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The Bab's Stay in Kashan: A Historiographical Analysis of the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* Based on the Kashan Pericope

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Abstract

The Kitāb-i Nuqtat al-Kāf has been at the centre of many debates in Babi and Baha'i history and historiography since it was first brought to public attention in 1893. Even to this date most exposés and attacks on the Baha'i Faith rely heavily on this book. Therefore the authenticity, authorship, historical reliability of the text and its relevance are of both academic and apologetic importance for contemporary Baha'i scholarship. This article seeks to challenge the historically unnecessary tie to the martyred Haji Mirza Jānī through an examination of the stay of the Bab in Kashan as gleaned from the primary data provided by different sources. The synoptic examination of such a small episode is a useful way of bringing out some of the hidden traits of each manuscript author or manuscript tradition. The Babi texts developed out of, and responded to, the apologetic needs of the community of faith. A study of the Kashan event shows that neither Haji Mirza Jani nor Dhabih (his brother) could have been involved in the writing of the Nuqtat al-Kaf, given its highly deficient treatment of the one significant episode in which they would have been most directly involved. The provenance and authenticity of the book can then be better assessed. A great deal of the material in the Nuqtat al-Kaf is indeed early and useful, and it may have been part of an earlier Babi oral tradition, developing alongside the changing theological and apologetic needs of the early Babi community. Until recently, the absence of a properly identifiable manuscript tradition has further limited the search for the earlier versions of the narrative, adding to the uncertainty of the accuracy of the published version. Given the limitations in available manuscripts of the Nuqtat al-Kaf, all conclusions must be regarded as speculative, pending further research and the detailed examination of discovered manuscripts.

The *Kitāb-i Nuqtat al-Kāf*¹ has been at the centre of a debate in Babi and Baha'i history ever since its publication in 1910. The narrative history, discovered by Edward Granville Browne in 1892 at the Bibliothèque Nationale, was identified in 1893 as the long lost early narrative by Haji Mirza Jani Kashani (d. 1852, Tehran) written around 1851-52. The authenticity, authorship and historical reliability of the text and the importance attached to it in the writings of Edward Granville Browne were strongly contested by contemporary Baha'i apologists. More recently, beginning with the publication of H. M. Balyuzi's *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahā'ī Faith*,² that debate entered the realm of academic

¹ Haji Mirza Jani, *Kitāb-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kāf* (ed. E. G. Browne), E. J. W. Gibb Memorial, vol. 15, (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1910). In this paper, *Nuqtat al-Kaf* refers to the work in general, *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* refers to this book published by Browne. I am particularly grateful to William McCants and Siyamak Zabihi-Moghaddam for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of the paper.

² London: George Ronald, 1970.

discourse on Babi and Baha'i history and historiography. The current academic consensus is that the book is an early source for Babi history, while acknowledging the possibility of some later distortions. This study will focus on one minor episode in the life of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi, known as the Bab, through the lens of multiple primary sources and will demonstrate, from the internal evidence present in the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, that while containing early material, it is probably not at all the work of Mirza Jani. The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* is probably part of a family of Babi histories (and only remotely related to the *New History*³) which form a manuscript tradition with multiple redactions.

The Kashan episode is of particular value for a comparative study of Babi sources. In short, with the death of the governor of Isfahan – Manuchihr Khan, the Mu'tamad ad-Dawlih – in the winter of 1847, the Bab lost his powerful protector and the last period of relative ease in his life came to an end. Gurgin Khan, the nephew of the late governor, and the deputy-governor, discovered shortly thereafter that the Bab had not been sent to the Imperial Court in Tehran as had been surmised. In fact Manuchihr Khan had secluded the Bab in his private residence, the 'Imarat-i Khurshid, waiting for an opportune moment to introduce his guest to the monarch. Upon receipt of this news, Muhammad Shah issued an order summoning the Bab to Tehran. Gurgin Khan arranged for the Bab to be sent to Tehran with a company of escort guards led by Muhammad Big Chaparchi. En route to Tehran the company arrived in Kashan, where they stayed for a few nights. The Bab's short stay in Kashan provides an interesting opportunity to study a number of sources on early Babi history and historiography.

The events of the Kashan stay have been narrated in a number of primary and secondary sources. Three general Babi primary sources that cover the Kashan stay are the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, *Tarikh-i Jadid* (the shorter version of the *New History* in Persian), and *The New History of Mirza 'Ali Muhammad the Bab* (the longer version of the previous book translated into English and annotated by E. G. Browne).⁴ Nabil-i-Zarandi, whose narrative account of early Babi history has been translated into English as the *Dawn-Breakers*, devotes one full chapter to the Kashan episode.⁵ Another primary source of importance is Ahmad Yazdi's memoirs as he was an eyewitness to the Bab's stay in his city.⁶ Further critical evidence can be found in the historical narrative of Haji Muhammad Isma'il Dhabih Kashani (Mirza Jani's brother) which is in the form of a *Mathnavi* that contains important details lacking in other sources.⁷ The *Tarikh-i Samandar* is a well-known history of the Babi and Baha'i religions that covers this episode rather superficially, but it is nevertheless important as it provides a relatively

³ Mirza Husayn Hamadani, *The New History of Mīrzā 'Alī Muhammad, the Bāb* (trans. and ed. Edward G. Browne), Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1980.

⁴ Hamadani, *New History* 213-15. The *Tarikh-i Jadid* is an important source based on earlier documents, compiled by Mirza Husayn Hamadani before 1880. It was translated into English by E. G. Browne and it was published in 1893. Hamadani's history exists in a number of manuscripts. I have used two manuscripts, a longer one, which has been translated into English by E. G. Browne, and a shorter Persian manuscript in my possession. There are a number of manuscripts of the *Tarikh-i Jadid* (see Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History*, E. J. Brill: Leiden, 1992, 153-71). I have not been able to examine one manuscript of particular importance for the purposes of this paper, and that is the one located in the Cama Oriental Library, Bombay. This manuscript may be an earlier one than the ones examined here and therefore an important source in future studies of Babi history and manuscript development.

