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**The Kitáb-i Aqdas of Mírzá Husain `Alí Núrí, Bahá'u'lláh:
Redating its Beginnings**

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"Various petitions have come before Our throne from the believers, concerning laws from God, the Lord of the seen and the unseen, the Lord of all worlds. We have, in consequence, revealed this Holy Tablet and arrayed it with the mantle of His Law that haply the people may keep the commandments of their Lord. Similar requests had been made of Us over several previous years but We had, in Our wisdom, withheld Our Pen until, in recent days, letters arrived from a number of friends, and We have therefore responded, through the power of truth, with that which shall quicken the hearts of men."¹

In 1992, the centenary of Mírzá Husain `Alí Núrí, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), the founder of the Bahá'í faith, and more than 120 years after it was written during the early period of his banishment to `Akká (1868-1892), the first authorized translation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas, "The Most Holy Book" and "Book of Laws" of his dispensation was published by the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa. Although an annotated summary with an introduction and selected translations by Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh and "Guardian of the Cause", was issued in 1973 by the Universal House of Justice, the supreme administrative body of the Bahá'ís², for many years efforts to produce an acceptable translation had been checked.

In a letter dated 2 May 1947 and written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, the preparation of a translation was categorically prohibited. It was indicated that he, Shoghi Effendi, "does not

1 Bahá'u'lláh: The Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The Most Holy Book, Haifa 1992, paragr. 98, pp.55f. The original Arabic text, together with its Persian supplement (*Risála-i Su'ál wa Jawáb*) and Persian annotations was published by the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í World Center, Haifa 1995.

2 A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i Aqdas of Bahá'u'lláh, Haifa 1973.

want (it) translated at present". Since the Aqdas was not yet promulgated and since it was not yet possible to enforce all its laws and provisions, it was considered "premature to let it fall into the hands of the public"³. The Universal House of Justice confirms this fact and states: "From various letters written on behalf of the Guardian, it is apparent that he did not consider the time had yet arrived for the publication of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, seeing fit only to release certain of its provisions concerning matters of personal status and a number of its more general passages such as those addressed to the kings"⁴. Bahá'u'lláh himself had also dissuaded from translating his book of laws and warned: "Although the intention of the translator was good, such an action in these days will lead to differences and is therefore not permissible"⁵.

The genesis of the Kitáb-i Aqdas is enveloped in obscurity. The exact circumstances under which it came into being are far from being clear. Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í sources give contradictory information regarding the date of its composition. These range from 1870 to 1875. Only few try to support their respective dates with evidence. It is the aim of this paper to demonstrate that the Kitáb-i Aqdas was not written on one and the same occasion, but constitutes a process which started at least in 1868 with the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh in the citadel of `Akká and continued over a period of five years or more and in different locations.

The main copies and editions of the Kitáb-i Aqdas

The first edition of the Kitáb-i Aqdas, more correctly *al-Kitáb al-Aqdas*, since it is written completely in Arabic and was designated as such by Bahá'u'lláh in his Arabic writings, was published during the lifetime of its author as *al-Kitáb al-Aqdas*, together with a selection of "tablets" (*lawh*, pl.*alwáh*), in a volume of 380 pages in Bombay in 1308 AH/1890-1⁶. According to Shoghi Effendi another volume, of which little is known, was

3 Response written on behalf of the Guardian on 2 May 1947 to an individual believer, quoted in a Memorandum of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (UHJ), 25 Apr.1995: "Incoming Letters to the Guardian about The Kitáb-i Aqdas". Copies of this and of other Memoranda quoted in this paper are in the private papers of the author.

4 "Critique of the English Translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", Memorandum of the Research Dept. of the UHJ, 18 Nov. 1993.

5 q.v. Synopsis and Codification, p.6.

