

Memoirs of Count Dolgorukov *

Summary by Moshe Sharon

The numbers in brackets are the page numbers of the Arabic translation of the “Memoirs:” *Mudhakkarāt Dālkūrki*, translated by as-Sayyid Aḥmad al-Mūsawī al-Fālī, from the Tehran edition 1944

(25-26) The Memoirs begin in 1834. Dolgorukov arrived in Tehran (in reality he did not arrive in Tehran before 1845) to fill the position of the translator of the Russian Embassy. He had just finished the Academy of Arts, but needed to strengthen his knowledge of Persian and Arabic (“the Arabic in Persian is like Latin in French” p.25). The Embassy agreed to pay for his extra education and he found himself a teacher from Mazandran a certain Muḥammad, who was himself the pupil of a very erudite Muslim scholar Ḥakīm Aḥmad al-Gīlānī. Dolgorukov was a very good student; he frequented the house of his teacher and learnt with him not only Arabic but also Islamic subjects, Philosophy and classical sciences. As he gained the confidence of his teacher, Dolgorukov asked to be converted to Islam but without circumcision. The teacher agreed and also accepted the condition that the conversion of his Russian pupil to Islam should be kept secret (“If the Russian ambassador knew I would be in a mortal danger” p.26. In fact he had informed the embassy about his plans). After his conversion to Islam his teacher gave him in marriage his niece, a 14 years old girl.

Accepted as a Muslim he was able to carry his activity as a spy in the service of the Tsar’s government easily and successfully. He sent orderly reports to the minister of the foreign affairs in Moscow, frequently above the head of the ambassador, and thus he gained the confidence of the central government in Russia and could work independently of his superiors in Tehran much to the chagrin of the ambassador.

Once he was accepted as a pious Muslim he was introduced to Ḥakīm Aḥmad al-Gīlānī whose home was frequented by important persons who belonged to the intellectual as well as the religious elite of Iran, and although the great man was not completely convinced of his Islam he still was very polite to him and answered all his questions. Among the people who belonged to the circle of Aḥmad al-Gīlānī were also three men from the province of Nūr: Mīrzā Riḍā Qulī, Mīrzā Ḥusayn alī (*sic!*) – Bahā, (*sic!*) and Mīrzā Bi.ayn (probably mistake for Yaḥyā) Ḥājj Azal (*sic!*), who were the servants (or in the service of Āqā Khān Nūrī and part of his entourage). (The first and the last were half brothers of the Bahā. Here and in the following pages we find already the clumsiness of the document: “Ḥājj Azal,” but later “Ṣubḥ-i-Azal”. Note also: Mīrzā Yaḥyā was then two to three years old. This alone is enough

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sign of the crude forgery. In the earlier, Khurāsāni edition the year was 1838 and then Yaḥyā was 5 or 6 years old).

(27-30) Slowly Dolgorukov gained the confidence of al-Gīlānī as well, and was able to spend in house the nights of Ramaḍān one year after the other. Wanting to learn about the political views of his host he asked about the reasons for the deterioration of Iran from the important state in which it had been to its present inferior state. The Shaykh answered that Iran was sick. Its body, like the human body was attacked by microbes. The microbes were the foreigners but also the Jews and Zoroastrians who succeeded to gain influence in the Shah's court and thus infect the ruling system of Iran with degenerating illness. Among the methods which helped the foreigners to infiltrate the Iranian court al-Gīlānī mentioned the Jewish women. They married Iranian notables and in that way succeeded in infecting the court thus creating the conditions for the destruction of the Ancient Kingdom. Islam for a while united Iran but again it fell prey to the foreigners in modern times. Dolgorukov succeeded to learn much in the Kīlānī's home also about general political matters, which were much appreciated in Moscow. The attempt of the ambassador to inform the ministry that Dolgorukov truly became Muslim did not make any impression.