⁵ Nabil [Zarandi], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabī's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā'ī Revelation* (trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, Ill.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1970) 217-22.

⁶ See 'Abd al-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari, *Muḥādirāt* (2 vols., Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i Verlag, 1987) 653-61.

⁷ The relevant parts of the historical *Mathnavi* are cited in Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, *'Ahd-i A'lā* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000) 241-5.

early Baha'i account.⁸ Two secondary sources are also germane to this study, the *Zuhūr al-Haqq* (vol. 2)⁹ and the *Kawākib ad-Durriyyih*.¹⁰ While, strictly speaking, these two latter books are secondary sources, they nevertheless introduce and synthesize data from a number of primary sources. The most detailed examination and reconstruction of the Kashan stay among the secondary sources occur in *Resurrection and Renewal* by Abbas Amanat and *Hadrat-i Bab* by Nosratollah Muhammad-Hussein.

The historian's mandate is to reconstruct history and bring new insights from its analysis. In so doing one distinguishes between the 'event' itself, the 'data' and the 'reconstructed event'. Clearly no historical event can be fully reconstructed, and the historian's task is to reconstruct the surviving evidence, given this limitation. It is not too difficult to reconstruct the Kashan stay of the Bab, at least in its main outline. In fact the Kashan event can be studied as a pericope.¹¹ The Kashan event can then be reconstructed, not only as an end in itself, but also as an attempt to compare and contrast the sources, and comment in a historiographical vein on the authors and narrators of the accounts as primary transmitters of data. The conclusions of such a process will then open further debates in Babi historiography. The Kashan episode is an appropriate choice for such an analysis as it provides a sufficiently minute event with adequate sources that permit a comparative historiographical survey. This study will, in particular, critique the current academic consensus surrounding the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. It will be maintained that the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, while an early and important source, was probably not authored by its alleged author Haji Mirza Jani. Based on internal evidence, the authorship of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* should be reconsidered. It goes without saying that all conclusions remain highly tentative until all relevant manuscripts are located and fully interrogated.¹²

The Kashan Event

The Bab probably arrived in Kashan just before Naw-Ruz 1847. Given the nature of the journey from Isfahan, and the haste with which it was occasioned, the Bab suffered much en route, as he was without adequate preparation in terms of food, and he was without a steed. The escorts sought forcibly to obtain a steed for the Bab from the villagers and peasants they encountered on the way, but the Bab was disinclined to allow such methods to be used in order to obtain a horse. Sources differ, but reportedly either Haji Mirza Jani or his brother Dhabih Kashani had had a dream the night before the Bab's arrival, in which they were informed of the Bab's arrival and were bidden to make preparations to receive him. The Bab and his escort guards were met by Mirza Jani and possibly one other Babi at the 'Ata Gate of Kashan. The chiefs of the company of guards were bribed, to entice them to stay in Kashan and to release the prisoner to Mirza Jani for a few days. The ancient Iranian festival of Naw-Ruz was observed with Mirza Jani and others.

⁸ Shaykh Kazim Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar va Mulhaqqāt*. (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974) 222-3.

⁹ Fadil Mazandarani, *Zuhūr al-Haqq* vol. 2 (<http://www2h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol4/2tzh>) 134-5.

¹⁰ 'Abd al-Husayn Avari (Ayati), *Kawākib ad-Durriyyih fi Ma'āthir al-Bahā'īyyah* (Cairo: Maṭba'a al-Sa'āda, 1923) 90-3.

¹¹ A pericope is a unit of textual material, such as a text, parable or an event that occurs in different narratives.

¹² The present author and William McCants have discovered two surviving manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* bearing dates in their colophon of 1268 AH (1852) and 1327 AH (1909). See William McCants and Kavian Milani, "The History and Provenance of an Early Manuscript of the Nuqtatu'l-kaf Dated 1268 (1851-52)," *Iranian Studies* 37 (Sept. 2004) 431-49. For the purposes of this article I have necessarily avoided an analysis of the manuscript families and possible variants, limiting this study to a careful reading of the published text. Also see MacEoin, *Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History* 134-52.

During this short stay the Bab met many clerics and Babi sympathizers. Notable among the visitors was Sayyid ‘Abd al-Baqi who was a man of learning and erudition and the head of a theological seminary in the city with Babi leanings. Most sources agree that the Bab did not make himself known to ‘Abd al-Baqi. Even though he attended sessions where the Bab was engaged in revealing verses, ‘Abd al-Baqi nevertheless failed to recognize the Bab that night. He did however recognize later that he had been in the presence of the Bab and became saddened and remorseful. Another guest that met the Bab was Ahmad Yazdi, whose attendance is not mentioned by any source except his own memoirs.¹³ His absence from other sources may be due to the fact that he was at the periphery of the community or due to the secretive nature of the Babi community, given possible safety concerns.¹⁴ After a stay of two nights and two days, the Bab and the company of guards departed for Tehran. Table 1 summarizes some of the data provided by different sources.

Historiographical Considerations of the Kashan Event

The present study assumes the existence of a variety of oral traditions in early Babi historiography transmitted by the original witnesses to these events. These transmissions were eventually written down and recorded, sometimes by the original eye-witnesses and at times by others. Clearly, the further the oral narration has travelled from the original witness-source, the less dependable it becomes. In some cases the sources acknowledge and inform the reader of the chain of transmission, whereas other sources are silent as to the original source and the chain of informants.

