

Sacred Text, Social Hierarchy, World Polity: The Journey of a Single Sentence That Shaped a World Religion

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Abstract

Among the central tropes of Baha'i socio-political theology is a single sentence from the Persian Bayan which, alluded to in Baha'u'llah's Kitab-i Aqdas became, in Shoghi Effendi's interpretation, the 'myth of origin', in the sense of a starting point in sacred narrative, for the Baha'i Administrative Order structuring the Baha'i community, and for the Baha'i World Order envisaged as its culmination, ultimate purpose and eventual fruit. The passage in question states, in Shoghi Effendi's translation, 'well is it with him who fixeth his gaze on the Order of Baha'u'llah'. Shoghi Effendi's interpretation of that passage as alluding to a sacred socio-political entity which is the hallmark of the Baha'i revelation and is anticipated as the embodiment and structure of the millennial promise of the unification of humankind, represents a radical interpretive leap, given that the passage in the Persian Bayan in its most intuitive reading refers, not to an institutional idea, but to the compilation and arrangement of sacred Babi texts. At the heart of this seemingly incompatible usage lies the single word nazm, which may be translated as both order and arrangement.

The present paper will explore the interpretive trajectory of the word nazm, from its roots in the earliest Qur'anic hermeneutics dating from the 2nd Islamic century, to its complex articulation in the Bab's writings, including various instances in the Persian Bayan and in the Kitabu'l-Asma'. It will contextualize these occurrences in the Bab's subtle and esoteric (batini) cosmogony of the universe as Text, including the simultaneity and parallelism of levels of interpretation, within which the apparently innocuous passage of the Bab is revealed to be charged with cosmological, communal and messianic dimensions, which it will be argued form the implicit substratum or at least demonstrate a substantive correlation to the counter-intuitive, although not exclusive interpretation of that passage by Shoghi Effendi as denoting likewise a communal, global and, in its deepest level, a messianic cosmic order.

1934: The Night of the Long Knives; Mao's Long March; Stalin's Great Terror; Franco's suppression of the Asturian Uprising; the anti-Jewish riots in France surrounding the Staviski Affair; Mussolini's first meeting with Hitler. Shadows heralding the impending triple darkness of World War II. Amidst the overcast skies of that oppressive year, Shoghi Effendi's treatise, 'The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, 'burst upon the Bahá'ís', in the words of Ruhiyih Khanum, 'like a blinding white light'.'

Keywords

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In this boldest of expository works, amidst the collapsing fracas of crumbling systems and institutions, Shoghi Effendi unveiled before the Baha'i community perspectives on Baha'i scripture and Baha'i identity that had heretofore been inconceivable. Ruhyyih Khanum recalls,

I remember when I first read it I had the most extraordinary feeling as if the whole universe had suddenly expanded around me and I was looking out into its dazzling star-filled immensity; all the frontiers of our understanding flew outwards; the glory of this Cause and the true station of its Central Figures were revealed to us and we were never the same again.²

A clear example of this expansion of meaning, the sudden vistas disclosed by Shoghi Effendi in this remarkable work, is his unprecedented interpretation of two pregnant passages from the Mother Books of the Baha'i and Babi dispensations respectively. The first concerns paragraph 181 of Baha'u'llah's *Kitab-i Aqdas*. The second refers to the sixteenth section of the third chapter of the Persian Bayan of the Bab. Shoghi Effendi writes,

To what else if not to the power and majesty which this Administrative Order – the rudiments of the future all-enfolding Bahá'í Commonwealth – is destined to manifest, can these utterances of Bahá'u'lláh allude: 'The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System – the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.

Shoghi Effendi continues,

The Báb Himself, in the course of His references to 'Him Whom God will make manifest' anticipates the System and glorifies the World Order which the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is destined to unfold. 'Well is it with him,' is His remarkable statement in the third chapter of the Persian Bayán, "who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh and rendereth thanks unto his Lord! For He will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayán.³

Thus does Shoghi Effendi link in these passages the Bab's prophecy regarding the Order of Baha'u'llah, or *al-nazm Bahá'u'llāh* in the original Arabic, to paragraph 181 of the *Kitab-i Aqdas*. This *nazm*, or order, Shoghi Effendi in turn relates to the Baha'i Administrative Order and ultimately to the Baha'i Commonwealth that he anticipates as the fruit of Baha'u'llah's revelation.

Ten years later, as the night and chill of the Second World War began at last to dissipate, we find the same exegesis repeated in the Guardian's only book, *God Passes By*, in yet clearer detail. He declares,

It should be noted, ... that in the third Váhid of this Book [the Persian Bayan] there occurs a passage which, alike in its explicit reference to the name of the Promised One, and in its anticipation of the Order which, in a later age, was to be identified with His Revelation, deserves to rank as one of the most

significant statements recorded in any of the Báb's writings. 'Well is it with him,' is His prophetic announcement, 'who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord. For He will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayán.' It is with that self-same Order that the Founder of the promised Revelation, twenty years later – incorporating that same term in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas – identified the System envisaged in that Book, affirming that 'this most great Order' had deranged the world's equilibrium, and revolutionized mankind's ordered life. It is the features of that self-same Order which, at a later stage in the evolution of the Faith, the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and the appointed Interpreter of His teachings, delineated through the provisions of His Will and Testament. It is the structural basis of that self-same Order which, in the Formative Age of that same Faith, the stewards of that same Covenant, the elected representatives of the world-wide Bahá'í community, are now laboriously and unitedly establishing. It is the superstructure of that self-same Order, attaining its full stature through the emergence of the Bahá'í World Commonwealth – the Kingdom of God on earth – which the Golden Age of that same Dispensation must, in the fullness of time, ultimately witness.⁴

Thus the 'Order' of Baha'u'llah mentioned by the Bab and proclaimed by Baha'u'llah is said by Shoghi Effendi to refer to the administrative order outlined in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahā, to the structure of the contemporary Baha'i community, to the anticipated Baha'i World Commonwealth and, in the last analysis, to the Kingdom of God on earth which has been the promise and goal of all previous revelations. The originality and suddenness of Shoghi Effendi's interpretation of the word 'order' (*nazm*) in these passages has been attested to by Hand of the Cause Hasan Balyuzi who related that until Shoghi Effendi linked the passages of the Bayan-i Farsi and the Kitáb-i Aqdas to the Baha'i Administrative Order and the Baha'i World Commonwealth, the references to order (*nazm*) in both texts were understood by Baha'is to refer to no more than Baha'u'llah's literary style.⁵

