Message from the Chair

With the winter academic term now officially behind us, and hints of summer finally beginning to take hold across campus, I am pleased to present our spring special issue of the NMC Newsletter. This issue highlights some of the many activities and events that have taken place in the Department over the winter term, while also celebrating some of the myriad accomplishments of our students, faculty, and alumni. I wish especially to acknowledge Professor Todd Lawson for the rich and varied contributions he has made to the academic life of the Department over the past decade. We wish him all the very best as he enters retirement.

As I look back over the past year, it has been a particularly busy—and productive—time in NMC. The Department is flourishing, with many exciting initiatives underway that promise to further advance our academic mission, and resource the programs that sustain it. As I have mentioned in recent communications, NMC is literally bursting at the seams, and in great need of enhanced meeting space. Thankfully, we have received the green light to renovate our second floor meeting area, with construction slated for the summer, and scheduled for completion before classes resume in September. We look forward to inaugurating the new space when everyone returns in the fall. Until then, enjoy a safe, rejuvenating—and warm—summer!

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Graduate Student Symposium

In February the NMC Graduate Students’ Association hosted the 18th Annual Graduate Student Symposium entitled Power, Patronage and Politics: Taking Stock of Empires. NMC students contributed on various topics on ancient and modern Near Eastern cultures: Sabrina M. Guerrieri presented on “Shari’ati’s Third World Existentialism: reconciling ‘anti-materialism’ and ‘Islamic Marxism,’” and Netanel Silverman on “What Grows from New York Concrete: Haim Nahman Bialik’s Romantic Tidhar (Plane Tree) and Mahmoud Darwish’s Ironic Zanbak (Lily).” Rasha Eleandari discussed “Assad and Isis: Syrians on the Horns of a Dilemma.” Meira Gold spoke about “Victorian Egyptology in Context: The Egypt Exploration Fund’s Search for the Biblical Exodus Route.” Yehia Amin gave a talk on “Between Peripatetic and Mystic: Studying Suhrawardi’s Early Thought” and Dina Fergani discussed “Abdallah al-Nadim and the 19th century Egyptian intellectual milieu: Modern, all too modern?”

In the sections focusing on ancient times Thomas H. Greiner explored “Byblos and its Egyptian Connections in the late 2nd Millennium BC,” while Radovan Kabatiar examined “Life on the Periphery, Life at the Crossroads: Subsistence Strategies at Kinet Höyük (Turkey) in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages,” and Tracy L. Spurrier analyzed “‘Alme, Akšud, Ašlula šallassunu!’ Searching for evidence of Neo Assyrian Kings sharing their glory.”

In addition to UofT students, this year the symposium attracted a record number of presenters from other universities, including Harvard University, Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich, Koç University in Istanbul, McGill University, and the University of Michigan.

NMC participates in the ARCE Annual Meetings

NMC was admirably represented at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, held in Portland Oregon from April 4-6, 2014. A contingent of graduate students, researchers, and faculty from the UofT attended the conference and shared the results of their ongoing research with colleagues from all over the world.

Professor Dr. Katja Goebi presented on “Mythos as Logos: Some Thoughts on Cognitive Functions and Correspondences of Egyptian Myth(eme)s.” Post-doctoral fellow Christina Geisen spoke about “An Analysis of Basilophoric Personal Names - Case Studies of the Old and Middle Kingdoms,” and Meredith Brand (PhD Candidate) gave a talk on “Ancient Foodways: Examining the Lack of Specialized Cooking Pottery in the Old Kingdom.” Dr. Mary-Ann Pouls Wegner, the director of the Toronto Abydos Votive Zone Project, presented on “Tracing the Development of a Sacred Landscape: The Toronto Abydos Votive Zone Project.”

The high point of the conference for Professor Pouls Wegner came following her presentation, when a senior Egyptologist and an acknowledged expert on Hatshepsut’s monuments, excitedly confirmed that the very rare wooden statue of a ruler excavated by her team at Abydos in 2011 does in fact depict Hatshepsut, a member of the powerful Eighteenth Dynasty who ruled Egypt as king although she was a woman. A detailed analysis of the statue is currently in preparation.

(Photo: Courtesy of Dr. Mary Ann Pouls Wegner).

