

Baron Rosen's Archive Collection of Bábí and Bahá'í Materials

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Baron V. R. Rosen after his death left behind a vast collection of unpublished materials which among other things are of extreme value for the study of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths as well as for research on the Bábí and Bahá'í studies in Europe especially for those interested in having an historical perspective. These materials are preserved in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Russia. They comprise Rosen's correspondence with A. G. Tumanski, E. G. Browne (the larger part of the collection), Y. Batyushkov, academic Oldenburg, V. I. Ignatyev, Sebastyan Vuarot, I. Kheyrulláh.

Of special importance are manuscripts (and copies of manuscripts), official reports of Russian diplomats from Persia on the Bábís and reports from Adrianople on the Bábís residing there at the same time when Bahá'u'lláh was exiled in Adrianople.

It would be relevant to say a few words about the key figures featuring in the given collection of materials.

A Russian aristocrat of German descent, Baron Victor Romanovich Rosen (1849-1908) was an academic, professor of Arabic, head of the Oriental Branch of the Russian Archeological Society, and the translator of several Bahá'í Writings into Russian. He prepared for publication in the original Arabic and Persian a volume of Epistles by Bahá'u'lláh and left profound descriptions of many Bábí and Bahá'í manuscripts which now belong to the manuscript collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Rosen also properly identified some important Epistles such as the *Surih-i-Muluk*

(The *Surih of the Kings*) as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. He encouraged his students A. G. Tumanski and others to collect and study materials related to the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths.

Alexandr Grigoryevich Tumanski (born in 1861), who belonged to an old Lithuanian aristocratic stock, was Rosen's student. When he was a young captain in the Russian Imperial army, and while he was serving in the Turkistan region, namely in Ashkabad, he came into close contact with the recently established Bahá'í community there. He undertook a trip to Persia arranged by Bahá'ís and sanctioned by the Russian authorities to collect information about the Bahá'ís in Persia. He was accompanied on his trip by his young wife, and his journey to Persia at that time was a real adventure. Among Tumanski's good friends was prominent Bahá'í scholar Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání. Tumanski was the first translator of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* into a European language (Russian). According to Professor Akimushkin of St. Petersburg, after the so called Bolshevik October Revolution, Tumanski fled with his family into Turkey and died in 1920 on the Prince Islands. His descendents live in Belgium.

The third prominent figure whose correspondence is contained in the archive is the British orientalist E. G. Browne, who does not need any introduction. His letters to Rosen form the largest part of the preserved correspondences in the Archive. The above three figures were pioneers of the Bábí and Bahá'í studies in Europe.

Also represented in the collection of materials are:

1. Academic Oldenbourg, who mentions the Bábís in his letter to Rosen;
2. Vladimir Ivanovich Ignatyev — another of Rosen's University students, diplomat working in Tehran, Ashkabad and Bukhara;
3. Yu. Batyushkov — Persian and Arabic scholar and diplomat working in Tehran in 1893-1899;
4. Sebastian Vuarot — a French Bahá'í.

Let us now briefly describe the materials preserved in the Archive collection. They consist of the following items:

1. Tumanski's letters to Rosen, which date 1892-1899. These comprise over 23 letters (in Russian). The latter deal with a wide range of issues: the Bábí community in Ashkabad, the translation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (and related issues), Tumanski's trip to Persia and some information he gathered there about the Bahá'ís, other subjects. Among these is a news-paper "Kavkaz" article on the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh by Tumanski in which he gives an unbiased account of the history of the Bahá'í Faith and calls Bahá'u'lláh "a prophet."
2. Browne's correspondence with Rosen comprises 73 letters, dating 1889-1902 (one letter is in Persian, the rest are in English). These letters too cover a very wide range of issues and show in what close cooperation with Rosen Browne was doing his research on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths. From these letters one, for example, finds out that Browne used for his work both manuscript copies of the *Persian Bayán* from the St. Petersburg manuscript collection, made available for him owing to Rosen.
3. Ignatyev's correspondence with Rosen comprises 3 letters (in Russian). These throw light on the stance of Russia's Foreign Ministry on the Bábí/Bahá'í issue and reveal the differences between the Foreign Ministry and the Russian authorities in Turkistan in this respect.
4. Batyushkov's correspondence with Rosen consists of 3 letters (in Russian), revealing Batyushkov's attraction to the Bahá'í Faith and his protective attitude towards it.
5. Sebastian Voirot's letter (in French) throws some light on the French Bahá'í community of the time.
6. Kheyrulláh, who was put in touch with Rosen by Browne, offers Rosen his book in his letter (in English).
7. Official reports of Russian diplomats in Persia on the Bábí/Bahá'ís (one is in French, the rest are in Russian written in a Russian script specially modified to make its reading difficult). These cover a period of 1855-1879.

Among them is a report by the Russian Charge d'Affaire in Tehran Mr. Zinovyev to Duke Gorchakov (in French).

