



The Black Standard

Dawn-Breakers Chapter 19

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Glimmerings notes are a companion to study of the Dawn-Breakers

Prologue

A *hadīth* ¹ attributed to the Prophet Muhammad says:

Should your eyes behold the Black Standards² proceeding from Khurásán,
hasten ye towards them,
even though ye should have to crawl over the snow,
inasmuch as they proclaim the advent of the promised Mihdí³,
the Vicegerent⁴ of God. ⁵

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¹ Also called Traditions, the *hadīth* are oral sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammad and the Imáms and given very high importance – second only to the Qur’án. For more details on *hadīth* see Resources: Brief Background on Shí’a Islam.

² Meaning Black Flags

³ One of the titles of the *Qá’im*

⁴ Vicegerent means a person exercising delegated power on behalf of a sovereign or ruler; here a person regarded as an earthly representative of God.

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p351

Section One: To Mázindarán Under the Black Standard

July 1848 had been a fateful month. The Conference of Badasht had ended at the beginning of that month; the incident at Niyálá transpired by middle of the month; and the Báb had been taken to Tabríz, interrogated and bastinadoed by the end of the month. Also, by the end of that month, Bahá'u'lláh and Táhirih were safely in Núr, but Quddús who had reached Sári, was being held in house confinement there. Mullá Husayn who was in Mashhad during this time, was not yet aware of any of these events.

Mashhad: July 1848

Mullá Husayn had been staying by order of the Prince Hamzih Mírzá at the Prince's regiment's encampment on the outskirts of Mashhad. The Prince had asked Mullá Husayn to come there as part of trying to calm down the situation in Mashhad caused by the earlier altercation between the locals and the Bábí's [DB 13-16, Section 5]. By July, things were sufficiently calm, such that the Prince allowed Mullá Husayn to return to Mashhad.

Quddus' parting instructions to Mullá Husayn before leaving Mashhad, had been: "We shall meet at whatever place the Almighty will have decreed."¹ For now, Mullá Husayn decided that he would go to Karbalá' in Iráq. The Prince, who thought Mullá Husayn's goal was to go on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Imám Husayn in Karbalá', offered to pay for the cost of this pilgrimage to that holy city. But Mullá Husayn would not accept and asked him to instead give the money to the poor of Mashhad. The Prince's artillery captain² who knew Mullá Husayn and greatly admired him, offered to cover the requirements of the trip for everyone. Mullá Husayn again would not accept that either, but instead accepted a sword and a horse, both of which, we shall see, he is destined to utilize.³

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 16, p290

² Artillery captain was 'Abdu'l-'Alí Khán-i-Marághiyí [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 16, p290]

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p324

“Adorn your head with My green turban” and unfurl “the Black Standard”

Mullá Husayn was still in Mashhad preparing to leave for Karbalá', when a messenger from the Báb arrived. He brought with him the Báb's green turban and told Mullá Husayn he had been given the new name, Siyyid 'Alí, by the Báb. The message from the Báb was:

Adorn your head with My green turban, the emblem of My lineage,¹ and with the Black Standard [Black Flag] unfurled before you, hasten to the *Jazíriy-i-Khadrá* ﴿﴾ [Verdant Isle], and lend your assistance to My beloved Quddús.²

Where was this *Jazíriy-i-Khadrá* and where was Quddús? This was not clear, but that did not stop Mullá Husayn. As soon as this message of the Báb reached him, Mullá Husayn arose, gathered his things, and calling on his companions who wished to follow him, left Mashhad. The path would become known only upon action.

When they had reached the outskirts of Mashhad, Mullá Husayn placed the Báb's turban he had received on his own head, and mounting his steed, raised the Black Standard. His companions were numbered two hundred and two. That memorable day was 21 July 1848.³

They travelled westward: Níshápúr, Míyámay & Dámghán

Mullá Husayn and his companions journeyed westward from Mashhad, although their final destination was still unknown. Nabíl records:

¹ The green turban is worn by *siyyids* as a sign of their lineage. The Báb was a *siyyid* meaning He was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Siyyids are usually distinguished by wearing a green turban or a black turban and a green shawl or sash.

Note: When the Báb sent His green turban to Mullá Husayn, He also sent another of His green turbans to Quddús. Later both Mullá Husayn and Quddús will be martyred at Fort *Shaykh* Tabarsí wearing these same green turbans that they had received from the Báb. Describing Mullá Husayn's preparation before his last battle at Fort *Shaykh* Tabarsí, Nabíl records this: "That same afternoon, Mullá Husayn performed his ablutions, clothed himself in new garments, attired his head with the Báb's turban, and prepared for the approaching encounter." [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p379]. And later, describing Quddús leaving Fort *Shaykh* Tabarsí to go meet the enemy which will lead to his martyrdom, Nabíl records this: "As the hour of their departure approached, Quddús attired his head with the green turban which the Báb had sent to him at the time He sent the one that Mullá Husayn wore on the day of his martyrdom." In the interrogation of Quddús that then followed in the enemy camp, Nabíl records this question put to Quddús: "For what reason," the *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá* impertinently enquired, "have you, by choosing to place a green turban upon your head, arrogated to yourself a right which only he who is a true descendant of the Prophet can claim?" [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p409].

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p324-325

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p325

Wherever they tarried, at every village and hamlet through which they passed, Mullá Husayn and his fellow-disciples would fearlessly proclaim the message of the New Day, would invite the people to embrace its truth, and would select from among those who responded to their call a few whom they would ask to join them on their journey.

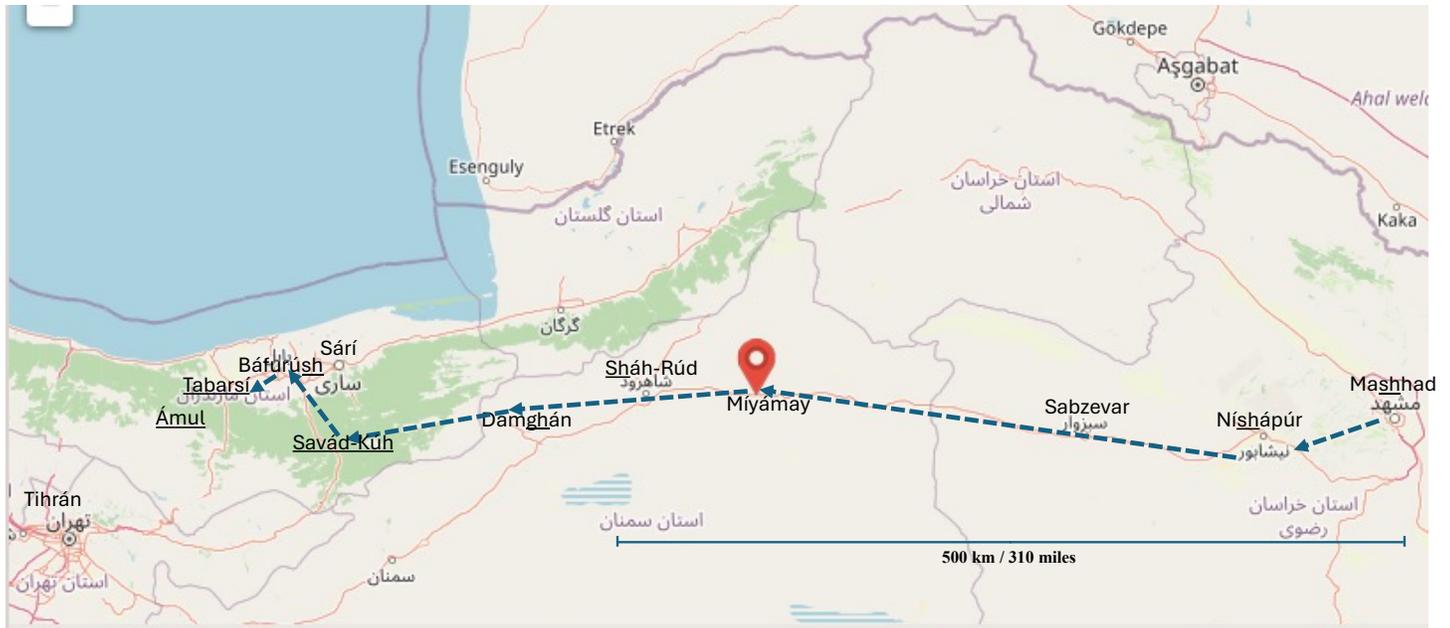
In the town of Níshápúr ^{﴿﴾}, Hájí 'Abdu'l-Majíd ^{﴿﴾}, the father of Badí',¹ who was a merchant of note, enlisted under the banner of Mullá Husayn. Though his father enjoyed an unrivalled prestige as the owner of the best-known turquoise mine of Níshápúr, he, forsaking all the honours and material benefits that his native town had conferred upon him, pledged his undivided loyalty to Mullá Husayn.

In the village of Míyámay ^{﴿﴾}, thirty among its inhabitants declared their faith and joined that company. All of them with the exception of Mullá 'Ísá, fell as martyrs in the fort of Shaykh Ṭabarsí.²

[Níshápúr, sometimes called Níshábúr. is in the province of Khurásán, while Míyámay is further west and in the neighboring province of Semnán, quite close to Sháh-Rúd.]

