

# Elias Muhanna

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## **Education**

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Ph.D. (with distinction), Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations, Harvard University, 2012.  
A.M. (with distinction), Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations, Harvard University, 2008.  
A.M., Comparative Literature & Literary Theory, University of Pennsylvania, 2004.  
A.B., *magna cum laude*, Linguistics and Philosophy, Duke University, 2000.

## **Professional appointments**

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Faculty Fellow, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University, 2016-18  
Manning Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature, Brown University, 2014 – present  
Assistant Professor, Comparative Literature, Brown University, 2012 – 2014  
Visiting Scholar, Program on Arab Reform & Democracy, Stanford University, 2011 – 2012

## **Publications**

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### **Books**

*The World in a Book: Al-Nuwayri and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 2017)

*The Ultimate Ambition in the Arts of Erudition: A Compendium of Universal Knowledge from the Classical Islamic World*. New York: Penguin, 2016.

*The Digital Humanities and Islamic & Middle East Studies*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016.

### **Articles and book chapters**

“The Art of Copying: Mamluk Manuscript Culture in Theory and Practice.” In *Autograph/holograph and authorial manuscripts in Arabic script*. Edited by Frédéric Bauden and Élise Franssen. Leiden: Brill, in press.

“Islamic & Middle East Studies and the Digital Turn.” In *The Digital Humanities and Islamic & Middle East Studies*, edited by Elias Muhanna, 1-9. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016.

“The Scattered and the Gathered: Questioning Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi.” In *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, edited by Alireza Korangy, Roy P. Mottahedeh, and William Granara. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016.

“Encyclopaedias, Arabic,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

“Why Was the 14<sup>th</sup> Century a Century of Arabic Encyclopaedism?” In *Encyclopaedias and Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, edited by Jason König and Greg Woolf, 343-56. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

“The Sultan’s New Clothes: Ottoman-Mamluk Gift Exchange in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.” *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 189-207. (Winner of the Margaret B. Sevcenko Prize from the Historians of Islamic Art Association)

“Ilyâs al-Mawsiî.” In *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography, c. 1350-1830*, edited by J. Lowry & D. Stewart. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2009.

### **Selected essays and commentary**

“What Gertrude Bell’s Letters Remind Us About the Founding of Iraq,” *The New Yorker* (online), June 14, 2017.

“The Contradictions of Reza Aslan’s ‘Believer’,” *The New Yorker* (online), Apr. 19, 2017.

“A Lesson in Emotional Geography,” *The New York Times* (opinion), Nov. 19, 2016.

“The Fate of a Joke in Lebanon,” *The New Yorker* (News Desk, online edition), Sept. 26, 2015.

“Hacking the Humanities,” *The New Yorker* (Culture Desk, online edition), July 7, 2015.

“Iraq and Syria’s Poetic Borders,” *The New Yorker* (Page-Turner, online edition), August 13, 2014.

“Translating ‘Frozen’ into Arabic,” *The New Yorker* (Page-Turner, online edition), May 30, 2014.

“Lebanon’s War in Syria,” *The New Yorker* (News Desk, online edition), February 21, 2014.

“Letter from Lebanon: A Bookshop Burns,” *The New Yorker* (Page-Turner, online), Jan. 16, 2014.

“The Many Faces of Wissam al-Hassan,” *The New York Times* (Latitude, online), October 22, 2012.

“Syria’s Foreign Policy: A Juggling Act,” *Al-Akbar* (English section), July 17, 2012.

“Nasrallah’s Fighting Words,” *The New York Times* (Latitude, online edition), December 14, 2011.

“Lebanon’s Confused Secularism,” *The Guardian*, April 23, 2010.

“Two Houses, Many Mansions,” *The National*, August 14, 2009.

“Our Lady of Hizbullah,” *Bidoun* (Winter 2008), 98-99.

### **Book reviews**

Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, in *The Nation* (Jan. 6-11, 2016).

Carl Petry, *The Criminal Underworld in a Medieval Islamic Society*, in *Mamluk Studies Review* 18 (2014-15): 355-57.

Ramzi Baalbaki, Saleh Said Agha and Tarif Khalidi, eds., *Poetry and History: The Value of Poetry in Reconstructing Arab History*, in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 73.1 (April 2014): 176-78.

Matthew Ingalls, “Subtle Innovation within Networks of Convention: The Life, Thought, and Legacy of Zakariyya al-Ansari,” Ph.D. diss., Yale (2011), in *Dissertation Reviews* (May 10, 2013).

