

Soliman Inger, the Self-Proclaimed Hungarian Ruler of Somalia

Abstract: The present study explores the extraordinary life of Soliman Inger, a Hungarian adventurer who, throughout his life, claimed to be—among other things—a freedom fighter, an emir, and the ruler of the Somali population of East Africa. Inger’s bold and outlandish claims about his identity; his supposed connections to powerful figures across Europe and Africa; his involvement in the political spheres of France, Britain, Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire; and his scandalous exploits all often made headlines. The study seeks to distinguish fact from fiction, uncovering the truths of Inger’s life and to provide insight into the motivations behind his actions.

Keywords: Soliman Inger; Karl Inger; Africa; Sudan; Somalia

<https://doi.org/10.61795/fssr.v27y2025i5.02>

Introduction

Known by a variety of names in contemporary news reports, including Karl Inger,¹ Alexander Inger,² Solomon Singer,³ Izidor Singer,⁴ and Karl Singer,⁵ the individual who would later become known throughout Hungary as Soliman Inger—often referred to as the “Viceroy of Somalia”—was a man of extravagant character and bold claims. Inger captured the imagination of the public, his larger-than-life persona and daring exploits frequently making headlines all across Europe. Soliman Inger claimed to be many things, a freedom fighter, an emir, and the sovereign of a distant African land, but how much of it was actually true? Was he truly a monarch or were his claims merely the product of his imagination?

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- 1 *Aradi Közlöny*, 1935.08.07, Abessziniába készül a bihormegyei származású, olvaszverő Inger Károly – Emir Suleyman Abdullah, 9.
 - 2 *Magyarság*, 1935.08.04, Magyar katonatiszt a khedive seregében, 35.
 - 3 *Szentesi Napló*, 1941.06.06, Tallózás, 3.
 - 4 *Pesti Hírlap*, 1928.01.29, Az afrikai magyar királyok és alkirályok, 40.
 - 5 *Typographia*, 1935.11.01, Afrika lelke, 3.

The Story of Inger Soliman, as Told by Contemporary Sources

The present chapter explores the life and career of Soliman Inger as pieced together from contemporary sources including press coverage, studies, and interviews. As the available sources often present conflicting information, the reconstruction of Inger's early life has been approached with caution. Instead of incorporating all the varying accounts—which could lead to confusion—the focus has been placed on those details that are most consistently reported across multiple sources.

Soliman Inger was believed to have been born in the Transylvanian town of Temesvár (present-day Timișoara, Romania). After completing four years of secondary education, he chose to embark on a military career. He attended a military academy for four years before being commissioned as a lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian army. During his service in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he had frequent interactions with the local Turkish population and became fascinated by the enigmatic charm of the East. Ultimately, he relinquished his rank as an officer and traveled to Turkey, where he joined the Ottoman army.⁶

Inger's grandfather was described as a veteran of the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848–1849, who emigrated alongside Lajos Kossuth, the prominent leader of the failed revolution. He eventually settled down in Constantinople, where he joined the services of a certain Osman Pasha. As it was reported by the Hungarian press, this connection later played a crucial role in Inger's warm reception into the Ottoman army.⁷

As a soldier, Inger was posted to Egypt, where he converted to Islam and adopted the name Suleyman Inger Ibn Abdullah (Sanderson 1954: 25). During this time, Sudanese Muslims repeatedly rose in rebellion against the Khedivate of Egypt (an Ottoman tributary state) and later against British rule, striving to establish their independence. The rebellions, launched by the various Sudanese tribes, took years for the British to suppress, often at a significant cost. These uprisings would come to be remembered as the Mahdist War (1881–1899).⁸ Inger too became entangled in these conflicts and embraced the ideology of the rebels, eventually making his way to Omdurman, the capital of the Mahdist State (Sanderson 1954: 25). Upon arrival, he announced himself

6 *Déli Hírlap*, 1940.08.24, Az egykori szomáli alkirály erdélyi származású volt és karrierjét a k. u. k. hadseregben szerezte, 9.

7 *Új Kelet*, 1935.08.29, Hogyan élt és hogyan halt meg Inger Szolimán az egykori Magyar hadnagy és szomáli alkirály, 2.

8 *Tolnai Világlapja*, 1931.09.09, Inger Szolimán Közös Tisztból egyiptomi katona, szudáni vezér, mohamedán főpap, aki osztrák-magyar gyarmatot akart alapítani Afrikában, 49.

as an Egyptian, stating that he was inspired to abandon his homeland and join the Mahdists out of admiration for their beliefs and their leader, the caliph. Through his fluency in Arabic, apparent sincerity, and demonstrated abilities, Inger earned the favor of the caliph, who granted him the title of emir (Bell 1937: 298).

This appointment marked the emergence of the figure who would be well known throughout Hungary as Emir Soliman Inger, the Viceroy of Somalia. In this role, he was supposedly responsible for overseeing the training and equipment of the Mahdist army. In 1887, he served as Chief of Staff to Hamdan Abu Anja and established a garrison near the town of Khasm al Qirba, where he fought alongside the Sudanese tribes. That same year, Inger took part in the Mahdist campaign against Ethiopia, which led to the sacking of Gondar. Sometime afterward—presumably following the Battle of Matammah in March 1889—Inger, who was described as tall, fair, and clean shaven, became the “king of an Abyssinian province.” He claimed to have ruled for three years as “king,” with his reign ending only when Emperor Menelik II reunited Ethiopia (Sanderson 1954: 24–25).



Picture 1. The young “emir”⁹

9 *Bihari Napló*, 2013.08.27., Inger Károly – Szulejmán Ibn Inger Abdullah, 7.

Inger's Own Account

In his publication, *Hungary's Colony in Somaliland*, Inger provides a detailed account of his life up to 1904. He stated that he was the grandson of "one of those great men" who had fought in the Hungarian War of Independence of 1848–1849 and who was forced to spend his final years in Ottoman lands.

Inger emphasized that from a young age, he was raised to become a soldier and eventually rose to the rank of officer in the Austro-Hungarian army. After fulfilling his military obligations, he chose to leave voluntarily, claiming that prolonged peace made his life dull and boring. He believed that the army already had a sufficient number of skilled officers to prepare the nation for potential future conflicts. Driven by a desire for a more meaningful life, he sought not only to serve his country but also to express his gratitude to the Muslim populations of the East, who had sheltered his grandfather and his fellow compatriots after their flight from Hungary. With these aspirations, he traveled to Africa, wishing to assist the Muslim tribes—whom he described as being left behind in terms of civilization-building—in their integration into the modern world. At the same time, he wished to open up the East's markets to Hungarian trade, contributing to both the region's development and Hungary's economic interests.