¹ Badí' is the seventeen-year-old youth who later in 1869 carries Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Násiri'd-Dín Shâh, is captured, brutally tortured and martyred. At this time of Mullá Husayn's coming through the town of Níshápúr, he was not born. His father, Hájí 'Abdu'l-Majíd follows Mullá Husayn to Fort Tabarsí and is one of its few survivors. Hájí 'Abdu'l-Majíd returns to his hometown and some years later Badí' is born. An account of Badí's life is given by Balyuzi in *Bahá'u'lláh King of Glory* Chapter 33, p293-310. Badí's father is also eventually martyred, as described by Shoghí Effendí in *God Passes By* Chapter 12, p200: "After the martyrdom of his son, [Haji Abdu'l-Majid] had visited Bahá'u'lláh and returned afire with zeal to Khurasan, [where he] was ripped open from waist to throat, and his head exposed on a marble slab to the gaze of a multitude of insulting onlookers, who, after dragging his body ignominiously through the bazaars, left it at the morgue to be claimed by his relatives."

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p325-326



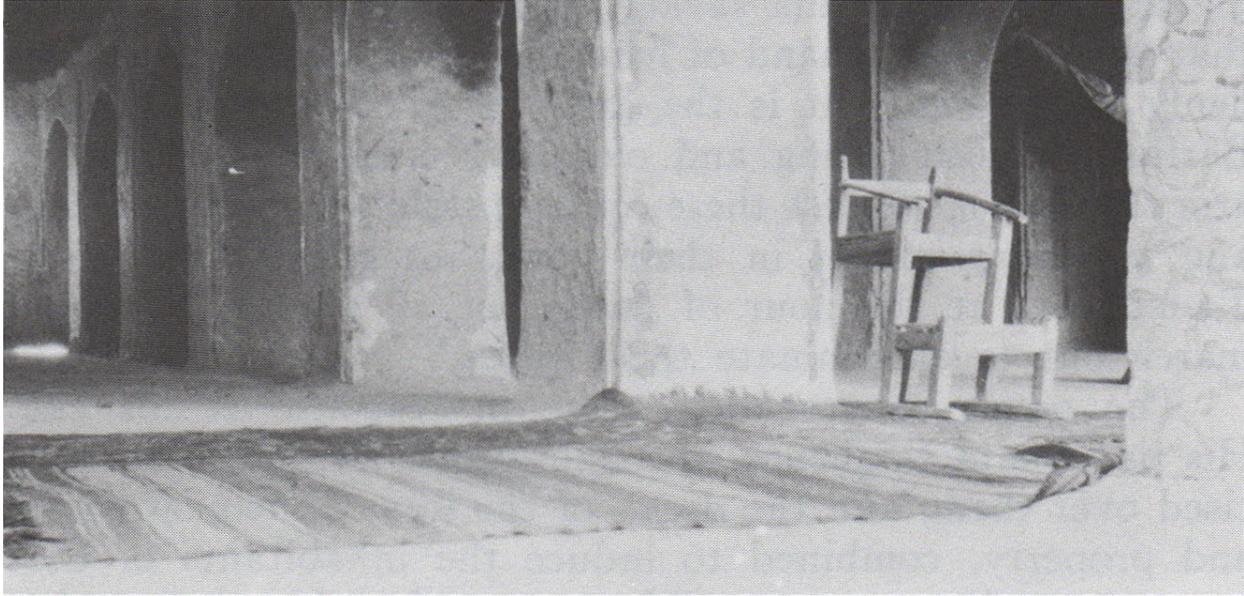
The route of Mullá Husayn and his companions with the Black Standard from the outskirts of Mashhad to the Fort of Shaykh Tabarsí. Route shown [about 1000 km / 625 miles] is an approximation as all stops are not known. Borders of the provinces are shown as thin grey lines on the map.¹

Note on provinces of towns indicated on map [going east to west; right to left on map]:

- Mashhad, Níshápúr and Sabzevar are in Khurásán province [now called Khurásán Razaví province].
- Miyámay, Sháh-Rúd and Dámghán are in Semnán province.
- Badasht lies just east of Sháh-Rúd [en route from Miyámay to Sháh-Rúd] and therefore in Semnán province.
- Dámghán is in Semnán province but close to the Mázindarán province border.
- Savád-Kúh is in the southwestern part of Mázindarán province.
- Sárí [where Quddús was being held under house arrest in September 1848], Báfurúsh [now named Babol, Quddús' hometown and where he is eventually martyred], the Fort of Shaykh Tabarsí [which is about fourteen miles southeast of Báfurúsh/Babol], and Ámul [where Bahá'u'lláh is bastinadoed], are all in the mid-northern part of Mázindarán province.

¹ Google Maps [2024]





Village of Míyámay. View of the village [top], exterior [middle] and interior of the masjid [bottom] where Mullá Husayn and his companions prayed. Archival photos.¹

Another historian records this about what transpired in Míyámay:

He [Mullá Husayn] arrived first at Míyámay where he rejoined thirty Bábís whose chief, Mírzá Zaynu'l-Ábidín, pupil of the late Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í, was an elderly, pious and respected gentleman. His zeal was so intense that he brought with him his son-in-law, a young man of eighteen years, who had been married to his daughter only a few days.

"Come," he said to him, "Come with me on my last journey. Come, because I must be a true father to you and make you partake of the joy of salvation!" They departed therefore, and it was on foot that the aged man desired to travel the road which was to lead him to martyrdom.²

From Míyámay the group kept travelling westward via Sháh-Rúd until they arrived at the hamlet of Chashmih-'Alí in the outskirts of the village of Dámghán.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p327

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p326 footnote 1; quoting A. L. M. Nicolas' "*Siyid 'Alí-Muhammad dit le Báb*," p 290.



Tree in Sháh-Rúd under which Mullá Husayn and his companions camped. Archival photo.¹

Chashmih-‘Alí and Savád-Kúh: “Whoso is unable to renounce the world, let him now, at this very moment, depart.”

Mullá Husayn decided to take a break in the travel and the group camped a few days in Chashmih-‘Alí. Mullá Husayn told his companions:

We stand at the parting of the ways. We shall await His decree as to which direction we should take.²

It was now nearing the end of September 1848. Mullá Husayn was encamped under a large tree by the side of a running stream. One day, a fierce gale arose, and it struck down a large branch of that tree, whereupon Mullá Husayn observed:

¹ *Bahá’í World* Vol 6, p75

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p326

The tree of the sovereignty of Muhammad Sháh has, by the Will of God, been uprooted and hurled to the ground.¹

Three days later, a messenger, who was on his way to Mashhad arrived from Tihrán and reported the death of Muhammad Sháh.

The following day, Mullá Husayn, gathered the companions and told them the decision had been made: they would be heading to Mázindarán. As they arose to depart, Mullá Husayn pointing in the direction of Mázindarán said:

This is the way that leads to our Karbilá². Whoever is unprepared for the great trials that lie before us, let him now repair to his home and give up the journey.³

As they journeyed into Mázindarán province, Mullá Husayn repeated this warning several times. When they got close to Savád-Kúh , Mullá Husayn declared:

I, together with seventy-two of my companions⁴, shall suffer death for the sake of the Well-Beloved. Whoso is unable to renounce the world, let him now at this very moment, depart, for later on he will be unable to escape.⁵

Twenty of his companions chose to return, feeling themselves powerless to withstand the trials to which their chief continually alluded.

From Savád-Kúh, Mullá Husayn chose to head north to Bárfurúsh .

Towards Bárfurúsh: “Leave behind all your belongings.”

As they headed towards Bárfurúsh, Mullá Husayn one morning, immediately after offering his morning prayers, called the companions, and told them:

Leave behind all your belongings, and content yourselves only with your steeds and swords, that all may witness your renunciation of all earthly things, and may realise that this little band of God’s chosen companions has

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p326

² Karbalá’ is where Imám Husayn with his companions were martyred, an event which can well be considered as the single most defining event in Shí’a history.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p326

⁴ Shí’a historians record that Imám Husayn was martyred at Karbalá’ together with seventy-two companions.

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p326

no desire to safeguard its own property, much less to covet the property of others.¹

Nabíl records what happened next:

Instantly they all obeyed and, unburdening their steeds, arose and joyously followed him. The father of Badí' was the first to throw aside his satchel, which contained a considerable amount of turquoise which he had brought with him from the mine that belonged to his father. One word from Mullá Husayn proved sufficient to induce him to fling by the road-side what was undoubtedly his most treasured possession, and to cling to the desire of his leader.^{2,3}

And so Mullá Husayn and his companions journeyed until they reached the outskirts of Bárfurúsh. But as news of their approach reached Bárfurúsh, the clergy began to incite the ignorant population.

