Syrian Studies Association Bulletin

The Bulletin is the regular publication of the Syrian Studies Association, an international association created to promote research on and scholarly understanding of Syria.

Andrea L. Stanton, Editor; Benjamin Smuin, Book Review Editor

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Letter from the President

13 November 2016

It is difficult to imagine how the situation confronting Syria and Syrians could become worse. Five years into civil war, reports estimate over 400,000 Syrians are dead and 11 million displaced, yet repeated efforts to stop the fighting and negotiate for peace have failed. Since the start of the war, the Syrian Studies Association has organised events at the MESA Annual Meeting about the conflict. Our speakers have discussed the political, social, cultural, and human dimensions of the conflict, and raised awareness of the ways in which academics and their institutions can help.

This year, we have decided to turn our focus inward and ask **whether there is a future for the academic study of Syria in the coming years.** We face a conundrum: at a time when knowledge and public awareness of Syria is crucial, there are significant barriers to producing new research on Syria, past and present. Access to sources is challenging and our ranks are thinning, as doctoral students and established scholars turn their attention to other countries in the region. We will confront this conundrum through a conversation led by a panel of academic experts and focused on two related topics: research and impact. We will explore the sources that are available for research on Syria, including archival and library materials held outside of Syria, and through connecting with Syrians abroad, including refugees. We will also discuss strategies for contributing effectively to the policy making and awareness raising initiatives that are crucial for improving the situations faced by Syria and Syrians today.

Please join us on Thursday 17 November in the New Hampshire Room on Floor 5 of the MESA conference hotel to consider this important topic. We will hold our **business meeting** (open to all SSA members) from 5-6pm and then **this conversation** (open to all conference attendees) from 6-7:30pm.

At the start of 2016, we welcomed former secretary-treasurer **Stacy Fahrenthold** back on the board as our junior member-at-large and **Graham Pitts** as our graduate student representative. Now, at the close of the year, it falls on me to thank five departing officers for their service to the association. **Andrea Stanton** has made an especially significant contribution over the past decade, serving as Book Review Editor from 2007-2010 and Co-Chair of the Prize Committee from 2008-2010, and then Editor of the Bulletin for the past six years. **Benjamin Smuin** has been on the board for five years, first as Student Member in 2012 and 2013, and then as Book Review Editor for the past three years. We are also grateful for the service of **Charles Wilkins** and **Melanie Schulze Tanielian**, and **Geoffrey Schad** over the past two years, as Prize Committee Chair, Member-at-Large, and Secretary-Treasurer, respectively. Results of the elections to replace them will be announced at the MESA meeting later this week.

Best wishes,
Hilary Kalmbach

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**Dr Hilary Kalmbach holds a tenured position in the History Department at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom. Her research focuses on Islam in the modern**
Middle East, with particular attention to authority, knowledge, education, and gender. She is the founding director of MENACS, the Middle East and North African Centre at Sussex, and is the current President of the Syrian Studies Association.

Syrian Studies Association News

Syrian Studies Association Annual Meeting: Thursday, November 17

Andrea L. Stanton

The Syrian Studies Association will hold its annual business meeting on November 17, 2016, at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting at the Boston Marriott Copley Place in Boston. We look forward to seeing SSA members at the business meeting and all interested in Syrian studies at the panel discussion.

Executive Board Meeting: 3:30-4:30pm: Connecticut (5)

Business Meeting (open to all SSA members): 5:00-6:00pm: New Hampshire (5)

Panel Discussion (open to all MESA attendees): 6-7:30pm: New Hampshire (5)

Andrea L Stanton is Editor of the Syrian Studies Association Bulletin.

Syrian Studies Association-Sponsored Panels at MESA 2016

Andrea L. Stanton

The Syrian Studies Association is sponsoring two panels at the 2016 Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting. We are pleased to support these fine panels and encourage SSA members to attend.

P4298 Text and Technology: Exploring the Materiality of Early Arabic Periodicals:
Friday, November 18, 8:00am

This session examines how the materiality of Arabic periodicals impacted political ideas, identity, and language in the late Ottoman world. The papers focus on periodicals produced in the cities of Cairo and Beirut (between 1851 and 1885) and examine them as objects, artifacts, and carriers of knowledge whose physical and material dimensions lend additional layers to the understanding of their broader socio-political and cultural significance. The session offers a multi-disciplinary “reading” of these dimensions and examines crucial questions of politics and identity. How can we describe the relationship between sensual experience and epistemology in Arabic? How did periodicals function as aesthetic objects or disseminators of knowledge? How did these publications’ visual aspects impact textual content and vice-versa? How did affordable news impact the public use of Arabic language or the very way language was instrumentalized?

Addressing these questions by offering new interpretations about the transnational world of (Ottoman) Arab modernity, the papers selected for this session present new research that examines the ways in which materiality can be historicized in order to provide alternative readings of knowledge production and historical transformation.
The first paper explores the production and language of Majmu’ Fawayid (Beirut, 1851-1856), an early Arabic-language missionary periodical printed at the press of the Protestant mission in Syria. The second examines the dissemination of military knowledge and visual aspects in the largely overlooked first Arabic military periodical, Jaridat Arkan Harb al-Jaysh al-Misri (Cairo, 1873-1877) as an extension and promotion of the ideologies of Euro-Egyptian imperialist expansionism. Another paper considers the interplay between illustrations and textual content of the medical journal al-Tabib (Beirut, 1874-1885) as important markers of the multifaceted perceptions of medical practice and their intersection with the views on society, identity, and technology. The final paper explores the relationship of Arabic print technology to the mediation of knowledge via standardized Arabic as a protocol of control. This session thus considers crucial problems of modern Middle Eastern history through a deep engagement with print materiality and its impact on ideas and identity.

