

# CMES

NEWS

THE CENTER FOR  
MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



2021-22

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## A FAREWELL MESSAGE FROM WILLIAM GRANARA

AS I PREPARE TO DIVEST of my multiple responsibilities at Harvard, I look back at the past three decades of my life at the University with tremendous gratification. When I returned to my native Boston in the late summer of 1993, after nearly twenty-five years lived from Washington to Cairo to Philadelphia and Tunisia, I harbored unbridled enthusiasm for my new position as Senior Preceptor in Arabic in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC). I was tasked with rebuilding a program for the Arabic language that was witnessing at the time a surging interest on campus and throughout the United States. Pleasantly caught in a tug-of-war between NELC and CMES, I found myself, with the prodding of Professors Bill Graham and Roy Mottahedeh, settling into Harvard with my office on the fifth floor of Coolidge Hall, home to CMES at the time.

Being a faculty member in NELC and homed at CMES put me in an enviable position to start my Harvard career. Not the first nor the only faculty member to be an integral part of both places, I did see myself as an effective bridge between the two most important sites for Near/Middle Eastern studies. In those first years I jumped at every opportunity to serve on committees: FLAS and fellowships, admissions, undergraduate curriculum, and so on. I served as a freshman advisor for a number of years, as well as a member of the Committee on International Education and the Weissman International Internship Program. I was honored by the invitation of Professor Gregory Nagy to join him as a co-director of the Comparative Rhetoric and Poetics Seminar at the Humanities Center, a role that gave me wider exposure to the vast intellectual activity across campus. I was indeed exhilarated to learn as much

about the many constituent parts that make up the Harvard universe.

In 1998 I was promoted to Professor of the Practice, which allowed me greater academic upward mobility. I served for eight years as NELC's DUS (Director of Undergraduate Studies) under the wise guidance of my colleague Professor Peter Machinist. In addition, I was asked to teach a Foreign Cultures course in the CORE program on modern Arabic literature, which, in retrospect, contributed to the steady increases in Arabic language enrollments especially among undergraduates. I also began to join a number of doctoral committees in NELC, MES/History, and Comparative Literature. If a robust program in Arabic language is one of my great accomplishments at Harvard, then supervising and co-supervising sixteen doctoral students is another area of immense pride. My promotion to Professor of the



William Granara, Jocelyne Dakhla, Baber Johansen, Cemal Kafadar, William Graham



Roger Owen, William Granara, Roy P. Mottahedeh

## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



Mediterranean Encounters: France and the Arab World, Lourmarin, France, summer 2012



Joint conference with the Graduate School of Design, 2017

Practice also had a hand in my founding of the Harvard Summer School program in postcolonial studies—Mediterranean Encounters: France and the Arab World—a program that brought undergraduate students of Francophone and Arabophone studies under one roof in Aix-en-Provence.

I assumed the directorship of CMES at Harvard in 2013. My three terms at the helm are indeed highlights of my Harvard years. Foremost of my goals in accepting it included extending the Center’s mission throughout the University, and especially into the corridors and classrooms of the humanities and social sciences. My invitation to join the Department of Comparative Literature, a source of tremendous personal pride, aided in this mission. As I stated in my inaugural interview with the CMES newsletter, I envisioned a changing direction throughout the Middle East and in the field of Middle Eastern studies, and in response I initiated the Arabian Studies Lecture Series that resulted not only in numerous lectures and book talks, but in conferences and workshops. CMES has provided funding for students to embark on short-term research in the Arabian Gulf region. And the international conference “After Dark: Nocturnal Landscapes and Public Spaces in the Arabian Peninsula,” co-sponsored with Harvard’s Graduate School of Design and co-convened with Professor Gareth Doherty, and the recent hire of Professor Rosie Bsheer in the Department of History, have done much to enhance Harvard’s profile in this shift of attention toward the Arabian Peninsula.

In 2015 CMES began negotiations to open a research center in Tunisia. With the visionary and generous support of



The Harvard contingent at the inaugural celebration of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies Tunisia Office

Harvard alumnus Hazem Ben-Gacem, as well as the encouragement and guidance of Harvard's Office of the Vice Provost for International Affairs, and with the Herculean skill and efficiency of CMES Executive Director Lauren Montague, CMES Tunisia opened its doors in January 2017, with a gala inauguration attended by Harvard and Tunisian dignitaries and scholars. For the occasion Professor Malika Zeghal delivered the inaugural lecture. What has followed are annual winter-midterm study programs, summer classes in advanced Arabic, and numerous lectures and workshops conducted in person and online by Harvard, Tunisian, and international scholars. We take great pride in the fact that CMES has and continues to fund such excursions to literally

hundreds of Harvard students across the various Schools and disciplines. As much as I concede that I was at the right place at the right time, I do take personal pride in my contribution to and oversight of this extraordinary accomplishment.

If these remarks are to be considered a farewell speech of sorts, allow me to thank those whose support has been instrumental in my success at CMES. In addition to expressing my gratitude to all the members of my steering committees, I thank Professors Roy Mottahedeh and Cemal Kafadar, whose continual presence at 38 Kirkland have provided much wisdom and counsel. Second I thank my super efficient, always joyful, and loyal staff: Lauren Montague, Liz Flanagan, Karen Daley, Eric

Edstam, Jesse Howell, and Sean Widlake, as well as Sihem Lamine in the Tunisia Office, who individually and collectively make CMES such a delightful place to work, and I thank as well all of the staff at NELC. Third, I thank the NELC language faculty at CMES, my loving colleagues and staunchest supports, hard-working, dedicated, and utterly devoted to their students and their profession, and who constantly remind me of the grace and nobility of teaching. And lastly, I thank the hordes of my students, undergraduates and graduates, which I calculate to number somewhere between one and two thousand, who have made me not only smarter, but much the happier in these past glorious three decades.

—WILLIAM GRANARA

# NEWS AND NOTES

## WILLIAM GRANARA RETIRES AFTER TWENTY-NINE YEARS AT HARVARD

by Roy P. Mottahedeh, Gurney Professor of History Emeritus

William Granara, Professor of the Practice of Arabic on the Gordon Gray Endowment, Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Director of the Modern Languages Program in his own Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, and a member of the Department of Comparative Literature, retired June 30, 2022, after twenty-nine years serving Harvard University in a variety of capacities. His colleagues in Islamic studies who are spread throughout many departments and faculties at Harvard, the staff with whom he has worked at CMES for nine years, and the many undergraduate and graduate students who have benefited from his instruction in Arabic language and literature over the years will miss his learning and exuberance.

Many years ago I called a friend who had outstanding skills as an Arabist and literary critic to ask who would be the best choice to appoint as a teacher of Arabic at Harvard. She immediately said, "Bill Granara is the best!" He was trained by fine Jesuit schools and by the inimitable George Makdisi. He had spent many years in Cairo and Tunis, working for the American University of Cairo and later for the State Department and supervising programs to intensify the Arabic of English speakers. Now, many decades later, I can testify that Bill Granara truly is the best.

We, his friends and colleagues in Islamic studies, quickly found out that Bill was an outstanding teacher not only of Arabic but also of Arabic literature. Then we learned he was also a discerning specialist of Arabic novels, several of which he translated into English. He was also well-acquainted with the masters of classic Arabic literature and taught seminars on figures like the tenth-century poet Mutanabbi. Soon it also became clear that he was well-organized and sound in his judgments and therefore became an outstanding Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. A very generous

Tunisian alumnus became interested in extending Harvard's outreach to Tunisia. In Bill this donor found the right person to guide and foster Harvard's outreach to Tunisia resulting in the first CMES field office in the region, which has welcomed students and scholars since its opening in 2016. The exceptional success of these programs owes a great deal to Professor Granara. His two books on Arabic literature, one on medieval Sicily and one on the late eleventh-century Arab Sicilian poet Ibn Hamdis, have been handsome successes. Long may he and his good works flourish! ▣



Roy P. Mottahedeh and William Granara with 2017 Gibb Lecturer Maribel Fierro

Photo: Martha Stewart

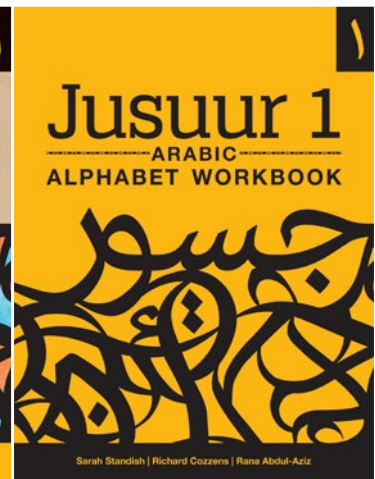
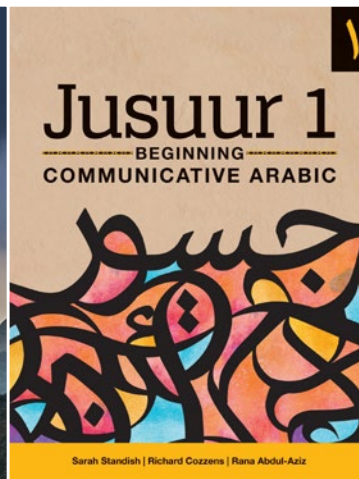
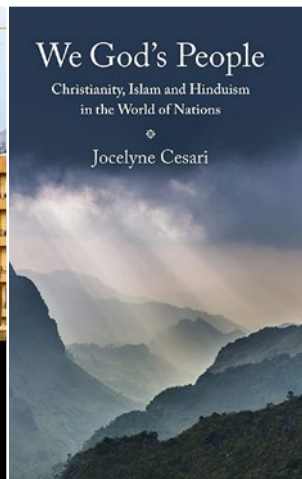
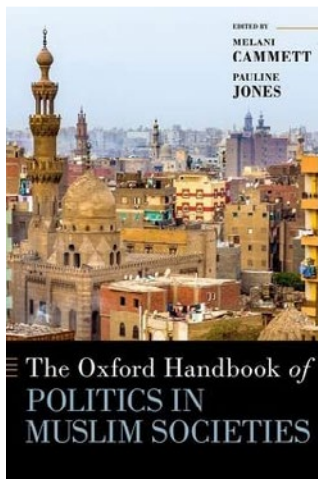
## **FACULTY NEWS**

**Rosie Bsheer** was promoted to Associate Professor of History, beginning July 1, 2022. Her book *Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia* (Stanford University Press, 2020) received the 2021 AGAPS Biennial Book Award, sponsored by the Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies; the 2021 Choice Award for Outstanding Academic Title, sponsored by the American Library Association; 2021 Honorable Mention in the Nikki Keddie Book Award, sponsored by the Middle East Studies Association; and was included in *Foreign Affairs'* The Best of Books 2021. She joined the Editorial Board of the peer-reviewed academic journal *Comparative Studies of South*

*Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, and she received the Dean's Competitive Fund for Promising Scholarship for 2021–22 and 2022–23. **Melani Cammett**, Clarence Dillon Professor of International Affairs, Department of Government, co-edited, with Pauline Jones, *The Oxford Handbook of Politics in Muslim Societies* (Oxford University Press, 2022). **Jocelyne Cesari**, T. J. Dermot Dunphy Visiting Professor of Religion, Violence, and Peacebuilding at Harvard Divinity School, Professor of Religion and Politics, University of Birmingham, and Senior Fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University, was elected Chair of the Religion and IR Section of the

International Studies Association for 2022–24, named Distinguished Scholar of the Religion and International Relations Section of the ISA, 2020, and nominated as a member of the Newsweek Expert Forum in 2021. In 2022 she published *We God's People: Political Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in the World of Nations* (Cambridge University Press), and in 2021 she published "Securitization of Islam: The Lethal Combination of Threat and Identity Politics," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 28.1; "The Muslim Stranger: the Combined Effect of Xenophobia and Islamophobia," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 88.4; "Political Islam: More than Islamism," *Religions* 12.5; and

"Time, Power, and Religion: Comparing the Temple Mount and the Ayodhya Dispute over Sacred Sites," *Journal of Law, Religion and State* 9.1. She participated in the G20 Interfaith Forum and planning of the International Conference, September 2021, and the Annual Conference on Religion and International Affairs of the Council of Foreign Relations, New York, May 2021. In 2021–22 she made numerous appearances on television and radio and contributed essays and was interviewed in several newspapers and online publications. Preceptor in Arabic **Richard Cozzens**, with Sarah Standish and Rana Abdul-Aziz, published *Jusuur 1: Beginning Communicative Arabic* and *Jusuur 1 Arabic*





Meryem Demir at dinner with Modern Turkish students

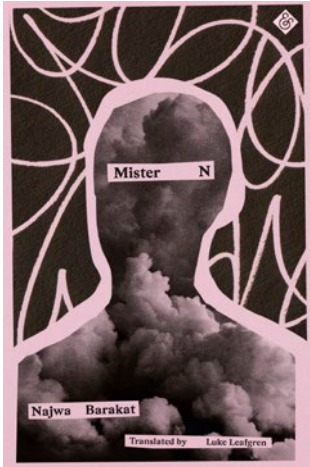
*Alphabet Workbook* (Georgetown University Press, 2022), which together comprise the first year of the two-year Jusuur Arabic Language Program ([jusuurtextbook.com](http://jusuurtextbook.com)), intended for the high school Arabic instruction market. Preceptor in Modern Turkish **Meryem Demir** received an award from the Provostial Fund for the Arts and Humanities for her project proposal “Zip Down to the Istanbul’s Wall Writing.” The project aims to address how the street wall writings in Istanbul, a unique example of Turkish language, are used in

multiple ways (idioms, expressions, poems, rhymes, songs, literary prose) and how this medium of language use is essential as it encompasses both popular and traditional culture. A sustainable digital resource (web portal) will be created for Turkish classes at Harvard in order to expand and enrich the Turkish curriculum. **Gareth Doherty**, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture and Director of the Master in Landscape Architecture Program at the Graduate School of Design, received a grant from the Middle East Initiative and

the Kuwait Program at Harvard Kennedy School. The project, “Design with Darkness: Inhabiting the Kuwaiti Nighttime in the Era of Climate Change,” is a continuation of research that began with the 2017 CMES and GSD conference, *After Dark: Nocturnal Landscapes and Public Spaces in the Arabian Peninsula*. The project is based in the GSD’s Critical Landscapes Design Lab, which Doherty leads ([criticallandscapes.com](http://criticallandscapes.com)). **Luke Leafgren**, Allston Burr Resident Dean and Assistant Dean of Harvard College,

Mather House, published his sixth translation of an Arabic novel, *Mister N*, by Najwa Barakat (And Other Stories, 2022). **Gülru Necipoğlu**, Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art and Director of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard, published “The Mangalia Mosque in the Waqf Empire of an Ottoman Power-Couple: Princess İsmihan Sultan and Sokollu Mehmed Pasha,” in *From Riverbed to Seashore: Art on the Move in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Alina Payne (Getty Publications, 2022); “Volatile Urban Landscapes between Mythical Space and Time,” in *A Companion to Early Modern Istanbul*, ed. Shirine Hamadeh and Çiğdem Kafescioğlu (Brill, 2022); and “Transregional Connections: Architecture and the Construction of Early Modern Islamic Empires,” in *Reflections on Mughal Art and Culture*, ed. Roda Ahluwalia (Niyogi Books, 2021). She delivered “Transregional Connections: Architectural Monuments as Cultural Symbols of Early Modern Islamic Empires,” the keynote lecture in the conference *Cultural Symbols of Early Modern Rule: A Global*





Comparative Approach, University of Bonn, Department of Islamic Studies and Middle Eastern Languages, May 2022. *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4)*, 2 vols., (Supplements to Muqarnas, vol. 14, Brill, 2019), which she co-edited with Cemal Kafadar and Cornell H. Fleischer, received the Middle East Librarians Association Book Award Honorable Mention for 2022. **Derek Penslar**, William Lee Frost Professor of Jewish History, completed a book titled *Zionism: An Emotional State*, which will be published next year in Rutgers University Press' Keywords in Jewish Studies series. His co-edited volume (with Stefan Vogt and Arieh Saposnik)

*Unacknowledged Kinships: Post-Colonial Theory and the Historiography of Zionism* was accepted for publication by Brandeis University Press. He published "Solidarity As an Emotion: American Jewry and the 1948 Palestine War," in *Modern American History*; "How (Not) to Talk to an Antisemite: On the Failure of Jewish Apologetics," in *Activating Archives, Libraries, and Museums in the Fight Against Antisemitism*; and "Who's Afraid of Defining Antisemitism?" in *Antisemitism Studies*. He delivered talks at Brandeis University, the College of Charleston, Fordham University, Tel Aviv University, Stanford University, and the University of Alberta. He co-organized and spoke at a global virtual conference, Jewish Soldiers and Fighters in World War II, and gave a keynote address at a conference, held at the IUPUI Law School in Indianapolis, on antisemitism in contemporary American law. In spring 2021, **David Roxburgh**, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Professor of Islamic Art History and Chair of the Department of History of Art and Architecture, joined Ben Youtz and Nazneen Cooper to present "Reinvigorating a Campus Landmark:

Repositioning Stirling's Museum into a Vibrant Academic Building," at the Society for College and University Planning, North Atlantic Regional Conference. In the summer of 2021, he delivered the keynote lecture at the Persian Arts of the Book conference—celebrating ten years of the Bahari Fellowship at the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University—about the Shahnama made for Timurid prince Muhammad Juki. In October 2021, under the auspices of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, he interviewed Farah Pahlavi on the occasion of the republication of her memoirs *1001 Days: Memoirs of an Empress*. Most recently, he delivered a lecture at Johns Hopkins University also on the topic of poetry and painting in Muhammad Juki's Shahnama. His essay on Baysunghur's anthology in the Berenson Collection, "Calligraphy, Painting, and Illumination in the Berenson Anthology," appeared in *Persian Manuscripts and Paintings from the Collection of Bernard and Mary Berenson at I Tatti*, ed. Aysin Yoltar-Yildirim (I Tatti in collaboration with Officina Libraria, 2021). **Malika Zeghal**, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Professor in Contemporary Islamic Thought and Life,

Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, has the article "The Shaping of the 1857 Security Pact in the Regency of Tunis: A Reappraisal of the Nineteenth Century Constitutional Reforms," forthcoming in *Studia Islamica* 117.2 (2022).

## STUDENT NEWS

### PHD STUDENTS

New History and Middle Eastern Studies PhD graduate **Chloe Bordewich** organized a five-day intensive (virtual) workshop for thirty emerging scholars, "Under-Mapped Spaces: New Tools and Methods for Critical Storytelling with Maps," at Stanford's David Rumsey Map Collection and began co-leading walking tours of Boston's Little Syria, the first stage of a collaborative Ottoman Boston public history project.

### AM STUDENTS

New AM graduate **Faria A. Nasruddin** published a book review of Shenila Khoja-Moolji's *Sovereign Attachments: Masculinity, Muslimness, and Affective Politics in Pakistan* in the journal *Politics and Gender*. She accepted a position as the Program and Events Manager at the Middle East Institute in Washington, DC.

## CMES WELCOMES NEW LANGUAGE FACULTY

CMES welcomed three faculty members to Harvard's Middle Eastern studies community in fall 2021. Born in Qom, Iran, Mojtaba Ebrahimi joined the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC) as Preceptor in Persian. He received his BA in English language and literature (University of Isfahan) and MA in English literature (Shahid Beheshti University) in Iran. He received his PhD in Near Eastern studies from the University of Arizona in 2020 with a dissertation titled "The Iranian Perceptions of Europe during the Early Decades of the Nineteenth Century." His research interests include Persian language and literature,

Iranian cultural history, travel writing studies, comparative literature, and literary theory and criticism. He has published or has under review several articles on Persian literature, as well as Iranian cinema and history. Before coming to Harvard, he taught all levels of Persian language and literature courses for eight years at the University of Arizona and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Amr Madi joined NELC as Preceptor in Arabic. He has been working and researching in the field of teaching Arabic as a second language since 2011. He worked as an instructor in the Flagship program with the American Councils

for International Education from 2013 to 2016. Following this, he worked as a lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin, then as a lecturer at the University of Michigan until February 2020. During this time, he also worked as an instructor at several Arab universities, including Alakhawayn University in Morocco and the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, as well as Alexandria University, where he worked with the study abroad programs of Georgetown University and Middlebury College. He was also the director of the Ningxia University study abroad program in 2015. He has developed the following course materials

for the Flagship program: Modern Arab Thinkers, in 2014, Women in Arab Society, in 2015, Contemporary Arabic Literature, in 2016, and Issues in Contemporary Arab Media, in 2016. He also developed a curriculum on readings in Arabic literature for the University of Texas at Austin in 2018. In 2018, Amr earned his PhD in literary criticism from Alexandria University. His current research focuses on second language acquisition and the application of Communicative Language Teaching to improve language proficiency.

Greg Halaby joined NELC as a Full-Time Teaching Assistant in Arabic. He earned his BA at UC Berkeley and his MA and PhD in Arabic language and literature from NELC, graduating in 2019. His research focuses on Arabic language politics, as well as Arabic literary, intellectual, and cultural history in the Middle East and beyond. Halaby has taught Arabic, comparative literature, Persian (Farsi), and postcolonial studies at Harvard, Brown, the American Institute in Aix-en-Provence, and Macalester. In his spare time, he enjoys Arabic stand-up comedy, crossword puzzles, and conversations about food.



Mojtaba Ebrahimi



Amr Madi



Greg Halaby

## ROY MOTTAHEDEH REMEMBERS AHMAD MAHDAMI DAMGHANI

by Roy P. Mottahedeh, Gurney Professor of History Emeritus

Professor Ahmad Mahdavi Damghani, who taught part-time as an associate at Harvard University from 1987 to 2014, died on June 17, 2022 (13th of Shahrivar, 1305). He was born on September 5, 1926, in the shrine city of Mashhad, where his father, Ayatollah Shaykh Muhammad Kazim Damghani, was a distinguished cleric. He pursued both a secular and a Shi'ite clerical education in the schools of Mashhad. Afterwards he studied at the University of Tehran, where he received a PhD in Islamic theology and in Persian literature. Subsequently, he was appointed Professor in that university, both in the School of Theology and in the School of Literature. He taught in these faculties from 1962 to 1985.

Mahdavi Damghani's memory was legendary. He was famous for knowing by heart tens and tens of thousands of lines of Arabic poetry as well as almost as many lines of Persian poetry. Even those who studied with him in his old age marveled at his ability to help a student understand a line by reciting a parallel passage in

other poems. This knowledge also helped him to write over 300 academic articles as well as over ten editions and commentaries on classical works in Arabic and Persian literature. He was honored in several Festschriften, including one by his Western colleagues published in Berlin in 2016. In addition to Harvard University, he also taught at the University of Pennsylvania during his stay in America.

He was known to be a very fine cook of Persian food, a skill he was careful to explain

to his friends. He believed that a learned man should be a good cook so that he might not marry the wrong woman for her cooking. He was endlessly supportive of his children. One of his daughters, Farideh Mahdavi-Damghani, followed in his footsteps and became a celebrated translator, winning a prize in Italy for her Persian translation of Dante.

Mahdavi Damghani's passing was mourned not only in Iran but throughout the Shi'ite world, and Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the highest authority

for most Twelver Shi'ites, wrote an open letter mourning the passage "of one who had so many perfections of learning and excellences of character." At his passing, Ayatollah Mohammad Hasan Safi wrote that his father, Grand Ayatollah Safi Golpayeghani, "praised him (Mahdavi Damghani) for this spirit [of devotion to knowledge] and considered him an example of an educated and pious man." It is doubtful that anyone of comparable skills has survived him. He will be buried in Mashhad. □



Ahmad Mahdavi Damghani with William Graham and William Granara at CMES in 2012

## Q&A WITH CMES TUNISIA'S SIHEM LAMINE

*Sihem Lamine is the Administrative and Program Manager of the Tunisia Office of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Prior to officially joining CMES, Sihem worked as a consultant for CMES and Harvard Global Research and Support Services and played a major role in the transformation of the office space in Tunis from an empty shell to a functional and beautiful multi-purpose facility. For over six years she has been welcoming students, faculty, and visitors to the office, the city of Tunis, and the country of Tunisia, facilitating research projects, organizing public events, and generally helping visitors navigate and enjoy the resources and opportunities that Tunisia has to offer.*

### **What is your professional background?**

I studied architecture at the Ecole Speciale d'Architecture in Paris. I worked as a project architect in a ship-construction practice, Seine Design, in Paris for three years. Then, in partnership with fellow architect Jean Baptiste Barache, I co-founded Arba, a design practice specializing in sustainable residential architecture. We worked

together for more than a decade building wooden houses in the Alps, Normandie, Burgundy, and the suburbs of Paris and won several awards.

In 2013, having always been particularly drawn to the urban history of Islamic cities, I decided to go back to university and study the history of Islamic art and architecture at SOAS, London. I wrote a dissertation that explored the formation of the early medieval Zaytuna Mosque of Tunis. What I thought would be a nourishing break in my architectural path proved to be a turning point in my professional life: It drove me back to the academic and publishing worlds.

That is how, in late summer 2015, I found myself taking a job interview with Professor William Granara, CMES Director, and Lauren Montague, CMES Executive Director, in a hotel in Tunis for a position that consisted in the implementation of the first branch of Harvard CMES in Tunisia. Despite having spent most of my early professional years in construction fields dealing with artisans and construction companies, and drawing more than writing, I found an immense interest

and inspiration in the project, and in CMES programs and vision.

As a child and teenager, my family lived in campus residences, first at the Ecole Normale Superieure of Bizerte, then in the Faculte des Lettres of Manouba. Our house was constantly filled with students and scholars of various nationalities. The gardens, amphitheatres, and libraries of these campuses were our playground. I grew up intuitively familiar with the backstage of higher education structures: how they function, how they look when they are empty and when they are filled with the flow of students. I saw and lived the 1980s tensions and protests in Tunisia's universities from the ground.

It has been more than six years since I joined CMES as the Administrative and Program Manager of the Tunisia Office. It took me some time to draw clear links between these childhood years and my CMES Tunisia experience, but university campuses are somehow a natural milieu for me, and this might explain the passion that has been driving my work at the Tunisia Office.

### **What attracted you to the CMES Tunisia Office position?**

It is useful to keep in mind the context in which the inception of CMES Tunisia took place: Such an initiative would have never been possible in pre-2011 Tunisia, a country where individual and academic freedoms were arbitrary, not to say nonexistent. The idea of implementing a research center in the humanities and social sciences embodied a lot of what I believed in and dreamt of. I saw the project as a powerful signal proving that a substantial change was really taking place in the country.

After meeting the CMES team for the first time in Tunis, I knew that I wholeheartedly wanted/had to help the CMES Tunisia Office project to exist, succeed, and grow, with all the means and skills I had. Needless to say it was not any random Middle Eastern studies research center, it was part of Harvard University, an institution I have always admired and respected. I was thrilled to be part of a team committed to building bridges between academic communities, creating a multidisciplinary environment that values the lived experience, a team convinced that knowledge continues beyond the classroom, on the ground,

and that studying societies and communities cannot ignore their arts, literature, cinema, theater, built environment, and culture.

**What have been the best parts about managing the CMES Tunisia Office and programming?**

The best moments in the last six years have doubtlessly been meeting the Harvard community, students, faculty, and staff, learning about diverse research interests, and catalyzing connections with local academic communities. Programming and hosting for the successive trips, visits, and academic events has been a truly rewarding and rich experience. One of the greatest rewards is seeing students return to the country after a first visit, use the office resources as a remote place they can benefit from and where their work can thrive.

One of the highlights of the CMES Tunisia programs is the J-term Introduction to Tunisia three-week annual trip. The CMES Tunisia Office hosted five successive winter trips (2016–20). All of them were supervised by Professor Granara, and were fascinating moments of discovery and interaction for groups of students who visit



Sihem Lamine with Yo-Yo Ma in the Medina of Tunis

Photo: Austin Mann

the region, sometimes for the first time. Each of these trips represented an opportunity to witness the students’ tremendous curiosity and thirst to learn and understand, and rediscover my own environment through their eyes.

The Arabic Language Summer Program is also a wonderful moment of the year at the office. Groups gather for a five- to six-week period. It is an opportunity for them to learn the language while being in an Arabic-speaking environment and while enjoying Tunisia’s summer atmosphere.

Spring faculty visits are also rewarding and humbling moments in the office’s life. They offer, of course, the opportunity to hear from Harvard’s incredible talents, and to host lectures by Harvard faculty that are open to everyone. They are also moments of rich exchange and connection. Professors Granara, Malika Zeghal, Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar, Roy Mottahedeh, and Gareth Doherty all gave fascinating lectures attended by the Tunis academic community.

The CMES Tunisia Office also organized two major

academic gatherings in the field of Mediterranean studies: The first, “Mediterranean Cousins: Tunisia and Italy on Opposite Shores,” was held in October 2019. A group of scholars from Tunisian, American, and European universities met in Tunis to present and discuss their work on history of the relations linking the northern and southern shores of the Central Mediterranean Sea. The second, “Mapping Tunisia in Mediterranean Studies: Approaches to Research and Professional Development in the Humanities and Social

## NEWS AND NOTES

Sciences,” was organized in March 2020, in collaboration with the Mediterranean Seminar. It offered a great opportunity to students in the humanities studying in Tunisian universities to hear from guest professors such as Julia Clancy-Smith, Professor of History at the University of Arizona, and Brian A. Catlos, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

In addition to these major programs, visiting scholars have contributed actively to building and maintaining a local academic community with lectures or series such as Al-Jisr Academic Writing Workshop, initiated by Laura Thompson, Eyalet, Discussions on Ottoman Tunisia, moderated by Youssef Ben Ismail, or the Urban in North Africa Workshop, led by Myriam Amri.

### **What have been some of the challenges, and in particular the challenges in the Covid era, and what kinds of programming have you been able to pursue given the ever-changing protocols regarding travel and gatherings in Tunisia, the United States, and other countries?**

As an off-campus remote office, the biggest challenge we encountered was the Covid

pandemic and the travel restrictions it generated. This caused a great deal of uncertainty and successive program cancellations. However, it forced us to substantially adapt our functioning mode and programs to keep the community together, connected, and involved remotely.

In summer 2020, we launched a digital humanities program supervised by Professor Granara with a group of Harvard CMES researchers. The initiative's aim is to research a corpus of press publications from the interwar period in Tunisia, and to make the content available to the community of researchers with interest in the intellectual, social, and literary history of Tunisia and the region. The corpus was collated and digitalized in collaboration with the CDN (Archives of the Tunisian Press), the National Archives of Tunisia, and National Library of Tunisia. The program has been running for four terms, and we are hoping to see the results of the research published in collaboration with Widener Library.

Also in reaction to the first Covid lockdown, we worked in collaboration with the Center for Hellenic Studies in Greece to co-produce *#After Lockdown:*

*Very Short Stories about Enduring a Global Pandemic*, a 50-minute animated film presenting individual stories about living through the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic in different places in the world. The film, designed by Mr Sebs, an animation studio co-directed by CMES alumnus Mohamad Saleh AM '18, premiered at 24 Hours of Harvard 2020, the first online version of Harvard Worldwide Week. It features testimonials from students and professors, but also contributors from outside the academic community, narrating their personal experiences with lockdown, travel restrictions, switching to new forms of education, displacement, isolation, job loss, and more broadly, adapting their lives to the new circumstances imposed on them and on their communities. When we look back at the film today, it is incredibly rewarding to have this collective scrapbook documenting a moment of change for all of us.

The switch to online programming was also the opportunity to launch Tunisia Newsreel: Notes from the Ground, a webinar series on contemporary Tunisia in which selected guests discuss the country's economy,

international and regional politics, public health, crisis management, policy making, social justice, race, gender, history, heritage, and arts.

### **What opportunities have you had to collaborate with other Harvard departments and Schools?**

The CMES Tunisia Office is committed to serve as an outreach, promotion, and recruitment platform for other Harvard Schools, departments, and programs with relation to the Ben-Gacem Fund at Harvard or with specific interest in the country.

In past years, we have organized information sessions on applying to Harvard College, held in person at the Tunisia Office and livestreamed to audiences in multiple locations around the country in collaboration with AMIDEAST and local education institutions. We have provided assistance to Harvard Kennedy School for recruitment for fully sponsored opportunities for the Master in Public Administration and Master in Public Policy programs in collaboration with Tunisia's Ecole Nationale d'Administration. The office has also served as a connection and development platform for the implementation of HMX

online courses in Medical Fundamental Sciences in four medical schools of Tunisia, a program that is developed and run by Harvard Medical School. The Tunisia Office also supported establishing connections between Harvard Business School and Tunisian companies. And we have been an active partner of the Crossroads Program, an opportunity open to first-generation college students in South Asia, Africa, and the MENA region, initiated by the the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute.

**You recently published an article in the journal *Muqarnas* (edited by Gülru Necipoğlu, Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art in Harvard's Department of the History of Art and Architecture and a core CMES faculty affiliate). What was the piece about? Do you hope to publish more work in the future, in *Muqarnas* or elsewhere?**

It was such a pleasure and honor for me to have my article on the minaret of Zaytuna Mosque published in *Muqarnas*, after having presented the preliminary findings of the research at the 2019 MESA Annual Conference in New Orleans. The article is

titled “Colonial Zaytuna: The Making of a Minaret in French Occupied Tunisia.” It explores the complex and fascinating context of the construction of a monumental minaret for the city’s Great Mosque, the Zaytuna, in the late nineteenth century while the country was gradually transitioning from its Ottoman past and surrendering to the newly established French colonial rule. The article questions the presence of a colonial structure where it is less expected to be found. The article is also meant to be a humble tribute to the architects, artisans, and builders who contributed to the construction of this beautiful piece of architecture.

The production and publication of this article was a team work that would never have been possible without many members of the CMES community. I am grateful to my colleagues and friends who helped me to accomplish this work by offering opportunities, connections, advice, revisions, or simply words of encouragement. I do hope I will be able to write and publish more work on Tunisia’s urban history and history of architecture. I am drawn and concerned by questions related to heritage preservation. I belong among

those who believe that our relationship to the land, the built environment, and to memory of place can be key to building creative and sustainable environments and economies. And I do believe that academic research and publication can serve as a tool for advocacy: Telling the stories of buildings is a way to protect them.

**Celebrated cellist Yo-Yo Ma ’76 was in Tunis recently, and CMES Tunisia hosted a panel conversation with him. Can you tell us more about it?**

Sunday, March 27, was an unforgettable day, indeed! The Harvard CMES Tunisia Office took part in the North Africa edition of Yo-Yo Ma’s Bach Project, organized in Tunis on March 26 and 27, 2022. On the first day, Ma gave an exceptional concert at the Cité de la Culture of Tunis. Then the second day was dedicated to action and dialogue on how culture connects people and how hope can be (re)built through creative heritage. In the panel discussion entitled “Finding Beauty in What We Call Home,” Yo-Yo Ma conversed with two Tunisian artists: painter and sculptor Sonia Kallel and urbex photographer Mourad Ben Cheikh Ahmed. The three of them talked about their work

and projects; they spoke on themes as diverse as beauty, memory, heritage, war, and the role of artists in society and in the world. It was an immense pleasure for me to moderate this discussion.

What is fantastic is that the very first connection with the Bach Project’s team happened thanks to two Harvard CMES Tunisia alumni, Dustin Klinger, NELC PhD ’21, and CMES PhD candidate Salmaan Mirza, in early 2020. I remember responding to the introduction email saying that Yo-Yo Ma’s visit to Tunisia would be a “dream come true.” Then, after two years of Covid, the dream became reality! And all of us at CMES are most grateful to Yo-Yo Ma and everyone who contributed to putting Tunis and the CMES Tunisia Office on the Bach Project’s map.

**What are you up to at the office for the coming spring and summer?**

I am thrilled to be relaunching in-person programming with such a celebration, and in music! And we are very much looking forward to resuming the in-person Summer Program after two years of interruption. The return of students to the CMES Tunisia Office will be a delightful moment! ☐

## A TRIBUTE TO HERBERT C. KELMAN

by Sara Roy and Lenore Martin, Associates of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Herbert Chanoch Kelman passed away peacefully on March 1, 2022, at age 94. He was predeceased by his beloved wife and partner of 67 years, Rose Brousman Kelman.

Professor Kelman's career began in 1947, when he graduated magna cum laude from Brooklyn College and from the Seminary College of Jewish Studies in New York. In 1951, he received his PhD in social psychology and personality from Yale University. After completing his PhD, he spent three years at Johns Hopkins University on post-doctoral fellowships from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and the US Public Health Service, where his primary research emphasis was in the area of social influence, which became a central theoretical focus of his career. During this period in Baltimore, another focus of his life and career, international conflict, also began. He was one of a small group of social scientists who in 1952 founded the Research Exchange on the Prevention of War—one of the first attempts in the new field of peace research. The following year, in 1953, he married Rose Brousman, who became active with him in the local chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality, which Professor Kelman helped establish.

While a Fellow at Stanford University's Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in 1954–55, Professor Kelman was instrumental in founding *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, which began

publication at the University of Michigan in 1957. The journal represented a major milestone in the development of the peace research movement and remains a critical outlet for interdisciplinary work in peace and conflict research.

During the next two years, 1955–57, Professor Kelman worked at the National Institute of Mental Health, where he completed a monograph entitled *Compliance, Identification, and Internalization: A Theoretical and Experimental Approach to the Study of Social Influence*, for which he was awarded the 1956 Socio-Psychological Prize of the American Association of the Advancement of Science.

His Harvard career began in 1957, when he joined the Harvard faculty as a Lecturer on Social Psychology in the Department of Social Relations, where he remained until 1962. He was then appointed Professor of Psychology and Research Psychologist at the Center for Research on Conflict Resolution at the University of Michigan. Among his many accomplishments during this period, Professor Kelman edited and contributed to *International Behavior: A Social-Psychological Analysis*, which was published in 1965 and is widely accepted as the definitive presentation of the social-psychological dimensions of international relations.

In 1968 Professor Kelman returned to Harvard as the Richard Clarke Cabot Professor of Social Ethics, a position he held until 1999, when he became the Richard Clarke Cabot Research Professor of Social Ethics. During his 54 years at

Harvard, Herbert Kelman was remarkably prolific. He held numerous prestigious academic appointments including the Distinguished Visiting Professor at the American University in Cairo (1977); Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC (1980–81), at which time he was also a Guggenheim Fellow; Visiting Scholar at the Truman and Davis Institutes at Hebrew University in Jerusalem (spring 1985); Sterling McMurrin Distinguished Visiting Professor of Liberal Education at the University of Utah (fall 1985); Jennings Randolph Distinguished Fellow of the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, DC (1989–90); and Visiting Professor at the University of Economics in Vienna (1994).

Professor Kelman's achievements and contributions to the disciplines of social and political psychology, toward resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and, in the larger sense, toward understanding and preventing international and inter-group violence, were significant and remarkable. His life's work, shaped largely by his experience as a Holocaust survivor, was informed by a profound concern with human dignity and the danger of dehumanization. In his own words:

*The central motivating factors in my work on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have been my concerns about a secure future for Israel and about justice for the Palestinian people. Both of these concerns are directly linked to my experience with the Holocaust.*

*The most difficult moments in my Israeli–Palestinian work were those at*



*which I had to confront . . . Israeli policies, practices, or isolated acts that involved humiliation, harassment, and arbitrary treatment of Palestinians, depriving them of their dignity and identity. Such moments painfully reminded me of what happened to my own people and what I personally observed in my childhood. I have never, until now, shared these reactions with anyone other than my wife, for fear of being misunderstood. I am not comparing the Palestinian experience to the Holocaust. I have strongly rejected any attempt to draw such an analogy, just as I have rejected the analogy between Palestinian terrorism and Nazi pogroms. But one of the central lessons that I have drawn from the Holocaust is the need to be supremely vigilant to any action that degrades others merely because of the category in which they are placed and excludes them from one's own moral community. Although such actions may be far removed from mass murder or ethnic cleansing, they establish an inexorable logic that readily points in that direction.*

Professor Kelman's disciplinary work focused on four areas—the ethics of social research, conformity and obedience, nationalism and national identity, and international conflict and its resolution, with a particular focus on the Israeli–Palestinian crisis. The major themes of his work were the moral dimensions of human behavior, the dynamics of individual and social change, and the application of social science to social issues and its contribution to the problems of war and peace. One of Professor Kelman's most significant contributions was his development of

the interactive problem-solving methodology, a Track II diplomatic approach to resolving conflict, which continues to be used.

He was a prolific writer, having authored well over 200 publications. Among his most significant and widely quoted works were, as mentioned above, *International Behavior: A Social-Psychological Analysis* and *Crimes of Obedience*, with V. Lee Hamilton.

Professor Kelman was the recipient of over 30 prestigious awards throughout his academic career, including the Kurt Lewin Memorial Award of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, the New York Academy of Science Award, the Lifetime Contribution Award in the Division of Peace Psychology from the American Psychological Association, the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order from the University of Louisville, the Austrian Medal of Honor for Science and Art, the Gold Medal of Honor of the Federal Capital of Vienna, and the Grand Medal of Honor for Meritorious Contributions to the Republic of Austria. In 2011, Vienna's IICP was renamed the Herbert C. Kelman Institute for Interactive Conflict Transformation.

Professor Kelman's intense involvement in the Middle East began during his Harvard years. In 1977, he became Chair of the Middle East Seminar, co-sponsored by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and the Weatherhead Center for Inter-



national Affairs. Under his chairmanship, the Middle East Seminar became a major forum on modern Middle East politics at Harvard University. In 1993, he and his graduate students founded the Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution (PICAR). The program is based on the scholar-practitioner model, which calls for a continuing interaction of practice with research, theory building, and training.

Herbert Kelman's life and his foundational work are a testimony to great achievement, moral courage, and spiritual resource. He will be deeply missed. ▣

# COMMENCEMENT RECEPTION 2022



Jesse Howell, Faria Nasruddin,  
Christina Bouri, Uri Inspector



Ghazi Ghazi and guests



William Granara, Jesse Howell, Dutton Crowley



Chloe Bordewich



Guests with Sheng Zhang, Xuechen Wang



Lisa Gulesserian, Reilly Barry



Sumaya Malas and guest



William Granara addresses graduates and guests



Sumaya Malas, Diallya Jandali, William Granara, Christina Bouri, Ghazi Ghazi



Joseph Kushner and guest



Mojtaba Ebrahimiyan, Himmet Taskomur

## CONGRATULATIONS 2021–22 AM AND PHD GRADUATES!

### AM PROGRAM

- **Reilly Barry**
- **Christina Bouri**—*Thesis*: “Mirî and Mawat: From the 1858 Ottoman Land Code to Modern Israeli Land Grabs in the West Bank.” *Advisor*: Rosie Bsheer
- **Dutton Crowley**—*Thesis*: “Modernity and Cultural Invasion: Ali Khamenei, the United States, and the Software Movement.” *Advisor*: Mojtaba Ebrahimian. CMES Thesis Prize
- **Joseph Cushner**
- **Katie Falk**

- **Ghazi Ghazi**—*Thesis*: “Artistic Expression and Memory in Conflict: The Politics of Iraq War Art 2003–2011.” *Advisor*: Gareth Doherty
- **Uri Inspector**—*Thesis*: “Arab Palestinian Labor in Israel, 1880–2000.” *Advisor*: Derek Penslar
- **Dialla Jandali**
- **Sumaya Malas**—*Thesis*: “Patterns of Ongoing Conflict Reconstruction Contract Distribution: Evaluating the Syrian Conflict.” *Advisor*: Kristin Fabbe
- **Faria Nasruddin**—*Thesis*: “Halidé Edib Adivar’s ‘melting-pot’ in the ‘ghost-sky’: Drawing the Early Turkish Republic into the Indian Ocean.” *Advisor*: Lerna Ekmekçioğlu (MIT)
- **Tianyu Qiao**
- **Xuechen Wang**—*Thesis*: “Incarcerated in Time: A Linguistic Analysis of the Palestinian Social Temporalities’ Development and Shift from the Nakba to the New Millennium.” *Advisor*: Arthur Kleinman

- **Sheng Zhang**—*Thesis*: “A Perplexed Wanderer toward Modernization: The Jadid Movement as the Seed for the Flourish and Collapse of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism in Early 20th Century Xinjiang.” *Advisor*: Cemal Kafadar

### JOINT PHD PROGRAMS

- **Chloe Bordewich** (History and MES)—*Dissertation*: “Leaking Empires: The Struggle over Information in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1870–1952.” *Advisor*: Maya Jasanoff. *Committee*: Arthur Asseraf, Rosie Bsheer, Khaled Fahmy, Cemal Kafadar
- **Caroline Kahlenberg** (History and MES)—*Dissertation*: “How Locals Became Settlers: Mizrahi Jews and Bodily Capital in Palestine, 1908–1948.” *Advisor*: Derek Penslar. *Committee*: Rosie Bsheer, Abigail Jacobson, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Sherene Seikaly
- **Aylin Yildirim Tschoepe** (Anthropology and MES)—*Dissertation*: “Brave New Turkey: Contesting the Production and Valuation of Bodies, Urban Space, and Ecology.” *Advisor*: Michael Herzfeld. *Committee*: Theodore C. Bestor, Ajantha Subramanian



William Granara and Jesse Howell with 2021–22 CMES AM and PhD graduates

## IN THE SHADOW OF HISTORY: A SUMMER IN TUNISIA

*In the summer of 2022, after a two-year hiatus due to Covid-19, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies' five-week Arabic language program in Tunis made its long-awaited return. Led for a fifth time by the Gordon Gray Research Professor of Arabic and outgoing CMES Director William Granara, the program synthesized modern Tunisian history, literature, and culture through various texts dating from the early-twentieth-century pre-Independence period to the contemporary, post-Revolution setting. Nicolas Pantelick '24, a joint NELC and government concentrator, detailed his summer experience in Tunisia, joining six other undergraduate and graduate classmates from across the University.*

To comprehend a nation's culture, history, and traditions requires an act of submission—a supplication to journeys covered, cataloged, and yet to be conceived. Nowhere is this more evident than in Tunisia. Tunisia's is a rich and splintered history, its eras cross-pollinated by bygone civilizations—Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine, and many Islamic empires. History is the setting, seat, and sequence on which modern Tunisia models and reimagines itself.