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¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p329

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p329

³ *God Passes By* Chapter 3, page 39: "We marvel at the spirit of renunciation that prompted those sore pressed sufferers to ... content themselves with their steeds and swords; that induced the father of Badí', one of that gallant company, to fling unhesitatingly by the roadside the satchel, full of turquoises which he had brought from his father's mine in Nishápúr; that led Mírzá Muḥammad-Taqíy-i-Juvaynání to cast away a sum equivalent in value in silver and gold ..."

Section Two: The Storm makes Landfall at Bārfurúsh

Bārfurúsh: A misguided populace led by hate and fear

As the news reached Bārfurúsh of the approach of the band of Bábís led by Mullá Husayn under the Black Standard, the clergy of the town panicked. The head cleric of Bārfurúsh, the *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá* [head of the 'ulamá], was an exceedingly power-hungry, scheming and vicious person. He called all the townspeople to the *masjid* [mosque] and put on an act which used the age-old trick of appealing to the prejudice, blindness and fear of an ignorant population, to incite them to do what he wanted. Nabíl records this:

An immense crowd of men and women thronged the *masjid*, saw him ascend the pulpit, fling his turban to the ground, tear open the neck of his shirt, and bewail the plight into which the Faith had fallen. "Awake," he thundered from the pulpit, "for our enemies stand at our very doors, ready to wipe out all that we cherish as pure and holy in Islám! Should we fail to resist them, none will be left to survive their onslaught. ...

It is the duty of all the inhabitants of Bārfurúsh, both young and old, both men and women, to arm themselves against these contemptible wreckers of Islám, and by every means in their power to resist their onset. Tomorrow, at the hour of dawn, let all of you arise and march out to exterminate their forces."¹

The entire congregation arose in response to his call. They assembled arms, ammunition and any other weapon they could devise, and set out at the break of day from the town.

"Not until the aggressor forces us to protect ourselves must our swords leave their scabbards"

It was at the outskirts of Bārfurúsh, where Mullá Husayn and his companions encountered the armed multitude from that town. The companions, in the face of the uproar of this angry populace, began to unsheathe their swords. Mullá Husayn, however commanded:

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p328

Not yet. Not until the aggressor forces us to protect ourselves must our swords leave their scabbards.¹

He had scarcely uttered these words, when the fire of the enemy was directed against them. Six of the companions were immediately killed. The appeal was again raised by another of the companions:

Beloved leader, we have risen and followed you with no desire except to sacrifice ourselves in the path of the Cause we have embraced. Allow us, we pray you, to defend ourselves, and suffer us not to fall so disgracefully a victim to the fire of the enemy.²

But Mullá Husayn replied:

The time is not yet come; the number is as yet incomplete.³

Virtually immediately a bullet struck and killed Siyyid Ridá, a believer from Yazd – a man known for his pure and simple ways, who out of respect, had walked all the way from Mashhad alongside Mullá Husayn's horse ready to meet his every need.⁴

With this, Mullá Husayn raised his eyes to the sky and called out:

Behold, O God, my God, the plight of Thy chosen companions, and witness the welcome which these people have accorded Thy loved ones. Thou knowest that we cherish no other desire than to guide them to the way of Truth and to confer upon them the knowledge of Thy Revelation. Thou hast Thyself commanded us to defend our lives against the assaults of the enemy. Faithful to Thy command, I now arise with my companions to resist the attack which they have launched against us.⁵

The tree, the musket-barrel, and the man – all in a single stroke

With these words, Mullá Husayn unsheathed his sword and spurred his charger into the midst of the enemy. Nabíl records what happened next:

Mullá Husayn pursued, with marvellous intrepidity, the assailant of his fallen companion. His opponent, who was afraid to face him, took refuge behind a

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p330

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p330

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p330

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p330 footnote 1. Martyr #137 **DB 19-20 Part B, Section 3.**

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p330

tree and, holding aloft his musket, sought to shield himself. Mullá Husayn immediately recognised him, rushed forward, and with a single stroke of his sword cut across the trunk of the tree, the barrel of the musket, and the body of his adversary. The astounding force of that stroke confounded the enemy and paralysed their efforts. All fled panic-stricken in the face of so extraordinary a manifestation of skill, of strength, and of courage.^{1,2}

In later years, survivors of that group of Mullá Husayn's companions met Nabil, and they confirmed what had transpired. One of them, the distinguished Mírzá Muhammad-i-Furúghí , emphatically told Nabil:

I, myself, was a witness to this act of Mullá Husayn. Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I never would have believed it.³

[We will share more about Mullá Husayn's incredible swordsmanship in **DB 19-20 Part A, Section 2**]

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p330-331

² This incident is described in other historical accounts. Some of these accounts include descriptions from non-Bábís who were present. All of accounts are similar and describe Mullá Husayn's incredible swordsmanship and fearlessness. Extracts from one such historical account called *The Tarikh-i-Jadíd* [p48, p106-109] are quoted in *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p331 footnote1 and Chapter 20, p413 footnote 2. Although the descriptions of the incident are very similar in both the *Dawn-Breakers* and *Tarikh-i-Jadíd*, the timing appears to be different. The *Dawn-Breakers* places the incident as described here at Bárfurúsh, while *Tarikh-i-Jadíd* seems to place the incident later at the siege of the Bábís at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p332



Mullá Husayn's sword.¹ Note: Mullá Husayn had several swords. It is not known if this sword is the one used in the tree-man-musket incident.

Muhammad-i-Furúghí then added:

Mullá Husayn had no sooner dealt his memorable blow to his adversary than he disappeared from our sight. We knew not whither he had gone. His attendant, Qambar-'Alí, alone could follow him. He subsequently informed us that his master threw himself headlong upon his enemies, and was able with a single stroke of his sword to strike down each of those who dared assail him. Unmindful of the bullets that rained upon him, he forced his way through the ranks of the enemy and headed for Bárfurúsh. He rode straight to the residence of the *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá'*, thrice made the circuit of his house, and cried out: "Let that contemptible coward, who has incited the inhabitants of this town to wage holy warfare against us and has ignominiously concealed himself behind the walls of his house, emerge from his inglorious retreat. Let him, by his example, demonstrate the sincerity of his appeal and the righteousness of his cause. Has he forgotten that he who preaches a holy

¹ Photo from *Bahá'í World* vol 13, p432

war must needs himself march at the head of his followers, and by his own deeds kindle their devotion and sustain their enthusiasm?"¹

The inhabitants of Bárfurúsh now surrendered and raised the cry of "Peace, peace!". As this was ongoing, the companions of Mullá Husayn, came riding in, with the cry of *Yá Sáhibu'z-Zamán*  [O Lord of the Age]². The companions were astounded and elated, as they had given up hope of finding Mullá Husayn alive. Now they found him seated erect on his horse, unhurt and unaffected by the fierceness of the onslaught. Each reverently approached him and kissed his stirrups.

It was now the afternoon and the peace which the inhabitants of Bárfurúsh had implored was granted by Mullá Husayn. Nabíl records that Mullá Husayn spoke these words to the crowd:

O followers of the Prophet of God, and *shí'ahs* of the Imáms of His Faith! Why have you risen against us? Why deem the shedding of our blood an act meritorious in the sight of God? Did we ever repudiate the truth of your Faith? Is this the hospitality which the Apostle of God has enjoined His followers to accord to both the faithful and the infidel? What have we done to merit such condemnation on your part? Consider: I alone, with no other weapon than my sword, have been able to face the rain of bullets which the inhabitants of Bárfurúsh have poured upon me, and have emerged unscathed from the midst of the fire with which you have besieged me. Both my person and my horse have escaped unhurt from your overwhelming attack. Except for the slight scratch which I received on my face, you have been powerless to wound me. God has protected me and willed to establish in your eyes the ascendancy of His Faith.³

With this, Mullá Husayn ordered his companions to head out, and they left the Bárfurúsh town-centre for the nearby caravanserai [roadside inn] at Sabzih-Maydán  [Green Field/Square].

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p334, p336

² One of the titles of the *Qá'im*

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p336-337

The treachery at Bárfurúsh's Sabzih-Maydán

Upon arriving at the caravanserai, Mullá Husayn sent some of the companions to the town-centre to get some bread and water. However, the companions returned empty handed, as no one would sell them anything. At this, Mullá Husayn ordered the gates of the caravanserai to be closed and assembled his companions together. He asked them to be patient and put their trust in God and resign themselves to His Will.

Soon it was the hour of sunset, and time for the sunset *namáz*  [Obligatory prayer]¹. Mullá Husayn, asked whether any among them would be willing to arise and renouncing his life for the sake of his Faith, ascend to the roof of the caravanserai and sound the *adhán*  [Call to prayer]². Nabíl recounts what happened next:

A youth gladly responded. No sooner had the opening words of “*Alláh-u-Akbar*” dropped from his lips than a bullet suddenly struck him and immediately caused his death.

“Let another one among you arise,” Mullá Husayn urged them, “and, with the selfsame renunciation, proceed with the prayer which that youth was unable to finish.”

Another youth started to his feet, and had no sooner uttered the words, “I bear witness that Muhammad is the Apostle of God,” than he also was struck down by another bullet from the enemy.