Chair: Dana Sajdi, Boston College
Discussant: Nadia al-Bagdadi, Central European University
Presenters: Adam Mestyan, Harvard University; Hala Auji, American University of Beirut; Antoine Edwards, Washington and Lee University; Rana Issa, University of Oslo

P4522 Imperial State Practices and Local Perspectives in Early Ottoman Syria:
Saturday, November 19, 8:00am

Despite great strides by scholars over the last half-century, the history of the Arab lands under the first centuries of Ottoman rule (1500s-1700s) remains greatly understudied. This panel addresses key questions in the research agenda for geographical Syria (Bilad al-Sham), ranging across political, social and cultural history and adopting a variety of sources and methods.

The first two papers investigate major challenges that Istanbul authorities faced in the extension of their power over Syrian society following the conquest in 1516 of the Mamluk Sultanate. Making use of Ottoman official correspondence in the 1530s, the first paper identifies and evaluates major problems in the early management of Syrian military cadres, many of whom were former soldiers in the Mamluk regime. The paper also investigates the changed relationship between Syria and Egypt; now separated from its former capital, Cairo, Syria enjoyed a shift in its imperial status relative to Egypt. Turning from the macro- to the micro-historical, the second paper follows the career of a Syrian Kurdish notable in Ottoman state service and in so doing evaluates the capacity of the Ottoman system to recruit and retain local elites. It illustrates a discretionary Ottoman practice whereby chiefly lineages, with their regional knowledge and influence, were brought into Ottoman state service with regional appointments but not wholly integrated into a system of regular, rotating appointments empire-wide.

Affecting interactions between the Ottoman capital and Syrian provinces were subjective perceptions of the other, articulated in writing by individuals possessing social and cultural authority and reaching a broad audience. The third paper examines the travelogue of Syrian Arab Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi (1499-1577) describing his journey through Anatolia to the
Ottoman capital in 1530, less than two decades after the Ottoman conquest. Penned by a member of a prominent scholarly family with historic connections to the former Mamluk state, the text sheds light on the receptivity of those newly conquered populations to a new political master and the limits of their appreciation of cultural difference. The fourth and final paper also examines Damascene attitudes about the Ottoman dynasty but refines its inquiry to consider only views of Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520-66) that emerge from histories, poems, and other texts over a longer temporal span, the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. What emerges is an embrace of Suleyman not so much as warrior-hero but as founder of imperial institutions that they regarded as just and protective of their welfare.

Chair: Abdul-Karim Rafeq, College of William and Mary
Discussant: Stefan Winter, Universite du Quebec a Montreal
Presenters: Linda Darling, University of Arizona; Charles Wilkins, Wake Forest University; Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, American University of Beirut; Malissa Taylor, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Andrea L Stanton is Editor of the Syrian Studies Association Bulletin.

Syrian Studies Association 2016 Officer Elections

Andrea L Stanton

In 2016, Syrian Studies Association members will elect new officers for the Member at Large, Prize Committee Chair, Bulletin Editor, Webmaster, and Secretary-Treasurer Positions. Candidates for each position are listed below. The Syrian Studies Association thanks each person who volunteered to serve as a candidate for these officer positions, and encourages all members to consider running for office in 2017.

**Member at Large:** participates in all business of the board and acts as the Elections Officer in the first year of his or her term. Duties of the Elections Officer include soliciting nominations for board positions and preparing a ballot to circulate to the membership in advance of the MESA annual meeting. In their second year, the Member at Large manages some of the secretarial duties for the organization (in concert with the secretary-treasurer). This office carries two-year term.

**Candidates for Member at Large:**
Reem Bailony: Reem Bailony received her Ph.D. in Middle East history from UCLA. Her research focuses on the engagement of Syrian-Lebanese migrant communities in the Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927. She is currently the ADF Postdoctoral Fellow at Georgetown University’s Center for Contemporary Arab Studies. As an SSA Board member, Reem hopes to bring discussions about migration to Syrian studies.

Hadi Abdalhadi Alijla: Abdalhadi is the Executive Director for The Institute for the Middle East Studies Canada (IMESC). He has a PhD in Political Studies (comparative politics and public policy) from State University of Milan, Italy and holds an M.A. degree in Public Policy and Governance from Zeppelin University- Friedrichshafen,
Germany. He is the Regional Manager for MENA at the Varieties of Democracy Institute in Sweden. He worked the advisor and program manager on religion and public affairs at Adyan foundation in Beirut. Currently, he is conducting research on Syria’s refugees livelihood in Turkey and Lebanon.

**Marwa Daoudy:** Marwa Daoudy is an Assistant Professor in International Relations at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS) and the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. Her research and teaching focus is on international and regional security, international relations, the environment, and Middle East and Syrian politics. Her current research is on the environmental and socio-economic roots of the Syrian Uprising. In these particularly difficult times for Syrians, she is interested in joining efforts to contribute to the SSA's activities and diffusion of scholarly work on Syria, its politics, history, and people.

**Prize Committee Chair:** publicizes the SSA’s annual book, article, and dissertation prizes and supervises the awarding of prizes. Each year, the chair solicits at least two volunteers from the SSA membership to serve on the prize committee to select the best new work on Syria. The Prize Committee Chair position carries a two-year term which can be renewed through reelection.

**Candidates for Prize Committee Chair:**

**Malissa Taylor:** Malissa Taylor is an Assistant Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her research connects intellectual history with political and social practice in Ottoman Syria. She has previously served as a member of the SSA prize committee and is now eager for the opportunity to serve as chair.

