



‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt: Early September 1910-5 December 1913

Abstract. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá discontinuously sojourned in Egypt from early September 1910 to 5 December 1913. This paper is a concise study of this sojourn’s historical and political background and its chronicle. Egyptian cities and towns visited by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are briefly described as they were in those days. Members of the Holy Family who visited Him in Egypt are mentioned. The reaction of the public opinion and the press coverage are succinctly outlined. Several important personages and resident and visiting Bahá’ís who met Him are listed. A short comment on possible meanings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s presence in Egypt concludes the paper.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travel in Egypt is announced by Shoghi Effendi as follows:

He, quietly and without any previous warning, on a September afternoon, of the year 1910, the year following that which witnessed the downfall of Sultan ‘Abdu’l-Hamid and the formal entombment of the Báb’s remains on Mt. Carmel, sailed for Egypt . . .¹

Historical and political background

This travel, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá decided to undertake to Egypt, Europe and North America, was made possible by an important historical event, known as the Young Turk Revolution. The Ottoman Empire, whose part the Holy Land was in those years, had always been ruled by an authoritarian regime. This kind of government was normal in previous centuries, and no one paid any attention. But after the American Revolution (1763-1783), and especially the French Revolution (1789-1799), libertarian ideas entered the Western world, producing the sundry insurrectional, bourgeois, liberal and democratic movements of the Nineteenth century. Unavoidably, the echoes of these risings also reached the Ottoman Empire. And thus, at the beginning of the Twentieth century, an association was formed in that country known as the Young Turks, inspired by Mazzini’s “Young Italy (Giovane Italia)” (1831-1848). Historians define it as a coalition of groups, quite different

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¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p.280, chap.19, para.6.

from one another, formed by dissident, progressive, modernist Turkish citizens opposed to the status quo, united by the common wish to actuate a constitutional reform of the Turkish absolute monarchy. In 1908, they arose in arms against the Sultan ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd II (1842-1918), who reigned from 1876 to 1909, and his despotic government. The first result of this military revolt was the restoration of the constitution on 24 July 1908. Consequently, all the Empire’s political and religious prisoners were set free. Among them was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who was thus free to leave Akká and the Holy Land, where He had arrived in 1868.

As to Egypt, the first country that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited after He departed from Haifa, conflicting political movements pervaded it in those days. The country was only nominally a part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1867 the Sultan ‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz recognised Egypt’s Governor, Ismá‘íl Páshá (1830-1895), a grandson of Mehmet Ali (1769-1849), an Albanian Pasha, a politician and a military leader, considered the founding father of modern Egypt, as Khedive. Khedive, from the Persian *khidív* o *khadív*, “lord, prince, sovereign,” is often translated as “viceroy.” In 1879, Ismá‘íl was deposed, and his title passed to his son Tawfíq Páshá (1852-1892). In 1882, the British army occupied Egypt, but the Khedive remained on the throne, and the country was nominally under Ottoman rule. At the beginning of the Twentieth century, Great Britain struggled to increase its influence over the country’s affairs and more or less covertly undermined the attempts by the young Khedive, ‘Abbás Ḥilmí II (1874-1944), who assumed the throne at the death of his father Tawfíq Páshá in 1892, to innovate the Egyptian administration. At the same time, an arising and increasing national conscience kept alive the wish of many Egyptians to achieve complete freedom. And thus, there was strife between those who saw the wellbeing of the country as actuation of the Western models and those who wanted to seek the assistance of the tottering Ottoman Empire to achieve the Muslim Union, preached by the Persian (or Afghan) theologian Jamálu’d-Dín-i-Afghání (1838-39–1897), who came to be considered as the preeminent Muslim reformer of the Nineteenth century. Moreover, immediately before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s arrival, an umpteenth violent clash between Copts and Muslims shook Egypt.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in Egypt and brought a wave of spirituality and modernity to a country which, although it was the most intellectually advanced

nation in the Arabic world, in the religious, political and literary perspectives, had undoubtedly much to learn from such an innovator as the Master.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sojourn in Egypt

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sojourn in Egypt lasted 23 months in three different periods. The first time, He remained in the country for eleven months, from early September 1910 to 11 August 1911, when He took off for Marseilles on the S.S. Corsica. The second time, He stayed on for four months, from early December 1911 to 25 March 1912, when He sailed via Naples bound for New York on the S.S. Cedric. The third and last time, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sojourned in Egypt for seven months, from 16 June 1913, when He arrived in Port Said from Marseilles on the S.S. Himalaya, to 2 December 1913, when He boarded a Lloyd Triestino boat bound for Haifa, where He arrived on 5 December. Ahmad Sohrab (1893–1958), who served as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secretary and interpreter from 1912 to 1919 and was excommunicated by Shoghi Effendi in 1939, has left a detailed account of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sojourn in Egypt from 1 July to 30 September 1913. Sohrab, whose original name was Aḥmad-i-Iṣfahání, went to America in 1901-1902, when he was very young, as Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl’s attendant. His diary, published as *Abdul-Baha in Egypt* by New York’s Sears and London’s Rider in 1929, comprises a chronicle of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s activities during those months and translations of His Tablets and talks.

A short chronicle of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sojourn in Egypt

The details of the Master’s departure from Haifa are reported by the *Bahá’í News* of the Bahá’ís of the United States, later called *Star of the West*, whose first issue appeared on 21 March 1910. *Bahá’í News* publishes a part of a letter written on 29 August 1910 by Sydney Sprague (1875-1943) to Isabella Brittingham. Sprague became a Bahá’í in Paris in 1902ca. He was one of the earliest Bahá’í pioneers and travel teachers and went as far as India and Burma. His book *A Year With the Bahais in India and Burma*, in which Sprague narrates his travels in the East, was published in London in 1908. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called him Eskander. In 1910 he married a niece of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wife,² the daughter of Mírzá Asadu’lláh-i-Iṣfahání, the man who had been in charge of the conveyance of the remains of the Báb from Iran to the Holy Land, and the sister of Amín Faríd (1880ca.-1953), who

² See “News Notes,” *Star of the West*, vol.1, no.10 (8 September 1910) p.9.

accompanied the Master in His travels in the West and was excommunicated by the Master in 1914.³ Isabella Brittingham (1852-1924), one of the 19 Disciples of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is considered the most eminent among the early American Bahá’í women.⁴ The letter said:

I have a very big piece of news to tell you. Abdul-Baha has left this Holy Spot for the first time in forty-two years, and has gone to Egypt. Think of the vast significance and importance of this step! . . . Everyone was astounded to hear of Abdul-Baha’s departure, for no one knew until the very last minute that he had any idea of leaving. The afternoon of the day he left, he came to Mirza Assad Ullah’s home to see us and sat with us awhile beside a new well that has just been finished and said that he had come to taste the water. We did not realise that it was a good-bye visit. Then he took a carriage and went up the hill to the Holy Tomb (of the Bab). That night, as usual, the believers gathered before the house of Abdul-Baha to receive that blessing, which every day is ours, of being in his presence, but we waited in vain, for one of the sons-in-law came and told us that Abdul-Baha had taken the Khedivial steamer to Port Said.⁵

It seems that even the Greatest Holy Leaf, His beloved sister, was informed of this travel only by a Tablet He sent her while He was already on the steamer bound for Egypt.⁶

Other details of this departure are described in another letter published by the Bahá’í News in December 1910. The letter is signed by Siyyid Asadu’lláh-i-Qumí, an old believer who, a resident in the Holy Land since 1886, accompanied ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His travels to Europe and North America. The letter says:

You have asked for an account of Abdul-Baha’s departure to the land of Egypt. Abdul-Baha did not inform anyone that he was going to leave Haifa. The day he left he visited the Holy Tomb of the Báb on Mt. Carmel and

³ See *Star of the West*, vol.5, no.15 (12 December 1914), p.237.

⁴ See “The Disciples of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. ‘Heralds of the Covenant’,” *Bahá’í World*, vol.3 (1928-1930), pp.84-5.

⁵ “Abdul-Baha in Egypt,” *Star of the West*, vol.1, no.12 (16 October 1910), p.1.

⁶ Quoted in *Bahíyyih Khánum*, p.13.

when he came down from the mountain of the Lord, he went direct to the steamer. This was the first anyone knew about the matter. Within two days he summoned to his presence Mirza Nouredin⁷, Shougi Effendi, Khosro,⁸ and this servant. The only persons who accompanied Abdul-Baha to Egypt were Mirza Moneer Zain⁹ and Abdul Hossein, one of the pilgrims who was leaving at that time. When Mirza Nouredin arrived in Port Said, his brother Mirza Moneer returned to Haifa.

For nearly one month Abdul-Baha remained in Port Said and the friends of God came from Cairo, in turn, to visit him. One day he called me to accompany him when taking a walk in the streets of the city. He said: "Do you realise now the meaning of my statement when I was telling the friends that there was a wisdom in my indisposition?" I answered, "Yes, I do remember very well." He continued, "Well, the wisdom was that I must always move according to the requirements of the Cause. Whatever the Cause requires for its promulgation, I will not delay in its accomplishment for one moment! Now, the Cause did require that I travel to these parts, and had I divulged my intention at that time, many difficulties would have arisen."¹⁰

As soon as the Master left the Holy Land, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí (1853ca.-1937) spread the rumour that the Master had fled away because He feared new persecutions from the new Turkish government. Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí immediately told it to ‘Akká’s Metropolitan, who was among his friends. The Metropolitan telegraphed to one of his men in Jaffa, who boarded the same steamer on which the Master was, approached the Master and dared to inquire about His identity directly from Him. The same thing happened in Port Said.

