

S.T. Lee Conference and Lecture

10-12 December 2025

Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), Princeton NJ

One Century of “Oriental” and Semitic Studies, 1830 through 1933 (and beyond): Scholarly Networks, Trajectories and Concepts¹

Convened by

Dorothea Weltecke (Humboldt University, Berlin)

Sabine Schmidtke (Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton NJ)

S.T. Lee Lecture, 11 December, 5 pm, Keynote Speaker, Title and Abstract:

Dorothea Weltecke (Humboldt University, Berlin)

Title: “The characteristic of the Syrians is a certain mediocracy”: Western pioneers of Syriac studies and their contempt

Abstract: European Aramaicists regarded the second half of the nineteenth century up to about the First World War as a particularly fruitful period, indeed the beginning of scientific Syriac studies. They themselves attributed this explosion of research to the growth of manuscript collections, particularly in London and Paris, but also in Berlin and Cambridge. Curiously, the same pioneers in London, Paris and Berlin often showed little respect for the cultures of Christians of the Syriac tradition and their written heritage. Scholars such as William Wright, Ruben Duval and Theodor Nöldeke made no secret of their contempt for their subject. The Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Barsaüm, a contemporary witness and himself an eminent Syriac scholar, protested in vain. This lecture will present the current state of the debate about these pioneers of modern Syriac studies, and trace the attitudes of some of them in the context of the changing international landscape and European academia.

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Speaker's bio: Since 2021 Dorothea Weltecke is Chair for Mediaeval History at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Before she held chairs for the History of Religions at the Universität Konstanz (2007-2017) and for Medieval History at Goethe-Universität Frankfurt a. Main (2017-2021). Dorothea Weltecke teaches and studies medieval history and particular focuses on the history of religions, religious minorities, social history and the history of historiography. Since her PhD thesis on the Syriac orthodox Patriarch Michael the Great (1126-1199) research on Syriac Christianity has been of special interest to her.

S.T. Lee Conference, 10-12 December, Speakers, Titles, and Abstracts:

Adam Mestyan (Harvard University)

Title: Genealogy, Race, Philology: Goldziher's "The National Question Among Arabs"

Abstract: A 22-year old Ignác Goldziher gave a talk entitled "The National Question Among Arabs" ("A nemzetiségi kérdés az araboknál") at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in January 1873. The paper in its published version is a discussion of the contradiction between the Prophet's call for equality among Muslims and Arab-Persian genealogy, with an analysis of the *shu'ūbiyya* literature, and with some well-chosen Arabic excerpts in the appendix. Apart from the text being a clear demonstration of an Arabist *Wunderkind* and a somewhat incoherent engagement with the day's racial theories, I conclude in this talk that the topic of this text is a window into the dilemmas of a young Hungarian Jewish scholar at the moment of liberal nationalism in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, even more importantly, an experiment with what the *scholarly* study of the history of Islam and Arabs would tell to an (Eastern) European audience. As I am translating this essay now into English I hope to engage also with some questions about the translation.

Amir Theilhaber (Bielefeld University)

Title: Transnational Transformations: Oriental Studies between Germany and the US in the long Nineteenth Century

Abstract: "We American Orientalists have suckled ourselves big on the breasts of the German Orientalists", declared the German educated Indologist Maurice Bloomfield of Johns Hopkins University at Hamburg's International Orientalist Congress in 1902. Bloomfield's declaration reflected a long history of US Orientalists seeking out sources and methodologies of knowledge from German Orient scholarship, reaching back to the beginnings of the American Oriental Society (A.O.S.) in the 1840s. Next to Semitic and Bible studies, Sanskrit and ancient Indian history, regular transatlantic exchanges also developed on Ethiopian, Iranian and Islamic studies. Rather than looking at US Orientalism as holding significance only in relation to US world power in the twentieth century or conceiving of Oriental scholarship as nationally separated containers, I posit that the *longue durée* of Oriental studies in the US shows a history of transnational

discovery, invention, definition and contestation. The immigration of German Orientalists, for whom the US philanthropic system offered possibilities to pursue their Oriental studies under political and economic circumstances vastly different from Central European state universities. The import of German Orientalist knowledge in form of publications and collections provided a continuous impetus for US Oriental studies well before the large wave of German Orientalist emigration in the 1930s. As such, I follow Rosane Rocher's unpublished work on the history of the A.O.S (1970) and Patricia Sutcliffe on the "Exporters of 19th Century German Philology" (2000) in challenging nation-centric studies on German and US Orientalism. The migration and transformation of Orientalist scholars, ideas and knowledge between the two countries (and beyond) reworked and re-embedded central categories of scholarly inquiry: What qualified as "Oriental", how concepts such as the Aryan or the Semitic were given meaning, or how the modern-medieval dichotomy was discussed, depended on and informed the larger political, societal and institutional surroundings of Oriental studies in Germany and the US. The circulation of Orientalist knowledge made and reformulated the discipline in the US and fed back into discourses in Europe and "the Orient" itself.

Amit Levy (Martin Buber Society of Fellows, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Title: German Orientalism and Political Engagement: Knowledge Production and Arab-Jewish Relations in Mandate Palestine

Abstract: Founded in 1926 by a group of primarily German-Jewish scholars, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's School of Oriental Studies aimed not only to establish itself as a leading institute for the study of Arabic, Islam, and the Middle East, but also to create a "common intellectual ground" with Arab and Muslim scholars. These aspirations were deeply rooted in the German *Orientalistik* tradition, which shaped the School's academic framework and influenced its approach to fostering intellectual rapprochement between Jews and Muslims.

This paper draws on previously unpublished archival sources from the interwar period to trace how knowledge production was used as a tool to advance Arab-Jewish relations. The School's scholars sought to build bridges through a shared appreciation of the German philological tradition, alongside parallel efforts to reform both Judaism (in the spirit of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*) and Islam. However, these efforts were constrained by the increasingly volatile political climate in Palestine, which undermined the ideal of neutral academic space. By examining the School's research and teaching, this paper will explore the tensions between its intellectual ambitions and the harsh realities of the Arab-Jewish conflict, shedding light on both the successes and the limitations of these early efforts at intellectual rapprochement.