8. "The Bábís in Adrianople" – a report by the head of the Russian Consulate in Adrianople based on eye-witness accounts (the report was compiled in Russian on Rosen's request).
9. Manuscripts:
 - The *Lawḥ-i-Samsun* (in Arabic) also known as the *Lawḥ-i-Hawdaj* (Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in Samsun on his way to Constantinople). The manuscript is preserved in an excellent condition.
 - The *Lawḥ-i-Jawad* (3 pages in Persian).
 - A chapter from the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* ('chapter of Josef') in Arabic.
 - Prayers
 - 'History of Haji Muḥammad Riza' – a history in Persian of the martyrdom of Haji Muḥammad Riza Isfahani in Ashkabad, manuscript in Abu-l-Fazl Gulpáygání's hand.

All the above manuscripts (except for the *Lawḥ-i-Jawad*, included into Rosen's Volume of Epistles by Bahá'u'lláh) have not so far been available for general public, because they have been preserved in the Archive, which accounts for their excellent condition. They are not described in any published descriptive catalogue of manuscripts.

10. Two letters in Judeo-Persian¹ with a translation into regular Persian, giving an account of the events which happened to Bábís (Bahá'ís) of Jewish background in Iran and the persecutions they suffered. One letter is addressed by Agha Sulayman 'Attar Hamadani from Tehran to Agha Sulayman Shalfurush Hamadani in Ashkabad.
11. A letter written by Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání to Tumanski (in Persian) on behalf of Abdu'l-Bahá. The letter is probably a transcript of Gulpáygání's original letter.

From Tumanski's and Browne's correspondences with Rosen we would know many interesting facts. For example, we can retrace fully how these two scholars were proceeding with their work on the translation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and the study of the *Persian Bayán* respectively. We would also know that Abdu'l-Bahá was originally against the publication of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and would find out what were the considerations behind this objection. We would know that Tumanski chose to wait for the Master's consent and approval. We would also find out why Browne after so much labor on the manuscripts was eventually forced to cut his work on the *Persian Bayán* in the middle and give up his attempts to publish it. Since these letters contain and touch upon so many various subjects, it is impossible to class them according to their content. So I arrange them chronologically, sometimes emphasizing the main subject of the letter or quote. All the Russian language materials are quoted in this presentation in my English translation. I would start with Tumanski and several of his letters dated 1892:

The Bábí [community] in Ashkabad consists of very interesting members. Many of them have been witnesses of and participants in very interesting events. Some of them personally knew the Báb. The most interesting of all the Bábís is my friend whom I met last year, a Samarkand dweller, who came to Ashkabad for the sole purpose of helping me translate the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*...

Also I managed to obtain autographs of Bahá'u'lláh² and the Báb. I have also been promised a photo of the house in Akka. As for the picture [of Bahá'u'lláh], it cannot be obtained. The *Tarikh-i-Sayyah* (Traveller's Narrative) mentions a drawing of the Russian Consul. The Bábís are very eager to know whom exactly that drawing was by and whether you are familiar with this drawing. If it were possible to make a copy or take picture of it this could afford great pleasure to Bahá'u'lláh... [February 28, 1892]

Having received the news of the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh Tumanski wrote:

It has finally occurred. The page is turned over. **آن رچودهف صرعود حضرت** ('His Holiness has ascended') – These are the words in which the Bábís of Ashkabad informed me of the passing away of Beha... [July 3, 1892]

He published an article about this event in the newspaper 'Kavkaz,' from which I will read you a quote:

A report has been received the other day about the death of the Head of the Bábís and their prophet, which occurred in Akka..., Syria on 16 May³. This is a remarkable person, who managed to attract about a million followers in different parts of Persia and accorded to Bábíism the peace-loving nature which is now characteristic of the adherents of this religion. This teaching has made a proud shi'ih Persian, who accepts friendship only with his coreligionists and fully turns his back on people of other beliefs (*tabarra' va tavalla*), into a humble person, a Bábí, who considers everybody to be his brother.

Bahá'u'lláh, whose original name was Mírzá Ḥusayn Núrí, was born on 1 November 1817. He was a son of Mírzá Buzurg Núrí, the former minister (*vazir*) of Fath Ali Shah. He spent his youth in his father's house, where constantly moving around cultured and educated people he displayed at quite an early age great mental capacity and a wonderful moral mindset... [July 9, 1892]

About the publication of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* with his Russian translation Tumanski tells Rosen the following:

On the publishing [of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*] I recently received a letter from Mírzá Abu'l-Fazl, in which he asks me to delay the publication due to the Most Great Branch (*Ghusn-i-'Azam*)'s concern about the possible consequences [of such a publication] for them. Enclosed is a copy of the letter. In response to this letter I wrote Mírzá [Abu'l-Fazl] to reassure their [community] head, saying that no harm would be caused to them by a Russian translation and that I would not proceed with its publication unless I got the permission of his Holiness (*hazrat*).