The same is recounted by Ali Nakhjavani in an article on the Order of Baha'u'llah published in the Persian periodical *Payam-i Bahá'í*. Nakhjavani explains that formerly in Iran, in study classes dedicated to the Kitáb-i Aqdas, the word *nazm*, which Shoghi Effendi variously translates as 'World Order', 'world's equilibrium', and implicitly 'System', was understood to refer to the *shiva* (elegance, skill, perfection) of Baha'u'llah's verses, that is, to the pre-eminent beauty of his style. The word *tartib*, another word for order or arrangement, which the Guardian translates in the Aqdas as 'mankind's ordered life', was understood to refer to the organizing structure of Baha'u'llah's Kitáb-i Aqdas. The prevalent interpretation was that while the Bab's Persian Bayan was clearly divided into sections and chapters, constituting the *tartib* or structure of the Bayan, Baha'u'llah's Most Holy Book was not thus arranged. The absence of such strict division in the Aqdas made its arrangement altogether novel and unique (*badi'*) and was hence understood to have revolutionized the preceding (literary) structure (*tartib*) established by the Bab. At the same time the beauty of his style (*nazm*) had eclipsed the literary skill of ages past.⁶

The hermeneutical distance between this exclusively literary interpretation of the verses of Bayan 3: 16 and Kitab-i Aqdas 181 on the one hand, and Shoghi Effendi's metaphysical and socio-political translation of the same terms on the other, could not be greater. The leap of vision that it demanded from Baha'is was as dramatic as it was characteristic of the general broadening of perspective that Shoghi Effendi imparted to the Baha'i community in the course of his ministry.

The Hermeneutical Context of the Word *Nazm*

To understand the transition from a primarily literary to a primarily spiritual and socio-political interpretation of the concept of order (*nazm*) in the writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, it is helpful to explore the semantic context within which subsequent Baha'i interpretations emerged. From a purely grammatical perspective, it made sense for early Baha'i scholars to approach the meaning of *nazm* in Bayan 3: 16 and Kitab-i Aqdas 181 from a literary and stylistic perspective, since in contemporary literate usage, the word *nazm* had, and retains, primarily literary connotations. Hence Francis Joseph Steingass (1825–1903), in his classic *Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, the standard reference work for 19th-century Persian usage, defines the word *nazm* as follows:

(v.n.) Joining (pearls) in a row; composing (verses); order, arrangement; a string (of pearls); poetry, verse (opp. to *nathr* 'prose composition').

The literary connotations are thus very clear, particularly in its associations with versified composition, while entirely absent are the spiritual and socio-political connotations perceived by Shoghi Effendi.

Such literary connotations remain present to this day in Islamic theological discussions of the Qur'an. For instance, in a well-known compendium of Islamic belief based on the Persian letters of the Nakhshbandi Sufi master Shaykh Ahmad Shirindi (d. 1624 CE), and compiled by the late Turkish scholar and publisher Hüseyin Hilmi Işık (d. 2002 CE), we read the following:

Qur'an al-karim is nazm-i ilahi (the divine verse). The lexical meaning of nazm is to string pearls. It has been called nazm also because words are arranged side by side like pearls. Each poem is a nazm. The Qur'an's words are in Arabic. However, Allahu ta'ala [God, exalted be Him] arranged these words side by side. These words were not arranged by any human being.⁷

Thus the word *nazm* is used to denote the divinely inspired arrangement of Arabic words into the holy verses of the Qur'an. This interpretation has its roots in contemplations that crystallized into doctrine in the course of the 2nd to 3rd Islamic centuries (9th to 10th centuries CE), when a philosophical ferment took place that generated the rich heritage of Islamic thinking on the *nazm* of the Qur'an.

While the word *nazm* does not appear in the Qur'an, yet from the time of the great 'Abbasid scholar al-Jahiz (776–869 CE), doctrinal exploration of *nazm* was carried forward by al-Sijistani (d. 928 CE), al-Bakhî (d. 933 CE) and Ibn al-Ikshid (d. 937 CE). In the same period al-Rummanî and

his contemporary al-Khattabî (d. 998 CE) contributed meditations on the psychological effect of the *nazm* of the Qur'an in their *al-Nukat fi I'jaz al-Qur'ân* and *Bayan I'jaz al-Qur'ân* respectively. The development of this doctrine culminated the following century in the work of Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjanî (d. 1078 CE) in his seminal *Dalâ'il al-I'jaz*, and in the writings of al-Zamakhsharî (d. 1144) and Fakhr ad-Din al-Razî (d. 1209) CE.⁸

The perspective underlying these explorations is explained by Al-Jahiz specialist Dr Jamal el'Attar, in a paper presented to the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) in 1992. Dr el-'Attar writes:

According to al-Jahiz, Arabic had been miraculously enriched, initiated and divinely nurtured until it reached its pre-Qur'anic destined stage of maturity whereby Arabic and the Arabs were both to experience and witness an unusual charming Arabic, the Qur'an, that had an unprecedented arrangement (*Nazm*), a new literary configuration that assembled their very own alphabets and words yet which lies beyond their literary level of superiority, and stays unsurpassable.⁹

In al-Jahiz's own words:

The Qur'an differs from all the known rhymes of poetry and prose. It is a prose whose rhythm is not modelled on that of poetry or rhymed prose (*saj'*, "سجع") and whose configuration [*nazm*] stands as a magnificent evidence and as a great Divine proof.¹⁰

Al-Jahiz thus sees the miraculousness of the Qur'an's *nazm* in its distinctive poetic prose – an interpretation which already prefigures the traditional Baha'i interpretation of the *nazm* verses of the Kitab-i Aqdas as related by Ali Nakhjavani and Hasan Balyuzi. Al-Jahiz's interpretation, as noted earlier, was taken up by subsequent Islamic thinkers, becoming integral to the theological doctrine of *i'jaz*, or the inimitability and miraculousness of the Qur'an – a doctrine which was in the fullness of time to be incorporated and refined in the writings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah.¹¹

In recent years, partly in response to orientalist analyses of the Qur'an which stressed its lack of structural coherence, Muslim thought on the Qur'anic *nazm* has shifted from a concentration on the linguistic style of the Qur'an to the overall arrangement and sequential ordering of the Qur'anic verses. While the earliest commentators tended, like western scholars, to see the Qur'an in terms of a more or less arbitrary collection of isolated verses and series of verses, not necessarily related in a sequential manner, a current of thought most closely associated with the Pakistani school of Hamîd al-dîn Farâhî (d. 1930) and his disciple Mawlânâ Amîn Aḥsan Iṣṣāḥî has emerged which sees, on the contrary, a subtle but significant set of principles organizing in a coherent way the structure of the Qur'an. This structural coherence is referred to by such scholars as the *nazm* of the Qur'an.¹² This line of reasoning is not wholly dissimilar to the early Baha'i approach to the *tartib* or structure of the Aqdas in relation to the Bab's Bayani prophecy regarding the *nazm* of Baha'u'llah, as related by Mr Nakhjavani.

From the above discussion, it becomes apparent that the early Baha'i approach to the *nazm* of Baha'u'llah is inspired in a significant

way by the hermeneutical tradition of Islam, and in particular the rich heritage of linguistic and literary analysis associated with the doctrine of *i'jaz* or inimitability of the Qur'an. In their discussions of *nazm*, Muslim commentators, paving the way for the early Baha'i commentators of a later age, focused on the elegance and originality of Qur'anic prose in relation to the Arabic tongue and the compositions of writers and poets, and also on the distinctive arrangement of Qur'anic verses.

