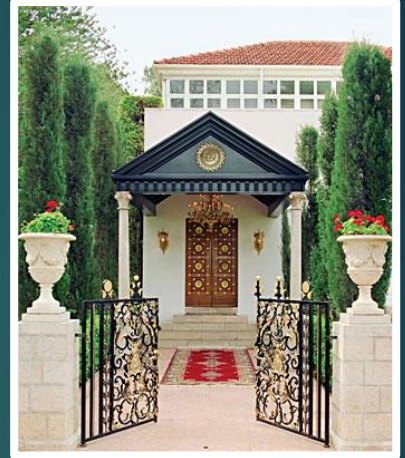


Approaching the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

STEVEN PHELPS

WILMETTE INSTITUTE WEBINAR, 9 FEBRUARY 2020



Last time:

2

of
14

- ▶ Background to this presentation:
 - ▶ August 18, 2019 WI Webinar: The Writings of the Báb
 - ▶ <http://wilmetteinstitute.org/overview-of-the-writings-of-the-bab/>

This time:

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- ▶ The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh: The “Most Great Ocean”
- ▶ Complete the trilogy of Central Figures: The Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá
- ▶ Address challenges:
 - ▶ Access
 - ▶ What is out there?
 - ▶ “Chart the coastline”
 - ▶ Content
 - ▶ What does it say?
 - ▶ “Plumb the depths”

Challenges on the path of approach: The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

► Access

- Both original texts and translations are scattered, uncoordinated (beyond the BWC)
- Majority of original texts (~55-60%) in Arabic
- Majority of texts (>90%) are untranslated
- For those wanting an exhaustive and systematic study: where do they begin and where do they end? And where can I find them?

► Content

- Size: ~6 million words (vs. ~5 million for the Báb)
~20,000 surviving works (vs. ~2,000 for the Báb)
- Uncharted vastness discourages the approach

The goal

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Create two aids for advanced study

- ▶ 1. Facilitating access: catalog the accessible sources
 - ▶ Exhaustive list of what we presently have access to
 - ▶ Both original texts and translations: focus is on original texts
 - ▶ Spreadsheet method: see previous webinar
 - ▶ Include all three Central Figures
- ▶ 2. Exploring content: thematic reconstructions
 - ▶ Multiple approaches possible

Caveat lector

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- ▶ This is not an “introduction”: Familiarity with the Central Figures and their principal works is assumed
- ▶ First, get one’s bearings...
 - ▶ I. Take the sequence of Ruhi courses
 - ▶ II. Read the available published literature at bahai.org/library/
- ▶ ...before heading into uncharted waters
 - ▶ III. This resource:



Primary sources for the inventory

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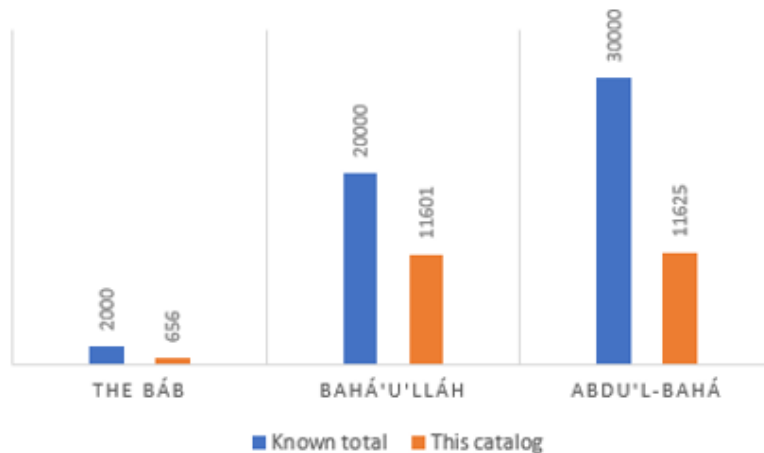
- ▶ Existing lists of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, in English
 - ▶ Shoghi Effendi's "Best-Known Works" list from the old *Baha'i World* volumes. ~150 items
 - ▶ "Leiden List" ~500 items total: 2.5% of the total. Last update >10 years ago.
- ▶ Core resources
 - ▶ **Bahá'í Reference Library** (<https://www.bahai.org/library/>)
 - ▶ Iranian Bahá'í National Archives (INBA) (>100 volumes, <http://www.afnanlibrary.org/docs/persian-arabic-mss/inba/>)
 - ▶ British Library (>50 volumes)
 - ▶ Misc. publications, scanned and digitized in Arabic/Persian/English. www.bahailib.com etc.
 - ▶ Misc. publications still in paper form.
 - ▶ "internet-original content": Misc. web sites such as www.bahai-library.com, personal web sites

