

The Bābī-Bahā'ī transcendence of khātām al-nabiyyīn (Qur'ān 33:40) as the 'finality of prophethood'.¹

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Muhammad is not the father of any man among but he is the rasūl-Allāh (Messenger of God) and the khātām al-nabiyyīn, the 'seal' ('last', 'best' 'acme') of the prophets (Qur'ān 33: 40).

Lost indeed are they that cried lies to the encounter with God (liqā'-Allāh) so that when the [eschatological] Hour comes to them suddenly they shall say, 'Alas for us, that we neglected it!' (Qur'ān 6: 31).

Then We gave Moses the Book, complete for him who does good, and distinguishing every thing, and as a guidance and a mercy; haply they would believe in encounter (liqā') with their Lord (rabb) (Qur'ān 6:155).

Whoso looks to encounter God (liqā'-Allāh), God's term (ajal) is assuredly coming (Qur'ān 29: 5).²

This paper consists of interrelated notes upon the Bābī-Bahā'ī theological transcendence of khātamiyya or the khātām al-nabiyyīn (loosely, "seal of the prophets", Qur'ān 33:40) when understood as the 'finality of prophethood'. It also surveys select qur'ānic texts about a predicted future or eschatological "Encounter with God" (liqā' Allāh) understood as an elevated messianic theophany. Often understanding the khātām in Qur'ān 33:40 to mean "last", most Muslims came to consider this verse as foundational for the post-qur'ānic doctrine of the 'finality of prophethood'; that no nabī (prophet) or rasūl/mursal (sent messenger) would appear after Muhammad, the final rasūl Allāh (messenger of God).

¹ This paper is a slightly modified and expanded version of a few pages of my unpublished, early 1980s / 2002, University of Newcastle upon Tyne (UK), doctoral thesis (see bib. below). An English language, occasionally further updated and expanded version of these notes, can be found on my UC Merced personal 'Hurqalya Publications' website (see bib. below). A French version translated by Louis Henuzet will appear in a forthcoming volume entitled (add details here).

² Most of the translations of verses of the Qur'ān cited here are those of A. J. Arberry (d. Cambridge, 1969) with occasional modifications and/or added transliteration. He often translated liqā' as "encounter".

Perhaps echoing earlier claims of Manī (d. c. 277), the son of a Parthian prince and messianic claimant,³ the probably Aramaic qur'ānic Arabic loanword khātām came, throughout most of the Muslim world, to indicate that the succession of pre-Islamic prophets was "sealed up" or "ended" in Muhammad. This just as it had previously been in Manī and in other pre-Islamic notables or claimants to prophethood.⁴ It was thought that after Muhammad, sometimes even after the eschatological consummation, no future prophet would appear to found a new or renewed religion. Many commentators on Q. 33:40 have it that the Islamic belief in the second coming of Jesus indicates his reappearance as a nabī (a prophet and not a Divine figure) but in a role subservient to Muhammad and Islamic law on the Day of resurrection (Zamaksharī, al-Kashshāf, III: 544-5).

The alleged 'finality of prophethood' (khatm al-nubuwwa) after Muhammad became a firmly accepted Islamic dogma. One of the traditionally 313 (or more) 'sent Messengers' (al-rasūl / mursal), the Arabian prophet is said to have completed the chain of numerous, (traditionally 124,000 or more) pre-Christian (BCE) Israelite prophets.⁵ It came to be thought that Muhammad was the "last-termination-finality" of the never to be succeeded prophets up until the Day of Resurrection. Such was variously affirmed in thousands of Sunnī and Shī'ī traditions or ḥadīth sources, as well as in numerous expository and secondary post-Islamic literatures (see al-Ṭabarī, Tafsīr on Q, 33:40).

³ al-Bīrūnī, Sachau, 1879:190; Widengren, 1955: 12f; Ort, L. 1967:123ff; Stroumsa, 1986; Reeves, 1996: 11, 25 fns. 52-4.

⁴ Note also the use of 'seal of the prophets' in pre-Islamic Samaritan sacred writings such as the 4th cent. CE., Memar Marqeh ('The Teaching of Marqeh') where Moses is referred to as the M-Ḥ-T-M N-V-Y-Y-H ("The seal of the prophets"). See also MacDonald: 1963; text vol. I sect. V. 3, 35, p.123; trans. vol. II sect. V. 2-3 p. 201; Meeks, 1967: 221, 287 cf. p. 281-2; Stroumsa, 1976). Carsten Colpe in a 1980s article (see bib. below) has traced the 'seal of the prophets' title back to Jesus as registered by the Latin Christian author Tertullian of Carthage (d. c.. 220) via an exegesis of Daniel 9:24 contained in his *Adversus Judaeos* ('Treatise Against the Jews', c. 197 CE). Helmut Bobzin has similarly noted that the Syrian Christian theologian Aphraates (d. after 345) in his *Homilies* also applies the 'seal of the prophets' title to Jesus (Bobzin, in Neuwirth, 2011, p, 566 and fn.4).

⁵ On occasion Islamic tradition reckoned Moses the first of the "prophets of the children of Israel (anbiyā' banī Isrā'īl), the "last" (ākhir) of them being Jesus! (so a tradition from Ibn 'Abbās cited Majlisī, Bihar² 11:43; cf. 15:240' cf. below on the Jesus related khatam speculations of Ibn al-'Arabi).

Even though it is not at all clear that the absolute finality of prophethood was the original intention of Q. 33:40, this finality is today something firmly entrenched in both Sunnī and Shīī orthodoxy (Friedmann, 1986; 1989: 49ff, 64). Any hint of another post-Islamic prophetic claim or a challenge to the i`jāz al-Qur`ān (the inimitability of the Qur`ān) has generally met with dire consequences, including theological castigation, the accusation of heresy, imprisonment, exile or execution.⁶ It is yet indisputably the case, as several respected academics and others have maintained in the light of early Islamic traditions and philological commentary and analysis, that the post-qur`ānic Islamic doctrine of the `finality of prophethood` was not originally so clearly implied in Q. 33:40. For some early champions of emergent Islam, as well as modern academics, prophethood need not have terminated or be seen to have ended for all time with the prophet Muhammad (refer, Goldziher, Muslim Studies vol. 2:103-4; Friedmann, 1989: 58ff, 70ff; Cecep Lukman Yasin, 2010:131ff).

The khatm / khātam al-nabiyyīn motif in Sufism, Islamic mysticism and twelver Shi`I Imamology and gnosis.

The twelver Shīī and Sufi positions regarding pre-Islamic and post Muhammad divine guidance is more complicated with their rich prophetological and diverse eschatological materials.⁷ They not infrequently register future messianic-type roles occupied by Muhammad, Jesus, and the twelver Imams; most notably Imam `Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib (d. 40/661), Imam Ḥusayn ibn `Alī (d. 61/680), the Mahdi (Rightly guided one) or the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, known as the Qā'im (messianic "Ariser"). The "seal of the prophets" stamp is hardly rigidly applicable throughout the millennium and more of Shīī history with its evolving prophetology,

⁶ As frequently noted by Aḥmadiya Muslims and other Islamic thinkers and scholars, there exists an interesting ḥadīth transmitted from `Ā'yisha (daughter of Abū Bakr and wife of the Prophet Muhammad). It has it that Muslims should proclaim that Muhammad was the khātam al-anbiyā' (= khātam al-nabiyyīn) but not state that he is the `last of the prophets'; or "one after whom there would be no prophet" (Ar. lā nabīyy ba`dahu). This ḥadīth is cited by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) in his Ta'wil mukhtalaf al-ḥadīth... and by the polymathic Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d.905/1506) in his al-Durr al-manthūr fī'l-tafsīr bi'l-ma`thūr, vol. 5: 204 (refs, noted by Friedmann, 1989 : 63 + fn. 56 and 57),

⁷ I shall frequently use the word eschatology here in the sense of having to do with the 'last times' as this future apocalyptic era is detailed in numerous Abrahamic and related sacred writings

imamology and eschatology. Its Imams are pictured as having a universal, pre-existent, and future role transcending nubuwwa (prophethood) and often centered on the related walāya (providential overseership, intimacy, friendship) phenomenon.⁸ As exalted vehicles of divine guidance they, along with the Prophet Muhammad, are accorded an all-enduring role. Twelver Shīī traditions have it that during eschatological times, there is to be a multiplicity of prophet related and imamological “returns” or second comings. Future divine guidance mediated by a cascade of exalted individuals is anticipated in hundreds of sacred, messianic traditions relayed through the prophet Muhammad, the twelver Imams, and many others.

al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (b. Tirmidh, near Balkh c. 204/820 - d. 320/932).

A profound theological and hagiographical mysticism surrounding the “seal” (khatm, khatam, khātim) motif in Islamic thought, theology and mysticism, can to some degree, be traced back to Muhammad ibn ‘Alī al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932). He was a famous Sunni ḥadīth scholar and jurist, who was to some degree subject to Shīī influence and to the tradition of esoteric gnosis. The great Ibn al-‘Arabi and numerous of his disciples, as well as many other Islamic mystical philosophers and theologians, were influenced by al-Tirmidhī’s ideas about nubuwwa (prophethood),

⁸ The Qur’ān rooted Arabic walāya (or the synonymous wilāya) and the related walī (plural, awliyā’ = ‘friend, saint, overseer, leader, authority, guardian’, etc), is often indicative of an aspect of spiritual or divine intimacy, of divine providence and its human locus or vehicle of expression. Walāya has thus (among many other things) been regarded as an expression of special intimacy, friendship, saintliness, providence and overseership, etc. The human walī, for example, may be a special intimate, Saint, Friend or Sage, etc. From the early Islamic centuries, Walī became a significant human centered technical term within select Sufī circles. So too in the writings of those who sought to clarify dimensions of Shīī imamology. The figure of the Walī is sometimes descriptive of a human authority figure; one possessed of a role and function seen in the Ithnā ‘ashaī (twelver) Imam as religious leader and authority. For Bahā’īs the Walī / Valī is the title of the ‘Guardian of the Cause of God’ (Persian, valī-yi amr Allāh). For some details pertinent to the many Islamic meanings of walāya, walī and the often related nubuwwa (prophethood) see Landolt, ‘Walayah’ in *Enc.Rel.* ; Radtke, 1996; Renard, 2008, especially pp. 260-263; Kamada, 455ff in Lawson, ed., 2005; McGregor, ‘Friends of God’ in *EI*³ (Brill online version 2013).

the khātam al-nubuwwa (the seal of prophethood), and the related notions of khatm al-walāya (the Seal of Friendship / Sainthood).

In several of his many influential writings, this great Sufi theologian spoke about an elevated `Seal of the Saints' (or Friends). He even explicitly stated in his Khatm al-awliyā' (also known as the Sirat al-awliyā', `The Seal of the Friends' or `Life of the Friends of God'), that there exists a great leader or chief in possession of the "seal of sainthood (friendship, intimacy) with God" (khātim al-walāya). Responding to a question about the Qurān-rooted expression khātam al-nubuwwa (`Seal of prophethood, cf. Q. 33:40b), al-Tirmidhī wrote:

و لخاتم النبوة بدءٌ وشأن عجيب عميق أعمق من أن تحتمله ...

[58] For the "Seal of prophethood" (khātam al-nubuwwa) is an origin and a nature (bada' sha`n) which is wondrous (`ajīb) and profound (`amīq), more profound (a`maq) than you can possibly conceive ... [61] God gathered together in Muhammad all the parts of prophethood (ajzā' al-nubuwwa) and having thus perfected prophethood, He set His seal upon it (bi-khatmi-hi). And because of that seal (al-khatm) neither Muhammad's carnal soul, nor his enemy [Satan], found the means to penetrate the place of prophethood [within him]".⁹

The focus of al-Tirmidhi's hagiography was not upon any limited notion of the finality of prophethood or sainthood. In his elevated concepts surrounding the "seal", he made room for a future hierarchy of Sufi saints, mystics and sages. As cosmic powers, certain among them (such as the later 40 or 356 *abdāl* or "substitutes") were viewed as very elevated persons. Sometimes their leader (s) took on a messianic type persona, were subject to divine inspiration, and were thought to have a very

⁹ Sirat al-awliyā', ed. Radtke 1992 sect. 58 p. 40; sect 61 p. 41; trans. Lambden + O'Kane, 1996, 104, 106. cf. al-Tirmidhi, Khatm al-awliyā, ed. Yahya, 161ff

important role in eschatological times. al-Tirmidhī even speaks of a special, chosen walī (Intimate of God, Friend of God, Saint) who will come forth on the Day of Judgement and be in perfect or complete possession of the khātim al-walāya, the “seal of Friendship with God”:

Whenever one of them dies, another follows after him and occupies his station (maqām), and it will continue until their number is exhausted and the time comes for the world to end. Then God will send a Friend (walī) whom He has chosen and elected, whom He has drawn unto Him and made close, and He will bestow on him everything He bestowed upon the [other] Friends (al-awliyā’) but He will distinguish him with the seal of Friendship with God (bi-khatim al-walāya). And he will be the Proof of God (Ḥujjat Allāh) on the Day of Resurrection (yawm al-qiyāna) above [against] all of the other Friends of God (awliyā’). By means of this seal he will possess the sincerity of Friendship with God (ṣidq al-walāya) the same way that Muhammad possessed the sincerity of prophethood (ṣidq al-nubuwwa).¹⁰

This special figure, distinguished in the *Sirat al-awliyā’* as the khātim al-walāya (“seal of Intimate Friendship with God”; sect 64.), was later referred to by some as al-ghawth (“the Helper, One who assists”) and al-quṭb (“the Pole, Apex”). He is the supreme eschatological Ḥujjat Allāh (the “Proof of God”) and one especially intimate with God as the walī Allāh. This title Ḥujjat Allāh was sometimes applied to the expected Shīṭī messianic twelfth Imam and was often utilized by the Bāb himself in his *Qayyūm al-asmā’* and many other writings.¹¹

¹⁰ *Sirat al-awliyā’*, 64, ed. Radtke 1992, sect. 64 pp. 44-5, trans. O’Kane, 109f adapted Lambden.

