

## Textual Context and Literary Criticism: A Case Study based on a Letter from Shoghi Effendi<sup>1</sup>

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Written replies by Shoghi Effendi, along with those written on his behalf, include seminal statements of doctrine on a wide range of topics, statements which are considered binding for the Bahá'í community. It is currently the case that the vast majority of such letters are generally accessible only in the form of text compilations (in particular, *Lights of Guidance*<sup>2</sup> and *Directives from the Guardian*<sup>3</sup>), which do not include the enquiries to which these letters constitute the responses. In addition, the letters are generally presented not in their entirety, but only in the form of selected extracts, these moreover sub-divided into the smallest possible fragments and re-ordered thematically. The fact that the ensuing well-nigh complete dissociation of such fragments from their original textual contexts represents an exorbitant loss of information, a loss which can substantially influence the interpretation of individual text passages, will be demonstrated in detail on the basis of a particularly severe example which came to the fore during the present writer's research activities.

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The text passage with which this presentation is primarily concerned is a single sentence from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi<sup>4</sup> on 15 May 1940:

As to which spot should be regarded as the standard, this is a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to decide.<sup>5</sup>

It is not my intention here to explore the properties or the practical application of the “spot [that] should be regarded as the standard” as such – I have written about that extensively elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> My sole purpose is to explore whether this text passage represents an unambiguous confirmation of the indispensability of such a spot for the determination of the day of Naw-Rúz as stipulated by Bahá'u'lláh, as is generally assumed, or whether it could also be understood in some other way. I have occupied myself intensively with this question on two occasions separated by a gap of several years.

It must also be clarified from the very beginning that this presentation will not concern itself with the veracity, i.e. the objective accuracy, of any individual interpretation. That is a judgement to which I am in any event not entitled. My interest lies solely in the bandwidth of potential meaning – how this statement *might possibly* be understood. This approach is known as *literary criticism* (“literary” in the broad sense of “anything written”). In this presentation, this term implies the systematic analysis of the written word as a preliminary stage of the process of exegesis<sup>7</sup> and – to achieve clarity from the very start – has nothing to do with criticism in the popular sense of complaint or faultfinding. As a theological-scientific activity this discipline is known in the West primarily through Judeo-Christian scholarship (Talmudic commentary and Bible criticism), but there is nothing preventing Bahá'í scholarship from profiting from the rich experience of other traditions for the study of its own writings – in the present case, Shoghi Effendi's correspondence. This suggestion is not new,<sup>8</sup> but the discussion in Bahá'í academic literature has until now more or less concentrated on the methodology of – and problems associated with – historical criticism of the writings of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>9</sup>

While endeavouring in principle to maintain neutrality with respect to the question of veracity, I will most certainly address the question of the degree to which one or another reading of a text passage is *appropriate* to the available textual context in each individual circumstance. Such reflection constitutes an inalienable aspect of literary criticism; without it, analysis would be devoid of any appeal to reality, and any exegesis which was based on such an analysis would be purely

arbitrary. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that the assessment of the appropriateness of a given reading has nothing to do directly with the question of its truth value, merely with its hermeneutic feasibility within a given textual context.

This assessment necessarily involves critically examining the reading under consideration for anomalies which it may imply – and naming them by name. This candid use of language may irritate some readers not accustomed to the methodology of literary criticism, who could easily misinterpret this approach as criticism of the guidance offered by the Guardian. It is therefore important to stress that it is expressly *not* the purpose of analysis to make inferences regarding the meaning intended by its author, but rather to assess the potential signification projected onto a text by the *reader*. Anomalies invariably signal that something is wrong with the assumptions underlying the reading, and they ideally indicate directions of investigation which might resolve these anomalies, as was for example the case in the study described in this presentation.

If the only information available to the critical reader is that which comes from the text itself, then his judgement of the appropriateness of a given reading will be based solely on text-internal consistency. But there is virtually no such thing as a text for which there is no external reference. At most, mathematic expressions or statements of a propositional calculus might perhaps be considered self-inclusive, but even these make reference, at least implicitly, to the rules and conventions by which they are governed and which are therefore not understandable to anyone not acquainted with these rules. In the case of texts in natural language, not only are the rules and conventions of the metasytem involved – natural language – incomparably more complicated, so too are the relationships between individual texts and their linguistic and factual environment multifarious, and not always easy to identify. That is the reason why Christian exegetes, for example, in the wake of nearly two thousand years of preoccupation with scripture are still able to uncover novel and unexpected facets of biblical narrative using the methods of literary criticism.<sup>10</sup>

It is admittedly extremely difficult to quantify the appropriateness of a given reading. But despite all subjectivity necessarily involved in any such assessment, it is nevertheless possible to subject the text to a set of individual questions and in so doing to proceed in a structured manner, so that the critical reader need not base his conclusions solely on holistic and purely intuitive judgement. In the case of the corpus with which this presentation is concerned — Shoghi Effendi's correspondence, which consists to a large part in letters written in response to written enquiries from individuals or from Spiritual Assemblies — the appropriateness of specific readings can be investigated by subjecting them to questions such as the following:

- Inner cohesion: Are the individual components of this reading thematically, stylistically and objectively consistent among themselves?
- Outer cohesion: Do the assertions implied by this reading stand in concord with comparable assertions from other written sources?<sup>11</sup>
- External cohesion: Does this reading accord with system-external standards (experience and reason<sup>12</sup>)?
- Relevance: Does this reading address the main purpose of the question which preceded it, so far as that purpose can be ascertained?
- Commensurability: Does this reading leave the impression that it answers the question(s) actually asked?
- Completeness: Does this reading cover all of the issues which were broached by the question which preceded it?
- Motivation: Is each of the individual elements of this reading prompted in some manner by the preceding enquiry — especially with regard to the details (which is, as we know, where the devil lies)?
- Terminological parallelism: Are terms which occur both in this reading and in the preceding question

used in the same fashion, or if not, are terminological differences explicitly topicalised?

- Symmetry: Does the answer reflect the character of the preceding question? (a statement of general principle as answer to the description of a special-case problem, an explanation of administrative procedure in response to a question about ethics, a theological exposition where the questioner is uncertain about correct demeanour, are examples of tendentially inappropriate readings.)
- Language and knowledge level: Do the demands implied by this reading correspond to the level of perceptivity to be reasonably expected from the enquirer? (a child should not be bombarded with an “adult” answer; and a technically correct answer which is understandable only to the specialist is only then called for when the necessary background knowledge and terminological competence can be assumed on the part of the enquirer.)

This list, which is undoubtedly incomplete and capable of improvement, serves in the first instance to concentrate the focus on individual aspects of the text under examination. No single aspect can be totally divorced from the others, and every such text survey involves certain limitations. For example, lack of inner cohesion of a reply might well be conditioned by the haphazard structure of the original enquiry; a given reply might be the sole existing statement in all of the writings to the theme under discussion, so that either the possibility of comparison with additional materials is not viable or the material which is consulted for comparison leads to false associations or conclusions; and the store of knowledge drawn from a broader, predominantly secularly disposed culture is often insufficient or even inappropriate as background for assessment of the plausibility of a given statement from a Bahá’í point of view. But the analysis of the communicative context suffers most frequently from the incompleteness of the available documentation: since in most cases only Shoghi Effendi’s remarks are available, assumptions concerning the nature of each respective preceding enquiry must be drawn on the basis

of the statement which has been formulated in response to it — which means that application of the majority of the above criteria would involve circular reasoning. And even when it is available, the preceding enquiry represents a text which should itself ideally be subjected to the scrutiny of literary criticism.

In the case of the particular text with which this presentation is concerned (which as so far presented consists of a single sentence), the potential for text-internal analysis is correspondingly limited and the dependence on additional sources of information all the greater. In the course of this presentation the communicative context of this sentence will grow step by step, and with each step the potential for interpretation will expand, contract, become more specific — and even contradict itself.

Once again: this presentation is not a discussion about the “spot to be regarded as the standard”. This subject is merely the vehicle for transporting the central thesis: that the effectivity and reliability of exegesis is dependent on a textual context which is as exhaustive as circumstances permit.

## The first attempt

In the course of a study of the Badí‘ calendar which was published in 2005,<sup>13</sup> I investigated the future calendar ruling for determining the day of Naw-Rúz, i.e. the day which carries the nominal specification 1 Bahá‘. This ruling was established originally by the Báb in the Persian Bayán and subsequently confirmed and rendered more precise by Bahá‘u’lláh in the Kitáb-i Aqdas. The Báb writes:

*va án yawm ast keh shams montaql mīgardad az borj-e húb behamal dar hín-e taḥvíl chēh leyl váqi‘ shavad va chēh nahár.*<sup>14</sup>

*This day is the day whereon the Sun passes from Pisces into Aries at the moment of its passing, whether it be night or day.*<sup>15</sup>

Bahá‘u’lláh’s statement differs in principle from that of the Báb only in the fact that Bahá‘u’lláh explicitly mentions sunset:

*har rúz keh shams taḥvíl beḥamal shavad hamán yawm  
‘eid ast agar cheh yek daqíqeh beh ghorúb mándeh  
báshad.<sup>16</sup>*

*The festival of Naw-Rúz falleth on the day that the sun  
entereth the sign of Aries, even should this occur no  
longer than one minute before sunset.<sup>17</sup>*

Despite differences in wording, both statements express the same content, since the term “day” in the sense of “calendar day” is understood to be the period of time between two successive sunsets: this moment serves not only the Badí‘ calendar, but also for example the Islamic (*hijrī*) calendar as delineator between two calendar days.

