

A PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

It was nearly thirty years ago that I had the first chance to meet Sándor. At that time, in May, the Eötvös Loránd University organized a Conference to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the foundation of its Arabic Department. Sándor was waiting for me at Ferihegy airport. For me it was a major occasion to attend that Conference for several reasons. First of all, because that was my first visit to my own country after eighteen years of absence. During those years, living in exile since the Revolution of 1956, I was unable to get a permit and visa to return even for a short visit. That at that time I was able to come home was mainly due to the efforts of members of the Arabic Department, among them a major share by Sándor. He was then a young lecturer at the Department, whose head at that time was my own former teacher, Professor Czeglédy. However, we were supposed to meet a few years earlier, namely during the summer of 1968, when he received a grant to visit my own college, SOAS in London. The proposed visit, however, coincided with the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the unfortunate and tragic participation of Hungary in that event. One of the negative consequences of that invasion was that Sándor's grant and visa were withdrawn. So our meeting had to wait for another six years. Since our first meeting we became not only good friends, but colleagues working together on many projects.

Soon after I was appointed as Hungarian Ambassador to Kuwait, I was able to arrange an invitation for Sándor, by then Professor at the University of Budapest, to deliver a lecture on one of his favourite topics, namely on Talismans and magical bowls. It was at that time that he discovered that the Tareq Rajab Museum has a vast collection of such objects. These he is now preparing for publication. That this work is still not in print is not his fault. There is a simple reason for that: Whenever he returns to Kuwait he finds many new acquisitions, among them a few so rare and interesting objects that he simply cannot leave them out. However, that is a well-known problem to many of us working on different collections. One of our most recent joint projects is the Islamic Art exhibition which will take place in the Helikon Castle Museum in Keszthely, Hungary.

The Arabic Department of Eötvös Loránd University, (or our beloved ELTE), the Head of which is now Professor Fodor, boasts a long list of distinguished scholars as its former professors. Among them it is sufficient to mention Ignaz Goldziher, or Julius Germanus, who was much admired by scholars of the Arab world and who was one of the outstanding experts in modern Arabic literature, and Károly

Czeglédy, whose special field was the study of Arabic sources on the early history of the Hungarians. Thus, Professor Fodor is the successor of outstanding and well-respected scholars and I feel proud that I can work together with him and can call myself his friend.

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My first contact with Professor Fodor was at a lecture he was giving here in Kuwait a few years ago. The subject was "Magic and Magic Symbols". I made a comment at that lecture telling him that Islam is very much against magic and the practice of it. Then after the lecture I looked at our Museum's collections and to my amazement I found that we hold a sizeable number of manuscripts and objects made in different mediums that were used for magical, medicinal or purely *şūfī* applications. From that date Professor Fodor is still engaged in the research of this large collection, investigating its historical background and deciphering its many symbols. I have never met such a dedicated scholar and I am very proud to be associated with him. The work he is doing whether in Hungary, Kuwait or indeed in other Arab countries is of great importance and the service he is giving to Arab and Islamic studies is of great significance. Hungary should be proud to continue giving the world such dedicated scholars as Professor Sándor Fodor.

Tareq Sayid Rajab

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