

Librarianship, bibliography, and two pioneers of the study of the Jews of Islam

Dear Friends,

On behalf of Heather Bleaney, Pablo García Suárez and myself, I would like to express our deepest gratitude to the Association of Jewish Librarians for this award and to the generous donors who have made it possible. We would also like to express our gratitude to Brill publishers for giving us the wonderful opportunity to carry out this project and being so understanding with our many requests and constant re-scheduling of our initial time plan.

I was commissioned by Brill publishers to coordinate the compilation of this bibliography in 2007 and, from then until its publication, at the beginning of 2010, a permanent group of three editors, with the occasional help of two collaborators in the Hebrew section, have devoted a significant part of our time and efforts to the completion of this project.

Although we were able to draw on the bibliographical data already existing in different databases, notably the Index Islamicus, but also Rambi and others, it soon became clear to us

that the task ahead was enormous for several reasons. In the first place, the existing information had to be revised and completed since many interdisciplinary items were missing for being "too Jewish" or "too Islamic". Furthermore, the evolution of the field, the different methodological approaches and, especially, the different terminology used in the different fields of study made it necessary to annotate and clarify the existing content of the records in order to produce a coherent classified and indexed bibliography. To give but one example, the series of articles entitled "Mélanges judéo-arabes" by the renowned Hungarian scholar Ignaz Goldziher have little to do with what we nowadays refer to as Judeo-Arabic, that is, the Jewish language and literature of the Jews of the Arabic lands. Rather, these works dealt mostly with historical aspects of Jewish life under Islam in the Middle Ages. On the contrary, nineteenth-century scholars simply referred to all Judeo-Arabic literature as Arabic literature of the Jews, making it difficult for the modern scholar to retrieve in modern databases and studies of this specific field.

Researching the foundational stages of Jewish-Islamic studies in the early nineteenth century acquainted us with the profound development of the field. Furthermore, it brought us to the work of illustrious scholars such as Salomon Munk and Moritz

Steinschneider. It is these prolific intellectuals who have aroused our deepest admiration. The scope of their academic work that we might label Oriental studies, showed their expertise in various Semitic and non-Semitic languages and their deep knowledge of the history and culture of the Middle East. These scholars produced an impressive number of contributions under sometimes the most difficult circumstances. The prohibition against Jews working in Prussian universities made Salomon Munk migrate to France and start from scratch a career as Librarian of Oriental collections at the Royal Library in Paris. After years of reading manuscripts, Munk went blind, a fact which did not prevent him from contributing to the field of Jewish-Islamic studies with numerous publications until his death 17 years later, in 1867.

As for Moritz Steinschneider, his more than 1400 publications including major Judaica and Arabica reference works and catalogues, might lead us to think that he enjoyed a successful or easy professional career. Far from that, Steinschneider endured harsh financial circumstances for most of his life due to fact that he could not get a lectureship or a librarianship in any of the numerous German institutions in which he applied for jobs. And when he finally got a permanent position in a modest Jewish college he had to take other jobs to make ends meet.

The quality and breadth of the work of these two pioneers of the study of our field and their unshakeable academic vocation, cannot but elicit our admiration. For this reason, I would like to dedicate this award today to a librarian - Salomon Munk - and a bibliographer - Moritz Steinschneider - of nineteenth-century Central Europe, who can arguably be considered the founders of the scientific study of the Jews of Islam.

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