



MOḤAMMAD-TAQI WAKIL-AL- DAWLA ŠIRĀZI

MOḤAMMAD-TAQI WAKIL-AL-DAWLA ŠIRĀZI, Ḥāji Mirzā Sayyed (1830- 30 August 1911), prominent Iranian [Bahai](#) merchant from [Shiraz](#). He was the son of Ḥājia Bibi Fāṭema-Sāḥeb and Ḥāji Mirzā Sayyed Moḥammad (1798-1876), the great maternal uncle (*kāl-e akbar*) of Sayyed ‘Ali-Moḥammad Širāzi, the [Bāb](#) (1819-50).

Ḥāji Mirzā Sayyed Moḥammad and his two brothers, Ḥāji Mirzā Sayyed ‘Ali (*kāl-e a’zam*) and Ḥāji Mirzā Ḥasan-‘Ali (*kāl-e ašgār*), ran a trading house (later known as the Afnan Trading House) in which they and their sons conducted commercial activities dealing in various goods. Each of the three brothers established himself in a different commercial center in Iran, with Moḥammad, the eldest, based in [Bushehr](#), ‘Alī in Shiraz, and Ḥasan-‘Ali, the youngest, in Yazd (Ḥ. Afnān, pp. 307-8). They seem to have adopted a system in which each of the three brothers gradually developed his own businesses, some in partnership between themselves and some with others, mainly members of the extended Shirazi family; but they helped each other in various ways, such as in administrative work, shipment of goods and their release from customs, and training their nephews in business affairs after the completion of their studies. This cooperation made them grow from a nationwide trading house into an international one, operating in such commercial centers as Hong Kong, Bombay (Mumbai), and [Ashkhabad](#) (Ešqābād; *Yazd dar asnād*, pp. 245-46).



Thus, in 1845, at the age of 15, and after having completed his studies, Moḥammad-Taḳi was sent to Bushehr to work alongside his father in the family's firm there. His cousin, the Bab, had terminated his business there by 1841 and gone to visit the shrines of the Atabat, before returning home to Shiraz in 1842 (Amanat, pp. 136-46; Ḥ. Afnān, p. 316).

In 1854, at the age of 24, Moḥammad-Taḳi moved to Yazd, where he married Bibi Zahrā Bagom, but later took a second wife (Ḥ. Afnān, p. 316). In 1859 he traveled to Baghdad, where he met [Bahā'-Allāh](#). This meeting made a great impression on him, and he became a believer (Ḥ. Afnān, p. 319). In Yazd the Shirazis operated their various commercial activities from K̄āja Caravansary, where they had rented some "six-seven large commercial offices" (*ḥojra; Yazd dar asnād*, p. 106).

The Shirazis were engaged in commercial activities, ranging from trade in traditional commodities to that of newly introduced items, such as [opium](#) (*taryāk*). It was Ḥāji Mirzā Moḥammad-'Ali (1824-96), Moḥammad-Taḳi's eldest brother, who was mostly involved in the opium trade with his younger brother, Ḥāji Mirzā Bozorg, at least until the consumption of, and trade in, opium was banned by Bahā'-Allāh (item 155; *Ganjina-ye ḥodud*, pp. 428-29; E. Afnan, p. 17 of draft article). However, as far as Moḥammad-Taḳi is concerned, while it is possible that he or other members of the Shirazi clan either helped Moḥammad-'Ali in the opium trade or even partnered with him (as long as it was not forbidden to do so by Bahā'-Allāh), the available sources indicate that Moḥammad-Taḳi's main commercial activity was elsewhere. These included, among others, real estate (mainly land purchase, rent, or lease); agriculture and cultivation; trade in a range of commodities (e.g., [gum tragacanth](#), sugar, cubic sugar, rice, silk), as well as farming of official offices, such as the entire customs of Yazd for the year of Tushqan'il 1270s (corresponding to 21 March 1891 until 19 March 1892) for 40,000 toman (Āqā Ḥaydar-'Ali to Amin-al-Žarb, as quoted in Mahdavi, pp. 83-84; Moḥammad-Taḳi to Amin-al-Žarb, in *Yazd dar asnād*, pp. 283, 427, 465; 'Ali-Naqi Aštari to Amin-al-Žarb, in *Yazd dar asnād*, pp. 331-32; Mālmiri, p. 67).

Concurrent to his own family's commercial activities, Moḥammad-Taḳi became heavily involved in matters related to the merchant (*tojjār*) community, and specifically in their relations with the local and central governments in Iran. In this regard he was actively and heavily involved in promoting reform in these relations, efforts which in 1884 resulted in the establishment of the Councils of Representatives of the Merchants (*Majles-e*



wokalā-ye tojjār), which dismantled a year later (e.g., see Moḥammad-Taqi to Amin-al-Žarb, in *Yazd dar asnād*, pp. 239-40 and also pp. 132, 337-40; Gilbar, pp. 639-74).

