

District of Egypt and the Sudan

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THE Craft is in a flourishing condition in the Land of the Pharaohs, there being 17 Lodges working under the English Constitution; 4 under the Scottish Grand Lodge, as well as a number under the National Grand Lodge of Egypt, several of which are composed mainly of British Brethren, and which work in the English Language.

The little that is known of Freemasonry in the early days seems to indicate that Lodges under the English Constitution first came into existence in Alexandria in the early '60's, the first Warrant having been granted to "St. John's," No. 919. This Lodge lasted for about 15 years, and was erased in 1877. The "Hyde Clark," founded in 1865, lasted four years. "St. John's and St. Paul's," founded in 1867, existed for five years.

"Bulwer," "Grecia," and "Zetland" are the only Lodges now existing of those which were formed in the space of five years during the "sixties."

The oldest Lodge is "Bulwer," No. 1068, meeting in Cairo. Its Warrant is dated 7th June, 1865. In those days, Egypt, being regarded as part of the Turkish Empire, was placed under the direction of the D.G.M. for Turkey. "Bulwer" takes its name from Sir Henry Bulwer (afterwards Lord Dalling) who was at one time D.G.M. for Turkey. Prince Halim Pasha was initiated in "Bulwer," and, in 1867, was appointed

D.G.M. for Egypt, and, as such, was installed during a brief visit to England. His Highness was exiled in 1868, and the D.G. Lodge remained in abeyance until 1870 when its activities were resumed. In 1877, owing to the recognition by the Grand Lodge of England to the National Grand Lodge of Egypt, the Patent of D.G.M. was withdrawn and the District Grand Lodge of Egypt ceased to exist. In the early days the Craft passed through troublous times, owing to persecution due to the suspicion with which Freemasonry was regarded, and to the political troubles which arose in the '70's and '80's. During this period Lodges were unable to work, but when affairs reached a more settled state efforts were successfully made to revive the Craft, and Masonry has flourished from then and is now in a healthy condition.

The present District Grand Lodge of Egypt and the Sudan was formed in 1899, the late Bro. Lord Kitchener being the first District Grand Master. Bro. Lord Kitchener went to South Africa in 1900, and in the following year Bro. Sir Reginald Wingate was installed as D.G.M., a position he occupied until 1919. During this period, and under the wise rule of Sir Reginald, the Craft prospered exceedingly; the number of Craft Lodges increased from 4 to 13; R.A. Chapters from 3 to 6; and Mark Masonry also progressed. Bro. John Langley succeeded Sir Reginald in 1920, but,

having left Egypt, he resigned in 1923. Bro. Sir Lee Stack was then appointed and installed in 1924. Before the end of that year Sir Lee was assassinated in the streets of Cairo, to the great sorrow of the Brethren to whom he had endeared himself during his all too brief period of government of the District. Bro. Brig.-Gen. C. S. Wilson is the present D.G.M., and he takes the keenest interest in the work of his widely spread District. Each of the last three District Grand Masters was installed in Cairo by the Grand Secretary (Bro. Sir Colville Smith) assisted by a Deputation of Grand Lodge Officers from London. As previously stated there are now 17 Craft Lodges in the District, and a glance at the map will convey some idea of the vast area over which they are spread, from Alexandria, Port Said, and Suez, in the North, to Khartoum and Atbara, in the South.

A few short notes regarding the several Lodges may be of interest:—

“Bulwer,” 1068 (Cairo), founded in 1865. Many distinguished names connected with Egypt and the Sudan appear in its records, amongst them Lord Grenfell, Lord Kitchener, Sir Leslie Rundle, and Sir Reginald Wingate. The late King Edward paid a visit to this Lodge in 1865, and it is believed to be the first Lodge visited by H.M. after his initiation. “Bulwer” being the oldest Lodge in the District, is the parent Lodge of several of the other bodies. Its Membership is about 90.