Tumanski goes on to say:

I have to be on good terms with them, as Bahá'u'lláh's biography is on its way and this is something which would be interesting to get. Please, don't write Browne about it so that he won't beat me to it. If an opportunity presents itself I will translate it together with extracts from the *Tarikh-i-Jadid* (Manukchi) [New History] and the *Maqala-yi-Sayyah* [Traveller's Narrative]. This would serve as a kind of introduction to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*... [October 24, 1892]

Several letters are about Tumanski's trip to Persia. He writes in one of them:

The Bábís with their stories about Persia greatly enkindle the flame of my desire to undertake this trip and draw a picture of a very interesting journey for me. God willing (en sha Alláh). Of course recommendations will not be lacking. By now reports have gone to many places concerning my forthcoming arrival... The point is that to make this trip secret has not worked out, because from the very first this whole affaire has not been handled quietly and before my arrival in Ashkabad almost everybody had already known about my forthcoming business trip, and surely inferred that the Bábís were the main purpose of it... I can only count on the negligence of the Persians themselves and fear lest the English should get in my way...

Is there any news from Browne? How is he getting on with the Bábís [corrected into] Bahá'ís. Has he got along with or most probably broken further apart from them because of his publication of Subh-i-Azal's portrait and writings?... [January 9, 1893]

An extract from another letter shows how Tumanski was proceeding with his work on the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*:

In the next mail I am sending you the translation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* with footnotes. As for the supplements only three of them are ready so far, namely: 1) an extract from the Tablet to Karim Khan, the Shaykhi, 2)

a translation of the Tablet on the elementary reality (*basit al-haqiqā*), in which Bahá'u'lláh touches upon pantheism, 3) a Tablet about the Sufis.⁴ I also intend to add a few Tablets containing commandments (*ahkam*).

No real news so far. Just an increased activity in Bábí's visiting Akka can be seen. A treatise titled *Risala-yi-Siyaysiya* has recently been received from the Most Great Branch (Ghusn-i-'Azam), of which I will give you an account, for I am planning to include its content into my Introduction. In the meanwhile it is now time to end. Let peace and Bahá' abide upon you. [January 21, 1894]

The closing line of the above letter merits special attention. Tumanski uses this expression: 'let Bahá abide upon you' in the closing part of several of his letters. On one occasion Batyushkov does the same in his reference to E. G. Browne. He says: *alayhi Bahá* ("let Bahá abide upon him").

Meanwhile Tumanski ran into some difficulties with the Russian authorities while arranging his trip to Persia. Baron Rosen as it is clear from the given correspondence was instrumental in paving Tumanski's way to that country. After sharing with Rosen some details of his itinerary Tumanski says:

It is going to be organized in the following way. A report will be sent to Akka concerning my journey, and a circular letter will be sent out from there requesting the believers as part of their obligation to give me full assistance. I don't know how to thank you for all this. My fiancée and I are completely delighted. The Bábís are also jubilant, while giving their praises (*zikh'r'es*) they are promising me the most exciting trip. One of them will be sent from Ashkabad to accompany me on my journey... [January 17, 1894]

As his journey was drawing to a close Tumanski wrote:

I have almost finished my journey. I cannot say that it was an easy one. Though I was never exposed to a real danger, I had a lot of troubles... As to the Bábís I can say that almost everywhere where they exist I came into contact with them and this will be the subject of my

special note which I will include into my report...
[October 28, 1894]

Tumanski takes up this issue in another letter after the completion of his trip. This letter dated January 4, 1895 is of special interest for in it Tumanski among other things gives statistical data about the Bábís living in different parts of Persia. He, for example, says:

Their total number mustn't exceed 100000 or 150000. The figure given by Curson and quoted by Browne is to the best of my knowledge exaggerated. However, this by no means detracts from their importance. Presently there is an especially large number of Bábís in Tehran, among whom you can find very high-ranking and influential people. Moreover, Bábúism also serves as a banner around which elements unhappy with the existing regime group together. Among these there are some very influential khans and chiefs of nomadic tribes... I personally met two highly influential Baktiyari khans and an Arab shaykh from Fars...

Although Batyushkov's letters are few, they also contain some very interesting information.⁵ For example, in a letter dated January 18, 1894 he writes about Mírzá Yahyá:

Finally about Subh-i-Azal, he is said to be dragging out a very miserable existence now. For his sons, who are almost his only adherents, leave no hope for a bright future, though they have traveled extensively around the world. By the way, they have often been to...,⁶ but without showing any tendencies to preoccupy themselves with the salvation of either their souls or other people's. The rest of the Bábís have already become convinced of the meaning of the words of Nuqta-yi-Awla, that Bahá had to be in concealment for 9 years in order to be saved from an inevitable death. Therefore [Subh-i-Azal's] role is limited to this period...

In another letter to Rosen, dated June 3, 1899, Batyushkov writes:

Valentin Alekseevitch⁷ tells me that Tumanski's publication of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is nearing completion

if not already completed. You, surely, know of what importance it is for Persia and how greatly demanded it would be. Some people already made inquires to me about it and therefore I am wondering if the translation is printed together with the [original] text or separately and in the latter case, if it is possible to have the original text alone. In case of your positive [reply to this question] I would ask you to do me a favor by sending me about 20 copies of the text with the translation and 80 copies of the [original] text without the translation...

