

CENTENARY OF THE PASSING OF ABDU'L-BAHA (1921-2021)

ABDU'L-BAHA'S LIFE & LEGACY: KEY FACTS



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Pittsburgh, PA • December 11, 2021

Background:
'Abdu'l-Bahá's Life
(1844–1921)

May 23, 1844

Bahá'í History Begins:

1. Declaration of the Báb
2. Birth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S LIFE: HIGHLIGHTS / 1

- *The late historian and Yale Professor Emeritus, Firuz Kazemzadeh, has periodized 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life as follows:*
- **Life with Bahá'u'lláh, 1844–1892**
- **Iran, 1844–1853**
- **Exile and Imprisonment, 1853–1892**
- **Ministry, 1892–1921**
- **Acre Period, 1892–1908**
- **Freedom, 1908–1921**
- **International Travels, 1910–1913**
- **War Years, 1914–1918**
- **Final Years, 1919–1921**

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S LIFE: HIGHLIGHTS / 2

- **Childhood ("Abbás Effendi")**
- At first, childhood was idyllic.
- That situation dramatically changed soon after Bahá'u'lláh, in the fall of 1852, was put in the subterranean dungeon known as the Síyáh-Chál (the "Black Pit").
- On 12 January 1853, after his release from the Síyáh-Chál, Bahá'u'lláh and his family, including **young 'Abbás Effendi (who was eight years old at the time)**, began the arduous journey over mountains under severe winter conditions, a result of which **he reportedly suffered frostbite, with lifelong effects.**

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S LIFE: HIGHLIGHTS / 3

- 'Abbás Effendi became known as 'Abdu'l-Bahá ("Servant of the Glory [of God]," referring to Bahá'u'lláh).
- As a youth in his teens, 'Abdu'l-Bahá took on increasing responsibilities on behalf of his father, serving as Bahá'u'lláh's ambassador, amanuensis (personal secretary), and administrator of his father's affairs.
- In 1863, Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to Constantinople (Istanbul) for four months (arriving on 16 August 1863).
- Then to Adrianople (Edirne) for over four years (arriving on 12 December 1863).
- Finally, on 31 August 1868, to the prison city of Acre in Palestine (modern Akko in northern Israel).

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S LIFE: HIGHLIGHTS / 4

- In 1867 while still in Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh, after publicly proclaiming his prophetic mission in open epistles to the world's most powerful political and religious leaders, withdrew from the general public, whereupon 'Abdu'l-Bahá became Bahá'u'lláh's representative in all external matters except those affecting the community of exiled Bahá'ís (as they came to be known) internally.
- In 1872, at the urging of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá married Munírih Khánum, from a distinguished Bábí/Bahá'í family.
- They had nine children—seven daughters and two sons—of which four daughters survived to adulthood.
- By Ottoman decree, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's status as an Ottoman prisoner continued [from 1868] thereafter for 40 years (ending in 1908).

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S LIFE: HIGHLIGHTS / 5

- **Ministry, Acre Period, 1892–1908**
- In 1907, 'Abdu'l-Bahá began relocating his family to Haifa, where he had built a house at the foot of Mount Carmel, one of the most sacred places in the Holy Land.
- On the majestic slopes of Carmel, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also constructed a shrine in honor of the Báb.
- In March 1909, he tearfully placed the Báb's mortal remains in the Shrine of the Báb, thereby establishing it as a holy pilgrimage site for Bahá'ís, second in importance only to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Bahjí.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S LIFE: HIGHLIGHTS / 6

- July 1908, the Ottoman "Young Turk" Revolution.
- Sultán Abdülhamid was divested of autocratic powers.
- Amnesty for all political prisoners.
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá was liberated.
- Thus freed, he could now travel abroad to spread Bahá'u'lláh's message of world unity, far and wide.
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá's travels abroad first began at the advice of his treating physicians.
- After suffering several bouts of serious illness, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was urged by his doctors to change his environment for the betterment of his health.
- So, in August 1910, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sailed to Egypt, where he spent the next year.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S LIFE: HIGHLIGHTS / 7

- **International Travels (1910–1913)**

- In August 1910, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sailed to Egypt, where he spent the next year.
- Then, in August 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá –his health having improved– traveled to Europe.
- On 10 September 1911, he gave his first public address, from the pulpit of the City Temple in London.

- In December, 'Abdu'l-Bahá returned to Egypt for the winter, thus concluding his first journey to the West.
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá's second journey to the West (March 25, 1912–June 17, 1913) was much more extensive, most notably in America, where he spent 239 days, from 11 April 1912 to December 5 1912.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S LIFE: HIGHLIGHTS / 8

- After departing New York on Dec. 5, 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá embarked on the rest of his itinerary to England, France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary.
- This was a highly successful mission.
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá proclaimed Bahá'u'lláh's teachings.
- Expounded his major principles.
- Applied them to the most pressing contemporary issues of the day.
- Consolidated the fledgling Bahá'í communities throughout North America.



'Abdu'l-Bahá with a group of Bahá'ís
under the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France,
January 1913

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S LIFE: HIGHLIGHTS / 9

- During the First World War, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's contacts with the outside world were drastically curtailed.
- Notwithstanding, he penned a series of 14 important letters—known as the **"Tablets of the Divine Plan"** (in March–April 1916 and February–March 1917)—which served as a charter and mandate for greatly expanding the Bahá'í Faith internationally.
- The **"Tablets of the Divine Plan"** were addressed primarily to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, whom he charged with the task of leading this global mission.
- Meanwhile, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged the Bahá'í farmers (who were of Zoroastrian background) throughout the Jordan River valley and on the shores of the Sea of Galilee to produce an abundance of wheat, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá then distributed to the people of Haifa, saving them from starvation, since food supply chains were cut off.
- The British—who had occupied Haifa at the end of September 1918—witnessed firsthand this extraordinary humanitarian service of famine relief.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S LIFE: HIGHLIGHTS / 10

- On April 27, 1920, the British government, in a formal recognition of his humanitarian service, knighted 'Abdu'l-Bahá (investing him with the insignia of the Knighthood of the British Empire, which title he accepted but never used).
- On November 28, 1921, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, at the age of 77, passed away in Haifa, British Palestine (now Israel).
- His funeral was held the very next day. On short notice, an estimated 10,000 mourners assembled to pay their respects, in spontaneous tribute, to 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
- Throngs of ethnic Arabs, Jews, Kurds, Turks, and Europeans and Americans were also in attendance.
- The procession was led by the British High Commissioner for Palestine, who was accompanied by the governors of Jerusalem and Phoenicia along with other officials, including religious leaders from among the local Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Jewish, and Druze faith-communities.
- The coffin was solemnly carried up the slopes of Mount Carmel, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá's mortal remains were laid to rest in one of the chambers of the Shrine of the Báb.



