

Elias G. Saba

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Curriculum Vitae | July 19, 2024

Education

- 2017 PhD, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania.
Awarded the British Association for Islamic Studies—De Gruyter Prize 2018 and the Roger M.A. Allen Dissertation Prize in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the University of Pennsylvania.
- 2013 MA, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania.
- 2010–11 Center for Arabic Study Abroad (Damascus, Syria).
- 2009 Middlebury College Arabic Summer Language School.
- 2008 BA, Near Eastern Studies, Cornell University.

Professional Appointments

- 2023– Assistant Professor in the Department of History and the Department of Religious Studies, Grinnell College.
- 2019–2023 Senior Lecturer in the Department of History and the Department of Religious Studies, Grinnell College.
- 2017–19 Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, Grinnell College.

Publications

BOOKS

Khalil al-Khūrī, *Oh No! I am not European!: A Satire of the Ottoman Levant*, edited and translated by Matthew L. Keegan and Elias G. Saba. Library of Arabic Literature. New York: New York University Press. Under contract.

- 2019 *Harmonizing Similarities: A History of Distinctions Literature in Islamic Law*. Berlin:

De Gruyter, 2019.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

”Memories of al-Shāfi‘ī’s Inquisition,” *Journal of Abbasid Studies*, forthcoming.

- 2024 ”Canonizing *al-Furūq*: Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi’s Text on Legal Canons,” *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, published online 7 June 2024.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ojlr/rwae016>.

BOOK CHAPTERS

- 2020 “Translating Tahrir: From Praxis to Theory with Tahrir Documents,” by Thomas Levi Thompson, Emily Drumsta, and Elias G. Saba in *Routledge Handbook of Arabic Translation*, edited by Sameh F. Hanna, Hanem El-Farahaty and Abdel Wahab Khalifa. New York: Routledge.

TRANSLATIONS

“Selections from *al-Manthūr fī-l-Qawā‘id* of Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī” in *Islamic Law in Context: A Primary Source Reader*. Edited by Omar Anchassi and Robert Gleave. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.

- 2019 Al-Ṣadr al-Shahīd, ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, *The Book of Claims for Buildings, Roads, and Waterways in Art in Translation* 11.3: 265–85.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17561310.2019.1693235>.

- 2016 “Al-Azhar Draft Constitution of 1979,” translated by Elias G. Saba and Thomas Levi Thompson in *Constitutionalism, Human Rights, and Islam after the Arab Spring*. Edited by Rainer Grote and Tilmann J. Röder, 113–119. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

BOOK REVIEWS

- 2024 Review of Youcef L. Soufi, *The Rise of Critical Islam: 10th-13th Century Legal Debate* in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, forthcoming.
- 2019 Review of Baudouin Dupret, *What is the Sharia* in *Religious Studies Review*, 45.2 (June): 214. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsr.13882>.

- 2018 Review of Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Bāsit, ed., *Catalogue of the Private Collections of Manuscripts in the Egyptian National Library (Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah)* in *Manuscript Studies Journal: A Journal of the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies*, 3.1: 253–56. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mns.2018.0013>.
- 2017 “Truth-Making in Early Islam,” a review of Shahab Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam* in *Books & Ideas*, 7 December, 2017. <https://booksandideas.net/Truth-Making-in-Early-Islam.html>.
- 2017 Review of Sophia Vasalou, *Moral Agents and Their Deserts: The Character of Mu‘tazilī Ethics* in *Religious Studies Review* 43.3 (September). <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsr.13153>.
- 2016 “The Art of Not Punishing,” a review of Intisar Rabb, *Doubt in Islamic Law: A History of Legal Maxims, Interpretation, and Islamic Criminal Law* in *Books & Ideas*, 7 December, 2017. <http://www.booksandideas.net/The-Art-of-Not-Punishing.html>.

ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRIES

- 2018– “Furūq,” “al-Ḥumaydī, ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr,” “al-Jīzī,” “al-Kalwadhānī, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb,” and “al-Karābīsī, Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*. Edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson, et. al. Leiden: Brill, 2008–.
- ”Wills (7th–16th c.),” in *The Routledge Medieval Encyclopedia Online, Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*. Edited by Jo Van Steenberg. New York: Routledge, forthcoming.

