

**SCHOLARS IN PRIVATE
ON THE CORRESPONDENCE OF GOLDZIHHER AND VÁMBÉRY¹**

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1. Letters by Ármin Vámbéry in Ignaz Goldziher's Correspondence²

The monumental correspondence of Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921) occupies a prominent place among the scholarly correspondences of several centuries. Despite its one-sidedness – since it mainly consists of letters addressed to him – it clearly reflects the intricate systems of relationships and networks of communication that existed at the late 19th and early 20th centuries.³ In this collection from the legacy of the influential figure of European research on Islam one has to do with more than 13,000 documents. These pages preserve the messages and thoughts of leading contemporary scholars, faithful disciples, editors of journals, professors of renowned foreign universities, and rabbis of small rural communities alike. The documents show an extraordinary variety concerning their language, content and even the amount of letters from different persons. Goldziher's chief corresponding partner was the Dutch Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) who discussed in nearly 500 letters various scientific issues with his esteemed Hungarian counterpart.⁴ At the other end of the line are the persons who sent just one note, a business card or a birthday wish. These include, among others, the later Nobel laureate Albert Szent-

¹ The first version of this paper was written on the occasion of the centenary of Á. Vámbéry's birth. It was published online at <http://vambery.mtak.hu/en/06.htm>.

² Goldziher's correspondence was donated to the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences by his son, Károly [Charles], who was also responsible for the careful arrangement of the letters. The letters have been digitised and are available online within the digital collections of the Library. All the call numbers start with "GIL", an abbreviation which stands for "Goldziher Ignaz Letters" at the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

³ It is clear from the letters that Goldziher was a very conscientious letter writer, trying to answer the questions put to him almost instantly. He preferred to reply by return mail, but even if he had to look up something, he usually responded as soon as he obtained the requested information, see Dévényi 2005:29.

⁴ See Koningsveld 1985.

Györgyi (1893–1985) who – during his stay in Leiden – was recommended to Snouck Hurgronje’s attention and patronage by Goldziher. Szent-Györgyi, in the only surviving letter⁵ from him in this collection, gratefully informs Goldziher of his friendly reception at the Dutch scholar’s house.

Altogether more than 1,600 persons were in correspondence with Goldziher, and Ármin Vámbéry (1832–1913) features among those who sent a significant number of letters to him. There are only 56 persons who sent more than 50 letters, and the “dervish” – as he was often referred to – is among them with 71 letters signed by him. Besides these, there are in the envelope⁶ of Vámbéry’s letters two business cards from his wife, an envelope and a letter from the Turanian Society,⁷ Goldziher’s draft response to a letter of Vámbéry, and three obituaries⁸ of Vámbéry, one of which was sent by the Academy, and two by the University of Budapest.

Ármin Vámbéry stayed in close contact until the end of his life with his preeminent student, Ignaz Goldziher. A good documentation of their relationship is provided by Vámbéry’s letters and – in lack of Goldziher’s replies – Goldziher’s entries in his *Tagebuch*,⁹ as well as his *Memorial speech* written on the occasion of Vámbéry’s death.¹⁰ Their communication was determined by the teacher–student relationship. Goldziher often emphasised how great an impact Vámbéry’s suggestive lectures had on him:

“This vivid immediacy necessarily influenced the spirit of the young student, and transferred him by magic into that living Oriental milieu whose spiritual phenomena he tried to understand” (Goldziher 1915:17).

“Ich wäre eine gemeine Seele, könnte ich ihm dies je vergessen, oder verläugnen wollen, dass ich Vámb[éry] die aufrechte Liebe für die orientalischen Studien verdanke” (Goldziher 1978:26).

⁵ GIL/42/42/01. Although Szent-Györgyi’s letter is undated, it could only have been written between 1920–21 during his stay in Leiden.

⁶ The call number of the complete Vámbéry envelope is GIL/44/09.

⁷ GIL/44/09/01: an invitation dated 3 January 1912 to a committee meeting in order to organise the celebration of the 80th birthday of Ármin Vámbéry, honorary president of the society.

⁸ GIL/44/09/21–23.

⁹ Goldziher 1978. It has partially been translated into Hungarian in 1985.

¹⁰ His memorial speech was read in the Academy on 25 October 1915 and was published the same year.

At the same time, Vámbéry was understandably proud that the attention of the young researcher, who became one of the most prestigious scholars of Islam in the contemporary world, was directed by him towards the Orient.

