

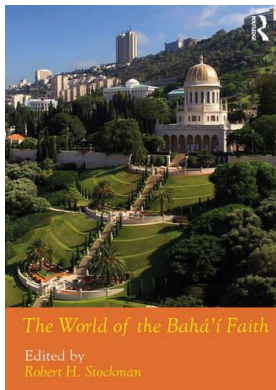
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The World of the Bahá'í Faith

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IRAN

Moojan Momen

Iran (Persia) is designated in the authoritative Bahá'í texts as the 'cradle of the Faith' (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 296), in that the Bábí and Bahá'í religions originated there and their founders were born in that country. Thus the early Bahá'í community was predominantly Iranian and continued to be so until the 1960s. Iran was the stage for many of the key historical events in Bahá'í history and many of the organizational and structural developments in the Bahá'í community originated there. Iran has also been important as a source of large numbers of individuals who have migrated to other parts of the world and have played and continue to play an important part in the spread and administration of the religion. Certain elements of Iranian culture have been carried forward into the Bahá'í Faith such as the coordination of the new year with the spring equinox and its designation as 'Naw-Rúz'.

Provincial histories 1844–1921

The different parts of Iran have their own strong local culture, even more so in the nineteenth century compared to today. Until the 1920s, although the king was in theory an autocrat, in practice, his writ was often only effective in the capital and local governors ran their provinces as they wished most of the time. Thus the social and political context in which Bahá'í communities emerged around the country differed greatly, mostly depending on the attitude of local governors and religious leaders. It is only in the 1920s when a strong central state emerged that it is possible to make comments about the whole community. Therefore in this chapter, the development of the major Bahá'í communities in Iran up to 1921 will be described first and then some general points regarding the history of the Bahá'í community will be made.

Tehran

As well as being the birthplace of Bahá'u'lláh and the capital of the country, Tehran emerged as the most important Bahá'í community in the country in the 1870s. The whole Bábí community there had become Bahá'ís when Bahá'u'lláh first put forward His claim (although later Azalís did move to Tehran from other cities). Many of the most important Bahá'í scholars and teachers also migrated to Tehran and became resident there, including the four Hands of the Cause,

who were appointed by Bahá'u'lláh from about 1887 onwards. The earliest Bahá'í administrative institutions were formed in the city. After premature attempts to set up a consultative council in 1877 and 1894, the Hands of the Cause established an Assembly of Consultation in 1897, which became an elected body in 1913. It was called the Central Spiritual Assembly because it was a national coordinating body as well as being responsible for the affairs of the Tehran Bahá'ís. Bahá'í schools were established from 1900 onwards and books were published from about 1898 onwards, although because of the restrictions on the Bahá'ís, they had to use jellygraph and photo-offset methods, and the most important books were published outside Iran. Already by 1920 a considerable degree of organizational sophistication existed with the Central Spiritual Assembly in Tehran having committees for education, teachers' training, poor relief, publishing, international correspondence, hospitality, adjudication of commercial and other disputes, and teaching.

In the decades after the attempt on his life in 1852, Násiru'd-Dín Sháh actively sought out and arrested leading Bahá'ís throughout the country and had them brought to Tehran, imprisoning some and executing others. The enmity of the governor of Tehran for many years, Kamrán Mírzá Na'ibu's-Saltānih, as well as several of the important clerics of the city meant that the well-known Bahá'ís in Tehran were frequently arrested and imprisoned for periods of time. Bahá'í meetings were infiltrated by agents of the secret police, which was established in 1878. This led initially to the arrest of large numbers of Bahá'ís in 1880 and 1883. Paradoxically however, this proved beneficial for the Bahá'ís since it clearly established that they were not plotting against the king and government. From this time onwards, centrally directed persecution of the Bahá'ís of Tehran abated very considerably, only being reignited briefly in 1892 and 1896 because the Bahá'ís (who were still called Bábís by most people) were not sufficiently distinguished from the Azalí Bábís and other subversive reformers (Momen 2015: 1–104).

Also in the vicinity of Tehran were a number of other Bahá'í communities such Ishthiárd (which dated from the time of the Báb) and in a number of villages to the south of Tehran and in the Taliqán area (Momen 2015: 104–118).