It certainly didn’t escape the notice of the early believers that the procedure for determining New Year’s Day was very similar to the corresponding procedure in connexion with the Iranian National Calendar. Also called the *Jalálí* calendar or simply “the solar calendar” (*taqvím-e shamsí*, to distinguish it from the (Islamic) lunar calendar, *taqvím-e qamarí*), this calendar has served since the twelfth Gregorian century as house calendar in virtually all of Iran, in Afghanistan, in the Shi‘ite regions of Iraq and in several adjoining regions of Central Asia. It is thus easy to appreciate how Bahá’u’lláh’s instructions would be understood by the early believers to imply an adaption of the ruling to which they were already accustomed, whereby the new ruling would differ from the old in only one aspect: in the Iranian National Calendar, determination of New Year’s Day is made on the basis of midday,<sup>18</sup> whereas in the Badí‘ calendar it is made on the basis of sunset, the terms “midday” and “sunset” each denoting a characteristic orientation of the sun as observed from some agreed-upon geographical location. In the as yet unpublished second part of his narrative, in which he presumably reflects the views of the community of his time, Nabíl Zarandí (Nabíl-i A‘zam) obviously shares this impression:

*... yawm-e nawrúz hamán rúz ast keh beh qá‘ede-ye  
taqvím-e írán dar shab yá rúz án rúz shams beh borj-e  
ḥamal vârd shavad agar che yek daqíqe qabl az ghorúb-e  
áftâb báshad bar khaláf-e qá‘ede-ye sâbeq-e ahl-e írán*

*keh agar taḥvíl ba‘ad az zohr váqe‘ mishad rúz-e ba‘ad-ra nawrúz qorár mídádand ...*<sup>19</sup>

On the basis of the Iranian calendar, the day of Naw-Rúz is the day on which the sun enters the sign of Aries, whether at night or during the day, even if this happens one minute prior to sunset, in contrast to the earlier ruling in Iran, according to which one chose the following day as Naw-Rúz if the shift [i.e. the transit of the sun into the sign of Aries: my comment] should occur after midday ... [my translation]

The similarities of Nabíl’s description with the texts of both Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb indicate that he was acquainted with, and based his own text on, both versions. Admittedly, the parallels in the English-language texts are partly the result of the fact that the above translation has been undertaken with a view to maintaining stylistic conformity with the existing official translations of similar texts. Nevertheless, even in the Persian-language originals the similarity in content can hardly be overlooked.

All that remains of this passage, if one removes those parts of it which are directly derived from the statements of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, is the reference to the Jalálí calendar:

On the basis of the Iranian calendar ... [Badí‘ ruling] ... in contrast to the earlier ruling in Iran, according to which one chose the following day as Naw-Rúz if the shift should occur after midday.

Nabíl asserts that the ruling of the Iranian National Calendar serves as the basis (*qá‘ede*) for the corresponding Badí‘ ruling. That might imply nothing more than that Nabíl felt the new ruling easiest to explain on the model of the old ruling, with which he could assume his readership was acquainted. But these words could also possibly imply that, according to the testimony of Nabíl, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh intentionally adapted the existing Jalálí ruling to serve as the new Badí‘ ruling. This possibility is of course pure speculation, since a confirmation on the part of the Báb or Bahá’u’lláh doesn’t appear to exist in writing. Moreover, the assumption that a direct relationship between the two calendar forms was



historically unavoidable would be tantamount to claiming that a Manifestation of God is a child of his times, dependent on models from his immediate social and cultural environment. But even without support from this speculation, it is easy to appreciate how the undeniable similarity of the two New Year rulings would indeed foster the conclusion that they are meant to be equivalent in all details except for that one aspect which the Báb explicitly altered.

It is perhaps precisely such considerations which resulted in the assumption that, prior to activation, Bahá'u'lláh's ruling would have to be supplemented with the nomination of a particular spot on Earth which would serve as the reference for the determination of Naw-Rúz. After all, this expectation was in accord with the experience of the early believers with respect to no less than two of the other calendars with which they were intimately familiar: not only is the determination the day of the equinox and therewith the Jalálí New Year accomplished with reference to a particular geographical location, the precise spot on Earth of the sighting of the new moon also plays a decisive rôle in the Islamic calendar both for the determination of 1 Muḥarram (the nominal start of the Islamic year) and for the commencement and duration of the month of fasting.

Once it had become engrained community-wide – a state of affairs which was without doubt consummated very early in the history of the Faith – this assumption would quickly assume the character of a tacit agreement. From that time onward, the only detail which would still remain open to speculation would be the location to be selected. Given the already existing possibilities in Iran and Iraq, and subsequent to the interment of Bahá'u'lláh's earthly remains in Bahjí, the erection of the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel and the establishment of the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, discussion would have focussed to such a degree on the multitude of possibilities available that the original assumption which generated the demand for this supply of candidates in the first place would hardly have been subjected to further scrutiny. The community would only have to remain patient until an authoritative decision in favour of one or another of the potential reference spots had been taken.

Meanwhile, the proliferation of the teachings with respect to the spot took its inevitable course: from Iran and the Near East, the teaching spread over the entire globe and was inculcated among peoples who had no knowledge of the Iranian National Calendar and therefore no possible insight into the history of the consensus opinion of which they were being informed, an opinion which perforce mutated for them into an apodictic truth.

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It was no real hardship for the community to postpone the final decision indefinitely, since by virtue of the provisional coordination of the determination of the day of Naw-Rúz with the properties of existing mainstream calendars, the community possessed a practicable interim solution. It therefore comes as no particular surprise to note that, up until the appearance of the letter of 15 May 1940 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, nearly seventy years after the Kitáb-i Aqdas was revealed, the spot appears to have received not a single mention — neither in the writings and letters of Bahá'u'lláh nor in those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi. In spite of that, in the letter of 15 May 1940 Shoghi Effendi could rest assured that the members of the National Spiritual Assembly were acquainted with the concept of the “spot”.

Over and above the fact that it is to be “regarded as the standard” (a condition of which the Spiritual Assembly was no doubt already aware), in this letter there is no further elucidation regarding the “spot”. Not that it was in any way a pressing issue: every Bahá'í, then as now, knew all too well how important “the spot to be regarded as the standard” was — even though it might not at all be clear to him just what function this spot is supposed to fulfil. Calendar details feature among the favourite topics of conversation among those interested in hearing about the Faith. The Badí' calendar always goes down well; it serves admirably as an easily recognisable group-defining feature of the community for individuals who are not really able to cope yet with the more spiritual aspects of the Bahá'í Religion. Moreover, the pleasing symmetry of the nineteen nineteen-day months and the flexibility of the

intercalary days in achieving parity with the solar year are immediately obvious to those who, if truth be told, could never really appreciate why, in their “own” calendar, the extra day in a leap year should be attached seemingly arbitrarily onto the end of the curiously undersized month of February. The Badí‘ calendar sports one blemish, however: the cycle of the year is determined (in the West) according to the dictates of the Gregorian calendar. Were it not for the pending nomination of a spot, this situation would be an embarrassing admission of dependency on the very time calibration system which the Badí‘ calendar is meant to replace. As it is, however, the Gregorian calendar serves the purposes of the Badí‘ calendar, not the other way around: as soon as we Bahá’ís decide for ourselves and on our own terms that the time is ripe, this interim measure will be cast aside.

Since the expectations placed in the future nomination of a spot play such an important rôle in the maintenance of a positive public image of the community, and since the firm belief in the necessity of the spot has such a long history, one which reaches right back to the earliest phases of the Bábí Revelation, it is hardly surprising that the mere mention of the spot on the part of Shoghi Effendi would be automatically, indeed gratefully taken up as confirmation of a conviction which in any case predominated in the community. For example, the editors of the *Kitáb-i Aqdas* conclude, apparently on the strength of that one sentence quoted at the beginning of this presentation, the following:

The Guardian has stated that the implementation, worldwide, of the law concerning the timing of Naw-Ruz will require the choice of a particular spot on earth which will serve as the standard for the fixing of the time of the spring equinox. He also indicated that the choice of this spot has been left to the decision of the Universal House of Justice.<sup>20</sup>

Although an editorial commentary in no way carries the same import as the divine revealed word, by virtue of its occurrence in the official release of the holiest work of the Bahá’í Revelation this commentary takes on a certain normative authority. It can be quoted, cited in evidence, and with

reference to the supervisory function of the Universal House of Justice even adorned with the aura of inerrancy. In this fashion, what started out as an uncritical assumption and became in stages a consensus opinion, a tacit agreement and an apodictic truth, ultimately takes on the quality of authoritative doctrine.