As participants in CMES' five-week Arabic summer language program, my classmates and I had the privilege of experiencing the endless wisdom, wit, and dry humor of Professor William Granara. Our class was distinctly global, with members hailing from the United States, United Kingdom, Italy, and China, each

bringing with them an inimitable character, expertise, and charm. The existence of the CMES Tunisia Office can largely be attributed to Granara's dedication and his role as a leading force within Middle Eastern studies at Harvard. In many ways, Tunis is a second home to Granara, who spent five years there as the Director of the US State Department's Arabic field school before arriving at Harvard, as well as many summers living there since.

Befitting someone of Granara's expertise, our Arabic reading selections were eclectic, historically apropos, and in tune with the tumultuous tenor of modern-day Tunisian politics. Each selected text unlocked the sprawl of Tunisian cultural, social, and political history that lay beyond the Center's walls, spanning a century from the height of French colonialism to the contemporary moment. While our textual journey through this breadth of millennia was not strictly linear, the literary thread that Professor Granara unraveled created both a coherent web to visualize the Tunisian national consciousness across time and a compelling paradigm for our summer's travels.

Our reading of early-twentieth-century Tunisian writer and intellectual Ali Du'aji's (1909–49) colloquially titled narrative “Barhopping through the Mediterranean” evoked a continuity between historical context and the contemporary, emphasizing the region's hybridity and shared culture. Du'aji's work recounted his 1933 journey around the Mediterranean, irreverently capturing the flaws and complications

of the interwar period through vivid vignettes while bucking the stringent literary parameters of the traditional *rihla* (or travel) genre that is often connected to the Hajj. Sometimes known as “the father of the modern Tunisian short story,” Du'aji was born into a wealthy merchant family of Turkish ancestry in Tunis. As a young writer, he joined the nationalist, anticolonial “Jama'at that al-sur” or “Beneath-the-Wall Group,” who met in the old Medina of Tunis near Bab Souika. Ninety years later, our class's travels seemed to fill a missing national link in Du'aji's epic, the young luminary having traversed and written about every corner of the Mediterranean but his own, though always carrying with him the Tunisian ethos. Although our summer treks across Tunisia may not have been as dramatic as the absurdities Du'aji described, we too found ourselves, strangers in a new land, piecing together abstract, refracted understandings of history and culture from fleeting moments, characters, and conservations.

My Tunisian story began on an early June evening when I arrived in Tunis, carrying on my brow the perspiration and excitement of my long journey from San Francisco. I met my classmates at our accommodations, nestled atop a panoramic perch thirty minutes north of the city center. From this vantage, we gazed down on the blue and white porticos of Sidi Bou Said to the left and the glamorous beach town expanse of La Marsa and Gammarth to the right. Beaches hemming

## NEWS AND NOTES

the Mediterranean's expanse would be our constant companion, whether those along the translucent waters of the rocky Raf Raf and Bizerte peninsula to the northwest of Tunis or on the sweeping plains speckled with olive groves of the country's Sahel to the center east, with its port cities of Sousse, Mahdia, and Monastir.

Indeed, if beaches were our steadfast summer skyline, the musky ambrosia of cigarettes was our perpetual perfume. In any Tunisian *café au bord de la Mer*, whether enjoying a sugary mint tea, bitter "Turkish" coffee, or fresh fruit juice, with smoke curling up from many a patron's lips, you would soon be greeted by a jasmine flower seller bearing a woven basket adorned with a crown of a dozen or so neatly packaged white bouquets. As persistent as they are ubiquitous, the purveyors find success around Tunis' tourist-heavy beachfront towns, such as our Sidi Bou Said and La Marsa enclaves. The jasmine flowers invoke an old Andalusian tradition, wherein men place the white coronation behind an ear to allure a future lover. Wide-eyed foreigners stand out like sore thumbs amidst Tunis' urban frenzy, especially with tourism subdued by Covid-19 in recent years.

In Tunis, the humming rails of the TGM (Tunis-Goulette-Marsa) commuter tram built in 1872 bisect the city, zigzagging through the sun-soaked silhouettes of whitewashed houses and antique ruins alike. In 1912, the Tunis tram system had been the site of a boycott by Tunisian Arabs, who refused to ride all city trams for over a month after a car driven by an Italian conductor had hit and killed a



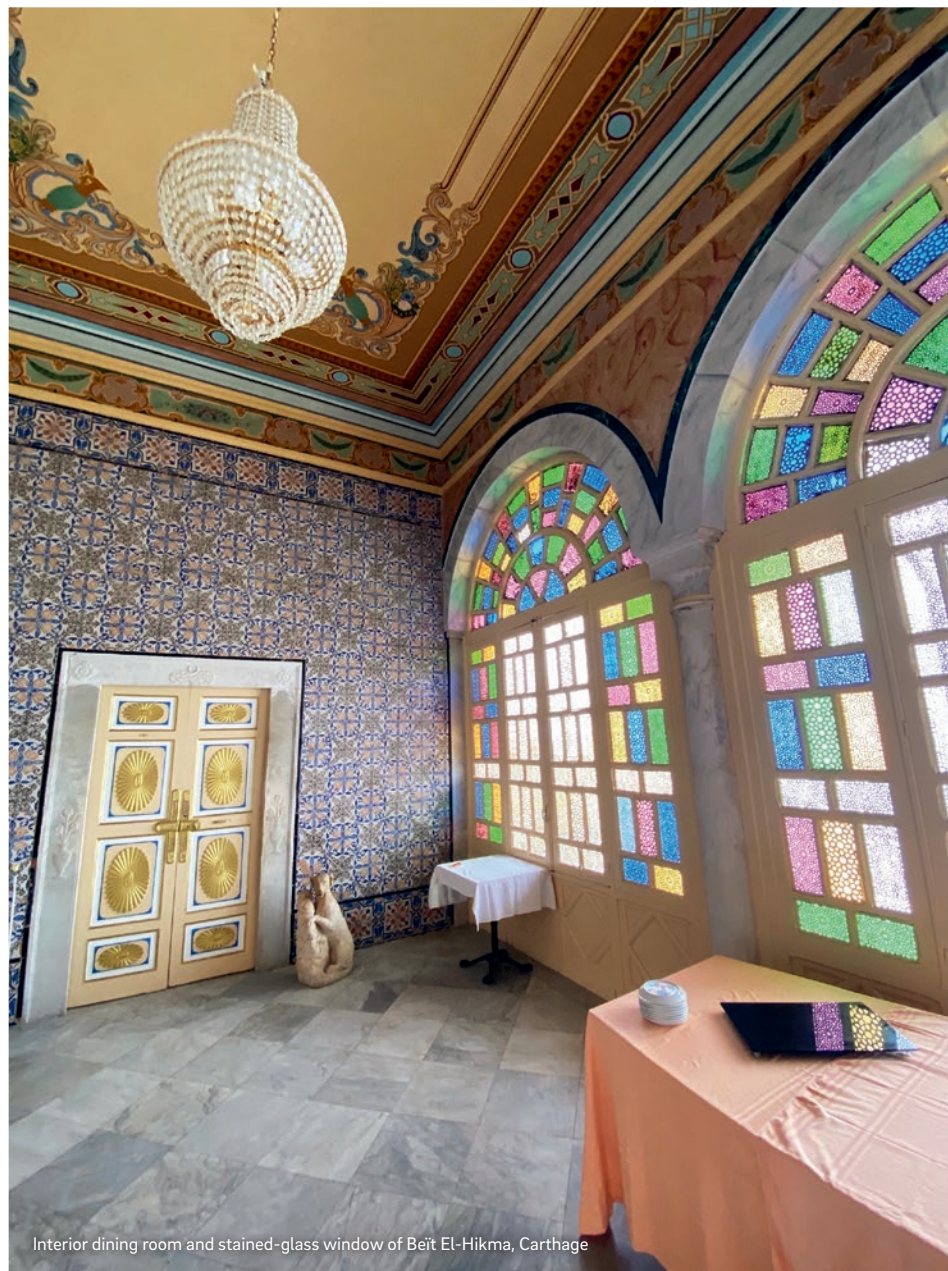
Our class (left to right: Alex Garnick, Flo Sharp, Maggie Thielens, Giulia Benvenuto, Josh Willcox, and Nicolas Pantelick; not pictured: Lavinia Zhao) at the foot of El-Zitouna Mosque in the Medina of Tunis



View from above the blue- and white-toned village of Sidi Bou Said, a northern suburb of Tunis, where we stayed for the summer

child near the Medina downtown. Though ultimately unsuccessful, this experience in collective action provided a catalyst for Tunisians' political awareness, one that coalesced around the leadership of newly formed political organizations such as the "Destour (Constitutional Liberal) Party"—the principal force behind the national independence movement. Fittingly, on the first day of Granara's course, we began reading the 1920 Tunisian independence manifesto, "Tunis the Martyr," of Abdelaziz Thâalbi (1876–1944), an eminent founding Destour Party member, who wrote his nationalist commentary while exiled in France following the tram boycott.

One day in late June, with the crawl of summer towards its dog days, the weather in Tunis had grown warmer, and the sea offered a welcome respite from the sun's glare. Disembarking the TGM, I walked down the Carthage shore, cutting a path through the shallow water and the dancing drone of the beach's cacophony. The gentle thrum of Mediterranean swells against the shore was a welcome repose from the raging wedding party at our hotel the night before when the deluge of noise reached its zenith in the early hours. Eventually, I reached Beït El Hikma (also known as the Zarrouk Palace), a monumental nineteenth-century Ottoman villa constructed by the Husainid officials, towering above the antique splendor of Carthage, adjacent to the Baths of Antonius. Families swam and played in the water, splashing and jumping like minnows beneath dilapidated concrete blocks—former Carthaginian fortifications and the site of Punic War carnage. Beït El Hikma holds historical significance



Interior dining room and stained-glass window of Beït El-Hikma, Carthage

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in Tunisia as the *mise-en-scène* of the proclamation of the Republic of Tunisia in 1957, which deposed the country's last monarch, Lamine Bey, and a realized Thâalbi and other National Movement leaders' struggle. Land stretched in the distant periphery across the yawning Gulf of Tunis, an acute reminder of the distance a nation must travel to throw off colonial shackles and achieve sovereignty.

Later that week, we headed south from Sidi Bou Said. Tunis suburbs floated by the taxi's window lost in the roar of a warm summer wind. To be a passenger in Tunisia is an act of reckless abandon. Yet, you would not know it by observing drivers navigate nimbly through obstacles, straddling lanes without a turn signal or care, the brazen made tranquil and innate. With each sharp acceleration, my shirt clung to my back, as I did to my chair, the seatbelt a luxurious afterthought.

We would tour the city's Medina on one of the summer's hottest days, congregating around its imposing doorstep at Bab El Bhar (or "the sea gate")—the seat of Tunisian colonial cosmopolitanism during Du'aji's epoque. The everyday ebullience seemed as if it were plucked from a medieval *modus vivendi*; our presence was rendered alien and insignificant. Timelessness again colored our stroll through the Medina on Eid El-Adha in early July, each step tinged with the fetid smell of burnt meat as so many years and celebrations before. Every few paces, we would come across men barbecuing quartered lambs with torches, belching flames onto the blackened animal skin in a slow whine. In the week prior, the bleating



Exterior of El-Zitouna Mosque in Tunis. Photo by Walid Akef, PhD candidate in history of art and architecture

of sheep had echoed across Tunisia, the imminent stained sacrifice of flocks solemnizing a week of familial celebration and a guarantee of a nation well fed.

Within the confines of Tunisian medinas, perhaps no two buildings better epitomize the country's amalgam of history, culture, and civilization than the El-Zitouna and Great Kairouan Mosques. Both are formerly renowned Islamic university and legal centers buttressed by columns and facades salvaged from Carthaginian, Roman, and Byzantine ruins. Although El-Zitouna dates from around 700 CE, the mosque became the main national scholarly hub in the thirteenth century—when the Almohad and Hafsid rulers established Tunis as the capital of Ifriqiya—producing

scholars such as the esteemed historian Ibn Khaldun. Sihem Lamine—the CMES Tunis Office Administrative Manager and our exceptionally generous resident Tunisia expert, who deserves our endless appreciation—noted how shops in the Tunis Medina fan out from El-Zitouna, with the finest wares, perfumes, and silks in closest proximity to the holy building. Without Sihem's guidance on this history and others, ad infinitum, I do not doubt that such an observation would have been entirely lost on us, as navigating the labyrinthine Medina already constituted a captivating challenge.

The Great Mosque of Kairouan—whose name comes from the word caravan due to its strategic trade route location—predates





Interior of the Great Mosque of Kairouan. Photo by Walid Akef, PhD candidate in history of art and architecture

its northern counterpart, El-Zitouna, by several decades to claim the title of being one of the earliest Islamic city's nucleus. Piercing the arid desert ether, the mosque's singular towering minaret became the architectural paragon for all Islamic buildings to its west, across the Maghreb and Andalusia. While divinity is Kairouan's most precious and ubiquitous resource, the Great Mosque's form and function also chronicle the region's perennial water scarcity. Cisterns hide beneath the surface of its courtyard, forming an *impluvium*—or rainwater collector—furnished with horseshoe arches of white marble, able to hold nearly a thousand square meters of liquid. As we stood in the mosque's central sternum, small birds fluttered

and dove, announcing themselves with shrill invocations. Behind the courtyard's peripheral arches, women sat in cloisters swathed in shade, reciting Qur'an in forlorn and rhythmic tones, their voices blending in the lilt of prayer.

Textiles are another commodity for which Kairouan is renowned, a fact readily attested to by the bulging, tightly wrapped carpets we crammed into our luggage and caravanned back home. Forty thousand or more knots can be held within one square meter of lamb's wool or silk, the culmination of a month's work and generations of artisanry distilled into a strip of vibrant pattern and color no bigger than my torso. Just as our souvenir carpets' stitches converged together, so did the

different historical veneers on the surface of El-Zitouna and the Great Kairouan Mosques intersect with one another to produce the character of antiquity in the ephemerality of the present. Though appropriating the bones of Carthaginian, Roman, and Byzantine buildings, the mosques achieved dynamic continuity. Trade facilitated access to the diverse materials found in El-Zitouna and Kairouan's limbs; Roman capitals and columns were often reused, with their style adapted to Islamic conventions but still partial to a shared Mediterranean heritage and disposition.

From the pre-Islamic era, El Jem amphitheater stands alone as an immortal marker of Tunisia's vast history. Paid for by the olive oil trade and built in the third century CE, the colosseum wears its millennia modestly and with timeless defiance. To visit the structure today, located 2.5 hours south of Tunis, seemed an odd affair; stagnant and impetuous, it was once the focal point of macabre violence and spectacle. Today, 1,800 years later, the amphitheater's near-perfect preservation serves as a more complete reification of Roman glory than its

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Since 2016, the CMES Tunisia Office has welcomed more than 100 graduate and undergraduate students from across the University for January term study excursions, summer advanced Arabic language sessions, and independent research.

