

Tehran (Tihrán), Iran

Capital city of Iran and birthplace of Bahá'u'lláh; called by Him the "Land of Tá" (Ard-i-Tá); site of numerous important events in Bahá'í history.¹

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GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Tehran is situated near the ruins of the ancient Iranian capital city of Rey (Rayy) on the southern flanks of the Elburz Mountains, where they rise from the central plain of Iran. The city lies at an altitude of about twelve hundred meters (3,900 feet).

As a village and later a town, Tehran was overshadowed by Rey until 1220, when Rey was destroyed by the Mongols. Tehran began to grow in the mid-eighteenth century and became the

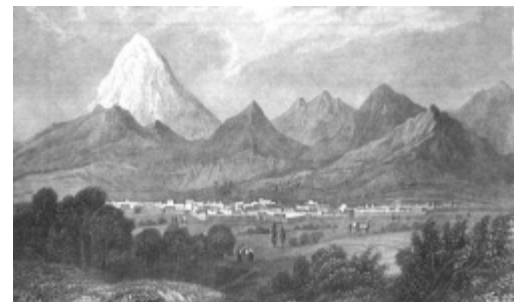
capital of Iran in 1788 under the Qajar ruler Aqa Muhammad Khan. Europeans visiting the city provided estimates of its subsequent growth. In 1796 the city had no more than 15,000 residents. By 1817 the population numbered between 60,000 and 70,000, with people of means leaving the city during the extremely hot summer months for the cooler climate in nearby resorts in the foothills north of Tehran. By 1861 the population had nearly doubled: 80,000 in the summer and 120,000 in the winter. Nine years later, Nasir al-Din Shah began a major renovation of the city; its boundaries were expanded well beyond the old town walls, and new walls and gates were built.

Tehran was rapidly modernized in the twentieth century, particularly after World War II. The surrounding villages have become integrated into a sprawling metropolitan city of some 600 square kilometers (240 square miles) with a population of about eleven million in 2006.

NATIVE CITY OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Bahá'u'lláh was born in Tehran on 12 November 1817 in the house of His father, Mírzá Buzurg, a member of the nobility from Núr in Mazandaran. During the years when Bahá'u'lláh was growing up, His family customarily spent most of the year in Tehran, retiring in the hot summer months to their garden property in the summer resort district of Shemiran, located in the foothills fifteen kilometers (nine miles) north of Tehran, or to their mansion in Takúr, in the district of Núr in the mountains of Mazandaran.

Bahá'u'lláh was, therefore, brought up in Tehran and lived in the capital after He married in 1835. In that same year, Bahá'u'lláh's father fell from favor at court and sustained great losses. The family house in Tehran had to be sold. Bahá'u'lláh then rented a house near the Shemiran Gate in the northeast part of the city. His children 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Mihdí, Mírzá, and Bahíyyih Khánum were born in this rented house, in which the family lived until 1852.



Engraving of Tehran, about 1850. Bahá'í Photographic Library

THE BÁBÍ PERIOD



Historic photograph of the entrance to the House of Mirzá 'Abbás Núrí (Mirzá Buzurg, the father of Bahá'u'lláh) in Tehran, Iran. © Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í Media Bank

Mullá Husayn Bushrú'í, the Báb's first disciple (See: [Letters of the Living](#)), brought the message of the Báb to Tehran at the beginning of the Báb's mission in 1844. Bahá'u'lláh was among those who became adherents during the first few months of the new religion. Soon an influential Bábí community existed in Tehran, including several figures who moved in court circles, such as Bahá'u'lláh Himself and Ridá Khán Turkamán, an officer in the service of Muhammad Shah.