It is not my purpose, neither here nor anywhere else, to question the potential correctness of this reading of the sentence from Shoghi Effendi's letter of 15 May 1940. In particular, the concern of the current presentation is literary criticism, not exegesis; in other words, it is about the total meaning potential inherent in any given text, and not about what that text is ultimately supposed to mean. My intention is to describe the stages of my investigation of this statement of Shoghi Effendi's in its own right, divorced from the question of assessment of truth – a process which involves among other things ignoring whatever interpretation has heretofore been assigned to it, however self-evident this advance judgement might appear.<sup>21</sup>

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The conduct of this investigation was not devoid of ulterior motives. In the course of my aforementioned study of the Badí' calendar, I wanted to present a technically feasible alternative to the reference-spot method and to discuss the respective advantages of the two methods. In face of the predominance and more recently the implied doctrinal authority of the consensus opinion, I felt it necessary to provide myself with insurance against the potential reproach that I had ignored the clear instructions of Shoghi Effendi. In the end, I didn't have to look very far for my immediate purposes: it was enough to point out that Shoghi Effendi had characterised the spot as a "matter". Had he instead said something like "the Universal House of Justice will decide on a suitable location for the spot", then the situation would have been clear: it would indeed have been merely a question of nomination. But in light of the word "matter", this passage can legitimately be taken to imply in the first instance a decision concerning the *issue* of the spot, and only thereafter, if appropriate, its location.

This interpretation is admittedly anything but cogent, since the word “matter” can just as easily be interpreted as a placeholder for the entire phrase “which spot should be regarded as the standard”, i.e. devoid of independent lexical meaning. Therefore, in support of my further objective – the stimulation of a serious discussion about alternative methods for the future determination of New Year – something more tangible than that which the isolated sentence produced would have served my purposes quite nicely.

The next step consisted of considering this sentence in the context of the complete paragraph of the letter of 15 May 1940 in which it occurs. This paragraph reads as follows:

Regarding Naw-Ruz: if the vernal equinox falls on the 21st of March before sunset it is celebrated on that day. If at any time after sunset, Naw-Ruz will then, as stated by Bahá'u'lláh, fall on the 22nd. As to which spot should be regarded as the standard, this is a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to decide. The American National Spiritual Assembly need not therefore take any action in this matter at present.

This passage is the response to a written enquiry by the then National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada directed to Shoghi Effendi, a copy of which I had tried in vain to obtain while preparing the manuscript for publication in German. It is most probably the case that I am personally responsible for this failure. Having already made liberal use of the services of the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre in the course of my researches, I decided to direct my enquiry to the secretariat of the National Spiritual Assembly in Wilmette – the successor organisation to that which authored the original letter – and thus avoid stretching the patience of the World Centre even further. Presumably due to limitations in the services available to researchers, my enquiry did not produce the result I was banking on. Eventually, preparations for publication of the study reached such an advanced stage that a substantial alteration to the text would no longer be possible, and this project lost momentum. For clues regarding the content of this unseen enquiry I thus had no other option

than to rely on inferences drawn from the formulation of Shoghi Effendi's response.

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The three-part structure of this passage is obvious at first glance. The first portion is in effect a reformulation of the law presented in the Kitáb-i Aqdas:

Regarding Naw-Ruz: if the vernal equinox falls on the 21st of March before sunset it is celebrated on that day. If at any time after sunset, Naw-Ruz will then, as stated by Bahá'u'lláh, fall on the 22nd.

The second portion is the reference to the "spot", discussed above:

As to which spot should be regarded as the standard, this is a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to decide.

Finally, the third portion is a sort of guideline:

The American National Spiritual Assembly need not therefore take any action in this matter at present.

This structure implies a corresponding multi-part enquiry:

- How is Naw-Rúz to be determined? — perhaps expressed in the form: Under what circumstances should Naw-Rúz deviate from 21 March? — followed possibly by:
- When, or under what conditions, will a decision be made about the spot? — and perhaps concluding with the question:
- What measures should the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada undertake in anticipation of such a decision?

The above speculation can be varied indefinitely, but Shoghi Effendi's response appears in any case to consist of two pieces of information and one suggestion for action. In light of the portion of the reconstructed enquiry with which it is associated, though, this concluding suggestion is somewhat

puzzling: one would normally take it as a matter of course that the National Spiritual Assembly would abide by any instruction currently in force until such time as it is explicitly superceded by another. It is therefore plausible to imagine that the instruction to refrain from taking action is simply a formulaic closing remark. Perhaps the Spiritual Assembly didn't even pose the question whether it should take any action or not – or if so, then perhaps it was merely meant rhetorically, just as the answer it prompted sounds rhetorical. It would appear that the editors of *Lights of Guidance* came to a similar conclusion, since in their version the final sentence was omitted.

In anticipation of this closing instruction, the second part (concerning the spot) seems to function primarily as a rationalisation for the postponement of this decision until some indefinite point of time in the future. Thus understood, and in the event that the Spiritual Assembly didn't itself broach the issue, it provides a conceivable motivation for the fact that the spot is mentioned at all in the response, even though nothing in addition is revealed about the function or particulars of the spot itself.

With regard to the first part, it is difficult to imagine just why Bahá'u'lláh's New Year ruling is presented in the manner in which it occurs here. It is hardly surprising to find a reference to the Gregorian calendar in a letter addressed to Bahá'ís in the West, but it is indeed somewhat curious that only one of many inevitable scenarios has been singled out for mention. As a consequence of the Gregorian leap year formula, the vernal equinox can occur in fact on 19, 20, 21 or 22 March, depending on the year and the nominal location on Earth. The moment of the vernal equinox – the so-called vernal point, or point of Aries – is presented in the standard reference works exact to the minute in UT (Universal Time, for the present purposes synonymous with Greenwich Mean Time). This time specification applies by definition to the null meridian, or in other words, it indicates the time at longitude zero, which runs through the middle of Greenwich, a suburb of London. Should the point of Aries occur in a given year at, say, 17:45 UT (5:45 p.m. GMT), then at this moment the sun has already set in Middle Europe but not for example in Ireland, Spain, Portugal

and a large proportion of France. The further away from the null meridian a given location lies, the greater is the probability that a day shift must be reckoned with, i.e. either a Gregorian date change (based on midnight) or a Badí' one (based on sunset), or both. Shoghi Effendi provides no details concerning how this potentially complicated day shift effects the determination of New Year in all these situations, nor does he mention the special conditions which obtain in the polar regions. All in all, this excerpt from the letter of 1940 leaves one somewhat ill at ease: as methodology for the future application of the revealed New Year ruling it is virtually useless.

Had these two sentences been addressed to an individual (and non-Persian) believer who, purely out of personal interest or curiosity, wanted to know something about the future determination of New Year, then the explanation for this apparent carelessness would be clear: in all probability the poser of the question would have been acquainted his whole life long with no other calendar than the Gregorian, perhaps not even aware that it has a name. His choice of words might well have left the impression that he was not particularly versed in matters of astronomy, and an all too abstract or technical answer might have been too much for him to handle. In short, there are understandable grounds for assuming that, in his answer to such an enquiry, Shoghi Effendi would have made reference to 21 March in this fashion — as if the matter really were that simple, and as if Gregorian date specification were an absolute scale against which other, in this case Badí', time expressions are to be measured. And since in any case the application of the law did not lie in the domain of responsibility of this individual, there would be no necessity for providing a lengthy and involved explanation which, while encompassing all conceivable circumstances, would probably include far more than the enquirer really wished to know.

But Shoghi Effendi is not writing here to an individual, but rather to a National Spiritual Assembly, indeed to that of the largest Bahá'í community at that time outside of Iran. For this reason alone one ought to be justified in assuming that Shoghi Effendi's remarks are being directed to a technically proficient readership, and that they are not intended simply to satisfy someone's casual curiosity, but rather to serve as instructions



which are to be put into practice at some future time (as the words “at present” suggest). In light of the words “The American National Spiritual Assembly need not therefore take any action in this matter” it could be argued, albeit somewhat strained, that this passage doesn’t have to do with instructions for action, but at best with instructions for inaction. Yet this objection would have been more convincing if Shoghi Effendi had dispensed entirely with a description of the ruling: silence would then have been preferable to disinformation. And finally, it can be seen that the level of communication is quite simply inappropriate: neither do these sentences pay justice to the level of knowledge which may rightly be assumed on the part of a National Spiritual Assembly together with the consultative resources at its disposal, nor does this reading reflect the care and preciseness characteristic of Shoghi Effendi.

A possible explanation for these apparent shortcomings is provided by the existence of an article which bears the title “Additional Material gleaned from Nabíl’s Narrative (Vol. II), Regarding the Bahá’í Calendar”. This article appeared in every volume of *The Bahá’í World* from vol. III (1928 – 1930) until vol. XX (1986 – 1992). The close collaboration of the Guardian on this article is documented in writing, and it is in fact highly probable that Shoghi Effendi was its author.<sup>22</sup> An excerpt from this article explains:

The day of Naw-Rúz falls on the 21st of March only if the vernal Equinox precedes the setting of the sun on that day. Should the vernal Equinox take place after sunset, Naw-Rúz will have to be celebrated on the following day.

