

FROM ALGIERS TO BUDAPEST THE LETTERS OF MOHAMED BEN CHENEB TO IGNAZ GOLDZIHNER

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In the following paper the letters of Mohamed Ben Cheneb will be analysed as part of the vast correspondence of Ignaz Goldziher held in the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. For the correct assessment of these letters and their place in the correspondence, the history of the collection and its composition will also be touched upon.

1 Goldziher and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921) died nearly a century ago, nevertheless he has remained among the most influential European thinkers on Islam until our days. His influence is best reflected by the continuous (re)publication and translation of his books and articles into different languages as well as by the incessant references to his scholarly oeuvre.¹

In addition to his works, even his personality, his place within the Hungarian Jewish intellectual life of the period, and his Hungarian patriotism have attracted the attention of scholars.² This ingenious scholar had been attached to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences since his youth, which is well exemplified by the fact that he was elected a corresponding member of this learned society at the age of 26,³ while

¹ In addition to the major European languages, many of his works have been translated into Arabic and Hebrew alike. Among these translations, however, we can also find versions in Turkish, Persian, Urdu, or Indonesian, amongst others. Cf. https://www.worldcat.org/search?qt=worldcat_org_bks&q=Goldziher%2C+Ign%C3%A1c&fq=dt%3Abks [last accessed 6 October 2018].

² In addition to the publication of his two diaries (Goldziher, *Tagebuch*; Goldziher, *Oriental Diary*), without listing all the relevant literature, the following major books should be mentioned: Shayovits 1977–78; Simon 1985; Haber 2006; Beránek 2010; Trautmann-Waller 2011; Turán and Wilke 2017.

³ *Akadémiai Értesítő* [Bulletin of the Academy] (1876:137) stating that Goldziher – who had already proven by several articles his profound knowledge in the field of Semitic languages and literature together with his talent for independent investigation – was elected corresponding member of the Academy.

an ordinary member at the age of 42.⁴ In 1911 he became the member of the governing body of the Academy, and as the president of Section I,⁵ that of Linguistics and Literary Scholarship, he remained a prominent figure of Hungarian intellectual life until his death ten years later. His fame, however, far surpassed the borders of his native country as is well shown – amongst others – by the different titles conferred on him, like, for example, his honorary membership in the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland,⁶ in addition to the great number of endeavours to try to convince him to accept a professorship outside his native country.⁷ Already during his lifetime, his fame reached far beyond the borders of Europe, to the East and West alike, as is well exemplified by his correspondence which is an unrivalled source not only for Hungarian and European but also for global intellectual history in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

2 The Goldziher correspondence at the Academy

2.1 Donation and first steps

It is a well-known fact that in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the communication of scholars most often took the shape of active correspondence as is evidenced by

⁴ *Akadémiai Értesítő* [Bulletin of the Academy] 1892:283, 347. See also *ibid.* 681 where his inaugural lecture entitled “The tradition of pagan Arab poetry” is mentioned.

⁵ He held that position between 9 May 1905 and 23 October 1919 when he resigned on account of the anti-Semitic campaign against him. On his election, see the entry in his diary (Goldziher, *Tagebuch* 243), where he emphasises with pride the ratio in his favour (27:3). Cf. also *Akadémiai Értesítő* [Bulletin of the Academy] 1905:249. On the reasons leading to his resignation, see *Akadémiai Értesítő* [Bulletin of the Academy] 1919:274–275, Goldziher, *Tagebuch* 313, and the letters of Lajos Lóczy (1849–1920), a famous Hungarian geologist and a former friend of Goldziher, dated 19 August, 4 and 19 December 1919 in the Goldziher correspondence in the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (GIL/26/02/10, GIL/26/02/13 and GIL/26/02/12). It should be noted that Lóczy – while maintaining his opinion on Jews in general – repeatedly expressed his incomprehension and regret that his “highly esteemed friend” misunderstood his speech.

⁶ The titles conferred on Goldziher are listed in full in his obituary notice by the University of Budapest. It is quoted by Heller 1927:263.

⁷ Probably the most prestigious from among these invitations was the Cambridge professorship after the death of Robertson Smith in 1895. Goldziher, however, declined all these propositions, in order to remain faithful to his triple pledge made on the basis of Proverbs 27:10, in order not to be unfaithful to the religion of his fathers, his family name, and his Hungarian homeland, cf. Ballagi 1921. As for his equally unsuccessful invitation to Cairo, see Ormos 2001. Cf. also Goldziher’s saying “Scholarship has no country, but the scholar does have his country” quoted by Somogyi (1961:15–16).

Goldziher's correspondence as well,⁸ where mostly private and sometimes official letters by more than 1600 individuals are kept. Other scholarly correspondences can, of course, be found in several collections, the uniqueness of Goldziher's correspondence, however, lies in its size, contents, the diversity of the topics discussed and the identity of the persons who corresponded with him.

One of his preeminent students, Joseph de Somogyi (1899–1976), who after his emigration to the United States was teaching at Harvard and Brandeis, remembered the importance of correspondence for Ignaz Goldziher in his article entitled “My reminiscences of Ignace Goldziher” quoting the words of his master, saying: “Two things I enjoin on you if you want to prosper in life. ... Answer every letter or card you receive, even if your answer be negative; and take part in the Orientalists' congresses with lectures. This is as important as literary work. And do not be discouraged by eventual adverse critics; they help you as much as your friends do.” (Somogyi 1961:9).

The correspondence, containing some 13,500 letters, together with other literary remains of the great scholar was donated to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1926. But already before that year, his library had been acquired by the newly founded Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The Goldziher Library which formed the nucleus of what is today the Islam and Middle Eastern Collection of the National Library of Israel opened in September 1924 to the public with a festive celebration in Jerusalem.⁹

The Hungarian Academy of Sciences lacked the necessary funds to obtain a library of that scale. In addition, the transfer, storage and cataloguing of this large bequest would also have entailed considerable costs. Accordingly, even valuable donations were only accepted after special investigations into the nature of the bequest, the possible costs of transfer, cataloguing, etc. as is exemplified by the fate of the library of Iranist Alexander von Kégl (1862–1920) which not only contained scholarly books on several languages, but included dozens of (mainly) Persian manuscripts. The offer was made by his younger brother in September 1924, but the donation was accepted only after having received the report of the eminent Turkologist Gyula Németh (1890–1976) emphasizing the inestimable scholarly value of the collection, and its complementary nature to that of the Oriental Collection of the Academy, and after having made the necessary steps to achieve exemption from the usual estate duties.¹⁰

Although to the great loss of the Hungarian scholarly community and to the gain of universal scholarship, the Goldziher Library ended up in Jerusalem, his correspondence and manuscripts became incorporated into the collections of the

⁸ Cf. e.g. Dévényi 2005.

