nmc news
near and middle eastern civilizations • university of toronto • summer 2015

• spotlight on turkish studies
• the crisis in the levant
• arabic: a global tongue
• events and achievements
• giving opportunities
worthy programs!

I hope you enjoy the issue, and will continue to support NMC and its many faculty and students this award season.

addresses issues of pressing contemporary relevance. We are proud that this scholarship community’s unwavering commitment to scholarship that is both vigorous and infectious enthusiasm and engagement reflected in these activities attest to the NMC that are further expanding and invigorating our Arabic Language program. The ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria, and highlights a number of exciting initiatives faculty and student involvement in efforts to grapple with the devastating impact of This issue also spotlights our thriving Turkish Studies program, reports on NMC activities and achievements of our faculty and students during this past winter term. I am pleased to present NMC’s summer issue of NMC News, reviewing the many activities and achievements of our faculty and students during this past winter term. This issue also spotlights our thriving Turkish Studies program, reports on NMC faculty and student involvement in efforts to grapple with the devastating impact of the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria, and highlights a number of exciting initiatives that are further expanding and invigorating our Arabic Language program. The infectious enthusiasm and engagement reflected in these activities attest to the NMC community’s unwavering commitment to scholarship that is both vigorous and addresses issues of pressing contemporary relevance. We are proud that this scholarship is also conducted with distinction, as indicated by the many awards bestowed on our faculty and students this award season.

I hope you enjoy the issue, and will continue to support NMC and its many worthy programs!

— Timothy P. Harrison, Professor and Chair
Turkish Studies is an essential component of a robust program in Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations. In the first and second millennia CE, Turkic empires stretched from East and Central Asia to the Middle East and Eastern Europe, shaping the histories of these vast territories in innumerable ways. With a geopolitical legacy rivalling that of any European power, the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922 CE) was, at its height, a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual realm that controlled trade around the Mediterranean and Black Sea basins and encompassed much of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and North Africa. Today, with ever increasing access to Ottoman imperial archives, scholars enjoy unprecedented access to a transformative historical resource and are making discoveries that will change the way we see our world.

Modern Turkey’s significance in global politics cannot be overestimated, and the emergence of independent Turkic states in Central Asia underscores the need for nuanced inquiry into this region’s cultural and economic vitality—an endeavour that has a distinguished history at the University of Toronto. Over the past half century, our campus has been home to such prominent scholars as Richard Blackburn, Fahir Iz, C. Max Kortepeter, and Eleazar Birnbaum, whose personal manuscript collection includes rare texts dating to the 13th century and copies of the earliest Ottoman books. Today, Turkish Studies in Canada is spearheaded by Victor Ostapchuk, an expert on the Black Sea region and Co-Director of the Akkerman Fortress Project, Timothy Harrison, Director of the Tayinat Archaeological Project, and Milena Methodieva, an expert on 19th-20th-century Ottoman, Balkan, and Turkish history.

NMC’s Arabist and Iranist historians are also actively engaged in Turkish Studies. Jens Hanssen and James Reilly research and teach on the 19th-century Ottoman Levant. Linda Northrup is a Mamluk specialist. Maria Subtelny specializes in the study of the Timurids, a Turkic empire of Central Asia. Virginia Aksan of McMaster University, a specialist in 18th-century Ottoman history, is a member of our graduate faculty. And Karin Ruehrdanz, who is jointly appointed to the Royal Ontario Museum, is an expert on Islamic, including Ottoman, art history.

Located in the world’s most culturally diverse city, the University of Toronto is rapidly becoming a hub of research on Turkish and Turkic history. The Seminar in Ottoman and Turkish Studies (SOTS)—co-founded by Professors Ostapchuk and Methodieva—meets regularly and has recently hosted lectures on Ottoman military reform in the Crimean War era, competing narratives about the 1915 Battle of Gallipoli, and the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman War in historical memory. Our department has also partnered with the Turkish Canadian community, including the Consulate General of the Republic of Turkey in Toronto, to endow a scholarship to support trailblazing graduate research.

