The Meeting Place of British Middle East Studies

The Meeting Place of British Middle East Studies: Emerging Scholars, Emergent Research & Approaches

Edited by

Amanda Phillips and Refqa Abu-Remaileh

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Most of all, the editors also wish to thank the contributors, who not only shared their own research, interpretations and conclusions in this volume but also worked with one another to deepen and sharpen their respective insights. We are grateful for their patience, good-will and grace as we all progressed.

—Amanda Phillips and Refqa Abu-Remaileh

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In the spirit of accessibility, we have attempted to render most Arabic words and names in simplified transliterated form, eschewing diacritical marks.

However, there are several important exceptions: ‘ayn and hamza are indicated, as these are separate letters. Turkish words, too, are left in their Turkish-Latin form, where ç is pronounced ch, ş pronounced sh, ğ remains silent and the curious undotted i (ı) denotes a short 'u'. Only in the case of transliterated Arabic poetry have we kept the diacritical marks as they play an important role in the accuracy of transliterated language in that context.

In keeping with the British Journal of Middle East Studies and most other conventions, we have italicized Turkish and Arabic words only when they are not found in a standard English dictionary: Pasha remains pasha but *fath* is italicized. And despite our best efforts, we are equally sure inconsistencies have crept in and for this we apologize.

FOREWORD

ROBERT GLEAVE*
UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

Introducing this set of interesting essays by emerging scholars of the Middle East is, for me, a particular pleasure. I was Executive Director of the British Society of Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) between 2004 and 2008, and one of the most important development during this period was the development of the BRISMES Graduate Section. That this Section developed was, I hasten to add, nothing to do with my tenure as Executive Director. The Section is entirely student-led, and its annual conference is a largely unfettered by the meddling of established academics. The essays in this volume speak volumes for the strength of graduate studies of the Middle East in the UK. Even the process of collating them, editing them, and producing them in a volume is an impressive testament to the ingenuity and tenacity of the Graduate Section executive. I thought, in this Forward, it would be appropriate to consider the mechanics of British graduate studies in the Middle East, and how these might develop in the future.

Is There Anything Distinctively "British" about Middle East Studies in Britain?

The field is now so internationalised, and scholarship (both in terms of material and persons) is now so mobile, that it is difficult to discern anything other than a negative answer to this leading question. Middle Eastern Studies (MES) departments throughout the UK are now populated by students and staff from such diverse backgrounds and nationalities that the insularity of the past is no longer feasible or desirable. Unlike the situation, say, twenty years ago, today very few British-based MES scholars or doctoral students have been entirely educated within the UK

* Professor Robert Gleave is the former Executive Director of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, 2004-2008.

education system. This has been the case in nearly all area studies disciplines. Latin American Studies, East Asian Studies, Eastern European Studies – all these have experienced a similar morphing of their academic profile within the UK. In all cases, a number of processes have been at work over the past fifteen years – in no particular order, these have included:

1. The improved level of English language skills in the region, combined with a rapid development of higher education capacity there, has brought onto the western European and north America job market a cohort of skilled scholars and prospective doctoral students.
2. Regional governments have invested in scholarship programmes which have brought students to the UK to study, and a proportion of these students have stayed to work in British HE.
3. British Universities have seen a cash cow in the recruitment of overseas students with government scholarships. The universities have aggressively recruited in the region.
4. The British HE system has, simultaneously, reduced the number of postgraduate scholarships and bursaries in area studies.

These are in no particular order of importance or extent of influence – and there are other factors not enumerated here. The situation in British MES in, say, the 1970s, when BRISMES came into being, was of a field largely populated by scholars who were British-educated, from cradle to college. Reflecting recruitment into British HE at the time, this profile was largely white, male, privately schooled, and middle class. In short, it summed up everything which Edward Said targeted in his devastating critique of the Orientalist study of the Muslim world in the late 1970s. In short, if there is anything distinctively British about British MES today, it cannot spring from the profile of its academic membership, since that is now so diverse that a common ground, if there ever was one, has been eroded, and will, I suspect, never be re-established – and this is not a bad thing.

