

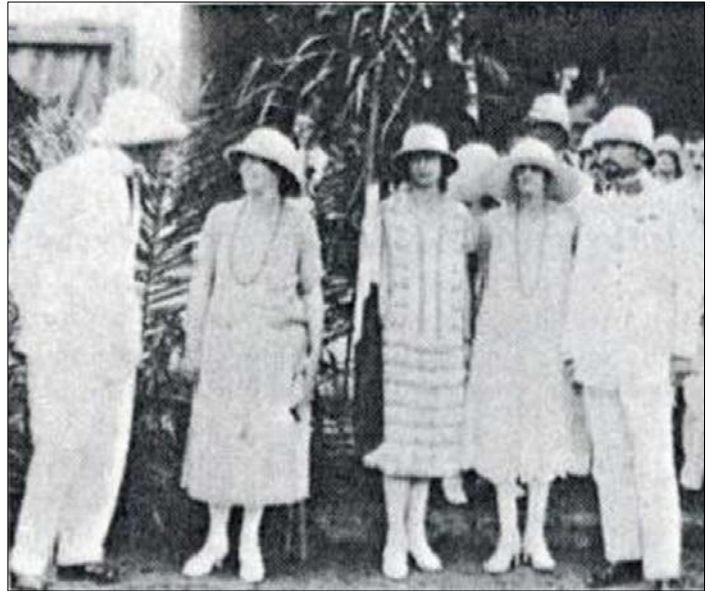
# Matteo Maurice Alfassa

## Sephardic Intellectual / French Government Official

By Shelomo Alfassa

**M**atteo Maurice Alfassa (1876-19XX?) was the son of Maurice Alfassa, born 1843 at Adrianople (modern Edirne, Turkey).<sup>1</sup> Maurice traveled from Adrianople to Egypt where he met his wife Mathilde Ismaloun (b. 1857 in Alexandria). Max, their first child died; they then had Matteo who was born at Alexandria in 1876, and later a daughter, Mirra, while in Paris.<sup>2</sup> Matteo's grandparents were Mirra Pinto and Matteo Ismaloun who married in Ottoman Alexandria. Mirra Pinto (daughter of Saïd Pinto) was born in Ottoman Cairo. Pinto is a Sephardic name, a name Spanish & Portuguese Jews brought with them from Iberia in the 15th century to the Ottoman Empire; it's an old surname, from Castile.

The Alfassa family emigrated to France in 1877 and lived on the, "Boulevard Haussmann near the Opera" located in the heart of Paris. The relationship between Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire and France lends itself to the educational institution known as the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU) which brought the modern French educational system to Jewish children throughout the Mediterranean and beyond. After many of the families learned French, it was not uncommon for some to migrate to France and other French speaking locations. France had colonial possessions, in various forms, from the beginning of the 17th century until the 1960s. In the 19th and 20th centuries, its global colonial empire was the second largest in the world behind the British Empire.



Governor-General Alfassa (on right with beard), with Madame Alfassa (on left) speaking with future Governon-General Reste.

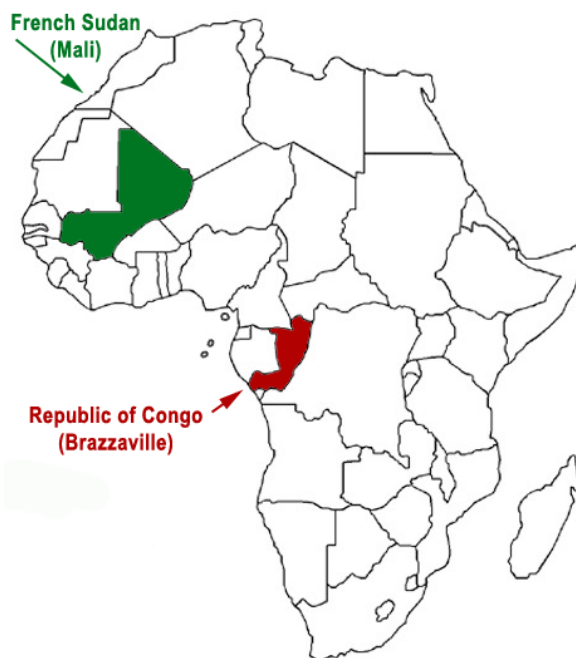
An intellectual, Matteo was said to have a library of some 2,000 books at home. He graduated *Ecole Polytechnique* in Paris and married Eva Brosse. He had many papers published on the subject of labor and

<sup>1</sup> Alfassa means "one from Fes" (as in the city of Fes in modern Morocco) however it is obvious these people do not know this. Many Jews with the name Alfassa, DeFes or Alfasi lived in Turkey, specifically Adrianople. A common ancestor and one of the most important rabbis in Jewish history was Isak Alfassi (known as the RiF) came from Fes and moved to Spain in the 11th century. Alfassi/Alfassa surnames can be found in Spain since that time. With the bloody carnage thrust upon the Jews in Spain by members of the Catholic Church in the 14th and 15th century, thousands of Jews fled to Turkey, later, hundreds of thousands were forced out in 1492 and also went there.

<sup>2</sup> Their third child was Mirra Alfassa (1878-1973), known as "The Mother," she is/was considered a Hindu spiritual leader by a large group of followers in India. See [www.alfassa.com/momma.html](http://www.alfassa.com/momma.html).

politics,<sup>3</sup> and helped translate a book into French from English.<sup>4</sup> Along with a George Alfassa [who has not yet been researched] he edited a large volume, a formal report on home “sweatshop” workers in Paris that worked in the linen trade.<sup>5</sup> After the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Matteo would become the general manager of a railway<sup>6</sup> where he dealt with various union issues.<sup>7</sup> It is the railroad which may have lead him to Africa, but this is only a theory of the author of this paper.

