

The Beginnings of Shī‘ī Studies in Germany

Rudolf Strothmann and His Correspondence with Carl Heinrich Becker, Ignaz Goldziher, and Eugenio Griffini, 1910 through 1923

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Dedicated to Wilferd Madelung, Rudolf Strothmann's last student

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“The progress of Islamic research assigns to us to-day a new task, that of elucidating the more intimate aspects of our subject: that is, we have to turn from a description and investigation of Islam in general towards that of its different formations, the so-called sects. It is only in this way that we shall be able to understand all the impulses which were active during the history of Islam; and thus only we can comprehend the—to-day predominant—Sunni Islam in its competition with rival schools of thought. The only original sources for the study of sects are their own writings; their publication is, therefore, of primary importance.”

(Strothmann, “On the History of Islamic Heresiography”, p. 5.)

“Archives tend to put people to sleep. They seem about as exciting as footnotes. Yet the frontiers of knowledge can hardly be advanced without them. What we know of the past is always but ‘a plank from a shipwreck,’ to quote the memorable image of Francis Bacon. To approach Leopold Ranke’s lofty goal of getting a good look at the past, we need to come up with more planks, and it is no accident that his prodigious output was firmly anchored in pioneering archival research. For all his attention to diplomacy and foreign affairs, he wrote history literally from the bottom up, on the basis of untold documents long buried in oblivion.”

(Schorsch, *Better a Scholar than a Prophet*, p. 29.)

Part I: Biographical Sketch

The Early Years

Heinrich Friedrich *Rudolf* Strothmann was born on 4 September 1877 in Lengerich, in North Rhine-Westphalia, into a Lutheran family. His parents, the tenant farmer¹ Johann Heinrich Strothmann (b. ca. 1831 and still alive in 1917²) and Marie Elisabeth Strothmann (*née* Stapenhorst, b. 1843, d. 23 January 1884),³ got married in 1868,⁴ and the couple had eight children: besides Rudolf, the sixth child of Johann and Marie, these were Heinrich Rudolph (b. 22 March 1869),⁵ Frederike *Marie* Caroline (b. 12 December 1870, d. 1935),⁶ Heinrich Friedrich *Wilhelm* (b. 7 April 1873, d. 1942),⁷ Heinrich Wilhelm

¹ For this type of tenant farming, see Johne, “Von der Kolonenwirtschaft zum Kolonat”. The Strothmanns are attested as tenant farmers in Lengerich Wechte since the fifteenth century; see Leesch, *Schatzungs- und sonstige Höferegister*, passim.

² See letter Theodora “Thea” Strothmann to Rudolf Strothmann (4 June 1917), Strothmann family archive, SFA-D-StrothmannThea.

³ See the birth certificate issued by Standesamt Stadt Lengerich (no. 149/1877), which reads: “Lengerich am 7. September 1877. Vor dem unterzeichneten Standesbeamten erschien heute, der Persönlichkeit nach bekannt, der Colon Johann Heinrich Strothmann wohnhaft zu Lengerich Bauerschaft Wechte, evangelischer Religion, und zeigte an, daß von der Marie Elisabeth Strothmann gebor. Stapenhorst, seine Ehefrau evangelischer Religion, wohnhaft bei ihm zu Lengerich Bauerschaft Wechte in seiner Wohnung, am vierten September des Jahres tausend acht hundert siebenzig und sieben [...] ein Kind männlichen Geschlechts geboren worden sei, welches den Vornamen Heinrich Friedrich Rudolf erhalten habe. Vorgelesen, genehmigt und unterschrieben Strothmann. Der Standesbeamte.” Johann Heinrich was apparently the son of Eberhard Wilhelm Strothmann and Elisabeth Hergemöller. Nothing further is known about Rudolf Strothmann’s parents, as the register (“standesamtliche Aufzeichnungen”) was kept only since 1874.

⁴ See Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evang. Kirche, Westfalen: Kirchenkreis Tecklenburg: Lengerich (accessed via archion.de on 30 December 2020) [henceforth Landeskirchliches Archiv Lengerich]: Trauungen 1863–1874.

⁵ See Landeskirchliches Archiv Lengerich: Taufen 1854–1869: 1869 no. 65.

⁶ See Landeskirchliches Archiv Lengerich: Taufen 1870–1890: 1871 no. 3. Marie married Julius Bauer (b. 1871, d. 1950) on 15 November 1897; see the marriage certificate issued by Standesamt Stadt Lengerich (no. 65/1897).

⁷ See Landeskirchliches Archiv Lengerich: Taufen 1870–1890: 1873 no. 65. Wilhelm Strothmann married Theodora “Thea” Kölling (b. 12 January 1883, d. 1931) in April 1906; see Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evang. Kirche, Westfalen: Kirchenkreis Dortmund West: Marten (accessed via archion.de on 30 December 2020): Taufen, Trauungen, Beerdigungen, Konfirmationen 1906–1908: Getraute im Jahre 1906, p. 4. At the time of their marriage, Wilhelm already served as a pastor in Marten. The couple had a son, Werner Strothmann (b. 1907, d. 1996), who, like his father and his uncle Rudolf, was trained as a Lutheran theologian and served as a pastor between 1934 and 1962. From 1958 onwards, Werner Strothmann embarked on an academic career focussing on Syriac church history. See Kaufhold, “Strothmann, Werner”; Rabo, “Die Publikationen von Professor Dr. Werner Strothmann (1907–1996)”.