Message from the Chair

As the academic year winds down, and we turn our collective attention to summer (Yes, the warmth of summer is coming!), I wish to thank everyone for the contributions you have made to the life of the department over the past year. It has been a busy, but good year for NMC. Indeed, as many events this year have made increasingly clear, NMC is literally bursting at the seams, and in great need of enhanced meeting space. Thankfully, the Dean’s Office has given the green light to renovate our second floor meeting area, with construction to take place during the summer, and slated for completion before classes resume in the fall. The plan calls for the southern half of the second floor to be transformed into a commons area, with a removable wall connecting it to our conference room (200B), and an adjacent meeting space for NMC’s undergraduate students. Something to look forward to when you return!

I wish to make special note of the approaching retirement of Professor Todd Lawson, who will be stepping down from his active teaching duties at the end of this spring. Professor Lawson’s contributions to the academic life of NMC have been immense over the decade that he has been teaching at the UofT, and his departure will leave an enormous void. We wish him peace and much blessing as he enters a well-earned retirement.

Institute of Islamic Studies
Inaugural Lunch and Symposium

Read more on page 2 ...

Left to right: Geoff Martin, Prof. Walid Saleh, and Matt Gordner
Institute for Islamic Studies Inaugural Meeting

Recently the Institute of Islamic Studies hosted a lunch gathering for graduate students and faculty members interested in the study of Islam and the Islamic world including the Middle East. The aim of the lunch gathering was to establish activities by and for the university wide community of graduate students across disciplines. The IIS intends to create a space for academic interaction among the graduate students, including reading groups, dissertation workshops and small conferences. The IIS is also launching an Ontario wide consortium of Islamic Studies. This new initiative aims to create a mechanism for utilizing the many resources available in Ontario for the study of Islam. The consortium will also connect graduate students from different institutions and help generate a wider sense of a Canadian scholarly identity among our graduates. The gathering was well attended and a follow up meeting for an organizing committee took place in mid-April. Look forward for activities from the graduate students soon.

Top left to right: Professors Walid Saleh and Amira Mittermaier among students.
Bottom right to left: Professors Jim Reilly and Jens Hanssen participating in the roundtable discussion.

NMC Faculty Retirement

Professor Todd Lawson will be retiring on June 30, 2014, after more than a decade of dedicated teaching and service in NMC. Professor Lawson joined NMC as Associate Professor of Islamic Studies in 2003, and he has been an integral part of the department’s Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies program over the past decade, teaching courses on Qur’anic Exegesis, Islamic Mysticism, Shi’ism, and the Gnostics. Before joining NMC, Professor Lawson lectured in the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University (1995-1998). Prior to that, he was an Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies in the former Department of Middle East and Islamic Studies at UofT (1988-1994).

Professor Lawson’s research has been wide-ranging, encompassing a diverse range of topics within the fields of Qur’anic Exegesis and Islamic Thought, including Islamic mysticism, Sufism, and Shi’ism. He has written extensively, and published widely. Recent monographs include, The Crucifixion and the Qur’an: Historical Survey and Analysis of Muslim Scriptural Commentary (2009), Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam: Qur’an, Exegesis, Messianism and the Literary Origins of the Babi Religion (2012), and A Most Noble Pattern: Collected Essays on the Writings of ‘Ali Muhammad Shirazi, the Bab (2012).

We will miss Professor Lawson’s infectious passion for his field, his dedication to teaching, and commitment to his students. May he have continued success and fulfillment as he enters retirement!
Middle Eastern Excursions

At the invitation of the Lebanese Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, where teaching is conducted in English, Professor Amir Harrak spent three days (April 8-11, 2014) to help organise a newly established programme in Syriac Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Science. There is a massive literature written in this language between the 2nd and the 14th centuries, covering major disciplines, and the university decided to invest a teaching position to teach this literature, beginning at the undergraduate level and in a few years at the graduate level. Professor Harrak emphasized the need to create an introductory course in Biblical/Imperial Aramaic in which Syriac, as is also the case of Babylonian Aramaic, is rooted. This would give learners of Syriac an excellent background in the language and vocabulary. During the first year of the programme, Prof. Harrak, as well other European scholars of Syriac, will be asked to travel to Lebanon to assess the progress of the programme and to enhance it with individual lectures.