A third youth, at the bidding of his chief, attempted to complete the prayer which his martyred companions had been forced to leave unfinished. He, too, suffered the same fate. As he was approaching the end of his prayer, and was uttering the words, “There is no God but God,” he, in his turn, fell dead.³

With the fall of his third companion, Mullá Husayn ordered the gates of the caravanserai to be opened. The Sabzih-Maydán was seething with an armed mass, who had gathered there at the instigation again of the treacherous *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá'*. Nabíl then recounts:

¹ Muslims are called to *namáz* five times a day.

² The call to the *namáz* is called *adhán*, [Arabic word meaning to listen]. The *adhán* is raised at these times: [in Arabic] *Fajr* [dawn], *Dhuhr* [noon], *Asr* [afternoon], *Maghrib* [sunset], and *Isha* [evening]. For details on *adhán* wording see [DB 8-9, Section 1](#), section “Mullá Sádiq changes the *Adhán*”.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p337-338

Leaping on horseback, he [Mullá Husayn] gave the signal to charge upon the assailants who had massed before the gates and had filled the Sabzih-Maydán. Sword in hand, and followed by his companions, he succeeded in decimating the forces that had been arrayed against him. Those few who had escaped their swords fled before them in panic, again pleading for peace, again imploring mercy. With the approach of evening, the entire crowd had vanished. The Sabzih-Maydán, which a few hours before overflowed with a seething mass of opponents, was now deserted. The clamour of the multitude was stilled. Bestrewn with the bodies of the slain, the Maydán and its surroundings offered a sad and moving spectacle ...¹

This struggle continued for several days, despite the arrival of government armed forces. The 'ulamá of Bárfurúsh had urgently asked the military chief of the province, 'Abbás-Qulí Khán² to intervene and restore order. 'Abbás-Qulí Khán had sent a captain with three hundred horsemen, who had joined in the attack at the caravanserai at Sabzih-Maydán. As one historian notes: "The struggle went on, but if ten Bábís were killed, an infinitely larger number of aggressors bit the dust."³

¹ Dawn-Breakers Chapter 19, p338

² 'Abbás Qulí Khán-i-Lárjání. He is described as follows: "The Turkish and Persian nomads pass their lives in hunting, often also in fighting and above all in talking of the hunt and of war. They are brave but not always and they are well described by Branttome who, in his war experience had often encountered that type of bravery which he called 'one day courage.' But this is what they are in a very regular and consistent manner, great talkers, great wreckers of towns, great assassins of heroes, great exterminators of multitudes, in a word, naive, very outspoken in their sentiments, very violent in the expression of anything which arouses them and extremely amusing. 'Abbás-Qulí Khán-i-Lárjání although well born, was a perfect type of nomad." [Comte de Gobineau's *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale*, p. 171] quoted in *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p339 footnote 1.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p338-339 footnote 1





Views of the caravanserai at Sabzih-Maydán close to Bárfurúsh. Archival photos.¹

Seeing that this struggle was not being resolved, ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán-i-Lárijání [🔊], the military chief of the province and governor of Ámul, himself together with the other leading military chief of the province, Hájí Mustafá Khán-i-Turkamán [🔊] arrived. Simultaneously, several of the nobles and chiefs of the people began to personally intervene. They came to Mullá Husayn begging for a truce. They told Mullá Husayn that all the fault lay with the *Sa’idu’-‘Ulamá’* for inciting the people, and that Mullá Husayn should forgive the past, and in the interest of peace leave the area the next day and go to the town of Ámul. ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán and Hájí Mustafá Khán were among those present. They both arose and said they would order one of their men, Khusraw-i-Qádí [🔊]² together with a hundred horsemen to escort Mullá Husayn and his companions safely from Sabzih-Maydán through Shír-Gáh [🔊] on their way to Ámul. Swearing on the Qur’án, they said:

The malediction of God and His Prophets be upon us, both in this world and in the next, if we ever allow the slightest injury to be inflicted upon you and your party.³

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p335. Note: Sabzih-Maydán as a name of an area is used in other parts of the Iran as well. For example, the Sabzih-Maydán in Tihrán [where several Babís were later martyred].

² Khusraw-i-Qádí-Kalá’í, described as “a notorious scoundrel who often rebelled against the government” *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p339 footnote 2.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p339-340

Mullá Husayn knew the insincerity of these people, but he consented. That evening, Mullá Husayn and his companions ate together with ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán and some other notables. It was the eve of Friday 10 October 1848.

In the middle of that same night, the *Sa’idu’l-‘Ulamá’* secretly summoned Khusraw-i-Qádí. He told Khusraw that the following day as they travelled, Khusraw should put the entire company of Bábís to death and take all their property. Although Khusraw was not a particularly righteous person, he still raised some concern regarding this double-crossing, to which the *Sa’idu’l-‘Ulamá’*, as he pointed with his finger to his own neck, said:

Slay them and be not afraid. I hold myself responsible for your act. I will, on the Day of Judgment, be answerable to God in your name. We, who wield the sceptre of authority, are surely better informed than you, and can better judge how best to extirpate this heresy.¹

“Mount your steeds, O heroes of God!”

The next morning, at the hour of sunrise, ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán met with Khusraw, and repeated the instructions of giving utmost consideration and safe passage to Mullá Husayn and his companions through Shír-Gáh. In addition, he told Khusraw that he should not accept any reward that Mullá Husayn should offer him. The duplicitous Khusraw pretended submission to ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán and assured him that “neither he nor his horsemen would flinch in their devotion to them [Mullá Husayn and his companions].”²

After this exchange, ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán together with several other notables, went to Mullá Husayn and introduced Khusraw and what his charge was to be. Mullá Husayn said to them:

‘If ye do well, it will redound to your own advantage; and if ye do evil, the evil will return upon you.’³ If this man should treat us well, great shall be his reward; and if he act treacherously towards us, great shall be his

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p340. The hatred of this *Sa’idu’l-‘Ulamá’* of Bārfurúsh against the Bábís was unquenchable. We will see how his hatred will result in the martyrdom of many of the Bábís including Quddús [DB 19-20 Part A, Sections 7 & 8].

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p341

³ *Qur’án* 17:7

punishment. To God would we commit our Cause, and to His will are we wholly resigned.¹

With these words, Mullá Husayn gave the signal for departure, at which Qambar-'Alí raised the call for his master:

Mount your steeds, O heroes of God!²

It was two hours after sunrise when they left Bárfurúsh. Shír-Gáh was only a few hours march from Bárfurúsh, but Khusraw intentionally took the longer way through the forest, as that route suited his attack plans. The group was divided such that it was led by a few of Khusraw's horsemen and Mullá Husayn and Khusraw. The rest of the companions rode in a line a distance behind and on their left and right rode Khusraw's armed men numbering over a hundred. Shortly after they had entered the forest, the signal was given to Khusraw's men to attack the companions. Several of the companions were killed. The cries from the attack were heard by Mullá Husayn who was riding well ahead. He immediately halted his horse and dismounting said to Khusraw:

I refuse to proceed further with you; I can dispense with your guidance and company and that of your men.³

With that he walked away and asked his attendant Qambar-'Alí to spread his prayer-mat as it was time for the noon-day prayer. Khusraw who had also dismounted a distance away, called one of his attendants and told him to inform Mullá Husayn that if he wished to reach his destination safely, he should hand over both his sword and his horse. Mullá Husayn just ignored this and proceeded with his prayers. As all this was going on, Khusraw's personal attendant was preparing the *qalyán* [smoking pipe, also called *shíshá* or hubble-bubble pipe] for Khusraw. One of the Bábí companions who had now reached Mullá Husayn told Khusraw's attendant that he would take it to his master. Khusraw was not paying attention as the companion came right beside him pretending to start the fire in the *qalyán*. The companion reached and grabbing Khusraw's own dagger from his belt, stabbed him. Mullá Husayn was still in the act of prayer, when he heard the cry of *Yá Sáhibu'z-Zamán* raised by the remaining companions, as they rode in and threw

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p341

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p341: "Mullá Husayn spoke these words and gave the signal for departure. Once more Qambar-'Alí was heard to raise the call of his master, "Mount your steeds, O heroes of God!"—a summons which he invariably called out on such occasions."

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p342

themselves at their treacherous assailants. All of Khusraw's men were killed, except for his attendant who was left holding his master's bejewelled *qalyán*. Mullá Husayn told him to return to Bárfurúsh and recount to 'Abbás-Qulí Khán the treachery of his man, Khusraw. He added:

That false miscreant [Khusraw] foolishly imagined that my mission had come to an end, that both my sword and my horse had fulfilled their function. Little did he know that their work had but just begun, that until the services which they can render are entirely accomplished, neither his power nor the power of any man beside him can wrest them from me.¹

The night was approaching, so Mullá Husayn ordered the companions to stay the night at that very spot.

