

Letters to Bahá'í princesses

Tablets revealed in honour of the women of Ibn-i Asdaq's household

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Introduction

This article discusses some of the major themes of the tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the women of Ibn-i Asdaq's household: his wife, Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájiyyih (ca. 1861-1923); his mother-in-law, Shahansháh Baygum (ca. 1835-1918); his sister-in-law, Ághá Sháhzádiḥ (b. ca. 1850); and his four daughters, Laqá'iyiyih (b. 1886), Huvyya (b. ca. 1888), Rúḥá (b. ca. 1894) and Ṭalí'ih. (b. ca. 1896).¹ Before discussing the circumstances of the conversion of these women to the Bahá'í religion, brief biographies for Ibn-i Aşdaq and his father, Mullá Şádiq Khurásání, will be presented to help locate these women within the 19th/early 20th Century Iranian Bahá'í community.

Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad, Ibn-i Aşdaq (ca. 1850-1928) was the son of the early Bábí-Bahá'í teacher, Mullá Şádiq Muqaddas Khurásání. As a child (ca. 1861), Ibn-i Aşdaq visited Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad with his father. Soon after returning to Iran, father and son were imprisoned in Tehran, where they remained for more than two years and both underwent intermittent torture.² Whilst in prison, Ibn-i Aşdaq fell ill and

was treated by Ḥakím Masíḥ, who, through contact with Mullá Şádiq, became one of the first Iranian Jews to accept the new religion. As a young man, Ibn-i Aşdaq once again entered the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, this time in 'Akká. Ibn-i Aşdaq wrote to Bahá'u'lláh expressing his desire to be martyred for his faith. Bahá'u'lláh replied, explaining that martyrdom does not necessarily mean the shedding of blood and, in 1882, Bahá'u'lláh conferred the station of martyrdom upon Ibn-i Aşdaq by giving him the title "Shahíd, Ibn-i Shahíd" ("Martyr, Son of Martyr") in recognition of his tireless efforts to promote and propagate the Bahá'í religion in Iran. Ibn-i Aşdaq often used this title when corresponding with other believers. In 1887, Bahá'u'lláh named Ibn-i Aşdaq as one of the first four Hands of the Cause of God (*Ayádí-yi Amr'ulláh*). Along with the other three Hands appointed by Bahá'u'lláh, Ibn-i Aşdaq served on the first Consultative Assembly of Tehran, which was founded around 1897. Following the passing of Bahá'u'lláh in May 1892, Ibn-i Aşdaq, along with the other Hands, travelled throughout Iran to help gain the community's firm alle-

giance to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Through his wife's family, Ibn-i Aşdaq was able to represent the Bahá'í Faith to leading members of Iranian society, something he was encouraged to do by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Ibn-i Aşdaq travelled extensively in India, Burma, the Caucasus, Transoxiana and parts of the Arab world to deepen new believers and help them liaise with the local authorities. In 1919 he travelled to Holland to deliver 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet to the Central Organisation for a Durable Peace at the Hague. Ibn-i Aşdaq visited the Holy Land on several occasions as a pilgrim. His last stay in Haifa lasted over two years and ended shortly before the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in November 1921. Following the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Ibn-i Aşdaq devoted himself to Shoghi Effendi, who subsequently named him as one of the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh. Ibn-i Aşdaq passed away in 1928 and was buried in Tehran.³

Mullá Şádiq Khurásání, Ism'ulláhu'l-Aşdaq (d. 1889), son of Mírzá Ismá'íl Khurásání, was born into a Mashhadí clerical family some time in the early 19th Century. Mullá Şádiq became known in Khurásán by the honorific title "Muqaddas" ("holy") on account of his exceptional piety. Mullá Şádiq moved to Iraq in the late 1830s and studied under the Shaykhí leader, Sayyid Kázim Rashtí, in Karbalá, rising to the rank of *mujtahid* shortly before the passing of his teacher in 1843-44. Mullá Şádiq met the Báb on several occasions in Iraq and even offered to supervise the Báb's religious studies, although the Báb's uncle decided instead to send his young nephew back to

Shiraz. Mullá Şádiq met Mullá Hısayn Bushrú'í in Isfahan (who was on his way to Tehran, where he met Bahá'u'lláh) in the early summer of 1844. Mullá Şádiq independently recognised the Báb through a vision and immediately left for Shiraz. By the time he arrived in Shiraz, the Báb had already left for Mecca. Mullá Şádiq became an *imám jum'a* (leader of congregational prayers) at one of the important mosques of the city, and when, in 1845, he complied with the order of the Báb to add a phrase to the call to prayer, he, together with Quddús, was mobbed by the congregation, arrested and interrogated by the governor. Following their interrogation, Mullá Şádiq and Quddús together became the first Bábís to be tortured publicly in Iran for their faith. Subsequently, Mullá Şádiq was expelled from Shiraz, from whence he travelled to Yazd and Kirman where he converted some clerics and relatives of the Báb to the new religion and debated with the Shaykhís. Mullá Şádiq was one of the few Bábís who fought at Shaykh Ṭabarsí in Mázandarán to survive the ordeal. He was spared execution on account of his erudition and learning. As mentioned above, he visited Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad around 1861 and recognised Him as "He Whom God shall make manifest" (*man yuzhiru-hu Alláh*). Following his return to Iran, Mullá Şádiq was imprisoned for twenty-eight months, only to be released by Náşiru'd-Dín Sháh. After his release, Mullá Şádiq spent a number of days at the home of Muḥammad-Valí Mírzá (d. 1864), fourth son of Fath-'Alí Sháh, where he debated

with notable clerics of Tehran, including Mullá 'Alí Kaní and Sayyid Şádiq Sanglají. Náşiru'd-Dín Sháh's mother, the Mahd-i 'Ulyá', attended some of these debates with other women of the court, listening to the proceedings from behind a curtain. She was so impressed by Mullá Şádiq that she offered him fine gifts, as did the Shah himself. Mullá Şádiq graciously declined these gifts and returned to Khurásán, where he continued to promote the Bábí (and later Bahá'í) religion. Until his death at Hamadan in 1889, Mullá Şádiq remained faithful to Bahá'u'lláh, visiting Him again in 'Akká towards the end of his life. Bahá'u'lláh gave Mullá Şádiq the honorific title "Ism'ulláhu'l-Aşdaq" ("the Name of God, the Most Truthful") and, after his death, was named as a Hand of the Cause by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.⁴

The first of the women of Ibn-i Aşdaq's wife's family to declare was his sister-in-law, Ághá Sháhzádi. She was the eldest child of Mírzá Muḥammad Háshim Qáđi Ṭabátabá'í and Shahansháh Baygum, the eldest child of Mírzá Mas'úd Anşarí Garmrúdí and Fath-'Alí Sháh's seventh daughter, Sháh Baygum, Ḍiyá'u's-Salṭani. ⁵ Ághá Sháhzádi became Bahá'í through her husband, Sayyid 'Abd'ulláh, Intizámu's-Salṭani, who himself had been converted to the new religion by the family doctor, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khán, Munajjim-báshí. ⁶ Ághá Sháhzádi appears to have become a Bahá'í some time in the late 1870s, soon followed by her mother and younger sister, 'Udhrá Khánum, Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájjiyih. ⁷ At some point after

her conversion, Bahá'u'lláh gave Ághá Sháhzádi the honorific name of "Badí'ih" ("wondrous" or "unique"). ⁸ The first part of her given name, "Ághá", is the archaic female equivalent of the common male title "Áqá" ("mister"). When addressing Ághá Sháhzádi, however, Bahá'u'lláh raises her to the level of an honorary man by spelling the first part of her name with a "q", rather than "gh". In a heavily patriarchal society such as that of Qájár Iran, this small detail would have seemed a great honour. ⁹

