

sense in which all of the writings of Baha'-Allah are universally designated as Alwah or Tablets. In this general sense, they are loosely described by Baha'-Allah as comprising 100 volumes (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf 115) and over 7,000 tablets of Baha'-Allah have been collected and authenticated by the Baha'i World Centre (personal communication, 3 Feb. 2004). Only a small proportion of these have been published and an even smaller number translated. A great deal of work still remains before these writings are cataloged, authenticated, dated, contextualized, analyzed, and critical editions prepared.

As for literary style, Baha'-Allah was a great admirer of Mirza Abol-Qasem Farahani Qa'em-maqam, who had striven to free Persian "official epistolography from the arrant bombast and rhetorical jugglery that made it sound so ridiculous" (Rypka, p. 335). Baha'-Allah's Persian can thus be seen, from the literary viewpoint, as part of the 19th century literary "Return" (bazgašt) movement, which aimed for a return to the simplicity and conciseness of pre-Mongol Persian prose. Thus E.G. Browne hailed Baha'-Allah's Ketab-e iqan as being "as concise and strong in style as the Chahar Maqala, composed some seven centuries earlier" (Literary History 2:89). Nevertheless, Baha'-Allah's Persian presents difficulties for modern Iranians, filled as it is with Arabic words and phrases and often even long passages in Arabic. Baha'-Allah's Arabic also reaches a very high literary standard in places: in the latter part of the Lawh soltan and the first part of the Lawh-e hekmat (see below), for example.

In this brief survey of the form and contents of some of the most important and well-known Tablets, we will restrict ourselves to discussing works whose titles carry this designation in the original Arabic or Persian. Some seventy separate works with this designation are listed in successive volumes of The Baha'i World (see for example 14:461-62) and well over fifty are noticed and/or discussed in Taherzadeh (RB = Revelation of Baha'u'llah). We will describe here a few from each of the five major periods of Baha'-Allah's ministry (Lawh -e in the title of these works has been abbreviated to L.).

Baghdad (1853-63). The earliest composition of Baha'-Allah's carrying this designation is probably the L. Koll al-ta'am (Arabic; MA = Ma'ada-ye asmani 4:265-76; see also IK = Ishraq-Khavari, "The Writings of Bahaa'u'llah," 14:622-23) written shortly before the author went to Kurdistan in 1854 as an extended commentary on the Koranic verse 3:93, in which, among other matters, he relates the word "food" to five metaphysical realms. As with several of Baha'-Allah's compositions of this period, the style is abstruse, employing the allusive terminology found throughout the writings of the Bab and the Šaykiya, together with standard Sufi technical terms. It is generally held that this Tablet was seen by Mirza Yahya Azal, the Bab's nominee, as a threat to his authority. Baha'-Allah went into seclusion for two years as a result of the ensuing disunity within the Baghdad refugee Babi community.

The L. Madinat al-tawhid (Arabic, ca 1858, MA 4:313-29; partial trans. Gleanings 24:59-60; see also RB 1:109-19 and IK 14:627) is an extended

treatment of the theological problem of the unity and transcendence of God and of humankind's knowledge of God. Here, the Bahai concept of the manifestation of God takes center stage as the solution to this problem.

The L. Ayat al-nur (also known as the Tafsir-e horufat-e moqatta'a, Arabic, MA 4:49-86; see also RB 1:125 and IK 14:627) is a work of moderate length, written at the request of a follower wanting an explanation of the famous Light Verse of the Koran (24:35) and also an explanation of the mysterious disconnected letters of the Koran.

