

Scholarly Correspondences Among Orientalists during the Early and Late Modern Period as a Historical Source

A Series of Lectures

Convenors: Sabine Schmidtke and María Mercedes Tuya
Institute for Advanced Study
School for Historical Studies and Digital Scholarship

version of January 11, 2023

The object of this lecture series is to bring together scholars and librarians engaged with collections of correspondences and/or include related projects that use appropriate digital tools to map and analyze such corpora. It is hosted by Sabine Schmidtke (NES@IAS) and María Mercedes Tuya (Digital Scholarship@IAS).

Sabine Schmidtke

Institute for Advanced Study

Scholarly Correspondence: The Case of Oriental Studies During the Late 19th and Early 20th Century

January 20, 2023

The history of “Oriental studies” especially during in the late modern period is still a largely neglected field. This gap is astonishing, given the vibrant scholarship on the “Science of Judaism” (“Wissenschaft des Judentums”) during the same period, a field that in many ways closely intersects with “Oriental studies”, an umbrella term for Arabic and Islamic studies, Semitic studies, and cognate fields. Acknowledgement that the discipline’s history during the late modern period constitutes an important and legitimate part of cultural history, which can and should be studied in its own right, is a fairly recent phenomenon, and it is remarkable that some of path-breaking studies in recent years were written by cultural historians rather than by scholars trained in the field. The scholars involved in “Oriental studies” during the late modern period—European scholars for the most part but also those who were based outside of Europe (Russia, the US, and of course the Middle East and India)—constituted a veritable Republic of Letters. The material that has come down to us is voluminous. The lecture will discuss the potential of the by far richest source genre for the history of “Oriental studies”, namely epistolary exchanges.

Rukayyah Reichling *and* Kotoz Abdelhafiz Ahmed

University of Amsterdam *and* Leuven Centre for the Study of Islam, Culture and Society

Goldziher between European Orientalism and the Arab Nahda: Digitally Mapping a Far-Reaching Network

January 27, 2023

The Goldziher Nachlass is remarkable in many ways: it is enormous, multilingual, well catalogued, and digitally available. It provides historians with invaluable insights into aspects Goldziher’s noteworthy scholarly biography, and gives a sense of the intimate relations he held with both European Orientalism and the Arab Nahda.

We argue that with the aid of a variety of digital tools and methodologies, the Goldziher Nachlass will prove to be an illuminating corpus in reconstructing the historical Arab-Orientalist network of the long nineteenth century. The multilayered and far-reaching connections of Goldziher’s correspondence clearly illustrate his position on the nexus of a maturing Orientalist enterprise and a blooming Arab intellectual awakening.

To illustrate, we will highlight two significant connections on this network that left a lifelong impact on Goldziher: firstly, Goldziher’s relationship with his Arab mentor Tahir Al-Jaza’iri and, secondly, the scholarly as well as brotherly bond Goldziher maintained with C. Snouck Hurgronje, the most significant actor in Dutch Orientalism at the time.

Finally, we will briefly turn to the possibilities that increasingly available digital research tools offer to future generations of researchers and how these tools open up the way for new research questions and avenues.

Ernst Herb

Freelance Writer

Leo Strauss’s Letters to the Arabist Paul Kraus: Between the Search of the Hidden Truth and Exile in Mizraim

February 10, 2023

Ernst Herb is a freelance writer, writing, among others, for the Swiss online portal *Republik*. Currently, he is working on a monographic essay on the transformation of the Asian art scene in times of the rise of China. Till 2020 Herb worked for 15 years as the Asia correspondent of the Swiss economic publication *Finanz und Wirtschaft*. Prior to this, he worked for a decade as a freelance journalist, writing for the *NZZ*, *Die Welt*, *Swiss Broadcast Corporation*, *Finanz und Wirtschaft* and others on the Middle East, being based in Cairo and Tehran. In 1994 and 1997 Herb also was a part time lecturer of journalism at the American University in Cairo.

