

Tablet to Hardegg (Lawḥ-i-Hirtík)

A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to the Templar Leader Georg David Hardegg¹
Introduced and translated by Stephen Lambden

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Mírzá Ḥusayn ‘Alí Núrí, entitled Bahá'u'lláh (the “Splendor of God”, 1817–1892), Who founded the Bahá'í Faith in the middle of the 19th century, addressed a number of scriptural tablets (*alwáh*) to Christians during the latest, West Galilean (Acre = Ar. ‘Akká’) period of His religious ministry (CE 1868–1892). Most notably His Lawḥ-i-Páp (Tablet to Pope Pius IX, c. 1869), and Lawḥ-i-Aqdas (“Most Holy Tablet”, late 1870s?) that was most probably addressed to (“Dr”) Fáris Afandí who had been converted to the Bahá'í religion by Mullá Muḥammad Nabil-i-Zarandí (1831–1892) in Alexandria (in 1868).

It is now clear that the letter of Bahá'u'lláh commonly referred to as the Lawḥ-i-Hirtík was also addressed to a Christian named Georg David Hardegg (= Hirtík) (1812–1879). During the time of Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment in ‘Akká’, Hardegg was the leader of the *Tempelgesellschaft* (Association of Templars [alternatively, ‘Templars’]) community in Haifa.

On first coming to know something of the nature of the Lawḥ-i-Hirtík through the note on it in ‘Abd al-Ḥamid Ishráq Khávári’s *Ganj-i-sháygán*,² (and since it had not been published), I wrote to the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa requesting a copy for detailed study. On receipt of a typed copy (cf. text below) I began to try to work out what the consonants H-R-T-K might signify, as they were evidently neither indicative of an Arabic nor a Persian construction. Ignoring the pointing and guessing that it might indicate the name of the recipient of the letter, the name Hardegg eventually sprang to mind. I then consulted Moojan Momen’s *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions* and was delighted to find that what was obviously a very garbled translation of the Lawḥ-i-Hirtík had been forwarded by the missionary Rev. John Zeller (c. 1830–1902) to the English Church Missionary Society and identified as a letter of Bahá'u'lláh to Hardegg.³ Furthermore, as Zeller’s letter forwarding Bahá'u'lláh’s Lawḥ-i-Hirtík was dated July 8 1872, it may be inferred that the Lawḥ-i-Hirtík was written between late 1868 (when both Bahá'u'lláh and Hardegg arrived in ‘Akká’ and Haifa respectively) and 8th July 1872. It was thus most probably between late 1871⁴ and early 1872 (= AH 1288–1289) that Bahá'u'lláh addressed this Tablet to the Templar leader.

Hardegg and the Tempelgesellschaft

The Tempelgesellschaft was founded by the German theologian and polemicist Christoph Hoffmann (b. Leonberg 1815, d. Jerusalem 1885) whose religious orientation was rooted in German Pietism of a highly chiliastic nature. Influenced by the belief that God’s judgement and the parousia (‘presence’, return) of Christ were at hand, and critical of the “conventional Christianity” of his day, he came, whilst residing in Ludwigsberg in the early 1850’s, to advocate the creation of the “people of God” (Ger. *das Volk Gottes*). He was apparently influenced either by events of the Crimean War (1853–6) or the belief that the Ottoman Empire was crumbling, in such a way that he conceived the idea that he and his people might become heirs to the biblical promises. He elaborated a theory centering upon the [Jerusalem] Temple and its restoration and dreamed of a mass emigration to Palestine.

In 1854 such visionary ideas led Hoffmann to establish the *Gesellschaft für Sammlung des Volkes Gottes* in Jerusalem (The Association for the Assembling of God’s People in Jerusalem). In this he was aided by his associate Georg David Hardegg a native and merchant of Ludwigsberg, who had turned to mysticism after being imprisoned for revolutionary activities. By the mid-1850s Hoffmann and Hardegg had managed to enlist around 10,000 members. An attempt was made via the Frankfurt Assembly to petition Sulṭán ‘Abd al-Majíd (Ottoman Sultan from 1839–1861) for permission to settle in Palestine. This petition failed and the members of the association had to content themselves with the establishment of a settlement near Marbach (1856). Four of the leaders of the movement, including Hoffmann and Hardegg, visited Palestine in 1858. To some extent they came to realize the largely impractical nature of their

¹ This article and the provisional translation of the Lawḥ-i-Hirtík was first published in the *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* vol. 2/1 (June 1983), 32–63 (© Hurqalya Publications). It has been very slightly revised since that time. This printing is without the detailed commentary, which can be found in revised and expanded form on the author’s (forthcoming) personal website, which contains an electronic reprint of the whole *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* (1982). Published in *Lights of Irfan*, bk. 4, pp. 97–111. Wilmette, IL: Irfan Colloquia, 2003.

