

# THE MAIN SOURCES ON THE LIFE, CAREER AND ACTIVITIES OF MAX HERZ PASHA (1856–1919)

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Max Herz (in Hungarian: Herz Miksa) was born at Otlaka in Hungary in 1856. Having completed his studies in architecture in Budapest and in Vienna, he went to Egypt in 1880 and joined the Technical Department of the Ministry of Pious Religious Foundations (*Waqf*), where he worked as an architect. From 1890 on he was chief architect of the Commission for the Preservation of Ancient Arab Monuments (it is usually referred to by its French name as the *Comité*), and in this capacity he was responsible for the preservation and eventual restoration of Islamic and (later on) Coptic monuments in Egypt. From 1887 on he was in charge of the activities of the Arab Museum (now the Museum of Islamic Arts), eventually becoming its first director in the building erected expressly as a museum in 1903. In addition, he also worked as a prolific architect of modern buildings in Cairo: he is reputed to have designed more than 150 buildings, both private and public. He seems to have played a central role in the emergence of the once very fashionable Neo-Mamluk or Mamluk Renaissance style. He was also an accomplished scholar, publishing extensively on Islamic art. After the outbreak of World War I towards the end of 1914, he was compelled, as an enemy alien, to retire from all his posts and leave Egypt. He settled with his family in Milan, the native town of his Italian wife, but soon after he moved to Zurich, where he died in 1919. He is buried next to his beloved son in Milan.

The life and activities of Herz Pasha deserve our interest from more than one point of view. First of all, owing to his position as chief architect to the *Comité*, he played a central role in all its activities: there is hardly a monument of Islamic architecture in the capital of Egypt that he has not been involved with in some way or other and has not left his mark on. He headed the Arab Museum for quite a long period, and his contribution to the installation of its present building was essential. As for his activities as a private architect, he seems to have been one of the most sought after architects of the period, who at the same time was considered an authority on the then fashionable Neo-Mamluk or Mamluk Renaissance style which was setting the trend in Egypt at the turn of the century. He was also a prolific scholar, whose contributions to the history of Islamic art are remarkable both for their richness in detail, the lucidity of argument and their capacity to place all developments and data in the broad context of Arab and Islamic history. And finally, his career as that of a Hungarian citizen within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy may shed some light on the interaction between Europe and modern Egypt.

There is no full account of Herz's life, career and achievements in any language. This will remain a strong *desideratum* for some time to come. Material on Herz Pasha lies scattered in many places and collating it will require great effort. It is written in a number of languages: English, French, Italian, German, Hungarian and Arabic. In addition, the author of the final, definitive account will have to be an art historian, whose task will be the exact evaluation of Herz Pasha's place in the history of preservation and restoration, as well as in that of modern architecture in Egypt. As a preliminary step towards fulfilling this aim, the present paper aims to sum up what we know now about the main sources of interest to our study.

In general we know that much of the relevant material lies scattered in the most unlikely places and will take time to collate. Another difficulty is that a considerable part of the data is unreliable and so each piece of information must be checked and carefully weighed wherever possible.

The author of the present paper intends to publish — both in Hungarian and English — what he has succeeded in collecting in this field up to now. He is not an art historian; nevertheless he has had the privilege and luck to find some unexpected and scattered material of considerable interest, and perhaps not easily accessible to everyone. It is rather unlikely, too, that a single person could be found with all the qualifications necessary for this task, so he has decided — after some hesitation — to publish this material, on the basis of which art historian(s) in the future will be able to proceed towards the fulfilment of the aim referred to above.

As far as the life of Herz Pasha is concerned, we possess a short description of it in Hungarian, which was written in all probability by himself. It does not cover the whole span of his life but extends to the date of publication only, yet it is of the utmost importance — each word carries weight in it: Szinnyi 1891-1914: IV, 812-814. (Volume IV, containing the entry on Herz Pasha, was published in 1896.) The relevant entry in the updated continuation of this work does not add substantially to our knowledge of his life: Gulyás 1993: XIII, cols 522b-523a. The Hungarian obituary by his old friend Ignaz Goldziher also contains material not obtainable elsewhere, and is in general reliable (Goldziher 1919: 228-233). The Arabic obituary by Tawfīq Askarūs was written by a well-known journalist of the era not acquainted with Herz Pasha personally. Nevertheless, five years after his departure from Egypt, there were still quite a few people around in Cairo who had known him and his activities well, and Askarūs was able to interview some of Herz's close colleagues. It is an important source, that no researcher should disregard, yet at the same time it should be used with considerable caution, and its data needs constant checking: Askarūs 1919: 921-928. The German articles by Marcella Stern give — in this respect — a summary of Szinnyi, Gulyás and Goldziher (see above): Stern 1992: 42-45; Stern 1993: 57-60. Philipp Speiser's Ph.D. thesis on the history of the *Comité* relies mainly on Stern as far as Herz Pasha's life is considered (Speiser: 63-65). It also contains a remarkable first attempt at a general evaluation of Herz Pasha's role in the field of the conserva-