This September, NMC will help to launch the Canadian Society for the Advancement of Turkish Studies (CSATS), a nonprofit that aims to stimulate interest in this vital field and forge new opportunities for public outreach, professional development, and cross-cultural inquiry. Please stay tuned for more on this exciting venture. To learn more about how you can support our Turkish Studies program, please visit nmc.utoronto.ca/support-us
With the rise of the self-styled Islamic State in Syria and the Levant, the value of research that puts current events in the Near and Middle East in socio-historical context has never been more apparent. The need to safeguard the region's communities and their cultural heritage has become an urgent priority for such organizations as the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), which has partnered with the U.S. State Department to document destruction, preserve heritage sites, and plan postwar responses through the ASOR Syrian Heritage Initiative (SHI).

NMC researchers have been centrally involved in many of these efforts. A Co-Investigator on the Syrian Heritage Initiative, Professor Timothy Harrison is also Director of the Computational Research on the Ancient Near East (CRANE) Project, which has been gathering data on the Orontes Watershed for several years. CRANE researchers are producing a comprehensive database that will detail the location and archaeological history of thousands of sites. CRANE's mapping project will offer the SHI an indispensable resource to identify damage—past, present, and potential—to specific sites.

Under the oversight of Project Manager Dr. Stephen Batiuk, the team is now working swiftly to ensure seamless integration between CRANE's database and the SHI's. In January, Dr. Batiuk spoke on these efforts at the Joint Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) and the Society for Classical Studies (SCS), where he presented at a session on “Politics and Archaeology in the Middle East: New Paradigms of Cooperation,” which explored the instrumentalization of ancient artifacts and sites in modern constructions of national identity, as well as the challenges of balancing expectations from governments, local communities, and other stakeholders while working in the field. Photos of the Orontes river valley (below) and Dr. Batiuk (opposite, far right) are courtesy of the CRANE Project.

View of the Orontes valley from the town of Samandağ in Hatay province, southern Turkey. The mouth of the Orontes River is located on the Mediterranean coast, near the Turkish-Syrian border.
On March 10th, amid international outrage over the Islamic State’s destruction of artifacts in Iraq’s Mosul Museum and the ancient cities of Nimrud and Hatra, Professor Clemens Reichel (pictured above left) was interviewed on CNN. He urged the global community to take action and stressed the irreplaceability of relics that date back to the dawn of human civilization. On April 14th, Professor Reichel was featured on CBC News, where he condemned the acquisition of artifacts from conflict zones by well-intentioned Western collectors, pointing out that the trade in looted antiquities is a major revenue source for the Islamic State. That evening, he also spoke at a panel discussion on “Cultural Genocide in Iraq and Syria” at the Royal Ontario Museum, where he is Associate Curator of World Cultures.

On March 31st, Professor James Reilly led a discussion on the Syrian civil war following a screening of Silvered Water, Syria Self-Portrait at the Canadian Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. An expert on the history and politics of the modern Middle East, Professor Reilly researches the social and economic history of Syria and Lebanon.

Professor Amir Harrak continues to document centuries-old Syriac engravings of central importance to Iraq’s Eastern Christian community, including those in ancient monasteries that have been threatened or damaged by Islamic State militants. By partnering with local researchers, Professor Harrak is using new methods in digital photography to preserve and catalogue inscriptions dating from the 7th-20th centuries CE for future generations. Learn more about the Harrak Collection of Iraqi Syriac and Garshuni Inscriptions at www.epigraphy.ca

As the humanitarian tragedy expands and vulnerable communities are increasingly caught in the crossfire, our faculty and students have stepped up, pitched in, and spoken out against these and other grave injustices. We thank you for supporting their efforts.

Imagine that the Acropolis of Athens or the Coliseum in Rome or the pyramids in Egypt had been flattened by bulldozers. This is not a matter of financial value. It’s our history.

Clemens Reichel
ROM Associate Curator

Part of CRANE’s mandate is to work closely with the antiquities agencies responsible for cultural heritage in these regions. This gives us an opportunity to build partnerships that will benefit the region and its people.