* * * * *

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p342

Section Three: Fort Shaykh Tabarsí is Built

The next day, upon offering his dawn-prayers, Mullá Husayn gathered all the companions together and said:

We are approaching our Karbilá, our ultimate destination.¹

Immediately after, Mullá Husayn set out on foot, instead of riding. The companions followed him and also walked. Mullá Husayn noticed that a few of the companions were attempting to carry with them some of the belongings of Khusraw's men. He told them to leave behind everything except their swords and horses, adding:

It behooves you to arrive at that hallowed spot in a state of complete detachment, wholly sanctified from all that pertains to this world.^{2,3}

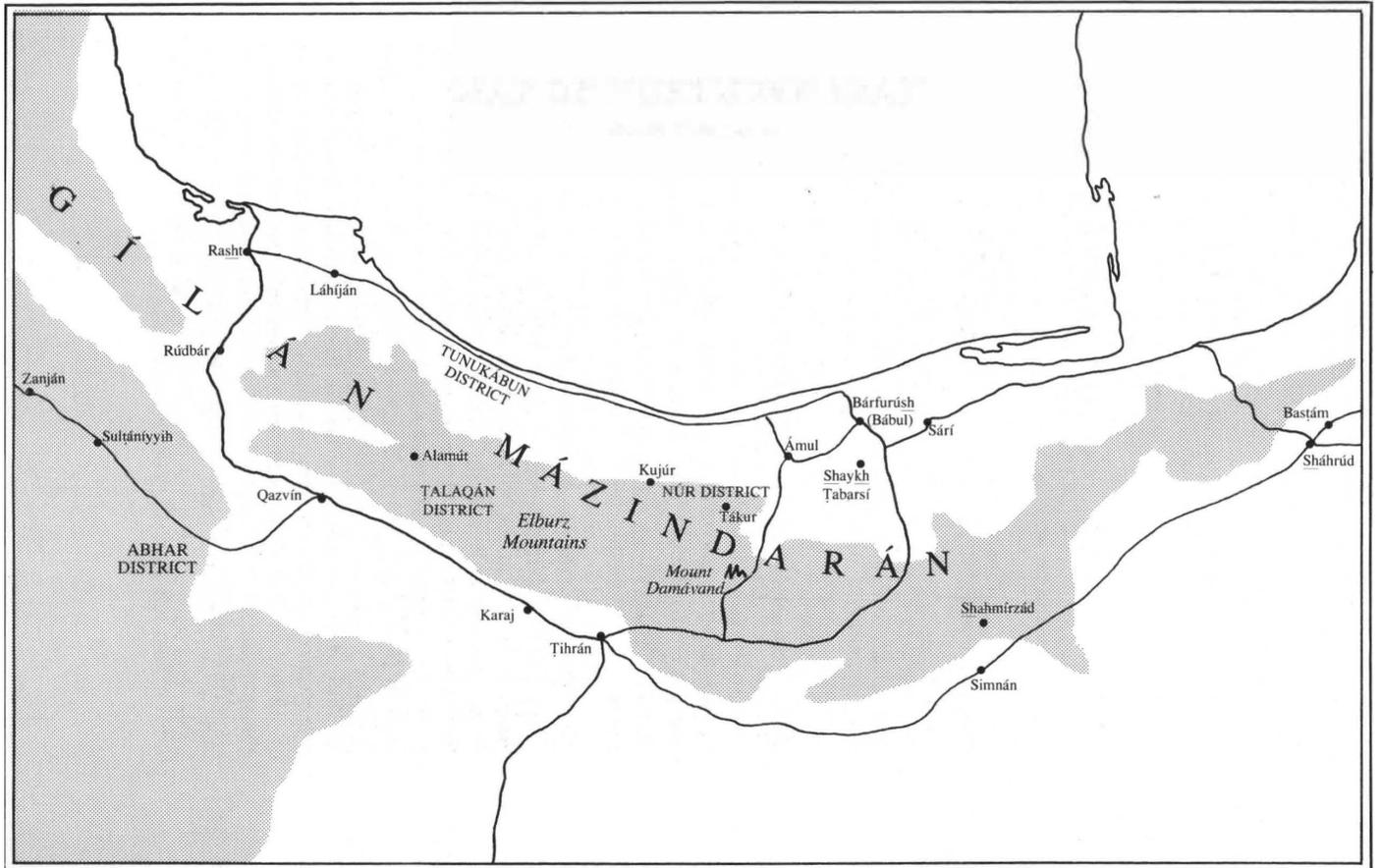
12 October 1848: They get to the Shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí

Mullá Husayn and his companions had walked only a short distance, when they arrived at the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí, which was about fourteen miles southeast of Bárfurúsh. This small local shrine, visited often by the villagers, was the grave of Shaykh Tabarsí, a holy man who had been a transmitter of the *hadíth* [oral traditions] ascribed to the Shí'a Imáms.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p343. "Arrival at Karbilá" is being used as a metaphor by Mullá Husayn to signify arrival at the place where they will suffer and eventually be martyred. The actual Karbilá [Karbalá'] is located about 60 miles / 100 km southwest of Baghdád in Iraq. It is where the third Imám, Imám Husayn, and his seventy-two companions and their families were surrounded by their enemies, attacked and eventually martyred. For more details see [Resources: Brief Background in Shí'a Islam](#).

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p343

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p343 footnote 1: "Then turning to his companions he said: 'During these few days of life which remain to us, let us beware not to be divided and estranged by perishable riches. Let all this be held in common and let everyone share in its benefits.' The Bábís agreed with joy and it is this marvellous spirit of self-sacrifice and this complete self-abnegation which made their enemies say that they advocated collective ownership in earthly goods and even women!" [A. L. M. Nicolas' *Sijyid 'Alí-Muhammad dit le Báb*, p 299].



Map of mid-northern part of Iran with focus on Mázindarán province.¹

The night before the arrival of Mullá Husayn and his companions, the caretaker of the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí had a dream that the Imám Husayn, together with seventy-two warriors² and a host of other companions, arrived. In that dream, this band stayed and engaged in the most heroic battles, and that one night, the Prophet of God, Himself, arrived and joined that blessed company. Upon the arrival of Mullá Husayn, the caretaker immediately recognized him as the figure of the Imám Husayn he had seen in his dream. The caretaker threw himself at Mullá Husayn's feet and kissed them devoutly. Mullá Husayn lovingly raised him up and sat him by his side and heard all about the dream. He then said to the caretaker:

¹ From Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the time of Bahá'u'lláh*, Chapter 22, p289

² The number seventy-two is significant for the Shia because of the heroic martyrdom of Imám Husayn and his seventy-two companions at the battle at Karbalá'. The return of Imám Husayn and his seventy-two companions is metaphorically seen to have taken place here, with Mullá Husayn representing the return of Imám Husayn.

All that you have witnessed, will come to pass. Those glorious scenes will again be enacted before your eyes.¹



¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p345



Shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí: view of the shrine [top]; view of the door to the shrine [bottom]. Archival photos.¹

That caretaker threw in his lot eventually with the heroic defenders of the fort which will be built on that spot and fell a martyr within its walls.

The day Mullá Husayn and his companions arrived at the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí was 12 October 1848. That day, Mullá Husayn gave Muhammad Báqir-i-Qá'íní , who had built the Bábíyyih centre in Mashhad,² the preliminary instructions regarding the design of a simple fort to be constructed.

The Inhabitants of Qádí-Kalá Attack

By the evening of the same day of their arrival at the shrine, the Bábís found themselves surrounded by an irregular multitude of horsemen who had emerged from the forest and were preparing to open fire. They shouted:

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p343 [top photo], p345 [bottom photo]

² See [DB 13-16, Section 3](#)

We are the inhabitants of Qádí-Kalá. We have come to avenge the blood of Khusraw. Not until we have put you all to the sword shall we be satisfied.¹

The Bábís were forced to draw their swords in self-defence. Muhammad-Taquí-i-Juvayní ﴿﴾, with the permission of Mullá Husayn, assumed command of that encounter. Raising the cry of *Yá Sáhibu'z-Zamán*, a group of Bábís leaped forward, repulsed the assailants and put them to flight.

The village of Nazar Khán

Fearing that the assailants from Qádí-Kalá might return, the Bábí horsemen pursued them until they reached a village they thought to be the village of Qádí-Kalá. At the sight of the Bábí horsemen, the men of the village all fled, and in the dark night amid the chaos, a village woman was inadvertently killed. It soon turned out that the village was not Qádí-Kalá, but belonged to a Nazar Khán ﴿﴾, who had taken shelter in his own house. The woman who was killed was his mother. Greatly distressed at the discovery of so grievous a mistake on the part of his companions, Muhammad-Taquí-i-Juvayní ﴿﴾ who was leading them, sorrowfully explained to the villagers:

We did not intend to molest either the men or the women of this village. Our sole purpose was to curb the violence of the people of Qádí-Kalá, who were about to put us all to death.²

Muhammad-Taquí was taken to Nazar Khán to whom he apologised earnestly for the pitiful tragedy which his companions had unwittingly enacted. Though suffering from a great loss, Nazar Khán believed the Bábís pure intentions, and asked Muhammad-Taquí to introduce him to Mullá Husayn.

