

JULIUS GERMANUS, THE ORIENTALIST*

ERNŐ JUHÁSZ

Julius Germanus was almost predestined by several circumstances to become an orientalist. Two very important starting points in his career as an orientalist were the following. His interest in the orient, which he got during his childhood, from his parents' house (and which coincided with the vigorous opening of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy toward the Balkan Peninsula and the territories of the Ottoman Empire in Asia Minor in the last decades of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th centuries); and his proficiency in the German language (which in those days was much more the *lingua franca* of oriental studies, at least in Central and Eastern Europe, than it is today).

No less important, and fortunate, was the fact that Germanus got his knowledge at Budapest University from such world-famous professors as Ármín Vámbéry (1832–1913), the celebrated traveller, whose nickname, "the lame dervish" sounded familiar in the bazaars of Persia and in the court of Queen Victoria in London alike, together with Ignác Goldziher (1850–1921), who is rightly considered to have been the real founder of European islamology. Vámbéry's scholarship and his scientific accomplishment were already being widely disputed in Hungary in his lifetime and he polarized scientists and public opinion as well. His pupil, Ignác Goldziher, for example, was rather critical of Vámbéry in his diary, which was published first in its original German version,¹ and in its abridged Hungarian translation.² Goldziher queried Vámbéry's scientific achievements, just as he did his human behaviour.

Not wishing to argue with all this here, I should like only to register that, because of his well publicized journeys in Central Asia, Vámbéry belonged to the unquestionable celebrities of the turn of the century. He exerted a deep impression and influence on his contemporaries and students, no less on the

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young Germanus. Without so much as qualifying Germanus's accomplishment as an orientalist in advance, I should like to point to the fact that his career and *oeuvre*, in their entirety, meant much more the undertaking and continuation of the Vámbérián than the Goldziherian concept of orientalism.

Germanus, similar to his famed professor and predecessor, preferred the excitement, in its truest sense of the word, of gaining first-hand experience of journeys in, and of the deepest possible submersion into, Eastern cultures, to the thorough, philological and philosophical approach to, and interpretation of the facts and phenomena of the Orient. In my opinion, instead of counterposing the two approaches, it is better to emphasize the importance of both, since the Vámbéry-Germanus versus Goldziher parallel was characteristic of orientalism in other European countries, too.

Germanus's lucky star did not wane at all when he finished his studies at Budapest University. On the contrary, one could say that he was enviably lucky throughout his life. He lived almost a hundred years (from 1884 till 1979) and preserved all along his mental and physical faculties. And what a century was his, especially in Hungary! He survived two world wars, several upheavals and at least 4 or 5 social systems, each of them different from the next.

Soon after his graduation from Budapest University, Germanus could continue his studies at Leipzig, Germany. At that time the spirit and influence of the great German Arabist, H. L. *Fleischer* (1801–1888) were still alive at Leipzig. Goldziher, who in the late 1860s also studied at Leipzig, regarded Fleischer very highly and took his doctor's degree from him. As regards Fleischer, he got the mastery of his profession directly from *Silvestre de Sacy* (1758–1838), the great French Arabist, the founder of European Arabic Studies.³ So it can be laid down as a fact that Germanus was able to study Arabic, the subject which was to become so decisive in his subsequent scientific activity, in the best schools and under the supervision of the best scholars in Europe of that time.

After his university years, which were lengthened by his studies at Leipzig and Vienna, his stay in London examining the oriental collection of the British Museum between 1909–1911 was also decisive for Germanus, above all because there his previous and necessarily narrower, Central European way of thinking was broadened and he was able to gain a wider perspective of the Orient, including, of course, the Arab and Islamic world. It seems to be

a well-founded supposition that it occurred there and then that an idea came up in Germanus's mind, even if it was not yet a conscious aim, that was India, where later, when he got there (between 1929–32) he gained decisive impulses for the rest of his life.