The Mechanisms of Graduate Funding of British Middle East Studies

One would have thought that the last decade's intellectual shift towards interdisciplinary studies would have benefited area studies (such as MES), since a field which takes a region as its focus is, after all, by definition interdisciplinary. But this has not, on the whole, been the case. In terms of

funding for PhD studentships, and in terms of research projects, the disciplinary boundaries have been remarkably resistant to dissolution. Government schemes and programmes have been developed to try and break these barriers down, and MES has, to an extent, benefited from these programmes. However, schemes such as the Language-based Area Studies Initiative, have generally been hurried and knee-jerk. They may have worked to the short term benefit individual institutions which teach MES – but the benefit for the UK field as a whole is yet to be determined. The limitations of such schemes are most obvious when one considers the distribution of PhD scholarships in Middle Eastern Studies by the British Research Councils (primarily the AHRC and ESRC). These are the only sources of government funding for British doctoral studies within the UK. Two tendencies in the distribution of these scholarships can be recognised:

1. The Research Councils now, increasingly, provide doctoral scholarships to students linked to a scholar's research project. The old model of a final year undergraduate or MA student finding a topic which interested them, and developing a research plan independently and locating an appropriate supervisor within UKHE is now the privilege of the wealthy. Those who want access to Research Council scholarship funds have their subject area dictated by a research project which is led by an individual academic and has been pre-selected by the Research Council. Scholarships in open competition remain. In the ESRC, these are a laughable 100 for the whole of the UK in all subject areas. In the AHRC, the situation is much healthier (with between 800 and 900 in any one year) though MES topics not been very successful in gaining recognition within the competitions (with, by my count, only 1 or 2 successes in any one year). This can, to an extent, be explained by the power of the established disciplines, a resistance to interdisciplinarity amongst the application assessors and perhaps most importantly, the difficulty of producing a convincing application when so many criteria are in play (language skills, discipline-specific skills, experience in the region itself etc).
2. The Research Councils are also increasingly seeking to outsource the awarding of doctoral scholarships to institutions themselves. This happens with the project-linked doctoral studentships already mentioned, but perhaps more worryingly, the tendency to award a number of doctoral studentships in, say, MES, to a particular institution. This then uses up all the studentships for

> MES in any particular year, as the Research Councils see no need to make any special provision for MES in their open competitions. The lucky institution then advertise these scholarships and invite applications. The effects of such a policy on a small field such as MES are becoming clear. Students who want to study topic X for their PhD, go to institution A because that is the only place where there are scholarships available. However, there are no specialists in X in institution A, so the student is now faced with a dilemma. The student could change research topic to something of less interest, but for which there is expertise locally. Alternatively the student can soldier on with good, but ultimately inexpert, supervision. Whichever the student chooses, the end result is far from ideal. The individual gets a poor deal, and the field as a whole suffers. Of course, there is no guarantee that the expert in a less fortunate institution would have been the best supervisor (he or she could be a lacklustre supervisor). However, the way the system is currently developing, studying with the most appropriate expert in the field of one's PhD study will be restricted to the point of non-existence.

These developments will, ultimately I believe, lead to the reduction in the quality of the graduate experience for those studying MES in British universities. The old system was patronage based and discriminatory. The new system is incoherent and piecemeal. Neither will serve the field well.

Future Prospects

One thing that this collection of papers demonstrates is that despite the almost wilful attempt to marginalise MES by successive UK governments, the field, intellectually speaking, is very healthy indeed. Graduate students, both British and from overseas, are working together in the UK university sector. They are not embroiled in the politics of institutions and departments fighting one another. Instead, they are focussing on academic quality, and the potential for intellectual exchange that the British context gives them. And this, perhaps, is where we find the answer to our lead question. If there is something distinctive about British MES, it is a combination of various factors:

(1) The distances between our centres of MES are small enough to enable the face to face networking and sharing of ideas in a way which is not possible in north America. The high degree of

collaboration in MES between departments is reflected in, say, the uniquely British external examiner system, further embeds this integration.

(2) The number of MES centres within the UK outstrips most of our European counterparts. This means that both scholars and graduate students do not only have access to an individual institution and its resources, but a far wider range of diverse resources. Because of the density of expertise in the UK, collaborative work and the sharing of ideas becomes possible.

(3) The history of British involvement in the Middle East means that there is a solid base of knowledge production about the region – a factor to which these essays are testament.

(4) The importance given to language learning within our MES departments and the requirements of our undergraduate degree system, means that not only are there ample teaching opportunities for our trainee graduate academics, but also that our graduates are comparatively advanced when they finish their undergraduate education – this feeds into the graduate population, enriching it further. [but only for students coming from the British system—the paucity of these is discussed above . . .]

Other characteristics could be added here, but to little effect. The reader of these essays can, perhaps, judge whether there is a distinctive method or approach exemplified in this book. Perhaps postulating the existence of such a British approach to MES is fanciful ("scholarship is scholarship" one might say). However, the success of the graduate section of BRISMES, its continued vibrancy, and the very existence of this collection of papers, indicates that the prospects for MES in the UK – in terms of both teaching and research – are promising. Of course, postgraduate study has had to change and develop in response to the fads of the Research Councils (who in turn are merely responding to the ephemeral demands of governments). However, the adaptability of the field, and in particular the flexibility of the students involved in its maintenance and future development, bode well for the future.

