

THE FIRST NEWSPAPER ARTICLES IN THE AUSTRIAN EMPIRE DEALING  
WITH THE BABI-BAHA'I RELIGION AND THEIR SOURCES<sup>1</sup>

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The ties between the Austrian Empire and the Bábí-Bahá'í religion are a long neglected area of scholarly research. In the period between 1850 and 1900, the Austrian (later Austro-Hungarian) Empire was, along with the British and the Russian Empires, one of the three most influential European powers in Irán (or Persia, as it was then known). Austrian subjects were witnesses to many of the most important episodes in the early history of these Faiths. Their accounts of these episodes were often published in the leading newspapers of the day -- the first in 1850 and a large number in October and November 1852.

The Bábí religion had been born less than a decade earlier on 22 May 1844, as a young merchant of Shíráz in southern Persia, Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad, advanced the claim to be the awaited Qá'im (He who shall arise)--the Promised One of Shí'ih Islám--and the "Gate of God," a claim soon to agitate the entire country and to create a sensation even beyond the borders of Persia. The teachings of the Báb (Gate), as Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad was known, spread throughout Persia and neighboring Iraq; tens of thousands from all classes of society, from the peasantry to the 'ulamá, accepted His teachings and embraced His cause. The rapid growth of the Bábí community inevitably aroused the opposition of the Islamic divines -- ecclesiastics and religious scholars--who had been the leaders of Persian society until that time. They "regarded the doctrines of the new religion as a direct contravention of and a challenge to the tenets of Islám"<sup>2</sup> as well as to their own position in society.

From surviving accounts, the initial reaction seems to have been verbal-- in various towns and villages, the 'ulamá debated with the adherents of the Báb on the meaning of Islámic prophecies regarding the advent of the Qá'im and on the teachings of the Báb as compared with those of Muhammád.

The rapid spread of the Báb's teachings soon brought the new religion to the attention of the ruler of Persia, Muhammád Sháh. The governor of Isfahán, Manúchihr Khán, a Christian sympathetic to the Báb and His teachings, attempted to arrange a meeting between the Báb and the Sháh, but his plans were foiled by the Grand Vizier, Hájí Mirzá Aqásí, who feared for his own position should this meeting take place. The Grand Vizier therefore ordered the confinement of the Báb in a remote fortress in the northwestern corner of the province of Adhírbáyján, near the Ottoman and Russian borders. In this manner, by denying the followers of the Báb all contact with their leader, he sought to stifle the movement in its infancy.

However, these measures did not check the growth of the infant faith--indeed, the spread of the doctrines of the Báb accelerated, which in turn brought about a change in the form of opposition. Emboldened by the virtual absence of secular authority caused by the infirmity of Muhammád Sháh and the incompetence of Hájí Mirzá Aqásí, the 'ulamá increased the stridency of their sermons and incited their congregations to take up arms against the Bábís.

The twin sparks which seem to have ignited the persecutions were the conference of the leading disiples of the Báb in Badásht, and the Báb's formal declaration of His station and His mission in Tabríz in July 1848.

Alarmed by the success of the new doctrine, the Grand Vizier had "issued his orders for the immediate convocation of the ecclesiastical dignitaries of Tabriz in the official residence of the governor of Adhírbáyján for the express purpose of arraigning the Báb and of seeking the most effective means for the extinction of His influence."<sup>3</sup> In the course of this examination, the Báb proclaimed:

"I am, I am, I am the promised One! I am the One whose name you have for a thousand years invoked, at whose mention you have risen, whose advent you have longed to witness, and the hour of whose Revelation you have prayed God to hasten. Verily I say, it is incumbent upon the peoples of both the East and the West to obey My word and to pledge allegiance to My person."<sup>4</sup>

Náṣirí 'd-Dín Mírzá, governor of Adhírbáyján and heir to the throne of Persia, was present at this gathering and testified in a later letter to the claim put forward by Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad.<sup>5</sup>

This declaration, as well as the conference in the village of Bádasht in which the leading disciples of the Báb proclaimed the abolition of Islamic Shari'a (religious law)--symbolized by the appearance of Táhirih without a veil--made it clear to Bábí and Muslim alike that the process of emancipation had begun. Initially, many of the Bábís themselves had believed that the Báb was merely claiming to be the gate to the hidden Imám whose advent the Shí'ih had awaited,<sup>6</sup> but, following the conference at Bádasht, they came to realize the Báb had inaugurated a new Dispensation, independent of Islám.

In various parts of Persia, hostility reached new heights as the populace, incited by the Islámic divines, assaulted the followers of the Báb. The Bábís, cut off from the guidance of the Báb, banded together to offer armed resistance. The initial, relatively passive attitude of the civil authorities rapidly changed, as the government committed troops on the side of the 'ulamá.

Following the death of Muhammad Sháh in September 1848, Násiri 'd-Dín had ascended the Peacock Throne, and had appointed Mírzá Taqí Khán, the Amír-Nízám, as his Grand Vizier a short time later.<sup>7</sup> According to Bahá'í history, the Amír-Nízám acting alone decreed the use of troops against the Bábís, resulting in the first systematic campaign against the infant religion.<sup>8</sup>

Fighting occurred at the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí in the province of Mázindarán (Oct. 1848 - May 1849) and in the village of Zanján (May 1850 - Jan. 1851) in the north, and in Nayriz (May - June 1850 and Oct.-Dec. 1853) in the south.