In addition to the above, in our analysis of event, data and the reconstructed event, the theological affiliation of the author is also of utmost importance. The reconstruction of a historical moment and its meaningful interpretation is sometimes done through a third party, who, however disinterested and objective, will nevertheless introduce their own interpretative biases into the narrative. Accordingly, one’s view of a particular event or its interpretation is often influenced by one’s experiences, ideology and belief system. The authors are also writing for different communities of faith and their writing therefore reflects the theology and historical self-understanding of their respective community. Sources on early Babi history, such as those examined above, are highly susceptible to such biases and must be carefully examined with regard to such methodological considerations. While the analytical thrust of this paper is the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* and the problems of its dating and authorship, it is nevertheless important to recognize that similar textual criticism could (and must) be applied to other Babi historical narratives for a more holistic reconstruction of Babi history.

¹³ Ahmad Yazdi is the recipient of the well-known Arabic Tablet of Ahmad written by Mirza Husayn ‘Ali Nuri, Baha’u’llah, in Adrianople.

¹⁴ It should be noted that while some guests were Babi sympathizers and others were known Babis, such as Jani’s brother Dhabih, Ahmad seems to think there were only two Babis in Kashan, himself and Jani. Since none of the other sources, including Nabil, mention him it would seem that he was a peripheral character in the Kashan community. It may also be that the Babis were prudent, if not secretive, and they may not have all known one another.

Table 1. Summary of nine sources on the Bab's sojourn in Kashan.

	<i>NN</i> ⁵	<i>ZH-2</i>	<i>NK</i>	<i>NH-E</i>	<i>NH-P</i>	<i>KD</i>	<i>MOA</i>	<i>DK</i>	<i>TS</i>
Narrator	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear ¹⁶	Unclear	Unclear	Author	Ahmad Yazdi	Dhabih Kashani	Shaykh Kazim
Time of Arrival	After-noon								
Date	20 March 1847, 2 Rabi', 1263	19 March 1847, 1 Rabi' 1263					possibly Dec-Jan, 1847 ¹⁷		
Duration of stay	3 days	2 days 2 nights	2 days 2 nights	2 days 2 nights	2 days 2 nights	1 night	2 days	3 days 3 nights	2 days
Vision	Yes	Yes						Yes	
Whose Vision	Jani	Jani						Dhabih	
Time of Vision	Eve of arrival							20 years prior	
Number of Guards	'guards'	'guards'	6	7	6				'guards'
The Bab's condition		Poor preparation; hard journey	Poor preparation; hard journey						
Bab is first seen	'Attar Gate	'Attar Gate							
Bribe-(Amount)	Jani offers to pay expenses to the guards but the Bab refuses.	Yes	Not mentioned	Yes	Heavy bribe	100 tumans	200 tumans	Yes	300 tumans-offered by both brothers
Naw-Ruz	Yes	Yes							
Siyyid-Hasan Yazdi	Arrives earlier								
'Abdu'l-Baqi	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Not mentioned by name		
'Abdu'l-Baqi recognizes the Bab	Yes, but later. Hears the Bab revealing verses but the Bab hides his identity from him.	Yes		Yes, but later.			No		
Departure	Leaves Kashan in grief	Leaves Kashan in grief							
Other attendees	Mahdi, a later martyr at Tabarsi, and a few others	Haji Mulla Hashim Naraq, Aqa Muhammad Taqi Navvab (Jani's uncle) and two others.					Local clerics and one servant. The servant believes in the Bab later on.		

¹⁵ The abbreviations key follows here: *NN*, *Nabil's Narrative*; *ZH-2*, Mazandarani, *Zuhur al-Haqq* vol. 2; *NK*, *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*; *NH-E*, *New History* (English version); *NH-P*, *New History* (Shorter Persian version); *KD*, Avarih, *Kawakib ad-Durriyyih*; *MOA*, *Memoirs of Ahmad Yazdi* (cited in Ishraq-Khavari, *Muhadirat*); *DK*, Mathnavi of Dhabih Kashani (cited in Afnan, *Ahd-i A'la*); *TS*, *Tarikh-i Samandar*.

¹⁶ This has been left as unknown since it is the argument of this paper that it is extremely unlikely that Haji Mirza Jani was the author of *Nuqtat al-Kaf* as Browne has asserted.

¹⁷ This is understood from Dhabih's poetry and its reference to the month of *Day* (*Shahr-i-Day*) the tenth month of the Persian solar calendar.

Nabil's Narrative and its Relationship to Other Accounts

Table 1 provides interesting elements for a comparative study among the sources. Each narrative is an important window into the narrator's historiography in that it provides the author's interests, preoccupations and theological views. A study of the sources also demonstrates the extent to which these sources borrow from one another and how much each author is indebted to his fellow historians. For example, a comparison of *Nabil's Narrative* and *Zuhur al-Haqq* suggests that one very closely follows the other, and that these diverge little in terms of the major (and even minor) details. Even transcription errors are transmitted from one to the other, as seen in the case of the Gate of 'Attar mentioned in both accounts. This should, in all likelihood, be the Gate of 'Ata (*Darwāzih-yi 'Atā*), as suggested by Muhammad 'Ali Faizi.¹⁸ In this case, one can assume that Fadil Mazandarani may have relied on Nabil. It is important to note that all the other sources presented in Table 1 appear not to be based on Nabil's informants. Hence Nabil (and by extension *Zuhur al-Haqq*) represents an independent line of sources, informants and historiography, which distinguishes it from other sources. The texts of neither the *Kawakib ad-Durriyyih* nor the *Tarikh-i Samandar* (nor indeed the *Kashf al-Ghita*) seem to be informed by the data contained in Nabil.¹⁹

Nabil's Narrative is a very interesting account from a historiographical perspective, in that it generally identifies the informant-sources used by the author. This is an unusual feature for a pre-modern historian. The Kashan account is a rare occasion where Nabil does not identify his source, but it was possibly Sayyid Husayn Yazdi, whom the Bab had dispatched earlier from Isfahan.²⁰ A careful reading of Nabil demonstrates some unique historiographical traits, such as his particular fascination with the ancient Persian festival of Naw-Ruz. One notes that Nabil (and naturally Mazandarani, following Nabil) is the only source that synchronizes the Kashan stay with Naw-Ruz. Nabil synchronizes many of the major events in the life of the Bab with Naw-Ruz, including the calm of the second Naw-Ruz after declaration (190) and the arrival of Mulla Husayn in Mah-Ku and his stay with the Bab (255-7), among others.