Khorasan

This province in northeast Iran was the home of one-third of the Letters of the Living of the Báb and of several important Bábí and later Bahá'í communities in its towns and villages. From 1845 to 1848, Mashhad was probably the most important Bábí centre in Iran, with activities led by Mullá Husayn Buṣhrú'í and focussed on a house that became known as the Bábíyyih. When Bahá'u'lláh's claim was brought to Mashhad in 1866 by Nabíl Zarandí, the whole community accepted it and the greeting of 'Alláh-u-Abhá' (now universally used by Bahá'ís) was first used there. A number of prominent figures such as Mu'taminu's-Saltānih were Bahá'ís and could extend their protection to the Bahá'í community. As this first generation of Bahá'ís died, however, persecutions arose from about the 1890s onwards (Momen 2015: 119–152).

In Qúchán, it was the governor, Shujá'u'd-Dawlih, who protected the Bahá'ís until his death in 1893, while in Sabzivár it was the leading cleric of the city Hájí Mírzá Ibráhím Sharí'atmadár, until his death in 1898. As in Mashhad, once these powerful protectors died, persecutions began. In the southern part of Khorasan, there were many towns and villages where Bábí communities existed that later became Bahá'í communities. These included towns such as Turbat-i-Haydarí, Qá'in, Buṣhrúyih (the hometown of Mullá Husayn Buṣhrú'í), and Ṭabas (where the governor, 'Imádu'l-Mulk, protected the Bahá'ís), and villages such as Námíq, Hiṣṣár, Azqand, and Fayḍábád (Furúgh). Other communities sprang up at a later date such as those in the villages of

the Qá'inát area (around Bírjand): Durukhsh, Sarcháh, and Shákhin. In the area of Simnán and Damghán, there were important Bahá'í communities in *Shahmírzád* (which dated from Bábí times), Sangsar, Simnán, and *Shahrúd* (Momen 2015: 152–268).

Azərbayjan

Azərbayjan, in the northwest of Iran, was a stronghold of the Bábí movement (five of the Letters of the Living came from this province), building on pre-existing *Shaykhí* communities in the large towns and many villages in the province, including Tabriz, Marághih, *Khúy*, Urúmiyyih, Mílán, and Saysán. Because the Báb spent the last three years of His ministry imprisoned in this province, there was a great deal of travel through it by Bábís visiting the Báb. The governor of this province was traditionally the crown prince and from the 1870s onwards, there was a strong Bahá'í presence in the court of the crown prince at Tabriz. Because of this, the province was one of relative safety for Bahá'ís and many moved there from other areas of Iran where they were being persecuted. There were some Azalí Bábís in the province until the 1860s and some of the Bahá'ís joined the rebellion of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí against 'Abdu'l-Bahá. But neither of these had any lasting effect on the Bahá'í community (Momen 2015: 360–450).

Qazvin and Khamseh

The provinces of Qazvin and Khamseh (capital: Zanjan) lie on the road going from Tehran to the northwest. There were strong Bábí communities in both the cities of Qazvin and Zanjan and indeed one of the major Bábí upheavals played out in Zanjan in 1850–51. In Qazvin, the Bábí community was built on the basis of the pre-existing *Shaykhí* community and spread particularly among the merchants of the city. In Zanjan, however, the Bábí community arose as the result of the conversion of a leading cleric of the city, Mullá Muḥammad-'Alí Ḥujjat, who belonged to the *Akhbári* school. While Qazvin continued to be an important centre in the Bahá'í period, Zanjan's importance declined both because of the numbers who had died in the 1850–51 upheaval and because of the presence of an Azalí community. In Qazvin, a number of Bábí and Bahá'í factional groups existed for short periods of time but all eventually disappeared. Qazvin was unusual among the towns of Iran in that a number Sufis from the town became Bahá'ís. A Bahá'í school was established in Qazvin in 1908. In Abhar, an important local cleric, Mírzá 'Abdu'r-Raḥím, was converted and a Bahá'í community was established (Momen 2015: 451–500).