Some time soon after her conversion to the Bahá'í religion, Shahansháh Baygum and her youngest daughter 'Udhrá Khánum, went on pilgrimage to Mecca with other Qájár women, which is presumably how 'Udhrá Khánum gained her honorific title by which both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed her, "Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájjiyih". ¹⁰ Shortly before or after the Ḥajj, Shahansháh Baygum married her second husband, Mírzá Ma'súm Khán Anşarí, Muntakhabu'd-Dawlih, a Muslim relative of her first husband, who held a high government position in Mashhad, Khurásán. Shahansháh Baygum moved from Tehran to Mashhad with her new husband and her youngest, unmarried daughter Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájjiyih some time around 1880. Before leaving for Khurásán, Shahansháh Baygum had been put in touch with Ibn-i Aşdaq, the outstanding Bahá'í teacher (*muballigh*) of Khurásán, through Munajjim-báshí who had converted Ághá Sháhzádi's husband to the Bahá'í religion. Soon after arriving in Mashhad, Ibn-i Aşdaq began to visit Shahansháh Baygum and Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájjiy-

ih on a regular basis to deepen them in their new faith. Ibn-i Aşdaq, who had been married previously to Mullá Ĥusayn Bushrú’í’s niece (who was now deceased), soon proposed to Ǫiyá’u’l-Ĥájiyyih. The couple were secretly married and left Mashhad for Tehran, where they settled near Khiyábán-i Amíriyyih, a new avenue in the west of the capital in a house prepared for them by Intizámu’s-Salṭanih and Ághá Sháhzádiĥ, some time around 1882.¹¹

Ibn-i Aşdaq and Ǫiyá’u’l-Ĥájiyyih had four children (all daughters): Laqá’iyyih, Huviyyih, Rúḥá and Ṭalí’ih. The eldest, Laqá’iyyih (b. 1886), married Hidáyatu’lláh Mudabbir (Mudír-i Kháqán), the son of one of the early Bahá’ís of Rasht, Mudabbiru’l-Mamálik. Huviyyih (b. ca. 1888) married ‘Ináyatu’lláh Farzár, the son of Áqá Muĥammad Karím ‘Attár and Ibn-i Aşdaq’s sister, Shamsu’l-Jahán. Rúḥá (b. ca. 1894) married Músá Khudádúst, a Bahá’í doctor from Shiraz, and Ṭalí’ih (b. ca. 1896) married Luṭfu’l-láh Munajjim, the grandson of Munajjim-báshí who had originally converted Intizámu’s-Salṭanih to the Bahá’í religion.

In 1913-14 Ibn-i Aşdaq, Ǫiyá’u’l-Ĥájiyyih and their three younger daughters spent seventy-two days in the Holy Land as guests of the family of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Laqá’iyyih, who had several young children, could not join them and so stayed in Rasht where she also cared for Huviyyih’s infant child so that she might benefit from the bounty of pilgrimage.¹² Rúḥá’s account of this pilgrimage (*Yik ‘Umr, Yik Kháṭirih*) is replete with evi-

dence of how close the family of Ibn-i Aşdaq was to that of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, with Whom they corresponded regularly. Shahansháh Baygum (ca. 1835-1919) was too frail to join the family on pilgrimage and stayed behind in Tehran. When they returned, Ibn-i Aşdaq’s family brought with them a *táj* (white headdress) which had belonged to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had sent as a gift for Shahansháh Baygum.

The Tablets

To date, I have managed to locate thirty-nine tablets revealed in honour of the women of Ibn-i Aşdaq’s household and his wife’s female relatives, most of which have neither been published nor translated. According to my figures, Bahá’u’lláh revealed at least ten tablets (five of which include separate Arabic prayers) to Ághá Sháhzádiĥ; five tablets to Ǫiyá’u’l-Ĥájiyyih (two of which contain separate Arabic prayers); two tablets to Laqá’iyyih and a further two tablets to Huviyyih (giving a total of nineteen tablets). Abdu’l-Bahá revealed at least twenty tablets to these women; two for Ághá Sháhzádiĥ (one being an Arabic tablet of visitation following her passing); ten for Ǫiyá’u’l-Ĥájiyyih; two for Shahansháh Baygum (one an Arabic tablet of visitation in her honour); one for Laqá’iyyih; two for Huviyyih; one for Rúḥá; one for Huviyyih, Rúḥá and Ṭalí’ih together, one for Ǫiyá’u’l-Ĥájiyyih, Shahansháh Baygum and Ǫiyá’u’l-Ĥájiyyih’s four daughters and at least two for Ǫiyá’u’l-Ĥájiyyih and her daugh-

ters.¹³

As one might expect, Bahá'u'lláh revealed proportionally more Arabic tablets to these women than 'Abdu'l-Bahá, although both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá also revealed Persian tablets to them. Ághá Sháhzádiḥ received more tablets in Arabic than her sister, Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájjiyyih, which may suggest that Ághá Sháhzádiḥ had a better working knowledge of Arabic than her younger sister, which may have been the case.¹⁴ It seems likely, however, given that their maternal grandmother, Princess Ḍiyá'u's-Salṭaniḥ, was an accomplished poet and calligrapher who wrote a number of Qur'áns in her own hand, that both sisters would have been able to read and understand Arabic well. According to Rúḥá, her maternal grandmother, Shahansháh Baygum, (Ḍiyá'u's-Salṭaniḥ's eldest child) taught the daughters of Ibn-i Aşdaq Arabic.¹⁵ Ibn-i Aşdaq had an excellent command of Arabic, as had his father, Mullá Şádiq, who had been a prominent Shaykhí *mujtahid* and prayer leader before recognising the Báb. There can be little doubt, therefore, that Ibn-i Aşdaq himself would have also trained his daughters in reading Arabic tablets.¹⁶

Persian was, however, without question, more readily understandable than Arabic, and tablets revealed in Persian could be circulated more readily among the Bahá'í women of Tehran for study and recitation than those revealed in Arabic.¹⁷ Arabic was, however, regarded as the liturgical language par excellence

by the majority of 19th-century Iranians, and so short Arabic prayers may well have been learnt by heart to be recited either privately or at organised gatherings. Here are two Arabic prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the first for Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, the second for Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájjiyyih:

Praise be to You, O God my God, that You have illumined my heart with the light of Your knowledge and have assisted me to recognise the Horizon of Your verses and the Dawning-place of your utterances. I ask You to enable me to remain steadfast in Your love and in Your cause. O my Lord! You see Your handmaiden clinging to the cord of Your bounty and holding fast to the hem of the cloak of Your mercy. I ask You not to deprive her of that which You have decreed for Your leaves and handmaidens who have circled round Your mighty throne and lofty station. Praise be to You at all times, O God of the world and Desire of the nations and Beloved of the hearts of the knowers.

provisional translation
from Arabic¹⁸

Might is Yours, O You in whose grasp are the reins of power! Strength is Yours, O You through Whom the call was raised upon Sinai! Power is Yours, O You in Whose hands are the reins of free will! I ask You by the splendours of the lights of the Sun of Your bounty and by the hearts which have melted in love for You to assist me to be steadfast in Your Cause and to raise me up in Your Name among Your handmaidens

and Your leaves, midst Your close companions and Your servants. In truth, You are the Powerful, the Mighty, the Ever-generous.

provisional translation
from Arabic¹⁹

Another point of interest is that Ibn-i Aşdaq’s two elder daughters, Laqá’iyyih (b. 1886) and Huviiyyih (b. ca. 1888), each received at least two tablets from Bahá’u’lláh. This must have been a great honour for children who would have barely reached the ages of six and four respectively at the time of Bahá’u’lláh’s passing.²⁰

Similar tablets revealed by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to other Bahá’í women can be found in *Makátíb-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (volume 7), *Áyát-i Iláhí* (daily readings from the tablets of Bahá’u’lláh),²¹ *Yárán-i Pársí* (tablets to Zoroastrian Bahá’ís)²² and *Áyát-i Bayyinát* (tablets revealed in honour of the Samandarí family).²³ A number of extracts from such tablets have been translated and published in the compilation on women, prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.²⁴

On the revelation of writings in their honour

Some of these Tablets are short, whilst others are relatively long and discursive. Since Ághá Sháhzádiḥ (the first of the women to convert), became Bahá’í some time in the late 1870s, the tablets revealed by Bahá’u’lláh in honour of these women must date from the ‘Akká period of His revelation (1868-1892).

