

**Ponder Thou upon the
Martyrdom of
Hájí Muhammad-Ridá**
Nineteen Historical Accounts



**Introduced and Translated by
Ahang Rabbani**

Volume 5
Witnesses to Bábí and Bahá'í History

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... ponder thou upon the martyrdom of Háji Muhammad-Ridá in the City of Love ('Ishqabad). The tyrants of the earth have subjected that wronged one to such trials as have caused many foreigners to weep and lament for, as reported and ascertained, no less than thirty-two wounds were inflicted upon his blessed body. Yet none of the faithful transgressed My commandment, nor raised his hand in resistance. Come what might, they refused to allow their own inclinations to supersede that which the Book hath decreed, though a considerable number of this people have resided, and still reside, in that city.

Bahá'u'lláh
Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 77



Dedication



*As a token of love and remembrance,
this book is dedicated to these ten Bahá'ís,
who were executed in Shiraz on 18 June 1983
on the charge of teaching Bahá'í children's classes.*

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Foreword

*Great is the blessedness of those whose blood Thou hast chosen
wherewith to water the Tree of Thine affirmation, and thus to exalt
Thy holy and immutable Word.¹*

The Báb

The facts of this incident are simple and well-known. In 1889, the Bahá'í Faith came to public attention in 'Ishqabad as the result of an appalling crime that involved the taking of the life of a prominent, elderly Bahá'í by two assassins who had been hired by a group of Muslims resentful of the commercial success of Bahá'í businessmen in their city and the rapid spread of the Faith in the region. The Russian authorities arrested the murderers and those suspected of involvement in the crime and, subsequent to an official military trial held in 'Ishqabad, they sentenced most of them to death or long incarceration in Siberia. The Bahá'ís petitioned the Governor to spare the lives of the perpetrators. The plea was submitted to Czar Alexander III, who asked the Senate to consult on it. The Senate decided to honor the request of the Bahá'ís for clemency and the Czar agreed. It was publicly announced that a reduction in the sentences was granted at the request of the Bahá'ís. From that time, the Bahá'í community won all the unfettered right to practice their religion without restriction and under the government's protection.

The importance of this incident was profound. For the first time in the history of the nascent Bahá'í community, persecutors of its members had been publicly tried, found guilty and subjected to punishment under the law. Further, for the first time, the independence of the Faith from its Islamic roots had been clearly established and proclaimed by governmental officials acting on behalf of the state.

While it appears that the incident of the martyrdom specifically, and the success of the Bahá'ís in 'Ishqabad more broadly, had been

¹ *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 90

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anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh, it also appears that the actions of the Bahá'í community of 'Ishqabad in the course of events immediately after the martyrdom, first in collaborating closely with the authorities towards ascertaining the truth of occurrences, and then in their effective presentation at the trial and their ensuing magnanimity in pleading on behalf of the convicts, were a source of great joy to Bahá'u'lláh. In a number of Tablets during the final years of His life, Bahá'u'lláh made mention of this incident and praised the Bahá'ís for the manner in which they had conducted themselves. He was also exceedingly pleased with the government of Russia and the impartial attitude of her officials in administering justice.

The purpose of this monograph is to bring a number of primary source documents about this incident to the attention of English language readers. It is hoped that a close study of these documents will provide a basis for a more thorough analysis of this singularly important chapter in the Bahá'í history.

Translations from the Bahá'í writings contained in this monograph are provisional, except where they are attributed to sources which have been authorized by the Bahá'í World Centre.

Occasionally it was necessary to include certain comments or insert subheadings to assist with flow and transition. All of these are placed in square brackets, []. Unless specified otherwise, all footnotes are by the present translator. Several Russian terms transliterated incorrectly by various authors have been corrected.

In the course of this study, I received gracious help from a number of colleagues to whom I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude and whose assistance I wish to hereby record:

- Ruhullah Mehrabkhani and Adel Shafipour were most generous with his unceasing encouragements throughout this project;
- Farshid Kazemi, Firooz Oskooi, Iskandar Ha'i, Juan Cole and Houshang Rafat assisted with providing copies of various documents beneficial to this study;

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- Omid Ghaemmaghami and Khazeh Fananapazir each translated a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh for this project; and
- Phillip Tussing and Mark Costine patiently and with care read the manuscript and offered a number of important suggestions.

Any errors or shortcomings in this monograph are to be ascribed solely to myself.

*Ahang Rabbani
Houston, Texas
September 2007*

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A Historical Overview

At a time when the somber night of ignorance, of neglect of the divine world, of being veiled from God, had overspread the earth, a bright morning dawned and a rising light lit up the eastern sky. Then rose the Sun of Truth and the splendors of the Kingdom were shed over east and west. Those who had eyes to see rejoiced at the glad tidings and cried out: 'O blessed, blessed are we!', and they witnessed the inner reality of all things, and uncovered the mysteries of the Kingdom. Delivered then from their fancies and their doubts, they beheld the light of truth, and so exhilarated did they become from draining the chalice of God's love, that they utterly forgot the world and their own selves. Dancing for joy they hastened to the place of their own martyrdom and there, where men die for love, they flung away their heads and hearts.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá²

‘Ishqabad (literally, the “city of love”) is the capital of Turkmenistan, a Persian term meaning, the land of the Turkmen. The country is located in Central Asia and is also known as Turkmenia.



² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 32.

The ancient history of Turkmenistan is largely unknown, but its known history can be traced to the arrival of Indo-European Iranian tribes circa 2000 BC. Because of the arid conditions of the region, early tribes were nomadic or semi-nomadic.

The region's recorded history begins with its conquest by the Achaemenid Empire of ancient Persia, which divided the area into three administrative units. The region was later subjugated to the armies of Alexander, then to the Parni and Ephthalites.

The Parthians, who were fierce, nomadic warriors from the north of what is now Iran, established the kingdom of Parthia, which covered present-day Turkmenistan and Iran. The Parthian kings ruled from the city of Nisa, founded by Arsaces I (reigned c. 250-211 BC). Modern excavations have revealed substantial buildings, mausoleums and shrines, and many inscribed documents and artifacts, often decorated with Iranian figures or classical mythological scenes. 'Ishqabad was built only 10 miles from Nisa.

The Parthian Kingdom succumbed in 224 AD to the Sassanids – rulers of Persia. At the same time, several tribal groups, including the Alans and the Huns, were moving into Turkmenistan from the east and north. A branch of the Huns wrested control of southern Turkmenistan from the Sassanian Empire in the 5th century.

During this early phase of history, the majority of the region's inhabitants were either Zoroastrian or Buddhist, and the region was largely populated by tribes from the area of modern Iran.

Central Asia came under Arab rule after a series of invasions in the late 7th and early 8th centuries. The region was incorporated into the Islamic Caliphate, and after this conquest all the peoples of Central Asia gradually converted to Islam. The city of Merv was occupied by lieutenants of the third caliph Uthman, and designated as the capital of Khurasan. Using this city as their base, the Arabs brought under subjection Balkh, Bukhara, and Kashgaria, and penetrated into China as far as the province Kan-suh early in the 8th century.

Merv once again came into the political spotlight in 748 AD, when Abu-Muslim (d. 750) declared a new Abbasid dynasty. He set out from

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this city to conquer Iran and Iraq and, established a new capital at Baghdad.

In the latter part of the 8th century, Merv became the centre of heretical propaganda preached by al-Muqanna, “The Veiled Prophet of Khurasan”. In 874, Arab rule in Central Asia came to an end. During this period, Merv, Samarqand and Bukhara were sites of great schools of learning, producing renowned scholars, like the celebrated historian Yaqut who studied in Merv.

The Oghuz brought the Turkic Turkmen language that came to dominate the area. The Turkic period was a time of cultural fusion, as Islamic traditions brought by the Arabs merged with local cultures from the region of current Iran and then were further altered by Turkic invaders and rulers such as the Seljuks.

In 1040, the Seljuk Turks defeated Sultan Masud of the Ghaznavi dynasty and founded the Seljukid dynasty, with its capital at Nishapur. It was about this time that Merv reached the zenith of her glory.

In 1157, the rule of Seljuks dynasty came to an end in the province of Khurasan. The Turkic rulers of Khiva took control of the area of Turkmenistan, under the title of Khawrazmhah.

In 1221, Central Asia suffered a disastrous invasion by Mongol warriors, who swept across the region from their base in eastern Asia. Under their commander, Genghis Khan, the Mongols conquered Khawrazm and burned the city of Merv to the ground. The Mongol leader ordered the massacre of Merv’s inhabitants as well as the destruction of the province’s farms and irrigation systems. The Turkmen who survived the invasion retreated northward to the plains of Kazakhstan or eastward to the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Small, semi-independent states arose under the rule of the region’s tribal chiefs later in 14th century. In the 1370s, the Mongol leader Timur The Lame, a self-proclaimed descendant of Genghis Khan, conquered Turkmen states once more and established the short lived Timurid Empire, which collapsed after Timur’s death in 1405, when Turkmen became independent once again.

The history of Turkmenistan from the 16th until the 19th century was determined by relations among the states of Persia, Khiva, and

Bukhara, and more specifically by the tension between Persia, which had adopted Shi‘a Islam and the Turkmen, who were Sunni. This tension often resulted in armed conflicts. On a number of occasions thousands of Shi‘as were seized as prisoners and sold as slaves in Bukhara, Samarqand and other towns of Turkmenistan.

Popular epics such as Korogly and other oral traditions, took shape during this period, which could be taken as the beginning of the Turkmen national culture. The poets and thinkers of the time such as Devlet Mehmed Azadi and Makhtumkuli became voices for an emerging nation, calling for unity, brotherhood and peace among Turkmen tribes. Makhtumkuli is venerated in Turkmenistan as the father of its national literature.

In the 18th century, Turkmen tribes came into contact with the Czarist Empire. After the suppression of the Bukhara and Khiva emirates, the Russians decided to move into the region in order to subdue the Turkmen slave trade and banditry. By 1844, they reached the Aral Sea; Tashkent was captured in 1865; Samarqand in 1868; and Khiva in 1873.

By the end of the 1870s, the Russians were ready to occupy lands immediately to the north of Khurasan. Despite Iran’s protests, the Russian General Lomakin fought a campaign against the Geok Tepe Turkmen in 1879 but was held back. The Transcaspian Railway was started from the shores of the Caspian in the same year in order to secure Russian control over the region and provide a rapid military route to the Afghan border. Russia sent forces to Turkmenistan under General Mikhail Skobelev, and in 1881 fighting climaxed with the massacre of 7,000 Turkmen at the desert fortress of Geok Depe, near modern ‘Ishqabad. Another 8,000 were killed trying to flee across the desert.

The border with Iran was fixed by an agreement in 1881, and from this the Russian province of Transcaspia came into being. About four hundred miles from the Caspian Sea, the Russians built a new city to be the capital of the new province of Transcaspia. The name of this city was ‘Ishqabad.³

³ The name of this city is spelled in different ways, including: Ashkabad, Ashgabat (the official English transliteration of modern Turkmenistan), Askabad, Aşgabat,

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Soon 'Ishqabad developed. In order to encouragement settlement in the new town, the government granted land to anyone willing to build. Initially the population was predominantly Turkmen; yet before long many Iranians, Azeris, Russians, a few Afghanis and people of other nationalities migrated to the region seeking security, prosperity and a better life. The population of 'Ishqabad expanded; by 1884 it was estimated to be about 4,000 and five years later, by the time of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá's martyrdom, had reached over 10,000.



*Ishqabas (Ashqabat)
in relation to the neighboring region*

Ashqabad, Ashkhabad, Askhabad and Poltoratsk. The simple transliteration of *'Ishqabad* was adopted in this study.

Bahá'í Settlement in 'Ishqabad

The first known Bahá'í contact with the region took place around 1875 by a prominent Bahá'í teacher, Ibn Asdaq. At the invitation of a Turkmen chief, he had gone to the fortress of Karím-Virdí Ishán, where the chief and twelve others, who were all Sunni Muslims, became Bahá'ís. It is not known what became of them or if others of that group embraced the Faith as well.

Shortly after that, in 1881, an affluent relative of the Báb, Hájí Mírzá Hasan, better known by the title Afnán Kabír, traveled through 'Ishqabad with his family on his way to visit Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká and realized the potential of the area, which was just being developed by Russia. He sent instructions to his son to proceed to the area and buy land for him there.

In 1882, Hájí Muhammad-Kázim Isfaháni and his son Muhammad-Ridá Arbáb, along with Hájí 'Abdu'r-Rasúl Yazdí, who was a son of Mullá Muhammad-'Alí Yazdí, were the first Bahá'ís to settle in 'Ishqabad.⁴

In 1883-84, there was a general persecution of Bahá'ís throughout Iran, particularly in the nearby province of Khurasan, and soon four of those affected by these harassments in Sabzivar arrived and settled in 'Ishqabad. On 3 April 1884, Ustád 'Alí-Akbar Banná Yazdí, Ustád Muhammad-Ridá Khurram-Sháhi (along with his family), and some other Bahá'ís of Yazd departed for the newly-founded town in search of a more comfortable life away from the harassments in Iran.

A steady stream of Bahá'ís, mostly builders, carpenters and merchants who were equipped to capitalize on the opportunities of the developing town, followed them and settled in the new city.

One of the prominent Bahá'ís, Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí Afnán (a brother of Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí Afnán, the Vakílu'd-Dawlih) traveled from China to 'Akka, where Bahá'u'lláh encouraged him to

⁴ 'Azízu'lláh Sulaymání, *Masábib Hidáyat*, vol. 10, p. 178.

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purchase land in ‘Ishqabad for building a Bahá’í-operated inn. In 1887 in ‘Ishqabad, he bought a parcel of land from a certain A‘zam, who was from Kirmanshah, and some other properties. By December of that year, Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí Afnán decided to build on this land a public bath and a meeting room similar to the Mansion of Bahji. Shoghi Effendi notes that about the same time, “assured of the good will of a sympathetic government,” the community was enabled to “establish a Bahá’í cemetery and to purchase property and erect thereon structures that were to prove the precursors of the first Mashriqu’l-Adhkar of the Bahá’í world.”⁵

By 1889, the number of Bahá’ís in ‘Ishqabad had reached about four hundred. By then, the city had emerged as an important route for commerce, and a number of Bahá’ís prospered by trading through that region. In particular, the tea trade from India via Afghanistan and Bukhara went through ‘Ishqabad.⁶ In July of 1889, the celebrated Bahá’í scholar Mírzá Abú’l-Fadl Gulpaygání arrived, which greatly expanded the community’s ability to share the teachings of the Faith with interested parties, and his presence enhanced intellectual and educational activities of the growing Bahá’í group.

⁵ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 195.

⁶ Áqá Ja‘far Shírání, known as Hadioff, writes in his memoirs (n.d., n.p., manuscript in private hands) that when one time he had gone to Haifa and was in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he requested permission to build a pilgrim house near the Shrine of the Báb. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was aware that Hadioff could not afford such an undertaking by himself and, therefore, responded, “That is acceptable, but you must return and enlist the support of Áqá Músá Naqioff.” The latter had been an affluent believer at the time. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also instructed Hadioff to return by way of Turkey. However, Hadioff asked if he could go by way of India, to which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá consented. En route, Hadioff experienced a severe sea storm, and thought this might have been why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had told him to go by way of Turkey. In India he purchased 500 cases of tea and took them to ‘Ishqabad. These cases filled several warehouses and were difficult to store, but soon he learned that he could sell them for six times more than he had paid for them. Therefore, he sold them for 600 manát and, since he was unsuccessful in gaining the cooperation of Naqioff (who lost his vast fortune soon after and died penniless), proceeded to Haifa, where he funded the construction of a pilgrim house.

It was at this juncture that an important event occurred which was to be a turning point in the history of the community. On 8 September 1889, one of the prominent Bahá'ís, Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání, was assassinated in broad daylight in the town's bazaar.⁷ The perpetrators of this crime were a group of Shí'a immigrants who had been recruited by their clerics and affluent Muslim merchants who considered the Bahá'ís as significant business rivals. They also planned to kill some two dozen other prominent Bahá'ís, maintaining that they were entitled to do this under Islamic law. They hoped that in so doing they would instill fear in the Bahá'ís and cause them to leave that region.

The fact that the government gave no credence to this line of argument, brought the criminals to trial in November 1889, and convicted them, was a shock to the Shí'a community. The Bahá'ís were, of course, jubilant, and Bahá'u'lláh commended the action of the Russian government. It was the first time in the history of the Bahá'í Faith that an attack on one of its members had been dealt with justly by the state.

The event had one other major consequence. During the trial, the judges ordered the various religious communities to sit separately. This was the first occasion on which many who had secretly been Bahá'ís openly identified themselves with the Faith. It was also the first occasion on which official recognition was given by any government body to the Bahá'í Faith as a religion independent of Islam. During this period, the learned Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl served as the Bahá'í spokesperson and lawyer.

The two murderers received the death sentence for their crime, and several others who were involved in the murder were sentenced to long imprisonment in Siberia. However, the Bahá'ís interceded on behalf of the convicts to have their severe punishments somewhat mitigated. At first, the Governor was reluctant to reduce the sentences but referred the matter to Czar Alexander III, who in turn placed the matter before the Senate for a decision. The Senate decided to accept the Bahá'í intercession and reduced the sentences – a decision endorsed by the Czar and communicated to the Governor of 'Ishqabad.

⁷ Not to be confused with the Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání who was martyred in Tehran in the summer of 1852; see Hasan Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, p. 89, and Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 180.

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Shoghi Effendi has summarized these events in these words in his history of the first hundred years of the Faith:

[I]n the city of ‘Ishqabad the newly established Shi‘ah community, envious of the rising prestige of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh who were living in their midst, instigated two ruffians to assault the seventy-year old Hájí Muhammad-Ridáy-i-Isfahání, whom, in broad day and in the midst of the bazaar, they stabbed in no less than thirty-two places, exposing his liver, lacerating his stomach and tearing open his breast. A military court dispatched by the Czar to ‘Ishqabad established, after prolonged investigation, the guilt of the Shi‘ahs, sentencing two to death and banishing six others – a sentence which neither Násiri’d-Dín Shah, nor the ‘ulamá of Tíhran, of Mashhad and of Tabriz, who were appealed to, could mitigate, but which the representatives of the aggrieved community, through their magnanimous intercession which greatly surprised the Russian authorities, succeeded in having commuted to a lighter punishment.⁸

The conduct of the Bahá’ís during the trial and then in showing mercy to their persecutors by pleading for the life of the murderers was greatly pleasing to Bahá’u’lláh and drew from Him much praise:

Although in recent years a number of the faithful have, in most of the cities of Persia, suffered themselves to be killed rather than kill, yet the hatred smoldering in certain hearts hath blazed more fiercely than before. For the victims of oppression to intercede in favor of their enemies is, in the estimation of rulers, a princely deed. Some must have certainly heard that this oppressed people have, in that city (‘Ishqabad), pleaded with the Governor on behalf of their murderers, and asked for the mitigation of their sentence. Take, then, good heed, ye who are men of insight!⁹

⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 202-203

⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 78

Shortly later, again Bahá'u'lláh commented on the same theme in the *Lawh Dunyá* [Tablet of the World]:

Day and night this Wronged One yieldeth thanks and praise unto the Lord of men, for it is witnessed that the words of counsel and exhortation We uttered have proved effective and that this people hath evinced such character and conduct as are acceptable in Our sight. This is affirmed by virtue of the event which hath truly cheered the eye of the world, and is none other than the intercession of the friends with the high authorities in favour of their enemies.¹⁰

Also, in a Tablet in honor of Mullá Muhammad-Báqir Há'í Najaf-Ábádí (1819-1916), the following is revealed by Bahá'u'lláh:

*He Who gazes from the Supreme Horizon!
O thou who art gazing upon My Visage and art present before this Throne!*

Praise be to the Lord that in His path, virtuous and sanctified deeds have been manifested. In the land of 'Ayn and Shín¹¹, the fire of tyranny was enkindled and, without any reason or cause, one of the knights of the field of wisdom and exposition was martyred.¹² Praise be unto God that after the flames of enmity, the light of pure justice was spread over this incident and all that hath occurred. At last, an order was issued that caused the denizens of the city of equity to utter these words to the inhabitants of the city of justice: Thine eyes were illumined by that which was concluded by the one who stood strong and whose speech was eloquent. For years, justice was deprived and there was no trace thereof. Praised be to God that in these days it manifested itself over the horizon of might with the standards and banners of authority.

¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 90

¹¹ An abbreviation for 'Ishqabad in Persian.

¹² A reference to the martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání.

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Two mighty deeds were demonstrated by the near ones in that land: Firstly, avoiding hostility towards the tormentors, and secondly, intercession before the authorities on behalf of the enemies.

O Há'í! I beseech God, blessed and exalted is He, to adorn the earth with such a fairness through which the celestial dwellers will be made luminous. I implore God, moreover, to illumine men with the light of friendship, unity, affection and harmony. Today, love, fraternity, cordiality and unity are considered the greatest deeds before God ...¹³

Also, Bahá'ú'lláh in a Tablet for Ibn Dakhíl Marághi'í reveals the following sentiments:

Praise belongs to God that divine verses have been disseminated and their fragrance supplied. ...¹⁴ Through sanctified deeds and goodly character must firm, willing and laudable souls guide and direct the men and women of the world to the Author of Revelation and the Source of Inspiration. Today, pleasing deeds and inclinations are numbered among the Almighty's host, and this host has always been and for ever will remain victorious.

The law of holy war and sedition has been erased by the fingers of might. From the near ones in Ishqabad appeared that which gladdened the denizens of the Most August Horizon. After the martyrdom of one of the chosen ones who was named Ridá in the Book of Names, all adhered to patience and forbearance and held fast to the law of God as revealed in His Pages and Tablets. And beyond that, they interceded on behalf of the murderers and evildoers. This deed was adorned with the ornament of acceptance and Our good-pleasure, and now We beseech God to confirm these people in unity, harmony, affection and fidelity.

¹³ Left blank in the published version. Tablet cited in Vahid Rafati, "Diyánat Bahá'í dar Russiyih", *Pazhubeshnameh*, vol. 2.

¹⁴ Left blank in the published version.

Verily, He is the Almighty, the Incomparable, the Powerful.
...¹⁵

Years later, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was faced with an acute problem. There were three Persian-language journals published in Cairo that were antagonistic towards the Faith. In particular, the editor of Chihrih-Nama newspaper, Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Muhammad Irání, titled the Mu’addibu’s-Sultán, published harsh attacks against the Bahá’í Faith.¹⁶ In addition to meeting this editor when He was in Egypt and helping him overcome his negative attitude towards the Cause, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote him about the incident in ‘Ishqabad to illustrate the character of Bahá’ís:

Respected and compassionate friend!

Your esteemed letter arrived and its essence was filled with realities and meaning. ...¹⁷ Praise belongs to God that the Bahá’ís are the utmost well-wishers of the entire world, and you are well aware of that. They have no intentions save providing benefits. They even love their enemies, and treat the ill-wishers as well-wishers. No deceit, no hypocrisy, no dissimulation, no schemes. Under swords they raise the cry of “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abbá!” They will intercede for their slayers, as occurred in ‘Ishqabad. A distinguished personage, who was exceedingly kind to all, had rendered great services to Persians, and was renowned throughout the world for his virtues, was slain and martyred by seven others, and this was proven, established and became evident to the government of Russia. Three of the murderers were sentenced to death. Banishment to Siberia for eighteen years was announced for the other four.

¹⁵ Left blank in the published version. Tablet cited in Vahid Rafati, “Diyánat Bahá’í dar Russiyih”, *Pazhubeshnameh*, vol. 2.

¹⁶ There were several periodicals in Egypt, particularly *Chihrih-Nama* (published 1904-50 as an illustrated newspaper), *Hikmat* and *Parvarish*, which called for freedom and reform in Iran. These publications were important points of contact between Arab and Iranian reformist thinkers in the years before and during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, and assisted with the development of constitutional discourse among the Iranian community in exile.

¹⁷ Left blank in the printed copy in *Pazhubeshnameh*, vol. 2.

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After these sentences were announced, the Bahá'ís rose and quickly went to the Governor. They pleaded with utmost intensity in both writing and in person, asking the government to pardon the convicted men. The Governor did not accept. At last, they collectively telegraphed the Emperor, "We implore and beseech His Majesty the Emperor to forgive these men, as otherwise we would be disappointed and saddened. But if you were to pardon them, we will be grateful and thankful for all eternity, and will entreat the Threshold of Oneness to bestow blessings upon the Emperor."

The Emperor pardoned the convicts as they were under the gallows and reduced their sentences to seven years imprisonment, and those destined for banishment to Siberia were reduced to five years.

Such are the ways of the Bahá'ís. "God is with those who restrain themselves."¹⁸ ...¹⁹

¹⁸ Qur'an 2:194.

¹⁹ Left blank in the published version. Tablet cited in Vahid Rafati, "Diyánat Bahá'í dar Rússiyyih", *Pazhubeshnameh*, vol. 2.

A Brief Biography of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá

Hájí Muhammad-Ridá was originally from the city of Isfahan, and had developed a successful trading business in that city.²⁰ He was an eloquent man, and in the course of his daily routines endeavored to mention the Bahá'í Faith to those he found receptive. As a result of these teaching efforts, the opponents of the Faith constantly harassed him and eventually brought about his imprisonment in 1294 AH [1877]. He was joined in this incarceration by another Bahá'í, Mullá Kázim Tálkhúnychih'í. Some time later, through the efforts of Mírzá Muhammad-Hasan, later known as the Sultanu'sh-Shuhadá [the King of Martyrs], he regained his liberty. While attempting to reestablish his former business, the enemies caused him great difficulties in the hope of frustrating his plans and urged the Governor, the infamous Mas'úd Mírzá, commonly known as the Zillu's-Sultan, to imprison him once more. However, before he could be seized, the Baha'is learned of these plans and advised Hájí Muhammad-Ridá to leave town secretly.²¹

After leaving Isfahan, he traveled for a while and eventually went to 'Akká, where Bahá'u'lláh was living. This contact ignited a deep fire of devotion in him, and he spontaneously implored Bahá'u'lláh to grant him the opportunity for martyrdom. It is reported that in response Bahá'u'lláh told him that it was not necessary, as many souls had already sacrificed their lives in the path of the Faith. However, Hájí Muhammad-Ridá was so enthralled with the experience of being in His presence that he repeated his plea. This time Bahá'u'lláh remained silent and the Hájí took it as a sign of His consent. Later he asked Bahá'u'lláh for advice as

²⁰ Muhammad-'Alí Faizi, *Lá'li Dirakhsbán*, p. 213, incorrectly states that he was from Khurasan. The same error is reflected in Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 4, p. 342.

²¹ Muhammad-'Alí Faizi, *Lá'li Dirakhsbán*, p. 213.

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to where to reside. Bahá'u'lláh suggested the newly-founded city of 'Ishqabad.

Hájí Muhammad-Ridá established himself in 'Ishqabad where he lived for several years, where, unlike many other Bahá'ís of that town, he openly professed his allegiance to the Faith and was always engaged in teaching the Cause among the Muslim population.

On 1 July 1889, he received a Tablet from Bahá'u'lláh in which He praised him for his devoted services and bestowed His blessings upon him for his steadfastness and devotion. He further stated that a grievous upheaval had occurred in the city of 'Ishqabad and described it as the attack of a serpent upon one who was the recipient of the Lord's bounties.

Although the identity of the believer who was to be the target of the attack was not disclosed by Bahá'u'lláh, He prayed in this Tablet for Hájí Muhammad-Ridá that God would give strength to his body and assurance to his heart. This Tablet arrived at a time when Hájí Muhammad-Ridá had invited all the Bahá'ís of 'Ishqabad to a feast – a community that by that time numbered around 400 members.

When it was read out to the gathering, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl stated that, although no upheaval had taken place so far in 'Ishqabad, since Bahá'u'lláh had used the past tense and had clearly indicated that one of the believers had been struck down by the enemies, this martyrdom was inevitable and would happen soon and that only one person would be martyred. Hájí Muhammad-Ridá said to the gathered Bahá'ís that he believed that he was the person whose martyrdom Bahá'u'lláh had foretold in the Tablet.

Two months later this prophecy was fulfilled. Enraged by the progress of the Faith and the commercial success of the Bahá'í merchants in 'Ishqabad, the Shí'a community had been secretly planning to assassinate a number of prominent Bahá'ís. Although the full extent of their plan did not materialize, they succeeded in murdering Hájí Muhammad-Ridá when two men, armed with daggers, attacked him in the bazaar and stabbed him to death on the morning of 8 September 1889. It is reported that he was stabbed over thirty times amid the jubilation of a great number of people who had gathered to watch him

die. Some of the Bahá'ís attributed the prayer revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet he had received, which beseeched God to give strength to his body, as an indication of the agonizing and tortuous way in which he was to be martyred. The murderers were so bloodthirsty that they were seen licking their daggers which were dripping with blood, until the Russian police arrived and took them into custody.

Hájí Muhammad-Ridá was buried outside of the city. His memory has been immortalized by Bahá'u'lláh through a moving Visitation Tablet.²²

²² More details about Hájí Muhammad-Ridá's life can be gleaned from documents contained in this monograph, particularly Documents 3 and 10. In addition, Muhammad-'Alí Faízí, *Lá'lí Dirakhsán*, pp. 213-17, provides a general outline of this biography.

A Glossary of Russian Terms

Several eyewitness accounts in this monograph cite various Russian terms that may be unfamiliar to an English speaking reader. To better decipher these terms, the following table may help.²³ It should also be noted that the eyewitness accounts cited in this monograph have inconsistently transliterated these terms into Persian. As such, all Russian terms used in these documents have been replaced with English transliterations of the original Russian terms as they appear below:

<u>Russian</u>	<u>English equivalent</u>
Katorzhnykh rabot	Labor camp in prison
Nayabr	November
Povestka	Subpoena
Polevoy Sud	Field court-marshals
Polkovnik	Colonel
Predsedatel suda	Chief Justice
Prokuror	Prosecutor
Qulup	Clubhouse
Sekretar	Secretary
Sledovatel	Investigator (in criminal cases)
Soldat	Soldiers
Sudja	Judge
Sud	Court or trial
Voennyi Sud	Military court
Zashchitnik	Defense attorney

²³ The present translator is grateful to Alexandra Tussing for deciphering various Russian terms.

Document 1

The Founding of ‘Ishqabad and Gathering of Bahá’ís in Russia

[The following is a translation of a segment by Fádíl Mázandarání, Táríkh Zubúru’l-Haqq, vol. 5, pp 346-49, which describes how the city of ‘Ishqabad was established, the early Bahá’ís settlers, and the process of development of the sizeable Bahá’í community of later years. Translator.]

When the Russian government conquered Turkmenistan, they decided to raise a town similar to those in the developed countries of the West, with straight and geometrically-designed roads and large, tall buildings, which would serve as a capital for their Eastern dominions, on the spot where presently ‘Ishqabad [currently Ashgabat] is situated – a location that was agreeable for a city. Therefore, they laid out a properly engineered plan and announced that the government would cooperate with whoever desired [to reside there] by granting him a parcel of land easily and without any complications. From every direction, multitudes of Iranians and Russians proceeded to that region and raised dwellings and other buildings. In the hope of finding security and establishing a community free to practice their beliefs, and also in anticipation of finding a new place for commerce and trade, the long-suffering Bahá’ís of Iran also proceeded towards that area.

At the beginning of 1299 AH [1881], Hájí Mírzá Hasan, the Afnán Kabír, was proceeding from Yazd to ‘Akká [to visit Bahá’u’lláh] by way of Russia. Upon reaching Marv, he heard about ‘Ishqabad and decided to purchase properties in the new town. This resulted in Hájí ‘Abdu’l-Husayn Yazdí going to ‘Ishqabad to acquire land for the former and for himself.

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In those days, the Caucasian Railroad had not been completed. The aforementioned Hájí Mírzá Hasan [the Afnán Kabír] went from Baku to Batum in forty days, and by way of Istanbul arrived at the Holy Land and attained the Glorious Presence [of Bahá'u'lláh]. The Bahá'ís considered this a good omen, took advantage of the opportunity and pioneered to 'Ishqabad, creating comfortable lives in the Russian realm, freed from the persecution of the mullás and the authorities in Iran, thereby establishing the Cause of Bahá in that region. From the Holy Land, directives supporting and encouraging this initiative were received as well.

The Afnáns of Yazd decided to send Ustád 'Alí-Akbar [Banná Yazdí] and Ustád Muhammad-Ridá Banná by way of Khurasan to 'Ishqabad for the purpose of building homes, shops and caravansaries. In the same year, namely, 1300 AH [1882], as detailed earlier, a general persecution, harassment and discrimination against these people [the Bahá'ís] took place throughout Iran, through the combined efforts of the state, the 'ulamá and the authorities. This resulted in the captivity of Varqá in Yazd and his exile and imprisonment in Isfahan. Also, as noted earlier, Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí Isfahání was prevented from staying in Tehran, and was forced to proceed to Isfahan and Yazd. There he consulted with the Afnáns and other eminent Bahá'ís of Yazd about ways to free [Bahá'í] prisoners, and to generally alleviate the difficulties of the friends in Iran. [Based on these discussions,] Áqá Siyyid Ahmad Afnán decided that a number of Bahá'ís should appeal directly to the Russian government, and complain of their harassment and maltreatment by Násiri'd-Dín Sháh. As such, they asked Áqá Mírzá Asadu'lláh Isfahání to come from Tehran for the purpose of consultation. However, when they telegraphed Bahá'u'lláh and asked His permission, they were sternly forbidden and so the aforementioned Afnán decided against the planned undertaking.

Eventually, Ustád 'Alí-Akbar [Banná Yazdí] and Ustád Muhammad-Ridá arrived in 'Ishqabad. After them, Hájí 'Abdu'r-Rasúl Yazdí, Áqá Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání and some others came as well. They approached the authorities and asked for land to raise houses and other buildings. They also raised a splendid trading house.

The new town was growing and expanding at an incredible rate as people from every direction arrived, settled and established new homes and businesses.

After two years the number of Bahá'ís had grown considerably and they had constructed shops, residences and other buildings. In particular, the Afnán Kabír, Áqá Siyyid Ahmad, Hájí Siyyid Mihdí²⁴ and Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí²⁵, who all numbered among the Afnáns, purchased many parcels of land.

Eventually, in the year 1305 AH [1887], in accordance with the instruction sent by the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh], the believers decided to raise a Temple. At this time, Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí, the Vakílu'd-Dawlih of Russia, and his son, Hájí Mírzá Mahmúd, came to ‘Ishqabad from Yazd. For 600 manát²⁶ he purchased a large tract of land from a certain Turkmen by the name of A‘zam. They planted a tree and at every dawn, with the utmost liberty – and in a way that they could only have dreamt of in Iran – the Bahá'ís would gather at that site, raising their voices in prayers and supplications. Soon that location became known as the Land of A‘zam and became [the site of] the first official Bahá'í Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in the world. The fame of ‘Ishqabad thereby became widely known in Iran as the first provider [of a temple site] for the Bahá'í Faith.

‘Ishqabad is the closest city in Russian Turkmenistan to [the province of] Khurasan [in Iran]. It is located on the northern side of a mountain range, which separates Khurasan from Turkmenistan. As will be noted in subsequent sections, in a very short time, the Bahá'í pioneers of ‘Ishqabad became renowned among the local population, particularly among the Russians, the Christians and the Turkmen, for their uprightness, piety, and trustworthiness in all their [business] transactions, and were greatly cherished and esteemed by all. A number of them settled and started businesses in Bukhara, Samarqand and other towns of eastern Russian Turkmenistan and began to teach the Faith. Indeed,

²⁴ A son of the Báb's youngest uncle, Hájí Mírzá Hasan-‘Alí.

²⁵ A son of the Báb's oldest uncle, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muhammad.

²⁶ The Turkmen name for the Ruble in czarist and Soviet times; since 1993, the official currency of Turkmenistan.

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Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl came to 'Ishqabad and then to Samarqand for the propagation of the Cause and to print its literature. With the support of the Russian authorities, he decided to start a print-shop and a newspaper, but was discouraged from doing so by the officials of the Faith in Tihran. It was about then that Fádil Qá'iní arrived in 'Ishqabad and after a while settled in Bukhara for the purpose of teaching the Cause.

Document 2

Expansion of the Bahá'í Community of 'Ishqabad

[The following is a translation of Fádil Máẓandarání, Táríkh Zubúru'l-Haqq, vol. 6, pages 993-1002. In this segment, the learned author describes the founding of the city of 'Ishqabad, and gives considerable detail about the early years of the Bahá'í community in this city. Translator.]

