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chive show that Gejou also sold several hundreds artefacts via shipping companies, Frank Strick & Co. especially, who received payment on his behalf and which therefore do not appear as sold by Gejou (Ait Said-Ghanem 2020). The British Museum online collection lists 17,128 objects purchased from Ibrahim Gejou, see here https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?agent=I%20%C3%89lias%20G%C3%A-9jou&view=grid&sort=object_name_asc&page=1. Among these objects, 14,335 are identified as cuneiform tablets, see https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=tablet&agent=I%20%C3%89lias%20G%C3%A-9jou&view=grid&sort=object_name_asc&page=1.

(20) I have consulted documents kept in the archive of the British Museum, as well as in the Louvre, the Yale Babylonian collection, the Vorderasiatische Museum, Brussel's Royal Museums of Art and History, the Bohl collection and the Risjkmuseum, Harvard, and the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.

(21) Gejou's study of medicine is recorded in his Légion d'honneur Dossier which reads: "Bachelier en lettre – a pris 4 inscriptions à la faculté de médecine de Paris". See page 6 of the digitized file : http://www2.culture.gouv.fr/LH/LH068/PG/FRDAFAN83_OL1106020v006.htm (Archives Nationales, database Leonore).

(22) Certificate of nationalisation, Reference codes: 2569 x 04.

(23) His extraordinary services are listed in his Legion d'honneur file, see above.

(24) Acte de Mariage cote V4E 6388, no.5, Ibrahim Géjou and Eugénie Julie Deschaumes, 10e arrondissement, 4 Janvier 1890.

(25) Acte de Mariage cote 13M163, no.109, Ibrahim Géjou and Ernestine Marie Picardat, 11 February 1904, 13e arrondissement, Paris.

(26) For a profile of Joseph Svoboda see Ait Said-Ghanem 2021b.

(27) The Joseph Svoboda Diaries are available online in digitized form on the University of Washington's website, see here: <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/iraqdiaries/search>.

(28) For information on the Lynch brothers and their commercial steamships see Parry 2013:163.

(29) "I came home, Elias Jejo and Han-nosh Kroomi called on me" Svoboda Diary 18, p.162, Sunday 4 November 1877.

(30) The reasons for opposition to the marriage are narrated in the Svoboda Diaries 18, p.141-144.

(31) Svoboda Diary no 47, p. x, Monday 13 June 1898: "Gejou has sent 3 cases containing shoes and perfumery, etc, to his brother Isak for sale (in Iraq)"

(32) Letter to Albert T. Clay, Yale Babylonian Collection dated 23 October 1919: "at the moment I am occupied with firewood affair (I bought with some friends 7000 tons and am trying to get the best of it)."

(33) The tablets are described as 'non identified omens' in Khayt 2018.

(34) During the course of my research on Ibrahim Elias Gejou, I was fortunate to meet Ibrahim Elias Gejou's great grandchildren (as well as his great great grandchildren), who allowed me to consult their personal documents, and to publish the portraits of Ibrahim in their possession. I am very grateful to them for their generosity. For two other portraits of Ibrahim Elias Gejou, see Ait Said-Ghanem 2023.

Endnotes

- (1) Department of Antiquities and Assyrian Department, Correspondence Volume 1896, Letter dated 21 May 1896
- (2) Ismail 2021:120-131.
- (3) The Ottoman Antiquities Law of 1884 is cited in full in *Reinach 1884: 36-343*. *Article 8 reads*: “Il est absolument d’être interdit d’exporter l’étranger des antiquités découvertes dans l’empire ottoman.” This Law can also be consulted online here <https://transllegisl.hypotheses.org/uebersicht/osmanisches-reich-21-02-1884>
- (4) Çelib 2016:43-46; 63.
- (5) For examples of prices paid to Baghdad-based antiquities dealers by the British Museum, see Ait Said-Ghanem 2021b, and 2022.
- (6) The friendship between Frank Bottomley and Wallis Budge can be seen through the letters they exchanged, kept in the archive of the British Museum (Correspondence Volumes 1893 to 1904).
- (7) Elias Gejou letter 21 May 1896 : “J’ai l’honneur de former la présente pour vous aviser que d’après le conseil de Mr Bottomley l’Agent de Messrs Lynch & Co à Bagdad, je vous ai expédié 4 caisses d’antiquités contenant 186 pièces.”
- (8) This equivalence was calculated for 2021 using Official Data Inflation <https://www.officialdata.org/uk/inflation/1896?amount=250>
- (9) Elias Gejou letter 24 September 1896: “Le prix que vous m’offrez bien loin auquel sont achetées ici à Bagdad. Ma perte est très grande; sans compter les dépenses et la fatigue que j’ai subie pour pouvoir les expédier à Londres et fuir le risque d’être confisquées par les autorités locales.”
- (10) Dealers often referred to seizures and fines, see for example Henry Svoboda’s letter to Wallis Budge dated 27 December 1894, British Museum Correspondence Volume 1895: “You know that it will be very difficult for me to have them back here as the government will seize [sic] them so I shall be much obliged if you

