IGNAZ GOLDZIHER’S INVITATION TO THE EGYPTIAN UNIVERSITY

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The foundation of the Egyptian University – present-day Cairo University –, the first modern secular university on Egyptian soil, was a landmark of historic significance in the cultural history of the country. It opened on December 21, 1908 in a rented mansion belonging to the Greek cigarette magnate Nestor Gianaclis and others. The recruitment of a suitable teaching staff was not easy and the employment of European professors was also envisaged right from the beginning. Interim professors were also invited from Europe to deliver courses of lectures for shorter periods, e.g. one academic year. They could be conveniently arranged into two groups: those who lectured in French or English on topics unrelated to the Middle East, such as French or English literature or world history, and the Orientalists, who lectured in Arabic on Arab and Islamic subjects. The heads of the fledgling University, principally its Rector, Prince Ahmad Fu’ād, made efforts to secure the cooperation of some well-known authorities of high reputation. The Prince played a key role in the organization of the University: he became its first Rector at its opening as a private institution in 1908, and in 1925, already as king, he refounded it as a fully-fledged state institution (Reid 1990:1). In the pre-war days the Prince was simply one of the numerous members of the ruling family, the descendants of Muhammad ‘Alî, who had been mainly known for his eventful marriage with Princess Šuwaykâr. Owing to the totally unpredictable and unforeseen turns of history, however, he was to become Sultan (1917) and even later King of Egypt as Fu’âd I (1922) (Kâmil 1998:10-31; Goldschmidt Jr. 2000:59-60) He also approached Ignaz Goldziher of Budapest University and made several efforts to invite him to Cairo as visiting professor. He did his best to gain the cooperation of Goldziher and persuade him to come to Cairo. He even used his connections to certain members of the ruling dynasty and the political leadership of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to exert pressure upon Goldzi-

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1 The building, where the University stayed until 1915, is now the central building of the American University in Cairo in downtown Tahrîr square. It was built around 1870, then it was acquired by the Greek cigarette magnate Nestor Gianaclis, who had it transformed to its present-day Mamluk revival form. The architect of the transformation was Max Herz, who was universally regarded as the greatest authority on Mamluk revival and who himself played an important role in the propagation and dissemination of this style in Egypt. See Ormos 2001:169-170.

2 See Reid 1990:37-42.
her. This they did, no doubt because they were quick to realize how important Goldziher’s eventual professorship might be in raising the Egyptian presence of Hungary and the whole Monarchy – it can be regarded as an essential constituent of imperialist aspirations that the European powers, among them the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, competed with each other fiercely to assert their presence in the field of Egyptian cultural life. In the end these efforts did not bear fruit, Goldziher did not go to Egypt, and so, as far as the University was concerned, “Austria-Hungary lost its chance when Ignaz Goldziher turned down Fuad’s invitation to teach” (Reid 1990:37-38). Among the letters of Max Herz to Ignaz Goldziher, which are preserved in the Goldziher Correspondence in the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest, there are several items dealing with this subject. In the present paper, these letters will be reviewed in connection with other sources with the aim of shedding light on the details of this intermezzo.

Max Herz (1856-1919), the Hungarian chief architect to the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe in Cairo for a quarter of a century (1890-1914), came into contact with Ignaz Goldziher in 1895 and soon they became good friends. The letters Herz wrote to Goldziher contain a wealth of information on various subjects.

The first letter on this subject Herz states explicitly that it was he who first suggested to the organizers that they invite Goldziher, who was universally regarded as the greatest European authority on Islam of his time, but then it was Prince Ahmad Fu‘ād, who undertook to persuade Goldziher to accept the invitation to deliver the course “History of Philosophical Doctrines” (Histoire des Doctrines Philosophiques / il corso di storia delle dottrine filosofiche) at the Egyptian University for one winter semester beginning on 15 November 1911. In his letter of 16 July 1911, the Prince mentions that they had personally met in Athens, where Goldziher’s behaviour had

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4 On the Correspondence see [Anon.] 1933. Somogyi 1935:149-150.

5 Herz arrived in Cairo in 1880 and joined the Technical Bureau of the Waqf Administration, where he worked as architect until his appointment to the post of chief architect to the Comité. See Ormos 2001.