INTRODUCTION

BRITISH MIDDLE EAST STUDIES AS MEETING PLACE: EMERGING SCHOLARS, EMERGENT RESEARCH AND APPROACHES: SELECTED PAPERS FROM THE 2007 BRITISH SOCIETY FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES GRADUATE CONFERENCE

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Background

This volume brings you some of the best of New Middle East Studies and introduces a vibrant new generation of scholars in the field. The Middle East is an area of pronounced international interest at present, the focus of global politics, and a source of resurgent cultural concerns. Yet the images of the Middle East that resonate in the media world-wide and in much public discourse are often disseminated without context; these stock clichés include camels and tents, bombs, beards and veils. The Middle East is often portrayed as homogenous and yet incomprehensible. The definition of the Middle East itself has been manipulated, conflated and confused, sometimes for the sake of ease but more often in the pursuit of a tidy polemic. As a counter to these notions of homogeneity and inscrutability, this volume highlights both the diversity of the Middle East, past and present, and of 21st-century Middle East Studies.

This book is written for general enthusiasts and for an audience of Middle East specialists. The range of topics, from Abbasid poetry to 2007 Libya, not only showcase some of the best research and analysis by young authors, but also attest to the many faces, and many disciplines, of Middle East Studies. The authors below use a variety of approaches to understand

their respective topics: in the case of each article, fresh insight may be gained from a combination of innovative methodology and original findings. Taken together, the diverse articles in this book inform each other, and encourage the type of critical thinking key to our work: thinking which extends across the usual bounds of topic, time and place and affirms the value of primary research in understanding the Middle East.

The ten papers in this volume are based on presentations from the Third Annual British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) Graduate Student Conference, which took place at the University of Oxford in 2007. The conference was by definition broad: Students presented on topics that spanned the Middle East, including a range far outside its traditional geographic parameters, and analyzed subjects from literature to policy-making to social history; reaching back to the first Islamic dynasty, the Umayyads, to end in contemporary Damascus. This diversity made for some potent interactions, fuelled by curiosity and enthusiasm, and was praised as provoking fresh insights and conceptions. We hope the reader will share a similar experience.

The links, themes and trends explored here also serve to introduce the authors, who can be referred to as some of the best young voices in Middle East Studies. The selected articles are the result of a rigorous recruitment and selection process, the final ten of an original seventy-nine would-be contributors. Hailing from all over the world, and studying at five different universities in the UK, and one in the US,[1] they contribute new perspectives. These scholars are already at the forefront of their fields, and might be expected to go on to participate in the intellectual life of the UK, and beyond, for years to come.

British Middle East Studies

But what is Middle East Studies? Middle East Studies can be defined in two principle ways, either as a discipline in its own right, or as a meeting place for disciplines. At present it is both.

The current understanding of Middle East Studies is a consequence of an evolving history: with its forerunner Oriental Studies, Middle East Studies has been a proud tradition in British academia for over a century.[2]

[1] In its mandate, BRISMES extends its welcome and membership to individuals outside the United Kingdom; this volume does the same. Jasper C. van Putten represents one of the three foreign universities represented in the presentations at the 2007 conference, and one of the nine which sent students to participate.

[2] Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: the History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). C.E.

The institutions represented in this volume have been home to a great variety of scholars, including Edward Pococke, Albert Hourani, William Montgomery Watt, and A. J. Arberry. British-educated academics continue to make up some of the most eminent scholars in the field.

The authoritative tradition in Middle East Studies—including the work of these eminent scholars—has in recent times come under attack. Like other disciplines, a generation ago Middle East Studies faced an epistemological crisis. Edward Said's *Orientalism*[3] attacked it for its non-objectivity and cultural essentialism, for privileging a distorted perspective of the region, and for its dichotomisation of East and West. More broadly, area studies has been accused of a tendency to focus on philology and history, and to over-privilege a reified culture linked inextricably to territory.[4] Observers found Middle East Studies simplistically empirical, and criticised it for being insufficiently theoretical.[5] This was not the first crisis.[6]

More recently, area studies in general has been attacked from a different perspective, as the wrong frame of analysis for a changing world. Globalisation theorists argued that area studies was of little relevance to the post-Cold War world order, given the global character of social dynamics, the ongoing instability in regional blocks and the supposed end of the nation-state.[7] Subsequently, Middle East Studies has been lambasted, often unfairly, for its irrelevance to understanding the Middle East—regardless of how this Middle East is conceived.[8]

In the wake of these debates, there have been attempts to redefine Middle East Studies and to consolidate it as a discipline, making it a subsection of a new "interdisciplinary area studies".[9] These attempts seek to codify a coherent, if oxymoronic, new interdisciplinary discipline, with a language-based methodology, that straddles the arts and humanities and

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Bosworth, "The Study of Islam in British Scholarship", in Azim Nanji ed. *Mapping Islamic Studies: Genealogy, Continuity and Change*. (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997).

