

MUSHEGH ASATRYAN, PhD

University of Calgary

School of Languages, Linguistics, Literatures and Cultures

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CURRENT POSITIONS

University of Calgary

Undergraduate Advisor, Program in Arabic and Muslim Cultures (since July 1, 2022)

Associate Professor of Arabic and Muslim Cultures, School of Languages, Linguistics, Literatures and Cultures (since 2020)

Adjunct Professor, Department of Religion and Classics

Past positions

University of Calgary:

Director, Language Research Centre (July 1, 2022-June 30, 2025)

Chair, Division of German, Russian and Arabic (2019-20)

Assistant Professor (2015-2020)

Yale University: Visiting Lecturer in Classical Arabic and Classical Persian (spring, 2015)

The Institute of Ismaili Studies (London): Research Associate (2012-2013)

EDUCATION

PhD Religious Studies (Islamic Studies), **Yale University** 2012

MA Medieval Studies, **Central European University** 2002

BA Arabic Studies, **Yerevan State University** 2001

Non-degree programs

2001-02 The University of Isfahan, Qur'an, Exegesis, Shi'i texts, and Hadith

1999-2000 The University of Cairo, Arabic language and literature

2000 Tarbiat Modares University (Tehran), Persian Language and Literature

PUBLICATIONS

Books

- 2017 *Controversies in Formative Shi'i Islam: The Ghulat Muslims and their Beliefs* (London: I.B. Tauris).
- 2024 [with David Hollenberg] *The Nusayri Path of Knowledge: A Study and Critical Edition of 'Iṣmat al-Dawla's (thrived 11th century) Manhaj al-'ilm wa l-bayān wa-nuḡbat al-sam' wa l-'iyān* (Leiden: Brill).
- 2025 *Debating the Freethinker: A Study and Translation of Abu l-Husayn al-Khayyat's Kitāb al-Intisār* (Gorgias Press).
- 2026-7 [editor] *Early Islamic Sectarianism in Context: The Ghulat Between Late Antiquity and Modernity* (collected volume, under contract with Gerlach Press)

Articles and book chapters

- 2026 "Prophecy After Muhammad: The View from Late Antiquity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shii Islam*, eds. Ahab Bdaiwi and Sajjad Rizvi (under review).
- 2025 "The Emergence of Sunnism: When did the Sunnis Become a Sect?" in *Illusions of Orthodoxy: Islamic Politico-Religious and Legal Discourses (10th-11th century)*, (De Gruyter), eds. Blain Auer and Wissam Halawi (forthcoming).
- 2025 "Imami Hadith and the Abbasid Culture of Debate," in *Compiling a Tradition: The History and Development of the Early Imāmi Hadith Corpora*, eds. Haider Hobbollah, Ali Rida Rizek, George Warner (Al-Mahdi Press, Birmingham, UK) (forthcoming).
- 2025 "Muhammad dans la pensée des Shiites, les Ghulat et les Nusairis," in *Mahomet des historiens*, eds. M. A. Amir-Moezzi and John Tolan (Editions du Cerf, Paris).
- 2024 "Of Wine, Sex, and other Abominations: The Meanings of Libertinism in Early Islamic Iraq," *Global Intellectual History* 9.5: 529-557.
- 2022 "The Heretic Talks Back: Feigning Orthodoxy in Saffar al-Qummi's *Basa'ir al-Darajat*," *History of Religions* 61.4: 1-27.
- 2022 "How to Read Muslim Heresiology? An Ismaili man-of-letters and his Classifications of Muslim Sects," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 51: 293-336.
- 2020 "The Good, the Bad, and the Heretic in Early Islamic History," in *Deconstructing Islamic Studies*, eds. Majid Daneshgar and Aaron Hughes (Cambridge, MA)
- 2019 "Early Ismailis and Other Muslims: Polemics and Borrowing in *Kitab al-Kashf*," in *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019)
- 2019 "Shi'i Literature in the Late 9th Century Ishāq al-Ahmar al-Nakha'i (d. 286/899) and His Writings," in *Light upon Light: Essays in Islamic Thought and History in Honor of Gerhard Bowering*, eds. Jamal Elias and Bilal Orfali. (Leiden: Brill, 2019)
- 2018 "An Agenda for the Study of Early Shi'a Cosmologies," *The Gnostic World*, ed. Garry Trompf (Routledge, 2018), 321-327.
- 2016 [with Dylan Burns] "Is Ghulat Religion Islamic Gnosticism? Religious Transmissions in Late Antiquity," in *L'ésotérisme shi'ite, ses racines et ses prolongements*, eds. M. A. Amir-Moezzi et al., (Brepols, 2016 [Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes and The Institute of Ismaili Studies]), 55-86.
- 2016 "Shiite Underground Literature Between Iraq and Syria: The Book of Shadows and the History of Early Ghulat," in *Texts in Transit in the Medieval Mediterranean*, eds. Tzvi Langermann and Robert Morrison (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), pp. 128-161.
- 2015 "An Early Shi'i Cosmology: *Kitab al-ashbah wa l-aẓilla* and its Milieu," *Studia Islamica* 110 (2015), pp. 1-80.
- 2014 "Bankers and Politics: The Network of Shi'i Moneychangers in Eighth-Ninth Century Kufa and their Role in the Shi'i Community," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 7 (2014), pp. 1-21. (an earlier version of this paper won the 2011 Middle East Medievalists Graduate Student Paper Prize)
- 2011 [with Hatim Mahamid, in Arabic] "Wathīqat 'ahd min al-rasūl ilā l-nasārā kāffatan: dirāsa wa tahqīq," in *Maqālāt tārīkhīyya takrīman li l-ustādh al-dukūr Butrus Abū Manna*. Eds. 'Atā' Allāh Qutbī, Jūnī Mansūr, and Mustafā l-'Abbāsī: 3-28.
- 2006 "Iranian Elements in Arabic: the State of Research," *Iran and the Caucasus* 10.1: 87-106.