6 On Max Herz’s letters to Goldziher see Ormos 2001:172. Goldziher’s replies do not survive: they seem to have perished together with Herz’s belongings after his expulsion from Egypt as an enemy alien at the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

7 Goldziher-Herz, Correspondence. Letter from Herz dated Cairo, 6 January 1911.

8 See Goldziher-Ahmad Fu‘ād, Correspondence. Letter from Ahmad Fu‘ād dated London 16.7.1912 [recte 1911].
led the Prince to hope that Goldziher might deliver the course in question. At the beginning confidential feelers were put out by Herz, and then in the later phases of the undertaking, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand, crown prince of Austria-Hungary, and Count Széchenyi, the diplomatic representative of Austria-Hungary in Cairo, joined the unofficial negotiations, Herz acted as a sort of intermediary between the Prince and Goldziher — Herz’s role is also attested to by Prince Ahmad Fu’âd’s letter to Goldziher where he refers to Goldziher’s first answer to Herz Bey on this matter. After some hesitation, Goldziher seems to have turned down the invitation, yet Herz did his best to convince him of the advantages and desirability of such a stay in Cairo. Goldziher seemed to have had objections, which Herz strove to allay giving details concerning the visits of such acquaintances of Goldziher as Guidi, Santillana, Nallino and Littmann. He reminds Goldziher that he would be in a good company among such persons as Littmann, Nallino and Snouck Hurgronje. In one case Herz copied for Goldziher an Italian letter by Fago, Prince Ahmad Fu’âd’s secretary, on this subject. This latter letter shows how important

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9 See Goldziher-Ahmad Fu’âd, Correspondence. Letter from Ahmad Fu’âd dated London 16.7.1912 [recte 1911].

10 Goldziher-Ahmad Fu’âd, Correspondence. Letter from Ahmad Fu’âd dated Karlsbad 19.9.1911.


13 Carlo Alfonso Nallino (1872-1938) held an important course on the history of Arab astronomy, in Arabic, at the Egyptian University in 1909-1910, which also appeared in print. See Meyerhof 1939. Fück 1955:299-301. Reid 1990:2, 39, 41-42, 52 (ill. 3), 95, 153-154.

14 Enno Littmann (1875-1958) of Germany lectured on Comparative Semitic Languages and Literatures in 1910-1912 and returned as visiting professor in 1929. It may be remarked that Littmann reckoned Goldziher among the founders of Islamic studies in 1930 but omitted to mention his name in his overview of contributions in German to Near Eastern studies published in the days of National Socialism in 1942. Goldziher-Hartmann, Correspondence xxvi (editor’s Introduction); Reid 1990:2, 41, 95. On him see Paret 1959.

15 Snouck Hurgronje had also been invited to the Egyptian University in Cairo but he too did not go there. I owe this piece of information to P. Sj. van Koningsveld. Cf. Goldziher-Snouck Hurgronje, Correspondence 357-360. See also Reid 1990:38. In his letter of 28 July 1911 (Goldziher-Herz, Correspondence) Mr. Fago informs illustre e carissimo Herz Bey that — among others — Snouck Hurgronje has agreed to go to Cairo: Il principe Fuad a ottenuto l’accettazione del prof. Littmann, del prof. Snouck Hurgronje di Leiden e dei professori italiani (Nallino & Meloni). Gerardo Meloni taught on the history of the ancient Near East. See Reid 1990:39.

16 Goldziher-Herz, Correspondence. Letter of Fago dated Paris, 28 July 1911 (the original); Vetriolo (Trento), 4 August 1911 (the copy by Herz). Dr. Vincenzo Fago was sent to Cairo by the Italian government, accompanying a donation of 500 books. He went to Cairo from the University of Rome. His task was the organization and the administration of the University Library. See Reid 1990:39. He was also “international secretary” to the Prince. Goldziher-Herz, Correspondence. Letters of Herz dated Cairo, 26 May
Goldziher was in the prince’s eyes because he asks Herz to do everything possible (and impossible) to persuade Goldziher accept the invitation:

“My Dear Herz Bey, to come to the point at once, I am asking you most fervently in the name of His Highness Prince Fuad to be so kind as to do everything possible (and even impossible) in order that Prof. Goldziher may consent to come to the Egyptian University on November 15th of this year to deliver the course on the history of philosophical doctrines in Arabic.”