After a month’s sojourn in Port Said, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá again boarded a steamer without mentioning His intentions to anyone. *Star of the West* announced this event as follows: "SPECIAL. Word has been received from Port Said that Abdul

⁷ Mírzá Núri’d-Dín-i-Zayn, the son of Zaynu’l-Muqarrabín, one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh, the person who asked the questions of "Questions and Answers" of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. See "The Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh. ‘Pillars of the Faith’," *The Bahá’í World*, vol.3 (1928-1930), pp.80-1.

⁸ Khusraw, the attendant of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, coming from Burma.

⁹ Mírzá Munír-i-Zayn, the son of Zaynu’l-Muqarrabín.

¹⁰ "Abdul-Baha in Egypt," *Star of the West*, vol.1, no.15 (12 December 1912), p.2.

Baha has sailed from that port on a steamer for an unknown destination.”¹¹ He intended to go to Europe. But it was evident that His health did not permit Him to undertake such a journey. He disembarked in Alexandria, whence He left only on 11 August 1911, bound to Marseilles.

A few details of this departure are recorded in the same letter written by Siyyid Asadu’lláh-i-Qumí and published by the *Bahá’í News*:

The day that he left for Alexandria he did not mention the matter to anyone; nor did this servant know the time of his departure. However, when I heard that he had left, I hurried to the steamer and there met him with two pilgrims from Ishqabad. He said: “*Tell the friends, how, under severe circumstances of bodily weakness, I have accepted the hardships of traveling to promote the Word of God, to spread the Cause of God and to diffuse the Fragrances of God! I have left behind friends, relatives and home for the sake of the Cause!*” By this he meant that the believers of God must follow in his footsteps and illumine the East and the West with the lights of knowledge, peace and brotherhood.¹²

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá disembarked in Alexandria, He discovered that the climate suited his health and stopped there. After all those years of imprisonment in an insalubrious place, His health was poor. And thus, He did what He Himself recommends to the Bahá’ís:

. . . man must become evanescent in God. Must forget his own selfish conditions that he may thus arise to the station of sacrifice. It should be to such a degree that if he sleep, it should not be for pleasure, but to rest the body in order to do better, to speak better, to explain more beautifully, to serve the servants of God and to prove the truths.¹³

He put His body at rest so that He may muster His strength in view of the long travels He intended to undertake. Thus, the Egyptian city became His headquarters during His prolonged sojourn in Egypt. In those three years, He repeatedly

¹¹ “Abdul-Baha in Egypt,” *Star of the West*, vol.1, no.12 (16 October 1910), p.1.

¹² “Abdul-Baha in Egypt,” *Star of the West*, vol.1, n.15 (12 December 1912), pp.2-3.

¹³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets*, vol.2, p.460.

returned to that city, whose climate enabled Him to regain the required energy for facing His later journeys, especially His long travel to North America.

Ali M. Yazdi (1899-1978), a believer born in Egypt and gone to the United States in 1921, who witnessed the Master's arrival in Alexandria in October 1910, describes this event in a book, *Blessings Beyond Measure*, posthumously published by his wife in 1988, as follows:

A crowd gathered in front of the Hotel Victoria for His arrival. Suddenly there was a hush, a stillness, and I knew that He had come. I looked. There He was! Then He walked through the crowd—slowly, majestically, smiling radiantly as He greeted the bowed heads on each side. I could only get a vague impression of Him, as I could not get near Him. The sound of the wind and the surf from the nearby shore drowned out His voice so that I could hardly hear Him. Nevertheless, I went away happy.

A few days later a villa was rented for Him and His family not far from the Hotel Victoria. It was in the best residential section, next to the beautiful Mediterranean and the beaches. Like all the villas in that area, it had a garden with flowers and flowering shrubs. It was there that 'Abdu'l-Bahá chose to receive a great variety of notables, public figures, clerics, aristocrats, and writers—as well as poor and despairing people.¹⁴

A detailed chronicle of those days, during which 'Abdu'l-Bahá so frequently came and went, would take too long. We will describe only a few episodes.

Hasan M. Balyuzi (1908-1980), a biographer of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reports a fact that reveals the Master's care in His relations with the Muslims. Balyuzi remarks that

'Abdu'l-Bahá's sojourn in Alexandria coincided with the Muslim lunar month of Muḥarram. This is the month that witnessed the martyrdom of Ḥusayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad and the third apostolic Imam of His Faith, together with many others of the House of the Prophet. That tragedy occurred on the tenth day of Muḥarram, 61 A.H., which

¹⁴ Yazdi, *Blessings*, p.16.

corresponded to 10 October A.D. 680. The Shí'ah world has mourned his martyrdom ever since.¹⁵

During that month, Shi'ites arrange gatherings to commemorate the sad event. Balyuzi narrates that

Persians of Alexandria invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to their meeting. He went and was received with every mark of respect. He gave a robe to the reciter of the heart-rending story of Karbilá, rewarding him richly for his talent and devotion. He also left money with the hosts to hold a commemorative meeting on His behalf and to feed the poor.¹⁶

In those days, the organisers of the First Universal Race Congress, which was held in London on 26-29 July 1911 and was attended by more than 2000 people, invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to deliver a speech during the Congress. On 29 May 1911, He answered that His present circumstances prevented Him from attending.¹⁷ At the beginning of May, 'Abdu'l-Bahá moved to Cairo and settled in Zaytun, a city district. Balyuzi informs us that during that sojourn, besides meeting several eminent personages, on a Friday, He visited the Shrine of Siyyidah Zaynab, sometimes considered as Imam Ḥusayn's sister, and recited there the Friday prayer.¹⁸ Then, the *Star of the West* issue of 8 September 1911 records:

Abdul Baha, after staying nearly three months in Cairo during which time he was interviewed by many prominent people returned again to Ramleh, the delightful suburb of Alexandria, on 22 July. He was accompanied by Mirza Assadullah, Mirza Moneer, Mirza Mahmoud and Aga Khosro.¹⁹

The same issue of *Star of the West* also publishes an article by Louis G. Gregory (1874-1951), which briefly describes Gregory's sojourn in Ramleh between 10 April and 4 May 1911. Gregory also wrote a more detailed account of

¹⁵ Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p.137.

¹⁶ Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p.137.

¹⁷ See Tudor-Pole, "The First Universal Races Congress," *Star of the West*, vol.2, no.8 (10 August 1911), pp.3-4.

¹⁸ See Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p.138.

¹⁹ "News Items," *Star of the West*, vol.2, no.9 (8 September 1911), p.7.

his pilgrimage in a book entitled *A Heavenly Vista: The Pilgrimage*, published in Washington in 1911. The article published by *Star of the West* says:

I am asked by the STAR OF THE WEST for impressions gathered during a recent pilgrimage to Abdu'l Baha at Ramleh and the Holy City. Now I can respond but briefly; but later I hope that a full account may be given to the friends of the Cause of all the valuable lessons received from the Perfect Man.

It is the will of Abdul Baha that all the friends should be united and happy in the light of the Kingdom. On one occasion BAHAOULLAH said, "My Presence is happiness and peace. Hell is the hearts of those who deny and oppose." Today the happiness and peace of the Glory of God (BAHA'U'LLAH) are reflected in the clear Mirror of Abdul Baha. Thus by meeting him one meets all the Prophets and Manifestations of cycles and ages past. It is difficult for one to realise at the time, or for a long time afterwards, the true honor of such a meeting. To one who realises even faintly who this Servant of God is and what powers he represents, such a meeting is high above all the honors of earth. But no soul can give adequate testimony of what Abdul Baha may be to any other soul. With mental and spiritual horizon more or less limited, each pilgrim discerns according to his capacity the Majesty and Power that radiate from the Center of God's Covenant.

At Ramleh Abbas Effendi²⁰ might at times be seen walking about the streets. Ofttimes he would ride upon the electric tramway, making change and paying his fare in the most democratic fashion. His reception room was open to believers and non believers alike. Upon a visit to some unfortunates one day I asked if they knew him. "O yes," they responded, 'he has been in this house.'" Thus in one way or another thousands of Persians had opportunity to see ABBAS Effendi; but among these how few perceived Abdul Baha Viewed with the outer eye, he scored about the medium height, with symmetrical features. His lineaments indicate meekness and gentleness, as well as power and strength. His color is about that of parchment. His hands are shapely, with the nails well manicured. His forehead is high and well rounded. His nose is slightly aquiline; his eyes light blue and penetrating; his hair is silvery, and long enough to touch the shoulders; his beard is white. His dress was the

²⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá was also known under this name.

Oriental robes, graceful in their simplicity. On his head rested a light tar bush, surrounded by a white, turban. His voice is powerful, but capable of producing infinite pathos and tenderness. His carriage is erect and altogether so majestic and beautiful that it is passing strange that anyone seeing him would not be moved to say: “This truly is the King.”

