

Interview with Colonel Sám Khán
A Dramatic Reading by David Hofman

Revised by Marlene Macke *
June 2018

Interviewer

I am here today with Colonel Sám Khán, commander of an Armenian regiment, who witnessed one of the most remarkable events in religious history. In the Persian city of Tabríz on July 9, 1850, a firing squad executed 30-year-old ‘Siyyid ‘Ali Muhammad, the Prophet known as the Báb. Colonel, we are eager to hear your story. But first, tell us about your background.

Colonel Sám Khán

I grew up in Armenia. My father was a military man. My mother was a tailor. Ours was a very proper Christian home. My father was very disciplined while my mother was a compassionate woman.

Interviewer

How so?

Colonel Sám Khán

Her compassion was a trait my father struggled with at times. She was always dragging some down-on-their-luck stranger through the doors. Feeding them, giving them shelter. My father didn’t approve but my mother was of strong moral character. But then, so was my father in his own way.

Interviewer

How did you come to be living in Tabríz?

Colonel Sám Khán

When I was a child, we moved to Tabríz where my father trained young army recruits. It was a beautiful place. As a youth, I studied all of the military arts – drilling, swordsmanship, marksmanship. By fourteen, I was thought of as one of the finest marksmen in the country.

* See more about this document at https://bahai-library.com/macke_dramatic_readings

Interviewer

With your family background and early training, you naturally became a military man too.

Colonel Sám Khán

Yes, I joined the army's infantry division at sixteen. It wasn't long before I was promoted to sergeant, earned my commission as a first lieutenant and later as a Captain. I was given my own regiment at twenty-one. A regiment of 750 strong. What wonderful men! Loyal, gallant, strong. Heroes they were. They'd have given their lives for me and I loved them for it. I served in this post for some nineteen years and then something happened that made it impossible for me to carry on.

Interviewer

Please tell us more.

Colonel Sám Khán

It was early July in 1850 when I received the news that my regiment had been chosen to execute a political prisoner who had supposedly mounted an effort to destroy the security of Persia and to overthrow the Sháh.

Interviewer

And this was 'Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad, the Prophet known as the Báb?

Colonel Sám Khán

Yes, he had taken the title of the Báb, meaning the Gate in Arabic. At first, I was anxious to discharge the duty, to rid the country of such an evil. Then I saw Him. The Báb. He was so beautiful. I can never describe the power and majesty that sat on His brow. Nor can I place into words the sensation of fear that overtook me as I contemplated the issuing the order to my men, an order that would take His life.

Interviewer

At this point, had you met Him?

Colonel Sám Khán

Yes, and when I attained His presence, I was torn in agony by my fear. I will never forget the brief exchange that we had. I entreated Him, saying, “I profess the Christian Faith and entertain no ill will against you. If Your Cause be the Cause of Truth, enable me to free myself from the obligation to shed Your blood.” I stood motionless, studying the exquisite features of His face and then He spoke in a most melodious voice.

Interviewer

What did He say?

Colonel Sám Khán

He said, “Follow your instructions, and if your intention be sincere, the Almighty is surely able to relieve you from your perplexity.”

Interviewer

You told me before we started the interview that what happened next changed your life forever.

Colonel Sám Khán

It was impossible and yet I witnessed it with my own eyes. And if that is not enough, ask any of the multitude of 10,000 who were there! The Báb was suspended with ropes hung by a nail from the exterior of the prison wall together with a valiant youth who had the title Anís. That youth had, of his own accord, chosen to die alongside the Báb, another phenomenon that defies imagination!

Obediently, but reluctantly, I followed my orders and acceded to the Báb’s admonition to carry out my mission. I assembled my regiment in three ranks. Each rank comprised 250 soldiers. I felt myself trembling when I gave the command. As was customary procedure, each of the three ranks discharged their volleys, one after the other. It seemed to take an eternity as I watched on in great anxiety. The scene was one of musket smoke so dense that it took sometime to clear.

When it did, I could not believe my eyes! Young Anís was standing on the ground directly under the nail. He was unharmed!

Interviewer

Unharmed, after 750 bullets had been aimed directly at him and the Báb?

Colonel Sâm Khán

He was unharmed. I mean to say that there was not the least trace of injury on his person. It took me a moment to realize that the Báb was gone. I think it was a voice in the crowd crying ‘The ‘Siyyid-i-Báb has gone from our sight’ that brought this fact to my attention.

Now mark you this. I know my men. They have been well trained. It is a rare occasion that one of them misses their target. But, as God is my witness! All 750 of them had missed!

Interviewer

How did you feel at this point?

Colonel Sâm Khán

I felt as if I was in a dream. The crowd began to grow very restless on beholding this sight. There was something extraordinary, even mystical, something glorious about this Man. And I am forever grateful to Him for allowing me to escape the fate of being His executioner.

Interviewer

What did you do?

Colonel Sâm Khán

I ordered my men to cease their activity and to vacate the premises immediately.

Interviewer

But that is not the end of the story of the execution by firing squad, is it.

Colonel Sâm Khán

Not at all. I had occasion to follow the sad fate of the Báb and His youthful companion and to learn of those who had a hand in His suffering. The elite Nasiri regiment was ordered to replace my men. And incidently, the official who had employed my services and then assembled the other regiment, later fled his post, never to return!

Interviewer

I’ve also heard it said that the Báb addressed the crowd before His execution.

Colonel Sám Khán

His words spread among the crowd. He said, referring to His companion Anís, “Had you believed in Me, O wayward generation, every one of you would have followed the example of this youth, who stood in rank above most of you, and would have willingly sacrificed himself in My path. The day will come when you will have recognized Me; that day I shall have ceased to be with you.”

Interviewer

And then a violent windstorm blew up suddenly?

Colonel Sám Khán

Indeed, right after the second round of shots, a sand storm of such magnitude such as Tabríz had never known blotted the sun’s rays from sight until the sun herself set and rose on the following day.

Interviewer

Tell us what happened to the bodies of the Báb and Anís. And the deadly consequences for those who had facilitated the execution?

Colonel Sám Khán

Did I mention that while the bodies of the Báb and His companion were mutilated beyond recognition, the Báb’s face was unmarred? That night, the bodies were dragged through the streets and left to lie, unceremoniously, in a moat at the outskirts of the city.

Interviewer

All those who signed the death warrant or had some business in the execution of the Báb died horrible deaths. Even the Nasiri regiment, all 750 of them, every man perished soon thereafter. 250 in an earthquake that occurred within the year. The remaining 500 by firing squad some three years hence, as a result of a mutiny in which they had engaged. Imagine! They died even as they had executed the Báb, by gun shot.

Interviewer

What did you make of all this?

Colonel Sám Khán

Now, you tell me, my friend. Could this be some bizarre series of coincidences?

The result of mere sorcery? Or could all this have been driven by the Hand of God, Himself?

Interviewer

Thank you, Colonel, for sharing with us your remarkable eye witness account. We have been speaking with Colonel Sám Khán who was ordered to undertake the execution of ‘Siyyid ‘Ali Muhammad, known as the Báb. The Colonel has described a sequence of extraordinary events. Despite being a career soldier well used to carrying out orders, his Christian compassion led him to plead with the Báb to be allowed to spare killing Him. And the Báb granted his plea. After the first attempt, which utterly failed, Colonel Sám Khán removed his regiment and a new one took its place. While the implacable Will of God was indeed carried out that fateful day, the Martyrdom of the Báb will come to be known and commemorated around the world.

The End.