IN PREPARATION

Books

The Abbasid Culture of Debate: Competition, Piety and Knowledge (under contract by I.B. Tauris)

Articles

“Were the Qaramita a Countercultural Movement”?

“Transmigration of Souls and the Architecture of the Universe in Ghulat Thought”

Encyclopedia Entries

Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE

“Mukhammisa,” “al-Nahiki,” “Bayaniyya,” “Janahiyya” (forthcoming)

Encyclopedia Iranica, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (New York, 1983-)

“Mokhammesa,” “Eshaq Ahmar Nakha‘I,” “Mofazzal al-Jo‘fi,” “Tanasokh” (forthcoming)

The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought, ed. Gerhard Böwering (Princeton, 2012)

“Alawis”

Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage, ed. Larissa J. Taylor (Leiden, 2010)

“Hajj,” “Ziyara”

Book Reviews

- 2025 Tehseen Thaver, *Beyond Sectarianism: Ambiguity, Hermeneutics, and the Formations of Religious Identity in Islam* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2024), *al-Usur al-Wusta*
- 2021 Omid Ghaemmaghami, *Encounters with the Hidden Imam in Early and Pre-Modern Twelver Shi‘i Islam* (Brill, 2020), *BSOAS* 84.1
- 2019 Hussein Abdulsater, *Shi‘i Doctrine, Mu‘tazili Theology: al-Sharif al-Murtada and Mu‘tazili Discourse* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), *al-Abhath* 67
- 2016 *The Politics and Culture of an Umayyad Tribe: Conflict and Functionalism in the Early Islamic Period* by Mohammad Rihan, *Ilahiyat Studies* 7.2
- 2015 Sālih Ahmad al-‘Ali, *Al-Kūfa wa ahlubā fi sadr al-islām: dirāsa fi ahwālībā l-‘umrāniyya wa sukkānībā wa tanzīmātībim*, in *Muslim Civilisations Abstracts* (Edinburgh), ed. Aptin Khanbaghi
- 2014 Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London, 2011) in *Studia Islamica* 109.2 (2014): 329-347
- 2014 Isra Yazicioglu, *Understanding the Qur’anic Miracle Stories in the Modern Age* (University Park, 2013), in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*: 214-15
- 2009 Gautier Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith* (Leiden, 2007), in *Muslim Civilisations Abstracts: Encyclopedias about Muslim Civilisations*, ed. Aptin Khanbaghi (Edinburgh): 75, 255
- 2007 Ethel Sara Wolper, *Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia* (University Park, 2003), in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 7.1: 203-207
- 2005 Nicola Laure al-Samarai, *Die Macht der Darstellung* (Wiesbaden, 2001), in *Iran and the Caucasus* 9.2: 406-407.