[3] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

[4] Arjun Appaduari, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996)

[5] Lockman, *Contending.*

[6] Azim Nanji, "Introduction", *Mapping*

[7] Appaduari, *Modernity,* passim.

[8] Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand: the Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001).

[9] Roger Goodman, ed., *The Future of Interdisciplinary Area Studies in the UK: A Source Document* (2005)

the social sciences within new centres,[10] and to affirm the utility of area knowledge. In British Middle East Studies, this claim to relevance has recently been focused on the problem of new security challenges and Islamic radicalisation.[11]

The focus of *this* book, however, is on contemporary Middle East Studies as a meeting place of different disciplines, with their different perspectives, theories and approaches. Yet before exploring the nature of this meeting in any detail, it is worth considering what is the "Middle East" around which these disciplines are meeting. Despite its name, Middle East Studies as we define it here is not only the study of "the Middle East", a field bringing together different theories and understandings about a particular place. For all intents and purposes, the "Middle East" is wherever Muslims happen to be; on balance, wherever Muslims happen to be, we find the "Middle East" –at least, as we have accepted it here. This reflects not a particular ideal or theoretical paradigm, but the current state of the discipline. This said, it is not of "the Middle East", which assumes the essentialised cultural coherence about which Said, Arjun Appadurai and others have complained.

In this form, contemporary Middle East Studies encompasses an amazingly large swath of the world. The mandate for BRISMES includes the conventional Middle East, from Morocco to Iran and Iraq, and also includes what might be called peripheral regions: Central Asia and western Mongolia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, and parts of Southeast Asia, Saharan and Sub-Saharan Africa, and even Spain—all, of course, included because of the contemporary or historic presence of significant Muslim populations. Though area studies was often criticised for being too comfortable with its own maps of the world, this volume testifies to the huge complexity of maps operating in Middle East Studies. The Middle East might be considered as places: as an empirical place it has changed frequently over the historical period Middle East Studies reviews. Moreover, the Middle East of this volume is not a monolith; it reflects changing political realities and their thematic interests. In certain ways, the

[10] Details of these new centres can be found at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/current_funding_opportunities/lang_based_area_studies.aspx, [accessed 19 March 2008]

[11] BRISMES, *Middle Eastern Studies in the United Kingdom: A Challenge for Government, Industry and the Academic Community* (2002). See also: New Security Challenges: 'Radicalisation' and Violence Research Programme, available online at http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/apply/research/sfi/ahrcsi/new_security_challenges.asp, [accessed 19 March 2008].

Middle East of Middle East Studies is increasingly disconnected from territory; migration, global imaginations in a digital world, and the new prominence of Islam—among other things—dictate shifting horizons. The underlying rationale for the far-ranging geographical designation is delimited chiefly by the theory and practice of a religion, Islam.

With this understanding, the range across the centuries in this volume also becomes clear. This volume, in keeping with the BRISMES mandate, uses the rise of Islam as its starting point. Jewish, eastern Christian and other faiths practiced in the same regions in earlier years are not part of the definition, though the later interaction of these communities with Muslim neighbours or under Muslim rule are, as are the internal dynamics of these communities themselves. Various diasporas from the Middle East are also considered, though not in depth here.[12]

In order to describe what Middle East Studies *is*, it is useful to consider briefly what it is *not*. There are gaps in both time and space. This volume is too small to be representative of the field as a whole; however, the abstracts submitted for the conference totalling 79, from 35 universities, provide a better sample. A brief survey reveals that there were no topics focusing on the Maghreb and only one on Sub-Saharan Africa. The Mughal Empire was as far east as the authors travelled: there were no proposals to discuss Malaysia, Indonesia, or western China or Central Asia—all places with large Muslim populations. Some regions with recent major conflict were conspicuously absent, namely the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq. There were also some noteworthy chronological gaps, most prominently the later 17th, 18th centuries and early 19th centuries.

These gaps notwithstanding, the breadth of Middle East Studies—as interdisciplinary meeting point in this volume—draws the reader through a wide variety of intellectual connections. Middle East Studies includes linguists, art historians, political scientists, historians, students of literature and film, and anthropologists. This volume includes a range of disciplines, from the new "studies", such as migration studies, socio-legal studies and gender studies, to modern social sciences, such as political science, and the humanities, modern history, art and architectural history, literature and Islamic theology. These fields, however, should not be separated from one another. Our conversation stretches fluidly across history and geography;

[12] This is an unwieldy definition; the reader may wonder if a change in terms might be necessary. "Islamic Studes", with its traditional focus on philosophy, law, science and culture, also has its ambiguities and limitations. "Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies" may be the most useful; here, though, we will adhere to "Middle East Studies" and to our affiliation with BRISMES.

the volume exhibits a balance between modern and pre-modern analyses. It also bridges seamlessly the humanities and social sciences.