**Geoffrey Schad:** Geoffrey Schad is a Lecturer in the College of Liberal and Professional Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and the Syrian Studies Association's Secretary-Treasurer. He has been involved in Middle East studies his entire adult life, having traveled to the region immediately after college as a Thomas J. Watson Foundation Fellow studying Sufi music. After obtaining his A.M. in Regional Studies-Middle East at Harvard, he worked in the non-profit sector in Washington, D.C. for nearly a decade before going to Penn for his Ph.D. in history. He has taught at a number of institutions, including the University of Texas at Austin, Franklin and Marshall College, and Albright College. His major interest is in the social history of Syria during the French Mandate and the first decade or so of independence, his most recent paper being “The figure of the native expert: Léon Mourad in the service of the High Commission for Syria and Lebanon,” delivered to the conference “Experts and Expertise in the League of Nations Mandates: Figures, Fields and Tools/Experts et expertises dans les mandats de la Société des Nations: figures, champs et outils” held at INALCO in Paris in March 2015. He has served the Syrian Studies Association as newsletter editor, member at large, and secretary-treasurer, and is a cofounder and past editor of H-Levant.

**Bulletin Editor:** edits and publishes the biannual Syrian Studies Bulletin. The editor also works with and appoints a Book Review Editor. When necessary the Bulletin Editor
may seek assistance from the Board and membership with article ideas, editing, and proofreading. The Bulletin Editor serves a renewable three-year term.

**Edith Szanto:** Edith Szanto is an Assistant Professor at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani. She received her PhD in Religious Studies from the University of Toronto in 2012. Her dissertation examined Twelver Shi‘i practices and discourses in the Syrian shrine town of Sayyida Zaynab. Edith has been a regular contributor to the Syrian Studies Association Bulletin. She has published several articles on Syria and is currently finishing her manuscript tentatively entitled *Transgressive Traditions: Twelver Shi‘ism in Modern Syria.*

**Webmaster:** serves a renewable three-year term. The Webmaster's duties are to maintain the SSA website and keep the website up to date.

**Dara Conduit:** Dara Conduit is a final year Ph.D candidate working on the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood at Monash University and a researcher at the Middle East Studies Forum at Deakin University. She is interested in contemporary Syria, conflict, Islamism, and violence. Ms. Conduit would like to join the board because Syrian studies is a rapidly expanding field, and she believes that the SSA has an important role to play in supporting and connecting scholars, and promoting the development of the field.

**Secretary-Treasurer:**

none.

This election closes on November 15, 2016. The results of the voting for each officer position will be announced at the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting.

Please contact Stacy Fahrenthold, Member at Large and Elections Officer, with any questions.

*Andrea L Stanton is Editor of the Syrian Studies Association Bulletin.*

**SSA Book and Article Prizes 2015**

**Charles Wilkins**

The Prize Committee of the Syrian Studies Association is pleased to announce the prizes of the most outstanding book and article for 2015. The committee considered books published between 1 July 2013 and 30 June 2015 and articles or book chapters published between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2015. The committee was made up of Charles Wilkins (chair), Antoint Borrut, Laura Ruiz de Elvira Carrascal, Elyse Semerdjian, Malissa Taylor, and Tina Zintl.

We had eleven books and seven articles to evaluate, ranging in discipline from archaeology, history and art history to political science, anthropology and literary, theatre, and gender studies. The subjects covered included, in the medieval period, Umayyad and Ayyubid monumental architecture; in the Ottoman period, popular religion, the urban representations of nomads, the history of the Jewish community and rabbinate, the administration of Syria during the First World, and the rise of Western humanitarianism in that conflict; and in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the gentrification of Old Damascus, theatre as a site of political dissent, feminism in the academic establishment, and the practice of Islamic law in the ongoing Syrian Civil War.
The committee commends the winners and expresses its appreciation to the participants for contributing to this closely fought competition.

Book Prize
The committee named two co-winners of the 2015 book prize:


This book is a bold and provocative study that explores and re-evaluates the phenomenon of popular religion in Greater Syria from the 17th to the 19th centuries. The author argues that the mass of the population, both urban and rural, engaged in forms of everyday worship that were shaped decisively not by their respective confessional religious identities, but rather by a single, vast social ethos that transcended the conventional religious establishments. Working as a historical ethnographer and using an impressive range of sources, Grehan describes a massive sphere of popular culture characterized by the use of propitiatory magic, reverence for miracle-workers and for nature cults and spirit cults, and various forms of ancestor veneration. While Grehan’s study focuses on Ottoman Syria and Palestine from the late 17th century to the early 20th century, his analysis is rich with comparisons to other societies and cultures; and his conclusions will challenge scholars working on other parts of the Middle East and elsewhere across Afro-Eurasia, from late antiquity into modernity.


In this highly original book, Stephennie Mulder offers a fresh look at medieval shrines and reveal how Alid monuments can unveil an architecture of coexistence that challenges long-established views of sectarian divisions. Looking particularly at Balis, Aleppo, and Damascus’ many shrines, Mulder offers the first systematic analysis of the construction of an ecumenical religious landscape in medieval Syria. She successfully demonstrates that Shiite architecture surprisingly flourished during the “Sunni revival” (11th-13th centuries), largely under the patronage of Sunni benefactors. Mulder notably shows how, in the aftermath of the Karbala drama, the itinerary of Husayn’s head (real or imagined) created an Alid topography that became meaningful for Sunnis as well. Along the way, she also demonstrates how the built environment needs to be understood in terms of lived experiences and ritual practices. The book is a major contribution at the intersection of art history, archaeology, and socio-cultural history, with insights that will interest specialists in anthropology, archæological ritual, and landscape studies.