For the latest news and events in NMC, please visit our website: www.nmc.utoronto.ca.
The Institute of Islamic Studies (IIS) was officially established on July 1, 2013. The vision of the IIS is to foster a coordinated program of activities that will provide a focal point for tri-campus scholarship on the Islamic world, advance understanding about Islam in society, inform public policy and raise the profile of the Islamic studies endeavours at UofT. An interdisciplinary extra-departmental unit, the IIS will focus primarily on research and outreach by leveraging the strong educational programming already in place across the University. The UofT has a long and distinguished history of research and teaching in Islamic Studies, with no less than 35 faculty members currently affiliated with departments across all three campuses, whose core expertise is in Islamic studies or whose research deals in some way with the Islamic world.

In September 2013, Walid Saleh, Associate Professor in NMC and in the Department for the Study of Religion, was appointed the first director of the newly founded institute. On April 4, 2014, the IIS 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 was to identify activities by and for the university wide community of graduate students across disciplines. 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.

Currently, the Institute is developing a web portal to showcase Islamic scholarship and teaching across the University. The portal will serve both as an electronic resource and provide information on Institute events, including links to the rich set of activities in other academic units across the three campuses. The site will also include links to the programs and faculty of the many units engaged in Islamic studies. In addition, the Institute will foster and facilitate networking activities across the UofT. Faculty and students who wish to propose an activity, receive more information about the IIS’s forthcoming activities, or join the email list, are encouraged to contact Professor Saleh (walid.saleh@utoronto.ca).
Student Award Winners

Danielle Kenney is the recipient of this year’s R.F.G. Sweet Award. The Sweet Award was established by the Near Eastern Studies Students’ Association in 1994, in honor of Professor R.F.G. Sweet, former chair of NMC.

In her current studies and research Danielle is interested in the interactions between the Near East and Ancient Greece, especially during the Aegean Bronze Age, and would like to pursue graduate work in this field. She is looking forward to her first archaeological field work in Bulgaria this summer, where she will be focusing on the conservation of pottery from the Archaic and Classical Greek periods.

Sharon (Sherwin) Mizbani has been awarded the Oktay and Virginia Aksan Scholarship. Sharon is currently pursuing a Major in Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations and a double Minor in Political Science and History. Her research interests include the modern history of the Middle East with a focus on Turkey, as well as women’s movements during the Ottoman and post-Ottoman periods.

Meira Gold has been awarded the Kathleen Beatty Adamson Scholarship in Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations.

Meira’s research interests include ancient Egyptian language and literature and the History of Egyptology, especially the professionalization of the field at the end of the 19th century. She is currently a research assistant with the CRANE Project, and will spend the summer excavating at Khirbet al-Mukhayyat, Jordan.

New Edition of the Undergraduate Journal of Middle East Studies

NMC is pleased to announce the publication of the seventh edition of the annual Undergraduate Journal of Middle East Studies. This year the Journal celebrates its tenth anniversary. Since its inception in 2004, the Journal has offered undergraduate students the opportunity to voice their opinions on a variety of topics related to the Middle East, and to publish their research essays.

In this issue Jennifer Green analyzes ancient Egyptian Letters to the Dead, Emily Hotton explores Perspectives on Women in Male-dominated Ancient Egyptian Literature, and Felipe Gonzales-Macqueen traces Egypt’s Trade Relations with Near East during the Naqada Period. Carissa Beata contributes an essay on Neorealism and the Bombing of the Osirak Reactor, Ayse Jamal discusses The Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey, Shahryar Pasandideh debates the Ottoman Search for Security, and D. Reid Dobell analyzes British Decision Making during the Suez Crisis.

A downloadable version of the Journal is available on the NMC website: http://nmc.utoronto.ca/undergraduate-journal-of-middle-east-studies/
Faculty Research


Lisa Golombek, Robert B. Mason, Patricia Proctor, and Eileen Reilly: Persian Pottery in the First Global Age: the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Brill and ROM, 2014. This publication studies the ceramic industry of Iran in the Safavid period (1501–1732) and the impact that the influx of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain had on local production, heightened by the activities of the English and Dutch East Indies Companies after c. 1700.


Linda S. Northrup, Associate Professor of Islamic History, has recently published “Al-Bīmāristān al-Manṣūrī Explorations: The Interface Between Medicine, Politics and Culture in Early Mamluk Egypt.” Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg Working Paper 12, Bonn 2013.

Professor Enrico G. Raffaelli (Zoroastrian Studies) has recently published a monograph The Sīh-rōzag in Zoroastrianism: A Textual and Historico-Religious Analysis. The book focuses on the Avestan and Pahlavi versions of the Sīh-rōzag, a sacred text devoted to Zoroastrian divine entities. The study provides a reconstruction of the approximate chronology of the text as well as its ritual function.

