

As one of her friends and admirers said to me, “In short, Renie was a stylish, graceful, intellectual whirlwind.” May she rest in peace. ✨

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Peter Heath
1949–2014

With the passing of Peter Heath on 12 November 2014, we lost a brilliant scholar and administrator who spent most of his life studying Arabic literature and furthering various academic institutions dealing with Arabic culture. He considered this his mission, in both the U.S. and Arab countries, whether as student and researcher, or as educator and administrator.

Peter started his Arabic and Near East studies in 1967 at Princeton University, where I was lucky to be one of his teachers and a member of his thesis committee (BA, magna cum laude, 1971). After obtaining his PhD from Harvard (1981), he taught cultural studies at Birzeit University, West Bank, Palestine (1981–86). Later, he focused on Arabic language and literature and comparative literature at Washington University in St. Louis (1986–1998), where he was promoted from assistant to associate to full professor.

Thereafter Peter moved to the Middle East, where he spent the last sixteen years of his life; first as provost and professor of Arabic at the American University of Beirut (AUB; 1998–2008) and then as chancellor of the American University of Sharjah (2008–2014).

Peter Heath remained an active scholar all his life. In addition to two major monographs on Ibn Sina and *Sirat 'Antara*, he published dozens of articles in peer-reviewed journals, dealing mainly with Arabic literature, philosophy, folk epics, and cultural studies.

We left Princeton together in 1971, and I was lucky again to go back to AUB in the same year of his arrival as provost, and to be his colleague in the Arabic Department. To me, he remained the same Peter, with his unbelievable stamina, sharp mind, and fulgurating energy, coupled with a positive attitude in tackling the thorniest academic and administrative tasks and, above all, his generous sense of humor to cheer up earnest meetings, enliven the

atmosphere, and put people at ease. His dynamism and friendly disposition impressed all those who knew him, be they his teachers or colleagues, assistants or students.

“He was a compassionate teacher,” said student Bilal Orfali. “As provost he did not have to teach, but he insisted on doing so, and in Arabic. Despite his very busy schedule, I felt I was always welcome in his office. He helped me with advice and recommendations. To him the teacher–student relationship was the defining characteristic of scholarship itself.”

To Ahd Sbouh, who wrote her MA thesis with him, he was “a visionary who saw the extraordinary where others were content with the obvious.” Advising her on the subject of translation, “he pulled out an art book from his library and equated translation to interpreting a scene or a concept with a paint brush—the translator being the artist giving his interpretation of an original text.” She remembers “his quiet demeanor, ever so sensitive, never imposing, and always attentive and generously giving.”

At AUB, his energy was blessed by an astonishing serenity. He was rarely demoralized or irritated and seemed to have solutions for the many problems of those times. If he had any anxiety, he did not show it; colleagues and assistants felt that the man at the helm could steer the ship in the right direction. Yet, he was not insensitive to the tragic sides of life. Renowned Arab novelist Rashid El Daif remembers their frequent meetings in Beirut: “Peter was eager to learn about the Arabic literary and artistic scene, yet when we discussed the sociopolitical situation, I could not but notice some sadness in his eyes.” Apart from such moments, his commitment to his mission as educator, scholar, and academic administrator was the best testimony to his faith in his own ideals and in the culture he studied and helped flourish.

His vision as educator is remembered by David Wilmsen, who had read in graduate school one of Peter’s articles in which he “spoke of our responsibility to our students, inviting us to reflect upon the outcomes we wish for them and the outcomes to which they themselves aspire.” Wilmsen remarked, “In our preoccupation with classroom techniques, methodologies, the balance between speaking, reading, and writing proficiencies, we lose sight of our reasons for teaching.” But, observing Peter as colleague and provost at AUB, Wilmsen realized that “for him, the interests of our students took priority.”

Peter’s sustained scholarship also impressed Ramzi Baalbaki, who expressed his admiration of Peter’s unbelievable capacity to maintain his rich and distinguished scholarly output despite his administrative responsibilities. Peter is survived by his wife Marianne, daughter Christine, and son Simon.

We will all miss his creative mind, fascinating presence, and genuine friendship. ✂

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Wolfhart P. Heinrichs 1941–2014

Wolfhart Heinrichs was professor of Arabic at Harvard's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations since 1978 and held the James Richard Jewett chair from 1996 until his unexpected death on 23 January 2014. Educated in Semitic languages, Islamic studies, and philosophy in Cologne, Giessen, Frankfurt, and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, he studied with such luminaries as Werner Caskel, Helmut Gätje, R.B. Serjeant, Rudolf Sellheim, and Ewald Wagner. He soon became a luminary in his own right, cooperating with Fuat Sezgin on the monumental *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* and authoring more than fifty articles in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second edition), for which he was also co-editor.

Wolfhart Heinrichs was a philologist in one obvious sense of the word: a lover of language. Not only was he one of the foremost Arabists of his generation, but he also knew an astonishing number of other languages: German (his mother tongue), French, English, Russian, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Persian, Turkish—and even this impressive list is not exhaustive. In his last years, he was intensely interested in the southern African language Mbarakwengo, and eagerly sought to pass on this knowledge.

For Wolfhart Heinrichs, interest in language went hand in hand with a keen interest in—and sympathy for—the history, ideas, and culture of the people who used it. What the German hermeneutic tradition called *Sitz im Leben* (roughly “social and cultural context”) was central to his understanding of the challenge of interpreting historical texts. He explicitly invoked *Sitz im Leben* in his classic article, “On the Genesis of the Ḥaḳīqa-Majāz Dichotomy” (*Studia Islamica*, 1984). The article traces in masterly fashion how the Arabic term *majāz*, which later came to mean “figurative usage,” in earlier times