The L. Huriya (Arabic, AQA = Atar-e Qalam-e A?la2 2:647-53; poor trans. in Baha?i Scriptures 249-51; see also IK 14:626, Walbridge, Sacred Acts, 159-61) is in the form of a dramatic dialogue between the Maid of Heaven and the Youth (Baha?-Allah); this form occurs in several other tablets. In the course of this tablet, which is charged with very powerful imagery and motifs, Baha?-Allah expresses the loneliness and despair he feels as a bearer of divine revelation to an unresponsive and hostile humanity. The Maiden, a symbol of ineffable divine beauty, seeks to comfort him and encourage him as he languishes in the midst of sorrows so intense it has caused both his heart and liver to be consumed.

The L. Fetna (may be from the Edirne period, Arabic, MA 4:261-65; see also RB 1:128-29, 136-37) is addressed to one S3ams-e Jehan, a grand-daughter of Fath ?Ali Shah (who took the pen-name Fetna), a close friend of the remarkable Babi heroine, Tahera. The theme of this tablet is the trials and tribulations (sing. fetna) that face the devoted believer in the new religion.

The L. Mallah al-qods (The Tablet of the Holy Mariner, Arabic & Persian, 5th day of Naw Ruz, 1863; AQA 4:335-41; trans. Baha?i Prayers 319-27; see also RB 1:228-44 and Sours, Tablet) is composed in two parts, the first in Arabic saj?, employing a standard refrain after each verse; the second in Persian prose. The Persian functions as something of a gloss on the earlier Arabic, which is not a little obscure in places. The basic theme is that of the appearance of the manifestation of divine beauty (the Holy Mariner) to the world and the ensuing rejection by those unable to recognize this beauty. The Maid of Heaven laments this cruel fate and attempts to comfort the Mariner.

Read the rest of this article, including discussion of many other tablets, online at www.iranicaonline.org/articles/lawh.

The L. Ayyub (also known as the Sura-ye sabr and Madinat al-sabr, Arabic, AT = Ayyam Tes?a 262-304; see also RB 1:263-73) was composed on the eve of Baha?-Allah's departure from Baghdad in April 1863. It was written for a Babi of Nayriz, the scene of one of the more prominent conflicts between the followers of the Bab and government troops. Accordingly, this lengthy tablet is a celebration of the heroism and sacrifice of the Babis.

The L. Gulam al-kold (Arabic and Persian, c. 1863, AT 92-99; see also RB 1:211-14, BW 14:630-31, Walbridge, Sacred Acts pp. 159, 161-63, 222) is in celebration of "the year sixty" (1260) when the young merchant, Sayyed

?Ali Mohammad declared himself to be the Bab. It is a particularly moving composition, which like the L. Mallah al-qods is in two parts: the first in saj?, the second in Persian prose. In the process of commemorating the advent of the Bab and his irresistible beauty, Baha?-Allah also alludes to his own spiritual rank.

Istanbul (1863). Baha?-Allah spent some four months on the journey from Baghdad to Istanbul (April-August 1863) and less than four months in Istanbul (August-December 1863) but he wrote a number of important tablets and other works during this period. This period also saw the first of the tablets addressing kings and rulers, L. ?Abd al-?Aziz wa Wokala (September 1863), the text of which appears to be lost. Among other tablets of this period are:

L. Hawdaj (also known as L. Samsun and Sura-ye Hawdaj, Arabic, August 1863; La?ali al-hekmat 1:12-16; partial trans. IK 14:631; see also RB 2:6-7) is said to be Baha?-Allah's first composition after departing Baghdad. It was composed in the port of Samsun en route from Baghdad to Istanbul. The title is derived from the fact that it was composed as the author gazed upon the Black sea from his howdah. The theme combines the impending sea voyage to Istanbul with the dire predictions made in the L. Mallah al-qods.

L. Bolbol-e feraq (Arabic and Persian, Autumn 1863; partial text: GS = Ešraq-Kavari, Ganj-e Šaygan, 42-45 and AQA 4:324; see also RB 1:244-45). Although it is stated that this brief work was composed on the eve of Baha?-Allah's departure from Baghdad (RB 1:244), internal evidence suggests that it was composed in Istanbul. It laments the separation of Baha?-Allah from his friends and followers in Baghdad.