Annca Pielenhofer (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, and Humboldt University, Berlin)

Title: Tapping Ancient South Arabia: The Making of Paper Squeezes in Late Nineteenth-Century Sabaean Studies

Abstract: Squeezes—paper reproductions of ancient stone inscriptions—were widely used in European classical epigraphy from the mid-nineteenth century. My paper explores how South Arabists soon began to adapt this medium for the study of ancient South Arabian inscriptions. I aim to show that a consideration of the history of Sabaean squeezes can contribute to our understanding of disciplinary boundary-making in “Oriental” studies. Examining sources relating to the research voyages to Arabia associated with Julius Euting, Eduard Glaser, and David Heinrich Müller, I first provide some examples of experimentation with materials and techniques for squeeze-making in Arabia. I will then discuss the relationship between such scholarly efforts and broader discussions about the status of squeezes as a medium for epigraphic editing within and beyond the developing field of Sabaean Studies. In doing so, I reflect on the dynamic between a growing disciplinary specialization in “Oriental” studies and the emergence of a scholarly network linking not only different fields—such as Classics, Semitic Studies, and Anthropology—but also a global network of squeeze-makers.

Athina Pfeiffer and Mathias Gyoot (Princeton University)

Title: The Making of Hagarism: Preliminary Findings

Abstract: *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (1977) remains one of the most discussed and controversial works in the field of Islamic Studies. For some, it represents a welcome revisionist approach to the history of early Islam; for others, it epitomizes a new manifestation of ill-fated Orientalism. Drawing on interviews and the personal archives of Patricia Crone (d. 2015) and Michael Cook (b. 1940), this paper reconstructs the intellectual and academic milieu that produced *Hagarism* and the broader strand of skeptical scholarship that emerged in Islamic Studies during the 1970s. The discussion begins with Crone and Cook’s early encounters with John Wansbrough (d. 2002) in London, before turning to Crone’s 1973 single-authored paper “Hagarism,” which laid the groundwork for her long scholarly collaboration with Cook. Together, they embarked on a scavenger hunt for early sources—in Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, and more—across the libraries of the United Kingdom. Following the book’s controversial release in 1977, the paper examines its reception and enduring legacy within and beyond academic circles, including the numerous, though often fraught, attempts to translate it in the Arab world.

Augustin Jomier (INALCO, Paris)

Title: What colonialism does to orientalist scholarship: René Basset and his networks in colonial Algeria (1880–1924)

Abstract: Originally from Lorraine and trained in Paris, the young Arabist and Berberist René Basset (1855-1924) moved to Algiers in 1880, where the *École supérieure des Lettres* had just been founded as a scholarly tool of French colonization. In the course of his career, Basset became one of its deans, as well as the director of the French edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, and the main organizer of the 14th International Congress of Orientalists (1905), the first to be held outside Europe, in Algiers, as well as the founder of an orientalist dynasty.

Based on Basset's private archives – a massive, unpublished documentation held in Paris at EHESS – and a collective survey conducted from 2016 to 2021, this paper proposes to trace the networks that the academic built over more than four decades in the colony, making Algiers a capital of scholarly orientalism. Overlaying scholarly, administrative and military spheres, these networks allow us to question the way in which the colonial context structures and influences or not scholarly practices and sociability.

Bernhard Maier (Tübingen University)

Title: **The middle man: Martin Haug (1827–1876) in India and Europe**

Abstract: Among students of Avestan and Pahlavi, the pivotal importance of Martin Haug's contributions to Old and Middle Iranian Studies has widely been acknowledged. In my presentation, I propose to highlight Martin Haug's unusual – and much less widely known – biography. I shall focus, on the one hand, on his interaction with Parsi scholars during his six-year sojourn in British India (1859–1866), and, on the other hand, on his strained relations with some academic colleagues in the German university system, both during his formative years at Tübingen and during his later career as Professor of Sanskrit and Indo-European Studies in Munich. The title of my presentation refers to Homi Bhabha's characterisation of the Parsis in late-Victorian British India: "A very small minority, neither Muslim nor Hindu, nor Christian – the three major faiths in India – yet Parsis were able to play in the interstices; they were able to bridge those differences to their advantage, sometimes in a creditable way, sometimes less creditably, as they became the middle man in India" (H. Bhabha, "Diaspora and Home", in: Florian Kläger and Klaus Stierstorfer [ed.], *Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging*, Berlin 2015, 11–20). In my paper I will argue that Martin Haug, too, may be regarded as a kind of middle man, and that it was his standing aloof from contemporary German academia, Christian missionaries, British colonial administrators and Parsi scholars that enabled him to act as an intermediary between these groups.

Bruna Soravia (Rome)

Title: **The Reluctant Jew: Giorgio Levi Della Vida and Italian Judaism, from the Giolitti era to the racial laws (1903–1938)**