Timothy Harrison
CRANE Project Director
As the native language of over four hundred million people worldwide, Arabic has a dynamic and storied history. The need to equip emerging leaders in industry, politics, health, and social advocacy with Arabic language skills has never been starker. Here at Canada’s flagship research university, opportunities to gain advanced proficiency in this vibrant tongue are unparalleled. Not only does the University of Toronto maintain unique Study Abroad partnerships with many universities in the Arab world through the International Programs and Partnerships Office and the Centre for International Experience, our campuses are nestled in the richly multicultural Greater Toronto Area, home to the newly opened Aga Khan Museum.

NMC boasts a passionate team of scholars whose specialties span modern Arab history, Arabic linguistics, classical Arabic literature, medieval Arabic textual analysis, and more—including Professors Abdel-Khalig Ali, Jens Hanssen, Jeannie Miller, Linda Northrup, James Reilly, Walid Saleh, and others. Our Arabic Studies program offers grammatical, dialectical, cultural, historical, liturgical, and palaeographic training at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Enrichment is regularly available through special events and seminars, as well as an interdepartmental Arabic Reading Group that meets Monday evenings at Wycliffe College (4-6 PM). Led by Darnell Chambers and Esther Reiser, this group explores classical and modern Arabic through a survey of such materials as children’s literature, newscasts, political essays, and religious texts, as well as films and multimedia.

Our partnerships extend well beyond the campus grounds. On February 26th, NMC hosted a lively conversation between renowned Egyptian novelist Sonallah Ibrahim and Professor Robyn Creswell (Yale University), whose translations of Ibrahim’s Tilka al-Ra’iba and Yawmiyyat al-Wahat—published in English as, respectively, That Smell and Notes from Prison (New Directions, 2013)—have earned widespread critical acclaim. Moderated by Professor Jeannie Miller and followed by a spirited question-and-answer session, this event was co-sponsored by the Arab Canadian Cultural Group, the Toronto Arabic Studies Colloquium, the Egyptian Students’ Association, the Middle Eastern History and Theory Workshop, and the Institute of Islamic Studies.

In March, NMC also co-sponsored a weeklong visit from Professor Michael Cooperson (UCLA), who delivered intriguing lectures on the linguistic politics of Maltese comedy as well as poetry and narrative in 9th-century Baghdad. Cooperson concluded his visit by leading an advanced Arabic translation seminar—a wonderful coda to his contribution to the Jackman Humanities Institute’s annual Program for the Arts.
Our research community has had a busy and fruitful year. Through our partnerships with scholarly societies like the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies (CSSS), the Canadian Institute for Mediterranean Studies (CIMS), the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities (SSEA), the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies (CSMS), and the Foundation for Iranian Studies (FIS), we have enjoyed a cornucopia of seminars, workshops, and colloquia.

The Canadian chapter of FIS—led by Professor Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, a committed team of graduate students, and the editors of Iran Nameh—held its Iranian Modernity Symposium on April 10th. The FIS’ winter seminar series, which examined everything from cross-cultural healthcare delivery to the history of Persian urban art music to Iranian-American identity politics, was also very well-received.

The 2014-15 CSMS Public Lecture Series was a great success. Its fall symposium was chaired by Professor Paul-Alain Beaulieu and featured lively talks by Professors Clemens Reichel and Maria Brosius, among others. This winter’s A.K. Grayson Lecture on Assyrian History and Culture, “Making an Empire: Neo-Assyrian Craftsmen and Other Workers,” was delivered by Professor Heather Baker.

Egyptology continues to flourish at NMC through vibrant communities like SSEA-Toronto (www.thessea.org/toronto_chapter.php), Ancient Egypt Alive! (www.ancientegyptalive.com), the Canadian Institute in Egypt (www.canadianinstituteinegypt.org), and the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies (CSCS, www.facebook.com/CanadianSocietyCopticStudies).