⁹ Cf. *Petiĥat šifriyat Goldziher*. On the original intention of Goldziher concerning his library, its brief description and the circumstances of its purchase, see Somogyi 1961:11–12.

¹⁰ Cf. Reviczky–Balogh *Correspondence* and Németh, *Report*.

Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The Goldziher room, however, was opened only on the 18th of October 1933, seven years after the donation of the documents.

The documents – containing Goldziher’s correspondence together with his hand written notes, preliminary studies to his publications and the manuscripts of some unpublished and published works – were donated in the beginning of 1926 to the Academy by Goldziher’s son, mathematician Károly Goldziher (1881–1955) following the death of his mother, Laura Mittler, at the end of 1925, whose will it was that these documents find a permanent home there. The documents were indeed transported to the Academy in a huge, sealed crate from Ignaz Goldziher’s home in Holló Street, in the central 7th district of Budapest, on the 18th of January 1926. In his letter to Jenő Balogh, Secretary General of the Academy, Károly also offered his services to arrange and catalogue the yet unsorted material.¹¹

The Academy repeatedly thanked Károly for the valuable donation, emphasising that “the scholarly correspondence is a highly important source for the development of our intellectual life and the advances made in the field of Oriental studies” – as it can be read in a letter of the Secretary General to Károly dated 12 January 1926.¹²

2.2 The Goldziher Room

Despite all this sincerely grateful attitude, nearly six years have passed in complete silence, until Sir Aurel Stein’s intervention. Goldziher was a paternal friend of Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943), the Hungarian British Orientalist, archaeologist and explorer of the Silk Road, an external member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on the recommendation of Goldziher and Ármin Vámbéry.¹³ Now this friend acted in the interest of the scholarly legacy of Goldziher suggesting to the Academy that they make accessible the correspondence for scholars from all the four corners of the world.¹⁴ On the basis of this initiative, Károly Goldziher started to work on the catalogue of his father’s correspondence in the beginning of 1931. In 1932, also on the initiative of Stein, the Academy entered into an agreement with the University Library of Tübingen, to obtain the nearly 300 letters of Goldziher addressed to Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930).¹⁵ The ambitious task was to collect the letters written by Goldziher and dispersed in different collections abroad and unite

¹¹ Letter of Károly Goldziher to Jenő Balogh, 14 January 1926, Goldziher–Balogh *Correspondence*.

¹² Letter of Jenő Balogh to Károly Goldziher, Goldziher–Balogh *Correspondence*.

¹³ *Akadémiai Értesítő* [Bulletin of the Academy] 1895:303. Stein also contributed to the enlargement of the Academy’s collection by books, manuscripts and photographs, both by his donations and his bequest, cf. Rásonyi 1960.

¹⁴ His initiative is mentioned in a letter of Jenő Balogh to Bernát Heller dated 14 November 1933 (Balogh, *Letter*).

¹⁵ Cf. Berzeviczy 1933:347.

them with the letters written to him, thereby enhancing their value. The correspondence was meant to be open for scholars in a separate room, next to the Academy's library, as it can be read in a letter of the secretary general addressed to the chief librarian.¹⁶

The letters were duly sent from Tübingen and copied at the secretariat of the Academy, after office hours.¹⁷ While two scholars – Bernát Heller (1871–1943), Goldziher's former student and the compiler of his bibliography (1927), and the future Iranist and linguist, the young Zsigmond Telegdi (1909–1994) – entered words in non-Latin scripts into the copies. Telegdi's compensation was that he was allowed to borrow a few books of his interest from the library.¹⁸

In addition to Bernát Heller, Károly's cataloguing work was also helped by literary historian and Germanist Béla Pukánszky (1895–1950). It is thanks to their painstaking efforts that the correspondence was arranged into 47 boxes and an alphabetical list of all the letter writers was compiled, also indicating the number of letters sent to Goldziher. We cannot be grateful enough for this heroic work, without which the coherent and meaningful transformation of this correspondence to the digital platform would have been an impossible task, considering the amount of the letters.

The Goldziher room was inaugurated on 18 October 1933 by Albert Berzeviczy, President of the Academy. In his speech, he emphasised that the opening of the room for the use of Hungarian and foreign scholars alike was necessitated by the interest the vast correspondence may generate in addition to the lack of funds at the Academy to publish the hitherto unedited manuscripts of Goldziher. The December 1933 issue of *Ungarische Jahrbücher* contained a two-page description of the contents of the Goldziher-room written by Béla Pukánszky (1933), one of the cataloguers. Another, more detailed overview of the Goldziher collection was given by Joseph de Somogyi in 1935. Pukánszky's description was sent by the Academy to 40 leading scholars of Islamic studies in Europe who in their answers showed great enthusiasm about the opening of this collection.¹⁹

However, in the aftermath of WWII, several rooms dedicated to various special collections in the palace of the Academy could not be reopened, as both the palace of the Academy and the collections housed there were severely damaged. The Goldziher room was used for a certain time immediately after the war as the kitchen

¹⁶ *Goldziher's bequest.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* The copies were typed by Ms Mária Csánki, and were compared to the originals by Bernát Heller and Béla Pukánszky.

¹⁸ Letter of Jenő Balogh to József Szinnyi, head librarian, dated 15 November 1932, asking that Telegdi be allowed to borrow a few books from time to time (*Goldziher's bequest*).

¹⁹ Several messages of felicitation – among them those of Karl Budder, A. J. Wensinck, F. Babinger, R. Paret and Cyrus Adler – were deposited among the documents of the *Goldziher's bequest*.

of the secretary general – as we can learn from a notice dated 17 August 1945 of the chief librarian, János Melich (1872–1963), who was alerted to this fact by one of the members of the Academy, Alajos Györkösy (1896–1973) (Melich, *Note*). Since the secretary general removed the correspondence and other manuscripts from the room without any prior notification of the chief librarian, he further noted that he himself tried to reunite the dispersed objects.

Thus the years following World War II were mainly spent by repairing the war damaged building. While the years 1950–1953 saw severe transformations together with the renovation of certain interiors. It was at this time when a special Oriental Collection was opened on the ground floor²⁰ and the contents of the Goldziher room were – amongst others – incorporated into the holdings of this collection, which – at the same time – meant that the Goldziher room ceased to function forever, together with other collections which – as has been mentioned above – had until WWII been open to the public.