"The pattern of each of these upheavals was much the same. A band of Bábís, who were armed but for the most part unskilled in warfare, being peasants, traders and mullás, would come into conflict with the local populace incited by the 'ulamá. Troops would be called in and the Bábís besieged by the army equipped with firearms and cannons. After a prolonged and heroic defence, the defenders would be overcome through treachery and massacred."<sup>9</sup>

In the midst of these bloody upheavals, the Amír-Nízám decided to extinguish the Bábí Religion by striking at its very root; he decreed that the Báb be brought to Tabriz for public execution on 9 July 1850. All accounts agree that the first volley from 750 rifles did not harm the Báb or Mírzá Muḥammad-'Aliy-i-Zuzúni, the disciple who was to be executed with Him, but only severed the ropes that suspended them against a wall of the barracks courtyard. After the smoke of the first volley had cleared, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Ali was seen to be standing at the foot of the wall, but the Báb had disappeared. Following a short search, the Báb was found in a room, where, according to Bahá'í history, He was "engaged in completing His interrupted conversation with His amanuensis."<sup>10</sup>

The Báb and His companion were again suspended on the wall and executed with a second rifle volley.

According to Momen, the martyrdom of the Báb and the fighting at Zanján were the subject of a short article published in the Gazzetta Uffiziale di Venezia on 12 September 1850, which was based on information received from Tabriz. The author has not been able to locate a copy of this article, which is the first known reference in print to the Bábí-Bahá'í faith in the Austrian Empire.

"On 15 August 1852, there occurred an event that was to have far-reaching implications for the new religion. Not only did it in the short term lead to a massacre of the adherents of the Báb and the exile of Bahá'u'lláh from his native land, but its dark shadow hung over the Bahá'í community for the remainder of the century, ensuring the hostility of the Sháh and the Persian government, and providing ready ammunition for those who wished to denounce the religion as a politically-oriented, revolutionary movement. It destroyed whatever hopes there may have been for a reconciliation between the new religion and the Government following the removal of the obdurate Mírzá Taqí Khán, the Amir-Nízám. It confirmed in the minds of the common people the denunciations of this faith by the 'ulamá as a movement subversive of the State and of the religion of Islám. This event was the attempt on the life of the Sháh by a few Bábís, an incident in which the vast majority of Bábís were completely uninvolved."<sup>12</sup>

Several young Bábís--reports differ on the number<sup>13</sup>—half crazed by the martyrdom of the Báb and the blows struck against the community of His followers at Shaykh Tabarsi, Zanján, and Nayriz, decided to assassinate Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, whom they considered to be the author of their sorrows.<sup>14</sup> Their state of mind is demonstrated by the fact that they loaded their pistols with light shot of the type used to kill birds or small animals. They waylaid the Sháh as he was riding outside his summer palace at Níyávarán, inflicting slight wounds. One or more of the assailants were killed on the spot, depending on the report, and the rest were tortured to death.

Persian authorities were convinced that this attempt was part of a larger conspiracy against the Sháh--or perhaps they were just looking for an excuse to exterminate the Bábí community in Irán.

The reports received in Europe about the assassination attempt originated in Tabriz, which at this time was the most important trade center in Persia. Theodor Bauer, an Austrian businessman who visited Tabriz in 1850 on a fact finding mission for the Association of Austrian Industrialists, reported:

"I had heard much about the grandeur of the trading in Tabriz in the course of my journey, however, I still could not have imagined its actual scale. What quantities of goods are to be found in the caravansaries there, of which there are around twenty larger ones. To find your way around the manifold corridors of the bazaar, where thousands upon thousands of people move amongst the shops, the escort of one of the shopkeepers of the bazaar is indispensable. The stock of wares during a trade fair in Leipzig or those of the former fair in Bergamo, or even the warehouses in Vienna cannot even be compared to the stocks held in the caravansaries and in the bazaar here."<sup>15</sup>

Tabriz owed its importance as a trade center to the fact that it lay on the caravan route to the harbor of Trebizon, on the Black Sea. Trebizon, in turn, was connected by a regularly scheduled Austrian steamship service to Constantinople,<sup>16</sup> and thus indirectly with Trieste, the Mediterranean harbor serving Central Europe. This route, from Trieste via Constantinople and Trebizon to Tabriz and on to the rest of Persia was of vital importance to continental Europe--in particular to the Austrian Monarchy and the German states--as an alternate to the land route, because Russia, protectionistic and jealous of its interests in Irán, often hindered the transit of goods through its territory.

Upon learning of any happening of note in Persia, the European consuls or businessmen living in Tabriz would transmit the news to Trebizon, from whence it would be sent on to Europe. As there was no Austrian consul in Tabriz at that time, although several Austrian firms were operating there, the consul at Trebizon was responsible for reporting any news from Persia. Due to the importance of the Sublime Porte in Austria's foreign policy, the internuncio, the Austrian minister to Constantinople, was the foremost diplomat in the Levant and his mission served as the clearinghouse for all information originating in this area. Thus, the newspaper articles dealing with the attempt on the life of Násiri'd-Dín Sháh were variously datelined "Tabriz," "Trebizon" or "Constantinople."

