



## BAHĀ'ĪYA KĀNOM

**BAHĀ'ĪYA KĀNOM** (b. 1262/1846, Tehran), eldest daughter of [Bahā'-Allāh](#) and considered by Bahais as the “outstanding heroine of the Bahai Dispensation” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, 1965, p. 108). She was named Fāṭema but is better known by her titles of Bahā'īya Kānom, Bahīya Kānom and Ḥāzrat-e Warāqa-ye 'Olyā (usually translated as the Greatest Holy Leaf). From the age of seven, she accompanied her father and family in the successive stages of their exile (Baghdad, Istanbul, Edirne, and finally 'Akkā). During these years, she refused to marry and dedicated herself to the service of her father and the organization of the household. When Bahā'-Allāh died in 1892 and most of his family turned against 'Abd-al-Bahā', she remained loyal to her brother.

Bahā'īya Kānom's most important contributions were however reserved for her advanced years, when she occupied an increasingly important position, complementing her brother's role, and later nurturing and supporting Shoghi Effendi in the early years of his ministry. She also met Bahais who came to Haifa as pilgrims, maintained an extensive correspondence, and acted as custodian of relics and archives. She was put in charge of affairs during 'Abd-al-Bahā's travels, 1911-14, and on several occasions during Shoghi Effendi's absences from Haifa. Those who met her describe her as possessing a quiet, self-effacing nature, a remarkable combination of outward frailty and inner strength. She died in Haifa on 15 July 1932.

According to Bahai teaching, there is in each religious dispensation one woman (the Virgin Mary, Fāṭema the daughter of Moḥammad, and, in the Babi



dispensation, Qorrat-al-'Ayn Ṭāhera, q.v.) who outshines all others and becomes an embodiment of feminine virtues and even a symbol of the feminine aspects of the Divine. Bahā'īya Kānom fills this role in the Bahai dispensation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

A commemorative volume entitled *Bahīyyih Khānum, the Greatest Holy Leaf*, Haifa, 1982, was published on the 50th anniversary of her death. It contains many translations of her previously unpublished writings and also passages written about her by Bahā'-Allāh, 'Abd-al-Bahā', and Shoghi Effendi. It also has an appendix listing all significant references to her in English-language Bahai publications. Her spoken reminiscences are in Lady [Sara] Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, Wilmette, 1967, pp. 37-69, and M. H. Phelps, *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, New York and London, 1903, pp. 12-94 (the relevant sections has been reprinted as *The Master in 'Akkā*, Los Angeles, 1985).

See also M. Gail, *Khānum, the Greatest Holy Leaf*, Oxford, 1982.

J. Savi, *Bahīyyih Khānum, ancella di Bahā*, Rome, 1983. For a Bahai assessment of her spiritual and symbolic significance, see B. Nakhjavani, *Response*, Oxford, 1981, pp. 30-35, 40-41.