

Chapter 25

The *Allahdadi* Incident in Mashad

(Based on various sources)

Reference: Two Centuries of Resistance: The History of Mashadi Jews VOL I

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The *Allahdadi* incident occurred approximately 100 years since the first group of Jews arrived in Mashad, a holy Shiite city in Khorasan province. As early as 100 years prior to the incident, the Muslims of Mashad found reasons to torment the local Jews, using intimidation and threats to force them either to accept Islam or leave the city.

Soon after the arrival of the second group of Jews to Mashad, the Jews lost their only protector when Nader Shah was assassinated in 1747. During the *Allahdadi* riots of 1839, approximately 32 innocent Jews were killed, while 400 more were forced to convert to Islam.

In March of 1839, during the reign of Muhammad Shah (Qajar, 1834 - 1848) some Mashadi Muslims spread a false rumor that the local Jews had blasphemed against Islam. An angry mob of Muslim thugs reacted by attacking, robbing and killing numerous Jews. In an attempt to end the violence and bloodshed, the Muslim clerics of Mashad ruled that all of the Jews of the town must convert to Islam.

The brutal events of 1839, perpetrated by the Shiites of Mashad, resulted in the forced conversion of 400 Jews, following a bloody riot in which 32 Jews were murdered and many more, including women and children, were injured, synagogues were burned, religious articles such as *tefilin*, *tzizit*, and *sidurim* were destroyed and *sifrei* Torah were desecrated.

As the riots raged about them, the leaders of the Jewish community of Mashad met to on decide the best course of action. They convened in the absence of the head of the community, Mullah Moshiach Ajun, who happened to be in Kandahar, Afghanistan, at the time. After much discussion, they affirmed their desire to live. They knew that refusing the demands of the Muslims would be tantamount to suicide, an act forbidden by the Torah. And so they announced to the Muslim cleric, or *mojtahed*, "We hereby declare that we believe in worshipping only one G-d, and we also believe that Muhammad is G-d's prophet." According to the Islamic faith, stating these words openly renders a person no longer "unclean," and he or she is then recognized as a *Jadid al-Islam*, or a "new Muslim."

But during the period when the Mashadi Jews were openly practicing Islam, many of them silently replaced the name Muhammad with Moussa (Moshe) when they prayed, saying : *Ashadu an la ullah ellallah – Ashad an Moussa rasulellah*.

The Jews of Mashad followed the teachings of the Sephardic sage, Rambam (Miamonides, or Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon) who wrote in his book, *Igeret Teman*,

that when a Jew has no choice, he may temporarily change his religion. The Rambam wrote this ruling for the Jews of Yemen, who also faced forced conversion on pain of death. The Rambam advised the Yemeni Jews to accept a new creed, but to return to their own faith as soon as they could safely do so. The Jews of Yemen took his advice, lending support to the idea that the Mashadi Jews descended from the Yemeni Jews.

The *Allahdadi* period marked the beginning of Mashadi Jews having both Jewish and Muslim names. The practice of defying Islam by the secret observance of Judaism began in the *Sar Heite* (head of the courtyard) of the *Eidgah*, or Jewish district of Mashad, at the time of the *Allahdadi*, and continued for approximately 100 years.

The Eastern-European Jewish traveler Ephraim Neumark visited Mashad in the early 1880's. In his book, *Masa' be Erets Hakedem*, he wrote that during the *Allahdadi*, 50 men, women and children died over a two-day period.

In describing the events of the *Allahdadi*, Mullah Yosef Dilmani, the son of Abdul Samad, wrote that 36 Jews were killed, and in addition, several beautiful Jewish girls were seized and brought to Muslim homes. These included two who were given to Imam Jomeh as "gifts" in recognition of his not stopping the anti-Jewish riots. Imam Jomeh later married both of these girls, but after his death they returned to the Jewish community.

Walter Joseph Fischel, a scholar who wrote extensively about the Jews of Iran, stated that 35 Jews were killed during the riots, and several who were injured were left lying in the streets.

Two elders of the Mashadi community, named Nassrolahi and Ahronoff, reported 25 dead, many injured, and much property burned or stolen.

In his book, Lovers of Zion, Khanania Mizrahi wrote that on the 12th day of the Hebrew month of Nissan, 5599 on the lunar calendar, or 1839 C.E., the Jews of Mashad were attacked, 35 were killed, while the rest were ordered to convert to Islam or leave the city. In actuality, however, the perpetrators of the riots ordered the Jews to convert or die, and looted 30 of their stores.

Isaac Ben Zevi reported that letters to other Jewish communities were written by those who had witnessed the events in Mashad in 1839, and the information was also written in the back of a *siddur*, (prayer book) near the *tefila* (prayer) of Eliyahu Hanavi (Elijah the Prophet – this refers to the prayer *Patach Eliyahu*, traditionally read before daily prayers). The *siddur* was owned by an individual who had written his name in it as “Yaqub,” and had inscribed in the back of the book that his ancestors had come to Mashad from Dilman and Qazvin.

Ben Zevi stated that the *Allahdadi* occurred on the 11th day of the month of Muharram, 1255, according to the Muslim calendar, or on the 12th of Nissan, 5599, according to the Jewish calendar, and that the dead numbered 32 Jews.

When reports of the events of the *Allahdadi* , describing the destruction of the Mashadi Jewish community and the forced conversions reached the Jews of other Iranian cities, they became very frightened for their own safety.

The devastated Mashadi Jewish community, which normally anticipated the Pesach holiday of freedom with great happiness, and celebrated the holiday more joyously than most communities, was now left to mourn its dead and grieve for its kidnapped daughters. By the first night of the holiday, 400 Jews had been forced to convert, with their *sefer* tables now becoming tables of mourning. Everything had been stolen from them save their priceless faith in the G-d of Israel, who had led the Jews out of Egypt and had wrought great miracles for their sake.

For 30 days the Jews of Mashad mourned and fasted for their lost brethren and children. From that point on, whenever seen in public they pretended to be Muslim, but within their own homes they kept their Judaism, gathering quorums of ten men to pray to their G-d in secret, underground chambers.

Despite the dangers and difficulties, this courageous and G-d-fearing community defied their Muslim oppressors by secretly keeping their Judaism for nearly 100 years.