As noted in an earlier section, in about 1298 A.H. [1880], the Russian government gained control over the regions surrounding the Caspian Sea and decided to establish and raise new cities, including Tazih-Shahr, Qazil-Ardad, 'Ishqabad and Divanib-Bagh, from the seashore to the shores of the Jayhun [River]. 'Ishqabad is situated in the midst of that region, on the northern face of the mighty mountain range that runs between that province and Khurasan, and near an ancient village known as Ashkabad, and it serves as the capital of the territory. In order to sell land and facilitate people's [migration and] settlement, authorities made certain that provisions and people from every direction proceeded towards the town. They bought land, raised buildings and dwelt there. Having no [other] haven of safety or security, Bahá'ís proceeded to that area as well.

In 1299 A.H. [1881], Hájí 'Abdu'l-Husayn Mi'már [master-builder] Yazdí went there [to 'Ishqabad] and bought land for himself and Hájí Mírzá Hasan, the Afnán Kabír. First [to arrive were] Áqá Muhammad-Ridá, son of Hájí Muhammad-Kázim Isfahání, and Hájí 'Abdu'r-Rasúl, son of Áqá Muhammad-'Alí Yazdí. As a result of persecution by the enemies, years earlier they had left their native town and settled in Sabzivar. Now, once more due to continued harassment, they left that

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town as well and came to ‘Ishqabad, settle there and commenced trading tea.

After a while, Hájí ‘Abdu’r-Rasúl returned to Sabzivar and, as noted earlier, was confronted by the enemies, imprisoned by the authorities in Mashhad and upon paying a fine was released. He returned to ‘Ishqabad and once again established his residence there.

It was then that Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar Mi‘már Yazdí together with Ustád Muhammad-Ridá Banná [builder] Khuramshádí-Yazdí came to ‘Ishqabad from Yazd for the purpose of procuring land and settling there. This journey was subsequent to consultation between Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí Isfahání and other believers, particularly, the Afnáns of Yazd – a consultation the outcome of which was announced throughout the Bahá’í community of Iran.

From Sabzivar, Hájí [‘Abdu’r-Rasúl] telegraphed Bahá’u’lláh and received a [coded] cable that read, “Number one silk is not permitted.” This text was sent from Sabzivar to him in Faran. Recognizing that this cable forbade their journey, the two of them obediently came to ‘Ishqabad on 5 Jumádá’t-Thání 1301 AH [2 April 1884], and thereby were spared the persecutions in Yazd. They purchased land and built a caravansary, shops and homes for themselves and for the Afnáns and were engaged actively in construction.

In 1302 AH [1884], Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Ardabílí arrived and settled [in ‘Ishqabad]. In the same year, Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar received a Tablet in response to his supplication sent from ‘Ishqabad, in which it was revealed, “*Engaging in an occupation in the new realm is consistent with wisdom and the Tongue of Consultation hath consented to it as well. Today, all must arise with the utmost exertion to serve the Cause of God.*”

Also, Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar [Banná Yazdí] and Ustád Muhammad-Ridá [Isfahání] went to the Holy Land to attain the presence of Bahá’u’lláh. It was about then that Mashhadí Yúsuf together with Mashhadí Ibráhím, who were both of Milan, came to ‘Ishqabad, and in 1302 AH [1884] they commenced a partnership in the trading business.

After pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Áqá Muhammad-Ja‘far Uskú’í arrived in ‘Ishqabad in 1304 AH [1886] and established his residence there. In the same year, Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar Dih-Bálá’í Yazdí arrived,

together with his two sons, Muhammad and Ridá. After a while they returned to Iran, but once more returned and settled in 'Ishqabad. Ustád 'Alí-Asghar, the younger brother of Ustád 'Alí-Akbar Mi'már, arrived with his family in the same year as well, and settled there. Áqá Ridá Yazdí (Sa'ádatí) also settled there, in the same year.

In 1305 AH [1887], upon conclusion of his pilgrimage to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání (the martyr) arrived. Mashhadí 'Alí Yá-Hú and Mashhadí Muhammad-Qulí Urdúbádí, who were among the Muslim residents of 'Ishqabad, became believers in the same year. Dhikr-'Alí, son of Mashhadí 'Abbás Mílání, also arrived in 1305 AH [1887]. After a while he returned to his native land to fetch his family, and they all settled in 'Ishqabad afterwards. Karbalá'í Hájí Muhammad Kúrih-Pursizdárí in the same year became a believer in the same town. Mashhadí Husayn Bábáioff Tabrízí started working in the commercial office of Mashhadí Yúsuf Mílání, and converted to the Faith.

After being released from the state prison in Rasht, Mírzá Mihdí Rashtí proceeded to the Holy Land for the pilgrimage and afterwards came to 'Ishqabad. Mullá Yúsuf-'Alí and Áqá 'Alí-Asghar, together with his brother, Mashhadí 'Alí, were also released from the Governor's captivity in Rasht and went to 'Ishqabad and settled there permanently.

In 1306 AH [1888], Áqá 'Alí-Akbar, son of Muhammad-Ja'far and a brother of Mashhadí Yúsuf Mílání, brought his paternal uncle's family to 'Ishqabad, and soon his daughter married there. Mírzá Ja'far Shírází (Hadioff), who had a trading business with his father in 'Ishqabad, became a believer in the same year as well.

In 1305 AH [1887], Mashhadí 'Alí Urúmiyyih became a Bahá'í. Also in that year 'Abdu'l-Husayn Khán Dínyár-Ábádí Hamadání arrived in 'Ishqabad and took a room with Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání. Siyyid Kázim Yazdí left Yazd in favor of 'Ishqabad in 1305 AH [1887] due to intense persecution by ruffians. After a while he went home, but soon returned again and settled permanently.

Mihrabán Púr-Bahrám, who after becoming a believer became known as Khayru'lláh, was one of the Zoroastrians of Bahram-Abad, a village in the vicinity of Kirman. In 1306 AH [1888], he fled the harassment of his fanatical parents and relatives, and came to 'Ishqabad.

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He settled, married and formed a family. Because of the persecution perpetrated by the enemies in Isfahan and Sabzivar, Ghulám-Husayn Isfahání came to 'Ishqabad and settled. Mullá 'Alí, a believer from Darud in [the province of] Khurasan, moved to 'Ishqabad in 1306 AH [1888] to avoid the enmity of foes.

Áqá Muhammad-Ja'far, a brother of Hájí Muhammad-Kázim Isfahání, arrived in 'Ishqabad in 1306 A.H. [1888] and started a trading business. In the same year, Áqá Muhammad-Husayn Uskú'í arrived and settled. His paternal cousin, Karbalá'í Qásim, a son of Karbalá'í Muhammad-Ja'far, came and commenced business, but passed away after only two years. The aforementioned Áqá Muhammad-Husayn was sent to Shanghai by the Umíd Company, which will be discussed later, and committed suicide there.

In the same year [1306 AH] Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl Gulpáygání arrived [in 'Ishqabad] and he also visited Bukhara and Samarqand to teach the Cause and to write. In the latter city, he succeeded in teaching Dr. 'Atáu'lláh Khán and Shír-Muhammad Khán, the Afghán. Áqá 'Azízu'lláh Jadhhdháb, whose biography was presented as part of the events of Khurasan, has penned the following in his autobiography:

In 1304 AH [1886] I journeyed from Mashhad to Bukhara, and through my brother, Karbalá'í Muhammad-Husayn, who for several years had been a trusted representative of the Mashhad merchants in Bukhara and was well-known and completely trusted by the near and far, I met several individuals. They included Amír 'Abdu'l-Ahd Khán, Qúshbagi Vazír-Amír, and some other noble personages, whom I befriended, and by observing their kindness and good character, I concluded that if a competent teacher of the Faith was available in Bukhara, these prominent individuals would most likely embrace the Faith. Therefore, I submitted a supplication to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, requesting that if He deemed appropriate, Áqá Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl Gulpáygání, Áqá Mírzá Muhammad Qá'iní [Fádil], and Áqá Muhammad-Mustafa Baghdádí be sent to Bukhara.

One day a year later, while I was on pilgrimage in the Holy Land, Mírzá Áqá Ján Khadimu'lláh mentioned [to me], “Your supplication was presented to His Immaculate presence. He instructed, ‘Inform Fádil and Abú'l-Fadl to proceed to Bukhara.’”

Therefore, in 1306 AH [1888], the illustrious Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl came to 'Ishqabad and Turkistan²⁷. However, it was towards the latter part of 1308 AH²⁸ that the illustrious Fádil Qá'iní came to 'Ishqabad and, after a short stay, went to Bukhara.

In the year 1306 AH [1888], Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim Afnán came from Yazd to manage the homes, shops and caravansary that had been purchased by the other Afnáns, including Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí, Áqá Siyyid Mihdí, Áqá Siyyid Ahmad, and Áqá Siyyid 'Alí. He stayed until 1313 AH [1895] and then left. It was then that his brother, Áqá Mírzá 'Alí, came in his place.

Fleeing the enmity of foes and ruffians in Yazd, Ustád 'Alí-'Askar Tirmih-Báf [silk-weaver] came to 'Ishqabad towards the end of 1306 AH.²⁹ His sons, Mírzá Mihdí, Husayn-'Alí and Haydar-'Alí, soon became well known. His wife was Túti-Bagum. They had daughters, including Bíbí-Sakínih, who was a poetess and a teacher of the Cause, and who was married to Áqá Siyyid Yúsuf Khavídakí.

Construction of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar commenced in 1305 AH [1887]. Ustád 'Alí-Akbar Mi'már (the martyr) has written the following in his autobiography:³⁰

²⁷ Turkmenistan.

²⁸ 1308 AH corresponds to 17 August 1890 to 6 August 1891. Therefore, it must have been in the summer of 1891 that Fádil Qá'iní arrived in 'Ishqabad.

²⁹ The last day of 1306 AH corresponded to 27 August 1889.

³⁰ The present translator was unable to locate the exact same passage in *Tárikh 'Ishqabad* by Ustád 'Alí-Akbar Banná Yazdí. However, Yazdí appears to have written a separate autobiography which is unavailable to this translator, and this passage may well be recorded there.

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“Together with Ustád Muhammad-Ridá, we arrived in ‘Ishqabad in 1301 AH [1883]. After a year, we journeyed to the Holy Land and attained the sanctified presence of Bahá’u’lláh. After a period of stay there, partaking of the everlasting bounties of the Beauteous One, I left for a short visit to Yazd. Eventually in 1304 AH [1886], I returned to ‘Ishqabad. We became engaged in constructing shops, dwellings and other buildings.

It was during this period that a letter was received from the illustrious Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí, the Afnán Kabír. Therein was stated, “When I was in the presence of the Ancient Beauty, I supplicated for permission for a building to be raised in ‘Ishqabad in the name of the Faith. This request was accepted and viewed favorably. Therefore, you should find a suitable location and purchase that land. Raise a building that would include a pool, a small bathhouse, and a second floor that would surround the courtyard. Record all expenses and I will reimburse [them].”

His esteemed sons started searching for suitable land. On Mardikah Street – currently known as Ázadí Avenue – I purchased a parcel of land for 600 manát in the name of the Afnán [Kabír] from a certain A‘zam who was Iranian and who had recently procured that land from the government and had built a small structure on it. I reported the details of the Afnán’s request and of the purchase of the land to Bahá’u’lláh.

In response a Tablet was received in my honor, which opens with the following expression in the tongue of the Khádimu’lláh: *“O beloved of my heart! According to what the illustrious Afnán, upon him rest all the Glory of the Most Glorious, hath written, a plot of land hath been purchased in the name of God. Upon presenting this news to the Most Holy Threshold, it was deemed to merit acceptance, and this instruction was received: Write to the honored ‘Alí before Akbar, upon whom rests My Glory, that the construction, development and erection of this edifice resides with him.*

This is among the bounties of his Lord upon him! We have instructed the Afnán Kabír to write thee in whatever manner he deemeth appropriate. This is an undertaking that will last for as long as the earth and the heavens endure. Blessed art thou and praise be unto thee.”

After beholding this blessed Tablet, I started construction on 27 Rabí‘u’l-Awwal 1305 AH [13 December 1887]. A building was raised on one part of the lot in accordance with the design that was sent. The pool, the entire first floor and half of the second floor were built as well.

About the same time, a second lot situated to the east of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar was acquired through a government grant and registered in the name of Hájí Siyyid ‘Alí Afnán. Currently a boys’ school is on that lot.

Two more lots on the western side, on Ázadí Avenue, were also acquired through government donations in the name of Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Ardabílí. A building was raised on the corner lot, and the latter resided there, and the second lot became part of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar’s orchard.

Subsequently Áqá Mírzá Abú’l-Qásim, a son of Hájí Mírzá Áqá Afnán, came from Yazd to ‘Ishqabad, and all the properties owned by the Afnáns, as well as the aforementioned orchard, were delivered to him.

General Krupatkin came to ‘Ishqabad to supervise land distribution and to ensure the proper registration of ownership for parcels that already had a building. At that time the title of a plot that was originally acquired in the name of Hájí Siyyid ‘Alí [Afnán], but at the time of property division had come under the ownership of Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí Afnán, was given to the authorities and registered in the name of the former.

The title of a parcel of land that was in the name of Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím [Ardabílí], but two-thirds of which belonged to his servant [Ustád] ‘Alí-Akbar [Banná Yazdí],

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was also registered in the name of Hájí Mírzá Mahmúd, son of Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taqí Afnán.

For several years, the garden of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar consisted of the three aforementioned parcels and the building, of which half of the upper floor was unfinished. Also, it included a few more rooms and a terrace on the side of Ázadí Avenue, where some of the Bahá'í gatherings would be held.”

In short, the above-mentioned Bahá'ís were able to freely hold meetings and raise their voices in worship and supplication in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar situated on the land purchased from A'zam for 600 manát, and which had become known by the name of the Land of A'zam. They were known for their outstanding character and upright conduct among the general population, particularly among the Russians, the Christians and the Turkmen.

Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání had his residence on the upper floor of an inn known as Saráy Rashtí, which belonged to the Afnán and which was situated in the midst of the bazaar, surrounded by other shops and houses of Iranians. Most other Bahá'ís also resided in the same vicinity. They associated and mixed with the Iranian Shi'í population, and would even help to organize commemorations for the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, and they would participate in those events also. However, they taught the Faith diligently, particularly Hájí Muhammad-Ridá who was fearless in his endeavors to propagate and promote the Faith.

Numerous and frequent Bahá'í gatherings led by Áqá Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl were held where many prominent citizens, whether Muslims, Christians or others, would attend. He also intended to establish a print-shop through the support of the Russian authorities.

One day at about this time, Hájí Muhammad-Ridá mounted a picture behind the glass entrance of a photo-shop. This picture portrayed him standing between two other believers. It showed him holding over his chest a most exquisite, original calligraphy done in nast'aliq style which was written in 'Akká, depicting the verse “*Be with God*”. The other

two believers in the picture were Áqá Muhammad-Rahím Isfahání, who was holding up the calligraphy of “*Thou called me, I hearkened unto Thee. Thou summoned me, I hastened unto Thee*” and Áqá Mírzá Mihdí Rashtí who held over his chest the calligraphy of the verse “*Elevate wisdom through Thy Pen.*” This picture provoked the fury of the Iranian antagonists and great commotion ensued from seeing this photograph. They charged that of the three men in the picture, one was claiming the station of the Divinity while the other two those of the Prophethood and the Guardianship, respectively. They took their complaint to the authorities and the masses constantly spread in the streets and the city that “The Hájí claims Godhood!”

The Governor immediately summoned the complainers, as well as Mullá Muhammad Qádí [judge] Qarábághí. They also called in the Hájí and his photograph. They asked him of the meaning of verses in the picture and he explained and expatiated on their intent. [Mullá Muhammad] Qádí confirmed his explanation. The Governor admonished those who had brought forth complaints and dismissed the Hájí.

On another occasion a few prominent Christians were meeting with Áqá Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl in the residence of Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar Mi‘már and discussing this Cause. Also in attendance were Mullá Ahmad Yazdí and several Iranian Muslims, who were all silent while listening attentively. Eventually, Mullá Ahmad was overcome with a rage of jealousy over the eloquence of Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl and rising from his seat, said to the Christians, “Do not seek the truth in vain, as talking with these people [Bahá’ís] will lead to naught save depravity and gloom!” With that outburst, he and his followers walked out and commenced [a campaign of] opposition and hostility [against the Bahá’ís].

Eventually on 11 Muharram 1307 AH³¹ the martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá was perpetrated. This led to the authorities’ sentencing of the offenders and the subsequent intercession of the Bahá’ís [on behalf of the convicts], which resulted in the nobility, goodness and virtue of the people of Bahá being further spread amongst the

³¹ 7 September 1889. However, as other documents cited in this monograph demonstrate, Hájí Muhammad-Ridá’s martyrdom took place on 12 Muharram.

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population. All of these were discussed in the section on the events of 1307 AH, and also in this volume under the segment for the martyred Hájí.³²

Day by day, other Bahá'ís of Iran transferred their residence there [‘Ishqabad] and the number of believers, both men and women, increased. Their institutions and gatherings expanded and were strengthened. Since it was no longer possible to bury their deceased in cemeteries belonging to others, soon [the Bahá'ís sent] a supplication to the Governor, which resulted in a large parcel of land being granted for the purpose of Bahá'í burial. This land was located outside the town, on the north side, in close proximity to three other cemeteries belonging to the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities, and a wall was erected around it. The first to be buried there were the elderly mother of Mashhadí Husayn Babaióff Tabrizí and the small child of Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Ardabílí.

Among the Bahá'ís resident in ‘Ishqabad, one must mention Mashhadí Rahím Kaffásh [shoemaker] Zanjání, Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí Uskú’í, Mullá Ahmad and Mírzá Husayn who were the sons of Mullá Ridá Mílání, ‘Abdu’l-Javád and Hájí ‘Abdu’r-Rahím who were the sons of Áqá Muhammad-Sádiq, who in turn was a brother of Hájí Muhammad-Kázim Isfahání. Mírzá Mahmúd Afnán stayed in ‘Ishqabad for a short while and then proceeded to Bukhara, where he commenced trading and raised a building in the newly constructed town of Darkakan.

At the beginning of 1309 AH [1891], Áqá Muhammad Qá’iní [surnamed Fádíl], Nabil Akbar and his nephew, Áqá Shaykh Muhammad-‘Alí, arrived in ‘Ishqabad. After a few months, Fádíl went to Bukhara, and soon became ill. When the news of the setting of the Sun of the Abhá Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] was received, the believers of the region were overcome with grief and sadness. The Afnán and other believers did not mention the news [of Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension] to Fádíl. Two days later he took his flight to the next world.

Alexander Tumanski was one of the high-ranking artillery officers in the Russian military and established ties of friendship with Mírzá

³² Fádíl Mazandarání is referring to another part of *Tárikh Zubúrn'l-Haqq* which appears in Document 15 in the present monograph.

Abú'l-Fadl Gulpáygání, who wrote *Risálih Iskandariyah* for him. The latter was a man of letters and had a deep interest in all things Eastern. With the permission of his government, he journeyed to Iran and obtained a great deal of information about the Cause. He also translated into Russian the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*, the *Hidden Words*, and some other late Tablets, and in accordance with his own understanding, provided some interpretation and exposition. Additionally, he published parts of the aforementioned *Risálih* [by Abú'l-Fadl] in *Periski* [Zapiski] Journal, published by the Russian Royal Oriental Society.³³

³³ The present translator speculates this is a reference to the following publication by Tumanski: *Zapiski of the Russian Oriental Society*, Vol. 7, pp. 183-192 and 193-203, St. Petersburg, 1892.

Document 3

Remembering Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání

By Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar Banná Yazdí

[Some time prior to his martyrdom in Summer of 1903 in Yazd, possibly around 1901, Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar Banná Yazdí wrote a detailed account of the early Bahá’í settlers in ‘Ishqabad. This history, known as Táríkh ‘Ishqabad, provides biographies of many individuals, within which are many communications from Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This document has been published electronically at: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol4/banna/ashgabat.htm>. The following translation is an extract from Táríkh ‘Ishqabad, pp. 59-63.³⁴ Translator.]

An extensive account of the honored Hájí Muhammad-Ridá, the martyr and a native of Isfahan, has been given at a certain point in my autobiographical volume and it will be [briefly] mentioned to bless and sanctify this book.

After conversion to the exalted and eternal Cause, that honored personage [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá] rose with great ardor and intensity [to propagate the Faith], and began unreservedly to expound the truth of the Cause of God with friends and foes. Soon [he discovered that] it was not prudent for him to stay in one place. For a while, he journeyed through Khurasan and Sabzivar, and every day the enemies [in that region] perpetrated many abuses and outrages against him. Unable to stay in Sabzivar, he went to Isfahan in order to visit his family, wife and kinfolk.

³⁴ Portions of this text are cited in Fádíl Mazandarání, *Táríkh Zubúru’l-Haqq*, vol. 5, pp. 375-377, published at: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol3/tzh5/5tzh.htm>.

In that city, he started teaching anew. However, hypocrites and men of enmity began machinations and harassment [against him]. In those days, Siyyid Hasan Káshání, who was an embittered enemy of this party [i.e. the Bahá'í Faith], was in Isfahan, and an evil-minded group had circled around him. Each day, he ascended the pulpit and preached hatred and prejudice, mentioning the honored Hájí [Muhammad-Ridá] by name. Together with other mischief-makers, the aforementioned Siyyid sought suppression [of the Bahá'ís] through appeal to the Governor. The Zillu's-Sultán ordered that the esteemed Hájí be seized, but he managed to hide. The Governor's men and the foes began to search and inquire after him, and left instructions at the city's gates [for his seizure]. However, wearing a disguise, the honored Hájí secretly left Isfahan. With the utmost difficulty and hardship, and through an unfrequented route, he walked to Yazd.

He stayed with the illustrious Afnáns for a while, regaining his strength. No matter how he searched, he did not find anyone turned to God [i.e. a seeker]. Therefore, by way of Daru's-Salám³⁵ he advanced to Wadíu's-Salám³⁶ – the resplendent city of 'Akká – and attained his highest desire.

For a while he dwelt under the shadow of the Blessed Tree, tasting the choicest delicacies of the Abhá Paradise and savoring the most luscious fruits of the exalted pavilions. He was showered and honored with the endless bounties and the infinite mercies of the Governor of Names. How blessed and how fortunate was he! The venerable Hájí would relate:

Repeatedly, I pleaded for martyrdom. However, each time He [Bahá'u'lláh] would respond, 'We have suffered many martyrs.' One last time though I implored Him. This time, He did not respond. I took that silence to be His consent to my request. I was thrilled. When the period of beholding

³⁵ Lit. the Abode of Peace, the historic designation of Baghdad.

³⁶ Lit. the Valley of Peace. In Islamic eschatology, it designates a place in Barzakh (a plane where souls wait between death and the Day of Resurrection) where the soul of the pious wait.

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[i.e. pilgrimage] had come to an end and the days of union were concluded, and Bahá'u'lláh had granted permission for departure, I asked, 'I will reside wherever You designate.' He responded, 'Settle in 'Ishqabad till We see what transpires.'

He [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá] bid everyone farewell and proceeded to Istanbul. He lived there for a few months in the shop belonging to Muhammad-'Alí Isfahání. From there he came to 'Ishqabad, settling in the Caravansary of Hasht, where we roomed together and he worked through my assistant. This continued until the honored Áqá Siyyid Ahmad [Afnán] arrived in 'Ishqabad and placed all his special affairs in the hands of the Hájí.

However, the Hájí was continuing in his old ways, perhaps even more boldly, teaching the Faith to every interested party, and without the least consideration to observing wisdom. He was a model of self-abnegation and, moth-like, with great courage, he strove for self-sacrifice.

On 2 Dhi'l-Qa'dih 1306 AH [30 June 1889], an envelope was received from the Holy Land in the name of this lowly one. It contained six Tablets from the Ancient Beauty, exalted be His Most Great Name.³⁷ One of the Tablets was addressed to this ephemeral servant, while another was in the name of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá and the other four were for four other believers. In the Tablet revealed for the Hájí statements were made that indicated the martyrdom of the one of the friends [was nigh]. The beginning of this Tablet was in Arabic, and the remainder in Persian, except that it concluded in Arabic. In the other book the entire Tablet is quoted.³⁸ A portion pertaining to our theme is quoted below. Exalted be His utterance:

Myriad thanks unto the Desire of the Worlds, Who confirmed ye in service to the Cause. Blessed is the one who was not held back by the

³⁷ From this sentence to the end of this section is cited in Fádil Mazandarání, *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 5, pp. 375-377.

³⁸ Presumably a reference to the author's autobiography mentioned earlier. This sentence is missing in Fádil Mazandarání, *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 5, p. 376.

accidents of the world from the love of the chosen ones and who was able to arise with the utmost exertion in service. I swear by the Sun of Reality that no deed is hidden from God, everything is known unto Him and its reward hath been revealed and inscribed by the Ancient Pen.

During these days, once again, an incident hath occurred in the city of lovers.³⁹ Verily, the serpent hath opened its mouth and, alas, hath stung the dayspring of the Lord's favors. I beseech God to endow His chosen ones with a most seemly patience and a mighty and wondrous fortitude.

Thou art remembered and will always remain so. I beseech God to strengthen thy temple, and to assure thy heart and illumine thy face and spread thy grace. Verily, He is the Hearer, the Redeemer, the Omnipotent, and the Powerful.

My Glory be upon thee, time after time, and again and again, from the Ever-forgiving, the Compassionate.

This blessed Tablet arrived on a day when the honored Hájí Muhammad-Ridá had invited the friends to a feast on the A'zam Land. This Sacred Tablet and the other five Tablets were recited in the gathering of the believers. Everyone was thoroughly astonished, as no event had occurred in 'Ishqabad like the one for which Bahá'u'lláh was urging patience and forbearance. In accord with his own understanding, each person offered an explanation. The honored Áqá Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl was present in that gathering and stated, "Of a certainty, a terrible and strange event is to befall! The phrase '*the serpent hath opened his mouth and, alas, hath stung the dayspring of the Lord's favors*' is a prophecy of the martyrdom of one of the friends! To whom would the Beloved be inclined and whom would He desire? And since this event will come to pass with absolute certainty, it has been revealed in the past tense. We must wait and see for the effect of the blessed utterance to be made manifest."

³⁹ *Madínih 'ushsháq*, a play on words in a reference to 'Ishqabad, which means the city of love.

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Similar intimations and anticipatory allusions to the same event were included in other Tablets. For instance, the Tablet revealed for this lowly one bore evidence of the same precious purpose, and since it is brief, the entire blessed Text will be included herein. Blessed and exalted is His utterance:

He is the Hearer, the All-Knowing, the Wise!

O 'Alí before Akbar! Mention of thee hath been and continues to be made before the Most Great Horizon. Verily, thou hast been honored with a Tablet that shineth over the horizon of the daystar of the bounty of the Lord, the Merciful. Some time ago a mighty and holy Tablet revealed specially for that honored person, along with other Tablets, was sent. We beseech God not to withhold His servants from the ocean of understandings concealed in His verses, nor to deprive them of the straight and perspicuous path.

Convey My greetings to the near ones and share with them glad tidings of the bounties and favors of the Lord. Say: Do not be saddened by the fire of sedition and hatred enkindled by the brutality of the servant's heart. I swear by the effulgence of the Divine Visage which is manifest and evident over the Supreme Horizon, such occurrences have exalted and will continue to exalt the Word of God. Erelong, all will disappear ...

In consideration of the enshrined wisdom, all are forbidden from speaking or discussing this matter revealed by the Lord of creation. ...

In short, after the arrival of the aforementioned Tablets, it became evident to the men of discernment that the chalice of trial was to flow freely in the feast of the men of piety. To whom would the cupbearer of decree bestow this cup of martyrdom? The honored Hájí [Muhammad-Ridá] would say, [at this time] “Without a doubt, this chalice is brimful for me, since this allusion is recorded in my Tablet.” He then would add his recollection of the silence of the Ancient Beauty when he had supplicated martyrdom. Unceasingly, the honored Hájí was wrapped in the thought of when he would attain his wish.

Soon the month of Muharram 1307 AH⁴⁰ arrived from behind the horizon.

The moon of Muharram is a crescent over the horizon
Like a nail a downcast stains crimson.

The days of turmoil arrived and the men of mischief boiled the blood of the fanaticism and prejudice of the people of intolerance and imitation.

The Hájí had also completed his affairs, prepared a will on the ninth of Muharram [5 September 1889] and stood ready to drink his fill from the cup of sacrifice.

⁴⁰ 28 August – 26 September 1889.

Document 4

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl's Letter 9 September 1889

[The original text of this letter is dated 13 Muharram 1307 AH, corresponding to 9 September 1889, and is preserved at the Bahá'í International Archives. A typed version was printed in Pazhubeshnameh, vol. 4, pp. 109-11, and it was this latter version that was used for the present rendering. It is not known to whom this letter was addressed. However, from internal evidences it appears that it was sent to Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taqí Afnán, the Vakílu'd-Dawlih, who was the Russian Consul in Yazd. Since this letter was written the day after Hájí Muhammad-Ridá's martyrdom, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl's outrage over this heinous crime and his urging of appeal to higher authorities, including the Czar of Russia, is evident. Translator.]

In the Name of God, Who alone is the Sovereign, the Everlasting!
May my spirit be a sacrifice unto your favors!

The hand trembles, the pen hesitates, the heart is heavy, and knowledge and meaning have fled from memory. I do not know what to write and what to present. No land is left that has not been thoroughly soaked by the sacred blood of the friends spilled through the malfeasance of the mischief-makers. No realm is left whose atmosphere has not become suffocating for the near-ones, by reason of the torments and rancor of the tyrants.

For years the city of 'Ishqabad was a place of residence, a haven of safety and a sanctuary of comfort for the friends of God. About two months ago, this servant arrived in this city in the company of some gentlemen.⁴¹ I observed that most of the inhabitants of this town were

⁴¹ Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl arrived in 'Ishqabad on 17 Dhi'l-Qa'dih 1306 AH [15 July 1889] in company of some of the Afnáns, including Áqá Siyyid Ahmad. Therefore, by *Áqáyán* [gentlemen], the Afnáns are intended. It should also be noted that in 19th

troublemakers, scoundrels, fugitives, and drifters from other regions who, because of theft of people's belongings, or embezzlement, or lack of occupation, had not been able to remain in their [native] towns and of necessity had fled to this city as refugees. And since they perceived this region to be endowed with liberty, they have not withheld themselves from any manner of crime or misdemeanor. Day and night, they arise to annoy and molest intelligent beings.

I further observed that the only righteous⁴² Iranians living in this city were the Bahá'ís, who were engaged, with serenity and honor, in crafts, commerce and the development of this realm, in accordance with their laws and beliefs.

Even though the governmental authorities and the prominent functionaries of the Imperial Russian government – may God exalt the standards of her majesty – have evinced no shortcomings in protecting the order of the town and the safety of the friends, yet during these ten days of 'Ashurá the mischief-makers have been busy day and night with discussing and preparing the means of disturbance.

Yesterday, 12 Muharram, two Tabrízís attacked the venerable Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání – may my life be a sacrifice unto his sacred blood – in the midst of the bazaar and in front of all the people, and, by inflicting thirty-one fatal wounds with swords and daggers, they cut his sanctified person into pieces.

After committing this crime, they tried to flee, but, through the vigilance of the city's police, were prevented to do so and were both apprehended. Presently, they are in prison.

The Russian authorities gathered around the remains of the illustrious martyr and placed *saldat* [soldiers] and guards at various spots in the bazaar and in front of Bahá'í shops. Nonetheless, the entire city is boiling with turmoil and the friends are in the height of anxiety.

and early 20th century Iran, the term *Áqá* [pl. *Áqáyán*] meant *master*. For instance, rarely would this term be used in communications originating from the royal court, and instead a more neutral *jináb* be preferred.

⁴² The original *ma'qúl* means rational or logical. However, it appears that the moral character of the Bahá'ís of 'Ishqabad is intended.

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From what has become evident, the instigators of these ruffians are a group of merchants and shopkeepers, all affluent and wealthy, such as, Mashhadí Samad Tabrízí, Mashhadí Ismá'íl Tabrízí, Mullá Ahmad Yazdí and Mihdí Kashí. The last two men were bankrupted in Yazd and Kashan and fled to this town, where they have amassed a little capital and each night they gather at a place to consult and to hatch their plots.

From what has been determined, the foes have taken oath to slay twenty-five of the friends whom they have specified. They have deceived the ignorant by saying, "These people [Bahá'ís] have enmity towards our Chosen Ones and speak contemptuously of the Imams. You must not withhold yourself from killing these people. Each of us will contribute a thousand manát as your surety and will not allow you to be executed or taken to Siberia. Even if you are taken [to Siberia], there should be no concern as we will send money for your expenditures so that you live comfortably and are able to escape from there." In short, your excellency is well aware how the ignorant rabble are deceived by such talks.

Since the late Hájí [Muhammad-Ridá] had come to this region on behalf of the honored Áqá Siyyid Ahmad – may my spirit be a sacrifice unto him – therefore, it is necessary for you to inform the venerable and distinguished Minister Plenipotentiary [i.e. Ambassador] – may his life be perpetually exalted – and indeed to submit the same before His Majesty the Emperor as well⁴³, since the authorities of the Russian government as well as others know that the majority of the developments in this realm are due to the gentlemen.⁴⁴ And when such disruptions take place, that is, when in the middle of the bazaar mischief-makers kill merchants, then no assurance remains for any one. Such disturbances have not been witnessed even in Iran.

In short, do not neglect or delay in this matter whatsoever. The General, who is the Governor of 'Ishqabad, has himself granted

⁴³ The fact that Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl is asking the recipient of this letter to appeal to the Russian Ambassador and the Czar is an indication that the letter was sent to the Vakílu'd-Dawlih, since as a Russian Consul he could bring about such an intervention.

⁴⁴ By "gentlemen", presumably the Afnán family of Yazd who provided much of the initial Bahá'í investments in 'Ishqabad is intended.

permission that should an Iranian cause agitation, then, as a lesson to all, he should be executed. Therefore, it is timely that through whatever means possible you secure this punishment and ensure its occurrence, since many of these ignorant people [i.e. Iranian Shi'as] are not afraid of Siberia.

Since time is short and the postman is about to leave, there is no opportunity for greater detail. Yesterday the city was immersed in turmoil. I sent a telegraph which surely has arrived.

Kindly convey my greetings to the friends in that region. Destiny has delayed the time when once again I shall attain the presence of the friends in that region. There is no knowledge save the knowledge of God, He to Whom belongs the Kingdoms of Revelation and Creation and unto Whom all affairs return.

Beyond this, I have nothing more to offer. May the rays of victory and the light of happiness perpetually radiate from the brow of your illustrious self!

13 Muharram 1307 AH [9 September 1889]

Abú'l-Fadl.

Document 5

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl's Letter 16 September 1889

[It is not known to whom this letter was addressed. The original is dated 20 Mubarram 1307 AH, corresponding to 16 September 1889, and a typed version was published in Pazhubeshnameh, vol. 4, pp. 111-12. Translator.]

In the name of God, the High, the Most High!

May my spirit be a sacrifice to your bounties!

After the occurrence of the illustrious martyrdom, two missives on 13 and ...⁴⁵ were submitted to your ever-bountiful presence. Of a certainty, both have been presented before your honorable self.

Nothing new has occurred. Praised unto God, the friends are in good health and are engaged in their occupations. The two murderers of the illustrious martyr are in prison. From what has been said, each one is incarcerated separately from the other in a dark and inhospitable cell.⁴⁶ Three or four others who are known to be allies and accomplices of the assassins are imprisoned as well. From what the Russians and Armenians [Christians] report, the murderers will be executed. We shall see what the Lord, exalted be His mention, has willed.

In truth, it is a source of wonder how the meekness of the illustrious martyr has so profoundly attracted the hearts of the distinguished Christian people to the friends of God. In the bazaars, wave upon wave [of Christians] come to the friends and express their sympathies and request that this servant meet with them for an hour, so that they can investigate this mighty, bountiful, resplendent, glorious, exalted and all-conquering Manifestation and have discussions. Day and

⁴⁵ Left blank without an explanation in the copy printed in *Pazhubeshnameh*.

⁴⁶ It appears that the accused were placed in solitary confinement.

night, this servant is either writing or, to a degree consistent with wisdom, is meeting and conversing with seekers.

In truth, through the influence of the sacred blood of the illustrious martyr, two things have transpired. Firstly, the meekness and rationality of these people [i.e. Bahá'ís] have been established, which has attracted the compassion of other citizens to the Cause of God. Secondly, permission has been given for a house to be raised in God's Name. That is, in accordance with the blessed instruction [of Bahá'u'lláh], a building has been erected which is near completion. Presently it is known as the A'zam Land.⁴⁷ For some time though, the friends had wondered through what means they could secure the authorities' permission [for its inauguration], so that it would not raise the government's suspicion, nor provoke the people's anxiety.

