

The Ancestry of Bahá'u'lláh

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The celebrated Bahá'í scholar, Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl-i-Gulpáygání, has written that at the time when he lived in Tihrán a controversy arose amongst some of the Bahá'ís regarding the purpose of verses composed by Shalmaghání that point to the Advent of a Manifestation of God in future years.

Abú-Ja'far Muhammad Ibn 'Alí was a native in the village of Shalmaghán, which was situated in the region of Wásit in 'Iráq. So he was known as ash-Shalmaghání. He was a Shí'ih and a close associate of Husayn Ibn Rúh, who claimed to be the third deputy of the Hidden Imám. Husayn Ibn Rúh was a prominent member of the House of Nawbakht, and owed his appointment to the previous deputy: Abú-Ja'far Muhammad Ibn 'Uthmán al-'Umarí. Despite his high connections, he was thrown into gaol by the highly capricious 'Abbásid caliph, al-Muqtadir.

Shalmaghání is greatly vilified, because during the period of Husayn Ibn Rúh's incarceration he changed his views and denied the existence of a Hidden Imám. The Twelvers, amongst whom Shalmaghání had enjoyed prestige and leadership, then directed their efforts towards his destruction. During the caliphate of ar-Rádí (AD 934-40) Shalmaghání and Ibráhím Ibn Abí-'Awn, one of his ardent supporters, were both put to death and their bodies were burned.

In a Tablet addressed to Mullázádih of Tabríz, 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out that Shalmaghání spoke the word of truth, foretelling the rise of the Divine Luminary from the horizon of Írán, but that men devoid of truth denounced him and condemned him to death.

The following pages are from the pen of Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl, to whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred Áqá Khusraw Bimán for information concerning the ancestry of Bahá'u'lláh. His reply was later published as a pamphlet in Bombay and is here translated, in part, by the present author.¹

'Some considered that the poem under consideration carried the tidings of the Advent of the Primal Point². They took the word "Fársí" that appears in the poem to be the same as "Shírází". Others considered the reference to be to the Advent of the Abhá Beauty³, because Shalmaghání had denied that the appearance of the Promised One would be from the House of Hášim, and had prophesied that the Light of Abhá would shine from the

¹ *Sharh-i-Shajarih Námih-i-Mubárákih* (Description of the Blessed Genealogy). Bombay: Mustáfá'i, AH 1321/AD 1905. (URL: http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/gulpaygani/AbulFadl_Sharh_Shajarihnamih_Mubarakih_India_1_16.pdf (ed.))

² The Báb (ed.)

³ Bahá'u'lláh (ed.)

House of Kisrá [Chosroes] Thus it is proved [they concluded] that the prophecy gave the tidings of the Advent of the Blessed Beauty⁴ and not of the Báb.

‘Sometime previous to that I had noted these words in the *Dasatír* [a book related to the Mazdean Faith]: “Should it remain of high Heaven, I shall raise up one of your people and shall show Him the Way, and shall not take away prophethood and Lordship from thy children”. And in other books of the Pársís I had observed amongst the tidings which they carry the definite statement that this bounty shall be realized after the passage of twelve hundred and some more years from the time of the inception of the Faith of Islám: that is to say, before 1300 years have come to pass from the birth of Islám that shining Luminary will appear over that delectable horizon. Briefly, for these reasons I reached the conclusion that the ancestry of the House of Núrís goes back to the ancient dynasties of Írán; and therefore Shalmaghání intended in that poem to convey the tidings of the Advent of the Abhá Beauty and not the Advent of the Primal Point.

‘However, since firmly holding this conception without the support of the testimony of history was not a rational act, I went out to investigate the matter in the history of Tabaristán. Historians maintain that consequent to the victory of the Muslims over Írán and the extinction of the Sásánids, some princes of Írán captured Mázindarán, and several dynasties branching out from them reigned over that domain for a very long time. Such were the Bádústáníyán, who, as it is retailed in *Habíbu’s-Siyar* [a history by Khundmír, AD 1523], after the abandonment of the capital by Yazdigird the son of Shahriyár [Yazdigird III, the last of the Sásánids, took over Mázindarán and protected it from domination by the Arabs. The seat of the government of the Bádústáníyán was at the city of Ámul and the city of Bârfurúsh and also other central cities of Tabaristán. For many a generation the governance of these cities belonged to this dynasty. And of the kings of Tabaristán there is also the dynasty of Ál-i-Ziyár whose first ruler was Mardávij , the son of Ziyár, who came to power in the year AH 315 [AD 927] and within a short time brought all the cities of Tabaristán under his independent reign. The Ziyárids held power for nearly one-hundred-and-sixty years. Their capital was Gurgán or Jurján. They were descendants of Sásánids. The most famous of them is ‘Unsuru’l-Ma’álí Kávús the son of Vushmagír, son of Mardávij , son of Ziyár of Daylam. To this day, his book the *Qábús Námih*, which he wrote in a style eloquent and strong for the edification of his son, Gílân-Sháh, is well-famed and pleasing to masters of ethics.