¹¹ *Ibid* and see further Abrahamov, 2014, 85-90; Elmore 1999, 2001, index, .

Muhammad Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-`Arabī (b. Murcia [Spain] 560/1165 - d. Damascus [Syria] 638/1240).

The influential master of Islamic mysticism, Ibn al-`Arabī (d. 638/1240) with numerous of his commentators, made much of the concepts of nubuwwa (prophethood) and wilāya ("human mediated providential guidance"). For the Great Shaykh, walāya is essentially the bāṭin (inner depth) of nubuwwa, itself of various kinds. The following (loosely translated) passages from the al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya (The Meccan Disclosures) revolve around khātam (seal) concepts touching upon modes of nubuwwa (prophethood) and of wilāya (providential guidance), and must suffice to illustrate these developments:

Walāya (divine guidance) is expressive of nubuwwa `amma (general prophethood) and that prophethood which is legalistic (al-tashrī) also known as nubuwwa khāṣṣa (specific prophethood)... Muhammad is the khātam al-nubuwwa (seal of prophethood) for there is no prophethood (nubuwwa) after him. Yet after him was the like of Jesus among the ūlū al-`azm (those characterized by steadfastness) of the Messengers (al-rusul) and certain specified Prophets (al-anbiyā)... there will be disclosed a Walī ("Chosen Intimate", "Friend", "Saintly Leader") possessed of absolute prophethood (nubuwwa al-muṭlaqa)... (Futuhat, II: 24ff, 47ff; cf. I: 200, 429; Fusus, 134-6; 160, 191).¹²

Some commentators on Ibn al-`Arabī and his many writings, reckon that he himself was or claimed to be the khātam al-walāya (The Seal of Divine Intimacy). Many of his disciples certainly saw him in this light (see further Ibn al-`Arabī trans. Elmore 1999, Elmore, 2001).

¹² For further details see al-Tirmidhi, Khatm al-Awliyā, ed. Osman Yahya Abrahamov, 2014, Elmore 1999, 2001, Renard, 2008: 263ff,

Maḥmūd ibn ‘Abd al-Kaīm Shabistaī (b. Shahbistar, near Tabriz c. 686/1287 - d. c. 720/1320).

Sufi insights and twelver Shīī perspectives surrounding the khātam al-nabiyyīn and associated matters touching upon finality and non-finality, cannot be comprehensively dealt with here. The following stanzas from the Persian *Gulshan-i rāz* (The Rose Garden of the Secrets) of the Ibn al-‘Arabī influenced Maḥmūd ibn ‘Abd al-Kaīm Shabistaī, must suffice to give an indication of deeply profound khatm / khātam (“seal”) related insights. They provide a glimpse into the fascinating universe of the mystical and messianic dimensions of doctrines inspired by the qur’ānic khātam (“seal”) motif:

Prophethood (nubuwwat) came to be manifest in Adam, Its perfection (kamāl) was realized through the existence of the Khātam [Muhammad].

Wilāyat (“Saintly guidance”) lingers behind while it makes a journey,

As a [Prophetological] Point (nuqṭa) in the world, it scribes another cycle.

Its theophany in its fullness (zuhūr-i kull-i ū) [through Him] will [ere]long be realized through the Khātam (‘Seal’).

For through him the cycle of Existence (‘ālam-i wujūd) will be completed.

His chosen ones (awliyā’) are even as his bodily organs (‘aḍw).

While he Himself is the Pleroma (kull), they constitute segments thereof.

As one intimate with the Master (khwajah), his Providence complete,

Through him will Universal Mercy (raḥmat-i ‘āmm) find realization.

An Exemplar he shall be throughout both worlds, a Leader (khalīfa) for the progeny of Adam (Gulshan, 1978: Per. 369-374 pp. 22-3, trans.Lambden).¹³

In summary, as I understand these lines: The first man Adam initiated primordial prophethood (nubuwwa) which came to be perfectly fulfilled or realized in Muhammad, its “seal” (khātam). The potent, supra-prophetological force of walāya (“Divine Guidance”) as a “Point” or locus of Divine Reality, came to express itself through scribing, writing out, initiating or delineating, a new cycle or era. As a result the fullness of a Divine Theophany related to the Khātam (Seal) will come about.

¹³ On Sufi aspects of the khātam al-nabiyyīn in Ibn al-‘Arabī etc., see further al-Futuhat and the Fusus al-Hikam (indexes) as well as Friedmann, 1989: 71ff + index.

Through this evolution, by means of a future Exemplar and Leader, Universal Mercy (rahmat-i `āmm) will find realization. Transcending finality, the “Seal” through its transcendent walāya (divine potentiality), becomes a future locus of universal, Divine Guidance.

The Commentary of Muhammad ibn Yaḥyá al-Lahījī on the Gulshan-i rāz (The Rose Garden of Secrets).

Twelver Shī`ī Imamology, Prophethood and the Walāya phenomenon.

Ḥaydar al-Āmolī (b. Āmul 719–787 / 1319–1385).

This learned twelver Shī`ī scholar and mystic was much influenced by Ibn al`Arabī upon whose seminal Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam (The Bezels of Wisdom) he wrote a commentary entitled Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ (The Provision of Provisions). His position of the matters of interest here have been well summed up by Kohlberg in his Encyclopedia Iranica article on al- Āmolī

In accordance with Āmolī’s system, the Mahdī must be a walī, not a prophet; indeed, Āmolī follows Sa`d-al-dīn Ḥammūya (d. 650/1252) (in his al-Maḥbūb) and `Abd-al-Razzāq Kāšānī (d. 730/1330) in maintaining that the seal of the universal (moṭlaq) walāya is `Alī and the seal of the particular (moqayyad, Mohammadan walāya is the Mahdī (who for Āmolī is identical with the Twelfth Imam). On this issue Āmolī differs from Ebn al-`Arabī, who identified the k̄ātam al-walāyat al-moṭlaqa with Jesus and who was himself regarded by some of his disciples as the k̄ātam al-walāyat al-moqayyada (Jāme` al-asrār, pp. 385, 395-448). (Kohlberg Elr. Vol. 1: 983-985).

Muhammad Muhsin Fayḍ al-Kashānī (d. Isfahan 1091/1680),

Add here

In many Sufi circles and within streams of Twelver Shī`ism, the personified walāya expressed through the walī as Friend, Saint, Intimate or messianic Imam, all but exploded the constraints of the finality of the prophetological tradition. For some the Islamic universe came to embrace or expect a future supreme walī, Guide-Mahdī or

‘Perfect Human’ (al-insān al-kāmil). For many deep thinkers the finality of providential divine guidance failed to be utterly finalized.

The Bāb, Qur’an 33: 40, Messianic Hopes and the Eschatological Theophany. ¹⁴

From the outset of his six year messianic career (1844-50), Sayyid `Alī Muhammad Shirazi, the Bāb (“Gate”, 1819-1850), in his neo-qur’ānic Qayyūm al-asmā’ (“The Deity Self-Subsisting through the Divine Names”; henceforth = QA.) dating to mid. 1260/1844, and in other early writings (see INBMC 91), challenged both the finality of prophethood and the inimitability of the Qur’ān. In complex interpretations of the qur’ānic surah of Joseph (= Q. 12), he regularly exegetically rewrote or ‘re-revealed’ verses of the Qur’ān, thus opening up new bāṭinī (“deep interior”) depths, new vistas of messianic hope and eschatological meaning. In the light of his eschatologically charged, high Shīṭī-Shaykhī imamology in other words, he modified the standard understanding of the ‘finality of prophethood’ by incorporating rewritten forms and new contextualizations of the khātām al-nabiyīn (Q. 33:40b) verse into his first major work, the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf (Q. 12) or Qayyūm al-asmā’.

Khātām al-nabiyīn in the Qayyūm al-asmā’.

In his QA the Bāb frequently underlined an immanent yet partially realized messianism as well as the hope for the great Theophany. Qur’ān 33:40, as the following notes must suffice to illustrate, is re-contextualized and transcended:

O people of the earth! God did not create Muhammad the father of any of your men but he made him in the midmost-heart of the celestial Throne (fī kabd al-`arsh) for His greatest [eschatological] Day. God hath, in very truth, concluded this matter as something hidden and treasured-up (QA XLIV [44]:164).

Here the Bāb rewrites Qur’ān 33:40 so as to modify or pass over the note of finality which most Muslims read into the last phrase of this qur’ānic verse. Through his supernatural link with the heavenly Dhikr (messianic Remembrance) and/or the occulted twelfth Imām, the Ḥujjat-Allāh (messianic ‘Proof of God’), he several times radically modified any straightforward notion of the finality of prophethood and

¹⁴ In this paper the word theophany indicates an indirect appearance or manifestation of the Godhead. The related words theophanic and theophanological, are descriptive of something that has to do with such a divine theophany.

associated the Dhikr (Remembrance) with the immanent or actual liqā' Allāh/ al-Rabb, the eschatological 'Encounter with God' (see further below).¹⁵

In QA IV [4] the Bāb addresses the ahl al-madīna ("people of the city", of Shiraz?). He accuses them of polytheism if they acknowledge Muhammad as the "seal of the Prophets" and affirm his book (the Qur'ān), yet fail to bear witness to the fact that God also revealed "the like of it" (the Qur'ān) in the form of the QA of the Bāb ("Our servant"; cf. Q. 2:23). In QA LXIV [64], the Bāb similarly sets down a messianic rewrite of Q.12:63 in the light of Q. 33:40. He exhorts believing Muslims gathered before Muhammad, the khātam al-nabiyyīn, to utter the following words:

O our father [Muhammad], the Dhikr (messianic "Remembrance"), is a "further Measure" (al-kail) [Q.12:53] which has been denied to us. So dispatch with us, the sign of the Dhikr for the greater magnification (li'l-takbīr al-akbar)... (QA LXIV [64]: 260).

The finality of prophethood is here transcended through the messianic Dhikr (personified Remembrance of God) who, as a new Joseph type figure, represents and offers a "greater measure" (al-kail) of divine guidance. A few sūras later in QA LXVI [66], the Bāb speaks of a "Book" (= QA) sent down to inform the people that the messianic Ḥujjat-Allāh ('Proof of God' = the 12th Imam) is closely associated with the messianic Dhikr, even as the likeness of the Ḥujjat (Proof) nigh Muhammad, the khātam al-nabiyyīn. It seems to be implied that the messianic "Hour" is about to be realized through the close relationship between the Dhikr (Remembrance) and the twelfth Imam or Ḥujjat-Allāh, the messianic Proof of God. In translation, this passage within QA LXVI [66], reads as follows:

"O Thou Jet-Black Tree (shajarat al-sawdā')! ...This is a Book which We revealed, in very truth, blessed and confirmatory of the Truth (al-ḥaqq). This that the people might be informed that the [messianic] Ḥujjat of God ("Proof of God"), in the mode of the Dhikr (Remembrance), is even as the likeness of

¹⁵ In two of his six or so uses of the word liqā' for the eschatological encounter with God in his early Qayyūm al-asmā', the messianic Dhikr (Remembrance) is closely related to the expected Divine Theophany, the liqā' Allāh / al-Rabb (see QA XX [20] p.33; XXIX [29] p. 52; XXXVI [36] p. 65; LIII [53] p.103 and especially QA LVII [57] p. 114 and LXXIV [74] p. 169.

His Ḥujjat (messianic “Proof”) nigh Muhammad, the khātam al-nabbiyīn (the ‘Seal of the Prophets’). In the Archetypal [Mother] Book (umm al-kitāb) this [eschatological] matter was mighty indeed (QA ., LXVI [66] Sūrat al-aḥadiyya, p.132).

In subsequent years (1848-50) the sometimes thinly veiled ‘messianic secret’ of the Bāb’s claim to be the Dhikr - Qā’im / Mahdī and maẓhar-i ilāhī (Manifestation of God), was publicly broadcast and his more exalted claims openly promulgated (see Persian Bayān, Kitāb-i panj sha`n, etc). Through his bold claims and thousands of allegedly revealed Arabic and Persian verses, he strove to outwardly exemplify the transcendence of the narrow understanding of the khatam al-nabiyyīn of the Qur’an.

Early on in his trenchant Arabic Izhāq al-bāṭil (The Crushing of Falsehood, 1845) on the basis of his analysis of the abovementioned Qayyūm al-asmā’, the Persian Shaykhī leader Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1871) not suprisingly accused the Bāb of such heresy as went well beyond the constraints of Islamic Shīṭī piety.¹⁶ In more recent times, hundreds of Sunnī and Shīṭī anti-Bābī and Bahā’ī tracts citing and centering around Q. 33:40, have been penned by Muslims bent on crushing out the need for messianic reform, renewal and revolution (see for example, Yahya Noori, Khātamiyyat, many 20th and 21st cent. printings). Messianic claimants (like the Bāb, Mirza Ghulām Aḥmad and Bahā’-Allāh) have often been mercilessly condemned in the light of Qur’ān 33:40. Pious religionists have been shunned and consigned to oblivion. Any proposed eschatological plan of God has been eclipsed by ‘finality fundamentalists’ objecting to divinely inspired human messengers with their new hopes for humankind.