At dawn of the next day, the group of Bábís together with Nazar Khán got to the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí and found Mullá Husayn leading the dawn congregational prayer. The devotion and spirit that glowed from Mullá Husayn led Nazar Khán, of his own accord, to join the prayers being recited. After the prayers, Mullá Husayn was informed of what had transpired, at which he expressed in the most touching language the sympathy which he and the entire company felt for Nazar Khán in his great bereavement. He assured Nazar Khán:

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p345

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p346

God knows, that our sole intention was to protect lives rather than disturb the peace of the neighborhood. ¹

Mullá Husayn then proceeded to relate to Nazar Khán how the Bábís had been attacked by the people of Bárfurúsh and the treacherous conduct of Khusraw. He again assured Nazar Khán of the deep sorrow he felt at the death of his mother. Nazar Khán was transformed by all this. He pledged his undying loyalty to Mullá Husayn and hastened back to his village to return with whatever provisions might be required for Mullá Husayn and his companions.

Construction of the Fort

By the end of the first day of their arrival at the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí, Mullá Husayn had already made the initial plans for the construction a simple fort around the shrine. The shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí itself was a small construct. It was located on a plot of land about three to four thousand meters square,² which is equal to about half a soccer field. The boundaries of this area only had a hedge and ditch going round.

As soon as the group had settled in, Mullá Husayn directed Muhammad Báqir-i-Qá'íní  to lead the construction.³ Muhammad Báqir-i-Qá'íní  was experienced in such projects having previously led the construction of the Bábí Centre in Mashhad [named Bábíyyih] for Quddús and Mullá Husayn [DB 13-16, Section 3]. A simple fort with four towers of wood and mudbricks was built round the shrine, and small wooden dwellings were constructed inside the fort for the group to sleep in. As to materials, sun-dried bricks were made using dug up earth and straw, and the plentiful Siberian elm trees right besides shrine became the source of large logs.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p347

² Mehrabkhani, *Mullá Husayn – Disciple at Dawn*, Chapter 20, p213

³ Mehrabkhani, *Mullá Husayn – Disciple at Dawn*, chapter 20, p214 footnote: “There were now two men at the fort by this name [Muhammad-Báqir]: one was Mullá Husayn’s nephew, and the other ... [was Muhammad Báqir-i-Qá'íní]. As they were of different statures, the friends called Mullá Husayn’s nephew “little Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir” and the other “big Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir.” The latter [Muhammad Báqir-i-Qá'íní] had been an important cleric whom thousands of people had followed as their mujtahid. When he accepted the Faith, four hundred of his followers embraced it as well. He was intelligent and erudite, a good organizer, very brave, and of noble spirit.” Muhammad Báqir-i-Qá'íní was the builder of Bábíyyih and led the construction of the fort around the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí. Both Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir’s are martyred at Fort Tabarsí. The “little” one is martyr #4 and the “big” one is martyr #7, DB 19-20 Part B, Section 1.

The companions were organized into groups and each given one part of the fort to defend.¹

As the fort was being constructed, the Bábís were continually attacked or harassed by the people of the neighbouring villages, who were being incited by the implacable, hate-ridden *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá'* of Bárfurúsh. The companions withstood every attack, while continuing the construction of the fort. While the construction work proceeded, Mullá Husayn began preparations for storage of food and water, for he knew the siege of the fort lay ahead.

Visit of Bahá'u'lláh

The initial work on the fort had just been completed when Shaykh Abú-Turáb arrived with the news that Bahá'u'lláh had arrived at the village of Nazar Khán and was on His way to visit them. The survivors of Shaykh Tabarsí have described how this news brought indefinable joy to Mullá Husayn. Nabíl quotes one of them as saying:

He [Mullá Husayn] hastened immediately to his companions and bade them bestir themselves for the reception of Bahá'u'lláh. He himself joined them in sweeping and sprinkling with water the approaches to the shrine, and attended in person to whatever was necessary for the arrival of the beloved Visitor. As soon as he saw Him approaching with Nazar Khán, he rushed forward, tenderly embraced Him, and conducted Him to the place of honour which he had reserved for His reception. We were too blind in those days to recognise the glory of Him whom our leader had introduced with such reverence and love into our midst. What Mullá Husayn had perceived, our dull vision was as yet unable to recognise. With what solicitude he received Him in his arms! ... He [Mullá Husayn] was so lost in admiration that he was utterly oblivious of us all. His soul was so wrapt in contemplation of that Countenance that we who were awaiting his permission to be seated were kept standing a long time beside him. It was Bahá'u'lláh Himself who finally bade us be seated.²

¹ Mehrabkhani, *Mullá Husayn – Disciple at Dawn*, Chapter 20, p213-215. As the siege proceeded and the army got reinforcements with cannons to attack the fort [see DB 19-20 Part A], the companions added and modified the fort's fortification. These changed the fort from the initial rectangle to a final octagonal structure. For details see Mehrabkhani, *Mullá Husayn – Disciple at Dawn*, Chapter 20, p215.

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p348-349

Bahá'u'lláh, in the course of that visit, inspected the fort and expressed His satisfaction at the work. As He discussed matters related to the needs and mission of the Bábís gathered there, He said to Mullá Husayn:

The one thing this fort and company require, is the presence of Quddús. His association with this company would render it complete and perfect.¹

Bahá'u'lláh then instructed Mullá Husayn to send Mullá Mihdíy-i-Khu'í² with six companions to Sárí, where they should demand the leading *mujtahid* of Sárí who was holding Quddús, to immediately release him. Bahá'u'lláh assured Mullá Husayn that they would release Quddús.

As Bahá'u'lláh departed, He enjoined them to be patient and resigned to the Will of the Almighty. He said that He intended to return to them in the future, and added:

You have been chosen of God to be the vanguard of His host and the establishers of His Faith. ... Whatever may befall, victory is yours, a victory which is complete and certain.³

With that, Bahá'u'lláh left. He would now go to Tihrán by way of Núr.

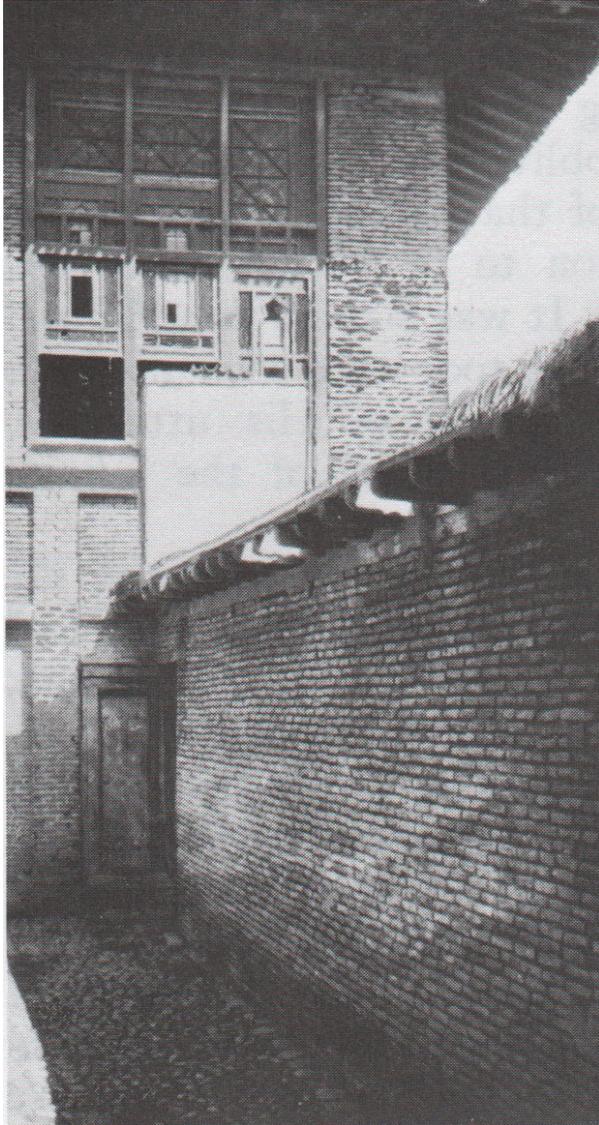
Quddús' confinement in Sárí

After the incident at Niyálá, Quddús had made his way Sárí, the capital of the province of Mázindarán. Quddús had lived in Sárí when he was young when he had been sent to school there. He was related to the leading *mujtahid* of Sárí, Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí⁴ who opposed the Faith of the Báb. When Quddús got to Sárí after Niyálá, he was in effect put under house arrest in the home of this same Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p349

² He is the brother of the Letter of the Living, Mullá Mahmúd-i-Khu'í. Both brothers are eventually martyred at Fort Tabarsí, [martyrs #147 and #148, DB 19-20 Part B, Section 4](#).