Article Prize
In this book chapter, Trombetta provides a much needed analysis of the shifting power structures during the rule of Hafiz al-Asad and his son Bashar al-Asad. The author casts new light not only on the functioning of Syria’s authoritarian system but also on the catalysts of the Syrian uprising. The analysis hinges on two conceptual distinctions -- between formal and informal power, and between exposed and hidden power. Trombetta argues that the authoritarian system was destabilized by a rupture in the delicate and complex balance between these multiple forms of power. The author finely combines empirical research with secondary sources to elaborate an original theoretical framework, the relevance of which will be significant both to the literature on authoritarianism and power in general and to that on the political systems in the MENA region and in Syria in particular.

Charles Wilkins is Associate Professor of Middle Eastern History at Wake Forest University.

Research Notes

Non-Alignment Movement Networks in the Global South: The Hoover Institute Archive

Lily Balloffet

The formation of diasporic communities with heritage roots in the Arabic-speaking Eastern Mediterranean is garnering increasing attention from scholars across a number of disciplines who are pushing the tired geographic boundaries leftover from a Cold War age of area studies. Academic studies of these communities in Latin America, while lagging in quantity behind their North American counterparts, are also beginning to proliferate. While this growing body of scholarship is successfully documenting the early twentieth century migratory flows that connected the Mashriq to the Americas, the World War II and postwar era remain much less studied periods.

In the case of the South American region of this diaspora, the dearth of Cold War era Mahjar historiography is acute even in regions with large populations who can trace their roots back to the Levant – such as Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. In the process of finishing my doctoral dissertation, this gap in the literature began to stand out to me, and spurred me to formulate a second project that would be temporally grounded in this era. As a Silas Palmer Fellow at Stanford University’s Hoover Institute, I was able to initiate the research for this project in May 2015.

Through working with archival materials housed at the Hoover Institute collections, I have begun to develop a project that addresses the relationships between Levantine states and prominent Latin American military governments in the post-World War II era. My current manuscript project on Argentine Mahjar communities from the late nineteenth century through WWII inspired me to expand upon my previous work on Middle Eastern-Latin American networks, but with an additional comparative dimension. Using Peru and Argentina as case studies, I have begun to track “South-South” relationships between Peru, Argentina, and the Mashriq during an era marked by the non-alignment
movements that proliferated in the Global south. My preliminary research has already uncovered instances of Syrians living in the diaspora in South America who acted as interlocutors, unofficial citizen diplomats, and couriers of correspondence between prominent political figures in Latin America and the Mashriq.

I have also located unpublished academic texts, and personal correspondence, that speak to the backlash of fear that these potential “South-South” relationships evoked, in particular, in the writings of U.S. academics and government officials, who especially worried about the possibility of a “Latin American Nasser” during the years of Syria and Egypt’s union as the United Arab Republic. The rise in charismatic, personalistic leaders in both Latin America and the Arabic-speaking Eastern Mediterranean in the wake of WWII was an important factor that led U.S. academics and policy-makers to be concerned that these figureheads would spark a wave of anti-U.S. sentiment among general populations ranging from Latin Americans to people in the Middle East and North Africa.

Syrian Studies scholars interested in conducting research at the Hoover Institute Archives have the option of accessing a digital catalogue of the Institute’s archival holdings, including a number of searchable digitized indices within specific document collections. One particularly interesting collection is the “Hoover Institution Library Pamphlet Collection,” which includes close to 60,000 pamphlets relating to twentieth-century political, social, and economic issues around the world.

Those who are interested can also apply for a range of funding opportunities that cater to scholars at varying stages of their academic career. Grants for U.S. undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, postdocs, and independent scholars can all apply for research support in the form of either a Silas Palmer Fellowship, or the U.S. Scholar Research Support Program. International students, faculty, and independent scholars have the option of applying for a grant from the International Scholar Research Support Program.

For more information, visit the Hoover Institution homepage at: http://www.hoover.org
To access the Hoover catalogue, visit the Online Archive of California: http://www.oac.cdlib.org

Lily Balloffet is Assistant Professor of Global Migration at Western Carolina University, and was the 2015-2016 Postdoctoral Research Scholar in Middle East Diaspora Studies at North Carolina State University’s Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies. She completed her PhD in History at the University of California Davis in 2015, and is currently working on a book manuscript entitled Mahjar Maps: Argentina in the Global Arab Diaspora.

Book Reviews


Reviewed by Johanna L Peterson
Students of the late Ottoman Empire in the Arab lands are familiar with the *Nahda*, a revival of Arabic language and literature that began in the early nineteenth century. In Greater Syria, this cultural and linguistic flowering can be seen in the growth of novel-writing and magazine, newspaper, and journal production as early as the 1830s. In Fruma Zachs’ and Sharon Halevi’s *Gendering Culture in Greater Syria*, the authors challenge the existing contention in studies on gender in the *Nahda* which suggest that it failed women. Through an examination of the novels, poems, magazines, and newspapers that were produced during the *Nahda*, Zachs and Halevi suggest that it was a time of intense debate over the question of gender as new conceptions of masculinity were created, and women’s place in Greater Syrian society was actively discussed. They further suggest that the *Nahda* can be divided into two facets – the cultural, in which one sees the resurgence of linguistic, journalistic, and literary activity in the early nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth; and the political, seen in the emergence of ideas related to political identity and nationhood that developed in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In both, questions of gender were at the center. Thus, rather than the *Nahda* failing women and women’s progress in the Middle East, it served as an early step in debates about republican motherhood seen during the mandate period, as well as questions of women’s citizenship in the first years following independence.