“Doch wenn man den Studiengang Dr. Goldziher schildert und von seinen Lehrjahren spricht, da darf ich mir es nicht nehmen lassen dass ich in ihm meinen ersten Schüler kenne, den ich in der Vorhalle des orientalischen Wissens eingeführt, dessen ersten Schritte ich geleitet und für dessen Aufkommen ich viel complimentieren und antichambrieren musste.”¹¹

It should, however, be mentioned that by the time Goldziher started to write his diary on his fortieth birthday, he resented Vámbéry’s earlier patronage, was embarrassed by it, and felt that it was disadvantageous for him from several points of view. As he writes (Goldziher 1978:26):

“Er pries mich allenthalben als Wunderknaben, als orientalisches Sprachgenie an Bald wurde ich auch in die Schriftstellerei hineingetrieben und der Grund zu verfrühter Publizität meiner Studien gelegt, die ich späterhin bitter bereute.”

2. The language and style of Vámbéry’s letters¹²

The distribution of the letters is interesting both linguistically and thematically. Vámbéry started to correspond with his student in the 1860s. The language of the letters was almost exclusively German¹³ until 1894. Twenty-seven letters have survived from this period, and this series of German letters was broken by just two letters in Hungarian and one in English.¹⁴ However, in 1894, there was a sudden change in the main language of the letters. While at the beginning of the year Vámbéry penned his letters in German, in June he recommended his “private secretary”¹⁵ to Goldziher’s attention in Hungarian. And from then on – with four exceptions – he was writing exclusively in Hungarian, a total of thirty-seven letters. The main language of the letters is often broken by a Turkish or

¹¹ GIL/44/09/19.

¹² The orthography of the original letters was kept throughout the transcription. No attempt was made to correct their spelling and grammar or modify them according to present day orthography.

¹³ On Goldziher’s mother tongue and the contemporary linguistic situation in Hungary, see Ormos 2005.

¹⁴ GIL/44/09/11. For its contents, see below.

¹⁵ GIL/44/09/09, dated 27 June 1894 is the first in the series of Hungarian letters.

Arabic word or phrase. Sometimes even Vámbéry's signature is written with Arabic characters.

Among the letters we also find postcards and business cards on which Vámbéry wrote a few words. The tone of the letters is always very friendly. An undated, early letter is addressed as "Liebes Kind". This cordial message clearly indicates that Vámbéry had great affection for the young Goldziher:

"Liebes Kind

Du hast dich für den unglücklichen Scheich exponirt fahre fort nach dein الاحسان بالاتمام dein Mannern zu helfen, und eine kleine Collecta behuffs Weiterbeförderung zu machen.

Konntest du nicht heute auf ein Wort zu mir kommen?" (GIL/44/09/65)

Other letters in German are addressed as "Lieber Natzi", while those in Hungarian as "Kedves öcsém uram" (My dear young lord). Goldziher addresses Vámbéry in his surviving Hungarian letter as "Nagyon tisztelt professor ur!" (Very honoured Professor), and in the early German one as "Hochwürdiger Herr".¹⁶ The three letters written in the 1910s by Vámbéry's son, Ruzstem (1872–1948), to Goldziher were addressed to "Mélyen Tisztelt Goldziher Bácsi"¹⁷ (Deeply Revered Uncle Goldziher), and "Kedves Goldziher Bácsi"¹⁸ (Dear Uncle Goldziher).

3. The themes of the letters

3.1 An even more nuanced picture can be obtained from the thematic distribution of the letters. In the long letters written in the 1870s Vámbéry provides the young scholar with advices, or asks from him some favours during his European university studies, and afterwards.¹⁹ Vámbéry also felt the death of

¹⁶ GIL/44/08/01. This letter, written in Leipzig on 15 March 1870, was acquired by the Library of the Academy in 2007.

¹⁷ GIL/44/10/01. In this letter written in December 1913 Ruzstem only asks to meet Goldziher.

¹⁸ GIL/44/10/02; GIL/44/10/03. In the first, undated letter Ruzstem mentions that a posthumous work of his fathers will be sent to Goldziher, In the second letter, written in 1918, Ruzstem turns to Goldziher as the editor of the *Hungarian Law Society Gazette* (*Jogtudományi Közlöny*) to request an article on Muslim jurisprudence on the occasion of the visit of an important delegation of Turkish lawyers to Hungary.

