

[F] Goldziher Conference, Göttingen, November 12-13, 2021

Opening Remarks by Sabine Schmidtke

Scholarship in the humanities, past and present, appears to be [F] a solitary undertaking as the single-authored publication, be it a monograph or journal article, continues to be the predominant endproduct. And indeed, creativity and originality in research often flourishes best when the scholar has the privilege of complete seclusion, at least temporarily, to focus on the material and reflect on its interpretation. But this is only half the truth. Scholars in the humanities, and historians in particular, at all times benefit from the support of a network of peers, be it by sharing material, by reading, discussing, commenting, and criticizing each others' work, etc. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, before photography and microform technology became available and affordable, entertaining a close network of peers was indispensable to gain access to and circulate knowledge. Scholars were typically limited to their local library, with access perhaps to some other libraries in their immediate vicinity. Travelling from one city or even country to another to visit different libraries and transcribe the manuscripts one needed for one's own research, was time-consuming and costly. Especially in a field like Islamic studies, where manuscripts continue to be the bread and butter of virtual all historical research, the limited access to only a few libraries poses a serious impediment to scholarship. Providing colleagues with excerpts of manuscripts one had access to, checking references, or collating each other's work with the manuscripts within one's reach, keeping each other informed about new publications and discoveries, discussing new findings, reading each others drafts, purchasing books on behalf of others whenever opportunities arose, and, of course, exchanging offprints and publications, were indispensable for scholars during those days. Most of this happened through the medium of letters.

In „Oriental studies“ during the late modern period, the scholars involved—European scholars for the most part but also some who were based outside of Europe—constituted a veritable Republic of Letters. The material that has come down to us is voluminous. The relevant holding institutions increasingly understand the value of the treasures they possess, and the preparation of detailed inventories and digitization of entire corpora of correspondence is on the rise. Examples include [F]

the archive of Paul Ernst Kahle in Turin, which comprises the correspondence of this renowned Hebraist, Semitist and scholar of Islamic studies with more than 2,500 correspondents; [F] the recently discovered Eugenio Griffini archive in Milan, which sheds entirely new light on the history of Yemeni manuscript collections in Italy and Germany; or the correspondence by and / or addressed to [F] Ignaz Goldziher, which is the topic of our conference. The picture that evolves from a mere quantitative analysis of the preserved materials is that of a closely-knit comprehensive network of scholars, beyond denominational, national, and disciplinary boundaries.

I am grateful to my colleagues Sebastian Günther, Kinga Devenyi, and Hans-Jürgen Becker for the wonderful collaboration over the past year to prepare this conference, and to all those among you who contribute to the meeting with your scholarship on selected aspects of the Goldziher correspondence. Thanks are also due to those among you who agreed to chair individual sessions or to act as respondents. A special word of thanks to Uta Nitschke and Maria Mercedes Tuya, whose support was and is indispensable in order to make this event happen. We had hoped for an in-person meeting in Göttingen but this turned out to be impossible. This is sad on the one hand, but on the other it allowed us to open up the meeting to scholars worldwide, and I extend a warm welcome to all the attendees from all over the world.

Before I pass the word to my colleagues, a few housekeeping rules. We kindly ask all our presenters to please stick to the 20 minutes allocated to each paper. A strict time management is essential if we want to make our online conference successful. [F] We also asked our panel chairs to limit the introductions of the panelists to a minimum and to keep a close eye on the schedule. Detailed bios of all speakers are available through our website. Attendees are kindly requested to type their comments and questions into the chat, addressing everyone; panelists can pose their questions and comments verbally when the chair gives them the floor. The room will stay open during the entire day, including the breaks. Please also note that we are *not* recording the meeting but if any of the speakers wish to have their individual presentations recorded, please let us know and we can do this.

[F] And now I give the floor to Frank Rexroth, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy.