

Taherzadeh, pp. 157-58). Baha'-Allah's reply to these questions was said in several Baha'i sources to have been very speedily "sent down," or "revealed," in one or two days (Rabbani, 1970, p. 138; Balyuzi, 1980, p. 164). The response of the *Ketab-e iqan* persuaded the Bab's uncle to accept the elevated messianic claims of both the Bab and ultimately Baha'-Allah also as his successor.

The aforementioned questions of the then skeptical uncle were largely centered upon the following Shi'ite Islamic themes which seemed to him unfulfilled or outwardly unrealized: (1) the latter-day *Yawm al-qiyama* (Day of Resurrection) and such associated events as "judgment," "reward" and "punishment"; (2) the problem of the identity of the Twelfth Imam and the disparity between the Bab's claims and the heritage of Shi'ite traditions; (3) the contradictions between the non-literal exegesis of the Bab and the straightforward heritage of Shi'ite doctrinal tradition; and (4) the non-fulfillment of messianic expectations associated with the expected Qa'em and his followers engaging, for example, in eschatological jihad type activities centered at Kufa (Fayzi, pp. 40-41; MacEoin; Balyuzi, 1991, pp. 164-5). Though Sayyed Mohammad was the primary addressee in the *Ketab-e iqan*, Baha'-Allah also specifically addressed a range of other individuals and groups, including Shi'ite Muslims, Šaykis (Shaykhis), various Babi groups as the "people of the Bayan (Exposition)," and, in a few places, all of humankind, in a manner reminiscent of the style of the Bab himself (KI, p. 72, tr., 1968, p. 93 ; Buck, 1995, p. 14).

Read the rest of this article online at www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ketab-iqan.

Dating of the text. Though the exact date of the writing of the *Ketab-e iqan* remains unknown, it is clear from internal and historical evidence that it was written in the early 1860s, a year or so prior to Baha'-Allah's claiming an exalted theophanic-messianic status when he initiated the Baha'i religion in April-May 1863. The dating to 1861-62 seems most likely in light of a reference in the *Ketab-e iqan* to an "eighteen year" period of Babi persecution. When computed in terms of the Babi calendar, this results in 1278/1861-62 ($1260+18 = 1278$ AH) (KI, p. 176, tr., 1968, p. 226; Dahaji, p. 41). Consequently, another reference in the *Ketab-e iqan* to the Islamic year 1280 (1863-64) can hardly be taken literally. Edward G. Browne initially dated the *Ketab-e iqan* to 1274/1857-58 (KI, pp. 134, 195, tr., 1968, pp. 172, 251) but later favored an 1861-62 dating (Browne, 1889, p. 945; Idem, 1909 p. 302), as did Shoghi Effendi (Rabbani, 1970, p. 138; idem, 1981, p. 429; Buck, 1995, pp. 7-12, 38-90).

The reference in the *Ketab-e iqan* to previously composed scriptural Tablets (*alwah-e mastura-ye qabl*) (KI, p. 15, tr., 1968, p. 19) is a clear allusion to Baha'-Allah's slightly earlier Arabic *Jawaher al-asrar*, a work which according to a manuscript colophon dates to the Babi year *al-bahi*, which, according to the abjad system, computes to the Babi year 17, or 1277/1860-61 (Baha'-Allah, INBMC, XLVI, p. 40). This again suggests a

Ketab-e iqan date of 1278/1862-63, as do most other Baha'i sources, although this may have to be revised in the light of a letter of Sayyed Mohammad about his meeting with Baha'-Allah, apparently written in 1861 (Fayzi, pp. 42-43, Buck, 1998, Rabbani, 1999).