After providing a basic outline of the evolution of the “woman question” in the press of Greater Syria from the mid-1800s to 1900, Zachs and Halevi turn to their examination of the ways in which notions of gender were discussed, debated, and negotiated in the literary productions of the *Nahda*. They begin by looking at *Asma* (1873), one of Salim al-Bustani’s early novels. They examine it for its place in the development of the modern Arabic novel, as well as how its plot illustrated al-Bustani’s thinking about social issues in the face of a rapidly modernizing society. At the center were women and their role in the creation of the modern Arab family. Zachs and Halevi next examine the emergence of a modern idea of masculinity in Greater Syria, a conceptualization that utilized the pre-Islamic notion of *muru’a* (manly virtue) in a very modern context. They use novels that ostensibly focus on the question of the “new woman” as a vehicle for discussing this shift to modern notions of masculinity and manly virtue.

Zachs and Halevi then turn to the discourse on domesticity that appeared on the pages of novels, journals, newspapers, and the like in Greater Syria in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this discussion, the authors use the term “glocalization” to define the ways in which global processes become incorporated into local practices, understanding, and structures. In examining this hybrid idea of domesticity, Zachs and Halevi first focus on the ideal woman as promoted in early lectures of cultural societies, and then on a thematic analysis of domestic advice columns found in several Beirut and Cairo-based newspapers. In looking at discourses on domestic health and hygiene, the spatial reorganization of the home, and Western fashion, the authors show that though women were encouraged to “expand their social horizons through a variety of communal and familial activities,” this expansion did not include
“the crafting of independent identities or agendas” (p. 86).
While the discourse of much of the late nineteenth century on the “woman question” focused on women’s role as mothers and wives and their successful management of the domestic sphere, beginning in the mid-1890s and continuing into the first decades of the twentieth century, one sees a shift, in both male and female-authored works, toward social and political commentaries. Here, one sees a transformation in the discourse of domesticity from a construct of the emerging middle classes to one that had increasingly nationalist and anti-colonialist purposes. Zachs and Halevi here suggest that the women who authored these novels serve as a link between the Nahda’s cultural and political facets. This analysis, in particular, offers an important addition to the many studies that overlook the first couple decades of the twentieth century in looking at women’s work and activism in Greater Syria. In examining late nineteenth century women novelists, Zachs and Halevi show how women used their novels to pose questions and critiques about the existing social, cultural, legal, economic, and political structures, especially in regard to those that affected women. To highlight the ways in which these questions and critiques were presented, and to get at their content, the authors look at debates related to women’s right to paid work and political rights, as well as at those women who emerged as activists and political writers during this period. Zachs and Halevi conclude that this period was not a minor transitional phase, but was instead a time in which the feminist and intellectual agendas raised by women in conceptions of the nationalist projects of mandate Syria and Lebanon were begun.

The movement in the focus of women’s writings from the domestic to the political sphere was accompanied by a shift in the discourse on the domestic sphere. The final chapter looks at this shift and its impact on the “woman question.” Here, the authors examine the depiction of marriage and sexuality in turn-of-the century Arabic novels. They focus on the theoretical idea of “outlaw emotions,” those feelings expressed in literature, art, etc., that subvert social and political norms and practices, making the works, in and of themselves, expressions of attempted subversion. Zachs and Halevi examine a set of novels, novellas, and short stories from the late Nahda period that sought to challenge existing social and sexual norms. The fact that these fictions were serialized in newspapers allowed readers to respond to and debate about these ideas. They suggest that, in “providing a discursive or ‘rehearsal space’ in which to voice and share ‘outlaw emotions,’” the authors “laid the foundation for a subculture opposing the prevailing gender norms” (p. 128). Though this experiment was rather short-lived, coming to an abrupt halt with the imposition of the mandate, Zachs and Halevi suggest that the themes dealt with in these works were again taken up by women beginning in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

In their examination of the ways in which the “woman question” was approached, from the earliest days of the Nahda in the early nineteenth century through to the beginning of French mandate rule in Syria and Lebanon in 1920, Zachs and Halevi show the central role it played in emerging notions of Arab and middle class modernity.
Indeed, discourses of domesticity, proto-nationalism, and political rights placed women at the center. Not only was Arab modernity tied to the creation of educated wives and mothers heading scientifically-organized middle class households, it also came to be linked to changing notions of masculinity in light of the “new woman,” as well as, for those in the later years of the Nahda, women’s full participation in political life.

Zachs and Halevi provide an engaging, thoughtful, and innovative examination of the Nahda period. Using novels, short stories, newspaper and periodical literature (which includes transcribed public lectures, scientific articles, household advice columns, and advertisements), biographies, memoirs, and personal correspondence, they provide a compelling analysis of discourses on women in the Nahda, the ways in which Nahda literature can be seen reflected in the works of the late mandate and early independence periods, and the benefits of interdisciplinarity in rethinking earlier assumptions. For students of Greater Syria in the late Ottoman Empire, this work provides a cultural and gendered analysis of a region and period often examined through the lens of political history. For those who examine the mandate, Zachs’ and Halevi’s analysis provides useful background for understanding the trends and changes in the women’s press and women’s activism over the course of the mandate period.

Johanna L Peterson is a PhD student at the University of California, San Diego.