(35-36) His teacher used to receive a very handsome payment which came from the Tsarist secret service. He needed only a small part of this money for his running expenses, and the rest he used to build a beautiful house where Dolgorukov and his wife had a special wing. In this wing the Russian kept a room for himself in which he had a letter box that was used for keeping the contact with his agents. The main agent in his service was Ḥusayn alī the Bahā' (p. 37). Dolgorukov appearance as Muslim was so perfect that he was taken even for an *ākhund*, that is to say a member of the learned shī'ite clergy. He used to dress as one.

He found his way into the internal politics in Iran and succeeded in establishing Muḥammad Shāh on the throne of Iran, and even interfered in the foreign policy and military policy of the Shah ("I convinced him to capture Herat " p.39). The shāh was indebted to the Russians for enthroning him, and was on constant contact with the Russian agent. As a rule when he wanted to get rid of a suspicious member of the administration, with Russian knowledge, he used to banish such a person or, better, poison him. Every one therefore knew about the Russian influence and turned for counsel and protection to the Russian agents. "Most of decisions were taken only on the basis of our counsel." No body dared to oppose the representative of the Russian Empire. The Shah was totally indebted.

Meanwhile Dolgorukov was trying to find every way possible to sow strife among the Muslims. In the fifth year of his stay in Iran he succeeded to build for himself a group of spies all of whom were Iranian Muslims. None of these spies working for the Russians was better than Ḥusayn alī (Bahā'.) and his brother Yaḥyā Ḥājj Azal. They were the best of all spies. Dolgorukov adds that the Iranians are nationalistic and faithful to their country which

makes the two brothers real traitors. After Ramaḍān of that particular year Ḥusayn·alī brought to Dolgorukov's post box a very important piece of information that he heard Gīlānī and the prime minister of Iran planning, with the help of the British, a coup against Muḥammad Shāh who was a Russian puppet. Dolgorukov immediately informed the Shāh, who knew how to deal with his minister ("strangled him" p.47) but was afraid to touch Gīlānī. The Russian spy took upon himself to get rid of Gīlānī. He prepared poison which he gave to Ḥusayn·alī who put it in Gīlānī's food and killed him. This was in 28 Ṣafar 1251 [25 June 1835] (This of course is impossible. If Dolgorukov came to Teheran in 1834 and these events took place five years later, then they could not have taken place in 1835 and the whole story is yet another hoax. MS).

(49)Dolgorukov used his wife to get access into the homes of the nobility of Tehran and its religious leadership and to get first hand access to every thing that took place in these circles. This in addition to the fact that he got such a high position in the Shah palace that he was able to influence all the appointments that were done and get rid from all the pro-English functionaries. England was regarded the main enemy of the Russians in Iran. Among the appointments which were influenced by him was the appointment of Manuchehr Khān – *Mu·tamid ad-Dawlah* as the governor of Fārs. Nominally, Ḥājjī Mīrzā Āqāsī was the new premier but in fact the true mover of the affairs of the Court and of Iran in general was Dolgorukov.

(53)When he felt that he was on the top of the world he was struck by one tragedy after the other. In a plague which hit Tehran his family was wiped out: his wife, son and teacher Muḥammad. He felt remorse for what he did especially for the killing of Gīlānī by Ḥusayn·alī.

(54) Trouble came also from the side of the Graff Simnovitch, the Russian Ambassador, who sent reports to the imperial government accusing Dolgorukov of corruption, and that he was dishing out payments to his friends and family from the funds sent to him from Russia. (55)The Graff stopped these payments or reduced them. Among these reduced payments were also the salaries of the three brothers from Nūr: Ḥusayn·alī, Mīrzā Yaḥyā – Ṣubḥ-i-Azal (this time correctly spelt) – and Mīrzā Riḍā Qulī. In this way the whole construction of spies which Dolgorukov had prepared collapsed. The Shāh, learning about his misfortune, and hearing that the Russian ambassador is persecuting this good Muslim promised to see to it that the Graff was replaced. However Dolgorukov decided to go back to Russia to answer directly, not in writing, the accusations against him, give full report about his activity in Iran, and clear himself with the imperial government. Meanwhile, he became convinced of the truth of Islam and that this religion is the best religion for the world. From a fake Muslim he was about to become a true believer. He decided to begin spreading the Islamic religion in Russia even among the Emperor and his ministers (p.55). Soon, however, when he understood that he might bring trouble upon himself, he changed his mind and returned to his