Ten thousand mourners from numerous religious backgrounds attend the funeral of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa, 29 November 1921

"As to **the three aims** which Shoghi Effendi has stated in his America and the Most Great Peace to have been **the chief objectives of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry**, it should be pointed out that the first was: **[1] The establishment of the Cause in America**; **[2] the erection of the Bahá'í Temple in Ishqábád**, and **[3] the building on Mt. Carmel of a mausoleum marking the resting-place of the Báb**, were the two remaining ones."

- SHOGHI EFFENDI

Directives from the Guardian (1973), p. 1

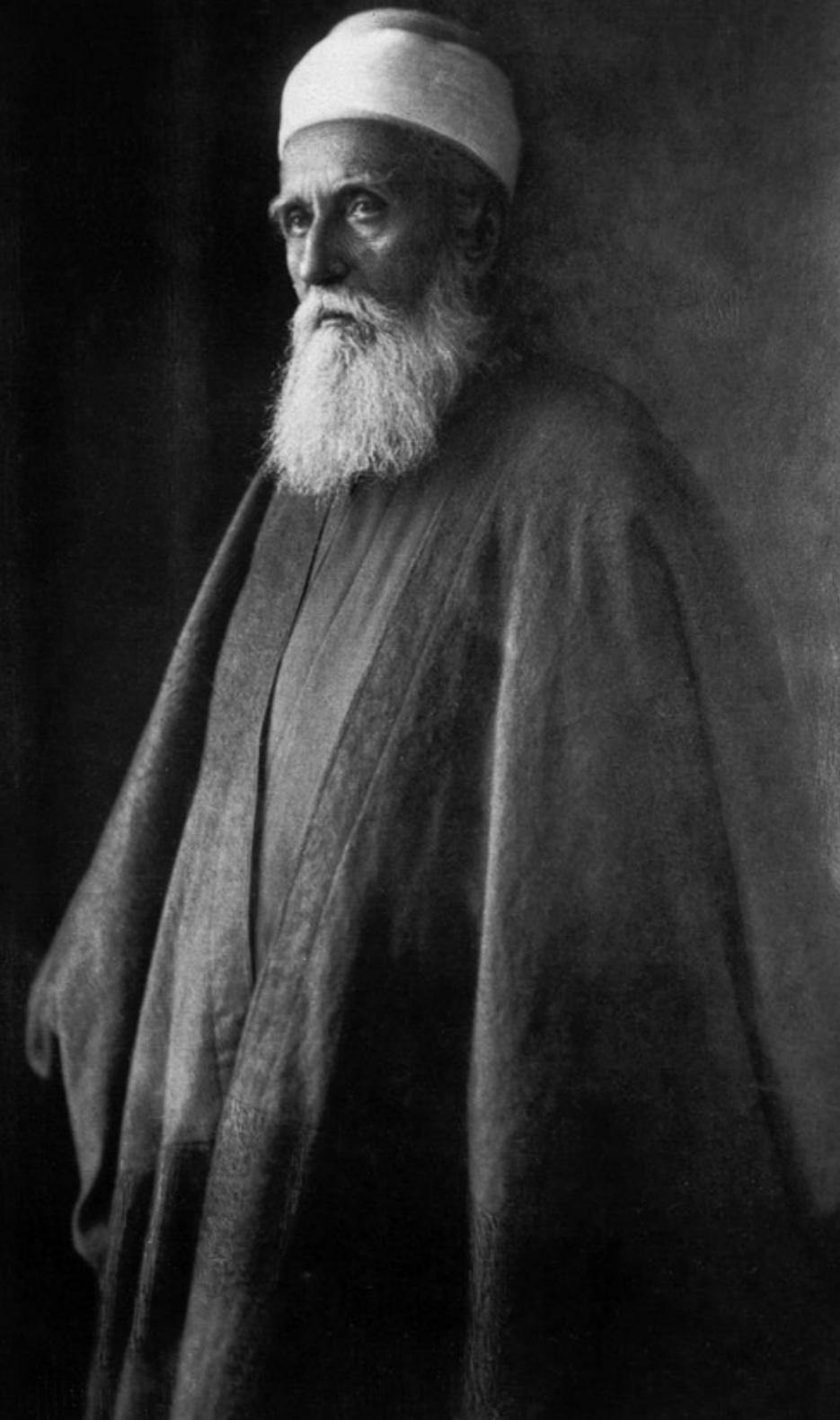


'Abdu'l-Bahá with a group of friends in Brooklyn, New York, June 1912

“The Perfect Exemplar”
as Bahá'í Teacher

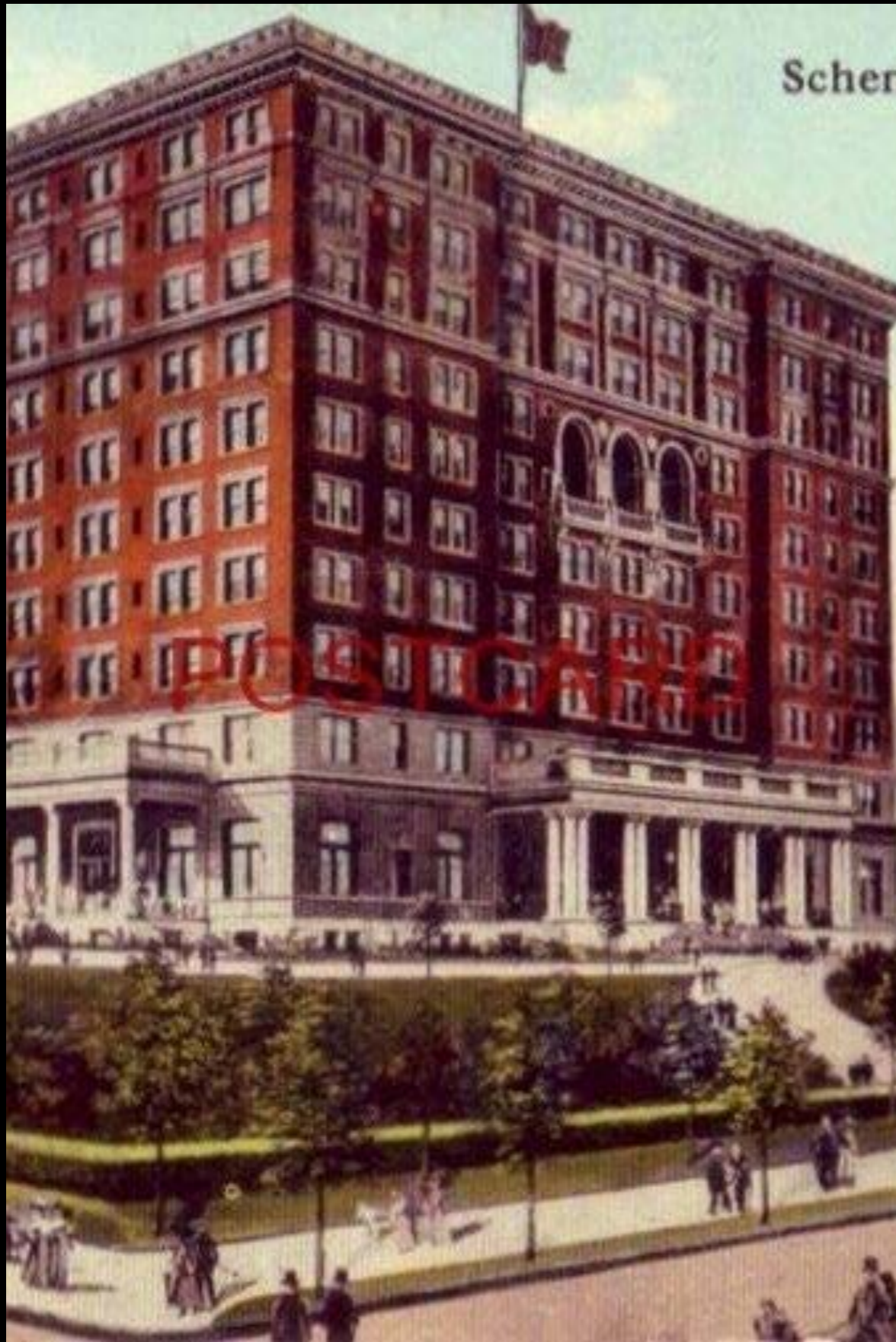
1912 – 'ABDU'L-BAHA SELECTS KEY TEACHINGS OF BAHÁ'U'LLAH

- As both an introduction to the Bahá'í Faith and to the life and legacy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), let's look at the **distinctive principles of Bahá'u'lláh** (1817–1892), as selected – and emphasized – by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in America in 1912.