6 *Al-Kitáb al-Aqdas wa nabdha min alwáh Bahá'u'lláh*, published at the Dutt Prashad Press belonging to one of the Afnan kinsmen of the Báb. It was lithographed and the copyist was Hájjí Mirzá Husain of Shiraz, cf. Edward Granville Browne: *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion*, Cambridge 1918, repr. 1961, p.195. For other examples of the Arabic designation of the Aqdas cf. one of Bahá'u'lláhs tablets in: `Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Kháwarí (compiler): *Rahiq-i Makhtúm*, vol.2, n.p.(Tehran) 131 A.B.(1974), p.337f., and another tablet addressed to Mír `Abdu'r-Rahím in: *Majmú`a-i az alwáh-i jamál-i aqdas-i abhá ki ba`d az Kitáb-i Aqdas názil shuda*, Langenhain 1980, p.168. During the early period of his ministry Shoghi Effendi, too, preferred the Arabic version and used to write *Kitábu'l-Aqdas*, cf. Rúhiyyih Rabbání: *The Priceless Pearl*, London 1969, p.205; Adib Taherzadeh: *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol.1-4, Oxford 1988, vol.3, p.345.

published in `Ishqábád⁷. Presumably two versions were published in Bombay, the second one being a slender book containing the text of the Aqdas only⁸. Another edition was then published in Bombay during the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son and successor, `Abdu'l-Bahá' (1844-1921), in 1314 A.H./1896 consisting of 263 pages and including a number of other tablets of Bahá'u'lláh; then again of 178 pages during the period of Shoghi Effendi, probably without his consent. The 1896 edition may thus have been the last official issue, since Shoghi Effendi let all copies of another edition of the Aqdas, ordered to be printed by Sulaymán Raf'at in Beirut 1945, be sent together with the printing plates to the World Centre at Haifa⁹.

The Kitáb-i Aqdas was also published in Baghdad in 1931 with a polemical preface by its editor Khadúri Ilyás `Ináyat¹⁰. Bahá'ís of the East refrained, according to the wish of Shoghi Effendi, from publishing new editions. Nevertheless, copies were made and distributed among the believers.

The first summary translation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas was published during Bahá'u'lláh's lifetime by Edward G. Browne in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1889¹¹, and the first full translation into a European language, Russian, was published together with the Arabic text, by Alexandr Tumanskij in 1899¹². The only other translation was then prepared by the two Presbyterian missionaries Earl E. Elder and William M. Miller in 1961¹³. The translation, although complete, is not always correct, especially in regard to the notes¹⁴. It may also prove exigent that the new 1992 authorized translation will also have to be reexamined in regard to the accuracy of some of its terms. This is especially the case regarding the interpretative rendering of "*bilád*" (actually: land/lands, or country/countries)

7 Letter, 9 Feb.1930, q.v. Memorandum of the Research Dept. of the UHJ, 25 Apr.1995, op.cit., p.2.

8 Baharieh Rouháni-Ma`áni: Das Kitáb-i Aqdas. Seine Offenbarung und seine Bekanntmachung, in: Aspekte des Kitáb-i Aqdas, Schriftenreihe der Gesellschaft für Bahá'í Studien, vol.2, Hofheim 1995, pp.31-50, here p.39.

9 Ibid., p.38.

10 *Matba`at al-Adáb*, Baghdad 1931.

11 Erroneously as "The '*Lawh-i-Akdas*' (Most Holy Tablet)", cf. Edward Granville Browne: "The Bábís of Persia,II: Their Literature and Doctrines", in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 21(1889), pp.881-1009, here pp.972-981; reedited by Moojan Momen in: Selections from the Writings of E.G.Browne on the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, Oxford 1987,pp.278-287.

12 *Kitabe Akdes, Zapiski Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk S.Petersburg* (Mémoires de L'Academie Impériale des Sciences de St.Petersbourg) 8th ser., vol.3, No.6, 1899.

13 Al-Kitab al-Aqdas or The Most Holy Book, Royal Asiatic Society Oriental Translation Fund, N.S.38, London 1961, appended later to: William M. Miller : The Baha'i Faith. Its History and Teachings, South Pasadena 1974.

14 Alessandro Bausani: "*Aqdas*", in: Encyclopaedia Iranica, ed. by Ehsan Yarshater, vol.2, New York,London 1985-87; cf.also the review of Miller's "detailed but surely one-sided account" by L.T.Elwell-Sutton in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*,1976, pp.157f.: "This is a polemical work ... an all-out attack on, a merciless tirade against Baha'ism, but treated not ... from the Christian, but from the Azali point of view".

into "world" in the only passage of the Aqdas (Aq.42) in which a reference, not necessarily contained in the original Arabic, was thus introduced to the institution of the "Universal" (*bilád!*) House of Justice and to its being established by Bahá'u'lláh in his Kitáb-i Aqdas. Beside this and a number of other inaccurate translations, the English edition of 1992 generally refrains from giving references concerning the Islamic background and the Koranic origins of major parts of the Aqdas and its termini technici in order to avoid "the impression of a work that was peculiarly Oriental in its outlook, scope and aims"¹⁵.

