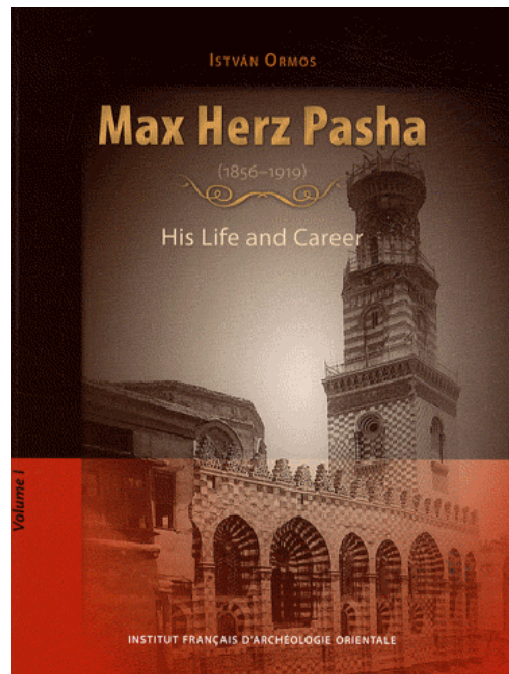


Tibor Schatteles:

Herz Pasha of Temesvár and Egypt... and the Jews

Egypt and the Jews - not a new story, yet not a very well known one. Most people, of any race and creed, associate the two with the Biblical history, and thereby also the roots of Western civilization. But - this again for "most people" - whatever relations between Jews and Egypt developed after the Scriptural age, has been essentially neglected. I may claim to be an exception to this trend, but only in a minor sense. This time the subject attracted me when friends of mine, trying to revive some forgotten aspects of the history of our native city, Temesvár, as it was called formerly in Hungary, or Timisoara as it is since 1919 in Romania, chanced upon the name of Max Herz, also Herz Pasha. It so happens that he was a relative of a distinguished local Jewish family. I will not insist on the complicated family story, which should remain the duty of several of my friendly compatriots, also claiming/having some family relations with the person named. I will rather concentrate on the "Egyptian" aspect of the story, even if the "family business" could not be completely avoided.



I went to the library of the University of Ottawa and discovered a most important work authored by a distinguished Hungarian scholar named István Ormos. The title of the work is: **Max Herz Pasha, 1856-1919, His Life and Career.**¹ Two very heavy volumes which I had trouble bringing home. Yet I did not let myself be discouraged. And who published this work written in English by a Hungarian? Well, it was the *Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale IFAO*. And where was it published? In *Le Caire*, sometime in 2009. And as we read in an

¹ Max Herz Pasha (1856-1919), 2 volumes https://www.payot.ch/Detail/max_herz_pasha_1856_1919-istvan_ormos-9782724705089

official document: "*L'IFAO fait partie du Réseau des Écoles françaises à l'étranger*". It is clear that the Institution was French-French, which did not find anything unpleasant with what an Egyptian publisher might have found when preparing his product to the citizens of this Arab country.

So let me insist a little, indeed shortly, on Herz Pasha (1856-1919), mainly though not only because of his connection to our city, but also as a source of understanding the more recent cultural history of the Middle East and its neglect. I will use this occasion also to expand my research a little bit beyond the story of the Pasha. - He was born 19 May 1856 in the village of Ottlaka in Arad county, at that time Hungary. His father, Ignác Herz, was mentioned in documents as a farmer of rather modest conditions. But he tried to improve his and his family's situation and moved to Temesvár in 1868. Here Max enjoyed a much better schooling which he appreciated, as shown in several of his letters, all his life. He graduated the local *Reáliskola*, a secondary school "modern" oriented, i.e. no Greek or Latin, but a lot of mathematics and physics. When much later, in 1895, living in Cairo, the association of the alumni of his class was created and was celebrating, he wrote them a letter which, in the English translation of Ormos, reads: "A beautiful day indeed! I share the celebrators' warm feelings because it makes me happy to recall the days when I spent the most receptive days of my life in the upper *Realschule* in Temesvár". [Quoted from Berkeszi: *A temesvári királyi állami főreáliskola története*, Temesvár 1896.]

After graduating this high school he went to study architecture, first at the Technical University of Budapest (1876) and then, for some time only, at the *Technische Hochschule* in Vienna, and then to Budapest again. Later in the 1880s (the year does not follow clearly from documents) a wealthy family invited him to a trip to Italy and then Egypt. In the Moslem Egypt the Hungarian Jew (not strictly observant) Max Herz started a new life. As an architect he showed much interest in the monuments and art works planted in that country throughout history by all the ruling religions, and made acquaintance with a European called Franz ... Pasha, responsible with the technical section of the Ministry of Religious Endowment. Herz was offered a job by the Pasha, which he accepted.