There is evidence to suggest however, that *nazm* was not used in exclusively literary ways already previously to the Bab's revelation. In a telling exception to the rule of a literary usage of the word *nazm*, the great Iranian philosopher Mulla Sadra wrote that the essence of philosophy is *nazm al-'alam* (the order of the world).¹³ This rare usage of *nazm* prefigures the philosophical subtext of the Bab's discussion of this theme, and resonates with Baha'u'llah's distinctive usage of the term in later years. It is not dissimilar to neoplatonic concepts of order, as expressed by Plotinus, who writes about the 'the cosmic order which leads all in accordance with the right'.¹⁴

One more element needs to be highlighted by way of context before analysing the concept of *nazm* in the Bab's Persian Bayan. While for Sunni Islam the concept of the *nazm* of the Qur'an is legitimized by the authority of notable and respected scholars, for Shi'i Muslims the *nazm* of the Qur'an has been further hallowed by a sacred tradition from the eighth Imam himself, 'Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha. The tradition is significant for our purposes insofar as it is found in a text that the eminent Canadian scholar of the Bab's writings, Todd Lawson, has identified as an important source of Islamic traditions in the Bab's Qayyum'u'l-'Asma.

The tradition in question, after recounting its *isnad* or chain of transmission going back to Ibn Babuwayh, states:

He said one day in making a strong proof that the signs and miraculous nature of the Qur'an lie in its *nazm*: '[The Qur'an] is God's firm cord and sure handle, his exemplary path (*t@ariqa*) leading unto Paradise and away from the fire. It has not been created for a specific time, nor to be a difficulty for the tongues, for it was not made for one time over another but rather as a guidance and a proof for all of mankind. Falsehood is neither in it nor behind it, and it was sent down from the All-Wise, the Most Praised.'¹⁵

The title of the chapter containing this tradition is as interesting as the tradition itself, and is translated by Lawson as follows:

On the reason that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic and that its miraculousness is in its arrangement (*naz@m*) and its meaning is newly applicable through the course of time, and by it each succeeding generation will be refreshed until the Day of Resurrection.¹⁶

What is most crucial in this tradition is not only the stress on the evidentiary character of the Qur'an's *nazm*, which sacralizes for Shi'i Muslims the ideas put forward by the religious scholars we have briefly reviewed above. It is also the emphasis in the title of this chapter on the contingent character of the meanings produced by this *nazm*, to be refreshed 'until the

Day of Resurrection'. This perspective in Bahrani's *Burhan* anticipates, as we shall see, one of the most distinctive features of the Bab's approach to *nazm*, that is, its dispensationary nature.

The Concept of *Nazm* in the Bab's Persian Bayan

Nazm has a significant presence in the Persian Bayan, with two whole sections (*abwabs*) of that book being devoted to its exposition (*vahid* 3, *bab* 16; and *vahid* 6, *bab* 1). The first of these two sections is the source of the Bab's announcement of the *nazm* of Baha'u'llah, which Shoghi Effendi writes, 'deserves to rank as one of the most significant statements recorded in any of the Bab's writings'. A reading of this statement in the context of the whole passage in which it appears, shows how very radical and unexpected Shoghi Effendi's exegesis truly is:

Bayan III, Bab 16¹⁷

It is not permissible to act save in accordance with the writings of the Point.

The sum of this chapter is this:

It is not permissible to act save according to the writings of the Point of the Bayan, for in this Dispensation the writings of the Letters of the Living proceed from the Sun of Truth Himself. Thus, sacred verses (*ayat*) pertain to the Point, supplications (*munajat*) pertain to the Messenger of God, commentaries (*tafsir*) to the Imams of guidance, and scientific treatises (*suvar-i-'ilmiiyyih*) to the Gates. Yet all these traces arise from this Ocean, hence they all may be witnessed in the most noble form in the Primal Reality.

For in the presence of God and the estimation of them that are endowed with knowledge no grandeur compares to that of being swift in the path of faith, which is the most precious of all things, and all bounties are under its shadow. From the setting of this Sun, to the rising of Him Whom God shall make manifest, the authoritative texts will remain exalted and unchangeable, and the Letters of the Living and all the believers in God and in the Bayan shall be within their pale.

Nevertheless, should someone soar in the knowledge of one of the ordinances of God, be it a fundamental pillar (*usul*) or a secondary teaching (*furu*), and produce a text of his own behoof, he will be resurrected within His shade only if he doth not transgress the bounds of the Bayan. Otherwise, he shall not be worthy of mention in the presence of God and in the presence of them that are endowed with understanding. For rather, in this Dispensation it is the inner truth of issues that is mostly looked upon, the import of arguments and proofs being less. Rejoice in that which the Point of the Sun of Reality hath revealed, for His writings are like the light of the sun in relation to the glimmer of the stars. Is there any comparison? Exalted, immeasurably exalted is God above such conceptions.

However, they must strive in the science of letters, in the numerical linking of the divine Names, in the stringing together of words of like meaning and in the conjoining of compatible writings in the appropriate place. For it is permissible for each person to arrange the order of the Bayan (*nazm-i Bayan*) as appeareth sweetest. Inasmuch as though it manifests itself after a thousand fashions, with one volume differing from another by reason of the

ordering of verses or the conjunction of words, yet shall it all return to the soul of the Bayan (*kulli raja' nafsi Bayan*); nor shall a single word be added or excised therefrom.

It will be apparent that no order (*nazm*) shall be adopted save that it be sweeter (*ahla*) and better arranged (*anzam*) than the order (*nazm*) that preceded it. Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze on the Order of Bahā'u'llāh (*tuba li man yanziru illa'l-nazm Bahā'u'llāh*) and rendereth thanks unto his Lord! For He will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayan. Verily, God raiseth whatsoever He willeth and bringeth down whatsoever He desireth.

The best arrangement (*nazm*) manifests itself in accordance with specific limits (*hudud*). Should there be, for instance, ten prayers, each of one hundred lines (*bayts*) it is best that they should be arranged together; nor should the five styles of revelation be mixed. The verses are set apart in their loftiness, the supplications in their celestial exaltation, the commentaries on their seat of grandeur, the scientific treatises (*kalimat-i 'ilmiyyih*) in their horizon of sanctity, and the Persian writings in their gladsome heights. Thus the necessity for such ordering is not lost to the attentive observer.

This is of the bounty of God to the learned in the Bayan, that they may busy themselves in the Cause till God doth comfort them through the Manifestation (*bi-zuhur*) of that for which they beseech God in the daytime and in the night season. And should He be made manifest and none be found to recognize Him, yet shall His shaping (*murratib farmayad*) of the Bayan stand out as the Sun amidst the stars, at a time when He perceives everyone to be wrapped in veils.