The article published on 3 October 1852 in the Ost-Deutsche Post was the first to appear in the Austrian Empire and apparently the first in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

#### "CONSTANTINOPLE, 23 SEPTEMBER

Letters from Tauris [Tabriz] dated 28 August bring the news that the Sháh of Persia was the object of a murderous assassination attempt while riding following a hunt. Four men approached him to present a petition, which he refused to accept at that place. Thereupon two men seized the horse's bridle, while the two others fired two double-barrelled pistols at the Sultán, whereof a bullet from one load damaged the Sháh badly on the thigh, another on the mouth. Still, the Prince had strength enough to dismount and to assume a defensive posture against the further attacks. The suite, which according to Persian custom, had remained back to let the Sháh ride ahead, hastened to his assistance as soon as this dreadful deed to his person had been done, and literally hewed two of the criminals to pieces. The two others, who were taken alive, declared that they had no accomplices, that they belong to the Bábí sect and had determined to avenge the death of their chief by murdering the Sháh. His condition is said to be improving and his life no longer in danger. Dr. Clouquet<sup>18</sup> has extracted two bullets, but has not yet succeeded with the third. One is assured that, on the contrary, there is a conspiracy against the Sháh and that accomplices are already being seized.<sup>19</sup>

The parallels between this article and the one that appeared in the Sun of London,<sup>20</sup> which include a common phrasing in several passages, lead to the conclusion that these two articles had the same source. The four-day difference in publication dates is explained by the longer time required for the route Constantinople-London and the differing date given for the report from Tabriz could be a typographical error. This theory is supported by the fact that in the first report of the incident to be found in the files of the Austrian Foreign Ministry, dated 7 September, the Austrian vice-consul in Trebizond, Oculi, states he had received the news of the attempt just that day.<sup>21</sup> This report, which was filed directly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, differs in several details--the number of assailants, the number of wounds, no mention of the Bábís--and contains generally less information than the newspaper article.

The earliest report from Constantinople preserved in this archive which mentions the persecution of the Bábís in Persia is a dispatch dated 4 November 1852 regarding an interview by Eduard Freiherr von Klezl, the Austrian chargé d'affaires, with Fu'ad Páshá, the Foreign Minister of the Ottoman Empire, in which von Klezl notes that the latter had mentioned "the unmeasurably horrible and inhuman executions in Tíhrán to which 400 individuals of the Bábí sect fell victim. Upon my review of previous inhuman events, he noted that no previous bloody drama can show atrocities of such a shocking type as these."<sup>22</sup>

Subsequently, the Ost-Deutsche Post's report was picked up by other Austrian newspapers. As Momen has also noted, there was extensive 'borrowing' between newspapers of that era; the same article was published in the Bohemia on 4 October and in the Prager Zeitung on 5 October.

On Tuesday, 5 October, the Fremden-Blatt, a semi-official news-paper which served as the organ of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during this period, published a different version of the assassination attempt:

"According to news received from Tíhrán, the Sháh of Persia was the object of an attempted assassination in August, during which his life was saved only by a miracle. He was on a hunt in forest near Tíhrán; he was on horseback and the suite maintained the customary distance. Suddenly, four men step out of the thicket who behave as if they wish to present him a petition. However, they use the chance offered by the inclination of his upper body to fire pistols at him, hitting him in the upper jaw and in the thigh. The suite galloped forward, and two of the murderers were literally hewn to pieces. Two were spared in order to acquire confessions, in the course of which they turned out to belong to the fanatic Bábí sect, which damns the Sháh and whose head was executed on his order. They had sworn, without further accomplices, to avenge this execution. There is no reason to doubt the recovery of the Sháh."<sup>23</sup>

The dateline on this article, Vienna, shows that the newspaper received the information from sources in that city, presumably from within the Foreign Ministry. It was a common practice at that time for ministries to pass embassy dispatches on to the newspaper that served as their organ--such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Fremden-Blatt or the Ministry of Trade to the Austria<sup>24</sup>--as notes in the files of these Ministries show: "Passed on to .... on ...." Unfortunately, many of these reports were never returned.

The official newspaper of the Austrian government, the Wiener Zeitung, published the translation of an article from the Journal de Constantinople, an organ of the Sublime Porte, which was also based on a report dated 28 August from Tabriz.<sup>25</sup>

This translation, which was also datelined "Constantinople, 23 September," differs in detail from the articles in the Ost-Deutsche Post and the Fremden-Blatt, e.g., the four would-be assassins presented "several" petitions and the two who survived had their hands cut off. The translation closes: "It is hoped that the Sháh will soon be recovered from his wounds."

The Wiener Zeitung argumented this translation with a further account:

"A report from Trepizond, dated 12 [September] on the same subject states that it was eight to ten individuals on horseback, all belonging to the Bábí sect, who attempted to present the Sháh a petition demanding the reasons for the execution of their chief. As the petition was rejected, two of the Bábís fired four shots at the Sháh with double-barreled pistols. One pistol misfired, the other two shots struck. Dr. Cloquet succeeded in removing two bullets from the wounds, a third could not yet be removed; there is no danger; the murderers have been arrested and also further arrests have been made; it is said that several executions have already taken place."<sup>26</sup>

On the next day, 6 October, the Wiener Zeitung published a short article noting that "the Kurds and other mountain tribes, had risen in open rebellion following rumors of the Pope's death."<sup>27</sup> The article as published in at least seven other newspapers throughout the Monarchy referred to "rumors of the Sháh's death"--therefore the reference to rumors of the Pope's death in the Wiener Zeitung must be regarded as a mistake.<sup>28</sup> One newspaper, Der Wanderer, noted that one of these mountain tribes, "namely the Báb tribe," was "an hereditary enemy of the reigning dynasty."<sup>29</sup> This newspaper, one of the very few which acknowledged its sources, indicated that this information had come from the Triester Zeitung. Unfortunately, the author has not yet been able to locate the source article.