Another item of interest in the Kashan pericope is that of the bribe offered by the Kashani brothers to the company of guards. Virtually all sources, except the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, indicate that a bribe or incentive of some type was offered by the brothers to the chief of the guards. The amounts differ, as shown in Table 1. The reasons behind this omission from the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* will be examined later, but it suggests that it was not written by either of the Kashani brothers. Nabil's treatment of this event diverges from other sources. According to Nabil, Mirza Jani offered 'to defray the expense of the horsemen's three days' stay in Kashan', which was a culturally acceptable way of offering a bribe. Nabil reports that the Bab rejected this offer commenting that it was 'unnecessary'.²¹ Nabil's reconstruction of the event is more consistent with later Baha'i teachings on the prohibition of bribe-taking and

¹⁸ Muhammad 'Ali Faizi, *Hadrat-i-Nuqtih-yi 'Ulā* (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1975) 208.

¹⁹ There is however some evidence that suggests a literary dependence of Abu'l-Fadl's *Kashf al-Ghita* (1919) on the *Kawakib ad-Durriyyih* (1914) as suggested by their respective treatment of the Kashani brothers. See, for example, the reference in both sources to two prominent Kashani merchants with the name Haji Mirza Jani, hence the need for both sources to distinguish between Haji Mirza Jani Buzurg and Haji Mirza Jani Turk (*kūchak*). Haji Mirza Jani Buzurg is the Babi merchant who hosted the Bab and was eventually martyred. The *Kashf al-Ghita* and the *Kawakib ad-Durriyyih* are the only two sources that preserve this detail.

²⁰ *Nabil's Narrative* 214 and 219.

²¹ *Nabil's Narrative* 219.

bribe-giving than other contemporary accounts.²² Such characteristics allow the historian to identify the author whose work is being examined and his theological affiliation.

Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf

Since its publication in 1910 as the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, this work has proven to be one of the most disputed and controversial accounts of early Babism. The Kashan episode holds important keys to some problems in Babi historiography including the authorship and dating of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*.

In order to place the evidence from the Kashan episode in its proper perspective, it is essential to capture, however briefly, some of the century-long debates surrounding the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. Strangely enough the historical narrative of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* text itself contains no date, whereas the Babi apologetic epistle incorporated in the book contains two internal dates referring to 1267 AH and 1270 AH (1850-1 and 1853-4) respectively.²³ Edward Granville Browne, who uncovered the relevant manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in April 1892, considered it the 'most important document which exists for the study of early Babis'.²⁴ His writings, including the introduction to the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, indicate that he was convinced that the manuscript was an early document, later suppressed and distorted by Baha'is with omissions from, and additions to, it in the later preparation of the *Tarikh-i Jadid*, aiming to undermine the position of Yahya Azal in favour of Baha'u'llah. It should be pointed out that Browne does not provide any evidence for the suppression of *Nuqtat al-Kaf* by Baha'is. Furthermore Browne was unable to explain the absence of such an important early source from the Babi-Azali circles even supposing a Baha'i inspired plot to suppress the manuscript.

Upon the book's publication, 'Abdu'l-Baha – the eldest son of Baha'u'llah, and the head of the Baha'i Faith from 1892 to 1921 – dismissed the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* and particularly its Persian introduction as an Azali-inspired forgery, and instructed a number of prominent and scholarly Baha'is to write rebuttals and refutations to the book. 'Abdu'l-Baha was aware of the fact that the few fragments written by Mirza Jani had already been incorporated in the text of the *Tarikh-i Jadid* and there was no reason to assume that Mirza Jani had written any other works. He also noted that Mirza Jani was a merchant with little formal education and questioned the grounds on which Browne conferred an undisputed historical primacy on *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. The gist of 'Abdu'l-Baha's argument, as gleaned from a later tablet to Browne dated 1913, is to place the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* within its proper place in historiography. He seems to seek to bring more balance to Browne's analysis and emphasized the importance of relying on multiple sources (other than the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*) for early Babi history.²⁵

A number of contemporary Baha'is wrote rebuttals to the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* with the most significant Baha'i apology being written by Mirza Na'im Sidihi and Mirza Hasan Adib as

²² See 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Secret of Divine Civilization* 15.

²³ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* 61 and 92 respectively. The apologetic treatise has long been considered to be an independent and separate book that was later added to the manuscript that Browne entitled and published as *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*. More recent evidence supported by comparative handwriting analysis and stylistic grounds suggests that the two parts are by the same author and are part of the same book by its original author(s). This data will be presented in forthcoming studies examining the original clean copy of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*.

²⁴ *New History* xiv-xv.

²⁵ M A. Faizi, *Hayat-i Haqrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā* (Langenhein: Baha'i-Verlag, 1994) 220-2.

early as 1911-12. There is some indirect evidence, based on their correspondence with Abu'l-Fadl, suggesting that these two authors had actually tracked down the scribe who had written the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* in order to support their case. There is no report of this work ever being published and since the manuscript of this apologetic treatise is not available at this time it is impossible to appraise it critically.