Mazandaran, Gilan, and Gurgan

These three provinces on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea have a sub-tropical climate. Mazandaran was an important centre for the Bábí movement, being the home province of Qudús, the Báb's leading disciple, and the location of the *Shaykh* Ṭabarsí upheaval in 1848–9. It is important for the Bahá'í Faith as the home-province of Bahá'u'lláh (more specifically, the region of Núr, where there was a short but bloody persecution in 1852). The Bábí communities in the towns and villages of the province developed into strong Bahá'í communities, especially in the towns and some villages of the eastern half of the province: Barfurúsh (Bábul), Sári, Máhfurúzak, Bihnamír, 'Arab-Khayl, Ívil, Búr-Khayl, Kafshgar-Kalá, and others. Bahá'í schools were established in Barfurúsh, Sári, and several of the villages (Momen 2015: 269–324).

There were Bábí communities in Rasht, the capital of Gilan, and Lahíján in the 1840s. The Bábís in Lahíján had close connections with Qazvin and they became Bahá'ís in the 1860s.

Bahá'ís from Lahj́án then moved to Rasht in the 1870s. There was an episode of persecution of the Bahá'ís in 1903 which was the first link in a chain of more severe persecutions that affected Isfahan, Yazd, and other places that year (Momen 2015: 328–359).

In Gurgan, which lies to the east of Mazandaran, Bahá'í communities arose as a result of the movement of Bahá'ís there from other parts of Iran (Momen 2015: 325–327).

Kashan and Qumm

Kashan was an important centre for the Bábí movement but after Bahá'u'lláh put forward His claim, the community was divided between Bahá'ís and Azalís. By the late 1860s, most of the important Azalís had either left the area or become Bahá'ís. Strong Bahá'í communities also grew in a number of towns and villages in the province: Naráq, Qamşar, Mázgán, Árán, Vádqán, and Jawshqán. There was much social and political turmoil in the area and the Bahá'ís suffered greatly, mainly at the hands of local leaders. Kashan was one locality where a considerable proportion of the Jewish community became Bahá'ís. A Bahá'í school was established in Kashan in 1909. In Ardístán a large Bahá'í community developed, occupying one of the town's quarters (Momen forthcoming).

Qumm is a major religious centre in Iran. There were Bábís in Qumm from the 1840s. Although a Bahá'í community was established in the town, it remained small because of relentless persecution. There were strong Bahá'í communities in Qumrúd and the Jasp area (Momen 2015: 501–516).

Isfahan and Central Iran

It was Mullá Husayn Bushrú'í who brought the message of the Báb to the city of Isfahan, which is situated in the centre of Iran. The Báb also visited this city for about six months. The religion spread particularly among the traders and craftsmen of the bazaar. When Bahá'u'lláh announced His claim, a few of the prominent Bábís of the area sided with Azal. Although the number of Azalís shrank over the years, they maintained a presence both in the city and the province. There were numerous episodes of persecution in this province, most of them initiated by Shaykh Muḥammad Báqir (who Bahá'u'lláh named 'The Wolf') and his son Shaykh Muḥammad Taqí ('The Son of the Wolf'), usually with the collusion of the governor Zīlu's-Sulṭán. Despite this, the Bahá'í Faith grew in both the city and in the towns and villages of the province. In the town of Najafábád, the community started in the time of the Báb, eventually establishing a Bahá'í school and growing to between one-fifth and one-quarter of the population of the town (Momen forthcoming).

Between Isfahan, Qumm, and Hamadan is an area where a number of Bahá'í communities arose. In Sulṭánábád (Arák), the early Bábí community was split into Bahá'ís and Azalís, but eventually, most became Bahá'ís. There was an episode in 1864 when seven prominent Bábí men were killed and a Bábí women taken to Tehran and killed there. A number of Jews in the town became Bahá'ís. In 1916 an entire Bahá'í family including five children and a 40-day old baby were killed at night. A number of villages in the area such as Khalajabad and Shahabad had large Bahá'í populations. Towns such as Gulpaygan and Khunsar also had Bahá'í communities.