This excerpt is based on the passage from Nabíl’s narrative quoted earlier. A comparison of both renditions quickly reveals that the excerpt is far from a translation; it is in fact a complete new formulation. This situation is in itself a convincing indicator of Shoghi Effendi’s participation – no other individual would have undertaken such a liberal reformulation of a passage from a work which had been compiled at the behest of Bahá’u’lláh himself – and demonstrates to what lengths Shoghi Effendi went to target his intended readership. The choice of words in *The Bahá’í World*

is, as it is formulated in a letter from the Bahá'í World Centre, not a translation, but rather “a partial paraphrase that highlights the essential information or principle gleaned from the Persian text in order to clarify the Bahá'í Naw-Rúz for Persian and non-Persian Bahá'ís and for non-Bahá'í readers of *The Bahá'í World*”.<sup>23</sup> The language used and the degree of prior knowledge assumed is appropriate to the range of readership for which the passage was written.

The parallels between these two sentences and the first two sentences of the passage from the letter of 1940 are surely not pure coincidence. Whilst putting together material for letters to be sent on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi's secretaries would routinely access archives of correspondence and other written sources in search of appropriate text passages which the Guardian had already written or approved. It is therefore plausible that this excerpt from the article in *The Bahá'í World*, which had been written some ten years earlier, served directly or indirectly as a template for the corresponding passage of the letter of 1940. Apparently, a secretary adopted this already available text with a minimum of re-wording in order to spare Shoghi Effendi from unnecessary expense of his limited resources of time and energy. However, it still remains a mystery, in light of the difference between the expected degree of perceptibility of the members of a National Spiritual Assembly and that of a non-Bahá'í readership, why Shoghi Effendi let these sentences go through as they did.

The only formulation which has been added to the text from *The Bahá'í World* is the insertion “as stated by Bahá'u'lláh”. However, Nabíl explains in his narrative that he gleaned this information from the *Kitáb-i-Asmá'*, which was revealed by the Báb. In other words, this insertion seems misleading. Perhaps Shoghi Effendi simply wanted to make it clear that Bahá'u'lláh had confirmed this ruling. In light of the impracticability of the rest of the formulation, however, it is hard to imagine why Shoghi Effendi felt the need at all to include this additional remark.

For the purpose of literary critical analysis it has so far been possible to expand the context to include four text passages which preceded the letter of 1940:

- the New Year ruling of the Báb from the Persian Bayán;
- the New Year ruling of Bahá'u'lláh from the Kitáb-i Aqdas;
- the statement from part II of Nabíl's Narrative; and
- the article from *The Bahá'í World* volumes II - XX (1928-1992).

This extended field of information has led in certain respects to an improvement of our understanding of the passage in the letter of 1940: the relationship between the passage and the divine law has become clearer, the provenience of the consensus opinion regarding the spot has been identified, and the source text for the problematic first two sentences has been discovered. Nevertheless, one cannot deem this passage from Shoghi Effendi's letter of April 1940 to be a paragon of clear and unambiguous communication – at least not in accordance with the impression left by the greatly expanded but still incomplete communicative context. The suspicion has grown that the problems presented by this text cannot be satisfactorily resolved without examination of the original enquiry.

## The Second attempt

In preparation for the English-language edition of my study a few years later, I obtained a copy of the original letter of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada from the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre. It was explained to me that the letter of 1940 consisted not just of this one question, but rather contained “a large number of questions about different aspects of the Bahá'í Faith and the operation of its Administrative Order.”<sup>24</sup> This information alone made the situation more transparent: in the face of a considerable number of individual questions, and in view of the pressure of time which bore constantly on the Guardian, it

is not unreasonable to assume that Shoghi Effendi might rely on the preparatory researches of his secretary and dispense with an extensive revision of each and every passage of a letter of this size written on his behalf – in particular, those individual responses which were either of diminished importance or which did not entail any immediate consequences. Obviously, these conditions applied at least partially to the question regarding the New Year ruling, the inappropriateness of whose presentation is therefore at least understandable: it was necessary under those combined circumstances to leave the sentences which had been virtually lifted from *The Bahá'í World* as they were.

\* \* \*

The reference to “a large number of questions” motivated me to look for answers to other questions in this letter. An Ocean search in *Lights of Guidance* for text passages which had been written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada on 15 May 1940 resulted in four hits in total: not exactly a “large number” (from which we may surmise that only a small selection of items from this letter is included in this compilation), but nevertheless sufficient to gain an impression of the bandwidth of topics for which answers were being sought.<sup>25</sup> Of course it is only an assumption that all four extracts come from the same letter; but if they do not, then that merely means that Shoghi Effendi answered up to five separate enquiries from the American National Spiritual Assembly on the same day, of which at least one included “a large number of questions”. And so it remains the case in any event that Shoghi Effendi was burdened with the task of supplying answers to a large number of questions or alternatively to the same large number plus four or more, all on the same day and presumably during the same working session, and it is irrelevant for the purpose of the discussion to speculate which excerpt was written in reference to which theoretically existing letter.

Of these four excerpts, three have nothing do with the spot. They read as follows:

Regarding the interpretation of mental unfitness, this is not the same as being physically incapacitated. By

the latter is meant a condition much more serious than any temperamental deficiency or disinclination to conform to the principle of majority rule. Only in rare cases when a person is actually unbalanced, and is admittedly proved to be so, should the right of membership be denied him. The greatest care and restraint should be exercised in this matter.<sup>26</sup>

Regarding the age of fifteen fixed by Bahá'u'lláh; this relates only to purely spiritual functions and obligations and is not related to the degree of administrative capacity which is a totally different thing, and is, for the present, fixed at twenty-one.<sup>27</sup>

In connection with the selection of particular photographs of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for circulation among the friends, the Guardian strongly feels that no definite ruling should be laid down establishing the superiority or distinction of any particular photograph. The friends should be left quite free to use their individual independent judgement in this matter.<sup>28</sup>

We will take a closer look at these passages, with the intention of identifying the degree to which Shoghi Effendi was involved in their formulation, using criteria which he himself validated:

Although the secretaries of the Guardian convey his thoughts and instructions, ... their words are in no sense the same as his [and] their style certainly not the same, ... for they use their own terms and not his exact words in conveying his messages.<sup>29</sup>

Since we possess a vast corpus of authentic material from Shoghi Effendi, we are in a good position to analyse these passages with respect to their degree of conformity with his writing style. I contend that much in these excerpts falls short of Shoghi Effendi's level of language competence, as several examples will amply demonstrate:

Regarding the interpretation of mental unfitness, this is not the same as being physically incapacitated.

The antecedent of the word “this” can only be “the interpretation of mental unfitness”. In other words, this sentence is inadvertently claiming that a certain act of judgement (interpreting mental unfitness) is not the same thing as a certain state of existence (being physically incapacitated). And quite aside from this totally nonsensical observation, the word “interpretation” is problematic: it should be either (a) “meaning” or “definition”, (b) “identification” or “prognosis”, (c) “ramifications” or “consequences”, or (d) “assessment” or “toleration”, depending on what is actually meant. And that is not all:

Only in rare cases when a person is actually unbalanced, and is admittedly proved to be so, should the right of membership be denied him.

It is the state of being unbalanced, not someone’s admission to the fact, which is grounds for the denial of membership. There can be no doubt that Shoghi Effendi could easily have found a more appropriate term, such as “officially”, “medically”, “professionally”, “conclusively”, “reliably”, “demonstrably”, to name only a few.

Incidentally, the expression is “cases where”, not “cases when” – as Shoghi Effendi well knew: the former occurs for example in *Advent of Divine Justice* and *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, the latter only in letters which were written on his behalf.

This sentence quite simply doesn’t match up to the habitual fastidiousness of Shoghi Effendi’s writing style. The Guardian was only too well aware that the believers hung on every word from him and that a careless utterance could have disastrous consequences.

The second excerpt likewise features a rich series of solecisms:

... the degree of administrative capacity [*missing comma*] which is a totally different thing, [*superfluous comma*] and [*missing “which”*] is, for the present, fixed at twenty-one.

Instead of “degree of administrative capacity” it should read for example “the age at which aptitude for administrative activity may be assumed”. As it stands, the reader is obliged to imagine a scale of degrees of “administrative capacity” (which presumably means capacity for administration) ranging from, say, 1 to at least twenty-one. According to this statement, the “fifteen” of this scale does not mean the same thing as “fifteen” as passage of time since birth. Naturally, when one reads such a message one mentally carries out the adjustments necessary to disentangle the botched semantics, a process which is so automatic that one is usually not even aware that it is taking place – nor is one generally cognizant of the danger of misconstruction which it encourages. But at the moment we are concerned solely with the question of authorship. One will search in vain for such dubious prose in letters which are known to have been written personally by Shoghi Effendi.

The missing word “which” results in an ungrammatical sentence structure: the “is” of “is a totally different thing” is a copula, whereas the “is” of “is fixed at twenty-one” is a passive auxiliary. However commonplace it might be among native English speakers, this error is not characteristic of Shoghi Effendi. The missing comma transforms a parenthetical relative clause into a modifying one, thereby distorting the meaning: as it stands, there must exist at least one additional scale which is *not* “a totally different thing”. And finally, the superfluous comma is an example of punctuation in accordance with sentence rhythm instead of grammatical function: most likely an indication that the originator of the sentence – in contrast to Shoghi Effendi – was not well versed or practiced in the formal rules of punctuation in English. With regard to the ungrammatical semicolon, it should be noted that the same passage in *Directives from the Guardian* features a colon instead. It is therefore not possible to ascertain whether the one version is an error on the part of the editor of the compilation, or the other version an editorial correction.