One night this servant and the beloved of hearts, the honored Áqá Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím Ardabílí, were in the presence of the General [A. Kamaroff], and he inquired of me, "Do you [i.e. Bahá'ís] perform obligatory prayers?"

I responded affirmatively.

"Where do you offer your obligatory prayer?" he asked.

"In our homes," I replied.

"Why do you not perform your obligatory prayer in a mosque or a special temple?" he inquired further.

"Because of their religious teachings, these people [Bahá'ís] endeavor greatly to ensure that people's hearts are not made anxious or overcome with worries. They will never consent to be a cause of distress among the people."

He stated, "No, of a certainty, you must build a temple. The government will not be remiss in protecting you or in extinguishing the fire of the enmity and hostility of the transgressors."

The honored Áqá Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím said, "The land known as the A'zam Land, which is known to your Excellency, has a building under construction. God – exalted be He – willing, when it is finished, we will do as you have instructed."

⁴⁷ This land was donated by Hájí Siyyid Muhammad-'Alí Afnán. The first building over it was commenced in 1887.

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In short, praise be to God and His good-graces, through the Almighty's all-encompassing will, affairs are improving.

However, the infamous enemies are not neglectful. They have raised funds and sent a person to Mashhad before the 'ulamá and the exalted Ruknu'd-Dawlih [the governor of Khurasan]. We shall see what answer they give. It appears that they have appealed to the Ruknu'd-Dawlih for him to intercede with the luminous government [of Russia] to entrust this adjudication to Iran's government. The authorities of the Senneh province⁴⁸ of 'Ishqabad have also learned of these exchanges and are aware.⁴⁹ We shall see to what the divine will inclines and to what the pregnant night gives birth.

This servant has written a missive for the illustrious Excellency Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí [the Vakílu'd-Dawlih], may my spirit be a sacrifice unto him, and informed him of the details. I implored him that since he owns many properties in this region and the illustrious martyr supervised these properties on behalf of the venerable Siyyid Ahmad, therefore wisdom dictates that, at a minimum, he [the Vakílu'd-Dawlih] should write to the General, thanking him and pressing the point [by having the murderers tried and punished]. And secondly, if your excellent self considers it prudent, he should to write to the illustrious [Russian] Minister Plenipotentiary [i.e. Ambassador] in Tehran, asking him to send a letter to the General requesting protection of his [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá's] kinsmen.⁵⁰

In short, act however your august self is inclined. Of a certainty, you will arise to this matter to the highest possible degree since its benefits will go to the Cause.

I beseech Almighty God that through His all-encompassing bounties He will render your prosperous self, who always has stood

⁴⁸ This province is presently known as Ahal Welayaty.

⁴⁹ The Shi'a conspirators in 'Ishqabad were attempting to transfer the trial to Iran where they were assured of a favorable outcome.

⁵⁰ As noted earlier, the children and other family members of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání lived in Isfahan. Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl feared that they might become victims of revenge-killing by the associates of the imprisoned assassins.

ready for service, triumphant and confirmed through the signs of victory, exceptional brilliance and the standards of might and glory.

Kindly convey my greetings to the friends in that region, particularly the true beloved, the esteemed Áqá Mírzá ‘Ali-Naqí, may my spirit be a sacrifice unto him. I implore all for their prayers, and God willing this will not be forgotten.

I should add nothing further. I have written so much that the pen is now slow and the hand trembles.

I forever wish days of happiness and joy unto you.

20 Muharram 1307 AH [16 September 1889]

Abú'l-Fadl Gulpaygání.

[P.S.] The esteemed Áqá Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim conveys his greetings. Please be kind enough to send the enclosed letters to Sabzivar at the earliest possible time.

Document 6

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl's Letter 18 September 1889

[It is not known to whom this detailed report was addressed, though someone in 'Akká, possibly one of Bahá'u'lláh's secretaries, seems likely. A typed version of this tract was published in Pazhubeshnameh, vol. 4, pp. 113-17. Translator.]

In the Name of God, the Most Holy, the Most Glorious!

After praise and laudation upon the Object of the world and the Point of adoration of the people, great is His grandeur and exalted is His word, I offer: By reason of my erstwhile devotions, many times I have wanted to submit a missive to the presence of your exalted self and express my sincerity and renew our friendship, but the pressure of work and the requirement of critical correspondence have prevented me. However, in recent times, an envelope was received from Tehran, sent by the beloved and venerable Áqá 'Alí-Haydar – may the Glory of God rest upon him. Therein was recorded that your beloved person had mentioned me. Although there was no need for trial or test as this servant knew your good self was adorned with the garment of fidelity and imbued with the most excellent qualities, nevertheless, with the utmost joy I loosened my tongue to praise and thank the Lord, and considered it necessary and essential to submit a missive at the first opportune moment. Meanwhile, the incident of the martyrdom of the illustrious martyr, the honored Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání, occurred and what little leisure time had been imagined was lost.

Even though one ought to raise his voice in greatest ecstasy and utter a myriad acclamations that a sanctified person has been sacrificed at the alter of divine love and that sacred blood has been shed in the path of the Divine Beloved – exalted be His Name – nonetheless since my

heart was heavy and [the memory of] firm friendship [with the Hájí] prevented serenity and patience, once again submission of a supplication was delayed, as thoughts were overwhelmed by his meekness and how the fire of sedition engulfed him.

Today, while in a state of sorrow and despondency, submerged beneath waves of wonder and emotion, the thought of that beloved one rose above my heart's horizon and the vision of that illustrious personage filled my mind.⁵¹ I considered the subsidence of the attack of sorrow and the reduction of the intensity of mourning a time to write of the present conditions to that personage, informing him of the events of this land. I implore God, exalted is He, to perpetually adorn your excellent self with rays of victory and confirmations, and that, once again, this hapless one may be honored and gladdened by beholding your countenance. Verily, He is Supreme over all things.

Recalling that beloved's affections from the past, I beseech you that, like last year, be kind and gracious by attaining, on my behalf, the Most Holy, the Most Resplendent Presence [of Bahá'u'lláh] and with expressions of humility and submissiveness submit that, "I do not know what to offer. All the friends are gone and this unworthy one still remains in this realm of absolute nothingness."

I swear by His Beauty, the Most Holy, the Most Resplendent, that there is no hope for life and no will for its duration and no wish for reward at the end or at the beginning, save for His good-pleasure, His affection and martyrdom in His path. I implore Him by the pure blood shed in His path, and the eyes that wept through separation from Him, and by His signs above the horizon of His dominions and the necks of His servants humbled before Him, not to withhold from me that which I have implored of Him. His mercy is my sole hope. Verily, He is the Clement, the Gracious, the Bestower, the Merciful.⁵²

Out of your graciousness, also convey the greetings of this servant to the luminous presence of my master, the high, the great, the resplendent, the illustrious Ghusnu'lláh Akbar, may my spirit and

⁵¹ Expressions *beloved one* and *illustrious personage* appear to be a reference to the recipient of the letter.

⁵² This paragraph is in Arabic and appears to be a spontaneous prayer by the author.

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essence be a sacrifice unto the dust beneath his feet.⁵³ God willing, if circumstances permit, I will directly write to his blessed presence. Alas! When will the demand of writing, the opposition of these mischievous people [Shi‘as], and other obstacles, come to an end! Only if divine confirmations help bring about a relief.

And the incident of the illustrious martyr came to pass thus: Two or three hours into the day on the 12th of the present month, which is Muharram [8 September 1889], in the middle of the bazaar, two thugs from Tabriz martyred that personage [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá], with their knives and daggers inflicting thirty-one cuts. From what was learned, at that time no evidence of weakness or anxiety was observed in him, and he only uttered a few spiritual words and in the utmost submissiveness and serenity hastened to the Exalted Paradise.

At that moment, the foes were exhibiting signs of joy and happiness, congratulating one another. Governmental officials and a physician came without delay, but, alas, it was too late. They arrested the two murderers and took them into custody. That day, though the town was filled with tumult and the adversaries with animosity, yet the friends remained in their shops, clinging unto fortitude with patience and composure.

On the morrow, evidence of mischief became even more pronounced. News was received that the enemy had given permission for twenty-four specified individuals [Bahá’ís] to be murdered. The ignorant foes were emboldened with speeches such as: “These people [Bahá’ís] have enmity towards the Chosen Ones and speak contemptuously of our Imams. We must kill them all. This issue is not of concern to the Russian government, as our protector is the Shah of

⁵³ *Ghusnu’lláh Akbar* (lit. the Most Great Branch of God) was a title of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s half-brother, Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí, who at that time – two years prior to Bahá’u’lláh’s Ascension – was broadly admired by Bahá’ís. Seven years after this letter, when rumors of Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí’s defection began to reach Egypt where Mírzá Abú’l-Fadl resided, he strongly protested against them and asked a close companion, Mírzá Habíbu’lláh Afnán, to inquire of the details while on pilgrimage. For details see, Afnán, *Memories of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Trans. Ahang Rabbani, *Witnesses to Bábí and Bahá’í History*, vol. 4, at <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/>.

Iran.” They had further assured the ignorant, “We will not allow you to be killed or sent to Siberia, nor will we withhold any expenditure for you.” They had taken an oath over these promises.

In short, the matter became difficult. In the afternoon of the second day, five armed men attacked the illustrious Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Tájir [“merchant”] Ardabílí and the honored Áqá Mashhadí Yúsuf Tájir Mílání. Moreover, they did not hold back in the streets and bazaar from any manner of insult, abuse or insolence.

Therefore, at sunset on the day following the martyrdom, Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím, Áqá Husayn-‘Alí Yazdí who is a brother of Áqá Ahmad, Áqá Mashhadí Yúsuf, Áqá Mashhadí Ibráhím Mílání, Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar Mi‘már [“master-builder”] Yazdí, Mashhadí Muhammad-Qulí Urdúbádí, and this servant went to the judiciary of the government of Imperial Russia. Early in the evening, the governor of Kharazm and ‘Ishqabad, who is a General in the Imperial Russian government and is known as Kamaroff⁵⁴, summoned me and Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím [Ardabílí], while the others stayed outside.

After we entered and sat, I stated, “It has been about ten years since individuals who have been identified and allied with this Name [Bahá’í] began living in ‘Ishqabad and have been engaged in trade or other occupations, serving the nation. During this period no instance of ill-conduct or illegality has been observed from them. They have associated with everyone and every group with love, friendship, truth, sincerity, trust and integrity. Even though they have been a constant target of the injuries, insults, abuses and cruelties of these people [i.e. the Shi‘as], they have remained patient and have never retaliated, nor have they been a cause of concern or wasted the authorities’ time. With complete patience, resignation, sagacity, and moral rectitude they have conducted themselves, while you have observed the enmity of the people

⁵⁴ His name is often spelled Komarow in scholarly sources. He was the Governor-General of Transcaspia until early 1890, when he was replaced by Kuropatkin. At this time the province of Transcaspia was still under the supervision of the Government of the Caucasus. Komaroff is described by Curzon as “a quiet and unwarlike professor, who was happier when labeling his insects than when reviewing his men.” (*Persia and the Persian Question*, Vol. 1, p. 83.)

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– which is utterly baseless. You saw how they murdered Hájí Muhammad-Ridá with the utmost cruelty and brutality. Nevertheless, we did not petition you, since it was evident to us that the authorities of the city of ‘Ishqabad would themselves strive to extinguish the fire of sedition and prevent mischief. However, now the situation has surpassed patience and serenity, since they plan to murder a group [of Bahá’ís]. We fear that out of moral conduct and patience, we would be accused and charged with inattention and carelessness before the authorities. We now implore you to tell us what we should do.”

With the utmost affection, the General assured us, “In protecting the city and its inhabitants from the mischief of Iranian thugs, that is, the Shi‘a sect, the government will not be negligent. In particular, it will act with justice in the matter of the murder of the late Hájí [Muhammad-Ridá]. Do not be saddened or disheartened by the troubles that have occurred. Such mischief will increase your prestige and diminish theirs.” He further added, “Our plan is to discover and seize the masterminds of this sedition and the instigators of these thugs.”

Much discussion took place regarding this issue and with his own hand he wrote the name of several promoters of these troubles. He inquired about the health of his excellency Áqá Siyyid Ahmad Afnán, upon him be the Glory of God, and asked, “In which town does he live now?” I submitted, “He is in Istanbul.”

During the remainder of the discussion that took place, he stated, “Even though I am familiar with your beliefs and know that you will never speak contemptuously of anyone, nay, are the well-wishers of all the peoples of the world, and translations of your books are available to us, nevertheless in order to complete the examination, I ask: What do you say regarding His Holiness Muhammad and the Chosen Ones of Islam? I inquire about this because the killers of the late Hájí claim that he spoke derisively about the Prince of the Martyrs [Imam Husayn] and the reason for murdering him was this.”

This servant responded, “Regarding the past and bygone eras, these people [Bahá’ís] speak only approvingly; then how much more so about the Messengers and Prophets [of Islam]. Indeed, by a law with which the illustrious Inaugurator of this Cause has charged these people

[Bahá'ís], they are barred from speaking negatively about their enemies and foes, how much less about past [religious] figures. And Your Excellency is well aware of this.”

He stated, “Indeed, it is true.”

I submitted, “The reason for the truth of my statement is that if we had spoken disapprovingly of the great figures of Islam, of course we would have spoken such things even more readily before other people, such as, Christians, Jews and others. Presently in ‘Ishqabad there are over thirty Russians and Armenians [Christians] who have asked detailed questions from this servant about His Holiness the Messenger [Muhammad] and the Chosen Ones of Islam. I have said to them, ‘Regarding bygone eras, we can say nothing but most approvingly. Proving or rejecting bygone [religious] figures is not our duty. We speak only of today and the present Cause.’ Often it happens that because we refuse to disprove the religion of Islam, they have become annoyed with us. You can ask them the truth of this matter, thereby satisfying yourself of the truth of our statement and of the method of these people [Bahá'ís].”

He said, “It is true. I know of your beliefs and that you do not speak negatively about anyone, nor desire bad for anyone. However, it is possible that a person, at a time of great anger and rage, would allow his tongue to utter foul words.”

I responded, “This did not occur either, because if it had been so, then they would first have taken a complaint to the authorities. It is evident that if the Shi‘a people had a reason to reject us, or had a proof against our teachings, then they would not be in need of murder. Indeed, a neutral government, like the Russian government, would have been sufficient for them to fulfill their intention”.

The General was greatly pleased with this comment and once again assured us of his steadfastness and support.

Among the discussions that took place, he asked, “Who has educated you in such well-pleasing manner?”

In consideration of the fact that religious precedence was vital before governments and also in observance of wisdom, I stated, “Our conduct was like these Iranians that you see. We spoke harshly about all

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people and considered them unclean. Forty-six years ago, a great Man arose and altered our thinking.⁵⁵

He asked, “What has your present chief taught you?”

I submitted, “The pleasing manner and the rectitude of conduct for which these people [Bahá’ís] are well-known are all due to His teachings. His greatest bounty unto us is that He has changed our ignorance to knowledge, treachery to trustworthiness, dishonesty to truthfulness, and enmity to love. He has rescued us from all those things that cause ruin and destruction.”

He asked, “Do you [i.e. Bahá’ís] perform obligatory prayers?”

I responded affirmatively.

“Where do you offer your obligatory prayers?” he asked.

“In our homes,” I replied.

“Why do you not worship in a mosque or a special temple?” he inquired further.

“Because of their teachings, these people [Bahá’ís] endeavor greatly to ensure men’s hearts are not made anxious, to create means of tranquility, and to avoid disturbance, as you have observed. You also have observed that despite all our acquiescence, how entrenched is the Shi’a enmity. Now if they were to observe the performance of new laws [from Bahá’ís, such as, having a temple], then it is well evident how far their hostility would reach.”

He stated, “No, of a certainty, you must build a temple for yourselves. The government will not hold back from restraining the ruffians.”

The honored Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím said, “A certain location known as the A‘zam Land is under construction, but has not been completed.”

He said, “Very well.”

In short, extensive discussions like these took place; it is not possible to detail them in these pages. However, the main points were the ones mentioned. The purpose of this servant behind this verbosity is that all should be known in the Sacred Presence [of Bahá’u’lláh].

In short, after these discussions took place, we were dismissed.

⁵⁵ A reference to the Báb, Who declared His mission in 1844.

From that very night, they added more night-guardsmen and great emphasis was placed on the town's security. The next day, they arrested those who had attacked the friends in the bazaar and they are now imprisoned. At the present, praise be to God, the city is safe and the foes are subjugated. We shall see what happens next, since from what has become evident, the Russians intend to discover the main instigators of the murder of the late Hájí and it appears that this matter will end in a tribunal.

Through the efficacy of the blood of the illustrious martyr, the hearts of distinguished Christians have become inclined and attracted to the friends, and because of the friends' trustworthy conduct in this town, the government wishes to protect and guard these people [Bahá'ís], for during this period they have observed nothing but mischief from the Shi'as and only affection from the friends [Bahá'ís]. During this period, Russian dignitaries, who are called in their own language *afsar* [officers], have been frequently heard to say, "We pray unto God that all the inhabitants of 'Ishqabad become Bábís." Still, the foes are most united and their number is large. This nothingness [Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl] and the friends beseech that beloved person that in the Blessed Presence [of Bahá'u'lláh] he will implore that celestial bounties and favors be vouchsafed to these wronged-ones, and divine triumph bestowed. The eyes of the friends are fastened upon Him and none other. All affairs are in His mighty hands. No object can ever impede His will. He is, verily, the Mighty, the Powerful.

All the friends of this land beg you to be so kind as to mention them in the Most Holy, the Most Resplendent, the Most Exalted Presence [of Bahá'u'lláh] and to convey their expressions of obedience, nothingness, and annihilation, beseeching the advent and outpouring of divine bounties. The beloved and exalted Áqá Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim, the venerated son of the esteemed Hájí Mírzá Áqá Afnán, the honored Áqá Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím Tájir Ardabílí, who during these days has truly sustained great difficulties and troubles, the esteemed Áqá Safí-'Alí Yazdí, the honored Mashhadí 'Alí, the honored Áqá Yúsuf-'Alí Rashtí, and the brothers of the aforementioned Áqá Mashhadí 'Alí, [namely,]

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Áqá Mírzá Báqir and Áqá ‘Alí Asghar, each one requests that you mention his name before the Blessed Presence [of Bahá’u’lláh].

God willing, exalted be He, you will mention in the Luminous Presence [of Bahá’u’lláh] the beloved of my heart, the honored Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar Mi‘már Yazdí, who, from the very beginning of the city’s development until now, has been engaged in its construction and presently is the target of the foes’ attacks and attention. Also the honored Áqá Siyyid Kázim Yazdí, who presently is in ‘Ishqabad serving the honored Áqá Mírzá Abú’l-Qásim Afnán, pleads [to be mentioned to Bahá’u’lláh]. In short, the longing hands of each and every one of these helpless ones are upraised for the bounties of God, beseeching divine mercy.

May the sprinklings of the cloud of God’s most excellent favors perpetually rain upon that beloved personage.

22 Muharram 1307 [18 September 1889].

Abú’l-Fadl Gulpaygání.

Document 7

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl's Letter 31 October 1889

[While the addressee of this letter is not known, it appears to be someone in 'Akká, as Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl expresses submissiveness before Bahá'u'lláh and asks for His confirmations and bounties. The text is dated 6 Rabí'u'l-Avval 1307 AH [31 October 1889], and a typed version was published in Pazhubeshnameh, vol. 4, pp. 117-19. Translator.]

In the Name of God, the Most Holy, the Most Glorious.

May my spirit be a sacrifice unto your bounties!

God- exalted be He!- willing, may you perpetually receive sustenance, under the shadow of God's mercy, from the choicest fruits of the Most Great Paradise, and attain the highest benefits of nearness to and of beholding the Countenance [of Bahá'u'lláh], and be enveloped by His special and bounteous rewards, through His favor, kindness and benevolence.

Several weeks ago the True Helper granted the bounty of submitting two missives to your presence, wherein the recent incidents of 'Ishqabad were reported. Since then, nothing new has occurred that would be worthy of submission, save that two more instigators of the mischief-makers have been arrested.

From that time until yesterday, the officials of the province have been engaged most days in investigation and interrogation. Yesterday on the street, I met the translator of the examiner, who is called *Salischi* in their own language. He said that the examination file has been completed, read to the prisoners and today was submitted to the General who is the Governor of this region. We shall see what will appear next through the all-conquering Divine Might. All affairs are in His mighty

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hand and rulers' and kings' hearts pulsate through His will. Even though on the night of our meeting the Governor of this realm had stated that this matter will come to its conclusion slowly, nevertheless the authorities' considerable patience and deliberation has brought anxiety to the hearts of the friends, causing them to think that perchance, because of the length of time, opportune circumstances, the foes' attentiveness and instigators' provocation, a new scheme would be carried out [by the enemies] and once again the ruffians would launch an attack. This is because until now the government has dealt harshly with our oppressors who have suddenly become disenchanted and disheartened with 'Ishqabad to the point that more than thirty of the rabble-rousers have fled and appealed to Iran's government. They have sent several emissaries to Mashhad and Tehran and with the utmost ingenuity and artifice they are seeking assistance. From Quchan news was received that when the [Shi'a] merchants telegraphed the Sultan [of Iran] and implored him for support, they received a negative response. Two of the prominent authorities of Mashhad have written to this ephemeral one giving assurance that the government of Mashhad would not heed the petition [of our enemies].

However, the eye of these servants is to God's bounties and His pervasive will. Our earnest supplication is that, beneath the shadow of His favors and under the canopy of His compassion, He will protect His servants from the assault of the creatures and save the friends from the scheme of the foes.

I implore you, out of your liberal generosity, to express, on my behalf, with the utmost humility and meekness, my obedience before the luminous Threshold of the Desired One and the sanctified presence of the Promised Beauty – lofty is His Grandeur, and all-encompassing and all-pervasive is His Benevolence– and to beseech, from His Ocean of forgiveness and clemency, for pardon and absolution for the wrongs and faults of this helpless one. God, exalted be His Splendor, is aware of my condition and testifies to the sins of this servant. I swear by His sacred essence that I am deeply ashamed of myself, of the fewness of my deeds, of the nearness of my demise and the immensity of my failings, and I am embarrassed over these shortcomings. I take refuge unto His greatness

and cling to the rope of His bounty and supplicate Him and call unto Him by all that hath been revealed through His Supreme Pen and take comfort in His Most Gracious Favors.

Praise be unto Thee, O my Lord, and thanks be unto Thee, O my Desire, for illuminating Thy straight path and manifesting Thy Mighty Announcement unto me. Enable me to attain unto the Dawning-place of Thy Revelation and the Source of Thy Command after all Thy servants and Thy creation have turned their backs unto Thee. I implore Thee, O Sovereign of all Eternal Dominions, by the murmur of Thy Supreme Pen, and by the voice that calleth from the burning Fire in the verdant Tree, and by the Ark that Thou hast destined for the people of Bahá, to make my steps firm in Thy love, and to make me resigned to whatsoever hath been ordained in Thy Revelation, and to assist me in [serving] Thy Cause and [performing] all that hath been revealed in Thy Book. Thou art Powerful and Omnipotent over all that Thou desireth and all things are in Thy grasp. There is none other God save Thee, the Mighty, the Omniscient, the Wise.⁵⁶

The other matter is that an envelope in your exalted name sent by the honored Mullá ‘Alí Bajistání⁵⁷ from Mashhad was received and therein was noted that he had written a description of the martyrs of Khurasan, which is enclosed. God willing, exalted is He, you will grace him with a response.

The venerable and honored Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Tájír Ardabílí conveys his greetings to your esteemed self. In truth, during these days his honored person has arisen in such wise that he has won the gratitude of all the friends. Similarly, the honored Áqá Mírzá Husayn Mílání, who is a most affectionate youth and has attained the Blessed Presence [of Bahá’u’lláh], requests that you kindly mention him to the Blessed Presence, and perchance the divine bounties that surround all the servants will be bestowed upon him too and his name be inscribed

⁵⁶ This paragraph is in Arabic and appears to be a spontaneous prayer by the author.

⁵⁷ Mullá ‘Alí Bajistání was one of the prominent Bahá’ís of Khurasan who later settled in Samarqand and passed away in 1316 AH/1899. A Tablet of Visitation by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá adorns His tombstone.

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by the Supreme Pen. Verily, He is Graceful and Merciful unto all servants.

Nothing further is left to submit. God willing, exalted be He, soon you will respond to these missives, which would bring delight to the friends.

May the clouds of utmost bounty be over you and sprinkle upon you.

6 Rabí'u'l-Avval 1307 AH [31 October 1889].

Abú'l-Fadl.

Document 8

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl's Letter 25 November 1889

[The addressee of this letter is not known, but it might be Siyyid Ahmad Afnán, who owned several properties in 'Ishqabad. The present rendering is based on the typed version published in *Pazhuheshnameh*, vol. 4, pp. 119-21. Translator.]

In the Name of God, the Most Holy, the Most Glorious!

May my spirit be a sacrifice unto your bounties!

[It is hoped that], God- exalted is He- willing, your blessed person is perpetually enjoying the luscious fruits of nearness, and attaining the heights of triumph and the peaks of independence.

I then present before you: Several missives have been submitted before your ever-bountiful self and until now I have not had the honor of receiving a reply to any of them. Nevertheless, I have decided to send this page informing your illustrious self again of the occurrences in this realm, perchance it will bring gladness to your noble heart and will honor and exalt this servant.

The essence of recent happenings is that, after the conclusion of the cross-examination of both sides, the esteemed Excellency General [Kamaroff] telegraphed the Emperor [Alexander III] requesting conclusion of the affair through a ruling by a *Paladai Sud*, that is, a military court, which would issue a severe decision against the guilty. In accordance with his request, a military *Sud*, who is a most dignified, courageous and admirable military-man, and is styled *Persitjil*, arrived in 'Ishqabad.

On Saturday, 23⁵⁸ Rabí'u'l-Avval [17 November 1889], corresponding to 4 Nayabr of the Russian calendar, there was issued a

⁵⁸ Most likely a copyist error, as Saturday was 22 Rabí'u'l-Avval.

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written summons to over sixty persons from both sides to attend the trial [as witnesses] on Monday, in a building known as the *Qulup*. Among these were fourteen Bahá'ís, six Christians, two Muslims who were witnesses on behalf of the Bahá'ís, and the rest were among the foes and their witnesses. The esteemed General ordered that eight translators in Turkish and Persian languages be present as well – though none were to be of the Shi'a religion; rather were they to be either Christian or Sunni.

In short, a great tumult was evident in the city; all wondering what would appear from behind of the hidden veil. All hearts trembled as to who would be favored with the breeze of approval and who would suffer the consequences of their deeds.

On Monday 24 [Rabí'u'l-Avval, the same as 18 November 1889], corresponding to the sixth day of the Russian month [of Nayabr], phaetons proceeded towards the *Qulup* with rank upon rank of people directing their steps in that direction. Confident of divine bounties and certain of celestial favors, the Bahá'ís entered [the building] with radiant faces and assured hearts.

The *Qulup* is an excellent, large building. In its middle is a hall that can sit five-hundred people. On either sides of this hall are two rooms. The hall's platform is about one meter elevated. The *Sud* was seated in the middle on this platform and on his right and left were situated four other high-ranking military officers. On the right side the *Parakerur* [prosecutor] and a clerk were seated, and, at the behest of the government, they were to support and speak on behalf of the murdered. On the left side were another person and his clerk, who were representing the murderers and prisoners. Thus, the members of the court were nine persons. Translators sat before the platform on the right. The nine prisoners sat on the left. Russian dignitaries, military chiefs, and Armenian [Christian] and Muslim merchants sat on stools, observing. Certain distinguished and eminent Russian ladies were present at the assembly as well.

At first, when we arrived at the *Qulup* building, all the claimants, defendants and witnesses of both sides were told to take seats in the two rooms on the right and left of the main hall. They placed guards in those rooms and instructed that none was permitted to speak with another.

One by one, they were summoned [to the hall] and engaged in question and answer. When each person's examination was concluded, he was seated in the general assembly [in the hall] in the presence of the *Sud* and was not permitted to return to the original waiting room.

In such wise, examinations and cross-examinations continued from morning until six hours into the night. However, every three hours, five or six minutes [of recess] were granted for everyone to leave their seats for rest. In the afternoon also a two and a half hour break was given for everyone to return home, on the condition that they would return at the beginning of the night.

Like this, on Monday, 24, and Tuesday, 25 [Rabí'u'l-Avval, 19 November 1889], the interrogation of all parties continued from morning until about the middle of the night. In consideration that Wednesday, 26 [Rabí'u'l-Avval], coincided with an anniversary for the venerable Christians, the court was adjourned – but everyone was ordered to return on Thursday.

We arrived at the *Qulup* on Thursday, 27 Rabí'u'l-Avval [21 November 1889], corresponding to the ninth of the Russian month [of Nayabr]. The hall was full of Russians, Armenians [Christians], and Muslims – both Shi'a and Sunni. In truth, it was a most impressive gathering. Since examination of both sides had concluded, after the arrival of the *Sud* on that day and his taking the bench, the *Parakuvar* rose and, in a most eloquent manner, which is beyond any attempt by me to describe, he established and proved the meekness of the illustrious martyr and the truth of the Bahá'ís. When his speech was completed, his counterpart on the opposing side, who was charged to support the prisoners, rose to reject the proofs offered by the friends. In truth, he rejected all of our testimonies, since we had no eyewitnesses as it is evident that the foes' discussions about the murder of the late Hájí Muhammad-Ridá and other friends had taken place in their own secret gatherings and the Shi'a would not testify for us.

In short, the Almighty God assisted and the *Parakuvar* was inspired in pleading the case of the friends. In sum, the exchanges between these two individuals lasted for about three hours. At the end, the *Parakuvar* stated, "The very lack of proof and absence of evidence of the Bábís is

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considered evident proof by me. And by this reason, I ask the death sentence for these six prisoners. A murder took place in broad daylight, in midst of the bazaar; none came forward to assist the innocent victim; the transport of his remains precipitated so much scorn and insult; no one would dare bury the remains the next day, with the result that his torn body had to be buried in the middle of the night – all of this demonstrates the contempt and assault of the Shi‘as upon this hapless wronged-one [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá].”

The discussions then concluded. The *Sud* and four other government dignitaries who sat to either side of him then retired to a private room and consulted for two hours. Afterwards, the *Sud* and other associates returned and stood at the head of the hall, in front of the assemblage. They had prepared a written order and it was read aloud. The essence of it was this: Firstly, in regard to the nine criminals, it was announced that two men named Ibráhím and Gaffár had been proven not-guilty and were to be released forthwith. The friends [Bahá’ís] also testified that they had had no involvement. The two murderers, Husayn-Qulí and ‘Alí-Bábá, are to be hanged. Mullá Ahmad Yazdí, Mashhadí Samad Tájjir [merchant] Tabrízí, Jalíl Bayk Tabrízí and Mullá Mihdí Rawdih-Khán Tabrízí are to be banished to Siberia for life-imprisonment. A certain Asadu’lláh who had caused sedition in the bazaar is sentenced to a year and four months imprisonment in ‘Ishqabad.

When the decision was read it was near sundown and the gathering was concluded. The foes, defeated and dejected, and the friends, triumphant and victorious, returned. Praise belongs to God, the Lord of both worlds.

Yesterday a letter was seen that your excellent self had written to the beloved and distinguished Áqá Mírzá Abdu’l-Karím regarding your properties. Even though it is not a matter related to me, nevertheless, God knows that for your own good, and for the protection of God’s Cause, I submit: A situation is observed that greatly weakens the Cause and brings sorrow to the friends. Your own illustrious self is well aware. If you inquire the remedy of these matters from the honored Áqá Mírzá Abdu’l-Karím, that is, entrust the properties solely unto him, you will

win mightily for yourself and God's Cause. Otherwise, day by day, unfortunate matters will appear. Of course, the decision resides with your own self.

I beseech conveyance of my expressions of humility to my great master, the illustrious Amín, may my spirit be a sacrifice unto him.

May your days be sweet!

1 Rabí'u'th-Thání 1307 [25 November 1889].

Abú'l-Fadl.

Document 9

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl's Letter 21 January 1890

[Shortly before leaving Ishqabad in February 1890 for Samarqand, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl wrote a detailed account of the events that led to the martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá and subsequent incidents in the form of a letter to Mírzá Asadu'lláh Khán Vazír, one of the most prominent Bahá'ís of Isfahan, so that it could be read in a gathering of the believers of the native town of the martyred Hájí Muhammad-Ridá. The original of this document is published in Rúhu'lláh Mibrábkhání's seminal biography of Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl.⁵⁹ For the purpose of the following translation, two other copies were consulted: an early manuscript, which is almost identical to the text published by Mibrábkhání; and a copy printed in 'Azízu'lláh Sulaymání, Masábih Hidáyat, vol. 2, pp. 232-263.⁶⁰ Translator.]

⁵⁹ Rúhu'lláh Mibrábkhání, *Zindigání Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl Gulpáygání*, Germany, 145 BE [1988], pp. 171-197.

⁶⁰ Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844-1944 Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, p. 299, notes that a copy of this letter was in the archives of the British Legation in Tehran, though marked from an unnamed Bahá'í to a friend at Isfahan. "The native secretary of the Legation, Mírzá Hasan-'Alí Khán-i-Navváb obtained a copy of it from a Bahá'í friend of his in Tihiran. This letter was translated by the Navvab in a memorandum dated 1 May 1890. The last part of the letter reads thus:

It is the first justice and is the first support in this world that has been shown by this Great Sovereign who has removed the atrocities of the powerful enemy from this oppressed sect... It is an astonishing contrast between the justice of the great Russian Govt. and the Persian Govt. as for instance if such a murder had taken place in Persia and great merchants, as were in this case, were concerned in it, it is evident to every one that how much both parties would lose in bribing the officials; but in this case the Russian officials did not take a penny from any one, even, on account of excess of justice and equity. No one dared to speak to any one of bribe or to intercede for the culprits. The Shia sect has given bribes to their Ulamas and

In the name of God, the Most Mighty, the Most High.
May my spirit be a sacrifice unto you!

Praise be unto God, the Lord of the End and the Beginning, and salutations unto Those Who are the instrument of His bounty amongst mankind!

I submit: The incident of the martyrdom of the illustrious, blessed martyr, the late Hájí Muhammad-Ridá – may my spirit be a sacrifice unto the dust of his resting-place – in the city of ‘Ishqabad and the justice rendered in the course of the subsequent trial by the stalwart and glorious Russian Government – may God prolong her sovereignty in the west, the east, the north and the south – is deserving of being recorded in history and worthy of discussion among the friends in all cities and regions. Therefore, I thought it was imperative for me to describe these events for the believers in the Darú’s-Saltanih of Isfahan in order that you may read these pages at the friends’ gatherings, where all may raise their supplicating voices in prayer so that the life, sovereignty, pomp and glory of His Imperial Majesty Alexander III and the ministers of his all-powerful nation may long endure.

The exalted Tablets which have been received recently from the Holy Land make reference to this matter, the essence of which is this: In gratitude for the protection which has always surrounded the Cause of the Lord of Creation, this wronged community must never forget the support and the fair treatment it has received from the glorious government of Russia and should ceaselessly beseech from Almighty God an increase in divine confirmations and blessings for her most glorious Emperor [Czar] as well as her esteemed General [Kamaroff].

Indeed this was the first instance of justice and assistance that the world afforded the [Bahá’í] community through the equity of this great Monarch and renowned King [Czar], who blotted out the threat of an

officials in Persia, in order that they might intercede for them but it was a failure.”

Momen identifies this document as, “Memo of Hasan-‘Ali Khan-i-Navvab 1 May 1890: FO 248 509”

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inveterate enemy towards a handful of gentle people who have no other champion save the sanctified and exalted God.

It is astonishing to recall that the land of Kharazm, which contains Turkmenistan, with ‘Ishqabad [currently Ashgabat] raised within its borders, is the same turbulent realm where every year at least a thousand Iranian captives were put to the sword and the Shi‘i women and daughters were subject to untold atrocities. And this was in addition to the multitudes [of the Iranian Shi‘is], who, worse than Sudanese slaves, were sold in Bukhara, Samarqand and Kiev, as well as other cities of Turkmenistan. However, it is now nine years since through the might of this illumined [Russian] government, [this region] has become a haven of justice among the nations of the East, and the wolf and the sheep, and the beast and the prey, lie down together in the same bed with the utmost ease and comfort. Exalted is God, the Lord of Destiny!

