

Egypt: Baha'i history

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Egypt is among the few territories opened to the Faith during the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh (1853-92). Bahá'í merchants began establishing themselves in Alexandria and Cairo from the 1860s. Haji Báqir-i-Káshání and Siyyid Husayin-i-Káshání took up residence in Egypt during the period Bahá'u'lláh was in Adrianople (GPB 176). Bahá'u'lláh sent Haji Mulla Ali Tabrizi and Mirza Haydar Ali Isfahani to Egypt. They lived at Mansúriyya and there converted a number of people, including Haji Abu'l-Qasim of Shiraz (E.G. Browne, Materials 33). In 1888 the Khedive Isma'il Pasha deported Isfahani to Sudan. (Cole, "Rashid Rida")

1892-1921

Mirza Abdul-Fadl Gulpaygani arrived in Cairo in the mid 1890s. He taught at al-Azhar, and attracted more than fourteen teachers and students to the Faith (Cole "Rashid Rida"). Mirza Ratfi of Cairo went to Akka for the first time with Sarah Farmer as interpreter (Ford, Oriental Rose, 176-7). Port Said Bahá'í M.T. Basheer visited Chicago in 1910 (Bahá'í News 1:5, 12)

Literature

Gabriel Sacy, a Frenchman of Syrian origin, lived in Cairo, and had corresponded with Leo Tolstoy (Stendardo, Leo Tolstoy and the Bahá'í Faith. 23). In June 1902 Sacy printed in Cairo *Du r }gne de Dieu et de l' Afneau*, connu sous le nom de *Babysme*. Many early treatises were published in Cairo: an Arabic history of the Bábís (unsympathetic but well-informed) written by the Persian, Mírzá Muhammad Mahdí Khan, *Za'imu'd-Duwla*, was printed in Cairo in 1903-1904). Numerous Persian titles were published in Cairo, including *Tablets from Bahá'u'lláh*, *Tablets and Prayers from Bahá'u'lláh*, *The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*; *Seven Valleys*, *Four Valleys and Poetry of Bahá'u'lláh*, *The Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (in three volumes); *Some Answered Questions*; *Abu'l-Fadl's Al-Fara'id*, *Dwrer'l-Bahiyyeh*, *Hujaj'l-Bahiyyih* and *The letters of Abu'l-Fadhl*; *Haider Ali's Dala'il-el-'Irfan* and *Bihjet'l-Sudur*. Other works published in Cairo included *The History of Tahireh*. Some titles were co-published with Bombay - *The Book of Iqán*, *'Abdu'l-Bahá's The Muduniyyeh*, and *Siasiyyeh* (BWI, 111)

Publications in Arabic included *The Ishraqát*, *Tajalliat*, *Tarazat*, and *Kalamat* and *The Talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Europe and America*.

Myron H. Phelps completed his work *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi* when in Cairo in March 1903. On 24 September, 1913, the *Egyptian Gazette* printed a letter to the editor by Jean Stannard concerning the recent death of Aminius Vamb }ry.[1] This letter included Vamberyâs testimony to the Îreligion of Abdu'l-Bahââ.[2]

Miss J. Stannard is here since the 2nd January, she arrived in Burma Rangoon

about the 12/12/22 from Egypte.[3]

Haji Abdu'l-Karim travelled from Cairo to USA c.1901 (Gail, 157). Ford (Oriental Rose, 94-101) describes Karim as a trader who spent much time in Akka, from the time Bahá'u'lláh moved outside Akka until at least 1892. Gail describes Haji Ghulam Riday-i-Khurasani as "The distinguished servant of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, gardener and caretaker of the Shrine of the Bábä. see Gail, 228.

Zaynu'-'Abidín Ismá'íl, surnamed 'Zaynu'l-Mukhlisín (the adorning of the sincere ones) by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, had migrated from Hamadan to Cairo. Married to Hamídh Khánúm-Aqá from Shiraz. 'Abdu'l-Bahá had spoken in their home in Cairo. In 1946 their son Fawz Zayn married Bahiyyih 'Ali Sa'd'id-Din, daughter of a Lebanese Bahá'í who obeyed 'Abdu'l-Bahá and came to Egypt to marry Ismat Ali Effendi, daughter of the first Egyptian Bahá'í.