The total correctness of the third of these three excerpts stands in striking contrast to the overabundance of errors in vocabulary, diction, punctuation and syntax in the first two. One need not look far for the reason, which is to be found in the words “the Guardian strongly feels”. In this case it is a

matter which Shoghi Effendi considers to be relatively important – important enough to take the time, it would seem, to examine the formulation more carefully and to improve or re-write the text as necessary.

In consideration of the Guardian's precise, accurate and grammatically flawless English writing style, there is enough text-internal evidence to suggest that, in this letter of reply, we have to do with varying configurations of authorship: passages which the secretary had formulated largely autonomously and which Shoghi Effendi let through despite glaring language deficiency, alongside a passage which shows clear signs of the Guardian's collaboration. The situation with respect to the fourth excerpt from the letter of 15 May 1940, i.e. the passage which describes the New Year ruling, remains unclear. It has already been established that this passage consists partly of existing material, and this fact suggests the collaboration of the secretary. To what degree is this passage based on Shoghi Effendi's instructions, and to what degree was Shoghi Effendi actively involved in its composition?

There is a certain amount of text-internal evidence, both positive and negative, which speaks for an active participation on the part of Shoghi Effendi. The interpolated remark "as stated by Bahá'u'lláh" can for example be taken as positive evidence: since the source of the paragraph in which it occurs seems to be a paraphrase of a text which is not even from Bahá'u'lláh (note: this assumption will be reexamined later), it would have been alone the prerogative of Shoghi Effendi to decide if these words could be identified with Bahá'u'lláh himself. Conversely, there is negative evidence which also speaks for an active intervention on the part of the Guardian: namely, the absence of solecisms of the sort which were present with such prolific abandon in the first two of the excerpts examined above. However, this evidence presents another puzzle: If one assumes that Shoghi Effendi was involved in the formulation, then one is forced to ascribe the ultimate responsibility for the earlier discussed incongruencies in content to the Guardian. This attitude is problematic – not on account of the infallibility of the Guardian,<sup>30</sup> but simply because such lapses of communication are totally uncharacteristic of him. There must be other factors involved to explain why the text took the



form which it took, factors which cannot be discovered or imagined on the basis of text-internal clues.

Consideration of further excerpts from the letter of 15 May 1940 has led once again to new insights – not only about the scope of the letter in general, but also specifically with regard to the passage concerning the New Year regulation and the rôle Shoghi Effendi possibly played in its creation. Nevertheless, these new insights also bring with them new problems without really resolving the old ones. In particular, the extended textual context does not offer any help in the crucial matter of the interpretation of the sentence in which the spot is mentioned.

\* \* \*

In addition to that remark concerning the comprehensiveness of the letter from the American National Spiritual Assembly, the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre provided me with a copy of the specific paragraph to which the passage in the letter of 15 May 1940 regarding the New Year ruling is the response. It reads:

The ... Chicago Assembly suggests that the NSA determine the correct date of Naw-Rúz astronomically and notify the believers in advance, to prevent confusion. The Egyptian statement declares that Naw-Rúz begins when the sun enters the sign of Aries, and the reckoning of the beginning of spring is made by the astronomical observatories for years in advance. The NSA could obtain the information from the Naval Observatory each year. However, the question is raised whether the determination of Naw-Rúz should come from the Bahá'í World Center.

This paragraph came as a complete surprise in every respect. It is not difficult to recognise that this text is totally unlike anything which had been possible to reconstruct on the basis of the textual clues in Shoghi Effendi's response alone. The text is in fact not an enquiry at all, but rather a suggestion. Only incidentally, and right at the very end, a last remaining question is aired – as if the dispensation of responsibility for the carrying out of the suggestion were open to discussion, but not the suggestion itself.

This text makes implicit but nonetheless unmistakable reference to the Gregorian calendar. Since Naw-Rúz always coincides with 1 Bahá',<sup>31</sup> the date designation according to the Badí' calendar does not need to be determined. It follows that the expression "determine the correct date of Naw-Rúz" can, strictly speaking, only mean the date in some *other* calendar system; in the Western world that would be the Gregorian by default. Even if Shoghi Effendi suspected a slip of tongue — the enquirer perhaps really meant "day" and not "date" — he understandably responded to what was actually said.

The "Egyptian statement" mentioned in this suggestion is a document which had been compiled in the early thirties of the twentieth century by the National Spiritual Assembly of Egypt and the Sudan. (The historical — and historic — significance of this document, which has been described by Shoghi Effendi in detail,<sup>32</sup> is not directly relevant to the current examination.) The original document was photographically reproduced in 1936 in *The Bahá'í World*,<sup>33</sup> followed in 1940 by a Persian-language translation.<sup>34</sup> This document, which is principally concerned with Bahá'í marriage and inheritance law, contains only one paragraph which deals with the calendar in any way (article 52). It is essentially a paraphrase of the divine law as explained in the Kitáb-i Aqdas.<sup>35</sup> The Arabic-language original reads:<sup>36</sup>

*tanqasimu's-sannatu'l-Bahá'íat ilá tis'at 'ashr shahran khiláfa'l-ayyámi'z-zá'idat wa tabtadi'u bi-dukhúli'sh-shams fí burji'l-ḥamal wa yakúnu ra'isu's-sannat huwa'l-yawmu'lladhí yaḥṣulu fíhi dhálíka'l-intiqál wa lau bi-daqíqat wáḥídat qabla'l-ghurúb.*

*The Bahá'í year is divided into nineteen months, leaving aside the days in excess, and it begins with the entry of the sun in the sign of Aries, commencing on the day during which the transition into Aries takes place, even if [this should happen] one minute before sunset. [my translation]*

The American National Spiritual Assembly was in all probability in possession of the Persian-language translation, whose content is accurate, though somewhat awkwardly formulated.<sup>37</sup>

*sál behá'í beh núzdah máh taqsím míshavad. be-'alá ve-ye ayyám-e zá'edeh va ibtedá-ye an dochúl-e áftáb ast dar borj-e ḥamal keh mabdá'e sál gerefteh míshavad. va an-rúzist keh ín inteqál-e áftáb be-borj-e ḥamal šúrat gírad va lú yek dagígeh qabl az ghorúb báshad.*

The “Book of Questions and Answers” (*ketáb-e su'ál va javáb*) is referred to frequently in the Egyptian statement, whose authors explicitly characterise this work, which is a supplementary part of the Most Holy Book,<sup>38</sup> as a primary source of information. In addition, the “one minute” clause is clearly based on the nearly identical wording from Bahá'u'lláh as it occurs in “Questions and Answers”, just as the expression *al-ayyámi'z-zá'idat* conforms to Bahá'u'lláh's wording in *Kitáb-i Aqdas* verse 16: thus article 52 of the Egyptian statement demonstrably represents a deliberate paraphrase of the divine law of the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*. It is therefore probable that the insertion “as stated by Bahá'u'lláh” in the first part of the letter of 1940 refers not to the text in *The Bahá'í World* based on Nabíl, but rather to article 52 of the Egyptian statement. One serious objection carried over from earlier readings is therewith eliminated.

It should be noted that the National Spiritual Assembly did not press Shoghi Effendi in any way for an explanation or statement with regard to the spot: the topic isn't even hinted at, neither in the wording of the enquiry itself nor in the Egyptian statement. This means among other things that the sentence “As to which spot should be regarded as the standard, this is a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to decide” in no way takes its cue from the preceding enquiry, but is, as it were, a voluntary disclosure: had Shoghi Effendi wished to avoid the topic of the spot, he would have been perfectly at liberty to have done so.

It is thus clear that Shoghi Effendi introduced the theme (i.e. the “matter of the spot”) for a reason of his own. For those who are already convinced that the spot is an inalienable component of the New Year determination and who moreover reject the efficacy of literary criticism, that reason is clear: Shoghi Effendi introduced the spot into the discussion simply because it is part and parcel of the future ruling. “There is no reason

whatever for even the slightest reassessment of the possible meaning of Shoghi Effendi's response in light of its newly expanded textual context", they will contend, adding: "It is undoubtedly interesting to know what the American National Spiritual Assembly was concerned about at that time, but for the understanding of Shoghi Effendi's text this knowledge is of no relevance: utterances of the Guardian conform to their own rationality, they stand for themselves, in no way dependent on the broader communicative context, self-sustaining and sovereign."

