

## History of Islamic Studies at Harvard Timeline

### Home Page

The founders of Harvard College, “dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches,”<sup>1</sup> had long required students to study Hebrew for the purpose of Biblical studies.<sup>2</sup> Interest in Hebrew eventually extended to interest in Arabic, the most well-preserved Semitic language, for its utility in shedding light on Hebrew and to the ancient Near East as the “Bible lands.”<sup>3</sup> Interest in Islam as a religion and Muslim societies slowly began to develop in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century at Harvard and expanded tremendously with the development of area studies after World War II. From Biblical studies and Orientalism to postwar area studies to an interdisciplinary and global field, Islamic studies has evolved with Harvard over much of its long history and now reflects increasingly diverse interests, perspectives, and approaches.

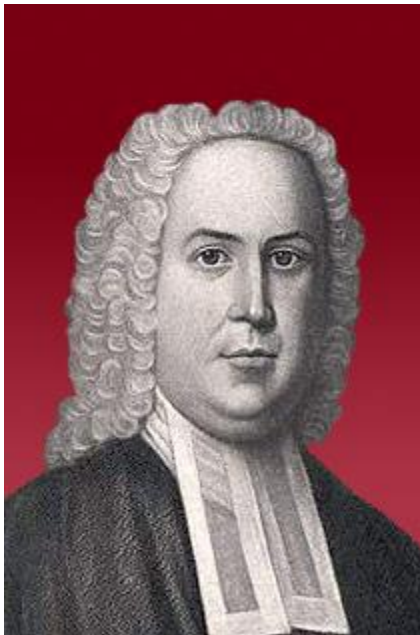


Image: Charles Chauncy <sup>4</sup>

### 1654-72 – Early Arabic instruction

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<sup>1</sup> “New Englands First Fruits,” 22.

<sup>2</sup> Lyon, “XIII. Semitic, 1880-1929,” 231.

<sup>3</sup> Lockman, *Field Notes.*, 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Charles Chauncy, President of Harvard University 1654-1672.*

According to Harvard historian Samuel Eliot Morison, Harvard’s first two presidents, Henry Dunster and Charles Chauncy, saw themselves as “primarily Orientalists” who studied and taught not only Hebrew, but also Aramaic, Arabic, and Ethiopic.<sup>5</sup> In his 1896 paper on “Semitic Studies in American Colleges,” Rabbi William Rosenau wrote that Arabic was added to the Semitic languages already being taught during the presidency of Chauncey (1654-1672).<sup>6</sup> This instruction was most likely from Chauncy himself, who had studied Arabic at University of Cambridge in England,<sup>7</sup> taught it to local ministers outside of Harvard,<sup>8</sup> and “boasted that he knew more Arabic than any other person in the American colonies.”<sup>9</sup> Since Chauncy’s presidency, Arabic may have been taught at Harvard occasionally as an adjunct to Hebrew but was only formally offered with Professor Crawford H. Toy’s appointment in 1880.<sup>10</sup>

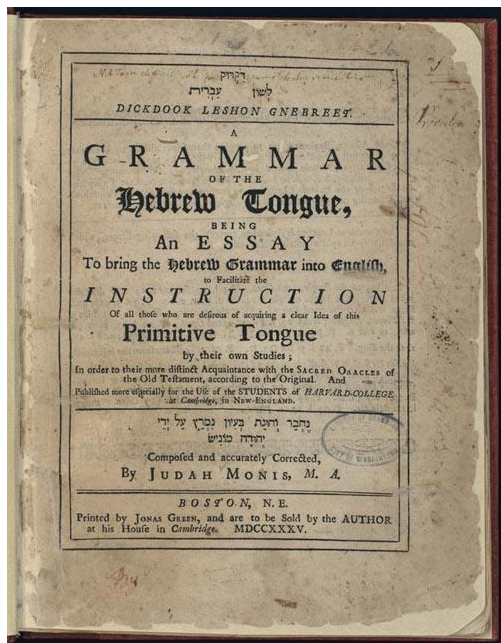


Image: *Grammar of the Hebrew Tongue* by Judah Monis

<sup>5</sup> Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue*.

<sup>6</sup> Rosenau, *Semitic Studies in American Colleges: A Paper Read Before the Central Conference of American Rabbis in Milwaukee, Wisc., July, 1896*.

<sup>7</sup> “Charles Chauncy.”

<sup>8</sup> Edwards, “Reasons for the Study of the Hebrew Language.” 115.

<sup>9</sup> Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Yamak, “Introduction The Middle Eastern Collections of the Harvard Library.”, vii.