Reza Aslan, *Tablet and Pen: Literary Landscapes from the Modern Middle East*, in *The Nation* (Aug 29, 2011).

Michael Young, *The Ghosts of Martyrs Square: An Eyewitness Account of Lebanon’s Life Struggle*, in *The Nation* (July 15, 2010).

Eugene Rogan’s, *The Arabs: A History*, in *The National* (December 4, 2009).

### **Presentations**

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#### Invited lectures

“They Love Me in Shiraz: Teaching the Medieval Islamicate Bestseller.” Medieval Bestsellers vs. Masterpieces conference, Univ. of California at Santa Barbara (May 6, 2017).

- “The Register of the Arabs: Classical Arabic Poetry and Distant Reading.” Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ (April 5, 2017).
- “What is a Classic? Arabic and the Horizons of Translation.” Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, NYU, (Feb 27, 2017).
- “Comparative Literature and Islamicate Languages.” Division of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages, Stanford University, January 31, 2017.
- “Reading the Encyclopedia: A Talk on Literary Translation.” Distinguished Public Talk at Hamad bin Khalifa University. Doha, Qatar, October 31, 2016.
- “The Ultimate Ambition in the Arts of Erudition.” Invited talk at Early Sciences Working Group, Harvard University, October 25, 2016.
- “Textual Topographies: Some Notes on Patterned Corpora of Arabic Literary Texts.” Digital Ottoman Platform Workshop, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton University (June 8-12, 2015)
- “Digital Scholarship in Islamic Studies: A Workshop” (co-taught by Prof. Roy Mottahedeh and Andras Riedlmayer), Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University (April 23, 2015).
- “Digital Scholarship in Islamic Studies: A Workshop.” University of Chicago Islamic Studies Workshop (April 16, 2015).
- “Elements of Style: Modeling Mannerism in Classical Arabic Poetry.” DH Forum, University of Chicago (April 16, 2015)
- “New Books from Old Books: Compilation and Authorship in the Mamluk Period.” The Histories of Books in the Islamicate World, CSIC, Madrid (March 9-11, 2015).
- “Reading Post-Classically: Poetry and Encyclopedism in the Mamluk Empire.” Dept. of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University (Dec. 11, 2014).
- “Vernacular.” *Political Concepts* conference, Brown University (November 16, 2013).
- “A Mamluk Encyclopedist’s Working Method: The Evidence from Several Autograph Manuscripts of al-Nuwayrī’s *Nihayat al-arab fi funun al-adab*.” Autograph/Holograph Manuscripts in Arabic Script Conference, Université de Liège, (October 10-11, 2013).
- “The Aesthetics of Accumulation in Mamluk Literature.” Yale Arabic Colloquium, (March 27, 2013).
- “Archiving the Revolution.” Habits of Living, Brown University, (March 22, 2013).
- “The Imperial Context of Mamluk Literature.” Delivered at the Arabic Studies Seminar, Columbia University, October 25, 2012.
- “Delineating the Post-Classical Muslim Humanitas.” “Imagining Muslim Humanities” Symposium Duke University, April 13-14, 2012.
- “Mamluk Encyclopaedias as Tokens of Decadence and Renaissance.” “Inhitat: Its Influence and Persistence in the Writing of Arab Cultural History” Symposium, American University of Beirut, Lebanon, December 8-10, 2010.
- “Historicizing *adab* in Mamluk Literature: The Case of al-Nuwayrī’s Encyclopaedia *Nihayat al-arab fi funun al-adab*.” Foundations of Arabic Literature Colloquium, Yale University, April 17, 2010.

#### Conference papers

- “Paronomastic Play in al-Safadi’s *Jinan al-jinas*.” School of Mamluk Studies, American University of Beirut, Lebanon (May 13, 2017).
- “The European Reception of the Mamluk Encyclopedias.” School of Mamluk Studies, University of Chicago (June 23-25, 2016).
- “Vernacular and Cosmopolitan Aesthetics in Mamluk Literature.” School of Mamluk Studies, Université de Liège, Belgium (June 25-28, 2015).