‘Again, of the kings of Tabaristán is the dynasty of the Sipahbudán of Mázindarán. Historians consider them to have been the real kings of Mázindarán, and trace their descent back to Anúshirvân the Just. The residence and the seat of government of this dynasty was mostly in the district of Núr and Kujúr. Every ruler of this line dwelt with his family and offspring in the castles of these areas. And the people of Tabaristán — peasant and landlord, ruler and governor — kept their Zoroastrian Faith until the third century of the Hijrah. It was then that Dá’íy-i-Kabír, Hasan Ibn Zayd-i-’Alawí, conquered Tabaristán and the star of the ‘Alawid Zaydíyyih rulership rose over Eastern lands. When that happened all the people of Tabaristán, young and old, rich and poor, without compulsion and dislike, guided by this great Emir, were converted to Islám and became known far and wide as faithful to the Imámate of the Zaydíyyih School. The rulership remained with this dynasty until the star of the Safavids rose in turn. Tabaristán was then governed by the celebrated Emir, Áqá Rustam-i-Rúzafzún. He refused to

⁴ Bahá’u’lláh (ed.)

acknowledge the sovereignty of Sháh Ismá'íl. Because of that the emirate of that House became extinct. All of those emirs were well known for their devotion to the Imáms, and for their patronage of knowledge and learned men. Some of the celebrated savants have penned invaluable tomes dedicated to the rulers of Gurgán and Tabaristán. Eminent poets have composed lambent odes in praise of the Sipahbuds of Mázindarán. One such was Manúchihrí, the well-famed poet of the fifth century AH [eleventh century AD] who praised Falaku'l-Ma'álí Manúchihhr, the son of Shamsu'I-Ma'álí Qábús, the son of Vushmagír, from whose name he adopted his sobriquet. And another was the celebrated Kháqání, who composed splendid odes in praise of the Sipahbuds of Mázindarán. Another famous poet, Zahír-i-Fáriyábí [twelfth century AD], although in the service and a panegyrist of Qizil-Arslán [AD 1186-91, Atábak of Ádharbáyján] and a fervent Sunní himself, addressing his patron in an ode tells him that after thirty years of service in 'Iráq, it is the King of Mázindarán who supplies the daily bread of the poet. And in another ode, equivocally he says: "Decided have I to turn towards Mázindarán. Love of Abú-Bakr and friendship for 'Umar provide not the means of living."

'In brief, when I noticed these occasions in history books I became convinced that in all probability I could find correctly the genealogy of the Abhá Beauty. Then a number of trustworthy people stated that Ridá-Qulí Khán, entitled Amíru'sh-Shu'ará, has mentioned in his book *Nizhád-Námih* that the descent of the House of Núris goes back to the just king, Anúshirván. This was a reliable source, because Hidáyat [Ridá-Qulí Khán's sobriquet], although immersed in waywardness, is one of the most celebrated historians of Íran. *Rawdatu's-Safáy-i-Násirí* is one of his works, over which he has toiled many years and has rearranged a famous book. Secondly, Hidáyat is an enemy of the Cause of God. The nonsense which he has included and published in the Appendices to *Rawdatu's-Safá*, even overtaking the author of *Násikhu't-Tavárikh* [a history of the world in several volumes by Muhammad-Taquí Khán-i-Sipihr of Káshán, entitled Lisánu'l-Mulk] in shameless fabrication and disparagement, provides clearproof of his enmity. Therefore it was evident that had he had any doubt regarding the descent of the House of Núris from the just monarch, Anúshirván, he never would have put it on record and given it wide publicity.

'Fortunately, at that very time I met the late Hájí Mírzá Ridá-Qulí [a half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh] at the home of one of the noblemen of Tihrán. The host, prompted by me, asked Hájí Mírzá Ridá-Qulí to explain who the forebears were of the House of Núris. He replied that their descent was from Yazdigird-i-Shahriyár [the last of the Sásánids]. Our host further enquired whether they had a genealogical table to indicate their descent, or was it only a matter of oral tradition and repetition passed on by the prominent personages of the House? Hájí Mírzá Ridá-Qulí replied that such a genealogical table existed, in which the names, the professions, and the entitlements of every one of the forebears of this House are all recorded, right up to Yazdigird the son of Shahriyár. One could gather from what he said that there were several copies extant of that genealogical table in the possession of his cousins and the prominent members of his family.

'When these evidences were all obtained I presented a supplication to the Holy Threshold of the Abhá Beauty, stating the variety of views expressed regarding Shalmaghání's intent and the tidings related to Írán and the historical evidences that exist. In answer I was honoured with a Tablet, dated 26 Sha'bán 1299 [July 1882]. Regarding the intent of Shalmaghání in his poem, the Pen of the All-Merciful did thus inscribe in

that holy Tablet: “O Abu’l-Fadl! Verily thou hast spoken the truth and hast brought to light that which was enshrined in his words...” (*Sharh-i-Shajarih Námih-i-Mubárahik*, p. 14)

‘As it happened, in those years Ustád Javánmard, the principal of the Pársí School of Yazd and a teacher of the school, who was a prominent Bahá’í of Pársí origin, wrote a supplication and enquired about the genealogy of the Blessed Perfection. In answer to that supplication the Tablet of *Shír-Mard* was revealed. In that Tablet it is said: “You had enquired about the pure-natured ancestors; Abu’l-Fadl-i-Gulpáygání, upon whom be My Glory, has written of heavenly works on this theme that would impart information and increase perception.” Since the text of the Tablet was not available, here the gist of it was quoted.

‘What I have written here is also the gist of the treatise which I wrote about the holy Family. And since on 28th of Rabí’u’l-Avval 1300 [February 1883], on the orders of Kámrán Mírzá, the Náyibu’s-Saltanih, a number of friends and myself were arrested in Tihrán, and all my books and writings were looted, the manuscript of that treatise fell into the hands of enemies and was lost to me...’