A LEGACY OF ISLAMIC PRESENCE
MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS IN HUNGARY

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0. As is well known, Hungarians have come into contact with Islam during several periods of their history, from the earliest ages up to the present, but the majority of the population in neither epoch embraced Islam. Islamic religion and culture, however, existed in the Carpathian Basin at various periods, and in this article I wish to examine the legacy of this presence, if any, in the Islamic manuscript collections of present day Hungary.

For this purpose I shall first give a brief overview of the institutions of Islamic learning, so that we have a general picture of what we should look for and what we can expect to find among the MSS, and then I shall endeavour to present the contents of the existing Hungarian collections against this cultural background.

1. Islamic learning: institutions and curriculum

“The history of Islamic institutions of learning is inextricably linked with Islam’s religious history” – wrote George Makdisi (1981: xiii) in his pivotal study on the rise of colleges.

And accordingly, it is not surprising that the ordinary, everyday mosque, the masjid, was the first institution of learning in Islam, and one which preserved its primacy as the ideal institution of disseminating knowledge. From the earliest times there is also evidence of the development of mosque libraries. The basis of which could have been the custom for authors to deposit copies of their works for reference in the mosque of their quarter or town.

The founder of the masjid could decide and determine in the foundation document which one of the Islamic sciences should be taught in it. So, in the
first centuries of Islam *masğids* also functioned as teaching establishments. They served as colleges for the Islamic sciences and their ancillaries, including grammar, philology and literature. Often a khan was built next to them as a residence for out-of-town students. Being highly meritorious and socially desirable, the founding of *masğids* was a practice followed by several men of power and influence. The professors usually also served as the imams of these mosques, and the mosques often became designated by the names of those who taught in them.

Bigger mosques also functioned as institutions of learning on a larger scale. The Friday congregational mosque (*ğāmiç*) had *halqas*, i.e. study-circles, in which the various Islamic sciences were taught. The existence of study-circles was common to all congregational mosques. They were led by professors specifically appointed to a certain mosque’s study circle. In this sense a *halqa* was a professorial chair. And this practice continued well into the 20th century, as is sufficiently documented in the case of the Azhar mosque in Cairo. According to the account of the Egyptian writer Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, who attended Muḥammad ʿAbduh’s lectures at the Azhar, “the content of Abduh’s teaching did not depart in the slightest from the traditions that had been laid down. He used the most ancient and the most venerated of the classics as the basis of his teaching.”

So the *ğāmiç*, besides being a place of worship for the Muslim congregation on Friday, with its Friday sermon, also supplied the place where the various Islamic disciplines and their ancillaries, including Arabic language and literature, were taught.

After the crystallisation of Islamic law in the tenth-eleventh centuries, the *madrasa* developed from the *masğid* to become the institution of learning par excellence, in the sense that it was devoted primarily to the study of Islamic law, the most prestigious of the Islamic sciences and the most important for the community. This development, however, did not mean that the *masğid* and the *ğāmiç* ceased to function as centres of Islamic teaching. The basic difference was the special focus on law in the *madrasa*, while the *masğids* continued to be the seats of other religious sciences.

Now the question remains about the exact nature of the sciences that could have been taught in the mosques.

From the beginning the Qurʿān was in the focus of Islamic sciences and the aim of all scholarly activity was the better understanding and interpretation of the Holy Book. The 9th century, however, was witness to a sharp change, since this was the epoch of great translations from Greek. Hereafter there was no escape from the influence of the so-called Greek sciences within Islamic sciences proper. Hence logic and the weapons of dialectic could not be disposed of by those well versed in law. So its study became a prerequisite for studying Islamic sciences.
Libraries from the outset collected works in all available branches of Islamic sciences which also facilitated the spread of non-Islamic sciences, like logic, mathematics, etc. while medicine was taught in hospitals.

Talking about libraries, it is interesting to note that the arrangement of books followed a hierarchical order and this order remained the same throughout the centuries. Goldziher in his Report (submitted to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1874) on books brought (by him) from the East listed the books in this order mentioning that “according to the Muslim custom which has become a rule to be followed, books should be piled upon in a manner that the Qurʾān should be on the top of the pile as it is the accumulation of knowledge. Directly underneath follow the exegetical works in a strict order: commentaries of the Qurʾān, works of Prophetic tradition (ḥadīṯ), law and adab, the latter in the widest sense, containing the knowledge of everything necessary for the cultured people, including lexicography, grammar and poetry” (Goldziher 1874:10-11). And indeed, this is the skeleton of the hierarchy of Islamic sciences, which has remained the curriculum of teaching until well into the 20th century.