Structure and contents. Following indications in the original text for the English translation, Ali Kuli Khan and Shoghi Effendi, not inappropriately, divided the text into two parts (KI, part 1, pp. 2-72, tr., 1968, pp. 3-93, part 2, pp. 72-199, tr., 1968, pp. 95-257). At times Part One has a very close relationship to the Jawaher al-asrar, while sections within Part Two echo portions of the Bab's Persian *Dala'el-e sab'a*. The issues within Shi'ite messianism that led to the writing of the Ketab-e iqan were not dissimilar to those raised when Baha'-Allah composed the Jawaher al-asrar for Sayyed Yusuf Sedehi (Esfahani), a one-time resident of Karbala' and pupil of the Shi'ite marja'-e taqlid (source of emulation) Shaikh Mortaza Ansari (d. 1281/1864). Both of these major works of Baha'-Allah open with a consideration of the reasons for the rejection of past prophets in order to convince the reader of the falsity of anti-Babi sentiments and to argue against literalistic eschatological expectations as mapped out by many relevant Shi'ite traditions (KI, pp. 1-5, tr., 1968, pp. 3-6; Baha'-Allah 1965, III, pp. 4-31). As an illustration of the way that "throughout all ages and centuries" Messengers of God have, like the Bab, been subjected to "heinous cruelties," Baha'-Allah provides a brief account of the prophetic missions of the rejected pre-Islamic figures Noah, Hud, Saleh, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (KI, pp. 5-15, tr., 1907, pp. 7-19). The account of these maligned prophets is derived from accounts in the Qur'an as well as from the narratives of the *Qessas al-anbia'* (Stories of the Prophets), and certain early sections of the *Rawzat al-safa* of Mirkvand (d. 1428).

Aspects of these brief sketches of the prophets opening the Ketab-e iqan are carefully, though subtly, related to the Bab so as to incline Sayyed Mohammad to a positive view of his mission. The aborted and largely unsuccessful mission of Noah, for example, parallels that of the early mission of the Bab, who in view of an inspired realization that the Divine Will had been altered (through *beda'*), had cancelled an 1845 Babi jihad oriented congregation in Karbala' (*Qayyum al-asma'* 1:29; Bab, "Prayer in reply to questions", pp. 173-75). Baha'-Allah's retelling of the Noah story in the Ketab-e iqan and what he has to say about the spiritual sovereignty of the crucified Jesus (KI, pp. 5-7, 102-5, tr. 1968, pp. 6-9, 132-35) strongly suggests the possibility of divine victory for the Bab as the expected *Qa'em*, despite his long imprisonment and his execution in 1850. Designed to modify the triumphalist messianism implicit in many Shi'ite prophetic Hadiths, others cited in the Ketab-e iqan picture the expected *Qa'em* as a rejected figure whose Persian and other followers are to be severely persecuted (KI, pp. 190-193, tr., 1968, pp. 245-48). Among the writings of the Bab referred to in the Ketab-e iqan are his early *Qayyum al-asma'* (mid. 1844), characterized as "the first, greatest and mightiest of all Books" and the *Tafsir* on the [Letter] "H" (*al-ha*), both of which are cited in connection with the

Bab's predictions of his own martyrdom for the sake of the future Babi messiah (KI, p. 180, tr., 1968, pp. 31-32).

The Bible, the Qur'an, Hadith texts and other literary citations. In the *Ketab-e iqan*, Baha'-Allah does not hesitate to cite the Bible in arguing for the truth of the prophet-hood of Mohammad and the Bab. He denied the legitimacy of the charge of biblical tahrif (distortion) and highlighted the need for the non-literal exegesis of its often abstruse, allegorically-oriented eschatological predictions. Like Fakr-al-Din Razi, Mohammad b. 'Abd-al-Karim Šahrastani and others in Islamic history, Baha'-Allah rejected the notion of a complete textual corruption (tahrif-e nass) of the Bible and other divinely revealed sacred books. He preferred to speak of a widespread distortion of the meaning (tahrif-e ma'ani) of scriptures at the hands of ignorant and misdirected religious leaders. He saw scriptural tahrif not primarily as a practice of concrete textual alteration (tabdil), but as a misplaced hermeneutic (KI, p. 57, tr., 1968, pp. 75-76). Biblical distortion was, he said, only limited to a few specific instances (KI, pp. 65-67, tr., 1968, p. 86; Baha'-Allah, 1965, III, p. 27).

