



The Handsomest Young Man in Baghdad

By Annabel Knight

Published: June 12, 2012

Permalink: <http://239days.com/2012/06/12/the-handsomest-young-man-in-baghdad/>

“IF ANYONE HAS NOT YET MET ME,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “or if anyone has some urgent business, call them. All others I will meet in the public gatherings because I have no time and it is impossible to see everyone individually.” It was in the morning on Wednesday, June 12, 1912, at 309 West 78th Street in Manhattan, where he was staying. And he was exhausted.

He was talking with one of his secretaries, Mahmúd. Perhaps polite New York society would have been piqued to encounter such forthrightness from ‘Abdu’l Bahá, but those friends of his who knew his life story would have understood completely.

When ‘Abdu’l Bahá was twelve or thirteen years old--his name was Abbás then--he began managing the crowds who came to see his father. Bahá’u’lláh had returned to Baghdad from the mountains of Kurdistan in 1856. The family was in exile; as prisoners of the Ottoman Empire they weren’t allowed to leave the city.

On his own door, Abbas hung a placard. “Those who come for information may apply within,” it read, but, “those who come only because of curiosity had better stay away.” On his father’s door he hung another. It read: “Those who are searching for God come and come and come.”

The young Abbás had taken it upon himself to distinguish between crass voyeurs and truth seekers, and to admit only the latter into his father’s presence. While some visitors were sincerely hoping to learn about his religion, others were more like inquisitive tourists, arriving to view an interesting exhibit. No doubt the same was happening in New York.

In 1903, his sister, Bahiyyih told the story of these years to Myron Phelps’s friend, Madame Canavarro, and Phelps published it in his book, *The Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, in 1904. She said that her brother was also a dynamic and proficient horseman. He had sky blue eyes and a short, trimmed beard. “He was,” she said, “one of the handsomest young men in Baghdad.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had grown from the courageous 8 year old boy, who faced the pelting stones of angry mobs in the streets of Tehran, to become Baha’u’llah’s chief companion in his exiles, and his protector.

In Baghdad as a teenager, despite not having attended school, Abdu’l Baha would challenge the city’s learned men in debate in the mosques. They would often ask: “Who is your teacher? Where do you learn the things you say?” His reply was invariably: my father. He soon became known as “The Youthful Sage.”

Abbás would continue to filter Bahá’u’lláh’s seemingly endless visitors for the remaining seven years the family spent in Baghdad. He would argue the exiles’ case in front of government officials in Constantinople, the capital, where the Sultan held the family under watch for four months. During the six years they faced starvation under house arrest in Adrianople, now Edirne, on the European side of the Bosphorus, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá motivated them to survive. ...and then for the last twenty-four years of Bahá’u’lláh’s life in around the Ottoman penal colony of ‘Akká, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remained a prisoner until 1909.

How to Cite this Article

The formatting below is from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th Edition. For other academic citation styles, please adapt accordingly. Since the **239 Days** site and its contents may be updated from time to time, we recommend you include a “last modified” date, which is provided at the top of both the web and PDF versions of this article.

FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:

Annabel Knight, “The Handsomest Young Man in Baghdad,” *239 Days in America*, ed. Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett, June 12, 2012, <http://239days.com/2012/06/12/the-handsomest-young-man-in-baghdad/>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Knight, Annabel. “The Handsomest Young Man in Baghdad.” *239 Days in America*. Edited by Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett. June 12, 2012. <http://239days.com/2012/06/12/the-handsomest-young-man-in-baghdad/>.

HOW TO CITE THE *239 Days in America* WEBSITE IN A BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Menon, Jonathan, and Robert Sockett, eds. *239 Days in America*. <http://239days.com/>.

Terms of Use

239 Days in America™ and the 239Days.com website is licensed under a Creative Commons 3.0 License as specified at this link: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. **This PDF file** is shared with you with the following additional terms:

YOU MAY quote from this PDF file with proper attribution. Your citation must include the author's name and the **239 Days in America** project's name. You may download and print this PDF file, and you may share individual PDF files in print or electronic form.

Although we want to make our work easy to share, we also wish to maintain the unity and integrity of **239 Days in America** as a whole. Therefore,

YOU MAY NOT republish or rebroadcast our PDF files in a public forum—such as by uploading them to a blog, app, or other web property, publishing them in print form, or distributing them widely using electronic means—without our prior written consent. We invite you to discuss such opportunities with us by contacting the Editor-In-Chief at editor@239Days.com. Otherwise, please share the permalinks displayed at the top of each file.

YOU MAY NOT extract pages from this file, recombine this PDF file with other documents, assemble its contents into any free or paid product, app, ebook, collection, compilation, or archive, nor remove this page of Terms. The **Adobe PDF**™ security features employed in this document have been selected to prevent such use. You may not circumvent these security features in any way.