In their writings, the Bāb and Bahā’-Allāh never ceased referring to Muhammad as the khātam al-nabbiyīn (Qur’ān 33:40b).¹⁷ For them it did not

¹⁶ The full title of this Arabic work is Izhāq al-bāṭil dar radd al-Bābiyya (“The Crushing of Falsehood in refutation of the Bābī phenomenon”). It was completed on the 12th Rajab 1261/17th July 1845 or just a year after the prophetic declaration of the Bāb on May 22 [23], 1844.

¹⁷ The XXV/25th sūrah of the QA of the Bāb is entitled Sūrat al-khāta/im, the ‘Surah of the Seal / Ringstone’ which is distinctly eschatological with repeated references to the messianic Dhikr Allāh (Remembrance of God), thus transcending any finality read into Q. 33:40. For further references of

necessitate the finality of prophethood nor outrule eschatological messianism. The Qur'ān-rooted and repeated hope for an eschatological theophany precipitating judgement, guidance, justice and millennial peace, was not compromised. Though there are numerous hadith texts interpreting Qur'ān 33:40b with implications of finality, there are repeated injunctions in the Qur'ān against doubting the liqā'-Allāh, the eschatological encounter or meeting with God through his messianic or theophanic representative. We shall see below that according to the writings of the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh, God, in His Essence (dhāt), cannot be seen or encountered.¹⁸ Early on in his ministry (c. 1845 CE) in a 'Letter to Salmān' (perhaps written from Musqat), the Bāb had already confirmed that the eschaton, "The [eschatological] "Hour" (al-sa`at) had "come to pass" and that the "signs" associated with this time were being realized in a literal and/ or symbolic manner:

... these are the verses of the Tablet (al-lawḥ) which were revealed by God according to the levels of the deep inner sense of the Qur'ān (ḥukm bāṭin al-Qur'ān) perchance the people may come to faith in the [newly revealed] verses of God.

Say: O thou concourse of the people of the Qur'ān! ... There hath indeed come unto thee the Dhikr (messianic Remembrance) from the Baqiyat-Allāh (occulted, messianic "Remembrance of God")¹⁹ (L-Salman, INBMC 91: 52-55. Cf. Ibid p.89).

We may now pass on to examine a few Qur'ānic and other Islamic testimonies to an eschatological theophany or vision of God, the Lord, since they too are often held by the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh to transcend the finality of prophethood.

the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh to the qur'ānic khātam al-nabiyyīn and related matters see below Appendix One.

¹⁸ See esp. Q. 6:30, 130; 7:51, 145; 10:7,12, 15, 46; 13:2; 18:105; 23:33; 25:23; 30:8, 15; 32:10, 14; 39:71; 40:15; 41:54 and 45:34.

¹⁹ In messianic twelver Shi'ism, the title Baqiyat Allāh (Remnant of [the true religion of] God) can refer to an eschatological figure whose advent in the latter-days was expected.

The Islamic Vision of the “Lord” (al-rabb) on the Day of Resurrection.

“God is He who raised up the heavens without pillars you can see, then He sat Himself upon the Throne... He distinguishes the signs; haply you will have faith in the encounter with your Lord (liqā’ rabbika)” (Qur’ān 13: 2).

“No indeed! When the earth is ground to powder, and thy Lord comes forth (wa jā` rabbuka), and the angels rank on rank” (Qur’ān 89: 21-22).

“Faces [of believers] shall shine brightly (nāḍira) on that Day [of Resurrection] gazing upon their Lord (rabb)” (Qur’ān 75: 22-3).

The Islamic implications of such Qur’ānic verses as have been cited above, have been well summed up in the following succinct manner by Murata and Chittick:

“We have seen that the Koran promises in no uncertain terms that people will encounter their Lord. One of the questions that theologians often debated was whether or not this encounter implied the vision of God. Most thought that it did, and they had Koranic verses and hadiths to support them. The general picture, in fact, is that the vision of God is the greatest possible bliss, and that all those taken to paradise will achieve it. However, those who remain in hell will be barred from this vision, and this will amount to the worst possible chastisement” (Murata and Chittick, 1994: 177).

In line with those Qur’ānic passages which speak of the eschatological therophany, the encounter or meeting (liqā’) with the Lord (rabb) (see Q. 13:2) and of the eschatological vision of the Lord (rabb), there are traditions ascribed to Muhammad about a latter-day vision of God as the resplendent and luminous “Lord” (rabb).²⁰ One such frequently recorded Sunnī tradition, is registered in slightly variant forms in the Ṣaḥīḥ (the Reliable/Sound) of Muhammad ibn Ismā’īl al-Bukhārī (d.256/870), Within, for example, the Kitāb al-Tafsīr (Book of Qur’ān Commentary) the following tradition narrated from Abū Sa’īd al-Khudrī (c/ 65/584) is found:

²⁰ There exist many ḥadīth about the eschatological vision of God, the resplendent Lord, in numerous respected Sunnī and Shī’ī Islamic sources. These include numerous Islamic Tafsīr literatures and, for example, the ḥadīth collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim (d. 875 CE), Ibn Mājah (d. 886 CE), al-Tirmidhī (d. 815 CE), Abū Dāwūd (d. 888 CE) and al-Nasā’ī (d. 915 CE), as well as in the early al-Muwattā’ (“The Approved”) of Imam Mālik ibn Anas (d.179/795).

During the lifetime of the Prophet [Muhammad] it was said, `O Messenger of God! Shall we see our Lord (rabb) on the Day of Resurrection (yawm al-qiyaama)?' The Prophet said, `Yes!' (na`am); do you have any difficulty in seeing the sun (al-shams) at midday when it is bright (ḍaw') and there is no cloud (al-saḥāb) [in the sky]?" They replied, "No." He said, "Do you have any difficulty in seeing the moon (al-qamar) on the night of the full moon (laylat al-badr) when it is bright (ḍaw') and there is no cloud (al-saḥāb) [in the sky]?" They replied, "No." The Prophet said, Likewise will you have no difficulty in seeing God (Allāh) on the Day of Resurrection as you have no difficulty in seeing either of them [the sun or the moon]... (Lambden, trans. Arabic Bukharī, 1997, al-Sahih, vol. 6, Bk. 65 No. 4581, pp. 90-92).

This above ḥadīth from the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukharī, further has it that "On the Day of Resurrection ... the Lord of the worlds (rabb al-`ālamīn)" will come to various ummat (religious communities) in a "form", "shape" or mode closest (adnā sūrat) to the vision of Him expected or "generated by the people themselves". It then adds that the true eschatological vision of God will be a universal, personal vision of the Qur'ānic God.

Several Sunnī traditions about the vision of the Lord on the Day of Resurrection are also found in the Kitāb al-Tawḥīd (Book of the Divine Unity) within the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukharī where they are considered expository of Qur'ān 75:22-23 (cited above), including the following narration from a certain Jarīr ibn 'Abd-Allāh al-Bajalī (d. ca. 51/671),

We were sitting with the Prophet [Muhammad] and he looked at the moon (al-qamar) on the night of the full moon (laylat al-badr) and said, "You shall see your Lord (rabb) just as you see this [full] moon (al-qamar), and you will have no difficulty or trouble in observing Him (ru'yatihi)... (Lambden, trans Arabic Bukharī, 1997, al-Sahih, vol.9, Bk. 97 No. 7434. p. 318).

More categorically, Jarīr ibn `Abd-Allāh al-Bajalī is again cited by al-Bukharī as narrating that the Prophet said:

"You will indeed see your Lord (rabb) with your own eyes" (satrūna rabbakum `iyyān ^{an}) (Lambden, trans Arabic Bukharī, 1997, al-Sahih, vol. 9, Bk. 97 No. 7435. p. 318).²¹

In certain of these and other early, related traditions, the expected normally formless Lord (rabb) is to appear on the Day of Resurrection in human-like ("anthropomorphic") "form" (ṣūrat). In some texts this has messianic and theophanological implications. Within Islamic theological writings, it is admitted that God may manifest Himself in whatever manner he pleases; as, for example, a human-like Deity (human beings are in "His image" Gen. 1:27) redolent of divine, supernatural beauty (al-jamāl). In some traditions God, the latter-day Lord, is pictured as taking on beautiful bodily forms, like that of the youthful prophet Jesus or Muhammad. Even the archangel Gabriel is said to have assumed the stunningly beautiful form of the merchant Diḥya al-Kalbī (d. c. 45/618; see Lammens and Pellat, "Diḥya", in EI²). According to Islamic sources, God, the Lord, may thus exhibit outstandingly beautiful features, appearing at times as an adolescent "beardless youth" (al-shābb / amrad)²² or as an "Ancient of Days", old man or Shaykh. According to Anas ibn Mālik (d. 91-93 /708-10), Muhammad himself is said to have stated,

I saw my Lord (rabbi) in the most beautiful form (aḥsan sūrat) like a youth with abundant hair (ka'l-shābb al-mūfiri) on the throne of grace (kursī karāmat), with a golden rug (firāshun min dhahab) spread out around Him... (cited Ritter 2003: 459).²³

²¹ Refer further to the similar traditions about the vision of the Lord on the Day of Resurrection recorded by al-Bukharī in the Kitāb al-Tawḥīd (Book of the Divine Unity), from Jarīr (No. 7436, pp. 318-9), from 'Ata' ibn Yazid al-Laithi as narrated from Abū Hurayrah (No. 7437, p. 319-322), from 'Aṭā' bin Yazid several times from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (No. 7438, p. 322+ No. 7438, p. 322), etc

²² The prophetic tradition relayed from 'Ikrima picturing the "Lord" as a "beardless Youth" (al-shābb) can be found in various hadīth collections and in numerous Sufi and other sources including the writings of the great mystic Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240). See his al-Futuḥāt al-makkiyya ("The Meccan Disclosures") vol. I: 97, 755; II: 377, 426; III: 111, 330, IV: 182, 474 etc. For further details and references in early Islamic literatures, Ritter, 2003 esp. Ch. 26 p. 460f.

²³ Traditions relayed from Ibn 'Abbas (d. c. 68/687), the 'Father of Tafsir', have it that on the night of his Mi'rāj (ascent through the heavens), Muhammad saw Jesus as a snow-white (bayḍā') shābb (youth) with curly or long hair. Also worth noting here are the observations of the 8th Imam 'Alī al-Ridā' (d. 201/818), on a possibly originally Sunnī registered tradition (summed up by Hisham ibn Salim, Saḥīḥ al-Taḥī and al-Maythamī) about an alleged vision of Muhammad picturing God as a

Bābī and Bahā'ī sacred writings often underline the fact that God can never be directly seen or incarnated as a human being (Q. 6:103, Q. 112). Yet, He can be visioned or “seen” after the “image” of his divine Manifestation who is often pictured in human, super-human or in diverse symbolic and supernatural terms. Without incarnation, the formless, yet imaged divine “Beauty” according to Abrahamic religious sources, suffuses the whole of creation and may be visioned. Bahā'-Allāh and his successors taught that past prophets visioned the eschatological Lord as the human-like “Glory” (kavod) or the divine Splendour of God (see Ezekiel 1:26f and 10; Revelation 1:12ff), as an archangelic being such as Michael (Heb. = “One like unto God”), or as the Danielic “Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7 : 7, 9, 22; 1 Enoch 46:1; 71:10). The symbolic language of Abrahamic sacred scripture and numerous post-biblical Jewish writings, have the great Messenger founders and expected manifestation of Divinity, as being portrayed in elevated human and/or Divine terms. Though never to be taken literally, the sacred writings of the world’s religions, including Islamic ḥadīth texts, sometimes picture God in elevated “human” terms. Eschatological portraits of Divinity with messianic implications are sometimes viewed by Bahā'īs as glimpses of the “Glory-Beauty” (Bahā') of the person of Bahā'-Allāh. The eschatological ‘coming of God’, the Lord, is demythologized in Bābī-Bahā'ī texts relative to messianic, prophetic fulfilment (see further below).

The Eschatological Encounter / Meeting with God, the Lord. ²⁴

Great messianic, theophanological importance was given by the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh to the qur'ānic references to liqā'- Allāh, the latter day meeting or encounter with God (including Q. 6:31; 130, 154; 7:51,147; 10:7ff; 13:2 etc.).²⁵ In the Qur'ān itself the eschatological Day of Judgement or Resurrection (yawm al-qiyāma), is referred to as the yawm al-talāqi, the “Day of the the Encounter” with God

youth of thirty years but ‘hollow’ down to the navel, then of solid form, apparently for standing upright (see al-Kulaynī, al-Kafi, Pt. II. Sect. 10, Ḥadīth 266).

²⁴ While numerous other translations are possible, the centrally important qur'ānic Arabic phrase liqā' Allah will usually be translated here with the suitably neutral “encounter” / “the encounter with God” (so Arberry). Among possibilities, the translation “the meeting with God/ the Lord” is especially appropriate to its Bābī-Bahā'ī historical and theological senses.

²⁵ For a complete list of references for the qur'ānic liqā' Allāh, including nominal and verbal uses of the root letters (l-q-w) see Kassis, Concordance, 744f.