Inger claimed that he set out on his mission without any support. He joined a caravan and, as he put it, relied on the humility instilled in him through his upbringing to earn the trust of the natives. He claimed that he and the natives shared a common goal: to resist European domination, which was often masked as humanitarianism, while embracing civilization on their own terms and to "open their country to trade." Inger claimed that their opposition to British rule made them enemies of those who viewed British control as the only path to prosperity, despite "its frequent disregard for law and morality."

Inger also described his appointment as emir by the Mahdist caliph and the responsibilities entrusted to him by the Somali tribes. According to him, this designation resulted from the numerous European military raids that disrupted the lives of the native population. This prompted the tribes to seek leadership from someone who could guide them in their struggle for independence. Inger emphasized that he was given the task of overseeing the affairs of a country larger than Austria-Hungary, with a population of 5 to 6 million people. According to his account, the Somali people fully embraced his vision and followed his guidance with unwavering loyalty.

Inger also described how, in December of 1897, he wrote a letter to Hungarian Prime Minister Dezső Bánffy in which he outlined his and the Somali tribes' situation. He once again emphasized that the Somalis wished to establish commercial connections with

Hungary and were aiming for Hungary's political support. Inger assured Bánffy that the tribes were strong enough to defend themselves and that they only needed protection at sea. Inger claimed that the Hungarian government responded positively to his proposal, offering political support. Negotiations were held in Budapest, resulting in a secret 10-year commercial agreement. As part of the deal, 250,000 francs and ships loaded with goods were allocated to support Inger's mission.

During his journey to Africa, Inger passed through British-controlled Aden, accompanied by state representatives. However, his mission took an unexpected turn when some of his associates betrayed him. They fled the ship and informed the British authorities, falsely claiming that Inger had no ties to Hungary and that his true intent was to wage war against both Britain and Ethiopia.

To avoid issues with the British consul, Inger decided to head to French-controlled Djibouti, where he claimed to have been well-known and respected. Upon arrival, the French governor seized his belongings and supplies, citing accusations from Inger's associates regarding his hostile intentions. Despite this, the governor allowed him to remain in Djibouti while awaiting support from his home country. During his stay, Inger received no support from Budapest, and after nearly two months, the French governor informed him that the Hungarian government had not responded to the French inquiries either.

When he returned to Hungary, Inger discovered that public opinion had turned against him, with damaging reports circulating about his character. He tried to get to the bottom of the situation by reaching out to the Hungarian authorities but was placed under police surveillance. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna had been involved in the case, and numerous legal actions were taken against him. Inger claimed that Foreign Minister Agenor Goluchowski had opposed his enterprise from the start and that, as a result, the Hungarian government had effectively abandoned him.

Inger visited the editorial offices of several newspapers that had published defamatory and, in his view, false articles about him and his mission. One of these visits was to *Budapesti Hírlap*, where Inger engaged in a conversation with the editor-in-chief. During their conversation, the editor disclosed that the Hungarian government had directly ordered them to publish negative stories about Inger, with the goal of undermining his reputation and to create the public perception that the government had no ties to his mission. Similarly, Inger visited the offices of *Neue Freie Presse*, where the editors expressed sympathy for his situation. They explained that they were not fully informed about the specifics of his project and had merely reported the information given to them by the state (Inger 1904: 4–14).

Picture 2. Soliman Inger¹⁰

The Supposed Domain: Ogaden

Throughout his life, Inger repeatedly asserted that he was the true and legitimate ruler of the Somali people. In October 1898, *Pesti Napló* published a letter of his, written while he was stranded in Djibouti. In this letter, he claimed sovereignty over the Ogaden region of East Africa, a land under Ethiopian control but predominantly inhabited by Somalis.

In East Africa—as the emir writes in his letter—east of the Jubba River lies a vast country, the free homeland of the Somalis. Ogaden is the center of this fertile land. It has never been under foreign rule, neither Christian nor Muslim. This is the most beautiful

¹⁰ Az Est, 1935.08.28, Meghalt a legendás Inger Szolimán Emir, 3.

and most fertile part of Africa, many say: the paradise of Africa. [...] Ogaden is free and will never be under foreign yoke. This is my land, the center and foundation of all my plans. No matter what the newspapers write, no matter what the traitorous Europeans I recruited may say, my sheikhs remain steadfastly by my side. [...] ¹¹

Inger's own account of how he came into possession of Ogaden changed several times throughout his life, his claim often being inconsistent and contradictory. On one occasion, he asserted that Emperor of Ethiopia Menelik II had granted the region to him as a personal gift in recognition of his bravery, a narrative that directly contradicted his earlier claims of being appointed as the viceroy of the entire region by the Mahdist caliph. ¹² In some reports, it was even suggested that Inger intended to turn Ogaden into a Hungarian colony. ¹³



Picture 3. The region of Ogaden ¹⁴

¹¹ *Pesti Napló*, 1898.10.19, Inger Szolimánról, 8.

¹² *Amerikai Magyar Népszava Szabadság*, 1935.09.10, Inger Szolimán – szomáli alkirálya meghalt, 2.

¹³ *Ellenzék*, 1935.09.01, Hogyan élt Bihar-ban az abessziniai Ogaden tartomány emirje, 10.

¹⁴ www.britannica.com/place/Ogaden; (last accessed 2025.04.11.)