Ághá Sháhzádiḥ died some time during the ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (‘Abdu’l-Bahá revealed a Tablet of visitation after her passing), but before the autumn of 1913 when the family were invited to visit the Holy Family in Haifa.²⁵

In an Arabic Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh addresses Ághá Sháhzádiḥ from ‘Akká, saying:

*O My handmaiden! Listen! Listen!
The Wronged One is calling you
from the prison with a call sweet-
er than sugar and more luminous
than the sun and moon.*

provisional translation
from Arabic²⁶

In a Persian Tablet addressed to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, Bahá’u’lláh writes:

*. . . And so these hidden pearls
and stored gems which were in the
Oman of the utterances (bayán) of
the Desire of the peoples of the
world were revealed so that you
might receive them.*

provisional translation
from Persian²⁷

In a number of these Tablets we find references to the letters (now, presumably no longer extant) sent by Ághá Sháhzádiḥ and the other women of the family to Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In Tablet to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, Bahá’u’lláh writes:

*She has sent to the Dawning-place
of Your revelation and the
Horizon of Your divine inspira-
tion that which indicates she has
turned towards You and heard
Your call and faced in Your direc-
tion and submitted to Your sover-
eignty and bowed down before*

Your Cause.

provisional translation
from Arabic²⁸

This extract suggests that Ághá Sháhzádíh, once having converted to the Bahá'í religion, wrote to Bahá'u'lláh directly to express her allegiance to Him. In at least two other Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh mentions that He has received correspondence from Ághá Sháhzádíh, whether directly or indirectly, conveyed via pilgrims from Tehran.²⁹ In an Arabic Tablet revealed to Huvíyyih, who at the time was a child of barely four years of age, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Thank your Lord, the Imprisoned One, the Wronged One, that He, in the midst of sorrows, has made mention of you through that which has caused the mountains to shake.

provisional translation
from Arabic³⁰

In many of these tablets, Bahá'u'lláh mentions how, after recognising His station, the women have been honoured with receiving tablets and prayers revealed specifically for them. In a Tablet to Ághá Sháhzádíh He writes:

O My leaf! I bear witness that you have attained My days and turned towards My horizon and drunk the wine (rahíq) of revelation from the hand of My bounty and, with the hand of submission, taken hold of My tablet and My writings. Blessed are you and whosoever has attained to this mighty and unique Cause, through which the light has shone from the horizon of manifestation (zuhúr) and the Sidratu'l-Muntahá has given glad

tidings to all mankind.

provisional translation
from Arabic³¹

And again to Ághá Sháhzádíh, Bahá'u'lláh alludes to the significance of the revelation of tablets in the honour of His believers:

Mention of you has been made at the throne of God ('arsh) and this tablet was revealed for you in which your name has been recorded in the tablets . . . We have revealed for you verses (áyát) and sent them to you so that you may find from them the scent of the shirt of your Lord, the Mighty, the Bounteous. Glory be upon you and upon every handmaiden who has turned towards God, the Revealer of verses.³²

provisional translation
from Arabic³³

The joy felt by the recipients of tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá must have been immense. Such tablets played a vital role in strengthening the resolve of early believers in the face of intense opposition to the Bahá'í movement in Iran and elsewhere, and would have acted as an effective morale booster for more marginalized elements of the nascent community, in particular women. To Ághá Sháhzádíh Bahá'u'lláh writes these words of encouragement:

God willing that leaf is immersed and swimming in the depths of the sea of oneness and detachment. This station is most great; this is what God meant by "patience is beautiful" (ṣabr jamíl)³⁴ . . . The most exalted fruit of the tree of

detachment has always been and will ever be patience.

provisional translation
from Persian³⁵

With no definitive list of the tablets revealed to these women, it is impossible to know how many may have been mislaid over the century or so since their composition. The tablets themselves give us some clues, however. In a Tablet to Ḍiyá’u’l-Ḥájjiyyih, Bahá’u’lláh says that she should try to grasp something of the power and majesty of the revealed word, and indicates that many tablets have already been revealed in her honour:

*Praise be to God, that leaf has repeatedly received divine verses and has quaffed the sealed wine (raḥíq-i makhtúm) from the hands of God’s bounty, the Self-Subsistent. This favour cannot be equalled by any other material thing (shayy) . . . Previously you have received writings from the Exalted Pen. This station is most great; treasure it.*³⁶

provisional translation
from Persian³⁷

This sentiment is echoed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who suggests Ḍiyá’u’l-Ḥájjiyyih was the recipient of many tablets during the lifetime of Bahá’u’lláh:

. . . In the days of the Manifestation (zuhúr) you received much bounty and numerous tablets (alváḥ-i muta‘addidih).

provisional translation
from Persian³⁸

On the importance of recognising

the Manifestation of God

This is a recurrent theme which dominates many of these Tablets. In a tablet addressed to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, Bahá’u’lláh writes

O My leaf! Upon you be My glory (bahá’). Praise be to God that in the days of God you have experienced the endless rains of mercy and have drunk from the cup of recognition (‘irfán).

provisional translation
from Persian³⁹

In this Tablet addressed to Laqá’iyyih, Bahá’u’lláh appears to make reference to her allegiance to Him at a young age:

O leaf! Blessed are you for, in the first days (avval-i ayyám) you have turned to face God. Today is a blessed day and for it no like or similar day has been decreed.

provisional translation
from Persian⁴⁰

In another Tablet to Laqá’iyyih, Bahá’u’lláh highlights the importance of recognising the manifestation of God during His earthly lifetime, and elevates the station of this young child above that of the world’s leaders:

Praise be to God that in the days of the Blessed Tree, you have attained unto that which the learned men (‘ulamá’) and rulers (umará’) of the world have not, except those whom God has willed.

provisional translation
from Persian⁴¹

In a Tablet to Laqá’iyyih’s younger sister, Huviyyih, Bahá’u’lláh suggests that this young child and her female relatives

(“the other leaves”) will guide the women of the world to the new religion:

God willing that leaf and the other leaves will quaff from the cup of this revelation (bayán) which has appeared from the horizon of God's revelation and will lead the handmaidens of the earth to the plain of God's bounty.

provisional translation
from Persian⁴²

This powerful statement suggests that Bahá'u'lláh was of the opinion that the acceptance of the Bahá'í faith by women from socially prominent families in 19th-century Iran (like that of ʔiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih which had familial ties to high government officials) could, in turn, lead to the conversion of other Qájár women and perhaps the wives and daughters of princes and ministers. Tehran's population in 1883 has been estimated at just above 100,000.⁴³ It is not unreasonable to believe, given the city's relatively small population, that a nucleus of committed, deepened Bahá'í women could, given the right climate, exert a great deal of influence on the educated women of the capital.

In a Tablet addressed to Rúḥá (ʔiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih's third daughter), 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of the ease with which she has been able to recognise Bahá'u'lláh, because of her family's devotion to the Bahá'í religion. 'Abdu'l-Bahá underlines the responsibility the bounty of being born into a steadfast Bahá'í family carries:

*A hundred thousand maidservants,
who for countless years engaged in*

divers arduous devotions, and who, with fervent longing and tearful lamentation, supplicated the threshold of Divine Oneness that they may live but for a moment in these days and perceive the merest glimmer of the Sinaitic fire, expired at last in the wilderness of separation, and, with infinite regret, laid down their lives in love's arena. Thou, however, having neither expended effort or suffered hardship, nor experienced the fatigue of arduous devotions, hast, through purest grace and bounty, become a recipient of this bestowal from Him Who is the Lord of the seen and the unseen, attained unto the Days of God, and been favoured with a boundless outpouring of His mercy and loving-kindness.

translated from Persian by
the Research Department
at the Bahá'í World Centre⁴⁴

References made to the women's royal heritage in the Tablets

Shahansháh Baygum, Ághá Sháhzádiḥ and ʔiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih, by virtue of their direct descent from Fath-'Alí Sháh via his seventh daughter, ʔiyá'u's-Salṭaniḥ, were members of the Qájár nobility. Their allegiance to the Bahá'í religion no doubt diminished their influence at court, but they did have a number of close Muslim relatives who occupied positions of power. In addition to Intizámu's-Salṭaniḥ's non-Bahá'í relatives and descendants (who have been discussed above), it should be noted that Shahansháh Baygum's nephew, 'Alí-Qulí

Khán, Musháviru’l-Mamálik, held a number of important political posts during his lifetime. He was appointed to the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs on several occasions between 1915 and 1926, tried in vain to represent Iran at the Paris Peace Conference at Versailles in 1919, and was Iran’s ambassador to Moscow from 1928-1931.⁴⁵ It was Musháviru’l-Mamálik whom ʔiyá’u’l-Ḥájiyyih contacted to acquire the necessary travel documents for the pilgrimage to Haifa.⁴⁶ Another high-ranking Muslim relative of Shahansháh Baygum was her first cousin, Galín Khánum, Shamsu’l-Dawlih, daughter of Aḥmad-‘Alí Mírzá (one of ʔiyá’us’-Salṭaniḥ’s full-brothers) who was the first wife of Náṣiru’d-Dín Sháh.⁴⁷

As minor Qájár princesses, it is perhaps not surprising that we come across subtle references to royalty in Bahá’u’lláh’s and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets to the women of Ibn-i Aṣḍaq’s family. This is not to say that tablets to other women who did not have connections to the royal court do not contain references to queens and the like, but the fact that Shahansháh Baygum and her daughters were of the aristocracy adds an added layer of meaning to these royal references when they appear in the Tablets revealed in their honour.