The next article to appear was the letter written by Alfred Baron von Gumoens, which is cited by Shoghi Effendi in God Passes By. This account appeared originally in the Österreichische Soldatenfreund on 12 October,<sup>30</sup> and was 'reprinted' by several newspapers on subsequent days.<sup>31</sup> Gumoens was one of six Austrians engaged by the Persian government to train the Persian army and teach at the newly-established Dáru'l-Funún (military college).

During the next two weeks, the Austria, the Wiener Zeitung--and the official organs of the provincial governments, such as the Prager Zeitung and the Salzburger Landeszeitung--were the only newspapers to publish accounts of the situation in Persia. On 12 October, the same day as Gumoens' letter appeared in the Österreichische Soldatenfreund, the Wiener Zeitung published a translation of an article from "Tíhrán's official newspaper" dealing with the attempt on the life of Násiri'd-Dín Sháh:

#### "PERSIA

Regarding the previously reported attempt on the life of the Sháh, Tíhrán's official newspaper writes:

'We spoke in a previous edition about the dreadful assault made on the person of the Sháh by several madmen belonging to the sect of the Bábís. Today we wish to reassure the Persians regarding the condition of their beloved sovereign and to report the following details of the serious occurrence:

As on the 28th of Shavvál the Sháh wished to hunt in the surroundings of Tíhrán, the Grand Vizier and the other high dignitaries accompanied him, as customary, on foot. Outside the city, the Sháh signaled the Grand Vizier to mount his horse; at this very moment, one of those assassins rushed towards the Sháh, calling at the top of his voice: "I must present Your Majesty a petition. I am an unhappy creature, who is being oppressed." Although the suite had no idea of this person's horrible intention, it was concerned about the boldness and resolution with which he plunged towards the Sháh's horse; they therefore galloped forward to restrain him. At the very moment in which they wanted to seize him, he drew a pistol which he had hidden in his belt and fired at the Sháh from a short distance, without, however, hitting. Now a second Bábí approached and fired also, but did not hit, because the Royal Master of the Horse,<sup>32</sup> had the presence of mind to grasp the attacker's right arm firmly and to stab him in the armpit with a dagger;

the bullet flew over the Sháh's head. In spite of his serious wound, the murderer tore the dagger out of the wound and attacked the Sháh with it. At the sight of this new danger, some of the suite rushed towards the criminal and hewed him in pieces. During this [episode] a third Bábí joined the group and fired at the Sháh, wounding him slightly. He was captured, as was the first. Both are now to be interrogated regarding the motive for such a dreadful assault."<sup>33</sup>

This article, as well as the special audience described in the 16 October edition of the Austria,<sup>34</sup> in which the Austrian instructors serving the Persian Court also took part, were designed to calm the Persian public, for as the earlier reports of upheavals among the Kurds and other mountain tribes show, the mere rumor of the death of the reigning Sháh was enough to cause tumult and uprisings all over Irán.

The second translation on an article from an official Persian newspaper was published in the Austria on 22 October 1852:

#### "PERSIA

According to the facts gathered about the notorious attempt on the life of the Sháh, further circumstances were as follows, according to the Government Newspaper: Followers of the teachings of Siyyid'Ali-Muhammad the Báb, as they did not succeed in spreading their principles and prayers, decided to overthrow the existing government, in order to elevate their teaching to the ruling faith during the general disorder, amongst robbery, murder, plundering and carnage. During one of their secret gatherings, they agreed to murder the Sháh. Twelve of them volunteered to undertake the deed and received assassin's weapons in order to go to Niyávarán and to carry out the crime wherever and whenever they could succeed. The remainder remained behind in the house where they gathered, fully armed, ready and willing to attack as soon as the crime had been committed outside the city, the signal for general slaughter and plundering in the royal residence. The agreed upon date was 15 August, as the Sháh hunted in the company of several dignitaries. First one of the conspirators pushed forward in the mean subterfuge of presenting the Sháh a petition. [He did this] with a frightful din and such vehemence that several of the [Royal] suite, who did not have a premonition of his crazy intention, hurried forward to restrain him.

Before they were even aware it, he had fired a shot at the Sháh, which missed its target. Thereupon, a second, dressed the same as the first, rushed forward with a pistol. He also missed, as the Sháh's Master of the Horse had grabbed his arm as he was aiming. In spite of a sword wound inflicted by the Master of the Horse, he then drew a dagger, but was hindered by the suite and hewn to the ground on the spot. While they were still dealing with this one, a third fired a shot at the Sháh, wounding him only slightly.