It is, however, extremely likely that Mirza Abu'l-Fadl had access to the book by Sidihi and Adib when composing his *Kashf al-Ghiṭā 'an Ḥiyāl al-A'dā* (The Removal of the Veil from the Machinations of the Enemies), the most systematic and methodical Baha'i rebuttal published at that time (in 1919). Here the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* was examined and critiqued by the Baha'i scholar Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani and his learned nephew Sayyid Mahdi Gulpaygani. This work is a provocative read and raises excellent questions concerning the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. However, it has been faulted (with some justification) on grounds of its apologetic tone and at times deficient treatment of the subject.²⁶ The *Kashf al-Ghita* manages to expose some important problems in Browne's chronology, such as the date the text had left Iran. Browne had suggested that the manuscript had left Iran by 1274 AH (1858 CE), whereas the incomplete manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* was dated 1279 AH (1863 CE), some five years after Gobineau's departure, causing difficulties for Browne's timeline. They also correctly point out that there is no reference to the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* in Gobineau's *Religions et philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*, published in 1865, and that in fact the former at times contradicted the latter.²⁷ Abu'l-Fadl is clearly interested in exposing *Nuqtat al-Kaf* as a forgery, but the only concrete evidence for a possible Azali forgery presented by the *Kashf al-Ghita* is the evidence he cites indicating that the *haykal* (calligraphic temple) reproduced by Browne (in the published book) as a work of the Bab is actually a calligraphic work of Azal.²⁸

Despite its strengths, the *Kashf al-Ghita* is marred by its own particular problems, such as failing to take into account (following Browne) that the Comte de Gobineau had a second term in Persia ending in 1863, and that he could have acquired his manuscripts during the second term in Persia and afterwards. In short, as Abbas Amanat has pointed out, the book introduces new material and raises more questions than it answers.

The debate was reopened in the modern era by H. M. Balyuzi who devoted one chapter to a treatment of *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* in *Edward Granville Browne and the Baha'i Faith*. He concludes that book should be de-emphasized as an early source primarily on grounds that it represented a work perhaps only loosely based on the narrative of Haji Mirza Jani. On the issue of authorship he suggests that Jani's brother, Ahmad, a supporter of Azal, could have had 'a hand in tampering with the text of fragmentary history written by his martyred brother'.²⁹ He acknowledges that no documentary evidence exists that supports this theory. Balyuzi nevertheless raises important issues especially with regard to the authorship of the Persian Introduction of the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*.³⁰ Later authors who have dealt

²⁶ Denis MacEoin, following Muhammad Muhiṭ Tabataba'i, suggests that the book was 'ill received' by 'Abdu'l-Baha and that he ordered all copies burnt. Neither one presents any evidence for this assertion. The present author's investigation of the latter allegation has not unearthed any supporting evidence.

²⁷ *Kashf al-Ghita* 170.

²⁸ *Kashf al-Ghita* 11. Abu'l-Fadl argued this point on the basis of a comparison with a copy of Azal's writings that he had obtained from the collection by Sayyid Asadu'llah Qumi. It contained 13 temples and 43 letters (tablets).

²⁹ Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne* 64.

³⁰ There is now an academic consensus that the Persian Introduction to *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* was penned by Muhammad Qazvini, a collaborator with Browne and a literary critic. See Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and*

systematically with the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* include Abbas Amanat, Denis MacEoin and Juan Cole, all of who seem to suggest that it is an early book based largely on the original narrative of the Haji Mirza Jani. All three also present a critical and analytical approach to the book and suggest that it is an early and useful source on early Babism. Amanat for instance, writes that 'Browne's edition of *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* appears to be the nearest to this yet-untraced old history. But there is no definite proof that *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* is the original version of the old history. Controversy surrounds the authenticity of some of its passages, and the possibility exists of later distortions.'³¹ He nevertheless emphasizes the usefulness and reliability of the book and adds that 'as far as the events of the earlier years are concerned, *Nuqtat al-Kaf* is largely in agreement with other sources of the period'.³² Denis MacEoin has also made a similar observation after a detailed examination of many of the available versions of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. In addition to bringing to light a number of valuable manuscripts of the book, MacEoin's most significant contribution regarding the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* is his 'synoptic' study of the differences in the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* and *Tarikh-i Jadid* narratives that demonstrates significant differences between the sections in *Tarikh-i Jadid* where the notes of Mirza Jani are quoted and the extant text of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. Notwithstanding the above, MacEoin's overall assessment is that the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* 'deserves to retain its reputation as the earliest comprehensive internal history of Babism'.³³ All of the above authors essentially trace the historical nucleus of the book to 1850-2, and to Mirza Jani, the Babi martyr.

In a recent study published on the H-Bahai website, Juan Cole has attempted to bring together current academic thinking on the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. His study is particularly innovative because he attempts to introduce the methods used in textual analysis in New Testament scholarship to the study of Babi historical texts. No doubt the readers are familiar with the basics of the literary criticism that deals with the synoptic problem, but a brief review may be in order. The synoptic problem is, in brief, the establishment of the literary dependence between the three synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. There is clearly a large amount of material that the three Gospels share. In fact it has been suggested that Matthew reproduces 90 per cent of the material in Mark, whereas Luke reproduces only slightly more than half of Mark.³⁴ The two-source theory of literary relationship for instance, argues that both Matthew and Luke used Mark and another source called Q (for *Quelle* meaning source in German).³⁵ The four-source theory in New Testament literary criticism argues that in addition to Mark and Q, both Matthew and Luke used other unique sources as well, generally abbreviated as M and L. While Juan Cole does not use any particular unit of analysis for comparative purposes he nevertheless argues that most academicians in the field agree that the earliest manuscript of the historical narrative preserved as *Nuqtat al-Kaf* can be traced to the Kashani merchant. He notes that 'it is certainly the case that some portion of this work derives from his [Jani's] early chronicle'.³⁶ Cole suggests that the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*

Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran 1844-1850 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989) 423 and Denis MacEoin, 'Afnan, Hatcher and an Old Bone', *Religion* 16 (1986) 195.

