

**Denis MacEoin's *Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History*
Some Notes**

by

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2022

Dr. Denis MacEoin's *Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History* (E.J. Brill, 1992, ix + 274 pp, 7 lams.) is a groundbreaking book on the subject. It is hoped that he or some other scholar will come out with a similar book on the works of Baha'u'llah.

The author's intention is very well stated: "My aim in the present work has been to facilitate access to the raw materials: it will be up to future researchers to decide to what use they wish to put them." (p. iii)

This important study is covered in eight chapters: I. The Fate of the works of the Bab. II. Early Works. III. Later Works. IV. Writings of the Babi hierarchy. V. Works of anti-Babi polemics. VI. The Kitab-i Nuqtat al-Kaf. VII. The Tarikh-i Jadid and other Babi Sources. VIII. Later Histories.

It has twelve appendices, the most important one being Appendix I: Manuscripts of the Bab's Writings and their Locations (pp. 182-203)

The Bibliography is extensive, but unfortunately the Index is useless.

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This work has many merits; as for a Baha'i reader, the main feature is that it silences once and for all, the vociferous claims of the ill-wishers: that the Bahá'ís have destroyed, tampered with, and eliminated all trace of the Bab's work. This stems from the Azalis of old and their friend Browne to Avarih, Jelal Azal and Rev. Miller.

Dr. MacEoin considers himself an agnostic/atheist, and is not very friendly to the Baha'is, particularly to some of their scholars. He is one of the best authorities on the subject and some of his findings on Babi sources are quite interesting ones, particularly to Baha'is:

- "Both Azali and Baha'i sources agree that this task [of collecting and transcribing the writings of the Bab] was carried out on the instructions of Husayn-'Ali Bahá'u'lláh." (p.27)

- "[The manuscripts of the Báb in Haifa]...have been sent to Palestine during the lifetimes of Mirza Husayn-'Ali Bahá'u'lláh, his son Abbas and his grandson Shoghi Effendi Rabbani" (p.37)

- In Tehran, MacEoin was presented with "xerox copies of **all manuscripts**", "I was also permitted to examine the **original manuscripts...**", "Working with **the originals**, I was able to identify virtually all of them, a total of **twenty-eight volumes**." (p.35). For what reason does he call this extraordinary Archive: pseudo-archive in p. 263?

- Of the Mss. at Haifa (p.37) he says: "...the collection will undoubtedly become the largest and probably the most important of the world." ... "excellent conservation work is currently being carried out at Haifa..." On another subject, on p. 166, he says: "I was able to consult...Zarandi's [Nabil] **complete** [two-part] history, 1014 pp."

And, what about the Azalis? MacEoin has several Azali friends in Iran, yet he admits that "despite of many requests of my part, I was not shown any manuscripts during my stay in Tehran in 1977, nor I have seen any since." (p.38)

In p.40, MacEoin copies two important letters of Baha Allah. In these letters Bahá'u'lláh accuses Mirza Yahya of forging some works of the Bab.

"In a letter by Baha Allah to Ali Siraj Isfahani, between 1866 and 1868, He says: 'At the time when I separated myself from my brother [Mirza Yahya] ... I wrote him: "indeed, you have added certain forged words of your own to those words, in order to cause the feet of those who have known God to stumble."

"In a letter to Zayn al-Muqarribín, Bahá Alláh speaks of the preparation of forgeries by his brother: '... In the first years of this wonderful cause, for a four-year period, we had given instructions for him to make copies from the originals in

the Báb's hand; manuscripts transcribed by that unbeliever [Mirza Yahya] in the style of the Báb's handwriting are still extant. In these days, he has once again begun to make copies, and whatsoever Satan inspires him to write, he writes and seals with the Báb's seal..."

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The work has some minor mistakes like:

-p.205: "Mirza Musa Nuri, an **elder** (?) brother of Bahá'u'lláh", is actually younger.

-p.258: That A. H. Wright wrote about the Bab in **1831**(?). Mistake probably picked up from Amanat. Really 1851.

-p.263: The well-known book by Khusravi, the **Iqlim-i-Nur**, is ascribed to Ishraq Khavari.