This attitude might well be valid to a degree in certain cases, such as the lengthier letters from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'í world community. In the present case, however, it ignores certain inconsistencies which are not so easy to dismiss out of hand. Of the three parts of Shoghi Effendi's answer, only the third appears to have anything directly to do with the enquiry which preceded it, and even here our euphoria is held in bounds: one would normally expect that a suggestion, once made, would either be accepted or rejected; the summons to carry on as before is otiose. Other than that, the response doesn't appear to have any genuine points of contact at all with the letter from the National Spiritual Assembly. The Spiritual Assembly demonstrates acquaintance both with the astronomic circumstances and with the functioning of the ruling as presented in the Egyptian statement and incidentally also in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*. The first part of Shoghi Effendi's answer thus addresses a question which was not asked at all, and indeed in a manner which presents the situation in a far less satisfactorily fashion than either the explanation in the Egyptian statement or the accompanying remarks from the National Spiritual Assembly. Similarly, the second part of the answer is concerned with a topic which was not touched upon at all in the enquiry. And once again, the motivation for this disclosure is not at all identifiable: a matter which is supposedly so central and without which the divine law is allegedly incomplete, and about which the Spiritual Assembly demonstrates no specific foreknowledge, is mentioned laconically, more or less in passing.

It is the case right down to the present day that the intended function of the spot is not unambiguously clear. In the notes

to the English-language edition of the Kitáb-i Aqdas, for example, it is described as “a particular spot on earth which will serve as the standard for the fixing of the time of the spring equinox”,<sup>39</sup> a formulation which suggests that it is to function as a parameter to a calculation, in apparent agreement with the underlying assumption of the National Spiritual Assembly in its letter of 1940. By contrast, in the German-language edition of the Kitáb-i Aqdas it is presented as “Messpunkt für die Feststellung der Frühjahrs-Tagundnachtgleiche”, that is, as the location at which the vernal equinox is to be determined, in a manner reminiscent of the historical Jaláli practice by which midday is defined as the moment at which the azimuth of the sun is 0° (due south) relative to an agreed point of observation. If this spot is really so indispensable, then Shoghi Effendi might at least have taken this opportunity to clarify how it was supposed to work, even if he was at pains to avoid preempting the nomination of a particular location.

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But there is also another way of viewing Shoghi Effendi's reaction. One must bear in mind that, by suggesting that New Year's Day be determined on the basis of the actual point of Aries, the American Assembly was effectively requesting the immediate enactment of the divine law. There were valid reasons, which I will discuss presently, why this request was totally unacceptable. Instead of simply blocking the suggestion, however, the Guardian offered a precise, indeed a logically watertight explanation why, by all sympathy with the aspirations of the Spiritual Assembly and in full appreciation of its good intentions, he was not disposed to take up this suggestion. The three parts of Shoghi Effendi's response correspond namely to the three parts of a classical syllogism. That is not to say that Shoghi Effendi intentionally formulated his response in this manner. That may or may not be the case, but all that is being claimed here is that, in this reading, one can discern the line of reasoning which forms the basis of the Guardian's judgement and subsequently of his answer, and that this line of reasoning can be best illustrated in the form of a syllogism, which in its turn can be mapped onto the structure of the answer.

Syllogisms consist of nothing more or less than normal, healthy common sense, albeit painstakingly structured. A syllogism comprises three propositions: two premises (roughly, “contentions”) and a logical conclusion. The first premise is typically a general statement and the second a particular one, but this arrangement is not mandatory. The integrity of the conclusion is dependent on the validity of the two premises, which for that reason must be meticulously substantiated. A premise is then considered substantiated if it is an empirical or axiomatic statement, or if it is itself the result – the logical conclusion – of a valid syllogism. A syllogistic argument is accordingly a potential hierarchy of syllogisms nested within one another, reaching theoretically so far into the depths of exposition until nothing remains other than axiomatic or empirical assertions. Normally, however, the chain of argument ends at the point at which the justification is acceptable to every rationally thinking being (thus avoiding not only unnecessary toil, but also the danger of infinite regress).

In the present case, the three parts of the passage from the letter of 1940 correspond to the three propositions of the syllogism: major term, minor term, conclusion. The first premise (the major term) consists of the paraphrase of the law as presented in the Kitáb-i Aqdas:

Regarding Naw-Rúz: if the vernal equinox falls on the 21st of March before sunset it is celebrated on that day. If at any time after sunset, Naw-Rúz will then, as stated by Bahá'u'lláh, fall on the 22nd.

The essence of this statement in terms of the syllogism is the fact that the occurrence of the day of Naw-Rúz is conditioned by two temporal events: the moment of the vernal equinox and the moment of sunset. In other words: these two factors together determine the definition of the expression “day of Naw-Rúz”. Whereas the term “vernal equinox” is well-defined, the meaning of the term “sunset”, in terms of the divine law, remains unresolved. Reduced to its essentials, therefore, the premise (major term) reads as follows:

The enactment of the divine law with regard to the determination of the day of Naw-Rúz presupposes an

unambiguous definition of the term “sunset” with respect to the law.

In accordance with this understanding, the statement contains everything which is necessary to convey the message. It is not in any way an attempt to inform the Assembly what the Gregorian equivalent to 1 Bahá’ might be; instead, it is an outline of the essential criteria for a procedure whose outcome is fully known, understood and agreed upon in principle by all parties concerned, with the intention of establishing a launching-point for the statements which follow. After all, it was hardly necessary for Shoghi Effendi to provide an elementary lesson in the features of the law: the text of the preceding suggestion (along with its extended context) amply demonstrated that the American National Spiritual Assembly was not in need of enlightenment in this respect. The example of the day of Naw-Rúz in connexion with 21 and 22 March served merely to illustrate the degree to which the determination of Naw-Rúz is conditioned by the properties of sunset.

In short: if we regard the purpose of this part of the passage from the letter of 1940 as a premise, and not as dissemination of information, then our irritation over the Gregorian reference and over the many undiscussed exceptions simply vaporises.

From this perspective, the interpolation “as stated by Bahá’u’lláh” — a clause whose justification has in the meantime been clarified — serves formally to substantiate the premise. Since a statement from Bahá’u’lláh automatically counts for Bahá’ís as axiomatic in terms of syllogistics, it would have been superfluous to pursue the formal substantiation of the major term any deeper.

The second premise (the minor term), which will be examined more closely below, consists of that statement which is of central concern in this presentation:

As to which spot should be regarded as the standard, this is a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to decide.

The conclusion (signalled by the word “therefore”), which follows logically from these two premises, reads:

The American National Spiritual Assembly need not therefore take any action in this matter at present.

The words “need not therefore take any action” represent in this reading a gentle way of insisting that the members of the National Spiritual Assembly abandon this project altogether, since it does not lie within the bounds of their administrative competence. Just how this follows logically from the two premises will become clear when we take a closer look at the minor term, i.e. the premise which mentions the spot.

There are two aspects of the second premise which demand closer scrutiny. The first has to do with the matter at hand:

As to which spot should be regarded as the standard ...

In order to comply with a methodology derived from the Iranian National Calendar, the term “sunset” would have to mean “sunset at a specific location on Earth”, a circumstance which would be thoroughly consistent with the requirement for the nomination of a particular spot to be regarded as the standard. As we have seen, the historically conditioned assumption that the Badí' calendar is to follow Jalálí practice in this respect explains the preoccupation with the spot. But it so happens that the revealed law could also be interpreted in a manner which in fact does *not* require a specific reference spot<sup>40</sup>. This fact in itself renders the concept of “sunset” in terms of the law ambiguous, over and above the question of its exact location. In other words, authoritatively establishing that the resolution of the issue of the spot is directly connected with the definition of sunset does not imply by extension that the use of a spot is prescribed. Uncontestable is alone the fact that, in connexion with the concept of sunset, there is need for clarification with regard to the spot.

The second aspect has to do with the question of competence:

... this is a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to decide.

In contrast to the major term, Shoghi Effendi does not offer an explicit substantiation. Nonetheless this premise is well-



founded, a fact which can be amply demonstrated in the form of a nested syllogism whose propositions are as follows:

major term: All matters which are not expressly recorded in scripture must be referred to the Universal House of Justice.

minor term: The spot is a matter which is not expressly recorded in scripture.

conclusion: Any decision with respect to the matter of the spot must be taken by the Universal House of Justice.

In accordance with this understanding of the text, the thematic intonation does not fall on the word “decide”, but instead on the phrase “the Universal House of Justice”:

As to which spot should be regarded as the standard, this is a matter which the *Universal House of Justice* [and no-one else] will have to decide.

The substantiation of the major term of this inner syllogism is to be found as before in the documented tenets of the Faith – in this case in the Lesser Covenant, which specifies that authoritative interpretation of scripture is vested exclusively in the Guardianship:

*... it is incumbent upon the Aghsan, the Afnan of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abha Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi ... the Guardian of the Cause of God ... He is the Interpreter of the Word of God ...*<sup>41</sup>

– whereas every matter which is not expressly mentioned in the writings is “a matter which the Universal House of Justice will have to decide”, or as it is explained in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament,

*Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice.*<sup>42</sup>

Shoghi Effendi took great pains to maintain this strict division of domains of competence between the Guardianship and the House of Justice, and he states unequivocally

... that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.<sup>43</sup>

Had Shoghi Effendi, in his authoritative understanding of scripture, been of the opinion that the spot was an express part of the writings – and that would mean that he understood “Questions and Answers” no. 35 in the same fashion as Nabíl apparently did – then the matter would clearly lie in his own area of responsibility. In that case he might still have postponed a decision indefinitely, perhaps delegating it to one or another of his successors in office, but expressly *not* to the House of Justice. Otherwise – that is, in the event that Shoghi Effendi were of the opinion that the revealed word is silent with regard to the spot – then he or any other Guardian of the Cause of God would be excluded from clarifying this matter, since he would otherwise “infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain” of the Universal House of Justice and thereby “curtail the specific and undoubted authority” with which that body had been “divinely invested”. Given this reading of the text, Shoghi Effendi leaves no room for doubt that he holds this second opinion. His conclusion is explicit, unambiguous and compulsory: “This is a matter that the Universal House of Justice will have to decide.”