- Principle #12 points to the key role of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the **"Center of the Covenant."**



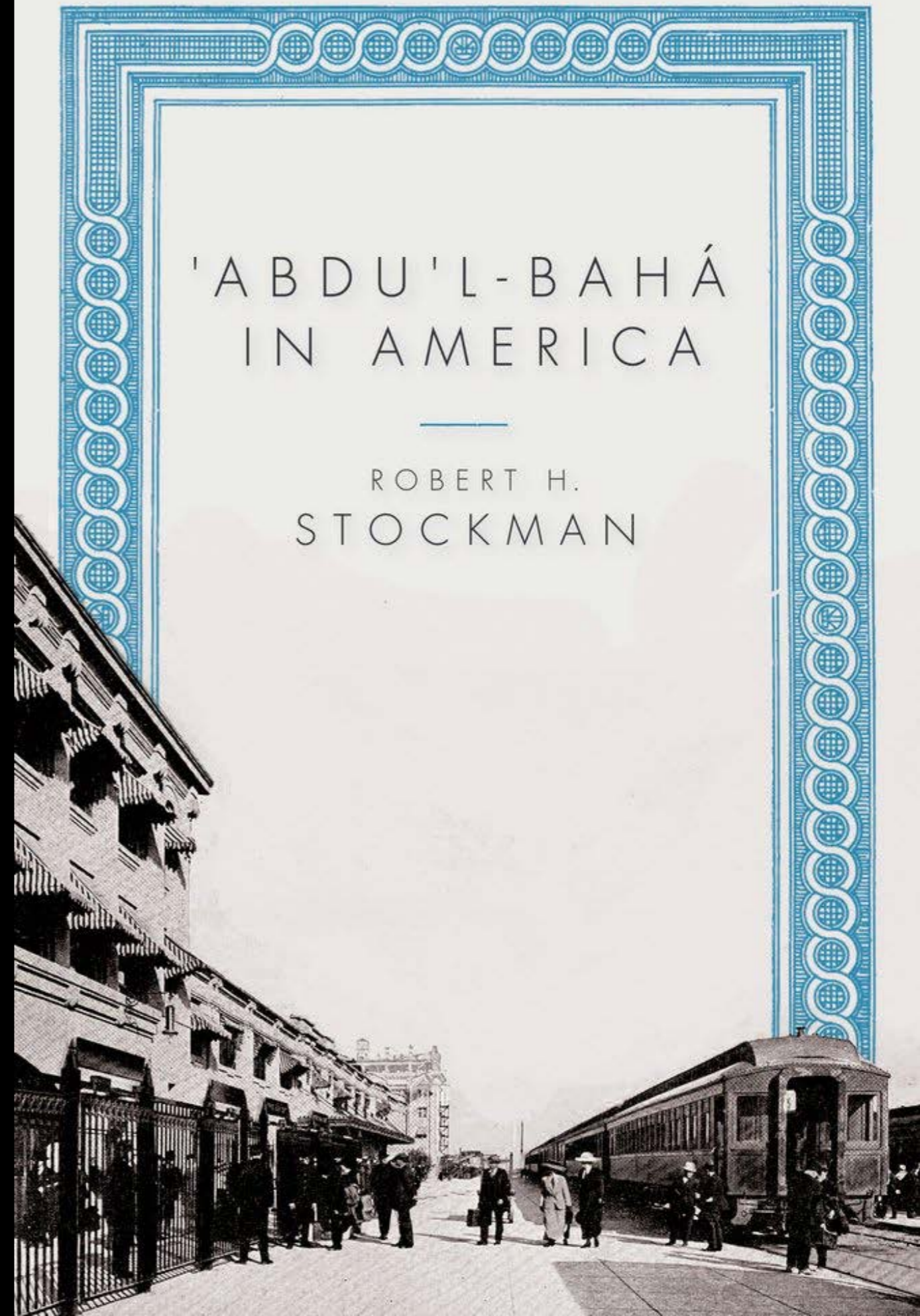
Portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris, France, October 1911

Background:
Pittsburgh, May 7, 1912



PITTSBURGH, MAY 7, 1912

- It was a significant talk because it was the first time 'Abdu'l-Bahá had enunciated a series of Bahá'í principles to a public audience in North America. He did not just list principles, however; he set them in the context of the inadequacy of material civilization and the need for spiritual civilization. It was a point that, later, Bahá'ís did not always understand or emphasize when they explained the Faith's teachings.
- After the talk, 'Abdu'l-Bahá met privately with leaders of thought. Five local newspaper articles were a product of his visit. – Robert H. Stockman, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in America* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing, 2012), pp. 152–153.



'ABDU'L-BAHÁ:

"I will speak to you
concerning the special
teachings of Bahá'u'lláh."