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Ottoman-era entrance hall of a famous carpet manufacturer in Kairouan



A few members of our class on a visit to El Jem (Thysdrus) colosseum

ancient counterpart in the Italian capital, testifying to the human impulse for permanence despite the inescapable stampede of time over lives, places, and civilizations. El Jem, in an area once known as Thysdrus, has also been a granary and marketplace throughout its history. This heritage evokes Tunisia's legacy as El Khadra, meaning green or verdant, due to its agricultural cornucopia of olives, grapes, and cereals that buoyed ancient Rome in its efforts

to sustain a far-flung empire. Tunisia's globally nonpareil mosaic collections at the Bardo in Tunis, the Sousse Archaeological Museum, and the "House of Africa" villa near El Jem—the latter two sites we had the privilege of visiting—reveal the country's enduring agricultural legacy, with countless kaleidoscopic tiles conjuring images of cultivation across the four seasons.

Redolent Tunisian specialties flavored our journeys throughout the country. We

gorged ourselves on national street food staples, from the Tunisian-Jewish *fricassé* (greasy rolls stuffed with tuna, hard-boiled egg, olives, harissa, and mashed potatoes) and *brik* (triangular filo pastries packed with egg, onions, tuna, harissa, and parsley) on our first afternoon in La Marsa, to copious *bambalouni* (deep-fried donuts daubed in powdered sugar) enjoyed on balmy evenings scaling the cobbled passages of Sidi Bou Said. In



Octopus couscous is a dish reflecting Tunisia's dual Maghrebi and Mediterranean culinary lineage. Photo by CMES AM candidate Giulia Benvenuto



Our group resting against a wall of ceramic tiles at the Sidi Sahbi Mosque in Kairouan. Finally, a very special thank you to Sihem Lamine (far left), without whom none of our adventures would have been possible

Kairouan, we salivated over local delicacies of *keftaji* (fried vegetables married with eggs) and *makroudh* (diamond-shaped cookies infused with dates or almond paste, concocted from semolina and flour dough). The standard *complet poisson*, *couscous*, *ojja* with *merguez* (shakshuka's progenitor, often served with spicy sausage), and *salata mechouia* (or "grilled salad" of vegetables, tomatoes, peppers, onions, and garlic) were staples of any Tunisian meal.

Although the weight of antiquity is unassailable in Tunisia, the recent decades have been equally foundational in reframing the nation's illustrious history and future. In the sunny summer we spent in Tunisia, more than eleven years after the embers of Tunisian national discontent found fiery footing on the striking image of Mohamed Bouazizi's

self-immolation, the North African nation's intrepid democratic project seemed on the precipice, its horizon brooding with clouds. International democratic norms had proven hollow and inane when promises of social, economic, and political equality and justice succumbed to inertia and corruption under their lofty theoretical trappings. As the anniversary of President Kaïs Saïed's dissolution of parliament on July 25, 2021, approached at the end of my Tunisian stay, political consternation, the prospect of a new constitution, and economic malaise reached a fever pitch. To understand the raucous roots of the nation's politics over the last decade since the Revolution, I turned to Tunisian poet Abu al-Qasim al Shabbi's (1909–34) near-century-old composition "The Will to Life," chosen by Professor Granara for our class. During

the Arab Spring, couplets from al-Shabbi's poem were chanted in streets and inscribed defiantly on public spaces throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Spawned from the same anticolonial verve as the work of his contemporaries Du'aji and Thâalbi, al-Shabbi's resistance-laden verses implored citizens to oppose traditional government structures and take their lives into their own hands. The poem ends as it starts, with the resolute and eternal notion that "Should people seek or want life / Destiny will inevitably respond." In some small way, I hope my Tunisian summer embodied this ideal—not just to be a spectator of life and its conditions, however bleak or blissful, but to be an active and willing participant, wherever one's journey through the shadow of history might lead. ▣

## YO-YO MA COMES TO TUNISIA, WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM CMES

When world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma '76 and his Bach Project visited Tunisia in March 2022, it was the realization of plans set in motion over two years earlier with help from members of the CMES Tunisia community.

The Bach Project ([bach.yo-yoma.com](http://bach.yo-yoma.com)) began in 2018 with the goal to perform

Johann Sebastian Bach's six suites for solo cello in 36 locations around the world. In addition to celebrating the power of music to connect people, the project also seeks to explore and celebrate all the ways that culture makes people stronger as individuals, as communities, as societies, and as a planet. Thus, in conjunction with

each Bach Project concert, Ma and his team partner with artists and culture makers, cultural and community organizations, and local leaders from across sectors to design conversations, collaborations, and performances on a smaller scale for a "Day of Action" in the communities they visit.



All photos: Austin Mann

Yo-Yo Ma performing at the Théâtre de l'Opéra de la Cité de la Culture Tunis

Originally scheduled for April 2020 but, like so many other events, performances, and gatherings around the world, delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Bach Project's visit to Tunisia finally took place this March. On March 26, Ma performed the cello suites at the Théâtre de l'Opéra de la Cité de la Culture Tunis for an audience of over 1,500.

"The concert was an encounter with beauty," says CMES Tunisia Administrative and Program Manager Sihem Lamine, who worked closely with the Bach Project team on preparations for the visit. "It was an experience comparable to seeing a Van Gogh masterpiece or the Hagia Sophia, or a great city or landscape, for the first time. You leave the room as a different person. Yo-Yo Ma invents a musical language of his own. It was mind-blowing to listen to the Bach suites—which are among the least approachable pieces of classical music—performed in a way that transforms them into something more accessible, that speaks to the deepest human emotions, beyond the cultural background of the listener. The concert was a gift to the city. I am certain many people in the audience, like myself, will keep the memory of this performance with them for the rest of their lives."

Ma dedicated the second day of his visit to action and dialogue on how culture connects people and how hope can be (re)built through creative heritage. On Sunday morning, Ma met with a group of creative peacemakers from Libya who convened in Tunis to explore reconciliation through artistic and creative ventures. Ma joined a discussion about cultural reunification through the stories of Libyan



In conversation with a group of Tunisian students

## NEWS AND NOTES



In the workshop of silk weaver Abdennebi Chentouri



Touring the historic Medina of Tunis with local students

artists, arranged in partnership with the delegation of the European Union in Tunisia, the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, and the Libyan Peacemakers Network. Videos of the group's workshops will be used to promote ongoing peace initiatives in Libya.

The second part of the Day of Action took place in the Medina (old city) of Tunis and was coordinated in partnership with Blue Fish, a social enterprise dedicated to heritage preservation, urban revival, and community empowerment, led by Leila Ben-Gacem. Ma met for a conversation with a group of local students, with whom he then toured the historic Medina. As craft is an essential part of Tunisia's culture, history, and future, they visited the studios and shops of artisans, including silk weaver Abdennebi Chentouri, shoemaker Souhail Fitouri, and bookbinder Mohamed Ben Sassi. Following the visits, fourth-generation calligraphy artist Mohamed Saber Akili joined Ma for a calligraphy workshop at Dar Ben-Gacem, a beautifully restored guesthouse and event space and sister company to Blue Fish, owned and operated by Leila Ben-Gacem, who helped facilitate several of the activities during Ma's visit.

Later in the afternoon, the CMES Tunisia Office hosted a panel discussion at Dar Ben-Gacem with Ma and two Tunisian artists, painter and sculpturist Sonia Kallel and urbex photographer Mourad Ben Cheikh Ahmed, moderated by Lamine. The three artists talked about their work and projects, touching on themes as diverse as beauty, memory, heritage, the sense of belonging to a land or a culture, the work of construction craft workers, who are



In the workshop of bookbinder Mohamed Ben Sassi



Calligraphy workshop with Saber Akili



In the workshop of shoemaker Souhail Fitouri



Panel discussion with artists Mourad Ben Cheikh Ahmed and Sonia Kallel



vital to the preservation and restoration of Tunisia's architectural history, and the role of artists in society and the world, specifically in times of war and crisis.

The day concluded on the Dar Ben-Gacem rooftop, overlooking the city and the domes of Mohamed Bey Mosque. As the sun set, second-generation Tunisian musician Sabry Mosbah and his group featuring guitar, lute, and piano performed

for the afternoon's participants, including a collaboration with Ma. Poet Zina Ben Ammar presented reflections on Tunisia's cultural future and the socio-economics of Tunisia today. And finally, Ma performed a rendition of "Amazing Grace," which was followed by a symphony of calls for prayer emanating from the Medina's minarets.

"I believe stars had to align for Yo-Yo Ma's visit to Tunis to be possible," says

Lamine. "When it finally happened, it was beyond all expectations and preparation efforts." CMES might not have been involved with the project at all, however, were it not for the intervention of CMES PhD candidate Salmaan Mirza and Harvard NELC alumnus Dustin Klinger, PhD '21. After they had spent time with CMES in Tunis, they suggested to mutual friend Sophie Shackleton, a senior producer



in Ma's office who scouts projects and locations, that the CMES Tunisia Office would be a valuable partner especially in planning the Day of Action activities in Tunis, and they introduced her to Lamine.

CMES began hosting student and faculty travel and research to Tunisia in 2016, and in 2017 officially opened an office in Tunis, with work and event spaces. Over 120 students, faculty, and administrative officials from across Harvard have visited for research and language study, and the office has hosted dozens of public and private lectures, conferences, and workshops, including a full slate of virtual events during the Covid period. Funding for the office and programming was provided by a gift from Harvard College alumnus Hazem Ben-Gacem '92. A second gift from Ben-Gacem, in 2021, will fund the office, student and faculty travel, and related programming through 2026.

"Although music is not what the CMES Tunisia Office is usually programmed for," says Lamine, "contributing to the Bach Project Tunis 2022 lies at the core of our mission to build bridges between scholarly communities and institutions, and seek impact through academic and cultural exchange. It was a great satisfaction to see members of CMES Tunisia's alumni community extend these goals beyond the strictly academic milieu, and actively contribute to making a beautiful event like this one possible. And I am proud to see that the CMES Tunisia Office has now built the capacity and community to support, host, or originate impactful projects and embrace initiatives greater than its original sphere of activity." ■



Playing "Amazing Grace"



With Sihem Lamine and Leila Ben-Gacem

## NAFPLIO CONFERENCE CAPS MULTI-YEAR BYZANTINE STUDIES INITIATIVE

by Jesse Howell, PhD '17, CMES Academic Programs Manager and Associate Director of the AM Program

Certain dates stand out in the collective historical consciousness. On May 29, 1453, Ottoman forces under the command of the twenty-one-year-old Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II took control of the city of Constantinople. To many Muslim observers, this was the long-awaited fulfillment of a pronouncement (*hadith*) attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. To many Christians, it was a catastrophe. For historians looking to divide human events into coherent periods, it is a definitive signpost, often invoked to mark the endpoint of the medieval era. The Republic of Turkey highlights the date every year with official celebrations. In recent years, the government's festive announcements on Twitter have carried a catchy hashtag: #29Mayis1453.

Dates endure, but they can also obscure. Thinking of the world historical ramifications of a pivotal moment, it is easy to overlook commonalities and continuities. The Ottoman conquest was not simply the case of an upstart newcomer arriving from distant steppes to displace an ancient political order. In fact, when looking more closely, it can be hard to see precisely where one empire ended and the other began. By the mid-fifteenth century, the Ottoman and Byzantine Empires had been neighbors, antagonists, and allies for 150 years. Their military, political, cultural, and demographic fortunes were deeply intermingled.

Prior to 1453, the borderlands of Western Anatolia were largely populated by Greek-speaking Christians and an increasing number of Turkish-speaking Muslims. As the Ottomans grew in power and prestige, they attracted support from across confessional lines. Christian commanders and their followers, including such formidable leaders as Köse Mihal and Evrenos Bey, joined the Ottoman side. They contributed to the young dynasty's military successes and brought expertise and local knowledge to the settlement and administration of conquered areas in formerly Byzantine territory.

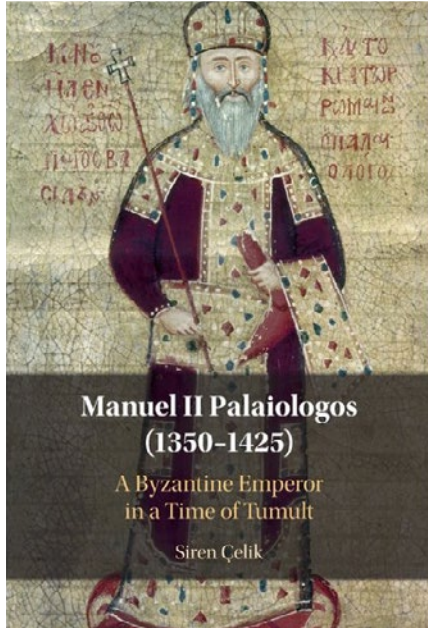
Byzantium, meanwhile, was fractured internally by political conflicts and rivalries between powerful dynastic lines. Warring factions relied on good relations and the support of their growing Ottoman neighbors. Marriage was a key tool of alliance-building, as when Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos gave his daughter Theodora in marriage to the Ottoman ruler Orhan Gazi. Theodora, like countless other Ottoman subjects, remained a Christian.

Despite his notoriety as the individual responsible for obliterating the final vestiges of the Eastern Roman Empire, Sultan Mehmed II held Greco-Roman culture and learning in high esteem. As a young man, his tutors read to him in Greek and Latin sources. His library came to include thousands of manuscripts, including foundational Greek texts. Well known for bringing Italian Renaissance artists—including the Venetian painter Gentile Bellini—to his new court in

Istanbul, the Sultan also valued Byzantine scholars. George Amiroutzes was a learned Byzantine official who became a privileged member of Mehmed's court. One of Amiroutzes's tasks was to prepare an edition of Ptolemy's works for the Sultan, along with explanatory charts.

Despite such profound linkages, Byzantine and Ottoman histories have largely been studied in isolation, divided by ingrained academic traditions and specialized linguistic demands. With this artificial separation in mind, it was a fruitful decision by Dimiter Angelov, Dumbarton Oaks Professor of Byzantine History, and Cemal Kafadar, Vehbi Koç Professor of Turkish Studies, to partner with Nevra Necipoğlu, Professor of History at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. Their efforts led to the establishment of the Byzantine Studies Initiative, a multi-year collaboration between CMES and the Byzantine Research Center (BSRC) at Boğaziçi University. Funded by a grant by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the initiative centers on cross-cultural contacts and comparative perspectives, locating the Byzantine Empire in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean world.

The CMES community benefitted tremendously from the Byzantine Studies Initiative, particularly with the participation of two exceptional postdoctoral scholars-in-residence: Nathanael Aschenbrenner and Siren Çelik. Both are specialists in Byzantine history whose work deals with political developments in the fourteenth and



fifteenth centuries, when Byzantine–Ottoman interactions were at their peak.

While at CMES, Aschenbrenner, currently teaching at the University of California, San Diego, worked on his monograph, “Universal Monarchy Between Sultan and Pope: Reorienting Constantinople in the Fifteenth-Century Mediterranean.” Çelik, now Assistant Professor at Marmara University in Istanbul, completed her book project, *Manuel II Palaiologos (1350–1425): A Byzantine Emperor in a Time of Tumult*. It was published by Cambridge University Press in 2021.

In addition, the initiative allowed CMES to support Harvard history PhD candidate Jake Ransohoff as he completed his degree. Ransohoff, now a Postdoctoral Fellow



at Simon Fraser University, co-edited the remarkable volume *The Invention of Byzantium in Early Modern Europe*, together with Aschenbrenner. Their work was published by Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in 2022.