After Budapest, Leipzig, Vienna, London, Santiniketan and Delhi, i. e. the main stations of Germanus's preparations and gathering of his knowledge, I ought to mention his extensive journeys throughout the Balkan Peninsula, Asia Minor and the Arab world, which also influenced the career of the Hungarian orientalist. But there were so many of them (well over 70: Germanus still undertook strenuous trips to India, Saudi Arabia and Morocco, not to mention his regular, yearly visits to Cairo, to take part in the winter sessions of the Arab Language Academy, of which he was a corresponding member) that it is almost impossible to give an accurate figure. I cannot help drawing attention to one particular trip of Germanus's, however, namely to his first pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in 1934–35. It was by this journey – and his accomplishment there – that Germanus rightly entered his name in the list of such European travellers and orientalists like Varthema, the 16th century, Bolognese and the 19th Century Briton, Sir Richard Burton.⁴

A scholar's closed scientific career is best measured by reckoning his writings. The portrait can be coloured and completed by his correspondence and educational activities (in Germanus's case I shall speak about these two areas later) but *verba volant, scripta manent*.

József Antall, his close friend, mentions 123 items in his selected bibliography of Germanus's writings.⁵ Antall tries to give a brief biography of Germanus, too.⁶ In my opinion, Germanus's life was much more colourful and richer in events and changes than this barely more than twenty-page summary of it would suggest. Nobody knows what to-morrow holds. A more shaded and detailed, inspired biography of Germanus could at once be either a successful doctoral thesis or a literary bestseller.

For a romantic treatment of the subject and for a dissertation, too the book by his second wife, Kató *Kajári* (in the East her well known name is *Aysa*) could be a starting-point.⁷ In the book, she deals mainly with the period she lived with Germanus (the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s).

An elaborate analysis, if only of the 123 selected items of Germanus's writings cannot be my aim here. Over the next few pages I shall try, however, to establish certain tendencies in Germanus's works, by analysing two or three of his writings, which I consider the most important and to find

out the secrets and reasons behind the author's popularity and widely-read books.

Surveying his selected bibliography, it may be the reader's first observation how wide Germanus's interest was and how many fields of orientalism he dealt with during his long tenure, even if his thoroughness and deepness considerably varied by turns. The writings from his youth were almost exclusively connected with the *Turks* and Turkish civilization. Later, however, he gradually gave up this subject and laid increasing stress upon the *Arabs* and Arab civilization. In the latter writings on the history, language and literary history of the Arabs, translations of ancient and contemporary Arab poets appear in the same way as travel books and philosophically — motivated essays on Ibn Haldun and on the renewal of Arab intellectuality. In addition to these two main fields of interest, Germanus was the first to publish an intelligible study in Hungary about Gandhi and Gandhism, which was based on his experiences in the field⁸ and together with his first wife, he wrote a romantic travel book on India, called *The Flame of Bengal*.⁹ After more than four decades, and as a result of at least ten editions, this became the number one reference book of whole generations on India.

In addition to the spatial width of his subjects, Germanus, in his writings, moved rather freely in the different ages and centuries.

It is true that he was most familiar with 20th century historical, religious and literary subjects (his travel books, which amount to a considerable part of the *oeuvre*, also belong to this period), but every now and then we find among Germanus's works those which deal with subjects from the near or remote past. Thus, he translated into Hungarian the famous Turkish traveller, Evliya Celebi's, account of the 17th century trade guilds in Turkey, wrote a study of the first Turkish-Hungarian military conflicts in the 15th century, another about Ibn Battūta the 14th century Arab globe-trotter, and a third about the 13th century great Persian mystic poet, Ibn Rūmī. The 11th century Muslim heretic, the blind poet Abū'l-^cAlā al-Ma^carrī also occupied him.

In my opinion, two works stand out from the *oeuvre*. In the first place, the *Allah Akbar!* (the first Hungarian edition appeared in 1936, quickly followed by German and Italian translations, both in 1938); the other, his monumental anthology of Arab poetry: *Arabs Poets from Pagan Times Up to the Present*.¹⁰

Having read the *Allah Akbar!*, Germanus's *chef-d'oeuvre*, one can get closer to the secret of the author's unparalleled popularity, especially among

the general public. Worthy of attention by its size alone, the more than 500-page book is a comprehensive encyclopaedia about the Arabs and Arab civilization and, what is more, at times it reads like a novel or a travelogue! Germanus speaks about his subject-matter, the Arabs, who were, at least in the Hungary of the thirties, a relatively unknown people, in such a way that the reader gets acquainted with their faith, Islam, and its fundamental laws, their holy book, the Koran, the minute description of the ritual of Meccan pilgrimages etc. and, in the meantime, the author himself is always there, not only as a narrator, but as an active participant in the events. It is my opinion that, in addition to the choice of the subject, this rendering – together with the authenticity of his personal experience – explain the success of *Allah Akbar!* inside and outside Hungary alike.

