires he had seen earlier. Browne's timeline of the collection also contained inaccuracies that rendered it suspicious, such as a colophon dating of 1279 (1862) for the *Suppl. Persan*,

1070 manuscript that had supposedly left Persia before 1858 (Noqtat al-kaf, introduction). The Bahais were receptive to the idea of an Azali conspiracy, given the precedent with Hašt behešt, a pro-Azali tract written by Mirza Aqa Kan Kermani, but attributed by Šaykh Ahmad Kermani and Mirza Mostafa to the Babi-Bahai Sayyed Jawad Karbalaʿi (Nicholson, p. 76). This was complicated by Azal’s identification of the work with Jani despite strong evidence to the contrary. By 1912, ʿAbbas Effendi Nuri (ʿAbd-al-Bahaʿ, q.v.), the head of the Bahai community, also entered the debate. He stated that Jani had only written a few segments and that these were in the possession of his relatives. He argued that the published Noqtat al-kaf (particularly its introduction) was an Azali inspired production (Ešraq-Kavari, p. 208). Browne’s claim that only one manuscript of this history had survived rendered it suspicious in ʿAbd-al-Bahaʿ’s eyes, given the Babis attention to the preservation of manuscripts. He then instructed Abu’l-Fazl and others to search for the original manuscript written by Jani, and to collaborate on a refutation of the Noqtat al-kaf. This quest led to the discovery of other manuscripts. One important manuscript was almost identical to the published Noqtat al-kaf except for two sections, one on “the life and condition of Azal” and another one on later “manifestations.” Naʿem, the Bahai poet, informed ʿAbd-al-Bahaʿ in a letter dated April 9, 1912 that Mirza Mohammad Hasan Adib-a prominent Bahai residing in Persia-had borrowed and examined this manuscript from Molla Mostafa, and reported that it was identical to the printed edition except for the sections noted above. The original manuscript was written on English cream-colored starched paper, whereas the two added sections were written on Russian unstarched paper, and that these had been inserted in the manuscript. Hence in his letters from that date ʿAbd-al-Bahaʿ only referred to the fact that the text had been tampered with, and one finds no references to an Azali forgery. Meanwhile Mirza Mohammad Hasan-e Adib notes that other recensions of the Noqtat al-kaf had been identified, including one in the handwriting of the Mirza Jani. The fate of most of these manuscripts is unknown.

The Noqtat al-kaf contains three distinct dates. It gives the date 1277 from baʿta (p. 61), 1267 (1850-51) in Babi nomenclature and 1270 from hejri (p. 92, 272). These dates support the thesis that the book is early and that it was penned by multiple authors who used different systems of dating.

To date five manuscripts have been identified, with two bearing colophon dating. The colophon dated manuscripts were introduced in 2004 (McCants and Milani, pp. 431-49). One of these (NK1268) is dated 1851-52 (1268) and the other (NK1327) is dated 1909 (1327). NK1268 is the clean copy prepared from an earlier codex. Two undated MSS are identified as the Tehran MS and the Haifa MS. Both have important differences from other known copies, notably missing sections on Azal (238-45) and later manifestations (252-61). These two MSS probably predate the NK 1268, and the missing sections were added by later redactors. Codicological evidence suggests that the Haifa Codex is the earliest and that the other codices are dependant upon it. The section on the life of Azal creates an awkward break in the published version. The section begins to

present the end narrative of the Bab, where the narrative is broken by a large section on Azal, and only later is the narrative of the martyrdom of the Bab resumed. The source for the section on “later manifestations” appears to have been a letter from Jani to his brother Haj Mohammad Esmaʿil Dabih (Afnan, pp. 482-84). In this letter Jani described a visit by Sayyed Bašir Hendi to Kašan and his challenge for charismatic authority with Mirza Jani and Molla ʿAli Šayk ʿAzim. The material from this letter is reproduced almost verbatim in both NK 1268 and Browne’s edition. Its absence from the Tehran and Haifa MSS suggests that it was added later, perhaps by Dabih.

In short, the Noqtat al-kaf is an early general history of the Babi religion. Its final composition was finished by 1852, but it did have earlier redactions with important differences.

Bibliography (annotated):

Manuscripts.

Six manuscripts are known to exist, two of which are at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (suppl. persan 1070, suppl. persan 1071). The 1268 colophon dated MS is held in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Princeton University, Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, Vol. 43. The 1327 colophon dated liothʿque MS is Vol. 38. The Haifa MS is held at the Bahai World Centre Archives (catalogued MR 1548). The Tehran MS has been examined by both A. M. Davoudi and Denis MacEoin (but not by the present author).