L. Naqus (also known as L. Sobhanaka Ya Hu, from the refrain in the tablet, Arabic, October 1863, AT 100-106; see also BW 14:632, RB 2:18) is an incantatory work with much internal rhyme and rhythm, written on the anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab and announcing Baha?-Allah's own claims (albeit in ambiguous language such that one is uncertain whether he is referring to the Bab or himself).

Edirne (Adrianople, 1863-68). The next period of the literary activity of Baha?-Allah is marked by his arrival and residence in Edirne, his open proclamation of his claim and the final separation in 1868 between him and his half-brother Mirza Yahya as a result of which the Babi community was divided into two major groups, the Bahais, followers of Baha?-Allah, and the Azalis, followers of Mirza Yahya Azal.

Thus one important group of tablets of Baha?-Allah in this period were those announcing his claim, giving proofs for this, and refuting the claims and accusations of Azal and his supporters: L. Mobahila (Arabic and Persian, 1867, MA 4: 277-81); L. Seraj (for ?Ali Mohammad Seraj Esfahani, Persian; MA 7:4-111; partial trans. Gleanings 50:103-4, 97:197-98; see also RB 2:262-63, 268-69); L. Ašraf (for Ašraf Zanjani; Arabic; MAM = Majmu?a-ye alwah-e mobaraka-ye Hazrat-e Baha?-Allah, 211-219; part. trans. Gleanings 52:104-7; see also RB 2:230-32); L. Nasir (for Haji Nasir Qazvini;

mainly Persian; MAM 166-202; partial trans. Gleanings 53:107-8, 75:153-54; see also RB 2:245-54 and Browne 1889, 949-53); and the L. Ruh (Arabic; AQA 2:451-79; see also RB 2:181-82, 186-88).

During this period there were also more tablets written addressing kings and rulers. These include the first tablet to Napoleon III, the L. Napolyun I (unpublished, partial trans. Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day* 51; see also RB 2:368-69), not to be confused with L. Napolyun II (see below), and the L. Soltan, which was written during this period, but sent to its addressee in the next period (see below).

Other important tablets of this period include:

L. Ahmad (for Ahmad Yazdi, c. 1865, Arabic; TWT = Ešraq-Kavari, *Resala-ye Tasbih wa Tahlil* 215-18; trans. Baha'i Prayers 307-11; see also RB 2:107, 116, 119-20 and Lawson, "Seeing Double"), one of Baha'-Allah's most important prayers, in which it is stated that the person who reads this tablet "with absolute sincerity" will receive a great reward and hence this tablet has been accorded a special status among Bahais. In this brief work, Baha'-Allah in no uncertain terms identifies his own cause with the cause of the Bab through an invocation of symbols and motifs well known to the recipient. This tablet should not be confused with another lawh of the same name written during this same period but in Persian for Ahmad Kašani, a supporter of Mirza Yahya (MAM 315-34; partial trans. Gleanings 152:322-23, 153:323-29; see also RB 2:137-51). The theme of this much lengthier tablet is steadfastness in the cause, the avoidance of evildoers, and the cultivation of praiseworthy morals. In the L. Baha' (Arabic; GS 40-42; see RB 2:171, 179-80), Baha'-Allah refers, perhaps for the first time, to his own followers as the "People of Baha'" in contradistinction to the followers of his half-brother Azal who henceforth would be recognized as either Babis, Bayanis or Azalis. This historic tablet was written for Katun Jan, a faithful and heroic follower of Tahera and ardent supporter of Baha'-Allah.