³¹ Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 423.

³² Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 423.

³³ MacEoin, *Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History* 151.

³⁴ Freed, Edwin D., *The New Testament: A Critical Introduction* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1986) 49.

³⁵ In this case Q would be the entire body of text common to Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark.

³⁶ Juan Cole, 'Nuqtat al-Kaf and the Babi Chronicle Traditions', *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies*, 2/6 (August 1998) at <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/notes/vol2/babihist.htm> (2002).

represents a ‘manuscript tradition’ traced back to Jani, and not a single book. Cole further theorizes the existence of an 1851 codex (written by Jani) and an 1854 one (called anonymous but may be by Dhabih), and one or two later redactions in the 1860s. Here Cole presents a very intriguing possibility with respect to manuscript development, with all manuscripts grounded in the codex 1851 authored by Jani. His theory remains of little practical application since he produces no textual analysis of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* or any of the other texts he identifies as stemming from the same family of manuscripts. Given the lack of any units of analysis and the absence of any synoptic parallels in his study, it cannot be critically assessed on this ground. In fact, the Kashan pericope strongly questions the link to the Kashani merchant.

The Kashan Accounts and the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*

The Kashan episode sheds additional light on the authorship of the *Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*. It should be kept in mind that the authorship of the book has been attributed to Mirza Jani only because Azal responded as such to Browne’s inquiry about the purported author of his find. It is known that Azal did at no time see the entire book or its facsimile, but only the descriptions that Browne had sent him of the five manuscripts located in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Azal wrote to Browne: ‘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.’³⁷ The copy of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* manuscript that Browne located in Paris and eventually published is both undated and anonymous. It does not contain the name of the scribe either. Internal dating of the portion of the text that is an apologetic epistle bears two separate dates of 1267 and 1270,³⁸ and the historical narrative is not directly dated as mentioned earlier.

If one accepts that the Bab stayed in Kashan for two nights at the house of Mirza Jani, as two primary and first hand witness accounts suggest (Ahmad-i Yazdi and Dhabih-i Kashani), as well as Jani’s memoirs preserved in the *New History*, a proposition supported by data contained in all other sources, it would be expected that Mirza Jani would have written of the Bab’s stay in detail, outlining both major and minor events. It may strike the reader as surprising that Jani, as an author, leaves out of his narrative his own unique experiences such as his mystical vision beforehand, his encounter with the Bab at the Gate of ‘Ata, the bargaining with the guards to temporarily release the Bab, the (generous) bribe given to the guards, the celebration of the Naw-Ruz holiday, the guests and their interactions with the Bab, as well as his revelation of verses as confirmed by other sources. It is ironic that of the seven sources examined, the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* has the least amount of detail (conveying next to nothing) and is by far the least specific with regard to the Kashan stay. Even the account given by Ahmad Yazdi, who had only one audience with the Bab and had a very peripheral role in the Kashan Babi community, is richer in terms of details than the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*.

The reader of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* will note that the author of the book records encounters and audiences of less significance that he had had with Babi leaders such as Mulla

³⁷ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu’l-Kaf*, English Introduction xvi.

³⁸ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu’l-Kaf* 61 and 92. The two conflicting dates in the apologetic section indicates that even that portion had existed in different versions and was subject to redactions at different times. In Babi literature, such as the Persian Bayan, the year 1270 means 1260 AH as suggested by Persian Bayan 2:7. In this case however the 1270 is probably from the *Hijrah* (AH) and different from the customary Babi dating, which was not based on the *Hijrah* of the Prophet of Islam but rather was calculated starting from his open proclamation.

Muhammad 'Ali Zanjani (Hujjat) and Sayyid Yahya Darabi (Vahid). These encounters are present in exhaustive detail, as is the interview with the much less important Muhammad Big Chaparchi and other peripheral characters, so one has to wonder why there is no treatment of the Bab's stay in Kashan for two days and two nights, definitely the most significant encounter Mirza Jani ever had with any Babi leader.³⁹ This oddity had not escaped the attention of Browne himself who appears puzzled by the lack of reference when he writes: 'Concerning the Bab's stay at Kashan, it is very remarkable that Mirza Jani, whose guest he was, says nothing beyond what is given in the footnote on p. 214 *supra*.'⁴⁰ Unfortunately Browne seems to have accepted Azal's assertion about the authorship of the manuscript rather uncritically. Any narrative based on memoirs of Mirza Jani must have included the historical nucleus of his encounter with the Bab, and yet it is barely mentioned. One can conclude that the Kashan episode by itself is strong enough evidence to seriously undermine the possibility that Mirza Jani is the author of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*. In other words, it has always been assumed that Mirza Jani is the author of the fragmentary notes that form the framework of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* but no evidence is given to support such an assumption, and the assessment by Azal based on reading Browne's description should therefore be regarded as unsatisfactory.