After this one and the first perpetrator had been seized, and it had been learned that they were adherents of the teachings of the Báb, painstaking investigations as to the spread of these teachings were initiated. The security forces were able to discover their gathering place the very next day. Thereupon, the police lieutenant of that district received the order to proceed there with a detachment of troops. Hájí Sulaymán Khán and twelve of his accomplices were arrested; at the same time the remaining conspirators had used the opportunity to flee to safety along various routes. From these prisoners, the names of all of their accomplices were learned, and four to five of the latter are arrested daily. Each of these newly arrested persons are publicly confronted with their accomplices to establish their identity and their guilt. Ultimately, the Royal Chief Steward<sup>35</sup> succeeded in capturing the head of the dangerous sect, Mullá Shaykh 'Alí, in the surroundings of Shimírán, whence he had fled from the city and remained in hiding, along with several of his followers. This one too was publicly confronted with his earlier and more recently arrested followers by the Grand Vizier himself, and proven to have been the actual originator and instigator of the crime. At this time it was seen that one of the evil-doers who had first fired at the Sháh was Mullá Shaykh 'Alí's servant, with the name Muhammad Sádiq, from whom the latter had received his weapons. A total of thirty-two<sup>36</sup> guilty parties were taken, one of whom had sought asylum in the summer residence of the British ambassador. The Ambassador<sup>37</sup> found him not to be worthy of his protection, and handed him over to government authorities.<sup>37</sup> The tribunal passed the death sentence on all of the accused; the sentences of six of them, whose guilt could not be fully proved, were commuted by the Sháh into life imprisonment. The sentences of the remainder were carried out immediately: that of the head, Mullá Shaykh 'Alí, by the ecclesiastics, of Siyyid Hasan (of the House of the Prophet) by the Royal Princes, of those belonging to the military class by the troops, of those belonging to the merchant class by the tradesmen, etc., etc. (in the most cruel manner)."<sup>38</sup>

As this article is merely a much abbreviated version of the account cited in Momen,<sup>39</sup> it must be assumed that the source is the same, i.e. the Rúznámiy-i-Vaqáyi'-i-Ittifaqíyyih.

This official account of the executions of the Bábís had been previously published in the L'Union in Paris on 18 October and in the Giornale di Roma on the same day as in the Austria. The phrase in parenthesis in the closing line seem to have been added by the editors of the Austria.

One article dealing with the execution of the Bábís did not mention the name of the Báb' religion:

"PERSIA

English newspapers<sup>40</sup> report the cruel execution of Hájí Sulaymán Khán, who was accused of instigating the recent attempt on the life of the Sháh. In different parts of his body, holes were drilled and burning candles placed therein; so illuminated, he was dragged through the bazaar to one of the town gates, where he was quartered 'like a fat ram.' Besides him, Qurratu'l-'Ayn, known as the 'fair Prophetess of Qazvin,' and twelve other persons were executed. The Sháh is almost recovered from his slight wounds."<sup>41</sup>

This article, which was published in a provincial newspaper, the Bothe für Tirol und Vorarlberg, is the only one as yet found to mention Qurratu'l-'Ayn or the execution of Sulayman Khán by name.

The holocaust which engulfed the Bábí community following the attempt on the life of Násiri'd-Dín Sháh seemed to be the final blow destined to destroy it. The fighting at Shaykh Tabarsi, at Zanján and Nayriz, and the executions at Tíhrán had decimated the ranks of the adherents of the Báb and robbed the community of most of its leading figures. Although the official accounts speak of twenty-six executions, the primary source of Bábí history in the English language, The Dawn-Breakers, lists the names of thirty-two Bábís who were martyred in Tíhrán at this time.

Undoubtedly, many others died, unrecorded by friend or foe, for Oculi reports the death of "fifty of these Bábís in the most shocking and atrocious manner."<sup>42</sup> A letter from Tabriz dated 27 September--published in the Journal de Constantinople<sup>43</sup>--records the death of 400 Bábís in Tíhrán alone. The scores of deaths which occurred during persecutions in Mílán, a village near Tabriz, in Takúr in Mázindarán, in Yazd, Nayríz and Shiráz are not included in this sum.

The article from the Journal de Constantinople was reprinted in several Austrian newspapers on 27 October:

#### "TELEGRAPHIC DISPATCHES

Tauris (in Persia), 27 September. According to reports 400 members of the Bábí sect, some of whom had made the attempt on the life of the Sháh, have been executed in Tíhrán. An infernal machine with twelve barrels of unknown determination was discovered in the bazaar here."<sup>44</sup>

The Ost-Deutsche Post published a follow-up article containing further information the following day:

#### "CONSTANTINOPLE

News from Tabriz dated 27 September, which arrived here yesterday via Trebizon assert that in consequence of the attempted assassination of the Sháh of Persia 400 Bábís were submitted to the most monstrous tortures and then killed. They were said to be involved in the plot against the Sháh. An infernal machine consisting of twelve large barrels was also said to have been found in the bazaar in Tabriz. It is assumed that it was also destined [for use] against the Sháh."<sup>45</sup>

It is possible to identify the source for the next article dealing with the situation in Persia which appeared in the Austrian press. Oculi had dispatched a follow-up report on the attempt on the life of the Sháh, dated 8 October, in which he described the Bábís of a "sect of reformed Shi'ih which repudiate praying five times [daily],

fasting and several other Muslim doctrines, which on the other hand lead a strict, ascetic life," and reported the execution of fifty of them.<sup>46</sup> In the second part of his dispatch, he reported that 'Abbás Mírzá, Násiri 'd-Dín Sháh's half-brother, had been exiled to Karbilá. Oculi's report was quoted word for word in the Austria on 27 October and Der Wanderer on 28 October:

"PERSIA

Trebizond, 8 October. Letters from Tíhrán dated 22 September, which arrived here today with the English Legation courier, contain the news that Násiri 'd'Dín Sháh has ordered his thirteen-year-old brother, 'Abbás Mírzá, who has been living in exile in Qum (a city situated on the route between Tíhrán and Isfahán) for some time, to leave immediately for Karbilá and never to return to Persia. It is believed that Násiri 'd'Dín Sháh, a cruel and vindictive man, will have 'Abbás Mírzá, a talented and promising prince, executed, because he views him as a zealous protector of the Bábís, who at the urging of many dignitaries, had decided to proclaim 'Abbás king ...."<sup>47</sup>

'Abbás Mírzá, a favorite of his father, Muhammád Sháh, had early excited the jealousy of the mother of the heir to the throne, Násiri 'd'Dín Mírzá, who was his half-brother. Following the death of Muhammád Sháh, she contrived, with Mírzá Taqí Khán, to have 'Abbás Mírzá executed. Only through the intervention of Colonel Farrant, the British chargé d'affaires, was the sentence commuted to exile in Qum. Even here 'Abbás Mírzá was not secure, for Mírzá Husayn-i-Qumí, one of the six accused who survived the holocaust in Tíhrán, had been his tutor. This Mírzá Husayn "was forced, under torture, to sign a confession implicating 'Abbás Mírzá in faked Bábí plots."<sup>48</sup> This was then the reason used to justify his exile to Karbilá.

Following this account, nothing concerning Irán or the Bábís appeared in the Austrian press for almost a month.

Towards the end of November, the Triester Zeitung published an article about the current situation in Persia, which was immediately picked by several other Austrian newspapers:

"PERSIA

According to reports from Tíhrán, the persecution, arrest and killing of the members of the Bábí sect is continuing. The cruelest tortures which the most cunning and bloodthirsty villain can think of are used to force these unfortunates to confess. They, however, deride their executioners, heroically maintaining their silence. You will excuse me that I do not describe the details of all of the tortures, of which the drilling of holes in flesh and mounting of wax candles in the wounds, hewing into pieces, limb by limb, and quartering, can be described as belonging to the lenient punishments. I will only note that the efforts of Colonel Sheil, the English minister, and those of the Russian minister have succeeded in stopping these atrocities and in achieving the pardon, i.e. the simple execution of the prisoners.-- To the religious practices of the Bábís belong the taking of only one wife, and praying according to Christian ritual; they also do not recognize the provision regarding the bath and ablutions. (Triester Zeitung)<sup>49</sup>

A shorter version appeared in several other newspapers:

"TURKEY

Constantinople, 13 November....--In Persia the Bábí sect is being very badly used. They are being quartered, having holes drilled in their flesh, burning candles placed therein, and similar monstrous deeds.<sup>50</sup>

The persecution of the Bábís had continued, undiminished in cruelty, for over ten weeks--from mid August to at least the end of October.

The tone of these last articles was quite different from that of the first ones. The original articles had presented the attackers as crazed nihilists, attempting to overthrow legitimate authority. This attitude was a result of the still vivid memories of the Revolution of 1848, during which uprisings against the autocratic

central government occurred all over the Austrian Empire. In Vienna students and workingmen rose in insurrection, captured the city and invaded the imperial palace; the diet in Hungary proclaimed its complete constitutional separation while still recognizing the house of Hapsburg; Bohemia was granted substantially the same status a few days later; in Milan, the populace drove out the Austrian garrison; Venice declared its independence; the populace of Tuscany drove out its Hapsburg grand duke and proclaimed itself a republic.<sup>51</sup>

In the course of the Counterrevolution--June to December 1848--the insurgents all over the Empire were put down and the authority of the central government restored and even strengthened, but memories of the uprisings had not dimmed. The bourgeoisie and the aristocracy "were sure that they had narrowly escaped a ghastly upheaval....Society was 'prey to a feeling of terror incomparable to anything since the invasion of Rome by the barbarians.'"<sup>52</sup> It was this feeling that had colored the first accounts of the attempt on the life of the Sháh.<sup>53</sup>

However, the tone of the articles soon changed. The barbarity of the executions, and the fortitude of the victims soon affected the eyewitnesses--such as Polak and von Gummoens--to such an extent that von Gummoens gives these executions as the reason for his resignation from Persian service. The change in the attitude underlying the accounts from Persia can be attributed to the experiences of the European observers present there. Even the most prejudiced adherent of the European status quo could not fail to be moved by the cruelties of the Persian government as well as the forbearance and the tranquility of the Bábí victims.

In 1852 14 daily newspapers were published in Vienna and 172 periodicals within the Austrian Empire.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, in the

following century, copies of many of these periodicals were lost; the author was able to locate the 1852 editions of only eight of the Viennese daily newspapers and seven of the provincial periodicals. Still, the seventy-seven articles found therein are ample proof that the press accounts regarding the attempt on the life of the Sháh published in Europe were the first stage in a process which would, for example, enable Matthew Arnold to state less than twenty years later, "most people in England have at least heard the name" of the Bábí religion.<sup>55</sup> This statement can be applied with equal validity to Austria.

The parallels with the current situation are obvious: media reports of the contemporary persecutions in Irán have led to an unprecedented amount of publicity for the Bahá'í faith as the Universal House of Justice has testified, which, if mid-nineteenth century Austria be an example, will lead to an upsurge of interest and sympathy for a religion which can inspire such courage and steadfastness in its adherents.