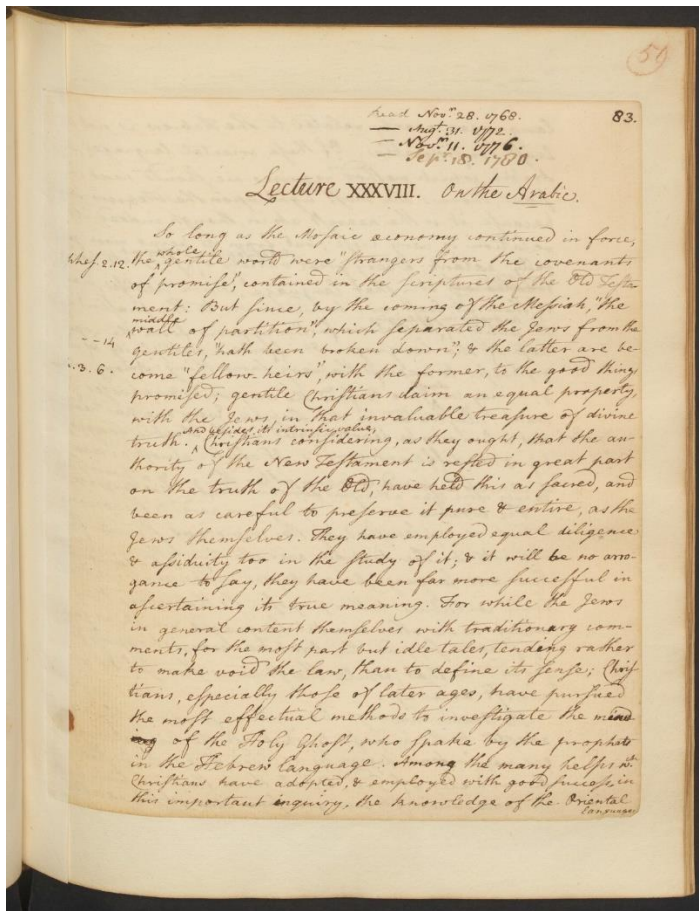
## 1765 – Hancock Professorship of Hebrew and Other Oriental Languages established

The Hancock Professorship of Hebrew and Other Oriental Languages was established in 1765, becoming the third oldest endowed chair at Harvard after the Hollis Professorship of Divinity and Hollis Professorship of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy. The statutes for the Professorship required that the professor be a Protestant, a Master of Arts, instruct students in the Oriental languages, especially Hebrew and Chaldee, give public lectures in the chapel once per week, and offer private instruction 2-3 hours per week to such of his pupils as should desire it “in the Samaritan, the Syriac, and the Arabic.”<sup>11</sup> The first instructor dedicated to teaching Hebrew at Harvard was Judah Monis, a Jewish rabbi who converted to Christianity who was said to be from “either Italy or one of the Barbary states,” and the first to hold the Hancock chair was Monis’s successor in Hebrew instruction, Stephen Sewall.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Peirce, *A History of Harvard University: From Its Foundation in the Year 1636 to the Period of the American Revolution*, Appendix 101-2.

<sup>12</sup> Peirce.



Harvard University, Harvard University Archives, HUG\_1782\_B06-METS

Image: Stephen Sewall's Lecture Notes<sup>13</sup>

## 1768 – Stephen Sewall delivers lectures on Arabic

Stephen Sewall, the first Hancock Professor, delivered lectures on Arabic as part of his lecture series on Oriental languages in which he discussed Arabic's alleged origin at the Tower of Babel, development, characteristics, and importance to the "Mahometans" due to its being the language of the "Alcoran."<sup>14</sup> Like his predecessors, Sewall viewed Arabic as a tool for Biblical exegesis. "Of the Oriental languages," he said, "the Arabic, which method requires we should next consider, throws the most light upon the Hebrew. Not because it is the nearest akin, though indeed its relation is very close, but from its being more generally extant, a very great variety of treatises on different subjects being written in that language, which treatises, many of them at least, are handed down to the present

<sup>13</sup> Sewall, "Professor Sewall's Lectures on the Hebrew and Oriental Languages."

<sup>14</sup> Sewall.

day.” Professor Sewall called it a “pity, not to say disgrace,” that Harvard was behind its peer institutions in Europe in the study of Arabic. Sewall himself taught Arabic through private instruction, as was required by the statutes of his professorship.<sup>15</sup>

[Read Stephen Sewall’s lecture notes]

Link :

[https://islamicstudies.harvard.edu/files/aisp/files/stephen\\_sewall\\_on\\_the\\_arabic.pdf?m=1606754594](https://islamicstudies.harvard.edu/files/aisp/files/stephen_sewall_on_the_arabic.pdf?m=1606754594)



Image: Crawford Howell Toy<sup>16</sup>

### **1880 – Crawford H. Toy joins Harvard faculty and teaches Arabic**

Crawford H. Toy was born in Virginia in 1836 and studied at the University of Virginia and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. After serving in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, Toy spent two years in Germany studying theology and Semitic languages at Berlin. He then became a professor of Old Testament interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary but

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<sup>15</sup> Edwards, “Reasons for the Study of the Hebrew Language,” 116.