take both those of D. Sassoon and the 10 cylinders you have and pay me what you think as I do not care much what you offer and they will always be of some use in your museum”

- (11) This sum was calculated using Official Data Inflation <https://www.officialdata.org/uk/inflation/1897?amount=32>

(12) Letter of 24 September 1896: “Je sais très bien que vous êtes un homme bien juste & pour cela tout acceptant votre prix je vous prie & je vous supplie d’augmenter l’offre de quelques pounds pour diminuer ma perte et recompenser ma fatigue”, Department of Antiquities and Assyrian Department, Correspondence Volume 1896.

- (13) The Trustees report notes that the collection was made of “188” tablets, not of 186 as per Gejou’s letter of 21 May 1896.

(14) Elias Gejou to Wallis Budge, letter dated 24 September 1896: “Elias Géjou courtier chez Stephen Lynch & Co à Bagdad”, British Museum Correspondence Volume 1896.

- (15) Ibrahim Elias Gejou, letter to Wallis Budge dated 10 November 1920: “N.B. I have to raise money for the marriage of my daughter”.

(16) Ibrahim Géjou’s Chevalier de la Légion d’honneur dossier records that he was born on “13” May 1868, but all his other official documents give the “12” May as his day of birth. The file is digitized by the Archives Nationales and can be freely consulted here www2.culture.gouv.fr/LH/LH068/PG/FRDAFAN83_OL1106020v001.htm

- (17) Ibrahim Gejou’s death certificate, which I acquired from the Mairie of Cosnes-sur-Loire, confirms Ibrahim died on 12 July 1942. For a profile of Ibrahim Elias Gejou, see Dessagnes 2017:76-121, and Ait Said-Ghanem 2021a.

(18) Private communication from Nicolas Benoit, Documentaliste scientifique au Musée du Louvre.

- (19) Letters in the British Museum ar-

who sold smuggled cuneiform tablets to the department. By nature, Elias Gejou's work as a broker consisted in buying and selling merchandise, like wool and wheat, and based on archival material in the British Museum it is evident that he also sold cuneiform tablets, at least on occasion. This background helps to better understand Ibrahim Elias Gejou and his long career as an antiquities dealer. Ibrahim not only traded a variety of artefacts (cuneiform tablets, prisms, cones, cylinder seals, statues, as well as artworks like rare Arabic, Persian, and Coptic manuscripts, and gold and silver coins), he also bought and sold other commodities throughout his life, like shoes and perfume⁽³¹⁾, and even firewood⁽³²⁾. The extent and diversity of Ibrahim's trade may seem surprising taken in isolation, but put in the context

of his family background, it appears as a natural extension of his own father's practice. Undoubtedly, Ibrahim must have learnt from his father how to import, export, and speculate. Many elements about Elias Gejou remain unknown, like his place and date of birth, as well as the year in which he died. Uncovering Elias' own filiation, as well as that of his wife Ferida Kroomy, would be particularly interesting to establish whether the family was indeed Armenian – an origin never alluded to in Ibrahim's letters. Despite these gaps in our knowledge, Elias Gejou's profile can also be useful to a provenance history of BM 23158 and BM 23169⁽³³⁾, two unpublished Old Babylonian omen texts which were part the collection he sold to the British Museum, one hundred and twenty six years ago.



Fig.(1) : Portrait of Ibrahim Elias Gejou (undated)
 Reproduced with the kind permission of Ibrahim Elias Gejou's great
 grand-children⁽³⁴⁾

2021b). Joseph also knew several members of the Gejou family, among whom Elias, to whom Joseph was probably close in age.