(see Q. 40:15). This future era of the interface, beatific vision or meeting with the Divine is referred to around twenty-four times in thirteen different surahs (chapters) of the Qur'ān (see above and Kassis, Concordance, 744). In the Bābī-Bahā'ī viewpoint, the Qur'ānic liqā'-Allāh is not simply an individual post-death or afterlife beatific experience, but an individual and/or collective end-time experience of God through his latest Messenger, the eschatological Manifestation of God who represents the Godhead in the worlds of creation.

The Persian and Arabic Bayāns (Expositions).

Though present in earlier writings dating prior to 1848 (after 1260 AH/1844 CE), the Bāb gave clear elucidation to the meaning of the Qur'ānic promise of the liqā' Allāh (the Encounter / Meeting with God) in his Persian and Arabic Bayāns or scriptural 'Expositions' set down around 1848. The encounter or meeting with God/the Lord is the specific subject of Bayāns III.7 (cf. II.7; VI.13 VIII.5). In the Persian Bayān, the Arabic-Persian word liqā' encounter meeting, etc., occurs more than fifty times. Aside from God himself this key term (or other verbal and nominal forms of the Arabic) is most frequently linked with Muhammad, the Bāb and the messianic man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God shall make manifest). Having theophanic import, it is often associated with the Manifestation of God (maẓhar-i ilāhī) or with his many associated titles such as mashiyyat (the Divine Will) or the shajarat-i ḥaqīqa (Tree of Truth). In the writings of the Bāb references to the encounter with God are often found in theologically complex contexts. They often express sentiments summed up in the following beatitude of the Bāb found in Persian Bayān VIII.6, "Blessed be whomsoever comprehends the liqā'-Allāh (Encounter with God) on the Day of His theophany (zuhūr)" (printed ed., 287).²⁶ The following few paragraphs sum up and comment upon a select number of key references of the Bāb to the subject of the Encounter with God (liqā' Allāh), the Lord in his Bayāns. They have to do with past divine manifestations and with a coming, realized or future eschatological theophany.²⁷

²⁶ Note also the following beatitude in P. Bayan VIII.16, "Blessed be whomsoever maketh mention of Fatherhood (abuwiyya) relative to the Dhikr (messianic Remembrance) of His Lord!" (p. 301).

²⁷ See especially Persian Bayan (with page refs. from the well-known printed edition) : I.1 (p.3); II.1 (pp. 3, 19, Qur'an 13:2 is cited here); II. 7 (pp. 30-33); II. 8 (p.36); II.16 (p. 58, 63); II.17 (p. 66, 71); II.18 (p. 73); III. 3 (p.78); III. 7 (pp. 81-82, around 18 refs. in this section); III.11 (p. 90); IV. 8 (p. 128);

Unlike its probably earlier Persian counterpart, the often terse Arabic Bayān only occasionally (less than seven times) directly refers to the liqā'-Allāh/ al-rabb.²⁸ Arabic Bayān II: 7 on the Day of Resurrection, makes important passing reference to the liqā' Allāh, the Encounter with God and may be loosely translated as follows:

The seventh gate [Unity II.7] concerns the Day of Resurrection (yawm al-qiyāma) just as you have come to understand. From the onset of its dawning forth through the Sun of Glory (shams al-bahā') until the time of its setting, is better in the Book of God than any period of "Night" (al-layl), as is evident to such as comprehend. Indeed! God did not create anything save for this Day of Resurrection, for thereon all are destined for the liqā' Allāh, the Encounter with God, consonant that is with such action as accord with His good-pleasure.

On the Day of Resurrection this [liqā' Allāh] will be outwardly realized (ẓāhir^{an}) ... whosoever attains the Encounter with Him [God] (liqā'ihī) hath assuredly attained the Encounter with Me (liqā'ī) [the Bāb] though one should not be content with this if one has not had personal experience thereof. Wherefore, should thou be mindful of this quintessence of the [eschatological Day of the] Hereafter (ḥarf al-ākhir) and be conscious of thine own limitations (Ar-Bayān II: 7, text in al-Ḥasani, 84 cf. Nicolas 1905:103-4).

Here the yawm al-qiyāma (Day of resurrection) is identified by the Bāb with the "Day" of the liqā'-Allāh, the Encounter with God. It commences with the rising up of the manifestation of God as the radiant "Sun of Bahā'-Glory" which eclipses the phase or era of the "night time" of the darkness of unawareness or irreligiosity. The personalistic theological actualization of the liqā' Allāh (encounter with God) on the 'Day of Resurrection', is the faith-generating encounter or meeting with the Bāb

IV.17 (p. 146); VI.13 (219-228 Qur'an 13:2 [3] is again cited or paraphrased on p. 222 here); VI. 8 (p.213); VI.13 (p.222, 226); VII. 6 (p. 247); VII.6 (p.247); VII.17 (p. 263 = tilqā' al-shams; p. 265); VIII.1 (p. 274); VIII.2 (p. 277-8); VIII. 6 (p. 287, a Beatitude); VIII.16 (p. 301); VIII.17 (p.304); IX.3. (pp. 314, 317), etc.

²⁸ See especially Arabic Bayān (with page refs. from the well-known al-Hasani printed edition) II.7 (p. 84); III.7 (p. 86); cf. VII.9 (p.94 tilqā'); X.6 (p.101; expressed verbally; cf. Qur'ān, 43:83; 52:45; 70:42).

himself, along with the practise of such deeds as are befitting of his new era and are acceptable to God.²⁹

Persian Bayan II.7 also describes itself as pertaining to the Day of Resurrection which is here defined as “the Day of the Manifestation of the “Tree of Reality (yawm-i zuhūr-i shajarat-i ḥaqīqat)”, something synonymous with the era of the theophany of the Messenger of God. Acting contrary to what should take place at the time of the eschatological liqā’ Allāh (Encounter with God), people exiled the Bāb from the heart of the Islamic world to a remote mountain in Ādhirbayjān (NW Persia) known as Mākū. Because God, the Most Sanctified Essence (dhāt-l aqdas), is ever beyond human approachability, people were destined to meet his representative, the Bāb as the `Tree of Reality. Meeting him as the Primordial Tree (shajarat-l awwaliyya) is the meeting with God promised in the Qur’ān. This encounter, however, in the light of his worldly occultation in Mākū, might be fulfilled by obtaining a token devotional portion of clay (ḥīn) from the vicinity of his Shiraz house (or perhaps the Meccan Ka`ba). Associated actions could then be viewed as tantamount to realizing the Encounter or Meeting with God in the face of the unavailability of the person of the Bāb (P Bayan II.7, printed ed, pp. 30-33).

Speaking with the voice of God in Arabic Bayān III: 7, the Bāb boldly opens this section by declaring that human beings, “my creation/creatures”, can never comprehend His Reality, let alone gain any direct vision of Him. It is thus the case that whatever was revealed in the Qur’ān about the liqā’ (Encounter / Meeting) with Him, forever has and will forever pertain to the one who represents Him. Knowledge

²⁹ As early as 1865, Gobineau (with the assistance of others) translated the Arabic Bayān which he entitled the ‘Ketab-e-Hukkam’ (sic. for the Arabic Bayān) in *Les Religiones...* 2nd ed. 1866, pp. 461-543. For Ar. Bayān II: 7 see p. 478. The French writer Nicholas also translated Arabic Bayān II: 7 pages 103-4 in his 1905 translation, *Le Bayan Arabe...* (see bib. below).

of this is “Greatest of Paradises” (a`zam al- jannāt). This can be grasped by such as are capable of appropriating deep “gnosis” (`irfān).³⁰

The Arabic summary prefixed to Persian Bayān III: 7 places the messianic successor to the Bāb, man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God will make manifest) at the centre of the eschatological Encounter/Meeting with God (liqā’ Allāh):³¹

The seventh gate of the third unity concerns that which God hath revealed concerning the meeting with Him (liqā’) or the meeting with the Lord (liqā’ al-rabb). This since the intention is the person of man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God will make manifest) for God in his Essence (dhāt) cannot possibly be seen.

The subsequent, main text of Persian Bayān III: 7, continues by underling the incomprehensibility and indescribability of the Ultimate Divine Essence (dhāt-i azal), Godhead or the Real (ḥaqq).³² The scriptural mention of His liqā’ (the Encounter) is outwardly possible only through His Manifestation (zāhir bi-zuhūr-i ū) by which is intended the “Point of Reality” (nuqṭat-i ḥaqīqa) which “hath ever been and will forever remain the Primal Will of God (mashiyyat-i avvaliyya)”. The Qur’ān, the Bāb continues, makes mention of both the liqā’ Allāh (the Encounter with God) and the liqā’-i Rabb (Encounter with the Lord). This through the aforementioned Primal Will of God (mashiyyat-i avvaliyya) centered in the Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of God (rasūl Allāh). In stages, or little by little, there is a further descent of this primordial Reality (centred in Muhammad) until everything (har shay’) is affected by the powers of the encounter; though, he adds, there is no obvious evidence for this, save what God himself discloses of the descending ramifications, the shadows of that Primordial Reality (ḥaqīqat-i avvaliyya). This divine phememonen is evident in

³⁰ For Ar. Bayān III.7, see Gobineau, ‘Ketab-e-Hukkam’ in Les Religions, p. 484. Nicholas also translated Arabic Bayān III. 7 on page 114 of in his 1905 translation, *Le Bayan Arabe...*

³¹ The messianic phrase man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God will make manifest) was very frequently used by the Bāb in his later writings to designate his successor and/or future successors. This elevated figure is mentioned over 200 times in the Persian Bayān. For Baha’is it is a title referring to Bahā’u’llāh himself (see further below).

³² I have consulted the original texts of Persian Bayan III: 7 in Minasian Coll. Ms. 741, pp. 165-168; INBMC 24: 161-2; Azalī ed. 81-82. cf. also Nicholas 1913, II: 28-31. See further, Browne, ‘A Summary of the Contents of the Persian Bayān’ (on Per. Bayan III: 7) in Momen ed. 1987.

the Reality (ḥaqq) of the rightly-guided twelver Imams, for “whomsoever hath known them, hath indeed known God”. The liqā’ Reality of the encounter descended in a similar manner through the knowledge or gnosis (‘ilm) of the Bāb as a “Gate” (bāb-i maftūḥ) swung open. A new fullness of Divinity was made possible through the youthful Sayyid of Shiraz.

The “Pre-Existent Reality” also made possible the liqā’ Allāh (Encounter with God) relative to the Reality (ḥaqq) of the person of faith or believer (mu’min). The believing soul is able thereby to attain a state of “bliss” or “happiness” (surūr), which is described as the very bliss or happiness of Muhammad the Messenger of God, further said to be tantamount to the “bliss” or “happiness” of God Himself (surūr-i khudā). On the other hand, the believing soul may come to experience a state of “lamentation” or “sadness” (ḥuzn) which is again said to be tantamount to the “lamentation” or “sadness” (ḥuzn) of the Prophet Muhammad and thus of God Himself. The goal of the true believer is to attain to the “Primordial Divine Reality” through the persons of the Gates of imamological or eschatological guidance (ḥaqīqat-i avvaliyya-yi abwāb-i hudā). In this way every soul may attain their ultimate goal relative to the mystery of the liqā’-Allāh (the Encounter with God).

The case of the effect of these primordial liqā’-Allāh (Divine encounter) generating divine forces on the wayward unbeliever, is said to result in nothing but “hell-fire” (al-nār). The encounter with God becomes an act of eschatological judgement resulting in archetypal “happiness” (al-surūr) or deep “sadness” (al-huzn), the paradise of “heaven” or the depths of “hell”. Any person who attains to the post-Babi, messianic man yuzhīru-hu Allāh (Him whom God will make manifest), has truly experienced the great liqā’ Allāh / liqā’-i rabb, the fullness of the Encounter with God or the Presence of the Lord.³³

Persian and Arabic Bayāns VI.13 concern the number of the gates or entrances to the house of the Bāb; they should not exceed ninety-five (= 5 x 19). Perhaps because gateways can be openings to a place of spiritual encounter, the subject of the encounter/meeting with God (liqa’ Allāh), is several times raised.

³³ A 1913 French translation by Nicolas de Perle. Bayān III: 7 can be found in volume 2 (pp. 28-31) of his 4 vol. translation of the Persian Bayān (see bib. below). An Azālī printed edition of the Persian Bayān was first printed in the 1960s (see bib. below).

Mention is made of the duration of the Islamic dispensation (spanning 1270 years or up until 1260 AH = 1844 CE), then to a period of Ziyāra (sacred Visitation) for the purpose actualizing the “Encounter with God” (liqā’ Allāh). It is explicitly stated that “all were created” for this (p, 222). Linked with the ‘Encounter with God’ (liqā’ Allāh) or with the Lord, this Ziyārat (visitation) to the house of the Bāb, this matter is referenced in the key opening verse (verse 2 or 3) of the Sūrat al-Ra`d (‘Surah of Thunder’, Q, 13). The Divine encounter through a sacred journey is further related to visitation to the site of the bodies or tombs of the ‘Letters of the Living’ (ḥurūfāt al-ḥayy ; eighteen of the Bāb’s most important disciples). Towards the end of VI.13 (printed ed. p.226), the rising up of the Sun of Reality (shams-i ḥaqīqat) is associated with a state of preparedness for the Encounter with God (liqa’ Allāh) on the Day of Resurrection (yawm al-qiyāma) (printed Azali, ed. pp. 219-228). Finally, in this connection, it should be noted that Arabic Bayān VI.13 boldly relates the encounter with God (liqā’ Allāh) with a meeting with the Bāb himself. This is declared to be the “greatest of Paradises” (a`zam al-jannāt) (Ar, Bayan III.7, al-Hasani, p. 86).