In the case of the *Arab poets* . . . the selection, introduction and rough translation formed Germanus's contribution, while the final translation of the poems was made by a group of literary translators, among them the well-known Hungarian poet, Zoltán Jékely. The volume spans a period of more than 1400 years and includes the poems of more than one hundred Arab poets, starting from the Beduin poets of the *ǧāhiliyya* up to our contemporaries in the 20th century, like the Syrian Nazzār Qabbānī, the Iraqi ^ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayāṭī and the Egyptian Aḥmad ^ʿAbd al-Mu^ʿīṭ Hiǧāzī etc. The anthology is noteworthy even on an international scale, and in the Hungarian-speaking area only one other achievement can be compared with Germanus's: the excellent Transylvanian translator, Zoltán Franyó's anthology.¹¹ Franyó translated into Hungarian, and published in his monumental three-volume collection, the poems of 37 Arab poets, mainly from classical period.

As is usual under such circumstances, the Hungarian translation of the poems in Germanus's anthology is not of even artistic level. But even the relatively weaker translations are able to give the feeling of the poetical world of such remote epochs and lands, which would have been hardly known to the Hungarian readers without the arduous work of Julius Germanus.

I mention only as a fact Germanus's book on the history of Arab literature,¹² which was edited three times. I consider it inevitable, however, to speak about the beneficial and effectual efforts Germanus exerted to make Hungarian literature better known in the Arab world. As early as 1940, he wrote and published an essay in Arabic about the poetry of our great national

poet, Alexander Petöfi.¹³ In the 60s and 70s Germanus concentrated his efforts very seriously on the Arabic translation and the publishing of one of Hungarian literature's works of world importance, the dramatic poem of Imre Madách, *The Tragedy of Man*. His efforts were crowned with success and Madách's work was translated with great inspiration by the late ^cIsā al-Nā^cūrī and was published under the Arabic title *Ma'sat al-insān* (Beirut, 1972). Hungarian literary work of greater importance has not been published in the Arab world ever since.

Germanus was one of the best-known scholars in Hungary in his lifetime. As for the Arab and Islamic peoples, he was practically the only Hungarian scientist whom they bore in mind – and still bear to this day. As far as his popularity here in Hungary is concerned, I attribute it, above all, to the fact that he deliberately cultivated a relationship with the mass media: first with the press and radio, later with television and even film. The majority of his writings are that kind of romantic description of the Orient which can count on the widest possible audience. His Indian travelogue, *The Flame of Bengal* has so far run into its tenth edition, the *Allah Akbar!* was published six times, not to mention its publications abroad, and *In the Pale Light of the Crescent* and *Towards the Light of the East*, two of his romantic autobiographies were published five and three times, respectively. All this means that the total number of copies of his books amounts to well over a million, a number no other orientalist and not that many belletrists in Hungary can boast.

For me, however, the most interesting task was to unravel the secret of Germanus's popularity abroad, from Rabat to Calcutta. Having personally visited some of the great intellectual centers of the Arab and Islamic world (Cairo, Damascus, Algiers, Rabat, Amman, New Delhi etc) in the 60s, 70s and 80s, I have satisfied myself about how widely Germanus's name is known and respected there, not only among the *ulema*, but among writers and poets and even among natural scientists and engineers, too. For the majority of Arab and Islamic intellectuals, the name of Germanus meant – and still means – Hungary, too.