Graduate Student Research

Mustafa Banister 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”. 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.

New NMC PhDs

Yona Katz successfully defend her doctoral dissertation on May 5, 2014, completed under the supervision of Professor Harry Fox. Her dissertation, entitled “From Crying Comes Light: The Impact of Post-Traumatic Stress on the Poetry of Amir Gilboa,” analyzes Gilboa's poetry through the lens of post-trauma theory. It focuses on his hidden poems collection, written during the Second World War, and published as a book only in 2007 after his death.

Krzysztof J. Baranowski successfully defended his doctoral dissertation on March 7, 2014, written under the supervision of Professor Paul-Alain Beaulieu, and entitled "The Verb in the Amarna Letters from Canaan." These cuneiform documents date back to the 14th century B.C.E., and were addressed to the Pharaoh by Canaanite rulers. Krzysztof’s dissertation focuses on the nature of the linguistic system of these letters, their verbal system, its morphology and semantics.

Alumni News


This past year she has been a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at the Pennsylvania State University, where she organized a lecture series on Tehran. Her chapter entitled "Dancing Angels and Princesses: The Invention of an Ideal Female National Dancer in Twentieth-Century Iran" was just published online (with print to follow soon) in the Oxford Handbook of Dance and Ethnicity, edited by Dr. Anthony Shay. Meftahi’s first book, based on her dissertation, just received a contract from Routledge’s Iranian Studies Series, which is published in collaboration with the International Society for Iranian Studies.

In 2014-15, Dr. Meftahi will be a Visiting Assistant Professor in Persian Studies at the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, University of Maryland. Ida will be affiliated with the Roshan Institute for Persian Studies, and will be teaching courses on Iranian culture and society.

Dr. Marica Cassis, a graduate of NMC’s Aramaic-Syriac programme, and now a tenured professor in the Department of History, Memorial University of Newfoundland, was awarded a five-year $400,000.00 SSHRC grant to explore the Byzantine settlement at Çadir Höyük in rural Anatolia (Turkey). Her Project goals are (1) to clearly articulate the phases of the long-term Byzantine habitation at the site, (2) to more clearly identify how small agricultural settlements in central Anatolia adapted and changed over the course of the Byzantine period, and (3) to better understand the relationships between the sites in this region, and to larger urban centers and fortifications.

Dr. Amar Baadj is a recent alumni of NMC. His doctoral dissertation, supervised by Prof. Linda Northrup, focussed on “The Struggle for North Africa between Almohads, Ayyubids and the Banu Ghaniya (Late Twelfth to Early Thirteenth Centuries A. D.).”


On May 1, 2014 Dr. Baadj began a one-year post-doctoral fellowship at the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg/Research College for the study of ‘History and Society during the Mamluk Era (1250 - 1517),’ of the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität in Bonn, Germany.
Visiting Scholars

During the 2014 Winter term NMC hosted several foreign scholars and doctoral fellows who came to UofT to conduct research on a variety of topics, and to foster relations between our respective educational institutions.

Dr. Derya Şahin is an Associate Professor in the Department of Archaeology at the Uludağ University (Bursa, Turkey) and her research interests include mosaics, iconography, late ancient settlements, and archaeological methods. While in Toronto, she conducted research on the Lelegian Wall, part of the fortification system of the earliest settlement (ca. 2nd millennium B.C.) at Mydnos, located near Bodrum-Gümüşlük, in southwest Turkey.

Hanan Taha is a visiting scholar from Cairo University, where she works as a Lecturer in the Egyptology department. As a Lecturer she focuses on the study of languages and has taught courses on Middle and Late Egyptian Hieroglyphics, Ancient Egyptian Language in the Greco-Roman Period, Coptic language and grammar texts, and an Introduction to Egyptology in the University’s Conservation Department.

Bharat Punjabi is a visiting doctoral fellow from the Department of Geography at Western University. His current doctoral research investigates contemporary regional water politics between the city of Mumbai and its agricultural hinterland, specifically on the intra-rural and urban-rural conflict over water as sub-narratives within a focus on the broader regional water politics and sustainability in the region. Bharat has taught about the Middle East at Huron University College (London, ON), and is interested in the cultural interconnections between the Middle East and South Asia.

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!
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