The Persian Dalā’il-i sab`a (Seven Proofs).

The Bāb registers the theological centrality of the liqā’ Allāh (Encounter with God) in his Persian Dalā’il-i sab`a. After celebrating the exalted status of the Prophet Muhammad, he underlines the fact that all were created for the purpose of the eschatological liqā’ (Encounter/Meeting), though not for actualizing any direct relationship with God, the apophatic, Eternal Divine Essence (dhāt-i azal). Rather, it revolves around an interaction with His agent of communication, the Divine Manifestation of Reality (mazhar-i ḥaqīqat). On this level nothing can establish the depth of His gnosis (‘irfān) though this matter is known by virtue of His own Logos Self (bi-nafsihi). The rulers or kings of the Islamic domains during the Qajar period, in their wastefulness and self-centeredness, are said by the Bāb to have failed to appoint any agent to inform everybody about an immanent or actual fulfilment of the liqā’ (Encounter with God) for which all were created (Per. Dalā’il, 31ff).

The Futurity of Prophethood and Divine Guidance.

It is today a central Bābī-Bahā'ī teaching that future divine messengers (al-rusul) or maẓhar-i ilāhī (divine manifestations) will, for many thousands of years, found and progressively renew the eternal religion of God. The Bāb's claim to be the Sunni-Shī'ī messiah, the Qā'im/Mahdī and one in whom the liqā' Allāh (Encounter / Meeting with God) finds fulfilment, did not prevent or inhibit his also predicting numerous future messianic advents of the perhaps originally Sufī figure man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God shall make manifest). All these future theophanies are events expressive of the liqā' Allāh (Divine Encounter) which finds successive fulfilments (Goldziher, 1921 tr. Lambden & Walker 1992). This is indicated in a passage from the Bāb's late Kitāb-i panj sha'n ('Book of the Five Grades', 1850 CE) where the following words could be taken to indicate an infinite number¹ of future theophanies of the Bābī theophanic messiah, man yuẓhiru-hu-Allāh:

.. And after the Bayān comes [the theophany of] man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh (He whom God will make manifest) [1]. And after man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [1] man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [2]. And after man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [2] man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [3]. And after man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh, [3] man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [4]. And after man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [4] man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [5]. And after man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [5] man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [6]. And after man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [6] man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [7]. And after man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [7] man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [8]. And after man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [8] man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh [9] ... (K. Panj-Sha'n, 314-5, cf. 397).

There is a similar passage of the Bāb to the above, in his earlier Arabic al-Dalā'il al-Sab'a (Seven Proofs, c. 1849). Commenting on the Qur'ānic statement of Muhammad about past prophets (al-nabiyyīn; cf. the khatam al-nabiyyīn of Q. 33:40), he emphasizes that this indicates their essential oneness in promoting a single religion or Cause of God (amr wāḥid). This oneness continues from the Islamic era until that of the Bāb as the "Point of the Bayān. Thereafter from the Point of the Bayān it continues until the era of the first messianic man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh (Him whom God shall make manifest)" and subsequently to another man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh and yet another man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh. This messianic theophany, the Bāb then states, will continue on "unto the end (ākhir) which knoweth no end (ākhir)" (Ar. Dala'il, p. y = 10).

The position of the Bāb is thus the exact opposite of the Islamic proponents of the doctrine of the finality of prophethood. The mention of nine or of an endless succession of theophanies of man yuzhīru-hu Allāh (He whom God will make manifest), most likely indicates their endless future realization. Towards the end of his life in his Haykal al-dīn (Temple of Religion, 1266/1850), the Bāb made increasing mention of "He whom God will make manifest". He variously indicated the time of his messianic advents at after nine (=1269/1852), nineteen (= 1279 =1862-3) or between 1511 (abjad of Ar. ghiyāth = 'the Assistance') and 2001 years (abjad of Ar. mustaghāth = 'The One Invoked for help') from 1260/1844. These latter figures were understood by Bahā'-Allāh as either numerically and/ or messianically suggestive Names of God, sometimes indicative of the nine (1844-1852-3 CE) or nineteen year period (1844-1863 CE), sometimes of non-chronological import. Certain of these diverse messianic datings are also viewed as allusions to the times of further future, post-Bābī-Bahā'ī era theophanies (see Bahā'-Allāh, Lawḥ-i Khalīl Ibrahim Muballigh Shirazi, pp.1-30; 'O Thou Creator', Hebrew Univ. ms.).

Khātamiyya and the Liqā' Allāh in the writings of Bahā'-Allāh

"The mystery of this theme (khātamiyya, "the sealedness of the prophets") hath in this Dispensation (zuhūr)... been a sore test (mumtaḥan) unto all mankind" (KI: ¶ 172-3, pp. 107-8 trans. 162).³⁴

It has been indicated above that the Arabic word khātam in khātam al-nabiyyīn (Q. 33:40) need not signify "seal" implying "last" of prophets. For Bahā'īs it more appropriately indicates Muhammad as the best, the supreme "acme of the prophets" during the era before the yawm al-qiyāma (Day of Resurrection) when the liqā' Allāh, through a messianic maẓhar-i ilāhī (Manifestation of God), would be realized. Like the Bāb, Baha'-Allāh in his Kitāb-i īqān ('The Book of Certitude) specifically deals with the issue of the khatam al-nabiyyīn (seal of the prophets) in the light of the liqā' Allāh (encounter with God).

The deep theological senses of the eschatological realization of the liqā'Allāh/al-Rabb and of the future vision of the Lord God, are central to the religion

³⁴ Note the following almost parallel passage in the Persian Seven Proofs (Dalā'il-i sab'a) of the Bāb : "The people of the Bayān ... will be sorely tested (mumtaḥan) in man yuzhīru-hu Allāh (Him whom God shall make manifest) (Per. Dala'il, 45).

founded by Bahā'-Allāh. He proclaimed the depths of this subject in the light of his theophanological claims expressed in many of his major books and scriptural Tablets. He presented his Bahā'ī religion as being established on the Day of God, the era of the presence, meeting or encounter with God (liqā' Allāh). Bahā'-Allāh many times states that the era of the liqā' Allāh (Encounter with God) was and will be realized through the messianic Parousia (presence) of the theophanic mazāhar-i ilāhī (Divine Manifestations) who renew religion from age to age. Today the liqā' Allāh (Divine Encounter) is thought by Bahā'īs to have come about through the persons and religious teachings or missions of the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh, They are both seen to represent the indirect theophany of the unknowable Godhead on the Day of God (yawm Allāh). Throughout the forty-year period of his prophetic mission (1852-1892), Bahā'-Allāh often referred to, and commented upon, the liqā'-Allāh, the Encounter-Meeting with God. Only a few scriptural texts dealing with this important subject can be surveyed here.

Rashḥ-i `amā' ("The Sprinkling of the Theophanic Cloud", 1852-3).

In the fourth couplet of his early poem, the Rashḥ-i `amā', there is reference to "a Wave of the Ocean of the Meeting with God' (mawj-i liqā)" through which "the Sea of Purity (baḥr-i sifā)" cried out. This perhaps indicates the realization of the eschatological divine theophany through the liqā' Allah (Encounter with God) in the Bab and/ or Bahā'-Allāh himself.

Lawḥ al-Ḥurūfāt al-muqaṭṭa`āt (Tablet on the Isolated Letters, c. 1858).

Another early writing of Bahā'-Allāh dealing with the issue of the khātam al-nabiyyīn (Q. 33:40b) is his testimony to the theophanic mission of the Bāb in his Lawḥ al-Ḥurūfāt al-muqaṭṭa`āt. The Bāb, it is said, came with all manner of "dazzling proofs", though the people "waxed proud" in their denial. This despite the qur'ānic promise of the liqā'- Allāh (Meeting-Encounter with God). When God sealed prophethood (khatama al-nubuwwa) through Muhammad (Q. 33:40) "he gave the servants the glad-tidings of the encounter with Him [God]" and the matter was "definitively resolved" (khatama al-makhtūm). In the person of the Bāb, "God came [unto them] in the shadows of the clouds (fī ḡulal al-ghamām, Q.2:210), breathed into the Trumpet of the Cause (nafakha fī ṣūr al-amr; cf. Q.18:99; etc), split the Heaven asunder (inshaqqat al-samā' cf. Q.55:37; 69:16; 84:1) and crushed the mountains to dust (Q.56:5; 69:14, etc). At this, symbolically speaking, all "retreated back upon

their heels” (cf. Q.3:144; 6:71) (Ma’ida, IV: 65). In the Lawḥ-i Ḥurūfāt, Bahā’-Allāh continues to argue that in spite of the theophany of the Bāb, the people acted like Jews and Christians. They continued to await the realization of the promises and the eschatological liqā’ Allāh (Divine advent).

Tablet to `Alī Muhammad Sarrāj (c.1867 CE)

In his decade or so later and lengthy Persian Tablet to `Alī Muhammad Sarrāj (c.1867 CE), Bahā’-Allāh himself mentions the subject of the obscurity of eschatological prophecies in Abrahamic religious scripture. He highlights the supremely clear implications (aṣraḥ al-kalimāt) of finality in the khātam al-nabiyyīn (Q. 33:40) but thinks it has become an unfortunate, unacceptable veil, inhibiting post-Islamic faith in another supreme agent of God. Despite its implications of finality, Baha’u’llah has it that pure-hearted persons still came to true faith in the Point of the Bayān (bi-irfān nuqṭa-yi bayān = the Bāb). Indeed, he adds, such pure-hearted persons so comprehended the matter of khātimiyyat (“sealedness”) that they would happily acknowledge the appearance of a “prophet” (nabī) “from the beginning which has no beginning unto the end which has no end” (Lawḥ-i Sarrāj, Ma’ida, VII: 28ff).

For the Bāb and Bahā’-Allāh, the qur’ānic khātam al-nabiyyīn in no way rules out the theophany of divinity on the eschatological “Day of God” (yawm Allāh). Even if it is taken to outrule the finality of the appearance of a post-Muhammad nabī (prophet) or even rasūl (sent one), it does not negate an eschatological theophany. Both the Bāb and Bahā’-Allāh claimed to be fully human yet fully divine maẓhar-i ilāhī (Manifestations of God) in a way that transcends issues revolving around the various limiting meanings of the khātam al-nabiyyīn. In fact Bahā’-Allāh so transcended these matters that in numerous theophanological passages he presents himself as the divine figure who commissioned or sent out the nabī (Prophets) and rasūl (Messengers) of the pre-Islamic era. In an important Arabic Tablet of the Acre period, Bahā’-Allāh defends himself against accusations that he has contradicted the Muslim understanding of Q. 33:40b by stating:

You have assuredly confirmed [the truth] by what you have announced [in citing Q. 33:40b]. We do indeed testify that through him [Muhammad] messengership and prophethood (al-risāla wa’l-nubuwwa) were sealed up. Whomsoever after him [Muhammad] makes claim to such an elevated station is indeed in manifest error.... The carpet of prophethood (bisāt al-nubuwwa)

has been rolled up and there has appeared the one who sent them out (arsal) [Bahā'-Allāh] in manifest sovereignty... (Untitled Tablet to Ḥasan or `Lawḥ-i Khātām al-nabbiyīn').

Jawahir al-asrār ("The Gems of the Mysteries" (c.1861)).³⁵

The Arabic Jawāhir al-asrār (Gems of the Mysteries) of Bahā'-Allāh was written in Baghdad in c. 1277/1860-61 in response to questions posed by Sayyid Yūsuf Sidihi (Isfahanī), a pupil of the high-ranking Shī'ī cleric, the one-time marja' al-taqīd (supreme Shī'ī authority), Shaykh Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī (d. Najaf 1864). It contains ten or eleven references to liqā' (the encounter with God) and comments upon the theology of its end-time realization. The addressee is described as one "certain about the "Encounter with their Lord" (liqā' rabbihim) at a time when the wayward failed to attain unto faith in the Bāb as "His Beauty" (jamāl) on the "Day of His Encounter" (yawm liqā'ihī) (Jawahir, 7, 25, cf. trans. Gems, 7, 40).

Referring to Muhammad as the illustrious "Point of the Furqān [Qur'ān]" capable of enabling his followers to enter the jannat al-liqā, the "Paradise of the Divine Presence/ Encounter", Bahā'-Allāh describes the subsequent "Paradise on the Day of God" (jannat fī yawm Allāh) as supreme or "greater than every other Paradise" (a`zam min kull al-jinān). This is indicated by the fact that, prior to it, God "sealed the station of prophethood" (khatama maqām al-nubuwwa) through Muhammad as indicated in Qur'ān 33:40. After specifically citing this Qur'ānic verse, Bahā'-Allāh straightway reminds his readers that God promised in the Qur'ān that they would all attain the liqā' (the Divine Encounter/Presence) on the Day of Resurrection" (yawm al-qiyāma). By this and by means of the Qur'ānic verses about liqā', the greatness of renewed eschatological religion (`aẓimat zuhūr al-ba`d) as the supreme "Paradise" is indicated. Having made this point, Bahā'-Allāh registers the following blissful clarificatory salutation:

"Blessed be he who knoweth of a certainty that he shall attain unto the presence of [encounter with] God (bi-liqā'ihī) on that Day when His Beauty (jamāl) shall be made manifest" (Jawahir, 36ff, trans. Gems, 42ff),

³⁵ Here I shall cite the page numbers of the 2003 Arabic printing (2nd ed.) and the 2002 Gems translation (see bib.). References to liqā' (encounter) can be found on the following pages Ar. 7/Gems 7; Ar. 18/Gems 21; Ar. 34/Gems 40; Ar. 36/ Gems 42-3 (twice); Ar. 37/Gems 43-4 (twice); Ar. 39/ Gems 47; Ar. 40/Gems 48; Ar. 49/ Gems 58; Ar. 62/ Gems 73.