In early 1847 Muhammad Shah summoned the Báb to Tehran from Isfahan, where He had spent four months under the protection of the governor, Manúchihr Khán. On 28 March the Báb and His escorts stopped at Kinár-Gird, a fortress forty-five kilometers (twenty-eight miles) southwest of Tehran. Haji Mirza Aqasi, the prime minister, sent word that the party was to stop for rest in the nearby village of Kulayn, which he owned. While the Báb and His companions spent several weeks there, camped in a delightful spot, Haji Mirza Aqasi gradually convinced the shah to defer meeting the Báb and, instead, to transfer Him to the prison of Mákú in the province of Azerbaijan in northwestern Iran (for further details regarding the Báb's aborted journey to Tehran, see: Aqasi, Haji Mirza. *Relations with the Báb and Bábís*). The Báb remained a prisoner for the rest of His life and never returned to the vicinity of the capital.

Tehran became a natural center for Bábí activities. It was the point from which the writings of the Báb were distributed between 1847 and 1850, when He was imprisoned in Mákú and in Chihriq, another remote fortress in Azerbaijan. Manuscripts were brought to Tehran, transcribed by Mirzá Ahmad Kátib Qazvíní, and then disseminated.

Some of the most prominent Bábís spent time in Tehran or made short stopovers while passing through the city on their travels. When Táhirih (Fátimih Umm-Salamih, known also by the title *Qurratu'l-Ayn*), one of the Báb's outstanding disciples (See: [Letters of the Living](#)), was held captive in the city of Qazvin following the assassination of her uncle Hájí Mullá Muhammad Taqí on 25 October 1847, Bahá'u'lláh arranged for her to escape and to be sheltered in Tehran. Bahá'u'lláh's house appears to have been a focus for the Bábís; many well-known figures—including Vahíd (Siyyid Yahyá Dárábí), formerly an influential cleric with close ties to the shah—visited or stayed there.



Courtyard in the bazaar of Tehran where many followers of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh were executed. National Bahá'í Archives, United States.

As a consequence of the murder of Hájí Mullá Muhammad Taqí, Bahá'u'lláh Himself was first arrested in Tehran. For His monetary assistance to a group of Bábís of Qazvin—who, though innocent, had been arrested along with the assassin, brought to Tehran, and held under harsh conditions—Bahá'u'lláh was detained for a few days in the house of a *kad-khudá* (ward chief) of Tehran. Subsequently, one of the Bábís from Qazvin, Shaykh Sálíh, was executed in Tehran, becoming the first Bábí to die for his faith in Iran.

In 1850 a number of Bábís in Tehran were arrested and charged with allegedly plotting to kill the prime minister, Mirza Taqi Khan. Eventually, seven of them, including the Báb's uncle Hájí Siyyid 'Alí, were condemned to death. Since these seven individuals were well-respected members of society and the charges against them were transparently false, leaders of their various professions made great efforts to save them; the prisoners were promised their lives if they would recant their belief in the Báb, but they refused. On 19 or 20 February 1850, in the Sabzih Maydán, a public square near the city prison, large crowds witnessed their execution and the subsequent desecration of their bodies, which lay unburied for three days. These individuals are remembered by Bahá'ís as "The Seven Martyrs of Tehran."

Following the Báb's execution in Tabriz in July 1850, His remains, which a small group of His followers had managed to recover, were concealed for many years in Tehran. Several shrines and private homes served as temporary hiding places until 1899, when the remains were taken to Palestine, where they were later interred on Mount Carmel in Haifa (See: Bahá'í World Center. Early Development).

The Bábí community of Tehran fragmented after the Báb's death. Several persons, including Shaykh 'Alí 'Azím and Siyyid Basír Hindí, put forward claims to leadership. During the summer of 1851, Mirza Taqi Khan, the prime minister, ordered Bahá'u'lláh, who had rallied the Bábís since the tumultuous final years of the Báb's imprisonment, to leave the country for a time. Bahá'u'lláh traveled to the holy cities of Iraq (places of pilgrimage in Shia Islam), remaining there until the spring of 1852.