Abstract: One of the leading orientalists of the last century, Giorgio Levi Della Vida (1886–1967) was born in a family of assimilated Jews. After a brief encounter with Judaism, in the course of a personal crisis he underwent as a teenager, Giorgio turned

toward a scholarly approach to religion, although this experience left him with “a capacity for empathically understanding the religious phenomenon in its essence”, in his own words, and surely influenced his choice of orientalism and Semitics as a study subject. From the beginning of the twentieth century to the end of WWI, Italian Jews as a community were actively engaged in the political and cultural life, most of them on the liberal side and many of them assimilated into the national upper class. In his youth, Giorgio participated in the political debates that resulted in Italy’s entry into the war, a decision he agreed with, but that took him apart from his father, a liberal and a prominent banker in the newborn *Banca d’Italia*. The Levi Della Vida as a family were related to influential national figures such as Ernesto Nathan, the mayor of Rome, whose daughter married Giorgio’s elder brother, while Giorgio himself married a non-Jewish noblewoman. His work as a professor of Semitic studies at the University La Sapienza in Rome brought him inside the inner circle of Italian orientalism, dominated at the time by great scholars such as Ignazio Guidi, David Santillana and Carlo Alfonso Nallino, whose influence on his own historical and philological method of research was undeniable. The turning point came with the rise of fascism, in 1922. As an intellectual of liberal and quasi-socialist views, he was against the new regime from the beginning, dueling with the Fascist academic establishment in a few memorable feats. His Jewish ancestry never was an issue until 1931, when he was asked to write the entry on “Ebrei” (Jews) for the Italian national Encyclopaedia. When his thoughtful synthesis was contested by one of the Encyclopaedia’s directors, a priest, he was defended by yet another priest, a witness to the contemporary Church’s acceptance of modern biblical exegesis. Nonetheless, the situation became even worse as, in the same year, the Fascist regime asked all the academics to make an oath of loyalty to Mussolini. Levi Della Vida was among a dozen who refused to comply and was dismissed and forced to find an underpaid work with the Vatican library. It is worth noting that many Jewish academics took the oath, as did Levi della Vida’s successor, Umberto Cassuto, although, throughout the 1930s, the status of Jews in Italy and elsewhere worsened. Giorgio Levi Della Vida was loath to acknowledge it until 1938, when he suddenly understood that Italian authorities were after him, not only as an antifascist, but also as a Jew, and it was probably as a Jew that he finally obtained an offer from Penn University to move to Philadelphia in 1939, thus escaping the fate of many Italian Jews, before definitively returning to Italy after the war.

Christoph Rauch (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin)

Title: The correspondence of Heinrich Friedrich von Diez (1751–1817): Ambitions and limitations of an amateur orientalist in the early 19th century

Abstract: Heinrich Friedrich von Diez was a Prussian lawyer who worked as an envoy at the Sublime Porte from 1784 to 1790. It was there that he discovered his interest in the Turkish language and literature. He is still remembered today as a passionate book collector and orientalist autodidact. In addition to his library preserved at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, his influence on Goethe’s *Divan* is still known today.

Together with the German scholar Arne Klawitter (Tokyo), I have dedicated

myself in recent years to editing Diez's private and scholarly correspondence. Although Diez had his personal notes and correspondence destroyed, the 260 or so letters to his correspondence partners that have survived provide a wealth of new source material. This makes it possible to trace Diez's development from a radical freethinker to an anti-enlightenment Prussian patriot and pious man (he devoted the last years of his life intensively to the edition of a Turkish Bible) in greater detail. His preoccupation with Turkish language and culture for more than 30 years forms a constant parallel to this change of attitude.

In addition to the correspondence, my presentation presents new sources that allow Diez's orientalist contacts and knowledge to be better understood. His recently rediscovered catalogue of oriental coins, for example, shows him to be one of the first numismatists to systematically collect and describe Ottoman-Turkish coins. The correspondence also offers new insights into the causes of the well-known conflict with Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, which continued to have an impact on the orientalist positioning well into the 19th century. Furthermore, the sources on Diez are well suited for an assessment of academic mentalities in the run-up to the development of Oriental studies into an independent discipline. The ambitions, working methods and limitations of the 'orientalist amateur' Diez will be critically discussed, particularly against the background of the professionalization of Oriental studies that began at the beginning of the 19th century.

Garrett Davidson (College of Charleston)

Title: Between Paris, London, and Cairo: Abraham Shalom Yahuda and Sāmī Amīn al-Khānjī

Abstract: Based on the recently discovered al-Khānjī Archive, this paper examines the complicated relationship between British Jerusalem-born orientalist and bookseller Abraham Shalom Yahuda (d. 1951) and Sāmī Amīn al-Khānjī (d. 1967), son of the prominent Syrian-Egyptian bookseller, M. Amīn al-Khānjī (d. 1939). In 1928, Sāmī al-Khānjī was sent by his father to attend medical school in Paris. While in Paris, however, he was also tasked with the responsibility of managing the account of his father's most important customer, A. S. Yahuda in London. In this role, Sāmī mediated the often-fraught relationship between Yahuda and his father and facilitated the sale of thousands of Islamic manuscripts and rare books, and then ultimately conducted considerable work on the description of Yahuda's famous collection.

George A. Kiraz (Beth Mardutho, Piscataway, and Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton NJ)

Title: The Mustašriq and the Šarqī: The Ethical Terrain of Syriac Biblical Philology

Abstract: This paper explores the ethical and epistemological fault lines that emerged at the intersection of Eastern and Western scholarship on Syriac Biblical texts. Drawing on Ignatius Afram Barsoum's early twentieth-century critique of Orientalist scholarship, it traces how the relationship between *mustašriq* (Orientalist) and *šarqī* (Eastern scholar) evolved from collaboration to containment. Through three case studies—the *editio princeps* of the New Testament (Vienna, 1555), the *editio princeps* of the Old Testament in the Paris Polyglot (1645), and the Mosul Bible (1887–1888)—the paper examines how *šarqī* editors were alternately silenced, discredited, or dismissed in European historiography. Together, these episodes illuminate how Orientalism constructed authority through selective citation and moral judgment. The paper argues that to recover the *šarqī* editors is not merely to correct the record, but to restore the ethical balance in the history of Syriac biblical philology.