The Covid-19 pandemic divided us physically with our partners at Boğaziçi University. Despite challenges and delays, collaboration continued. It was a joyful moment when, in June of 2022, we were finally able to gather together in Nafplio, Greece, for an academic conference organized by Angelov and Necipoğlu. Titled “Geography and Cosmography in the Byzantine and the Ottoman World,” the conference brought together faculty and graduate students from CMES, Boğaziçi University, and beyond. Four sessions

featuring ten speakers addressed key issues and new approaches. The Center for Hellenic Studies in Greece—led by Managing Director Christos Giannopoulos, with support from Mina Tsentourou and Evan Katsarelis—gave us the perfect venue for lively scholarly exchange.

Gathering in Nafplio, we had an opportunity to learn from one another and to develop approaches that accounted for the centuries of parallel experience and dialogue that marked Byzantine and Ottoman history. Geography and cosmography represent ways that humans make sense of their physical, celestial, and metaphysical surroundings. A growing body of scholarship has shown how Byzantine and Ottoman thinkers in these fields were grounded in shared Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions as they developed their own distinct modes of thought and culture. Speakers at the conference dived into these interwoven roots, revealing new ways that the two empires continuously reacted and learned from each other.

In the initial session, Maria Mavroudi deftly laid out fluid patterns of intellectual exchange. Her paper described how translations of Ptolemy were studied at the Ottoman court, while Byzantine scholars were deeply indebted to Arabic sources. Angelov revealed ways that medieval Byzantine writers looked to ancient Roman texts to explore the Central Asian origins of the Turkic people who had begun to arrive in increasing numbers in their eastern borderlands in the eleventh century.

Sessions two and three, with papers by Anne-Laurence Caudano, Didar Akbulut, Immaculada Pérez Martin, and Sonja

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Sonja Brentjes, Maria Mavroudi, and Christos Giannopoulos



Didar Akbulut



Lunch in Nafplio: Nevra Necipoğlu, Gulru Necipoğlu, Dimiter Angelov, and other conference attendees



Fresco detail from Mystras

Brentjes, articulated the interplay between diagrams, maps, and texts as distinct modes of transmitting geographical information.

One particularly vivid image, described by Akbulut (a PhD candidate at CMES), located the origins of the universe not in an

act of divine generation, but in the decay of an immense pearl, which created the earth and its heavenly spheres as it melted.



Overview of site of Mystras



Pointing the way, Nafplio

The final paper, presented by Cemal Kafadar and myself, broadened the already wide temporal framework. We looked at the Ottoman invention and adaptation of a mythic pre-history of the city of Constantinople/Istanbul. King Solomon and Queen Belkis—as the Queen of Sheba is known in the Islamic tradition—were key figures in these legends, around whom narratives of an Ottoman past that pre-dated Byzantine history were constructed.

Once the talks were completed, we loaded into buses and headed inland to a searingly hot valley near the site of ancient Sparta. Anastasios Tantsis, a Byzantine archaeologist from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, was our guide as we approached the remains of a medieval city located on the slopes of the Taygetos

Mountains. Mystras, our destination, became prominent in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as the capital of the Byzantine Despotate of the Morea. The city experienced great prosperity at a time when Byzantine Constantinople was increasingly isolated within the expanding sphere of Ottoman power.

The sloping site of Mystras consists of an array of stone buildings built on a sharp incline. Their fine construction and ornamental programs are a vivid reminder of the city's wealth and prestige. Mystras was the center of what became known as the Palaiologan Renaissance. At the center is the Despot's Palace, with a spacious, recently renovated central hall. Surrounding the palace are multiple churches and monasteries. The remains of elaborate fresco cycles are visible in

the city's sacred buildings—crowds of overlapping haloed saints, pointy clouds of winged angels, seated Marys with wizened child Christs in their laps—a vivid reminder of the cultural connection to far-away Constantinople. Mystras, we were reminded, was the city where the renowned philosopher Gemistos Plethon spent much of his adult life.

Our visit to Mystras brought the geography and cosmography of the late Byzantine moment sharply into focus. The site, which now feels remote and somewhat forgotten, was an important center of scholarship and artistic production. It thrived even as the millennium-old capital of the Eastern Roman Empire was taken over by newcomers, a reminder that culture can innovate, adapt, and endure even in volatile political circumstances. ▣

## NEWS AND NOTES

### ALUMNI NEWS

#### AM ALUMNI

**Zena Agha** ('17) published her debut poetry collection, *Objects from April and May*, with Hajar Press in April 2022. The manuscript was selected as a finalist for the Alice James Book Award 2020, the Omnidawn first/second poetry prize 2020, and the Philip Levine Poetry Prize 2020. Zena also co-directed a short film called "The Place that Is Ours," which premiered on Nowness in November 2021 and was selected for the Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival (France) and the 13th Parish Festival (UK). She continues to write articles and policy analysis, most recently in the *New York Times* around the criminalization of six Palestinian NGOs. **Oula Alrifai** ('19) joined the immigration advocacy nonprofit National Immigration Forum as an Assistant Vice President, where she recently published the blog post "11 Years," marking the eleventh anniversary of the peaceful Syrian uprising against Syria's dictator, Bashar al-Assad. **Dilek Barlow** ('04) continues to work in tech for startups in Silicon Valley. She's currently the VP of Product for Happify Health, a personalized digital therapeutics company.

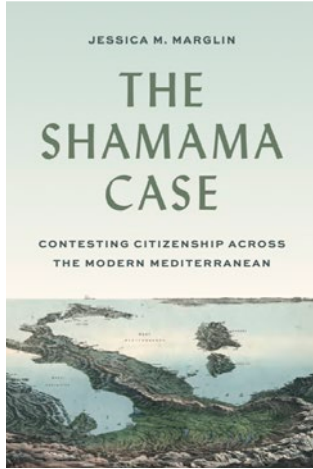
In her spare time, she tutors Afghan refugees and helps them navigate life in the United States. **Cristina (Hughes) Blough** ('13) joined World Learning in May 2022 as Director of Corporate and Foundation Partnerships. She will lead fundraising directed to corporations and foundations, playing a vital role in securing sponsorships, building new funder relations, and demonstrating thought leadership to promote World Learning. **Samah Choudhury** ('14) was presented the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding's 2021 Young Scholar Award, which recognizes an emerging leader whose research focuses on American Muslims. **Hannah-Louise Clark** ('05) published "The Islamic Origins of the French Colonial Welfare State: Hospital Finance in Algeria," *European Review of History* 28.5-6 (2021), and "Of Jinn Theories and Germ Theories: Translating Microbes, Bacteriological Medicine, and Islamic Law in Algeria," *Osiris* 36 (2021). She started a multi-year NEH-funded project on African medical and cultural heritage with Helen Tilley and Michael Oladejo Afolayan. Since graduating from CMES, **MK Harb** ('18) has been

building a writing career in fiction and critique. He currently serves as Editor at Large for Lebanon at *Asymptote*, the premier journal for literature in translation. At *Asymptote* he has interviewed numerous authors and written a number of articles on Lebanese and North African literature. Most recently, his short story "Amwaj" was published with *The White Review* in London. "Amwaj" is set in the fictional city of Multaqa in the Arabian Peninsula, during a time when the water disappears and the government pilots a hologram sea with Huawei. **Brandon Kennedy** ('09) has been working as a Trial Attorney at the US Department of Justice, Civil Division, Commercial Litigation Branch, International Trade Field Office in New York since January 2020. In that role, he represents the United States, its departments and agencies, and federal officials in



Zena Agha

both affirmative and defensive litigation at the US Court of International Trade in New York, as well as in appeals at the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington, DC. Matters within his area of responsibility include, among others: importer challenges to US Customs and Border Protection decisions concerning the classification, valuation, and country of origin of imported merchandise; lawsuits relating to the interpretation and application of trade-related presidential proclamations, executive



orders, international treaties, and free trade agreements; disputes over the government's refusal to grant or the revocation of various licenses under the customs laws; and actions for the collection of duties and penalties under the customs laws. **Aaron Magid** ('15) started a new podcast on the latest developments in Jordanian politics, with each episode featuring a different expert on the Hashemite Kingdom. Featured guests have included Canadian Ambassador to Amman Donica Pottie, Jordanian minister Nayef al-Fayez, Professor Hassan Barrari, former Royal Court chief Jawad Anani, and journalist Mohammad Ersan. **Jessica M. Marglin** ('06) published *The Shamama Case*:

*Contesting Citizenship across the Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton University Press, 2022). She is Associate Professor of Religion, Law, and History and the Ruth Ziegler Early Career Chair in Jewish Studies at the University of Southern California. **Nicholas Norberg** ('19) is a Presidential Management Fellow assigned to the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and has completed a rotation as a Policy Advisor at the Treasury Department's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. Former US Ambassador to Israel **Daniel Shapiro** ('93) served in 2021–22 as a Senior Adviser to the Special Envoy for Iran in the Biden Administration. He was recently named Distinguished Fellow at the Atlantic Council, where he joined the Middle East programs focusing on US–Israel relations and normalization between Israel and Arab states. Since August 2021, **George Somi** ('12) has been serving as an Assistant District Attorney (prosecutor) in the Worcester, Massachusetts, District Attorney's Office. **Caroline Williams** ('65) published the booklet *The Art of Belgian Painters from the Shafik Gabr Collection* (2022),

which describes the work of four Orientalist artists whose paintings depict scenes and people of nineteenth-century Algeria.

#### PHD ALUMNI

**Sa'ed Atshan** ('13) is now an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Emory University and is loving living in Atlanta. **Efe Murat Balıkcıoğlu** ('19) is a lecturer in the Department of Religion at Wellesley College, teaching courses on Islamic history and philosophy. He is currently working on the proofs of his first academic manuscript, *Verifying the Truth on Their Own Terms: The Ottoman Scholarly Culture and the Court Debate between Mollâ Zeyrek (d. 903/1497–8?) and Hocazâde (d. 893/1488)*, to be published by Ca' Foscari University of Venice's Series in Knowledge Hegemonies in the Early Modern World in fall 2022. The book deals with a previously unedited fifteenth-century court debate presented to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II by two prominent scholars of the time, and includes the first annotated edition of the debate in classical Arabic along with its translation, analysis, and contextual significance in Islamic intellectual and

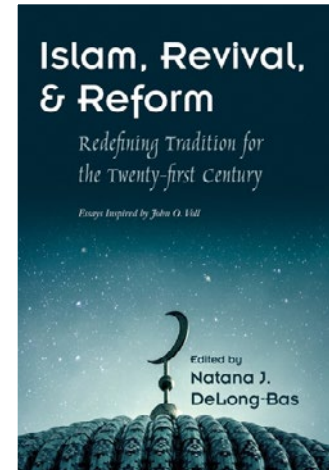
cultural history. For the summer of 2022, he was selected by the University of Bologna–Wellesley Faculty Exchange Program to conduct research on Islamic manuscripts at the Marsili Library. His most recent article is a collaborative piece with Kristin E. Fabbe of Harvard Business School, "When Fifth Columns Fall: Religious Groups as Fifth Columns in Turkey in Historical Perspective," a book chapter on the current regime's policy on religious groups and organizations in Turkey, published in *Enemies Within: Unpacking Fifth Column Politics*, ed. Harris Mylonas and Scott Radnitz (Oxford University Press, 2022). **Elise K. Burton** ('17) is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto's Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology. Her first book, *Genetic Crossroads: The Middle East and the Science of Human Heredity* (Stanford University Press, 2021), was awarded the 2021 Nikki Keddie Book Award by the Middle East Studies Association. After six years directing the Turkey Program at Washington's Foundation for Defense of Democracies, **Aykan Erdemir** ('04, AM '98) joined the Anti-Defamation League

## NEWS AND NOTES

as Director of International Affairs Research in April. In December 2021, he co-authored a monograph published by FDD Press, *Collusion or Collision? Turkey-Russia Relations Under Erdogan and Putin*. He continues to serve as a Steering Group member of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief. **Carter V. Findley** ('69) received the 2021 MESA Mentoring Award, which recognizes exceptional contributions retired faculty have made to the education and training of others. **Zahra Jamal** ('08) participated in the International Religious Freedom Summit, co-sponsored by Boniuk Institute; hosted and advised the US State Department's Pakistani Women Educational Leaders Delegation on peace education in madrasas and colleges; and participated in hate crimes convenings held by the Department of Justice and the US Attorney's Office for Southern Texas Hate Crimes Working Group. Engaging faith at work, she highlighted religious identity in Rice University's updated employee diversity training, collaborated with Tanenbaum and the American Jewish Committee to address antisemitism at work, and advised hospital

administrators in Wisconsin on culturally inclusive ways to support Afghan Muslim refugee women and children they serve. In educational settings, she helped write Boniuk Institute's K-12 friendly, Creative Commons-licensed, Respecting Diversity in Religions and Worldviews products in six languages; contributed to Knox Thames's US Institute for Peace report on best practices in religious pluralism education in the United States and abroad; and lectured university administrators and students at Edgewood and Hamilton Colleges on countering Islamophobia at college. Regarding research, she represented Rice in the national INSPIRES study on how colleges support worldview diversity and oversaw the Houston Coalition Against Hate's commissioned research (conducted by University of Houston faculty) on community responses to local hate crimes. She published the op-ed "Let the Virgin Mary Bring Christians and Muslims Together at Christmas" and a chapter in *World Religions and Their Missions* (Peter Lang, 2022). She researched, designed, and recorded "The Virgin Mary on Compassion: A Muslim Perspective" for

Compassionate Houston, and was featured in the UNA-USA Houston International Women's Day 2022 Program, the short film "Ismaili Centre Conversations USA: Building Bridges: Beyond the Blueprint," and in "Migration and Refugees in Islam." **Mana Kia** ('11) recently received tenure at Columbia University's Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies Department. **Mira Xenia Scherwda** ('20) has been awarded a research fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh to work on her forthcoming book "Between Art and Propaganda: Photographing Revolution in Modern Iran (1905-1911)." The book, which is based on her PhD dissertation and includes unpublished photographic material from archives in Iran and Turkey, focuses on Iran's first revolution and presents a new history of the visual narratives of political violence brought about by the triad of the telegraph, printing press, and photography. In the last year she has also been made co-editor of the journal *Art in Translation*, taught courses on the global history of photography and the Islamic arts of the book in the department of Art History at



the University of Edinburgh, and continued her significant involvement in successful digital art history initiatives (she is a founding member of the Mellon-funded *Khamseen: Islamic Art History Online* and the co-founder and co-convenor of the Virtual Islamic Art History Seminar Series). **John Voll** ('69, AM '60) was recognized by the publication of a festschrift in his honor, *Islam, Revival, and Reform* (Syracuse University Press, 2022). The volume contains essays by former students and colleagues on the subject of Muslim movements and organizations. He is retired and living in Washington, DC, where he is working on a volume on eighteenth-century world history.



# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

All 2021–22 events were held virtually, unless stated otherwise.

## SEPTEMBER 2021

### **Kleptocracy, Militias, and the October Revolution: The Iraqi State between Sectarianism and Democracy.**

A talk with Eric Davis, Professor of Political Science, Rutgers University. Discussant: Muhamed Almaliky, MD, Associate, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs; Director, Iraqi American Institute; Physician, University of Pennsylvania Health System. Co-sponsored with the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.

### **Global Jihad and Movements of Rage.**

A talk with Glenn Robinson, Associate Professor, Naval Postgraduate School. Discussant: Peter Krause, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Boston College. Co-sponsored with the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.

