

# Ignaz Goldziher and His Correspondents

Review on Hans-Jürgen Becker, Kinga Dévényi, Sebastian Günther, and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.) *Building Bridges: Ignaz Goldziher and His Correspondents - Islamic and Jewish Studies Around the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Brill, 2024. (Series: Islamic History and Civilization, Volume: 212) pp. XIV + 444 Hardback ISBN: 978-90-04-69058-5 / E-book ISBN: 978-90-04-69059-2

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The book under review is a well-documented examination of the large spectrum of scholarly influences of Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), a pioneer of Islamic studies. In this collection of original studies on his correspondence with peers, the contributors (Camilla Adang, Hans-Jürgen Becker, Kinga Dévényi, Sebastian Günther, Máté Hidvégi Livnat Holtzman, Amit Levy, Miriam Ovadia, Dóra Pataricza, Christoph Rauch, Valentina Sagaria Rossi, Sabine Schmidtke, Jan Thiele, Samuel Thrope, Tamás Turán, Maxim Yosefi, Dora Zsom) shed light on the development of both Islamic and Jewish studies. These previously unseen letters give a fascinating glimpse into a foundational period for these academic fields.

This volume emanates from an international online conference entitled “Islamic and Jewish Studies around the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Ignaz Goldziher and his Correspondents” organized by the editors of the volume, as convenors, in the framework of the Alexander-von-Humboldt Research Prize. The aim of the conference, as stated in the abstract, was “to focus on the correspondence between Ignaz Goldziher and colleagues from different countries preserved in the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, addressing aspects of the history of the discipline as seen through the letters.” It was also anticipated that papers would examine “specific aspects of Goldziher’s contributions to Islamic and Jewish studies from a wider history of science point of view” (ibid.) From among the materials presented in the rich actual program held on 2021, September 20, twelve contributions are included in the volume, one is modified in focus, and two chapters that are pertinent to the research are added (1. Scholarly Correspondence: Mapping the DNA of

Scholarship. An Introduction; 15. The Published Correspondence of Ignaz Goldziher: A Bibliographical Guide).

In the introduction, the editors and convenors first raise the question of how the “genetic makeup of the final [academic] product” (p. 1.) can be understood, and then give possible answers (from the probably self-censored references in the publication itself, or, more authentically, from raw material, such as scholars’ notes, drafts, diaries, etc), and in this context, they accentuate the importance of epistolary exchanges. The reader is introduced to some aspects of the process of how Ignaz Goldziher worked on his scholarly publications. The editors then highlight another reason for the importance of correspondence in Goldziher’s lifetime: it was crucial for gaining knowledge to keep a regular and close connection with colleagues. The reader then can expect to uncover the influences, stimuli and possible sources Goldziher relied on, as well as the ones he provided. The title is meant to communicate the considerable importance of the epistolary exchanges of Goldziher; the introduction also contends that these offer the most valuable insights into the development of Arabic, Jewish, and Islamic studies, as well as related fields, during his era.

No single volume could possibly cover all the themes that are addressed in the correspondence, nor picture the multitude of scholars Goldziher kept contact with, influenced or gained stimuli or knowledge from. That said, *Buildig Bridges* stands as a paradigm of what a book of essays on a vast corpus of scholarly correspondence and an academic network, as well as the historiography of a discipline should be.

To contextualize the studies, I start with the last chapter, prepared by Kinga Dévényi and Sabine Schmidtke (*The published Correspondence of Ignaz Goldziher: A Bibliographical Guide*), which helps the reader’s orientation considering the already existing scholarship on Goldziher’s correspondence. This accurate guide reveals what parts of the corpus are available in critical editions or have been studied in works on the historiographies of Islamic, Arabic and Jewish studies, as well as it corroborates the claim in the Introduction, that “the bulk of the material has as yet remained untapped”. (p. 2.) Against this background, the reader comprehends even better the value of the new segments of Goldziher’s *Nachlass* studied/published in the volume, selected from the scientific correspondence that includes overall more than 13.500 letters and c. 1650 correspondents.

Besides the Introduction and the bibliographical guide, there are thirteen essays by distinguished specialists in the fields. What first follows is an overview of the essays, presented in the order of their appearance, then I will make some general comments at the end.

Camilla Adang’s research (*‘In vollkommener Verehrung’: Israel Friedlaender’s letters to Goldziher*) dives into the intellectual exchange between Ignaz Goldziher and his younger colleague Israel Friedlaender (1876-1920), a specialist in Semitic languages. Based on letters Friedlaender sent to Goldziher (1901-1920), Adang’s analysis shows Friedlaender frequently sought Goldziher’s advice on Islamic history and Jewish philosophy, despite his academic position as a scholar of Biblical Studies. Adang’s work not only highlights Friedlaender’s deep respect for Goldziher, but proficiently address the letters to give access to the *Sitz im*

*Leben* of Friedlaender. For instance, it reveals his disappointment with the academic environment at his workplace, the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, and how this, along with other commitments, may have limited his own scholarly output.