The crucial distinction is what underpins these interdisciplinary connections: namely, context. Middle East Studies is a broad field that draws the reader through a variety of connections built around a common context of place, history and language—mostly delimited by the practice of Islam—and all grounded empirically. The focus is on qualitative studies rather than quantitative and on the contextual quality of human experience. It is those disciplines with a lingering interest in contextual knowledge that attend to our shared discipline.

Connecting New Scholarship

These connections run through the various chapters in this volume. We start with the earliest, Abeer al-Abbasi's analysis of the role of astrology in the early Abbasid period. Al-Abbasi uses a truly unusual approach to a topic that has long engaged scholars of the Middle East, the Mu'tazilite debates and the disputes over rationality, free will and divine authority. While the conventional focus of scholars has been on the contentious integration of Greek philosophy, al-Abbasi focuses rather on the resilience of Sasanian and other astrological practices to provide a unique perspective on the Arab-Persian disputes of the Abbasid era. Her work considers some large contexts: the interaction between Islam and the classical Persian and Greek traditions and between different interpretations of Islam itself. While her focus is poetry, the article is also about the politics of epistemology: the relationship between competing belief systems within this poetry, such as the Qur'anic Word, rational philosophy, and divination of the stars, and the renegotiation of political authority in turbulent times. Her work highlights the interaction between faith, epistemological authority and "real world" power struggles within the sophisticated debates of the classical period. These debates about free-will and about competing claims to the mantle of religious authority have resonance to our own turbulent times both in the Middle East and beyond.

Denis McAuley picks up with an Andalusian-born author, Ibn 'Arabi. Ibn 'Arabi is famous for his contribution to Sufi metaphysics, known mostly through his prose. McAuley, though, chooses the poetry of the *Mu'ashsharat*, a set of poems systematically based on the letters of the alphabet and highlights the profoundly theological context of this poetry and its rendering of a harmony between form and content. McAuley's analysis initially confirms that the themes found here—human perfection and the heavenly spheres—are familiar from Ibn 'Arabi's other work.

However, this new attention to the *Mu'ashsharat* reveals that the author was also making claims about his own role in the tradition of Islamic saints. McAuley's approach highlights the problems of a conventional 'piecemeal' approach to Sufism, usually seen either as literature or as spirituality, and emphasises both the literary form and the intellectual depth of Ibn 'Arabi's poetry.

Theology provides the subject matter for Stephen Burge's thought-provoking paper, a new translation and analysis of a set of hadiths contained in the Egyptian author al-Suyuti's *al-Haba'ik fi akhbar al-mala'ik*. Burge explores al-Suyuti's work as a source of cosmology and personal salvation rather than as a source of jurisprudence and social law. The angels discussed in this volume of hadith are not those involved with the *mi'raj* or other eschatological traditions, but rather those involved with personal salvation, who play a role in judging the fitness of the human soul for entrance into paradise. Burge highlights those hadith dealing with personal ethics and culpability. Like al-Abbasi's investigation of free will, these concerns of classical Islamic cosmology seem remarkably relevant to the 21st century.

The Egyptian contribution provides part of the context for Margaret Graves' paper on Qur'an boxes from Ottoman Istanbul. These elaborate objects, created mostly for Sultanic foundations in the 16th and early 17th century, may be understood to combine influences from Mamluk Cairo, Umayyad Syria and Christian cultures. She provides a thoughtful exploration of these boxes, elaborating on their mimetic function as containers for the Holy Word, and explores them as a text on the Ottoman Empire's attempts to aggrandise itself through architecture and display. In her discussion, Graves suggests that the interaction between distant and supposedly antagonistic political entities is more nuanced than might be supposed. She also highlights the metaphysics of power and the complex and creative relationship between the divine and earthly orders of the Ottoman Caliphate, manifested in the majesty and protection of the Holy Word.

The interplay of influences from Renaissance Europe also informs Jasper van Putten's article about the use of allegorical portraiture during early 17th century in one of the more remote corners of Middle East Studies, the Mughal Empire. A historian of northern European prints, van Putten provides an intriguing account of the cross-cultural borrowings and representations of power in Mughal portraiture. He carefully dissects the manner in which Emperor Jahangir understood and used western traditions of allegorical portraiture to promote his own agendas, highlighting a rich history of dynamic interchange in the pre-colonial era and providing a

careful and considered reflection on the ruler's claims to good government, which are almost contemporary in their focus on an end to poverty. Like Graves, van Putten illustrates the transmission of forms and ideas between two cultures separated by faith, customs and language.