original plan to disseminate dissent and trouble within Islam. To his superiors he explained that he adopted Islam outwardly because it was the best way for him to carry his spying work within the Islamic milieu. He demonstrated his achievements, but at the beginning he remained for sometime under suspicion. Meanwhile he kept contacts with his friends in Iran, and received letters particularly from the three brothers – Ḥusayn alī, Yaḥyā and Riḍa Qulī whom he described as “the worshipers of the stomach” (p.57) They begged him to come back to Iran, and tempted him with descriptions of the delicious Iranian dishes. He knew however that they were after his money.

(58) Working with the Russian government, he tried to get Russia into more active policy in Iran, and supply the Shāh with arms and ammunition. He found out that his efforts were unsuccessful because some of the officials dealing with Iranian affairs were in contact with the British whom he defined as the main adversaries of Russia in Iran. Finally he succeeded to convince the ministry to renew the payments to his agents in Iran, having proved the effectiveness of his work there. Payments were renewed to Ḥusayn alī and his two brothers as well as to Muḥammad’s (his teacher’s) family. From them he received details about the activity of the Russian ambassador in Tehran. They also sent him his furniture and his traditional *ākhund* cloths as well as all the clothes of his late wife. In order to demonstrate in Russia the effectiveness of his disguise as a Muslim scholar in Iran he dressed up as an *ākhund* and appeared in his uncle’s home causing laughter and excitement. The uncle advised him to appear in the same attire in the Tsar’s court. The year, he says was 1838, when he and a woman, whom he convinced to join him, dressed as a Persian Muslim couple, appeared in the imperial court. The performance was a great success. The Tsar was convinced that the work which Dolgorukov did in Iran under cover was praiseworthy and ordered him to go back to Iran to resume his activity using the same old tricks.

(61-62) At the end of September of that year he went back, but not to Iran but to the holiest *atabāt* in Iraq – Najaf and Karbalā, – calling himself: Shaykh ʿĪsā an-Nukrānī (p.62. What a hint! The appellation (*nisbah*) *Nukrānī* comes from the Arabic *nukrān* – Denial – a little, but significant, joke of the author of this forgery. MS). (And the dates again are impossible. If Dolgorukov went back to Russia more than 5 years after he had arrived in Iran in 1834, and stayed for quite a while in Russia to clean himself and gain the confidence of the emperor, the year in which he went back to Iran could not have been 1838. MS).

In Karbalā, he joined the circle of students of Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī and was introduced to the idea of the forth pillar and the veneration of ʿAlī and the imāms. Among the pupils of Rashtī he met ʿAlī Muḥammad of Shīrāz and soon found out that he can use him for his own purposes. The belief in the Hidden Imām-Mahdī, *ṣāhib az-zamān* – Lord of the Time – gave him a new idea how to enhance the fragmentation of Islam. He saw the potential of creating new religious sects in Islam and preparing a fertile ground for internal strife therein. He chose ʿAlī Muḥammad (the Bāb) for this purpose.