Holding back from citing all the numerous and elevated Qur'ānic references to the liqā' Allāh/al-rabb, to which he assigns a tremendous importance, Bahā'-Allāh singles out Qur'an 13:2 which he quotes in full. Finally, but not exhaustively in this connection, it should be noted that in the Jawāhir al-asrār Bahā'-Allāh several times associates the liqā'-Allāh with the coming "Day" of the "latter resurrection" (qiyāmat al-ukhrā). As in the Bayān, he closely associated this with the messianic figure man yuzhīru-hu Allāh ("Him whom God shall make manifest" (see Jawahir, 49, 62. trans. Gems, 37, 73). In this connection a beatitude is pronounced upon the person who experiences the liqā'-Allāh through this Bābī messiah:

"So Blessed be (tūba) the one who experiences his presence and attains unto the Encounter/Meeting with Him" (liqā')!" (ibid).

The Kitāb-i īqān (Book of Certitude)

The around 1862 CE Persian Kitāb-i īqān (Book of Certitude) of Bahā'-Allāh, contains many paragraphs clarifying theological issues, especially those surrounding the khātam al-nabiyyīn and the expected qur'ānic liqā' Allāh/al-Rabb, the encounter/meeting with God. Such as view the eschatological liqā' (Encounter) as naught but a general or fully theophanic Divine tajallī (divine "Self-manifestation", "effulgence", "glorious theophany", etc cf. Q. 7:143) are offered a messianic perspective. The Kitāb-i īqān was written in reply to questions posed by a maternal uncle of the Bāb named Ḥajjī Mīrzā Sayyid Muhammad (d. 1293/1876') and known as Khāl-i Akbar (The Greatest Uncle). He had specifically enquired about the traditional Islamic "signs" of the eschatological manifestation or theophany (zuhūr). This in the light of the messianic claims of the Bāb, including a clarification of khātam al-nabiyyīn and of the Qur'ānic liqā' Allāh (Encounter with God).³⁶

This question of the theophany, the liqā' with God on the Day of Ressurrection, is mentioned around 37 times in the 'Book of Certitude'. Six or so of these references are found within cited qur'ānic verses, including Qur'an 2:188; Q, 29:23; Q, 2:46, 239; Q. 18:110 and Q. 13:2 (see esp. KI: ¶ 148-9; pp. 92-3, trans. 136f). In the Kitāb-i īqān, Bahā'-Allāh himself notes that there are references after

³⁶ For some further details about the Kitāb-i īqān see bibliography, Quinn + Lambden Elr. article.

Qur'ān 33:40b to the future promise of the liqā'-Allāh. He states that there is “nothing more exalted (a`ẓam) or more explicit (aṣraḥ)” than liqā' (the encounter with God/ attainment unto the divine Presence) in the Qur'ān (see esp. Q. 39:71; 40:15; 41:54, etc., Kassis Concordance, 743ff and refer KI: ¶ 181 p.112, trans. pp.169-70).

Numerous paragraphs in the Kitāb-i īqān deal directly or indirectly with the challenging subject of khātamiyya, the issue of the “seal of the prophets”. Bahā'-Allāh states that people generally failed to understand the meaning of this subject. They were severely tested when this phrase obscured and challenged their understanding. This to the degree that many were deprived of the ever-unfolding providence of God through the coming of the Bāb. The exalted reality of the person of Muhammad, Bahā'-Allāh argues in the light of various Islamic traditions, was historically “timeless”, both “first” and “last” and not at all something “sealed”. The prophet is said to have declared his identity with all past prophets or messengers such as the first Adam, Noah, Moses and Jesus. Since Muhammad regarded himself as Adam, the “First of the Prophets”, it is not at all surprising that he legitimately saw himself as the “Seal of the Prophets”. This latter phrase was never meant to outrule the eternal succession of prophets who offered divine guidance. Like God Himself according to Qur'ān 57:3, the great Prophets are ever and always both the “First and the Last” (KI: ¶ 172ff., p.107ff., trans. p. 162ff).³⁷

It is on these lines that Bahā'-Allāh in his Kitāb-i īqān and elsewhere, argues that khatām al-nabiyyīn was an important epithet of Muhammad. It underlines the elevated nature of the Arabian prophet but does not imply the absolute finality of prophethood. Understood with the sense of utter finality, Bahā'-Allāh states that khātām al-nabiyyīn degenerates into one of the hubristic subuḥāt al-jalāl (“veils of glory”) which can severely hinder the realization of unfolding reality (KI: ¶ 175, p. 109, trans. 164-5).

³⁷ Bahā'-Allāh further counsels the followers of the Bāb not to be veiled by khātām al-nabiyyīn (seal of the prophets) type veils in the era of messianic fulfilment, the time of the mustaghāth (“He who is Invoked”) which Baha'is regards as the person and dispensation of Bahā'-Allāh (KI: ¶ 256, p. 152 trans. 229-230). See also, furthermore, KI: ¶ 177-8, pp. 110-111, trans. 166-7 where the khātām al-nabiyyīn phrase is linked with the hubris of the wayward `ulamā' (divines) as the suhuḥāt al-jalāl (“veils of glory”) mentioned within the ḥadīth of Kumayl ibn Ziyād al-Nakhaī (d. c. 81 / 701). Details cannot be given here.

Introducing the person of the Messengers or Manifestations of God and their ongoing rejection throughout history by their wayward contemporaries, Bahā'-Allāh refers to the eschatological liqā' ("the Divine Encounter" / "Presence") as "the very essence of the liqā' Allāh of God Himself". Clarifying the Persian text here, Shoghi Effendi had it that the Divine Messengers are "His Face (liqā') (liqā'-i ū), the very "the Face of God Himself" ('ayn liqā' Allāh) (KI ¶ 3 p. 2, trans. p. 3). The person of the Manifestation of God is presented as the quintessential embodiment of the liqā' Allāh (Encounter with God), the divine Theophany. The importance of this theological interface between God and his Messenger (traditionally between "Him/It" and the subordinate "Him/It"), is repeated throughout the Kitāb-i īqān as the following few notes much suffice to further illustrate.

Islamic and Pre-Islamic Liqā' (The Divine Encounter/Presence).

Observing the Jewish rejection of Jesus who is referred to as the "Beauty of Jesus" (jamāl-i 'Isavi), Bahā'-Allāh states that the people failed to attain the liqā'-Allāh, the encounter with God, through this "youthful Nazarene" (javān-i nāširi). Worth noting in this connection, is the fact that various texts within the Gospels as well as many other New Testament writings and related apocryphal texts, apply prophecies of the Hebrew Bible about a Divine advent, the coming of of God, the Lord (Gk, kyrios) himself, to Jesus.³⁸ For Bahā'īs the liqā' Allāh (encounter with God) was realized at the time of the advent of all pre-Bābī-Bahā'ī Manifestations of God including Moses, Jesus Muhammad and many others. They hold that the latter-Day liqā' Allāh through the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh, was echoed in the past though more fully fulfilled in recent times when the promised "Day" is believed to have come to pass (KI: ¶ 17 pp. 11-12, trans. 17-19).

Within the sacred books of the past, all were promised the liqā' Allāh (Divine Encounter/Presence) and the ongoing receipt of deep knowledge 'irfān (*gnosis") through Him, through the recognition of Him (KI: ¶ 148 p. 91 p. 136-9). Such has been fulfilled in the past and is expected again; like the first and the second advents of Jesus. Bahā'-Allāh explains that devout Muslims had attained the nobility of the encounter with God (liqā' Allāh) through the reviving, "sanctified breaths" (nafaḥāt-i qudsiyya) of Muhammad. They may now anticipate the challenge of the

³⁸. See below and, for example, Adams, 2006.

eschatological liqā' Allāh in the Babi-Bahā'ī era of the Day of Resurrection (KI: ¶ 170, p.106 trans. 159-60).

Though, from the Bābī-Bahā'ī point of view, most Muslims came to reject or misinterpret meaning of the attainment to the liqā' Allāh (“encounter/ presence of God”), it is an encounter referred to in the ‘Book of Certitude’ as “the utmost degree of ever-abiding grace” (fayḍ-i fayyāḍ-i qidam), the very “fullness of His absolute bounty” (kamāl-i faḍl-i muṭlaq) bestowed upon humankind (KI: ¶ 148, p. 91 trans. 136-7). Having said this Bahā'-Allāh cites five confirmatory qur'ānic ‘Liqā'-Allāh verses’ (Q. 29:23; 2:46, 49; 18:111 and 13:2) some touching upon its past rejection and/or its future realization. He comments that “No theme hath been more emphatically asserted in the holy scriptures (kutub-i samāvi)” (KI: ¶ 148-9, p.92 trans. 138f).

Bahā'-Allāh rejected the interpretation of liqā' Allāh as an eschatological tajallī Allāh (“the effulgence of God”) on the qiyāmat or ‘Day of Resurrection’. Such an understanding of Divine Self-revelation is in fact only a general divine disclosure, something already evident within everything as a “Universal Revelation” (tajallī-yi ‘āmm). God is actually ever-present. On this level everything is actually a “locus” (maḥall) and manifestation (maẓhar) of the divine tajalli (Effulgence/ Theophany) of the “Sovereign of Reality” (sulṭān-i ḥaqīqi), expressing elements (āthār) deriving from the Sun of the divine Theophany, the “Source of all splendour” (shams-i mujalla).³⁹ On this general level these divine effulgences or reflections, originated with or are centered within the elevated Deity-reflecting Messenger or ‘Manifestation of God (maẓhar-i ilāhī) (KI: ¶ 149, p.92 trans. 139-141).

To attempt to clarify this further, Bahā'-Allāh argues that the eschatological liqā' Allāh (the Divine Encounter/ Presence) cannot, as some Sufis have maintained, merely be an expression of the “Most Holy Outpouring” (fayḍ-i aqdas), a specific or direct Divine Self-revelation (tajallī-yi khāṣṣ) of the unknowable Essence of God

³⁹ The tajallī (loosely, “theophanic effulgence”) related verbal noun mujalla (‘the manifest Theophany) – there are many possible translations - has profound theological significance in the writings of Bahā'-Allāh. It is found for example, in the opening basmala of one of his important ‘Riḍwān Tablets’. See for some details, Lambden Hurqalya website at : <http://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/430>

Himself.⁴⁰ If the liqā'-Allāh, on the other hand, were to be considered to be an indirect or secondary Divine revelation (tajallī-i thānī), a "Holy outpouring" (fayḍ-i muqaddas), this would not be expressive of the qur'ānic eschatological liqā'-Allāh (encounter with God) since it would be something that has long been realized within the realms of being, "in the realm of the primal and original manifestation of God (ʿālam-i zuhūr avvaliyya)" through His Chosen Messengers.

This latter mode of tajallī (Divine effulgence) applies to the supremely elevated persons of the divinely inspired Manifestations of God, His Prophets (anbiyā') and chosen ones (awliyā') who reveal "the unchangeable attributes and names of God". They most perfectly represent God for humanity. It is thus the case that attaining the presence of these holy Luminaries (liqā'-i anvār-i muqaddasa), the liqā'-Allāh, the encounter or "Presence of God" Himself is attained. In its fullness, however, the Divine "encounter" or "presence (liqā') is possible only on the Day of Resurrection (qiyāmat), which is the Day of the rise of the Personal representative of God Himself (qiyām nafs Allāh) through His all-embracing Revelation", His latest eschatological manifestation or theophany (KI: 150f, pp. 93-4 trans. 141f.). As the Bāb had frequently stated, the liqā' of the Divine Manifestation is the essence of the liqā' Allāh (KI: ¶ 170, p.106 trans, 159f.). The promise of the eschatological liqā', the encounter/presence of God is, in reality, attainment unto the jamāl ("Beauty") of the mazhar-i ilāhī (Manifestation of God) in the person or temple of His theophanic Manifestation (dar haykal-i zuhūr-i ū) (KI: ¶ 182, p. 170, trans. 106).

Kitāb-i Aqdas ("The Most Holy Book").

A centrally important reference to the liqā' Allāh/al-Rabb is found in the c. 1873 'Most Holy Book' of Bahā'-Allāh. This encounter, it is stated, is possible on the eschatological "Day of God" being the cause of great rejoicing. We thus at one point read in this weighty Arabic text :

The Promised One (al-maw'ūd) hath appeared in this glorified Station, whereat all beings, both seen and unseen, have rejoiced. Take ye advantage

⁴⁰ Examples of the kind of tajallī ("Theophanic") theology spoken about here, can be found in select writings of Ibn al-'Arabī and such of his disciples as Muhammad Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091 / 1680), (see the opening pages of his Kalimāt-I maknūna, "Hidden Words..." referenced in the bibliography below.

of the Day of God (yawm Allāh). Verily, to meet Him (liqā'ihī) is better for you than all that whereon the sun shineth, could ye but know it" (Aqdas ¶ 88).

