

## PREFACE

مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَطْلُبُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَلَكَ اللَّهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا مِنْ طُرُقِ الْجَنَّةِ  
وَإِنَّ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَتَضَعُ أَجْنِحَتَهَا رِضًا لِطَالِبِ الْعِلْمِ  
حديث نبوي شريف

### **Alexander Fodor (1941-2014)**

Professor Alexander (Sándor) Fodor was born in Budapest on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, 1941 and died in Ábrahámhegy, at Lake Balaton, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, 2014. He studied Arabic and History at the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, between 1960 and 1965. He counted among his beloved teachers Julius (Gyula) Germanus – also born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November as Alexander used to point it out – and Károly Czeglédy. The former made him love the Arabic language and the Arab world, while the latter was the supervisor of his doctoral thesis written on the origins of the Arabic legends of the pyramids of Giza. Since his graduation in June 1965, he was working at the Department of Semitic Philology and Arabic Studies of the University. Having been advanced to the position of Reader in 1981, he became the Head of the Arabic Department till 2006. He acquired a full professorship in 1996, and held the post of Director of the Oriental Institute at the University between 1999 and 2006. Having served the Faculty of Humanities thrice as Vice-Dean in charge of the international relations, he held the post of Dean in the academic year 2000/2001.

After having spent a year in Egypt on a scholarship grant in 1966 he repeatedly visited that country where he had the honour to be elected member of the *Mağma' al-Luğa al-'Arabiyya*. For 15 years he returned to Kuwait every autumn for lecturing and investigating the amulet collection of the Tareq Rajab Museum. He spent a lengthy period of research in 1994 at the London based Warburg Institute. He also spent six months in Jerusalem as a guest research fellow at the Hebrew University. A regular participant of international conferences with his presentations, he contributed since 1974 to 2014 to almost all the congresses of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants (UEAI). He organised two of these

congresses in Budapest in 1988 and in 2000. On the occasion of the first of these congresses he founded *The Arabist (Budapest Studies in Arabic)* of which he was the series editor until his death. In 1993 and 1995 he organised conferences on the popular beliefs in the religions of the Middle East and North Africa. He was vice-chairman of the 35th ICANAS held in Budapest and the chairman of the Arabic Studies Section thereof in 1997. In 2002 he organised a conference on the theme “Paradise and Hell in Islam” in the town of Keszthely at Lake Balaton. On this occasion he also helped to bring into being an Islamic art exhibition on loan from the Tareq Rajab Museum of Kuwait which remained open for twelve years.

His attraction to the survival of ancient legends and beliefs in the Middle-East (Egypt included) was decisive in his scholarly work all his life. His main academic interests were, however, from his student days, magic and sorcery. One of his early articles was written about the evil eye in today’s Egypt and from here there remained only one step to the world of amulets, which remained his favourite theme. His first article in this field bears the title “Notes on an Arabic Amulet Scroll”. In the centre of his research work lay the study of popular religion in the Middle East in general and popular Islam in particular, with a special emphasis on Egypt and Mesopotamia. Moreover he studied with never ceasing interest the so called religious syncretism which was the subtitle of his first book which earned him the degree of PhD: *Arabic Legends on the Pyramids* (in Hungarian). In the field of Islamic divination he published several articles, among them a study with the textual edition of the *Malḥamat Dāniyāl*, and a long treatise on the connection between Arabic bowl divination and Greek magic papyri. His main scholarly endeavour in the field of studying popular religion was to demonstrate the identical features of Muslim, Christian and Jewish popular religions in the Middle East and to show the survival and continuity of ancient ideas and practices in the Islamic world. The main matter of interest and importance to him, however, was to give an idea about the birth, growth and degeneration of making amulets as far as the material, craftsmanship and complexity of the contents are concerned. In “The Rod of Moses in Arabic Magic”, for instance, he deals with certain Jewish elements in Arabic magic, by following the path of a popular Biblical motif until its full integration into Islam. To the scriptural sources he always connected his personal observations made in the Arab world. In the above article, for instance, he mentioned a Nubian house he had seen in the neighbourhood of Aswan with the Mosaic serpent on its entrance door. From the beginning of his scholarly research he emphasised the outstanding significance of the words inscribed on the magic objects to which the magic power is attributed not the objects themselves. He held that the use of names, sometimes unintelligible but always tending to be alliterative, is a basic characteristic of Arab magic.

Alexander Fodor did not only come to be an expert of international reputation on Islamic talismans and amulets, and especially talismanic charts and amulet

scrolls, but he also was the owner of one of the bulkiest collections of such material. When the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants held its 14th Congress in Budapest in 1988 on the central theme “Popular Culture in Islam”, this occasion gave him the opportunity to organise an exhibition from a part of his collection, about 400 pieces, of amulets, magical books and manuscripts, fear cups, censers and rosaries. His book under the title *Amulets from the Islamic World* represents best his collection.

Though he published a great number of significant articles, as is shown by his bibliography in the present volume, he was working on several topics in his last months which he could not finish and had held many lectures at various conferences which he planned to publish. All of his friends, colleagues and students were hit hard by his sudden death which is a great loss to Arabic and Islamic studies.

Budapest, on the 6th of November, 2016

*Tamás Iványi*