(63) The Bāb was young, quite handsome with a thin golden beard (this is not the impression from the existing portrait) who loved to smoke pipe with ḥashīsh. Under the influence of the drug he could write very quickly. Dolgorukov describes him as a person with good intelligence, but with limited ability for learning, whom he wanted to train and present as *ṣāhib az-zamān*. (64) This seemed rather easy since ʿAlī Muḥammad believed in talismans and engaged himself in mystical exercises. Ḥashīsh he smoked particularly on Friday nights. He told Dolgorukov that through the smoking of ḥashīsh he was able to receive the knowledge of secret wisdom. Dolgorukov felt that the drug made him apathetic and lowered his learning ability. One day in a lecture of Rashtī one of the students asked where was the Lord of the Cause (*ṣāhib al-amr*) and Rashtī answered that he did not know, but he added that he could be “here.” The answer was an illumination for Dolgorukov and he knew that he could use it for his own purposes. He decided to make the youngster from Shīrāz the Lord of the Cause. (67) He began to pump him up, addressing him as the Hidden Mahdī, and encouraging him to reveal himself. The Bāb first refused, but he agreed to write for Dolgorukov a commentary on Sūra 78 of the Qurʾān (known by its first verse as “*ammā yatsāʿalūn*”). He first smoked ḥashīsh and then began to write in great speed.

(68) Dolgorukov praised him and referred to him as the Mahdī. His encouragement, with the help of the drugs and mystical exercises, convinced ʿAlī Muḥammad that he actually was the Lord of the Time. He also wanted very much to reveal himself but he lacked the courage, and sometimes even rejected the idea of his Messianism. Dolgorukov did not give up. He knew that the Bāb craved for honour, and decided to take advantage of this weakness.

(72) His aim was to create a new religion inside the Shīʿah. He knew that it should not be difficult. In Iran people very frequently were attracted to all kinds of strange “holy men” and myth makers. There were so many ṣūfīs and ṣūfī sects that to add a similar one should not be difficult, he thought. He decided that whether the Bāb agrees or not he was going to make him the “Gate of Knowledge” and “Lord of the Time.” His aim was to deepen the fragmentation in the Islamic social and religious order. To the Bāb he said: “from me the money, from you the claim of Bābihood and revelation.” The Bāb agreed to be the “deputy” of the Mahdī but Dolgorukov insisted that he was the Mahdī himself. This was in 1844. The Bāb left for Bushehr. Beforehand, Dolgorukov said to him that he was his first believer and they drank “Shīrāzī” wine together and smoked ḥashīsh. Now Dolgorukov started spreading the word that the Imām had appeared and that he had been in the company of Rashtī. Most of the peoples laughed at him but there were enough silly men who believed. The British agents were aware of Dolgorukov’s machinations.

(76) Meanwhile he was informing by letters his superiors in Russia about his activity. One of these letters fell into the hands of his opponents (the British?), and he had to escape from Karbalā (then under the Ottomans) to Russia. In Russia he asked to be sent to Iran and the emperor sent him at the end of May 1844 as the Ambassador to Iran, a position which he did

not even dream about. He found in Tehran that most of his friends died that year in the plague. However Bahā. and his two brothers were not effected; they renewed relations with him and resumed their work for him.

(78)In Bushehr the Bāb was meanwhile busy with his mystical exercises and prayers, and when he returned to Shīrāz he spoke about himself as the deputy of the imām-Mahdī. Some silly people followed him. (79) The government banished him from Shīrāz and he reached Iṣfahān. Dolgorukov wrote to the governor in Iṣfahān to take care of him but the governor (Manuchehr Khān) died. The government arrested the Bāb and wanted to bring him to Tehrān. Dolgorukov with the help of Ḥusayn.alī and his brothers incited the mob to start disturbances because the Lord of the Time was arrested. The government decided not to bring the Bāb to the capital and sent him instead to Mā Kū via Tabrīz. Dolgorukov succeeded to bring a large number of people including a few shī'ite divines to oppose this move of the government.

(80)The banishment of the Bāb to Mā Kū was received with much relief by Dolgorukov since had the Bāb been in Tehran, he would have, no doubt under investigation, tell about his relations with the Russian ambassador and about the secret activity of the latter inciting him to put forward his claim. Even so, Dolgorukov was convinced that the Bāb should be destroyed if he, the ambassador, was to retain his peace of mind. Besides the Bāb was dispensable, he had already fulfilled his function; the Bābī movement was created. Moreover, if he were killed then it would be easy to foment popular troubles in the country. The English were continuously, and closely, following Dolgorukov's activity.