² Refer, *Ganj*, 172–3. Here Ishráq Khávári mistakenly identifies the followers of the recipient of the Lawḥ-i-Hirtík with the Millerites, the followers of William Miller (CE 1782–1849).

³ Refer Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, 216–8.

⁴ In 1871 Hardegg’s son Ernst became US consular agent in Jaffa. There he remained in office until 1909 when he resigned at the age of 70 (Kark, 1994:114).

eschatologically oriented ambitions. Then, in 1859, the leaders of “God’s people” were formally expelled from the National Evangelical Church. Consequently, in 1861, they set up their own distinctive religious body at Kirschenhardhof, the *Deutsche Tempel* (The German Temple). Hoffmann acted as spiritual leader and Hardegg as provisional secular leader, with an advisory council of 12 elders.

By 1867, numbers had dwindled to just 3,000, including women and children. Despite this, in 1868 a group of Templar families made an abortive attempt to settle in the Nahalal area.⁵ Though by this time a bitter antagonism had come to exist between Hoffmann and Hardegg, it was decided to emigrate to Palestine and attempt to gain support for the movement from there. Thus, both Hoffmann and Hardegg arrived at Haifa on the 30th of October 1868. They began establishing, amidst considerable local opposition and difficulty, an initially agricultural settlement. A few dozen Templar families from Württemberg (S. Germany) settled at the foot of the western cape of Mt. Carmel. According to Katz they were “joined by kindred families of German origin from southern Russia, and by some who had emigrated to America and become citizens, mainly from New York state” (Katz 1994:263).

In 1869 Hoffmann migrated to Jaffa where he came to establish a school and a hospital. By 1874 the breach between Hoffmann and Hardegg was such that the latter founded his own Temple Unity having gained the support of about one third of the perhaps 200 (?) members of the Haifa community. These supporters of Hardegg subsequently returned to the (German) Evangelistic Church, though the Haifa Templers under new leadership continued to prosper. They contributed notably to the modernization and improvement of local Haifa conditions. Despite sometimes marked local opposition from Muslims and Christian Arabs, the number of Haifa Templers rose from about 300 in the early 1880s to around 750 at the time of the outbreak of the First World War (1914).⁶

Among the letters contained in J. M. Emerson’s travelogue entitled *New York to the Orient* (1886) is one that includes details about local circumstances in Haifa and Acre including the position of the “German Colony” (= Templars):

One of the most noteworthy and interesting features of Haifa is the settlement here of a group of Germans, known as the German Colony. They came here some twenty-five years ago, being prompted to emigrate thither by a religious sentiment. There are three distinct colonies of them in Palestine—at Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa—consisting of about one thousand members. The colony here [at Haifa] numbers some three hundred persons, and they are in many respects a remarkable people. The appearance of the part of the city they occupy is in striking contrast with the main town in that it is regularly laid out, and is clean and orderly. These colonists are the only people who have ever come to live in Palestine who are self-supporting. (Emmerson 1887:113).⁷

Hardegg and the Bahá’í religion

As previously indicated, Bahá’u’lláh, along with over 60 followers and members of His family, arrived as prisoners at ‘Akká’ on August 31 1868 some 40 days before Hoffmann and Hardegg arrived at Haifa to found their colony. Though at first subject to strict confinement within the barracks as decreed by Sulṭán ‘Abd al-‘Azíz, He had, by late 1871, managed to establish Himself in the house of ‘Údí Khammár in the heart of the Christian quarter of ‘Akká’. From there, Bahá’u’lláh succeeded in gaining the devotion of a number of local notables, including Shaykh Maḥmúd ‘Arábi (d. late 1890s, later Mufti of ‘Akká’).