Removal from the public eye, however, did not go hand in hand with a loss of interest in the collection. During the following decades, several larger correspondences were edited, either one-sidedly (i.e. only based on the Goldziher Collection) or in their totality.²¹

2.3 The correspondence in the digital environment

Since its foundation in 1826, the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences – working in line with its mission statement – has dedicated itself to supporting scientific and scholarly research and safeguarding its precious collections for generations to come. Preserving its traditional values and relying on state-of-the-art information technology of the 21st century, it has been serving the public by making its holdings accessible to an ever-expanding circle of users. The construction of a database of the letters addressed to Ignaz Goldziher, served exactly this purpose.

In 2012 the Oriental Collection embarked upon the on-line cataloguing of what ended up to form the 13,430 records of the correspondence.²² Since that time, two

²⁰ Cf. Dévényi and Kelecsényi 2017:339.

²¹ The following editions should be listed here: P.Sj. van Koningsveld, ed. *Scholarship and friendship in early Islamwissenschaft: the letters of C. Snouck Hurgronje to I. Goldziher: from the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest*. Leiden, 1985; Róbert Simon, *Ignác Goldziher: His Life and Scholarship as Reflected in His Works and Correspondence*. Leiden – Budapest, 1986 (including the selected correspondence of Theodore Nöldeke and Ignaz Goldziher); Ludmila Hanisch, Hrsg. *„Machen Sie doch unseren Islam nicht gar zu schlecht”: der Briefwechsel der Islamwissenschaftler Ignaz Goldziher und Martin Hartmann 1894-1914*. Wiesbaden, 2000.

²² The cataloguing was funded by the National Cultural Fund (2012/3532/253) the main aim having been the mass digitisation of the nearly 30,000 documents integrated with metadata into the online catalogue of the Library. The project started in 2012 was finished

further steps were taken. In 2016, the images together with appropriate metadata were integrated into the Library's repository from where they are freely downloadable. In addition, the records were uploaded to WorldCat in 2017 thereby giving more people easier access to this legacy.

In the forthcoming parts, I would like to present some relevant statistics together with some glimpses of Goldziher's correspondence with Middle Eastern and North African scholars before examining in more detail the letters sent by Mohamed Ben Cheneb. He obviously had a lot of contacts with Europeans who were living in this region for shorter or longer periods, but in this brief survey this part of the correspondence will not be considered.

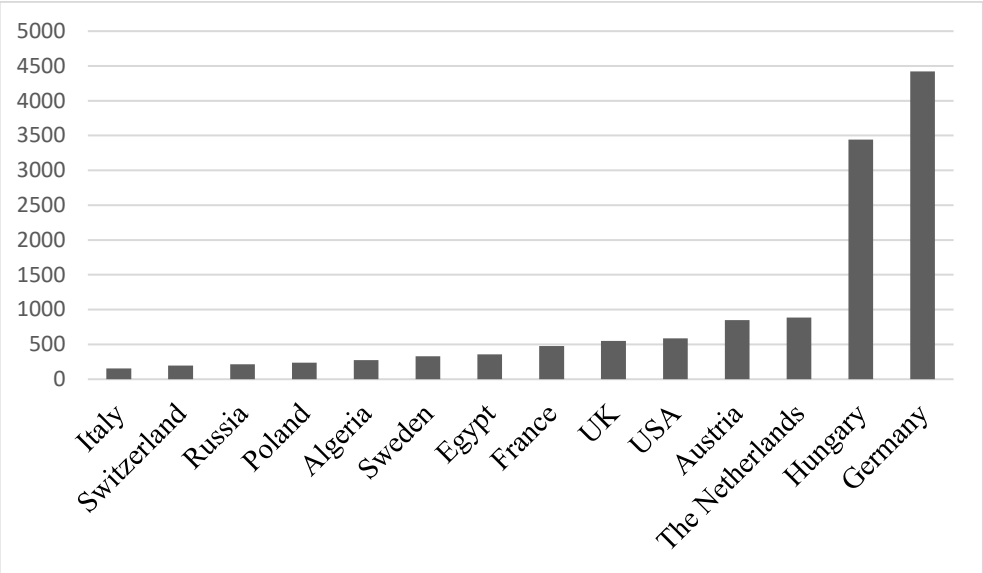
2.4 The correspondence in numbers

The on-line catalogue makes the statistical analysis of the correspondence feasible despite the constant changes in the political map of Europe (and the world) during Goldziher's lifetime and after it, which makes an adequate country by country presentation problematic. In the country statistics, an arbitrary decision was made to use the 1878 borders as a starting point, deviating from it in certain cases in order to better represent present day territories.

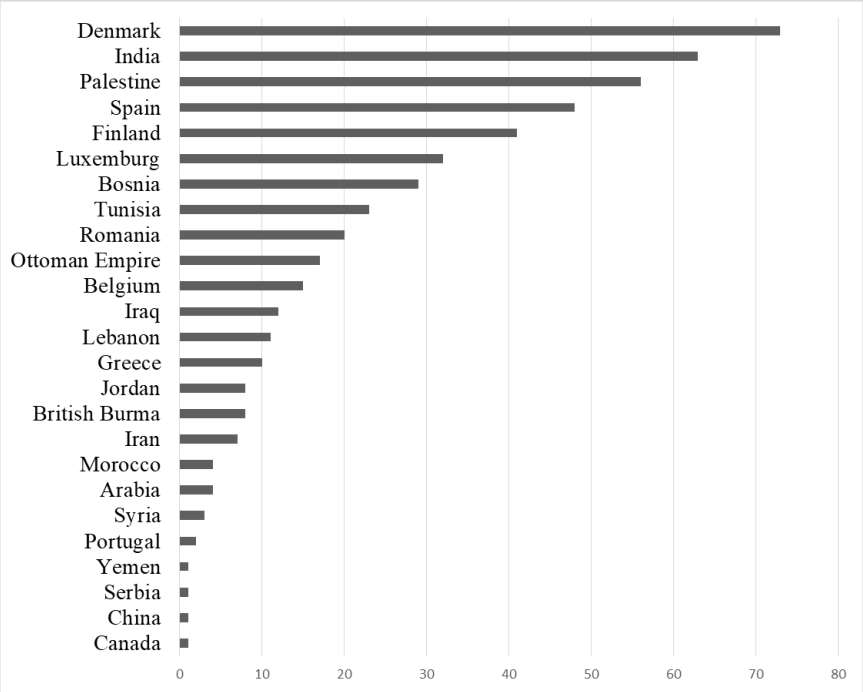
The two diagrams below represent the geographical distribution of the persons who were corresponding with Goldziher.