Hamadan, Kermanshah, Kurdistan, and the southwest of Iran

There were a few individual Bábís in this western region of Iran. Functioning communities did not develop, however, until Bahá'ís migrated to Hamadan in the 1860s from such towns as

Naráq. Conversions among the Jews of the town began in about 1875 and eventually resulted in about a quarter of the Jews in the city becoming Bahá'ís. A Bahá'í school was established in the town. The Bahá'í Faith also spread among the towns and villages of this province, including Amzájird, Bahár, and Dinárábád (Momen forthcoming).

In Kermanshah, the spread of the Bahá'í Faith was hampered by a small but active group of Azalís, the opposition of a *Shaykhí* and an Ahl-i-Ḥaqq religious leader, and the enmity of a number of governors. Some of the Jews of the town became Bahá'ís, however, as a result of the effort of Jewish Bahá'ís from Hamadan. The Bahá'í Faith also spread among the Ahl-i-Ḥaqq villagers of the Gúrán area to the west of Kermanshah. There were in addition Bahá'í communities in some of the other towns and villages in the province, such as Maláyir, Tuysargán, Asadábád, and Karand (Momen forthcoming).

The fact that the majority of the population of Kurdistan are Sunni Muslims meant that the Bahá'í Faith was slow in spreading to this province as well as in the tribal areas of Laristan and Khuzistan. Bahá'í communities were established in some towns such as Burújird and some villages of the Hindiján area (Momen forthcoming).

Fars and the Gulf ports

Shiraz, the capital of the province of Fars, was the birthplace of the Báb and witnessed the start of the religion of the Báb in 1844. As distinct from the Bábí communities in the rest of Iran, many of the Bábís of the city had known the Báb personally. The House of the Báb in Shiraz was designated by Bahá'u'lláh as a place of pilgrimage. One of the major Bábí upheavals occurred in the town of Nayriz in this province. Although most of the family of the Báb did not become Bábís during the lifetime of the Báb, they were converted in the 1860s and later became Bahá'ís as did almost all of the town's other Bábís. As in many other towns in Iran, the Bahá'ís fell victim to the rivalries and manoeuvrings of the governor, notables, and clerics of the town as well as to the general political instability of the country in the early twentieth century (Momen forthcoming).

Following the first Nayriz upheaval in 1850 in which hundreds of Bábís were killed, there was a second episode in 1853, which again led to the death of many. The community managed to re-establish itself, however, and grow until it formed one of the quarters of the town. Abadeh is another town in which the Bahá'í Faith established itself, including among its numbers several of the notables of the town. There were flourishing Bahá'í communities in many of the towns and villages of Fars, including Sarvistán, Jahrum, Zarqán, and the villages of the Bavánát area (Momen forthcoming).

In the two main ports along the Persian Gulf, such as Bushehr and Bandar Abbas, a number of high officials, including governors, were Bahá'ís, although the size of these Bahá'í communities was not large (Momen forthcoming).

Yazd and Kerman

The southeast of Iran is hot and dry. Yazd is a desert town with a reputation for religious zeal. Despite this, the Bábí and Bahá'í religions became established there and a number of important teachers of the Bahá'í Faith came from this area. There was a major episode of persecution there in 1903 when a mob rampaged through the town and some of the surrounding area, killing over 80 Bahá'ís. From about 1885 onwards, a considerable number of the Zoroastrians became Bahá'ís (Vahman 2008). In the towns and villages of the Yazd area such as Taft, Arda-kán, Mahdiyábád, Maryamábád, and Manshád, many became Bahá'ís, including from among

the Zoroastrians. Several Bahá'í schools were established in Yazd and a few of the neighbouring villages (Momen forthcoming).

In Kerman, the Bahá'í community faced opposition from strong *Shaykhí* and Azalí communities and growth was slow at first. Nevertheless, a community did develop and by the end of the nineteenth century was flourishing. There were considerable Bahá'í communities also in Rafsanján, Anár, and Dihaj (Momen forthcoming).