In the gloom that descended upon the leaderless community, a number of the Bábís came together to make desperate plans. Bahá'u'lláh heard of their plotting in May 1852, shortly after a new prime minister, Mirza Aqa Khan, summoned Him back to Iran from His enforced exile. Although Bahá'u'lláh tried to dissuade 'Azím, who appears to have been the ringleader, three Bábís made an ill-fated attempt on the life of Nasir al-Din Shah on 15 August 1852. Their pistols loaded with shot caused only superficial wounds to the shah, but the attack unleashed a violent campaign of persecution against the Bábís.

Before the attempt on the life of the shah, Bahá'u'lláh had been staying in Afchih, a summer resort in the mountains some sixty kilometers (thirty-seven miles) northwest of Tehran, as the guest of the prime minister's brother. When He was notified of the attack and the immediate retribution against the Bábís, instead of seeking refuge, as His friends urged, Bahá'u'lláh set out for the capital. En route He stopped at his brother-in-law's home in Zarkandih, a summer resort village north of Tehran near the royal summer palace at Niyávarán in Shemiran. He was taken into custody there and forced to walk to Tehran in the intense summer heat, bareheaded, barefoot, and in chains.

In Tehran all known Bábí males were arrested. Most of those not killed immediately, including Bahá'u'lláh, were put into the underground Siyáh-Chál (Black Pit) prison in the royal palace compound. Of those imprisoned there, many were subsequently executed. Although official records list by name more than thirty Bábís killed in Tehran between August and December 1852, other accounts report hundreds of deaths.

Among those executed were Siyyid Husayn Yazdí, one of the Báb's first disciples and His amanuensis, and Sulaymán Khán, a prominent courtier. Táhirih, already imprisoned in the house of Tehran's mayor (*kalántar*), was sentenced to death. Because it was not customary to execute women condemned as heretics, Táhirih, unlike her male coreligionists, was not killed in public. Taken to a garden in the middle of the night, she was strangled and her body thrown down a well.



The village of Afchih, near Tehran, where Bahá'u'lláh was staying when a warrant was issued for His arrest and detention in 1852. Photo date: 1914. Photographer: Mirza Hadji Aqa. © Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í Media Bank

Bahá'u'lláh was one of the few to survive the Siyáh-Chál and the storm of persecutions that decimated the remaining ranks of the Bábís. During the months that He spent in the Siyáh-Chál, he experienced a series of visions that He later referred to as the start of His mission. On His release in December 1852, His properties having been confiscated and His rented home looted, He stayed at His half-brother's residence near the Arg, the fortress complex that included the royal palace and the seat of central government. Exiled for life from Iran and given just one month to leave the country, Bahá'u'lláh chose to go to Baghdad. He set out from Tehran, accompanied by His close family, on 12 January 1853.

The Bábí community of Tehran was shattered by the persecutions that followed the attempt on the life of the shah. After a few years, however, the community began to regain its vigor. Later, in the Bahá'í period, propagation of the religion in the city resulted in many new converts. The community also grew as a continuous stream of Bahá'ís fleeing persecution in other parts of the country sought sanctuary in the capital. These refugees, often destitute on arrival, began to settle in the poor quarters of Tehran. Some districts in the Darvázih Qazvín and Sar Qabr Áqá areas of the town became known as Bábí quarters.

THE BAHÁ'Í PERIOD TO 1921

Throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, many influential people in Tehran were greatly opposed to the new religion. Foremost among these were Nasir al-Din Shah and his son Kamran Mirza, the governor of Tehran, and two of the most important religious figures in the capital, Mullá 'Alí Kaní and Siyyid Sádiq Tabátábá'í Sanglají.