A counter-argument to the above analysis may be anticipated. It can be suggested that a more substantial and appropriate narrative of the Kashan stay existed in the original notes and that it was later removed or redacted by later editors, or that Mirza Jani was such a humble and self-effacing person that he opted not to record much of his historic encounter with the Bab. Neither explanation stands up to the evidence. It is known that the author of the *New History* produces sections that we are told are penned by Mirza Jani himself (214-16), containing specific details of the Kashan stay. How is it that these passages corresponding to the Kashan stay have been deleted only from the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*? By whom and to what end? It is hard to imagine why any redactor or editor would have taken the time to omit such a central piece of the narrative. Moreover, such a deletion would have created a textual problem by leaving a break in the narrative. One notes, however, that the narrative is smooth and without any awkward lacunae. As to the second possibility there can not be any reason whatsoever explaining why Mirza Jani gives appropriate details of the Kashan episode in the passage attributed to him in *New History*, whereas only Mirza Jani's *Nuqtat al-Kaf* narrative bears the mark of his humility and self-effacement. The only acceptable alternative is that Mirza Jani did not write the fragmentary notes or the narrative surviving as the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*.

Two modern authors, Denis MacEoin and Nicola Towfigh, have also pointed out the problematic absence of the Kashan episode.⁴¹ MacEoin seems to suggest that the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* was compiled around 1853-4 with the involvement of a number of individuals including Dhabih and possibly Aqa Muhammad Rida (Jani's nephew) while simultaneously maintaining it was grounded in the Jani account.⁴² However an analysis of the Kashan pericope presented earlier argues strongly that neither Jani nor his brother Dhabih could have been the authors of an 1851 or 1854 version of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, as a history by either one would have presented more details of the Bab's stay in Kashan. Also MacEoin seems to be ignoring the strong evidence to the contrary presented in the important historical narrative

³⁹ For the encounters with Vahid and Hujjat, see *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* 120-1 and 125-7 respectively.

⁴⁰ Hamadani, *New History* 349.

⁴¹ See Udo Schaefer et al, *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahā'ī Apologetics*. (trans. Geraldine Schuckelt, Oxford: George Ronald, 2000) 503 and MacEoin, *Sources* 149..

⁴² *Sources* 151.

Mathnavi, by Dhabih. The details given in Dhabih's *Mathnavi* differ from the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* in so many details that Dhabih could not possibly be the author of the latter.⁴³ It seems that MacEoin is attempting to deal with the problems posed by the strong evidence suggesting that Jani is not the author, while striving to maintain that the book is early (and based on Jani's account). Having presented the evidence cited above against Jani being the author, MacEoin then appears to contradict himself by stating that the 1854 manuscript was based on Jani's 'notes'.⁴⁴ Another piece of evidence with regard to the Kashan episode comes from the encounter between the author and Muhammad Big Chaparchi, who was the officer in charge of the company of guards. This encounter occurred after he had delivered the Bab to Adharbayjan. The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* does not identify this as their second meeting, as would have been expected if the author was indeed Mirza Jani (as they had certainly met in Kashan). This is consistent with the other parts of the narrative where Mirza Jani is consistently referred to in the third person.⁴⁵

Important for the problems of dating and authorship of *Nuqtat al-Kaf* is that the book is frequently in error regarding some of the basic events in the life of the Bab, or with regard to specific events in the history of the Babi movement. One clearly cannot expect historical accounts to be free of mistakes, given the exceptionally difficult nature of historical writings, and the difficulties presented by maintenance of records and manuscripts by authors of old. It is therefore not surprising that narrative accounts contain internal inconsistencies. Thus, for example, *Nabil's Narrative* gives two separate and mutually exclusive dates for Sayyid Kazim Rashti's birth date,⁴⁶ but Nabil was not a contemporary of Sayyid Kazim. The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* however suffers from serious omissions (and errors) not expected from a contemporary source. The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* does not mention the arrival of Mulla Husayn at Mah-Ku during the fourth Naw-Ruz after the declaration of the Bab. It is also highly unexpected for a person as central and informed as Mirza Jani seems to have been to state that the duration of the Bab's imprisonment in Mah-Ku was three years, as reported in the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*.⁴⁷ The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* also suggests that the Badasht gathering occurred in 1847.⁴⁸ Again, one would not expect a contemporary narrator (such as Jani) to make such basic errors with regard to the life of the Bab and Babi chronology in his timeline. Such errors suggest that the author was not an informed contemporary. This is consistent with the conclusions drawn from the Kashan pericope.

Some have pointed at evidence suggesting later redactions to the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* in the late 1850s and the early to mid-1860s. Some of these are suggested by Moojan Momen, Juan Cole and Nicola Towfigh.⁴⁹ It is significant for instance that the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* reports that the Babis had spread to all regions (*jamr'-i bilad*) including India and Turkey.⁵⁰ It was

⁴³ See Table 1 above.

⁴⁴ *Sources* 151.

⁴⁵ In fact the text never refers to Mirza Jani in the first person.

⁴⁶ See *Nabil's Narrative* 10, 45. According to page 10, Sayyid Kazim was ten years old in 1815-16, giving a birth date of 1795-6, whereas page 45 suggests that in 1843 he was sixty years of age, giving a birth date of 1783.

⁴⁷ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* 132.

⁴⁸ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* 144. It also contradicts Azal's writings. The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* claims that Azal received and buried the body of the Bab in Adharbayjan after his martyrdom, whereas Azal himself has stated that the casket containing the body of the Bab was stolen.

⁴⁹ See Moojan Momen, *The Bāb and Bahā'ī Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981) 32-4, and Juan Cole, 'Nuqtat al-Kaf and the Babi Chronicle Traditions'. Also see Schaefer et al., *Making the Crooked Straight* 500-13.

⁵⁰ *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* 172.

clearly many years after Mirza Jani's martyrdom before the Babi religion had spread to that extent. It is also important for the dating of the later redactions that one finds it stated in the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* that a large number of Babis are present in Istanbul, a development that did not actually occur until mid-1860s as pointed out by both Momen and Cole. It appears that this evidence is not determinative one way or the other and that it merely represents speculation and some exaggeration on the part of the author. The same may be said for another criticism found in the *Kashf al-Ghita* (p. 248). Sayyid Mahdi Gulpaygani argues for a later redaction in the glowing passages that specifically narrate the story of Yahya Azal because of the occurrence of an important switch in the manner in which the purported author refers to himself. Throughout the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, he is referred to as *haqīr* (lowly one) whereas in the passages about Azal the author refers to himself as *haqīr-i mussanif* (lowly writer). It is important to note that while the premise is valid, and that this combination indeed occurs only once, it nevertheless does not provide any determinative evidence one way or the other.