On the rational plane his wisdom is incomparable. During the time of my visit persons of culture were present from different parts of the world. But people of acquired learning are but as children to Abdul Baha. They were reverent in their attitude toward him²¹

Another pen portrait of the Master in those days was written by Ali M. Yazdi, who was eleven years old then. He remembers that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s voice was “very resonant, very beautiful.” Then he adds:

He was straight as an arrow. His head was thrown back. His silver-gray hair fell in waves to His shoulders. His beard was white. His eyes were keen; His forehead, broad. He wore a white turban around an ivory felt cap. He looked at everyone, smiled and welcomed all with “*Khushámádíd. Khushámádíd*” (“Welcome. Welcome”) . . . When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke to me, I would look into His eyes—blue, smiling, and full of love.²²

On 11 August 1911, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá boarded the S.S. Corsica bound to Marseilles. He went back to Egypt in early December 1911. Of this second sojourn of the Master in Egypt, Balyuzi only wrote: “‘Abdu’l-Bahá wintered in Egypt.”²³ Neither *Star of the West*, a rich source of information on the Master’s travels, reports news about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sojourn in Egypt in those months. On 9 April 1912, it simply writes:

A report that Abdul-Baha and suite sailed from Alexandria, Egypt, 25 March on the White Star Line S. S. “Cedric” due to arrive in New York City, 10 April, has been confirmed.²⁴

²¹ “Impressions of Abdul-Baha while at Ramleh. By Mr. Louis G. Gregory,” *Star of the West*, vol.2, no.9 (8 September 1911), p.5.

²² Yazdi, *Blessings*, pp.18, 20.

²³ Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p.171.

²⁴ “Special,” *Star of the West*, vol.3, no.2 (9 April 1912), p.8.

Only in 1918 did *Star of the West* inform us that Abdu'l-Bahá celebrated Naw-Rúz 1912 at the Victoria Hotel with a dinner attended by 85 friends. He delivered a speech on the meaning of Naw Rúz published by the American journal.²⁵

‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s departure for America on 25 March 1912 is described by both Ali M. Yazdi and Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání (1875ca.-1924), a Persian Bahá’í, a chronicler of ‘Abdu'l-Baha’s travels in the West. In his youth, Maḥmúd travelled and taught the Faith throughout Iran. In 1903, he went to India, where he sojourned for many years. Later, he went on pilgrimage to Haifa, where he remained for a certain time and transcribed many Tablets. From Haifa, He accompanied the Master to Europe and America. Yazdi writes:

Again ‘Abdu'l-Bahá left us, this time for America. I will never forget the scene of His departure, as He came out of the house and turned to wave His last farewell to His disconsolate family looking down from the veranda above. They were greatly concerned about His safety and wellbeing. He was sixty-eight years old. He had suffered many hardships and gone through severe trials. He had been in prison for forty years of His life. And now He was undertaking a journey to a far-off country utterly different from any to which He was accustomed.

But ‘Abdu'l-Bahá had made up His mind. And when He made up His mind, nothing could change Him. He strode out of the garden gate without looking back. He walked for several blocks near the shore to take the electric train to Alexandria, where He would board the ship that was to take Him to New York. He was followed by about thirty believers who walked silently behind Him. I was one of them.²⁶

Yazdi also mentions the S.S. Cedric, on which the Master embarked bound for the United States: “It was a beautiful ship, one of two that plied regularly between Alexandria and New York, stopping only at Naples.”²⁷ Of His departure from the port of Alexandria, Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání writes:

²⁵ See “The Feast of Naurooz (New Day),” *Star of the West*, vol.9, no.1 (21 March 1918), pp.8-9.

²⁶ Yazdi, *Blessings*, pp.20, 22.

²⁷ Yazdi, “Memories of Shoghi Effendi,” *Bahá’i World*, vol.19 (1983-1986), p.756.

The ship left the port of Alexandria with a burst of steam and great fanfare. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s companions numbered six: Shoghi Effendi, Siyyid Asadu’lláh-i-Qumí, Dr Amínu’lláh Faríd,²⁸ Mírzá Munír-i-Zayn, Áqá Khusraw and this servant.²⁹

Maḥmúd says that the Master was sad because He had just received the news that His third daughter, Rúḥá Khánum, was seriously sick. He also says that the ship’s physician was an Italian and misidentified them as Turks. The doctor immediately gave them trouble because of the health of Khusraw’s eyes. He said that they were affected by trachoma. In Naples, other Italian doctors confirmed his diagnosis. They said that the eyes of Shoghi Effendi and Mírzá Munír-i-Zayn were also affected by the same disease and that the American authorities would have never permitted them to enter the U.S.A. Therefore, the Master, given that the same Dr Faríd agreed with the Italian doctors, asked the three to disembark at Naples and return to the Holy Land. Yazdi remembers that in Ramleh, Shoghi Effendi had been “in seventh heaven. He had heard so much about America and longed to be with the Master as He travelled throughout North America and gave the Message. He looked forward with great anticipation to the experience . . . He was extremely happy.”³⁰ Rúḥíyyih Rabbani (1910-2000), the wife of the Guardian, says about this episode of the life of her husband:

One can well imagine what heart-break this brought to a boy of fifteen, setting out on the first great adventure of his life, how much more to Shoghi Effendi, so attached to his grandfather, so excited over the trip on a big boat, the great journey to the West in a day when such long voyages were relatively rare and eventful! He always remembered this episode with sadness, but in a touching spirit of submissiveness to the constant blows he received all his life. It is easy to say it was the Will of God—but who knows how often the next step, planned by God, is diverted into another, less perfect path, by the evil plotting of men? There is no doubt the Master was greatly grieved by this event, but had to keep His own counsel, lest the

²⁸ A nephew of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wife.

²⁹ Zarqání, *Maḥmúd’s Diary*, p.13.

³⁰ Yazdi, *Blessings*, pp.51-2, 53.

secret of Shoghi Effendi's future be prematurely revealed and worse befall him through the malice and envy of others.³¹

The story of this travel to North America and later Europe is not our concern. In July 1913, Ahmad Sohrab, who came back from the United States together with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, wrote to *Star of the West*:

On 17 June 1913 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived at Port Said aboard the steamship *Himalaya*. From there he sent a telegram instructing many pilgrims to come to Port Said. As there was not enough room to receive them in the hotel in which he was staying, a tent was erected on the roof for the purpose.³²

He was accompanied by Siyyid Asadu'lláh-i-Qumí, Mírzá 'Alí-Akbar-i-Nakhjavání, Mírzá Maḥmud-i-Zarqání and Ahmad Sohrab.³³

'Abdu'l-Bahá remained in Port Said from 17 June to 11 July 1913. He left the town because of its heat and humidity and went to Ismailia, where He stayed in the hotel of a certain Mr. J. Bosta. His health did not improve. Therefore, on 17 July, He went to Alexandria, where He stayed for two weeks in Hotel Victoria in Ramleh. Then, He rented a villa close to Maḥlúm Páshá Station. Ahmad Sohrab describes several details of that sojourn. On 13 August, he describes one of the most common occupations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, writing Tablets to believers and non-believers:

When I returned from Alexandria in the afternoon I was told that the Master had asked for me. I went immediately to the garden. Seeing me standing near the door, he permitted me to enter and to take a seat. He was walking in the avenue fronting a most charming rose-garden, and dictating Tablets to Mirza Moneer. Shoghi [sic] Effendi was there also. For nearly three hours, the limpid stream of revelation flowed to irrigate the parched ground of hearts in distant climes! Just as the sun was sinking behind the western horizon, he revealed a most touching prayer. His voice was like the music of the spheres, now chanting in a clear rich voice, now in a low, sweet undertone. The effect made us forgetful of everything. The dusk of the

³¹ Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, p.19.

³² Sohrab, quoted in "News Notes," *Star of the West*, vol.4, no.7 (13 July 1913), p.121.

³³ See Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p.395.

evening, the murmur of the breeze through the roses and trees, the unbroken calmness of the atmosphere, the spiritual beauty of the presence of the Master, and then as we looked up, the twinkling stars all combined to weave around our hearts a garland of spiritual enchantment! We were in reality worshipping the glorious King of Kings in the holiest moment of our lives! The prayer was a supplication to the throne of the Almighty for the purification of souls and the spiritualisation of hearts,—in order that men might sing the praises of their Lord, and cause the ringing cries of “Ya Baha El Abha” to ascend from their meeting places to the Supreme Concourse. As we left the garden, I carried with me that wonderful prayer of the Beloved! On the wings of Light it had ascended to the throne of the Almighty and had been accepted by the Ruler of Mankind.³⁴

Sohrab’s diary also illustrates other aspects of the Master’s daily life in those days. On 4 August, Sohrab writes that he “was summoned by the Beloved” with other friends early in the morning and thus went to His house. When he arrived there

. . . the door opened and we were bidden to the Master’s writing room. As we sat there we heard Shoghi Effendi chanting with pathos and sweetness. As he ended the prayer suddenly I heard the voice of the Master. I was on my feet. What marvelous depth of feeling! It causes the stones to dance with joy! He was teaching Shoghi Effendi how to chant and how to control his voice under various expressions³⁵

On 18 September, he writes:

It was a hot day, but the rose-garden is always cool, the fresh breeze wafting. The master asked Shoghi Effendi to bring him a bottle of Evian water. Meanwhile an Arab, who is a laborer, came in and saluted him. The Arab told a long story, illustrating it with poems, about the source of the Nile, that it is in paradise and flows from under a throne—a pretty legend. Then a few men came in to see the Master. He spoke to them in detail on trustworthiness, and told them three stories about his own life. For three hours we sat in his presence listening with attention to every word he said. When

³⁴ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, pp.187-8.