Reviewed by Maya El-Darzi

Islamism and the Future of the Christians of the Middle East by Habib C. Malik is a straightforward piece capturing the tragic decline of the indigenous Christian community in the region. Since the September 11 attacks, much of the scholarship has focused mainly on Islamic trends in Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, in hopes of clarifying the misunderstandings between East and West. But Malik’s work sheds light on an often a neglected aspect of this relationship – the “relic status” of indigenous Christians. Jerusalem, for instance, was twenty percent Christian in 1948, but is currently less than two-percent (p. 7). Likewise, half of Iraq’s 1.4 million Christians have fled the country since the American invasion in 2003 (p. 8). In light of these alarming statistics, Malik tells the story of Christians in the Middle East, “the trials they face, their options, and their prospects” (p. 9).

Although four chapters long, the book can be divided into three main parts, with chapters one and two describing the history and current state of indigenous Christians. Despite originating in the Middle East, Christianity never took root in the region. With the coming of Islam, along with various other political events – ranging from the Arab-Israeli conflict to the invasion of Iraq – many Christians have emigrated to the west, or even converted to Islam, to avoid becoming scapegoats. Furthermore, Christians in the region have often exercised a degree of passivity in the midst of Islamic extremism. Malik then focuses on
the two biggest Christian communities in the region – the Copts in Egypt and the Maronites in Lebanon. While the former, characterized as protected peoples or “dhimmi,” have struggled to safeguard their community, the later have dominated the political system, and carved a free standing for themselves in the midst of a Muslim majority.

In the third chapter, Malik explores the many factors resulting in a decreasing Christian population. Perhaps the most significant factor is the fact that many Christian communities in the Middle East lack a proper protection against rising religious fanaticism, which discourages Christians from returning to their homes. Malik then discusses the rise of Sunni and Shiite Islamic fanaticism, which in general is rousing much popular support due to the failure of Arab secular governments at improving the standard of living for their people and the nation in general. In the last chapter, Malik poses his thoughts on the future of Middle Eastern Christians. Although Europe has shown occasional sensitivity, US policy focuses more on repair the relationship between East and West. However, in places like Lebanon, there is an increase in number of priests, exemplifying that several Christian communities are solidifying their identity as “Christians.” Ultimately, Malik concludes that the same rights Muslims demand in the West should be granted to the Christians living under Islamic majority rule in the East.

The most interesting aspect of Malik’s piece is the way he interprets the infamous dhimmi concept. Meaning “protected peoples,” scholars have often applauded the policy of dhimmitude, marking it a sign of tolerance in Islam. Yet Malik argues that dhimmitude actually subjugated Christians under Islamic legal and political rule. Marginalizing Christians as strangers in their ancestral homelands, dhimmitude reduced such demographic to second class citizenry. Another significant element was Malik’s explanation of Christian attitudes towards Sunni Salafism and Shiite followers of Wilayat al-Faqih. If an Islamic state were to be established, several Christians would prefer Shiite rule, since Christian communities still exist in Iran, whereas any such traces have been eradicated in Saudi Arabia.

In the future, Malik may consider expanding his study by examining opinions and perspectives of Muslims at the “Arab street” level, by interviewing common Muslim lawmakers, and even mixed families to see how each sect views the other, and to see if there is any potential for such outlook to change. Malik may also want to study other predominantly Islamic countries – like Indonesia – and compare the treatment of minorities to that of the Middle East. In this way, scholars may not only learn more about Islam, but also try to determine the degree in which culture plays a role.

Islamism and the Future of the Christians of the Middle East is an excellent starting point for Middle Eastern scholars in general striving to comprehend the current livelihood of minority communities in the region. It is also a valuable contribution for Levantine scholars, specifically those analyzing the political divide in the Lebanese Christian community between the Saudi influenced March 14 alliance and the Shiite led March 8 alliance. With various threats, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the ever decreasing trend in Middle Eastern minorities is alarming. The
region will lose the richness and diversity that marked it for centuries.

Maya El-Darzi is a graduate of California State University, Northridge with a B.A. in both, Political Science and History, and is currently an M.A. student in the same institution.


Reviewed by Mary C. Wilson

The general public and professors who wish to assign a survey of modern Syria will welcome John McHugo’s *Syria a History of the Last Hundred Years*. It is short and organized into chronological chapters, according to standard periodization: ancient civilizations to World War I, the French mandate, independent Syria until 1970, Hafiz al-Asad’s 30-year rule (divided into two chapters), and Bashar al-Asad up to 2013. Since it is a synthesis of English language secondary sources, however, the book adds little to scholarship on Syria.

Every author who aims at a general audience has to choose what to tell and what details to provide as evidence. To his credit McHugo has neither dumbed down his presentation nor overwhelmed it with extraneous details. That said, I think there are points that he has missed. For example in chapter one, which necessarily skims over ten centuries to get to the last one hundred that are the focus of his book, he should have explained the evolution of the cultural geography of Syria in addition to its topography, which he describes well. Readers need to be weaned from the essentialism that so often clouds our view of the Middle East. We always need to be reminded that people move around, learn and forget languages, and change religions. Readers also need to get over an excessively sectarian view of Syrian society; here a few examples of shared holy sites and rituals would have helped. That said, McHugo does a good job of situating today’s Syria in the context of what Arabs called *Bilad al-Sham*.