<sup>16</sup> *Crawford Howell Toy*.

resigned due to his unwillingness to accept the doctrine of inspiration of the scriptures, which was insisted upon at that institution.<sup>17</sup> Professor Toy then joined Harvard Divinity School, at which “no assent to the peculiar doctrines or practices of any denomination of Christians” was required, as Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Other Oriental Languages and Dexter Lecturer on Biblical Literature.<sup>18</sup> In his first year at Harvard, Professor Toy taught Old Testament Hebrew and offered Arabic as an elective.<sup>19</sup>

### 1889-90 – Crawford H. Toy first to teach Islamic history

The division of “Semitic Languages” founded by Professor Toy was re-named “Semitic Languages and History” and his “History of the Spanish Caliphate” became the first course on Islamic history taught at Harvard.<sup>20</sup> This course and “Political and Literary History of the Bagdad Caliphate” were then offered in alternate years<sup>21</sup> and were both expanded over time to include topics such as the Qur’an, the history of Islam in India and Egypt, the Crusades through Muslim sources, the Barbary States, and Muslims in Sicily. Professor Toy’s Arabic offerings also expanded in subsequent years to include the study of Wright’s *Grammar*, *The Thousand and One Nights*, the Mu‘allaqāt, Mutanabbī, Ibn Khaldūn, and *Kitāb al-Aghānī*.

### 1889 – Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East founded

The Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East was founded in 1889 as the Harvard Semitic Museum by Assyriologist David Gordon Lyon, first Hollis Professor of Divinity and later Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Other Oriental Languages,<sup>22</sup> for teaching and research related to the ancient Near East. In the same year, Lyon’s mentor and friend, Crawford Toy, proposed the establishment of a Semitic Fund to purchase manuscripts and other materials in Hebrew, Arabic,

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<sup>17</sup> “Toy, Crawford Howell,” 621-22.

<sup>18</sup> Sever, “Harvard University Catalogue 1880-81,” 28.

<sup>19</sup> “Annual Reports of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College 1880-81,” 57.

<sup>20</sup> “Harvard University Announcement of Courses of Instruction 1889-90,” 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> “Harvard University Catalog 1890-91,” 56.

<sup>22</sup> Lyon, “XIII. Semitic, 1880-1929,” 231.

Syriac, and other Near Eastern languages for Harvard. A gift from Jacob H. Schiff, a Jewish investment banker and philanthropist from New York, made the establishment of the Semitic Fund and Museum possible.<sup>23</sup> Professor Lyon assembled the original collections between 1889 and 1929 when he travelled to the Ottoman lands of Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, and Jerusalem to purchase hundreds of ancient artifacts and manuscripts.<sup>24</sup> Although the Semitic Museum was established for the study of the Near East before Islam, its founding demonstrated Harvard's commitment to the study of the "Orient" and became a means for its first significant interactions with Muslim societies.

### **1911 - James Richard Jewett becomes first Professor of Arabic**

James Richard Jewett began pursuing Semitic studies at Harvard College, from which he graduated in 1884, and then continued in Germany and Syria. He received his Ph.D. at Strasbourg and then taught Semitic languages at Brown, Minnesota, and Chicago. In 1887, Professor Jewett returned to Harvard as Instructor in Semitic Languages and taught courses in Hebrew Bible, Arabic, and Ethiopic. In 1911, he was appointed Harvard's first Professor of Arabic.<sup>25</sup> Professor Jewett's Arabic courses included the study of Wright's *Grammar*, Socin's *Grammar*, selections from the Qur'an, hadith, and classical works on geography and history. He also taught Semitic 15 on the "Political and Social History of Mohammedanism till the End of the Crusades," later the "Political and Social History of the Mohammedans to the Conquest of Egypt by Selim I" and a research course on "Arabic Sources for the History of the Crusades."

### **1902 - George Foote Moore teaches Islam in History of Religions**

George Foote Moore was born in Pennsylvania in 1851 and studied at Yale University and Union Theological Seminary before joining the Presbyterian ministry. He began his teaching career at Andover Theological Seminary before joining the Harvard faculty.<sup>26</sup> Starting in 1902, Professor Moore taught a course

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<sup>23</sup> Parsons, *Crawford Howell Toy*, 205-7

<sup>24</sup> Greene, "A Complicated Legacy: The Original Collections of the Semitic Museum," 61.