The spread of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths

From the earliest days of the Bábí movement, there has been an emphasis on the spread of the religion. The Báb sent His first 18 disciples, the Letters of the Living, out from Shiraz in all directions, even to neighbouring countries, to spread word of the new religious movement. These first disciples all belonged to the Shaykhí school of Twelver Shi'ism, founded by *Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsá'í* (1753–1826) and *Sayyid Kázim* (1753–1843), which had both set up expectations for the coming of the Báb and had certain doctrinal teachings that made it easier for its members to accept the Báb. Therefore the initial spread of the Bábí movement in each city was usually through the Shaykhí network of that city. The movement soon spread to other schools of Twelver Shi'ism, such as the *Akhbá'í* school in Zanjan and the *Uṣúlí* school in Nayriz. It also spread across different social networks: among the guilds of the bazaar tradesmen in some cities, among the wholesale merchants in others, and also among peasants in some villages. Where a leading cleric became a Bábí, a large proportion of His followers often also became Bábís (Momen 1983; Smith and Momen 1986). As the Bahá'í community emerged, it broadly followed the same pattern of growth, although after the intense persecutions of 1848–52, it became rare for a large number to follow their religious leader if he became a Bahá'í. A few locally prominent religious leaders continued to convert but it became more usual for their congregation to turn against them.

Direct meetings with the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh were effective but relatively infrequent causes of conversion, because of the imprisonment and exile of these leaders. The more educated also became believers through reading the Bábí and Bahá'í scriptures. But probably the most effective cause of the growth of the religion were the efforts of teachers of the Bahá'í Faith who travelled across Iran. This became institutionalized during the early twentieth century with a number of learned Bahá'ís being recognized as teachers (*muballighs*), who were either resident in a locality or travelled from one place to another. These were usually converted Islamic clerics who had the knowledge and skills to speak to Muslims and convince them. In the first decade of the twentieth century, *Şadru'ş-Şudúr* (Ḥájí *Sayyid Aḥmad Hamadání* 1868–1907) set up a training institute in Tehran for teaching young Bahá'ís how to teach their religion to others and thus become *muballighs*. From the 1920s onwards, the movements of the *muballighs* were directed by the emerging Bahá'í administrative institutions. In 1936, *Shoghi Effendi* instructed that the payment of salaries to full-time *muballighs* should cease. Nevertheless the ethos of looking to learned individuals to be the main propagators of the religion continued until the 2000s when the processes of the Five Year Plans began a change of culture in the Bahá'í community.

Until the 1880s the spread of the Bahá'í Faith remained largely within the Shi'í majority in the Iranian heartlands and the Turkish-speaking Shi'is of Azarbayjan. Then in the 1870s and 1880s, there was a cultural breakthrough with significant numbers of Jews (in Hamadan, Kermanshah, Khorasan, Kashan, and Tehran) and Zoroastrians (in the Yazd area) becoming Bahá'ís (Smith 2016; Vahman 2008). The integration of these converts into the mainstream Bahá'í community was slow and not fully achieved until the second half of the twentieth century. There were no appreciable number of conversions among the tribal groups until the early twentieth

century when there began to be a few, especially among the Búyir Aḥmad tribe of the southern Zagros Mountains.

The persecution of the Bahá'í community

Both the Bábí and Bahá'í communities have faced persecution in Iran. Most Bahá'ís in Iran for most of the history of the religion have lived with continuous persecution, starting with having stones thrown at them on the way to school, to harassment by colleagues and seniors at work, to discrimination in their dealings with officials, to injustice at the hands of the police and courts. This continuous pressure was then punctuated by episodes when the level of persecution increased for a time. This persecution can be broken down into four phases:

The Bábí period (1844–53)

The Shi'í clerical class led the opposition to the new religion. Their motives were primarily religious in that they regarded the new religion as a direct challenge and contravention of Islam, but there was also an element of fear for their status and livelihoods. From 1848 onwards, the clerics managed to obtain the support of the state. The response of the Bábís was to defend themselves if attacked in places where they had large numbers, but in most places they just suffered.

The late Qájár period (1853–1921)

During this phase persecutions were generally started locally by individual clerics or governors, not for religious reasons but for private gain in wealth or prestige, the Bahá'ís being a suitable pawn since they were not protected by any of the European powers. After about 1882, the central government no longer sought to persecute the Bahá'ís and sometimes regarded the disturbances created by local clerics with disfavour. On the instructions of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahá'ís did not defend themselves, thereby demonstrating their peaceful intentions and their obedience to the government.