In like manner, the Point of the Bayan hath written three commentaries of the Qur'an: two in the style (*nahj*) of verses throughout, and one a commentary on the Suratu'l-Baqara in the manner (*nahj*) of a scientific treatise (*shu'un 'ilmiyya*). A single word from His commentaries stands unequalled by the commentaries of every commentator, from the moment the Qur'an began to descend till the rising of Him Who setteth forth commentaries (*ta irtifaa`-e u tafsir namudeh*). And whoso compareth the Sun's radiance to the glimmer of the stars, his gaze is unworthy of mention before God.

Will ye not, then, perceive?¹⁸

From these clear verses it becomes apparent that the purely literary interpretation of the *nazm* of Baha'u'llah is not to be ascribed to the general simplicity of Baha'i thought before Shoghi Effendi.¹⁹ Rather, such a reading was the natural interpretation to adopt on the basis of the evident (*zahir*) meaning of the text. The Bab makes clear that the *nazm-i Bayān* lies 'in the science of letters, in the numerical linking of the divine Names, in the stringing together of words of like meaning and in the conjoining of compatible writings in the appropriate place'. Hence in Professor Nader Saiedi's *Logos and Civilization*, which includes the only extended analysis thus far published of Bayan 3: 16 and its link to Aqdas 181 and Shoghi Effendi's interpretation, we read that:

The fact that in the Persian Bayan the concept of order refers to the writings of the Bāb is beyond any doubt. Similarly, the fact that the reference to the 'order' of Bahā'u'llāh also applies to the order of the writings of Bahā'u'llāh and His restructuring of the Bayan is completely obvious.²⁰

He thus validates the early Baha'i interpretations of *nazm*. He sees them, however, as preliminary layers of interpretation that, while not superseded by Shoghi Effendi's expositions and still valid today, are nevertheless exegetically incomplete, in need of further unveiling to grasp the metaphysical and social nuances that it contains. These nuances are not self-evident, so that, while the literary interpretation of the concept of *nazm* in this passage may be accessed at face value, Shoghi Effendi's exposition of it as referring to the present Baha'i Administrative Order and the future Baha'i Commonwealth is itself in need of further exegesis.

Professor Saiedi's approach is to see in the revealed word not only a literary, but also a cosmological dimension. To understand this perspective one must bear in mind two concepts. First, is that in the covenantal theology of mystical/theosophical Shi'ism, contact with the transcendent God is mediated through a hierarchy of divine manifestations occupying four subordinate degrees of authority. The first such manifestation of the Unknowable God occupying the highest degree of authority is the metaphysical entity sometimes designated as 'the primal Point' out of which have been generated all created things (a broad equivalent to the Johannine concept of the Logos or Word of God at the beginning of fourth Gospel); followed by the Messenger of God (the Prophet Muhammad) who mediates human contact with the divine; followed by his divinely appointed and infallible heirs and successors (the twelve Imams); followed by the four successive representatives or 'gates' (*abwab*) of the twelfth and last Imam, held to have gone into occultation in the year 260 AH and expected to return as the Promised One of Shi'i Islam on the Day of Resurrection.

The second concept is that the Bab divided his writings into five styles or grades (*shu'un*) comprising verses, supplications, commentaries, scientific treatises and Persian writings. The last of these modes (Persian writings) appears to be on occasion subsumed into the previous four modes, so that sometimes, as in the beginning of Bayan 3: 16 the Bab speaks of only the first four styles, and sometimes, as occurs late in the same text, he distinguishes all five styles.

The key to Professor Saiedi's exegesis lies in the link that the Bab draws in Bayan 3: 16 between the four principal modes or genres of scripture identified by the Bab (verses, supplications, commentaries and scientific treatises) and the four corresponding levels of covenantal authority in Twelver Shi'ism (Primal Point, Messenger, Imams, Gates). Thus each scriptural style, in Bayan 3: 16, corresponds to a station or degree of divine authority:

It is not permissible to act save according to the writings of the Point of the Bayan, for in this Dispensation the writings of the Letters of the Living proceed from the Sun of Truth Himself. Thus, sacred verses (*ayat*) pertain to the Point, supplications (*munajat*) pertain to the Messenger of God, commentaries (*tafasir*) to the Imams of guidance, and scientific treatises (*suvar-i-'ilmīyyih*)

to the Gates. Yet all these traces arise from this Ocean, hence they all may be witnessed in the most noble form in the Primal Reality.

(Bayan 3: 16)

In other words, the literary form or *nazm* in which God reveals His Word is inextricably linked in the Bab's writings to the hierarchical form in which God exerts His authority in the world. Therefore Bayan 3: 16, as Professor Saiedi writes, 'recapitulates the basic structure of the entire revelation of the Bāb'²¹ not only in a literary, but, by implication, in a theological and covenantal way.

Hence any reformulation of scripture must imply, from a Babi perspective, a reformulation of religious authority and thus a reconfiguration of the Covenant of God. In the past, the four scriptural genres identified at the beginning of Bayan 3: 16 (verses, supplications, commentaries, scientific treatises) were associated with separate repositories of religious authority (the Point, the Messenger, the Imams and the Gates). In the Bab's dispensation, Saiedi notes, these four genres have been revealed by one and the same the same Person, reflecting not only a stylistic shift, but a Covenantal shift in the authority of the Manifestation of God, who now speaks with the voice of the Gates, the Imams, the Messenger of God and the Primal Point himself, reflecting the eschatological climax associated with the coming of the Day of Resurrection.²² This shift in religious authority in turn implies a change in religious hierarchy, and hence in the administrative and ultimately social order of the Babi community.²³

But the *nazm* of the Bayan, in Saiedi's exposition, goes even further than the implicit order of religious authority. Numerological symbolism of all kinds was very popular in the Bab's time, and constitutes one of the most common literary devices to be found in his writings. And among the rich numerological allegories found in the Bab's writings, the numbers four and nineteen are regarded by Saiedi not only as the organizing principle of the Persian Bayan itself, and of the Bab's hierarchy of authority and social order, but as the cosmological structure of all things (*Kullu Shay'*) according to the Bayan.²⁴ Saiedi identifies the formula 'In the name of God, the Inaccessible, the Most Holy', the four words and nineteen letters of which open the Persian Bayan, as the underpinning structure of the Bab's revelation.²⁵ He draws on the first chapters of the Persian and the Arabic Bayans for evidence, where the Bab links the structure of his books to the number of all things (*Kullu Shay'*), as in the following passage in the exordium that opens the Persian Bayan as translated by Dennis McEoin:

God, indeed, is powerful over all things. He structured the creation of all things according to the number of 'All Things' [*Kullu Shay'* = 361], through the decrees which He caused to come down from the court of His holiness and which He caused to shine forth from the sun of His own bounty, in order that all things, through the mention of all things, might reach a state of perfection for the sake of the manifestation of the next resurrection, so that He might reward each thing with the reward due to all things.²⁶

The number of 'all things', in abjad notation, is equivalent to 361, or nineteen times nineteen. Underlying this perspective is what Saiedi describes

as 'the unity and parallelism between the realms of creation (*takvín*) and revelation (*tadvín*).²⁷