Hanan Harif (Tel-Hai College, Qiryat Shemona)

Title: When Frankfurt met Sanaa: S. D. Goitein and the turn of “Jewish Orientalism” in Mandate Palestine

Abstract: Like most of Josef Horowitz's graduate students at Frankfurt University, S. D. Goitein dedicated his doctoral research to the Qur'an. He submitted his dissertation, *Das Gebet im Koran* (The Prayer in the Qur'an), in 1923; however, he refrained from publishing this early work. In the six decades that followed, Goitein increasingly turned toward Judeo-Arabic based research, leaving an indelible mark on Oriental and Semitic studies while almost entirely avoiding Quranic research. This shift was not incidental; rather, it was part of a broader process that accompanied the establishment of Jewish Orientalism in Palestine-Israel. In my lecture, I will use archival materials to analyze the early developments in Goitein's professional career, focusing on the years between his immigration from Germany to Palestine (1923) and the publication of his first two scholarly books: *Jemenica* (Leipzig 1934) and *Von den Juden Jemens* (On the Jews of Yemen, Berlin 1934). I will argue that these two works symbolize Goitein's scholarly journey between Germany and Palestine, and mark wider developments within this academic discipline.

Henning Trüper (University of Oslo)

Title: Fringe Orientalism and the Search for Other Others

Abstract: Drawing on case examples from the history of Ethiopian studies, this paper will address a pattern of research in the history of European oriental studies that one could describe as thematic scattering: the tendency of many scholars to focus on marginal regions, minoritarian peoples, languages, scripts, and religions. I will seek to sketch the various guises this pattern takes on (study fields, forms of argument, travel destinations, and impulses of avoidance, for instance concerning the study of Islam). More importantly I will also seek to present some tentative arguments as to the causes and functions of the pattern, with regard (a) to the aggregative structure of philological studies in general; (b) to the relation of scholarship to imperialism as a national as well as transnational project (provoking both embrace and escape, fantasies and realities of

dominance and its rejection); (c) to what one might call an epistemology of superficiality and the refusal of “depth,” as a nonetheless effective form of the production of knowledge; and (d) to structures of desire and moral values, e.g. in terms of possession and tropes of empathy and rescue, as connected with the collection of knowledge, objects, and interpersonal connections. I will plead for recognizing “fringe orientalism” as a particular variant of philological studies the importance of which has often been eclipsed.

Jacqueline Vayntrub (Yale Divinity School)

Title: Jews, Biblical Philology, and “the Higher anti-Semitism” of the German Academy: The Case of Abraham Heschel and *Die Prophetie*

Abstract: Abraham Heschel’s 1962 book on the Hebrew prophets began as a dissertation on the prophetic consciousness, completed at the University of Berlin in 1932 and published in 1936. The dissertation is often assumed to anticipate Heschel’s mature philosophical positions, yet most fail to understand the younger Heschel whose motivations for such a project were quite different than those shaping his ideas in America in the 1960s. In this project I ask: What was Heschel doing methodologically, conceptually, even politically in writing a dissertation on the Hebrew Prophets—a topic usually reserved for specialists of the Old Testament—in Germany at the end of the Weimar republic and Hitler’s rise to power? Drawing from *Die Prophetie*, his other work including poetry penned at roughly the same time, correspondence and other archival material, as well as his daughter Susannah Heschel’s accounts, I argue that Heschel’s choice of subject (pre-exilic prophets) and unique interpretive method (a blend of secular, historical-critical principles and a presentist-oriented exegesis in the Hasidic tradition) situated him as a Jewish alternative to German biblical philology. In this project of recovering a Heschel-in-Berlin, I will compare him to other Jewish philologists of his era who selected the Hebrew Bible as one of their objects of study.

Jan Thiele (CSIC, Madrid)

Title: The beginnings of the journal *Al-Andalus*

Abstract: In 1933, during the Second Spanish Republic, the journal *Al-Andalus* published its first volume, co-edited by Miguel Asín Palacios (1871–1944) and Emilio García Gómez (1905–1995), directors of the two seats of the *Escuela de Estudios Árabes* in Madrid and Granada respectively. Flagship journal of Spanish Arabic and Islamic studies, the journal was published under this title until 1978, only interrupted in 1937-1938 during the civil war, before it was succeeded in 1980 under the title *Al-Qantara*, which has remained the journal’s name until the present day. This paper attempts to study the beginnings of the journal *Al-Andalus* within the context of the emergence of modern Spanish Arabic studies, making use of the archival material of the historical *Escuela de Estudios Árabes*, held at the Biblioteca Tomás Navarro Tomás of CSIC's Centre of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Jens Scheiner (Göttingen University) [zoom]

Title: From “Oriental” Studies to *Islamwissenschaft*: Josef Horovitz’s Impact on German Academia in the early Twentieth Century

Abstract: Josef Horovitz is mainly perceived as an expert in Quranic Studies. This being the case, Horovitz engaged in far more disciplines than that and is, hence, an underestimated figure in early twentieth century German academia. As newly discovered letters of his in the Goldziher collection show Horovitz’s vita and academic impact must be revisited. These letters evidence the influence Golziher had on Horovitz intellectually and Horovitz’s indebtedness to his contemporary Carl Heinrich Becker (d. 1933). They also shed new light on Horovitz’s research stay in Cairo and the Middle East as well as his activities at the M.A.O. College Aligarh in British India. Therefore, in the presentation I will argue that due to his methodological approaches and national as well as international networks Josef Horovitz must be counted to the first generation of Islamicists (*Islamwissenschaftler*) active in Germany.

