

Hájí Mírzá Áqásí: A Portrait of a Tyrannical and Ignorant Prime Minister

With a Translation of His Letter Addressed to the ‘Ulamá—the Learned Divines—of Isfahán

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As the situation in Shíráz steadily worsened, the Báḅ was subjected to confinement within His residence for several weeks, while the pressure exerted upon Him by the central authorities and the ecclesiastical leaders of the city grew increasingly oppressive. At length, the mounting hostility and unrest rendered His continued stay untenable, and He was compelled to depart from Shíráz, after a sojourn of fifteen months following His return from pilgrimage.

He set out with the deliberate intention of attaining the presence of Muḥammad Sháh, directing His steps toward the city of Isfahán. That this momentous journey was divinely ordained is clearly borne out by the words of the Báḅ Himself, enshrined in His blessed Tablet addressed to the sovereign.

"...Whilst I was in Shíráz, I suffered grievous wrongs at the hand of its wicked and iniquitous governor¹—wrongs so severe that, were but a portion thereof made known unto thee, thou wouldst assuredly, in the cause of justice, rise up to exact retribution. For he cast the foundation of his dominion upon pure oppression, and by such tyranny he rendered the very throne of sovereignty the object of God's wrath until the Day of Resurrection. So great was the measure of his rebellion and the excesses of his drunkenness that no decree issued from him bore the faintest trace of reason or discernment. It was thus that, fearful and constrained, I departed from that place, resolved to attain the presence of that all-illuminated court—the seat of glory and majesty."²

Most historians who have chronicled the Báḅ's travels from Shíráz to Isfahán have noted that upon reaching the outskirts of Isfahán, He sent a letter to Manūchehr Khān Mo'tamad al-Dawlah, the governor of the province, informing him of His arrival and requesting that suitable accommodations be arranged for His stay.

Manūchehr Khān Mo'tamad al-Dawlah (d. 9 February 1847), a distinguished statesman of Georgian origin, ranked among the more competent and broad-minded

¹ This refers to Ḥusayn Khān Ājudān-Bāshī (died 1862–1867), a notable Qajar military officer and statesman who governed Shiraz from 1844 to 1848. During his tenure, he played a significant role in the political and religious affairs of the region amid a period of considerable unrest.

² Selections from the Writings of the Báḅ, p. 15.

administrators of the Qájár period. Renowned for his firmness of rule and openness of spirit, he played a decisive role in preserving order in a region fraught with political and religious turbulence.

The Báb, fully aware of his character, discerned in him a trustworthy and receptive soul. That the Báb's choice of Isfahán was deliberate, and not incidental, is further supported by the fact that, even while in Mecca, He had abandoned His earlier intention of journeying to Karbalá, and instead instructed His followers to proceed to Isfahán and await His arrival.

The Báb entered that city around the 23rd of September 1846 and remained there for nearly six months, until the issuance of a royal decree mandating His transfer to the distant fortress of MáKú. During this interval, He captivated the leading divines of the city by His humility, His innate spiritual discernment, and the astonishing rapidity with which He revealed verses. Among those who were deeply impressed was the city's Imám-Jum'ih (Friday Prayer Leader), in whose residence the Báb sojourned for approximately forty days.

It was during this period of comparative tranquillity that the Báb revealed two notable works: the *Tafsír-i-Súratu'l-‘Aşr* (Commentary on the Súrih of al-‘Aşr), composed at the request of the Imám-Jum'ih, and the *Dalā'il-i-Nubuwwat-i-Khāşşih* (Proofs of the Specific Prophethood), revealed in honour of Manūchehr Khān.

These six months in Isfahán may rightly be regarded as a brief interlude of respite and comparative peace in a ministry otherwise marked by relentless trials and persecution—a period unparalleled in the six years stretching from His Declaration to His martyrdom. Yet even this short-lived calm was soon shattered.

Fearing that the growing popularity of the Báb might move Muḥammad Sháh to grant Him a personal audience, Ḥájí Mírzá Áqásí, the Prime Minister, set out to poison the minds of the 'ulamā of Isfahán. The very clerics who had but recently extolled the Báb's knowledge and virtues now turned against Him, denouncing Him from their pulpits and circulating slanderous and incendiary accusations.

What follows is an English rendering of one such communication—a letter penned by Ḥájí Mírzá Áqásí and addressed to the 'ulamā of Isfahán, dated 30 December 1846 (*Fereydun Ādamiyat, Amīr Kabīr va Īrān*, p. 445).

In this letter, Áqásí echoes the invective of the clergy, portraying the Báb as both misguided and misleading, and insisting that His punishment was essential for the preservation of religion and the security of the state.

He accuses the Báb of having overstepped the bounds of vicegerency by brazenly claiming the station of prophethood, and cites verses from the Qur'án to discredit His revealed Writings as incoherent fabrications.