In solving what I called the "Germanus syndrome" I got valuable help from two of Hungarian orientalists' closest friends in the East, whom, thanks to my fate, I personally got to know: one of them was *Muḥammad Ṣawqī Amīn*, the respected Arab linguist and member of the Arabic Language Academy of Egypt, who died just recently, while the other was the already mentioned ^cIsā al-Nā^cūrī, Secretary General of the Arabic Language

Academy of Jordan, the well-known Arab writer, literary historian and translator, who also died two or three years ago.

Both of them — and others besides and others besides them, unanimously asserted that they liked and respected Germanus above all because he proved to be a true friend to them for decades and never let any of their gestures or letters go unanswered. It is a seemingly insignificant explanation, but let us consider, for example, to what extent Germanus's professor, Ignác Goldziher, regarded it as almost a moral imperative to answer letters addressed to him.¹⁴

One can get an idea about the extensiveness of Professor Germanus's correspondence from the letters addressed to him. The several hundred letters, for the time being unprocessed and unpublished, which he left us, spanning over half a century and we find among their senders well-known writers, poets and thinkers from the Arab and Islamic world, and even, from the *al-mahğar*, the Arab diaspora in North- and South-America.

The publication of the correspondence in the Germanus Collection by an Arab or Islamic scientific institution would be a worthy homage to the memory and noble services of the Hungarian orientalist.

The whereabouts of Germanus's own letters are naturally much less known. His literary letters, in which he reflected on new Arab novels, poetical *diwans* etc. were published quite regularly by the *al-Adīb* monthly in Beirut. In addition to that, his articles and essays appeared very often in the Arab language periodicals *Rābiṭat al-Ālam al-Islāmī* (Mecca), *Mağallat Qāfilat al-Zayt* (Zahran) and *al-Asala* (Algiers), as well as in the English language *Islamic Culture*, *Muslim Digest* and *Islamic Review*. The already mentioned Āli al-Nauri presents a basis for the contents and style of Germanus's personal letters, since he published all the 52 letters which the Hungarian orientalist sent to him between 1960 and 1979.¹⁵

A further component of the "Germanus Syndrome", firstly among the learned of the *al-Azhar Mosque* in Cairo and, in general, among Muslim intellectuals is the fact that — after mastering the Arabic language and acquiring a knowledge of Muslim culture — he himself embraced the faith of Islam and performed, more than once, the *hağğ*, the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, a duty of every true believer.

Secular scholars, like the already mentioned Muḥammad Šawqī Amīn, and others too, who knew Germanus closely, spoke to me almost enthusiastically about his sociability, his exceptional quality to establish human relationships and about his amazing command of languages. M. Š. Amīn, in our talks in Cairo in 1975 or 1976, relived with me his walks in the *sūqs* of the

Cairo of the 30s with Germanus. The Hungarian orientalist was respected there as a real genius of languages; in addition to his mastering the major European languages of that time (English, German, French, Italian) and Arabic, he could also chat with the Turkish, Circassian, Kurd, and Persian merchants in their mother tongues.

As a secondary school student I first attended a public lecture of Julius Germanus in 1955 or 1956 at the then existing building of the National Casino, in the central part of Budapest. It happened in those years that I listened to his radio programmes, too. As university professor, Germanus taught me between 1958-1963, at the very end of his long university career, when he was almost 80.

During my university years Germanus no longer held regular classes on Arabic grammar, Arab history and Arab literary history and did not hold seminars either. These basic subjects were taught by his assistant, Dr Károly Czeglédy, who from 1964 took over the chair from Germanus. Germanus held two types of classes only: Arabic textual commentary and the history of Muslim civilization.

In the Arabic textual commentary lessons we used the 6-volume chrestomathy of the Lebanese Jesuit, Father Louis Cheikho, *Mağānī al-adab fī ḥarā'iq al-^carab*, the approximate English translation of which is: 'The Literary Yields of the Arabs' Camp-Fires (Beirut, 1954-1957.) It is interesting to note that Father Cheikho very much appreciated Ignác Goldziher, Germanus's professor and predecessor.¹⁶ Recalling these classes after a lapse of a quarter of a century I remember to what extent we students admired Germanus's enormous lexical knowledge and how much we enjoyed his plastic glossology which was very often based on his vivid common sense. Germanus, as a teacher, was more or less on a large scale, however, and mainly left it to his students to get on with their texts from the first centuries of the *hiğra*. Thanks, to Allah and Father Cheikho, the Arab texts which we read with Germanus were with *ḥaraka*, i. e. they were vowelized. In order to enliven the monotony of the Arab textual commentary lessons, Germanus very often inserted a story or an anecdote:

