



Letter From The Editor

I joined the *Review of Middle East Studies*' editorial team in a disquieting time—one in which the world we study and inhabit is engulfed by political upheavals with traumatic human, material, and environmental consequences. Although every age has its crises, it is hard not to feel that we are in a moment of critical import for the future of domestic and global relations, as nation-states once again seek to assert and extend power through increasingly xenophobic means. How grateful, then, I have been that Richard Martin's brilliant stewardship and Ashleigh Breske's managerial acumen guided *RoMES* into a position primed to address our role as an academic community dedicated both to the MENA region and to the global dimensions of scholarship. Rich and Ashleigh planned and steered this Issue of *RoMES* through the editorial process, and generously offered their time and insight while waiting for me to assume the duties of Editor and transition the office to Claremont McKenna College. We are indebted to Rich for re-mapping the vision of *RoMES* while presumably retired, tirelessly working through a backlog of submissions, commuting to Virginia Tech after convincing the institution to house and support the *Review*, and for generally embodying a spirit of dedicated service to the field we can only hope to approximate. His willingness to walk me through the intricacies of the *Review* process while also navigating a cross-country move further illustrates a generosity of spirit that I hope will continue to suffuse *RoMES* in the future. Rich and Ashleigh together also streamlined the production process, and along with the team at Cambridge University Press, I look forward to building on their efforts and maintaining *RoMES* as a vibrant and consistent voice in an increasingly volatile climate.

With its new online format *RoMES* has, and should more pointedly, spearhead an important shift toward a platform that avoids flattening either

the information it contains or the collaborators that produce it, and reaches instead toward bridging the various divides that plague the field of Middle East studies: between national and international academics; professors and students; the academy and “the public”; and between scholars and specialists such as GSI mapping technicians, urban planners, digital archivists, and librarians. Even more significantly, the editorial team seeks to bridge the divide between scholarship *on* the region and the lives and experiences that unfold *in* the region. These bridging efforts facilitate an important framework to counter the ethical dilemma at the core of regional studies specialists: how to avoid objectifying, and thus reinforcing, asymmetrical relations of power that negate agency through academic critique. Given that books recently published by Zachary Lockman and co-authors Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar have brought the politics of Middle East studies to the forefront of debates concerning structures of power, policy, and the academy, *RoMES* aims to model, through its very content, an alternative collaborative forum. Through both the members of the Associate Editorial Board and the authors contributing content, we seek to internationalize the *Review* and decenter Euro-American “readings” of MENA and diasporic lives. Building on Richard Martin’s focus on interim reports and roundtable conversations, *RoMES* will continue to focus on how work in the margins (of disciplines, political structures, modes of research, artisanal and professional practice) might generate new energy both for *RoMES* itself and, ideally, for the field as a whole.

The *RoMES* team also seeks to both echo and steer global shifts toward the digital that have transformed how we perform as educators, researchers, and contributors to the field of Middle East studies. We continue to build an Associate Editorial Board dedicated to highlighting the vitality of the region itself, through comics, satire, graffiti, street performance, film clips, photographic essays and other media. Together we will promote the virtual pages of the *Review* as a theater of engagement that integrates the varied agendas of MESA as an organization, and models an online presence capable of shaping academic and public discourse. The contents of this Issue embody these varied agendas, and also demonstrate how Rich’s vision has helped to illuminate a path forward. A roundtable titled *What Is Preservation? Diversifying Engagement With The Middle East’s Material Past* brings together creative and provocative commentaries on the representational politics of preservation practices and the heritage industry both past and present. Review essays by Joel Beinin and Anthony Byrd tackle recent scholarship on the 2011 events in Egypt and the strategic rise of ISIS. Beinin’s critique of “Sentimentalizing and Hyper-Theorizing Egypt’s 2011 Uprising” explicitly addresses problems that

arise when scholars rely on models *about* the region rather than practices *within* it. And Byrd's "Interpreting ISIS" traces the difficulties scholars face when writing about evolving events. Pointedly, the opening pages of the Issue contain Beth Baron's 2016 Presidential Address, which challenges MESA members to rethink our scholarship in the face of escalating global crises. The roundtable format and use of review essays, along with the content focus on material culture and the pitfalls inherent in research agendas, will continue to shape future Issues of the *Review*. Multiple voices on a themed issue, and reviews that bring books in conversation with each other, provoke productive debate and ideally help shape future research agendas.

Upcoming Issues (which will now be published in April and October) will also introduce several new initiatives to meet the *Review's* goals to bridge divides and embody a new performance space. "Perspectives on Pedagogy" will showcase strategies for innovative teaching, and bring the undergraduate classroom into the foreground of our attempt to rethink both the field and the region. In a similar spirit, "Curator's Corner" will draw from experts and practitioners in museums, libraries, galleries, performance spaces, and street scenes so as to foreground the various venues in which knowledge and cultural forms are shaped, presented, and consumed. Finally, as debates concerning free speech and academic freedom increasingly turn college campuses into a crucible for questions MESA members address on a daily basis, we will also seek to bring this space more consistently into the *Review*. Short "Briefly Noted" reviews of books written by undergraduates are now a longstanding tradition of *RoMES* that the five-college consortium in Claremont is ideally suited to maintain. Future Issues will explore other ways of capturing how "Middle East Studies" programs have evolved and continue to shape student learning both during their college years and beyond. In combination, these varied methods all seek to build on the *RoMES* effort to embrace within its pages the dynamism of a field in action.

Together the *RoMES* team has mapped an ambitious future agenda. It is my hope that a *RoMES* mission defined by a commitment to performing, through its organizational structure and contents, as a bridge across the seemingly rigid divides between fields, publics, and geographies will accentuate MESA's ability to define unique pathways through the increasingly treacherous landscapes, both physical and philosophical, of Middle East Studies. A new Executive Editorial Board, with inaugural members Ken Cuno, Bill Ochsenwald, and Laila Hussein Moustafa, will help guide the *Review* and integrate the expertise of the impressive cohort of scholars that comprises

our Associate Editorial Board. Without our Associate Editors' knowledge, dedication, and commitment to fostering diversity and quality within the *Review*, none of the ideas expressed here would be possible: I am indebted to their service. ✨

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