Matteo Alfassa served the French government as Lieutenant Governor of the Middle Congo and Congo (Brazzaville)<sup>8</sup> from August 21, 1919 to August 16, 1922. Two years later, at age 48, Alfassa was promoted to Governor-General of the French Congo and French Equatorial Africa, where he would serve five separate terms.<sup>9</sup> He held the office of Governor-General from July 8, 1924 to October 1924. His second post was May 1925 to December 1925. A photo from November 11, 1925 marking a ceremony for Armistice Day shows Matteo as a slender man, tall, with a dark trimmed beard. He is wearing a light colored suit and is donning a pith helmet, as is his wife Madam Eva Alfassa. Matteo’s third term in office was November 1929 - August 1930; fourth, April 1931 - November 1931; and fifth, December 1932 - December 1933.<sup>10</sup> A street was named on behalf of the Governor and it remains today, “Rue Alfassa,” where the French Embassy still exists.



From 1934-1935, Alfassa served as Governor of the country of Martinique. Martinique is an island in the eastern Caribbean Sea, south of Puerto Rico, that has remained part of France.<sup>11</sup> Today there remains a well known major street named after the Governor, known as “Boulevard Alfassa” that runs along the coast line in the capital city of Fort-de-France.

<sup>3</sup> M. Alfassa. "La Crise Ouvriere Recente des Chemins De Fer Anglais. Une solution nouvelle des conflits." Paris, 1908. Qtd. in Alderman, Geoffrey. "The Railway Companies and the Growth of Trade Unionism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." The Historical Journal, Cambridge University Press: 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Cannon, E. *Histoire des theories de la production et de la distribution dans l'economie politique anglaise de 1776 a 1848*. 1910.

<sup>5</sup> See: "Recent Official Papers." The Economic Journal: Royal Economic Society, 1908.

<sup>6</sup> P. Mantoux and M. Alfassa, *La Crise du Trade-Unionisme*. Paris, 1903. pp. 213,320.

<sup>7</sup> As an intellectual, Alfassa wrote various articles. For his comments on post WWI accounts, see: Alfassa, M. "L'Amerique, Suzeraine de Monde." *La Nouvelle Revue*. 4th ser., 58. April 1922; For an article of political interest, see: Alfassa, M. *Le probleme financier: la politique de tresorerie*. *Nouvelle Rev.* February 15, 1925; also see: Alfassa, M. "Le billet de rente." *Nouvelle Rev.*, November 1920; He wrote about the trade-union acts of 1871 and 1876 in Alfassa, M. *Le chambre des lords et les trade-unions*. *Rev. d'Econ. Pol.*, Oct.-Nov. 1905; Discussion about post-WWI, see: Alfassa, M. "Preparation (La) de l'apres-guerre." *IV. Nouvelle R.*, 21 (2): 101, 209. September 1918; Article on the UK Parliament, see: Alfassa, M. *Le parti ouvrier au parlement anglais*. *An. de. Sci. Pol.* January 15, 1908.

<sup>8</sup> Brazzaville is the capital and largest city of the Republic of the Congo and is located on the Congo River. It has a population of 1,174,000 (2005 census). The city was founded in 1880 on the site of a village named Nkuna by an Italian born French explorer, Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, after whom the city was named. In order to distinguish between the two African countries with "Congo" in their names, the Republic of the Congo is sometimes called Congo-Brazzaville, as opposed to Congo-Kinshasa (the Democratic Republic of the Congo, known from 1971 to 1997 as Zaire, the capital of which is Kinshasa). Kinshasa lies on the southern bank of the Congo, across from Brazzaville. This is the only place in the world where two national capital cities are situated on opposite banks of a river, within sight of each other.

<sup>9</sup> For more on the country, see: M. Mazen. "A Visit to French West Africa and Nigeria." *Journal of the Royal African Society*. Oxford University Press: 1937.

<sup>10</sup> Some of his papers reside in the Depot des Archives, Section Outre-Mer ar Aix-en-Provence, dossier 5D74.

<sup>11</sup> As part of France, Martinique is part of the European Union.

At the end of 1935, Matteo Alfassa arrived to take up the post of governor of French Sudan.<sup>12</sup> He held office from November 20, 1935 to November 9, 1936. French Sudan was a colony in French West Africa that had two separate periods of existence, first from 1890 to 1899, then from 1920 to 1960, when the territory became the independent nation of Mali. At the time Alfassa held office, the land had an essentially Muslim and hierarchized population with a higher level of education than in French Equatorial Africa.

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<sup>12</sup> In 1902 the parts of the French Sudan colony not organized into military districts became Senegambia and Niger, then Upper Senegal and Niger in 1904, then the old name came back in a reorganization of 1920. When Upper Volta was first abolished in 1933 (it was reestablished in 1947), French Sudan picked up some of its provinces. After the 4 October 1958 French constitutional referendum, the "République Soudanaise" became a member of the French Community, once again with the name French Sudan, and gained complete internal autonomy 25 November 1958. On 4 April 1959, French Sudan was joined with Senegal to form the Mali Federation, which became fully independent within the French Community on June 20, 1960. The federation collapsed on August 20, 1960, when Senegal seceded. On 22 September, French Sudan proclaimed itself the Republic of Mali and withdrew from the French Community.