*Illustrare e carissimo Herz Bey, senza preambuli, La prego caldissimamente da parte di S. A. il Principe Fuad di voler fare tutto il possibile (e anche l'impossibile) perché il prof. Goldziher accetti di venire il 15 novembre di quest'anno all'Università Egiziana, per tenervi in lingua araba, il corso di storia delle dottrine filosofiche.*

In the course of this discussion Herz Pasha informs Goldziher that the subject he is supposed to lecture on was taught by Santillana in the previous academic year. Santillana arrived in Cairo with the fair copy of the text of his lectures but to his great distress he discovered that these lectures were pitched way over his students’ heads, so he was compelled to rewrite them from day to day17. Herz also mentions that Guidi was sometimes compelled to make use of some sort of a translator to make himself understood:

“I have no doubts concerning your facility in Arabic. Prof. Guidi was sometimes compelled to make use of some sort of a translator in order to make himself understood. But of course Guidi has never been in the Orient before, while you have been here years. You can choose as you like: literary or colloquial Arabic. But I want you to ask Nallino for his opinion and suggestion concerning this matter.”


This correspondence goes on for a while but it is known that in the end Goldziher did not accept the invitation and did not go to Cairo19. In a letter to Prince Fu’ād he informs the prince that “his professional duties do not allow him to leave his chair vacant for several consecutive months”20. In a letter to Theodor Nöeldeke dated Budapest, 9th November 1911 Goldziher tells his colleague and friend in strict

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17 Goldziher-Herz, *Correspondence*. Letter from Herz dated Cairo, 26 May 1911.

18 Goldziher-Herz, *Correspondence*. Letter from Herz dated Cairo, 26. 5. 1911.


20 Goldziher-Aḥmad Fu’ād, *Correspondence*. The draft of Goldziher’s answer enclosed with the letter from Ahmad Fu’ād dated London 16.7.1912 [recte 1911].
confidence of all the stress this affair has caused him and why he does not want to accept the invitation:

"The kind forwarding of your study on Schulthess' version of Kalilah wa-Dimnah,21 is an exhortation to me to send you once again a written greeting after such a long time. This was postponed from day to day because in recent weeks I was so agitated at heart that I hardly found the mood for communicativeness. I would like to hint at the cause of this mental condition in strict confidence. About nine months ago I received an invitation in a semi-official way to give a course of lectures on philosophy at the new university in Cairo in the following winter. These invitations were then followed in August by a most obliging letter from Prince Fuad Pasha22, in which I was urgently pressed to accept the invitation. I replied that I was unable to comply with the respectful appeal. Then in the middle of October the prince himself came from Vienna to Budapest accompanied by two companions "pour me convaincre". In an intercourse that lasted for hours with the amiable grandson of Muhammad 'Ali and his kind companions I was attacked in a most forcible way to give a binding consent. No matter how flattering the importance that the Egyptians attached to my personal participation and how attractive the task offered to me, after impartial and calm self-examination, I found myself unable to accede to the request. Now I am too old to catapult myself all of a sudden into strange surroundings, to subject myself to the task of preparation from one lecture to the other and finally to be compelled by the delicate nature of the subject to be constantly on my guard not to cause offence in matters of religion (cf. Vollers-Algiers)23. In addition I have the impression that the urgent character of the invitation is based on an overestimation of my qualities caused by the indulgence of my friends. I informed the prince that for the time being it was impossible for me but I thought I owed to the obligingness of this person, so kindly disposed towards me, the consideration of not cutting the thread once and for all. J'y réfléchirai: on this we parted. But with that the affair is not settled, not even provisionally. Ten days ago I received an official communication from our prime minister, Count Khuen24, in which he strongly recommends that I accede to the invitation: the state secretary at our Ministry of Education informs me simultaneously that a note of identical content has reached the Hungarian

22 Goldziher-Aḥmad Fuʾād, Correspondence. Letter from Aḥmad Fuʾād dated London 16 July 1912 [recte 1911].
23 Karl Vollers (1857-1909) was director of the Khedivial Library in Cairo from 1886 until 1896, when he was appointed professor at Jena University. Fück 1955:240. At the 14th Congress of Orientalists at Algiers, Vollers' paper on the language of the Qurʾān displeased Muslim participants so he withdrew it from publication. Cf. Goldziher-Hartmann, Correspondence 228-229.
24 Goldziher-Khuon-Héderváry, Correspondence. Letter from Khuen-Héderváry dated 16.10.1911. The draft of Goldziher's answer is enclosed: he replies to the polite letter from the prime minister that "his personal conditions do not enable him to accept the gratifying invitation at present, but he will keep considering the possibility of taking another standpoint in the future" (personal pronouns altered by me - L. C). Count Károly Khuen-Héderváry (1849-1918), conservative politician, prime minister of Hungary (1903, 1910-1912).
Minister of Education from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Aehrenthal\textsuperscript{25}. I do not need to tell you that being pressed like this causes me enormous agitation. It is only under quiet and steady conditions that I can work and smooth away – as far as possible – the marks adhering to me from my past. Now I feel that mentally I am not fit – at least for the time being – for the task offered to me and thus I feel I cannot follow the advice pressing upon me. But the many discussions in connection with this cause me palpitation of the heart. I am only just equal to the tasks I have to fulfil every day; but I have the strongest and most serious doubts whether I would also be equal to the tasks I would have to confront in Egypt. In one word: doubts and more doubts, which must necessarily result in a negative decision in the end. This all strictly confidentially."