Lawḥ-i Jawhar-i Ḥamd ("Tablet of the Essence of Praise"),

In his late Acre period Lawḥ-i Jawhar-i Ḥamd ("Tablet of the Essence of Praise"), Baha'u'llah has much to say about Babi-Baha'i theology (see INBMC 35: 161-168). As in his Jawāhir al-asrār, he quotes Q. 13:2 and comments in some detail about the liqā' al-rabb ("encounter with the Lord") as the meeting with the eschatological maẓhar-i ilāhi ("Manifestation of God"). The Pre-Existent Divine Essence (dhāt-i qidam) has never nor will ever be attainable through His Hidden and Sanctified Attributes at the time of the liqā' Allāh (Encounter with God). As in the Kitāb-i īqān, Bahā'-Allāh states that such as are unaware of deep truth (ʿirfān) in their tafsīr (commentary upon this qur'ānic verse), inappropriately view the liqā' (Divine encounter) as being indicative of a general Divine Effulgence (tajallī-yi ū) on the Day of Resurrection. The Day of Resurrection (qiyāmat) is actually the time of the rising up of the Manifestation of the Logos-Self of God (qiyām-i maẓhar-i nafs Allāh) who is both the Qā'im (the 'Supportive' messianic Ariser) and the Qayyūm or subordinate deity Self-Subsisting (Jawhar, 18-19).⁴¹

The Lawḥ-i Shaykh or 'Epistle to the Son of the Wolf'

In his c. 1890 Lawḥ-i Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Mujtahid-i Iṣfahānī [Najafī], (or as Shoghi Effendi entitled this quite lengthy Persian work of Bahā'-Allāh), the 'Epistle to the Son of the Wolf', there is an important reference to Muhammad as the "seal of the Prophets" (khātam al-nabiyyīm). His prediction of the eschatological vision of the Lord is also registered (see the Qur'ānic refs. cited above):

"What explanation can they give concerning that which the Seal of the Prophets (Muhammad) ... hath said?: "Ye, verily, shall behold your Lord (rabb) as ye behold the full moon (al-badr) on its fourteenth night" (ESW: 50/ trans. Shoghi Effendi, 41-2).⁴²

⁴¹ On the subject of the messianic Qā'im and the Divine Qayyūm see the Lambden Hurqalya webpage at : <http://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/258/>

⁴² As we have already observed, there are several versions of this and similar prophetic traditions (ḥadīth) in Sunnī canonical books of tradition as in a few related Shī'ī writings. The full forms of several of them (see below) can be found in the Saḥīḥ (the reliable, 'Sound') Sunnī collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

In later paragraphs of this ‘Epistle to the Son of the Wolf’, Bahā’-Allāh cites and succinctly interprets a cluster of fifteen qur’ānic verses (in Persian termed the āyat-i liqā’, ‘the verses of the Encounter’) ⁴³ most of which contain a reference to the liqā’ (“encounter”. etc) with God. They are seen as expressive of the latter-day promise of the divine theophany or “Presence” of God/the Lord”, ⁴⁴ a presence actualized on earth and the realms beyond through the divine Manifestation of God. God Himself cannot be literally seen. He states that the promise of the liqā’ (encounter / meeting / presence) of God, the Lord, is explicitly recorded in all past sacred scriptures or books. It has a personal, individualistic or Logos-centered interpretation (maqṣūd-i liqā’ liqā’ nafsī ast) closely related to the one who is the Qā’im-Maqām, the divine Messenger, His “Viceregent” amongst men (so Shoghi Effendi, see ESW: 139/ trans. 118).

The Biblical and Post-Biblical ‘Coming of God’.

Perhaps informing the above-cited qur’ānic verses and traditions about an eschatological advent of Divinity, the Hebrew Bible and many post-biblical Jewish literatures contains texts indicative of an eschatological theophany (“coming of God”) of the person of the Divine or as “God”, the “Lord” in his “Glory” (Heb. kavod Ar., Bahā’). Praying in Aramaic that Jesus Christ as the “Lord” might soon return or come again as a divine figure, early Christians uttered the exclamatory μαράναθά, maranatha (“Come, Lord!”) prayer (Aramaic Mar = Greek Kyrios = Lord ; see 1 Cor. 16:22; cf. Zech 14:5; Jude 1 Enoch 1:9’ Didache 10:6).⁴⁵ Some such biblical texts are cited by Bahā’-Allāh in many of his alwāḥ (scriptural writings or ‘Tablets’) as being predictive of himself as a divine Manifestation (not the essence of God Himself):

“Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. 3 Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence” (Psalm 50:2-3).

⁴³ The fifteen Qur’ānic verses are (loosely referenced in the order in which they are cited) : Q. 13:2; Q. 29:5; Q. 29: 23; Q. 32:10; Q. 41:54’ Q. 10:7; Q. 10:15; Q. 6:154; Q. 18;105; Q. 20: 9-14a; Q. 30: 8; Q. 83:6; Q. 32:23; Q. 89:21-22; Q. 61:8; Q. 28:29-30.

⁴⁴ Shoghi Effendi often translated liqā’ as “Presence” in the KI and elsewhere. See ESW: 135-138; trans. pp. 115-118),

⁴⁵ An important article touching upon aspects of this subject is Edward Adams, ‘ The “Coming of God” Tradition and its influence on New Testament parousia texts’ (see bib.).

“... the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints [holy ones] with thee. (Zech 14:5b).

“And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it... Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him” (Isaiah 40: 5, 10 cf. Rev 22:20).

Like Jesus Christ in the Gospels and Christianity, the Bāb and Baha'-Allāh have been regarded in Bahā'ī sacred writings, as manifestations of the “Lord” or “Lord God”, ⁴⁶ the latter as the master, owner or “Lord of the Vineyard” (refer Mark 12: 9; Matthew 21:40; Luke 20: 15b).⁴⁷ These end-time theophanoloical predictions are of central interest providing important background to the Qur'ānic Liqā' Allāh.

At this point it should be mentioned that there exists a theologically important, quite lengthy Arabic scriptural Tablet of the son and successor of Bahā'-Allāh entitled `Abd al-Bahā' (1844-1921). It is a text which might be called the Lawḥ-i Liqā' Allāh or `Tablet of the Divine Theophany'. It contains materials about the eschatological coming of God through his representative (as Baha'u'llah, the Manifestation of God), the fulfilment of the Qur'ānic liqā' Allāh predictions, and related Islamic ḥadīth texts (see `Abdu'l-Bahā' Makātib 1: 102-108). There are clear references within it to the widespread Abrahamic religious texts about the eschatological theophany or `Meeting with God':

Know that the aforementioned beatific vision on the Day of God (ru'yat fī yawm Allāh) is mentioned in all the scriptural scrolls (al-ṣaḥā'if) and sacred writ (al-zubr); in the tablets (al-alwāḥ) which have been sent down from heaven unto the prophets (al-anbiyā') throughout ancient times (ghābir al-azām), during bygone eras (al-`uṣūr al-khāliyya), and from the primordial centuries (al-qurūn al-awwaliyya). Every single prophet (nabīyy) among the

⁴⁶ The Bāb in his writings identifies himself with the “Lord” (rabb) in the light of the eschatological theophany and the Qur'ānic liqā' (“encounter / meeting”) verses. He noted that the numerical equivalence of his parentally bestowed name `Alī Muhammad (= abjad numerical value 202) with that of the Arabic “Lord” (Rabb: r =200 + b =2, total 202) (see Per. Dala'il, p. 54 etc.).

⁴⁷ See the New Testament references to the “Master/Owner/Lord of the Vineyard” in the synoptic versions of the `Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen' and their Baha'i interpretations at <http://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/3071/>

prophets (al-anbiyā') announced unto his people the glad-tidings of the Day of the Theophany [Meeting with God] (yawm al-liqā'). Consider then the specific references found in the Gospels (al-injīl), the Psalms (al-zubūr), the Torah [Pentateuch] (al-tawrat) and the Qur'ān.

God Himself says in the Qur'ān: "Know ye that thou shall indeed meet Him (mulqū-hu)!" (Q.2:223b) on the Day of Resurrection (yawm al-qiyāma)". And also He says [in the Qur'ān], "Lost indeed are such as cried lies to the Meeting (liqā') with their Lord (rabb) [God]" (Q. 6:31; 10:45; 23:33; 30:8b; 32:10; 41:54, etc). And again He says [in the Qur'ān], "Perchance thou might be assured about the Meeting (liqā') with thy Lord (rabb)" (Q. 13:2b. cf. 6:154, etc). (ʿAbd al-Bahā', Makatib 1:103-4).⁴⁸

Having cited or paraphrased these Qur'ānic verses, ʿAbdu'l-Bahā' quotes a summary version of the above mentioned Prophetic ḥadīth about a future vision of God, the Lord, like the sight of the full moon in the middle of the month. He continues to cite several passages from writings attributed to Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d.40/661) expressive of the beatific or eschatological vision of God. They are understood to apply to the person of Bahā'-Allāh. Though details cannot be spelled out here, it must suffice to translate a few lines pertinent to the subject of liqā', the meeting or encounter with God and its Baha'ī exegesis:

Now as regards the essence of the enquiry [about the eschatological theophany] and the reality of the matter, it is that the Liqā' (Meeting with God) is a matter clearly proven, firmly established and specifically set down in the sacred scrolls (al-ṣuḥuf) and the scriptural Tablets (alwāḥ) of the Living One (al-ḥayy), al-Qayyūm (the Deity Self-Subsisting) [Bahā'u'llāh]. This is assuredly the sealed wine (al-raḥīq al-makhtūm) whose seal is of musk ... The Paradise of the Encounter with God (jannat al-liqā') is the Most Elevated [Bābī] Paradise and the All-Glorious [Bahā'ī] Kingdom (malakūt al-abhā)" (ʿAbd al-Bahā', Makatib 1:104-6).

⁴⁸ For the Arabic text and a full Lambden translation of this ʿLawh-I Liqā' (Tablet of the Divine Theophany) of ʿAbd al-Bahā' see the Lambden Hurqalya Publications Website at : (forthcoming, URL to be added).

The Lawḥ-i Liqā' ("Tablet of the Meeting with God") of Bahā'-Allāh.

In a volume of scriptural Tablets (alwāḥ) of Bahā'-Allāh compiled by the Persian Bahā'ī apologist `Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq Khāvarī (d. 1972), there exists an Arabic text provisionally entitled Lawḥ-i Liqā' ("Tablet of the Meeting with God"; see Mā'ida, VIII: 167-168). It opens with a prefixed "He is [God is] the Eternal (huwa al-baqī)" and continues:

This is a communication [book] which We [Bahā'-Allāh] made to be the Meeting with Us (liqā'i-nā) for such as have drawn nigh unto God during these days in which countries (bilād) have been revitalized through attainment unto that which was revealed in this Tablet (al-lawḥ) before the Divine Throne. It was revealed for such as find themselves in doubt about the Meeting with their Lord (liqā' rabbihi). Such persons are among those who have turned away from God, exalted be He, the Cleaver of Dawns [Dawn-Breaker] (fā'iq al-aṣbāḥ).

There follows an address to Bahā'ī believers as "birds of Paradise" who, having heard "the Call of the Beloved One (nidā' al-maḥbūb)", travelled to attain his presence. Their proximity to the imprisoned Bahā'-Allāh in the Acre prison caused "the denizens of the Supreme Concourse" (ahl al-malā' al-a'lā) to rejoice, despite their being debarred from attaining unto the Meeting with God (al-liqā'). Their inability to meet him directly also caused "lamentation" or "weeping" (huzn) from the celestial inmates of "the Cities of Eternity" (madā'in al-baqā'). Yet, Bahā'-Allāh comments :

How wonderful is this happiness (al-surūr) and this sadness (al-ḥuzn) for the both of them have been realized on the Day of God (yawm Allāh), the Powerful, the Mighty, the Chosen" (L-Liqā', Ma'ida VIII:169; cf. Persian Bayān III:7).

Probably referring to the Azālī Bābīs who prevented the Bahā'īs from the union of liqā' (the Encounter with Bahā'-Allāh), they are referred to as persons who "delude themselves before My Self at both eventide (al-'ashiyy) and in the early morning (al-ibkār)". A comforting beatitude is uttered upon those that attain the Divine presence: "Blessed be unto thee in that thou hast entered into the city (al-madīna) [Acre] and have attained that which was intended by thy Lord, the Mighty, the Bestower."

The Bahā'ī debarred ones Bahā'-Allāh adds, will yet experience a divine epiphany by virtue of their spiritual joy generated by "proximity", their countenances manifesting

“Glad-Tidings (al-bishārat) and Radiant-Joy (al-ibtihāj) (cf. Q, 75:22-3)”. This such that every person among them will have their proximity accepted or be saluted (al-taslim) resulting in their spiritual contentment (al-riḍā). Not only have these Bahā’ī pilgrims attained their goal, but they themselves have been circumambulated from on high. Bahā’-Allāh informs them that :

Thou art in the shadow of My Providence and the edifice of My Mercy (qibāb raḥmatī) since God hath circumambulated about thee! O ye possessors of insight!”

They did indeed, it is added, attain the liqā’, the Meeting with Him [Bahā’-Allāh] and circumambulated about the Ka`ba of His religious Cause. They spiritually attained unto “His Countenance”.