<sup>25</sup> Lyon, "XIII. Semitic, 1880-1929," 235.

<sup>26</sup> "George Foot Moore."

under the new heading of “History of Religions” that included the religions of Japan, China, Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, the Western Semites (including Judaism and Mohammedanism), India, Persia, the Greeks, the Romans, the Germans, the Celts, and Christianity. He later also taught courses focused on Islam that covered the topics of the life of Muhammad, the Qur’an, the Muslim conquests, and Islamic law and theology. The second volume of his two-volume work, *History of Religions* (1919), is devoted to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.<sup>27</sup> Professor Moore also had an interest in the “history of Mohammedan heresies” and presented a paper on Babism and Bahaim at the American Oriental Society while he was its president.<sup>28</sup>

### 1929 – William Thomson and Islamic intellectual history

William Thomson earned his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1924. He began his career at Harvard as Associate Professor of Arabic<sup>29</sup> and saw the further expansion of the study of Islam into history. His course, Semitic 15, “The Political and Social History of the Mohammedans to the Conquest of Egypt by Selim I” which he first co-taught with Professor Jewett, was cross-listed as History 50 in 1932. In 1934, he taught “The Political and Social History of Moslems to the Decline of the Abbasid Caliphate (c. 950 A.D.),” also as History 50. His course on “Moslem Religion and Literature” began as Semitic 10 and was later cross-listed as History of Religions 8. Professor Thomson also taught Islamic intellectual history with courses on “The History of Moslem Religious Thought from Mohammed to Al-Ghazali,” “The Development of Moslem Orthodoxy,” and “The Development of Moslem Sects.” His publications included articles on “The Early Muslim Sects” (1937), “The Concept of Human Destiny in Islam” (1945), and “An Introduction to the History of Sufism” (1945).<sup>30</sup> Professor Thomson became Harvard’s first James Richard Jewett Professor of Arabic.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Barton, “A Great Book on Three Great Religions, History of Religions II,” 425-7.

<sup>28</sup> “The American Oriental Society,” 329.

<sup>29</sup> Lyon, “XIII. Semitic, 1880-1929,” 235.

<sup>30</sup> “Harvard Divinity School Faculty Writings File: BMS 13001/Thomson: Writings of William Thomson.”

<sup>31</sup> Lockman, *Field Notes*, 16.

### **1936 - James Richard Jewett Professorship of Arabic established**

The James Richard Jewett Professorship of Arabic was established through a gift from Professor Jewett's wife, Margaret Weyerhaeuser Jewett, and was the first chair of Arabic established at an American university.<sup>32</sup> The chair has since been held by William Thomson, Sir Hamilton Gibb, Muhsin Mahdi, Wolfhart Heinrichs, and Khaled El-Rouayheb. Professor Jewett's gift to the Harvard College Library also established a fund for the purchase of Arabic books and books relating to "Moslem religion and history."<sup>33</sup>

### **1949 – Richard Frye first to teach Iranian languages**

Richard Frye, "dean of the world's Iranists," was born in 1920 in Birmingham, Alabama and earned his B.A. at University of Illinois and Ph.D. at Harvard. He held posts at Columbia, in Germany, and in Iran and spent four years serving in the Secret Intelligence branch of the Coordinator of Information, the wartime agency preceding the CIA. Professor Frye's expertise spanned from ancient to contemporary Iranian studies and he was called "Iran dust," meaning "friend of Iran," by an Iranian linguist for his love of all things Iranian.<sup>34</sup> His courses included Old Persian, Middle Persian, Modern Persian, Sogdian, Pahlavi, Old Turkish, "Iranian Languages and Literatures to Firdosi," and "Iranian Religions." In 1957, he became Harvard's first Aga Khan Professor of Iranian<sup>35</sup> and was one of the founders of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. He published over 20 books and 150 articles including *The Heritage of Persia* (1962) and "The Charisma of Kingship in Ancient Iran" (1964).<sup>36</sup> Among his notable students is Roy Mottahedeh, Gurney Research Professor of History.

### **1954 – Center for Middle Eastern Studies founded**

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) at Harvard was originally founded to "counter the Soviet threat in the Middle East" and "to train selected men for

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<sup>32</sup> Yamak, "Introduction The Middle Eastern Collections of the Harvard Library," vii.

<sup>33</sup> "Harvard College Library Funds: James Richard Jewett Fund."

<sup>34</sup> Giudicessi, "Professor Richard N. Frye Dies at 94."

<sup>35</sup> "Frye Chosen First Iranian Professor."