tion and restoration of architectural monuments written by an architect and art historian. Important data can also be collected from Herz Pasha's letters to Ignaz Goldziher and Max van Berchem (see below). I owe some substantial pieces of information to Herz Pasha's grandson, Mr. Paolo Sereni, in Naples.

Herz Pasha regarded himself above all as a conservator of architectural monuments. His exact contribution in this field is only vaguely known: it is common knowledge that he preserved and restored some important mosques such as the Sulṭān Ḥasan, the Abū Bakr Mazhar mosque or the Qalā'ūn-complex, yet the exact extent of his contribution remains unknown. For the study and exact assessment of this aspect of his career and activities there seems to be enough material at hand: the proceedings of the sessions of the *Comité* and the reports of the Second Commission<sup>1</sup> are available in printed form — they appeared in French and they have in part been translated into Arabic. Important as they are, these proceedings and reports are usually rather vague in their wording as far as our subject is concerned: often it is difficult to know who did exactly what, because the text uses the passive voice, a general subject, or simply names the *Comité* or the Second Commission as the agent. In consequence, serious and detailed research in the future will have to resort to an investigation of the original documents, which are kept in the Archives of the descendant of the *Comité*, the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, in Cairo. There is reasonable hope that in the future it will be possible to treat exhaustively this most important constituent of Herz Pasha's activities and career on this basis. Yet it will be a difficult — though most interesting and enjoyable — task, because during the 33 years that he spent in Egypt, he left his mark on most of the Islamic and Coptic architectural monuments in Cairo and also on some in the provinces, thus such research will amount to no less than the history of the *Comité* at this period.

Herz Pasha succeeded Franz Pasha, also as director of the Arab Museum. In addition to frequent references to the Arab Museum in the proceedings of the *Comité*, we possess two editions of the detailed catalogue of the Museum — partly English and Arabic translations, too. (The original editions appeared in French.)

Herz Pasha was also an accomplished scholar, who published extensively on the history of Islamic art. Creswell's Bibliography (1961) and Marcella Stern's article (1992) contain his most important contributions, but they cannot be considered complete: they disregard — perhaps understandably — Hungarian publications, among which can be found what is perhaps Herz Pasha's most important achievement as a scholar: a lavishly illustrated complete sketch of the history of Islamic architecture

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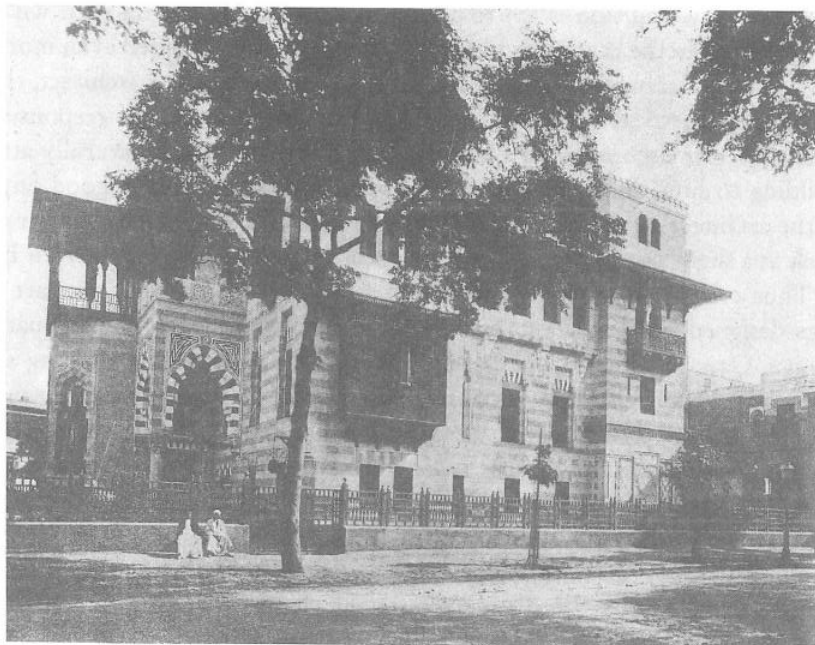
<sup>1</sup> The *Deuxième Commission* dealt with technical problems and its tasks also included the inspection, control and supervision of monuments.