Baha'-Allah refers to the Hebrew Bible only once in the *Ketab-e iqan*, in a paraphrased Islamo-biblical form, when he cites Isaiah 65:25 in Persian as a *hadit-e mašhur* ("well-known Tradition," KI, p. 73, tr., 1968, pp. 113-14). As in the *Jawaher al-asrar*, he cites the New Testament more extensively than the Old Testament. In this respect he makes use of an Arabic Christian textual tradition very close, if not identical, to that printed in the 17th century Paris and London Polyglot Bibles. The New Testament text published in these Polyglot Bibles was often reprinted in the West with revisions, one of which may have been presented to Baha'-Allah by missionaries or diplomats during his Baghdad years (Lambden, 2002, pp. 291-316).

Over thirty-five pages of Part One of the *Ketab-e iqan* consist of a detailed "spiritual" interpretation of Matthew 24: 29-31(a), in proof of the mission of Mohammad as the "return" of Christ (Baha'-Allah 1965, III, pp. 4-31). Baha'-Allah does this so that the reader might adopt the non-literal hermeneutical position when weighing up the Islamic predictions relating to the Bab that he later cites in the *Ketab-e iqan*. Baha'-Allah's quoting and paraphrasing New Testament texts in the *Ketab-e iqan* (e.g. Matt. 24:29 f., 2:2, 3:1-2; John 3:5b-7; Luke 9:60, Mark 2:3 f.), and his strong arguments against biblical tahrif, led to the Baha'is engaging in biblical interpretation in Iran, Egypt, and elsewhere in the Middle East, and more extensively in the West. In the *Ketab-e iqan*, the sacred texts revealed from age to age, namely the Torah-Hebrew Bible, the Enjil-Gospel(s), the Qur'an, and the Bayan (the main work by the Bab) are the centerpieces of divine guidance. Veritable "cities" of the "Word of God," they enshrine all good and must be forever available. A future such "Book" will be that of the Babi messiah *man yozhero-hu Allah* (Him whom God shall make manifest) (KI, pp. 151-54, tr., 1968, pp. 196-200). Baha'-Allah subsequently claimed

to be this latter figure and wrote perhaps 20,000 lawhs (scriptural tablets), some in the form of books of varying length.

Like the first two Šayki leaders and the Bab, Baha?-Allah frequently refers to the Qur?an and various traditions of the Twelver Shi?ite Imams as authoritative and divinely inspired sources. Aside from making numerous allusions to the Qur?an, he explicitly cites the text itself approximately 135 times (Buck, 1995, p. 235). He interprets it in novel ways, occasionally registering or contesting standard tafsir (exegesis) (KI, pp. 87-88, tr., 1968, pp. 115-16). For Baha?-Allah, the Qur?an is a repository of all mysteries (Qur?an 6:59) even containing, for example, a reference to Mohammad-Karim Khan Kermani, his Šayki adversary, through his self-adopted title Atim (Sinful) and his miserable fate as the Karim (“Honorable”) eater at the infernal “tree of Zaqqum” (Qur?an 44: 43-44, 49; KI, p. 147, tr., 1968, p. 190).

Baha?-Allah several times in the *Ketab-e iqan* censured a literalist or fundamentalist mode of Qur?anic exegesis. He taught that the sacred books have many levels of meaning, from the literal to scores of deep allegorical and even abstruse levels. Consonant with this he argues from Hadith that the Bab vastly supplemented the totality of pre-Babi revelations (“two letters”) with the rest of the alphabetic “totality” (twenty-five of twenty-seven letters) of knowledge (KI, p. 189, tr., 1968, p. 243).

Aspects of certain Qur?anic verses deemed motašabahat (ambiguous, requiring exegesis) such as the first al-horufat al-moqatta?a (isolated letters) A-L-M., are succinctly interpreted by Baha?-Allah. It is said that in these specific letters “the mysteries of the Divine Ipseity” (howiya) are enshrined and that within their “shells” the pearls of the “Divine Unicity” (ahadiya) are treasured up (KI, p. 156, 1968, pp. 202-3).

