

MUSHEGH ASATRYAN, PhD

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Department of History
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CURRENT POSITIONS

University of Calgary

Associate Professor, History
Adjunct Professor, 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-nuẓḥat al-sam' wa l-'iḳān* (Leiden: Brill).
- 2025 *Debating the Freethinker: A Study and Translation of Abu l-Husayn al-Khayyat's Kitab al-Intisar* (Gorgias Press).
- 2026-7 [editor] *Early Islamic Heresy 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).
- 2026 “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).
- 2026 “Imami Hadith and the Abbasid Culture of Debate,” in *Compiling a Tradition: The History and Development of the Early Imami 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 tārikhiyya takriman li l-ustādh al-duktūr 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 Ghaemmaghani, *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‘taẓili Theology: al-Sharīf al-Murtada and Mu‘taẓili 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 fī sadr al-islām: dirāsa fī ahwālībā l-‘umrāniyya wa sukkānībā wa tanzīmātībīm*, 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 Bénédictin 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

- Editor (2027-2032): *Al-‘Usūr al-Wustā: The Journal of Middle East Medievalists*
- *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