2 December 1912

Talk at Home of Mr. and Mrs.
Edward B. Kinney

780 West End Avenue, New York

Photo: Portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá taken in
New York, New York, December 1912



- On Monday, 2 December 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave a talk in New York on the “the special teachings of Bahá’u’lláh” in direct response to the question: “You have asked me what new principles have been revealed by Him.” ... ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had responded:
- I will speak to you concerning the special teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. All the divine principles announced by the tongue of the Prophets of the past are to be found in the words of Bahá’u’lláh; but in addition to these He has revealed certain new teachings which are not found in any of the sacred Books of former times. I shall mention some of them; the others, which are many in number, may be found in the Books, Tablets and Epistles written by Bahá’u’lláh—such as the Hidden Words, the Glad Tidings, the Words of Paradise, Tajalliyát, Ṭarázát and others. Likewise, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas there are new teachings which cannot be found in any of the past Books or Epistles of the Prophets. ...
- – Excerpt from [Baha’i Faith: The Basics](#) (p. 45).

they are old and familiar; we have heard them before.” Therefore, I will speak to you upon the distinctive characteristics of the manifestation of Bahá’u’lláh and prove that from every standpoint His Cause is distinguished from all others. It is distinguished by its didactic character and method of exposition, by its practical effects and application to present world conditions, but especially distinguished from the standpoint of its spread and progress.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s opening statement, at this public meeting held in the home of Bahá’í artist, Julia Thompson, is quoted, in full, for the simple reason that few, if any, other such declarations by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, available in English, state the case so clearly, i.e. that Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings are *sui generis* (Latin, literally “of its own kind”)—that is, unique in the history of religions. This same question, in fact, came up again a little over two weeks later. On Monday, 2 December 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave a talk in New York on the “the special teachings of Bahá’u’lláh” in direct response to the question: “You have asked me what new principles have been revealed by Him” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, BRL). In answer to this excellent question, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had responded:

I will speak to you concerning *the special teachings of Bahá’u’lláh*. All the divine principles announced by the tongue of the Prophets of the past are to be found in the words of Bahá’u’lláh; *but in addition to these He has revealed certain new teachings which are not found in any of the sacred Books of former times*. I shall mention some of them; the others, which are many in number, may be found in the Books, Tablets and Epistles written by Bahá’u’lláh—such as the Hidden Words, the Glad Tidings, the Words of Paradise, Tajalliyát, Ṭarázát and others. Likewise, in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* there are *new teachings which cannot be found in any of the past Books or Epistles of the Prophets*. ...

1. A fundamental teaching of Bahá’u’lláh is the oneness of the world of humanity. ...
2. Another *new principle* revealed by Bahá’u’lláh is the injunction to investigate truth—that is to say, no man should blindly follow his ancestors and forefathers. ...
3. Bahá’u’lláh has announced that the foundation of all the religions of God is one, that oneness is truth and truth is oneness which does not admit of plurality. *This teaching is new and specialized to this Manifestation.*

Bahá'u'lláh's "Special" Teachings

Nov 15, 1912

Dec 2, 1912

(New York)

1. Search for Truth

1. SEARCH FOR TRUTH

*First among the great principles revealed by Him [Bahá'u'lláh] is that of the investigation of reality. The meaning is that every individual member of humankind is exhorted and commanded to set aside superstitious beliefs, traditions and blind imitation of ancestral forms in religion and investigate reality for himself. Inasmuch as the fundamental reality is one, all religions and nations of the world will become one through investigation of reality. The announcement of this principle is not found in any of the sacred Books of the past. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). – Excerpt from *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (p. 49).*

'Abdu'l-Bahá

2. See Humankind as One

2. SEE HUMANKIND AS ONE

A second characteristic principle of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is that which commands recognition of the oneness of the world of humanity. Addressing all mankind, He says, "Ye are all the leaves of one tree." There are no differences or distinctions of race among you in the sight of God. . . . *No other scriptures contain such breadth and universality of statement; no other teachings proclaim this unequivocal principle of the solidarity of humanity.* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). – Excerpt from *Bahá'i Faith: The Basics* (p. 51).

'Abdu'l-Bahá

3. See Religion as One

3. SEE RELIGION AS ONE

Bahá'u'lláh has announced that the foundation of all the religions of God is one, that oneness is truth and truth is oneness which does not admit of plurality. *This teaching is new and specialized to this Manifestation [Bahá'u'lláh].* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). – Excerpt from *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (p. 53).

'Abdu'l-Bahá

4. Religions Should Unify

4. RELIGIONS SHOULD UNIFY

Another fundamental announcement made by Bahá'u'lláh is that religion must be the source of unity and fellowship in the world. If it is productive of enmity, hatred and bigotry, the absence of religion would be preferable. *This is a new principle of revelation found only in the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh. ...*

*He [Bahá'u'lláh] sets forth a new principle for this day in the announcement that religion must be the cause of unity, harmony and agreement among mankind. If it is the cause of discord and hostility, if it leads to separation and creates conflict, the absence of religion would be preferable in the world. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). – Excerpt from *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (p. 54).*

'Abdu'l-Bahá

5. Religion Respects Science

5. RELIGION RESPECTS SCIENCE

Furthermore, He [Bahá'u'lláh] proclaims that religion must be in harmony with science and reason. If it does not conform to science and reconcile with reason, it is superstition. Down to the present day it has been customary for man to accept a religious teaching, even though it was not in accord with human reason and judgment. *The harmony of religious belief with reason is a new vista which Bahá'u'lláh has opened for the soul of man.* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). – Excerpt from *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (p. 56).

'Abdu'l-Bahá

6. Women and Men Are Equal

6. WOMEN AND MEN ARE EQUAL

Spiritually, women and men are equal, but, not socially—yet. *“Another [new] teaching,”* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá announced at the Thompson event, *“is that there shall be perfect equality between men and women”* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). This is both a mandate and prophecy. For ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, this issue had great social importance, and is a distinctive feature of the Bahá’í social agenda. Bahá’u’lláh *“establishes the equality of man and woman,”* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declared at the Kinney event, hastening to add: *“This is peculiar to the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, for all other religions have placed man above woman”* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). – Excerpt from *Bahá’í Faith: The Basics* (p. 57).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

7. Abolish Every Prejudice

7. ABOLISH EVERY PREJUDICE

Again, Bahá'u'lláh declares that all forms of prejudice among mankind must be abandoned and that until existing prejudices are entirely removed, the world of humanity will not and cannot attain peace, prosperity and composure. *This principle cannot be found in any other sacred volume than the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. ...*

A new religious principle is that prejudice and fanaticism—whether sectarian, denominational, patriotic or political—are destructive to the foundation of human solidarity; therefore, man should release himself from such bonds in order that the oneness of the world of humanity may become manifest. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). – Excerpt from *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (p. 59).

'Abdu'l-Bahá

8. Promote World Peace

8. PROMOTE WORLD PEACE

Universal peace is assured by Bahá'u'lláh as a fundamental accomplishment of the religion of God—that peace shall prevail among nations, governments and peoples, among religions, races and all conditions of mankind. *This is one of the special characteristics of the Word of God revealed in this Manifestation.*

('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). – Excerpt from *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (p. 60).