For a model curriculum of Islamic teaching at the end of the 19th century we can take the example of the Azhar where subjects were taught in two categories. Subjects belonging to the first category were to be studied for their own sake. Here belonged:

– theology (kalām or tawḥīd)
– jurisprudence (fiqh) and principles of jurisprudence (uṣūl al-fiqh)
– Qurʾānic exegesis (tafsīr)
– traditions of the Prophet (ḥadīṯ).

Subjects belonging to the second category were to be studied as necessary tools for studying subjects belonging to the first group. This second group comprised:

– syntax (nahw)
– morphology (sarf)
– the different branches of rhetoric
  ○ semantics (maʾānī)
  ○ science of figurative expression (bayān)
  ○ embellishment of speech (badīʾ)
– logic (manṭiq).

The 1896 reform of the Azhar added a few subjects to the syllabus without modifying its basic structure. To the first group: Religious ethics, Islamic history, Composition, Oratory. To the second group: Arabic language, Arabic lit-
erature, Geometry, Geography, Terminology of Prophetic tradition, Arithmetic, Algebra, Prosody and Rhyme.

2. Islamic manuscript collections in Hungary

2.1 Minor collections

After this brief survey of the institutions and the curriculum of Islamic learning, let’s turn our attention to the question of how Islamic manuscript collections were brought into existence in Hungary and what their relation is to the curriculum of the traditional Islamic learning system.

Apart from tiny collections of about ten Oriental manuscripts each owned by the Library of the Arabic Department at Eötvös Loránd University Budapest, and the main library of the same university, the Museum of Ethnography, and a private collection of texts and scrolls related to magic, there are two larger collections open to the public in Budapest, one in the National Library, and the other in the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

2.2 The collection of the National Library

The Oriental manuscripts of the National Library were first described in two articles by Ignaz Goldziher in 1880. There – based on the evidence of lines inscribed in the manuscripts – Goldziher states that the majority of the holdings were acquired by the new owners after the Turks had left them behind after their defeat in the Battle of Buda in 1686. Several of these manuscripts formed originally part of the waqf (religious endowment) of the congregational mosque of Buda as is evidenced by the possessor notes. These MSS were subsequently donated by their Hungarian owners to the National Library. As there are altogether 91 Islamic MSS (39 Arabic, 7 Persian and 45 Turkish), this small number of surviving MSS does not allow us to draw any conclusions as to the exact content of that library or any other Islamic library in Hungary in the 16th and 17th centuries.

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3 A general survey of these collections was given by A. Fodor (1992).
4 A characteristic remark is what can be read in a codex (Sign, 6 Quart, arab.) from the M. Jankovich collection: “Dieses Buch ist bey Eroberung Offen bekommen worden von denen Türk-en” (Goldziher 1880:105).
5 Cf. eg. the following remark: “Donatus ad templum magnum Urbis Bodum seu Budám (!) in Hungária per sacerdotem ejus Schaichi Soliman Efendi” (Sign. 2 Quart, arab.) (Goldziher 1880:107).
2.3 The collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

2.3.1 The Muslim community in Hungary at the beginning of the 20th century

If we, however, turn our attention to the most significant collection of Islamic MSS in Hungary which is to be found in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, we find a completely different situation. There are three distinct groups of Islamic manuscripts in this collection, from among which our interest will be focused only on the Arabic ones. The reason for this is their provenance. The Turkish\(^6\) and Persian manuscripts possessed today by the Library of the Academy can be primarily attributed to the conscious effort of certain scholars who collected these manuscripts in the 19th century, like e.g. Dániel Szilágyi\(^7\), Áron Szilády, Arminius Vámbéry\(^8\), and Alexander Kégl\(^9\). The majority of the Arabic manuscripts, however, originally belonged to the small group of Muslims who lived in Hungary in the beginning of the 20th century. According to the 1910 census, the number of Muslims living in Hungary amounted to 553 (from among them 179 had Turkish as their mother tongue and 319 Bosniac), not counting those living in Bosnia itself (more than 600,000)\(^10\). The majority of the Turks were students. Their first group arrived in 1909 led by imam ِAbdallātiṭīf. The centre of their worship was the shrine of the 16th century Bektashi dervish, Gül Baba, which – after having been converted to a Jesuit chapel in the 18th century – regained its position in Islam as the northernmost centre of Ṣūfī pilgrimage after the dissolution of Jesuit order in 1773\(^11\).