The first two chapters follow familiar storylines: the decline of the Ottoman Empire, modernization, imperialism and nationalism. Perhaps the more accurate than decline is devolution, which in the Ottoman Empire had the misfortune to coincide with growing European military and economic power. By the mid-nineteenth century a revolution in power and communications allowed the Ottoman Empire to initiate a process of centralization at the same time as it increased European interest and interference in Ottoman affairs, the two pulling in opposite directions. Still, the Ottoman Empire fought on four fronts during the First World War and survived, if not for very long. Modernization theory has been given the bum’s rush by its many critics of the past forty years, but its evil twin modernization lives on. It is far too general a term to carry much meaning beyond its Eurocentrist beginnings. Considering specific components of ‘modernization’ might have helped: for example integration into a global economy and extension of the state into all aspects of life. Lacking culturally neutral criteria for what constitutes modernity, American students will all too readily fall back on an
easy dichotomy: we are modern, they are not.

The French mandate and the rising tide of nationalism in response provide the central narrative of Chapter 2, with the Great Syrian Revolt serving as the meat grinder that turned the peoples of Syria into Syrian nationalists. Along with Michael Provence I would argue differently: the Great Syrian Revolt, along with the battle of Maysalun became the foundation tales of Syrian nationalism, but many, especially urban notables and Alawites, did not take part. They wrote themselves into the nationalist narrative later. Far from detesting the French (p. 79), many urban notables spoke French and admired French culture and political organization. Of course, one can both admire France and lead a nationalist party so the more useful line of inquiry concerns the uses of nationalism in building political support and the process of building consciousness and loyalty to a particular state. France worked against this component of state formation by playing on difference to challenge the appeal of either Arab nationalism or Syrian nationalism.

The third chapter takes on the difficult task of making the rapid changes of government between 1946 and 1970 into a coherent narrative. McHugo begins with the creation of new parties based on new ideologies and the men that led them: the Ba`ath Party, the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party, the Syrian Communist Party, and the Muslim Brotherhood, followed by the series of coups, the creation of the United Arab Republic and its demise, and the first Ba`ath government. To his credit he follows this story without confusing the reader. Still, a shift of focus from the particular to the general might have made the period more comprehensible. It was not and is not obvious in what ways peoples inside Syrian borders differed from those on the outside or in what ways the inhabitants of Syria themselves could identify as a single political unit. The political elites of post mandate Syria faced the formidable task of making the state more tangible than simply a morass of resentment against the French. How did they do so without easily manipulated differences like language or religion to separate Syrians from Iraqis, Palestinians, Lebanese, or Jordanians? Second, as McHugo explains, a new ruling elite composed of the sons of peasants replaced the old urban notables. I think he could have stressed that although it may have taken twenty-five years, by the time Hafiz al-Asad came to power in 1970 a shift in the social location of power, a revolution, had taken place. Despite the ever changing governments and their inconsistent, unfinished programs, how did this shift take place?

Chapters 4 and 5 cover Hafiz al-Asad’s rise to and exercise of power, four covers foreign policy and five internal affairs. Granted the thirty years of Hafiz al-Asad’s rule is the longest period a single ruler has survived in Syria’s twentieth century history and short chapters give readers much-needed resting places in surveys. Yet by separating the two, McHugo loses how closely the external and the internal are intertwined. For example Asad’s intervention in Lebanon on the side of the Phalanges in 1976 served to coalesce militant Sunni Islamist opposition against him. And a look around the region in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the Iranian revolution took place, Juhyman al-`Utaybah took over the Great mosque in Mecca, and a militant Islamist group
assassinated Anwar Sadat would have shown that Islamist opposition hardly needed to be sharpened by presumed sectarian spite. In Syria the Islamist opposition certainly played the sectarian card, but did Asad’s support of Iran in the Iraq-Iran war necessarily inspire Islamist or Arab nationalist opposition back home? The Iranian revolution may have been carried out by “Persians” (p.177) and Shi`a, but to many in the Arab world, irrespective of ethnic or sectarian tags, the success of a largely unarmed people in overthrowing an authoritarian ruler supported by the United States was positively inspiring. Perhaps Asad was shielded from an Iranian-style mass uprising owing to the distance he maintained from the United States, another close connection of the external and the internal. In keeping his distance, Asad stood alone in the Arab world, except for Qaddafi, and thus Iran became and remains a very important regional ally for both father and son.

In McHugo’s telling, Asad’s rise to power appears to be more an outcome of character than the result of political strategy. Asad was a pragmatic, disciplined, cautious, cool-headed workaholic according to this book and everything else I have read, but I would have appreciated examples of his strategies in building and maintaining support. Asad seems very generally to have followed a system of redundancy in the military and the bureaucracy. Every military or police command was balanced by another command, and every command had an accompanying intelligence service. In the bureaucracy, competition for posts and higher salaries created an insidious climate of gossip and tattling; efficiency sacrificed for security. Divide and rule also served Asad well. When he created the Progressive National Front as a Ba`th dominated umbrella for all leftist, nationalist political parties in the country, the parties that shared the political end of the spectrum with the Ba`th split into two broad groups. One part of each such party joined the Front and so maintained formal existence at the cost of actual influence or even credibility; the other part of each party remained outside and was forced to disband or go underground. Similarly after the ‘time of troubles’ that ended with the destruction of central Hama, Asad co-opted some of the Muslim Brotherhood who then made their peace with the regime and even won seats in the Syrian parliament running as independents. The rest disappeared or were disappeared, creating a well of resentment that is feeding the opposition to Bashar al-Asad today.