## OCTOBER 2021

### **The Latest Chapter in the Hundred Years War on Palestine.**

A talk with Rashid Khalidi, Edward Said Professor

of Modern Arab Studies, Department of History, Columbia University. Co-sponsored with the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.

**1001 Days: Memoirs of an Empress.** A talk with Empress Farah Pahlavi, the first and last crowned empress of Iran.

### **The Vanishing: Faith, Loss, and the Twilight of Christianity in the Middle East.**

A book talk with Janine Di Giovanni, multi-award-winning journalist and author; Senior Fellow and Professor, Yale University's Jackson Institute for Global Affairs. Co-sponsored with the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.

## NOVEMBER 2021

### **“Those Infidel Greeks”: A Late Dialogue with the Ottoman Resources on the Greek War of Independence.**

A talk with H. Şükrü Ilıcak, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for Mediterranean Studies, Crete. Discussants: Thanos Veremis, Professor Emeritus of Political History, University of Athens; Cemal



Kafadar, Harvard; and Katerina Laskaridis, Vice President of the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation. Co-sponsored with the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation.

### **The Politics of “Enemies Within”: Collusion, Subversion, and Loyalty Signaling by Religious Groups in Erdogan’s Turkey.**

A talk with Kristin Fabbe, Jakurski

Family Associate Professor, Harvard Business School. Discussant: Andrew O’Donohue, PhD candidate, Department of Government, Harvard University. Co-sponsored with the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.

**Whither? The Jews as a Diaspora Nation.** The 2021 Hilda B. Silverman Memorial Lecture, with Daniel Boyarin,

## EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



Hermann P. and Sophia Taubman Professor of Talmudic Culture, Departments of Near Eastern Studies and Rhetoric, University of California, Berkeley.

**Implosion and Collapse: Lebanese Women in Revolution, Civil Resistance, and Reconstruction.** A talk with Carmen Geha, Visiting Fellow, Weatherhead Center For International Affairs, Harvard University; Associate Professor of Public Administration, Department of Political Studies and Public Administration; Founding Member, Center for Inclusive Business and Leadership for Women, American University of Beirut. Discussant: Rami G. Khouri, Non-

resident Senior Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School; Director of Global Engagement and Adjunct Visiting Professor of Journalism, American University of Beirut. Co-sponsored with the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs.

**On Guest Workers, Migrants, and Germans of Turkish Descent: Reflections on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the German-Turkish Recruitment Agreement.** A talk with Lauren Stokes, Assistant Professor of History, Northwestern University. Moderated by Cemal Kafadar, Harvard.

**Armenia and Turkey (Non)-Relations: Can Peace Break**

**Out after the War in Nagorno Karabakh?** A panel discussion with Anna Ohanyan, Richard B. Finnegan Distinguished Professor of International Relations, Stonehill College; Cengiz Aktar, Adjunct Professor of Political Science, University of Athens; and Vicken Cheterian, Lecturer in History and International Relations, University of Geneva.

**DECEMBER 2021**  
**Twice Displaced: Syrian Armenian Stories of Resettlement and Revival in Armenia and Abroad.** A talk with Rebecca L. Thomas, Professor and Director, Center for International Social Work Studies, University of Connecticut School of Social

Work; Anoush Baghdassarian, Harvard Law School 3L; co-founder of ReRooted, a Syrian-Armenian Archive; and Ani Schug, co-founder of ReRooted, a Syrian-Armenian Archive.

**JANUARY 2022**  
**Thinking about Poverty and Equality from the Perspective of Human Rights.** Friends of Hrant Dink and CMES present the 2022 Speaker of the Hrant Dink Lectures in International Human Rights, Ayşe Buğra, Professor Emerita of Political Economy, Boğaziçi University.

**Misunderstanding Mid-Century Turkey: Ottomania, Academia, and the Rise of Erdogan.** A talk with Nicholas Danforth, Senior Non-

Resident Fellow, The Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy. Discussant: Jesse Howell, Academic Programs Manager and Associate Director of the AM Program, CMES.

#### **FEBRUARY 2022**

**Cartographic Narratives on Shaping the Land and Water Divide in Istanbul.** A talk with CMES Visiting Researcher Gökçen Erkişiç.

**The Oldest Guard: Landowners, Local Memory, and the Making of the Zionist Settler Past.** A book talk with Liora Halperin, Associate Professor of International Studies and History and Jack and Rebecca Benaroya Endowed Chair in Israel Studies, University of Washington.

**What Went Wrong in Libya? Foreign Meddling and Local Agency in Libya's Civil Wars.** A talk with Frederic Wehrey, Senior Fellow, Middle East Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

**Beyond the Frontier Paradigm: Kurdistan(s) in Space and Time (16th–19th Century).** A talk with Yavuz Aykan, Associate Professor of

Early Modern History, École d'Histoire de la Sorbonne, Université Paris 1 – Panthéon-Sorbonne.

**The Cambridge History of the Kurds.** Book launch and panel discussion with editors Hamit Bozarslan, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris; Cengiz Güneş, The Open University, Milton Keynes; and Veli Yadirgi, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

**The Kurds, Imperial Dynamics, and Inter-Imperial Spaces (12th–19th Centuries).** A talk with Hamit Bozarslan, Director of Studies, Center for Turkish, Ottoman, Balkan, and Central Asian Studies, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.

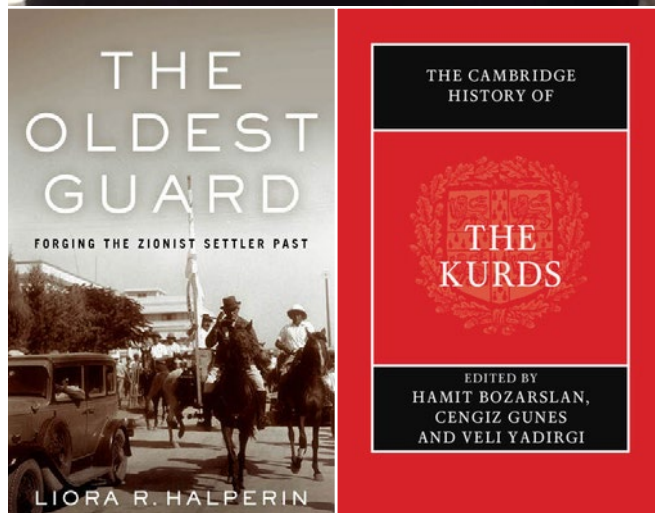
**The Political Economy of Humanitarian Aid in Yemen: Benefit or Detriment?** A talk with Asher Orkaby, Associate Research Scholar, Transregional Institute, Princeton University. Discussant: Afrah Nasser, Yemen Researcher, Human Rights Watch.

#### **MARCH 2022**

**Writing the History of Ottoman Kurdistan from an Environmental Perspective.**



Gökçen Erkişiç



A talk with Zozan Pehlivan, environmental historian, University of Minnesota.

**The Fractured Iraqi Community: Rethinking Development.** A talk with

Martha Myers, international and humanitarian development assistance professional and former Chief of Party, Iraqi Durable Communities and Economic Opportunity Project, USAID.

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## EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

# NEW HORIZONS IN KURDISH HISTORY LECTURE SERIES

by *Deren Ertas, PhD candidate in History and Middle Eastern Studies*

In the last decade, Kurdish history has become an exciting arena of scholarly inquiry in Ottoman and Middle Eastern studies. Showcasing this emerging literature was the main goal of the New Horizons in Kurdish History lecture series that Cemal Kafadar, Vehbi Koç Professor of Turkish Studies, and I organized for spring 2022. Professor Kafadar and I initially formed the idea in his basement office at Robinson Hall during one of our regular meetings in fall 2021, when I worked as a Teaching Fellow for his Ottoman history survey course. Over the course of the semester, we brainstormed about who to invite and the format of the series. Once we had a better sense of how we wanted the series to go, we solicited the know-how of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies' indispensable Jesse Howell. With his help, and support from Liz Flanagan, Eric Edstam, and Lauren Montague, the series took off.

The series opened with a lecture by Yavuz Aykan (École

d'Histoire de la Sorbonne, Université Paris 1 - Panthéon-Sorbonne), author of *Rendre la justice à Amid* (Brill, 2016). His talk, "Beyond the Frontier Paradigm: Kurdistan(s) in Space and Time (16th–19th Century)," offered a novel analysis of Kurdistan's cultural geography from the period of its initial conquest by Sultan Selim I, in the 1510s, to the establishment of the Province of Kurdistan, in 1847. How did Ottoman intellectuals—from Kurdistan or other parts of the empire—imagine the space of Kurdistan? Through Aykan's lecture, we learned that early modern Kurdistan was less a territorial and more a cultural-linguistic landscape that he characterized as a "scattered geography."

The second event hosted three scholars who edited *The Cambridge History of the Kurds*, published in 2021. The volume brings together over twenty essays representing diverse disciplinary inquiries. It examines the cultural, political, and economic developments that shaped Kurdish spaces and peoples from the sixteenth century to the present day. The book launch brought us together with Cengiz Güneş (The Open

University, Milton Keynes), who introduced the book. He ended his opening remarks by summarizing his research on the decline of religious nationalism and the rise of leftist politics among the Kurds in the 1970s. Next, Veli Yadırgı (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London) presentation focused on his chapter in the edited volume and book, *The Political Economy of the Kurds in Turkey* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). Yadırgı creatively uses Sara Roy's notion of de-development to explain the political economy of Kurdistan from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. One of the consequences of de-development, according to Yadırgı, is the late development of national consciousness among the Kurds and the forestalling of independence. The event's final speaker was Hamit Bozarslan (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris), one of the foremost scholars of Kurdish studies in Europe. He spoke about a forthcoming edited volume that takes a long-durée perspective and traces the genealogy of ethnonational solidarities among the Kurds.

The majority of the world's Kurdish population lives at the intersection of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The area they inhabit is shaped by the complex interaction of mountains, valleys, rivers, and arid plains. In recent years, scholars have become increasingly attentive to the environmental history of Kurdistan. One of the rising voices in this field is Zozan Pehlivan (University of Minnesota), whose book *A Climate of Violence: Environmental Crises in the Late Ottoman Empire* will be published in 2023. She was the third speaker in the New Horizons in Kurdish History series. Her talk, "Writing the History of Kurdistan from an Environmental Perspective," shed light on the intertwining of the economy and environment in nineteenth-century Ottoman Kurdistan. Shaped by a close cooperative relationship between towns, peasants, and nomads and at the center of a vibrant animal trade, she showed that Ottoman Kurdistan was an important part of the global economy. However, she also explained how the region's political economy suffered due to the



Cernal Kafadar, Deren Ertas

Russo–Ottoman War of 1878–79 and the years of famine that enveloped the region. The fifth talk of the series, Faisal Husain’s (Pennsylvania State University) “The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Kurdish History,” examined the interaction between Kurdistan’s mountainous ecosystem and the region’s two major rivers. Looking at the agricultural economy, pastoral economy, and communication networks across the area, he showed that in comparison to southern Mesopotamia, the Kurds only minimally relied on the river system.

Our series was enriched by the participation of anthropologist Marlene Schäfers (University of Utrecht), whose book *Voices That Matter: Kurdish Women at the Limits of Representation in Contemporary Turkey* will come out with the University of Chicago Press in December 2022. Her talk, “Voicing Kurdish History,” focused on her ethnographic research on Kurdish women dengbêj singers. She showed how history gets inscribed in their narrative songs, as well as the new vulnerabilities and opportunities that

contemporary politics in Turkey afford their self-expression. The final talk of the series, Cevat Dargın’s (Pennsylvania State University) “Rebellion as Myth in State Building and State Evasion,” showed how the 1938 massacre in Dersim was the last phase of a decades-long process of internal colonization. Following the centralized state’s relationship with the province of Dersim from the late Ottoman Empire to the early years of the Turkish Republic, Dargın showed how the two states employed the myth of rebellion to colonize

and dominate the mountainous region.

Scholars hailing from different disciplines and fields have found the Kurdish spaces of the Middle East fruitful sites of cutting-edge research. Their works are beginning to illuminate new aspects of the past and revise existing narratives written from the perspective of hegemonic institutions and identity positions. In addition to contributing to the depth and breadth of historical knowledge on the Ottoman Empire and the modern Middle East, new Kurdish histories present the region as a site of theory-making from the margins. Taking on approaches informed by cultural history, environmental history, and political economy, they represent the future of their subfields in ways that will contribute to scholarship far and wide. From state-formation to the peripheral incorporation of the Middle East into the world economy, these scholars offer field-changing perspectives on a region of the Middle East that has been neglected in existing scholarship. They move us beyond existing paradigms into terrains of research that will inspire further investigations. ▣

## EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



**“I Put My Fear for You above My Fear of You”: The Role of Emotions in Ibn al-Jawzi’s Political Thought.** A talk with Han Hsien Liew, Assistant Professor, Religious Studies, Arizona State University. Co-sponsored with the Harvard University Association for Global Political Thought.

**Rethinking Arabic Literary History.** Michael Cooperson, Professor of Arabic, University of California, Los Angeles, delivers in person the first talk in the 2022 H.A.R. Gibb Arabic and Islamic Studies Lecture Series.

**Learning Arabic Backwards: Was It Absolutely Frightening?** Michael Cooperson, Professor of Arabic, University of California, Los Angeles, delivers in person the second talk in the 2022 H.A.R. Gibb Arabic and Islamic Studies Lecture Series.

**Voicing Kurdish History.** A talk with Marlene Schäfers, Assistant Professor in Cultural Anthropology, University of Utrecht.

**APRIL 2022**  
**Can Russia Manage Its New Role in the Middle East?**

A talk with Carol R. Saivetz, Senior Advisor, MIT Security

Studies Program; Research Associate, Davis Center, Harvard University. Discussant: Mark N. Katz, Professor of Government and Politics, Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University.

**Contemporary Architecture and the Cultural Landscapes of the Mediterranean: A Critical Look at the Case of Anatolia.** A talk with CMES Visiting Scholar Burcu Kütükçüoğlu, Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, Istanbul Bilgi University; Part-time Instructor, Boston Architectural College.

**Policing and Political Development in Tunisia: Origin and Evolution.** A talk with CMES Visiting Fellow Khansa Ben Tarjem, PhD candidate, University of Lausanne, Switzerland.

**Abhá Conference and Tā’if Treaty: Saudi–Yemeni Border and the Construction of the Ismaili Minority.** A talk with CMES Visiting Fellow Sultan Alamer, PhD candidate in the Political Science Department, George Washington University.

**The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Kurdish History.**

A talk with Faisal Husain, Assistant Professor of History, Pennsylvania State University.

**From Policy to Practice: A Critical Review of United States Government Stabilization Efforts in Syria.**

A talk with Michelle Bradford, international development professional and former Team Leader for multi-donor funded stabilization programming in Syria, US Department of State, and UK Department for International Development.

**Rebellion as Myth in State Making and State Evasion: The Case of Dersim Across Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey (1878–1938).**

A talk with Cevat Dargın, Postgraduate Research Associate, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University.

**De-development, Political Violence, and Informal Control: The Kurds in Iran and Turkey.**

A talk with Ahmad Mohammadpour, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, Department of Anthropology, Sociology, and Criminology, Troy University, and Dilan Okcuoglu, M. Barzani Postdoctoral Fellow and Lecturer, Global Kurdish



Studies, School of International Service, American University.