“Grecia,” 1105 (Cairo), founded in 1866. Up to 1890 its members were of Greek Nationality. Lodge records from 1866 to 1880, unfortunately have been lost. From 1882 to 1890 the Lodge was not working owing to its political troubles. In the latter year Englishmen were first proposed as Joining members. As “Grecia,” and a Lodge named “Concordia” (working in Italian), were practically in abeyance at that time, and it was thought that there was room for another English-speaking Lodge in Cairo, a successful effort was made to revive “Grecia,” and a number of British names were put up for joining. At the regular meeting on 8th May, 1890, British names appear for the first time in the Attendance Book, the first signature being that of “H. H. Kitchener.” At this meeting it was decided that, in future, the Lodge should work in English, and one of the oldest Masons in Egypt, who was present, states that on this occasion the Lodge was opened in Greek and closed in English—surely an unique occurrence in the annals of Freemasonry. In December, 1891, Bro. Kitchener was elected Master of the Lodge; Bro. Wingate was S.W. In 1895 the Hall in which the Lodge met was burnt down, and the Warrant and most of the Regalia, etc., was destroyed. As no Warrant existed, the Lodge could not meet until January, 1896, when a Warrant of Confirmation had been received from Grand Lodge. A number of distinguished names appear in the Lodge records—Lord Kitchener, Sir Reginald Wingate, Lord Milner, Lord Athlumney, Sir Rennell Rodd, Sir Lee Stack, etc., etc. “Grecia” has a membership of about 100, mostly Officers of the Army, Officials of the Government, etc.

“Zetland,” 1157 (Alexandria), was founded in 1867, and has continued its activities until the present time,

even through the eventful times of 1882. The Minute Book, which had been placed in the British Consulate for safe custody, was destroyed owing to the Consulate being burnt down. The account, and other books, amongst them being a digest of the Minutes prepared by an energetic Secretary, had been left in the Lodge Room, so that all the records were not lost. For some years after 1882 the Lodge worked more or less under difficulties, but the loyal support and self-sacrificing efforts of the Brethren held the Lodge together, not only keeping its end up, but assisting it to go forward to better and happier times.

The Lodge first met at the English Masonic Hall; then at Fleming Station, Ramleh, in 1874; the Masonic Hall, 1878; and the German Club, 1885. In 1905 the Dedication of the new Masonic Hall (where the Lodge now meets) and the opening of the Alexandria Masonic Club, took place. “Zetland” has a membership of about 130.

“Star of the East,” 1355 (Cairo), was constituted in 1871. No records exist previously to 1907, they having been burnt or lost. This Lodge worked in Arabic until 1908, and refused for many years to accept Europeans as members. In 1890, Bro. Idris Bey Ragheb, G.M. of the National Grand Lodge of Egypt, was Master. For a number of years prior to 1907 the Lodge had been declining. Meetings were seldom held owing to the difficulty of getting sufficient members to attend. Bro. Delanoy, late D.D.G.M., was the first European to be admitted. He saw that the occasion was favourable for revivifying the Lodge with English blood, and, mainly owing to his exertions, several good British Brethren were brought in. In the latter part of 1907 English replaced Arabic as the working language. “Star of the East” has a membership of about 50.

The above mentioned Lodges may be regarded as the four old Lodges of the District, and they worthily maintain the principles and tenets of the Order.

Soon after the re-conquest of the Sudan, and the establishment of a settled form of Government in that vast country, Freemasonry made its appearance there. The first Lodge to be consecrated at Khartoum was “Khartoum,” 2877, on 19th December, 1901. It has a membership of about 60, mostly Officers of the Army and Officials of the Government.

“Sir Reginald Wingate,” 2954 (Khartoum), was consecrated on 20th April, 1903, by the D.G.M. of that period (Bro. Gen. Sir Reginald Wingate, Sirdar of the Egyptian Army, and Governor-General of the Sudan). This Lodge is in a very flourishing state, and is a liberal supporter of the Masonic Charities and the Freemasons’ Hospital.

It has also contributed generously to the M.M.M. Fund. It has a membership of about 100.

“Pelusium,” 3003 (Port Said), founded in 1904, and is named after the ancient city of Pelusium, which was situated near where Port Said now stands. This is an excellent Lodge, and gives great assistance to the Masonic Institutions. It also heads the list in the District of contributors to the Masonic Million Memorial Fund. It has a membership of about 75.

"Delta," 3060 (Tanta), was consecrated 19th November, 1904, and although only a small Lodge, it being situated in a somewhat out of the way part of Egypt, it does its best to keep up the Masonic traditions. Membership about 29.

"Lotus," 3296 (Cairo). In 1907 there were only two English working Craft Lodges under the Grand Lodge of England, "Bulwer," considered semi-military, and "Grecia," whose members were mostly Officers and Government Officials. A number of English Freemasons, chiefly members of Lodges under the Egyptian Constitution, thought there was room in the Capital for another Lodge, purely civilian. The outcome of this was the consecration of "Lotus" on 29th May, 1908. This is a very popular Lodge and one that pulls its full weight with regard to the Charities, etc. Membership about 70.