The genesis of the Kitáb-i Aqdas

The exact circumstances surrounding the genesis of the Kitáb-i Aqdas are not clear. Although hundreds of Bahá'u'lláh's writings are available in his own hand, no copy of the Kitáb-i Aqdas was produced, to our knowledge, in his own handwriting. One early copy seems to be in the hand of `Abdu'l-Bahá'¹⁶ and may be taken to indicate that it was dictated to him by Bahá'u'lláh. Another copy in the hand of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, a former *mujtahid* and one of the noted companions of Bahá'u'lláh esteemed especially for his calligraphy and whose questions on the Kitáb-i Aqdas together with Bahá'u'lláh's answers constitute an appendix to Kitáb-i Aqdas¹⁷, was designated by `Abdu'l-Bahá' as authentic, whereas the printed version - probably the edition published in Bombay in 1308/1890-91 in the handwriting of `Abdu'l-Bahá's half-brother Muhammad `Alí, which was published again in letter-press in 1314/1896-97 - was regarded by him to have been manipulated¹⁸. The copy used by Earl E. Elder for his translation and indicated to have been autographed by `Abdu'l-Bahá' and presented by him to one of the first American Bahá'ís who had visited him in Palestine, is, according to a statement by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, identical with the 1308/1890-91 Bombay edition in the handwriting of Muhammad `Alí¹⁹. Whereas the copies

15 "Critique of the English Translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", Memorandum of the Research Dept. of the UHJ, 18 Nov.1993, p.2. For a discussion of the Koranic and Islamic backgrounds of the Aqdas cf. Kamran Ekbal: *Islamische Grundlagen des Kitáb-i Aqdas, mit neuen Erkenntnissen zu seiner Datierung*, in: *Aspekte des Kitáb-i Aqdas*, op.cit., pp.105-148; Kamran Ekbal: *On the English Translation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas and the Koranic Background of Some Legal and Theological Terms Regarding Women and Homosexuality*, Paper presented at the Arjmand Conference in Chicago, Illinois 1994, to be published in the proceedings of ditto.

16 Rouháni-Ma`ání, p.35. A copy partly in the handwriting of `Abdu'l-Bahá' is held in the Bahá'í World Center Archives in Haifa. The first 24 pages of this manuscript are identified to be in `Abdu'l-Bahá's handwriting, whereas pages 24-57 are in the handwriting of Muhammad Jawád-i Qazwíní, cf. Memorandum of the Research Dept. of the UHJ, 26 Sept. 1995.

17 "Questions and Answers", in: *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Haifa 1992, pp. 105-140. On Mullá Zaynu'l-`Abidín, surnamed Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, cf. Moojan Momen: *The Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh*, in : H.M.Balyuzi: *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, Oxford 1985, pp.261-276, here pp.274-6.; cf. also Taherzadeh: *Revelation*, vol.3, p.278ff.

18 Fádíl Mázandarání (compiler): *Amr wa Khalq*, repr. Langenhain 1985, vol.1, p.11; `Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Kháwarí (compiler): *Má'ida-i Asimání*, vol.2, repr. New Delhi 1984, p.97.

19 cf. Elder's preface to *al-Kitáb al-Aqdas*, p.3, and also Memorandum of the Research Dept. of

of `Abdu'l-Bahá' and Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín were produced in 1880 and may thus be regarded as the earliest copies available, another manuscript in the handwriting of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, probably his latest, dated 31 December 1900 and deviating from the foregoing ones, was used as the basic text for the translated edition of 1992, as it was the copy relied upon by Shoghi Effendi and used by him for his translations!²⁰ Although some differences exist between the various issues of the Kitáb-i Aqdas - one major discrepancy that was noted in the "'Abdu'l-Bahá'" text, is, e.g. that Aq.190, forbidding the use of opium, was not included²¹ - and some were obviously manipulated, no thorough study has yet been made of this matter. It may also prove exigent to investigate the problems arising from using a manuscript prepared eight years after the death of Bahá'u'lláh and neglecting the earlier ones produced during his lifetime, partly even by his own son and successor `Abdu'l-Bahá'.