[Meeting Hájí Muhammad-Ridá]

It was on 17 Dhí‘l-Qa‘dih 1306 AH [15 July 1889] that, in the company of the Afnán gentlemen, I arrived in ‘Ishqabad, and that was the first time that I had the privilege of meeting the illustrious martyr [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá]. I discovered in him the highest attainments of perseverance, tenderness, morality, fidelity and sincerity. He treated kin and strangers with true affection, and dealt with his friends and foes with warmth and generosity. However, by reason of his fame and steadfastness [in the Faith], he was constantly harassed and beleaguered by the promoters of enmity and hate, and in the same way that you observe in Iran, he too was falsely labeled and slandered. For instance, he was referred to as “the Imam Ridá of the Bábís” and – I take refuge unto God – they spread among the people that he harbored resentment towards the Sanctified Prophets.

‘Ishqabad is now the gathering place of the ruffians of Tabriz who, because of the policies and the skilled administration of Amír-Kabír, the Amír-Nizám⁶¹ of Adharbayjan [province], have escaped here and are

⁶¹ In the Qajar period, referred to the General of the Army.

taking advantage of the liberties offered by the glorious [Russian] government.

In short, it had been over a year since a group of mischief-makers had risen in opposition to that choice friend and were determined to slay that essence of goodness. The leaders of this band and the original promoters of this mischief were Mullá Ahmad Tájir [merchant] Yazdí, Mihdí Tájir Kashání, Mullá Mihdí Rawdih-Khán [soothsayer] Tabrízí, Mashhadí Samad Tabrízí, Mashhadí Jalíl Tabrízí, and a large number of people from Iran and Caucasia.

It was in the latter part of Dhi'l-Hajjih⁶² when the illustrious martyr requested this servant to draft a will for him, a request to which I consented. A few days passed. One day we saw each other in the streets and he inquired, "Why have you not prepared the will?" "What is the haste?" I asked. "Time is short and affairs may fall into disarray," he responded.

Some days later, that is, on the first of Muharram [28 August 1889], he came to this servant's house in the company of Áqá Ghulám-Husayn, who was his close companion, trusted friend and business partner, and also accompanied by Áqá Mírzá Mihdí Rashtí. In accordance with his instructions, a will was prepared stating essentially: "All my possessions in 'Ishqabad, completely and in their entirety, I leave to the illustrious and venerable Áqá Siyyid Ahmad Shírází⁶³, who is of the Afnán of the Sacred Lote-Tree." He added verbally the details: "My residence and its furniture in Isfahan belong to me and are bequeathed to my surviving family members. All my books and papers in Isfahan, whether Bahá'í or otherwise, must go to my brothers," that is, his two brothers who lived in Isfahan. He emphasized that everything he possessed in 'Ishqabad belonged to the esteemed Áqá Siyyid Ahmad, and that he only served as a caretaker of these properties, and also collected

⁶² End of August 1889.

⁶³ Siyyid Ahmad was a son of Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Hasan, known as the Afnán Kabír. He was a devoted Bahá'í and for a while lived in Yazd and 'Ishqabad, engaged in commerce. For his fascinating biography see, Afnán, *In the Land of Refuge: The Genesis of the Bahá'í Faith in Shiraz*, Trans. Ahang Rabbani, eBook: 2007, Witnesses to Bábí and Bahá'í History, vol. 1, Appendix 6, <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/shiraz>.

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rent from them, and that the exalted personage [Siyyid Ahmad] paid for the daily expenses of the illustrious martyr.

In short, this will was written in the presence of Áqá Ghulám-Husayn and Áqá Mírzá Mihdí Tájir Rashtí.

[Muharram Commemorations]

Since the month of Muharram 1307 AH⁶⁴ had arrived, the Iranians of the city, in accordance with the customs of their native land, commenced setting up *takiyyih*⁶⁵ and organizing *dastih*⁶⁶, *zakhm-zan*⁶⁷ and *rawdih-khání*⁶⁸. During those nights and days, [the Shi'is] were observed by foreigners to commit such unseemly acts, which truly are unworthy of description or further mention. It was in the course of these gatherings that they laid plans to slay the illustrious martyr. However, because of the presence of the government soldiers, they were unable to carry out their dreadful scheme during the 'Ashúrá period.⁶⁹ In this wise, the ten days of 'Ashúrá came to an end and the rawdih-khání gatherings were concluded.

[The Martyrdom]

On the morning of 12 Muharram [8 September 1889], however, about three hours into the morning, as the illustrious martyr was passing

⁶⁴ 28 August – 26 September 1889.

⁶⁵ Theaters for passion-plays commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.

⁶⁶ Mourning groups and processions.

⁶⁷ In order to act out the injuries which had befallen the Imam and His companions, a number of those in the Shi'í mourning procession would cut themselves, often quite severely, and with blood gushing out from their foreheads, or as they beat their own bare backs with sharp knives, would continue the march – a horrendous scene which greatly incites public sympathy.

⁶⁸ Large public sessions typically devoted to telling and acting out the events of Karbala, which led to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and His family.

⁶⁹ The first ten days of Muharram is a period of especially feverish observance for the Shi'is, reaching its emotional height on the tenth day of the month which marks the martyrdom of the Imam and His companions.

through the bazaar, two of the Tabrizi thugs, one known as Husayn and the other named ‘Alí-Akbar and referred to as ‘Alí-Bábá, in full view of the public, surrounded and martyred Hájí Muhammad-Ridá with thirty-one stabs, cutting him into pieces, making the earth crimson with the noble blood of that essence of love, purity, faith and fidelity.

At the time of his martyrdom, over five hundred of the shopkeepers were present who inwardly were of the same mind as the murderers and outwardly cheered them and shouted expressions of immense joy. Nevertheless, because of the alertness of the authorities, the perpetrators were unable to escape and were seized immediately. The city’s medical examiner as well as the senior security officers came at once, but, alas, it was too late and his sanctified soul had winged its flight to its heavenly habitation in the most exalted pavilion.

Even though the two villains were chained and made captive by the hand of fate, and the city’s security forces were vigilant and watchful, the fervor of the enemies and the uproar of the men of enmity was of such intensity that not one of the friends dared to go near the sacred remains lying on the ground. In this manner, until sometime after noon, the remains of that hallowed being remained in the dust of the same bazaar.

Eventually, in accordance with the instructions of Áqá Muhammad-Ridá Arbáb⁷⁰, Áqá Ghulám-Husayn asked Mashhadí ‘Alí-Haydar Shírvání, who was renowned for his generosity, leadership and ability, to help him rescue the remains, hoping that with Shírvání’s presence no other incident would occur. The honored Mashhadí ‘Alí-Haydar consented and came to the location, but no one else had the courage to help, and whoever they approached for assistance refused.

At last, Mashhadí Muhammad-Qulí Urdúbádí, who was a pious and righteous young man, came forth and lifted the remains over his shoulders. He brought it to a caravansary belonging to Áqá Siyyid Ahmad Afnán, and which had been in the custodianship of the illustrious martyr. [In the process,] however, he had to sustain the intense and unrelenting attack of the enemies, who spoke every manner

⁷⁰ Interesting recollections of Kazem Kazemzadeh, a son of Áqá Muhammad-Ridá Arbáb, are captured in Document 18.

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of insult and abuse. The foes then rushed forth and withheld not themselves from any manner of mischief or perpetrating harm. Having no other recourse, Áqá Ghulám-Husayn and Áqá Mashhadí ‘Alí-Haydar closed the caravansary’s gate, but from the [adjacent] roofs, the foes continued to bombard them with rocks and subject them to every manner of violence, trying to prevent them from washing the blessed body in preparation for burial. Under such conditions, the remains were washed and, with the utmost difficulty and hardship, that pure jewel was buried at midnight at a choice location outside the city of ‘Ishqabad.

[Plot for General Massacre of Bahá’ís]

The following day, the uproar of the enemies reached a new height. News was received that they had laid plans for the killing of twenty-four of the believers, who were considered leaders of the Bahá’í community of ‘Ishqabad. For this purpose they had collected and spent a very large sum of money in order to stir the naive people’s sense of [false] pride with such nonsense as: “This matter concerns our Faith! We are Muslims and Iranian citizens. This has nothing to do with the Russian government for them to interfere!”

In short, on the afternoon of the second day, a group of Tabrizi ruffians rushed to the middle of the bazaar, and with drawn weapons attacked Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Tájir Ardabílí, Mashhadí Yúsuf, Mashhadí Ibráhím Tájir Mílání, Mashhadí Muhammad-Qulí Urdúbádí and some others among the believers. However, as the friends were vigilant, they were unable to inflict any injuries.

[Meeting General Kamaroff]

By then, the situation had become most difficult and perilous. Therefore, that same day at sundown, together with the above-mentioned friends and others of the believers, we went to the office of the distinguished Kamaroff, who was a General in the esteemed Russian government and the governor-general of the provinces of Kharazm and Marv. After our arrival had been announced, while the rest of the friends stayed outside,

this servant and the honored Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Ardabílí were led into the General’s presence. When we entered his office, permission was granted for us to sit. With the utmost gentleness and affection, he inquired after our situation. Our translator was the honored Mírzá Ahmad Bayk, who is a Sunni from Caucasia with pleasing manners. It became evident that it had been reported to the General: “The slain person – and I take refuge unto God! – had insulted the chosen ones of Islam and on hearing this, the two murderers had been unable to restrain their anger, had killed him in a fit of rage, and are now in prison.”

This servant stated: “It is now over eight or nine years that under the protection of the glorious [Russian] government this [Bahá’í] community has been engaged in commerce and labor in ‘Ishqabad. During this period you have not heard any mention of wrongdoing or misconduct committed by any of them. Even in the case of the illustrious martyr, who was killed with the most evident brutality, we had no intention of imposing on the favor of the authorities or of filing a complaint. This was because of our awareness that the provincial officials always endeavor to maintain order and provide contentment for the people. However, now the situation has gone past the point of patience and forbearance, because news has reached us that the Shi‘í sect has arisen to slay a number of Bahá’ís. For a long time the Shi‘ís have insisted on their calumny that these people [i.e. Bahá’ís] do not believe in God, nor in the Prophet [Muhammad] and have enmity towards the Imams of Islam. However, since these accusations have become old in Iran and the officials of the realm no longer heed such utter rubbish, they have therefore decided to raise these slanders here in order to create mischief.”

The General inquired, “Do you believe in the Chosen Ones of Islam? Do you speak contemptuously of them?”

“We do not speak negatively of anyone,” this servant responded, “and are disallowed from uttering the slightest insult or abuse even towards our staunchest enemies, much less the eminent figures of religions or those sent by the Lord of both worlds. And the truth of this statement is in the fact – and I take refuge unto God! – that if we had been derisive towards the chosen ones of Islam before the Muslims,

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surely we would have spoken more readily and with greater courage of such things in front of foreigners who disbelieve in the Immaculate Figures of Islam. Your Excellency can inquire of the prominent Russians or of the Christians in this region who have met and spoken with this servant of the manner in which we refer to the past Prophets.”

The General responded, “Yes, I know that you never speak disrespectfully of anyone. I have your books and I am not unfamiliar with your convictions. However, it is possible that a person in the heat of anger would speak contrary to one’s beliefs or traditions.”

“This did not occur either,” I stated, “since if the late Hájí – and I take refuge unto God! – had spoken an offensive word, then they should have brought a complaint to the authorities who would have dealt with him according to the law, and would have punished him appropriately. In that event no one could have objected. However, since they decided to murder him on their own, it proves that the perpetrators are lying and had no justification for their deed.”

He remarked, “That is indeed true.”

We continued to have a marvelous discussion, but its details are beyond the available space in this missive. With his own hand, he [the General] wrote the name of the felons. Through the translator, Mírzá Ahmad Bayk, he sent clear and strong instructions about the security of the city and the friends to the *Polkovnic*⁷¹, who was responsible for the city’s security and military. Subsequently, we left his office.

[Official Investigation]

When that evening had concluded and the morning sun had risen, the thugs and the ruffians, who on the previous day had been intent on killing the friends, fled the city. Three of them, however, were captured, and these were: Asadu’lláh, Ibráhím and Ghaffár. The latter two men [Ibráhím and Ghaffár] were, however, innocent and were apprehended in error. When people learned of their imprisonment, fear seized the enemies and security was restored throughout the city.

⁷¹ Colonel in the Russian military.

The officials of the Russian government embarked on an investigation to discover the identity of the instigators of the mischief, as it was evident to those endowed with understanding that two worthless thugs could not by themselves have mustered the audacity to perpetrate the murder of the illustrious martyr without the full backing of powerful instigators. Therefore, an astute and competent native of Russia, who is known in the language of this realm as the *Sledovatel*,⁷² was appointed to the task of interrogating the associates of the murderers and others suspected of instigating this incident. Thus he began to prosecute his charge and investigate the matter.

As a preliminary to a better understanding of the [subsequent] events, I should acquaint you with certain details. Prior to the arrival of this ephemeral servant in ‘Ishqabad, there existed little fellowship or friendship between the friends [Bahá’ís] and the Christians.⁷³ However, after the arrival of this servant in the region, the doors of association, of gatherings and of discussions between the Russian and the Christian scholars and myself were opened. At all times of day, the learned ones of this region would come to the dwelling of this servant and discuss religious and scientific topics. These discussions, however, never exceeded such limits as to lead to the severing of ties of affection or the darkening of the horizon of friendship. Therefore, following my arrival in ‘Ishqabad, the teachings and principles of the Faith became widely disseminated among the Christians; they completely recognized the scholarly and intellectual attainments of the friends [Bahá’ís] and their superior and excellent achievements. Strong bonds of sincerity and brotherhood were established between them [i.e. the Christians and the Bahá’ís], and they gained a thorough understanding of the profound difference between the beliefs of the enemies [of the Faith] and those of the friends [Bahá’ís], since distinguished Christian people associated and dealt with both groups. From one side they witnessed naught save knowledge, learning, righteousness, forbearance, affection and friendship, and from the other side [Muslims] they observed nothing but malice, hypocrisy, slander, lies and enmity.

⁷² Russian term for investigators of criminal cases.

⁷³ Armenians, as opposed to the Russians, who were Russian Orthodox.

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As such, when the martyrdom of the illustrious martyr [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá] occurred, it deeply touched the hearts of these people, and proved the wickedness of the enemies and the meekness of the friends in a manner that is well nigh impossible to describe. Therefore, they exerted their utmost in discovering the purpose of the opponents in slaying the illustrious martyr and demonstrating their wicked intent before the glorious [Russian] government's authorities. [Towards this end,] they confided sincerely to the *Sledovatel* and other eminent officials whatever they had seen or heard.

In short, for nearly two months, interrogations and investigations were conducted most days, resulting in the arrest and imprisonment of Mullá Ahmad Tájir Yazdí, Mulla Mihdí Rawdih-Khán Tabrízí, Mashhadí Samad Tabrízí and Mashhadí Jalíl Turk. When these men, who were the masterminds and instigators of the martyrdom, were seized, profound dread and dismay overcame the enemies, and anxiety and apprehension shook them to the core of their existence.

Mihdí Tájir Káshí – the staunchest [of our] enemies bar none – immediately fled. After him, whoever had been involved in the martyrdom or had participated in the conspiracy also took to flight. In all, over sixty or seventy of the enemies retreated in haste from 'Ishqabad. In the holy city of Mashhad, Tihran and Tabriz they took the hem of the garment of the Iranian officials and the 'ulamá of those regions. Those who remained in 'Ishqabad fabricated false tales and disseminated various fictitious rumors. Each day that the sun came up, they would spread a new tale of the imminent arrival of such and such an Amír or General from Tihran to arrest the Bábís and carry them off to Tihran in chains. They hoped that these rumors would overwhelm the friends with fear and lead them to leave 'Ishqabad for other regions. In every town of Adharbayjan and Khurasan, the 'ulamá and the merchants had united in their support of our enemies and the persecution of the friends.

Indeed, during those days, the believers in 'Ishqabad exhibited such a degree of forbearance as to entitle them to every praise and acclaim. This is because in order to frighten the friends, the enemies conspired on such schemes that no other mind could fathom and were

so thoroughly united [in their opposition] that no recourse seemed possible.

However, the friends placed their reliance solely on divine confirmations and the bounties of the Almighty God, exalted be His mention. The administration of justice by the Russian government and the fact that His Majesty the King of Iran was ignoring the various false petitions presented by the foes were sources of comfort and tranquility. During those many days, from Quchan, sacred Mashhad and Tabriz, merchants and other enemies telegraphed Tihiran and spent a considerable fortune promoting their own nefarious designs. However, divine favors and heavenly decrees, which have invariably reduced the oppressor and succored the meek, neutralized the schemes of the enemies and brought to naught their campaigns of mischief. It is self-evident and clear that truth, righteousness, charity and honesty will always conquer and defeat oppression, enmity, lies, and malice.

In truth, the unfortunate people of Iran have acquired the same manners and behavior that the ignorant ‘ulamá and unworthy leaders have shown and instilled in them – indeed this is their great and mighty adversary, and a potent sword severing the cords of their self-worth and integrity. Forever they will be shamed and disgraced before the civilized world and will be considered brutish savages in the eyes of enlightened people.

[Preparation for the Trial]

In short, nearly two months after these arrests, when the investigations on both sides had been completed and the details of the events had been satisfactorily determined, the renowned General – may his glory and resplendence be safeguarded – reported the details to [St.] Petersburg, to the presence of His Majesty the exalted Emperor [Czar]. About the middle of the last Rabí‘u’l-Avval⁷⁴, His Majesty the Emperor issued a royal command instructing the formation of the *Voennyi Sud* court, which in the Russian language refers to a military court. *Voennyi Sud*,

⁷⁴ Circa 9 November 1889.

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which is also known as *Polavoy Sud*⁷⁵, is the highest level of the [military] judicial system in the Russian government. No one in the country, not even the person of the monarch, can reject its ruling, reverse its decision, or dismiss its proceedings. Moreover, this is the only *Sud* [court] with the authority to issue a death sentence.

This is but one of the bounties of the His Majesty the Emperor [Czar] and the illustrious General – may both be exalted with the effulgence of glory and happiness – towards this community [Bahá'ís], for if the case had been submitted to other courts, the deliberations would have been prolonged and the impact on the enemies lessened and it would have been the cause of much concern to the friends.

After the case was sent to the *Voennyi Sud*, a government official by the title of *Persetatil*, who was among the most eminent military commanders and a man of profound knowledge, nobility and compassion, arrived in 'Ishqabad. The news of his arrival quickly spread throughout the city and every one [of our foes] began to wonder about his own fate and what he could do to exonerate himself, with fear and trepidation penetrating all hearts.

On Saturday, 22 Rabí'u'l-Avval [16 November 1889], which corresponded to 4 Nayabr by Russian reckoning, about one hundred and fifty subpoenas were issued [by the court] in the name of the Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís. The documents addressed to these individuals stated, “On 24 Rabí'u'l-Avval, corresponding to 6th of the Russian month [of Nayabr], you must present yourself at a building known as *Qulub*⁷⁶ at 9 in the morning, which is one hour after sunrise, for the trial of 'Alí-Akbar and eight others on the charge of the assassination of the late Hájí Muhammad-Ridá.”

A great commotion overtook the city when the subpoenas – known as *yavasqib*⁷⁷ in Russian – were received, and they became the sole topic of conversation. In addition to sending emissaries to various parts of Iran and appealing to the royal court, the enemies sought the help of

⁷⁵ Military court-marshals conducted in the field under the auspices of the *Voennyi Sud* court.

⁷⁶ The correct spelling may likely be Kilub.

⁷⁷ Plural for court summons, literally meaning to show up.

prominent men of ‘Ishqabad, and the city’s wise men, day and night, searched for remedies.

On the morning of the 24th, rank upon rank of the friends and their foes, filled with hope and fear, some arriving in phaeton, proceeded towards the *Qulup* courthouse. Relying on divine confirmation and filled with assurance, the friends, with expectant faces, also directed their steps [towards the courtroom]. When we arrived, the proceedings commenced, as will be briefly outlined below, even though no description can enable one to visualize and imagine the true state of what transpired.

Description of the *Sud* Trial

The *Qulup* is one of the government buildings in ‘Ishqabad. In appearance it is dissimilar from the governmental offices in Isfahan and Iran. It has a large hall approximately in the middle of the building, which served as the trial-room and which was about the same size as the reception hall of the Chil-Sutún⁷⁸ building in Isfahan. This hall can accommodate about five hundred people and has a dais, which is raised about a meter above the floor. In addition, there are three more rooms, to the right, to the left and to the back of this platform respectively.

When we entered the hall, we saw that his honor the *Persetatil* of the *Sud* was sitting at the center of the dais upon the seat [of justice] with great ceremony and pomp. Sat next to him were four governmental officials [judges], on his right and left. Before them was a table, at one end of which a framed mirror was installed. The mirror had inscriptions by three renowned Russian Emperors enjoining administration of justice [in judicial proceedings], and on the frame there was a golden eagle, which is the emblem of the Russian State.

On the right of the platform was the *perokyror* [prosecutor], a government official who spoke on behalf of the deceased, and he was joined by a clerk known as the *sekretar*⁷⁹ [secretary]. On the left of the platform was the *zashinik* [defense attorney], who spoke on behalf of the

⁷⁸ A famous building in Isfahan used previously for official purposes.

⁷⁹ The spelling in the text is Seklohdar.

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defendants, together with a *sekretar*. In total, nine members of the *Sud* [court] and judiciary served in the court.⁸⁰

Inside the courtroom, city officials, military officers and prominent merchants of Russian, Muslim and Christian [Armenian] backgrounds were seated, observing the proceedings.

In accordance with the instructions of the distinguished General, Russian-Turkish and Russian-Persian translators, who were of the Sunni religion, were present and sitting to the left. In front of all, the nine [accused] criminals were sitting, and from behind, soldiers known in their native [Russian] tongue as *saldat*, surrounded them. A Shi'a qádí [religious judge] was also present. Everyone observed complete silence.

[The Trial]

Upon arrival at the *Qulup* building, those who were involved in the trial, from plaintiff to defendants, their witnesses, the friends and the non-Bahá'ís, were asked to enter the room on the right side of the courtroom, and guards were positioned so that no one would enter or exit without permission, and so no one would speak with another.

First the Shi'i qádí, following the instructions of the *Sud* [Judge of the court], swore in the witnesses called in by the defendants in the name of God and by the Sacred Qur'án, in accordance with Islamic law, so they would not offer false testimony, and would show no bias due to friendship or kinship, or speak anything save the truth. In the same fashion, the Shi'i qádí was himself sworn in by the illustrious *Sud* [Justice of the court], so he too would not speak other than the truth nor would give any testimony out of spite. Nevertheless, the testimony of the majority of them, including the person of the Shi'i qádí, was so remote from equity and truth that everyone present endowed with a sense of

⁸⁰ Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl is referring to the panel of the judges, which consisted of a Chief Justice and four associate justices, and two teams of prosecutors and defense, each consisting of an attorney and a clerk.

justice, including the Justice of the court⁸¹ and the government officials [judges], readily realized their hollowness.

The Armenians [Christians], who served as witnesses for the friends, were sworn in by their priest, who was also present. After that, the friends were summoned collectively and each was asked to state his religion and testify that he was a follower of Bahá. The Justice of the court inquired from the honored Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Ardabílí, “Who will serve as the Bahá’í mujtahid and the leading learned person?” He asked this for the purpose of the swearing-in of the Bahá’ís.

The Mírzá responded, “We have no clergy, but have men of learning and knowledge.” The Justice asked of them and Mírzá introduced this servant.

The Justice then inquired of me, “In what manner do you take an oath in your community?”

I responded, “We have no such practice and no such law has been enjoined upon us. However, we abide by whatever the government requires of us and with genuine happiness and contentment will follow the commands of the authorities, and indeed consider them binding upon us.”

He stated, “I now wish to establish a covenant with you and hold you to it as a solemn and firm oath. Firstly, since I have heard that you associate with all people and nations with the utmost sincerity, kindness and brotherhood, and do not consider differences in religion a reason for enmity and intolerance nor cause for departure from equity and humanity, therefore, I ask that in your testimony you treat these defendants the same way and do not utter untrue words about them. Secondly, since taking an oath is not a common practice in your religion, you must make sure that your witnesses speak no lie, because otherwise I will sentence you to Siberia.”

⁸¹ The author consistently refers to the *hadrat Sud* [*hadrat* is an Arabic/Persian term meaning “honored”], which appears to be a reference to the court’s chief Judge. This has been rendered as *Justice of the court* to distinguish him from the other four associate Judges.

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I responded, “God willing – and blessed and exalted be Him – we will commit no such wrong, and will completely abide by your instructions.”

He then inquired, “Are your people and the Shi‘i community permitted to inter-marry, and do such marriages occur?”

I submitted, “Since complete separation has not occurred as yet, inter-religious marriage may happen. In fact, there are cases where someone is a Baha’i while his father is a Shi‘i, or vice versa. Or many times it has been seen that out of two brothers, one is a Shi‘i and the other a Bahá’í. The same can be seen among cousins and other kinsmen. Therefore, we are commanded to associate, marry, and observe other social interactions.”

Thereupon, the Justice of the court called on the Shi‘i cleric and asked, “Do your people marry Christian girls? That is, in accordance with religious laws?”

He responded positively. “Do they marry Jews?” Again, the response was affirmative. “How about marrying fire-worshippers?” Once more, he responded positively.

The Justice of the court realized that the Shi‘i was being frugal with the truth.

After these discussions, they began to question the witnesses of both sides, starting first with the Baha’i side.

That day, which was 24 Rabí‘u’l-Avval [18 November 1889], corresponding to the Russian 6 Nayabr, the process of questioning and trial continued from the morning till five hours into the night. Almost every three hours, a five-minute recess was granted so people could exit the building to rest, smoke, or refresh themselves before returning to the proceedings. During the trial no one was permitted to speak or smoke in the courtroom, and even the Justice of the court and the Judges followed these rules. From two-and-a-half hours before sundown until sunset, people were allowed to return to their homes, but had to come back at dusk, at which time the court reconvened.

The second day of the trial, which was Tuesday, 25 Rabí‘u’l-Avval [19 November 1889], corresponding to the Russian 7 Nayabr, continued in the same manner as the day before. From the morning until the

middle of the night, the court proceedings were under way. This day was devoted to taking testimony from the defense witnesses.

Once testimony was completed during these initial two days, on Wednesday, 26 [Rabí'u'l-Avval], corresponding to the Russian 8 Nayabr, the court was adjourned due to a Russian national holiday.

[The Verdict]

On the morning of Thursday, 27 Rabí'u'l-Avval, once more everyone proceeded towards the *Qulup*. Hearts were trembling and spirits were filled with trepidation, not knowing what fate awaited behind the shroud of destiny, and in whose favor would the all-encompassing Divine Will incline. That day marked the final day of proceedings, and the verdict was to be pronounced on that occasion. Truly it was a stressful day, and everyone's behavior testified to his or her inner agitation. The size of the audience was greater than on the two previous occasions. In fact, the courtroom was exceedingly crowded, and the Justice of the court instructed that no one else should be allowed to enter.

When the court came to order, the Justice of the court took his seat. At first the *perokyoror* rose, and with eloquent words and brilliant deduction – which thoroughly astonished the Russians, the Turks and the Iranians – spoke for over an hour, proving the guilt of the defendants. When he had concluded, the *zashtinik* rose, and speaking for nearly an hour and a half endeavored to dismiss the testimony of all the Bahá'ís one by one. When his presentation came to an end, once more the *perokyoror* rose and demonstrated the errors of the defense's objections. In such wise these two great men debated before the Judges until one hour past noon.

When these discussions were concluded, the Justice turned to the defendants and said, “O prisoners! The *perokyoror* has proven the guilt of seven of you, and your responsibility in this crime is clear and well-established. However, the guilt of one of you, namely, Asadu'lláh, is less than the others. For the other six, he has requested the death penalty, recommending you to be hanged to death [for your actions]. If you can

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show cause why this punishment should be reduced, speak now, perchance it would lessen your penalty.”

After the Justice spoke these words, the defendants requested permission to change their translator to Yahyá Bayk Qarábághí, who knew Persian, Russian and Turkish. The Justice consented. Yahyá Bayk, who was present, came forth to assume his duty. Thereupon, the defendants rose one by one and spoke in their own defense words that most evidently were untrue.

When these appeals were completed, the Justice and the eminent Judges who had sat on his side of the platform rose and retired to the room behind the raised dais for the purpose of preparing documents about the court's decision. During this time, no one was permitted to enter their room. For two hours, the Judges continued their private deliberations, while everyone patiently awaited the outcome and wondered what the Hand of the Almighty had in store for them: who would be victorious and vindicated and who would be defeated and humiliated. In truth, a most strange and astonishing mood governed the people that day, as everyone knew that the court's decision was, like a divine decree, irreversible, and its implementation compulsory.

It was nearly sundown when the Justice of the court returned and with utmost dignity and poise stood at his designated spot, with everyone, whether learned, merchant, plaintiff or prosecutor, also standing in silence. The Justice of the court then read aloud the decisions that he had written in private, as the interpreter translated point by point. The summary of the decision was:

Regarding the case against the nine men who presently stand accused of the murder of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání, after thorough examination and investigation it has been determined by the court that: Firstly, two of them, namely, Ibráhím and Ghaffár, are blameless and are hereby released. ‘Alí-Akbar, known as ‘Alí-Bábá Tabrízí, and Husayn Tabrízí are to be hanged to death for their part in the murder of the late Hájí. Mullá Mihdí Rawdih-Khán Tabrízí, who from the pulpit commanded [the Shi‘is] to curse and insult [the

Bahá'ís], thereby inciting the people into tumult, is to be exiled and imprisoned for life in the farthest regions of Siberia. Mullá Ahmad Tájir Yazdí, Mashhadí Samad Tájir Tabrízí and Mashhadí Jalíl Tabrízí, who instigated the ruffians, are sentenced to fifteen years of *qatur vajni rabut*⁸² in Siberia. Asadu'lláh is sentenced to sixteen months of imprisonment, and afterwards he is to be deported from Russia.

We hereby grant the distinguished General Kamaroff, the Governor-General of 'Ishqabad and Turkmenistan, the authority to reduce these sentences.

Once the court's decision was read and translated and the court proceedings were concluded, the spectators were dismissed, some joyous and some sad. Praise belongs to God, the Lord of both worlds.

The meaning of *qatur vajni rabut* is: In cases where a person is found deserving of the death penalty, the esteemed Christian nation [of Russia] has, out of compassion and the preference for avoiding capital punishment, decided that the convict can instead be imprisoned [in Siberia]. Because of the bitter cold [in that region], it is not possible to farm or raise dairy animals in Siberia, but prisoners work in hard labor camps in mines or other locations. However, due to its considerable hardships and difficulties, the majority die under the most miserable conditions, and perhaps only one in a thousand survive to complete his sentence. Even then he is not permitted to return to his native town, and must spend the rest of his days in the Siberian region, where he can work and earn a living. Because of these conditions, the majority of those found guilty prefer death to imprisonment in Siberia.

Effect of the Verdict

On the day that the verdict was announced, the hand of destiny inscribed an astonishing event on the pages of history; the Author of the divine decree manifested an amazing wonder from behind the shrouds

⁸² *Vajni rabut* means important jobs.

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and delivered yet another bitter humiliation to the enemies. The details are as follows: While the Judges were engaged in private deliberation and none were yet aware what the final decision would be and which side would be rendered victorious by all-conquering Providence, one of the men present in the court, without thinking or observing the protocols of the court, had rushed outside and had announced to an spectator outside the *Qulup* building, “Mullá Ahmad and the other defendants have been freed!” The recipients of this news also, without pausing to consider or determine the veracity or falsehood of this remark, had in great haste, which according to the well-known hadith, “Haste is the work of Satan!”, and which is a characteristic of the people of hatred and oppression, boarded a phaeton, and with great speed had reached the bazaar, crying, “Glad tidings! Mullá Ahmad and others have been liberated and are now free!”

On hearing this false news, a tremendous commotion had ensued, much like the great uproar and tumult that occurred on the day of the martyrdom of the illustrious martyr. People began to insult and mock the Baha’i storekeepers, who were engaged in their work. They [Muslims] brought three sheep to be sacrificed in front of the shops of Mashhadí Samad, Mullá Ahmad and Mashhadí Jalíl, and butchers stood knife in hand awaiting the arrival of the defendants to slaughter sheep as a sacrifice. Meanwhile, they shouted every manner of insult at the friends and constantly cursed them in the most cruel and abusive way. Rank upon rank of people had gathered in the streets and squares, waiting to welcome the prisoners.

It was then that all of a sudden, He Who decrees destiny and rules with manifest might turned the page and with the conclusion of the court’s proceedings, the correct verdict became known to the people. Suddenly, all that joy turned into bitter sorrow, and their jubilation was transformed into humiliation and shame. Sheep that had been brought for sacrifice were quickly removed from the scene and everyone went into hiding much like thieves fleeing the law.

During these events, unaware of all that was transpiring outside, this servant was in the courtroom awaiting the Judges’ decision. When I came out, I saw an emotional state in the believers, which remains

beyond any written description. During that one hour after the receipt of the false news, in which they encountered the insults, abuse and mistreatment of the enemies, the unreservedly helpless friends had withstood such a calamity that they were hardly able to utter a word. In fact, for one or two hours, they [Bahá'ís] did not believe what this servant, or others who had been in the courthouse, reported to them, until they heard it directly from the enemies and saw with their own eyes how quickly they dispersed and sought a place to hide. "And thus decreed their Lord, the Powerful, the Sovereign, the Mighty, the Ancient."

If one were to closely compare the ways that the Russian and the Iranian governments administer justice and conduct trials, he would be totally astonished by the difference. If such a murder had occurred in Iran, where eminent merchants had arisen in support of either the murderer or the victim, it is quite obvious what great sums would have had to be spent on both sides and what large bribes would have been received. Moreover, because of the persistent intercessions and interference, it would have not been possible for the judge to arrive at a just decision nor to maintain his impartiality. However, in the case of the murder of the illustrious martyr [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá], the governmental authorities in Russia did not accept a single coin from anyone. In fact, due to their devotion to equity and justice, no one dared to even mention the word "bribe" or to mediate on behalf of the defendants.

On the other hand, the Shi'í community spent a considerable fortune and sustained great losses in filling the pockets of the 'ulamá and the influential men of Iran in the hope that, through their assistance, the attention of the Russian government would be diverted from giving them punishment for their savage and despicable deeds. However, the all-conquering will of the Almighty God did not allow the bloodthirsty oppressors, who had openly perpetrated such a heinous act, to find respite under the blanket of safety and comfort. The integrity of the officials of the Russian government – may God perpetually brighten their days – prevented these ruffians from transforming the security and justice of this region into the violence and oppression of another Iran.

[Bahá'í Mitigation]

Since at the conclusion of the court's proceedings it was decreed in writing and was announced in the courtroom that the distinguished General Kamaroff – may God unceasingly enrich his days with glory and good fortune – could reduce the punishment of the criminals, therefore, Mullá Ahmad and other prisoners sent messages to their kinsmen, begging and pleading, “Since the General has not yet signed the court order, go to the Bábís and ask them to intercede with the General, perchance he would reduce our sentence and the door of liberty may open before us.”

Consequently, as emissaries, they sent Hájí Ridá, who was a brother of Mullá Ahmad, and a number of other merchants, including Ridá Bayk Akbar, a learned and distinguished man who for many years had served the Russian government and had attained an exalted position, and Yahyá Bayk Qarábághí, who was renowned in learning, sincerity, problem-solving and prevention of misconduct, and Áqá Muhammad-Ridá Arbáb Isfahání. These men came to this servant and to Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím [Ardakání], and asked that we attain the presence of the illustrious General and intercede on behalf of the prisoners.

The following day, this servant, Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím, Áqá Ghulám-Husayn Isfahání and Áqá Mashhadí Yúsuf Mílání, went to the General's house. In the courtyard outside the Governor's residence, we met Hájí Ridá and some other Shi'is who had gone to plead mitigation of the sentence of the prisoners but who had not been admitted into the [Governor's] presence. After speaking with us, they thought it best to join our group in order to gain an audience with the honored General [Kamaroff].

Once our arrival was announced, permission was granted for us to go in, and Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím spoke about the purpose of our visit. Simultaneously, Javád Bayk translated his words into Russian. In response, the General spoke, the essence of which is:

The Shi‘i community has become a source of infamy for the Russian nation throughout the world, as it has been His Majesty the Emperor’s view that all religions are considered the same.

You should be praised because, despite all the injuries perpetrated against you by the defendants, you have arisen to intercede on their behalf. Is it not true that if a Bábí had murdered a Shi‘i in ‘Ishqabad, in turn the Shi‘is would have killed every member of your community in Iran? I am well pleased with you. However, I cannot promise that I will reduce their punishment. But should I decide to reduce their sentence, I will keep in mind to advise you beforehand.