Lina Jabali (Tel Aviv University, EPHE-PSL–Paris, and NLI–Jerusalem)

Title: Behind the Deals: Abraham Shalom Yahuda and His Agents in Islamic Manuscript Trade Between Legitimacy and Manipulation

Abstract: *“I am afraid I shall have to ‘break his hand’ by giving him a good tip and by promising him a more substantial thing than a good site in Paradise and a pleasant sojourn in Heaven.”* (Abraham Shalom Yahuda)

This presentation examines the intricate network between Abraham Shalom Yahuda (d. 1951) and his agents in the trade of Islamic manuscripts during the early twentieth century. By studying unpublished documents from Yahuda’s archive at the National Library of Israel (NLI), it uncovers practices ranging from lawful methods to questionable tactics, such as bribery, customs evasion, and social and cultural ties to achieve financial and academic goals. The presentation combines an in-depth analysis of Yahuda’s and his agents’ actions with critical questions: Was his involvement driven by a genuine desire to transfer knowledge and enrich academic studies, or was it primarily about pleasing his agents and enhancing his standing in the global manuscript trade network? It further explores the broader implications of Yahuda’s work: Did his role serve as a bridge for transferring knowledge and preserving Islamic heritage, or was it an exploitation of this heritage under a colonial framework and for commercial interests? These questions challenge traditional narratives about the motivations behind the trade of Islamic manuscripts and its impact on cultural identity. By offering a critical analysis of these dynamics, the presentation highlights how Yahuda’s practices and his agents shaped collections of Islamic manuscripts in the West and influenced the fields of Semitic and Oriental studies.

Mathias Gyoot (Princeton University)

Title: Reassessing Ḥanbalism in Orientalist Scholarship: Western Interpretations and Islamic Modernist Parallels before Henri Laoust, 1849–1937

Abstract: The study of Ḥanbalism in Western scholarship has long been shaped by Ignáz Goldziher’s polemical portrayal of the school as an obstacle to the development of a rational theological orthodoxy in Islam. Yet the intellectual history of Ḥanbalism’s reception in the West began well before Goldziher and unfolded with greater nuance than previous accounts suggest. This paper re-examines Orientalist engagement with Ḥanbalism between 1849 and 1937, tracing how scholars in Europe and North America interpreted the movement’s legal, theological, and cultural significance in Islamic history. Drawing on works in French, German, Arabic, and English, it identifies three major interpretive strands: (1) Ḥanbalism as a heresiographical key to the study of ancient religions, most notably Nuṣayrism; (2) as a marginal, anti-rational school thought to have hindered the development of a rationalistic Ash‘arism; and (3) as a principled defense against superstition and scholasticism in Islam. Significantly, the paper also argues that Orientalists’ conception and “rediscovery” of Ḥanbalism in the nineteenth century often aligned with that of contemporary Islamic modernists, who edited and published medieval Ḥanbalī texts as part of their effort to counter the scholastic traditions of late Ottoman Islam. By contextualizing the academic, personal, and political motivations of several Orientalists—Edward Salisbury, Stanislas Guyard, Walter M. Patton, Ignáz Goldziher, Martin Schreiner, David Margoliouth, Charles D. Matthews, and Serajul Haque—the paper contends that early Western studies of Ḥanbalism were far more diverse than prevailing narratives of neglect and hostility imply, and that they often developed independently of—and sometimes in contrast to—the burgeoning discipline of Wahhābī studies. This reassessment ultimately invites a broader understanding of how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Orientalists helped shape modern perceptions of Islamic orthodoxy.

Mirjam Thulin (Center for Jewish History, New York)

Title: The *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (ZDMG): A Forum for Jewish Orientalists

Abstract: The *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (ZDMG) has been the publication organ of the *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft* (DMG), the German Oriental Studies Association, since 1847. Oriental studies, formerly an auxiliary field of theology, only established as an independent academic discipline in the course of the nineteenth century. Unlike theology and history, German Oriental studies initially distanced both its research and everyday relations from questions of daily politics and was largely unprejudiced towards Jewish scholars. For this reason, the DMG became an important academic forum for numerous Jewish scholars soon after its foundation and the ZDMG a preferred publication venue beyond the organizations and journals of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. My paper traces this development in the context of the history of Oriental and Jewish studies.

Nora Derbal (University of Hamburg)

Title: Heinrich von Maltzan: Travel Writer, Philologist and Outsider on the Inside

Abstract: This paper looks at German Oriental and Semitic studies in the second half of the nineteenth century through a case study of an academic outsider: the German travel writer Heinrich von Maltzan (1826–1874). When Oriental and Semitic studies emerged as an academic field of study at German universities over the course of the nineteenth century, most German university scholars of the “Orient” never set foot in the lands they studied. As Marchand pointedly remarked, “most mid-century German orientalist were philologists and most philologists did not travel” (Marchand 2009, 141). Travelers provided the universities and its scholars with materials for the study of the “Orient,” such as manuscripts and cuneiform tablets, they brought back ideas and narratives about the “Orient” and its people, which they shared with the wider public.

Maltzan counts as one of the most popular German travelers to the “Orient” of the nineteenth century, since he claimed to have performed the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca around 1860, a journey prohibited to non-Muslims. Trained as a jurist, Maltzan quit civil service in 1851 and traveled to North Africa, the Levante and the Arabian Peninsula in numerous journeys between 1851 and 1871. During his travels, he studied Arabic and a number of Semitic languages, including Hebrew, Phoenician and the Mehri. Maltzan’s travel accounts were published in much-read books as well as in articles in the daily press and in professional journals. At the height of his career, between 1869 and 1873, the *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft* published Maltzan’s philological studies in its journal, the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, the flagship publication of German Oriental studies. This paper examines the relations that university-based orientalists in Germany maintained with travelers through an analysis of the private correspondence of Maltzan with Johann Gildemeister (1812–1890), Moritz Abraham Levy (1817–1872) and Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer (1801–1888) as well as the reception of Maltzan’s work in the ZDMG. What was discussed in these letters? How was Maltzan’s work received and discussed in the ZDMG? What was the place of Maltzan within the network of German orientalists? In other words, what was the place of the amateur and traveler within the emerging field of Oriental studies in Germany? The research suggests that as both a traveler, who wrote vividly about his journeys, *and* as an amateur philologist, who copied and translated inscriptions during his travels, Maltzan managed to claim a place within scholarly circles. Given his lack of university training, it is rather remarkable how Maltzan seems to have enjoyed quite a favorable standing within the community of scholars (*Wissenschaftsgemeinschaft*). This allows us to discuss the emergence and consolidation of categories such as “amateur” and “authority”, “outsider” and “insider” in the establishment of the academic tradition.