Prof. Harrak was also invited to participate in an international conference organised by the University of Duhok, the Faculty of Arts and Science in Akre (‘Aqra), in Iraqi Kurdistan, and which took place April 13-14, 2014. The conference concentrated on the history and culture of the region of Akre, called in Classical sources Gordyene, and in Jewish Aramaic and Syriac sources Qardu. Between the 5th century BCE and 3rd century CE the region was a small kingdom on a long trade route linking Persia with Egypt. It was located to the north of the kingdom of Adiabene, made famous by the conversion of its 1st century CE king to Judaism as stated by the Jewish historian Josephus. After delivering a paper on Akre in Cuneiform, Greek, Latin, and Syriac sources and chaired one session, Prof. Harrak was asked to speak on behalf of more than hundred participants at the concluding session. He took the opportunity to stress the need to establish a position in Akkadian language and literature, and another position in Aramaic and Syriac within the newly established Department of Archaeology. These ancient languages left their traces in the Arabic and Kurdish languages of Iraq. New universities have been founded in Iraqi Kurdistan during the past two decades, and their administrators look forward to learning from Western universities about academic programmes and administration.

ROM Revealed Weekend

ROM Revealed Weekend - VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
May 3-4, 2014

During this special weekend the Royal Ontario Museum offers free unique access to the Museum’s public galleries, ROM experts and their discoveries at ROM Ideas, and engaging family activities in the galleries. The weekend includes massive behind the scenes open house.

Volunteers are needed to watch over the collection, in shifts of two hours each or longer if available. Please contact Bill Pratt at billp@rom.on.ca if you would like to help!
Upcoming Events

NMC GSA Council Elections and End of the Year Hookah Party

The NMC Graduate Students’ Association would like to invite all graduate students to participate in the **NMCGSA Council Elections for 2014-2015**. The elections will take place in the Graduate Lounge (NMC Department, 4 Bancroft Avenue, Room 202) on **Thursday, May 1, at 4:30 pm**. Come and take part and speak your mind about graduate student issues in the NMC department.

The elections will be followed by the **End of the Year Hookah Party**, which will take place at the GSU Pub patio after the elections, starting at 5 pm. Come relax and celebrate the end of the academic year with your fellow graduate students.

Ancient Egypt Alive! Public Event

The Ancient Egypt Alive! Society invites all to their upcoming lecture (via conference call) on **“Looting in Egypt, Then and Now - Robbery, Re-use, and Recycling from Antiquity to Today”** by Dr. Monica Hanna. The lecture will be followed by roundtable discussion on the recent devastation at Egypt’s archaeological sites and on the history of looting in antiquity.

May 1, 2014, the Arts and Letters Club, 15 Elm Street, 7-10 pm

Science Rendezvous at the University of Toronto

Science Rendezvous is a free science festival, where visitors of all ages get a chance to meet with high-profile researchers, conduct experiments, and above all, have fun while experiencing science in a whole new way. This year’s event will focus on busting common science myths and misconceptions, in over 30 disciplines ranging from social, physical and biological sciences to engineering and medicine! For a sneak peak, check out the videos on our website that showcase some of the great examples of organizations, experiments, and activities that integrate science, engineering, technology and human ingenuity.

May 10, 2014, from 11 am to 5pm along St. George Street between Harbord and College Streets

Events will include the Science Carnival, an exciting, science-based mystery game called Science Chase, and tours of real science research labs. For more information and updates go to: [https://sr.escalator.utoronto.ca/home/](https://sr.escalator.utoronto.ca/home/).
Announcements

Syrian Studies Association Prizes for Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation and Article on Syria 2014 - Call for Submissions

In order to promote and highlight excellence in research, the SSA awards annual prizes for the best writing on Bilad al-Sham until 1918 and on Syria following that.

In 2014, the SSA seeks submissions for the most outstanding doctoral dissertation and article submitted/published between September 1, 2012 (for dissertations)/July 1, 2013 (for articles) and July 1, 2014. In order to be considered for the prize, candidates must join the association. Information about the Syrian Studies Association is available at: http://www.ou.edu/ssa/index.html. Submissions in languages other than English are welcome. Articles should be sent electronically.