After that, once more Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím [Ardakání] rose to plead intercession for the prisoners. For the second time, the General spoke words close to his initial comments.

Hájí Ridá and other Shi‘is were present in this meeting and heard what transpired. We departed [from the Governor’s house].

On the following day, it was rumored throughout the city that the Siberian sentence of the prisoners had been reduced and also it was noised that the two condemned men would be hanged on 4 Rabí‘u’th-Thani [28 November 1889].

[Day of Punishment]

In accordance with the Governor’s instructions, two gallows were raised near the royal prison and a hole, two or three meters deep, was dug under them, where the bodies could fall. The murderers themselves were forced to construct these gallows and the hole.

These events made people extremely nervous and gave to the unruly ruffians an ever-present admonishment about [the observance of the legal codes and] the importance of civilized ways.

When the sun of the morning of 4 Rabí‘u’th-Thání [28 November 1889] rose, everyone knew that it marked the day on which the two condemned were to be hanged. An astonishing commotion and a great

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tumult could be seen everywhere. Due to their ignorance and prejudice, people [Muslims] were most agitated, but because of the power of the authorities, they were unable to utter any objections. Signs of mischief were evident on everyone's face, betraying their inner anger and rage.

First, in accordance with the command of the [Russian] authorities, Turkmen cavalry surrounded the execution field. Chief military officers and prominent citizens were present by the [Governor's] instructions. A large multitude had also gathered to observe the event. Since the compassionate Christian people disdain killing, and to the extent possible even their military men avoid such an act, a Turkmen was hired to place the ropes on the neck of the prisoners, sending them to where they belonged. The Shi'í qádí [cleric] was present so that the prisoners could repent and utter the Islamic confession of faith.⁸³ When everything was ready, the two murderers were brought to the gallows.

In a state of mind that cannot be described, the [Shi'í] qádí received their repentance, and they uttered words of confession. Thereupon, the aforementioned Turkmen [who served as the executioner] had placed the ropes around their necks, when suddenly, contrary to everyone's expectation, the all-encompassing Hand of the Almighty ordained otherwise. In short, at that point, the *perokyror* who was present read aloud an official decree, which was immediately translated. Its essence was this:

Since the representatives of the Bábí community have interceded on behalf of the convicts before the distinguished General – may his days be perpetually filled with happiness and sovereignty – to mitigate the punishment of the offenders, consequently the esteemed General, as a means of expressing his good-pleasure, gratitude and admiration for these [Bahá'í] representatives, has commuted the death sentence of these two murderers, and forgiven their blood shedding. He has decided that these two are to be removed to Siberia for fifteen years of *qatur vajni rabut* sentence, and

⁸³ It is an Islamic tradition that prior to death one should utter a specific formula, testifying to the oneness of God and to the Prophethood of Muhammad.

because of this mercy, may they eternally be thankful to the government.

When this decree was read to the population, every tongue spoke in praise and gratitude of divine bestowal, and with the utmost cheer and joy people returned home, while the prisoners were removed to their cell.

In truth, this incident greatly enhanced the position of the friends and increased their standing and prestige. From what some in the audience have described, this intercession so profoundly touched the eminent Russians and Christians [present on the field of execution] that some were moved to tears, saying, “Consider the devotion of the Bábí community to the qualities of forgiveness, leniency, compassion, kindness and forbearance that they even interceded in behalf of those who slay them, and in such wise show mercy towards the ruffians who have spent days and nights plotting their murder!”

[Aftermath]

From the beginning of the incident of the martyrdom until now, divine benediction and heavenly bounties have ceaselessly encompassed the friends and the exalted and blessed Almighty has confirmed our every step. Before the authorities of the Russian government, our truthfulness, wisdom, honesty, integrity, charity towards all nations, and our uprightness of conduct under all conditions have been demonstrated and established.

The incident of the intercession was solely through the Divine will, for it was the Almighty’s doing that the decree pardoning the prisoners [from execution] was read in public at a time when a large multitude of Russians, Christians and Muslims, including the Shi’í qádí [cleric], was present. This was a mighty bounty and a great blessing, which on one hand provided the friends with an added measure of stature, and on the other robbed the ignorant [Shi’is] of the opportunity to claim, “The freeing of these two murderers was a miracle of the Imam!” or devise equally nonsensical reasons. However, if one wished to truly appreciate

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the depth of the ignorance of these people [the Shi'is], one should note that even now they fabricate such ridiculous and absurd claims and have further ruined their own reputation, nay, the reputation of all Iranians, before the world community, and have proven their own folly and stupidity.

During these days, joy and delight has surrounded the friends from all directions, and the showers of divine bounty have continued to fall on the believers with ever-greater profusion. On the other hand, we are immensely elated, as the court proceedings have been concluded, and the truth of our claim has been well-established before the officials of the Russian government. We have unbounded joy and eternal gratitude because Sacred Tablets and Divine Verses have been received confirming the Almighty's pleasure with our deeds and actions. In many Tablets, Baha'u'llah has bestowed endless blessings upon the illustrious martyr and has designated for him stations that are beyond the comprehension of any of the inhabitants of the world and are exalted above the conceptions of those occupying the highest heavenly pavilions. Moreover, He has revealed His good-pleasure with the actions of the believers in the course of these events. In particular, in one of the Sanctified Tablets, in response to a sum that one of the friends had contributed, permission was granted for that money to be used for the beautification of the resting place of those sacred and hallowed remains, which are located on a choice spot outside the town of 'Ishqabad. However, because of the bitter cold and snow, these improvements cannot yet be carried out and must be delayed. God willing, when the weather is more agreeable and the spring has arrived, and days and nights are equal, they will be undertaken and completed.

A few days after the execution sentence of the two ruffians was pardoned, a picture of six of them in the special uniform of Siberian prisoners was taken, by the authorities' command, as they were being sent to Siberia by way of Badkubih. The day that they were removed for Badkubih was yet another occasion for the enemies' commotion and remorse. From that day until now, which has been over a month, the merchants and the Shi'i leaders in Badkubih, sacred Mashhad, Tehran and Tabriz are engaged in intrigue, hoping to rescue the prisoners from

banishment and to save them from their fate. We will see how the divine decree unfolds and what is hidden behind the veil of destiny.

This is a summary of the events in the region pertaining to the martyrdom of the illustrious martyr, which has been outlined most succinctly out of my love for your good self [Mírzá Asadu'lláh Khán Vazír Isfahání] and other friends of Isfahan.

This servant supplicates that the friends not forget him in their prayers at their gatherings. On behalf of this ephemeral servant, convey my heartfelt greetings to your esteemed father, distinguished brother, the honored Áqá Mírzá Mihdí – may God prolong his days of delight – and the other friends in Isfahan.

May your brow always shine with resplendent rays of glory, grandeur and holiness.

Written by Abú'l-Fadl Gulpáygání on 29 Jamádu'l-Avval 1307 [21 January 1890].

Document 10

The Martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá

By Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar Banná Yazdí
Tárikh Ishqabad, pp. 65-83

[The following section is a continuation of the excerpt from Tárikh Ishqabad that was introduced earlier as Document 3. Most of this portion is also cited in Fádil Mazandarání, Tárikh Zubúru’l-Haqq, vol. 5, pp. 377-95. Translator.]

[The Martyrdom]

On 12 Muharram 1307 AH [8 September 1889] this lowly one and the honored Mírzá Abú’l-Fadl were in the public bath of the illustrious Afnáns. It was two hours before noon when the honored Áqá Khayru’lláh came in and informed us that the ruffians had martyred the honored Hájí Muhammad-Ridá in the middle of the bazaar. Quickly we dressed and left the bath. When we came out, we saw that people like crazy men were running in every direction in the streets and in the bazaar, and each was crying a different thing. One was shouting, “They killed the Imam Ridá of the Bábís!” The other was claiming, “He will be resurrected in three days!” Yet others were uttering insults and imprecations, while some were congratulating each other. Some were saying, “We must finish off the others [Bahá’ís] as well!” The condition of these ungodly people during such turbulences must be well evident – particularly, the people of the bazaar who for the most part were thoroughly corrupt.

The details of the martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá are as presented below.

The honored Hájí had gone to the bazaar [to purchase] several bottles of quinine⁸⁴ for shipment to Bukhara. He acquired them in the bazaar and was returning home. He had reached the shops of which he was the rent-collector when two Turkish ruffians, like bloodthirsty wolves, suddenly rushed out from the nearby coffee-shop known as Khán-Isfahání, which was always frequented by thugs and hoodlums. With large daggers, they attacked that meek, self-sacrificing soul. From right, left, front and back, they stabbed him repeatedly and fatally. The people of the bazaar had gathered to watch and were most jubilant, praising and complementing those two brave champions, because it was the height of valor and courage for two young thirty-year-old men to attack and overcome an unarmed seventy-year old man with no means of self-protection!

The honored Hájí became unconscious and fell to ground, yielding life to the One Who bestowed it and uttering “*Now is the truth manifest (to all).*”⁸⁵

With this martyrdom, he actualized the statement of the Blessed Beauty, Who had revealed in a Tablet “*Verily, the serpent opened his mouth and, alas, stung the dayspring of the Lord’s favor*”⁸⁶, since its meaning was now clear and manifest. And the realization of the blessed Words “*I beseech God to strengthen thy temple and assure thy heart*”⁸⁷, in his enduring of those fatal wounds, was now established and evident. This is because they stabbed him deeply thirty-two times, when one would have been sufficient to slay a man. For instance, they cut wide open his sides in such a way that his liver and spleen were exposed, and they cut his chest and repeatedly slashed open his abdomen.

In short, it was clear that the allusion “*strengthen thy temple and assure thy heart*”⁸⁸ was an intimation of this event, and similarly the meaning of the phrase “*spread thy grace and illumine thy face*”⁸⁹ became evident to men

⁸⁴ Ethyl carbonate of quinine.

⁸⁵ Qur’an 12:51.

⁸⁶ See Document 3.

⁸⁷ See Document 3.

⁸⁸ See Document 3.

⁸⁹ See Document 3. In the cited Tablet, the phrase is, “*illumine thy face and spread thy grace.*”

endowed with discernment, because in a short time this news was spread to all regions and this martyrdom was the cause of profound benefits.

At all events, immediately upon this occurrence, several policemen arrived and stood over the corpse, preventing people from further insolence. The two murderers also stood there with bloody daggers, licking and savoring the blood from the blades. They began to leave, but slowly and leisurely. ‘Alí Bayk Qadimoff, who was the chief of police in those days, took after them, [seized them,] called a phaeton [carriage] and placed both men into it, promising them freedom and liberty as he himself boarded. They proceeded to the police station, and from there the two were sent to the jailhouse.

[Removal and Burial of the Remains]

Meanwhile, more police officers were sent to the bazaar in order to prevent the ignorant from committing mischief. However, a multitude had surrounded the corpse, clamoring, applauding and shouting unseemly expressions. No matter how the police tried to remove the body from that spot, the throng of people and the ignoble deeds of the ignorant and wicked masses barred them.

The honored Mashhadí ‘Alí-Haydar Shírvání came forth and by threatening, intimidating and admonishing the people for their misdeeds, succeeded in moving the body from that place and bringing it to Caravansary Hasht, which was the residence of the illustrious martyr. The gate of the caravansary was firmly shut, but from other directions the people got onto the rooftop and continued to utter insults and imprecations.

That sanctified corpse was shrouded and placed in a coffin. However, they wondered when they could move the casket [for burial] and indeed where could they bury it for it to be safe from the foes’ harm. They resolved to move the remains at midnight and bury them at a location far from the city.

That midnight, they carried out the coffin by carriage. In their party was the honored Karbalá’í Hájí Muhammad Sabzivári, two others and four *soldat* [soldiers]. They came out of the city and, north of a mill,

on the way to Iran and near Chishmih [“pond”] ‘Azízu’lláh, dug a grave, buried the body and removed all traces of interment. For a while, no one save Karbalá’í Hájí Muhammad [Sabzivári] knew of its location.

[Plot for the Massacre of Bahá’ís]

The day after the martyrdom, the friends gathered at a certain place and consulted about the assassination of the honored Hájí, wondering what would be the right course of action. Eventually, they decided unanimously not to make a complaint to the Governor, as he was aware of what had transpired and he would take action as prescribed by law.

However, the band of mischief-makers and the people of hate also gathered and consulted, “Now that we have carried out this deed, we must complete our purpose.” Some stated, “We must go out en masse⁹⁰ and slay all those known to follow this Cause [Bahá’í].” Others specified fourteen individuals [for killing]. Eventually, they selected three of the friends that must certainly be murdered. This mission was entrusted to three men who were inclined to the task.⁹¹ These men decided to carry out their charge in the afternoon of the following day in the bazaar.

The following day, they arrived at the bazaar in the afternoon. The three believers selected for slaying were the honored Áqá Mashhadí Yúsuf Mílání, the honored Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Ardabílí and this lowly one, ‘Alí-Akbar Banná Yazdí. Most of the Bahá’ís were in the bazaar at that time. When the three men saw the multitude of believers and witnessed them to be united and unified, they were overcome with fear, and discarded their plans.

[Appeal to Authorities]

When the believers learned of their [foes’] plans, once again they gathered at a certain place and consulted. They resolved to prepare a petition, describing the murder of the illustrious martyr, the events of the subsequent day and to disclose the identity of the authors of this

⁹⁰ Intent of the original text appears to be a mass revolt.

⁹¹ The original text can be read that the three would-be assassins had volunteered.

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mischievous, and to collectively present this to General Kamaroff. They quickly wrote an extensive supplication and together went to the residence of the honored General Kamaroff.

Those who were present that day, consulted and signed the petition were as follows: Mashhadí Ibráhím; Áqá Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl [Gulpáygání]; Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím [Ardabílí]; Áqá Mashhadí Yúsuf; Mashhadí Ibráhím⁹²; this lowly one, 'Alí-Akbar; Áqá Hasan-'Alí; [Áqá 'Alí-Akbar] Arbáb; Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim; Mashhadí 'Alí-Rashtí; Mírzá Mihdí Rashtí; Mashhadí Muhammad-'Alí; Mashhadí Husayn Tabrízí; 'Alí-Akbar, son-in-law of Mashhadí Yusúf; Ustád Muhammad-Ridá; Áqá Muhammad-Ja'far Uskú'í; Mullá Yusúf-'Alí Rashtí; Áqá 'Alí-Asghar Rashtí; Áqá Mírzá Haydar-'Alí Uskú'í; and Áqá Mashhadí 'Alí-Asghar Hamzioff Mílání.⁹³

It was two hours after the sundown when the General's doorman informed him [of our arrival]. He came immediately. The petition signed by fifteen⁹⁴ of the friends was presented to him in our community's name. Upon reading its contents, he expressed his sympathies and kindness, and sought to reassure us. The Governor of the realm immediately summoned the honored Naftanoff and instructed him to position guards at the homes of the friends and to increase the number of guardsmen in the streets and in the bazaar. He told us, "Be not perturbed. All will be well." Thereupon he dismissed us and we returned home. The General⁹⁵ also instructed the police to be vigilant for several days and said to us, "Each of you should carry a concealed weapon."⁹⁶

⁹² Appears to be the same name mentioned earlier.

⁹³ In the original text, p. 67, this paragraph is set apart from the main narrative and appears to be a later addition by the author (since it is in the same hand). The names have been difficult to read by the present translator and when a better copy of *Tárikh Ishqabad* is found the list presented in this translation may need to be revised. This paragraph is offered as a footnote in Mazandarání, *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 5, p. 381, apart from the main text.

⁹⁴ As noted in the previous paragraph, the author gives the name of 20 believers.

⁹⁵ The original text is hard to read and may be a reference to someone else.

⁹⁶ This sentence is missing in Mazandarání, *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 5, p. 381.

[As instructed,] for a few days we carried weapons until we became confident [of security], as the fury of the ruffians had subsided in light of the splendor and might of the just Governor.

[The Investigations]

The distinguished General sent our petition to the *Prokuror* [prosecutor], who in turn sent it to the investigator, who commenced inquiry and examination. All those named in the petition, whether witnesses or accused, were gradually summoned, questioned, and the interrogations documented. For each person, a separate file was prepared.

For about two months this process of individual interrogation of both sides continued. And while the investigation was unfolding, gradually the mischief-makers were seized and imprisoned until all were in custody. The investigator sent all the files to the *Prokurur*, who determined what each person was to be charged with, and submitted his conclusions to General Kamaroff. In turn, the General brought the details to the attention of [St.] Petersburg with a request that a high-ranking *Sudja* [judge] be named to conclude the confrontation and rule on the matter.

A *Voennyi Sud* [military court] was appointed from Teflis to investigate and decide on this case. The manner in which this *Sud* operated was that it convened for no more than twenty-four hours devoted to discussions. This time was spread over three days and nights, each of eight hours duration. [After its deliberations,] none was permitted to reject its decision or appeal elsewhere. “*The matter would be settled at once, and no respite would be granted them.*”⁹⁷

After a short while, the *Sud* and some other officials arrived in ‘Ishqabad. Their arrival filled the hearts of the companions of mischief and the people of enmity with fear and trepidation. Anxiety and perplexity also surrounded the friends, wondering what the outcome would be.

Several days later a police officer gave this lowly one a *povestka* [subpoena] and mentioned, “The police has given eighty such *povestka* to

⁹⁷ Qur’an 6:8. The cited text is at some variance with the published Qur’an.

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me to serve for this case to various Bábís, Muslims, Armenians [Christians], Jews and Russians, whether a witness or otherwise, instructing all to assemble tomorrow [morning] at nine o'clock in *Voennyi Qulup*, in the presence of the *Predsedatel Suda* [Chief Justice]. Placing our reliance in God, the following day we proceeded to the presence of the *Sud*. However, our hearts trembled with anxiety, worrying that fear should overcome us or perchance words be spoken contrary to the dictates of wisdom. Otherwise, the friends were confident that the Army of God had ever been and will ever be triumphant.

At the moment of leaving the house [in the morning] for the place of the *Sudja*, this ephemeral servant opened the Qur'an, seeking divination of the outcome. When I opened the Book of God the following sacred verse adorned the top of the page:

*Most assuredly, We will give victory to Our messengers and to those who believe, both in this world and on the day the witnesses are summoned. On that day, the apologies of the disbelievers will not benefit them. They have incurred condemnation; they have incurred the worst destiny.*⁹⁸

I knew then that the divine victory was with us. And whoever was present at that gathering [i.e. court] readily recognized that the meaning of the Sacred Verse became manifest through the testimony of the Muslims, the Christians, the Jews and the Bábís, through the begging and the pleading of the evildoers who were trying to rescue themselves from punishment for their crimes, through the disregard that was given to their repentance and through the banishment⁹⁹ that was eventually determined and decreed for them.

⁹⁸ Qur'an 40:51-52. The text cited in the narrative is at slight variance with the standard printing of the Qur'an.

⁹⁹ The original *Sú'u'd-Dar* literally means *evil abode* and is rarely used in modern Persian. This phrase is also used at the end of the Qur'an 40:52, cited on the previous page.

[The Trial]

In short, when I arrived at the *Sud*, I saw a gathering organized in the utmost dignity and decorum. Several lanterns were hung from bayonets, and more bayonets were used as wall decorations. On a platform in front of the *Qulup*'s main hall was a large table with a red cloth spread over it. The *Predsedatel* [*Suda*] was seated in the middle with four others at either side of him. Moreover, on either side of the platform were two tables facing each other. [Behind one table] on the right was sitting the *Prokuror* [prosecutor] on a chair, representing the wronged one [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá], and in front of him were stacks of deposition pages. Facing that table was another [table] with someone appointed by the government to speak on behalf of the villains, trying to prove, if possible, their innocence. He also had copies of the deposition papers stacked in front of him. Several other people were also standing in various corners and by the walls, ensuring that no one spoke with others.

Most of the members of the *Sud* wore red attire. The infamous criminals, that is, the evildoers¹⁰⁰, were sitting in chains and fetters on the floor on the left-hand side, near their attorney, looking gloomy. Surrounding them like a mantle was a line of *soldat* [soldiers], like seraphs of penalty and chastisement. Similarly, the Bábís sat on designated benches on the side opposite to that of the villains. Also, each group of witnesses was clustered in a separate place with several *soldat* ensuring that they would not converse with one another. Whenever one of the witnesses needed to visit the bathroom, two *soldat* would accompany him and afterwards would return him [to his seat].

For the purpose of swearing in the witnesses, a *qádí* [i.e. religious judge] was brought for the Muslims, a Christian pastor for the Armenians [Christians], a Russian priest for the Russians and a rabbi for the Jewish witnesses. Similarly, the honored Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl was asked to swear in the Bábís and all stood ready in their designated spot. Three hundred chairs were placed in the middle of the *Qulup* for the public to

¹⁰⁰ *Asháb shumál* is literally, the companions of the left hand; see Qur'an 56:41. However, the left in this context is associated with evil, harm and generally negative characters. Elsewhere in this monograph, *asháb shumál* is rendered as *men of wickedness*.

sit, and all around, to the fullest capacity, people of every kind were standing to observe [the proceedings]. Some of the people had come from such regions as Caucasia, Marv and Bukhara for this purpose. In truth, it was a most amazing scene.

Six Russian interpreters, knowledgeable in Russian, Turkish and Persian, were present, vigilant that none would mistranslate anything.

In short, the witnesses of each group took an oath in accordance with their own tradition. They said to Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl, "You must also swear in the Bábís." Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl replied, "There is no such practice in our religion. If a person is devout and righteous, without being compelled to take an oath he will speak the truth. And if he is irreligious or deceitful, then he will take an oath, but will lie."

Subsequent to taking the oath, deliberations and examinations commenced. First, one by one, the people of Bahá [Bahá'ís] were summoned forth [to the witness box] and questioned. After each had stated what he had presented to the interrogator [during the previous interrogations], the *Predsdatel* [*Suda*] would then ask the offenders, who were men of wickedness, "If you have a response to what this person has said, state it now." Occasionally, one of them [i.e. defendants] would stand and speak some untruth. Then the *Sudja* [chief judge] would ask the defense attorney, "If you have a response, state it as well." At times the defense attorney would remain silent and at other occasions would stand and say a few words.

Thereupon, the *Prokuror* would stand and with his thoughtful remarks, much like the serpent of Moses that would instantly swallow the sorcerers' rods,¹⁰¹ destroy their baseless arguments, which were feeble like a spider's web. Thereby he would establish the wrongness of their deeds, their unseemly conduct and the unsavory character of the people of rancor before every man and woman present [in the court]. For instance, he would state, "I am astonished at how callous and heartless these people [Shi'as] are that they surrounded an old man of seventy years of age and slew him in this manner, while the rest of the people stood around watching jubilantly, shouting triumphantly and

¹⁰¹ Exodus 7:11-12.

congratulating one another!” As he spoke, most of the Russian women were crying bitterly.

In short, after the rebuttal of the *prokuror*, the *predsedatel* and the four others who were to either side of him together with the *prokuror* and the defense attorney would retire to an adjacent room, discuss what they had heard, write their decision and return to the court. Then they would summon another [witness], and thus it would continue.

I will describe the manner of questioning by describing how this lowly one was asked for his testimony. First they called this lowly one by name, “Alí-Akbar Baqiroff!” I stood and went before the *Sud*. My file from the [previous] questioning was available in at least three copies: one before the *Sud*, one before the *prokuror* and the last copy before the [defense] attorney.

He asked, “What is your name?”

“Alí-Akbar Baqiroff.”

“Where are you from?”

“Yazd.”

“Citizen of which country?”

“I serve the King of Iran.”

“How old are you?”

“I am forty-nine years old.”

“Are you married and do you have a family?”

“Yes.”

“What is your religion?”

“Bahá’í.”

“What is your [Holy] Book?”

“The *Bayán* and the Mother of the *Bayán*.¹⁰²”

“Do you accept the Qur’an?”

“Yes.”

The attorney of the people of the left [i.e. rancor] stood and said, “He is lying, as he has previously stated that he does not accept the Qur’an.”

¹⁰² Presumably a reference to the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*.

This lowly one stated:

I have never spoken thus. The interrogator asked a question to which I responded and the text of that exchange is now before you gentlemen and I invite you to consider it. That is, the discussions of this lowly one with the investigator was:

He asked of my religion and I responded that I was Bahá'í.

He then inquired, "For what reason have you accepted this religion?"

I responded, "Now is not an opportune time for such a discussion, but I will briefly mention that whatever other people, whether it be of the Jewish, the Christian, the Muslim, or others, consider as the proof of the truth of the Prophets of their own age, Who are the Manifestations of the divine names and attributes, which has caused them to turn unto these Prophets, we have seen a greater profusion and a mightier manifestation of that from the Primal Point [the Báb] and the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] and that is why we have come to believe. Furthermore, by the prophecies of the Sacred Scriptures of the past we can adduce proofs that the glad tidings of the appearance of this Sanctified Being, namely, His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh, Who has arisen to edify the whole of humanity, have been recorded in the Old and New Testaments and in all the other Scriptures of the past, and the time of His manifestation has been fixed as well.'

He then inquired, 'What about the Qur'an?' I responded, 'We do not produce proofs for the Christians based on the Qur'an; rather we adduce from the Torah and the Bible. We speak to the Muslims from the Qur'an and reason from it. We, the people of Bahá, desire that a gathering be organized where the 'ulamá of each religion would assemble, and the 'ulamá of this party [Bahá'í Faith] would be invited as well, where we could present and state

with manifest clarity and lucidity our proofs and arguments about the truth of this Cause. That way the reality of this Faith would be clear and obvious to the entire world.’

The interrogator wrote all these words, but the place where it is mentioned that we do not speak of the Qur’an to the Christians was not correctly rendered by the interpreter.

The *Sud* realized that there had been an error in the translation [of my deposition], at which point I stated, “Today, the Torah, the Bible and the Qur’an are the limit of people’s understanding. We believe in the religion and the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh.”

At the beginning it had been decreed that the court would be in session for three days, eight hours each day. However, because a great multitude was at hand, a fourth day was also added, to which three hours in the morning and three hours of discussions, after two hours into the night had already been added. The fourth day, however, [the court] concluded before noon. Altogether, the sessions took twenty-one hours.

After the conclusion, the honored *predsedatel* announced, “This work is completed. If the witnesses and the Bábís wish to leave, [the Court] will not hinder them.” Together with the *prokuror* and other members, he went into a secluded room to deliberate on the case.

After this announcement, some people left [the building and] dispersed, and in their vain imaginings had stated, “The Bábís were all condemned, and the prisoners were liberated and have been released!” The impatient people had believed these and once again commenced mischief, abuse and insult. They went by the homes of Mullá Ahmad, Mashhadí Jalíl and Mashhadí Samad and had given the glad tidings, and had readied sheep for sacrifice. Sherbet was also prepared. Everyone anticipated the defendants’ imminent arrival. Two men had brought two sheep onto the path so that when the prisoners were freed he would sacrifice them [the sheep] before their feet.

Suddenly it then happened that the people, having heard the court’s ruling, began to exit the *Qulup* in a manner that betrayed their inner agitation and with faces flushed with agitation. They informed others of the *Sud*’s decision and the poor people who had brought sheep

were deeply disappointed and, hiding the sheep under their ‘abá or jackets, quickly dispersed with heads hung low in shame.

[The Verdict]

In short, the decision of the *Sud* was:

The two murderers, ‘Alí-Akbar and ‘Alí-Bábá, are to be hanged. Asadu’lláh Ardabílí and another are to be imprisoned for two years in Badkubih. Mullá Ahmad, Mullá Mihdí, Mashhadí Samad and Mashhadí Jalíl are to be exiled and imprisoned in Siberia for fourteen years.

This is the justice that has been decreed for them. However, if the honored General Kamaroff wishes to reduce the sentence, he is permitted to do so.

Two others have been seized in error, since the illustrious Bábís have made no mention of them. As such they are free to leave.

God is my witness, what immense joy and elation overcame the friends, and what sadness and grief resulted for the enemies! Complete separation took place that day [between the Bahá’ís and the Muslims]. This occurred in the year 1307 AH [1889], and the number of that day of separation was also three hundred and seven past one thousand. “*Verily, the Day of Sorting Out is a thing appointed.*”¹⁰³ On that day the truth of all the blessed utterances that previously had been revealed in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas* and the realization of which was eagerly anticipated by the servants, stood manifest. Blessed and exalted be His utterance:

O Land of Kha! We hear from thee the voices of heroes, raised in glorification of thy Lord, the All-Possessing, the Most Exalted. Blessed be the day in which the banners of the divine Names shall be upraised in the kingdom of creation in My Name, the All-Glorious. On that

¹⁰³ Qur’an 78:17.

day the faithful shall rejoice in the victory of God, and the unbelievers shall lament.

*None must contend with those who wield authority over the people; leave unto them that which is theirs, and direct your attention to men's hearts.*¹⁰⁴

Consider that this event took place in 'Ishqabad which is part of [the old] Khurasan and also of Kharazm¹⁰⁵, and how justice was decreed and none was able to protest against it, as it was revealed, “*None must contend with those who wield authority over the people.*”

Further, the hoisting of the banners,¹⁰⁶ which was the appearance of those sanctified and steadfast souls, was most evident, as were the joy of the faithful and the lament of the unbeliever. Not one blessed word [of Bahá'u'lláh] remained that did not come to pass in fulfillment. However, most people are steeped in ignorance and, much like the people of the past [i.e. the tribe of Ad, who rejected the Prophet Húd], they say, “*Bring us what thou threatenest us with, if it so be that thou tellest the truth!*”¹⁰⁷

[Intercession of Bahá'ís]

¹⁰⁴ The *Kitáb-i Aqdas*, verses K94 and K95.

¹⁰⁵ All of this seems to have been anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh years earlier in His prophetic statement in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*, K94. Regarding that passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has commented that it referred to the establishment of the Bahá'í community of 'Ishqabad: “The Blessed Beauty had mentioned Khurasan, stating that this blessed Cause would be propagated from there. Everyone thought that His sanctified intent was Khurasan. However, through the bounties of the Blessed Beauty all were directed towards 'Ishqabad and everyone realized His intent was that city. Afterwards, a Mashriqu'l-Adhkar was established in that location;” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s talk in Haifa on 14 February 1914, quoted in Fádíl Mázandarání, *Amr va Khalq*, vol. 4, p. 434. See also, *Amr va Khalq*, vol. 4, pp. 434-34, for a talk of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa on 29 June 1914.

¹⁰⁶ A reference to the above-cited passage from the *Kitáb-i Aqdas* regarding, “*Blessed the day on which the banners of the divine Names shall be upraised in the kingdom of creation in My Name, the All-Glorious.*”

¹⁰⁷ Qur'an 7:70.

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Two days after the court pronounced its decision, the relatives and kinsmen of Mullá Ahmad, Mashhadí Jalíl and Mashhadí Samad came to the friends and asked, “Since the *Sud* has given authority to the General to reduce the sentences of the offenders, we implore you to go before him and to intercede on their behalf. Perchance he would overlook their crime or lessen their punishment.” The friends consulted and decided that, in company of several of the family and kinsmen of the convicts, they would visit the General and intercede on their behalf.

As such, several of us went before the General along with the relatives of the offenders. We stated, “We have come for the purpose of interceding and intervening, beseeching you, if possible, to pardon their felony, or if that is not possible, to reduce their sentence. We are deeply grateful and thankful to you. Our main purpose was that our meekness and their oppression and acrimony be established. Praise belongs to God, that out of the bounty of the glorious and just Russian government, this came to pass. Furthermore, we have no will for revenge or retribution.”

The honored General stated, “What you have just said demonstrates the height of your humanity and charity. However, by the civil law, and to protect the nation, it is imperative that they be punished. The action of these men has ruined the Governor’s reputation and invited castigation upon the authorities. Soon in all the newspapers it will be published that in a certain location in the Russian realm certain people have raised a tumult and, in broad daylight, in the middle of the bazaar, have killed someone over a religious argument. This will be seen as an indication of chaos and disorder in this nation and her institutions. And that would be a disgrace for the government.”

We responded, “If it is possible. If not, you know best how to administer your affairs.” Thereupon we left his presence. The relatives also left disappointed.

[Iran’s Inability to Intervene]

Immediately thereafter, their leaders began to telegraph the ‘ulamá in Tehran, Tabriz and Mashhad. In turn, the ‘ulamá collectively appealed to

the government [of Iran], pleading and requesting: “If the decision of the *Sudja* is implemented, it would be a dishonor for the [Iranian] authorities and nation, since for merely slaying a Bábí, several persons will be harshly punished. What insolence is greater than this, that for killing a Bábí – of whom five by five or ten by ten are killed or burned in Iran, and we consider so doing to be a source of honor – such misery and disgrace is brought upon the Muslims in this land of infidels. What calamity, what adversity! O our world, O our religion! Islam is lost! How the precious religion has become worthless and how the luminous nation has become dark!”

The government responded [to the ‘ulamá], “The conduct of civil laws in foreign countries is not subject to our intervention from outside. Moreover, the person who was killed was our subject as well. Did that helpless soul not have a wife and children? By whose permission or behest did they carry out this act [of murder]? Was it by the government’s leave or through a fatwá of the ‘ulamá? Of a certainty, unilateral deeds will have such a result!”

Therefore, in a Tablet revealed after the martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá and addressed to the believers of ‘Ishqabad, it was revealed, “*they have neither a helper, nor a succorer*”, because His Majesty Násiri’-d-Dín Shah also refused to support them [i.e. the convicts] or to intercede on their behalf.

[Bahá’u’lláh’s Counsel]

At this point that blessed Tablet is cited. Glorified and mighty is His utterance.

O My loved-ones in that land! Ye are the keys to the portals of constancy amidst the people and the standard of guidance among the creatures. Through you the oneness of God’s essence and His sanctity hath been established.

We counsel ye, O chosen ones of God, to wisdom and to that which exalts thy station.

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Blessed art thou and those who love thee wholly for the sake of the Cause of God, the Lord of earth and heaven, and the Lord of the Most Exalted Throne.

Take heed lest ye be frightened by the tumult of the people who have cast justice behind them and clung to cruelty. Verily, they are in a severe chastisement, and they have neither a helper nor a succorer. Ere long will the winds of retribution surround them from every direction.

Verily, He is the Almighty, the All-Powerful, the Avenger.

If this lowly one were to include all the Tablets revealed from the heaven of Divine Will and Bounty regarding this incident, these pages would not suffice, and the discussion would lead to prolixity.

Subsequent to the conclusion of the gathering of the *Sudja* and the issuance of its verdict, this lowly one wrote all the details to the sacred presence of the Beloved of the World [Bahá'u'lláh]. Several other friends wrote as well. After a short while a package containing two Tablets in honor of various believers was received. At the end of those Tablets, a Visitation [Tablet] in the name of the honored martyred Hájí was revealed as well. That sanctified Tablet was in honor of this ephemeral servant and it is cited at this point. Exalted is His utterance and all-encompassing are His bounties.

In His Name that is Omnipotent over all Names!

Verily the decreed time has arrived and the Revealer of verses has come from the Heaven of His Cause with a power that will not be weakened by the tyrannies of the evildoers, who have broken God's Covenant and His Testament and who have slain God's friends without the leave or authority of Him Who is the Sovereign over them. We testify that these are indeed the ones who have wrought mischief and corruption in the land after its betterment, and who have shown ingratitude towards the bounty of tranquility when indeed that tranquility and bounty were realized and spread abroad by virtue of the justice of the sovereign of that country and his power.

In such wise does this Wronged One voice His utterance as He strolls in this Spot which is named the Most Great Prison of the world - a Spot which is sanctified from the mention of all peoples. Blessed is the one who has hearkened to that which is commanded by God, the One Who causes the Dawn to appear.

In truth, We have forbidden all men to engage in corrupt deeds, and have commanded them to observe piety and righteousness. But the heedless have abandoned that which will profit them, and have instead followed wickedness and iniquity. Are such not the people of error in the presence of their Exalted Lord? They have forsooth slain him who believed in God [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání], him who assisted the Cause and who spoke in His praise in the daytime and in the night season.

O thou 'Alí before Akbar! Upon thee be My Glory and loving providence! Thy letter, which thou didst send to one of the Afnáns, gladdened Me, in that We inhaled from it the sweet fragrance of unity in these days when all men are in disagreement as to the Great Announcement which was announced by Moses, He Who Speaks With God in the Torah and the Friend of God in the Qur'an.

We made mention of thee time and again, and have revealed for thee that which stirs all things and attracts the minds and spirits. Be thou steadfast in rendering assistance and victory to my Cause through that wisdom whose orb has shone from above the horizons of all My Scrolls and Tablets. Mention of thee was made in the presence of this Wronged One. He verily is the One Who confirmed thee in the service of His Cause and He is the One Who made known unto thee the path of piety.