Thus the *nazm* or order of the Bayan, based on the numerical structure of four and nineteen, while outwardly concerned with the written corpus of the Bab and the Letters of the Living, is implicitly addressing the metaphysical order of all things. 'In the Persian Bayan', writes Saiedi, 'the order of the Bayan is simultaneously the order and structure of authority, covenant, sacred history, and the society which embodies those writings.'²⁸

By implication, Saiedi explains, the *nazm* or order of Baha'u'llah proclaimed by the Bab, while ostensibly concerned with the arrangement of Baha'u'llah's verses and restructuring ('*murratib farmayad*') of the order of the Bayan, is of necessity referring also to the ordering by Baha'u'llah of all things, since all things are implicated in the order of the divine Book. By the *nazm* of Baha'u'llah, Saiedi argues, 'the Báb is referring simultaneously to the modes of Bahā'u'llāh's revelation, the order of His writings, the order of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, and the New World Order of Bahā'u'llāh'.²⁹

Professor Saiedi's illuminating interpretation is somewhat weakened by his occasional lack of references for key arguments and ideas in his discussion. A close reading of the Persian Bayan shows, however, that Professor Saiedi's arguments, even where supporting references may at times be absent, are nevertheless strongly grounded in the text of the Bayan. Thus, his argument regarding the whole of creation being contained in the Bayan, and specifically in the opening invocation, 'In the name of God, the Inaccessible, the Most Holy', although not linked to specific Bayani passages in Professor Saiedi's discussion, is clearly drawn from Bayan 3: 8, where the Bab writes that all that to which the quality of being a 'thing' is applied is contained in the Bayan, and all the Bayan is contained in its opening invocation, *Bismillah al-'Amna, al-Aqdas* ('In the name of God, the Inaccessible, the Most Holy'), and all the *bismillah* in the first letter, b, which itself stems from the Primal Point.³⁰

Likewise, Professor Saiedi's linking of the four Qur'anic rivers of paradise with the four modes of revelation, also not referenced to the Bayan, evidently stems from Bayan 6: 1, where the selfsame point is clearly made. The parallelism he sees between *tadvin* and *takvin*, the creation of the Book and the creation of the world, unreferenced in Professor Saiedi's book, is stated in Bayan 2: 4.

Finally, as has been said, a substantial part of Professor Saiedi's exegesis is the importance not only of four, but of nineteen in the *nazm* of the Bayan, mirroring the structure of all creation. However, a reading of Bayan 3: 16 will fail to show any particular link to the number nineteen, except, tacitly, in the references to the Letters of the Living, whose writings are specifically set apart from the Bayan, the writings of the Bab himself. While the lack of references to supporting passages of Bayan 3: 16 in relation to the number nineteen might lead to the perception of a forced reading on the part of Professor Saiedi, one need only turn to Bayan 6: 1 to see that, again, Professor Saiedi's discussion is based on his careful readings of the Persian Bayan.

In that section of the Bayan, the Bab enjoins that the *nazm* or arrangement of the Bayan should consist of no more than nineteen volumes arranged into four groups. The first three should consist of verses; the following four of supplications; the next six of commentaries; and the last

six of scientific discourses. Thus we find the link clearly made between the *nazm* of the Bayan and the numbers nineteen and four. This arrangement is, moreover, linked not only to the word *nazm* in this chapter, but also in passing to the word *tartib* which likewise appears in conjunction with *nazm* in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, again underscoring the enduring validity, though not exclusiveness, of the literary interpretation of that passage.

To recapitulate then, the Bab adopts the time-honoured and primarily literary concept of *nazm* associated with the *ijaz* or inimitability of the Qur'an and embeds it in a mystical metaphysics of divine revelation that sees the Word of God as the agent and pattern of creation.

We recall Alessandro Bausani's penetrating analysis of Baha'i scripture in the context of the Persianate literary tradition:

The classical Persian literary tradition in general, and particularly in its mystical literary expressions, is distinctly anti-realist, symbolist ... when the mystical tradition, and classical Persian literature in general, speaks of *real love* and *allegorical love*, it intends exactly the inverse of that which we would understand by the same expression, real love being love for the absolute, allegorical love being love between a man and a woman. The axiom: 'the invisible is of superior rank to the visible, the absolute is superior to the relative, the eternal to the contingent, that which is above is more real than that which is below' is the basis not only of the *substance*, but also of the literary *form* of Persian mysticism.³¹

Hence, the ordering of the realm of the Word of God, or *tadvin*, takes precedence over that of the realm of creation (*takvin*), yet is inseparably linked to it by a hierarchy of analogical relationships that begin with the four words and nineteen letters of the opening invocation of the Bayan, through the four modes of revelation corresponding to the four degrees of spiritual successorship, and the nineteen chapters and nineteen holy figures comprising the Bayan, through the cosmic arrangement of all things (*kullu shay*) according to the number of nineteen times nineteen, or 361.³² As we read in the opening of Bayan 3: 8: 'whatsoever is in the macrocosm is in the Bayān'³³ Thus the ordering of verses is indissolubly linked to the ordering of the whole of creation.

In this context it is therefore highly significant that the Bab, in his Kitabu'l-Asma', should name God the Best Order (*Anzam*). This is the very same word, *anzam*, that occurs in Bayan 3: 16 to denote the superiority of successive arrangements of the Bayan. In the Kitabu'l-Asma' the Bab invokes God in the following terms:

In the name of God, the Best Arrangement of the Paramount Order. God, there is no God but Him, the Superlative arrangement of the Finest Order. Say: God is the Unsurpassed Arrangement above every pre-eminent Order.

(*Bismillah al Anzam al Anzam. Allah. La elaha illa Huwa al Anzam u'l Anzam. Qul: Allahu Anzam fawqa kulle zi Anzam.*)³⁴

And again a few pages later:

In the name of God, the Greatest Arrangement of the Most Excellent Order. Praise be to God, besides Whom there is none other God. He is the

Incomparable Order of the Matchless Arrangement. The Glory of God (*Baha min Allah*) rest upon the first unity (*al-wāhid al-awwal*).

(*Bismillah al Anzam al Anzam. Al.H.amdu lillAh alladhi IA elAha illA huwa. al-Anzam u'l Anzam. wa innamA al-Baha'u min Allah 'al a alWAhid il Awwal*).³⁵

Thus *nazm* takes on the nature of a divine attribute, a name of God that transcends the contingent qualities of literary shape or social structure; an ultimate, spiritual dimension which our own attempts at order may at best reflect or approximate. And it seems to me that it is precisely in the tension between our human yearnings and approximations and the transcendent Order associated with God Himself that the heart and function of the Bab's concept of *nazm* may be found. For indeed in all the discussions of *nazm* in the Bayan one central aspect has so far passed unnoticed, and that is the instruction to the Bab's followers to compile their own Bayan from the Bab's writings in accordance with a *nazm* or order within the limits (*hudud*) set by God in Persian Bayan 3: 16 and 6: 1, and reflecting the utmost balance (*i'tidal*).