Baha?-Allah cites several standard as well as several less known Shi?ite Hadith compendia in the *Ketab-e iqan*. These sources include Abu Ja?far Mohammad Kolayni’s (d. 941) *al-Kafi fi ?elm al-din* and its supplementary volumes *Rawzat al-kafi*, Mohammad-Baqer Majlesi’s (d. 1699-1700) *Behar al-anwar*, the ?Awalem al-?olum of Majlesi’s student ?Abd-Allah b. Nur-Allah Bahrani (d. early 17th century), a rich repository of Shi?ite messianic Hadith for Babis, and the *Yanbu?*, possibly a compilation of Ebn Jonayd Eskafi (d. 991; KI, p. 189, 1968, p. 243 ; Ešraq Kavari, 1970-72, IV, pp. 1866-67). An unspecified *Ketab al-arba?in* (Book of the forty [traditions]) is also cited in the *Ketab-e iqan* (p. 188, tr., 1968, p. 242) as is the *Do?a? al-nodba* (Supplication of lamentation), a prayer included in various Shi?ite devotional compilations of Ebn Tawus (d. 1226) and others (KI, p. 28, tr., 1968, p. 35). Additionally, for example, Traditions are relayed through Mofazzal b. ?Omar Jo?fi (d. ca. 762-3), from Imam Ja?far al-Sadeq (d. ca. 765), and through Komayl b. Ziad (d. ca. 704) from Imam ?Ali b. Abi Taleb (d. 661) about al-haqiqa (truth, reality) (KI, p. 77, tr., 1968, pp. 102-3). Some of the more esoteric Hadiths cited in the *Ketab-e iqan* seem to have originated in the *Mašareq anwar al-yaqin* of Rajab Borsi

(d. ca. 1411), perhaps as mediated through early Shayki writings where unusual traditions are frequently cited and commented upon (see KI, p. 130, tr., 1968, pp. 167-68).

Baha?-Allah also refers to other literary sources in the *Ketab-e iqan*, such as the lengthy Persian *Eršad al-?awamm* of Mohammad-Karim Khan Kermani (d. 1871), which was published several times in the 1850s in Bombay and Tabriz. Baha?-Allah specifically mentions that he sought out and read parts of this book. He contrasts Kermani's listing of twenty-five or more branches of often esoteric knowledge allegedly necessary for fathoming the mysteries of the *me?raj* (ascension to Heaven) with an equal number of ethical hallmarks of spirituality necessary for the true seeker to enter the archetypal, certitude (*iqan*)-generating, Book-centered "City of God." (KI, pp. 152-54, tr., 1968, pp. 196-98). Renewed from age to age, this "City" is the source of all good and in the future will be the Book of the universal Babi messiah, *man yozhero-hu Allah*. (KI, pp. 152-155, tr., 1968, pp. 196-200). Baha?-Allah did not explicitly make this claim for himself in the *Ketab-e iqan*, where his focus was on the messianic identity and divine status of the Bab as indicated in many Shi?ite messianic traditions.

Baha?-Allah underlines the spiritual interpretation of the *me?raj* (ascent) of Mohammad in the *Ketab-e iqan*. This in line with the sometimes non-literal interpretations proposed by various Shi?ite philosophers and mystics, including the first two Šayki leaders and the Bab (cf. *Qayyum al-asma?*, sura 68). He counters Karim-Khan Kermani's corporeal (*ba jesm*) exegesis and denial of its spiritual (*ruhani*) interpretation in his *Eršad al-?awwam* (Kermani, p. 450). Like Mohammad, the "Lord of the *me?raj*," the spiritual seeker should come to true understanding through purity of heart and soul unencumbered by such esoteric sciences as *kimia* (alchemy) and *simiya* (gematria related magic) reckoned essential by Kermani (KI, pp. 144-45, tr., 1968, p. 186). For Baha?-Allah primacy should be given to non-literal (*bateni*) levels to the meaning of the *me?raj* of Mohammad.

In the initially theological second part of the *Ketab-e iqan*, the incomprehensibility of the ultimate Godhead is underlined, as is the subordinate "divinity" of the great divine manifestations (*mazaher-e elahiya*) who have the right to declare "I am God" (*ana Allah*) (KI, p. 138, tr., 1968, p. 178). The great founder-Prophets of religion are distinct individuals but exhibit an essential spiritual oneness, such that they are all the alpha and the omega of Reality and could claim to be the spiritual persona or "return" of each other. Each could legitimately claim to be the "seal of the prophets." The alleged "finality of prophet-hood" read by most Muslims into the *katam al-nabiyin* (Qur?an 33:40), for Baha?-Allah is indicative of Mohammad as the "acme of prophethood" and not his being the "seal of the prophets" as the last of them. Divine guidance through divine messengers had no beginning and will have no end.