³⁵ Sohrab, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt*, p.152.

he left the rose-garden, Shoghi Effendi and I went to the Sidi Jaber station to welcome our dear sister, Mrs. Fraser. We greeted her on behalf of the Master. After ten minutes, she stood before him. She is going to live with the Holy Family, and I have no doubt that the Bahai world will receive a rich and valuable treasure when her Diary is given out.³⁶

On 30 September 1913, Ahmad Sohrab's diary concludes. Balyuzi gives but a short description of those days. He informs us that the Master did not feel good in Ramleh, and thus, He moved for a few days to Abúqír. This move may have happened in November 1913. Since His health did not improve and the friends in the Holy Land were begging Him to return, He decided to go back to Haifa.³⁷ *Star of the West* does not give any information about the Master's sojourn in Egypt in those months. Only the issue of 19 January 1914 publishes a letter written on 27 December 1913 by H. Imogene Hoagg (1869-1945), an American believer who visited Italy several times, to Charles Mason Remey (1874-1974).³⁸ This letter describes the Master's arrival in Haifa. Ali M. Yazdi writes that on 2 December 1913, 'Abdu'l-Bahá left Alexandria and returned to the Holy Land.³⁹ He arrived in Haifa on 5 December. We have no photograph of His presence in Egypt. Indeed, as Balyuzi remarks, after the Master's earliest photographs taken in Adrianople in 1867 when He was a young man, "there were none until He reached London in 1911."⁴⁰

Egyptian cities and towns visited by 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The first Egyptian town visited by 'Abdu'l-Bahá was Port Said. He sojourned there when He arrived in the country, during September and October 1910. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was again in Port Said from 17 June 1913, when He arrived on the S.S. *Himalaya* back from His long trip in North America and Europe, to 11 July of the same year, when He moved to Ismailia. He spent most of His time in Alexandria's Ramleh suburb. He arrived there in October 1910 and remained until

³⁶ Sohrab, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in Egypt*, p.330.

³⁷ See Balyuzi, *'Abdu-Bahá*, p.402.

³⁸ Hoagg, "Abdul-Baha's return to the Holy Land," *Star of the West*, vol.4, no.17 (19 January 1914), pp.288, 290.

³⁹ See Yazdi, "Memories of Shoghi Effendi," *Bahá'i World*, vol.19 (1983-1986), p.756.

⁴⁰ Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p.xii.

May 1911, when He went to Cairo. He returned on 22 July 1911 and moved away bound to Europe on 11 August 1911. He returned from Europe in early December 1911 and left on 25 March 1912, bound for North America via Naples. Finally, He sojourned in Ramleh from 17 July 1913 to 2 December of the same year, except for a short period in November that He spent in Abúqír.⁴¹ He also spent three months in Cairo, in the suburb of Zaytun, from May 1911 to 22 July of the same year, a week in Ismailia, from 11 to 17 July 1913, and a short time in Manşúra.⁴² Ahmad Sohrab has written graphic descriptions of some of the Egyptian towns that hosted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Port Said had become a town only after the opening of the Suez Canal on 17 November 1869. Sohrab writes about it:

Forty years ago there were only a handful of dingy hovels with half-naked Arabs. There was no trade, there were no houses, and no communication existed with the outside world. Almost all the area on which the present up-to-date city with its 60,000 busy inhabitants is built, is land reclaimed from the sea. When the Suez Canal joined the two mighty oceans together, Port Said became an international port, and from that date the magical progress of the city continued uninterrupted.⁴³

In 1910, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived there, Port Said was an international centre inhabited by Egyptians and Europeans of different nationalities. Sohrab describes a feast for the French Day of Independence:

The European part of Port Said is decorated with thousands of Japanese lanterns, the French flag is seen everywhere, and everybody seems to enter into the spirit of celebration on this National Feast of the Republic of France. After sunset the principal avenues, the French Consulate, the Banks, firms and buildings are lighted up by electricity. The street in which the Eastern Exchange, Continental and Casino Palace Hotels are built, is a riot of music promenaders, Arabs, Greeks, Italians, English, German, and French. Everybody is out to have a good time and to see the sights. The

⁴¹ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p.281, chap.19, para.6.

⁴² See “The Centenary of the Arrival of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt (continued).”

⁴³ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, p.96.

avenue from one end to the other is wired, and a roof is constructed of Japanese lanterns. The trees also bear such luminous fruits.⁴⁴

Sohrab also describes a Catholic procession in the town:

Today the French inhabitants had a gorgeous religious procession which started from their church. All the streets through which it passed were adorned with flags, bunting and Japanese lanterns. The priests were dressed in their pompous surplices of red, gold and silver. There were long lines of young girls dressed as angels, also a company of choir boys. The procession was brought to an end by a large statue of the Virgin Mary, holding the child, Jesus, in her arms. Of course thousands of Arabs left their work to gaze at this very spectacular sight of what they called “idol worship,” and not understanding the sacredness of these symbols, they poked fun and laughed in their sleeves. How sad is the ignorance of humanity!⁴⁵

As to Alexandria, Sohrab writes:

Alexandria to all intents and purposes is like a progressive American city. Its tall buildings, its large department stores, its clean avenues, its double-decked electric cars, its delightful parks, its electrically lighted boulevards and streets, its fine promenades around the seaport, are all signs of a wonderful prosperous spirit. As I passed along the streets it seemed as though I was walking on an avenue in New York, and I wondered at the magical transformations which had taken place since this city was burned to the ground during the Arabi [sic] revolution thirty-one years ago. The inhabitants of all nations, Greeks, Italians, French, Jews, English, Arabs, Persians, live here and associate with one another in perfect harmony.⁴⁶

As a matter of fact, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sojourned in Ramleh, about which Sohrab writes:

Ramleh is a modern Egyptian town with all the conveniences of western civilisation. It is a summer resort for the most important European officials

⁴⁴ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, pp.62-3.

⁴⁵ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, pp.88-9.

⁴⁶ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, pp.109-10.

in the service of the Egyptian Government, and also for the native Pashas. There are lovely parks, all kinds of hotels and splendid houses. We have a nice furnished apartment about two hundred yards from the residence of the Beloved.⁴⁷

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in Alexandria, He stayed at the New Victoria Hotel (later Summer Palace Hotel). Sohrab describes it as follows:

From my room I see the great clock of the New Victoria Hotel, wherein the Beloved stayed from time to time. The manager with much pride shows to the guests the various rooms occupied by the Master. He knows something about the Cause, and recognises the great honor and blessing bestowed upon him and his hotel. When the Master was here the last time, he gave two large feasts just before his departure for America. There are a few other hotels and houses in which the Beloved has lived periodically. The homes of the Pashas are really wonderful specimens of the best Renaissance architecture. They very much resemble the houses and villas I have seen at Nice. Wonderful palaces, furnished with a taste truly magnificent, and are enclosed within gardens, the beauty and charm of which rival the fairy-lands of the artists and the poets. These “villas” are surrounded by walls from two to four yards high. The principal avenues are macadamized and clean and the narrow streets are also very much like the garden paths of Nice. As one walks through them the perfume of the flowers is inhaled, the branches of the trees overhanging the walls give a cool, inviting shade and the climbing vines add to the charming verdancy. A man passing through the streets and observing the houses, sees all the windows tightly shut. The stranger may think that they are not inhabited, but on inquiring about this custom of closing the windows, he is politely informed that as the owner is Mohammedan, the blinds are drawn, so that no foreign eyes may gaze upon the dark beauties of the women.⁴⁸

‘Abdu’l-Bahá also lived for three months, from May to 22 July 1911, in Cairo, in the Zaytun district, recently becoming famous for supposed Marian

⁴⁷ Sohrab, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt*, pp.106-7.

⁴⁸ Sohrab, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt*, pp.165-6.

apparitions. Thousands of people reportedly saw those apparitions of lights, and some people have photographed some of them.

In Ismailia, the Master stayed from 11 to 17 July 1913, to avoid the humid heat of Port Said. Sohrab describes it as follows:

There is a beautiful large park, lovely buildings, clean avenues and many electric lights. I was quite surprised at the size of the park with its big pine trees and flowers. We saw also the native quarter. The goats, the hens, the donkeys and the other animals live in the same room with the Arabs, making a peaceful family.⁴⁹

As to Abúqír, a village on the Mediterranean Sea about 20 miles northeast of Alessandria, Europeans remember it for the battle fought and won by Napoleon I in 1799 against the Ottoman army. The Master stayed there only a few days. As to Manşúra, it is a town located in the Nile Delta region on the eastern bank of the Damietta branch. Its name means victorious, in remembrance of a victory achieved by the Egyptians against King Louis IX of France in 1249 during the Seventh Crusade. Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí (1830ca.-1920), known as the Angel of Carmel, who, during his travels to teach the Faith, had spent ten years in the terrible prisons of Sudan, lived there for many years since the years when Bahá’u’lláh was confined in Adrianople (he may have gone there in 1866). Sohrab’s diary, which ends on 20 September 1913, does not mention either Abúqír or Manşúra.