This, the human arrangement of the writings of the Bab, is a dimension of *nazm* that, although constituting the bulk and substance of the Bab's discussion in Bayan 3: 16 and 6: 1, has not benefited from detailed attention. Indeed, as is made clear in both the Persian Bayan 3: 16 above and also in Bayan 6: 1, the *nazm-i Bayan* does not refer primarily to the order of the Persian Bayan itself, nor to the Arabic Bayan for that matter, nor even to the Bab's arrangement of his revealed output, but rather to the compilation and arrangement by the Bab's followers of the wider corpus of the Bab's writings, which he collectively designates the Bayan. It is in fact we, his followers, who are challenged to reflect the cosmological structure of the divine Word in our human ordering and compilation of the Bab's writings, a cosmological structure that may find expression in a multiplicity of forms. For as Bayan 3: 16 informs us, the *nazm-i-Bayan* may manifest itself 'after a thousand fashions ... yet shall it all return to the soul of the Bayan (*nafs-i Bayan*)'.

And this appears to be ultimately the purpose of arranging the legacy of the Bab in accordance to the principles underlying the *nazm-i-Bayan* – to bring us in touch with the very soul of the Bayan, the *nafs-i Bayan* that is the vitalizing spirit underlying the principles and words of the Bab's teaching. In this light we may also understand the stress, in both Bayan 3: 16 and Bayan 6: 1 on recognizing the common spirit animating the diversity of literary expression in the Bab's writings. In Bayan 3: 16 we read:

Thus, sacred verses (*ayat*) pertain to the Point, supplications (*munajat*) pertain to the Messenger of God, commentaries (*tafasir*) to the Imams of guidance, and scientific treatises (*suvar-i-'ilmiyyih*) to the Gates. Yet all these traces arise from this Ocean, hence they all may be witnessed in the most noble form in the Primal Reality.³⁶

And in Bayan 6: 1 we find:

Behold the Bayan: it hath been ordained that it is divided into volumes; but all these volumes stem from but one source of manifestation, and this water runs through all the letters of the Unity. It is thus that there is no Creator,

Nourisher, Quickener, Slayer, beside God. This first unity is His creation, which demonstrates in the world of potentialities the unity possible in the contingent world.³⁷

The aim is to find, in the multiplicity of words and letters, the Primal Reality that is the soul of the Bayan (*nafs-i-Bayan*). It follows from Babi theology that had previous generations been in touch with the *nafs* (soul, self, identity) of their holy texts, rather than outward expressions only, they would have recognized the same *nafs* pulsating in the words of the subsequent divine manifestation. Instead, they took pride in their own understanding of the sacred words while failing to see their source, the Primal Reality, now made manifest in the new revelation from God. Hence the cautions in Bayan 3: 16 and 6: 1 against superficial considerations:

Nevertheless, should someone soar in the knowledge of one of the ordinances of God, be it a fundamental pillar (*usul*) or a secondary teaching (*furu*), and produce a text of his own behoof, he will be resurrected within His shade only if he doth not transgress the bounds of the Bayan. Otherwise, he shall not be worthy of mention in the presence of God and in the presence of them that are endowed with understanding. For rather, in this Dispensation it is the inner truth of issues that is mostly looked upon, the import of arguments and proofs being less. Rejoice in that which the Point of the Sun of Reality hath revealed, for His writings are like the light of the sun in relation to the glimmer of the stars. Is there any comparison? Exalted, immeasurably exalted is God above such conceptions.

(Bayān 3: 16)

And, from Bayan 6: 1:

Take care in the Day of Manifestation of the truth you make not of these words a veil from Him, for the whole of the Bayān is His previous manifestation and He is most wise of all concerning that which he has revealed.³⁸

By focusing on the *nafs-i-Bayan*, or soul of the Bayan, rather than its diverse expressions, we are expected to perceive the difference between essential and contingent qualities. This is made particularly clear in Bayan 3: 16 in the analogy of the sun amidst the stars, which occurs not less than three times in this brief section. Before the first occurrence of this analogy, the Bab clarifies his use of the term 'sun':

From the setting of this Sun, to the rising of Him Whom God shall make manifest, the authoritative texts will remain exalted and unchangeable, and the Letters of the Living and all the believers in God and in the Bayan shall be within their pale.³⁹

The 'Sun' then in the first instance is the Bab, who rises once more in Him Whom God shall make manifest. The Letters of the Living and the generality of believers occupy a rank subordinate to the writings of that Sun. The same relationship as that between the Manifestation of God and his followers and disciples likewise applies to the divine Word:

Rejoice in that which the Point of the Sun of Reality hath revealed, for His writings are like the light of the sun in relation to the glimmer of the stars. Is there any comparison? Exalted, immeasurably exalted is God above such conceptions.

Here Bab's writings are likened to the light of the sun, this time in relation to the glimmer of the stars. In a subsequent paragraph of Bayan 3: 16 we further read:

And should He be made manifest and none be found to recognize Him, yet shall His shaping (*murratib farmayad*) of the Bayan stand out as the Sun amidst the stars, at a time when He perceives everyone to be wrapped in veils.

This time it is Him Whom God shall make manifest's shaping of the Bayan that will stand out as the sun amidst the stars. This theme is of such importance, that the Bab devotes the entirety of Persian Bayan 8: 1 to expounding how 'Him Whom God shall make manifest is in His acts as the sun, whilst the deeds of all men, when in conformity to the good pleasure of God, are like stars'. Finally in Bayan 3: 16 the Bab explains:

A single word from His commentaries stands unequalled by the commentaries of every commentator, from the moment the Qur'an began to descend till the rising of Him Who setteth forth commentaries (*ta irtifaa`-e u tafsir namudeh*). And whoso compareth the Sun's radiance to the glimmer of the stars, his gaze is unworthy of mention before God.

Here the Bab's Qur'anic commentaries are once more compared to the sun amidst the stars in relation to the commentaries of every commentator. The challenge then is to recognize the one Sun through its variegated rays in each dispensation, the *soul* within the verses, rather than focus on the reflection of that light in the multiplicity of human thought and words, which are like stars before the sun.

The purpose of the Bab's instruction to his followers to compile his writings in accordance with a *nazm* derived from the fundamental principles of his theophanology (theology of manifestation)⁴⁰ symbolized by the numbers four and nineteen, is, as with so many of his ordinances, to prepare the Babi community to recognize Him Whom God shall make manifest.