'Abdu'l-Bahá

9. Provide Education for All

9. PROVIDE EDUCATION FOR ALL

"He has also proclaimed the principle that all mankind shall be educated and that no illiteracy be allowed to remain," 'Abdu'l-Bahá declared by adding: *"This practical remedy for the need of the world cannot be found in the text of any other sacred Books"* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). ...

"Bahá'u'lláh declares that all mankind should attain knowledge and acquire an education," 'Abdu'l-Bahá declares, adding: *"This is a necessary principle of religious belief and observance, characteristically new in this dispensation"* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). – Excerpt from *Bahá'i Faith: The Basics* (p. 61).

'Abdu'l-Bahá

10. Economic Problems Require Spiritual Solutions

10. ECONOMIC PROBLEMS REQUIRE SPIRITUAL SOLUTIONS

In brief, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, at the Kinney meeting in New York, introduced the idea that Bahá'u'lláh's teachings offer spiritual solutions to economic problems as follows, "He [Bahá'u'lláh] has set forth the solution and provided the remedy for the economic question. *No religious Books of the past Prophets speak of this important human problem*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). ...

To their credit, the Bahá'í writings set forth various economic teachings, although not systematically developed (a task for economists). *Bahá'í teachings do so largely by anchoring economic values in human values.* – Excerpt from *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (pp. 62–63).

'Abdu'l-Bahá

1 1. The Universal House of
Justice is Unique

11. THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE IS UNIQUE

*This “principle” is actually an institutional principal, i.e. the Universal House of Justice, which is a unique religious institution. Ordained by Bahá’u’lláh in his Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (1873), the Universal House of Justice was established in 1963. This august institution is the democratically elected council that oversees the affairs of the global Bahá’í community today and has no real precedent or parallel in prior religious history. Bahá’u’lláh “has ordained and established the House of Justice. . . . A universal, or international, House of Justice shall also be organized,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá proclaimed at the Kinney event. “Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, and that which the Universal House of Justice ordains shall be obeyed by all mankind,” that this “international House of Justice shall be appointed and organized from the Houses of Justice of the whole world” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL). – Excerpt from *Bahá’i Faith: The Basics* (p. 63).*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

12. The Special Bahá'í “Covenant” Protects Bahá'í Unity

12. THE SPECIAL BAHÁ'Í "COVENANT" PROTECTS BAHÁ'Í UNITY

... Bahá'u'lláh designated 'Abdu'l-Bahá as successor, interpreter, and exemplar of Bahá'u'lláh himself and his teachings. As such, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is referred to as the "Center of the Covenant." At the Kinney meeting, 'Abdul-Bahá briefly introduced this key Bahá'í institution. *"As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past: It is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant,"* 'Abdu'l-Bahá declared, adding, "By this appointment and provision He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). – Excerpt from *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (p. 64).

'Abdu'l-Bahá

13. Adopt a Universal Auxiliary Language

13. ADOPT A UNIVERSAL AUXILIARY LANGUAGE

Another new religious teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá often spoke about, is the adoption of a universal auxiliary language: "Bahá'u'lláh has announced the necessity for a universal language which shall serve as a means of international communication and thus remove misunderstandings and difficulties," 'Abdu'l-Bahá declared at the Thompson meeting. *"This [new] teaching is set forth in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Book) published fifty years ago"* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added). This is why: "And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is the origination of one language that may be spread universally among the people," 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated in the "Tablet to the Hague," further explaining: "This teaching was revealed from the pen of Bahá'u'lláh in order that this universal language may eliminate misunderstandings from among mankind" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections, BRL). – Excerpt from *Bahá'i Faith: The Basics* (pp. 64–65).

'Abdu'l-Bahá

14. Work is Worship

14. WORK IS WORSHIP

*The following principle was also presented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the context of the "new" teachings given by Bahá'u'lláh. At the Kinney event, 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasized that Bahá'u'lláh "teaches that it is incumbent upon all mankind to become fitted for some useful trade, craft, or profession by which subsistence may be assured, and this efficiency is to be considered as an act of worship" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL). "If a man engageth with all his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshipping God in churches and temples," 'Abdu'l-Bahá, elsewhere states, adding, "In this universal dispensation man's wondrous craftsmanship is reckoned as worship of the Resplendent Beauty" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections, BRL). – Excerpt from *Baha'i Faith: The Basics* (p. 65).*

'Abdu'l-Bahá

15. The Bahá'í Faith Offers Other “New Principles”

15. THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH OFFERS OTHER "NEW PRINCIPLES"

At the end of his discourse at the Kinney event on 2 December 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá concluded, "The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are boundless and illimitable. *You have asked me what new principles have been revealed by Him. I have mentioned a few only. There are many others, but time does not permit their mention tonight*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, BRL) (italics added).

As corroboration of this reported statement, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in a Tablet, likens Bahá'u'lláh's "new principles" to a "new garment" for the new age: "Out of this pitch blackness there dawned the morning splendour of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. *He hath dressed the world with a garment new and fair, and that new garment is the principles which have come down from God.*" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections, BRL) (italics added). – Excerpt from *Bahá'í Faith: The Basics* (pp. 65–66).