I wish to acknowledge with thanks the continuing assistance of the staff of the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv—in particular of Dr. Elisabeth Springer—as well as that of the staff of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek and of Mag. Elisabeth Gamlich. I also wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Moojan Momen for his pioneering work, The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts, and for his valuable information and advice contained in the introduction to this essay, to Dr. Helmut Slaby, who kindly loaned me the manuscript of his forthcoming book on the history of the diplomatic relations between Austria and Irán, and to Mr. Karl Kadletz and Dr. H. Sauer for their valuable indications of possible source material. I am especially indebted to Miss Wendy Heller for her critical comments on the draft essay and to Mrs. Regina Prinzellner for her painstaking typing of the manuscript. Needless to say, any mistakes in the present essay are my own.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This essay concentrates on the German-language newspapers as the archives in the other language areas of the former Austrian Empire--such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia--are no longer readily accessable to western historians.

<sup>2</sup> Moojan Momen (ed), The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), p. xxv.

<sup>3</sup> Nábíl-i-A'zam (Muhammad-i-Zarandí), The Dawn-Breakers: Nábíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation, trans. and ed. by Shoghi Effendi, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 314.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp. 315-6.

<sup>5</sup> H.M. Balyuzi, The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973), p. 145.

<sup>6</sup> Momen, Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, p. xxi.

<sup>7</sup> Better known by his later title of Amir-i-Kabír. Balyuzi records "although Násiri'd-Dín Sháh now reigned over Irán, it was Mírzá Taqí Khán who ruled it." The Báb, p. 148.

<sup>8</sup> Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Momen, Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, p. 91

<sup>10</sup> Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> Momen, Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, p. 11n.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 128.

<sup>13</sup> Bahá'í sources such as Shoghi Effendi, Nábíl and Balyuzi and some newspaper accounts speak of three; various other newspapers of four to six perpetrators.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Smith, "Motif Research: Peter Berger and the Bahá'í Faith," Religion, VIII (Autumn 1978), p. 223:

"The execution of the Báb and the various massacres of Bábís had the effect of driving the faith underground. It is probable that there was a complex of responses on the part of the Bábís: the abolition of the Islamic Shari'a combined with the defeat of their cause and the death of most of their leaders led some to disregard all law; the difficulties of communicating with Subh-i-Azal, the Báb's appointed successor, and in general the lack of leadership and of authoritative texts led to confusion, intense speculation and fragmentation."

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Helmut Slaby, Bindenschild und Sonnenlöwe: Die Geschichte der österreichischen-iranischen Beziehungen, (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, forthcoming) ms.p. 81. The transcription of the Persian and Arabic names used in the quotations has been changed to conform with that used in the body of the essay.

<sup>16</sup> Initiated 1837.

<sup>17</sup> Cf Momen, Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, pp. 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Ernest Cloquet, a Frenchman, was Polak's predecessor as personal physician to Náṣiri'd'Dín Sháh.

<sup>19</sup> Ost-Deutsche Post (Vienna), 231, 3 October 1852. It is interesting to note that according to the register of letters received at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the dispatches from Constantinople dated 23 September arrived that very day. Mail often required two weeks from Tíhrán to Trebizond, a further two weeks from Trebizond to Vienna, and ten days from Constantinople to Vienna.

<sup>20</sup> Reproduced in Momen, Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, p. 128.

<sup>21</sup> Oculi to Buol-Schauenstein, No 207, 7 September 1852, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (hereafter abbreviated as HHStA), Politisches Archiv XXXVIII, 97. This dispatch was the basis for the article in the Austria of 6 October.

<sup>22</sup> Von Klezl to Buol-Schauenstein, No 85C, 4 November 1852. HHStA, PA XII, 45, fol. 453r.

<sup>23</sup> Fremden-Blatt (Vienna), 237, 5 October 1852. The same article also appeared in Der Wanderer (Vienna), 459, on the same day; in the Wiener Lloyd (Vienna), 231, 6 October; Linzer Zeitung (Linz), 238, 6 October; Bothe für Tirol und Vorarlberg (Innsbruck), 230, 7 October; and in the Salzburger Landeszeitung (Salzburg), 229, 7 October. The Linzer Zeitung and the Salzburger Landeszeitung also published a confirmation of their earlier report on the following day.

<sup>24</sup> The first article in the Austria, dated 6 October, is a direct quote from Oculi's dispatch from 7 September.

<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, although several persons have made intensive searches in London, Paris, Rome, Trieste, Vienna, and Istanbul, no copies of the Jounal de Constantinople from this period have been found.

<sup>26</sup> Wiener Zeitung (Vienna), 238, 5 October 1852.

<sup>27</sup> Wiener Zeitung, Abendblatt 230, 6 October 1852.

<sup>28</sup> Ost-Deutsche Post, 234, 7 October; Fremden-Blatt, 239, 7 October; Die Presse (Vienna), 237, 7 October; Wiener Lloyd, 232, 7 October; Linzer Zeitung, 240, 8 October; and Bothe für Tirol und Vorarlberg, 232, 9 October 1852.

<sup>29</sup> Der Wanderer, 463, 7 October and Prager Zeitung (Prague), 240, 9 October 1852.

<sup>30</sup> Österreichischer Soldatenfreund (Vienna), 129, 12 October 1852. This periodical had earlier published other letters from von Gumoens, in one of which he had previously mentioned the Bábís. This letter was reprinted in three parts in Der Wanderer, 464, 7 October; 466, 8 October; and 468, 9 October 1852.

<sup>31</sup> Ost-Deutsche Post, 239, 13 October; Die Presse, 242, 13 October; and Bohemia (Prague), 194, 14 October and 195, 15 October 1852. None of these newspapers is the issue 291 dated 17 October 1852 which was translated by E.G.Browne in Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion, (Cambridge: University Press, 1918), pp. 267-271.

