



## NOQTAT AL-KĀF

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*NOQTAT AL-KĀF* (Point of the letter Kāf), the earliest general history of the Bābi religion spanning the years 1260/1844 to 1268/1851-52 with a theological preamble (Browne, pp. 1-99). The work was completed in 1852. It has been assumed that *kāf* referred to Kāšān, the hometown of Mirzā Jāni, but the text (p. 5) indicates that it was derived from the Qur’ānic injunction “*kon fayakun*” ([“He merely says to it] `be’, and it is;” Q. 19.35).

The first ninety-nine pages of the book contain a treatise on theology and apologetics consisting of one *koṭba* (religious address), an introduction, and four sections. Early in the text, the author apologizes for his poor knowledge of Persian and Arabic, and for his inadequate command of Arabic grammar and spelling (p. 10). He also states that he is writing while traveling under dangerous conditions, fearful of enemies, and saddened by the plight of fellow-believers. This section captures the main theological and apologetic concerns of an early Bābi. The author sets out by outlining the Bābi cosmology in terms of quaternities such as the stages of “coming into being” (substantiation) of *mašīyyat* (divine will), *erāda* (divine purpose), *qadar* (predestination) and *qazā* (fate) in parallel with the other quaternities: pen, point, letters and words. The theological section is heavily influenced by Shaykhi (Šayḳi) thought. As to be expected in a Bābi treatise, the cosmology and angelology schemes are based on numbers four or seven. Much of the evidence is produced from the Qur’ān and Hadith literature while emphasizing the innate (*feṭri*) aspect of knowledge. The next section (pp. 53-62) offers a systematic criticism of the revelation of verses as criteria for



prophetic office. The apologist rejects three standard criteria of eloquence, prophecies, and rational nature of the new law and, using Islam as an example, offers the de facto establishment of a religion as sufficient proof of its veracity. Important aspects of Bābi apologetics such as the proofs based on innate knowledge (feṭrat), based on the eloquence of the Qur'ān are presented and critiqued. A brief history of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus is given but the sections on the life of Moḥammad and the persecution of Shi'ite Imams are presented in more detail (pp. 63-85). The author is concerned with the theological interpretation of religious history as a Bābi apologetic. The advent of the Qā'em is identified with the Day of Resurrection. This section is important because it provides a fairly concise presentation of Bābi 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 Ḥosayn (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 Aḥmad Aḥsā'i (q.v.; p. 99), and transitions into the narrative of Sayyed Kāzem Rašti (pp. 100-105). Here important information is given concerning the meetings between Rašti and the Bāb (q.v.; Sayyed 'Ali Moḥammad of Shiraz). The early days of the Bāb, 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 Yaḥyā Dārābi (q.v.) and Mollā Moḥammad Zanjāni are covered (pp. 120-26). An important feature of the narrative of the Bāb 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'ānic miracles attributed to Jesus such as speaking at birth (pp. 110-11). The Isfahan, Māku and Čehriq periods, the examination of the Bāb in Tabriz, and his martyrdom, are presented in detail. The clashes between the Bābis and government forces in Māzandarān are described in detail, with briefer presentations of the Nayriz and Zanjān clashes. The *Noqṭat al-kāf* is generally in accord with other histories of the period in its account.

The *Noqṭat al-kāf* is unique in placing Mollā Moḥammad-'Ali Barforuši (q.v.; Qodduṣ) above the Bāb, a point repeatedly emphasized in the book. Qodduṣ is

identified with the return of Moḥammad, whereas the Bāb is identified with the return of Imam ‘Ali (p. 153). In the Qoddus 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 *Noqṭat al-kāf* 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 Bayān 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 Hamadāni’s *The New History of the Bāb*, where he also presented a comparative analysis of the two histories. Browne had expected that the Bābis would “universally” acknowledge Mirzā Yahyā Nuri (Şobḥ-e Azal) as their “sole head.” He was surprised that most of the Bābis had accepted Azal’s older brother Mirzā Ḥosayn ‘Ali Nuri (Bahā’-Allāh; 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 Bābi merchant Hāji Mirzā Jāni (d. 1852). The manuscript identified Azal as the Bābi messianic figure “Him whom God shall make manifest” (p. 244). Browne attributed the authorship of the (entire) book to Mirzā Jāni Kašāni 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 *Noqṭat al-kāf* manuscripts in the following note: “The history to which you allude must, by certain indications, be by the uplifted and martyred Hāji [Mirzā Jāni], for none but he wrote [such] a history” (*Noqṭat al-kāf*, p. xvi). He did not mention Jāni by name, but Browne understood the reference to the martyred Hāji as Hāji Mirzā Jāni, and Azal never disputed Browne’s assumption.

The introductions are in Persian and English and penned by Browne (with the unacknowledged assistance of Moḥammad Qazvini). Here Browne introduced the manuscripts he had found in the Gobineau collection and narrated his visits to Bahā’-Allāh and Şobḥ-e Azal.