Uncovering the Truth of Inger's Life

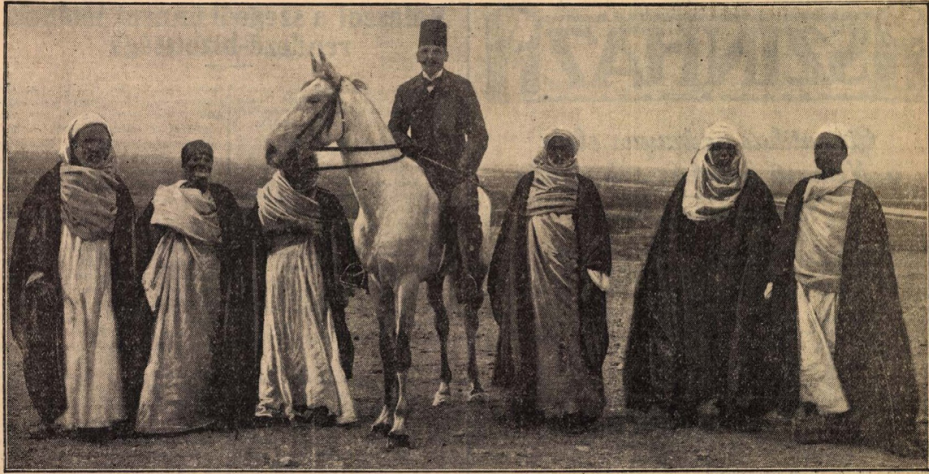
Soliman Inger's birth name was Karl, as confirmed by Austrian military records, which reference a Lieutenant Karl Inger born in Temesvár on September 18, 1868 (Sanderson 1954: 27). He was the son of a "master shoemaker"¹⁵ and was possibly of Jewish origin (Szélinger 2008: 33). He attended the Infantry Cadet School in his hometown from 1883 to 1888, graduating with an overall grading of "very good." On September 19, 1885, he voluntarily enlisted in the 61st Infantry Regiment and later achieved the rank of second lieutenant in the 85th Infantry Regiment. These documented service records directly contradict such claims that he fought in Sudan during the Mahdist's Ethiopian campaign or that he was ever present at Omdurman, where he was allegedly granted the rank of emir.

In April 1892, he was granted a year's leave from the army, during which time he traveled to Morocco and learned the Arabic language, but as G. N. Sanderson wrote in his study: "there is no evidence at all that he visited or attempted to visit Sudan" and that "it is abundantly clear from Inger's statements that he was very imperfectly acquainted with Sudanese affairs" (Sanderson 1954: 27–28). Inger made a request to be transferred to the army reserve on December 5, 1894, indicating that he wished to settle down in Morocco. This request was approved on February 10, 1895, and he was posted to the reserve of the 39th Infantry Regiment (Sanderson 1954: 24–27). There have been claims even in contemporary reports that Inger in fact was merely an adventurer and who had never set foot in Sudan or Somalia. One author even expressed astonishment that "the tales of the pseudo-Muslim from Temesvár," Soliman Inger, were ever believed.¹⁶

There is indeed no documented evidence of anyone who could be identified as Emir Soliman Inger in contemporary European intelligence reports on Africa or in the caliph's official correspondence. If he had truly been a ruler or held a significant position in the Mahdist army, his name would have likely appeared in some shape or form. Even the British report *Foreigners and Foreign Missions in Abyssinia* makes no mention of anyone resembling Soliman Inger (Sanderson 1954: 27).

15 Magyarország, 1897.01.11, Az én szudáni tervem, 4.

16 Pesti Napló, 1897.12.12, Inger Szolimán mesél, 9.



Picture 4. Inger, sitting on his horse¹⁷

Arrest by the British

In contrast, extensive records exist on a certain Karl Inger, who was arrested by the Anglo-Egyptian authorities in the port town of Suakin, northeastern Sudan, in October 1896. These reports detail his arrest and the subsequent background investigation carried out by the authorities. In his study, Sanderson argues that based on the available evidence, Karl Inger and the so-called Emir Soliman Inger were, in fact, the same person. He further asserts that Inger was an impostor who neither held the title of emir nor had any contact with the Mahdist caliph. While official British reports suggested some connection between Inger and the French—possibly as a spy or an agent working against the British in some capacity (see later)—his exact relationship with them was unclear to them.

At the time of his arrest, Inger was described as an exhausted and terrified man, having wandered the plains for five days without shelter or food. He was also dressed in a Dervish jibbah, which, to the British, amounted to wearing the uniform of the enemy. According to the authorities, there was strong circumstantial evidence suggesting that he had been attempting to communicate with and assist Britain's regional enemies. While in custody, Inger made oral statements to the Court of Inquiry, which were transcribed and included his responses to the questions posed to him. In his testimony, Inger detailed his movements and explained his reasons for attempting to enter Sudan.

17 Az Est, 1935.08.29, Hogyan dajkálta Inger Szolimán emir Hailé Szelassziét, a négust, 5.

Sanderson notes that, facing serious charges, Inger seems to have made up his mind to finally tell the truth. Many of his confessions were incredibly harmful to his case, and one British report even described his statements as “lacking all common sense.” Sanderson argues that it seems improbable that Inger would have intentionally fabricated such self-incriminating stories unless he was “completely insane.” However, he raises doubts about whether Inger truly understood his own motivations (Sanderson 1954: 27–29).

Karl Inger’s Written Statement Submitted to the Authorities

During his imprisonment, Inger submitted a detailed written statement to the Court of Inquiry. In it, he described his retirement from the Austro-Hungarian army, which he claimed was a voluntary and honorable discharge, dated February 10, 1895, in line with Austrian military records. Inger stated that he left Europe to enlist in the army of the Moroccan sultan. In preparation for this endeavor, he had started to learn Arabic in 1892 and practiced it by translating Austrian military training manuals. He also hoped that these translated documents would help him secure a military position in Morocco. These translations were later discovered among his belongings and were initially regarded as highly suspicious by his captors. Inger explained that his attempt to join the Moroccan army was unsuccessful: “I received support from nobody and failed in Morocco because the whole country was in an uproar as a result of Muley Hassan’s death” (Sanderson 1954: 30).

In November 1895, Inger moved to Turkey hoping for a fresh start. He tried to enlist in the Ottoman army, but his efforts were thwarted when the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic authorities there refused to provide him the necessary recommendation. By the end of January 1896, he left Constantinople and relocated to Egypt, but the Austrian diplomatic officials in Cairo also refused to assist him. Left without a patron, Inger resorted to offering his translated drill manuals to various Egyptian War Offices, hoping to find someone willing to back him, ultimately in vain.

In February, he seized the opportunity to pursue his long-held desire of becoming a soldier of fortune by volunteering to join the Italian forces in Ethiopia. His passport for Eritrea was approved by an Italian diplomatic agent, and his application, along with his manuals, were forwarded to General Baratieri. Unable to wait for an official response, Inger took matters into his own hands and boarded an Italian transport ship bound for Massawa. Upon his arrival, Inger was informed that his paperwork had been lost in the chaos of the ongoing conflict. He then made his way to the town of Asmara and presented himself to General Baldissera, but Inger was later informed that they could not make use of him, as he was not an Italian citizen.