At least two main factors served to counter the political and religious hostility toward the Bahá'ís. First, the shah could not afford to have mobs running through the streets of the capital, killing and looting, as occurred elsewhere in the country during episodes of persecution. Such a breakdown of order would have been an insult to the shah's authority. Moreover, the presence of foreign ambassadors helped to assure order in the capital, since their reports to their governments about violent disturbances would have embarrassed the shah. Indeed, for humanitarian reasons, foreign ambassadors occasionally intervened on behalf of the Bahá'ís in various parts of the country (note, in particular, the interventions of Drummond Wolff, the British Minister in Tehran from 1888 to 1890, in response to persecutions of Bahá'ís in Najafábád, Isfahan, and the village of Sidih).²

Second, the Bahá'ís could rely on a number of persons who helped them and forewarned them of pending persecutions. Rahím Khán Kan-kan, the *farrásh-ghadáb* (royal executioner), was the person ordered by the government to arrest Bahá'ís; because his daughter was married to a Bahá'í, however, he would first warn them through her, enabling them to avoid arrest. He also assisted the Bahá'ís to obtain food during the famine of 1871. A Bahá'í, Mírzá Faraj, was the cousin and *pishkár* (steward) of 'Alí Asghar Khan Aminu's-Sultan, the prime minister for much of this period. Many other Bahá'ís, such as Sulaymán Khán Tunukábuní, a landowner and notable of Tunukábun, moved in influential circles. Tá'irih Khánum, a poet and outspoken advocate of women's rights, came from a prominent family; her father, Mírzá Ismá'il Khán Mustawfí, was an army financial officer, and her mother, Habíbih Khánum, had worked as a secretary in the *andarún* (women's quarters) of the shah. Among the clerics, Shaykh Hádi Najmábádí, a leading *mujtahid* (preeminent religious scholar and doctor of Islamic law), was favorable toward the Bahá'í Faith.



Gathering of Bahá'í men and boys in Tehran. National Bahá'í Archives, United States.

Episodes of persecution did erupt in Tehran from time to time. Bahá'ís were arrested in 1868, 1872, 1873, 1876, 1888, and 1891. A particularly serious episode occurred in 1882, when some fifty Bahá'ís were arrested and held for nineteen months. Bahá'ís were executed in Tehran, usually having been arrested elsewhere and sent to Tehran for sentencing. Notable Tehran martyrs include Áqá Buzurg Badí', the seventeen-year-old boy who was killed for having delivered a letter from Bahá'u'lláh to the shah in July 1869; Mullá 'Alí Ján of Máhfurúzak (See: 'Alavíyyih Khánum, and 'Alí Ján, Mullá); and the poet Mírzá 'Alí- Muhammad Varqá, whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá appointed posthumously a Hand of the Cause of God, and his twelve-year-old son, Rúhu'lláh, both killed in May 1896. The main sites used for executions in Tehran in the period were the Sabzih Maydán and the Maydán Pá Qápúq (later Maydán I 'dám).

Against this dark background of persecution, the Bahá'í community in Tehran and environs continued to grow. The Bahá'í Faith spread to a number of villages in the area surrounding the capital. In Táliqán the deputy governor Iskandar Khán and his son Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí, who succeeded him, were Bahá'ís. Through the governor, a resident named Mírzá 'Abdu'r-Rahím became a Bahá'í. He, in turn, taught others, including some of the ulama (Muslim religious leaders) of Táliqán and of the nearby village of Fashandak.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, many learned and eloquent Bahá'ís from various parts of the country established themselves in the capital city, including Ibn Abhar; Ibn Asdaq; Hájí Ákhund; Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí Isfahání; Áqá Jamál Burújirdí; Sadru's-Sudúr; Mírzá Hasan Adíb; Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl; prominent poet-teachers Muhammad Na'ím, Nayyir, and Síná; and Nabil Qá'iní.³ As part of an institution that came to be known as the muballigh (teacher-proclaimer), they undertook regular journeys to teach the Bahá'í Faith, traveling from Tehran throughout Iran and to nearby countries.

Other institutional developments that germinated in Tehran include the establishment of a local administrative council and the beginnings of the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God. During the last years of His life, between 1887 and 1892, Bahá'u'lláh named four individual Bahá'ís, all at that time residents of Tehran, as Hands of the Cause, thus establishing an institution the full significance of which did not become apparent for more than half a century.

In 1897 'Abdu'l-Bahá instructed the four Hands to convene a meeting of a group of prominent Bahá'ís of Tehran. This meeting evolved into an embryonic local administrative council, the Central Assembly of Tehran, which became an elected body in 1899 and was the predecessor of both the Spiritual Assembly of Tehran and the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran (See: Administration, Bahá'í. Institutions of Bahá'í Administration. Local Spiritual Assemblies; and Institutions of Bahá'í Administration. National Spiritual Assemblies). A significant feature of that first elected body was that its membership included one person of Zoroastrian background (Siyávash Sifídvasht) and another of Jewish background (Zakaríyá Javáhiri), demonstrating the integrative power of the Bahá'í Faith in the land of its origin. Although women were not included in the membership of these early assemblies, a Committee for the Advancement of Bahá'í Women, which was



Persian and American Bahá'ís, Tehran, c. 1912. L. to r. (standing): Miss Elizabeth Stewart, Mirza Muhammad Labib, Dr. Sarah Clock, Mirza Nouredin. L. to r. (seated): Miss Lillian Kappes (teacher, Tarbiyat School), niece of Muhammad Labib, Dr. Susan Moody, Tarbiyat School pupil, Ghodsia Ashraf Khanum. National Bahá'í Archives, United States.

established in Tehran around 1910 and continued until 1917, provided opportunities for women to participate in the administrative processes of the Bahá'í community.

Tehran gradually became the main center of a variety of Bahá'í activities in Iran. From about 1898 the Bahá'ís of Tehran began to publish books by jellygraph and photo-offset methods. Around the same time, Tehran became a focal point for the development of Bahá'í schools. The Tarbíyat Boys' School (established in 1900 and recognized by the government in 1903) and the Tarbíyat Girls' School (established in 1911) became noted for their exceptional academic caliber and admitted students of all religious backgrounds and all social strata. The girls' school was especially notable because educational opportunities for Iranian girls, which had been virtually nonexistent at the beginning of the twentieth century, were just beginning to be established.

Some of the boys and girls attending the Tarbíyat schools received scholarship assistance from the Persian-American Educational Society, a charitable organization formally established in North America in January 1910 as a result of efforts by a number of Iranian and American Bahá'ís. A young Bahá'í from Tehran, Qudsíyyih Khánúm Ashraf (Ghodsia Ashraf Khanum), the first Iranian woman to undertake higher education in the West, addressed the society's inaugural meeting in Washington DC in 1911. The Bahá'í schools in Tehran later included a kindergarten, one of the first and best institutions of its kind in Iran. In December 1934 the Ministry of Education closed the Tarbíyat schools because they refused to open on Bahá'í holy days.

In 1910 a group of Bahá'í medical doctors in Tehran, including an American, Susan Moody, established the Sehat Hospital. Dr. Moody, who opened her own private practice in 1909 to meet the needs of poor women who could not afford to go to the hospital, was the hospital's superintendent of women's health and trained Iranian women in midwifery and nursing. Her special efforts to bring modern health care to the female population of the city were assisted by another American doctor, Sarah Clock, and a nurse, Elizabeth Stewart, both of whom arrived in Tehran in 1911.

In 1914 Dr. Moody, who had also helped found the Tarbíyat School for Girls, spearheaded the establishment of Bahá'í religious instruction classes for girls that paralleled the instruction already available to boys. In 1917 interest in children's education also led Muhammad Labib to establish Nawnahálán, which was initially set up in Qazvin as a children's savings group and then moved its headquarters to Tehran and became a national Bahá'í-owned financial organization. Bahá'í children were encouraged to learn financial planning and to take responsibility for their future economic well-being by making regular investments. Eventually, the company attracted investments by Bahá'ís throughout Iran.