O Pen! Call to remembrance the one who was martyred in the Path of God!

And Say:

May the first effulgence of light which has shone from the heaven of grace and bounty rest upon thee, O thou who wert named Muhammad before Ridá!

I testify that thou art indeed the one who believed in the All-Merciful God when the ocean of His recognition cast its

billows upon the shores of existence. Thou didst respond to the Call when that Call was raised betwixt earth and heaven and thou didst quaff the sealed choice wine of Revelation from the hands of the munificence of thy Lord, the Lord of the Kingdom of all Names. Thou art the one whom the veils of the people of oppression have not impeded, nor did the curtains of the transgressors prevent thee. Thou didst abandon the following of those people who corrupted the land after it was bettered and reconstructed and who furthermore gainsaid the bounty of God after it did descend unto them. May the Spirit rest upon thee! O thou at whose calamity the near ones have raised their lamentations and the sincere ones have groaned in sorrow.

Great is the blessedness of thee and of him who visits thee and who confesseth that which hath been revealed by the Supreme Pen in this most holy, most glorious, most luminous, most exalted station.¹⁰⁸

O 'Alí-Akbar! Upon thee be My glory and My loving kindness. Make mention of My loved ones on My behalf and give them the glad tidings of the mercy, the grace, the bounty, and the loving-kindness of God. In truth We admonish them to be in the utmost unity and concord and We beseech God that He may assist thee in thine efforts to improve their circumstances under all conditions. He verily is the Self-Sufficient, the Exalted, and He verily is the Well-Beloved, the Most Gracious.¹⁰⁹

[The Day of Execution]

In short, no matter what effort they exerted towards regaining the convicts' liberty, it bore no fruit. For a while they were incarcerated in 'Ishqabad's prison, associating with those of their own character and kind. Each day, they anticipated freedom and emancipation until it was

¹⁰⁸ The Visitation Tablet is also cited in Muhammad-'Alí Faízí, *Lá'li Dirakhshán*, pp. 213-17

¹⁰⁹ A slight modification of a rendering by Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir posted on Tarjuman Internet discussion group in June 2007.

announced that on the following day the two murderers would be hung and the others sent on their banishment to Siberia.

They erected gallows for the two condemned near the Governor's Ark [office]. Mounted soldiers were at hand and a company of *soldat* [soldiers] and several cannons were readied too. These preparations were made since some of the crass elements, who blindly consider religious intolerance as their sacred duty, had stated, "If they try to send these men to Siberia or hang anyone for slaying a Bábí, whose killing in our religion is a compulsory duty, we will revolt and raise a *jihád* [holy war]. Even if we are slain, we will be considered martyrs." This news had reached the Governor. Therefore, he had ordered that everything that was needed for security and public protection be readied.

People had gathered to observe the proceedings. The convicts were brought out in chains and fetters. The two murderers were brought by the gallows and compelled to ascend the structure beneath which a hole was dug, so that after the execution their remains could be deposited in that hole and covered. Each man was wearing a burial cloth.

[The Czar's Ruling]

When they were about to place the nooses around their necks, the honorable *Prokuror*, who was present, stated, "Wait." He then pulled out a piece of paper and read the proclamation in Russian and motioned the translator to render it into Turkish and Persian.

The essence of his remark was: After several of us [i.e. Bahá'ís] had gone before the General to intercede [for the attackers], he had sent a telegram with all the details to the Great Emperor [Alexander III], mentioning that the illustrious Bábís had come to intervene on behalf of the convicts. His Majesty the Emperor had forwarded that communication to the Senate¹¹⁰ with instructions to telegraph what they

¹¹⁰ The original phrase is *majlis shawr*, which literally means "consultative assembly." However, Prof. Youli Ioannesyan (private communications, 26 September 2007) has brought to my attention that it was only the Senate which functioned as the Supreme Judicial Body and the highest institution which could reconsider a court verdict.

thought best to General Kamaroff. The Senate had consulted and decided that it was best that the intercession of the Bábís be accepted to some degree, so that the opponents' enmity would be reduced. They resolved that the two men who were to be executed should not be killed, but instead be sent for life-imprisonment to Siberia, and the other convicts who had been given 14 years imprisonment have their sentences reduced by half, that is, each be incarcerated for seven years. The Emperor had signed this decree and telegraphed it to General Kamaroff, who had kept it confidential.

On that day when a large multitude from every group and sect was present, this background was conveyed in detail, emphasizing, "The Great Emperor has issued such a decree solely at the request of the Bábís for a reduction of the sentences; otherwise the original punishment would have been carried out."

[The Convicts' End]

After hearing this proclamation, the two men who had been readied for hanging, stated, "We do not consent to the intercession of the Bábís. Of a certainty, death is preferred for us."

They were joined with others who had their heads shaven and a Russian hat placed inverted on their heads. They were put on board a carriage, and with pomp, ceremony and much following brought to the rail station where a special cabin was prepared for them. They boarded and were sent on their banishment.

Two of them expired along the journey. The two murderers were sent to a location from which no news or trace of them was ever heard. Two more died shortly after arrival. Mullá Mihdí fled to Iran and after six months died, and his soul returned to its original abode. Of all of them, only Mullá Ahmad Yazdí remained as an example and a lesson to anyone who had not seen others who had vanished, so they would see him and be warned.

At all events, the aim of describing all these details was that the men of insight and those endowed with wisdom would recognize the meaning and purpose of the blessed verse, "*Fain would they put out God's*

*light with their mouths; but God only desireth to perfect His light, albeit the infidels abhor it*¹¹¹ stood evident and manifest.

This is because when they had gathered and consulted, the men of enmity had stated, “As protectors of the perspicuous creed [Islam] and the followers of the religion of the Prince of Messengers [Prophet Muhammad], we must arise and exert effort to ensure that not one of these people [Bahá’ís] remains resident in ‘Ishqabad. We must kill a few of them and then the remaining ones will understand their situation and will leave this region.” They unanimously thought this to be the best plan and were united on this course. They selected two individuals for [to carry out] the martyrdom of the honored Hájí and paid them two-hundred *manát*. However, they were neglectful of the effect of the blessed words, “*God only desireth to perfect His light.*” That is, God, despite their lack of awareness, will manifest His light over the horizon of the city of love [‘Ishqabad], brightening and illuminating the entire world with its effulgence and rays.

As has been revealed in a Tablet addressed to this lowly one – exalted be His grandeur and lofty be His might, “*There is no will to oppose His irrevocable decree, nor is there a hindrance to impede his injunction. Verily, he is the All-Powerful, the Almighty, the Wise.*” And this was one of the six Tablets mentioned earlier that came in an envelope addressed to this ephemeral one – among which was the Tablet for the honored martyr that contained allusions to his martyrdom.

At any rate, in one of the Tablets it was revealed, “*Say: Do not be saddened by the fire of enmity and sedition that hath been enkindled through the cruelty of the servants’ hearts. I swear by the effulgence of the Divine Visage which is radiant and resplendent over the Supreme Horizon, such affairs exalt the Word of God and so shall it forever remain.*”

What has been shared should suffice the men of insight. However, for those without discernment, no matter what is mentioned it would be insufficient. For this reason it has been revealed, “*if they saw every one of the*

¹¹¹ Qur’an 9:32. Translation from Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 19.

signs, they will not believe in them."¹¹² And who is more truthful than God?
"And whose word can be truer than God's?"¹¹³

[Bahá'u'lláh's Reaction]

At any rate, if I were to cite all the Tablets in this regard that were revealed before and after the martyrdom of the honored Hájí, then a separate book would have to be prepared.

In the conclusion, this exalted and holy Tablet, which is evidence of the bounty and favor [of Bahá'u'lláh] upon the everlasting government of Russia – may God exalt her – is included. For centuries and ages, the good mention of her name will endure in this blessed Tablet and is also recorded in other Tablets as well.

He is the Protector, the All-Powerful, the Omnipotent!

O Husayn! Upon thee rest My Glory!

I testify that thou hast attained unto that which was concealed in the Tablet as inscribed by the Supreme Pen at the behest of God, the Lord of both worlds.

Blessed art thou for having turned unto this Most Great Ocean, for having beheld His waves and pearls hidden within His utterance, and for having heard that what hath risen from the Most Sublime Horizon, through the bounty of God, the Lord of the Most Mighty Throne.

O My chosen ones in all dominions! Recognize ye the station of those who rendered thee victorious and ruled with pure justice amongst you. We beseech God to confirm this people in His remembrance, His praise, and service unto Him, and to manifest through them holy, sanctified, mighty and supreme deeds.

¹¹² Qur'an 6:25. The complete verse is: *Of them there are some who (pretend to) listen to thee; but We have thrown veils on their hearts, so they understand it not, and deafness in their ears; if they saw every one of the signs, they will not believe in them; in so much that when they come to thee, they (but) dispute with thee; the Unbelievers say: "These are nothing but tales of the ancients."*

¹¹³ Qur'an 4:122.

O people of Bahá! Verily, the Daystar of justice was veiled and hidden behind the clouds of tyranny. However, for His deliverance from behind every thick veil and dark cloud, God hath aided the illustrious and glorious government of Russia whereby He manifested Himself and shone forth.

We beseech God, hallowed and exalted is the Lord, to confirm him [Czar] and his chosen ones and ministers, through whom the banner of victory was hoisted in that land and the standard of triumph lifted high before the face of all creation; this despite those who obstructed justice and fairness, and prevented its effulgence, light and manifestation, through the exaltation of His word, the coming forth of His Cause and the establishment of His truth. May God confirm him [Czar] to deliver the oppressed into the arms of justice and equity, and rescue them from the oppressors, aggressors, and deniers. Thus hath it been decreed by the bidding of the Almighty, the All-Wise.

Hearken unto the call of this Wronged-One in the Persian tongue. From this day until the end that hath no end, the friends must all recognize the favors of this glorious government – may God aid her – and arise to that which is befitting of this justice. Those persons who without concealment or veil promoted justice and caused its triumph and brought forth this Oppressed Prisoner from the darkness of the well through the sure rope of fairness and rescued Him, they are worthy of a mighty recompense from God, exalted is He. This Wronged One testifies to the deeds through which the servants of God were aided and the rights of the oppressed ones were protected against all tyrants and all impious doubters. God willing, in centuries and ages to come, the near-ones of God will render thanks for this great bounty that hath appeared from this blessed and just government.

May glory, light, honor and praise be upon His Majesty and upon those who wield authority with pure justice at his behest, who prevented the oppressors from perpetrating transgression and who apprehended them by the leave of the Almighty, the All-Powerful Avenger.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ With some slight variation, this Tablet also appears in Baron Victor Rosen, *Collections Scientifiques de l'Institut des Langues Orientales*, Vol. VI, Manuscrits Arabes,

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Numerous Tablets have been revealed by the Ancient Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] – may His mention be exalted – for the honored Hájí, the martyr. Certain items from the Blessed Beauty were with that esteemed personage as well.¹¹⁵ For instance, an ‘abá that the Blessed Beauty had worn at one time over His shoulders was with him [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá]. Some of these relics were in Isfahan in the care of his brother.

A daughter of the honored martyr also remained in Isfahan. Some other holy relics he possessed were in the care of the honored Áqá Siyyid Ahmad Afnán, while some others were with Áqá Ghulám-Husayn.

Moreover, Áqá Ghulám-Husayn also kept the clothes worn [by the Hájí] at the time of his martyrdom, which were torn into pieces by the knives and daggers that cut him. There were kept in the same blood-soaked manner.

The Hájí used to say, “I have collected many precious items, including calligraphy done in emeralds which I have kept in Isfahan. It is more excellent than all other calligraphies by Dervish Muhammad, Mír ‘Imád or others.”

"Manuscripts Babys", St. Petersburg: Academie Imperiale de Sciences, 1891, p. 250. This manuscript is electronically available at: <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/diglib/books/P-T/R/Rosen/VolVI.htm>. In the Rosen edition, the Tablet is missing the portion from “*O Husayn*” to “*the bounty of God, the Lord of the Most Mighty Throne.*”

¹¹⁵ Similar to other religious traditions, many early Bahá'ís treasured items associated with the Founders of the Faith or other important figures of Bábí and Bahá'í history, and often considered such possessions means of attracting divine benediction.

Document 11

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl's Treatise – An Excerpt 25 February 1903

[While in the United States, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl wrote a treatise outlining the history of the Bahá'í community of Isfqabad. This document was reprinted in Pazhubeshnameh, vol. 4, pp. 122-26. The first portion of this treatise – offered in translation below – focuses on the town's geography, general history, and martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá. The second portion traces the construction and inauguration of the city's Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. Translator.]

In the Name of God, the Most Glorious!

There is a desert between Iran and the regions of Turkestan which in the ancient times was called the Plain of Khavaran or the Plain of Kharazm, and presently it is known as the Plain of Turkmenia. This region is bounded on the east by the city of Bukhara and on the west by Iran and on the south by Afghanistan and on the north by Bahr Khazar, which the Europeans call the Caspian Sea or Qazvin.

The farms on this Plain are irrigated by three well known rivers. The first is the River Jayhun¹¹⁶, that is, the River Amu, which is one of the best known rivers in the east. It originates from the Bilurdagh [Pamir] Mountains and reaches the Aral Sea. The average width of this river is three miles. The second is the Murghab River with the famous town of Marv located on her banks. The third is the Tejen River which passes by the town of Tejen.

The Russian government built the [Trans-Caspian] rail system that connects the Caspian Sea to Bukhara in 48 hours. In the southwest of this region is a mountain which separates Iran's province of Khurasan

¹¹⁶ Jayhun is a derivative of Gihun, the biblical name for one of the four rivers of the Garden of Eden.

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from Russian dependencies in Turkmen, and the city of ‘Ishqabad is situated on the foot of this mountain on the side of the city of Quchan, which is a pasture for the Ekrad-Zafaranlu Tribe who are the bravest of tribesmen in Khurasan and for a long time maintained the border of Iran.



The town of ‘Ishqabad is a newly-built city. It was raised 22 years ago and became the seat of the governor of the Russian government. That is, after Skobelev, the brave Russian General, defeated the Turkmen army after a year of battles near Kuk-Tappeh, most of the region came under the control of the luminous Russian government.¹¹⁷ However, due to his excessive killings, the Great Emperor [Alexander III] dismissed him from military command and installed in his place

¹¹⁷ Mikhail Dmitrievich Skobelev (1843–82) was a Russian general famous for his conquest of Central Asia and heroism during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. His second tour in Turkestan was in 1880-81 where he distinguished himself in undoing disasters inflicted by the Tekke Turkmen, captured Geok-Tepe, and, after much slaughter, reduced the Akhal-Tekke region to submission. He was advancing on ‘Ishqabad and Kalat Nadiri when he was disavowed and recalled.

[General] Kamaroff, who was among the prominent figures of the Russian government, a man known and respected for great dignity, confidence, immense intellect and deep wisdom.

The aforementioned Kamaroff built a military compound in a barren desert, which was an uncultivated plain, on the spot where the city of 'Ishqabad is situated. Without war or bloodshed, he brought the rest of the Plain of Khavaran under the rule of the [Russian] government, and part of the province, including the portion on the east from the city of Marv to the Jayhun and south until the hard plateau of the city of Balkh, where the Saruq and Salur tribes and their dairy animals roam.

When this large territory was conquered by Russia and the standard of security and justice was hoisted over it, merchants and craftsmen from the cities of Khurasan and the regions of the Caucasus came to that military fort [which became 'Ishqabad] for work and trading. As such, the doors of commerce and business, which had been closed with Turkmen tribes for some four-hundred years, were reopened. And finding immense opportunities, these merchants and craftsmen began to build the city of 'Ishqabad under the supervision of Russian engineers.

The condition of the town of 'Ishqabad, in terms of its stability, spread, streets, stores, cultivated park and gardens, is similar to the city of Washington. All the homes are built in the middle of adorned orchards, trees and fragrant flower gardens. All the streets have special trees planted on both sides and brooks with flowing water. Russian sanitation workers and officials exert the utmost effort in keeping clean all the roads and homes. Not for a minute are they negligent in administering the affairs of the city, since it is situated at the crossroads of four renowned countries and, from the perspective of commerce and politics, it has a most evident importance. This is because on the east it borders Turan [Central Asia] and Turkistan, on west Khurasan and other regions of Iran, on the south Balkh and Afghanistan, and on the north the Caucasus and Tajikistan.

At the beginning of the formation of the city of 'Ishqabad, when merchants and craftsmen were coming to this town from diverse and far

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away places, about twenty-two or three of the people of Bahá and companions of the Crimson Ark also came from Khurasan, the city of Yazd and other places, to engage in trading or their profession.

Though numerically fewer than other groups, with the utmost honesty and trustworthiness, these individuals [Bahá'ís] exerted great effort towards the development of the town, as they had been taught through the commandments of the Supreme Pen [Bahá'u'lláh] to observe good behavior, friendly association [with people of all religions], integrity, and morality. Therefore, more than other groups, they received the favor and esteem of the authorities of the Russian government, her administrators and military chiefs, and won the trust of all Christian people and denominations.

Since the majority of the inhabitants of 'Ishqabad were Turks from the Caucasus or thugs rejected from Adharbayjan, who ignorantly and fanatically were entrenched in the Shi'a creed and had innate enmity towards the people of Bahá, this esteem [from the authorities] fueled the fire of their hate and loathing.

Instigated by the Shi'a merchants, before noon on 8 September 1889, corresponding to 12 Muharram 1307 AH, in full view of the public, in the midst of 'Ishqabad's large bazaar, two Tabrízí hoodlums martyred the late Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání with thirty-three incisions from their daggers and knives. Since the martyred Hájí was well known to Governor Kamaroff and other administrators and military commanders for his dignity, tranquility, pleasant character and rectitude of conduct and was martyred in a most heinous and brutal manner – the details of which are extensive and are beyond the scope of this short tract – this greatly increased the Russian government's affection for the Bahá'ís.¹¹⁸ In particular, during the subsequent trial, the officials of the Russian government observed such serenity, composure, honesty, truthfulness, clemency and peace in the friends of God [Bahá'ís] that their hearts were greatly attracted and the fame of these people [Bahá'ís] was spread among the regions of Russia, the Caucasus, and Turkmenistan.

¹¹⁸ The original text refers to *ummat Babá'í*. *Ummat* is an Islamic term indicating the body of believers or the nation of the faithful.

By accident, the author of this treatise lived in 'Ishqabad at the time, and represented [the Bahá'í community] at the trial along with the honored Áqá Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím Ardabílí, who was one of the finest Bahá'ís residing in 'Ishqabad. This trial lasted about three months.¹¹⁹ Due to sympathies with their coreligionists, the prominent figures in Iran all supported the murderers of the late Hájí Muhammad-Ridá.

At last this trial acquired such importance that in accordance with the instructions of the late Alexander III [reign 1881-94], the late Great Emperor of Imperial Russia, a military court, which in Russian is called *Voennyi Sudja* and is uniquely empowered to issue death sentences, was commissioned for this purpose from [St.] Petersburg.

Upon arrival in 'Ishqabad, for three days and nights, this military *Sudja*, whose members were all high-ranking Russian Generals, convened and conducted the trial.

At the end, the veracity of the Bahá'ís was established as was the guilt of seven prominent Shi'as who in private had connived to murder the late martyr [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá]. One of the convicts was of the 'ulamá and had a pulpit. The court ruled that of these seven, two should be executed by hanging and the other five sent to Siberia for life imprisonment with hard labor.

After the ruling, the leaders of the Shi'a appealed to the Bahá'ís, who also deemed the execution of the foes to be most undesirable. Therefore, this servant, the aforementioned honored Áqá Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím Ardabílí and two other merchant Bahá'ís went before Governor Kamaroff, interceded on behalf of the convicts and in a most pleasant manner implored that great man to reduce their punishment. This was by reason of the fact that in the ruling it had been written that for three days the illustrious Governor was permitted to reduce the sentences.

Fortunately, this intercession greatly increased the affection of the authorities of the Russian government towards the Bahá'ís. It was also approved in sanctified presence of the Beauty of the Cause [Bahá'u'lláh], exalted is His Name, the Most Exalted, Who showered His bounties and favors. In many Tablets, this pious act was mentioned, for never before

¹¹⁹ Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl is referring to the period from the martyrdom, 8 September, to the court's decision on 21 November 1889.

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had any [of the Bahá'í communities] interceded on behalf of its enemies and saved from death those whose sole object was to slay Bahá'ís.

In short, in the manner that has been described, day by day the credibility of the friends of God [Bahá'ís] rose in the eyes of the prominent men of that realm, and their confidence and trust in all the Bahá'ís was thoroughly confirmed.

[The second half of this document pertains to the construction of the town's Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and is not translated as it has no bearing on the theme of the present monograph. Translator]

Document 12

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl: 28 December 1911

[Over two decades after Hájí Muhammad-Ridá's martyrdom and the subsequent trial, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl briefly recalled that incident in his celebrated *Burbán Lámi'* [*The Brilliant Proof*].¹²⁰ Even though this work was translated and published in 1912, a revised rendering of this section is included below. Translator.]

Numerous historical and tangible evidences can be furnished to demonstrate and prove that it was the very powerful and mighty pen of Bahá'u'lláh which protected from death His own enemies, such as Subh Azal, Násiri'd-Dín Shah and certain great divines and clerics. Otherwise [i.e. had it not been for the influence of Bahá'u'lláh's pen], the Bábís would not have allowed a single one of these people to escape alive. Indeed, it was Bahá'u'lláh who, through the effect of sanctified, celestial utterances – utterances even more refreshing than the zephyrs of the morn wafting from the rose-garden and even more limpid than the vernal rain which distils drop by drop from the fragrant rose-petals – through these He so trained the friends that the people of the world were amazed and astonished. For these possessors of heart and soul – who astonished and bewildered the enemy as well as the warriors of other nations by their valor, heroism, strength of heart, firmness and resolution in the terrible battles of Nayriz, Zanzan and Mazandaran, and three hundred and thirteen of whom resisted in battle [at the fort of Shaykh Tabarsi] thousands of regular troops of the government during

¹²⁰ For an account of the events prompting the composition of *The Brilliant Proof*, see Mu'ayyad, *Eight Years Near 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Memoirs of Dr. Habib Mu'ayyad*, trans. Ahang Rabbani, eBook: 2007, Witnesses to Bábí and Bahá'í History, vol. 3, <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/>

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many months – these were so trained in tenderness of heart and gentleness of disposition through the luminous teachings of Bahá'u'lláh that during the long years from the time of His arrival in Baghdad down to the present day, they have shown forbearance and self-restraint throughout many seminal events and have not committed that which would disturb any soul or be contrary to the law of any government. They were killed but they killed no one. They endured violent calamities but their tongues were not loosened in complaint.

When the late Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání suffered martyrdom in the city of Ishqábád in 1889 AD, the chief of police found the city in great excitement and the Bahá'ís exposed to danger. He therefore permitted the Bahá'ís to carry arms, but they did not do so, considering death better than self-defense. The government then engaged in the trial of those who had conspired and murdered the martyrs. After five months' of investigation, examining and hearing from both sides, a High Justice of the Ministry of War, accompanied by an imposing body [of judges and officials], arrived at 'Ishqábád from [St.] Petersburg. An open court, the account of whose proceedings would lead to prolixity, was held. That court ordered that the two murderers be hanged and the conspirators imprisoned for life in Siberia and subjected to hard labor.

Since the governor of the province had the right during the subsequent three days to lessen this penalty, four of the Bahá'ís appeared before him. This great man was Kamaroff, the victor of Merv and the viceroy of the province. They interceded on behalf of the condemned murderers. As the governor was greatly pleased with the excellent conduct and good manners of the Bahá'ís, he accepted their intercession and exercised his authority by changing the verdict of hanging into exile and reducing the punishment of the others from hard labor to simple confinement.

The incidents referred to are not based upon hearsay but are recorded in the register of the government of 'Ishqábád and in other official papers.

Now, could such pure morality, kindness and gentleness, such training and noble conduct be inculcated by one who had attempted murder and who sought to poison his own brother? What then becomes

of the words of His Holiness Christ: “Ye shall know the tree by its fruit”? And what becomes of the criterion embodied in the words: “Thou makest righteous by Thy words and Thou judgest by Thy sayings”?

Document 13

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl – Undated

[Fádil Mazandarání, Táríkh Zubúru'l-Haqq, vol. 5, footnote on p. 386, cites an undated passage attributed to Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl. While Mazandarání appears to offer this as an extract from a document composed by Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl, a close reading suggests the possibility that it is a summary prepared by Mazandarání based on the writings of the great Mírzá. As such, the provenance of this document requires further research. Translator.]

After the judge had heard the witnesses of both sides, the public prosecutor rose and for almost three hours spoke in Russian, proving the crime of the eight accused. He asked for the execution of six prisoners and the banishment of the remaining ones. The response by the attorney of the murderers bore no fruit, as the public prosecutor had established their guilt.

Thereupon, the chief judge and the other four judges retired to a separate room for consultation. They returned after an hour and a half and read their decision as follows:

‘Alí-Husayn and ‘Alí-Bábá are to be hung. Mullá Ahmad Tájir Yazdí, Mashhadí Jalíl and Mashhadí Ahmad Adharbayjání are banished forthwith for imprisonment to Siberia with hard labor. Nasru’lláh is hereby banished to a nearby town for two and a half years [imprisonment]. Mullá Mihdí Tabrízí, the preacher and rawdih-khán,¹²¹ is to be banished for life to Siberia with hard labor, as he used his pulpit to curse and insult [the Bahá’ís] and ordered the murder of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá.

¹²¹ A rawdih-khán is one who is a professional narrator of the events surrounding the martyrdom of Husayn, the third Imam, at Karbala.

It is ordered that these decisions be put into effect in three days time, before which Governor Kamaroff is empowered to reduce or lessen the sentence of each convict.

During these three days, cannons were trained on the city, and foot soldiers and cavalry were charged to guard all the roads and the outskirts of the town.

When the opponents were disappointed from all their attempts [to rescue the prisoners], they went to the believers expressing remorse, shame and need. Therefore, Áqá Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl,¹²² Áqá Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím, Mashhadí Yúsuf Mílání, Áqá Husayn-'Alí Tájir Yazdí and some others, on behalf of the Bahá'í community, went before the Governor and expressed their gratitude, and also interceded for the foes. They pleaded to such a degree that he softened somewhat and expressed his astonishment at the Cause of the Abhá Beauty and the pleasing conduct of the Bahá'ís. He promised that he would exert efforts to bring about a reduction of the convicts' sentences – for the efforts of the Shah, merchants and 'ulamá had produced no result.

Therefore, on the appointed day [for the executions], the public prosecutor read the Governor's proclamation that, in accordance with the request of the Bahá'ís, the sentences were to be reduced. This news was printed in all the newspapers and the people of 'Ishqabad expressed their immense gratitude to the Bahá'ís and showed them respect.

¹²² One clue that this document may not have been composed by Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl is that it is unlikely that he would have referred to himself by name.

Document 14

A Report by the British Embassy on 17 December 1889

[On 18 December 1889, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, who was the British Minister in Tehran (April 1888-November 1890), forwarded to London a memorandum by (later Sir) Henry George Outram Bax Ironside, a British Diplomat, on the martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá and the subsequent events. For this report, the British officers were relying on reports that reached Iran, almost certainly through Shi'ite channels. This report appears in Moojan Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844-1944 Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, pp. 298-99, and identified as "Memo by Bax Ironside 17 Dec. 1889, enclosed in Wolff to Salisbury No. 235, 18 Dec. 1889: FO 60 502". Translator.]

A Babi was murdered in the bazaar at Ashkabad during the month of Moharram (August last) by some Persians of the Shiah sect. He was stabbed in cold blood for scoffing at the Mohammadan religion and faith in Islam.

The prisoners, nine in number, were tried in Ashkabad in the Russian Court of Justice and, after a trial lasting several days, two of the prisoners were sentenced to death, two were acquitted, one was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for one year at Ashkabad, and the remaining four, all respectable Persian merchants, to fifteen years penal servitude in Siberia.

These sentences were delivered in Ashkabad on the 21st November and when known created intense excitement at Mashad and other religious quarters. The Babis of Ashkabad gave cash presents amounting to 6,000 roubles to the Russian officials and begged the latter

to protect them¹²³: they stated that they could not live in Persia and purposed taking refuge in the Russian Empire.

General Komaroff took their part and reported to the Russian Government that if the sentences were not carried out he would be unable to maintain order in Ashkabad and the Mohammadans would commit murders daily.

On the news reaching the Russian Consul General at Mashad he went at once to see Agha Sheikh Mohammad Taki, one of the most influential of the Ulama, and he assured the Sheikh that he would get the prisoners released and the sentences cancelled.

On December 1st M. de Velassow¹²⁴ sent his translator to inform the Sheikh that all the sentences had been cancelled. This statement has, however, so far not been confirmed from any other quarters.

The Governor General of Khorassan, H.R.H. the Rukn-ud-Dowleh, the Shah's brother, the entire Ulama and all the religious party at Mashad employed their united influence to obtain the remission of the sentences and the Russian Legation was appealed to get them annulled, it being pointed out that should they be carried out the Persians would, in future, regard Russia as the foe of Islam and the friend of Babis, renegades and of the Shah's enemies in general.

On December 17th Mr Churchill had a conversation with the Amin-us-Sultan, who said that the matter had been repeatedly discussed with the Russian Legation, who asserted that they were powerless to revoke a judgment already given by a law court; but that the Emperor had the power of altering the death sentence to one of imprisonment for life, and that the Persian Government should make any representations they had to submit to His Imperial Majesty through the Persian Minister at St Petersburg.

The Persian Government, accordingly, had instructed its representative at St Petersburg to submit the matter to the Emperor with the result that the death sentences have been commuted to

¹²³ There is no evidence from other sources that the Bahá'í community made any such offer or payment.

¹²⁴ P. M. Vlassov, the Russian Ambassador.

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transportation to Siberia, and the other sentences to imprisonment of lesser durations.

The Shah has directed his representative at St Petersburg to inform the Imperial Government that His Majesty is dissatisfied with what has been done, as he considers transportation to Siberia is equal to death.

Document 15

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl – Undated

[Fádil Mazandarání, Táríkh Zubúru'l-Haqq, vol. 5, footnote on pp. 380-81, cites the following summary of an oral report by Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl. While most of the details provided in this report are available elsewhere in this monograph, it was decided to include this report as it is one of only two instances (the other is in Document 17) in which the identity of the presiding Chief Justice is given, which may assist future archival research in Russia. Translator.]

Kamaroff, the Governor of Kharazm, said to the gathered Bahá'ís, "During these seven years, I have thoroughly witnessed your well-behaved manners. However, they have reported to me that you have spoken contemptuously of the Imáms of their religion [Shi'a Islam]." The believers proved and established that they respect the Shi'a Imáms.

At the Governor's behest, they then submitted their petition signed by nineteen believers. The Governor instructed the police chief, Naftanoff, to place armed guards around our neighborhood and Bahá'í shops and ensure the city was under security and protection, so that the criminals and their instigators would not escape. That very night, four of the mischief-makers were arrested.

In addition, it became known that three prominent Iranian merchants and an accomplice, who was a rawdih-khán and a preacher, had been the instigators of this sedition and had given the assassins money and the promise of profit on real estate. Consequently, those four were arrested and imprisoned as well.

It was at this time that an official investigation was initiated, and the murderers and witnesses were questioned. The enemies sought every means [to save themselves]. They even wrote to the Shah [of Iran] and the 'ulamá of Najaf. However, Kamaroff asked the Emperor to appoint a high-ranking military judge. Therefore, Khaschnewski, who was a

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deeply learned, perceptive, knowledgeable and wise man, and also the chief of the military judiciary that in Russian is called the *Suda*, and who had a high position serving as a prominent Russian military officer, was appointed. He arrived with four other high-ranking judges. From all directions, people came to observe, and Russian soldiers firmly controlled the city.

Document 16

A Report by Victor Rosen in 1891

[Baron Victor Romanovitch Rosen (1849-1908) was a distinguished academic, Professor of Arabic at the Oriental Department of the Imperial Russian University in St. Petersburg, and founder of the Russian Geographical Society. He translated several collections of Bahá'í Writings into Russian, including publication in 1908 of a large collection (185 pages) of Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh. He also prepared for publication in the original Arabic and Persian a volume of Epistles by Bahá'u'lláh and left detailed descriptions for many Bábí and Bahá'í manuscripts which at present belong to the manuscript collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Rosen also properly identified a number of important Tablets, such as, Surih Muluk (The Surih of the Kings), as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. He encouraged his students A. G. Tumanski and others to collect and study materials related to the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths.

Using Rosen's materials, after describing intense persecution of Bahá'ís in Isfahan, Prof. Edward G. Browne notes the following in *A Traveler's Narrative*, p. 411:

An event which took place still more recently in the Russian dominions may perhaps have a salutary effect in checking the ferocious intolerance of the Mullás, at any rate outside Persia. Baron Rosen had described this occurrence, from notes made on the spot by M. Toumansky¹²⁵, in

¹²⁵ Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844-1944 Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, p. 41, notes: "The second important Russian scholar was Capt. Alexander Tumanski, who had, according to his own statements, first heard of the Bahá'ís through an account in Reclus's *Universal Geography*, which he had read while studying for the entrance examination to the officer's course in the military Oriental Languages Training Section. But it was in the winter of 1889-90, when he read an account of the martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá in 'Ishqabad and the manner in which the Bahá'ís had intervened on behalf of the murderers that he determined to investigate the religion more closely. The following summer, he asked special permission to proceed to Transcaspia, and there met the Bahá'ís of 'Ishqabad. He

connection with two epistles from Behá [Bahá'u'lláh] to the "revelation" of which it gave rise. This account, together with the text of these epistles, will be found at pp. 247-250 of the forthcoming sixth volume of the Collections Scientifiques [de l'Institute des Langues Orietales] &c.¹²⁶ Availing myself of Baron [Victor] Rosen's generous permission to make full use of his still unpublished work, I conclude this note with a translation of his narrative.

Browne's translation of this account by Baron Victor Rosen based on notes of Capitan Alexander Tumanski appears in A Traveler's Narrative, p. 411-12 and is cited below for ease of reference. Translator.]

At 7 a.m. on September 8th (August 27th, old style) 1889, two fanatical Persian Shi'ites, Mash-hadi 'Alí Akbar and Mash-hadí Huseyn, threw themselves, dagger in hand, on a certain Hájí Muhammad Rizá of Isfahán, who was peaceably traversing one of the most frequented streets of 'Ishkábád, and inflicted on him 72 wounds, to which he succumbed. Hájí Muhammad Rizá was one of the most respected of the Bábís of 'Ishkábád. The crime was perpetrated with such audacity that neither the numerous witnesses of the occurrences, nor the constable who was on the spot could save the victim of this odious attack. The assassins yielded themselves up to the police without any resistance; they were placed in a cab and conveyed to the prison. During the transit they fell to licking up the blood which was dripping from their daggers. The examination, conducted with much energy by the military tribunal, gave as its result that Muhammad Rizá had fallen a victim to the religious bigotry of the Shi'ites. Fearful of Muhammad Rizá's influence, the

names three Bahá'ís as having particularly helped him in his studies of the religion: Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím-i-Ardibílí (Asadov), Mírzá Yusif-i-Rashtí and Ustád 'Alí-Akbar.[83] In his later studies, Tumanski came into contact with the greatest of the Bahá'í scholars, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl-i-Gulpaygání, and was thus in a position to obtain the most detailed and accurate information regarding the new religion. [83. Tumanski, 'Dva poslednikh', pp. 314-16]"

¹²⁶ This text is available at: <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/diglib/books/P-T/R/Rosen/VolVI.htm>

Shi'ites of 'Ishkábád, acting in accordance with the orders of Mullás who had come expressly for this purpose from Khurásán, resolved to cut short the Bábí propaganda by killing Hájí Muhammad Rizá. Knowing well, however, that the crime would not remain unpunished, they left it to chance to determine what persons should sacrifice themselves for the Shi'ite cause. Thus it was that the individuals named above became the assassins of Muhammad Rizá, who had never injured them in any way. The sentence of the tribunal was severe: 'Alí Akbar and Huseyn, as well as two of their confederates, were condemned to be hanged, but the penalty of death was commuted by His Majesty the Emperor to hard labor for life.