This is made unequivocal in Bayan 6: 1. There, in addition to the instruction to compile up to nineteen volumes of the writings of the Bab grouped in accordance to the four key modes of revelation, a further injunction is given to subdivide each volume into sections from the One (*Wahid*) to *Mustaghāth* (meaning 'He Who is Invoked' = numerical value of 2001), that is, made up of between one and 2001 verses. This instruction comes immediately after discussion of the coming of Him Whom God will make manifest. *Mustaghāth*, as is well known, is the maximum length of time separating the advent of one Manifestation from the next as described in the Persian Bayan 7: 10, where the Bab writes:

For only God knows how long it will be from the beginning of a Manifestation until another, but if God please, it will not be more than the number of *Mustaghāth*.⁴¹

Thus the very subdivision of the *nazm-i-Bayan* is meant to generate a sense of expectation and receptivity. The Bab writes in Bayan 6: 1:

The fruit of this *nazm* is that perchance on the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāmat*) all the believers in the Bayān may be guided through the assistance of the letters of unity⁴²... for that Day is the Day of Tests.⁴³

We have already seen that the *nazm-i-Bayan* (Order of the Bayan) embodies in all its human multiplicity the single *nafs-i-Bayan* (soul or self of the Bayan), which in turn we are told is Him Whom God shall make manifest ‘in His previous manifestation’. Our recognition of Him Whom God shall make manifest is therefore itself the test of our recognition of the soul of the Bayan (*nafs-i-Bayan*) permeating the order of the Bayan (*nazm-i-Bayan*) as Bayan 6: 1 also indicates.

But why make the human compilation of the texts of the Bayan, that is of the writings of the Bab, subject to individual preference rather than to a uniform arrangement as was the case with the Qur’an? Why subject the *nazm-i-Bayan* to human whims? For the Bab, in Bayan 3: 16, places considerable stress on the multiplicity of forms that Babi scripture may take in accordance with the individual preferences of the compiler:

For it is permissible for each person to arrange the order of the Bayan (*nazm-i-Bayan*) as appeareth sweetest. Inasmuch as though it manifest itself after a thousand fashions, with one volume differing from another by reason of the ordering of verses or the conjunction of words, yet shall it all return to the soul of the Bayan (*kulli rAja’ nafsī Bayan*); nor shall a single word be added or excised therefrom.

The instructions for the division of volumes and the collation of texts by genre or mode of revelation therefore take on the character of no more than general guidelines. In Bayan 6: 1, for instance, having suggested that the *nazm* of the Bayan should consist of ‘no more than nineteen volumes’, the Bab explicitly stresses that this is not strictly binding and obligatory.

This multiplicity of expression itself has a function. Immediately after stressing in Bayan 3: 16 that everyone should order the Bayan ‘as appeareth sweetest’ and ‘after a thousand fashions’, we are told that the Promised One Himself will bring His own order to the Bayan:

It will be apparent that no order (*nazm*) shall be adopted save that it be sweeter (*ahla*) and better arranged (*anzam*) than the order (*nazm*) that preceded it. Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze on the Order of Baha’u’llah (*tuba li man yanziru illA’l-nazm Baha’u’llah*) and rendereth thanks unto his Lord! For Him Who “will assuredly be made manifest”. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayan. Verily, God raiseth whatsoever He willeth and bringeth down whatsoever He desireth.

The first sentence of this verse echoes Bayan 3: 4 which is entirely dedicated to this theme, explaining that ‘in each manifestation of the Will the words of the Lord of that manifestation are, in consequence of His intrinsic

exaltation, more elevated than those from earlier times' ⁴⁴ Thus the sentence regarding the superiority of each subsequent order alludes to the dispensationary nature of *nazm*.

For the Bayan, this dispensationary aspect is made clear in the ensuing prophetic announcement which links the *nazm* of Baha'u'llah to the expectation of Him Whom God shall make manifest. There thus appears to be, on the one hand, the *nazm* created by the followers of a messenger in each dispensation, and on the other hand, a *nazm* created by the new messenger at the beginning of each new revelation. The use of the word *anzam* in this context, bearing in mind its use in the Kitab al-Asma', simply underscores this reading.

Even greater clarity may be obtained from a subsequent passage in Bayan 3: 16:

This is of the bounty of God to the learned in the Bayan, that they may busy themselves in the Cause till God doth comfort them through the Manifestation [*bi-zuhur*] of that for which they beseech God in the daytime and in the night season. And should He be made manifest and none be found to recognize Him, yet shall His shaping (*murratib farmayad*) of the Bayan stand out as the Sun amidst the stars, at a time when He perceives everyone to be wrapped in veils.

In like manner, the Point of the Bayan hath written three commentaries of the Qur'an: two in the style (*nahj*) of verses throughout, and one a commentary on the Suratu'l-Baqara in the manner (*nahj*) of a scientific treatise (*shu'un 'ilmiyya*). A single word from His commentaries stands unequalled by the commentaries of every commentator, from the moment the Qur'an began to descend till the rising of Him Who setteth forth commentaries (*ta irtifaa`-e u tafsir namudeh*). And whoso compareth the Sun's radiance to the glimmer of the stars, his gaze is unworthy of mention before God.

Here we are explicitly told that the Promised One will give His own shape (*murratib farmayad*) to the Bayan. The meaning of this process is explained by analogy ('In like manner') to the Bab's own Qur'anic commentary, which may be said to have reshaped the *tartib* and *nazm* of the Qur'an. His Qur'anic commentary was merely one among a host of Qur'anic commentaries produced by the followers of Islam, but stood in relation to them like the Sun amidst the stars, even as the *murratib* or shaping of the Bayan by the Promised One will stand out like the Sun amidst the stars of the Babi community.

As if this was not clear enough, Bayan 6: 1 concludes:

The science of the Bayan is linked to the knowledge of its descent from its beginning to its end. For that which hath descended in the beginning conforms to the Qur'anic strictures (*ahkam*), while subsequently the Bayani laws appeared. One must not therefore on account of the beginning remain ignorant of the end, or by reason of the end, remain in ignorance of the beginning ... but the divine purpose is most evident in the most recent verses.⁴⁵

So we find that the first irruption of the Bayan into creation took shape within Islamic law, although in a manner that reshaped already the prevailing order,⁴⁶ giving way in the fullness of time to an altogether new order and structure (*nazm va tartib*), which, taking the form of a new body of scripture, also implied,

as we have seen, not only a cosmic renewal but a social and political reform as well. Clearly, the Bab's expectation is that the new Order of Baha'u'llah will likewise unfold gradually, first of all within the context of the Bayan's ordinances. As with the Bab's Qur'an commentary, the *nazm* of him who 'will assuredly be manifest' will stand out as the sun amidst the stars, to be recognized by those whose hearts are looking upon 'the inner truth of issues' rather than "arguments and proofs", and who are in touch with the 'soul of the Bayan'.⁴⁷

Against this backdrop the Bab's reluctance to commit his followers to a rigid scriptural structure and foster a multiplicity of scriptural forms is designed to create a space, on the one hand, for the emergence of the Promised One's distinctive *nazm* without questions of order and structure clouding 'the inner truth of issues'; and on the other hand, for his spiritually attuned followers to fix their gaze on the soul of the Bayan rather than its outward form, that they might recognize its new manifestation in the beginning, no less than in the end.