Besides the *Questions and Answers*, the *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After The Kitáb-i Aqdas*²² are considered to be supplements (*mutammimát*) of the Kitáb-i Aqdas. These supplementary laws, however, are incomplete. Some of them in the pen of Bahá'u'lláh were e.g. among the papers of `Abdu'l-Bahá' that were stolen by his half-brother Mírzá Muhammad `Alí²³ and appear to be still missing. One may thus conclude that the Kitáb-i Aqdas together with its supplements, as they exist today, are not the complete and final versions.

Little is known about the precise circumstances under which the Kitáb-i Aqdas came into being. `Abdu'l-Bahá' e.g. gives no information concerning the copy in his own handwriting as to whether it was dictated to him by Bahá'u'lláh, and if so, when, where and under what conditions. Some evidence may lead, however, to the conclusion, that the Kitáb-i Aqdas was written, respectively dictated by Bahá'u'lláh, not at one point in time, but over a period lasting several years. In one letter written in the hand of his most prominent amanuensis Mírzá Aqá Ján, surnamed "Khádimu'lláh",²⁴ and addressed to *'ain-lám qabl-i Akbar*, i.e. Hájji Mullá `Alí Akbar Shahmírzadí "Hájji Akhúnd",²⁵ Bahá'u'lláh states that during his sojourn in Adrianople (1863-1868) he had revealed a number of laws in Persian in response to the questions of

the UHJ, 26 Sept. 1995.

20 "Further questions about the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", Memorandum of the Research Dept. of the UHJ, 26 Sept. 1995.

21 Ibid.

22 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i Aqdas*, Haifa 1978.

23 *Ishráq-Kháwarí: Má'ida-i Asimání*, vol.2, p.18.

24 Most of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh were dictated to one of his several amanuensis and then, though not always, confirmed and sealed by himself. On Mírzá Aqá Ján, who later became a "covenant-breaker", i.e. someone who according to Bahá'í terminology denies the line of succession of Bahá'u'lláh, and later of `Abdu'l-Bahá', Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, cf. Taherzadeh: *Revelation*, vol.1, pp.24, 40f.

25 On Hájji Akhúnd cf. Moojan Momen: *The Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh*, in: H. Balyuzi: *Eminent Bahá'ís*, op.cit., pp.265f.

some of his adherents, but that he had not released them (*irsál nashud*)²⁶. In this letter dated 15 Jumádí I. 1290A.H./11 July 1873 mention is made that "in these days (*dar in ayyám*) the Kitáb-i Aqdas ... was revealed (*názi*)" - a statement that has been generally regarded in Bahá'í sources as an indication for the dating of the Kitáb-i Aqdas. Nevertheless, and with good reason, both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í sources remain uncertain about the exact date.

In his introduction to the 1961 translation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas, W. Miller states that it is not possible to determine the exact date of its writing. Nevertheless, he suggests that the probable date was 1875²⁷. In his more recent and polemical work, *The Baha'i Faith* (1973), Miller avoids the date issue completely. Hermann Roemer, on the other hand, mentions "the first years of the seventies"²⁸, whereas neither Ignaz Goldziher, nor John Richards²⁹, or, as far as I can see, E.G.Browne, give any dates.

Shoghi Effendi's statement in *God Passes By*, his review of Bahá'í history, that the Kitáb-i Aqdas had been "Revealed soon after Bahá'u'lláh had been transferred to the house of `Udí Khammár (circa 1873)"³⁰ was most probably relying upon the above mentioned tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to Hájjí Akhúnd dated July 1873, which had mentioned the book as having been revealed "in these days". The formulation - "(circa 1873)" - shows that even Shoghi Effendi was not sure of the exact date. In the same manner the Universal House of Justice, in its introduction to the authorized translation of 1992, mentions it being revealed "around 1873"³¹. Adib Taherzadeh alludes that it was revealed "In the early part of 1873"³², Peter Smith writes "about 1873"³³ and Nusratu'lláh Husainí states "around 1873" (*dar hudúd*)³⁴.