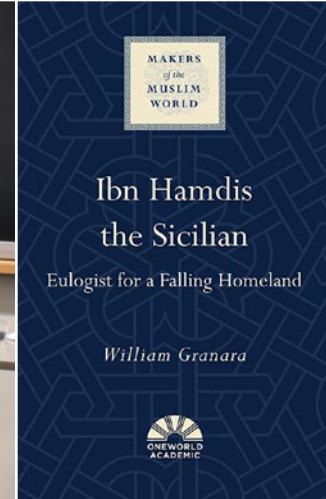
**The Impact of the Russia–Ukraine Crisis on the MENA Region.**

A discussion with Mohammed Alyahya, Visiting Fellow, Hudson Institute; Kirsten Fontenrose, President of Red Six International, former Senior Director for the Gulf, National Security Council, the White House; Emile Hokayem, Senior Fellow for Middle East Security, the International Institute for Strategic Studies; Nikolay A. Kozhanov, Research Associate Professor, Gulf Studies Center, Qatar University, Non-Resident Scholar, Economics and Energy Program, Middle East Institute; Karen E. Young, Senior Fellow,

Director of the Program on Economics and Energy, Middle East Institute. Moderator: CMES Visiting Fellow Adel Hamaizia, Associate Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House. Co-sponsored with the Middle East Initiative, HKS.

**A Medieval Life in Modern Circumstances.** An in-person book talk with CMES Director William Granara on his recent publication *Ibn Hamdis the Sicilian: Eulogist for a Falling Homeland* (Oneworld Academic, 2021). Organized by the Al-waleed Islamic Studies Program.

**APRIL 2022**  
**From Dictatorship to COVID: Intergenerational**



**Trauma among Argentinian Israelis.** A talk with CMES Visiting Scholar Sigalit Gal, Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel.

**60 Years after Independence: What Has Algeria Become?**

A conversation with Hugh Roberts, Edward Keller Professor of North African and Middle Eastern History, Tufts University; Slim Othmani, President of CARE Algeria, President of MEF Tunisia; and Zahia Smail Salhi, Professor of Modern Arabic Studies, University of Manchester. Moderator: CMES Visiting Fellow Adel Hamaizia. Co-sponsored with CMES Tunisia.

## HAMILTON A. R. GIBB LECTURE SERIES RETURNS AFTER TWO-YEAR HIATUS

by *Hacı Osman Gündüz, PhD candidate in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations*

After two years of dormancy due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Hamilton A. R. Gibb Lecture Series was back in action in March 2022. The series is the *tāj* (crown) of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, as CMES Director William Granara, Gordon Gray Professor of the Practice of Arabic, described it. The series was established in 1964 with funds provided by John Goelet, who was a student of Sir Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb (d. 1976), the former James Richard Jewett Professor of Arabic and University Professor at Harvard University. This year's guest speaker was Michael Cooperson, Professor of Arabic at the University of California, Los Angeles, who is the first speaker of the series to have completed all his higher education—AB ('87), AM ('91), and PhD ('94)—at Harvard.

Cooperson delivered two talks, titled “Rethinking Arabic Literary History” (March 21) and “Learning Arabic Backwards: Was It Absolutely Frightening?” (March 23). The talks were attended in person by Harvard University affiliates and simultaneously broadcast via Zoom. Granara, who has served as the CMES Director for the past eight years, introduced the first talk, and Roy P. Mottahedeh, Gurney Professor of History *Emeritus*, introduced the second talk. Mottahedeh, who was a student of Gibb's, taught the guest speaker, thus forming a *silsilah* (scholarly chain of authority) from Gibb to Cooperson. Cooperson's primary advisor and mentor

in Arabic literature was, however, the late Wolfhart P. Heinrichs (d. 2014). The talks were attended by Heinrichs' widow, Alma Giese, a fellow scholar of Arabic literature and acclaimed translator of classical works from Arabic to German.

Cooperson completed his PhD in 1994 and published his thesis as a book in 2000, titled *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mūn*. He also contributed to the Makers of the Muslim World series with a volume published in 2005 on the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–833). He has co-authored and edited other books in addition to penning numerous articles. Cooperson is a celebrated translator; one of his most recent translations is al-Ḥarīrī's (d. 1122) *Maqāmāt* rendered into English under the title *Impostures* (2020). This masterful translation won the 2020 Sheikh Zayed Book Award in translation category, and it was shortlisted for the 2021 National Translation Award.

Al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* is a work of fifty anecdotes in rhyming prose narrating the adventures of a rogue character who gets himself in and out of trouble using tricks and by resorting to eloquent speech. The word *maqāmāt*, sing. *maqāmah* (literally, “standing”), has also been translated into English as “assemblies.” Following a suggestion by Shawkat Toorawa of Yale University, Cooperson chose the word “imposture,” which clearly alludes to trickery, a common theme in the work. “Imposture” also contains the word “posture,” a reference to the literal meaning

of the word and to the fact that these anecdotes were delivered while standing.

The work was deemed impossible to translate faithfully into a target language while preserving all that makes it *sui generis* with its wordplay and lexical gymnastics. Cooperson overcame the challenge by translating each *maqāmah* into a different register of the English language or style of writing, such as Singaporean English and Middle English of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. As Sam Sacks notes in his article about the translation in the *Wall Street Journal*, “[s]peaking to an interviewer, Mr. Cooperson remarked that the *Maqāmāt* is ‘a book that shows off everything that Arabic can do.’ ‘Impostures’ shows off English in the same flattering light, demonstrating its dynamism, its endurance, its mutability and its glorious, weedy wildness. In this way, a translation that is so brazen in its liberties is faithful to the spirit of the original.”

Al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* was an instant success during the author's lifetime, and it has remained so until modern times. Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1114), the famous Quran exegete, composed the following lines celebrating the work—as translated by Reynold Alleyne Nicholson's (d. 1945):

*I swear by God and His marvels,  
By the pilgrims' rite and their shrine:  
Ḥarīrī's Assemblies are worthy  
To be written in gold in each line.*

أَقْسِمُ بِاللَّهِ وَأَيَاتِهِ      وَمَشْعَرِ الْحَجِّ وَرِمَقَاتِهِ  
أَنَّ الْخَرِيرَى خَيْرٌ بِأَنَّ      نَكَلْتُ بِاللَّيْبِ مَقَامَاتِهِ





Photo: Martha Stewart

Michael Cooperson, Roy P. Mottahedeh, William Granara, Alma Giese

The work's esteem was not restricted to the Arabic speaking lands. The Ottoman biographer Âşık Çelebi (d. 1572), in describing how dedicated a certain poet was to the study of Arabic, says the following—as translated by Helen Pfeifer in her recent book *Empire of Salons* (2022): “In that family, knowledge of Arabic is a necessity, and young and old are devoted to study and knowledge. Newborns are put to sleep with the Assemblies [*Maqamat*] of Hariri, and when they cry they are consoled

with Platters of Gold [*Atbaq al-Dhahab*] [two classics of Arabic literary prose].”

What is surprising is that *al-Maqāmāt* was used to teach and learn Arabic even though it is a notoriously difficult text. It is, as Cooperson noted, like learning English from *Finnegans Wake*, James Joyce's equally notoriously difficult work. For that matter, how did non-Arabs learn Arabic? This was the topic of Cooperson's second lecture.

Non-Arabs started learning Arabic following the Muslim Arab conquests from

seventh century onwards. At the advent of Islam, there were numerous languages spoken in the Near East and North Africa, such as Persian, Kurdish, Greek, South Arabian, Coptic, and Amazigh. While some of these languages died out, others have survived. It is not clear as to whether new converts were expected to learn Arabic in the formative period of Islam. Al-Shāfi'ī (d. 820) appears to be the first to make the case that every Muslim should learn enough Arabic to make the profession

## EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

of faith and perform rituals that require reciting verses from the Quran in Arabic. However, the Quran was not always the major text people used to learn Arabic. As Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) would later note, the Quran is not a sufficient medium from which to learn the Arabic language.

The early grammar manuals were not composed to help non-Arabs learn Arabic. Al-Sibawayhi's (d. 796) *al-Kitāb*, for example, is an analytical text, rather than a language learning manual. There are, on the other hand, certain exegetical works that appear to have been used as texts for learning Arabic, such as the *tafsīr* of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767), which provides detailed explanations for things that do not need explanation if the reader knows Arabic.

Ibn Khaldūn recommended that people learn Arabic as it is spoken and used by its native speakers. Simply memorizing abstract grammatical concepts will not help the learner to be an effective communicator—a surprisingly modern understanding of second language acquisition best encapsulated in communicative language pedagogy. Ibn Khaldūn also recommended that a student of Arabic should resort to literary texts, and the most popular secular work was the *Maqāmāt*.

The *Maqāmāt*, though, presented challenges even to native Arabic speakers, best demonstrated by the fact that there are numerous commentaries on the work. There are manuscript copies with interlinear glosses not only in Arabic, but in other languages as well. One such example Cooperson shared in his presentation is a manuscript of the *Maqāmāt* with

interlinear glosses in Gilaki, an Iranian language.

Matthew Keegan, a scholar of Arabic literature and the *Maqāmāt*, has argued that the work was used as a learning tool. The work itself does not allude to language learning or, for that matter, to any other language directly, but the protagonists search for a specific word and such searches create constant motion within the narrative. The reason that the *Maqāmāt* was used as a learning tool, Cooperson argued, is because of its narrativization, a method that is used in modern language teaching. (Those of us who have learned or taught Arabic in the United States will be familiar with the story of Mahā and Khālid and how each lesson is constructed around a narrative; Mahā's father works at the United Nations [remember this word from Lesson 1?], they live in a big city, but Mahā is lonely!)

European scholars from the past centuries recommended that the student of Arabic use the *Maqāmāt* to learn the language. The Dutch scholar Albert Schultens (d. 1750), who was the first to edit the work and translate it into Latin, is one such scholar. Baron Silvestre de Sacy (d. 1838), on the other hand, noted that the work cannot be translated because of all the word games, but it should still be studied to learn Arabic. The author of this essay is not sure if students of Arabic now use the *Maqāmāt* at all for improving their language skills, but as a teacher of both Modern Standard Arabic and Classical Arabic I can attest to the fact that students do appreciate a challenge. I ask my students to memorize one or two lines of poetry with

new words, and it seems to work. I have not tried to assign sections from the *Maqāmāt* yet, though I might soon.

If the reader is interested in learning more about the *Maqāmāt* and other seminal works, there are several reference sources covering the history of Arabic literature from the pre-Islamic to modern times. Cooperson plans to contribute to the field by writing a history of Arabic literature or his own view of it, as he put it, and this was the topic of his first talk, "Rethinking Arabic Literary History."

Some of the well-known histories of Arabic literature in the English language are the following:

- Nicholson's *A Literary History of the Arabs*, first published in 1907. The work's disproportional focus on pre-Islamic period (pp. 2–140) is in stark contrast to its brief treatment of the post-Mongol period (post-1258)—some six centuries (pp. 442–70). Nicholson provides rhymed translations of select poetry—as cited above—in his work, but Cooperson noted that he does so only for his favorite Arabic poems. His translations are rendered into rhyming English so that they are presentable to a western audience in the best manner.
- Gibb's *Arabic Literature*, first published in 1926 and published in a revised second edition in 1963. This brief work examines the history of Arabic literature in five epochs: 1) the Heroic Age (c. AD 500–622); 2) the Age of Expansion (AD 622–750); 3) the Golden Age (AD 750–1055); 4) the Silver Age (AD 1055–1258), and 5) the Age of the Mamlūks (AD

1258–1800). Gibb also provides rhymed English translations.

- Roger Allen's *An Introduction to Arabic Literature* (2000). This work does not examine Arabic literature by dividing its history into epochs, but it does so by focusing on genres. Allen, unlike Nicholson and Gibb, does not translate poetry into rhymed English, but rather into prose-like renditions.
- *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, published in six edited volumes between 1983 and 2006: *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (1983); *'Abbasid Belles-Lettres* (1990); *Religion, Learning, and Science in the 'Abbasid Period* (1990); *Modern Arabic Literature* (1992); *The Literature of al-Andalus* (2000), and *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period* (2006). Each volume has articles covering genres, literary trends, and eminent figures written by scholars in their respective fields of research. While some volumes received adulatory reviews, others did not.

Cooperson has been thinking about writing a literary history for a while, and he has started taking practical steps into materializing his project. He has already drafted some chapters, and he showed the audience what he has been working on. In this project, Cooperson distances himself from, as he put it, “the Orientalist project of asserting control over textual artifacts by making them legible to Europeans in a way that exclude those who identify as bearers of the culture.” His aim is “to replace it with a project that acknowledges

the Western reader's present positionality. Because it's this positionality rather than some inscrutability inherent in the past that makes the past unreadable in the first place.”

What inspired Cooperson to venture into this project is his observation that there is growing indifference to pre-modern literature in the Arab world itself. When he was in Abu Dhabi on a grant to work on *Impostures*, he told people that he was working on *maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī, only to find out that his interlocutors thought that he was working on *maqālāt* (articles) of the late Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri (d. 2005). (The connection between the pre-modern and new generation is not completely severed, nonetheless. Arab authors find creative ways of maintaining that link. For example, Cooperson cited an interesting work which is a translation of Abū 'Alā' al-Ma'arrī's [d. 1057] *Risālat al-Ghufran* (Epistle of Forgiveness) into modern Egyptian Arabic by Nārīmān al-Shāmīlī [2016]. Cooperson interprets this as a response to a “slippage that has increased.”)

In his project of writing a history of Arabic literature, Cooperson needs to deal with the question of what to include. Who and what should make it into a literary history? For that matter, which canon should be examined? When we speak of an Arabic literary canon, what we have in mind is generally what was canonized, so to speak, by the late Ottoman-era editors as they chose to edit and publish certain works in the so-called nahḍah period. As Ahmed El Shamsy of the University of Chicago has argued in his *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics* (2020), Cooperson noted,

some canonical works and authors came to be accepted so only in the past century. Before then intellectual life revolved around scholars and works that did not make it into the nahḍah canon. This canon excluded many significant works from the post-Mongol era.

Cooperson will aspire to cover all periods and locations equally without focusing on one era or place more than others. In order to achieve these principles, Cooperson's project will be a textbook of didactic presentation using as many images as possible to bring the materiality of the past to the foreground. This book, furthermore, will treat Arabic literature in its own terms by not succumbing to the notion that certain European categories are universally valid. In order to make the Arabic literary text legible, Cooperson will foreground translation, and his translations will “follow Nicholson's and Gibb's model in that if it's a poem in Arabic, it's going to be a poem in English. And if it fails, it fails because it is badly translated, not because it's a bad poem.” Once the project comes to fruition, Cooperson hopes to make the book digitally available. Such a textbook will undoubtedly be a welcome resource for the students and teachers of Arabic literature, as well as the general readership.

In addition to his book project, Cooperson has also been adding new languages to his polyglotism. He has mastered Maltese, and he shared over dinner that he is now learning Hawaiian. *Hoihoi loa*, indeed! He is also interested in time travel as a literary device. We look forward to Cooperson's future works and thank him for the two wonderful talks. ▣

الفنون  
الإنسانية



Yo-Yo Ma and Sihem Lamine in the Medina of Tunis

Photo: Austin Mann



Class visit to Houghton Library with Cemal Kafadar.



Sarah DeMott in Tunisia

## AT A GLANCE

**WILLIAM GRANARA RETIRES**  
**FACULTY NEWS**  
**VISITING RESEARCHER NEWS**  
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