Omer Michaelis (Tel Aviv University)

Title: Fritz (Shlomo Dov) Goitein and his doctoral dissertation, “Das Gebet im Qorān”

Abstract: [tbc]

Paul Babinski (Department of Religion at the University of Georgia)

Title: A Center of Islamic Studies in Vienna: The Oriental Academy Library, 1754–1938

Abstract: The Oriental Academy in Vienna was founded in 1754 to train diplomatic interpreters for service in the Ottoman Empire, following the model of the French *École des jeunes de langues*. By the nineteenth century, it had become an important center of European orientalist learning, training generations of graduates who moved between the Habsburg state and an international community of scholars. The heart of the Oriental Academy was its library, whose collection by 1842 contained more than four hundred Turkish, Persian, and Arabic manuscripts, in addition to a variety of early Ottoman printed books. Today the library no longer exists, and its collections are spread across multiple Austrian institutions. Bringing these sources together, this paper uses the growth and dissolution of the Oriental Academy library as a case study in the changing institutional contexts of nineteenth and twentieth-century oriental studies.

Peri Bearman (Harvard University)

Title: Pioneers and Pathbreaking Corpora: The Late 1800s and Islamic Studies

Abstract: Three large reference works of the later nineteenth century, whose importance resounds still today, might never have seen the light of day were it not for Michaël Jan de Goeje, professor of Arabic at Leiden University in the Netherlands from 1866–1906. He singlehandedly edited the eight-volume *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum* (1870–1894); organized the first complete edition of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (1879–1901); and facilitated the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. All owe their existence to de Goeje, who bequeathed to Leiden University Library his letters, among which are some 435 over a fifty-year period to his friend and colleague Theodor Nöldeke. On the basis of these letters, Nöldeke's replies, reviews, and other reactions by orientalists of the period, a description and analysis of the first pioneering corpus and the scholarly network relied upon to produce it will be given.

Peter Tarras (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

Title: 'The Desire to Possess': Scholars' Involvement in the Dispersion of the Eastern Christian Manuscript Heritage of St Catherine's Monastery

Abstract: In 1924, Georg Graf (1875–1955), a leading scholar in the field of Christian Arabic studies, held in his hands the inventory list of an impressive contemporary private collection of manuscripts whose owner had recently passed away. He could not help but immediately write about it to his friend, the librarian and Semitist Emil Gratzl (1877–1957). Graf describes how he 'involuntarily' experienced two feelings: 'the desire to possess [the manuscripts] or at least to have them within reach [and] the great sorrow about the vandalic dismemberment of the rich and precious holdings of the Sinai monastery continuing now for four decades'. In the literature on the manuscripts of Sinai, one of the oldest and most valuable clerical collections worldwide, especially with regard to the early Eastern Christian manuscript heritage, one rarely, if ever, comes

across such expressions of sentiment. Yet a ‘desire to possess’ and similar feelings must have played a major role in European scholars turning to this library from the early nineteenth century onwards. They were intrinsically linked—without Graf realising the latent contradiction—to the ‘vandalic dismemberment’ he lamented, a major act of biblioclasm in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that has hardly been acknowledged to date. The late owner of said private collection, Friedrich Grote (1861–1922), was one of its main culprits.

In this contribution, I would like to show that Graf’s lament, however, also highlights a false dichotomy often drawn between scholars and manuscript collectors, between the academic and commercial interest in manuscripts. In reality, European scholars were themselves notorious manuscript hunters, the most prominent examples being Constantin Tischendorf (1815–1874) and Robert Curzon (1810–1873), whose names are associated with the Sinai collection to a lesser or greater extent. Grote, too, set off for the Sinai monastery as a young scholar with high hopes; he too was eventually overcome by a ‘desire to possess’. Yet, even when they were not hunting for manuscripts, scholars played a key role in creating a market for them.

This contribution aims to shed light on the different ways in which scholars were involved in the dispersion of Sinaitic manuscripts. We not only encounter as buyers well-known figures of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bible and Oriental Studies, such as Paul Kahle (1875–1964), Agens Lewis (1843–1926) and Margaret Gibson (1843–1920) or Alphonse Mingana (1878–1937), but also scholars who acted as agents for European libraries, as intermediaries between sellers and collections or as beneficiaries of collectors. From the early nineteenth century onwards, the travellers who wrote about the Sinai Monastery and its collection of manuscripts equally helped to construct an infrastructure for looting. A particularly sensitive issue that will be examined here is the question of the extent to which academic work with manuscripts and scholarly expertise has contributed to the market value of Sinaitic manuscripts and continues to do so. The present need to discuss and critically reflect the ethics of dealing with cultural heritage objects is directly related to the acquisition practices of the colonial and imperialist era. I shall argue that the dispersion of the Sinai manuscripts should also be considered from this perspective and ask what this might mean for our engagement with them in current collection contexts and beyond.

Rainer Brunner (CNRS, Paris) [[zoom](#)]

Title: “A man of retiring habits”: Biographical Fragments of Franz Steingass

Abstract: Most scholars in the field of Oriental Studies will be familiar with the name of Franz Steingass, who is known mainly for his famous "Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary" of 1892. Hardly anything, however, is known about Steingass' biography. Who was this remarkable scholar who was credited with having an acquaintance of "at least 14 languages"? Only few facts are well-known about his life. Born in Frankfurt in 1825, he obtained his PhD in Indian studies from Munich University in 1846. After his habilitation in 1847, however, he left academia and got by with several jobs, before he moved to the UK in the early 1870s. There, Steingass compiled two Arabic-English dictionaries and a two-volume translation and edition of parts of Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*. Yet it is mainly his Persian lexicon with which he left a

distinct mark in Western scholarship. My paper intends to assemble the fragments that have come to light so far and presenting a number of hitherto neglected German and Swiss archival sources, including private correspondence.

Rubina Raja (Aarhus University, Denmark)

Title: Oriental studies, *Islamvidenskab*, and the Archaeology of the Orient: Some notes on the Danish engagements in the region in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

Abstract: The small Kingdom of Denmark and some of its subjects already with Carsten Niebuhr and his travels together with many others displayed significant interests in the “Orient” and the surrounding regions. While Niebuhr’s travels and research results have been subject to extensive discussions and research in scholarship, much of the research in and on the region that again surged from the later parts of the nineteenth century well into the twentieth century has not received that much attention. This contribution pin points and bring to the forefront some of the overlooked histories of the various Danish engagements in Oriental Studies, the study of Islam as well as the archaeology of the region and bring these together in a first attempt at a narrative that situates the Danish engagement within its time: one of major private sponsorships, the race for building archaeological collections in large European museums, global political and military instability and the role of the individual researcher in pushing boundaries for what was possible.

Sabine Mangold-Will (University of Wuppertal)

Title: The Librarian Gotthold Weil: trajectories and networks of a German Jewish Orientalist between Berlin and Jerusalem

Abstract: Gotthold Weil lived many lives: he was a son and a Berliner, a Prussian professor and a Zionist, a German and a Jew, a librarian and an orientalist. In my lecture, I would like to contextualise some of these lives by showing which networks Weil was involved in and which he was not; which paths he chose and which he did not; which places and spaces he passed through and which he did not. His personal and professional horizon of experience encompassed a whole century of Oriental studies, from Abraham Geiger's ‘What did Muhammad absorb from Judaism’ in 1833 to the perversion of this ‘cosmopolitan science’ (H. L. Fleischer) from 1933 onwards. Perhaps I will succeed in grasping the special and lasting, but also the obstructive aspects of these hundred years of Orientalist influence. In the end, it will hopefully be possible to explain why the same values that produced an Orientalist like Gotthold Weil led to his ultimate failure: hardly anyone read his last book and hardly anyone noticed his death in 1960. What this means for the history of science will be explored.

Sofía Torallas Tovar (Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton NJ)

Title: Disiecta membra: the dispersion of Papyri and the birth of Papyrology

Abstract: Interest in papyrology arose at the end of the nineteenth century when the first findings raised hopes for the reconstruction of lost classical literature and the discovery of the oldest bibles. Both through archaeological expeditions and through the antiquities market, vast amounts of papyrological material were dispersed in diverse collections in the Western world. The recent boom of biblical papyri entering the antiquities market, including some cases of forgery, has ignited widespread interest in questions regarding the history and ethics of this market. In this paper I will discuss some examples of these dispersals, and some recent efforts by papyrologists to address questions of provenance and reconstruct the processes that have created the context-less archives in which papyrologists largely work today.

Sonja Brentjes (University of Wuppertal)

Title: The Journals "Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik, Astronomie und Physik" and "Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik", their Conceptualization and their Scholarly Networks

Abstract: The journal "Quellen und Studien" was founded after WWI by two German mathematicians, Otto Neugebauer and Otto Toeplitz, and one German classical philologist and philosopher, Julius Stenzel. In the short years until 1933, they published above all studies on Near Eastern and Mediterranean mathematics and astronomy. In my talk, I will discuss the goals of the three editors, the manner in which they conceptualized history of science, and with whom they cooperated in order to implement their intentions.

Stefan Heidemann (Hamburg University)

Title: A De Sacy student returns to Germany, Johann Gustav Stickel (1805–1896)

Abstract: Johann Gustav Stickel may be one of the lesser known students of A. I. Silvestre de Sacy, but this makes Stickel probably more representative for the situation which German scholars faced. He was professor at Jena University from 1828 to 1896, almost the entire century. He was trained in Jena as a theologian in Oriental languages, first of all in Hebrew and the Old Testament. In 1829/30 he studied for a semester in Paris with De Sacy and Chézy Arabic and Persian beyond the Bible. Upon his return he wanted to establish such a philology in Jena. It was not easy. The university structure was rigid. On the one hand the university had its legally fixed appointment scheme for full professorships, on the other hand Stickel was financially dependent on tuition fees, meaning of actual students attending his classes. And those were mostly from the School of Theology. After ten years, things got into flux in Jena. In 1839, Stickel got finally a full professorship in philology. The university stood in competition with other universities and in the same year Hermann Brockhaus was appointed as professor for Indo-Germanic languages (Sanskrit and Persian). Jena covered now the full canon of Oriental languages. Brockhaus left

already in 1842, not at least because of the rigid university structure, crippling the development of Oriental Studies in Jena. In 1845, Stickel became one of the founding members of the German Oriental Society. In 1876, he was regarded as the German representative at the International Congress of Orientalists in St. Petersburg.

In order to answer the question for the case study in Jena and to contextualize the case study we look at the large network of scholars in his own and neighboring fields as they are documented in his letters and his extensive diary, where we even find his thoughts about the university situation mirrored.

Stefan Schorch (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Title: Focusing at the Marginal: The Establishment of Samaritan Studies as a Core Endeavor of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

Abstract: Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, Samaritan studies saw an enormous development. Above all, the name of Zeev Ben-Hayyim (1907–2013) needs to be mentioned in this regard. Ben-Hayyim, professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1948–1976 and president of the Academy of the Hebrew Language 1973–1981, had studied at the *Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar* and finished his doctorate at the *Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität* at Breslau in 1932, under the guidance of Carl Brockelmann. In his autobiography, Ben-Hayyim mentions that he decided to turn to Samaritan studies shortly after his graduation and his move to Jerusalem. There is no doubt that this decision was strongly motivated by his academic background in *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, since the study of the Samaritans occupied a central place in the oeuvre of scholars associated with it since its outset.