By the end of March, Inger departed Massawa for Djibouti, arriving on April 5, 1896. He had intended to venture into Ethiopia. When questioned of his motives, Inger claimed that he had been keeping a diary and planned to write a book about the war. All signs point to Inger wishing to offer his services to the Ethiopian emperor, possibly motivated by resentment towards the Italians. Nothing came of this plan, however, as he was informed that traveling to Ethiopia would require personal permission from the emperor, a process that could take two or three months. This delay seemed to dissuade him, and he later admitted that because the Italians had treated him with respect, he ultimately decided against writing to Menelik: "At Massawa I had been kindly received and treated as a comrade and a guest, and for that reason I could not write to the Negus." Inger then made his way back to Cairo, where he attempted once again to join the Egyptian army, though his efforts were unsuccessful (Sanderson 1954: 31–32).

The Peacemaker

During his time in Cairo, Inger developed an interest in Sudanese affairs and the Mahdist uprising. Recognizing the tension between Constantinople and London following the British occupation of Egypt, he devised a scheme to forge an alliance between France and the Ottoman Empire against Britain and to restore Ottoman control over to the region. His plan involved securing French support by offering them a portion of Sudanese territory in exchange, thereby enlisting the help of Britain's most formidable rival in this geopolitical maneuver (Eshete 1974: 1).

Inger believed that a peaceful resolution could be achieved between the Ottoman sultan and the Mahdist caliph: "[...] the Khalifa Abdullah should be recognized by the Sultan of Turkey as Sultan of Nubia [...] It would be rendering the world a great service if one could bring about peace between Soudan and Egypt in this way" (Sanderson 1954: 32). In essence, he proposed that the Mahdist caliph should be permitted to govern the region under Ottoman overlordship.

Convinced that he was the right man for the job, Inger devised a plan with the assistance of a certain M. Ximenes, whom he had met in Cairo, and who claimed to have influential connections in Sudan. Their plan centered on Inger leading an expedition to Omdurman, the capital of the Mahdist State. Once there, he and Ximenes wanted to persuade the caliph to send a diplomatic delegation to Constantinople under their escort, in an effort to negotiate peace with the Ottoman sultan. Realizing that their ambitious plan required the backing of a major power, Inger and Ximenes sought support from France. Ximenes claimed to be in contact with officials in Paris, Constantinople, and even Russia, which further fueled Inger's hopes of securing international backing for their mission.

In the end, Ximenes failed to provide the promised funds or any tangible evidence of French support. Each time Inger pressed him for specifics, Ximenes offered only vague excuses. When Inger suggested traveling to Paris himself to secure backing, Ximenes responded coldly, claiming that such a move would likely ruin everything. As time passed, Inger's suspicions grew. Despite claiming to have influential connections, Ximenes showed signs of financial instability, struggling to pay for his hotel and wearing shabby clothes. This only deepened Inger's doubts about Ximenes' credibility. Eventually, Inger decided to travel to Paris on his own, lying to Ximenes, telling him that he was heading to Hungary (Sanderson 1954: 32–34).

Seeking French Support

In Paris, Inger's suspicions about Ximenes were confirmed: his partner had been driven solely by personal gain and lacked any genuine interest in brokering peace. Despite this revelation, Inger stayed focused on their original plan. After meeting with several individuals Ximenes had previously been negotiating with, Inger discovered that his partner had unsuccessfully sought 20,000 francs in aid from the French government. Undeterred, Inger decided to take control of the situation, submitting a proposal directly to the French Foreign Office which, according to him, offered a promise of assistance.

Inger met with representatives of the Colonial Ministry, who informed him that his proposal had been reviewed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When the French asked him whether the caliph would even receive his expedition, Inger confidently assured them, though he later admitted in his statement to the British that this was a fabricated claim to advance the mission. In the end, Inger received only verbal encouragement and support but no financial assistance. Disheartened, he returned to Egypt in September.

By the summer of 1896, Inger had begun presenting himself as an envoy of the Mahdist caliph and adopted the name Suleyman. Upon his return to Egypt, he once again attempted to gain support for his project, contacting both his acquaintances and influential Egyptians. While his ideas were met with general approval, he was unable to gather any financial backing. At the same time, Inger was negotiating with M. Boutiron, the acting French Minister in Egypt, in hopes of securing both financial support and official credentials, as he had not received either while in Paris. Boutiron refused to provide any funding, even though Inger insisted: "I asked for no money for myself. My aim was holy: It was peace" (Sanderson 1954: 34–36).

Inger was confident that arriving in Omdurman with only three or four companions and delivering the message that Europe sought peace would be enough to convince the caliph. He only sought a formal letter of endorsement from the French to strengthen his case, but Boutiron refused to provide one, fearing it might fall into the wrong hands.

Nevertheless, Inger's efforts seemed to have attracted the attention of other officials in Paris, prompting Boutiron to assure Inger that he would consult with Paris.

During his questioning by the Court of Inquiry, when asked if Boutiron had ever received instructions from Paris, Inger responded, "Yes, he told me he had and wrote it to M. Barrière, the Editor of the *Journal Officiel* in Cairo. He said he had the authority to allow me to proceed to Djibouti, near Obock, into the Soudan" (Sanderson 1954: 36–37). On October 6, 1896, Inger boarded a ship at Suez, on which he met Bimbashi Fadli, a senior medical officer from Suakin. In his statement to the Court of Inquiry, Fadli revealed that Inger traveled incognito, alternating between "dressing as an Algerian" by day and posing as a European by night. Inger also held credentials to act as a correspondent for various French journals, though he later admitted that these were merely a form of disguise.

Upon arriving in Jeddah, Inger reached out to the French consul, who promptly visited him during his time in quarantine and brought him provisions. This visit was confirmed by Fadli's testimony, which stated that the French consul inquired about his whereabouts aboard the ship before making his way to the location where he had been taken. After his release from quarantine, Inger visited the French Consulate but was met with a cold reception and was told not to bother coming again. Stranded in Jeddah with no place to stay, Inger believed the change in the consul's attitude was a result of a letter from Boutiron, likely informing the consul that the Egyptian authorities were monitoring Inger, advising him to distance himself from the situation.

Inger claimed that his next step was to try and secure a Turkish passport with the assistance of the Austro-Hungarian consul in Jeddah. This was done in line with an Ottoman law that mandated that foreign travelers intending to enter the interior of the Ottoman Empire must apply for a passport through their respective diplomatic representatives, as the region was still considered *de jure* part of the Ottoman Empire at the time. Inger was unable to obtain the required passport and instead received a consular visa for Suakin (Sanderson 1954: 38–40).

Abandoning his original plan of reaching Omdurman via Djibouti and Ethiopia, Inger decided to take the route through the British-controlled port of Sudan. He left Jeddah and traveled to Suakin, where he was ultimately arrested by the British (Eshete 1974: 2).