'Abdu'l-Bahá

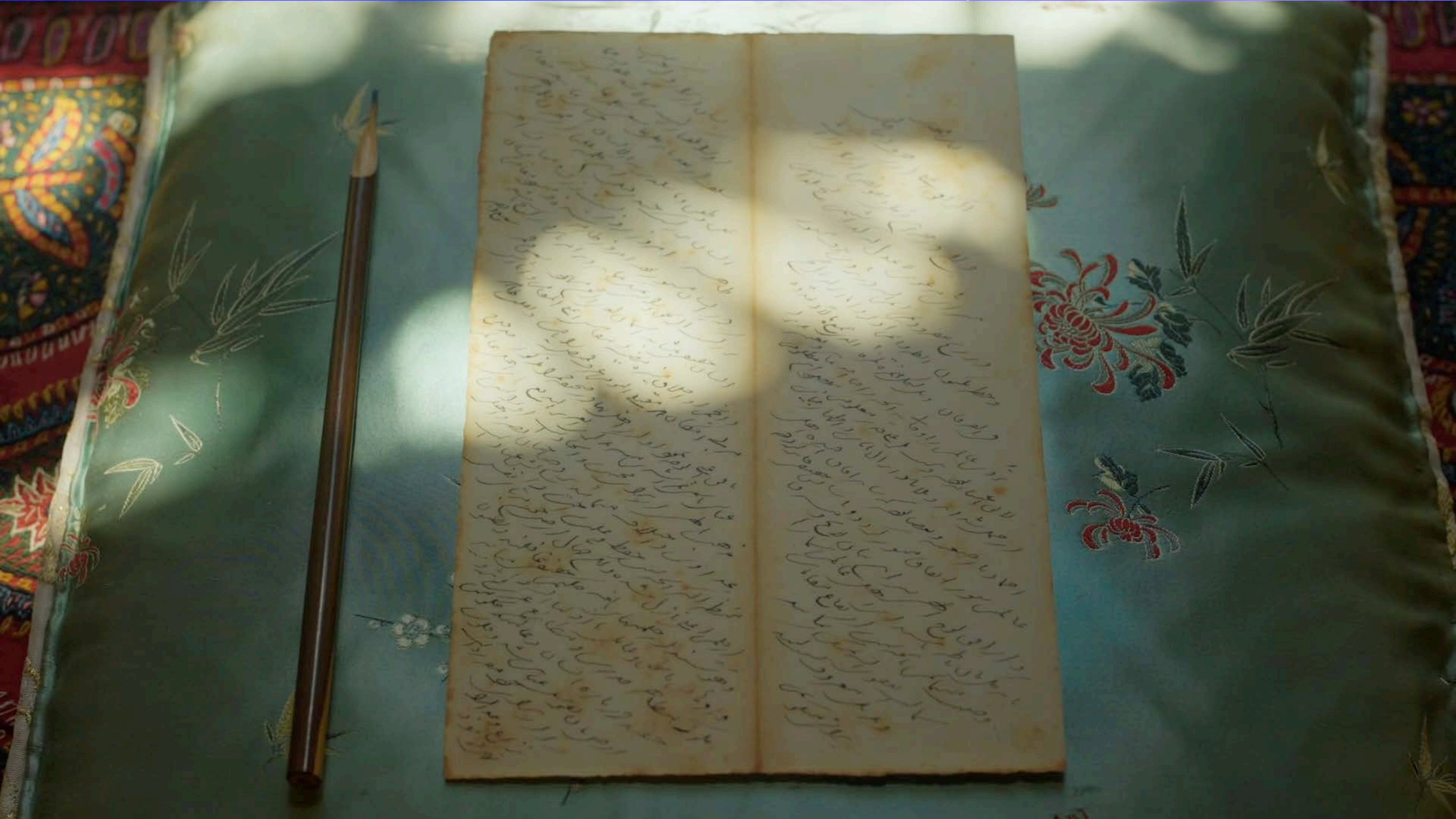
'ABDU'L-BAHA

"CENTER OF THE COVENANT"

- After Bahá'u'lláh passed away on May 9, 1892, 'Abdu'l-Bahá led the Bahá'í community for the next 29 years (1892-1921).
- Bahá'u'lláh had explicitly designated 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Bahá'í community's officially appointed **successor**, authorized **interpreter**, and moral exemplar.
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá's subsequent role as the **Center of the Covenant** is pivotal in Bahá'í history, for it was the lynchpin of Bahá'í solidarity as a faith-community, safeguarding it from schism.



Color portrait, 'Abdu'l-Bahá,
Paris, France, October 1911



Handwritten text in two columns, likely in a historical or literary language, possibly Persian or Arabic script. The text is dense and fills most of the page area.



The 1893 Russian Publication of Baha'u'llah's Last Will and Testament: An Academic Attestation of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Successorship

Christopher Buck *Independent Scholar, Pittsburgh*

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Abstract

This study concerns the publication of a document that may well be unique in the history of religions: the written designation of a successor by the charismatic founder of a world religion. Mīrzā Ḥusayn-'Alī (1817–1892), known as Bahā'-Allāh (more commonly, Baha'u'llah, 'Splendor of God'), prophet-founder of the Bahā'ī Faith. In the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī ('Book of My Covenant'), Baha'u'llah designated his eldest son, 'Abbās Effendī, known as 'Abdu'l-Bahā (1844–1921), as successor. Baha'u'llah died on 29 May 1892 (at 3:00 a.m.) in Bahjī (near 'Akkā), Palestine (now modern-day Israel), and the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī was read aloud nine days later. In 1893, Russian orientalist, Aleksandr Grigor'evich Tumanski (1861–1920) published this document, in the original Persian, with Russian translation, together with a eulogy composed by the celebrated Bahā'ī poet, Mīrzā 'Alī-Ashraf-i Lāhijānī, known by his sobriquet, 'Andalīb ('Nightingale'; d. 1920). Since 'Andalīb was an eyewitness to the events he describes, his eulogy may be treated as a historical source. Tumanski's scholarly publication of the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī is discussed in the context of Russian scholarly and diplomatic interests. The present study is presented as follows: (1) Introduction; (2) Aleksandr Grigor'evich Tumanski; (3) Contents of the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī and Brief Commentary; (4) 'Andalīb's Eyewitness Account of the Reading of the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī, 1892; (5) The St. Petersburg Edition of the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī; (6) The Original Manuscript of the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī and the Textus Receptus; (7) Textual Variants Between the St. Petersburg Edition of the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī and the Textus Receptus; (8) The Cambridge Manuscript of the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī in the E. G. Browne Collection; and (9) Conclusion: Contemporary-Historical Attestation of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Successorship by Tumanski and other Russian Notables.

1. Introduction

On 29 September 1892, at a meeting of the Oriental Section of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society, Russian Orientalist, Baron Viktor Romanovich Rosen (1849–1908), announced the decease of the

Keywords

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Baha'u'llah
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Browne



Figure 1: Russian Orientalist, Baron Viktor Romanovich von Rosen (1849–1908) mentor of Aleksandr Grigor'evich Tumanski (1861–1920), and editor of the latter's 1893 publication of Baha'u'llah's 'Book of My Covenant' (Kitāb-i 'Ahdī). (Public domain.) Archived in the St Petersburg Branch of the Archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Undated photograph. Source: Rosensches Familienarchiv, Hamburg. Courtesy of Prof. Dr. Claus Freiherr von Rosen, Hamburg.

prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith, Mīrzā Ḥusayn-'Alī Bahā'-Allāh, known as Baha'u'llah ('Splendor of God', 1817–1892), who passed away on 29 May 1892 (at 3:00 a.m.) in Bahji (near 'Akka'), Palestine (now modern-day Israel). Rosen then read a paper that he had recently edited for publication, written by his junior colleague and former student, Aleksandr Grigor'evich Tumanski (also Anglicized as 'Toumansky'; b. 23 September 1861; d. Istanbul, 1 December 1920). In this then-forthcoming article, which Rosen read aloud to his colleagues, Tumanski published, for the first time, the original Persian/Arabic text of Baha'u'llah's 'Book of My Covenant' (Persian: Kitāb-i 'Ahdī; Arabic: Kitāb 'Ahdī),² along with a translation into Russian.³ This text, translation and accompanying commentary appeared in the *Zapiski Vostochnogo otdeleniia Imperatorskogo Russkogo arkheologicheskogo obshchestva* (Proceedings of the Oriental Department of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society), which was the first Orientalist Russian academic journal (established in 1886).⁴ The 'Book of My Covenant' is the way Tumanski understood and translated the title into Russian.