Two scholars are especially prominent in this regard – Abraham Geiger (1810–1874), co-founder of both the Breslau *Seminar* and the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Berlin, and Samuel Kohn (1841–1920), who after his graduation from Breslau became rabbi in Budapest and professor at the *Landesrabbinerschule*. Geiger's and Kohn's numerous publications in the field certainly stand out, providing a large number of truly seminal studies, relating to a wide range of Samaritan sources in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and Arabic, and dealing with multifarious cultural aspects, from Bible translation and exegesis to halachic topics and liturgical poetry. Nevertheless, the interest in Samaritanism was a general and much broader phenomenon within *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, as attested by a vast number of publications authored by a wide variety of scholars.

Considering the wealth of evidence for Samaritan studies pursued by scholars associated with *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, it seems difficult to follow I. Elbogen, who in his summary "Ein Jahrhundert Wissenschaft des Judentums" (1922) does even fail to mention it among the minor subjects. Addressing this omission, our presentation aims to describe, contextualize, and understand the extent and role of Samaritan studies within *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and also beyond it throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, in the context of the emerging Oriental Studies and their academic institutionalization.

Tamás Turán (Budapest)

Title: Oriental Rearview Mirror: Late Nineteenth-Century Jewish Orientalists Look at Western Society and Contemporary Jewry

Abstract: European Jewish Orientalists such as Arminius Vámbéry, Jacob Obermeyer, Ignaz Goldziher, Joseph Halevy, Eduard Glaser, made extensive field-work in the Near and Middle East and became thoroughly acquainted there with local Islamic societies and Jewish communities as well. Their Oriental experiences urged them to reflect critically and incisively on Western societies and Western Jewry, in scholarly essays, travelogues, etc. These reflections form a distinct category and genre within the intellectual trend called “European Jewish Orientalism.”

The presentation will focus on Vámbéry, Obermeyer, and Goldziher – all of them from Central Europe. Despite significant differences in their Jewish background and outlook, they had much in common in their critical views on Western societies and Jewries, against the backdrop of the traditionalism and tight social fabric of Islamic societies that they were familiar with. The relative lack of professionalization of the religious elites of these societies, their relative tolerance and the lack of a schismatic spirit – all these traits seemed to them superior to what nineteenth century social transformations brought to Western Jewry. They also recognized and appreciated some of these traits in East European Orthodox Jewries, still present in their Central European environments. Their critical insights therefore had numerous common elements with Orthodox criticism of Western progressive Judaism.

Oriental Jewries were painted by these Orientalists in rather dark colors: they were considered by and large primitive and superstitious. Western Jewry, on the other hand, was recognized by them as inauthentic and disintegrated. Both characterizations were meant as reflecting the worst in the non-Jewish environments of these Jewries.

Vámbéry’s, Obermeyer’s, and Goldziher’s scholarly critiques of contemporary Jewish life were inseparable from their critiques of contemporary social realities, in the Orient as well as in the Occident. In this matrix of cultural, religious, and social criticism, it seems that in numerous respects, the mentioned three scholars personally felt closer to Oriental Muslims than to Occidental Jews.

Valentina Sagaria Rossi (University of Rome Tor Vergata)

Title: On the Hunt for Arabic Manuscripts: The Correspondence between Carlo A. Nallino and Eugenio Griffini (from 1897 through 1922)

Abstract: The two arabists Carlo Alfonso Nallino and Eugenio Griffini corresponded for twenty-five years, from 1897 until Griffini’s death in 1925. Their discussions focused on shared research interests, primarily the acquisition and review of Arabic manuscript sources, concerning Islamic law, bio-bibliographical repertoires, as well as works on astronomy, geography, and cosmography.

On his trip to Tunisia in 1907, Griffini provided Nallino with various manuscripts and books and collected extensive information on Arab authors and works about the history of Muslim Sicily, unavailable elsewhere, along with folk practices he documented personally.

In the following years, he kept Nallino thoroughly informed about Giuseppe Caprotti's shipments of manuscripts from Yemen. Nallino, in turn, provided comments and analyses on their contents, exchanging text transcriptions and manuscript versions of works unknown to European scholars.

This rich documentation – 153 documents preserved in the archives of the respective scholars in their locations in Milan and Rome – is investigated here for the first time, after having been organized, inventoried, and digitized only very recently. It is an almost complete correspondence, of extraordinary significance, a true preliminary text for the studies of the two scholars and for future studies on the manuscript collections they uncovered and researched.

Vincent Engelhardt (Leiden University)

Title: The Circulation of Islamic Antiquities in the Early Twentieth Century: The Example of Bernhard Moritz

Abstract: This paper reconstructs the collection activities of Bernhard Moritz (1859–1939), who served as director of the Khedival Library in Cairo from 1896 to 1911. Drawing on his scholarly correspondence with museum officials and academic colleagues, the paper traces the socio-political context and the institutional and diplomatic networks that enabled the transfer of artefacts to the newly established Islamic Department of the Berlin Royal Museums. In addition to information on the provenance of the artefacts and his local intermediaries on Cairo's antiquities markets, Moritz's letters reveal the strategies he employed to circumvent the increasingly strict Egyptian antiquities regulations. He also encouraged fellow scholars to transfer artefacts without authorization to Germany. This demonstrates how scholarly, diplomatic, and institutional actors were entangled in the imperial appropriation of artefacts. Moreover, archival files indicate that Moritz's involvement in Germany's imperial endeavors had legal repercussions within the Khedivial Library, ultimately leading to the curtailment of the director's authority. In discussing Moritz's case, this paper engages broader themes within the field of "oriental" studies such as scholarly involvement in diplomacy from pre-World War I through the National socialist era.

The IAS NES Cohort of 2025/26 (Amy Singer, Ismail Warscheid, Yury Arzhanov, Marion Katz, George A. Kiraz, Henri Lauzière, Sabine Schmidtke)

Title: Genealogies of Scholars in Near Eastern Studies from 1930 to 1950: Toward a Proof of Concept