Ignatyev's letters are no less interesting. They enlighten us as to the Russian authorities' approach to the Bahá'í Faith and to some controversy characteristic of this approach. Thus Ignatyev wrote:

When correspondence about granting Russian citizenship to the Bábís living in Ashkabad started our Envoy in Tehran informed the Head of the [Transcaspian] Region, that about the spread of the Bábís in Persia there could only be made conjectural assumptions, but there was reason to believe that the number of the Báb's followers reached a million. They are spread among all the strata of society including the upper class. Presently it is still more difficult to judge how successful the propaganda of the Báb's teaching is. Among the Sunnis the followers of the sect are very few.⁸ A Persian told me with certainty that even some Armenians (of the Armenian-Gregorian Church) in Ashkabad had recently become Bábís. He did not want to disclose the names of those Armenians, for they, not without a good reason, fearing persecution from both the [Russian] authorities as well as from their own [former] coreligionists, carefully conceal their adoption of Bábíism. It was expected here that Bábíism was a transitional stage to Christianity and apparently it was hoped that the Bábís, having seen so much kindness, not only would agree to adopt the Russian Orthodox Church's form of Christianity but would moreover have a beneficial effect on other Moslems. However, the opposite has happened: Christians

became Bábís, while not a single Bábí has so far, to the best of my knowledge, embraced Christianity. If others follow the two Armenians' suite, then certain measures, surely, will have to be taken...

From here Ignatyev goes on to say:

It is taken for granted that neither Russia nor England have any reason to support the Bábís, and it seems inconceivable to me that such a reason would ever (at least in the foreseeable future) be found... Not a single European envoy has dared to intercede on behalf of the persecuted with the Shah during the latest executions of the Bábís in Yazd...

I have also to disagree with you that our diplomats should intimidate the Shah using the Bábís and by making threats of a further support for them coerce the Shah to fulfill our demands. Firstly, such a threat could and surely would be ineffective, which would make it uncomfortable for us. Secondly, as I have already pointed out above, we can only harm ourselves by such a threat. For we are going to set against us the vast majority of Moslems and the clergy. What if the Shah responds to the threat saying to us: 'So be it. I will meet your terms if you do not accept the Bábís in your country and extradite those whom you have already accepted'? In what situation shall we find ourselves? Definitely, under no circumstances can we extradite the Bábís. Because their extradition would not correspond to Russia's image as a great power [March 25, 1892].

Needless to say that the assertion sometimes made in Iran by some Iranian circles that Bahá'ís were supported and used in Iran by foreign (Western) powers to promote their own political aims, in the light of the above confession made by the high-ranking Russian diplomat, appears totally unfounded. In another letter to Rosen Ignatyev touches upon the passing of some Bahá'í Writings to Russian officials:

In reply to your letter dated April 8, which I received on 20th I need to inform you urgently that for some

political considerations, when publishing Bábí documents it seems to me more proper not to mention my name as well as the fact that these documents were presented by the Bábís to General Kuropatkin.⁹ As you well know, our Ministry is not quite sympathetic to the attempts of the authorities of the Transcaspian Region to offer the Bábís exceptional support. The mention of my name, given my official status here, would accord to the delivery of Bahá'u'lláh's epistles into my hands by the Bábís a somewhat official character, which is undesirable... [April 23, 1892]

I will now turn to the "Report on the Bábís in Adrianople," which was compiled on Baron Rosen's special request by the Russian Consul of the time. It comprises several accounts made by different individuals. All the accounts emphasize that the Bábís lived quite peacefully in Adrianople and were far from being trouble-makers. Among these materials there is a document titled: "A rough translation from German of the petition of the Bábí Shaykh (i.e. Bahá'u'lláh) to the Austrian Consulate" concerning the new upsurge of persecutions that befell the Bábís, by which Bahá'u'lláh's banishment to Akka is implied. I will not quote this document here. Instead I will read you an extract from a report based on the accounts of some Sufi Shaykhs in Adrionople:

According to the testimony of old Adrionople dwellers (Shaykhs belonging to the dervishes of the Mevlevi and Qadrikhane Sufi orders..., who were people with whom Shaykh Husayn Ali had a personal relationship), the Bábís lived a quiet and humble life. Shaykh Husayn Ali was a very clever and respectable person. He was engaged in the study and interpretation of many theological issues. Haji Izzet Pasha finds that the Bábí teaching is an aspiration for self-perfection. The *Báb* is the outward sign of a gate leading the soul to Paradise. Humility and self-possession, and also firmness in sustaining sufferings purify the soul and open for it the gate (*Báb*) of Paradise. The person preaching this, enlightening people and guiding them unto salvation is the one who is the *Báb*. This is also what the Gospel speaks about. Isa (Jesus Christ), the prophet, calls

himself the *Báb*, for through him people enter Paradise. According to Hadr and Izzet Pasha, the *Báb's* pure doctrine was distorted by uneducated people, while in essence it by no means contradicts Islam. Muḥammad, in the exalted sense of the word, was also the *Báb*, and Musa and Isa, as well as all the great saints and wise men, who taught and corrected humankind.