There are certainly many examples of interim decisions taken by Shoghi Effendi in matters over which the writings remain silent but which, for purely operative reasons, couldn't wait until the Universal House of Justice had been established (for example, the modalities for the election of the initial members of this body), but only in cases where subsequent alteration by the House would be practicable. In the case of the spot, a later revision of an interim decision would have been virtually impossible, since it would involve the abrogation of an already consummated calendar reform. For this reason, a possible interim decision from the Guardian regarding the spot did not come into consideration.

\* \* \*

Everyone must decide for himself whether Shoghi Effendi is here pursuing a logical line of argument, or whether the above discourse is baseless and suggestive. From the point of view of literary criticism, however, it can be observed that, in light of the deliberations above, this reading of Shoghi Effendi's remarks represents in every respect an appropriate response to the passage from the letter of the American National Spiritual Assembly:

- *Inner cohesion*: As carriers of the three propositions of an implicit syllogism, the three parts of the answer are tightly interrelated both structurally and from the point of view of content.
- *Outer cohesion*: This reading is in accord with the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, on the condition that one abandon the assumption of a direct dependence on the properties of the Iranian National Calendar. Furthermore, this reading is supported by the conditions of the Lesser Covenant.
- *External cohesion*: No form of discourse fulfils the criteria of reason better than the syllogistic argumentation which forms the basis of this reading. Moreover, the scientifically backed astronomic circumstances play a contributing rôle to the extent that they are assumed as necessary background. And finally, this reading is in conformity with the

documented, though not ultimately provable, origin of the consensus opinion regarding the spot.

- *Relevance*: The main issue of both the suggestion of the National Spiritual Assembly and of Shoghi Effendi's response according to this reading is the enactment of the divine law regarding the calendar.
- *Commensurability*: The suggestion of the National Spiritual Assembly ends with a query concerning the administrative responsibility for its implementation. This question is answered.
- *Completeness*: No request for information, clarification or instruction contained in the preceding suggestion by the Spiritual Assembly is left unanswered.
- *Motivation*: All aspects of the response according to this reading are motivated either by the circumstances involved or by the extended textual context, right down to the finest details of choice of words:
  1. the repeated mention of sunset;
  2. the interpolation "as stated by Bahá'u'lláh";
  3. the well-considered inclusion of the word "matter";
  4. the indication of compulsion through "will have to"; and
  5. the use of "therefore" to introduce the logical conclusion.

In addition, the use of Gregorian calendar dates is motivated, admittedly not directly (or better, probably not intentionally) by the preceding suggestion, but nevertheless indirectly, as a result of the preparatory researches on the part of Shoghi Effendi's secretary, who had adopted a passing response from already available materials.

- *Terminological parallelism*: The terms used, as understood in this reading, orient themselves directly on the terms used in the preceding suggestion, along

with those which occur in the Egyptian statement which it mentions. As counterbalance to the suggestion's persistent concentration on the equinox, the response explicitly makes the sunset its central theme.

- *Symmetry*: By virtue of the fact that both the preceding enquiry and the response to it are objective examinations of the conditions surrounding the enactment of a specific aspect of divine law, the response totally reflects the nature of the enquiry.
- *Language and knowledge level*: This reading assumes basic knowledge of the details of the law in the Kitáb-i Aqdas and of the astronomic circumstances involved; that both assumptions are justified is evident from the content of the preceding enquiry. Moreover, it must be considered reasonable for Shoghi Effendi to assume acquaintance with the stipulations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament from the members of a National Spiritual Assembly.

Alone the fact that, of all possible readings, this particular one is the demonstrably most appropriate reaction to the preceding enquiry from the National Spiritual Assembly does not mean that it is the objectively correct reading; it merely means that it best satisfies the criteria of literary criticism. To what degree this observation is to be taken into consideration is a decision which must ultimately be taken by that organ which will one day be responsible for the enactment of the divine law: the Universal House of Justice.

\* \* \*

Let us now return to the ambiguity noted at the very beginning of this examination, that is, the question whether Shoghi Effendi is referring to the whole issue of the spot, or simply to the question of its location. Everything said so far with regard to this reading of the passage of the 1940 letter appears to apply equally to both alternatives. However, in light of what we have in the meantime learned concerning the extended context of this passage, the question can now be reformulated: What does "Questions and Answers" no. 35 tell

us about the spot? If we assume (as Nabíl apparently did) that the Badí' New Year ruling differs from the Jalálí ruling only where expressly stated, then we would have to interpret Bahá'u'lláh's silence as endorsement both for the use of a spot *and* for its traditional location in Teheran, being presumably some specific vantage point within the confines of the royal precinct. At the very most the Universal House of Justice might be free to select a specific location in the immediate vicinity to serve as the spot – say, the site of the birthplace or later residence of Bahá'u'lláh – in order to redefine its symbolic significance without measurably altering its effect. If this had been his understanding we would expect that, at some point in his ministry, Shoghi Effendi would have made this restriction clear. For example, in his letter of 15 May 1940 he might quite easily have written

As to which spot in Teheran should be regarded as the standard ...

But instead, the Guardian left the decision of the location (if that is what his remarks imply) entirely up to the Universal House of Justice. That would be in conformity with the divine law only if we understood Bahá'u'lláh's silence to imply that the Jalálí spot prototype holds in principle but not in practice. However, we would then be obliged to identify some text-related criterion which justifies our making such a distinction: some criterion, that is, other than the fact that this particular reading satisfies the expectation which was placed on the text in the first place.<sup>44</sup> What is more, we would have to ask ourselves why Shoghi Effendi should deliberately have elected to generalise the issue by characterising the spot as a “matter”, thus incurring the risk that this binding interpretation of the divine ruling might be understood differently – not only by some individual pursuing literary criticism, but potentially also by the then future Universal House of Justice.

Again, it is not possible here to conclude which reading is ultimately correct; that will only become clear after the Universal House of Justice has issued enactment legislation with respect to the calendar law. But in anticipation of such legislation it is legitimate to consider the material – including the testimony of Bahá'u'lláh – from a literary-critical point of

view in order to help establish which readings best comply with objective hermeneutic criteria.

In summary: When seen as a reasoned rejection of the plan advocated by the American National Spiritual Assembly to activate this aspect of divine law, Shoghi Effendi's reply appears to confirm that no scriptural basis exists – also and in particular no ruling on the part of the Guardian – in support of the assumed indispensability of the spot: almost exactly the opposite of what is generally interpreted into this text passage.

## Conclusion

Every text has both an internal and an external context on which the reliability of its interpretation is causally dependent. Aside from its explicit content it has an origin, a purpose, an evolutionary history, an intended readership. Its author pursues a goal, represents interests, draws upon his own knowledge and perspective, advances a point of view, presents his own opinion, selects according to circumstances what to say and what not to say. A number of these factors can be easily recognised on the basis of text-internal clues, provided that the text is of sufficient size; one or more of them might even be explicitly addressed by the author himself.

The briefer the text, the more meagre the internal textual context, and thus the greater the possibility of a misreading. The external context, which in the case of a passage extracted from a letter means the entire sequence of correspondence of which it is a part, thus becomes all the more important. This context is missing entirely in the available compilations of letters from Shoghi Effendi – and yet the usefulness of such compilations lies precisely in their extensive breadth of theme, which in turn is only possible because the individual entries are kept extremely brief. In other words, compilations are problematic not by virtue of their quality, but by their very nature. In any case, the pursuit of literary criticism in a methodologically sound and systematic manner is not practicable on the basis of such compilations alone.

This presentation has made use of many of the tools of literary criticism, if not in all facets exhaustively: the

application of the methods of historical, linguistic, literary/stylistic, tradition and genre criticism has led to deeper insights into the text under analysis. But it will not be sufficient in the long run for the Bahá'í community simply to adopt existing tools of literary criticism "uncritically". Rather, the task is to examine these as a basis for the development of a specific Bahá'í methodology which acknowledges and reflects the unique quality of Bahá'í writings. In no religious community before have primary documents been preserved with such authenticity and in such plenitude as they have been in the Bábí-Bahá'í revelations; bible critics, for example, cannot even venture to dream of such felicitous circumstances. And yet it is precisely this quality which exposes literary criticism to fresh challenges which demand the development of new departures for analysis. In this presentation, for example, mention has been made repeatedly of the heterogeneous cooperation which apparently existed between Shoghi Effendi and his secretaries in the course of the composition of individual letters. This working relationship could be a central key to questions not only of interpretation, but also of authenticity.

The methodology of literary criticism is principally the same whether it is pursued in the service of one's own personal investigation of religious content or conducted as preliminary analysis in the forefront of authoritative decision-making. Since it aids in the search for, but brackets out the question of, ultimate truth, literary criticism as I see it is a legitimate field of activity for Bahá'í researchers who wish to make a significant contribution to the formation of opinion regarding the substance of Bahá'í belief without thereby encroaching upon the areas of competence of those institutions – the Guardianship and the House of Justice – which are authorised to make binding pronouncements in the name of the Faith.