Founded in 2009, the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies aims to bring together students and scholars who are interested in Coptic culture, history, art, language, and literature. On April 18th, CSCS held its 8th Annual Symposium, “Interchanges between the Coptic and Ethiopian Churches: Literature, Monasticism and Culture.” This event was keynoted by Professor Ugo Zanetti of the Institut Orientaliste de l’Université Catholique de Louvain. Presenters included Professor Michael Gervers of UTSC Historical and Cultural Studies, and Joseph Youssef, a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology and CSCS’ incoming Treasurer for 2015-16.

The SSEA’s 40th Annual Symposium, “Age of Chaos? Demystifying Ancient Egypt’s Intermediate Periods” was launched on November 15th with a standout presentation by Professor Ronald J. Leprohon (“History, Text and First Intermediate Period Egypt”). This symposium featured an impressive lineup of international speakers. The SSEA also welcomed a new editorial team for its journal and thanked its outgoing editors—Editor-in-Chief Professor Katja Goebels, Associate Editor and NMC alumni Professor Sally Katary, French language editor Professor Jean Revez, and Assistant Editor and NMC graduate student Aliza Fatima. Ancient Egypt Alive!—an initiative of NMC graduate students Thomas Greiner and Laura Ranieri—has had another lively season. In addition to hosting a discussion with ROM Egyptologist Gayle Gibson at the Konzelmann Estate Winery on April 26th, AEA coordinated a special discussion with Gibson and Professor Mary-Ann Pouls Wegner on the life and legacy of Queen Hatshepsut, the fifth pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt. All proceeds were donated to excavations in Abydos, Upper Egypt.

For more on the wide array of activities coordinated by our partner societies, please browse our events calendar at nmc.utoronto.ca/events.
Yes, I would like to support the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations at the University of Toronto.

Thank you for your contribution! For more information, please contact Heather McLean, Senior Development Officer, Faculty of Arts & Science, at 416-978-4179 or heather.mclean@utoronto.ca

Please return undeliverable copies to 4 Bancroft Avenue, 2nd floor, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1C1, Canada. This edition of NMC News was edited and designed by Eugenia Tsao.

1. YOUR INFORMATION:

Name __________________________________________________________________________________________

Email __________________________________________________________________________________________

Address ______________________________________  Phone ___________________________________________

May we recognize you in published donor listings?

☐ Yes, please recognize me as ______________________________________________________  ☐ No

Legacy Giving: ☐ I have named UofT as a beneficiary in my Will. ☐ Please send me information about leaving a bequest.

2. YOUR LEADERSHIP GIFT:

a. Here is my single donation of ☐ $___________

☐ Visa  ☐ Mastercard  ☐ Amex

Card Number ___________________________________________ Expires _____ / ________

Name on card ___________________________________________ Signature __________________________

☐ Cheque, which is enclosed (payable to the University of Toronto)

b. Here is my monthly donation of ☐ $_________

☐ Please charge my credit card on the 1st day of each month:

☐ Visa  ☐ Mastercard  ☐ Amex

Card Number ___________________________________________ Expires _____ / ________

Name on card ___________________________________________ Signature __________________________

☐ A blank cheque marked VOID is enclosed. I authorize the University of Toronto to deduct the amount I have specified from the account number on the cheque, on the 1st day of each month.

Signature ___________________________ Date __________________

To donate, mail this completed form to: University of Toronto, Donations Management

21 King’s College Circle

Toronto ON M5S 3J3

Or donate online at: www.donate.utoronto.ca/ncm

Your Privacy: The information on this form is collected and used solely for the administration of the University’s advancement activities, undertaken pursuant to the University of Toronto Act, 1971. If you have any questions, please refer to www.utoronto.ca/privacy or contact the University’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Coordinator at 416-946-7303, McMurrich Building, Room 201, 12 Queen’s Park Crescent West, Toronto, ON M5S 1A8. Monthly Donation: You have certain recourse rights if any debit does not comply with this agreement. For example, you have the right to receive reimbursement for any debit that is not authorized or is not consistent with this PAD Agreement. To obtain more information on your recourse rights, contact your financial institution or visit www.cdnpay.ca.

Charitable Registration # BN 1081 62330-RR0001  Solicitation Code: ANS16ANNMARTSCALUMNI