Printed Editions of the Text.

Edward G. Browne, *Ketab-e Noqtat al-kaf*, Leiden, 1910, which includes an English Introduction and a critical edition based on the Bibliothèque nationale manuscripts, has been reprinted at least nine times in Qom (perhaps due to its perceived anti-Bahai content), the last reprint in 2001. It is also available online (accessed 26 May 2009). Idem, *The New History (Tárikh-i-Jadíd) of Mirzá ʿAlí Muhammad the Báb*, Cambridge, 1893, repr. London, 1975, pp. 327-96, is a comparative study of the Noqtat al-kaf and *The New History*.

Bahai Responses.

A contemporary account of Mirza Abu’l Fazl’s immediate reaction is found in *Katerat-e Habib I*, Hofheim, 1998, pp. 68-69. The most important Bahai rebuttal is by Mirza Abu’l-Fazl Golpayegani and his nephew Sayyed Mahdi Golpayegani, *Kašf al-getaʿ*, Tashkent, 1919. For ʿAbd-al-Baha’s responses, see ʿA. Ešraq Kavari, *Maʿeda-ye asmani 2*, Tehran, 1975, pp. 206-22.

Modern Expositions.

No general survey as yet incorporates the recent literature; Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History: A Survey*, Leiden, 1992, pp. 134-52, remains the most comprehensive study. H. M. Balyuzi, Edward Granville

Browne and the Baha'i Faith, Oxford, 1970, pp. 62-88, is the earliest modern study. Two important articles have appeared by Mohit Tabataba'i: "Ketabi bi nam ba nami taza," *Gawhar* 11/12, 1975; and "Tarik-e qadim o jadid," *Gawhar* 5/6, 1976. An important rebuttal to the above and the introduction of the Tehran MS is found in A. M. Davoudi's *Maqalat va rasa'el dar mabahet-e motafarreqa*, ed. Vahid Raf'ati, Hofheim, 1993, pp. 189-206, 225-33, and 235-66. See also Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850*, Ithaca, 1989, p. 423; Juan Cole "Noqtato'l-kaf and the Babi Chronicle Traditions," available online (accessed 28 July 2008). A recent study that raises important questions is Udo Schaefer, Nicola Tawfigh, and Ulrich Gollmer, *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics*, tr. from German by Geraldine Schuckelt, Oxford, 2000, pp. 500-28.

William McCants and Kavian Milani, "The History and Provenance of an Early Manuscript of the Noqtatol-kaf Dated (1851-52)," *Iranian Studies* 37/3, September 2004, pp. 431-50 (in which the 1268 and 1909 manuscripts are introduced).

Kavian Milani, "The Bab's Stay in Kašan: A Historiographical Analysis of the Kitab-e Noqtatol-kaf Based on the Kašan Pericope," *Baha'i Studies Review* 12, pp. 1-14.

Negar Mottahedeh, "Resurrection, Return and Reform: Ta'ziyeh as Model for Early Babi Historiography," *Iranian Studies* 32/3, summer 1998, pp. 387-99.

-->

METADATA

Views 6948 views since posted 2008-07; last edit 2024-04-30 09:58 UTC;

previous at archive.org.../milani_iranica_nuqtat_kaf;

URLs changed in 2010, see archive.org.../bahai-library.org

Language

English

Permission

fair use

Share

Shortlink: bahai-library.com/3487

Citation: ris/3487

select Collection:

Archives

Articles

Articles-unpublished

Audio

Bibliographies

BIC

Biographies

Books
Chronologies
Compilations
Compilations-NSA
Compilations-personal
Documents
East-asia
Encyclopedia
Essays
Etc
Excerpts
Fiction
Glossaries
Guardian
Histories
Introductory
Letters
Maps
Music
Newspapers
NSA-documents
NSA-letters
Personal
Pilgrims
Poetry
Presentations
Resources
Reviews
Scripts
Software
Statistics
Study
Talks
Theses
Transcripts
Translations
UHJ-documents
UHJ-letters
Video
Visual
Writings

home

sitemap

series

chronology

search:

author

title

date

tags

adv. search

languages

inventory

bibliography

abbreviations

links

about

contact

RSS

new

— Nuqtat al-Kaf (Used by permission of the curator)