'Abdu'l-Bahá in Egypt Soon after being freed from imprisonment in Palestine, 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived in Egypt in September 1910. See Bahá'í News 1:13, 8; Bahá'í News 1:15, Dec 12, 1910, p2; Bahá'í News 1:17, Jan 19, 1910, p4-5; Bahá'í News 1:19, 4-5; publicity of `Abdu'l-Bahá Bahá'í News 2:3, 5. Cairo was a centre for intellectuals and other influential figures, a number of whom made Abdu'l-Bahá's acquaintance. Tudor-Pole visited `Abdu'l-Bahá outside Alexandria in November 1910. An interview with him appeared in Christian Commonwealth (1910 28 Dec), "A Wonderful Movement in The East" (reproduced in Bahá'í News 1:18, 1-4). Khaja-Hassan Nizami, an Indian intellectual who met Abdu'l-Bahá in Egypt, later translated Seven Valleys into Urdu. (Bahá'í World Vol. III, 1930-32, 89) Sheikh Faraj, a Kurd living in Cairo, translated Ishraqat into Arabic during the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá.[4]

Perhaps `Abdu'l-Bahá was so well known in Egypt that there was considerable press coverage of his funeral, a decade later. Reports of Abdu'l-Bahá's passing in Egyptian newspapers included Al Lataif Al Musawa (Cairo) 5th December; the Sphinx of Cairo on 17 December,[5] and the Egyptian Mail (The World Religion of the Future. Teachings of Abdel-Bahá. Passing of A Great Prophet) n.d. Viscount Allenby, Egypt's High Commissioner, who had visited with 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa, cabled a message of sympathy to his relatives (BWI, 28 and The Bahá'í World vol. 2, 1926-28, 15).

Following his time spent in Egypt, `Abdu'l-Bahá sometimes spoke of his experiences there when he travelled further abroad. When in London in 1911, for instance, he said:

Knowledge is the first step; resolve, the second step; action, its fulfilment, is the third step. To construct a building one must first of all make a plan, then one must have the power (money), then one can build. A society of Unity is formed, that is good - but meetings and discussions are not enough. In Egypt these meetings take place but there is only talk and no result.[6]

Bahá'ís in Egypt at this time included Mirza Hassan Khorassani, "Rue Cherif Pasha", D. Mohammed Yazdi, "an oriental gentleman of pleasing manners and placid countenance". Tamaddun ul Molk and Nouraddin Zaine acted as secretaries to `Abdu'l-Bahá. Nevill G. Meakin, Miss Louisa A.M. Mathew from England, Kaem Maken of Tehran, formerly a minister of state; Haji Mirza Haydar Ali, Shaykh Momammed Baghdadi, Abdol Hosein (who was soon to visit Persia). Western pilgrims who visited Egypt included Coy, and Grey, and M & S Paine, were given hospitality in Cairo in August 1920 by Muhammad-Taqi Isfahani (In His Presence, 67). Louis Gregory visited `Abdu'l-Bahá at Ramleh beginning April 10, 1911, and remaining until 4 May.[7]

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.[8] On 2 December 1913 'Abdu'l-Bahá left Alexandria to return to the Holy Land.[9]

For other information on Abdu'l-Bahá in Egypt see also Star of the West 6:18, February 7, 1915, p159 "Letters from the Orient received by Miss Martha L. Root", p159-60; 9:17, January 19, 1919, p.199-2000; 9:19 Mar 2, 1919, p.217; 10:4 May 17, 1919, p73-74; 10:7 July 13, 1919, p.141-2.