Kinga Dévényi's article ("*Your unconscious personal influence started me on my course*": *On the Correspondence of Ignaz Goldziher and Duncan B. Macdonald*) unpacks the letters exchanged with Duncan Black Macdonald (1863-1943), who established the first American school for Middle Eastern Christian missionaries. This contribution, similarly to the previous one, is also a testimony to a scholar's considering Goldziher as his mentor. The contribution traces their connection, starting from their initial exchange of published works and critical feedback offered to each other to more personal tones, including discussions of challenging times. It explores a lively intellectual exchange between two pioneering figures in Arabic and Islamic Studies across the Atlantic Ocean, by following the trajectory of their correspondence. Macdonald was one of Goldziher's most frequent correspondents. Their correspondence is quite unique, since the letters written by both academics complement each other's.

Livnat Holtzman and Miriam Ovadia's contribution (*Ignaz Goldziher: The Founding Father of Gesture Studies in Arabic and Islamic Studies*) dives into a specific work by Ignaz Goldziher: "Ueber Geberden und Zeichensprache bei den Arabern" (On Gestures and Sign Language among the Arabs, 1886). Goldziher stands out as the first researcher to analyse Islamic prophetic traditions, noticing that these texts contain rich details about physical gestures. He continued exploring this theme in other articles, but this research area remained largely neglected. This chapter takes a closer look at Goldziher's groundbreaking work, and highlights his innovative approach to Muslim sources and his lasting impact on the study of gestures in Arab culture.

From Amit Levy's study (*Rediscovering the Goldziher Legacy in Jerusalem: Religion, Language, and History in the Making of a Hebrew University*), the reader learns that Goldziher's impact on the Hebrew University, established between 1918 and 1925, went beyond his famous library collection, which became the foundation for the university's Oriental Department. Goldziher also directly shaped the institution's early development, as is attested by the letter he wrote in 1919, providing proposals for the curricula for the university at the request of its founders. This letter proposed creating five unique departments: Semitic Religions, Oriental Languages, Archaeology specific to the Holy Land, Jewish History, and Jewish Literature. Levy investigates Goldziher's rationale for these departments, the potential challenges of his proposals, and their lasting influence. Levy also shows how scholars inspired by Goldziher's work on Arabic and Islamic studies continued his legacy for years by translating his writings into Hebrew.

Dóra Pataricza and Máté Hidvégi analyse a postcard exchange with Immanuel Löw (On *The Kiss: An Early Piece of Correspondence between Ignaz Goldziher and Immanuel Löw*). Goldziher's postal message brings information concerning the genesis of Löw's (1854-1944) important work on folklore. Löw, a close friend and Hungarian prominent rabbi, was a major figure in the progressive Jewish movement. The article meticulously put into context both

Lów's work and Goldziher's own research (specifically, his studies on the Zāhirite school of Islamic law) during the summer of 1882, when Lów sent a copy of *A csók* [The Kiss].

Christoph Rauch's article (*A Complicated Relationship: Carlo Landberg's Friendship with Ignaz Goldziher—Between Ambition and Anti-Semitism*) sheds new light on the life and work of Carlo Landberg (1848–1924), a Swedish scholar of Arabic dialects. Using their correspondence, the author follows the milestones of Landberg's long and rich career, along the lines of his friendship with Goldziher, their connection that began in Damascus in 1872. The story ends with a postcard Landberg sent in 1921, mentioning the publication of a major work – the *Glossaire daïnois* – which Goldziher had urged him to complete.

The essay of Valentina Sagaria Rossi (*Arabicae Investigationes in the Correspondence between Carlo Alfonso Nallino and Ignaz Goldziher, 1893 through 1920*) explores a previously neglected part of Goldziher's correspondence: namely that exchanged with Carlo A. Nallino (1872–1938), a leading figure in Italian Arabic studies. Their previously unpublished correspondence forms the basis of this study, including Goldziher's letters to him which have also been preserved. The paper delves deeply into the ways their ideas aligned or diverged, throughout a relatively short and yet so transformative period in the history of Italy which culminated, only a few months before Goldziher's death, with the establishment of the *Istituto per l'Oriente* in Rome by Nallino.

Sabine Schmidtke's *Ignaz Goldziher, Walter Gottschalk, and the Kitāb al-Aymān by Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd Allāh al-Najīramī* is dedicated to the letters exchanged with Walter Gottschalk (1891–1974). The correspondence covers both the period before and after World War I, and centers on a specific text: *Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd Allāh al-Najīramī's (10th century) Kitāb al-Aymān*. The paper also explores Gottschalk's path after the war, then looks back to his time as a librarian at the Berlin State Library and his forced departure from Germany in 1935.