<sup>32</sup> Asadu'lláh Khán.

<sup>33</sup> Wiener Zeitung, 244, 12 October 1852. Also in Linzer Zeitung, 244, 13 October; Prager Zeitung, 244, 14 October; and Salzburger Landeszeitung, 235, 14 October. This article seems to be an attempt to present the actions of the suite in a better light after the fact; the British minister to Persia, Colonel Sheil, reported "the Sháh is said to feel deep mortification that he should be engaged in a struggle of some minutes without a simultaneous rush being made by his attendants on the assassins." Cited Momen, Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, p. 131.

<sup>34</sup> Austria (Vienna), 241, 16 October 1852. Also in Wiener Zeitung, 249, 17 October. The Wiener Zeitung had also published a short article in the Abendblatt 237 on 14 October stating that reports from Baghádád asserted that the conspirators belonged to the suite of the Sháh and were incited to the deed by Bahmán Mírzá, cousin of the Sháh. (Also in Bohemia, 196, 16 October.) The source for this article was a dispatch from Beirut: Pozzoli to Buol-Schauenstein, No 541, 27 September 1852. HHStA, PA XXXVIII, 96.

<sup>35</sup> Hájí 'Alí Khán, the Hájibu'd-Dawlih. Cf Momen, Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, p. 491.

<sup>36</sup> Other sources disagree with this number. See supra.

<sup>37</sup> This is probably Bahá'u'lláh, who was a guest at the Russian compound for a short time before His arrest. The account cited by Momen (pp.138-42) gives the Russian minister as the ambassador involved. See also the dispatch from Dolgorukov to Seniavin, 11 August 1852 OS (23 August NS), Dossier No 158, Tíhrán 1852, pp. 501-3, cited in "Excerpts from Dispatches Written during 1848-1852 by Prince Dolgorukov, Russian Minister to Persia," World Order, Vol I, No 1 (Fall 1966), p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Austria, 246, 22 October 1852. Also in Wiener Zeitung, 255, 24 October and Prager Zeitung, 254, 26 October 1852 (both without the phrase in parenthesis in the last line).

<sup>39</sup> Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, pp. 139-42.

<sup>40</sup> The Times, 13 October 1852. According to Momen, ibid., p. 12, "this was in all probability taken from another newspaper."

<sup>41</sup> Bothe für Tirol und Vorarlberg, 240, 19 October 1852.

<sup>42</sup> Oculi to Buol-Schauenstein, No 230, 8 October 1852. HHStA, PA XXXVIII, 97.

<sup>43</sup> Momen, Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> Austria, 250; Ost-Deutsche Post, 251; Fremden-Blatt, 256; Der Wanderer, 497; Die Presse, 254; Wiener Lloyd, 249; Wiener Zeitung, 257; all: 27 October 1852; Bohemia, 206; Prager Zeitung, 256; Salzburger Landeszeitung, 247; Linzer Zeitung, 257; all: 28 October.

<sup>45</sup> Ost-Deutsche Post, 252, 28 October. Also in Wiener Zeitung, Abendblatt 250, 29 October 1852.

<sup>46</sup> Oculi to Buol-Schauenstein, No 230, 8 October 1852. HHStA, PA XXXVIII, 97.

<sup>47</sup> Austria, 250, 27 October and Der Wanderer, 499, 28 October 1852. Also in Wiener Zeitung, 259 and Linzer Zeitung, 258, 29 October; Ost-Deutsche Post, 254; Die Presse, 257; Wiener Lloyd, 252; and Prager Zeitung, 258, 30 October; Bohemia, 209, 31 October; Bothe für Tirol und Vorarlberg, 251, 2 November.

<sup>48</sup> Balyuzi, The Báb, p. 135.

<sup>49</sup> Der Wanderer, 545, 25 November 1852. Also in Ost-Deutsche Post, 276; and Wiener Zeitung, 282, 25 November; Prager Zeitung, 281, 26 November.

<sup>50</sup> Wiener Lloyd, 25 November 1852. Also in Die Presse, 279, 25 November; Linzer Zeitung, 282, 26 November; Bothe für Tirol und Vorarlberg, 27 November; Salzburger Landeszeitung, 29 November.

<sup>51</sup> Cf R.R. Palmer and Joel Colton, A History of the Modern World, Vol 2: Since 1815, (New York: Knopf, 1971), p. 521.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 515.

<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note that there was no difference in this aspect between the various newspapers, although the Wiener Zeitung, the Prager Zeitung, the Linzer Zeitung, the Salzburger Landeszeitung, the Fremden-Blatt, the Wiener Lloyd and Der Wanderer were all official or semi-official gazettes serving different authorities, Die Presse, liberal and the Ost-Deutsche Post Pan-Germanic.

<sup>54</sup> Johann Winckler, Die periodische Presse Österreichs: Eine historisch-statistische Studie, (Vienna: L. Sommer & Co, 1875), Teil III, of these 172 periodicals, 132 were published in German, twenty-six in Slavic languages, thirteen in Italien, one in Armenian and one in French; thirty-nine were published daily; and sixty-three in the Imperial residence, Vienna.

<sup>55</sup> Matthew Arnold, "A Persian Passion Play," in Essays in Criticism, (London: Macmillan & Co, 1895), p. 226.