The deadline for submissions is July 1, 2014. All submissions should be sent to Thomas Pierret, Chair of the Prize Committee at thomas.pierret1@gmail.com. Winners will be announced at the SSA annual meeting in November 2014.

THE SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES

2014 SCHOLARS’ COLLOQUIUM
FIRST CALL FOR PAPERS

The Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities/Société pour l’Étude de l’Égypte Ancienne invites all doctoral level graduate students and senior scholars to submit proposals for papers to be given at this year’s Scholars’ Colloquium. The deadline for submission August 31, 2014. Those who need early acceptance to apply for travel grants are urged to apply before this deadline, and to indicate the reason for needing early notification in their covering email.

Proposals for Scholars’ Colloquium papers will be accepted from graduate students and senior scholars in the fields of Egyptology, Anthropology, Classics, Fine Arts, Archaeology, Nubian Studies and related fields on ANY topic connected with predynastic, pharaonic, Hellenistic, Roman or Coptic Egypt, but must represent an original contribution to the field. Presentations may be given in either English or French. Papers may not exceed 20 minutes in length.

Interested scholars should send a title and brief abstract of their proposed paper to the Scholars’ Colloquium Coordinators at scholarscolloquium@thessea.org or scholarscoll@thessea.org. Please note that only proposals submitted in electronic format [i.e. via email] will be considered. Abstracts must not exceed 350 words in length. Acceptances of papers will be issued in September.

The SSEA/SÉÉA is also holding its 40th Annual Symposium that weekend. Papers accepted for the Scholars’ Colloquium are not limited to the topic of the symposium, and no preference will be given to proposals based on topic. Please also note that the SSEA is soliciting proposals for the Scholars’ Colloquium only.
SSEA/SÉÉA ANNUAL MEETING
November 14-16, 2014
CALL FOR POSTERS

The Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities/Société pour l’Étude de l’Égypte Ancienne is now inviting proposals for poster contributions for its Annual Meeting, to be held November 14-16th, 2014 on the campus of the University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.

The final deadline for receipt of proposals for posters is September 15, 2014.

Posters may address any aspect of any topic connected with predynastic, pharaonic, Hellenistic, Roman or Coptic Egypt. However, poster presentation is best suited to material with a strong visual impact, rather than a great reliance on text. Work submitted must represent an original contribution to the field and must not have been published elsewhere. Posters may be in either English or French.

Interested scholars should send a title and brief abstract of their proposed poster to the Scholars’ Colloquium Coordinators at scholarscolloquium@thessea.org or scholarscoll@thessea.org.

Millet Scholarship - Call for Applications

The Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities (SSEA), Toronto Chapter is offering the Nicolas B. Millet Memorial Scholarship to a graduate student for research on ancient Egypt.

This scholarship is open to all Graduate students of the Department of NMC Studies who are members of the SSEA and also to other Graduate students of other Departments in the University of Toronto, who are also members of the SSEA, whose area of research encompasses work that will be meaningfully related to the study of Ancient Egypt up to 550 C. E.

The scholarship is intended to help cover expenses for research conducted between September 2013 and August 2014 inclusive. The deadline is September 15, 2014, 4 pm EST.

For further information and application package please visit our website: http://www.thessea.org/nicholas_b_millet_travel_scholarship_toronto_chapter_.php

For the latest news, a full list of lectures and events in NMC, please visit our website: www.nmc.utoronto.ca.
Research and Publications

**Dr. Derya Şahin** is a visiting scholar from the Department of Archaeology at Uludağ University (Bursa, Turkey), where she has been working as a lecturer in the Department of Archaeology since 2007. Dr. Şahin completed her doctoral degree in Archaeology at Selcuk University in Konya, with a dissertation on “Nereid Iconography in Terms of Roman Time Mosaic Depiction.” In early 2014 Şahin was appointed Associate Professor in her department. As a lecturer she has been teaching courses on classical archaeology namely Ancient Roman Mosaics, Roman Portraits, and also Mythology.

Şahin’s research interests include mosaics, iconography, late ancient settlements, and archaeological methods. Since 2004 she has been the member of the Myndos Ancient City archaeological project. While in Toronto, she will be conducting research on the Lelegian Wall, part of the fortification system of the earliest settlement (ca. 2nd millennium B.C.) at Mydnos, located in Bodrum-Gümüşlük.