The controversy concerning the *Noqṭat al-kāf* began with the publication of Browne's *The New History (Tārīkh-i-Jadīd) of Mirzā 'Alī Muḥammad the Báb* (Cambridge, 1983), where Browne alleged that "a large number of Bābis themselves came to have a direct interest in the suppression" of this book. He argued that as Bahā'-Allāh'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 *Noqṭat al-kāf* and replace it with a "revised, expurgated, and emended 'New History'" (*New History*, p. xxix). While it is true that copies of the *Noqṭat al-kāf* were not found in the possession of Bābi-Bahais, neither were copies of the book known in the Bābi-Azalis community where its absence (Azal and notables such as Mirzā Āqā Khān Kermāni 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 Mānakjī Šāḥeb the Zoroastrian agent, the Bahai scholar Abu'l-Faḏl Golpāyegāni (q.v.) had seen a few quires of a history written by Jāni, some of which was incorporated into the *New History*. He noted that the *Noqṭat al-kāf* 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 (*Noqṭat al-kāf*, introduction). The Bahais were receptive to the idea of an Azali conspiracy, given the precedent with *Hašt behešt*, a pro-Azali tract written by Mirzā Āqā Kān Kermāni, but attributed by Šaykh Aḥmad Kermāni and Mirzā Moṣṭafā to the Bābi-Bahai Sayyed Jawād Karbalā'i (Nicholson, p. 76). This was complicated by Azal's identification of the work with Jāni despite strong evidence to the contrary. By 1912, 'Abbās Effendi Nuri ('Abd-al-Bahā', q.v.), the head of the Bahai community, also entered the debate. He stated that Jāni had only written a few segments and that these were in the possession of his relatives. He argued that the published *Noqṭat al-kāf* (particularly its introduction) was an Azali inspired production (Ešrāq-Kāvāri, p. 208). Browne's claim that only one manuscript of this history had survived rendered it suspicious in 'Abd-al-Bahā's eyes, given the Bābis attention to the preservation of manuscripts. He then instructed Abu'l-Faḏl and others to search for the original manuscript written by Jāni, and to collaborate on a refutation of the *Noqṭat al-kāf*. This quest led to the discovery of other manuscripts. One important manuscript was almost identical to the published

*Noqṭat al-kāf* except for two sections, one on “the life and condition of Azal” and another one on later “manifestations.” Nā’em, the Bahai poet, informed ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ in a letter dated April 9, 1912 that Mirzā Moḥammad Ḥasan Adib—a prominent Bahai residing in Persia—had borrowed and examined this manuscript from Mollā Moṣṭafā, 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 ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ only referred to the fact that the text had been tampered with, and one finds no references to an Azali forgery. Meanwhile Mirzā Moḥammad Ḥasan-e Adib notes that other recensions of the *Noqṭat al-kāf* had been identified, including one in the handwriting of the Mirzā Jāni. The fate of most of these manuscripts is unknown.

The *Noqṭat al-kāf* contains three distinct dates. It gives the date 1277 from ba’ṭa (p. 61), 1267 (1850-51) in Bābi nomenclature and 1270 from ḥejri (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 Bāb, where the narrative is broken by a large section on Azal, and only later is the narrative of the martyrdom of the Bāb resumed. The source for the section on “later manifestations” appears to have been a letter from Jāni to his brother Hāj Moḥammad Esmā’il Ḍabiḥ (Afnan, pp. 482-84). In this letter Jāni described a visit by Sayyed Bašir Hendi to Kāšān and his challenge for charismatic authority with Mirzā Jāni and Mollā ‘Ali Šayḳ ‘Aẓim. 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 *Noqṭat al-kāf* is an early general history of the Bābi 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 liothique 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, *Ketāb-e Noqṭat al-kāf*, 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 (Tārīkh-i-Jadīd) of Mirzā ‘Alī Muḥammad the Bāb*, Cambridge, 1893, repr. London, 1975, pp. 327-96, is a comparative study of the *Noqṭat al-kāf* and *The New History*.

##### Bahai Responses.

A contemporary account of Mirzā Abu’l Faḏl’s immediate reaction is found in *Ḳāṭerāt-e Ḥabīb I*, Hofheim, 1998, pp. 68-69. The most important Bahai rebuttal is by Mirzā Abu’l-Faḏl Golpāyegāni and his nephew Sayyed Mahdi Golpāyegāni, *Kašf al-ḡeṭā’*, Tashkent, 1919. For ‘Abd-al-Bahā’s responses, see ‘A. Ešrāq Ḳāvāri, *Mā’eda-ye āsmāni 2*, Tehran, 1975, pp. 206-22.

##### Modern Expositions.

No general survey as yet incorporates the recent literature; Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābi Doctrine and History: A Survey*, Leiden, 1992, pp.

134-52, remains the most comprehensive study. H. M. Bālyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahā'ī Faith*, Oxford, 1970, pp. 62-88, is the earliest modern study. Two important articles have appeared by Mohiṭ Ṭābāṭabā'ī: "Ketābi bi nām bā nāmi tāza," *Gawhar* 11/12, 1975; and "Tārik-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 *Maqālāt va rasā'el dar mabāheṭ-e motafarreqa*, ed. Vaḥid Rafāti, Hofheim, 1993, pp. 189-206, 225-33, and 235-66. See also Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Bābi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850*, Ithaca, 1989, p. 423; Juan Cole "Noqtato'l-kāf and the Bābi 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.

See also:

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

Kavian Milani, "The Bāb's Stay in Kāšān: A Historiographical Analysis of the Kitāb-e Noqtatol-kāf Based on the Kāšān Pericope," *Bahā'ī Studies Review* 12, pp. 1-14.

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

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July 28, 2008