



KÉGL, SÁNDOR

KÉGL, SÁNDOR (b. Szúnyog, Hungary, 1 December 1862; d. Áporka, Hungary, 28 December 1920, [Figure 1](#)), Hungarian orientalist, polymath, and bibliophile who devoted a major part of his studies to Persian literature.

Sources on the life of Sándor (Alexander von) Kégl, a pioneer in Iranian studies in Hungary, are relatively scarce and limited (Gaál). Kégl was born into a wealthy Catholic landowner family in the suburbs of Pest (from 1873 Budapest) on the Szunyogh farmstead lying between the towns of Kiskunlacháza and Bugyi in Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county. Austrian ancestors of Kégl (originally perhaps Kögl) were ennobled in 1762 by the Habsburg Empress Maria Theresia; they became Hungarian subjects and possessed large estates around Kiskunlacháza. Kégl did his high school studies mainly as a private student in Catholic and Protestant institutions of Budapest (Kelecsényi and Dévényi). Inspired by the travelogues of Arminius Vámbéry, the famous Hungarian explorer and orientalist, he showed keen interest in linguistics and philology from his early youth (Gaál, pp. 37-38). After learning various European languages, he devoted his whole life to the study of different Oriental languages and literatures, namely, Persian, Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Tatar, Sanskrit, Urdu, Chuvash, and Mordvin. To improve his knowledge in Oriental languages, in 1884 (or, according to other sources, in 1885) he enrolled at the university of Budapest (Dévényi and Kelecsényi). Kégl studied Arabic and other Semitic languages with Ignaz Goldziher and Péter Hatala and Persian and Turkic languages with Arminius Vámbéry at the Hungarian Royal University of Budapest between 1885 and 1889. Kégl received his Ph.D. degree



with great distinction (*summa cum laude*) on 20 May 1889. The subject of his thesis was a scientific analysis of Mo-ḥam-mad Damiri's *Ḥayāt al-ḥaywān*, a para-encyclopedic work on animals (Sárközy, 2005, pp. 134-41; Dévényi and Kelecsényi).

Encouraged and supported by Vámbéry's letters of recommendation, including one addressed to Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (Dévényi and Kelecsényi; Sárközy, 2010), Kégl traveled on a study trip to Iran in October 1889 in order to collect books and to enhance his practical knowledge of Persian and thus prepare for the teaching career of his choice. After a long and exhausting journey, Kégl arrived in Tehran at the end of November 1889. He did not leave Tehran for nearly three months, although Vámbéry's letter to Nāṣer-al-Din Shah suggested other cities such as Isfahan and Shiraz. His main interest in Tehran was collecting Persian manuscripts and lithographs, which probably provided him with sources for his later publications on poets (e.g., Weṣāl Širāzi) and men of letters (e.g., Rezāqoli Khan *Hedāyat* [see s.v. HEDĀYAT]) of the Qajar period. Kégl later published many articles in Hungarian newspapers that give a vivid picture of the daily life in the Persian capital (Sárközy, 2005, pp. 125-27; idem, 2010).

Academic career. Kégl started his academic career in 1893 when he was appointed instructor of Persian language and literature at the Department of Oriental Philology of the Hungarian Royal University. In 1907 he became extraordinary titular professor at the same department. According to his brother, Kégl always taught *pro bono* (Dévényi and Kelecsényi). He taught mainly Classical Persian grammar and literature, including the works of Sa'di, Rumi, Ferdowsi, 'Omar Kayyām, and occasionally works of 'Aṭṭār and Ḥosayn Wā'eẓ Kāšefi (Sárközy, 2005, pp. 131-35). In his earlier years he also held Sanskrit classes and, according to the university documents, once he held an "Indo-Persian Epic comparative class," where he taught both Sanskrit and Persian epics (Kelecsényi, p. 65). In 1906, Kégl replaced Goldziher temporarily in the latter's Arabic classes (Dévényi, pp. 159-60), and a year later he became extraordinary titular professor at the same department.