The story of his work is very long and has to be read in various publications, mainly that of Istvan Ormos. But for us, and now, it should be mentioned that after he had become in 1890 chief architect of the mentioned "technical section" he had a long list of contributions to the recovery of ancient monuments, Christian, mainly Coptic, and Moslem. But very likely the most important contribution of Herz, first a Bey since 1895, then a Pasha since 1912, was the creation of the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. As for his private life, it should only be mentioned that he married in 1895 the Italian Lina Colorni and had with her a son, who died at the age of 17, and three daughters. The letters of his wife are to this day very important documents about the life and work of Max Herz.

Then came the war and Egypt, since 1882 under British domination, declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in August 1914, and Herz Pasha was given a choice: either to give-up his Hungarian citizenship or to leave Egypt. As an ardent Hungarian nationalist he chose the latter, moving with his family to Italy and then to Switzerland where he died on May 5, 1919.

However interesting his biography may be, I will concentrate only on a few points which are interesting from the point of view of a *Temesvarer*, and most importantly a *Fabrukler*, *Fabrik* or *Fabruk* being a city district in which the Herz family used to live, just as my humble self.

As mentioned, the family moved to Temesvár when Max/Miksa was twelve years of age and then he studied at the local *Reáliskola*. But he continued to be a *Temesvarer* also when

making a career in Egypt. We read in the book of Ormos [p.25] that "he appeared regularly in the press of the town of his school-years, *Temesvár*, both before the world war and between the two wars". And these papers were, among others, the *Temesvarer Zeitung*, *Temesvari Hirlap* and *Délmagyarországi Közlöny*. Moreover "he presented *objets d'art* to the Museum of *Temesvár*" [p.43]. And, though he was not present on June 29, 1901 at yet another meeting of the alumni of his school, he nevertheless wrote them a letter saying that "... I shall be present at the festivity in imagination and shall rejoice together with you on this beautiful feast of concord and harmony". [Quoted from Berkeszi]. But Herz Pasha kept close also to his family and "gave a lamp [an Egyptian *objet d'art* - T.S.] to his niece, Teri Moravetz-Stein in *Temesvar*" [Ormos, p.439]. I may add that relatives of the mentioned lady are also at the origin of this exercise. Therefore I may quote again from Ormos [p.505] that "the firm of Moravetz brothers, a bookshop and music publishing house, the first of this kind in *Temesvár*, owes its high level of prosperity in great part to a niece of Max Herz's, who has been an intelligent partner of her husband Gyula Moravetz, right from the beginning". [Follows a footnote with lots of family details.] But it was not only the niece Teri who received *objets d'art* as presents from the Pasha. The museum in *Temesvár*, today the *Muzeul Banatului* in Timisoara, received many valuable presents of Egyptian origin from Herz Pasha. No list will be given here but it is to be mentioned that no less than 36 "Pharaonic objects" were part of the donations mentioned also in publications of this museum.

So Herz Pasha was, by some definition, a *Temesvarer*. But he was also an Egyptian. He was one of the many "Egyptians" who made considerable contributions to the study and conservation of that land's cultural traditions. Several, probably most of the important ones, were not Arabs but Europeans, Jews among them. The one mentioned already as the first employer of Herz was a German (or Austrian) called Julius Franz (1831-1915) who at that time was the official "chief architect" of the Egyptian government, much preoccupied with the conservation of that country's artistic tradition. But the financial stability of these exercises had much to thank to the activity of another Hungarian Jew. It was Julius/Gyula Blum, a close friend of Herz, but mentioned only once, just by the way, in the work of Ormos. He was born in Budapest (1843) and became in Vienna a senior executive of the *Credit-Anstalt für Handel und Gewerbe*, one of the empire's leading banking organizations. Later he was named head of the Austro-Egyptian Bank, which went bankrupt in 1876. But not Blum. He became, first, secretary of state of finance and then Minister of Finance of Egypt. And he also became, naturally, Blum *Pasha*. His contributions were the financing of many new undertakings, from the Suez canal, the development of Port Said and, most importantly in our context, the cultural institutions mentioned a propos Herz Pasha. For the reader interested in details I may recommend a comprehensive essay: "JULIUS BLUM PASHA - an Austro-Hungarian Banker in Egypt 1843-1919", in *Zeitschrift für Firmengeschichte und Unternehmerbiographie*, 1968, Nr.2. He was a friend and active supporter of Herz and worth to be mentioned as such and as "Egyptian" though the international conflicts caused him to return to Vienna where he became head of the *Creditanstalt* until the end of his days.

The story of "Islamic art" is, of course, long and interesting, but not to be treated in our context. What is particularly interesting, also in our context, is the fact that the Arab contribution is minimal. The architecture in all Arab lands is essentially based on the heritage of the "unbelievers", and in Egypt largely on the Byzantine one. And though I will not expand this short note of mine on the subject, the contribution of Herz Pasha reminds me also of the fact that, once upon a long time ago, when Baghdad was built, that city's plan was made by a Jew, Massalah, native of Egypt. His story, and in general that of Arab city building would be worth a special study. Now, I just intended to remind the role of a Jewish countryman of mine and those who read this note: *Zachor! Remember!*