<sup>36</sup> Giudicessi, "Professor Richard N. Frye Dies at 94."

service in private industry and in government,” according to the proposal by the Committee on International and Regional Studies.<sup>37</sup> Its first director was William Langer who, although primarily a scholar of modern European and diplomatic history, had been teaching courses on the modern Middle East<sup>38</sup> since 1935. CMES saw tremendous growth from 1957 to 1964 under the leadership of Sir Hamilton Gibb, who secured significant funding for the Center, especially from the Ford and Rockefeller foundations. In the 1990s, Director William A. Graham expanded the mission of CMES to encompass the broader Islamic world and, along with Professor Roy Mottahedeh, led an Islamic Studies Committee.<sup>39</sup> After the establishment of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Islamic Studies Program in 2005, CMES returned to its original focus on the Middle East.<sup>40</sup>

### **1955 - Sir Hamilton Gibb bolsters Islamic studies and advocates an interdisciplinary approach**

Sir Hamilton Gibb resigned from his position as Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford and became Jewett Professor of Arabic and University Professor at Harvard in 1955.<sup>41</sup> During his time at Harvard, Professor Gibb drew many students and faculty to the university including George Makdisi, George Kirk, and Albert Julius Meyer. Professor Gibb sought to move beyond the rigid Orientalist approach of European scholarship and embrace a more interdisciplinary one to create an “academic amphibian” who could be at home in different academic environments while remaining grounded in classical training, with philology and history at its core.<sup>42</sup> In February 1964, Professor Gibb tragically suffered a stroke, causing a leadership void in CMES for many years.<sup>43</sup> His publications include *The Arab Conquests in Central Asia* (1923), “The Islamic Background of Ibn Khaldūn’s Political Theory” (1933), *Modern Trends in Islam* (1945), *Mohammedanism* (1949), and *The Life of Saladin: From the Works of Baha' Ad-Din and 'Imad Ad-Din* (1973).

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<sup>37</sup> Babai, *Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University Reflections on the Past, Visions for the Future*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Kann, “Historian Langer Enters Retirement After 37 Years On Harvard Faculty.”

<sup>39</sup> Babai, *Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University Reflections on the Past, Visions for the Future*, 27.

<sup>40</sup> “History.”

<sup>41</sup> Babai, *Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University Reflections on the Past, Visions for the Future*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Babai, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Babai, 11-12.

Among his notable students is Roy Mottahedeh, Gurney Research Professor of History.

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/user-775598562-582960913/prof-roy-mottahedeh-sir-hamilton-gibb-preeminent-arabist-and-islamicist>

### 1959 – George Makdisi teaches Arabic and Islamic history

George Makdisi was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1920 and studied at the University of Michigan and Georgetown University before earning his Ph.D. at the University of Paris at Sorbonne in 1964.<sup>44</sup> From 1959 to 1973, he served on the Harvard faculty in the Department of Semitic Languages and History which became the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, first as a lecturer and eventually as a full professor, and taught courses including “Arabic Poetry,” “Arabic Grammar and Grammarians,” “Islamic Historiography,” and “Islamic Religion and Law.” Professor Makdisi was the preeminent Arabist and Islamicist at Harvard after Professor Gibb and was a specialist in Islamic history whose publications include *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (1981), *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West* (1990), and *Ibn ‘Aqil: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam* (1997). In 1973, he left Harvard for the University of Pennsylvania where he served as Professor of Arabic until his retirement in 1990.<sup>45</sup>

### 1964 – Wilfred Cantwell Smith teaches global, comparative Islamic studies

Wilfred Smith was born in 1916 in Toronto, Canada. After he studied Oriental Languages at the University of Toronto and pursued graduate studies in Cambridge, England under the supervision of Sir Hamilton Gibb, Professor Smith and his wife, Muriel, spent five years with the Canadian Overseas Mission Council in Lahore, India where he taught Islamic and Indian history. Professor Smith was appointed the first Birks Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill and became the founding director of McGill’s Institute of Islamic Studies in 1951. In 1964, he joined Harvard Divinity School where he and Muriel developed the Center for the

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<sup>44</sup> “George Makdisi, May 15, 1920 - September 6, 2002 Media, Pennsylvania.”

<sup>45</sup> “George Makdisi, May 15, 1920 - September 6, 2002 Media, Pennsylvania.”

Study of World Religions and he built the Comparative Religion and Study of Religion programs.<sup>46</sup> Among his publications are *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis* (1946), *Islam in Modern History* (1957), and *Believing: An Historical Perspective* (1998). His colleagues remember him for his critiques of Orientalism and area studies,<sup>47</sup> as “one of the last puritans,” and for his commitment to taking people of all faiths and cultures equally seriously.<sup>48</sup> Among his notable students is William A. Graham, Murray A. Albertson Research Professor of Middle Eastern Studies and Harvard University Distinguished Service Professor.