There were also activities by covenant-breakers in Egypt in the early years. In God Passes by Shoghi Effendi records:

“The strenuous exertions of an ambitious Armenian, who, in the course of the first years of its establishment in Egypt, endeavored to supplant it by the "Scientific Society" which in his short-sightedness he had conceived and was sponsoring, failed utterly in its purpose.”- God Passes By, 327

Persecution of Egyptian Bahá'ís 1919-1920 By 1915 Bahá'ís from Cairo, Port Said and Alexandria had contributed to the Bahá'í Temple Unity Fund (BWI,69-70). A Photo of the Bahá'í Assembly of Port Said can be seen in the first Bahá'í World. (BWI,44) On early publishing activities see Bahá'í Yearbook 1925-26, p.111. Edward Mickail Youssef described his community in correspondence with Victoria Bedikian:

My father [Mickail Youssef] is a station master. As he was at Hamul, a village in Menouffia Province, he was accustomed to go every week in his rest day, at Shebin El Kom, the biggest town at that Province. After a short time there were many friends in that town. I was at the secondary school of Shebin El Kom. Many friends sent letters to our Guardian, and He wrote to them many beautiful and spiritual answers.

The friends were accustomed to meet regularly at my house. The number of them reached about 10. In every meeting many of the beloved were gathered to hear the word. Sometimes their number reached about 20. That state was complete about one year, and after that I finished my education, and my father also was transferred to another far town in upper Egypt, and after he was transferred to Rosetta. We hope that God may help us in spreading his light in the hearts

of Rosetta and planting the seed of Bahá'u'lláh in it.[10]

1921-1957 The NSA of Egypt and Sudan was established in 1924 and incorporated in 1934. It was later one of twelve national assemblies that participated in the Ten Year World Crusade

Port Said The Port Said Bahá'ís continued through the years to meet many pilgrims arriving from other countries to make their pilgrimage in the Holy Land. In 1936 the Assembly's address was in Kawala Street, Secretary 1953-38 was J. Chawafaty. In 1923 an Assembly was established at Kummus Saayidah [Kom-el-Saaid?]. The Bahá'ís there also established a school (the Abbasia Charity School) and a pilgrim house, and had taught their faith in 14 towns in the Deni-Suef district.[11]

See also: "The Bahá'í Cause in Northern Egypt", Star of the West 14:8, November 1923, p.313; The Bahá'í Cause in Egypt, Star of the West 14:12 March 1924, p.375-6. In the mid-1920s there were Bahá'ís in Port Said, Alexandria, Isma'ílyyah and Assiut (BWI, 102). Photo of Annual Convention (BW II 1926-28, 35). Photo of Ridvan fest in Alexandria (BW 26-28, 76). Some of the Egyptian Bahá'ís also visited Europe. Mustapha Suliman, of Port Said, travelled in Europe 25 April - 27 July 1922, visiting the Bahá'ís in Paris, London, Berlin, Stuttgart.[12]

Ecclesiastical Court Decision In Muslim countries of the near and middle east only recognised religions were entitled to establish ecclesiastical courts, which presided over matters of personal status, such as registration of birth, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. When the Muslim ecclesiastical courts denounced Egyptian Bahá'ís as heretics, who were not entitled to the benefits of Muslim law, the Bahá'ís appealed to the Egyptian government.

On 10 May 1925 an Islamic court pronounced the Faith to be independent of Islam. (Report BW II 1926-28, 31-33) (See WOB,10-12; Guardian's communications 10/1/26; 12 January 1927 in Bahá'í Administration) Hippolite Dreyus-Barney assisted the Egyptian Bahá'ís in lifting some of the persecution they received (BWIII,210).

1940s A photo of the National Hazirat'ul-Quds under construction in Cairo appeared in Bahá'í World 1940-44, p.47. It was completed by the Centenary celebrations in 1944. (See report BW44-46, 56-59) The number of LSAs in Egypt rose to seven, with the addition of those in Suez, Tanta and Sohag.

Pioneering Hassan Effendi Al Saeed of Port Said and Rashad Effendi Al Hamamsy of Cairo pioneered to the Sudan in 1944, although the latter was transferred back to Egypt after six months (BW44-46, 57). There was also a pioneer to Ethiopia.