In conclusion, we may say that the reference to *nazm* in the Bab's Bayan, while on a superficial first reading referring simply to the literary arrangement of the Bab's corpus by his followers, is pregnant with rich metaphysical, covenantal, communal and dispensational allusions subordinated to a logic of eschatological expectation. Shoghi Effendi, by identifying the *nazm* of Baha'u'llah in Bayan 3: 16 with the famous passage in the Kitab-i Aqdas 181; with the Administrative Order outlined in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha; with the future Baha'i World Commonwealth anticipated in his own World Order letters, and with the Kingdom of God on earth promised in ancient scriptures, released and intensified the chiliaistic, covenantal and dispensational charge already implicit in the allusive language and complex theology of Bayan 3: 16 and 3: 61; and filtered it through a uniquely Baha'i hermeneutic of fulfilled eschatology to connect the dreams and labours of a modern Baha'i community to the millennial hopes of the Bab's foremost scriptural text.

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Endnotes

1. Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl* 213.
2. Ibid.
3. Shoghi Effendi, 'The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh', *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 146.

4. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 25. See also *ibid.* 324; *Messages to America* 22, 49; *Citadel of Faith* 5; and *Summary Statement – 1947, Special UN Committee on Palestine*.
5. This is reported by former member of the Universal House of Justice David Hofman in 'Shoghi Effendi, Expounder of the Word of God', *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi*, Association for Bahá'í Studies, Ottawa, 1993, 97.
6. Ali Nakhjavani, 'Nigáhí bih Nazm-i-Bad'í-i-Iláhi', *Payám-i-Bahá'í* no. 149 (April 1992), 17–18.
7. Hüseyin Hilmi Işık, *Se'âdet-i Ebediyye (Endless Bliss)*, fascicle 1, section 25, Waqf Ikhlas, Istanbul. 1993. Cf. Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, letter 100 of his *maktubat*.
8. Issa J. Boullata, 'I'jaz', in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia Of Religion*, vol. 7, p. 87.
9. Jamal el'Attar, 'A Rich Concept of Arabic / al-'Arabiyya: al-Jahiz's Original View of "Arabic" in relation to the Holy Qur'an', *Democracy in the Middle East*, BRISMES 1992 Annual Conference, 20–33.
10. Cited in *ibid.*
11. Cf. Kavian Sadeghzade Milani and Leila Rassekh Milani, 'The Proof Based on Establishment (*Dalíl-i-taqrír*) and the Proof Based on Verses (*Hujjiyyat-i-ayát*): An Introduction to Bahá'í-Muslim Apologetics', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 7: 4 (1997).
12. See Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islahí's Concept of Nazm in Tadabbur-i-Qur'an*, Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986. Cf. Asma Barlas, 'Believing Women' in Islam: *Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, ch.1, section 2, University of Texas Press (2002). This discussion is potentially relevant to current scholarly debate on the ordering of the Kitab-i Aqdas, and whether its structure is coherent and intentional or circumstantial and ad hoc, reflecting its progressive revelation and compilation over a period of years. See Nader Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization*, University Press of Maryland, 2000, 213–35, and the references he cites in that chapter to the work of the Mirza Asadullah Fadil Mazindarani, Kamran Ekbal and Anthony Lee.
13. Mulla Sadra, *Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfár al-'Aqliyyah al-'Arba'ah*, as cited in *Qamus-i Iqan* by Ishraq Khávari, vol. 2, p. 1108. I am indebted to the erudition of Dr Khazeh Fananapazir for this valuable reference.
14. Plotinus (c.250 AD), *Enneads*, IV.3.16, p. 273, Stephen MacKenna/B. S. Page, (translators), Faber & Faber, London, 1969. I am grateful to Sherveen Lotfi for this reference.
15. al-Sayyid Hashim al-Bahrani, *Kitab al-burhan fi tafsir al-Qur'an*. 4 vols. Tehran, 1375/1955, vol. 1, third Báb, p. 28. I am indebted to John Vahid Brown for locating and translating this tradition.
16. Cited in B. Todd Lawson, *The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Báb*, Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1987, 16.
17. The following provisional translation was produced jointly by Will McCants and the present author, with help from Kavian Milani and Vahid Brown.
18. Bayan Farsi, 3: 16.
19. Cf. David Hofman, in 'Shoghi Effendi, Expounder of the Word of God', *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi*, Ottawa: Association for Bahá'í Studies, 1993, 97.
20. Nader Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization*, University Press of Maryland, 2000, 294.
21. Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization* 295.
22. *Ibid.* 295–9.
23. On the link between the metaphysics of spiritual authority in the writings of the Bab and the anticipated administrative and social regulation of the Babi community, see Dennis McEoin, 'Hierarchy, Authority and Eschatology in Early Bábí Thought', in Peter Smith (ed.), *In Iran: Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, vol. 3, Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1986, 95–141 (113–22).
24. Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization* 297.
25. Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization* 296.
26. <http://www.bahai-library.org/provisionals/bayan.html>.
27. Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization* 299.
28. Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization* 299.

29. Ibid.
30. This concept is elaborated further in Bayan 3: 12.
31. Alessandro Bausani, 'I Testi Sacri Della Religione Bahá'í', *Saggi Sulla Fede Bahá'í*, Roma: Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 1991, 147–62, (151). Cf. 'Considerazioni Su Alcuni Aspetti Meno Noti Dello Stile Espressivo Bahá'í', *ibid.* 162–73, translated as 'Some Aspects of the Bahá'í Expressive Style', in *World Order*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Winter 1978–79), 36.
32. This brief list does not begin to do justice to the recurrence and symbolical richness of the numbers 4, 19 and 361 in the writings of the Bab.
33. As translated by E. G. Browne, *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne*, Moojan Momen (ed.), Oxford: George Ronald, 1987, 341.
34. Author's provisional translation from the *Kitab al Asma'*, 517.
35. Author's provisional translation from *ibid.* 524. I am deeply grateful yet again to the knowledge and generosity of Dr Khazeh Fananapazir for this and the previous reference. In a further striking link to this passage, the concept of the first unity is given extended attention in Bayan 6: 1 as part of the discussion of *nazm*.
36. Author's own provisional translation.
37. Ibid.
38. As translated by E. G. Browne, *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne* 375.
39. Author's own provisional translation.
40. A very useful term coined by Juan Cole in his seminal monograph *The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings*, Bahá'í Studies monograph 9, Ottawa: Association for Bahá'í Studies, 1982, 1–38.
41. As translated by E. G. Browne, *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne* 390.
42. I am tempted to follow Nicolas in seeing 'letters of unity' in this sentence as denoting the writings of the Bab compiled into nineteen volumes (as per the instructions of the preceding paragraph), the word 'unity' (*vahid*) being numerically equivalent to nineteen. It is also probable however that the term refers to the nineteen Letters of the Living, mentioned later on in the same passage.
43. Bayan 6: 1, author's translation.
44. Bayan 3: 4, author's provisional translation.
45. Author's own provisional translation from the original text.
46. Cf. B. Todd Lawson, *The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid `Ali Muhammad, the Báb*, PhD dissertation, McGill University, 1987.
47. Bahá'u'lláh too speaks about 'the revelation of the Soul of God that pervadeth all His Laws' (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* 160). Shoghi Effendi would eventually write about 'that World Order that must incarnate the soul, execute the laws, and fulfill the purpose of the Faith of God in this day'. (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* xiii); of 'the System designed to incarnate the soul of His Faith' (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 18).