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/user-775598562-582960913/prof-william-graham-wilfred-cantwell-smith-and-global-islamic-studies?in=user-775598562-582960913/sets/islamic-studies-at-harvard>

### **1967 – Annemarie Schimmel teaches the Islamic mystical tradition and literature**

Annemarie Schimmel was born in 1922 in Erfurt, Germany. She was introduced to the divan of Jalaluddin Rumi as a student at the University of Berlin and began a lifelong journey scholarship in the Islamic mystical tradition. She earned her first doctorate in 1941 at the age of 19. After earning her second doctorate at Marburg in 1951, she became History of Religion chair at Ankara University in Turkey. In 1967, Professor Schimmel accepted Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s invitation to come to Harvard.<sup>49</sup> She taught only in the spring term, usually spending the fall in Pakistan. Her courses included “Islamic Calligraphy,” “Ghalib’s Persian Poetry in the Context of the Indian Style” and “Maulana Rumi and his Influence on East and West” and among her publications are *My Soul is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam* (1997), *Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art, and Culture* (2004), and *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (2011). Her notable students include Ali Asani, Harvard’s current Professor of Indo-Muslim Culture, and Wheeler Thackston, Professor of the Practice of Persian *Emeritus*.

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<sup>46</sup> Graham et al., “Wilfred Cantwell Smith, In Memoriam.”

<sup>47</sup> Graham, Mottahedeh, and Asani, *AISP Directors Interview*.

<sup>48</sup> Graham et al., “Wilfred Cantwell Smith, In Memoriam.”

<sup>49</sup> Asani et al., “Annemarie Schimmel, Faculty of Arts and Sciences - Memorial Minute.”

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/user-775598562-582960913/prof-ali-asani-first-class-with-annemarie-schimmel?in=user-775598562-582960913/sets/islamic-studies-at-harvard>

### 1969 – Muhsin Mahdi teaches Arabic philosophy

Muhsin Mahdi, one of the world's leading experts in Arabic history, philology, and philosophy, was born in Karbala, Iraq in 1926. After earning his B.A. from the American University in Beirut and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, he taught at the University of Baghdad and the University of Chicago. Professor Mahdi then came to Harvard as Jewett Professor of Arabic and served as director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations.<sup>50</sup> He taught courses including "Arabic Philosophic Texts," "Sources, Methods, and Problems in Islamic Intellectual History," and "Medieval Arabic Political Philosophy." He also helped to institute and teach Foreign Cultures 14, a core curriculum course aimed at helping students understand the economic and cultural foundations of current political problems, with a focus on the Middle East.<sup>51</sup> Professor Mahdi is especially known for his work on the philosopher al-Fārābī, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History* (1957), and his critical edition of *One Thousand and One Nights* (1995).<sup>52</sup> Among his notable students is Professor *Emeritus* William A. Graham.

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/user-775598562-582960913/prof-william-graham-muhsin-mahdi>

### 1969 – Oleg Grabar first to teach history of Islamic art and architecture

Born in Strasbourg, France in 1929, Professor Grabar earned his A.B. at Harvard in Medieval History and his Ph.D. at Princeton in Oriental Languages and Literatures and the History of Art. In 1969, he joined the Harvard faculty as Professor of Fine Arts and became the first to teach history of Islamic art and architecture at

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<sup>50</sup> Graham et al., "Muhsin Mahdi, Faculty of Arts and Sciences - Memorial Minute."

<sup>51</sup> Early, "Twelve FAS Faculty Members to Retire."

<sup>52</sup> Graham et al., "Muhsin Mahdi, Faculty of Arts and Sciences - Memorial Minute."

Harvard.<sup>53</sup> His expertise, however, included the peoples, history, and culture of Muslim societies more broadly. Professor Grabar taught courses such as “Medieval Islamic Art (1000-1300)” and “Studies in Islamic Decorative Art” and is remembered for his “flamboyant, exciting, and always substantive” lectures and ability to make Islamic art and architecture appealing to non-specialists. His publications include *The Formation of Islamic Art* (1973), *The Illustrations of the Maqamat* (1984), *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem* (1996). Professor Grabar played an instrumental role in the founding of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture in 1979 and became the first Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art in 1980.<sup>54</sup> His student, Gülru Necipoğlu, is Harvard’s current Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art.