The chapters then move into the early 20th century, though the theme of cultural interaction continues: Francesca Biancani's intimate history of prostitutes in colonial Cairo uses new source material to investigate foreign and local women working in the sex industry. She explores prostitutes' perspectives to offer a highly original view on the colonial era and its power relations. Biancani focuses on the prostitutes' agency and survival strategies and challenges the stereotypical construction of prostitution in pathological terms. Her article is concerned with a gender-specific notion of subaltern agency and the personal politics of the colonial era. Biancani's analysis of court cases and other material with careful attention to the outlook of these women, and the decisions they made, creates a contribution focused on the personal to understanding colonialism, a subject often written about in far broader institutional terms.

Ahmet Sezgin also writes about the early 20th century. But here, the article starts with the nascent Turkish Republic of the 1930's and moves into the 1980's, surveying how the renowned Ottoman architect Sinan (d. 1588) was portrayed, and appropriated, by various authors and playwrights. Sezgin introduces the 20th-century spectre of nationalism and the peculiarly Turkish phenomenon of Anatolianism. Through the remarkably plastic figure of Sinan, Sezgin offers us a lens on the dynamics of Turkish nationalism and how his image has come to be revised and revisited by succeeding generations of Turkish political activists. Using the "national hero" as a window on the changing intellectual, religious and social climate in 20th century Turkey and beyond, Sezgin's work offers rare insight on both 100 years of Turkish political history and on how nationalism and identity politics have shifted in their articulation over this period. This review of shifting ideologies across generations is a reminder of the competing interpretations of ideas, texts and objects familiar from al-Abbasi's chapter.

Interpretation and interaction with law is the subject of Stefan Soehnchen's analysis of different Palestinian experiences with Israeli law in the early 2000s, focusing on the increasing legalisation of politics and politicisation of the law throughout Israel/Palestine. His work provides a highly original perspective on the Palestinian struggle, on the shifting dynamics of Palestinian politics inside Israel, and also an interesting view on the "rule of law" discourse. The discussion uses a new theoretical model to frame the political role of law and the individual experiences of

those bound by the law. An unexpected subjectivity in the supposedly objective rule of law is highlighted. Soehnchen's work finds a parallel in that of Biancani, as both have introduced first person accounts of groups which have been largely denied a legitimate voice in their own respective societies.

The oral first person accounts used by Soehnchen also provide the basis for Hilary Kalmbach's article on women's activism within a religious context. Her interviews with Huda al-Habash, a female mosque instructor in Damascus, provide the basis for a description of how al-Habash is able to negotiate her own space in the primarily male Syrian Sunni religious establishment. Kalmbach highlights the significance and growth of the current synthesis of "pietist" women's agency. She explores the global feminist context of these negotiations, as well as their relevance to the contemporary Middle East, where women's status has become central to policy debates within international politics and development. Her research challenges a key ideological division in these debates, between feminism and conservative Islamic practice, reflecting that the actions of a female mosque preacher are simultaneously both in keeping with Sunni Islam and enhancing of women's status.

Emanuela Paoletti picks up notions of policy relevance on an international level, with a review of the newly evolving international migration regime. Paoletti's work offers a fascinating insight into the shifting dynamics of Middle Eastern politics under the geostrategic transformations of the region and highlights in a different way the changing politics of contemporary East-West relations—especially as the geographic reality here is North-South. Her assessment of the agreements on migration between Italy and Libya reveals new patterns of interdependence and invites reflection on the changing status of Libya, as former pariah state now emerging as a major force in the Euro-Mediterranean region. She shows how new forms of national cooperation and international governance, especially evident in migration and its policing, mark an off-stage transformation in Middle Eastern politics and law. She provides a rich analysis of the national controversies and the hotly contested debates occasioned by immigration policies in the Mediterranean.

Middle East Studies as a Meeting Place

The authors of these ten papers have all included in their own introductions some notes about the state of their respective subfields. This helps provide context for each contribution, and allows the reader to see

the continuing interest in certain fields, the changing dynamics in new approaches, and the contemporary relevance of even the oldest topics. Collectively, these reflections on the tradition of each topic and its changing dynamics offer the reader an insight into how Middle East Studies as a field is developing; they provide common ground for the articles.

Yet given this diversity, in what sense can these articles be characterised as a coherent body of scholarship, as constituting a "New Middle East Studies"? There is no self-conscious movement of New Middle East Studies at present. Are there any grounds for arguing that new directions for Middle East Studies might be evolving?

As well as presenting new research and fresh perspectives, this volume acts as a snapshot of our shared visions and concerns. If nothing else, there are a striking number of affinities among the variety of different perspectives and practices in this volume. These affinities suggest the ways in which a New Middle East Studies might be emerging, as characterised by at least three key attributes: an ever-increasing awareness of marginal perspectives, fresh insights on exchange and controversy, and new "textual" approaches.