(154 pages), written for a general history of the arts published under the auspices of the Royal Hungarian Ministry of Education: Herz, *Az iszlám művészete* 108–262.

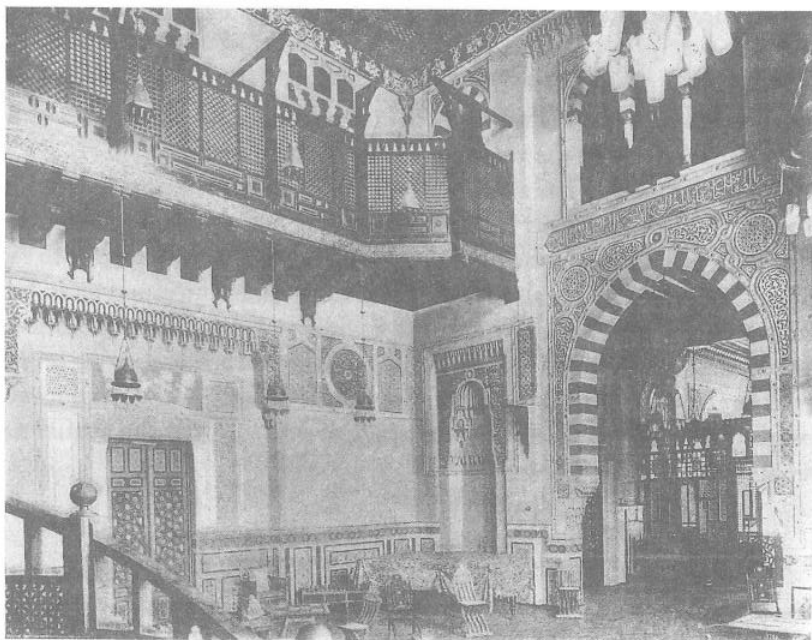
Herz Pasha was also a prolific private architect in Cairo. We must not forget that his sojourn in Egypt came at the period when modern Cairo emerged, during the great building booms in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. He is reputed to have designed more than 150 buildings in various styles (among them Neo-Mamluk and Gothic). He is even said to have played a decisive role in the propagation of the Neo-Mamluk style. Unluckily, we know very little about this field of his activities, and it is rather unlikely that this situation will change considerably in the future. The problem is that there are no central archives of building designs for this entire period. Consequently very often it is impossible to determine who the architect of a certain building was. Herz Pasha himself does not seem to have attached great importance to this aspect of his career; probably he considered it as a means of supplementing his income: in the c. 125 letters by Herz Pasha to Goldziher and van Berchem that I have seen he never speaks about this subject, there is one single casual allusion to one of the buildings he has designed<sup>2</sup>. From among the buildings that can be attributed to him with certainty, the most important, and at the same time perhaps the most beautiful specimen of Neo-Mamluk architecture, the palace of Count Zogheb in Qaṣr an-Nīl Street, was demolished in 1963. We possess, however, two important illustrated publications about it, the former of which is extremely rare, which allow us to form an idea of its exterior and interior appearance: Zogheb 1941; E. B. 1903: 142–144. Our main source on the attribution to Herz Pasha of the Neo-Mamluk transformation of the Gianacis palace, the present main building of the American University in Cairo in Taḥrīr square, is Hind Nadim's unpublished thesis on the history of the building (Nadim 1992: 62–64). Askarūs mentions in his obituary that Herz Pasha designed his own residence in the Neo-Mamluk style in the fashionable quarter of Qaṣr ad-Dūbāra (Askarūs 1919: 924). With the help of photos in the possession of Mr. Paolo Sereni in Naples and contemporary maps the present author has succeeded in finding its location: it stood at 19 Šārī<sup>c</sup> aš-Šayḥ Barakāt (now: Šārī<sup>c</sup> Kamāl ad-Dīn Šalāḥ off Taḥrīr square, behind Hotel Semiramis) – it has been demolished in the meantime. Little else is known about Herz Pasha's output as a private architect. In the absence of systematic archive documentation one can only rely upon casual finds and occasional references in descriptions of contemporary Egypt and Cairo, travel reports, memoirs etc. These are, however, rather unreliable. More often than not the relevant pieces of information have been collected by the authors of these works from the descendants of the persons in question, and even if we exclude the probability of outright distortion of

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<sup>2</sup> He added the words *Arch. Herz* on the subscription of a post-card depicting the palace of Count Zogheb in Cairo, which he sent to Ignaz Goldziher.