Spared by Incompetence

A high-ranking British official described Inger as a misguided person "[...] possessed of a certain amount of military knowledge but devoid of all common sense." Another officer, expressing a less sympathetic view, characterized him as "a poor dreamer of unre-

alizable dreams, who is quite beneath our vengeance [...] the most dignified course would be to hand him over to his Consulate” (Sanderson 1954: 43).

After reviewing such reports, the British leadership concluded that it was not worth risking diplomatic friction with another great power over the punishment of an “impecunious and probably half-witted adventurer.” It was decided that Inger would be sent to a European port, from which he would be free to travel to wherever he wished. Following consultations with Baron Heidler, the Austro-Hungarian minister in Cairo, arrangements were made for Inger to leave Suez aboard an Austrian steamship. He boarded the ship on December 12, 1896, and arrived in Trieste three days later. However, this was not the conclusion of Inger’s journey, nor the final attempt he would make to enter Sudan (Sanderson 1954: 42–44).

Another Attempt at Reaching Sudan

Inger reappeared in Egypt on March 21, 1897, announcing to the *Courrier d’Égypte* his renewed determination to enter Sudan. British Intelligence swiftly took notice, assigning the same officials who had previously interrogated him to once again monitor his movements closely. This time Inger deliberately avoided Suakin and chose a different path, traveling through Djibouti and Ethiopia, likely counting on his French contacts for assistance. At the time, the governor of the French Somali Coast was M. Lagarde, whom Inger claimed to have met in Paris the previous summer. Instead of securing official backing, Inger once again acted impulsively. Described by Sanderson as a man who had little patience for bureaucracy, he chose to set off alone, repeating the same reckless patterns that had led to his earlier failures.

Fate once again intervened in Soliman Inger’s journey when, on June 6, 1897, he unexpectedly encountered a British mission returning from Ethiopia. Despite previously assuring the British that he would abandon his quest to reach Sudan, Inger was once again attempting the journey. He tried to evade the British group, but this only heightened their suspicion, leading to Inger’s identification and detention and another round of interrogation. Dressed in oriental attire, he was accompanied by two men, believed to be a Frenchman and a Greek.

By the end of 1897, Inger was in Budapest, where he wore down the Turkish consul-general with his plan to establish the Mahdist caliph as the sultan of Nubia under Ottoman suzerainty. The Turkish official, who described Inger as a combination of a madman and an adventurer, wanted nothing to do with him. In 1897, an article in *Pester Lloyd* denounced Inger, describing him as a lunatic who had been banished from Egypt (Sanderson 1954: 44–45; Eshete 1974: 1–2).

Later Endeavors

Never one to stay idle for long, the ever-ambitious Inger abandoned his earlier peace-making plans and turned his focus to commercial ventures. He was often seen around Budapest, wearing European clothing paired with a fez, “driving ostentatiously about town.” He made bold claims, stating that the Somali sheikhs had recently chosen him as the king of a still uncolonized region of Somaliland—likely referring to Ogaden—and that the caliph was one of his closest friends and officers.

On several occasions, Inger expressed a deep concern for the economic welfare of his Somali “subjects” and attempted to capture the attention of the Hungarian Minister of Commerce and other influential figures, promoting his idea of establishing trade relations between Hungary and his “kingdom” (Sanderson 1954: 44).

Inger had approached several banks for loans, promising repayment in gold, ivory, ostrich feathers, and other exotic goods, claiming that these resources were already prepared for transport and were being brought to Djibouti by his Somali officers.

In July 1898, Inger once again arrived in Djibouti, this time posing as the chief interpreter of a so-called scientific expedition aboard an Austrian steamship. Officially, the expedition aimed to explore Mahdist Sudan, but Inger’s true objective was far more ambitious. The 32-member party included 8–10 Austro-Hungarian ex-military men and 10 Muslim officers from the Constantinople military school. Inger’s hidden goal was not exploration but the liberation of the Somali population from French, British, Italian and Ethiopian rule. How exactly he wished to achieve this goal is unclear, but he envisioned the founding of an independent Somali state under his leadership, with a modern army trained by the military personnel who accompanied him (Eshete 1974: 2–3). He had a stockpile of weapons aboard the ship, and his followers addressed him as “Your Highness” (Brockett 1970: 48).

Once the true nature of Inger’s expedition was uncovered, the governor of Djibouti issued an expulsion order. At the same time, he was barred from entering Ethiopia as well. The mission fell into disarray, and letters from members of his party spoke of the severe hardship they faced, including hunger and destitution. Their situation worsened when a series of lawsuits led to their baggage and possessions being auctioned off, leaving them without the means to return to Europe (Eshete 1974: 3).

A report by Elek Kodolitsch, an engineer from Inger’s expedition, was published in *Pesti Hírlap*. In it, Kodolitsch confirmed that Inger’s objective was to establish a new state that would become the protectorate of Austria-Hungary, effectively turning the region into an Austro-Hungarian colony. Kodolitsch revealed that Inger had granted each mem-

ber of the expedition a military rank, and before their departure, had commissioned a Viennese tailor to design military uniforms for them. The hilts of their swords and the buttons of their shirts were embroidered with a crescent moon and the letter “S,” symbolizing Soliman. Additionally, they carried a black flag adorned with quotes from the Quran.¹⁸

To lend some credence to Inger’s claims that he had indeed been in negotiations with the Hungarian government, it is noteworthy that Lajos Hell was also part of his expedition, presenting himself as an official representative of the state. Hell later recounted that his travel expenses were covered by the Hungarian Ministry of Commerce. However, over the course of their journey, he came to the realization that Inger was, in fact, an impostor and a liar who held no real authority or influence in Somalia. While they were sailing across the Adriatic Sea, Hell confronted Inger and informed him of his intention to withdraw from the expedition upon their arrival. According to Hell’s account, Inger desperately begged him to stay.¹⁹

Inger resurfaced in Djibouti once again in 1900, only to be arrested on charges of fraud arising from his previous visit. Convicted and sentenced to two years in prison, he was eventually expelled from the territory in October 1900, before serving his full sentence. Despite his repeated failures, Inger launched one final scheme in March 1902, this time attempting to gain British support. He presented himself as the key to ending the Somali resistance against British rule, which had begun in 1899 under the leadership of the infamous “Mad Mullah.” Inger boldly asserted that the rebel leader was his most loyal and devoted follower, claiming that, if allowed entry into British Somaliland, he could convince him to abandon his fight. Dismissing Inger as an “utterly unscrupulous” liar, British officials refused to take him seriously. Nevertheless, a few desperate individuals entertained the idea of using his services, if only out of sheer frustration with the ongoing conflict (Eshete 1974: 2–4).