### 1972 – Abdelhamid Sabra first to teach history of Arabic science

Abdelhamid Sabra was born in Tanta, Egypt in 1924 and studied philosophy at the nascent Alexandria University. In 1950, the Egyptian government sent him to the London School of Economics where he earned a doctorate in the Philosophy of Science under Karl Popper and wrote a dissertation on the “Theories of Light from Descartes to Newton.” Sabra then taught at Alexandria University and the Warburg Institute in London. In 1972, he accepted an offer to join the History of Science Department at Harvard, where he remained until his retirement in 1996<sup>55</sup> and taught courses such as “Arabic Scientific Texts,” “Islam and Scientific Thought,” and “The Reception of Greek Thought in Islam.” Professor Sabra is best known for his contributions to the study of medieval Arabic science, especially *The Optics of Ibn al-Haytham* (1989), a critical edition, English translation, and commentary of *Kitāb al-Manāẓir*. In 2005 he was awarded the George Sarton Medal for lifetime achievement by the History of Science Society and a prize by the Kuwait Science Foundation.<sup>56</sup>

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/user-775598562-582960913/prof-william-graham-abdelhamid-sabras-expertise-in-history-of-science-and-kalam>

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<sup>53</sup> Necipoğlu et al., “Oleg Grabar, Faculty of Arts and Sciences - Memorial Minute.”

<sup>54</sup> Necipoğlu et al.

<sup>55</sup> “A. I. Sabra (1924-2013).”

<sup>56</sup> “A. I. Sabra (1924-2013).”

### 1972 – Wheeler Thackston brings expertise in Persian studies

Wheeler Thackston earned his bachelor's degree at Princeton in Oriental Languages and Literatures and his Ph.D. at Harvard in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures under the supervision of Annemarie Schimmel. From 1972 until his retirement in 2007, Professor Thackston taught as Professor of the Practice of Persian at Harvard in the same department.<sup>57</sup> He taught courses such as “The Qur'an,” and “Selected Readings in Classical Persian Literature” and is known for his passion for languages, especially Persian, that extended not only into the classroom at Harvard but also to teaching at his home. He is known for his Persian and Classical and Qur'anic Arabic grammars and his translations of Saadi's *Gulistan* (2008), the *Baburnama* (1996), and the *Jahangirnama* (1999). Professor Thackston has also produced manuals or editions of texts in Levantine Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Syriac, Uzbek, Luri, and Kurdish.<sup>58</sup>

### 1973 – William Graham advocates for Islamic studies across faculties

After receiving his B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Ph.D. from Harvard, Professor Graham joined the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard in 1973 and later the Faculty of Divinity in 2002. His scholarship has focused on early Islamic religious history and textual traditions, especially Qur'an and hadith, and on the global history of religion. In addition to his teaching, Professor Graham held the positions of Dean of Harvard Divinity School, director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, master of Currier House, chair of the department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, chair of the Committee on the Study of Religion, chair of the Core Curriculum Committee on Foreign Cultures, and director of the Alwaleed Bin Talal Islamic Studies Program. Among his many publications are *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam* (1977), which was awarded the American Council of Learned Societies History of Religions Prize in 1978, and *Islamic and Comparative Religious Studies* (2010).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> “Wheeler Thackston.”

<sup>58</sup> “Wheeler Thackston.”

<sup>59</sup> “William Graham.”

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/user-775598562-582960913/prof-william-graham-islam-in-the-broader-university-curriculum>

### 1978 – Wolfhart Heinrichs brings expertise in Arabic studies

Wolfhart Heinrichs was born in Cologne, Germany in 1941 and studied Semitic languages, Arabic, and Islamic studies at Cologne, Frankfurt, London, and Giessen. He joined the Harvard faculty in 1978 and held the James Richard Jewett Chair of Arabic in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. Among his many accomplishments was working with Fuat Sezgin in Frankfurt to produce the first *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (1967) and serving as co-editor of the major second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, for which he wrote 50 entries.<sup>60</sup> His courses included “History of the Arabic Language,” and “Medieval Arabic Writings on Grammar and Literary Theory.” In addition to an internationally-renowned Arabist, Professor Heinrichs was a beloved teacher and colleague. His untimely death in 2014 after a brief hospitalization only months before his planned retirement was mourned by the generation of Arabists and Islamicists that he trained and colleagues around the world.<sup>61</sup>

### 1979 – Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture and Professorship of Islamic Art established

The Aga Khan Programs for Islamic Architecture (AKPIA) at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology were established in 1979 for the study of Islamic architecture, urbanism, visual culture, and conservation and are supported by endowments for instruction, research, and student aid established by His Highness the Aga Khan. Through its programs at Harvard’s Department of History of Art and Architecture and Graduate School of Design, AKPIA seek to increase the visibility of the pan-Islamic cultural heritage in the modern Muslim world.<sup>62</sup> In 1983, AKPIA began to publish *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual*

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<sup>60</sup> Graham et al., “Wolfhart Peter Heinrichs, Faculty of Arts and Sciences - Memorial Minute.”

<sup>61</sup> Graham et al.

<sup>62</sup> “AKPIA.”

