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Hungary and Egypt

The Austro–Hungarian Monarchy did not step onto the land of Pharaohs as a conqueror. Its aim was to maintain sound relations as well as to guarantee the safety of its commercial interests and of the people living under its protectorate. These good relationships can be justified by the accolades awarded to the rulers by the emperor along with the audiencia held by the kedive. For example, the emperor's honours awarded to Mohamed Taufik khedive, which was rendered by Alexandrian consul general by Ignacz Schaeffer in 1881 to recognize the remarkably warm reception that heir Rudolf experienced during his trip to Egypt.[1]

Within the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, the commercial relations between Hungary and Egypt go back to the 19th century. One of the first statements, dated in the 1860s, counts 12 different Austro-Hungarian companies trading and importing wood and jewellery in Alexandria and 9 in Cairo.

The most important export products of Egypt featured cotton besides agricultural products (rye, different types of seeds, spices, senna leaves, gum). The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was the 3rd most important importer of Egypt, coming before France. The most popular imported items included scarves from Görlic and Brünn as well as different wooden and paper products. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy also transported beer, wine and mineral water into Egypt.

Regarding *beer*, we can say that the Monarchy was one of the most important suppliers of Egypt. In 1883 for example, it delivered more than 15 thousand hectolitres of barrelled and 25 thousand litres of bottled beer. The major suppliers included mills of Dreher from Kőbánya along with Reininghausen from Steinfeld, Schreiner from Graz, Puntigamer, Schwehat from Vienna; and the British beers did not sell.

The situation was less favourable for *wine,* because even though the Hungarian red and white wines would have coped with the Egyptian market, they had no chance against the way too cheap Greek, French and Italian wines. Among the wines sold in the country, only two Hungarian brands, Palugyai and Jalics were popular and they were delivered for private orders in small quantities.

Similarly to the *beer,* the mineral waters also sold well in the Egyptian towns due to the climate. Their season stretched through the whole year. The mineral and bitter waters from Hungary (Rákóczy bitter water, Hunyadi János, Mohai Ágnes) and from Austria (Giesshübler, Rohitschler, Pulnauer, Carlsbader) were quite popular in Egypt. The Austro–Hungarian waters counted for one-third of the Egyptian market.

The Austro-Hungarian colony had the fifth largest population in Egypt. Among the Austro-Hungarian citizens, who lived in Egypt and had a significant role there, it is worth highlighting Miksa Herz. In 1892, Miksa Herz was appointed to manage the Arabic Museum developed in the el-Hakim mosque. Beside his assignment as director, in 1903 he raised a new building for the museum where, also taking over the khedive

[1] Krisztián Komár: *Austro–Hungarian Monarchy and Egypt relations in 1882–1914.* Doctoral thesis, Szeged, 2006 (manuscript)

library, he established the Museum of Islamic Arts which is called the Arabic library today. He further expanded collection of the museum during his management and he was the first to catalogue the items. Europe did not only take away from, but also gave to the land of Pharaohs.

The short but so much more intensive marriage of May Török and Abbas Hilmi 2nd can be interesting not only because of the Hungarian lady was involved in it, but maybe also because, in the Egypt of that age, some social and political issues were brought to the surface through the marriage. By the turn of the 19–20th century, the establishment of monogamy was more and more accepted in the family structures of Egyptian middle and upper levels. But the marriage of the khedive represented the opposite attitude.

According to May Török from Szendrő, she was born in 1877, but the truth is 1874. The young May grew up in a castle nearby Graz where she acquired knowledge appropriate for her rank. She met the khedive via her brother, József Török jr. at a reception held at the Teresianum.

The two youngsters saw each other again in Paris in June 1890 where they met by chance. In the meantime, Abbas got married in Egypt, to the highest consternation of the court, with one of his mother's servants of scout roots – Ikbal Hanem – and they had 6 children. During this same time, countess Török also got married with a – closely not known – Swedish baron.

The youngsters allegedly fell in love from the first sight and Abbas invited May Török to Egypt where they shortly got married, although, the khedive himself never admitted it. The khedives considered monogamy that is abolishing the traditional polygamy, as one of the cornerstones in their pursuit to reform the country. Accordingly, the Palace was exerting to create an image that reflects an ideal family life of the khedive. With monogamy, he was conveying to the people that the fundamental unit of society is the modern family and that this is the only way to lessen their disadvantage compared to Western countries. By the end of the century, under the influence of the Egyptian opinion-shaper papers and magazines, love marriage and monogamy became the instance to follow.

However, the countess appeared more and more often near the khedive which caught the people's eyes, too. Khedive Abbas, returning – with his love, from his pilgrimage to Mecca was received with sparse whistle from among the celebrating crowd. A few days before the arrival of the khedive, the rumour dispersed saying the khedive's girlfriend had converted to Islamic faith. Then several comments and combinations were related to it, saying that the khedive is now going to marry the foreign woman and provide her with the khedival rank (the khedive's wife).

As the consul general in Cairo reported, "it is worth mentioning that the khedive may marry the Hungarian citizen Ms Török, alias countess Török, I believe I have to report to His Excellence that I have been confidentially told by some people belonging to the court of the khedive that, in fact, the marriage already took place a few weeks ago."