In one very intriguing Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh praises Ághá Sháhzádiḥ for having recognised Him and raises her station as a steadfast female believer above that of the queens of the world:

By the grace of God, exalted be

His Glory, you have attained a station, which is the pride of the queens of the world. Every day in the name of God, the Queen of London goes to church, and in her mind (bih gamán-i khud) she is busy with the remembrance of God, but God has borne and does bear witness to her heedlessness (ghiflat), because she is deprived of knowing Him and clings to His name, just like the rest of the empresses of the world (sá’ir-i impirátúriḥ-há-yi ‘álam).

provisional translation
from Persian⁴⁸

Since Ághá Sháhzádiḥ did not convert to the Bahá’í religion until the late 1870s, it is reasonable to assume that Bahá’u’lláh penned this Tablet after having sent His tablet to Queen Victoria (ca. 1868). It is known that Queen Victoria began to use the title “Empress of India” around 1877; Bahá’u’lláh’s reference to “the rest of the empresses of the world” would suggest that this Tablet was revealed some time after that. This Tablet may be useful to those who wish to understand Bahá’u’lláh’s reaction to Queen Victoria’s lukewarm response to His weighty Tablet.

Bahá’u’lláh again appears to refer to His addressee’s royal lineage in a Tablet to ʔiyá’u’l-Ḥájiyyih:

The queens of the world, night and day have turned towards the Lord of Eternity and have uttered the mention of the Greatest Name and when the horizon of the heaven of manifestation was illumined by the lights of God’s face, all were seen to be heedless . . .

provisional translation
from Persian⁴⁹

Bahá'u'lláh exalts the station of those women who recognise Him above that of the temporal rulers of the world. Iran did not have a “queen” as such. The word used here is *malakih-há*, which suggests non-Iranian queens, and therefore it is more likely that Bahá'u'lláh means European royals, such as Queen Victoria.

In a Tablet addressed to ʒiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the power of the word of God, seemingly alluding to the Tablets He has sent to the kings and rulers of the world:

Ponder on the power of the exalted Word. It is continually in motion. In these days from every direction . . . its traces have headed for the leaders of the world so that all may become aware of that which they are veiled from in this day.

provisional translation
from Persian⁵⁰

Since the Tablets to the kings were sent between 1867-1869, and ʒiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih did not become a Bahá'í until the end of the 1870s, perhaps Bahá'u'lláh is referring to subsequent tablets, or else speaking metaphorically.

In a Persian Tablet addressed to ʒiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá alludes to her royal heritage in both subtle and poetic terms, suggesting that she has lost a temporal crown and gained a spiritual one:

Thank God that He has chosen you from among the women of the

world and has exalted your head with the glittering crown of recognition (‘irfán). This diadem of the love of God is the pearl of the casket of bounty which has illuminated the eastern and western horizon. What more do you seek? What more do you want than this? Praise be to God that in servitude to the Ancient Beauty you have a neckband encrusted with gemstones of the Greatest Name around your neck and a golden earring of the Most Exalted in servitude to that manifest Spirit in your ear.

provisional translation
from Persian⁵¹

Here ‘Abdu'l-Bahá describes ʒiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih as a woman slave, with a neckband (*tawq*) and earring (*ḥalqih*), both characteristic indicators of slavehood. The intended message is, perhaps, that ʒiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih should not take pride in her royal lineage, but rather in her obedience to the Centre of the Covenant.

There is a sense in many of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ and ʒiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih that He appreciates the fact that, although they come from a wealthy background and are part of the Qájár ruling elite, they sacrificed (or at least risked) much of their material wealth and social status by aligning themselves with the Bahá'í movement. Their allegiance to the Bahá'í religion no doubt caused them financial hardship. Ághá Sháhzádiḥ seems to have been fairly wealthy (in part due to her marriage to Intizámu's-Salṭaniḥ). She and her husband provided a house for ʒiyá'u'l-

Ḥájjiyyih and Ibn-i Aşdaq in Tehran (near to Intizámu’s-Salṭanih’s garden residence) and there are references in the tablets revealed in her honour that she helped the family financially. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá thanks Ághá Sháhzádiḥ for her efforts, saying:

The consideration and love you have shown to the family of Ibn-i Ismu’lláh al-Aşdaq is beloved and mentioned before God.

provisional translation
from Persian⁵²

As mentioned above, Shahansháh Baygum appears to have owned her own house in the same district of Tehran in the late 1800s, but to have moved to live with Ḍiyá’u’l-Ḥájjiyyih and her family by the early 1900s. Shahansháh Baygum also provided financial support to Ḍiyá’u’l-Ḥájjiyyih’s family, perhaps by selling her personal possessions and jewellery.⁵³ Ibn-i Aşdaq was a full time Bahá’í teacher and administrator who earned a modest income, had no personal wealth to speak of and who was often on missions which took him far away from Tehran. His family did not live in luxury, which is apparent from Rúḥá’s description of their simple house, and from the fact that Ḍiyá’u’l-Ḥájjiyyih and her daughters were accustomed to performing every-day household chores such as cooking and sewing clothes.⁵⁴ It was from limited savings set aside by Ḍiyá’u’l-Ḥájjiyyih for her daughters that Huviiyyih, Rúḥá and Ṭalí’ih were able to pay for their passage to Haifa.⁵⁵

In a Tablet to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, perhaps referring to financial problems,

Bahá’u’lláh consoles her, saying:

By My life and by the Cause of God, the treasuries of the world do not equal this Tablet, nor does that which the kings and sovereigns of the world possess.

provisional translation
from Arabic⁵⁶

In another Tablet, perhaps revealed in response to a letter detailing the family’s difficulties, financial or otherwise, Bahá’u’lláh again alludes to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ’s royal lineage, saying:

O My leaf! O My handmaiden! Upon you be My glory (bahá’) . . . All the women of the world, queens, princesses and others have sacrificed much material wealth in order to hear the words, “O My handmaiden!”, and in this time of the divine manifestation and the appearance of the breaths of divine revelation all have been deprived, except a few. Give thanks to the Desire of the peoples of the world that you have attained this most great bounty and most exalted station. What is now vital and necessary is the preservation of this station.

provisional translation
from Persian⁵⁷

In a Tablet to Ḍiyá’u’l-Ḥájjiyyih, Bahá’u’lláh says that it is her relationship to God that is important today, not her connection to any worldly wealth or familial bond:

Today being related to God (nisbatu’lláh) is acceptable and desired . . . This relationship is the king of relationships and this station is the sovereign of all stations

. . . Blessed is the soul whom outward connections (nisbat-i záhiriḥ) and material possessions (asbáb-i fániyyih) have not prevented from being connected to God . . . One word from Him is better than the wealth of the whole world.

provisional translation
from Persian?⁵⁸

The risks involved for women who gave their allegiance to the Bahá'í Faith in late 19th-century Iran should not be underestimated. Ághá Sháhzádiḥ's husband was himself a Bahá'í (although he might have kept this quiet at court), as was Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih's husband, Ibn-i Aşdaq. Shahansháh Baygum, however, secretly converted some time around her marriage to her second husband, who was a Muslim. It is likely, given the circumstances, that Shahansháh Baygum kept her Bahá'í identity from her husband, at least at the outset, and perhaps until his death.⁵⁹

In addition to exalting early Bahá'í women above the queens and empresses of His day, more controversially, Bahá'u'lláh raises them to a level higher than that of the clergy of the time. In a Tablet to Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih He writes:

Praise be to the Desire of the world that He has assisted you to turn towards and recognise the Horizon of His revelation and the Dawning-Place of His cause at a time when the clergy ('ulamá')⁶⁰ of the world and its rulers (umará') have been seen to be prevented [from doing so] and veiled [therefrom]. Throughout the centuries and ages they have asked God –

exalted be His glory – to see this day, and when the horizon of the heaven of manifestation was illumined by the One who spoke on Sinai, they acted in such a way that the eyes of grandeur wept and the trees of the Exalted Paradise began to groan. He did not deprive you of His grace, and He has guided you to the Straight Path.

provisional translation
from Persian⁶¹

References in the Tablets to women and their role in the Bahá'í community

With the declaration of Ághá Sháhzádiḥ in the late 1870s and the subsequent conversion of her mother and her younger sister, and the birth of Laqá'iyiyih (Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih's first daughter) in 1886, by the mid 1880s, three generations of women in this branch of the Qájár clan were Bahá'ís. This fact is reflected in a number of the tablets revealed in their honour. In an Arabic prayer revealed by Bahá'u'lláh for Ághá Sháhzádiḥ we read:

O my Lord! I am Your handmaiden and the daughter of Your handmaiden. In Your verses you have made me one of the leaves of the Blessed Tree.

provisional translation
from Arabic⁶²

Similarly, in a Tablet to Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyih, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

I am Your handmaiden and the daughter of Your handmaiden. Your Call has awakened me and

Your Verses have attracted me.
provisional translation
from Arabic⁶³

In a Tablet addressed to Ḍiyá’u’l-Ḥájiyyih’s second daughter, Huviyyih (b. ca. 1888), who represented the third generation of Bahá’í women on her mother’s side, Bahá’u’lláh writes:

*O my Lord! I am Your handmaiden
and the daughter of Your hand-
maiden.*
provisional translation
from Arabic⁶⁴

In Their tablets to women, Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often draw comparisons between the faithful devotion of their female followers and the heedlessness of the generality of the men of the age. In such tablets, women believers are said to have surpassed men. In a Tablet to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, Bahá’u’lláh writes:

*How many are those men (rijál)
who, after waiting, did not attain
the most exalted horizon and how
many are the women (imá’) who,
in the name of Abhá, have quaffed
from the goblet of recognition
(‘irfán).⁶⁵*
provisional translation
from Persian⁶⁶

This suggests that the number of women who independently recognised Bahá’u’lláh (rather than through their husbands, fathers or other male relatives) was fairly high. The term Bahá’u’lláh often uses to refer to the prominent or influential men of the age is “rijál”, an Arabic word which literally means “men”, but which often (though not always) conveys the idea of “prominent

men” or “leading men” when used by Bahá’u’lláh, whether in Persian or in Arabic.⁶⁷ In an Arabic Tablet addressed to Ḍiyá’u’l-Ḥájiyyih, Bahá’u’lláh says:

*Blessed are you that you have
heard and turned towards God
when the majority of men (rijál)
have turned away from Him. By
the Lord of the worlds, this suf-
fices you. In truth He loves his
handmaidens and servants who
make mention of Him.*
provisional translation
from Arabic⁶⁸

And in another, Persian, Tablet to Ḍiyá’u’l-Ḥájiyyih, Bahá’u’lláh writes:

*By the grace of God, exalted be
His glory, you have attained that
which the majority of the men of
the world (rijál-i arḍ) are ignorant
of.*
provisional translation
from Persian⁶⁹

Similarly, Bahá’u’lláh addresses Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, saying:

*A remembrance from Us be upon
she who has turned towards the
Face of God and sought to
advance towards the Most Great
Ocean when the majority of men
(rijál) have turned away from
Him.*
provisional translation
from Arabic⁷⁰

As regards the role women should play in the Bahá’í community of the late 19th/early 20th Century, both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encourage Ibn-i Aṣḍaq’s female relatives to be active members of the community. In an Arabic prayer revealed by Bahá’u’lláh for

Ḍiyá'u'l-Hájjiyyih we read:

*Assist me and Your maidservants
in Your remembrance and praise
and in arising to serve Your
Cause.*

provisional translation
from Arabic⁷¹

As mentioned above, female Bahá'ís were the primary teachers of non-Bahá'í women during the early years of the growth of the religion in Iran. From reading the tablets revealed in honour of the women of Ibn-i Aşdaq's household, it seems clear that both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá believed Bahá'í women could best attract other women to their religion through upright conduct and stainless chastity. In a Tablet to Ḍiyá'u'l-Hájjiyyih, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

We ask God to adorn His maidservants with the ornament of chastity (işmat) and illumine them with the light of knowledge (ma'rifat).

provisional translation
from Persian⁷²

In a society where women had little (if any) semblance of a public role, and where they were not encouraged to express themselves verbally, it is not surprising that 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid great emphasis on morality and teaching by example. In a Tablet to Ághá Sháhzádi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

Today, when one of the leaves of the Blessed Tree becomes steadfast in the Covenant, she will reach the highest branches of the Sinai Tree . . . And when, through the power of piety and the light of guidance, she rises up to serve the Cause of God and to exalt the Word of

God, she will shine brightly like a luminous star over the horizon of the world. The bounty of these days is great, most great and the mercies of the merciful Lord are glorious, most glorious. One good deed and one action for the sake of God in this day is equal to one hundred thousand good works and righteous deeds, and one breath in this day is equal to one hundred thousand years of pious worship . . . So thank your Lord the All-Glorious that your services have been recorded by the shining pen in God's court (díván) and at the threshold (ayván) of the All-Merciful your ample reward is decreed.

provisional translation
from Persian⁷³

In a further Tablet to Ághá Sháhzádi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly spells out the mission of the Iranian Bahá'í women of His day, both within and without the Bahá'í community:

O confirmed leaf! The time has come to set aflame the world with the heat of the love of God and, through the lights of holiness and purity, to transform the earth into a paradise of oneness (tawhíd). The maidservants of the All-Merciful today must be sent out like birds of holiness and night and day strive for the sanctification and purification of the other souls so that all the maidservants of the All-Merciful may gather like angels of purity.

provisional translation
from Persian⁷⁴

Female Bahá'ís could easily convey the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to other women

of their social class in 19th-century Iran, but in a Tablet to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, Bahá'u'lláh suggests the actions of his female followers could lead to the awakening of the generality of mankind:

O maidservants of God! Today is the day of remembrance and praise and the day of pure deeds. Strive that perhaps there may appear from you that which will cause those who have turned away to draw near and awaken those who are asleep.

provisional translation
from Persian⁷⁵

In a similar Tablet to Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájjiyyih, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encourages her with these words:

This Servant . . . is ever waiting for that maidservant of the Abhá Beauty to kindle such a flame among the maidservants of the All-Merciful that she may become a centre of the heat of God's love. The favour of God in respect to you is great, most great . . .

provisional translation
from Persian⁷⁶

'Abdu'l-Bahá is encouraging Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájjiyyih to become a catalyst for change among the Bahá'í women of Tehran, whose numbers cannot have exceeded a few thousand at the dawn of the 20th Century. In a segregated community, the influence of Bahá'í women was generally limited to that which they could exert on their female coreligionists, as Bahá'í women's gatherings and activities would have normally been closed to men. In a tablet addressed to Laqá'iyih, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Make me at all times to call out Your praise among Your maidservants.

provisional translation
from Arabic⁷⁷

Some time in 1914, following their pilgrimage, Huviyyih, Rúḥá and Ṭalí'ih sent some photographs to 'Abdu'l-Bahá of themselves which had been taken whilst in the Holy Land. In response, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote this Tablet in which He encourages these young women to actively promote their religion:

The photographs ye sent of yourselves have been received and seen. Praise be to God that the light of faith is clearly shining in your faces. It is my hope that ye may attain the most great spirituality; that the fount of knowledge may well up in your breasts; that your tongues may speak out in praise of our gracious and beloved Lord . . . And that, by day and night, ye may have no thought or concern save to set forth His proofs and testimonies, and to become enkindled in your love for the Almighty.

translated from Persian by
the Research Department at
the Bahá'í World Centre⁷⁸

Service to the Bahá'í community through upright, moral behaviour implied strict observance of Bahá'í laws; after recognition comes action. In a Tablet to Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájjiyyih, Bahá'u'lláh says:

We send greetings to the maidservants of God and counsel you all to follow that which God has sent down in the Book.

provisional translation
from Persian⁷⁹

In a further Tablet to Diyá'u'l-Hájiyyih, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

*We send greetings to the maidser-
vants of that land and counsel
them to do that which befits the
days of God. Blessed is the soul
who has heard and acted in accor-
dance with the counsels of the
Most Exalted Pen.*

provisional translation
from Persian⁸⁰

Bahá'u'lláh's references to "the Book" (*kitáb*) and "the counsels of the Most Exalted Pen" most probably refer to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, which was completed around 1873. The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* was first published in Bombay in 1890-1 and printed copies may well have reached Iran before Bahá'u'lláh's passing in 1892.