The sentence was hailed by the Bábís with an enthusiasm easy to understand. It was the first time since the existence of the sect, i.e., for nearly fifty years, that a crime committed on the person of an adherent of the new religion had been punished with all the rigour of the law. The impression produced on the chief of the sect, Behá [Bahá'u'lláh], appears to have been equally profound. The two *revelations* which we shall submit to the reader sufficiently prove this. They are also interesting from another point of view: they are almost the only Bábí documents of which we can understand all the meanings, all the allusions.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844-1944 Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, p. 297, notes: "In this account there is no mention of the fact that the Bahá'ís astonished the Russian authorities by interceding for the murderers and asking that the death penalty not be imposed. Tumanski, however, in an article[2] published at about the same time as Rosen's work, refers to an account from 'Ishqabad in the Journal *Novoye Vremya* which confirms this fact. Tumanski himself arrived in 'Ishqabad in June 1890, nine months after the event. [2. Tumanski, 'Dva poslednikh', p. 315]

Document 17

A Biography of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá

[Fádil Mazandarání offers a biography of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá which also includes a synthesis of various accounts about his martyrdom.¹²⁸ It is likely that Mazandarání prepared this account in the 1930s or '40s. Translator.]

Among the renowned martyrs of Isfahan is Hájí Muhammad-Ridá, who was a distinguished merchant. At the beginning of the disclosure of the Cause of the Abhá Beauty, he attained faith, sincerity, fortitude and perfection in teaching. His brothers, Áqá Mashhadí 'Alí and Áqá Muhammad-Taquí, became believers as well.

Uncontrollably and with great rapture, the Hájí would speak with associates and strangers about of the truth of the wondrous Cause and consequently gained fame as a Bábí and became a target of opposition and attacks. Therefore, he was compelled to leave for Sabzivar and remote regions of Khurasan, where he stayed for some time engaged in commerce. After a while, he returned to his native town with considerable capital and an expanded trade, and regained his residence. He resolved to teach [the Faith] to his kinsmen and family, and with a strong heart, deep-rooted faith, patience and fortitude, withstood the hostility of the foes. This grew to the point that his aforementioned brothers became concerned and anxious, and warned him. Time and again, difficulties, imprisonments, financial impediments, insults and humiliation were visited upon him.

In 1294 AH [1877], he was imprisoned with Mullá Kazim Tálkhúnychih'í, whose account was given in the previous volume under that year's entry. Eventually he regained liberty through the efforts of the Sultánu'sh-Shuhadá [the King of the Martyrs] and some other Bahá'ís.

¹²⁸ Fádil Mázandarání, *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 6, pp. 146-55, published at: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol3/tzh6/tzh6.htm>

However, none of these occurrences had instilled the slightest fear or caution in the Hájí. Nay, indeed they had propelled him to greater heights of enthusiasm and activity in promotion of the Cause.

In 1302 AH [1884], in a teaching gathering that he regularly held in his house on a specific day of the week, he introduced the wondrous Cause to two men who were related to the Governor Zillu's-Sultan and some of the clerics. They reported what they had heard to the Governor and the clergy, who commissioned a number of men to attack the Hájí's home [on the night of the fireside meeting] and to arrest him and any of the believers who might be present there. However, the Hájí learned of this plan and did not hold the planned meeting that night.

Several days later while passing through the street, the Hájí came upon Hájí Siyyid Hasan, the preacher. The preacher spoke harshly to him, "Why did you not greet me?" He responded, "According to Islamic custom, a more distinguished person on a mount must first greet a lesser person on foot." The exchange continued for several minutes. The preacher decided on [taking] revenge and [making] mischief and each day, from his pulpit, he spoke contemptuously of the Abhá Cause and the Hájí. The believers thought it best that the Hájí should secretly leave the city.

The next day, uproar and tumult commenced. The Governor's men searched for the Hájí and instructed the city's gatekeepers to seize him. However, the Hájí, in disguise, managed to exit the city without being molested. They seized, however, other believers: his brothers [namely, Áqá Mashhadí 'Alí and Áqá Muhammad-Taquí], Hájí 'Abdu'l-Husayn, Áqá 'Abdu'l-Hamíd, Áqá Muhammad-Báqir, and Áqá Mírzá Husayn, who was a son of Áqá Muhammad-Kázim 'Abá-Báf. They were severely beaten with sticks and smeared with a mixture of yogurt and charcoal-dust, and in such a state they were paraded in the bazaar and then compelled to leave the city. That night, however, they returned home, though some were forced to migrate to other towns.

In the course of his escape, Hájí Muhammad-Ridá endured great hardship. On foot, he fled from one mountain to the next. He has related the following incident:

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The Zillu's-Sultán had sent men after me in all directions, but they were unable to locate me. They took my brother to the Governor's building where he was harshly beaten with sticks in an attempt to force him to divulge where I was hiding. However, he did not [give in]. This news reached me and caused tremendous sadness and sorrow. I decided to return to the Governor's office and surrender.

On the way, I mentioned this to a grocer as we stood by his shop's entrance. Two of the Governor's farrashes arrived and asked the grocer about me, but did not recognize me even as I was standing there. The grocer did not betray me.

I left the shop and arrived at the Governor's office. In the hall, the Farrash-Báshí was training the farrashes in how to locate and identify me. He was commissioning each to search in a different direction. I heard my brother's screams from being battered by the sticks. I stood there and reflected on the situation. The thought came to me that perchance there is a divine wisdom in this. So I decided against surrendering myself and returned home.

I took my rifle, brought the horse out of the stable, mounted him and fled to the mountains. I spent forty days in the hills and survived by hunting.

I found someone at Sarabaran and sent him to my home inquiring if it was prudent to return. They advised that it was not possible for me to return, as the Governor's men and the foes were searching and seeking for me.¹²⁹

Also, it was heard and recorded from him [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá]:

I was addicted to opium. Regarding this matter, I asked the Abhá Presence [i.e. Bahá'u'lláh]. A Table was received in

¹²⁹ Mazandarání, *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 6, p. 148, offers this account in a third-person voice, but as it is attributed to Hájí Muhammad-Ridá, it is rendered in a first-person voice.

response, which contained the verse, “*It hath been forbidden you to smoke opium.*”¹³⁰ Later when the *Kitáb-i Aqdas* was disseminated, I saw that Book and noticed that it contained the aforementioned verse.

In obedience to this divine injunction, I renounced the use of opium. I became ill for three days and was unconscious in bed. My physicians insisted that I should gradually quit the opium, but I did not consider this an appropriate course. After three days I regained my well-being.¹³¹

From Isfahan he went to Yazd and spent some time with the Afnáns, where he recovered his health. Since it was the beginning of the development of the town of ‘Ishqabad, some believers were migrating and settling in that region. The Hájí entered into an agreement with the Afnáns and proceeded in that direction [‘Ishqabad] to supervise and collect rents on their properties.

From there [Yazd], he went to Baghdad and then to the Holy Land, where he was in the Abhá Presence for a while. He received instructions to return and settle in ‘Ishqabad, which he obeyed.

On the way back, he was in Istanbul for several months and then arrived in ‘Ishqabad, where he established his residence. He lived with Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar [Banná] Yazdí in Caravansary Hasht until Áqá Siyyid Ahmad Afnán arrived and entrusted the management of his properties to the Hájí.

Abiding by his old way, indeed even bolder, the Hájí continued to teach the Abhá Cause. He would always tell the friends that in the Abhá Presence he had implored the bounty of martyrdom. The first time he

¹³⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i Aqdas*, K190. This statement is the final verse of the Most Holy Book and two early manuscripts of this Book in the possession of the present translator do not have this verse, which suggests that it was a later addition by Bahá'u'lláh. It may well be that the first time that the injunction against the use of opium was revealed was in the Tablet mentioned by Hájí Muhammad-Ridá.

¹³¹ Mázandarání, *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 6, p. 149, offers this account in a third-person voice, but as it is attributed to Hájí Muhammad-Ridá, it is rendered in the first-person voice.

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had asked, [Bahá'u'lláh] had responded, “O honored Hájí, we have had many martyrs.” But the second time he had asked, Bahá'u'lláh had remained silent and the Hájí had understood this to be His consent. For this, he was exceedingly happy.

Because of his pleasing manners, he was greatly esteemed by all Russians, Armenians and Turks. However, an Iranian mullá [cleric] and his followers had great enmity towards him.

Five days prior to Muharram [23 August 1889], he asked Áqá Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl Gulpaygání to prepare a written will for him. In the beginning of this will the following was recorded at the Hájí's instructions, “In consideration of the fact that the time for the fulfillment of the glad-tidings of my martyrdom is nigh – and with the utmost rapture I await that joy – I hereby record my will.”

At the beginning of the month of Muharram, he offered a venue to the Iranian Shi'as to observe the ta'ziyah¹³² and contributed money towards that commemoration. However, in the course of their mourning, they plotted and schemed to murder him and other prominent Bahá'ís. They selected and enticed two Adharbayjani thugs, 'Alí Bábá and 'Alí-Akbar, who would have the primary role in committing this blood-shedding.

The day of 'Ashurá [10 Muharram, corresponding to 6 September 1889] arrived and, without fear, the Hájí joined the procession of mourners who were beating themselves with daggers and chains. Until that year, this event had been observed with great emotion by Iranians in 'Ishqabad, but after the martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá, the government completely banned this event, allowing the Shi'as to only gather in their takiyyih where they could observe the commemoration in a manner of their choosing – and the government would always position soldiers to keep this building under guard and to ensure that the mourning did not spill outside.

¹³² A form of Shi'a pageant that is the theatrical expression of religious passion. It is based on the Battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, and is performed annually during the first 10 days of the month of Muharram.

That day of ‘Ashurá passed without any incident. Before noon on the eleventh¹³³ day, the two aforementioned men were seated in a coffeehouse in the bazaar, armed and ready to carry out their charge. The Hájí was carrying several bottles of quinine¹³⁴ and proceeding through the bazaar on his way home. When he reached the coffeehouse, the men rushed out like bullets fired out of a pistol. They inflicted thirty-two fatal injuries, to the point that his abdomen and sides were lacerated wide open and his liver was exposed. No part of his body was without a deep wound. Covered in blood, that wronged one fell to the ground.

The two murderers had begun to flee when ‘Alí-Bayk Qadímoff, who was a policeman, seized them and with keen ingenuity managed to board them on a carriage. He took them to the police-station where they were imprisoned. Many soldiers were sent for security and to calm the city. However, thugs and hoodlums had surrounded the remains of the deceased, engaged in insulting and mischief-making, and utterly ignoring the police. At this time, Mashhadí ‘Alí-Haydar Shírvání, who later was inclined to the Cause, arrived. While the throng of onlookers had gathered and a group of distinguished Russian ladies were crying and sobbing over what had occurred, a physician arrived and examined the injuries. He counted thirty-four cuts on the body. [Mashhadí ‘Alí-Haydar Shírvání] admonished the thugs about the government’s punishment and dispersed them from the corpse.

A white sheet was spread over the body which, for several hours, continued to remain in the middle of the bazaar. Eventually, Siyyid Shírání, who had a long beard and was the chief of the Shi‘as, came and at the same time several Russian police arrived. He said “Even though the murdered man is a Bahá’í, he is a native of our country. Help me so we can remove him from the midst of the bazaar to a secure location.” Therefore, several well-intentioned Muslims gathered. At the same time, a group of ruffians surrounded the corpse to perpetrate heinous and unseemly acts. Áqá Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím Ardabílí and Áqá Mashhadí

¹³³ Hájí Muhammad-Ridá’s martyrdom took place on the 12 Muharram, corresponding to 8 September 1889.

¹³⁴ Ethyl carbonate of quinine.

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Muhammad-Qulí Urdúbádí, who were of the believers, also learned [of this martyrdom] and arrived.

The aforementioned Muhammad-Qulí [Urdúbádí] who was a brave and courageous young man, lifted the bloodied and glorious remains over his shoulder and proceeded to the shops owned by the Afnán which also was the residence of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá. On his way, he disregarded the insults, curses and insolence that the Shi‘a continued to heap upon them. They closed the doors to the mischief-makers, who had gathered in a large crowd and were throwing stones, though they were eventually dispersed by the police.

In the middle of night, the believers washed and shrouded the remains and placed them in a coffin. Karbalá’í Hájí Muhammad Sabzivári and his attendee, Hasp Khusraw-Kirví¹³⁵, placed [the body] in a carriage and conveyed it to a location three kilometers south of the city, near Husayniyih ‘Azízu’lláh, known as Áb Barzangí, where it was buried. All traces of burial were removed. For a while no one other than the aforementioned Hájí [Muhammad Sabzivári] knew of the grave’s location. Later a tombstone was placed over the burial spot.

The next day, not satisfied with what they had wrought, the foes became the authors of a greater mischief. Soon news was spread that twenty-four prominent Bahá’ís were to be killed. They [the Shi‘as] telegraphed the Shah who was on a European tour, “We have killed one of the Bábís and enemies of the Shah.”

Frightful rumors were circulating in the city. Nonetheless, the believers decided not to appeal to the Russian authorities, preferring to leave the foes to God. However, the enemies attacked the shops and trading offices of these people [Bahá’ís], and therefore, on the second day after the Hájí’s martyrdom, the believers were compelled to take a complaint to the home of Kamaroff, the Governor of that region.

He greeted them with affection and stated, “During these seven years of my residence in ‘Ishqabad, I have witnessed the refined manners and qualities of your people [Bahá’ís]. However, they [Shi‘as] claim that you have spoken contemptuously of the Imáms of their religion.” The believers proved and established that they respect the Imáms even more

¹³⁵ The present translator is uncertain that he has correctly read this name.

than any other [holy person] and that what had come to pass was only through prejudice and religious enmity.

At the Governor's behest, they then submitted their petition signed by nineteen believers requesting protection [for the Bahá'ís] and investigation of the incident. The Governor instructed the police chief, Naftanoff, to place armed guards around the Bahá'í neighborhood and shops, and to ensure that the city was enveloped in security and protection, so that the thugs would not escape.

Four of the mischief-makers were arrested and incarcerated. The believers were also summoned and questioned. It became known that three prominent Iranian merchants and one of the 'ulamá, who was a rawdih-khán, were the instigators of this sedition and had given the assassins money and the promise of profit on some real estate. Consequently, those four were arrested and imprisoned.

By seeing these occurrences, the Iranians became anxious and appealed to their leaders. Repeatedly they telegraphed and petitioned the 'ulamá in Iran, clerics in Iraq and the Shah.

However, Kamaroff asked the Emperor [Alexander III] to appoint a high-ranking military judge. Therefore, Khaschnewski, who was a deeply learned, perceptive, knowledgeable, and wise man, and also the chief of the military judiciary that in Russian is called the *Suda*, and who had a high position serving as a prominent Russian military officer, was appointed. He arrived with four other high-ranking judges. From all directions, wave after wave of people came to 'Ishqabad to observe the trial, and soon the streets and roads were filled with spectators. Guards and soldiers firmly surrounded the town and great fear overtook the city. The Shí'as, however, were confident of their supporters and with much pride would encounter the believers.

On the first day after the arrival of the judges, a court was formed where members of the court gathered, wearing special attire and carrying out special customs. They summoned witnesses from each religion and creed.

The Shí'as had greatly endeavored to enlist Zhirinovskii, who was 'Ishqabad's official lawyer, to accept the defense of their case. They had offered him four thousand manát, but he had rejected their request. He

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went to the Bahá'ís and stated, "I will agree to represent you for free." He expressed his sympathies and assurances.

Similarly, the Shí'as were confident in their situation to the point that they even readied sheep to sacrifice when [they thought that] the court had ruled in their favor by freeing their cleric and merchants.

In the court, their witnesses swore on the Qur'an about their innocence and having had no role in the murder. Other witnesses stated what they knew or had seen. The Bahá'í witnesses, who were Áqá Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím Ardabílí and Áqá Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl Gulpaygání, stated, "The Bahá'í Faith does not have a practice for swearing in [witnesses], and insists that one speaks and testifies naught but the truth."

When the witnesses had completed their testimonies, the public prosecutor rose and spoke in Russian for about three hours, proving the treachery and crime of the eight accused. The attorney for the Shí'as then spoke at length in their defense, but it bore no fruit.

Thereupon, the chief judge and the other four judges retired for consultation and returned after an hour and a half with their decision. They read to the court their verdict as such:

'Alí-Akbar and 'Alí-Bábá are to be hung. Mullá Ahmad Tájir Yazdí, Mashhadí Jalíl Khú'í, Mashhadí Samad Adharbayjání and Mullá Mihdí Tabrízí, the preacher and rawdih-khán who on the pulpit had cursed and insulted [the Bahá'ís] and issued a fatwa for their deaths, are to be banished for life to Siberia with hard labor and incarceration. Asadu'lláh and Nasru'lláh are to be banished to a nearby town for two and a half years [imprisonment].

The convicts were handed over to the attorney for the Bahá'ís. The criminals and convicts were charged a total of twenty-thousand manáts for expenses associated with the trial. The order was given that after three days, the ruling of the court should be carried out. During those three days, cannons were trained on the city of 'Ishqabad, and *soldats*, foot soldiers and cavalry filled all the roads and neighborhoods of the city.

This news reached the Shí'as in other regions. They rose to action in every manner they could. In Mashhad, for three days the bazaar and all the shops were closed and they telegraphed the Russian Consulate in Tehran. The Shah also lent his support, but all to no avail. The [Muslim] Persians in 'Ishqabad found themselves utterly incapable to change the course [of the decision]. Eventually they came to the Bahá'ís pleading and imploring, expressing remorse and regret, begging forgiveness for their misdeeds and beseeching aid and assistance. The friends accepted [their plea] and went before the Governor to intercede [on behalf of the prisoners].

He telegraphed the Emperor, and he in turn referred the matter to the Senate, which decided that it was best to accept the intercession of the Bahá'ís.

On the third day [after the trial], gallows were constructed. The two murderers were brought out and compelled to dig their own graves beneath the gallows while several thousand spectators, both mounted and on foot, gathered for the hanging. The murderers were made to stand on a stool, and mullás were readied to hear their confession of faith.¹³⁶

The public prosecutor read the Emperor's order, which proclaimed that the intercession of the Bahá'ís had been accepted and that the decreed punishments had been reduced: those convicted of murder were banished for life to Siberia, and the punishment of those originally sentenced to life-imprisonment was halved.

They immediately brought leather uniforms and the seven men put them on and, under guard, they were conveyed away. When they arrived in Badkubih, the Iranians pleaded and implored their Consulate and gave ten thousands manát for their release, but it was of no use. We wrote of the details of this incident in the previous volume under the entry for 1307 AH [1889] based on the account of Ustád 'Alí-Akbar Mi'már Yazdí (the martyr).¹³⁷

¹³⁶ In Islam, the last rites include a standard formula for the confession of faith.

¹³⁷ As noted in Document 10, *Tárikh Zubúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 5, cites a section of the narrative of Ustád 'Alí-Akbar Banná, which is rendered as Document 10.

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Regarding the remains of the martyred Hájí: as was mentioned above, he was buried outside the city in the middle of the first night by Karbalá'í Hájí Muhammad Sabzivári, Hasp Khusraw-Karví and several Russian soldiers. For some time, no one other than Karbalá'í Hájí Muhammad knew of the grave's location. After a while, in accordance with the Abhá's [Bahá'u'lláh's] instruction, a burial tomb was raised and protected by strong stones.

Not long thereafter, the opponents removed the stones and broke into the tomb. When they were about to remove the corpse, several Turkmen arrived which caused them to flee. The Turkmen reported the incident to the believers. Consequently, Karbalá'í Hájí Muhammad, Ustád 'Alí-Asghar Yazdí, Áqá Ghulám-Husayn Isfahání, Hájí Muhammad-Husayn Isfahání, Hájí Abú-Tálib Hamadání, Áqá Ridá Yazdí, and several other [Bahá'ís] went and excavated the coffin. They dug a new grave three meters deep, and with stones made a wall completely surrounding the chamber, and then placed the coffin within that chamber. Then they covered the coffin with a copious quantity of rocks and limestone, filling [the grave] to the brim. Moreover, they mounted a considerable number of granite stones over the grave to ensure that it was completely fortified and that the foes could no longer break into the tomb.

The blood-soaked clothing of the martyr [Hájí Muhammad-Ridá] was removed at the time of the washing and shrouding of the remains and was preserved by some of the Bahá'ís residing in the city of 'Ishqabad as a precious memento and a source of blessing, and remains protected to the present time.

A great many Tablets were revealed in his honor. A brother and a daughter survived him after the martyrdom.

Document 18

Recollections of ‘Ishqabad

[In 1882, Hájí Muhammad-Kázim Isfahání and his son, Áqá Muhammad-Ridá Arbáb, were the first Bahá’ís to settle in ‘Ishqabad. Some time later, Arbáb formed a family and his son, Kazem Kazemzadeh, went on to become a successful lawyer (often taking on the defense of Bahá’ís of Iran, such as, serving as one of the Bahá’í lawyers defending members of the Spiritual Assembly of Yazd in 1953. On 6 March 1977, Mr. Kazemzadeh shared his recollections with Los Angeles Study Class, and a summary was reported at: http://www.b-net.msu.edu/~bahai/docs/vol2/lastudy/LA%20Vol%202/LA2_06_2.gif. The editor of notes published by the Los Angeles Study Class states:

In the early 1900’s, at the height of its power and influence, ‘Ishqabad was the most complete Bahá’í community in the world. Within a few years, its influence was shattered, its institutions dissolved, its believers imprisoned and, in some cases, executed and its existence all but snuffed out. The Bahá’í Study Class of Los Angeles heard the details of this transformation from a man who saw much of it happen, Mr. Kazem Kazemzadeh, now living in Santa Monica, California. Here is what he told us at our class of March 6.¹³⁸

The stenograph notes of this presentation are kept at the archives of Los Angeles Bahá’í community. Translator.]

The area of ‘Ishqabad was seized from Persia by Russia in 1881. Before the Russian conquest, ‘Ishqabad was little more than a tent city of some 500 dwellers on a windy plain. Czarist authorities decided to make it the administrative center of Turkistan (now known as the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic). They pushed through a railroad and ‘Ishqabad

¹³⁸ This summary was later augmented with two sets of editorial corrections, which have been incorporated into the text. Also, transliterations have been brought in conformity with the present monograph.

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became an important administrative center in Southern Russia. Almost overnight, ‘Ishqabad, a dusty, sleepy backwater, was transformed into a boom town. Around 1884, a relative of the Báb named Siyyid Muhsin Afnán¹³⁹, a relative of the Báb, visited ‘Ishqabad and recognized its potential. Not far from Iran’s northern frontier, it seemed an ideal place for a Bahá’í community. Siyyid Muhsin traveled to ‘Akká and conferred with Bahá’u’lláh about the possibility of sending Bahá’í pioneers to ‘Ishqabad. Bahá’u’lláh agreed and wrote a Tablet to Persia, urging Bahá’ís to emigrate to ‘Ishqabad.¹⁴⁰ About 200-300 believers, from all parts of Persia, did so. It was not hard to recruit volunteers. Iran was in the throes of one of its periodic persecutions of Bahá’ís. Bahá’ís began moving to ‘Ishqabad, buying land, and beginning new lives as merchants and tradesmen. As Mr. Kazemzadeh, who was born in ‘Ishqabad, put it “in comparison to Persia, it was paradise.” By 1890, there were about 1000 Bahá’ís living in the ‘Ishqabad area.

They were not the only emigrants to this new land. Other Persians – Muslims – also moved into ‘Ishqabad, often bringing their fanatical hatred of the Bahá’ís along with their baggage. In September, 1889, [Hájí] Muhammad-Ridá was murdered in the town’s bazaar in broad daylight by two hired assassins. The czarist government moved quickly. About a dozen Muslims were arrested as participants or accomplices to the crime. The Czarist government sent in a military commission from St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) to conduct the trial.

The trial itself had some curious aspects. The Muslims arrested readily admitted having killed Muhammad-Ridá. They claimed he had insulted the Imams, which provoked the wrath of the deeply religious Islamic community.¹⁴¹ But underlying their statements was a confidence

¹³⁹ Original 6 March notes incorrectly gave the name as Muhammad-Ridá, but this was corrected in 11 April 1977 Los Angeles Study notes.

¹⁴⁰ Los Angeles Study notes of 11 April 1977 offers the correction that it was Siyyid Muhsin Afnán, and not Bahá’u’lláh, who wrote to Iran urging migration to ‘Ishqabad, although the writing of this communication was approved by Bahá’u’lláh.

¹⁴¹ In 19 March 1977 Los Angeles Study notes, further amplification has been offered: “During the course of the trial, the Muslims accused of the murder justified their actions on the grounds that [Hájí] Muhammad-Ridá was a Bahá’í and had insulted the Imams, testifying on the assumption that they would not be convicted

borne of experience. In Persia, one could kill Bahá'ís with virtual impunity and not fear punishment. Indeed, the Muslims were so certain of acquittal that they began laying plans for a general massacre of the Bahá'ís once the legal formalities were over. Meanwhile, the Bahá'ís feared that, once again, they would be the victims of a religious pogrom.

This time would be different. The judge in the trial ordered his courtroom segregated to separate the Bahá'ís from the Muslims. That constituted the first official recognition that the Bahá'í Faith was not an Islamic sect. As the prosecutor presented his case, he asked each of the defendants if they had murdered or conspired to kill Muhammad-Ridá. They all testified openly that they did. Summarizing his case to the court, the prosecutor urged that the two assassins be hanged and the others involved banished to Siberia for various prison terms. The Muslims were stunned. The judge agreed to that sentence and ordered it carried out.

Upon learning of the verdict and sentence, the Persian and Turkish governments attempted to intervene on behalf of the Muslim defendants, but the czarist government rejected their pleas. Swallowing their pride, leaders of the Muslim community approached the Bahá'ís and asked them to intercede and seek lesser sentences. The Bahá'ís agreed and asked the Russian governor of 'Ishqabad to reduce the punishment. The governor passed the request along to his superiors in Tashkent. On the day the two assassins were to die on the gallows erected in front of the local high school, government authorities announced that, because of the intercession of the Bahá'ís, the two murderers would not be hung. Instead they, along with the other Muslims involved in Muhammad-Ridá's slaying were banished to Siberia.

The trial and its result established for the first time ever that the Bahá'ís had a right to exist free from persecution of the Muslims. By successfully persuading the authorities to reduce the punishments for the Muslims, the Bahá'í community gained an enormous amount of prestige.

The end of the trial signaled the beginning of the flowering of the Bahá'í community in 'Ishqabad. Developing land they had purchased earlier, the Bahá'ís began to build elementary schools, one for boys and

of killing an infidel. There was never any doubt about who committed the act; the only question at issue was the criminality of it.”

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one for girls, as was the custom in those days, a Bahá'í library, a hostel for visitors, an auditorium, and, in 1902 they undertook the construction of the first Bahá'í House of Worship in the world. As evidence of the growing prestige of the Faith, the Czar sent General Krupatkin¹⁴², the governor-general of Turkistan, to represent the House of Romanov at the laying of the foundation stone. Under 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions, a Bahá'í named Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí, a cousin of the Báb, was directed to personally oversee the erection of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. Muhammad-Taquí dedicated his entire fortune to the project. The Bahá'ís also established their own cemetery in 'Ishqabad.¹⁴³

At this same time, they created their own journal, called "Sun of the East" and written in Persian. The Local Assembly had between 12 and 16 members who were elected for terms of about 5 years. Things were going so well that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had to warn the 'Ishqabad believers not to make too much progress too swiftly lest it provoke problems for the Bahá'ís in Persia. Meanwhile, construction of the House of Worship progressed slowly. It was expensive and funding was always a problem as was buying all the necessary building materials. In the end, it required about 19 years to complete the work; the Temple was not completed until 1922.

Although it was not immediately apparent, the bubble burst with the Russian Revolution of 1917. At first it seemed as if the Bolshevik takeover might work to the advantage of the Bahá'ís. Though the czarist government had been tolerant of Bahá'í activities, it was cruel and despotic. The Bolsheviks promised an end to the erratic tyranny of the czarist regime. And it seemed as if even greater freedoms were within reach. Up until the revolution, the Baha'is were forbidden [under the

¹⁴² Los Angeles Study notes of 19 March 1977 suggest that an alternative spelling is Kuropotkin.

¹⁴³ Los Angeles Study notes of 11 April 1977 adds: "Volkov, the Russian architect of the House of Worship in 'Ishqabad, (also spelled Volkoff), was given a Bahá'í funeral when he died. 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent a Tablet praising the architect and saying that by building a great edifice for Bahá'í on earth, he had constructed himself a palace in heaven."

law] to teach among the native Russian population.¹⁴⁴ They could, and did, convert Muslims, and import members of their own Faith. It was illegal, under czarist law, for anyone born into an Eastern Orthodox family, to convert to any non-Christian religion. After the first Revolution broke out in February, 1917, the czarist rules vanished, and Bahá'ís began teaching among Russians, Armenian and Caucasian peoples. The Bolsheviks tolerated this and did not interfere. 'Ishqabad was thousands of miles away from the center of the revolution in northern Russia.

When the fighting ended in victory for the Bolsheviks, the Bahá'ís sent a delegation of believers to Moscow, the site chosen as the new capitol of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The Bahá'ís assured the members of the new government they could be trusted: loyalty to government was a cardinal Bahá'í principal, they explained. The Bolsheviks, busy consolidating their powers, listened and made no objections. During the four year period from 1918 to 1922, Bahá'ís held open public meetings with as many as 400 people in attendance to proclaim the Faith. Local Assemblies flourished as far north as Moscow and Leningrad. The Bolsheviks, knowing that Bahá'ís were routinely persecuted in Persia, hoped to use the Faith as the cutting edge for their revolutionary ideals, spreading these to India. Things began to go sour when the Bahá'ís refused to allow themselves to be exploited as carriers of Bolshevik ideology.

As the relations between the still-growing Bahá'í community in Russia and the newly installed Communist started cooling, the Bahá'ís sent a new delegation to Moscow. Mr. Kazemzadeh was a member of that party. In a meeting with a government official, the Communist bureaucrat candidly told the Bahá'ís he was not at all worried about supplanting the influence of the Christians and Muslims in Russia. And then he added, "Frankly, you are more dangerous than the others."

¹⁴⁴ Los Angeles Study notes of 19 March 1977 provides the following explanation: "Before its conquest in the 1880s, 'Ishqabad was a Persian village. When the Russians took over, many Russians and others moved in and built a large city. So, technically, there was no *native* Russian population in the city of 'Ishqabad.

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In 1922, the official gazette of the new communist government published an article in which it accused the Bahá'ís of turning the thoughts of the Russian youth away from Bolshevik ideals and toward their own religion. The Bahá'í efforts would have to be stopped, the article stated. Bahá'í meetings in Moscow and Leningrad were broken up by the police and believers arrested. In 'Ishqabad, the recently finished House of Worship was seized as state property and the Bahá'ís were forced to sign a contract to rent it for their own use. The Bahá'í community of 'Ishqabad, now numbering about 2,000 strong, began to feel the full weight of government repression.

During 1927 and 1928, the Russian Bahá'ís in Moscow were arrested and imprisoned. There followed sporadic incidents of more arrests, banishments to Siberia (reviving a czarist practice) and, in the case of some Persian Bahá'ís exile back to their native land.

In 1933, the Bahá'ís of 'Ishqabad were forced to sign a new, five-year lease of the House of Worship. They were allowed to meet there but, public teaching of the Faith was forbidden. Publication of "Sun of the East" was barred and the printing press which produced it was seized by police authorities.

In 1937, with the onset of the Stalinist purges, things grew much worse. Thousands of Russians were rounded up and shipped off to forced labor camps in the polar regions of Siberia. In 'Ishqabad, 280 Bahá'ís were arrested and most were put on trains heading for Siberia. The lucky ones were expelled back to Persia. A handful of Bahá'ís, accused of being spies for England (a favorite denunciatory tactic during Stalinist times) were executed.

Josef Stalin died in 1953, after a massive stroke. And although the systematic oppression eased, the Bahá'í community of 'Ishqabad was broken. In 1938, the House of Worship was taken over by Soviet authorities, who converted it into an art gallery. Ten years later it was severely damaged in an earthquake and had to be demolished as a structural hazard. A few Bahá'ís, released from concentration camps in Siberia, trickled back to 'Ishqabad. And, although the Communist authorities allowed them to have meetings, public teaching remained banned, nor was it permitted to re-form the Local Assembly.

Today, there still exists the remnant of a Bahá'í community in Ishqabad, but it is cut off from contact with the Bahá'í world at large. Under Soviet rule, the Bahá'ís were never persecuted as subversive to the state, but were oppressed for the reason that they presented too strong and too valid a competition for the atheistic ideals of the Communist cause.

Document 19

“The Rise of the Bahá’í Community of ‘Ishqábád” – An Extract

[The following is the first half of “The Rise of the Bahá’í Community of ‘Ishqábád”, Anthony A. Lee, Bahá’í Studies, vol. 5, pp. 1-14, January 1979, Canadian Association for Studies on the Bahá’í Faith. Since it contains a number of oral histories which provide insights not otherwise available in the written accounts cited earlier, an extract pertaining to the martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá is included with the kind permission of the author. While oral histories relied upon in this account add to known details, a careful reader will note that the challenge with oral traditions is that the passage of time may have eroded some of the specifics from memories. Unless otherwise indicated, all footnotes are by Dr. Lee. Comments in square-brackets are by the present translator. For the sake of completeness it should also be noted that Dr. Lee has preserved manuscript notes of interviews with ‘Alí-Akbar Furutan, ‘Abbas Parvini, Kazem Kazemzadeh, and Tarazollah Namdar. Translator.]

The history of the Bahá’í Faith in Russia has been strangely neglected by the Bahá’ís of the West. While many accounts of Bahá’í history in Írán or under Ottoman rule, in Europe and or America are available in English, references to the history of the once large and prosperous Russian Bahá’í community are few and scattered. Yet, some of the most signal events in Bahá’í history took place in Southern Russia. It was here that the first official recognition was extended to the Bahá’í Faith by any government. It was here that the first Mashriqu’l-Adhkár was raised at the command of Bahá’u’lláh Himself. It was here that, at one time, perhaps five percent of the Bahá’ís of the world found refuge and developed the most complete Bahá’í community which has ever existed.

This paper draws upon the few published materials available in English and some Persian sources.¹⁴⁵ However, it relies most heavily on oral interviews conducted with Bahá'ís who lived in Russia. The paper sketches the history of the Bahá'í Faith in 'Ishqábád in Russian Turkistan from the establishment of the Bahá'í community there until the Russian Revolution.

The history of the Bahá'í Faith in 'Ishqábád falls actually into four major periods. The first extends from the arrival of the first Bahá'ís in that city to the recognition of the Faith by the Russian government and the social separation of the Bahá'í community from the Muslim community. The second period begins at this point and lasts until the Russian revolution. It witnessed the development of a strong, independent, prosperous and closely-knit religious community which became a major force in the city. The third period, from the revolution to the eruption of the sever persecution against the Faith, can be regarded as the “Golden Age” of the Bahá'ís of 'Ishqábád. And the final period saw the disruption of Bahá'í life, the arrest and deportation of hundreds of believers, the flight of many more, and the reduction of the Bahá'í community to a mere remnant. This paper limits itself to a sketch of the first two of these periods.

The Establishment of the Russian Bahá'í Community

The Russian Bahá'í community was established during the lifetime of Bahá'u'lláh. A large Bahá'í community emerged in 'Ishqábád during this time and a handful of believers established themselves in Samarqand and Bukhárá as a result of the efforts and activities of “the erudite Fádil-i-Qá'íní and the learned apologist Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl”.¹⁴⁶ 'Ishqábád was, however, the first city in Russia to be opened to the Faith and it became an important center of Bahá'í activities almost immediately.

¹⁴⁵ I am grateful to Mr. Mehrdad Amanat for his kind assistance in translating the Persian sources for me. [Lee].

¹⁴⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944), p. 195. [Lee]

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In the early 1880's, Russian administration was established in an area of Turkistán which had previously been a part of the Persian empire. 'Ishqábád became the centre of Russian administration for the area. The city lies on a plain just a few miles from the Elburz Mountains which form a border between Russian and Persia. Tradition has it that before the Russians established their control, 'Ishqábád was a village of about "500 tent dwellers".¹⁴⁷ However, the Russians began the construction of a new city there, built on a European design, with long, broad streets laid out on a grid plan. The new city attracted many immigrants from Russia and from Írán. It lay on the path of the Transcaspian Railway, which the Russians later constructed, and so became a center of trade, as well as an important administrative centre.

The first Bahá'ís to settle in Ishqábád were refugees from the town of Sabzivár in Khurásán.¹⁴⁸ These Bahá'ís had earlier fled to Sabzivár from as far away as Yazd and Isfáhán, to escape from persecutions in these areas. Some of them were merchants. These men were generally known as Bahá'ís and so had enemies in the town among the Muslims.