Her status was probably legalised (despite the defiance of the court) as khedival (princess) because of the khedive, and she received remarkable lands from her husband. The contemporary reports described the wife as someone who "is not in the

first years of her youth but still such a glorious beauty and besides, so endlessly clever, witty and well-educated woman that she is worthy of the throne. The Egyptian king has been consulting with her in all major issues for years." The relationship perished eventually and ended up with divorce in 1913. May Török left Egypt and never returned to the country which Abbas, having resigned, also had to leave a year later. This was the time when the First World War started in Europe.[2]

The World War and the split of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy tore apart Hungary's earlier contacts and put them into a new economic-political context. The trade with Egypt fell back after the First World War. The diplomatic relations were being settled slowly between the two states, the Hungarian Honorary Consulate General started operating in 1923 in Alexandria, the level of envoys in the relationship was introduced in 1928.

The Hungarian envoy accredited in Egypt served their diplomatic mission from Bern, Budapest, Athens and later Andor Semsey served in Cairo from 1939. The envoys accredited in Hungary served from Vienna till 1943 and then they represented the Egyptian interests from Bern, for example envoy Ahmed El Kadry, envoy Ahmed Mourad Sid, Abdel Kerim Szavat deputy.[3]

The two countries signed a temporary trade contract in 1927, and one year later a regular contract based on the objective of the highest limited benefit. The contract started a commercial upsurge which was evaluated by an economic report as follows: "Commercial relations between Hungary and Egypt have boosted to such a rejoicing extent that may augur well for the future." This upsurge was due to the export of two Hungarian products, sugar and flour.

Despite the strong British concurrency, Hungary was entitled to coin Egyptian silver money. The procurer was so satisfied with the activity of the Hungarian Royal Mint that he placed further orders (of around 60,000 LE, a quantity of 60 cases) which had the portrait of monarch Fuad on them.

The other issue was the Hungarian horse export. Hungarian horses were presented at the agricultural exhibition in Cairo where the Egyptian monarch really liked them and got his personal guard supplied with Hungarian blood-horses (from Bábolna).

The Hungarian-Egyptian Trade joint-stock company was established in 1933 with cooperation of the English-Hungarian Bank, the Egyptian MISZR Bank and the Pesti Hungarian Commercial Bank.[4]

In the directory, dr. Fuad Sultan bej, Miklós Horthy jr., László Polnauer and Sándor Polnauer can be found. The aim this commercial society is to improve trade between Egypt and Hungary. Two people had significant roles in it, namely Miklós Horthy jr. and László Polnauer or the Polnauer family.

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[2] Krisztián Komár: *Austro–Hungarian Monarchy and Egypt relations in 1882-1914*…

[3] Pál Pritz: *Iratok a magyar külügyi szolgálat történetéhez 1918–1945.* Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1994; János Sáringer: *Adattár a magyar külügyi szolgálat történetéhez 1920–1944.* Szekipress Kiadó, Budapest, 2004.

[4] Krisztián Komár: *A Magyar–Egyiptomi Kereskedelmi Részvénytársaság története.* In: *Limes,* 55. sz. 63-78. p.

Horthy Jr., the son of head of state Miklós Horthy obtained unforfeitable merits in establishing the society. Via his marriage, he had good relationships with his brother-in-law, president of the English-Hungarian Bank. Miklós Horthy jr. recognised the potentials when visiting Egypt and got in inward contact with king Fuad I's wife, mother of the later monarch Frauk I. This is how he described his experiences in Egypt: "When I went on business trip to Egypt, I saw that the whole world's industry and commerce meet there."

László Polnauer was also solicitous about the improvement of Egyptian – Hungarian relations. Polnauer was head of the honorary Hungarian Royal Consulate General in Alexandria.

Horthy jr. and Polnauer organised the Hungarian example exhibition, the HUNGYPT travel agency in Cairo which was supported by king Fuad I, too. 19 large Hungarian companies presented at the exhibition of Hungarian products along the Nile. The Hungarian Egyptian Tourist Office was founded in 1935 in Alexandria and Cairo where there is also a Hungarian shop set up with the most popular Hungarian products.

The tourist relations of the two countries were good: "In summers, around 50,000 rich Egyptian travelled for a few months from Egypt to Europe, France, Italy, Greece and Hungary per year." Minister of Agriculture Aly Serry bej visited Hungary with his wife, secretary Husszein Sabri pasa, brother-in law of the king and in July 1938 also king Farúk's mother and daughters. At the railway station, Miklós Horthy jr. received "the prominently beautiful and personable young, slim and very tall queen and gave her red orchids." The queen was accommodated in Hotel Ritz along with her daughters and was escorted by Horthy jr. in the Hungarian capital. The Hungarian papers even wrote about the intimate affair of Nazlieh and Horthy jr. As a result of the visit, the Egyptian Royal Aero Club purchased Hungarian aeroplanes. The Hungarian – Egyptian relations were cut off by the 2nd World War in the middle of the last century.[5]

The next act of the Hungarian – Egyptian relations is a different story.

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[5] Ágnes Judit Szilágyi – János Sáringer: *Ifj. Horthy Miklós, a kormányzó kisebbik fia. Tanulmányok, dokumentumok.* Holnap Kiadó, Budapest, 2004, 24–31. p.