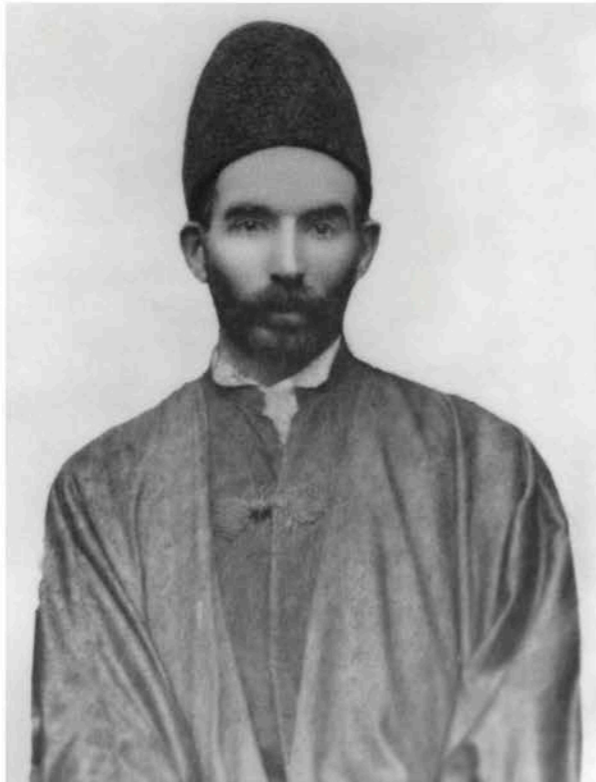


Figure 3: The celebrated Baha'i poet, 'Andalib, who was an eyewitness to the events surrounding Baha'u'llah's ascension. Undated photograph. Source: Baha'i Media Bank. Courtesy of the Baha'i International Community, Haifa, Israel.

'Greek', not 'Roman', in the modern European sense. The Greek month here must imply the Julian calendar month. Thus Tumanski translates the phrase in the poem as: 'It was the sixteenth day of the month of the Greeks, namely, of May'.¹⁰³

The dates can be reconciled by adding the 13-day difference between the Julian and Gregorian calendars: 16 May 1892 (Julian calendar) plus 13 days converts to 29 May 1892 (Gregorian calendar). Tumanski, throughout all his correspondence with Rosen, uses the Julian calendar, which was the official Russian calendar of the time. That 16 May 1892 is confirmed by Tumanski in his letter to Baron Rosen: 'The news of his death which transpired in Bahji ... near Akka on the morning of 16 May, according to the old calendar'.¹⁰⁴

It is noteworthy that, in his funeral oration at the Baha'u'llah's funeral, as recounted by 'Andalib, 'Abdu'l-Baha recites a passage from the Kitāb-i Aqdas, but does not declare the successorship provision of the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī, of the contents of which were disclosed on the ninth day following Baha'u'llah's the ascension. Evidently, wisdom dictated that the announcement of Baha'u'llah's designation of 'Abdu'l-Baha as successor was judiciously postponed, so as not to divert the focus from Baha'u'llah to 'Abdu'l-Baha during this period of grief and mourning. As to the succession provision of the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī itself, the poet provides an independent, eyewitness attestation in verse 29: 'Thanks be God's that we are all beneath the Most Mighty

document in the original Persian and provided a Russian translation as well, and in so short a time after the 29 May 1892 decease of the prophet-founder of what was to emerge, in the course of its subsequent expansion and institutional development, as a new world religion, is remarkable. Tumanski's later publication, in the 1892 ZVORAO (1893), of the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī – within around one year after Baha'u'llah's death – provides contemporaneous attestation of a historic document that may well be unique in its function and purpose (i.e. explicitly designating and conferring successorship) considering the fact that, in the history of religions, never has there been a clear document conferring successorship upon a designated leader after the death of the founder of a world religion, prior to successorship provision of the Kitāb-i 'Ahdī, which provision exists in splendid isolation. Because of this designation, 'Abdu'l-Baha is reverently referred to by Persian-speaking Baha'is as 'His Holiness, the Center of the Covenant' (*ḥadrat-i markaz-i mīthāq*). The 'Centre' keeps the line of succession straightforward and the circle of unity of the Baha'i faith-community unbroken.¹⁸¹