within a year when it was reported that the altogether 13,430 letters containing 28,327 digital images were freely available in the Library's online catalogue. During the re-cataloguing process a slight discrepancy was noticed sometimes between the number of letters noted on the large envelopes by Károly Goldziher and the actual number of letters contained in some of the envelopes. The post-war fate of the correspondence might provide an explanation for some of the losses which altogether amount to roughly 300 letters, cards and visiting cards, since the original numbers add to a total of 13,764 documents. The reason for some differences may also be due to an original error in the numbers, especially in case of large-scale correspondences. The on-line cataloguing was done in English to reach a much wider public in addition to those – relatively few in number – for whom the Hungarian language does not appear as an impenetrable stronghold.

Countries with more than 100 letters



Countries with less than 100 letters



It is noteworthy that Goldziher received more letters from Germany than Hungary – despite the fact the Poland was considered here as a separate entity – well reflecting the scholarly nature of the correspondence and within it the high percentage of letters received from his German colleagues. It is all the more remarkable, since in Hungary he was often contacted by his friends, colleagues, students, and last but not least the rabbis of several Jewish communities.

The distribution of the languages²³ of the letters reflects even better the high importance of German in the correspondence, since there are altogether 7663 letters in German, while only 3380 in Hungarian. This ratio is assisted by the fact that even Hungarians often corresponded in German.²⁴ Another four languages can still be considered frequent in the correspondence. These are French (973 letters), English (761), Hebrew (475) and Arabic (223). Letters in Italian (79), Spanish (16), Yiddish (2) and Russian (2) can only seldom be found. The sum total (13,574) is more than the number of actual letters because in some letters multiple languages are used.

If we have a closer look at the senders of these letters, we can easily conclude that the majority of the letters were exchanged with twenty persons, each of them sending more than a hundred letters. At the top of this list stands his close friend, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936), with 472 letters, followed by Theodor Nöldeke (327) and Martin Hartmann (321). The most important Hungarian person (with 216 letters) was the famous scholar and chief rabbi of Szeged, Immanuel Löw (1854–1944), while at the end of this line Viktor von Rosen (1849–1907), a well-known Arabist of Saint Petersburg,²⁵ can be found. A particular feature of the correspondence is connected to the languages used therein, as is exemplified by the exchange of letters between Goldziher and Duncan B. Macdonald (1863–1943), professor of the Hartford Theological Seminary, who generally wrote in English while Goldziher in German.²⁶

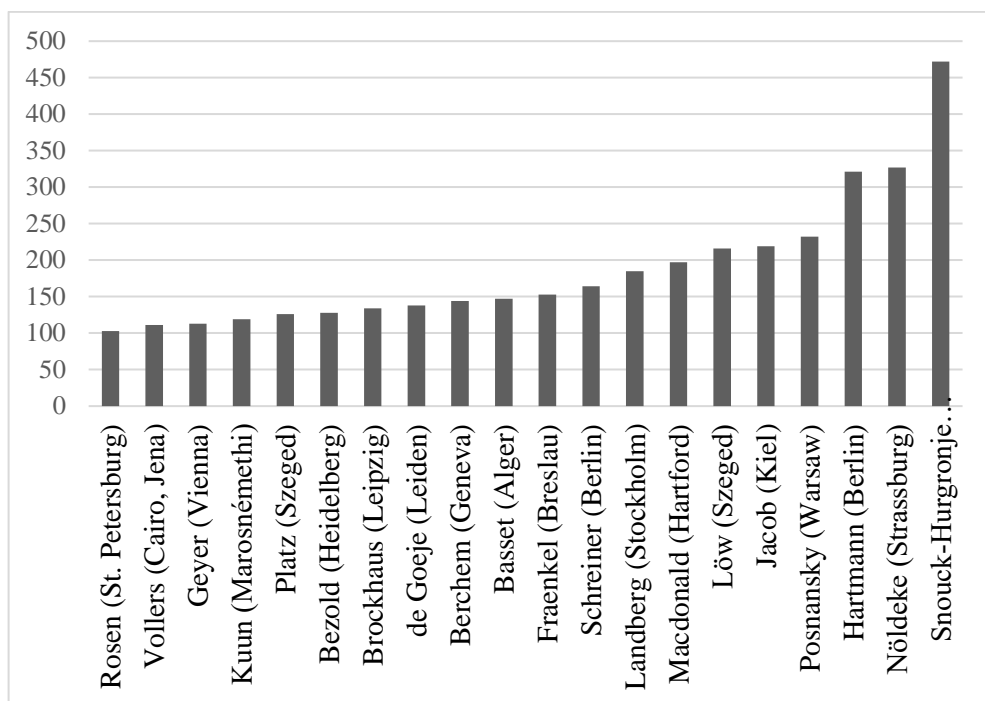
²³ On the importance of German for Goldziher, see the study of Ormos, who concluded that Goldziher's "mother tongue was probably a variety of German, [while] he considered Hungarian to be his national language, the language closest to his heart" (Ormos 2005b:243). According to a remark made by Somogyi (1961:16), however, Goldziher "considered Hungarian as his mother tongue, despite the fact that he wrote most of his works in German".

²⁴ Cf. e.g. the letters written to Goldziher by Ármin Vámbéry where from among the 79 letters in total, 30 fairly long letters were written in German. Cf. Dévényi 2015.

²⁵ The significance of this correspondence is further enhanced by the survival of Goldziher's letters in the Archives of Saint Petersburg (Fond 777), a microfilm copy of which is available in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (B 1192/I).

²⁶ After Goldziher's death Macdonald sent to the Academy the letters he had received from Goldziher. Thus the correspondence is available in full both physically and digitally.

Persons having sent more than 100 letters



3 Letters from the Muslim world

3.1 An overview

Goldziher was attached to the Muslim world not only because of his scholarly interest but also because of his very positive personal experiences there. Already at a young age, he went on a study tour in 1873–74 during which time he made lasting friendships in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt.²⁷ Goldziher's amiable personality²⁸ and his language skills made these bonds easy to form. A token of such friendship is provided by the 26 line long panegyric (*Rā'īyya*) (Fig. 1) written to him by Ibrāhīm al-Laḳānī (1848–1908), one of his fellow students at Al-Azhar, on the occasion of Goldziher's departure from Cairo on 25 February 1874.²⁹ Already the

²⁷ See Goldziher, *Oriental Diary*.