## NOTES

- 1 This is an abridged version of my paper entitled *Textzusammenhang und Kritik: Ein Fallbeispiel anhand eines Briefes von Shoghi Effendi* presented at the 'Irfán Colloquium held in Tambach, Germany on 19 - 22 July 2007 and printed in *'Irfán-Studien zum Bahá'í-Schrifttum: Beiträge des 'Irfán-Kolloquiums 2007/2008*, Hofheim: Bahá'í-Verlag 2009. Translated by the author.
- 2 Hornby, Helen (ed.), *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File Part I*, New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1988.
- 3 *Directives from the Guardian*, India/Hawaii 1973.
- 4 This presentation is not concerned with the assessment of the degree to which individual excerpts from letters are binding on the recipients of the letters or on the Bahá'í community as a whole. Furthermore, questions of author attribution, i.e. of the authorship of Shoghi Effendi and/or that of his secretary or secretaries, will be addressed only when the discourse requires.
- 5 *Directives from the Guardian* no. 76, p. 30; also *Lights of Guidance* no. 1027, p. 302.
- 6 Keil, Gerald, *Time and the Bahá'í Era. A study of the Badí' Calendar*, Oxford: George Ronald Press 2008, pp. 127-180.
- 7 In contrast to advocates of deconstructionism (for a critical examination of the deconstructivist viewpoint see McLean, Jack, "Literary Criticism, Theology und Deconstructionism", <http://mclean.titles.googlepages.com/LiteraryCriticismTheologyandDeconstr.htm>) I make a plea not for the exclusion of the question of truth content (i.e. the rejection of its validity as an attribute of meaning), but merely for its suspension, for the application of literary criticism as a "safeguard against closures of meaning" (McLean p. 12), in conformity with the Bahá'í principle of discrimination between free expression of opinion (here in the sense of opinion potential) and authoritative interpretation of the teachings.
- 8 See for example Hatcher, John S., "The Validity and Value of an Historical-Critical Approach to the Revealed Works of Bahá'u'lláh", Momen, M. (ed.), *Scripture and Revelation*, Bahá'í-Studies Volume III, Oxford: George Ronald 1997, pp. 27-52; Stockman, Robert H., "Revelation, Interpretation and Elucidation in the Bahá'í Writings", *op.cit.* pp. 53-68; Lewis, Franklin, "Scripture as Literature. Sifting Through the Layers of the Text", in: *Bahá'í Studies Review* vol. 7, 1997; and more recently, McLean, J., "The Art of Rhetoric in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi", in: Iraj Ayman, ed., *Lights of 'Irfán – Papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars, Book Eight*, Evanston: Bahá'í National Center 2007, pp. 203-256.

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- 9 At the latest since [the events leading up to] the publication of *Modernity and the Millennium* by Juan R. I. Cole (New York: Columbia University Press 1998) and the preparation of the text compilation entitled *Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith: Extracts from Letters written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1999), especially the letter of 8 February 1998 (pp. 37-44), the employment of historical-critical methodology in the study of the writings has been the topic of a continuous debate among a number of Bahá'í writers reaching into the present time: the latest significant comment (at the time of this writing) can be found in Schaefer, Udo, *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: George Ronald 2007), Appendix, Section IV, "The Freedom of Historical Research". This debate has dominated the examination of literary criticism, with the result that consideration of other aspects has been for the most part overlooked.
- 10 For a – critical – examination of the findings of newer Bible criticism see for example Ratzinger, Joseph (Papst Benedikt XVI), *Jesus von Nazareth*, Freiburg: Herder Verlag 2 2007 (or its English-language equivalent).
- 11 For an analysis of the application of this principle in the framework of the understanding of Bahá'í law see Tober, Gilan, "Ein eindeutiger Wortlaut als Auslegungshindernis? Zur Interpretation normativer Bahá'í-Texte", in: *Schriftreihe der Gesellschaft für Bahá'í-Studien* Band 7, Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag 2003, pp. 95-128.
- 12 Cf. Gollmer, Ulrich, "Der Geringere Frieden: Göttliches Heilsangebot in Säkularer Gestalt", in: *Beiträge des 'Irfán-Kolloquiums 2005*, Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag 2006, p. 132.
- 13 Keil, Gerald, *Die Zeit im Bahá'í-Zeitalter: Eine Studie über den Badí'-Kalender*. Sonderband der Schriftreihe der Gesellschaft für Bahá'í-Studien für das deutschsprachige Europa, Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag 2005.
- 14 Kindly made available to me by the late Dr. Badí'u'lláh Panáhi (my transcription).
- 15 Momen, M. (ed.), *Selections from the Writings of E.G.Browne on the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, Oxford: George Ronald Press 1987, "A Summary of the Persian Bayan", Wáhid VI, Chapter 14.
- 16 Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitábu'l-Aqdas*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre 1995, Risálíh (Su'ál va Javáb) no. 35 (my transcription).
- 17 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre 1992, "Questions and Answers" no. 35, p. 118.
- 18 For the purposes of the Jalálí calendar, it would seem (though sources are not in unanimous agreement) that midday is nowadays defined as 12:00 true solar time calculated on the basis of the reference longitude for Iran Standard Time (52°30'E). At the time of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, however, it was most probably still determined by

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- observation, i.e. the moment when the sun stood due south (azimuth 0°) relative to that longitude which passed through a particular reference location in Teheran (approx. 51°25'30"E, or roughly four minutes and eighteen seconds earlier).
- 19 Nabíl-i A'zam, *Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, part 2 (unpublished). Text kindly made available to me by the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa (my transcription).
  - 20 *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, note 26, p. 177.
  - 21 In his review of Hatcher, John S., *The Ocean of His Words. A reader's Guide to the Art of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1997), Sen McGlinn stresses, in an impressive manner, the importance of the detachment of the literary-critical inspection of a text from extraneous expectations, especially in the sections "Subjectivism" and "Docetism" (*Bahá'í Studies Review* vol. 9, 1999-2000).
  - 22 See *Time and the Bahá'í Era*, pp. 161-163.
  - 23 Memorandum of 18. April 2001 from the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa to the present writer.
  - 24 Communication of 31 July 2006 from the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre to the present writer.
  - 25 A parallel search in *Directives from the Guardian* is ruled out on account of that work's lack of source references.
  - 26 *Lights of Guidance* no. 194, p. 55.
  - 27 *Lights of Guidance* no. 515, p. 154.
  - 28 *Lights of Guidance* no. 1623, p. 486.
  - 29 Excerpt from a letter of 25 February 1951 written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, quoted in a Memorandum of 12 January 2006 to an individual believer from the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre, reprinted in: Iraj Ayman, ed., *Lights of 'Irfán – Papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars, Book Eight*, Evanston: Bahá'í National Center 2007, p. 398. Remarks about the relative authority of such texts have been omitted, since this issue does not concern us here.
  - 30 The ramifications of the infallibility conferred upon the Guardian of the Cause by virtue of the Lesser Covenant are certainly of relevance with regard to the status of Shoghi Effendi's communications, but they do not contribute to the literary-critical analysis of them.
  - 31 *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* verse 111, p. 60.
  - 32 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1974, p. 370. I am indebted to the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre for pointing this out to me.
  - 33 *The Bahá'í World*, vol. VI (1934-1936), pp. 363 - 379.
  - 34 *The Bahá'í World*, vol. VIII (1938-1940), pp. 493 - 499, as well as vols. IX und X.

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- 35 *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* verse 16, pp. 24-25; verse 127, p. 64; "Questions and Answers" no. 35, p. 118.
- 36 Facsimile reproduction in *The Bahá'í World* (my transcription). Note that the Arabic *tá' marbút&at* (i.e. the feminine ending) is here rendered uniformly as *at*, whether medially (rather than *-at-*) or finally (rather than *-a*, *-ah* or occasionally *-at*).
- 37 Facsimile reproduction in *The Bahá'í World* (my transcription).
- It is also conceivable that the American National Spiritual Assembly was in possession of a copy of an English-language translation completed in India in 1939: cf. the letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi on 26 November 1939 to the National Spiritual Assembly of India: "The copy of the English translation of the compilation on 'Bahá'í Laws on Matters of Personal Status' which you had submitted for the Guardian's consideration has safely reached him, and while he does not advise that your Assembly should proceed with the publication of the English text at present, he has no objection to its being translated and published in Urdu and Burmese. As to the Iranian translation of the same; the friends in Iran have already completed this work, and the Guardian would therefore advise that you consult the Iranian National Spiritual Assembly on the subject before deciding to publish the text of the Iranian translation." Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent 1923-1957*, New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1995, p. 183.
- 38 *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Introduction, p. 9.
- 39 *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, note 26, p. 177.
- 40 See *Time and the Bahá'í Era*, pp. 164-171.
- 41 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament* part I: 17, p. 11.
- 42 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament* part II: 8, p. 19.
- 43 Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1974 (reprinted 1980), p. 150.
- 44 I make reference once again to my remarks in note 21.