

Preface

In their original formulations and settings, religious and scholarly traditions often have local backgrounds, determinants, and colors. In his works Goldziher extensively discussed the merits accorded in early Islam to travelling, even to remote places, in search of traditions and “rescuing” them.¹ According to Talmudic tradition, when R. Yohanan, the great third-century rabbi in the Holy Land, happened to be in Parod, he did not miss the opportunity to inquire about traditions transmitted by Bar Qappara, a local sage of a previous generation. Fruits do not fall far from the tree; if anyone, fellow townsmen are supposed to preserve those local traditions.²

Apples from the trees of Judaic and Islamic knowledge, planted and cultivated by Ignaz Goldziher and his contemporaries in Hungary, rolled far and wide—and this is why traveling back to find these trees, or at least their trunks or roots, may be interesting. This was my purpose when I started this research, upon realizing that there is much to correct, nuance and add to what is known about the Hungarian, Jewish, and Hungarian Jewish contexts and roots of Goldziher’s life and work.

I had the privilege to learn from great scholars from all walks of Jewish and academic life in Hungary and elsewhere, who grew out of the same Hungarian soil. Born two, three, or four generations after Goldziher, they still faced historical, religious, and academic predicaments which were in many respects similar to those he had to cope with. The interplay between religious “habitus” and academic ethos in their careers still produced patterns that are not unlike those that we know from Goldziher’s world.

I wish to dedicate this book to the memory of one of them, my father, Pál Turán, יוסף בן דב ז"ל.

The idea for this book originates from a conference presentation given in 2012, and it is an outgrowth of a paper published in the conference volume.³ The book largely follows the structure of the paper and expands upon its central themes and theses. When I started working on this book (in late 2020) I hoped it would be published in 2021, on the centenary of Goldziher’s death, to be laid as a pebble on his gravestone. This could not happen, but gravestones wait patiently.

1 *Jelentés a M. T. Akadémia könyvtára számára keletről hozott könyvekről*, 79 (Mestyan, “Ignác Goldziher’s Report on the Books,” 461); “Muhammedán utazókról,” 120–121; *Muh. St.*, II, 175–186.

2 bAvoda zarah 31a, R. Yohanan interpreting Kohelet 11:3.

3 On the conference, see Turán and Wilke, “Wissenschaft des Judentums in Hungary,” 31.