It should not be forgotten that there remained many practical restrictions on women and their freedoms (or lack thereof) in Iran at the time. It was almost impossible for women (whether Bahá'í or otherwise) to travel without the permission or, at the very least, the support of their male relatives. Many women of the royal court and those from wealthy families did make pilgrimages to Mashhad, Najaf, Karbalá and even Mecca, but these journeys were expensive, time-consuming and fraught with danger.⁸¹ Pilgrimage to the Haifa and 'Akká area was not impossible for Bahá'í women, but it was not that common (especially during the lifetime of Bahá'u'lláh), although some women did manage to make this difficult journey.

It seems that Ághá Sháhzádiḥ longed to visit Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká, although for some reason this does not seem to have happened. In a Tablet addressed to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

*Your letter has reached this
Wronged One in the Most Great
Prison and the fragrance of love
and longing is spreading from it.
Be patient in separation! Verily He
will destine for you the reward of
reunion and assist you through
His grace, and decree for you what
will perpetuate your mention
throughout the Kingdom of God,
the Mighty, the Wise.*

provisional translation
from Persian and Arabic⁸²

It is unclear why Ághá Sháhzádiḥ was unable to make the pilgrimage to 'Akká. Perhaps the journey was too politically sensitive, given her family connections to the royal family and her husband's government employment. No doubt it was important not to jeopardise the court connections of the family, which were vital for Ibn-i Aşdaq if he was to teach prominent people and deliver tablets addressed to courtiers by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, such as 'Abdu'l-Bahá treatise on politics, the *Risálih-yi Siyásiyyih* (1892-3), which he delivered to the court. Although Ághá Sháhzádiḥ does not seem to have travelled to the Holy Land, in at least on tablet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that the women of the Holy Family have visited the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in her name. As a post script to a Tablet addressed to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

On the Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh

(yawm-i mawlúd), a feast was given in the name of that handmaiden of God and all the women of the Holy Household (ḥaram), in her stead, made pilgrimage to the Most Holy Shrine.

provisional translation
from Persian⁸³

Similarly to Diyá'u'l-Ḥájjiyyih, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

*When visiting the Shrine, the Concourse on High made pilgrimage in your place and in that of all your relatives and similarly, in proxy, a feast was given in the name of those leaves and all was accepted (maqbul).*⁸⁴

provisional translation
from Persian

In another Tablet to Diyá'u'l-Ḥájjiyyih, written some time before or after her pilgrimage to Haifa in 1913-1914, 'Abdu'l-Bahá reassures her, saying:

O handmaiden of God and daughter of His handmaiden and sister of His handmaiden! Rest assured that at all times in this presence you are mentioned and that you are present in this assemblage. For, if in body you are far away, in spirit you are close by; you are prevented from seeing [us], but you have attained insight (baṣírat). Physically you are distant, but spiritually you are near, and at the Holy Threshold remembrance of you is on the tongues and in the hearts of the maidservants of the All-Merciful.

provisional translation
from Persian⁸⁵

The conversion of Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, Diyá'u'l-Ḥájjiyyih and their mother to the

Bahá'í faith seems to have been more faith-motivated than to do with women's rights or any other social issue. Given their court connections and social status, it is highly likely that these women held conservative views on religious and moral matters. Their conversion to the Bahá'í religion at a time when the faith's adherents were openly persecuted by the Qájár state was, in itself, however, a radical and courageous step, especially when we consider that Shahansháh Baygum's husband was both Muslim and an employee of the government.⁸⁶

Of the two Tablets revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in honour of Shahansháh Baygum that I have located, one is an Arabic tablet of visitation revealed after her passing (around 1919) and the other is a short Persian tablet in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá praises Shahansháh Baygum for recognising Bahá'u'lláh and aligning herself with the Bahá'í religion, when so many have turned away in rejection of His call:

O handmaiden of God! When the effulgence of the light reached the pinnacle of Sinai, the eyes of those in the graves did not perceive the light . . . So give thanks that you are of those few [who did] and that you are clinging fast to the Blessed Beauty and that in both the unseen and seen worlds you are looked upon by the glance of favour and a manifestation of favours and mercy.

provisional translation
from Persian⁸⁷

Perhaps the most outstanding tablet to the women of Ibn-i Aṣdaq's family as a

whole was penned in their honour by 'Abdu'l-Bahá after He had been informed of the instrumental role they played in establishing the first Bahá'í study classes for women in how to teach the Bahá'í religion. This Tablet was most likely revealed some time after they returned from Haifa in 1914. It does not mention Ághá Sháhzádh, who passed away some time before 1913. This Tablet was sent via Ibn-i Aşdaq and, in addition to naming Diyá'u'l-Hájiyyih and her four daughters, it is addressed to sixteen other Bahá'í women of Tehran, including one of Ibn-i Aşdaq's sisters, surnamed "Ukht-i Shahíd" ("sister of the martyr").⁸⁸ Below is an extract from the Tablet:

O you handmaidens who are attracted to the divine fragrances! Until now no study class on teaching the Cause (dars-i tabligh) had been established among the handmaidens of the All-Merciful. Now, through the bounties of the All-Glorious Beauty, in Tehran, the handmaidens of the All-Merciful have succeeded in establishing such a class . . . It is hoped that in a short space of time those beloved maidservants of God will become so skilled in using rational proofs (dalá'il-i ma'qúlih) that each one of them will talk with decisive proofs, clear explanations, luminous reasoning, eloquent speech and fluent words before the learned ('ulamá) of the world. If this assemblage succeeds as it must and should, and if makes progress and if the members memorise the annals (akhbár), Qur'anic verses and Hadíth that point to the dawning of the Sun of Truth . . . Confirmations from the kingdom of God will assuredly be

received, enabling some radiant leaves to appear resplendent in the assemblage of this world with clear proofs and convincing reasons, which will adorn the case of womanhood. They will prove in this cycle women are equal to men, nay in certain respects they will excel . . . In this wonderful Cause numerous were the men who scaled the heights of knowledge; they had a brilliant utterance, a convincing proof, an eloquent tongue and magnificent speech, but the blessed leaf, Jináb-i Ṭáhirih, because she was a woman, emerged with immense splendour and dumbfounded all the people. If she were a man, this would not have been so at all . . . If one of the leaves is attracted and gains mastery in demonstrating reasons and proofs and in uttering convincing evidences, she will shine resplendently . . . If you work actively in this realm, the outpourings of the Blessed Beauty will reflect as the sun in the mirrors of the hearts. Your progress will astonish all. The attracted leaves should not, when associating with each other, talk merely about the temperature of the weather, the coldness of the water, the beauty of the flowers and gardens, the freshness of the grass and the flowing water. They should rather restrict their discussions to glorification and praise and the uttering of proofs and reasons, to quoting verses and traditions and putting forth clear testimonies, so that all the homes of the loved ones will be converted into gathering places for lessons on teaching the Cause.

provisional translation
from Persian⁸⁹

Notes

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1. A selection of these tablets was sent to me by the Universal House of Justice. Additional tablets can be found in numbers 26 and 16 of the Iranian National Bahá'í Archives Manuscript Collection [INBA] volumes. All translations in this article are my own, unless stated otherwise.