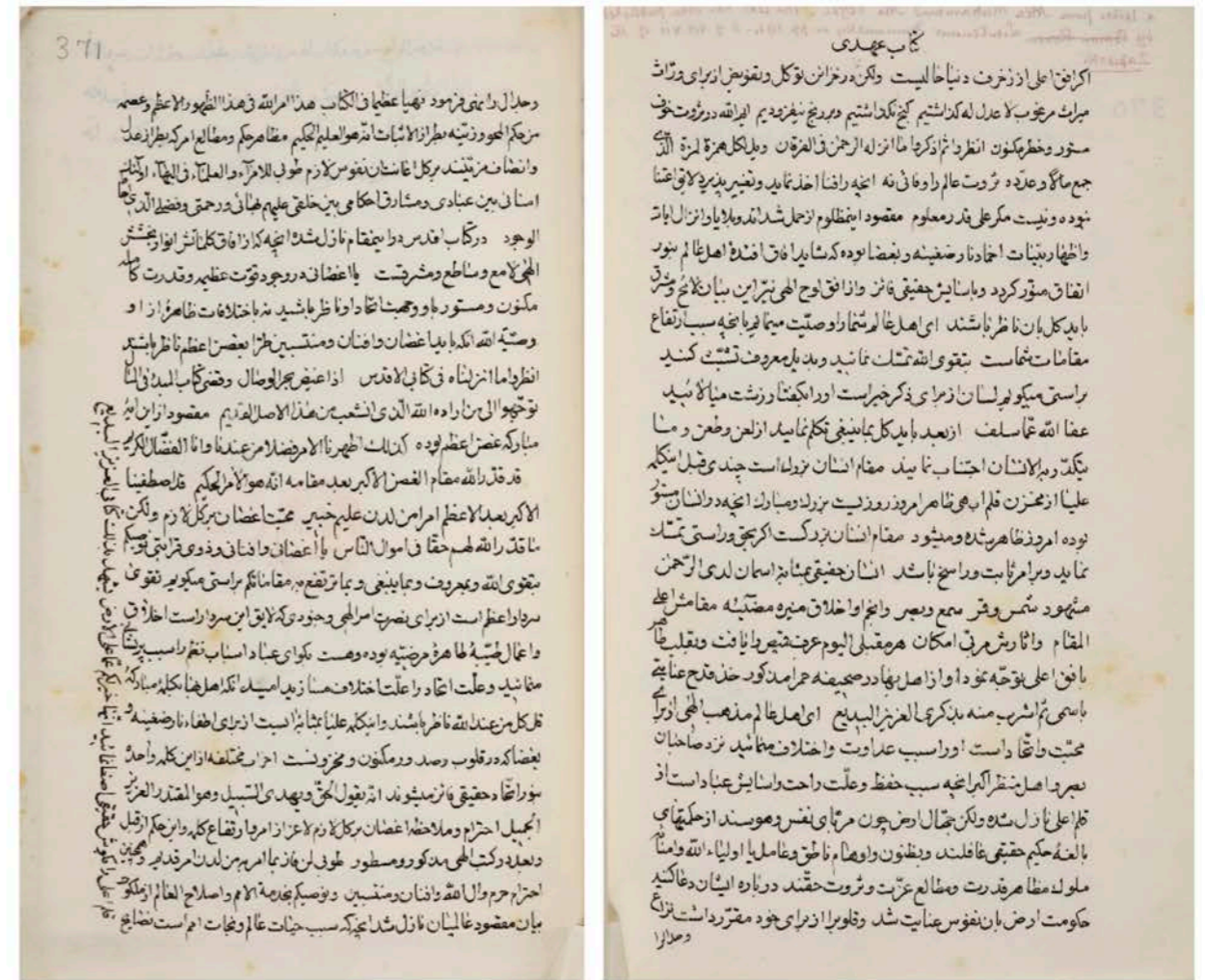


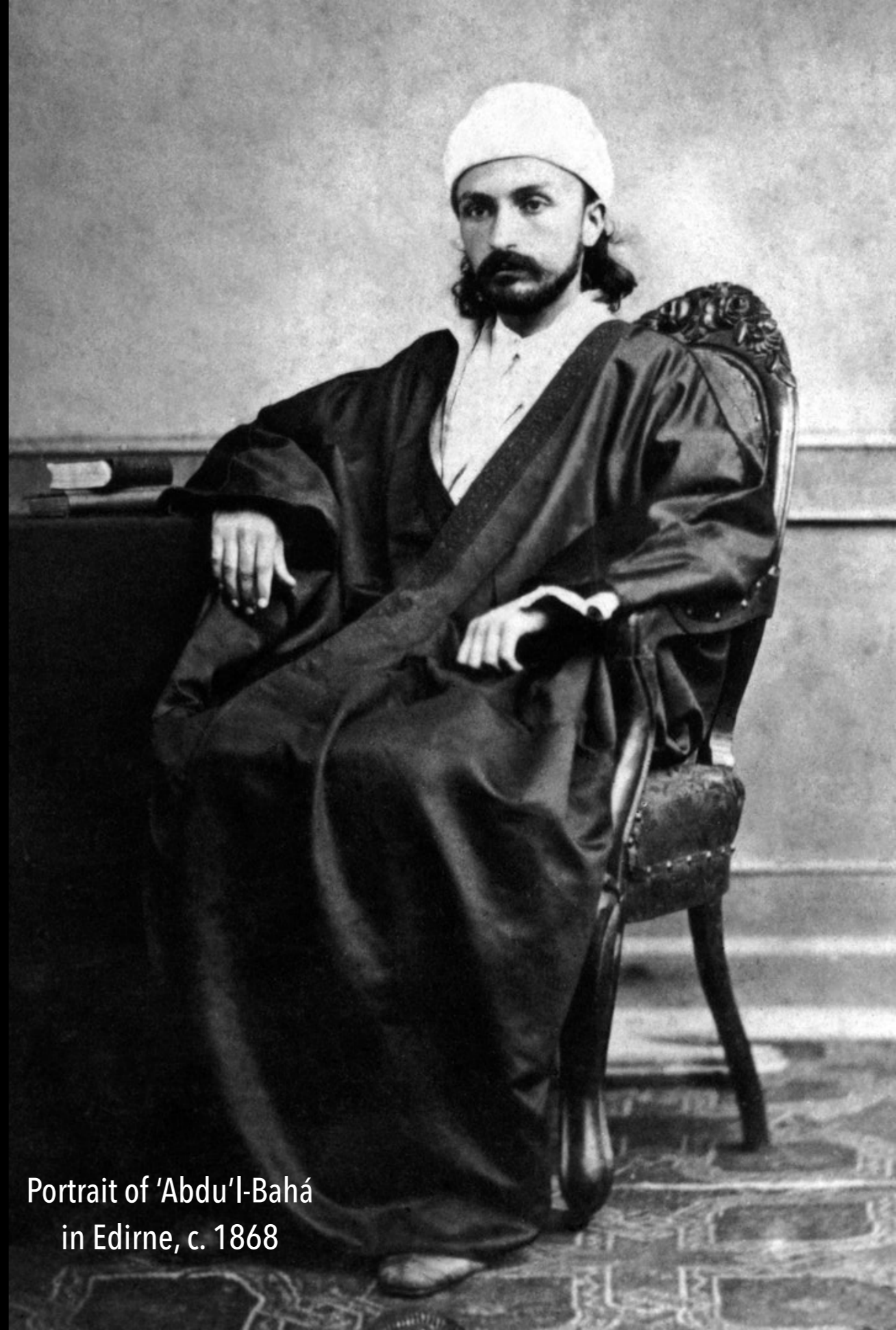
Figure 4: Folio 370 verso and 371 recto of F. 25(9), Manuscript 8 (listed as 'Kitābu 'Ahdī') of the E. G. Browne Collection. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.



Portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Philadelphia, June 1912

ABDU'L-BAHA'S LIFE: KEY FACTS

- Most of the key facts and quotations provided above are based on the new book, [Bahá'í Faith: The Basics](#) (Routledge, 2021).
- The key principles of Bahá'u'lláh that 'Abdu'l-Bahá expounded (see above) are part of his "living legacy"— i.e. these "new" or "special" principles are useful for teaching the Bahá'í Faith today.
- For further study, you can [download this PowerPoint](#).



Portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
in Edirne, c. 1868

BAHA'I FAITH: THE BASICS (2021)

CHRISTOPHER BUCK

- 1. Introduction: What is the Bahá'í Faith?
- 2. Beliefs: Bahá'í Spiritual Teachings
- 3. Principles: Bahá'í Social Teachings
- 4. History: Bahá'u'lláh and His Covenant
- 5. Scripture and Authoritative Writings: Bahá'í Sacred Texts and Inspired Guidance
- 6. Institutions: The Bahá'í Administrative Order
- 7. Building Community: What Bahá'ís Do
- 8. Social Action: Social and Economic Development
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Christopher
Buck

Bahá'í Faith

the basics

QUESTIONS?