?Akka (1868-1877). Perhaps the most significant tablets of this period are those addressed to a series of kings and rulers, possibly in parallel to the epistles that the prophet Mohammad is said to have sent to the rulers of his time. Each of the following received a special lawh: Pope Pius IX, (L. Pap, Arabic; AQA 1:33-41; trans. Summons, pp. 54-67; see also RB 3:116-18, 133 and Browne 1889, 963-67); Napoleon III (L. Napolyun 2, Arabic; AQA 1:41-51; trans. Summons pp. 67-83; see also RB 3:110-15 and Browne 1889, 967-75); Czar Alexander II (L. Malek-e Rus, Arabic; AQA 1:51-55; trans. Summons, pp. 83-88; see also RB 3:118-23 and Browne 1889, 969); Queen Victoria (L. Maleka, Arabic; AQA 1:55-60; trans. Summons, 88-96; see also RB 3:123-27 and Browne 1889, 969-78), and Naser al-Din Shah (L. Soltan, mainly Arabic; AQA 1:60-88; trans. Summons, pp. 96-137; see also RB 2:337-57 and Browne 1889, 954-60). These last five tablets were collected together with an introductory section as the *Sura-ye haykal*. In these tablets, Baha'-Allah claimed to be the Lord of Lords, the voice that called out from the tree on Sinai, and the bearer of the

“Most Great Name” (haykal al-esm al-aʿzam). To Napoleon III, he addresses words of rebuke for having ignored his earlier missive and predicts his overthrow; to Naser al-Din Shah, he defends himself against allegations made about him; and to Queen Victoria, he writes words of praise for having promoted democracy and for the actions of her government against the slave trade, but warns of the necessity to take steps to promote international peace and stop the arms race. ʿAli Pasha also received a tablet (L. Raʿis, Persian; MAM 102-16; Summons, pp. 161-73; see also RB 3:33-34, 36-37) as did Manekji Saheb (Manekji Limji Hataria), the Zoroastrian leader in Iran (L. Manekji Saheb; MAM 261-62; part. trans. in Gleanings 106:213, poor full trans. in Star of the West vol. 1, no. 1, 1910, pp. 5-9). This last tablet was one of many written by Bahaʾ-Allah to Zoroastrians, most of them being mainly in pure Persian (Parsi-e sara), a literary trend that was much encouraged by Manekji Saheb. A collection of these tablets of Bahaʾ-Allah and ʿAbd-al-Bahaʾ to Zoroastrian Bahais has been published as Yaran-e Parsi. Among the most important of these is L. Haft Porses³ (MAM 240-48; see also RB 3:272), written in response to a Zoroastrian convert, Ustad Javanmard, and dealing with themes that were of interest to Zoroastrians such as Bahaʾ-Allah’s ancestry.

Other well-known tablets from this period include: L. Qad ehtaraqa al-moklesun (for Sayyed ʿAli-Akbar Dahaji, usually called in the West the “Fire Tablet”; TWT 219-24; trans. Bahaʾi Prayers, pp. 312-18; see also RB 3:226-30) an incantatory work with rhyme and rhythm lamenting the opposition and betrayals that Bahaʾ-Allah had experienced (often subsequently recited by Bahais in times of distress and persecution); and the L. Tebb (for Aqa Mohammad Reza Tabib Yazdi, usually called in the West the Tablet to the Physician; Arabic and Persian, MAM 222-26; partial trans. Bahaʾi Prayers, p. 96; poor partial trans. in Star of the West vol. 13, 1922, p. 252; see also RB 3:358-60).

Mazraʿa and Bahji (1877-1892). During this period Bahaʾ-Allah withdrew from public life and devoted himself to his writings, mainly responses to the hundreds of letters that reached him from his followers. Thus a large proportion of Bahaʾ-Allah’s total corpus of works dates from this period.

