Bernhard Maier. *Semitic Studies in Victorian Britain. A portrait of William Wright and his world through his letters.* Arbeitsmaterialien zum Orient 26. Würzburg: Ergon, 2011. 378 pp; €42.00.

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Several days ago a conscientious friend with whom I have talked on occasion of the delight and even necessity of knowing as much as we can about the lives of our intellectual forbears pointed out to me the appearance of a new book he had just learned of. With the excitement of a finally fulfilled wish I laid eyes on the title above. I immediately searched for the book and purchased it. The price is modest at around €50.00, and, having read it, I can easily declare that it will be worth much more to those who follow in William Wright's footsteps in Arabic or Syriac studies.

While most readers of this journal undoubtedly know Wright's justified stature, a little setting is not out of place for those who do not. In the study of Syriac, Arabic, Gəʿəz, and comparative Semitic linguistics, Wright's name is well-known. For Syriac scholars, the only likely contenders for a capstone of earlier generations other than Wright are Joseph Simon Assemani (1687-1768) and Wright's contemporary Theodor Nöldeke. But, as is clear from his letters, Syriac was certainly side-work for him (not unlike for Nöldeke): Arabic grammar and poetry he felt to be his real calling and occupation. And so, in Arabic, too, he remains a chief resource. What serious student or scholar of classical Arabic does not have Wright's grammar on the shelf? Finally, in comparative Semitics, there are his *Lectures on the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages*, published posthumously based on his notes. There have naturally been sweeps of advancement in linguistics both generally and in Semitics since Wright wrote and taught, but a student in 2011 could still do far worse than to know by heart what Wright said and to follow his example by knowing lots of texts in the concerned languages well, and then make his or her own deductions from that, and as Wright himself never seems to have shied away from admitting his ignorance or from getting the opinions of his fellow scholars, there is yet more of a good example for today's scholars and students both.

Now to the book. The author is a professor of religion at Tübingen, and he has also published a biography of Wright's younger colleague William Robertson Smith. This newer volume

consists of a biographical part of about 100 pages, followed by a reasonably sized selection of letters that Wright wrote, which runs to about 250 pages. There are numerous footnotes throughout both the biographical part and the epistolary part, and the book concludes with a list of the sources the author used (i.e. a succinct catalog of the letters and their whereabouts), a bibliography of Wright's works, an index, five pages of photographs of Wright's contemporaries and correspondents (including one of Wright himself, whose picture also graces the book's cover), and a facsimile of one of the published letters. The inclusion of these photographs would certainly have pleased Wright himself, in whose letters we find him mentioning the inclusion of his own photographs or requesting photographs from his letter recipients. The facsimile of the letter makes us grateful for Maier's work in transcribing Wright's hand; while one can get used to almost any script, Wright's is not always immediately patent! A different or additional letter facsimile, however, one showing Wright's Arabic or Syriac script, would have been welcome. Based on use over a couple of weeks' use and perusal, the book seems physically well put together, and the typography is not bad, although the Arabic type is unlikely to beckon anyone to a new admiration of calligraphic beauty. The greatest detriment to this publication is the great number of typographical errors. There is little evidence that the book was proofread much before going to press. I will not list all of those errors that I found and marked, but suffice it to say that they are much too plentiful. These errors are mostly in the English portions (the bulk of the book, of course), but the few bits of Syriac, mostly just in reference to Payne Smith's progress on the *Thesaurus Syriacus*, are sometimes incorrect, too.

By my count based on Maier's list of sources, in addition to fifteen previously published letters to Moritz Steinschneider, he made use of 824 letters written by Wright, which are now scattered about in various places. Of these 824, Maier has here published 214, mostly in full, but some with omissions (on which more below). What of the content of the letters themselves? Happily, other scholars, languages, manuscripts, and editions of texts occupy the bulk of what is presented. But there is more. There are references to the weather, traffic, and other items of daily life, not to mention the requisite Victorian penchant for frequently mentioning one's illnesses and doubting whether one is ever long

for this world. (In Wright's case, this last characteristic proved unfortunately appropriate: he died only having reached age fifty-nine.) One aspect that is sometimes passed over in biographies and can become abundantly clear in letters is some details of everyday life. We learn in this collection, for example, that virtually all of the continental book purchases and gifts Wright received came to him through Williams & Norgate, a name well known to anyone who has used Wright's own published volumes. These non-scholarly items are not so great as to detract—for those interested in Wright's academic work—from the whole, and in fact they supply the necessary background for understanding how and in what environment Wright worked, whether studying manuscripts at the Bodleian, cataloging at the British Library, or teaching at Cambridge. We meet here many well-known names. In this particular collection, his most frequent correspondent by far is Heinrich Fleischer, especially earlier on in Wright's career, but others include Georg Hoffmann, de Goeje, Nöldeke, and de Lagarde. By mention, however, we encounter the names of virtually every orientalist at work at the time: *inter alia*, Rödiger, Dozy, Payne Smith, Field, Zotenberg, Socin, Rieu, Bensly, Loth, Aufrecht, Wüstenfeld, Goldziher, Dillmann, Praetorius, Tischendorf, Euting, Pertsch, and Max Müller. (As mentioned above, Maier gives an index.) To give an idea of the relative ages of Wright's chief correspondents, here are the dates of their lives and rough difference in age from Wright:

Wright	1830-1889	*Age difference from Wright*
de Goeje	1836-1909	-6
Hoffmann	1845-1933	-15
Fleischer	1801-1888	+29
Lagarde	1827-1891	+3
Nöldeke	1836-1930	-6
Pertsch	1832-1899	-2

While there are no letters to Payne Smith (1818-1895), Wright often mentions him, especially with respect to his own reading of the proofs to the *Thesaurus*. In addition to some of the scholars named above, Wright did collating or copying work for the

Bollandists, both for Gəʿəz and Syriac (see, e.g. p. 323). It seems that Wright wrote his letters exclusively in English, and his many German colleagues and friends wrote him in German.

There is unfortunately very little in his letters, or at least in this selection of them, that gives us an idea of how he learned and how he taught. The latter, in any case, he does not seem to have thought too highly of. There are two seeming reasons for this: lack of students and genuine interest in oriental studies, and because its administrative duties took away from research time. We learn, too, that Wright knew Arabic strictly as a literary language, apart from interaction with contemporary native speakers, although he envied the travels and linguistic interaction possible to some of his younger colleagues. (Cf. Franz Praetorius' knowledge of Amharic and Tigriña, which he gained without ever leaving Germany.)

Wright was very amiable with his colleagues, and this shows in the personal interest—that is, an interest beyond the academic and scholarly—he takes in them. He is found to be enquiring about their health, marriage, children, etc., and almost always including his good wishes for the future and the quick resolution of any difficulties. Especially notable are Wright's gifts of stamps to Nöldeke's sons Arnold and, later, Wilhelm, and to de Goeje's son Jan. His personal character shows through, of course, in directly scholarly ways, too: in his generosity with his time and expertise, his willingness to copy or collate manuscripts at his disposal, and even his willingness to loan his own copies of manuscripts to other "brother Orientalists." In these days of easily reproducible manuscript copies, whether from microfilm or as digital photographs, it is almost impossible for us to really grasp what such a copy would have been worth merely for the amount of labor and time spent in producing it. Wright also holds his colleagues accountable for their work and especially their scholarly manners: he does not shy away from calling someone an ass (at least in letters), when a scholar has shown himself to be one by slovenly scholarship, putting on airs, or rudeness. (I do not use gender neutral language in the last sentence because there is no evidence that Wright corresponded with any of the few female scholars then working in oriental studies; he did, however, on occasion exchange letters with Lagarde's wife.)

It should be pointed out that what is published here is not really correspondence, but only letters from Wright. While we can

get a very good picture of things just from Wright, not least because he often refers to what his correspondents had written, we would most naturally be better informed if we had more letters from those with whom Wright so frequently kept in touch. I have referred more than once to "this particular collection" of letters, and I said above that in this volume Fleischer appears as the recipient of the most letters from Wright, but Maier's data at the end of the book on the fuller surviving groups of letters shows that he actually wrote more to Nöldeke, and Maier's selection from the latter is rather disproportionate to the whole: 143 letters to Fleischer (77 published here) and 170 to Nöldeke (only 27 published here). No one would expect strict statistics to determine the inclusion or exclusion of letters from a larger corpus, but these numbers do seem too much out of balance. Is it possible that the criterion for inclusion centered rather heavily on there being little philological discussion in the letter? It is very likely that Wright would have engaged in this with Nöldeke, and Maier has clearly indicated some parts in the letters he did publish where there have been omissions, sometimes substantial, of philological discussion, both Syriac and Arabic (e.g. p. 195 n. 199, p. 304 n. 347). Perhaps some readers will be grateful for these omissions, but I cannot imagine their number to be high, especially among those who are prospective readers of a book dedicated to the life of someone like Wright.

I have only spoken about the second (and larger) part of the book, that on the letters. About the first hundred pages, in which Maier has given what is to my knowledge the longest treatment of Wright's life, and that based on studying over 800 letters that Wright penned, I will only say that it is a worthy read for anyone active in Syriac or Arabic studies and a very fitting introduction to the letters themselves published in this book. William Wright is an inspiration and an example to follow for his nobility, his honesty, his liberality, his kindness, his friendliness, and, not least, of course, his scholarship. I was delighted at the long belated appearance of a volume like this dedicated to Wright, and the author is to be heartily praised for finally being the one to carry out the labor. I relished the reading of it thoroughly; I only wish there had been even more letters published.