²⁸ Cf. Ormos 2005a.

²⁹ See al-Laḳānī, *Letter*, GIL/24/04/01. For the biography of al-Laḳānī, see al-Bābṭayn. *et al.* n. d.

beginning of the poem attests to the high esteem in which the young Goldziher was held by his peers.³⁰

أم الغيث شق الكم عن طيب الزهر	أسفرت الحسنى عن الأنجم الزهر
فعاب به عن مصرنا طالع القهر	أم الطالع المسعود قد لاح بشره
فأمست به نختال في الحل الخضر	أم البر بحر العلم جار بارضنا
من المجر المحروس ذى العسكر المجر	هو الكوكب المفضل من لاح نوره

In this poem the young Goldziher appears to excel in different fields of Islamic scholarship:

ولكن يري التقليد من سيمة الكفر	امام له في كل فن مذاهب
طواله تعلو افتخارا على الفخر	ففي المذهب السني اصبح سيذا
ونال مفاتيح الكنوز بلا سكر	وفى المذهب الصوفى جل جلاله
ام الله حقا حل في ذلك الصدر	فلم ندر هل ام الكتاب بصدرة

To Egypt he returned with a group of high school teachers in 1896 (6 January to 20 February),³¹ while in Algeria he participated at the International Congress of Orientalists in 1905³² and also published some of his works.³³

Despite all this, Goldziher's correspondence was very limited with Muslim scholars. His main correspondence was with European scholars who resided, among others, in Algiers and Cairo. His main non-European partner from the Muslim world was Khuda Baksh (1877–1931), the founder of the Oriental Public Library in Patna that bears his name. Nevertheless, only twenty letters in English serve as witnesses of this acquaintance.³⁴

Goldziher also met notable persons from the Middle East in Budapest, who wanted to keep in touch with him, not least because of his affable personality. To these persons belonged Abdu'l-Baha, the eldest son of Baha'u'llah, who visited Budapest in April 1913, at the invitation of the Hungarian Theosophical Society. In

³⁰ The text follows the orthography of the manuscript.

³¹ Several works in Hungarian by the different members of this study tour attest to the success of this trip. The most comprehensive among these is Kőrösi 1899, which also contains a detailed bibliography of the works published on the basis of the study tour, Kőrösi 1899:9–10.

³² He was the sole member of the delegation of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (*Actes du XIVe Congrès International des Orientalistes* 17).

³³ I. Goldziher, éd. *Le Livre de Mohammed Ibn Toumert mahdi des Almohades. Texte arabe accompagné de notices biographiques et d'une introduction*. Alger 1903. In addition to this important text edition, Goldziher published a few articles in the *Revue africaine*, an important journal of the Algerian Historical Society (Société historique algérienne) published between 1856 and 1962. It was there that Goldziher published his article on the Samaritans ("Lā Misāsa", *Revue africaine* 52 [1908] 23–28) and a short contribution entitled "La onzième intelligence" (*Revue africaine* 50 [1906] 242–243).

³⁴ These letters are to be found at GIL/21/13.

addition to writing to Goldziher after their meeting, he also sent him a Persian rug as a token of their friendship.³⁵

A tone similar to the eulogy of Ibrāhīm al-Laḳānī can be read in a letter (Fig. 2) Abdu'l-Baha sent to Goldziher after his arrival at Port Said:³⁶

“O thou learned scholar worthy of every respect!

From the day that the fever of separation attained to a high degree and the fire of remoteness blazed forth between veins and arteries I have experienced the greatest longing to meet thee another time – so that I may associate with thee. Verily the sweetness of thy conversation is always in my taste and excites my yearning to behold thy face, to look in thy countenance and to be intoxicated with thy wine. Therefore through this letter I express my gratefulness to you and ever expect to receive your letters conveying the good news of your happiness and attainment to your most great desire.”

The analysis of this part of the correspondence would go beyond the aims of the present paper. Suffice it to say, that although these letters are not significant because of their amount, they are important because of the persons with whom Goldziher corresponded, and the topics these letters cover. Ġirġī Zaydān (1861–1914), for example, the acclaimed man of letters of Lebanese origin, the founder and editor of the literary journal *al-Hilāl* was corresponding with Goldziher from 1896 until his death.³⁷ In his history of Arabic literature, Zaydān deals in a long chapter with European Orientalists (*al-mustašriqūn wa-l-luġa al-‘arabiyya*), and among them Goldziher. His usual factual descriptions get elevated to another level in the characterisation of Goldziher, whom he calls a reliable authority among contemporary Orientalists in relation to Islam, the Muslims, and Islamic culture.³⁸

3.2 The letters of Mohamed Ben Cheneb

Not all the letters were as flattering as the ones quoted above. The scholarly nature of the correspondence, however, can be well observed in a small bunch of seven letters which were sent (in addition to two visiting cards) by the famous Algerian scholar and teacher, Mohamed Ben Cheneb³⁹ (1869–1929).⁴⁰ Theirs was not an

³⁵ Abdu'l-Baha, *Letters*, GIL/03/16/07, letter dated 2 July 1913, and a separate letter in French about the sending of the rug (GIL/03/16/02).

³⁶ The translation is taken from GIL/03/16/07 which accompanied the original letter in Arabic by Abdu'l-Baha (GIL/03/16/01). For a detailed analysis of this visit, see Lederer 2004.

³⁷ Zaydān, *Letters*.

³⁸ *Ṭīqat al-mustašriqīn al-mu‘āširīn fī-l-islām wa-l-muslimīn wa-l-ādāb al-islāmiyya* Zaydān 1960: IV, 158.

³⁹ His name is written by himself in his letters to Goldziher most often as Bencheneb.

⁴⁰ For his detailed biography, see Ben Cheneb 2012:9–12 (editor’s introduction).

active exchange, the letters spanning seven years between 1905 and 1912, but all the correspondence was centred on the publications of the two scholars.

It seems that the initial step was taken by Goldziher, and the occasion was the appearance of the first volume of Ben Cheneb's *Proverbes arabes de l'Algérie et du Maghreb* in 1905. Although being thankful of Goldziher's remarks, Ben Cheneb notes in his long letter of four large pages dated 1 July 1905⁴¹ that he could only have accepted these had not the proverbs been taken from the locally spoken dialect, his mother tongue.