He mocks the Báb's usage of disconnected letters, likening them to meaningless substitutions, and attributes His utterances to delirium induced by narcotics, which he

alleges were prevalent among the Shaykhí community. On these grounds, Áqásí announces his decision to consign the Báb to perpetual confinement in the remote and forbidding stronghold of MáKú, and urges the clergies to assist in identifying His followers, that they too might be apprehended and punished.

This document stands as a stark testament to the Prime Minister's efforts to arouse clerical opposition and to pre-emptively cast the Báb's Message as doctrinally heretical.

In his letter, Ḥájí Mírzá Áqásí writes³:

"To the presence of the illustrious 'ulamā and learned men of dignity and respect, this humble servant offers his salutations and submits the following:

Concerning the individual from Shíráz who has styled himself as the Báb and vicegerent of the Imám, you have written that—being a misguided and misleading figure—it is necessary, in accordance with the exigencies of religion and the interests of the state, that he be subject to the punishment of His Most Exalted Majesty, the All-Powerful Sovereign, the Peerless Monarch, the Refuge of Islám⁴—may the spirit of the world be sacrificed for him—so that his fate may serve as a lesson for posterity.

That mad and deluded one has not contented himself with a claim to vicegerency; rather, in the depths of his ignorance and the baseness of his judgment, he has openly laid claim to prophethood. For, despite the clear import of the noble verse: "Bring then a Surah like it" which indeed indicates that matching even a single brief surah is impossible, he has compiled a book of nonsensical fabrications, named it "Qur'án."

Yet how far removed is such a book from the divine Word! For the verse states: "Say: If all mankind and the jinn were to gathered together to produce the like of this Qur'án, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they were to support one another."

And this ignorant soul, instead of revealed letters such as Káf. Há. Yá. 'Ayn. Şád, has written Káf. Há. Jím. Dál, and in this manner, has composed a string of absurdities and futilities.

As for the truth of his condition, I know it best: since the greater part of this Shaykhí faction are addicted to hashish and opium, his utterances and deeds arise from the stupor of narcotics. It is under the influence of such depravity that this heretical wretch has fallen into these vain delusions.

The course of action I have determined for his punishment is to send him to MáKú, where he shall be confined perpetually in the fortress. As for those who have believed in him and follow his lead, they too are culpable.

³ A transcription of the original Persian text of the letter is found in Fereyduñ Ādamiyat, *Amīr Kabīr va Īrān*, p. 445.

⁴ All these honorific titles are references to Muḥammad Sháh Qájár, the sovereign of Persia during this period.

You are therefore requested to identify a few of his followers and inform me, so that they may be punished and disciplined. May your days be ever adorned with the continuance of bounty and beneficence.”

**A Transcription of the Letter of Ḥájí Mírzá Āqásí, Dated 11 Muḥarram 1263 A.H. / 30
December 1846 C.E., to the ‘Ulamá—the Learned Divines—of Isfahán**

مکتوب حاجی میرزا آقاسی خطاب به علمای اصفهان

خدمت علمای اعلام و فضلالی ذوی العز و الاحترام مصدع می شود که در باب شخص شیرازی که خود را باب و نایب امام
نامیده نوشته بودند که چون ضال مضل است بر حسب مقتضیات دین و دولت لازم است مورد سیاست اعلیحضرت قدر
قدرت قضا شوکت شاهنشاه اسلام پناه روح العالمین فداء شود تا آینده را عبرتی باشد آن دیوانه جاهل دعوی نیابت نکرده
بلکه دعوی نبوت کرده زیرا که از روی کمال نادانی و سخافت رأی در مقابل با آنکه آیه شریفه فأتوا بسورة من مثله دلالت
دارد که مقابله یک سوره اقصر محال است کتابی از مزخرفات جمع کرده و قرآن نامیده و حال آنکه لئن اجتمعت الانس
والجن علی ان یأتوا بمثل هذا القرآن لا یأتون بمثله ولو کان بعضهم لبعض ظهیرا چه رسد بقرآن آن نادان که به جای
که یعیص مثلاً کاف، ها

جیم دال نوشته و بدین نمط مزخرفات و اباطیل ترتیب داده بلی حقیقت احوال او را من بهتر میدانم که چون اکثر این طایفه
شیخی را مداومت بچرس و بنک است گفته ها و کرده های او از روی نشاء حشیش است که آن بدکیش به این خیالات باطل
افتاده و من فکری که برای سیاست او کرده ام اینست که او را بماکو فرستم که در قلعه ماکو حبس موبد باشد اما کسانی که
به او گرویده اند و متابعت کرده اند. مقصرند شما چند نفر از تابعین او را پیدا کرده و به من نشان بدهید تا آنها مورد تنبیه و
سیاست شوند باقی ایام فضل و افاضت مستدام باد

[Source: Fereyduṅ Ādamiyat, *Amīr Kabīr and Iran* (Tehran: [Publisher], 1362 H.Sh. /
1983–84 C.E.), p. 445. A slightly different version also appears in *Fitnah-yi Bāb*.]