First, the reader might be struck by the number of papers that focus on subjects conventionally considered marginal. The three articles by Biancani, Soehnchen and Kalmbach might be all be said to fall under the rubric of subaltern studies. Each investigates how a minority interacts with structures imposed by the authority under which it lives. All explore marginal perspectives and use them to challenge mainstream understandings. These perspectives rebut those criticisms made of an earlier generation of Middle East Studies and Orientalists by Said and others and delegitimise authoritative perspectives on the Middle East. In its place, New Middle East Studies seems to offer voices previously excluded by earlier generations of scholarship. Indeed the focus on the marginal, from Abbasid astrologers to Palestinians within Israel, is sufficiently prevalent to constitute almost a mainstream approach in contemporary Middle East Studies.

This diversity is reflected in its practitioners; contemporary Middle East Studies is far more international than its predecessors, as reflected in the contributors to this volume. They provide a breadth of perspectives, and a voice beyond that of a male elite. Moreover, especially at this time, the highlighting of marginal perspectives and the politics of the personal is often associated with an investigation of moral dimensions.

More subtly, it might also be associated with a transforming sense of history. In different ways, our contributors present a great array of historical voices, though each focuses more on a careful analysis of particular and local historical moments than on developing a grand view of history. Earlier generations were concerned more with the public sphere. In Hourani's magisterial *A History of the Arab Peoples*,[13] a total of six pages are devoted to gender relations, first about the 11th-15th centuries and then post-1967. Neither section addresses the subject in a broader perspective, as Biancani has so capably done with her intimate focus on the complexity of micro-power relations. We are shifting away from writing canonical history and toward personal and nuanced stories informed by their context.

Yet as the presentation of marginal perspectives in place of overarching narratives has become an increasingly mainstream approach, the potential danger in Middle East Studies, as elsewhere, is an increasing topical specialization. Middle East Studies as an interdisciplinary meeting point becomes highly valuable in this context. The attentiveness to context and history that guides interdisciplinary area studies means that Middle East Studies provides a broad historic and cultural range for interaction between different fine grain perspectives and a frame in which they can be apprehended and appreciated. In other disciplines this can be potentially isolated and devoid of context—even a voyeurism of the local—this contextual strength puts these voices in perspective.

Equally, this focus on marginal perspectives has also involved a transformation of sources. The contributors to this volume all incorporate fresh sources on familiar topics. Whereas Middle East Studies was formerly criticised for its over-reliance on canonical texts,[14] these articles mark a far greater use of materials such as the Internet, oral testimony, participant observation, and objects as sources of data. This echoes both an expansion and a democratization of the definition of research documents, compared to earlier generations' focus on classic sources, which historians have observed in the past decade.[15]

The key thematic concern in much of this focus on marginal perspectives throughout the volume is on subaltern agency. New Middle East Studies celebrates agency often found in the least expected corners. Further, a number of articles explore subaltern challenges to authority, explicitly, as in the cases related by Soehnchen, or in the more subtle

[13] Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992)
[14] Said, *Orientalism*.
[15] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1997).

examples presented by Kalmbach. There is a new interest in the essentially contested nature of authority. A number of our articles—al-Abbasi, Biancani, Graves, van Putten—provide detailed analyses of power relations, power's manifestations and challenges, gender dimensions, metaphysical dimensions and even the relationship between power and epistemology. Similarly, there is a focus on controversy and controversial issues, illuminating how power structures change. This holds true for both the most recent and the oldest subject matter: Paoletti shows the limits and transgressions of enforceable international law, while al-Abbasi's work illustrates astrology's challenges to early Islamic religious authority. In many cases, these conflicts involve an array of local and international forces; these extend beyond the 20th-century notions of national settings, a point brought out clearly by Middle East Studies' focus.

The second major topic of investigation is the long history of what has become a major if sometimes cliché concern in late 20th-century scholarship—the East-West interaction. Some contributors look explicitly at meeting points. Here, the Middle East of New Middle East Studies is not a tightly defined Other, a key criticism made of an earlier generation of scholars in Oriental Studies, which in many ways lives on as a distinction made in contemporary politics. Rather our Middle East Studies is keenly interested in encounters and osmosis and mutual borrowings of East and West, or North and South. It also recognises the limits of these geographical designations: inter- and intra-regional interactions as well as those between people sharing neighbourhoods, courts of law, space in religious foundations and even traditions of rhetoric and poetry.