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p349



Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí's house in Sári. Archival photo.¹

Quddús' confinement at Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí's house lasted ninety-five days.² Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí treated Quddús well and with respect during this confinement. The cruelty and wickedness which were latent in Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí would show itself later when he joins forces with the blood-thirsty *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá'* in massacring the survivors of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí. That Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí treated Quddús well at this time was in large part because he was so impressed by the immense spiritual insight shown by Quddús. He had asked

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p350

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p351

Quddús to write a commentary on the very short *súra* of *Ikhlás* ﴿﴾¹ of the *Qur'án*. Quddús wrote an incredible commentary which was three times the size of the whole *Qur'án*, on just the first letter *Sád* ﴿﴾ of the word *Samad* ﴿﴾ [Eternal] which is one of the names of God in the second line of that *súra*².

Mírzá Muhammad-Taqí's tolerant attitude towards Quddús may also in part have been because of the congenial manner in which Quddús interacted with him. Nabíl records:

While in Sárí, Quddús frequently attempted to convince Mírzá Muhammad-Taqí of the truth of the Divine Message. He freely conversed with him on the most weighty and outstanding issues related to the Revelation of the Báb. His bold and challenging remarks were couched in such gentle, such persuasive and courteous language, and delivered with such geniality and humour, that those who heard him felt not in the least offended. They even misconstrued his allusions to the sacred Book as humorous observations intended to entertain his hearers.³

As instructed by Bahá'u'lláh, Mullá Husayn dispatched Mullá Mihdíy-i-Khu'í with six companions to Sárí, with the message to Mírzá Muhammad-Taqí to immediately release Quddús. As predicted by Bahá'u'lláh, this message strangely enough disarmed Mírzá Muhammad-Taqí, who right away released Quddús, saying that he was just being hosted as a guest and not held as a prisoner.

¹ *Súra al-Ikhlás* [purity/sincerity] *Qur'án súra* 112; also called *súra al-Tawhíd* [unity]. It has only 4 verses.

Note: Quddús continued to add to this commentary while under siege in the Fort *Shaykh* Tabarsí in spite of all the ongoing attacks [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p357]. Further, this commentary of Quddús is interpreted as being an eulogy to Bahá'u'lláh:

"Did not the Báb, in the earliest days of His Mission, allude, in the opening passages of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, His commentary on the Súrih of Joseph, to the glory and significance of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh? Was it not His purpose, by dwelling upon the ingratitude and malice which characterised the treatment of Joseph by his brethren, to predict what Bahá'u'lláh was destined to suffer at the hands of His brother and kindred? Was not Quddús, although besieged within the fort of Shaykh Tabarsí by the battalions and fire of a relentless enemy, engaged, both in the daytime and in the night-season, in the completion of his eulogy of Bahá'u'lláh—that immortal commentary on the *šád* of *šamad* which had already assumed the dimensions of five hundred thousand verses? Every verse of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, every word of the aforementioned commentary of Quddús, will, if dispassionately examined, bear eloquent testimony to this truth." *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p70-71.

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p357

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p351

Quddús' arrival at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí

It was the end of October / early November 1848. The occupants of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí had been prepared by Mullá Husayn to receive Quddús. Mullá Husayn had told them that they should approach Quddús, as if they were in the presence of the Báb Himself. He had added:

As to myself, you must consider me as his lowly servant. You should bear him such loyalty that if he were to command you to take my life, you would unhesitatingly obey. If you waver or hesitate, you will have shown your disloyalty to your Faith.¹

When the messenger arrived, saying that Quddús was approaching the fort, Mullá Husayn could not repress his joy. He jumped to his feet and ordered about one hundred of the companions to join him. To each he gave two candles, one in each hand, which they lit and proceeded on foot to greet Quddús. As they reached Quddús who was on horseback, Mullá Husayn raised the refrain:

Holy, holy, the Lord our God, the Lord of the angels and the spirit.²

The companions echoed this refrain. The forest of Mázindarán was filled with this jubilant refrain, with Quddús on his horse surrounded by a sea of candles. Such was Quddús' arrival at the Fort of Shaykh Tabarsí.

Three Hundred and Thirteen

As soon as they arrived at the shrine door Quddús dismounted and, leaning against the shrine recited this verse from the *Qur'án*:

The *Baqíyyatu'lláh* ﴿﴾ [Remnant of God]³ will be best for you if ye are of those who believe.^{4,5}

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p350

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p352

³ One of the titles of the *Qá'im*

⁴ *Qur'án* 11:85; *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, 352

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, 353: ' By *Baqíyyatu'lláh* Quddús meant none other than Bahá'u'lláh. To this testified Mullá Mírzá Muhammad-i-Furúghí [one of the survivors of Tabarsí], who related to me [Nabí] the following: "I myself was present when Quddús alighted from his horse. I saw him lean against the shrine and heard him utter those same words. No sooner had he spoken them than he made mention of Bahá'u'lláh and, turning to Mullá Husayn, enquired about Him." '

These were the first words uttered by Quddús at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí. And thereby was fulfilled the prophecy recorded in this *hadíth* attributed to the Prophet Muhammad:

And when the Mihdí is made manifest, He shall lean His back against the Ka'bih¹ and shall address to the three hundred and thirteen followers² who will have grouped around Him, these words: "The *Baqíyyatu'lláh* will be best for you if ye are of those who believe."³

Shortly after his arrival, Quddús asked Mullá Husayn to determine the number of the assembled companions. Nabíl recounts:

One by one he [Mullá Husayn] counted them and passed them in through the gate of the fort: three hundred and twelve in all. He himself was entering the fort in order to acquaint Quddús with the result, when a youth, who had hastened all the way on foot from Bárfurúsh, suddenly rushed in and seizing the hem of his garment, pleaded to be enrolled among the companions and to be allowed to lay down his life, whenever required, in the path of the Beloved. His wish was readily granted. When Quddús was informed of the total number of the companions, he remarked: "Whatever the tongue of the Prophet of God has spoken concerning the promised One must needs be fulfilled ..."⁴

With this, Quddús ordered that no further individuals be allowed to enter the fort.⁵

* * * * *

¹ Ka'bih [Ka'ba] located in Mecca is the *Qiblih* – place to which Muslims turn to for prayer and go to for *Hajj* [pilgrimage]. In this *hadíth*, as in instances in Islamic poetry and literature, is it used as a metaphor for the House of God or ultimate goal. For more details see [Resources: Brief Background in Shí'a Islam](#).

² One symbolic significance of three hundred and thirteen companions is that it was the number of companions of the Prophet Muhammad at the famous battle of Badr.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p352

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p353. The final number at that point became three hundred and thirteen, which fulfilled the *hadíth* prophecy mentioned above.

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, -357-358. Note: In a compiled listing of participants at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí, the total number is given as three hundred and sixty [*Amanat Resurrection and Renewal* Chapter 8, p359]

Section Four: Siege of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí Begins

Lies-filled appeal by the *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá'* to the Sháh

The hatred and blindness of heart of the 'ulamá of region led by the *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá'* of Bárfurúsh was like a bottomless abyss. The *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá'* now addressed a lies-filled manipulative appeal to the new king, the seventeen-year old Násiri'd-Dín Sháh. The message said:

The standard of revolt has been raised by the contemptible sect of the Bábís. This wretched band of irresponsible agitators has dared to strike at the very foundations of the authority with which your Imperial Majesty has been invested. The inhabitants of a number of villages in the immediate vicinity of their headquarters have already flown to their standard and sworn allegiance to their cause. They have built themselves a fort, and in that massive stronghold they have entrenched themselves, ready to direct a campaign against you. With unswerving obstinacy they have resolved to proclaim their independent sovereignty, a sovereignty that shall abase to the dust the imperial diadem of your illustrious ancestors. You stand at the threshold of your reign. What greater triumph could signalise the inauguration of your rule than to extirpate this hateful creed that has dared to conspire against you? It will serve to establish your Majesty in the confidence of your people. It will enhance your prestige, and invest your crown with imperishable glory. Should you vacillate in your policy, should you betray the least indulgence towards them, I feel it my duty to warn you that the day is fast approaching when not only the province of Mázindarán but the whole of Persia, from end to end, will have repudiated your authority and will have surrendered to their cause.¹

An army of twelve thousand is mobilized against Fort Shaykh Tabarsí

The young Sháh gave the matter over to his Grand Vazír, the *Amír-Kabír* ² who called in the main military officials of the province of Mázindarán and demanded that they take whatever measures were needed to put an end to this so-perceived sedition of the Bábís as soon as possible. The two main military officers of

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p358-359

² Mírzá Taqí Khán, who was generally known as *Amír-Kabír* [the Great Commander] or *Amír-Nizám* [Commander of the Forces].

Mázindarán who had met Mullá Husayn at the time of the first confrontation in Bárfurúsh [DB 17-18, Section 4], led the charge again. One of them, Hájí Mustafá Khán  wrote to the sovereign giving the following plan:

I myself come from Mázindarán. I have been able to estimate the forces at their disposal. The handful of untrained and frail-bodied students whom I have seen are utterly powerless to withstand the forces which your Majesty can command. The army which you contemplate despatching is in my view unnecessary. A small detachment of that army will be sufficient to wipe them out. They are utterly unworthy of the care and consideration of my sovereign. Should your Majesty be willing to signify your desire, in an imperial message addressed to my brother 'Abdu'lláh Khán-i-Turkamán , that he should be given the necessary authority to subjugate that band, I am convinced that he will, within the space of two days, quell their rebellion and shatter their hopes.¹

The Sháh gave his consent and issued an edict ordering 'Abdu'lláh Khán-i-Turkamán to recruit an army and with them subdue the Bábís at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí. The Sháh also sent a royal badge with the edict, as a mark of confidence and authority given to 'Abdu'lláh Khán. Within a short space of time, 'Abdu'lláh Khán raised an army of about twelve thousand men, composed largely of the Turkish tribes and the Afghán communities living in that region.² The army was equipped with whatever ammunition was required and it marched to the makeshift Fort Shaykh Tabarsí.