The Holy Family

Members of the Holy Family visited a few times their Beloved during His stay in Egypt. As has been said, the Master called Shoghi Effendi in September 1910. Then, Shoghi Effendi returned to the Holy Land to attend his school. In April 1911, Shoghi Effendi was once more with his Grandfather in Ramleh. We learn this detail from Gregory, who writes in his diary: “Before entering we met Shoghi and Rhoui, two beautiful boys, the grandsons of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. These children of the Holy household show great affection for pilgrims.”⁵⁰ Shoghi Effendi was also with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in March 1912 when He embarked on S.S. Cedric bound for

⁴⁹ Sohrab, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt*, p.80.

⁵⁰ Gregory, *A Heavenly Vista*, http://bahai-library.com/gregory_heavenly_vista.

America and remained on board with Him as far as Naples. On 1 August 1913, Sohrab writes:

the Greatest Holy Leaf, Abdul Baha's sister, his daughter,⁵¹ Shoghi Effendi, and five or six others . . . arrived from Haifa. The Beloved came to see us, sat for one hour, drank a cup of coffee, and then left us to return to his house to see the newcomers . . .⁵²

'Abdu'l-Bahá had sent the Greatest Holy Leaf to Egypt in 1892 after Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, together with His eldest daughter, Díyá Khánum (d.1951), so that she may recover after the severe blow of her Father's loss. In that period, she was a guest of Hájí Mírzá Hasan-i-Khurásání. During the Master's absence from Haifa, she administered the affairs of the Cause in the Holy Land. Shoghi Effendi writes in this regard:

And when, in pursuance of God's inscrutable Wisdom, the ban on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's confinement was lifted and the Plan which He, in the darkest hours of His confinement, had conceived materialised, He with unhesitating confidence, invested His trusted and honoured sister with the responsibility of attending to the multitudinous details arising out of His protracted absence from the Holy Land.⁵³

Elsewhere, he more concisely writes:

At the time of His absence in the western world, she was His competent deputy, His representative and vicegerent, with none to equal her.⁵⁴

The Master's daughters also visited their Father during His sojourn in Egypt. For example, on 24 July 1913, Sohrab informs us that Túbá Khánum (1880ca.-1959), the Master's second daughter, was in Ramleh with her Father⁵⁵ and on 19 July 1913, he writes that Rúhá Khánum, His third daughter, was coming to Egypt.⁵⁶ On 5 September, Sohrab writes:

⁵¹ His eldest daughter Díyá Khánum.

⁵² Sohrab, *Abdul-Bahá in Egypt*, p.141.

⁵³ Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p.192.

⁵⁴ Quoted in *Bahiyih Khánum*, p.28.

⁵⁵ See Sohrab, *Abdul-Bahá in Egypt*, p.107.

⁵⁶ See Sohrab, *Abdul-Bahá in Egypt*, p.85.

Yesterday the Master's daughter⁵⁷ left for Cairo with Basheer,⁵⁸ for a short stay. Today Shoghi Effendi joined his mother with Haji Niaz.⁵⁹ In the afternoon four Bahais arrived from Cairo.⁶⁰

Baharieh Rouhani Ma'ani, a biographer of the women of the Holy Family, hypothesises that Munírih Khánum (1847-1938), 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wife, also was among the members of the family⁶¹ who, in Rúhíyyih Rabbani's words,

hastened to His presence there [in Egypt], among them Shoghi Effendi, who joined Him about six weeks after His arrival . . . arriving in the company of the Greatest Holy Leaf and others on 1 August in Ramleh, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá had once again rented a villa.⁶²

Like her sister-in-law, Munírih Khánum had already been in Egypt for health reasons, first in 1898ca. and then at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶³ Finally, members of His family were with Him in Ramleh when He left for New York.⁶⁴

Although this person is not a Holy Family member, we mention the meeting between the Master and one of His cousins on His Father's side. On 1 July 1913, Sohrab writes:

Today two pilgrims arrived, Mirza Fazlollah, the son of the oldest brother of Baha-Ullah from Persia, and a young Bahai from Damascus. Upon hearing of the arrival of the son of his uncle, Abdul Baha called him into his presence and showered much love upon him. I was not there to witness the scene and to hear his words. But Ali Akbar [Nakhjavání] told me that the

⁵⁷ Seemingly the first daughter of the Master, Díyá Khánum, the mother of Shoghi Effendi]

⁵⁸ A Bahá'í who in 1913 was with the Master in Ramleh. See Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, pp.189, 195, 282. He could be the same Bashír, the Master's steward, mentioned by Marzieh Gail (1908-1993) in *Summon*, p.237ff.

⁵⁹ An old Persian believer of the times of Bahá'u'lláh who in those days lived in Cairo and who passed away in a very advanced age on 5 December 1919. See "Mirza Haji Niaz", *Star of the West*, vol.10, no.19 (2 March 1920), p.351.

⁶⁰ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, p.283.

⁶¹ See Rouhani Ma'ani, *Leaves*, p.346.

⁶² Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl*, p.21.

⁶³ See Rouhani Ma'ani, *Leaves*, pp.336-8.

⁶⁴ See Yazdi, *Blessings*, pp.20, 22.

Master spoke about his childhood days. Things that I should like to have heard.⁶⁵

The public opinion

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in Egypt, Egyptians knew little about Him and the Bahá’í Faith. They only knew what had been reported by such authoritative but prejudiced sources as officers of the Iranian government, which had banished Bahá’u’lláh from His own country, or Ottoman officers, who had condemned Bahá’u’lláh to a perpetual exile in the prison city of ‘Akká. Egyptians had heard only calumnies about the Faith. As soon as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in Egypt, He was immediately able to prove that those rumours were wrong. Indeed, such was His charm that He won the esteem and friendship of all the major personages of the country, whom He repeatedly met during mutual cordial visits. He met “clerics, aristocrats, administrators, parliamentarians, men of letters, journalists and publicists, Arabs, Turks and Persians, who sought His presence. The poor and the deprived also had access to Him and went away happy.”⁶⁶ During His stay in Egypt ‘Abdu’l-Bahá received many guests. Still, He never delivered a public talk. However, as a Blog on His travels in the West remarks, “the little the Egyptian press published about Him or about His talks given in other countries was . . . rich enough to be considered by historians and writers as a public proclamation of the Bahá’í Faith, which in those days was referred to also as the Bábí Faith.”⁶⁷

Siyyid Asadu’lláh wrote to *Star of the West* in this regard:

Also, distinguished editors of Arabic and Persian newspapers, such as Moaid [Mu’ayyad] and Tchehre Nema [Chihrih Nama], have talked with him and afterward wrote and published columns of praise and commendation on his Teachings and greatness. Thus the newspapers have given great publicity to the Movement. In regard to the Moaid [Mu’ayyad] article, Abdul Baha says: “A clipping from the newspaper of Moaid [Mu’ayyad], which is the first newspaper of Egypt and its editor well known throughout the world for his learning, is enclosed. Formerly, this person, through the instigation of some influential resident Persians, wrote many articles against this Cause

⁶⁵ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, pp.6-7.

⁶⁶ Balyuzi, ‘*Abdu’l-Bahá*, p.139.

⁶⁷ Quoted in “bahaitravelwest. #9 – 100 Years Ago – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remains in Ramleh, Egypt.”

and called the Bahais infidels. But when Abdul Baha arrived in this country, with one interview he was completely changed and contradicted all his former articles with this one. This is the type of the just man!”

There is no doubt that this trip is fraught with wonderful results for the Cause and many people will become awakened. In one of these interviews Abdul Baha stated he may go to Cairo and pass the remainder of the winter in that city. The Egyptian winter weather is ideal, temperate and agrees with him. Since he has arrived in Egypt his health is much improved, and should he decide to go to America it will not be before the springtime.⁶⁸

Century of Light remarks:

To some extent the way had no doubt been paved by warm admiration for the Master on the part of Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh, who had met Him on several occasions in Beirut and who subsequently became Mufti of Egypt and a leading figure at Al-Azhar University.⁶⁹

Muḥammad Abdúh (1849-1905) was an Islamic liberal reformer and teacher, initially the editor of the official gazette of the Egyptian government, *Al Waqa’i’ Al Misriyya* (Egyptian facts), which was founded in 1828, the first Egyptian newspaper. Exiled from Egypt in 1882, when he returned to his country, he was a teacher at the ancient al-Azhar University, founded in 970ca. which took its name, the luminous, from one of the titles of Fatima, Muḥammad’s daughter, called *az-zahra*, the brilliant. He also was the Great Mufti of Egypt, the second-highest religious position in the country. He is remembered as one of the greatest Egyptian thinkers and reformers. In the 1880s, while in exile in Beirut, he met ‘Abdu’l-Baha and was influenced by His words, coming to think that Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings could save Egyptian society from the ills it was afflicted with. Therefore, he attempted to reform the Shari‘ah, but his plans were frustrated by the conservatives’ opposition.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ “Abdul-Baha in Egypt,” *Star of the West*, vol.1, n.15 (12 December 1912), pp.2-3.