Chapter 6 covers the years since Hafiz al-Asad’s death. This must have been the most difficult chapter to write owing to the relative lack of secondary sources much less primary ones. McHugo tells us about the hopes Bashar al-Asad raised early on for less state control of economic activity and political expression, but says little about the impact of the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. What happened to all those soldiers and migrant workers whose earnings in Lebanon arguably staved off unrest at home? Are they and their impoverished families feeding the many faces of Syrian opposition today? Also since journalists like to demonstrate the magnitude of Syrian refugees by reference to the displaced persons crisis after World War II, perhaps greater attention should have been accorded Syria’s generous reception of Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi refugees since World War II.
In the conclusion McHugo aims, as he says in the title of the chapter, to “draw... the threads together”. Some of his threads do not work for me, or are two simplistic to be meaningful. That the French bombed civilians and the Ba`th does the same does not make them similar. That both the urban notables and the Ba`th tried to limit the political organization and expression of other groups does not make them similar either. Other threads he draws out are more useful, the politicization of religion, for example, and the politics of fear, neither uniquely Syrian.

To sum up, this book makes the last one hundred years of Syrian history accessible to general readers. This necessarily involves choices of what to include and what not. What I most miss from this account is a sense of warm-blooded people living the material realities of their times. By not using primary sources, and there are some in English, or even a very complete list of English language secondary sources (where for example is Malcolm Kerr’s The Arab Cold War, Elizabeth Thompson’s Colonial Citizens, Keith Watenpaugh’s Being Modern in the Middle East, or Lisa Wedeen’s Ambiguities of Domination?) the sense of lived history is lost. And it is this sense, the sense of real people rather than victims or monsters, which is missing from our understandings of Syria and the Middle East today.

Mary C. Wilson is Professor of History at UMass Amherst.

Keith David Watenpaugh, Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of


Reviewed by Gershon Shafir

Bread from Stones is very well thought out, written, and put together book, all the way from the evocative title, through the vast amount of original data collected in half a dozen languages in rarely tapped archives, to its eloquent and nuanced argumentation, all of it animated by the revulsion from the morally reprehensible genocide at its center but always from within the historian’s discerning perspective.

Professor Watenpaugh gives us a new chronology, the interwar period, a novel geographical focus, the shattered Ottoman Empire, and a new focus on the old victims, the Armenians. The Ottoman Empire already in the second half of the 19th century served as the site where Western humanitarian intervention, frequently in the service of imperial interests, was practiced. The book’s focus is on the intensification, as well as redefinition of humanitarian intervention as assistance to the genocide’s surviving trafficked and kidnapped Armenian women and children. This books also accomplishes what is widely urged but rarely accomplished – the joint study of East and West. By focusing on the Eastern Mediterranean as a region of interaction between the Ottomans, their subjects, and the Western Great Powers, he shows it to be a site of cultural and humanitarian innovation. Finally, Professor Watenpaugh not only suggests an eye-opening parallel between the origins of humanitarianism and human rights, the former in response to the Armenian genocide, the letter in reaction to the Jewish Holocaust, but also connects them
by pinpointing the mutual influence of humanitarianism and human rights. Though both partake in a common conception of shared humanity, eventually they diverged as to the proper way to address the systematic mass abuses of victim groups.

In *Bread from Stones*, Professor Watenpaugh has established a new and rigorous standard for the study of one of the defining moral economies and social imaginaries of our time, modern humanitarianism. To start with, he carefully separates the thread of humanitarianism as a phenomenon on its own right from nationalism and colonialism. He is also part of the new scholarly approach which refocuses the origins of human rights by emphasizing its relative novelty but gives additional depth to this view by highlighting the connection between the failures of humanitarianism and the growing attraction of human rights. Finally, he seeks to remove from the objects of humanitarian assistance the bland bureaucratic labels of refugee, sufferer, orphan, and, whenever possible, recognize their distinct voice and agency.

In particular, I appreciated his efforts to “disentangle—but not disconnect—humanitarianism from colonialism” and nationalism (p. 3). Throughout the volume Watenpaugh demonstrates the emergence of humanitarianism as one strand of the secular, management-oriented, scientific, apolitical, bureaucratic, and professional ethos of Western liberalism. He, consequently, distinguishes between the dynamics and logics of colonialism and humanitarianism but remains sensitive to their manifold connections. While recognizing the novelty and distinctness of humanitarianism, he never overlooks the many forces by which it was buffeted, shaped, and used and consequently concludes that it was “a minor force,” mostly one of resistance. Though interwar humanitarianism sought to be apolitical and neutral, a substitute for politics, it was shaped by the major political forces of the age, and remained a bone of contention between western promises of universalism and the nationalist claims of the newly-formed Turkish state that it was unjustly singled out. Highlighting this tangled web, allows Professor Watenpaugh to shed light on the present day entrapments of humanitarianism by militarization and corporatization of humanitarian actions and intervention.

Watenpaugh not only disentangles humanitarianism from colonialism; he is at his best when he disentangles humanitarianism itself. Humanitarianism, as he demonstrates, is played out between the poles of universal compassion for the sufferer and the more selective, frequently sectarian, *humanitarian imagination* which allows the self-same sufferers either to be drawn into the circle of care or be denied care and even exposed to barbarism beyond imagination. Modern humanitarianism is, therefore, the unexpected offspring of genocide, an attempt to correct the inhumanity inflicted on genocide victims by repairing their humanity and communities. But the other pole of humanitarianism, its universalism is hardly simple compassion for the distant stranger; in fact, to view a group as deserving compassion, and therefore care, it first has to be ‘unstrangled.’

In sum, *Bread from Stones* offers a rich social and cultural overview in the service of a historical and intellectual genealogy of modern humanitarianism. The book serves
up a complex narrative with many parts, each component articulated both on its own terms and as part of a larger picture.

*Gershon Shafir is Professor of Sociology at the University of California, San Diego*