The earliest mention of Elias Gejou in the Svoboda diaries dates to the year 1865. On 18 December of that year, Joseph's steamship had just left Baghdad for Basra, and as was usual for Joseph in his diaries, he took note of the owners who sent merchandise on his ship. On that day, wheat belonging to Elias Gejou was being shipped to Basra: "*Baghdad to Basreh. Left Baghdad at 12am laden with 60 wheat of Elias Jejo [sic] @ 47 (& 40 k. 27 ½) and about 40 passengers*" (Diary 4, p. 49, 18 December 1865). Reference is again made to this cargo of wheat after the ship's arrival in Basra, when merchandise was discharged on 24 December: "*Commenced discharging wheat of Elias Jejo but is raining always so that I cannot discharge the Basreh cargo as the Custom people did not want to do it fearing from the rain*" (Diary 4, p. 53, dated 24 December 1865). At the beginning of the year 1866, Joseph again recorded that his ship was transporting goods owned by Elias Gejou: this time, wool co-owned by Elias and a friend of Joseph named Hanna Andrea ("Took in lots of cargo today & 40 bales wool of Elias Jejo and Hanna Andrea", Diary 4, p. 65, dated 24 January 1866). Joseph encountered Elias through work, but he also seems to have come across him socially. In a diary entry written on Sunday 4 November 1877, twelve years after his entries about cargo ownership, Joseph writes that Elias had visited him at home with a friend named Hannosh Kroomy⁽²⁹⁾. A month before, Joseph had just married for the first time. He and Eliza Marine had celebrated their wedding on 11 October 1877 in strained circumstances. Joseph's family had strongly objected to this marriage, not only because Eliza was older than Joseph, but also because she was a recent widow with adult children⁽³⁰⁾. It is likely that Joseph

took note of Elias Gejou's visit, as well as the visit of other acquaintances, because they had not shunned his bride despite the scandal. The patronym of the person who accompanied Elias Gejou on this housecall is also of interest: 'Kroomy' is the surname of Ferida, Elias' wife, and it is likely that Hannosh was one of Ferida's relatives. Joseph continued to record instances when he met Elias, and also when he met Elias' children. He mentions meeting Elias' daughters, Sarah and Looloo in 1899 when he went to visit Ibrahim, who had just arrived from Paris: "[I] then went to call on Ibrahim Gejou at his father's house but did not find him at home. I sat with his mother & the two sisters, Sarah & Looloo" (Svoboda Diary 49, p.63, 15 June 1899). Clearly, Joseph also encountered Elias' wife, but as can be read in the previous quote and in the following one, when Joseph mentions Ferida she is not named, but instead only identified as a 'wife' or as a 'mother'. It is in an entry dated 6 December 1895 that explicit mention of Elias Gejou's profession is made: "*we have no other passengers aft except the wife of Elias Jejo (the Broker of Lynch and Co) and her daughter*" (Svoboda Diary 42, p.1, 6 December 1895). This sentence about Elias working as a broker for Lynch & Co, written almost in passing, is precious for linking the 'Elias Gejou' one finds in the Svoboda Diaries to 'Elias Gejou' the author of the letters to the British Museum. Unless two persons named Elias Gejou worked for Lynch & Co during this period, the antiquities dealer who sold 186 cuneiform tablets to the department of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities in 1896 was Ibrahim's father.

Concluding remarks

Though scant, the above documents are invaluable to reconstructing the identity of a dealer who made only one sale to the British Museum, and to distinguishing him as a person with a family history rather than as one name among hundreds

which at least 14,335 cuneiform tablets⁽¹⁹⁾. Ibrahim was selling artefacts both as an agent, on behalf of private sellers, and also as the full owner of the objects he presented to museums, having purchased them before offering them for sale or co-owning them with other parties, often dealers like him. As a result of Ibrahim's offers, many museums preserve the letters Ibrahim sent to their respective curators, especially when they led to an acquisition. The British Museum archive preserves the largest source of Gejou documents: Ibrahim corresponded with the department of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities for forty-five years, between 1895 and 1940, with only two years interruption during WWI. If no museum archives preserve a photograph of Ibrahim Elias Gejou⁽²⁰⁾, his family still owns several, and Fig.1 is shared here with the kind permission of his heirs to enrich the biographical information that scholars have so far gathered.