The *Mağānī* was read only by students specializing in Arabic studies. The audience in his lessons on the history of Muslim civilization, however, was more heterogeneous. In addition to would-be Arabists and Turkologists and students of other branches of oriental studies historians, art historians and even students of other faculties, mainly those of the Faculty of Law, regu-

larly participated in these lessons. Our number quite often reached 30 or 40 people.

It is difficult now to recall to mind the exact topics of Germanus's lessons on Muslim civilization history. Nevertheless, I can say that an exceptionally long career and rich experiences formed the solid basis of Germanus's lessons. A well-defined part was devoted to explain the *šarīʿa*, Muslim law, but besides that the great periods of the history of the Arabs, the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates were dealt with in the same way as contemporary Arab literature and poetry. Germanus usually read these lessons from his long, hand-written notes.

In my university years I did not belong to Germanus's inner circle. Actually, at his advanced age, he hardly had any such circle. Later, however, our relationship became closer and more intimate. This was after my 9-month long trip to Egypt in 1964 and 1965 and it started as an official link. As a member of the then-existing Institute of Cultural Relations, in charge of Egyptian affairs, I regularly consulted Germanus, most often in such a way that I visited him at their flat in the evening hours.

These evening talks lasted one or one-and-a-half hours each time, during which I could see how strong and vivid a memory he had. Sitting behind his huge writing-desk, which he got from General Artur Görgey (1818–1916), one of the most tragic personalities of Hungarian history, who as the military leader of the Hungarian army, capitulated before the army of the Russian tsar in 1849, Germanus spoke uninterrupted for a long time about his favourite subjects: history, mainly 20th century history and history makers, above all those whom he met and knew personally. From the names, places and dates he mentioned one could rightly feel that he was always in the midst of the events. It was one of his special faculties accurately to follow the fate of his characters – and their children and grandchildren! – from birth to death, like a chain-reaction.

It is absolutely impossible for me now to give an inventory of all the Hungarian, European, Arab, Indian, and other personalities whom Germanus met in his life and whom he most often remembered during our evening sessions.

Some of them, however, occurred more often than others. With them, Germanus cherished real friendship and great memories till his last day. Those who belonged to this inner core were numerous. Let me mention a few of them only.

No doubt of his Hungarian contemporaries, Pál Teleki (1879–1941), the excellent geographer and the ill-fated politician made a deep impression on Germanus. From among his Egyptian friends, he most often mentioned *Mahmūd Taymūr* (1894–1973), the noted writer and one of the pioneers of the short story in Arabic literature. In North-Africa he respected very much the Moroccan thinker, *Muḥammad ḲAllal al-Fāsī* (born in 1906). His close Jordanian friend, *ḲIsā al-NāḲūrī* has been already mentioned more than once before. From the many Saudis whom he met in his life, Germanus recalled most often the memory of the legendary King, *ḲAbd al-ḲAzīz Ibn SaḲūd* (1880–1953), the founder of the present-day Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. His Indian friends were numerous, too. Among them, Germanus appreciated very much his friendship with the Nobel Prize winner poet and thinker, *Rabindranath Tagore* (1861–1941), and with the eminent Muslim scholar and onetime President of the Republic of India, *Zakir Husayn*, (1897–1968).

Germanus was more closely connected with the culture of the Orient, and with Arab and Indian intellectuals with more threads than any of his Hungarian contemporaries. The spiritual leaders of the East respected him, and through him, they respected his country, too. In this respect his departure from among us is simply irreplaceable.