«Je vous fais tous mes compliments pour l'honneur que vous me faites en m'écrivant, et c'est avec plaisir que j'ai lu vos remarques si ingénieuses qui auraient été fort justes s'il s'était agi d'un recueil de proverbes écrits. Les proverbes que je publie sont une langue parlée de l'Afrique mineure, c'est-à-dire dans ma langue maternelle, dans la langue que je parle depuis mon enfance, que j'entends journellement parler autour de moi ; et vous n'ignorez pas qu'elle diffère de la langue de Moḍar. »⁴²

It should, however, be noted in this respect that since Ben Cheneb published the proverbs in Arabic writing, did not supply a transliteration, nor did he always indicate the short vowels to help the pronunciation, so in several cases it is hard to tell that these proverbs are in the local dialect, since their grammatical construction would at times be equally acceptable in the literary language as well.

Despite his initial dismissal of Goldziher's criticism, Ben Cheneb – admitting the great number of typos which he wished to correct at the end of the second volume – goes on to make detailed comments on Goldziher's observations. He concludes this letter by admitting his unfamiliarity with Goldziher's articles published in the *ZDMG* as well as his *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*. This seems to be quite natural in the light of Ben Cheneb's remark in another letter, dated 29 June 1906, where he states that even with the help of a dictionary he finds great difficulty in understanding German texts.⁴³

⁴¹ Ben Cheneb, *Letters*, GIL/03/23/08.

⁴² "I pay you all my compliments on the honour you give me by writing to me, and it is with pleasure that I have read your ingenious remarks which would have been very correct if it had been a collection of written proverbs. The proverbs I publish are a spoken language of minor Africa, that is to say, in my mother tongue, in the language that I speak from my childhood that I hear daily spoken around me; and you are not unaware that it differs from the language of Moḍar," i.e. different from Classical or Literary Arabic. It is a reference to Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Muqaddima* Chapter 6, Sections 48: *Fī anna luḡat al-ḥaḍar wa-l-amṣār luḡa qā'ima bi-nafsihā li-luḡat muḍar* and 49: *Fī ta'līm al-lisān al-muḍarī*. I am greatly indebted to Antoine Boustany (École nationale des chartes, Paris) for his initial typing of the French parts of the letters. Needless to say, any eventual errors are mine.

⁴³ Ben Cheneb, *Letters*, GIL/03/23/07: «Je ne suis pas omniscient et en dehors de la langue arabe que je crois posséder pour mes fonctions de professeur de grammaire et de littérature, et de la langue française dans laquelle je suis un véritable طفيلي, je comprends avec

Another letter of Ben Cheneb⁴⁴ sheds further light on the co-operation of scholars, while Ben Cheneb's erudition also comes to light when answering Goldziher's query on the word "*taqnīs*" which – based on the context – he easily identifies with metempsychosis, stating, however, that – with the exception of a Rabbi from the town of Médéa – nobody seems to be familiar with this word. In addition, Ben Cheneb probably rightly notes that this word seems to be a slip of the pen for *taqmīs*. We can learn from the same letter that the Hebrew text in Goldziher's article "*Lā Misāsa*"⁴⁵ was copied by Ben Cheneb, while the French translation was revised by William Marçais (1872–1956), the notable member of the community of French Arabists working in Algiers at that time.

Ben Cheneb returned to the problem of *taqnīs* vs. *taqmīs* in his letter dated 22 March 1908⁴⁶ because he remembered to have seen this erroneous identification explained by Dozy (1881: II, 405, 411–412). He continues this subject by quoting the dictionary entitled *Aqrab al-mawārid* by aš-Šartūnī. He also adds a reassuring remark on the "highly important" notes Goldziher had sent to Doutté for his article "*Lā Misāsa*" – i.e. that they had been entered to the text.

The best witness to the scholarly nature of the correspondence, the speed⁴⁷ of reactions, and the usage of the scholarly network, is a question Ben Cheneb asked from Goldziher in his letter dated 28 May 1906. There he enquired about a Turkish expression preserved in Algiers:

«Je profite de l'occasion pour vous prier de me faire connaître si vous connaissez la locution turque, conservée à Alger چاق چملاق que j'orthographie phonétiquement. Ici, elle a le sens de: 'rien, du vent, sans le sou, n'avoir plus rien'». ⁴⁸

peine en me servant du dictionnaire le turk, le persan, l'italien, l'espagnol et plus difficilement encore l'allemand. Quant à l'hébreu, je puis à peine épeller [*sic*].». "I am not omniscient and apart from the Arabic language that I believe to possess for my duties as professor of grammar and literature, and of the French language in which I am a real طفيلي, I understand with difficulty using the dictionary the Turkish, Persian, Italian, Spanish, and with even more difficulty German. As for Hebrew, I can hardly spell."

⁴⁴ Ben Cheneb, *Letters*, 8 March 1908, GIL/03/23/09–10.

⁴⁵ Cf. fn. 33 above.

⁴⁶ Ben Cheneb, *Letters*, GIL/03/23/05.

⁴⁷ Somogyi (1935:9) describes Goldziher's method of answering letters and reacting to authors' queries as follows: "Not only did he [i.e. Goldziher] answer every letter he received but he read the shorter reprints right on the same day, and on the following morning he mailed his answers to the authors, correcting their mistakes and even the misprints of their articles".

⁴⁸ Ben Cheneb, *Letters*, GIL/03/23/06. "I take the opportunity to ask you to let me know if you know the Turkish phrase, conserved in Algiers چاق چملاق that I spell phonetically here, it has the meaning of: 'nothing, hot air, penniless, to have nothing'."

Ben Cheneb at that time was already working on his doctoral thesis on the Turkish and Persian words conserved in the Algerian dialect,⁴⁹ and he turned to Goldziher for an explanation because – as he says in this letter – the Turks in Algiers no longer knew the meaning of this expression which he could not find in any dictionary at his disposal either.⁵⁰

Upon receipt of this letter, Goldziher appears to have immediately consulted his former professor of Turkish language, Ármín Vámbéry (1832–1913), concerning this elusive expression, as is evidenced by the latter's answer⁵¹ written on 2 June 1906 from Vorderbruck (Austria) – where he sometimes spent the Summer – on the correct form and possible meaning of this saying. Vámbéry in this orthography recognised the expression *çak çömlek* “empty pot”, in the sense of “uselessness”. It is interesting to note that this saying was unknown to Vámbéry, despite the fact that his proficiency in the different layers, varieties and dialects of Turkish cannot be questioned. In connection with the use of *çak* in this context and meaning, Vámbéry refers to Sâmi, *Kâmûs* I, 498–499. In his letter dated 29 June 1906⁵² Ben Cheneb already notes with thanks Vámbéry's answer which Goldziher transmitted to him on 8 June, saying: « Je remercie M. Vambéry qui me confirme mon opinion sur l'expression turke défigurée à Alger چاق چلماق pour چاق چوملك ‘un pot vide’, que donnent les dictionnaires ». Note that Ben Cheneb writes the second, questionable word differently here than in his letter above.