- “Innovation and Tradition in Scribal (Best) Practices: The Concept of *istilab* in Chancery Literature.”  
School of Mamluk Studies, Venice (June 2014).
- “Reception Studies and the Post-Classical Islamic World.” American Comparative Literature  
Association, New York City (March 22, 2014).
- “Orientalism & Encyclopedism: The European Reception of the Mamluk Encyclopedias,” Modern  
Language Association (January 9, 2014).
- “The Database and the Eyebrow.” Opening remarks delivered at the Conference on the Digital  
Humanities and Islamic & Middle East Studies, Brown University, (October 24, 2013).
- “If it Walks Like a Genre, Quacks Like a Genre, and Swims Like a Genre: Some Observations about  
Large-Scale Compilation in the Mamluk Period.” American Oriental Society Annual Meeting,  
Portland OR, March 16, 2013.
- “Antoine Galland’s Eastern Muse: Hanna ibn Diyab’s Contribution to the 1001 Nights.” American  
Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) Annual Meeting, New Orleans, April 1-4, 2010.
- “Eighteen Words for Snow and Everything Else: Eloquence and Encyclopaedism in the Mamluk  
Period.” Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Meeting, Boston, Nov. 24, 2009.
- “Semantics or Poetics: Reframing Ibn Jinni’s Theory of Greater Derivation.” American Oriental  
Society (AOS) Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL, March 15, 2008.
- “The Word as Wound: The Meaning of *kalam* in the Qur’an.” Middle East Studies Association  
(MESA) Annual Meeting, Montréal, November 18, 2007.
- “The Sultan’s New Clothes: Ottoman-Mamluk Imperial Gift Exchange in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.”  
Historians of Islamic Art Association (HIAA) Majlis, New York NY, February 17, 2007.
- “The Wandering Sheep: Irony & Imagination in Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi’s *al-Hawamil wa-l-Shawamil*.”  
Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Meeting, Boston, November 20, 2006.
- “Imagining the New World: Ilyas al-Mawsili, Hanna al-Maruni, and the *1,001 Nights*.” Middle  
Eastern History and Theory Conference, University of Chicago, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005.
- “How the *Qāf* Lost its Spots: Aesthetics of Ambiguity in Medieval Arabic Inscriptions.” Penn  
Humanities Forum, University of Pennsylvania, March 27, 2004.
- “Anastas, al-Shidyāq, and their Dictionaries.” Middle East Studies Regional Conference at the  
University of California, Santa Barbara, March 20, 2004.

### **Academic honors and distinctions**

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Manning Assistant Professorship, Brown University, 2014–present  
Bruce D. Craig Dissertation Prize, *Mamluk Studies Review*, 2012  
Margaret B. Sevcenko Prize, Historians of Islamic Art Association, 2008  
Certificate of Distinction in Teaching, Harvard University, 2007

### **Research grants and fellowships**

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Whiting Foundation Public Engagement Fellowship, 2017-18.  
American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship, 2015-16.  
Humanities Initiative Research & Teaching Award, Brown University, 2014-2015  
Humanities Initiative Research & Teaching Award, Brown University, 2013-2014  
Humanities Initiative Research & Teaching Award, Brown University, 2012-2013  
Whiting Fellowship in the Humanities, Harvard University, 2010-2011

Friends of Princeton Library Research Grant, 2008  
Harvard University Graduate School of Arts & Sciences Doctoral Fellowship, 2005-2010.  
University of Pennsylvania, William Penn Fellowship, 2003-2005  
Fulbright Scholarship, Morocco, 2000-2001

### **Conferences organized**

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Convener, “The Digital Humanities and Islamic & Middle East Studies” (October 24-25 2013 conference at Brown University)  
Convener, “Textual Corpora & the Digital Islamic Humanities” (October 17-18, 2014 workshop at Brown University)  
Convener, “Distant Reading and the Islamic Archive” (October 16, 2015 conference at Brown University)  
Founder and director, Digital Islamic Humanities Project (2013-15);

### **Teaching**

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#### Regular courses

The 1,001 Nights (COLT 0510K)  
Narratives of Decline in Arabic Literature (COLT 1813A)  
The Classical Arabic Literary Tradition (COLT 1310A)  
The Encyclopedic Imagination from Pliny to Google Books (COLT 2820Z)  
Desire and Sexuality in Arabic Literature (COLT 0811O)  
The Problem of the Vernacular (COLT 1813)  
Islam & Liberalism (COLT 1440G)  
A Classical Islamic Education: Readings in Arabic Literature (COLT 1310E)  
Before Wikipedia (COLT 0610Q)  
Literary Bestsellers of the Islamic World (COLT 0812H)  
Orientalism in Theory and Practice (COLT 2821M)

### **Languages**

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Classical Arabic: Excellent  
Levantine Arabic: Native  
French: Reading knowledge  
German: Reading knowledge  
Persian: Intermediate reading knowledge