As in the writings of the Bab, Baha?-Allah interprets Qur?anic references to the eschatological "encounter with God" (*leqa? Allah*) as indications

of a concrete meeting with the divine Person of the Manifestation of God (the Bab) on the “Day of God,” which is equated with the era of the mission and religious dispensation of the Bab (KI, pp. 107-10, tr., 1968, pp. 138-40). The Bab’s call to humanity initiated the “Day of resurrection.” Like the Bab, Baha’-Allah reinterpreted a good deal of Islamic apocalyptic eschatology; “life” and “death,” for example, are states of spirituality and materialistic unbelief, respectively, while individual “resurrection” is essentially a transition to true heavenly life. With the advent of the Bab, the “dead” to truth are resurrected to new “life”; faith in him precipitates a new level of spiritual “life” consonant with a new era of divine revelation. A multiplicity of individual resurrections through faith in the Bab constitutes the realization of the Yawm al-qiyama, (the Day of Resurrection). The physically dead do not literally come alive again.

In arguing for the truth of the Bab as the expected Shi’ite Qa’em, Baha’-Allah cites some prophetic Hadiths and highlights the Bab’s constancy in his messianic convictions, despite persecution, imprisonment, and eventual execution (KI, pp. 179-80, tr., 1968, pp. 230-32). He cited predictions from the Twelver Shi’ite Imams, which to him indicated the Bab’s being the real 19th century persona and spiritual “return” of the expected Twelfth Imam. The Bab came at the right time with twin Shi’i-Šayki forerunners (nurayn-e nayyerayn “twin shining lights”), the Arab born insan-e kamel (Perfect Man) Shaikh Ahmad Ahsa’i (d. 1826) and the Persian sage Sayyed Kazem Rašti (d. 1843; KI, p. 51, tr., 1968, p. 65). The Bab came in the year “sixty,” understood as 1260 AH/1844, the year of the commencement of his religious mission. This, according to him, was predicted in a disclosure of Imam Ja’far al-Sadeq to his disciple al-Mufazzal and cited, for example, in early Šayki literature (Ahsa’i, I/1, p. 83). For Baha’-Allah, this year “sixty” indicated “the year of the zohur” (manifestation) of the Bab as the “Ipsity of Light” (KI, p. 196, tr., 1968, pp. 253-54).

Such prophetic testimonials deemed fulfilled in the Ketab-e iqan led the Bab’s uncle and many others to view the youthful Bab as a Širazi Sayyed fit to be the expected Qa’em who legitimately came at the right time with a “new book” and a “new law” within a new amr or religious Cause. Throughout the Ketab-e iqan, Baha’-Allah argues that the Bab was the Shi’ite universal messiah figure and that the onset of the Day of Resurrection had commenced in both a concrete and a spiritual sense with his call to humankind through Mulla Hosayn Bošru’i (d. 1849), whom he refers to as the “locus of the radiance of the Sun of the [Babi] theophany.” This took place one thousand years after the disappearance around 260 AH of the son of Imam Hasan al-‘Askari, traditionally reckoned the occulted Twelfth Imam (KI, p. 173, tr., 1968, p. 222).

Literary style and technical vocabulary. Edward G. Browne described the Ketab-e iqan as “ 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" (Browne, 1889, p. 254). It is marked by clarity of style as well as exegetical-eisegetical depth and a richness of intertextual and mystical vocabulary. Its author frequently utilizes mystical and sometimes esoteric Shi'ite-Babi terminology in a lucid fashion. Baha'-Allah delights in the use of the interpretive genitive, which often lends poetical depth to the meaning, (e.g., bayza-ye 'erfan "white [hand] of gnosis," rezwan-e Enjil "paradise of the Gospel"; KI, pp. 8, 19, tr., 1968, pp. 11, 24).