The date of Ibrahim's arrival in France is unclear, but he may have come to live in France in 1887 (Dessagnes 2017:88), where he settled in Paris initially to study medicine⁽²¹⁾. He would remain in France until his death in 1942, acquiring the French citizenship in 1913⁽²²⁾. Like most French citizens, Ibrahim had to register many official forms during the course of his life in France, and several of his documents can still be found in the *Archives Nationales*, like the certificates of his marriages and divorce, and his *Chevalier de la légion d'honneur* dossier, an award he was given in 1926 by the French government for his "extraordinary service" to the nation⁽²³⁾. Among these documents, it is Ibrahim's marriage certificates that are particularly relevant as they record that Ibrahim's father was named Elias Gejou. Ibrahim married twice in his life in France. His first marriage was to Eugénie Julie Deschaumes. Ibrahim was twenty-one years old then, and his bride was a young woman of twenty. The wedding was cel-

ebrated on 14 January 1890 in the 10th arrondissement of Paris⁽²⁴⁾. After their divorce in 1899, Ibrahim remained in Paris, and eventually married Ernestine Marie Picardat on 11 February 1904⁽²⁵⁾. Naturally, the certificates of both these marriages record personal details about the bride and groom, such as their place and date of births, professions, current addresses, as well as their filiation. It is there that one finds the name of Ibrahim's parents, given as: Elias Gejou and Ferida Kroumy. In these certificates, Ibrahim is described as the "fils majeur de Elias Géjou et de Férida Kroumy son épouse" and as the "fils majeur légitime de : Elias Gejou, et de : Férida Kroumy". Unfortunately, no further information can be gleaned about Elias Gejou from these documents, and though the trail runs cold here, it can be picked up in the diaries of Joseph Svoboda, a friend of the Gejou family, who regularly spoke about Elias and about his four children, Ibrahim, Isaac, Sarah, and Looloo.

Joseph Svoboda and the Gejou Family

Joseph Svoboda (1840-1908)⁽²⁶⁾ is known today through the diaries he wrote from 1862 until he died in 1908, and which are today in the Manuscripts Department of the Iraqi Museum in Baghdad⁽²⁷⁾. Joseph was born and raised in this city, and it is there that he began working as a purser on steamships owned by the British company Lynch & Co⁽²⁸⁾, which ran steamers from Baghdad to Basra weekly transporting people, merchandise, as well as the national and international mail. In his diaries, Joseph kept a record of life on board ship, as well as his encounters with family, friends, and the numerous travellers he encountered through his work. It is clear from these documents that Joseph knew the Gejou family well. He was especially close to Ibrahim, at least enough to leave his nineteen year-old son Alexander in Ibrahim's care during Alexander's stay in France in 1897 (Ait Said-Ghanem

evade the authorities' confiscation of the collection⁽⁹⁾. If detected, not only would his shipment be seized, he would also be fined⁽¹⁰⁾. The collection, however was not intercepted and by August 1896, the tablets had arrived in London and had been delivered to the department. After examination, Wallis Budge offered £30 for the tablets (equivalent today to c. £4,190)⁽¹¹⁾, a sum Elias Gejou very much deplored given it was so far below his asking price. But he did not want to delay the sale and accepted the offer, asking only that it be increased by a few pounds⁽¹²⁾. The British Museum's Trustees Report of 8 May 1897 confirms that the increase had been accepted: the collection was purchased for "£32"⁽¹³⁾.

Today, Elias Gejou's sale to the department can be reconstructed from the two handwritten letters, dated 11 May and 24 September 1896, that he addressed to Wallis Budge, both written in French but signed in Arabic. These documents are today kept in the archive of the British Museum, where they are filed in the Correspondence volumes of the department, together with hundreds of others sent by antiquities dealers writing from Baghdad in the late 19th century. Elias Gejou's two letters are catalogued in the Correspondence volume of 1896 together with several others sent in that year by another individual bearing the same surname: Ibrahim Elias Gejou, a professional antiquities dealer who sold archaeological artefacts to the department from 1895 to 1940. Given their patronym, it is natural to hypothesise that Elias and Ibrahim may have been relatives, but if so what were these two men to each other? Unfortunately, their letters give no indication of their relationship. Personal information about Elias can be found in his two letters to the British Museum, but only to the extent that he discloses he worked as a broker for Stephen Lynch & Co in Baghdad⁽¹⁴⁾. Equally, in the forty-five years of his correspondence with the British Mu-

seum, Ibrahim does not mention anyone named Elias. Ibrahim in fact rarely spoke about his family except for his young brother Isaac (who was his business partner, but whom he rarely named explicitly), and his second daughter Georgette (b.1897), mentioned when Ibrahim was trying to encourage Wallis Budge to make a purchase from him in 1920, arguing he needed to sell artefacts to raise money for Georgette's wedding⁽¹⁵⁾.