The army arrived and set up its camp at the village of Afrá, which was on a hill overseeing Fort Shaykh Tabarsí. Barricades were set up in front of the fort, with orders to open fire on anyone who chanced to leave its gate.

The siege of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí had begun. It was November 1848. The stage was set for the epic encounter between the dark forces of ignorance and the battalion of light.

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¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p359-360

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p360 and footnote 2

NOTE

Additional information on the design, construction and manning of the fortifications at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí

Initial construction of the Fort

Mullá Husayn had already made the initial plans for the construction of a simple fort around the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí by the end of the very first day of his arrival there. Under the charge of Muhammad Báqir-i-Qá'íní, the construction of the fort began as soon as the group was settled.

The shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí itself was a small construct. It was located on a plot of land about three to four thousand meters square,¹ which is equal to about half a soccer field. One historian records:

The boundaries of the courtyard of the shrine were limited by a hedge originally planted to keep the animals out. A ditch had been dug around the shrine about one meter deep and one meter wide. The earth from the ditch was piled on the inside of the square, and the hedge was planted on the top of the pile of earth, along with sticks and canes tied together with straw. Of course, this hedge would not be sufficient to protect Mullá Husayn and his companions from their enemies, so they would reinforce and repair the walls many times while at Tabarsí.

During the first nights of their arrival at the shrine, Mullá Husayn ordered that each part of the wall be guarded by different groups of believers from the various provinces of Iran. The Bábís of Khurasan stood watch on one side, the believers from Shiraz on another, and so forth. They began to construct a new wall, and in some places added more land and enlarged the courtyard. Mullá Husayn himself supervised the project and Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir², who built the Bábíyyih in Mashhad,³ was the engineer of all the work.

¹ Mehrabkhani, *Mullá Husayn – Disciple at Dawn*, Chapter 20, p213

² Mehrabkhani, *Mullá Husayn – Disciple at Dawn*, chapter 20, p214 footnote writes: 'There were now two men at the fort by this name: one was Mullá Husayn's nephew, and the other one mentioned here. As they were of different statures, the friends called Mullá Husayn's nephew "little Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir" and the other big Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir.' The latter had been an important cleric whom thousands of people had imitated as their mujtahid. When he accepted the Faith, four hundred of his followers embraced it as well. He was intelligent and erudite, a good organizer, very brave, and of noble spirit.'

This "big Mírzá Muhammad Báqir" is Mírzá Muhammad Báqir-i-Qá'íní. He is martyr #7, [DB 19-20 Part B, Section 1](#). The "little Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir" (Mullá Husayn's nephew) is martyr #4, [DB 19-20 Part B, Section 1](#).

³ See [DB 13-16, Section 3](#)

Before the Bábís arrival, there had been one entrance to the grounds of the shrine. The companions build another on the western boundary, facing Báfurúsh. They build four small towers on four sides, then constructed a number of small buildings of wood and grass where the friends could lodge. The yard of the shrine had been over-grown with huge Siberian elms that served as building material.¹

As the fort was being constructed, the Bábís were continually attacked or harassed by the people of the neighbouring villages. These neighboring villages were being incited by the implacable, hate-ridden *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá'* of Bárfurúsh. The companions withstood every attack, while continuing the construction of the fort.

When the work of initial construction was completed, Mullá Husayn began preparations for storage of food and water for the siege of the fort, which he knew lay ahead.

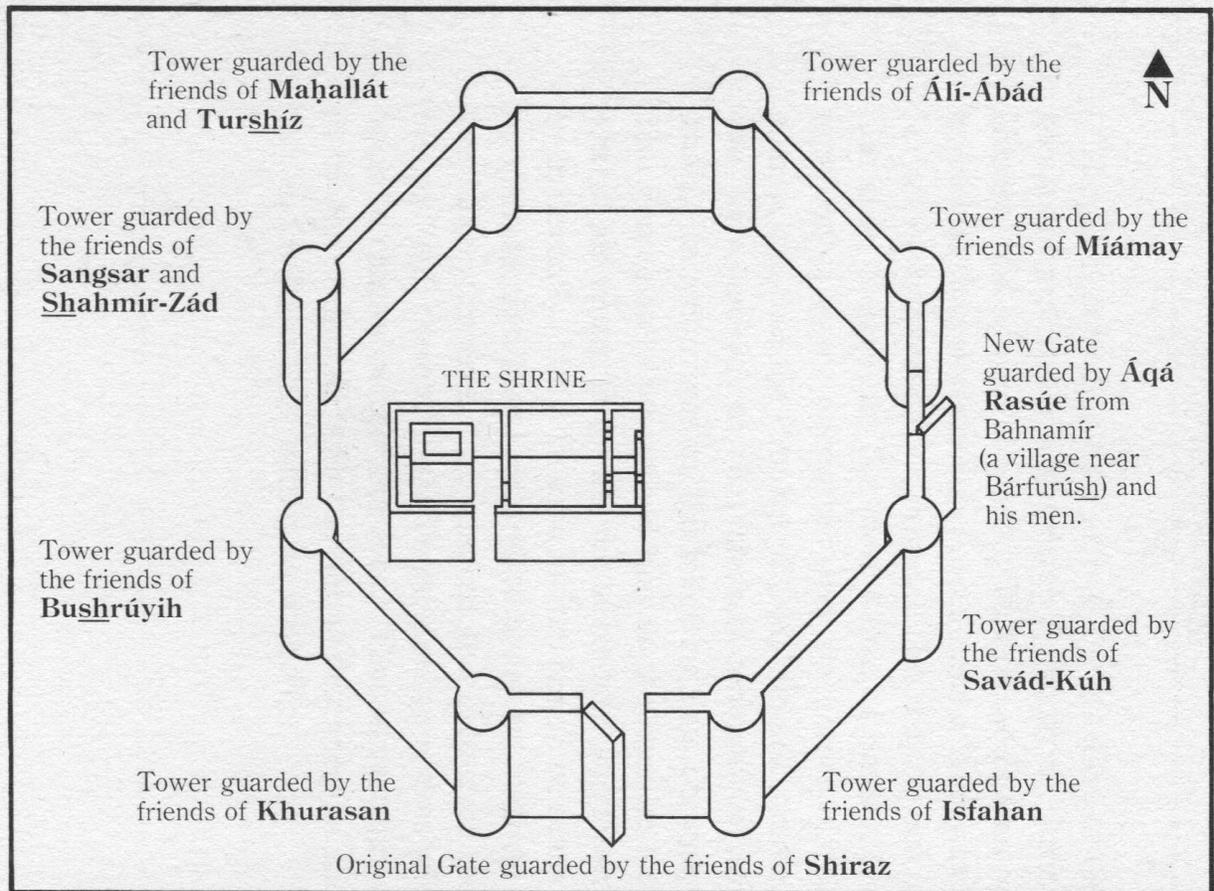
Additional construction of the Fort

As the siege proceeded, and the fort attacked with more advanced weapons such as cannons [see **DB 19-20 Part A**], the fort will be further fortified including addition of towers and an additional new gate. These additions and modifications will change the fort from a rectangle to an octagonal structure with addition of towers, gates and thickened walls to withstand cannons. One historian records:

Later when the Sháh's army laid siege to the fort [see Act 9], the walls had to be constructed again. The initial fortifications were not strong enough to withstand the cannonballs and full, frontal attacks. And so, the fortifications were reinforced – again under the care of Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir. The grounds of the shrine were enlarged to include more land, and two gates built of bricks brought from the neighboring villages. Every companion was assigned to carry twenty bricks to the fort. Mullá Husayn took part in the work and carried his twenty bricks. When the two gates were finished, one was turned over to the believers of Mazandaran. The other was assigned to the Bábís from Shiraz. The new fort was octagonal and had eight towers. Each side was built by a group of companions who guarded it during the fighting.²

1 Mehrabkhani, *Mullá Husayn – Disciple at Dawn*, Chapter 20, p213-215

2 Mehrabkhani, *Mullá Husayn – Disciple at Dawn*, Chapter 20, p215



A rendering of the design of the Fort at Shaykh Tabarsí based on various historical sources. Also indicated are the posts assigned to different groups of companions. With the exception of the original shrine itself at the centre, all the fortifications were destroyed by the army when the siege ended.¹

End of “DB 19: The Black Standard”

¹ Mehrabkhani, *Mullá Husayn – Disciple at Dawn*, Chapter 20, p212