At the cultural level, this topic is picked up most strongly by Graves and van Putten. Both of these papers look at the overlap between European visual forms and those of the Ottoman and Mughal Empires. Art history, and its attendant public manifestation, museum exhibitions, has also anointed this theme with the recent Venice & the Islamic World (2006-7, Paris, New York, Venice), and several major general publications.[16]

Politically, interactions and even synthesis are explored by a number of contributors. Soehnchen reviews the interaction of Palestinian land claims, international human rights and the Israeli legal system, Kalmbach reflects on the relationship between women's Islamic activism and global feminism, Paoletti on interactions through the evolving new migration

[16] Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Jerry Brotton, *The Renaissance Bazaar*: *from the Silk Road to Michelangelo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

regime. In this last case, North-South has become the new East-West; the Mediterranean is now divided along its latitude, rather than longitude. Paoletti's work critically highlights the new bargaining mechanisms that have come about as a result of migration and how they influence the relations of power between the EU and its Mediterranean partner states. Her analyses of this encounter step beyond the national context to review the interaction of "global" notions, such as rule of law, gender equity, citizenship and migration; they also look closely at local reality and its creative agency and levels of power relations.

At the philosophical level, the contributors offer a rich awareness of cosmological issues and the meeting of different systems of belief. Cultural and political interactions find resonance in al-Abbasi's work, which investigates an ideological conflict and synthesis between two cultures, and the political manoeuvring that accompanied it. Similarly, McAuley contextualises the disparate influences found in Sufism as it was practiced in the medieval period. His analysis points to the fact that these many currents were not perceived as foreign in that period, but were part of a larger world-view in which, whether consciously or unconsciously, there was room for syncretism.

A focus on this intermingling acts as a corrective to the pervasive "clash of civilisations" paradigm and that of absolutist cultures in locked in a death-struggle; this notion has cast a long shadow on contemporary discourses about the Middle East. In contrast, the articles offer careful analyses of synthesis and interaction across geography and history. They highlight the complexity of these interactions, and indeed observe that the dynamics of synthesis are seen most clearly in controversy. Dissent provokes the most electrifying and productive interactions.

The third key theme in this volume concerns matters of interpretation. This interest in interpretation—on the part of both the authors and their research subjects—stands in contrast to notions of the unproblematic positivism that once characterised disciplines from anthropology to history.[17] The new reflexivity emphasises the choices made by researchers as they choose, and interpret, their subjects.

There is an explicit thematic interest in the act of interpretation, and its contests and controversies, running through many of these articles. Burge's chapter looks at how al-Suyuṭi focuses on certain, and only certain, hadith to form a corpus that would become a popular source for

[17] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books,1973).

judges. He sets the interpretive work of al-Suyuṭi at one remove from the first source, the Qur'an; the work of interpreting al-Suyuṭi is set at yet another remove. In a similar fashion, Sezgin's work shows how even a historical figure about whom very little is known can become the subject of various politically motivated interpretations. Is the Ottoman architect Sinan a Muslim? Greek? Turkish? Crypto-Christian? An icon of the Turkic Anatolia or of an Islamic tradition? Likewise van Putten's work shows how visual imagery might be understood by different audiences. He comments on the ideology that drove new conventions of Mughal portraiture and how the correct interpretation by a small but influential audience was key to promotion of this imperial agenda. The chapters by Kalmbach and Soehnchen both look at how law, secular or divine, can be interpreted at different moments to suit different purposes. Explicitly political battles enacted through interpretive space are a recurring theme across the articles.

However, this interpretive quality has a rather more fundamental dimension in New Middle East Studies, since it highlights what might be termed an increasing "textuality". This is to say a novel, hermeneutic research approach that uses A to look at B, and that treats its main topic as a 'text' on something else. McAuley uses poetry to explain theology; al-Abbasi uses poetry to explore cosmology and then cosmology to explore politics. In our volume, this "textuality" is markedly political—if one wants to know about power and politics in the historic Middle East, one will learn more about it from these studies of boxes or theological disputes than one would from a stock discussion about the politics and history of radicalisation. Sezgin's work takes depictions of Sinan in fiction and uses these depictions as a text on Turkish nationalism and the formation of an Ottoman and a Turkish identity during the corresponding periods; Graves reviews Qur'an boxes as a text on Ottoman statecraft and so forth. These approaches are qualitatively different from the type which might have been developed by an art historian interested in Ottoman architecture as part of an Islamic or Ottoman canon. New Middle East Studies involves a different approach to many traditional objects of knowledge, first asking different questions and then finding new ways to interpret their sources. This "textuality" requires the unfolding of sources discussed above; the early generation of formalist scholars might have rejected the use of Qur'an boxes as a source of information about Ottoman statecraft.

This "textuality" has provoked a creative surge within the canonical topics of Middle East Studies, as old topics are being developed in remarkably new ways. The works of Abbasi, McAuley and Burge each take a familiar subject—in each case explored by some of the great