Kégl became a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1906 as an expert in Oriental manuscripts and prepared the first catalogue of the Islamic manuscripts in the Oriental Collection of its Library. In 1914, after the death of Vámbéry, Kégl was appointed a public extraordinary professor (Dévényi and Kelecsényi; Sárközy, 2005). Despite the fact that Kégl mostly enjoyed the support of the leading colleagues of his field, there are no documents known to



the present author that he was appointed as the head of the department of Persian language and literature, which had been suggested in the proposal for his appointment as public extraordinary professor. The unfavorable conditions generated by World War I and later political events in Hungary had a negative effect, and the plans to found a department of Persian studies were canceled. Iranian studies as a separate unit were established only in 1958 at the Faculty of Humanities of the same university in Budapest (by then called Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences), within the framework of the Department of General Linguistics, all due to the efforts of János Harmatta and Zsigmond Telegdi. Noteworthy among Kégl's students is Rezső Honti, a polymath like his master, who made the selection and prose translation of the *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsi into Hungarian.

Kégl devoted all his life to Oriental, and especially Iranian, studies. He was shy in character, never married, and mainly led a withdrawn, private life in his country mansion in Áporka, a tiny village near Budapest. He died of heart attack in 1920. Due to his untimely death, plans to establish a Department of Iranian Studies in Hungary were suspended until 1958. His remains were laid to rest in the Kégl family crypt in Kiskunlacháza.

Works. Kégl's scholarly output reflects his deep knowledge and interest in classical and post-classical Persian literature. Between 1890 and 1900 his primary interest was poetry during the Qajar period. He published many articles in Hungarian and German about Persian poetry in the 19th century, including his voluminous essay in Hungarian about Persian literature during that time. His articles in German about Weṣāl Širāzi and his sons, the satirical poetry of Šāyeq Eṣfahāni, Reżāqoli Khan Hedāyat, and female poets can be perceived as his major contributions (Rypka, pp. 318, 320; see also [GERMANY iv](#)). Also noteworthy is his essay about the Persian folk poetry of Tehran, which contains folksongs collected and written down by him during his stay in the Persian capital. This article (in Hungarian) is certainly a remarkable collection of the popular culture in the reign of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (Sárközy, 2012a, pp. 14-15).

In the second decade of his scholarly activity, Kégl's pursuit was extended to Classical Persian literature. As a collector of medieval manuscripts, his interest was focused on the works of Persian mystics, like Sanā'i and Rumi (see Bibliography). His article "Perzsia" (1903) is the first ever detailed and elaborate essay about Persian literary history published in Hungary (Sárközy, 2012a, p. 17). In his later years Kégl made significant contributions to the field



of Indo-Persian literature. The fact that he was well versed both in Sanskrit and Hindustani literature induced him to make further steps in the field of Indo-Persian literature. His two studies about [Amir K̄osrow Dehlavi](#) in 1910-11 are particularly noteworthy (Kovács). Kégl also dealt with the questions of Persian poetry in the Ottoman empire. His article about the Persian poems of Sultan Selim I was published in 1910 in a volume dedicated to Ignác Goldziher (Kégl, “Szelim szultán”; Péri, pp. 21-22). A selection of Kégl’s works on Persian literature was recently published by the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Dévényi and Kelecsényi).

Kégl in forty-five years collected a personal library of approximately 11,000 volumes of various Oriental manuscripts, lithographs, and other books, which he kept in Áporka, where he lived until his death. In 1925, in accordance with Kégl’s bequest, his brother donated it to the library of the Hungarian Academy. The Kégl library was the second largest donation in the history of the Library of the Hungarian Academy (Dévényi and Kelecsényi, Szántó, 2010a) and the largest such collection concerning Iranian studies. Out of the total 120 Classical Persian manuscripts preserved in Hungary, 59 belong to the Kégl collection; among them, a [Kalila wa Demna](#) manuscript (dated 719/1319) is the oldest Persian manuscript in Hungary libraries. The provenances and dedications on some of his books refer to his far-reaching scholarly connections. For instance, we find the names of [Charles Schefer](#), [Paul Horn](#), and Harald Rasmussen, among those of previous owners (Szántó, 2010b, pp. 169-70).

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