Jan Thiele's *Publishing Ibn Tūmart's 'Book' in Colonial Algeria* draws on the letters received by Ignaz Goldziher between 1901 and 1903, while he was working on a lengthy introduction for a critical edition of political and religious writings attributed to the founder of the Almohad Empire. The editor of this project, published in 1903 in Algiers, was the French scholar Jean-Dominique Luciani. The paper analyses their correspondence, along with letters from two other French Orientalists involved in the translation process. These documents reveal how much authority Goldziher held as an expert on Almohad history; and showcase the productive collaboration and ultimate success of this international academic project in the early 20th century.

The chapter written by Samuel Thorpe (*The Goldziher Collection at the National Library of Israel*) explores how the vast collection of books, journals, and manuscripts that belonged to Goldziher came to be in the possession of the Zionist Organization, becoming a foundational resource for the newly established Hebrew University library, through the tireless efforts of Israel Cohen, the Zionist Organization's leader in London.

The paper of Tamás Turán (*Goldziher and Jewish Scholarship in Light of His Correspondence with Immanuel Löw and Michael Guttman*) examines how Goldziher influenced both Imma-

nuel Löw's (mentioned earlier) and the Hungarian rabbi Michael Guttmann's (1872–1942) work, and how they influence him, as far as comparative Semitic philology, and Jewish religious and folklore parallels to Islam are concerned.

In his contribution (*Friend, Teacher, "Shaykh": Goldziher and the Founders of Islamic Studies in St. Petersburg*), Maxim Yosefi focuses on the intellectual and personal bonds with groundbreaking Islamic scholars in St. Petersburg: Baron Viktor von Rosen (1849–1908), Alexander von Schmidt (1871–1939), and Ignaty Kratchkovsky (1883–1951). The analysis is further enriched by the memories of their colleagues and students. This two-pronged approach reveals the Goldziher's substantial impact on building Islamic studies in Russia, and the support he received from St. Petersburg, where connections were made with the wider framework of the Western European scholarships.

Last but not least, Dora Zsom's study (*Goldziher as a Master: The Correspondence of Ignaz Goldziher and Martin Schreiner*) explores the surprising dynamic with his prominent student, Martin Schreiner (1863–1926). This essay contributes to Goldziher's scholarly biography by delving into the psychological factors that shaped his mentorship, particularly Schreiner's harsh attacks, and Goldziher's patience and forgiveness. This seems to contradict Goldziher's diary entries, which portray him as easily offended and quick to anger with colleagues. Schreiner, in turn, shows himself as a loyal dissenter, expressing constant even excessive admiration.

The volume builds upon the statement that Goldziher's letters provide the most important source material for the development of Arabic, Jewish, and Islamic studies, as well as related fields, during his era, and stated that the bulk of the collection has remained unstudied. The volume constitutes a significant step towards filling the gap. The volume is not homogeneous, due to the variety of the material the contributors studied. Some of the papers offer an outline and analysis of letters, such as those of Adang, Dévényi, Levy; some are not based on the correspondence, instead, present results of research pertinent to Goldziher's legacy, such as Holtzman and Ovadia's contribution; some even cite passages from letters and then provide an analysis, such as Pataricza and Hídvégi's as well as Rauch's, Zsom's and Yosefi's articles; Rossi, Schmidtke, and Thiele even published the entire correspondence they examined; Thrope, when presenting a topic pertaining to the volume, relied on archival material which is not Goldziher's correspondence; Turán's analysis of the correspondences provides a thematic outline, as well as the publication of a letter in the Appendix.

The book significantly contributes to the main discussion of "building bridges". The contributors sketch a bird's eye view of Goldziher's time and, as a result, attest to the existence of a vibrant European and even global scientific community, a large academic network engaged in a continuous exchange of information, and united by a shared intellectual pursuit. It is noteworthy that Goldziher's life and, thus, his correspondence ended at the juncture preceding the progressive fragmentation of this scientific community. The intellectual cohesion began to erode notably in the aftermath of World War II, ultimately culminating in the Cold War escalation.

The volume, as it has been implied above, is of interest for anyone who works in Arabic, Islamic and Jewish studies or their cognate fields. For the readers of the *Ephemeris*, the multifaceted and textured depiction of the oeuvre of a scholar of Hungarian origin, his ability to keep up an international and a national network, the valorisation of his *Nachlass* preserved at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, as well as the clear guide that shows what parts of the correspondence have not been studied yet, i.e. indicating possible directions of future research, are highly appreciated and inspiring.