¹⁹ Here belong, e.g. GIL/44/09/02 and GIL/44/09/55 in which Vámbéry writes, among others:

"Lieber Natzi

József Eötvös²⁰ to be a major blow for Oriental studies in Hungary, and shared this opinion with Goldziher. In addition, we can find the following topics:

3.2 Request for support

Several letters were written by Vámbéry in support of various persons. He liked to help people who deserved it. We have a testimony for this trait of his, for example, in the bequest of a scholar of Persian studies, Alexander Kégl (1862–1920) who was also supported in his scholarly endeavours by Vámbéry, his professor at the University of Budapest.²¹ Kégl did not only receive from his master letters of recommendation that he could make use of during his study tour in Iran, but he was also persistently supported by Vámbéry in his election among the members of the Academy, a position which he finally attained after several attempts for a number of years. In his support, Vámbéry found an ally in Goldziher who backed Vámbéry's proposals as is apparent from the records of the yearly elections (*Akadémiai Értesítő* 1905:5).

Election to the membership of the Academy was a serious issue with a long list of meritorious candidates each year. Accordingly, it is no wonder that applications had to be submitted repeatedly for several years. Vámbéry and Goldziher, however, were always supportive of talented people and united their forces for a good cause. Such was the election to honorary membership in 1895 of Aurel Stein (1862–1943) to the success of which both scholars contributed a great deal as is attested by their correspondence.²²

Goldziher became the secretary of the Jewish Community of Pest in 1874, a position in which he could help the members of the community to get financial support. No wonder that he received numerous letters asking for his help. Vámbéry also called his attention to several persons in need. These included his

Sei so gut und frage den شيخ الشيوخ [i.e. Heinrich L. Fleischer (1801-1888), Goldziher's professor in Leipzig] in meinem Namen ob ein geographisches Werk über den mohammedanischen Osten aus der Mitte der 4ten Jahrhunderts der Hira”

²⁰ GIL/44/09/55. József Eötvös (1813–1871), a man of great erudition, and Minister of Religion and Education between 1867 and 1871 was an ideal statesman and a liberal politician who held progressive views since his youth. Among these it is important to mention that he advocated Jewish emancipation already in one of his first speeches at the National Diet (published, with additional matter, in 1841). He was instrumental in providing Goldziher with a state scholarship to study abroad in the years 1868–1872.

²¹ On Kégl's life, oeuvre and his collection of Persian manuscripts see Dévényi *et al.* 2010.

²² See, e.g. GIL/44/09/08 (dated 8 January 1895), and GIL/44/09/51 (dated 3 February 1895) from which it becomes apparent that Vámbéry was very keen on this issue, discussing the different options with a number of academicians. A friendly tone also shines through these two cards, in the second of which he addresses Goldziher in Arabic: *yā ḥabībī, yā 'azīzī*.

students²³ and relatives alike. The following rare English letter (GIL/44/09/11) dated 22 May 1887 has a very peculiar style. It also demonstrates Vámbéry's familiarity with people as well as the fact that he liked to support persons in case it did not involve a donation from his own purse:

“My dear Natzi,

I beg leave to send you with the best possible recommendation Rabbi Mordekhai Deutsch, the husband of my step-sister, consequently my brother in law who is a downrigh[t] S[c]honorer by profession, a Jewish dervish in the strictest sense of the word, and who of course came here to empty my purse as far as possible.

Knowing, as You do, that my purse suffers of stricture, and knowing as I do, that You have the strings of a much wider purse, namely that of the Community in your hand, I will ask You to make the Község [community (in Hungarian)] for this time my exchequer and to participate Rabbi Deutsch in the fund of charity.

This is all what I ask and nothing else, take care of the Rabbi, he is a first rate scamp in spite of his considerable Talmudic knowledge.

Yours sincerely,

A. Vámbéry”

3.3 Congratulations

As a famous person in and outside Hungary, Goldziher received several hundreds of congratulations on the occasions of the great events of his life, personal or professional. Vámbéry was evidently among the well-wishers. He sent notes on the occasions of Goldziher's promotions,²⁴ family events,²⁵ or the launch of his books;²⁶ as well as his condolences (GIL/44/09/35) on the occasion of the death of Goldziher's mother.

²³ Cf. e.g. GIL/44/09/05 where Vámbéry pleads the cause of Mór Eismann, a student of Turkish language, detailing his circumstances, or GIL/44/09/66 where he asks Goldziher to help two talented young scholars, Bernát Munkácsi (1860–1937) and Ignác Kúnos (1860–1945) who applied for Jewish community scholarships.

²⁴ GIL/44/09/61, dated 24 December 1872 on Goldziher's appointment as Honorary Professor at the University of Budapest; and GIL/44/09/48, dated 05 June 1905 on Goldziher's appointment as full professor at the University of Budapest.

²⁵ Among others GIL/44/09/52, on the occasion of the wedding of Goldziher's niece and ward in 1898.

²⁶ Goldziher even sent his longer works to Vámbéry who always acknowledged their receipt and in his letter of thanks he also included some critical remarks. Here belong the letters GIL/44/09/49 and GIL/44/09/56 in which Vámbéry writes about the two volumes of Goldziher's *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*.

