

Wolfhart P. Heinrichs, 1941-2014

Wolfhart Heinrichs was professor of Arabic at Harvard's NELC since 1978 and held the James Richard Jewett chair from 1996 until his unexpected death on January 23, 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 *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (GAS) and with Helmut Ritter on the Neo-Aramaic dialect of Ṭūrōyo. His dissertation (1967) dealt with Ḥāzīm al-Qarṭājannī's reception of Aristotelian poetics.

Professor Heinrichs was a philologist in the very basic sense of the word: a lover of the word. His interests ranged far beyond his formal field of expertise – classical Arabic literary theory – to fields such as Islamic jurisprudence, philosophy, exegesis, linguistics and the vast array of classical Arabic literature, including poetry. In addition to his numerous publications on foundational notions in literary criticism, he authored more than fifty articles in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam, second edition*, for which he was also co-editor. The titles of his advisees' dissertations also attest to his scholarly breadth, ranging from *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory) to modern Arabic dialects. (His full bibliography can be found in the Festschrift for his 65th birthday, ed. Gruendler, 2008.)

Yet despite his encyclopedic knowledge, coupled with his 'Jāhizian' curiosity, Professor Heinrichs is perhaps best remembered by his students as a teacher and a mentor. His legendary *Arabic philology* class, where he would write personally tailored exams for each student; his meticulous analysis of term papers and dissertation chapters as if they were one of the classical texts themselves; his creativity in writing General Exam questions, which would always include one he knew the student could not answer (just for the fun of it); his trust in his students to pursue whatever paths their research led them to (even if it meant taking a year or two longer to finish); the much-awaited limerick he would write when the student finally did finish -- all of these, together with his humble, kind and shy demeanor, made Professor Heinrichs an object of admiration and inspiration for a generation of Arabists.

Wolfhart Heinrichs is survived by his loving wife, the Arabic scholar Alma Giese, as well as his nine pets (rabbits, rats, a guinea pig and Charlie and Pumpkin the cats). Students and colleagues around the world mourn his passing and feel privileged to have known him.

The following poem by Ibn Fāris encapsulates, according to Professor Heinrichs, the life of a scholar: (He also wrote three different renderings thereof, varying by meter; the one here is parlando, free rhythms)

وقالوا كيف أنت؟ فقلت خير ... تقضى حاجة ويفوت حاج
إذا ازدحمت هموم القلب قلنا ... عسى يوماً يكون لها انفراج
نديمي هرتي وسرور قلبي ... دفاتر لي ومعشوقتي السراج

“How are you?” they said, and I said “not too bad,
one wish is fulfilled but many pass me by.”
When sorrows crowd out my heart, I say:
Maybe one day there will be surcease of sorrow!
My companion is my cat, and the joy of my heart
is notebooks I have, and my beloved the lamp.

(trns. Wolfhart Heinrichs)

- Avigail Noy

(with thanks to Beatrice Gruendler, Ahmed El-Shamsy, Lidia Gocheva and Joanne Abed)