Stefan Dumont

Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin

CorrespSearch-Connect and Search Scholarly Editions of Correspondence

February 17, 2023

Kinga Dévényi

Independent Scholar

“So far away, yet so close”: The correspondence of Ignaz Goldziher between 1863 and 1922

March 3, 2023

The paper will present a survey of the scholarly correspondence of over 13,000 letters of the founder of European studies of Islam, Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), which is freely available in digitised form in the repository of the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In addition to winning his daily bread as secretary of the Neolog Jewish community of Pest, teaching at the University and the Jewish Theological Seminary of Pest, and conducting research in his free time, Goldziher had enough time to remain an avid letter writer. He did not only strongly believe in the necessity of answering letters with lightning speed, but also put this principle into practice. His fame brought him into contact with renowned scholars all over the world. He also corresponded with students and ordinary people from remote Hungarian villages. His correspondence highlights his scholarly network. More importantly, however, the letters he received shed light on his personality.

Kinga Dévényi, independent scholar, former curator of the Kaufmann and Goldziher collections in the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and associate professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at Corvinus University of Budapest.

Paul Babinski

University of Copenhagen

A Taste for the Difficult and Abstruse: A Seventeenth-Century Paris Librarian and His Orientalist Network

March 10, 2023

Isolde Lehnert

Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Kairo (DAIK)

The Life of Max Meyerhof through his correspondence

March 17, 2023

Max Meyerhof, born in 1874 as the only son of a German-Jewish family in Hildesheim, spent half his life in Cairo, where he died in 1945, shortly before the end of the war. He practiced as a successful ophthalmologist, who was said to be able to cure even the blind, and participated in the establishment of a polyclinic for the poor. Autodidactically, he trained himself as a medical historian and orientalist, collected old manuscripts and opened up these sources of Arabic and Jewish medicine of the Middle Ages. His various correspondence partners reflect this development to some extent. In both fields, he acted as a mediator for the exchange and a new understanding of the achievements in East and West, which are ultimately based on a common cultural heritage of the past centuries.

Isolde Lehnert, M.A., studied Egyptology, Near Eastern Archaeology and Ethnology at the University of Heidelberg. Since 2003 she has been the librarian at the German Archaeological Institute in Cairo, in whose archives the partial scientific estate of Max Meyerhof is kept. These documents, together with the "Meyerhof Collection" in private ownership, form the basis for the planned biography.

Celeste Gianni

Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Collegeville MN

A library lost in translation: Paul Sbath's correspondence with Eugène Tisserant

March 31, 2023

At the beginning of the 20th century, Syrian Catholic priest Paul Sbath (Aleppo, 1887 – Aleppo, 20 October 1946) obtained and consolidated a collection of 1,325 manuscripts, mainly acquired between Aleppo, Jerusalem, and Cairo. In 1927, Sbath sold part of his collection to the Vatican Library. His long transaction with the Vatican is attested by 85 documents – mostly letters in French – written between 1913 and 1945, that are currently held at the Vatican library. They mostly concern the exchange of offers, refusals, and change of terms between Paul Sbath and the librarian and orientalist Eugène Tisserant (24 March 1884 – 21 February 1972) for the purchase of Sbath's manuscripts. This paper will retrace and discuss Sbath and Tisserant's apparently impossible grasp of each other's vision of a manuscript library that caused a series of misunderstandings and delays to reunite Sbath's complete library at the Vatican.

Dr. Celeste Gianni joined HMML in 2020 as a Cataloger of Arabic Manuscripts. A native of Italy, she earned her BA in Arabic Language and Culture, from the Università degli Studi Carlo Bo, Urbino, Italy, and a MA and PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Prior to joining HMML, Gianni held teaching and research positions in the United Kingdom, working for the University of Oxford and SOAS. Her most recent publication is, Gianni, C. "Paul Sbath's manuscript library: Conceptualizing the library of a Syrian Catholic priest between Europe and the Middle East in the early 20th century", in *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts*, vol. 13/4.

Garrett A. Davidson

College of Charleston

The Correspondence between the orientalist and manuscript dealer Abraham Shalom Yahuda (d. 1951) and the Cairo-based publisher and manuscript dealer Mohammad Amin Khanji (d. 1938)

April 7, 2023

Ahmed Khan

American University in Cairo

Orientalists and 'Ulama' in Egypt in the 20th Century

The lecture examines correspondence between Orientalists and 'Ulama' in Egypt in the 20th century and initiatives in which they worked together in the field of Islamic Studies and editing.

April 14, 2023

Jan Just Witkam

Professor emeritus, Leiden University

Lives and letters: The correspondence of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936)

April 21, 2023