Turning now to E. Browne's correspondence with Rosen, we will start with a quote from a letter in which the British scholar describes his recent journey to Cyprus and the Palestine. He says:

My journey — as I daresay you will have desired was intimately connected with the same object. It appeared to me that for a proper understanding of the subject (apart from the great interest one feels in beholding face to face the prime movers in a great national or religious movement) it was very desirable to have a personal interview with the chiefs of both parties of *Bábís*, since from them (if they chose to speak) the most authentic and detailed accounts might be expected.

So, having obtained some extension of the Easter vacation, I once more turned my face Eastwards, and on March 19th landed in Cyprus...

As regards the history of the Cyprian exiles, there, I believe that I have all the information obtainable, and of all the papers I took copies which are now in my possession.

After leaving Cyprus (on April 5th) I proceeded to Beyrout, & thence, after a delay of 5 days (for I had to obtain permission from Beha to approach him) to Acre. This delay unfortunately reduced my time at Acre to 5 days) (for the ride thither & back occupied 3 days each way), but during these 5 days I was completely amongst the *Bábís*, who treated me with unbounded kindness. I was granted 5 interviews with Beha himself, but of course I could not ask him any questions. I sat humbly before him while he talked. His discourse was oracular but rather general in character.

He spoke as 'one having authority,' but not exactly as I had expected — like a Master, and a Prophet — but not as an Incarnation of the Divinity... His manner is gracious and dignified, but somewhat restless, suggesting great stores of energy. He talked for the most part of the necessity of all nations choosing one language as a means of international communication & one writing (a sort of sermon on the concluding text of the *دساق و حل*)¹⁰ & of the necessity of putting down war & international jealousy & hostility. Of doctrine properly so called he spoke little.

I might write pages on all I saw & heard, but to the present I must confine myself to the above brief outline. Of course I hope to publish the result of my journey ere long... [From a letter dated May 6, 1890]

The following letter helps us to understand how Browne classified and selected Bábí and Bahá'í writings from the standpoint of their importance. He wrote:

But of course the printing of oriental works is expensive, & we cannot publish the whole of the extensive literature which the Bábís have managed to produce in this short time, so that I am anxious to make a wise selection... As regards the work about the Bábís, I think it would be a good thing to publish -

(i) Selections from the Báb's writings, including the whole of the Persian Beyan, the *Dala'il-i-Sab'a*,¹¹ portions of the Commentaries on the *Suras* of Joseph, *قره ب*, *ال عصد و*,¹² one or two of the *آراتزی*;¹³ & other shorter writings,

(ii) Selections from Beha's works, including,

اق دس کتاب¹⁴

نصیر و حل

مکنونه لماتک

فردوسیّه لماتک

Some other of the shorter الواح (Tablets) which you have not published, and selections from the كتابى (Kitáb-i-Íqán)

(iii) Selections from Subh-i-Ezel's writings, including portions of his الروح غماتن , (Persian)

مجالى ئالىى and the short account of the Bábí movement which he wrote for me.

... If you would give me your advice as to how I had best proceed I should be very grateful. I think that the Persian Beyan is very important, but my MS. is not a very good one, & I am waiting an opportunity (sic) to spend a few weeks in London to collate it with the British Museum MS. Unfortunately their rules are very stringent, & it is impossible to borrow any MS... [From a letter dated July 12, 1891]

In another letter Browne says:

I am very glad to hear that your Collections Scientifiques¹⁵ are so nearly ready, as they will be a very great acquisition not only to 'Bábology," but to Oriental Studies in general..

As you say that M. Tumanski¹⁶ is at present working at a popular resume of his sojourn amongst the Bábis in Ashkabad, & that he thinks of adding to it a brief account of my investigations, and also that he will soon be returning to his military duties in Asia, I thought that it might perhaps be convenient to him to be able to refer to my forthcoming work without further delay...