A Potential Alliance with the British

On May 7, 1903, *The Times* reported that Inger had issued a lengthy appeal to the British government, boldly offering to end the conflict in Somaliland within 10 days. While many dismissed him as a fraud, some within the Foreign Office—most notably Lord Lansdowne and Lord Cranborne—were desperate enough to entertain the possi-

18 *Pesti Hírlap*, 1898.09.29, Inger Szolimán expedíciója, 7.

19 *Pécsi Napló*, 1898.08.20, Inger Szolimán – szédelgő, 11.

bility of using him. They sought information about Inger, debating whether he had ever been to Somaliland or held any real influence there.

One individual who wholeheartedly believed in Inger's grandiose claims was a British adventurer and businessman, Thomson Lyon. Convinced of Inger's legitimacy, Lyon informed Cranborne that Inger was not only willing to bring Somaliland under British suzerainty but was also prepared to become a loyal vassal of the Crown. Given the dire situation in Somaliland, Cranborne did not wish to dismiss any possibility for peace. He even considered the idea of Inger ruling the hinterlands, despite previously describing him as a "scoundrel." Lansdowne, too, saw a slim possibility that Inger could broker peace, and as a result, a British military attaché in Vienna was instructed to interview him—though as informally and discreetly as possible—to assess whether he had any real influence in the region.

Between May 16 and May 21, Inger met with the British military attaché in Vienna three times, making further claims that the Somali rebels would immediately cease their hostilities at his orders. As for the terms of peace, he stated that his "people" desired nothing more than British protection and the freedom to trade, while he himself wished to be recognized as the ruler of the inland Somali territories. For many British officials, these demands were so absurd that they dismissed the entire proposal outright. However, Cranborne, along with several influential figures—including the Director-General of Military Intelligence—managed to persuade the cabinet that Inger might still be of use. A telegram was even sent inquiring whether he was ready to depart for Somaliland immediately. Inger not only affirmed his readiness but also declared that he would finance his own journey.

Somehow, he had convinced just enough people that he wielded real influence in Somaliland. With the British Cabinet reluctant to prolong hostilities and lacking any viable alternatives, they decided to proceed with the plan. Thomson Lyon was to be appointed as the intermediary, relaying the British government's terms to Inger, who in turn was expected to pass them along to the rebels. Lord Lansdowne, acknowledging the potential for international ridicule, remained pragmatic, stating that so long as Prime Minister Balfour raised no objections, he saw no reason not to move forward with the plan.

Although the prime minister expressed no opinion on the matter, opposition to the idea of using Inger steadily grew. Influential politicians voiced strong objections, and those who had encountered him in the past—particularly during his ventures in Egypt—urged the Foreign Office to sever all ties with him. Some argued that it was absurd for a man of his background, who had converted to Islam so recently, to claim any authority over

the Mad Mullah. Faced with mounting resistance and increasing doubts about his credibility, the British government was ultimately persuaded to abandon the plan.

Despite this setback, Inger remained determined and informed officials that he would proceed with his intervention in Somaliland regardless, claiming his goal was to restore order and peace. Concerned about his activities, British authorities requested the Budapest police to monitor his movements.

True to his word, reports surfaced in late December that Inger had arrived on the Red Sea coast of Yemen. By this time, however, British military efforts in Somaliland had gained ground, and an order was issued to prevent Inger from entering the territory. The War Office even sought the cooperation of the Ottoman authorities to have him arrested, but by then, Inger had already been expelled.

From Yemen, Inger traveled to Jeddah, where the British consul promptly arranged for him to be put on a ship bound for Suez. Meanwhile, international efforts to block his interference intensified: Ethiopian authorities agreed to bar his entry, the French pledged to keep him out of Djibouti, and Austro-Hungarian officials in Cairo ensured that he would not be allowed to travel southward from Egypt.

Faced with an insurmountable wall of international opposition, Inger had no choice but to return to Budapest. There, he set about recording the story of his life from his own perspective, an account detailed in a previous chapter. (Brockett 1970: 51–54).

Personal Life

Inger returned to Hungary and settled down permanently to live the life of a landed gentleman in Transylvania. The source of his wealth remained a mystery, as it was unclear how he managed to purchase a castle in the town of Kimpány (present-day Câmpeni de Pomez, Romania), especially given that his adventurous activities appeared to be financially unprofitable. One possible explanation is that his family's shoemaking business operated on an industrial scale, and Inger may have inherited a substantial fortune (Sanderson 1954: 47).

On June 11, 1904, it was reported:

Soliman Inger, known for his Somali expedition, has now completely given up on conquering distant worlds. His much-troubled ship has finally docked in the peaceful harbor of marriage. At noon today, before civil registrar Antal Pettykó, he entered into a lifelong alliance with Henny Tina, a stunning Dutch woman born in Batavia. The marriage was wit-

nessed by members of parliament Gábor Ugrón and Márton Lovász. Registrar Pettykó delivered a beautiful speech to the newlyweds.²⁰

However, the path to marriage was not without its complications. The civil registrar imposed several obstacles due to Inger's faith, as Islam was not officially recognized in Hungary at the time. To navigate these challenges, Inger formally converted to Roman Catholicism and declared himself a landowner by profession. Once the marriage was legally finalized, he swiftly sought to amend the official records. As reported in the press

Inger visited the Budapest mayor's office today, submitting an appeal for corrections to the marriage register. He presented official documents proving his status as an emir of the Sultan, arguing that listing his religion as Roman Catholic would severely disadvantage him.²¹

Inger and his wife spent only a few short months together in Transylvania before parting ways. She, along with their son Norbert—also referred to in some accounts as Nureddin²²—then settled in Brussels, Belgium.²³ In 1907, it was reported that Inger had become an advocate for the establishment of Hungarian overseas colonies. He proposed that Hungary should, through diplomacy or warfare, secure a colony in the Far East or South Africa, thus preventing large-scale emigration to America. Inger believed that these colonies would help keep the emigrated Hungarian communities united and generate economic profit for Hungary.²⁴

The outbreak of World War I prompted Inger to offer his services to his country. On September 2, 1914, he sent a letter to the War Ministry, signing it as “Emir Suleyman ibn Inger Abdullah.” In this letter, he emphasized his past as a Mahdist emir—a narrative he appeared to genuinely believe by this point, as noted by Sanderson—and highlighted his military experience and Muslim connections. He proposed leading military operations in the Balkans or, alternatively, the Caucasus, where he claimed to have close ties with influential figures, such as Turkish Commander-in-Chief Izzet Pasha. Inger, who by this time lived as a recluse in his castle, was described to the ministry as “a religious enthusiast with exalted ideals,” and his offer was ignored (Sanderson 1954: 49–50).

