The Fihrist of professional bookseller Ibn al-Nadim (d. 990 CE) is a catalogue of books—a bibliography of Arabic works in all fields of science and genres of writing, providing to posterity the equivalent of the card catalogue of the libraries of Baghdad in the late tenth century. At once a crucial source for the historical development of the Islamic science over the previous three centuries and the single most important record of the Abbasid translation movement that facilitated the transmission of scientific knowledge from Greek, Persian, and Sanskrit into Arabic, the Fihrist remains an enigmatic text. Despite concentrated study of the Fihrist since the mid-nineteenth century, editions by Gustav Flügel in 1871-72, Rida Tajaddud in 1971, and Ayman Fu’ad Sayyid in 2009 and 2014, and a complete English translation by Bayard Dodge in 1970, many problems remain in the establishment of the text, the restoration of lacuna, and the interpretation of hundreds of titles, proper names, and enigmatic entries. After an overview of the historical investigation of Ibn al-Nadim and his work, this lecture explores outstanding problems in interpretation of the work, including in particular his discussions of the world’s scripts and Greek scientific patrimony.

Wednesday, January 27, 4-6 pm, White-Levy Room
Near/Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies
School of Historical Studies, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ

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