2. Ibn-i Aşdaq and his father were most likely imprisoned in the prison known as Ḥabs-i Anbár.

3. In the tablets addressed to the women of Ibn-i Aşdaq's family there are frequent references to him as a Hand of the Cause of God. In an Arabic Tablet written by Bahá'u'lláh to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ we read:

Blessings and peace be upon the Hands of His Cause who have taken hold of the Book through His power and made His Cause victorious among His servants. We ask God to assist them under all conditions to be so steadfast as to cause the hearts of the heedless to tremble.

provisional translation from Arabic; UHJ Selection

In a Tablet written to Ḍiyá'u'l-Ḥájíyyiḥ, 'Abdu'l-Bahá lists some of Ibn-i Aşdaq's most recent travels:

Praise be to God, he is a servant of the Cause and, arising in service, he hastened to India and raised up the flag of the mention of God and in that region (íqlím) he caused a commotion. Then he was sent on a mission to the Caucasus and 'Ishqábád and, God willing, those services will also be accomplished. Among other things, in Marv, he facilitated the establishment of the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár and he sent a plan to the Holy Land (arḍ-i maqşúd). Now in that city he is supervising an inn for travellers and a school (maktab) so that the Bahá'í children will receive divine education and the glorious government of Russia has donated a plot of land for free on which to build the temple and, with the permission of the Emperor, the Mashriq'u'l-Adhkár will be built . . . In brief, you must consider that his Holiness the Martyr (ḥaḍrat-i shahíd) is busy with praiseworthy services . . . Now, in order to facilitate some of the affairs of that land, he has been ordered

to Tehran. Soon he will light up the house and nest of that dear handmaiden.
provisional translation from Persian; INBA 16

4. For more biographical information on Ibn-i Aşdaq, see 'Abdu'l-'Alí 'Ala'í, *Mu'assasiḥ-yi Ayádí-yi Amr'ulláh*, Tehran (1974), pp. 465-493; Hasan Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the time of Bahá'u'lláh*, Oxford (1985), pp. 171-176; Kázim Samandar, *Tárikh-i Samandar va mulḥaqqát*, Tehran (1975), pp.163-171. For more information on Mullá Şádiq, see 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tadhkiratu'l-Vafá'*, Langenhain (2002), pp. 5-8; Abú'l-Qásim Afnán, *Ahd-i A'lá: Zindagáni-yi Haḍrat-i Báb*, Oxford (2001), pp. 84, 123-129 and 379; Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: the making of the Babi movement in Iran, 1844-1850*, Ithaca (1989), pp. 136-138, 146, 151, 260-264 and 286-289; Hasan Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the time of Bahá'u'lláh*, Oxford (1985), pp.7-23; 'Aziz'ulláh Sulaymání, *Maşábiḥ-i Hidáyat*, vol. VII, Tehran (1973), pp374-418.

5. Mírzá Mas'úd Anşarí Garmrúdí (1790-1848) was first appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs by Muḥammad Sháh in 1835, a position he held until 1838, and once again from 1845-1848. Mírzá Mas'úd was the first Iranian official to master French, a distinction which gained him entry into the entourage of 'Abbas Mírzá. Mírzá Mas'úd was an important member of the delegation headed by Khusraw Mírzá which was sent to the Russian court at St. Petersburg after the murder of the Russian Ambassador, Alexander Griboyedov in Tehran in 1829. In 1835 Mírzá Mas'úd married Fath-'Alí Shah's seventh daughter, Shah Baygum, Ḍiyá'u's-Salṭaniḥ (1799-1873). Ḍiyá'u's-Salṭaniḥ acted as private secretary to Fath-'Alí Shah and was the Munshú'l-Mamálik (official secretary) of the royal *andarúni* or harem. Ḍiyá'u's-Salṭaniḥ was an accomplished poet and an excellent calligrapher. Other descendants of Fath-'Alí Shah who converted to the Bábi-Bahá'í religion include, Abu'l-Hasan Mírzá, Shaykhu'l-Ra'ís, son of Fath-'Alí Sháh's seventh son, Muḥammad-Taquí Mírzá; Shams-i Jahán Khánúm, "Fitniḥ", daughter of Fath-'Alí Sháh's thirteenth son, Muḥammad-Ridá Mírzá; and Badr-i Jahán Khánúm, Fath-'Alí Sháh's forty-eighth daughter who became a Bábi through Ṭáhirih in Kirmanshah.

6. Sayyid Abdullah, Intizámu's-Saltanih himself received tablets from Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá. He may well have kept his allegiance to the Bahá'í religion a secret at court, since shortly before his death he was appointed Chief of Police for Tehran. Intizámu's-Saltanih's father Mírzá Músá Vazír, was appointed Minister of Tehran by Náşiru'd-Dín Sháh, a position conferred on his elder son, Mírzá 'Isá, after him. Mírzá Músá had been present at the interrogation of the Báb presided over by the crown prince, Náşiru'd-Dín Mírzá, at Tabriz in July 1848. Ághá Sháhzádiḥ and Intizámu's-Saltanih had one son, Sayyid Muḥammad, who was given his father's title after his death and who was a Bahá'í (see Maḥmúd Zarqání, *Badáyi'u'l-Athár*, vol.II, Langenhain). Sayyid Muḥammad married Khurshíd-Laqa Ghaffári and two of their sons, 'Abdu'lláh and Naşr'u'lláh Intizám, rose high in the service of the Pahlaví state.
7. According to Parvin Namdar (eldest granddaughter of Laqa'iyiyih) soon after her husband's secret conversion, Ághá Sháhzádiḥ became worried that he was attending clandestine meetings. When she confronted him about the matter, he did not tell her he had become a Bahá'í, perhaps because of his high social standing and government employment. Some time after this confrontation Ághá Sháhzádiḥ had a dream in which she saw the phrase, "*Haqq záhir shud*" ("God has become manifested") written in the sky. When she related this dream to her husband, he finally told her of his conversion and she soon declared. Within a relatively short space of time she converted her mother, Shahansháh Baygum, and her younger sister, 'Udhra' Khánum, to the new faith. Ághá Sháhzádiḥ's middle sister, Khánum Sháhzádiḥ, who married a relative, Mírzá Isháq Khán Mas'úd Anşári, did not become Bahá'í.
8. It is unclear when or for what reason Bahá'u'lláh gave Ághá Sháhzádiḥ this name, but it appears at the top of several of the tablets revealed in her honour. It may be concluded that tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh for Ághá Sháhzádiḥ which do not name her as Badí'ih predate those which do carry her new conversion name.
9. Ághá Sháhzádiḥ's mother, Shahansháh Baygum, was known as "Ághá Jan" to her close relatives and in her later years, Ibn-i Aşdaq's eldest daughter, Laqa'iyiyih, was called "Ághám" by her children and grandchildren. In at least one of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ, He addresses her as "Jináb-i Áqá Sháhzádiḥ" using the male title "Jináb" ("sir") which is occasionally used to refer to outstanding early Bábí-Bahá'í women such as Ṭáhirih, Qurratu'l-'Ayn.
10. According to Parvin Namdar, Shahansháh Baygum and Diyá'u'l-Hájiyyih were taunted by some of the other women in their party who knew of their allegiance to the Bahá'í faith and their desire to make a pilgrimage to 'Akká.
11. This may be the house labelled, "House of the daughter of Diyá'u's-Saltanih", which appears on the 1892 map of Tehran drawn up by Najmu'd-Dawlih.
12. According to Parvin Namdar, after returning to Iran, Huviyyih related that when the daughters of Ibn-i Aşdaq entered the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá he said, "*Laqa'iyiyih musharraf shud*" ("Laqa'iyiyih has already made her pilgrimage").
13. The definitive list of the tablets revealed to the women of Ibn-i Aşdaq's household has yet to be compiled. It is also important to note that Diyá'u'l-Hájiyyih may well have been addressed at the end of those tablets revealed to her husband, Ibn-i Aşdaq. The number of tablets revealed to Ibn-i Aşdaq and his father, Mullá Şádiq, are thought to number in the hundreds and have yet to be published as a collection. When they are, additional sections addressed to the women of the family may well come to light. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá also revealed a number of tablets to Ibn-i Aşdaq's mother, Bibí Ján (Mullá Şádiq Khurásáni first wife) and to Mullá Şádiq's second wife and his three daughters, Ibn-i Aşdaq's sisters.
14. In tablets addressed to both Ághá Sháhzádiḥ and Diyá'u'l-Hájiyyih, Bahá'u'lláh quotes from the Qur'án and expounds on the meaning of particular verses, thereby suggesting that they were familiar with Islamic texts and doctrines.
15. Rúḥá Aşdaq, *Yik 'Umr, Yik Khátirih* (1987), p. 7. Shahansháh Baygum also read Persian poetry with her granddaughters, who also studied Esperanto and English (see *ibid.*, p. 8). See also *Yarán-i Pársi*, p. 477 for a tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a certain Fariburz who taught English to these young women. When Dr. Sarah Clock arrived in Tehran assist the city's Bahá'í women, she chose Rúḥá to be her interpreter (*ibid.*, p. 8). Ibn-i Aşdaq's daughters supported the education of