⁶⁹ *Century of Light*, p.14, chap.2, para.16.

⁷⁰ See Scharbrodt, *Islam and the Baha’i Faith*.

The press coverage

As soon as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá arrived in Egypt, the main newspapers immediately published articles on His visit. On 19 September 1910, Al-Ahram (The pyramids), founded in 1875, then pro-French and today the most popular Egyptian newspaper published the news of the unexpected visit to the country of the “leader of the Babi Faith.” The article said:

Abbas Effendi left His residence in the city of ‘Akká a few days ago for Port Said, an event that has precipitated His Persian followers residing in Egypt to hasten to that city to be blessed by visiting Him. This surprise visit has given rise to speculation and controversial claims between His opponents and supporters about its motive. The former have alleged He left ‘Akká out of fear of what may come upon Him from the new constitutional Turkish regime. His followers, strongly deny these uncorroborated allegations. In fact, He came to Egypt for health reasons because the air of Egypt is indicated as a cure for His asthmatic attacks caused by His long incarceration.⁷¹

Despite this article, a few unfriendly personages questioned the opportunity of the visit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt. After about a month, on 16 October, the editor of Al-Mu’ayyad (“the victorious” or “the supporter”), a nationalist newspaper founded in 1889 and very popular in those years, answered their questions. This editor was the skilful Shaykh ‘Alí Yusif, who had previously criticised the Bahá’ís and their faith, suggesting taking firm measures against them. He met the Master in Ramleh, and after that meeting, he wrote: “His Eminence Mirza ‘Abbas Effendi, the learned and erudite Head of the Bahá’ís in ‘Akká and the Centre of authority for Bahá’ís throughout the world, has reached the shores of Alexandria.”⁷² The writer related that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stayed at the Victoria Hotel but moved to a rented house after a few days. Then he went on to explain:

He is a venerable person, dignified, possessed of profound knowledge, deeply versed in theology, master of the history of Islam, and of its denominations and developments . . . whosoever has consorted with Him has seen

⁷¹ Quoted in “bahaitravelwest. #9 – 100 Years Ago – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remains in Ramleh, Egypt.”

⁷² Quoted in Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p.136.

in Him a man exceedingly well-informed, Whose speech is captivating, Who attracts minds and souls, dedicated to belief in the oneness of mankind . . . His teaching and guidance revolve round the axis of relinquishing prejudices: religious, racial, patriotic.⁷³

Shaykh Yusif said that he twice went to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and during those interviews, learned that His coming had absolutely no political motive, for “he ‘does not interfere in political matters;’ His ‘stay in Egypt is for health reasons.’” The news report concluded with a warm welcome to the learned and wise Visitor and wished Him a happy stay and recovery of good health.⁷⁴

Al-Muqattam also a pro-British newspaper, founded in 1888, which took its name from a chain of hills south-east of Cairo and which in those years was the most eminent among the Egyptian newspapers, published on 28 November 1910 an appreciative report. The nationalist semiweekly Wadía’n-Níl (the Valley of the Nile), founded in 1867 and sometimes considered the first private newspaper in Egypt, did the same and published many praises of the Master. Even the Persian illustrated weekly journal, Chihrih-Nama, published in Egypt between 1904 and 1950, praised Him. Balyuzi writes in this regard:

Its editor, Mirza ‘Abdu’l-Muhammad-i-Írání, the Mu’addibu’s-Sultán [the Preceptor of the Sovereign], had in the past, in common with many of his countrymen resident in Egypt, displayed feelings far from friendly. Now he reported ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travels with respect and admiration.⁷⁵

On 19 January 1911, Al-Ahram spoke once more about the Master. It wrote:

His reverence Abbas Effendi, the head of the Bábí Faith, is still visiting and being visited, with much veneration, by senior officials and high ranking individuals. He is the son of Bahá’u’lláh, and His successor, and a descendant of a noble Persian lineage. Kindness and love to all regardless of social rank or religious affiliation are His distinguishing attributes for He looks at

⁷³ Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp.136-7.

⁷⁴ See “bahaitravelswets. #9 – 100 Years Ago – ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remains in Ramleh, Egypt.”

⁷⁵ Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p.137.

the unifying force latent in the humanity of all people and not at their diverse beliefs or worldly conditions.⁷⁶

Balyuzi mentions a last article about the Master published by the Egyptian Gazette of 27 June 1913, entitled “‘Abdul Baha in Egypt. Wonderful Scenes in Port Said. Eastern Bahais Assembled in Force.”⁷⁷ The article also said: “At Port Said the pilgrims have erected a huge tent on the roof of a native hotel and there they gather and sing with touching devotion.”⁷⁸

Personages

Of the many personages that attained the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt, only the most important will be mentioned. Easterners will be listed as first. In 1910-1911 in Alexandria, an old enemy of the Faith, Mírzá Muḥammad-Mihdí Khán, the Za’imu’d-Dawlih [Chief of the State], a Persian politician who had published in 1903 a critical history of the Bábí Movement, called repeatedly on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and showed great reverence towards Him. In Cairo, Shaykh Muḥammad Bakhit, the Mufti of Egypt, and Shaykh Muḥammad Rishád, the Imam of the Khedive, visited Him, and He returned their visit. In Cairo, He met Jurji (Giorgio) Zaydan (1861-1914), an eminent Lebanese Christian writer and the editor of the journal Dar al-Hilal (The Crescent), who later transformed into a publishing house that still exists today. Zaydan was proud of his Arabic background and wrote the book *The Flying Mameluch*, a popular work of Arabic history.

The most important meeting in Cairo was with the Khedive, ‘Abbás Ḥilmí II (1874-1944), who showed a special reverence towards the Master. Balyuzi says that the two personages met twice. The organiser of those meetings was ‘Uṯmán Páshá Murtaḍá, the Khedive’s chamberlain, and Balyuzi remarks that he

was devoted to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá . . . A Tablet which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed to ‘Uṯmán Páshá in October 1919 (five years after ‘Abbás Ḥilmí was deposed) is indicative of the stature of the man: he is called ‘Amír-al-wafa’—the Prince of Fidelity.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Quoted in “The Centenary of the Arrival of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Egypt (continued).”

⁷⁷ Quoted in Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p.398.

⁷⁸ Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p.5.

⁷⁹ Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p.401.

The Master met once more the Khedive in Ramleh in 1913. On 15 August 1913, Ahmad Sohrab writes in this regard:

During our absence in the afternoon, Osman Pasha, one of the Ministers of the Khedive, called on the Master conveying the loving greetings of the Ruler of Egypt and his longing to meet him. The date was then fixed for the afternoon of 17 August. His Highness the Khedive is now staying in Alexandria. His summer resort is near Ramleh. He lives in one of his palaces fronting the sea called Raas-ottin [Ras at-Tín]. The Khedive is friendly to the Bahai Movement and has special regard for the Master. It may be that history will record that he is one of the few Oriental Rulers who has received Abdul Baha with due honor.⁸⁰

On 17 August, he records:

This was an important date in the Bahai calendar because Abdul Baha and the ruler of Egypt met each other for the second or third time. Beyond this bare announcement I have no other information. The Master may give us, later, an account of the meeting, and thus in our imagination we may construct a picture, or he may not divulge any of the details. None of the believers were with him. For the present it is enough to know that on this day, between three and six p.m., the sovereign of Egypt had the honor and privilege of talking with Abdul Baha.⁸¹

On 4 September 1913, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had a visit from Prince Muḥammad ‘Alí (1875-1955), the Khedive’s brother and the heir to the throne. The Prince had already attained the presence of the Master, first in Egypt in 1912, then in New York on 22 July 1912,⁸² then again in Paris in 1913, and finally, during the Master’s travel to Egypt, the Prince was with Him for four days, on 12-16 June 1913. He admired so much ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that he considered Him “the most important man in our century.”⁸³ He loved Him so much that he called Him “‘Abbás

⁸⁰ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, pp.195-6.

⁸¹ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, p.201.

⁸² See Balyuzi, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p.230.

⁸³ Quoted in Root, “A Great Prince Speaks of ‘Abdu’l Baha,” *Star of the West*, vol.20, no.10 (January 1930), p.301.