Summer School Seventeen attended the first Egyptian summer school, held near Port Said in July (1944?). (BW44-6, 59).

Persecution The Egyptian community experienced renewed persecution in 1944. It was instigated largely by the Sharia Muslim Courts, whose verdicts were

published in newspapers without right of reply (elaborated BW44-46, 57-8). There were disturbances in Tanta and Arish. Bahá'í marriages were not recognised by the Immigration department. Furthermore, the Grand Mufti of Islam in Egypt issued a statement declaring the independent status of the Faith. The NSA was preparing a memorandum for the government seeking protection for the Egyptian Bahá'ís.

To mark the centenary of the martyrdom of the Bab, in July 1950, the NSA of Egypt and Sudan published a memorial pamphlet and held a public meeting, which resulted in coverage in the local press (BW50-54,20). By April 1950 the community had been granted a burial ground by the government in Port Said (M, 4); by April 1951 right of membership on LSAs had been extended to women (M, 12, 97), and the City governate of Cairo stepped toward recognition of Bahá'í laws of personal status, which had been codified and submitted to govt by the Egyptian NSA. (M, 12)

In June 1952 Shoghi Effendi described the Egyptian Bahá'ís as: "the members of the second most persecuted yet resolute community established in the heart of both the Arab and Muslim worlds, who, by virtue of the position they occupy, must play a distinctive part in the emancipation of a proscribed Faith from the fetters of religious orthodoxy" (M, 36)

Abdelnasser, in *The Islamic Movement in Egypt*, records the opposition to the Bahá'í Faith from such Islamic figures as Shikh 'Abdil-Hamid Kishk:

The famous mosque preacher Shikh 'Abdil-Hamid Kishk accused Jews of spreading dissension around the world throughout history. He believed that Israel was created in the region to divine Muslims. Shikh Kishk accused both Israel and colonialism of creating Bahá'ísm as a means to combat Islam....[13]

Property

The NSA had to purchase site for Mashriqu'l-Adhkar in Cairo. The Guardian advised it to establish a fund for purchase of land in a Cable dated December 7 1953 (BN Jan 54, 1-2). The property was acquired by April 1955, 17,000 sq metres on the banks of Nile (M, 81). There was also an endowment for North East Africa. By 1953 the National Hazíratu'l-Quds in Cairo was valued at LE 11,000, Villa Safvan at Port-Fuad was worth LE 8,000, and property at Isma'iliyyij was worth LE 1,500 (ISC, 17) Land for a Summer School was acquired by Ridvan 1957. (M,116)

Ten Year Plan

In 1953 the Egyptian Bahá'ís were given a plan of expansion that required opening 6 African territories to the Faith, and consolidating eight others. (See M72)

Territories to be opened to the Faith AFRICA:

1. French Equatorial Guinea - Knight of Bahá'u'lláh Max Kenyerezi, October 1953

2. French West Africa - KBs Labib Isfahani, Nov 53; Habib Isfahani, April 1954
3. Morocco (International Zone) - KB's Manuchihi Hizari, Sept 53; Hurmuz Zindih, Sept 53; Elsie Austin Oct 53; Muhammad-'Ali Jalili, Oct 53; Husayn & Nusraat Ardikani, Nov 53; 'Ali Akhbar & Shayistih Rafi'i, Nov 53; 'Abbas Rafi'i, Nov 53; Richard & Evelyn Walters, Apr 54; Richard & Mary L. Suhm, Apr 54.
4. Rio de Oro - KB Amin Battah, Oct 53.
5. Spanish Morocco - KB's: Fawzi Zaynu'l-'Abidin & family, Oct 53; Luella McKay, Oct 53; John & Earleta Fleming, Oct 53; Alyce Janssen, Oct 53.
6. Spanish Sahara - KB: Muhammad Mustafa Sulaman, Oct 53.