Albeit this small community of Muslims was divided because of the different ethnicity of its members, its existence was well known outside Hungary as is evidenced for example by the donation of books in 1935 in the form of inalienable religious endowment (\emph{waqf}). The books comprising 13 titles in 64 volumes were donated to the community of Muslims in Hungary by a certain Ḥāğğ Yaqūb ِAbdalwahhāb from Cairo. The text of the donation (\textbf{Fig. 1}) is printed in each volume and reads as follows:

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\begin{quote}
In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate
I instituted an endowment of this book irrevocably to God almighty with a lawful and true donation. It cannot be sold, donated, changed, or exchanged.
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\(^6\) For a more detailed description of the provenance of Turkish MSS and their contents, see, e.g. Parlatir et al. 2007: 11-12.
\(^7\) On the collection of this remarkable person, see Kúnos 1892 and more recently Sudár 2003 and Sudár & Csorba. 2003.
\(^8\) Cf. Apor 1971.
\(^9\) For his collection, see Szántó 2013.
\(^10\) Cf. Léderer 1988:34.
\(^11\) For Gül Baba and the Bektashi Order in Hungary, see Ágoston & Sudár 2002.
I made its storage place the country of Hungary in its capital, Budapest, so that it be in the zāwiya of Gül Baba so that Hungarian Muslims and other Muslims who come to the above-mentioned town of Budapest benefit from it, at the care of his excellence, the muftī and imām of Muslims in the country of Hungary, Imām ‘Abdallaṭīf efendi. After him the care should fall into the hands of whoever will lead the Muslims there.”

These printed books – which survive in the library of the Arabic Department of Eötvös Loránd University – are a careful collection of the most important Islamic texts, comprising everything necessary from Qur’ān commentaries, (like that of the tenth century aṭ-Ṭabarī in 30 volumes) to ḥadīt, and collections of legal decisions.

2.3.2 Arabic manuscripts in the Library of the Academy

Prior to the arrival of these printed books to Hungary, and also parallel to them, the members of the Muslim community in Hungary, and in particular their imam, ʿAbdallaṭīf, made use of MSS, since the beginning of the 20th century was a period in the Islamic world when people still relied on MSS in the field of religious studies. And indeed, we frequently encounter ʿAbdallaṭīf’s name or the name of other members of this community in the Arabic manuscripts of the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Although the number of Arabic MSS is only 176 in this collection, the majority of them come from the small Muslim community that lived in Budapest before the Second World War. Imām ʿAbdallaṭīf died in 1946 and the community was quickly dissolved in the post-war period not favourable in Hungary to any religious activity.

There are several collected volumes among the 176 MSS, containing two to nine works, so in reality the number of works is 291. Since the overwhelming majority of the MSS come from this community, we have a clear picture of the works they used. The frequency of certain types of manuscripts and oevres reflects very well the Islamic teaching curriculum as we have seen it in the case of the Azhar mosque.

Though the surviving manuscripts cannot be equated with the total holdings of the former Islamic community, we can still make an adequate assessment about the character of their MS possessions. It can be established, that most of the manuscripts that belonged to this community are late – usually 17th, 18th, 19th century – copies of works that were not collected but used by the community. So they were not valuable for them as artistic pieces of MS culture, but as texts that contain important information about their religion and the sciences necessary for its study.
It should be pointed out that although the mother tongue of the majority of Muslims at that time in Hungary was either Turkish or Bosniac, the MSS as well as the books donated by Ḥāğğ Ya'qūb ʿAbdalwahḥāb were all in Arabic, this being the language of religious studies in the Islamic world even at that time.

It is interesting to note that the largest thematic unit of Arabic manuscripts contains 83 works dealing with Arabic grammar (syntax and morphology). These are standard works in multiple copies (from two to seven) that formed part of the curriculum for the teaching of this discipline. The best represented author in this category is the 15th century Molla Ġāmī whose commentary – entitled al-Fawāʾid ad-ḍiyāʾ iyya – on the 13th century Ibn al-Ḥāġib’s al-Kāfiya fi n-nahw is available in nine copies, only two of which were donated by Hungarian collectors. While Molla Ġāmī can be considered the most well represented author in the field of grammar, the second best represented is the 16th century Turkish imām, Meḥmed efendi Birgivi (1523-73). It may be interesting to note that also very late copies of his work, copied obviously for the purpose of learning, survive in the collection, like e.g. a copy of one of his grammatical works (al-ʿAwāmil al-miʿa, MS Arab 156) which was copied in Iskodra (Northern Albania).