(80) Meanwhile the Bāb was examined in Tabrīz, and announced his repentance. Now there was no doubt that he had to be killed. It was quite easy. The Shāh died and Nāṣir ad-Dīn Shāh the new king "hanged the Bāb and crucified him." These words refer to his killing by shooting.

(81)The description of the execution: the first time the bullets hit the rope with which the Bāb had been tied with to the wall. The Bāb then hid himself in a toilet and was cursing from there the Shaykh Īsā (that is to say: Dolgorukov), he begged for his life and announced his repentance, but for no avail. He was caught and put to death. When the news about his death reached Tehran Dolgorukov gave instructions to Ḥusayn.alī to start troubles in the capital. Some Bābīs were very angry and opened fire on the Shāh. The latter gave orders to arrest many people and among them was also Ḥusayn.alī and many other friends of his. Dolgorukov made great effort to release him and sent him and others to Baghdad. He gave orders to Ḥusayn.alī to conceal his brother Mīrzā Yaḥyā, announce that he was "*man yuḥirū allāh,*" but prevent him from talking to anybody. Ḥusayn.alī was "to openly fill up his place." Dolgorukov gave him large sums of money but he thought that he was too old and would not fit into his schemes (Bahā.u.llāh was then 33 years old "too old!"). He arranged for other

people to be with him, but he knew that none of them was able to do what he wanted, and he himself, being the ambassador, was very limited in his open activity. The money which Dolgorukov gave the Bahā. consisted of monthly payments, because he suspected that were he to give the money to Ḥusayn·alī in one lump sum the latter might take the money and run away.

(83) He found some old writings of the Bāb, went over them and corrected them, wrote similar ones at the embassy, and sent them to Ḥusayn·alī. He found it difficult to convince people to accept the nonsense of the Bāb (*kalmiāt sakhīfa khuza·baliyyah*), or his own garbage. But he sent rifraff to join Ḥusayn·alī and sent him every month 3000 tūmān to cover his needs. The Ottoman government banished the Bahā. to Istanbul and then to Edirne.

(84) The Russian embassy under Dolgorukov was busy in inventing Tablets and convincing simple people to join the supporters of Bahā., aiming at creating strife and unrest. The ambassador understood meanwhile that a serious quarrel developed between the Bahā. and his brother Mīrzā Yaḥyā. The latter left his brother and went to Cyprus. There he got married and the English, who did not know that he was useless, gave him pension which was enough to supply him with what was needed to pleasure himself.

(85) The Iranian government asked the Ottomans to banish Bahā. to Acre. The Russians arranged for ʿAbbās Mīrzā (later Effendī, ʿAbd’ul Bahā.) to get good education, because they knew that he was cleverer than his father. There was a great need to replace the Bābihood with Bahā’ihood and decrease the importance of the Bābī tablets of Mīrzā Yaḥyā.

(86) All the tablets were written in the Russian embassy, but when they were given to Ḥusayn·alī, who was now called “*man yuḏhiruhu allāh*” he messed them up by making amendments to them, for basically he could not even read these tablets properly. The Russian embassy was also busy helping and protecting everybody who professed Bābihood or Bahā. ihood, (87) and concurrently used the two sects to spread false accusations against unwanted persons. Many shī’ite divines were accused of belonging to these sects, and once this was known the accused found it difficult and even impossible to clear themselves. Nobody believed them.

Dolgorukov finished his “Memoirs” saying that (after his long activity) he was able to inform his government that he had achieved all his goals having introduced the elements of discord, strife and disunity into Islam.

(91) Appendix: The Bāb’s repentance written in Tabrīz, in his own hand and sealed with his own seal. The document is said to be kept in the government archives in Tehran.