Territories to be Consolidated AFRICA:

1. Abyssinia
2. Algeria
3. Eritrea
4. Libya
5. Morocco (French)
6. Somaliland
7. Sudan
8. Tunisia

In 1953 the Guardian directed Hands of the Cause Varqa and Ala'i to visit Egypt and Sudan (Messages to the Bahá'í World, 172)

The NSA of Egypt and Sudan became the Regional Assembly for North East Africa. It included French Somaliland; Egypt, Sudan, Abyssinia, Libya, Eritrea, British Somaliland; Italian Somaliland; and Socotra Is. This Assembly was given the task of forming a National Spiritual Assembly for North West Africa, which Shoghi Effendi announced in October 1954 was to be established at Ridvan 1956.

The NSA had the task of incorporating the National Spiritual Assembly of North West Africa, and establishing a National endowment. The NSA was to establish a National Haziratul'Quds in Tunis, but was unable to complete its goals of establishing a National Bahá'í Court, and National Bahá'í Publishing Trust in Cairo. Neither was the NSA able to establish an Israel Branch. It achieved incorporation in 1961.

The NSA of North Africa was to double the number of LSAs and Localities in Egypt & Sudan, and instigate local incorporations in Egypt & Sudan.

By decree 263 of 1960, President of the United Arab Republic, Nasser, dissolved Bahá'í assemblies, confiscated their belongings, banned all

Bahá'í activities in Egypt, provided for the punishment of "any organisation or individual who performed any of the activities of the said Assemblies, by a minimum sentence of six months' imprisonment or a fine not exceeding [100 Egyptian pounds]." (Bahá'í World 1983-86, 284). The community ceased its administrative activities, but continued to hold 19-Day Feasts. Egypt ended the Ten Year plan with 13 LSAs, 11 groups & 9 isolated centres.

Muhammad Mustafa was one of the main pillars of the embattled community. See also Sabri & Rushdie (Bahá'í World 54-63, 905); Farajullah Al-Kurdi (Bahá'í World 54-63, 916); Ruhi (Bahá'í World 54-63, 939); GPB 176, 364-72, 195, 302, 338, 344-5, 333, 336, 400, 178, 195, 248, 286, 257, 262, 267, 280-1, 283, 290, 315, 317, 319, 327, 330, 335-6, 339-41, 343, 383-4, 388

Bibliography See M97,116,148,68

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Bahá'í World 1954-63, 287.

"The Persecution of the Bahá'í Community in Egypt 1985-1986", Bahá'í World 1983-86, 283-

Notes:

[1] Star of the West 4:17, January 19, 1914, p.284-6.

[2] Bahá'í Year Book, vol 1. 1925-26, 118-9.

[3] Mustafa Roumie, 27 January 1923 to Victoria Bedikian, Victorian Bedikian Papers. 23/4-5. Syed Mustapha Roumie. US National Bahá'í Archives.

[4] Bahá'í Administration, 23.

[5] Excerpts are reproduced in The Bahá'í World vol. 2, 1926-28, 14.

[6] `Abdu'l-Bahá in London: Addresses and Notes of Conversations, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988? 54.

[7] Louis G. Gregory, A Heavenly Vista: The Pilgrimage, Washington, 1911.

[8] Mirza Amhad Sohrab, Star of the West 4:7, July 13, 1913, p.121.

[9] Ali M. Yazdi, ÎMemories of Shoghi Effendiâ, The Bahá'í World Vol. XIX, 1983-1986, 756.

[10] 12 January ? 1935. Victoria Bedikian Papers. 31/51. E/M/ Youssef. USBA.

[11] "Bahá'í News and Notes", Star of the West 14:7, October 1923, p.214.

[12] M. Suliman to V. Bedikian, 30 July 1922. Victoria Bedikian Papers. 28/9. Mustapha Suliman. USBA.

[13] Shikh Kishk, The Story of My Days. In Abdelnasser, Walid Mahmoud, The Islamic Movement in Egypt: Perceptions of International Relations 1967-1981, Kegan Paul International, London, 1994, p.138.

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