20 *Budapesti Napló*, 1904.06.11., Inger Szolimán esküvője, 5.

21 *Szeged és Vidéke*, 1904.08.10., Inger Szolimán házassága, 8.

22 *Erdélyi Hírlap*, 1935.09.08., Inger Szolimán a házvezetőnőjére hagyta vagyonának nagyobb részét, 4.

23 *Ellenőr*, 1937.11.30., Eladták Inger Szuleyman kastélyát, 18.

24 *Felsőmagyarország*, 1907.06.20., Gyarmatot a magyarnak, 2.

The Prophet of a New Faith

In the summer of 1917, *Pesti Napló* reported that Inger had been fined for promoting a “new religion.” The article described how Inger, who had been living in quiet seclusion for years by now, became the leader of a new faith and began distributing pamphlets to spread its teachings across the country. According to the report, he held weekly open-air services on his private estate, which attracted many locals from the surrounding area. For a while, he was able to continue with these gatherings undisturbed, until the gendarmerie reported his “cult” to the chief magistrate. When questioned, members of his flock testified that they were simply praying for world peace. Inger claimed that God had personally appeared to him and commanded him to spread his word. He never sought donations from his followers, and he freely shared the teachings of his faith, which was rooted in the Quran. In the end, Inger was fined 20 korona for holding unauthorized gatherings. A notary had observed one of his services and reported that there were no formal ceremonies. Inger simply preached peace and love in the name of God.²⁵

Inger also documented the principles of his new faith in a book titled *Die Freundschaft* [Eng. The Friend Message], in which he offered a critique of materialism. He emphasized the destructive nature of envy and selfishness, while also denouncing the consumption of alcohol and tobacco. However, as one article wryly noted, Inger himself had not been able to abstain from cigars. The fundamental tenet of his religious doctrine centered on the purification of the individual. Even the Greek Orthodox bishop of Arad, János Papp, issued a formal warning to the public, urging caution regarding this emerging religious movement.²⁶

According to the November 2, 1920, edition of *Nemzeti Újság*, Inger persisted with his prophetic activities and had begun promoting his teachings in Budapest.²⁷ After his lectures in the Hungarian capital, he planned to take his efforts to Berlin, Paris, London, and New York.²⁸ Inger stated in 1921 that he was no longer a Muslim, as he believed that this religion “stood in the way of progress,” although he continued to use his adopted name for the rest of his life.²⁹

25 *Kecskemét Lapok*, 1917.05.17., Uj vallás Kimpányon, 2.; *Pesti Napló*, 1917.08.11., Inger Szolimánt elítélték új vallásterjesztésért, 10.; *Kecskeméti Lapok*, 1917.08.15., Inger Szolimánt megbüntették új vallás terjesztéseért, 3.

26 *Világ*, 1918.05.30., A kimpányi hegyen megjelent az Úr, 5.

27 *Nemzeti Újság*, 1920.11.21., Inger Szolimán új hitet hirdet, 4.

28 *Magyarország*, 1920.11.23., Inger Szolimán Abdullah: Isten küldöttje, 3.

29 *Tükör*, 1921.05.26., Inger Szolimán az igazhitűség hirdetője, 25.

In August 1923, *Temesvári Hírlap* published a new statement from Inger, in which he described his religion as one that advocated for the renewal of humanity and emphasized the need to reconcile the conflicts between science, religion, and moral life. He stressed the importance of eliminating racial and religious divisions among people, promoting instead a profound and all-encompassing sense of human love and solidarity:

The principle of divine authority has collapsed and must be restored. That is my mission. The divine commandment says, “Thou shalt not steal,” yet people still take what is not theirs. It says, “Thou shalt not kill,” yet there are still murderers. We must eliminate the misconceptions that have taken root in religious life. The true believers, reject the concept of creation as it has been presented to us in the Bible.

Inger described the Carpathian Basin as God’s chosen land, where, in his belief, distinctions such as majority and minority ethnicities should not exist, as only human beings inhabit the land. He emphasized that the people of this land are destined to fulfill the Gospel’s message by dismantling the divisions imposed by science, religion, and racial distinctions. According to him, in this “chosen land,” there are no Jews, Germans, Slovaks, Romanians, or Hungarians, only individuals who mistakenly identify with these outdated ethnic labels. He believed that once these people attain a higher level of ethical development through divine grace, they will recognize each other as brothers and live together in peace and harmony.³⁰

Later Life

On September 13, 1922, an article in the *Brassói Lapok* reported the discovery of gold, silver, and high-quality coal deposits on Inger’s estate in Kimpány. Inger held the mining rights to the discovered deposits and had established a joint-stock company to oversee the operation.³¹ By December of the same year, the mine had already begun operations. The revealed wealth of the four-kilometer-long deposit exceeded all expectations. Miners, along with their families, relocated to the area and formed a mining colony, presumably yielding a considerable profit for Inger.³²

Throughout the 1920s, Soliman Inger continued to make appearances in various newspaper outlets. In 1926, several newspapers, including *Magyarság* and *Aradi Közlöny*, reported on a newly published Hungarian novel by Count Lajos Königsseg titled *Soliman ben Darja*. Set in the wilds of Africa, the novel chronicles the adventures of a

30 *Temesvári Hírlap*, 1923.08.17., Inger Szolimán Temesvárott, 2.

31 *Brassói Lapok*, 1922.09.13., Hirek, 4.

32 *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*, 1922.12.20., Megnyitották a kimpányi bányákat, 7.