In Yazd the Shirazis enjoyed much respect and honor, in spite of the fact that everyone in that city knew that they were Babi-Bahais. According to Mālmiri, a Bahai merchant who worked with the Shirazis, this was a direct result of a number of reasons, such as their status as *sayyeds* (descendants of Prophet Moḥammad); the fact that they were big wholesalers with considerable wealth; their pleasant and kind character; and their pious behavior, chastity, faithfulness, and wisdom. Such characteristics were enough to draw many of the locals towards the Bahai faith (Mālmiri, pp. 59-61), to protect the Shirazis during fanatical persecutions, and to gain the respect of officials and dignitaries

Among the Shirazis of Yazd, it was Moḥammad-Taqi who enjoyed a special status. This was not only the result of the good reputation of the Shirazis, but also specifically due to his own righteous, humble, and trustworthy character (Ṭāherzāda, I, p. 199; ‘Abd-al-Bahā’, p. 127); his position as a prominent merchant in Yazd; his close association and friendship with Aqā Moḥammad-Ḥasan Eṣfahāni (also known as Amīn-al-Žarb), probably the richest and most influential merchant in late 19th-century Iran (*Yazd dar Asnad*, p. 106); and his activities in relation to representing the merchant class (see above).

Thus, given all his qualities and prominence in Yazd, Moḥammad-Taqi seemed the right choice when Tsarist Russia decided to appoint a Russian commercial agent in Yazd. He was offered this position in 1889, which he readily accepted (Russian embassy to Ḥāji Mirzā Sayyed Moḥammad-Taqi, 23 April 1889, p. 1; Moḥammad-Taqi Širāzi to Russian embassy, 30 April 1889; Tumanski, “Report”). The requirements of the post were to represent and assist Russian subjects, especially merchants, in Iran (Russian embassy to Ḥāji Mirzā Sayyed Moḥammad-Taqi, 23 April 1889, p. 1).

The post came with the title of Wakil-al-Dawla-ye Rus (representative of the Russian government), a special and large golden emblem of the Russian government, and a Russian flag that was fixed over Moḥammad-Taqi’s house. Furthermore, as Russian representative, he enjoyed all the benefits that came with such a post, for instance, immunity from legal and religious persecution as well as 24-hour guarded protection for him and his family (Mālmiri, pp. 60-61). In this post, which he held for over a decade, Moḥammad-Taqi not



only fulfilled his duties, but also used it to protect and facilitate his and his family's business in Iran and in the new Russian Transcaspian territories, where he set up new branches of his business in localities such as Ashkhabad and Bukhara, places to which Bahais from Iran gradually began to immigrate from Iran during the mid-1880s (Moḥammad-Taqi to the Russian ambassador in Tehran, 12 October 1889, p. 4; Moḥammad-Taqi Širāzi to 'Arab Šāḥeb, 12 October 1889, p. 5).

Since Moḥammad-Taqi filled his post to the full satisfaction of the Russian government, on 7 January 1902 he was awarded a golden medal from the Order of Saint Stanislav (Russian consulate, Isfahan to the Russian ambassador, Tehran, 11 November 1901, pp. 29a-29b; Russian ambassador in Tehran to the First Dept., Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15 November 1901, pp. 30a-30b; First Dept., Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Russian Mission in Tehran, 20 November 1901, p. 31; Director, the First Dept., Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Kimon Manuilovich Argiropulo, 19 February 1902, pp. 33a-33b).

By the end of the 1890s, Moḥammad-Taqi was recognized as “the leader and the headman” of the Shirazis (*Yazd dar asnād*, p. 106). By then he was also preparing himself to retire from business activity and to devote himself entirely to serving his religion. One of the landed properties, which his brother, Moḥammad-'Ali, had bought in 1887 in Ashkhabad, had been dedicated by Bahā'-Allāh for the building of a *Mašreq al-Aḏkār*, a Bahai house of worship, with other properties to be endowed to support it (Ḥ. Afnān, p. 319). Thus, when 'Abd-al-Bahā' asked Moḥammad-Taqi to superintend the construction of the *Mašreq al-Aḏkār*, he closed his business in Yazd and set out for Ashkhabad (4 April 1900). The construction began in late 1902 (Armstrong-Ingram, p. 11) and was completed in 1906, with interior and exterior decoration completed in 1919 (Fayzi, pp. 102-4; Balyuzi, p. 110; Ra'fati, p. 8; Momen, 1991, p. 285; Hassall, p. 49; Lee, 11).

After completing the challenging task of building the *Mašreq al-Aḏkār*, Moḥammad-Taqi retired to Haifa, where he spent the last two years of his life. He passed away on 30 August, 1911, at the age of eighty-one, and was the first to be buried in the Baha'i cemetery in Haifa (Ḥ. Afnān, pp. 318-19).

Moḥammad-Taqi's rich business experience, various activities, and strong devotion to his Bahai faith won him many titles. These included titles in relation to his activities for the merchant class (Malek-al-Tojjār, Wakil-al-



Tojjār), for representing Russian interests in Yazd (Wakil-al-Dawla-ye Rus), for his devotion and services he rendered to his faith (Wakil-al-Ḥaqq), and for his delightful character (Afnān-e Maliḥ) (RSHA, “Mission in Persia,” 528/1/1889-1904/1596, p. 1; ‘Abd-al-Bahā’, p. 126; H. Afnān, p. 316; E. Afnan, p. 19). He also received the title of “Afnān” (twigs, branches), which was given by Bahā’-Allāh to the siblings of Faṭema Begom and Kādiya Begom, the Bāb’s mother and wife, respectively.

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