REFERENCES TO TEHRAN IN THE BAHÁ'Í SACRED WRITINGS

The Bahá'í sacred writings include numerous references to Tehran as a place of special import and as the birthplace of a Manifestation of God. In His book the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* the *Báb* refers to Tehran as "the Sacred Land."⁴ Bahá'u'lláh apostrophizes Tehran in many of His writings, conveying a great fondness for His native city, which He describes as "the Abode of supreme blissfulness" and "the holy and shining city."⁵ Following His frequent practice of representing place names by referring to their initial letter in the Persian alphabet, He frequently calls Tehran the "Land of Tá." In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Most Holy Book), Bahá'u'lláh refers to the city of Tehran, saying, "Rejoice with great joy, for God hath made thee 'the Dayspring of His light', inasmuch as within thee was born the Manifestation of His Glory."⁶ He also calls Tehran the "mother of the World"⁷ and "the city in which the sweet savors of reunion have breathed."⁸ "In thee," He states,



A view of the city of Tehran, where Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in 1852. Date: c. 1930. Photographer: Effie Baker. © Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'í Media Bank

"the Unseen hath been revealed, and out of thee hath gone forth that which lay hid from the eyes of men."⁹

Perhaps the most well-known reference to Tehran in Bahá'u'lláh's writings occurs in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, where He prophesies changes of government and an end to the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran:

Let nothing grieve thee, O Land of Tá, for God hath chosen thee to be the source of the joy of all mankind. He shall, if it be His Will, bless thy throne with one who will rule with justice, who will gather together the flock of God which the wolves have scattered. Such a ruler will, with joy and gladness, turn his face towards, and extend his favours unto, the people of Bahá. . . . Erelong will the state of affairs within thee be changed, and the reins of power fall into the hands of the people. . . . The day is approaching when thy agitation will have been transmuted into peace and quiet calm.¹⁰

Tehran is the site of many places that Bahá'ís throughout the world regard as holy. Among them are locations associated with Bahá'u'lláh; the places where the remains of the Báb were kept; the house where Táhirih was imprisoned and the garden where she was killed; and the Sabzih Maydán, where the Seven Martyrs of Tehran were executed.

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Notes:

1. This article covers the Bábí and Bahá'í history of Tehran from 1844 through 1921.
2. Moojan Momen, ed., *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981) 249–50, 279, 284–88.
3. For biographical information on Ibn Abhar, Ibn Asdaq, Hájí Ákhund, and Mírzá Hasan Adíb, see *Hands of the Cause of God*. Table 1.
4. Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh, 1st pocket-size ed. (Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006) 2: 2.2: 52.
5. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 1st pocket-size ed. (Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, 2005 printing) 64: 121.
6. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, 1st pocket-size ed. (Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993, 2005 printing) ¶92: 54.
7. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 63: 120.
8. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 64: 121.
9. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 55: 109.
10. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶91–93: 54–55.

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- Sources in English, which discuss various periods and episodes in the city's history, include Moojan Momen, "Millennialism and Violence: The Attempted Assassination of Nasir al-Din Shah of Iran by the Babis in 1852," *Novio Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 12.1 (2008) 57–82; Nabil A'zam [Muhammad Zarandí], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi (1932; Wilmette, IL, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996) 101–08, 182–83, 255, 261, 278–80, 284–87, 432–33, 440–58, 462–63, 521–22, 537–40, 606–37, 643–44; H. M. Balyuzi, *The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973) 48–57, 119–23, 206–08; Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850*, paperback ed. (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2005) 272–73, 361–67; David S. Ruhe, *Robe of Light: The Persian Years of the Supreme Prophet Bahá'u'lláh, 1817–1853* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1994) 50–53; and H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1991) 31–37, 61–65, 74–78, 84–93. See also Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 1: *Baghdad, 1853–63* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1977) 7–13, 46–49; vol. 3: *'Akká, The Early Years, 1868–77* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983) 424–31; and vol. 4: *Mazra'ih & Bahjí, 1877–92* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987) 290–92, 306–07, 311–12, 379–80.
- Information was received from Iraj Ayman, Manuchehr Derakhshani, and Amin Banani.

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