I was Germanus's interlocutor till 1974 when I was sent to Egypt as cultural attaché. From there, however, I remained in touch with him, mainly through correspondence. I regularly informed him about the events of intellectual life in Egypt, and about his Egyptian linguist friends, like the above mentioned *Muḥammad Ṣawqī Amīn*, or *Ibrāhīm Maḍkūr*, the President of the Arab Language Academy of Egypt and *Magdī Wahba*, the eminent scholar, who in spite of his younger age, was one of the most reliable friends of Germanus. I also notified Germanus of the new books and writings of the giants of Egyptian literature, *Nagīb Maḥfūz* and *Tawfīq al-Ḳakīm*, whom he respected very much and the translation of whose works into Hungarian he encouraged using all possible means.

In the second half of the 1970s, our personal meetings were limited to my visits to him during my summer holidays. This was the case in August, 1979 too. On that occasion, he and his wife, *ḲAyša*, received me and my wife (she had been his student, too) in his hospital room where he was just undergoing a routine medical check-up. Our visit was just a few months prior to his

95th birthday. As for his mental capabilities, I found him as fresh and vivid as he had been a quarter of a century ago, when I first met him in my life. Just to show me that he was physically fit too, when he saw us off, he ran all along the long corridor of the hospital, to the great astonishment of his doctors, nurses and visitors. I would not have thought that it was our last personal time together . . .

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As I have already mentioned, Germanus did not belong to those Hungarian orientalists who established their own philological schools. From among his predecessors and professors, not Ignác Goldziher, but Ármin Vámbéry was his real spiritual mentor. In this respect, he differed considerably from his renowned colleagues at Budapest University, the Turkologist Gyula *Németh*, and Lajos *Fekete* and the eminent Central Asian expert, Lajos *Ligeti*. Those of Germanus's students, who later excelled themselves in the Arabic language and philology, in Koran Studies, in the history of Islamic Art or in the study of the oriental sources of Hungarian prehistory, may owe their achievements to the influence of other professors or scientific schools, or to their own efforts.

Nevertheless, Germanus, who exceeded almost all of his contemporaries in primary experiences, in his attachment to the Orient and in his ability to endear it to others and, last but not least, because of his good-humoured, optimistic view of life, did not leave anybody indifferent who ever got into touch with him.

In this sense, however, we may well say that Julius Germanus was a school creator scientist and personality. To his school belong all orientalists, historians, archeologists, linguists, jurists, men of letters and others, inside and outside Hungary, who in one phase of their lives or other were inspired by, or got impulses from, Germanus to immerse themselves in studying the Orient and to try to understand its message . . .

NOTES

1. Ignaz Goldziher: *Tagebuch*, Hrsg. v. Alexander Scheiber, Leiden, 1978.
2. Goldziher Ignác: *Napló*, Budapest, 1984.
3. In connection with this European scientific school, hallmarked by the de Sacy – Fleischer – Goldziher line, cf. Róbert Simon: "Goldziher Ignác", *Magyar Filológiai Szemle* ("Hungarian Philosophical Review"), 3 (1982), pp. 336–379. especially p. 348.
4. Philip K. Hitti: *History of the Arabs*⁸, London, 1963, pp. 118–119.
5. Julius Germanus: *Gondolatok Gül Baba sírjánál* ("Reflections at the Tomb of Gül Baba"), selected, edited and after-word by József Antall, Budapest, 1984, pp. 360–366.
6. *ibid.*, pp. 303–324.
7. Kajári Kató: *Kelet vándora* ("Wanderer of the East"), Budapest, 1985.
8. Julius Germanus: *India fényessége* ("The Light of India"), Budapest, 1934.
9. G. Hajnóczy Róza: *Bengáli tűz*, ("The Flame of Bengal"), Budapest, 1944.
10. Julius Germanus: *Arab költők a pogánykortól napjainkig* ("Arab Poets from Pagan Times up to the Present"), Budapest, 1961.
11. Zoltán Franyó: *Évezredek húrjain* ("On the Strings of the Millennia"), Marosvásárhely, 1958.
12. Julius Germanus: *Az arab irodalom története*, Budapest, 1962.
13. *al-Muqtataf*, 96, pp. 369-377.
14. Róbert Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 341.
15. *Rasā'il al-mustašriq al-maġarī al-rahīl al-hāġġ* ^c *Abd al-Karīm Germanus*, India, 1982.
16. Cf. Goldziher Ignác: *Napló*, p. 308.