Although replying to this letter at lightning speed, as was his usual custom, Goldziher must have been rather disappointed since Ben Cheneb could not fulfil his request, which was a copy of an earlier publication of his on Islamic education (Ben Cheneb 1897), as we can read:

«M. Doutté m'a communiqué dernièrement votre lettre dans laquelle vous me demandiez un exemplaire du tirage à part d'un petit opusculé sur la pédagogie musulmane que j'ai fait paraître il y a plusieurs mois dans la *Revue Africaine*. Je regrette beaucoup de ne pouvoir vous en adresser un exemplaire car moi-même je n'en ai plus aucun.»⁵³

⁴⁹ Ben Cheneb defended his thesis in 1921, but it was only published in 2012. There he also utilised the information provided by Goldziher (Ben Cheneb 2012:37).

⁵⁰ «Mes recherches à Alger où il y a même quelques Turcs, sont restées vaines, les dictionnaires dont je dispose ne me donnent aucun sens satisfaisant. Je vous serais très obligé si je recevais de vous quelques renseignements sur cette locution proverbiale» (GIL/03/23/06).

⁵¹ Vámbéry, *Letter*, GIL/44/09/43.

⁵² Ben Cheneb, *Letters*, GIL/03/23/07.

⁵³ Ben Cheneb, *Letters*, GIL/03/23/06. “Mr Doutté has recently communicated to me your letter in which you asked me for a copy of the edition of a little pamphlet on Muslim pedagogy which I published several months ago in the *Revue Africaine*. I regret very much that I cannot send you a copy because I myself have none.”

This publication – which contained an edition and French translation of an anonymous treatise from Morocco – would have been highly important for Goldziher who had been asked to compile a study on the same topic for *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* by its editor, James Hastings.⁵⁴ The study appeared only in 1912, and proved to be a rich survey on Islamic education which is still being quoted.⁵⁵ During its writing, however, Goldziher managed to acquire a copy of Ben Cheneb's translation as is evidenced both by a reference in Goldziher's study and Ben Cheneb's letter dated 17 July 1910.⁵⁶ From the latter we also learn that this was Ben Cheneb's first translation, followed by others on the same subject, like e.g. al-Ġazālī's short epistle (Ben Cheneb 1901).⁵⁷

The quality of this study by Goldziher, on a topic in which he was also interested, did not escape the attention of Ben Cheneb, who having received it hastened to congratulate the author in a short message of well-chosen words, expressing his admiration:

«Je viens de recevoir votre article sur l'Education chez les Musulmans, et m'empresse de vous exprimer mes plus vifs remerciements. C'est vraiment un précieux joyau que vous venez d'ajouter à votre inestimable couronne,⁵⁸ et les pierres précieuses dont il est garni ont été taillées de main de maître et encadrées avec art. En vous adressant mes félicitations les plus sincères et les plus vives, je vous prie d'agréer, Cher Monsieur, l'expression de mes meilleurs sentiments.»⁵⁹

With this note of appreciation ended the correspondence between the two scholars. It is impossible to say why the exchange of ideas and offprints ceased between them. Since this was a purely scholarly correspondence, it can be supposed that their interests shifted apart after the publication of Goldziher's writing on Islamic education.

⁵⁴ Hastings, *Letter*, 20 February 1905, GIL/16/02/22.

⁵⁵ Like e.g. Graham and Kermani 2006:136.

⁵⁶ Ben Cheneb, *Letters*, GIL/03/23/03.

⁵⁷ Ben Cheneb does not specify the source of his translation. He only mentions that it is based upon a publication in Tunis from the year 1314 [1896–97]. It can, however, be identified with a chapter entitled *Bayān at-tarīq fī riḡāḡat aṣ-ṣibyān* of al-Ġazālī's *Iḥyā'*, Part 3 (*Rub' al-muhlikāt*), Book 1 (*Kitāb ṣarḥ 'aġā'ib al-qalb*).

⁵⁸ Underlined in the original.

⁵⁹ Postcard of Ben Cheneb to Goldziher, dated 20 June 1912, GIL/03/23/04. "I have just received your article on Education among Muslims, and I hasten to express my warmest thanks. It is truly a precious jewel that you have added to your priceless crown, and the precious stones of which it is garnished have been masterfully cut and artfully recessed. In sending you my sincerest and most vivid congratulations, please accept, dear Sir, the expression of my best feelings."

4 Conclusion

The Goldziher correspondence, in addition to shedding light on various aspects of intellectual life at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century is also valuable as a deposit of nearly 600 hundred rare picture postcards from that period. This legacy is still unexploited to its full potentials. Despite its one sidedness, it can deepen our knowledge of the intensity and character of scholarly exchange before the Great War.