*Cultures of the Islamic World* with Professor Oleg Grabar, Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art, as its founding editor.<sup>63</sup>

### **1986 – Roy Mottahedeh becomes first Professor of Islamic History**

Roy Parviz Mottahedeh was born in New York City in 1940. He graduated from Harvard College with an A.B. in history in 1960 and earned a second B.A. in Persian and Arabic from Cambridge University. He then went on to earn his Ph.D. at Harvard under Sir Hamilton Gibb and Richard Frye and was elected a Junior Fellow in the Harvard Society of Fellows. Professor Mottahedeh began his teaching career at Princeton where he earned tenure and was one of the first MacArthur Fellows. He returned to Harvard in 1986 as Professor of Islamic History, where his many accomplishments have included directing CMES, founding the *Harvard Middle East and Islamic Review*, and founding the Alwaleed Bin Talal Islamic Studies Program.<sup>64</sup> He is well-known for his many publications including his books, *Loyalty and Leadership in Early Islamic Society* (1980) and *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (1985), and his article, “The Clash of Civilizations: An Islamicist’s Critique” (1995).

Audio: <https://soundcloud.com/user-775598562-582960913/prof-roy-mottahedeh-the-importance-of-history-in-islamic-studies>

### **1991 – Islamic Law Program founded at Harvard Law School**

With the aim of being a truly global school of law, Harvard’s was the first law school in the United States to begin offering courses on Islamic law in the 1950s. At the invitation of the late comparative law professor, Arthur von Mehren, several visiting professors taught single courses on Islamic law. The Islamic Legal Studies Program (ILSP) was founded in 1991 under the directorship of Frank Vogel, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Adjunct Professor of Islamic Legal Studies, who led the program until 2006.<sup>65</sup> Among ILSP’s initiatives was the Harvard Islamic Investment Project, undertaken in collaboration with the Center

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<sup>63</sup> “Muqarnas.”

<sup>64</sup> “Roy Mottahedeh.”

<sup>65</sup> “Who We Are.”

for Middle Eastern Studies and Harvard Business School, that was dedicated to research on Islamic banking and investment.<sup>66</sup> Today, the Program in Islamic Law, directed by Professor Intisar Rabb, and Program on Law and Society in the Muslim World, directed by Professor Kristen Stilt, promote the study of Islamic law at Harvard Law School.

### **2005 – Baber Johansen teaches Islamic law at Harvard Divinity School**

Baber Johansen was born in Berlin, Germany where he earned his Ph.D. at Freie Universität Berlin. He then served on the faculty there and later at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Centre d'étude des normes juridiques) in Paris. In 2005, he was appointed Professor of Islamic Religious Studies at Harvard Divinity School, where he taught until his retirement in 2020. Professor Johansen has also been an affiliated professor at Harvard Law School and the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and has served as acting director of the Islamic Legal Studies Program and the director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. He has also been a faculty associate and a member of the executive committee of Harvard's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. Professor Johansen's publications include *Muhammad Husain Haikal Europa und der Orient im Weltbild eines ägyptischen Liberalen* (1967), *Islamic Law on Land Tax and Rent* (1988), and *Contingency in a Sacred Law: Legal and Ethical Norms in the Muslim Fiqh* (1999).<sup>67</sup>

### **2006 – Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Islamic Studies Program and professorships established**

In 2005, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Alsaud pledged a \$20 million gift to Harvard University for the establishment of a university-wide Islamic studies program that would be interdisciplinary and global. "I am pleased to support Islamic studies at Harvard and I hope that this program will enable generations of students and scholars to gain a thorough understanding of Islam and its role both in the past and in today's world," Prince Alwaleed said. The gift also gave Harvard

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<sup>66</sup> Babai, *Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University Reflections on the Past, Visions for the Future*, 28.

<sup>67</sup> "Baber Johansen."

the funds to endow professorships in Islamic studies, support graduate students, and to digitize Islamic manuscripts.<sup>68</sup> Roy Mottahedeh, Gurney Professor of History, served as the Program's founding director and committed to expanding Islamic studies at Harvard to better reflect the geographical spread of Muslim cultures.<sup>69</sup>

## 2020 - Islamic studies today

Today, Islamic studies at Harvard is represented across the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard Divinity School, Harvard Law School, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard Business School, Harvard Graduate School of Design, and Harvard Medical School. It is also increasingly interdisciplinary and global in nature, with faculty, visiting scholars, students, and programs that increasingly represent the scope, diversity, and complexity of Muslim societies and communities around the world.

See our current faculty

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<sup>68</sup> "Harvard Receives \$20M Gift for Islamic Studies Program."

<sup>69</sup> Chen, "Islamic Studies Director Tapped."

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