



VARQĀ, 'ALI-MOḤAMMAD

VARQĀ, 'ALI-MOḤAMMAD (b. Yazd, 1855; d. Tehran, 2 May, 1896, [FIGURE 1](#)), a well-known poet, student of traditional Iranian medicine, and an early follower of [Bahā'-Allāh](#), the founder of the Bahai Faith. He was the youngest son of Ḥāji Mollā Mehdi ('Aṭri) of Yazd. Varqā became a courageous teacher of Bahaism. He was one of the four Hands of the Cause of God ([Ayādi Amr-Allāh](#)), posthumously elevated to this rank by 'Abd-al-Bahā' (The Universal House of Justice, p. 446) and one of the 19 Apostles of Bahā'-Allāh (Harper, pp. 42-51). He was given the title Varqā ('dove,' in Arabic) by Bahā'-Allāh in recognition of his poetic talents, and he subsequently adopted this title as his family name, often using it as a pen name (*takalloṣ*) in his poetry.

It is estimated that the collection of Varqā's poetry is in excess of 6000 verses, of which 3052 verses have been classified and copied (Varqā, p. 488; Afnān, p. 37). Regarded as one of the outstanding Bahai poets of his time, Varqā's poetic style comprised virtually all structures typical of Persian poetry, including *ḡazals*, *maṭnawīs*, *qaṣīdas*, and *tarkiband* and *tarji'band* compositions. The theme common to all of Varqā's poetry is a testimonial to his dedication and absolute devotion to Bahā'-Allāh and 'Abd-al-Bahā'. In this regard, his poetic output is unique and unparalleled inasmuch as the combination of his style and content is not encountered amongst the works of any of his contemporaries (Afnān, pp. 37-38).

In his early twenties, Varqā married Faṭema, the only child of Mirzā Abd-Allāh' Khan Nuri Māzandarāni (Goharriz, pp. 92-94). The marriage produced four sons, Aziz-Allāh, Ruḥ-Allāh, Wali-Allāh, who was appointed a hand of the



cause of God by Shoghi Effendi, and Badi'-Allāh. Ruḥ-Allāh was put to death at the age of twelve along with his father (Momen, pp. 361-62). Varqā's second eldest son, young Ruḥ-Allāh, was an avid teacher of the Bahai faith from an early age, and was endowed with poetic talents of high caliber. The most well known of his poetic work is in couplets (*matnawi*).

During his lifetime, Varqā made three voyages to the Holy Land, twice on pilgrimage during the life of Bahā'-Allāh (1879, and 1891), and once during the lifetime of 'Abd-al-Bahā' (1893). His two eldest sons accompanied him during his last two pilgrimages.

In the spring of 1896, Varqā and his son Ruḥ-Allāh, along with two other Bahais, were imprisoned under heavy chains in the government prison located in Sabza Maydān, Tehran, on charges of spreading the tenets of the new religion and failing to recant their faith (*taqia*; Mehdi Varqā, 2001, p. 97). Enraged by the assassination of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (1 May 1896) while on a pilgrimage at the Šāh 'Abd-al-'Azim shrine in the south of Tehran, Mo'in-al-Solṭān Ḥajeb-al-Dawla, accused Varqā of having instigated the assassination and proceeded to stab and mutilate his body in front of his son, thereafter strangling the young Ruḥ-Allāh who also refused to recant and insisted on joining his father.

The remains of Varqā and Ruḥ-Allāh were buried in the old Bahai cemetery in Tehran (Mehdi Varqā, 1994, p. 34).

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