Bahā’-Allāh and Modes of the Eschatological Liqā’-Allāh

For 19th century Bābīs and Bahā’īs, travelling to meet the Bāb and/or Bahā’-Allāh was the fulfilment of their eschatological liqā’ Allāh, their experience of the Divine Encounter/Presence. We may note here that the great British Persianist Edward G. Browne (d. 1926) was, to his astonishment, advised by certain of his Bābī-Bahā’ī contemporaries in Persia to “travel to `Akkā’ (Acre) and “see God”.⁴⁹ After the execution or martyrdom of the Bāb (1850 CE) and the passing of Bahā’-Allāh in 1892 CE, it was obviously not possible to outwardly attain the liqā’-Allāh as the direct encounter with the founder prophets who claimed to be latter-day Manifestations of God. Yet, there are statements of Bahā’-Allah about other modes of attaining or precipitating the Presence or ‘meeting with God’ (liqā’-Allāh).

We have seen above that within the massive corpus of his Persian and Arabic writings, Bahā’-Allāh variously interprets the Qur’ānic liqā’ (“encounter-meeting”). In his Lawḥ-i Liqā’ (“Tablet of the Meeting with God”) he at one time (perhaps late 1860s or early 1870s) interpreted the fulfilment of this eschatological hope in ways other than through a personal encounter or meeting with him in his current place of confinement. Indeed, it is alleged that the liqā’ Allāh promise can be fulfilled through experiencing the potency of inspired, revealed scriptural Tablets, and amongst other ways, through the individual receipt of such an item of revelation. There are likewise

⁴⁹ See Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 1893: 492. Quinn. “Every Shade of Piety and Impiety”, forthcoming. Browne did indeed eventually travel to Acre in the rearly 1890s. Four or more times, he met the founder of the Bahā’ī religion and left for posterity his now very famous pen-portrait.

statements of Bahā'-Allah to the effect that his devotees should teach his religion and thereby precipitate the wider possibility of the liqā'-Allāh (Encounter with God) among humankind:

We decree in this Tablet that most of the [Babi-Baha'i] friends should write Istdilaliyya ('apologetic testimonia') tracts (lit. 'tablets' alwāḥ) in establishment of this Cause and send them unto the [various] countries perchance thereby none should be veiled from attaining the Encounter-Meeting with God (liqā'-Allāh [through Bahā'-Allāh], the Mighty, the Beautiful" (Arab. text AQA 4:195, trans. Lambden).

In one of his lengthy and important untitled writings communicated through his one-time amanuensis Mirza Khadim-Allah, Mirza Āqa Jān (d. 1901) Bahā'-Allāh sums up key aspects of his 1863 Baghdad declaration. Supplementary to his interdicting (murtafi') jihād as "holy war", his setting the minimal era of his religions dispensation (zuhūr) as a millennium, and claiming to manifest (tajallī) all the Divine Names upon all things, he seems to refer to another mode of fulfilment of the anticipated liqā'-Allāh on the eschatological "Day of the Encounter" (yawm al-tilqā). He adds a further equally important directive. This fourth directive has it that whenever the name of anyone (asami), living or dead, is mentioned before the Person or Countenance of Bahā'-Allāh (tilqā'-i wajh), they have thereby attained the Presence of God,⁵⁰ the pre-existent King (mālik al-qidam = Bahā'-Allāh) (refer trans. in 'Days of Remembrance', Sect. 9. p. 49). Attaining his presence, the tilqā'-i wajh (lit. encountering his face) could be fulfilled through an individual being mentioned by name in his presence. Many could not encounter, meet or approach the imprisoned founder of the Bahā'ī religion, but individuals could (during his lifetime) have been mentioned before him.

Concluding Summary Notes

This paper has attempted to sum up and clarify a few aspects of the Bābī and Bahā'ī interpretations of Qur'ān 33:40 in the light of the expected Abrahamic

⁵⁰ The genitive Persian (or the Arabic equivalent) phrase tilqā'-i wajh, meaning before the Face/Countenance' or 'in the Presence' is fairly common in the writings of the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh. These phrases need not always have this theologically loaded liqā' (divine encounter) implied or rooted sense.

eschatological theophany which, in the Qur'ān, is the liqā' Allāh/ al-rabb on the Day of Resurrection. Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī and thousands of other Muslim exegetes, have restricted the khatāmiyya, the sealed nature or (for some) "finality" or prophethood, to the era preceding the end-time Day of Resurrection:

"the messenger of God and khatam al-nabiyyīn ("the seal of the prophets") [Q.33:40] was the one who sealed prophethood for he sealed up this matter. Thus, no one of you should open it up after him [Muhammad] until the [eschatological] onset of the "hour" (qiyām al-sa`at)" (Al-Tabarī, Tafsir on 33:40, initial exegetical paraphrase).

The Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh claimed that with their prophetic commissions, activities and declarations in the mid 19th century (1844-50 and 1863-92 CE), the long-awaited "Hour" of the Day of Resurrection and Judgement had been set in motion or come to pass, and that the era of Israelite-type prophets / prophethood had ended. The encounter or meeting with God/ the Lord through His divine representative was now possible in literal, allegorical and other senses. This initiated an age of fulfillment. Former notions of prophetological khātamiyya, or being "sealed up" in finality were bypassed or transcended. Muhammad was indeed the "last prophet" to come before the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh who opened the long-rusting gates or renewal, thereby heralding millennial peace and justice. They proclaimed that many Abrahamic scriptural promises had been, or would ere long be fulfilled, in an ongoing era of judgement and beatitude. They announced that God had once again visited his creation through his human yet superhuman messengers capable of communicating divine revelations (waḥy) and mystical insights (`irfān).

Bahā'-Allāh interpreted the fulfilment of the `encounter with God' (liqā' Allāh) in at least three ways: (1) meeting him in his place of imprisonment or residence, (2) receiving a scriptural Tablet from him, and (3) being mentioned by name in his presence. The Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh proclaimed that God had, through their persons and prophetic missions, again passed indirectly by, lived among them and spoken anew to humankind (cf. Exodus 33:22). Yet, they never compromised the Biblical and Qur'ānic theological axiom, that God Himself, in His absolute, transcendent Essence (dhāt), can neither be directly seen, encountered, incarnated or comprehended. Today, experiencing the millennial liqā'Allāh (Divine Presence), means coming to faith in the Bāb, Bahā'-Allāh and such previous founder Prophets

as Zoroaster, Moses, the Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad. This involves transcending notions of both a one time commencement and a subsequent cessation of divine guidance through Prophets and Messengers of God and such sages and saints as come under their shadow. It is the belief of Bahā'īs that the fanaticism generated by time-bound religious triumphalism and fixity, should give way to new visions of religious interdependence and unity.

Though they have not been surveyed in detail here, Bahā'ī arguments against the 'finality of prophethood' usually operate on a somewhat more basic level than the elevated theophanological challenges set down in the writings of the Bāb and Baha'u'llāh. In modern Bahā'ī apologetics a distinction is often made between a possible future rasūl ('sent Messenger') as a founding maẓhar-i ilāhī (Manifestation of God) and the role of the (lesser) nabī or secondary prophets. Diverse lexical and Islamic understandings of the implications of the Arabic root letters kh-t-m khātam/khātim, etc are frequently commented upon in the light of the possible non-finality of prophethood. The Islamic understandings of Q. 33:40b might, it is sometimes held, outrule the further appearance of Israelite type nabiyyīn (prophets) but this phrase does not negate future appearances of rasūl or mursalīn (sent messengers) the like of which is indirectly hinted at in the 'liqā' Allāh verses (understood messianically, see above) and, for example, more directly in the following qur'ānic verse:

O children of Adam! There shall come among you mursalīn (sent messengers) from among yourselves rehearsing my signs unto you... (Q. 7:43)

Many thousands of eschatological traditions were assiduously compiled into sometimes bulky Istidlāliyya tracts (prophetic testimonia) by 19th-20th century disciples of the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh. Considerable attention was given to overcoming any finality implied by Q. 33:40b. ⁵¹ Some, at Bahā'-Allāh's command, followed the lead of the Bāb's Dalā'il-i sab'a (Persian Seven Proofs) and his own Kitāb-i īqān (Book of Certitude). This with a view to arguing that all manner of messianic predictions and apocalyptic "signs", had come to pass (cf. INBMC 80).

⁵¹ See Gulpaygānī, K. Farā'id, index; Ishrāq Khavarī, QI: 383ff; al-Tibyān wa'l-burhān, I:59ff Rawshānī, Khātamiyyat; Momen 1999: 34f, 87ff.

Bābīs and Bahā'īs have claimed that for many thousands of years, divine messengers (rusul) or mazḥar-i ilāhī (divine Manifestations) founded and will progressively renew the eternal religion of God.

Appendix 1 Muhammad as al-khātām al-nabiyyīn (the Seal of the Prophets) in Bābī-Bahā'ī Scriptural Writings.

The Bāb.

Qayyūm al-asmā' (= QA) or Tafsīr Surat Yūsuf (mid. 1844) (= QA)..

The XXV/25th sūrah of the QA of the Bāb is entitled Sūrat al-khāta'im, the 'Surah of the Seal / Ringstone' which is distinctly eschatological. It has repeated references to the messianic Dhikr Allāh (Remembrance of God), thus transcending any finality read into Q. 33:40. For other references of the Bāb to khātām/ khātām al-nabiyyīn in the QA. see, for example,

QA IV [4] p. 9; XXV [25] p. 42f; QA LII [52] p.100; LXIV p. 129; LXVI [66] p. 132; LXXV [75] p.153. cf. XXIV [24] p.40; XLVII[47] p. 89; CXI [111] p.232; LXIV [64] p. 129;

Other Writings of the Bāb

'Letter to the Imam/ People of Medina' In INBMC 91: 24;

Work of the Bāb in INBMC 91 p. 38-39 (= Q. 33:40 cited) and p.44 (Muhammad ... khatām al-nabiyyīn) p. 50 (Muhammad ... khātām al-nabiyyīn);

Khuṭba al-Jidda in INBMC 91: 67; INBMC 91 p. 95 (= Q. 33:40 cited); p. 50;

INBMC 91: 115 (Muhammad khātām al-nabiyyīn);

Persian Bayān VII.5 (p. 244); VII.11 (khātīm-i ū; p, 255).

The Bahā'-Allāh.

References in the writings of Baha'u'llah to Muhammad as the 'seal of the prophets' include:

Kitāb-i ṭiqān (Book of Certitude, c. 1862 CE = KI).

- KI., ¶ 40 p. 26 / trans. p.39 (= Per. khātām-i anbiyā');
- ¶172 pp. 107-8, trans., 162;
- ¶ 178, p. 110 trans. 166-7;
- ¶ 181f, p. 112f, trans. 169f;
- ¶ 196,p. 118 trans, p. 179;
- ¶ 263, p. 155, trans. 233.

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Select bibliography and abbreviations.

BPT = Bahā'ī Publishing Trust;

BWC = The Bahā'ī World Centre (= BWC), Haifa, Israel.

L = Lawḥ (pl. alwāḥ), a scriptural writing or sacred 'Tablet'

MMMA = Majmu'ah-yi millī-yi maṭbu'at-i amrī (Iranian BPT.).

INBMC = A privately published (in the mid. 1970s.) series of bound photocopies of mss. (in 100+ vols.) of the writings of the Bāb, Bahā'u'llāh and others.

Q. = Qur'ān

QA = Qayūm al-asmā' (see Bāb below).

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- al-Bayān al-`Arabī, in `Abd al-Razzaq al-Ḥasani, al-Bābiyyun wa al-Bahā'iyyun fī ḥadirihi wa hadihi. Sidon: Matba`at al-`Irfan, 1962, pp. 81-107
- Ar. Bayan = French trans. in Gobineau 1865 [2nd ed. 1866 see bib. below] as an Appendix entitled 'Ketab-E-Hukkam' [sic.] (Le livre des préceptes), pp. 461-543.
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- S-Preuves = Le Livre des Sept Preuves de la mission du Bab. Paris: Maisonneuve, 1902
- K- Haykal = Haykal al-dīn. ("The Temple of Religion") np.nd [Tehran, Azalī ed. 196?].
- `Letter to the Imam / ` People of the City of Medīna') In INBMC 91: 23-25.
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- K-Panj-S = Kitāb-i panj sha'n. ("The Book of the Five Modes"), np.nd. [Tehran Azali ed. mid.1960s]
- Qayyūm al-asmā' / Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsif (Qur'ān 12) = QA. [1] QA. INBMC III. Pagination usually refers to this early ms. [2] QA = Qayyūm al-asmā' Afnān Lib. ms.5 (copy of ms. dated 1261/1845).
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- ESW [Persian] = L-Shaykh = Lawḥ-i Ibn-i Dhi'b ("Epistle to the son of the Wolff") = Lawḥ-i Khiṭāb bi-Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Mujtahid-i Iṣfahānī ma`ruf bi Najafī. Cairo: nd. 1338/1919-20.
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- Lawḥ-i Khalīl, Mirza Ibrahīm Muballigh Shīrāzī ms in TBA ms. 3003C (photocopy in personal library), pp.1-30.

- L-Creator = `O Thou Creator!' ms (trans. Hebrew University, Jerusalem).
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- L-Jawhar-i Ḥamd ("Tablet of the Essence of Praise") in INBMC 35:161-168.
- L-Khātam = Lawḥ-i Khātam al-nabīyyūn. (ms) = an untitled Tablet to a certain Ḥasan containing important statements touching upon the Qur'ānic `Lawḥ-i Khātam al-nabbiyīn' and related matters.
- L-Liqā' = Lawḥ-i Liqā' (Tablet of the Meeting with God) in Mā'idah-' Āsmānī, 8: 69-70.
- L-Sarraj = Lawḥ-i Sarrāj (Tablet to `Alī Muhammad Sarrāj), Ma'idih VII: 4-118; [2] INBA 73:198-231.
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