Fellowships and Prizes

EXTERNAL

- 2024 Life Worth Living Fellowship, Yale Center for Faith & Culture, Yale Divinity School.
- 2018 British Association for Islamic Studies – De Gruyter 2018 Prize in the Study of Islam and the Muslim World.
- 2015 SSRC-Mellon Mays, Preparing for the Professoriate Seminar Grant.
- 2015 Dissertation Completion Grant, SSRC-Mellon Mays.
- 2014 Council of American Overseas Research Centers Fellowship, American Center for Oriental Research.
- 2013 Pre-doctoral Research Development Grant, SSRC-Mellon Mays.
- 2013 SSRC-Mellon Mays Proposal Writing and Dissertation Development Seminar Grant.
- 2012 Graduate Enhancement Grant, SSRC-Mellon Mays.
- 2011 Graduate Enhancement Grant, SSRC-Mellon Mays.

2010–11 Center for Arabic Study Abroad, Full-Year Fellowship.

INTERNAL

2022 Competitive Grant, Committee for the Support of Faculty Scholarship, Grinnell College.
2020 Small Grant for Collaboration, Center for the Humanities, Grinnell College.
2017 Roger M. A. Allen Dissertation Prize in Arabic and Islamic Studies, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania.
2016 Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations Departmental Fellowship, University of Pennsylvania.
2014–15 Communication Within the Curriculum (CWIC) Critical Speaking Fellowship, University of Pennsylvania.
2014 Training Grant, Digital Humanities Forum, University of Pennsylvania.
2013 Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship Academic Year Fellowship (Arabic) (declined).
2012 Janet Lee Stevens Fellowship, University of Pennsylvania.
2012 School of Arts & Sciences Travel Grant, University of Pennsylvania.
2009 Foreign Language and Area Studies Summer Fellowship (Arabic).
2008–13 Benjamin Franklin Fellowship, University of Pennsylvania.
2008–09 Foreign Language and Area Studies Academic Year Fellowship (Arabic).

Presentations

PRESENTER

2024 “Text(iles): Dress and Fashion in Mamluk-Era Legal Sources.” Fifth-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Online Conference (November 11–15).
2024 “Cloth, Dress, and Textiles in the Work of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Asnawī.” Tenth Conference of the School of Mamluk Studies, Kuwait City, Kuwait (March 5–7).
2023 “Law and Language in the Writings of Jamal al-Din al-Asnawi” Fifty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Montreal, Canada (November 2–5).
2023 “Evading the Canon: Al-Qarāfī and His *Furūq*.” British Association for Islamic Studies 2023 Conference, London, UK (May 15-16).
2022 “I’m not European: Khalīl al-Khūrī and Arabic Literary Modernism.” Fifty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Denver, CO (December 1–4).
2022 “Memories of al-Shāfi‘ī’s Inquisition.” Fifteenth Conference of the School of Abbasid Studies, Oxford, UK (July 12–16).
2022 “Canonizing *al-Furūq*: Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī’s Text on Legal Canons.” Canon or

- Code? Standardising and Transmitting Islamic Law, Bergen, Norway (June 16–18).
- 2020 “Author and Genre: A Study of an Unknown Text of Legal Distinctions.” British Association for Islamic Studies 2020 Conference, London, UK (April 6–7; cancelled due to COVID-19).
- 2020 “Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Ashbāh wa-l-nazā’ir* as a Portrait of Late Mamluk Shāfi‘ī Law.” 230th Meeting of the American Oriental Society, Boston, MA (March 20–23; cancelled due to COVID-19).
- 2019 “Sufis and Sufism in the Jamāl al-Dīn al-Asnawī’s Biographical Dictionary.” Fifty-Third Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, New Orleans, LA (November 14–17).
- 2019 “Islamic Law as Intellectual Refinement in the Writing of Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī.” Sixth Conference of the School of Mamluk Studies, Tokyo, Japan (June 15–17).
- 2019 “Coherence from Disagreement: Disputations and Distinctions in Early Islamic Law.” British Association for Islamic Studies 2019 Conference, Nottingham, UK (April 15–16).
- 2019 “Legal Distinctions and the Systematization of Islamic Law.” Ninety-Fourth Meeting of the Medieval Academy of America, Philadelphia, PA (March 7–9).
- 2018 “Centering Archives: A Different Approach for Mamluk Studies.” Fifth Conference of the School of Mamluk Studies, Ghent, Belgium (July 5–7).
- 2018 “Games of Law: Islamic Legal Genres in the 14th Century.” Annual Meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association, Los Angeles, CA (March 29–April 1).
- 2018 “God’s Language or Human Language: Lexicography, Synonyms, and Theology in the 4th/10th Century.” 228th Meeting of the American Oriental Society, Pittsburgh, PA (March 16–19).
- 2017 “The Unlimits of Language: The Theology of Lexicographical Distinctions.” *Philology as Literature – Literature as Philology: Critical and Aesthetical Interactions in Arab Culture and Beyond*, Bamff, Scotland (July 9–12).
- 2017 “An Unknown Text of Legal Distinctions: The Implications of a New Discovery.” 227th Meeting of the American Oriental Society, Los Angeles, CA (March 17–20).
- 2016 “Riddles, Questions, and Performance: A Social Life of Islamic Legal Knowledge.” American Association of Religion, San Antonio, TX (Nov. 19–22).
- 2016 “Forms of Law: Ritual Purity in the Works of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Asnawī.” Third Conference of the School of Mamluk Studies, Chicago, IL (June 23–25).
- 2016 “Disputation and Objection: The Rise of Legal Distinctions.” 226th Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society, Boston, MA (March 18–21).
- 2014 “Evolving Difference: Legal Distinctions in the Ḥanafī Tradition.” Forty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Washington D.C. (November 22–25).
- 2013 “Illuminating Differences and Creating Differences: The Shifting Conceptions of a Legal Distinction (*al-Farq al-Fiqhī*.)” *Rethinking Classical Islamic Law: Can Fiqh*