As an example of the terminology and style of the text, one can cite the quasi-cosmological term *soradeq*, used on ten occasions in the *Ketab-e iqan*. The term, in light of a Hadith cited by Majlesi and others, denotes a succession of pavilions around the divine throne, each specifically characterized by a name of God as expressed by a particular divine attribute such as glory (*majd*) and splendor-beauty (*baha'*; Majlesi, LVIII, p. 43). Among the nine genitive phrases commencing with *soradeq* is *soradeq al-'ama'* (the beclouded pavilion) (KI, p. 76, tr., 1968, pp. 101-2) reminiscent of Ebn al-'Arabi and the Bab, who both made considerable use of the term *'ama'* and commented upon its source Hadith about the location of God "in a cloud" (*fi'l-'ama'*) before he fashioned the creation (Tabari, pp. 206-7).

Manuscripts, editions, and translations

The original autograph manuscript of the *Ketab-e iqan* appears to be lost, though an early copy presented to Hajj Mirza Sayyed Mohammad in the handwriting of 'Abd-al-Baha exists at the Baha'i International Archives in Haifa (Israel). This manuscript copy has a few marginal corrections and a note in the handwriting of Baha'-Allah expressing his desire for martyrdom in the path of the Bab and his wish to leave Baghdad (Fazel Mazandarani, 1967, I, p. 266; Taherzadeh, p. 158). In the entry "Iqan" in his *Asrar al-atar*, Fazel Mazandarani mentions a second early manuscript dated 1280/1863-64, which would appear to be that transcribed for Hajj Mirza Hasan-'Ali, the younger uncle (*kal-e asgar*) of the Bab. This manuscript is now in private hands, as is another important early 1871 manuscript from the Baha'i copyist Aqa Mirza Aqa Rekabsaz Širazi (d. 1288/1871; Fazel Mazandarani, 1967, I, p. 268; Balyuzi, 1980, p. 164). Over the succeeding decades, scores of sometimes unsatisfactory manuscript copies of the *Ketab-e iqan* were made.

The first undated lithographed edition of the *Ketab-e iqan* most probably appeared in Bombay in the early 1880s (Buck, 1995, p. xviii). Aware of textual corruptions in manuscripts of the *Ketab-e iqan*, Baha'-Allah arranged for another Bombay printing in 1310/1892-93 at the Nasiri Press, owned by members of the Bab's family, in the hand of the famous calligrapher Mirza Hosayn Esfahani, titled *Moškin-qalam* (d. ca 1912; Fazel Mazandarani, 1967, p.278; Buck, 1995, p. 106). Later printings of the original text appeared in slightly revised editions such as the Cairo printings of 1900 and 1933-34. This

latter revised edition has been several times reprinted in Tehran (1976), Germany (1980), and Karachi (1997). Anti-Babi-Baha'i attacks on the *Ketab-e iqan* include materials contesting the textual integrity and veracity of the *Ketab-e iqan* (e.g. Najafi, pp. 460-85; cf. Buck, 1995, pp. 18-36) and the truth of doctrines expounded therein. Other general attacks on this work include that of Shaykh 'Abd-al-Salam, the Šayk-al-Eslam of Tbilisi, which was voluminously dealt with by the Baha'i apologist Mirza Abu'l-Fazl Golpaygani (d. 1914) in his *Ketab al-fara'ed* (completed 1898).

Perhaps initiated by 'Abd-al-Baha' after the Cairo 1900 printing of the *Ketab-e iqan*, the first European translation was most probably the 1904 printed English translation of Ali Kuli Khan (d. 1928), assisted by the American Baha'i Howard MacNutt. Apparently later in the same year the first French translation was published by the early French Baha'i Hippolyte Dreyfus (d. 1928) and Mirza Habib-Allah Širazi. Both of these translations were revised and reprinted many times. The far from literalistic, though for Baha'is authoritative English translation, is that by Shoghi Effendi (d. 1957), which was first published in New York in 1931. This printing has been slightly revised and reprinted many times. It has also served as a basis for translations into other languages, although new translations direct from the original are also in progress in scholarly academic circles.

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Please note that in the article the *Ketab-e iqan* page numbers are first given according to the revised 1934 Cairo edition followed by page numbers from the Ali Kuli Khan English translation (2nd edition) then the English translation of Shoghi Effendi (USA ed.).

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