The façade of the Zogheb Palace from Qaṣr an-Nīl street in Cairo. *The Studio* 29.144.



The hall (*qā'a*) of the Zogheb Palace. *The Studio* 29.142.

facts, pious family tradition is apt to attribute more to the fathers than what can justly be claimed. In the case of architecture the situation is rendered even more complicated by the collaboration of several people in one project: the architect, the contractor, the interior decorator etc. So, for instance, if someone was responsible for part of the interior decoration of a building, family tradition will naturally attribute that building to him, and before long his descendants will claim in good faith that he was the architect of the whole building. In addition, a suggestion that is raised in one work as a slight possibility, will often appear in another as a fact proven beyond doubt. Thus one must proceed with the utmost care. A considerable part of the buildings designed by Herz Pasha are likely to have been located in the quarters of Ismā'iliyya, Qaṣr ad-Dübāra and Garden City, where much of the building activity of the period was concentrated. A considerable part of his architectural output may also have gone into private villas, very fashionable at the time. As a result of an astronomical increase in land prices in downtown Cairo, however, many of these have no doubt been demolished in recent decades — e.g., Count Zogheb's palace or Herz Pasha's own residence —, or are in the process of being demolished right now in order to make way for multi-storey apartment blocks, much more profitable than even the most luxurious villa<sup>3</sup>. Thus the only solution is to collect all these random and haphazard data, as Mercedes Volait (Paris/Tours/Cairo) is doing, weigh them carefully, and then, some time in the future, we will perhaps possess all that is available in this field. The volume of data will not be large and will certainly not be exhaustive, but I am confident that some interesting and noteworthy details will come to light.

Herz Pasha's contribution to the mosque of ar-Rifā'ī can be assessed with approximate precision on the basis of the booklet he published on the occasion of the ceremonial inauguration of the mosque (Herz, *Mosquée el-Rifai*).

A lot of data concerning Herz Pasha can be found in contemporary travel reports and memoirs. Herz Pasha seems to have been a very sociable and affable man, who enjoyed meeting people, and who seems to have been popular among both residents in Cairo and visitors to it. He also spent much time on architectural sites, where he met visitors and tourists. We know that for a while — before the publication of the first printed catalogue — he also acted as guide in the Arab Museum on several days of the week, and the exact times of his service in this capacity were announced in the local newspapers. This was surely a good opportunity to make the acquaintance of many people.

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<sup>3</sup> There is a civil movement emerging now in Cairo which aims to salvage the city's turn-of-the-century architectural heritage, currently under threat of extinction (Abdel Hamid). The participants of the colloquium "Un siècle d'architecture savante en Égypte (1850-1950)" in March 1997 also issued a proclamation encouraging these activities.

Important details concerning Herz Pasha's life, career, and activities can be found in his correspondence.

His letters to Ignaz Goldziher are kept in the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and consist of 61 items, 57 of which are letters, postcards or visiting cards with short notices. The four additional items contain Herz Pasha's wedding announcement, the obituary notice for his son in *Corriere della Sera*, his own mourning-card, and Madame Herz Pasha's visiting card expressing gratitude for the condolences of the Goldziher family. These letters are in Hungarian and German, and some are written in both languages. One postcard is in French.

Herz's letters to Max van Berchem are kept in the Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Ville de Genève. They number 62 and are in German and French. They also contain important details concerning Herz Pasha's life and activities, which raise for discussion a number of questions on details in the field of art history, especially those connected with Herz Pasha's last works on Qaṣr aš-Šam<sup>c</sup> and the Qalā'ūn-complex, which he completed in Zurich shortly before his death.

Herz's letters to the director of the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest, are kept in the archives of that museum. They are 8 in number. There are traces of two more letters in the register-book, which however seem to have been lost.

Herz's own papers which are in the possession of his grandson, Mr. Paolo Sereni in Naples, are of considerable interest. It is known that when Herz Pasha had to leave Egypt towards the end of 1914, he was not able to take his belongings with him, so his furniture, books, photos, sketches, papers and vast correspondence remained in Cairo. A small part of his papers was later forwarded to him in Zurich by the British Foreign Office, but the bulk of his books, photos, sketches, papers and correspondence seems to have been lost. This must be borne in mind when we consider his legacy in Naples. Mr. Paolo Sereni has kindly agreed to the preparation of a microfilm of the complete material which will be undertaken by the present author on behalf of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences later this year (1998) — *in šā' Allāb*<sup>4</sup>. The microfilm in the Library will be at the disposal of the academic community. The present author will also prepare a detailed description and a catalogue of the material to be published in due course.

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<sup>4</sup> It was completed in October 1998.

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