\textsuperscript{25} Among Balogh’s letters to Goldziher there is none relating to this affair. Goldziher–Balogh, Correspondence. Count Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal (1854-1912), Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy from 1906 until 1912.

The polite letter from prime minister Khuen-Héderváry to Goldziher is extant with the draft of Goldziher's answer enclosed: he informs the prime minister that "his personal conditions do not enable him to accept the distinctive invitation at present but he will keep considering the possibility of taking another standpoint in the future."

The relevant entries in the Tagebuch run as follows:

"[August 25] At the same period many letters arrived from Egypt exhorting me to give a course of lectures on philosophy (again for mammon in profusion!) in the new university in Cairo in the coming winter. Prince Ahmed Fuad is at the head of this foundation as Président-Recteur. His secretary was given the task to do "everything imaginable, even unimaginable" to induce me to take a positive decision. Finally a letter from the Prince himself dated the 16th inst. arrived from Paris, which should be consulted in the original. Before leaving for this place I wrote my refusal. Why? Why? One should conjure up in one's mind the scars I still bear on my body from my slavery during the years 1875-1905 in order to understand why I feel incapable of undertaking anything unusual, that I can do nothing but daydream and perish in my daily work. And this daily work has been crowned with magnificent recognition. [...]"

"[October 13] The arrival of the Egyptian Prince Ahmed Fuad and his visit to our university was announced for today. The Rector told me to be present at the reception. Even during the presentation and while we accompanied him to the library, the Prince and his companions, Dr. Forti, librarian at Cairo University and Consul Bondy Bey, were already intimating to me that the Prince's excursion to Budapest was meant for me alone. During breakfast at his hotel, to which the Prince had invited me, the offensive aimed at getting me to accept the above-mentioned invitation began. "Je suis venu seulement pour vous convaincre," I am assumed to be "le plus grand arabisant du monde" and to have an obligation to bring Occidental culture and scholarship to the Orient. In Vienna he asked the minister Count Aehrenthal and even the King to exert pressure upon me to this end. I would be "worshipped" in Egypt and the greatest respect would be shown to me. So it went on for three hours. The three gentlemen also tried to suggest patriotic motives to me. During the whole journey all over Europe all the experts had referred to me as the most qualified authority. I was entreated to yield to the "suffrage universel". At the same time


Goldziher–Khuen-Héderváry, Correspondence. Letter from Khuen-Héderváry dated 16.10.1911 (personal pronouns altered by me – I. O.). The draft of Goldziher's draft is undated. [Both letter and draft are in Hungarian.]

Puszta Tövisegyháza.

Emperor Franz Joseph (of Austria) was also the King of Hungary and it is his latter title which is always used in Hungary.
the advancement of a lot of university professors to the next rank up was published in the official gazette today. People of very inferior quality enjoyed this recognition and promotion. My name is not to be found in the list. This year I conclude the fortieth year of my activities in the university, 34 years as an unsalaried Privatdozent. And I am supposed to go to Egypt to seek laurels!"

"[October 17] Today I received a letter from our Prime Minister, Count Khuen Héderváry, in which His Excellency gives me to understand, at the request of Prince Fuad recently submitted to him, how much my acceptance of the invitation to Egypt would be in the interest of the reputation of Hungarian scholarship. The letter and my answer can be found among the papers concerning this affair."


While these statements shed light on the personality of a great Arabist elucidating the highly personal motives behind his decision to turn down the invitation to the Egyptian University, at the same time they also offer an insight into the early days of the newly founded institution, along with glimpses into the broader implications of an undertaking which had relevance in international politics, too.

REFERENCES

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