Still I think there can be no doubt that you are right as to the فارسی زبان¹⁷ being more important by far, and it would be a pity if the University Press after finishing the جدید اریخت,¹⁸ should weary of spending money on what one of my un-initiated friends had termed "a religion of which nobody ever heard before" I shewed what you had written to Professor Robertson Smith, by whose opinion the University Press Syndicate would be chiefly guided in the matter, & I also shewed him my

MS. of the text & translation of the دی دج اریخت , and he said that he did not think it would be advisable to urge the Press to incur the expense of publishing so large a work unless you, who were best able to judge impartially of its value, recommended it strongly. He also said that he thought that they would certainly print the Persian Beyan for me if I prepared a text; and if I have decided to get to work on that as soon as possible ... So now I have decided to concentrate my energy on the فارسی یاناب . It rests with your kindness to tell me how I should proceed with a view to obtaining the loan of the St. Petersburg MSS. I should be glad to begin the work during the vacation if it were possible, for from now till October 10th I shall have much more leisure than when term time begins... [From a letter dated July 28, 1891]

The theme of the *Persian Bayán* also features in Browne's following letters:

First of all as to the Persian Beyan. It is unfortunate that delay is unavoidable, but it is very generous of your librarian to allow their MSS. to go abroad at all, and eager as I am to commence the work, I cannot but feel that they are right in safe-guarding possessions so precious in whatever way seems best to them. And after all I can always be employing myself in collating my own two MSS, & if I am in London, the British Museum codex also. I am chiefly sorry to give you so much trouble... [From a letter dated August 15, 1891]

...I returned to Cambridge after my vacation at the end of last week... this morning to my great delight I received from our Foreign Office the MS. of the Persian Beyan belonging to the Academy of Sciences, which had been transmitted to me through them from the Russian Ambassador. I need not say how much pleasure its arrival gave me, and I know not in what words sufficiently to express my deep sense of gratitude to you for all the trouble you have taken in the matter and to the Academy of Sciences for the generosity with which they have placed at my disposal

so precious a manuscript. Pray convey to them my most sincere and warmest thanks.

Two days ago I dispatched the application for the other MS. belonging to the Institut. I was unable to do it sooner, as I wished to obtain a formal endorsement of my application from the Vice-Chancellor, thinking that too would strengthen it. My application and the Vice-Chancellor's "covering letter" were advanced to Sir Robert Morier, the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg. I hope they may prove as effective as your kind offices have done in the other case.

As I now have three MSS. in my possession (two of my own and the copy belonging to the Academy) I can begin the work of collation at once... [From the letter dated October 15, 1891]

...I have been steadily collating my best MS. of the Beyan with the MS. so kindly lent me by St. Petersburg Academy. It is rather tedious work, and I find I cannot satisfactorily do more than 3 pages of the St. P. MS. a day, as the attention begins to be blunted after that. However

قطره با قطره دری شود¹⁹

And I have already collated nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ of the whole, so that, all being well, I hope to have finished with it before the six months have passed.

I told [you] that I had applied to our Ambassador Sir Robert Morier, to obtain for me the loan of the MS. belonging to the Institut. I did this chiefly to avoid the delays inseparable from doing anything through the Foreign Office. Unfortunately Sir Robert Morier had just left St. Petersburg for England on account of his health. Consequently my letter fell into the hands of his Charge d'affaires, who not feeling the same interest in the matter...

The Academy MS. evidently belongs to the same "family" as my own, the variants being on the whole

few & unimportant, & mostly evident slips and errors. Still I suppose they should be collated... [From a letter dated November 10, 1891]

Quotes from a few more letters I will read without comments. For they speak for themselves:

You will see therefore, that my trip to Paris has not been fruitless. I have found a new M.S. of the Persian Beyan, as I believe, the original of the الاحكام تابك²⁰ translated by Gobineau; and, most interesting still, as I think, a book that would appear to be the original from which the compilers of the جدید اریخت²¹ got most of their circumstantial narratives...

What you tell me about M. Gamazof inspires me with the highest admiration for his enterprise and disinterested love of science. How I wish we had, such a publication in England.

I safely received the proof-sheets of the الملوک ورقة²² & etc which are being printed by the Academy of Sciences, and also the Zapiski (vol. vi, 1-4),²³ for which very many thanks. I have not yet had time to examine them carefully...

How I wish I could read Russian; unfortunately I cannot, so that the Russian part of the Zapiski is a sealed book to me. I must try and learn some when I get a little time, but a brief examination of Russian grammar which I once indulged in led me to the conclusion that it is a very difficult language...

As to the copies of my Traveller's Narrative which M. Toumanski says the Bábís at Ashkabad wish to buy, I need not say that it would be likely to encourage the University Press very much in the publication of other such works if so large a number were sold all at once. I have written to them to give me an estimate of the cost and weight of –

- 50 copies of the English
- 100 copies of the Persian bound in cloth like your copy.

- 100 copies of the Persian in a special paper cover to diminish the weight

...The only difficulty I see is, will the books be allowed to pass through Russia without difficulty? I understand that there are difficulties in the transmission of books through Russian territory. They would, I suppose, be most cheaply sent by steamer to Odessa or Batoumi, thence rail to Baku, steamer to اطه وزون²⁴, and rail to Ashkabad...