Bábá’ which in Arabic means ‘Abbás Father or Father ‘Abbás.’”⁸⁴ Sohrab describes their meeting in Ramleh as follows:

In the afternoon Prince Mohamad Ali, the brother of the Khedive, called on Abdul Baha. The Prince arrived in his automobile at the door of our house, and hearing that the Master lived close by in another one, said that he would walk to it. Mirza Moneer was about to go on ahead to notify Abdul Baha, when he appeared in his long, loose, cream-colored coat from the other side of the street. Thus, in the middle of the road, the Master and the Prince met, each offering to the other courtesies designated for the most distinguished men. Every one looking at this strange scene wondered, while trying to imagine what had brought a royal Prince of Egypt to the Threshold of Abbas Effendi. The Master was walking ahead and the Prince a few feet behind, and while they were talking in the most animated manner, they disappeared from our view.⁸⁵

Ahmad Sohrab also describes the Egyptian Páshás’ admiration for the Master through words uttered by one of them:

We have produced in the Orient a man such as Abbas Effendi, who alone visited Europe and America, and who through the sheer force of his personality and the wonderful soundness and brilliancy of his philosophy, captivated the pulpits and platforms, revolutionised the current of western thoughts, opened before your faces vistas of glorious ideals, and drew to his audiences thousands of men and women who were deeply attracted to his humane and divine wisdom, while the Press of the West from one end to another had but one tongue by which to praise his many virtues and to elucidate his system of religion and philosophy. Yes, we are proud of him. We honor him because he comes from the heart of the Orient. He represents us, he utters our ideals and longings. You have never sent us a man who could travel in the Orient and deliver lectures as Abbas Effendi has done in the West.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

⁸⁵ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, p.276.

⁸⁶ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, p.167.

In Egypt, the Master also received Khájih Ḥasan Nizamí (1879-1955), an Indian scholar and mystic of the Chistí Sufi order, a prolific writer, an upholder of Islam in India, who later on translated the Seven Valleys into Urdu.⁸⁷ Finally, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá met in Ramleh the well-known Egyptian writer ‘Abbás Maḥmúd Al-‘Aqqad (1889-1964), the author of about a hundred books of philosophy, religion and poetry, famous for his flourished prose. In the 1980s, Egyptian television produced a TV series on his life titled *The Giant*. ‘Aqqad has left a description of that meeting titled “An hour with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.”⁸⁸ Last but not least, Sohrab’s diary records on 24 September 1913:

Yesterday the new Persian Consul General arrived from Constantinople and the Master sent all the students to welcome him at the steamer and today, with Mirza Ali Akbar [Nakhjavání], he went to Alexandria to pay him a visit, in the hotel where he is staying for a few days before his departure for Jadda. In the course of conversation Abdul Baha pointed out to the Consul General the impartial attitude of the Bahais in recent developments in Persia and how they are the lovers of Peace and progress. The mission of the Bahai Cause is universal and not local; its principles are for all humanity; its objects are world-wide. The Bahais are the army of spiritual and intellectual advancements. Then he spoke a few words about the promotion of the Cause in America and Europe. The Consul General became very attracted, and made an engagement to come next day and call on the Master.⁸⁹

As to the Westerners, we remember the English Wellesley Tudor Pole (1884-1968), who visited the Master in Ramleh in the second half of November 1910. Tudor Pole is remembered as a writer, a philosopher, a mystic and a lifelong lover of religious experiences, mystic visions and spiritualism. He is also remembered because, along with Winston Churchill, he was the deviser of the silent minute, which the people of Britain observed during the Second World War (1939-1945) every evening at 9 pm. After that meeting, he accepted the Faith but became estranged when Shoghi Effendi began to build its Administrative Order.

⁸⁷ See Holley, “Current Bahá’í Activities in the East and West. Australasia and the Far East,” *Bahá’í World*, vol.4 (1930-32), p.89.

⁸⁸ See “‘Abbás Maḥmúd Al-‘Aqqad visits ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” *The Far-Stretching River*.

⁸⁹ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, pp.354-5.

During the First World War, Tudor Pole was a major in the British army. He learnt of the perils hanging over the Master because of the hate of the Turkish commander, Jamál Páshá, and urged the British military authority to protect Him. In December 1910, he published his interview with the Master in the journal *Christian Commonwealth* (28 December 1910), later reprinted by *Star of the West*.⁹⁰ *Star of the West* also published a part of a letter describing Tudor Pole's meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

You may be interested in hearing of my recent visit to Abdul-Baha at Ramleh, near Alexandria. I spent nine days at Alexandria and Cairo during the second half of November, 1910. Abdul-Baha's health had very greatly improved since his arrival from Port Said. He was looking strong and vigorous in every way. He spoke much of the work in America, to which he undoubtedly is giving considerable thought. He also spoke a good deal about the work that is going forward in different European centres as well as in London, and he expects great things from England during the coming year . . . A Bahai paper is to be read at the Universal Races Congress in London next July.⁹¹

In Cairo, 'Abdu'l-Bahá met Ronald Storrs, the Oriental Secretary of the British Agency and later knighted. Storr had known 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1909 in the Holy Land. Now, in Egypt, in his own words, he "had the honour of looking after him and of presenting him to Lord Kitchener."⁹² Lord Horatio Herbert Kitchener (1850-1916) was Egypt's British Agent and Consul-General (de facto administrator). In 1898, he conquered Sudan, and therefore, he was known as Lord Kitchener of Khartoum. Sir Storrs writes that Lord Kitchener "was deeply impressed by his personality, as who could fail to be?"⁹³

Sometimes, between 1910 and 1913, the Russian playwright Isabella Grinevskaya (1864-1944) attained the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. After that meeting, Grinevskaya accepted the Faith, to which she remained faithful for the rest

⁹⁰ See (Tudor-Pole), "A Wonderful Movement In The East. A Visit To Abdul Baha At Alexandria," *Star of the West*, vol.1, 18 (7 February 1911), pp.1-4.

⁹¹ "Extracts from Letter from Mr. Wellesley Tudor Pole," *Star of the West*, vol.1, no.18 (7 February 1911), pp.5-6.

⁹² Quoted in Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p.227.

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

of her life, keeping in touch with Eastern and Western Bahá'ís. She is remembered for the many books she published, in which she described the life of the Jews of the middle class and especially the situation of young intellectual Jewish women. She wrote a play titled *The Báb*, which was performed in St. Petersburg in 1904 and 1916-1917. The play was translated into French and praised by Tolstoy. She also wrote an essay about her meeting with the Master and a poem and play titled *Bahá'u'lláh*. This play was never performed.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s presence was also attained by Rustum Vambery, the son of the famous Arminius, the Jew Hungarian intellectual (ca.1832-1913) whom the Master met in Budapest on 12 April 1912.⁹⁴ Arminius Vambery was a traveller, an orientalist and a polyglot. Some scholars maintain that the personage of Professor Van Helsing in Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula* (1897) was inspired by Vambery. Chapter 23 of the novel mentions a “friend, Arminius of Buda-Pesth.”

Resident and visiting Bahá'ís

Among the many Bahá'ís who lived in Egypt in those days, the chronicles mention especially Mírzá Hasan Khurasání of Alexandria, who in 1892 had the honour of hosting Bahíyyih Khánum and Mohammed Yazdi (1848-1933), whom Gregory describes as “an oriental gentleman of pleasing manners and placid countenance.”⁹⁵ The Bahá'í historian Graham Hassall also mentions Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí.⁹⁶ Among the Bahá'ís in Egypt during the Master’s visits, there also was a very distinguished personage, Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl-i-Gulpáygání (1844-1914), known for his broad culture and his profound studies of the Bahá'í Faith, one of the 19 Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh. He went to Cairo in July 1895 and was a lecturer at al-Azhar University. Between 1901 and 1904, he travelled through Europe and North America to strengthen the new Bahá'ís. When the Master went to Egypt, He often invited him to His presence. Ahmad Sohrab repeatedly describes their meetings. Isabel Fraser also wrote about Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl’s presence in Ramleh, where the Master had asked him to come to enjoy his company.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ See Root, “A Visit to Rustum Vambery,” *Star of the West*, vol.19, no.11 (February 1929), p.330.

⁹⁵ Gregory, “A Heavenly Vista.”

⁹⁶ See “Baha’i country notes: Egypt.”

⁹⁷ See “A Glimpse of Mirza Abul-Fazl at Ramleh,” *Star of the West*, vol.4, no.19 (2 March 1914), pp.316-7.

The chronicles also mention Shaykh Faraju'lláh Zakí al-Kurdí, a Kurdish Bahá'í who lived in Cairo. He is the author of the well-known compilation of prayers by Bahá'u'lláh in Persian and Arabic, beside the Persian Hidden Words, *Ad'iyih-i Haḍrat-i Maḥbúb* (Prayers of the Beloved). He also published the Kitáb-i-Íqán, three volumes of Tablets by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a collection of talks delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Europe and America and other relevant Bahá'í texts. He translated the Tablet of *Ishráqát* into Arabic and submitted his translation to the Master. Shoghi Effendi writes in this regard:

So great is the importance and so supreme is the authority of these assemblies that once 'Abdu'l-Bahá after having himself and in his own handwriting corrected the translation made into Arabic of the Ishraqat (the Effulgences) by Sheikh Faraj, a Kurdish friend from Cairo, directed him in a Tablet to submit the above-named translation to the Spiritual Assembly of Cairo, that he may seek from them before publication their approval and consent.⁹⁸

As to Westerners, as has been said, Louis Gregory, an American negro who had accepted the faith in 1909 and the first Hand of the Cause of his race, was invited by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and stayed in Ramleh from 10 April to 4 May 1911. In his diary of this pilgrimage, he describes the house of the Master as “a modest but comfortable-appearing house with a front garden.” He lists the persons who were present during his first meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá: “Tamaddun ul Molk and Nouraddin Zaine, Persians, and Nevill G. Meakin and Miss Louisa A. M. Mathew (afterwards Mrs. Louis G. Gregory), English.” In this booklet, he describes again the Person of the Master:

'Abdu'l-Bahá appeared about the medium height, with a strong frame and symmetrical features. His face is deeply furrowed and His color about that of parchment. His carriage is erect and His entire form strikingly majestic and beautiful. His hands and nails are shapely and pure. His silver hair is long enough to touch the shoulders. The beard is snow white, the eyes light blue and penetrating, the nose slightly aquiline. The voice is powerful, but capable of infinite pathos, tenderness and sympathy. His dress was that of

⁹⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p.23.

the Oriental gentleman of the highest classes, simple and neat and very graceful. The color of His apparel was light, the outer robe being made of alpaca. On His head rested a light fez, surrounded by a white turban. The meekness of the servant, the majesty of the king, are in His brow and form.