3.4 Greetings, invitations

Goldziher's correspondence also contains a lot of greetings on various occasions. Their survival shows that Goldziher did not discard anything, irrespective of the importance or the insignificant nature of the contents.²⁷ Accordingly, some of these cards are nothing more than New Year's wishes,²⁸ and other, similar greetings,²⁹ or invitations.³⁰

3.5 Etymologies and other linguistic matters

Beyond the exchange of courtesies and asking favours, the two scholars counted on each other's knowledge in the languages of their specializations. This is actually the professional part of the correspondence, and it clearly shows that Goldziher repeatedly turned to his former master when he could not cope with a Turkish expression, and Vámbéry also counted on Goldziher's answer in the case of the Arabic language in which he never attained an appropriate level of proficiency.

Only one letter survives in which Vámbéry asks Goldziher a question related to the Arabic language. The simple nature of the problem, however, shows well that Vámbéry did not really master this language.

27. 11. 1896³¹

“Please translate the following passage to me

لحوم العلماء مسمومه من شمشها مرض و [من] اكلها فقد مات³²

²⁷ It does not mean, however, that despite the great quantity of letters everything survived from the correspondence. It can, however, be supposed that the percentage of loss is quite low, as can be seen, e.g. from the correspondence of Goldziher and David Simonsen (1853-1932) chief rabbi and university professor in Copenhagen. Whereas the Simonsen Archives (<http://www.kb.dk/en/nb/samling/js/dsa>) preserve only seven letters from Goldziher, there are 13 letters written by Simonsen in the Goldziher collection. If, however, the two sets are paired, it becomes apparent that a few letters might be missing from the Budapest collection as well.

²⁸ Like e.g. GIL/44/09/25 and GIL/44/09/37.

²⁹ See GIL/44/09/31.

³⁰ Like, e.g. GIL/44/09/49 (dated 17 June 1896) sent from the small Austrian hillside town of Mürzzuschlag, where Vámbéry retired for the summer, and GIL/44/09/24.

³¹ GIL/44/09/50, in Hungarian. In another Hungarian letter (GIL/44/09/54) dated 13 October 1911 Vámbéry only quotes one Arabic phrase:

“Could you please tell me the name of خبز مسهل you mentioned yesterday and the place it can be bought?

sincerely

”وامبرى“

³² Vámbéry's problem was caused by the fact that he wrote the last two words as one (فقد مات). This was underlined by Goldziher who also inserted the second pronoun by

I do not understand the last word, so the whole is a bit vague. Do not you know where it is from? In my text it appears as a proverb.”

He answered, however, several queries of Goldziher related to Ottoman Turkish and other Turkic languages.³³

4. Goldziher’s university appointment and Vámbéry’s role in it

There is only one, highly significant exchange of letters from the spring of 1897 which cannot be inserted in the above categories. In order to evaluate it properly, it has to be noted that Goldziher interrupted his connection with Vámbéry³⁴ in 1881 suspecting that he was a double-dealer as had already been suggested to him by the Minister of Religion and Education, A. Trefort³⁵ in 1875. Goldziher renewed his connection with Vámbéry only twelve years later, when his former professor asked him to send him his list of publications,³⁶ as this was necessary to obtain the post of full professor at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Budapest.

The subject of the 1897 correspondence is a new proposal by Vámbéry, submitted to the Faculty of Letters to provide regular remuneration to Goldziher, who has not yet received a salary for his university teaching. “My request” – writes Vámbéry in the official document – “to the respected Faculty of Letters is the following: let the Faculty address a petition to the Minister of Religion and Education, His Eminence Gyula Wlassics, in which they propose a reward of 1500 forints yearly to Ignaz Goldziher”.

This exchange of letters is also interesting because of its completeness. Not only has Vámbéry’s formal submission of 27 April 1897 survived (which he sent

pencil above the original text. The famous quote (“The flesh of scholars is poisoned meat. Whoever smells it gets ill, and whoever eats it dies”) goes back to Ibn ‘Asākir, (*Tabyīn* 29) and is not to be understood literally. It has theological implications and refers – first and foremost – to the elevated status of scholars. Its precise interpretation, however, is being debated until our days.

³³ See, e.g. GIL/44/09/03 (dated 22 February 1902, in connection with a quotation from Evliya Celebi); GIL/44/09/04 (dated 8 November 1902, on the elusive meaning of بکلردی); and GIL/44/09/43 (dated 2 June 1906, on the possible meaning of an unknown saying: چاق چملاق).

³⁴ See Goldziher 1978:105–106.