INVITED TALKS

- 2025 “The Abbasid Culture of Debate: Competition, Piety, and Knowledge” – University of Notre Dame
- 2025 “The Abbasid Culture of Debate” – The 2nd Annual Egmont Lee Founders’ Lecture, Calgary Institute for the Humanities
- 2023 “Imam the Debater: Imami Hadith and the Abbasid Culture of Debate” – Featured Speaker at the University of Chicago Shi’i Studies Symposium
- 2021 “Prophecy After Muhammad: The Early Alid Rebellions in a Late Antique Context” – Leiden University (remote presentation)
- 2021 “Theology in Society: Reading Medieval Muslim Constructions of Heresy and Orthodoxy” – University of Notre Dame (remote presentation)
- 2018 “Language, Heresy, and Power in an Early Islamic Text: Or how to Smuggle in your argument through the backdoor, unnoticed” – University of Calgary, Cercle Benvéniste Conferences
- 2018 “Of Wine, Sex, and Other Abominations: Accusations of Libertinism in and their Cultural Meaning in 8th-9th-century Iraq” – University of Calgary, Medieval and Renaissance Cultural Studies Research Group
- 2014 “Medieval Heresy between Armenia and Khurasan: Writing a Connected History of the Tondrakians” – UCLA
- 2011 “Divine Man or Man of God? The Early Islamic Sources on the Idea of the Divinity of the Imams” – Trinity College, Hartford, CT

SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION

- *Al-‘Usūr al-Wustā: The Journal of Middle East Medievalists*, editorial board member
- *Advances in the Study of Islam* book series, Edinburgh University Press, editorial board member
- Peer reviewed for:
 - o Book presses: Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Brill, I.B. Tauris
 - o Journals: *Speculum*, *Oriente Moderno*, *Shii Studies Review*, *Arabica*, *al-Usur al-Wusta*, *IJMES*
 - o Granting agencies: National Endowment for the Humanities, European Commission

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 2023-24 **Calgary Institute for the Humanities (University of Calgary):** Resident Fellowship

- 2020-23 **National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)**, USD 132,266
Project co-director: Mushegh Asatryan; project director: David Hollenberg,
“Recovering Early Nusayri Shi‘ism.” The result of the grant is the book *The Nusayri Path of Knowledge* (Brill, 2024).
- 2020 **Zahid Ali Fellowship (The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London)**: GBP 5000
Granted for a research project on medieval Muslim heresiographies
- 2018 **Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton**: three-week visiting fellowship at the Shii Studies Research Program
- 2010 **Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Yale University)**: Research Fellowship

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Panels Organized

- 2014 “Texts and Contexts in Pre-Modern Shi‘ism,” - *Middle East Studies Association*, Annual Meeting (Washington, DC)
- 2013 “Shi‘ism in Historical Perspective,” - *Middle East Studies Association*, Annual Meeting (New Orleans)
- 2009 “Armenians and Islam”, Organizer and Chair - *Central Eurasian Studies Society*, Annual Meeting (Toronto)