Hardegg came into contact with the Bahá’ís in Haifa and ‘Akká’ before Bahá’u’lláh’s move to the House of ‘Údí Khammár. Jakob Schumacher (1825–1891; American consular agent for Haifa and Acre for almost twenty years), a naturalized American citizen of German origin (Katz, 1994:120) and Templer who became head of the Haifa colony after Hardegg, wrote the following (partially cited) letter published in the official Templer publication *Süddeutsche Warte* of June 29 1871:

I can give notice of yet another spiritual phenomenon which can strengthen our belief. This concerns 70 Persians, who have been banished to ‘Akká’ on account of their beliefs. Mr. Hardegg has already spent considerable time and effort trying to discover the actual basis of their belief, and had dealings with them through an interpreter just yesterday. (cited Momen, *op. cit.*, 236).

Shortly after the publication of Schumacher’s note on the Bahá’ís, an article by Hardegg himself, dated June 15 1871, was published in the same organ of the Templers for 20 July 1871. This article provides some details of Hardegg’s efforts to understand Bahá’í doctrine and history. Hardegg also refers to an interview he had in ‘Akká’ on 2 June 1871 with Bahá’u’lláh’s eldest son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), having failed to gain an interview with Bahá’u’lláh himself. He also notes his contacts with the Bahá’ís of Haifa and records his impression that “these people, despite all the obscurity of their knowledge, were seeking the truth” (cited, Momen, *ibid*, 237). Hardegg most likely made other trips to ‘Akká’ in order to investigate Bahá’í beliefs and attempt to interest or convert the Bahá’ís to Christianity.

The missionary James J. Huber (1826–1893), who resided at Nazareth during the 1870s, has recorded in a letter dated

⁵ 10 km west of Nazareth.

⁶ On the Tempelgesellschaft, refer to the entries in the bibliography below and Whitley, ‘Friends of the Temple’, in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (6:141–2; Kolb, ‘Friends of the Temple’; Ussishkin, ‘Templers (Tempelgesellschaft)’, *Enc. Judaica* 15:994–996 (this article is especially useful for details on 20th century Templer history); Carmel, *Die Siedlungen*; idem, ‘The German Settlers in Palestine ...’, 442–465; cf. also Oliphant, *Haifa or Life in Modern Palestine*, 17ff; Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá’í religions*, 215f, 503, 506f, 521. For some useful information on contacts between Bahá’ís and Templers see Ruhe, *Door of Hope*, Index.

⁷ A recent booklet put out by the Haifa Tourist Board entitled, ‘Bahá’í Shrine and Gardens on Mount Carmel, Haifa-Israel’ contains two pages that illustrate the Haifa project, “the restoration and development of the main axis of the German Templar Colony”. This small booklet contains some excellent photographs and details about the 19th century Templer building project and its anticipated restoration.

November 28 1872 that Hardegg had invited him to accompany him on a visit to the ‘Akká’ Bahá’ís. They travelled together to ‘Akká’ in October 1872 having been promised an interview with Bahá’u’lláh by some of the Bahá’ís. Perhaps as a result of Bahá’u’lláh’s withdrawal in the house of ‘Údí Khammár following Bahá’i-Azali tensions and the misdeeds of certain Bahá’ís which culminated in the murder of several Azalis.⁸

Hardegg’s desire to gain an interview with Bahá’u’lláh has been referred to by Bahá’u’lláh Himself in a scriptural Tablet (*Lawḥ*) which was perhaps written around 1875 and addressed to Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar ‘Alí Iṣfahání (d. Haifa 1920) (cf. *Ganj*, 172–3). In it Bahá’u’lláh stated that all the [Holy] Books “*make mention of the appearance of the Promised One in the Holy Land*”. He alludes to the Templers who came from afar to settle in the regions of the blessed Holy Land. Calling to mind the well-known German Templar inscription *Der Herr ist nahe* [1871],” meaning, “God is nigh” (cf. Ruhe, *op. cit.*, 193n) the Templers are represented as having said *zuhúr nazdik ast*, “The theophany [manifestation] is nigh and we have come that we might attain unto it (his presence).” Nevertheless, Bahá’u’lláh adds, they remain in great heedlessness. None of the Templers had become Bahá’ís. Reference is then made to Hardegg and to the writing or revelation of the *Lawḥ-i-Hirtík*:

*A few years ago their leader [Hardegg] desired to attain [My] presence but this request did not find acceptance in the most holy court.⁹ Nonetheless, a sublime and Most-Holy scriptural Tablet (Lawḥ-i-amna‘-i-aqdas) was specifically sent down for him. In that Tablet was established that which enableth every righteous one to attain salvation and every wayfarer to reach the goal. Yet the confirmation of the utterance, “Let none touch it save those who are pure” was manifest for they did not attain even a drop of the ocean of its significances. (cited *Ganj*, 172–3)*

Though Bahá’u’lláh represents the 19th century Templers as a people who failed to understand or respond to his message, the Bahá’ís seem to have had cordial relations with them. Bahá’u’lláh Himself, on several occasions, perhaps had personal contact with them in the course of His several trips to Haifa during the 1880s and early 1890s.

⁸ The Azalis are the followers of Bahá’u’lláh’s younger half-brother Mírzá Yahyá (c. 1830–1914) who was entitled Şubḥ-i-Azal (The Morn of Eternity) and had been exiled to Cyprus from Turkey in 1868.

⁹ The interview with Bahá’u’lláh did not materialise. Instead Hardegg and Huber conversed with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ (cf. Momen, *op. cit.*, 218).

The Tablet to Hardegg The Lawḥ-i-Hirtík*

[I]

In the name of God, the Most Holy.

[1]

Thy sealed letter arrived before the Wronged One.

[2]

There from did We catch a fragrance of thy sincerity towards God,
the Protector, the Self-Subsisting.

[3]

We entreat God that He might inform thee of that which is
concealed in an inscribed Tablet;

[4]

might enable thee to hearken

unto the cooing of the Dove upon the branches

[5]

and the murmuring of the Water of Life
which hath flowed with Wisdom and Explanation
from the spring of the Will of the King of Existence.

[II]

[1]

O beloved one! It is necessary that thine eminence contemplate the Word of God,
the grandeur and sweetness of which sufficeth all the worlds.

[2]

The first of those who believed in the Spirit [Jesus]
was enraptured by the Word of his Lord
and through it turned and believed, detached from whatsoever
the people possess.

[3]

Such action is incumbent upon the
fishes of the Most Great Ocean.

[III]

[1]

O Thou informed mystic knower
and insightful religious leader!

[2]

Know thou that base passion hath hindered most mortals
from turning their faces unto God, the King of Names.

* This is a provisional translation for presentation and discussion at 'Irfān Colloquia. It is not to be reproduced or further distributed in any form or medium.

[3]

Such, however, as gaze with the eye of insight,
shall bear witness and seeing, exclaim,
'Praise be unto my Lord, the Most Exalted.'

[4]

Land and sea hath rejoiced at the Beneficence of God.

[5]

The nations were given the promise regarding
the appearance of the Healer of Infirmities.
He, assuredly, is the expected Builder of the Temple.

[6]

Blessed be such as are possessed of mystic knowledge.

[7]

When the appointed time came, Carmel cried out,
trembling as if shaken by the breezes of the Lord,
'Blessed be such as hearken!'

[8]

Should anyone incline with the ear of the inner nature,
the same would assuredly hear the cry from the Rock.

[9]

It, verily, proclaimeth in a most elevated voice
and beareth witness unto the Eternal God.

[10]

Blessed be such as catch a fragrance of the Utterance
and turn unto the Kingdom,
detached from the contingent world.

[11]

When that which is mentioned in the Holy Books
hath come to pass,
thou shalt see the people beholding but not understanding.

[IV]

[1]

O beloved one! Behold the mystery of reversal
on account of the symbol of the Ruler
for He hath made their exalted ones
their lowly ones and their lowly ones their exalted ones.

[2]

And call thou to mind the fact that when Jesus came
He was rejected by the divines, the learned and the educated.

[3]

He who was a mere fisherman [Peter],
on the other hand, entered the Kingdom.

[4]

This is the mystery of what was mentioned
in the heart of the words
by means of intimations and allusions.

[V]

[1]

Great, great is the Cause!
Peter the Apostle,
in spite of his excellence and the eminence of his station,
held back his tongue when asked about it.

[2]

Shouldst thou consider sincerely
what hath heretofore come to pass,
for the sake of the Lord alone,
thou wilt assuredly see the Light shining before thine eyes.