I am less anxious for the English volumes to go than the Persian, firstly because I doubt if they would meet the approval of any Bábí (the Beha'is would not like Note W), and secondly because I very much doubt whether there are 50 Bábís or even Persians sympathizing with Bábís who know English, and I do not see what use they would have for so many copies. Indeed my feelings about the Traveller's Narrative are curiously mixed: I sympathize profoundly with the Bábís as a whole, but hardly know what to think as between Beha and Subh-i-Ezel. My book would certainly please neither: the former would by no means approve of the English, the latter would never forgive me for editing Persian... [From a letter dated April 10, 1892]

...Many thanks also for your notices on the St. Petersburg فسیرال اسماء²⁵. I have not yet had time to compare them with my copy...I must also thank you for pp. 89-104 of the collection of الواح (Tablets) which you are printing, and for calling my attention to the expression[:]

26 الامكان بدن فی كالشردی ان نباضراً نُك

Which is interjected by the Ezeli's in so sinister a manner. Very probably you are right (and on the whole I hope so) in supposing that they have invented the context in which they place it... [From a letter dated October 9, 1892]

...I have to thank you very sincerely for your letter of April 15th with its very interesting enclosure, all the

contents of which were entirely new to me, (except for the resume of the ...²⁷ facts which you so kindly gave me in a letter some months ago). No copy of the رسالة اسكندریه²⁸ has come to me, and I fancy I have become suspected amongst my good friends at Acre & Alexandria of Ezeli proclivities. Anyhow some months have elapsed since I heard anything from them, and the last letter had a tone of reproach... It is a most fortunate thing that, thanks to M. Tumansky's energy & tact my excommunication will not injure the cause of science... [From a letter dated April 27, 1892]

... I am very glad to hear that M. Toumansky is getting on so well at Ashkabad, and I confidently anticipate the most precious results of his labours. To his last memoir on the Tarikh-i-Jadid²⁹ & etc I owe, as I said, a very great debt of gratitude. I wish I knew the truth about Aka Seyyid Jawad of Kerbela!... [From a letter dated May 31, 1893]

...Many thanks for your kind letter of July 31, and for the corrections you point out, It was very stupid of me not to see that the title رسالة الأسر bore reference to M. Toumansky's name and that it should be translated "Epistle of Alexander" – luckily the proofs, though passed, had not been printed off, and I was able to make the required correction. I am very grateful to you for having saved me from so stupid a blunder... [From a letter dated August 22, 1893]

...I cannot tell you how pleased I was to receive your kind letter together with the last number of the Zapiski and the "authorized version" of the Bábí scriptures, for all of which I offer you my most sincere thanks... I am extremely grateful to you for obtaining for me this new collection of Bábí scriptures, for as you know, my relations with Acre have ceased; at least it is a long time since I have heard from them, & from the Ezelis either...

As regards the Bábís I am rather doubtful whether I shall go on with any more of their books or not. I should like to publish both the انب³⁰ and Haji Mirzá

Jani's history, but most of my orientalist friends have dissuaded me, saying that enough has been done for the present. However ³¹مىخواهد هیچ خدا ات I should be sorry to abandon the Beyan after going through the labour of collating 3 MSS. [From a letter dated November 19, 1893]

The following letter explains what he means:

I feel my countrymen are tired of Bábís (sic), and that there is little chance of my getting either the Beyan or Mírzá Jani's history published, unless it be at my own expense... [From a letter dated October 27, 1894]

...I thank you very sincerely for what you say about the Beyan. I am almost certain that it would be impossible to get it printed here, unless it were at my own expense: and I fear I could not afford this. To show you how difficult it is to get books, which cannot prove remunerable, published here, I may tell you that I have just applied to the Press to print my Catalogue of Persian MSS. in the University Library, and that even about this I am having some difficulties and anxiety... [From a letter dated December 23, 1894]

...Your letter of Feb. 26 reached me in the Island of Cyprus at Famagusta, and I wrote a short reply from thence...

The assassination of the Shah of Persia is naturally enjoying a great deal of attention here.³² I am very sorry that the first telegrams connected it with the Bábís, as I am convinced that they have nothing whatever to do with it, but no doubt it will be made an excuse for renewing the persecutions. My own belief is that the assassination is the work of a political Society organized by Sheykh Jemalu'd-Din el-Afghani — an able but dangerous man, who has been expelled from nearly every country in Western Asia. I met him in London in 1891, where he was trying to stir up public feeling against the Shah by articles in the magazines on what he called "The Reign of Terror in Persia." He conducted an Arabic newspaper called ³³الوشقى لعروفا in Paris... intended to stir up Muḥammadan feeling against the English. He was also concerned in a reactionary

Persian newspaper called the نزدق³⁴ published in London in 1890-1. He has nothing whatever with the Bábís, but is a zealous Muḥammadan whose ideal is the union of all Muḥammadans to resist European influence. He is, I suppose, safe for the present as I see that the Sultan refuses to give him up to the Persian Ambassador at Constantinople... [From a letter dated May 9, 1895]

The theme of the emerging Bahá'í community in America is also reflected in Browne's letters. It is touched upon in 3 of the 4 letters with which I would like to conclude this presentation:

P.S. I think I told you about the Bábís in America (Chicago). There are Americans who account themselves of the sect. I send you herewith (enclosed with the J.R.A.S.³⁵ extracts) a little work published by their leader, Kheyru'lláh, which may amuse, though it can hardly instruct you... [From a letter dated February 2, 1898]