"Mahfal el Ittihad" (Union), 3348 (Khartoum). Consecrated 9th December, 1908. For some years after the re-conquest of the Sudan only two Lodges were in existence here, both working in English. There were a number of Government Officials, Officers of the Egyptian Army, Merchants, etc., who did not speak English, some of whom were members of Lodges under other Constitutions, and others who desired to be initiated into the mysteries of the Craft. The desirability of having an Arabic-speaking Lodge was felt, and a petition, cordially supported by the D.G.M., was put forward. The name "Union" is specially suitable as the Lodge membership consists of Brethren of many different races and religious beliefs who assemble together fraternally and carry out the great principles of Masonry in the midst of a nation which, hitherto, believed only in religious brotherhood, and which regarded Freemasonry as an institution whose principal aim was to undermine religion. "Mahfal el Ittihad" is probably the only Lodge under the English Constitution which works in the Arabic language. It has a membership of about 75.

"Ataka," 3367 (Suez), was consecrated 21st May, 1909. As far as is known there was a Lodge named "Oriental" working in Suez in 1860. The Hall in which the Lodge met is still to be seen, but it is now used for other purposes. In 1909 it was desired to form a Lodge, and "Ataka" came into being. It takes its name from a hill overlooking the town. In spite of a fluctuating population the Lodge has justified its formation, and maintains the traditions of Freemasonry in first-class style. The standard of working is excellent and a very fine Masonic spirit prevails. "Ataka" has a membership of about 115.

"Lord Kitchener," 3402 (Cairo), was consecrated 17th November, 1909. This is a purely military Lodge, and has the largest membership (about 180) of any Lodge in the District.

"Atbara," 3407 (Atbara). Consecrated 19th January, 1910. The town of Atbara is the Headquarters of the Sudan Government Railways and Steamers Department, and in 1909 it was ascertained that among the continually increasing British community there were a number of Brethren who had no other means of continuing their Masonic activities than by travelling a

distance of some 200 miles to the Capital, Khartoum. The time was considered favourable to form a Lodge and "Atbara" came into being. It has justified its existence right from the beginning, and well and worthily upholds all that Masonry stands for. It is a Hall Stone Lodge, so far, the only one in the District. It has a membership of about 50.

"Ionic," 3997 (Cairo), was consecrated 28th February, 1920. This Lodge was formed by a number of Brethren who were members of Lodges working in English under the National Grand Lodge of Egypt. It has a membership of about 50.

"Alexandria," 4184 (Alexandria). Date of Warrant 3rd November, 1920. Has a membership of about 48.

"Red Sea," 4570 (Port Sudan), was consecrated 5th January, 1924. This Lodge was formed to meet the needs of Brethren residing in this flourishing and ever-growing Port, for similar reasons to those mentioned concerning "Atbara." The consecration was carried out by the late Bro. Sir Lee Stack, assisted by a number of Brethren from Khartoum and Atbara. The Lodge is progressing slowly, but nevertheless surely, and promises to be a real acquisition to the District. Its membership is about 40.

"United Service," 4571 (Alexandria). Consecrated 14th November, 1923. A purely military Lodge formed to meet the needs of members of the British Forces stationed in and near Alexandria. It has a membership of about 80.

At the present time there are in the District two other Lodges under the English Constitution, "Unity, Peace and Concord," 316, and "Social Friendship," 497. These are the only Lodges under the Constitution with travelling Warrants. "Social Friendship" will shortly be leaving for India.

Lodges of Instruction exist at Cairo, Atbara, Port Said, and Alexandria.

The District is liberal in its support of the Masonic Institutions, and has given freely to the Masonic Million Memorial Fund. In addition, it has endowed a bed in one of the Cairo Hospitals, for the use of Brethren in need. This is a Memorial to the late D.G.M., Bro. Sir Lee Stack, and has already proved of benefit.

From the foregoing brief note it will be observed that the District Grand Lodge of Egypt and the Sudan is fully maintaining the grand principles of the Order. The Lodges are very much alive and keenness is shewn in keeping up the great reputation of the Mother Grand Lodge of the World.

The Cairo Lodges meet, at present, in the Masonic Hall, Maison de Farro, Sharia Antikhana el Masria (nearly opposite the Cairo Museum), and Brethren visiting Egypt during the coming winter may be assured of receiving a hearty welcome from the courteous District Grand Secretary (Bro. H. M. Thornton, P.D.G.D., Gibraltar), and his assistant (Bro. H. St. C. Garrood) both of whom will be most pleased to furnish any information concerning Freemasonry in Egypt.