-p. 38: Mirza Yahya died in **1911**, correct year 1912

There are some contradictions like:

p.4 Regarding Browne's Index to the Bayan: "...the index was about as useful...as a map of Moscow in the center of Detroit." and in

p.84, n.28: "Browne prepared and published a valuable index".

p.2: The Bayan and other works published by the Azalis are "poorly edited." and in

p.84, n.28, the Bayan is "well edited."

P.151 "...Subh-i Azal did play an 'important role' in early Babism..." and in

p.170 "[Subh-i Azal] largely 'inactive role' within the movement during the period under discussion" i.e. early Babism.

There is much room for comment in this important work; only few examples:

-p.41.-"Shoghi Effendi is 'certainly seriously wrong'", suggesting that only three books of the Bab are dependable.

-p.49.-"Less excusable is the error' made by Shoghi Effendi respect to a date: 1845, that actually is 1846"

-p.55.-“Abbas Effendi ‘mistakenly’ describes [the Qayyum al-Asma] as the ‘first book’...”

-p.56.-“the Baha’i writer Shoghi Effendi states that its entire text was translated into Persian by... Tahirih”...” I am certainly unaware of any such translation, nor I have found any reference to Qurrat al-‘Ayn having produced a translation of the Qayyum al-Asma in any...documents I have consulted...”

- p.90.-“Shoghi Effendi in his rather ‘spurious’ list of the Bab’s best-known works...”

- p.154.-Mirza Abu-l-Fazl “is being ‘economical with the truth’” because he makes no reference in his Iskandariyya of 1892 of the NK given to Tumanskii in 1894. Regarding the same book, MacEoin quotes Tumanskii: “As regards to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, the falsification of my copy by them is beyond doubt”, knowing well that, he was comparing two different books (n.53). Etc.

His study of the Nuqtat al-Kaf is highly informative but, it seems that he stopped just when his findings were heading towards validating the ‘Theories of ‘Abbas Effendi’ (p.139) correct. The NK of the Gibb Series has been “poisoned”, as ‘Abdu’l-Baha said. MacEoin is not naïve, but he considers that it is inherently improbable to place the NK at the *Bibliothèque* by devious means; this would be with normal people but not the very astute and sly Azalis of the day. There is no comment as to what happened between the death of Count Gobineau and the placement of the NK at the Library. McEoin lists eleven copies of this history, E.G. Browne knew many, but remained silent about them; his Paris Mss. was much criticized. The title page of the *Nuqtat ‘ul Kaf* says: “Compiled by Hajji Mirza Jani of Kashan between the years A.D. **1850 and 1852.**” Finally, in his last book *Materials* p. 232, Browne had to admit that “...my edition of Haji Mirza Jani’s history of the Bab, **composed in 1853**, only three years after the Bab’s martyrdom.”, that is, after the supposed author was dead; this is no small admission. (See: Gonzales, Grover “Browne’s Mirza Yahya, before and after his Second Visit”, Bahá'í-library.com/gonzales_browne_yahya)

It is clear and evident that, without studying the Bahá’í Archives at Haifa and Tehran, this important study would have not seen the light.

The Preface is too controversial for comment, from the blacklisting of several titles and the forced closure of Kalimat Press to the attempts to suppress his book, and the reasons that, according to him, “will be apparent to any academic reading of these pages.” (p.i). The Introduction is no less controversial, particularly when he considers the Baha’is as not having academic honesty (p.2). All these could prejudice his main readership, besides not adding much to the prestige already won by the author.

In the Bibliography, one wonders why Salisbury’s “An Examination of Suppression and Distortion in 20th Century Baha’i Literature” is presented in the Unpublished Works in European Languages (p.254). Has he anything to say on Early Babi texts? or did the author find this title appealing?. On the other hand, the works of Baha’u’llah, or “Nuri the hierophant” as he calls Him, are not found in the Bibliography of Published Works in European Languages; a ‘lapsus’ of some kind?

It must be disappointing for a scholar that has dedicated so much time and effort in his research, to conclude that The Bab is just a man “obsessed...by words and concepts he had never fully understood...” and that His work cannot “interest or inspire the modern reader.” (p.102)

This work published by the prestigious Brill has many clerical errors, repetition of words and entire lines, etc. The Index has scores of mistakes; so many, it proves useless.

The book presented by Dr. Denis MacEoin could be considered a *tour de force* for any future studies on the subject. It is hoped that some scholar will produce a similar book on the work of Baha’u’llah.

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