... I hope that you are well, and that your official work leaves you some time free for the Bábís. I think I told you that the sect has established itself in America. And has several hundred ardent behaits in New York, Chicago and San Francisco. I had a visit from one of them last June. As a rule they seem to know very little about it, but some of them perform pilgrimages to St. Jean d'Acree, and are received there by the صانغ³⁶... [From a letter dated November 1, 1899]

...I am most delighted to receive yesterday Captain Toumanky's edition and translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and other Bábí works, with Commentary, Introduction, etc. As I do not know his address, I am taking the liberty of sending you my letter of thanks to him, hoping that it will not trouble you too much to forward it to him. I have naturally only had time at present to glance at it... [From a letter dated February 6, 1900]

... I had a visit last week from a Bábí عید³⁷ on his way to America — a very serious intelligent & interesting man, who put me en courant as to the very serious

quarrel and schism which has arisen between 'Abbas Efendi – اعظم صرغ – and his younger brothers. The latter represent the stationary or conservative element, while the former, so far as I can learn, wishes to be regarded in the same light as Behá'u'lláh... [From a letter dated February 10, 1901]

In conclusion I would like to say that what I have presented to you is but a glimpse of the highly valuable materials preserved in Baron Rosen's archive in the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. I would also like to stress again that this collection has so far neither been published nor even referenced. Some of its items such as manuscripts of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings and Abu'l-Fazl Gulpáygání's autograph of the "History of Haji Muḥammad Riza Isfahani" have a special value of their own. In order to make this collection available to the public the soonest publication of all these materials in the original languages and translation (with all the necessary references) seems to me highly desirable.

NOTES

- ¹ By Judeo-Persian we imply the peculiar Persian dialect of Iranian Jews using Hebrew characters in writing.
- ² One of these autographs might be the manuscript of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner now preserved in the manuscript collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The manuscript is presumably an autograph of Bahá'u'lláh (though this still needs to be confirmed) and was sent to St. Petersburg from Ashkabad. The sender could well have been Tumanski. My article on this manuscript, its content and related issues is now forthcoming in the Journal published by the above Branch.
- ³ This and some other dates featuring in the correspondence are according to the old calendar used in pre-Revolutionary Russia.
- ⁴ The numbers are mine.
- ⁵ Batyushkov, as it appears from one his letters, preserved some Bahá'í Writings from extinction after the death of their owner.
- ⁶ The word is unclear.
- ⁷ Valentine Alekseevitch Dzukovski – a prominent Russian Persian scholar of the 19th century.
- ⁸ Probably the Sunnis of the Transcaspian region, e.g. Turkomans are implied here.
- ⁹ General Kuropatkin was Russia's General-governor of the Region.

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- ¹⁰ The *Most Holy Tablet*, probably the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is implied.
- ¹¹ The *Seven Proofs* by the Báb.
- ¹² Chapters 2 (“The Cow”) and 103 (The Afternoon).
- ¹³ *Visitations*.
- ¹⁴ Mentioned here respectively are: *The Most Holy Book*, *The Tablet to Nasir*, *The Hidden Words* and *The Words of Paradise*.
- ¹⁵ Here and below highlighted by E. G. Browne.
- ¹⁶ Tumanski's first and second names were Alexandr Grigoryevich. The letter “M” preceding Tumanski's family name in Browne's letters to Rosen must originally have stood for “Mr.,” which was possibly mistaken by Browne for the abbreviation of the first name.
- ¹⁷ The *Persian Bayán*.
- ¹⁸ The *New History*.
- ¹⁹ “A drop upon a drop makes a sea” (Persian).
- ²⁰ “The Book of Precepts.”
- ²¹ *New History*.
- ²² The *Surih of the Kings*.
- ²³ The full title of this academic journal edited by V. Rosen is: “Zapiski Vostochnovo Otdeleniya Rossiyskovo Archeologicheskovo Obshestva” (“Notes of the Oriental Branch of the Russian Archeological Society”).
- ²⁴ Uzun-Ata – a town in Turkistan.
- ²⁵ Tafsir al-Asma' (“Commentary on the Names”).
- ²⁶ “Be pulsating like the artery in the body of the world of creation” (Arabic).
- ²⁷ The word is unclear.
- ²⁸ “The Treatise of Alexander” (e. g. Alexander Tumanski). See also below.
- ²⁹ “New History” (Persian).
- ³⁰ *The (Persian) Bayán*.
- ³¹ “Let us see what God wills” (Persian).
- ³² E.g. in England.
- ³³ “The Sure Handle.”
- ³⁴ “The Law.”
- ³⁵ An abbreviation which stands for the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.
- ³⁶ “Aghsans” (Branches) – descendants of Bahá'u'lláh.
- ³⁷ This term usually applied by the Isma'ili's to their traveling preachers can in the given context be translated as “a teacher.”