Be Applied Law? Rabat, Morocco (November 13–15).

- 2013 “Explanation or Innovation? An Analysis of the *Farq Fiqhī*.” Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, New Orleans, LA (October 10–13).
- 2013 “Explaining, Interpreting, and Clarifying the Qur’an: The ‘Commentary’ on NEP–27.” Toward a ‘Biography’ of a Manuscript: A Copy of the Qur’an from 12th c. Iran: A Project in the History of the Book, Philadelphia, PA (February 22–23).
- 2010 “Heroes, History, and Fiction: Rereading and Rewriting History in Ba’thist Iraq.” Graduate Humanities Conference, Penn Humanities Forum, University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, PA (February 19).

ORGANIZER

- 2023 “Blurring Disciplinary Boundaries: Intellectual History in the Middle East, 1200–1500” Fifty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Montreal, Canada (November 2–5).
- 2019 “Mamluk Scholarship and the Transmission of Knowledge.” Sixth Conference of the School of Mamluk Studies, Tokyo, Japan (June 15–17).
- 2019 “Legal Systematization among Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Islamic World.” 94th Meeting of the Medieval Academy of America, Philadelphia, PA (March 7–9).
- 2016 “Aesthetics and Performance of Knowledge: The Social and Courtly Roles of Scholarship in Mamluk Cairo.” Third Conference of the School of Mamluk Studies, Chicago, IL (June 23–25).
- 2014 “Infinite Data, Finite Results: Organizing and Classifying Knowledge in Medieval Islamic Law.” Forty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Washington D.C. (November 22–25).
- 2013 “Action, Innovation and Change – Assessing the Efficacy of Islamic Legal Concepts.” Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, New Orleans, LA (October 10–13).
- 2012 “Documenting the Revolution: The Print Culture of Tahrir Square.” Forty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Denver, CO (November 17–20).

Invited Talks

- 2022 20 Minutes @ 11, *Reverent Ornament: Art from the Islamic World: September 27 – December 10: 2022*, Falconer Gallery, Grinnell, IA (April 24).
- 2022 “Make it Different: Islamic Law and Education in the Middle Ages,” Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Senior Graduation Dinner, Grinnell, IA (May 21).
- 2021 “Furūq as a Tool for Understanding Relationships between Theory and Practice in Islamic Law,” Genre as a Tool for Understanding Relationships between Theory and Practice (uṣūl and furū‘): Internal Perspectives, University of Münster and Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA (December 21) [via videoconference].

- 2021 “Islamicizing Greek Knowledge: Al-Ghazali and Logic,” Series on Islamic Intellectual Traditions, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT (March 10) [via videoconference].
- 2020 “Harmonizing Similarities,” Program in Islamic Law Book Talk Series, Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA (November 17) [via videoconference].
- 2019 “On Legal Distinctions: Concept and Genre,” Near Eastern Studies Colloquium, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY (September 23).
- 2018 20 Minutes @ 11, *Making Life Visible: Art, Biology, and Visualization*, February 2 - June 10, 2018, Faulconer Gallery, Grinnell, IA (April 24).
- 2016 “Establishing Legal Genres: The Case of Riddles and Distinctions,” Beyond Circulation: Non-Western Universalisms and Global Histories of Science, Graduate Conference, Columbia University, New York, NY (October 7–8).
- 2015 “Tahrir Documents: Reflections on Building a Digital Archive” (with Alexander Winder), University of Pennsylvania, WORD LAB Digital Humanities Discussion Group Philadelphia, PA (March 17).
- 2015 “Systems and Taxonomies in Islamic Legal Thinking: Comments on Ḥanafī Distinctions (*Furūq*) Literature,” Middle Eastern History and Theory Workshop, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL (March 10).
- 2014 “*Daa?! Zaa?! Discussing Paronomasia in West Africa*,” Middle East Center Colloquium, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA (November 3).
- 2014 “Digital Humanities Skills for Research,” Roundtable, Digital Humanities Forum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA (October 29).
- 2014 “Thinking through Distinctions: Language, Law, and Theology,” ACOR Fellow’s Talk, American Center for Oriental Research, Amman, Jordan (May 7).