The Pahlavi period (1921–79)

The pattern of attacks on the Bahá'ís changed greatly in this period. With Riḍá Sháh's suppression of the clerics, it has been suggested that the Bahá'í community entered a period of relative freedom. But in fact, the main instigator of attacks became the state itself. Starting from about 1934, on the pretext that the Bahá'í Faith was not a recognized religion, Bahá'ís were dismissed from government employment and imprisoned just for getting married. There were bureaucratic attacks upon the Bahá'í institutions: schools, meeting places, holy places, and administrative institutions. During the reign of Muḥammad Riḍá Sháh (r. 1941–79), the clerics were given more freedom to act, on account of the fear of communism. They used this freedom to relaunch their attacks on the Bahá'í community, including falsely accusing Bahá'ís of criminal activity. Rather than accept persecution meekly as in the previous period, the Bahá'ís attempted to induce the police and courts to carry out their responsibilities and defend them against these attacks. When this failed, they appealed to international opinion and institutions.

The Islamic Republic (1979–present)

With the accession of the clerical class to political power through the Islamic revolution, they were at last able to give free reign to 150 years of pent-up aggression towards the Bahá'í

community, rapidly seeking out every possible means to persecute and drive down the Bahá'ís. They went through all of the stages towards a genocide of the Bahá'ís and were only held back from this by strong international pressure, which arose as a result of a vigorous global Bahá'í campaign. They then sought alternative means of exerting pressure on the Bahá'í community in an attempt to force them to convert to Islam through financial strangulation and cultural genocide. The campaign of vilification of the Bahá'ís in both the official and other media set the scene for every department of the government to be given specific instructions to harass the Bahá'ís and to pressure the general population to do likewise, even to the extent of encouraging members of the public to attack and kill Bahá'ís with impunity (murderers and looters would plead that as apostates from Islam, Bahá'ís could be killed or despoiled with impunity). Thus every effort is made to make every aspect of social life as difficult as possible for the Bahá'ís. The reaction of the Bahá'ís has been to accept whatever is thrown at them by the state and the clerical class with resilience and instead to seek to consult with like-minded individuals from all sectors of society about local constructive paths of action to improve and develop their local communities (Momen 2019).

One result of this 160-year history of persecutions was that many Bahá'ís migrated. Some migrated from areas of intense persecution to areas where there was less persecution (from places such as Isfahan and Yazd to Tehran and Khorasan in the late nineteenth century). Many migrated from the rural areas where they were more readily targeted to the comparative anonymity of the larger cities (particularly since 1979). Many also fled to other countries: Ashkhabad (Ashgabat, now in Turkmenistan), India, and the Ottoman Empire during the Qajar period, but wider afield since that time (Europe, North America, Australia, and elsewhere) (Momen 1991). In Ashgabat, a significant Bahá'í community developed, which constructed the first Bahá'í House of Worship in the world in the early years of the twentieth century (see Figure 44.1).

The fact that the Bahá'í leaders were in exile in Palestine, more than a thousand kilometres away from the main body of their followers in Iran, made the question of communications of great importance. Although the postal service was used to a small extent, this was unreliable and subject to surveillance by the Ottoman and Iranian authorities. The Bahá'í community therefore came to rely on two methods of communicating with its leadership. A system of full-time couriers was developed who would take communications back and forth. Some of these couriers would also take offerings of financial contributions to the Bahá'í leaders. There was also a constant stream of Bahá'í pilgrims making the arduous journey to visit the Bahá'í leaders in exile and they would also take letters and financial contributions with them and bring back replies. When the writings of the Bahá'í leaders arrived in any location, multiple copies would be made for distribution (Momen 1991).

Organization and leadership

Leadership in the Bahá'í community was initially provided by learned individuals (who had often been Islamic clerics before becoming Bahá'ís) or by wealthy and prominent individuals. Thus the Bahá'í community resembled in structure and ethos the Islamic community that surrounded it. Starting in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, however, under the direction of successive heads of the Bahá'í Faith, a group of four individuals called 'Hands of the Cause' began to direct and coordinate the affairs of the community. From 1897 onwards, they organized the setting up of local administrative institutions, which became the elected local Spiritual Assemblies. The Tehran Assembly acted as a national coordinating body that eventually became in 1934 the national Spiritual Assembly. These institutions gradually took over the leadership role at the local and national level and became complex bodies with many committees.