Conference papers

- 2025 “Were the Qaramita a Countercultural Movement?” – Minority Islams, International symposium, Université de Lausanne
- 2024 “The Transmigration of Souls and the Architecture of the Cosmos in the Ghulāt Corpus” – Colloque international La métempsycose en Islam, Université de Lausanne
- 2024 “Imami Hadith and the Abbasid Culture of Debate” – Compiling a Tradition: The History and Development of the Early Imāmi Hadith Corpora, Al-Mahdi Institute, Birmingham UK
- 2022 “Muslim Prophecy after Muhammad: The View from Late Antiquity” – Rethinking Arab History, Society, and Culture - A Conference in Honor of Aziz Al-Azmeh, Central European University, Vienna
- 2022 “Who Gets to be Sunni? The Making of a Heresiological Category” – Heresy and Infidelity: Islamic Politico-Religious and Legal Discourses (10th-11th century) International Conference, University of Lausanne
- 2021 “Feigning Orthodoxy in an Early Islamic Polemic” – Schools, Networks and Communities in the Study of Early Shi‘i Hadith workshop
- 2019 “How to Read Muslim Heresiology? Abu Hatim al-Razi’s Classification of Muslim Sects,” *14th Colloquium “From Jāhiliyya to Islam,”* Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities (Jerusalem)
- 2018 “Of Wine, Sex, and Other Abominations: Accusations of Libertinism in and their Cultural Meaning in 8th-9th-century Iraq,” *Middle East Studies Association*, Annual Meeting

- (San Antonio)
- 2018 “The Nusayris in Medieval Syria: What can a 13th-century Theological Debate Tell us about them,” *World Congress for Middle East Studies* (Seville, Spain)
- 2017 “The Discourse on Magic and Miracles in 11th-century Baghdad: a Broader Context,” *American Academy of Religion, Northwest-Pacific Regional Meeting* (St. Mary’s University, Calgary)
- 2017 “A Medieval Nusayri Shaykh’s Disputations and the Study of the Nusayris in Western Academia,” *Shi’i Studies: The State of the Art*, Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton)
- 2016 “Conflict or Symbiosis? The Nusayris and the Ismailis in Medieval Syria,” *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread* – The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London
- 2015 “Iranian Loanwords in Classical Arabic Language Contact and Sound Change,” *Digital Arabic and Digital Persian Research Workshop*, The University of Leipzig
- 2015 [co-presented with Dylan Burns] “Is Ghulat Religion Islamic Gnosticism,” *American Academy of Religion-International Qur’anic Studies Association* joint panel (Atlanta)
- 2014 “The Ghulat Corpus and its Authors,” *Middle East Studies Association*, Annual Meeting (Washington, DC)
- 2014 “The World and Worldview of Early Shi’i Ghulat” – *Reason and Esotericism in Shi’i Islam* (The University of Chicago)
- 2013 “*Kitāb al-azīlla*, Nusayrī Literature, and the Transmission of Texts from Iraq to Syria in the Tenth Century” – *Middle East Studies Association*, Annual Meeting (New Orleans)
- 2012 “A New Source for the Study of Early Shi’a *ghulāt*” – *Middle East Studies Association*, Annual Meeting (Denver)
- 2012 “How Shi’is Adopted Mu‘tazilī Rationalism: Two Early Texts on the Proof of God’s Existence” – *American Oriental Society*, Annual Meeting (Boston)
- 2011 “Bankers and Politics: 8th c. Kufan Moneychangers and their role in the Shi’a Community” – *Middle East Studies Association*, Annual Meeting (Washington, DC)
- 2010 “Mystical Shiism between the Two Occultations: *Kitāb al-sirāt* and its milieu” – *American Academy of Religion*, Annual Meeting (Atlanta)
- 2010 “Who were the Mufaddaliyya? A Study of an “extreme” Shiite Sect” - *American Oriental Society*, Annual Meeting (St. Louis)
- 2008 “Mufaddal al-Ju‘fi and the Kufan ‘extremists’ in the eighth century” - *Central Eurasian Studies Society*, Annual Meeting (Washington, DC)
- 2005 “Ibn Khaldūn’s Refutation of the Occult Sciences” - *American Oriental Society*, Annual Meeting (Philadelphia)

LANGUAGES

Arabic – reading fluency in Classical and Modern Standard; speaking fluency in Modern Standard

Persian – reading fluency in Classical and Modern, speaking fluency in Modern Farsi

Armenian – native competence in Modern Eastern Armenian; reading fluency in Classical Armenian

Russian – near native fluency in speaking, reading, and writing

German, French, Syriac, Turkish, Latin, Old Persian – reading competence