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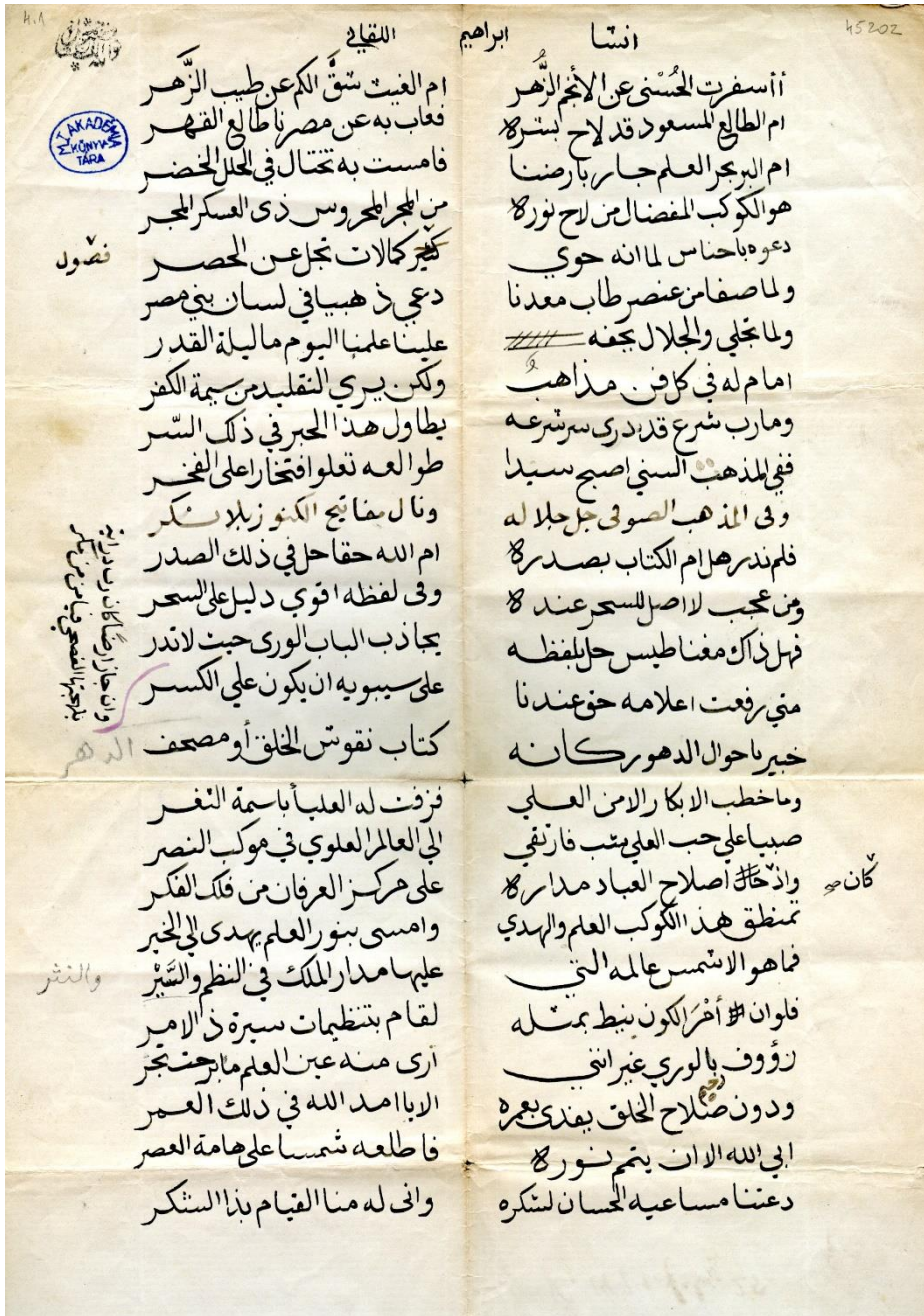
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Fig. 1 Ibrāhīm al-Laḳānī's panegyric (*Rā'iyya*) to Goldziher, Cairo, 1874, GIL/24/04/01

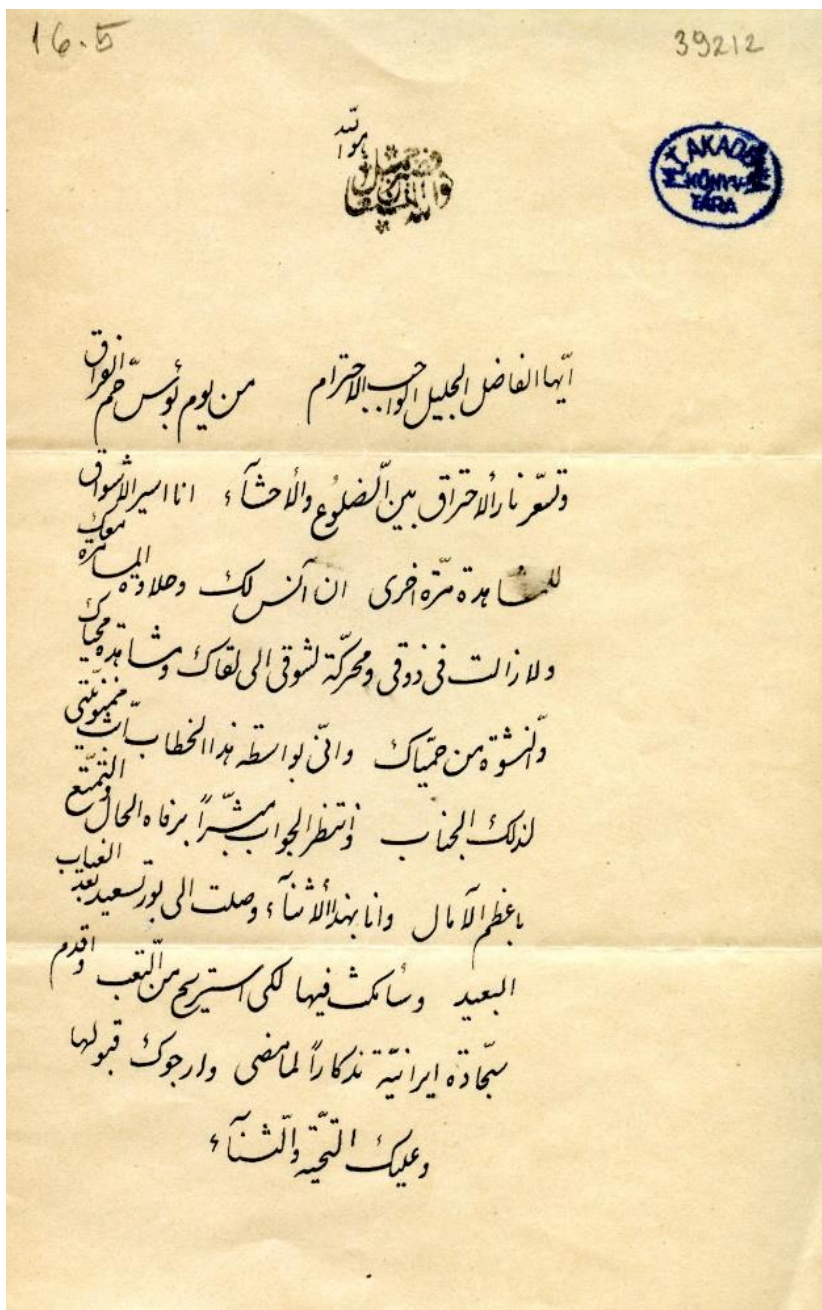


Fig. 2 Abdu'l-Baha's letter to Goldziher, Port Said, 1913, GIL/03/16/05