The renown Bahá'í scholar `Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Kháwarí, on the other hand, dispenses altogether with referring to the ambiguities surrounding the date and gives "in 1873 and A.H.1287" (*bi-sál-i 1873 wa 1287 A.H.*)³⁵. He seems unaware of the fact that 1287 A.H. began on 3 April 1870 and has nothing to do with 1873! On another occasion he mentions the

26 Mázandarání: *Amr wa Khalq*, vol.1, p.10; cf. also Taherzadeh: *Revelation*, vol.3, p.279.

27 p.20.

28 "*die ersten der Siebziger Jahre*", Hermann Roemer: *Die Babi-Beha'i. Die jüngste mohammedanische Sekte*, Potsdam 1912, p.108.

29 Ignaz Goldziher: *Vorlesungen über den Islam*, Heidelberg 1910; John R. Richards: *The Religion of the Baha'is*, London 1932.

30 Wilmette, Illinois 1944, p.213, cited again in: *Synopsis and Codification*, p.2, and in the new authorized translation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas 1992, p.12, as well as in many other studies by Bahá'í authors. When the barracks where Bahá'u'lláh and his family were incarcerated were needed for housing Ottoman soldiers in late 1870, the prisoners were allowed to leave for better quarters within the city. From Sept.1871 till late 1873 Bahá'u'lláh lived in the house of `Udí (probably either `Udayy or `Awda) Khammár, a well-off Christian merchant of `Akká, cf. *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary*, ed. by Wendi Momen, Oxford 1989, pp.109,128.

31 p.8.

32 *Revelation*, vol.3, p.275.

33 *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, Cambridge 1987, p.80.

34 In: *Payám-i Bahá'í*, No.150 (May 1992), p.29.

35 *Ganj-i Sháyigán*, n.p. (Tehran) 124A.B.(1967), p.134.

Kitáb-i Aqdas as having been revealed "towards the end of 1287" and, taking Aq.86 where an allusion is made to the defeat of Napoleon III at the battle of Sedan (2 September 1870), concludes, this time more correctly, that the book must have been revealed around that time, i.e. 1870³⁶. His statements that the Kitáb-i Aqdas was revealed in the hand of (*bi-khatt-i*) Bahá'u'lláh and that it has been preserved ever since and is available (*maujúd*)³⁷ also seem unreliable.

Information on the concomitant circumstances surrounding the genesis of the Kitáb-i Aqdas is also controversial. Taherzadeh, who had mentioned that it was revealed "In the early part of 1873,"³⁸ observes that this was during the same year of `Abdu'l-Bahá's marriage³⁹. But according to the same author the marriage took place in 1872⁴⁰ !

Some other authors writing from a Bahá'í point of view are more cautious in regard to the dating of the Aqdas. Whereas Hasan Balyuzi e.g. states that it was "in the year 1873 ... that Bahá'u'lláh completed the revelation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas"⁴¹, Fádil-i Mázandarání maintains that the revelation was completed about 1288 A.H./1871-72⁴². The prominent Bahá'í author Muhammad `Alí Faidí refrains altogether from giving any date⁴³.

In spite of such uncertainties concerning the exact date, other Bahá'í sources seem to be gradually letting this fact fall into oblivion. In their interpretative presentations they now state apodictically that it was revealed "in 1873"⁴⁴.

Some authors now admit that the Kitáb-i Aqdas was most probably not written on one and the same occasion, but that its genesis has been a gradual process. Amír Farhang Imání e.g. gives "1871-1873" as the period in which the revelation of the book took place⁴⁵, and Wahid Ra'fatí designates a period running from "1287-1291 A.H.(1870-1874)"⁴⁶. The Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre seems to be unaware of this statement of one of its own members, when it maintains "that the revelation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas did not span a period of years, that the book was revealed no earlier than 1871-72"⁴⁷.

36 *Rahiq-i Makhtúm*, vol.2, p.338; "Aq." refers to the paragraphs of the Kitáb-i Aqdas according to the 1992 English translation.

37 *Muhádirát*, revised ed., Hofheim-Langenhain 1987, p.1078.

38 *Revelation*, vol.3, p.275.