Although documents in museum archives provide no clues about Elias and Ibrahim's connection, information about Elias Gejou is not entirely out of reach. Two sets of documents establish the nature of these dealers' relationship: Ibrahim's marriage certificates reveal his father was named Elias Gejou, and the diaries of Joseph Svoboda, a friend of the Gejou family in Baghdad, not only confirm that Ibrahim's father was named Elias Gejou, but also record his profession as a broker for Lynch & Co, thereby identifying the father of Ibrahim as the antiquities dealer who made the sale described above to the BM. In order to reconstruct part of Elias Gejou's identity, this article will present the information that links both these antiquities dealers as father and son.

1. Ibrahim Elias Gejou, "the adult son of Elias Gejou and Ferida Kroumy"

Ibrahim Elias Géjou (12 May 1868⁽¹⁶⁾, Baghdad - 12 July 1942, Cosne-sur-Loire⁽¹⁷⁾) was an antiquities dealer based in Paris, who is known to have sold tens of thousands of archaeological artefacts, primarily cuneiform tablets, to museums in Europe and America in the late 19th century and early 20th century (Ait Said-Ghanem 2023 and 2021a; Dessagnes 2017). Among the museums who purchased the most artefacts from Ibrahim are the Louvre and the British Museum. The Louvre considers Ibrahim as their largest seller, with approximately 16,000 archaeological objects purchased from him⁽¹⁸⁾. While the British Museum purchased just under 18,000 artefacts from Ibrahim, among

SUMER

Elias Gejou, Father of the Antiquities Dealer Ibrahim Elias Gejou

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ABSTRACT

The British Museum archive preserves hundreds of letters sent by collectors of archaeological artefacts found in Iraq who regularly wrote in the late 19th century from Baghdad to offer smuggled cuneiform tablets for sale to the department of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities. Elias Gejou and Ibrahim Elias Gejou are among the many antiquities dealers who made such sales to the department, and given their patronym. It is natural to speculate they may have been from the same family. But if so, how were they related? In order to bring their relationship to light, this article presents archival material that demonstrate Elias Gejou was the father of the well-known antiquities dealer Ibrahim Elias Gejou.

Introduction

In June 1896, the British Museum's Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities, Dr E.A. Wallis Budge, received a letter from a man named Elias Gejou who advised he had just sent 186 cuneiform tablets from Baghdad, hoping The British Museum would purchase them⁽¹⁾. The department was used to receiving such offers from individuals based in Iraq. Since the early mid-1880s, Baghdad-based antiquities dealers had regularly sent archaeological artefacts discovered in Iraq for sale. Offers had substantially increased post-1888 after Wallis Budge's first visit to Iraq, when he had made it known among the antiquities dealers' community that the department was interested in purchasing cuneiform tablets sent directly to the British Museum⁽²⁾. Dealers willing to send archaeological artefacts to London were doing so in the full knowledge that they were violating article 8 of the Ottoman Antiquities Law of 1884⁽³⁾, which

strictly banned the exportation of antiquities⁽⁴⁾. Lured by the large sums these sales could reach, the word had quickly spread among dealers in Baghdad that the risk was worth taking⁽⁵⁾. Friends of Wallis Budge had also regularly encouraged private individuals who could buy cuneiform tablets to send them to the British Museum. Elias Gejou had been one such person: his colleague Frank Bottomley, who was a good friend of Wallis Budge⁽⁶⁾, had recommended that Elias send his collection of tablets to the British Museum. It was based on this nudge that Elias Gejou had contacted Wallis Budge⁽⁷⁾. Unlike many dealers who approached the department, Elias Gejou was straightforward about the price he wanted for this sale: he explicitly stated he would sell the tablets for £250 (equivalent today to c. £34,930)⁽⁸⁾. While he acknowledged the price was steep, Elias justified it by noting that it reflected the risks he had taken to