One main subdivision of Bahaʾ-Allah’s works from this period relates to his social teachings, some of these being given as adjuncts to the Ketab-e Aqdas. This group includes tablets such as the Ešraqat (for Jalil Khuʾi, Arabic and Persian; TB/T 57-79; trans. TB/E 99-134; see also RB 4:146-60), Tarazat (for Ustad ʿAli Akbar Banna Yazdi, Persian; TB/T 16-24; trans. TB/E 33-44; see also RB 4:168-76), Tajalliyat (Arabic and Persian; TB/T 25-29; trans. TB/E 47-54; see also RB 4:118-44), Bešarat (Arabic and Persian; TB/T 10-15; TB/E 21-29; see also Buck, Paradise, pp. 142-79 and RB 4:161-67), Kalamat-e Ferdawsiya (Arabic and Persian; TB/T 30-45; trans. TB/E 57-80; see also RB 4:214-26) and the L. Donya (for Aqa Mirza Aqa Nur al-Din Afnan, 1891, Persian; TB/T 46-56; trans. TB/E 83-97; see also RB 4:329-50). Among the themes elaborated in these tablets are unity, world peace and the means to

achieve it, the functioning of the House of Justice, the importance of education, the need for moderation, the role of religion, and various ethical injunctions.?

Other important tablets from this period include: L. Aqdas, (for Fares in Egypt, known as “Tablet to the Christians” and not to be confused with the Ketab-e Aqdas; Arabic; TB/T 3-9; trans. TB/E 9-17; see also RB 4:227-35 and Sours, Study), addressed by Baha’-Allah to Christians announcing himself to be the fulfillment of their prophecies; L. Hekmat (for Molla Mohammad ‘Ali Qa’ni, Nabil Akbar, Arabic; TB/T 80-91; TB/E 137-52; see also Radmehr, Arbab-e hekmat and RB 4:33-49), in which Baha’-Allah deals with philosophy, some of the philosophers of ancient times and some philosophical subjects such as creation; L. Karmel (Arabic; TB/T 1-2; trans. TB/E 3-5; see also RB 4:351-67), an important tablet, which was considered by Shoghi Effendi to be the charter for the development of the Baha’i World Centre on Mount Carmel; L. arz al-Ba’ (viz. Beirut, Arabic, TB/T 138; trans. TB/E 227-28) written on the occasion of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s visit there in 1879 at the invitation of Medhat Pasha; and L. Anta ‘l-kafi (known in the West as the “Long Healing Prayer”; Arabic, TWT 207-15; trans. Baha’i Prayers, pp. 102-110), a tablet in an incantatory style calling on God for protection and healing.

One group of tablets of Baha’-Allah from this period is those addressed to Islamic religious leaders in Iran. In the L. Borhan (Arabic; TB/T 125-33; trans. TB/E 205-16; see also RB 4:91-102), for example, Baha’-Allah rebukes the two leading clerics of Isfahan who had encompassed the killing of two Bahai merchants of Isfahan; in the L. Qena (Arabic and Persian; MAM 67-87), Baha’-Allah reproves the Šayki leader Haji Mirza Mohammad Karim Kermani. The L. Ibn al-de’b (1891, Arabic, translated as the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, also known as L. Šayk Mohammad Taqi), Baha’-Allah last book-length work, is written as an epistle to Šeyk Mohammad Taqi, Aqa Najafi, son of Šeyk Mohammad Baqer Esfahani, one of the above mentioned clerics of Isfahan, whom Baha’-Allah had stigmatized as “the Wolf.” It is in many ways an anthology and summary of Baha’-Allah’s writings.

In addition, Baha’-Allah wrote many ziyarat-namas, prayers to be said when visiting a shrine, which in English are called Tablets of Visitation, for prominent Bahais who died, as well as for the Imam Husayn.

The tablets of Baha’-Allah have been published in a large number of volumes over the years, beginning with individual volumes in India in the late 19th century and in Cairo in the early 20th century. The series A2tar qalam a’la was begun in Iran in 1964 and has recently begun to be republished in Canada. The series La’ali al-hekmat has also been published in recent years, as well as individual volumes that parallel the official translations into English. Recently a volume, Ayat-e Bayyenat, of all of the tablets addressed to the families of Šeyk Kazem Samandar and his brother Nabil ibn Nabil Qazvini was published and more such volumes are forthcoming.

ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ and Shoghi Effendi. Several works by ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ have “lawh” in the title while even his letters are commonly referred to as “alvah.” Although this is more from usage among the Bahais than in the authoritative Bahai texts (but see references by Shoghi Effendi to ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾs writings as “lawh” and “alvah” in Tawqīʿat pp. 68, 327), it makes it difficult to say that the term is restricted to revelation, because technically ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ is not seen as a revelator, rather an interpreter or expounder (viz., mobayyen). ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ wrote in a very clear and vigorous style of Persian and Arabic and there are also a number of his writings in Ottoman and Azeri Turkish.

A good percentage of the literary output of ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ, and indeed that of the leadership of the Bahai Faith in general, may be described as epistolary. In this context, the charming story is told of how ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ, in weary indulgence of the childish pleading of his beloved grandson, Shoghi Effendi, composed for him his very own “Tablet” when he was five years old. (Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, p. 8)

Among ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾs most prominent alvah are: *Alvah-e Tabligi* (Tablets of the Divine Plan), a cycle of 14 letters written to the Bahais of the United States and Canada in the years 1916-17 bearing instructions on how best to spread the Bahai teachings and establish communities of followers not only in North America, but around the world; *L. Tanzih wa taqdis* (called “the Tablet on Purity” in the West, Persian: *Makatib* 1:324-30; trans. *Selections*, pp. 146-50), enjoining cleanliness on the Bahais and strongly condemning the use of alcohol, opium and tobacco; the two tablets both known as *L. Hezar Bayti* (Persian, 1897-98; *Montakʿabat* 4:232-59, 259-300), which deal with the issue of the rebellion of his half-brother, Mirza Mohammad ʿAli; *L. Haft šamʿ* (the Tablet of the Seven Candles, to Mrs. White, England, 1906; *Montakabati* 1:27-31; trans. *Selections* 29-32), on seven stages towards world unity; *L. Forel* (the Tablet to Dr. August Forel, 1921; *Ešraq-Kavari*, *Payam-e Malakut*, pp. 315-32; trans. *Bahāʾi World Faith*, pp. 336-48), a lengthy discussion of what might be termed religious philosophy; and two tablets to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace at the Hague (*L. Lahih I*, 1919, and *L. Lahih II*, 1920; *Makatib* 3:101-18, 118-21; part. trans. of first tablet in *Selections*, pp. 296-307, second tablet *Star of the West* vol. 11, 1921, pp. 288-89). In addition, ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾs *Will and Testament* is usually referred to in Persian as the *Alvah-e Vasaya* (1901-08). In this, ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ appoints Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Bahai Faith, gives instructions on the manner of electing the Universal House of Justice and defines the relative functions of these two institutions.

A series of volumes of the writings of ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ was published in Iran under the title *Makatib-e ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ*, and more recently outside Iran under the title *Muntakʿabat az makatib-e Hažrat-e ʿAbd-al-Bahāʾ*. A three-volume collection of his writings translated into English and entitled *Tablets of Abdul-Baha* was published in 1909-19 (see bibliography).

Although the annual message of Shoghi Effendi to the Persian Bahais for BE

101/1945, the start of the second Bahai century, is usually called L Qarn (see bibliography), this appears to have been a title given by the Persian Bahais and not by Shoghi Effendi himself. The term lawh is not ordinarily used to designate the compositions of Shoghi Effendi, although, it should be observed that a similarly-charged term is used to designate his letters and other communiqués, (viz tawqi'/tawqi'at). This term is also used for letters by the Ba2b and, interestingly, seems not to have been used by Baha?-Allah. The current Bahai leadership, the Universal House of Justice (Bayt al-?Adl-e A?zam, See BAYT-AL-žADL), does not refer to any of its messages as alwah, rather it communicates with the Bahai world and others through texts called nama and payam.

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