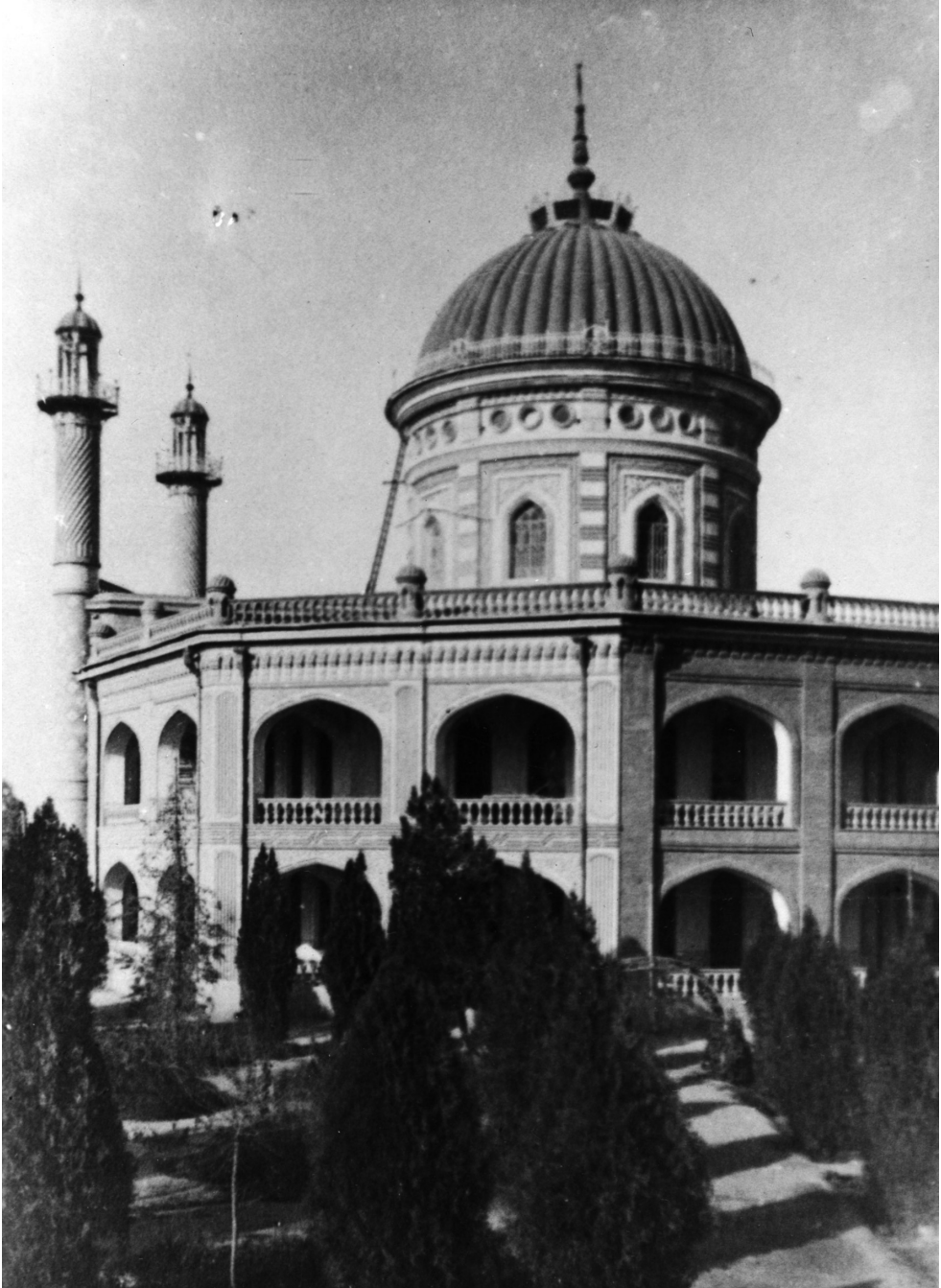


Figure 44.1 The first Bahá'í House of Worship in the world was completed in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, in 1908. It was confiscated by the Soviet authorities in 1928, damaged in a severe earthquake in 1948, and demolished in 1963.