Results of the inventory

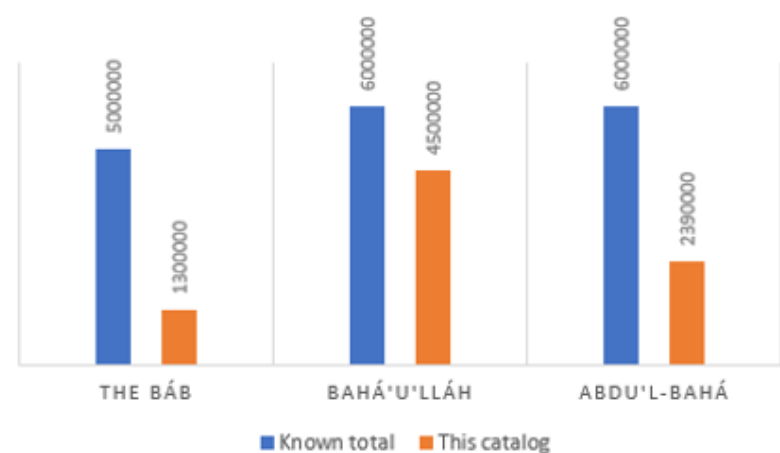
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- ▶ Availability:
 - ▶ The Báb: ~25% in public domain in original languages
 - ▶ Bahá'u'lláh: ~75%
 - ▶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá: ~40%

CATALOG COVERAGE, BY ITEM COUNT



CATALOG COVERAGE, BY WORD COUNT




- ▶ Reported utterances
 - ▶ A few thousand more (mostly 'Abdu'l-Bahá)

Accessing the inventory (~50MB pdf)

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► <http://blog.loomofreality.org/>



Welcome

Here is the latest version of the "Inventory" — an unofficial, academic tool for the identification of Bahá'í texts in Arabic/Persian and in English translation:

[Download](#)



**A Partial Inventory
of the Works of
the Central Figures
of the Bahá'í Faith**

Compiled from public domain sources

With a subject classification scheme
for the Bahá'í Writings

Version: 7 Feb. 2020

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Parsing catalog entries

<http://blog.loomofreality.org/>

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- ▶ ID
- ▶ Title
- ▶ Word Count
- ▶ Language
- ▶ First line (Ara/Per)
- ▶ Manuscripts (Ara/Per)
- ▶ Publications (Ara/Per)
- ▶ Translations (Eng only)
- ▶ First line in translation
- ▶ Notes
- ▶ Hyperlinks

BH00001. Kitab-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book). 10520 words, Ara. ان اول ما كتب الله على العباد عرفان مشرق وحيه و مطلع امره الذي كان مقام Mss: INBA43:069, BLIB.Or02820.001, BLIB.Or15691.001, BLIB.Or15729.002, BLIB.Or15737a.001, KB#833:006, CMB.F29, CMB.F30, CMB.F31, LEID.Or4969x, BN.6397. Pubs: AQDA, GWBP#037 p.062bx, GWBP#056 p.078x, GWBP#098 p.130bx, GWBP#105 p.137x, GWBP#155 p.213x, GWBP#159 p.216x, GWBP#166 p.222bx, ROB3.000x. Trans: AQDS, GWB#037x, GWB#056x, GWB#098x, GWB#105x, GWB#155x, GWB#159x, GWB#166x, BADM.016x, BADM.021ax, COF.018-019x, TDH#082x, TDH#158.3x, GPB.102x2x, GPB.112x, GPB.154x, GPB.170x2x, GPB.176x, GPB.195x, GPB.206x6x, GPB.207x3x, GPB.208x5x, GPB.209x5x, GPB.211x, GPB.214x7x, GPB.215x15x, GPB.215-216x, GPB.216x, GPB.225x, GPB.226x4x, GPB.230-231x, GPB.231x, GPB.242x, GPB.254x, GPB.325x, GPB.331-332x, GPB.376x, GPB.390x, GPB.395-396x, GPB.396x, MBW.166x, MBW.168x, PDC.040x, PDC.040-042x, PDC.042x, PDC.058-059x, PDC.059x, PDC.059-060x, PDC.064-065x, PDC.092x, PDC.092-093x, PDC.095x, PDC.100x, PDC.118-119x, PDC.121x, PDC.133-134x, PDC.134-135x, PDC.161x, PDC.187x, WOB.105x, WOB.109x, WOB.146x, WOB.132x, WOB.134x, WOB.162x, WOB.171-172x, WOB.172x, WOB.176x, SW v01#05 p.009x, SW v14#04 p.112 (et al)x, DWN v1#02 p.002-003x, DWN v2#09 p.069-070x, BLC.PT#045, BLC.PT#056, BSC.110 #043-044+046x, BSC.156 #138-139x, BSC.262 #547x. *The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws...* Notes: LAC.213-257, ROB3.275 et al, BKOG.351 et al, GPB.206 et al, EBTB.155, EBTB.189, MMAH.199, GSH.133, LL#027.