39 *Ibid.*, p.400.

40 *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, Oxford 1992, p.357.

41 Bahá'u'lláh. *King of Glory*, 2nd ed., Oxford 1991, p.351.

42 *Amr wa Khalq*, vol.1, p.9.

43 *Hadrat-i Bahá'u'lláh*, Langenhain 1990, p.231.

44 e.g. David Hofman : Bahá'u'lláh. *The Prince of Peace*, Oxford 1992, p.163,165; *Basic Bahá'í Dictionary*, pp.109,132.

45 *Payám-i Bahá'í* 150 (May 1992), p.25.

46 *ibid.*, p.54.

47 Enclosure, letter from the Association of Bahá'í Studies to the author dated 13 Sept. 1994.

The time span given for the genesis of the Kitáb-i Aqdas in some Bahá'í sources stretches thus from 1870 to 1874, non-Bahá'í sources, e.g. Miller, go even further and give 1875. An examination of the primary sources of Bahá'u'lláh's own writings, supported by those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá', could now produce evidence that the Kitáb-i Aqdas has been the result of a gradual process, the beginnings of which must inevitably be traced back to 1868.

In a letter to Jamál-i Burújirdí, one of his prominent adherents who later became a "covenant-breaker", i.e. one who renounced 'Abdu'l-Bahá's claim to the succession, Bahá'u'lláh mentions that even after the process of revelation had been completed, the book was kept back by him and concealed (*mastúr*) "for a number of years", before he, upon the insistence of some of his followers, released a copy of it⁴⁸. In Aq.98, quoted at the beginning of this paper, it is also mentioned that the book had been revealed upon the request of the believers and that Bahá'u'lláh had withheld his pen (*amsakná al-qalam*) for several years. Jamál-i Burújirdí, to whom the aforementioned letter was addressed, was then permitted to make a copy and deliver it to the Bahá'ís of Persia⁴⁹. The Aqdas was eventually sent around 1290 A.H/1873-4 to Persia⁵⁰.

Taking for granted that the Book of Aqdas had been kept back "for a number of years" before Bahá'u'lláh allowed it to be released for distribution and that it had been sent to Persia about 1873-74, a problem would apparently arise from maintaining 1873 as the date of its genesis. If it had originated in or around 1873 and had been sent to Persia in or about the same period, it could obviously not have been kept back simultaneously "for a number of years"!

In *Ishráqát*, a tablet written by Bahá'u'lláh after the Kitáb-i Aqdas in 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh refers himself to the date in which a particular verse of the Aqdas had been revealed. There he quotes Aq. 48 regarding the obligation to educate children and is very precise in giving the exact date of its emergence: "Behold that which the Will of God hath revealed upon Our arrival in the Prison City (*sijn*) and recorded in the Most Holy Book (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*)"⁵¹. The original Persian of this verse is still more precise: "*dar awwal-i wurúd-i sijn*"⁵² which literally means: "At the (very) first (moment) of entering the prison" must be generally taken to imply the very earliest period after arrival in the citadel of 'Akká on 31 August 1868⁵³.

48 Cited in: Mázandarání: *Amr wa Khalq*, vol. 1, p.10; cf. also Taherzadeh: Revelation, vol.2, p.354 and note no.126 in the 1992 edition of the Kitáb-i Aqdas, pp.219f.

49 Tablet to Hájjí Akhúnd, dated 15 Jumádí I 1290/11 July 1873, in: Mázandarání: *Amr wa Khalq*, vol.1, pp.10f and discussed above.

50 Mázandarání: *Amr wa Khalq*, op.cit.; cf. also the conclusion of Mázandarání, the editor of this compilation, in: *ibid.*, p.11.

51 Seventh *Ishráq*, in: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, op.cit., p.128; cf also Mázandarání: *Amr wa Khalq*, vol.1, p. 9.

52 *Majmú'a*, op.cit., p. 75.