It has been previously noted by other historians that the claim that Yahya Azal was the Babi Messianic figure, 'Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest', (as asserted by the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*) is somewhat anachronistic for 1852.⁵¹ Such a claim would have been completely natural and expected for a post 1865 redaction.⁵² However here again the evidence is not at all conclusive. The early Babi milieu was one that was replete with claims and counter-claims, and it would not be at all surprising to find a pocket of early Babis claiming for Azal a claim that he did not advance until more than a decade later: 'that he had been made the recipient of divine revelation', a claim consonant with the promised prophetic figure of the Bayan, 'Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest'.⁵³

The most accurate way to date the text using internal evidence comes from the portions of narrative that deal with the end of Amir Kabir, the Persian Prime Minister. Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir, then Prime Minister of Iran, is best known in Babi and Baha'i histories for his persecutions of the Babis and for the enforcement of his policy to execute the Bab. Naturally, the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* does not treat him kindly, and an *en passant* reference is made to his dismissal from premiership (233-4). The dismissal of Amir Kabir (from premiership) occurred on 6 November 1851 (10 Muharram 1268) and he was dismissed from the position of Amir Nizam (commander-in-chief) on 21 November 1851 (25 Muharram 1268).⁵⁴ He was murdered on 13 January 1852, and the news of his death was announced in the official state gazette *Waqāyi' Ittifāqiyyih* on 30 January 1852 (18 Rabi' al-Awal 1268). The *Nuqtat al-Kaf* refers to his dismissal (*azl*) but does not refer to the Amir's death. Therefore the most likely date for the composition of the text seems to be in the interval 6 November 1851-30 January 1852.

There are clues however that pre-1865 manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* existed.⁵⁵ It is perhaps to such a manuscript of Mirza Jani's narrative that Avarih refers in his *Kawakib ad-*

⁵¹ See for example Nicola Towfigh in Schaefer et al., *Making the Crooked Straight* 504.

⁵² There is no historical data to suggest that Azal made a claim to be the *Man Yuḏhiruhu'llāh* (Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest) in the Baghdad period (1853-63). In all, more than twenty individuals had put forth such a claim during this period, but not Azal. The number of claimants indicates that there was a perceived vacancy for, if Azal's appointment was as overt and well-known as the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* suggests, then there would not have been as many claimants.

⁵³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, rev. ed. 1974) 167.

⁵⁴ Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe* 154, 165 and Khan Malik Sasani, *Siyāsatgarān-i Dawrih-yi Qājār* (Tehran: Hedayat, n.d.) 1:2, 12.

⁵⁵ Two important manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* have been identified in the past year, bearing colophon dates of 1268 (1851-2) and 1327 (1909), by William McCants and the present author. These manuscripts are being

Durriyyih.⁵⁶ While on a trip in Iran in 1909 (one year before the publication of the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*) he came across a manuscript attributed to Mirza Jani which included passages of exaggeration (*quluww*) concerning Quddus (as does the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*) but apparently did not have the sections concerning Yahya Azal. The copy he inspected in Naraq may have been a version of the common progenitor text upon which both the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* and the *Tarikh-i Jadid* are based. Avarih's comments and critique of the text are important for a variety of reasons. First, from his description it appears that the manuscript had significant similarities to both the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* and the *Tarikh-i-Jadid* in form and content. Second, it was also inspected by Avarih in 1909, one year before the publication of the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, and many years before the publication of the *Kashf al-Ghita*. Avarih does not mention Browne, the *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, 'Abdu'l-Baha's tablets on the matter, or any specific reference to an Azali forgery, so we can assume his assessment is actually of a manuscript other than the published *Kitab-i-Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*. The possible discovery of this manuscript at some point in the future should help future historians trace the manuscript tradition and its redactions with more accurate and verifiable results.

Conclusion

This article examines the stay of the Bab in Kashan through the primary data provided by nine different sources. The synoptic examination of such a small and limited pericope is a useful way of bringing out some of the hidden traits of each manuscript author or manuscript tradition. The Babi manuscripts (like the early Christian and Islamic ones) were generally developed and written to respond to the needs of a community of faith. A study of the Kashan event shows that neither Mirza Jani nor Dhabih could have been involved in the writing of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, given its highly deficient treatment of the one significant episode in which they would have been most directly involved. Once the historically unnecessary tie to Jani (speculated by Azal for unknown reasons) is loosened, the book can then be properly placed without needing to ground it in Kashan in 1851-2. Nevertheless, a great deal of the material in the *Nuqtat al-Kaf* may indeed be early and useful (despite the redaction hypothesis), as these may have been part and parcel of an earlier oral tradition, developing alongside the changing theological and apologetic needs of the Babi community before it became increasingly polarized in the 1860s, and accordingly may reflect the confusion and mayhem of that earlier period. The above is complicated by the fact that the manuscript used by Browne bears neither the name of a scribe nor a transcription date, adding to the problems of authenticity and reliability of the text. Given the limitations in available manuscripts of the *Nuqtat al-Kaf*, all conclusions must be regarded as speculative pending further research and the detailed examination of discovered manuscripts.

closely interrogated at this time, and once the provenance and status of these manuscripts are established, some of the century-old problems related to manuscript edition may be solved, and, inevitably, new problems will be introduced.

⁵⁶ *Kawakib ad-Durriyyih* 91-3.