- ▶ Intended as a scholarly tool: assumes acquaintance with original languages, source criticism.

Some use cases

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- ▶ Lookup from source reference (e.g., “GWB#050”)
 - ▶ Refer to bibliography for source code abbreviations
- ▶ Lookup from words/phrases in first line
- ▶ Systematic readthrough
 - ▶ Longest-to-shortest, shortest-to-longest
- ▶ Browse titles (from index)
- ▶ Browse questions (from index)
- ▶ Collation of original text from multiple manuscripts
 - ▶ May be useful when authorized text at Bahá’í Reference Library does not exist

<http://blog.loomofreality.org/>

Next step: Content

(appendix to the Inventory)

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Kant's Critique of Pure Reason

- ▶ What can we know?
- ▶ What should we do?
- ▶ What may we hope?

THE CANON OF PURE REASON

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THE CANON OF PURE REASON

Section 2

THE IDEAL OF THE HIGHEST GOOD, AS A DETERMINING GROUND OF THE ULTIMATE END OF PURE REASON

Reason, in its speculative employment, conducted us through the field of experience, and since it could not find complete satisfaction there, from thence to speculative ideas, which, however, in the end brought us back to experience. In so doing the ideas fulfilled their purpose, but in a manner which, though useful, is not in accordance with our expectation. One other line of enquiry still remains open to us: namely, whether pure reason may not also be met with in the practical sphere, and whether it may not there conduct us to ideas which reach to those highest ends of pure reason that we have just stated, and whether, therefore, reason may not be able to supply to us from the standpoint of its practical interest what it altogether refuses to supply in respect of its speculative interest.

All the interests of my reason, speculative as well as practical, combine in the three following questions:

1. What can I know?
2. What ought I to do?
3. What may I hope?

{ A 805
B 833

The first question is merely speculative. We have, as I flatter myself, exhausted all the possible answers to it, and at last have found the answer with which reason must perforce content itself, and with which, so long as it takes no account of the practical, it has also good cause to be satisfied. But from the two great ends to which the whole endeavour of pure reason was really directed, we have remained just as far removed as if through love of ease we had declined this labour of enquiry at the very outset. So far, then, as knowledge is concerned, this much, at least, is certain and definitively established, that in respect of these two latter problems, knowledge is unattainable by us.

The second question is purely practical. As such it can

A classification scheme

- ▶ What can we know?
 - ▶ What are the ultimate things to know about?
 - ▶ How do we know them? How does language function as a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge?
- ▶ What should we do?
 - ▶ As individuals, in relation to ourselves, others, the Truth?
 - ▶ As groups of individuals that need to both cooperate and compete?
- ▶ What shall we hope?
 - ▶ Where did we come from, and what kind of a world are we creating?

APPENDIX

A SUBJECT CLASSIFICATION SCHEME FOR THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS: MAIN HEADINGS

Questions of being

I. Degrees and Conditions of Existence

METAPHYSICS,
THEOLOGY,
NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

- A. God and the Realm of the Divine Will
- B. Metaphysics and Natural Philosophy
- C. The Manifestations of God
- D. The Covenant and the Faith of God

Questions of knowledge

II. Knowledge, language and symbol

EPISTEMOLOGY,
PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE,
HERMENEUTICS

- A. Knowledge and the Investigation of Reality
- B. Language, Symbol and Interpretation
- C. Sacred Writings: Modes, Styles, Disposition of

