



## Letter From The Editor

Once again, this issue of the *Review* circulates as turbulent events continue to displace and fracture the history, culture, and everyday realities that define the MENA region and diasporic lives. As MESA members seek ways to interrogate and intervene in these chaotic moments through academic and pedagogical practice, our hope is that the *RoMES* mission to bridge divides between fields, publics, and geographies in Middle East studies will provide potential pathways forward. We also face ongoing public debate concerning the role of academics and of liberal arts education during a time when conscientious, critical scholarship and curricula are often labeled as partisan projects. It is thus incumbent on all of us to reassess the roles we play in the various fora that define our lives: classrooms, conferences, public media outlets, scholarly publications, editorial and institutional boards, think tanks, and beyond. In this issue we introduce three new sections of the *Review* intentionally created to capture some of these varied roles and thus to offer *RoMES* as a space for interrogation and reflection.

First, and most urgently, we present an inaugural Special Focus section, intended to showcase analytical engagement with evolving contemporary events or with methodological conundrums that plague our respective fields of inquiry. Here our aim is to address scholarship “in action,” either in the attempt to introduce an analytic pause in the turmoil of the present or to wrestle with the manifold ways in which disciplinary requirements may reinforce asymmetries of power. This section builds on the expertise of our Associate Editorial Board, and here I acknowledge my debt to the collective knowledge, dedicated labor, and energetic endeavors of its members. Our Associate Editor of Turkey and Central Asia, Sultan Tepe (University of Illinois at Chicago), was invited to guest edit “Special Focus on Turkey: Reflections on a Referendum.” Tepe worked tirelessly with scholars in the United States and Turkey as they grappled with the historic import of the 16 April 2017

vote that dramatically altered Turkey's system of governance. Indeed, this issue of *RoMES* is dedicated to those who are courageous enough to seek the means to promote the rule of law and justice in Turkey and beyond despite ongoing efforts to curtail the voice of dissent. Mirroring the fortunes of many both domestically and around the globe, this Special Focus is intended as a clarion call for scholarly engagement in emergent authoritarian contexts.

The Curator's Corner and Pedagogical Perspectives columns figure as our second and third initiatives toward bringing representational politics and classroom dynamics to the fore of our worlds as MESA members. Patricia Blessing (Pomona College) surveys curatorial designs for Islamic art pieces in European museums and traces innovative efforts to incite public engagement and overcome dominant themes of war and violence. Despite these moves toward renewal and redesign, museum staffs still struggle to overcome chronological display narratives for the region. In his Pedagogical Perspectives contribution, Will Hanley (Florida State University) revealingly addresses the often-difficult task of shaping research agendas within undergraduate curricula. Hanley invites readers to follow his attempt to bridge a commitment to digital humanities projects with modern Middle East history courses as he trains students in the technical and conceptual skills necessary to code and then analyze the content of the *Egyptian Gazette*. Blessing and Hanley both indicate the potential challenges that face our exertions to re-think how MENA is represented in public and educational forums.

With guest editor Madeline C. Zilfi (University of Maryland, College Park), the issue's roundtable on "Televisual and Cinematic Narratives of the Middle East" tackles representational questions within the terrain of scholarly inquiry in addition to the museum and classroom spaces identified in the new columns. Contributors to the roundtable address the history and politics of serials and films produced in Egypt, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq and interrogate the increasingly fine line between entertainment and state-sanctioned visualizations of key historical events. From the dramatic and comedic serials *Resurrection Ertuğrul* (*Diriliş Ertuğrul*, 2014–present) and *Capital* (*Paytakht*, 2011–15), to Ramadan television, or cinematic depictions of the so-called Anfal Massacre of Kurds in the city of Halabja, these roundtable essays foreground the manifold ways in which state and non-state actors manipulate and reinvent history for transnational viewing audiences. They thus problematize nationalist readings of even those narratives that adopt state-centric viewing angles.

As part of our mission to liaison with active MESA committees, the issue also includes the work of MESA's Committee for Undergraduate Middle East Studies and a statement by its current director, Jeff VanDenBerg (Drury University). The Committee curates an annual poster session, and we have included examples from selected candidates present at the meetings in Washington, D.C. These posters range from sex education for second-generation Iranian-Americans, comparative constitutionalism in Tunisia and Egypt, and selective immigration practices in Bahrain to representational politics in U.S. public education. Collectively, these posters demonstrate the impressive range of possibilities in Middle East studies undergraduate research. Undergraduates are also present in the "Briefly Noted" reviews of books, and we are excited to share these students' first experiences in research and publishing within a scholarly venue.

Traditionally *RoMES* also serves as a significant repository for reviews of books and films, and as a commemorative record of members now lost to the field of Middle East studies. "In Memoriam" pieces therefore strive to honor the significant contributions and passions of Şerif Mardin, Rula Quawas, Cheryl A. Rubenberg, and Jack G. Shaheen. Reviews showcasing the dynamic nature of our various fields attend to publications in history, politics, film, literature, anthropology, and ethnomusicology. Future issues of *RoMES* will feature both review essays that critically evaluate the linkages between recent publications and a re-organized review section that follows thematic arcs so as to further underscore interconnected developments in scholarly inquiry. Our upcoming October 2018 issue includes: a Special Focus titled "Reflections on the Geopolitics of Refugees and Displaced Persons," commissioned and guest edited by Associate Editor of Political, International, and Strategic Studies, Kristin Fabbe (Harvard Business School); an interview with Syrian-American spoken word poetry artist Amal Kassir for our Curator's Corner; and pedagogical ruminations by Rachel Goshgarian and Neha Vora (Lafayette College) on their interdisciplinary course "Muslim Girls (Run the World): Gender and Popular Culture from Prophetic Tradition to Arab Futurism."

52.1 is the first full issue of the *Review* under my editorship, and without the unflagging cheer and magisterial organizational skills of managing editor Kelsey Cherland, I fear readers might have waited much longer to dive into the contents outlined above. Navigating publication timelines and subterranean politics would also have been impossible without the aid of Executive Committee Members Laila Hussein Moustafa, Ken Cuno, and William Ochsenwald. And I close, in a new *RoMES* tradition, with heartfelt

thanks to my Associate Editors for their work ethic and, more importantly, for their patience as we push toward new intellectual horizons. ✦

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