In about 1884 or 1885, persecutions broke out against the Bahá'ís of Sabzivár. The homes of some of the Bahá'ís were viciously attacked and looted. Three or four Bahá'í men were arrested, taken before the local Muslim clergy, pronounced as apostates to Islám, and sentenced to death. The Bahá'ís of Sabzivár appealed to the capital of the province, Mashhad, and asked the governor for assistance. An order came that those arrested were to be transported to Mashhad and imprisoned there. Some enemies of the faith made plans to murder the prisoners in Mashhad. But after lengthy negotiations, some Bahá'ís of the city were able to satisfy the governor and secure the release of their Bahá'í brothers.¹⁴⁹

These Bahá'ís were now unable to return to Sabzivár and they could not remain in Mashhad. They fled to nearby 'Ishqábád. Their

¹⁴⁷ Kazemzadeh, Kazem: (Interviews March 6, 1977, April 4, 1977, May 14, 1977, and January 18, 1978) Interview March 6, 1977. [Lee]

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, April 4, 1977. Parvini, 'Abbás: (Interviews March 23, 1977 and April 1, 1977.) Interview March 23, 1977. [Lee]

¹⁴⁹ Parvini. Interview March 23, 1977. [Lee]

families joined them in Russia sometime later. Among the first Bahá'ís to reach 'Ishqábád were 'Abdu'r-Rasúl of Yazd¹⁵⁰ and Aqá Muhammad-Ridá-i-Arbáb-i-Isfáhání.¹⁵¹

Even before the first Bahá'ís came to live in 'Ishqábád, Bahá'ís had become involved in the life of the city. Hájí Mírzá Hasan, the Great Afnán, passed through 'Ishqábád in 1881 or 1882 on his way to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká. While in Russia, he decided to buy property in 'Ishqábád. Later, he wrote to his son, Siyyid Ahmad, who was in Sabzivár and asked for him to arrange for the purchase of some properties there. Mírzá Hasan realized, no doubt, that the new Russian city offered excellent opportunities for investment. Soon other Bahá'ís had followed his lead and invested in property there.¹⁵²

The migration of large numbers of Bahá'ís to 'Ishqábád, however, was the result of the efforts of Siyyid Muhsin-i-Afnán. In about 1884, this Afnán also traveled through Russia from Írán on his way to 'Akká where he made a pilgrimage to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He may have actually passed through 'Ishqábád on his journey. But, in any case, while in Russia he learned of the opportunities offered by the new city which was being constructed. He brought this news to 'Akká.¹⁵³

While on pilgrimage, Siyyid Muhsin suggested to Bahá'u'lláh that Bahá'ís might immigrate to this city and stressed the new, strong Russian authority there which could offer safety and protection to the friends, the availability of work, the abundance of land, etc. Since this was a period of severe persecution for Bahá'ís of Írán, the response to Siyyid Muhsin's suggestion was almost immediate. Within a short time, four or five hundred Bahá'ís had settled in 'Ishqábád from different parts of Írán, but especially from Yazd and from Khurásán. By 1890, the number of Bahá'ís had reached about 1,000.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Later known as 'Abdu'l-Rasúl Alioff. [Lee]

¹⁵¹ I had the honour of interviewing the son of 'Abdu'r-Rasúl, Mr. 'Abbás Parvini, and the son of Áqá Muhammad-Ridá-i-Arbáb-i-Isfáhání, Mr. Kazem Kazemzadeh. [Lee]

¹⁵² Banná, Ustád 'Alí-Akbar, *Tárikh-i-'Ishqábòd*, photocopied manuscript. [Lee]

¹⁵³ Kazemzadeh, Interview March 6, 1977. [Lee]

¹⁵⁴ *idem*. Furútan, 'Alí-Akbar: Written memoir prepared for Dr. David Ruhe; xeroxed., n.d. [Lee]

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During these very early days of the Bahá'í Faith in 'Ishqábád, Shoghi Effendi writes in *God Passes By* that the community was able to "... establish a Bahá'í cemetery and to purchase property and erect thereon structures that were to prove the precursors of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the Bahá'í world."¹⁵⁵ It was Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí-i-Afnán, the Vakílu'd-Dawlih (known also as Afnán-i-A'zam), who arranged for the purchase of a great deal of land in the city. He informed Bahá'u'lláh of this fact and was instructed to use a part of this land for the site of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.¹⁵⁶

The land itself had a curious background. It belonged to an Armenian by the name of A'zam. This was an unusual name for a Christian since A'zam is an Arabic word meaning "Most Great" and would usually be thought of as a Muslim name. In any case, the land was well known among the people as "A'zam's Land". These were the properties which were to become the site of the first Bahá'í House of Worship.¹⁵⁷ The Bahá'ís continued to refer to the area as "Zamín-i-A'zam" (The Most Great Land) after its purchase.¹⁵⁸

Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí constructed a meeting hall and a travelers' hostel on this land at first. The meeting hall was regarded as a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár by the early Bahá'ís of 'Ishqábád since, at the time, any place of prayer for Bahá'ís was called by this name.¹⁵⁹ Here the believers were able to hold meetings and practice their Faith with some degree of freedom.

Bahá'ís were able to establish themselves easily in 'Ishqábád with money and skills which they brought with them from Írán. Naturally, a great deal of construction was in progress in the new city. Since many of the Bahá'ís were masons and construction workers, especially the Yazdís, they could easily find work. Moreover, land was cheap and Bahá'ís were

¹⁵⁵ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 195. [Lee]

¹⁵⁶ Taherzadeh, Adib, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, (London: George Ronald, 1974), p. 199. [Lee]

¹⁵⁷ Kazemzadeh, Interview April 4, 1977. [Lee]

¹⁵⁸ Or, A'zam's land. Since Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí was called Afnán-i-A'zam, this title also referred to his ownership. [Lee]

¹⁵⁹ Kazemzadeh, Interview April 4, 1977. [Lee]

able to purchase it and build their own homes.¹⁶⁰ They also found it easy to become successful in trade and became importers – principally of Chinese green tea.¹⁶¹

Bahá'ís were not the only Persians attracted to 'Ishqábád. The development of the new city drew large numbers of other people from Írán who left their country for a variety of reasons. Among them were a number of *lutís* (hirelings or ruffians) who were forced to flee Írán for political reasons and who attached themselves to the Shí'ih clergy in the city. Not surprising, many of the Persian Muslims carried their prejudice and animosity against Bahá'ís with them to Russia and resented the rising influence of the Bahá'í community.

'Ishqábád was no haven of tolerance and freedom for Bahá'ís at this time. Bahá'ís were still under a great deal of pressure and were obliged to be cautious about revealing their religious identity. One Bahá'í, Mullá 'Alí, arrived in 'Ishqábád in about 1888. He had come from Mashhad in hopes of escaping the prejudice and persecution against Bahá'ís which existed there. He recalled later that after his arrival he regretted his move to 'Ishqábád since he found that conditions were little different there from what they had been in Mashhad.¹⁶²

However, there were no violent incidents in the city and the government was not hostile. Bahá'ís and Muslims lived together in the city with little social distinction between them. Bahá'ís went about their daily lives in a Muslim context.

It is interesting to note how rapidly 'Ishqábád developed into an important Bahá'í center. The combination of relative freedom and economic opportunity attracted large numbers of believers. In July of 1889, Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl, one of the foremost Bahá'í scholars, came to the city and assumed a position of leadership in the community. Other Bahá'í scholars also appear to have come to 'Ishqábád in its early days,¹⁶³ and the city may have developed into a kind of intellectual centre for the

¹⁶⁰ *idem.* [Lee]

¹⁶¹ Furútan notes. [Lee]

¹⁶² Banná, *Tárikh-i-'Ishqábád.* [Lee]

¹⁶³ Míhrabkhání, Rúhu'lláh, *Sharh-i-Ahval-i-Jináb-i-Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl Gulpáyigání,* (Tíhrán: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 131 B.E.) [Lee]

Faith. Abu'l-Fadl wanted to begin the publication of a Bahá'í magazine there as early as 1890, but was unable to raise the necessary funds from among the believers.

The Martyrdom of Muhammad-Ridá

It was not long before the large number, and rising prestige and prosperity of the Bahá'ís in 'Ishqábád attracted the notice of some leaders of the Shí'ih community, and their prejudice and envy caught flame. Their plottings eventually led to the martyrdom of a prominent believer, the official recognition of the Bahá'í community, and the complete separation of Bahá'ís from the social life of their Muslim countrymen in the city.

It was Hájí Muhammad-Ridáy-i-Ishfáhání who fell victim to the hatred of the enemies of the Faith. He was a powerful and well-known person in 'Ishqábád since he acted as the agent and manager of Siyyid Ahmad-i-Afnán, whose father, the Great Afnán, had placed him in charge of his extensive properties in the city. Hájí Muhammad-Ridá was, therefore, an important Bahá'í and was known among Muslims as the "Imám Ridá of the Bábís".¹⁶⁴

Muhammad-Ridá was always very bold about identifying himself as a Bahá'í in 'Ishqábád. He was not careful about his speech and refused to dissemble his beliefs. Before coming to 'Ishqábád he had gone on pilgrimage and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in the Holy Land. There he had begged to be allowed to become a martyr for the Faith. At first, Bahá'u'lláh refused. Then Muhammad-Ridá related to friends that he took this silence as a sign of acceptance and was quite happy.¹⁶⁵

During his pilgrimage he also asked where he should go and Bahá'u'lláh suggested that he proceed to 'Ishqábád. He went there and was later appointed by Siyyid Ahmad as his representative.¹⁶⁶

Muhammad-Ridá's murder was the result of the conspiracy of five Shí'ih Muslims: Mashhadí Jalíl-i-Tabrízí, Mashhadí Samad-i-Tabrízí,

¹⁶⁴ *idem.* [Lee]

¹⁶⁵ Banná, *Tárikh-i-'Ishqábád.* [Lee]

¹⁶⁶ *idem.* [Lee]

Mullá Ahmad Tájir-i-Yazdí, Mihdí Tájir-i-Káshání, and Mullá Mihdí Rodih [Rawdih] Khán-i-Tabrízí. It seems that they began their plottings a full year before the murder actually took place.¹⁶⁷ Apparently they intended to initiate a general persecution of Bahá'ís of 'Ishqábád. Their precise motives are unclear, but their religious fanaticism may have been reinforced by the anticipation of economic advantage. They were certainly encouraged by the new wave of Bahá'í persecution which was sweeping Írán.¹⁶⁸

About seventy days before the martyrdom, six Tablets, addressed to various believers in 'Ishqábád, arrived from Bahá'u'lláh. Their themes were all similar and they puzzled the friends very much. The Tablets all enjoined patience on the believers and called them to resignation to the Will of God.¹⁶⁹

Muhammad-Ridá received one of these Tablets. In it, Bahá'u'lláh alludes to the martyrdom of one of the believers. He praises God that Muhammad-Ridá has been appointed as a servant of the Cause and testifies that the affairs of the world will not keep him from the Cause. He declares that God will recompense all deeds done on earth. Bahá'u'lláh then states that some incident has occurred in 'Ishqábád and asks God to give His servant patience. He asks the blessings of God on Muhammad-Ridá.¹⁷⁰

Muhammad-Ridá openly asserted to his companions that the Tablets must refer to his own martyrdom. He insists that Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl, who had recently arrived in 'Ishqábád in the company of Siyyid Ahmad, should prepare his will and testament. He emphasized to Abu'l-Fadl that time was short and there could be no delay in writing the document.¹⁷¹

On the twelfth day of Muharram (the Muslim month of mourning for the imams), in September 1889, at about 9:00 a.m.,¹⁷² the five

¹⁶⁷ Mihrabkhání, *Sharh-i-Ahval*. [Lee]

¹⁶⁸ cf. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 197-203. [Lee]

¹⁶⁹ Banná, *Tárikh-i-'Ishqábád*. [Lee]

¹⁷⁰ *idem*. [Lee]

¹⁷¹ Mihrabkhání, *Sharh-i-Ahval*. [Lee]

¹⁷² *idem*. [Lee]

conspirators “instigated two ruffians to assault the seventy-year old Hájí Muhammad-Ridáy-i-Isfáhání, whom, in broad day in the midst of the bazaar, they stabbed in no less than thirty-two places, exposing his liver, lacerating his stomach and tearing open his breast.”¹⁷³

The murder took place in the bazaar just outside of a tea-house which stood opposite to some shops which Muhammad-Ridá managed for the Afnán. A crowd of about 500 Muslims witnessed the deed and clamoured their approval. The two *lutí* murderers, Husayn-i-Tabrízí and ‘Alí-Akbar-i-Tabrízí (known as ‘Alí Bábá), were immediately arrested, but a great disturbance was raised in the city. Muhammad-Ridá’s body lay exposed in the bazaar until late afternoon since no one dared approach it in the midst of disorder. Finally, two Bahá’ís enlisted the aid of a prominent Muslim friend, and braved a stone-throwing mob to carry the body to the safety of one of the caravanserais of Siyyid Ahmad where Muhammad-Ridá had lived. The burial was arranged with great secrecy under cover of night.¹⁷⁴

The next day, disturbances in the city continued. The Shí’íhs told the Russian authorities that Muhammad-Ridá had publicly cursed the holy imams and that his assassins were deeply religious men who could abide his insults no longer.¹⁷⁵ They had willingly surrendered to the authorities for their crime. It was claimed that this was purely a religious matter, of no concern to Christians, and that, further, since all those involved were Persian citizens, the Russian government should not become involved.¹⁷⁶

The Bahá’í community was in grave danger. Bands of *lutís* roamed the bazaar, bent on the murder of other prominent Bahá’ís. Though they were hesitant about approaching the authorities, on the evening of the day after the murder, a group of Bahá’í men led by Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl and Mírzá ‘Abdu’l-Karím-i-Tájir-i-Ardíbílí went to the home of the governor

¹⁷³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 212. [Lee]

¹⁷⁴ Mihrabkhání, *Sharh-i-Ahval*. [Lee]

¹⁷⁵ Balyuzi, H.M., *‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1971), p. 109. [Lee]

¹⁷⁶ Mihrabkhání, *Sharh-i-Ahval*. [Lee]

to ask for protection.¹⁷⁷ Abu'l-Fadl presented the case for the Bahá'ís. He argued successfully that the charges made against the martyred Muhammad-Ridá were false, that Bahá'ís were law-abiding people, that they believed in all of the prophets of God and wished to live in harmony with the followers of all religions. He pointed out that Bahá'ís also believed in and revered the Shí'ih imams and so would not speak disparagingly of them.¹⁷⁸

The governor, General Komaroff, was convinced. He gave orders to put down the disturbances in the city and offered government protection to the Bahá'ís. The next day, three more people were arrested for the murder and the disorders were ended. Investigations were conducted and more people were arrested. Eventually, nine persons were brought to trail, including four of the prominent conspirators.¹⁷⁹

The arrest of so many prominent Shí'ih's struck fear into the hearts of the enemies of the Bahá'í Faith in 'Ishqábád. All those who had any role in the conspiracy to kill Muhammad-Ridá fled to Írán. Even some people who had only spoken in favour of the murder were afraid that they would be arrested and left the country. Some sixty or seventy Muslims in all felt it wise to return to Írán. From Tihrán, Tabríz and Mashhad, these persons made representations to the 'ulamá in an effort to influence the trail in 'Ishqábád. The fact that so many chose to flee when it became clear that the conspirators would be brought to justice gives some idea of the scope of the anti-Bahá'í plotting which had taken place.

General Komaroff was well disposed toward the Bahá'ís after the initial meeting with Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl. He reported the incident to the Tsar and a military commission was sent from St. Petersburg to conduct the trail of the conspirators. This was considered a sign of favour to the Bahá'ís since it ensured a speedy court-martial and thus meant that the possibility of Muslims influencing the trial through bribes and other means was minimized. No less than 150 persons in 'Ishqábád received

¹⁷⁷ *idem.* [Lee]

¹⁷⁸ Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 109. [Lee]

¹⁷⁹ Míhrabkhání, *Sharh-i-Ahval*. Midhí Tájir-i-Kashání was able to flee to Írán. [Lee]

subpoenas to testify before the commission. The whole city was agitated by the case. It was the main topic of conversation everywhere.¹⁸⁰

The trial began on November 6, 1890 [1889], and was completed on November 9 of that year. Translations into Turkish and Persian were provided since these were the principal languages of those involved. The proceedings generally started in the morning and continued late into the night on each day of the trial.¹⁸¹

The judge who conducted the trial required that the various religious communities sit in separate places in the courtroom. The Bahá'í Faith was afforded full recognition as an independent religion and the Bahá'ís were seated apart from the Muslims who were present. *This was the first formal recognition extended by any government to the Bahá'í community.* It was also a day of separation between Bahá'ís and Muslims. As the believers took their seats in a special section of the room, many Muslims were amazed to discover that their friends were not seated with them, but among the Bahá'ís. From this point forward, the Bahá'ís of 'Ishqábád lived as a distinct social community.¹⁸²

An interesting problem arose at the start of the trial. The ecclesiastical leaders of each religious community were called upon to place their followers under oath. Each religion had established customs to accomplish this. The turn of the Bahá'ís came, and they were asked to present their *mujtabid* (clergyman) to swear in the believers. Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl spoke on behalf of the Bahá'ís and explained that the Bahá'í Faith had no established method of placing believers under oath, for such a thing was not covered in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. He offered to follow any procedure which the judges might require. It was finally agreed that the Bahá'ís would make a covenant with the court to respect its authority and to speak the truth.¹⁸³

On the last day of the trial, the crowds that packed the courtroom became so great that the judges ordered all spectators out. Large numbers of people waited outside, while the prosecution and defense

¹⁸⁰ *idem.* [Lee]

¹⁸¹ *idem.* [Lee]

¹⁸² Kazemzadeh, Interview March 6, 1977. [Lee]

¹⁸³ Mihrabkhání, *Sharh-i-Ahval.* [Lee]

made their final arguments. The judges then retired and deliberated for two hours.¹⁸⁴

During this time, rumors circulated among the Muslim crowds that the accused would all be found innocent and set free.¹⁸⁵ This was a cause of great rejoicing. A samovar was prepared and three sheep were brought for sacrifice and feasting after the victory. Some people began to openly curse the Bahá'ís in the streets. The believers observed these events and were very much afraid. They knew that an acquittal would open the door to a general massacre.¹⁸⁶

Suddenly, the Bahá'ís outside could see that the samovar was removed and the sheep led away. The verdict had been delivered. The two ruffians who had carried out the murder of Muhammad-Ridá were sentenced to death. Four others involved in the plot were exiled to Siberia – one of these for life and the rest for fifteen years. One defendant was found guilty of a lesser charge and was to serve sixteen months in prison and then be deported to Írán. Two of the accused were found to be innocent.¹⁸⁷

The Bahá'ís of the city were astonished to learn of the verdicts. Many would not believe the news until they heard the story from the

¹⁸⁴ *idem.* [Lee]

¹⁸⁵ Mr. Kazemzadeh related the story (Interview March 6, 1977), which he heard from his father, of how these rumors developed. Apparently, the prosecutor, during his remarks on the last day of trial, turned to one of the defendants and asked, “Why did you kill Muhammad-Ridá?” The defendant answered, “He was a Bábí, and so we killed him.” He apparently did not realize the seriousness of this statement since he was only familiar with conditions in Írán, where Bahá'ís could be killed with impunity. The prosecutor said nothing and sat down.

The Muslims were delighted by the prosecutor's reaction. Since he did not protest the answer given, they believed that he was satisfied with it and had no objection. Someone went out to inform the Muslims gathered outside of the good news.

The prosecutor asked the same question of all the defendants and received the same answer. He still made no objection. So, the Muslims were certain that the accused would be set free. But later the prosecutor was able to ask for conviction on the basis of the defendants' own testimony. [Lee]

¹⁸⁶ Kazemzadeh, Interview March 6, 1977. Mihrabkhání, *Sharb-i-Ahval.* [Lee]

¹⁸⁷ Mihrabkhání, *Sharb-i-Ahval.* [Lee]

Muslims themselves. They could not believe that the government had provided them with the full protection of the law.¹⁸⁸ It was the first time in the history of the Faith that anyone had ever been brought to justice for persecuting Bahá'ís.

When the Muslims realized that all of their efforts to influence the outcome of the trial had failed, they went to the Bahá'ís themselves for help. A delegation presented itself to Áqá Muhammad-Ridá-i-Arbáb-i-Isfáhání and asked that the Bahá'ís approach the authorities with a plea for clemency so that the harsh sentences might be reduced. The Bahá'ís agreed to do this. The same group of Bahá'ís who had first gone to the governor's house to ask for protection now returned to ask for leniency for their persecutors.¹⁸⁹

General Komaroff [Kamaroff] was surprised and impressed by this display of magnanimity on the part of the Bahá'í community. However, he would not be swayed and would promise the Bahá'ís nothing. He pointed out that the Muslims had planned a general massacre of Bahá'ís in the city and that the judgment was a fair one.¹⁹⁰

On the day of the execution, after the gallows had been prepared, and just minutes before the murderers were to be hanged, it was announced that their sentences had been commuted to fifteen years banishment to Siberia because of the intercession of the Bahá'ís. One of the convicts protested this change, saying that he did not want to receive any mercy from the hands of the Bahá'ís.¹⁹¹

Bahá'u'lláh was pleased that the Bahá'ís of 'Ishqábád would plead for mercy for their enemies and He praised this act very much. In *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, He writes:

Likewise, ponder thou upon the martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá in the City of Love ('Ishqábád). The tyrants of the earth have subjected that wronged one to such trials as have caused many foreigners to weep and lament for, as reported and ascertained, no less than thirty-two

¹⁸⁸ *idem.* [Lee]

¹⁸⁹ *idem.* Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 110. [Lee]

¹⁹⁰ Kazemzadeh, Interview March 6, 1977. Mihrabkhání, *Sharh-i-Ahval.* [Lee]

¹⁹¹ *idem.* [Lee]

wounds were inflicted upon his blessed body. Yet none of the faithful transgressed My commandment, nor raised his hand in resistance. Come what might, they refused to allow their own inclinations to supersede that which the Book hath decreed, though a considerable number of this people have resided, and still reside, in that city.

... For the victims of oppression to intercede in favor of their enemies is, in the estimation of rulers, a princely deed. Some must have certainly heard that this oppressed people have, in that city (‘Ishqábád), pleaded with the Governor on behalf of their murderers, and asked for the mitigation of their sentence. Take, then, good heed, ye who are men of insight!¹⁹²

The verdict of the trial of the murderers of Muhammad-Ridá opened a new era in the history of the Bahá’ís in ‘Ishqábád. Russia became the only country in the world to extend full recognition to the Bahá’í Faith and offer its followers complete protection from persecution. The city became a refuge for Bahá’ís seeking freedom and opportunity outside of Írán, and the Bahá’í community grew rapidly in size and prestige.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), pp. 77-78. [Lee]

¹⁹³ The second half of the article – not included in this monograph – discusses the next decade of growth of the Bahá’í Faith in ‘Ishqabad, including the rise of the first Bahá’í Temple.

Appendix 1

Biography of the Principle Eyewitness-Authors

Of the historical documents presented in this monograph, twelve of them are eyewitness accounts by Ustád ‘Alí Akbar Banná Yazdí and Mírza Abú’l-Fadl, who both lived in ‘Ishqabad at the time of the incident of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá’s martyrdom and were closely aware of all the details, particularly the events subsequent to this martyrdom. In order for the reader to become better acquainted with these authors, a brief biography of each is offered in this appendix.

Ustád ‘Alí Akbar Banná Yazdí

Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar Banná was born and raised in Yazd and worked as a master-builder for the city’s affluent, particularly the Governor. After becoming a Bahá’í, he was particularly enthusiastic about teaching the new Faith. In 1295 AH [1878], the Bahá’í teacher Nabíl Akbar was traveling through Yazd and this roused the interest of a fanatical cleric, who used the occasion to issue a fatwá condemning Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar to death. Wishing to avoid unpleasant disturbances, the Governor advised both prominent Bahá’ís to leave the city. They went to Isfahan, stayed a few days in the home of Mírzá Muhammad-Hasan and Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn, later immortalized by the titles “the King of Martyrs” and “the Beloved of Martyrs”, respectively. Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar then went to Tehran while Nabíl Akbar remained in Isfahan.

Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar stayed for nine months in the capital, succeeding in introducing a number of individuals to the Faith. He then returned to Yazd. On his return, his enemies began agitating the authorities against him. The ‘ulamá again issued a fatwá for his death and gave it to the

Governor for execution. But his qualities and skills had endeared him to the Governor, who extended his protection to him. However, Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar’s life was still in danger, because having failed to put him to death officially, his enemies plotted assiduously to assassinate him. For several years he was the target of many intrigues, but continued to teach the Faith.

As his autobiography indicates, many incidents took place against him during these years in Yazd. Eventually, after consultation with the Afnáns, it was decided that Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar should go to ‘Ishqabad. He arrived there in the year 1301 AH [1883].

As noted earlier, a few members of the Afnán family had taken considerable interest in ‘Ishqabad. Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí Afnán had purchased some properties in that city on the advice of his younger brother Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí, the Vakílu’d-Dawlih, who served as the Russian Consul in Yazd.

For about two years Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar was engaged in building shops, a caravanserai and houses for the Afnáns. He then received permission from Bahá’u’lláh to go on pilgrimage to ‘Akká in 1303 AH [1885]. It appears that it was at this time that the renowned *Lawh Tajalliyat* was revealed in his honor.¹⁹⁴ In this Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh addresses him in the following words:

We testify that thou hast set thy face towards God and traveled far until thou didst attain His presence and gavest ear unto the Voice of this Wronged One, Who hath been cast into prison through the misdeeds of those who have disbelieved in the signs and testimonies of God and have denied this heavenly grace through which the whole world hath been made to shine. Blessed be thy face, for it hath turned unto Him, and thine ear, for it hath heard His Voice, and thy tongue, for it hath celebrated the praise of God, the Lord of lords. We pray God to graciously aid thee to become a standard for the promotion of His

¹⁹⁴ For a translation see, Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 47-54.

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*Cause and to enable thee to draw nigh unto Him at all times and under all conditions.*¹⁹⁵

On his return to 'Ishqabad, Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí had purchased a parcel of land from a certain Armenian by the name of A'zam, and construction of a two-storey building on the corner of the land was commenced by Ustád 'Alí Akbar. At Bahá'u'lláh's direction, this land was also set aside as a site for the future Mashriqu'l-Adhkar.

By then the Bahá'í community of 'Ishqabad was growing in influence and prestige. It was not much later that in September 1889, the martyrdom of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá, who lived with Ustád 'Alí Akbar, took place.

Ustád 'Alí-Akbar went on pilgrimage once more in 1311 AH [1893] during the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It was on this occasion that under the direction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who conceived the plan for a nine-sided building, he designed the main features of the House of Worship. In his last Tablet to Ustád 'Alí-Akbar, 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms that this design was drawn when Ustád was in the Holy Land, and asks him to send a few copies to one of the Hands of the Cause in Iran. It was, however, a Russian architect who planned and executed the details of the construction; this began in 1902 when the foundation stone was laid in a ceremony in the presence of the Czar's representative General Krupatkin, the Governor-General of Turkistan.

Ustád 'Alí-Akbar took a leading role in this construction. However, only six months had passed from the laying of the foundation stone when he received a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá urging him to go on a visit to Yazd in the spring. He advised him not to hesitate or delay his departure.

After twenty years of absence, he arrived in Yazd in the spring of 1903. His arrival, however, once again created a stir among the fanatical population who circulated rumors that he had returned to build a Bahá'í Temple in that city. The people who lived in his neighborhood were particularly angry, because over the years he had succeeded in converting many individuals to the Faith.

¹⁹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 48.

In the meantime, one of the Hands of the Cause, Ibn Abhar, was dispatched by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Yazd. Large gatherings were held where Ibn Abhar spoke and encouraged the believers.

Shortly thereafter, a massive pogrom of the Bahá’í communities of that region erupted. This was the severest persecution of Bahá’ís until that date. Although it lasted only a few days, every Bahá’í found in the region was put to death in the most heinous manner. Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar was among those martyred. The first fatal shot was fired by one of his close relatives. He fell to the ground and shouted, “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá!” Then crowds of people attacked, smashed his head with a pickaxe, tied a rope to his feet and dragged his corpse through the city where hundreds of people hurled stones at it and inflicted blows upon it. His disfigured body was then lowered into a deep unused well on the outskirts of the city in which the bodies of other martyrs had been deposited.

Although Ustád ‘Alí Akbar only had an elementary education, he is the author of a remarkably cogent book on proofs, which remains unpublished. Also around 1901 or 1902, he wrote a detailed account of the early days of the Faith in ‘Ishqabad, portions of which are cited in this monograph. His achievements in the teaching field were most remarkable. He notes in his autobiography that 300 individuals had come into the Faith as a direct result of his teaching efforts.

Twenty-seven Tablets were revealed in his honor by Bahá’u’lláh – several of which are cited in this study – and many more by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Mírzá Abú’l-Fadl

Mírzá Abú’l-Fadl Gulpáygání (1844-1914) was the preeminent Iranian Bahá’í scholar and apologist of his generation, who also contributed considerably to the advance of the Faith in Turkmenistan, Lebanon, Egypt, and the United States, and was designated as one of the Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh by Shoghi Effendi.

A trained seminarian, he became a Bahá’í after a series of encounters with various promoters of the Faith. He soon faced persecution, and after sustaining several years of harassment in Iran,

which included a period of imprisonment, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl arrived in 'Ishqabad from Mashhad on 15 July 1889. A short time later, on 8 September of the same year, the assassination of Hájí Muhammad-Ridá Isfahání occurred. Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl immediately helped the Bahá'í community to respond to this event and served as the learned spokesman and the *de facto* lawyer for the Bahá'ís at the trial of the assassins and their accomplices. This event established the independence of the Bahá'í Faith from Islam both for the Russian government and for the people of 'Ishqabad, and was referred to in a number of Tablets by Bahá'u'lláh. Moreover, in several Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh expressed His strong approval of the manner in which Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl had conducted himself and led the Bahá'í community of that town. For instance, the following is recorded in a Tablet addressed to Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím Ardabílí, a leading Bahá'í of 'Ishqabad, revealed shortly after these events:

*It is Our wish and desire to conclude this Tablet by remembering Abú'l-Fadl, upon him be My glory and loving providence. My Tongue and Pen bear witness to his purity, his service, his perseverance, and his presence at this very moment before the gate of the mercy of God, the Lord of the worlds. Glory be upon him and upon those who have attained unto justice and equity and observed what hast been prescribed unto them as bidden by Him who is the Ordainer, the All-Wise.*¹⁹⁶

As noted earlier, during the entire three months of investigation and trial, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl kept Bahá'u'lláh informed of the events through letters that he wrote to various Bahá'ís in 'Akká. One of the Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in honor of the great Mírzá at that time which touches on a number of critical themes is the following:

*In the Name of the Incomparable, the Peerless God!
The highest praise is due to them who have immersed themselves in the ocean of detachment—they who in the darkness of these times, before the cruelty of men, while plunged in sorrows and afflicted with anguish*

¹⁹⁶ Provisional translation graciously contributed by Omid Ghaemmaghani.

and distress, were not hindered from turning unto the Sea of Oneness and setting their faces on the everlasting Sun. The veils of names have not failed to keep them back from the Possessor of all things. They have put names aside and set their faces to the Ocean of true understanding. Verily, they are those servants who have quaffed My sealed Wine in My Name, the Self-Subsisting. In their estimation, all else but God hath been and wilt remain like unto a handful of dust. Names have not deprived them from Him Who is their Lord. With such constancy did they arise and proclaim His Cause that the limbs of them who deny and repudiate the Bayán have trembled! Glorified be His power, magnified be His might! There is no other god but Him!

O thou who hast fixed thine eyes upon My horizon! O thou who hast upraised the banner of My triumph by virtue of thy wisdom and utterance! I testify that thou hast desired the betterment of the world under all conditions and counseled its peoples to be righteous and to prosper and advance. Great is thy blessedness and the blessedness of them who have loved thee for My Name's sake and hearkened to thy utterance in the service of My Cause. We beseech God—exalted and glorified be He—to reinforce and assist thee with the hosts of the seen and the unseen. Verily, He is the Friend of the doers of good. His mercy hath surpassed all things and His loving-kindness encompassed all. Blessed is every fair-minded person that hath judged His Cause fairly. Well is it with every just one who hath spoken equitably concerning that which He hath manifested.

O Abú'l-Fadl! My glory, My loving-kindness and My mercy be upon thee! That which hath transpired in that land is evident and clear. Glorified be the One Who hath protected His chosen ones from sedition, iniquity, and corrupt inclinations and commanded them to be righteous and God-fearing. Praised be God that they were killed in His path yet did not kill. At all times and under all conditions, enjoin the friends to uphold peace and certitude, to work for the betterment of the affairs of men and the refinement of souls, and to observe trustworthiness, godliness, chastity and purity. Verily, We were with thee in the Land of Há' and Mím.¹⁹⁷ Thy deeds in that land achieved

¹⁹⁷ Hamadan.

the glory of My acceptance and the honor of My approval, likewise that which was befitting for thee to perform in the Land of Yá' in the service of the Cause of thy Lord, the Revealer, the Compassionate, the Faithful.

*Say: {Give a hearing ear, O people, to that which I, in truth, say unto you. The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath ever regarded, and will continue to regard, the hearts of men as His own, His exclusive possession. All else, whether pertaining to land or sea, whether riches or glory, He hath bequeathed unto the Kings and rulers of the earth. From the beginning that hath no beginning the ensign proclaiming the words "He doeth whatsoever He willeth" hath been unfurled in all its splendor before His Manifestation. What mankind needeth in this day is obedience unto them that are in authority, and a faithful adherence to the cord of wisdom. The instruments which are essential to the immediate protection, the security and assurance of the human race have been entrusted to the hands, and lie in the grasp, of the governors of human society. This is the wish of God and His decree.}*¹⁹⁸

I swear by the Sun of Truth that hath appeared and shed its radiance from the horizon of the heaven of the Most Great Prison! One soul from among the government officials is in the sight of God more advanced, more distinguished and more compassionate than a whole company of religious leaders and divines, inasmuch as by day and night, this one soul is commissioned to perform a service that is the cause of the peace and well-being of men, whereas that company of divines is day and night engaged in sedition, repudiation, defamation, killing, and plunder. In Iran, for some time now, His Majesty the Sháh—may God, glorified and exalted be He, assist him—hath protected and continueth to protect these whom the world hath wronged from the evil designs of those men. And yet, they continue to agitate. Each day, some new upheaval is stirred up and some new commotion doth appear.

{We cherish the hope that one of the kings of the earth will, for the sake of God, arise for the triumph of this wronged, this oppressed

¹⁹⁸ This passage has been translated by Shoghi Effendi and appears in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 206-7.

*people. Such a king will be eternally extolled and glorified. God hath prescribed unto this people the duty of aiding whosoever will aid them, of serving his best interests, and of demonstrating to him their abiding loyalty. They who follow Me must strive, under all circumstances, to promote the welfare of whosoever will arise for the triumph of My Cause, and must at all times prove their devotion and fidelity unto him. Happy is the man that hearkeneth and observeth My counsel. Woe unto him that faileth to fulfill My wish.}*¹⁹⁹

*Forget such things, O Pen, and place Thy trust wholly in God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Make then, mention, of him who hath ascended unto the Most Sublime Companion with the crimson countenance and been set aflame with the fire of love in the City of love. Say: The first breeze hath been wafted from the musk of hidden meanings. The Divine Utterance be upon thee, O thou who hast offered up thy spirit in the path of the All-Merciful. I testify that thou hast cast away all vain imaginings and directed thy steps by the light of certitude towards the Dawning-Place of Divine Inspiration. The ecstasy of His Call hath attracted thee to the horizon of the Supreme in these times wherein the fire of enmity hath been set ablaze in the hearts of them who would cast away the fear of God and deny the proof of God, the Lord of all being and the Possessor of the Throne on high and of earth below. I beseech Thee, O Thou the Desire of the world, by this blood which hath been shed in the path of Thy love, to forgive those servants of Thine who have fulfilled their pledge to Thy Covenant and Testament and have confessed their belief in that which hath been sent down in Thy perspicuous Book. Praised be Thou, O Lord of the worlds!*²⁰⁰

After these events, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl remained for a time in that city and tried to persuade the Bahá'ís to use their freedom there to undertake various activities, especially the publication of a Bahá'í journal.

¹⁹⁹ This passage has been translated by Shoghi Effendi and appears in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 207.

²⁰⁰ Provisional translation graciously contributed by Omid Ghaemmaghami.

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Unfortunately, like most other great men, he was thinking ahead of the rest of the community and it was not until 1922-23 that this was realized.

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl's aim in going to Turkmenistan had been to take the Bahá'í Faith to more remote regions and, as such, after eight months in 'Ishqabad, he moved to Samarqand in February 1890.

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