Morphology and morphonology, the twin sciences of grammar, are exemplified by a popular work available in five copies in the collection. This is the Marāḥ al-arwāḥ written by a 13th century author, Ibn Masʿūd whose fame rests on this composition (Fig. 2). Already in the 15th century, the Egyptian author of encyclopaedic works, Ġalāl aḍ-Dīn as-Suyūṭī, described it as “a famous concise book at the disposal of people”12. And this situation has not changed until the 20th century. This work is the fruit of some six centuries of studies in morphonology, and accordingly, although it is concise, yet comprehensible, so well serves the aims of the students of Arabic language. It has frequently been copied and bound together with four other shorter compositions in this field, like the Taṣrīf of his contemporary, az-Zanḡānī, and three anonymous works, one of which (al-Maqṣūd fī ṣ-ṣarf) has popularly been attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa.

To this group we may add lexicography (ʿilm al-luġa) which is present with only one manuscript (Kulliyyāt al-ʿulūm by al-Kaffawī), and rhetoric (balāġa), represented by eleven volumes three of which are copies of al-Qazwīnī’s Talḥīs al-Miṭlāḥ.

This linguistic group is closely followed by the group of manuscripts on logic (maṯṭiq). The 45 manuscripts that represent this group here are mainly al-Fanārī’s al-Fawāʾid al-fanārīya and its various commentaries. The author, al-Fanārī (1350-1431) – qāḍī of Bursa at a young age, later grand mufti of Istanbul – was a highly influential person in his age, and author of numerous composit-

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12 About the author’s life, however, he could not find any data, cf. as-Suyūṭī, Buġya I, 151, s.v. “Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Masʿūd”.
tions. To this we can add another popular textbook from the 13th century: the numerous copies Atīr ad-Dīn al-Abhari’s Ḥsāġūḡī and its commentaries.

These two fields – grammar (in its broadest sense) and logic – represent the main subjects which belong to the second category of Islamic sciences which were to be studied as necessary tools for studying subjects belonging to the first group.

Two among the subjects to be studied for their own sake are present within the MSS in great quantity. These are jurisprudence (fiqh) and theology (kalām or tawḥīd). In the second largest group of MSS we find 53 fundamental works of mainly Ḥanafī jurisprudence, the legal school of the Ottoman Empire, like e.g. several copies of the Multaqā l-abhur by the 16th century Ottoman faqīh, al-Ḥalabī. Theology also forms a relatively large group composed by 29 works on Muslim dogma. Taking into account that Gül Baba was a mystic, it is no wonder that we find several manuscripts devoted to Islamic mysticism.

Imām ʿAbdallaṭīf also had handbooks of munāẓara, i.e. theological-juridical dispute, without the mastering of which he could not have been appointed to this position. The main representative of this topic is the book of the 17th /18th century Sāğaqlīzāda together with its commentaries. A few MSS of the Qurʾān also found their way into the collection of the Academy’s Library, obviously not reflecting the amount of copies which should have been in the possession of the Muslim community.

Other subjects are represented by an even smaller amount of manuscripts. The few number of ḥadīṯ works (altogether five works in three MSS) and Qurʾān commentaries (three works in three MSS) can probably be explained by the fact that these usually voluminous works had become printed by this time, so there was no need to use manuscript copies.

The majority of manuscripts show evidence of the fact that they have been studied and discussed under the leadership of Imām ʿAbdallaṭīf. They are full of interlinear and marginal glosses, and sometimes even small slips of papers are put between the pages where these commentaries continue. So we can confidently state that this collection preserves the cultural memory of the Muslim community that lived in Budapest in the first half of the 20th century.
REFERENCES

A. Primary sources


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B. Secondary sources


Fig. 1. The *waqf* notice in the books donated to the Muslim community
Fig. 2. Ibn Mas‘ūd (7/13 c.), Marāḥ al-arwāḥ (copied 1123/1711) Ms Arab O. 108, f. 4r
by courtesy of the Oriental Collection, Library of the HAS