[3]

The Truth is too manifest to be wrapped up in veils,
the Path too open to be enveloped in darkness
and the Certainty too evident to be obscured by doubts.

[4]

Those who have been held back are the ones who have
followed their lusts and are today slumbering, sleeping.

[5]

They shall wake up and run around but find no place to hide.

[6]

Blessed be such as catch the fragrance of Truth,
then awaken, that they might attain whatsoever the sincere
servants attained.

[VI]

[1]

Know thou that We saw the exterior letter *ṣád*
in the word “Peace” (Ar. *ṣulḥ*).

[2]

It, verily, was adorned with
the ornament of the upright letter “A” (*alif*)
and is what hath assuredly been mentioned
in an Outspread Tablet.

[3]

And upon the manifestation of the lights of
that Divine Word,
the Gate of Heaven was opened
and the Kingdom of Names appeared.

[4]

And this matter was completed through the letter “H” (*há*)
after which it was united to the levelled letter “A” (*alif*)
which was adorned with the Point (of the letter “B,” *bá*)
from which the Treasured Name, the Hidden Mystery
and the Guarded Symbol (*Bahá’*) emerged.

[5]

It, verily, is the Point
from which existence hath appeared

and unto which it hath returned.

[VII]

[1]

Then We saw the Word which uttered a Word
which every community found to be according to its own
tongue and language.

[2]

When that Word was uttered,
a Sun shone forth from the Horizon of its Announcement,
the Lights of which eclipsed the sun of the heavens.

[3]

It said,
'The head of the seventy
hath been adorned
with the crown of the forty
and been united with
the seven before the ten.'

[4]

Then it lamented and it said,
'What is this that I see?
The house doth not recognize its master
neither doth the son pay heed unto his father;
nor likewise is the hopeful seeker cognizant of his
place of refuge and haven.'

[VIII]

[1]

O thou who soarest in
the atmosphere of mystic knowledge!

[2]

Whoso knoweth the one in whose Logos-Person
what floweth yet exhibiteth solidity;

[3]

what soareth yet is at rest;

[4]

what is manifest yet concealed

[5]

and what is resplendent yet veiled,

[6]

shall be seized by the attraction of the divine Effulgences
to such an extent that he will fly on the wings of yearning
in the atmosphere of nearness, holiness and reunion.

[IX]

[1]

With regard to that which thine eminence hath mentioned

concerning the darkness.

[2]

We bear witness that it hath encompassed the creatures.

[3]

Blessed be he who hath been illumined by the Light
which shineth forth from
the horizon of the Mercy of his Lord, the Most Holy.

[4]

The darkness is the vain imaginings by virtue of which
the people were prevented from turning towards the Kingdom
when the King of the Divine Realm
appeared with the Cause of God.

[X]

[1]

As for what thou hast mentioned,
that a certain person hath supposed
that there are no differences between Us
with regard to the Spirit [Jesus].

[2]

This is indeed the truth inasmuch as the Spirit [Jesus]
is sanctified beyond being overwhelmed by differences
or encompassed by symbolic expressions.

[3]

He, verily, is the Light of Oneness among mankind
and the sign of the Ancient of Days among the peoples.

[4]

He who turneth unto Him [Jesus]
hath turned unto He [God]
who sent Him [Jesus]
and he who rejecteth Him hath
rejected He who caused Him
to be made manifest and to speak forth.

[5]

He hath ever been what He was
and will ever remain the same as what He was;
only the Effulgence of His theophany in the Mirrors
varies on account of Their different forms and colors.

[XI]

[1]

O beloved one!

Should a hint of the secret which was veiled in mystery be disclosed,
the hearts of those who cling unto what they possess
and cast away what is with God would be thrown into confusion.

[2]

If thine eminence would ponder upon what We have set forth for thee
and rise up according to what hath been mentioned with the greatest steadfastness,

there would, verily, be manifest from thee what was previously made manifest.

[XII]

[1]

O beloved one!

This Bird is ensnared betwixt
the talons of oppression and hypocrisy,
and seest no nest wherein He might dwell
nor any retreat unto which he might wing his way.

[2]

In such a state doth He summon mankind unto everlasting life.

[3]

Blessed be the attentive ear!
We ask God that He might bring us together in the same place
and might assist us in what He loveth
and is well-pleasing unto Him.

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