**Jonathan Ferguson**, PhD Candidate in NMC, has published two recent articles on his research for the Tell Madaba Archaeological Project (TMAP) in Jordan, and a third on his research at Khirbat az-Zūna.


**Mustafa Banister** will be presenting his paper, “Casting the Caliph in a Cosmic Role: The Transmission of al-Suyuti’s Historical Vision,” at the First Conference of the School of Mamluk Studies in Venice on June 23, 2014. The paper discusses interpretations of the Sunni Caliphate by the late fifteenth century Egyptian scholar al-Suyuti and his student, the historian Ibn Iyas.

Mustafa’s first article, “Naught Remains to the Caliph but his Title: Revisiting Abbasid Authority in Mamluk Cairo,” has been accepted for publication in a forthcoming volume of the Mamluk Studies Review.

Mustafa is a PhD candidate in NMC. His doctoral dissertation (supervised by Prof. Linda Northrup) is tentatively titled “The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo (1261-1517): History and Tradition in the Mamluk Court.”
Faculty Reflections
War and the Linguistic Landscape of the Middle East
by Professor Emeritus Amir Hassanpour

The ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria have not only devastated the architectural and archaeological heritage of the region, they have also threatened some of the languages and religions that have survived thousands of years of ethnocide, linguicide and ethnic cleansing.

Our Department has a prominent record offering courses on a number of ancient (e.g., Akkadian, Assyrio-Babylonian, Sumerian, Aramaic-Syriac, Biblical Hebrew, Ancient Egyptian) and modern (Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, Turkish) languages. During the last decade or so, some minorities, in particular Christians who continue to speak varieties of Western and Eastern Aramaic in Syria and Iraq, are being uprooted and, as a result, the survival of their languages is in doubt, not only their spoken form, but their written heritage is threatened as well. In 1997, Professor Harrak had access to a precious collection of Syriac and Garshuni manuscripts in Baghdad, and he recently published a detailed description in his *Catalogue of Syriac and Garshuni Manuscripts: Manuscripts owned by the Iraqi Department of Antiquities and Heritage* (2011). This has been particularly important for Assyrians living in Iraq’s Kurdistan, where Aramaic is the medium of instruction in primary and secondary education, and is also used in print and broadcast media. [Ed. See also Professor Harrak’s report on his recent visit to the region on p. 3.]

By contrast, Kurdish, despite its long history of repression, has made important recent gains, more so in Iraq, but recently also in Turkey and Syria. According to the 2005 Iraqi constitution, it is, together with Arabic, an official language of the country. In Turkey, meanwhile, Kurdish has been allowed to be spoken since 1991, and is now taught as an elective course in secondary schools, with a few Kurdish studies programs in universities. It is also the medium of instruction in the autonomous Kurdish region that was recently formed in northeast Syria. While the war and its aftermath have raised the status of Kurdish in the region, ironically, internal conflicts in the language have come to the fore.

Together with colleagues, Jaffer Sheyholislami and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, I worked on a special issue of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language (IJS)*, which was published in 2012 under the title “The Kurdish Linguistic Landscape: Vitality, Linguicide and Resistance.” In addition to co-authoring the introductory and concluding sections, I contributed an article, “The indivisibility of the nation and its linguistic divisions,” and a book review, “Politics and language ideology in Kurdish lexicography.” Unlike Aramaic, which is threatened in part because of the suppression of the religion and ethnic identity of those who speak it, Kurdish has benefited from a combination of numerical strength (it is the 40th largest language group in the world) and repression. The formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq has raised the status of Kurdish, which can be seen, among other things, in the publication of “Learn Kurdish” teaching material by Eurotalk and other publishers.

This interest in KRG and Kurdish is apparently due primarily to the existence and extraction of oil in the region. The special issue of *IJS* examines many aspects of the changing landscape of this language. In my writings, I have focused on both the internal and external contradictions within Kurdish. Although the mainstream media are more interested in reporting about oil, war, and violence, at times they do try to inform the public about the suppression of religious and/or linguistic minorities in the region. These minorities form an integral part of the diverse cultural mosaic that is the Middle East, and they deserve our focused attention and support. We all stand to benefit.
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