Louisa Matthew (1866-1956) was an English believer from a well-to-do family who graduated from Cambridge. She had gone to Paris to continue her musical studies and accepted the Faith in the early twentieth century in the French capital. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá introduced Louis G. Gregory to her in Ramleh in April 1911. On 27 September 1912, He Himself married the two. It was a happy marriage, but filled with difficulties because of their different races. The two said that, during their travels, they were often obliged to stay at different hotels. Louisa devotedly served the Faith throughout her life, especially in Central Europe (Sofia, Bulgaria).

In those years, also Edith MacKaye de Bons (1878-1959) lived in Egypt. This American lady went to Paris to study voice. There she met May Bolles Maxwell (1870-1940). Their meeting took place on 1899 Christmas Day, and Edith became the first person brought to the Faith by May Bolles in the French capital. Edith later moved to Sion, Switzerland, because she had married Dr Joseph de Bons (1871–1959), a local dentist. The de Bons lived in Egypt for a few years, and in 1911 they had the honour of attaining the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Ahmad Sohrab writes in his diary of 29 July 1913:

In the afternoon I called on the Beloved and in his presence found DeBons, a French Bahai dentist practicing in Cairo—now on his way to Switzerland to meet his wife. Abdul Baha is going to take him for a drive through Nozha Park, which is the National Park of Alexandria. I have heard much praise of it, but have not yet been there. They say it rivals any park in Europe or America. For nearly two hours Abdul Baha entertained the doctor driving through the park and speaking to him about his spiritual experiences in America.⁹⁹

Sohrab’s diary also informs us of two other believers who visited Egypt to attain the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. On 13 July 1913, Sohrab mentions Mrs Jean

⁹⁹ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, p.126.

Stannard, an English believer and a travelling teacher who translated the Hidden Words into English in 1921, a translation highly appreciated by Shoghi Effendi. In 1925, she founded the International Bahá'í Bureau in Geneva, which Imogene Hoagg later managed. The Bahá'í International Community writes in this regard:

The International Bahá'í Bureau served as a gathering place for Bahá'ís traveling to Geneva for the activities of the League of Nations and of other international organisations, and published an international magazine.¹⁰⁰

In 1929, the International Bahá'í Bureau was recognised by the League of Nations. Sohrab writes about Mrs. Stannard:

Mrs. J. Stannard, an English Bahai, is back in Port Said and may stay with us for several days. I had a most pleasant conversation with her about the progress of the Cause in Germany and England. The Master may send her to India. She is a very active and energetic worker and no doubt will be able to spread the Bahai movement very effectively.¹⁰¹

On 24 July 1913, Lua Getsinger (1871-1916), the Herald of the Covenant and one of the 19 Disciples of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, arrived in Egypt.¹⁰² Sohrab writes in this regard:

This morning the Beloved sent for me. He was feeling well. Mrs. Getsinger was called into the room and the plan of her journey to India discussed. Since her arrival she has been living with Abdul Baha's family which is presided over by the Greatest Holy Leaf!¹⁰³

Sohrab informs us that the Master did not want Lua to go to India alone and thus summoned Mrs. Isabel Fraser Chamberlain (1871-1939), the compiler of a collection of talks delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Europe, known as *Abdul-Baha on Divine Philosophy*, published in 1917 in Boston by the publisher The Tudor Press. Sohrab's diary of 18 September 1913 records:

¹⁰⁰ "1926. International Bahá'í Bureau."

¹⁰¹ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, p.62.

¹⁰² See "The Disciples of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. 'Heralds of the Covenant'," *The Bahá'í World*, vol.3 (1928-1930), pp.84-5.

¹⁰³ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, p.182.

In the afternoon Abdul Baha passed by, followed by Shoghi Effendi. He called for me and I walked behind him in the rose-garden. A telegram sent to Port Said from the Master to Ahmad Yazdi: “Send Mrs. Fraser to Ramleh,” brought back the answer that she had left at one o’clock. He told me to go with Shoghi Effendi to the station and bring her home. We were expecting her for a few days. I was delighted to hear the news.¹⁰⁴

On the same day, Sohrab writes that he went and retrieved her from the station with Shoghi Effendi.

On 22 September, Sohrab announced the arrival of Dr Edward Getsinger (1866-1935), Lua Getsinger’s husband, one of the first pilgrims in December 1898, a faithful servant of the Cause, who published the first collection of Baha’u’llah’s Writings in English. Sohrab recorded many anecdotes of the meeting of the Master with the Bahá’ís who hastened to Egypt to see Him. We want to conclude this short note on those visits of devoted pilgrims with a detail from Sohrab’s diary:

One of the pilgrims—El Yahou, an old man—had brought with him from Cairo a bouquet of fragrant white flowers and six white fezes for the Master. He stayed with us last night and kept our party in a good humor until very late. In the morning he wanted the flowers and fezes to be taken to the Master, which I did with great pleasure. I knocked at the door, and the beloved opened it. He took the bundle out of my hand and told me that he would send for him in a few minutes.¹⁰⁵

Meanings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s presence in Egypt

‘Abdu’l-Bahá may have chosen Egypt as the headquarters of His travels in the West first of all because it was near enough to the Holy Land to enable Him to see what the Covenant-Breakers would do in His absence and, in case of extreme necessity, to go back home quickly. In the meantime, the climate of Egypt, much healthier than that of ‘Akká and Haifa, would have alleviated the consequences of the numerous afflictions that troubled His body, for example, His asthmatic attacks. Moreover, in Egypt, there was a flourishing Bahá’í community, and the

¹⁰⁴ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, pp.329-30.

¹⁰⁵ Sohrab, *Abdul-Baha in Egypt*, p.198.

relations between that community and the Bahá'í community in the Holy Land had always been very close.

The consequences of His presence in Egypt have been significant. First of all, 'Abdu'l-Bahá could personally deny, through His wisdom and the mysterious charm emanating from His Person, all the calumnies on the Bahá'í community and Himself, which external and internal enemies of the Faith had spread through the country. The importance of the Master's sojourn in Egypt is explained by *Century of Light* as follows:

An aspect of the Egyptian sojourn that deserves special attention was the opportunity it provided for the first public proclamation of the Faith's message. The relatively cosmopolitan and liberal atmosphere prevailing in Cairo and Alexandria at the time opened a way for frank and searching discussions between the Master and prominent figures in the intellectual world of Sunni Islam. These included clerics, parliamentarians, administrators and aristocrats. Further, editors and journalists from influential Arabic-language newspapers, whose information about the Cause had been coloured by prejudiced reports emanating from Persia and Constantinople, now had an opportunity to learn the facts of the situation for themselves. Publications that had been openly hostile changed their tone. The editors of one such newspaper opened an article on the Master's arrival by referring to "His Eminence Mírzá 'Abbás Effendi, the learned and erudite Head of the Bahá'ís in 'Akká and the Centre of authority for Bahá'ís throughout the world" and expressing appreciation of His visit to Alexandria.¹⁷ This and other articles paid particular tribute to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's understanding of Islam and to the principles of unity and religious tolerance that lay at the heart of His teachings.¹⁰⁶

Las but not least, 'Abdu'l-Bahá met many important Western personages who later spoke about Him to their European relatives and friends, both through letters and personally during their visit to their countries. *Century of Light* writes in this regard:

Despite the Master's ill health that had caused it, the Egyptian interlude proved to be a great blessing. Western diplomats and officials were

¹⁰⁶ *Century of Light*, pp.14-5, chap.2, para.16-8.

able to observe at first-hand the extraordinary success of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s interaction with leading figures in a region of the Near East that was of lively interest in European circles. Accordingly, by the time the Master embarked for Marseilles on 11 August 1911, His fame had preceded Him.¹⁰⁷

The Universal House of Justice summarises the main aspects of the presence of the Master in Egypt and the West in the triennium 1910-1913 as follows:

Uncompromising in defence of the truth, yet infinitely gentle in manner, He brought the universal divine principles to bear on the exigencies of the age. To all without distinction—officials, scientists, workers, children, parents, exiles, activists, clerics, sceptics—He imparted love, wisdom, comfort, whatever the particular need. While elevating their souls, He challenged their assumptions, reoriented their perspectives, expanded their consciousness, and focused their energies. He demonstrated by word and deed such compassion and generosity that hearts were utterly transformed. No one was turned away.¹⁰⁸

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