Teaching

- 2015 Certificate in College and University Teaching, University of Pennsylvania.

INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD: GRINNELL COLLEGE

- 2017– “The Crusades in the Middle East,” History Department and Religious Studies Department.
- “Farm-to-Table\Table-to-Farm,” First-Year Tutorial.
- “The Life of the Qur’an,” Religious Studies Department.
- “Life Worth Living,” Religious Studies Department.
- “Introduction to Historical Inquiry: The Prophet Muhammad,” History Department.
- “Islam and Gender,” History Department and Religious Studies Department.
- “Islamic Empires,” History Department.
- “Islamic Law in Theory and Practice,” Humanities Division and Social Sciences Division.
- “Research Colloquium: Studies in Africa, Middle East, and South Asia,” SAMESA Concentration.

“Slaying Dragons, Depicting Saints: The Life and Legacy of Saint George,” First-Year Tutorial.

“Studying Religion: The Middle East,” Religious Studies Department.

“Theory and Method in the Study of Religion,” Religious Studies Department.

“Traditions of Islam,” Religious Studies Department.

INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD, LIBERAL ARTS IN PRISON PROGRAM, GRINNELL COLLEGE

2018 “Traditions of Islam,” Religious Studies Department (Fall).

INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

2015 “Arab Voices of Dissent: From Muhammad to Tahrir,” Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations.

TEACHING FELLOW, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

2009–12 “The Islamic Intellectual Tradition,” Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations.

“The Mongol Experience,” Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations.

“The Middle East through Many Lenses,” Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations.

Service

EXTERNAL

2024 Middle East Studies Association, Graduate Student Paper Prize Committee.

2022 Middle East Medievalists, Dissertation Prize Committee.

2021 NEH Peer Review Panelist.

2017– Reviewer for *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*; *Islamic Law and Society*; *Journal of Abbasid Studies*; *Journal of Islamic Studies*; *Journal of Law and Religion*; *Mamluk Studies Review*; *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*; Brill Publishing.

2011–17 Freelance indexer. Prepared indices for books from the following presses: Brill, Lockwood (Resources in Arabic and Islamic Studies), and New York University (Library of Arabic Literature).

2011–14 Co-Founder, Translator and Editor (2011–2014), *TahrirDocuments* archive.

INTERNAL

2024– Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, Director, Grinnell College.

2022– Chair, Studies in Africa, Middle East, and South Asia Concentration.

2023–2025 Institute for Global Engagement Advisory Board, Grinnell College.

2024–2025 Fischlowitz Travel Fellowship Selection Committee, Grinnell College.

- 2016–2024 Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, Associate Director, Grinnell College.
2020–2023 Scholarship Selection Committee, Grinnell College.

Academic Workshops

- 2024 "To What Degree Can Mamluk Artifacts be Interrogated?" led by Bethany Walker, School of Mamluk Studies, Kuwait City, Kuwait (March 2–4).
2018 "Uses of the Past in Islamic Legal Thought and Practice" Understanding Shari'a: Perfect Past, Imperfect Present, Leiden, Netherlands (November 11-16).
2016 "Reading Fatwas," Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg, Fall School 2016, Bonn, Germany (August 8-12).
2016 "Mamlūk Numismatics" led by Warren Schultz, School of Mamlūk Studies, Chicago, IL (June 20-22).
2015 "A Holistic Approach to Manuscript Studies" led by Frédéric Bauden, School of Mamlūk Studies. Liège, Belgium (June 22-24).
2014 "Arabic Manuscripts and Early Qur'ans" led by François DéRoche, Princeton University (June 9-14).
2014 "Fundamentals of Programming/Coding for Human(s)ists" led by John Simpson, Digital Humanities Summer Institute, Victoria, Canada (June 1-6).

Languages

English (Native).
Modern Standard Arabic (Advanced).
Syrian Colloquial Arabic (Advanced).
Persian (Reading).
Spanish (Native).
French (Reading).
German (Reading).

References

Available upon request.