Questions of conduct

III. Individual Reality and Development

PSYCHOLOGY,
PERSONAL ETHICS,
MYSTICISM

- A. Individual Spiritual Reality: Soul, Mind, Spirit
- B. The Spiritual Purpose of Human Existence
- C. Spiritual Life and Practice
 - 1. In Relation to God
 - 2. In Relation to Self
 - 3. In Relation to Others

Questions of governance

IV. Collective Reality and Development

JURISPRUDENCE,
SOCIOLOGY,
ECONOMICS,
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

- A. Laws and Ordinances
- B. Prohibitions and Admonitions
- C. Social Teachings
- D. The Administrative Order and the Bahá'í Community

Questions of historical contingency

V. Past, Present, and Future

HISTORY,
ESCHATOLOGY

- A. Beliefs and Dispensations of the Past
- B. The Central Figures and Events of Their Ministries
- C. Present and Future Order; Crisis and Victory; Prophetic Statements

Classification: sub-categories

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- ▶ Links to thematic compilations of extracts
- ▶ Shoghi Effendi, Universal House of Justice heavily referenced here

A SUBJECT CLASSIFICATION SCHEME FOR THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS:

SUB-HEADINGS

I.A. GOD AND THE REALM OF THE DIVINE WILL

God [Alláh; Khudá; Haqq; Ulúhiyyat]
 God: transcendence/unknowability of
 God: absolute freedom/independence of
 God: no causal link to creation
 God: every concept of is sheer imagination
 God: beyond "being", "oneness", "existence"
 God: love for own essence
 God: self-description of
 God: impersonality of
 God: impossibility of true worship of
 God: as immanent/personal
 God: essential vs. actional attributes
 God: proofs for existence
 God: proofs for existence: cosmological proof
 God: proofs for existence: teleological proof (from design)
 God: proofs for existence: proof from "voluntary composition"
 God: proofs for existence: proof from existence of opposites
 God: proofs for existence: impossibility of logical proof
 names and attributes of God [asmá' va shifát]
 names and attributes of God: inadequacy of in describing the essence
 names and attributes of God: within all things; every atom
 names and attributes of God: require the existence of objects
 names and attributes of God: God's knowledge of things
 names and attributes of God: same as knowledge of God
 names and attributes of God: eternal archetypes [a'yán-i-thábitah]
 names and attributes of God: oneness [ahadiyyih and wáhidíyyih]
 names and attributes of God: revealed in the Manifestations
 Divine unity [tawhíd] and levels of unity
 the Primal Will [mashíyyat]/First Mind ['aql-i-awwal]
 the Primal Will: in relation to God
 the Primal Will: self-generation of
 the Primal Will: appearance in the Manifestation
 the Primal Will: identified with the Logos/Word of God
 the Primal Will: identified with the First Remembrance
 the Primal Will: immediate/efficient cause of creation
 the Primal Will: inner reality of all things

the Holy Spirit: as mediator
 the Holy Spirit: source of knowledge/inspiration/influence
 the Holy Spirit: cause of quickening of souls
 the Holy Spirit: gift of; successive descent of
 the Holy Spirit: love as breath of
 the Holy Spirit: cause of physical/spiritual healing
 the Holy Spirit: cause of unity
 the Holy Spirit: cause of progress in the world/discoveries
 the Holy Spirit: humanity's need for
 the Holy Spirit: personified as dove/maiden/etc.
 Primal Will identified with Word of God
 Word of God identified with Holy Spirit

I.B. METAPHYSICS AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

divine philosophy contrasted with natural philosophy
 the realms of being and overlapping hierarchies/frameworks
 the realms of being: God, Will/Command, creation
 the realms of being: three degrees of divine emanation
 the realms of being: arcs of ascent and descent
 the realms of being: material and spiritual existence; two books
 the realms of being: Nasut/Malakut/Jabarut/Lahut/Hahut
 the divine emanation
 the divine emanation: three degrees of
 the divine emanation: all things emanate from God
 the divine emanation: the divine bounty pervades all things
 the divine emanation: infinite power of
 the divine emanation: necessary condition of existence
 the divine emanation: ceaseless/eternal
 the divine emanation: continual re-creation of the world
 emanation [sudúr] vs. manifestation [zuhúr]
 the four/five pathways of love [mahabbat]
 love: first pathway, of God for own essence
 love: second pathway, of God for the creatures
 love: third pathway, of the creatures for God
 love: fourth pathway, of the creatures for each other
 love: fifth pathway, of the self of God standing within
 creation [khalq]