53 Shoghi Effendi: God Passes By, p.215; Taherzadeh: Revelation, vol.3, p. 11f; Balyuzi:

Establishing the fact that at least parts of the Aqdas were already written in August/September 1868 resolves the aforementioned irregularity arising from dating it to 1873 and makes it compatible to it being kept back "for a number of years" by Bahá'u'lláh before releasing it in 1290/1873-74 for the general use of the believers. A statement by `Abdu'l-Bahá' that provisions regarding the covenant (*`ahd wa mítháq*) had been established in the Kitáb-i Aqdas "twenty-five years before the Ascension" of Bahá'u'lláh⁵⁴, i.e. about 1867-68, is another confirmation of the fact that the beginnings of the Aqdas must inevitably be traced back to Bahá'u'lláh's confinement in the citadel of `Akká, and, taken literally, could even allude to a still earlier period, possibly to that in Adrianople, where some verses regarding the laws and ordinances had been produced in Persian upon the insistence of some of his followers. Redating the initial process of the revelation back to 1868 remains in any case congruent to the assumption, that it may have been "completed"⁵⁵ in the year 1873 in the house of `Udí Khammár.

Regarding the statements by Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá' quoted above that certain provisions of the Kitáb-i Aqdas were revealed, respectively, "at the beginning of Our arrival in the prison city", and "twenty-five years ago", the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre suggests that "these might quite conceivably be accounted for on the basis that they constitute approximate statements, and that their intention is not to establish precise dates"⁵⁶!

The above mentioned reference by `Abdu'l-Bahá', in whose hand the original copy of the Aqdas probably came into being, is not the only one which leads us back to 1868. In another letter sent by him to Hájjí Mullá Husain of Lár dated 2 Jumádí I 1316 A.H./18 September 1898, which was read aloud to a circle of believers in Cairo and of which a copy was forwarded to E.G. Browne, `Abdu'l-Bahá' asks: "Was not the Kitáb-i Aqdas revealed thirty years ago?"⁵⁷. Subtracting 30 years from 1898 again one obtains 1868.

Evidence concerning a more reliable dating of the Kitáb-i Aqdas than 1873 and in full congruence with `Abdu'l-Bahá's information is made also available by Bahá'u'lláh himself. References contained in his writings give testimony to the fact that the composition of the Aqdas had already started during the early period of his incarceration in the citadel of `Akká. Beside the passage in *Ishráqát* stating that at least one part of the Kitáb-i Aqdas had been revealed right after entering the prison in `Akká, many more passages in his writings seem very much to confirm the same and may hardly be regarded merely to "constitute approximate statements", as the Research Department suggests.

Bahá'u'lláh. King of Glory, p.270f.

54 Cited in Mázandarání: *Amr wa Khalq*, vol.1, p.9.

55 Balyuzi: Bahá'u'lláh. King of Glory, p.351.

56 Enclosure to letter from the Association of Bahá'í Studies, dated 13 Sept. 1994.

57 Browne: Materials, p.163.

In *Lawh-i Dunyá* (Tablet of the World), another of his tablets written after the Kitáb-i Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh states: "Whilst in the Prison of `Akká, We revealed in the Crimson Book (*dar sahífa-i hamrá'* - i.e. Kitáb-i Aqdas - *dar sijni-i `Akká názil shud*) that which is conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world"⁵⁸. It is obvious that Bahá'u'lláh in mentioning "the Prison of `Akká" (*sijn-i `Akká*) is referring here to the "citadel" and not to the "city" of `Akká in general, which, upon his arrival, he had designated as the "Most Great Prison" (*as-sijn al-a`zam*)⁵⁹, and in the boundaries of which he was staying during the composition of *Lawh-i Dunyá*. It may thus become evident that at least considerable parts of the Kitáb-i Aqdas had already been composed before leaving the citadel in late 1870 and particularly in the period prior to entering the house of `Udí Khammár⁶⁰.

In a similar manner Bahá'u'lláh states on another occasion: "While in prison (*sijn*) We have revealed a Book which We have entitled 'The Most Holy Book' (*al-Kitáb al-Aqdas*)"⁶¹, where *sijn* also designates very clearly the citadel and not the city of `Akká.

The fact that Bahá'u'lláh seems to distinguish between the two terms *sijn* for "citadel" and *sijn-i a`zam* for the "city of `Akká", may also be deduced from another excerpt of his writings: "O friend! The Best-Beloved (*mahbúb* - i.e. Bahá'u'lláh -) is calling thee from His Most Great Prison (*min sijnihi al-a`zam*) and exhorteth thee to observe that which Mine exalted Pen hath revealed in My Most Holy Book (*Kitábí al-Aqdas*)"⁶².