³⁵ “Hüten Sie sich vor Vámbéry, der spielt eine Doppelrolle mit Ihnen” (Goldziher 1978:105). In his diary’s entry for the year 1885, Goldziher described in quite harsh terms the character of his former teacher, using terms like “Scheusal, Lügenvater”, etc. Not denying that he was his first teacher in the field of Oriental studies, he considered it to be his misfortune (“Er ist wohl mein Lehrer gewesen, aber dies ist mein Unglück”).

³⁶ GIL/44/09/10 (in German).

over to Goldziher, after having it withdrawn from the Faculty,), but also the detailed draft response of Goldziher written during the night of 1 May, together with the two answers written by Vámbéry on 2 May and 6 May.

Goldziher, as he writes in his *Tagebuch* (1978:215) saw this proposal for the first time on the table of the Dean, and he was very upset by it:

“30. April [1897]

Um Gottes Willen! Heute hatte ich beim Dekan zu thun, traf ihn jedoch nicht in seinem Bureau an. Als ich mich hinsetze, um einige Zeilen über den Zweck meines Besuches aufzuschreiben, erblicke ich auf seinem Tische offen ein Geschäftsstück überschriebenen: „Antrag des Prof. Vámbéry in Sachen der Remuneration (jutalom) des ordentl. Honorarprofessors I.G.“ Also dahin ist es mit mir gekommen am Beginne des 26. Jahres meiner Wirksamkeit an hiesiger Hochschule? Offene Bettelei! statt regelrichtiger Anerkennung! Und obendrein das Fiasko das bevorsteht. Das wird der Lügenderwisch prachtvoll inscenirt haben zu meiner größeren Ehre. Ich bin wahrhaftig zu Tode erschrocken beim Anblick des fatalen Schriftstückes, das so für die Blicke aller Studenten und Amtsdienner frei herumlagert. Nun wollen wir doch zusehen, was sie damit machen und wie lange sie es sich überlegen.”

At that time, however, he was still thinking to let the things proceed their own way. But on the same day he also visited Vámbéry, who mentioned to him the application, and as a result, during the night of 1 May he wrote a long letter to his former professor, asking him to withdraw the submission. Vámbéry, having carefully considered Goldziher's words, first decided to present the application to the Faculty if it will be accepted “without debate and contrary vote”. However, in his second letter he writes that during his informal interviews he learned that a debate would be inevitable. Thus he withdrew his proposal, but he did not give up supporting Goldziher's advance. “I will speak to the minister, and I hope that he will fulfil my wish by his own will” –, he closes his letter.³⁷

Vámbéry did not only support his former student in his university career. Since his youth he also tried to introduce him into the Hungarian scientific world, encouraged him to publish, and presented his studies at the Academy. These endeavours, however, were later felt unjust by Goldziher, who loved to mature his works.³⁸ Goldziher felt that after the outbreak of the “Ugro-Turkish

³⁷ GIL/44/09/46 (in Hungarian).

³⁸ As Goldziher (1978:26) himself expressed it: “Bald wurde ich auch in die Schriftstellerei hineingetrieben und der Grund zu verfrühter Publicität meiner Studien gelegt, die ich späterhin bitter bereute.”

war”³⁹ many opponents of Vámbéry also transferred their hostility on him, the “home student” of Vámbéry. Vámbéry willingly wrote opinions even in the later years on Goldziher’s works waiting for publication, as it is attested by a handwritten page on his study “The religion of the desert and the Islam”. From the above exchange of letters and the other gestures of Vámbéry in support of Goldziher – recommendations of books, invitations etc. – it seems that Goldziher unjustly accused his former professor by doing a negative campaign against his university advance. The tensions may have come from their extremely different disposition: the self-taught traveller, who changed his faith several times, published with an easy hand, thereby also opening new fields of research, was the contrary of the well-trained scholar, who deeply felt his religion, and put down every single line with great consideration and care. However, upon the death of Vámbéry Goldziher was able to overcome his reservations. He devoted a part of the summer of 1915 to write the *Commemorative speech*, in which he appreciated for long and in detail the groundbreaking nature of Vámbéry’s achievements in several fields. He gave a personal and individual overtone to his commemoration and appreciation by mentioning that in October 1865 “he was the first student, who ... enrolled for his lectures”, and with the speech delivered on 25 October “he closed the “Vámbéry chapter” of his life.

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³⁹ A heated linguistic discussion – the waves of which also reached the general public – on the origins and affinity of the Hungarian language ignited by Vámbéry’s study on “Hungarian and Turc–Tatar word correspondences” published in *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények*, the linguistic periodical of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1870.

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