Hungarian adventurer. The protagonist was widely believed to be inspired by Inger, whose life closely resembled that of the novel's main character.³³

Besides being a prophet of a new religion, having his life story serve as a compelling reading material for many years, and inspiring the protagonist of a novel, Inger also engaged in political discourse, particularly regarding the Jewish question. In 1928, he published a 16-page pamphlet titled *The Jewish Question*. In this work, he argued that the Jewish people do not exist as a distinct ethnicity and that European Jews are merely members of a religious community, separated by an unbridgeable gap from the "Palestinian racial Semites." According to him, what distinguishes European Jews from other peoples is solely their way of life. He believed that it would be preferable for Jews to abandon their isolation and assimilate into a community aligned with progress, the teachings of enlightenment, and the religious sentiments of a modern, free-thinking individual. However, he also posed a fundamental question: Can anyone be expected to abandon their faith and undergo such a transformation? In response to Inger, an article examining his writings concluded by acknowledging that the idea of mass Jewish conversion had been proposed numerous times before, only to fail each time. The author stated that Inger's pamphlet still warranted attention, particularly for those who envisioned a brighter future for humanity.³⁴

Inger wrote critically about Zionism, questioning its feasibility and consequences. He believed that while the movement arose from a genuine desire, attempting to revive an ancient Jewish nation was an unrealistic goal. Inger argued that a small group of Jewish immigrants could not recreate a lost nation in a land where Jews and Arabs coexisted peacefully. He also criticized Zionism's reliance on British support. He viewed the movement as a costly illusion that would bring hardship and persecution to the settlers. Additionally, he doubted that a national state could be built solely on religious unity. Inger ultimately believed that Zionism served British colonial interests, not Jewish prosperity, and warned of the suffering it would bring.³⁵

Inger continued his publicist work with two new books, *Örömhír* [Eng. Good News] and *Revízió* [Eng. Revision]. In 1930, he sent a copy of *Revízió* to the editors of *Új Kelet* [Eng. New East], who provided a brief introduction, highlighting its central theme: universal moral renewal. In these works, Inger argued that Christian culture had declined and that true renewal would come from the East. He claimed that "Western Aryans"

33 *Magyarság*, 1926.07.18., A Magyar Ossendowski Afrikában, 8.; *Aradi Közlöny*, 1926.08.05., Regényt írt egy volt aradi földbirtokos, 7.

34 *Aradi Közlöny*, 1928.02.23., Az egykori szomáli alkirály meg akarja oldani a zsidókérdést, 10.

35 *Ellenzék*, 1929.09.26., Inger Szolimán levelet ír Palesztináról, 4.

had exhausted themselves and were no longer fit for this new historical mission. The editors found little merit in Inger's works, noting that his life was more intriguing than his writings. Nevertheless, Inger had no desire to write his life story, considering it less important than sharing and promoting his views.³⁶

Final Years

In one of his final interviews before his death, Inger once again spun a web of extraordinary and entirely fabricated tales from his time in Africa. He claimed that during the Mahdist War, after engaging in battle with British forces, he was forced to retreat due to the enemy's overwhelming strength. According to him, he fled to Ethiopia, where he allegedly met Emperor Menelik II in the capital, Addis Ababa. He described a surreal encounter in which Menelik greeted him "half-naked" in his tent and expressed his frustration over court intrigues. Inger also claimed to have encountered a young Ras Tafari, who was only four years old at the time. He recalled playing with the child and expressed his astonishment that the boy later grew up to become Emperor Haile Selassie I. He also alleged that, during this time, with Italian forces amassing at the border, the Mahdist caliph had instructed him to remain in Ethiopia as a military advisor, offering guidance to Menelik, which he claimed was pivotal in the defeat of the invaders.³⁷

Decades later, upon hearing news of Mussolini's forces attacking Ethiopia, Inger voiced his frustration, stating:

Abyssinia belongs neither to Haile Selassie nor to Mussolini. Forty years ago, the people of Ethiopia swore loyalty to me in Ogaden under the Prophet's flag. Only I can end this war, by going there with flag in hand and making that province a Hungarian colony.³⁸

Inger expressed his desire to travel to Africa one last time, with various newspapers reporting that, despite his worsening health, he was eager to fight the Italians.³⁹

Soliman Inger passed away on August 25, 1935, due to a brain hemorrhage.⁴⁰

36 *Új Kelet*, 1930.11.07., Emir Szuleyman ibn Inger Abdullah könyvet irt, 5.

37 *Az Est*, 1935.08.29., Hogyan dajkálta Inger Szolimán emir Hailé Szelassziét, a négust, 5.

38 *Utunk*, 1957.06.27., Egy vekkeróra igaz története, 3.

39 *Új Kelet*, 1935.08.09., Abessziniába készül a hires Inger Szolimán, 5.; *Az Est*, 1935.08.10., Az agg Inger Szolimán Abessziniába, 9.; *Felsőmagyarországi Reggeli Hirlap*, 1935.08.10., Hirek, 6.

40 *Az Est*, 1935.08.28., Meghalt a legendás Inger Szolimán Emir, 3.

Picture 5. Inger in his later years⁴¹

At the time of his death, he had accumulated a considerable fortune, mainly consisting of his estate and castle in Kimpány. Most of this wealth was bequeathed to Piroska Unghy, his housekeeper, who had lived with him for 28 years and who cared for him during his final years.⁴² A few years after his death, his son, sister, and former housekeeper reached an agreement regarding his wealth, and together they sold Inger's castle, which was eventually demolished.⁴³ Thus ended the adventurous tale of Soliman Inger.

Conclusions

As Balázs Szélinger noted in his dissertation, Soliman Inger was far more than a mere adventurer; he was, in all likelihood, a man grappling with profound psychological turmoil. Sanderson, for his part, described him as a self-dramatizing romantic.

Soliman Inger's story is as puzzling as it is fascinating. He stands out as a deeply complex—and in many ways, tragic—figure so caught up in his own grandiose claims that by the end of his life he may have lost track of who he truly was. While his statements were often full of contradictions, dismissing him as just an opportunistic adventurer or con-man would be an oversimplification of his character. He seemed to possess a genuine

41 *Bihari Napló*, 2013.08.27., Inger Károly – Szulejmán Ibn Inger Abdullah, 7.

42 *Erdélyi Hírlap*, 1935.09.08., Inger Szolimán házvezetőnőjére hagyta vagyonának nagyobb részét, 4.

43 *Ellenzék*, 1938.04.29., Lebontották Inger Szolimán kastélyát, 6.

sense of conviction and purpose. His tireless efforts and emotionally charged appeals suggest a sincere, albeit hard to understand attachment—one might even call it an obsession—with Africa and the Somali people.

Inger's enigmatic persona, coupled with his supposed ties to influential individuals, earned him both admiration and skepticism. He appears to have been driven by a heartfelt desire to make a difference, to leave his mark on history, and to be remembered as someone of significance. In pursuit of these ambitions, he seems to have deluded himself and fallen prey to self-deception. Revered by some and dismissed by others, his life straddled the fine line between the extraordinary and the absurd.

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