Source: Bahá'í World News Service.

The Bahá'í community of Iran also gradually put into place other elements of Bahá'í community life which are laid down in the Bahá'í scriptures, such as the Nineteen Day Feast and the *Mashriqú'l-Adhkár* (prayer meetings, especially for dawn prayers).

Initially, the finances of the community were on an ad hoc basis with wealthy individuals financing the purchase of properties for meeting halls and schools and supporting the *muballighs*. With the emergence of the administrative institutions, funds were set up, initially called *mahallu'l-barakih* (the seat of blessings) and later *sanduq-i-khayriyyih* (the charitable fund) to which all were invited to contribute. The money was spent on supporting the *muballighs*, Bahá'í schools, orphans, and the needy. The *Huqúqu'lláh* is an institution set up by Bahá'u'lláh for a set proportion of a Bahá'í's capital gains to be voluntarily donated to the head of the religion. A trustee for this was appointed and as the institution developed, local trustees were also appointed. The money was spent at the discretion of the head of the religion, but often in Iran itself.

From its earliest years, social and economic development was a central concern of the Faith in Iran. Education was considered a priority and the Bahá'í community was at the forefront of building modern schools in Iran in the early twentieth century in many towns and villages (these were all closed by government action in 1933–4) (Shahvar 2009). The moral education of children and the youth was also given great importance in the community. The social advancement of women was given a figurehead in the person of Táhiri, one of the 18 Letters of the Living appointed by the Báb. Further advances were made through the building of schools for girls and the appointment of administrative committees to support women's progress. Advances in health and hygiene were made through the building of modern public baths with shower facilities, in place of the communal baths in traditional facilities, while the gradual elimination of the use of alcohol and addictive drugs from the community brought its own benefits. Schools, agriculture reforms, and selling co-operatives were a feature of Bahá'í communities in villages. To these activities were added, in later decades of the twentieth century, medical clinics and literacy campaigns among women (Rafati 1989).

Recent history

The planned expansion of the Bahá'í Faith began in the 1930s when Shoghi Effendi called for the Bahá'ís of Iran to spread the Faith to Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Arabian peninsula. From 1943, there was also a campaign to settle Bahá'ís in small towns and villages in Iran where there had not previously been Bahá'ís. Many of these Bahá'ís were forced by the local authorities to return home but some managed to stay. A Forty-Five Month Plan was launched by the national Spiritual Assembly of Iran on 11 October 1946, resulting in an increase in the number of Bahá'í communities in Iran and the dispatch of many Bahá'ís to surrounding countries. After this, a Four Year Plan was launched in 1950. Among the objectives of this plan was the elevation of the status of women such that by the end of the Plan, women were for the first time made eligible to be elected to local and national Spiritual Assemblies. Then in the Ten Year International Plan (1953–63) and the subsequent Nine Year Plan (1964–73), Iran was given the goal of sending Bahá'ís to a large number of other countries. During the Nine Year Plan, for example, some 3,500 Iranian Bahá'ís settled in other places both within and outside Iran in order to spread the religion and another 5,000 undertook journeys for the same purpose. During this plan, some 184 books were published, as well as periodicals and news bulletins (*Bahá'í World* 1976: 247). Also as part of these plans, holy sites were acquired and local Bahá'í centres built. Plans were underway in the 1950s to build a Bahá'í House of Worship (*Mashriqú'l-Adhkár*) near Tehran, but when an outburst of persecution in 1955 caused Shoghi Effendi to abandon it, he decided instead to build three other Houses of Worship, in Africa, Australia, and Europe.

The Iranian Bahá'í community has made a great contribution to the growth and development of the Bahá'í Faith. Almost all of the leading Bahá'ís from the time of Bahá'u'lláh and the majority of the leading Bahá'ís from the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were Iranians. Until the 1960s, it was the largest national Bahá'í community in the world (Smith and Momen 1989: 72) and Tehran was the largest local Bahá'í community in the world. The community had developed a high degree of organizational complexity with some 150 national committees by the 1960s.

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