The excerpts of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets, published as part of his *Tablets Revealed after the Kitáb-i Aqdas*, provide no details as to their dates, addressees and contexts. Should a researcher gain access to such information sometime in the future, this could help determine more precisely the history of the Bahá'í faith in general, but also of the Kitáb-i Aqdas in particular. One such excerpt contains another significant reference for dating the Aqdas: "A year ago the Most Holy Book (*Kitáb-i Aqdas*) was sent down from the heaven of the bounty of the Lord of Names"⁶³. The epistle, which is published without a date, was addressed to Hájjí `Alí Langarúdí and dated Rabí'u'l-Awwal 1292/April-May 1875. It may be taken to indicate that by then the Kitáb-i Aqdas, or at least its major parts, had been completed.

58 Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, op.cit.,p.89; *Majmú`a*, op.cit., p.50.

59 Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, p.185; Taherzadeh: *Revelation*, vol.3, p.1; *Basic Bahá'í Dictionary*, p.13.

60 That the "Crimson Book" mentioned in this passage is an indication to Kitáb-i Aqdas may be gathered from the following passages, but also from the index to the German edition of the *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i Aqdas* (*Botschaften aus `Akká offenbart nach dem Kitáb-i Aqdas*, Langenhain 1982, p.332), which lists this as well as other passages making mention of the "Crimson Book" under the index-heading "Kitáb-i Aqdas".

61 Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p.262; *Majmú`a*, p.168.

62 Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh,p.264; *Majmú`a*, p.171.

63 Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p.268; *Majmú`a*, p.174.

Concluding remarks

Important aspects of the history of the Bábí and Bahá'í religions are still engulfed in obscurity. In the future, research will have to deal with many sources and documents which hopefully will become accessible. Apart from the vast number of Bahá'u'lláh's own writings, this would also have to include e.g. the original text of Nabil's Narrative, the main and most important source of Bahá'í historiography, of which only the first part is available as translated by Shoghi Effendi in 1932⁶⁴. The Dawn Breakers, as this "translation" was entitled, is based on the original of Nabil, "but transfigured through the brilliant handling it received"⁶⁵, as Shoghi Effendi's wife puts it. The original is still kept out of reach for researchers, allegedly because of its poor condition⁶⁶! Copies were never made available. Particularly its second part could then provide more information on the genesis of the Kitáb-i Aqdas.

Accessibility to the sources will not only increase the attractiveness of Bábí and Bahá'í topics for the impartial researcher, but will certainly shed more light on many aspects and details of the history and the doctrines of the twin religions, last but not least, with regard to the genesis and history of the "Motherbook" of the Bahá'í Faith and its contents.

It was the intention of this paper to demonstrate that, according to Bahá'u'lláh's own testimony as well as to that given by `Abdu'l-Bahá' and in contrast to the general representation of Bahá'í historiography, the emergence of the Kitáb-i Aqdas was a process continuing for several years and most probably at different locations and that this process had already started and was actually taking place immediately after Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in `Akká at the end of August/beginning of September 1868.

64 The Dawn Breakers. Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation, translated from the original Persian by Shoghi Effendi, repr. London 1975.

65 Rabbani: The Priceless Pearl, op.cit., p.217.

66 Concerning the original text of Nabil's Narrative the UHJ wrote: "It has not yet been possible for the Bahá'í World Center Archives to prepare the original copy of Nabil's Narrative so as to make it accessible Clearly it is a very precious document, and the most important consideration is its preservation." "Concerning the English Translation of the Kitáb-i Aqdas", Memorandum of the Research Dept. of the UHJ, 18 Nov. 1993. In regard to an inquiry, why no microfilm copies were ever produced in order to ensure the preservation of the document, no response was made. It may be interesting to note that `Abdu'l-Bahá' in his biographical account of Nabil-i Zarandí praises him for his abilities as a poet, but makes no mention of his having ever prepared a "history" of the Bábí and Bahá'í religions, cf. `Abdu'l-Bahá': *Tadhkiratu'l-Wafá' fi Tarjumat Hayát Qudamá' al-Ahibbá'*, Haifa 1343/1924, pp.57-63.