- women, and his eldest granddaughter, ʿĀl'at Mudabbir (Khalílí-Qazvíní), was among the first graduates from the Tarbiyat school for girls, which opened in Tehran in 1910.
16. See Rúhā Aşdaq, *Yik 'Umr, Yik Kháṭirih*, p. 21.
 17. Tablets with a more general content may well have been circulated for other members of the family or the wider community (including men) to read. Those tablets (or sections thereof) with a more personal message, or those tablets in which specific questions addressed by the recipients to Bahá'u'lláh or Abdu'l-Bahá had been answered, may have been considered private correspondence and therefore would have most likely not have been circulated to those outside the recipients immediate family. It should be noted, however, that, even as late as 1925, literacy among women in Iran has been estimated to have been as low as 3%. See Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: mutiny, appeasement and repression from 1900 to Khomeini*, New York (1982).
 18. From UHJ selection.
 19. From UHJ selection.
 20. Rúhā and Talí'ih were born after 1892 and so did not receive tablets from Bahá'u'lláh. The revelation of tablets in honour of children was not unheard of. When Ibn-i Aşdaq visited Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad aged 10-11 years, Bahá'u'lláh revealed a tablet in his honour.
 21. *Áyát-i Iláhi*, vol. II, Langenhain (1996), pp. 43, 44, 52, 65, 152, 187, 238, 252, 261, 264, 266, 335, 358 and 363.
 22. *Yárán-i Pársí*, Langenhain (1998), pp. 167, 373, 375, 381, 384 and 391.
 23. *Áyát-i Bayyinát*, Dundas, Ontario, (1999), pp. 109, 110, 128, 129, 133, 379, 397, 398, 399, 400, 414, 436, 437, 438, 450 and 451.
 24. *Women; Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice*, Wilmette (1997), pp. 2-7, 19-20, 26-27, 36-37 and 46-51.
 25. Rúhā Aşdaq, *Yik 'Umr, Yik Kháṭirih*, p.36: Bahiyyih Khánun says to Diyá'u'l-Hájiyyih, "I wish you had undertaken this trip at the time of Ághá Sháhzádiḥ."
 26. From UHJ selection.
 27. From UHJ selection.
 28. From INBA 26.
 29. In one of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets to Ághá Sháhzádiḥ He mentions that her petition (*'aríḍih*) has been received and her requests have been put to Bahá'u'lláh by Rúḥ'ulláh Varqá.
 30. From INBA.
 31. From UHJ selection.
 32. Here, Bahá'u'lláh is alluding to the story of Joseph's cloak which restores Jacob's sight, Qur'án 12:91-96.
 33. From INBA 26.
 34. This is a reference to the story of Joseph, Qur'án 12:18 and 12:83.
 35. From UHJ selection.
 36. This would suggest that Bahá'u'lláh may have revealed more than five tablets for Diyá'u'l-Hájiyyih. There might also exist, within the tablets addressed to Ibn-i Aşdaq by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sections revealed for Diyá'u'l-Hájiyyih which could be considered equivalent to independent tablets.
 37. From UHJ selection.
 38. From INBA 16.
 39. From UHJ selection.
 40. From INBA 26.
 41. From INBA 26.
 42. From INBA 26.
 43. See the entry on Tehran in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.
 44. Quoted in the preface to Rúhā Aşdaq, *One Life, One Memory*, Oxford (1999).
 45. Ironically, as Musháviru'l-Mamálik was attempting to get Iran represented fully at Versailles, Ibn-i Aşdaq (his first cousin's husband) had arrived in Holland to deliver 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet to the Hague. See Jelle de Vries, *The Babi Question You Mentioned: the Origins of the Baha'i Community of the Netherlands, 1844-1962*, Leuven (2002), pp. 106-108, 111, 118, 119, 132, 178, 240, 271, 296 and 301.
 46. Rúhā Aşdaq, *Yik 'Umr Yik Kháṭirih*, p. 21.
 47. See Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Náşiru'd-Dín Sháh Qájár and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896*, London (1997) pp. 48-49 and 78.
 48. From UHJ selection.
 49. From INBA 26.
 50. From UHJ selection.
 51. From INBA 16.
 52. From UHJ selection.
 53. Rúhā Aşdaq, *Yik 'Umr, Yik Kháṭirih*, p. 19.
 54. *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 37-38 and 50.
 55. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19. Rúhā (*ibid.*, p. 54)

- writes that Shahansháh Baygum sent a ring for Bahiyyih Khánum, which Bahiyyih Khánum refused to give to 'Abdu'l-Bahá who wanted to present it to one of the believers.
56. From UHJ selection.
 57. From UHJ selection.
 58. From UHJ selection.
 59. It is unclear how much Shahansháh Baygum's middle daughter, Khánum Sháhzádiḥ, was attracted to the Baha'i teachings. Her husband was a Muslim, which would have made open allegiance to the new religion almost impossible. I am not aware of any tablets addressed to Khánum Sháhzádiḥ, but, from reading *Yik 'Umr, Yik Kháṭirih*, it is clear that Khánum Sháhzádiḥ maintained close ties with her Baha'i relatives. After her second husband's death, Shahansháh Baygum appears to have moved back to Tehran. When it is decided that Shahansháh Baygum is too frail to join the rest of the family to go on pilgrimage to Haifa in 1913, she moves temporarily to Khánum Sháhzádiḥ's home.
 60. The word *'ulamá'* (lit. "the learned"), in Persian normally refers to Muslim clerics.
 61. From INBA 26.
 62. From UHJ selection.
 63. From INBA 26.
 64. From INBA 26. Ibn-i Aṣḍaq's daughters were also third generation Bahá'ís on their father's side, through their paternal grandmother, Bibí Ján, and their paternal grandfather, Mullá Ṣádiq Khurásání.
 65. In this context, *rijál* seems to refer to men per se, rather than prominent or influential men in particular.
 66. From INBA 26.
 67. It could be argued that, in certain instances, prominent women may be counted among the *rijál* of an era.
 68. From INBA 26.
 69. From INBA 26.
 70. From INBA 26.
 71. From INBA 26.
 72. From INBA 26.
 73. From UHJ selection.
 74. From family archives.
 75. From INBA 26.
 76. From INBA 16.
 77. From INBA 26.
 78. Quoted in the preface to Rúḥá Aṣḍaq's *Yik 'Umr, Yik Kháṭirih*.
 79. From UHJ selection.
 80. From INBA 26.
 81. Ḍiyá'u's-Salṭaniḥ (Shahansháh Baygum's mother) performed the Hajj after her husband's death in 1865, as did Shahansháh Baygum and Ḍiyá'ul-Ḥájjiyyih around the time of their conversion to the Baha'i religion.
 82. From INBA 26.
 83. From UHJ selection.
 84. From INBA 16.
 85. From INBA 16.
 86. Not enough is known about Muntakhabu'd-Dawliḥ to know whether he knew of Shahansháh Baygum's conversion, what he thought of it, or whether he knew Ibn-i Aṣḍaq visited his wife and stepdaughter to deepen them in Baha'i doctrines.
 87. From UHJ selection. In all likelihood Shahansháh Baygum also received tablets from Bahá'u'lláh, although, as of yet, I have been unable to locate these. Shahansháh Baygum is also mentioned in a number of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablets to Ḍiyá'ul-Ḥájjiyyih and is addressed in at least three other tablets written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the women of Ibn-i Aṣḍaq's family.
 88. Since the tablet does not mention Shahansháh Baygum, it is most probable that it was revealed either after her passing in 1918-19, or else when she was too infirm to attend these classes.
 89. See the compilation on women, pp.48-49 for an English translation of a section from this Tablet.
